

Parsiānā

Roll of Honour

Hutokshi Doctor and Gouri Wagadarikar

"I am proud to be a Parsi," said J.R.D. Tata, and although he was the only one to say so in those exact words, the sentiment was shared by all the eminent Parsis honoured on December 21, 1982 in Bombay. The atmosphere in the unused Brabourne stadium was charged with the pride of achievement and fellow-feeling.

An estimated 4000 Parsis, resplendent in full social regalia, watched 13 of their distinguished kinsmen felicitated by the Bombay Parsi Punchayet as part of the Punchayet's tercentenary programme. The red-carpeted rostrum with a backdrop of the *Asho Farovar* symbol in red, orange and white flowers, the invocation in Avesta by Dastur Minochehr-Homji and Kersi Mistry's musicians playing *Chaiye hame Zarthosti* added to the distinctly Zoroastrian air.

At the function, organised to "serve as a stimulus for the younger generation," according to BPP chairman Dr Aspi Golwalla, and to encourage them to "emulate the example of these eminent

Parsis," scrolls of honour on silver salvers were presented to the nominees. The citation listing their numerous achievements were read out by the trustees of the BPP and prefaced by a few well-phrased remarks by compere Dr Jimmy Sidhwa, the noted radiologist and amateur dramatist.

The personalities honoured for their national and international contribution to their respective fields included: former Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Jal Cursetji, former Air Marshal Aspi Engineer, Sohrab P. Godrej, industrialist and present Sheriff of Bombay, Dr D.J. Jussawalla, cancerologist, Field Marshal S.H.F.J. Maneckshaw, Adi Marzban, playwright and journalist, Zubin Mehta, renowned music conductor of the New York Philharmonic and the Israeli Philharmonic, Nani Palkhivala and Homi M. Seervai, eminent jurists, Dr Homi N. Sethna, chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, H.J.H. Taleyarkhan, ambassador, cabinet minister and currently Governor of Sikkim, A.F.S. Talyarkhan, noted sports com-

mentator, J.R.D. Tata, industrialist and aviator, Naval Tata, industrialist and vice-chairman of the Tata group of companies, and Ms Avabai B. Wadia, social worker and president of the Family Planning Association of India.

Referring to his historic flight to Karachi to commemorate 50 years of Indian civil aviation, J.R.D. Tata said, "I have been embarrassed more than ever in my life three times in the past few weeks. First by the Parsi community in Karachi where I was felicitated. Secondly on October 15, after a very simple flight in an "old lady" plane at Juhu airport, and then again tonight. I'm told embarrassment is sometimes good for the soul." He said he accepted the honour "with gratitude and humility," and thunderous applause followed his words "I am proud to be a Parsi, just as I'm proud to be an Indian," as he raised his hands and folded them in a 'namaste.'

The celebrated maestro of western music Zubin Mehta, who was in India for the shooting of the 90-minute docu-

Left:
Tata (left) and
Golwalla.
Mehta (left) and
Vimadlal.



Right:
Hodiwalla (left)
and Godrej.
Palkhivala at the
micro.



drama 'The Quest for Zarathustra' in which he plays a pivotal role said, "I spent half my youth in this stadium playing cricket and I never thought I

"I have been embarrassed more than ever in my life three times in the past few weeks"— J.R.D.

would one day be standing on the pitch talking to all of you... There are few places where my soul gets a little pinch when I land, and one of them is Bombay airport. The plane touches down and I know that I am home."

Zubin Mehta regretted that none of the Parsi cricketers had been felicitated, and also felt that his father, the noted musician Mehli Mehta, founder of the Bombay Symphony Orchestra "should be standing here tonight... My soul and my spirit has been slightly appeased," Mehta said, "by the fact that somebody

(Dr Sidhwa) mentioned my father."

After explaining the theme of the film which, he said, would not "give the world any answers - only some points of view," Mehta asked "If this film is a success and the increasing numbers of the religiously conscious in the world want to convert to our religion, what are we going to do?"

Chairman of the well-known Godrej group of industries Sohrab P. Godrej, who is a keen conservationist, warned that the Parsis are an "endangered species." The Parsis should be more adaptive, he said, both within the community and in society in general, and if the current dangerous trend is to be reversed, we must follow certain "enlightened policies" in housing, education and other community spheres.

Nani Palkhivala, noted jurist and former Indian ambassador to the U.S.A., stressed three basic thoughts which the Parsis should bear in mind. Firstly, the teachings of Zoroastrianism were not intended for a total of 1.25

lakhs out of a global population of 4.5 billion. It is a universal teaching, a religion that transcends all religions, he said. "Zoroastrianism is not for a tribe only."

Secondly, Zarathustra taught the way to freedom of moral choice, he said, so that each man can choose his creed, thinking before believing.

Thirdly, he said, "We've had a glorious past, we have a perilous present, but (we can) avoid a dim future," if we

"There are few places where my soul gets a little pinch when I land, and one of them is Bombay airport" — Zubin

fully utilise our material and human resources and concentrate on the "will to do the right thing by the community."

It is the community's tenacity of character, originality, and talent which has enabled it to survive, said industrialist Naval Tata, who was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1969. He compared the Parsi community to "pebbles in the deep ocean" and affirmed that the Parsis would successfully meet the "great challenge for the survival of the community."

"My direct contribution in the service of my community has been minimal," said scientist Homi N. Sethna. He feels, however, that "the greatness of our community lies in the fact that we expect our members to serve the country effectively and well," a conviction that is certainly exemplified in his work. He hoped the trustees of the Panchayet would "spare no effort in guiding our youth to achieve this objective."

Thanking the trustees for honouring him, Dr D.J. Jussawalla, Dean of the Tata Memorial Centre, Asia's largest

"Zoroastrianism is not for a tribe only." It is a universal teaching.

cancer centre, who, according to Gollwalla, "has indicated that ethically, philosophically, and literally there is more to surgery and medicine than practice," said that he was grateful to his wife, "without whose support I wouldn't have achieved so much in life."

Admiral Jal Cursetji who was Chief of the Naval Staff from 1976 to 1979 said, "There has been an appreciable number of our community in the services and an equally high number in the higher ranks." But Cursetji was of the opinion that this number was likely to decrease in the future. He urged young Parsis who, he said, preferred the professions and displayed a dislike of leaving the city and striking out on their own, to join the services as "there is a lot the services can offer."

"What of the future?" reiterated Homi M. Seervai, Advocate General of Bombay from 1957 to 1974. Man who now lives in a corrupt society is apt to ask, "What can one man do?" Seervai, who was awarded the Padma Vibhushan for his two volumes on the Indian constitution and judiciary, would have such a man look at the past, at the example of men like Dadabhai Naoroji and Jamsetji Tata as well as at the present. He cited the Indian example in 1977 (the end of the Emergency), when "public



Naval Tata (left) and Guzder.



Sethna (left) and Kanga.



Jussawalla (left) and Guzder.



Ms Noble (left) and Cursetji.



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spirited citizens showed that corruption in high offices is brought to book and does not go unpunished."

The Parsi community's cosmopolitan outlook was stressed by Homi J.H. Taleyarkhan, the Governor of Sikkim, former Indian ambassador to Libya and an active member of the Maharashtra legislature who has held several important state portfolios. We have never sought separate representation, he said, "Our charities have always been cosmopolitan, our outlook always international." Pointing out as a misconception the general belief that the Parsi community is a wealthy one, Taleyarkhan said that many Parsis who live below the poverty line need assistance.

Ms Avabai B. Wadia, who was honoured as "the foremost among Parsi women in the field of social work" said, "It is right that the Parsi community should be proud of the work of its women in national life," and referred to the role of Madame Bhikaijee Cama, who gave the nation its national flag, and to Ms Shirinbai Cursetjee, the first lady barrister in India. While the Parsi community does not need population control, family planning is still applicable, said Ms Wadia, a recipient of the Padma Shree in 1971 and the Padma Bhushan in 1980 in recognition of her pioneering work in population control and family welfare.

Apprehensive about the declining numbers of the Parsi community, Golwala remarked that what the community needed was ironically, not the message of family planning spread by Ms Wadia but a 'Fertility Association for the Parsi community'.

"I am deeply moved by this recognition accorded to half a life-time of the written and the spoken word," said A.F.S. Talyarkhan, popularly known as 'Bobby Talyarkhan' who, according to the citation, was the first person to introduce a Sports Page in the Indian press. He hoped that his writing and speeches on sport had helped its development in India. "I have always been proud to be a member of a microscopic community which has asked nothing of the country but has given so much to the country."

Adi Marzban, who was awarded the Padma Shree by the Indian Government in recognition of his contribution as a writer, actor and producer of Gujarati and English plays both on stage as well as over the air, stepped up to the microphone and began in his familiar voice and characteristic style, *Meherban*

banuon ne grahaston, and continued to speak in Gujarati, the only speaker to do so that evening, keeping his audience laughing as usual.

Field Marshal Sam Maneckshaw and Air Marshal Aspi Engineer were unable to attend and were awarded the citations in absentia.

What the community needed was not family planning but a 'Fertility Association'.

The function, the first of its kind in Bombay in recent times, won the BPP many accolades but some criticism as well. Letters and articles appeared in

several papers inquiring why certain individuals had been omitted from the list, people like K.F. Rustomji, former chief of the Border Security Force, Cushrow R. Irani, the managing director of *The Statesman* who has won international recognition for his fight for freedom of the press, A.D. Gorwala, proprietor and founder editor of *Opinion*, who courageously defied government censorship during the Emergency, Sohrab Mody, the noted pioneer film maker, Pilo Mody (who expired in January) and Minoo Masani, noted statesmen and opposition parliamentarians, legal luminaries such as Soli Sorabjee and F.S. Nariman, former Bombay High Court Chief Justice, Sohrab Kotwal and present Bombay High Court Chief Justice D.P. Madon, among others.



Left:
Seervai addressing the gathering.
Golwala (left) and Taleyarkhan.
Talyarkhan addressing the audience.

Right:
Desai (left) and Ms Wadia.
Ms Noble (centre) and Marzban.

Photographs courtesy Liberty Photos.

The orthodox group was annoyed that no religious scholar had been honoured nor those who had served the community over the years. Many others complained that they were not aware of the function as it had been advertised only in the Parsi press.

But the three-hour function which at times proved to be tedious due to the reading of the long citations and at other times disappointing because of the brevity of many of the awardees' speeches, was a step that augurs well for the community.

Many felt the function, with some refinements, should become an annual occasion when those who have worked for the welfare of others and achieved excellence in their fields of endeavour are honoured and held as exemplars for others to follow.

Erratum

Some of the diacritical marks in the article 'Of Clippings and Cuttings' by Dr Kaikhushroo M. JamaspAsa (*Parsiana*, December 1982) were inadvertently placed incorrectly. The error is regretted.

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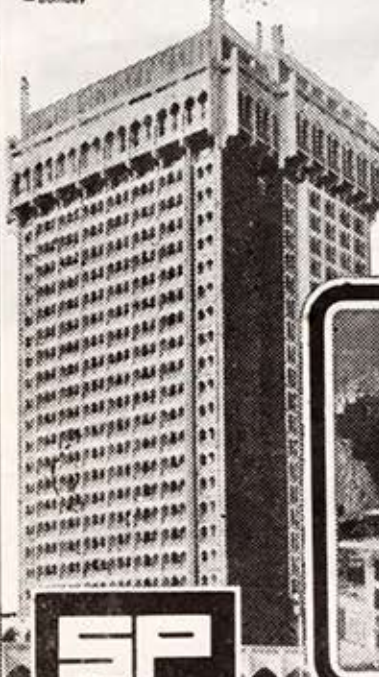
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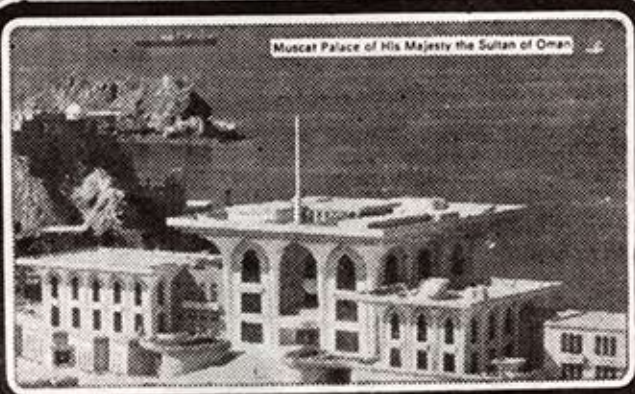
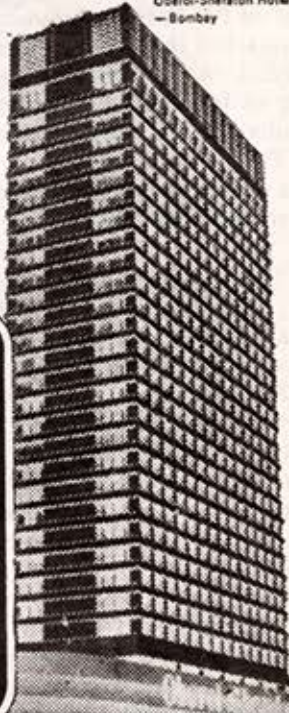
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Final Entreaty

The Life of Dastur Dhalla XXXI

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 31st edited and condensed extract from the book "Dastur Dhalla - The Saga of a Soul" — an English translation by Gool and Behram Rustumji 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.

In the last instalment, Dhalla wrote about the American Mazdaznan Sect formed by a Christian, Dr Hannish.

This is the concluding instalment.

The Jooddin question is the question of prime importance to our microscopic community. Its span of life already extends over twelve hundred years. Time and again it has harassed our forefathers and is pestering us today. If we minutely examine the pros and cons we will find that they fall into two distinct categories:

1. The question of admitting into the fold children born of a Zoroastrian father and a Jooddin mother.
2. The question of opening the doors of the community to completely Jooddin children born of Jooddin parents.

For twelve centuries thousands of children born of Zoroastrian fathers and their mistresses and of unions by Civil Marriage since a century, have mingled with the community, thus a fair-sized group of such semi-Zoroastrians has been accepted without objection.

But the question of taking into the fold Jooddins whose parentage and lineage is absolutely non-Zoroastrian is of a completely different nature. Excluding a few exceptional examples, the whole community is staunchly opposed to admitting people of other communities and other religions into our community.

The distressful condition of the community which became like a flock of sheep without a shepherd after the loss of our empire, made it essential to prevent others from coming into the fold. Hence, when we are reminded that our religion ordains that we accept Jooddins into the faith, providing evidence that it was done in the days of our sovereignty

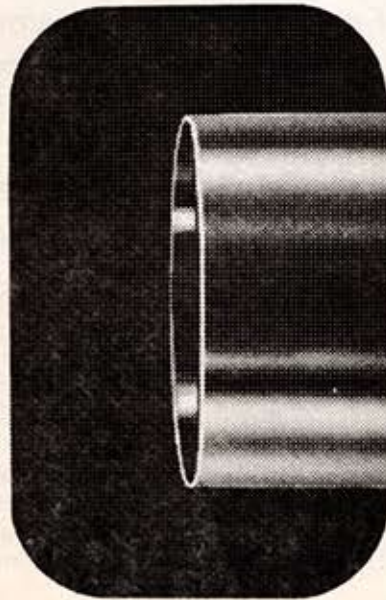
and supremacy, and are told that in order to increase our strength we should also throw open the doors of our community and our faith to people of all religions, we are taken aback. We are honestly afraid that by doing so the solidarity and particularly the characteristics of the community will be endangered. Our fear and our foreboding are not unfounded.

Setting aside all self-praise and self-appraisal and just viewing it with an open mind, according to the facts presented by history it can be said that the achievements that have been manifested by this community, which is like a needle in a hay-stack from the time of its ruined and tottering condition to its present level of progress, are truly unparalleled and unprecedented. The leading position that has been attained in shipping, textile, banking, steel, hydro-electric power, airways and numerous other industries; the memorable part played in national movements; the three Parsi members who found admittance into the British Parliament; foremost in social reforms; excellent in charity; the first and, to date, the only community to introduce universal education; and innumerable other ventures could be definitely eulogised. We naturally begin to think that there must be something rare and wonderful in our race, our species, our genes, our disposition, or temperament which enables us to reach such heights and to re-capture the ancient Iranian glory that was diffused and lost twelve hundred years ago. We are now living on the laurels of the proud belief that all this applause and

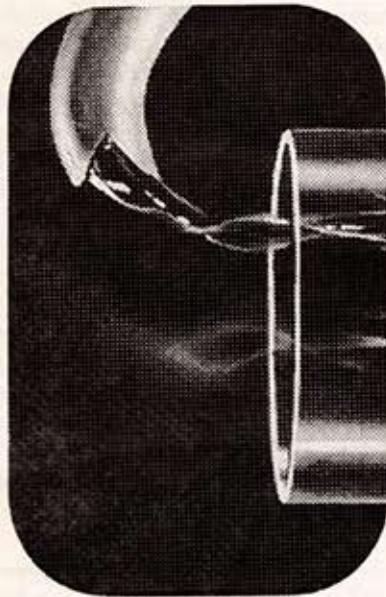
It did not seem possible that a Parsi Shivaji would be born in the strong-hold of Muslim Iran, nor was one born.

affluence is due to the 'blue' Kyanian blood that runs in our veins.

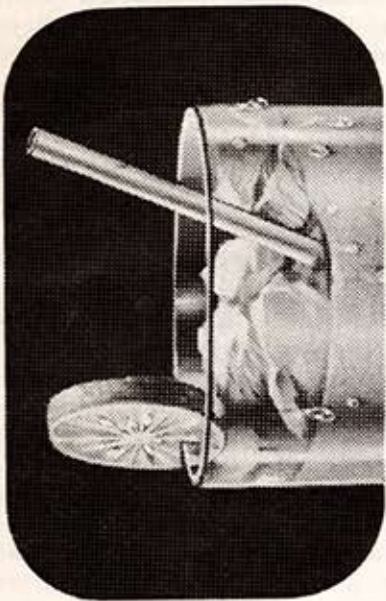
Amongst the vastly populated nations of the world, the Hindu population is estimated in millions. Until the middle of the last century Muslims as well as Christian priests penetrated into Hindu habitations and converted thousands of the faithful. A sound remedy was found by Dayanand Sarasvati, the bold founder of the Aryasamaj. Through vehement propaganda and an



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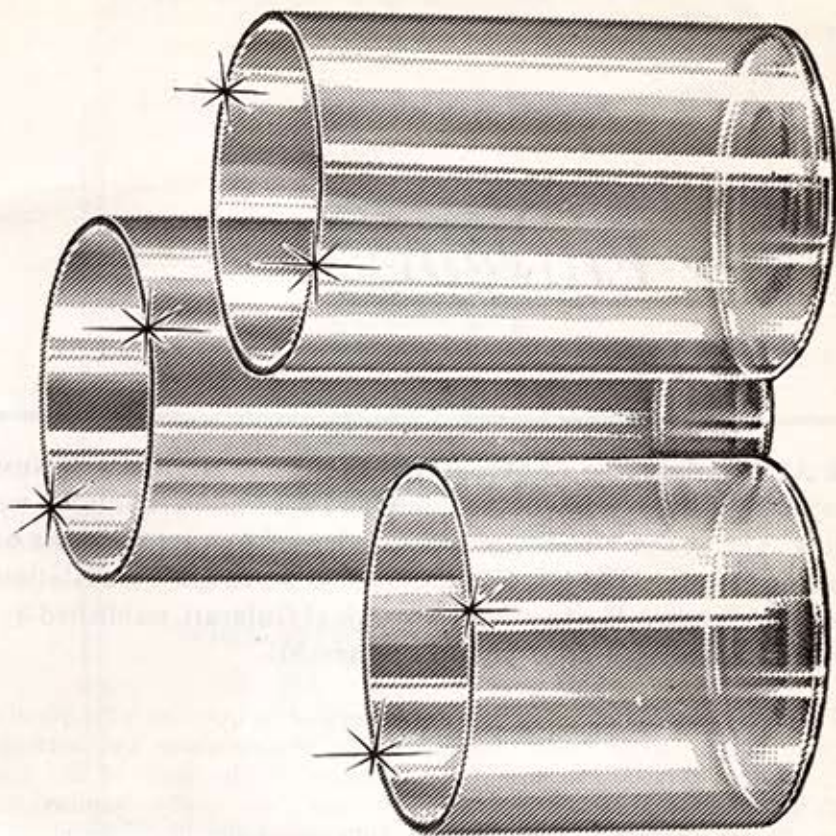
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extensive jihad, he began to re-admit into the Hindu faith those who had been converted to Christianity and Islam. Moreover, he threw open the closed doors of Hindu temples to those of other faiths who wished to enter of their own free will.

Although the Muslim flag fluttered over India, there remained pockets under the rule of Hindu rajas and maharajas, hence it was possible that a Shivaji would spring from them. After the loss of our empire, stray signs of Parsi kingship endured in Tabristan and other places, but later they were annihilated forever. Hence, it did not seem possible that a Parsi Shivaji would be born in the stronghold of Muslim Iran, nor was one born.

Moreover, we did not let any Parsi Dayanand Sarasvati unfurl the flag of conversion over the Parsi fold nor are we allowing him to do so even today.

Our press and our communal organizations are continuously waging a bitter controversy over the Jooddin question. Throughout all these bickerings there runs a major strain of prejudice, conflict and vengeance. The Jooddin question is surveyed on the surface without going

into the root of the matter. We never care to study this poignant problem calmly, delving deep down into its intricacies and working on it in a scholarly, scientific and statistical manner. It is essential for our revered orthodox group as well as for our reformists to scrutinize patiently and intelligently whether the forceful and frightening causes that have been presented regarding the decrease in marriages and births

The Jooddin question has become the thread on which hangs the very existence of this microscopic community.

the marrying outside the fold of increasing numbers of men and women are sound or suppositions, real or illusory, truly threatening or unnecessarily alarming.

Everything in this industrial age is based on statistics and calculation. Unfortunately we are not working on

those lines when the Jooddin subject is tackled. Instead of collecting all the data and examining this question of social upheaval scientifically and systematically, we look at it in a shallow way with frenzy and fanaticism and continue to create an uproar. Regarding our girls and boys who go out of the fold and marry non-Zoroastrians, when there are about five or seven incidents, the Parsi press gives publicity to one or two. The community is not aware of all such events.

Just as all movements and associations in the world change shape and colour, the Jooddin question too appears from time to time in altered forms. The large numbers in which formerly children born of Parsi men and their alien mistresses were added to the community is now decreasing due to fear of social censure and urbanization.

Examples of marrying non-Zoroastrian girls through Civil Marriage or by being converted into Aryasamajite Hindus, Christians or Muslims are on the increase.

Formerly there were scattered incidents of Parsi girls being converted into other religions and leaving the fold. Today they are steadily increasing. In

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Karachi, fifty-four years ago one Parsi lady married a Muslim. That incident was considered most unusual in those days. Fifteen years ago an educated good-natured girl of a respected family of Karachi got married to a Hindu outside Karachi. Her parents succeeded in persuading her to see me before she took such a step. The girl had a high opinion of me and respected me. She came. But neither my wife's persuasion nor mine had any effect over the passion she felt for her Jooddin husband.

A noble lady came to my house one evening with her Muslim husband and as they were to leave Karachi by train within an hour they received my hurried farewell blessing. During that same period I received a long letter by post signed 'Nine Parsi Girls'. It informed me that each one of them was deeply in love with their respective non-Parsi friend and wished to marry him. Stating this fact they wanted to know whether the Zoroastrian faith prohibited such a union. They further requested that my reply be given in the 'Parsi Sansar' and in English so that their non-Parsi friends could also read it. The 'Parsi Sansar' published in its issue that X. Y. Z. be informed that the question they had asked being of a delicate nature could not be discussed in public, hence they should personally meet the gentleman to whom they had addressed the letter.

In order to place the facts before others, I collected twenty-five ladies and gentlemen who were social workers, through the Secretary of the Anjuman and discussed the letter with them. When this matter came to light, within a few days I received another anonymous letter stating that I should not have given such publicity to their letter.

We are now living on the laurels of the proud belief that all this applause and affluence is due to the 'blue' Kyanian blood that runs in our veins.

Shortly after this, six Parsi girls of Karachi got married to non-Zoroastrians.

An educated and reputable young lady of Bombay, in her keen desire to marry a non-Parsi youth, has at present asked my advice to solve her problem. Frequent events are now occurring in

many a town and city, of Parsi girls abandoning their dear and renowned community.

This fresh facet of the Jooddin question has captured my special attention since some time. Five hundred miles away from the heated atmosphere of Bombay suffused with party-spirit, strife and conflict, after quiet and careful consideration in Karachi I have come to look upon the Jooddin chapter with trepidation.

In the last century, a western scholar who was a well-wisher of the community predicted with a heavy heart that a

Instead of collecting all the data, we look at (the Jooddin issue) in a shallow way with frenzy and fanaticism.

hundred years hence the Parsi community would cease to exist. Only the historic memory will remain that a world-renowned nation bearing that name had reigned for centuries over Persia and its microscopic progeny lived a glorious life in India.

Taking into consideration the permanent blockade to an influx from outside, the abandoning of the fold by an increasing number of both men and women, and the ever-falling birth-rate of the community and pondering upon them carefully, this fearful foreboding does not sound altogether unsound.

Without the slightest sentimentality it can be said that this Jooddin question has become the threat on which hangs the very existence of this microscopic community of all-told a hundred and twenty-five thousand. If the community endures then all is well. If it succumbs then all is lost. My hand trembles as I write this and my heart aches.

The time has passed for trying to solve this question through party-politics. Sane and serious thinkers, learned and educated leaders and intellectual social workers of all sections of the community have remained aloof from this intricate problem. I humbly appeal to all these to unite on a common platform and to call a conference to examine with an open mind this difficult and gigantic question on which depends the very existence of the community.

Concluded

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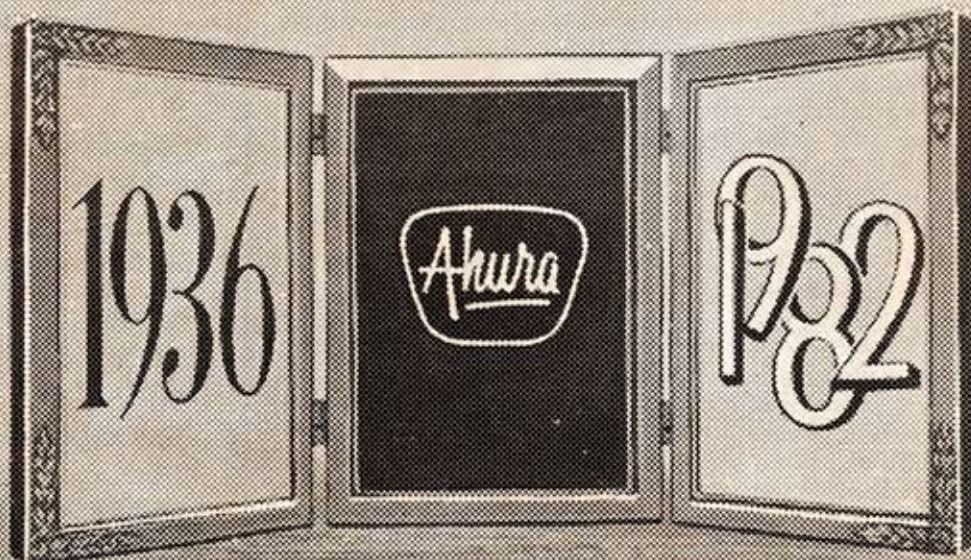
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