

Parsiānā

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'Just a Rump'

"My dear Shiavax:

When I indicated to you my willingness to accept the Presidentship of the Federation of the Parsi Anjumans of India, it was, I am afraid, in ignorance of the material facts... I have, regretfully, to withdraw and decline to accept the office."

With those words, Nani Palkhivala, the noted jurist and India's former ambassador to the United States of America, in a letter to Shiavax Nargolwala, the controversial president of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman and vice president of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India (FPZAI), threw the well laid plans of the community's apex body in a tizzy.

An extraordinary meeting of the Federation had been convened in New Delhi on 12 April with the express purpose of placing Palkhivala at the head of the Federation (see *Parsiānā* May 1981 issue). The members present first voted to amend the Federation's constitution which specified the President of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat (BPP) was the *ex-officio* president of the Federation, and then voted unanimously to elect Palkhivala.

The BPP's abrupt withdrawal from the Federation in February 1978, over some critical remarks made by Nargolwala at the Third World Zoroastrian Congress held two weeks prior, left the apex body without a head for over three years. Nargolwala's earlier attempts to amend the constitution were kept in abeyance on the assumption that the BPP may rejoin. But the BPP instead is trying to set up a parallel all-India body, barring Delhi.

Nargolwala then decided to go ahead with the amendment and on a

visit to Bombay a day or so prior to the Delhi meeting approached Palkhivala to head the Federation. Palkhivala accepted and a triumphant Nargolwala returned to Delhi with the news. The *Bombay Samachar* issue of 26 April made mention of Palkhivala's election and two weeks later of his declining the post.

In his letter to Nargolwala turning down the post, Palkhivala stated: "I was under the impression that the Federation represented all the important Parsi Anjumans of India except the Bombay Parsi Panchayat. But now I find that the Parsi Anjumans of Surat and other small Anjumans of Gujarat as well as the Anjumans of Poona, Madras and Bangalore have resigned from the Federation. I understand that both the Ahmedabad and Hyderabad Anjumans are also thinking of resigning. This means that now the Federation is just a rump and represents a very small minority of the Parsis of India."

"Your hasty action... is a severe blow to the unity of the community."

"Further, I was not aware that under the constitution of the Federation, the President of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat is also the *ex-officio* President of the Federation and that in order to have appointed me President of the Federation, you were required to change its Constitution."

"If the above facts had been known to me, I would not have given my consent to be elected the President of the Federation."

In a letter dated 14 May, Nargolwala replied he was "surprised and

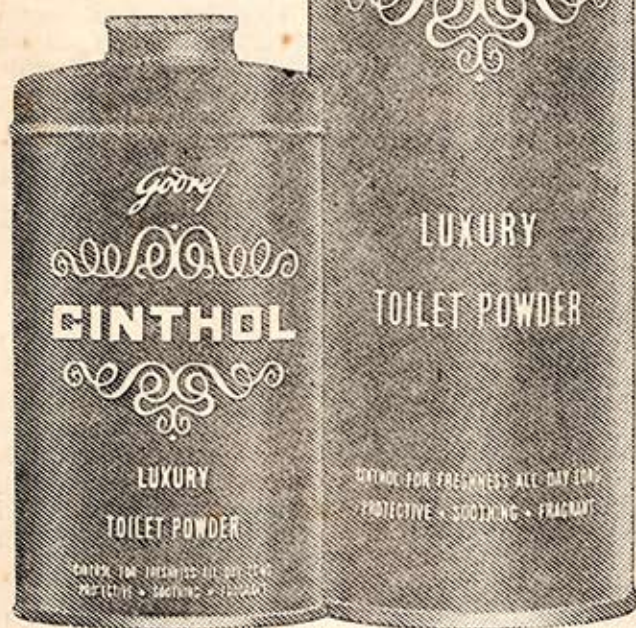
pained" to read Palkhivala's letter. "It appears to me that you have not only been misinformed but misled by interested parties." Outlining the recent history of the strife torn Federation, Nargolwala noted, that many of the Panchayats keep their funds with the BPP "they were... forced to withdraw from the Federation..."

"If the Federation were 'Just a Rump', would the Parsi Member of Parliament from the south (Mrs Roda Mistry) have agreed to serve on the Executive council of the Federation? Equally, would the leader of the CER, Mr Jamshed Kanga have agreed to serve on the Executive Council of the Federation? I hope you will soon see that the Anjuman Committee of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat under their young leaders initiates moves for the Bombay Parsi Panchayat to rejoin the Federation. If and when this happens, the stooges and satellites of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat will automatically rejoin the Federation..."

"You were elected as the President of the Federation in the sincere hope that you would bring about the much desired unity within the community. Your hasty action in declining to accept the Presidentship of the Federation is a severe blow to the unity of the community, apart from the fact that you would be shirking the challenge and the confidence reposed in you by the community..."

"I sincerely hope that after knowing all the facts you will agree to reconsider your decision."

Whether Palkhivala reconsiders his decision or not, the community's quest for an all-India body has suffered yet another set-back.



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Piloo's Pineapple

A week back Delhi newspapers carried a photograph of Mrs Gandhi in a round-table discussion with opposition leaders. According to the photograph captions the PM was discussing the Gujarat agitation, but those present at the time the lensmen were clicking away say that Mrs Gandhi was in fact grumbling about the number of man-days lost in the country because each community insisted on a national holiday for observing its religious festivities. It seems that the papers concerning Gujarat took quite a while in arriving and in the meantime Mrs G. was forced to make small talk with her not-so-loyal opposition.

Piloo Mody, Janata MP and Parliament's leading quipster, pointed out that while others might be insisting on holidays, his own community, the Parsis, had not got a single national day off for its festivals. Mrs Gandhi, who was herself married to a Parsi, discussed knowledgeably with Piloo on "Pateti", "Jamshedi Navroz", and "Khor-dad Sal", while the other opposition leaders ranging from the far right to the ultra revolutionaries were all at sea about what was being talked about. Parsis being an unknown commodity outside Gujarat and Maharashtra.

The conversation about Parsi festivals reminded Mrs Gandhi that the next day was in fact Navroze and Mrs G., who believes in the little gracious touches, sent the country's only Parsi MP a pineapple. Hearing of the regal gift a Congress (I) MP felt that in view of Piloo's constant snipes and cracks at Mrs G. it would be fairer if the pineapple was handed over to him. But the bulky gourmet Piloo refused to part with his gift, whatever his opinion of the sender. It was, he noted with a connoisseur's knowledge, best quality pineapple from Guinea, having arrived along with the President of Guinea, Ahmed Sekou Toure.

(Free Press Bulletin 27 March 1981)

Dead may help limbless in medical advances

The dead may tell no tales but there might well be stories of how the deceased have helped the limbless lead a more pleasant life.

The possibility of the dead bringing sunshine into the lives of the living by providing their skins and bones for implantation of full limbs has



Modi: Gandhi's gift

brightened, thanks to advances made in the science of immunology.

An eminent international surgeon, **Dr Pesi B. Chacha**, an Indian expatriate with permanent residence now in Singapore visualised such possibilities when outlining new horizons in medical science.

Dr Chacha, who has a group practice at Singapore, told this reporter that the knee-joint transplant in China had already been reported. The modern micro-vascular surgical technique

was employed in restoring limbs or their parts to those who might lose them in accidents.

The technique made it possible to harvest bones and skins from certain parts of the bodies into the areas deficient in them.

Dr Chacha, an orthopaedic surgeon and an F.R.C.S., has himself performed over 50 finger implantations, six severed limb attachments, besides numerous free skin flap and bone grafts in patients with the aid of microscopes, which yield a magnification of 25. With that magnification the thinnest of damaged blood vessels and nerves of human beings could be sutured perfectly, he said.

Already micro-vascular surgery has helped arthritic patients get relief. Temporary attacks of paralysis have also been effectively checked by reconstructing the blocked blood vessels.

Dr Chacha, who set up the micro-vascular surgical technique in Singapore, had learnt the procedure all by himself. "I had bought books and equipment, practised at clinical laboratories and achieved expertise all by myself," he said.

He had tried hard to secure a teaching-cum-research assignment in India but without much success. He migrated to Singapore on the recommendations of his professor in England.

Dr Chacha envisioned bright pos-

Chacha: promising prospects

(Photo courtesy The Times of India)





Boyce: students in horse-drawn cars

(Photo courtesy The Times of India)

sibilities of certain implantations of the deceased being accepted by the living. In certain cases, like the brain and kidney tissues, for instance, the regeneration might be difficult in view of the highly specialised constructions of the organs.

Limb attachments as also skin grafts held out promising prospects although practical realisation of the dream might take our lifetime, he said.

Although the micro-vascular surgical technique opened new vistas for

those deprived of their limbs or fingers, Dr Chacha cautioned against undue optimism. "Much of the success of an operation would depend on the extent of the damage caused", he said.

There had also been instances of bone with tissue and skin being grafted on parts of the body excised for tumour. Here also body acceptance of the transplanted part would depend on the malignancy of the tumour, he observed.

Dr Chacha, who works for nine hours daily at his operation theatre,

eschews coffee within two hours of the commencement of surgical work lest it should induce tremors in the fingers.

The operations require steady fingers and sustained application. The operations stretch out into long periods of time and should be employed only as a last resort.

Dr Chacha came to Bombay to give a demonstration in the latest surgical techniques at the first workshop on micro-vascular surgery organised at the Tata Memorial Hospital recently.

R. K. RANGAN

(Times of India 7 April 1981)

"Alma Mater" then and now

As Elphinstone College, Bombay, completes 125 years, the first Indian woman to secure an M.A. degree from this institution recalls her early years as an Elphinstonian.

Mrs Piroja Boyce, now 102, occasionally spends her time seeing her college certificates, letters and so on. There are any number of them and all these mementoes are stacked in the corner of her beautiful house at Vaccha Gandhi Road. In the sitting room itself there is a photograph of her graduation day.

"I remember students used to arrive in horse-drawn cars or walk to the college all the way from home and wait for two bells for the classes to begin." The lecture rooms were on the second floor and the professors, most of them from Oxford and Cambridge, put on a special gown before getting on to the lecture platform to start a session.

Those were the days when "intellectual dialogues and debates" between students and teachers were a regular feature of the college, according to Mrs Boyce. Women students were just three and had a room for themselves and the men never bothered them. In short, Mrs Boyce remembers men giving way to women when they crossed each other in the corridor.

Unlike today the college had no social life, but occasionally the principal himself entertained the students at tea at his residence. The women, moreover, never took part in sports. There was no canteen and neatly-dressed servants brought lunch for the students from their homes. The college servants were disciplined and used to wear a thick band around their waists while on duty.

Examinations were held in the Town Hall, which now houses the Asiatic Society. Articles for the college magazines were assigned by the professors themselves.

Mrs Boyce, who got her M.A. degree in 1901, revisited her *alma mater* two years ago to attend a function. She spent exactly half an hour and found everything had changed. It seemed as though she had entered another college altogether.
(CITY LIGHTS, Times of India, 2 March 1981)

Those days at the Coroner's Court

In a rented apartment in an old building in Bandra, Bombay, Homi Chinoy, the ex-City Coroner looks at me with sharp eyes and announces, judge-like, "I was a strict disciplinarian. My order in the Coroner's Court was always final".

Coming from a lesser man this would have sounded like a boast, but Chinoy and his decisions created history a number of times and his judgments, though questioned and fought to the level of the Supreme Court, were always upheld.

As the City Coroner he gave the accused the right to cross-examine a witness — the first time in a hundred years of the Coroner's Court's existence that cross-examination of witnesses was allowed. Though questioned and fought, this judgement was



Chinoy: 'niggardly amount'

also upheld by the High Court of Bombay.

Even after burial, if there is any doubt regarding the cause of death, the Coroner has a right to get the body exhumed. This, however, happens rarely. And with Chinoy something even rare happened. He recovered the dead body of a Parsi female from a *bunglee* (the place where the body rests before it is carried to the Tower of Silence) where it had been

taken after the holy bath. Though himself a Parsi, Chinoy, despite the hue and cry in the community, and the possibility of being excommunicated, ordered the exhumation.

Chinoy also remembers the Central Railway accident in 1965, when, again for the first time in the history of the Coroners' Court, the court was temporarily shifted to the site of the accident to facilitate people in recovering the bodies of dead relatives.

Today, despite Chinoy's pioneering efforts, he has to live on a meagre pension. "Please write that we are paid a niggardly amount," he insists.

Commenting on the medical staff of those days he points out: "At times doctors would suggest a post-mortem. I would decline. What for? The cause is already known, I would say. Then they would admit: it is for academic research. I would then permit it only if the relatives consented."

He once admonished a forensic student who entered the morgue with a handkerchief over his nose: "You will be a doctor one day and will have to work in this stink. How will you do it if you can't bear it? Remove the handkerchief and don't insult the dead."

(Sunday Standard 29 March 1981)

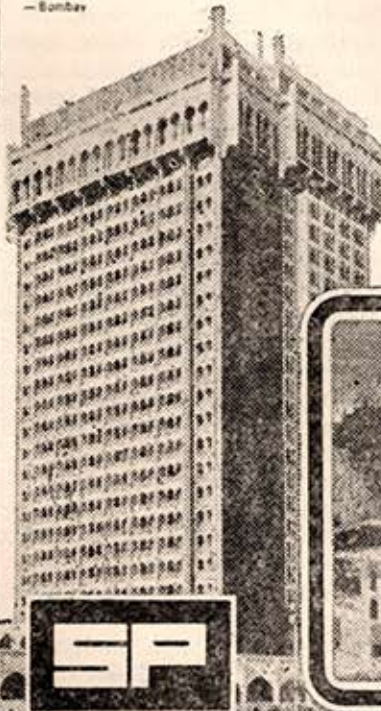
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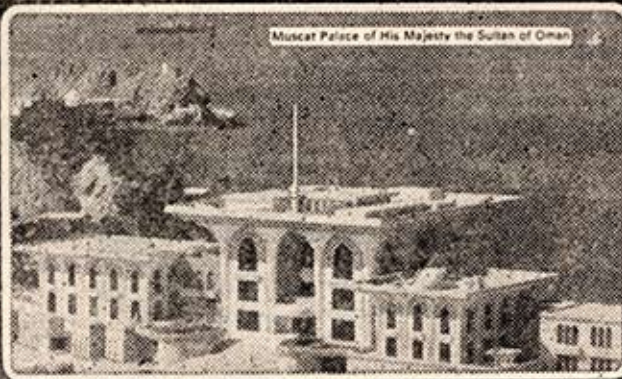
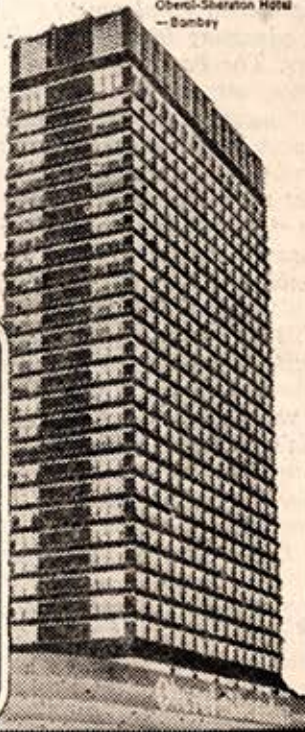
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THE DASTUR OF KARACHI

The life of Dastur Dhalla—XIV

Aek Atmakatha is the autobiography of the late Dr Maneck Nusserwanji Dhalla, high priest of the Pakistan Parsis and a religious scholar of world repute. This is the 14th edited and condensed extract from the book, 'Dastur Dhalla. The Saga of a Soul,' translated from the original Gujarati by Gool and Behram Rustomji and published by the Dastur Dhalla Memorial Institute, Karachi.

THE STORY SO FAR

Born to a poor dastur family in Surat on 27 August 1875, Dhalla moved with his family to Karachi three years later. He was married to five-year-old Cooverbai when he was eight years old. After failing his matriculation, Dhalla sought employment while educating himself in religious matters. The Parsis of Karachi made arrangements for him to study for his masters degree in Iranian languages at Bombay University. While in Bombay, Dhalla came into contact with several prominent Parsis of the time, with whose assistance he went to New York's Columbia University. There under the guidance of Professor A. V. W. Jackson, a well-known Zoroastrian scholar of the west, Dhalla secured his Ph.D. in 1908. Four years in the west had altered Dhalla's outlook to life and religion. He was now the propagator of new concepts, examining Parsi customs and traditions in a scientific light. Dhalla returned from New York, an admirer of western culture. On returning to Karachi, Dhalla found plans afoot to establish a seat for a dastur to which he was to be nominated.

The culmination of the move to appoint me as a dastur took a whole year. During that period I had given serious thought to the risks and responsibilities involved in dasturship.

Mobed is a word of deep significance but it does not command the same respect as the term *ervad* by which the first batch of K. R. Camaji's educated priests were known. To a certain extent I had already attained some publicity as an *ervad*. Now I was to become a dastur.

Dastur is an elevated position. But the word dastur had become cheap and commercialized in the community. It was an appellation given to white-turbaned men and was freely ridiculed. Should any mobed pass by, laymen joked about him as a *jokta*, *badsha* or dastur. He who distributed invitations for a wedding or a navjote was a dastur; he who prepared food for ceremonies was also a dastur; the supervisor of some inn in a small village of 12 or 15 Zoroastrians was also a dastur; he also taught little children the alphabet and he was of service to laymen in many small ways.

The illiterate and the educated alike used the word dastur flippantly and the Parsi press also most unconcernedly carried on this confusion of terminology. I was confident that I would be able to raise the status of my priestly class by accepting the dasturship, hence I had accepted the offer.

When a religious leader selfishly claims his own clientele and makes it hereditary, decline sets in.

Another reason why I wished to become a dastur was that a life of study was very dear to me. Our sacred literature has suffered many setbacks due to the scourge of time. There is a great dearth of good literature amongst us. By lectures and by sermons I was eager to render verbal service to my religion, and it was my ardent hope to contribute as much as I could towards the enhancement of Zoroastrian literature.

This was not the first attempt at establishing a dasturship at Karachi. In 1848 the community had elected as its high-priest *Ervad Fardoonji Behramji Jamaspashana*, who had translated into Gujarati the Persian *Farajut Nama* written by the well-known Dastur Darab Pahan. His dasturship ended within a year.

Again in 1871 the Zoroastrians of Karachi had appointed *Ervad Kawasji Jamshedji* as their dastur. He belonged to the dastur family of the Shahanshai *Atashbehran* at Surat. This second

attempt of the Parsis of Karachi to avail of a dastur failed within four years. Thirty five years later, I was the third probationary candidate.

The community has made no arrangement for the maintenance of dasturs. Some dasturs have their own clientele and are able to earn a good income from the prayers and ceremonies performed for the laity who come within their jurisdiction. Those who are not *punthakies* themselves perform marriage ceremonies, navjotes, *faresh-tas*, *jashans*, *afrangans*, and *uthamnas* and earn a smaller income than the dasturs of the first category.

I was neither a *punthaky* dastur nor did I wish to earn a livelihood by spending many hours performing ceremonies. I did not wish to become a ceremonial dastur. My desire was to be a student of religion. The kind of arrangement that had been made for my maintenance differed from the traditional practice of our community. The Anjuman had decided to pay me a monthly emolument of Rs 150. It had collected this amount by voluntary monthly or annual donations from members of the community. My financial standing was unstable. When I had incurred my life's very first debt through the publication of *Goolshan-e-Danesh*, my uncle had advised me to beware of the malady of becoming a debtor. But I could not save myself from this weakness.

The allowance I was to receive was not sufficient for the upkeep of my family. Every month I bought books worth Rs 12 or Rs 15. At short intervals booklets were printed and distributed gratis. My life of learning demanded certain unavoidable expenses. To meet these expenses, I had the support of the illustrious family of Tatas. On the strength of this support, I was able to accept the dasturship of Karachi.

On *Amerdadsal*, 19th September 1909, my 35th birthday, I was invested with the dasturship of Karachi. On the occasion I delivered a lecture before the assembly. The contents of that talk I compiled into a booklet entitled, *Why I accepted the Dasturship* and distributed it amongst the members of the community, to give an idea of my views at that time upon what the duties of a dastur should be:

"When a community advances in education its outlook on certain matters undergoes a change. Similarly, its ideas about what the duties of the priest class should be, also alter. Under such circumstances, if the priestly class also changes with the times, not many difficulties arise. But if the condition of

the priest class remains as it was and laymen advance on the strength of their scholarship leaving the priestly class behind in the race, then step by step the feeling of respect for that illiterate priestly class abate. Thus when sentiments slacken for the custodians of religion, then ultimately faith itself falters.

"This is the state of affairs of the community at present. When the younger generation notices a lack of respect and independence in the priestly profession they refrain from following that profession.

"Today highly educated young men do not become priests as they did in days gone by. Many a young, well-educated mobed graduates from our Madressah every year, but all of them turn away from that vocation and not one seems eager to attain the dasturship. This may be due to more lucrative outlets in other professions, or the lack of prestige, or, possibly, they fear that they may not be able to enjoy the freedom of thought commensurate with their high training.

"The Kadmis have not yet been successful in persuading any educated young man to accept the leadership of their group. But when a religious leader selfishly claims his own clientele and makes it hereditary, declines sets in. Thus a custom commences whereby capability, character or quality is not evaluated but the right of succession is the only criterion of nomination. This is harmful to the mobed flock itself. Religion suffers and people lose faith.

"Educated youths do not embrace priesthood, as they deem it safer to remain aloof from this profession for fear of coming into conflict of thought with their uneducated brethren and also because they find that laymen do not distinguish between the work of educated and uneducated priests and appreciate their services accordingly.

"The orthodox members of the community believe that the duty of a dastur is only to safeguard zealously age-old customs and traditions. These gentlemen place the precepts of religion and practice of its rituals on the same level and firmly declare that these cannot be altered. Such a religiosity has never borne good results anywhere. Among the many causes of the downfall of Persia, was that during the Sassanian period our priest class had become less tolerant. Blind bigotry is not the true test of faith and it is improper to evaluate a community's strength of faith on such findings.

"An educated mobed evaluates things in the light of knowledge, begins to distinguish the true from the

false, is able to weed out the unworthy, and the majority of the community has not the vision to accept his freedom of thought, then he does not shoulder the responsibility of such a thankless profession.

"Our social history shows that any necessary reforms or changes that have been made have not originated from our leading educated men of religion but from outsiders. Among the many reasons why religious men do not take a lead in such matters is that it is necessary to adhere to the wishes of a large majority of the community. Yet, day by day for guidance and leadership people are turning away from men of religion regarding such reforms. Consequently their need is not so keenly felt and respect for them is on the ebb.

"People must realize that the duty of a dastur is not the blind guardianship of ancient creeds and customs, nor is it to pamper popular sentiment. Such an attitude may be simple; it may evoke applause, it may gain cheap renown; but it does not behove the stature of a dastur who bears upon his shoulders the responsibility of being a true disciple of Zarathustra.

"Those who are under the impression that a dastur has no concern with our so-called irreligious educated youth, but only to affiliate with the orthodox and to uphold old ideas, are quite mistaken. This is not true leadership. It is not the path of righteousness preached by Prophet Zarathustra.

"The onslaught of education is in full force and today's illiterate will be the enlightened ones tomorrow. Thus every year a fairly large batch of educated boys and girls is drifting away which our community can ill afford. It is the bounden duty of a true dastur to check our educated youths from becoming irreligious or irresponsible to religion, for which they should be prepared to serve according to changed

times and circumstances.

"In our community the word 'reform' has become distasteful and unpalatable. According to our religious literature the greatest reformist was Prophet Zarathustra himself. His religion was a religion of reform. It was a faith that wiped out false practices from a nation and introduced newer and better ways of living.

"If, with the passage of time and alteration of dynasties, the true spirit of religion has been lost sight of and undesirable elements have crept in, it is the duty of a true Zoroastrian to remove such misunderstandings and to bring in reforms. These discrepancies might have been born out of centuries of ignorance or through contact with different nations. It is a sacred injunction for a dastur particularly, to introduce such sound and necessary reforms.

"As a true reformer, a dastur has not to introduce reforms merely for self-aggrandisement or just for the sake of doing something new. His is not the role so much of a destroyer as of a co-ordinator. He should hold before him Zarathustra's example of tolerance and perseverance.

"The most important characteristic of a religious leader is independence of thought. Undeterred by seeming benefit, he should not become a parasite or a dependent, but be prepared to endure any opposition arising from following the dictates of his own conscience."

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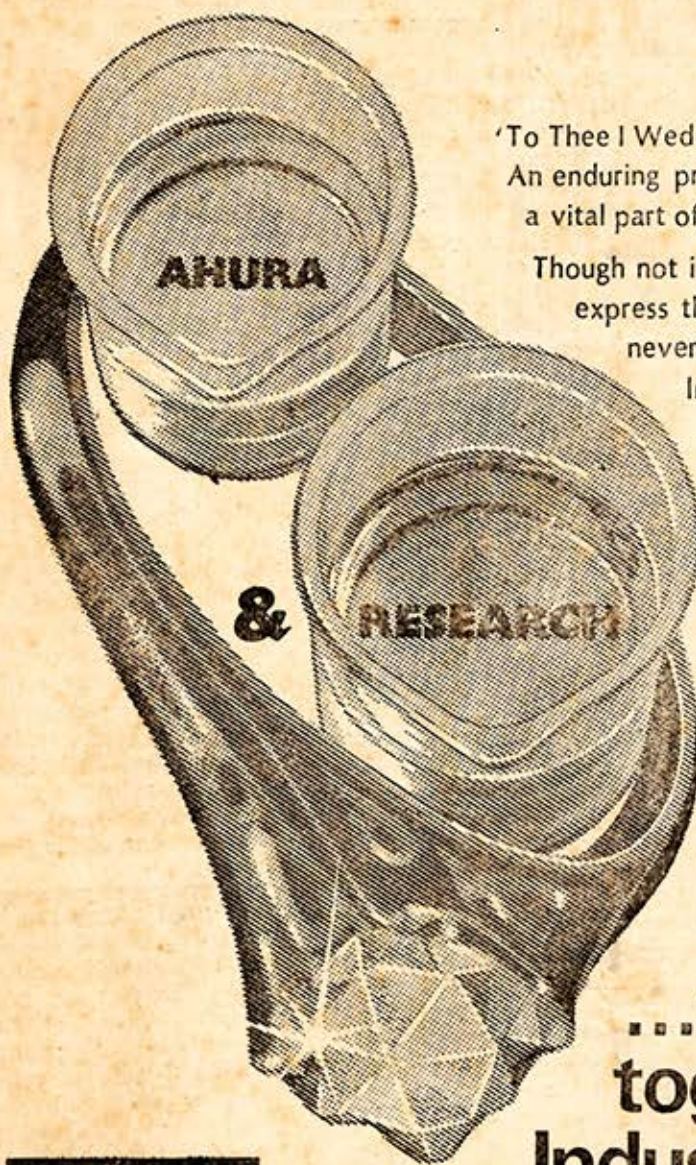


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