

Parsiānā

Election scheme challenged

Donors move Bombay High Court over new BPP election scheme which reduces their voting rights

Arnavaz S. Mama

The fate of the new election scheme of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) awaits the Bombay High Court's decision. Some members of the Donor Register, whose voting rights have been whittled down by the new reforms, have moved the court to prevent the proposed changes. Originally expected to come up on the board on June 19, the matter was not taken up for hearing. With the Anjuman Committee elections due in March 1988, the BPP has barely five months in hand to ready its general and donor registers before the stipulated November 30 deadline for voter registration.

On April 6, '87, a month after the High Court judgment of Justice H. Suresh which rationalized and simplified the election scheme, four aggrieved members of the BPP Donor Register have challenged Justice Suresh's judgment, with a request in their plaint that the new scheme be set aside and/or reviewed. A notice was served on the BPP trustees by Hormuzd Patel residing at the Godrej Colony at Vikhroli, Aspi Medhora and Parvez Katila of Godrej Baug and Jehangir Bamji of Bazargate Street,

complaining that the revised scheme "adversely affects the rights of the donors of the Anjuman Committee...fixes a very high figure of Rs 50,000 as the minimum figure for being eligible to directly vote on the election of trustees (and) abolishes the direct right of the donors, both present and future, to vote directly on the election of a trustee."

Suresh's ruling whittled down the voting power of the donors—those who had paid Rs 5,000 to the BPP and its affiliated charities—by requiring the donors to elect around 100 out of 750 donors. Membership on the Donor Register will now be permitted only to those paying a minimum donation of Rs 7,500 and not 5,000 as previously. Hitherto, every donor could vote directly for a trustee. The judge also raised the figure required to be a direct donor voter from Rs 5,000 to 50,000. The A Register (comprising those who had donated between Rs 500 and 4,999), the C Register (of graduates) and the D Register (comprising the rank and file of the community who had paid a registration fee of Rs 5) were also scrapped and replaced by a

General Register from where 100 members would also be elected to the Anjuman Committee, who along with the 100 donor members would elect trustees. The reforms ensured parity between the donors and the other members of the community.

Appealing for a stay order against the operation of the new scheme pending the final disposal of the application, the petition relies on an affidavit sworn on April 6 by Jehangir Bamji who has twice officiated as scrutineer at the BPP trusteeship elections and is one of the trustees of the Tithal Sanatorium, currently in the news for having leased away the 13-acre property to non-Parsis at a throwaway price.

"In view of the fact that admittedly notice was not given and the donors and the Parsi community were not aware as to what was sought to be done," Bamji's affidavit suggests that "the matter should be heard afresh again after proper notice being given to the donors and the Parsi community." Briefly recapitulating the various amendments suggested to the scheme as advertised in the two Gujarati dailies, *Jam-e-Jamshed* and *The Bom-*

bay Samachar, the affidavit notes, "As the only difference as far as the donors (were) concerned was that the minimum qualification was going to be increased from Rs 5,000 to Rs Rs 7,500 we did not think it necessary to file an appearance in the matter and take part in the hearing of the above petition."

Bamji contends that Suresh's oral verdict of February 6, 1987 registered a sea change in the concept of donor representation on the Anjuman Committee. The oral judgment was codified into a scheme by the BPP's lawyers and re-presented to the Court on March 6, when it was formally accepted by the Judge.

It is Bamji's argument that the BPP failed to advertise these radical changes in the scheme, which had not been contemplated by the Punchayet itself: "There was no suggestion or mention of any amendment of the sort which was suggested by his lordship Mr Justice Suresh. The persons who were appearing had no authority on behalf of the donors to agree to any suggestion which vitally affected the donors' rights. Even apart from the specific provision of the scheme, in the interest of justice, equity and good conscience, it is incumbent that adequate publicity and notice should have been given to the donors and the Parsi community so as to make them aware of what was sought to be done. As a result of notice not having been published and the hearing before the honorable Mr Justice Suresh not having been reported in the newspapers, the donors did not know that their rights were going to be adversely affected, and that great restrictions and stringent conditions were being imposed upon persons who desired to be fresh donors. The applicants and virtually an overwhelming majority of the donors were not aware as to what was happening. This apart, it is my contention that the vested right of any donor cannot be taken away without the specific consent of the donor...The severe restrictions now sought to be placed on new donors should be seriously debated and reconsidered as it would result in the drying up of donations.

"The suggestions made by the learned Judge are really contrary to the considered opinion of the trustees of the Parsi Punchayet and to the representations received by them from the Parsi community. This is apart from the fact that the principles of

natural justice have been ignored."

Bamji further faults the BPP on the ground that "even after the order of March 6, 1987 to the best of my knowledge, information and belief the matter was not reported in the newspapers. The applicants came to know of the order having been passed and the radical alterations made on reading a letter addressed to *The Bombay Samachar* of March 22, 1987 by one Kersi Gazdar alleged to be the joint secretary of the CER (Committee for

The 75-year-old scheme is "a unique fund raising scheme (whose) chief aim was to create a continuous source of money..."

Economic Revival) managing committee..."

While the four applicants have gamely presented their case in the light of being deprived of a right enjoyed hitherto, subsequent letters in the Press have sought to revive the argument that abrogation of the direct voting rights of F register members will result in the drying up of funds for charity. The late Khurshed J. Bardy who was general manager (finance) of Godrej and Boyce, in a letter published by *The Samachar* on May 24, referred to the 75-year-old scheme as "a unique fund raising scheme (whose) chief aim was to create a continuous source of a trickle of money...Persons who fail to read this appeal in our scheme and exert to maintain this scheme from generation to generation can be termed as born enemies of our less fortunates."

With increasing agitation Bardy writes, "We have been given the right to go for amendments to the High Court. What does the High Court Judge - not our own - care? Can we spurn what is coming in naturally? Look at our various institutions: Our Parsee General Hospital, our Parsi ward at J. J. Hospital, our widows'

homes, our different colonies, our dharamshalas, our estates and sanatoriums all over India! Do they not require money?"

While all that Bardy says about the community's need for funds is true, it must be mentioned that according to the 1910 scheme, only a donor paying Rs 5,000 and over to the BPP and BPP managed institutions is assured the right to vote at BPP trusteeship elections. His largesse in any other direction, though it be for the community, does not buy the return benefit of a right to vote.

Describing Bardy's appeal as "fervent and emotional," *The Samachar's* Editor Jehan Daruwalla admitted on May 24, "Mr Bardy rightly says that before going to the court the parties concerned—which does not merely mean BPP, CER and COVP (Council of Vigilant Parsis)—ought to have sat together and taken before the honorable court a draft acceptable to all the parties. In this case the Prince of Denmark (F Register voter) was conspicuous by his absence from the performance of the Parsi Hamlet."

A week later, Jal Vakil of the Rahnumae Mazdayasnan Sabha asked in *The Samachar*, "Had the old scheme failed?" Stating that he had been a member of the committee appointed by the BPP to suggest amendments to the electoral scheme, Vakil argued, "The old scheme was a very well thought out one which had stood the test of time. It gave representation to all sections of the community..."

"Originally the donors of Rs 5,000 and more stood apart from the 'Sohnoon Mandal.' The Mandal consisted of members in the A, B (comprising the Parsi peers before India became a republic), C and D registers and they could send their representatives in certain fixed proportions (totalling) 100, whatever be the number of members in each register...If the election of the electoral college had been strictly enforced by trustees, the present situation would not have arisen...Unfortunately, donors of A Register wanted to get elected...from the D Register and similarly many qualified and educated persons wanted to get elected through the D Register where the chances of getting elected were more. So the D Register is packed. The scheme has not failed but its implementation has been faulty."

Submitting that the old scheme could have been modified, Vakil says, "The whole difficulty has come about because of the parity bogey between the E Register and the F Register. If this is done away with, it will not be difficult to conduct an election of trustees to the BPP. The charitable aspect of the old scheme has been completely overlooked."

Viewing the matter in perspective, *The Samachar's* Editor noted, "According to his own statement (Vakil) was associated with a committee appointed by the trustees of the BPP to suggest amendments to the scheme of election of the trustees. The matter went to court and a new scheme has been worked out...Advertisements regarding the suggested new scheme had appeared in two newspapers four times, and those who wanted to be party to the case had already put in their representations. It is after hearing them that the honorable court has given the scheme...The BPP, the CER and (the) COVP had already submitted their views before the court and Mr Vakil and his friends could have done the same..."

In an article entitled "Electoral reforms in danger," the CER's newsletter *The Zoroastrian*, April 1987, notes that some disgruntled donors are instigating other F Register members to file an appeal against the new scheme formed by the High Court, on the basis that "their vested right of a lifetime to vote at trusteeship elections has been taken away and/or whittled down by the Court's order." *The Zoroastrian* questions, "What is this vested right?" and proceeds to state, "If a donation of Rs 5,000 was given for the sole purpose of purchasing a right to vote for a trustee then that donation is no longer a gift, as a gift can have no strings attached and hence there is nothing like a vested right."

According to *The Zoroastrian*, most of the donations have been given "solely and exclusively for the sake of charity without any strings attached, and the consequent right to vote is only a badge of honor in appreciation of the donation and not a lifetime vested right."

"In fact the scheme itself lays down that it can be amended by following a proper procedure, hence it goes without saying that any right given in the scheme can also therefore be amended."

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Beyond the boundaries of growth



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

"The 11 days' controversy"

I am glad to report that the 11 days' controversy has subsided and a long, peaceful and harmonious period for many many years seems possible. Every method was resorted to, to undermine the unity of the community, but these have failed.

The annual general meeting of November 30, 1986 established beyond any doubts the true wishes and sentiments of our anjuman in the UK. There were eight vacancies to be filled on the managing committee (of 12 members). The 17 members who had contested included Mr Shahpur Captain and five others who had earlier resigned, the six members who were opted in their place, and five new members. From Mr Captain's group,

all lost the elections except Dr (Ms) Shirinbanoo Kutar. The other seven vacancies were filled by the remaining members with the full support of the anjuman. The trustees' elections also took place on that day. All the three trustees' seats were vacant and there were five contestants. Mr Captain and Mr Rumi Sethna both lost the election.

These results clearly demonstrated the majority sentiment of our people, not only on the religious issue, but also their disapproval of the autocratic manner in which the affairs of the association were managed for many years. To reestablish democracy into the system was our goal and that was achieved.

The annual general meeting was followed by a special meeting on January 18, 1987 to:

- remove Shahrokh Shahrokh (who had already stepped down at the annual general meeting);
 - remove Bailey Irani (president) from the committee;
 - remove Behroz Mody (vice-president) from the committee;
 - elect Rumi Sethna, Soli Master and Adil Dehnugara as committee members; and
 - appoint Shahpur Captain as trustee.
- Only the second resolution was voted upon and defeated by a large majority.

Certain queries have been raised in the article: "Why was this resolution introduced only after the demise of Dastur (Dr) Sohrab Kutar (High Priest of UK) in April 1984? Why did not the orthodox priests raise any objection from 1966 to 1985 during which period they accompanied Dastur Kutar in the prayers?" These questions need answering. The facts are that dear Dasturji's demise had nothing to do with the event and the objections were not raised by the orthodox priests as people are generally made to believe.

This whole matter was instigated by what the article refers to as "minor incidents," where two non-Zoroastrian spouses openly challenged the community members and insisted on being present when requested by some members to sit outside the hall in which the muktad and Farvardian prayers were taking place. From time to time, in the

past, and we can go back 20 years, such objections and requests, both at the individual and committee level have been voiced and on all such occasions these requests have been honored by the non-Zoroastrians and also by the managing committee. There existed in my opinion a subtle understanding which resulted in a dignified give and take from both sides, and it was this understanding, the mutual respect that existed for many many years, which was flaunted by the two non-Zoroastrian spouses on these particular occasions.

This total disregard shown by the non-Zoroastrian spouses to the religious sentiments of our people, aroused the anjuman members and they felt that action was necessary. They felt that a conscious attempt to turn liberty into licence was made here, and this could not be allowed. It was a matter of principle. We, as priests, and I mean all priests in UK, supported the religious sentiments of our community and the principle involved, as that was our duty.

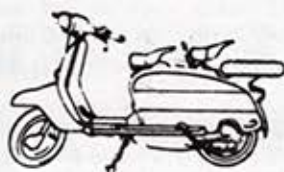
Nevertheless this matter could have been contained and would never have reached this proportion, had it not been for the stubbornness, arrogance and gross misjudgment of the situation by the then president (of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe) Mr Shahpur Captain. But as we Zoroastrians believe that everything happens for the best, the Zoroastrian community in the UK has overwhelmingly welcomed the change and has moved much closer. This is borne out by the fact that membership is growing and our functions are breaking all-time records in attendance. Six hundred Zoroastrians attended our Navroz function and had a wonderful time. The propaganda that our community in UK is split right down the center is false and this wishful thinking on the part of a handful of people, who did try to cause the split, failed. A tremendous awareness and feeling of communal bond has been stimulated by the recent events, and the enthusiasm to render voluntary service to the association and the community has once again sprung to life.

ZAL NARIMAN SETHNA
Surrey, UK

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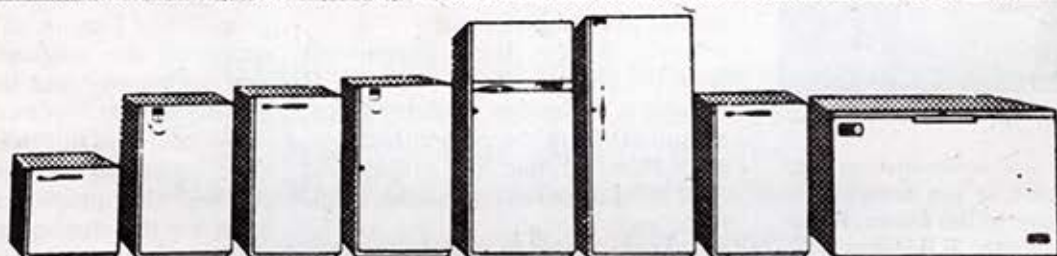
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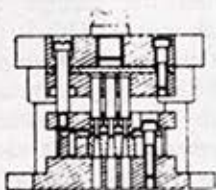
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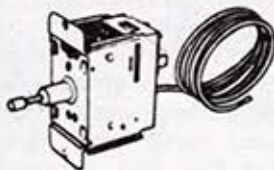
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The purpose is to create a talent pool which our Institute can draw upon for advice and consultation in its efforts to apply these sciences and disciplines to certain well-defined problems of our community. If we can contact and involve such people in our community problems, we feel it will be extremely interesting and challenging to these people, and it will be a novel and fruitful approach to our community problems.

Readers who are in these fields are requested to send their bio data to the undersigned at the following address: Zoroastrian Community Development Institute, GPO Box 1995, Bombay 400001.

DR JAMSHED A. MODI
Zoroastrian Community Development Institute

Religion emblem for Scouts

In "Religion emblem for Canada" (*Parsiana*, August 1986), there was reference to the religion in life emblem for Zoroastrian boys and girls as introduced by the Scout and Guide Associations of Canada for Zoroastrian Scouts.

One of our former Scouts, Mr Fred Edulji Morris, who is at present director, management services, Boy Scouts of America, and a member of the 'Good Life' Religious Emblem Administrative Council of the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York, has sent us emblems with details about this scheme. He desires more boys and girls to take advantage of this scheme.

Any Zoroastrian boy or girl between 12 to 18 years can participate. On completion of the studies and field work, an emblem — medal in brush gold plate with white ribbon — will be awarded.

At present, these details are available with Mr Murzban J. Giara, Scout Leader of Homavazir's Eleventh Central Bombay Bharat Scout Group, residing at Dhunmai Building, 667

Lady Jehangir Road, Dadar, Bombay 400014 (Phone 4120371). Interested boys and girls are requested to contact him.

B.A. PALKHIWALLA

Polluting sacred water

Near the Parsi well (Bhikha Behram Kuva) where so many respectable Parsis — ladies and gents, young and old — come for worship and offerings, a full



Bhikha Behram Kuva: sacred center

view is had of some persons answering nature's call. This is definitely against the religious sentiments of any community. The most important thing is that during holidays and early hours of the day, the whole place near the Parsi well turns into a bathing ghat polluting not only the sacred water of the well but the adjoining places too. There is an urgent need for good toilet facilities in the vicinity.

I would implore the municipal commissioner and trustees of the Bhikha Behram Kuva to look into the problem of the filth created at this busy crossing where lakhs of commuters and thousands of tourists and motorists pass by every day. D.D. NATERWALLA

Good seats reserved for ...

The Zoroastrian community in the twin cities of Secunderabad and Hyderabad comprise of barely about 1,500 Zoroastrians (maybe less). The major concentration is however at three places viz. the two fire-temples at Secunderabad within close proximity of Macleodguda Chenoy Chawl, and the fire-temple at Hyderabad within close proximity of Dinabad Estate. Pilchers Compound, Sappers Lines, Shapurbagh and Sohrab Manzil may be considered to be consisting of lesser numbers (compared to the three major concentrations mentioned above). The last two are quite

close to the Hyderabad fire-temple.

Jamshedi Navroz is a happy occasion and this year two Parsi plays were to be staged for two days after the Navroz by a drama troupe from outside our state.

Most Zoroastrians await such opportunities and no sooner the advance booking date is announced, there is a rush for the same. The tickets this time were in the denominations of Rs 100, 50, 30 and 15. With great zeal and zest, I approached the landlord cum honorary secretary and treasurer of the Hyderabad fire-temple, who I came to know had the tickets for advance booking.

The Rs 100 and Rs 50 tickets were not available at this 'advance booking office.' I thought I would go in for the lower ones. However, on opening the books available, I found the last few letters in the English alphabet and I felt they must be the last two or three rows in the respective classes. I was right! The first three or four rows in both Rs 30 and Rs 15 were reserved in advance for the *maama maasis* (close relatives).

This leaves one guessing whether there are just the three acknowledged sects of Zoroastrians, the Faslīs, the Kadmis and the Shahenshahis, or are there two more — the wealthy Zoroastrians and the poor Zoroastrians?

KEKI TARAPORE
Hyderabad

Since we have had no Parsi Gujarati *nataks* (plays) in the twin cities of Secunderabad — Hyderabad for many years, I decided to invite the famous Karanjia Group from Surat to perform two plays.

As the very purpose of my inviting them was for entertainment of our community, I had no intention of treating it as a business venture. In order that the money raised would go to some charity, it occurred to me to involve the Zoroastrian Stree Mandal (ZSM), a charitable organization doing some good work for our community. I gave them an offer to keep all the money they could collect as advertisement revenue from publication of a brochure, plus 60 percent from the sale of tickets after deducting all the expenses. I kept only 40 percent of the surplus money, if any, from the sale of tickets. This was done only with a view to keep control and some say in the venture.

The ZSM collected over Rs 75,000 from advertisements alone and I was very happy as the sum collected was beyond anybody's dream. In spite of this windfall, ZSM did not have even the courtesy to say a single word of thanks for my efforts, when their president, a learned lady, addressed the gathering during the interval on the second day, i.e. March 23, 1987 (though) she thanked persons by name who had arranged for cars for the group from the Parsi Dharamshala to Rail Nilayem, a distance of about two kilometers and persons who had booked a good many advertisements.

RUSTOM J. BISNEY
Secunderabad

When the president of the ZSM was contacted for her explanation, she said she would not like to comment before discussing the issue with her colleagues at their next managing committee meeting on June 10, 1987 — Editor

Alternatives to conversion

The sublime name of our prophet Zarathrust (Zar = golden/shining, athr = fire, tu = thou, st = art) means thou art shining like a glowing fire, because at his birth Zarathrust had a halo around him. We are Zarthustees and not Zoroastrians. Our sacred reli-

gion is: Deen e Mazd yasne daad e Zarthrust and certainly not Zoroastrianism, a misnomer slammed down on us by the western writers. It is equally disheartening to find our scholars, preachers, writers, etc harping on this Zoroism. There is no room for any ism in our religion. Our prophet has vehemently decried this. At the most, the English version of our religion could be Zarathrustee religion.

On the one hand the future of Parsis is bleak and on the other, the North American Parsis (Californians, New Yorkers and Canadians, not Houstonians) are encouraging conversion to our sacrosanct, sophisticated religion and society. To start with they initiated Joseph Peterson, and now the wolf cry is that the Parsis are dwindling in North America and worldwide as though we have already perished! They hope that by introducing outsiders they shall have an all-white future generation. However, they do not pause to think that America is inhabited by people from all parts of the world and by all races. If you take one, you take all.

If they are so sincere about our community, especially in North America, incessant efforts should be made to see that our children remain within our Zarthustee fold. To do so, all parents

should enlighten their children on our religion, culture, past glorious history and achievements worldwide.

The fundamental cause for the reduction in our numbers is that our girls are permitted to marry outside the community thereby losing not only such irresponsible girls but their children and their children's children. This is where the axe should fall. This is where the roots should be cleaned.

Parsis all over the world must get out of the rut of a solemnized practice of not having more than two children and improve the productivity of our community. Despite their despicable pecuniary condition, our parents and grandparents had raised larger families.

Efforts should also be made to encourage families from Pakistan, etc to emigrate. Their future is not as rosy as it used to be. All the industrial achievements, accomplished by them in a short span of time, have now been taken over by the government and its proteges. Of course, Parsis are in every field, but on the lower rung, with very few pursuing professions or commerce. Lately, English has been wiped off from all schools including our Parsi schools where the medium of instruction was English. On an average two Parsi girls get married to Muslims every month and profess the Islamic faith.

PHIROZ D. DOTIWALA
Houston

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Not by numbers alone

In recent times there have been quite a few articles on the dwindling population of our community with statistics that linger on the borderline of doom-day. Though many suggestions are offered, has anyone thought that with the living conditions prevailing in the world, can humanity offer anything to the newborn infant? The very air that the infant breathes upon its birth is polluted, and pain instead of pleasure is served on a first come first served basis. Injections and foul smelling and tasting medicine are a must if the child has to bear with the hazards of life.

The Zoroastrian community has to increase not merely in numbers but to increase in numbers that really matter. If the numerical strength is considered more important than quality, then Zoroastrians would be pursuing a future that is not only physically handicapped but mentally crippled.

TIRANDAZ S. IRANI

Events and Personalities

BPP locates leaders

"Potential leaders have been identified and... all possible help will be given to these students hereafter to shape them into effective future leaders of the community," noted a Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) press release, highlighting the accomplishments of their holiday program for youth which was conducted from April 6 to May 9.

The keyword of the program being 'grow,' 51 girls and 45 boys, most of whom had appeared for their SSC exam this year, "were helped to develop their own talents and skills through various in-built group competitions where cooperation was intrinsic," states the release. Among the 96 students there was one participant each from Mhow and Navsari and four observers, two from Bombay and two from Karachi.

Inspired by BPP trustee Dr (Ms) Mehroo Bengalee, vice-chancellor of the University of Bombay, the program was coordinated by Dr (Ms) Ketayun Madon, director of the defence-government services project of the BPP, under the direction of the trustees and the chief executive, Rustom K. Anklesaria.

The students' schedule included religious and career talks, psychological testing, leadership training and creativity programs, and a seminar on the role of newspapers in the development of the community. They also visited places of educational, social and cultural interest, such as a pharmaceutical college, the University library, the Garware Institute of Career Development and Education, the Godrej plants and the Parsee General Hospital in Bombay. They also got a chance to visit historical and educational places outside the city: the Sanjan stumbh, the Gofvad Boys' and Girls' Homes and the National De-



Madon: helping develop talents

fence Academy at Khadakvasla, Pune. These trips acquainted them with the practical experiences of specialists in different careers, and provided an insight into Zoroastrian philosophy, religion and history.

The program has been evaluated and "necessary follow-up will be done in consultation with other qualified resource personnel," notes the release.

Wheeler readers

A Parsi-owned automobile is always said to fetch a higher price in the market. So, perhaps a Parsi-published magazine on the subject of autos should also fare well in the highly competitive world of magazine publishing. *Car and Bike International*, a monthly magazine published by Vitta Mazda Limited and edited by motorbike racing enthusiast Adil Jal Darukhanawala, intends to race to success.

The glossy-covered, 76-page inaugural issue priced at eight rupees "heralds a new era for the automobile industry in our country and as such we believe it to be a collector's item," stated the press release issued at the magazine's launch ceremony on June 1, at Bombay's Taj Mahal Hotel. The magazine's targeted readership will in-

clude owners, racing enthusiasts, industry professionals, garage operators, manufacturers, etc, said Darukhanawala. "There is a tremendous future in two-wheelers in this country, more than even four-wheelers." He noted for example, that Bajaj Auto is the sixth largest two-wheeler manufacturer in the world.

Speaking on the occasion, Rahul Bajaj, chairman and managing director of Bajaj Auto, advised the publishers to keep the enthusiast-user in mind while editing the magazine: "He is the guy who's interested." If *Car and Bike* managed to get readers, advertising



Darukhanawala with the first issue

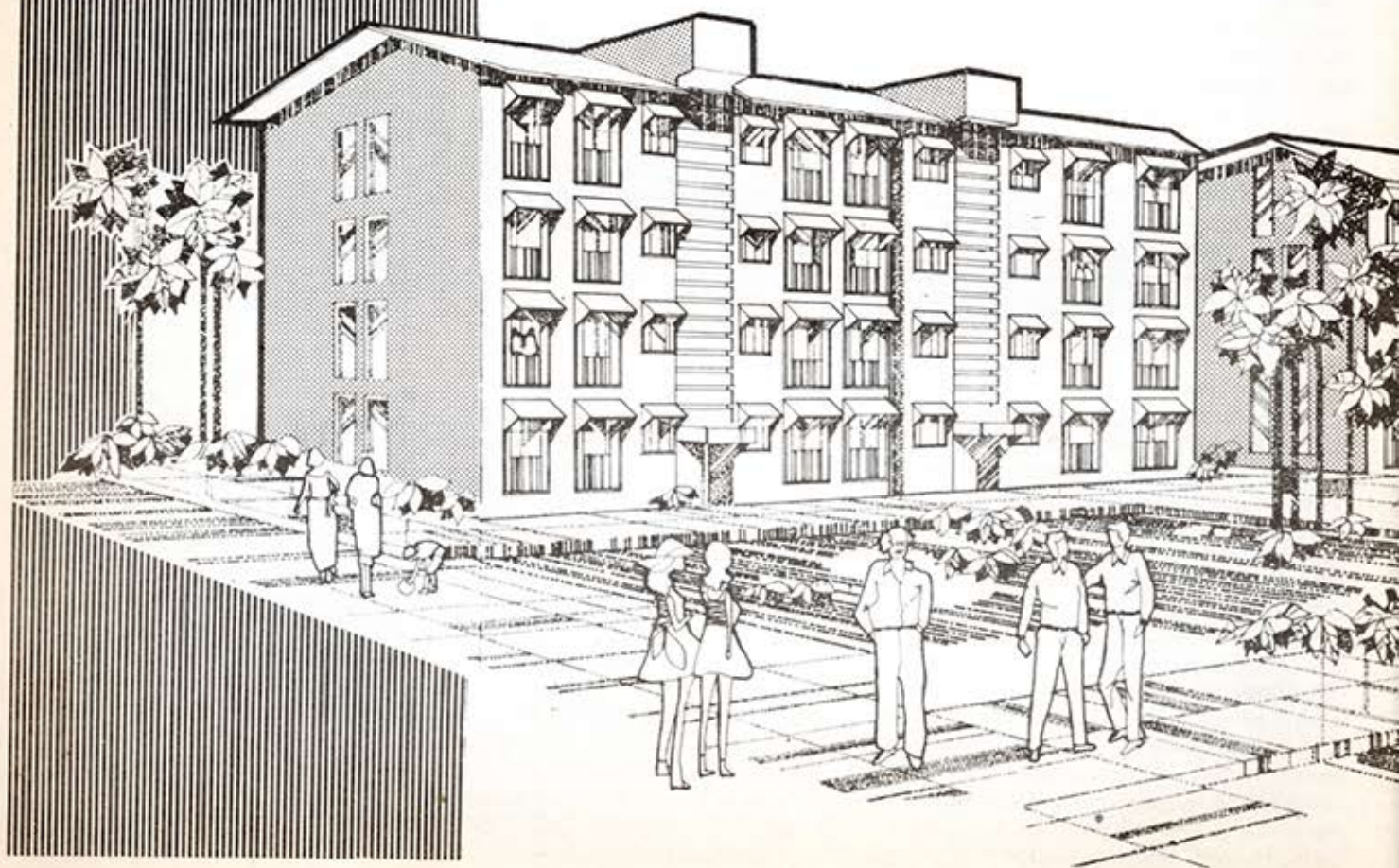


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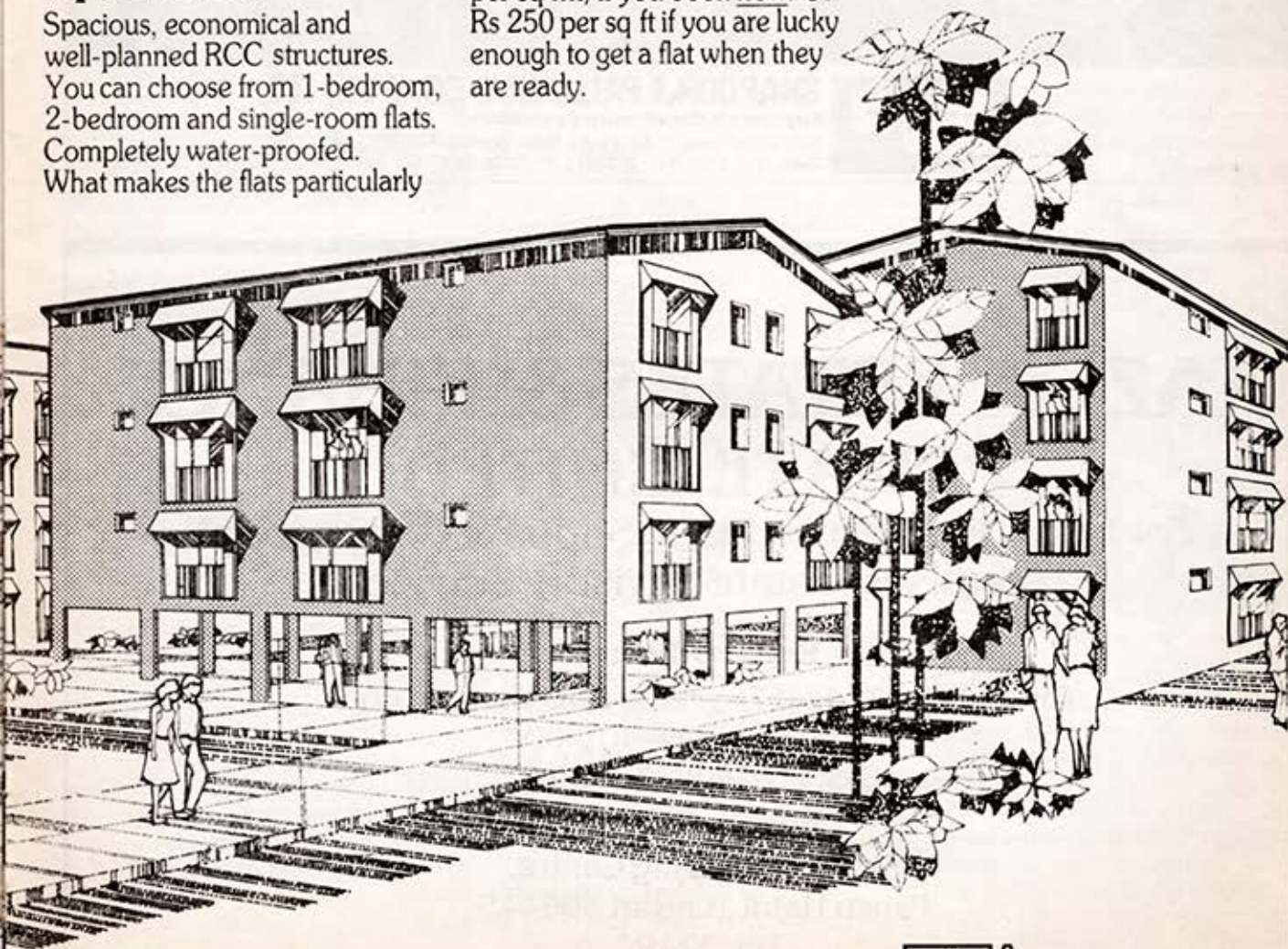
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would follow, said the auto magnate. Bajaj then handed the first issue to S.K. Wankhede, a well-known political figure in the state, who was happy that India had moved from the bicycle age to the scooter age.

The company's chairman Dara Deboo noted that *Car and Bike* was the first diversification venture undertaken by Vitta Mazda. Farrokh Mehta, a director of Vitta Mazda, proposed a vote of thanks.

Religious software

"The bird that Ahura likes is Parodharsh the cock!" reads the computer screen and soon an animated version of the favored cock comes on and



Havewala: "good storyteller"

takes a walk across the screen, to the accompaniment of electronic music. Part of a 12-page program titled "Zarathushtrian education software," devised by Porus Havewala, a computer professor at the Daver's College of Commerce, stories associated with the Zoroastrian religion, but unknown to many Parsis, are also narrated, notes Havewala. Mainly devised for children ("but I have seen older people enjoying it too!"), the program tells of "what happens to the soul after death, who is Ahriman, etc and teaches two prayers - the *Ashem Vohu* and the *Yatha Ahu Vairyo*. The *Shah Namah* chapter on Zohak and Faredoon is also included."

Noting that, "I am a very good storyteller," Havewala says that he got the inspiration when one day he was telling a religious story to the little son of his boss. Havewala realized that by using the computer he could reach out to more children. Steadily working for two months in his spare time (36 actual hours on the computer) he developed a program where the computer asks questions and answers them.

Aware that in India there is no market for such forms of learning at the moment, though many people have expressed their interest in it, Havewala hopes that Zoroastrians abroad would be interested. "The main purpose is not monetary, though it would be better if compensation is there," he adds.

Based mainly on the book by Dastur M.N. Dhalla, titled *History of Zoroastrianism*, Havewala hopes in future to include the life of Zarathushtra, kusti prayers, stories from the *Shah Namah* and perhaps feature the *Ramayana* because "people today don't have much knowledge of religion - any religion, be it Zoroastrianism, Hinduism or Christianity."

Dastur School's platinum

Realizing that "education systems need to adapt themselves to a different kind of student" populace, the Sardar Dastur Hoshang Boys' High School, in its platinum jubilee year, is planning to construct an assembly hall and auditorium, better equip its laboratories, and improve its games facilities, notes a press release issued by the principal of the School, Vijay Mathu.

While the School will be organizing a series of platinum jubilee functions to raise funds for its different projects, it has also solicited the aid of its ex-students: "If you remember your old school with the same fondness with which we remember you, do write in and send us your donation."

Founded on January 8, 1912 "to meet the educational needs of Zoroastrians in and around Poona," later the school's English-medium coaching was extended to "boys of every social class, community and linguistic group," details the write-up.

Scout group's sixtieth

To celebrate its diamond jubilee year, the Homavazir's Eleventh Central Bombay Bharat Scout Group has planned a 'jubilee special good turn' in October 1987, a car treasure-hunt in December, an outing and hike in January '88, and, as a valedictory function, a "grand, closing concert" in February '88, states a press release sent by Bahadur Palkhiwalla.

With their base at the Mancherji Joshi Colony, Dadar, the jubilee celebrations of the Scout group began with a jashan performed by the senior boys of the Dadar Athornan Madressa

on April 25. In the presence of chief guest Dr Rusi Maneck Billimoria and other outstanding scouters, Ms Coomi Dastur, daughter of the late Ardeshir Byramji Homavazir spoke about her father's activities in the fields of scouting, first aid and nursing. Later, a Gujarati skit *Jara Osmochhoo* was presented by the Dadar Parsi Colony dramatists, adds the release.

To commemorate the anniversary, a "small, attractive memento ... shall be sold throughout the diamond jubilee year." Special efforts are being made to contact past scouts and to buy new camping equipment during the year. Donors and former scouts desirous of participating in the forthcoming activities may contact Group Leader Rusi D. Mothwalla at 764 F, Sarosh Court, Tilak Road, Dadar, Bombay 400014.

Piano festival

Drawing on her "experiences and performances in... (music) festivals in Canada" during her student years there, Ms Roxana D. Anklesaria, committee member and joint honorary secretary of The Poona Music Society, "perceived and introduced" the concept of the All India Piano Festival/



Anklesaria: new concepts in music

Competition. Celebrating "40 years of service to music lovers of Poona," the Society has planned this festival from October 14 to 17, 1987, notes a press release.

This concept of a music festival where entrants are rated as individuals rather than as competitors "is a new one in India," adds the Society's press release. The announcement further states, "The Society will be inviting prominent musicians as adjudicators," and classifying entries "according to the grade or level of difficulty of the

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piece." The festival will culminate with "a public honors recital" featuring the best talent. Attractive prizes will also be awarded to finalists of different classes. The last date for enrolment being September 15, music students have been invited to participate and should write to Anklesaria at 372 A/1-2 North Main Road, Koregaon Park, Poona 411001.

Anklesaria, who is actively involved in the organization of the Festival, received her bachelor's degree in music in the spring of 1985 from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. She has taken courses in piano and music pedagogy and since her return to Poona has been teaching privately, besides giving public performances and accompaniment at lecture-recitals. She also conducts workshops for piano students appearing for the Trinity College of Music (London) examinations.

In league with homeopaths

Three homeopathic physicians from Bombay, Dr Sarosh R. Wadia, Dr Farrokh Master and Dr Prakash Vakil were among the 300 delegates to the Forty-second International Homeopathic Medical Congress which was held in Washington from March 29 to April 2, states a press release. Besides presenting papers at the main sessions, the three also showed slides and organized discussions on them.

The Congress was organized by the International Homeopathic Medical League which was established in 1925 with Germany, France, Switzerland, England and the USA as its founder-members. With a present strength of over 100 nations, the League organizes an international congress almost every year, two of which have so far been held in India, noted Dr Wadia, past national vice-president for India of the International Homeopathic Medical League. The 1988 Congress will be held in Athens and the 1989 one in India.

Food therapy scheme

Noting that food deficiency seems to be the factor responsible for the minor illnesses of the community, the Free Food Service Charitable Trust has launched "a food therapy scheme to serve the poor and the sick," according to a press release.

Recently, the Trust organized a feeding program, where homeopathic

physician Dr Inam Abdus Salam honorarily examined needy patients and advised dietary changes. Undertaking to provide, free of cost, the nutritious items recommended by Salam, the Trust would appreciate it if donations in its name are sent to Crown Building, Uranwalla Street, Grant Road, Bombay 400007.

Shah Namah's fourth volume

"Discover for yourself the finest record of culture and history of the Zoroastrian civilization - the story of Iran's great kings and knights," invites a press release announcing the fourth volume of the *Shah Namah of Firdaosi*, written in English prose by Dr Bahman Surti.

The fourth volume deals with the adventures of Gushtaasp and Aspandiyar in 220 pages and costs Rs 65 (postage extra) and an added attraction is a map of ancient Iran and a table of dynasties and kings, states the release.

All four volumes are illustrated and encased in plastic jackets and would make ideal gifts, it adds. Limited copies of Volume I (Rs 55), Volume II (Rs 75), Volume III (Rs 65) and Volume IV are available from: Marzban J. Giara, Dhunmai Building, 667, Lady Jehangir Road, Dadar, Bombay 400014.

A spiritual lift

"Are you frustrated because you find it difficult to make headway owing to the contradictions of philosophies and religions? Do you think that rising spiritually...requires giving up normal life?...Do you find the world irksome and long for peace and harmony? If so, this book is meant for you," writes Jehangir M. Shapoorjee in a preface to his book, *Behold thy self*, published by The Sanctuary of Peace and Harmony, Sunbeam S.V. Road, Bombay 400102.

The way to find God in the midst of life, is the theme of this book, summarizes M.P. Pandit in his foreword. In its 11 chapters spanning 104 pages, this hard cover pocket book makes repeated references to qualities like righteousness, love, truth, selflessness and humility which it hopes to inspire in its readers. Though the author's style, marked by clarity and simplicity, gives the impression that noble virtues can be easily cultivated, the arduous striving needed to reach this utopian state is not discernable. The blatant proof-



Activity High School's concerted 'firemen'

ing errors detract from the appeal of the book, but where goodness is sought to be cultivated, perhaps forgiveness would also list high!

An instructive chapter entitled "Charter of living," spelt out in 16 clauses, emphasizes that the joy of living should be experienced by working with full responsibility and knowledge of the laws of life. Shapoorjee further elaborates, "The laws of life intend human beings to be both human and divine" and to act "fearlessly and in good faith with an open mind and a clean heart."

Served with the simple, straightforward dish are generous helpings of quotations, verses and anecdotes which could make the book a handy guide when you feel the need to reform yourself.

Cancer conscious Activity

On behalf of the social service club of the Activity High School, which strove to raise funds for cancer patients, principal Ms Dolat H. Dongaji presented an initial nominal collection of Rs 600 to Dr Darab Jussawala, managing trustee of the Indian Cancer Society, notes a press release.

In a subsequent attempt to "cultivate...active social conscience" in the students, the school organized a concert in aid of the Cancer Society when the senior pupils performed Bernard Shaw's play *Arms and the Man* and the juniors took part in "socially oriented musical items," adds the write-up.

SPOTLIGHT

Vispi S. Dastur has been appointed member of the Government of India's philatelic advisory committee in the Ministry of Communications, New Delhi for the years 1987 and 1988, according to a press release.



The king of sprint

Niloofer J. Madon

With 12 years of successful running to his credit, Adille Sumariwalla intends to keep taking great strides

"You just feel great when you win a national award like that...(though) I think I got it a bit too late. I should have got it two years earlier." The 'fastest man in India' Adille Sumariwalla, who has won the national 100 meter sprint title 11 times and has represented India at the Moscow Olympics; received the Arjuna Award for excellence in sports from the President of India, Giani Zail Singh, on December 10, 1986 at a ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, Delhi. (The Arjuna Award is presented to sports persons who have given good performances during the preceding three years at national and international events, with excellence during the year for which the award is given. Qualities of leadership and discipline are essential requisites for the Arjuna awardee).

Seated in the Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company (TELCO) office at Fort, where he works in the accounts department, on May 8, 1987, Sumariwalla apologised profusely for coming in half an hour late for the appointment. Five foot seven inches tall, the bespectacled and moustached 29-year-old athlete with a pleasantly

rounded face exuded confidence throughout the interview - a confidence sprinkled generously with sensitivity towards the sport and fellow athletes.

"I've had a very long innings," notes Adille, who over the last 12 years has won in India a total of 40 medals (22 gold, 13 silver, and five bronze) - reportedly the maximum in any individual athletic career!

He also won an impressive medal tally of 17 medals for India at international competitions (six gold, five silver and six bronze). "The guys I used to run with previously are now coaches and I'm running with their students!"

Not sure how much longer he'll keep running, Adille notes, "I love running so I'll just run...But I won't push myself physically like I used to. I will run if I'm fit." However, "I would like to give sports all the help I can...to give to sports what I've got from it."

Today, apart from competing, Adille runs coaching classes at St Mary's School and at the Bombay Gymkhana, free of cost, where he trains amateurs in all athletic events. It was Adille in fact who trained sprinter Hirjee

Nagarwalla, who till recently was the national champion. He has also trained Sangeeta Bharot, the 'silent' girl who is the national champ and holds the national record in the 100 and 200 meter runs and the long jump, and who came fifth at the Silent Olympic Games at Los Angeles in 1985.

According to Sumariwalla, the best moment in his long career was when "I won at the South Asian Games in Kathmandu. I was working in the office like this (pointing to his colleagues immersed in their work) when I got a telephone call giving me 24 hours notice to fly to Kathmandu. At that point I was not even in training and I still won the race (the 100 meters). Under all these conditions you win and stand up on the victory stand and hear your national anthem..." Sumariwalla was seemingly lost for words to describe that special feeling.

However, his athletic career has not been without its disappointing moments as when "they (the officials) played dirty politics and dropped me from the team for the Los Angeles Olympics for some statement I made

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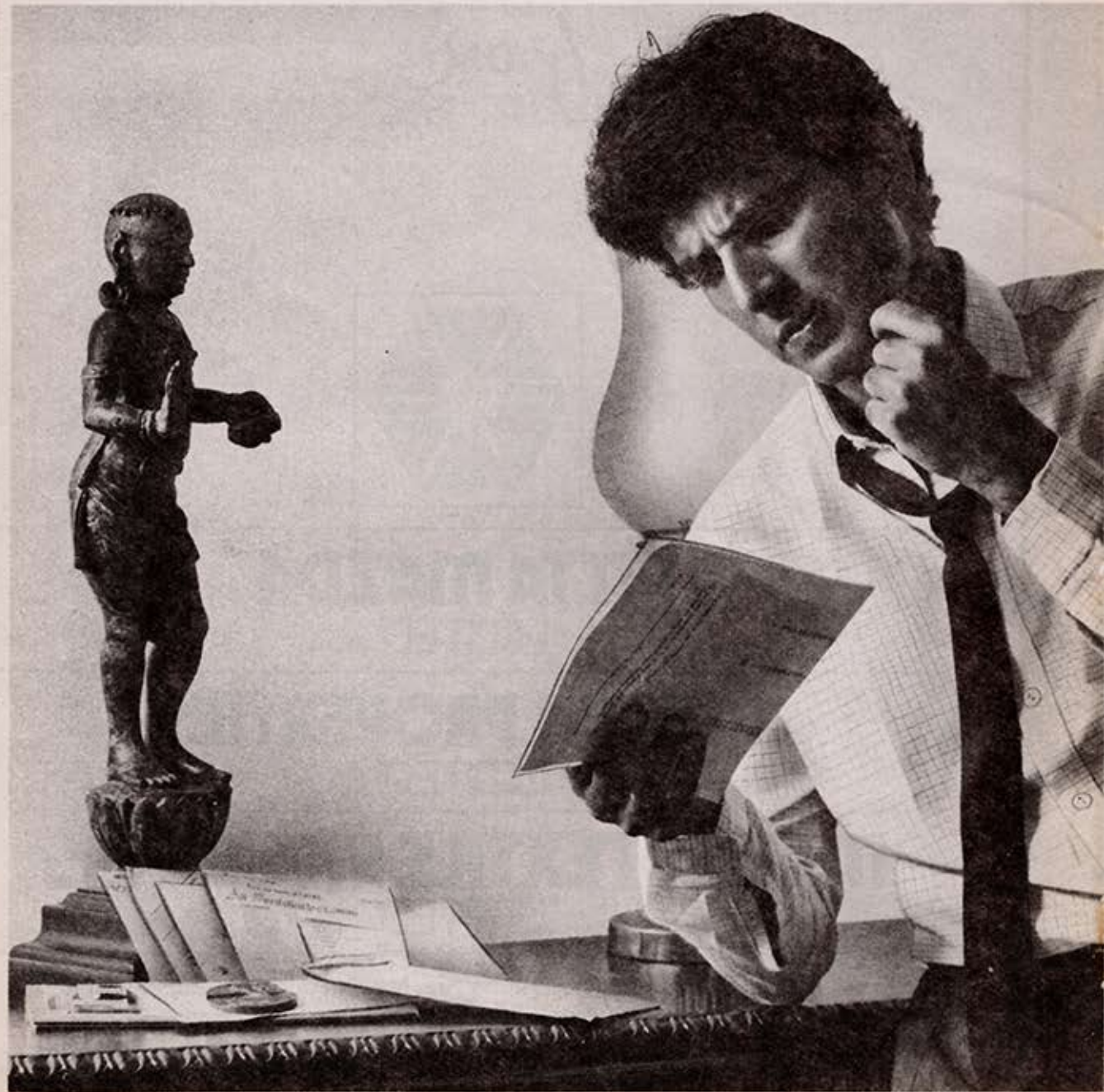
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in the Press. I was very outspoken against the officials who have generally mismanaged everything. People are not chosen correctly. We (the athletes) are treated very badly. The camps are not good and the food is bad."

In an article he recently wrote for *Sportsweek*, titled 'What is right with Indian Sport?' Adille stated, "I have, of course, been a marked man for several years, and many officials have tried to destroy my athletic career

*"I got a telephone
call giving me
24 hours notice
to fly to Kathmandu.
I was not even
in training then, yet
I won the race"*

...because in all modesty, I belong to the fortunate minority of literate and educated sportspersons (Adille is currently studying for his Masters in Commerce, specializing in management), and because I will call out black to whatever I think is black. But for the sake of sports, that doesn't bother me."

Sporting career

"Basically I was always interested in outdoor activities," says the athlete who started his sporting career while still a student at St Mary's High School, Bombay. "One fine day I just knew I was good at sport. I beat everyone including the inter-school champ. When I finished school I started doing science (I was supposed to go to the Indian Institute of Technology for engineering), but in between I decided I wanted to concentrate on sport so I chucked up science and did commerce. My parents were very upset and I don't think they've forgiven me yet. I used to be very, very good in physics in school, but I never regretted my decision. I did what I wanted to do, that's it."

Getting seriously into the realm of sport meant devoting six hours a day to training. The mornings would see the athlete do step running, hill run-

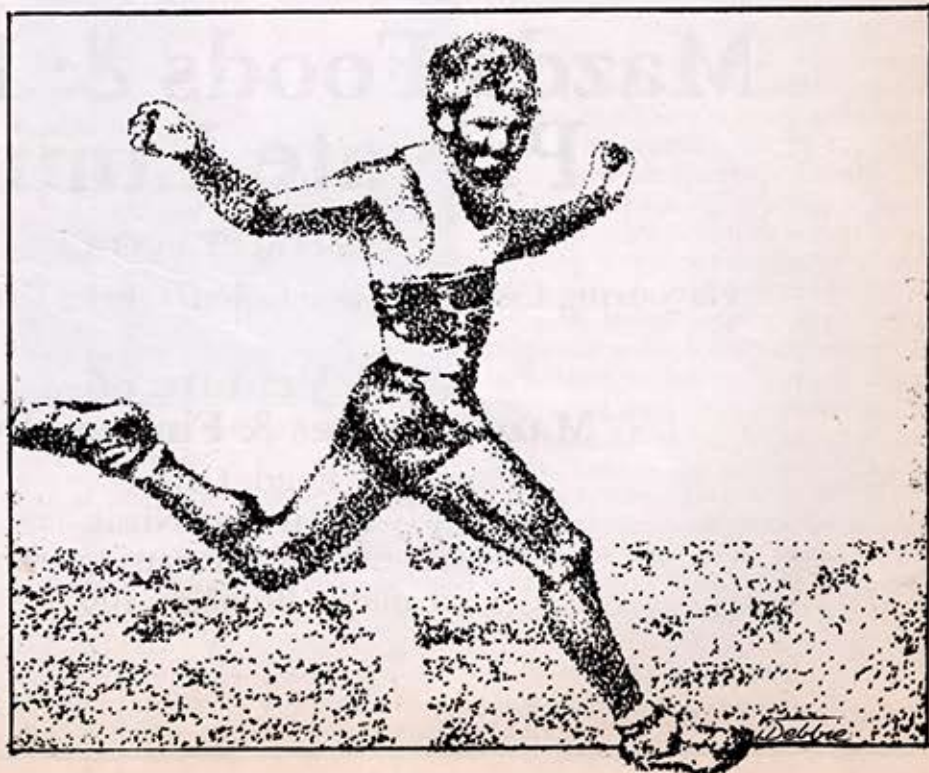
ning and sand running, and occupied at college. Weight training at St Mary's would commence at 1.30 pm and last for 45 minutes after which he would "crash out" until six o'clock, at which time Adille would practice the sprints, starts and acceleration till about 8.30 pm. This exhausting exercise schedule continued for eight years from 1975 to 1983. Says Adille, "After 1983 I cut out the afternoon session till about a year ago. Now it's only an evening session. (Even so) with work and all that, I can hardly do an evening session," and he is grateful to his employers for all their help. "I was asthmatic, had sinus trouble and torn muscles, but I fought on and on and on. There was a time when I stepped onto the track and no one could beat me. For six years I was unbeatable and every second race I set a new record." He still holds the national record of 10.4 seconds for the 100 meter sprint.

Married early last year to Armaity Rao, Adille lists amongst his hobbies a love for hiking, camping and scouting, taking walks in the woods and hearing the birds. "I love to drive — drive fast. Every Sunday I would spend half a day with my car (a Fiat) to get it into good shape. I love to go on long drives and I love to watch English theater." He also is a keen collector of antiques, especially of old watches, he notes, and adds, "If I have any time left, I

like to sleep!" Having played football and hockey in school, Adille says, "If you ask me which sport is my best sport I would say hockey, even though I am an athlete."

A qualified official of the Amateur Athletic Federation of India, Adille notes that the wealth of sports talent among Parsis is being wasted because "all the blessed time the youngsters are in the park chatting and not using their talents... I can assure you as far as talent goes we are far superior to other communities. I just hope our guys would take it seriously and put in a lot of hard work."

He himself attributes his long life in the arena to mental strength which enables him to cope effectively with the stress brought on by fame, and the expectations of others to continuously do his best. "I was mentally too strong for my opponents. So many times I was 25 percent less fit than others but I used to 'psyche' them." Explains Adille: when he was defending his fifth inter-state title, he had just about recovered from a bout of chicken pox and went "straight from the bed to Delhi," where the games were scheduled. His rival at the games, who was expected to win against him this time, was doubtful whether history would repeat itself again for Adille. Adille's reply: "As far as I'm concerned, I make history!"



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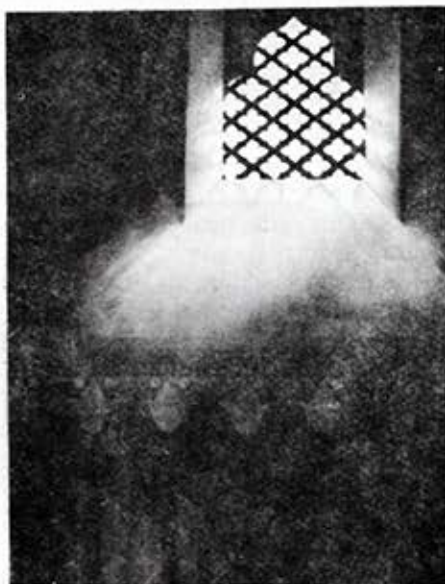
The canvas story

Engaged in commercial and fine art, Behram Rana feels that the community does not give encouragement to upcoming artists

"The usual trend is to respect the big names and ignore the struggling artist," states Behram Rana who, being a commercial artist by profession, skillfully organizes his spare time to pursue his interest in fine art which he feels has limited takers. After painting with oils for the last 11 years and holding four exhibitions in Bombay, the last being held in April '87, Rana claims, "I enjoy expressing myself, and the freedom which painting gives me." His regular job entails complying with "the clients' commands," so as a painter he looks forward to "the freedom to develop my creativity."

At Rana's recent exhibition held at the Jehangir Art Gallery, all his canvasses revolved around 'The Sun.' The preceding one had Ganesh as its central idea. Yet, Rana rejects the possibility of any religious influence on his work. He views his creations as the outcome of his "inborn nature." Though he is against thematic constraints which he considers a bondage, as a professional artist he realizes the need to observe the norms of the Art Society: "So I see it as a kind of discipline and I do not mind."

Explaining his work pattern, Rana says, "Whenever I am free, I think about painting. If I am ready with a theme, I work on some roughs," trying out different color schemes. He usually manages to complete this during his lunch break in office or after office hours. After zeroing in on some roughs, he would utilize his Sundays and half his privilege leave to complete his paintings, adopting an eight-hour work day or four-hour day, depending on the unfinished work. "I never paint after sunset," Rana adds. "Most of the paintings come to me piece by piece. Often, when I am inspired to start a particular painting, I am tempted to



Rana with a recent painting on 'The Sun': a kind of discipline

stay at home...it is difficult to make the transition from my office job to the creative world of painting smoothly," Rana referred to the practical difficulties of coordinating fine art and applied art on a regular basis.

Forty-four-year-old Rana is presently working with Larsen and Toubro. Prior to that he was with an advertising

agency which left him little time to pursue painting. A graduate from the J.J. Institute of Arts and a frequent visitor to the city's art galleries, the occasionally inferior artistic caliber of the exhibits on display convinced Rana that he could better that performance. Beginning first with water colors, he later switched to oils.

"I was greatly influenced by the works of Salvador Dali, Van Gogh, Picasso and Hussein," informs Rana. Impressed by the community's leading artists, Rana acknowledges, "Jehangir Sabavala always comes and encourages me. He mentioned that I have a strong surrealistic streak and asked me to work on it; Shiavax Chavda also gives me guidance and lends me books of art." The lack of interest shown by the Parsis in general has disappointed Rana, "My community has neither encouraged me nor patronized my work...Take my colony for example (Rana stays at Malcolm Baug, Jogeshwari). Many people know that I paint but nobody ever bothers to come and see my work. I am indeed unhappy about my community's indifference."

To enable upcoming artists to learn about the culture of their country, and different styles of painting in schools of art abroad, the Government should sponsor them, opines Rana. The corporate sector too should encourage new talent by buying their works and promoting them, Rana continued.

"I have a long way to go," confesses Rana. But with his attitude — "Learn to be a severe critic of your own work. Take criticism from those knowledgeable in the right spirit. Try to analyse and learn from them...And avoid compromise" — Rana hopes that a time will come when he will be able to live solely off and for his paintings.

Abridged from an article by Santan Roarigues

The moral choice

Rather than permit chaos to spread, sometimes non-pleasing acts need to be performed

Aspi Moddie

Peoples' beliefs and actions have been guided by a world view and a way of life, say scholars like Prof Kaikhosrov Irani, head of the department of philosophy, City College, New York. These determine our reactions to the natural order (the external world of phenomena) and the social order (the human world). Most people know the basics of the Zoroastrian world view: that Ahura Mazda created the universe according to *Asha* (righteousness); that *Asha* can be made realizable by *Vohuman* (the good mind); that there is free will to choose between good and evil; that *Kshathra Vairya* is the concept of worthy power, desirable dominion, legitimate authority to govern, act and organize in a worthy society. How far is such a world view a clear guide to a way of life?

The real problem lies in the criteria of moral choice in a highly secular and materialistic age, in which the magic of the transcendental is almost totally lost, religious roots are weak, and, unlike our Achaemenian and Sassanian ancestors, we do not live as masters in our own cultural domain, but in varied non-Zoroastrian environments in all continents.

Prof James Russell of Colombia University, New York, illustrates the nature of moral choice by a comparison between Arjuna in the Hindu and Vishtaspa in the Iranian tradition.

In the *Gita*, the means for a just resolution of conflict between the Pandavas and the Kauravas had been exhausted. But Arjuna, out of compassion for his kin, refuses to do his *Kshatriya* duty and to fight. He is in a moral quandary, but not out of fear or cowardice. Then his charioteer, Krishna, an *avatar* (incarnation) of Vishnu, tells him of the fallacy of his thinking in limited human or clannish terms; that to fail to act is to allow the circle

of chaos to widen; that our *bhakti* (devotion) must follow a higher law.

Vishtaspa too has his Kurukshetra choice in his conflict with Arjasp, chief of the Xiyonans, when he refuses Arjasp's demand to abandon the holy religion of Mazda worship. Like Arjuna, Vishtaspa is concerned about the results of the battle on his sons and brothers. When told by the seer Jamasp that Zarar and others will be killed, Vishtaspa withdraws from the battle. He commands that a bronze fortress with a gate of iron be made for the safety of his sons, brothers and princes. Jamasp's reply is simple and direct: "Who will be able to hold back so many enemies from the realm?" The security of princes is not enough. (In our day and country, No 1 Safdarjung Road, Delhi, with all its armed security was unable to protect the life of a Prime Minister in 1984.) Vishtaspa promptly relents, does his higher duty, fights with heavy losses, but is victorious at the end.

Vishtaspa's action, as Arjuna's, is the "battle of man that will culminate in the desirable kingdom, *Kshathra Vairyo*... For Zoroastrians, kingship is essentially the maintenance of *Asha*." The king (or office-holder) is only meant to be its embodiment. The bronze fortress was the symbol of safety before duty, security without risk, and escape before courageous action. In Yasna 44.6 it is said: "Rectitude is vain, unless it expresses itself in action." Today's bronze fortresses seem to be apathy, selfhood and lack of commitment to clear, higher goals, as much in the led as in the leaders.

How far can we bring the *Gathas* and the lessons of Achaemenian and Sassanian raj into our daily lives as parents, trustees, office-holders, and that too in a more secular, professional and cosmopolitan world? It is only reasonable to expect that the example

should, like water, come from higher places, from the leadership in all walks of life.

There are lights in the hearts of some achievers, not publicized, nor sufficiently appreciated. There is some recent revival of community service in housing, education, concern for priests, and the religious education of the youth. But there is also an impression of lack of enough action-oriented programs, even corruption. And in some cases, here and abroad, pure personal ego and ambition have been too patent.

The management of human affairs requires flexibility, autonomy, an acceptance of the Zoroastrian essence of moderation, the golden mean; and the avoidance of hard rigidities, the bronze fortresses of inner weakness and escapism, whether in an old empire or in a contemporary anjuman or federation.

The essence of the liberal messages of Zoroaster in Yasnas 33.3, 46.12, 49.6 and 34.12 is appreciation of the righteous man, the preaching of the gospel of Mazda to every race, the perception of the presence of Mazda in every one. It is a broad catholic message, not one of a religious sword-arm of violence in word and deed. A major need today is a Sassanian capacity to acknowledge the autonomy of those different, and to be able to contain the social costs of conflict — not brush differences under the carpet. No less, to seek what binds.

The last two World Zoroastrian Congresses seemed to have brought some of us closer to the central moral issues of the age, and of the globe as a whole. And they seemed to offer some close parallels to the central core of ancient Zoroastrian values, in freedom of conscience, in bending the material to the spiritual, in a reverence for the

continued on page 35

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Keepers of the dead

The nassessalars accept death as a way of life

Havovi Dubash

Nothing has changed within the gates of the Towers of Silence, although outside, the city rushes to keep pace with the changing times. Here, the rituals and prayers remain unchanged, the vultures still wait on the walls of the dokhmas that were built and consecrated 300 years ago; and generations of pallbearers have shouldered the iron bier — first with their fathers, and then with their sons.

In the *bungli*, the women wait for their men to return from the *sagdi* near the dokhmas. And then the mourners return — some solemn, some chattering animatedly about trivialities — death, a brief, unpleasant interlude, already in the background. But every face is turned in passing to the *nassakhana*. Curious eyes stare at the dark, unshaven faces, the figures in white that lounge around on the benches — these men who work in such close proximity with death.

When the mourners have gone, only the bereaved relatives remain to pray in the *bungli* for the next four days, while the soul hovers over its body and its loved ones — reluctant to leave — until Sarosha (divine intuition) leads the soul to Chinvat, the bridge of judgment, where Rashnu holds the scales of

justice and Mithra pronounces judgment. And at the end of the fourth day, while prayers are chanted in the quiet darkness preceding dawn, the soul is freed of all its worldly attachments; judgment is pronounced; and the soul proceeds to its destination.

But the pallbearers are not concerned with the immortal — only with the gross, mortal remains. After a few days, the nassessalars enter the dokhma to sweep the bones into the depression at the center where they will, eventually, crumble and turn to dust.

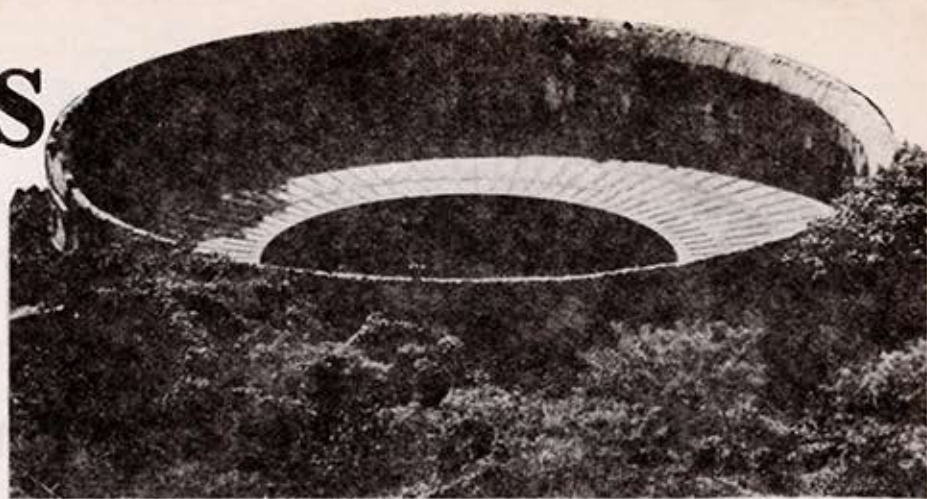
When the pallbearers return to the *nassakhana*, it is invariably to bottles of country liquor that will keep them going through the evening and into the night, while a small bulb burns before a picture of Zarathushtra and the holy fire over the threshold. Sometimes, the men grow bawdy, and drunken brawls are sparked off by petty rivalries and jealousy. But usually, a pack of cards, a forbidden cigarette and snorts of snuff provide satisfying accompaniments to the liquor that flows each night. Drinking is an age-old tradition here, a tradition that gave the *nassakhana* — home of the pallbearers — its name.

Conversations center around their work — the weight of the body they carried that day, the tips that have paid for tonight's liquor, and how many men it took to carry the body in. "And remember the time it took eight men to carry that fatso?" There are reminiscences of the old days, when 50-60 men were employed at the Towers of Silence, when the pallbearers would walk to the home of the deceased, where the death ceremonies would be held. And

of how they carried the body back, all those miles, quickly, before the sun positioned itself overhead or sank too low in the sky, and the auspicious hours drew to a close.

And then the conversation invariably turns towards the future. With the decrease in numbers of the Parsi community, this band of pallbearers has diminished too — there are now hardly 14 working men, not counting the old and retired, who still live here. There will come a time when non-Parsis will carry the bodies — sacrilege! — or even a time when relatives will have to do the distasteful job themselves.

This secluded hill in the middle of the city, is the pallbearers' world. What goes on outside has little bearing upon their lives. Their society is closely-knit — generations of young men taking up the family profession



without question, marrying the daughters of their colleagues. Newspapers are hardly ever read here and the only politics that concern them are the politics of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet, which runs this place, and their *mukadam*, Cowas Marolia, highest in the hierarchy of pallbearers, with over 60 years of service.

When the old men retire, they stay on at the chawls, their sons providing for them. If they are unmarried, they continue to live at the *nassakhana*, sleeping on the stone platforms or benches, their belongings locked up in a trunk, their clothes hanging in bundles from the walls, a pillow and a couple of sheets rolled up in a corner. Each man brings along his contribution to the *nassakhana*: another picture of Zarathushtra, or another calendar, or a picture of Laxmi or Sai Baba, or a couple of Commando comics, or a new pack of cards.

More often than not, those who stray into other professions, return at some stage in their lives, like prodigal sons, to the Towers of Silence, to the work their forefathers have done. So, the bus-driver with impaired vision, the lame handcart-puller, the retired mill superintendent, the unemployed graduate, have returned.

It is rare, however, for a pallbearer to leave this secluded hill for the outside world of which he knows so little.

"What can we say about this work?" says Pervez Vachcha, the former bus-driver, with bloodshot eyes and greying hair. "We are poor people doing the work of God. One day they

will take us, and put us in there. What difference does it all make?" And here, the young and the old have a standard reply when asked how they can carry corpses every day of their

Conversations center around their work — the weight of the body they carried that day, and the tips that have paid for tonight's liquor

lives. Have they never dreamt of doing anything else? "Aadat pari jai," they will say. "Né avhe apre kahan jaiyē? (It has become a habit. And anyway, where can we go now?)"

For there is nowhere they can go. Most of them are drop-outs from school, unskilled, unused to hard labor, with just enough money to live on, given to drink, and driven deeper into isolation by a society that shuns them.

Many Parsi families, however poor, will not associate with the family of a pallbearer. Pallbearers cannot enter a fire-temple until they have undergone a nine-day purification ceremony — for death is impure, and the keepers of the dead, unclean.

Most of the pallbearers will affirm this aspect of their lives with a nod and a shrug of their shoulders. But there is

resentment in their tones as they tell you about Parsis who sit down beside a pallbearer in a bus, but hurry away on recognising him; or about Parsis who cross the street when they see a pallbearer. And Keki Wadia, a genial man, laughs with scorn and sarcasm each time he tells the tale of a woman who peered into the *nassakhana* from a distance, pointed to the black, stone slabs that serve as beds, and exclaimed to her companion — "Look, what lovely beds they've made for the *khandias*!"

Minoo Cooper, a pallbearer who retired recently after 30 years at the Towers, says, "Some people have greater understanding — but the rest? What can you do? Recently we all went for a *gahambar* and I got talking to some man. For a while, he was so nice to me and then, when he heard that I was from the Towers of Silence, he got up suddenly, and left." These little incidents crop up everywhere, and the bitterness, tempered with acceptance, simmers. Visitors to the *nassakhana* are invited in hesitantly; a cup of tea is proffered with a nervousness that turns to relief when the cup is accepted. Most Parsis, it would seem, detect the aura of death around the pallbearers, and keep away from their 'unclean' presence. Yet, one day, these same men will carry them away.

Phiroze Bharucha, his old, wrinkled face dotted with white bristles and dominated by a huge, pitted nose, lazes at the *nassakhana* all day. He is the handcart-puller with the twisted foot. It was a job that he prized. Then, his cart rode over his left foot. Soon after, he left his wife and home, and, with nowhere to go, took up his father's profession. That was in 1969, and three months ago he retired as a pallbearer. Once again, there is nowhere to go. So he stays at the *nassakhana*, cackling at the occasional bawdy joke, shuffling around talking about the old days, or sweating on the floor on hot summer afternoons, his feet cooling against the wall.

Phiroze keeps a small, blue diary in the breast pocket of his shirt. He will produce it fumblingly for anyone who stops to talk. Between its pages is the visiting-card of a well-to-do relative. Behind is scribbled the missive: "Re-

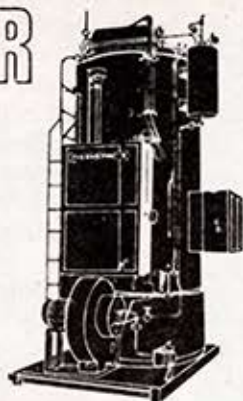


Nassessalors at the Doongerwadi: secluded from the rest of society
Photo courtesy: Imprint

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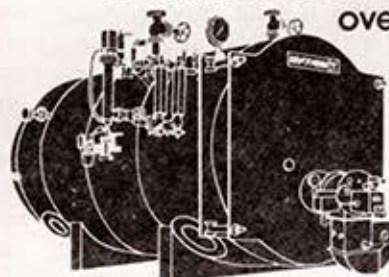
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ceived from Mr Phiroze Bharucha the sum of Rs 9,000 for safe-keeping." This is all that remains of his retirement benefits—not nearly enough to buy or rent a house and live off for the rest of his life. The rest of the diary is filled with small, black figures: what he spent his pension on, and a record of the amounts he has withdrawn from his capital — in tens and fifties and hundreds. Phiroze adds, subtracts and tots up his figures to make sure that all is well. Tucked away into the front cover is a photograph of his grandchildren, whom he hasn't seen for several years, and a picture of Zarathushtra and Sai Baba pasted so that they appear shoulder-to-shoulder. There is also a clipping from the *Jam-e-Jamshed*, announcing the funeral of a young girl called Parveen, dated 1983. "She was a lovely lady," sighs Phiroze, with a sad smile. Lovely, because she visited Phiroze at the Towers of Silence when no one else did; lovely, because she sat up with him in hospital when he needed her and no one else came. "You know the old saying? Strangers are better than relatives," he says, tucking the clipping away.

Sitting on the bench outside and fanning himself in the afternoon is Sam Makhaniya, a 'good Zoroastrian boy from a respectable family,' wondering at the fate that has brought him here. "What brought me here? Luck," he says, tapping his forehead. "And to

tell you frankly, when I first came here, I was really scared. Now it has become a habit."

But the misgivings of the afternoon are forgotten when the evening sets in, and Sam Makhaniya, a debonair young man, going grey very subtly, dresses up for the evening. There are several good-humored jibes about Makhaniya's many girl friends, as he marches out of the *nassakhana* in a snazzy black shirt, a silver chain around his neck, smelling strongly of eau de cologne.

There are some who feel that the pallbearers have 'a low mentality' — because they drink and gamble; because their small world is full of rivalry, superstition and ignorance; because they are known to demand a tip each time they leave a body to the vultures.

One victim of superstition is Rusi Marolia who has not carried a body for the last eight years, spending his time sitting on the wall or loping up and down the hill, hanging on to his loose, stained pyjamas. His colleagues still remember him as a brash young man, a man who organized the lives of the other pallbearers, who was always obeyed. Then, eight years ago, somebody decided he was getting too big for his boots, and had him beaten up outside the Towers of Silence. There were rumors that an evil spell had been cast upon him to weaken his spirit and strength. Whether it was true or not, Marolia came to believe in the rumor. "They have ruined my career," says Marolia, his strong brown face very solemn. "They gave me such a shock eight years ago, that now I cannot work." Every day brings a fresh resolve to approach the Punchayet and ask for his job back. But there's something that keeps him from asking, something that keeps him from working. And the thought of leaving the Towers of Silence never even occurs to him.

Up at the chawl the pallbearers' children play amidst the tall trees and the banana plants, while their parents sit flapping at the flies or dozing in the sunlight. Nargish Cooper, wife of Minoo Cooper, stands on her verandah with her washing drying all around her, watching the children play. She is tiny and white-haired, and quite deaf. Irrespective of what you seem to be saying, she will tell you about Maneck, her son, a pallbearer too, whose smiling photograph she wears inside a locket: "He committed suicide — nine liters of kerosene — and lighted a match. And



Above: young nassessalar takes up the family profession

Left: bird's-eye view of an unused dokhma in Bombay



he was wearing terrycot pants. Nine liters of kerosene — in two days he was finished." She smiles at you and her son smiles too, from her bosom. Then she goes back to watching the children play.

And the children will grow up to carry the dead into the dokhmas, to marry their neighbors or their cousins. Or perhaps they will grow up and leave the Towers of Silence, for already, through the resignation and acceptance, you can discern an odd grumbling remark — "This is worse than a slaughterhouse" — and a shame-faced dissatisfaction when a pallbearer says: "Ajub ché, Jähré bijaon na ghero baré, tahré apra choola baré (It's strange. When another person's fortunes burn, that is when our stoves are lighted)."

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Doongerwadi rates fixed

A spate of letters in the Parsi Press complaining that many bereaved families were being arbitrarily charged at the Bombay Doongerwadi, led the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) to issue a public circular announcing the charges payable (effective April 15, 1987) for services rendered there.

Hiring hearse for conveyance to Doongerwadi

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From Kalyan	Rs 120	Rs 250

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Hodiwalla Bungli	Rs 335
Wadia Bungli	Rs 165
Bhaucha Bungli	Rs 85
Bennet Bungli	Rs 85
Lower bunglis	
Darwish and Tarachand (each)	Rs 14

For performance of sachkar (prayers recited whilst placing the body on the marble slabs after bathing it at the bungli)
Rs 10 per person inclusive of one hearse driver

For bathing a female body at the bungli
Rs 10 per person for two ladies

For providing a new set of clothes to khandhias

(While formerly there was a distinction between nassessalars whose presence was necessary at the time of geh sarna, and khandhias who would carry the body to the dokhma, this distinction no longer holds good due to paucity of khandhias, explained Ms Gool Tata, joint secretary of the BPP.)

Rs 82.50 per set of new clothes comprising: *dagli* (overcoat) *lenga* (pants), *sudreh*, *dastaana* (gloves), *kaanbandhan* (kind of skullcap), *gadi* (shoulder rest), *topi* (cap), *haath paiwand* (piece of tape looped at each end to the hand of a khandhia) and *chiriyu* (shreds for tying dead body)

For khandh (carrying the corpse from bungli to dokhma)
Rs 10 per person

For gehan (biers)	
New bier (38 kgs)	Rs 180
New bier (28.5 kgs)	Rs 140
New bier (19 kgs)	Rs 100
Old bier (of any weight)	Rs 25

For consigning dead bodies at the dokhma

Adults (regular)	Rs 80
Adults (concessional)	Rs 15
Children (regular)	Rs 30
Children (concessional)	Rs 9

For divas (lamps)

For four days	Rs 40
For one day	Rs 20
Extras (per diva)	Rs 5

Charges for hearse, bungli, *khandh* and consignment at the dokhma should be paid to the Mehtaji (clerk); for *sachkar* and bathing of a dead body, to the manager; and for new clothes worn by the khandhias, biers and divas, to the bungli supervisor.

The rates payable for performing different ceremonies at the Towers of Silence were also finalized by the BPP after consulting the priests. Every mobed officiating at ceremonies at the Doongerwadi is expected to carry a copy of these rates and show it to the client on demand. Though the BPP did not issue a press release disclosing the rates, so as not to offend the sensibilities of the priests concerned, *Parsiana* felt it would be in the interests of the community to make known the charges so that bereaved families could anticipate the amount of money they would require.

Thus the purpose of publishing the rates is to assist community members, and the priesthood should not take offence. By publicizing the rates, upcountry anjumans could also be informed of the charges prevalent in Bombay and set their rates accordingly. It is also open to the community members to pay more than the rates prescribed, if they so desire. And it is hoped that those who can afford to, will.

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Rs 15 per mobed
During muktad days, the charges for geh sarna and uthamna shall be one and a half time the above rate, plus reasonable taxi fare.

For bhoi patharna (prayers before the corpse and thereafter before an oil lamp, for the soul's progress)
Rs 10 per hour per mobed, but the clients have to pay the panthaky or the agent at the rate of Rs 15 per hour. (If unable to afford a priest's services, family members can themselves recite any Avestan prayers.)

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Giving public performances since she was nine years old, pianist Zenobia Vakil-Patel continues to enthrall music lovers

Jerroo Irani



Music at her finger tips

The fingers of the diminutive concert pianist ripple over the ivory keyboard of the piano with nonchalant ease. Invited to Sydney by the Australian Zoroastrian Association (AZA) of New South Wales, Ms Zenobia Vakil-Patel's recent pianoforte recital was in aid of the AZA building fund.

Even while the flutelike melodies and soothing harmonies were still resonating in the Australian air, the pianoforte virtuoso flew to Hong Kong to give a concert at the invitation of the Hong Kong anjuman. Part of a five-week concert tour of Australia and Hong Kong, the pianist's second concert in Sydney was organized by the Australian Society for Keyboard Music and the two in Melbourne by the University of Melbourne and Monash University.

Confessing that she feels the normal and expected degree of nervousness prior to a concert, Vakil-Patel made her first concert appearance at the age of nine in Bombay. The first and reportedly the only Indian so far to have graduated with the highest honors as a concert pianist from the Mozart Academy of Music in Salzburg, Vakil-Patel performed Mendelssohn's Piano Concerto in G Minor when she was just 13 years old. As a child prodigy, she would cheerfully clamber onto the stool on the stage and launch into her piano recital. "Today, I feel a certain amount of nervousness is good for my

playing. As you grow older, you start feeling a little shaky," she says.

The problem that a pianist faces is that he or she cannot cart the familiar piano on a concert tour, like "a violinist his violin and the singer his voice." For this reason, Vakil-Patel prefers to practice, a few days prior to the performance, on the instrument she is likely to use for the concert. "When I performed at the Monash University's Robert Blackwood Hall which, incidentally, has the best accoustics in Australia, I tried out the piano just a few hours prior to the show."

There were other problems - a bomb scare on the Sydney-Melbourne leg which meant a three and a half hour wait in the aircraft; inclement weather in Hong Kong which broke in the afternoon of the day of the concert. Other than this, Vakil-Patel is ecstatic about the beauty of Australia and Hong Kong, and the hospitality of the Parsis in both places, "who really looked after me."

As much at ease in the drawing-room as in a concert hall, Vakil-Patel describes herself as an extrovert. If she were given the chance to live her life over again, and if for some reason she could not opt for the musical field, her second choice would be the diplomatic service, she says. Having given recitals in Austria, Poland, Germany, London, Pakistan, Delhi and Bombay, and having mingled equally with pro-

fessional and amateur musicians and world renowned teachers of music, Vakil-Patel exudes the air of being an accomplished woman of the world. However, her deeply rooted feeling for the tonal art comes across forcibly in the hour-long interview.

"People tend to think that a concert pianist merely gives concerts. A concert pianist has to earn the degree which is recognized the world over and is tough to get. For the exam, you have your director who does not judge and a jury of 12 to assess your performance," says the pianist. In the course of her musical studies, Vakil-Patel studied the theory of music, harmony, the history of music, etc. "If you were to ask me now to sit for the same exam again, I would say 'never again,'" she vehemently shakes her short cropped hair.

What makes a good musician? In-born talent, combined with hard work, and some ambition, is her opinion. Some people have loads of talent but no ambition nor any desire to work at it. "Such people can't get anywhere. Also, there must be..." she trails off, groping for the right English word. "I speak German, you see, and think in German as well," she adds, by way of explanation. "What I mean is that a person must have a certain direction...a goal, he must know where he is going."

Ultimately, music can be a demanding mistress who can draw blood and wring the soul. But she is kind to her disciples when they bring talent to her service. "Such disciples are not forgotten," states Vakil-Patel. Life may use the Beethovens and Schuberts harshly but time makes it up to them.

Vakil-Patel's life used to revolve around music in the days before she graduated from the Mozart Academy where she studied under celebrated teachers such as Heinz Scholz, Geza Anda, Bernhard Paumgartner, Erich Werba (song accompaniment) and Enrico Mainardi (chamber music). "After spending hours at the academy, I would practice for five to six hours at home. In the evening, I would go for concerts and operas." Today, having to blend a demanding career with looking after her husband, teenage son and her home, Vakil-Patel has to phase out of her teaching commitments. "Fortunately, both my husband Jehangir and son Karl enjoy classic-

The problem that a pianist faces is that he or she cannot cart the familiar piano on a concert tour

al music." The son, however, has a weakness for pop music which the mother fondly indulges. "I now practice only when there is a concert in the offing, yet I lead a very active life, play for the Cantata Choir and the Bombay Christian Choir twice a week. I get bored doing nothing — I am a typical Gemini," she confides, touching upon another of her life's passions — astrology.

It is said that if a man is not musical, he cannot be very spiritual. And if music is entirely a thing of the spirit, it is not difficult to believe Vakil-Patel's statement that she prays for an hour and a half every day. While she is proud to be a Parsi, she has more non-Parsi than Parsi friends. "The Sethna Agiary at Tardeo was built by my maternal grandmother," she adds, to emphasize her Parsi roots.



Vakil-Patel attributes her musical gifts to having been born in a family of amateur musicians where the atmosphere was saturated with music. By the time she was three, the little girl had set her heart passionately on becoming a musician. She feels she owes a debt of gratitude to her parents Din-bai and Hormusji Vakil (Vakil-Patel has a double-barrelled surname as she has built her reputation as a pianist on her maiden name) who encouraged her to become what she is today. By the time she was four, she was playing the piano like a veteran and could pick up most tunes by ear.

After completing her music studies in Bombay under the late Sarah Titina ("who was like a mother to me") and thereafter under Shanti Seldon and Tehmina Patel, she went to Salzburg.

Winner of several scholarships, she is also the first Indian to be awarded the West German Academic Exchange Society Scholarship for music and studied at the Music Academy in Munich under the internationally known teacher Prof Friedrich Wuehrer. She has performed as a soloist with the Camarata Academica, Salzburg and with the Bad Reichenhall Philharmonic Orchestra in West Germany. Under the sponsorship of the Max Mueller Bhavan and the Indo-German Cultural Society, the pianist has made several concert appearances in India. A proficient accompanist, Vakil-Patel has played with both foreign and local artistes abroad and in India.

In the musical arena, the composers who fill Vakil-Patel with delight are Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, amongst many others. And her preferences seem to have determined her style, for, as a German paper rhapsodized after a performance in West Germany: "We had great pleasure to hear Zenobia Vakil of Bombay as soloist in the Mozart D Major Concerto with the Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Dr Wilhelm Barth. She performed with great ease and self-confidence...the way she brought to life, with the freshness of spring, the spirit of Mozart... and her reproduction seemed as if from her own soul came the world of musical thoughts of the Salzburg master...Her runs seemed like strings of pearls, her faultless pedalling and her great musicality brought her the thunderous ovation she so richly deserved."

“Disseminating knowledge”

Died: Gool Rustomji, 71, who along with her husband Behram worked on the English translation of Dastur M.N. Dhalla's book *Aek atmakatha* (An autobiography), and was a Montessori directress in Karachi, on April 14, 1987.

“To keep alive the memory of this great...sage-savant, (his) personal life,



Rustomji: respected by students

ideals, aspirations, struggles and achievements,” the Rustomjis jointly labored over the 700 odd page translation of Dr Dhalla's autobiography which *Parsiana* serialized in 31 instalments. The translation was “practically and mostly” the work of Gool, writes husband Behram.

Ever since Rustomji completed her training in Montessori education in 1965, “her interest in this work for children was the most consuming factor of her life. First as a Montessori directress in the schools and very soon after as a co-directress of the Teachers' Training Courses...held annually in Karachi. Rustomji came to be known and loved by hundreds of her students,” wrote Ms Gool K. Minwalla in a eulogy to her colleague in the May '87 supplement brought out by the Karachi Theosophical Society.

At a condolence meeting at the Pakistan Montessori Teachers' Training School, leading educationists of Karachi, friends and pupils paid tributes to Rustomji. “Her untiring work in the service of humanity” as also “her joy in disseminating knowledge to children” were her chief characteristics as recapitulated in the May-June newsletter of the Informal Religious Meetings Trust Fund, Karachi.

The Karachi Theosophical Society convened a memorial meeting on May 8, 1987 in honor of Rustomji, “a dedicated student of theosophy and one of (its) helpful members.”

Willing to shoulder responsibility, Gool devoted “her time and effort” to different organizations like the Poor Families Welfare Society and the Karachi Zarhosti Banoo Mandal (a Parsi welfare organization), and her services were much sought after, summarizes Minwalla.

Born in Yokohama, Rustomji's first five formative years were spent in Japan, where she learnt to speak fluent Japanese. Subsequently educated in Bombay and “interested in the deeper problems of life,” Rustomji, a well-read lady, was inspired and guided by Karachi's well-known philanthropist Jamshed Nusserwanjee Mehta and philosopher Dastur Dr Maneckji Nusserwanji Dhalla, notes a press release.

Rustomji is survived by her husband Behram and three daughters.

A Persian poet

Died: Ardeshir Khodaram Bonshahi, 86, author of several Persian books and poems, on May 10, 1987, in Bombay.

Under his nom de plume, Khaze, meaning humble, Bonshahi authored several Persian books and edited many classics. His two recent works were *Khaterat-e Khaze* (memoirs of Khaze) and *Kuliyat-e Khaze* (poems of Khaze), notes a press release issued by Khaze Book-Sellers, an establishment he founded in Bombay in 1931 to make available the latest books and literature in Persian to schools, colleges and universities in India. He is also believed to have composed “hun-



Bonshahi: popularized Persian

dreds of couplets in Persian.” The works of famous Persian authors and poets were a constant source of fascination for Khaze.

He is credited with founding a girls' school in his birth place in Iran which has been functioning for the last 51 years, though his own education was restricted to an elementary stage.

For his efforts in popularizing Persian in India, Khaze was awarded the Pahlavi Medal by the late Shah of Iran. He was also the Indian correspondent for over three decades for the Iranian newspaper *Ettelaat*.

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natural environment. There seems to be some convergence between the central issues as posed by the physical sciences and by Zoroastrian tenets of old. Those central issues may be simply described as the moral choice between life-destroying forces (Ahriman) – war, violence, pollution, ecological stress, social injustice, and a naked materialism in which a life-style of self-hood is more important than a higher world view – and the life-sustaining, Hormuzdian forces of peace, eco-development, a caring, resource management for sustainable productivity and social justice, a blend of the spiritual and the material in the pursuit of a higher quality of life. In short, the latter is a world view of growth and limits to growth, of productivity and conservation, of matter and spirit, of balance in an upward curve of aspiration and living.

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