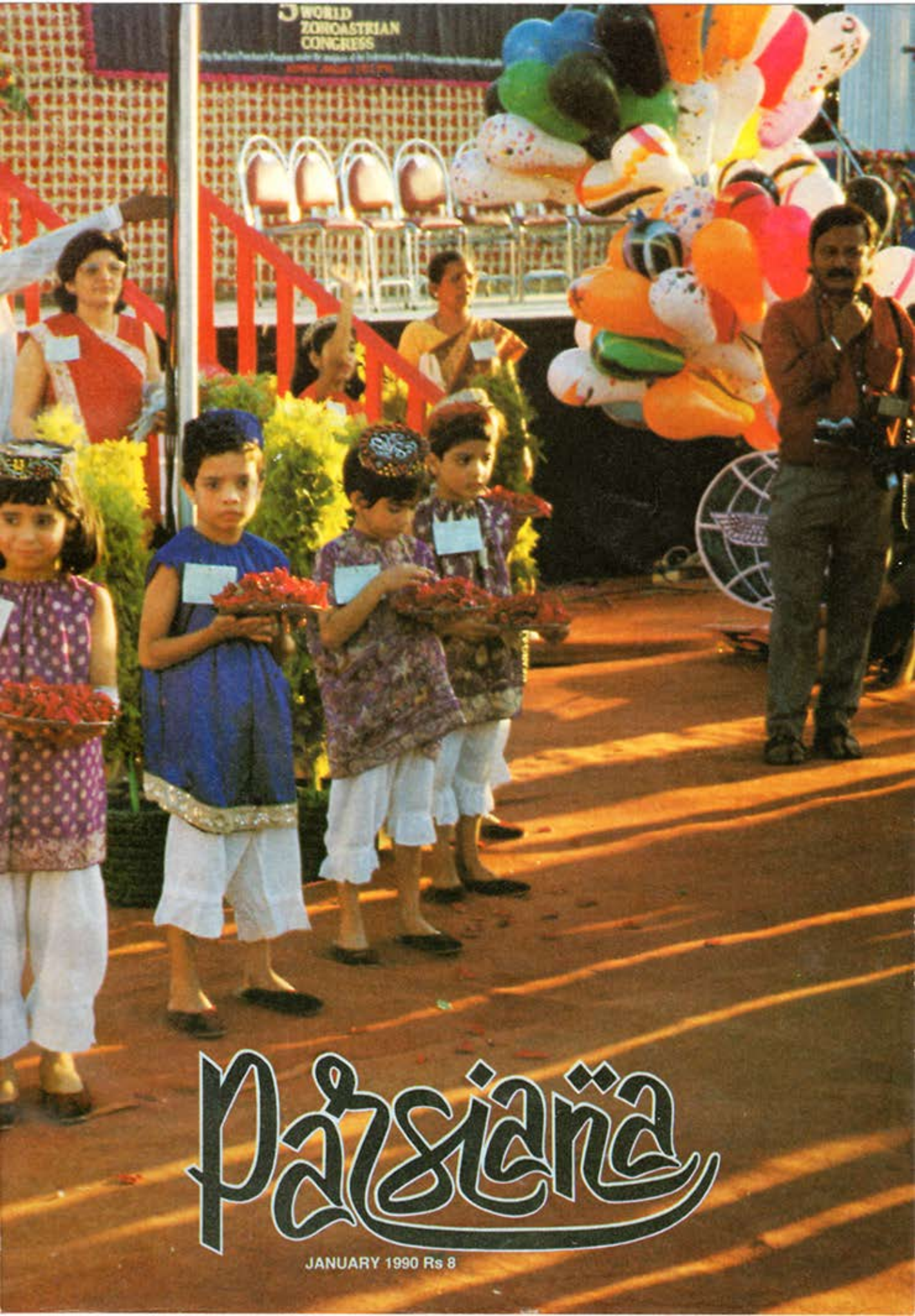




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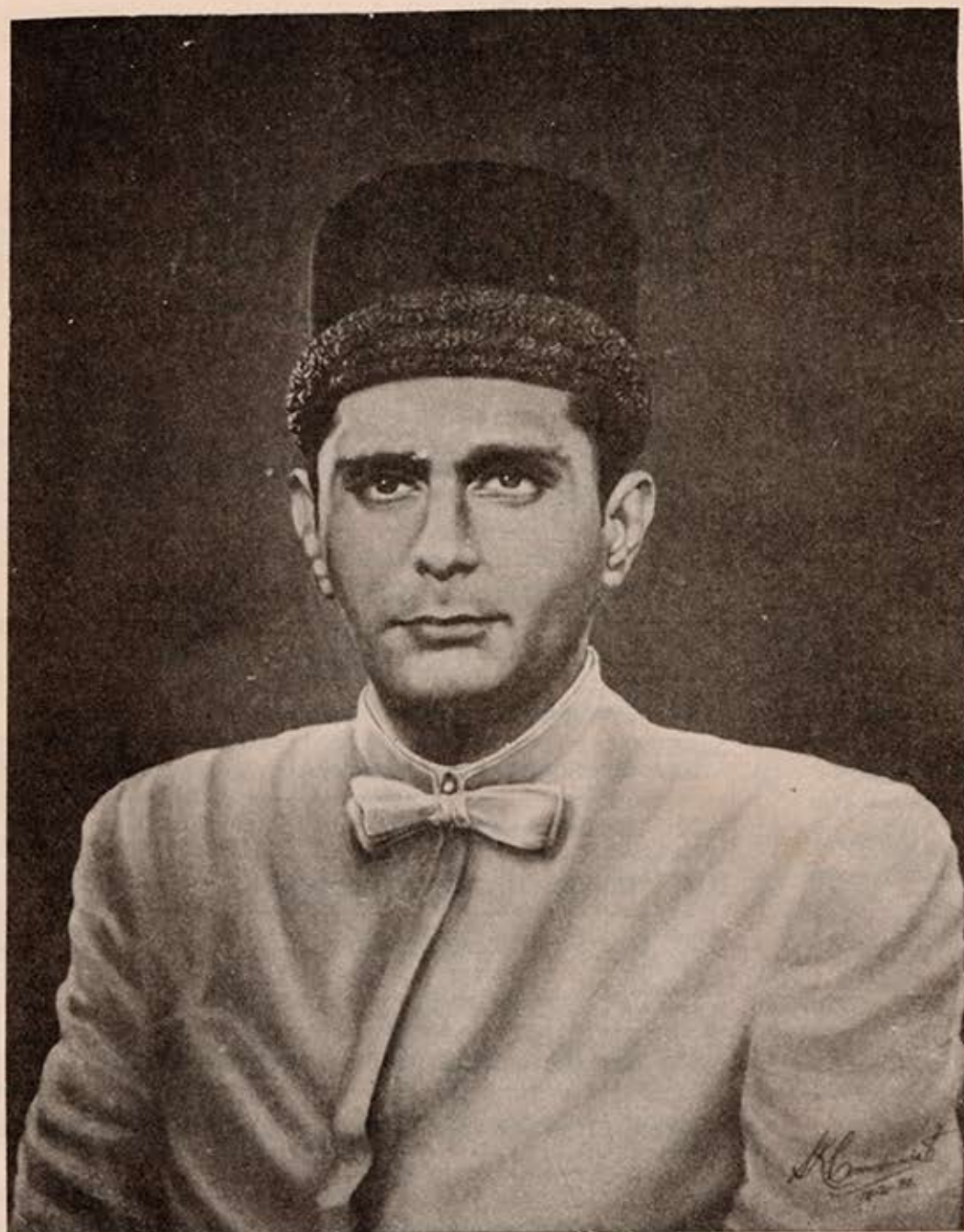
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Cover: At the inauguration of the Fifth World Zoroastrian Congress

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In Memoriam

Mr Fali Meherji Variava

Director

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'DIFFER' BUT NOT DIFFERENT'

The Fifth World Zoroastrian Congress will be remembered for the numbers flashed on the stark white screen of the auditorium. For the message the figures conveyed was mournful. By 1991, the community's population would be around 57,500 in India and 76,000 internationally. The figures would continue to dip. By 2021, the community population for India is projected at 30,000 and internationally, 69,000. The figures did not include the 91,000 Zoroastrians said to be in Iran according to the Government of Iran census. As there seemed to be some doubt as to the accuracy of the number pertaining to Iran, further study is required to arrive at an acceptable tally.

The figures also indicated a qualitative difference between this Congress and the last two. The Fourth World Zoroastrian Congress was a mishmash of speakers, with just about anyone who could piece together a paper being permitted to speak while the invited speakers were instructed to reduce the time allocated to them [As Prof Kaikhosrov Irani had commented at the time: "When I prepared this paper I thought it would be a summary of what I was going to say. Now my talk will be a summary of my paper." Behram Deboo of British Columbia had then complained, "When they wrote to me they said I would have 15 minutes to speak. When I arrived in the hall they told me 10 minutes and now (on the stage) I'm told not more than six minutes."]

The Fifth Congress was marked by orderliness and substance. Only one speaker, Dr (Ms) Jer Randeria, was brusquely told to curtail her presentation on the "Parsis in South Africa — four generations" as others had exceeded their time limit. This was a Congress of chairpersons and speakers, with deadlines

being largely adhered to during the sessions. Only once did an unpleasant incident occur between a chairperson and the audience. When Bombay Parsi Punchayet trustee Eruch Desai was at the mike, he was cut short by chairman Dr Farhang Mehr who contended that the five-minute quota allotted to Desai was over. Desai retorted that he had spoken for only two minutes and that the chairman possibly did not like the views expressed and was therefore shutting him up. Mehr rose from his chair in anger and prepared to walk off the stage just as Desai relinquished the mike. (A playback of the tape showed that Desai had spoken for four minutes and four seconds.)

In another incident, a speaker, when responding to written questions and comments from the floor, read out a statement that criticized the Iranian priest Ervad Rustam Shahzadi, who was sitting on the stage at the time, for his "destructive views." Neither did the speaker nor did the chairman comment on or refute the allegation. Another dig the Iranians had to endure was at an evening entertainment program when a character in a skit commented on a rather dandy, obese woman passing by: "She must be an Iranian delegate." The remark was uncalled for because many of the Iranians were fit and able with both the men and women well turned out. The large Iranian delegation felt at times that its presence was not adequately acknowledged, nor was enough hospitality extended to it. (Mehraban Kushesh, spokesperson of the Anjuman Zartoshtian Tehran, mentioned to *Parsiana* after the Congress that the Iranians had written to the Congress committee, requesting it to arrange for translation into Persian of the Congress proceedings, but "They told us to manage." He questioned why there was

no member of the Iranian Anjuman on the Congress' managing committee.)

Of the last three Congresses this one came the closest to having an international flavor. One reason being that the selection of overseas speakers was left to the respective anjumans/federations to decide (barring one or two exceptions). This no doubt increased their participation and ensured that the leaders of many of these communities attended.

Where the Congress organizers have traditionally been weak is in providing evening fare that is pertinent to the community. The last three Congresses, for example, had fashion shows that were largely unrelated to the community. At this Congress dancer Shiamak Davar, in one of his sequences, attempted to rectify that defect by showering his affections on an ape while singing a song that ended with the refrain that the community may not approve of the match because the girl didn't look a Parsi. The Congress however managed to end on a community note thanks to the efforts of the youth delegates who composed and sang a song about the Congress, and Mithoo Jesia, the Dadar community activist who roused the audience into singing *Chhaiye Hamé Zarthosti*.

The question that people kept asking before, during and after the Congress was "What did it achieve?" The answer to that query lies with each person who attended the Congress. What did they hear? What did they shut out? What will they now do? The Congress is a forum for exchanging ideas, meeting people, raising questions and searching for answers. In this regard, the Fifth Congress was far superior to the last two.

Some delegates contended that the Congress espoused the liberal line and that the orthodox section was not ade-

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quately represented. To some extent this statement is true but that is because the international community is more liberal minded than the community in Bombay and Gujarat. Zoroastrians living outside Bombay are greatly dependent on non-Zoroastrians for their existence and well-being as a result of which they become more adaptable, more willing to give and take. The question arose as to what customs and traditions one could keep and discard and who had the authority to decide. Prof Irani replied that this was not a matter that could be legislated. Certain customs just fell into disuse while others continued to exist. It was for the individuals to decide what they wished to retain or refuse. Homi Bodhanwalla of Jamshedpur informed the audience that in the steel city, children of Parsi Zoroastrian women married to non-Parsis are permitted to enter the agiary. In Iran also, non-Zoroastrians are permitted to enter certain fire-temples.

While many of the speakers put forth reasoned views, a few appealed to the emotions. One decried the inclusion of non-Parsi names in the recitation of prayers while another commented on Parsis marrying blacks or Japanese and their children therefore not looking like Parsis. The last remark prompted the

Congress chairman, Jamshed Guzder, to take a jibe at the racial prejudices of Parsis by enquiring whether the community would discriminate on the same grounds of complexion and features against the progeny of a Parsi woman married to a "handsome Englishman."

"Controversial" issues were thus raised in the Congress by numerous speakers and it was a sign of maturity that the community, by and large, permitted all points of view to be aired. Unlike in the Third World Congress where warnings were given about controversial subjects being discussed in the Congress, there was no such official restraint this time. As a matter of fact there seemed to be a realization that people would hold different views; what was important was that they were all Zoroastrians, all members of the same minuscule global community. There was less talk of fighting and splitting and more of "Let's find solutions. We may differ but we are not different."

And it is for the creation of this spirit of bonhomie and oneness that the organizers of the Congress and the staff of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet need to be congratulated. Organizing a Congress is difficult enough; ensuring that its purpose is achieved is a great accomplishment.



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WHICH WAY TO 20

"The life of the bird is in your hands," said the Zoroastrian sage Burzin Mehr when one of his impudent students, enveloping a bird in his palms, attempted to gauge the sage's wisdom with the question, "Is the bird in my hand dead or alive?" The sage knew that if he said the bird was alive, the student would crush it to death to prove him wrong; and if he said it was dead, the student would show him the bird alive. This telling anecdote was recounted in a paper by Kaemerz Dotiwala of Texas, likening the Zoroastrian community to the bird and impressing upon the audience at the Fifth World Zoroastrian Congress in Bombay from January 3 to 7, 1990 that the community's future lay in "the hands of each one of us who belong to this community."

"To 2000 and beyond" was the theme selected for the Congress and in the words of Dr Aspi Golwalla, chairman of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) which had organized this Congress at the behest of the Federation of Parsi Zoroas-

trian Anjumans of India, "Our business should be to see not only what lies clearly ahead at hand, but also to foresee what lies dimly at a distance." He further continued, "From small communities in Asia and Iran we are now spread and fragmented in four continents, with diverse problems of maintaining our traditions, our cultural and religious roots, our identity and cohesion... Perhaps, for the first time, we will be giving an in-depth thought to reexamining and strengthening our community organizations to respond to these beckoning problems."

"It is the youth of today who will be concerned with, and who will have to cope with, the changes in the new environment of the twenty-first century. We have therefore decided that this particular Congress will lay special stress on the youth and that they should have greater participation in the discussions," said BPP trustee Jamshed Guzder, chairman of the Congress. "In many ways the Fifth World Zoroastrian Congress will,

we believe, be looked upon in the future as a landmark in the history of our community, for it will be said that it was the discussions held, the advice obtained, and the steps taken and implemented at this Zoroastrian Congress that were responsible for preserving our identity, our religion, our customs and our ethos," expressed Guzder at the inaugural session.

From the galaxy of well-informed speakers that shared their knowledge of community affairs, one learnt that: the community in Bombay enjoys the distinction of having one place of worship for every 1,400 persons, a luxury not known to exist for any other community in any other metropolis/megapolis; one hospital bed is available among 100 members of the community (which means there is provision for every Zoroastrian in Bombay to spend nearly 3.5 days a year in hospital), probably the highest ratio for any civilized society in the world; one in every five persons is over 65 years of age, showing the Parsis



2000 AND BEYOND?

Parinaz Gandhi

Concern about the community's survival marked the deliberations at the Fifth World Zoroastrian Congress in Bombay

in India-Pakistan as the most aging community, even more than the highly developed western countries of UK, USA and Canada. But the figures that stared one in the face were the projections of the community numbers 30 years hence: a total of 32,217 in India and Pakistan, and a count of 37,476 in the rest of the world, not including Iran.

"We are all concerned, but some of us are not convinced enough. We are all concerned about our survival and have some inkling of the crisis but very few are convinced of the enormity of the situation... Each one of us has to get involved. We have no natural leaders. We have no hierarchical church structures, we have no Pope to lead us. We have to lead ourselves," the community attitude was summarized by Rohinton Rivetna, president of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA).

"We need leaders who are mobilizers, not just meeting attenders," stressed management consultant Aspi Moddie who hoped he was addressing those who have "come to this Congress not as mere spectators or socializers but architects of our future to 2000 AD and beyond... Our institutions suffer from the cardinal sin of apathy and lack of participation, of democracy." Trustee of the Poona Parsee Panchayet Brig Noshir Grant had a query: "In case of problems, there is no one single authority who can deal with them. Give authority to dasturjis/trustees or have a separate body to deal with problems." Suggested researcher Dr (Ms) Rashna Writer, "The community has no leaders probably because they (the members) are incapable of following."

Instead of waiting for organizations to initiate action, to suggest solutions, to provide facilities, "Each one of you be a Parsi Panchayet," the words of Kozad Bonshahi of Iran were greeted with thunderous applause. Clarified his Iranian colleague, Sohrab Dahmubed, "Everyone must feel competent like a trustee but work as a servant."

Firdosh Hiranek, a youth from Australia, was not happy at the excessive attention being paid to subjects concerning Bombay alone and suggested instead that the venue of a future congress be a neutral zone like Australia. He further questioned the accountability of the trustees and enquired regarding the payments collected by way of a raffle for the refrigerator and moped donated by Kelvinator. When Guzder jocularly announced that it would help pay towards conveyance costs to attend the congress in Australia, the youth was apparently not amused. At a later stage Guzder informed that the income arising from the Congress amounted to seven lakh rupees approximately. The chairman of the sou-



(Left) Organizers of the Fifth World Zoroastrian Congress (from left): Kanga, Golwalla, Guzder and Desai

(Center) A section of the audience attending a plenary session

(Right) Chairpersons of different sessions (from left): Minocher-Homji, Rohinton Rivetna, Engineer, Jungallwalla, Taleyarkhan, Farhang Mehr, Vera Mehta, Sam Variava, Marazban Patrawala, Sethna and Aspi Moddie

Clockwise from top left: Rohinton Rivetna, Shahzadi, Vera Mehta, Karanjia, Minocher-Homji, Poncha, Jungalwalla, Sethna, Bonshahi, Bodhanwalla, Khullar and Patel

venir and fund raising committee BPP trustee Eruch Desai was given credit for raising the largest amount ever collected at a Congress though it was also specified that the expenses were the highest too. BPP trustee Jamsheed Kanga's contribution was recognized for chairing the subjects committee and selecting topics of overriding interest and utility. Gratitude was also expressed to others on the organizing team, chiefly Ms Homai Modi, Ms Banoo Irani, Rustom Anklesaria, Ms Gool Tata, Ms Sheroo Master.

In Bombay, unlike other anjumans where members pay a contribution in return for the services and facilities they enjoy, the Zoroastrians "seem to want to live off the past munificence of a few ancestors. There is no systematic contribution from the community at large. It is a shockingly uncivic condition," pointed out Moddie who described the present community set-up as an 'onion society' with a large middle-class professional and business bulge, different from the past pyramid society with the millionaires at the apex.

Though not in direct response to Moddie's complaint, the gathering was informed of the various activities initiated by certain pockets: the formation of an ambitious The Zarathustrian Project which sought commitments from individuals to eliminate all problems facing the community by 1992. And Ms Dolly Bhungara wanted to start a Zoroastrian Action Group with the support of the BPP. Pledging a donation of one lakh rupees, Major Homi Daruwalla from the floor wanted to start a fund that would help towards the upkeep of a third or fourth child to induce couples to procreate. Golwalla too was keen on this, observing that at the Parsee Lying-in Hospital more couples came for abortion than for delivery. On behalf of the BPP he promised one lakh and a further one lakh from the Pirojsha Godrej Foundation. Also recommended was the formation of vigilance squads in different Punchayet-managed housing colonies which could intimate the BPP of any



possible encroachment in the colony flats. What came as a pleasant surprise was an announcement on behalf of three of the six youth speakers at the plenary session that they would redirect the prize money of Rs 500 each awarded to them towards the educational expenses of a poor child to show that "young as we are, we can be responsible too." Guzzder then announced that youths seeking jobs or finance loans should approach him.

The house was divided on the issue of approaching the government for reservation of seats for the community. In a question addressed to him, community activist Fali Poncha replied, "In my personal opinion I don't think we have a ghost's chance of getting it. But if a public referendum is in favor of making the approach, we should make the effort. If we fail there is nothing wrong." Member of the Minorities Commission Homi Taleyarkhan was firmly against this suggestion because of the "enormity of prestige and the issue of standing on one's own feet." Delhi Parsi Anjuman president Lt Gen Adi Sethna was of the opinion, "What we need is an attitudinal change. If you want something, get up and do it." He advised the attitude of self-help, self-discipline, and the spirit of giving without wanting anything in return. Poncha was more concerned that the community protest against the government action of requisitioning 30 percent of the Parsi community's lands when in the case of all other communities the proportion is only six percent. "Keep a low profile today and you are going to be steamrolled and stamped upon. Fighting for a right is not a sin but according to our religion is a duty and an obligation." The community is too fragmented and privatized, summed up one speaker.

The less fortunate and the underprivileged members of the community were no doubt remembered during the course of the Congress but as social worker Dr (Ms) Vera Mehta asked, "Where is the voice of the poor in this body?... This is a concerned crowd though not representing the actual community." There is no dearth of funds in the community. "The problem is a poverty of attitudes. There is a lack of vision, coordination, efficiency and streamlining of management techniques in welfare administration."

"We don't realize when it is time for change and when we do, it is usually too late!"

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she remonstrated.

When briefing the delegates on the progress attained by the anjumans of India between the Fourth and the Fifth World Congress Homi Bodhanwalla of Jamshedpur pointed out two areas in which sufficient advancement had not been made: well-informed, educated priests who could guide the laity, and the formation of an apex world body. "Can we not give to our dasturjis and mobeds the dignity in life and self-respect that the Pope and priests enjoy in Christianity?... If we give peanuts what do we expect?" he asked. The offer of Ervad Homi Turel seemed to support this statement: He was willing to give up his present job and take to full-time mobedi if he could be assured of a pay of Rs 75,000 per annum which he draws at present working in a bank. In the approximately 10,000 population of Zoroastrians in North America there is reportedly not a single full-time practising priest, and yet there are two mobed councils! South Africa is on the lookout for a mobed who could tend to the religious needs of the populace of 15 Zoroastrian families residing there. In Iran even the laity are encouraged to take to priesthood. First they serve as mobedyars and are later recognized as regular mobeds.

The concept of a globally acceptable apex world body for the community was reiterated by Bodhanwalla who felt that such a body should be established not to

(Left): Representatives from different regions who participated in the session on "Regional follow-up action on the recommendations of the Fourth World Zoroastrian Congress and future priorities"

(Right): Participants at the session on "Methodologies of Religious Education for Pre/Post Navjote Groups"

"Fighting for a right is not a sin but according to our religion is our duty and obligation"

govern, but as a center of communication. Rivetna felt it was time to think in terms of a Union of Federations incorporating India, Europe, North America and Iran.

He recommended that a constitution similar to FEZANA's be adopted for the purpose and that a constitution convention be held in London in July this year, "perhaps under the auspices of the World Zoroastrian Organisation (WZO)." The WZO, envisioned as a global body, has not so far been able to involve the participation of all representative groups and associations because of the nature of its constitution which gives as much weightage to individuals as it does to member associations. (Reportedly, efforts after the Congress, to reconstitute a representative world body by reconciling with the WZO, did not fructify.) Homi Minocher-Homji had visualized a Federation of World Zoroastrian Associations (FEWZA) and until that was formed he was keen that World Zoroastrian Congresses coordinate the different thinking, actions and priorities so as to serve as a world body.

The world body would necessarily encompass Zoroastrians in India, Pakistan, Iran, Europe, North America, Africa and the Far East — the seven regions representing the different hues of a Zoroastrian rainbow — as perceived by Bodhanwalla. But the Middle East was

forgotten by an oversight and as pointed out by Ms Meher Moos, there was no representative view from the Gulf countries at the Congress considering that nearly 500 Zoroastrians are believed to be settled in those areas.

Projections of demographic figures in the next 30 years as worked out by sociologist Ms Ava Khullar reveal that "Zoroastrians (37,476) in the rest of the world (without Iran) will outstrip the population of Zoroastrians in India/Pakistan (32,217). "In Bombay in particular, the population of the community would have halved in the next 35 years. The only possibility of a reversal of the declining trend in India is for the community to adopt the slogan as coined by Peshotan Nargolwala: "Parsi kaum ki yeh hai pukar, ham do hamare char (this is the plea of the Parsi community that each couple should produce four children)." This fact of dwindling numbers was accounted for by late marriages (the average age at marriage for a Parsi girl is 26 and for a male is 31), no marriage and a small family size (3.9 persons per family in Greater Bombay in 1982), emigration and marriages outside the community.

Delhi is the only region that is supposed to have conducted a survey to determine the trend of mixed marriages and it was revealed that while in the 1960s, 33.3 percent of all marriages were mixed marriages, in the 1970s, the percentage had risen to 66.3 with the number of females marrying out being twice that of the males. The 1980 figures however show that the ratio of males marrying out had increased considerably. Recommended Khullar, "We must face the inevitable and view it more positively...If this matter were considered coolly and dispassionately, it would enable the community to keep the mixed families and their children within the community,



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Young and old delegates express different views from the floor of the house

adding the much needed children to the community's depleting young." She further stated, "We are taking an unrealistic attitude towards adoption. A baby (irrespective of its religious heritage) brought up in a Zoroastrian home environment would learn the same values as our children. But we choose to make this a religious issue." In the view of Minocher-Homji, inter-faith marriages "are gaining social acceptance...and though it may be a little early to say so...these non-Zoroastrian spouses and their children may soon gain equality of religious acceptance also. Already they are included in Zoroastrian directories, they attend most religious classes and ceremonies (muktads being an exception occasionally), their names are included in reciting various public prayers and in the *tandarusti*, they participate in our working committees and their burial or scattering of ashes is provided for in several Zoroastrian cemeteries." In Iran too, non-Zoroastrian spouses and children of inter-faith marriages are accepted into the faith if both partners agree. Further, as informed by one Iranian speaker, Iranians don't believe in birth control unlike the Parsis. An interesting fact was brought to light by Dr (Ms) Mehroo Patel of Chicago: The divorce rate is as high as 25 percent in inter-community marriages (10 percent of the total recorded in Chicago) as compared to marriages within the community where divorce is virtually unknown.

The demography figure of Iran, 90,891 according to their official 1986 census, "gives hope of a revival and resurgence." But these figures are viewed with caution for, in the beginning of this century they numbered 6,900 and at the time of the last two Congresses their strength was indicated in terms of 20,000 to 40,000. Since this is the first official census figure from the country, it is presumed that tribes and clans practising Zoroastrianism in remote areas, though not in contact with the larger anjumanas, may have registered themselves as Zoroastrians. There is also the possibility of reclaimed Zoroastrians or "Asli Zarthushtys" who had per force to convert to Islam, now declaring themselves as Zoroastrians. Even the Iranians are agreed that they will have to study this figure in greater depth.



Unlike the closed-door policy in India, "In Iran, non-Zoroastrians are also permitted restrictively to enter the atash bahram," informed Ervad Rustom Shahzadi. Princess Margaret was the first visitor and thereafter it has been opened to "all the tourists, both Iranians and outsiders." (One of the Iranian trustees of the Yazd Atash Bahram later explained to *Parsiana* that a glass wall separates the non-Zoroastrian visitor from the sanctum sanctorum.) "Religion by its very nature should remain still in its essence, yet move with the passage of time," opined Ms Khursheed Khurody, one of the youth speakers representing FEZANA. "We must be careful not to block the path of religion and cause it to become an instrument of repression," she cautioned before continuing, "The older generation use rituals and customs as a tool for power and control." Referring to the "adulteration" that has seeped into the religion she said, "Let it not be said that the greatest destroyers of Zoroastrianism were Parsis." And for voicing her belief that "Rituals are only the mechanism and language of religion. They are the media or symbols of religious expression. They are not religion itself," she was almost hounded with a flood of questions challenging her assertion.

Very often people try to pass off personal knowledge as religious knowledge, it was lamented. But in most cases, the statement 'I am a Zoroastrian' "is not supported by adequate knowledge of our religion and its practice thereof in our daily lives," as compared to a statement, 'I am a doctor' or 'I am a lawyer' which implies acquisition of formal knowledge, pointed out solicitor Ms Bapsy Dastur. The religious and spiritual significance of the navjote ceremony is rarely understood by the child to be initiated into the faith, stated Ms Farhiz Cooper of Poona, because the parents and society attach undue importance to the social fanfare. In fact in a survey conducted by Writer, the responses to her question, "Do you have a knowledge of Zoroastrian history?" indicated that in India 80 percent of the youth and 74 percent of the elders said that they had no knowledge as compared to the North American figures where 33 percent of the youth and 17 percent of the elders said they had no knowledge. As explained by architecture student Ms Zenobia Rivetna from Chicago, "Whereas in Bombay, Zoroastrian youth can bask in the reputation built by their forefathers, in the USA most Americans have never even heard the word Zoroastrian."

Dearth of religious literature was time

and again reiterated at the Congress. However religious and Sunday school classes in different regions under the inspiration of guides like Ramiyar Karanjia, Ms Tina Mehta, Farrokh Mistree and Ms Piloo Jungalwalla are apparently using novel and unconventional methods to inculcate the teachings of Zoroastrianism in pre and post-navjote age-groups. Jungalwalla gave an illustration of how diction plays an important role in our prayers recited in a language we do not understand. If instead of 'ashem' we pronounce the word as 'asem,' the meaning of the very first prayer could change from righteousness is the highest good to stone is the highest good.

While in India it is found that not many parents want to send their children to Zoroastrian-founded schools, preferring the convents, in Karachi, after a lot of effort they were able to reinstate the teaching of the Zoroastrian religion and English as the medium of instruction in Parsi-founded schools, reported Byram Avari of Karachi. Earlier the options for students at school had been Islamiyat (a scoring subject) or civics (where, with luck, passing grades could be obtained).

As regards the long-term future of the Zoroastrian community, Writer's survey found that perceptions differed. While 40 percent of the Indian youth and 28 percent of the elders saw the future as positive, in Pakistan the figures were 9 percent for the youth and 25 percent for the elders, in North America, 33 percent and 27 percent, and in the UK 18 percent for the elders but not a single youth could visualize a positive future. This indicated that on the whole the Indian and

North American youths visualized a brighter future than the despondency shown by the Pakistani and UK youths.

"The life of a religion is to be found in the hearts and minds of the believers, validated in the ethics of their conduct and expressed in their ritual," Prof Kaikhosrov Irani summarized the message in a nutshell. While advocating the use of the principles of respect and reason, Irani said, "We thus avoid the two extremes of rigidism on the one hand and casualism on the other. Rigidism insists that there be no change, and casualism is satisfied with whatever change one may find convenient," he tried to ward off conflicts between the liberal and orthodox factions. Yet sporadic outbursts persisted throughout the Congress on whether emphasis was being given to the liberals and the influentials, on whether the conservatives were being denied their say, on whether disrespect was being paid to traditions. Clarified Irani, "Tradition is the living belief of the dead while traditionalism is the dead belief of the living." "If we open a quarrel between the past and the present, we will find that we have lost the future," the view of a famous statesman was quoted. Said Vera Mehta, "There is a difference between watchdog duties and character assassination." Explained Moddie, while the left part of the brain controls the creative nature, the right hemisphere is in charge of the rational. "Anyone suggesting that you give up one part of the brain for another must be totally out of his mind!" Solicitor Dadi Engineer in a lighter vein appealed to Guzder to convene a special world congress on "Argu-

ments among Zoroastrians."

Zoroastrians with differing philosophies and of divergent views availed of the Congress opportunity to distribute promotional literature before and after the Congress and during the recesses that invariably exceeded the time allotted. Though there may be no want of leaflets in the community, members did seem to miss, as expressed at different points of the Congress, the daily publication of the *Jam-e-Jamshed* and sought community involvement to revive it.

The proceedings of the Fifth World Congress, recorded on audio cassettes, will be sold by the BPP, though at what price it has not been decided. What is also not known is whether these cassettes will be edited before sale since a considerable amount of time reserved for speakers from the floor was spent on unrelated issues and scant consistency maintained in the time allowed to speakers.

Time and again, many in the audience felt, "The subject is not exhausted, but we are." If that was the impression of those who understood English, how felt the 200 plus Iranians, many of whom could not converse in English? Yet a general feeling of euphoria seemed to prevail during the four and a half days, culminating in a chorus sung by the youth from different corners of the world who displayed their camaraderie and promised hope for the future in a farewell song specially composed for the occasion.

In the words of Rivetna, "We have been rejuvenated with nourishment to sustain us for the next few years" and he issued an invitation stating, "If the next World Congress is to be held in Iran, the one thereafter should meet in North America."

An awakening seemed to dawn at this Congress, felt many of those present. To quote Shahzadi, "Time moves on but we do not. We don't realize when it is time for change and when we do, it is usually too late!" Seeing the usual inertia towards change, another speaker summarized, "If we cannot prepare the future for the youth, let us prepare our youth for the future."

Youths who participated in the session on "Making Zoroastrian religion more meaningful for the youth of today, and involvement/participation of youth inter se and with the community organizations"



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'Greetings to the Best

A recap of the formal inauguration of the Fifth World Zoroastrian Congress and its official entertainment

Arnavaz S. Mama

"We, the Zoroastrians, are meeting in this assembly for deliberation on the problems of our life. Guide us, O Lord, on the path of purity and truth..." High Priest of Udwada Dastur (Dr) Hormazdyar Mirza invoked divine help after quoting and translating from Yasna 43.3. The formal inauguration of the Fifth World Zoroastrian Congress, with the theme 'To 2000 and Beyond,' was underway at the Parsee Gymkhana grounds at Marine Lines on January 3, 1990 as old and young squinted in the glare of the setting sun.

As Dastur (Dr) Kaikhusroo Jamasp-Asa, High Priest of Bombay's Anjuman Atash Bahram, has noted so succinctly in his 'Preview' of the Congress, "We Parsis are such individuals that our motto sometimes seems to be, 'Divided we stand, united we fall.'" Hence, the estimated 1,000 plus, colorfully decked coreligionists who had gathered together — top executives and judiciary, bankers, lawyers, doctors, academicians from Canada, Europe, India, Iran, Pakistan, UK, US and even South Africa — would need the active involvement of Ahura Mazda!

Armed guards looked down upon the gracious concourse [which not only included eminent dignitaries of the state government and members of the international consular corps in Bombay but a four-member television team led by Richard Harris that was making a feature on the community for the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) Channel Four] from adjacent buildings and the Princess Street flyover as Vice President of India Dr Shanker Dayal Sharma valiantly tried to release balloons expected to soar upward and carry their glittering message of the Fifth Congress with them. Alas, the getig glimmer rose a little, then tripped and faltered. Fortunately for the organizers of the Congress — the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India and the Bombay Parsi Punchayet

(BPP) — there was no supernatural symbolism attached to its fate!

Messages of encouragement from the President of India R. Venkataraman, Prime Minister V. P. Singh, Maharashtra's Chief Minister Sharad Pawar (who was expected at the inaugural but conveyed his apologies) and Rajiv Gandhi, former Prime Minister and currently the leader of the Opposition, were read out by Homi Taleyarkhan, member of the Minorities Commission. "Zoroastrians, the world over, have come to be associated with the highest standards of excellence...their traditional values and cultural mores have enriched the life of many societies all over the world," noted Venkataraman. "Our Zoroastrian community has contributed in full measure to the building of the nation," commented Gandhi. A message from the Speaker, Mahdi Karrubi, of the Majlis Shaory Eslamic (the Iranian Parliament), detailing Iran's "holy war," was read out in Persian by Aflatoon Ziafat, the Zoroastrian member of the Majlis. The dissertation ended with the verse which, in translation, read,

"Emanating from the fire hidden in my chest,

The Sun is a small flame, blazing in the sky.

Greetings to the best and honest servants of God."

In his welcome to the Vice President, the Governor of Maharashtra and "the intellectual aristocracy of our community," BPP chairman and Federation president Dr Aspi Golwalla referred to the "post-1960 diaspora of the Zoroastrian communities from India, Iran and Pakistan," and detailed the "demographic, religious, cultural, educational and socioeconomic crossroads" which they now face. Advising the delegates to address themselves to the varied and complex enigmas facing the community with understanding, tolerance, realism and Zoroastrian Vohuman Golwalla noted, "If approached in that spirit, this Congress should be one of our most historic and productive so far... The problems and difficulties we are facing today require our close cooperation and harmony, to have confidence in ourselves and our capacity for performance, to believe that with Ahura Mazda's blessings and the dint of energy, tenacity of purpose, grit and determination ingrained in us, we shall keep the Zoroastrian banner



and Honest'

*Facing Page: Guzder, Golwalla and Reddy with Sharma holding the Congress souvenir which he had just released
Left: Congress joint secretary Ms*

*Homai Modi with Taleyarkhan, Sharma and the recalcitrant balloons
Center: Desai and Mirza — invoking divine guidance Photo: Minoo Balsara
Below: a section of the audience*

always aloft. And after all why should we not believe so? We are Parsis."

For the benefit of the VIP invitees, BPP trustee and chairman of the Congress Jamshed Guzder detailed the various subject-heads of the forthcoming deliberations, providing the rationalization behind each — the need to involve the youth who would inherit the twenty-first century, make the religion meaningful to them, consider the implications of demographic decline, etc.

Noting his "fascination for the exploits of this small community (which has) stood by the country in its moments of trial and tribulation," Dr K. Brahmananda Reddy, then Governor of Maharashtra, emphasized the Zoroastrian virtues of "integrity and loyalty... There is hardly any good cause Parsis are not associated with." He urged the community "to encourage early marriages, reverse the present demographic trends to be able to survive as a community... If you face your problems in the light of your religion, you will surely find the answers," he concluded. In a wistful aside Reddy added, "In lighter vein, excepting the Parsis, if the other communities in India follow these (the habits leading to the

Parsis' diminishing numbers) it would be a very happy India!"

Welcoming international delegates "on behalf of India," the Vice President spoke of the Parsis' "nobility of character and conduct (as) characteristics developed by the precepts and teachings of Zarathushtra."

A known scholar himself, Sharma spoke of Avestan literature as "a storehouse of wisdom" and deplored the fact that "the modern generation cannot use it." He urged translation into contemporary idiom, "but carefully done so the original meaning should not be lost."

Senior BPP trustee and chairman of the souvenir and fund raising committee of the Congress, Eruch Desai, proposed the vote of thanks.

There followed a few scenes from the play *Madame Cama* written by Ms Shirin Darasha, principal of the J. B. Petit School. Based upon a short biography by Ms Khorshed Sethna, the play had been produced a couple of years earlier by the School and had earned encomiums from the audience and the Press. At the request of the BPP, the School and its drama director Ms Pearl Padamsee got the girls, some of whom had already



"We Parsis are such individuals that our motto sometimes seems to be, 'Divided we stand, united we fall' "



passed out of its portals, together again to provide highlights from Cama's dedicated public life and tragic private one. Cama, who had sacrificed personal happiness to her dream of a free and united India, never lived to witness the dawn of Indian independence. Among the less known of India's freedom fighters, the posthumous acknowledgement came 26 years later when Bombay's Sachivalaya Road was renamed Madame Cama Road in 1962. Her portrait was installed in Parliament Hall barely six months ago, 53 years after her death.

The evening ended with the national anthem and snacks for special invitees on the lawns of the Gymkhana. The hoi polloi went home to return the next evening to view a fashion fantasy entitled 'To 2000 and Beyond.' Sponsored by M. N. Dastur and Company the show was choreographed by Ratan Batliwalla — an explosion of color and imagination with 26 models (11 of them Parsis) cavorting in outfits that ranged from the exquisite to the bizarre. The saris had been provided by the Thackersey Group of Mills and the outfits sponsored by Clothes A'Line of Linking Road, Bandra and Xpose of Kemp's Corner. Ms Shabnum Ichaporia, the evening's compere, was effective in keeping up the tempo.

Shiamak Davar and the Company provided the second part of the evening's entertainment. Sponsored by Tata Iron and Steel Company, Davar and his

Above: Dilnavaz Kapadia and Tarini Bedi as Perin Naoraji and Mme Cama respectively Photo: Minoo Balsara

Left: Nostalgia with Dotiwala and travelling partner recounting comical experiences in the music of Nelly and her band

Right: Shiamak Davar — rewording classic ditties Photos: Liberty Photos



troupe glided, pirouetted and pranced their way through *Can Can*, *Blue Suede Shoes*, *Grease Lightning* and an item from the local show *Last Tango*, called "Hafta nikalo (produce the protection money)," a parody on the local police, and more.

While Davar had attempted to reword some of the classic ditties in the interests of local color and some traditional apparel had found its way into the fashion show in the items appropriately titled *At the museum* and *Down memory lane*, there was little by way of entertainment that the delegates would be able to recall as a highlight of the Fifth Congress.

Indeed, the only strictly Parsi aspect of the evening was a delicious traditional dinner catered by Bomi Patel. Here, as usual, highly literate Parsis insisted on settling into the wrong sitting (everyone was allotted the *paat* — or sitting — on

arrival) while some vegetarians felt ignored, waiting for dishes that never came their way.

Rock and Religion on the High Seas, a boat cruise cum brain-storming session in Bombay harbor, was organized conjointly by Zoroastrian Studies and the Youth Wing of the WZO on January 5 (see "Searching for togetherness," page 32).

Nostalgia, presented in memory of the late Adi Marzban, was a nonstop musical variety revue sponsored by the house of Godrej and presented by Dolly Dotiwala at the Tata Theatre on January 6. With Nelly and her band as sheet anchor, veteran favorites like Dinshaw Daji, Dadi Sarkari, Nader Nariman, the Dotiwalas and others revived some of Adi's famous gags, ending with the qawali competition between the sexes that had been the highlight of *Agal dhusya*, *paachal khasya* which Adi had presented under Zoroastrian Studies aegis in 1984.

Uncanny mimicry by Farokh Gotla brought the late playwright to life while Dara Madon's magic show was framed around remembered conversations with Adi that vividly recalled the latter's idiosyncracies. Two eyefilling ballet items by Carla Singh and Dodo Bhujwala provided a welcome interlude.

The evening was a success because the audience, reflecting the community, was largely an aging one. The elders were more responsive to the mirth than the youngsters, especially the younger generation from abroad to whom Adi was probably only a name. Unfortunately for them, there was not even a portrait of the man to associate with the evening's plethora of riqué jokes — a Marzban forte. Worse, the canteen of the Tata Theatre ran out of snacks. Obviously they hadn't been warned: the Parsis are coming!



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Creating the capacity to care

Arnavaz S. Mama

The workshop revealed the need for a radical change in the organization of community welfare

As the community is getting older, it is getting poorer. An estimated 27.5 percent of the Parsi population in Bombay is beyond the age of 60 years; only 48 percent belongs to the 25-59 year age-group which constitutes the earning members of the community. The comparative figures for the city's total population are 3.6 percent and 42.3 percent respectively.

These statistics, based on Dr (Ms) Malini Karkal's 1982 *Survey of the Parsi Population of Greater Bombay*, were part of the background papers presented for discussion by social welfare consultant Meher Nanavatty and social activist Ms Huzan Kharas who also functioned as coordinator at the workshop on the problems of the poor and the aged. Chaired by Dr (Ms) Vera Mehta, secretary-general of the Association of International Schools of Social Work in Vienna the session at the SNDT University's council room on January 5, 1990, the session was a part of the Fifth World Zoroastrian Congress. The workshop was intended to assess the dimensions of the problem, provide interaction between field workers and professionals in the sphere of social work, donors and recipients of Parsi charities, and thereby to chart out guidelines for community welfare in the years ahead.

Differentiating between the absolute definition of poverty which relates to "man's subsistence level of nutrition" and the relative approach which defines poverty in terms of the average standard of living in a society, Kharas defined the

poverty line in the community at the per capita income level of Rs 500-600 per month. This figure, based on Karkal's report, compares favorably with the per capita monthly income of Indians quoted at Rs 265 in the *Manorama Year Book* (1987-88), she noted. On this basis 3,410 Parsi families fall within the ambit of the poor.

"Parsi poverty is distinct from the poverty experienced by the general public in India or Pakistan amidst whom they live," says Nanavatty, adding, "Poverty is the symptom of a disease; the disease is the social system." Nanavatty traces the "poverty syndrome" to the community's unrealistically high expectations and an artificially high standard of living coupled with a non-competitive, lethargic attitude to life; an earning capacity restricted by the low level of education; the ghetto mentality stemming from the cultural restrictions of the baus; and low per capita incomes due to a large number of dependents: all exacerbated by an easy access to the dole system.

Hard data on the contemporary scene is lacking and becomes the first priority. Nonetheless Nanavatty prescribed an integrated approach to battle the affliction: a two-pronged attack that would galvanize trained personnel on the one hand and harness the total welfare resources of the community on the other. To restore to the poor the ability and the will to fend for themselves, Nanavatty suggested education that would inculcate a changed

attitude to life: a positive, problem solving approach in place of the current "atrophy of mind and action;" one that would enable a change of values and habits so that "individuals realize their own worth as creative persons and not (view themselves) in terms of material possessions as is prevalent in our community."

Such drastic but necessary change in the perceptions of a host of individuals presupposes the provision of professional help from high caliber social workers who would not only provide the necessary educational and psychological support but be able to organize integrated welfare services. Other professionals like lawyers and management experts could help reorganize charity trusts as well as anjuman and punchayets, apply to the court for cy pres to release funds locked up with antiquated objectives, arrange subsidized work schemes and health insurance for the majority, leaving doles only for physically and psychologically handicapped individuals.

Neither the diagnosis nor the prescription is new. Perceptive savants had been sounding warning bells since the 1930s, as relates Nanavatty. He quoted from Prof P. A. Wadia of the Parsee Charity Organization Society, Dr Jal Balsara, one-time Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) secretary and Dastur (Dr) M. N. Dhalla to establish that the long-term disadvantages of uncoordinated doles, administered by independent trusts lacking in professional expertise and the clustering

of certain sections of the community in the baugs, had been recognized since the 1930s.

"Unfortunately, the community as a whole, especially its charity trusts, were never united to promote an agreed attack on poverty," said Nanavatty. Dr Behram Mehta of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) founded the Zarhosti Unnati Dwara (ZUD) to promote youth welfare in the baugs through recreational programs and leadership training but was wound up in a few years in the absence of community support, says Nanavatty.

The Parsee Charity Organization Society, established in 1919 under the leadership of Prof P. A. Wadia, drew the attention of the community to the need to co-ordinate Parsi charities with a view to rehabilitating the needy through constructive welfare measures. "Most of Wadia's appeals fell on deaf ears," added Nanavatty.

Though some 18 charities coordinated themselves into a Liaison Committee of Charity Organisations (LC) in 1946 to eliminate duplication, the overwhelming majority of Parsi charities (reckoned at 566 trusts with a combined corpus of 30-35 crore rupees, as per a 1979 study of the Zoroastrian Community Development Institute) remained outside its purview. The LC established a Central Bureau of Investigation with professionally trained social workers to investigate case histories and recommend assistance on scientific lines.

LC executive secretary Ms Banoo Roowala spoke from firsthand experience of working with poor Parsis as well as Parsi trusts: "(There are) cases where the aged are completely neglected. Some aged opt to go to old age homes. Some prefer to run around. (The latter) are a stain on the community. Some ask to be supplied meals. Serious modifications are required and new services (need to be) provided. We require professionally qualified workers. The services we can provide are limited. Not all trusts cooperate with the LC. Some trusts refuse to send money orders. Without dynamic force and scientific methods we will not be able to help significantly."

Currently coordinating about 60 trusts, the LC has only one social worker whose salary led chairperson Mehta to remark, "Nowhere are trained social workers paid as miserably as in the Liaison Committee!" Warned BPP's consultant for school and family counselling

Ms Homai Billimoria, "Unless the importance of social workers is recognized and paid commensurately, no trained social workers will be available."

"We should be businesslike in our social charities: go with the market in terms of salaries. Even in 1946 there was the same problem (of low salaries to social workers)," remarked Nanavatty who had been the LC's first secretary. "The philosophy of welfare and development must be established, must be emphasized." He urged the gathering to study the workings of the Salvation Army or Cheshire Homes as models. "In America, no less than 12.5 percent of the funds raised are used on the administration of the trust."

In the course of the general discussion, Vispy Dastur, trustee of the Parsi Amelioration Committee and several other trusts, noted, "Whenever I visit a Parsi institution, I see aged Parsis there eating, sleeping or occasionally reading." He recommended the use of occupational therapy, as the aged, "left to themselves, become quarrelsome and cranky." Noting that "the material needs of the elderly can be provided by institutions but that only children can fulfil their emotional needs," he urged that the scheme for adopting grandparents be given greater impetus while also encouraging the aged to seek penfriends among their compeers. Added Ms Shirin Petigara, one of the three members of the Ladies Working Committee which super-

"The aged require you, not money. They are very lonely. What is called for is greater community participation"

vises the working of the F. S. Parukh Dharamshalla, "The aged require you, not money. They are very lonely. What is called for is greater community participation."

Nanavatty described the combination of old people's homes and nurseries in Denmark comprising one room tenements around a central oval nursery where working parents leave their children to play. Each child is looked after by an aged adult. The little protégé is taken up to the room at midday, fed

lunch and put to bed until evening when it's playtime again. Thus two sets of dependents, the very young and the aged help each other, leaving the earning generation to work unharried. "Would Parsi parents approve of their child being looked after by a poor old Parsi?" someone enquired. "It's up to us to educate the community," responded Nanavatty.

Psychiatrist Dr (Ms) Katie Sethna asked for help for the aged with mental problems: "No institutions accept those (who are) rowdy or have mental handicaps. We (also) need infirmaries — with professional help and trained staff — for the old who are totally vegetative."

Kharas' paper, based on research into religious-based groups like the mobeds, the chasnivalas and the pallbearers as well as beneficiaries of financial aid and inmates of homes for the aged, was illustrated with photographs which a member of the audience found distasteful. Noting that the downfall of the priestly class can be laid at the door of the panthakies, the participant questioned the inclusion of the pictures which made some people uncomfortable. Squelched Sethna: "Only when these eyesores are brought to the notice of the community, will the community help."

The workshop, held concurrently with a workshop on the youth and the plenary session on demography, nonetheless drew as many people as the small council room could accommodate. Those who chose too late to attend, were turned away for lack of space. What was unfortunate was the very restricted turnout of representatives of the community's charity trusts. Of a total of 566 in Maharashtra, barely five were represented.

"We had asked mobeds and people on the dole to come and participate. Very few came... Their inarticulateness was significant. There is something about the culture of silence, the culture of poverty," remarked Mehta at the summing up session of the Congress. "What does higher dependency mean to younger families?" asked Mehta and urged the comfortable upper crust of the community to "feel the human dimension of what 40 percent of our population is going through." Noting that charity is also psychological, mental and emotional and cannot be equated with bread alone, Mehta sought an army of paraprofessional workers: "Human resource development is the subject most in need of a think tank... The capacity to care is what gives life its greatest significance."

"Zoroastrian Congress? What are you doing here with all these mad bawas?" "I'm just hanging around," replies the young peer, trying to justify his presence outside the hall where the Fifth World Zoroastrian Congress (WZC) is being held. "Ay tau dai che (It's a bore)," announces his friend candidly, dismissing the subject. This embarrasses the young man.

"It's a question of attitudes," declares the young delegate who recounted the encounter for the benefit of the participants at the Youth Workshop organized by the WZC: "We are ashamed to say that we are Parsis." "It's an attitude problem not only with the youth, it includes the entire community," observes another.

"The very fact that we are here, proves we care," a third delegate gives the lie to the general observation. The youth care, at least those who attended the workshop do. We sense their pride in being Zoroastrians and their concern for the problems that confront the community. Opinions were divided but the participants were willing to discuss and hear out the other point of view — within the limited time frame, of course.

Ms Shernaz Cama, in her background paper for the workshop, identifies the problems of the community at two levels — personal and professional. "The need is, and will be, to overcome the ABC of Apathy, Blindness and Complacency. Most important of all, is to accept that there is a problem, that we are now in a crisis situation, but there are solutions." Cama introduces the topics of discussion by identifying the problems and posing questions that beg answers. For instance: whether Parsi boys suffer from a mama's boy complex (Yes, reports one group leader); whether there is a complacency bred by dreams of past glory; and the paramount paranoia of the community — mixed marriages, conversion and declining numbers.

Time allowed for the group discussions was short and many of the issues were only glossed over. The youth group discussions gave due weightage to the crucial issues while quickly dismissing the smaller ones: "Divorce? But we are not even married," observed one participant and all further discussion on the subject lapsed. Should Parsis adopt children? Yes, was the consensus of one group, even permitting the adopted child

"WE ARE THE FUTURE"

Gustasp Irani

The youths at the workshop displayed their concern for community problems



to be converted to Zoroastrianism. The health hazards as a result of close cousin marriages? The problem, according to one delegate, was caused by overprotective parents: "If the only boy I'm allowed to meet is my cousin, I'm going to fall in love with him very fast." At the other end of the same scale, another participant was quick to point out, are overpermissive parents whose children marry out of the community.

Conversion. Two of the four groups felt it was important enough to merit a vote. While in one group, only two out of 20 opposed it, in another seven in 20 supported it. A Parsi girl married to a non-Parsi complained that the leader of her group, a publicly declared traditionalist, did not permit a vote on the issue as the leanings of the young people assembled were distinctively in favor of conversion.

Conversion? The term, lest one forgets, was used in a limited sense — the acceptance of children of Parsi women married to non-Parsi men. "If the chil-

Youths have their say at a workshop

dren of Parsi men married out of the community are accepted as Zoroastrians, why not the children of Parsi women married to non-Parsis?" enquired one young girl. The equality of the sexes was probably the strongest argument the pro-conversion lobby offered...and yes, it does help solve the problem of the rapid decline in the Parsi population.

Echoes: "How can they label a navjote (of a child of a Parsi mother and non-Parsi father) illegal? Religion has nothing to do with race." "Such navjotes should not be encouraged, but if both parents want it, yes, permitted." "It is the mother who cares for the child; why should the child not be entitled to follow her religion?"

In one group, the two who opposed conversion did so on grounds of tradition and technicalities. "For over 1,000 years we have survived without accepting converts. Are we more aware than our forefathers?" asked a young man who sported a skull cap. The other projected an argument that concerned misunderstandings arising from the use of non-Parsi names: The children of Parsi women married to non-Parsis will bear non-Parsi names. If they are accepted into the community, then how does one draw a line to prevent children with no Parsi blood from joining in?

An extension of the same issue is the status of the non-Parsi woman married to a Parsi man who refused to bring up their children as Zoroastrians because of her constant alienation during the ceremonies: "Don't touch. Stay away."

The problem of conversion, or rather the issue of conversion, stems from the growing number of women marrying out

"The need is to overcome the ABC of Apathy, Blindness and Complacency"

of the community. One group leader reported the complaint of an Iranian youth that Parsi girls preferred to mix with non-Zoroastrians rather than Iranian Zoroastrians even though they shared the same faith. Another young man from Delhi lamented that Parsi girls, "even those from the villages in Gujarat, don't want to marry anyone except boys from Bombay."

"Whatever do girls see in Bombay?" shot back a Nagpur girl. "Beyond the office, commuting and the home there is nothing here. In Nagpur, we enjoy a great social life that Bombay does not offer; clubs, get-togethers..." Apparently impressed, a Bombay youth suggested, "Why don't we have cultural exchange programs?" "But we do," replied the Nagpur girl, "Presently, we have three people from Bombay with us."

"I did not know about that." The phrase, in different shades, cropped up repeatedly. For instance when reference was made to a scheme wherein Poona-based industrialists would assist young Zoroastrian entrepreneurs, many voiced their ignorance. Under the scheme, the industrialists have offered to assist young Zoroastrians with floor training, give advice on what to manufacture, where to sell, how to obtain licences, raise loans — the ropes to set up small-scale manufacturing units.

A girl from the USA referred to how universities there bridge the communica-

tion gap between potential employers and students by inviting the companies to the campus to speak of their needs and requirements so that the young men can decide which subject to specialize in and how to go about getting the job they desire. She recommended organizations or industrial houses to take the initiative of arranging such get-togethers — job camps — where students can interact with potential employers. One participant sounded a word of caution: Employers should not think that by employing a Parsi they are doing him a favor and therefore expect him to work for less than the fair market price.

The youth insist on having their say. They demand that there be proper youth representation on all anjumans and punchayets. A youth trustee of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman observed that while some regional apex bodies have complied with the recommendation of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India to appoint youth trustees, many have not. Further, many anjumans and punchayets, in the view of MLA and cabinet minister Marazban Patrawala, have lost sight of their primary function. "Unfortunately, some Parsi punchayets have started to give religious decrees. Trustees are required to administer the funds and properties of the community; they are not qualified to dabble in religious matters," he declared. As a rider he asks: "Should the Parsis set up a council of mobeds to give the community religious guidance?"

There was a healthy sprinkling of realism. The youth repeatedly spoke of their own responsibility; the need to stop blaming parents and elders for all that ails the community. For instance, commenting on the general attitude of Parsi youth towards employment, one delegate noted: "We Parsis have become class conscious; we have (got mistaken notions of) dignity of labor." Commented another: "We have got to start at the bottom and work our way up in an organization." Added a third: "A lot of Parsis treat Godrej and Tatas as their father's companies. They think that they have a birthright to get a job in these companies."

"We've got to excel. We can't keep basking in the glory of our past achievements," urged a young girl. "We are the future." The youth are willing to be responsible and participate in the flowering of this future. Will the elders give them a chance?

Speakers delineate the topics of relevance for the youth workshop



Disruptive murmurs ripple through the audience. "Translate, translate." The cry echoes across the Birla Matushri Sabhagar hall. To silence the speaker, one section claps intermittently. However, the speaker from the floor of the Fifth World Zoroastrian Congress, held at Bombay in early January 1990, refuses to be intimidated by these sections of the audience. He holds his ground and completes what he has to say — in Farsi. The gathering heaves a collective sigh of relief and claps only to drown any attempt by the speaker to proceed. "Let me translate," interjects Dr Farhang Mehr, chairperson of the session in progress and a prominent member of the Iranian Zoroastrian community now settled in North America. "Our Iranian friend makes two points: First, he expresses the gratitude of the Iranian delegates to the organizers of the Congress and the Parsis of India for the courtesies shown them. Second he points out an omission. He believes that the organizers should have hung a portrait of Zoroaster up here (he points to a screen that serves as the backdrop to the stage) to guide and bless this gathering." The audience cheers as one, this time in genuine appreciation.

Two hundred and thirty Iranian Zoroastrian delegates attend the Congress to express, if nothing else, their solidarity with their coreligionists in India and the world over. Many of them, with only a smattering of English, sit, uncomplaining, through lengthy discussions — heated and light, boring and stirring — understanding little; just happy to be part of the microscopic international community of Zoroastrians. "The unity of Zoroastrians worldwide is crucial and must be maintained," says Ziafat Aflatoon, Zoroastrian member of the Majlis or Iranian parliament. Aflatoon has invited the community to hold the Sixth World Zoroastrian Congress in Iran. The first in the series was held in Tehran in 1960. "Certainly there are differences between Parsis and Iranian Zoroastrians. I can't eat chillies... and the language may be a barrier, but on important matters there is no difference. Our origins are the same and our faith is one — we are Zoroastrians," says Mehraban Kushesh, member of the Anjuman Zartoshtian Tehran.

Each of the 230 delegates has paid for

"Our faith is one"

Gustasp Irani

The large number of Iranian Zoroastrians present at the Congress reaffirm the common religious ties

his/her own passage and keep, as also the 25,000 toman (Rs 25,000) exit and airport tax that all Iranians have to pay in order to leave the country. The tax, however, has lost much of its earlier sting because of the high rate of inflation prevalent in Iran. One delegate points out that while living in Iran has become more expensive, leaving it has become cheaper! Inflation is only one of the effects of the turmoil the country has witnessed almost throughout the decade of the 1980s: a bloody revolution and a protracted war with Iraq.

Homi Taleyarkhan, member of India's Minorities Commission, congratulates a group of Iranians on the cessation of hostilities and advises them to push for peace and normal relations with Iraq. We witness a flash of fierce nationalism: "But Iraq is still holding some of our land," one Iranian protests and his companions echo the sentiment.

The paradox of the Islamic revolution in Iran is that Zoroastrianism has "for the first time, been recognized as an official religion," says Ervad Rustam Shahzadi, a senior practising priest in Tehran. Until Ayatolla Khomeini's edict that Zoroastrians are followers of the Book, Zoroastrianism as a religion was never recognized as an official religion by the Muslims of Iran, even during the earlier pre-revolution regime. Only Christianity

and Judaism, apart from Islam, qualified as they followed the Book — the Bible. Significant or otherwise, an Iranian delegate points out that whenever one comes across any Iranian government list on minority religions, Zoroastrianism is always slotted at the top. Both the Ambassador of Iran to India, Ebrahim Rahimpour and the Speaker of the Majlis, Mahdi Karrubi, sent messages to the Zoroastrian Congress, wishing it success and referring to the spiritual and historical bonds between the religion and Iran.

Politically, the Zoroastrian community in Iran is allotted one seat in its par-



liament. The Zoroastrian MP is elected by Zoroastrians alone. Like all citizens an Iranian Zoroastrian is entitled to only one vote. He may exercise it in the contest for the seat reserved for his community or for a candidate in the general elections, not both. "As far as personal rights are concerned, Zoroastrians are at liberty to follow their own rituals, rites and religious practices," says Aflatoon.

Zoroastrians are free to enroll in any school, anywhere in Iran, states Aflatoon. "All subjects, other than religious studies, are common to all students regardless of their religious beliefs." As regards religious teachings, Zoroastrianism is taught to Zoroastrian students in three Zoroastrian-run schools in Tehran. Aflatoon clarifies that while children of other minorities attend Zoroastrian-run schools, there are no Muslim students enrolled in these institutions. Interestingly enough,

since religious study is compulsory in Iran up to the first grade of high school, Zoroastrian children attending non-Zoroastrian schools are permitted to attend religious classes at special centers where Zoroastrianism is taught. Marks obtained at examinations at these centers are recorded in their official report card. "In a sense there is no religious distinction. In another sense there is more religious awareness now than there was before," observes Dr Farhang Mehr, former vice chancellor of Shiraz University, former minister of finance and briefly vice president of Iran.

"Zoroastrians have equal rights with the rest of Iranians and that is written in the constitution," insists Aflatoon. Farhang Mehr, now settled in North America, however expresses reservations on such claims: "Zoroastrians are better off than other religious minorities, but that does not mean that they enjoy full political and civic rights. Under Islamic law in Iran, the right to rule belongs only to the Muslims. Therefore, unlike other Muslim countries, in Iran non-Muslims cannot join the judiciary, the military academy; that is, they cannot become officers in the armed forces and there are restrictions on employment opportunities in the ministry of education and the min-

istry of foreign affairs." Farhang Mehr points out that there was an advertisement in the Iranian papers that listed Islam as one of the prerequisites for joining the infantry academy. By contrast he observes, that in Pakistan, a Muslim country, a Zoroastrian has been appointed a judge of the Supreme Court and its present ambassador to the USA is a Parsi.

A matter that has baffled even the Iranian Zoroastrians is the official government census figures of September/October 1986 indicating the strength of the Zoroastrians in Iran as 90,891. "Previously in Iran, whenever they took a census they did not categorize according to religion," says Farhang Mehr who was also the president of Anjuman Zartoshtian Tehran for 12 years. "So we cannot say with any certainty how many Zoroastrians there existed before. All we know is that those who voted or joined the various anjumans were about 25,000. There could have been Zoroastrians in other cities where there were no anjumans. I certainly cannot comment on the current census figure. First it must be broken down geographically and analysed."

"Until the recent census, it was supposed that the Iranian Zoroastrians were primarily living in the three cities of Tehran, Yazd and Kerman," write Dr Jehangir Oshidari and Mehraban Kushesh in their paper at the Congress on the demographic trends of the community in Iran. While the census did record the largest concentration of Zoroastrians in Tehran, 24,240, the real surprise was



(Left): Senior priest Shahzadi
Bottom row (Left): Congress chairman Jamshed Guzder presents bouquet to Ali Razai, Iran's consul general in Bombay
(Center): Aflatoon delivering an address at the inauguration
(Right): Kushesh representing Tehran



Khorasan which, with a population of 10,525, had the second largest congregation of the community. "We did not even know that there were any Zoroastrians in the area (Khorasan)," says Shahzadi. Kerman and Yazd incidentally, ranked seventh and eighth in the list. Lately some action has been initiated "by our representative in the parliament as well as the Tehran Anjuman to identify them (Zoroastrians in areas previously not known to have followers of the faith)," write Oshidari and Kushesh.

The Iranian Zoroastrians resent unfounded speculation on the census figures. The implication that there are people masquerading as Zoroastrians is dangerous and as one delegate points out, it can lead to uncalled for persecution of innocent Zoroastrians. For the record, the delegates clarify that the people conducting the census did not ask for proof of one's religion but merely noted the respondent's reply.

The Iranian Zoroastrians also resent the attitude of a Parsi delegate at the Congress who has indulged in meaningless ridicule when questioning the validity of the Iranian census figures. The statement that even if all the Romeos were working overtime in Iran, the radical increase in numbers could not be accounted for, has upset the Iranians present. What is also referred to time and again is the practice among the Iranian Zoroastrians of not donning the sudreh and kusti throughout the day. "Let's stop this pointless controversy. Let's be a community." Farhang Mehr's declaration from the stage of the Congress, sums up the sentiments not only of the Zoroastrians of Iran but also of members of the community settled in North America.

In fact, the Parsis, as they face a growing crisis of religious leadership and a fast dwindling number of full-time



Mehr: "more religious awareness"

mobeds, may have to take a closer look at how their Iranian counterparts handle these problems. The community there has a well-established Council of Mobeds and four years ago the Council decided to accept behdins as priests. Shahzadi, a senior member of the Council of Mobeds in Iran, explains that those behdins who choose to become mobeds have to undergo rigorous training before they are accepted as mobedyars, that is mobed helpers. "A mobedyar has to work as an assistant under a fully qualified mobed for three years before he can qualify to become a full mobed himself," says Shahzadi. Presently there are 10 mobeds and 10 mobedyars in Tehran and nine mobeds and 22 mobedyars in Yazd. Interestingly, of the nine mobeds in Yazd, three are from athorman families and six from behdin families, states Shahzadi. According to him, there are two mobeds in Kerman, one each in Shiraz and Isfahan and two mobedyars who look after the religious needs of the small Zoroastrian community in Sharifabad and Abadan.

Who are these behdins who are willing

to become mobeds when sons of athorman families opt for other professions? "Some of the behdin priests are retired or poor people who need to supplement their pension or income by serving as priests," explains one Iranian delegate.

Another job of the Council of Mobeds is to preside over and decide on divorce cases in the Zoroastrian community. According to Kushesh, couples seeking divorce must first file a suit with the civil court which in turn refers it to the Council of Mobeds. The Council hears each individual case and reaches a verdict which is communicated to the civil court which in turn passes the final sentence. Kushesh is quick to point out that di-

Population trends in Iran

Drawing from various sources, like the writings of tourists and the reports compiled by Maneckji Hataria, the celebrated agent of the Society for the Amelioration of the Conditions of the Zoroastrians in Persia, Dr Jehangir Oshidari and Mehraban Kushesh, in their paper on the demographic trends of the community, presented at the Fifth World Congress in Bombay, summarize the population trends in Iran over the centuries of Muslim rule: "Approximately 1,00,000 Zoroastrian families were living in Iran during the Safavid Dynasty of which more than 20,000 Zoroastrians were serving as soldiers and in the cavalry. There were more than one million Zoroastrians in Iran until the eighteenth century and this was reduced to 50,000 during the reign of Fath-Ali-Shah and further reduced to 30,000 in the reign of Mohammad-Shah-Qajar and finally reduced to only about 6,900 when Hataria visited Iran (in 1854)."

Zoroastrian cemetery in Iran



vores among Zoroastrians in Iran are an exception rather than the rule. The low rate he attributes largely to the fact that arranged marriages are still very predominant in the community. "Parsis seem to prefer love marriages. In Iran we prefer arranged marriages. Couples are allowed to go out together but there are restrictions. The engagement period is also very short," he states.

"In Iran we believe in living together, not loving together," says Kozad Bonshahi, president of the Zoroastrian

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Anjuman of Isfahan, in defence of arranged marriages. "Love can become hatred. Love is not necessary for the continuation of married life; forgiveness is. There is a lot to forgive between husband and wife and it is easier to forgive if the marriage is arranged." Parents start looking for suitable partners for their daughters when they are 18 and for their sons when they are 25 and as a rule girls are married before their twenty-second birthday and boys before their twenty-ninth birthday. There are very few confirmed spinsters or bachelors, explains Bonshahi.

Bonshahi's brother Yezdanyar, of Khaze Book Sellers in Bombay's Grant Road locality, explains the dynamics of social pressure: "People start pointing a finger if a girl is not married by 22 or a boy by 30. 'What's wrong?' they ask. And after marriage, if a couple does not get a child within two years, people start pointing fingers again. So couples generally have a child immediately after they are married." Iranian Zoroastrian families, as any Iranian Zoroastrian will verify, have not less than two children; many have three and it's not uncommon to find families with four or more children.

Housing, Kushesh states, is not a major problem. "Rents are high but about

75 percent of the Zoroastrians own their houses and the anjuman helps the poor of the community where it can. Unlike the Parsis of Bombay we have only a few housing colonies like Rustom Guiv Bagh which is for needy Zoroastrians. Of

Parents start looking for suitable partners for their daughters when they are 18 and for their sons when they are 25

course if housing does prove to be a problem, a family can always return to their family house in the village.

Like the Parsi migration from rural Gujarat to urban Bombay, the Iranian Zoroastrian community has also largely migrated from Yazd and Kerman to urban Tehran. However, unlike the Parsis with whom the severing of roots is almost always final, the Iranian Zoroastrians still hold on to their ancestral houses back in the villages. Most of the ancestral lands have gone though. Kushesh sees it as a combination of two factors — the migration from the villages that has

resulted in the lands lying fallow and the rise in real estate prices as the city has expanded to include the villages surrounding it. Zoroastrians started to sell their idle lands to cash in on profits that resulted from the boom in prices.

"The villages of Yazd don't exist anymore. They are all part of the city," says one delegate. We ask about the village Kuchibogi. A big highway cuts through it. Khorramshahr, another village, has become the site of a railway station. Naturally we also draw comments on the characteristics of the people of these villages. Not complimentary, but then they never are, regardless of which village one hails from. One does not take offence, one is used to it, for even among many Irani Zoroastrians settled in India it is a sport to snipe at each other's village back in Yazd — nothing malicious. This Iranian and Irani peculiarity is probably a reflection of the strong bonds the people feel for their ancestral roots. Now, more so, the Iranian Zoroastrians do not intend to betray their forefathers who had clung to the religion despite all persecution and discrimination. The presence of the 230 delegates at the Fifth World Congress is, if nothing else, a reaffirmation of their determination to keep the flame of the religion burning in the land of its origin — beloved Iran.

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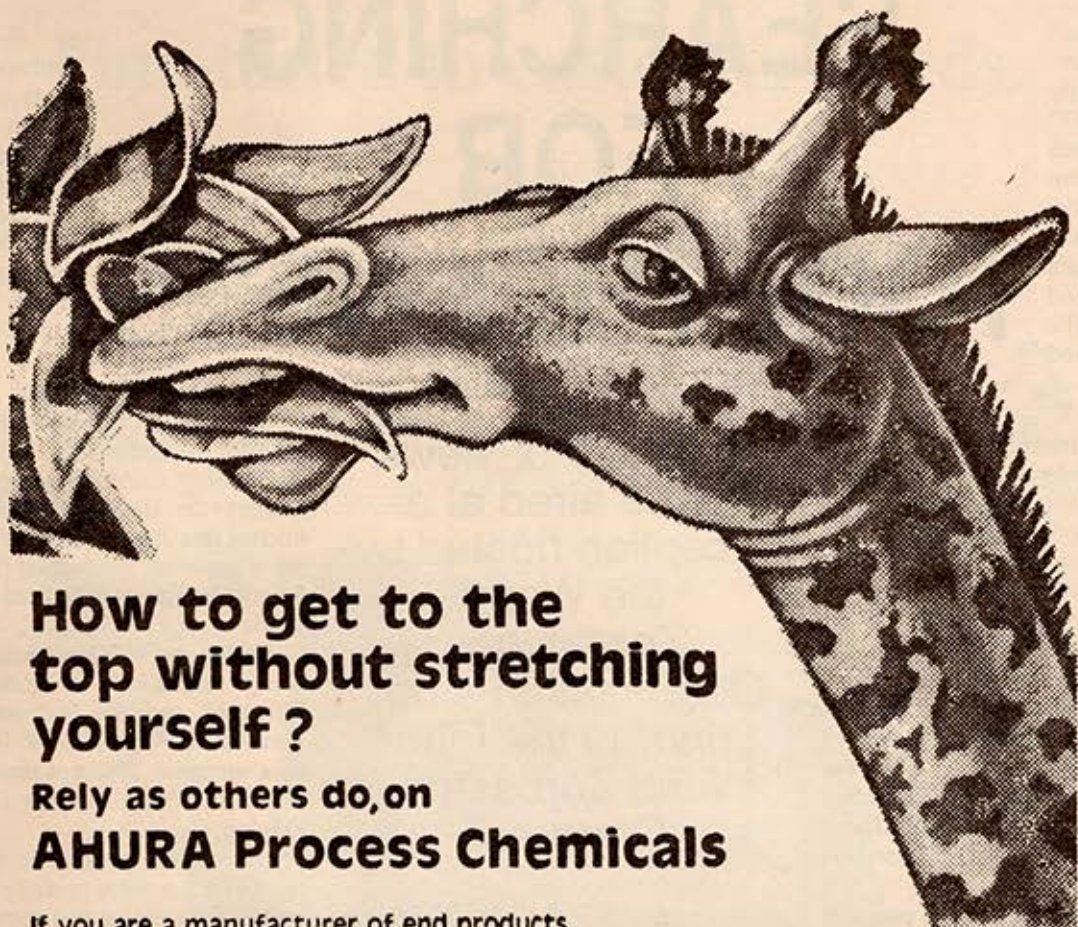
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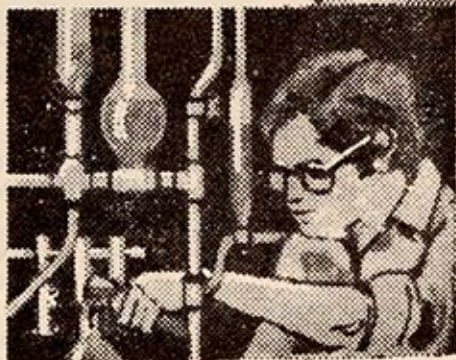
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SEARCHING FOR TOGETHERNESS

Arnavaz S. Mama

A variety of views
were aired at a
reception hosted by
the World
Zoroastrian
Organisation a day
prior to the Fifth
World Zoroastrian
Congress

"Will children abroad preserve their identity or will they merge?" Noted lawyer Dadi Engineer, president of the World Zoroastrian Organisation's (WZO) India committee, posed the problem at the reception organized by them at the J. J. Modi Hall of the K.

R. Cama Oriental Institute to welcome the members of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) and other delegates to the Fifth World Zoroastrian Congress. Sharing the podium with him were Dr Aspi Golwalla and Jamsheed Kanga, of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP), Prof Kaikhosrov Irani, Rohinton Rivetna, Homi Minocher-Homji and Darius Captain of FEZANA, Shahpur Captain of London, and Dr Burzin Khan and Dinshaw Tamboli of Bombay, Ms Mani Clubwalla of Madras and Dr Sam Bhacca of the Surat Parsi Punchayet, all members of the WZO's India committee.

The poser represents the most poignant doubt that plagues the first generation of Zoroastrian settlers abroad, especially in North America. It has galvanized them into greater activity in terms of seeking ways to educate the youth in the theology and traditions of Zoroastrianism. Here was the prologue to the soul-searching that would dominate the sessions of the Congress over the next five days.

The other major development that Zoroastrians are anxious about is the formation of an international body that could provide basic data on Zoroastrian demography, coordinate religious education in the interests of a homogenous society, hold the mandate to negotiate with the governments of the world — a necessity that forced itself on the consciousness of the internationally spread community while seeking to rehabilitate young refugees from war-torn Iran during the past two years.

Irani, who heads the department of philosophy at City College, New York and the FEZANA subcommittee on reli-

gious education and is trying to produce a video tape on the religion, acknowledged the problem of finding "accurate information on Zoroastrianism." According to Irani there is "no information on ancient Zoroastrian traditions. The total misrepresentation of the religion of Zarathushtra is our problem." Deploping the "morally arrogant and religiously inadequate" stance of the generality of religious teachers in the community, Irani says, "Our education should be in the honest to goodness principles of our religion. The way we teach religion must be free of ideas that (conflict with) contemporary ideals."

FEZANA president Rohinton Rivetna spoke of the international concern for the community's depleting numbers as well as the diminishing numbers of priests. "When we go abroad, an awesome responsibility is thrust upon us," says Rivetna. "There is a void to be filled. We miss the institutions we are familiar with and used to. When there are 50 to 100 Zoroastrians in an area, there is a strong urge to form an association." He referred

to the dedicated, hardworking individuals in each association and the mutual desire for co-ordination that led to the birth of FEZANA.

Rivetna's approach to the problem of identity is to let the "North American population know about Zoroas-

trianism — know what we are, who we are, through interfaith groups." Working through the Interfaith Council, Rivetna intends that Zoroastrians, as a body, present a paper at the second World Parliament of Religions to be held in Chicago in 1993.

Urging the WZO to accept the two existing federations of Zoroastrians — FEZANA and the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India — Rivetna ventures, "Accept them as part and parcel of WZO...Hold a convention in London..."

His second priority is the establishment of a task force to study the decline in population in India and abroad. "The average family has one or two children. To propagate the community you need at least 2.7," Rivetna states and refers to the census committee of FEZANA, established under statistician Minoo Patel of the University of Illinois. The task force should issue a white paper detailing what we can do about the decline, says Rivetna.

To satisfy the "intense desire to know more about our faith" Rivetna proposes to invite priests from Iran and India, sponsor their training in North American universities and have them "educate us in North America." With these courses of action Rivetna sees a "great future for Zoroastrians in North America."

"There is no good global organization," noted Minocher-Homji of the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario (ZSO) who is vice president of FEZANA's co-ordination and planning committee. Aware of the discussions between the Indian Federation, the BPP and the WZO (which have resulted in a stalemate) He recommended that the organizations get together for an interim period of

three years after which they could opt in or out. Voting should be in proportion to membership in good standing, suggested Minocher-Homji who felt, "At the end of three years (there would be) sufficient confidence to come to a decision regarding the type of constitution. Till we come together, we will remain a weak and dissipated community," he warned.

Further amplifying his suggestion of a voting procedure, Minocher-Homji said, "For example, there could be one vote for every 100 members in good standing but (there should be a) limit to votes available to the largest membership." He illustrated his suggestion with the example of the ZSO which has the largest membership among the member associations of FEZANA but whose "weightage is limited so that others do not feel we are riding roughshod," he added.

Another point Minocher-Homji touched upon was the preponderance of Iranian Zoroastrians in North America. Referring to the divergencies between Iranian and Indian mobeds, which related to the question of acceptance of non-Zoroastrians into the faith, Minocher-Homji related that the Iranians had a six-point pattern on which to accept converts: a fair knowledge of Zoroastrianism; an inclination towards the faith; the agreement to undertake a three-month course to acquire fundamental knowledge; that the choice be free and without obligation; and the willingness to meet a three-member committee who would evaluate the prospective convert's knowledge of the religion. Only thereafter would the initiation ceremony be considered.

"In North America there is a large number of Iranians. Not all are Zoroastrians (now) but had been so earlier," informed Minocher-Homji and urged the community to "try in good faith to understand our Iranian brothers." He noted that there were Iranians, with a very good background knowledge of Zoroastrianism, on the committee that was established to rehabilitate refugees from Iran. "In one

"There is a void to be filled. We miss the institutions we are familiar with and used to"

year we built considerable confidence in each other," Minocher-Homji added.

Darius Captain who is chairman of FEZANA's youth committee described its role as that of "a catalyst to organize functions for youth." Hailing from San Francisco, Captain revealed that 75 percent of the community there was married to non-Zoroastrians and accepted the children of either spouse into the fold.

Earlier, Shahpur Captain, the newly elected president of the WZO, had spoken of the establishment of the Organisation and its first meeting on July 18, 1980. "The bulk of work at inception (concerned) the resettlement of displaced Zoroastrians from Iran," noted Shahpur Captain. He added that the body was "currently assisting a case in London and a lady in New Zealand... We publicize these activities only in the annual report to members," he added.

While Dinshaw Tamboli referred to the WZO's activities in India — the funding of the Cashmera Bhaya report on the debt burden of rural Parsis in Gujarat; the renovation of an agiary and the infirmary in Navsari; contribution towards the Choksi Rural Girls Home and the con-

struction of mobed quarters of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman — Dr Burzin Khan spoke about the WZO's Youth Wing which has been aiding the Cowasji Jehangir Rural Home in Gholvad by the distribution of books and gifts, is holding medical and dental camps and has undertaken the planting of trees at Doongerwadi in Bombay.

As soon as the scheduled speakers had finished, and before the WZO committee members could react to Minocher-Homji's suggestions on making the world body more representative, Ms Mithoo Patel of Germany introduced a disturbing notion from the floor. Anticipating a decline of the community "if Parsis are not really concerned about the quality of fresh blood, if they do not remain within the Aryan race," Patel urged "selective breeding to save the community."

An appalled Irani was on his feet: "My religious conviction is that a person's religion is her internal affair. (As in) Yasna 30, you listen carefully and make your choice. This choice is sacrosanct. A person born of any blood may choose to be Zoroastrian. I do not see how anyone has any moral right to say he or she cannot. It is equally right for a Zoroastrian child to choose anything else... There are two forms of bigotry," announced Irani. "The positive one which says 'I have the superior religion. Yours is inferior and I will destroy it (but will allow you to convert).' And the negative which says 'I have the superior; you have the inferior. I will prevent you from accepting mine.'"

"Zarathushtra didn't bring his followers from heaven," interposed Ervad Rustam Shahzadi of Tehran. "(He found them from) among Persian and Turanian people... We cannot close the door to others. We don't propagate. We write books which others can buy. If they ask questions, we answer. In India and Iran it is not good to accept. But in other countries,

Mistree at the mike in the course of the harbor cruise

Photo: Noshir Gobhai



we must accept."

"At the end of the twentieth century, one word that frightens me is race," bridled Aspi Moddie, interceding from the audience. "Many will remember what Nazism and racism meant. (British biologist) Julian Huxley had refuted the theory (of the superiority of race) on grounds of science... Who will be framed and fashioned by bio-technology?" He sounded a moral caution: "Don't dabble in an area you don't know and have no moral right to handle."

Not to be silenced, Patel remarked that she sought "only to protect the biological existence of our own people. Please do not mix racial consciousness with racial prejudice. Put a person to the test..."

Into the charged atmosphere stepped noted politician Homi Taleyarkhan. "Religion should be a unifying and purifying force. We are proud of our Zoroastrianism — not racist, not isolated — integrated and completely secular in India," he asserted reassuringly. Then, with remarkable aplomb, he changed the subject. He sought "an international federation based on cooperation," adding,

"Zarathushtra didn't bring his followers from heaven. He found them from among Persian and Turanian people"

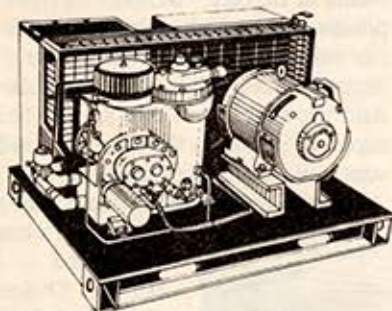
"Religion, if kept apart from political considerations, will play an important part... Those who represent Zoroastrians abroad (must) ensure the well-being of Indian Zoroastrians."

Taleyarkhan having thus defused the tension, it was time for dinner and the globetrotters migrated to the Radio Club for an appetising buffet organized by WZO's Zal Contractor.

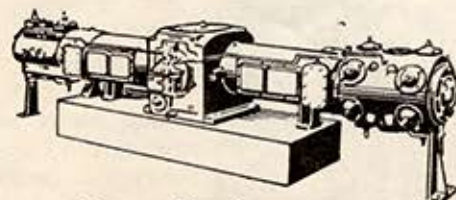
Three nights thereafter, on January 5, 1990 the *M. L. Mahavir* was the scene of a lecture on "Highlights of Zoroastrianism" by Zoroastrian Studies (ZS) founder Khojeste Mistree, informs a press release of the WZO Youth Wing which, together with ZS, had arranged for 'Rock and Re-

ligion on the High Seas.' The "cruise with a difference" was meant for the youth aged between 18 and 40 years — and had effectively caught their imagination as not only was the first boat fully booked but even a second one, organized at short notice, could not accommodate all those interested. This was an additional opportunity for the youth to interact on various community issues, the first two having been the plenary and the workshop sessions of the Congress.

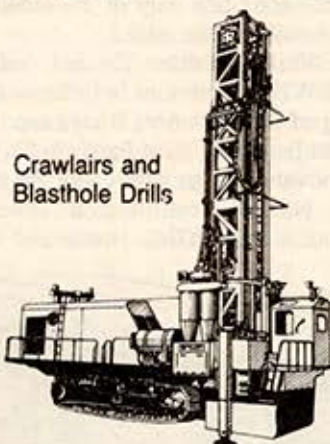
The youth working group — formed at the All India Youth Festival, held in Pune in November 1989 — had organized the cruise as a part of the plan to provide religious education in an informal manner, the press release noted. Mistree's talk was followed by a brainstorming session "where the youth were allowed to express their views and ask questions." While Professor James Russell of Columbia University stressed the importance of religious rituals, youth delegates of all hues took the social rituals — dinner and dancing — in their stride. In keeping with its mission, the evening ended with a recitation of the *Ashem Vohu* and *Yatha Ahu Vairyō*.



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Demographic despair

Ava Khullar

The Government of India censuses have highlighted the progressive decline of the Parsi population. The declining trend, especially over the last three decades in India, has come as a severe jolt to the community — approximately 10 percent decrease in 10 years, or a one percent decrease each year during the decades 1951-61 and 1961-71, and a major fall between 1971-81 of a hefty 20 percent. It is not difficult to visualize what the situation of the community will be if this trend continues.

Agitated by the trends noticeable, the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) sponsored two special surveys on the Parsis of Greater Bombay, one in 1961 which was carried out as part of the 1961 census operations, and again in 1982 by the International Institute for Population Sciences — which confirmed the worst fears of a community on the decline.

Most of the demographic work done in recent years has been based on the situation in India where one of the largest groups of Zoroastrians lives. However we have failed, till now, to look at this situation globally. What the community needs is science-based knowledge about itself with a global perspective.

It is with these concerns in mind, that we felt it imperative to draw a global picture of Zoroastrians. Data collected from all the regions of the world where Zoroastrians are now spread was used to

consider if reasonable projections point to any clear trends.

However, we have to keep in view the fact that, unlike India, where we have fairly reliable demographic data, the other regional groups (North America, Australia, West Europe, etc.) have not had the facility of official censuses of their Zoroastrian population, and hence they have had to make their own efforts to collect information about the size and nature of their population and the trends noticeable therefrom.

We may therefore consider the present exercise as the first ever tentative global picture. We cannot, at this stage, lay claims to absolute precision. To aim at that we have to make a beginning now,

Khullar: need for radical remedies



and then continue a systematic process of collecting data in all regional centers.

Let us now look at the three main components into which the Zoroastrian community is roughly divided: India and Pakistan, Iran, rest of the world, i.e. North America, UK, Europe, Australia, Africa, South East Asia, etc.

In India and Pakistan

The last census in 1981 showed the Zoroastrian population of India at 71,630, out of which Greater Bombay accounted for 50,053 persons and the rest of India, 21,577 persons.

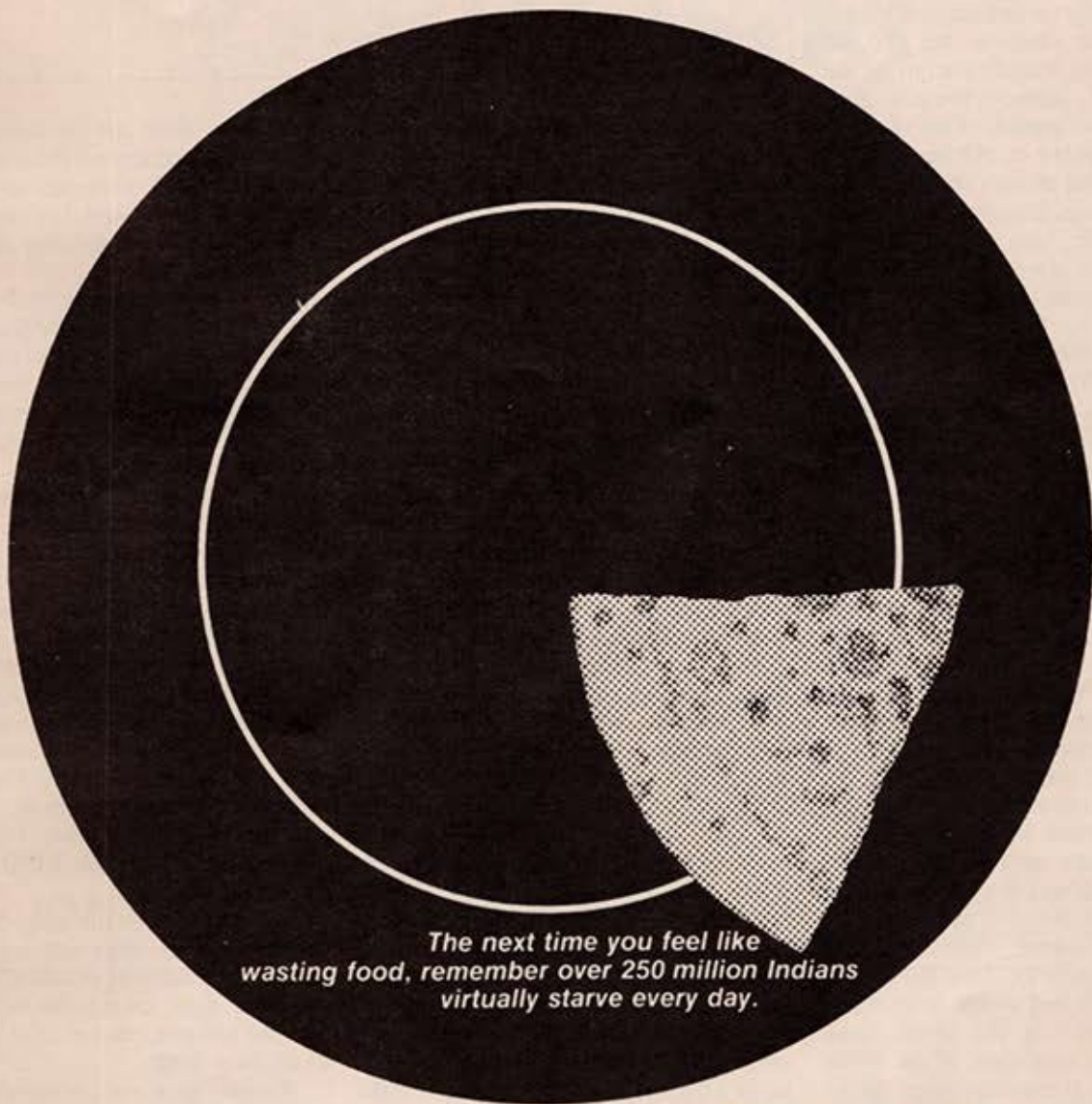
Projections for Greater Bombay have been given by Peshotan Nargolwala (1989). However, for the rest of India, in the absence of clear data on mixed-marriages, outmigration, etc we have simply extended the average exponential rate of decline over the period 1961-81, and projected at this constant rate of 1.7 percent per annum up to 2021.

The picture is truly astounding. In another 30 years, the Zoroastrian population of India will shrink to 30,224 and outside Greater Bombay, only 6,470 Parsis may survive. Taken with Pakistan, the population in the subcontinent will number 32,217.

Since, regrettably, data from Pakistan is not available, we have projected on the basis of figures available for Karachi (1961-1982) where was noticed a contin-

While the western world shows signs
of hope, the number of Zoroastrians in the subcontinent
will be less than half
the present strength within 30 years

"I don't feel like finishing what's on my plate"



*The next time you feel like
wasting food, remember over 250 million Indians
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ued negative growth rate of 1.25 percent per annum, and added about 500 persons for the rest of Pakistan. By 2021, we see a meager 1,993 Zoroastrians in Pakistan.

What is most distressing is that even those projections are on the optimistic side, especially for Parsis outside Greater Bombay. The table shows that between 1961-1981, the Parsis in the rest of India have come down from 36,119 to 21,577, a loss of 40.20 percent.

If we study the factors responsible for this demographic situation, we find the main culprits are: marital pattern of the community, i.e. attitude towards marriage, and fertility pattern of the community, i.e. the number of children born to Parsi couples. Not enough marriages, i.e. a large percentage remaining unmarried, tendency to marry late (the average age of a Parsi female at marriage is 26 and a Parsi male 31) and then having a very small family size. The Greater Bombay survey of 1982 showed the average family size to be 3.9 persons.

Besides Bombay, surveys have been carried out in 13 to 14 towns and rural areas in India, and the demographic picture shows similar features throughout. While the census and survey statistics clearly confirm these above mentioned trends, there are two factors regarding which we do not have very clear data i.e. emigration and marriages outside the community. Mr Nargolwala has placed the emigration figure at approximately 220 per year, in projecting the Greater Bombay population trends up to 2021.

The trend of mixed marriages is becoming highly noticeable. The only survey of Parsis which looked into this aspect was in Delhi in 1978, and to our great surprise it was found that out of 219 families, 69 families, approximately one-third, were mixed. What was also noted was that over the three decades of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, there was a leaping increase. In the 1950s, there were few mixed marriages, in the 1960s 33.3 percent of all marriages were mixed and 66.6 were Parsi to Parsi, but in the 1970s, 66.6 percent of all marriages were mixed and 33.3 percent were Parsi to Parsi. It was also noted that the number of Parsi females marrying out was more than double that of Parsi males (49 against 20).

We have now updated the data for the 1980s and find that since 1978, there have been 49 more such marriages. But out of these, 20 were males and 29 females. The ratio of males marrying out

Estimates of the Zoroastrian Population*

Year	Greater Bombay	Rest of India	Total of India	Pakistan	India and Pakistan	North America	Australia	Western World	Total
1961	70,065	36,119	1,06,184	na	na	na	na	na	na
1971	64,667	32,068	96,735	na	na	na	na	na	na
1981	50,053	21,577	71,630	3,400	75,030	na	na	na	na
1991	41,544	15,967	57,511	2,975	60,486	9,700	5,000	940	15,640
2001	34,482	11,816	46,298	2,603	48,901	16,000	6,420	1,550	23,970
2011	28,620	8,744	37,364	2,278	39,642	20,544	7,095	1,990	29,630
2021	23,754	6,470	30,224	1,993	32,217	26,380	7,842	2,555	36,776

*Excludes Zoroastrian population of Iran
na: not available

had increased considerably. It was found that only a small percentage of Parsi males and females married out were born in or were long-term residents of Delhi. In fact, they came from all cities of India including Bombay. Thus the high incidence of mixed marriages in Delhi has to be viewed against the backdrop of the mobile nature of Delhi's Parsi population and the socially prestigious occupations many of them pursue.

The findings of a few demographic surveys in smaller towns, as well as information available from the Registrar of Marriages in Bombay, show the incidence of mixed marriages in these places to be between 10 percent and 15 percent of all families. From the statistics we find that Zoroastrians outside greater Bombay are facing a much steeper decline. Several reasons may be responsible: first, the difficulty in finding suitable partners within a very small community leads to non-marriage. In a recent survey of rural Gujarat, it was found that for every married Parsi there was one unmarried Parsi. In many cases the young find themselves trapped, for in spite of a desire to marry a Parsi they find it impossible. While two to three decades ago, they chose to remain single, the new climate of cosmopolitan living has changed the trend and more and more young are finding partners of similar or higher socio-economic status from other communities. Parents are bowing down to the inevitable, rather than forcing their children to remain single.

But, for these small and older communities, the strongest factor causing quick decline would be the death rate. In one city with a population of approximately 700, the number of deaths per decade was 103.

If we add to this, the tendency to migrate to Bombay from small towns and villages, we are able to understand why

even today there are so many defunct anjumans dotted around India where only the agiaries and aramghahs stand — no doubt in decay and ruin — to testify to the presence of a once thriving Zoroastrian community.

The Zoroastrians in India-Pakistan find themselves in a demographic trap. On the one hand the marital and fertility patterns among the Parsis show all the characteristics of a highly literate, urbanized and modernized society, i.e. late marriages and small families. This in turn tilts the age composition precariously on the side of the aged.

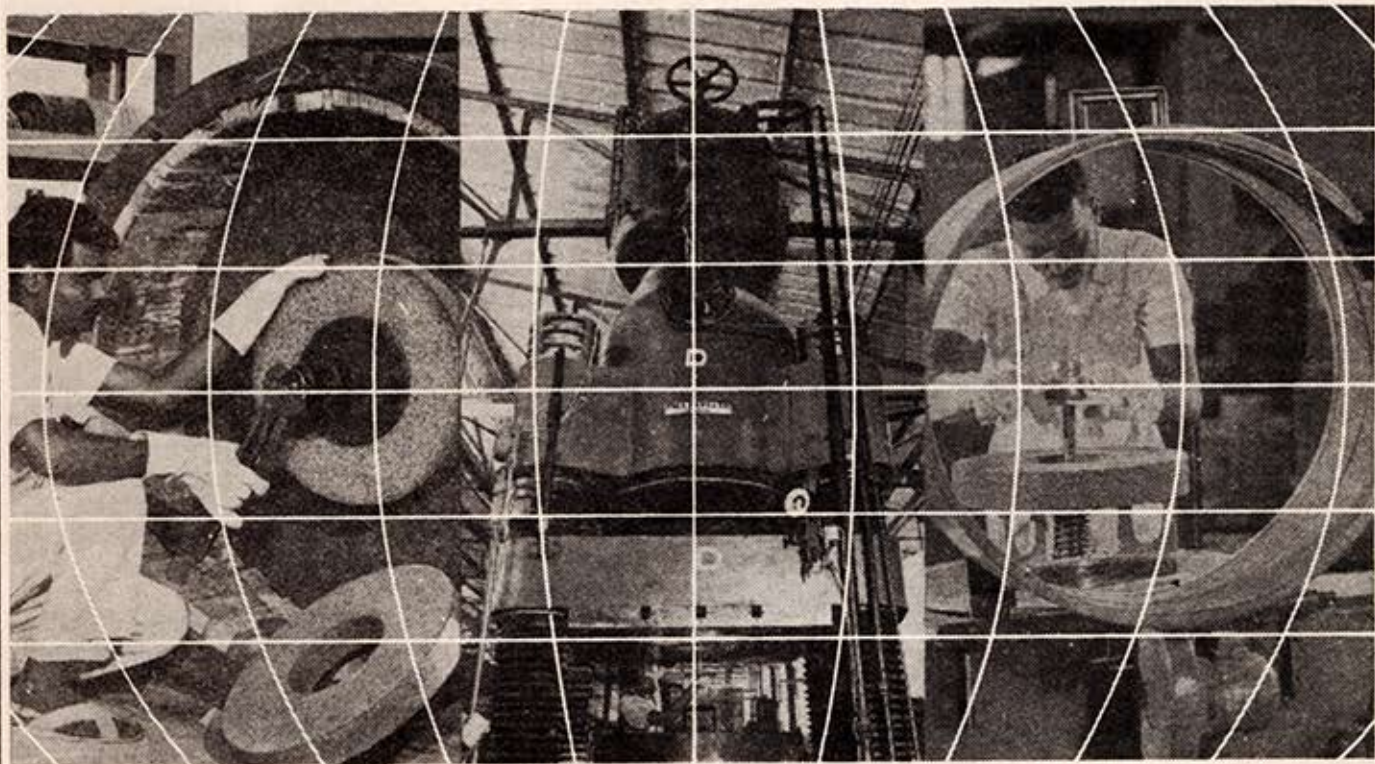
In 1881, almost one in three Parsis was a child under 14 years; by 1982, it was one child in eight Parsis. Similarly, in 1901 one in 50 persons was over 65 years of age, in 1982 one in five persons is over 65 years of age. These statistics tell their own story. Even a comparison with the most developed western countries, UK, USA and Canada, show the Parsis as the most aging community. In the 1981 census, out of 71,630 Parsis, 14,300 were over 65 years and only 9,000 under 14 years.

The scenario in the next 50 to 100 years will be a large and growing percentage of middle-aged and elderly Parsis, with time taking the middle-aged into the old age bracket until ultimately death takes over.

We may face a situation where Parsi baugs and homes will have, over the next 50 to 60 years, middle-aged and elderly people living with not many young to take their place. In another 100 years what will happen to these baugs? Instead of need for housing, houses may lie vacant, a silent testimony to a great community which unfortunately refused to recognize the dangers staring it in the face.

Yet, the community is closing all its options to save the situation. We have

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seen a growing percentage of our young women marrying outside. We are losing vital child-bearing capacity, but we choose to keep our eyes shut and keep the women and their children out of the community.

We find that due to late marriages, and possibly other factors, fertility among Parsis is low, and yet we are taking an unrealistic attitude towards adoption. After all, when a shortage of babies is the biggest problem, it is next to impossible for childless Parsi couples, who want to adopt, to find Zoroastrian babies. But there are enough innocent babies available for adoption in this country. A baby brought up in a Zoroastrian home environment would learn the same values as our own children. But, we choose to make this a religious issue!

In Iran

When we turn to Iran's Zoroastrian population at the present time, we are perplexed. The past and present figures call for much clarification. According to the 1986 official Iran census, the figure is 90,891, showing Zoroastrians spread over 24 provinces of Iran, unlike the past impressions. What is more, it is interesting to find the age composition tilted most favorably on the side of the young, 0-14 years age-group who constitute 47 percent of Zoroastrian Iranians, while the old-age group of 60 years and above, are only 8.5 percent. The productive age-group of 15-59 years is a healthy 44 percent.

We would like to consider these statistics cautiously. This is because the Iranian Zoroastrians at the beginning of the twentieth century had given a figure of 6,900 persons, and during the last two World Zoroastrian Congresses, their numbers were given between 20,000 to 40,000; let us presume a mean of 30,000. At this stage, since we do not have a reliable base or a clear picture of the past trends, it would be difficult to make meaningful projections of population trends in Iran.

The Iranian pattern, at face value, appears most promising — for where we are groaning under the shadow of impending extinction, Iran gives hope of a revival and resurgence. Even if the figure of 90,891 is approached cautiously, I think we have to accept that the overall population has grown significantly. Some explanations given by our Iranian friends are:

- There are some tribes and clans in remote areas of Iran, practising Zoroastrian traditions, ceremonies and rituals which may have been included in the census figure.
- The 1986 census has shown Zoroastrians living in many cities besides Tehran, Yazd, Kerman (where Zoroastrians were known to be living) even though the Zoroastrians or their anjumans in these smaller places had not maintained contact with the Tehran and other larger anjumans. However, for a country which is not very large, it does appear somewhat unusual that Zoroastrians in other

centers were unaware of the presence of their coreligionists in Iran for centuries.

• Non-Zoroastrian spouses and children of inter-faith marriages are accepted if both partners agree.

• But what is most crucial and striking is a renewed zeal to revive once again one of the most ancient and venerated religions of the world with "reclaimed Zoroastrians." These are a growing number of ex-Zoroastrians i.e. Zoroastrians who, due to force of circumstances, had converted to Islam but retained their Zoroastrian fervor, and under present conditions which appear to permit their reverting to the faith, are rejoining. They call themselves "Asli Zarthushtys," and their navjotes are carried out publicly and sanctioned by the Zoroastrian Anjuman of Tehran.

We appeal to our Iranian friends and the Zoroastrian Anjuman of Iran to study this demographic phenomenon objectively so that we may have an authentic picture of the population trends in Iran in the next two or three years.

Among the Iranian Zoroastrians as a whole, there is a strong sense of Zoroastrian identity and a determination to adhere to the tenets of the faith.

In North America and the world

In the absence of exhaustive information from the other regions, we may treat the fairly comprehensive North American data as applicable to the rest of the western world.

The community in North America has grown fairly rapidly in the last 30 years. In the absence of a proper census, we have a guesstimation of approximately 9,700 Zoroastrians in North America (1991). As Mr Homi Minocher-Homji has suggested, the influx from Iran, India, Pakistan, Middle East, Africa, etc is likely to continue, and to this may be added the immigrants from Hong Kong and China in the 1990s due to political changes there. By the end of the century the population in North America is estimated to reach approximately 16,500 at five percent compounded growth rate.

Presumably, the immigration rate would slow down in the subsequent decades, and so we have, thereafter, projected at the rate of 2.5 percent up to 2021. Similar growth rates of 2.5 percent are taken for Australia, which has an approximate population of 850 persons, and UK/Europe having about 5,000 persons in 1991. In the absence of clear

In another 100 years, instead of need for housing, houses may lie vacant



data and proven trends, we have had to go by regional guesstimations, and the projections therefore have to be considered tentatively.

The flow of immigrants only changes the pattern of future population trends in the world. What is of greater importance from the demographer's view point, is to see in what other natural ways the population is likely to grow. As we have seen, the population here is comparatively young, most of them having migrated after attaining college degrees, 22-25 years of age, whereas others who migrated earlier have young children. In the absence of a breakup according to age-groups, it is difficult to state precisely the size of the reproductive age group (20-45 years). But it is obvious that this group forms the major portion of the population, and has the potentiality of giving children to the community.

Since they are a young group, they have given priority in all their future planning and decision-making to the youth, for it is to the extent that the second, third and fourth generation will maintain their Zoroastrian identity that their future survival depends.

Their circumstances are forcing them to rethink their religious position. They aim to teach religion to the young not in a strictly orthodox or ritualistic style, but "with greater stress on scriptural and Gathic ethics and philosophy and knowledge of comparative beliefs of contemporary faiths" so that the young, though in minority among friends and colleagues of other more dominant faiths, can, with pride, proclaim their Zoroastrian identity.

In view of increasing mixed marriages, they have also to accept spouses and children of such marriages and try to keep them within the fold. The alternative would be to lose both the existing families and future children.

Here there are two strains, the Parsi and Iranian Zoroastrians. The Iranian Zoroastrians have brought to their new homeland the same strong religious fervor and, following the example of their mobeds in Iran, are taking into the faith ex-Zoroastrians and spouses and children of Iranians married to non-Zoroastrians.

A happy situation would be marriages between Iranian and Parsi Zoroastrians. As Iranians are more inclined to have larger families, this would be an added advantage.

It is imperative though, that the two groups consciously work together and

forge a Zoroastrian identity, rather than separate cultural-national identities as Parsis and Iranian Zoroastrians. To the extent that, with goodwill and a sense of give and take, this is achieved, the future of Zoroastrians in North America and elsewhere will get more secure.

Tentative global numbers

Putting the various population figures

Age-Group Composition		
Community	Age-Group (in percentage)	
	0-14	65+
USA (1980)	22.3	11.5
UK (1980)	21.0	15.1
Canada (1980)	23.0	9.5
Greater Bombay		
Parsi (1982)	12.1	19.2

together we would have by 1991, an approximate global Zoroastrian population of 76,126.

However in view of lack of clarity on the figures for Iran, we have deemed it prudent to attempt projections separately for the population outside Iran, and consider Iran as a separate and special case till satisfactory clarifications are available.

We see the Zoroastrians in India-Pakistan nose-diving from 75,030 in 1981 to 32,217 in 2021; while in the western world, mainly as a result of expected immigration, the population is estimated to go up from 15,640 in 1991 to 36,776 in 2021. It is highly significant that Zoroastrians in the rest of the world (excluding Iran) will outstrip the population of India/Pakistan in another 30 years. The total world Zoroastrian population outside Iran is likely to be 68,993 by 2021. To this we may add another 700 for South East Asia, Africa, Middle East, Hong Kong. This would raise it to 69,693.

We can only contemplate these projections with a heavy heart. From a peak of 1,14,890 in undivided India in 1941, we are faced with a world population of only 69,693, 80 years later.

All projections are courtesy Ms Shireen Jejeebhoy.

Creating awareness of crisis points

We need to set up a Demographic Cell in Bombay to monitor and keep updating population data received from all the global regions with qualified demographers and social scientists analysing and indicating trends, so that by the next World Zoroastrian Congress we may

have a fairly accurate picture of the Zoroastrian population.

The suggestion of holding a conference on demographic and related issues is excellent as a starting point to create awareness. This is not only a problem of the young in marriageable and reproductive age-groups but of the older generations also, for both display negative attitudes. Perhaps with awareness and fear of total extinction, some rethinking may emerge. As a practical step, youth groups in the bays as well as in towns outside Bombay, should enumerate the number in the 0-14 age-group, the productive 15-59 age-group and the aged 65 years and over in their respective areas. Such a firsthand exercise will bring home the true picture of how short we are of young children.

Are solutions possible?

While the concern of the newer settlements in the western world is institution building and trying to keep the diverse and thinly spread Zoroastrian community as a cohesive and forward looking unit, in the old settled communities in India and Pakistan, the concern is how to keep the community alive and kicking so that the institutional infrastructures, built over the years, do not become defunct and useless.

A multipronged approach is required to save a dying community which is in a state of inertia and apathy. Fresh approaches towards social and religious reform, changes in organizational structures, in thinking and behaviour patterns, etc could bring a revival of the old spirit, of the active pursuit of life and all that is good, and above all, a pride in being a Zoroastrian.

Since, from the demographic point of view, the marital and fertility patterns and attitudes to adoption are the main stumbling blocks, we need to tackle these squarely.

Housing or no housing, large house or small, the average Parsi couple tends to restrict the number of children to one or two. As these are basically problems of certain attitudes, they need to be understood and an effort made to modify them. Of course, it is very difficult to change attitudes towards something as personal as marriage and children. As Dr (Ms) Malini Karkal said in her 1982 Survey of Greater Bombay: "Experience in the field of fertility has shown that it may be possible to reduce fertility of rapidly growing populations, but once members

of a community have enjoyed the advantages of non-marriage and low fertility, the process is almost irreversible." But we are a community of survivors and we are in a desperate situation which calls for radical remedies.

The community as a whole accepts without censure late marriages or no marriages among its young. Among Hindus, Muslims and Jews, tremendous pressure is brought, especially on girls, to marry between the age of 20 and 23 years, which is the most fertile age. We need to adopt such an attitude and bring positive social pressure on our young to marry early.

Parsi parents display negative attitudes and actually discourage their daughters from marriage until they have experienced a career, and sons, till they are well established professionally. They further encourage marriage only when a partner meets all the expectations, i.e. house/car and so on. Many a young girl may be induced to marry a promising young Parsi with good career/business prospects, but who has not reached the desirable economic status, if parents are encouraging and supportive, and give help, if possible, until the couple can enjoy the lifestyle it desires. This is common practice among Hindus even if it involves staying with in-laws until the couple is in a position to set up home independently. Women with careers may be encouraged to pursue these with marriage and not make it a reason for delaying or not marrying.

Similarly, many a young couple, especially with working wives, may be willing to have a second and third child if parental support and help is assured. Parents and grandparents in other communities share the burden of child-care as a normal practice. Could we not persuade our elders to do so?

Children should be treated as the community's most precious asset and the anjuman and organized groups must appreciate, honor and help those couples who give them to the community. Child care centers need to be set up at convenient places — in Bombay every baug could have one — where working mothers may leave their children. Elders, unmarried and poor Parsi women could help these centers, thereby gaining some remunerative employment as well.

Parsi youth shy away from "arranged marriages" — hoping to meet the right man/woman — leading often to a late marriage or a choice from another com-

munity. The social stigma regarding this should go. I would seriously suggest that every eligible person register with the Matrimonial Bureau run on discreet and confidential lines by the Bombay Parsi Punchayet. Some very good matches have been made through this channel.

Incentives

The community needs to consider if suitable incentives may prove effective in encouraging early marriages and larger families. There are cases where such measures have shown positive results. In some East European countries e.g. East Germany, incentives have been fairly effective.

Our youth must discuss this and guide the community on what would prove effective and workable for them. Community organizations must then do some serious thinking regarding raising and allocating funds for such incentive schemes.

But the best inducement is the one that has an in-built incentive e.g. for couples who have started their own business, there is such an in-built incentive to have more children for working and carrying on the business. A very strong argument for Parsis to start businesses. Working hours would be more flexible if the wife wishes to help in business, so that instead of a rigid 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. white collar job, the wives could divide time between raising children and helping their husband in business according to convenience. The white-collar office jobs with fixed salaries, need for both partners to work and rigid working hours, are greatly responsible for couples being unable to raise larger families.

The issue of infertility within the community is rarely discussed. Couples without children should be encouraged to avail of the facilities of the Fertility Clinic at the B. D. Petit Parsi General Hospital, and success stories of couples who have been positively helped should be publicized and praised.

Childless couples may sponsor a child, by paying for the education, health costs, etc, giving the child the affection of a special aunt/uncle. This sponsorship may even encourage Parsi couples to have one more child if such support is ensured for the child's upkeep.

While every effort may be made to keep marriages within the community, the trend of mixed marriages cannot be stopped completely. We must face up to the inevitable and view it more positively. We have seen that it is Parsis from a

higher socioeconomic strata, i.e. highly educated career persons, who tend to marry out because they are unable to find suitable partners within the community. They naturally choose partners who are equal or better in education, occupation and income levels. Parsis marry among the highest socioeconomic groups of other communities. It is no longer the situation that prevailed earlier in Gujarat where Parsis married "dubras." It has also been seen that mixed couples tend to have more children due to the difference in attitude of the non-Zoroastrian spouse. This has been noted in North America also.

If this matter were considered coolly and dispassionately, it would enable the community to keep the mixed families and their children within the community, adding the much needed children to the community's depleting young.

Such a course would also enable the three groups India-Pakistan, Iran and the West to move in a unified manner in the same direction.

But the ideal scenario would be for Parsi and Iranian Zoroastrians to come together and build strong links by social intermixing and combined cultural and religious activities so that the young may get opportunities to find life partners from within the Zoroastrian fold. Iranis in India, as elsewhere, show attitudes and behavior patterns diametrically opposite to Parsis, and their example could well give food for thought to all who are bothered about the survival and upward mobility of the community. They tend to marry early. Parents and elders often help in arranging these, and families are started early. In a recent study done in Belgam, perhaps the only babies and little children within the community were from Irani families.

I have tried to identify and highlight the critical problem areas where immediate attention needs to be given. It is now for the community as well as each of us to think about it, keeping the larger interest of the community's survival in mind.

Let us accept the motto — adapt or perish.

The text is abridged and edited from a paper presented by Ms. Ava Khullar in the session on "Demographic Trends of the Community and Future Implications for Zoroastrian Institutions" at the Fifth World Zoroastrian Congress. A Delhi based anthropologist who has worked with the Center for Study of Developing Societies, Ms. Khullar has conducted surveys of pockets of the Zoroastrian community in Belgam, Visakhapatnam, Lucknow, etc.

What the figures foretell

Peshotan Nargolwala

The Parsi community in Bombay is heading for a steep decline in population, close to -1.7 percent per annum. The community is in a demographic trap. Any year, after the turn of the century, the all-India figure will drop below 50,000 creating problems which will require assistance from government agencies.

To the best of my knowledge, only one group, the people of the German Democratic Republic, have overcome such a situation in the past. From zero growth they have gone over to a positive rate of growth. The discipline and patriotism of the East German people plus the tremendous incentives provided by the state made this change over possible. Can we duplicate their example? It is very much an uphill task. The whole of Europe is aging. We, who have accepted a western way of life and living standards, cannot be an exception to the trend.

The declining numbers

Zoroastrians immigrated from Iran to India in the eighth century. However, there is no information regarding their numbers till the census enumeration in 1881.

The number of Parsis in Greater Bombay rose till 1961 but showed a decline in 1971 and once again in 1981. The percentage of the Zoroastrian population in Greater Bombay to the total Zoroastrian

population in India rose from 56.96 percent in 1881 to 69.87 percent in 1981.

Apart from the low birth rate, losses due to the following causes can be assumed: approximately 120-150 per year on account of outmigration, 80-100 per year on account of students going abroad and not returning to India, 40-50 per year on account of mixed marriages.

During 1977-1990 the birth rate remained around 12 and the death rate around 22 resulting in a negative growth rate of 10 per 1,000 of the population. The birth rate of 10-12 per thousand is a very low birth rate. The Bombay Parsis have experienced much higher birth rates of 20-25 per 1,000 in the past, a few decades ago. The low birth rate is due to: no marriage, late marriage, late consanguineous marriage, mixed marriage, paucity of children, working wives, premature deaths for reasons of ill-health, abortions, stillbirth, financial crunch, housing shortage, conversion to other faiths. Given such losses the actual growth rate works out to -16.8 or -17.

The figure of -16.8 has been worked out for a 20-year period from 1961 to 1981 on a "moving average" basis.

If the growth rate of -1.70 percent per annum is to continue for the projection period, the Parsi population of Greater Bombay will be almost halved in the next 35 years. There is strong reason to believe that the negative growth rate of the magnitude of 1.70 percent per an-

num is expected to continue, if not increase further.

Immediate line of action recommended

- Call an All-India Parsi Demographic Conference in Bombay in April or May 1990 under the auspices of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India.
- As a result of the Conference, set up an All-India Parsi Demographic Center in South Bombay with a small staff.
- The Center should work out a global picture of the Parsi population.
- This picture should be made up-to-date one year ahead of each Congress. It should be presented in the form of a standard format.

The BPP's financial position

The corpus of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) has grown over 50 percent in 10 years, from Rs 6.05 crores in 1979 to Rs 9.67 crores on March 31, 1989. For the future, there is need to widen the net. Income has grown from Rs 69.83 lakhs for a 12-month period in 1979 to Rs 1.99 crores for a period of 15 months ending March 31, 1989. Income is expected to grow in the coming decades because of well-planned investments, from low interest bonds to 13 percent and 14 percent interest bearing deposits. The expenditure has increased to

Nargolwala: losses will mount

An analysis of the possible repercussions on community institutions in Bombay as the number of Zoroastrians continues to dwindle



a small extent to match the increase in income. Steep increase in expenditure on property maintenance is expected as taxes and repair costs escalate. Elemenary help extended to beneficiaries has remained more or less constant, from 526 in 1979 to 568 in 1988. The amount given has risen from Rs 251 lakhs to Rs 4.73 lakhs. During this period the population has declined by approximately 5,000. During the same period grant for marriage expenses has doubled and for obsequial ceremonies halved. Medical grants have remained the same.

Assistance offered to Parsi farming families in Gujarat is a healthy feature. It will stabilize the farmers in Gujarat and prevent their out-migration to Bombay. The Surat Parsi Punchayet keeps a check on aid utilization.

The functioning of the Health Unit at Gamadia Colony is satisfactory and at no loss. Thirty-eight men and 30 women stay at the Parukh Dharamshala. Fourteen ladies and seven men pay up to Rs 1,000 per month for a special room facility. The rest are non-paying inmates. This establishment is losing about Rs

Zoroastrian Population of British India (excluding Aden and Burma) from 1881 to 1941 and for independent India from 1951 to 1981

Year	Total	In Greater Bombay	Percentage of Zoroastrians in Greater Bombay
1881	85,314	48,597	56.96
1891	89,808	47,458	52.84
1901	93,637	48,437	51.73
1911	99,412	53,100	53.41
1921	1,01,075	54,600	54.02
1931	1,08,988	60,965	55.94
1941	1,14,890	60,258	52.45
1951	1,11,791	68,816	61.56
1961	1,06,184	70,065	69.53
1971	96,735	64,667	70.86
1981	71,630	50,053	69.87

3.50 lakhs a year. This is basically a socioeconomic problem calling for assistance from a high grade economist.

The Doongerwadi too incurs a loss of around four lakh rupees per year. The number of deaths which is presently around 20-25 per week will go down to 10-12 per week by 2021, causing a corresponding decline in income. Even if the charges for the use of the Doongerwadi facility are increased, chances are that the losses will continue to mount due to higher labor costs. A close watch on the functioning of Doongerwadi is required both from financial and religious viewpoints.

A decline in attendance was expected

at the Golvad schools because of the decline in birth rate and migration of population to the cities. But there is no explaining why there is a steep decline in the number of girls as compared to the boys. It is interesting to observe that girls have maintained an equal standard with the boys in the field of education. As we decline in numbers, we must stress on quality. It is felt that somewhat higher expenditure on selective fields in education will considerably benefit the community. It is gratifying to note that more than 98 percent of the loan amount is returned by the students.

Housing

There are 3,800 flats under the control of the BPP and the R. N. and N. N. Wadia Trusts. FSI (floor space index) for another 800 flats on the above stated lands is available. Other Parsi trusts could have FSI for another 1,000 flats. Therefore, total available FSI for additional construction could be $800+1,000 = 1,800$ flats. This plus 3,800 flats makes a total of 5,600 flats.

The rate of construction of new flats in the past seven years (1983-89) has been between 35-40 flats per year. Can we increase this rate to 100 flats per year over a decade or more, say the next 18-20 years? At the rate of construction of 100 flats per year, it will take 18 years to construct 1,800 flats. That is, by the year 2011 the community will have 5,600 flats available for occupation. Thus between now and 2011 it is necessary to monitor construction of flats and speed it up, specially to occupy vacant land and save on costs. A monitoring agency will have to be established. In 2011, the Parsi population would be around 30,000. At

an average of 3.5 persons per flat, half the population of Greater Bombay would be staying in BPP and other charity flats. Around 2021, the accommodation problem will ease considerably when our population comes down to 25,000 and 5,600 charity flats are available. What a quirk of fate to bring about a solution to the housing problem!

With the passage of time the buildings will become old and in need of heavy repairs. The cost of repairs may escalate 3-5 percent per annum. The formula for sharing of repair costs, applicable to Wadia Baug flats, should be tried out in all Parsi colonies and improved upon if possible. Around 2011, 2021 and 2031, some buildings will be more than 100 years old and will have to be torn down and rebuilt. It may be necessary from now on for the BPP, the Wadia Trusts and the tenants to jointly build up financial resources for a Housing Reconstruction Fund. It is suggested that the Bombay Parsi Punchayet arrange for the preparation of a Housing Plan covering the next three to four decades so that it can keep track of what is happening on the housing front. A modest construction target of 100 flats per year may be kept in mind. The possibility of saving prime Parsi properties in the suburbs by preventing their falling into non-Parsi hands should also be considered.

Parsi managed schools

According to an article by Prof K. C. Shrier published in the Navroze issue of *Jam-e-Jamshed* dated August 26, 1982, there are 20 high schools under Parsi management, the majority of them in South Bombay. Of these only three schools are for boys, nine schools are for

Parsis in Greater Bombay, projections up to 2021

Year	Population in Bombay	Births	Deaths	Crude Birth Rate	Crude Death Rate	Growth rate	Excess Deaths over Births
1977	55,454	636	1059	11.5	19.1	-7.6	423
1978	54,051	648	1047	12.0	19.4	-7.4	399
1979	52,684	646	1084	12.3	20.6	-8.3	438
1980	51,352	655	1074	12.8	20.9	-8.1	419
1981	50,053	650	997	13.0	19.9	-6.9	347
1982	49,506	462	983	9.3	19.9	-10.6	521
1983	48,785	486	1020	10.0	20.9	-10.9	534
1984	48,051	570	1092	11.9	22.7	-10.8	522
1985	47,329	601	966	12.7	20.4	-7.7	365
1986	46,764	500	1027	10.7	22.0	-11.3	527
1987	46,037	580	974	12.6	21.2	-8.6	394
1988	45,443	620	1048	13.6	23.1	-9.5	428
1989	44,815	550	1000	12.3	22.3	-10.0	450 estimated
1990	44,165	550	1000	12.5	22.6	-10.1	450 estimated
1991	43,515						

girls and eight are coeducational institutions. Four schools have junior college facilities. A total of about 18,000 students study in these schools, of which about 3,400 are Parsis (19 percent). Today the number of Parsi children would be 3,000.

The Bombay Parsi population was around 70,000 in 1961, and has since been declining at the rate of 1 percent to 1.25 percent per year. So Parsi attendance in Parsi schools all over Greater Bombay should be declining. Let us find out if from 3,400 in 1982, it is 3,000 to-

Parsi trusts should see to it that more Parsi parents are attracted to their schools

day in 1989. Anything below 3,000 could be due to shift of population to the suburbs. The Parsi attendance in Parsi schools in Greater Bombay is likely to decline from 3,000 in 1990, to 2,400 in 2011 and to approximately 1,800 in 2031. Assuming the average number of births at 500 per year for the decade 1980-90 and assuming a child remains in a school for 12 years, there should be 6,000 Parsi children today in all schools of Bombay. The fact that of these, 3,000, i.e. 50 percent, are in Parsi-managed schools is some achievement for which these schools should be justifiably proud. Parsi trusts should see to it that Parsi-managed schools provide extra facilities like career guidance, tuition assistance for those who need it, special assistance for the brighter students, etc, so that more and more Parsi parents are attracted to our schools. I am certain, but for the falling birth rate over the last three decades, more children would have been attending Parsi-managed schools.

Parsi trusts must include Parsi principals, Parsi vice-principals, other teaching staff and good quality educational consultants on their boards to provide suitable educational opportunities to students who come to their schools. These schools must not lose their Parsi-managed character. They should provide employment opportunities to Parsi youngsters in the field of education.

Religious institutions and personnel
In the city of Bombay there are 44 agiar-

ies and four atash bahrams. They are serviced by about 180 full-time mobeds and 100 part-time mobeds. Many full-time mobeds are in the old-age group (60+). The two madressas in Bombay must produce at least a dozen mobeds per year for the next 10 years or so to replace and build up the ranks of the mobeds. The younger athornans prefer to take to other professions where rewards are higher and where they can have greater flexibility in their personal lives. A salary of Rs 2,000 per month for a mobedi aspirant does not appear attractive any more. The Athravan Education Trust has also not produced the desired results.

The scarcity of mobeds will not affect the seven atash bahrams in Western India in the initial stages. About a dozen of the financially weak agaries will be the first to be adversely affected. The fire-temples attached to the colonies and the baugs will not be affected very much as the population in these baugs will remain fairly constant. The fire-temples outside the orbit of Parsi residential localities will be seriously affected when the total Parsi population of 40,000 at present declines to 25,000 by 2021. Around 25 percent to 30 percent of the temples may face closure.

The fires in some of the fire-temples that have served the community for over a 100 years will cease to glow. At this stage, the BPP must appoint a "Best Response Committee" to go into all aspects of the problem taking into account the views of global bodies and their contribution to the problem. The BPP must ensure that the funds received from the sale of these properties are gainfully utilized for the benefit of the mobeds in particular and for the community in general. This committee should be chaired by an eminent, impartial lawyer and every deal should be examined.

Between 2005 and 2011 when the situation becomes critical, high priests and community leaders should meet and determine the availability of mobeds. If sufficient mobeds are available, well and good. If after providing adequate incentives, sufficient mobeds are not available, can the "Iran" pattern of training be adopted in Bombay? Of course, approval from all quarters including high priests will be necessary. The distinction between athornans and behdins for the mobedi profession has been eliminated in Iran. A behdin mobed works in Iran for the first 10 years as mobedyar. At the

end of this apprenticeship he becomes a full-fledged mobed.

A scheme for training paramobeds under the guidance of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India is also being tried out. Paramobeds can work on their own, or in conjunction with regular priests, and perform prayers and rituals which our scriptures permit. This step will specially mitigate the hardships on the mofussil fire-temples. The paramobeds could also serve Zoroastrian communities abroad.

Parsi professionals

According to our estimate there are about 500 Parsi professionals i.e. doctors, lawyers, chartered accountants, tax advisers, consultants, etc all concentrated in South Bombay. It will be necessary to make a survey of the professionals first and advise them to form a Parsi Professionals Organization.

The top-level Parsi professionals will not be affected by the decline in population. The middle-level and the level below will be adversely affected as the Parsi population declines. In general, the professional consultation at the middle and lower levels takes place very much on communal lines. The Parsi professionals will, therefore, feel the pinch when their Parsi clientele declines.

Some Parsi professional organizations will be bought over by non-Parsi professionals because the son of the proprietor may select another discipline in educa-

The number of deaths which is presently around 20-25 per week will go down to 10-12 per week by 2021

tion or because the proprietor has no one to inherit the business as he has no issue or his only child has settled abroad.

Under the above circumstances, the Parsi Professionals Organization may, if possible, conduct a rescue operation and see to it that another Parsi Professional takes over the handicapped unit. Can Parsi enterprises be saved from falling into non-Parsi hands, specially when around 2021 there may not be more than 200-250 professionals working in the field?

Parsi managed hospitals

The Parsi population of Greater Bombay will decline from 40,000 in January 1991 to 25,000 in January 2021, i.e. an approximate reduction of 5,000 per decade. The hospital beds available for the community will be as follows:

B. D. Petit Parsee General Hospital 285 beds

Masina Hospital

(The total number of beds are 215 of which 40-50 are, or would be, made available for the community) 40 beds

Parsi Lying-in Hospital

(A modern 15,000 sq ft fully-equipped 50-bed Hospital proposed at the present site. It may take five to six years for the project to be completed anticipating early clearance of all sections) 50 beds

J. J. Hospital 25 beds

Total 400 beds

For a population of 40,000 at present, it works to one bed for 100 persons of the population. This could be the highest ratio of beds to a unit of population for any civilized society in the world. The community is lucky in matters of schools, housing, hospitals, temples, etc gifted to us through the innate wisdom and generosity of our forefathers.

Of the four hospitals mentioned above, I shall discuss the impact of decline in population on the Parsee General Hospital, as for decades to come it will constitute the main hospital facility for the community. The following trends in the working of the hospital are observed and the situation needs to be monitored carefully.

Occupancy was close to 90 percent for the 15-month period ending March 31, 1989. Charges were increased from May 1, 1989. How this change will affect occupancy, specially on ground and first floors, has to be observed. With the decline in population at the rate of over 17 percent in a decade, occupancy may come down to 50-60 percent around 2021. Occupancy at Parsee General will go down further due to shift of Parsi population to northern suburbs in the years to come and, the functioning of the reconstructed Parsi Lying-in Hospital in South Bombay with 50 beds, five to six years hence.

The possibility of mechanizing operations at Doongerwadi without hurting religious feelings can be explored

The Parsee General Hospital has received a princely donation of Rs 1.50 crores from Shapoorji Jokhi of Hong Kong. It is suggested this donation be utilized in two stages: construct a separate building and centralize diagnostic and medical facilities like pathology, X-Ray, ICCU, ultrasonographic imaging and other sections under one roof; and then convert the present two-storey structure into a three-storey structure after making the necessary changes in the L-shaped building.

The right course of action would be to complete the first at the earliest. The second stage is likely to increase the capacity from the present 280 beds to 400 beds in the future. This may not be necessary if this Hospital has to serve the Parsi community only. Instead of spending money on the second stage the interest from the amount thus saved could be utilized to reduce the operational deficit which is likely to be Rs 15-18 lakhs for 1989-90, and improve amenities for medical and other staff. Of the deficit amount at present of Rs 10-15 lakhs, 30 percent is operational deficit and 70 percent is on account of depreciation and gratuity payment reserve fund. It is prudent to provide the 70 percent for depreciation and gratuity reserve fund.

Donations to the Hospital are received in two broad categories: from Parsi trusts and institutions, which may increase and from Parsi individuals. This would decrease with the decline in population.

Doongerwadi

It has been stated that at present there are 1,000 deaths per year. When in 2011 the population is 30,000, assuming a death rate of 20 per 1,000, the number of deaths per year will work out to 600 per year i.e. 12 deaths per week instead of the current figure of 20 per week.

The Doongerwadi manpower consists of 25 fixed employees, including the

caretakers of bunglis, *malis* (gardeners), cleaners, and 15 variable employees like nassessalars and others. I am informed that there is very little scope to alter the manpower complement even though the number of bodies to be disposed of per week will be halved. The financial loss per year for maintaining the Doongerwadi will mount from the current loss of five lakhs per year, to an unbelievably high figure assuming a labor cost increase of 10 percent per year.

The income at Doongerwadi will decrease as the number of bodies to be disposed of will go down from year to year and there will be resistance to increase in charges at the Doongerwadi.

The possibility of mechanizing operations at the Doongerwadi without hurting religious feelings can be explored. Otherwise families may have to carry bodies to the site of disposal as is the case in mofussil areas and the West.

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The text is abridged and edited from a paper presented by Peshotan Nargolwala in the session on demography at the Fifth World Zoroastrian Congress. A retired chemical and industrial engineer, Nargolwala is now occupied in social work and has evinced a keen interest in demography.

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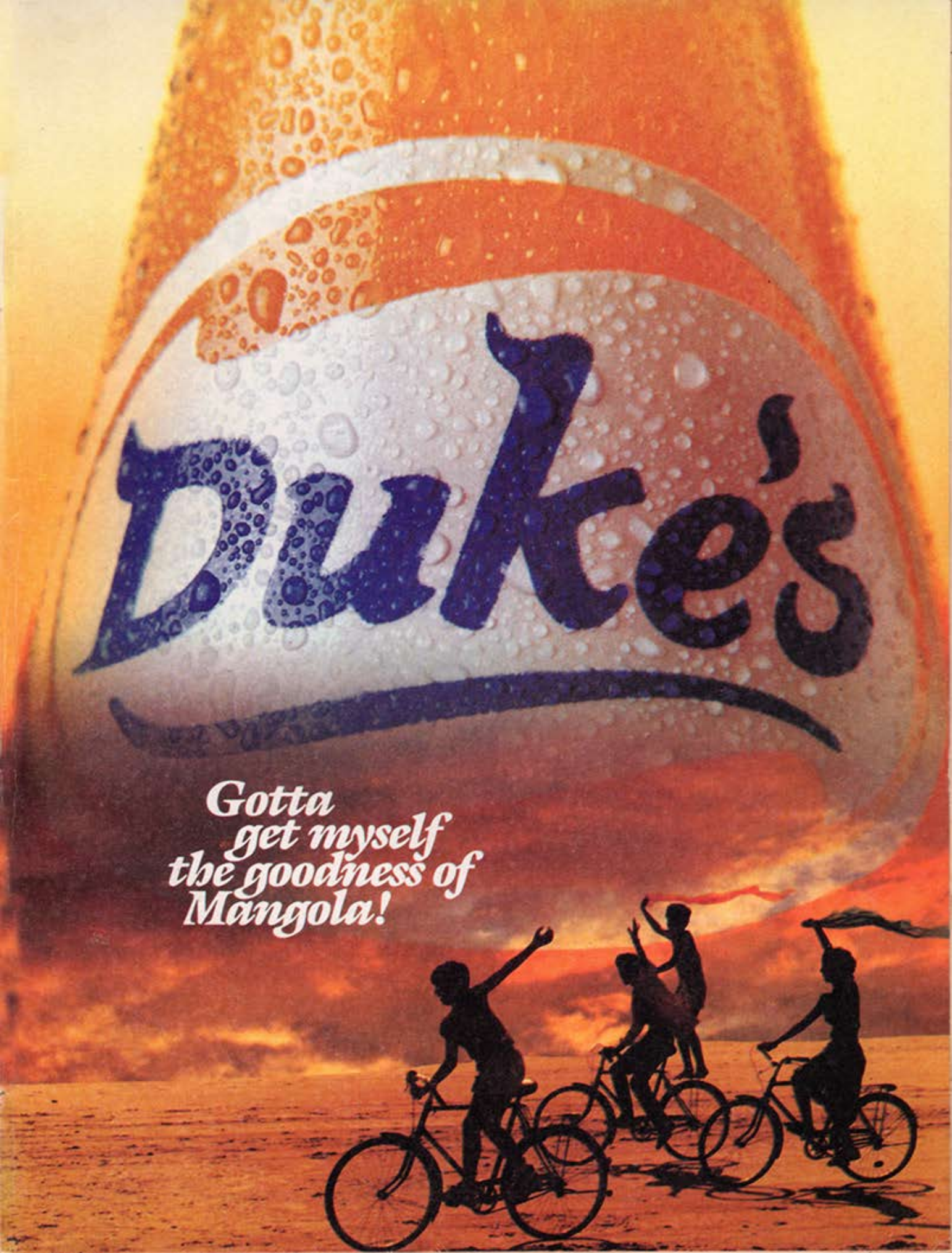
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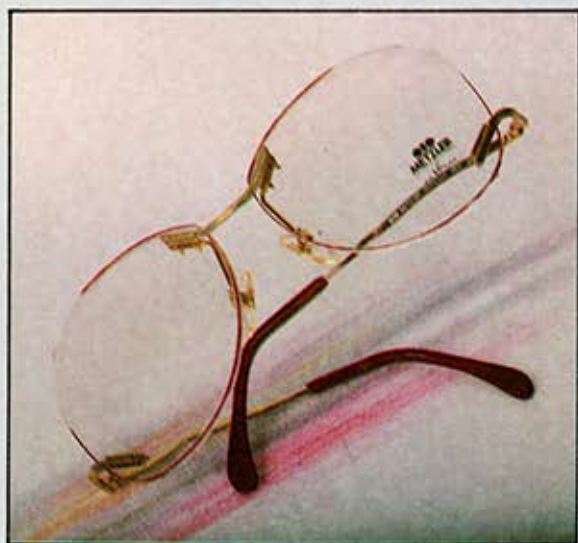


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