

Parsiānā

NEWS ANALYSIS

The making of a trustee

It was a stunning victory. Employing all the tactics that barely three years ago propelled his opponent's party to power, Homi Ranina conducted an almost text book campaign in the fine art of electioneering. Starting out as an underdog with negligible chances of success, in the course of a few months he upset the Committee for Electoral Rights' candidate Fali Poncha by a margin of 176 votes: Ironically, the figure that his opponents alleged he had 'packed' the F register donor voters list with.

What brought about the upset? The CER had nominated Poncha late last year as their candidate for the seat to be vacated by outgoing BPP Trustee Dr Nelie Noble whose term expired in July. Noble, a one time confidante of former BPP chairman B K Boman-Behram, represented the orthodox groups who swept the Anjuman Committee elections in 1974. In 1981 they were routed by the CER. Her chances of seeking re-election in a CER dominated Anjuman Committee were almost nil. Plus she had alienated factions within the orthodox group as well. Thus it appeared that with the CER controlling around 270 or so seats of the

303 on the E register, Poncha was a certainty (the E and F registers together comprise the Anjuman Committee that elects trustees).

But by February, word was circulating that Homi Ranina, the noted tax consultant and lawyer was feeling people out on his chances of contesting the trusteeship. At various meetings and gatherings, Ranina began to put forth his case for candidature. He had an impressive bio-data, directorship in 21 companies, a high profile personality, good connections. At the same time rumours against Poncha began to circulate. It was alleged that Poncha and his family members did not wear the sudreh and kusti, that they went to church and so on. Poncha who had built his candidacy around his expertise on housing (he is a director of Tata Housing Development Co) found the opposition questioning his expertise. On several occasions Ranina said one did not require a housing expert to build, one required money. The CER shot back that a tax exempt BPP did not require a tax expert.

Ranina hosted a series of dinners to which he invited the E and F register voters. Ms Nergis Nani Palkhivala, a

relative, phoned up people propounding the virtues of Ranina's candidature. The administration and staff of the B D Petit Parsee General Hospital on whose committee Ranina sits, threw their weight behind him. The hospital's support was crucial because many of the F register donors are people who have donated Rs 5,000 or more to the hospital and therefore would consider the hospital's recommendation seriously. Volunteers on behalf of Ranina also went around meeting voters at their residence.

Poncha kept a low public profile restricting his campaign largely to the Anjuman Committee voters.

Around May, Ranina announced formal candidature. He immediately set about holding public meetings, speaking to the community at large. He proposed a debate between himself and Poncha. Poncha still kept a low profile. A public meeting scheduled by the CER was cancelled due to the Hindu-Muslim communal riots in Bombay at the time. The only other meeting was scheduled on June 19, four days prior to the election.

The election that had received considerable exposure in the Parsi Press,

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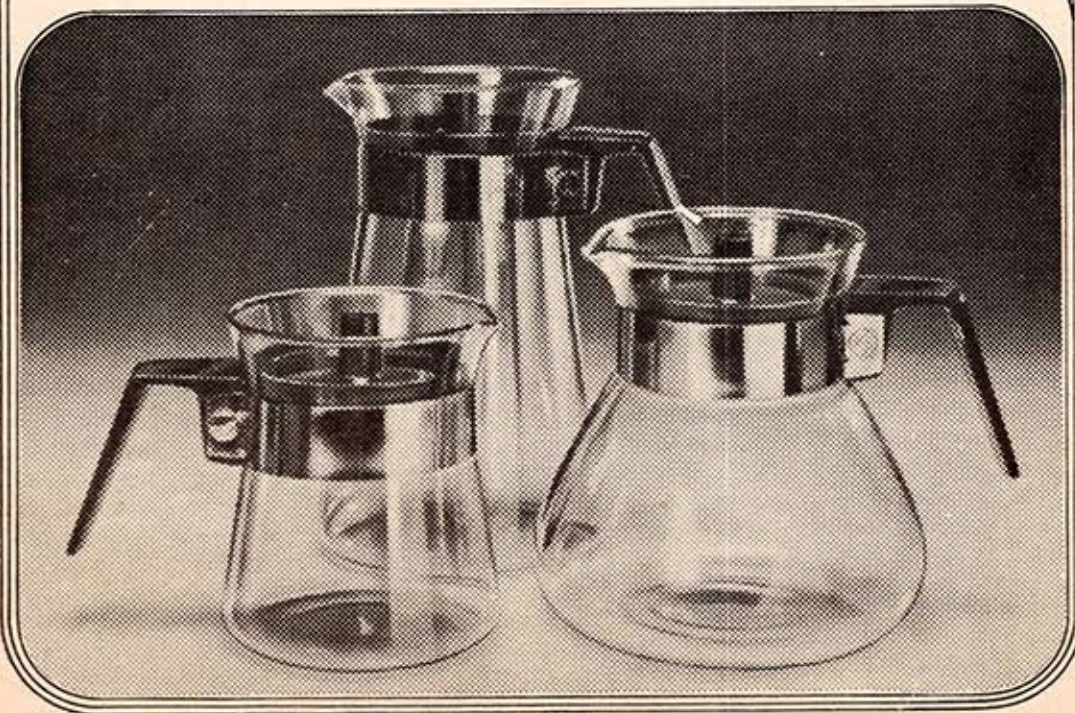
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spilt over to the general media adding a new dimension to Parsi politics. The orthodox Gujarati daily, the *Jam-e-Jamshed* for the first time carried their front page electoral editorials in English. While publicly trying to portray impartiality, the paper favoured Ranina and almost a week prior to the election called on BPP trustee and CER founder president Jamsheed Kanga and BPP trustee Jamshed Guzder, a CER sympathizer, to resign from the Punchayet for supporting Poncha.

Except for the *Jame's* last outburst, the paper maintained a fairer approach than during the 1981 elections when they had almost blanked out CER news and misrepresented a high court decision which went against orthodox thinking. In a magnanimous gesture the *Jame* even suggested another trustee resign to make room for both Ranina and Poncha.

The *Bombay Samachar* whose editor Jehan Daruwala had clashed with Ranina months earlier over some articles Ranina had written attacking J R D Tata's advice to Parsi men to marry non-Parsi women to improve the genetic mix, gave both sides an opportunity to have their say.

Smaller special interest publications like *The Zoroastrian* published by CER members, *The Parsee Voice* advocating the orthodox line and Russi Wadia's cyclostyled newsletter (favouring Ranina) made their presence felt. Even Khojeste Mistree's Zoroastrian Studies newsletter, *Ushta*, which normally comments on religious issues, interviewed the two candidates amongst

others, raising speculation that the Oxford-educated, controversial religious preacher-cum-scholar and author may be contemplating a bid for the trusteeship at some stage.

Except for Kanga and Guzder, the other five BPP trustees reportedly favoured Ranina. Poncha had been a critic of the Punchayet on several occasions and had demanded a public scrutiny cell to check applications for housing, a move the Punchayet opposed and resented.

The CER campaign suffered two major setbacks. The first came in the wake of a reported party whip issued to CER voters residing in Rustom Baug not to attend a meeting at which Ranina was to speak. Public sentiment was running high against the "party" system and this incident only served to heighten that distaste. The second setback was at the debate between the candidates at the Birla Matushri Hall when in an apparent fit of anger Poncha tore and threw a report on building repairs prepared by a CER architect commissioned by Ranina. The act was incomprehensible and uncharacteristic of Poncha's general behaviour and posture throughout the campaign. Poncha refrained from making any personal attacks against Ranina though at times he was subjected to considerable personal smearing.

Another setback was a letter in the *Jame* the day before the elections signed by Neville Wadia, Nani Palakhivala, Noshir Sidhwa, Dr Jimmy Sidhwa and Dr Tehemton Udhwadia, asking the public to eschew party labels

and vote for the independent candidate, Homi Ranina. While the support of four of the signatories could have been anticipated, what puzzled knowledgeable sources was why Noshir Sidhwa, managing director of Grindwell Norton, had turned against the CER. A founder member of the party, it was in the boardroom of his company that the CER was formed. It was Sidhwa who when the CER in its initial stages lacked confidence in their ability to draw a crowd to the Sir Cowasji Jehangir Hall, set about organizing an extensive drive to ensure people came. And it was Sidhwa who also helped enroll 500 rupee donors on the crucial A register that ensured a CER sweep of the 46 or so seats on that roll. As a matter of fact, several onetime CER supporters and sympathizers worked for the Ranina campaign.

As the June 23 election date drew nearer, the CER hopes of a victory began to wane. The voter registration in the F register soared from around 450 to over 600 thereby cutting down Poncha's E register advantage. While Poncha himself was a strong candidate, he was hard put to defend the CER record for the last three years. The party that had raised public expectations, spoke about accountability, democracy and electoral reform, appeared to fail miserably on all three counts. The leadership was divided on demo-

At the debate:

Poncha, moderator S R Vakil and Ranina (speaking).



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cratizing the organization with one section viewing the CER as a "ginger" group, a kind of catalyst body, and the other wishing it to be a broad-based party with elections for office-bearers. Poncha, however, was nominated by the high command, so to say, without a vote from the rank and file even though he would easily have won the members' nomination.

Not democratizing their organization only reinforced the public suspicion of elections being controlled or manipulated by a coterie of people, something Ranina capitalized on by presenting himself as an independent candidate though his main support in the initial stages was from the remnants of the erstwhile Committee of United Zoroastrians that disbanded after their rout by the CER in the 1981 elections.

Since the 1981 election, the CER did not hold a public meeting in the true sense, restricting most of their gatherings to the 600 to 700 Anjuman Committee members. As for election reforms, the party dragged its feet, naively believing the BPP would act in the matter. The CER thus slowly found

itself isolated from the community at large and even some of its own members.

The CER did a lot for the community by focussing on housing, publishing a blood donors' directory, arranging youth trips, aiding the ailing etc. But the body unfortunately became a victim of its 1981 rhetoric which focussed on the Punchayet's poor performance on housing and the CER plans to build more. In the course of the years, the emphasis had shifted to other problems and Ranina cleverly projected repairs to existing buildings as the need of the hour.

The CER campaign appeared uninspired. They produced no new faces in the top echelons of the party and none of the past wizardry that once positioned them as the right party at the right time. They appeared to be disheartened and lacking in will to fight till the end. When they finally moved the courts for an injunction a few days prior to the election on the grounds that the F register had been packed, they cut an even sorrier figure. Firstly, the question arose as to why they had not acted

earlier and secondly, by rushing to court they only served to further alienate the crucial F register voters. In 1981, the CER went to court on more than one occasion and each time came out successful. In 1981 the CER had a disliked BPP and its then chairman to attack. In 1984, they became the focus of attack. As Ranina rightly told Poncha at the June debate, "distinguish between my supporters and the CER's detractors."

Ranina's victory totally alters the politics of the Bombay community. Guzder whose term is to expire early next year was not to be opposed by the CER. But now the orthodox sections are certain to put up a strong candidate against him. And the CER will find it hard to publicly support Guzder when it has often stated a trustee should not contest for a second ten year term.

As to what will happen in the 1988 Anjuman Committee elections will depend on what transpires in the Bombay High Court which the CER has moved for electoral reforms. Whatever the outcome, the 80's will go down as a historic period in Parsi political annals.

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'The larger issues'

Homi Ranina
outlines
his trusteeship
plans

Arnavaz S Mama



After the hectic electioneering Homi Ranina was becoming acquainted with the rigors of being a Bombay Parsi Punchayet trustee. "People ring up to say 'my roof is leaking,'" said Ranina with a smile, seated in his Raheja Centre office on July 9, adding, "People expect a trustee to solve even personal problems." Such involvement with detail would leave "no time for effective work," says the 37-year-old tax expert.

Noting that the BPP's board of trustees should function like a company's board of directors, Ranina stressed the need to concentrate on the larger issues. A forum of dedicated social workers to register individual complaints would help the trustees to be in touch with trends in community thinking without getting bogged down in trivia, he says.

Surveying the community's strengths and weaknesses, Ranina feels that "some element of leadership" is necessary to motivate the Parsis today. "If you can organize things well—plan at the right time in the right way—you can achieve a lot," he says.

Ranina believes that the Punchayet's first duty is "to fulfil the obligations to the settlors who have created the trusts." Accordingly, Ranina proposes to form a large cell of engineers with each engineer being entrusted with the maintenance of a particular area, for example a baug or part of it.

To combat the rise in drug addiction and the attractions of intercommunity

marriage among Parsi youth, he favours an indirect, person-to-person approach, relying on the services of volunteer social workers. At an earlier (pre-election) interview Ranina had spoken of creating a central fund for mobeds by motivating

'At least 10 of my supporters went away because of the commotion in the morning.'

the average Parsi to contribute a minimum one percent of net income.

The revival of interest in community affairs has focussed on the need to change the electoral system which dates back to 1910. Ranina favours a change: "Let there be complete adult franchise." He suggests that the donation amount tied to the voting right (currently pegged at Rs 5,000 and above) be increased to Rs 50,000 "so that the question of money power (skewing the election process) does not arise... Some trustees feel that (thereby) donations may dry up but I personally am not of the view that there's any link. Most donors are not even aware of their voting right." In either case, Ranina feels that "in the next 30-40 years the present F register (which contains the

names of donors) will disappear as at least 100 people on it must be over 60 years old already."

Ranina had beat his CER opponent, Fali Poncha, by exactly 176 votes; which was ironic, because the CER had accused him of packing the F register by exactly that number. Noting that 99 percent had donated by crossed cheque and only 154 of them had voted, Ranina said, "I would have won by a margin of 200 votes. At least 10 of my supporters went away because of the commotion in the morning," he said, referring to the delayed and stormy election of Pesi Jagus as presiding officer of the election. "Another 20 of the older donors were out of town. Had the election been postponed (the CER had sought a judicial stay), I would have had more time to consolidate," he declared.

Analysing the figures, Ranina speculated that Poncha (who received 252 votes against Ranina's 428) must have received at least 60-70 votes from the F register including a dozen of the controversial new members. Thus only about 190 members of the E register's 303 elected members had voted for him, although the E register is a CER stronghold. "My aim was to get 50-60 votes from the CER group and I succeeded," said Ranina.

While Ranina is agreeable to an Anjuman Committee term of five years instead of seven as at present and a trusteeship term of five years instead of 10, he differs about restraining a trustee to a maximum of two terms. "Anybody who can contribute should be there. If 10 years later I feel that my continuing in office would be useful... I would like to continue. On the other hand, if I find that things are not happening, I may resign prior to that. I'm not at all after the office or the chair."

Come 1988 or earlier Ranina says, "I will definitely be playing my own small role in the next Anjuman Committee elections. The CER came into power only on an anti-Boman-Behram platform. This time they will not get this kind of majority. I'm averse to forming a party or group. (I will) help put up independent people with a record of social service or inclination to work for the community."

Noting that he did not have an organization when he started out, Ranina maintains, "My main forte was that I was able to convince people, including CER members." Ranina now needs to carry that conviction into the BPP board room.

The politics of electioneering

Fali Poncha reviews the BPP election battle

Arnavaz S Mama

It had been a long, sometimes uncomfortable campaign. In the aftermath of defeat, an introspective Fali Poncha, the candidate of the Committee for Electoral Rights (CER), probed the electioneering weaknesses which upset the party's expectations.

The CER rank and file is "disappointed at losing the election as it did not expect to lose," admitted Poncha in his Dhanraj Mahal office on July 25. "Money power has a very wide reach. CER members would be called by very senior executives (and instructed to vote as told)."

A deeper malaise that afflicted the CER was the alienation of the rank and file. "Zonal committees had been formed (in '81) to get everyone involved," said Poncha. "But after the victory in the Anjuman Committee elections, very few conducted themselves actively. We had failed to motivate or involve them. Close contact had been lost. We should have called a CER convention before my candidature was announced. It was a tactical error. Their endorsement would have made them more involved and therefore more committed."

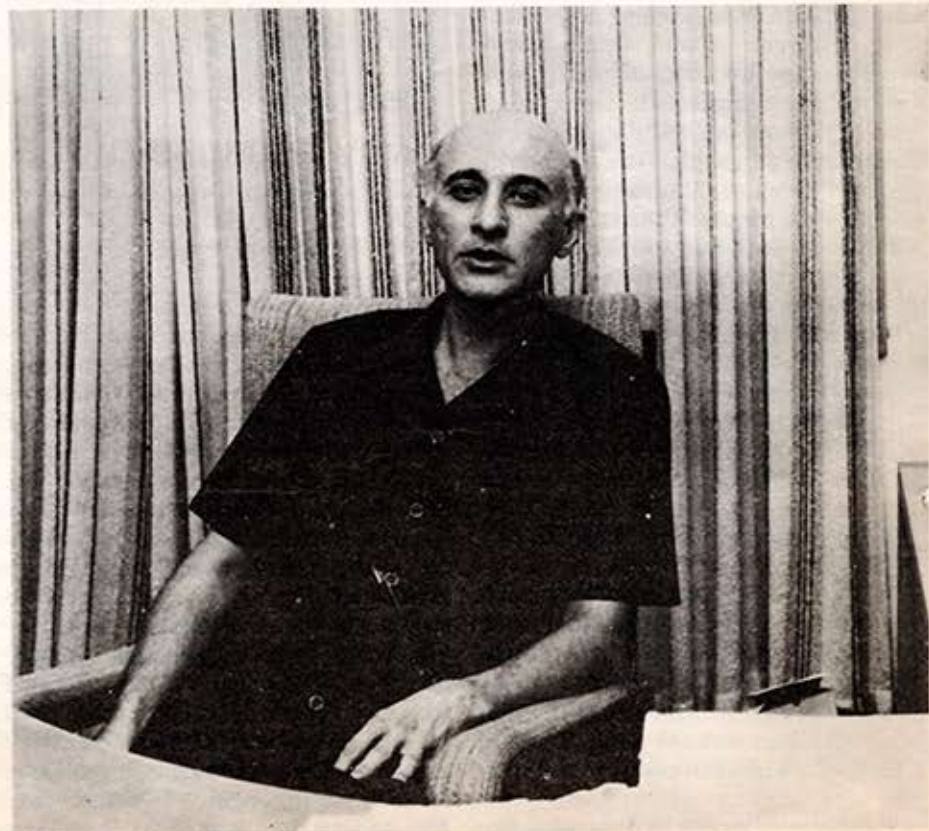
"All of which goes to prove that the CER is not a group dominated by a handful of people. Anywhere around 50 CER members voted for (opposition candidate Homi) Ranina. We never issued a party whip as we are not a political party," says Poncha, countering the charge made by notables such as Nani Palkhivala, Neville Wadia, Noshir Sidhwa, Dr Tehemton Udawadia and Dr Jimmy Sidhwa in their letter published in the *Jam-e-Jamshed* on June 22. The letter had requested all voters to avoid groups and vote for the individual.

Claiming that the majority of the trustees are wary of their own chances for re-election with the emergence of the

CER, Poncha declared that most of them actively or tacitly supported Ranina because he was a non-CER candidate. Much of Ranina's electioneering was conducted by family members of the trustees, he alleged. Poncha questioned the timing and contents of the 18-page statement of Dr Aspi Golwala, chairman of the Board of Trustees, outlining the BPP's record of performance which was published just 10 days before the election. A statement of the chairman of the Board of Trustees would always be taken by the public at face value, said Poncha and asked "How accurate are those statements?"

As an example Poncha launched into particulars of the Jyoti Studio property transaction (an L-shaped property

at Nana Chowk). The deal for one part of the estate was originally clinched by the trustees with a lessee, Shapur Irani, for Rs 50 lakhs, said Poncha. "There was no way we could get them to stop the sale until (BPP trustee and CER founder president Jamsheed) Kanga and I wrote to the Charity Commissioner that the sale of Jyoti Studio would be a very serious mistake. We showed the BPP the true value of the property. We persuaded Irani to improve his offer. The total amount would have worked out to well over one crore of rupees." Instead, the property was eventually sold to developer N L Mehta for Rs 72 lakhs "without a bank guarantee despite my letter that inflow of money would be very doubtful if not protected by a bank guarantee." When



Poncha: "set the record straight."

the Charity Commissioner gave his permission for the sale. Mehta contended that he should also get the other arm of the property in order to be able to develop it. Instead of making a separate agreement for the other part of the property, the trustees agreed to revise the whole deal (to Rs 90 lakhs) which is now again pending before the Charity Commissioner. While Mehta is supposed to have acquired the property for Rs 90 lakhs, since August 1981 to date, the Punchayet has received Rs 7.20 lakhs only with eight percent interest on the pending amount. Between then and now, the rupee has devalued and the cost of repair (for which the amount has been earmarked by the Punchayet) has increased at a compound rate of 15 percent, added Poncha.

Chafing at the inadequate press coverage of the CER viewpoint, Poncha charged that *The Bombay Samachar* had stated at most times that a letter which made any reference in favour of a candidate should come in only as a paid advertisement. As for the *Jam-e-Jamshed*, Poncha noted that about 10 percent of CER letters were published, which was an improvement on the situation which had prevailed at the time of the Anjuman Committee elections in 1981.

Referring to criticism of the timing of the CER decision to move the court on electoral reform (the CER appealed to the Charity Commissioner on June 13, ten days before the election) Poncha narrated the chain of events which led to the decision: "There is no automatic right for a donor to be enrolled on the F register," says Poncha. This is only done after a process of screening with the approval of the seven sitting trustees. At the end of May, the trustees passed a resolution that in order to save time, all applications will be screened by the chairman only. Two trustees — Jamshed Guzder and Kanga — dissented, as they felt this departure from practice was undesirable.

"In all these years, even in the most bitterly fought elections, there had been no attempt at packing the F register. The increase in the number of donors at election time had never been more than 25. This time, however, the number eventually reached 176.

"When the CER requested the trustees to rein in the runaway F register, it was told to move the Charity Commissioner or the High Court. At that stage, Guzder issued a letter and circulated it

to the other trustees saying that 'our action or inaction will be judged by history.' He prevailed upon the trustees to seek legal opinion.

"They consulted (noted lawyer and former BPP trustee) P P Khambatta who considered it a serious matter. He suggested that the trustees should take no sides and if the CER did refer this matter to the Charity Commissioner, the trustees should neither support it nor oppose it but reply with facts only.

"The CER filed a petition before the Charity Commissioner who fixed a joint hearing for June 19. We approached him to bring the date forward, but there was not enough time because notices

If "you can purchase
a vote with Rs 5,000
today, what will be
the position with
adult franchise?"

would have to be sent to the Punchayet. But he gave an *ex parte* order postponing the joint hearing to July 2 and staying the elections. The order was served on the morning of June 18 and by the same afternoon despite Khambatta's advice to the contrary, the BPP trustees had moved a battery of top advocates with a writ petition before the High Court to withdraw the stay. Justice Sujata Manohar ruled in favour of withdrawing the stay on elections and directed the Charity Commissioner to hold the joint hearing on the 19th.

"Despite the BPP battery of lawyers, including trustee Jal Vimaladai, a clear *prima facie* case was made out by the plaintiff (CER) and the Deputy Charity Commissioner ruled categorically in our favour granting us leave to apply to the appropriate court (the City Civil Court). This judgment was delivered on 21st morning. We could have claimed all the reliefs in the court (including postponing the elections)."

Poncha stated that as there was no hope of the trustees ever moving the court to change the scheme and as a 51 percent majority in the Anjuman Committee was unlikely in the present setup (both alternatives are provided within the scheme for amendment), the opportunity of proving the inherent malafides of the scheme could not be

allowed to slip away. Accordingly the CER went before the High Court, "sacrificing a battle to win a war."

Electoral reforms as envisaged by the CER include a maximum of two terms of five years each for a trustee and indirect representation for donors of Rs 5000 and above on the same lines as already exist for A register members who are donors of amounts ranging between Rs 500 to Rs 5000. Poncha does not favour adult franchise, because if "you can purchase a vote with Rs 5000 today, what will be the position with adult franchise?" he wonders.

Stressing the need for the trustees to enforce a code of conduct for elections that would preserve the dignity of candidates, Poncha suggested the screening of candidates by a high-powered body before they're allowed to contest. At such a screening session all allegations and claims can be examined. As things are, said Poncha, "You can have a dozen people from the community prepared to shout rubbish from rooftops which gets press exposure and which, at the end of the day, leaves you unnecessarily smeared. Fighting this election for a person of my nature has not been a pleasant experience," he confessed.

On the question of cooperating with the winner, Poncha stated that Ranina is only one of the seven trustees although he speaks and writes as though he were the only one. New housing, repairs, medicare, priestly amelioration must all go on said Poncha though "any ridiculous suggestion such as putting aside Rs 50 lakhs for priests would not be acceptable to the CER, especially as we have demonstrated in Malcolm Baug what can be achieved. If a proposal is in the interest of the community we do not oppose it because it is proposed by X or Y. It's not an Indira Gandhi-Maneka Gandhi syndrome," laughed Poncha.

Noting that if one cannot have the daily press one must have a strong press of one's own, Poncha states that the circulation of correct information is a continuous process. *The Zoroastrian* published by CER members will begin "by picking out each issue in the (BPP) chairman's statement and asking him to substantiate the claims. We will support any claim made by us with proper documentation.

"That's all we want to do: set the record straight. For the public should not be misled, not by the candidates and not by the trustees."

The drug danger

The growing incidence of drug addiction amongst young Parsis in Bombay was the subject of the talk by Ms Veera Mehta, professor of social work, Nirmala Niketan College, Bombay. "It is a torture to the entire family if forced to live with one young drug addict," explained Mehta. Noting that there was a high incidence of drug addiction among the Parsis, she added, "the Parsis, being status-conscious," delay in seeking professional guidance as they dread the social stigma attached to them.

"Though figures in absolute numbers may be small, in terms of damage and suffering caused, the magnitude deserves attention," stated Mehta. Researching the subject of drug addiction for her doctorate degree, she said the evidence showed drug addicts were usually in the 16 to 25 age group, with female addicts outnumbering the males, and the arts students indicating a higher frequency of addicts.

Information regarding this problem afflicting the youth of the Parsi community was gleaned mainly from the

and whom many Parsi addicts approach for help.

Mehta lamented that even within the community, the addicts did not know whom to approach for help. Describing the "terrible vacuum" which exists because "when individuals need us we are not there," Mehta was pleased that the BPP had planned to open a centre where, on some days of the week, they would talk to the children and relate to them. Referring to Padamsee's good work in this context, Mehta suggested that a squad of Parsi volunteers should assist Pearl in her work.



Mehta: "supportive help is needed."

Discussing the need for a two-pronged approach of prevention and cure, Mehta cautioned that though "supportive help is needed, psychotherapy alone will not help." According to Mehta, it is not therapeutic sessions but associations like Addicts Anonymous which are more successful in treating hardened addicts. Dr Perin Cabinetmaker, an invitee, quoted the cases of two Parsi drug addicts who were successfully treated by yogic therapy. As confessed by the youths, experimentation, inability to resist and peer approval were their three main reasons for taking to drugs.

Drug addiction seems to have afflicted both the affluent and the economically weaker sections of the Parsi community. With the average family income ranging from Rs 3000 to 5000 per month, these youths get their share of pocket money, yet steal from the home to support their habit. If hooked on to heroin, which costs Rs 40

per ampule, the monthly expenditure amounted to Rs 3000; if on cocaine then the cost rose to Rs 9000 per month. The addicts from the lower strata were usually hooked on to charas, said Mehta. In addition to stealing, excessive smoking and free sex were the other antisocial activities which these addicts indulged in. Though Mehta made reference to Parsi neighbourhoods where drug addiction was high, she asked the Press not to mention the areas.

The familial atmosphere prevalent in the homes of these addicts was not conducive to a healthy development, according to Mehta. "Lack of love, misunderstanding, unfavourable comparisons and absence of a strong father figure" were the noticeable pathological factors. Mehta quoted Padamsee who felt one contributing factor to the weak father figure was the Parsi mother's knack of running down her husband. Mehta added, "A majority (of the addicts) have parents living together but with strained relations or extra-marital affairs," and the attitude towards parents and other adults was seen as "resentful, vengeful and with dislike of hypocrisy and double standards."

On religious matters, the addicts experienced a "rootlessness and a vacuum" saying they were uncertain or did not believe in the existence of God. Mehta stressed that the "release of energy should be from within and in a spiritual direction rather than through drugs." In this context she praised the work done by Russel Pinto (a reformed addict) at Sevadham, the residential Christian Medical Centre at Bandra managed by Father Joe Pereira, where they emphasize the spiritual transformation of the addicts who have hitherto "lacked a true meaning and purpose in life."

Referring to Father Pereira's project in Bandra, BPP trustee Jamshed Gunder said, "We should have a similar scheme in South Bombay."

Assuring her of CER's support on the proviso that the BPP give support to the youth group, BPP trustee Jamshed Kanga requested Mehta to suggest a scheme to tackle this problem on an emergency basis.

Mehta put forth Dr Kohiyar's suggestion that the BPP should move

The Parsis, being status-conscious, delay in seeking professional guidance as they dread the social stigma attached to drug addiction.

noted Bombay psychiatrist Dr Jehangir Kohiyar who in the last two years had treated two boys and one girl; Dr Dinyar Gamadia, a general practitioner and president of the Cusrow Baug United Sports and Welfare League who had treated almost 25 cases; and Ms Pearl Padamsee, noted stage actress and directress who has made an in-depth study of this problem

the police to stop activities by the drug pushers at drink stalls and beediwalas. Federation president Dr Aspi Gollwalla, who had earlier been praised for taking the initiative to solve this problem, was of the view, "We should form a sub-committee and make a representation to the Prime Minister (so that) the Government of India can pass a regulation on drug addiction like in West Germany."

Urging the BPP to reorganize welfare activities in colonies, Prof Noshir Kaikobad, an invitee, suggested that funds for this cause may be raised by requesting Zubin Mehta to give a private show when he comes to Bombay.

To raise awareness on this subject, Federation vice-president (north zone) Shiavax Nargolwala felt that as in the case of dowry, there should be adequate publicity against this evil.

organizations to invite young mobeds to their functions; and implementing modern methods of teaching in the madressas to bring about a significant educational revolution among the mobeds whereby their self-respect may be enhanced. She even suggested that a substantial amount be allotted for a pilot project to bring about a "revolutionary attitudinal change." BPP trustee Jamsheed Kanga felt, in light of the survey findings, that the mobeds' plight was basically an "economic problem."

BPP trustee Eruch Desai while referring to the situation as "gloomy," added that he had read advertisements for mobeds from anjumans and agiaries in Mysore, Allahabad and other places which offered reasonable remuneration.

Peshotan Nargolwala, honorary treasurer of the Federation, said that one anjuman or agiary had offered Rs 1,500 per month income but found no takers.

Kharas said she had "dealt with (the subject) in my survey."

Desai: "Why are they not going (to these places) now?"

Kharas: "They don't want to go to rural areas."

Desai and the others noted that the openings were not only in rural areas.

P Nargolwala said that in a survey of 83 mobeds conducted in 1978 only 60 mobeds earned less than Rs 800 per month. "How," he questioned, "could

The priestly plight

With 79 percent of the mobeds interviewed confessing that were they younger and better educated they would opt for another profession, student researcher Ms Huzan Kharas said, "We, the community, are responsible for this pathetic and shameful condition" of the priests. Kharas researched her paper, "A socio-economic survey of the mobeds in Bombay extending to Thana district," for her Master of Social Work degree from Bombay University.

Describing the financial condition of the full-time mobeds, Kharas' findings revealed that the average per capita income in these families was Rs 332 per month with the lowest being Rs 92 per month. This data was based on her sample of 52 priests out of a total of 173 full-time mobeds working in 40 agiaries and four atash bahrams.

Inability to provide for their old age and retirement and absence of medical facilities was the complaint made by 88

After quoting the various statistics, Kharas submitted her scheme for the upliftment of the mobeds. Primarily stressing the need for the formation of a central organization to be called the Zoroastrian Association of Priests (ZAP), Kharas felt that after collecting funds through donations, publicity campaigns and charity shows, ZAP should have a full-time secretariat responsible for the day-to-day functioning.

Among the functions which she listed for ZAP were: helping the mobeds secure a minimum wage for themselves; keeping track of job openings; obtaining interest-free loans for them; reserving a fixed quota of flats for the mobeds; counselling the mobeds to ameliorate their psychological problems; encouraging youth

'A high percent of the mobeds are struggling for survival and in debt.'

percent of the mobeds. With 70 percent of the mobeds surveyed being over 45 years of age and 41 percent over 60 years of age, this factor is causing them a lot of worry. 62 percent of the mobeds stated that housing was not provided. 44 percent were known to be residing in old, dilapidated buildings in congested areas. "A disgracefully high percent of the mobeds are struggling for survival and in debt. Over 60 percent are in need of help to meet their basic needs," said Kharas.



Above:
Huzan Kharas

Left: priests performing muktad prayers:

Economic or attitudinal problem?

Mobeds: the forgotten few

- 70 percent of the mobeds surveyed are over 45 years of age and more than 41 percent are over 60 years of age.
- 46 percent of the mobeds are unmarried and blame it on: (a) insufficient income; (b) no respect for the priestly profession; and (c) lack of housing.
- 58 percent of the respondents said that they were totally dissatisfied with their profession and would not encourage their children to join it.
- 79 percent said that if they were younger and had better opportunities they would have opted for another profession.
- 89 percent have completed their primary and secondary education only.
- 83 percent felt that they, as mobeds, are given little or no respect at all by the laity.
- 70 percent of the young unmarried mobeds interviewed stated that it is difficult to find brides due to: (a) their low status in the community; (b) lack of education; (c) low income; and (d) a wrong belief that mobeds should not socialize.
- The average per capita income of mobeds is Rs 332 per month and the per capita income of one family was disgracefully low - Rs 92 per month.
- 38 percent stated that they were in debt and over 60 percent claimed that they are in need of help even for their basic necessities.
- 62 percent are not provided any housing facility as a perquisite to their work.
- 88 percent are unable to provide for their old age and retirement, nor do they get any medical benefits.
- 88 percent do not own vehicles.

they be earning less now?" It was subsequently clarified that Kharas' average of Rs 332 was the per capita income of a family and therefore the mobeds' total earnings were higher, probably in the vicinity of Rs 900 to 1,000.

P Nargolwala also alleged that Kharas' sampling was "defective" and "weighted in favor of poor mobeds." He said of the 52 mobeds interviewed, one was selected from each agiary and two from each atash bahram. There-

fore it could not be considered random sampling.

Khojeste Mistree, founder of Zoroastrian Studies who was also associated with Kharas' work, questioned the research techniques used by the 1978 survey which Nargolwala referred to. Describing Kharas' study techniques as "scientific" he stated that the "final figure would not be way off the mark." He said the help the mobeds received "is abysmal." He termed the mobeds "the registered slaves of the

community" who had to toil 21 hours a day.

Referring to the mobeds' reluctance to accept employment outside of Bombay, Khojeste felt it would not be feasible as many mobeds have inadequate education and may not be able to make the social and cultural adjustments. "The mobeds feel socially secure living in Bombay," said Mistree adding that if the mobeds were to leave for other areas "Who will look after Bombay's agiaries?"

Preserving the Parsi past

Many Parsis who were master craftsmen of ornate and utilitarian furniture had made remarkable contribution to the culture of India.



The Parsis are losing their reputation for being "great at preserving things," said Ms Nivedita Mehta, curator of the Alpaiwalla Museum of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet at Khareghat Colony, the first community museum in India. The population shift to urban areas and the pursuit of modernization were the main factors responsible for the change, according to her.

She cited examples of how "19th century books on Parsi plays and garba

songs are being retrieved from new and second-hand bookstalls which have a fantastic collection" and how leather bound manuscripts of the Avesta were being sold for a meagre sum of Rs 300. Commending the increasing awareness in the West, Mehta informed that old Parsi song records were being bought in India on behalf of the London Council. "These are the kind of things to be preserved even if we have to get them rebound and fumigated," she stressed.

Parsis, she said, had a tendency to favour certain objects like Chinese porcelain to the exclusion of brass and other utensils, industrial goods and glass paintings. Many Parsis who were "master craftsmen of ornate and utilitarian furniture" had made a remarkable contribution to the culture of India.

Letters, legal documents, papers and maps also need to be preserved, Mehta advised. She considered preservation of clothing to be important especially since the styles had changed.

Appreciating the efforts made by K T Satarawala, the former governor of Goa and presently the governor of Punjab, in helping preserve the nunnery at Diu which has a Zoroastrian origin, Mehta opined that other defunct properties also need to be given attention.

In conclusion, Mehta stated, "Old traditions serve a purpose in giving a background" and suggested that young college students should be encouraged to work on a collage of Parsi life-style in

continued on page 15

17th century Navsari gate;
Artifacts should be catalogued.



'I'm somebody with a camera'

Sooni Taraporevala

With 33 exhibitions to his credit, an honorary doctorate conferred on him by Concordia University in Montreal for his contribution to photography, and his photographs in the permanent collections of several museums and private collectors, Sam Tata can justifiably look back on his career with satisfaction and retire.

But Tata is not one for looking back. At 73, he continues his love affair with the medium he discovered way back in 1936. "I'm enamoured of the fact of photography," he says. "I eat it, and sleep it, and talk it."

If photography is sometimes considered to be a lonely profession, Tata has never found it to be so. Despite the fact that he lives alone in Montreal (he is divorced from his Czech wife, and their only daughter lives in Vancouver), he is neither lonely nor a loner. "You have to be stupid if you can't keep yourself amused."

He has always enjoyed people—meeting them, photographing them, making friends. His friends in Montreal admire his spirit, but they thought he was crazy when he decided, in 1983, to embark on a photographic voyage to India, Hong Kong and Japan to rediscover his roots. A grant awarded to him by The Canada Council made this undertaking possible.

In India, besides photographing on the streets, Sam Tata has also been indulging in his passion for making portraits of people associated with the arts.

While Tata has made friends in Bombay on the many occasions that he has stayed in this city, none perhaps changed his life as dramatically as the friendship

latest book, *A Certain Identity: 50 Portraits*, Cartier-Bresson writes, "Sam Tata and I have been close friends since 1949. He had a darkroom in his family's house in Shanghai and together we helped each other develop our films covering the last days of the Kuomintang. His kindness was so profound and refreshing that in spite of the ceiling propeller fan, the 100 degree heat was irrelevant."

Born in 1911 in Shanghai to Parsi parents, Tata's interest in photography began after he passed out of university. His father, an avid and good amateur photographer, supported his early efforts indulgently. His mother was not so amused, however, when a darkroom materialized in her ironing room. She yelled at her errant son: "That's right, begin something new all over again—a new hobby. I'll give you six months."

"Famous last words," laughs Tata as he recalls his beginnings. "In Shanghai with my dad's borrowed camera, I entered newspaper competitions and in the first week, I won a second prize. Next week, with the same Grafflex, I used a table-lamp and did a portrait of my brother Jehangir. It turned out very nicely—I bundled it in and it got the first

prize. So I thought I'm on my way: great portrait-photographer Sam Tata.

"Then I got very friendly with Alex Buchman, an aeronautical engineer who was doing newspaper photography. He told me: 'Want to start right? Buy a Leica.' So I bought a Leica."

"My father was very indulgent. I was working in his office but had no interest in the business. I was like a clerk; I entered the accounts and all that."

"So I started to photograph in the streets. I didn't do too many good ones. And then I got dragged into the Camera Club and, of course, I got wooed into pictorial photography."

"What pictorial photographers do, they do well, except that it's been repeated year in, year out—a whole century or more—from romantic landscapes to kittens in baskets. And if somebody wins a prize in a salon, then the next year, everybody's doing the same thing. So it becomes a sterile and contrived form. If it pleases one, one does it. At one time I used to disparage it, but today I feel—so what?"

Excerpts from an interview:

What was it that turned you off pictorial photography? And how did you discover

Tata: 'Somebody has to record the fact that these people existed.'



"I've also been called a humanist and that's a term I really love."

which grew after a chance handshake on Rampart Row in 1948 with Henri Cartier-Bresson, the legendary French photographer. On the jacket of Tata's

photo-essays and another kind of photography?

Well, that started right here in Bombay in 1948. Some months before, in 1947, I had my first one-man show of portraits opened by Jehangirji Unwalla (the pictorialist) and it was very well-received. In the same place at Rampart Row, Cartier-Bresson showed his pictures in February of 1948 and Kekoo Gandhi, an art-gallery owner, said, "You know who Cartier-Bresson is?" And I said, "No, I have never heard of him."

He said that a current American magazine had a piece on him. I got a copy and read it; I wish I'd kept it. I went to the show, I saw his wife standing on a dais there and we got talking. But before I approached her, I started to look at the photographs.

It was a completely new world to me, and I was pretty well stunned by it. I thought I must meet this fellow and so I asked his wife and she pointed him out. We were introduced, and I had no idea that that handshake and the greetings that we exchanged would result in a friendship that is still strong today.

When did you meet Cartier-Bresson again after the first time?

After 1948, I met him in 1949 in Hong Kong. His wife had come from Rangoon and I'd got a cable asking me to receive her. He came on a British gunboat and they both went back at the beginning of 1949 to mainland China. After the communists came in, they had to find a place to stay in Shanghai and he asked me to suggest a hotel and I said, "The best in town. Come and stay with my brother Jehangir and myself."

When he came there, he said, "The communists want to look at my work, and I haven't been in a darkroom for years." So I said, "Well, my fingers are crossed. Let's work together on your negatives." It was a great lesson—all that stuff unfolding before me. Two sets of contacts and I saw everything he did.

How long did Cartier-Bresson stay in Shanghai with you?

He was there for many months. He and his wife stayed with us and he used to work, sometimes shooting 10 rolls a day and come back exhausted.

When you wandered the streets of Shanghai with him was there ever any tension? Not tension perhaps, but since you were both photographers, both on the look out for photographs, did it ever

present any problems?

Once it did, because I was stupid enough to photograph something that he had just photographed. And he turned around and said, "You know, you shouldn't do that," and he was right, quite right.

It was a slightly different version, that's why I never used it. It never happened before that. When I'd go out and shoot with him—especially if we went and shot in the same area—then I'd look at his stuff and I'd look at mine and I'd say, "You know, now I can see the difference. You've got some tremendous stuff." And then, very polite, he'd look at my roll and say, "Oh you have some nice things too." The great French politeness, you know, I'd say, "Yeah, sure," rather disgruntled.

He influenced your work then at an early stage.

Influenced? Oh, without a doubt, he's the biggest single influence in my life. We had a lot of arguments and discussions when we used to sit in Shanghai, but slowly I was weaned away from my concept of pictorial photography. He changed my life.

One day I sat down and wrote him a letter (telling him) of the debt I owed him. He gave me a career—a successful career, if not in money terms then in terms of satisfaction and self-respect.

When you take portraits, do you have a particular way of dealing with the subject? What is your way of drawing out people?

It's a simple recipe—though I don't know how simple it is to follow. First, I am not a candid photographer—just to sneak a photograph is not what I want. The person has to say, "Yes, of course, come and see me." Then I'll say, "I need about an hour at the most."

The second is that the photographer

must have—the French have a beautiful word for it—*sensibilite*, in other words, to be sensitive.

And the third, he has to establish a rapport. You have to get them to trust you. Anybody can learn how to compose a photograph, make a negative and a print. But how do you teach anybody to see in the way Cartier-Bresson saw: one eye looking in and the other looking out at the world? The marriage of your feeling and observation gives it to you.

In every portrait I do, there's a bit of me. I'm feeling, reflecting. I'm the mirror, so I have to put people at their ease. A self-conscious photographer gets a self-conscious portrait.

I'm lucky that my nature is such that people respond well to me. They don't feel I'm some kind of threat, that I'm there to strip them of what they are.

If you were to look back at the work you've done so far, have you always done a lot of portraits? Does it occupy a large part of the work you've done in photography?

If it doesn't occupy a large part of my time, it occupies a large part of my mind. It has become an obsession. I'm obsessed with the idea of so many well-known people who have created so much—or even created a little. Somebody has to record the fact that these people existed.

You only photograph in black and white?

Yes. Though I have done colour, I'm not comfortable in colour. Colour requires a very special approach.

Very often, people say, "Oh shoot it in both colour and black and white." What do you mean, shoot it in colour and black and white? I've only got two hands and a pair of eyes.

When you take photographs like you did in Shanghai, did you ever do it thinking



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that you were documenting something that was going to fade and pass away, that your photographs would one day become history?

No, not really. I don't think in terms of documentation for use in the future. I react to situations because I am what I am and I'm somebody with a camera. Things were happening and they went straight onto my film. In Shanghai, it was the immediate effect. I didn't think about it historically, but looking back I realize I was eye-witness to history.

Sam, at 73, you've seen a lot of life in many different cultures. In retrospect, do you think that a certain rootlessness is conducive to art in some way or do you think that being settled in the place where one was born, where one has ties, one's own environment, has its advantages?

I have never really felt rootless. Though both my parents were Parsis and I was brought up in the Zoroastrian faith, there was a community of 125 people—a very solid community—in Shanghai.

Of course, I felt more Chinese than Indian. Most foreigners were there just to exploit, to make money and then go.

And some families, of course, stayed there. We thought we were there forever.

So every time I came to India, it was as if I was coming to somebody else's country—the country of my parents. I never really felt rootless. I'll tell you what I felt. I felt that I was very lucky to be cosmopolitan, to be international and felt that the individual is important, not what he is.

I'm an individual. By an accident of birth, I was born in China. By an accident of birth, both my parents were Parsis. You can wear any kind of clothes you like—wear a turban, or wear a *dugli* and *pheta*, or wear a peaked cap and tweeds—you're still that individual, no matter how you dress.

Would you consider yourself to be a photo-journalist or don't you believe in categorizing?

I don't like to categorize. I've been called a documentary photographer, a social photographer, a photo-journalist, a photo-essayist. But then I've also been called a humanist and that's a term I really love.

continued from page 12

the villages during the 18th and 19th centuries of which there is no readily available evidence. Emphasizing that "Parsis are losing roots," she urged that agiary and community centres should preserve material representing the Parsis of a bygone era so as to inform and educate the visitors.

Bejan Dittia, co-opted member south zone, suggested that the many treasures of the K R Cama Oriental Institute in Bombay should be microfilmed and informed that Ms Polly Chinoy of Secunderabad is making a mimeograph on the subject of the Parsis who served the Nizams in Hyderabad. He recommended the cataloguing of the artifacts to be found in Bombay with suggestions on how best to preserve each of them.

"We should educate the public first and then send out youths to have a look," advised BPP trustee Kanga who felt that publications should propagate this idea. He suggested that an appeal should be made for declaring the Bahrot Caves in Gujarat (where the Iranshah fire was kept for 17 years) as an archaeological monument.

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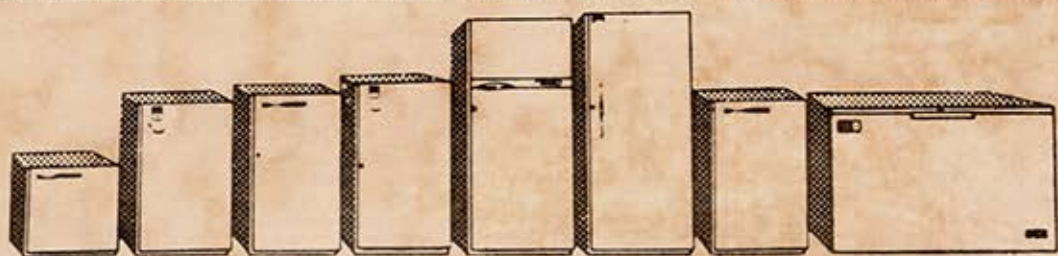
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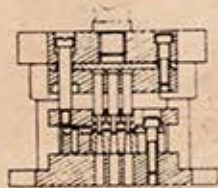
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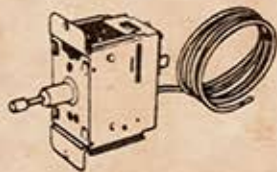
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