

Parisiana

Strife at the Sodawaterwalla Agiary

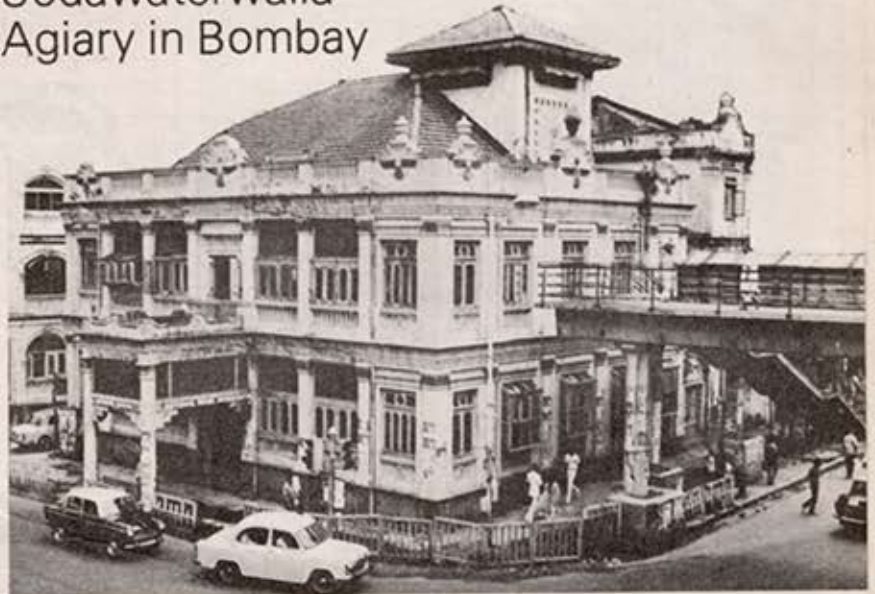
Arnavaz S. Mama

Its wood and glass windows are innocent of paint; its plaster-blistered walls are raw. The 111-year-old Sodawaterwalla Agiary stands desolate among the hurly-burly of traffic at Marine Lines, a prime urban site in Bombay city. Mutely testifying to a generation's neglect, the agiary is also a vivid example of strained relations between mobeds and behdins in the community.

"There is a tussle going on; one side or the other is trying to sell off the site and make money," says Shiavax Vakil, legal luminary and ex-trustee of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP), who has been following the events at the agiary. In the upshot, the concerned mobeds feel used and deserted.

The tussle has been obvious enough: a spate of public notices have appeared in the press under the signature of Jal Lovji Mody, "the founder's family member and managing trustee," vilifying Ervad Farok Mobedji, panthaky at the Sodawaterwalla Agiary, Dr Peshotan Peer, panthaky at the Tata Agiary at Bandra, Hormusji Kapadia, joint secretary of the BPP, Cmdr Nariman Vacha, secretary of the N.N. Wadia and R.N. Wadia Charities and Hormuzdiar Choksey of N.B. Choksey Jewellers.

A tussle between three trustees and the priests bedevils the functioning of the Sodawaterwalla Agiary in Bombay

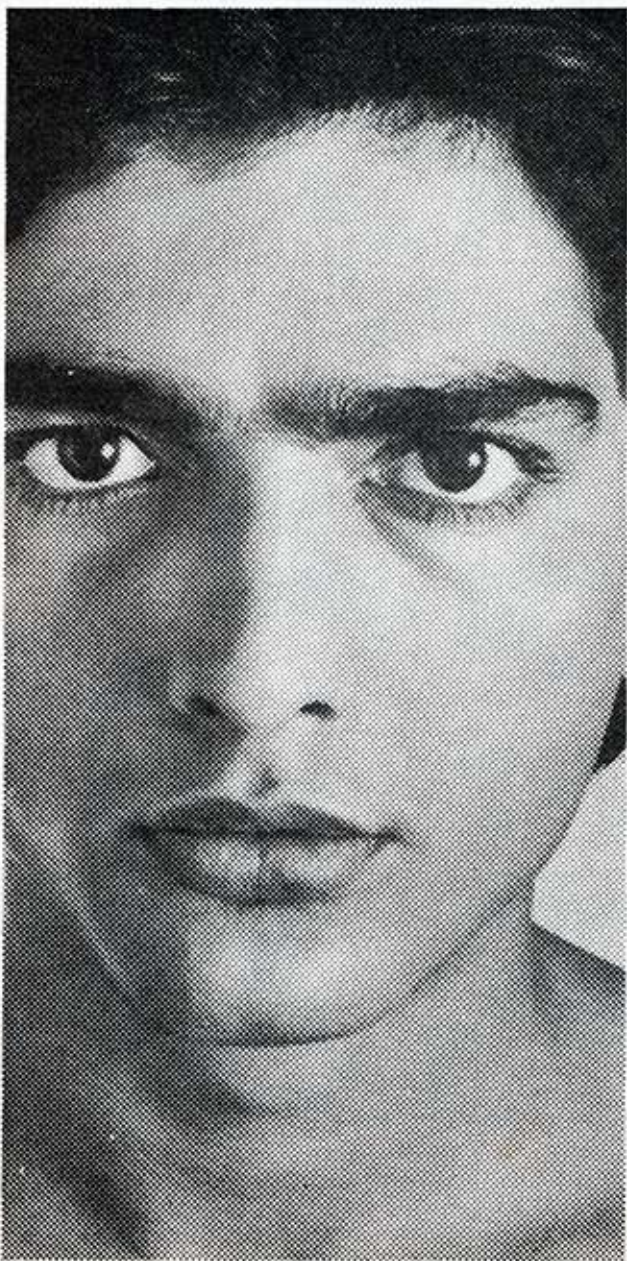


Mody is accusing Kapadia, Vacha and Choksey of conspiring to sell off the agiary; of liquidating the corpus of the trust; of using his and his wife's illness to edge the family out of the

agiary's affairs. Mobedji is being accused by the Modys of theft of agiary property and of receipts from devotees towards kathi funds; of not being present throughout the day to tend to the



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holy fire; of hiring out the upper hall without permission and pocketing the proceeds. Peer, the Modys' claim, is guilty of aiding and abetting Mobedji.

Mobedji and Peer contend that being priests they cannot possibly think of selling an agiary. An agiary after all provides a livelihood for priests.

Mobedji undertook the Sodawaterwalla panthak, say Peer and Mobedji, on the clear understanding that the sacred fire would be maintained with proper rituals, but that the agiary itself would remain closed to the public as happens at the Langrana Agiary at Fort, Bombay. Despite the agreement, they note, the Sodawaterwalla Agiary has still remained consistently open to the community. The trustees however conveniently forgot this agreement, say Mobedji and Peer, and are using Mobedji's absence from the agiary as justification for withholding his salary since March '84 and have done nothing to protect him from Mody's aspersions.

Mobedji also notes the upstairs hall was used only once for a wedding for which no payment was demanded or made.

Mody's case

The interview with Mody on June 19, 1985 did not begin until the venue shifted from his own flat to the one across the landing on the same floor at Chaman Chambers, Marine Lines where he introduced burly Burjor Marfatia as his nephew and legal heir.

Marfatia noted that when the agiary was founded in 1874 by Jamshedji Amaria, there were three founding trustees—Framji Bilia, Aimai Sorabji Sodawaterwalla and Jehangirji D. Patel. Aimai used to manage the agiary, subject to the general supervision of the other trustees, noted Marfatia, after referring to what he called the trust deed.

There are seven trustees on the board today: Aloo Jal Mody and Jal Lovji Mody—both aged and ailing, Behram A. Soonawala, Hoshedar F. Pavri, Hormusji Kapadia, Cmdr Nariman Vacha and Hormuzdiar Choksey. Of these, Aloo is the only descendant of the founders, being as Jal Mody notes, a grand niece of Aimai Sodawaterwalla. Jal, as her husband, can claim to be the "founder's family member." Kapadia and Vacha are the BPP's nominees on the board as per an order of the Bombay High Court of 1927 which en-

titles the punchayet to nominate two members on the Sodawaterwalla Agiary's board of trustees.

Until Gustad Antia, ex-secretary of the BPP, retired in July, 1978, Antia handled everything, said Marfatia. After that Mody began to handle the agiary affairs himself, Marfatia noted, until "he and Aloo aunty began their bimonthly visits to the hospital. During



Mobedji: "prepared to leave"
(Photos: Homiyar Mistry)

this time (of ill health), about one and a half years, trouble began to brew."

Alleging that the other trustees "held meetings one after another without intimating us... a total of six meetings between December 24, 1982 and July 8, 1983," Marfatia claimed, "One day we were informed that Farok Mobedji was appointed on a salary of Rs 1,250 per month. At the same time another clerk was appointed at Rs 200 and a sepoy at Rs 25 (sic)." "We are paying more than our income," said Mody, who declared that the annual income of the agiary is Rs 17,200.

Marfatia says, "My friends are trustees of several agiaries, so getting a (mobed) is not difficult for us. Even now we have a mobed (who may be ready to take over the Sodawaterwalla panthak) as retainer for Rs 1,000 per month." Warning to the subject, Marfatia continued, "Within 15 minutes I can get a mobed for Rs 500."

However, "in January or February 1984 or December '83" Marfatia declared that Mody sent for Mobedji. "We had two jashans performed to give the mobed a fair chance, one on *roj Meher*, *mah Meher* and the other sometime in the course of the same month. We even presented him with a shawl at the instance of Aloo aunty, costing Rs 185," Marfatia noted. "By the end of March '84 we realized that (Mobedji) was never at the agiary bet-

ween 7 am and 7 pm. Then we found certain items missing. We decided to take over charge. When we tried to take over on April 15, 1984, Peshotan Peer, who had been authorized by the BPP nominees not to hand over charge, went so far as to change the locks even of our office. Peer had collected five to six Parsi weight lifters... threatened us with physical violence."

The chain-smoking Marfatia charged that the other trustees were using Mobedji's "lack of intelligence to make a cat's paw out of him." Claiming theft of several items from the agiary including silverware and utilization of the upper hall for navjote and wedding ceremonies, Marfatia accused Mobedji of charging hall hire fees plus Rs 50 for electricity and pocketing the amount.

Marfatia notes that four notices have been issued to Mobedji to quit. Since April '84 the mobed has been living and working at the agiary without a salary, says Marfatia. At a meeting of the board of trustees called by Mody on July 4, 1984 which only the two Modys and Pavri attended, it was argued that Mobedji's appointment was invalid and that the "three persons who had acted on behalf of the Parsi Punchayet would be liable for the losses caused to the trust..." It was also decided to take legal action, including the filing of a criminal complaint, if so advised.

On September 12, 1984 appeared Mody's first public notice against Mobedji-Peer in *Mid-day*, notifying the public that Mobedji's services were terminated. Another on November 11, again in *Mid-day*, also charged Vacha and Kapadia, "mere representatives of the Parsi Punchayet," and Choksey. To the original list of misdemeanors was added "sacrilege and defilement of our sacred fire" and further noted, "we believe that all those who indulge in, encourage and further" defile the "holy and sacred agiary fire, cease to be Zoroastrians."

Vacha and Kapadia countered with a notice in *Jam-e-Jamshed*, November 15, 1984 announcing that Mobedji continued to be panthaky of the agiary and that they were not a party to the meeting of July 4, which authorized termination of Mobedji's services. However, Marfatia quoted from a letter from Kapadia dated January 9, 1985 stating Mobedji's appointment was "a stop-gap arrangement," and chuckled

contentedly that Kapadia "was shifting ground." On April 6 and 10, 1985 came two more notices in the *Jam-e-Jamshed* purporting to inform the public that "the Sodawaterwalla Agiary, the land on which it stands, the property thereon and therein are not for sale." Cautioning the public against Mobedji, Peer, Kapadia, Vacha and Choksey, the notice added, "investigations are being conducted to trace why the total quantum of yearly salaries alone, already disbursed, exceeds the total yearly revenue of the agiary trust, resulting in the utilization of accumulated balance as also part of the trust corpus (capital investments) towards such unauthorized expenditure." To this Burjor Antia of Mulla and Mulla, the BPP's solicitors, replied with a notice in *Jam-e-Jamshed*, April 13, noting that no meeting of trustees has been held to sell agiary property, said Marfatia.

Marfatia says, "Their whole idea is to denude the funds of the agiary and then say, '*Paisa khalas hai guyach. Agiary vechi kaariye.*' (As there are no funds, sell the agiary)."

Mody was upset that for the first time, the 1984 muktad ceremonies of his family could not be held at Sodawaterwalla Agiary due to the unpleasantness, and instead had to be held at the Dadysett Agiary at Fountain.

Mulla and Mulla filed a caveat (a notice to be heard in court to avoid ex parte judgement) in the Bombay City Civil Court and the High Court on April 20. "No innocent man files for caveat," affirms Marfatia. Noting that the agiary "is the second or third smallest of the six Sodawaterwalla trusts," Marfatia notes that at "Vasai or Nallasopara we are going ahead with a widows' home... We are not worried as far as finance is concerned... All I say is, 'just clear out.' We don't want to see your face. We're willing to make good all the damage."

Marfatia, who functioned throughout as spokesman, frequently interjected to Mody, "Correct me if I'm wrong," but Mody's few comments attested to emotional upheaval rather than a clear memory or reasoning ability. Indeed, no historical perspective on the agiary could be elicited. Neither Mody nor Marfatia could answer any questions about the founder or their exact relationship to him or about the main jubilees or events in the life of the 111-year-old institution. No monogra-

ph had ever been commissioned or published, they said, which testified to the level of interest in the agiary within the family.

The Mobedji—Peer story

Vacha briefly etched the scenario that preceded the Mobedji appointment. One Bahadur Panthaky, now manager of Albless Baug, was the officiating priest at the Sodawaterwalla Agiary but he was not deemed satisfactory

Being priests, they
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because he did not attend the atash properly, fought with the trustees and insulted a senior trustee. The trustees asked Panthaky to leave, Vacha said.

The search for a replacement led social worker and businessman Hector Mehta to tap his Dadysett Agiary connection on behalf of the BPP trustees. Said to be a daily devotee at the Dadysett Agiary, Mehta had at one time been instrumental in helping Peer and Mobedji out of an awkward procedural tangle at the Dadysett Agiary where both function as independent panthakias having their own clients. Hence Mehta enjoyed considerable leverage with them. Only in deference to Mehta's request, Farok Mobedji, his brother Jehangir and Peshotan Peer agreed to meet with Kapadia and take on the assignment, said Mobedji. Mobedji noted and Peer confirmed, that the arrangement was clearly spelt out that while the Sodawaterwalla Agiary fire would be regularly tended, "there should be no complaint that the agiary was closed and no one was there." To this Kapadia is said to have agreed, though Mobedji's demand for a salary of Rs 1,500 per month was scaled down to Rs 1,250.

Farok Mobedji was appointed panthaky in May '83, said Peer. "We told them that we are not responsible for the kathi which approximates Rs 600-700 per month. We had said that the trustees would be responsible for

providing the kathi. They agreed just to get us in... However, the Irani hotel keeper in the vicinity used to supply the kathi directly. From May to October, Mobedji was paid." When payment stopped for two months, Peer took Mobedji's case to Dr Aspi Golwalla, chairman of the BPP. "When Golwalla intervened," Peer continued, "Kapadia interjected 'Where do we have the funds? We cannot pay.'" Between April and November '83, Kapadia's attitude had changed, said Peer. "However, up to January '84, Mobedji was paid. After that Mody came into the picture."

Peer calls Jal Mody "a nice man — *khandani manas*," whom he says he has known slightly for a long time as Mody, a Kadmi, has been coming to the Dadysett Agiary for years. However, Peer notes, that "behind Mody is a man called Burjor Marfatia, a very shrewd person."

Peer claims that Boman Minochehr-Homji, vice-president of the Jashan Committee, informed them that the Sodawaterwalla Agiary was up for sale. It is Peer's conjecture, based on hearsay as well as certain background knowledge, that Marfatia is using Mody to his own ulterior motives, by spinning a web of aspersion on others. Peer notes that at a meeting at the agiary attended by Choksey, Kapadia, Mody, Mobedji and Peer, Marfatia said, "I am going to send Farok to jail. At the moment I'm placing an allegation for Rs 50,000 (against Mobedji) but if you don't listen (and leave the agiary) I'll make it one lakh."

"I am very angry," says Peer. "Why haven't the trustees cleared Mobedji's position? This is the way conspiracy works." Peer suspects the Freemasonic tie that binds Kapadia and Marfatia. For at another meeting at the BPP which included Golwalla, Choksey, Kapadia, Mehta, Mobedji and himself (Peer is not quite clear if Vacha was present), Peer says, "To our surprise Kapadia made two allegations (against Mobedji): one that Mobedji is not present at the agiary. Because we had entered this on blind faith, we had made no written agreement. When I raised my voice, Kapadia indicated that I was being rude. But when you behave like this have we no voice?" Despite their verbal agreement to only tend the fire and keep the agiary closed, Peer notes, "To this day the agiary has been kept open."

Kapadia's second allegation against Mobedji according to Peer, was that this panthaky is not reputable. But, says Peer, "the boys (Farok and Jehangir Mobedji) are quite innocent. Just because they do not know the art of reply, will you place false allegations against them? Justice must be served. Golwalla said, 'Aapre kai be karsu (We'll do something).'"

Regarding the April 15 encounter when Marfatia alleged Peer and Mobedji had lined up Parsi weight lifters at the agiary to intimidate them, Peer explained that Marfatia had threatened Mobedji earlier. "We were prepared in case he resorted to violence." Peer quotes Marfatia as saying, "Jaw bud-dha, hu tune be jailma mukas (Listen old man, I'll send you to jail)." Peer says he replied, "I know you, you're a first class rascal. I'll show you who's going to jail."

Mobedji notes that as a priest, it would never even occur to him to sell an agiary. As an independent panthaky working at the Dadysett Agiary he says he has been doing quite well and never sought the Sodawaterwalla appointment. Although he has not been paid since March '84, Mobedji claims he runs the Sodawaterwalla Agiary on his own money, paying Rs 20 per day to an assistant mobed, Soli Daruwalla, to tend the fire, Rs 7 per day to a Parsi to clean the agiary premises and Rs 7 per day to a non-Parsi to clean the rear accommodation.

Mobedji says, that though these notices have affected his prestige, those who know him have stuck by him. He notes that Marfatia called him home one day to say "Get out or what the older panthaky sold (it is alleged that the prior panthaky, in league with those at Chaman Chambers, sold off many of the agiary's vessels, lampshades etc.) we shall lay upon you. *Bairi baccha ne samalje* (Look after your wife and children)." Mobedji notes that he responded by stating "I do not know you, but I am prepared to leave when those who installed me here tell me to go." Mobedji claims that Marfatia threatened that he will not only uproot Mobedji from the Sodawaterwalla Agiary but from the Dadysett Agiary as well.

Regarding Mody's allegation that the agiary's upper hall is being used for *lagans* and navjotes, Mobedji noted that there has been only one Irani wedding solemnized by him at the Soda-

terwalla Agiary which was followed by a few snacks served to the 35 guests present — S.R. Vakil was one of them, he said. No payment was made for the use of the hall and none demanded, said Mobedji. In fact, he said, a rich relative of the wedded pair bequeathed Rs 6 lakhs for necessary repairs to the agiary. Mobedji sent the executors to talk it over with Mody / Marfatia at Chaman Chambers. What these executors saw and heard there prompted them to donate the amount to some other non-Zoroastrian organization, says Mobedji.

The electricity bill has not been paid for six to eight months, says Mobedji who estimates it at around Rs 4,000; yet the line has not been cut. The men who come to disconnect the supply, realizing that it's a place of worship, shy away for fear of a supernatural backlash, he laughs.

Mobedji, who claims to be able to afford such comforts of modern living as a TV, fridge and geyser by dint of hard work, alleges a nexus between Mody / Marfatia and his old enemy at Dadysett who is jealous of his well-being. "Aapri prosperity koi joi shaktu nathi (People look askance at our prosperity)."

The Mobedji brothers, Farok and Jehangir, are married to two sisters, Pinky and Suna. The two families are living together, currently at the Sodawaterwalla Agiary quarters. But they have accommodation at Grant Road and Mobedji says, "If they pay me for all these months, I'll go away."

All parties in the tangle, including Vacha and Kapadia, have a word of sympathy and respect for Mody, but, they aver, the letters and notices he is now signing are not his style. They

claim to have heard from various sources that Aloo and Jal Mody are badly in Marfatia's grip. The story gains credence from a news clipping of *The Times of India*, August 3, 1978 which notes that Burjor Marfatia, an ex-employee of the Dorab Tata Trust, was prosecuted for using forged documents, criminal breach of trust, falsification of funds of the Rosary Co-operative Housing Society, etc. Acquitted by the Sessions Court, the appeal was upheld by the High Court which sentenced Marfatia to one day's imprisonment and a fine of Rs 2,000. Marfatia's appeal was dismissed by the Supreme Court, the *Times* noted.

Kapadia, who after 40 years at the BPP has almost a civil service dread of controversy and journalists ingrained in him, notes that with the Sodawaterwalla file ready for handing over to the solicitors, silence is the best course to follow. He did mention however that there was no question of liquidating any bank deposits belonging to the Sodawaterwalla trust — all the documents were in Mody's custody. Kapadia also states that all the cheque books are with Mody so he is unable to make any payments. In fact, he noted, some premonsoon repair to the roof was paid for from his own personal bank account. After 40 years of dedicated service — Kapadia says he works till 7 pm every day and on Saturdays and Sundays too — this hydra controversy must seem to him one of life's nasty jokes, though he did not say so. Neither he nor Vacha can resign until the storm blows over. Vacha, though equally tight-lipped, was more pragmatic: "I've decided to ignore the whole thing. My contention is pay this mobed and let him go. Then we retire and you do what you like with your agiary."



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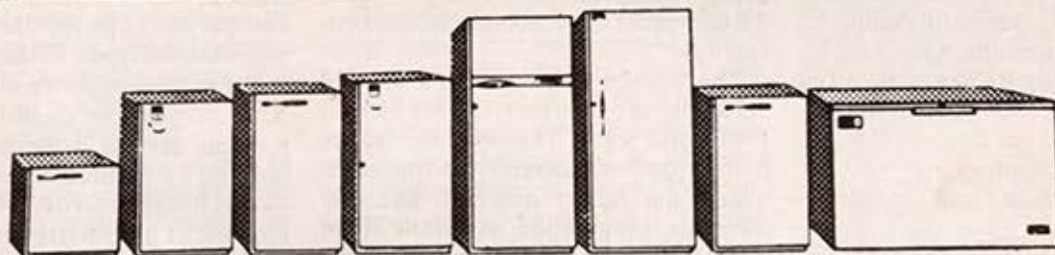
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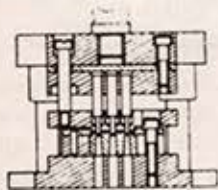
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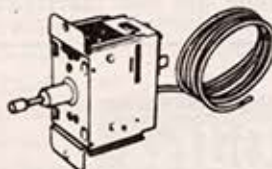
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From legal judgments to prayer books Union Press has retained its interest in calendars.

Parinaz Toddywalla

"Parsis are very particular about their calendars. They must have the date in bold type and the *roj* in smaller size," says Rohinton Chinoy, proprietor of Union Press, one of the oldest presses in Bombay. Having printed Parsi calendars for three decades, Chinoy can be considered an authority on the Parsi likes and dislikes in regard to calendars.

"I've introduced three to four new designs on the English calendar" but not on the Gujarati calendar. Also "new designs mean that there is escalation in costs."

"Since 1955 we started printing calendars," briefed Rohinton's father Parvez, who managed the Press from 1951 to 1961 and now lends an occasional helping hand to his son. "When Mr Pardiwalla of Calendar Mfg Co — the pioneer calendar makers — died, they discontinued printing calendars from 1951-52. They only had Gujarati calendars. I introduced English calendars also."

The demand for calendars was considerable and on an average Union Press had to accommodate a print order of 50,000 to one lakh calendars. Rohinton supplemented his father's remarks by clarifying that a print order of 50,000 would keep the letterpress machine busy for three months; in addition a two-color offset machine is engaged for two months each year on calendars. Pocket calendars are printed throughout the year.

Parvez remembers the time when they started printing prayer books. Some of the other publishers had "bad public relations then, therefore the

public wanted me to restart printing of these books." To introduce variety he printed them in varying sizes and different getups. As he admits jocularly, "Mane lobh thayo (I became ambitious)."

But Parvez acknowledges that he preferred undertaking "miscellaneous work because that involved less labour problems and no difficulty in finance." In the case of books there would be no immediate payment. It would take almost a year to print a book having a print order of 2000 copies, he explained, going into the details of the time-consuming nature of hand setting and proofing. Rohinton lamented that Gujarati compositors are almost a rarity now.

Rohinton is currently reprinting the *Kadmi Tamam Khordeh Avesta*. "In God's name I started. I don't know when I will recover my one to one and a half lakh rupees which are presently jammed," stated Rohinton. Since this book is not available in the market, Rohinton felt the need to print it.

History

When Parvez joined Union Press on Armistice Day on November 11, 1927 to assist his maternal uncle Pirojshaw Kharshedji Govewala, he remembers that they used to print "books in Gujarati to educate women at home, and law books in English. At that time there were many Parsi-owned printing presses. Even the composition, printing and binding work was done by Parsi labourers." Work would even be taken home where the children could

help out with simpler jobs.

In those days "regular work would be in the form of High Court judgments which would come in every evening at 5 p.m. and had to be ready by 10 a.m. the subsequent morning." This type of work involved night shifts and an intrinsic interest in law which Parvez felt was not suited to him, and hence discontinued.

The nature of work undertaken in 1857 when the Union Press started as a partnership between Nanabhai Rustomji Ranina and Nowroji Framji was mainly printing and publishing books, magazines and newspapers. The newspapers included *The Bombay Samachar* then edited by Maneckji Burjorji Minocherhomji and *Satya Prakash* edited by Karsandas Moolji. Ranina, a social reformer, pioneer of female education and author of many Gujarati books was a much known and respected figure in Bombay. He joined Framji, first as a manager and later became the proprietor. "His punctual and prompt execution of orders, coupled with the neatness of his work for which he obtained a medal and certificate of merit in the Paris Exhibition of 1866 gained him numerous customers," notes a booklet entitled *A sketch of the life and writings of Nanabhai Rustomji Ranina*.

Ranina's most cherished dream was to bring out an English to Gujarati dictionary. He worked on this in collaboration with Ardeshtir Framji Moos. He had reached the letter 's' of his dictionary when he died in 1900. His will, which bequeathed Union Press to his



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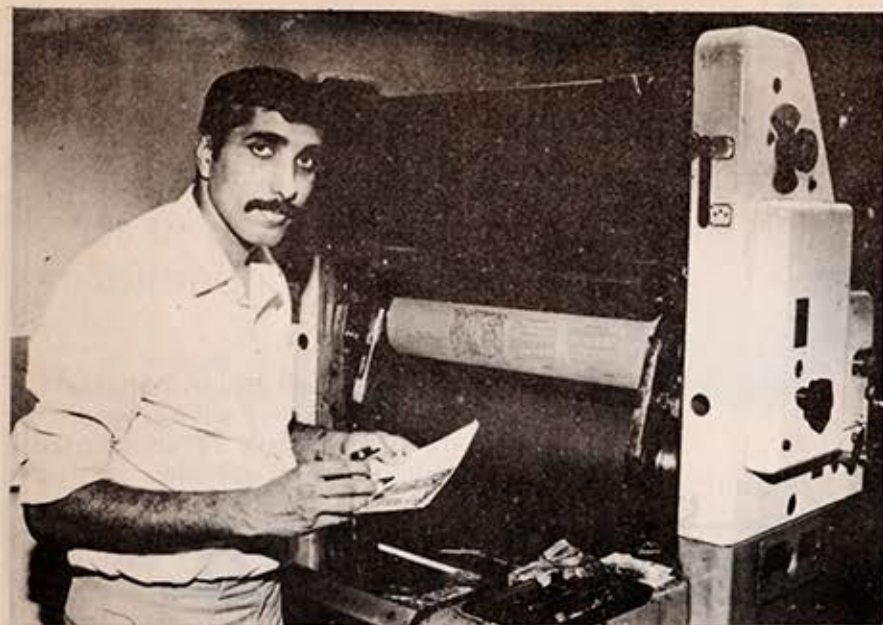


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Rohinton Chinoy (left) and father Parvez: demand for calendars considerable (Photos: Homiyar Mistry)

brother-in-law Kharshedji Bhikaji Govewala, had a condition stipulating that the dictionary must be completed. With the joint efforts of Ranina's son Rustomji and Kharshedji's son Pirojshaw, the dictionary was completed. Within a few months of Ranina's death, Kharshedji died leaving the press in the hands of his two sons Pirojshaw and Nusserwanji. "At that time the value of the press was Rs 1,500" disclosed Parvez. Nusserwanji was disinterested in the press within a few years and hence for 50 years the reputation of Union Press was preserved by Pirojshaw, assisted by his nephew Parvez.

On Pirojshaw's death in 1951, the responsibility fell on Parvez's shoulders. Most of Parvez's customers (around 15 to 20) were Parsis, though there were three or four Hindus who were his regular clients. Rohinton claims that his clientele includes Parsis and Hindus in equal proportions. While in the early days the Government of India was their regular client, their present list of clients include Air India and London Pilsner. Granting that most of their customers are "not finicky," Rohinton explains that they have a clear-cut policy with their clients: "No bargaining. Once we give dates we see that things are ready by then. We don't give them a chance to complain." During the busy season, Rohinton usually has 60-70 small jobs in hand which include invitation cards, numbering, punching, etc.

Though not inconveniencing their

customers, Union Press has changed premises four times, recalls Parvez. They started in a room opposite Anjuman Atash Bahram. Their next shift was to 413 Kalbadevi Road. Later they moved to Jambulwadi from where the Gujarati weekly *Mumbai Vartman* used to be printed. They are presently well-settled at 13 Homji Street near Horniman Circle. Rohinton is satisfied with their present office premises, occupying 1500 square feet on the ground floor of the Zoroastrian Association Building and explains that "space would be a problem only if we don't discard the old machines." Working with two offset machines and three letterpress machines, Union Press has a work force of 14 employees, informs Rohinton.

In 1981, Rohinton introduced the two offset machines because he predicts that "within 10 years letterpress machines will be no more in existence." The letterpress printing process is based on the use of metal types and blocks. Offset printing is a photo-mechanical process.

Rohinton's immediate plans are to diversify the press to include color jobs, multi-color folders, posters, annual reports, etc. Union Press also plans to reprint J.J. Modi's book *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees*. "Depending on the demand, I'd like to go in for a photocomposing unit and a four-color machine," said Rohinton who is now the main decision maker at Union Press. All the supervisory work is shouldered by Rohinton

while his father Parvez takes a detached overview of the press. Seated on the chair at the door of the entrance whereby he can shift his eyes from the machines within to the people without, Parvez spoke of his son's busy schedule in almost a reverential tone.

Parvez seems to be fully content that the responsibility no longer rests with him. This way he can avoid working with the "speedy *zamana na* speedy machines." Rohinton willingly took over the reins from his father when the latter had a heart attack in 1969.

But the new machines are not without their accompanying set of problems. Rohinton encounters difficulty in finding mechanics, operators and proofreaders. "Breakdowns in the letterpress (machines) I can handle myself, but I can't play around with sophisticated machines." While an experienced mechanic could earn Rs 100 a day, a printer could earn Rs 1,500 to Rs 2,000 a month," reveals Rohinton. Yet it is very difficult to find a good mechanic.

It is not easy to compete with this new set of small printers found on every alternate street. The government's decision to legalize imported machinery has made them face "too much competition." Actually two years back there was wide scope in this line, but today a new printer faces a work vacuum, says Rohinton. Realizing this, Rohinton is trying to quicken the pace "to meet the present demand for everything immediate — instant."

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Navjote audiovisual

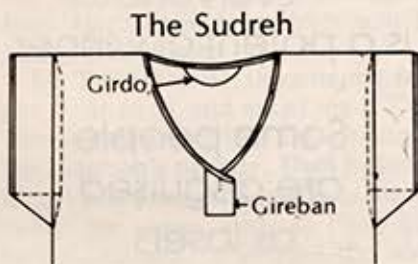
The Xavier Institute of Communications launches the first of a proposed series of audiovisuals on community customs.

"This is the first time that a full-fledged audiovisual has been used to create awareness of the Zoroastrian practices," explained Ms Feruzi Anjirbag, coordinator of AXIS, the audiovisual course at the Xavier Institute of Communications (XIC), referring to her production *Mazdayasno Ahmi, Mazdayasno Zarathushtrish* featuring the importance of the navjote ceremony in the life of a young Zoroastrian.

The first product in a series of audiovisuals intended to portray the beliefs and customs of the Parsi community, the navjote audiovisual comprises 74 color slides, accompanied by a pre-recorded cassette and a 16-minute sound track. The audiovisual was first screened before an audience of 2000 during a dinner organized for the delegates of the Fourth World Zoroastrian Congress on January 12, 1985 at the Co-opage grounds. Subsequently it was also screened during the third jashan and gahambar organized by the Committee for Economic Revival on April 20, 1985.

The reaction from general viewers has been "fairly positive" says Anjirbag and "much appreciated" notes Father Gerry D'Rozario, director of XIC, who was also responsible for shooting photographs for this audiovisual. He explained that though the audiovisual has not been screened often, "some Jains who viewed it got interested and wanted to use this modern medium to explain the teachings of their own religion."

The photographs were shot "partly during a navjote at Albless Baug and partly at the Athornan Madressa at Dadar. Basically we had to redo about half the shots for purposes of light and exposure," briefed Anjirbag. "A little western music is used as an interlude while a mother is shown adorning her little girl with jewellery after the navjote ceremony. The idea is to suggest elation, happiness," she continued.



As to what makes the audiovisual appealing, Anjirbag clarifies, "Words, pictures, music, pattern... all hold together as one unit... creating an atmosphere, an environment... making an impact." D'Rozario supplemented Anjirbag, "It is the totality which makes it viewable." Terming the project as "an ecumenical effort," Anjirbag specifies the contribution made by her teammates. Ms Neela Kapadia worked as production manager, Rahul D'Cunha was in charge of the sound track, D'Rozario looked after the visuals and Anjirbag wrote and researched the script with the guidance of Ms Arnavaz Chubb, a research student in Avesta Pahlavi.

Prior to the recording of prayers by Ervad Rustom Panthaki of the Dadar madressa, the AXIS team was a 'little awed' but afterwards they were "very impressed with our prayers," reported Anjirbag.

"This (audiovisual) is not intended as a thesis," clarifies Anjirbag. "It helps provide an insight. It is absolutely non-controversial. It is meant to evoke interest and excitement among the young and to encourage them to feel proud of being Zoroastrians."

For the young Zoroastrians with an enquiring mind, the audiovisual answers their queries: Who was the first to wear the kusti? Why must a sudreh-kusti be worn? Why is it tied in a parti-



'The kusti is a sign of the service of God, a token of sin ended...; and one is to tie it around and to gird it... with the religious incantation and the glorious Avesta.'

cular manner? Why is the kusti made of 72 threads? Why must a sudreh always have a gireban in front and a girdo behind?

"It is necessary to allow the people to get used to the idea of audiovisuals," opined Anjirbag who usually introduces the audiovisual before each screening. At present the AXIS team is working on an audiovisual on the subject of jashan for which they hope to find a sponsor. "In future it could even be used to convey different viewpoints on a controversial issue... to start people thinking on critical issues by presenting the two sides" and then leaving the viewer to arrive at his own conclusions.

"The purpose of an audiovisual is served if it manages to move you. And I think this audiovisual (on the navjote) has managed to do that," Anjirbag rationalized.

Presently there is a group of Parsis promoting the sale of this audiovisual priced at Rs 500. Anjirbag filling in the details adds, "We are in the process of making duplicates. These have not come back from Italy. We have got a couple of orders from abroad but have not been able to meet them." The production team wants people in the baus and those conducting religious classes to use this audiovisual. As Anjirbag succinctly puts it, "We have made the product, it is up to others to use it."

"Everyone
is a potential winner.

Some people
are disguised
as losers.

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their appearances
fool you"

— Kenneth Blanchard
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Readers' views are welcome on any subject of interest to the community and should be sent to the Editor, Readers' Forum, Parsiana, G.P.O. Box 892, Bombay 400 001. Letters are subject to editing for reasons of space and clarity.

"For whom the bell tolls"

In the article "For whom the bell tolls" (February 1985) *Parsiana* alleges that I 'physically accosted and verbally abused' Dr Kersey Antia at the Fourth World Zoroastrian Congress in Bombay. I did no such thing, and regard your accusation as malicious and unfounded. Unless a full retraction and apology for your slanderous remarks is printed in the next issue of *Parsiana*, I shall be obliged to undertake such action against you as my legal advisers counsel. I very much hope such a step will not be necessary, but I am left with the thought that by such irresponsible and inflammatory statements you are yourself fomenting the hatred and division in our community that you so often decry.

TAHAMTAN H. ARESH
California, U.S.A.

Antia's clarification

I am surprised on what grounds Tahamtan Aresh could sue *Parsiana*. He came out of the front entrance of the hall just as I was leaving the congress. Just prior to that, Mr T. Aresh's wife approached me and reproached me for doing Mr Peterson's navjote, questioning the example I have set for her children, stating that I did it for money from the Iranians or for name and fame. I replied to her very coolly but she returned to the hall through the back entrance and probably sent her husband after me.

Mr Tahamtan Aresh came out from the front foyer and asked me if I was Kersey Antia and if I had performed Mr Peterson's navjote. Then he hurled abusive language and insults at me and called me names such as "son of a bloody bastard," "you f'd the whole religion," etc. He asked me if I wore a sudreh-kusti myself. He assumed I did not wear a sudreh-kusti and so he questioned what right had I to put a sudreh-kusti on Mr Peterson. As a matter of fact, I have always worn a sudreh-kusti all my life, since my navjote, but he was too busy hurling insults at me to let me explain it to him.

He said so many offensive things, I don't remember them all. One of his themes was why did I not speak at the congress because if I did so, I would have known how many people were against me, that I chickened out, etc. He seemed to do his best to provoke me into a fight and there were not enough people to protect me but there were two men who tried to intervene and stood between him and me so that Mr Aresh could not beat me up as in all likelihood that had been his intention in catching me off guard when there

were not many around to protect me.

Without being immodest, I can say that it was only my innate cool that averted a fight and nothing else. The gist of my reply to him (and to his wife earlier) was that I've detailed my defense for the navjote in a booklet and they were welcome to refute it. I said the same thing to the ZS (Zoroastrian Studies) girls and it's not at all true, as mentioned in Bombay, that I avoided them or ran away as I had a drink of coconut water after that, picked up my congress certificate and talked with my sympathizers.

When I spoke on conversion in London at the W.Z.O. Conference on June 30, 1984, I was told by some attendants that Mr Aresh got wild as I spoke and wanted to beat me up and so I should avoid going near him.

KERSEY ANTIA
Illinois, U.S.A.

"A 'milestone'..."

Ms Arnavaz S. Mama, in "A 'milestone' round our necks..." (*Parsiana*, March 1985) has gone to great lengths in highlighting the benefits of the Karani Agiary extension scheme. She cannot, however, explain the glaring fact that the heads of 244 families or flats in Cusrow Baug rejected the entire plan in spite of its much publicized necessity.

Several inaccuracies and misquotes indicate a certain reluctance to accept factual information. Much of what was said to Ms Mama by me has been distorted out of context.

Ms Mama came ostensibly, to report on a community situation. The nature of her article belies the author's pretensions to an objective approach. Though not mentioned in her writing, can her personal leanings and depend-



(Clockwise from left)
Rear view of Karani Agiary:
site for proposed extension
Aresh: 'accusation unfounded'
Antia: Aresh offensive

ence on the "advice" dispensed at the agiary, have influenced this biased reportage?

RUBY D. MODY

Arnavaz Mama replies

My article may be roughly divided into four parts: The argument of the trustees in favour of extension to the Karani Agiary which covered 9.5 inches of space, the counterarguments of the Save Karani Agiary Committee which took 14.5 inches of space, background information on Ervad Aibara's activities which measured 6.5 inches of space and the conclusion which came to 5.5 inches. These statistics are in answer to Ms Mody's charge of the "great lengths" to which I went in "highlighting the benefits of the Karani Agiary extension scheme."

Regarding inaccuracies and misquotations, without specific examples I am unable to make a rejoinder.

In conclusion, while I'm grateful for whatever help and guidance I have received at the agiary, it has not prevented me from reporting the contrary viewpoint as fully as possible. Is Ms Mody implying that one must be an ingrate in order to report objectively?

"BPP electoral reforms"

In "BPP electoral reform hearing" (*Parsiana*, May 1985) you mention that "a special census of Parsis in Greater Bombay commissioned by the BPP at a cost of Rs 45,000..."

This gives an impression that the total cost of the project was Rs 45,000. I would therefore like to make a correction.

The project was jointly sponsored by the International Institute of Population Sciences (IIPS) and the BPP. Contribution made by the IIPS was much larger than that of the BPP even when the salaries of the staff and the infrastructure that an institute of the size of IIPS provides, are ignored. Those in the field of research will find it difficult to believe that the cost was only Rs 45,000.

Secondly it was a full-fledged research and not a census as mentioned. Data collected referred not only to the characteristics of members of a household, such as their age, sex, marital status (married to a Parsi or a non-Parsi), occupation, place of birth, duration of stay in Bombay and nationality, but data was also collected of family members who stayed away

from the house. Health of members of a household, membership of organizations, habits and hobbies of members, income of the household and possessions owned were also surveyed.

The project also canvassed schedules that collected data from individuals between the ages of 25 to 60 who had never married. Similarly even married women were interviewed for details about their marriages and pregnancies.

MALINI KARKAL

"Is God all-powerful?"

I read in *Parsiana*, May 1985 a report of Adi Doctor's criticism of my views concerning the omnipotence of Lord Ahura Mazda. As regards this question, one might suggest to Mr Doctor that if Ahura Mazda is at present all-powerful, then objective evil exists by His permission. Death, the various forms of physical impurity, lying and violence must be seen as the will of God. If this is so, why are Zoroastrians bidden to strive against the *Druj* — the lie — and to perform acts of purification of the world (*yaozhdathra*)? In the Zoroastrian scriptures, death, in origin and in its aspects, is called demon-created, and various demons are asso-

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ciated with it. Nowhere in the *Avesta* is the word transformation used to describe it. Mr Doctor's citation of *Yasna* 55.2 does not support his point, for Zoroastrians do not view the separation of the soul from the body as a good thing: it is inevitable in this world of contending forces, but we hope, through loyal struggle on behalf of our good and loving Creator, to reach *frashgird*, when the sundered parts of the human being will be reunified forever.

You report that Mr Doctor quoted freely from the *Khordeh Avesta*. He will, presumably, be familiar then with the duty of man as defined by the *Do'a-ye Nam Stayishn*, 'militant striving against the demons.' It is sadly ironic that the so-called Council of Vigilant Parsis have placed their militancy in the service of a theory that would attribute the existence of the demons to God.

J.R. RUSSELL

Karanj fire extinguished

I would like to bring before the community the sad plight of our sacred fires. In May, we visited various fire temples at Surat and the mofussil areas of Gujarat, in a tour arranged by the Iran League. When we went to Karanj to pay our homage to the fire, we were shocked. There was no fire in the fire-temple. We were told that the fire was extinguished for want of sufficient funds to maintain it. We were also told that the repeated requests to the trustees to repair the roof covering the fire and for an increase in the paltry sum given to the caretaker were turned down by the trustees. As a result the fire was no longer allowed to be kept burning. We used to blame Muslim invaders for extinguishing our fires. Whom should we blame now for such an atrocity? Our forefathers left their motherland, took exile in a foreign land to save the sacred fires and our religion, whereas we do not bother to look after our existing fires.

Where are the Karanjias who have left their native place and settled in Bombay? Have they forgotten their moral duties towards their own fire? In the process of urbanization, have we become so blind as to neglect the fire and to leave it orphaned? Did anybody take a timely step to shift the fire before leaving it for extinction? The Surat Parsi Punchayet put up a grand

show while shifting the Goti Adarian Saheb to its original place. We felt quite a contrast between the visits — to Goti and Karanj. One was like attending a wedding reception, the other a funeral procession (of an assassinated fire). Can we count on dedicated people to come forth to save our remaining sacred fires which will face a similar plight in the years to come?

If we are not able to look after our fires, we are not fit to call ourselves Zoroastrians.

J.F. PAVRI

Children's books

As your readers may be aware, the children's books in the series, *Our Religion*, with beautiful illustrations in color by Ms Mehroo J. Wadia, published by the Delhi Parsi Anjuman, have been selling well during the past five years. Out of 5000 copies of Book I, *Zarathushtra*, less than 400 copies remain.

As a follow-up in the *Our Religion* series, Ms Preen Lalkaka, an experienced nursery school teacher for over 25 years, is preparing free of charge, Activity Books to go with the books in the above series. Activity Book I, *Zarathushtra and Me*, illustrated in brilliant colors by a young student artist, Tenaz Irani, is ready for printing. The remaining books have been promised by the end of 1985.

Zoroastrian Catechism by the undersigned, is also well in hand.

The principal and staff of Boys' Town Public School, Nasik, are also doing excellent work using modern techniques in teaching children the basic principles of our religion in both the junior and senior sections. It is to be hoped that other schools are doing the same.

I appeal to all fellow Zoroastrians to stop wasting their energies in futile controversies and to come together in a spirit of tolerance and understanding, to work for the good of the community.

PILOO N. JUNGALWALA
New Delhi

"Best woman journalist"

No Parsi man will ever dream of using kerosene and a matchstick on his Parsi wife and conversely no Parsi woman is going to rush towards making herself a *sati* on her husband's death. I say all this from personal experience of 35

years in the police department where I held responsible positions.

But, it rather amused me to read in *Parsiana* (October 1984) that Ms Shahnaz Anklesaria is now going to agitate on behalf of Parsi women because according to her 'Parsi law as it stands is anti-woman, particularly the law relating to divorce and inheritance.' Whatever the Parsi law may be, many people amongst our community as well as amongst other communities will vouch that they have not seen more emancipated women in the world than Parsi women, and putting it conversely, I am sure that many will agree with me that Parsi husbands are more liberal with their wives than many husbands in the world.

One wonders as to what kind of freedom from gender oppression would be welcome and useful to women. Would she be happy if during the 30 to 40 years of her married life she had full freedom to do what she liked and meet people and participate in social activities at par with her husband or would a Parsi woman rather focus on the freedom to be able to divorce her husband easily and get a bigger share in her inheritance than other members of the family? With the utmost respect to my Parsi women-folk I would say that this kind of freedom, if stretched too far, would not be in the interest of any community. Let us keep in mind the freedom that a Parsi woman has:

— Complete freedom of speech, (including nagging!)

— Complete freedom of movement to lead the kind of life and vocation she chooses.

— Freedom of practising the religion the way she likes e.g. remaining a Zoroastrian on paper, and yet marrying out of the community on the plea that she has spotted an intellectual giant of another community because there are no intellectuals in her own community, according to her.

Divorces have been very easy for women in the West but look what has happened. Many homes are broken and there has been an army of women changing hands with different husbands, and women amassing fortunes by way of alimony, inheritance, etc.

At this juncture I cannot resist the temptation of quoting from *Homage Unto Ahura Mazda* by M.M. Dhalla: "Life becomes livable for man, for woman shares it. She is not his drudge or chattel. Woman again is not man in

the making; she is not to ape man and grow mannish. Woman is woman and always and ever woman. Wifehood and motherhood are her most sacred functions."

I would draw your attention to a few lines printed in bold capital in the *FED Newsletter* of April '85 in response to your intended crusade for the poor repressed Parsi women.

"Nay! Dear Shahnaz! Nay! Parsi wives always take the law in their own hands. So, what we Parsis really need is 'SPOPH' — A Society for Prevention of Oppression of Parsi Husbands!"

I agree with the above remarks and would add that it would be a shame if you as a crusader for repressed human beings did not do something for the upliftment of Parsi husbands.

K.S. PAVRI
Ahmedabad

"After the death..."

I was very saddened to read "After the death of loved ones" (*Parsiana*, August 1984), which was a very moving story but upsetting to me because that couple is being misled into thinking they are speaking to their dead children. When a person dies, he goes directly to the throne of the Lord. These people are talking to familiar spirits — spirits familiar with their sons' lives and personalities.

The Lord never kills anyone, so when those spirits told the Bhavnagris that the Lord took them to spare them the pain of a "terrible life awaiting them," this should have caused questions. Getting involved in seances is very dangerous for everyone. I understand the human desire to reestablish bonds broken through death, but even when one is assured that the medium is not a charlatan, how can one be assured that one is really speaking to the dead loved ones? Satan can use this medium to deceive and cause destruction. It is far better to wait until we are reunited at the end of time.

KRISTIN KUMANA
Florida, U.S.A.

Vintage cars

After reading the article "Vintage cars: the Parsi connection" by Ali Rajabally (*Parsiana*, August 1984) I felt I must inform your readers about my vintage car which is the only car of its kind in India because of the following features:



1931 Ford: 'only one of its kind'

My father bought a new 1931 Ford, four-cylinder, 24 horse power, tourer type i.e. with collapsible canvas hood and double stepney, in Secunderabad in April 1931 for Rs 2,800. Since then it has been with my family. From April 1931 till today the vehicle has not been involved in any accident.

From April 1949 to April 1952, I drove the car on more than one occasion between Secunderabad and Raichur, a distance of 201.6 km without any professional driver or mechanic. Five generations of our family have sat in this car.

I have most reluctantly decided to sell it to any individual who gives me a brand new diesel Ambassador in exchange for this priceless car.

B.S. SURTI
Secunderabad

Argument for acceptance

I have read with interest the booklet by Dr K. Antia entitled *The Argument for Acceptance*.

Towards the end of his article (page 43) Antia states that "conversion is already accepted by Iranian Zoroastrians and is on the verge of acceptance by North American Zoroastrians." Is it the implication that we in India should open the floodgates to non-Zoroastrians wishing to opt for Zoroastrianism? Apart from being foolish, I think the move would prove catastrophic for the tiny community. Not only will the identity of the Parsis be lost, but there could be a spate of inter caste marriages causing further problems.

I have always wondered why the Parsis as a group have survived so long

in India and except for some pockets in Iran, why it has not thrived in any other foreign country. I am sure that after the Arab invasion in the eighth century A.D., thousands of Iranians must have fled to Europe, but these migrants couldn't keep the torchlight of Zoroastrianism burning in the wake of strong Christian religious fervour in Europe. The Parsis have thrived in India because of the secular nature of this country where there is no state religion and every religion or form of worship is respected and tolerated.

However, as Antia has himself pointed out, the conditions in North America are very different. The tiny community finds it difficult to find partners for the survival of the community. Antia has taken upon himself the cudgels of propagating the faith in that country by conversion. Only time will tell whether these neo-Zoroastrians will remain true to the faith or get slowly absorbed into the vast majority professing the Judeo-Christian faith...

Though I am not in favour of inter caste marriages, yet it seems odd to me that a Parsi husband can beget Parsi children, while his wife remains like an outcaste — a non-Parsi. It creates problems in the family and in the community. I think a non-Parsi wife of a Parsi husband should be absorbed within the community, but Antia thinks that restricting acceptance into the faith only through marriage or adoption or any other type of legal bond is too restrictive. He thinks that opening the doors to any Tom, Dick and Harry to embrace Zoroastrianism will solve the problem of diminishing numbers on

which question depends the existence of the community. Such free-for-all measures as Antia suggests would have been alright for a large sized community; for a microscopic community like ours such half-baked measures could spell our doomsday.

DR P.D. SUNAVALA

"Non-availability of..."

With reference to "In the event of non-availability of full-fledged priests," (*Parsiana*, April, 1985) if by full-fledged priests is meant boiwala mobeds whose sole qualification is feeding fire and chanting prayers, allow me to say that in the Gathas which are the fountain-head of Zoroastrianism, there is no mention of atash or physical fire as such. Yet, all the priestly rituals are built around fire — fire which is just burning away the community's wealth.

Mention of ritual is singularly absent in the Gathas, thus we are required to live not by rites but by doing right.

Our dasturs, as our dastagirs, should be able to lead the community into *duniyadari* which is Zoroastrianism, the religion of a householder. To be spiritual is to live here in this our familiar world in the spirit of *humata, hukata, huvarashta*.

Zoroaster speaks of righteousness to be the only holy law of life. According to the Gathas there is no need for a professional mediator between man and God. A good Zoroastrian needs no washing or purifying of his soul, as only his *karni* will make him look worthy in the eyes of God.

Can our priests justify as religion the burning away of innocent trees in their afargans from morning to evening? Is this not priestly arson cloaked in so-called spirituality? Atash, in Avesta is called Puthro-Hormazd (son of God). How can we then accept that the son of God should devour his own Father's creation, his own kith and kin, the trees, so voraciously?

I hope my motives will not be misunderstood by the priests. My letter is not a challenge meant to affront them, but a quest for knowledge, for I may be in the wrong.

Religion, the way of life, should be discussed freely and fully.

DARA J. CAMA,

Chotra, if no dokhma

Dr Framroze Chinivala had stated that burial of the dead pollutes the soil and

brings calamities. He recommended that if it is not possible to erect a dokhma then a *chotra* should be erected. *Chotra* is the same as dokhma minus all the ceremonies that go along with laying of the foundation with nails of certain weights and sizes, etc.

A *chotra* should have a minimum 50 feet diameter, with a *bhandaar* (pit) of seven feet diameter by seven feet depth, walls 10 feet above the floor, and the floor to be at least seven feet above the ground level. The open top should be closed with spring steel wire netting with a mesh (three by three inch) and supported at the centre with precast reinforced cement concrete column with cap of four feet diameter.

Many times bodies brought from foreign countries are consigned in a *chotra* and not dokhma.

Wild dogs and other scavenging animals like the hyena would finish off dead bodies on mountain tops, in olden times. Nature provided such animals in all countries. Thus if a *chotra* is built where a zoo with hyenas exist, then they can be brought in barred cages to the *chotra* door and released inside it. It is believed that 10 hyenas can finish off one body in a matter of hours.

The whole world should adopt this cheapest form of disposal of the dead.

PRABHAKAR JADAV PATHI

Goti Adarian

A feature on the reinstallation of the Goti Adarian fire at Surat will be carried in the August issue of *Parsiana*.

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How much do mobeds earn?

Peshotan Nargolwala disputes the income figures stated in a recent survey of Bombay mobeds.

Peshotan Nargolwala

Friends within and outside the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India have urged me to express my views on the problems of the priestly class, specially in light of the Kharas report. While I consider it unethical to discuss a thesis submitted for the masters degree in public, what is stated in the Readers' Forum (*Parsiana*, April 1985) compels me to plunge into a controversy very much to my dislike.

In the course of my career as technical adviser, one of my special tasks was to receive, study, analyse and comment on reports. Thus, I can claim to be well versed in the scrutiny of reports.

Where has the Kharas report gone wrong? According to me, the major error is in the preparation of the sample. The researcher has selected one mobed from each of the 44 agiaries and two each from the four atash bahrams, thus making a total of 52 mobeds.

The correct technique would be to divide the 180 full-time mobeds into the following three categories:

Category A: consisting of mobeds working at Doongerwadi, senior mobeds working at the atash bahrams and the 28 yozdathregars (mobeds capable of performing the higher liturgical ceremonies).

Category B: consisting of mobeds working in high profile agiaries which number about 14.

Category C: consisting of mobeds working in low profile agiaries which number around 30. It is agreed that numbers in categories B and C will vary to a small extent with each researcher's classification.

Mobeds in category A earn Rs 1,000-4,000 a month. Those in category B earn as much as Rs 800-1,200 per month, while those in category C earn Rs 400-800 per month.

There are approximately 60 mobeds in each of the three categories.

I have stated that the major error in



the Kharas report is the wrong methodology adopted while preparing the mobed sample for interrogation. The correct methodology is indicated below:

The table is in order, except that one does find a few high income mobeds working in low profile fire-temples and vice versa, owing to locational and contact factors.

Column 4 in the table below indicates the sample after following the correct methodology. Column 5 brings

out the error in methodology as per the Kharas report, wherein the sample is heavily loaded in favour of small agiaries frequented by low income mobeds; hence the very pessimistic nature of the report. Change the sample and the report will present a true to reality picture. A good report is an asset to the community, a bad report creates confusion.

In my opinion it is meaningless to question a mobed "How much do you earn?" and put the figure quoted by him as the correct answer. It is an exercise in futility. From personal experience, I can quote an example. Once I asked a mobed working at Doongerwadi, "How much do you earn?" The answer "Rs 1,500-1,600 per month." I remarked "Considering the obviously high standard of life you enjoy, it appears to be an understatement." His evasive answer "*Saheb Khudani meher thi badhoo theek che.*" (By God's grace, all is well.) His co-workers put down his earnings at double the figure indicated by him.

As far as I am concerned, earnings include fixed and variable income plus

1) Mobed work place	2) Income per month (approx)	3) Number of mobeds (approx)	4) Correct sample	5) Kharas' sample
A) Doongerwadi atash bahrams yozdathregars	1000, 2000 3000 and above.	60	20	8*
B) High profile agiaries (14)	800-1200	60	20	14
C) Low profile agiaries (30)	400-800	60	20	30

Figures in columns 2, 3, and 4 based on a rapid survey of four atash bahrams and 14 agiaries — correct to the extent of ± 10 percent.

*Surprisingly, according to the Kharas report none of these earn Rs 1000 per month or more.

the *ashodad*. The income figures indicated in the table are based on numerous discussions with dasturs, panthakis, senior mobeds and office-bearers of religious and social groups, some of which I substantiate as follows:

•The Iranian Zoroastrian Anjuman employs an office assistant who is a part-time mobed. According to him he earns Rs 400 in a slack month and Rs 500 during a busy month. How could full-time mobeds earn less working eight hours a day?

"A healthy, hard working mobed should be earning more than Rs 1000 per month."

•According to the panthaky of a high profile agiary in Central Bombay, all mobeds (more than half a dozen) employed by him earn more than Rs 1,000 per month plus numerous other benefits. According to him panthakis are now paying a higher wage to stabilize their work force.

•According to the secretary of the Athornan Mandal "A healthy, hard working mobed should be earning more than Rs 1000 per month." The above statement is confirmed by a highly orthodox (lady) office-bearer of a socio-religious organization who reprimanded me saying that I was pampering mobeds by seeking financial assistance for them. I would like to introduce this lady to the researcher.

•I have interviewed over 40 mobeds for vacancies at Hyderabad, Delhi, etc. where the trustees have offered Rs 1,000 plus full board and lodge, and Allahabad where the offer was for Rs 1500 per month plus free accommodation. Half a dozen mobeds refused on grounds of health. The others said that they had a similar income in Bombay, so why should they face the rigours of a job in the mofussil areas for Rs 100-200 more per month?

•The BPP had given a substantial donation towards the preparation of the Kharas report. The secretary of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Associations of India approached the researcher for the names of 20-25 mobeds whom he could contact for work in mofussil agiaries as the report indi-

cated that they were earning only Rs 300-400 in Bombay and they would earn two to three times this figure out of Bombay. This was refused on grounds of secrecy of the report. Why this hush-hush attitude towards a straight request?

•On page 85 of the Kharas report it is stated, "It is significant to note that none of the respondents interviewed earned over Rs 1,000." It has to be so because the list of mobeds interviewed by the researcher did not include yozdathregars and senior mobeds of the Doongerwadi and atash bahrams who constitute 30 percent of the athravan work force and whose monthly income is over Rs 1,000. There are many such apparent mistakes in the report which make me feel that the researcher had made up her mind to present an overly pessimistic report and proceeded accordingly.

•The mobeds earn Rs 1,500 or so during the *muktad* days. This itself works out to an average of Rs 125 per month for every mobed.

•A thousand deaths occur every year. The total cost of ceremonies covering four days is Rs 3,500-4,000, of which the charge for prayers (the amount that goes directly into the pockets of mobeds) is Rs 1,200. Assume a lower figure at Rs 1,000. Multiply this by 1,000 (number of deaths) and divide it by 180 (number of mobeds) and 12 (months) and you arrive at a figure of approximately Rs 460 per month for every mobed. Some mobeds will earn less and some more than 460. But as per page 91 of the report we are concerned with the arithmetic average. If you add Rs 125 earned during *muktad* to Rs 460 on account of funerals, you have an income on these two counts alone, totalling Rs 585 per month. Add to this the income from prayers for the first year, jashans, weddings, navjotes and numerous other rituals performed daily in the agiaries and the total income per mobed (arithmetic mean) would go up to Rs 1,000 per month.

•It has been said that the report was prepared under the supervision of expert guides. But thesis work implies that the guides are dependent on the researchers for reliable information regarding the basics of the problem. Therefore the guides are as good as the data fed into their brain cells. Like the computer, if you feed wrong data to the guides, the result is disastrous. It may be pointed out that the advice of

expert mobed guides, which is easily obtainable, was not resorted to.

I could not attend the meeting on January 16 at Patkar Hall as I was scheduled to listen to a talk by a distinguished speaker at Cama Hall on the same evening. However, on my own initiative, I contacted Khojeste Mistree at his residence a few days earlier and explained to him the defect in the methodology of the Kharas report. He questioned, "What difference would your methodology make to the income of mobeds?" I replied, "The mobed income would be double that indicated in the Kharas report, say around Rs 1,000 per month." Khojeste commented, "Is not this a low figure too?" I said "While the income of mobeds should be higher than Rs 1,000 per month it is twice the amount indicated in the Kharas report. Can you not notice the difference?" That was the end of the dialogue.

I cannot but agree with Dastur Dr JamaspAsa, that "this is not the time for half-baked and botched reports." According to me these do more harm than good to the cause of mobeds and must be discarded. To conclude, the mobeds in category A do not need fi-

A social worker reprimanded me, saying that I was pampering mobeds by seeking financial assistance for them.

nancial assistance. But they should be provided with indirect benefits in housing, medical and educational grants, etc. Those in category B could receive some financial assistance and indirect benefits. However, those in category C are in urgent need of direct and indirect benefits. The scheme put up by BPP trustee Jal Vimadlal under the auspices of the BPP is a comprehensive scheme. It will gradually cater to all categories of mobeds and merits our serious consideration.

Peshotan Nargolwala, a management consultant, is the joint honorary treasurer of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India. A chemical engineer by profession, he is associated with the Athornan Mandal in Bombay.

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Graphic A-181