

Parsiānā

The Fourth Door of Love

The Arbab Rustam Guiv Darbe Mehr—Zoroastrian Center of Chicago, envisioned ever since the first Zoroastrians settled in Chicago over 30 years ago and realized by the small but determined Zoroastrian community, was inaugurated on September 3-4 this year, notes a ZAC report.

The fourth Zoroastrian centre in North America and the first to be constructed on American soil, the Darbe Mehr now stands in suburban Hinsdale, 20 miles south-west of downtown Chicago. The construction was completed just over a year after a simple ceremony broke ground and signalled the birth of the centre, and six years after the first Darbe Mehr or Door of Love opened on the American continent.

Built as a religious, cultural and educational focus for all Zoroastrians, the 6,000 square foot complex comprises a prayer hall, an assembly hall and a library/learning centre, and is "dedicated to the first generation of American Zoroastrians, so that they may carry the torch of the ancient Zoroastrian faith for future generations in North America," notes a ZAC newsletter. ZAC President Rohinton Rivetna outlined the goals of the Darbe Mehr: "Through worship and prayer

to bring inner peace and spiritual upliftment; to attract and keep our high calibre priests; to serve as centre for social and religious studies (through) the library and learning centre and to serve as a unifying force for all Zoroastrians."

A two-day celebration was planned to mark the inauguration, with Morvarid Khanum Guiv, wife of the Iranian millionaire philanthropist, the late Arbab Rustam Guiv, as the chief guest. The celebrations included a grand jashan by Ervad Dr Kersi Antia, a

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speakers' forum, a benediction, and cultural programmes including a Parsi natak.

This sees the completion of the first phase of the centre. A priest's residence was envisaged as the second phase and a guest house for visiting

Zoroastrians as the third, Rivetna is quoted as saying.

Like the Darbe Mehrs at Toronto, New York and Los Angeles, Chicago's centre has been made possible by the vision and generous donation of Arbab Rustam Guiv, who offered the ZAC a sum of \$ 150,000 in 1980, notes a ZAC report entitled 'The Making of a Darbe Mehr'. The death of Arbab Guiv soon after delayed the release of the funds. The Rustam Guiv Trust funds were tied up in real estate at Mettawa, Illinois, purchased in 1978 for a Chicago centre but unused for lack of construction funds, notes the report.

"The Chicago community came forward, formed a partnership, the 'Parsi Partners', and purchased 5 acres of the Mettawa property from the Trust for \$60,000. With the proceeds of this sale augmenting the Trust funds, the Trust was able to turn over \$150,000 to ZAC. Through various other projects including the Zubin Mehta Banquet, the ZAC raised enough funds to start the construction."

Ever since, the ZAC newsletters have featured a 'Building Report' which have reflected the involvement of the members in the construction of their Darbe Mehr. The Report initially recorded progress in the clearance of

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trees, building permits, laying of the foundation and later, details of the insulation, tiling, electrical, heating and alarm systems, varnishing and painting. Setbacks suffered in the course of construction were also published. "In September 1982... during the roof construction, one of the 50 foot trusses fell, bringing down 30 others. In the accident, a carpenter was injured and liability suits have followed. (But) the project quickly picked up again," states 'The making of a Darbe Mehr'.

"Nothing of course happened in the smooth chronology that this account may convey. Events mesh into one another, plans were revised a dozen times, there were times when grave doubts were expressed, when deep despair was felt, when the project seemed interminable. But out of these storms arose this Darbe Mehr, as testimony to the spirit of the Zoroastrian people.... as (a) monument to the faith and dedication of the Zoroastrian people and determination to preserve and perpetuate the great faith of Zarathustra on this continent."

Chicago's new Darbe Mehr is largely the product of the effort and skill of the 100 families settled there. The building design and general contracting is credited by the ZAC to Rohinton Rivetna, engineering assistance was rendered by Bomi Damkevala, accounts were managed by Noshir Daruwalla, while Keikhosrow Mobed liaised with the Rustam Guiv Trust. Roshan Rivetna offered general assistance at every phase of building design and construction and helped select the land and building furnishings while Tira Farhadieh communicated with Abou Mazdai and selected the Prayer Hall furnishings. Several other members of the community, young and old, enthusiastically chopped and cleared, painted, varnished and polished their Darbe Mehr.

"Nowhere in the world (is) there a group of Zoroastrians with a stronger sense of commitment and involvement than in Chicago," a ZAC newsletter quotes Rivetna as saying. "No group has achieved what our small community has achieved in the short span of its existence... Today the building stands as testimony to the courage, industry and dedication of our people."



Left: Community members clearing Darbe Mehr grounds
Below: Rivetna before the new Darbe Mehr building



Communication from California

Focussing on the religious, cultural and historical tradition of the Zoroastrian community as well as current events of import is a new monthly bulletin *The Zoroastrian* published in English and Persian by the Zoroastrian Center, California.

Frequently prefaced with a translation of prayers from the *Khordeh Avesta*, *The Zoroastrian* provides answers to questions on the philosophy and precepts of the religion and also treats diverse topics like 'The significance of Persian handicrafts', 'The splendour of Persia' and the discovery of fire by King Hushang while on a hunting expedition.

The June 1983 issue states the Zoroastrian Center of California's stand on the Peterson navjote: "The position of the Zoroastrian Center, California has been clear from the very beginning. It adheres to the Sublime Teachings of

Asho Zarathustra which are very vivid, that the Good Religion is universal and for all people of good understanding and fine discernment. The Center supports the new movement and lauds the four priests... for officiating at the ceremony as well as Behdin Joseph Peterson for his noble choice of religion."

The maiden issue of *The Zoroastrian*, (February 1983) was "dedicated to the memory of the late Arbab Rustam Guiv whose philanthropic services to the Zoroastrian community have proven inspiring and encouraging for all of us to work with more zeal for the cause."

The same issue noted, "The Zoroastrian Center, California hopes that the bulletin, though a modest beginning for a very lofty cause, will find a place in the eyes and hearts of its readers. It requests your moral and material support and welcomes inquiries, suggestions, comments, criticisms and articles," which may be addressed to The Zoroastrian Center, California, 1814 South Bayless Street, Anaheim, California, 92802.

Zoroastrian Scout Badge

When Framroze Patel's son wanted to pass a US Boy Scout badge on religion, Zoroastrianism was not on the selection list.

So Patel along with Fred Morris, a director of the Boy Scouts of America, Lovji Cama who teaches Zoroastrianism to the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York members' children, Prof Kaikhosrov Irani, chairman of the City University of New York philosophy department, and others prepared an almost 100 page mimeographed brochure to assist Zoroastrian Boy Scouts in securing a 'Good Life' religious emblem or badge.

"The purpose of this programme is three-fold," notes the brochure. Namely: to make Zoroastrian youths more aware of their faith, its outlook and achievements; to encourage them to achieve meaningful spiritual experience in living their faith, to inculcate the practice of the religion of the prophet Zarathustra, and to encourage Zoroastrian Boy Scouts to enthusiastically participate in community oriented projects, thereby practising the salient principle of the Zoroastrian faith, i.e., happiness unto him who makes others happy.

"It is *not* the intent of this programme to make over-zealous churchmen out of scouts, but to supplement their religious training imparted at home, either by the parents or the priests, and to intensify their motivation for a better understanding of Zoroastrianism. It is hoped that the programme will enable young Zoroastrians to think about religious issues, and to express their religious views with confidence. Furthermore, the programme will provide an opportunity and a vehicle for a scout to become acquainted and exchange his personal religious convictions and views with seasoned members of his faith.

"The programme has been designed primarily for boy scouts within the age

group of 12 to 18," notes the brochure. The aspiring scout will have to fulfil the requirements of religious education and a community-oriented project; it will take at least one full year from the date of registration in the programme to qualify for the emblem.

"The religious education requirements shall consist of four parts: understanding of basic principles of the Zoroastrian religion, and the historical perspective of Zoroastrians; awareness of the meaning and the liberal interpretation of daily *Kusti* prayers; familiarity with the fundamental concepts of essential ceremonies like: Navjote, Jashan and various festivals as per the Zoroastrian calendar and cognizance of: the various calendars followed by different groups of Zoroastrians; different stages of fire temples and the days of the month, and the months of the year of the Zoroastrian calendar.

"The second and non-religious requirement, it is stressed, will involve the action-oriented service project by the aspiring scout. In consultation with the counsellor, he may undertake *any* project of a 15-20 hour duration, within the time frame of 6-9 months. The primary goal of this project should be: assisting to a special *need* of the Zoroastrian

Community as endorsed and approved by the Local Association or an elder (but not the parent)."

"As the total population of Zoroastrians in the continental United States is rather microscopic and as not all Zoroastrians in most of the states are organized into church groups, it is very essential that counsellors at local levels play a very significant role while guiding the youngster. In certain cases it may be desirable to correspond with the religious co-ordinator of the local Zoroastrian Association or of the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York. The parent, in such a case, may act as the counsellor.

"This brochure has been prepared primarily for the Zoroastrian Boy Scouts; however, it is recommended that the counsellor and the parents should be well conversant with its content. The guidance provided by the counsellor and his active participation throughout the duration of the programme is very necessary. For example, the notebook which each boy is expected to keep is most important and should be checked regularly, with suggestions concerning its content, and reviewed at the completion of each stage.

"It is hoped that wherever possible, the counsellor would encourage the boy to discuss the conferring elements of this programme with knowledgeable adults whose wisdom and training give them considerable insight which could be beneficial to the candidate."

For further information on the project write: The 'Good Life' Religious Emblem Administrative Council of The Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York, Inc., 249 Weyman Avenue, New Rochelle, NY 10805.



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Criteria for Conversion

The minimum qualifications required of non-Zoroastrians who wish to have their navjote performed and guidelines for priests who perform the navjotes of non-Zoroastrians have been drawn up by the Religious Advisory Committee formed by the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York to discuss the 'Acceptance/Non-acceptance to Zoroastrianism and the Future'.

"The guidelines do not, in any way, suggest or imply that the committee is for or against the performance of the navjote ceremony of a non-Zoroastrian," notes the committee report.

Who can become a Zoroastrian?

"a) Children of parents who are both Zoroastrians; b) Children of one Zoroastrian parent—either male or female; c) Children legally adopted by a Zoroastrian; d) Spouse of a Zoroastrian, who being well-versed in the Zoroastrian tradition, wishes to be accepted into the Zoroastrian faith; e) In the case of (b), (c), and (d), the navjote ceremony should be performed with the agreement of both the parents, the child, or the spouse, as the case may be, and the performing priest. f) Persons of non-Zoroastrian parentage."

Criteria for a person of non-Zoroastrian parentage

"1) He/she must be capable of reciting the *kusti* prayers and of giving an account of and significance of the same. 2) The candidate should be able to state the basic concepts of the Zoroastrian view of the world and way of life. 3) The person must be familiar with the religious practices and customs of the Zoroastrian tradition such as jashan, navjote, wedding, and funeral ceremonies. 4) It will be the duty of the officiating priest to ensure that the above criteria are fulfilled. If not, the priest will have the right to reject the request until such time when the candidate is ready to try again and pass the requirements."

Guidelines for the performing priest and information material to the non-Zoroastrian candidate:

"1) Navjote should be done by an ordained priest. 2) No mass navjote should be performed by any priest. A priest can perform only one person's navjote at a time. 3) A priest must get himself convinced that the person is genuinely interested and not influenced by any non-religious and political motives. 4) Before the priest performs the navjote, the performing priest and candidate must receive approval from the Navjote Committee set up for that purpose. 5) The candidate must satisfactorily demonstrate or provide to the Navjote Committee the reasons why he/she wishes to forsake his/her present religious beliefs, if any. 6) The candidate must be made aware that he/she may not be accepted as a Zoroastrian by other Zoroastrian Associations or communities in any part of the world and that he/she may not be able to enter places of worship particularly Parsi-Zoroastrian temples in India and Pakistan. 7) No pressure or influence either direct or indirect be brought to bear upon any priest by the Board of ZAGNY or by the Trustees of the Darbe Mehr to perform or not perform the navjote or any religious ceremony of any Zoroastrian or non-Zoroastrian."

"If the above guidelines for navjote are not followed then the candidate initiated may not be accepted for membership in the association."

Time factor for initiation:

"There must be a lapse of a reasonable period from the time that the candidate announces his/her desire to become a Zoroastrian to the time of performance of the navjote ceremony. The RAC could not come to an agreement on the length of time and the recommendations."

Non-compliance of guidelines by priests:

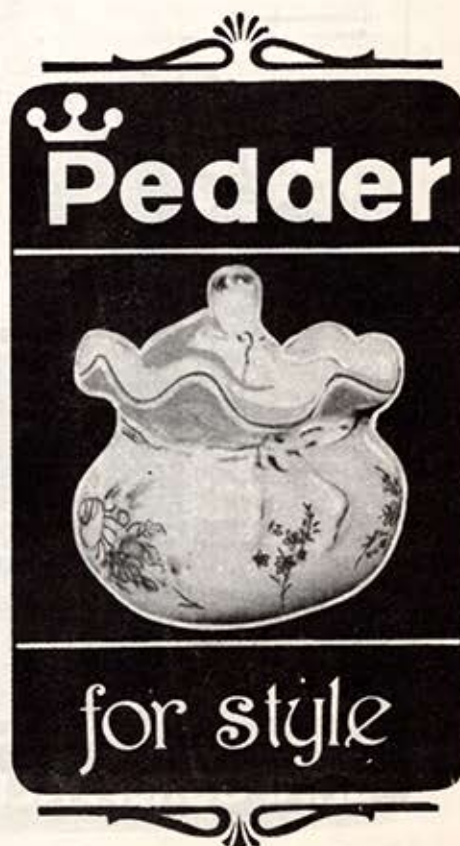
"RAC strongly urges that no priest violate the recommendations stated above. However, two members of the RAC are of the opinion that if the priest violates any of the above guidelines, he should be severely castigated by refusing to permit him to perform any religious ceremony under the auspices of ZAGNY."

Navjote Committee:

"The Navjote Committee will be formed by the Board of ZAGNY and will adhere to the guidelines as defined above."

"The guidelines have been framed in the context of a different social environment for Zoroastrians in North America," notes the report.

"All the members of the committee have done an excellent job in discussing and evaluating this critical issue with great character and a high degree of perceptivity," wrote Erach D. Munshi, chairperson of the RAC in a letter to ZAGNY president Faroke Gandhi. The other members of the committee are: Dr Darius Antia, Dr Lovji Cama, Cavas Desai, Tehmasp Dotivala, Ms Ivy Gandhi, Lovji Hakim, Prof Kaikhosrov Irani, Dr Shari Merabi, Framroze Patel and Pervez Patel."



ZAGNY's Stand

"It has never been the policy of (the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York) to hold any priest obligated to perform any ceremony or perform a ceremony with anyone," writes ZAGNY President Faroke Gandhi, in a letter addressed to 12 Zoroastrian priests who refused to perform any religious ceremony jointly with Ervad Kersi Antia and Ervad Noshir Hormazdiyar, following their participation in the navjote of 27-year-old American Joseph Peterson.

"We are in receipt of your letter of July 1, 1983, have noted the contents, and the extraordinary list of associations and publications to whom copies have been dispatched. It is odd that a preliminary letter about your position with respect to this association should require this wide and immediate publication. We cannot suppress the doubt that the letter is more of an attempt to publicize your views rather than communicate with us."

The 12 priests from the east coast area of the US had stated in a letter to the association ('Religious Boycott', *Parsiana*, August 1983), "We cannot

in our good conscience associate ourselves with these individuals who dared thrust their so-called "convictions" on their fellow colleagues and community members in clear defiance of their feelings."

The ZAGNY letter noted, "On the issue of participation in ceremonies, ZAGNY is concerned solely with public communal ceremonies, thus weddings, navjotes, *ghehsarnas* and other private ceremonies are not of our concern, hence irrelevant..."

"Looking at the signatories of the letter, it strikes us that only a handful of you have participated in the public ceremonies of ZAGNY. Indeed, some have not even taken the trouble to become members of the Association."

"We have noted the views you express. You are aware that the Association established a Religious Advisory Committee, of which some of you are members. The matters you raise have been discussed by that committee and guidelines for appropriate action in situations of the kind you refer to will be presented in their report."

"We appreciate the depth of your feelings and conviction. Be assured that we do not wish to impose any

views on anyone. However, we recognize diversity of opinion on these matters, as indeed there would be on such sensitive issues. It has been our major concern and fervent hope that differences in views should not, and do not lead to disharmony among our priests whom the community expects to be exemplars of the Zoroastrian way of life. And it is in that spirit we request you to reconsider your decision."

Tehran Priests Endorse Navjote

The Council of Mobeds in Tehran has supported the navjote of Joseph Peterson and noted, "The propagation and promotion of the religion is a meritorious deed."

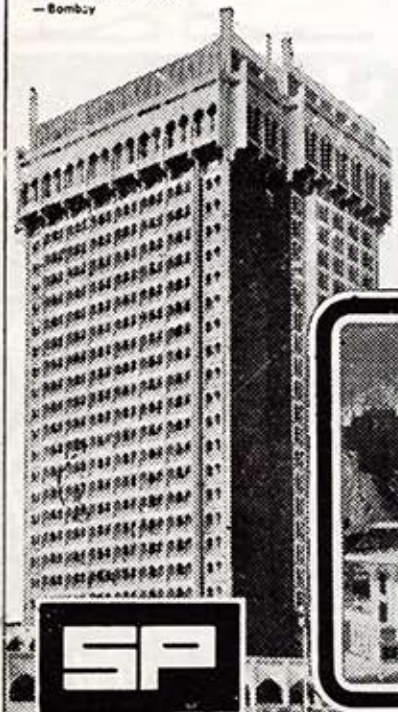
In reply to a query on conversion from mobed Bahram Shahzadi, one of the priests who performed Peterson's navjote, the council stated, "If we Zoroastrians believe that our religion is one of the great living religions of the world and that it is beneficial to all the peoples of the world, we must persevere to propagate it. We must accept persons who want to embrace the

LET'S BUILD THEM TOGETHER!

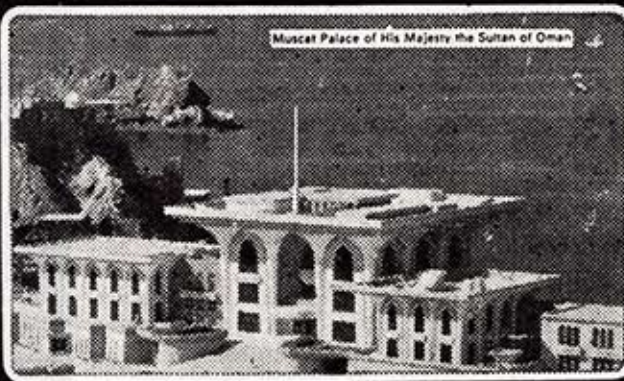
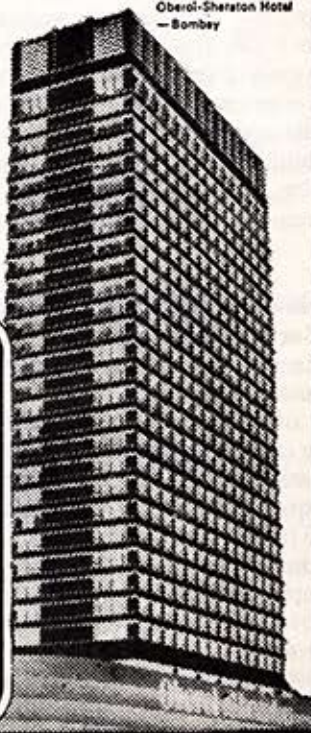
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Zoroastrian Religion. In fact we should follow those who set us an example."

According to Dr Shari Merabi, secretary of the Rustam Guiv Trust, Shahzadi's query was addressed to the council following objections to the navjote on the grounds that "the present government of Iran may be against the policy of accepting a Christian or other non-born Zoroastrians into our religion...(which) may put our Zoroastrian sisters and brothers, living in Iran, in a difficult situation."

"We feel that the Council of Mobeds in Iran (the highest authority in Iran in Zoroastrian Doctrine and in the guidance of Iranian Zoroastrians), has the responsibility of looking after their people and they are in a better position to judge the situation closely and they know better what is going on in Iran than the rest of us residing in USA or other parts of the world. Nevertheless, it is our responsibility to let all the Zoroastrians residing outside Iran know, what is the opinion of the Council of Mobeds in Iran, in this particular issue."

The following is the council's reply dated May 24, 1983, translated from Farsi into English by Dr Ali Jaffrey, the noted Zoroastrian scholar:

"Esteemed brother Bahram Shahzadi: We have received your letter of April 20, 1983. It beautifully describes in detail how Joseph Peterson, a Christian, studied books on Mazdayasna, realized the truth of the Zoroastrian Religion without any person preaching it to him, became a Zoroastrian on his own accord and later had his navjote performed at the Darbe Mehr of New York; also the opposition shown by certain persons on the occasion as well as the fact that certain parents have alienated their sons and daughters who have married non-Zoroastrians. The council discussed the contents of your letter at an official meeting.

"You have, in your detailed letter, asked the opinion of the council regarding the acceptance of people into Zoroastrianism. Let us glimpse through Zoroastrian scriptures and find an answer to it. We begin with the *Gathas* of Asho Zarathustra to see if our great prophet has reserved this religion for a particular caste or people and has forbidden the acceptance of aliens into it or that he has kept the Zoroastrian religion open to all: "Hear the best with your ears And ponder with a bright mind!



The Mehraban Guiv Darbe Mehr, Ontario where the *Atash Dadgah* was installed

Then discriminate for yourself
The two doctrines (of truth and lie).
Let each man and woman, for
his/her own self

Select the way before the Last Day
ushers in." (*Yasna* 30.2)

"Whoso, with his speech or mind
Takes action against the follower of
lie

Or leads him to tread the Path of
Good

Pleases Ahura Mazda for good."

(*Yasna* 33.2)

"If a wiseman, follower of Righteous
Doctrine

Succeeds in winning over a follower
of lie

So that he gives up his old doctrine;

He should, after satisfying himself,

Inform a religion leader

So that he is safe from harms by

others." (*Yasna* 46.5)

"The above stanzas show that Asho Zarathustra does not advocate force to spread the religion, but has kept it open for all. He has laid down certain rules and regulations for the propagation and promotion of the religion as well as for the acceptance of non-Zoroastrians. He has never reserved it for the Aryans or for a particular caste of people. *Yasna* 46.12 shows that the religion had spread into the Turanian lands during Asho Zarathustra's lifetime, because he praises Frayana, a Turanian chief who supported Mazdayasna.

"In addition to the *Gathas*, other scriptures also advocate acceptance. One may refer to the *Hom Yasht* (24), *Dinkard* IX-4 and 14 and *Dadistan Dinik* chapter 42. Also to the *Aerpatistan* 1-5-4 and 5 in which a non-Zoroastrian embracing the Good Religion is advised not to force his wife into it. Also refer to the same scripture 1-4-16.

"The above citations show that the propagation and promotion of the religion is a meritorious deed. If we look at other religions, we shall observe that they also do their best in promoting their cause."

The Atash of Ontario

On Hormazd roj (September 25), Zoroastrians in Ontario will witness the consecration and installation of Canada's first *Atash Dadgah* fire, notes a Zoroastrian Society of Ontario newsletter.

A jashan ceremony will be held at the main hall of the Mehraban Guiv Darbe Mehr, in which mobeds from other Zoroastrian associations of Canada and North America are scheduled to participate. This will be followed by the transfer of the Holy Fire to the *afargan* in the newly extended *Atash Dadgah* room at the Darbe Mehr, the report notes.

For Ontario's large Zoroastrian community numbering approximately 1000, the consecration of the fire "will be an occasion to remember," according to the newsletter. Recently, the community unanimously elected a new executive committee for 1983-84, with Dhun Bhaya as president, Sabar Balsara, executive vice-president, Jehangir Behboodi, vice-president, Faredoon Khory, secretary and Darayus Divecha, treasurer. Rati Mistry and Merwan Irani were elected executive officers.

At a jashan held to commemorate the death anniversary of Arbab Rustam Guiv in June, Homi Homji, past president of the ZSO expressed the hope that the projected *Atash Dadgah* would "bestow on the Zoroastrians of Ontario, mutual understanding, peace, tranquillity, unity and prosperity,"

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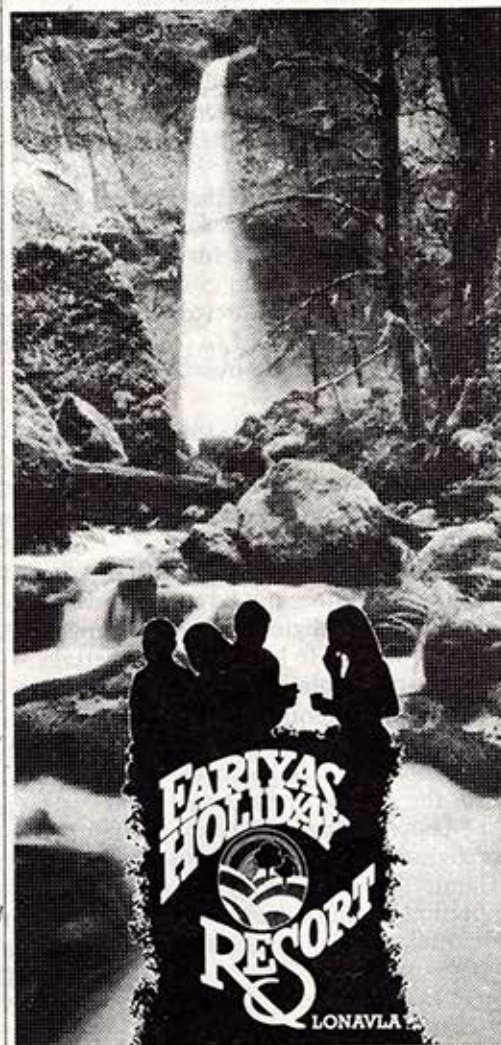


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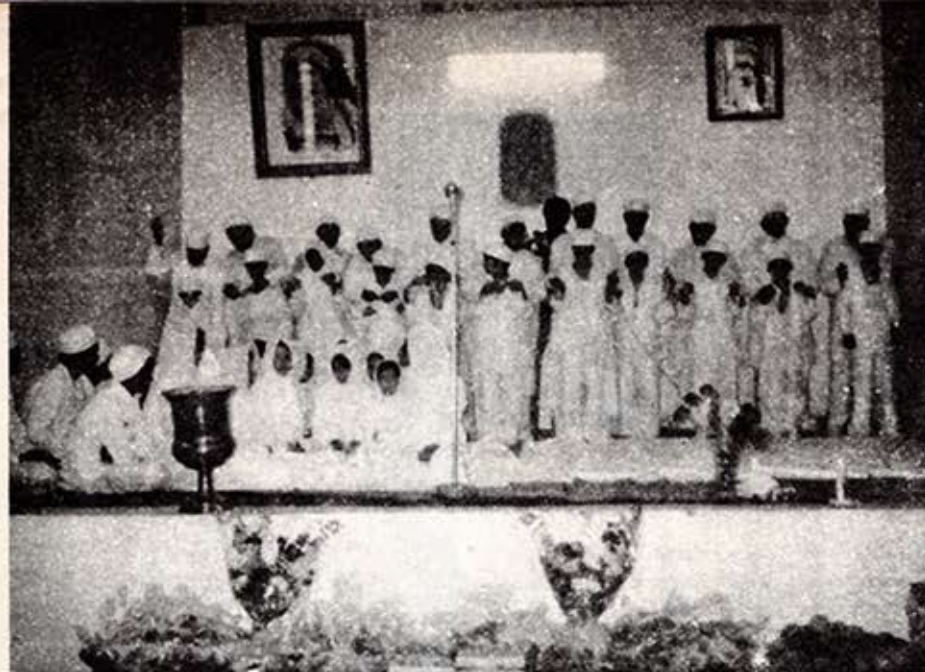
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Children of Yazd at the navjote ceremony

and the ability to "settle all our differences with harmony and (to) prosper in this new country of our settlement."

Group Navjote at Yazd

Thirty-three young Zoroastrians, dressed completely in white, were initiated into the faith at a group navjote ceremony held in the traditional Zoroastrian stronghold of Yazd in Iran in March, notes Kersy S. Bhesania, president of the Zoroastrian International Cultural Association, the sponsors of the navjote.

Around 600 enthusiastic Zoroastrians from Tehran, who travelled to Yazd, 700 kilometres away, to witness the event, reportedly the third such navjote organized by the ZICA, listened to the devotional hymn sung by two navjotees at the commencement of the ceremony, and watched 11 mobeds perform the ceremony in three groups.

After a recitation from the *Hormazd Yasht*, the 19 boys and 14 girls from Yazd, aged between nine and 14 years sipped the holy *Hom* water, and "mobed Kerman Katrak recited a speech in Persian expounding the virtues of each individual having the liberty to choose for himself whether he wished to be initiated as a Zarthosti," notes Bhesania. While mobed Cyrus Unwalla prayed the *Havan Gah* and the *Atash Nyaish*, a recitation of the *Tandarosti* by mobed Mehraban from the Yazd Agiary brought the ceremony to a conclusion.

Traditional dry fruits and Yazdicakes were served to all present, and *peramnīs* and gifts were presented to the mobeds

and navjotees.

The event was financed mainly by Hormazdiar Mahyar Lohrasbi, states the report, and partly by the ZICA, "from funds built up over the years mainly through membership subscriptions and proceeds from various functions and donations."

The ZICA was formed in Tehran about seven years ago, "to render cultural and other worthy services to the community... (and) to co-ordinate increasingly with local Zarthostis and Iranian Anjumans," said Bhesania in his address on the occasion.

Besides Bhesania, the president, the ZICA's nine-member committee for the year 1983-84 includes Hooshang S. Atashband, Ms Freny K. Bhesania, Hoshi D. Elavia, Khodaram M. Gha-vesni, Ms Homai F. Mistry, Rustom K. Zerepoush, Ms Farzane K. Darabian and Khashayar B. Fararooni.

North London Association

The four-fold purpose of the regional North London Zoroastrian Association (NOLZA) which was set up on May 2, 1982, is the promotion of education of Zoroastrians in and around North London, the provision of recreational facilities for its members, the encouragement of research into Zoroastrian history and heritage and the organization of social activities which bring the community together, notes the first annual report.

This association is "not a rival organization to the main body at 'Zoroastrian House' but a local body," notes Cyrus Mehta of London who sent in the

report. Earlier this year the association participated in a consultative conference held between 200 delegates from various minority groups and the Greater London Council, at County Hall.

As part of its activities, the association provides consultancy services to community members on problems ranging from the British Nationality Act and welfare rights to family problems within the community. On a larger scale several social activities, including a day coach trip to Broadlands — the home of the Mountbattens, a video film show and a whist-drive, have been organized by the executive committee of which F. Madon is the president and Ms Y.M. Sepai the honorary secretary. The highlight of the year's activities was the Navroz community dinner.

As for whether the activities of the association have lived up to expectations the report says, "What better evidence in support of this could we submit to you than to say that in less than a year we have doubled our membership."

Darbe Mehr Plan

For the establishment of a Darbe Mehr in British Columbia, the fifth Zoroastrian Centre in America, the Arbab Rustam Guiv Foundation has promised a donation of \$ 200,000, notes a Zoroastrian Society of Ontario (ZSO) newsletter.

"The Society further reports that pledges and cheques amounting to \$ 55,000 have so far been received from its own membership," adds the newsletter. The progress is reportedly "very encouraging" and increases the possibility of setting up a Zoroastrian Centre in British Columbia.

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Close Encounters of the Religious Kind

Russi M. Lala

Zoroastrianism—An Ethnic Perspective by Khojeste P. Mistree,
published by Zoroastrian Studies, Bombay, 1982. Pages 131, price Rs 99.

There is a stirring of faith among the Zoroastrians that was not there in the 1950s or even in the 1960s. There is a desire to be informed, enlightened, perhaps ennobled by our faith. Khojeste Mistree has fanned this desire and in recent years has been the prime informer and awakener of his people. A chartered accountant who left his profession to study the *Avesta* at Oxford University—first under Zaehner then under Mary Boyce—Mistree is no ivory-tower scholar. On returning to India he gave a number of lectures, and what is more, trained a group of teachers who in turn could teach others Zoroastrian studies.

The moving passion of Mistree's life is to protect, preserve and acquaint 'our tribe' (as he calls us) with the essentials of our faith. This first book of his is an extension of this desire. Hence he sub-titles the book, 'An Ethnic Perspective'—introducing the element of race. The work is an intelligent Parsi's guide to his faith. The book is elegantly presented on cream-wove paper in sepia ink and is lavishly illustrated, though only in one colour.

Mistree places the date of Zarathustra's birth at 1500 B.C. When the prophet received the revelation, accepted and spread it, Zoroastrianism became the first revealed religion of the world. The immensity of Zarathustra's stature springs from the fact that he was, in Rabindranath Tagore's words, "The first man we know who gave a

definitely moral character to religion... Though surrounded by believers in magical rites, he proclaimed in those dark days of unreason that religion has its truth in moral significance, not in external practices of imaginable value; that its value is upholding man in his life of good thoughts, good words and good deeds."

The basic struggle in the world for Zarathustra, was the one between good and evil within every man and between men. Khojeste Mistree shows that according to the faith the role of man is to join in the struggle to annihilate evil. *Yasna* 30.2 says: "Listen with your ears to the best things. Reflect with a clear mind—man by man for himself—upon the two choices of decision." A man's *fravashi* (soul) helps him to choose the right. God gave man free will. Zarathustra gave his followers the consciousness to choose the right from the wrong. Man is not a puppet with his future predestined. He is "a productive purposeful creation of God." The faith endows each man with dignity.

Zoroastrianism is a religion of hope. Monasticism, mortification and fasting, are alien to the faith. The latter weakens him and a man has to be healthy in body, mind and spirit to fight evil. God is powerful indeed and the ultimate triumph of good and truth will come but God needs man to fight the battle. "The emphasis in Zoroastrianism," says Mistree, "is upon the goodness and perfection of

God, rather than the brute strength of an omnipotent Being." A temporarily non-omnipotent God should not be seen as a weak Being for he will emerge invincible at the end of time and good men will aid him in the final victory.

The author quotes from the latest translation of the *Gathas* by Stanley Insler which is apparently superb. It was published in 1975. Insler's translation with commentary is priced at Rs. 800 a copy and it is worth an Indian publisher getting rights to reprint the verses of the *Gathas* only—without the commentary.

Mistree underlines that God, for the Zoroastrian, is a friend—not someone before whom a person trembles, but a friend one can speak to and who answers in return as he did to Zarathustra in the *Gathas*. *Yasna* 46.2 says: "Take notice of it Lord, offering the support a friend should grant to a friend." There is a verse in a Christian hymn which expresses this idea beautifully: "He walks with me, He talks with me, He tells me I am His own."

The 131 large-size pages of the book are divided into 18 chapters. The most important and informative chapters are those on The Nature of Prayer, The Incarnate Word (translations and text of some key prayers), The Navjote Ceremony and The Funeral Ceremony. Mistree answers several queries of a layman: "Why are foreigners not allowed before a dead Zoroastrian for



Zoroastrianism

An Ethnic Perspective

Khojeste P. Mistree

Sezdo?" "Why do we burn an oil lamp close to the head of a dying person?" "Why should we say prayers in the Avesta language?"

There is a brief chapter at the end on the arrival of the Parsis in India on which Mistree accepts Hodivala's findings of 936 A.D. and not the earlier ones.

The test of a book on religion is not its power to enlighten alone but its ability to bring the reader a little closer to God than he was before he started. If Mistree's work can sharpen the hunger for righteousness in the reviewer, the book can perhaps do the same in others.

Scholarship has not dulled the passion in his heart and his ever widening concern for the community. May more books flow from Mistree's pen.

The Gospel According to Pundol

Deenaz Damania

"Religious knowledge given in this book will not be found anywhere in our religious books, nor was such knowledge ever given by the dastoor and scholars of the community." These introductory remarks from the booklet entitled 'The True Knowledge which Minocheher Pundol Saheb acquired from the sahebs of Demavand Koh' arouse one's interest and curiosity.

Originally published in Gujarati in November 1976 on the consecration of the Pundol adaran in Udva and subsequently in English the 56 page booklet does not have a title page with the name of the author, publisher, place of publication, or price. One surmises, it has been published by the followers of the late mystic leader, Minocheher Pundol in his memory. His followers are restricted in numbers and largely concentrated in Bombay and parts of Gujarat. Amongst them are BPP trustee Dr Nelie Noble, the Sidwa family of Udva and lawyer Jimmy Shroff who unsuccessfully contested the BPP trusteeship now occupied by Jamshed N. Guzder.

During the last 15 years of his life, Pundol is supposed to have had a close relationship with the Magav Sahebs of

Demavand Koh ("direct extracts of Dadar Ahura Mazda"); the book, which contains some of the revelations he has preached to his followers, is divided into 16 short chapters. There is a brief statement of his teachings, followed by strict do's and don'ts about a Zoroastrian's behaviour in an agiary, at home or at work.

Given below are some of the points put forth.

Among all religions, Zoroastrianism is the purest and highest. In order of merit, Hinduism comes next, followed by Christianity. If one is attracted towards the Jewish faith, one cannot even reach *Chinvat* bridge after death, and to drift towards Islam, would be to condemn one's soul to centuries (43 to 45 lakh years!) or rebirths without achieving salvation.

All Pundol's followers wear a red cap saying "wearing a red prayer cap is more auspicious than wearing a black cap because red is the symbol of Behram Yazad." Wearing a black cap is pure sacrilege then, for "black signifies darkness and evil."

In his lifetime, Pundol denounced inter-communal marriages, and said the biggest mistake a Zoroastrian could make was to marry outside his faith. He stated that a Zarhosti by marrying a non-Zarhosti starts his/her own spiritual downfall. "A woman who marries a man outside her religion, can never expect her soul to rest in peace. Soon after her death, she is reborn and has to undergo all the hardships and miseries she has already gone through in her previous birth. Only then, her *ravaan* will reach *Chinvat* after she dies. In the same manner, a Zarhosti male marrying a non-Zarhosti female has to undergo punishment."

Is our faith universal in its approach, and if it is, can we Parsis restrict its membership? Pundol has this to say about conversion—"The Almighty gives birth to a human being on this earth. The human being should perform good deeds to please the Almighty while remaining faithful to his own religion, and he thus attains soul advancement. A time comes when such a person is fit to become a Zoroastrian. A Rainidar Saheb is a spiritually advanced person and he can judge whether a non-Zoroastrian is worthy of becoming a Zoroastrian, and he has the power to convert these non-Zoroastrians into fellow Zoroastrians. He has the power therefore, to perform their Navjote ceremony and make them Zoroastrians for the first time. Thus a

person at last becomes a Zoroastrian by undergoing the cycle of life and death innumerable times on this earth."

This publication highlights the fact that just as one discusses racial superiority, or the myth of racial superiority, there is within our faith a group (cult) which firmly believes that as

All Pundol's followers wear a red cap...Wearing a black cap is pure sacrilege, for "black signifies darkness and evil."

Zoroastrians their souls are superior, and in a class by themselves. When our forefathers came to India centuries ago, they did not claim they were a cut above the rest. Today, when we face such serious problems as the threat of dwindling numbers and extinction, it is difficult to accept some of the teachings put forth in the booklet. But the book highlights Pundol's role in making his followers proud of their Zoroastrian faith, and aware of the beauty of Zarathustra's teachings.

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The busload of school children leaves Bangalore's busy Shivajinagar Bus Station at 8.10 a.m. on its way to school. What strikes one immediately is that though there are almost 80 children aboard, the noisy chatter one hears sounds 'different'. It is only when you look closely at the happy, animated faces of the school children 'talking' with their hands and eyes, that you realise these children are deaf.

The bus is on its way to the Sheila Kothavala Institute for the Deaf, situated on the way to Bangalore Airport. Started in 1967, the school is 16 years old this year. It has been named after Sheila Kothavala who was very interested in educating deaf children, and on her demise, her family donated a part of their property to house the school building.

Interestingly, deafness is not a

handicap normally associated with the Parsi community, and yet education for the deaf has been pioneered by Parsi women. Dhun Adenwalla in Calcutta, and Behroze Vatcha in Bombay are prominent in the field. Bangalore saw the birth of the first school for the deaf due to the initiative and interest shown by Aban Unwalla who was born deaf and had to take her training in Madras, because there were no existing facilities in Bangalore then. Following the efforts of Aban, her parents and a group of other interested individuals formed the Deaf Aid Society which today runs one of the best schools of deaf education in the country.

Removing a few misconceptions people may have about the deaf, Tehmina Cawasji, the secretary of the Deaf Aid Society says, "Deafness need not be

associated with retardation. A lot of these children are perfectly normal. What they have missed out on is early childhood learning due to their inability to hear and relate to the world around." For example, a normal three-year-old who comes to nursery school already knows a few hundred words and their meanings. A deaf child who starts schooling at six years, has a very limited vocabulary and concept formation. He has missed out on a lot of growth and development due to his inability to hear. Therefore even though any two children may have the same I.Q. rating, the deaf child has a lot of learning to catch up on, before he can perform as well as his 'hearing' friend.

One field in which the deaf are indistinguishable from the normal is in the field of sport. The students of the Sheila Kothavala School excel in the field of sport. In fact at the National Sports for the Deaf, a lot of the school students are sent to represent Karnataka state, and win a lot of awards and trophies for their state. Providing equal opportunities for girls and boys in the field of sport is reflected in the school football team which comprises girls and boys. The school building with its large open spaces around gives the children a feeling of freedom and space. This is in direct contrast to the schools for the deaf in Bombay, which are normally run in apartments, maybe on the eighth or ninth floor of a tall building.

A very special feature in teaching the deaf is the teacher-pupil relationship. As Margaret Joseph, the principal of the school says, "Compared to a normal school where there are 50 students to a teacher, the teacher-student ratio at our school is 1:7. It is a very personal and close teaching relationship, and besides teaching the 3 R's the teacher has to help the child effect a better intellectual, emotional and social adjustment to life. As babies and toddlers they have never heard endearments whispered into their ear, and so some of these children are emotionally 'retarded', and slowly learn what it is to give and receive love and affection." Most of the students appreciate the special care and attention they receive. In fact, a little sister of one of the deaf students who went to a normal school wanted to quit her school and join her deaf brother's school, because they seemed to be having so much more fun!

Kothavala Institute: Nurturing the deaf

Deenaz Damania



Left: Teacher with student using a hearing aid

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The Byramji Touch

R. Arvindam

Shivaji Preparatory Military School in Pune. His schooling in the racing field started under the late S.A. Poonawalla, through whose patronage he obtained a trainer's licence. From then on he never looked back.

In 1968 came Byramji's first classic success when he saddled the Maharaja of Kolhapur's filly, Radha Pyari. But it was Prince Khartoum who gave him his first Derby triumph, in Bangalore, and his first Invitation triumph as well. Other Invitation successes followed. It was Topmost in 1974; then the first hat-trick through Comanche (1976), Squanderer (1977) and Manitou (1978). Another hat-trick followed from 1980 onwards as he sent out winners in Everynsky, Track Lightning and Almanac.

If Track Lightning set the tracks ablaze, Byramji's other wards did likewise in that memorable year at Madras for he sent out the first three in the Madras Derby. All the winners in the first four classics at Madras that year came from Byramji's stables.

How does the great trainer feel about his successes? He feels they have been achieved through hard work and sincerity of purpose. He travels round the country and takes a personal interest in purchasing two-year-olds for his owners.

There are some who wonder why so much is made of Byramji. They say that when he has 100 to 150 horses with him, there is nothing outstanding about sending out classic winners. Well, how does one get a big string unless the owners have tremendous faith in the trainer's abilities?

Byramji is of the opinion that the present crop of young trainers is a dedicated lot. They are hard working, willing to learn and spend a lot of time with the horses. That's a fine compliment indeed coming from the greatest trainer of them all.

The tale of King Midas and his golden touch comes to mind when one thinks of trainer Rashid Byramji: every horse he trains seems to turn into a classic winner. For two seasons in particular (1977-78 and 1980-81) the Byramji touch took the racing world by storm as he sent out a regular stream of winners for different owners.

The professional from western India, who has made Bangalore his home, has won, at the time of going to press, the Indian Turf Invitation Cup at Hyderabad for three consecutive years (seven times in 20 Invitations) — an incredible performance indeed.

Incredible, yes, but certainly not surprising for those who know the magnificence of this trainer. He is supremely dedicated, an excellent judge of horse-flesh and a man of high integrity.

Let's get the accolades straight from the owners for whom he is saddling classic winners. According to Sunit Khatau: "Although I have been buying the best two-year-olds for many years, it is only

since I shifted my horses to Rashid that classic success has come my way. The secret of his success is his attention to detail, hard work and a keen eye for the horse. And most important of all, absolute integrity."

Says Mr. J.P. Goenka: "Since my association with Byramji I have been observing his training talents from close quarters. His ability to work hard permits him to bring out the best out of his charges. They are finely tuned to meet precise racing requirements. His talent in assessing two-year-olds is remarkable."

Chairman of the Bangalore Turf Club Kumar Siddanna says: "The BTC is proud of his achievements as he has now made Bangalore his headquarters and holds an 'A' Trainer's licence with us."

Racing is in Byramji's blood, for both his father Rustomji and grandfather Byramji were trainers. No wonder Rashid gave up his studies after getting his matriculation certificate from the Sri

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