

Parsiānā

BPP Tercentenary: A New Age Dawns

For 300 years the Bombay Parsi Punchayet never celebrated their centenary anniversaries, lamented the former BPP Chairman, B.K. Boman-Behram.

Then Sapur Desai, a former secretary of the Punchayet told the trustees that the BPP's tercentenary "should not be allowed to pass by unnoticed." So eight years after the actual event, and amid the usual controversies for and against celebrating the occasion, the BPP ushered in the next 100 years with a grand function at the Birla Mathushree Sabhangar in Bombay on November 7, 1981. Present at the august gathering were the Vice-President of India, M. Hidayatullah, the Governor of Maharashtra, O.P. Mehra, the Mayor of Bombay, Dr. A.U. Memon and the elite of the community.

Two notable events coincided with the tercentenary celebrations, one being the inauguration of the Framji Dadabhoy Alpaiwalla Museum, the first community museum of its kind in India, and the releasing of the book, *The History of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet 1860-1960* written by S.F. Desai.

After inaugurating the museum, situated in the Khareghat Memorial Building on Patkar Marg (Hughes Road)-described by Hidayatullah as "a remarkable collection, small but selective," the Vice-President and others arrived at the Birla.

Addressing the gathering of around 600, Hidayatullah praised the BPP stating that "a trusteeship that has lasted 300 years does not need any recommendation." Noting the Punchayet's social welfare efforts over the years, the Vice-



Hidayatullah at Alpaiwalla Museum.

President said that unlike the vast majority of Indians, "the Parsis don't depend on the government for assistance. They go to the help of the poor themselves."

Boman-Behram, in his inaugural address, said that for over 300 years the BPP had "done well by the community... the Punchayet has kept the community together." Tracing the origins of the BPP, "one of the biggest welfare trusts in the country," Boman-Behram noted the institution "owes its origin to the initiative of Gerald Aungier, the Second British Governor of Bombay (1669-1677)...Aungier organised all the various castes and communities into associations or Punchayets to manage the social and religious affairs of their fellow members. Hence the Punchayet came into existence in Bombay. All others seem to have died out or seldom functioned, but the Parsi Punchayet of Bombay formed in 1673 has survived to this day...

"In the early days, the Punchayet heard and decided disputes between

individual members of the community and framed its regulations, what were called 'Bundobusts', to govern the religious and social life of the community. The regulations covered matters pertaining to religious practices and customs, marriages and divorces and social habits and usages of the community.

"For long it performed its functions without funds. In the beginning of the 18th century, the Punchayet engaged a staff of three persons which has now grown into a work-force of nearly 500. The first Deed of Trust was made on 4th December 1851 with an amount of Rs.18,062 at its disposal; this was the original nucleus of the Trust Funds of the Punchayet which today run into several crores of rupees."

The Governor of Maharashtra, Air Marshal O.P. Mehra, stated that a small community like the Parsis had "made an outstanding contribution to all facets of life in the country." Noting the community's declining population and the tendency towards "limiting the size of the family," Mehra wished other communities would follow the Parsi "example."

Hidayatullah disagreed with the Governor that "the Parsis should have small families." Instead they should follow the precept of the Bible and "go out and multiply." He also advised the community to show "a little more liberality towards erring Parsis...perhaps there are stray sheep in every community."

The Mayor recalled how as a child, the Parsis were always held in high esteem and cited as a community to emulate. "The Bombay Municipal Cor-

The Parsi Punchayet Case

Historical Conversion.
From Emperors to Paupers.

THE JUDGEMENT SO FAR

In 1903, R.D. Tata married according to Parsi rites, a French lady, after having her navjote performed. Tata claimed his wife "had become a Parsi professing the Zoroastrian faith and consequently she was entitled to participate in all the charitable and religious Funds and Institutions of the Parsis" including the right to enter fire temples and have her body consigned to the Towers of Silence.

Thus the scene was set for the historic court case of Petit vs Jeejeebhoy, also known as "The Parsi Punchayet Case."

The question before the two judges of the Bombay High Court, Justice Frank C.O. Beaman and Justice Dinshaw Dhanjibhoy Daver, was whether a person born in another faith but converted to Zoroastrianism was entitled to the benefits of certain community trusts.

The plaintiffs (Sir Dinsha Maneckji Petit, Tata and others) contended Zoroastrianism enjoins and practices conversion and that converts are entitled to all the benefits provided. The defendants (Sir Jamsetji Jeejeebhoy and others) while admitting that Zoroastrianism permits conversion stated that "ever since their (Parsis) advent into India (they) have not admitted a Juddin (person belonging to another religion) into their fold. They admit, however, that children born of a Zoroastrian father by an alien mother has been admitted into their fold by the performance of the Navjote ceremony."

The plaintiffs called certain witness's to "give some concrete instances of conversion of Juddins to Zoroastrianism."

Daver, in the part of the judgement printed in the last three issues of Parsiana, discredited the evidence presented by the witnesses.

The Plaintiffs relied on certain historical instances as proving the admission of Juddins into the Zoroastrian religion. The three historical instances were:

- (1) The conversion of three learned Hindu Pandits whose names are mentioned in the Dhup Nirang.
- (2) The conversion of the Emperor Akbar.
- (3) The conversion of certain men, women, and children of Mazagon, who were admitted into the religion by the late Dustoor Jamaspji in the year 1882.

The first one of these three instances relied on by the Plaintiffs is the oldest. The whole fabric of this historical instance of the supposed conversion of three Brahmin Pandits to Zoroastrianism is based on a passage in the Dhup Nirang. Its translation by Anquetil du Perron in the prayer is as follows :

"I invoke here the pure and happy soul of Mobed Hemdjiar Ormuzdiar (son of) Herbed Rahmiar. I invoke the pure and happy soul of Mobed Neriosang (son of) Daval. I invoke the pure and happy soul of Biopendet (son of) Djesalpendet (brother of) Schobulpendet."

Anquetil du Perron says that the three last names are the names of three Hindu Pandits, Bio, Djesal, and Schobal, who were converted to Zoroastrianism. It is not very clear from the translation whether the invocations are to the souls of all three, or only to that of the first one, the others being merely the recital of the names of the father and brother of the first. Several learned men who have been examined in this case have been questioned on this point. By some scholars these Pandits are supposed to have been converted 400 or 500 years ago; by others 1200 years ago. Mr. Sheriarji Bharucha says, Anquetil du Perron puts the period when these Pandits flourished as the same when Neriosang flourished, and tradition has it that Neriosang was amongst the original emigrants from Persia to whom Jadav

Rana of Gujarat gave permission to settle in India. The latter opinion seems to be the better opinion. The conjunction of Neriosang's name with these three names lend support to the suggestion that when the Dhup Nirang prayers were composed, the names of great men, who had flourished in those days about the same time, were named together in the invocations.

It seems that, at one time, it was taken for granted that what Anquetil du Perron had said about these three men being Hindu Pandits and converted to Zoroastrianism was correct, and the religions experts who framed their report assumed this statement to be correct. Since signing the report, however, Mr. Jivanji Mody, the Secretary to the Trustees of the Punchayet Funds and Properties, who was one of the Defendants' principal witnesses, has changed his opinion on this as on other points in the case, and he has submitted to the Court several theories against Anquetil du Perron's statement that these Pandits were converted to Zoroastrianism. He finds from his research that these three names are not known to Sanskrit scholars as those of Hindu Pandits of those days. He thinks Anquetil du Perron was misled into believing them to be Hindus. He thinks it is possible they were learned Parsis and called Pandits. This is not by any means an improbable suggestion. A learned Mahomedan is a Moola, a learned Hindu is a Pandit, and a Hindu learned in the Shastras is a Shastri. Parsis have been known by the surname of Moola, and Mr. Jivanji Mody showed an instance of a Parsi spoken of in a book as a Shastri. I have had recently before me Marathi literature in which the present Secretary of State for India is spoken of as Pandit Morley. This is, however, an alternative suggestion made by Mr. Mody, which, I think, is probably the correct explanation of this passage in the Dhup Nirang.

It is very likely that these three men

THE PRIESTLY

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were good men, who had rendered great services to the Zoroastrians in their early days of settlement in India. If they were contemporaries of Nariosang, they may have been men who were prominent in giving the wanderers a home in a strange land and in extending them a kindly welcome in this country. In grateful remembrance of these kindly services, their names were most probably inserted in the Dhup Nirang by the Dustoors who composed those prayers. It is extremely difficult to believe that this handful of homeless strangers, so soon after they were permitted to make their home in a foreign country, should have succeeded in converting to their own religion three eminent and learned Hindu Brahmins. Anquetil du Perron appends a note to his translation of this passage which is very suggestive. He says :

"These three *Dustoors* were Brahmins converted to the religion of Zoroaster, but whom the fear of the Rajahs obliged to hide their conversion."

How then, if their conversion was a secret, did Anquetil du Perron come to know of it? From the mere fact that at the end of the three names the word Pandit was affixed, I am not prepared to hold that they are the names of three Hindu Pandits; and from the mere fact that their names appear in the Dhup Nirang, I am not prepared to hold that they were converts to Zoroastrianism, assuming, for argument's sake, that they were Hindus. The mere fact that a name appears in the prayers of the Zoroastrians, does not prove that the bearer of that name was a Zoroastrian for Mr. Jivanji Mody has conclusively proved before the Court that the name of Firdusi Tooshi is also recited in the Dhup Nirang. No one can seriously suggest that Firdusi Tooshi was a converted Zoroastrian. Assuming that the three names in the Dhup Nirang are the names of three Brahmins, the presence of those names is most easily explained.

A Zoroastrian is nothing if he is not altruistic in his prayers. His prayers are not confined to asking for blessings on himself, his family, and his community. His prayers include invocations and petitions for benefits, both spiritual or temporal, for all Zoroastrians, for all holy and virtuous men of all communities; his prayers invoke blessings on his Sovereign, on his village, on his country, on the universe; they comprise the names of all good and great men whose souls are invoked for the good of all mankind. One favourite mode amongst the Zoroastrians of acknowledging and for ever remembering the good work of a great man, is to include his name in his prayers, and such a distinction it is not necessary, as far as I know, to confine to Zoroastrians alone.

Whereas I find great difficulty in entertaining the theory that Bio Pandit, Djsul Pandit, and Schobul Pandit were Brahmins converted to Zoroastrianism—a theory for which there is absolutely no foundation, I have no difficulty in believing that they were good men who had rendered services to distressed Zoroastrians when they landed in this country, driven from their own home by religious persecution; and that, in gratitude for their kindness, the Zoroastrians of the day introduced their names in their prayers, so that themselves and succeeding generations of Zoroastrians may for ever cherish their memory.

The second historical instance of alien conversion to Zoroastrianism is that of the Emperor Akbar. I confess I feel a difficulty in discussing this part of the Plaintiffs' case with any gravity. Six otherwise sober and sensible people solemnly instruct their Counsel to urge—in support of their contention that it is customary and usual amongst Zoroastrians to convert aliens—that the Emperor Akbar was a converted Zoroastrian. And the equal solemnity with which some of the learned wit-

nesses asserted and others contradicted the suggestion that Akbar was Zoroastrian bordered on the ridiculous.

Mr. Behramgor Tehmurus Anklesaria gravely told the Court that, from his researches, he had come to the conclusion "that at a certain period of his life Akbar had become a *Parsi* and a Zoroastrian." He, however, immediately destroyed the fabric built on his researches by saying, in the very next breath, that Akbar could not be said to have lived and died a *Parsi*, because he was buried. Says the witness, the first act of a convert would have been to build a Dokhma and Akbar never built one. Thus, to his evident satisfaction, the witness proved that his conclusion—arrived at from his researches—was wrong.

Mr. Jivanji Mody, in his book on "Parsi at the Court of Akbar" gave currency to the theory of Akbar's conversion, and a book called "Akbar Charitra" contained a ballad to the effect that Akbar was invested by Dustoors Meherji Rana with Sudra and Kusti. It seem to me that, in a fit of religious fervour, some irresponsible people, extolling the merits of the Zoroastrian religion, started the canard that even the great Emperor Akbar was once a convert to Zoroastrianism. This fable evidently tickled the fancy of enthusiasts, who gave currency to it and embellished the story by adding details as their fancy suggested. Mr. Jivanji Mody and others gave currency to the story, and, never dreaming that some day it would be used against the interests of the very religion he was extolling, allowed himself to be led into the use of language which justifies an impression that he was expressing his own belief in the story. He now, however, stoutly combats the theory of Akbar having ever been a Zoroastrian.

Whether Mr. Jivanji Mody and others expressed their belief in the story or not, the fact remains that Akbar lived

“I will be buried, but you try
and get admission into the religion of our fathers.”

and died a professed Mahomedan. Had a great Emperor like Akbar become a Zoroastrian at any period of his life, his very first acts would have been the building and consecration of Atash Behrams and Dokhmas; and if there is any, the smallest, foundation for the story that Akbar had embraced Zoroastrianism, responsible historians would have recorded it as an event of very great importance.

The third historical instance on which the Plaintiffs rely, far from being shadowy and unsubstantial as the first two, is based on facts. There ought to be no dispute as to what the real facts were, for they are recorded in great detail by the late Dustoor Jamaspji Minochurji, who, every one of the witnesses who were asked about it, say, was a man of the highest integrity, honour, and truthfulness. In the year 1882, Dustoor Jamaspji, one of the two head priests of the Shenshai section of the Parsi Community, invested nine persons—five females and four males, whose ages ranged from 35 to 77—with Sudra and Kusti in the presence of a large number of leading Parsis.

The other high priest, Dustoor Peshotan—between whom and Dustoor Jamaspji there always existed great rivalry and unfriendliness—issued handbills and distributed them amongst the people assembled as soon as the Navjot ceremony was over, stating that as he was not aware that ceremonies had been performed by Dustoor Jamaspji in admitting Juddins in the Zoroastrian religion, he would not allow the newly-admitted men and women in his Atash Behram. He subsequently published a pamphlet stating therein what, according to him, were the necessary ceremonies to be performed before admitting Juddins into the Zoroastrian religion.

Dustoor Jamaspji published a pamphlet in refutation of Dustoor Peshotan's brochure, in which he most emphatically resented the application of

the word Juddins to the people he had invested with Sudra and Kusti. In that part, Dustoor Jamaspji gives the whole history of the case and publishes copy of a Petition, addressed by the people whom he had admitted to Zoroastrianism, to the Trustees of the Parsi Panchayet Funds and Properties on the 19th of May, 1881. It appears from Dustoor Jamaspji's pamphlet that there were at Mazagon eleven persons—men, women, and children—who had been for a long time observing all the religious forms of Zoroastrianism and dressing as Parsis, but who had remained uninvested with Sudra and Kusti.

Their existence was well known to the Parsi community of Bombay for some time, and some years previous to 1882, the late Mr. Merwanji Framji Panday interested himself in their behalf and offered to have them invested with Sudra and Kusti; but these people, who belonged to a very humble sphere of life—the men earning their livelihood by working in the Docks—were frightened into a belief that the orthodox portion of the community would subject them to personal violence and forcibly divest them of Sudra and Kusti; so they abstained from taking advantage of the offer.

Sometime afterwards, however, they presented the petition to the Trustees to which I have referred. In this they solemnly asserted that they were all born of Parsi fathers, that they were all of true Parsi *olad*, and that they were desirous of being invested with Sudra and Kusti and of being formally admitted into the Zoroastrian religion. The Trustees took no action on the petition but about 200 leading Parsis interested themselves on their behalf and collected a fund. They approached Dustoor Jamaspji to admit these people. Dustoor Jamaspji thereupon instituted very strict enquiries and satisfied himself that all these eleven people were of Parsi *boon* that is, of Parsi fathers.

It was after he was satisfied that what these people had stated about their Parsi origin was true that Dustoor Jamaspji, in the presence of an assemblage of Parsis, in a public place and in the most open manner, invested nine out of the eleven persons with Sudra and Kusti. The remaining two were children of 5 and 2, and had not arrived at the age when they could be invested.

This is the correct history of what were spoken of as Mazagon converts. They were in no sense Juddins. They were born of Zoroastrian fathers. They professed the Zoroastrian religion as soon as they arrived at the age of discretion. They observed all the outward forms of the religion of their fathers. They prayed for admission into the religion of their fathers at the dying request of one of them who said: “I will be buried, but you try and get admission into the religion of our fathers:” and after full enquiries, when the Dustoor was satisfied that every one of them was of Parsi *olad*, they were admitted to the religion of their fathers.

Mr. Jivanji Mody, who is fully conversant with what has happened in the Parsi community, says with reference to this event, as follows:

“The Mazagon cases took place in 1882. After those cases, Dustoor Peshotan, one of the high priests, published a pamphlet finding fault with Dustoor Jamaspji, who performed the ceremonies, for not having performed *all* the proper ceremonies. Dustoor Peshotan complains of no Burushnum being performed before the Navjot ceremony. He contends that the Reemun Burushnum ought to have been first performed, then the investiture ceremony should have been performed, and then the great nine nights' Burushnum should have been performed. Dustoor Jamaspji, in the Mazagon cases, gave the great Burushnum of the nine nights to the people whom he admitted in this Zoroastrian faith. Dustoor Jamaspji wrote and pub-

THE PRIESTLY PROBLEM

The life of Dastur Dhalla XXI

lished a pamphlet in reply to Dustoor Peshotan. Dustoor Jamaspji argues at page 78 of his pamphlet that the Reemun Burushnum is not necessary."

A little later on Mr. Jivanji Mody said :

"In 1882, Dustoor Peshotan published his pamphlet referring to the Mazagon cases. He treated those people as juddins. The pamphlet is headed "Explanation of the ceremonies that should be performed for the admission of juddins to the Zoroastrian religion." At page 4, you find that by juddins, Dustoor Peshotan means children of Parsi fathers by alien mothers."

I have detailed at some length the controversy between two high priests as to what are the ceremonies necessary for admitting children of a Parsi father by an alien mother, as the question is of importance on another point which I propose to discuss later. It is difficult to give the exact meaning of the word Juddin. Literally, the word signifies a person belonging to another religion. There is no question that a person born of both non-Zoroastrian parents is a juddin, but I do not think Dustoor Peshotan was right in calling the children of a Parsi father and an alien mother juddins. For present purposes, it is sufficient to point out that the three historical instances do not in any way help the Plaintiffs.

Defendants have never denied that children of Parsi fathers have been admitted before now—no doubt, in some instances, without their undergoing the nine nights' Burushnum; and the admission of the Mazagon peoples loses all its importance for the Plaintiffs the moment it is established that the persons admitted were the offspring of Parsi fathers. The details given by Dustoor Jamaspji in his pamphlet with reference to each one of the nine persons whom he admitted proves beyond all doubt that they were, every one of them, the offspring of Parsi fathers.

TO BE CONTINUED

Aek Atmakatha is the autobiography of the late Dr. Maneck Nusserwanji Dhalla, high priest of the Pakistan Parsis and a scholar of world repute. This is the 21st edited and condensed extract from the book "Dastur Dhalla - The Saga of a soul" - an English translation by Gool and Behram Rustomji of the original Gujarati, 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. With the assistance of the Karachi Parsis, Dhalla studied Iranian languages in Bombay and then proceeded to Columbia University in New York, where he was awarded a Ph.D. in 1908. On his return to India he was nominated head priest of Karachi in which capacity he tried to critically evaluate old religious beliefs and customs in the light of his broadened outlook.

This approach caused him to clash with the more orthodox section of the community and he became involved in several religious and social controversies.

But despite the opposition, Dhalla proceeded with his efforts to educate the community and resolve old conflicts.

The question of supplying highly qualified priests to meet with the demands of a cultured community like the Parsis has been repeatedly discussed since at least a hundred years. The community has spent large sums of money to solve this perplexing problem and has made many a pious attempt. It has not been able to find a way out of this difficulty upto date.

After the publication of my book *The adornment of priests* in 1897 I have delivered several lectures on this intricate subject and have written many articles about it. During the long interval that has elapsed since then, I have pondered deeply on this my pet subject. I have observed keenly and experienced widely. In doing so my views on the subject formed on sentiment fifty years ago have altered and I shall state hereunder how I have begun to see and understand this problem since some time.

In the religious and social life of our community a great deal has been handed down to us by the Indo-Iranians prior to Zarathushtra. Among other things the onus of hereditary priesthood has been foisted upon us which has come down from time immemorial, long before the ancient Peshdadian and Kyanian period.

The accident of birth creates our dasturs and our mobeds. Our Athornan fold has become a distinct class by itself. The son of a Brahmin becomes a Brahmin, irrespective of calibre or capability. Similarly, every Zoroastrian descended from the priestly flock is invested with the garb of priesthood. If all the menfolk born within a certain fold hold the monopoly of a particular profession, it is not possible for the community to sustain them. Because of this, in India as there are many more Brahmins than the Hindu community can maintain, they are at liberty to carry on any other occupation besides their sacred vocation. In Sassanian Iran, educated priests became prime ministers, ambassadors, judges,

dignitaries, teachers, scribes, while those who were illiterate took any ordinary occupation to make both ends meet.

Hereditary priesthood entails: A conglomeration of an excess of priests; their principal qualification — a perfection in performing ceremonies; ceremonials — their mainstay of existence.

Due to the above reasons, wherever there is hereditary priesthood, that religion becomes replete with rituals for the maintenance of its priests. The priests themselves perform make it so. Only then can their fold find sufficient means of livelihood.

Such is the condition of today's heirs of the priestly class. The followers of prophet Zarathustra's simple, ethical and devotional religion have turned it into a religion of unlimited rituals.

Twelve hundred years ago, our forefathers emigrating to India, had to start afresh in a new land. Spreading from Kathiawad to Gujarat, as the community established itself in various places, we find our priests making a kind of collective effort to take under their control a congregation at will. In this way separate 'punthaks' are formed and each 'punthak' inherits the contract of practising within the appointed limits of its fold. On the other hand the members of each 'punthak' through individual effort, manage to secure a laity of varying dimensions and pose as their hereditary 'punthaks' or their family priests.

In former times laymen were usually farmers, toddy tappers, wine vendors, or grocers. As there were more priests than the laity could maintain, besides performing prayers and ceremonies the priests cooked food meant for sanctification, prepared sweetmeats for ceremonies, wove cloth, maintained small shops and carried on various incidental occupations. Their womenfolk assisted them in all their work. Besides, as they

had the monopoly of weaving 'Kustis' for all Zoroastrians, they were able to earn a little from that profession. To a large extent this routine continues to the present day.

In the field of learning, our religious leaders were somewhat superior to those who patronized them. Very few laymen were literate, whereas it was essential for every young mobed aspiring to be a Navar or a Maratab to be able to read and write in order to be able to learn by rote lengthy prayers from books written in Avestan script or transcribed in Gujarati.

Those priests and laymen who were

Educated Ervads were available but means to employ them were inadequate.

obliged to keep accounts relating to their business or occupations knew the rudiments of mathematics. The few who had contacts with the courts of Navabs studied Persian. A handful of dasturs and mobeds wrote books in Gujarati and in Persian and contributed to the field of literature. Such a state of affairs continued up to the end of the 18th century.

Conditions changed from the beginning of the 19th century. With the introduction of English education many sons of priests like those of laymen started taking advantage of it. Within two or three decades the number of western-qualified mobeds increased. These young men withdrew from their parental profession, with the result that as time passed on and English education advanced, Athornan youths having similar western qualifications as the sons of

laymen came forth to serve. Yet the practicing priests remained as they were fifty years ago.

Young Athornan graduates began to put on black-turbaned *paghdis* or *phen-tas*. They were credited as being qualified while those of their family who took to priesthood and whose education terminated at the learning of three or four Gujarati books were called comparatively ignorant. The priestly profession lost its reputation. Mobed and Andhiaru became terms of ridicule. In Parsi dramas and plays the farcical roles were assigned to Andhiarus together with Iranis and villagers. The sons of Mobeds themselves began to believe that to be a mobed was degrading.

The newly-enlightened section of the community drew everyone's attention to Christian priests and complained about the backwardness of our religious leaders. From 1839 when Rev. Wilson converted two Parsi youths and commenced a tirade against the teachings of the Zoroastrian faith, the community became more aware of the necessity of improving the priestly fold. The educated young men and women of the community were attracted to Christian priests because of the quality of their learning and of their character.

Well-wishers of the community believed that if the sons of mobeds were given such fine training, the community could attain qualified priests to suit the enlightened age. Until that time the sons of mobeds were trained for the priestly profession at Navsari, Udvarda, Surat or Broach, in the homes of experts in the field of religious study. The sons of mobeds went daily to the homes of these savants for seven or eight years to pray, and after being perfectly initiated into the study necessary for becoming a Navar or a Maratab and into the knowledge of performing ceremonies, they stepped forth to practise as priests.

TO BE CONTINUED

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"A trusteeship that has lasted 300 years does not need any recommendation."

poration was dominated by the stalwarts of your community for many years," he noted.

Noted social worker, Gulestan Billimoria pointed out that the BPP "renders service from the womb to the tomb." She related how the Parsis at the beginning of the present century built housing colonies because they "thought every Parsi should have a roof over their heads." Subsequently there was a lull. "It is a pity that when land was available at very cheap rates and even funds would have been forthcoming, the trustees of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet of those days did not have the foresight and the wisdom to acquire that land and build (as a result today we have) the grim spectacle of 4,000 Parsis clamouring for accommodation, knocking at the doors of the Parsi Punchayet."



Hidayatullah garlanding Desai at Birla function; BPP chief-executive Anklesaria at right.

Dr. Aspi Golwalla, who recently became the new chairman of the BPP, requested the dignitaries present to sanction No Objection Certificates to the BPP for building. He noted applications were pending with the government and until cleared, housing projects would be stalled.

Golwalla explained the tercentenary celebrations "should have taken place in 1973" and that "some critics may say the wheels of the Parsi Punchayet do move slowly." However, he was happy the

Parsis should follow the precept of the Bible and "go out and multiply."

celebrations were held while Boman-Behram was chairman.

Indeed it was a fitting end to Boman-Behram's 20 years on the board of trustees, six of which were as chairman.

Enmeshed in numerous controversies and the recipient of more brickbats than bouquets, the beleaguered chairman's final days were made memorable by the grandness of the tercentenary function and the distinguished gathering.

The tercentenary marked the end of an era, one which saw the alienation of the Punchayet from the community. But with the new awakening and consciousness aroused by the Anjuman Committee elections last year, the induction of a new trustee, Jamsheed Kanga, and a general mood of conciliation and pragmatism, the next 100 years have begun on an optimistic note.

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