

Parzianā

The Poona Housing Stalemate

Hutokshi D. Doctor

Housing for Pune's fast-increasing Zoroastrian population continues to constitute the community's major problem here, even as more than 44 acres of choice land, gifted to the Poona Parsi Punchayet in 1953, remain unutilized. Since 1972, the trustees of the PPP have been negotiating the sale of part of this land, the proceeds of which were to be utilized for the housing of needy Zoroastrians. In 1976, 25 plots measuring approximately four acres were offered for sale at Rs 4.50 per sq ft, but the sale deed has not been finalized to date, permission to execute the sale having been repeatedly refused by government authorities.

This extensive tract of land, situated on the picturesque slopes of the hill atop which the doongerwadi stands in Lullannagar, became the focus of the community's attention and the cause of much conjecture after the annual general body meeting of the PPP on December 1, 1983. The meeting was held in a crowded Pudumjee Hall where, for the first time in years, the required 20 per cent quorum was formed. The crowds came mainly in response to an appeal

signed by five Poonaites and sent out to members of the Punchayet, requesting their attendance to discuss "certain vital questions pertaining to Punchayet lands...which need to be finally settled by the community itself before the matter goes out of hand and the government intervenes to requisition the same." The land, hardly two kilometres from Main Street, around which the majority of the city's Parsis live, was donated by the late Aspandiar K Irani, an Iranian philanthropist.

The signatories of the appeal alleged that "the 25 plots... have been so laid out that the prospective buyers need not pay anything for the surrounding area of 4½ acres required for development of roads etc. The community therefore stands to lose a plot of 8½ acres while recovering the cost of 4 acres only" and that too at a ridiculous price of Rs 4.50 per sq ft." They observed, "It appears from the list of 25 plot holders that they happen to be close relations and friends interse," and that "three of the present trustees have a direct interest in acquiring the plots from the Poona Parsi Punchayet by executing the sale deed at any

cost." These allegations, among others, have been labelled "inadequate," "incorrect" and "misleading" in a clarifying statement prepared by some of the former trustees of the PPP but not yet signed or published. "As we were some of the persons who handled these matters in our capacities as Trustees of earlier Boards during 1971-81, we take it on ourselves to enlighten the members with the correct details, background, history and rationale of the whole matter," notes the statement.

Clause 9 of the Terms and Conditions for the sale of the plots to Zoroastrians requires that "The sale deed in favour of the allottee will be made only after the necessary permission of concerned authorities is obtained." Permission to sell the plots was, however, refused by the Deputy Collector and Competent Authority, Pune Urban Agglomeration in 1980, and then by the Government of Maharashtra under section 20 of the Urban Land Ceiling Act in September 1983. As a result, only a sum of Rs 1.50 per sq ft has been collected from the allottees as developmental cost.

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of permission to sell the land is a letter from some of the present trustees to the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, presenting the complete details of the case and requesting exemption from the Land Ceiling Act, notes one of the trustees. This letter was despatched just two days before the meeting. President Dinshaw S Anklesaria feels that before any decision on the plots is taken, it would be well to wait for a reply from the CM.

In view of the long status quo and the escalating value of the land which has recorded to date at least a five-fold increase, the signatories proposed that a resolution calling upon the trustees to "refund the deposits collected from the 25 prospective buyers" be tabled and voted upon at the annual general body meeting. "No such action has yet been taken and we do not expect the same to be taken as long as the vested interests persist," states the appeal. The appeal is signed by four voters on the Punchayet's electoral roll—Marzaban J Dorabjee of Dorabjee Hotels and Catering Services, Khodayar N Kayani, proprietor of

Kayani Bakery, Prof Hoshang D Moogat, head of the Department of Mathematics, Nowrosjee Wadia College and Kershasp M Irani, advocate and spokesman at the meeting. The fifth signatory is Ms Meher Master-Moos, advocate and Zoroastrian scholar. A day before the meeting, this notice signed by Prof Moogat and conspicuously placed in the daily *Maharashtra Herald* drew the community's attention to the issue again—"Being unaware of the complete details and later developments, I hereby dissociate myself from the entire appeal and controversy regarding the Parsi Punchayet land." Moogat did not attend the meeting.

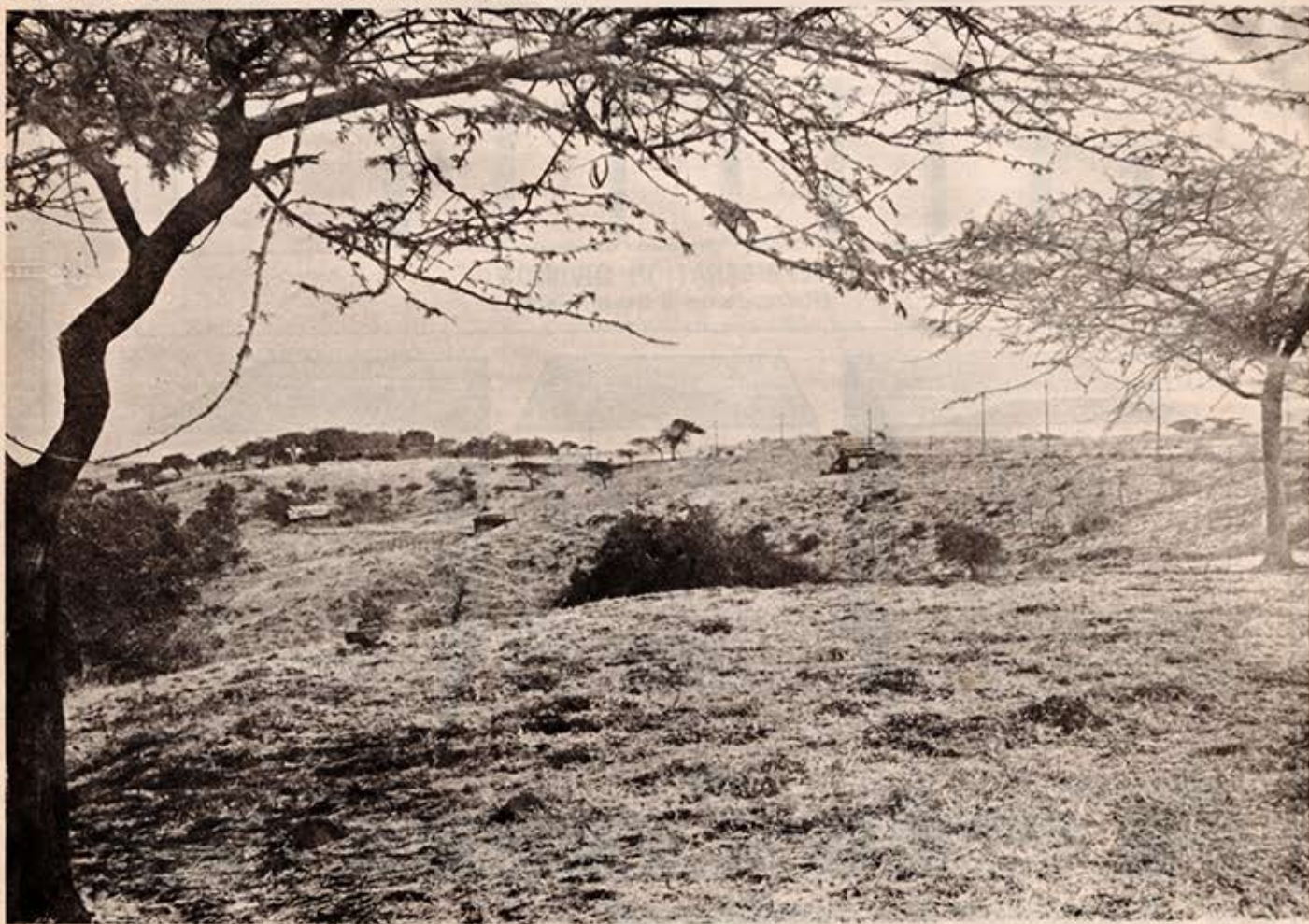
The resolution was not, however, tabled. According to Irani, the trustees claimed that adequate notice of the resolution had not been given to the members of the Punchayet. He added however, that the resolution had been submitted in writing to the president and trustees of the PPP, 15 days in advance as per clause 48 (C) of the constitution of the PPP.

Irani and Pervez Avari, an industrial engineer at Telco, claim that the entire proceeds from the sale of the land will be about Rs 7.5 lakhs, of which Rs 3 lakhs have already been spent on the development of the property. "With the remaining Rs 4½ lakhs you cannot even construct half a building," Irani retorts. "The whole community has been taken for a ride in the last 10 years," alleges Avari.

Anklesaria agreed that "the money we will be getting from these plots is peanuts," but he also explained that in 1976, when the scheme was floated, very few Zoroastrians were ready to buy the plots even at that rate. In an attempt to clear a popular misconception, he stated that Pune's housing plans were in no way dependent upon the sale of these plots, and that plans for a housing scheme for the middle and upper income groups which would generate a corpus for the lower income groups, were already afoot. These houses will be constructed on the rest of the land.

The trustees' tenacious attempts to

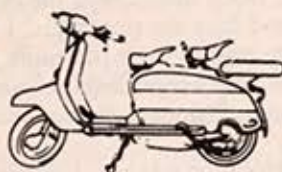
The focus of attention: the picturesque slopes of Lullanagar.



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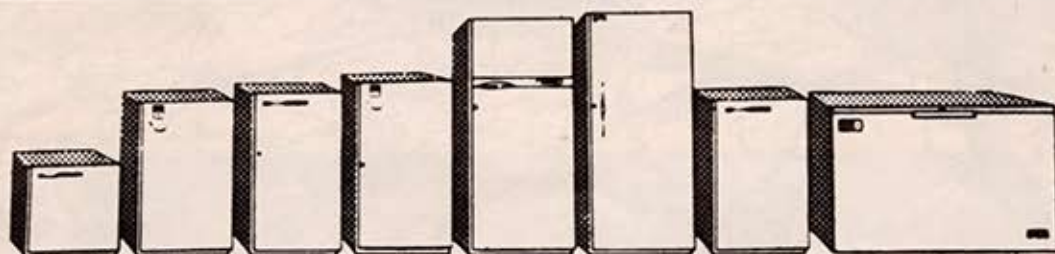
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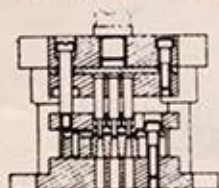
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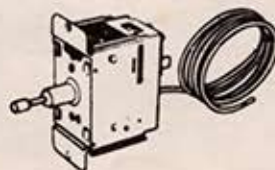
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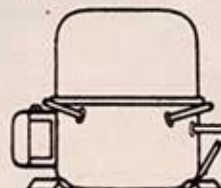
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clear the sale of the plots are substantiated by their belief that "we have given our word to these 25 parties, and if we go back on our word, the whole community will lose faith in us," as one of the trustees said. Replying to the charge that the buyers would be acquiring 8½ acres for the price of 4 acres, the clarifying statement notes: "Lay-out plans were prepared by responsible architects under the instructions of the earlier Boards. These plans were passed by the Poona Municipal Corporation in 1974... (and) by the charity commissioner... When an open plot of land with a large area is to be developed, considerable amount of footage is to be reserved for various purposes such as open roads, colony roads, town planning roads, school reservation etc. Nobody can think of buying and paying good money for open space, colony roads etc. The money that would be recovered would only be for the area under open plots."

The price of Rs 4.50 per sq ft was approved by the charity commissioner, the statement notes, and "it cannot, therefore, be said that this price was 'ridiculous'."

Kershasp Irani maintains that some of the plots changed hands without recovering five percent as administrative charges, contrary to the conditions for the sale of the plots. As a result, "the intention and object of the original donor is frustrated," the appeal states, while the "community at large does not stand to gain anything from this transaction." The trustees of the previous boards view this as a "serious allegation pointing a finger at all the trustees of all the boards in the past 15/20 years who have worked on the scheme," and they aver that "the signatories may have to answer to the membership at large."

"An impartial trustee would have returned the deposits which these trustees have not done," said Avari, talking about the alleged "vested interests" of three of the trustees in the plots under dispute. It is true that three of the trustees have invested their money in these plots as stated, but, the statement adds, "they were not trustees of the board at that point of time nor could have ever dreamt of being elected by the electorate five years hence." "Just because I own one of these plots, does it mean that I should not have stood for election?" asked one trustee. "If this was the case why was the objection not raised at the time of the elections?"

The trustees appear to be in a quan-

dary since, on the one hand, the land cannot be sold unless it is cleared from land ceiling restrictions and on the other, the sale of the 8½ acres to raise funds for the "activities of the trust and specially for the construction of houses for the poor and middle-class Parsi families" is, according to the trustees, one of the binding conditions of the trust.

Pointing out the legal, moral and economic implications of the resolution proposing the refund of deposits to the 25 prospective buyers, some trustees of the former boards state, "Any action to refund the deposits and squash the scheme would be open to litigation... Deposits have been collected legally and with an undertaking of future performance and if refunded it could cause legal involvement to all the parties concerned." "The 25 persons have deposited their monies and have waited for over 5/6 years in good faith. The Punchayet would be letting them down by summarily refunding their monies which would be, to say the least, immoral... Think of the interest loss suffered by them on the money. Also think of the increase in cost of construction of their houses on the plots." If the Punchayet refunds the money—a sum of Rs 2,50,000 to 3,00,000—"this money will remain buried in the mud and stone of developed plots and cease to earn interest which it is earning just now. The loss of interest would be Rs 25,000 to Rs 40,000 per year and would naturally reduce the quota of expenses of the Punchayet for charitable purposes... Who would prefer to see the poor and needy of the community starved to that extent?"

While Irani and Avari maintain that

they will file a writ petition in court challenging the sale of the plots even if the permission to sell is granted by the government, the trustees ask, "After the monies are refunded, what are the trustees going to do with the plots?... Nobody will come forward to book the plots until and unless they are cleared from under the Urban Land Ceiling Act... Commonsense dictates that as long as the plot-owners are decent enough and great-hearted enough to allow their monies to lie with the Punchayet, the Punchayet should be grateful to them... We feel that only after every possible avenue is exhausted without success, and no further opening is left to fulfil the conditions of the trust, that the trustees and the plot-owners sit together and think out some amicable and mutually beneficial alternative plan." The statement affirms that deposits will be returned to those depositors who desire their money back "and the plot could be reallocated to someone else, even at a higher rate, with the permission of the charity commissioner."

A request for another general body meeting, one month from December 1 was made, but no decision to this effect has been taken, and no meeting held to date, though members of the Punchayet in particular and the community at large here in Pune, are curiously awaiting a way out of the impasse. And while several bungalows and buildings have been raised in once-deserted Lullanagar, these 8½ acres scheduled for sale remain well and truly locked in entangling legalities. In the bargain/the rest of the land, approximately 32 acres stretching out on the slopes beneath the Tower of Silence, has been neglected too long.



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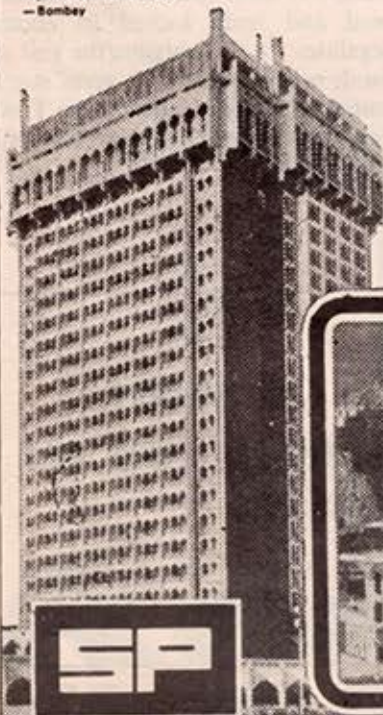
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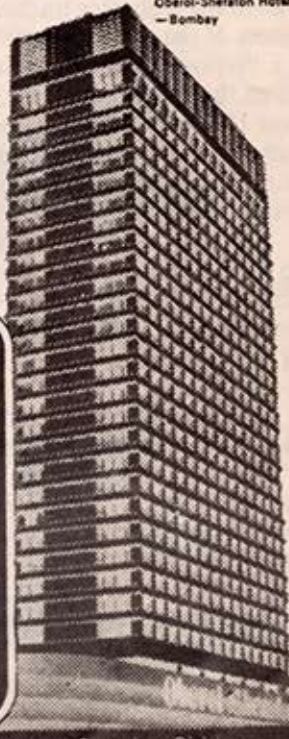
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With the same objective, the Federation published last month a pamphlet offering help and guidance to those seeking opportunities for a Job, Business, Career, Vocational Training or on job-training.

In response to this offer a number of candidates have sent in their Biographical data, which have been published in this issue in a summarised form. You are requested to go through them carefully and send to the Federation Secretary, (Address given below) *your offers, advice, guidance or information which will help these candidates.*

If you are in a position to offer any other opportunities for Jobs, Business Careers, Vocational Training, On-Job Training, career guidance, counselling, finance etc., Please send the details for publication in these pages.

The Federation seeks your help co-operation, guidance and advice in its efforts to promote the social and economic welfare of Zoroastrians.

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- B 2. A Bombay based young lad (age 21) who has passed his H.S.C. (Science) and Computer Programme conducted by the Daver's College of Commerce, Bombay, (Subjects: Auto Coder, Cobol, Basic, Fortran) is looking for an opportunity to work as a Computer Programmer.

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- B 3. A Bombay based young lady (age 25) who is an Arts graduate and holds a diploma (B Grade) in travel transportation and tourism has been working for the last three years with a General Sales Agent of an International Airline. During this period she has been involved in making group reservations, group quotations, group ticketing and has also handled Reserve Bank of India's statement. At present she is working on the computer terminals at the reconfirmation, Agent's ticketing and reservation, Pre-paid Ticketing Advice and Ticketing P.T.A. Counters. She is looking for a job as a Traffic Assistant in any International Airline.

ACCOUNTS ASSISTANT

- B 4. A 25 year old Commerce Graduate, who holds a diploma in

effective public speaking, has won the Bharat Scouts and Guides trophy and numerous medals certificates and trophies in Table-Tennis. He is at present working in the Tax Department of a reputed firm of Chartered Accountants in Bombay on a salary of Rs. 650.00 p.m. He is seeking a job as an Accounts Assistant in a Public or Private Limited Company in Bombay only, on a salary of around Rs. 1000 p.m.

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STENO/SECRETARY

- B 7. A Young lady Commerce Graduate (29) with 4 years experience as Stenographer (100/45) earning Rs. 1100 p.m. seeks a job as Steno/Secretary or an Assistant in Accounts/ Administration in Bombay.

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- C 1. A Calcutta based Zoroastrian (age 68) who has heard that an Irani Zoroastrian is making sweets in Poona wishes to accept the agency/distributorship for marketing the Lemon and Raspberry Sweets, in Calcutta.
- C 2. A Commere graduate (65) having 37 years' pre-retirement experience in Railways and Airlines as Audit Inspector, and post-retirement experience of over 6 years as Supervisor on Farms is seeking a job as Manager/Supervisor in Tea and & Rubber Plantations, Estates, Agriculture & Poultry Farms, Dairies, Nurseries, Stores, Wine-shops, Distille-

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Zoroastrians Abroad

Polls Favour Acceptance

The liberal trend in North America towards acceptance of converts to Zoroastrianism was further evidenced by polls taken by the Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago and the Zoroastrian Society of British Columbia.

"In an effort to gauge the feelings of the community served by the ZAC and to eliminate guesswork on this sensitive and volatile subject, questionnaires were mailed to all adults on ZAC's mailing list," notes the Chicago association's newsletter for December. Along with ZAC's own questionnaire, a questionnaire forwarded to ZAC by the Zoroastrian Association of Quebec was also included (ZAC was given the mandate of generating and surveying a well-informed opinion on the subject at the time of the Fourth North American Zoroastrian Congress in April 1982.)

ZAC Questionnaire

Q1 Do you accept mixed marriages between Zoroastrians and non-Zoroastrians?

99 Yes, 4 No, 2 Abstain.

Q2 Do you think the ZAC should accept mixed marriages? Should mixed marriages be allowed to be performed in the Darbe Mehr?

98 Yes, 6 No, 5 Abstain.

Q3 Should Zoroastrian priests perform mixed marriages?

99 Yes, 3 No, 4 Abstain.

Q4 Should we accept into the religion children of mixed marriages if both the parents and the child so desire?

105 Yes, 2 Abstain.

Q5 Should we accept into the religion the spouses of mixed marriages, if both partners so desire?

92 Yes, 6 No, 7 Abstain.

Q6 Should we accept into the religion any individual who has demonstrated a genuine desire to follow the teachings of Zarathushtra?

86 Yes, 10 No, 9 Abstain.

Q7 Should we actively seek out and convert people into the religion?

18 Yes, 75 No, 12 Abstain.

Q8 Should we accept into the religion children legally adopted by Zoroastrian parents if they so desire?

95 Yes, 6 No, 5 Abstain.

Q9 Do you believe the message of Zarathushtra was intended only for a chosen race of people?

3 Yes, 93 No, 10 Abstain.

Q10 Do you believe we need to preserve the purity of the race in order to preserve the Zoroastrian religion?

4 Yes, 85 No, 17 Abstain.

Q11 Entry into the North American Darbe Mehrs should be allowed to:

(a) Zoroastrians by birth only

28 Yes, 33 No.

(b) Spouses of mixed marriages

54 Yes, 7 No.

(c) Children of mixed marriages

54 Yes, 7 No, 1 Abstain.

(d) Open to all

81 Yes, 16 No, 2 Abstain.

Q12 Should we in North America consider reviewing and revising religious and social practices rather than adhere to the traditions of the past?

91 Yes, 8 No, 4 Abstain.

Q13 In controversial matters, who should set policy for North American Zoroastrians?

(a) Dastoor of India and Iran

8 Yes, 47 No, 7 Abstain.

(b) Institutions of India and Iran

10 Yes, 46 No, 5 Abstain.

(c) Dastoor organizations of North America

43 Yes, 25 No, 6 Abstain.

(d) An apex organization comprised of representatives of all North American Associations.

43 Yes, 19 No, 7 Abstain.

(e) A specially appointed committee of scholars from North America

35 Yes, 27 No, 6 Abstain.

(f) A specially appointed committee of scholars from all over the world.

36 Yes, 27 No, 4 Abstain.

(g) A community referendum

43 Yes, 13 No, 7 Abstain.

(h) Others _____

Q14 Does an individual priest have the right to change existing policies followed by majority of the community in the world?

29 Yes, 47 No, 25 Abstain.

ZAQ Questionnaire

Q1 Should a child of a marriage where either parent is a Zoroastrian, be initiated into the religion as a Zoroastrian, if both parents so desire?

96 Yes, 1 No

Q2 Should a non-Zoroastrian, married to or wishing to marry a Zoroastrian, exercising freedom of moral choice to follow the doctrine of Ahura Mazda, be allowed to be initiated into the faith?

92 Yes, 8 No.

Q3 If a non-Zoroastrian wishes to marry you or your child and does not want to become a Zoroastrian, but the couple

still wants to have the marriage ceremony with Zarathushtra's prayers, should it be allowed?

94 Yes, 7 No.

Q4 If a non-Zoroastrian wants to enter in your faith by exercising freedom of choice and shows his willingness to be initiated, should the genuineness of that person's beliefs be tested out and, if satisfied, should that person be allowed to become a part of the Zoroastrian fold?

87 Yes, 12 No

Q5 Should a child, irrespective of caste, colour or creed, adopted by Zoroastrian parents, be allowed to be initiated into the Zoroastrian faith?

93 Yes, 8 No.

ZSBC Questionnaire

"An adult meeting was held on December 4, 1983 to discuss and vote on the issue of Acceptance/Conversion into the Zoroastrian Religion" notes the Zoroastrian Society of British Columbia newsletter of December 1983-January 1984. The following was the result of the ballot.

Q1 If a Zoroastrian male marries a non-Zoroastrian female and she chooses to accept the Zoroastrian faith of her own free will, should we allow her to be a Zoroastrian?

98 Yes, 7 No

Q2 If a Zoroastrian female marries a non-Zoroastrian male and he of his own free will would like to become a Zoroastrian, should we allow him to be initiated?

96 Yes, 9 No

Q3 Should a Navjote of children of a Zoroastrian married to a non-Zoroastrian be performed if the children and parents both so desire?

(a) Where the mother is a non-Zoroastrian and the father is a Zoroastrian?

100 Yes, 6 No

(b) Where the father is a non-Zoroastrian and the mother is a Zoroastrian?

97 Yes, 9 No

Q4 If the Zoroastrian parents adopt a non-Zoroastrian child, should the child be initiated into the Zoroastrian faith?

96 Yes, 9 No

Q5 Do you believe the religion of Zarathushtra as revealed in the Gathas—

(a) is universal and for all humanity?

97 Yes, 8 No

(b) is for people of ancient Iranian origin only?

12 Yes, 84 No

Q6 Would you accept an individual who sincerely believes and wishes to practice

the Zoroastrian faith?

97 Yes, 9 No

In all 106 members participated in the vote in person and by proxy.

Australian office bearers

The managing committee for 1983-84 of the Australian Zoroastrian Association of New South Wales are Dr B Kalapesi, president; Ms F Kolsawalla, vice-president; T Desai, treasurer; B Mahabeshwarwalla, secretary; Ms G Katrak, joint secretary; K Meher-Homji and C Pestonji, committee members, and Jehangir Daver, auditor. Three trustees elected for a three year term are N. Irani, P. Katrak and D. Kotwal, while P. Kolsawalla was elected as Life-Member Representative on the Foundation Committee.

"The community at large owes a lot to the outgoing management committee," notes the August 1983 association newsletter, *Manashni*. They have performed a very difficult task magnificently. We will endeavour to follow their example. Our ideas may differ in some areas. As the saying goes in Gujarati *Navi Gilli-Navo Dav*. But if we fail in our efforts, it won't be for lack of trying."

Peterson at Chicago

Among those present at the inauguration of the Arbab Rustam Guiv Darbe Mehr-

Zoroastrian Center in Chicago was Joseph Peterson, the American engineer who converted to Zoroastrianism, notes a letter from Dr Shari J. Merabi a trustee of the Rustam Guiv Trust of California and chairman of the board of trustees of the New York Arbab Rustam Guiv Darbe Mehr Zoroastrian Temple where Peterson's navjote was performed.

Writes Merabi: "Mr Peterson was requested to climb to the platform of the hall of the newly built Darbe Mehr in Chicago to express his feelings at being present on the inauguration of the Darbe Mehr in Chicago. The welcome that he received from some 400 true Zoroastrians was tremendous ... I saw him participating in the procession of carrying the holy fire from the assembly hall (where the jashan ceremony had been performed) into the praying room (where the *boi machi* ceremony was performed by the High Priest of the Parsi community of Europe). It was so exciting to see non-Zoroastrian born Peterson, among the other Zoroastrian-born Zoroastrians, following Dastoor Saheb Sohrabji Kutar, Antia, Karanjia, Hormuzdiar, Bagli and the rest of 17 ordained and well respected dastoor to the praying room where the *atesh niyesh* prayer was going on. Nobody prevented Mr Peterson from entering and participating in the *atesh niyesh* prayer. In spite of the opinion of some of our com-

munity ervards, Joseph Peterson was considered one of us—a Zoroastrian."

The first American navjote

"Joseph Peterson's navjote created a furore in the Parsi community of Bombay some months ago. The orthodox maintain that this was against our religion and unprecedented. Ervad

'He has, by 1933, succeeded in converting about 30 persons to Zoroastrianism.'

Kersey Antia, who performed the navjote, also claimed that it was an unique and unprecedented event. It is not our purpose to fan the flames of the controversy again. We only want to put the record straight," noted the *Bombay Samachar* in its 'Parsi Tari Arsi' column on November 27, 1983.

"The great Parsi scholar Jehangir Barjorji Sanjana published in 1935 a book called *Ancient Persia and the Parsis*. On page seven of the introduction, he states:

"A still more noteworthy fact is that there is in California, USA, an American gentleman, a civil engineer by profession, with whom the religion of Zoroaster has become 'flesh and blood' during the past 25 years after a long period of study and investigation of all religions. He says that it is the call of Aryan blood in him. A Parsi dealer in objects of oriental art at the San Diego Exposition in 1916, happy to find some one on those western shores interested and zealous to spread the Zarathushtrian teachings invested this American gentleman who bears the name of Sraosha A. Kaul, with the Parsi sacred garments, *sudreh* and *kusti*, in token of friendship and brotherly love. This American Zoroastrian is so enthusiastic about his adopted religion that he is engaged in spreading it in America. He has, upto the first quarter of 1933, succeeded in converting about 30 persons to Zoroastrianism and expects to increase the membership to thousands in that continent."

"This proves that both our orthodox friends as well as Ervad Kersey Antia are wrong and that it is not for the first time that a foreigner had his navjote performed."

The Nolza banner: The North London Zoroastrian Association's new gold banner depicting 'the all-embracing Farohar' which was unfurled by Councillor Iris Woodger, Mayor of Haringey, last year.



Bahrain Directory

"For a considerable time now, whenever some Zoroastrians get together in Bahrain, it has been noticed that a frequent question is 'How many of us do you suppose there are on the island?' So states the introduction to the first newsletter and directory of the Bahrain Zoroastrian Anjuman. Listing 66 names and addresses, the smartly produced, mimeographed directory was a team effort, notes Ester S Bamji, president of the association. The other office bearers include Adi G Lawyer, secretary, and Nozer H Mistry, treasurer.

"At the best of times, and in almost any community, a question such as this is not easy to answer with accuracy. In Bahrain today with its rapid rate of growth and development, the population has multiplied rapidly, bringing in new faces. The Zoroastrians have not lagged behind and it is gratifying to see a fair increase in our numbers. The problem has been, in fact, getting to know of the new arrivals. Whereas most seek out their kinfolk, some—perhaps because of pressure of work or the location of their work or residence, or simply lack of opportunity—have been unable to meet the rest of us here, and hence this bulletin is a modest effort to stretch out a welcoming hand to the new or the not-so-new arrivals on this happy island. We also hope this will help to knit us into a close, better acquainted community."

The history of the anjuman dates to the summer of 1951, "a notoriously bad one. Of course, in those days, the luxury of air-conditioning was out of the reach of most people. At the time, there were just three Zoroastrian ladies on the island, all three of whom were expectant mothers. Two of them had very suc-

cessful confinements, producing (or rather adding to the community) two bonny boys. The third lady, sadly, did not have the same joy as her baby was stillborn. The Zoroastrians on the island were faced with the problem of where to inter the baby. They searched high and low for a solution, but faced a brick wall wherever they turned. It was then that

In 1951 there were
just three
Zoroastrian ladies
on the island, all
expectant mothers.

the Hindu Community, who had been living in Bahrain for many decades and had fortunately acquired for themselves a cremation ground from the Government, graciously consented that the baby could be interred in one corner of their crematorium. The incident preyed on the minds of the Zoroastrians in case the same problem recurred.

"Jamshed Marolia, who was the then oldest Zoroastrian resident here, and who had excellent contacts with Government and other sources, decided to find a solution to the problem. He approached the Ruler of Bahrain—at the time Sheikh Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the father of the present Amir, Sheikh Eisa Bin Salman Al Khalifa—seeking his assistance.

"With typical Bahraini generosity and graciousness, Sheikh Salman immediately instructed the Government that a suitable piece of land be granted to the community to be developed as a cemetery.

"Various locations were studied, test holes were made to ascertain the suitability for our requirements, and finally a plot of land, measuring 150' x 150' was granted to the community in what was then believed to be a remote corner of the island.

"Jamshed Marolia rightly felt that the land could not possibly be registered in an individual's name, and suggested that a body be formed in whose name the land could be registered. Accordingly, the Bahrain Zoroastrian Anjuman came into existence on 9 September 1956.

"At its first meeting, a draft constitution was drawn up as to the aims, objectives and regulations of the Anjuman, but basically from the outset, the intent of the Anjuman was that: (1) they be the owners of the cemetery; and (2) a forum of all Zoroastrians on the island be held at least once a month.

"Then as now, bachelors outnumbered the families, and these bachelors wholeheartedly backed the Anjuman, rightly hoping that this would give them an opportunity of enjoying mother's home cooking from time to time!

"Jamshed Marolia was elected its first president. That was twenty-seven years ago and we are delighted that the Anjuman has regularly held functions, where as many Zoroastrians as possible have got together to enjoy the fraternal spirit, and, of course, a good lunch or dinner.

"On numerous occasions, these functions have been arranged through the kindness of some Bahraini business friends in their gardens, where a dip in the pool was most welcome."

The address of the Bahrain Zoroastrian Anjuman is Post Box 535, Bahrain, (Arabian Gulf).

RAOBLAH



By Raobail. Reprinted from The Daily.

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Sikkim Distilleries: Himalayan Brew

Jeroo Gorimar

Sprawled over 23 acres, the entire complex of Sikkim Distilleries Ltd. in Rangpo is dwarfed by the mist swathed Himalayas. Nearby a tributary of the Teesta river gurgles, cold and sparkling. The landscape in the Sikkimese border town is reminiscent of Scotland where the balmy air, the clear streams and even the slope of the land are said to be distilled into the inimitable Scotch whisky.

The whisky of Sikkim Distilleries matures in giant oak casks imported from Scotland and the love and care lavished on the range of liquors is certainly reminiscent of the great liquor producing countries of the world which have been in the business for centuries. "We are now directing our efforts to ensure plentiful supplies of our liquors in all the major metros in India," notes the dapper 74-year-old Jamshed Contractor who founded the distillery way back in 1954, today the oldest industry in the state. "Supplies had been crippled in the last few years because of shortage of basic raw materials." The products of Sikkim Distilleries which include whisky, brandy, rum, gin, wine and liquors have found their niche in India's urban cocktail circuit, for Contractor, exuding confidence, affirms that there is terrific demand for their products.

With an annual turnover of over three crore rupees (pre-excite), the Government of Sikkim is the major shareholder with the management resting in Contractor's hands. Today, the distillery pays an annual dividend of Rs 30 lakhs to the government, for their original investment of Rs 2 lakhs and the staff strength has risen from 28 to 286.

The visitor is struck by the air of spanking newness of the complex, the quiet efficiency with which it works and the fact that one does not reel with the stench of fermenting molasses as reportedly happens in other Indian distilleries. The establishment has also taken advantage of the slope of the land to ensure that a minimum of power is required to carry liquids from one station to another, while efforts are constantly made to upgrade equipment.

If the task of distilling liquor in India's remote northeastern state, tucked at the foot of the mighty Kanchenjunga, seems

daunting to most, it does not faze Contractor. Raw materials are carted over long distances over the folds of the Himalayas—the malt extract for the whisky is imported from Scotland, bottles from Baroda, Calcutta and Delhi, jaggery for the rum from Bareilly—all of which is hazardous and expensive, notes Contractor. Marzban Parekh, a director of the company, points to giant steel storage tanks which "were dismantled and brought in 28 pieces."

Though whisky is the largest selling liquor in India, with rum a close contender, rum is the fastest selling product of Sikkim Distilleries, comprising between 60 to 65 percent of the total sales, according to Contractor. The armed forces are the largest consumer of Sikkim Rum "which is made from jaggery and not from molasses—the waste product of sugar factories—as in other distilleries. Rum keeps you warmer than any other drink at high altitudes. That's why it is given to the jawans." In fact, Jamaican ships which dock in Bombay prefer to pick up Sikkim rum which compares favourably with the famed Jamaican rum, informs Contractor.

"Rum is the best mixer in the world," says the distiller. It can be drunk neat, with water, on the rocks, added to

cocktails, soft drinks, food and desserts. Dark rum which is stronger is more popular in India while white rum is exported.

In processing brandy and wine, the Sikkim Distillery utilizes oranges, pineapples and pears because grapes are not available. The fruit alcohol is blended in varying proportions with neutral alcohol to make the different Sikkim brandies. Dry gin is made out of natural grain spirit infused with juice extracted from juniper berries. To cater to the Indian palate is the *paan* liqueur which is an extract of betel nut leaves, *supari*, *elaichi*, *katha* etc. and blended with neutral alcohol, sweetened with glucose and sugar syrup.

The whole range of liquors is exported to the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Sweden, Singapore and Hong Kong. Aside from Sikkim, Contractor has a wholesale liquor shop in Bournemouth, England, and a distillery in Nepal. (He was recently awarded a Gold Medal by the *Oro Verde* magazine in Madrid, Spain, for the consistently good quality of liquors manufactured at the Nepal Distillery.)

Despite the free flowing liquor, the general conviction at the distillery is to drink in moderation. As guests sample

Contractor (left) receiving the Oro Verde gold medal in Madrid, 1983.



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the various products—and amazingly enough do not suffer from a hangover the next day—the staffers abstain under the watchful eye of the portrait of Sai Baba, the protective deity of the distillery. Contractor himself only has wine and beer but is said to taste and test every batch of liquor that goes out of the distillery. Assisted in Sikkim and Nepal by around 10 Parsi families, mostly relatives, Contractor's life resembles the archetypal American Dream, a series of success stories in the face of tremendous odds.

His first venture was a cashew and toddy liquor distillery in 1937 in the Ratnagiri district on the border of Goa. By 1940, Contractor had put up five distilleries with his 30 shops holding the monopoly on selling rights. In 1946, came Prohibition and the distiller

became a pauper in one fell sweep. "I did not receive a paisa in compensation," he says while his losses totalled upto Rs 5 lakhs.

Contractor then went to Assam and started a plywood factory. On August 15, 1950, the factory was swallowed up by a devastating earthquake. He set up another, only to have it swept away by floods in October of the same year.

It was in 1954, that Nari Rustomji, the then Dewan of Sikkim "brought me back to life" with the offer of a contract to set up a distillery in Sikkim with the government being the major shareholder. In 1955, the Dewan of Bhutan gave the brewer a lakh of rupees to start another distillery in his state which was subsequently nationalized. In 1960, Contractor set up a distillery in Kathmandu as well. Subsequently, Sikkim Distilleries

diversified into making perfumes and colognes.

As for the future, Contractor, who believes in making the label and the bottle as appealing as the product is to the tastebuds, has plans to improve both in his range of liquors. Hamstrung by the fact that liquor cannot be advertised in the media, the distiller who once handled the manufacture, advertising and marketing of his products himself, plans to set up a marketing network. In 1976, Contractor retired as managing director and appointed Sam Mehta in his place. On Mehta's retirement, Dadi Contractor (cousin of Jamshed Contractor) was appointed managing director. Jamshed Contractor still remains a director. He is apparently loosening the reins. "I would like to give the younger chaps a chance," he says.

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The man with the deadly lens

Malvika Sanghvi



Though Rashid Bamanbehran is not more accident-prone than the average person, his name is synonymous with disaster. Which is not surprising, for be it a plane crash, a train accident, a fire or a road accident, somehow, by some uncanny set of events, this intrepid photographer has reached the scene and captured the destruction on film. Almost always Bamanbehran's on-the-spot pictures appear in the morning papers the next day.

To many, Bamanbehran's obsession with accidents and tragedy may appear ghoulish, if not frightening. Indeed, his photographs of broken bone and crushed stone have turned many a squeamish stomach. Though aware of the reactions to his photographs, Bamanbehran is quick to defend his passion. "People don't know that I take pictures of happy occasions too, like weddings, *navjotes*, birthday parties. And in fact that is the mainstay of my profession," he clarifies. Whereas wedding assignments are his bread-and-butter, it is his disaster shots that have brought him fame, recognition and of course that certain pinch of notoriety.

Lensman Bamanbehran and the scene of the Avro crash near Kiroli village in August, 1979.



Early attempts

It all began in 1968, when as a schoolboy at the Byramjee Jeejibhoy School, Rashid began borrowing his elder brother's Agfa Isoly, to take pictures of school picnics and plays. At that time a Kodak black and white roll cost only three rupees, and prints a meagre 50 paise each. Bamanbehrum could afford to easily indulge in his hobby, and the minimum amount he charged his school-friends for the prints more than covered his costs.

The son of an insurance agent who "never put any compulsions on us," Bamanbehrum grew up with no clear idea of what profession he should choose. He would have muddled along in this fashion had it not been for film music directors Kalyanji Anandji and their appointing him official photographer for hypnotist Max Coolie's show. The show ran for 125 nights and he clicked away faithfully on all of them. At the end of it, he had made up his mind.

Two years later he found a job in Kuwait as a colour technician operator in a photographer's laboratory. This job further enhanced his professional knowledge. On his return the wedding appointments started trickling in. At that time photography was relatively cheap with a black and white roll costing Rs 5.50 and a print Rs 1.25. Bamanbehrum charged a mere four rupees per print, and even at this rate, he managed a margin of profit.

Together with this, his career as a "disaster" photographer was gaining ground. "I would cover a stray accident or a fire, and give the picture in to a newspaper. Of course, nobody paid me anything in those days, but I was making enough from weddings, so it didn't really matter." The stray incidents became more frequent and soon there wasn't a day or night that passed without his being called to cover some accident or another.

Over the years Bamanbehrum has built up an intricate network of contacts and informants who get in touch with him the minute a disaster occurs. Apart from that his own alertness, and the weird coincidence, that somehow disasters always occur wherever he is around have given him the formidable reputation of the man who has covered nearly every major mishap in Bombay.



Always ready

Naturally Bamanbehrum has to be ready to dash out any time of the day or night. A shoulderbag containing two loaded cameras with extra rolls of film is always kept ready. As soon as the phone rings it takes him no more than a few seconds to get his act together and on the road. When the tip-off comes he grabs his helmet and glasses, slips into his gumboots, and jumps onto his scooter which always has a tank full of gas. Often his wife and family are not even aware that Bamanbehrum is away on an assignment, until he returns.

The fact that he is constantly risking his life has occurred to him, but he regards this with professional nonchalance. And neither does he wear fire-resistant clothes, or take any other precaution. "One of the worst accidents I have witnessed was in Bassein when 30 girls were killed in a local train accident. I myself escaped death narrowly when a beam missed me by inches," he recounts. On another occasion he was 15 feet away from a cylinder explosion, but escaped with minor injuries. Incidents such as these have not made him overly cautious and he regards them merely as professional hazards.

Amongst the major disasters that he has covered have been the accident at Vashi where an ST bus fell into the creek at night, the train mishap in April 1981

where 200 people were killed, the Caravelle crash, and the *jhoadpatti* disaster when a tanker climbed onto a hutment colony leaving death and destruction in its wake.

Bamanbehrum's stark and striking pictures have been published in every major English and Indian language newspaper in Maharashtra. Quite surprisingly it doesn't cost a fortune to get a Bamanbehrum print. For a black and white print which he personally develops and delivers often a couple of hours after the event, Bamanbehrum charges a meagre Rs 15 or Rs 20 a copy. Even at this price, Bamanbehrum finds the editors are reluctant to part with the money. "From that amount I have to cover my roll cost, developing cost, delivering allowance, equipment allowance, support my family, maintain my cameras, and also subtract payment for my talent and time," he says. His wedding assignments on the other hand are better paying, though infinitely less exciting.

Though he is interested in his wedding assignments, it is evident that his heart is in his disaster pictures. "I see my life in black and white. The white are my *navjote* and wedding assignments, whereas the black are the disaster pictures," he says with an almost philosophical glint in his eye.

Reprinted from *Business India* November 7-20, 1983

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