

Parsiānā

"Act Today, Preserve Tomorrow"

Is self-employment the answer to the community's economic ills? Are Parsi women more prone to breast cancer? Can the migration of rural Parsis to urban areas be arrested? Should Parsi women seek full-time employment?

These are some of the questions raised and answered at a symposium on 'The Problems of the Parsi Community and Their Solutions' held by the Bombay Parsi Punchayet as part of their tercentenary celebrations.

"We have to act today in order to preserve tomorrow," said BPP chairman Dr Aspi Golwalla, inaugurating the November 5 Patkar Hall function.

The frequency of breast cancer has been found higher in women who bear their first child around and after the age of 30.

After noting that the purpose of the meeting was not only to rehash problematic issues but "if not to solve at least to ameliorate some of the important Parsi problems," Golwalla requested the noted lawyer and former BPP trustee Shrivax Vakil to conduct the pro-

ceedings. Vakil put questions to the distinguished panel of speakers, all of whom are authorities on their subjects. The panel, in order of speaking, comprised: Dr Gulestan Billimoria, A.R. Balsara, Dr D.J. Jussawalla, Sam Rao, Minoo Shroff, Dr Mehroo Bengalee, Dr Jamshed Modi and Jal Pardiwalla.

The BPP trustees did not address the gathering but sat with the audience and heard the speakers.

Noting that "the days of the Tatas, Wadias and Godrejs are gone (as) they all come under MRTP (monopolies and restrictive trade practices)," Vakil asked industrialist Balsara what the future held for Parsis in industry. Balsara emphasized that "India is a land of opportunity. The time is now for enterprise and opportunity. The government is all for promoting industry at the center and the states. The banks rush to offer incentives."

"Amongst our strengths (as a community) are a high literacy rate, a pioneering spirit, excellent human relations and support from our own community."

The weaknesses comprised rank urban concentration, isolation from other communities, limited capacity for hard work, an easy-go-lucky approach, and pampering parents.

Parsis tended to look down "on manual labour. They should realize that the motor mechanic of today is the garage

owner of tomorrow."

"The Indian market is vastly expanding. The infra-structure is there, we have only to build on it. The answer is not in white collar jobs. It is in self-employment."

Balsara spoke of the business 'style of adoption' followed by other communities especially the Sindhi Sethias. "They encourage the youngsters, give them a portion of their premises when they are starting out."

We have to build up our youth. Days are spent on religious teaching but vocational guidance seldom gets the same stress.

"We have funds available for education but not enough for starting small

Of the participants at the ASIAD '82, 14 were Parsis.

industries. Community banks and trusts should help."

On the incidence of cancer in the community, an issue of much concern, "Parsis do have an unusual development of cancer," noted Dr D.J. Jussawalla, eminent cancer specialist and dean of the Tata Memorial Hospital, Bombay. "The frequency of various kinds of

cancer in various communities is different." Mouth and throat cancer are not prevalent among Parsis because they do not smoke or chew betel leaves, but breast and prostate cancer do occur frequently, though little is known, he said, about prostate cancer. The frequency of breast cancer has been found higher in

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women who bear their first child around and after the age of 30.

An experiment with mice injected with the mouse mammary tumour virus revealed that sometimes the milk of women with new-born children has the same particles as that of the injected mice and that Parsi women had more of these particles than American women. This could be, said Jussawalla, a hereditary factor combined with environmental factors. One solution would be to get married earlier and have the first child well before the age of 30.

Vakil noted that some Parsis believed that breast feeding caused cancer. Could the doctor comment? Jussawalla noted on the contrary, breast feeding appeared to lessen the chances of breast cancer. He cited the instance of a particular community in Japan where women suckled their young till the age of eight! No case of breast cancer among the women was reported.

But whatever the Parsi physique may be prone to, in sports the community was continuing to make a name for itself. Of the participants at the ASIAD '82, 14 were Parsis, stated physical culturist Jal Pardiwalla. They are weight-lifters Vispi and Neville Daroga, yatchmen Fali Unwalla, Jeejee Unwalla, Farokh Tarapore, Zarir Karanjia, Byram and Ghospi Avari (of Karachi), swimmer Persis Madon, cyclists Homi Bathena and Armin Arethna, sprinter Adille Sumariwalla, shot-putter Bakh-tawar Khambatta, and hockey player Hufish Nariman.

But on the whole "compared to the facilities offered, we have a meagre percentage of Parsi sportsmen," Pardiwalla noted; though Parsi schools usually afford sufficient facilities for sports,

Parsi youth do not take adequate advantage. "The present lot is lethargic," he said and also noted that few Parsis take to teaching sport as a profession. "No Parsi men or women take interest and I request the Parsi Punchayet to make a study and prevail upon youth today to take up this matter... Teaching demands missionary zeal, but in the end it is both paying and satisfying."

Replying to a question regarding Parsi children attending convent schools rather than Parsi trust schools, educationist Dr Mehroo Bengalee, a trustee of the Maneckji Cooper Education Trust School at Juhu, said that if Parsi schools are providing the required amenities to other communities, who appreciate them, these must continue. "Why stress on only Parsi students in these schools?" Of greater import, Bengalee feels, is the calibre of the students turned out by the schools, even Parsi schools.

"Why can't we have one polytechnic for our youngsters?" asked Bengalee. "Why can't we prepare our children for competitive exams? We never think of providing work experience to our children. There is no achievement motive, no guidance, no effort on our part. Our children are wasting their energy... provide them with opportunities... and even in the field of religious education, much more can still be done."

"Parsi women have moved much faster than our menfolk," said Bengalee. "Parsi ladies are still in the forefront... the best gynaecologist, the best swimmer, even the best secretary is a Parsi... Parsi ladies are in the service of

**"India is a land of
opportunity. The time is
now for enterprise."**

the community and mankind." A Parsi lady, she said, "never likes to be stationary but to advance, prosper... daily working, striving to reach the absolute top." Not far behind these tributes to our womenfolk, came the warning that "our homes are becoming boarding houses." No longer is the home filled with the perfume of lolan and the chant of a mother's prayers every morning; today's mother is in a constant flurry, often meeting her children only at night. "If this is to be, let not women strive so."

"Unmarried women should be encouraged to take employment to broaden their outlook, ensure economic independence and improve their status," said Gulestan Billimoria, dedicated social worker. "There is just one danger — that of mixed marriages," she said. "The situation is different for married

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women." The children are left to the tender mercies of an ayah, or at one of several mushrooming kindergartens. Billimoria suggested that the Parsi Punchayet conduct a creche for children from two to five years of age. She also said that men must help with the household work — "This would add to harmony in the home."

Success in the direction of community marriages will be partially negated by the housing problem, which the BPP considers worthy of the closest attention. Sam Rao, architect, reiterated that the Punchayet has land but a paucity of funds, and suggested that other organisations and trusts make these funds available to the Punchayet instead of merely accumulating interest. Rao said that the middle income groups should also be assisted in finding accommodation, and perhaps this would generate funds for the lower income groups. Young persons waiting to get married could be given priority in allotment, but equal attention must be paid to the maintenance of dilapidated buildings and to those retired persons who are deprived of accommodation, he said. Vakil commented that lack of cooperation from tenants was one of several impediments in the BPP's housing plans.

Aggravating the housing problem is the influx of Parsis from rural to urban areas. Minoo Shroff, economist and consultant to J.K. Industries, felt that at least one could "arrest the phenomenon (of migration), reversing it doesn't seem feasible." Urbanisation is a national phenomenon, but there is no reason why clusters of Parsis should not form in the villages. If the question is that of employment in the villages, Shroff feels

that "self employment is the answer."

Migration abroad is also a universal trend, and Parsis must not be discouraged from migrating, so long as they preserve their feeling of fraternity abroad. But "attachment even to the family, let alone the community, is slowly receding," said Shroff, and "out

"The motor mechanic of today is the garage owner of tomorrow."

of ten young people going abroad, hardly two might return."

Regarding the settlement of Parsis in the villages, however, Vakil commented that prices of real estate have shot up even in the villages, so that in places like Dahanu, real estate is priced at Rs 220 a square foot.

Dr Jamshed Modi, founder of the Zoroastrian Community Development Institute, who spent around 19 years in the U.S.A. before returning to India finds what he terms 'Parsipanu'

markedly lacking in children of mixed marriages abroad, and even when both the parents are Parsis; to some extent, Parsipanu is lacking even in the parents.

"Have we changed where we should have changed and have we stood strong and steady where we should have stood strong and steady?" Modi asked. His own belief, that "we have changed where we should have stood strong and steady," illuminates the core of the Parsis' problems. Befuddled by the fast-changing times the Parsis, in adapting to a new way of life, "may seem to be succeeding on economic fronts, but if we let go traditions, abandon religion, economic success will be spurious and short-lived," said Modi. "We must measure our success," he feels, "not by our assets, but by the service we render, by the amount we put out."

Speaking on the controversial issue of inter-marriage, Modi said that a child of an inter-community marriage is, to all intents and purposes, lost to the community. Today's youngsters claim to live by reason and argument, they claim to be rationalists, and therefore a well-documented case in favour of community marriages must be presented to them.

At this juncture, Modi posed yet another pertinent question — Do you have an argument that will stand the test of reason? Modi suggested the encouragement of programmes of interaction, where young people can be involved in meaningful social activity.

Commenting on the poor condition

"There is no achievement motive, no guidance, no effort on our part."

of our priests, Modi inquired, "Is their condition the result of the fact that they do not figure prominently in our daily lives?" The role of our dasturs has never been as direct and important as that of the Catholic priests and Protestant ministers with their parishioners, he said. "Invest in the priests, in their education... When he plays this role, he will be widely sought and adequately compensated." When the people are conscious of receiving something from the agiary

Continued on page 6

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The Parsi Punchayet Case

Petit vs Jeejeebhoy XIV

The Parsi Caste

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 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 Dinshaw Maneckji Petit; Tata and others) contended Zoroastrianism enjoins and practises conversion and that converts are entitled to all the benefits provided. The defendants (Sir Jamsetji Jeejeebhoy and others) while admitting that Zoroastrianism permits conversion state 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 have been admitted into their fold by the performance of the Navjote ceremony.

Daver, in his part of the judgement discredited the evidence, past and present, of conversion in India.

Beaman in the last instalment spoke of the community's tribal or caste sentiment superseding the religious bond.

I am quite ready to start with the assumption that the Plaintiffs make, namely, that when the Zoroastrian exiles fled from the Mussulman persecution, they brought with them to India, as their common bond—and practically their only common bond—their ancient religion. I will go further and add that, at that remote time, they would probably have not only approved but welcomed Converts if—to use the phrase that has so often since been repeated—those Converts would do no harm to the good religion. They needed help, they needed countenance, they needed above all things, powerful allies. And no allies were likely to be better disposed to them than such as had been converted to their own faith. They were not then a dominant, but a servient, timid, and scattered people, the mere remnant and straggling fugitives of an overturned kingdom. They were in a strange land, surrounded by strange peoples, professing an unknown religion. In these circumstances, it is easy to understand that while they dared not proselytize, they would have been only too glad to welcome influential Converts from Hinduism and Mahomedanism. And this, I have no doubt, is the real explanation of the Pandits and the Akbar story.

But two main causes must have been steadily at work to re-mould, and by degrees altogether to transform, the attitude of the community towards conversion. The first, and no doubt the most powerful of these, was the immemorial Indian caste sentiment, with which the whole atmosphere in which they lived was charged. The second was their own growing prosperity. This had a natural and inevitable tendency to re-inforce the pressure of the caste principle and to accelerate its growth. Caste must always be more acceptable to a high, than to a low, order in its organization. In proportion as the Indian Zoroastrians were

able to compare themselves and their circumstances freely, without apprehension, with the peoples about them with whom they came into the most direct and frequent contact, and from whom they were most likely to receive the infusion of new racial and social traits, it is almost certain that the caste idea must have struck a deeper and deeper root, and coloured all their relations with the indigenous Indians in their neighbourhood.

This is not a merely fanciful speculation. I think it is as certain a fact as any which could be proved *a posteriori* before us by evidence; and all the evidence which has been laid before us does, in my opinion, conclusively establish it. I cannot too strongly insist upon this substitution of caste for a religious basis of the organization of the Indian Zoroastrians, because that is the ground upon which *I have, after long and anxious reflection, felt that our common decision can be most securely founded.* While theoretically adhering to their ancient religion and consistently avowing its principal tenets—including, of course, the merit of conversion as the theological dogma, they erected about themselves real caste barriers, and gradually fell under the influence of the caste idea, till, in modern popular language, it has found current expression in the term Parsi, which now seems to me to have as distinctly a caste meaning as essentially a caste connotation as that used to denominate any other great Indian caste.

This, of course, by analogy only; but yet by an analogy that was forced upon the Indian Zoroastrians by the circumstances and conditions in which they found themselves, and by adaptation to which their corporate existence was alone made possible, therefore by an analogy which was both imperative and inevitable. Skipping the intermediate

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most exemplary foreigner.**

stages, the slow steps of this transforming process—skipping, I say, from the beginning, twelve hundred years ago to the end to-day, revealed in the Defendants' Written Statement, we need go no further for a complete and unanswerable vindication of the truth of this theory.

The first glance at the Defendants' definition of members of the Parsi Community professing the Zoroastrian faith, satisfied me, once for all, that the basis of the controversy had shifted, and that we were not really concerned with a religious, but with a caste question. If that is so, we must obviously re-adjust our perspective, rearrange the principles applicable, above all prepare ourselves to adopt different criteria in testing the rival cases. The Defendants, expressing as we now know the orthodox Parsi view, are prepared to overlook immorality, bastardy—anything but alienage. They are ready to admit any and every Irani Zoroastrian about whose antecedents they cannot possibly know anything. But they will not admit the purest, most blameless foreigner, of whose character and conduct they may have the completest assurance. They will admit all the illegitimate children of Parsi parents, begotten of prostitutes or kept-mistresses, but they will not admit the noblest, most exemplary foreigner. Why? Because a foreigner is outside the caste, and caste is an institution into which you must be born.

This is not religion, it has nothing to do with religion: it is essentially distinctly irreligious; but it is pure unadulterated Oriental caste. This is so plain that I do not apprehend any unbiased and competent person would dream of contradicting it. Then, what is the consequence? That, too, is equally plain. We have here, what in its origin was not but has undoubtedly become a caste, and the singularly powerful, influential, and, in every sense, a superior caste.

And our duty is to find out from the materials before us, if we can, the period at which the caste sentiment, as the predominant factor of the organization of the Indian Zoroastrians, substituted itself for the religious sentiment. Put in another way: if, at the time these Trusts were founded, the religious sentiment was still decisively predominant, then I think the Plaintiffs' contention would be sound, and for my part I should be disposed to give effect to it; but if by that time caste has so far overridden early religion as to have become the decisively predominant factor of the Indian Zoroastrian organization, we should have to apply quite different criteria, and I think that the Defendants' contention would correctly express the intention of the Founders.

The Indian Zoroastrians had been settled in their adopted country, roughly, for a thousand years before the period with which we are directly concerned. During the whole of that time, they had been exposed to the powerful impact of all sorts of social and religious

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conceptions, yet they were not absorbed. They emerge to-day as distinctive and peculiar a people relatively to the peoples, infinitely outnumbering them as when they first landed. They have kept their ancient faith pure and undefiled, and it is only in our own day, with the great inflation of their wealth and increased facilities of communication with the western world, that we are able to see any disposition at all to relax

the rigour of what must have been throughout that period the strongest conservative caste spirit. Immorality there was, and, in the circumstances, of course must have been; but there was never any open public recognition of the slightest deviation from the most rigid caste principle.

It is also to be noted that, however liberal they might have been when first they came to India, the Indian Zoroastrians were precluded—by the very means which they, growing in numbers and influence, adopted for the preservation of their own caste purity—from dissipating and losing themselves in the vast ocean of Hinduism about them. Caste again. Just as now that they have assimilated in every sense the caste idea, and made it the bulwark of their tribal or caste unity, so they were themselves hemmed in by it.

They could not have entered the Societies about them, because those Societies were Caste Societies, and refused to allow anyone who was not born into them within the pale. The very air they breathed for a thousand years was heavy with caste: caste was the condition of all social existence. As a caste, they might hope to preserve and improve their own status; as anything else, they could only expect rapid disintegration, and dissipation on the lowest levels, as unclassified outcastes and pariahs. Yet, of course, there must have been a long conflict between the religious and the caste sentiment, between the claims of religion and the claims of society. They had to serve God, but they also had to serve, to some extent, Mammon, or there would shortly have been none of the faithful left to uphold the Holy Mazdayasnian faith.

As we have seen, even to this day, and regarded rather as a theoretical than a practical question, the terms on which

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and the priests, then the situation will improve. "The key point here is service," and the priests, then the situation will and "If an agiary is a source of strength, the attendance will improve and people will put out to keep the agiary and priests in comfortable conditions."

Admittedly, "the people who preceded us did great things — but we must think — how much more I have to do now to get to their level." We look to the Punchayet and Trusts to solve our problems, said Modi, but "what is the individual doing?"

"Teaching demands missionary zeal, but in the end it is both paying and satisfying."

Many individuals unfortunately were not even aware the meeting was being held.

The traditional means of informing the community, through advertisements in the Gujarati press and notices at baugs is clearly not adequate as was noted by the poor attendance. A more comprehensive mailing list and advertisements in the English dailies are essential if the BPP wants to reach the larger community. An otherwise excellent meeting, whose form, content and speakers have seldom been matched in Bombay and for which the BPP deserves full credit, suffered because it was addressed to empty chairs.

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Parsi Roll of Honour

Eminent Parsi Zoroastrians who have made national and international contributions to their fields will be honoured at a public function held by the Bombay Parsi Punchayet on December 21, 1982 at the C.C.I. North Lawns in Bombay.

The personalities to be honoured include: J.R.D. Tata, industry and civil aviation; Naval H. Tata, industry and industrial labour; Soli Godrej, industry; Zubin Mehta, music; N.A. Palkhivala, economics and law; H.M. Seervai, law; Field Marshal S.H.F.J. Manekshaw, Admiral Cursetji and Air Marshal Aspi Engineer, defence services; Dr H.N. Sethna, science and technology; H.J.H. Taleyarkhan, politics; Dr D.J. Jussawalla, medicine; Ms Avabai B. Wadia, social worker, mainly in family planning; Adi Marzban, theatre and A.F.S. Tal-yarkhan, sports commentator.

The programme, which is open to the public, has been organised with the purpose of "appreciating the services and the role these eminent Parsis have

played," noted BPP chairman, Dr Aspi Golwalla. The function will also "serve as a stimulus for the younger generation" and encourage them to "emulate the example of these eminent Parsis," said Golwalla.

An invocation by Dastur N.D. Minochehr-Homji will be followed by a welcome speech by Golwalla and the presentation of the scrolls of honour in silver caskets to the nominees.

The selection of Parsis to be honoured was made by the BPP Board of Trustees, said Golwalla. Some of the individuals may not be able to attend but they would be given the scroll in absentia.

Erratum

Due to an oversight, the name of Noshir Sorabji Pochkhanawala was not included in the list of the Zoroastrian Co-operative Credit Bank's committee members (*Parsiana*, October, 1982). The error is regretted.

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The Vansda case

The Life of Dastur Dhalla XXIX

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 29th 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 Sura, 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.

In the last instalment, Dhalla wrote of the furor created in the early 1940's when two Parsi students studying at Bombay's Sophia College converted to Christianity.

From the time of the first sessions of the Zoroastrian Conference in 1910, the leading newspaper — regarded as the religious guide of the majority-orthodox party — has been continuously pouring out a vile tirade against the reformists. A great deal of slander was directed personally against me. This pained my associates and they urged me for permission to file a libel suit against the editors. I dissuaded them from taking such a step. In the middle of 1914 I went with my wife to New York to have the "Zoroastrian Theology" printed and to deliver some talks. Taking advantage of my absence, the Conference, on its own authority, filed a libel suit.

The case was conducted in the court of the Presidency Magistrate. The Hon'ble Justice, Sir Dinshaw Daver, considered to be the leader of the orthodox party, had come to bear witness against the Conference. In the course of his evidence he said with disdain: "That 'andhiaru' Dhalla had no right to come from Karachi and disturb the peace of the Parsis of Bombay." Despite the evidence of a renowned authority who presided over the High Court, the charge of libel was accepted and the main mouthpiece of orthodoxy was fined.

About the end of 1943 I received a letter from a lawyer's firm in Bombay stating that a case was being filed in the High Court of Bombay concerning the Jooddin Navjote that had been performed at Vansda. I should prepare to come to Bombay when called upon to give evidence on behalf of the complain-

ant. Despite my aversion to getting involved in legal matters, it seemed as though I would be obliged to shoulder this burden, so I requested that if my evidence was absolutely necessary, a commission may kindly be sent to Karachi for the purpose. I received a reply from the solicitor that they would try to comply with my request. Immediately after that, due to unexpected circumstances, I had to go to Bombay to deliver some lectures. Hence, although the case was not yet registered, arrangements were made to take my evidence.

The community was aware of my views regarding the Jooddin question. They had been publicized through my booklet on the subject in 1919. Later, in 1938 in the 'History of Zoroastrianism' and in 1942 in the 'Atma Katha' I had written at length about it. At that time the community was divided in four groups on the matter.

A very large majority of the community was opposed to accepting into the faith any non-Parsi or any child born of a Parsi father and a non-Parsi mother under any circumstances or on any condition.

Another section was positively against taking in non-Parsis, but advocated the acceptance of offspring of a Parsi father and a non-Parsi mother.

A third and minor group firmly believed that Zarathushtra had preached that his religion should reach the four corners of the globe and, as such, the community was obliged to take into the fold those who wished to enter of their own free will.

The discussions that had arisen since the first decade of this century, regarding the acceptance into the religion of a

All the religions of the world are essentially missionary in origin and dream of converting the whole of humanity into their own faith.

French lady born of Christian parents, gave birth to a grave announcement by some students that from the very beginning the doors of the Zoroastrian temples were not open to all and sundry. The Almighty had sent His holy prophet, Spitama Zarathushtra, into the world with specific instructions to admit into the faith only those people belonging to a particular tribe who lived

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on Iranian soil in those days! This fourth group, in order to maintain the validity of this weird statement, was attempting to annul at one stroke all the Pahlavi, Pazend, Sanskrit, Persian, Gujarati and English translations of ancient Avestan writings in support of conversion.

The history of religions reveals that there will always be some credulous adherent of the most ridiculous and

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absurd declarations. Similarly in our own community there appeared one such small group of men and women.

All the religions of the world are essentially missionary in origin and dream of converting the whole of humanity into their own faith. Today, not all religions have retained their pristine position. Christian and Muslim priests and mullahs, in the vain glory to make their religion universally acknowledged, continue their missionary work. Changed climes, times and conditions have arrested other religions from doing so. Yet, should anyone be willing to come into their faith, he is accepted.

After extending a joyous welcome at the birth of Zarathushtra, the Fravadin Yasht breathes a prayer that his faith may pervade the seven continents (haft keshwar jameen). Every Yasht and Nyash concludes with the same wish. Beginning from Zarathushtra's Gathas down to the Yajashnes, Visparad, Yashts and Vendidad throughout the entire Avesta, clear and unambiguous commandments to spread the sacred faith can be found.

Precious books composed in Pahlavi, the court language of the Sassanian kings, strictly enjoin the acceptance of non-Zoroastrians into the Zoroastrian faith. A great book like the Dinkard states that the most virtuous deed a 'Joodin' can perform is to relinquish his own religion and embrace the Zoroastrian faith. Moreover, it is written in the Dinkard that with the assistance of the learned Dastur Adarbad, King Shapur II performed memorable deeds to revive and radiate his religion. The Dinkard further adds that if persuasion and placation do not prevail, then it is correct

to convert non-Zoroastrians into Zoroastrianism forcefully. Even a ritualistic document like the Aipetistan gives evidence of conversion. *Madigane hazar dadistan* which relates to legal and constitutional matters informs us that if the Christian slave of a Zoroastrian master abandons Christianity and becomes a Zoroastrian, he should be set free.

At the time of the 'Joodin' case, the committee that had been appointed by a meeting of the Anjuman called by the Trustees of the Parsi Panchayat at Bombay in 1903, nominated a sub-committee consisting of conservative as well as radical Athornan and Behdin scholars to consider and present a report on whether it is valid according to the Zoroastrian religion to accept non-Zoroastrians into the faith. They presented a unanimous report that Zoroastrianism permits the acceptance of 'Joodins' into the faith.

Bishop Hlyus who has traced the history of behaviour patterns, writes that in Armenia King Yazdagard II used both persuasion and pressure in order to convert into Zoroastrianism, the Christians living there. In order that these Christians become Zoroastrians, the Persian Government bribed them with promises of position, rank, honour and titles and exempted them from the tax levied on them. The King's Minister, Narsih, through a royal proclamation informed the Christians that those who did not accept the Mazdayasnan religion are blind and deaf and that Satan was leading them astray. In Georgia, Albania and other countries also, Zoroastrianism was being widely spread.

Then the scourge of time enveloped mighty Iran in clouds of untold calamities. The Iran that Cyrus had crowned the Queen of Asia fell on evil days. The Zoroastrian Empire was destroyed forever. Naturally, together with it, the Zoroastrian religion immediately became non-missionary.

About 1,200 years ago, our forefathers felt that the continuance of the community depended upon following in the footsteps of the Hindus and living a distinct and closed community life. The question of conversion was closed permanently. Yet it clung to the community like a leech. Our men-folk who went for agriculture into fields and forests, at times established a relationship with women of the untouchable class and the children born of such unions were taken into the fold. Those

who were well-off purchased poor boys as slaves to work in their fields and with the passage of time, admitted them into the faith.

The majority of the community did not lose sight of its proud heritage. They were strongly opposed to the infusion of low-caste blood into the veins of the community. However, they would grouse and grumble, scream and shout but eventually be silent. Moreover, when the dear ones of those opposed to such an admixture of blood — or at times they themselves — got entangled in such involvements, the discussions remained at a standstill.

In the fifteenth century our contact with the co-religionists at Iran was more firmly established, so we sent couriers from this country and invited the opinions of the dasturs who dwelt there on matters concerning ceremonies, conventions and customs. Regarding the Joodin conflict, replies came from there that Prophet Zarathushtra has thrown open the gateways of his religion to all humanity, hence there was no objection to performing the Navjote ceremony of such children or of slaves. They went further to state that to bury or burn a corpse is regarded as a major sin in Zoroastrianism. And yet it is proper to accept into the faith even those Joodins who are practising such professions. However, at times they would utter a note of warning to beware and be cautious that in doing so it did not prove detrimental to the community.

Later, when the British conquered Hongkong, Canton and other cities of

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China, our forefathers established vast and flourishing businesses there. The proprietors who carried on trade with China employed their agents on condition that no one should take his wife along with him. Their boarding, lodging, laundry, medical treatment and sundry expenses were to be borne by the master's firm, and once in seven years they were granted leave to return to India for five or six months. As a result some of them brought back with them children born of Chinese women and

their Navjotes were being performed.

A 100 years ago we started going to England for trade and commerce or for study. There some got married to English ladies according to the Civil Marriage Act and the Navjote of their children began to be performed.

At the commencement of the last century the Parsi Panchayat at Bombay, due to its wide-spread influence, framed regular rules on the subject in 1818 and 1830 and announced that the Navjotes of the children of non-Parsi mothers that had been performed up to date had to be taken for granted. But, henceforth, should any Mobed perform such a Navjote, he and those responsible for having the Navjote performed, would be excommunicated and penalized in other ways. This ruling of the Panchayat remained on its records as an ornament. It could not be enforced in any way.

In 1882 a leading dastur of the community performed the Navjote ceremony of nine people of varying ages born of Zoroastrian fathers and non-Zoroastrian mothers in the presence of an assembly of Sethias of status at the Maneckji Seth's Wadi at Bombay.

In the first decade of this century, at the time of the 'Jooddin Case', the General Body Meeting of the Anjuman called by the Parsi Panchayat at Bombay passed a fresh resolution in 1905 against the Jooddin Navjotes and sent copies of the resolution to the various Anjumans in every town and city. After that, similar resolutions were passed by meetings called by the Anjuman or the Athornan Mandal and publicized amongst the entire community throughout the country. In spite of all this, such Navjotes are being performed up to date, because the resolutions of neither

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the Anjuman nor of any other body have ever been unanimously accepted by the community.

The members of the Anjuman were never united; they were always split into parties. It won the cooperation of the majority but could not gain the unanimous acceptance of each and every member of the community. Besides it

had no authority to enforce the resolutions on everyone. While giving its verdict in the memorable Jooddin case the High Court, on the strength of the documentary evidence of the usages and practices prevalent since 1,200 years, approved and sanctioned as Parsi, Zoroastrian children born of Zoroastrian fathers and their mistresses and later of Zoroastrian fathers and non-Parsi women according to the Civil Marriage Act.

This ruling of the High Court stands intact even today. Hence, on the strength of the majority vote of the community, the Anjuman or the Athornan Mandal or any other institution may pass whatever resolutions it wishes and as often as it wills, but lacking legal sanction they cannot be binding on the community.

In 1942 an unprecedented event in the 1,200-year-history of continuous performance of the Navjotes of children of Jooddin unions took place. The Jooddin Navjotes of children and adults, middle-aged and aged men and women totalling 77 and 35 respectively were performed at Vansda and Bharudi. This gave rise to an outburst of emotion in the community and resolutions were passed stating that the benefit of religious institutions and organisations should not be extended to those whose Navjotes had been performed under such circumstances. In consequence, as a 'test-case', a gentleman who had passed through the Navjote ceremony, filed a suit in the High Court against the Trustees of the building, establishing his right to enter the portals of that Fire Temple. My evidence was to be taken prior to the commencement of this case.

Taking into consideration my handicap in hearing, it was arranged that my daughter would relay through the ear-phone whatever was said by the lawyer or the Hon'ble judge. The hearing was conducted for three days. My evidence, commensurate with my above-mentioned opinions on the injunctions of admitting Jooddins into the Zoroastrian faith, were based on three main factors.

One was that Zoroastrianism advocates conversion.

Secondly, that history bears infallible evidence that since the advent of Zarathushtra till the Seventh Century when the Parsi Zoroastrian Empire fell forever in the reign of Yazdagard Shahrbaraz, the last Sassanian King, Jooddins were admitted into the Zoroastrian faith.

Thirdly, a tradition of almost 1,200 years has been established amongst Zoroastrians settled in India since the loss of the empire, of performing the Navjote of children born of Zoroastrian fathers and Jooddin women and of taking them into the fold. Despite the frequent restricting resolutions of the Anjuman, such Navjotes are being performed up to date.

A stern criticism was levelled against my evidence that the Navjotes of the offspring of Zoroastrian fathers and Jooddin mothers "are being performed up to date." The defendant declared that my statement was not correct as such Navjotes are no longer being performed. My statement was founded on facts, but the lawyer refused to accept its validity.

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As a result the Hon'ble Judge requested me to quote a definite case mentioning specific names and other particulars. Consequently, I announced—giving details of names and places—that in the very year that the case was being conducted, a Zoroastrian gentleman had come to me at Karachi from abroad and had laid bare to me the details of his predicament.

He informed me that at present he was married to a Zoroastrian lady, but he was anxious to have the Navjote ceremony performed of an 11-year-old girl staying in his home born of a Goanese woman. When I told him that such a Navjote could not be performed in Karachi, he had enquired who would do it and where it could be performed. I gave him the name of a revered Athornan gentleman who was residing outside Karachi. He wrote directly to the person concerned and there was an immediate reply that if the person concerned would come to his town with the girl he would willingly perform the Navjote, deeming it his duty to do so. The father took his daughter there and that Navjote was performed in the presence of five good people. This event had happened only five months ago.

This was the sum and substance of my two days' evidence based on the authority of Zoroastrian religion, his-

tory and tradition on the validity of performing the Navjote ceremony and admitting into the fold children of Zoroastrian fathers and non-Zoroastrian mothers.

On the third day the case was presented in a different form. A question was asked whether a son born of a Zoroastrian father and his non-Zoroastrian mate who, on attaining maturity, had married a Hindu woman according to Hindu rites, could then have his Navjote performed and be admitted into the religion.

The question had quite a new flavour. In the seventh century after the loss of our empire, our religion had become non-missionary, hence the religious and historical authority that had been exercised up to the end of the dynasty had ceased to function. From that time onwards the Jooddin question was limited to the practice of taking into the faith the offspring of a Zoroastrian father and a non-Zoroastrian mother. The principal basis of permitting the performance of the Navjote ceremony of such children rested on a twelve-century-old tradition. But this did not hold good in the above-quoted instance.

If the son of a Zoroastrian father and a Jooddin mother becomes a Hindu according to Hindu rites and marries a Hindu woman, the 1,200 year-old tradition of the community does not hold good. This question belongs to a completely different category and comes under a different heading, hence the entire Anjuman alone has the prerogative of solving it.

This evidence of mine given on the authority of Zoroastrian religion, history and tradition was impartial, unbiased and unprejudiced.

The Vandsa party thereafter requested the High Court and withdrew its claim permanently and the curtain was drawn on the incident.

The condition of these unfortunate residents of Vandsa and Bhimdi is most pitiable. Although they are recently converted Zoroastrians they are disdained and disregarded by Zoroastrians of longer standing. When the community refuses to extend a helping hand to these frustrated candidates who stand at the threshold crying for admission into the fold then God alone is their saviour and their guide.

To be continued

Continued from page 5

The Defendants, expressing as we now know the orthodox Parsi view, are prepared to overlook immorality, bastardy anything but alienage.

conversions are permissible and commendable have been the constant subject of more or less academic discussion. But, as a matter of fact, few if any, genuine conversions have ever been made; and so far as our information goes, the conversion of Mrs. Tata is the very first instance of a genuine open conversion of a person in every respect fitted to be a credit and an ornament to the community. I mean, of course, in recent times, and in circumstances which admit of no doubt or uncertainty. We cannot be sure whether Akbar was converted. In all probability he was not. The Pandits take us back to the dark ages, where myth and legend have free play. All the other alleged instances may be dismissed as cases of illegitimate children or adopted children or, at the highest, cases of persons smuggled in as Converts.

Now that the question is fairly brought to the test, where every circumstance, every condition is perfectly well known; where there is not a word to be said against the lady; where she was openly and with great pomp and ceremony received into the communion by one of the leading high priests of Indian Zoroastrians, what do we find? All the learning which used to be spent on the

We were not really concerned with a religious, but with a caste question.

academic discussions I have referred to is thrown to the winds, and the very professors and doctors—who were ready enough when the question was abstract, and in the air, to allow that conversion under certain conditions and

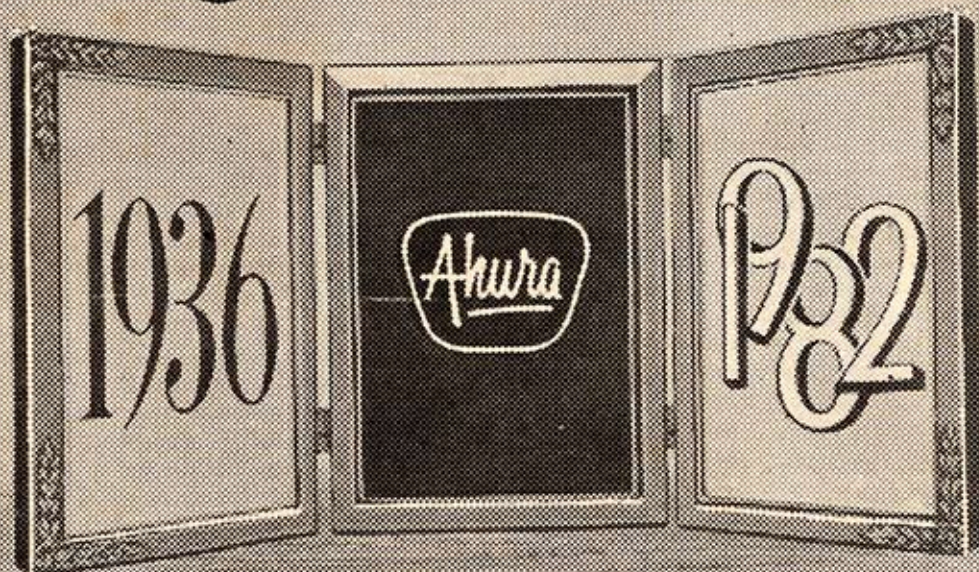
with some reservations was commendable—are unanimous in withstanding the attempt to give this new Convert full rights of religious communion and sepulture. All this is mere frippery and shallow sophistry. Either admission can be obtained to the Parsi Community by conversion, or it cannot.

It is simply puerile to pretend, for instance, that the admission of such a refined and cultured lady as Mrs. Tata would do harm to a religion which opens its doors to all sorts and conditions of bastard children. It is still stupider to resist her claims on the ground that she was not duly admitted. She was publicly admitted by a person corresponding in our religion, let us say, to the Archbishop of York: every one knew of it: leading citizens, English as well as Parsis, were invited to be present at the ceremony. The priest who ought to know says that she was fully and regularly admitted. I really had no patience with the quibblings of the learned men who spoke for the Defendants, and, while evading the plain direct points, spent hours of our time in trying to reconcile their own absurdly irreconcilable inconsistencies.

The real, the plain point was simply this, that notwithstanding anything in their sacred writings, notwithstanding their own published utterances to the contrary, notwithstanding the Ravayats, notwithstanding everything, they took their stand not on religion but on Caste and when it came to a practical test, denied that anyone could become a member of the Parsi Community except by birth. That in a nutshell was the whole case for the Defendants, and exasperatingly though it was presented to us, curiously enough, in the end, I think, that it is a good case and must prevail.

To be continued

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Published and edited by Jehangir R. Patel at c/o H.L. Rochat, Navsari Chambers, ground floor, 39 A, Nayak Marg, Fort, Bombay 400 001 and printed by him at Jyoti Industries, 324, A to Z Industrial Estate, G. Kadam Marg, Bombay 400 013 and phototypeset at Decora Printers, Bombay 400 009.