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Parsiana

August 1991
Volume 14 Number 2

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In Memoriam

Mr Fali Meherji Variava

Director

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Readers' views are welcome on any subject of interest to the community and should be sent to the Editor, Readers' Forum, Parsiana, G.P.O. Box 892, Bombay 400001. Letters are subject to editing for reasons of space and clarity. Unsigned letters or those without an address will not be published.

"Where there was..."

I would like to comment upon the article on Central Bank's Noshir Mistry ("Where there was opportunity, there was a Parsi," *Parsiana*, May 1991).

Mr Mistry wants us to believe that young Parsi boys lack the will to work hard and think it is below their dignity to do menial work.

I do not agree with these statements of Mr Mistry and why I do not agree can be seen from the following instances.

About six years ago, a Parsi youth of about 35 years started an aerated waters factory (manufacturing various sweet drinks), in the town of Bardoli. His name is Mr Pervez Bahman Mehta. Mehta was born, bred and worked in Bombay. He was employed by Bank of Baroda and held a good position when he left the bank after about 17 years of meritorious service in Bombay, and mind you, all his relations were, and are, in Bombay.

Mr Nariman K. Balsara, also of Bombay, came down to Bardoli to run a small hotel. He too was a born Bombayite and left a good job to start his hotel.

I have seen, both these lads work very hard and without feeling ashamed of doing 'low' work like carrying crates and delivering them to customers or washing dishes and standing at the tables, taking orders.

Further, there are two more lads from Bombay who are leaving their very good jobs with reputed companies and intend settling down in Bardoli. One is starting a poultry farm while the other is taking over his family farm for cultivating sugarcane, etc.

I am sure there will be many such cases in other towns and villages where too young Parsis from cities like Bombay, having good jobs, opt for hard labor-oriented work. If this is happening then I am sure we Parsis will once again be the leaders and pioneers of trade and industry in India.

M. R. BHOJA
Bardoli

"What heritage must we..."

The comment "What heritage must we preserve?" by Dina McIntyre (*Parsiana*, May 1991) is very interesting indeed. It seems that Parsi history repeats itself and as usual we, the Parsis, are always very keen to fight over issues facing the community rather than solving them in a calm and cool manner.

The McIntyre article has been written in anger as for example, others' opinions "are dead wrong" and the conduct of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) "unforgivable." As I know her, she is a very fine, dignified, rational, cool and calm person.

In all honesty, I think that it should be pointed out that ancient Iranian history vis-a-vis the *Shah Namah* as given by her is not well balanced, and the following historical facts should be noted: "Although Chosroes II had succeeded (in stretching) the frontiers of the Sassanian empire almost to the limit of the Achemenid empire... he was imprisoned and killed with the connivance of his son Shiroe (Richard Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, pp 336-337, Munchen-Beck 1983)." This infamous son, from his wife of alien faith had thus laid the foundation of total destruction of the mighty Zoroastrian empire.

Ms McIntyre has extensively quoted

from the *Sacred Books of the East (SBE)*

— Darmesteter's translations which are quite old and antiquated. This is not to say that the *Vendidad* is on par with the holy *Gathas*. Far from it. This is the book which has been highly tampered and at places written in corrupted Avesta which shows its tampering (*Vendidad*, Fargd. xiii, verses 31-35), and also gives magical formulae of chanting certain passages from the holy *Gathas* twice, thrice, four times, etc (*Vendidad*, Fargd. ix, verse 46) to achieve results by short cut and this does not fit the reflective religion of Zarathushtra. There exists enough scholastic knowledge among the present Zoroastrian savants to retranslate the *Vendidad* to assess its rightful place in the present religious environment.

I can well imagine that in anger McIntyre has written that "Kotwal" is not an Avestan name but the fact of the matter is, the great majority of Parsi surnames are not derived from Avesta. The history of how Parsi families had to take the last names during the British Raj may or may not be known to her (for example there existed a last name — "Soda-water-bottle openerwala" — because the guy's work only involved opening soda bottles in marriage or ghambar gatherings, etc).

Conversion and marriage out of the community will always remain a catch 22 question. Zoroastrian religion is fundamentally a proselytizing religion as can be clearly seen from the *Gathas*, the *Yasna Haptangaiti* and several other Avestan literature as well, besides the Pahlavi writings and the Persian *Rivayats*. It is a historical fact, however, that our forefathers in their utmost wisdom had stopped conversion and that may have helped us in preserving our ethnic uniqueness and prevented us from being absorbed among the multitude of natives of the land where we were granted asylum when we first came as refugees to preserve our religion. Had we wanted to preserve our lives, we would have converted to the religion of the conquerors of Zoroastrian Iran.

But now, as we face extinction, new foresight and outlook are badly needed to preserve once again the great religion of Prophet Zarathushtra. Maybe in the new settings in the West, Zoroastrianism may flourish and grow and again, maybe new blood will be infused and a new awakening will come. But we Parsis have not to fear. We can still be Parsi Zoroastrians while the new entrants will be non-

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KITASU-RS-3

Parsi Zoroastrians. But in present times, even as the *Hormuzd Yashni* says several names of Ahura Mazda, so must we also be benevolent, knowledgeable and tolerant of the views of others.

Dr PALLAN R. ICHAPORIA
Womelsdorf, Pa, USA

Dina G. McIntyre's article ("What heritage must we preserve?" *Parsiana*, May 1991), where she states that "everyone knows that Vedic and Gathic are sister languages and that Zarathushtra's people and the people of the Vedas shared a common ancestry" was interesting. However, does "everyone" know this?

Dr Ali Jafarey's interesting article on the equal status of men and women in the Gathic period (Women venerated and victimized," *Parsiana*, April 1991), brought to mind Shakuntala Rao Shastri's book *Women in Vedic Times* (BVB publication). In a chapter on Atharva-Vedic times she shows how Zoroastrianism was responsible for the liberating influences on those times, and how Aryan/Zoroastrian thought, fused across a wider, northern intercontinental sphere. For those who put down the Hindu-Zoroastrian link to the physical presence of Zoroastrians much later it is a revelation to know that the 'twain had met much, much earlier and the world of ideas flies lighter, faster and leaves a lasting impress.

Perhaps your magazine could, with the help of scholars like these develop the theme further. It seems relevant and urgent to Zoroastrians (albeit a fast reducing minority) in India today.

Ms S. N. NANPORIA

"Decreasing... figures?"

I refer to "Decreasing world figures?" (Events and Personalities, *Parsiana*, May 1991).

My friends and I have tried to work out how the figures of 27 and 216 for great-grandchildren have been arrived at.

I would like you to enlighten me, failing which I wish to approach Ms Jessica Mathews.

P. S. DAVER

The Editor replies

The statement assumes that the rate of reproduction remains constant in each case. Thus, if a lady has three children and they have three children each, there will be $(3 \times 3 =)$ nine grandchildren who will produce $(9 \times 3 =)$ 27 great-grandchildren in their turn. At the rate of six children each, the initial six produce $(6 \times 6 =)$ 36 grandchildren and $(36 \times 6 =)$ 216 great-grandchildren.

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"Family figures"

What does Ms Malini Karkal mean — that all the Malkanis and Vasvanis, Shahs and Patels, Puris and Khannas, Shettys and Nambiaris, Ibrahim Alis and Suleman Bhais, Krishnans and Venkatramans are Maharashtrians? ("Family Figures," Readers' Forum, *Parsiana*, May 1991). They quite abound in Bombay. I suggest she ask some of them and see.

'Maharashtrian' is a politicized label of convenience attached to the Marathi speaking peoples. With her nationalist bend she must have noted that the national anthem goes "...Punjab, Sind, Gujarat, Maratha..." and not Maharashtra which is a much later invention. If during a press conference a correspondent had asked Shivaji Maharaj, "Sir, as a Maharashtrian king how do you see..." he would not have quite understood what was meant. He may have just replied, "for my Maratha people I see a bright future..."

As for the belongingness of the Parsis, she need not worry. When they came, there were no Maharashtrians around. There were only Marathas, if at all.

F. M. SOONAWALLA
Lucknow

I do not know how you acquiesced to Ms Malini Karkal's suggestion that all Parsis living in Maharashtra are Maharashtrians.

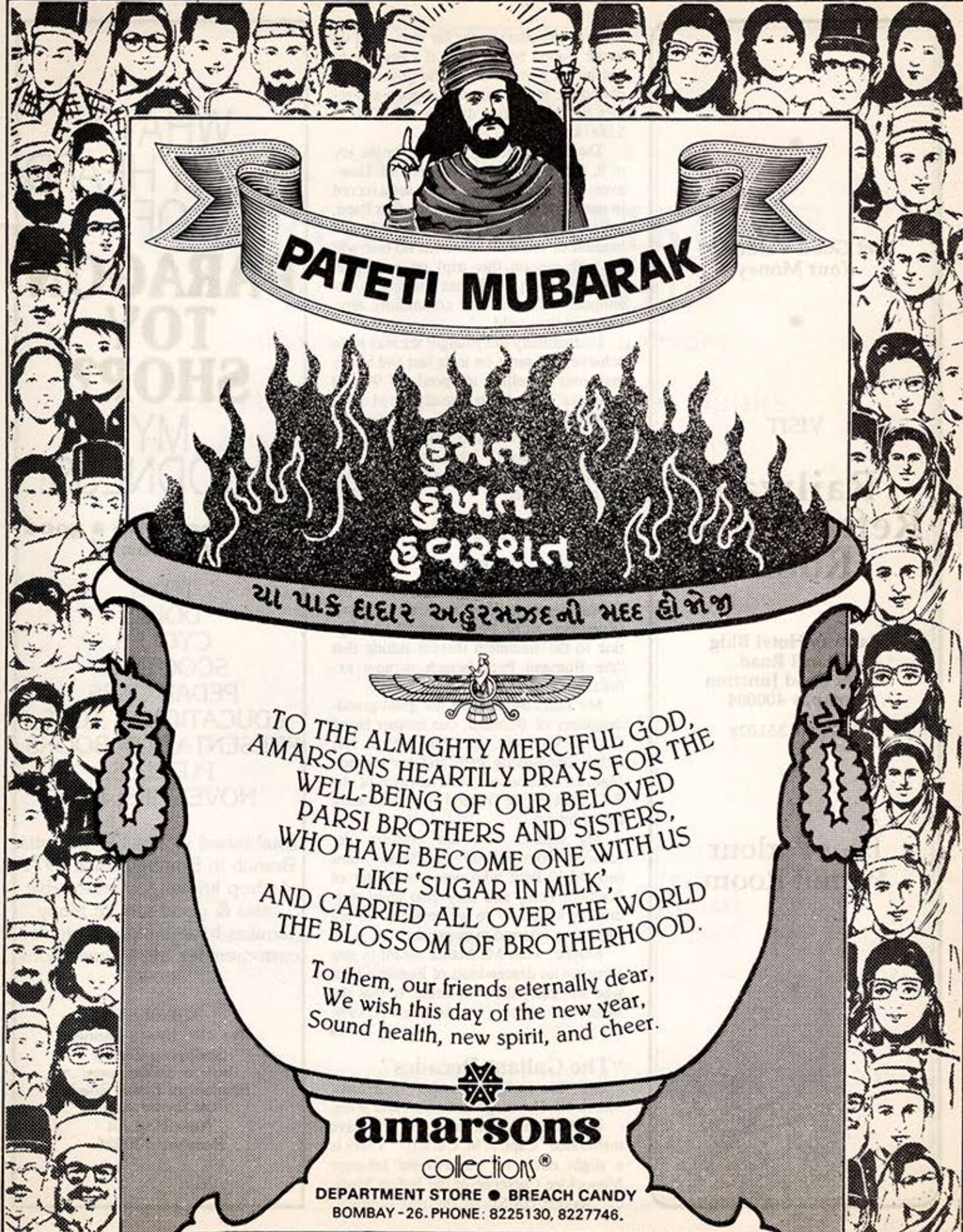
If a Parsi takes up a job in Bengal does he become, overnight, a Bengali? And then with a job in the Punjab, does he suddenly become a Punjabi? No, of course not. Central government servants are often shifted from north zone to south zone, etc. That doesn't mean that their linguistic or religious classification also changes. Are the Gujaratis in Maharashtra all Maharashtrians? None of the Gujaratis would agree to that. A Sikh remains a Sikh whether he resides in Andhra Pradesh or Arunachal Pradesh. Yes, we are all Indians first and last; further categorization can only be on the basis of mother tongue or religion, not according to the state where he resides.

Dr P. D. SUNAWALA

"Highway rider"

A small error has crept into the distance I covered every day in the course of my trip from Kanyakumari to Delhi ("Highway rider," *Parsiana*, May 1991). I travelled 200-250 kms per day, on an average, and not 50-55 kms as printed in your report.

The support given by *Parsiana* on my two earlier missions, has inspired me to attempt one more from the west coast of



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India (Porbander) to the far east, right up to the Burma border, and, if I am able to obtain the permission of the government of Burma, to drive up to Rangoon and return by ship, a total distance of 4,000 to 5,000 kms.

The last two missions were for the joy of it, with no thought of any record. However, this time I am hoping to set a record in our community for being the first Parsi, over 65 years, crossing the length and breadth of India all alone (as no one will be with me on this trip) on a moped, which I don't think has ever been attempted before in our community anywhere in the world.

Undoubtedly the younger set may have achieved the same on their fast and heavy machines travelling at speeds of 90-100 kms/hour but to keep a steady speed of 40 kms/hour at the age of 68, is a difficult task in itself, and I have done that on my previous missions. I hope to prove that the pioneering spirit of our forefathers remains undimmed.

D. C. PATEL

Secunderabad

The error is regretted -- Ed.

"Dinshaw Petit..."

I refer to the article "Dinshaw Petit, the Genial Gentleman" by Arnavaz S. Mama (*Parsiana*, April 1991), and take exception to the statement therein stating that "the Bomanji Petit branch is now extinct."

My sister Sylla and I are great-granddaughters of Bomanji, our mother being Coomie Vakharia, née Coomie Petit. Her father Dhunjibhoy Petit and her brother, Manekji Petit were both chairmen of the B.D. Petit Parsee General Hospital during their lifetime.

My mother also has cousins, descended from Sohrab and Maki Moos (née Maki Petit who was a daughter of Bomanji Petit) and they also have children as we do — so we certainly do not like being referred to as extinct.

Maybe, what Ms Mama meant is that there are no descendants of Bomanji Petit who still carry the Petit name. In that she would be correct.

Ms ROSHAN COOPER

Pune

"The Gallant Decades"

I read "The Gallant Decades" (*Parsiana*, March 1991) with great interest and pride.

In this article, on page 61, you have mentioned "Capt. J. M. Cursetji." There is a slight error: he was Hirajee Jehangir Manockjee Cursetjee of the Indian Medical Service (IMS); all the rest is practi-

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RHIZIC G C-5

cally correct. He was wounded at Gallipoli where he won the Distinguished Service Order (DSO).

He was my mother's *kaka's* (father's brother) son. Not only did he get the rank



Manockjee Cursetjee: pioneered female education

of major general during World War II (1939-45), but was knighted and titled Honorary Physician to the King.

This is just to give you more insight into my mother's illustrious family, the Manockjee Cursetjees.

My great-grandfather, Mr Manockjee Cursetjee, was the first Indian to become chief judge of the Small Causes Court at Bombay. He was the one to start The Alexandra Girls' English Institution in 1865, which is still functioning with more than 800 girls on its rolls. He was twice sheriff of Bombay — in 1856 and again in 1863.

Ms PERIN M. R. B. JEEBHOY

"In the matter of..."

Let's hope the Parsi community does not accept the Bombay Parsi Punchayet's decision ("In the matter of the late Ms

Roxan Darshan Shah..." *Parsiana*, March 1991) to allow Parsi women who have married non-Parsis the grudging privilege of using the Tower of Silence provided they agree to the official status of untouchables: To require an entrance ticket in the form of an affidavit, a "special place earmarked for the purpose" — what nonsense!

Dogs and horses and Parsi men don't have their pedigree cancelled if they choose the 'wrong' mate. Why this very special and different treatment to the women?

Ms MAHROUK VEVAINA
Calcutta

Grateful for bounties

Members of the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York, the Iranian Zoroastrian Association, the Zoroastrian Association of Pennsylvania and New Jersey, the Zoroastrian Association of Greater Boston Area, and the Zoroastrian Association of Pennsylvania got together at the annual luncheon organized by Ms Perin and Erach Munshi and Ms Mehroo and Lovji Cama and had fun.

To show their gratefulness to Ahura Mazda for bounties received in the shape of continued prosperity, health and happiness of the whole community in America, they collected a sizable amount for the maintenance of atash bahrams at Surat and Navsari, and especially the holy Iranshah at Udwa.

One-third of their collection, namely Rs 71,263 has been sent to the Surat Parsi Punchayet to be distributed as under: Rs 12,600 to 42 Parsi priests, Rs 16,500 to 165 nassessalars, etc, Rs 15,000 as kathi

The Iranshah (right) and fire-temples at Navsari (below left) and Surat: worshipped, long distance, from North America Photos: Homyar Mistry, Homz Prints

to five holy places, Rs 10,000 towards helping deserving Parsi peasants, Rs 15,000 towards the betterment of athravans.

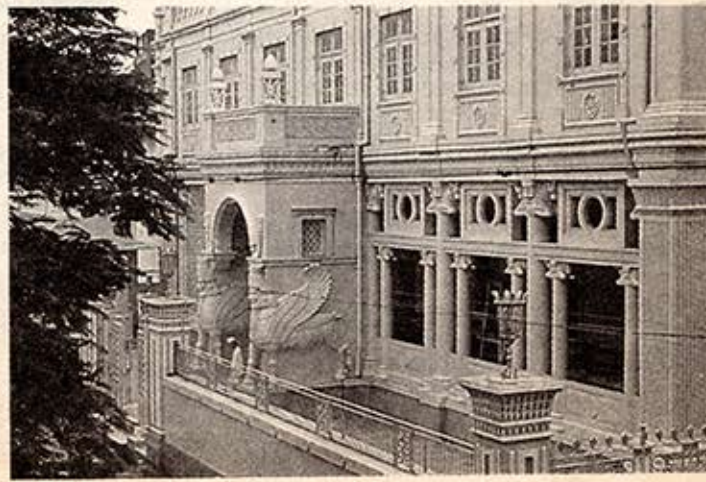
During muktad, 180 families will receive three kg rice, two kg dal, one kg sugar, one kg ghee, 500 gms sev (vermicelli) and 250 gms tea per family member, up to a maximum of three.

Dr SAM S. BIACCA

President, Surat Parsi Punchayet

Blanket aid

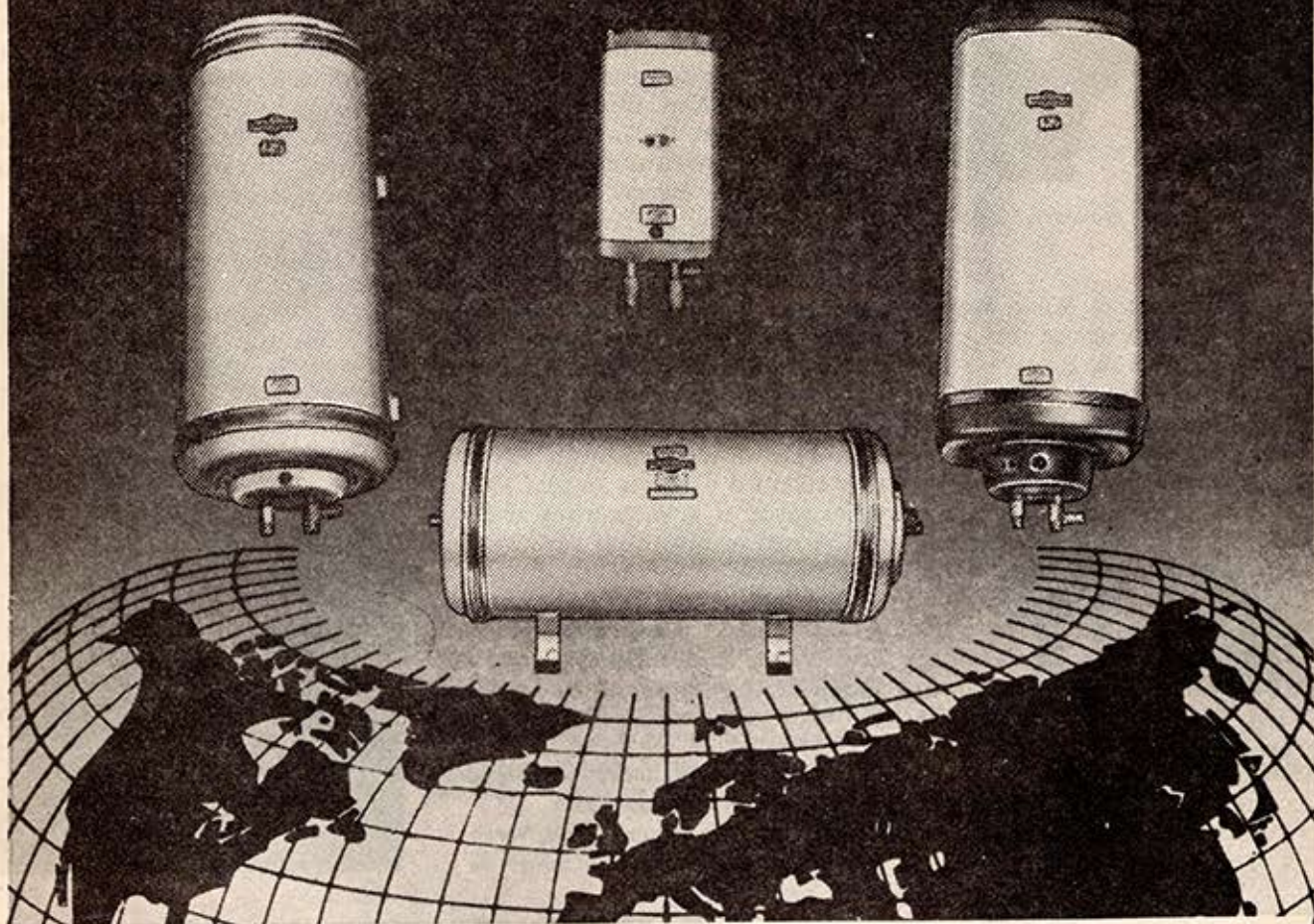
Six years ago, distressed by the plight of our needy Zoroastrians, a few of us ladies got together and started a Zoroastrian Winter Relief Fund encouraged by Ms Mitha Rustom Marazban (Mummy). We organized a blanket drive, and in 1985, we distributed over a thousand blankets, covering those in need in Gujarat villages and in Bombay city. The



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editors of *The Bombay Samachar* and the *Jam-e-Jamshed* have played a major role in our success by giving due publicity. Because of the continuous flow of donation from well-wishers, we have not looked back since then. Year after year articles of necessity like bed linen, sudrehs, pyjamas, gowns, woollen garments, utensils, kusti, clothes old and new, renovated furniture and so on, have been distributed to the unfortunate and needy of our community. In the 18-month period (January 1990 to June 1991) a sum of Rs 35,000 was utilized for the distribution of above articles, and financial aid for education, medicines, weddings, navjotes, etc. But for the bountiful help of large hearted individuals and trusts this would have been impossible.

The pressing demand this year, is again for blankets. In these days of price escalation, the lowest cost per blanket is Rs 100. To reach a majority of those in need, we should aim at a target of minimum 1,000 blankets.

Our accounts are open for your scrutiny and every paise is accounted for. Cash by money order or cheques may be drawn in favor of the "Zoroastrian Winter Relief Fund" and despatched C/o Ms Kumi J. Daroowala, 16/1, Rustom Baug, Sant Savta Marg, Bombay 400027, or Ms Shirin Manekshana, Nariman Parsi Girls Orphanage, Shahpore, Surat 395003 or Dr (Ms) Amy Gustadji, 8/526, Bamji Wad, Navsari 396445.

Ms KUMI J. DAROOWALA

Ms SHIRIN N. MANEKSHANA

Dr (Ms) AMY GUSTADJI
and other committee members of the
Zoroastrian Winter Relief Fund

Tavadia hit for WZO

In June this year, London saw the performance of an old Homi Tavadia hit, *Pestonjee na Parakram*, by a group of very talented, hardworking amateurs. The play was directed by an old colleague of Homi's, Mr Dara Madon. He had been flown in from Bombay and hosted by Rumi and Hilda Sethna at great personal cost.

Homi Tavadia was an actor, director, writer, magician and at times worked as a legal authority, but above all else he was a man driven by a passionate desire to be involved in any good cause or charity. I had the immense good fortune to be associated with him as a cast member of the Parsi Medical Amateurs from 1969 when he took over as our director. That our shows were such big hits and we were able to collect and donate large funds was

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in large measure due to his good humor and very able stewardship. It was therefore an even greater thrill for me to hear a sell-out audience enjoy and applaud the World Zoroastrian Organisation (WZO) show. The WZO has worked diligently for the poor, particularly the destitute Parsis of Gujarat. Wherever he is now, in his special place in heaven, Homi must be smiling and chuckling at the thought of his play being put to such a good cause.

Dr NUSLY P. J. POCHA

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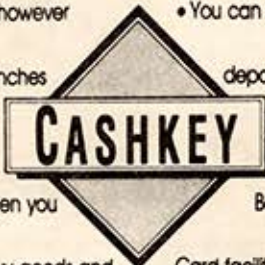
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Ms B. S. TARAPORE
Hon Secretary

Help for the aged

Not only is the proportion of aged Parsis increasing, but a larger number of them do not have near ones to look after them. Many rich individuals keep a host of servants but the poor old have to depend on their relatives, most of whom are either indifferent towards the old or bully them. Many live alone and uncared for.

This last lot of hapless individuals



File photograph of an inmate at Petit Widows' Chawl at Fort, Bombay

need most help. And not only in the form of doles given by charitable institutions. What they need is looking after — somebody who can visit them off and on if not daily, get them things they need, medical help, and help with other problems — and make them feel that they are not discarded. If an individual or a family adopts one such person, it will help a lot. But more than that, there should be a body of dedicated persons with missionary zeal, something on the lines of the

Christian missionaries.

To give one example: A very old woman between 70 and 80 years of age in Balam Street, who has adopted a relative, told me that the relative wanted to put her in a home. I had gone to give her some money from a charitable body because she found it difficult to go to the collection center. I met her on the road just outside her house. Every step was an effort for her and she could just trudge along. She said she had to spend a lot on medicines. She said, "I am ready to work in Tata Industrial, but I cannot go by bus and I cannot afford a taxi." While I admired her guts, I felt pity for her helplessness. I know of quite a few such cases and there must be many, many more.

This is where a dedicated band of workers could really be angels of mercy and spread happiness around in true Zoroastrian spirit — happiness unto him through whom happiness unto others. One Mr Marfatia had in your magazine sometime back called for worker volunteers to write to him. Did he get a response and could he help out with such cases?

Another very essential requirement is the right to die with dignity. There are dozens, perhaps hundreds, of old Parsis who are either waiting or wanting to die. If we visit a Parsi hospital, the sight is appalling. Many old ones are lying there — neither living nor dead. What a drain they are on their dear ones — on their energy and their money. I really wish they could have the right to die. Two things would not allow their relatives to say that they would be better dead — that society would castigate them as being cruel and selfish and that religion does not allow such death. Also the law of the land does not allow it. I understand that it is legalized only in Japan. Unfortunately also there is the possibility of unscrupulous persons taking advantage of the practice. Sometime back I had read in *Parsiana* that there is a Society for the Right to Die with Dignity. I sincerely wish the right could be legalized, especially for the Parsis. In the meantime, I can only repeat Omar Khayyam:

"Better, oh better, cancel from the scroll
Of universe one luckless human soul.
Than drop by drop enlarge the flood that
rolls,
Hoarser with anguish as the ages roll."

HOMI BAGWALA

Edited by Amavaz S. Mama

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Events and Personalities

Lofty privacy

"When you grow big remember to help others," noted solicitor and chairman of the Parsi Central Association Co-operative Housing Society (PCA), Soli E. Morris, advised members of seven families as senior trustee Nariman Khursedji handed over to them the keys of the respective flats on April 21, 1991. The ceremony had begun with a jashan on the premises. Four couples to be married, a young mobed with two sons and two families who have been sheltering in dharamshalas have been accommodated in the new Rati Engineer Block of the Dallas Trust Building at Prabhadevi in Bombay. Khursedji urged the young couples to maintain community numbers by rearing two to three children each.

Situated on the first floor, each of the seven huge rooms of the Block has been converted into self-contained units. The space provided by the high roof of the one-storeyed structure has been ingeniously utilized to create an upper loft bedroom so that the living space comprises two rooms and a kitchen. A rear balcony overlooks the inner courtyard of the triangular building which also houses up to 100 non-Zoroastrian families.

The building, constructed on a chawl system, provided common baths and toilets in each wing having 10 apartments — a style out of kilter with current Parsi ideas and lifestyles. The trustees appointed architect Farrukh Hyderabadwala of M/s Dara Mistry and Associates, who re-designed the premises under instructions of the PCA managing committee, particularly Khursedji and Adi Vasaigara. Thus seven families can avail of the facility, yet maintain their total independence. The revamping includes a tiled bath and toilet, and a small but bright and efficient kitchen in each unit. A separate storage

water tank and pump ensures a 24-hour water supply.

The old, fully-occupied Dallas Trust Building had been gifted to the PCA many years ago. The seven rooms in question were in the possession of the Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) for about 30 years or more, says Morris, utilized for a primary school. However, with the declining patronage of municipal primary schools, the Municipality closed this school (along with several others) but held on to the seven huge classrooms. In an effort to regain the premises for the use of the community, the PCA moved the Bombay High Court in 1983 and won the case in 1986, but the Municipality appealed the decision, informs Morris. Sometime thereafter the municipal policy changed in the direction of returning the premises not used for primary schools to the landlords at a price. The Trust paid up Rs 2,70,000 to the Municipality as per the Corporation's policy decision. This policy decision was challenged in a public interest litigation, leading to prosecution of the Municipality and some of the landlords including the PCA. The three-year legal battle resulted in favor of the BMC and the owners of these old private properties. The PCA ultimately regained possession in late 1989, Morris related the litany of troubles.

The PCA, registered in 1920, is one of the oldest housing societies in Bombay, says Morris. It established the Dadar Parsi Colony and owns about 24 residential buildings, popularly known as "society buildings." In the last 10 to 15 years the PCA has housed about 97 families by constructing about 81 additional flats on their several old buildings and a new building of 16 flats, informs the Association.

Hindus and Jains comprise the popula-

tion around the Dallas Trust Building. Representatives of the Jain settlement across the street made about two to three attempts to acquire the seven rooms for their own use offering Rs 30,00,000 to 40,00,000 as compensation, informed Morris. Realizing how important residential space is for the very survival of the community, the trustees rejected their offer and spent about Rs 1,30,000 instead, he added. "We used the Trust money in a good way for the welfare and benefit of the community," noted Morris with satisfaction and urged the new allottees, an insignificant group in the overall environment, to maintain decorum and harmony, adding 20th century sugar to their contemporary milieu.

Amavaz S. Mama

Grieving for "our Rajiv"

"For the world he was Rajiv Gandhi, but for us Parsis he was 'our Rajiv,'" noted Dr Aspi Golwala, chairman of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) at a condolence meeting convened on June 24, 1991.

"A friend of the poor and the down-trodden, he championed (secularism)... for the peace and prosperity of all communities and creeds in the country... in the cause of which he gave the supreme sacrifice," read the BPP resolution. The former Prime Minister of India was assassinated in a bomb blast in Sriperumbudur on May 21, '91 while he was on his election campaign.

Though he never professed to be a Parsi, Rajiv, son of Indira and Feroze Gandhi, "had a special affinity and love for our Parsi community and never missed an opportunity to mingle with us despite his heavy schedules," noted a resolution passed by the Shree Nagpur and Kamthi Parsi Zarthosti Anjuman. In fact on his birth certificate his name ap-



pears as Rajivratna Birjees Gandhi.

The Delhi Parsi Anjuman summoned a meeting on May 26 to condole 47-year-old Rajiv's death when president Lt Gen Adi Sethna reminisced: "Many of us in this hall will recall the carefree laughing Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi who was with us together with his charming...wife less than two years ago at pateti... Some of us will also remember his visit with Ms Indira Gandhi in 1984... He took easily from piloting the Avros and Boeings to piloting the ship of (the) state of India because the mainsprings of his personality were his own instincts: those of a gentleman."

The Parsi Zoroastrian Anjuman of Mhow noted in its resolution, "His grace and bravery in political defeat, his charming personality and endearing smile, will always be remembered."

When unable to attend the World Zoroastrian Organisation's (WZO) awards function at Bombay's Raj Bhavan on March 2 this year, Rajiv had sent a message, reportedly his last to the community. A copy of the message was forwarded to *Parsiana* by WZO member Dadi Mistry. It read: "It is a tribute to the genius of the Indian civilization, and to the good sense of the Zoroastrian community, that the Zoroastrians have been able to live in this country in perfect security, peace and harmony, without any interference in their identity, customs, usages and religious practices while at the same time considering themselves to be Indians first and last, and contributing in full measure to the building of modern India... (The Zoroastrians) have helped make our world a better place in which to live."

Principals win honors

Three principals of Parsi founded schools — Ms Mani Dhunjishaw Engineer of the Alexandra Girls' English Institution, Ms

Siloo Sam Commissariat of the Bai R. F. D. Panday Girls' High School and Ms Roshen Phiroze Framji Driver of the Byramjee Jeejeebhoy Parsee Charitable Institution and Junior College (BJPC) — were honored by the Bombay Association of Heads of Secondary Schools for their "dedicated service as principal and (for) valuable contribution in the field of education."



During her 41 years' association with Alexandra, Engineer has endeared herself to the students and ex-students who turn to her for guidance, notes a press release. A regular participant at different educational seminars and World Education Fellowship Conferences, for over 25 years Engineer broadcasted school programs over All India Radio and used to contribute articles to a technical journal for teachers, notes her curriculum vitae.

For 34 years Commissariat has taught at the Panday School where she has been principal for the last 15 years and before that its head teacher for eight years. Of the approximately 1,050 children on the School's roll, 101 are Zoroastrians, she informs. Commissariat, who always wanted to be a teacher from her early childhood, says: "I love children, especially the handicapped. We have several

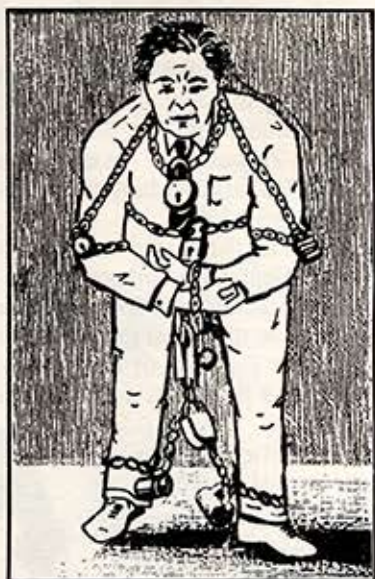
(Right) At the Bombay Parsi Punchayet convened condolence meeting for Rajiv Gandhi

(Left) Rajiv and Sonia Gandhi (far right) interacting with members of the Surat delegation in Delhi

(Below, from left) Educationists Engineer, Commissariat and Driver: "dedicated service as principal"

of them in our school." Herself interested in subjects like Vedic literature, yoga, reading, music, cooking and gardening, Commissariat has introduced these co-curricular activities for the benefit of her students too. The School also conducts classes in Zoroastrian studies and navjote prayers, she adds.

As principal of the Byramjee Jeejeebhoy Institution for the last 20 years, Driver has been credited for the school's achievement of cent per cent results at the SSC (Secondary School Certificate) board examinations, for making it a co-educational school, for introducing junior college facilities, for introducing the school band and rifle shooting as cocurricular activities, for expanding the laboratories and libraries and for starting job-oriented classes like electronics at the post-SSC level.



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Yet another principal to win acclaim for her outstanding contribution to education was Ms Nergish Daruwalla of the Hindi Vidya Bhavan who was felicitated by the state government on Republic Day last January, informs the *Jam-e-Jamshed* of February 10, 1991.

She is presently a member of the Association of British Council Scholars, the World Education Fellowship, the World Council for Curriculum and Instruction and the World College of Experimental Learning, notes the write-up. Daruwalla has also been privileged to represent the state at various educational seminars and conventions, adds the write-up.

Poonawalla feted twice

The president of the Serum Institute of India Research Foundation (SII) Dr Cyrus Soli Poonawalla was presented the Man of the Year Shiromani Award 1990 by the then Prime Minister of India Chandra Shekhar on February 26, 1991, notes a press release.

Fifty-year-old Poonawalla is member



of the Vaccine Production Board and the expert group of the Science Advisory Committee, both of the Government of India, and on the expert committee to assess the vaccine production capacities and need for upgradation of technology, informs his bio data. The SII which he heads supplies serums and vaccines that have resulted in import substitution. In fact, the SII fully handles the country's requirement of measles vaccines for its immunization program.

Prior to the Shiromani Award

Poonawalla was presented the Mother India International Gold Award at the hands of the former President of India Giani Zail Singh, reads a news clipping in *The Times of India* dated February 6.

The useful guide

The fourth edition of the directory of the Mancherji Joshi Colony at Dadar where reside the largest concentration of Zoroastrians in Bombay will be out in September 1991, according to Jehangir R. Gazder, committee member of The Dadar-Matunga Parsi-Zoroastrian Association (DMPZA) which is publishing the directory.

In addition to listing the names, addresses and telephone numbers of residents in each building, the fourth edition will also mention the blood groups of the occupants. The founders of the Colony, major landmarks in Dadar, a map of the

Right: Dinshaw (left) with Air Marshal Minoo Engineer



Left: Vaccine expert Poonawalla (in white suit) being felicitated by Chandra Shekhar

Colony, names and telephone numbers of educational and civic institutions, and medical facilities available in the vicinity of the Colony will also be presented in this edition, as it had been in the earlier editions of 1937, '64 and '81, notes a press release from the Association.

One thousand five hundred copies of the directory will be published, priced at Rs 25 each. Additional finance for the publication was raised through advertisements and the surplus income is intended for poverty relief to enable the DMPZA to

continue with its charitable activities, as notes the appeal for advertisements. "To keep the Mancherji Joshi Colony a place worth living in, a place to be proud of, a place that could be an example for others to follow in their efforts to provide wholesome living conditions for our people," is what the DMPZA is striving towards, the release mentions.

Brain and brawn

"Food for the brain and the brawn in a militant red jacket." Handy for those "who find the need for physical action when humility and good manners are of no effect." These are the reviews received by Sensei Farokh Dinshaw who brought out the fourth edition of his book *The Code of Bushido* in early '91.

Reportedly the first book on karate written by an Indian author, *The Code* is intended to be a standard text and a refer-

ence manual for all prospective martial artists, claims the author. The text and graphics in the book explain the basic karate terms, major styles of martial art, weapon training, 140 basic karate techniques and other points related to the art. Anecdotes from Oriental classics and the question-answer format adopted in the latter part of the book make interesting reading.

Thirty-year-old Dinshaw shares his knowledge from the experience he has gained over the years when he trained under Sensei Pervez Mistry "who taught me my first punch," Shihaan Teruo Chinen "who tested me to gruelling extremes and awarded me the black belt," and Hanshi Eiichi Miyazato who "opened my eyes to what lies beyond the physical forms of karate." These three earn a special mention in the 129-page book priced at Rs 50.

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*Byramjee (left): from local to national meets
Bharucha (center): forte is obstetrics
Contractor: concern for child health*

Dinshaw is presently the principal of Combat Centre. His students include cadets from the National Defence Academy (NDA) and also officers and soldiers from the Indian army. He is reportedly the youngest veteran in the country to have conducted over 100 training camps. In May last, he conducted an adventure camp at Fort Purandhar, for adolescent children of the armed forces personnel.

Making waves

After a series of wins at local swimming competitions organized in Bombay Ms Kainaz Byramjee was selected to represent the Maharashtra state in the 200 m breast stroke and the 200 m individual medley at the junior nationals in Gwalior scheduled for August 1991, notes a family source. Another notable success for Byramjee was at the open tournament in December last, swimming a five km stretch from Apollo Bunder to Sunk Rock. The swimmer has also been included on her school (Queen Mary) team competing at the national school games since 1988.

Her potential in the under-15 age-group was recognized by the government which has granted her a scholarship of Rs 1,800 for the entire year. But what Byramjee would have appreciated more is availability of coaches of national standard. "The diet, the training, the pool, the coach, the hours put in daily are all equally essential to bring forth talent and sustain this talent which we in India are failing to provide," notes the swimmer.

Kainaz practises for two hours in the morning before proceeding to school and two hours in the evening daily at the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) pool under coach Chin Shin Yang.

Interested in outdoor sports since her childhood, Byramjee has also been trained in karate and gymnastics. "Karate

has instilled in me a sense of discipline which is helping me immensely," acknowledges the swimmer. Though she does try to better her performance at each successive meet, Byramjee clarifies, "I have neither the aspiration to be like one of those celebrity international swimmers nor do I have an idol on which to mold my career. I am perfectly satisfied being myself."

Researched by Ruzbeh N. Bharucha

Topping the MD list

Topping this year's list of successful students at the Bombay University's Doctor of Medicine examination in obstetrics and gynecology was Dr (Ms) Azmy Pesi Bharucha, informs a family source.

In 1990 Bharucha had stood first in the diploma examination in obstetrics and gynecology, bagging two gold medals. She also enjoys the distinction of having presented the best paper at the All India Congress of Obstetrics and Gynecology for two consecutive years in 1988 and '89, mentions the write-up from the family. Additionally she has presented papers at several other national and international meets.

Honors in pediatrics

Standing first at the Doctor of Medicine examination in pediatrics conducted by the Bombay University was Dr Cyrus Pheroze Contractor, informs a write-up from the family. Last year Contractor had scored the highest marks at the diploma examination in child health, according to his curriculum vitae.

He is presently lecturer at the K. E. M. Hospital's Department of Paediatric Medicine and Neonatology. Twenty-seven-year-old Contractor has participated in many workshops on perinatal care and pediatrics, in addition to contributing articles to pediatric journals, his curriculum vitae reads.

His work experience at the K. E. M. Hospital, from where he did his internship, was as house physician in pediatric medicine and as registrar in pediatric medicine and neonatology. A distinction student throughout his academic career, Contractor had studied at the St Mary's High School, the S.I.E.S. College of Arts and Science and the G. S. Medical College. He had been conferred a scholarship for postgraduate studies by the Bombay University, the bio data further informs.

The doctor's other interests include reading, indoor and outdoor sports, and music.

Fight to save the Oval

"Right now our main battle is to prevent the government from building on the Oval... Let us not wantonly destroy what we can never get back," says Ms Shireen Bharucha, president of the Oval-Cooperage Residents' Association which is contesting the government's proposed move to construct a sports complex at the Oval Maidan. Presently overlooking this expanse of land are residential buildings on one side, and landmarks like the Bombay University and the High Court on the other. Bombay has no dearth of sports complexes and clubs which lie unused most of the time, believes Bharucha who has been appealing to government officials to abandon their ambitious project for the Oval: to build a football ground, volleyball field, tennis courts, cricket pitches, complete with spectator stands, reports *The Independent* of January 15, 1991.

An alternate proposal recommended by the Association is to set up a trust that will maintain the lawn, mend the fence around the Maidan, plant new palm trees and make security arrangements so that the Maidan becomes a "recreational ground for the use of everybody, even the poorest of the poor," notes Bharucha. Since negotiations with the government officials do not seem to have yielded any results, Bharucha, a solicitor with Tata Services Limited, is all set to pursue the matter in court.

"By putting up stadia the government will destroy the entire cityscape," fears Bharucha whose Association was last year conferred the Urban Heritage Award by the Bombay chapter of the Indian Heritage Society, further mentions *The Independent*.

Compiled by Roxana H. Kaka

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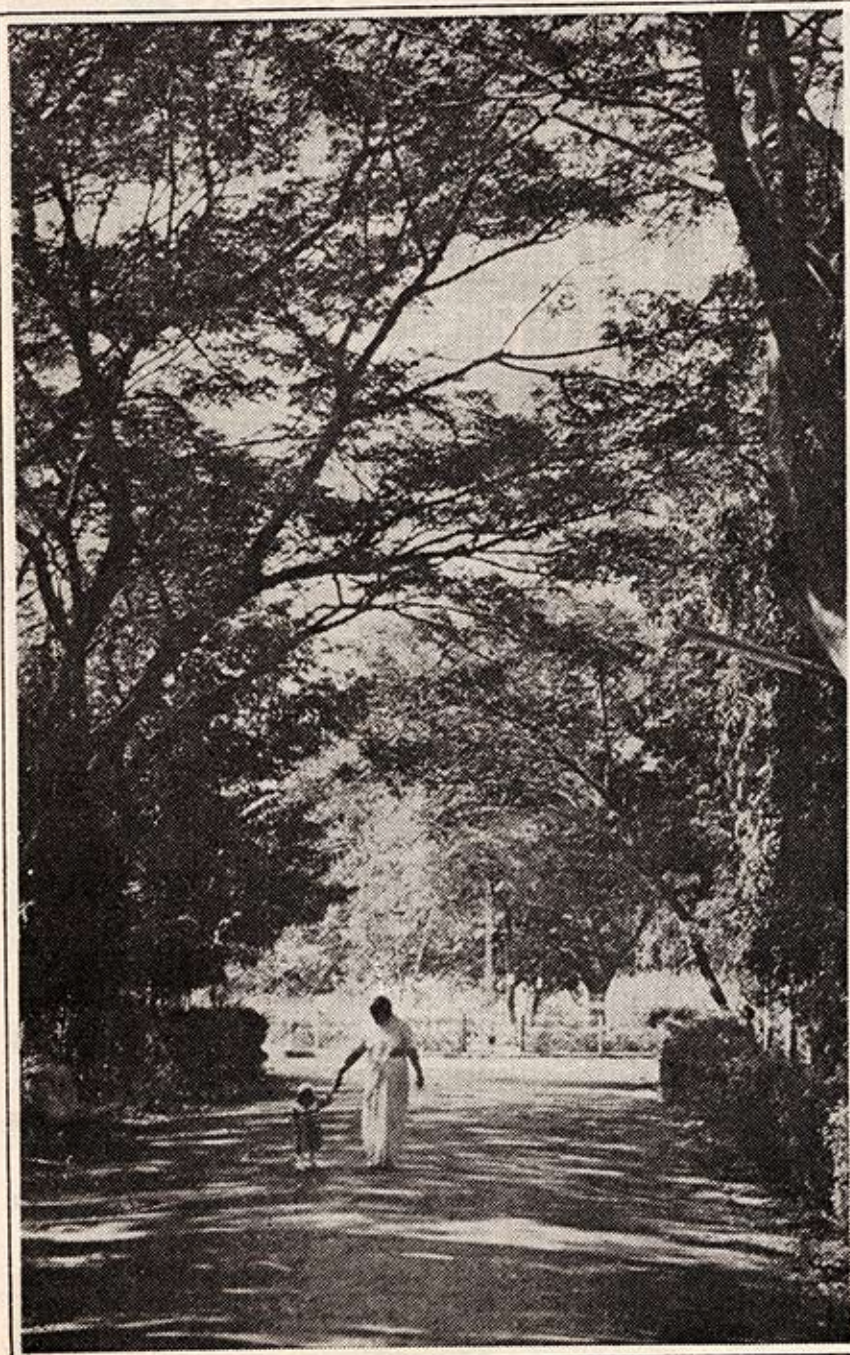
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"Anything can happen to you"

Parsis, as they become fewer and live longer, must plan for their own care in old age, says geriatric psychologist Dolly Dastoor

Arnavaz S. Mama

"Half our hearts are here (in India) because the parents are alone," says Ms Dolly Dastoor, secretary of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) and associate editor of *Gavashni*, the quarterly newsletter of the Zoroastrian Association of Quebec (ZAQ). Also cochairman of Zonta International's status of women committee, Dastoor moots the forming of an international Zoroastrian women's network through which Zoroastrian women from major pockets across the world can liaise with each other, undertaking joint projects such as old age residences.

The Dastoor concept is for middle and upper-middle-class people where the financial resources are available: a center where the old can be supervised with proper professional care instead of individual ayahs and tours can be organized for them to meet their children. "Sell the idea to people, sensitize them... only then the community will change its way of thinking," she urges.

Assistant professor in psychiatry at Montreal's McGill University and a research scholar in different types of dementia in the psycho geriatric program of Douglas Hospital, Dastoor is deeply concerned about the provision of geriatric care for Parsis. "Our community is getting smaller and smaller and living longer and longer, and hence is prey to more age-related illnesses," she says.

The well-known Parsi tendency to hoard isn't normal, but a pointer to mental illhealth, according to Dastoor. "Our social and emotional (needs) are becoming pathological," she says.

Dastoor's work in geriatric psychology has made her acutely conscious that

every fifth person over 80 years of age (and one in 18 over the age of 65) suffers from dementia. Beginning with loss of memory, dementia becomes a language problem, a perception problem. Dastoor detailed the course of failing mental capacities during an interview with *Parsiana* earlier this year. In the case of Alzheimer's disease where the central nervous system degenerates, showing up in

the form of premature senile mental deterioration, the patient forgets even the most elementary functions like eating, washing, dressing, etc. He/she "becomes suspicious, paranoid, resistant, heavy, aggressive, abusive," says Dastoor. "There is a complete reversal of personality as all repressive control (ingrained from early childhood) is forgotten.

"Dementia destroys the whole family in caring for the patient. The demented person needs lots of space. What happens to families living in two-room tenements?" she shudders. What's more, if you cannot recognize the symptoms as they set in, you may even feed them by making the wrong responses, she cautions.

Dastoor differentiates between normal aging and Alzheimer's: "When you remember that you can't remember, it's normal aging. A diet that's poor in vitamin B12 could lead to memory problems. An Alzheimer patient never remembers. Once the memory is gone, it's gone. Autopsy of Alzheimer (victims) could lead to better genetic counselling," for there is a 20 percent chance of the children of an Alzheimer parent inheriting the disease, says Dastoor who is president of the Alzheimer Society of Montreal. For Parsis, as an aging, dwindling community that tends to marry within itself and often within the family, the forecast may be bleaker, she implies.

"If we are closing our minds to injecting new blood, we must think now of creating institutions where you and I are going to live... The 40-50-60-year-old age-group should start planning for themselves, (provide) more open spaces, professional care," advocates Dastoor who

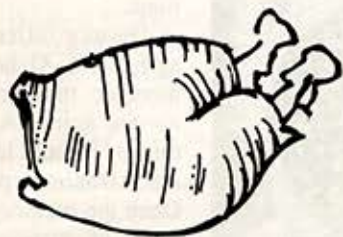


Dastoor (right) with daughter Natasha: identifiable in the mainstream.

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joined the staff of Montreal's Douglas Hospital Center's psycho geriatric program in 1973. She was conferred the Dr C. A. Robert Award in 1990. The award recognizes the individual who has contributed the most to the objectives of the Center. "Quality care to elderly patients" has been "one of her preoccupations," noted *Gavashni*, in its September 1990 issue. The publication noted that her expertise in the field of "cognitively im-

**"Our social and
emotional (needs)
are becoming
pathological"**

paired elderly is internationally recognized through her work and her publications."

She also suggests that the community undertake a survey to assess "how extensive is the problem, build a building in one of the bays to provide day-care for the elderly."

Dastoor's other preoccupation is community survival in North America. Past president of ZAQ, her concern is "How do we entrench ourselves in the wider North American community — in business, entrepreneurship — be a part of the mainstream but remain an identifiable body?"

Tracing the changes in her own perceptions, Dastoor (née Bharucha) notes, "When I left Bombay in 1964, I had no concept what it was to be a Zoroastrian. You were a Parsi..."

She had spelt it out in greater detail in the course of her contribution to the Seventh North American Zoroastrian Congress (7NAZC) in Houston in August 1990. "Not being very steeped in the religion and philosophy of Zoroastrianism in India, I had very often mistaken the customs, practices and rituals of daily living as the fundamental tenets of our religion. I had failed to appreciate the fundamental doctrine as mentioned in the *Gathas* and other scriptures... I now appreciate the value system of Zoroastrianism, namely freedom of choice and yet assuming responsibility for one's action, the contribution of man as Ahura Mazda's helper by standing up, of his own free will, for the final victory of good over evil, the affirmation of life and the appeal to be active in shaping the world..."

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not very religious, the personal religious identity matters more than the cultural identity," says Dastoor. According to her, many Zoroastrians in Montreal are members of ecumenical councils. "We participate by exposing our religion. On international bodies I always say that I'm a Zoroastrian."

Participating in a parent/offspring dialogue on "our present and future in North America" — an innovative feature of the 7NAZC — Dastoor, a mother of three

**"Dementia destroys
the whole family
in caring
for the patient"**

grown-up children, noted in the preamble: "Like all first generation immigrant parents we have had no traditional role model of parenting to follow and were very much left on our own to muddle along, when faced with contemporary challenges posed by our offsprings' independence and social behavior... Achieving a harmonious balance between the fundamental values of Zoroastrianism and the application of these values in the context of the 1990s is a challenge which all parents of my generation face."

Dastoor ascribes FEZANA's slow growth to peoples' fear that the autonomy of member associations will be undermined. However, they "have now begun to realize that that's not the idea" and that FEZANA has been formed to help associations and not take them over," she adds. Two new associations — in Dallas, Texas and in Washington state — were then in the process of being formed, she noted. Another assertion of local identity is the McGill Zoroastrian Students Society with Zoroastrian girls generally attending functions in a sari.

She considers "Iranian Zoroastrians to be much stauncher Zoroastrians — they went through a lot to preserve whatever they had" and expects the Zoroastrian community in North America to become self-sustaining when marriages between Parsis and Iranian Zoroastrians become a normal practice.

Dastoor left Bombay for Nigeria in 1964 to work as a research fellow in the University of Ibadan's department of psychiatry where the World Health Organization's program on schizophrenia was underway. In 1973 the family — Dolly,

continued on page 62

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Adoption only of Parsi children

After deferring this issue for over a decade, the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India has agreed to pursue legislation sanctioning adoption of only Parsi children

Parinaz Gandhi

By a majority vote, the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India resolved that it would pursue legislation sanctioning adoption of Parsi children by Parsi couples. Supporting the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) stand that a Parsi law on adoption should be introduced were 13 anjumans, while six dissented and four abstained from voting at the executive council meeting of the Federation at Bombay's Muncherji Khareghat Hall on March 23 and 24, 1991.

The subject of adoption has been hanging fire with the Federation for over a decade. Initially individual anjumans, punchayets, groups had sent their representation to the government until the then Prime Minister Ms Indira Gandhi had asked the BPP chairman Dr Aspi Golwalla why the community could not speak with one voice. Since then the subject has been debated at various meetings of the Federation.

The rehabilitation assistance package offered to the farmers by the Federation, jointly with the World Zoroastrian Organisation (WZO), has benefitted many Parsi families in south Gujarat.

Wells, pipelines and levelled fields have helped some agriculturists while others were to gain from the training program that was to commence in March '91 to induce them to use their scarce resources effectively.

The community was urged to adopt a common calendar beginning March 21, 1992 when it would be Hormazd *roj* according to all three calendars -- Shehen-shahi, Fasli and Kadmi. The prevailing practice of three different calendars being observed by the different sects within the community, while it gives an occasion for celebration of three New Years, creates an anomaly of three *Zarhosh no disos* (death anniversary of Zarathushtra), was the observation made. When Federation joint honorary secretary and BPP trustee Eruch Desai wondered whether a uniform calendar could be enforced on all, Federation president and BPP chairman Dr Aspi Golwalla replied, "If the BPP takes the lead and the Federation agrees, the rest will follow."

The final decision regarding a uniform calendar will be taken at the next Federation meeting in Calicut on September

14 and 15, 1991 after the delegates discuss this subject with their respective anjuman members. On behalf of the Calicut anjuman, its managing trustee Darius Marshall extended a cordial invitation. However, Federation joint honorary secretary Keki Gandhi reminded the delegates that in light of their being a small anjuman of barely 15 Zoroastrians, "let's not go with bag, baggage, family and relations; if there is more than one representative from an anjuman, one should be a youth."

Selective adoption

The prevailing divergence in views on whether adoption should be permitted, whether it should be restricted to adoption of a Parsi child, or whether it should be disallowed altogether resulted in member anjumans casting their vote on this sensitive issue. The majority supported the BPP decision that the community should proceed with a law on adoption on the proviso that only Parsi children would be considered for adoption.

Fearing that voting at Federation meetings would divide the anjuman loyalties,



Dinshaw Anklesaria of Poona claimed, "When we joined, it was decided that there should be no voting on any issue... Please refrain from taking votes and getting things done." Replied Gandhi, "There is no understanding either in the constitution or verbal that no votes will be taken at Federation meetings... On certain matters voting has to be done. Otherwise it would mean that no decision can be taken if there were to be even one dissenter."

If the community were to apply for a

take advantage by claiming rights to community flats on the presumption of their being "palak betas (adopted sons)." "Don't consider only the monetary aspect. The emotional attachment of 'my child,' 'my parent' doesn't exist under the law of guardianship which is presently applicable to the community," was Gandhi's rationale. Federation vice president Homi Bodhanwalla of Jamshedpur went a step further, advocating the protection of rights of non-Parsi children who have been accepted as wards by Parsi couples. In Jamshedpur, "we allow a non-Parsi adopted child even into our fire-temple. The BPP has a right to its views, but it can't be binding on smaller anjumans." A legislation on Parsi adoption will not come in the way of accepting non-Parsi children as wards or even permitting them access to institutions if the trustees concerned have no objections, clarified Gandhi.

Grooming the young

Would the presence of some select youth at Federation meetings give them the impression "ke mohtao larya karéch (the elders keep fighting) or does it gear them for future responsibilities? These uncertainties were voiced before it was

Some Parsi farmers can't afford one meal a day; others work as servants at neighboring farms

finally decided that four to five youths of outstanding caliber from the BPP Youth Club who had attended the BPP Holiday Program for Youth and subsequently been put through their leadership training program would be invited to the Federation meeting. Other anjumans were also called upon to bring their youth representative to the Federation meetings by quoting the practice of an overseas association which gives merit points to those who work for the community and giving the highest scorer a free air ticket to attend a national meet of Zoroastrians.

"In many anjumans youths are treated as a nuisance. But by not involving them we are making them into worse rebels," stated Kanga before giving his own ex-

legislation on adoption exclusively applicable to Parsis, "it will give us undue publicity," believed Delhi Parsi Anjuman president Lt Gen Adi Sethna. "Do we want to show ourselves as a fundamentalist community?" he continued. Davar Kavasji Modi of Surat feared, "It would mean an infringement of personal liberty because everyone would be bound by it." But the most persistent objections came from Desai: "There will be no bountiful blessings if we push through with this legislation nor will community numbers increase. This will unnecessarily create a hornet's nest. Presently there is no bar to adopting anyone of any community. If we can get (the same results) without legislation, why have legislation?... The BPP's view is not to have any legislation on adoption." Continued Desai, "We have only chosen the lesser of the two evils (adoption of a Parsi, rather than a non-Parsi child)." Corrected Golwalla, "We (the BPP) unanimously said we want legislation. If we want to change our minds, we should reconsider."

In the absence of a law on adoption, the adopted child can have no rights to inheritance in case of intestate succession, pointed out BPP trustee Jamsheed Kanga. Further, certain people tend to

From top: Bodhanwalla; Sethna (left) and Bhacca; Katpitia (left) and Anklesaria; Tamboly (left) and Modi; Taleyarkhan



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ample, "I started out as a rebel in the BPP; I am now accused of being over-conservative."

The formation of a Federation of Zoroastrian Youth Associations of India that had been agreed to at the last youth festival in Secunderabad is still awaiting the completion of formalities and registration by youth groups in different areas. A model constitution for a youth association is available with Jehangir Bisney of Secunderabad, informed Gandhi. The next All-India Zoroastrian Youth Festival will be hosted by Nagpur, the delegates were notified.

The new projects introduced by/for youths in different areas/anjuman were reported: In Ahmedabad, a minimum of one youth member has been coopted on



*Above (from left):
Golwalla,
Gandhi
and Guzder
Center: Minoo
Shroff (left) and
Kanga
Below: Desai
(left) and Modi*

every subcommittee of the Panchayat. Also the Youth League there has passed an amendment that any youth, whether male or female, who marries a non-Parsi will cease to be a member of the League. Previously only the woman married outside the community was discriminated against. Delhi is contemplating a 'roots tour' to familiarize the youngsters with places of historic significance to the community. Baroda youths are planning a trip to Udwada to improve on their religious knowledge. The enterprising Dahanu youth offered to host the next BPP youth leadership training camp, volunteered to organize a trip to Bahrot Caves for any anjuman interested, and gave a brief of the school they propose to start at a cost of Rs 65 lakhs. As an alternative to the only overcrowded English school in Dahanu they are confident it will be patronized by the increasing student population. The newly formed Yazd Education Trust will look after the school which will be largely Parsi managed on a four-acre plot of land. It will be gradually upgraded



to a high school and subsequently even introduce a boarding section, mentioned Ms Banoogoshasp Irani, the youth representative from Dahanu. There is need to keep some seats reserved for Parsis, recommended Golwalla.

On grave matters

"We are criticized for caring more for the dead than the living," stated Gandhi in response to a query from Surat Parsi Panchayat (SPP) chief executive Sorab Katpitia who conjointly with BPP chief executive Rustom Anklesaria manages the work on defunct anjumans. Katpitia was seeking the Federation's sanction on whether some Parsi graves in Junagadh and Nadiad could be relocated such that maximum returns could be obtained from community lands in those areas. When it was established that neither the names nor the years were legible on the graves, and no family member known to evince interest, it was decided that on the sale of the land, a part of the income would be used to look after the relocated graves and the rest for the benefit of the community.

Members of the Thana Anjuman who had initiated litigation against the Divecha Trust for reportedly selling off community property to a non-Parsi builder were pleased to report that they were "nearing the end of the tunnel." Strengthening their case by getting the Federation as intervenors, and securing a compromise such that 25 percent of the allotments by the builder is to Parsis, the Thana Anjuman president Rustom Cursetji noted that 50 Parsi families would be accommodated in this prime locality about 10-15 minutes' walk from the railway station. (Subsequent announcements in the papers indicated that the Thana Anjuman was authorized to invite applications for tenements of approximately 480, 600 and 825 sq feet at the rate of Rs 550 per square foot.)

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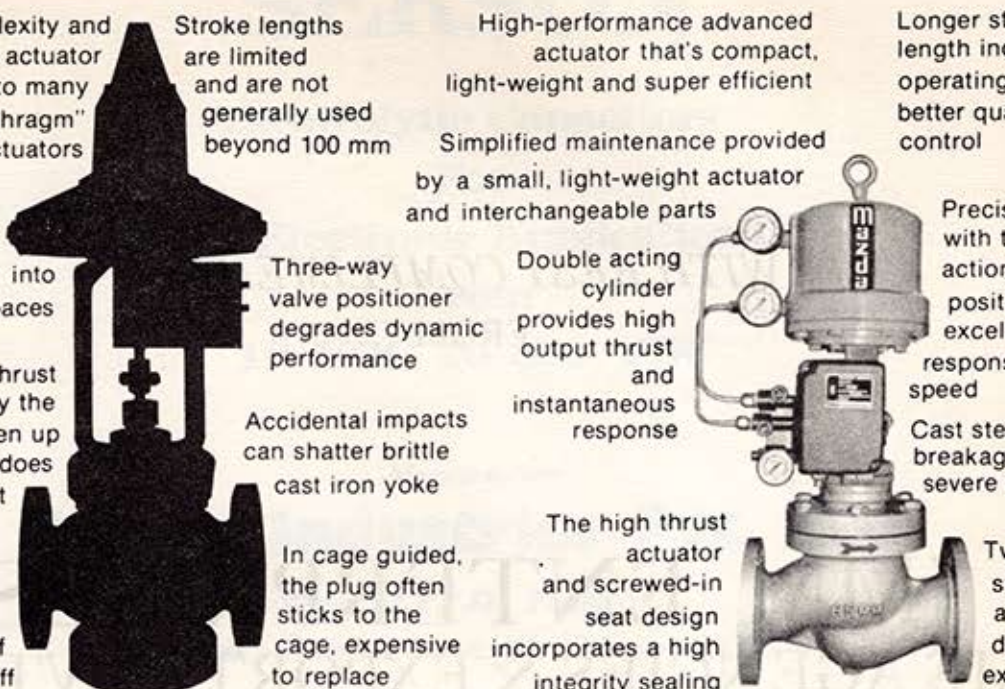
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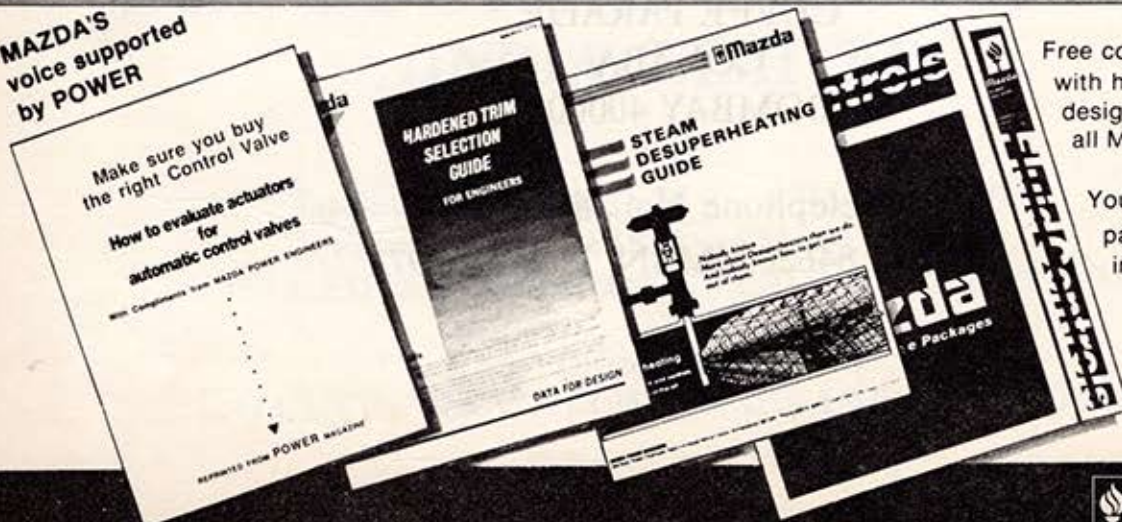
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conveyed that this report had been finalized at a meeting of the executive committee of the Congress convened at only four days' notice. In fact 14 members of the Federation executive council, who also happened to be on the Congress executive committee, were absent at the meeting when Moddie's summation was approved, Gandhi continued. Finally it

"In Jamshedpur, we allow a non-Parsi adopted child even into our fire-temple"

was decided that the preparation of a comprehensive revised report would be assigned to a professional.

"Let's not say 15 months have gone. There are certain omissions," noted Bodhanwalla who recommended every anjuman to go through the report once it is professionally prepared and give their comments within a stipulated time. "Nothing has been held up as far as implementation of the recommendations are concerned," believed Gandhi.

Ethical, laudable and regrettable

When studying the religiosity of Zoroastrian collegians, Dr Sam Taraporevala, professor of sociology at Bombay's St Xavier's College, found their knowledge wanting. Invited as a guest speaker to highlight the findings of his doctoral thesis, Taraporevala gave a detailed account of the students' knowledge of Zoroastrian concepts and their observance of religious practices (see "Low grades on religion," *Parsiana*, March 1991). Among the points he highlighted were: About 20 percent could not name Ahura Mazda as the God that Zoroastrians believed in; barely 20 percent could give the significance of the asho farohar. From the other stray comments made by the respondents it came across that: the Iranshah was understood as the deposed Shah of Iran; that manashni was explained as good deeds; that one respondent expressed, "The truth is I feel that no one on this earth knows the true teachings of Zoroastrianism," and another admitted, "I like to go to the fire-temple but not when the priest comes to beg."

"This shows the custodians of our faith in such a negative light," regretted Tar-

aporevala. He also added that "Breaking up into different schools of thought have put off youngsters. We are too small a community to afford this." Seeing the general ignorance on the religious score Taraporevala noted, "When there is no knowledge of (Zoroastrian) ethics, there is no question of applying these ethics to daily living."

The Indian tradition is such that respect and care for the elderly does not permit us to leave them in old people's institutions however congested the conditions may be at home, stated Guzder. He impressed on the Federation the need to start a complex for the aged in beautiful surroundings where they would gladly like to stay and where the family would be happy to visit them, unlike the geriatric wards at the B. D. Petit Parsee General Hospital and the J. J. Hospital. Inviting feedback from other anjumans, Guzder sought to ascertain whether the care of the elderly poses



a problem for other areas too. The infirmary at Surat is coming in useful for not only the habitants of Gujarat but also for Poona residents, acknowledged Dinshaw Anklesaria. Even then, 50 percent of its capacity is going abegging.

When anjuman representatives were given a chance to have their say, it came across that funds would be appreciated: by the Jhansi anjuman for the repair of their aramgah, by the Bardoli and Madras anjumans for their priests' quarters, by the Saronda anjuman for the repair of their agiary, by the Surat anjuman for the construction of a dharamshala, by the Vyara anjuman for constructing a shopping and residential complex, having completed their agiary and priests' quarters... "What's happening in our community is that the willingness to stand on its

From top: Marshall, Cursetji (left) and Tarapore, Cooper and Taraporevala

own feet, to finance our own projects (is declining). On principle I don't accept appeals to be carried in the *Fed Newsletter*," said Gandhi. His editorial policy was to outline achievement stories in the *Newsletter* rather than be flooded with appeals from anjumans which, instead of finding avenues to raise funds internally, resorted to the easiest solution of seeking funds. In addition to finance related problems another difficulty that was





From left: Karanjawalla, Bhote (top) and Bavaadam, Pervez Irani and Banoogoshasp Irani

brought to the notice of the delegates was the shortage of girls in the matrimonial age-group in Jamshedpur. The BPP offered to send some of the girls registered with their matrimonial bureau for a holiday to Jamshedpur hoping that matrimonial alliances would ensue.

"Since we are not getting fair coverage in other Press, at least let the *Fed Newsletter* publicize...the good work done by the BPP/Federation," stressed Kanga. "Every crank who has a personal grievance gets coverage in the Parsi Press. The BPP is made out to be a cesspool of corruption. This is the picture we are projecting of the community," he added. The functioning of the Federation and the decisions taken at Federation meetings should also be made known through the *Fed Newsletter*, stated Meher Anklesaria of Poona. While Homi Taleyarkhan, former member of the Minorities Commission, would have liked to see included both achievements and criticisms, Bodhanwalla felt that too much space was being used for Bombay news. Commitments to sponsor newsletters in the ensuing year came in from the BPP (three), and one each from Delhi, Jamshedpur, Madras, Poona, Surat, the Iranian Zoroastrian Anjuman and Desai. Sethna offered to bring in two more sponsors, and Tamboli three, through his WZO contacts.

The Federation represents not more than 20-25 percent of the total Zoroastrian population of India," said Poona Parsee Panchayat trustee Brig Noshir Grant. (The Poona Parsee Panchayat is said to

represent barely 10 percent of its total Zoroastrian strength.) "How can those who are not members of their anjuman resolve their problems. If the anjuman can't (help), the Federation can't (due to its constitution which forbids intervention in the internal affairs of an anjuman or discussion of controversial issues), then the only option is for him to go to the Press," said an agitated Grant.

"Anjumans/punchayets have been formed to give people representation in the administration of affairs of their anjuman. If they don't become members, exercise rights, it's their own fault," replied Gandhi. "If you've got guts, change. Take up cudgels. That's what we did in Bombay," Kanga added.

"A leadership which, for outdated reasons, debar itself from controversial issues, especially when the community itself is involved in them, excludes itself from problem solving," wrote Moddie in a detailed criticism of the Federation's working, a copy of which he had forwarded to *Parsiana* in advance. But since even the principal office bearers of the Federation had not had an occasion to study the contents (it had reached them that same day), discussion was deferred to the next meeting. "I think we should face criticism and see where we are wrong," was Golwalla's view.

Moddie impressed on the Federation "to get more serious and purposeful about its business, justify costs, man-days spent and productivity, and develop a psychology of wider public accountabil-

ity for results. The anjumans themselves have to function more actively to help become more functional." At this meeting itself, Gandhi's frequent comment, "I am sorry to say you are not reading the minutes," or Bodhanwalla's attempts to gear the discussions back to the subject at hand when the speakers tended to stray, or the non-observance of the time limit set for different topics, justified Moddie's criticisms.

Those attending the Federation meeting were: Gayomard Kasad and Porus Karanjawalla from Ahmedabad; Capt Homi Dandiwalla from Allahabad; Pervez Mehta from Bardoli; Shavak Patel and Ms Binaifer Bavaadam from Baroda; Dr Aspi Golwalla, Eruch Desai, Jamshed Guzder, Jamsheed Kanga, Minoo Shroff, Rustom Anklesaria, Ms Gool Tata, Ms Sheroo Master and Peshotan Nargolwala from Bombay; Darius Marshall from Calicut; Ms Banoogoshasp Irani from Dahanu; Lt Gen Adi Sethna, Keki Gandhi and Homi Taleyarkhan from Delhi; Edulji Dumasia from Dumas; Aspi Irani and Pervez Irani from the Iranian Zoroastrian Anjuman; Fardoon Adajania from Jalgaon; Homi Bodhanwalla and Pesi Tarapore from Jamshedpur; Ronny Dick from Jhansi; Dr Meherji Cooper and Ms Perviz Bhote from Madras; Dastur Meherji Meherjirana from Navsari; Meher Anklesaria, Dinshaw Anklesaria, Minoo Irani and Brig Noshir Grant from Poona; Homi Palsetia from Saronda; Dr Sam Bhacca, Davar Kavasji Modi and Sorab Katpitia from Surat; Rustom Cursetji, Pervez Bhesania and Dinyar Mehta from Thana; Dr Bahadur Jokhi, Parvez Amaria, Persi Buhariwala and Farrokh Kasad from Vyara-Songadh; Ms Soonoo Vesuna from Vesu; and Dinshaw Tamboli from the WZO. The Press was represented by *The Bombay Samachar* and *Parsiana*.

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A portrait of poverty

To bring about an awareness of the plight of the poor Zoroastrian farmers, the World Zoroastrian Organisation has produced a video film

Gustasp Irani



The camera focuses on the wrinkled face of an old lady. She looks away self-consciously as an uncertain smile plays across her toothless mouth. It is the face of the rural Parsis in Gujarat. It was in Gujarat that a handful of the community's forefathers settled; it was here that their numbers and wealth grew and flourished. In many ways Gujarat served as the economic backbone of the community for centuries. Then somewhere in time, and more so in the recent past, the old order changed: Parsi farmers started to uproot themselves, sell their lands in

exchange for an urban setting. Parsis have disappeared from the face of 128 villages in three districts of south Gujarat over a period of 18 years, according to the survey conducted by Ms Cashmera Bhaya (see *Parsiana*, March 1989). A few however held on to their rural roots. Among them, some are still prosperous; most are poverty-ridden, uncertain about their future, unhappy custodians of the community's heritage.

The World Zoroastrian Organisation (WZO) produced video film titled *Unbelievable* takes the viewer into the heartland of rural Gujarat to explore the plight of their less fortunate co-religionists

Interiors of Parsi farmhouses

there. It covers three villages near Navsari. Perhaps what is most striking in the film is that in comparison to the adivasi or tribal farmer, the Parsi farmer comes out second best.

The lush golden yellow sunflower fields, we are informed, belong to a tribal farmer. His well is sturdy with stone in-laid walls. His Parsi neighbor's holding, by contrast, is small, his only source of water is monsoon rains and, for a price, his neighbor's well. While the adivasi is able to harvest three crops a year, the Parsi must be content with one. The adivasi, we learn from district government officials accompanying the WZO team shown on the video, has been able to achieve prosperity as a result of govern-



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ment subsidies aimed at lifting him up from his backwardness. The Parsi must fend for himself. The paradox, as one WZO member accompanying the film crew points out: "The Parsis are now the underprivileged class."

"It is difficult to believe that there are Parsis living in such conditions," says Homyar Mistry, director of the video film. "The title of the film — *Unbelievable* — came naturally," he adds. According to him, people do not believe it when informed that the net annual income of many a rural Parsi family in Gujarat is Rs 1,000. "It's true they might be earning around Rs 12,000 a year but when you allow for expenses, the balance is about Rs 1,000. It works out to less than Rs 100 per month."

"The figures are authentic enough." Dinshaw Tamboli, vice chairperson, executive committee, WZO India, assures us. "We do not blindly accept the estimates given by the Parsi farmers themselves. We have a technical committee which makes its own assessment." The technical committee, according to Tamboli, comprises a retired conservator of forests, Phiroze Panthaky and two prosperous Parsi agriculturists, Farokh Kasad and Khushru Deboo. Assisting the team is Pervez Italia, a mechanical engineer turned farmer. More than assessing the Parsi farmers' income they also assess the farmers' needs, advise them about new cropping methods and techniques, and assist them wherever possible.

"The objective of the video film is to project before the Zoroastrians of the world the conditions of our poor co-re-



(Above and center)
*The face of the rural
Parsis in Gujarat:
holding on to their
roots*

(Below) *Laboring to
improve the land
yield: the Parsis are
now the
underprivileged class
surviving under
difficult conditions*

Photos: Homyar Mistry,
Homz Prints



ligionists and seek support to better their lot," says Tamboli. The sub-objective is to stem the flight of Parsis from the rural areas to urban centers, especially Bombay. This, Tamboli believes, can only be achieved if the land becomes economically viable. To be economically viable it must be able to produce two or three crops annually. This, in turn, can only be done with assistance in the form of equipment and facilities provided by the community as a whole.

For the first time in many years the Parsi farmers are getting aid from the more fortunate members of their community, says Tamboli. Apart from the active participation of the technical team, arrangements have been made with the Gujarat Agricultural College to conduct special programs in growing cash crops and on new methods of cultivation.

Furthermore, direct assistance is being



given to Parsi farmers in the form of bulls, pumps and other farming equipment, and even in the construction of wells. About eight lakh rupees have already been collected, Tamboli informs us. Of this sum, six lakhs have been invested in aid to the farmers. It is the rural welfare committee of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India under whose auspices the Surat Parsi Punchayet (SPP), the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) and the WZO are jointly functioning. The BPP and the SPP have contributed two lakhs each while other trusts and institutions have given about Rs 60,000. The WZO, to date, has contributed Rs 3.5 lakhs and has commitments and pledges adding to another four lakhs towards this effort. Two individual

*Top: The WZO team of volunteers with some rural Parsis
Center and right: Glimpses of the frugal lifestyle of Zoroastrian agriculturists*

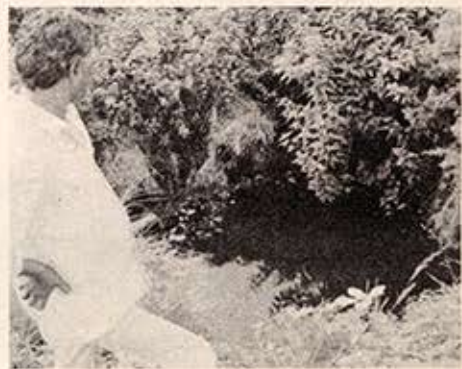
donors have distributed Rs 1,32,501 in the form of clothes and food grains, and a container of 101 cartons of clothes and shoes collected by the Parsis of the UK was shipped to Bombay to be distributed to Parsis living in the rural areas of Gujarat.

"The aim of our project is not to make them (the rural Parsis) dependent but self-reliant," says Tamboli. He shows us a bulging folder with requests for assistance. Each application is studied and if the needs of the farmer are genuine, he is

The Parsi farmers are steeped in the culture of poverty

given whatever assistance the constraints of finance permit. The exercise does not end here. There are follow-up visits to see how the farmer is faring. Tamboli shows us a letter from one farmer who was presented with two bulls to plough his fields. In the letter the farmer states that he cannot afford to maintain the animals and is therefore returning them. "Because we keep a track of things, he has returned the bulls. Otherwise he might have sold them and pocketed the money. Now we can give them to some other Parsi farmer," says Tamboli. He adds that all equipment given to the farmers remain the property of the donor, hence the beneficiary cannot dispose of it as he chooses. "We enter into legal contracts with them," he says as he shows us a file where these officially stamped documents are stored.

One problem that impedes the recipients is attitudes. "These people (the Parsi farmers) are steeped in the culture of poverty. Their mental blocks have to be



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breached," says Tamboli. From the organizational end the problem is lack of manpower. "It is not a question of giving them money and equipment and forgetting about it. We need people to regularly go to the villages and follow up." After the video had been shown on the cable TV networks in most of the Parsi baugs in Bombay and at a public screening at All-bless Baug many contacted Tamboli with requests to organize trips to the rural areas. "But we need more. We need a commitment of time." Among those who are ready to make this commitment, apart from the members of the technical committee, is Davar Kavasji Modi, member of the WZO and trustee of the SPP, who is looking after the affairs of the villages around Surat.

The area around Valsad remains unactivated yet. In fact, the selection of the districts of Navsari and Surat are not arbitrary but based on Bhaya's survey, an effort co-sponsored by the WZO, the BPP and the SPP, to assess the conditions of the rural Parsis in Gujarat.

The proposal to make such a film had been tossed around for some time. Mistry recalls that he had been informed about it three to four years ago but nothing came

of it. Then almost overnight the project materialized; Homi Taleyarkhan, chairperson, WZO India, was the catalyst. He arranged to visit the rural Parsis of Gujarat in his official capacity as a senior member of the Minorities Commission. A convoy of 13 jeeps with local district officials and WZO members buzzed the village trail for two days, taking in the plight and condition of the Parsis there. Many of them recorded their impressions on the video: Aspi Irani, Kersi Limathwalla, Zal Contractor, Dara Deboo, among others. Also actively involved in the project is Dastur Meherji Meherjirana, High Priest of the Navsari Atash Bahram. The common thread that binds these people together, regardless of the various organizations they represent, is the concern for the poor farmer.

Outdoor filming was not new to Mistry. "Before photography, mountain climbing was my first love. I knew such conditions and had been filming in them; it was not a new experience for me. I knew what to expect and what to take along," he observes. Some of his footage beautifully evoked the rural ethos — hens pecking at unwashed utensils, a pair of dusty shoes lovingly hung up on the walls

of a mud hut, people walking barefoot through slushy trails, farmers in sudreh and kusti... the nuances are delicate in parts.

If the film lacked slickness it was a result of the limited budget — Rs 15,000 only. The interviews with the farmers in Gujarati are subtitled in English for the benefit of Zoroastrians abroad and Iranian Zoroastrians who might have difficulty following the language.

"The video film is a record of how things were," Mistry makes a point of using the past tense. "Already as a result of this film, things have changed and the conditions of the Parsi farmers are improving." To illustrate the point he refers to the fact that panthakies of some agiaries are complaining. Formerly many of the Parsis came to the city to work as *chasniwallas* after harvesting their only seasonal crop. Now, with the assistance that they are getting, and their ability to work round the year in their fields, reaping three crops in the process, they have informed their panthakies that they will not be coming back to do menial work at the agiaries. That is the greatest reward for the dedicated team working for the welfare of the Parsi agriculturists.

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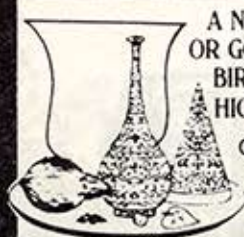
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*Disregarding the inconvenience
they brought upon themselves, men of conviction fought
for the values they cherished*

Zoroastrianism makes of life a battlefield with the righteous ranged against the forces of evil. Small wonder then that even more than the spirit to pioneer, the urge to reform is inbred in the community and has found expression in various spheres of public life like civic administration, banking and the world of finance, education and social reform. "Is" and "has?" Actually it is all in the past tense, for the urge to reform seems no longer to be there and has been replaced within the community by petty, pointless bickerings and internecine feuds. The lessons of the past need to be learnt today, not only by Parsis but by all communities.

Much has been written about the Parsi pioneers. Dadabhoi Naoroji, the Grand Old Man of India, was undoubtedly the greatest of them all. Lokamanya Tilak once commented that Dadabhoi's political views were of a professor rather than the leader of an oppressed people. But Mahatma Gandhi returning to Bombay on board the *S. S. Pilsna* in December 1931 from the Round Table Conference put Dadabhoi's achievements in the proper perspective by saying that in the circumstances then prevailing Dadabhoi's policy was "the right one" and that were he living in 1931, "he would follow the same policy that I have been pursuing for the last few years."

There were also other Parsi pioneers like the Wadias who laid the foundations

of the shipbuilding industry, the Tatas of the steel and other industries, Godrejs who were the first to manufacture soap out of vegetable oils and steel safety and other equipment, and early Parsi traders who by travelling to far-off China provided the beginnings of international trade.

But the zeal to reform with which we are concerned in this article more closely touches our daily lives. Take civic administration as an example. Bombay, which Rudyard Kipling described as "no mean city" but which another writer denigrated as "a charnel-house in which two monsoons were the age of a man," was one of the cities in the world to know a variety of municipal governments. But since they were found in practice to obstruct and counteract one another, the whole municipal executive authority was, by the Act of 1865, vested in a single commissioner under the control of the first nominated Corporation of Bombay with a seal, the Bench of Justices. But the justices as aediles had proved a signal failure, unable to exercise any control over the commissioner. It was argued hotly, particularly by Pherozeshah Mehta, that nominated members rarely possess the qualities and virtues to ensure civic success. So by the Act of 1872, 50 of the Corporation's 60 members were to be elected by the rate-payers. Since the responsibility of paying the rates had recently been transferred as a

measure of convenience from the tenants to landlords, the latter became legally rate-payers and got the vote. The election principle was still excitingly new. For better and, alas, also for worse, it transformed and enlivened the working of the corporation.

Today, when unparliamentary language is the rule rather than the exception in corporation meetings and councillors are known even to come to blows, it is pertinent to recall what Sir Pherozeshah Mehta had to say about this in a motion of order moved on April 20, 1905: "Freedom of expression and debate is a valuable privilege which I shall always strictly support. At the same time there are restraints imposed by well-understood rules which are founded upon the good feeling and courtesy of members for the maintenance of peace and suppression of disorder. One of these rules is that no member ought to use expressions which are offensive or insulting to members of the House individually or collectively or are disrespectful to the House."

The Bombay Municipal Corporation can take pride in two things above all others — a fairly streamlined system of committee management, and freedom from day-to-day interference by the Government. How this came about makes for interesting reading. It has been said of committees that they have neither a soul to be damned nor a body to be kicked! A

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persistent paradox of municipal working was that much was discussed and quite a lot decided, but little was actually accomplished. The practice for years of referring individual cases to separate committees resulted in a lack of coordination and a multiplicity of pending cases. The Hon'ble Mr (later Sir) Phiroze Sethna gave notice of motion recommending the appointment of special committees for special subjects. Accordingly the municipal secretary Rustom Masani was deputed to study at firsthand the system of committee work in the London County Council and other important municipalities in England and certain countries of Europe. After his study tour Masani submitted a report in December 1921 building up a strong case for efficient committee management. The report was adopted and a bill to amend the Municipal Act accordingly was passed. The effect was dramatic. Of the 45 committees functioning at the end of 1921, 18 were not reconstituted at all. Of the remaining 27, nine were retained and the remaining 17 were amalgamated into seven committees so that the total number became 16! And strangely, not a corporator shed tears over the passing of so many of the old committees, although whispers were heard against the alleged high-handed manner in which members for the various special committees were appointed.

The independence of the Corporation was hard-won. It brought the then municipal commissioner (Sir) Rustom Masani in sharp conflict with the governor of Bombay, Lord George Lloyd, an imperious satrap who, in those early days of the Civil Disobedience Movement, had against the counsel of trusted advisers resorted to the drastic steps of deporting B. G. Horniman and arresting Gandhiji. Departing from the traditional practice of appointing the municipal commissioner to the board of the Port Trust, Lloyd had on his own asked the Indian Merchants Chamber to nominate a non-official mem-

ber. Masani, who didn't believe in mincing words, publicly referred to this as a "blunder." Lloyd was not a person who could be lightly offended. As expected,

under the circumstances. It was he, Masani, who was the aggrieved party, since he felt that a word of explanation was due to him, as a matter of courtesy if nothing

else, as to why Government had decided to make a departure for the first time from the established practice.

"Explanation?" exclaimed the governor. "Has any Government ever given an explanation to its officer?" "That is the blunder," Masani rejoined quietly. "I am not your officer. I am an officer of the Corporation who was invited to accept the office of commissionership." He pointed out that as a servant of the Corporation, his loyalty was only to the Corporation.

At a dinner held on his retirement from the commissionership, Masani enunciated the motto that had steadfastly been his: "My caste, the Corporation; my creed, the Corporation; my party, the Corporation." All, he claimed modestly, brushing aside the glowing tributes showered on him, was "a little credit for the most spontane-

ous, most willing and unfailing adherence to the policy of strict neutrality which I had laid down for myself." Actually, his claim to the Corporation's gratitude was a more positive and far-reaching one. If as deputy municipal commissioner his major contribution was reform of the committee system, as municipal commissioner it was that, siding with the Corporation against the Government, he helped to restore the supremacy of that august body. Masani has often been credited with having been the first Indian municipal commissioner. Credit should really be his that he was the first municipal commissioner to correctly define and demonstrate the commissioner's constitutional position vis-a-vis the Corporation on the one hand and Government on the other.

It was another Parsi, Sorabji Pochkhanavala, who conceived the daring idea of a banking institution wholly Indian in outlook and approach and having the de-



Clockwise from top left: Zealous reformers Bomonji Wadia, Pochkhanavala, Rustom Masani and Sethna

Photo: Parsi Lustré on Indian Soil, Vol I, 1939

Masani received a communication from the private secretary that His Excellency wished to see him in Poona.

Lloyd began that meeting by reminding Masani that he had appointed him municipal commissioner in spite of the opposition from some of his officers who were naturally averse to the Indian Civil Service being deprived of a prize appointment, because he knew that Masani was a popular officer and he wished to encourage him. But what did he find? During his regime he had received resolutions from the Municipal Corporation couched in language never before used by it. Not only that (producing a printed report of Masani's speech regarding the commissioner's non nomination to the Port Trust), His Excellency added that no municipal commissioner in the past had used such language with reference to the Government. Politely but firmly Masani pointed out that the language was justified

velopment of indigenous enterprise as its main objective.

The latter half of the nineteenth century saw two banks spring up that were to illumine the financial horizon. One was the Bank of India resting securely on honest and efficient management and with a resourceful and powerful directorate at its helm. Among the first to join the service of the bank was the young Sorabji Pochkhanavala on a salary of Rs 20 a month. Frustration was his lot which, however, led him to found the Central Bank of India with the cotton merchant, Kalianji Jetsy as his main supporter and with the redoubtable Sir Pherozeshah Mehta as its chairman.

The Central Bank of India was accordingly born on December 21, 1911, with its registered office in Bombay. The first issue of 40,000 shares of the total face value of Rs 20 lakhs was taken up in less than three months, half the amount being paid-up. Deposits from the public mounted steadily, the net profit at the year's end was Rs 62,000 and a maiden dividend of six percent was declared. The foundation was so securely laid that the Bank was able to survive the financial crisis of 1913, which

felled as many as 64 banks, as well as World War I which dislocated trade and industry throughout the world. Its authorized and paid-up capital were progressively increased and branches were opened in Calcutta, Karachi, Lahore and other important centers. In 1923, the Central Bank took over the management of the Union Bank of India and amalgamated with the Tata Industrial Bank so that its paid-up capital grew to Rs 16,800,000 as against Rs 10,000,000 of the Bank of India. As the then finance minister of the viceroy's executive council declared: "Among the services which the Central Bank has rendered to India, possibly not the least pregnant with results for the future, has been its absorption of the Tata Industrial Bank."

It was in the sphere of education that the zeal to reform of two vice-chancellors of Bombay University, Sir Rustom Masani and later Sir Bomonji Wadia, was most strikingly evident and with the most far-reaching consequences. The Sargeant Report of 1944 had pointed out the glaring shortcomings in Indian university education such as undue emphasis on examinations and on book learning as contrasted with original thinking, lack of con-

tacts between teachers and the taught, the craze for amassing degrees and the shortage of universities. Along with his predecessor Dr John McKenzie, Masani was responsible for making long-neglected Indian languages — Marathi, Gujarati, Urdu and Kannada — the subjects of honors courses. A journal was launched with a view to promoting research by teachers and students and encouraging the publication of original articles, abstracts of theses and reviews of books. By encouraging the Deccan College to conduct the first Gujarat Prehistoric Expedition in 1941, a tradition of archaeological research by universities was established. In the context of World War II then raging, a scheme to provide military training to undergraduates was initiated. The Bombay Presidency Adult Education Association was encouraged to widen and intensify its activities.

Education in those days had its roots in religion and there was sufficient evidence, according to Masani, to hail Zarathushtra as the first apostle of adult education. As the fountainhead of all knowledge, he could be identified with the teachings of his disciples which speak specifically of the duty of giving adult

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education. He who has little knowledge, but shares it, offers a love-service more acceptable to Ahura Mazda than one who knows a lot but keeps his knowledge to himself. This love-service Masani exemplified in himself and enjoined upon teachers and students alike.

In the municipality Masani had come across cases of nepotism. To encounter them in an academic institution was more of a shock. One way to curb the evil was by personal example. Coming across his son Minoo's name in the list of examiners for the LL.B. examination, he immediately struck it off. The Dean of Law who had recommended Minoo protested that he had got it on his own merit, but Masani was adamant that as long as he was vice-chancellor his son could not be on the examiners list. At dinner that evening Masani casually mentioned what had happened at the University meeting. "There is far too much of this sort of thing in the country and I won't add to it," he told his son. Minoo who was at the time a struggling young barrister with few briefs replied: "Do you realize, papa, you've deprived me of the chance to earn Rs 2,000?" Masani said nothing, but after

dinner went to his study and emerged five minutes later to hand the astonished son a cheque for Rs 2,000. "Here's the income you lost," he said. Minoo did not cash the cheque — it was too precious a memento of integrity in public life.

The zeal to reform in various spheres of public life appears to be vanishing now; within the community itself it is nowhere in evidence. In an age of equality between the sexes, it does seem anachronistic that while the children of Parsi fathers who marry outside the community are accepted within the fold, the children of Parsi mothers are denied the privilege. Housing poses a burning problem. We have these so-called charity blocks dotted all over the city, with Mercedes cars parked in their compounds. We have composed a special proverb, charity begins with the rich. I know of a top executive of an industrial empire, drawing over Rs 15,000 a month, who occupied a charity flat to the end of his days. At the same time scores of couples are unable to marry for lack of a roof over their heads. And we talk of our dwindling numbers... We need a Pherozeshah Mehta or a Rustom Masani to solve these problems, not

puppeteers with their silken strings.

Forget the living, even the disposal of our dead rouses unseemly controversy. Consigning our dead to the vultures might have been based on highly hygienic principles, but when there aren't enough vultures to divide the spoils, surely the problem needs to be discussed dispassionately? Or shall we start vulture-breeding farms? If only half the zeal being displayed in fruitless controversies were to be devoted to finding cool and sensible solutions! There mayn't be much of pioneering left for us, but there's still a hell of a lot open for reform.

Among his writings, the author Burjor K. Karanjia rates *Portrait of a Citizen*, a biography of his mentor Sir Rustom Masani, as his best work. He did also have an occasion to work with Masani as literary assistant at the National War Front. Former editor of *Screen* and *Filmfare* magazines, Karanjia was chairman of the National Film Development Corporation. For several years he was the public relations manager of Godrej and Boyce.



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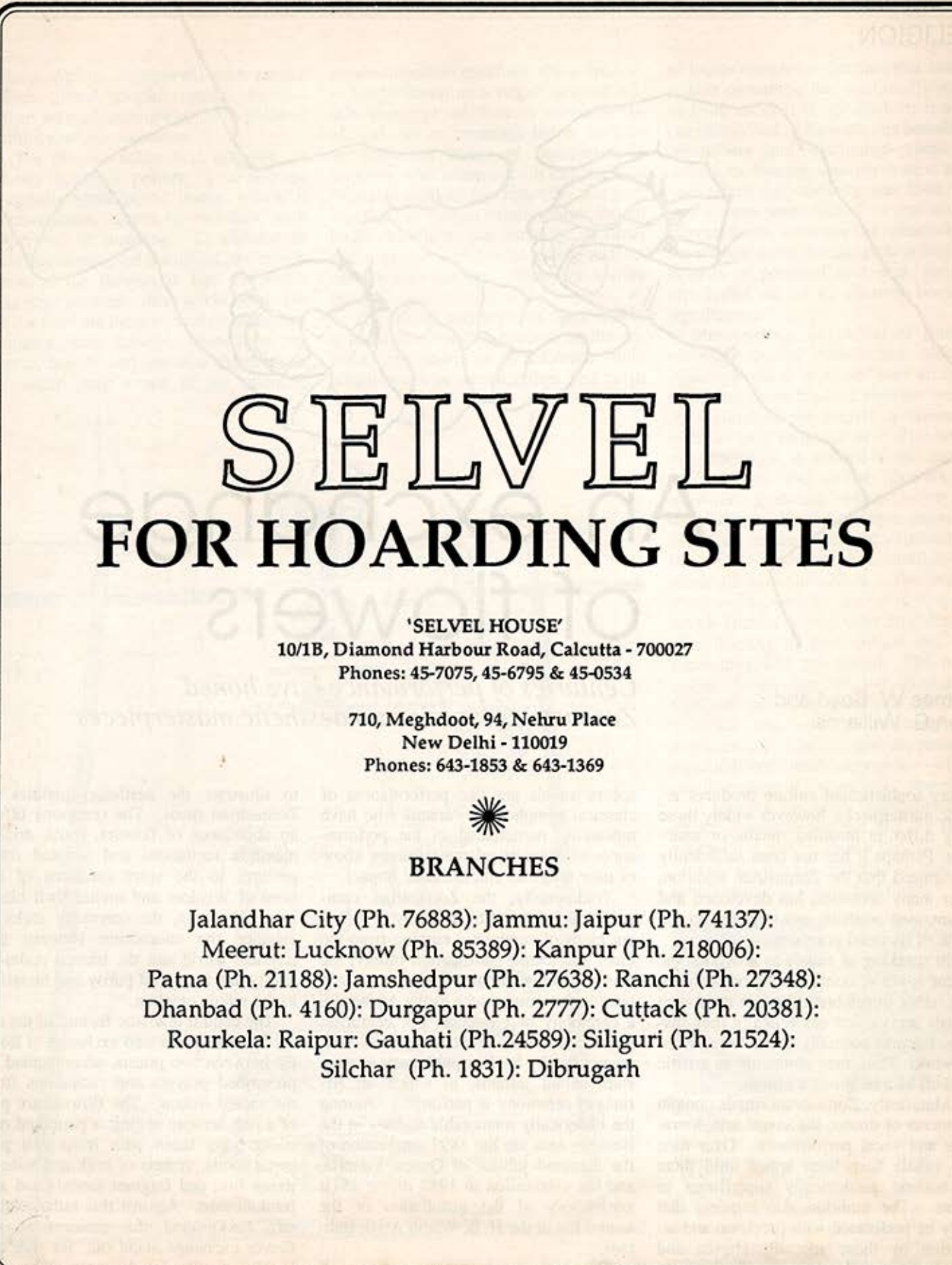
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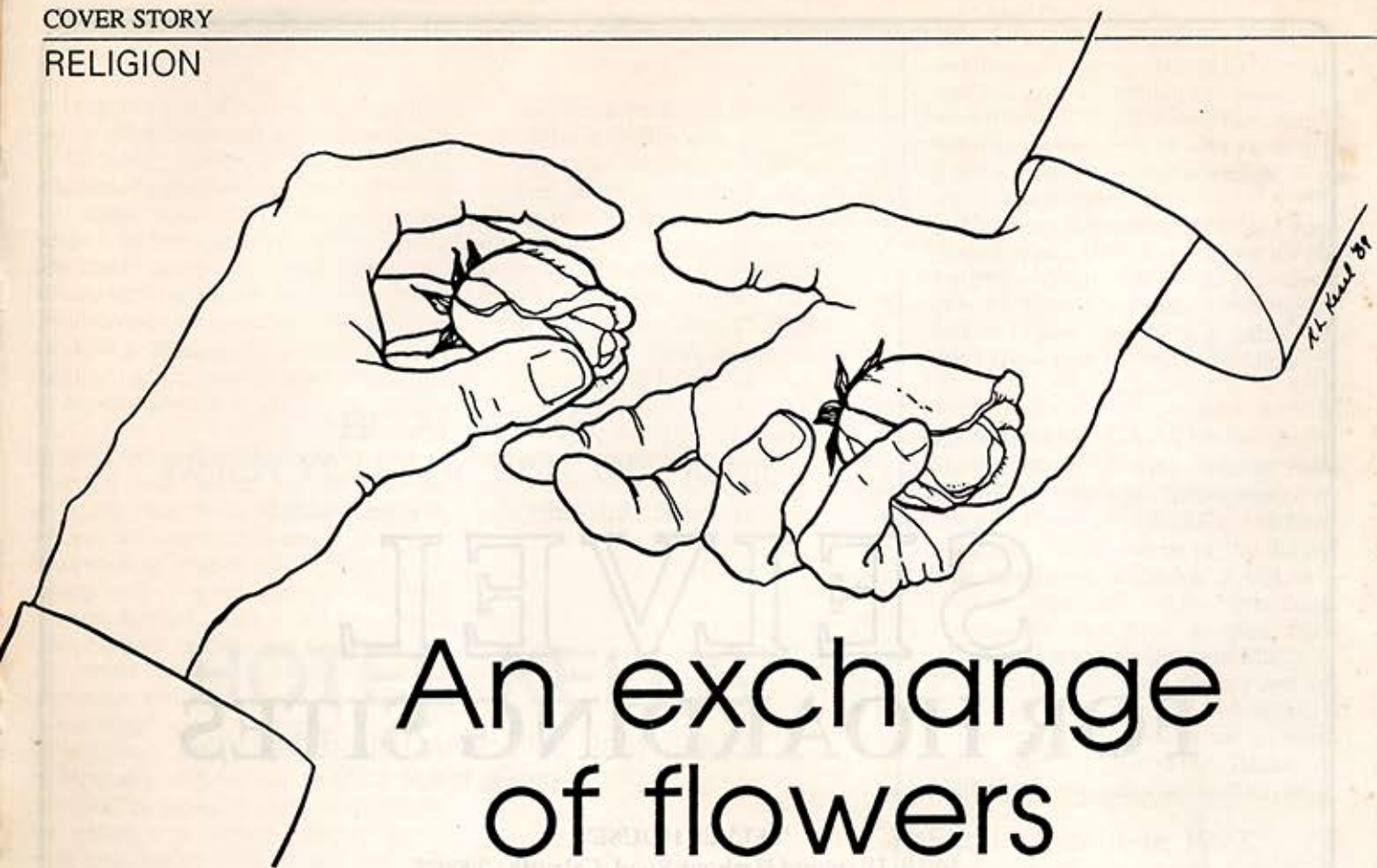
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An exchange of flowers

James W. Boyd and
Ron G. Williams

*Centuries of performance have honed
Zoroastrian rituals into aesthetic masterpieces*

Every sophisticated culture produces artistic masterpieces, however widely these may differ in meaning, media or structure. Perhaps it has not been sufficiently recognized that the Zoroastrian tradition, over many centuries, has developed and maintained aesthetic masterpieces in the form of its ritual practices.

In speaking of rituals as artworks, the intent is not to confuse religion with art, but rather to celebrate the fact that when rituals are viewed aesthetically they display features normally attributed to masterworks. Thus, they constitute an artistic as well as a religious tradition.

Manifestly, Zoroastrian rituals contain elements of drama, the visual arts, literature and vocal performance. Over time the rituals have been honed until there is nothing aesthetically superfluous in them. The tradition also requires that they be performed with precision and attention by those specially chosen and highly trained for the task. In these re-

spects, rituals are like performances of classical symphonies. Persons who have repeatedly participated in the performances of these ritual masterpieces know of their religious and aesthetic impact.

Traditionally, the Zoroastrian community is informed by a variety of different kinds of ceremony, ranging from the inner fire-temple purification liturgy, the Yasna, to those rituals which can be held outside the temple, such as the Afrinagan, a ceremony of blessings. For centuries, major community events have been commemorated by holding public acts of worship, called jashans, in which an Afrinagan ceremony is performed. Among the historically memorable jashans in the Bombay area are the 1897 celebration of the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria, and the celebration in 1980 of the 151st anniversary of the installation of the sacred fire at the H. B. Wadia Atash Bahram.

The Afrinagan ceremony serves well

to illustrate the aesthetic qualities of Zoroastrian ritual. The ceremony offers an abundance of flowers, fruits, drinks, mantric recitations and scripted ritual gestures to the spirit creations of the Lord of Wisdom and invites their blessings. As such, the ceremony seeks to enhance the connection between this physical world and the unseen realm of reality and to extend purity and blessings to the whole creation.

The central dramatic feature of the ritual is a thrice repeated exchange of flowers between two priests, accompanied by prescribed prayers and recitations from the sacred *Avesta*. The flowers are part of a rich sensory setting: a patterned rug, silver trays laden with fruits and prepared foods, vessels of milk and wine, a living fire, and fragrant sandalwood and frankincense. Against this rather elaborate background the gestures of the flower exchange stand out, for they are highly articulated and simple. They pos-

sess a rhythm interspersed with pauses which create elegant, posed images. When enacted attentively, these gestures exhibit aesthetic rightness.

The flower exchange is not only an ideally beautiful gesture, it is also an enigmatic visual/poetic image, which, if contemplated, seems to overflow with an excess of meaning. In addition to possible theological meanings (the movement of the flowers is like the soul's journey between this world and the next), there are the universal meanings associated with flowers: abundance, renewal, brevity and seasonal rhythms, all of which may evoke in the attentive

person important questions about life.

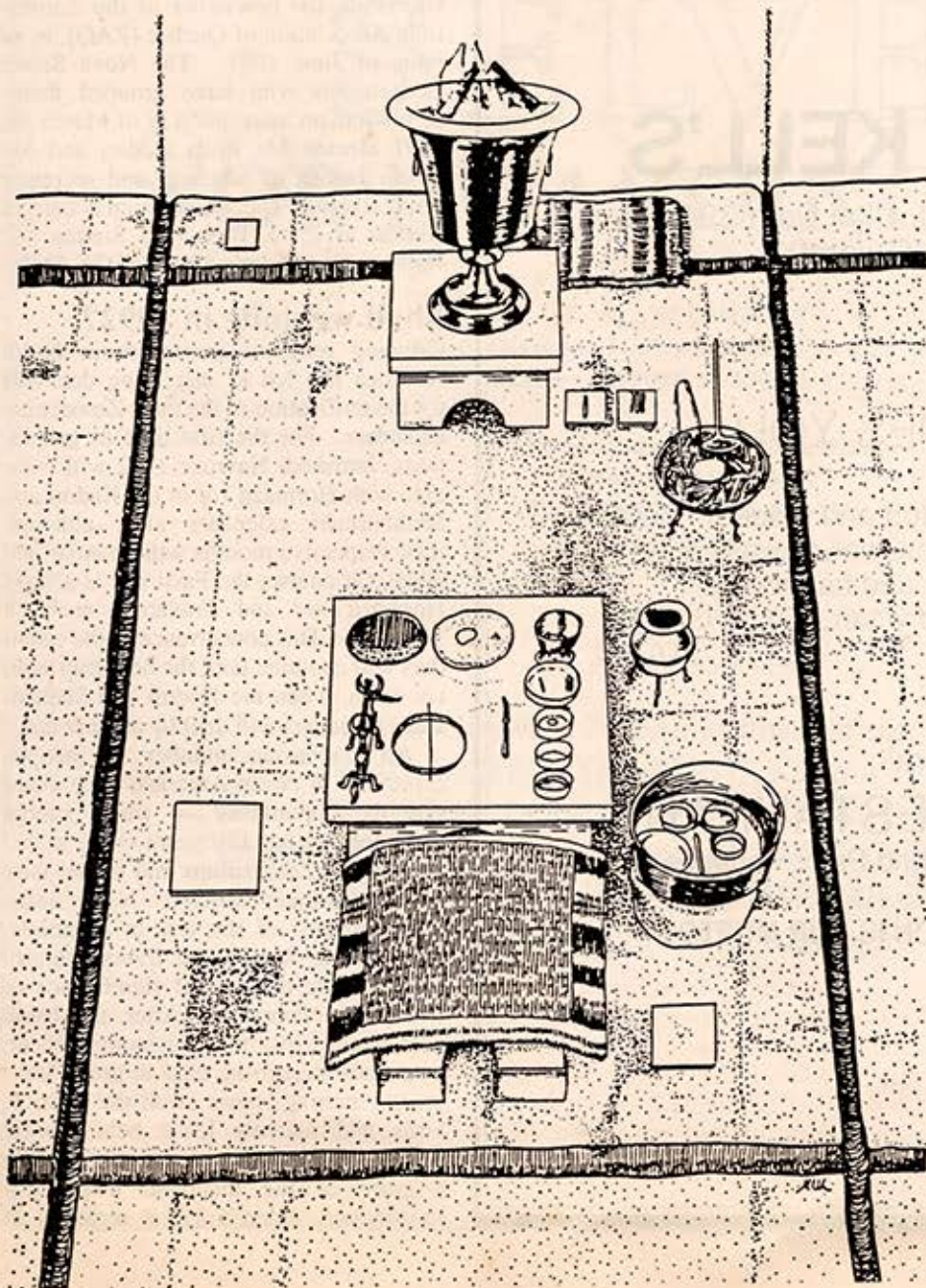
Furthermore, as a simple gestural act, this exchange of flowers conveys not just one set of meanings but is open to an unlimited range of interpretations by those who witness it. It can act as a visual metaphor, for example, suggesting that all human relationships should be as graceful as this exchange of flowers: a simple and honest giving and receiving between two exemplary human beings.

The flower exchange, in other words, is like a "horizon." A horizon, on the one hand, can serve as a reference point which gives us our bearings and helps

us locate ourselves. On the other hand, it is also something that continually recedes from us as it is approached; it never can be reached. Likewise, this beautifully compelling and disciplined ritual exchange of flowers may serve as a reference point for orienting our lives, and at the same time remind us that no one interpretation exhausts its possibilities. As a ritual gesture it suggests a limitless horizon of potential meanings, continually luring us on to discover levels of significance.

The aesthetic dimension of ritual is essential to its power and efficacy. Although ritual is more than art, it is important to understand that the artistry of a ritual is not merely a decorative addition to a religious act. The artistic dimensions of a refined ritual provide the symbols and forms (flowers and rhythmic gestures) which allow the ceremony to convey multiple meanings. The very nature of artistic expression is the subtle, complex and multi-leveled mode of communication. The arts, in other words, provide a kind of language which enables a people to articulate the rich diversity of their culture and their encounters with the sacred. The multi-valent dimensions of the Zoroastrian tradition, including its ethical, aesthetic, historical and religious teachings and practices, are mirrored and suggested in its established ritual celebrations — in the simple gesture of exchanging flowers.

It follows that ritual masterpieces are artistic masterpieces, and that the rituals which have played such a central role in Zoroastrian life for centuries are aesthetic achievements of the highest order.



Scholars involved in the field of ritual studies, Professors James Boyd (left) and Ron Williams belong to the University of Colorado's department of philosophy. They have collaborated on a book titled *Ritual Art and Knowledge, Aesthetic Theory and Zoroastrian Ritual* awaiting publication. Boyd's forte has been the history of philosophy and comparative religion. Williams entered the study of philosophy via physics, with special interest in aesthetics.

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continued from page 30

her husband Phiroze and the children — migrated to Canada. Her elder son Farahad has now completed his master's in microbiology, Ervad Zubin, the younger, is a mechanical engineer who wants to be a pilot, daughter Natasha intends to opt for physiotherapy.

Dastoor's Zoroastrian faith and background in psychiatry have shaped her philosophy of living: "What you are today is only by chance. Anytime, anything can happen to you. Live life as it comes. We don't know what is there is the future..."

Launching ZAAC

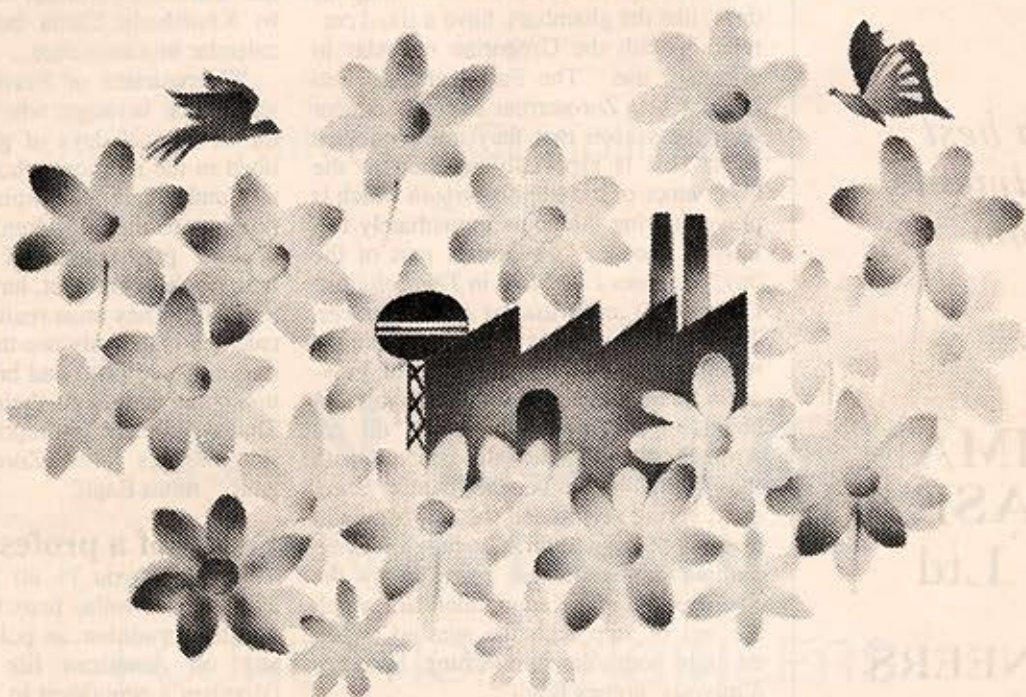
Shahpur Bhathena is the founding chairman of the Zoroastrian Association of Atlantic Canada (ZAAC), informs *Gavashni*, the newsletter of the Zoroastrian Association of Quebec (ZAQ), in its issue of June 1991. The Nova Scotia Zoroastrians who have grouped themselves into an association as of March 31, 1991 elected Ms Roda Godrej and Ms Shirin Jagosh as treasurer and secretary respectively. The Association's current address is P. O. Box 8382 Station 'A' Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada B3K 5M1.

Shall we unite in 1992?

Growing religious awareness in North America has led to increasing demands for the unification of the three Zoroastrian calendars. For the first time in generations, Jamshedi Navroze 1992 will coincide with Hormazd *roj* in the Kadmi and Shehenshahi calendars also, although their respective months will be Adar and Avan. Of course, the Fasli day is always Hormazd *roj* and Fravardin *mah* on March 21. This concurrence of the calendars will continue until the next leap year, i.e. 1996, when the Kadmi and Shehenshahi calendars will drift by another day.

An increasing number of people, especially in North America, have urged that the opportunity — which cannot recur for another 120 years — be seized to unite all Zoroastrians and revive their common Iranian heritage. Notes Shah-rokh Vafadari of the UK in an article, "One has to live on the Iranian plateau to appreciate the natural significance of (Jamshedi Navroze). After the harsh cold winter, overnight blossoms appear, bare trees start to be clad in green leaves, the melting snows swell the streams, birds and animals leave behind their winter hibernation and everything with a grace of life manifests a physical resurrection. (March 21) is regarded as

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nature's day of transformation."

Gavashni, the newsletter of the ZAQ, discussed the issue extensively in its March 1991 issue. According to Dr Jehan Bagli, editor and author of the article titled "Zoroastrian calendar — some questions answered," the Fasli calendar is the only one that maintains the computations by starting with the vernal equinox. Thereby, the main Zoroastrian religious days, like the ghambars, have a fixed correlation with the Gregorian calendar in universal use. The Fasli calendar also ensures that Zoroastrian festivals concur with the season that they are connected with. This is especially relevant to the observance of the Rapihvan *gah* which is prayed during the hours immediately following noon or "the hottest part of the day," as notes J. J. Modi in *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees*. The Rapihvan *gah* is not prayed from the month of Avan until the onset of Fravardin. The praying of the Rapihvan *gah* begins again after the jashan on *roj Ardibehesht*, *mah* Fravardin because with the "vernal equinox, the winter being over, spring sets in and the sun begins to be hotter," says Modi. To pray it during autumn and winter as required by the Shenhshahi and Kadmi calendars which are out of step with the seasons, when daylight hours are diminishing, becomes a travesty, argues Bagli.

Moreover, the Fasli calendar, like the Gregorian, intercalates an additional day (Avarad *sal*) each leap year unlike the Kadmi and Shenhshahi systems where the intercalation of a month every 120 years tends to be forgotten by generations which may be surrounded by other problems and different systems as has happened in India, Bagli further adds.

"The saga of the three calendars presently observed, was started by Zoroastrians in India," writes Bagli. "Somewhere between 1125-1131 AD the community in India corrected their religious calendar by adding an extra month. This was done to get the receding *roj* Hormazd of *mah* Fravardin to coincide with the day of the vernal equinox (March 21). Historical evidence clearly points out that then the major Zoroastrian community of Iran was completely unaware of this intercalation. The result was that the calendar of the Indian community fell behind that of the Iranians by one month.

"History records that this difference of one month revealed itself some six centuries later when Mobed Jamaspa Vilayati visited Surat from Kerman in 1720. After

the return of the Mobed to Iran, some Parsi Zoroastrians arbitrarily decided to follow the computation followed by the Iranians. They called themselves Kadmi, and the others called themselves the Shenhshahi. Thus, the two calendars came into existence. It is for this reason that the Kadmi calendar is one month ahead of the Shenhshahi. Later, in 1906, the Zartoshti Fasli Sal Mandal initiated by Khurshedji Cama brought the Fasli calendar into existence...

"Zoroastrians of North America who value their heritage; who wish to follow the devotional days of ghambar as outlined in the religion; who wish to rationally understand and explain the calendar problem to their children; who value the goal of perpetuation of the Zartoshti faith on this continent, have an obligation to fulfill. They must realize that the Fasli calendar is the only one that can put order into this confusion and bring back all the traditional rituals to their rightful place. That will be the resumption of the tradition on this 'New Zoroastrian Homeland,'" notes Bagli.

Facets of a professor

"We salute you in all your personae: as Dr Adenwalla, feared for your provocative erudition, as political commentator on American life in *Commerce* (Bombay's equivalent to *The Wall Street*



Journal), as an aristocratic Parsi known for your gentlemanly care and concern, and as an adviser and friend with reputation for both gracious advice and firm, paternal

guidance." This tongue-in-cheek citation accompanied \$ 1,000 which constitutes the Excellent Teaching Award at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin. The prize was voted by senior faculty members who were past recipients and came as a total surprise to Dr Minoo Adenwalla, the University's professor of government, as he notes in a letter to *Parsiana*. In 1989, Adenwalla had been awarded the Mary Mortimer Chair in Liberal Studies.

Adenwalla notes that there are currently three Parsi students at Lawrence, which he considers "one of the top undergraduate liberal arts universities in the country." He is anxious to see many



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Young achievers

Ervad Zubin Panthaki, Ms Natasha Dastoor and Bergez Mistry have been admitted to the McGill University's faculty of medicine this year, informs ZAQ president Capt Khushroo Mirza. The school is considered to be one of the best in North America, he writes.

"The son of Dr Nergish and Jal Panthaki who graduated earlier this year with honors in electrical engineering from McGill, Zubin had been awarded the 1988 North American Zoroastrian Student Excellence Award.

Dolly and Dr Phiroze Dastoor's daughter Natasha had studied in the talented and gifted students program at Centennial Regional School. She had attended and stood first in the junior college chemistry program while she was still in school, notes Mirza.

The son of Amy and Capt Faredoon Mistry, Bergez had completed his schooling in Bombay and, earlier, had been awarded the faculty scholarship in chem-

istry at McGill University for standing first.

In its March 1991 issue *Gavashni*, had featured Neville Billimoria, another outstanding student achiever who had been honored at the Houston Congress. An all-rounder with sports and musical skills plus a commitment to community work, Billimoria is proud to be a Zoroastrian, notes the write-up by associate editor Ms Dolly Dastoor. What he most values about Zoroastrianism is that "it gives man the free will to choose the path of righteousness or evil, truth or wisdom, the two main virtues of Zoroastrian ethics," and asks "Did you ever wonder why Zoroastrian youth are so smart in school? It is the effect of religion on our family and ourselves that pushes us to learn."

"This year it will give me great pleasure to present Aimee with an Outstanding Student Award as well as our highest honor, the Monsignor Arthur F. Bukowski Leadership Award," noted R. Paul Nelson, president of Aquinas College



in Michigan, USA in a letter to her father Jimmy Meher-Homji. The 22-year-old extrovert who graduated in political science, computers and econo-

mics had got a scholarship from Aquinas, informs her mother Ratusha.

A squash, gymnastics and drama captain during her school career at the Cathedral and John Connon in Bombay, Aimee is very good at jazz ballet which she studied with veteran dancer Shiamak Davar, adds Ratusha.

Erratum

The write-up on Murzban Morris ("A true citizen," Zoroastrians Abroad, *Parsiana*, July 1991) referred to the movie *An Officer and a Gentleman* as starring Tom Cruise. The movie had starred Richard Gere. The error is regretted.

Compiled by Amavaz S. Mama

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Correspondence invited from Parsi boys up to 31 years of age with good character and good family background for 25-year-old girl, B.Com, medium-built, attractive and fair-complexioned, living in Karnataka. Only Mangals need apply. Please write giving full details with photograph (returnable) to:

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The number one problem...

217 delegates at the Fifth World Zoroastrian Congress responded to a questionnaire on community problems and issues

The declining population was perceived as the number one problem facing the Zoroastrian community, according to the findings of a survey conducted by *Parsiana* of participants at the Fifth World Zoroastrian Congress held in Bombay in January 1990. While 41 percent marked declining population as the primary problem, 10 percent viewed intercommunity marriages, nine percent, housing, one percent, care of the elderly and zero percent, conversion as the most important problem.

Of the 750 questionnaires distributed over two days, 217 were returned; the response rate working out to 29 percent. While studying the results of the survey, readers must keep in mind that the respondents did not represent a cross-section of the community but those who are sufficiently interested in community affairs to attend the Congress and also sufficiently motivated to answer the questionnaire.

The personal data, gleaned from the respondents indicated that nearly 50 percent were in the over 45 age-group, 54 percent were males, 62 percent were married, 78 percent were graduates or postgraduates, and 31 percent were in the Rs 50,000 plus income bracket.

The subjects covered by the question-

naire concerned demography, religion, calendar, life after death and other general issues. The other salient findings showed that 96 percent wore the sudreh-

Forty-five percent expressed their belief in reincarnation. On the subject of conversion, 47 percent felt that the community should not accept converts to Zoroastrianism.

Another trend observed was on the issue of reservation of seats with 66 percent opining that seats should be reserved for Parsis in educational institutions.

Parsiana publishes the findings of the survey. Percentage figures have been rounded off to the nearest whole number. Where the responses do not total 100, it means that the remaining people have not replied to that question. Where respondents have ticked more than one alternative, the percentage figures add up to more than 100.

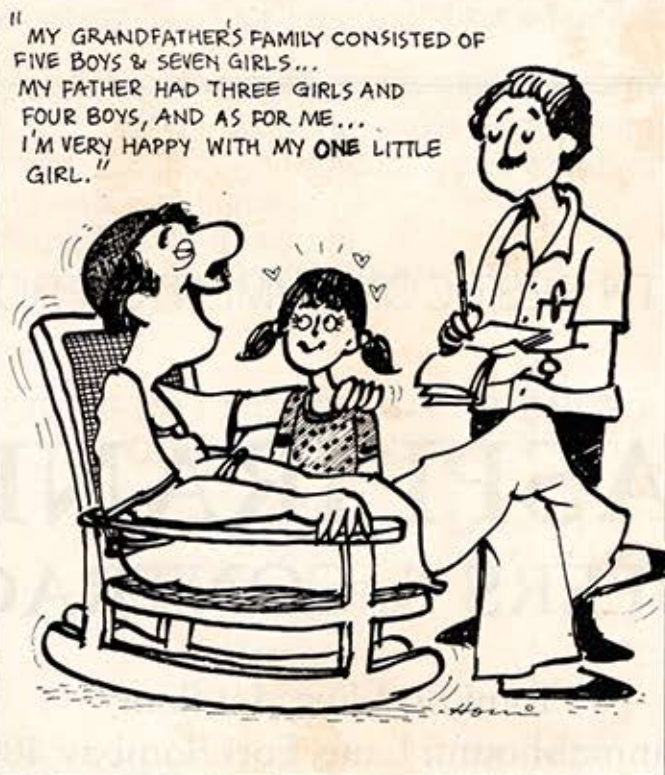
Demography

Question 1: What do you see as the number one problem facing the community?

Declining population: 41%
Housing: 9%
Care of the elderly: 1%
Shortage of priests: 6%
Conversion: 0%

Intercommunity marriages: 10%
Any other: 6%

Question 2 (a): Do you believe that the population of the community is:
Increasing: 0%



kusti and almost 90 percent assured that they would continue wearing the sudreh-kusti as also offering sandalwood despite the increase in prices. Seventy-three percent were in favor of the traditional mode of disposal of the dead, dokhmenashini.

Dwindling: 91%

Steady: 7%

(b): If dwindling, do you believe that the population of the community can be increased?

Yes: 86%

No: 6%

If yes, is it by:

More housing: 45%

Monetary incentives: 28%

Conversion: 16%

Adoption: 16%

Any other: 36%

If no, will the community become extinct?

Yes: 20%

No: 22%

Question 3: Are you in favor of adoption?

Yes: 76%

No: 22%

If yes, would you adopt

(a): Only a Zoroastrian child: 58%

(b): A non-Zoroastrian child: 24%

If you answered yes to (b) then is it because:

(i): A Zoroastrian child is not available: 13%

(ii): A non-Zoroastrian child because he needs a home: 12%

Question 4: How do you rate the facilities for looking after the elderly in your community?

Adequate: 18%

Inadequate: 54%

Totally inadequate: 23%

Question 5: Do you feel that there should be reservation of seats/quotas earmarked for the community?



(a): In educational institutions

Yes: 66%

No: 31%

(b): In government/public jobs

Yes: 47%

No: 45%

Religion

Question 6: Can Zoroastrianism survive if there are no ethnic Parsis or Iranian Zoroastrians?

Yes: 30%

No: 63%

Question 7: Should we accept converts to Zoroastrianism?

Yes: 39%

No: 59%

If you feel they should be accepted, should they be permitted:

(a): To enter fire-temples

Yes: 36%

No: 21%

(b): To be interred in Zoroastrian dokhmas/cemeteries

Yes: 37%

No: 20%

(c): To avail of trust benefits

Yes: 30%

No: 26%

Question 8 (a): Should a non-Zoroastrian spouse, if desirous, be converted to Zoroastrianism?

Yes: 48%

No: 47%

(b): Should a non-Zoroastrian spouse, al-

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though not converted, be permitted to attend:

(i): Religious ceremonies

Yes: 45%

No: 51%

(ii): Socio-religious functions

Yes: 80%

No: 16%

Question 9: Should non-Zoroastrian Iranians, if desirous, be accepted into the religious fold under "reclamation" of persons of Zoroastrian origin?

Yes: 50%

No: 41%

Question 10: Should children of inter-community marriages be admitted into the religious fold?

Yes: 73%

No: 21%

(i): Children of Zoroastrian fathers

Yes: 66%

No: 28%

(ii): Children of Zoroastrian mothers

Yes: 66%

No: 28%

Question 11: Do you wear the sudreh-kusti?

Yes: 96%

No: 4%

If yes, how often do you tie the kusti in a day?

Once: 29%

Twice: 33%

Three times or more often: 32%

Question 12: Will you continue to buy the kusti if the price of kusti keeps increasing?

Yes: 97%

No: 1%

Question 13: Will you continue to buy sandalwood if the price of sandalwood keeps increasing?

Yes: 89%

No: 8%

Question 14: Would you substitute sandalwood by another kind of wood if it were cheaper?

Yes: 29%

No: 64%

Question 15: Is there an agiary (atash-kadeh) in your neighborhood?

Yes: 88%

No: 10%

Question 16 (a): Do you have a family priest?

Yes: 68%

No: 29%

(b): Is there a full-time mobed in your area?

Yes: 83%

No: 13%

Question 17: Do the women in your family 'sit separately' during menstruation?

Yes: 12%

No: 86%

Question 18: Do you know the meaning of the prayers:

(a): Ashem Vohu

Yes: 77%

No: 20%

(b): Yatha Ahu Vairyo

Yes: 75%

No: 23%

Question 19: In which century was Zoroaster born?

6000 BC: 15%

2000 BC: 24%

1500 BC: 18%

750 BC: 12%

Any other: 6%

Question 20 (a): Do you attend religious classes on Zoroastrianism?



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Yes: 31%
No: 63%
(b): Do your children attend?
Yes: 16%
No: 44%

Question 21 (a): How often do you frequent an agiary (atash-kadeh)?

Daily: 13%
Weekly: 22%
Monthly: 30%
Any other: 33%

(b): Aside from Zoroastrian places of worship do you go to any other:

Churches: 10%
Mosques: 4%
Temples: 10%
Shrines: 5%
Dargahs: 6%
Any other: 2%

Question 22: Do you have faith in any other individual(s) besides Zoroaster?

Kookadaru: 37%
Behramshah Shroff: 11%
Sai Baba: 18%
Satya Sai Baba: 2%
Jesus Christ: 11%
Buddha: 5%
Bahauallah: 2%
Pir: 2%
Emamzadeh: 2%
Any other: 6%

Calendar

Question 23: Which Zoroastrian calendar do you follow?

Fasli: 10%
Kadmi: 6%
Shehenshahi: 81%

Question 24: Do you know by memory the names of the 30 rojs and 12 mahs?

Yes: 70%
No: 27%

Question 25: Do you observe major rojs?

Yes: 51%
No: 43%
If yes, which ones:
Hormazd: 38%
Bahman: 18%
Ardibehest: 21%
Adar: 22%
Ava: 16%
Behram: 41%
Farvardin: 17%
Sarosh: 19%
Mcher: 20%
Any other: 6%

Question 26 (a): Do you eat meat during Bahman mah?

Yes: 71%
No: 27%
(b): On Bahman roj
Yes: 40%
No: 43%

After death

Question 27: What mode do you prefer for disposal of the dead?

Dokhmenashini: 73%
Burial: 5%
Cremation: 12%

Question 28: Do you favor non-Zoroastrians viewing the face of the dead after the geh sarna?

Yes: 47%
No: 45%

Question 29: Do you observe the four-day death ceremonies?

Yes: 93%
No: 5%

Question 30 (a): Do you have muktad prayers said for your family?

Yes: 88%
No: 10%

(b): Do you say the muktad prayers yourself?

Yes: 26%
No: 69%

Question 31 (a): Do you believe in reincarnation?

Yes: 45%
No: 45%

(b): Do you believe in heaven/hell?

Yes: 63%
No: 26%

General

Question 32: Do you read the community press?

Yes: 83%
No: 12%

If yes, which publications:

Newsletters: 48%
The Bombay Samachar: 34%
Jam-e-Jamshed: 57%
Parsiana: 71%
Fravahr: 3%
Any other: 13%

Question 33: What is the language spoken at home?

Farsi: 5%
Gujarati: 91%
English: 66%
Any other: 4%

Question 34: Is Parsi/Iranian food cooked in your home?

Yes: 97%
No: 1%

If yes, how often:

Daily: 48%
Weekly: 14%
On special occasions: 15%

Question 35: Should a World Congress be held every four years?

Yes: 90%
No: 6%

Question 36: Where would you like the next World Congress to be held?

Tehran: 23%
Bombay: 52%
London: 8%
USA: 9%
Any other: 3%



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In recognition of his contribution to building up the Border Security Force and towards the maintenance of law and order in the country, Khusro Rustamji was awarded the Padma Vibhushan this year

Gustasp Irani

"We had a winning team"

Combing out dacoits from the ravines of the Chambal, piercing deep into enemy territory on reconnaissance missions during the Bangladesh liberation war, protecting a Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to be specific -- adventure has been an integral part of Khusro F. Rustamji's police career. There is a temptation to romanticize his exploits, but Rustamji, looking much younger than his 75 years which he carries with proper grey-haired dignity, sees them in terms as crisp as the uniform he once wore: "My field has been maintenance of law and order, and police work." The nation recognized his commitment to his task when, in 1971, after the Bangladesh war, it conferred on him the Padma Bhushan and then 20 years later, in 1991, honored him with the Padma Vibhushan, the second highest civilian award in India.

"It (the Padma Vibhushan) reflects excellence in any field," says Rustamji who however pegs his personal concept of excellence even higher: "The thought that came to me was how totally undeserved it was... I should have done more, I could have done more." It is an observation that does not spring from false modesty but a compulsion to give of his best which has been the hallmark of Rustamji's career.

"My men did a great job... We had a winning team... There was nothing that my men could not do..." When talking to Rustamji we constantly find him ready to share his achievements with his colleagues and subordinates, ready to give credit where it is due. It probably explains his ability to get together a team of men and galvanize them into giving their best. The creation of the Border Security Force (BSF) and molding it to become a vital institution in the country particularly highlights this ability of his. Promoted by General J. N. Choudhury, then

chief of army staff and L. P. Singh, then home secretary, the task of turning the BSF concept into a reality fell upon Rustamji who was its first director general. From scratch he put together the paramilitary force that was soon to play a significant role both during war and peace.

"We took what was the best from everywhere: from the armed forces, from the universities. We even took scientists, administrators and accountants. It was a very interesting and exciting period and I got together a first-class group from all sides," Rustamji recalls, adding: "When you get a group of young men with the right experience and right motivation they can work wonders." Within a few months the BSF was repairing its own weapons; they were the first force in India to make rockets and also use them in war.

The achievements of the BSF are as impressive as they are long. But most significant, probably, was the role it played in the Bangladesh liberation war, particularly during the early stages when the BSF group infiltrated into East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, to prop up the resistance forces. "I must say that great acts of valor were performed by the BSF boys and as a consequence the task of the Indian army was made easier in defeating the Pakistani army," is Rustamji's view.

Rustamji himself was in the thick of the action. "I remember going deep into Bangladesh and establishing rapport with the people. I remember sitting on the floor with a hurricane lantern plotting strategy and helping the Mukti Bahini (as the resistance force was known)."

Later the BSF was also called upon to deal with the enemy within the country.



President of India R. Venkatraman decorating Rustamji with the Padma Vibhushan

When Naxalites killed 78 policemen on the streets of Calcutta, the BSF was pressed into service to train the Indian police force on how to deal with urban guerilla groups. With the subsequent emergence of secessionist forces in Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Assam, and terrorism in different parts of the country, the BSF has even a greater role to play in maintaining law and order.

It was in a way Rustamji's legacy to the nation and he looks back at it with justifiable pride. Yet his selection as the first director general of the BSF was most unexpected. "I was dazed," he remembers. "I was lifted from a comparatively junior position and asked to head this organization. From inspector general of police (IGP) of Madhya Pradesh (MP) with some (experience in) dealing with dacoits in MP and insurgency in Nagaland, I was catapulted into organizing this force."

Insurgency in Nagaland? "The Nagas were experts in ambush — they would wipe out entire army patrols. I too had one or two narrow escapes," says Rustamji. Since the MP police had some success in dealing with dacoits they were sent to train the army in Nagaland on how to deal with the insurgents and later convince them to resolve their problems across the negotiating table. It was here that another Parsi, Yezdi Gandavia, foreign secretary at the time, played a significant role. One problem that cropped up was the rehabilitation of the Naga militants and in this matter Rustamji, now head of the BSF, had the solution. "I readily took them into the BSF and General Zuheto, chief of the Naga forces, became my lifelong friend. Just last week he sent a shawl woven by his wife for Naju (Rustamji's wife)."

While dealing with dacoits, however, the problem was a little different. Rustamji had taken a stand opposing the efforts by Acharya Vinoba Bhave and others to reform the murderous thugs who infested the ravines of the Chambal. This was at a time when Rustamji and his police force had the dacoits on the run. "We had wiped out 14 of the worst

gangs... Such was the morale of our Force that five constables made a gang of 80 dacoits run." Then along came the holy men seeking to reform the bandits. They asked for and managed to get a pardon on a Supreme Court death sentence on one dacoit, now a prominent politician, who

not the solution. They probably knew, as Rustamji did, that the real life dacoits were a far cry from the romanticized heroes portrayed by the Hindi film world. Their main strength was the ravines that they infested, deep fissures, 60 to 70 feet, which were very easy to hide in and certainly very difficult territory for Rustamji and his men to operate in.

But if the task of eliminating murderous bandits was difficult, then the task of protecting the then Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, was equally trying. "We had a lot of differences of opinion, a lot of arguments. He would complain about the excessive security. He would get very angry with me; then he would lean across and say something to wipe out what he had said before." For five and a half years Rustamji was his shadow. "I can say that he was really an outstanding Indian, the greatest I met after Gandhiji."

There is another aspect of security that one may tend to ignore, but of which Rustamji gives a glimpse: "Apart from the security of the person you have to guard, there is also the security of the crowds; the stampedes, the trampling... That's part of the job too."

Of course the security provided to the Prime Minister today is far in excess of what Rustamji had for Nehru. "We had no Punjab or J&K problem then," Rustamji explains. In the case of Rajiv Gandhi, the problem was made more complex after Operation Blue Star when Indian troops were used to liberate the Golden Temple from Sikh fundamentalists. "It is possible that an over-zealous police officer may hold up traffic, but given today's political climate, I don't see the security provided to Rajiv Gandhi as excessive. The same applies for the security of Chandra Shekhar, V. P. Singh or Advani." Rustamji's words were almost prophetic for, two weeks after the interview when Rajiv Gandhi brushed aside his security personnel while on the election campaign trail in Tamil Nadu, he was assassinated.

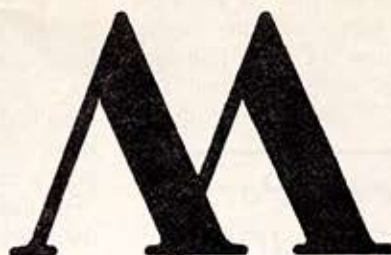
The assassination only highlights the deteriorating law and order situation in the country. The rot, according to Rus-



Rustamji with Naju (left) and Kerman

had killed 150 men, including four witnesses during his trial. "They (the holy men) were making a crime problem into a religious one. As other dacoits started to surrender, *aarti* was performed on them and they were made into religious heroes."

Rustamji was not one to stand by and be a passive witness to the farce or to cower before the Acharya. He called a press conference and, in his words, "dropped a bomb. I told them that Vinoba Bhave's actions were contrary to the law of the land; that he was deifying dacoity and obstructing operations." It was a bold step, for Rustamji had placed his career on the line and the only person he consulted before taking the plunge was his wife. "What happened was rather amazing. Almost the entire Press supported me. They agreed that making a crime problem into a religious one was



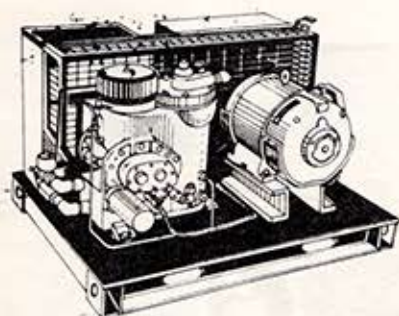
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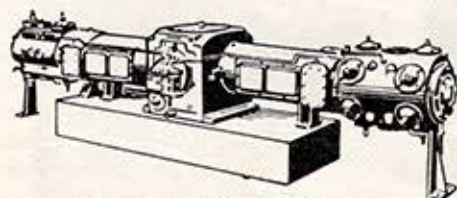
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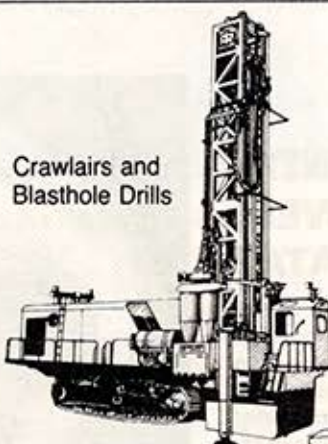
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tamji, is reflected in the caliber of the men who rule the country now. "We used to worship the white cap (symbolic of the Gandhian way of life) in our youth. They (the men who wore it) did so much for the country. Now they (the politicians) are motivated by money and a desire for power. I write (freelance) for seven newspapers in India and I criticize all the political parties of today," says Rustamji who admits that his harshness, meted out fairly, earns him the respect of all.

Politicians aside, Rustamji traces part of India's woes to the US funding and arming of Pakistan. "As a result our defence expenditure shot up to impossible levels." This meant diversion of funds which could have been better utilized in a country suffering from chronic poverty and an ever-rising population. The new problem of terrorism in Punjab, J&K and the northeastern states had led to cracks showing up in the law and order mechanism in the country. "The cup of the police is pretty full at the moment. They are a harassed lot," says Rustamji. Adding to the problem is the growing indiscipline and corruption in the ranks: "It is a reflection of our time."

The role of the police during the post-

Independence period was comparatively less complex. "In the first 20 years the real political problem was the rioting over the formation of the linguistic states, but these were problems that could be handled." The most significant

"To see the Parsi spirit in its true and vibrant form you have to go to North America"

development of the time, according to Rustamji, was how well India functioned as a democracy. "We grew as a democracy in the right way. The real test was the manner in which India treated its Muslims and other minorities, and the result was that you had a new generation from these communities coming up as scientists, educationists, entrepreneurs..."

The gains of Independence, which the country had to fight bitterly for, had not been squandered in the early years, believes Rustamji. As a member of the po-

lice force, however, he found himself on the wrong side of the freedom struggle. During the pre-Independence years the main task of the police was dealing with the civil disobedience movements launched by Gandhiji. Historic distortions aside, Rustamji points out that the police exercised the greatest of restraint: "For instance during the entire Quit India movement, the all-India casualty figure was only 42. Today you have more people killed in a single day in UP (Uttar Pradesh) or Punjab alone."

Another problem during the pre-Independence days was the communal riots. "From the very first month of my joining (the police force) I was posted in one riot-torn area or another," recounts Rustamji. It was a baptism of fire. Rustamji emerged from the ordeal unsinged. Even now, years after Rustamji has retired his police uniform, we feel the force of the man, his quiet dignity and an air which might be termed as "very proper." Today, apart from being a director of Bombay Dyeing he is also a member of the National Integration Council. He has also been asked to become a member of the Minorities Commission; his decision on whether to accept or not

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has been deferred for the moment.

No, he does not see himself as a protector of the Parsis. "I do not consider the Parsis as a minority community at all. In fact we have almost become a part of the all-embracing Indian culture," says Rustamji. He recognizes the fact that the Parsis do have problems, "but the Parsis need to set their own house in order more than anything else. At least we should be able to run our funeral ceremonies properly." He refers to the time he went to the funeral of a Parsi admiral and found the movements of the dead man's non-Parsi colleagues severely restricted. "How can you keep these men away?" he asks.

A similar situation had cropped up when Rustamji was the president of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman. A young Parsi air force officer had died in tragic circumstances. A large number of his non-Parsi colleagues had come to pay their respects and were barred from entering the aramgah. Rustamji protested; he asked that the gates be opened. The late Ervad Darius Bagli, who then looked after the religious needs of the Delhi Zoroastrian community, initially objected, but Rustamji prevailed on him to change his

stand. The gates were opened and till today the open gate policy is part of the Delhi community's ethos. "But here (in Bombay) poor Roxan Shah was turned away. If we can't set these things right as a thinking community, who else can?" he asks. Not the Minorities Commission.

Neither is it the job of the Minorities Commission to get reservation privileges for the community in jobs or educational institutions. "It is a small problem that the community must deal with by itself. In fact getting into the reservation trap might damage the interest of the community rather than benefit it," Rustamji observes.

The major setback, according to Rustamji, was when the community banked entirely on the British, the English language and the European culture. "There was a time when we refused to be Indians, we refused to learn the local languages, we would not sing Hindi songs, we would not even see Hindi films." This was during the period just before Independence and has carried over to the present too. "Those who have adapted to the Indian culture in the right way have fared well," says Rustamji. He recalls how dur-

ing his formative years in Nagpur, an *ustad* (maestro) would visit their house, Banoo Lodge, to teach the children Indian classical music. That level of commitment to the local culture is lacking, and sadly so, in the community today.

Another setback, has been the community's policy of keeping its religion to itself, its refusal to accept even children of Parsi mothers and non-Parsi fathers, opines Rustamji who has two children, son Cyrus and daughter Kerman. Orthodoxy has made the religion and community in India sterile: "We are all het up about the opening up of the (B. D. Petit) Parsee General Hospital and sharing our other trust funds," Rustamji notes.

But not all is lost. The flame of the community and religion is still alive, but beyond Indian shores. "To see the Parsi spirit in its true and vibrant form you have to go to North America," says Rustamji. Parsis settled there are the ones who reflect the spirit of adventure and enterprise that the community was once famous for; the courage to pack up their bags and follow opportunity. "I think that the spirit of wanderlust is still very alive amongst us Parsis," Rustamji asserts. He should know: he personified it.

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co-trustee in Boisar were what two trustees of the Jeevanji Jamsaji Mistry's Surat Adarian Fund were alleging. They assured that if the Federation's name was lent as intervenors, from their corpus running into four crores of rupees they would assist other poorer anjumanas, if permitted by the objects of their trust. Desai, on behalf of the legal firm Mulla and Mulla where he is partner, offered to look at the papers before pledging the Federation's commitment.

Fair deal for the farmers

In the hope of improving the yield of their agricultural holdings with the assistance of the BPP, the SPP and the WZO which were working on the rural welfare committee constituted by the Federation, three chasnawallas of different agiaries in Bombay conveyed to their panthakies that they would like to return to their farms, informed Dinshaw Tamboly of WZO.

The plight of those in the rural areas living below the poverty line was described by Modi who regretted that such an important subject was only brought up for discussion at the fag end of the Federation meeting. Some can't afford one square meal a day; others work as ser-

vants at neighboring farms, said Modi. Other disadvantages are the life of isolation when the nearest habitation is 10 km away, or limited educational facilities. However, when children are sent to orphanages as in Surat, their standard of education is better as compared to those who attend local schools, he added.

"Whom to help and whom not to help... To choose the right people is also difficult. Of 10, two will be bogus, getting help for nothing," SPP president Dr Sam Bhacca admitted. In the meanwhile a video cassette projecting the poverty of the rural Parsis is being circulated in the USA and UK to get donations for this cause.

The long walk for miles to reach the hapless farmers and the accompanying exhaustion notwithstanding, the team of volunteers are getting used to the task ahead of them. Bhacca mentioned the experience of a young city girl who first complained that walking on bare rocks was difficult and now states that the "rocks have become softer!"

Congress projections

"When someone picks up a report [of the Fifth World Zoroastrian Congress (WZC)] in 2000, is he going to have a sketchy report in hand? Are we not going to give a true picture?" asked Gandhi who advocated the preparation of a more comprehensive report than the summary worked on by vice chairman of the WZC subjects committee Aspi Moddie which, according to Gandhi, suffered "from wrong emphasis and a one-sided slant of liberalization... His summation does serve a certain purpose... It is his view of what happened at the Congress... So let it go down as that... He has also spent a lot of time and effort (like Jamshed Guzder and Jamsheed Kanga) in organizing this Congress."

In the interests of a "comprehensive representation" Guzder sought the delegates' views on what should be included in the report: the papers presented by the speakers, discussions that ensued from the floor of the house, the chairperson's summary of each session.

"Keki's views are based on evidence; Aspi's are based on interpretation of evidence. The report has been lying with us for more than one year; when are we going to implement it?" was Kanga's concern. Besides, "we (the Federation) are only one of the constituent units that participated in the Congress. We have no authority to direct how the report should read," Kanga added. In response to Kanga's statement that it is the executive committee of the Congress which had the right to finalize the report, Gandhi

From left: Meherjirana, Meher Anklesaria, Minoos Irani and Dinshaw Anklesaria



Spare the honor

Despite his protests
the Government of India conferred
the Padma Bhushan on
noted jurist Fali Nariman

Gustasp Irani



On Republic Day, January 26, 1991, Fali Sam Nariman, senior advocate of the Supreme Court of India, former additional solicitor general of India and, in brief, a leading legal light of the country, was honored with one of the nation's prestigious civil awards -- the Padma Bhushan. "Believe me," Nariman, based in Delhi, writes to us, "it is an innocuous encomium -- how innocuous I discovered when applying for a new passport... the authorities required submission of graduation certificate of the applicant. (As) my BA and LLB scrolls were somewhere in Bombay I thought I could 'swing it' with the P.B. (Padma Bhushan). Polite and prompt came the reply: 'we would prefer proof of university graduation.'"

Initially he had reservations about receiving the award. When the 'good news' was conveyed to him, Nariman wrote to the authorities to spare him the honor for two reasons which he spelled out in a letter to them: "First, ever since my resignation from a government position (additional solicitor general) a day after the declaration of the phony Emergency, I have refused to be aligned or to



President of India R. Venkatraman conferring the Padma Bhushan on Nariman

be regarded as being aligned to any political party, and second, I have consistently held the view that bestowing of titles is not in keeping with article 18 of the constitution."

The government dismissed his protests and proceeded to make the announcement of the award. Nariman relented only so as not to appear "ostentatious" or be discourteous to the President. After meeting Nariman we realize he is too much a gentleman to have acted otherwise. He accommodates us for an interview during his short and busy visit to Bombay with brief sessions over two days in his 21st floor suite at The Oberoi; on both occasions he graciously excuses himself from a clutch of clients. In expressing his views he is forthright, articulate and exacting, often pausing to find the right word. But more, it is his sincerity and optimism that strikes us.

Nariman believes that despite some "agonizing" and "anguishing" developments the Indian judiciary is "basically sound and healthy." The blackest hour was when the late Prime Minister Ms Indira Gandhi imposed her infamous Emergency in June 1975 and Nariman was in the thick of it as the country's additional solicitor general at the time. Nariman recalls that trying period when the Allahabad High Court nullified the

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Prime Minister's election to the Lok Sabha. "Ms Gandhi wanted me to settle the matter of appeal to the Supreme Court, which I did, and that same evening I flew down to Bombay." That night, her political lawyers advised her differently and instead of pursuing the matter through the courts, she chose instead to impose her Emergency. The very next day, Nariman submitted his resignation.

Were there any personal repercussions as a result of his action? "No," says Nariman, "I distanced myself from them and they distanced themselves from me and that's where the matter ended. I believe that a government is like an individual; if you take a firm decision and stand by it, they respect you; if you lose your self-respect you are finished."

The sad part of the episode was that in contrast to many High Courts which refused to be cowed down, the Supreme Court during that time lost much of its self-respect when, in its now infamous judgment, it came to the conclusion that law courts were powerless to give relief to people who could be detained without trial. "The only dissident was Justice Khanna who said that human rights were not the gift of the state or law but our inherent right as human beings," says Nariman, adding: "After the dark days of the Emergency, the Supreme Court has made valiant attempts to redeem itself, and it has."

More recently, dark shadows fell across the country's judiciary system when the integrity of senior judges (four of the Bombay High Court and one of the Supreme Court) was suspect. The issue, according to Nariman, is not just a question of the behavior of judges but one of reassessing the attitudes in the profession at all levels. "There should be greater responsibility and dedication on the part of advocates and all members of the bar... The health of the profession will be reflected on the bench for, in India, judges are drawn from lawyers."

Yet for all its failings, Nariman has enormous faith in the legal system. In an article in the *Indian Express* he writes: "Even today, isolated instances apart, judges of the higher judiciary (of the High Court and Supreme Court) are men and women of tried merit, and of high (do believe me), extremely high integrity." In the same article he traces the origins of the Indian legal system: "We, in India, inherited the tradition of judicial independence not from the Moghuls, not from the *Shastras* or the *Smritis*, not from Manu's Hindu law; we inherited it

from the British. Let us first acknowledge this and salute the British tradition which has its basis in idealism..."

Another problem with the Indian legal system, according to Nariman, is delay, "inordinate delay. This is because of few judges and few courts in the country... You must realize that in a country with so many people, with so many grievances, the courts are under tremendous pressure." But there is hope for judges have started to sit on extra days when they take up matters that they believe can be settled quickly and amicably. For this practice Nariman gives credit to the current Chief Justice of the

"If you lose your self-respect you are finished"

Bombay High Court, Prabodh D. Desai, who started this trend as Chief Justice of Himachal Pradesh.

It is a trend that reflects a growing sensitivity of law to the needs of the common man. "People in the law are traditionally resistant to social change but this has been reversed in the last 15 years and lawyers and judges are now more responsive to change," observes Nariman. As a result the common man has greater access to the courts than ever before. "He can now tilt at windmills, large windmills and far more effectively than before because of the Supreme Court promoting public interest litigation which has caught on in the High Courts too." According to Nariman, the view is that when public interest is involved, any member of the public, even if not directly concerned with the breach of law, can apply for court redressal in the interest of the public as a whole.

Probably most significant is the role the judiciary has played in safeguarding democracy in the country, the Emergency episode aside. "We are governed by a set of laws and not by the whims of people in power... An independent judiciary is essential to see that the rights of individuals are not encroached upon," says Nariman. Even in today's bleak political scenario of a hung parliament Nariman exudes optimism: "It means greater responsibility for the political leaders of today, more than any time in the past. I am hopeful, only because I believe that our country is greater than any of the governments it has had."

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is for this reason that Nariman does not envisage the emergence of a common civil code in the near future, even though it is one of the stated objectives of the constitution. "It is not just a matter of religious differences but one of cultural disparity between the various regions of the country." The Parsis, in other words, need not feel unduly threatened; their personal laws will survive for some time still.

Should the Parsi personal law be threatened there are enough Parsi lawyers to defend the community's rights. Parsis have, over the years, produced a large number of eminent men in the legal profession. Nariman attributes this, in part at least, to the fact that Parsis, with their English-based education, were better equipped than most other communities to assimilate the British legal system that the country inherited.

Today, when lawyers prowl around the courts soliciting clients, competition is fierce. While Nariman does ascribe luck as an important factor to success, he adds: "It is also a matter of a lot of integrity and application, and the ability to be useful to your senior with that additional bit of information you had to work for."

Nariman sees himself as very fortunate in having had Jamshed Kanga as his mentor. "Even at the age of 90, he would say he had a great deal to learn; it was the hallmark of his great humility. Apart from being a great lawyer he was a great man," says Nariman adding: "All who were fortunate to be in his chambers have done well. Palkhivala, Seervai, Sorabjee..." and, of course, Nariman himself.

Success, however, is eventually an outcome of personal commitment and drive, and the fact that a man has 24 hours in which to fit his day's work. "It's not really difficult," says Nariman. "In life you can achieve competence in whatever you do. The more you work at it the more competent you get. It's like the magician in Mahabaleshwar who used to do a version of the Indian rope trick. I remember as a child being fascinated by the trick. The point is that if you do something often enough you become very skillful at it and that applies to all levels of life, regardless of whether you are a magician or a lawyer... I won't be able to do magic tricks and I don't expect him to do law."

Nariman was born in Rangoon in 1929. His father was the manager of the New India Assurance branch there. In 1942, the family lost everything when

they had to flee from the advancing Japanese army. Nariman was only 12 then but he remembers the anguish of the flight, emotionally shattering, the physical exhaustion as they worked their way to safety through the jungles on foot. Then after World War II was over, his family returned to Rangoon in 1947, only to lose everything once again in 1964. This time, Nariman's mother, now a widow, had to flee a brutally repressive regime. Yet Nariman emerged from the ordeals with his optimism unscarred. Married to Bapsy, an active social worker, the couple have a son Rohinton, a Supreme Court lawyer like his father, and a daughter Anaheeta, a speech therapist working with the Spastic Society.

**"In a country with
so many people,
so many grievances,
the courts are
under pressure"**

Nariman sees the problems confronting the Parsi community at two distinct levels; the rural and the urban. In the rural areas of Gujarat it is a problem of poverty; a great many of the poor Parsi farmers there are caught in the mire (his wife is actively involved in assisting them). In the urban areas, the issue facing the community is lack of proper housing.

Quite distinct from community issues however, are the issues facing the Zoroastrian religion. "As a religion we were always a proselytizing one — we encouraged and accepted converts; there is no doubt about it," Nariman observes. According to him the community survived in India only because the forefathers had the foresight and vision to break away from tradition and ban conversion to the religion. Now times have changed and Nariman feels that it is non-Zoroastrian to restrict people from embracing the religion if they want to, particularly so when it involves children of Parsi women married to non-Parsis. Parsis abroad, he believes have the equation right: "The Parsis settled in Canada and the US are forward-looking and yet traditional in one sense: they have gone back to the roots of the religion."

That probably sums up the attitude of Nariman, a rational, thinking lawyer, who sees no contradiction in the concurrence of traditional and modern perceptions.



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A doctor in labor

Gustasp Irani

If ever there was a celebrity gynecologist and obstetrician, then Dr Rustom Soonawala, 62, is probably the closest we have to the concept in India. Fair, ruggedly handsome and well-spoken, he has been instrumental in bringing the children of the rich and famous into this world. Industrialists and filmstars are his patients and family friends; his name appearing in the Press is now routine. He had been specially flown down to Delhi by the then Prime Minister, Ms Indira Gandhi, for her daughter-in-law Maneka's delivery.

There is however another side to this high profile medical man — a dedicated doctor working on containing the cancerous growth of the country's population. It was in recognition of his efforts in this area that he was decorated with the Padma Shri by the President of India R. Venkataraman, on Republic Day, 1991. "The Padma Shri is awarded to professionals, scientists, social workers who have done outstanding work for the country," says Soonawala who views the recognition as a measure of job satisfaction.

"As a gynecologist and obstetrician one does get directly involved with people's problems at an individual level, but I have, in a way, got involved with the nation's problem," states Soonawala. He is the honorary medical director of the Family Planning Association of India, member of the WHO (World Health Organization) advisory panel on sterilization, and other national and international bodies.

Interestingly, India's staggering population problem has given it expertise in contraceptive and sterilization techniques which have been sought by other developing countries. Soonawala has conducted advanced training programs in these fields for doctors in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Bangladesh, Nepal and

Egypt, that is in addition to the efforts invested in training local doctors in all parts of the country.

But more, he has designed an advanced intrauterine device (IUD). "It is something similar to the loop; only it is more convenient so that even less skilled doctors can use it safely," he explains. In recognition of his contribution, the Kiel University in Germany awarded Soonawala the prestigious Dr Von Grafenberg Gold Medal in 1984. The significance of the medal is that Soonawala now belongs to an exclusive club where the membership will not exceed 10, that being the number of medals the University plans to award for what it considers significant contributions to contraceptive technology internationally. Instituted in 1981, the birth centenary year of Von Grafenberg who developed the first IUD, only six of the 10 medals have been distributed to date.

Soonawala refrains from singling out any one contraceptive method as the best. "It varies from person to person. What may suit one, may not suit another. In medical terms, it is what we call a cafeteria approach; you can pick and choose."

But for all Soonawala's and his colleagues' efforts, the high population growth rate remains one of the country's major problems. "It drowns out all our achievements," says the doctor. The country, according to him, just cannot generate enough jobs or provide adequate educational facilities to keep pace with its numbers. To illustrate, he points out that, just for education to keep up with the population growth, the country will have to build 100 new schools, accommodating 500 children each, every day.

Soonawala does not claim to have the answers to the problem but he does be-

lieve that the family planning program should be delinked from politics, and policy decisions taken by the organization should be universal: no discrimination, no exceptions. He concedes that the steps that must be taken — whatever they might be — must be harsh to be effective. The other option is education. "The moment a person is educated, his desire for more children is curtailed," he explains.

The agony of the nation's growing birthrate aside, Soonawala has also to deal with agony at a very personal level — the birth throes of women in labor. In recent times however, as a result of medical advancement, the birth process is less painful both for the mother and the doctor who has had to endure screaming women as part of the job. "Today we have excellent pain killers," he says referring particularly to the epidural process (that numbs the lower half of the expectant mother's body during delivery). He rebuffs fears that the process could cause paralysis to the lower part of the body.

Further, included in his consulting rooms at Peddar Road is a fully equipped, modern, prenatal clinic where expectant mothers and their spouses are readied for the big day. "Fear causes tension, tension causes pain. At the prenatal clinic we reduce fear and as a result the tension and pain are also less." But even if pain can be muted, there is little one can do about babies who want to make their grand entries at night. Soonawala is called upon six to eight times a month at unearthly hours to welcome the little crying bundles into the world. And his days that follow are long — rising at 7.15 a.m. the doctor rarely ever gets home before 11 at night. He is attached to the Breach Candy Hospital and Research Centre, the Nowrosjee Wadia Maternity Hospital, the Jaslok Hospital and Re-

Gynecologist Rustom Soonawala, whose effort to check the national birthrate has been rewarded with a Padma Shri, would like to see an increase in community numbers



The President of India awarding the Padma Shri to Soonawala.

Right: Soonawala (seated) with his immediate family

search Centre, the B. D. Petit Parsee General Hospital and the Masina Hospital.

Gynecology, he explains, deals with the female reproductive system; andrology, which is not his line, deals with the male reproductive system; obstetrics deals with childbirth. Unlike other branches of medical specialization where the doctor has the flexibility to plan, in gynecology and obstetrics almost every case is an emergency. "It is also a line where there is more involvement with the patient and her family. Patients also become family friends," says the gynecologist.

Soonawala learned his skills at the Topiwalla National Medical College where he studied to obtain his MBBS and MD degrees. He then proceeded to UK to qualify as a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons (FRCS). But the question of settling abroad never arose. "One cannot hope to reach the top there or become

a first-class citizen," he observes. It was an important consideration, for excellence was, and is, an important factor in whatever he did.

Take sports for example. He represented his college in its hockey, football, athletics, badminton and tennis teams. He also represented Bombay University and Bombay State in athletics, and was on the 4 x 100 meters relay team that set a record at Jabalpur at an all-India meet. "My father encouraged us (four brothers) to actively participate in exercise and games," says Soonawala. The father, Dr Phiroze Soonawala, a popular consulting physician at Nair Hospital, probably influenced his children's professional choice too, for all his four sons took to the medical profession. Jamshed, the eldest became a physician; Fareedoon, the next in line, became a urologist; and Soli, the youngest, a dental surgeon.

And Rustom relayed the tradition on to his own two sons Behram and Feroze, who have presently become doctors and are specializing in gynecology. Add wife Piloo and two daughters, Jenai Banaji and Kamal Tata to complete the family portrait. "We have done our bit for the community," Soonawala laughs as he refers to his four children in the context of

the crisis of declining numbers facing the community.

On a serious note, Soonawala sees the Parsi population crisis as a direct offshoot of a housing crisis. "The Parsis are an educated community. They will not take responsibility for a child unless they can provide for it," he observes, adding that in Bombay the lack of accommodation compounds the problem. "I get Parsi couples who want more children but won't plan for them unless they have a roof over their heads first." Low income housing for the middle-class with the Bombay Parsi Punchayet playing a key role, Soonawala believes, is the need of the hour. "Many Parsi families settle for one child when they should have two, preferably three." The first two children, Soonawala explains, is to replace the parents, the third is to compensate for the bachelors, spinsters and childless couples in the community.

The low birthrate in the community indirectly accounts for the poor utilization of facilities in the maternity ward at the B. D. Petit Parsee General Hospital. "When you average 10-14 births a month you can't expect the management (of the Hospital) to invest their limited resources in this department," Soonawala

explains the chicken and egg dilemma as patients are reluctant to use the Hospital till facilities are improved first. He is however quick to add that the amenities nevertheless are quite adequate. In fact he encourages his Parsi patients to have their babies at the Parsee General, but more often than not they would rather check in at other hospitals, Breach Candy in particular, for reasons that are social rather than medical. "Just the other day I convinced a middle-class Parsi lady to have her delivery at the Parsee General rather than the Breach Candy." He makes it a point to add a word in favor of the present committee members of the Hospital: "They are a real hardworking lot. It is the duty of every Parsi to help them in whatever way they can."

Returning to the low birthrate in the community, Soonawala points out that infertility is not a problem; in fact, the average infertility rate among Parsis is less than in other communities. The factors effecting low birthrates are more external: years lost in the pursuit of education, late marriages, both parents working, housing... and abortion of unwanted children.

"When a Parsi couple comes to me for an abortion, I go through the exercise of



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trying to convince them to continue with the pregnancy and give the child up for adoption. I have not succeeded in convincing anyone as yet," Soonawala laments. He refers to one case when a poor Parsi turned on him, "What are you saying? Are you asking me to sell my child?" the man demanded when Soonawala assured him that the child would be adopted by a well-to-do Parsi couple who, out of a sense of fair play, was willing to put aside sums of money for his other three children. "He went and had the abortion done elsewhere."

What about adopting non-Parsi children? Soonawala does not commit himself but states: "With the changing times one has got to rethink one's values." For starters, he believes the community should accept children of Parsi mothers and non-Parsi fathers as long as the father has no objection. "On the one hand we are trying to maintain the identity of the community while on the other hand, in another 50 years, we may no longer exist."

Equally, if not more, important to Soonawala is the Zoroastrian identity, the Zoroastrian way of life. "It is a very positive religion, a good way of life." He tells us of a visit to Sao Paulo in Brazil when he went out to lunch with one of the leading medical men of the country and ordered a beef dish. His companion observed: "You are an Indian and you eat beef?" To which Soonawala clarified: "I am a Zoroastrian." Whereupon the Brazilian doctor replied: "That's strange, for in Brazil, all the people who are honest are called *zoroastra*." The elation and pride Soonawala felt at the moment aside, the point he is driving at is a subtle one: "Zoroastrianism has so much to give to the world. We will be wasting it if we do not wake up and take practical steps. Why not share it with others? Conversion may be a difficult proposition but I don't think you have to be accepted by anyone if you want to follow a religion. If you like a religion, you follow it and there is nothing anyone can do about it."

Perceptions change with the context. Soonawala is used to dealing with paradoxes even in his professional life. At the national level he works to curtail the ever growing population and at the community level he aids and abets its growth. That he has been able to strike the right balance and win the recognition of both the nation and his patients is a testimony to his skills and talent.

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"I SING WITH PAINT"

Change is of the essence to artist Homi Patel

Gustasp Irani

A Parsi lady stormed into the art gallery. She demanded an explanation for the mess on display: this abstract modern art. She threatened the artist concerned that she was going to write to the papers unless he closed down his exhibition immediately. Homi Patel, a quiet grey-haired bachelor of 62, recalls how it was during his early exhibitions when contemporary Indian art was a fledgling movement. Reaction to his work was particularly harsh for his paintings were, as they still are, abstract. "Now contemporary art is accepted. Then, people would come to the gallery and say: 'What is this nonsense? Why are you wasting electricity on the fans, the lights?'" recounts Patel.

Years later, in April 1990, Patel's contribution to the contemporary art movement in India was recognized when he was awarded the Ara Memorial Award. The journey through time has been turbulent. Patel could well fit the classic mold of the suffering artist. "People, my family, have often tried to dissuade me from my work. They have kept on telling me to take on a regular job. But I always said 'no.' I have always been an artist," he says.

Patel's problems stem not from the fact that he has always been an artist but from the fact that he has been an uncompromising one. "He is a senior and very serious painter who has not had the right kind of exposure. The problem is that he is not the sort of person who would project himself; he is very unassuming," says Dadiba Pundole of the Pundole Art

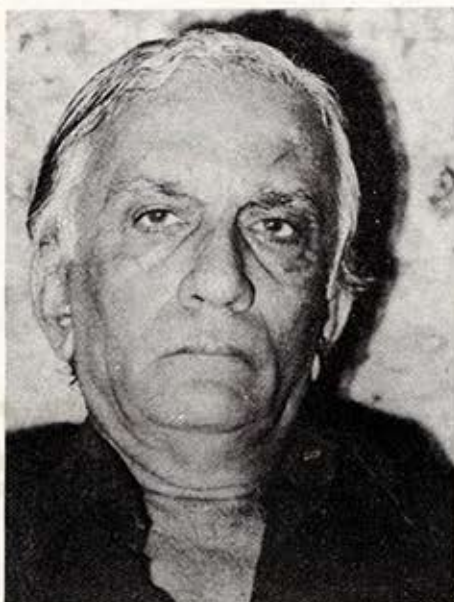


PHOTO: VARGHESE W. FERNANDEZ

Gallery. There was a time when he was considered one of the promising and exciting young artists on the contemporary art scene in India, says Kekoo Gandhi of Gallery Chemould, one of the people closely associated with the early movement. Patel was one of the select few artists whose works were sent to galleries in Zurich, Vienna, Brussels, Tokyo and other international centers as representative of the country's art movement.

Why has he not stayed with styles that were acclaimed and popular? He is appalled by the suggestion. "What? Copy myself?" he asks. He concedes that there are many artists who do repeat them-

selves, once they have excelled at a style or theme that is popular with the public; but his temperament is different. "You've got to move... each canvas is a new challenge. After every few years, I change my style, my technique."

In his search for the perfect form of color, texture and movement, Patel has recently discarded the brush and conventional artists' tools and developed a technique that is uniquely his own. He embosses his paint onto his canvas via a newspaper. Earlier he used cloth to relay the paint. There was a time when he had stopped using paint altogether; he gave his canvases movement and form by sticking colored paper on them. It was part of the process of change, the only constant that Patel accepts.

But it was only a part of the story. The other part of the paper on canvas phase was that Patel was dealing with the problem of space constraints. He had no studio then. He worked on the joint family's dining table between meals. "I moved from one studio to another. I even once worked in a stable...but that is another story," says Patel.

Like everything else, Patel's paintings have gone through phases. Patel recalls the canvases done in his youthful days: "They were vibrant, full of energy. Then I sobered up and so did my paintings...There was a time when my paintings reflected the solid form of stones...Then there was the quiet phase which was very popular..." The quiet phase, he explains, was when he worked

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with subtle shades of white. He recalls one quiet phase exhibition at Gallery Chemould when mats were laid out for visitors to sit on and absorb the serenity of the canvases while different *ragas* (Indian classical music) were played in the background. There were other phases too: canvases awash in waves of color and others taut with electric energy.

"I do not know if I am popular or not. I only know that I have painted and will carry on painting under any circumstances... I do not let my creativity stop at ABC. I try to explore the DEF too," explains the artist.

He takes us into his bedroom which is also his studio to see his latest canvases, part of the ongoing evolutionary process. "Look at that. What do you see?" he asks. We see color, in subtle shades on some canvases and blatantly loud on others. As we gaze on, figures emerge, teasing our vision and probing our memory bank for an identity; we see forests awash in mist and a cascade of colors. "I don't title my paintings. If I do, you will start looking for things you don't see. I leave it to you to see what you want," says Patel. "I see nothing, just form, color, texture, movement and space. That is the soul of my painting." His hands moved sensuously across the canvas as he illustrates a point.

He compares his painting with music. "I sing with paint. It's something you can't define. It's a question of intuition, not understanding. People see a rose and say: 'How beautiful.' But beyond the rose and its beauty are other perceptions. I am seeking out these perceptions in my work. I don't know if I succeed but I am enjoying it."

A good painting, according to Patel, must have impact. "First, it must appeal to the eye. The second time you look at it you are looking at the color effect; the inner silence of the work. This will stay with you forever." The inner silence, according to Patel, is the acid test of any work of art.

In today's world of growing commercialization in contemporary Indian art, the aesthetic and rupee values often get blurred, according to Patel. "Now it's all commercialization. You meet another painter and all he talks about is how much he is selling for; how much you are selling for; how much so and so is selling for. It's all sell, sell, sell. It's destroying the atmosphere."

Ah! The good old days, when Patel was young, when contemporary art in

"My Indian background is reflected in my paintings. I live here"

India was a fledgling movement. Those were the days when artists were committed to the work alone. "We used to meet at the Artists Aid Center. We discussed talent. We loved each other...It was a time when we had no money. We used to order one *broon* bread and one tea and three or four of us used to share it. We were a family of artists."

It was a time when Gandhi held the first art exhibition at his Chemould Frame Shop at Princess Street, a time when Ara, Raza and other leading artists formed the progressive group. "I used to admire their work and be inspired by them," Patel recalls. Earlier he was influenced by the works of many artists, both Indian and international. "It's important that you are influenced," says Patel, then adding, "but only in the beginning." A committed artist must evolve and furrow his own individual course.

There was a time when Patel's furrow ran parallel with the furrows of three other artists: Ambardas, Nikkam and Suza. Between 1958 and 1962 the four of them held four group shows together. The common thread that ran through these shows was that all the works on display were abstract. The group of four, as Patel refers to the clique, was breaking new ground in contemporary Indian art and as with all pioneers, they were misunderstood. So what if an agitated Parsi lady ruffled her feathers at their show, if others dismissed their work as nonsense? Patel knew the value of his own work. If anything, it spurred him on to push himself further, see and explore what others did not notice. "A stone for instance. You kick it but there is beauty in it too," he observes.

One of the first persons to recognize Patel's talent was the late Homi Bhabha, then chairman of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre. Patel still looks back with pride on the occasion when Bhabha bought two of his paintings. "It was my first significant sale," he recalls. The Bhabha Patel knew, was not the scien-

tist, but the patron of the arts. That Bhabha was a Parsi was not significant, though the contribution of the community in most fields of endeavor cannot be ignored. "We Parsis have been pioneers, even in contemporary Indian art. Three of the four private art galleries in Bombay are Parsi-owned (Chemould, Pundole and Cymroza)," says Patel.

Being Indian is of great significance to Patel. "Of course, my Indian background is reflected in my paintings. I live here," he states. Extend the equation to the Parsi influence and he shrugs. "Maybe. I don't know much about community matters." His lack of pretensions is disarming. Indeed, he wears a *sudreh* and *kusti*... But don't be fooled. As he attempts to explain the significance of his paintings, his abstractions, he reaches out for ready symbolism — fire. "Look at the fire, it's energy, you can see it, you enjoy its dancing flames but you cannot explain its form."

In many ways Patel's mild manner and soft-spoken facade are deceptive: there is a rebel lurking within, and the canvas is his stage. Patel himself recognizes this. "I have not been a conventional painter," he observes.

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Bhico J. Manekshaw

Vegetarian fare for the calorie conscious



The doctors say a low-oil kitchen is a healthy kitchen. Besides, oil prices are soaring in India, so here are a few recipes with very little oil used in them.

OKRA STEW

This is without any oil at all. I have often served it at parties. It is not slimy as one would suppose.

Okra ($\frac{1}{2}$ kg — small, tender, cut in 2-inch pieces)

Water (1 cup)

Onions (2 large — chopped)

Garlic (8 cloves — chopped)

Ginger (1-inch piece — fresh, chopped)

Curry leaves (2 strips)

Tomatoes (2 large — chopped)

Turmeric powder ($\frac{1}{2}$ tsp)

Salt (to taste)

Masala (dry roasted and coarsely crushed)

Dry roast the following ingredients separately and crush coarsely:

Coriander seeds (2 tsp)

Fenugreek seeds (1 tsp)

Cumin seeds (1 tsp)

Cinnamon ($\frac{1}{2}$ inch piece)

Cloves (2)

Cardamom (1 — peeled)

Black peppercorns (4)

Garnish

Chilli powder (1 tsp)

Milk ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup)

Coriander leaves (chopped)

Put crushed roasted masala in a pan with 1 tbsp water on a high flame. Stir till water evaporates. Add ginger, garlic and onions. Add 1 tbsp of water and stir. Add 1 cup of water, tomatoes and okras, turmeric powder and salt to taste. Cook on a high flame till okras are done. (Do not overcook the okras and do not cover the pan while boiling.) Remove from fire. Add chilli powder, milk and coriander leaves just before serving.

Excellent with grilled chops.

KOB NEE BHAI

Cabbage (1 — firm, weighing about $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ kg)

Turmeric powder ($\frac{3}{4}$ tsp)

Oil (1 tbsp)

Turka

Cumin seeds (2 tsp)

Mustard seeds (2 tsp)

Asafoetida (a pinch — optional)

Cocunut (2-3 tbsp — freshly grated)

Coriander leaves (2-3 tbsp — chopped)

Green chillies (2-3 — chopped)

Cut cabbage into four and blanch in boiling salted water for 2-3 minutes. Remove from water and refresh in cold water. Squeeze out all liquid by pressing between two plates. Slice thinly. Keep aside.

Heat oil in a frying pan. Add mustard seeds. When they stop spluttering, add rest of ingredients. Add turmeric and cabbage. Toss for a minute and serve immediately if possible.

Note: The cabbage need not be blanched if so desired.

BAIGAN BATATA

Potatoes ($\frac{1}{2}$ kg — peeled and cubed, although peeling of potatoes is not a must)

Aubergines ($\frac{1}{2}$ kg — cubed)

Garam masala powder (1 tsp)

Coriander powder (1 tsp)

Cumin powder ($\frac{1}{2}$ tsp)

Chilli powder (1 tsp)



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Tomatoes (2 — chopped)
Vaghar or Turka
Mustard seeds (1 tsp)
Asafoetida (a pinch)
Oil (2 tsp)
Salt (to taste)

Heat oil. Add mustard seeds. When they stop spluttering, add asafoetida. Add 1 cup of water, salt and potatoes. Bring to a boil. Add aubergines, tomatoes and rest of ingredients. Simmer on a slow fire till vegetables are cooked.

VAGHARELI KHEECHRI

Basmati rice ($\frac{1}{2}$ kg)
Toover dal (pigeon peas — 125 gms)
Masoor dal (Egyptian lentils — 125 gms)
Moong dal (green beans — 125 gms)
Channa dal (Bengal grams — 125 gms)
Oil (2 tbsp)
Potatoes (125 gms — peeled and cubed)
Carrots (2 — peeled and cubed)
French beans (50 gms — cubed and blanched)
Green peas (50 gms — shelled)
Spinach (1 small bunch — stems removed and blanched)
Yam (200 gms — peeled and cubed)

Masala

Onions (3 large — sliced)
Ginger (2 tbsp — ground)
Garlic (2 tbsp — ground)
Turmeric powder (1 tsp)
Chilli powder (1 tsp)
Green chillies (2 — chopped)
Cumin powder (2 tsp)
Garam masala (1 tsp — whole)
Salt (to taste)

Soak rice for $\frac{1}{2}$ hour and drain for $\frac{1}{2}$ hour. Half boil toover dal and channa dal together. Soak rest of dals.

Heat oil, add onions and brown. Add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water and cook till onions are mushy. Add rest of masala and brown.

Add rice, all dals and vegetables and stir fry for a minute or two. Add salt and enough boiling water (about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch above the rice mixture and bring to a boil. Lower heat, cover and cook in a medium oven for 20 minutes or over the stove on 'Dum' for 20 minutes till rice is done.

This dish does not need anything else with it except perhaps an onion salad.

One can also add kharu gosht when the kheechri is done to make it into a meat dish.

Bon appetit!

Bhico J. Manekshaw, a graduate of the prestigious Cordon Bleu School of Cookery, London, and author of the Traditional Recipes of India, has been associated with many haute cuisine organizations in the country.



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A royal laugh

Author Gustasp Irani recaptures the ambience of British India in his first novel

Yasmin D. Poonegar

Some people write to change the world, others to forget it... Freelance journalist and business executive Gustasp Irani writes to entertain it! Called *Once Upon a Raj*, Irani's first book is a fun-filled foray into the lavish past of British India. A past where maharajahs changed their minds as often as Imelda Marcos changed her shoes; where hereditary royal responsibility spelt the end of princely, youthful irresponsibility; and where palace intrigues were often fueled by British power pumped by the mechanics of traitors inside the courts. This book has been published by the well-known firm of Orient Longman's and was due to be available in Bombay by end August for Rs 60.

Once Upon a Raj is an adventure story in a simple, uncomplicated genre. A prince who is spending his youth in quasi-mandatory decadence in London is called back home to do his duty — get married and help run his father's kingdom. Prince Vir 'is not willin.' The plot follows the twists and turns that seem fantastical today, but were apparently quite true to life in the palace intrigues of those opulent, convoluted times. A diamond to beat all diamonds, and princesses that would make your heart beat backwards are involved, as the British administration clashes with the persistent prince and his wily vazir.

Lighthearted, humorous and enjoyable to read, the book is all these things and more. Its breeziness conveys a P. G. Wodehousian message: Life's like that!

Its characters have their share of pleasure and problems. But the problems are not to be taken as seriously as one often tends to. In short, failure should not get you down but goad you to fight harder,



for in action is the answer to living. Through this simple ethos, Irani subconsciously expresses what he believes to be the essential elements of his faith — Zoroastrianism. "I think our religion says that you have to live life fully — you have to participate in it, you cannot run away from it. If you fail you can get up and fight again. Zoroastrianism talks of man taking an active role in God's creation," he explains.

As a writer, Irani has an edge over the rest of mankind, for, not only can he take an active part but also a decisive part in the process of creation as well. Best-selling author John Fowles is known to have said that when you are

writing, you know what it feels like to play God. You create a character and define the boundaries within which he or she may act. Very often the character breaks through these boundaries and you let him move the way he wants... Picking up on this aspect of the writing process, Irani talks about the characters who broke through the boundaries that he had created for them in his book. "I started writing and the characters took over and almost wrote the book themselves," he explains. "For instance, I really didn't know what the prince was going to do till the very end. And the part where the grand vazir switched loyalties from his king to the British just happened by itself. It concerned me to see him doing that and I woke up Jeroo, my wife, in the middle of the night and told her how upset I was to have the vazir stabbing his king in the back. It

was only after I sat down and continued writing again that I realized that the vazir was just setting up the British inspector." Irani subsequently woke up Jeroo at 2 a.m. to express his relief that the vazir was not such a bad guy after all. Jeroo, happy to get a good night's sleep at last, commended the vazir on his proper (and timely!) behavior, jokes Irani.

For this author, writing is not a matter of inspiration from above. He puts it this way: "I get my inspiration from sitting on my posterior and just writing. One does not wait for it to happen." Discipline and hard work are the name of every writer's game. One has to learn how to organize one's time and put

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aside those few precious minutes for rumination and writing. "I started *Once Upon a Raj* when I was about 38, close to six years ago. I decided to put aside 10 minutes every day and just spend that time at my desk, writing. There were times when I extended that period by hours and it just flowed," says Irani, his two daughters, Ayesha and Nekshan, occasionally sparking off an inspired session. His plan of action extended to making time also for reading other works of fiction. "In the space of one year I read something like 52 books of different kinds," he informs. John Updike, James Michener, Alistair Maclean, they all passed through his curious writer's mind, sometimes leaving an imprint, sometimes not. Surprisingly enough, Irani says that he did not read any of the numerous works written on the days when Britannia ruled the waves — and India.

The current novel is entirely a creation of his ultra-visual imagination. The locales, like the Maharajah's Club in London and the kingdom of Prince Vir's father are concoctions from a store of exotic fantasy that is there in every one

of us and only releases itself if given the right instigation. Irani admits his instigation to write and create his own menagerie of characters came from a childhood dream to write. He once wrote a letter to his sister Oovi from his

The problems are
not to be taken as
seriously as one
often tends to

boarding school in Bangalore (St Joseph's): "I want to write. I don't know what I want to write. In writing this letter about my desire to write, I am writing which is what I want to do..."

Though the spirit was willing (to write), the spelling was weak, and he laughingly tells us that his teachers and classmates at school would never believe that he had become a published author. "My spellings were so horrible in school that I ended up getting really low marks in English," he mentions. He admits that his spelling prowess has more or

less remained static since his school days, but now he is blessed with a wife who corrects all of them for him effortlessly since she is a travel writer and managing editor of a magazine in her own right. "I bounce a lot of stuff off Jeroo. It gives me the proper perspective and her constructive criticism helps to put things in the right light," he acknowledges.

Today, Irani has been called a "new author breaking ground." His sequel to *Once Upon a Raj* is already in progress, its characters creating new adventures for themselves. However, his authorship has not been restricted to the *Once Upon a Raj* series. Among his still to be published works are two plays, *To Hell with Dr Faustus* and *Taro, Taro, Taro...*, and a semi-biographical work, on the Zoroastrian Iranian immigrants who came to India in the last century, called *Tongue of Flame*. It includes stories of some of the people whose ancestors withstood hundreds of years of religious persecution in Iran only to come to India and find themselves diluting their beliefs and assimilating with the religion of others. "I believe it is the price these

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immigrants had to pay. Just to take my example, within two generations my family had to deal with my almost converting to Christianity..." But, his days of flirting with other beliefs and atheism ended when he found that what he was searching so hard for was right there under his nose. "Strangely enough, I was led back to the philosophy of my own religion through Christianity, in a way," says Irani. "I was sitting, watching television one day in America (about 20 years ago) and there was this Christian program about how suffering is given to man by God as a signal to say 'come back to me.' I was about to switch off the TV set, but for some reason I left it on," he adds. This particular episode set him thinking, and "I slowly started realizing that I was born into a religion that does not talk of constant suffering. It talks positively — gives hope."

His hope in the religion, even today in its state of flux and discord, is intact. We will make it through, he summarizes. If not in India then in other parts of the world. "Many of our best minds have gone abroad in search of opportunity and we are left with the rest in this country.

This is one of the reasons why we Zoroastrians are facing these problems. We are unable to agree or act according to the current circumstances," he opines. Our forefathers had the strength not only of their convictions, but the intelligence to

The grand vazir switched loyalties from his king to the British

arm themselves with the survival tool of adaptability. Today, our circumstances have changed and, unfortunately, the ability to react to these changed circumstances has also changed — we have lost that adaptability, that ability to swim along with the powerful currents of our times, notes Irani. Orthodoxy is not bad in itself — it is often the structure that holds together the religion. Sometimes when one breaks the walls of orthodoxy indiscriminately, the structure collapses: "So, don't try to tear down the walls — let's just build more doors," advises Irani optimistically, expressing his own opin-

ion on a subject that is quite close to his heart. Former managing editor and now a freelance contributor to *Parsiana*, Irani continues to retain an interest in community affairs. Last year he was seen in a TV documentary, *The Parsees: the Zoroastrians of Bombay*, produced for BBC Channel 4 by a British team whom Irani had assisted with research material.

With an optimism that his faith has underwritten in his life, Irani has done many things. Today he is a freelance writer, and manages a transport company. He worked for five years in Iran with a Greek construction company until the revolution in the country put an end to his "re-migration." While in Iran he acquired a degree in business administration from the Harvard affiliated Iran Center for Management Studies and later did a stint with the United Nations Development Programme. Six weeks of his life were subsequently spent in the highlands of Sikkim, discovering his direction in life. In a way, Irani has traveled his own road, listening carefully for the sounds of his own silence; and finally using the accumulated experiences to create his own world of words.

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MILESTONES

For the first time *Parsiana* publishes intercommunity marriages registered at the MHADA office in Bandra (East), between the period January to April, 1991. Civil marriages contracted between Zoroastrians have also been listed. However, names which could not be identified as Zoroastrian have been omitted from the list. There were 21 intercommunity marriages registered at Bandra in 1990. The previous year (1989) saw two civil marriages contracted between Zoroastrians and 17 intercommunal marriages registered at Bandra. Henceforth, *Parsiana's* intercommunal marriages list will include information from the Registrar of Marriages at the MHADA office as well as at the Old Customs' House, once every four months.

The age of Zoroastrian brides in Bombay as listed in this issue (Parsi marriages only, as age statistics are not available for intercommunal marriages) ranged between 21 and 37 years, the arithmetic mean — the sum of individual ages divided by the total number of brides — being 29 years. The corresponding figures for the grooms were 22 to 32 years, averaging at 28.

As compared to 22 Bombay births enumerated in this issue, there were 94 deaths in the month of July. The major killer was heart disease claiming 31 patients of whom 11 were above the age of 80. Fourteen victims fell prey to pneumonia and lung

disease and 10 to old age and general debility. Diabetes took the lives of eight patients while four victims each succumbed to cancer, stroke and hypertension. The other killers were liver disease (three), bronchitis and kidney failure (two each). Urinary infection, accident, diarrhoea, septicemia, drowning, brain disease, nervous disorder, uremia, burns, hypoproteinemia (deficient protein in the blood plasma caused by dietary deficiency or excessive excretion), gastroenteritis and asthma were the isolated cases registered last month. In the case of one death, the coroner's report was still pending. Three youths, aged 30, 31 and 34 years were lost to the community as also a stillborn baby boy. Ninety-four was the highest age at death.

The data on births, marriages and deaths has been compiled from information supplied by various newsletters and anjumans in India and abroad, courts and hospitals. This information is not always complete or consistent. In the breakup of deaths, according to illnesses, specially of the elderly, death is often due to a combination of several diseases.

If readers have any births/marriages/deaths they would like published, some proof to ensure the veracity of the report would be required. We are sure our readers would appreciate this requirement and cooperate with us.

BOMBAY

Born

A girl to *Ameeta* and *Rohinton Marfatia* on July 1, 1991
A girl to *Dilnavaz* and *Jamshed Karanjia*; July 5
A girl to *Avan* and *Naval Oonwalla*; July 7
A boy to *Maharukh* and *Farokh Dadachanji*; July 8
A girl to *Behroz* and *Eddie Pherozshaw*; July 9
A boy to *Tanaz* and *Cawas Billimoria*; July 10
A boy to *Gool* and *Zarir Udwadia*; July 10
A girl to *Dinaz* and *Homiyar Aibara*; July 12
A boy to *Leena* and *Dinshaw*

Contractor; July 13
A girl to *Farangis* and *Keghobadi Rahmatbadi*; July 13
A girl to *Farida* and *Percy Parekh*; July 14
A boy to *Dilnavaz* and *Rohinton Engineer*; July 15
A girl, *Priyanka*, to *Hufrish* and *Vispi Balaporia*; July 16
A boy to *Farida* and *Fram Dhondy*; July 16
A boy to *Shenaz* and *Rohinton Parakh*; July 17
A girl to *Zareen* and *Darius Kotwal*; July 20
A boy to *Lata* and *Jal Tangri*; July 23
A girl to *Firoza* and *Sharukh Khan*; July 24

A boy to *Behroze* and *Kurush Billimoria*; July 25
A boy to *Maharukh* and *Percy Dalal*; July 25
A girl to *Hufrish* and *Hormuzda Davar*; July 25
A boy to *Navaz* and *Eric Dustur*; July 27

Married

Minakshi Ishwarbhai Mistry and *Firdosh Rohinton Irani*; January 18
Christina F. Arnephie and *Navroze Soli Belihomji*; January 19
Binaifer P. Madon and *Rajiv Lochan Thakur*; January 21
Evelyn Virginia Almeida and *Adil Dinshaw Sheriar Irani*; January 29
Triveni Premnath Karekar and *Feroz Mubarak Patel*; January 21
Ramila Khushalchandra Shah and *Sam Savakshaw Cooper*; February 28
Binaifer Fali Gordon and *Prakash Shyamal Devidasani*; March 5
Jennifer Shaw and *Lekhray Patel*; March 14
Selina Ohara and *Meher D. Engineer*; March 19
Perin Palanji Nargolia and *Nand Hemandas Israni*; March 19
Mala Balbir Johar and *Kersi Bomi Chavda*; March 22
Maya Tikarndas Chandiramani and *Yazdi Behram Mistry*; March 25
Hutoxi Jal Lahewala and *Nauzer Jehangir Nicholson*; April 23
Prochi Badshah and *Surender Bhatia*; April 30
Yasmina Gustasp Dordi and *Kersi Meherji Avari*; May 23
Ketayoun Faramroz Behramkamin and *Kersi Erach Fouzdar*; May 27
Roshni Sorabji Bulsara and *Pahali Eruch Sumariwala*; May 28
Farida Soli Khursigara of Ahmedabad and *Burzin Sam Patel* of Jamnagar; July 28

Mala Balbir Johar and *Kersi Bomi Chavda*; March 22
Maya Tikarndas Chandiramani and *Yazdi Behram Mistry*; March 25
Hutoxi Jal Lahewala and *Nauzer Jehangir Nicholson*; April 23
Prochi Badshah and *Surender Bhatia*; April 30
Yasmina Gustasp Dordi and *Kersi Meherji Avari*; May 23
Ketayoun Faramroz Behramkamin and *Kersi Erach Fouzdar*; May 27
Roshni Sorabji Bulsara and *Pahali Eruch Sumariwala*; May 28
Farida Soli Khursigara of Ahmedabad and *Burzin Sam Patel* of Jamnagar; July 28

Died

Jerbanoo Firoze Ghodawalla (66), residing at C/16 Malabari Bldg, New Khareghat Clny, Hughes Rd, 400007; June 29
Nadir Nusserwanji Toorkey (82),

5, Park Darshan No 1, Opp Lal-lubhai Park, Andheri (W), 400058; June 30
Chadan Dara Daver (73), Room no 36, Mulla Manzil, Balaram St, Grant Rd, 400007; July 2
Dhanjishaw Framroze Dhanidadona (80), Bhabha Sanatorium, Band Stand, Bandra, 400050; July 2
Soona Sam Khambata (90), 501, Sonata, 15/B, Perry Cross Rd, Bandra, 400050; July 2
Najamai Nadir Tata (89), Maskati Corner, 37, Altamount Rd, 400026; July 2
Eruch Pirojshaw Amroli (67), P/28, Nowroz Baug, Lalbaug; 400012; July 3
Piroja Dadi Chinoy (78), Percy Manor, 791, Jame Jamshed Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; July 3
Jerbai Ardeshir Mistry (91), 29/B, Sagar Sangeet, 58, Colaba Rd, 400005; July 3
Homi Savaksha Dolikuka (78), Amtobai Blocks, 170/D, S. V. Rd, Bandra (W), 400050; July 4
Allahmurad Bamon Khushnami (65), Dinshaw Hse, 732, Vimadlal Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; July 4
Pirozbai Mancherji Panthaki (85), A/16, Alamai Sapurji Mistry Bldg, Dr Shirodkar Rd, Parel, 400012; July 4
Dinyar Behramji Vimadlal (53), 1/2, Shirinbai Banaji Bldg, Forjett St, Gowalia Tank, 400036; July 4
Gool Cawasji Naterwalla (74), B, Wassiamull Bldg, Grant Rd, 400007; July 5
Framroz Nusserwanji Sattha (87), 759, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; July 5
Keki Dadiba Amroliwalla (48), 759, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; July 6
Jamasp Ardeshir Dastoor (75), A/62, Meghdoot, 403, Anand Ngr, Shivaji Cross Rd, Dahisar, 400068; July 6
Dolat Ratan Sanjana (62), E/20, Nowroz Baug, Lalbaug, 400012; July 6
Merwanji Maneckji Sethna (81), 3, Silver Foil, N. Gamadia Rd, 400026; July 6
Alamai Nusserwanji Kelawala (91), P/24, Nowroz Baug, Lalbaug, 400012; July 7
Shera Phiroze Mehta (78), Mani Mount, 24,

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Altamount Rd, 400026; July 7
Tehmuras Manchersha Jangberwala (64), 347/A, United Chmbs, Grant Rd, 400007; July 8
Ratansha Khurshedji Shroff (68), B/3, Bhiwandiwalla Ter, 618, Dhobitalao, 400002; July 8
Fariz Minoo Vakharia (35), 40/A, Hoshang Baug, Vakola Masjid, Santa Cruz (E), 400055; July 8
Rustomji Khurshedji Appoo (80), F. S. Parukh Dharamshalla, 34, Hughes Rd, 400007; July 9
Bomanshaw Shapurji Deboo (56), 12/B, Cawasji Petit Bldg, Marzban Clny, Gilder Lane, Tardeo, 400034; July 9
Freny Sorabji Doctor (69), 53, Piroja Mans, Sir Ratan Tata Rd, Tardeo, 400034; July 9
Jaloo Phiroze Katpetia (70), 16/B, Sleater Rd, 400007; July 9
Phiroze Kaikhasru Tantra (73), 141, Wadia St, Tardeo Rd, 400034; July 9
Dadi Edulji Avari (78), New Khan Bldg, Chikalwadi, Grant Rd, 400007; July 10

Aloo Ardeshir Bastani (61), 3/18, A. H. Wadia Baug, Parel Tank Rd, 400033; July 10
Phirozshaw Edulji Billimoria (67), 7, Rustom Baug, Victoria Rd, Byculia, 400027; July 10
Cawas Bheramji Chhar (60), 7/A, B Block, Old Wadia Bldg, Chandanwadi, 400002; July 10
Boman Sheriar Irani (68), 14, Pankaj Mhl, Churchgate Recl, 400020; July 11
Dhanjisha Ardesher Bharucha (86), B, Mancher Manzil, 35/C, Jairaj Lane, 400008; July 12
Nergesh Bomanji Mistry (65), 315/A, Ishrat Chmbs, Grant Rd, 400007; July 12
Freddon Phirojsha Antia (88), 16/A, Govind Nivas, Altamount Rd, 400026; July 13
Eddie Rustomji Dastoor (71), 5, Akash Ganga, 89, Bhulabhai Desai Rd, 400026; July 13
Naval Dara Marshall (85), Rock Land, Malcolm Baug, Jogeshwari(W), 400102; July 13
Hormusjee Framji Mehta (87), Dr Dossibai A.J.R.D. Charity Trust Home, Masina Hosp Comp, Byculia, 400027; July 13

Rati Dadi Mehta (73), Banoo Mans, 619, Jame Jamshed Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; July 13
Perin Framji Mogal (80), 4/18, A. H. Wadia Baug, Parel Tank Rd, 400033; July 13
Raty Framroz Pavri (88), Band View, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; July 14
Jal Kaikhasroo Irani (84), 11, Pooja Apt, Perry Cross Rd, Bandra, 400050; July 15
Jamshed Khodadad Irani (67), 15, Vijaya Bhuwan, 44, Proctor Rd, Grant Rd, 400007; July 15
Kaikhushru Behramji Irani (85), 31/32, Shanti Vila, Malcolm Baug, Jogeshwari (W), 400102; July 15
Homi Dinshawji Patel (76), 52, Wipata Hse, Bomanji Lane, Fort, 400001; July 15
Behram Ratanji Ukhaji (65), C/o R. K. Dastoor, H. B. Wadia Atash Bahram, Princess St, 400002; July 15
Minoo Dhunjishaw Kapadia (81), Bhatia Co-op Hsg Soc, Princess St, 400002; July 16
Nariman Burjorji Kapadia (90), 102, Valentina, N. Gamadia Rd,

400026; July 16
Baby boy of Dinaz Rohinton Amrolia (stillborn), P-28/B, Nowroz Baug, Lalbaug, 400012; July 17
Roshan Sam Bhathena (52), C/23, Nowroz Baug, Lalbaug, 400012; July 17
Mani Dara Contractor (79), Malabar Mans, 37, Garden Rd, Apollo Recl, 400019, July 17
Roosi Burjorjee Panthakee (67), 13, Wadia Bldg, Dr Ambedkar Rd, 400014; July 17
Hoshie Jalejar Deboo (47), 32, Sir Ratan Tata Blocks, Parel Tank Rd, 400012; July 18
Nariman Naoroji Sukhidas (82), A/4, Sanjana Bldg, Forjett Hill Rd, 400036; July 18
Soonamai Pirojshah Behramkamdin (89), 3, Albless Bldg, 266, Thakurdwar Rd, 400002; July 19
Dhunmai Bujorji Jithra (90), Banaji Bldg, Forjett St Cross Lane, 400036; July 19
Kaikhushroo Ardeshir Master (94), Sakseria Sadan, Napean Sea Rd, 400026; July 19
Najamai Rustomji Sethna (88), M/12, Cusrow Baug,

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Banoobai Eruchshaw
Siganporia (72), P/8, Nowroz
 Baug, Lalbaug, 400012; July 19
Khorshed Navroji Hozaar (80),
 609, Siganpori Bldg, Girgaum
 Rd, 400002; July 20
Najamai Jamshedji Mistry (90),
 4, Readymoney Bldg, 784/B,
 M. Joshi Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar,
 400014; July 20
Jalamai Behramsha Talavia
 (68), D/1, Bhatia Co-op Soc
 Bldg, S. Gandhi Marg, 400002;
 July 20
Dinshaw Cawas Wadia (88),
 F/1, Nowroz Baug, Lalbaug,
 400012; July 20
Najan Dadabhoy Daruvala
 (78), La Fleur, Plot no 154, 30th
 Rd, T.P.S. III, Bandra, 400050;
 July 21
Framroze Ardeshir Katpitia
 (89), 5/5, Rustom Baug,
 Victoria Rd, Byculla, 400027;
 July 21
Allamai Kaikhushru Mistry
 (81), Sethna Bldg, M.M.C. Rd,
 Mahim, 400016; July 21
Fakirji Maneksha Mobedji (85),
 689, Sethna Bldg, Dinshaw
 Master Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar,
 400014; July 21
Goolbai Phirojsha Moos (93),
 1, Goolddhan Abad, S. V. Rd,
 Jogeshwari (W), 400102;
 July 21
Mehernosh Ratansha Bhesania
 (31), Petit Sanatorium, Kamps
 Corner, 400036; July 23
Sehra Kaikhushru Gandhi (87),
 Meherabad, Juhu Koliwada,
 Sanja Cruz (W), 400054;
 July 23
Aloo (Aimai) Hormasji Karanjia
 (91), 8, Henry Bldg, Sleater Rd,
 400007; July 23
Jal Phirozsha Shroff (75), 40,
 Raja Ram Mohan Rd, 400004;
 July 23
Shirin Homi Bilimoria (93),
 Maison Belvedere, M. Karve
 Rd, 400020;
 July 24
Meherji Hormusji Ghadiali (85),
 18, Sai Darshan, 99, August
 Kranti Marg, 400036;
 July 24
Hirabai Jehangir Engineer (91),
 Talukdar Bldg, Marzban Clny,
 Dr Nair Rd, 400011; July 25
Minocher Rustomji Kapadia
 (81), 1, Shalimar Bldg, 216,
 Netaji Subhash Rd, 400020;
 July 25
Mani Jehangirji Mirza (71),
 24/1, Tara Manzil, Dhobitalao
 Lane, 400002; July 25

Percy Shavaksha Taraporewala
 (43), D/14, Chand Soc,
 Juhu Church, 400049;
 July 25
Framroze Naoroji Dandiwalla
 (80), A, Gool Mhl, Sleater Rd,
 400007; July 26
Nariman Rustomji Mistry (78),
 15/A, Row Bglw, Jesal Park,
 Bhayander (E), 401105;
 July 26
Adi Jalejar Pastakia (30),
 C/o R. K. Dastur, H. B. Wadia
 Atash Bahram, Princess St,
 400002; July 26
Dinshaw Mehrwanji Cooper
 (70), 8, Lady Navajbai Tata
 Bldg, S. V. Rd, Bandra,
 400050; July 27
Kolah Shiavax Bamji (74), 9,
 Khareghat Clny, Hughes Rd,
 400007; July 28
Ferdoon Maneksha Mehta (90),
 Vevai Villa, 686, Khareghat Rd,
 Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014;
 July 28
Framroze Hormusji Pavri (63),
 Marine Chmbs, Above Marine
 Restaurant, New Marine Lines,
 400020; July 28
Roshan Burjor Jussawalla (72),
 18, Gamadia Bldg, Gamadia
 Clny, Tardeo Rd, 400007;
 July 29
Tehmurasp Erachshaw
Sachinwalla (78), Saidunissa
 Bldg, Sleater Rd, 400007;
 July 29
Jerbanoo Framroze Umrigar
 (73), G-2/7, Shapur Baug, V. P.
 Rd, 400004; July 29
Khorshed Sorabji Bhagat (87),
 Dhunbai Villa, Dhunbai Wadi,
 Trla Lane, Vile Parle (W),
 400056; July 30
Cawasji Nusserwanji Cooper
 (88), Polson Bldg, 731,
 Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014;
 July 30
Banoo Framroze Patel (72),
 A/7, Mehta Bldg, Captain Clny,
 Tardeo, 400034;
 July 30
Kaikhushroo Rustom Surti (83),
 Dhanu Bldg, Dr Ambedkar Rd,
 Parel, 400012; July 30
Shirin Maneckshaw Elavia
 (70), Bhabha Sanatorium,
 Bandra, 400050; July 31
Darabsha Nasservanji
Patrawalla (70), 9, Albless
 Bldg, Chikalwadi, Grant Rd,
 400007; July 31

CALCUTTA
 Born
 A girl, *Mehernaz*, to *Daulat* and
Firdause Jilla; July 15

Died
Kuma Dorab Mogrelia, mother
 of Rusi, Phiroze and Burjor;
 July 12

POONA
Died
Freny Kaikusroo Irani (85), 21,
 Sasson Rd, 411001; July 9
Minocher Ardeshir Thanewala
 (80), Irani Hse, Goga St, Fort,
 Bombay, 400001; July 24
Khorshed Homi Cooper (46),
 7/D, Modi Clny, Synagogue
 St, 411001; July 26
Boman Sheryar Irani (50),
 5, Meher Apts, Sachapir St,
 411001; July 31

SURAT
Died
Hillamai Darabshaw Dudhwala
 (75), Vakil St, Shahpore,
 395003; July 13
Najamai Burjorji Dastur (93),
 Lam Agiary, Maachli Pith,
 395003; July 19
Hoshang Khodabux Baliwala

(82), Saraswati Apt,
 Athwalines, 395001; June 20
Jamshed Nariman Mistry (63),
 Gam Amroli, Dist Surat,
 395003; July 22
Hirji Jamaspji Kudianiwalla
 (73) Gam Vesu, Dist Surat,
 395003; July 24

KARACHI
Died
Freny Darabsha Variava (68);
 June 4
Rustom Meherwanji Mond
 (67); June 11
Jamshed Hormuzsha Wania
 (62); June 18
Jamshed Eruchsha Malbari
 (62); June 24
Naja Pirojsha Sarkari (83);
 June 27

TOTALS (for this issue)
 Births: Boys 11, Girls 11
 Marriages: Parsi 5
 Intercommunal 13
 Deaths: 111
 Compiled by Roxana H. Kaka

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Surti: revived a lost lore

Arnavaz S. Mama

"He wrote the entire manuscript in his own hand and himself typed out over 1,700 pages, all over a period of 16 years... He achieved his ambition of resurrecting Iran for the benefit of all English knowing people the world over for all (time) to come," noted the resolution adopted at the condolence meeting jointly convened by the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute (KRCOI), the Bombay Parsi Punchayet, The Oriental Heritage Trust, the India-Iran Cultural Society, the Iran League, the Athorinan Mandal and the Rahnumae Mazdayasnan Sabha to mourn the death of Dr Bahman Surti (74) in Secunderabad on March 21, 1991.

Twenty years ago, after retiring as the additional director of the medical and health services of the Government of Andhra Pradesh, principal of the Gandhi Medical College and superintendent of the Government Maternity Hospital in Hyderabad, he began to translate the *Shah Namah's* 55,994 extant couplets from the Persian of Firdaosi into 20th century English prose. Throughout, he took "the utmost care to maintain the same idiom of expression as in the original Persian," as he noted in the preface to the seven-volume edition. The travail overlaid the harried obstetric demands of a practising gynecologist.

The achievement was acknowledged by the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India with its 1987 award for excellence in Zoroastrian scholarship, conferred on Surti in Bombay in September 1988. In November 1989 the Naishapoor Foundation of Tehran, Iran, which is involved in promoting cultural, historical and literary activities of the ancient Iranian and Zoroastrian civilizations, also recognized Surti's epic effort with an award.

"Bahman was a great gentleman and a great scholar... He did so much to revive interest in the motherland and the language," noted well-known jurist Nani Palkhivala who presided over the condolence meeting at the KRCOI's Library

Hall on April 30, 1991. "1990 was declared by UNESCO as the Year of Firdaosi. Bahman Surti lived through that year and had the deep satisfaction of knowing that the world recognized Firdaosi as one of its epic poets," he added. Palkhivala recalled how he had met Surti 50 years ago in Hyderabad and had had a long chat. "He was steeped in Farsi literature and loved it... He believed Farsi was the sweetest language the world has ever known." Palkhivala remembered the deep emotion with which Surti had recited the poems of Sadi, Hafeez and Firdaosi.

"He typed himself, read the proofs himself, financed the printing himself," added Capt Hormuzdiar Desai, joint honorary secretary of the KRCOI, while acknowledging Surti's gift of his entire collection of Persian literature to the KRCOI library. Asked the venerable homeopath Sarosh Wadia, "How do we perpetuate his memory? Merely passing resolutions is not enough."

Murzbani Giara, the computer professional who "shared a dream (with Surti) that the younger generation and the world should have a chance to know (the *Shah Namah*)" recalled how "nobody even noticed Surti" as he sought help to publish the labor of a lifetime. Calling the doctor "a simple, gentle, humble human being" who lived up to his name — Bahman, the good mind — Giara reminisced about the "perfect rapport" that existed between them, undisturbed by any generation gap despite a 30-year difference between their ages.

A message from the Iranian Islamic Republic's consul general Ali Zali was read out in the original Persian by consul Mohammad Reza Alirezai Abyaneh, followed by the translated version. Thanking industrialist Sorab Godrej and the Parsi community for the invitation to address the meeting, Zali took "the opportunity to throw light on the unbroken bonds of unity between Iranians and Parsis... Despite being away for years, you are most sincere about the homeland and have helped Iran at the time of the earthquake." Zali extended an invitation to the community to visit Iran, "see the developments, visit religious places..."

A condolence message to the family from principal Ms Lily Ebener, the staff and students of the Gandhi Memorial College noted, "We cherish his memory,



Surti: steeped in Farsi literature

especially his profound knowledge, his subtle humor and impeccable manners." Surti has bequeathed his collection of books on medicine to the College.

The Parsi Zoroastrian Anjuman of Secunderabad and Hyderabad (PZASH) wrote Ms Khorshed Surti a condolence letter but did not summon a condolence meeting or pass a resolution. (Surti had been a trustee of PZASH. The anjuman connection ended at the time of the last presidential election when Surti felt that his candidature had been sidetracked.) It remained for five members of the general body of the Anjuman to join together to hold a condolence meeting at the Bai Pirojbai Chenoy Hall on June 23, 1991. Convener Burjor Batliwala, at the outset of the meeting, recorded the cooperation of Dr (Ms) Rashida Patel, Dr E. Reporter, Kuman Reporter and Sohrab Dittia and noted that the meeting had no connection whatsoever with any local organization. Several individuals paid tribute to the doctor's many fine qualities. "Most speakers regretted not having known and appreciated Dr Surti's serv-

ices during his lifetime," notes a press release forwarded to *Parsiana* by Ms Roshan D. Chinoy. It was suggested at the meeting that an amount should be set aside for scholastic purposes in memory of Surti — an idea supported by PZASH president Bazun Dittia. Another suggestion to include Surti's name in all religious ceremonies at the three fire-temples in the Twin Cities was declined as the meeting had not been summoned either by the trustees of the fire-temples or the managing committee of PZASH.

Surti had also authored a booklet, *Thus Spake Zarathushtra*, published by the Sri Ramakrishna Math of Madras and contributed articles on Mazdayasna, yoga and Hindu philosophy to *Vedanta Kesari*, the Math's monthly magazine.

Not one to bandy his opinions but forthright in his answer to questions, Surti had maintained a liberal stance. In an interview with *Parsiana* in 1988, Surti had refused to "condemn men or women to spinsterhood because they do not find suitable (partners within) their own community." And he was proud of his Swiss son-in-law and had had his grandson initiated into the Zoroastrian faith in a well attended navjote in Secunderabad.

It was an article of faith with the vegetarian doctor — Surti believed that the devil had appeared in the form of a cook to lure good people into meat eating — that a healthy mind could only function from a healthy body, the right diet and exercise providing the key.

Surti's father Sohraab, a surgeon, had cherished a copy of the *Shah Namah* in Persian as a family heirloom, reading out a few couplets every day to his wife Naazaan and son Bahman. Reading the epic, in the original, from his teen years, Surti was imbued with a love of the language as exemplified also in the Sufi poetry of Omar Khayyam, Hafeez and J. Rumi. He was also conscious that "it was Firdaosi and his *Shah Namah* which instilled a spirit of fervent nationalism that maintained intact (the Persian) language, culture and civilization and saved Iran from losing its identity and becoming an Arab state unlike all other countries overrun by Arabs such as Egypt, Byzantium, Syria, Babylon."

Surti believed the *Shah Namah* to be "a faithful record of the kings of Iran right from the very beginning up to the last ruler of the Sassanian dynasty, Emperor Yazdgurd III... 10.9 percent of the epic (consists of) sermons on the greatness and goodness of God (and) proclaims that life

is one perpetual struggle between the forces of good and evil and that the one and only God wants us always to be on the side of the forces of good by the strict observance of righteous thoughts... words... deeds...

"Firdaosi (had) pointed out the tragedy resulting from resorting to violence before thinking calmly and coolly over the consequences of an impulsive deed. As example he holds before us the world champion Rustam who was the protector of Iran against the evil rulers of Tooraan. He was so bent upon slaying Tooraanian knights in single combats or massed battles...that he did not wait to recognize his own son Sohraab... It was a case of 'kill in haste and repent at leisure.'"

Surti's one regret was that by his work he deprived his wife of the help and pleasures that were due to her. "The entire burden of bringing up my beloved children, son Navzar and daughter Rati, including their education, fell on her without any help from me. The expenditure involved in the preparation of the typewritten manuscripts of the translation deprived (them) of a corresponding amount of money which they could have usefully spent towards their necessities as well as luxuries." Thus Surti acknowledged "her innate nobility and generosity" in the preface.

Surti is survived by his wife Khorshed, son Navzar and daughter Rati Puz Surti.

Nariman's economic era

Died: Fali K. F. Nariman, 80, eminent economist and reputed banker, referred to as the "Father of Union Bank" on January 30, 1991 following complications arising from a paralytic stroke which led to his being in a comatose condition for many months thereafter.

"In the quarter of a century that he presided over the destiny of the Union Bank of India (UBI) he raised it from a Bank with just three branches (under the managing agency of Central Bank of India) to a forefront bank with over 800 branches — and that too in an era when there were no compulsions on banks to open branches here, there and everywhere," noted Phiroze Gutta who succeeded him as chairman of UBI. "He fully supported social control but he was not keen on state ownership of banking

for he foresaw politicization of banking if it was nationalized," Gutta added.

Firm and decisive he was, yet rarely given to dominating people around him, Gutta remembered. Instead, he set an example to others by his own example, recalls Limji Mistry, former general manager of UBI. As head of the committee appointed by the ministry of finance to formulate the Lead Bank Scheme, Nariman himself volunteered to take over a few of the most backward districts in Uttar Pradesh for development by the Bank.

Starting as a junior officer and retiring as custodian after a stint as chairman, he was viewed as the "Father of Union Bank," recalls Mistry.

There are additionally other financial institutions that gained from Nariman's expertise: He was deputy chairman of the Indian Banks' Association, founder director of the Agricultural Finance Corporation Ltd, on the board of the Industrial Finance Corporation of India, head of the different working and steering groups appointed by the Reserve Bank of India to deal with specialized subjects like unsecured advances and financing of small scale industries...

After his retirement from the banking scene, Nariman served as director of several companies, notable among which are Mahindra and Mahindra Ltd, Mafatlal Dyes and Chemicals Ltd, The Victoria Mills Ltd, the Navsari Cotton and Silk Mills Ltd. During the 15 years he served as chairman and five as director of the Navsari Cotton and Silk Mills "his sense of fiscal discipline and his judgment of people" were remarkable, according to Rosal Mehta, present chairman of the company. Equally long was Nariman's tenure with Mahindra and Mahindra where he was director for nearly 20 years. "Despite his financial skills, Mr Nariman's real interest lay in monitoring and nurturing the human wealth of the organization. His prime concern was that careers should be planned and succession be arranged with smoothness and efficiency. As a natural consequence, he was a mentor to many," recalls Anand Mahindra, deputy managing director of Mahindra and Mahindra.

"Until recently, a curious figure could be seen every day around 1 p.m. with comforting regularity wending his way from Gateway Building at Apollo Bunder (where the Mahindra office is situated) to the Taj Mahal Hotel. Dressed in a three-piece all-wool suit topped by a Homburg hat, F. K. F. Nari-

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Nariman: fiscal discipline

man would defy the tropical temperature in order to preserve his way of life. That was the kind of man he was — stubborn to a fault when it came to defending his convictions. It was this quality along with his wisdom and experience that endeared him to all those who were privileged to know him," Mahindra continued.

It was left to Jashwant Thacker, senior partner in the legal firm Mulla and Mulla and Craigie, Blunt and Caroe, to reminisce of Nariman as "a first class cricketer... Fali represented the Parsis in the Pentangular matches and also played for Bombay in the Ranjit Trophy Tournament. He was an excellent all-rounder and batted and bowled left-handed... the late Mr Vijay Merchant and Fali Nariman were the tormenting twins during their college days (at) Sydenham College."

His sporting spirit extended to his professional life. As notes Gupta, "Like the true sportsman that he was, he never grudged a personal defeat or disadvantage as long as it was fairly meted out to him or his organization... To Fali, authenticity prevailed over conformity."

The economist is survived by his wife Nargis, and daughters Daulat Jaiswal, Ayesha Patel and Pheroza Bilimoria.

Parinaz Gandhi

Rustamji: practising and preaching law

Died: Rustam Faramurz Rustamji, 82, freedom fighter and former advocate of the Supreme Court of India whose treatise on labor law served as a valuable reference work on the subject, on February 10, 1991 following cardiac arrest.

His legal acumen earned him acclaim as an advocate, popularity as a professor teaching at the Law College, Nagpur, and respect as legal adviser to the Nagpur Municipal Corporation. His forte especially was labor legislation and his book on the subject, *Law of Industrial Disputes*, wherein he analyses the fundamental principles governing labor laws in India, was considered a work indispensable



Rustamji: would incite students to rebel

to lawyers, judges, industrialists, trade unionists, workmen and others. "The book assumed special importance in view of India's policy... to achieve industrialization in a socialist pattern of society," notes a write-up on Rustamji.

His role in the freedom struggle was "to incite students to rebel against the British rulers," remembers a family

source. "It is the duty of all Indians to join hands and to work together to make India united, independent and strong," wrote Rustamji in his book *India and the Parsees*. He further called on the Parsis to "throw in their lot with the forces of nationalism; for then, our children — who are hostages to posterity — will find that in the India of tomorrow they will not be looked down upon as those who stood in the way of India's progress towards swaraj."

"He was extremely keen on joining politics and yet shied away when opportunities came his way. I still don't know why," reminisced Jal Gimi, director at the Nagpur University's Department of Business Management, in a condolence letter to the family. "I am sure if he had balanced his life adequately between the legal profession and political activities he would have become a political force to reckon with," Gimi continued.

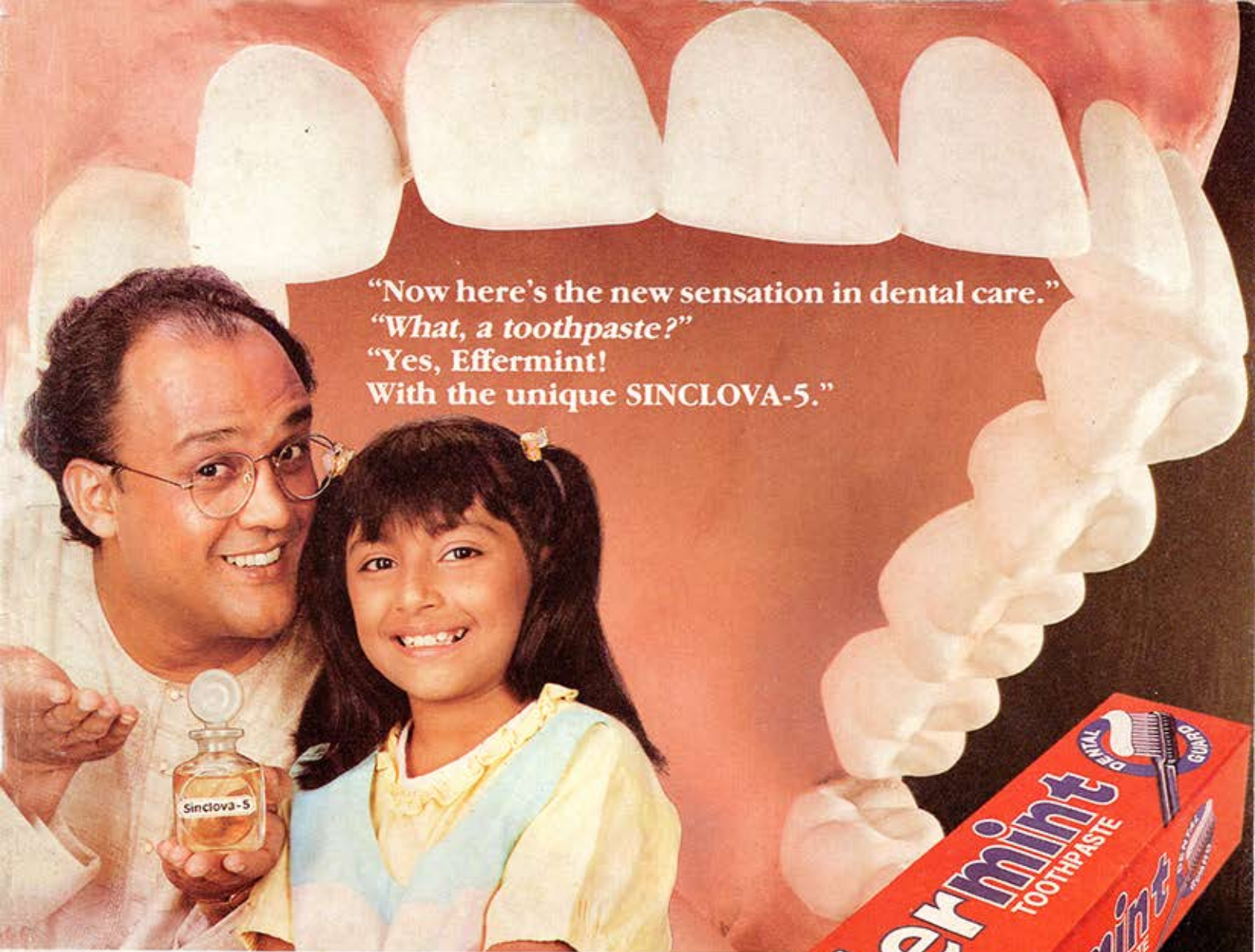
A graduate in arts and law from the Nagpur University, Rustamji is known to have been a fine orator and debater since his college days in Nagpur. Among those whom he inspired to take to debating was Gimi who remembered representing the Nagpur University along with Rustamji's brother Khuro. (Only a few days prior to Rustamji's death, Khuro was conferred the Padma Vibhushan.) Another consuming interest that began in his younger days was his collection of antique Chinese porcelain. Making his first purchase at the age of 17 at Bombay's Chor Bazar, the curios in his possession constituted one of the best private collections in India, mentions his daughter Perveen Aggarwal.

Rustamji was conversant with Zoroastrian ideology yet opted for cremation. "Every man shall have it in his power to earn merit or demerit in this as well as in the next world by means of his own actions, good or evil," was the doctrine he professed.

Happy to recount the success stories of Parsis, Rustamji added, "It is a misfortune of the Parsis that at present they have no front-rank leaders amongst them and, as a community, they do not play that part in public life and politics which might be expected of them... There are those however who realize that the community cannot live forever on its reputation nor must it expect to live forever under the shadow of the British empire."

Rustamji is survived by his wife Parin, and daughters Perveen Aggarwal and Ruksana Mehta.

P. G.



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