

Parsiana

Minoo Shroff front-runner for trusteeship elections

Opposition groups succeed in putting up lady candidates.

The expiration of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) trusteeship term of Maneck Hodiwala has created the fifth vacancy on the Punchayet's board in the span of the last two years. While two of the vacancies were heavily contested and two uncontested the fate of the fifth seat was undecided till June 24, the last date for filing nominations. On June 23, Ms Shirin Wadia, an educationist, and on June 24, Ms Meher Master-Moos, founder of Mazdayasnie Monasterie and a follower of the Ilm-e-Kshnoom mystic school of thought, filed their nominations, in addition to finance and management consultant and vice-president of the Committee for Economic Revival (CER), Minoo Shroff who was the first to announce his candidature.

The liberal, soft-spoken Shroff is said to be acceptable to a wide cross section of the community. An Anjuman Committee meeting, held at the invitation of CER's managing committee chairman Fali Poncha on May 27 at the Indian Merchants' Chamber Hall, unanimously endorsed Shroff's candidature.

The orthodox groups initially tried to field social worker and politician Aloo Chibber. Two letters in the

Jam-e-Jamshed — one signed by five ladies: Jeena Duggan, Mitha D. Petit, Hilla Nagarwalla, Jalu Wadia and Shirin Wadia, another by five men (see page 5) — claimed that the BPP board and the community suffered from a dearth of feminine caring and sympathy. It was suggested in the *Jame* that BPP chairman Dr Aspi Golwalla, whose term expires in 1988, resign to accommodate both candidates on the BPP's board of trustees.

Indeed, one Chibber supporter asked Shroff at the above mentioned meeting if he would be such a gentleman as to step aside in favor of the lady. The 150-strong audience protested strongly and Shroff responded matter-of-factly, "Chivalry has not been ascribed to me and let me be candid—I don't want to be chivalrous."

Chibber, widowed barely two months ago, says she is not emotionally prepared for an electoral fight just yet and did not file her nomination.

With Chibber's candidacy uncertain, yet another letter appeared in the *Jame* of June 20 pleading for a lady trustee to come forward. The signatories, Jehangir F. Shroff, Tehmi R. Damanwalla and K. J. Bardi "earnestly beseeched Dr (Ms) Nelie Noble or

Ms Perviz F. Dotivala to...stand as a lady candidate." Noble is a former BPP trustee and Dotivala is active in community politics and a supporter of the former BPP chairman B. K. Boman-Behram.

Though neither of the above ladies responded, a letter by Shirin Wadia in the *Jame* of June 24 noted, "I have read the urgent plea in the *Jam-e-Jamshed* dated June 20. I fully agree that what the board of trustees of the BPP needs is not a brilliant man, but a lady who is prepared to go around and listen to the poor and the needy and offer them sympathy and help...I have decided to offer myself as a candidate for the vacancy...If the community needs an honest, sincere and dedicated worker, here is an opportunity for them."

Parsiana's interviews with Shroff and Chibber revealed opposing viewpoints on tackling the problems facing the community. As this issue of *Parsiana* was prepared prior to the June 24 nomination registration deadline, *Parsiana* was unable to interview Wadia and Master-Moos.

The election is to be held on July 5 at the Punchayet office on Dadabhai Naoroji Road.

The managerial approach

Volunteers, not trustees, should head Bombay Parsi Punchayet subcommittees, says electoral candidate Minoo Shroff.

Arnavaz S. Mama

"You've got to be a good team player, but you don't have to be a passive team player." Management and financial consultant and Committee for Economic Revival (CER) vice-president Minoo Shroff was defining a quality very essential to the job of a Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) trustee.

In contesting the vacancy which will be created on the BPP board when Maneck Hodiwala retires on August 2, 1986, dapper, grey-haired Shroff favors a low-key, managerial approach with support from, and acceptability to, a wide cross section of the community, so that he can go back and seek their help and cooperation.

Though tipped as trusteeship material since a long time, Shroff has remained elusively in the background, giving rise to the notion that he was too mild to sustain his viewpoint in the face of opposition — a notion he repudiates totally.

Explaining his past reticence, Shroff, a fastidious man, says he personally detests "acrimony and vilification... During the recent two elections the climate was more congenial, worthy of our traditions," which led him to take a positive decision.

At his elegant J.K. Organization director's office at Ballard Estate on June 10, 1986, after an electoral foray at Rustom Baug, Shroff noted an overriding community concern with housing and the way flats are allotted. But, Shroff says, a lot has been done in recent years to straighten things out by the application of the merit rating system which makes allotment of flats objective by eliminating, as far as possible, the personal prejudices of those who decide. "The system gives

due weightage to factors which are important in at least arresting the decline in our population in Bombay," he adds.

Analyzing the mood of the people, Shroff says, "Even today the Parsi Punchayet is seen as not responsive enough to the needs of the community, both in terms of timeliness and quality. The qualitative response has to change. The BPP is a welfare organization. Given its constraint of resources, people who seek assistance, in whatever form, must be treated with the sympathy they deserve." Shroff is sanguine that once this change is effected, the flow of funds by way of donations will tend to increase.

The trustees "must take stock of the burning issues before the community, seriously debate and evolve a consensus with colleagues regarding possible solutions, set priorities, decide on a course of action which can be effectively implemented... plan ahead and monitor the implementation of the various projects approved by them."

Complimenting the Punchayet staff for its high dedication to the task, Shroff believes that it is essential to "induct the right type of talent and to motivate it by offering emoluments and conditions of service which are somewhat comparable to those obtaining in other well-run commercial and social organizations," he says. In return, the administration should actively assist the trustees in their task, by filling them in with enough background information, data and alternative solutions to problems, together with an estimate of what support would be required, including the active involvement of external agencies and voluntary organizations."

The Punchayet should not "keep

things to its chest," says Shroff. When "trustees and the administration cannot act with speed and effectiveness, they must galvanize and avail of the talent outside the organization," he adds.

One way to involve the community in the working of the Punchayet is to make non-trustees chairmen of the subcommittees, suggests Shroff. It is time to rethink "whether the grouping of the committees is proper. Just because they are historically set up, they shouldn't continue. Needs, aspirations and functions change." With the exception of strategic portfolios like housing, employment generation, medical relief, all of which require the commitment of large financial resources, the rest may be safely entrusted to volunteers.

"The battle cry for a woman trustee" is based on the fact that the seven men are busy, whereas women have more time and resources. Though "in the past some women have made very good trustees... the contribution of women has been largely on the periphery. Many women are highly motivated to do their bit for the underprivileged. They should be actively involved by putting them in charge of these various subcommittees."

The BPP had conscripted Shroff's professional expertise in 1982. "I must say, to the credit of the then trustees, that that was the time when we (CER) were vehemently fighting them and they chose me of all people!" Shroff's suggestions for toning up the financial and accounting procedures of the Punchayet were accepted by the trustees in toto, with the result that the publication of the annual accounts have been speeded up. "At one stage accounts

were in arrears for five years. Now the '83 accounts have been audited and the '84 and '85 accounts will be finalized and audited in the next few months." Says Shroff, "It shows that given the will, direction and staff support, there could be marked improvement in the system."

Shroff views career counselling as one of the prime needs of the community. Referring to the CER's seminar on self employment held last year and a prospective one to be held later this month, Shroff says that young people want to know what facilities and opportunities are available. "The BPP, with its resources, will have to do this (career counselling) in a far more intensive way."

"The aging of the population is another very serious problem. The dependency ratio is rising, with more than 20 percent of the population being over 65 years of age, which means greater charge on the youth." Shroff notes that the elderly find their own pensions and fixed incomes inadequate to cope with the current inflationary trends. Also, "the assistance

from charitable institutions is terribly meager — well below subsistence level, even by the general Indian standards, leave aside the standards of Parsi families." Shroff concedes the urgency to evolve schemes for the medical and financial support of the needy aged.

Shroff's enquiries have revealed that a fair number of Parsis sleep out in the open near agiaries, because they have no homes. The solution to the problem, according to Shroff, lies in going outside Bombay, to the thriving towns of Gujarat or places like Ahmednagar, Nagpur, etc where there are clusters of Parsi settlements, and job opportunities are rising.

Providing the community the housing that it desperately needs, would help to raise the Parsis' abnormally low birthrate as young people would be able to marry at an earlier age, says Shroff, who advocates that the Punchayet acquire large plots of land at Virar and Nalla Sopara on the periphery of Bombay where the cost of land is still only nine or ten rupees per square foot. He also requests that

community elders shift to smaller towns and cities in the mofussil so that city housing may be available to the productive younger generation.

Viewing Parsis as a small, highly dispersed community, Shroff favors the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India as a necessary, binding link. "It is a community feature, that we maintain our faith and traditions wherever we are. I've seen single families maintaining it, despite adapting to the mainstream cultural ethos."

Applying the same yardstick to the World Zoroastrian Organization (WZO), Shroff hopes that once it is agreed that anjuman members should have stronger representation on the WZO board than individuals, and the leadership of the organization becomes more responsive to the community, it will become an effective body.

Pleading ignorance of the finer aspects of religious knowledge ("I am more on the sociological side"), Shroff avoided any comment on the controversy about the Zubin Mehta-Khojeste Mistree starring film *On Wings of Fire*. "We are a very indi-

"The BPP is a welfare organization. People who seek assistance in whatever form must be treated with the sympathy they deserve."



Photo: Homiyar Mistry

vidualistic community, very happy to dissent! It's good trait," he countered.

Shroff's involvement with community affairs dates back to 1978 when he was invited to join the Committee for the Economic Uplift of the Parsi Community set up by the Punchayet. He was actively associated with the formation of the Committee for Electoral Rights in 1979 which was instrumental in creating awareness among the Parsis to participate more actively in community affairs as witnessed in the Anjuman Committee elections in 1981.

Along with Mani Dalal, Shroff petitioned the courts in 1984 to freeze the

F register of donor members — "In the present democratic climate can you buy votes?" As per the consent terms arrived at in the court, Shroff is happy that the trustees have been compelled to take up electoral reform — "That's an achievement" — even though they haven't gone as far as Shroff would like. Two trusteeship terms should be enough for anyone, notes Shroff in the context of the BPP's official scheme providing for an unlimited number of terms. As for increasing the minimum amount of donation qualifying for F register membership from the present Rs 5,000 to Rs 7,500, Shroff terms it a cosmetic change.

A bachelor of science and a management accountant, Shroff's recognition of the worth of the management movement that began in the 1950s, together with his grasp of economics, catapulted him to the presidency of the Bombay Management Association at the age of 37. Since then he has been successively president of the All India Manufacturers' Association (AIMO), chairman of the economic affairs and planning subcommittee of the Indian

Merchants' Chamber, has participated in international conferences and seminars on corporate planning and lectured at various management institutions as visiting professor in management, accounting and corporate finance.

A director of more than 20 companies including the Indian advisory board of the Chartered Bank, Shroff believes in "management by exception" — delegating everything that can be done by people who have more time and expertise and adequate authority, while retaining effective control.

Japan's economic miracle has continued to fascinate Shroff, who is vice-president of the Indo-Japanese Association since 1980 and chairman of the Economic Cooperation Council of the Indo-Japanese Association since 1983.

Shroff's wife Viloo, now exposed to the community's problems, is gearing herself, as well as friends and relatives, to the many tasks that require to be done within the community framework. Of their two daughters, Soona, a commerce graduate with an MBA (Bombay) has inherited her

father's flair for finance; while Niloufer, who has graduated from the Catering College and acquired a Cordon Bleu (London), specializes in party catering.

Proud, like all Parsis, of the past (after all, Shroff's uncle, the late A.D. Shroff was the financial wizard who lost a trusteeship election in 1944 because he was away, representing India at the famous Bretton Woods conference which created the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund), Shroff nonetheless believes the community's sights must be refocused towards the future, to understand the needs and requirements of the society we live in.

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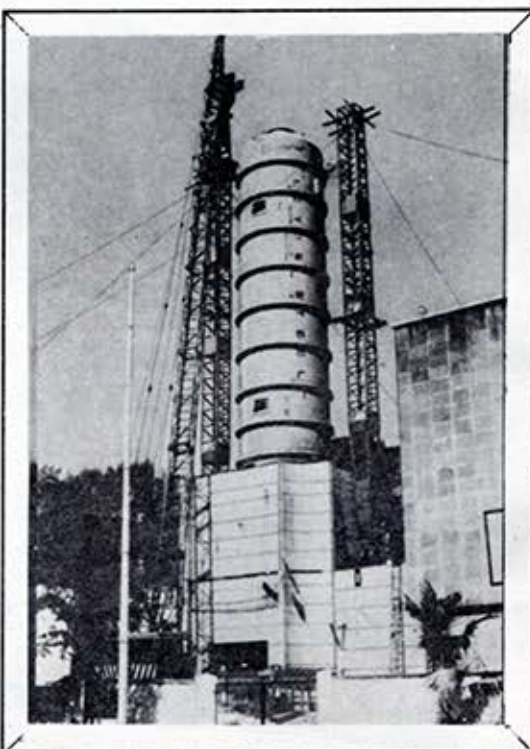
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Chibber's challenge?

Aloo Chibber feels that the presence of a woman on the BPP board would improve the functioning of the institution.

Arnavaz S. Mama



Photo: Homiyar Mistry

"I am not yet sure that I'll contest this election, but I certainly believe that what the community needs is a lady trustee," noted Ms Aloo Chibber, member of the Maharashtra Legislative Council and ex-member of the High Power Panel on Minorities appointed by the President of India, when *Parsiana* called for an appointment to interview her.

At the appointed hour (3.30pm on May 30, 1986) *Parsiana* was ushered into a drawing room where a balcony full of plants overflowed onto the old-fashioned furniture – well-polished, immaculately clean – draped with lacy, handmade covers, offset by lovingly embroidered velvet cushions. Photographs of family and political groups adorned the tabletops. An upright piano, nestling in a corner, attested to an earlier, more leisurely lifestyle.

The Chibber household was at pains to explain that the lady had been held up at an important meeting, but would arrive shortly. For nearly an hour, Homi Chibber, the eldest of Aloo and the late Dr Jal Chibber's three sons, spoke of the family's addiction to service. A closely knit unit, the family feels dismembered by Jal's demise barely two months ago, indicates Homi Chibber. The sons – Dr Percy, a urologist, Darius, a sales manager with Air India in Singapore, and Homi, a public relations man – want their mother to take it easy for the next six to 12 months, but are aware that their

late father – an "absolute Parso" in Aloo's words – favored all-out commitment to the community and the memory weighs heavily with Aloo.

A friendly voice, pregnant with authority and concern, ordering tea, giving instructions, is heard from the drawing room, and Aloo Chibber enters – a large, strong face framed in shades of grey, crowning a medium-built, sari-clad woman in her early sixties. The greeting, pleasantly short, is succeeded by a frank acknowledgment of misgivings – she had been warned by "friends" that *Parsiana* may slant her statements unfavorably and that the magazine favors the Committee for Economic Revival (CER): she wants no controversy.

Aloo Chibber says she may need some time to make up her mind whether to stand, but she is sure that the community needs and wants "a lady trustee." In the *Jam-e-Jamshed* of May 22, 1986, a letter signed by the erstwhile leader of the Committee of United Zoroastrians, Cawasji Nusserwanji Dinshaw (Adenwala), jointly with Jal Vakil, Shavak Sethna, A.K. Lavangia and Manek Medora stresses, "the need of the hour is a lady trustee." Several people have tried to persuade Chibber to stand, she notes.

Chibber is full of praise for all the professionals on the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) board of trustees, as well as aspirant Minoo Shroff. "You require tax consultants and lawyers

and financial experts...but not all seven of them. The Parsi Punchayet is for the community, to lift up the people from their problems, to help them to cope." Chibber, and others who think like her, allege that the Punchayet's trustees are "all too highly intellectual, too clever. They can't think of the poor in their own terms."

Chibber says she will appeal to all if "I decide to stand. I expect all voters to support me. Parsis should not have groups. I am asking the Parsi community to help me become a good trustee...It's a very big task."

As an ex-member of the High Power Minorities Panel, Chibber has waded through enormous statistical data including "thousands of school and university examination results, employment registers, administrative records, lists of licencees, subsidies of various ministries and departments, ledgers of nationalized banks and leading financial institutions... The statistical study showed that this community as a whole was faring very badly in practically every field regarding admissions to colleges, examination results, employment opportunities, business, housing, etc," as she had noted in her address to the executive council of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India in Bombay in November 1985. In her report to the Minorities Panel, she says, she "emphasized the need for protective discrimination in favor of Parsis."

When the community's performance at even the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations are deteriorating, Chibber views the hangup on white collar jobs as tragic, especially in light of the immense possibilities for economic growth open to craftsmen versed in such simple technologies as fabrication technology, computers, electronics, electrical contracting interior designing, and motorcar repair, etc, says Chibber. She is appalled to learn that the B.N. Gamadia Technical Institute is on the verge of closure for lack of Parsi students.

"The work of the Punchayet is to guide the community in the right way," she says, and believes that the way to do it is to adopt the social worker's attitude. She recalls that she used to go to the villages as a member of the High Power Panel on Minorities to help them to stand on their own feet, economically, through self-help. "I used to sit on *khatlas* (rope beds) full of *makars* (vermin) to listen to their stories of where the money goes; what are their needs. How many of the seven (trustees) do this?... It was Jawaharlal Nehru's idea that in order to help the masses, we must reach out to the poor people on our own; we cannot expect them to come to us. One must have the social worker's consideration, and inclination and time to do all this..."

"The Parsi Punchayet needs experts to save on taxes. But there are such people already... They may be able to create a grand edifice, but if the people do not attend, if there's a school and people don't go, what's the use? You have to play the game. Find out why they do not go... I ask my community to help me in this task."

Noting that she was born into a rich family - "my mother had many charities such as Dr R.E. Dadachanji General Hospital at Nasik"- Chibber says she has always been socially inclined. She learnt early that the way to win poor peoples' confidence is "to make them feel I am one with them." Her political career began in 1962 when she attended a women's meeting addressed by the late Indira Gandhi. "Everyone was saying something or the other about what women should do. Then Indira called upon me to say something. I was not prepared but ventured that whatever women may take upon themselves to do, they must first be trained for the task. Indira

approved of the idea and told me to undertake the training of women in political and social work. But what did I know? I was a socialite, busy enough with coffee parties and kitty parties, the Maharashtra State Women's Council, playing music and raising my three sons!" Despite this, Chibber stood up to the challenge and trained women in various social and political fields.

The Punchayet's trustees are "all too highly intellectual, too clever. They can't think of the poor in their own terms."

But Chibber, who says she is loath to turn down a challenge, brushed up the law she knew (after graduation, Chibber had worked part of the way to her LLB and MA degrees, but had not completed them). Then, aided by her husband's tacit (and often, explicit) support in all her undertakings, her own common sense and immense self-confidence, she started on a track that has led her to be chairperson of the Maharashtra State Social Welfare Advisory Board where she says she deals with an annual budget of over two crore rupees.

In 1972 Chibber won herself a seat on the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly "securing the highest number of votes, percentage wise, in all Bombay," notes her bio data.

Her loyalty during the late Prime Minister's wilderness years, earned her the treasurership of the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress (I) Committee from 1977 to 1981 despite protests that accounting was a weak point: "I told Indira that I even made mistakes in my household accounts!" But Ms Gandhi insisted she do the job, which Chibber attributes to the lady's "faith, not in me but in the Parsi community." The courage and perseverance were rewarded by her appointment to the Maharashtra Legislative Council in 1980.

Chibber's bio data lists a host of organizational activities dealing with welfare on the railways, for the armed

forces, for the rehabilitation of paraplegics, for social education and national savings. With justifiable pride, son Homi recalled how his parents had worked for the Campion School in the 1950s when it had only one small building. The enormous social welfare work earned invitations from abroad. Chibber visited England as a guest of the British Council, and Germany at the invitation of the West German Press and Information Office and represented India at the conference of the International Alliance of Women in London in 1967.

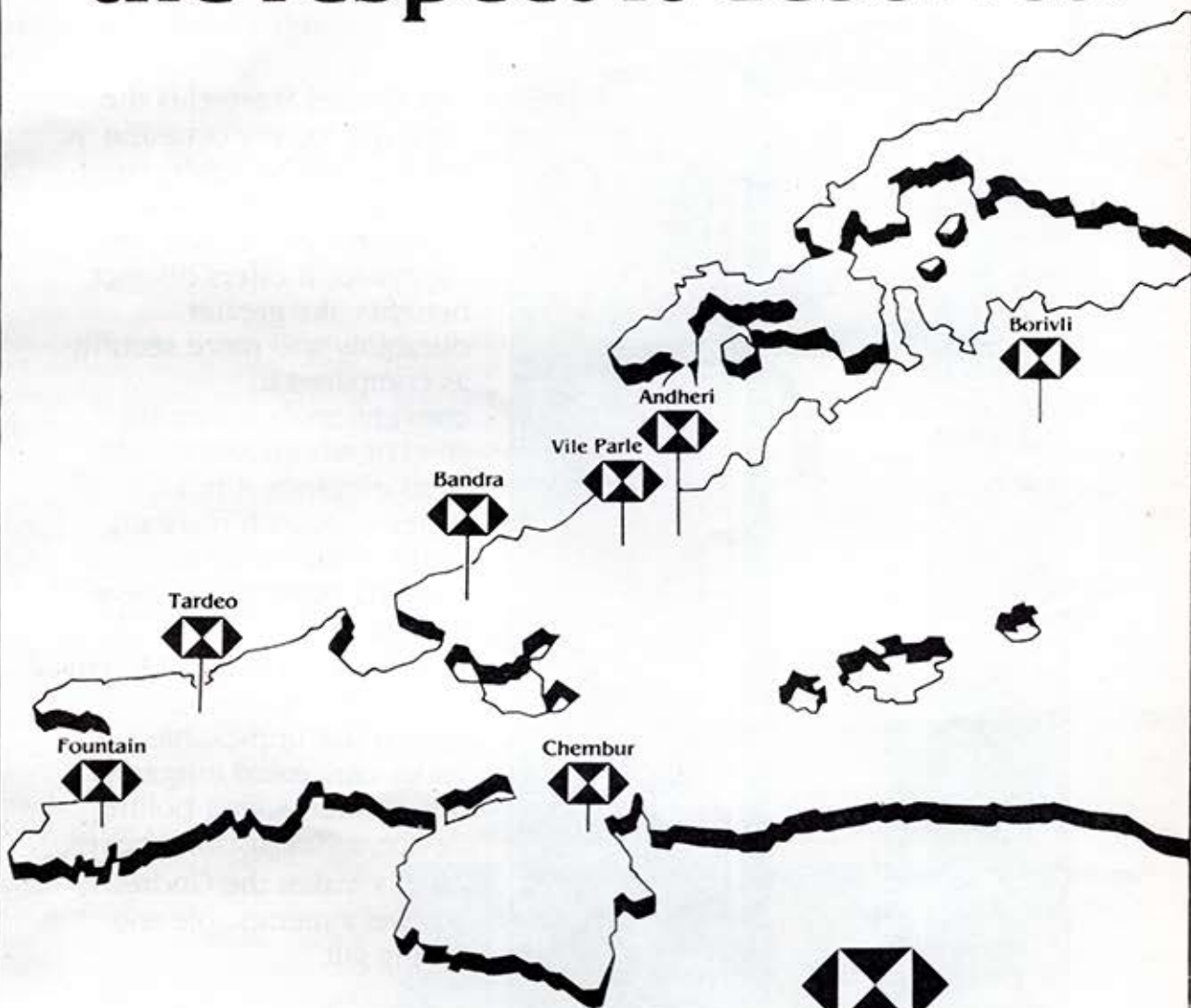
Though she was the only Parsi MLA in 1972, there are now two more: Marazban Patrawala of Bombay and Gev Avari from Nagpur, and Chibber is optimistic that more Parsis will be coming out in national politics. But the community is hopelessly ignorant of its rights as a minority. Says Chibber, "Parsis don't know, and don't even try to find out," though lately, she chuckles, the BPP has started writing a lot of letters to her!

Although the measure of Chibber's involvement with the community was restricted hitherto to a term as delegate on the Parsi Chief Matrimonial Court, and helping those who come to her door in search of jobs, she uses her good offices with government bigwigs to help wherever she can, the most recent occasion being the introduction of Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy to the Chief Minister regarding the Parsi ward at the J.J. Hospital. Chibber says that the Chief Minister rang up the hospital dean and told him that the donor's wishes must be carried out. But, she adds, it is up to the community to follow it up; the Chief Minister is not likely to repeat such actions.

When sentiments ran high on the Adoption Bill, because there were views both for and against the same and Ms Gandhi could not decide one way or another, Chibber "took the dasturjis to Indira. Madam said she would not do anything to hurt the community." One of them prayed the *Tandurasti* for Indira who then wanted a translation from Chibber!

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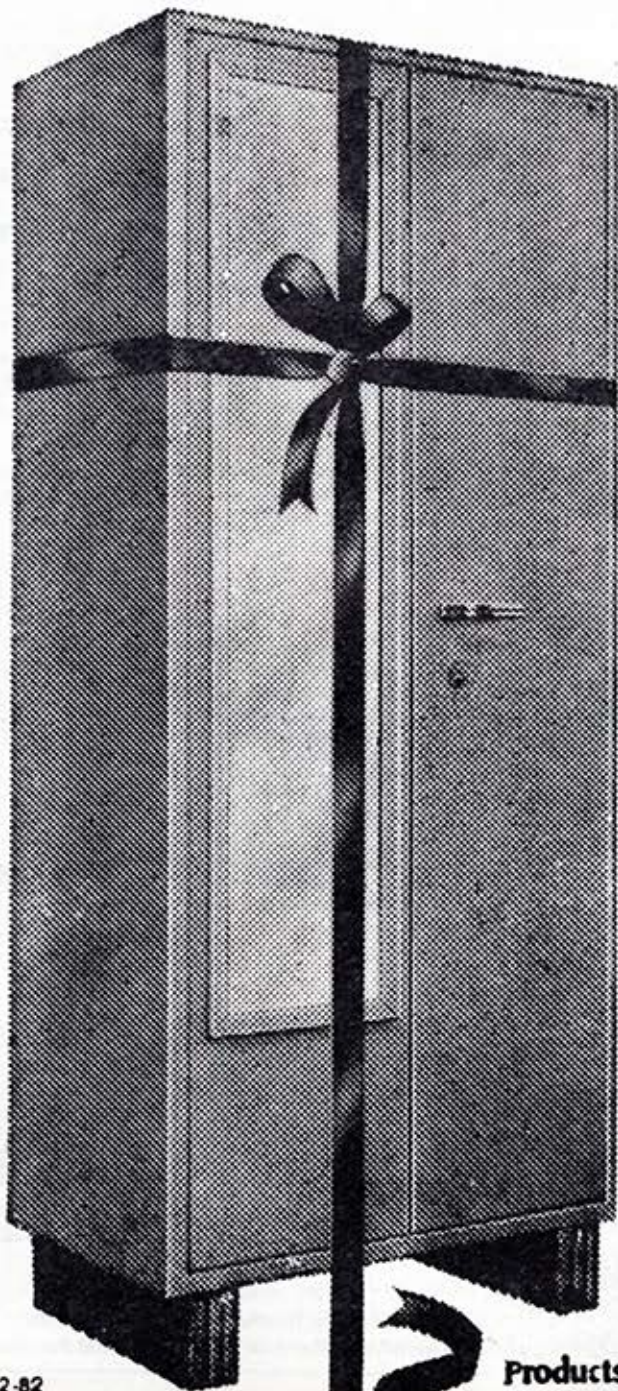


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Events and Personalities

Satarawala in *Who's Who*

The *Dictionary of International Biography* and the *International Who's Who*, 1986-87, have included a biographical sketch of Kershasp Tehmuras Satarawala, presently the Indian ambassador to Mexico, Guatemala and San Salvador, notes a press release issued by D.R. Edibanu of Poona, dated March 19.

The erstwhile governor of the Punjab was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1983, when he was lieutenant governor of Goa, Daman and Diu. The coordinator of the ninth Asian Games, and the Non-Aligned Summit Meeting held in 1983, Satarawala has been advisor to the governments of Gujarat, Orissa and Jammu and Kashmir, secretary of the Family Planning Association, Wild Life Preservation and Environmental Planning, notes the release.

Educated at Billimoria School, Pan-chgani, Wadia College, Poona and Government College, Lahore, the 70-year-old Indian administrator is also a fellow of Nuffield College, London. Satarawala served in the Indian Army (1940-46), and in the Indian Administrative Service (1947-75). Until 1967, he had held civil service executive and secretarial appointments in the old Bombay State and served the Central Government as district magistrate, deputy joint secretary, ministries of defence, commerce and industries, and as secretary of Gujarat's department of mines and power, states the biographical sketch.

Farewell to educationist

"For her meritorious services to the Singapuri Girls High School and through it to the educational sector of Gujarat," a special farewell function was organized in honor of retiring principal Ms Dina R. Ghadiali on January 18, 1986, notes a press release

issued by Dr Ratan Marshall of Surat. On the occasion, an address was presented to her in a *sukhad-ni-peti* (sandalwood casket) recalling her achievements and commitment to the cause of education. While Girish Vakil, chairman of the Surat Education Society, presided over the function, Dr Ratan Marshall, as the chief guest, unveiled a portrait of Ghadiali which will adorn the walls of the school, states the release.

Ghadiali served as vice-president of the Surat Corporation School Board, president of the Headmaster's Association of Surat, and member of several advisory boards like the Social Welfare Advisory Board, the Primary Education Board, and the Advisory Boards of the Wadia Women's College and Government Polytechnic for Girls. In 1968-69 she was awarded the President's Medal for the best teacher of the country by the Government of India, states the write-up.

Completing her schooling from the I.P. Mission High School for Girls in Surat, Ghadiali studied for a bachelor's degree in teaching and a master's degree in arts. At the San Francisco State College, she studied the methods

of teaching English as a foreign language. She was twice awarded the Fulbright Scholarship by the US Government and even availed of the Smith Mundt Scholarship, notes the release.

The first lady to be invited onto the board of trustees of the Surat Parsi Punchayet, Ghadiali now holds the position of a senior member on the board which controls various social welfare and educational institutions, notes the handout.

Turel for nuclear meet

Nuclear chemist, Dr (Ms) Zarin Turel, has been invited to an international meet on nuclear chemistry at Orleans, France, and to talk on radioisotopes and actinides at a symposium at Lund, Sweden slated for June 1986, notes a press release.

With post-doctoral research experience of 16 years, Turel has "received recognition for her work in the field of neutron activation and its application in the fields of analytical chemistry, medicine, agriculture, environmental pollution, etc," notes her bio data.

Turel was instrumental in discovering an economically exploitable ore of the rare element, rhenium, in India,



(Left) Marshall unveiling a portrait of Ghadiali

(Below) Satarawala: administrator and diplomat



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and has undertaken various projects on the aquatic environment in and around Bombay, sponsored by the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India. The Government of Maharashtra sponsored her studies on the various micronutrients in the soils of Maharashtra on the basis of which she prepared a contour map and established a data bank. Turel has also undertaken various projects on cancer, sponsored by the Tata Memorial Hospital, Bombay, and the Lady Tata Memorial Trust.

Her laboratory participated in an international project, sponsored by the International Atomic Energy Agency, Vienna, Austria, which involved neutron activation analysis of some trace elements found in the diet of eight to 11-year-old children from a rural area in Maharashtra, adds the write-up. In 1982, Turel was selected as a visiting professor under the Indo-US exchange program, where she visited various nuclear laboratories in the US, delivered talks and carried out research at the University of Maryland, adds the report.

Having 49 research publications to her credit, Turel is affiliated to a large number of technical and non-technical organizations and is a founder member of The Indian Association of Nuclear Chemists and Allied Scientists, and the International Association of Elementologists.

Recently she has taken charge of the newly constructed nuclear chemistry laboratory at the Institute of Science, having played a vital role in its construction, equipping, commissioning and functioning, states the release. The laboratory's modern sophisticated nuclear measuring equipment has been acquired with grants from the State Government, the Committee of Basic Research in Nuclear Sciences, and the Department of Atomic Energy, India, states the release.

Having obtained her BSc and MSc degrees from the Gujarat University, Turel did her PhD in nuclear chemistry at the Institute of Science, Bombay. Married to neurochemist Dr Rustom J. Turel, with two young children, Turel occupies the K.C. Mahindra Chair of Nuclear Chemistry, is professor and head of the nuclear chemistry division of the Institute of Science, Bombay, is a research guide for MSc and PhD degree students of Bombay University, and delivers lectures



to students appearing for the MSc and MPhil degrees in chemistry, for the past nine years, notes her bio data.

Sudrehs not enough

Ripon Club has banned its members from moving about on the club premises "improperly clad" in sudrehs. A notice to this effect dated May 21, 1986, has been circulated to all club members by the club's honorary secretary Manek Medora.

Speculating on the air-conditioned life-style that the members of the club may be used to, the honorary secretary notes in the circular that that does not automatically permit members to be improperly attired. Requesting them to refrain from the practice in future, the notice adds that defaulting members are "liable to disciplinary action."

Annexe for Madressa

"Since the existing building cannot accommodate more students nor can it provide an opportunity to expand our activities, we have decided to undertake a project of constructing an extension to the existing building," notes an article on the Athornan Boarding Madressa, Dadar, in the third issue of their bi-annual publication, *Knowledge* sent by the Madressa principal, Ervad Rustom Panthaki. Apart from providing residential accommodation for teachers and students pursuing higher studies, the annexe will include a community hall, library, reading rooms and gymnasium facilities.

"The project, when completed, will also give us the opportunity for conducting navjote and religious classes,

sudreh stitching and kusti weaving classes, arranging lectures on religious and allied subjects by Indian as well as foreign scholars as also holding cultural programs and seminars on Iranian and Zoroastrian subjects. We are also keen to encourage a comparative study of religions," notes the write-up. Towards this end, members of the community are requested to donate to whatever extent.

The Athornan Boarding Madressa which was established on November 9, 1919, has 45 students who are given full-fledged training on rituals, philosophy, ancient Iranian history and the Avesta language. Students are also given academic education up to the SSC in the English medium. All boarding, lodging, education and training is given free of charge. Moreover, those students who wish to graduate in Avesta - Pahlavi are allowed to stay on at the Madressa and are sponsored by philanthropic members of the community, states the report.

A boy from an athornan family enters the madressa at the age of six and is trained for a period of 10 years. "Our ultimate goal is to educate the young priests in such a manner as to help them to attain that high status which was enjoyed by the priests during the Sassanian period," notes an article in *Knowledge*.

Anyone wishing to have a copy of the magazine and/or donate towards the new Madressa annexe may write to: The Athornan Boarding Madressa, Plot number 651-52, Firdosi Road, Mancherji Joshi Parsi Colony, Dadar, Bombay 400014.

Australian center

"We are all indeed proud to jointly own a piece of Australia for our very own usage. This will enhance our stability, unity and leave a mark of us Zoroastrians on Australian soil for generations to come," noted Dr Boman Kalapesi, president of the Australian Zoroastrian Association of New South Wales (AZA of NSW) in a brochure published on the occasion of the inaugural jashan ceremony of the AZA House - the newly bought community center of the Association.

The jashan performed by five mobeds on February 9, 1986, in the presence of 300 Zoroastrians was followed by a hambandagi, and welcome addresses by Dr Boman Kalapesi and Dr Peshotan Katrak, chairman of the foundation committee and chief honorary mobed of NSW. Later, all present partook of chasni and ghambar.

The building project had been launched at the Association's Jamshedi Navroze function on March 18, 1978. After eight years of "frustration," the AZA acquired a five-acre property on December 17, 1985 at 196 Annangrove Road, Annangrove, NSW.

The foundation committee which was responsible for acquiring the property on behalf of the Zoroastrian community, included chairman Dr Peshotan Katrak, secretary Ms Sherna Kotwal, treasurer Ms Dinaaz Lentin, and committee members Kaikhosrow Ostowari, Daraius Battiwalla, Ms Arnavaz Minbattiwalla and Dr Toos Sachinwalla, notes the brochure. "The vision and hard work of pioneering members Farrokh Mistree (now in the USA), Ernani Giambuzzi, Minoo Battiwalla, Purviz Kolsawalla - among others - were also acknowledged," notes a press release issued by Kersi Meher-Homji, Editor of *Manashni*, the newsletter of the Association.

"The acquisition of this five-acre property is the first stage. Our ultimate aim is to build a hall which would be large enough for all our gatherings," noted Katrak.

In the meanwhile, alterations to the existing house are to be undertaken, whereby internal walls are to be knocked down so as to create a small meeting hall, a prayer room, a meeting

room-cum-library and the amenities, notes a foundation committee report in the January issue of *Manashni*.

The report adds that US \$ 60,000, promised by the Arbab Rustam Guiv Trust, have been deposited in the Westpac Bank but it remains under the control of the Trust and would be released on the condition that the center be named "Morvarid and Rustam Guiv Darbe Mehr;" and that two representatives nominated by the Guiv Trust be on the AZA's executive board.

However, in a letter dated December 5, 1985 to Dr Rostam Sarfeh of the Guiv Trust, Katrak, as president of the foundation committee, noted that the second condition was totally unacceptable and inappropriate to the AZA. Regarding the first condition of name, Katrak noted that a large sum, nearly \$ 150,000, was collected from the AZA members themselves and so the suggested name would be unfair to those who had put in their time and

money to collect this substantial amount. However, Katrak added, "The current building will be suitable for some of our activities (only)...Our intention is to build a larger hall on this site. This is likely to cost \$ 180,000 or more. If the Guiv Trust is prepared to pay the entire construction cost of the building, we would be very happy to call the center, 'Morvarid and Arbab Rustam Guiv Darbe Mehr.'" A reply to this letter is now awaited.

A donation of \$ 60,000 by the Ostowari family of Sydney, gave a major boost to the fund raising efforts of the AZA, notes the foundation committee report in the brochure, which adds, "Our current building will be used regularly for the monthly Sunday school for our youngsters. This activity has been held monthly at the residence of Jangoo and Jeanie Unvala for over eight years now... The Zoroastrian community (of Australia) owes a large debt of gratitude to (them)."





(Top) Darbe Mehr at Vancouver and (above) Pavri conducting children's choir at the inauguration

(Above right) Shroff: Local initiative

(Facing page) Jashan at the inauguration of the Australian community house (above)

(Far left) Australian Zoroastrians enacting Apri Cricket

To celebrate 100 years since the first team of 14 Parsi cricketers left India on a tour of England, the Zoroastrians of Sydney enacted a 40-minute play on Navroze, notes *Sportsweek* (April 16-22, 1986). This was in fact the first cricket team from India or Asia to tour that country.

Called *Aapri Cricket - Hastovari* (Our cricket - of course) the play, scripted and directed by Maggie Irani, had a cast of 18 and "was perhaps unique in the annals of stage drama. There was actual cricket played on stage, climaxing with Jamshedji Morenas, a Parsi batsman, hooking the legendary Dr W.G. Grace for three fours in an over - the red ball actually racing towards the startled but delight-

ed audience!" notes Kersi Meher-Homji of Australia. Dr Grace was not pleased, as he grumbled to the umpire: "The spectators have come to see me bowl, not these upstarts from Bombay and Karachi hit me for fours."

"The idea of a Parsi team visiting England was mooted in 1877, but it took a further nine years (April 17, 1886) before it became a reality. The team was in no way a selected one, being composed of a number of cricket-loving Parsis who could afford to pay their own expenses. It was purely an educational venture," writes Meher-Homji in the Australian publication, *Wisden Cricket Monthly* of May 1986.

The play was a success. Yet the cricket tour of England was not! Out of a total of 28 matches played, the visiting team won one, drew eight and lost 19. Yet they were so popular that they were invited by Queen Victoria to play a match at the prestigious Windsor Great Park!

The team consisted of Dr D. H. Patel (captain), A.R. Limbovala (wicket keeper), M. Framji, M.P. Banaji, S.N. Bhedwar, A.C. Major, P. Major, S.H. Harwar, J.M. More-

nas, J. Pochkhanavala and S. Bejonji from Bombay, and B. Bala, P.D. Dastur and D.D. Khambata from Karachi. An Englishman named Alcock was the manager of the side, writes Meher-Homji.

BC Darbe Mehr

"It is the duty of every one of us that this Darbe Mehr... should be used to its fullest extent and supported financially and with religious and social activities. The quality of the Darbe Mehr will depend not upon its beauty but upon the people who will use it," noted Jamshed Pavri, past president of the Zoroastrian Society of British Columbia, when the new Arbab Rustam Guiv Darbe Mehr - Zoroastrian House of British Columbia was officially inaugurated by Ms Morvarid Guiv, wife of the late Arbab, on March 26, 1986.

It was only after "three frustrating years" that the trustees of the Darbe Mehr eventually found an existing property, consisting of two interconnected buildings: one to be used as a place of worship, and the other for social gatherings, seminars, discussions, religious classes, a library, etc., said Pavri. He gave full credit for the project to Mehraban Zartoshty, chairman of the Arbab Rustam Guiv Darbe Mehr and Piroja Amroli, the honorary secretary of the Association.

On the occasion a silver replica of the Darbe Mehr (made in Bombay) was presented to Madam Morvarid Guiv on behalf of the Zoroastrian community of Vancouver. Others who spoke at the inauguration were Keikhosrow Guiv, nephew of the late Arbab and Mehraban Zartoshty, states the release.

The function included a jashan performed by Ervads Jehangir Panthaky and Arda-e-Viraf Minocher-homji and an entertainment program by Roda Pavri's Zoroastrian Children's Choir, which sang three songs, one of which was specially composed for the late Arbab Rustam Guiv.

The London local

"Recently we had an excellent display on the Zoroastrian religion, at the exhibition organized by the Harrow Inter-Faith Council and the Local Borough Council," notes a press release dated March 24 sent by Ms Thrity Shroff, chairperson of the Harrow Zoroastrian Group, London. "A lot of school

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children took an active interest in finding out about Zoroastrianism, and were quite fascinated," she states, adding that the display organized by Ms Naju Dastur, "is making the rounds of the local libraries for the general public," after which, it will be hired out to interested persons as an educational pack.

Registered with the local council, the Harrow Zoroastrian Group, started in January 1985, lists among its four aims: establishing a link between the local community and the larger organizations; providing an opportunity for informed discussions on different facets of the community; cultivating an attitude of positive understanding and expression of Zoroastrian beliefs and traditions; and stimulating local initiatives and social contacts, facilitating leisure time activities, and providing assistance and expertise in professional fields, notes a leaflet issued by the Group.

The committee members for 1986-87 are honorary president, councillor Ms Zerbano Gifford, chairperson Ms Thrity Shroff, joint honorary treasurers Jehangir Irani and Ms Piloo Desai who is also the membership

secretary, and social events secretaries Ms Sheroo Irani, Ms Hiloo Daruwala, Rusi Bhedwar and Homi Dordi, states the Group's leaflet.

Monthly classes on Zoroastrian history and religion, discussion groups on the problems faced in the practice of religion, and classes for navjote prayers are some of the activities undertaken by the Group. Generating funds through subscriptions and jumble sales, it welcomes support in the form of information and books on the religion, notes Shroff.

Karachi's demography

The demographic data of Karachi Parsis does not list a single birth in 1985 but gives the number of deaths as 47 (26 males and 21 females). However this number is eight less than the previous year, notes a report in the January/February issue of *Xanotira Ahure Mazdao*, the newsletter issued by the Informal Religious Meetings (IRM) Trust Fund, Karachi.

Moreover 41 navjotes and 26 marriages were enumerated. The average age of marriage was about 28 for boys and 25 for girls. Nine couples have settled in Karachi and have found accommo-

dation in communal properties like anjuman baugs and other charitable flats, nine couples have settled in Karachi and have either found their own accommodation or live in rented premises, three couples have settled outside Karachi but within Pakistan and five have settled abroad. No divorces were recorded in Karachi in 1985.

Older members of a group of German Zoroastrians known as the Mazdasnan Society, still wear the sudreh kusti on ceremonial occasions, notes a report in the January/February newsletter of the IRM Trust Fund. Taken from *My Travels Through Europe — 1985*, by Ms Meher Master-Moos, the report notes that this society practices Zoroastrianism, sings Avestan prayers translated into German hymns with music and gives special importance to Avan Ardevisur-Anahita. These staunch vegetarians run fortnightly courses on the religion which are attended by 60 to 100 people, adds the newsletter.

Meher Master-Moos, who delivered three lectures to the German Zoroastrians, notes that "a group of Iranian Zoroastrians from Kerman in Iran, migrated west into Europe over one

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thousand years ago and settled in Bavaria, Saxony and Thuringia... They continued to remain Mazdasnans until about the twelfth century AD when the Christian influence swept through Northern Europe. However, in the nineteenth century when Dr Hannish started propagating the Mazdasnan religion, "descendants of some of these people flocked back into this ancient faith," adds the write-up.

The Society's headquarters at Ederal are situated "in the midst of a beautiful countryside of lakes, hills and forests. The structure includes a large lecture hall, dining hall, kitchens and offices on the ground floor and residential accommodation for about 100 persons on the first and second floors, states the write-up.

Catherization chief

Appointed director of the Cardiac Catherization Division of the newly formed cardiovascular department of the Dameron Hospital, Stockton, California, Dr Fram Buhari and his team provide new coronary care techniques, especially coronary artery angioplasty, better known as the "balloon treatment" notes Lori Houston in the *Dameron Digest* (December 1985).

Cardiac catherization is the diagnosis of heart disease through the use of a dye injected into the coronary artery, via a tube. In angioplasty, another smaller tube is threaded through the first tube and fed up to the obstruction (usually a deposit of fat or cholesterol). The end of the tube is then inflated which literally "squashes" the obstruction back into the artery wall, according to Buhari.

Viewed as an alternative to bypass surgery, angioplasty has certain advantages: no massive scar and the patient is up and about within two days as against a three-month rehabilitation period in case of bypass surgery, adds the article. Those with multiple artery obstructions however are not eligible for the treatment. If during the course of the treatment the artery is damaged, immediate surgery is necessary. Hence a team of surgeons always stands by in case of emergency, adds the write-up.

The Aden born, British educated Buhari has been practicing in Stockton since 1976, notes the write-up. The 40-year-old physician who is "a big fan of professional football," also likes pleasure cruising with his wife Behrose and

their three sons, notes Houston in the interview.

Religious education fund

A Zoroastrian Religious Education Fund has been established wherein it is hoped that Zoroastrians of North America, Canada, Europe and Australia will participate. The Fund, which is tax exempt, wishes to create a means of communication between Zoroastrians on these continents; engage one or two fully paid mobeds to devote their entire time to performing religious duties in distant areas; to help towards training mobeds and assistant mobeds; and to spread the message of Zarathushtra and acquaint westerners with those spiritual teachings, notes a letter written by Dr Rostam Sarfeh of California, president of the board of trustees of the Rustam Guiv Trust and Rustam Guiv Foundation of New York, who clarifies that this Fund is distinct from the Guiv Trust.

"A capital of five lakh to one million dollars is thought to be required," \$15,060 have been donated in memory of Parviz Sarfeh and \$50,000 pledged by a Vancouver philanthropist, notes the letter. Any person willing to donate more than one lakh dollars, could have the Fund named after him, adds the letter.

To earn income from the capital, the money has been invested in Government Security Bonds through Merrill Lynch and Company of Lajolla. Donations of one hundred dollars and above should be sent to William Joslyn, manager, Merrill Lynch and Company, 7825, Fay Avenue, Lajolla, California 92037, USA. Donations of less than a hundred dollars should be sent to the treasurer, California Zoroastrian Center, 1814 South Bayless Street, Anaheim, California 92802, USA.

It has been decided that no withdrawal from the capital be allowed until the sum matures to at least one lakh dollars, after which a meeting of all the donors who have contributed five thousand dollars and above will be called to establish the constitution and bylaws for the management of the Fund. Advice and guidance would be sought from the leaders of the community even if no donations were received from them, adds the letter.

Rituals journal

The bi-annual, *Journal of Ritual Studies*, sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh's Department of Religious Studies, will begin publication in the summer of 1986, notes the February issue of the bulletin of the Center for Zoroastrian Research (CZR). "It solicits articles, reviews, correspondence, discussion, announcements and notes from scholars in any discipline that treats ritual in any of its various forms," adds the bulletin, noting that submissions should be sent to Ron Grimes, General Editor, Department Of Religious Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 2604, CL, Pittsburgh, PA 15260. A year's subscription (for two issues) is \$15 for individuals and \$25 for institutions in North America. Foreign subscriptions are \$20 plus \$5 for airmail. Checks and money orders should be sent in US dollars to Associate Editor Fred Clothey at the above address.

Zoroastrianism, is to be included in the *Asian Religious Studies Information* (ARSI), a bibliographical periodical, issued by the State University of New York's Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions at Stony Brook. The bi-annual journal will begin publication this year, notes the CZR bulletin.



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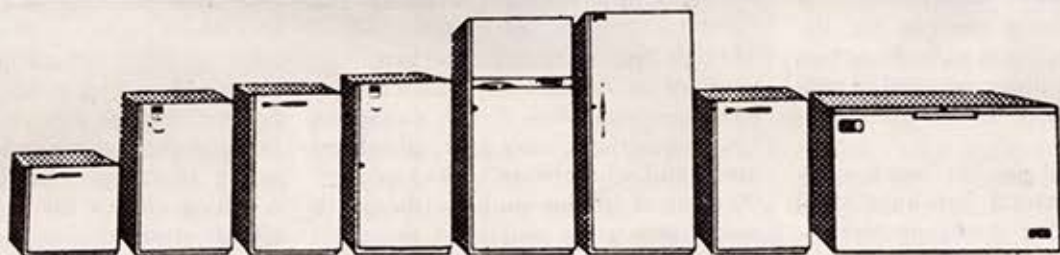
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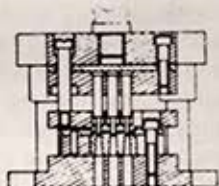
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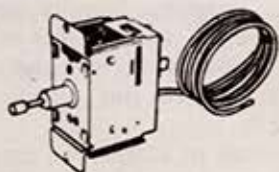
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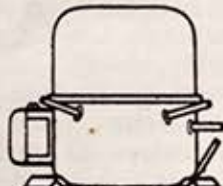
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"Children don't have anything to hold on to"

With young parents giving priorities to career advancement, they have no time to ingrain "Parsi culture" in the children, says Dr Mehroo Bengalee, Bombay University's first lady vice-chancellor.

Parinaz Toddywalla

"Today's Parsi youth are too bogged down with fashion and seem to be moving away (from our culture). With both parents working, our homes have almost become boarding houses. We're forgetting our good old customs and spirituality, and lack information on how to guide the young into right work areas." The first lady vice-chancellor in the history of the 128-year-old Bombay University, Dr Mehroo Bengalee's concern for the declining intellectual standard and loss of Zoroastrian culture, seemed to provoke her strong outbursts on this subject.

Simply attired in her work-a-day dress, seated behind her huge desk which dwarfed her size considerably, Bengalee had a look of confidence and authority as she handled routine affairs on June 2, 1986.

"Our Parsi boys are a major problem today. They don't want to learn, to shoulder responsibility as they should. You find them hanging around at baugs or teasing girls, but where are the menfolk of earlier days, willing to fight for any worthy cause? Today, girls are doing much more - both at home and in their careers. Even in education and scholarships, it's usually the girls who aspire for higher grades.

"Parsi girls are caught in diagonally opposing cross-currents pulling them from three different quarters. They have their responsibilities as housewives, as breadwinners, and as career (women) who have to compete with men to improve their job prospects. But you will find that many Parsi girls are not willing to accept the fact that some time must be set aside for their home and children... Trying to keep pace with these different demands would be easier if men realized that

they need to perform their share of household duties also. In the Indian context, where a boy is equated with wealth and a girl is considered a problem, the wives are too burdened to have time for their children, with the result that the children don't have anything to hold on to."

Then shifting her focus from the family to the educational institution, Bengalee queried, "Where are the Parsi educational institutions today? Though the institute may bear the name of its Zoroastrian founder, may have been established with donations by Zoroastrians, may give subsidized lunch and scholarships to its students, 90 percent of the students there are non-Zoroastrians and even the management is by non-Parsi staff." Referring to the Gamadia Girls' High School where she received her early education, Bengalee nostalgically explained how the "Parsi culture" was ingrained in all its students besides "traditionally grooming us to manage good Parsi homes... Tailoring, laundry, cooking, sports, music, dancing and religious classes conducted by the Kutar brothers ensured our all-round development."

According to Bengalee's estimates, while a school-going child spends six to eight hours a day at school, a collegian spends barely four to five hours a day at the college. "Do Zoroastrian parents ask their children how they spend the rest of the day, when out of the educational institutions?" she enquired. "Instead of allowing them to waste time, the community should plan some activities for them on a large scale, not a skimpy way. Instead of being glued to uneducative cable T.V. programs (where facilities of video programs are provided to mem-

bers in certain affluent buildings) the youth could liaise with Zoroastrians abroad and learn something practical from their advanced technical gadgets and know-how. Overseas, most people learn some craft or (something useful) from video programs," said Bengalee.

At Parsi baugs where concentrations of "200 to 400 Zoroastrian families reside in close proximity," Bengalee suggested the planning of group activities like music, arts, games, handicrafts, cooking, etc to occupy the young idlers. Herself a resident of Cusrow Baug, Bengalee observed, "There are many dedicated retired personnel residing in baugs who could conduct coaching classes for slow learners or gifted students in their respective fields of specialization... We expect the community members to show care."

Realistically looking at facts, Bengalee estimated that a maximum number of Zoroastrians would be found among the college-going drug addicts, especially in the affluent colleges of South Bombay. "At some very good colleges, while the parents think that their children are attending classes, in actuality they may be getting hooked on drugs. Very high expectations on the part of the parent or total rejection of children, when neither parents nor children have care for each other," would prompt a youngster to take to drugs, she said.

"There is loss of faith... The observance of community festivals, joint recitation of prayers, understanding the traditions, customs and rituals, and not just the ceremonies, have become a thing of the past. Instead of our homes being affectionate, three-fourths of the time there are quarrels and disparities. The sense of belonging is lacking. Tolerance, charity, sharing



another's suffering, devotion, loyalty, fervor for religion – all ingrained in us as Parsi culture – is now lost," Bengalee lamented.

Associated with Prof Noshir Kaikobad's school counselling and family counselling projects undertaken at the behest of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India, Bengalee feels it would be ideal if clinics could be opened in Parsi residential areas instead of educational institutions where there may be few Parsi students. "If greater stress is laid on vocational counselling, I think Parsis would benefit more. The spirit of entrepreneurship should be instilled since school days." Viewing the counselling programs as "very worthwhile" especially with trainee counsellors being roped in, Bengalee voiced, "I don't know whether it is filtering to lower income groups."

Author of 12 books on subjects related to counselling, career guidance and psychology, Bengalee's most recent book is *Guidance and Counselling*. Certain books like *Introduction to the World of Work* and *Vyavasi Duniyano Parichaya* (Introduction to the World of Careers) have been published in their eleventh and seventh

editions respectively. She has also constructed a personality test called *Youth Adjustment Analyzer*.

Bengalee has a doctorate degree in psychology, Master of Arts in economics, Master of Education in statistics and vocational guidance, postgraduate diploma in guidance and counselling, Counsellors Trainers' Certificate from Michigan State University and diploma in professional counselling, International Academy of Professional Counselling and Psychotherapy, Kentucky, USA. She has been invited to present papers at several international conferences and committees on education, counselling and career guidance.

Prior to her appointment as vice-chancellor, Bengalee was professor and head, department of education at the Bombay University for two years. For 28 years she was professor of psychology and in charge of the counselling department at the St Xavier's Institute of Education. A recognized guide for PhD students in education, Bengalee feels that higher education should be self-supporting. "Students should feel that they are getting a return on their investments. Instead of using scarce state resources for students who are not academically in-

clined, community resources should be generated to educate those genuinely interested in intellectual pursuits like research and post-graduate programs."

Parents and students should not give undue weightage to degree courses. If a student does not have an aptitude for theoretical studies, a specialized technical course would render him more productive, according to Bengalee. "Instead of postponing career decisions until graduation, with proper one-year orientation courses we hope to make the students economically viable sooner," said the academician. Ideally every boy and girl should be employable at 18 years of age, she feels.

In favor of granting autonomy to "identified" colleges because many good institutions suffer when, instead of using modern methods, they have to fall back on traditional ways, Bengalee acknowledged, "With 178 institutions falling within the purview of the Bombay University... we've outgrown our system." Quite resolute that she'd like to take stringent measures to discourage the practice of giving and accepting capitation fees, Bengalee reasons that if students don't get admission on merit, they don't need to get in.

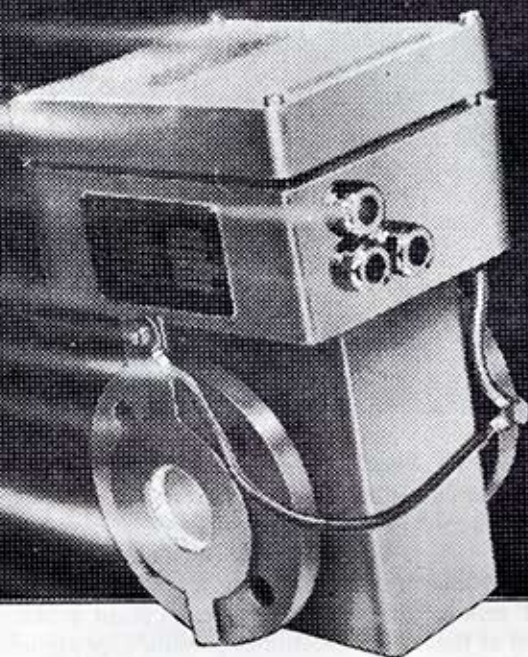
Soon after the Bombay University's image was blemished with the MD marks scandal – when there was an alleged alteration in marks to pass a medical student, a daughter of a chief minister – the authorities looked for a non-political candidate for the vice-chancellor's post. "I believe I was appointed because I am completely non-political, non-communal and mainly because I am a woman. The recommendation of three names by the three-member selection team (comprising Justice M. Hidayatullah, Justice B. Lentin and Tarkateerth Laxmansastri Joshi) and the final selection by the Governor of Maharashtra, must have been on the basis of my being an academician with 30 years of experience with the Bombay University."

Bengalee's career in education started by chance, she confessed. After passing the prestigious Union Public Services Commission examination, she expected to be recruited as an officer at the Reserve Bank of India. "But since the RBI had yet to formulate a policy for recruiting lady officers, I was not willing to wait... and here I am."

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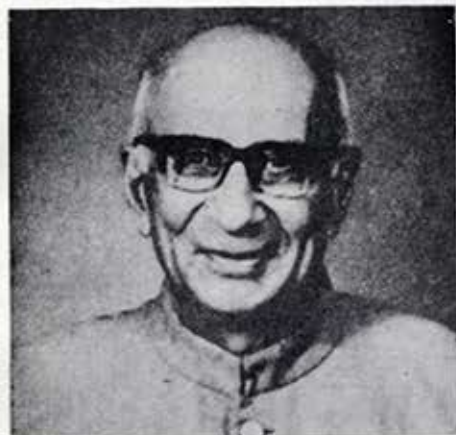
Bahman Surti publishes the first volume of his prose translation of the *Shah Namah*

Homi J. Rogers

Shah Namah of Firdaosi in English prose – Volume I by Dr Bahman Sohrab Surti. Published by the author in March 1986 from 37 Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad 500003 (Andhra Pradesh). Pp 160. Price: Rs 50.

"The homes that are the dwellings of today
Will sink 'neath shower and sunshine to decay
But storm and rain shall never mar what I
Have built – the palace of my poetry."

WARNER



Surti: "faithful" translation (Right) At the official launching of Surti's *Shah Namah* translation are (from left) Jehangir Shroff, Meher Master-Moos and Sarosh Wadia

The *Shah Namah* – the book of Kings – has vindicated the faith of its poet, Abul Kavim-i-Mansur, more popularly known by his pen name of Firdaosi. An epic of as great proportion as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Greece, or the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* of India, though much current in comparison to the others (having been written in the late tenth century), it is a work of over 60,000 couplets, of which 55, 693 are yet extant. It has inspired poets and philosophers, and many generations who have heard the story in the oral tradition. The first ever trans-

lation was undertaken only in 1774, nearly 800 years after it was first written, and the first *total* rendering, in the mid-eighteenth century by Jules Mohl and Barbier de Maynard in French, under the patronage of the French government.

Thereafter, many incidents from the *Shah Namah* have been rendered into English poems and ballads, the most famous being Matthew Arnold's *Rustam and Sohrab*. But the entire epic has not been translated into English very often. The Warner brothers – Arthur and Edmund – rendered the total tome in English verse, even adhering to the same rhyme and meter as in the original Persian (as can be borne out by the example at the beginning of the review) in 1906. A year later, Alexander Rogers translated it into poetry (the more dramatic parts) and prose. More recently, in 1967, UNESCO published under its Persian Heritage series, a prose translation by Reuben Levy, but even this book, like Rogers', selected the most representa-

tive and significant parts of the original, while summarizing other chapters to maintain continuity in narration.

To this small batch of books, we now have an addition in Dr Bahman Surti's translation. It is, as claimed by him in his preface, the first *detailed*, faithful translation in English *prose*, as Dr Surti has not summarized the stories, and has adhered to the chapters as Firdaosi had written them.

A retired medical practitioner from Secunderabad (he is a qualified obstetrician and gynecologist), Surti has been working on the translation single-handedly since 1971, even at the expense, as he informs in the preface, of neglecting his family members. On failing to find a publisher for seven years, he decided to publish it himself, with the help of Marzban J. Giara of Bombay (the book is available from Giara's residence at 667 Lady Jehangir Road, Dadar, Bombay 400014 and the Kaiser-E-Hind Press, 300 Perin Nariman Street, Bombay 400001) who undertook the responsibility of getting it printed and correcting the proofs.

The first volume of their combined efforts is out. It covers 171 chapters of the *Shah Namah*, starting with the mandatory praises to God, the Prophet (Mohammed), and the Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni who, delighted with Firdaosi's style and language, handed over the ancient chronicles of Persia for versification, promising to pay a gold miskal for every couplet composed.

The volume under review traces the history of Iran from the myths of Crea-



tion, through the times of King Kayumars (the first man to rule the world), Siyamak, Hooshang (he is credited with the discovery of fire), Tahmuras and Jamsheed, who is said to have lived for 700 years before meeting his death at the hands of the evil Zahhaak, who in turn met his nemesis in Fareedoon. The *Shah Namah* then covers the fratricidal wars between Fareedoon's sons, and the emergence of Meenochehr, during whose rule of 120 years, was born Zaal, the father of the legendary Persian hero, Rustam. On behalf of his emperor, the luckless and ill-fated Kaikaaos, Rustam stormed the demon kingdom of Maazandaraan, and waged a continual battle with Iran's traditional foe Turan, climaxing (or, more rightly anti-climaxing) in the death of his son, Sohraab at his own hands. The first volume ends on this tragic note.

While the translation is faithful to the text, and Surti offers no personal interpretation, or alteration, his style — and at many times, choice of words — leaves much to be desired. "The *Shah Namah* is not a mass of dry, deadwood and dehydrated facts, but a living historical document pulsating with the life, breathed into it by Firdausi, in his inimitable language, style and vigor of narration," writes *Blitz*' Editor R.K. Karanjia in his foreword. Sadly enough, this fire is missing. The translation is not just in prose — it is prosaic. The English-knowing world, and the western mind to whom the book is targeted, would have appreciated the rendering to be tinged with archaisms to create and convey the right atmosphere.

Compare, for example, Surti's version of the birth of Zaal, with Levy's. Surti: "In due course she conceived and gave birth to a lovely boy whose skin was as white as silver, but the amazing part was that the hair of his head was absolutely white, just as in an old man. Nobody carried this news to Saam for a week since everyone was afraid to tell him that he had a senile (sic) baby."

Levy: "When the child was severed from his mother his face was as beautiful as the sun, but his hair was entirely white, and for a whole week, because of his strange appearance, news of his birth was not brought to his father Sām. Those who lived in the inner quarters of that noble warrior's man-

sion stood weeping before the child, none having the spirit to tell Sām, the hero, that the son borne to him by his beautiful wife was hoary-headed."

A definite asset of the book is its transliteration of proper names and Persian words in phonetic English to enable the modern reader to know and pronounce Parsi names correctly (note: Jamsheed not Jamshed, Eerach, not Erach or Iraj, as the western translators put it). Yet another area where praise is due to Surti is for the geographical identifications undertaken by him, which give the reader an idea of the extent of the Persian empire, ambiguous in most foreign (including Rogers') translations, where Haamavaran is not identified as Assyria, or Rum as Byzantine.

It would have been appreciated if, extending the same scholarly study, Surti had provided the reader with occasional footnotes, or short prefixes shedding some added insight to the tales, and even on the original style and language of the epic. A few illustrations (this volume has eight line drawings of kings and warriors on its end pages, in addition to a multi-

colored jacket) would also have been welcome. Probably, in the forthcoming volumes, the author could consider these incorporations.

The *Shah Namah*, like all epics, is a great read. It has the same endearing quality of the Greek tales the modern generation grew up with; in the absence of a book that informed them of their own culture. The romance of Zaal-Rudaabah or Bizan-Manizeh is no less enthralling than of Jason-Medea or Paris-Helen. Rustam, complete with his adventures of slaying dragons and roping demons, is second to no Hercules. And the capricious, covetous Kaikaaos bears a close affinity to the Greek king Agamemnon. Surti's translation has filled the lacuna by re-introducing Persian lore at an affordable price. It may lack Rogers' evocativeness, Warner's imagery (any translation from poetry to prose would), or Levy's bristle; but then, these are out-of-print books now. And with the exception of Warner, not as complete too. One looks forward to the other volumes, which, judging from the material covered here, should number at least four.

Capital round-up

A booklet details the highlights of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman.

The Delhi Parsi Anjuman: A Profile by Noshir Homi Dadrawala with a foreword by Shivaax Nargolwala, Pp 19 + iv.

Delhi — India's political capital since 1912 — is a city steeped in history, and bound in red tape. Yet, paradoxically enough, for the Parsi community there, limited to just around 300 families, the exact converse holds true. Noshir Dadrawala while profiling the Delhi Parsi Anjuman (DPA), the premier Parsi organization in the city which has bound the community together, explores the various facets of this paradox.

The DPA was formed in 1925 (there being, in as late as 1912, just "some 30 to 40 Parsis residing in Delhi"), and its constitution was drafted by its first president, Nowroji Rustomji Kapadia, with the primary object of providing "facilities for religious, social, intellectual and other material benefits to

members of the Delhi Parsi community and to safeguard their interests." Dadrawala's booklet traces the activities of the DPA in meeting its objectives, many a times by cutting past the tapes of bureaucracy and/or orthodoxy.

Prominent among these bold steps is the one taken by the Anjuman in 1978 to admit non-Parsi spouses of Parsi members on its membership roster. It was as a result of this measure that the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) — the bastion of the old guard Parsis — withdrew from the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India which, along with the DPA, it had helped to establish in 1971. A considerable portion (nearly 25 percent) of the booklet deals with the Federation controversy.

Though not as revolutionary, some other activities undertaken by the Anjuman outlined here, include the

maintenance of Parsi cemeteries (aramgahs) at Delhi, Simla and Hathras, and the establishment of the Mengusi Parsi Dharamshala in 1951. What is creditable is that there appear to be no hassles, and unity and harmony seem to be maintained between the Anjuman members, trustees and government authorities. This is in marked contrast to the scene in Bombay, for example, where even renovation of a sanatorium causes a furore.

The Delhi Parsi Anjuman also set up Delhi's one and only Kaikhusru Pallonji Katrak Dar-e-Meher in 1961, which according to Shiavax Nargolwala, its president for the last 25 years, "is the one and only new Agiary established anywhere in India over the last 50 years," a fact no longer true, though, with the establishment of the Pundole Adarian at Udawada. What is however important to remember is that the task must have involved considerable liaising with the government, and within the religious order, and the achievement is hence laudable.

Dadrawala does not detail the hurdles crossed for the setting up of the

Agiary or Dharamshala. But what stands out from his text — restricted to a framework of just 19 small pages — is the innovativeness and zeal imparted by the DPA to its many activities. For example, much before the Athravan Educational Trust (AET) was formed to give mobeds a fair packet for their services, the DPA had implemented the same (including medical benefits, provident fund and gratuity) for the priests tending its Agiary. Similarly, since 1962, it has been publishing a newsletter and bringing out books, so as to disseminate knowledge of the religion — a form of propagation only recently taken up seriously by other Parsi organizations in the country and abroad.

Dadrawala's profile of the DPA, however, reads more like a prospectus than a work that would recreate for the reader the triumph and tribulations of the Anjuman. Dadrawala pulls no punches, pats no backs. He takes no sides, reveals no secrets, and, but for the Federation controversy, doesn't provide any details on such matters. The two reformist decisions

adopted by the Anjuman of (i) permitting of *sezdo* (final salute to the dead after the *satchkar* or preparation for the last rites) by non-Parsi friends and relations at the time of burial, and (ii) accepting within the fold, children of mixed blood whose navjote has been performed with the consent of both parents, are not even mentioned by Dadrawala. The reader is thus deprived of the knowledge of how these acts were permitted, and what was, and continues to be, the reaction of the community in Delhi to them.

The profile hence remains a straightforward narration of the Anjuman's activities, its aims and policies. It is a manual which other Anjumans or Parsi-unifying bodies elsewhere in India and the world could look up to for information and instruction. Yet, like the paradoxical nature of the city, vis-a-vis the community, what could be termed as a major weakness, is a positive strength. For the profile, as it is rightly termed, offers a side view that could leave the reader *indel(h)ibly* impressed, for he sees no warts.

H.J.R.

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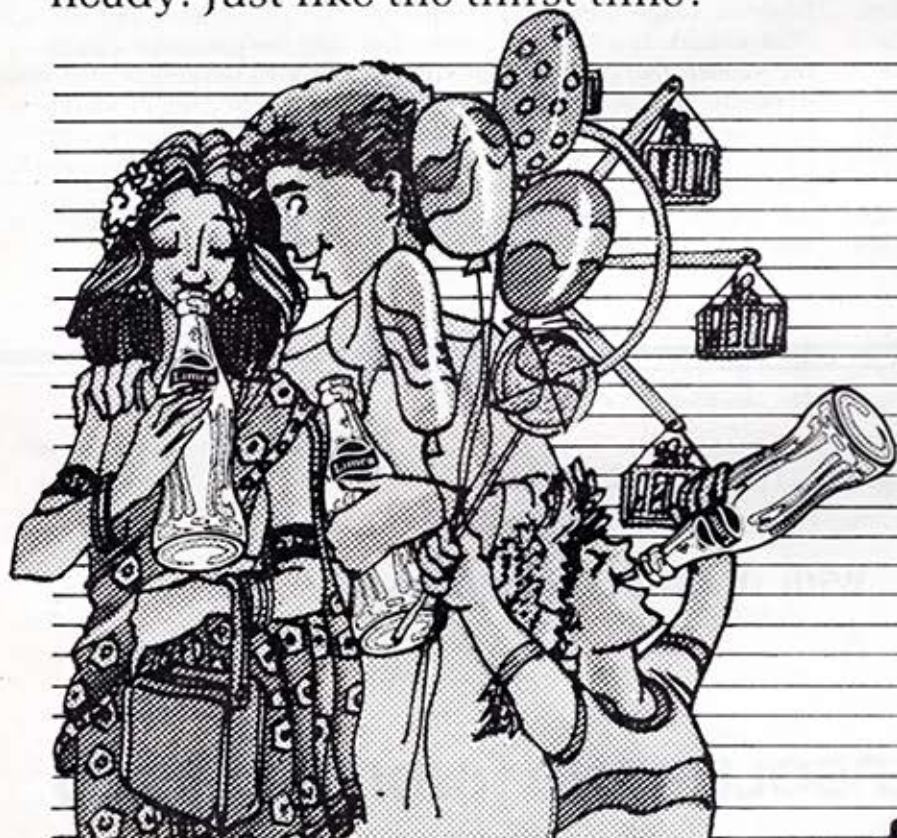
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Parsiana is edited and published by Jehangir R. Patel for Parsiana Publications Pvt Ltd at C/o Rochat, Navsari Chambers, ground floor, 39 A.K. Nayak Marg, Fort, Bombay 400001 and printed by him at Kaiser-E-Hind, 300 Perin Nariman Street, Bombay 400001 and phototypeset at Ace Fototypesetters, Bombay 400001