

Parzianā

The democratization of the CER

The Committee for Electoral Rights attempts to once again woo public support.

Arnavaz S Mama

The Committee for Electoral Rights will enroll members and hold elections for office bearers, states the Bombay based party's new president, Dadi Engineer. The three-year-old informal association of like-minded people, which successfully fought the 1981 Bombay Parsi Punchayet Anjuman Committee elections and this June suffered an electoral setback, will be shortly registering itself as a society under the Societies Registration Act.

A noted lawyer and former vice-president of the CER, Engineer takes over the mantle of leadership from CER founder-president and BPP trustee Jamsheed Kanga who, due to his professional workload as well as trusteeship responsibilities, stepped down in September this year. As a leader of the CER, Kanga also had to share the responsibility for the CER candidate Fali Poncha's defeat against noted tax consultant Homi Ranina in the June BPP trusteeship election.

Under the new set-up Poncha, a



Engineer: 'establish a liaison....'

director of Tata Housing and a vice-president of the CER, will be the chairman of the CER managing committee, while Minoo Shroff, former vice-president and Kersi Limathwalla, head of the youth wing, will function as vice-

presidents. Mani Dalal former secretary and Kersi Gazdar, member of the youth committee, will be the joint secretaries with Dinshaw Mehta as treasurer.

The CER leadership had scheduled an Anjuman Committee meeting on November 3, at the Indian Merchants Chamber of Commerce to acquaint the community with the new developments and to chalk out the CER's future plans.

"My first priority is to strengthen the CER's rapport with the public," said Engineer, seated in the Bank Street office of the noted law firm of Crawford Bayley and Company where he is a senior partner.

Though it is felt that "a new man taking over would give the CER a face lift or a new image," Engineer says, "I don't expect to achieve miracles. It will be an uphill task (but) I want to make people see the CER in correct perspective..." Elections for office-bearers will be held about a year after the CER is

registered. Noting that the "CER has grave impediments in terms of resources," Engineer notes that one of his early priorities is also to raise funds.

Starting, "with a clean slate.... my policy (will be) to co-ordinate with the BPP trustees. I am not one to criticize left, right and centre. We must always establish a liaison with the trustees.... make (them) realize that the CER is not out only to criticize the BPP."

Engineer says that "the CER's detractors have tried to hold out that

The "biggest mistake the CER made was the severance of contact with the public."

the CER is a bunch of religious reformists below the surface." But Engineer who claims that his personal views on religion are orthodox states, "The CER is committed to the goal of socio-economic reform. There may be some individuals with radical views on religious subjects but that is not important. Our stand has been consistent. On religious matters we are ready to abide by the guidance of our scholars and priests. This *dharam dubavo* plea I strongly object to. Since the CER's inception we have never discussed religious reform as a body. I have a blind faith in our religion. I attend the fire-temple everyday for a short while. I would have nothing to do with an organization with such aims as closing fire-temple."

While stating that the "biggest mistake the CER made was the severance of contact with the public at large, for which I share responsibility," Engineer summed up some of CER's major achievements: Awakening of the community to their rights vis-a-vis the Panchayet for which Jamsheed Kanga was greatly responsible; the party's vigilance cell which watchdogs tenancy changes in the baugs to sniff out dubious transfers and get the Panchayet to initiate action; the merit-rating system for flat allocation which has now been accepted by the BPP; Fali Poncha's considerable work on housing; the social work undertaken by Ms Sylla Kavarana and the Youth Wing under Limathwalla; the organization of the

CER zonal committees by Zal Contractor; the moving of the High Court for electoral reform in which Edul Bharucha and Berges Desai played a significant role....

Noting that Poncha was the best candidate the CER could field for the trusteeship election of June '84, Engineer explained, "I was abroad for about 40 days during the election which gave rise to the feeling in the community that I was aspiring for trusteeship," and added categorically, "I have made up my mind not to offer myself presently for trusteeship." Nor, he states, is there any split in the CER ranks: "Jamsheed (Kanga), Fali (Poncha), I and all the others see eye to eye. The top echelons of the CER are very united."

With BPP trustee Jamsheed Guzder's first 10-year term drawing to a close, the next trusteeship elections are due in January '85. What stand the CER will take has not yet been stated. The CER has, in the past, taken the stand that the total tenure of a Panchayet trustee should be restricted to 10 years. Jamsheed Guzder, however, has endorsed the CER stand on several issues in earlier events and the community has sensed a special understanding between him and the CER. However, Engineer says, "We have not yet made up our mind — it's going to take a little time."

Engineer was inducted into Parsi politics, ironically, by the BPP itself in 1978/79 when Jamsheed Kanga and himself — seeded professionals unknown to each other — were invited by the Panchayet to serve on the "Committee for considering a scheme for election of trustees," first under trustee Jal Vimadall and then under former BPP chairman Nadirshaw Mulla. "The committee deliberated for well over a year.... the changes proposed were cosmetic. Kanga and I put forward a plea for more democratic elections.... in course of time other like-minded people came forward" said Engineer, recounting the birth throes of the CER.

"In the heat and dust of the elections in 1981 we might have given the impression we were offering the moon — we'd build houses for the poor. (It was of course meant to be) in co-ordination with the Panchayet. As soon as the Anjuman Committee elections were over, I was the chairman of the CER electoral reforms committee. Kanga and I had put up a dissenting note to the BPP and simultaneously prepared a scheme on the basis of the dissenting

note. We gave a synopsis (of the scheme) to the Anjuman Committee and invited and accepted some suggestions. Then Jamsheed Kanga's election came on. We decided that that was not the time for putting the scheme across. Kanga was elected unanimously. Then we got wind that the trustees were considering the entire matter including our note (and there seemed to be) some possibility of the trustees carrying out reforms. Thus the CER let time slip by," admitted Engineer ruefully, but bounced back: "By March '85 the trustees will themselves propose a scheme and we will put out our own scheme if we do not find the trustees' scheme adequate."

Acknowledging that the BPP under the chairmanship of Dr Aspi Golwalla has been open to discussion — Engineer cites the example of BPP's favourable reaction to noted management consultant Minoo Shroff's suggestions on office management — Engineer is confident that so long as he heads the CER, there will be prospects of a great

"We will put out our own electoral scheme if we do not find the BPP trustees' scheme adequate."

ter mutual understanding between the CER and the BPP.

Engineer also heads the all-India committee of the World Zoroastrian Organization (WZO). "I believe in the concept of a world body," he states. The BPP (and the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India) has so far refused to join the WZO due to a variety of factors but chiefly due to the WZO's constitution which provides equal weightage for individuals and anjumans. "We are ready to negotiate and adopt a reasonable stance," says Engineer, "but certain views are very obdurate. A miniscule community like ours cannot afford to waste resources.... I'm terribly opposed to the concept of two (world) bodies.... the WZO has shown goodwill to negotiate... the main committee of the WZO has authorized Dadi Mistry (a trustee of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman)

and me to hold parleys and report back. Given goodwill, there should be a meeting ground."

Engineer referred to the Fourth World Zoroastrian Congress as "a good idea.... it brings people together on a common platform" and for that reason considered it worthwhile to expend "a reasonable amount on it. If we get together on a common platform, we can at least focus attention on problems. (It is) absolutely necessary to have such things."

Reputed to be an expert in the field of indirect taxation, Engineer is a

member of the managing committee of the Bombay Incorporated Law Society which is the governing body of solicitors. He teaches law part time to post graduates reading for the Master of Laws degree at the University of Bombay, and is a director of over 20 companies. The Regional Grand Master of the Regional Grand Lodge of Western India (Indian Constitution) of Free Masons, the jovial Engineer is also a keen Rotarian who sketches cartoons on the side, reads psychology and literature, is fond of music, and considers himself a reasonably good bathroom

singer! Wife Silloo is an executive with a Bombay based company, Zodiac, which manufactures and markets men's apparel and accessories.

While Engineer notes that conversion runs counter to his personal beliefs, he refuses to allow any religious question to interfere with work towards socio-economic goals for the community: "If we put our heads together instead of criticizing each other, we'd achieve a lot. If any of these bodies takes on religious reform, I'd disassociate myself from them — that is not within their purview."

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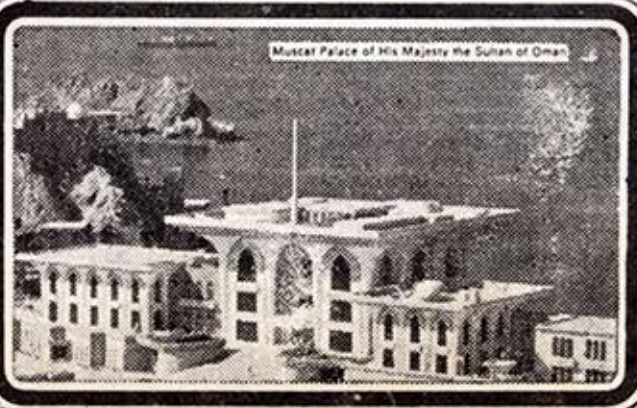
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The priestly dilemma

A High Priest critically analyzes the ills facing the priesthood

Kaikhusrroo M JamaspAsa

High Priest, the Zarthoshti Anjuman Atas Bahram

In the 1000 years that have elapsed since we Parsis came to India, we seem to be speeding to our destruction faster than even during the darker periods of our history. The community is being destroyed by moral and spiritual decadence. The virtues for which our forefathers were once celebrated are fast dissipating. The Parsi individual somehow seems to be lost in the mass society. Indifference, the worst ailment of all, has afflicted us, and the voices of the handful who profess to show some concern and anxiety are stifled in the morass of reports, committees, congresses and federations, incapable of decisive action.

Some years ago, a far-sighted western scholar of Zoroastrianism had warned: 'No priest, no Parsi!' To-day, when the warning is fast becoming a reality, those who are regarded as 'Akabars' of the community, sporadically display their insistence that 'something' should be done. Certainly, shelter, food and clothing are indispensable for the physical well-being of the individual, but, in pursuit of these, to what extent can one ignore one's moral and spiritual upliftment?

One can say without fear of contradiction that the average Parsi Zoroastrian to-day knows very little about his or her spiritual heritage — its culture, history and traditions — educated and brought up as one is in an acquisitive, material and secular environment. But, one who is sincerely interested in gaining knowledge about Zoroastrianism cannot say that facilities have not been provided. The world's best collection of books on Zoroastrianism are housed in the library of the K R Cama Oriental Institute in Bombay and the First Dastur Meherji Rana Library in Navsari. Yet, the Cama Oriental Institute has only about 200 members of which hardly a few take any interest in

its activities and even fewer the opportunity to imbibe learning from its treasure-house. The Moola Feroz and the Sir J J Zarthoshti Madressas in Bombay run classes in Old Iranian languages — Avesta, Old Persian, Middle Persian and Pazand — for all those interested in them, and have been doing so for more than 100 years. The classes are conducted free of cost from the assets of the Moola Feroz Madressa and the funds provided by Lady Avabai, wife of the first Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, and incentives by way of scholarships and gold medals are provided, but both the Madressas can boast of only a small number of students from the elementary to the post-graduate level. Obviously then the community cannot complain of lack of opportunities to learn about its religion. The actual malady that is plaguing the community seems to be lethargic indifference.

For centuries, religious education has been a priestly preserve. Yet to-day, priests who are well-versed in the ancient Iranian languages and scriptures, doctrine, and the significance of rituals can probably be counted on the fingers of one hand. And from the current trend, one foresees that within the next quarter of a century, the number will dwindle still further. The Athornan Boarding Madressa at Dadar in Bombay which trains candidates for the priesthood provides all facilities for the education, boarding and lodging of its students; still it has only a handful of students and it is very doubtful whether any of them will take up the profession for which they are painstakingly trained by its dedicated principal and staff.

It is imperative that priests educate themselves. We all realize that graduation is the minimum qualification required to-day for most types of employ-

ment. Even then the M F Cama Athornan Institute at Andheri in Bombay, which trains candidates for the priesthood, closed down the SSC course in 1977. At this Madressa training in the priestly profession was provided along with the regular SSC curriculum and every encouragement was given to pursue further studies. Unfortunately, the Managing Committee of the Madressa suddenly decided to scrap this facility and when two of its members objected to the ill-advised scheme, they met with hostility and had to resign their office. Thus the aspiration of the late Sheth Meherwanji Muncherji Cama who donated a magnificent sum of Rs 25,00,000 to present the community with well-trained, learned priests, will now remain unrealized. The new scheme led to a drastic drop in the number of students from 40 to nine. At present there are only five students housed in its palatial building. And while a few community members advocate selling the property to build houses for the community, the trustees of the Institute are complacent and nonchalant that all is well at the Institute!

It is a painful admission to make, but it is very unlikely that the community will ever produce priests of the calibre of the Meherji Ranas and the Sanjanas of old, leave aside those like Adurbad Mahraspand, an exponent of Zoroastrian orthodoxy during the Sasanian times, who underwent the ordeal of molten metal and emerged unscathed to prove the excellence of Zoroastrianism in the eyes of his opponents. The dedicated, sincere and hard-working priest seems to be an individual of the past.

In most religions when a man dedicates himself or herself to God, he or she has to renounce the world; in some, one has to take vows of celibacy and

forsake the pursuit of worldly things. Religions which demand such stringent codes of conduct from their priests find men of dedication who are content with their lot and eager to serve God. Zoroastrianism, on the other hand, does not advocate any renunciation of the world, nor does it advocate a celibate life. In fact it is incumbent on the Zoroastrian priest to marry and have children. He must live a full life in this world and still keep himself above worldly temptations. That is the true test of a good man — that he advances his spiritual progress while living among the denizens of the world.

We do not expect our priests to survive on spiritual sustenance alone — like all human beings they need the bare necessities of life; over and above, they yearn for respect and understanding; but while they expect the community to provide for their physical well-being, there does not seem to be a corresponding willingness amongst them to provide the community with a class of priests that are devoted, skillful and zealous to promote the knowledge of the religion among the laity.

Scheme formulators have little awareness of the grim situation facing the community at present, especially where *boiwalas* of Atash Bahrams are concerned. Whatever may be their academic qualifications, priests of this class are well-versed and fully qualified in the intricacies of the rituals, their mental training is quite unique in that they know almost the entire Avesta by rote and have a discipline befitting their higher spiritual status. Contrary to the general belief, they earn reasonably well. Evidently then, it is not a lack of monetary incentive that is a deterrent but a more deeply rooted spiritual decadence. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find a priest of this calibre who is willing to perform the higher liturgical ceremonies as these require concentration, dedication and stamina. And these ceremonies are vital for the very foundation of Zoroastrianism. Steps should be taken immediately to augment this class of priests without whom grave consequences will face the community in the very near future.

The western method of education, secularism, the present materialistic trend coupled with the loss of dignity has made inroads in the priestly profession also. To counterpoise these malignancies, the priests themselves will have to strive and a beginning has to be

made now. The elders of the community along with those in charge of religious institutions should take it upon themselves to inculcate in the sons of priests the usefulness and importance of the profession, and the urgent need to continue the tradition in the family. They must be made aware of the rich heritage of their religion so that they may be able to uphold it with faith and pride. Like all problems, the solution of the priestly dilemma lies at the roots. The roots are the potential generation of would-be priests. From their infancy they must be made to realize the im-



It is tragic that to-day's priest has to be bribed with promises of monetary gain in order to make his duties seem attractive to him.

portance of the role they ought to play. A sense of responsibility and dedication towards it must be impressed upon them. They must be made to comprehend the dignity and sanctity of the priesthood.

In the days of the Zoroastrian empires in Iran, the priest was a valued advisor and guide to the king, in most cases second only to the Prime Minister, or very often the Prime Minister himself. He gave guidance not just in spiritual affairs but also in secular activities. Many functions were embodied in him. He was a religious scholar, astrologer, astronomer, mathematician, medicine man, but above all, the upholder of the religion. In the last few centuries, almost till the last few decades, priests earned their livelihood practicing some cottage industry along with their priestly duties. Some laboriously copied old manuscripts without charge, preserving them for posterity, others attempted translations of them. They thus maintained their ritual purity and kept their dignity. It is tragic that to-day's priest has to be bribed with promises of monetary gain in order to make his duties seem attractive to him.

While the laity claims that priests are inadequately conversant in matters religious, the laity is even more so. Yet, voices are heard from the latter spew-

ing forth unintelligent reiterations about freedom of choice, reincarnation, Law of Karma, proselytism and the mode of disposal of the dead. Parsis in secular positions of prominence in the country, but with absolutely no knowledge of the religion, become authorities on it, which for them consists only of the Gathas. Others try to interpret the scriptures with their fanciful theories. In such inane din, the voices of those who know something about the religion become dim.

The higher echelon of the priesthood, the Dasturs, have been criticized

by some as being indifferent to the plight of their fellow priests. This is an unwarranted and unjust accusation. Whenever the Dasturs have been approached for any sort of help or advice, it has been given and whatever aid lies within their powers has been unstintingly extended to the priests. But because such services are not publicised through the Parsi media, the laity feels that the Dasturs are unconcerned about their fellow priests.

If the laity wants an educated and dedicated band of priests in the future, it is for them to encourage the younger generation of the priestly class to take up the profession and to reinstate the profession with dignity and respect. And if the laity shows its eagerness to learn about the religion and acquire some knowledge about the ceremonies being performed, it will be incumbent on the priests to perform them with more dedication, vigilance and conscientiousness.

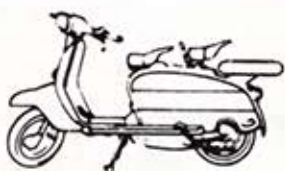
It will be incorrect to surmise that nothing has been done in the past to elevate the lot of the priesthood. There are funds like the Bhagarsath Amelioration Fund which has been looking after the educational and medical facilities of the Bhagaria priests and their families in Bombay. This fund has extended its facilities now to priests of

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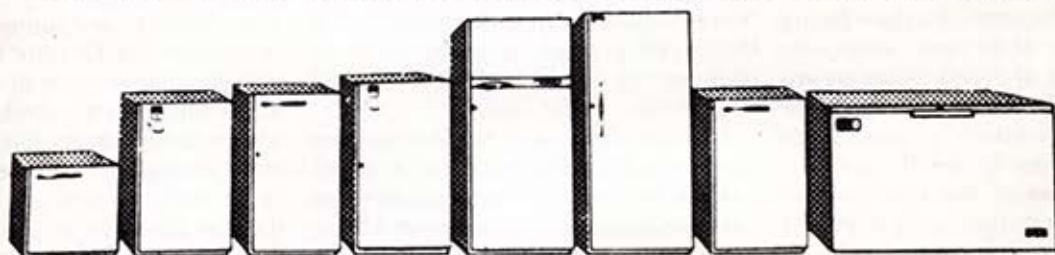
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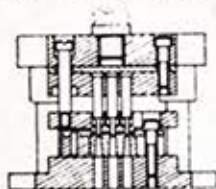
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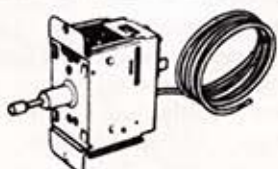
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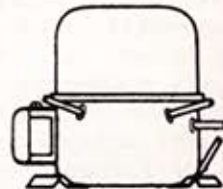
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A dumb flock sans shepherd

Former BPP Chairman
B K Boman-Behram
sees a bleak future for
the community.

Viewed objectively and without any aim at flattery, the Parsi community, which once held a proud position among our sister communities, is now a drifting vessel. In order to bring it on even keel, we have to look for solutions to certain problems, to look ahead at what the future holds for us in a fast changing world.

No amount of gimmicks such as indulged in by a group of youngsters or a grandiose plan of a fourth World Zoroastrian Congress sponsored by some of our shrewd elders for their own ends or to divert attention from the real problems facing the community, can inspire us with hope of a better future.

One handicap to our future progress is the tendency to rake up old, moth-eaten issues with a great deal of fanfare, accompanied by the drum-beats of a section of the Parsi press. Such issues are, for example, the recognition of Parsi females wedded to alien males with a view to admit them to fire-temples and other religious or social institutions, or the admission into our fold of the children of Parsi mothers by non Parsi fathers, or the adoption of other systems of the disposal of the dead, or the most controversial of all — conversion. Such issues do not today stir the community at large.

The problems which demand but seem to defy solution may be briefly defined as:

- a) Economic betterment of the community;
- b) Amelioration of the priestly class;
- c) Religious education and harnessing of the talents and energy of the youth of the community for promotion of individual and collective welfare;
- d) Participation in public life of the country;

e) Creation and maintenance of links with the Parsi Zoroastrians residing abroad;

f) Dwindling numbers of the community;

I shall not venture within the ambit of a short article to outline the scope and magnitude or even to touch the fringe of those problems. Unless studied in depth, they are likely to land us in familiar commonplace, or in uncommon fantasies to which not a few Parsis are prone.

There are, however, two aspects connected with those problems which need to be dwelt upon and can never be over-stressed.

The material or economic decline of the community is largely owing to the loss of spirit of enterprise. Can we imagine or expect that from our modern Parsi youth will arise a Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy who actually hawked empty bottles and made 10 hazardous voyages overseas in the past century to amass a

More and more Parsis
are not ashamed to
lean upon charity for
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was not so some
decades ago.

vast fortune which he lavishly spent for benevolent causes? It is sad to observe that the majority of our youth has become so inured to comfort or luxury that they shy away from any task which calls for toil or strenuous work or takes them away from the urban

environment.

Our community is fast becoming, or rather has become a community of white collar job-seekers. The outcome is that, being unable to face severe competition, the community is sliding into poverty as testified by the condition of the lower middle and poor classes and the increase of beggary.

The loss of the spirit of enterprise has brought with it the loss of self-respect and self-reliance. Charity abounds among the Parsis and more and more Parsis are not ashamed to lean upon charity for their existence. That was not so some decades ago.

There was a time when the entire Meadows Street was lined with "Europe shops" manned by Parsis and Europeans. Where are the Parsi traders and the Parsi shops? If the community is to be saved from the present economic morass, then the Parsi job-seekers must be converted into entrepreneurs. Such a transformation will enable the community to hold its head high and look with hope to the future.

Similarly, the community's interest in national affairs and public life of the country has declined considerably. Personally, I consider this to be a calamity. In marked contrast to this phenomenon we had, 80 years ago, a galaxy of great public men down from Dadabhoy Naoroji, Pherozeshah Mehta, Navroji Ferozji, Limji Banaji, Sir Cowasjee Jehangir, to a host of lesser figures. We were a voice which did not fail to make itself heard. Nowadays, we are a dumb flock without a shepherd. Worse still, we are becoming more and more exclusive and withdrawing from contacts with our sister communities. We are, so to say, withdrawing tortoise-like into a

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Zoroastrianism — Volume I Elementary Course: Elements of Zoroastrianism (76 pp); Volume II Intermediate Course: Salient features of Zoroastrianism (132 pp); Volume III Advanced Course: Light on Zoroastrianism (183 pp) — by Ervad Ratanshah Rustomji Motafram. Published by the Trustees of the Parsi Punchayet Funds and Properties, Bombay 1984. Price Rs 30.

For quite some years now, the Bombay Parsi Punchayet trustees have been under a constant barrage from the community: the unjust election system, the poor utilization of resources, the lethargy to construct houses on available land and to allot flats to the deserving, etc. In the midst of these salvos, where comments range from calumny to corruption, the trustees — especially with the onslaught of a new party whose members belong to the 'radical' (the Parsi word for thinking, non-orthodox Zoroastrians) group — have been stressing that housing and proper utilization of funds is not the only need of the hour. The trustees would like the community and its children to be more conscious of their religion, their glorious heritage and values which when imbibed by their children would pave the way for a better tomorrow.

The present Bombay Parsi Punchayet chairman, Dr Aspi F Golwalla has addressed himself to this task with dedication and sincerity. The Punchayet has printed, published and released a set of three books at a total cost of Rs 49,000 (figure quoted from the *Parsi Punchayet Quarterly Review*, Jan-March 1984 issue). The task of writing these books was accorded to Ervad Ratanshah Rustomji Motafram, MA, who judging by Golwalla's foreword, has abided by the trustee's injunction to provide "a systematic graded course which a Parsi who really desires to know and understand his religion, can read," thus "filling a vacuum" that existed "though there is a large volume of literature on our religion." The result is the set of three books under review, being sold at a subsidized rate of a modest Rs 10 each only.

However laudatory the scheme, the execution leaves much to be desired. It is not easy to divide religious thought into three parts, without sacrificing continuity or constancy, and sometimes both. Ervad Motafram sadly falls into both these traps. For example, in his Elementary Course book, he tells us that "Zarathushtra was born in Rae in the province of Azerbaijan, in a very distant past." In the intermediate course, where he tries to rise above the elementary stories narrated in the first book and prove that Zarathushtra was a historical personage, he concludes that the Prophet was not a Persian or Median but a Bactrian and his birthplace was Chorasmia in Bactria. As for the distant past, if we were to search for a definite date, Motafram — even in the Advanced Course — offers no concrete proof of the era in which our Prophet lived. He only, rather limply, states: "we can say this much with certainty that he must have lived before the historical event of the conquest of Assyria by the Medes in 606 BC."

There are innumerable such examples where two of the texts contradict each other — a difference not very apparent if one is to read the books in the manner they were written. But an inquiring mind — even if it be that of a child — may not necessarily confine itself to learning the basics of the religion before proceeding to its more advanced stages. In such a case, the questioning mind is left with more questions unanswered than when it started. To elucidate by stating just one more example: did primitive man offer worship to stones, trees, the elements, out of fear (as mentioned in Volume I) or because it was his way of expressing his feelings (a more positive thought) at the phenomena of nature (as indicated by the author in Volume III)?

Yet another inherent defect in the construction of the books is that there is little continuity in the three titles — especially Volume II, the Intermediate Course — which concerns itself mainly with *Asha*, the principal plank of the

Zoroastrian religion. The concept of *Asha* is very important in Zoroastrianism, and this is all the more reason, why a part of this subject should have been dealt with in the first volume to give the reader a comprehensive overview of this important precept. If the books are a graded course, the same topics should run through all of them — being dealt with differently and in greater detail in each volume.

However, when the last volume concentrates on institutions and practices (sudreh-kusti, fire-temple, repentance of sins, disposal of the dead etc.) and Zoroastrian rituals and ceremonies (the purificatory rituals of *padyab, nahn, barshnum*; the high liturgical services of *yazashne, visperad, vendidad* and other ceremonies of *afrikan, farokshi* and *stum*), there is no reason for dissent. The performing of these ceremonies would be of primary interest only to athornans and future priests, and its inclusion in the last book (an advanced study) is apt.

Rising above these constraints, placed, as the foreword indicates, by the publishers, the books contain within the 400 pages a mine of information. Of particular interest — even to the layman — would be the chapter on how an Atash Bahram is established. Here we learn that 16 different kinds of fire are used in the consecration, and these include the corpse-burning fire and the fire of lightning after which a total number of 1128 Yasnas and Vendidads are performed for the consecration.

The books also shed light on Zoroastrian Scriptures — a subject comparatively less dealt with in other similar texts. Two other chapters (also in Volume III) which compel attention because of their novelty are "Zoroastrian Cosmogony" and "Zoroastrianism in Existing Times." Volume III also has a 17-page dictionary of Zoroastrian terms: a positive asset to the book and the series.

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is the transcription and translation (with explanation and notes) in English of some short significant Zoroastrian prayers. Enjoined as we are to say our prayers in the original Avesta-Pazand (the book explains the reason for this practice), it is interesting to learn the meaning of our prayers. And their right pronunciation too. The translations, however, could be much better.

Of course, this is a minor criticism. But generally the tone of the book is very pedantic. And this is, sadly, a put-off. Zoroastrianism has much to offer, and the study need not be a dry-as-bone affair. Even text books on subjects less interesting are written today with verve and flair. The author has not aimed at such a zest in the writing. And to strike a chord with the young, a more vivacious style is required. It has been achieved by the many new books published recently on Zoroastrianism but, unfortunately, not the books under review.

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shell of our making. This attitude does not augur well for the healthy growth and progress of the community.

No doubt, the Parsis have distinguished themselves in various professions like law, medicine, engineering, architecture, journalism and so on. Parsis have become ministers and ambassadors and a Parsi, the late Sir Homi Mody, also became a Governor. They have shed lustre, not only on their own community, but on the country of their adoption. To my mind that is not enough. The Parsi mass must bestir itself. It is a pity to observe the present apathy of the Parsis at large towards national affairs, and much more so, towards such an elementary duty as the exercise of their franchise.

If this outlook and attitude persists, I feel no doubt that the future of our co-religionists is bleak. I feel that a community without any significant role in political life is a community without the levers of power in its hands; and without the levers of power, a community may at best be self sufficient, but at the

same time it will be a puny, self-centred one without the strength to strike.

If we are to hope for a bright future we must have the determination to solve the problems of the community and such determination pre-supposes unity of aim and purpose and an effective leadership. The community has to get rid of factions and petty disputes and be of one mind and one will under one leader. But where is the leadership to be found? Certainly not among the aimless weaklings, however high the position they hold, or among businessmen who are good hoarders of black money.

A leader will have to be found who is possessed of a good intellect and far-sightedness, and honesty and sincerity of purpose like some of our *Sethias* of a past generation. Let us look ahead for a new direction to our communal existence without severing our links with what was good in the past, and the community will be put back on the rails.

At present the prospect seems bleak, but let us never despair of the future.

Reprinted from The Daily, August 25, 1984.

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all denominations and even to the laity. The Working Group for Mobeds is another body which has been quietly trying to do its mite for the upliftment of the priests. The K R Cama Oriental Institute gives scholarships to students who take up Avesta Pahlavi studies in schools and colleges and there are other charity trusts which extend help to deserving and genuine cases. There is also the watered-down scheme of the apex body of the community — the Parsi Punchayet of Bombay. The scheme was first envisaged by the late Maneck P Mistry and prepared by him and the late Ervad Dr Minocher D Karkhanavala in 1965. It was a restricted scheme on a limited scale 'whereby adequate facilities could be offered to thoroughly trained *yozdathregars*.' While in the process of being implemented by the Punchayet, Mistry suddenly passed away and the scheme which had been announced with much eclat in the Parsi press just fizzled away. To-day just a couple of *yozdathregars* carry out their duties in one of the agiaries in the suburbs of Bombay under this scheme.

And now there are rumbles again about formulating new schemes for the

revival of the priestly class. But it is easily discernible from the above that no amount of financial incentives will bring about a spurt in the number of full-time priests. Such schemes will only bring further degradation on the profession. It is a fervent appeal to such formulators not to make beggars of the priests but to make them the blessers of

**The dedicated,
sincere and hard-
working priest seems
to be an individual of
the past.**

the community. This is not the time for schemes or recommendations, for half-baked and botched reports or for a central body and an elaborate secretariat to govern the priesthood. Now is the time to act, and the simplest, most efficient and useful action would be to ignite the spark of devotion and dedication, of respect and zeal in the sons of priestly families. This is where we have failed miserably.

The present condition has been ac-

centuated by the priests themselves, the profession is in shambles. They are responsible for the conditions that prevail to-day and it is upto them to remedy the state of affairs. They have to strive hard to re-establish the exalted status of the *athornan*. There is no question that if the present trend continues, the class will simply fade away. If efforts are not made in the right direction and concrete steps are not taken, no organization or committee will ever succeed. A religious revival has been initiated but it has not gone beyond the occasional social evening or public lecture or even a farcical drama. All these will not help unless the laity arouses itself from its apathy and the priests exert to educate and dedicate themselves to the profession with grave sincerity.

With the help and co-operation of one another, we should strive to bring back the proud and respected traditions of the Zoroastrian priesthood and with it establish firmly once again the glory that is the Zoroastrian religion. If one or two aspirants join the profession as full-fledged priests during the year, it will be a precious and beautiful contribution to continuation of the traditions of our community.



Time and Talents turns fifty

A leading social organization in Bombay that does unto others.

Indu Saraiya

This September a remarkable women's organization celebrated its golden jubilee. The Time and Talents Club entered its 50th year of voluntary activities ranging from music to mother care, handicrafts to holiday homes, galas to gourmet food, self-help to samaritanism, medicare to meditation. Celebrations started with celebrity conductor Zubin Mehta conducting the New York Philharmonic in a five-concert series in India.

It all started when a handful of like-minded ladies, back in 1934, yearned to do unto others what they would have others do unto them. They found just the opportunity they were looking for one September afternoon. The three Mulla cousins, Gool, Hilla, and Sooni, met Roshan Sethna who had just returned from Rajasthan, having learnt the difficult art of jewel-making.

The cousins prevailed on Roshan to teach them this craft, while they, in turn, taught Roshan some other skills they had. From this exchange of skills grew a body of work which they decid-

ed to sell. With staunch support from mother Lady Jerbai Mulla and aunt Maneckbai Mulla, the sale took place, and the proceeds were disbursed to charities.

The success of the venture opened up endless possibilities, and attracted other women from all communities to chip in with their offerings. Weekly meetings began to be organized, and as the group became larger and larger, it was brought under one banner and christened the Time and Talents Club. The name was given by the late Gool Shavaksha (nee Mulla), its founder-president and moving spirit, after the club of the same name in England.

Since the object of the club, as its name suggests, was to harness women's special talents and to provide suitable outlets for their work in the larger interests of charity, soon this nucleus of woman-power burgeoned into a growing network of several groups, with tentacles reaching out into various spheres and touching many women's lives.

Today, since 50 years of its incep-

tion, the 250-member strong club is on a sound footing, and encompasses 21 flourishing sub-committees, each of which actively contributes to the city's special ethos.

But raising and donating money to charities is not the total answer to social help, to the club's way of thinking. Club members believe that support must be given, not indiscriminately, but where it is deserved. In this spirit, members volunteer their precious time and assume onerous responsibilities on others' behalf.

The Club recognizes degrees and diversities, and provides different infrastructures for gaining maximum benefits. While raising funds had been the special preserve of the Club's celebrity music concerts and galas which naturally attract the limelight, many other wings have quietly and effectively bro-

Inauguration of Victory Stall in 1962. Ladies from left: Thrity Talyarkhan, Pipsy Wadia, Vijaylakshmi Pandit, Gool Shavaksha, Mary Cusette and Lady Jerbai Mody.

The object of the club was to harness women's special talents to provide suitable outlets for their work in the larger interests of charity.

ught redress to hundreds of needy persons. Because such activities are unglamorous, they are not widely known, and therefore, their benefits are underpublicized. Raising funds and dispensing charity are symbolic activities of the club; neither has meaning without the other.

The Helping Hand

This is, literally, what it is; a hand extending help to the needy through sympathy, counselling, and guidance with the help of the club's own panel of professional experts in their own fields. The Helping Hand shows women the means to cope with their difficulties relating to education, employment, marriage, divorce etc. and often provides the wherewithal.

The centre from which the Helping Hand operates is a tiny vestry of the St Sebastian Church on St Xavier's Street, Girgaum, Bombay. Volunteers man the centre on Tuesdays and Fridays (except on Bank Holidays) from 10.30 am to 12 noon. They are available for counselling and help to anyone who needs them. The club has registered some 500 cases, and successfully helped most of them.

Most people who avail themselves of this social help are referred there through friends or through neighbours spreading the word. Cases are carefully registered for a nominal fee of 25 paise and meticulously processed. Simple forms are filled, stating pertinent particulars regarding age, family income, reason for help, etc. The volunteers then make their recommendations to the club's managing committee and a

solution is worked out.

Other activities of the club

Annual sale for self-employed women: Many women with skills but no outlets for selling their wares benefit through these annual sales. Left alone with their special expertise, such women would find it difficult, and too costly, to organize exhibition-cum-sales. The Time and Talents Club through its infrastructure gives these women the invaluable opportunity, to reap a rich harvest from their special talents by organizing exhibition-cum-sales.

Holiday Home for working women

In these days of spiralling prices, holidays seem a luxury out of reach of many working women. The Time and Talents Club makes this possible by arranging and subsidizing two holiday sessions per year in Matheran in May and October.

In each month, two batches of about 20 ladies go for 15 days to Matheran.

Old Clothes Committee

These days there is a flourishing market for old clothes—specially if they are the trendy unisex jeans and shirts which the 'raddiwalas' sell to the chawl children and adults for fancy prices. The Time and Talents Club provides an opportunity for this special kind of charity, finding an outlet for the non-profit-minded. It appeals to those who want to dispose of their old clothes for meaningful charities to donate them to the Club, which, in turn, sells them to chawl-dwellers at throw-away prices through their annual jumble sales. Experience has shown that free gifts of such clothes are not advisable; they deprive prospective buyers of two things—their self-respect and the satisfaction of having found a good bargain.



Right: sale of work of self-employed women.

Above: Jal Sett and Banoo Cama at the West View Holiday Home function.

The India connection

Zubin Mehta talks about his music and his roots

Harold C Schonberg

New York — Some years ago Zubin Mehta was quoted as saying that he would never conduct any orchestra in India or Russia, countries hostile to Israel. This year he took the New York Philharmonic on a tour of the Far East, partly sponsored by Citibank, which began with Tokyo and culminated with five concerts in Delhi, Calcutta and Bombay, ending September 19.

Inconsistency? Change of heart? Mehta has been known to say things in the heat of the moment and then retract them. When he was music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic he had some nasty words to say about the musicians of the New York Philharmonic, in effect charging them with being a spoiled bunch of prima donnas, nowhere near as good a group as his. He would not marry the Philharmonic if it was the last orchestra on earth. Some years later he stood before them, an invited guest. He apologized handsomely — handsomely enough to become its leader not long after that.

[The Philharmonic cancelled two performances in Malaysia because of the government's request that Ernest Bloch's *Schelomo*, a Hebrew Rhapsody for Cello and Orchestra be dropped from the program. The orchestra agreed not to play *Schelomo*, but changed its mind after outrage was voiced by US Jewish organizations and government officials.]

Recently Mehta, spoke about India, Israel, music and politics.

He was excited about the trip. Born in Bombay 48 years ago, Mehta left when he was 18 to study in Vienna. It was not until 1967 that he returned, as conductor of the touring Los Angeles Philharmonic. Since then he has visited



India several times with his family.

He popped off about India in 1978, over disagreements between him and the Indian government about a tour with the Israel Philharmonic, of which he is lifetime conductor. At that time he angrily said that he would never conduct in India until it recognized Israel. Now he has calmed down a bit.

"I can't hold the New York Philharmonic responsible for my statements," he said. "And when it came down to it, I could not conceive of an Asiatic tour without going to my own country."

Mehta's roots in Indian life and culture run deep. He described the forthcoming visit as "more nationalistic than religious, though I am religious. My temples are only in India. When I am in India I go to the religious ceremonies. I am a Parsi, and we are brought up to practice the symbols. Our religion goes

back to Zoroaster 4,000 years ago. He taught the difference between right and wrong, and it became the religion of the Persian empire."

"I love India," he said, "and it is important for my spirit to go back. I feel I belong so much. When I land in Bombay it's like I never left. I never even changed my passport, though I could have become a Swiss citizen some years ago. Today there are about only 90,000 Parsis in the world. We are dwindling."

Aside from his spiritual involvement, there is another reason why Mehta is eager to conduct in India. He wants to bring Western music here.

Above: Mehta's mother welcoming Nancy and Zubin at Bombay Airport.

Facing page: 'Arti' for the Mehtas at the Taj Intercontinental.



India, unlike Japan or even the resurgent China, is not a country that has shown much interest in Western classical music. It has few orchestras and has not produced instrumentalists or singers who figure on the international scene. But of one thing Mehta is positive, and that is the response of the Indian public to the music he is going to bring. He believes that Indians will respond to Beethoven, Wagner, Bach and the other composers he will be conducting.

For many years Mehta has been much more allied professionally to Israel than to his native country. The lifetime conductor of the Israel Philharmonic, he spends several months each year there and is constantly taking the orchestra on tour. He finds in Israel a people whose beliefs are close to those he learned as a Parsi.

"I first visited Israel in 1961, and I felt so much at home," he said. "It even looked like home. The people reminded me of my own people. They are like Parsis. They, like us, have kept a racial identity. Israel is my country, almost. I am so much a native there that I can be very critical. When I disagree with Israeli politics I argue with the Israelis."

He has picked up some Hebrew in his years with the Israel Philharmonic, but mostly he talks Yiddish there, with complete fluency.

Last year it was announced that Mehta's contract with the New York Philharmonic had been extended to 1990. He has now been with the orchestra for seven years and has not been receiving a uniformly favourable press. It should be added that few Philharmonic conductors in recent decades have received a favourable

New York press. Mehta's predecessor, Pierre Boulez, had a hard time of it. Before Boulez, Leonard Bernstein was the favourite whipping boy of the New York critics, who felt that the Bernstein ego was getting in the way of his music. And so back to Dimitri Mitropoulos and, in the 1930s, John Barbirolli.

Nobody, in or out of the New York Philharmonic disputes Mehta's professionalism. But in many critical circles there is a feeling that he is more concerned with color and effect than with substance; that he can be inconsistent; that his strength is mainly in the big Romantic showpieces rather than in Beethoven and his predecessors.

Nor have the Philharmonic players wholeheartedly accepted him. They like him well enough as a person. They admire his clear beat and general technique. He does have his supporters. But there are also those who feel that he is not particularly inspiring musically. Of course, it can also be said that the Philharmonic, like any major orchestra, contains 30 or 40 players who think they can do as well or better on the podium than any of the maestros who address them.

On the other hand, musical administrators in New York look on Mehta with a great deal of respect.

"I know that some think him a rather superficial musician," says one respected figure who prefers to remain anonymous. "But the man is a real pro. And he is genuinely interested in the orchestra. Other conductors give the impression that they are interested only in their own careers. Mehta is committed. He has the ears of his players; he personally attends all auditions when there is a vacancy in the orchestra; he works

well with management. He is a good man for the orchestra."

Mehta shrugs his shoulders at criticism. He insists that honest criticism never bothers him. What he does not like is snobbishness in criticism. He thinks that too many critics are too eager to parade their knowledge, and he has little respect for that type.

He knows, with mingled irritation and amusement, that many regard him as a glamour-boy conductor, and he cannot figure out why. He considers himself a serious musician who has mastered his scores. He has very few platform mannerisms—certainly nothing along the podium acrobatics of a Leonard Bernstein. He always comes

"Nobody ever called me 'Zubi baby' and the writer who first used the expression later admitted that he had made it up."

out soberly, does his stint, takes his bows and retires.

"I spent 16 years in Los Angeles building up what I thought was a pretty good orchestra," he said. "I was too busy to be a glamour boy. But there were those reports about me, and those stories about the orchestra calling me 'Zubi, baby.' Nobody ever called me 'Zubi, baby,' and the writer who first used the expression later admitted to me that he had made it up. I don't have the time to be a glamour boy. I give five months a year to the Philharmonic, three months to Israel, do at least one new opera production a year and take a month off. In 1987 I will have a sabbatical for the calendar year and will conduct the Philharmonic only on an American tour. Perhaps I can do more opera that year. I love to conduct opera."

Of his tenure at the New York Philharmonic, he said, "I would say that after seven years there is much more honesty between us. There is a more relaxed relationship. Everything is in the open. I believe that today I am at a stage where I can convince my orchestra of my musical ideas."

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