

Parsiā

Requiem for a patriarch

Shiavax Nargolwala's death in a car accident deprived the community of its foremost liberal leader.

Arnavaz S. Mama

"We cannot stand aside when the whole country is moving forward," Shiavax Dinshaw Nargolwala had noted in an interview eight years ago. The sentence summed up the outlook of the man who was president of the progressive Delhi Parsi Anjuman (DPA) for 26 years and architect and vice-president of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India since its inception in 1972.

Felled by a freak highway accident on August 6, 1986 - Nargolwala's car collided with an Air Force truck at Rangpuri village near Mahipalpur on national highway number eight (new), as notes the Federation's special communique dated August 11 - he never recovered consciousness, the postmortem report ascribing his death to brain injury. His fellow passengers - wife Nergish, personal assistant Sat Narain Pasinhe and the driver - were also unconscious. The trustees and the members of the DPA rallied round Nergish Nargolwala and her sons in their hour of need and "worked

tirelessly day and night to complete the police formalities, the postmortem, recovery of the body, funeral arrangements... (as well as) the treatment and care of the injured," notes the communique.

At the funeral, which his devoted wife Nergish attended on a stretcher, a very large number of Nargolwala's friends and admirers were present to pay their last respects to him and to offer their condolences to the bereaved. In a personal letter to Nergish, the Prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi noted, "His death will be a great loss to the entire Parsi community and to all those who have known him through his illustrious career. I wish to extend my sincere condolences to you and your family and to the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India." The Federation's resolution described Nargolwala as "forceful and fearless... a dedicated, devoted leader."

At the condolence meeting held by the DPA on August 24, Dinshaw Mad-

an, ex judge of the Supreme Court recounted how "Shiavax was one of the first persons who met me when we came to reside in Delhi... (He) endeared himself to us and the acquaintance turned into affection... He was a man with a progressive outlook, a great administrator, a patriarch in the true sense of the word and a leader for the entire Parsi community." Among others who spoke at the condolence meeting were former DPA president K.F. Rustomji, Bombay Parsi Panchayet (BPP) trustee Jamshed Guzder, Federation secretary Keki Gandhi, J.K. Synthetics' president S.C. Rustogi, India Tourism Development Corporation's managing director Lt Gen Sethna, horticulturist K.D. Bahl, advocate of the Supreme Court Rustom Gae, ex vice-president of the Income-tax Appellate Tribunal J. Sen and the DPA's Dr Minoo Shroff, Russian Engineer and Dadi Mistry.

The letters have poured in - from individuals and associations: vice admiral Rustom Gandhi, Governor of

Himachal Pradesh, wrote in an anguished letter to Nergish: "We fully appreciate all that Shiavax did for the Parsis in Delhi and elsewhere. He is irreplaceable. I know how much he genuinely cared for the present and future welfare of the community, and how much of his time he gave up for us all."

The condolence resolution of the University Court of the University of Delhi referred to Nargolwala as "an ardent connoisseur of music...(and) himself a violinist of repute." P.A. Nair, president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India, offering condolences "on behalf of my Council and the entire profession of accountancy in India," wrote of Nargolwala as "one of the pioneers who helped in the establishment of the Institute...He guided and assisted the Council in laying down the high traditions of the profession of which we are all justly proud."

He stood tall; a zesty 71-year-old, optimistically eyeing the future. Despite 35 years in the Indian Civil Service (ICS), there were no hidebound bureaucratic ways about Nargolwala who was always ready to examine the need for "a change in priorities" as he had noted in January 1977. While the majority of Parsis were content with wringing their hands and despairing of Parsis marrying outside the community, the DPA, under Nargolwala, became the first major association in India to pass a resolution stating that spouses and children of Parsis married to non Parsis be admitted into the Parsi Zoroastrian fold and that conversion by marriage, as practiced in Iran, should be adopted by Indian Zoroastrians.

Parsi women contracting marriage to non Parsis lost none of their community privileges in Delhi but could avail of community institutions, trusts and funds as long as they continued to be practicing Zoroastrians. The DPA agreed to allow non Parsi spouses to become members of the Association because as Nargolwala noted, "It was a rather humiliating and embarrassing situation that the wife was a member and the husband came as a guest; or the husband was a member and the wife came as a guest. And there was no equality between the husband and wife so far as the membership was concerned." The non Zoroastrian spouse is not allowed into the agiary or to be



buried in the aramgah, and is denied the right to stand as trustee of the DPA. But these three restrictions apart, Nargolwala saw to it that the community helped the interfaith marriage to work, rather than provide added grounds for rupture.

Nargolwala's DPA also continued to support the practice of non Parsis being permitted to attend and pay their last respects at the death ceremonies of Zoroastrians. While Zoroastrians in the rest of India bewailed the diminishing numbers of mobeds, the DPA, together with other anjumans who are members of the Federation's north zone, agreed with Nargolwala that at a suitable opportunity, the priestly calling be opened to all Zoroastrians and not be kept exclusively for the athornan class.

For these reforms, seen as a necessary institutional adjustment of the community to the changing times, Nargolwala paid dearly in terms of the criticism he received. The community

Press was riddled with letters and articles. Coming down heavily on him for "Cutting capers with the PM" as they labelled the DPA's highly successful Jamshedi Navroze function in 1984 which the late Indira Gandhi, Rajiv and Sonia Gandhi had attended, *The Parsee Voice*, a conservative tabloid then owned by B.K. Boman-Behram, noted, "...the president of the DPA conveniently forgot to mention that some of the 'problems' like mixed marriages, have been aggravated, thanks mainly to men like him, who, while they pay lip service to the cause of inbreeding, have left no stone unturned in directly or indirectly encouraging mixed marriages!"

A patrician whose intellectual stature permitted him to brush aside such criticism, Nargolwala maintained that the trustees of anjumans and punchayets should be leaders of the community. "Our real problem is the motivation of our younger generation," he had noted in 1977. And to that end, he felt that the trustees



Above: Nargolwala (left) with the late Shah of Iran
 Left (top): With the late Indira Gandhi and members of the DPA at the 1984 Jamshedi Navroze function
 Left (puffing at his pipe): At the Federation meeting in Poona, his homework done
 Far left: With wife Nergish

should be elected by democratic adult franchise for short periods of three years, a system followed by the DPA. This fiercely held belief often led him into implicit and explicit criticism of the BPP and the Surat Parsi Punchayet which boomeranged badly when the BPP, led by B.K. Boman-Behram, withdrew from the Federation in a huff within a fortnight of the Third World Zoroastrian Congress which it had hosted at the Federation's behest. Nargolwala had criticized the BPP's electoral scheme in a paper which he had read at the Congress. Though it may have been a peevish, irresponsible act on the part of the BPP trustees, the enormity of their rebuff was a measure of Nargolwala's personal stature.

Nargolwala himself considered the Federation's main accomplishment to be "the elimination of the communication gap...for the first time in the history of the Parsis in India," conceiving of the all-India body in terms of "a father or grandfather in a family. Ev-

erybody respects the elderly person, everybody respects his advice and guidance."

Often castigated as an ill-tempered egoist who was concerned only with "building a following of like-minded people," Nargolwala had countered, "There is no personal axe to grind so far as I am concerned. I work for the good of the community. I may be wrong. No human being is perfect. But I am hurt when motives are ascribed to me. When people think I am doing this to collect a following, or I am doing this to go against some person in the Parsi Punchayet or Surat Punchayet..."

A generalist by virtue of his ICS training, Nargolwala was adept at understanding the problems of various categories of people. He pressed incessantly for a change in the sections of the Indian Succession Act dealing with intestate succession among Parsis and the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act to bring them into harmony with prevailing mores.

Each Federation meeting Nargolwala attended with his homework done. A mountain of papers lay before him and, unerringly, he produced the right document when the occasion demanded it, even as he puffed at his pipe, his eyes veiled in semi-repose (especially in the post lunch sessions), conveying a false impression of somnolence! He was always ready with ideas – and the will to see them through. Items that required finance or financial and tax acumen, were his forte. Thus the launching of the Federation's Women and Children's Fund, and applying for tax exemption for the Federation's income under section 10(23)(C)(v) were largely his handiwork.

His forward thrust propelled the Federation (and, at its behest, the BPP) into involvement with schemes for the social and economic uplift of Parsi Zoroastrians, and the modification of the community's stand on reservation in light of difficulties that Parsis encounter in their often hope-

less attempts to enter technical colleges. Irani Zoroastrians seeking Indian visas had his sympathy and his help. Advising small anjumans regarding finance, taxation and property involvements, came naturally to him. He viewed the Federation as the best vehicle for improving the community's future.

Almost to the very end, community matters exercised his mind. Barely a few days before he died, Nargolwala was said to have successfully negotiated with the Delhi administration for an extension of the Delhi aramgah. A letter dated August 1, requesting old issues, reached *Parsiana* after his demise.

Nargolwala was born June 5, 1915, the eldest of six brothers. He received his early education in Deolali and Bombay, achieving top honors in the Elphinstone and Sydenham Colleges. Graduating in commerce from the London School of Economics, and after successfully competing for the ICS examination in 1938, he studied in the London School of Oriental Studies for his Civil Service probation period. During this period he simultaneously completed a course in chartered

accountancy from South Wales. This enabled him to earn the rare distinction of being both an ICS member and a chartered accountant, notes the Delhi University resolution.

During his distinguished career as a civil servant, Nargolwala served in various capacities as Collector, Divisional Magistrate, Commissioner of Income Tax, Financial Adviser, Joint Secretary and Additional Secretary. "In the early 60's, he was closely associated with the commissioning of the COMSAT satellite, an early Indian venture for a futuristic entry into the satellite communication era," as notes the Delhi University resolution. Although Nargolwala retired from civil service in 1973, he continued to serve in his capacity as a professional consultant in financial matters.

In a tribute to Nargolwala on his completion of 25 years as president of the DPA, Ava Khullar had noted in *Dipanjali* (July 1985), the DPA's newsmagazine, "Mr Nargolwala took over the helm of affairs at a time when the small group of Parsis in Delhi were torn into two warring factions and the community threatened with prospects of litigation and controversy...A peo-

ple get the leaders they deserve...The Parsis of Delhi have, over the last two decades and more, shown a degree of sagacity, patience and overall sound judgment whenever forces endeavoring to undermine the unity and progressive outlook of the DPA have emerged. What the president has been able to achieve is in no small measure due to the sensible support he has received from a majority of the members of the Anjuman."

Nearly a year ago, the then recently bereaved Perin Satarawalla, wife of the late Lt Gen Jehangir Satarawalla, had related to a friend some of the unpleasantness caused by traditionalists in Poona vis-a-vis her daughter and non Parsi son-in-law (The Satarawallas had just settled in Poona after a long spell in Delhi when Jehangir expired). Said Perin, "I do not care for Shiavax - I find him too overbearing. But I do know that if Shiavax Nargolwala had been here, he would never have permitted this to happen."

Shiavax Nargolwala is survived by his wife Nergish and sons Adil and Mehrab; son Khushroo and daughters Navaz and Mehroo (children by his first wife, Dhun).

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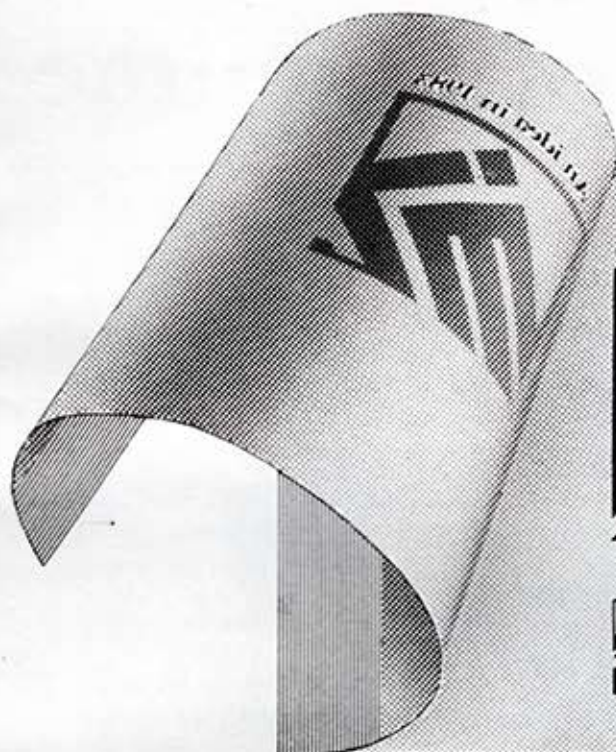
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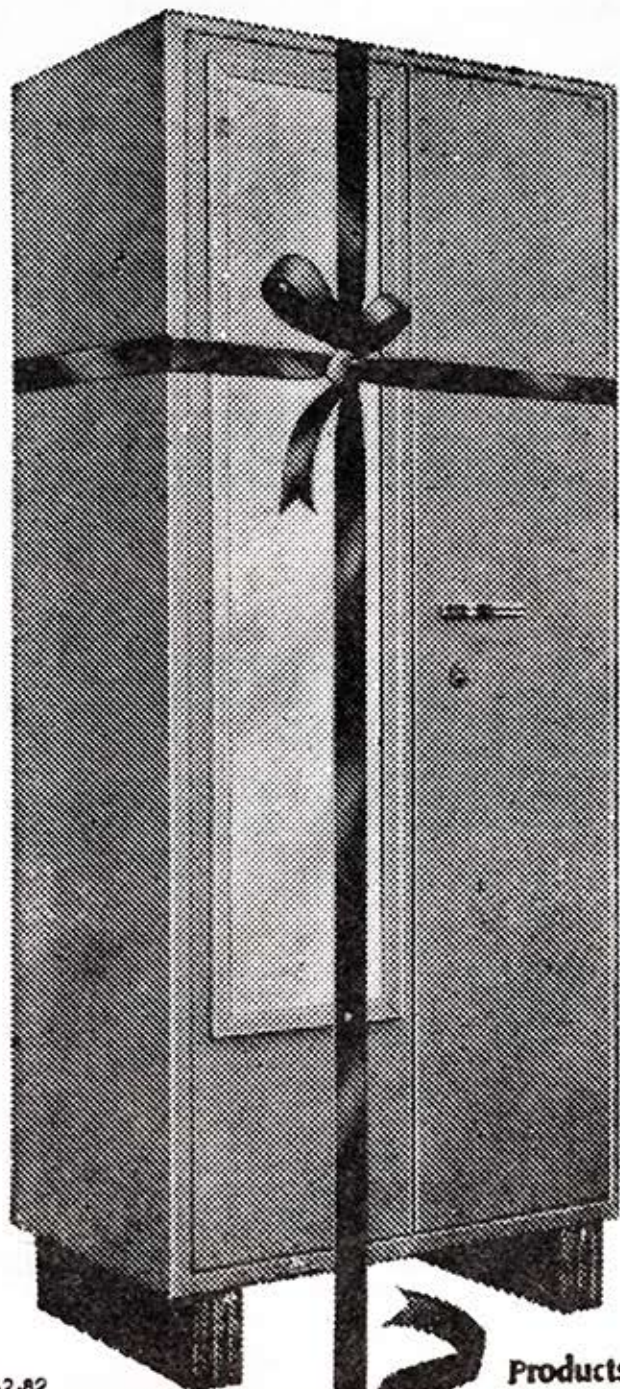
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'Wings' on fire

The report of court proceedings in the article "'Wings' on fire" (*Parsiana*, July 1986) needs clarification.

The writ petition filed to remove certain objectionable scenes from the film *On Wings of Fire* was rejected and the appeal thereon dismissed on the basis of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) trustees having approved the script of the film, as stated in the affidavit filed by the respondents. In addition, unilateral permission was granted by the BPP for shooting scenes at Doongerwadi and a donation of one lakh rupees made towards the cost of the film. The defence, as put forth by the respondents' advocate in the appeal court, that scenes of funeral rites were mere pictorialization of details given in Sir J.J. Modi's book *The*

Customs and Practices of Parsis is incorrect. When ordinary photography is prohibited at Doongerwadi, pictorialization could never be permitted. The honorable court did not want to interfere in this matter when approval was granted by the apex body of the community.

Mr Andhyarujina did say that the petitioners did not exhibit Zarathushtra's cardinal tenets of "total tolerance and adaptability." In the absence of any explanation it was difficult to understand what exactly he meant by adaptability; but if by any chance he was suggesting a change in the tenets of the religion then I am afraid he is on weaker grounds because today no one is qualified to do so.

It may be mentioned that the respondents, in the appeal court, did not reply to even a single objection on the basis of scriptural evidence although the appellants' advocate dealt with them all at great length. Mr Cyrus Bharucha and his advisers, including Dr Kotwal who lent considerable support to the film, have all along kept quiet on this score, and yet Mr Bharucha in his statement issued on June 20, 1986 when the matter was sub judice, had the audacity to make a sweeping comment that the objections raised by the petitioners were totally baseless and did not pass muster on religious grounds. Further, in his interview with *The Sunday Observer* of June 22, he went to the extent of abusing the appellants, proving thereby the old adage, "When arguments fail, abuses prevail."

The appellants all along behaved in a dignified manner and presented their point of view because they too have as much freedom of expression as Mr Bharucha. It was Mr Bharucha who showed total disregard for tolerance and not the appellants as alleged by Mr Andhyarujina.

Although Ms Arnavaz Mama is entitled to her own views, she has not been just and fair in saying that Mr Andhyarujina almost annihilated the petitioners' advocate Mr B. Suresh, a non-Zoroastrian, who fought the case with zeal and dedication like a Zoroastrian. The respondents won due to the support lent to them by the apex body

of the community, the BPP, and Dr Kotwal. The fact, however, remains that they lacked courage to counter the objections on religious grounds either in the court of law or in public.

SOHRAB NAWALSHAW PATWA

Arnavaz Mama replies

I agree with Mr Patwa that the court rejected the appeal on the basis of the BPP's permission and implied approval of the film. Nowhere does my original story contradict this statement. However, the appellants' case was argued long and repetitiously by their advocate. The fact remains that no Zoroastrian argued the appellants' case and that Andhyarujina's reply took less than five minutes as compared to Suresh's 45!

...

With great disgust I am forced to write in reference to the film *On Wings of Fire*. The people who made this so-called educational film are responsible for taking the whole Parsi/Irani Mazdayasni community for a ride.

The divine personality of the holy prophet Zarathushtra has been shockingly distorted in the film: the prophet is projected as a thinker and philosopher, subject to all human frailties and weaknesses of the flesh. The filmmakers did not care to research into the background of the historical figures concerned.

Actor Nigel Terry is not fit to act as holy Zarathushtra. Zarathushtra is shown bare-headed most of the time, with only a band on his head. When the cloud thunders and the devil's voice is heard, Zarathushtra is shown shivering and shouting, "Leave me, leave me" etc. Zarathushtra, thrown in jail, is depicted naked except for a half lungi, without sudreh-kusti and bare-headed, eating food without covering his head, using all the five fingers. Do the filmmakers understand what is *tarikhat*?

Whatever happens, Zarathushtra should be shown calm and quiet, always praying, with an aura round his head.

The scene of the arrival of the Parsi community in India, which showed people dressed in Roman style clothes, most of them bare-headed, reflected



Hinnells (left) Hodiwala (center) Sontakke (right)

the hypocrisy of the filmmakers.

Facts are not only distorted but are presented in a strongly biased and narrow minded manner. It is unfortunate that the best opportunity has been lost – rather misused – in filming the teachings and life of Asho Zarathushtra, and the donated amounts have gone down the drain.

As for the mock funeral ceremony, the less said the better.

If a film has to be made and shown, it must adhere strictly to our ancient scriptures and traditions and should not, under any circumstances, hurt the feelings of the community.

FALI S. MASTER

Jt. Hon. Secretary, Athornan Mandal

Nonpartisan researcher

I am seriously concerned that in a letter "Exclusive muktads" by Darius Sethna (*Parsiana*, May 1986) it was said that my research "has categorically proven that rapid destruction is the inevitable result of reformist thinking." As those who know me are well aware, I seek carefully and at all times in my work not to take sides in internal disputes in your community. I feel very strongly that as an outsider it would be wrong of me to do otherwise.

Your correspondent evidently refers to my recent Ratanbai Katrak Lectures at the University of Oxford. Unfortunately he was not at those lectures and regrettably appears to have received an unbalanced report of them; nor was he at the lecture I gave at the World Zoroastrian Organisation day school held in London recently where I stressed that the divisions into 'orthodox' and 'reform' is – at least as far as my research is concerned – too simple a division.

My Katrak research was on two main areas – the history of Zoroastrian

communities in various centers around the world from 1947 to the present day and a survey of current beliefs and practices. The latter focuses on such issues as: the impact of an education in the West; the correlation between a person's mother tongue (e.g. Gujarati or English) and his or her religious beliefs and practices; the effect of the sense of citizenship (such as identifying oneself as Indian or American), of having children, of membership of an extended family network, of living near a Zoroastrian center, on religious allegiance and the different patterns of belief and practice of various age-groups.

The research does consider some potentially controversial issues such as the pattern of education and beliefs of those who have married out of the community and of those who say they approve of intermarriage (and of people involved in other debates). The work seeks to understand the regional variations not only between countries, say Hong Kong and England, but also between different cities for example in America. Although the analysis of the data collected through my survey extends to approximately 12,000 pages of computer printout, the analysis is not yet complete and I certainly would not feel able to draw any simple conclusion until it is. Under no circumstances would I personally be willing to use that research in a partisan manner within your community.

One thing I have said in these, and other, lectures is that I fear your community now faces greater threats than at almost any time in its noble history because of diminishing numbers. The dispersal of so few around more countries than at any time in the religion's vast history does raise the danger of dilution through acculturation. It is a

major problem alongside the lure of materialism, the seductions of secularism and the disruption through divisions. As a *juddin* who respects your traditions considerably (but is not seeking conversion!) I find it immensely sad that the future of the Good Religion is so threatened. But the views attributed to me in the columns of your magazine are not a fair record of my lectures or writings and could cause misunderstandings which might threaten my neutral stance and future work in that it could cause alarm or mistrust among those in many countries whose cooperation I need and value.

JOHN R. HINNELLS
Manchester, U.K.

Hodiwala's commitment

Mr Maneckji Hodiwala hails from the philanthropic family of Hodiwalas. He is the son of the late Khanbahadur Bejonji Hodiwala. He and his brothers were responsible for constituting the Hodiwala Bungli at Doongerwadi and for donating building materials to innumerable charitable and deserving institutions and hospitals.

Maneckji can be called a true Akabar of the community. After successfully contesting the Panchayet election in 1976, Maneckji plunged headlong into the service of the downtrodden and the needy. There has not been a single person to whom he has turned a deaf ear. Though unable to help everybody in everything, his gentle manner, patient hearing and the will to help, endeared him to one and all in the community.

He never entered controversies nor asserted himself. He has always played the role of a pacifier and has been well balanced in his thinking. He was on the Doongerwadi committee, the R.H. Patuck Trust, the housing committee, the committee on vocational and technical education, the committee to help Parsis with loans and doles, and the Khareghat and Gamadia Colony welfare committee.

PERVIZ DOTIVALA

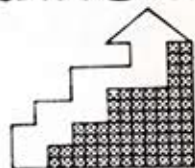
Zoroastrian at heart

The old rented house of the late Mr N.S. Sontakke in Pune's Sadashiv Peth had a door with a low lintel so that you had to bow to enter the small living room. To the right was a desk, as he left it, topped by the five-volume commentary on the *Rig Veda*, and the

continued on page 19

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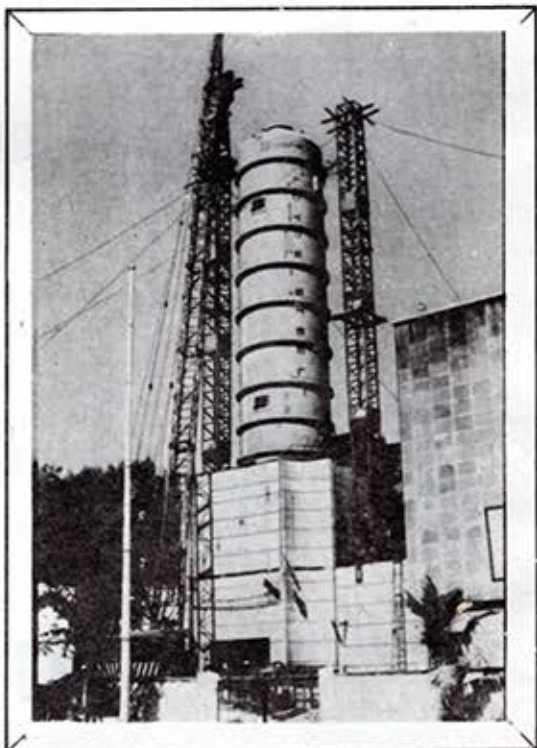
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A pressing decision

With losses mounting, the BPP has reluctantly decided to close down the Industrial Institute and the Godrej Press.

Arnavaz S. Mama

The current recession in the printing industry has claimed a community victim. The 50-year-old Industrial Institute and the 35-year-old Godrej Press, both set up by the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) to provide gainful employment – and self-respect – to Parsis who could find no other employment, will close December 31, 1986.

Located in a convenient corner of Gamadia Colony off the main Tardeo Road, the flat, sprawling structure, which houses the Industrial Institute for Men and the Godrej Press, has been incurring losses of one-and-a-half to two-lakh rupees per year. The 32 Parsis on its payroll constitute only one-third of the total workforce of 95 persons which cost the BPP a total wage bill of Rs 2,45,614 in the first quarter of 1986 while registering a total turnover of Rs 7,35,199 (figures from the BPP's *Quarterly Review*, Volume V, Number 3).

The machinery at the Press, based on antiquated letterpress technology, is old and slow. The only polygraph machine prints fairly good color pictures, one color at a time. The rest are all treadle machines. There are six Parsis employed at Godrej Press, only one being on the machines. The single Linotype machine employs a non Parsi operator and there is no Parsi capable of operating the polygraph. At the Industrial Institute where envelopes and boxes are made, there are 26 Parsis, almost all of them on handwork.

Noted industrialist Naoroji Godrej, who has handled the portfolio pertaining to the two institutions since his election as BPP trustee in February '85, made every effort to save the Press which bears his family name (after his late uncle Ardeshir Godrej who founded the Godrej works). Naoroji says he considered pumping in another one lakh rupees and volunteered to



The Industrial Institute and the Godrej Press: treadles and a single polygraph machine

give the Press as much of the Godrej Company's printing work as it was capable of executing at the same rates as the Company pays elsewhere. Unhappily, the Press management considered it almost impossible to print at those rates and the income and ex-

penditure figures revealed that the losses would continue at the same level despite the additional Godrej largesse.

The Godrej connection with the Press is actually a tenuous one. What Ardeshir Godrej actually bequeathed to the BPP was the two farms he owned in and near Nasik. "The land was transferred to the BPP trustees in January 1940. There grew on the farms...sugarcane, grapes, wheat, onions, tomatoes, maize, etc... Later a dairy was added which supplied milk to Nasik city and, from the surplus, made good wholesome ghee...it was difficult to run the farms as we were in the thick of World War II and it was difficult to send large produce to Bombay on account of nonavailability of railway wagons and trucks. Besides this it was found difficult to get Parsi apprentices to go in for agriculture and the idea of a settlement seemed to be under a haze on the horizon. Ultimately the trustees sold the farms to Mr Nusserwanji Hormusji Dinshaw on the understanding that he would continue

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Jamnagar, (Bedi) Bhavnagar.

to employ Parsis," notes Sapur Desai in his *History of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet 1860-1960*.

This sale money the BPP used to establish the Godrej Press in the Industrial Institute building in 1951, perhaps because as Naoroji Godrej ventured, "They may have thought Ardeshir, having been an industrialist, might have approved..."

Keki Wadia, the manager of the Godrej Press since the past six years, notes that the morale is low and it is difficult to get work done since the announcement of the closure. But orders already in the pipeline have to be completed and "old customers press us (to take on certain small jobs) which we can't refuse."

Caught between the pincers of rising labor and production costs and acute competition, the establishment has succumbed. "The production is stagnant because of old machinery and (unskilled) manpower... Besides, there is cutthroat competition - we can't resort to the same practices!" says Wadia.

The common, not too ethical ploys adopted by some other presses intent on survival include the use of inferior paper, printing less than the billed quantity, sharing kickbacks with the purchasing officers of ordering firms, etc. But the BPP does not resort to such practices, as note Wadia and BPP chief executive Rustom Anklesaria who inform that new employees are registered with the Employees' State Insurance Corporation the first day they report to work.

In addition, the Godrej Press suffers from all the shortcomings of location in a residential area - it can work only one shift a day and has to pay "double rates for overtime between 5 and 8 pm," says Wadia. Besides, municipal sanction has to be sought every few years for the Press to continue functioning in a predominantly residential area.

Thus there is no question of investing in expensive new machinery which, in the words of Godrej, needs normal working with at least two shifts, to be viable. Nor is there any hope of moving the establishment to a new location like Vikhroli where Godrej notes that his firm is under a blanket ban vis-a-vis any further industrial expansion.

The biggest drain on the Press' exchequer are the wages. "Every six months we have to revise the dearness



Top and above: women making envelopes and operators cutting paper at the Institute.
Left: checking reproduction on the polygraph (Wadia at extreme right). Photos: Homiyar Mistry

allowance - over and above the basic increase every January," notes Wadia. "Looking to the general position in the industry, the wages (at Godrej Press) are not that high; but compared to small printing presses, they're definitely higher," says Godrej. "Months ago the union came to us to increase salaries and wages." A new agreement would have hiked the rates "much higher than what we're paying," says Godrej, adding that he convinced the labor leader of the importance of making a profit, there being "no profit at the present rates. (Since) the BPP can ill afford higher losses (50 percent more) at the higher labor rates," the labor leader "agreed to closure if we

gave a long (six-month) notice."

Godrej says "we have agreed to a handsome severance allowance," and some of the labor has started drifting away to new jobs and there are already takers queuing up for the machinery. "We'll have to ask for bids," says Godrej. "The money will come to the BPP."

Though the BPP has taken this decision with a measure of regret, Anklesaria notes, "In light of the changed circumstances, the trustees have to be pragmatic... The doongerwadi and the old peoples' home (both departments incur losses) are inevitable services. The Press is not an inevitable service. One has to take an overall picture..."

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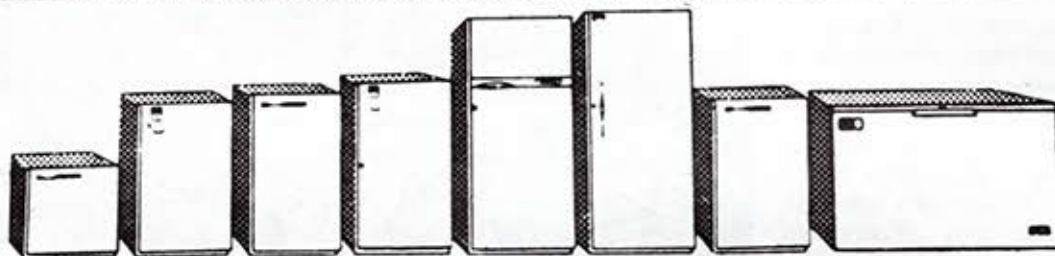
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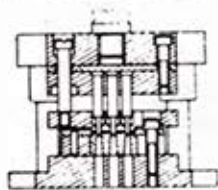
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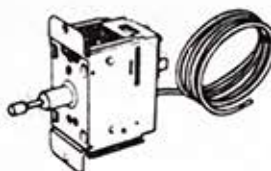
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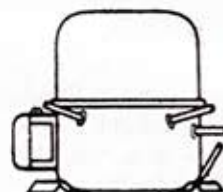
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Events and Personalities

Parsis aboard Pan Am

There were at least five Parsis on the ill-fated Pan American Boeing which was hijacked in Karachi on September 5, 1986, as can be gathered from various newspaper and magazine reports. They are: Dr Keki and Tehmi Grant of Poona (Ms Tehmi Grant is a trustee of the Poona Parsi Panchayat), Darius Eruch Katila, Faredoon Oshtori, and Sherene Viccajee who was one of the 13 Indian flight attendants.

A Karachi-based Pan Am mechanic Meherjee Kharas, who was in the cockpit checking the radio when the hijack occurred, was trapped in the plane along with the other passengers. It was through Kharas that radio contact was established with the four hijackers, notes *India Today* of September 30, 1986. However when the demands of the hijackers were not met, they shot at Kharas who was as a result seriously injured. Kharas was later reported dead.

Dr Grant, who was to attend the tenth World Congress on Cardiology, suffered a bullet injury and was reportedly dragged away from the plane by his wife, Tehmi.

CER-HOME

The Bombay Parsi Panchayet (BPP), together with the Committee for Economic Revival (CER), has set up a special committee to collect funds for a building to be constructed near Godrej Baug to house full-time practicing mobeds, notes a press release issued by BPP joint secretary Ms Gool Tata.

The committee, which is called CER-HOME (House-Our-Mobeds-Endeavour) is chaired by Kersi Limathwalla, member of CER's managing committee. The other committee members include prominent social workers and CER members: vice chairmen Nariman Khurshedji and Hector Mehta, joint honorary secretaries Nariman Mehta and Kersi Gazdar, and joint honorary treasurers Ms



Silloo Kavarana and Cyrus Ghasvala. BPP chairman Dr Aspi Golwalla and trustee Jamshed Guzder will represent the Panchayet on the committee, adds the release.

A unique feature of this committee is the proposed inclusion of non-resident members who are active workers of their local associations situated in India and abroad, notes the BPP press release.

Indo-Australian head

The new president of the Indo-Australian Society is Godrej N. Dotivala who was elected at the general body meeting of the Society held on August 18, 1986.

President of the All India Flexible Packaging Manufacturers' Forum, Dotivala is also connected with various social and cultural organizations in Bombay. He is the honorary treasurer of the India-Iran Cultural Society, executive committee member of the Indian Institute of International Relations and of the International Club of

India. Dotivala is also honorary secretary of the Mayor's Fund and district chairman, program committee, Rotary International, notes a press release.

Academic awards

At their New Year celebrations, the Parsis of Jabalpur felicitated two Zoroastrian girls for academic excellence for the year 1985-86. Farahnaz Dolly Bajan, a second year BA student of St Aloysius College received The Admiral Jal Cursetji prize for college students and Benaifer Phiroze Panveliwalla, a student of standard VII at the St Joseph's Convent received The Late Allamai and Dhunjishaw Machhliwala prize for school going students, notes a press release sent by Dolly Bajan, trustee of The Parsi Anjuman, Jabalpur.

Secunderabad builds...

Construction of new flats at Meeleodguda for the benefit of the community will be given top priority by the Parsi Zoroastrian Anjuman of Secunderabad and Hyderabad, notes the Anjuman's newsletter of July 1, signed by president K.S.J. Dalal and honorary secretary N.F. Nagarwala. The funds generated from the sale of the building on 85, Sarojini Devi Road will be utilized for the new construction work as per the decision of the general body, adds the newsletter.

From left: Dotivala, Bajan and Panveliwalla



For the convenience of the tenants residing in the Agiary complex, the managing committee has decided to install a second bore well. This will ensure a 24-hour water supply especially since the twin cities of Secunderabad and Hyderabad are facing an acute water shortage, notes the newsletter.

The other activities of the Anjuman included the organization of indoor tournaments, a Christmas party, a New Year function and the celebration of Jamshedi Navroze when 300 members partook of the dinner.

In the course of the last few months, there were nine navjotes, six weddings and nine deaths within the community in the twin cities.

Adieu to Vizag

The new secretary of the Vizag Zoroastrian Association (VZA) is Percy Daruwala, who was unanimously elected at a function held on July 12, 1986.

Captain Jal Postwalla, the outgoing secretary and Editor of the VZA's newsletter, has been transferred to Cochin as Command Electrical Officer in the Indian Navy. In a farewell speech, the VZA treasurer Kerfegar Antia noted that Postwalla was responsible for bringing VZA "into the all-India limelight." The speeches were followed by a potluck dinner with the small community participating merrily. Fortunately, balancing the Postwallas' transfer away from Visakhapatnam, S.M. Vasanias has arrived on posting as manager of the Hongkong Bank, together with his family, adds the VZA newsletter.

Dispensing 'sweet medicine'

The newly opened homeopathic outpatients department at Bombay's

Masina Hospital will be manned by three Zoroastrian doctors: Dr (Ms) D.D. Gamadia, Dr Farida Sholapurwala and Dr Farokh Master, noted a report in the *Blitz* of August 30, 1986. With the assistance of Dr J. Major and Dr P. Sahiar, patients of all castes and creeds will be treated and medicines dispensed at a nominal rate, according to the news report.

Inaugurated by Dr V. Subramaniam, minister for urban development, food and civil supplies, on August 30, 1986, the OPD at the 85-year-old Masina Hospital will function under the supervision of well-known homeopath Dr Sarosh R. Wadia who was at one-time honorary senior physician at the Government Homeopathic Hospital, Vile Parle, states the write-up.

Fortune to the brave

For his courage and zeal against smugglers, Darius Cawasji Bilimoria was presented the Finance Minister's Award at a function organized at the Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi on June 2, 1986, notes a press release issued by Ms Shireen Kerawala.

The 34-year-old intelligence officer, presently deputed to the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, Bombay, received a commendation certificate and a cash prize of Rs 50,000 from Vishwanath Pratap Singh, finance minister of India, adds the release.

On September 13, 1985, Bilimoria participated in a seizure of 14,000 tolas of foreign marked gold and Indian and foreign currency totally amounting to Rs 4.77 crores, for which he and nine other participants received the Award, notes the release.

An inspector of Central Excise and Customs, Bilimoria joined the service

in 1976 after acquiring science and law degrees from Bombay University, and has worked in various preventive organizations. During the Asian Games in 1982, he was appointed Enforcement Officer in the Enforcement Directorate (FERA) at New Delhi, adds the release. His various seizures include narcotics, gold, diamonds, and foreign and Indian currency, for which he has been rewarded with commendations and cash awards totalling two lakh rupees.

Poona dramatics

"Navroze time is Poona Parsi Dramateurs time and over the last 19 years we have held the tradition of adding gaiety, fun and laughter for the Parsi community during our festive days," notes Ms Tehmi Grant, president of the Poona Parsi Dramateurs, in a brochure issued on the occasion of their play, *Daddy Na Dubba Gul*.

Written by Dorab Mehta and directed by Yezdi Talati, the play was staged to collect funds for the group which gives educational scholarships to deserving students, pays medical bills and renders assistance to poor families and aging Zoroastrians in Poona. Other institutions which receive help from the group are: the Blind School, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, St Crispin's Home, Bhojan Fund, Athornan Aid and the Kamgar Fund.

However, the *natak* (play) "suffers for lack of volunteers" as notes Grant, who has appealed to those interested to come forward and help directly in the staging of the plays or by becoming members of the Association.

The Muslim comparison

"Although both Muslims and Parsis landed in India almost in the eighth century, the former's population has increased to more than 10 crores in India whereas the number of Parsis has markedly declined," noted S.L. Parashar in *The Hitavada*, a Nagpur publication of June 27, 1986, forwarded to *Parsiana* by Dr K.R. Hathi.

The reason for the Zoroastrian community in India numbering barely 72,000 in 1981 (less than a thousandth of the Muslim population) is that "in 1905 the community at Bombay expressed its disapproval of any conversion to Zoroastrianism being allowed at the time. This rigid attitude still persists," according to Parashar.



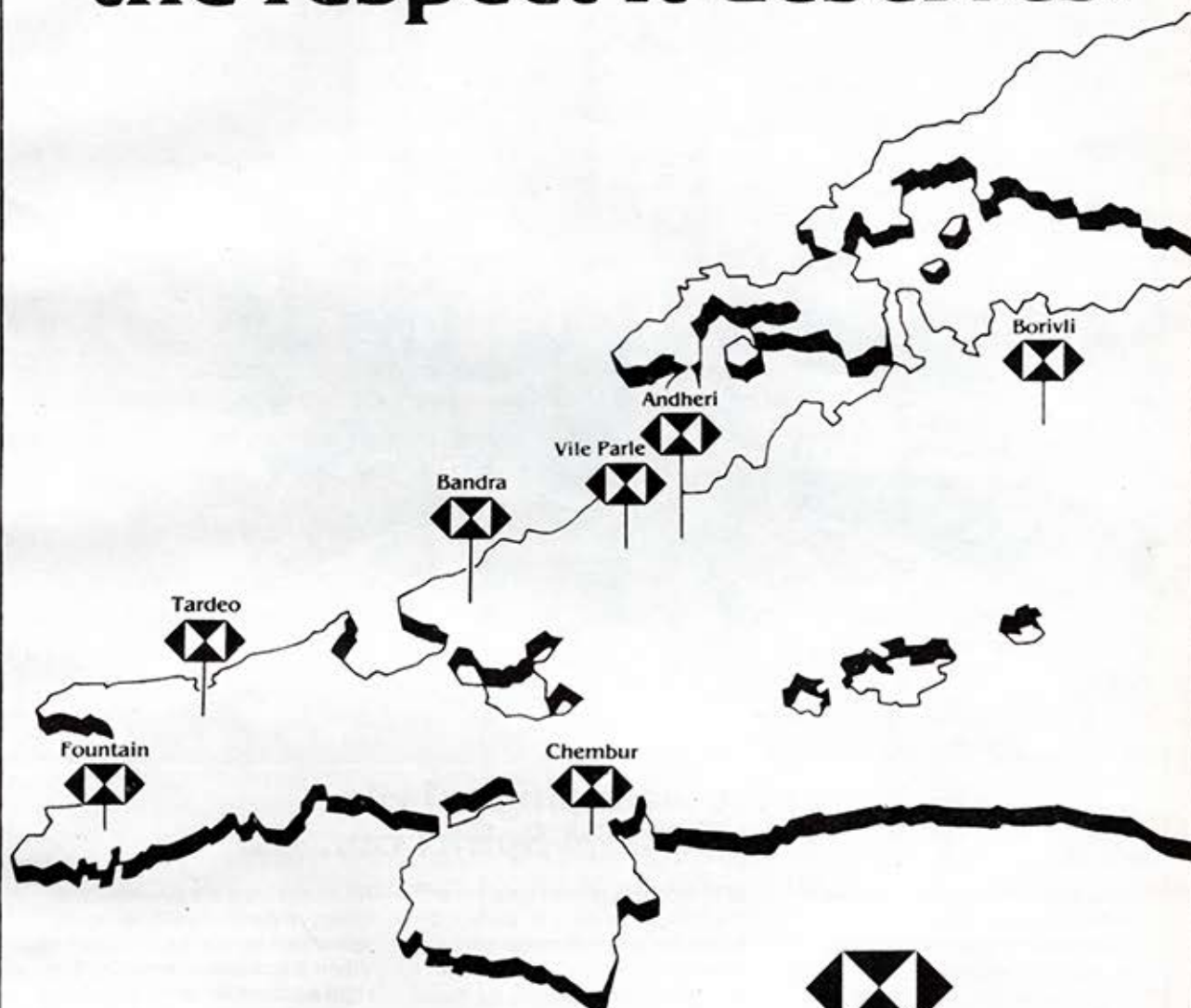
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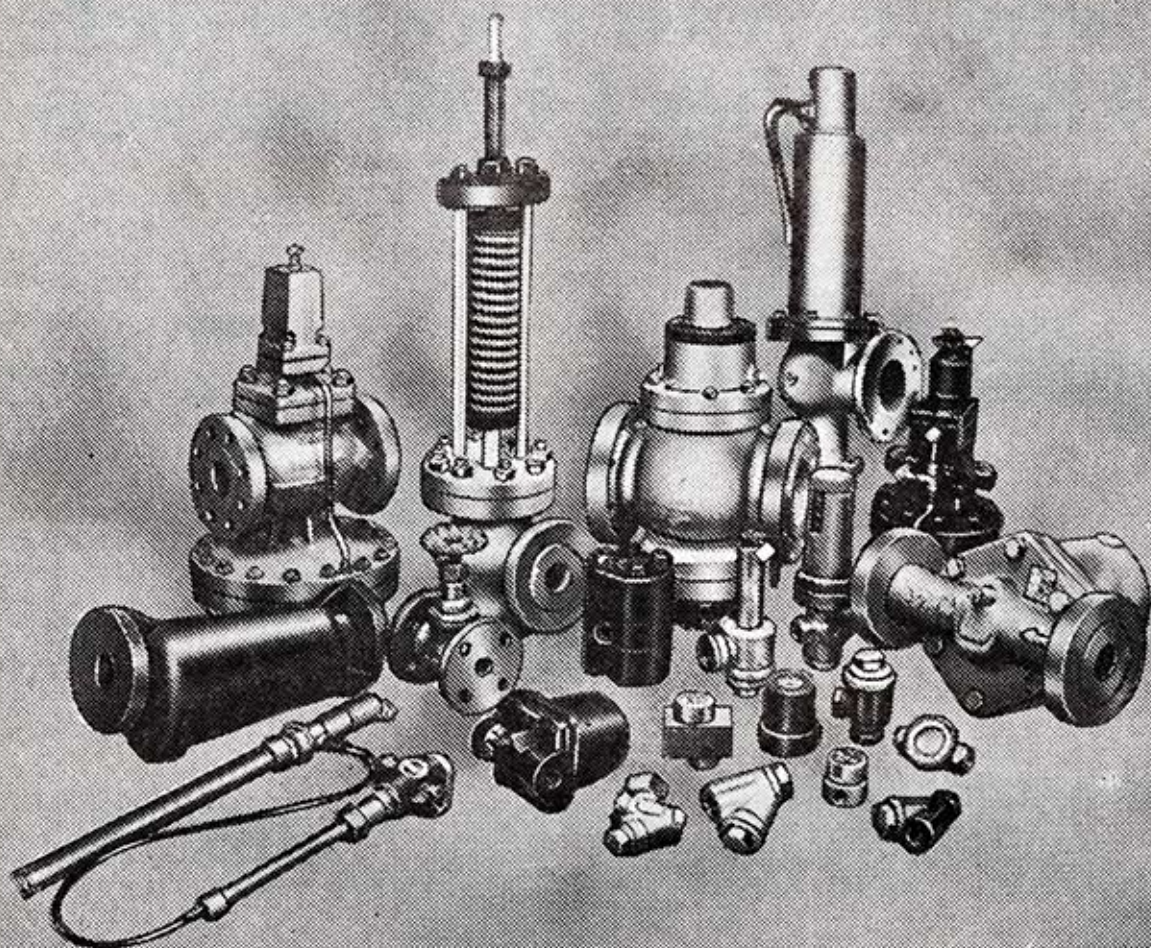


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continued from page 8

three-volume *Avesta* in Devanagari script which comprise his lifework. Atop the library shelf was a sepia print of Zarathushtra. To the left, the household gods were housed in a niche.

Prominently displayed was a portrait of the guru, Akkalkot Swami Maharaj, a sadhu who died in the 1890's, a decade before Sontakke's birth. The latter had a mystical dream-experience connected with this sadhu, involving fire worship (*agni puja*), which led the scholarly Brahmin to the study of the *Avesta*.

A notebook of his, projected his work on the *Vedic Concordance of Eternal Values* which aimed to show the unity of thought between Hinduism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism. The Avestan word 'yast' went through the Western analogy of 'worship' or 'sacrifice' and came out as the Sanskrit 'puja.' It was an etymology of oneness Sontakke was working on. His work was no less than codifying human culture itself; he was 'culturalising' man. No wonder his work is unfinished.

The Vedic concepts of *artha* (wealth), *kama* (love), *dharma* (duty) lead to *moksha* (liberation). It is only in doing his duty that the warrior of the faith is liberated. 'Have a son, till the earth, kill an enemy,' said Zarathushtra in the *Gathas*. Love and wealth make their demands: Sontakke married, had a daughter. He worked at the Vedic Sanshodhan Mandal (research center) for 48 years.

Recognition and funds for Sontakke were slow in coming. The President of India honored him in 1980 for his scholarship. The scroll with gold lettering on white muslin hangs by his desk. The former Governor of Maharashtra, Ali Yavar Jung, was trying to interest the Shah of Iran in Sontakke, who needed not so much money as materials (Zend texts) to carry on his work. Ms Gandhi's sanction of funds for Mr Sontakke got lost somewhere, only to emerge five years later, exactly six months after Sontakke's death.

The Parsis of Bombay were supportive: Lady Hirabai Jehangir visited the Mandal twice; Bapsy Pavri, Marchioness of Winchester and her brother, the High Priest of Navsari, religiously visited Sadashiv Peth and bequeathed their library to the Mandal; the industrial house of Tatas, during a drought in 1981, repaired a well at Sontakke's na-

tive village of Alsund in Sangli; complimentary issues of *Parsiana* still keep coming to the Sontakke home.

Mr Sontakke replied to this Parsi largesse in kind: he ran Avestan language classes; he bequeathed 14 acres of his ancestral property to the Parsis for cultivating sandal and *babul* wood for their fire rites. The Bombay-based Parsis refused this offer of land in far-away Sangli and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad now runs a non-sectarian dispensary on that property.

Each Zoroastrian New Year, Sontakke sent out a transliteration of an Avestan text in Devanagari script accompanied by his own beautiful English translation: "Grant unto me, O thou, Creator of the mother earth, waters and vegetations, perfection and immortality through Thy sublime spirit, O Mazda. Bestow strength unto my soul and renewal, through Vohu Mano, as revealed by Thy teachings. O Wonderful One, O Lord of Wonders, give us what is most wonderful, life-giving. O Bright One, with Thy brightness, give to Thy devotees plentiful wealth, brilliant with many heroes."

Apparently, Sontakke's English was self-taught since, as a young boy in the days of the Non-cooperation Movement, he had tossed up an English education at Hubli in a British government school to join the National University run by Indian freedom-fighter Lokmanya Tilak. Sontakke's forte was translating, not only from one language to another but between the material and spiritual modes.

I was led into his meditation room — a closet really. On the floor was a lamp lit before the same deities and teachers as those in the living room niche. I bowed to them. I looked up to see a shelf full of maturing pickles. The meditation-niche doubled as a pantry.

Yasna 33.7 delineates a palpable, personal deity:

"Come unto me O Supreme
In person and visibly O Mazda!
O Asha and O Vohuman
So that I may be heard beyond
Brotherhood
May it be made manifest among us
Our duties dedicated to Thee."

This was the verse Sontakke was reciting along with the Hindu Gayatri Mantra when he breathed his last at the age of 82, in December, 85.

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"Landslide win..."

From a perusal of the report "Landslide win for CER candidate" (*Parsiana*, July 1986) it appears that there was trading in mudslinging by the lady candidates as well as their supporters at the last Bombay Parsi Punchayet trusteeship elections.

The handsome lady, Ms Shirin Wadia, had come to canvass my vote and I had told her it would be a sheer waste of time and energy for her to run the race of candidature for the BPP trusteeship election. Ms Wadia is a beneficiary residing in a flat at Khareghat Colony. A trustee cannot be a beneficiary. Even if she had won, some Parsis would have gone to court to nullify her election. The lady insisted on her candidature, adding that she would try, and if defeated, she would not be sorry.

Ms Meher Master-Moos and her supporters cast unnecessary reflections on the character and suitability of candidature of Ms Wadia. Our present generation of Parsis seem to think that only university degree holders are qualified for candidature at BPP trusteeship elections. I have not even completed my middle school education, but would invite persons to exchange views on many subjects with me. It is therefore necessary that in future a candidate and his or her supporters do not exhibit such undesirable tactics towards their opponents and act without malice.

R.N. RUSTOMJI

Shahnamah — Volume II

Dr Bahman S.Surti's *Shahnamah of Firdaosi* in English prose received such an enthusiastic response that all copies of Volume I were sold out in two months. To meet the popular demand, Volume I — from Kayumars to Kaikaaos — has been reprinted. There are 188 pages with 16 illustrations and the price is Rs 55 inclusive of plastic jacket.

Volume II — the story of Siaavoush and Kaikhusrav in 310 pages with color illustrations — is ready; priced at Rs 75 inclusive of plastic jacket.

Outstation orders may be sent to Mr Marzban J. Giara with account payee cheque or demand draft in favor of "Central Bank Of India — A/c Shahnamah Book." Please add Rs 10 per cheque as bank charges and Rs 12 per volume as postage.

Both the volumes are available from

any of the following seven centers in Bombay city:

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MARZBAN J. GIARA

The Argument for...

Of the 10 conditions laid down by the King of Sanjan, Jadav Rana, before we (Parsis) were allowed to disembark, one was: "We will not convert any of his subjects nor will we accept in our religion anyone even volunteering at his own free will to be converted."

It is this condition we still uphold, if even subconsciously, as we wish to maintain our ethnicity as Parsis. I see nothing wrong in doing so as I am always proud to be a Parsi.

It is those Parsis who have migrated to the West who are in acute fear of losing their ethnic identity and the Zoroastrian religion and feel that it will disappear in a generation or two. The question of quoting various books of yore to fathom whether conversion was an in-thing in ancient Iran or not, does not arise. Our ethnic identity will not be salvaged by converting people. On the contrary it will be totally submersed.

Thirteen centuries ago, three Iranian groups migrated. Thanks to the King of Sanjan and his condition not to convert, we still survive. The other two Iranian groups disappeared. One migrated to China and the other to Europe. If our forefathers survived and brought us thus far, we shall survive yet a millennium more in India. We don't want these emigrants to tell us what to do.

I can also foresee who the new converts in India will be if we open the doors. The first people to line up to convert will be the slum dwellers.

We Parsis hardly number 60,000 in

Bombay, so even six lakhs out of the 60-lakh slum dwellers would swamp us into oblivion in less than a year. Hence, for us the question is not whether to allow conversion or not, but one of survival as Parsis — an ethnic entity. The Zoroastrian religion will automatically survive if Parsis survive.

No, thank you Dr Antia. Please practice what you like in the USA and leave us alone in India.

CAPT R.J. KATILA

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SUSHEEL SOMANI

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The retreat from Nargol

Once a Parsi stronghold, Nargol today is largely used as a vacation spot by those with ancestral property.

Niloofer J. Madon

Standing there on the long stretch of beach, the sun beating down, the water lapping softly round one's feet, I felt at peace. In the distance, a dog ran into the water and raced the waves out only to roll onto the sand playfully, happy with himself and his world.

If you want to find solitude, visit Nargol, the seaside fishing village in Gujarat. Once a Parsi stronghold, Nargol is full of old Parsi bungalows, most of them in a sad state of disrepair – lovely homes, locked up for years and unattended, making easy prey for marauders and thieves – some so fragile that the windows have to be held up with cardboard and boards of wood.

Walk down the main street of Nargol and you'll find a row of shops which seem to stock any and everything to meet your fancy – at a price, of course. On the left are houses, a quaint, slumbering post office and the Sohrab Bharucha Library, which though closed for the afternoon, opens its folding doors to all and sundry after four. Activity on one side; antiquity on the other.

The marketplace is itself a sort of *pucca* hall where every Thursday people come to sell their wares and stock up for the rest of the week. It is also the day for social get-togethers, where girls and boys, dressed in their best, try to attract each other's attention with elaborately loud talk, graceful gestures and daring antics! A hum of activity abounds, mixed with the smell of raw vegetables, a constant taste of dust in your mouth.

It was amidst all this activity, in fact, that I met Gul Kanga, a middle-aged woman dressed in a bright red printed dress, bargaining quietly for the vegetables she was buying. Though being a stranger to her, with an even stranger request to find out more about Zoroastrians living in Nargol, Kanga

Poonjiaji Dar-e-Meher at Nargol

invited us graciously to her more than 100-year-old home, showing us on the way, the beautiful Poonjiaji Dar-e-Meher looked after by Ervad Parvez Panthaky whose family has served this agiary for three generations. Gul's bungalow is a huge four storeyed house, part of which she has inherited and where she and her husband Sam, plan to spend their retirement. Gul's sister from Surat who is also with them, weaves a *kusti* as she usually does for the family. Though the Kangas are renovating their house by installing electricity and gas, the water still has to be brought from the compound well.

Later at Panthaky's home where there seemed to be the usual evening get-together of friends, everyone agreed in one voice that the best person to talk to regarding the history of Nargol would be "Dadiba." Dadiba Fatakia, a thin, tall man with a topi firmly positioned atop his head, is the president of the Nargol Parsee Association. He was finally found taking an evening stroll in the vast compound of the Tata-Wadia High School (actually known as The N.M. Wadia High School and The Bai Hirabai J.N. Tata Middle

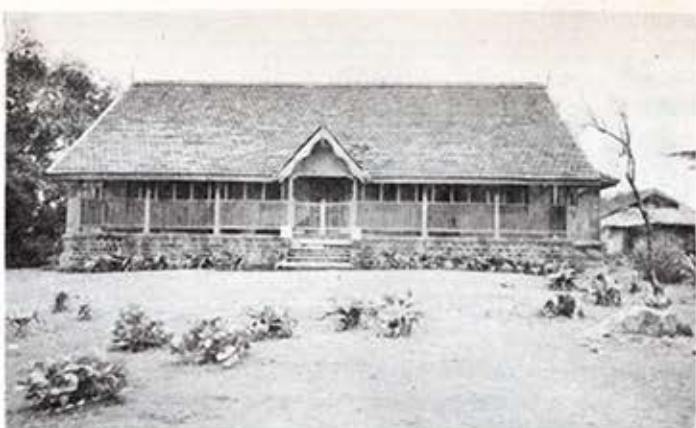
School), with Marazban Khandhiar, the managing trustee.

The next day, seated in the office of Takhurbhai N. Bhandari, the principal of the Tata-Wadia High School, Fatakia distinguished the Nargol Parsee Association from the Nargol Parsee Zarhosti Anjuman. The Association looks after the various Parsi founded educational institutes in Nargol – the Tata-Wadia High School with its adjoining Tata Hospital used more as a dispensary, The Rustom Taleyarkhan Fine Art Institute, The Rustom Taleyarkhan Drawing Teachers' College and the Hirabai Tata Technical Institute, the first technical institute in Gujarat. The Association also runs a guest house and the hostels that they have built for both boys and girls studying in their institutes.

Actually, most of the institutes in Nargol were built by the Zoroastrians for their community. Today they are all cosmopolitan, with only one Parsi girl studying there. However the schools are flourishing because the population of Nargol as a whole is on the increase. The Tata-Wadia School has more than 300 students on its rolls; and the vocational institutes are well-



Though most of the institutes in Nargol were built by the Zoroastrians, today they are all put to cosmopolitan use.



Top left: Tata-Wadia School. Top right: Nargol's sanatorium on the beach. Alongside (from left): Fatakia, Khandhiar, Vithalbhai Bhandari, principal of the Textile Institute and Karbhari. Above: Kanga and her sister on the verandah of their ancestral home.

known and well-attended by students throughout Gujarat.

On the other hand, the Nargol Parsee Zarthosti Anjuman looks after the Dar-e-Mehr and the 20 acres of dokhma land jointly used by Nargol and Saronda, a nearby village. There is also the Nargol Jashan Committee which helps in the funeral rites and conducts the annual ghambars of the Anjuman.

Not knowing much of the history of the Nargol Parsis – "*Peti maathi bad-dhu kaharvu parse*" (everything will have to be taken out from the trunk)," – Fatakia recalled that Parsis were originally agriculturists, liquor brewers and transporters, but because of three

government acts passed in the short period of five years – the nationalization of transport, Prohibition in Gujarat and the passing of the land ceiling and tenancy acts – the Parsis were deprived of their traditional occupations and had perforce to migrate to the cities in search of jobs. As a result, there are only 50 Parsis in Nargol today.

Nargol has refused to join the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India because "nothing concrete has been done there... *Manas ne pet no thikano nai hoi tau* (If a man can't feed himself then)..." trails off Fatakia, who adds that today there are mostly old Parsis in Nargol who need to be looked after; giving monetary help every month is not going to solve their problems.

Today, Nargol is used more as a holiday resort by the Parsis who have ancestral properties there and the vast

expanse of beach only adds to Nargol's many temptations. Therefore a new wing is being added to one of the beach bungalows owned by some Parsis from where children and adults alike run down the beach to fall into the waters, tyres securely round their waists. Everything else built by the Parsis are used in full measure only by the local people of Nargol.

Waiting in the bus at the Nargol bus station for people ambling down the road, in no seeming hurry to catch the bus that goes to the Sanjan station, I see once again the doors of the Sohrab Bharucha Library fold back to reveal an old Parsi gentleman engrossed in his newspaper. A young Gujarati boy seeing the doors opening, hurries across the road and eagerly settles down with a magazine which he quickly flips through only to take up another, unconsciously summing up the Parsi situation in Nargol today.

"Everyone
is a potential winner.

Some people
are disguised
as losers.

Don't let
their appearances
fool you"

- Kenneth Blanchard
Spencer Johnson

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