

Parzianā

The Federation's Fifty

Arnavaz S Mama

A round of applause greeted the enrolment of Nargol as the 50th anjuman to join the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India. The all-India body now covers 90 percent of the community in the country.

"I'm glad Nargol is the 50th," said a beaming Shiavax Nargolwala, vice-president of the Federation and president of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman at the Federation's executive council meeting at the Khareghat Hall, Bombay on May 19 and 20.

Encouraged by the Federation's growing strength, Federation and Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) chairman Dr Aspi Golwalla recommended the body enlarge its activities to include the role of peacemaker. He cited the example of Ahmedabad where, due to the "infighting" amongst the members of the anjuman, Ahmedabad went unrepresented on the Federation. "We should send one or two members to go and make peace," said Golwalla.

Preparations for the Fourth World Congress to be held in Bombay from January 10 to 13 appeared to be proceeding slowly with the list of speakers, subjects and formation of the main

committees still to be decided. In the meantime, however, the council empowered Golwalla to invite the President, Vice-President or Prime Minister to inaugurate the gathering.

'Invite the high priests to Federation meetings so that they'd know we're not die-hard reformists.'

The sensitive issue of the Federation joining the World Zoroastrian Organization received a setback when BPP trustee Jamshed Guzder informed the Council that the WZO had not provided the particulars on membership and related matters to the Federation as promised. BPP trustee and Federation joint secretary Eruch Desai was entrusted with the task of studying the WZO rules and byelaws to offer suggestions on how they could be suitably

modified to enable the Federation to join.

The preparation of an all-India directory of dharamsalas is under consideration especially with the objective of encouraging Zoroastrians to venture forth from the major cities. Though talk of a directory has been discussed off and on during the years, the realization that community property needs to be documented may finally result in the directory being published.

To tackle the problem of defunct anjumans' assets, the most crucial source of funds for the community, a sub-committee has been formed consisting of Maneck Gheyara, vice-president of the Federation and president of the Surat Parsi Punchayet (SPP) BPP trustees Jamshed Guzder, Jamsheed Kanga and Eruch Desai, Bejan Dittia, co-opted member of the south zone, Boman Cama, trustee of the Parsi Punchayet of Baroda and BPP chief executive Russi Anklesaria.

Welcoming the delegates, Golwalla noted "Social and economic progress of the community we must try to achieve rather quickly; the longer it takes, the greater the frustration." He apologized

for the change in date and venue of the current executive council meeting which was supposed to have met in Golvad on May 12 and 13 but had to be re-scheduled because of water shortage there. Golwalla was of the opinion that three executive council meets a year should suffice and that one of them should be in Bombay.

Before beginning the normal work of the Federation, Shiavax Nargolwala paid tribute to the late Nadirshaw Mulla, the founder president of the Federation: "Mulla was the perfect example of a true Zoroastrian, always willing to do his utmost... without his forethought and wisdom the Federation would have taken many more years (to evolve)." Another Federation stalwart missed by associates, was Eruch Tarapore, secretary of the Parsi Zoroastrian Anjuman of Secunderabad and Hyderabad who, said Nargolwala, "at every meeting of the Federation had made sound and useful contributions." The gathering observed a minute's silence in their memory.

The normal endorsement of the minutes of the Calcutta meeting took a halting start with Federation secretary Keki Gandhi noting that not a single anjuman had sent him the notes they had volunteered at Calcutta to send regarding the incentives offered to entrepreneurs by the various state governments. He still awaited the note on agricultural prospects volunteered by Nariman Balsara of Saronda and the recruitment pamphlets to the defense services promised by Jal Postwala of Vishakhapatnam. Information regarding the assets and properties of defunct anjumans, expected to be sent in by surviving neighbours, had not been forthcoming. Only a few anjumans had responded even in the matter of nominating a focal member (a representative from each anjuman with whom the Federation secretariat could liaise) he said.

Defunct Anjumans

Gandhi lamented the slow progress the Federation appeared to be making on the assets of defunct anjumans. He noted that at the last two executive committee meetings it had been decided "that the Federation should get hold of such property and try to sell it and hold the money; or examine any possibility for alternate use; or if alternate use was not possible (in the case of a cemetery), such cemetery should be given to another community on condi-



Side and top view of the unused dokhma at Bombay's Walkeshwar.



tion that they look after the place and look after the graves... How many such anjumans are there? We have set up the machinery, but the information is not forthcoming."

There is an agiary or a dokhma every

'How many defunct anjumans are there? We have set up the machinery but the information is not forthcoming.'

three or four miles apart in Gujarat, noted Gheyara. Much of this property could be salvaged by the Federation but Gheyara cautioned, "It is easy to talk, but the formalities are confusing and complicated." He cited the example of Khambhat in Gujarat where the Bombay and Surat Punchayets looked after the anjuman's assets after the former trustees had died.

"It is not possible for Aspi Golwalla or me or our trustees to go and stay there to do that work," said Gheyara. "We must have a fully paid, responsible person to do this work. The Junagadh aramgah is defunct...even the tombstones are missing. There is no one to use the Sumari dokhma. It is prime land...No one bothers, but when we try to do anything, everyone will pounce on us," he said.

The decrepit sanatorium in Tithal was another case in point. Noting that the property is worth crores of rupees, Gheyara said that Bulsar, a neighbouring anjuman, had wanted to take it up, but was refused. He requested Golwalla and his colleagues to come to Bulsar and see the Tithal sanatorium.

S Nargolwala spoke of the Simla cemetery which the Delhi anjuman has taken over. There is a project to plant trees and renovate the bungli there he said.

Gheyara: "There are so many aramgahs in India. There is no point in spending on land which is not of use to Parsis."

Guzder noted that Behram Pestonji of Srinagar had informed him regarding a large, well-located plot on cantonment territory in Srinagar with graves on one side. Can the Federation arrange to put up a dharamsala for the community in Srinagar asked Guzder.

Kanga suggested that it be offered to a company to build a holiday home for its staff and partly for the community but Guzder felt the trusts should contribute and create funds for the building of a dharamsala. "A company organization will monopolize it," he said.

Nargolwala noted that the Delhi Anjuman has the proviso for takeover of other anjumans' properties but that Pestonji had told him 'You in Delhi Anjuman are very progressive. I will not give it to you.'

Lt Col T A Divecha (ret'd), the last Parsi from Diu, spoke of the atash adaran and two dokhmas there. The area of the dokhma, twice the size of

Khareghat Colony, is now encroached and the agiary building became first a nunnery and then an old peoples' home, he said.

Anklesaria noted, "Money is the biggest constraint to our programs...if disposal of some of these properties is ensured, it would be the most important source of funds."

"Make a test case of Khambhat" suggested Kanga, adding a proviso, that "Part amount should be retained for the use of the local people (in case there is Parsi revival in the area). The formula can be worked out."

Fourth World Zoroastrian Congress

As chairman of the sub-committee for the Fourth World Zoroastrian Congress to be held in Bombay, Guzder noted that he had issued 77 invitations to anjumans in India and 22 to anjumans and associations abroad. Either the President, the Vice-President or the Prime Minister is to be invited to inaugurate the Congress on January 10, 1985. The venue of the four-day meet is most likely to be the central lawn of Cusrow Baug which can accommodate approximately 3,500 people with catering facilities at the pavilion and toilets to be constructed under a *mandap*. Fees for the various categories of members are still to be decided. Shiavax Nargolwala suggested two new classes of members – priest members and student members – to be incorporated at a

very low charge or none at all.

Kanga: "The learned high priests are staying away. They feel neglected. We should make it a special point to invite (them) as distinguished guests."

Among the western scholars to be invited, Mary Boyce, John Hinnells, Cyrus Pangborn and James Boyd were the names suggested. However, no list of subjects or speakers was finalized.

WZO

Negotiations for the Federation's membership in the World Zoroastrian Organization, were again bogged down as Guzder charged that the WZO "don't reply to our questions regarding membership and send extraneous letters."

The WZO's membership clauses give the same voting right to an anjuman as to an individual. The mode of selection and the working of the managing committee of the WZO have been other sources of contention. All these points had been discussed by the Federation members and the WZO delegation led by Shahpur Captain at the last executive council meeting in Calcutta, on February 11 and 12. The Federation had demanded particulars of WZO membership – individuals and anjumans – which Captain had agreed to send.

In light of this stalemate Guzder noted that his subcommittee had authorized Gandhi to give detailed information in the Federation newslet-

ter regarding the status of the deliberations. "We have requested Desai to study the byelaws, rules and regulations of the WZO and modify them on lines we have indicated, to enable us to join... There must be weightage for bodies. How are we going to influence implementation of particular decisions in different countries? There can be no question of executive decisions by individuals," he said.

Desai: "Just as we had our differences regarding the Federation and we were able to have one united Federation again...we must see that anjumans have a higher status."

Iranis in India

Shiavax Nargolwala proposed that the Federation take up the case of Zoroastrians residing in India but holding Iranian passports.

Classifying the Iranians in three categories, businesspeople, students and refugees, Nargolwala noted each had different requirements as regards obtaining visas to reside in India.

The plight of the refugees is the worst. "They land up in Delhi, having smuggled themselves overland and subsist from hand to mouth until the UN Refugee Organization finds them another country in which to settle. Their problem is really difficult and the Iranian Association should send a delegation to meet the joint secretary in Delhi," advised Nargolwala.

Kanga suggested that the community organize itself "so that all anjumans have a way of looking after the people who fall at their door, especially in Poona, Hyderabad and Bangalore (where Iranis are mainly settled)."

A Quest for Zarathushtra

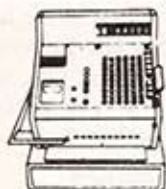
That night the visiting delegates viewed a short trailer of the controversial film, *A Quest for Zarathushtra*, which has been mainly shot in Bombay and Navsari with renowned conductor Zubin Mehta in the starring role. Produced by Cyrus Bharucha and Meherji Madan, the film has had a history of financial difficulties and was then said to have reached the editing and dubbing stage.

Noting that the film will be shown three to four times on TV in the US alone – not counting cinemas etc – Bharucha said that the cost of making it in America would have been nearly



Cusrow Baug's central lawn: proposed site for the fourth World Zoroastrian Congress.

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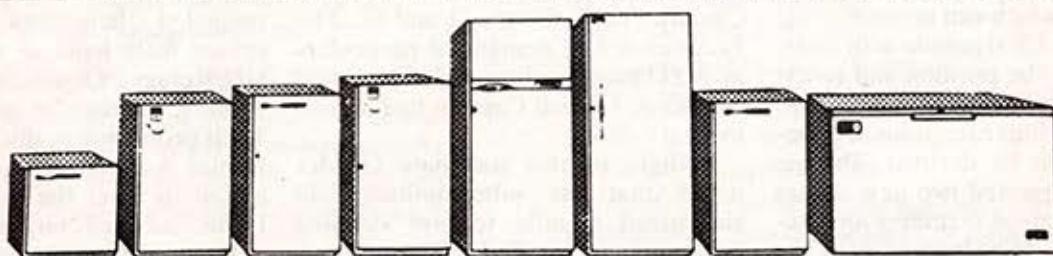
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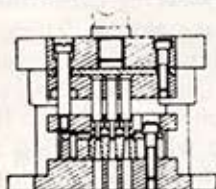
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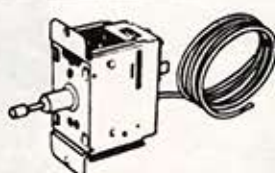
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four million dollars. Bharucha made a pitch for eight lakh rupees which he said he urgently needed by mid-June to make a "rough cut of the film."

Shiavax Nargolwala countered that he had received a phone call from Madan asking for Rs 25 lakhs to dub and edit the film. "Sell the franchise in America and Germany," advised Nargolwala. But Bharucha explained that Americans were not willing to buy until they had seen a rough cut of the film. "What we need overall is Rs 35 lakhs. What I need from India is eight lakhs," he said.

Kanga suggested Bharucha approach individual Parsis for donation of Rs 100 or Rs 1,000 against shares in the film.

Nargolwala: "I'm depressed. This is not a film that'll make world history."

Bharucha: "I'll never be able to please everyone."

Though he expects tremendous non-financial "spinoffs" from the film, Bharucha said, "I'm working for an average cinema-going audience. I'm selling the film as a piece of entertainment and knowledge. It's not an easy

film to sell. It will not make millions."

Bharucha expects Zarathushtra's emphasis, thousands of years ago, on preserving the purity of the elements to have considerable impact on conserva-

Can the Federation arrange to put up a dharamsala for the community in Srinagar?

tion-conscious western audiences. The feminist movement in America and the demand for equality of the sexes also find an echo in the film as the religion of Zarathushtra treats both sexes as equal, said Bharucha. The cameos of Parsi achievement, which form a part of the film, endorse the Protestant work ethic of America he added. Moreover, said Bharucha, "We'll never have a superstar of the quality of Zubin Mehta for the next 50 years."

The Priests

Ms Huzan Kharas, who has been researching the subject of Zoroastrian priests for her Masters in Social Work, spoke of the abject conditions under which they live and work, outlining their physical, psychological and social handicaps. She noted that "80 percent have fallen into a financial rut; neither the BPP nor the trusts reach out to them."

Kharas' conclusions were, however, challenged by the Federation's honorary treasurer Peshotan Nargolwala: "I have eight vacancies in the mofussil with a salary of Rs 1,000 plus perks but the mobeds don't want to go."

Khojeste Mistree, scholar and originator of Zoroastrian Studies (ZS), explained, "These mobeds feel socially secure here. They will not move to the mofussil because of their insufficient education."

The Federation's preoccupation with the priests is based on the problem of providing mobeds to agiaries and anjuman outside Bombay. Jal Vimadlal, a trustee of the BPP, is said to be working on a scheme for the amelioration of

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priests which is reportedly confined to Bombay and has bypassed the issue of creating a cadre of para-mobeds — behdins as also athornans not practising mobedi, who are trained to perform ceremonies (e.g. *stum*, *faroksi*, *geh sarna*, etc) which do not specifically require a priest. Said Shiavax Nargolwala, "The scheme is like a football between the BPP and the Federation. This scheme started in the Federation as an all-India scheme. The burning problem is to provide mobeds outside Bombay. If the scheme makes conditions in Bombay so favourable that mobeds have even less reason for leaving Bombay, it's counter-productive."

Gandhi noted that unless a class of para-mobeds is created, he did not see much hope for anjumans outside Bombay. "But where are the people who wish to be trained? And who will train them?" Gandhi noted that the high priests must first clear the idea.

While Kanga said the Federation had already burnt its fingers because people have accused it of dabbling in religious matters, Guzder suggested that the chairman should have a meeting with the high priests.

Desai: "Invite them to Federation meetings so that they'd know we're not die-hard reformists."

Legal Panel

The agenda item read "Reactivation of the legal panel." Consisting of Nani Palkhivala, Dadi Engineer, Ms Mehra Shroff, Soli Dubash, Tehmtan Andhyarujina and Dara Zaiwalla, the panel had been instituted at the April '81 meeting of the Federation in Delhi, three years after the BPP left the Federation in a huff in 1978. Desai charged that the establishment of the legal panel had created turmoil and more problems as its work had been publicized. The Federation has its own legal cell, he noted.

Nargolwala argued that there is no cell today, although there are people doing the work. Noting that our Marriage and Divorce Act is outdated and our Succession Act patently unjust — "widows and daughters get only half of what a son gets" if a man dies intestate — Nargolwala said, "Parsis were way ahead in 1937; now they're way behind. One person cannot do this (redrafting of the acts). We need the legal panel."

But Desai contended, "We have to carry a large section of the community with us. It's OK if the legal panel is

reactivated and given a specific task; but if the legal panel is allowed to take on subjects autonomously, it would be going into the lion's den."

"The legal panel will only consider subjects referred to it by the executive



Flour mill in rural Gujarat

council," said Nargolwala. "Its report on the Adoption Bill was more orthodox than the BPP's stand."

Income Tax Exemptions

The task of building a sizable corpus for the Federation would be easier if the income of, and donations to, the Federation were to be exempt under the relevant sub-sections of the Income Tax (IT) Act.

Gandhi reminded the delegates that the question of IT exemption for the Federation arose from use of the Third World Congress surplus income and declared, "We are going round in circles. Can the exemption be got before September? Haste is necessary."

Desai, who handles the tax and legal portfolio of the Federation, said he had received no reminders and while complimenting the efficiency of the joint secretary, Gandhi, noted "May I request Gandhi that minutes and letters be circulated briskly?" Nargolwala intervened: "May I remind Desai that he is also a secretary of the Federation?"

The council decided that the matter

be expedited in the interest of the Federation.

Jobs and Careers

Shiavax Nargolwala congratulated Gandhi on having compiled "single-handed, a list of those who can provide a job and those who need a job," by way of a four-sheet printed supplement listing job and career opportunities. Guzder, who is chairman of the Job, Business and Career Opportunities Panel said he'd "like to make it very clear — we're not an employment bureau. We want to act as catalyst, to bring together industrialists and young boys who'd like to learn a particular skill...and later to give them the opportunity to use that skill."

Kanga, who is secretary for industries to the Government of Maharashtra, suggested that the prospective entrepreneur approach the local industries directorate of the state for various schemes and benefits. But, countered Gandhi, "If a boy from a small town writes to me, I can't tell him to go to the state capital; if I have it, I can give him the information." Thereupon Kanga elaborated, "Every district in India has a District Industry Centre (DIC) headed by a general manager. These institutions have been set up by the Government of India with state governments, and unsecured loans of Rs 25,000 are given to a person who has passed standard ten. The DIC has the task force to determine the feasibility of the project in the area and a government bank gives a loan across the table in one month...there are even entrepreneurial development schemes where they train people for such projects"

Merwan Mehta of Ahmednagar referred to the specific problem of 15 percent seed capital which the entrepreneur has to provide. "If any agency can give guidance on this it would be helpful," he said.

In the course of later deliberation on the subject Kanga delved into the problem of Parsi youth being reluctant to leave a city like Bombay: "Why aren't (we) prepared to go out? (We are) scared we'd be among a lot of non-Parsis. If we could institutionalize this, arrange through our community some sort of godfather role...(it is) not enough that the entrepreneur stay in a dharamsala...Some one should welcome him, give him friendship."

Taking up this line of thought Gandhi suggested that mofussil anjumans

should offer "some special rate for dharamsala rent, for example two rupees per day – and for a fellow who's making a start in life, special boarding rates also" and invited member anjuman to write back giving information regarding the cost of living in their respective areas. Kanga elaborated on the idea to include assistance in accommodation, subsidy in food, introductions to the people in the neighbourhood, and eventually, accommodation for the entrepreneur's family. "He must be convinced that he has a better chance if he settled there permanently," said Kanga.

As the various anjuman present warmed to the idea, announcing the facilities and rates available in their areas, Shiavax Nargolwala declared that what was required was an "all-India directory of dharamsalas" and suggested that the Zoroastrian Community Development Institute, Bombay, be asked to compile it. Gandhi noted, "Where anjuman don't have dharamsalas and there are residential facilities in school hostels, why not make (them) generally available?"

"Please go slowly in the matter," cautioned Gheyara. "It's not so easy as you think."

Amendments

The council agreed on a second vice-

The venue of the four-day congress is most likely to be the central lawn of Cusrow Baug.

presidency for the western region and for the Federation's general meeting to be held every year instead of once in two years as at present.

Noting that the present membership fee of Rs 50 per annum barely covered the expense of sending agenda papers, Shiavax Nargolwala proposed an increase. But Desai noted that the smaller, non-member anjuman of Gujarat would be more likely to join if the present membership fee was main-

tained. The council favoured the status quo.

Nargolwala further suggested three executive council meetings in a year with the annual general meeting and the council meeting being held concurrently in January. On absenteeism among office-bearers Nargolwala commented, "Even when meetings are fixed with (their) knowledge, they remain away, I would earnestly request them that they must not fail to attend."

There were also some complaints from the smaller anjuman present that the discussions were monopolized by the larger anjuman, specifically Bombay and Delhi. Desai jokingly suggested only one mike should be permitted amongst the four Bombay trustees.

Newsletters

Nargolwala announced that the newsletters of the Delhi and Calcutta anjuman were expected to be published within the month. He exhorted members to publish their own newsletters. Golwala also stressed the need for newsletters.

Desai commented that the Federa-

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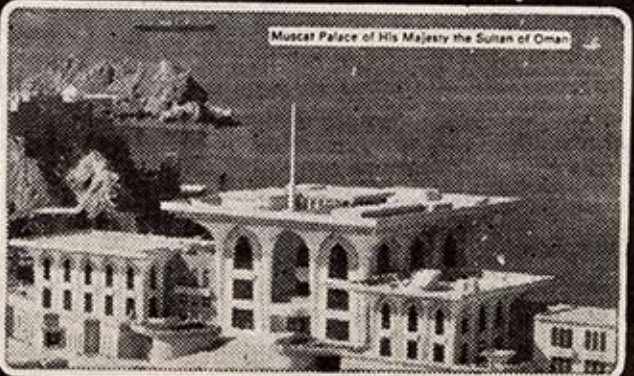
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tion's newsletter does not reach the members of the anjuman. Gandhi offered to effect direct mailings to individuals if the respective anjumans would furnish lists of names. Nargolwala recommended that the council sanction all expenses of the Federation newsletter.

Gheyara, referring to the "great responsibilities and great troubles" of punchayet trustees was the lone dissenter. "We don't want more publicity and trouble for ourselves," he said.

Gandhi explained that the newsletter was meant to give information regard-

'The scheme for amelioration of priests is like a football between the BPP and the Federation.'

ing the community, not necessarily of the punchayet. "The whole idea of newsletters is that the world Zoroastrian community should be aware of the happenings in Surat," he said. But Gheyara remained adamant. "To pass information in the hands of irresponsible persons is to do nothing but invite trouble," he declared. "The ayahs of Nariman Home (an old peoples' home in Surat) have filed a suit against us demanding several lakhs of rupees. Our money figures have been put in the labour court."

Desai noted placatingly, "Let us leave it to the anjumans to decide what is good for them."

On the matter of publicity it was noted that the Parsi Press — *The Bombay Samachar* and the *Jam-e-Jamshed* — were conspicuously absent. Representatives of the newspapers however were reported to have stated they did not receive formal invitations. Anklesaria stressed it was important for the Federation to have the support of the Press.

Membership

Of a total of 105 anjumans in India, 50 are now members of the Federation. The new members are Broach, Billimora, Belgaum, Gandevi, Devlali, Khergam, Vesu and Nargol.

On the question of enrolment, Gan-

dhi enumerated that of Gujarat's 42 anjumans, 17 are members while of Maharashtra's 24 anjumans, 11 are members. Referring to the anjumans of Bangalore, Udawada and Navsari who are not members of the Federation, Nariman Balsara of the Saronda Parsi Zarthosti Anjuman said, "If we attend one of their anjuman meetings we might be able to convince them to join." But Kanga negated the idea: "I don't think we should go after them. Let our work speak for itself." Golwala concurred, detailing the futility of his and Guzder's mission of persuasion to Bangalore.

Anklesaria: "We should see what percentage of the Parsi population has joined. Why give small anjumans with microscopic membership undue importance?"

Dr Minocher Contractor of Surat suggested that the Federation send its newsletter to the recalcitrant anjumans and invite them to its meetings as observers.

Nargolwala: "Write special letters regarding the World Congress."

Golwala referred to the infighting in Ahmedabad and noted that "an important function of the Federation was to see how such infighting or lack of co-operation can be minimized and suggested that the Federation should "send one or two people as ambassadors of peace." However, no decision was taken as to who should be sent to Ahmedabad.

Individual Anjumans

Ms Soonu Vesuna of the Vesu Zoroastrian Anjuman, who has been working with the government's rural development schemes, questioned, "Have we done anything to restore the rural home?" Having "no opportunities for education, no health schemes, no nutrition," these families have come to the city but "they are helpless even in Bombay, living in *zoppadpattis*. Can the BPP help me find how many Parsis have come from rural areas in the last 10 years?" she asked.

Vesuna was however cut off as some BPP trustees wanted to leave for the Eedawalla Agiary to survey the social work being done by Ms Veera Mehta and some youth of Mistree's Zoroastrian Studies. The youngsters planned to use their vacation to scrub and clean the place. Kanga suggested that Vesuna file a report for the next executive council meeting to consider.

Accordingly the council hastened to wind up and Shiavax Nargolwala was invited to sum up the deliberations because he "enjoyed" doing it. Nargolwala gleefully admitted, "In a sense I do, because it's the only occasion when I have the last word and can make some mildly satirical comments on the proceedings with morbid pleasure..."

The next Federation meeting will be held in Secunderabad on September 8 and 9, 1984.

Those attending the meeting: Ms Dolat Debara of Agra, Merwan B Mehta of Ahmednagar, Boman R

'I have eight vacancies in the mofussil with a salary of Rs 1,000 plus perks but the mobeds don't want to go.'

Cama and Shavak F Patel of Baroda, Dr R R Mahuvawalla and M B Bharucha of Bhavnagar, Rustom Belpodiwala of Bhopal, Dr Aspi F Golwala, Jamshed Guzder, Eruch B Desai, Jamshed G Kanga, Russi K Anklesaria and Gool Tata of Bombay, Shiavax D Nargolwala, Nergish S Nargolwala, Keki J Gandhi and Rustom E Daroga of Delhi, Dhunjishaw M Neterwalla of Devlali, Lt Col T A Divecha from Diu, Phiroze B Gandevia of Gandevi, Nariman D Elavia of Indore, Ronnie J Dick and Zerin R Dick of Jhansi, Aban J Satarawala and Dara S Master of Jodhpur, Bejoo R Jilla and Kersy N Mehta of Nanded, Tehmi K Grant and Dinshaw S Anklesaria of Poona, Nariman P Balsara of Saronda, Noshir F Nagarwala and Bejan F Dittia of Secunderabad and Hyderabad, Zarin S Amaria of Sholapur, Maneck J R Gheyara, Sam S Bhacca, Davar Kavasji T Modi and Minocher K Contractor of Surat, Ms Soonu J Vesuna of Vesu, Dr Bahadur P Jokhi of Vyara, Homi D Mehta of Zai Bordi and Peshotan D Nargolwala, honorary treasurer of the Federation. Prof Noshirwan F Kaikobad, Dr Perin H Cabinetmaker and Ms Dhun S Dastoor attended as invitees. The guest speakers were Prof M J Apte, Ms Huzan Kharas, Ms Veera Mehta and Ms Nivedita Mehta. The Press was represented by *Parsiana*.

Counselling service

Two counsellors who will work with school-going children, parents and teachers have been appointed by the Counselling Service Scheme Committee set up in Bombay at the initiative of the Federation with funding from the Bombay Parsi Punchayet. Prof Noshir



Kaikobad : "develop effective individuals"

Kaikobad, former professor of social work at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences who has also served as the United Nations consultant on social welfare stated that the counselling scheme would work in six directions: counselling children in the six to 13 age group; adolescents in the 14 to 18 age group; group therapy sessions; general guidance and awareness sessions for parents and teachers; family education through symposia, seminars and case narration, and raising financial and human resources.

The Scheme's Committee of Direction comprising of seven professionals felt that children who under-achieve do so not because they lack motivation but because of other psychological factors.

"The biggest social change begins with individuals," stressed Kaikobad and thus counselling should not be restricted to a school-going child, but via the child should reach his family. To assist the professional counsellors, Kaikobad recommended utilizing lay or "para professional voluntary workers."

Entrepreneurship within the community could be encouraged with the help of vocational guidance bureaus and school counselling centres, noted Kaikobad. The community will have to think of building their own professional cadres in several areas. "Community centres and other organizations at the grass roots level have the potential for developing effective individuals," said Kaikobad.

Referring to an oft-repeated statement that what the community needed was a counselling service that produced "more and more Nani Palkhivalas," Kaikobad retorted, "What is wrong with producing more and more Noshir Kaikobads.... so long as they are well-adjusted, socially-contributing individuals." Everyone did not have to be brilliant or outstanding.

So far as developing the potential of talented children was concerned, Kaikobad mentioned, "Exploration and experimentation is needed to fill the gap — someone who can help the child come to terms with reality."

Russi Anklesaria, chief executive of the BPP, pointed out that the counselling program focuses on social counselling which is different from attainment of scholastic excellence. To ensure that the scheme retains its viability, Anklesaria estimated that not more than 100 students would be covered in a year.

Ms Dolat Debara from Agra was in favour of organizing service clubs along the lines of the Lions Club. She felt that each baug should have a welfare league in which the members of the community could participate. College hostels could provide ample scope for implementing the policy of voluntary bureaus, and by planning workshops, community centres could be utilized as agencies of social change, added Kaikobad.

Ms Tehmi Grant, president of the Poona Parsi Punchayet, narrated the experiences of the youths in Poona who organize youth camps every summer. Bejan Dittia of Secunderabad and Hyderabad explained that they had introduced a scheme whereby prizes were distributed to those attending religious discourses. "The focus is on social service and not games," he stated.

In Surat, a Parsi Progressive Group

has been formed to organize activities with national objectives thus providing "a common platform for adults and youth to get together," mentioned Dr Minocher K Contractor, trustee, Surat Parsi Punchayet.

Shiavax Nargolwala, president of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman, stated that their policy of reserving one seat in the Anjuman for a youth trustee, usually a woman under 35, had proved successful.

Discussing divorce

Counselling services are provided by the Bombay courts for members of other communities seeking a divorce but not for Parsis, said Prof M J Apte, head of the department of family welfare at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. This anomaly is because Bombay Parsis are the only community to have their divorce cases heard in the High Court while all the other divorce cases are heard in the City Civil Court.

Apte said that the marriage counsellors attached to the City Civil Court had covered 400 cases in five years, claiming a success rate of 21 percent. She mentioned that though initially the judges feared interference, they are now convinced that a "useful service" is being rendered. A team of social workers pay home visits, hold discussions with the couple and the in-laws and try and secure better accommodation for the family where lack of housing is the factor responsible for the break-up.

"Attempts at reconciliation should be made before granting divorce," Apte said. She felt that prior to starting with a matrimonial case, the counsellor's advice should be sought where such facilities are available as in Bombay, Pune, Malegaon and Surat. She explained that when lawyers "poetically describe the grounds of cruelty," reaching a compromise becomes difficult. Where divorce is inevitable, the counsellors try and reach an amicable separation, and help the women seeking divorce with legal assistance in their right to alimony and economic independence.

Due to exigencies of space, speeches made by Ms Veera Mehta, Ms Nivedita Mehta and Ms Huzan Kharas will be carried in the next issue.

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PARSI CUISINE Off the Counter

Deepa Arora



Till recently, the only way an aspiring gourmet could sample authentic and traditional Parsi cuisine was by getting invited to a wedding or a thread ceremony (navjote).

The Godiwalas plan to change all that by retailing Parsi wedding specialities at a few select outlets in Bombay. *Patra ni machhi* (fish steamed in banana leaves) *Chicken farcha* (fried chicken), *Bheja na cutlets*, (brain cutlets), *Lagan noo custard* (baked custard), are some of the items now being sold off the counter in Bombay.

What makes the Godiwala enterprise noteworthy is the impeccable reputation and credentials that they bring to it, for in the last few years Freny Godiwala has come to be informally known as the 'queen' of Parsi caterers. The Prime Minister and her family have tasted Godiwala's fare on more than one occasion.

"We want people of other communities to come to like Parsi food, that's

why we decided to retail our specialities," says a smiling rotund Godiwala.

On a given day, a choice of at least five to six different items is available at any of the outlets. The food which is packaged in handy, easily carried containers gives the customers the alternative of eating it at the store or carrying it home. "We deliver the food by tempo around noon to all our outlets and pick up any possible leftovers the same evening" says Roxanne, Freny Godiwala's daughter who is currently in charge of this part of the operation. "This way we ensure the quality and freshness of the food we sell."

Plans are also afoot to fix a weekly menu so that the customers know in advance what specialities will be available on a given day and can even place party orders before hand. A sign of their success is that they have already begun catering for dinner engagements and 'kitty' parties hosted by non-Parsis. "They find our food a real speciality"

says Freny proudly.

Starting small and unambitiously, she and her husband began their foray into the food business by running a canteen for the residents of the Parsi housing colony of Cusrow Baug, Colaba, in the early 60's. After a few years of serving delectable titbits to a discerning Parsi clientele, they moved on, first to sending tiffin boxes at home to those who couldn't or didn't want to cook, and then to the more lucrative business of catering for weddings.

"Cooking comes naturally to me. I've never attended any cooking classes or bought any cookery books," says the

Left

Freny Godiwala (left) and daughter, Roxanne (second from right) supervizing sales service at one of their counters.



Godiwala: "Cooking comes naturally...." (Photos: Homyar J Mistry)

lady who has probably supervised thousands of wedding dinners. But the effort and the credit, she insists, is not just her own but her husband's too! "While people generally think that be-

ing a woman, I must be in charge of the cooking, in reality it is my husband who supervises the cooks, measures the masala, tastes the food before it is served and even experiments with new dishes. I look after the people."

It is therefore not unusual to find Freny Godiwala walking between the dinner tables at a Parsi wedding, scrutinising carefully the shiny banana leaves on which the guests are served their meals—in an attempt to find out if there is anyone who is not doing justice to his food. "I wouldn't like any guest to go hungry. So if I see someone who is not eating a particular dish because he finds it too spicy or is allergic to it, I see that he is immediately served something else to his taste. So also if a guest is just recovering from an illness like jaundice or colitis and finds the wedding food too rich and heavy, I see that something more suitable is provided," says Godiwala.

The traditional Parsi menu consists of five courses. Fish, chicken, meat, followed by a spicy rice and *dal* and then finally custard—all of which are cooked in large open *tapelis* (containers) over firewood, using only the purest of ingredients. None of the time-saving techniques or modern gadgets for this chef who firmly believes that it is her adherence to age-old recipes that makes her food delicious. Catering for an average of at least three to four functions every day during the peak months of November, December and January, the Godiwalas and their retinue of about 100 staff members put up five course meals for around 1200 people every day. "The inactivity of the monsoon season when the number of engagements trickle down to nil is what most caterers dread, but the retail business will help us weather it now" she says honestly.

Another unique service provided by the Godiwalas is a home-delivery service of lunches and dinners to those close relations and friends of the hosts who are unable to attend the celebratory dinner. They also home-deliver meals for other customers and party orders at a nominal charge for the distance travelled by the carrier. The choice of items is dependent on the menu that is being prepared in bulk for the evening.

Could future plans for the Godiwalas include establishing a speciality restaurant to cater to the gargantuan appetites of the city...? Godiwala refuses to commit herself, only saying mys-

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LAGAN NOO CUSTARD

3 litres milk

6 eggs

200 gm sugar

2 nutmegs

200 gm *charoli*

1 tsp Vanilla essence

Boil milk and concentrate to make 1½ litres. Add sugar and boil for 10 minutes more. Cool the milk. Add beaten eggs, nutmeg powder, vanilla essence and stir thoroughly.

Pour in a baking tray and sprinkle *charoli* on it. Bake in a moderate oven for about 20 to 30 minutes till the top is brown in colour. Serve at room temperature.

MARINATED CHICKEN

2 broilers (8 pieces)

10 gm cinnamon

10 gm cardamom

10 gm cloves

100 gm dry coriander

50 gm *sounf*

2 full nutmegs

10 gm red chilies

Make a paste of all the ingredients. Make eight pieces of the two broilers, salt, and apply ground ginger for 10 minutes, then marinate the above paste making deep knife cuts to the chicken. Set aside for three to four hours. Before deep frying the chicken, apply a little curd into the cuts. Fry till cooked and crisp and serve hot.

PATRA NI MACHHI

1 coconut

3 bundles coriander

50 gm chilies

½ bundle mint

1 tsp jeera

½ cup vinegar or juice of 2 lemons

1 small garlic

Salt and sugar to taste

Grind all the ingredients together.

2 fresh pomfrets chopped and salted.

Apply the ground *chutney* to six pieces of salted fish made from two fresh pomfrets. Wrap the fish with *chutney* on both sides in banana leaves. Place it in a broad vessel on a bed of banana leaf stems. Pour a little water and vinegar and a few sprigs of *curry patta* underneath the stems; enough to steam the fish. Serve hot with the leaves.



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