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Parsiana

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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 Unsigned letters or those without an address will not be published.

"Safeguarding the rights..."

Apropos the letter from Mr F. K. Tarapore ("Safeguarding the rights..." Readers' Forum, Parsiana, July 1992), I would like to point out that what is stated therein is not correct.

Our panthaky saheb of the Bangalore Agiary does permit male Zoroastrians married to non-Zoroastrian women to enter the fire-temple to offer prayers or to attend any religious function. Unfortunately, Zoroastrian ladies married to non-Zoroastrians are denied a similar privilege to enter and pray in the fire-temple.

In Bangalore, there are more than half-a-dozen such unfortunate ladies who suffer this injustice and indignity in silence, in the interest of keeping the peace and not raking up any controversy or ill will in an otherwise small, peaceful and harmonious community.

A person belongs to the religion in which he/she is born and there are no legal or moral obligations to excommuni-

cate a person on the grounds of marriage to an alien.

We all are currently witnessing the horrors of religious fundamentalism raging throughout the world and I only hope that our small community will be wisely guided onto the true path of the teachings of our prophet Zoroaster and not onto issues introduced under ecclesiastical pressure.

Dr M. D. DISAWALLA
Bangalore

"Autograph obsession"

I was very angry as I read the article "Autograph obsession" (Events and Personalities, Parsiana, July 1992), it being absolutely wrong and out of proportion.

- I do not spend Rs 500 every day. I spend about Rs 22 a month, that's two letters
- I do not have Garbo's autograph
- Pavarotti never proposed marriage
- Buyers do not approach me

Ms EIRENE MOWJI

"An intact astral body"

You had printed a letter from Ms Damania, "An intact astral body," in Parsiana, April 1992.

The lady has it backward! Actually the astral body cannot be cut by anything physical, so donation of organs after death (or even before, if the physical organ isn't necessary) is perfectly all right. A person in an astral body after death is in a state of total unconcern for his physical body. Do you still care for the first car you drove, now a rusting hulk?

Ms Damania must think that physical fire can burn up an astral form! I really doubt if anything physical, including fire, can affect one's astral body since the astral body is vibrating at a higher rate than anything physical...

I hope Ms Damania would reconsider her position, especially considering the evidence [for example, phantom (astral) limbs in amputees, which can be seen by the psychically sensitive].

Rev DAVID BROCK
Oregon, USA

"Mercury's moment of..."

When Freddie Mercury made his illness public, I was both shocked and saddened for, although I cannot say that I understand a great deal about modern "pop" or "rock," I thought it was a waste of talent and a young life. His illness and death also brought into focus the feelings of his

family. Their disappointment and pain (may have been anger as well at the knowledge of his life-style and his denial of his Indian/Parsi roots) must have deepened with the realization that their son and brother was dying.

On reading Gustasp Irani's "In Memoriam," (Parsiana, February 1992) I felt a sense of tragedy, a sense of the inevitability and pathos which are characteristic of such tragedies, when the main player is quite oblivious to what lies ahead, even though it is of his own making.

But need Farokh Balsara's manner of life and death have been the inevitable tragedy it turned out to be?

His uncle, Nariman Khory, says: "Rightly or wrongly, he believed that to succeed as a pop singer it was okay to be black but not brown, so he did not advertise his Indian origin." That is as it may be, but I don't think it would have stood in his way if he had the talent, which he obviously did have.

The "In Memoriam" speaks of two personalities: that of Freddie Mercury, the successful performer; and Farokh Balsara, the boy who somehow got lost, carried away by the glitter and adoration of his thousands of fans. Maybe both of them were thoroughly confused, not knowing who they were or where they belonged. Ms Julie Burchill feels "Freddie Mercury belonged to Britain..." Maybe he did; but where did Farokh Balsara belong? Could he have had doubts about himself as Freddie Mercury, which made him unhappy, and hence his hectic and undisciplined life? Who can tell?

Could Farokh Balsara have been able to hold on to his identity as a Parsi and a Zoroastrian if he had known how; if he had known what being a true Zoroastrian was all about? Would he have been stronger and thus able to control Freddie Mercury? If he had been helped to realize that Zoroastrianism was much more than old customs and observances? That the ancient religion, though still expressed in a "dead" language, was also a living religion which could be expressed in our everyday living? That it could meet the needs of the world of today, in whatever context or environment the individual found him or herself?

At his death his friends spoke of Freddie Mercury's generosity, his many unpublicized charitable acts, his kindness

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and concern for others. Where did this generosity come from? Does it have no value at all?

Although I do not and cannot condone Freddie Mercury's life-style, I feel that once again the Bombay trustees have shown a heartless and self-righteous face of the community. It is so easy to be self-righteous and smug when the one gone astray is not your own. The young boy who so wanted to sing and perform didn't seem to have the least idea as to where he was headed; he was so ill-equipped to meet the challenge when it came. No one seemed to have been able to help him realize his own worth as a person — as an Indian, a Parsi and a Zoroastrian. It seems as if a part of him remained the young boy who had performed at Bertorelli Restaurant at Worli so long ago, and who so wanted to be accepted as a singer/performer, but somehow got lost in a sea of diverse cultures, materialism and permissiveness. He was drowning and no one was able to save him. Why?

I don't think that there is any likelihood of many of our young people going the way of Farokh Balsara, but, nevertheless, we need much more than a few youngsters attending religious classes to save our community. We need this knowledge but we also need to listen to each other, and stop working against each other. We have to recognize the fact that we need the revival of the good religion Asho Zarathushtra preached. We need a more intelligent and wise approach so that all Zoroastrians may once again feel a pride — not arrogance — in our community, in being what we are, Parsis/Iranis and Zoroastrians, whichever country we may be citizens of today. And above all that being Zoroastrian is more important than being Parsi or Irani, although this is also important if we hap-

pen to be Parsis or Iranis.

"Mercury's moment of truth" is also the community's moment of truth — although for the community it has been a somewhat longer moment. At least he recognized his moment, while many in our community refuse to recognize what is happening and therefore fail to sense the direction in which they are headed. What are the messages going out to the children, or the younger generation, especially those who were born here, or came over while still very young, and are now growing up far from their roots? Many of them do not want to have any thing to do with the community, for whatever reason. Even this the orthodox will not acknowledge. They obviously believe that what they do not see could not possibly be.

While we ignore this truth about the members who stay aloof from the rest of us, refuse to recognize our folly in not accepting children of mixed marriages and their non-Zoroastrian parents into the religion, we are becoming a community of little significance — with little to offer the world of today. We are a part of this world: we are influenced by it in different ways, but we ourselves are not exerting the kind of influence the world needs. It is a world so war-torn and morally confused, trying so hard to save its soul, its spirituality, its sanity as well as its physical existence amidst so much chaos. Our children will have to live in this chaotic world, with its violence and hatred, its bigotry and ethnic and religious wars. The orthodox are only aggravating and strengthening these attitudes within the community.

In mid-April another tribute was paid to Freddie Mercury. I hope it went some way to compensate for the prayers the trustees of the Dadar Parsi Colony Agiary refused to Farokh Balsara. May

his soul find peace in God's ineffable love and compassion, for He alone knows and understands as to what went wrong between Freddie Mercury and Farokh Balsara.

Ms PERIN DIVECHA

Kent, UK

ZAGNY donation

The Udvada Anjuman has received a donation of Rs 82,145 from the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York and other Zoroastrian associations of America. This amount is for the Iran-shah Kathi Fund, and for helping the mobeds, nassessalars and behdins of Udvada. This amount in honor of the Udvada Atash Behram, is one-third of the total amount they collect at the yearly luncheon get-together where Zoroastrians make generous donations. All members of the Udvada Anjuman are grateful to fellow Zoroastrians of America and may they prosper from day to day by the blessings of Iranshah is our sincere prayer. KAIKOBAD PHIROZEJI DASTOOR

High Priest, Iranshah, Udvada

Attitudes of Parsi boys?

Why is it that the elders of our community insist that all that the Parsi youth today (especially male) are interested in doing is securing a clerical job of some sort in a bank?

While I do accept that the levels of motivation amongst us (Parsi youth) are not as high as they should be, I would like to point out that it is not a general rule (and definitely not an established fact) that all of us are as laid-back and unenterprising as certain older members of our community would like us to believe.

I know several people of my generation (I am 22 years old) and age, who are budding lawyers, doctors, engineers, businessmen, managers, chartered accountants and who also "coincidentally" happen to be male and Parsi.

I would request the older generations to visit the Parsi Punchayet, Bombay (each year around July-August) and see the number of well qualified, intelligent and enterprising young Parsis (both male and female) who apply for scholarships for studies abroad.

If the older generations believe that we are complacent and laid-back, surely a proportion of that fault can be attributed to them as well? They have, as grandparents, parents, uncles and aunts failed to instill "the traditional Parsi

continued on page 18

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Events and Personalities

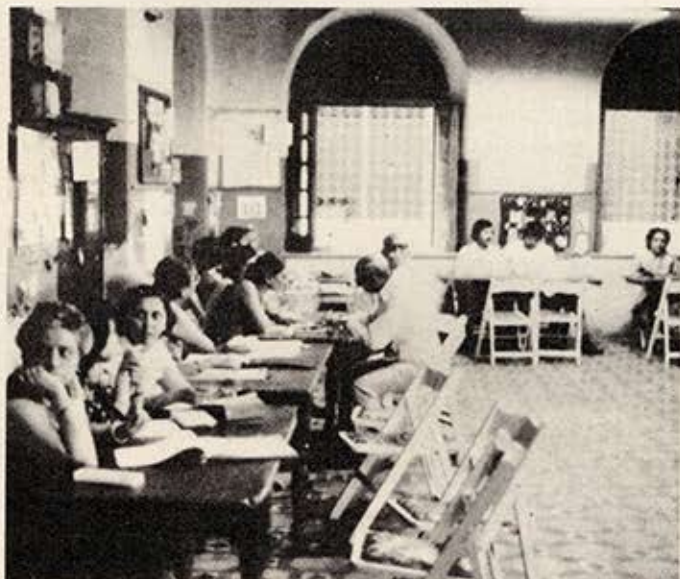
The cold elections

Only 18 percent of the 19,535 members on the General Register of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) voted at the recently concluded Anjuman Committee elections, the first to be held under the revised electoral scheme. In the national elections the voter turnout in the country is around 50 percent. Of the total 3,542 people who voted, 777 had to be issued new/duplicate certificates on the six days set aside for elections as otherwise they would not have been eligible to vote, notes a Punchayet source. The 802 seats on the Anjuman Committee were contested by 1,632 candidates, a little less than 50 percent of the total voters.

On the polling days, over three weekends in December, the maximum turnout was from the Tardeo and Hughes Road (J) constituency where 578 members voted for the 79 seats that were being contested, according to the Punchayet source. The lowest turnout was evinced in the Fort (B) constituency where only 190 members turned up to vote for the 90 allocated seats, the largest reserved for any constituency. And that too when the polling center for two of the six days allocated for voting was in the Head Office Building, in Fort.

While polling was permitted at any of the six centers, irrespective of one's constituency affiliation, the number of people, who chose to exercise their franchise was highest, 1,566, during the first weekend of December 5 and 6, and lowest, 896, during the last weekend of December 26 and 27. On December 5, when the venue was the Head Office Building, 561 members voted. December 6 at Khareghat Colony saw the high-

est turnout on a single day, 1,005. Due to political disturbances in the city following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, the voting scheduled for December 12 and 13 was rescheduled to December 26 and 27 at the Dadar Parsi Colony and Bharucha Baug respec-



On the first day of elections: awaiting voters Photo: Gustasp Irani

tively. While 527 persons turned up to vote at Dadar, the figure for Andheri was 369. At Nowroz Baug, on December 19, 548 members cast their vote while at the Head Office Building on December 20, polling was done by 532 members.

It was originally the intention of the Punchayet that voting rights would be granted only to those who had collected their new certificates in lieu of the old Anjuman Committee certificates. Considering that barely 5,000 voters had chosen to exchange their certificates in advance, for the convenience of the electorate the BPP decided that new/duplicate certificates would be issued even at the election venue on the candidate being able to establish his bonafide identity.

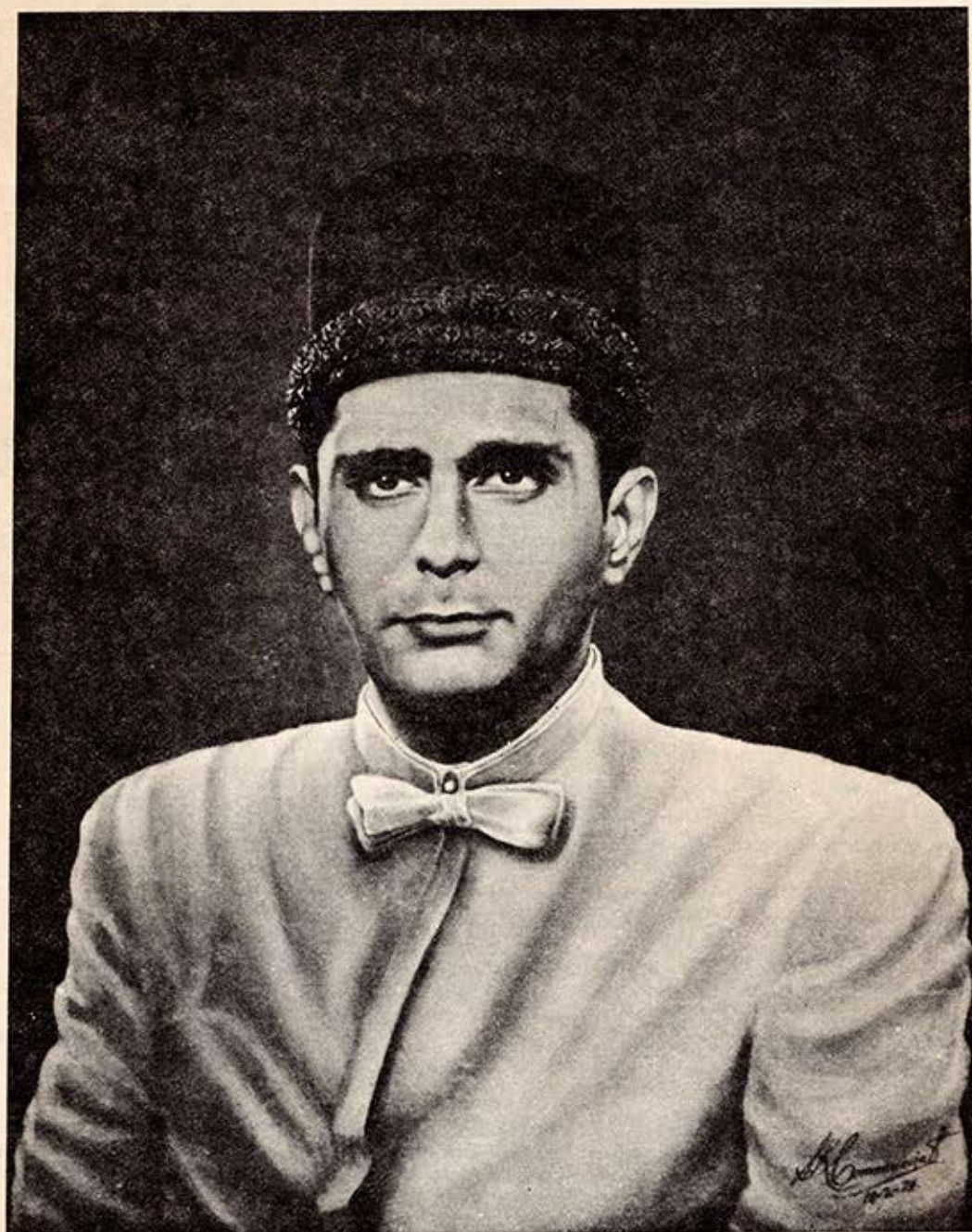
"A real dada"

"He was the first Indian who had the courage to fight for India's freedom on foreign soil... He was a man who ranked in the annals of Indian history as one of the earliest architects of our freedom when no one had dared to raise his voice against the British Empire."

These tributes for the Grand Old Man (GOM) of India came from Homi J. H. Taleyarkhan, chairman of the National Committee for Dadabhai Naoroji Parliamentary Centenary Celebrations that brought out a souvenir encapsulating the life and spirit of the GOM. The Governor of Maharashtra C. Subramaniam released the brochure and presented the first copy to well-known industrialist J. R. D. Tata at a function at Raj Bhavan on September 5 to mark the centenary year of the election of Naoroji, the first Indian, to the British House of Commons.

With his election, Naoroji carried the battle for swaraj to the British parliament, remarked Subramaniam referring to the GOM as a harbinger of spring after the dreary political climate that India had known. To JRD, Naoroji was "as great a man as Mahatma Gandhi." Gandhiji himself has been quoted in the booklet as saying, "Dadabhai became a real *dada* (elder) to me... for he was my constant adviser and inspiration... I found that Indian students (in London) had free access to the GOM at all hours of the day. Indeed he was in place of a father to every-one of them, no matter to which province or religion they belonged."

In keeping with Naoroji's secular spirit, the morning's program started with an all-religion prayer song rendered by the students of Bharatiya Vidya Bha-



In Memoriam

Mr Fali Meherji Variava

Director

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Taleyarkhan lighting the lamp at the Dadabhai Naoroji centenary celebrations at Raj Bhavan while (from left) Tata and Subramaniam look on

van. Representatives of different communities — Dalip Singh, vice principal of Khalsa College, Justice V. S. Deshpande, former chief justice of the Bombay High Court, Fr John Correa Alfonso, former principal of St Xavier's College, Dr (Ms) Mehroo Bengalee, former vice chancellor of the Bombay University — spoke of the GOM's popularity with all communities and his dream of national integration.

"Never despair" was the philosophy adopted by Naoroji who believed, "Our faith and our future are in our own hands," as he is quoted in the brochure. A pioneer of feminism, Naoroji stressed that unless a woman is allowed to vote the country cannot progress. He also strove for female education and free education for all, beginning at a young age, it was recalled.

With the Indian postal department planning to issue a commemorative stamp in his memory, a permanent imprint will be left of Naoroji's dedication to India, announced Prof S. S. Mohapatra, secretary general of the National Committee and former general secretary of the All India Congress Committee. It is also hoped that Richard Attenborough will undertake direction of a film on Naoroji.

The month of September saw several

other functions too organized in the city in memory of Naoroji. The Bombay Parsee Association observed his 167th birth anniversary on September 4. The K. R. Cama Oriental Institute had organized a symposium on the GOM on September 19. The staff and students of the Elphinstone College convened a function in memory of Naoroji who was not only an alumnus of that College but also the first Indian professor there. Mayor Chandrakant Handore garlanded the bust of Naoroji which stands at the Bombay Municipal Corporation building where the GOM had served as councillor.

His unswerving devotion to the national cause can best be understood through Naoroji's own assessment of his nature: "You may burn a *dordi* (a coir rope) but you can never take the twist out of it. So it is with me."

Conception complications

In industrialized countries infertility poses a serious problem for women over 35. These research findings reported in *The German Tribune* of September 25, 1992 should be an eye-opener for Parsis who are known for late marriages and low birth rates.

It is not only the women who could be adversely affected. Environmental factors like chemicals in the food chain and

changes in the modern industrialized society account for the low sperm count among males and the consequent infertility among couples. As a result where one marriage in 10 used to be childless, now 15 to 25 percent of marriages are without any issue, noted gynecologist Wilhelm Braendle of Hamburg. These findings were disclosed at the 49th annual congress of the German Gynaecological Society held at Berlin.

That conception is difficult for women over 40 and pregnancy fraught with complications is known. But what is little known is that only 50 percent of pregnant women over 40 are able to give birth to babies that could survive, the clipping informs. Also, that the Pill, if taken in low dosage reduces the risk of contracting breast cancer — the incidence of which is reportedly high in the community. Small dosage Pills, it is believed, reduce the risk of ovary and womb cancer, though smoking and the Pill together could be a dangerous combination, according to Prof Benno Runnebaum of Heidelberg.

Of breads and rolls

It is the only Irani restaurant that does not serve tea but is paradoxically reputed for its bread which many customers enjoy dipped in tea. The proprietors of Yazdani Bakery Zend Zend and his brothers Parvez and Rashid offer an assortment of bread from *laadi* bread or *pau* (also known as scotch bread), brown bran bread (supposedly good for the digestive system), the seven grains bread (so named because it is made from seven distinct grains), German bread (a favorite with the wife of a German consul), Swiss rolls, French loaves, dinner rolls, cheese and garlic bread... The latest addition is the contribution of Zend's son Zyros who after his training at the Sophia Catering Institute gained experience at the Taj and the Caribbean Cruise.

The Bakery on Cowasji Patel Street, Fort, enjoys the patronage of some leading figures in the city like industrialist J. R. D. Tata, Justice Bakhtawar Lentin, boxing referee Aspy Adajania, journalist Russy Karanjia and gynecologist Dr Burjor Dastur, according to a write-up in the Sunday edition of *The Afternoon Despatch and Courier* (The ADC) of September 13, 1992. Additionally establishments like the Associated Cement Companies (ACC), Western Railways, most of the clubs (from National Sports Club of India in the north to the United

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Services' Club in the south of the city), Leopold, Mondegar and Parisian restaurants are also said to have their bread supplied by Yazdani Bakery.

No preservatives, softeners or bleaching agents are used at Yazdani Bakery. They prefer to use the traditional method instead of the hi-tech methods of production which turn bread into a "white, biochemical mass," Zend informs.

It is at half past five each morning that the day's first *laadis* of *pau* and the bread pudding emerge from the ovens. The more exotic varieties come out at 11 a.m.: "You should see the crowds at that time queuing up to buy the oven fresh bread... Best reserve some for yourself a day in advance," advises *The ADC* correspondent.

Gold medal for Bajan

His studious application for nearly a decade to the study of languages and literature of Zoroastrianism earned Ervad Par-



Dr Aspi Golwalla (right) and Bajan

vez M. Bajan the prestigious Seth Khurshedji Fardunji Parukh Gold Medal awarded by the Bombay Parsi Punchayet to scholars of conspicuous distinction, notes a press release sent by Ervad Fali Master.

A practising priest, Bajan passed his MA examinations in Ancient Iranian Languages, Avesta and Pahlavi, with a first class from the Bombay University in 1989. It was under the guidance of Dasturs (Drs) H. K. Mirza and K. JamaspAsa that Bajan took to a serious study of the religious scriptures. The foundation for his religious knowledge was laid at the Athornan Madressa, Dadar and subsequently strengthened at the Sir J. J. Zarhoshti and Mulla Feroze Madressas.

A science graduate from the Institute of Science, Bajan later did his masters in arts and law from the Bombay University, the release further informs.

Dutifully serving

"Anyone can make money. Some make more and some less. But no one can take anything with them when they leave this world. It is a matter of great satisfaction to me that when I eventually go into the Great Beyond I will have with me in abundant measure the blessings of my patients and their relatives. What more can I wish for?" These thoughts were expressed by 91-year-old Framroj Sarkari, a ward boy at Bombay's B. D. Petit Parsee General Hospital, who was among the eight devoted workers recognized with the Exemplary Attitude Awards by the Rotary Club of Bombay Hills South at a function held at the Taj Mahal Hotel on October 29, 1992.

Though Sarkari is financially quite secure with one of his daughters working as a surgeon in the USA and another as an advocate in the UK, he, and the others showing remarkable dedication, all work irrespective of the monetary returns. It is



Dotivala (right) and Sarkari

these men and women from ordinary walks of life who are normally overlooked by society and do not receive any recognition for their loyalty, devotion to duty, honesty, and ever obliging nature, as noted Club president Godrej Dotivala.

This award presentation function, to mark the Rotary International vocational service month, followed a talk by world yachting champion Lieutenant Commander Farokh Tarapore who was conferred the Outstanding Achievement Award by the Rotary Club, the release further adds.

The governing Lion

As the newly installed District Governor, Lion Firoze N. Daroga has coined for his slogan "With friendship and fellowship we serve forever." Following a year of meritorious service as lieutenant governor, he was conferred the new rank at the

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Lions International Convention in Hong Kong in June last, informs a press release.

The fraternity shared by Lions, Lionesses and Leos is vital to serve society, believes Daroga. During his nearly two decades' association with the Lions movement he has been instrumental in the extension of the Dadar School for the Blind, in raising funds for the Industrial Home for Blind Women, in providing hearing equipment to the disabled at the Mazgaon Deaf and Mute Institute, etc, the release adds.

A builder by profession, Daroga has been adviser to various charitable institutions on property matters. His academic studies have been in the realm of science in which he graduated, and subsequently in law and construction engineering. Among Daroga's manifold interests are photography, pistol shooting, music, table tennis and cricket.

Personnel promotion
Industrial relations is his forte. And in this area he will be concentrating since

his appointment this year as general manager (personnel and administration) of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited. While discharging his duties from this new post Jamshed P. Balsara will oversee his company's industrial relations, staff, personnel, administrative services and facilities, notes a press release.

Fifty-six-year-old Balsara started his career in the field of marketing with the multinational Burmah-Shell Oil Storage and Distribution Company of India Limited in 1961. Since the company's nationalization he was transferred to Bharat Petroleum and has been involved with administration, gaining experience in various departments.

An economics graduate from St Xavier's College, Calcutta, numismatics and reading are Balsara's hobbies, the release further mentions.

Khodaiji TT champ

At the Inter-collegiate Table Tennis finals in Bombay in August this year, Ms Parveen Farokh Khodaiji of St Xavier's defeated Ms Spenta Patel of Sydenham College to win the junior girls' singles title, informs the *Jam-e-Jamshed* of September 13, 1992.

In the doubles event it was Patel and her partner who defeated Khodaiji's

team to win the title.

At another meet, the Bombay YMCA Open Table Tennis Tournament, Z. M. Khandadia defeated his opponent to win the veteran singles title, further notes the *Jamé*.

CORRECTION

In "Steelman' Irani," Events and Personalities, *Parsiana*, March 1992, Dr Jamshed Jiji Irani's age has inadvertently been printed as 65 years. He is 56 years old. The error is regretted.

Compiled by Roxana A. Mirza

MATRIMONIAL

Alliance invited for a tall, fair, good-looking Zoroastrian girl, aged 23, graduate in computer science from educated, well-settled, cultured Zoroastrian boys. Please reply with photograph & full

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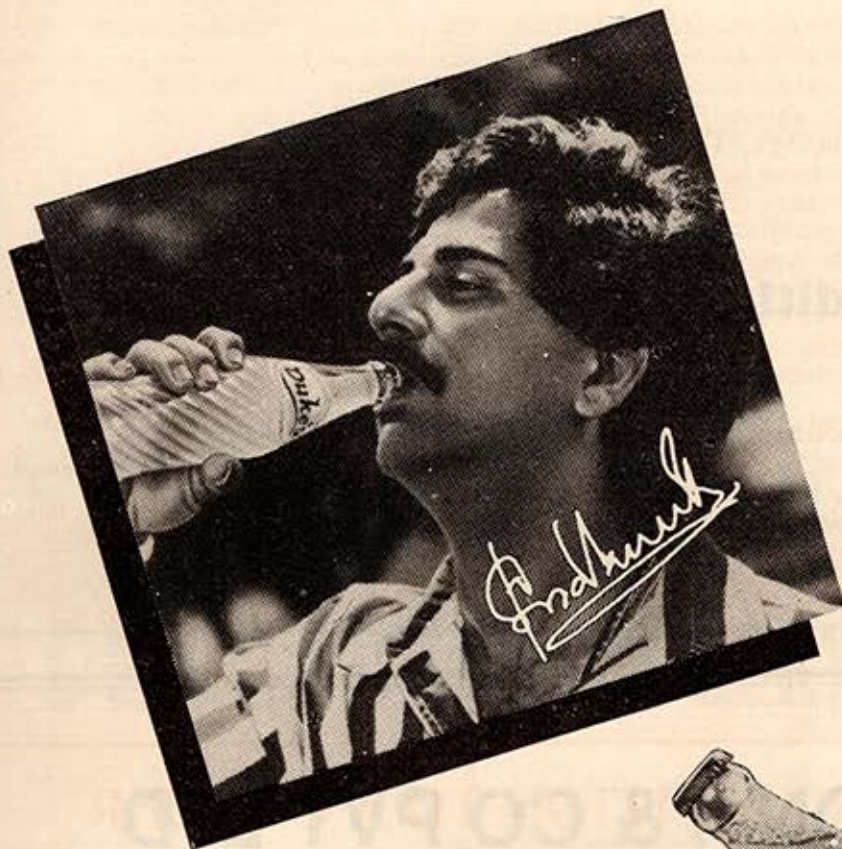


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Bordi's Bold Bharucha

For daring to confront the new landlords,
Nerges Bharucha as also the three activist Dahanu
women who came to her aid had to brave assaults

Parinaz Gandhi

The 10 km chase could have been the climax scene of a Hindi film. Only the cast was different. Instead of a lovelorn damsel in distress, there was this spirited septuagenarian, Ms Nerges Minoo Bharucha, who was trying to eke out an independent living in Bordi. The knights to her rescue came in the form of three committed lady members of the Dahanu Taluka Environmental Welfare Association (DTEWA) — Nergis Irani, Kety Rustom and Kerban Anklesaria who is also their advocate. Together they were trying to resist the efforts of Dinesh Thakur whose alleged harassment for the last three years was making it difficult for Bharucha to reside in her humble abode.

"Originally I was frightened but am not anymore," said the gutsy white-haired Bharucha relating the background of the property dispute. The Thakurs, it appeared, had bought over the house she had been occupying since 15 years and the surrounding property from the previous Parsi owners. What irks Bharucha is that no one had the courtesy to inform her of the change of ownership. She only knew that the Thakurs who were interested in developing the property were finding her presence on the land an impediment to their plans. She was willing to consider the alternative accommodation they were offering her until she realized that they were trying to take advantage of her compliance. Thereafter she refused to yield; least of all to any threats by the Thakurs.

Here is a lady who refused to succumb to pressure and oppression. "In our

community you will find that in the face of opposition, members will turn their back and run. She has taken a stand," appreciates Rustom. "What we (at the DTEWA) are trying to show is that she has taken the right stand despite the fact

toilet was made out of bounds for her compelling her to dig an outlet, once again within her own confines.

Life was made difficult for Bharucha when she refused to vacate the present premises. Initially she had decided to accept the substitute room they offered.

But on going through the agreement she realized that certain clauses inserted were detrimental to her interests. Thereafter she was determined not to cooperate. She recalls some of the terms — to the effect that she would not be permitted to remove a nail from the room,

would not be permitted to have anyone spend the night with her, the electricity meter would not lie within her control — that insinuated that she would not be deemed a tenant and could be evicted at their whim. "Am I an *angootha chhaap* (illiterate rubber stamp)? The answer is a capital NO," she asserts.

Her family members in Bombay have urged her to return to the city where she was formerly residing along with her husband. But after her husband's death she preferred to opt for a small town where the cost of living would be lower. She gave up her job with the Maharashtra State Women's Council and chose to start her own business. Vending sandalwood, incense sticks, eats and other miscellanea from door-to-door she prefers retaining her independence believing that after marriage a woman should not be dependent on her maternal house for support.

Never has Bharucha received either a written or verbal communication about change of landlords. She continues to



*Adopting a determined stand (from left):
Irani, Bharucha and Rustom*

that age is against her, she has no money, no power, the police refused to accept her complaints of harassment" and she was driven to despair.

Rustom informs how Thakur's men would openly tell her, "We will kill you; we will harass you so that living will become impossible for you." The story of Bharucha's travails is related through photographs that Rustom shows us. Only in euphemistic terms could her home be described as a cottage — it is more akin to a hut. Debris was piled in front of her entrance so that the approach route to her rooms became difficult. Her windows had barricades nailed from the outside so that she would have no access to natural sunlight. Her roof tiles were removed such that her sparse belongings in the room had to be shielded by an overhead plastic canopy. Her water supply was disconnected such that she had perforce to install a borewell in her room. The

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send her monthly compensation of Rs 50 to Ms Soona Rusi Mehta (who was the joint owner with Ms Homai Minoo Gami) even though it is invariably refunded.

She has been told to preserve the refusal slips. She has also been taught not to fear a physical assault and if necessary "maar khai levano (take a beating)" so that then at least the culprits can be convicted. Bharucha feels particularly let down by Mehta who had assured her that

"We Zoroastrians have progressed so far because we have stood for truth"

she could enjoy the use of her premises as long as she lived, and the Zoroastrian community in Bordi who she says did not support her cause.

On behalf of the Zai Bordi Parsee Anjuman Fund, president Firoze D. Patel and vice president Firoze R. Irani gave their version when contacted by *Parsiana*: "We have no manpower or resources to fight... We Parsis have never been selfish, crude or unfair... As such an anjuman is not supposed to interfere in anybody's private affairs. An anjuman is mainly for the agiary trust and its properties. But she being a Parsi and an old lady too it was our first duty to help her through and thus we tried our best by having meetings amongst us and then by having a meeting with the new landlord. Ms Bharucha is proof to it... There is one thing in life which is an important factor and that is compromise which she refused to do. The rest is the cause of it."

According to them she refused the alternative accommodation which was "far more superior" to her present lodging and demanded compensation of Rs 50,000 instead. "Living in a small village and having a small community of about 150 Parsis or so, we cannot afford to... spoil our relations with others or fight with them. But in Ms Bharucha's case, we really did our needful... No financial aid was rendered and as far as moral support was concerned, she had plenty. Not only we people of Gholvad

but also some Zoroastrians of Dahanu did try helping her."

When Bharucha appealed to the DTEWA, the support she sought came forthwith. "Here was a supreme example of one who was fighting for the right. How could we not help her?" Rustom explains their rationale. So they provided her with legal guidance from Anklesaria and Ms Mahrugh Adenwalla, and moral backing from the other activists who realize that their own lives are at stake but are willing to make the necessary sacrifice.

The DTEWA activists reached the Thakurs' residence on August 24, 1992 where they were met with filthy abuse, attempts at physical assault and even threats to life, they reported. Even a couple of policemen from Gholvad who were brought on the scene had to play the role of helpless spectators when Vinay Patil and his brother (two other builders from the area who had earlier been served a notice by DTEWA for illegal construction) allegedly joined the fray. "The Patils pulled the two policemen out of Ms Irani's van and then proceeded to stone the van... Meanwhile the men were shouting 'Strip these women, kill them, we will teach them a lesson.' The activists and Ms Bharucha who were quite terrified by now and within an inch of being beaten up by the mob that gathered, managed to flee in the van," mentioned a report in *The Times of India* of August 27, 1992.

There was stoning from four sides. The windshield of their van was shattered.

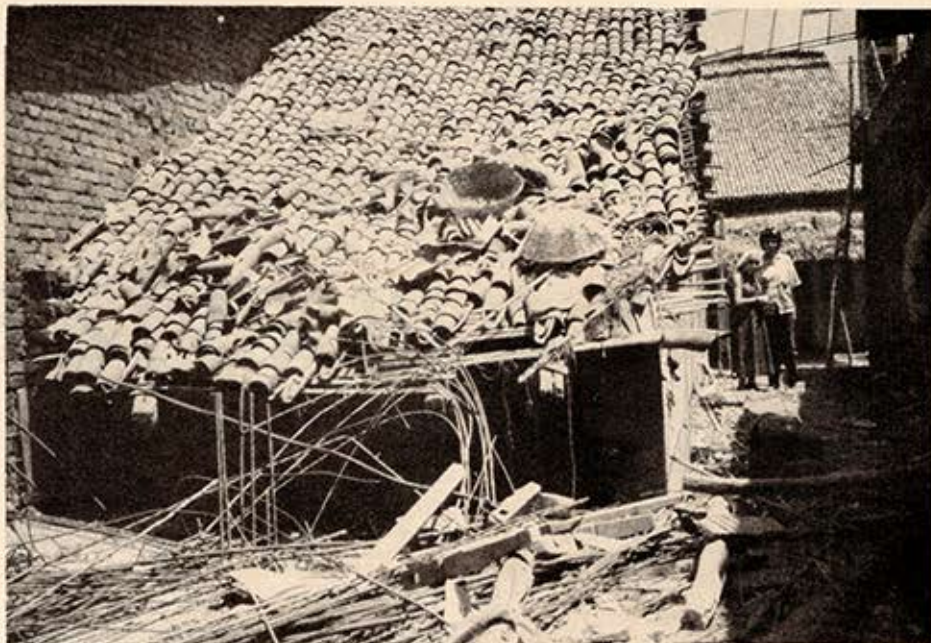
The railway crossing being temporarily closed to vehicular traffic they tried to maneuver the automobile through a tunnel but the assailants following them on their motorbikes refused to give up chase for nearly 10 km. "Nergishé su gari dafraavich (Nergish had to drive at breakneck speed)," Bharucha recalls the details in an interview with *Parsiana*. "She drove us to the police station at Dahanu, emptied the glass splinters from her lap before the policemen on duty and then just collapsed."

It was apparent that the Dahanu police were not keen to get involved in the case. Likewise, the two policemen from Gholvad went back to their base claiming that "everything was peaceful," briefs Rustom.

Looking back at the ordeal, Bharucha narrates how involved she was in prayer when they were fleeing that she forgot to take notice of the vehicle number of the motorbike trailing them. Repeatedly through the interview she keeps pointing to the message "If God be for us who can be against us?" to confirm her faith in His workings.

To see Bharucha once again settled in her own home was the DTEWA's priority in early September especially since circumstances like a wet spell and a subsequent business trip to Bombay had kept her away from her home since the last harrowing confrontation with Thakur and others.

"Don't say you are Zoroastrians if you only want to cling to words and rituals," is the message of the DTEWA which has



Debris piled outside Bharucha's residence at Bordi

been espousing several causes to protect their environment. For nearly three years they must have valiantly fought against the installation of a thermal unit in their area. They are now vigilant about development activities that impinge on the "ecologically fragile area" as Dahanu is classified under the state government's notification last June, notes a report in *The Times of India* of August 29. They try to book those guilty of rampant misuse of land, contravention of building bye-laws and disregard for coastal regulations which appear to be on the increase with the advent of ambitious builders and entrepreneurs keen to exploit new territories. Their rewards come in the form of stones! Irani's and Rustom's homes were literally stoned as mentions a news report in the *Mid-Day* of September 3.

"Ours is the first religion to fight for the environment. We should set examples for others and not do wrong ourselves. That is the crux," emphasizes Rustom, disappointed with the community's indifference. "We Zoroastrians have progressed so far because we have stood for truth. Link progressiveness with truth..."

READERS' FORUM

continued from page 4

values" in their grandchildren, children, nephews and nieces.

It is true that a lot of MCPs (Male 'Colony-type' Parsis) do sit around doing nothing, but then again surely the number of them today should be much less than of those say two decades ago (taking into account our rapidly dwindling population).

It would be interesting to know how many of the readers tend to agree with my opinion.

JAVID SOLI CANTEENWALA

London, UK

Roxan Shah RIP

For a long while now the columns of this magazine have provided a platform for discussion on the controversial issue of disposal of the dead body of a Parsi Zoroastrian woman married outside the community. It all began with the untimely and sad death of Ms Roxan Shah, who has been choicelessly dragged through this ugly business, with no concern for the fact that she is no more — nor what hurt it might cause to those who have lost her.

So, it is through the columns of this

magazine that I wish to offer, on behalf of our insensitive community, my heartfelt apologies to Roxan's parents, her husband and her family, for the unduly long and disgusting way in which we have carried on, in the name of religion, even in such unhappy circumstances, disregarding the pain, helplessness and grief suffered by her family with quiet dignity.

Whatever our personal views and opinions, we can ill afford to sit in pompous judgment over others — for none of us are flawless. The real test of our stern approach will be when one of us faces a similar crisis — will we then be as strict and as orthodox as we are now? Or can bonds of blood weaken our religious ethics?

When a Parsi Zoroastrian man married outside the community is allowed disposal at the Doongerwadi upon death, it stands to reason that the same principle should apply to a Parsi Zoroastrian woman in similar circumstances. Be that as it may, it is about time the community stops airing varied opinions on the subject, and allows Roxan's soul to rest in peace.

M. THIRTY E. BHARUCHA

Edited by Amavaz S. Mama

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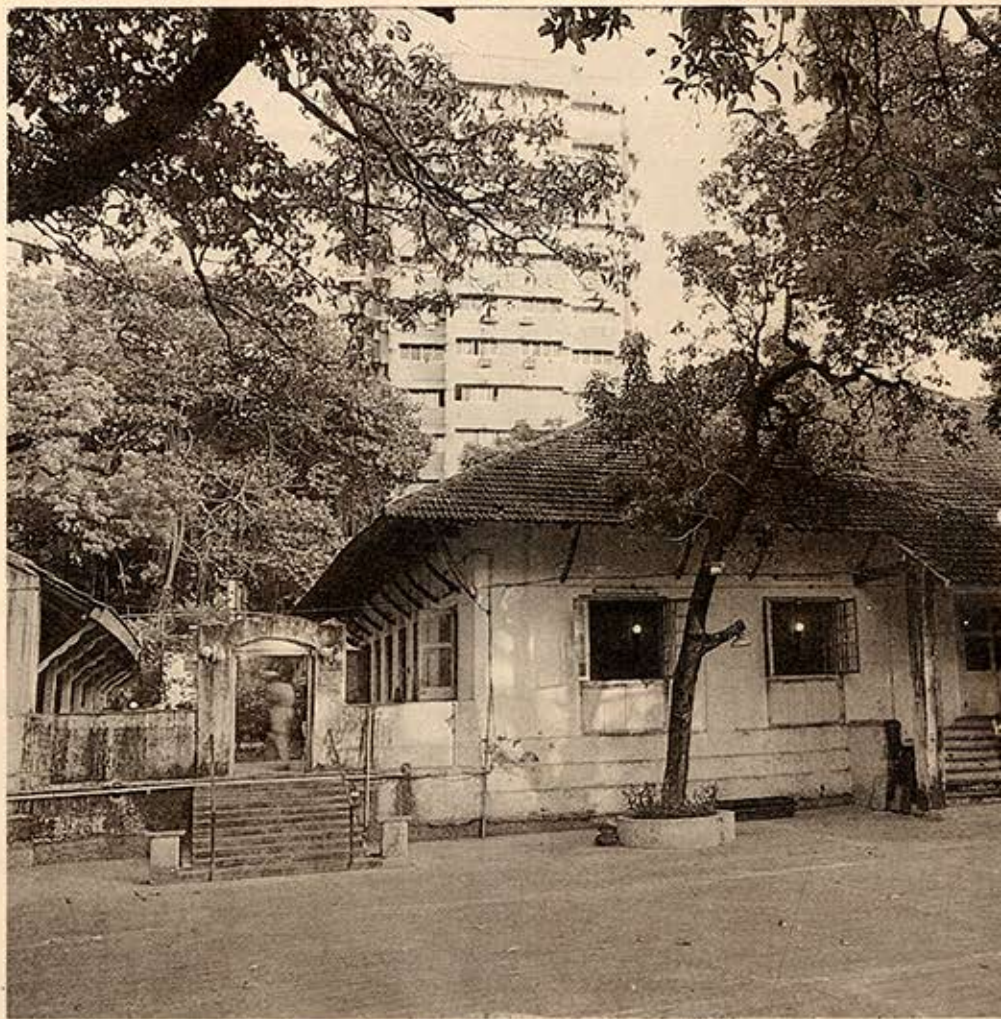
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Serenity at Saher

Parinaz Gandhi

There was a time when few Zoroastrians knew of the secluded existence of the Saher agiary. Subsequently several others came to learn of it but did not really know where it was located. Now there are hardly any who have not visited this Seth Hormusjee Dadabhoy Saher Dar-e-Meher in Bombay's affluent Warden Road area, drawn to it through reports of its tranquil surroundings or invitations soliciting attendance at some religious celebration.

"Once you get there the atmosphere is most peaceful and you actually feel as though you are out of Bombay. So it is ideal for worship," enthuses Nowrosji Gamadia, managing trustee of the H. D. Saher Agiary Trust. Off the main road that lures shoppers to famous stores like

the Garware Supermarket, Benzer and Amarsons, there is a prominent sign at the start of the uphill bylane directing the devotee to the Saher agiary. The ascent is rewarded with a view of the sedate fire-temple commanding respect as it dutifully stands apart from the multistorey buildings that surround it.

The same trees that serve to shelter the 146-year-old agiary by daytime, contribute to its festive look by night when multihued bulbs glow to create an enchanting setting for the celebrations in progress. It is only since the last five years that the agiary premises are being hired out for functions like weddings and navjotes. "The idea of doing this is to augment our trust funds. Also, more people come to know of the agiary's ex-

istence," Gamadia explains the rationale.

The increasing popularity of this venue despite the hike in rental charges to Rs 1,900 this year indicates that the primary objectives are being met. "We are booked for 22 days in December and 21 days in January," informs the Trust secretary Burjor Mehta. In fact only recently one party donated more than the lower limit set at Rs 1,900. "How much more?" we promptly enquire. He made an additional contribution of Rs 101, Mehta clarifies. Further, the trustees see no reason why the increase in rates should deter any party from hosting functions in this idyllic location, away from the hustle and bustle, when Allbless Baug now charges Rs 1,500 and Cama Baug, Rs 900. Needless to say, the



lights, the furniture and other perquisites would all be available at extra cost, just as in the case of the other Parsi baugs. There are certain stipulations though, laid down for the Saher agiary functions too. A religious ceremony is a must — whether navjote, lagan, or jashan in the case of birthday or anniversary celebrations. Besides, the catering can only be assigned to a Parsi. For a choosy host with a selective guest list, this venue is the logical answer as not more than 350 can be accommodated here. Even then it

most active among the trustees, supervising the accounts and general administration work concerning the agiary. Individuals too donated their mite, the trustees acknowledge. The deficit was met from the Saher Agiary Trust funds.

This Kadmi agiary today enjoys the maximum patronage from members of the Shehenshahi sect. As against 30 tables laid out for the Shehenshahi muktads, there are five or six laid out for the Kadmi muktads, and occasionally even one for the Fasli muktads, informs



is only the early bird that catches the parking space. This, despite parking on the left side being permitted along the uphill approach road to the agiary that belongs to the Trust.

A zealous watch over their financial position has placed the Trust in a comfortable position for the day-to-day running of the agiary. However, theirs being an old building where recurring repair and maintenance costs are inevitable, the trustees realize the need to gear for a future eventuality. Their appeal for funds early this year generated seven lakh rupees with which they set out to concrete the open space in front of the agiary where the functions are organized (see "Changes for the better?") Of the seven lakhs collected, the largest contribution of four lakh rupees came from the A. H. Wadia Charitable Trust, mentions Mancherji J. Cama who has been the

80-year-old Ervad Rustom Bhadha who has served this agiary for 45 years under different trustees and different panthakies. While formerly the *boi* prayers would be recited according to the Kadmi specifications, since the last few years the fire there has got used to the chant of Shehenshahi prayers as Kadmi priests are hard to come by.

The managing trustee himself follows the Fasli calendar and sees nothing wrong if prayers at the agiary are performed as per the specifications of another sect especially when there is only a marginal difference in the text, and no high priest available within the Kadmi and Fasli sects. What Gamadia considers more essential is for all "to take a practical view of things; to make mobedi attractive." The caliber of the priests should be such that "they should command respect and we should pay re-



Above: Saher agiary's environs and internal ambience

Photos: Homiyar Mistry, Homz Prints

Right: A navjote in progress at the Saher agiary

spect." To their own panthaky they pay Rs 2,250 per month. In addition, what he earns from his clients is his prerogative.

Before the present panthaky Boman-shah Dastoor was inducted at the Saher agiary, the temple wore a "jufaigaila (dilapidated)" look, concedes Gamadia. It is up to the panthaky in charge of the agiary to see that devotees are drawn to it rather than turning away from it, he believes.

A trustee too is accountable, according to Gamadia. "It is the duty of every trustee of every agiary to see that the objectives of the trust are met in that the agiary is well patronized and well maintained." In all earnestness he then seeks a critical appraisal of the Saher agiary so that improvements, where possible, can be introduced. He believes that all agiaries fall under three categories: those with funds and well patronized whose workings should not be disturbed; those with no funds but well patronized whose resources should be augmented; those with no funds and no patrons which should be merged. After relocating the fire in an area where Parsis abound, the real estate of the neglected temple could be sold and funds utilized to maintain the fire in its new abode in a respectable position.

There was a time when the Saher agiary too was deemed neglected. When Gamadia as a descendant of the Saher family was left as the sole trustee, he remedied the situation by getting new trustees appointed to the Trust one after another. Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, Cama, Phiroze Bookbinder and Rustom J. B. Jeejeebhoy are now working with Gamadia as co-trustees. They have not missed the female touch on their Trust board so far, they declare.

As the seniormost trustee Gamadia has been associated with the Saher agiary for nearly 40 years. He was brought on the Trust board when Dadiba N. Saher, Cavasji N. Saher, Muncherji N. Cama and Kaikhushru Hormusji Saher were serving on it. He is not sure of the Saher family tree. He only knows that his paternal grandmother belonged to the Saher family and her brother Nowrosji was the father of Dadiba and Cavasji. On the trust records there is just reference to the Dar-e-Meher being founded by Hormusjee Dadabhoy Saher in 1846 when the day according to the Kadmi calendar was *roj Sarosh, mah Meher, 1215 YZ*. It was from a 1906 publication, *Parsi Dharmasthalo* by Bahmanji Patel, that further information was gleaned: In

keeping with the late Hormusjee's wishes, the Saher agiary was built on the family estate by his brother Maneckjee. At the inauguration of the fire-temple on March 15, 1846 in the presence of a large number of Zoroastrians, the gathering was informed that the fire-temple's sturdy construction was built at a cost of Rs 13,000 and that the family would set



At the entrance to the Saher Agiary

aside a further sum of Rs 11,000 towards the maintenance fund of the agiary.

All the multistorey buildings in the vicinity, obstructing the view and disturbing the peace, are later developments, recounts Gamadia. There were then two bungalows on the family property (leased to Dr Jehangir Eduljee in the early part of the century). Along the uphill route stood Chateau Petit on one side and a mansion belonging to a Marwari tycoon on the other. The villas of yore have gradually made way for the towering structures.

With many Parsis too moving into this locality in recent times, the trustees hope the aura of the Saher agiary fire will encompass more devotees. Originally it used to be an occasional visitor who would drop in at the Saher agiary. The priests now get to see 10-15 devotees in the course of a day. Its unusual location, situated at a height which the trustees presume may be unsurpassed by any other existing agiary in Bombay, should give it a vantage position — accessible yet aloof.

Changes for the better?

"Saher agiary is becoming increasingly popular as a venue for celebrations," confirms trustee Mancherji Cama. "Since the agiary is in great demand now we have to provide more facilities," he adds. The facilities that have been added or redone at the agiary are mainly in the shape of repairs and restorations, with the addition of some modern conveniences that were lacking.

"We completely repaired the toilet blocks with all modern amenities and plumbing. We separated the mobeds' area from that of the outside users. The *nan nawani mori* (ceremonial bathing area) was repaired and other general repairs were also carried out. For instance, we completely cement concreted the front compound that is used for navjotes and weddings," says Cama.

Earlier the compound was a dusty expanse of red soil which was notorious for ruining many a beautiful sari, especially when the rains churned and wetted the mud. According to Cama, this is the main reason why the contractor layered the entire area with a coat of cement.

Nawshir D. Khurody, a long-time patron of Saher agiary, however voices his concern that the cementing of the compound to accommodate the navjote and wedding guests has resulted in the destruction of the flora. His daughter Khursheed (along with some volunteer school children) had undertaken the planting of approximately 50 trees in the agiary compound in July 1987. "We had planted trees at Doongerwadi that morning and then around 3 p.m. went to the Saher to continue planting there," Khursheed recalls. "After the planting I checked the trees whenever I was down in Bombay for the summer vacations and the Saher trees were well maintained unlike the ones we planted at Doongerwadi," says this young enthusiast.

When her father saw the changes taking place at the agiary on a visit in May, he was spurred to take action and to try to stop the trees from being damaged. Khurody brought forward his concern to the trustees of the Saher agiary in the form of a letter dated May 25, 1992,

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Notice is hereby given calling information about the children or great grand-children or any other heirs of late Mrs Ratanbai Khurshedji Pestonji Dalal through her daughter late Mrs Manekbai P. B. Bharucha who was staying at 585, Khan Building, Dhobi Talao, Bombay 400002 and call upon the claimants to contact the undersigned at his below stated office to establish their right, title and interest in the Trust Money of the said Testator.

If no response to this Public Notice is received within 30 days then without any further notice as per the authority and discretion of the undersigned the said Trust Money will be diverted as per the wish of the Testator for the education of Parsi and Irani boys and girls.

Dated this 15th day of
January, 1993

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S. V. Desai

Official Trustee, Maharashtra State
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Bombay 400032

where he states that "A full grown thevetia nerifolia (yellow oleander) next to the far wall has been completely cut down. All the casuarina trees planted at the boundary have been mutilated and will die in due course as will the other giant trees in the compound because the contractor is not leaving enough free space around the base for the air to get to the roots." His suggested alternative was to lay the ground with *ladis* (tiles) instead of a sheet of concrete, "like they have down in New Era School, thus giving the roots place to breathe" and making the entire process slightly more economical.

The trustees and administrators of the agiary did not take Khurody's concern

**Earlier the red soil
in the compound
was notorious
for ruining many
a beautiful sari**

lightly and his letter was answered by the Ward Officer, 'D' Ward, Bombay, stating categorically that the site had been inspected by their office staff and that "they (the contracting company) have not cut down/damaged any tree. At present they are concreting the open area in the premises and they have provided the *otta* around the tree basin for protection of trees. The small branches of (the) old mango tree have been cut down to reduce the weight and balance the same."

Cama affirms that the Saher trustees have tried their best to preserve the green environment around the agiary and in fact have plans to add fruit trees to the existing ones in the back garden. The concreted area will also be landscaped with pots of flowering shrubs and other plants, he asserts.

The agiary's popular panthaky Bomanshah Dastoor also refutes Khurody's secondary concern that in an effort to expand the wedding/navjote facilities the lush back garden may have to be sacrificed to the cement layer's trowel. Dastoor points out that the back garden can only be accessed through the agiary's courtyard, and therefore non-Parsis cannot be allowed into it.

Yasmin D. Poonegar

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Riding the tide

Hydraulic engineer Dr Zal Tarapore's career has been crowned with a Padma Shri

Sunita Kulkarni-Pendse

"When the call came from the income tax office, I was delighted. I thought it was regarding the refund which was long overdue. But they were asking peculiar questions: 'Are your tax returns clear? Are you assessable for wealth tax? Is your wife?' When they were satisfied with the answers, they congratulated me because I was due for some sort of an award. Then came the call from the Home Minister on the morning of the 26th (of January 1992) and I knew that I had been awarded the Padma Shri," recalls an amused Dr Zal Tarapore.

He was awarded the Padma Shri this year in recognition of his expertise in the field of hydraulic engineering in India — to put it simply, for his exploration of water resources for irrigation, power, transportation, etc. Tarapore has spent 28 years of his life in making contributions to this field. And he is only the second person to receive an award from the Central Water and Power Research Station (CWPRS), Pune. The CWPRS is one of the foremost organizations in the world in the field of hydraulic and allied research. Tarapore takes obvious pride in this institute where he has spent most of his working life. He retired as director last year and now works there in an advisory capacity.

"The institute is greater than an individual," he avers modestly when we express a desire to interview him. "Why not write about it instead?" he queries. He is as familiar around the 180-hectare campus as if it were his own back-

yard. Almost every major water project in India is represented here in models built to scale. Tarapore points out the model which depicts the bridge across the Yamuna river in Delhi, the Mahim creek where siltation is a major problem and the Tarapur thermal power unit. Using such scale models, various types of studies are undertaken: flood protection works, bank protection measures, bridge

designs, research into the size of barges, sediment control, pollution problems of coastal areas due to thermal discharges, oil spills and effluents, reclamation of deltaic areas, the pitching and heaving of ships, etc. One is amazed at the variety and diversity of the studies carried out in this complex, about 18 km away from Pune city at Khadakwasala.

"When my father was the executive engineer at the Nizam Sagar Dam (Hyderabad) on the Manjira river, it was one of the three dams in the country. We used to go on picnics near the Dam in the monsoon and for outings by the river or near tracts of water in other seasons as well. Moreover, my grandparents lived near the sea. So I developed a love for water at a very early age. But love is not a profession! Coincidentally, in college I had a very good professor for hydraulics which is a branch of civil engineering. He fuelled my love for the subject and enthused me to work further in the field. In childhood I had seen water flowing over the spillway. Now I was putting the calculations down on paper," reminisces the hydraulic engineer.

Tarapore did his BSc in civil engineering from Edinburgh. He recalls that the fees in those days were only £40 a year. "Very reasonable. And the cost of living, board and lodge about £3 a week. I came back to India after my degree, and through my uncle who was working on the Hirakud Dam, I met the director of design of the Central Water Commission." The director advised Tarapore that the best place in the world for this field was St Anthony Falls in Minneapolis in the USA. Tarapore worked there for eight



The President of India R. Venkataraman presenting the Padma Shri to Tarapore (left)

and a half years as research assistant and research fellow. "The institute gave me vast experience and I worked on international projects in Iran, Iraq, Venezuela, Pakistan, etc," he continues.

In 1962, when Nehru had started the concept of a scientists' pool to lure the best brains back from overseas, Tarapore came back to India. For almost three years the pool paid him his salary and finally in 1965 he was absorbed by the CWPRS. With his US education and his experience he was offered a post as head of the ports and harbor division. "I had the advantage here of working on many projects simultaneously. Clients were on our backs to complete their studies in time. We were constantly running up against deadlines."

Now the institute has over 200 clients and 500 projects in hand and is almost self-supporting (about 25 percent of the funds come from the government). In between, as the importance of scale models declined, the institute suffered a setback. But then the purchase of computers (and their extensive network) has led to a resurgence of its importance; and today mathematical modelling is an important function of the institute. "I would like to see the institute for which I have

worked for the last 28 years do better and better. But I'm satisfied with the work I have done," he notes.

Tarapore's thesis on erosion under spillway is considered a classic in its field. He has authored and co-authored a

**"The poverty you
see in rural India,
you don't see
anywhere"**

total of 43 publications. And, in addition, he has made over 20 visits overseas in connection with his work. He recalls that his longest stay, for about six weeks, was in Vietnam. "You saw... serious, hardworking, austere people. Women much more so. In Hanoi, I was amazed because there was not a single petrol pump. Every vehicle was owned by the government and obtained its petrol from a depot." In Iran, too, Tarapore encountered very serious people but not as mild or hardworking. In the Philippines they

were full of zest for life. "But," he adds with sadness, "the poverty you see in rural India, you don't see anywhere."

India spends 20 percent of its resources on water development. "You begin to think, 'what is the result of this?' At Independence there was a lot of hope, much enthusiasm, many goals. Perhaps we haven't achieved them all. Perhaps a market economy will lead us to them... I really don't know. I have retired now, I am on the sidelines."

Tarapore's wife Freni is the principal of the SNTD home science college in Pune. Son Noshir is doing his masters in computer science in Florida, USA, while daughter Newaz is in Nagpur in her final year of occupational therapy.

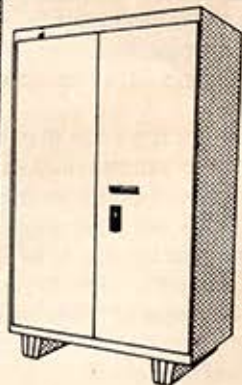
Tarapore claims that he has no real hobby. "Music, photography, swimming used to be my hobbies, but no more. The whole day is spent at the institute. In the evening I putter around in the house and garden, watch TV and am ready for bed." Moreover, he claims to be a passive observer of religious customs and festivals. "So many times I thought of becoming a member of the Parsi Anjuman, but didn't go out of my way to become one. One feels a minor sort of guilt at this."

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VYARAWALA

IN FOCUS

Roxanne Kavarana

"When Mr Jinnah held his last press conference in Delhi, an unknown woman press photographer caused a stir by toppling off a tall packing case on which she had perched, the better to 'shoot' the founder of Pakistan. Mr Jinnah's frown was transformed into a smile when he saw that the culprit was a woman — and that, although prone on the floor, she had had the presence of mind to save her camera and flash-gun from harm.

"Four years have sped since... and Mrs Homai Vyarawala has become in that period perhaps the best known press photographer in the capital. Efficient and unobtrusive, she has rarely been beaten by a male competitor. Mrs Vyarawala is probably the only professional woman press photographer in India. She not only takes pictures, but develops, prints, enlarges, retouches and finishes."

This curious report appeared in *The Statesman* of May 14, 1951 in the heyday of the distinguished paper. It went on to add: "Today no function seems complete without her."

Forty-one long summers later, the woman eulogized in this somewhat condescending report lives alone in her quaint flat in news-starved Baroda. So isolated a life has she made for herself that few (not even Parsis) know that they have a pioneer — India's first woman photojournalist — in their midst. She rarely ventures out except for daily chores. Although it is a decade now since she settled in Baroda, she has few friends, preferring instead to keep herself occupied with her housework (she has never believed in keeping domestic help) and her plethora of hobbies, notably

woodwork, metalwork, gardening and sewing. Her small pleasures include cooking food in cod-liver oil (the secret of her health?) in lieu of fish, which she loves. At a ripe but fit 79, her vision is almost perfect thanks to a Bombay doctor. Yes, Vyarawala lives like a recluse (and that too a determined one), but she

"He made a dark room under a four-poster bed and used a kerosene lamp"

is far from being a lonely lady.

It is 22 years since she took her last professional picture, 22 years ago that the world forgot her. A chance encounter with a press photographer in Delhi recently changed the evening of her life and landed her on the TV program *Taana Baana*. Since then, regional and national newshounds have made a beeline for her place. Today, the "mummy of Indian press photography" enjoys reliving her memorable past, a past which ran concurrently with the birth pangs of this nation.

Homai was born in a priestly family of Navsari to Sunamai and Dossabhai Hathiram in 1913. Subsequently, they moved to Bombay. Recounting her childhood, she says, "I grew up in a very orthodox family. At the age of 13, my parents asked me to wear a sari and

mathubanu and drape the sari pallav on my head, otherwise they wouldn't send me to school."

Notwithstanding the restrictions, she went on to finish a simultaneous BA (Hons) in economics from St Xavier's College and a diploma in painting from Sir J. J. School of Art. Amidst these scholarly pursuits, her interest in photography was fuelled by her cousin (and husband-to-be) Maneckshaw Vyarawala, a keen hobby photographer. "He used to work in Vyara initially where his love for photography developed. There was no electricity there at that time, so he used to get under a four-poster bed, cover it with blankets to make a dark room underneath and use a kerosene lamp," says Homai of her late husband and the biggest influence in her life.

It was his camera that Homai borrowed ("a Rolliflex which he very reluctantly gave me") to use on a college picnic. It proved extremely lucky — her first-ever pictures were published in *The Bombay Chronicle*, with Homai getting a paltry Re 1 per snap! But from then on there was no looking back.

Homai and Maneckshaw (he was now working in the job department of *The Times of India*) collaborated to cover every walk of life in and around Bombay and managed to get their pictures published in important Indian and foreign publications.

Impressed by her work, the then editor of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, Mr Stanley Japson, started giving her assignments. When World War II began, Homai covered every aspect of wartime activity in Bombay for the prestigious



As the country's first woman photojournalist, Homai Vyarawala recorded the birth of independent India

magazine.

The couple got married in 1941, a full 15 years after they had first met. With that came an offer to join the Far Eastern Bureau of the United Kingdom Publicity Office, which was shifting from Singapore to New Delhi. Maneckshaw took over as the chief photographer and in-charge of the studio and dark room, whereas Homai was to play second fiddle as assistant photographer.

Actually, not much later, with new-born son Farouq by her side Homai took over the responsibility of all outdoor shooting, maintaining a gruelling morning-to-night schedule till the very end. She left the UK Publicity Office after nine years, preferring to take on the challenge of freelance press photography instead.

Looking back, with a twinkle in her eyes, Homai says, "With the coming of Independence, life became more hectic and work more exciting and rewarding. I was amongst the very few lucky ones who witnessed and made photographic records of all the important events from very close quarters — events like midnight ceremonies on the eve of the Independence Day, the gathering of all our leaders on the ramparts of the Red Fort and the joy of the people who had collected in thousands down below to hear Panditji make his first speech as the Prime Minister of India."

Over the years, she shared many a joyful moment with the founding fathers and with visiting leaders eager to welcome India into the new comity of nations. Field Marshal K. M. Cariappa called her "energy," she was "a new phe-



Top: Vyarawala with her cherished camera

Captured moments with political dignitaries: Eleanor Roosevelt (above left) with an aide, Gandhi and Frontier Gandhi with disciples, Nehru and Jacqueline Kennedy

nomenon" to the first Governor-General of free India, C. Gopalachari, while to the Vietnamese leader, Ho Chi Minh, she was simply "my friend."

But her favorite remained the first Vice President, Dr Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan. "He was extremely friendly and informal. He used to call

me his 'lady friend' and 'royal photographer.' (Homai also used to take pictures of visiting royalty, and for the number one society publication of those days, *The Onlooker*.) Radhakrishnan would call out to me in front of all the ministers, 'Hello, Your Highness!' And Panditji would turn around and ask jocularly, feigning ignorance, 'Who's the Highness?' Of course, I would shout back, 'Me!'"

Then once Homai had hurt her lips in a fall and stuck a Band-Aid near her mouth. "Radhakrishnan saw me from the stage and became very curious as to what had happened. So all the time he kept on rubbing his finger on his lips to draw my attention. Later he passed by me at Rashtrapati Bhavan and very softly murmured, 'Were you bitten by your husband?'"

At another time, Homai had gone to the Taj Mahal, Agra, with Chief Justice and Ms Warren of the US for a *Life* magazine assignment. In her own words, "While moving backwards to take their picture against the backdrop of the Taj, I forgot, in my excitement, that there was a fountain canal behind me and I fell flat into the water. I was drenched but had in-

stinctively saved my camera. I came out and took their pictures as work had to go on. As it was a very hot day, Mrs Warren came up to me and whispered, 'How I wish I could do the same. It would at least cool me.'" Justice Warren said humorously, 'Don't try this stunt again... you might break your bones!'"

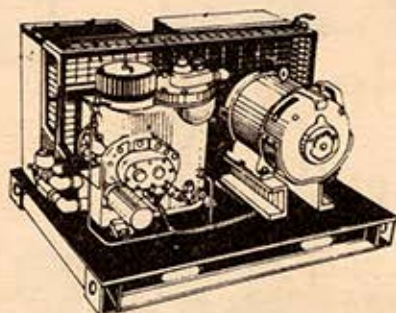
But it was not all fun and excitement; there were also disappointments and heartbreaks. No length of time will heal the wound of missing the biggest scoop of her life — Mahatma Gandhi's assassination on January 30, 1948. The Vyara-walas were working for the UK Publicity Office in those days and Homai had secured special permission that fateful evening to capture the Mahatma's prayer meeting on color film. "I was almost out of the office compound gate with the equipment when my husband called me back saying we could go together the next day. I insisted on going, but he persisted. He never forgave himself for calling me back, and that was the only time he ever prevented me from doing anything. True, I could have missed a photograph of that particular moment, but that day I was scheduled to take movies," she rues, the images of that day as fresh

in her mind as though it had all happened yesterday.

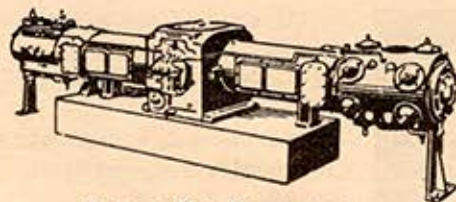
To add insult to injury, she was the only photographer scheduled to be present for the evening. "Even the government of India chap was not there," she points out. Incidentally, only after the demise of her husband in 1960 did Homai tell the world the real reason for missing "the greatest picture."

There are no such regrets for having thrown away all her documentary films and a sizeable collection of her photographic work not so long ago. "My son was interested in photography and he used to do a little bit. So I had kept my equipment and chemicals, but then he died two years ago and I threw away everything because I didn't need it," she says matter-of-factly.

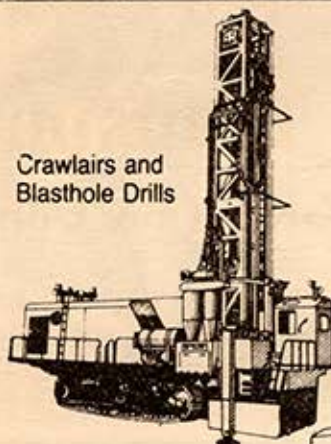
Notwithstanding the loss of an invaluable treasure house of India's past, she still has a huge collection to offer for posterity. It is a collection that is in dire need of preservation. The National Centre for Photography as an Art Form, Bombay, has recently sent feelers to her in this regard. For the present, history is stashed away in the drawers of an old wooden cupboard in Baroda.



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Of lovers and freedom fighters

Burjor K. Karanjia

And Some Take A Lover by Dina Mehta. Published in 1992 by Rupa Publishers, Post Box No 12333, 15 Bankim Chatterjee Street, College Square, Calcutta 700073. Pp: 317. Price: Rs 70.

Roshni Wadia *does* take a lover. She might also have, as her friend Douglas Archer suggests, quoting the poet, played the devil and then written a novel. But that isn't the sort of thing Roshni is given to doing, pouring out her troubles to strangers.

Even in the act of love, though losing her virginity, Roshni doesn't really give of herself to the rich married businessman, Rustom Bharucha, dealer in wines and spirits and chemicals, who practises adultery to the strains of Brahms and the rhythms of Shakespeare. Much later, when his wife Mithu loses the child on whom he had pinned his hopes for the future, Rustom does an about-turn, realizes (or says he realizes) that he is in love with Roshni and offers to make an honest woman of her. She spurns the offer.

Roshni is a very real person who gives to Dina Mehta's *And Some Take A Lover* its passion and strength. At the same time she is in a sense a curiously disembodied being, since we are not given an inkling of what she looks like. One imagines that had her creator been a male, he might have grown lyrical over her charms. Dina Mehta prefers to leave these to her readers' imagination which Roshni's inner vitality manages to keep continuously active. Her face on the book cover helps — scarlet lips, enquiring eyes, a troubled frown at life passing her by.

The blurb describes *And Some Take A Lover* as an absorbing novel about the conflicting loyalties of a Parsi family caught up in the political turmoil of the Quit India movement. Absorbing the novel is; as for loyalties, the members of Roshni's family, her friends and sundry hangers-on are firmly and raucously on the side of the British rulers. These

people with their quirks and eccentricities make delightful company, even if their lives are without purpose and their conversation tends to be trivial.

The conflict centers on Roshni. Her instincts, fuelled by her love for the taciturn freedom fighter Sudhir Mahipal, are to throw herself wholeheartedly into the Quit India movement, even to the extent of cutting herself off from her family and

spending her life with Sudhir in an Indian village of which he presents to her a graphic but most depressing picture. But her family background, her upbringing in school and college, the Parsi culture such as it is, the values she has been brought up to hold dear, make her hesitate. Ultimately, by a twist of circumstance (an appointment she fails to keep through no fault of hers), she loses Sudhir to Gauri,

a Harijan girl, who no doubt makes him a more suitable companion.

Roshni's life is further complicated when the lover of her English friend Sabrina, also married, is murdered in her flat. Roshni is tortured by doubt whether this is a political murder or a crime of passion, whether Sabrina did truly sympathize with Indian aspirations unlike her insufferable husband or is an undercover agent for British Intelligence. She finds herself further embroiled when, owing to her presence at the scene of the crime, she is confronted by the indomitable police commissioner, Colonel Fox, whose relentless inquisition makes life hell for her till a "political" solution to the murder is found.

One happy and, for Roshni, crucial outcome of the entire sorry episode is that she meets and befriends Douglas Archer who opens her eyes, with a sympathy and understanding unexpected in a foreigner, to the true significance of India's freedom struggle and Sudhir's part in it. Roshni feels drawn to him, "more like a friend than a stranger," she tells him. "That's how I'd like you to remem-

ber me," he replies. The word "remember" alarms her: "It seems that every time I meet someone I could like, he turns into a — memory." But Archer must go home and on the eve of his departure, he holds out his hand to wish her good-bye. She stands up on tiptoe and gently brushes his cheek with her lips. "What was that for?" he asks, surprised. "For being you," she replies.

And Some Take A Lover is a richly textured novel with characters that are amusing and alive and a story that fairly captures the excitement of India's freedom struggle. It is a rewarding read for the sharp little insights it offers into human frailties and strengths, setting it apart from the murky, sex-drenched, hastily drafted and fast-selling (like fast foods) novels that seem all the rage these days. Delightful turns of phrase give it a literary distinction: "When you wear khadi you assume a role, complete with costume and dialogue. But you don't deceive anyone but yourself"... "She was unwhole, because one set of loyalties in her conflicted with another set of imperatives. And the choosing of one over the other, a decision on her future, involved a painful snipping, whittling operation"... "She (Mithu) did not look pregnant yet, just thick-set and self-cherishing in her turquoise *tanchoi* sari with her husband's fortune dangling in sparkling clusters from her earlobes"... "He (Fox) stood looking at her with his strange eyes, his face empty and flattened, as if he had carefully erased the outer layer of expression"... "It was as if a page of her life had been silently turned, and the breath of its turning had changed her. Her soul came of age and with this prodigious blossoming she ceased to be a child."

The exotica of Parsi rituals and customs do not really add to the intrinsic merit of this novel. Not so Sudhir's moving last testament, which Archer posts to Roshni, detailing his harrowing experiences in Naokhali of man's inhumanity to man, "a record of his deeds, as well as of the unfoldment within him." It is as if by his own aspirations and sacrifice Sudhir enables Roshni to find a meaning to her life. Also, perhaps, a purpose?

At the novel's end Roshni does not find a husband. She doesn't find a job, nor even a vocation. What is more to the point, she finds herself.



"A novel does not have to be so exactly focused and paced as a short story. A play also has the same necessity. You must say what you have to say within one and a half hours. It is better focused and has more economy than a novel," says award-winning playwright and short-story writer Ms Dina Mehta who recently made her debut as a novelist with the publication of *And Some Take a Lover*.

The historical turbulence of India on the eve of Independence has been woven into the complacency of the average Parsi family. Mehta has used the nationalistic ambience of Elphinstone College for her heroine Roshni Wadia to imbibe an interest in the freedom movement. And in the process of Roshni's emotional and mental growth Mehta reviews the social turmoil that faced the generation of the 1940s (see "Of lovers and freedom fighters," facing page).

As Roshni evolves during this turning point in Indian history, she is caught as was Mehta and her generation, "Between two worlds," as says Mehta quoting English poet Stephen Spender, "One dead, the other powerless to be born." One set of loyalties pulling at another set of loyalties: she is lost." Referring to Roshni's brand of nationalism, Mehta, who admits to tremendous respect and admiration for Gandhi, speaks of the Mahatma's political commitment as a means to his self-realization: "Unless you find yourself, what can you give? Your giving has to be flawed."

Mehta and the book have been growing together for years. The first draft of *And Some...* was quite different from the published version, says the author. Originally it had been written as a straight-line narrative. In its final version the story unfolds in a series of flashbacks.

An admirer of Russian novelist Vladimir Nabokov, Mehta, who is also in the process of "rediscovering Kipling," is certain that you "cannot separate style from substance. Style is your perception of what you see. How can you separate it from the words you use?" she asks.

With short stories published in magazines of standing such as the *London Magazine*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Homes and Gardens*, *Good Housekeeping* and oth-

"Between two worlds"



Novelist Dina Mehta attempts to recreate the mental conflicts of the generation that ushered in an independent India

Arnavaz S. Mama

ers, Mehta says it takes her about three months to complete one "because I'm a slow writer. A novel takes much longer." Then, warming up to a comparison between the two literary forms she notes, "In a short story you can distill your work. I can imagine a perfect short story but I can't imagine a perfect novel... In some short stories the end never ties up neatly because it's open ended - echoes of it will go on in the outside world."

Mehta has been tilting with the sexist bias in social morality since many years. Her plays — notably the BBC award winning *Brides are not for burning* which is expected to be published as a Rupa paperback next January — have consistently underlined the code of double values so galling to one deeply committed to ethical pursuits. Mehta is continually harping on the mental conditioning of the Indian female, "a conditioning which starts from the time the baby is born... and sets woman against woman so that as a mother-in-law she gets a chance to get her own back." The concept of woman in the Indian male mind is that of an inferior, says Mehta, and "woman has accepted herself as such and therefore allows herself to be treated so... Women are conditioned to think of men as the be-all and end-all of their lives... Women don't want to grow; don't feel the need until something goes wrong." Young girls go through college and may be well educated but their only aim is to get married, she says. Mehta therefore considers it a "breakthrough for a woman to take sex as the modern generation does." In the novel, Roshni's sexual dalliance with Rustom, her friend's husband, is a measure of her rebellion against the codes that tie her down, says Mehta, but it is "not guiltfree, not the action of an emancipated woman. It is her despair that has made her take this stand."

Mehta's writing career began in Queen Mary's School, authoring "end of term plays which we used to perform." Describing herself as "very awkward in her early teens," Mehta (née Darasha) grew up "out of kilter at home, much more (herself) at school," finding in literary expression "a kind of compensation." Through Elphinstone College (where

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"there was a feeling that it had turned out men in service of the country") and journalistic stints with the *Evening Star* and *The Sunday Standard*, Mehta says she became ambitious under the nurturing of her "fantastically supportive" textile engineer husband Keki. With his early passing the craft became even more important and Mehta spent a few years as literary editor of *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and thereafter as managing editor of *Kaiser-E-Hind*. The Mehtas' two daughters — Huzan and Rashna — were not as happy about their mother's career, remembers Dina. "They still have reservations about a writing mother, feel my preoccupation was so great that I neglected them... I wasn't the traditional, conventional mother," says the happy grandmother of two whose eye problems now demand a rationing of the printed literary fare she may consume.

Comparing the current dreary, contemptible political scene with the resurgence and idealism of the 1940s and 50s, Mehta recalls how she "saw Nehru with rose-colored lenses and looked up to our leaders... The terrible letdown on the political scene, in all standards of integrity is or more or less like Piroja kaki predicted," Mehta refers pointedly to a character in the novel who espouses the general community point of view on the subject of Indian Independence, predicting a general slide in standards of integrity as the nouveau riche take on the reins of control.

"We're a remarkable community. It's a shame we are on the extinct list," says Mehta who is typically proud of the early Parsi contribution to the building of modern India. "We have a lot of potential. We're at the top of all the professions (and) though there has been an erosion also," Mehta says she has not created characters "whose mental outlook is limited."

Though Mehta concedes that the community is "moving away from the highest standards," she ascribes it to the "definite poverty in the community. Parsis are poor as they weren't before." She is aware of the lack of initiative and enterprise, the clinging to Bombay city which are a part of the present scenario. "All of these are to some extent mama's faults," she admits. The average community yearning for the pre Independence era is also "a natural outcome," according to her. "Our lot did improve with the British. It was advantageous to ourselves to support them. (Thereafter) there

were certain adjustments that we were not able to make. Now numerically we are down because we don't want to lower our standards." Mehta ascribes the demographic decline to urbanization: "When we had farms, etc we could afford larger families."

Mehta is not a keen follower of community politics. She is unaware of the intricacies of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet's (BPP) Anjuman Committee and her name does not figure on the general register of the BPP. They are seeming irrelevancies to one whose preoccupation is the human condition.

MATRIMONIAL

Matrimonial alliance invited from good-natured, home loving girl, between 35 and 40 years for a Parsi athonan, divorcee, 6' 1" tall, highly educated, good-natured, aged 45, having accommodation and earning a five-figure income. The girl may be a spinster, divorcee or widow.

Write to:

The Advertiser

Parsiana

Matrimonial (Oct/42-92)

GPO Box 892, Bombay 400001

MATRIMONIAL

Parsi boy, 30 years, studying and working in USA, invites correspondence with a view to matrimony, from Parsi/Irani Zoroastrian girls around 25 years or from their parents, well-settled in USA. Must be green card holders.

Reply to:

The Advertiser

Parsiana

Matrimonial (Oct/44-92)

GPO Box 892

Bombay 400001

The age of Zoroastrian brides (as listed in this issue) ranged between 19 and 36 years, the arithmetic mean (the total number of individual ages divided by the total number of brides) being 28 years. The corresponding figures for the grooms were 23 and 39 years, averaging at 31 years.

There were 25 births in Bombay as compared to 100 deaths in September. Twenty-nine Zoroastrians died of heart disease of whom eight were above the age of 80. The other major killers were pneumonia and lung disease and brain disease which took the lives of 16 and 11 victims each. Six patients fell prey to cancer, five to septicemia and four each to old age and general debility and diabetes. Parkinson's disease, bronchitis, kidney failure, asthma, hypertension and cerebral malaria claimed two lives each. Diarrhoea, cervical spondylosis, dehydration, nervous disorder, gastro-enteritis, gangrene, accident, tuberculosis, polycythaemia (increase in the number of circulating red blood cells), fistula, malnutrition, dementia and malaria were the isolated cases registered last

month. A stillborn baby and two youths, aged 31 and 36, were also lost to the community. The eldest to die was a 102-year-old lady as compared to the youngest: a nine-day-old baby girl.

The data on births, marriages and deaths has been compiled from information supplied by various newsletters and anjuman in India and abroad, courts and hospitals. This information is not always complete or consistent. For example, the birth figures for Bombay are supplied by four hospitals; births in suburban hospitals and private nursing homes are not included unless individuals send us information together with a copy of the birth certificate. In the breakup of deaths according to illnesses, especially 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 boy to Arnavaz and Khushroo Bhansali on September 2, 1992
A girl, Rhea, to Sherna and Sharukh Bharucha; September 2
A boy to Amy and Zarir Darbari; September 2
A boy to Neena and Pervez Balsara; September 3
A boy to Ruby and Behram Ghadiali; September 5
A girl to Maharukh and Sam Calagopi; September 6
A boy to Manek and Aspi Deboo; September 8
A girl to Azita and Ariz Irani; September 8
A boy to Yasmin and Aspi Irani; September 8
A boy to Kashmira and Noshir Mehta; September 12
A boy to Maharukh and Adil Tarapore; September 12
A boy, Arzan, to Monaz and Adil Kavarana; September 16

A girl to Persis and Feroze Sethna; September 16
A girl, Vahishta, to Kashmira and Ruzbeh Bharucha; September 18
A girl to Vahidai and Neville Gheewala; September 18
A girl to Nilofer and Reshad Rostomji; September 19
A boy to Mehernaz and Rayomand Tavadia; September 19
A boy to Goalnaz and Rohinton Bastani; September 20
A boy to Mehnaz and Rohinton Bhiwandiwalla; September 20
A boy to Dinaz and Homiyar Aibara; September 24
A girl to Tanaz and Jal Irani; September 25
A boy to Kamal and Kersasp Daruwala; September 26
A boy to Shirin and Bomy Elavia; September 28
A boy to Kamal and Homi Surti; September 29
A boy to Jeroo and Cyrus Vazifdar; September 30

Married

Shahnaz Rustomji Wadia and Homiyar Noshir Nariman; September 4
Farida Parvez Saklatwalla and Cyrus Marzban Gorimar; September 6
Pervin Shavaksha Elavia and Homiyar Jehangir Daroowalla; September 11

Died

Rustomji Hormusji Majoo (89), residing at 7, Khareghat Clny, Hughes Rd, 400007; August 31
Pheroze Peshotan Baria (65), 301, Raj Castle, I.C. Clny, Borivali (W), 400092; September 1
Freny Khushroo Dastur (76), Rajesh Mans, Dinshaw Vatcha Rd, 400020; September 1
Goolbai Eruchshaw Driver (82), A, Temple View, Owendunn Rd, 400007; September 1
Tehmina Eruch Dastur (59), 788, Avabai Mans, Jame Jamshed Rd, Parsi Colony, Dadar, 400014; September 2
Palonji Manchershah Khodaji (91), 5, Malcolm Baug, Jogeshwari (W), 400102; September 2
Rati Behramji Sutaria (75), Sir J. J. Bldg, 277, Tardeo Rd, 400007; September 2
Keki Maneckji Daruwalla (73), A-13/3, Sai Niketan, Mount Rd, Mazgaon, 400010; September 3
Jerbai Behram Engineer (80), F. S. Parukh Dharamshalla, 34, Hughes Rd, 400007; September 3
Khorshed Kaikhusru Pavri (74), 747, Rekha Sadan, Road No 6, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; September 3
Gustad Jamshedji Taraporwala (66), X-86/8-2, Godrej Qtrs, Stn Side, Vikhroli (E), 400079; September 3
Baby of Arnic Cyrus Wadia (stillborn), 265/N, Chikalwadi, Tardeo Rd, 400007; September 3
Khorshed Homi Bharucha (70), Pandit Mans, Balaram St, Grant Rd, 400007; September 4
Fram Nariman Daruwalla (85), 2/4, Lady Ratan Tata Bldg, Turner Rd, Bandra (W), 400050; September 4
Burjor Navroji Motiwalla (68),

United Chmbs, Grant Rd, 400007; September 4
Bomanji Navroji Tijoriwalla (92), Nawab Manzil, Wadia St, Tardeo, 400034; September 4
Dhun Faramroz Vatcha (72), Avabai Petit Bldg, Grant Rd Stn, 400007; September 4
Goolbai Dhanjishaw Billimoria (102), 9, Patel Chmbs, R. Sidhwa Marg, Fort, 400001; September 5
Dhun Tehmuras Cama (71), K/4, Cusrow Baug, S. B. Rd, 400039; September 5
Dolly Jamshed Gazdar (62), Tripathi Chmbs, 247, Bazar Gate St, Fort, 400001; September 5
Komi Homi Pardiwalla (72), 14, Wellington Ter, Dhobitalao, 400002; September 5
Khorshed Faramroze Achhadwala (80), Miraj, Irla Lane, Vile Parle (W), 400056; September 6
Shernaz Sam Mistry (58), Cheturbhut, 285, Princess St, 400002; September 6
Delnaz Bomi Patel (9 days), 221, Bora Bazar St, Fort, 400001; September 6
Khusroo Faramroz Velaty (74), K/275, Meherbai Wadia Bldg, Chikalwadi, 400007; September 6
Rustom Nariman Dadabhoy (81), 46/C, Gowalia Tank Bldg, Gowalia Tank Rd, 400036; September 7
Soonamaji Erachshah Goiporia (80), F. S. Parukh Dharamshalla, 34, Hughes Rd, 400007; September 7
Gool Sam Kanga (65), M/6, Nowroz Baug, Lalbaug, 400012; September 7
Banoo Keki Khapoliwalla (68), A/3, Empire Ter, Lamington Cross Rd, 400007; September 7
Sohrab Ardeshtir Nentin (86), Peace Heaven, Malcolm Baug, Jogeshwari (W), 400102; September 7
Kharshed Merwanji Patel (76), 83/A, Jal Darshan, 51, Nepean Sea Rd, 400036; September 8
Noshir Jamshedji Vazifdar (74), Eddie Hse, Peddar Rd, 400026; September 8
Sheroo Homi Mistry (64), Jamshed Hall, Above State Bank of India, 49, Forjett St, 400036; September 9

Padam Behramji Morris (73), 6, Aakash Apts, Agripada, 400011; September 9
Behram Jamshedji Zaikar (64), Tarapur, Dist Thana, 401502; September 9
Dina Rustomji Banaje (75), 3, Habib Park, Clare Rd, Byculla, 400008; September 11
Peshotan Jamshedji Desai (78), Nohan Manzil, Tardeo, 400034; September 11
Bani Hirji Devitre (72), F/42, Cusrow Baug, S. B. Rd, 400039; September 12
Homi Nawrojee Dubash (84), The Reward, 220, Tardeo Rd, 400007; September 12
Dina Eruch Medhora (84), P/35, Cusrow Baug, S. B. Rd, 400039; September 12
Dara Shorabji Mewawalla (84), 113, Sona Villa, Dolly Studio, S. V. Rd, Khar, 400052; September 12
Jeroo Jehangir Mistry (62), 35, Manish Ngr, Andheri, 400058; September 12
Roda Rustom Karanjia (81), 11/7, Tata Clny, Tardeo, 400034; September 13
Sirin Minoo Katrak (96), B/31, Empire Est Bldg, August Kranti Marg, 400036; September 13
Fardoon Naoroji Mehta (92), Pahelvi Bldg, 315, Lamington Rd, 400007; September 13
Hilla Pesi Bhoroacha (78), 171, Silver Arch, 66, Nepean Sea Rd, 400006; September 14
Dosabhai Behramji Desai (78), A/23, Cusrow Baug, S. B. Rd, 400039; September 14
Dina Savakshaw Pastakia (72), 42, Divecha Hse, Stn Rd, Thane, 400601; September 14
Dina Jamshedji Dadimaster (83), Mehta Bldg, Captain Clny, Tardeo, 400034; September 15
Aloo Rustomji Kaka (84), Jairajbhay Bldg, Forjett St, 400036; September 15
Jeroo Noshir Mody (77), 15, Sunshine, 78-B, Dr A. B. Rd, Worli, 400018; September 15
Freny Darabsha Homavazir (69), P/20, Nowroz Baug, Lalbaug, 400012; September 17
Rattanbai Dhunjisha Jilla (80), C/o Jilla Wadi, Suren Rd, Andheri (E), 400093; September 17
Jehangir Eruchshaw Patel (85), 16, Jenkins Hse, Henry Rd, 400039; September 17
Boman Ardeshir Nicholson

(75), Princess Bldg, 275, Princess St, 400002; September 18
Freny Kobad Dubash (79), 12/A, Empire Est, A. K. Marg, 400036; September 19
Faramroz Fakirji Engineer (78), Bhavnagri Bldg, S. V. P. Rd, 400004; September 20
Minoo Hormusji Fatakia (58), F/17, Navajbai Contractor Baug, Mori Rd, Mahim, 400016; September 20
Palonji Navroji Karanjia (64), 4A/8, Tata Clny, Tardeo, 400034; September 20
Khorshed Beheram Lelinwala (81), Adenwalla Bldg, 30/A, Powalla St, Grant Rd, 400007; September 20
Jal Shapurji Bharucha (78), G-11/12, Munsif Bldg, Captain Clny, Tardeo, 400034; September 21
Banoo Homi Doctor (92), Patel Bldg, N. M. Joshi Marg, Lower Parel, 400013; September 21
Noshir Edulji Mody (78), 15, Sunshine, 78-B, Dr A. B. Rd, Worli, 400018; September 21
Bapai Maneckshaw Patel (82), C/o R. J. Batliwalla, C/3, Adam Mhl, 143, Tardeo Rd, 400034; September 21
Kolamai Nariman Bharucha (96), 18, Taher Bldg, Jalbhai St, Charni Rd Jn, 400004; September 22
Banoo Homi Jambusarwala (90), 804, Cumballa Crest, 42, Peddar Rd, 400026; September 22
Homai Kaikhushroo Mewawalla (79), 11, Soonawala Bldg, Khetwadi, 12th Cross Rd, 400004; September 22
Freny Minocher Mirza (73), 816, Mistry Charity Bldg, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; September 22
Burjorji Kharshedji Mowdaval (95), 63, Wodehouse Rd, Colaba, 400005; September 22
Nargis Dara Vania (46), B/2, Godrej Baug, Off Nepean Sea Rd, 400036; September 22
Bejonji Cursetji Dastoor (87), 728, Sorab Mans, Jehangir Vimadlal Rd, Parsi Colony, Dadar, 400014; September 23
Khorshed Darabsha Gandhi (82), Q/1, S. B. Bharucha Baug, Andheri (W), 400058; September 23
Pecy Gustad Irani (50), D, Motiwala Bldg, Byculla, 400027; September 23

Daulat Boman Mody (73), 8, Todywala Chawl, Sunmill Rd, Lower Parel, 400013; September 23
Pirojshah Pallonji Palkhiwalla (78), 4/7/C, Tata Block, Sir C. J. Clny, Tardeo, 400034; September 23
Rustomji Pestonji Vajifdar (88), 164, Bora Bazar St, Fort, 400001; September 23
Navroji Jamshedji Dinshaw (85), 3, CBI Colleagues Co-op Hsg Soc, Irla, Vile Parle (W), 400056; September 24
Adi Dinshaw Mapla (80), Motiwala Bldg, 66/C, Gowalia Tank, 400026; September 24
Cooverbai Kaikhushroo Marolia (82), 4/6, A. H. Wadia Baug, Parel Tank Rd, 400033; September 24
Gulamaji Pestonji Vajifdar (76), 164, Bora Bazar St, Fort, 400001; September 24
Pesi Ratanshaw Chothia (62), M/3/9-4, Cama Park, Cama Rd, Andheri (W), 400058; September 25
Nusserwanji Hormuzji Malegamwala (80), Dhunbad Bldg, N. Bharucha Marg, 400007; September 25
Dinshaw Ardeshir Patel (70), 651, Karanjia Bldg, J. S. S. Rd, 400002; September 25
Yazad Jehangir Punekar (78), 1/9, Rustom Baug, Victoria Rd, Byculla, 400027; September 25
Banubai Ratanshaw Sarkari (92), 19, Pirojba Bldg, Mahalaxmiwala Block, 400007; September 25
Firoz Ardeshir Sunavala (70), 7-A/35, Navjivan Co-op Hsg Soc Ltd, Lamington Rd, 400008; September 25
Jerbanoo Kaikhushroo Bhagva- (87), 39/40, Efqubar, Malcolm Baug, Jogeshwari (W), 400102; September 26
Mani Nariman Bulsara (74), Vasudev Mans, Cawasji Patel St, 400001; September 26
Dara Hormasha Kooka (81), Ravi Co-op Hsg Soc, 73, Warden Rd, 400026; September 26
Dinyar Framroz Balaporia (36), 12, Ivanhoe, 139, Backbay Recl, Opp Sachivalaya Gym, 400021; September 27
Percy Maneck Daver (31), 6/B, Crown Mans, Forjett Cross Lane, Gowalia Tank, 400036; September 27
Roda Pecy Irani (45), A, Motiwala Bldg, Opp Victoria

Garden, 400027; September 27
Baimai Dhunjishah Marolia (92), G-28, Cusrow Baug, S. B. Rd, 400039; September 27
Rustom Darabsha Shroff (69), E/46, Jer Baug, Dr Ambedkar Rd, Byculla, 400027; September 27
Rohinton Jehangir Mehta (73), The Reward, Next to Ganga Jamuna, Tardeo, 400007; September 28
Pochaji Godrej Irani (78), B, Shirin Mans, Gamadia Clny, Tardeo, 400007; September 29
Minocher Kawasji Kapadia (88), 808/C, Satyabhama Nivas, Dr Ambedkar Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; September 29
Khodamorad Behram Khosravi (80), Bana Bldg, Khetwadi, 11th Lane, 400004; September 29
Pestonji Phiroze Saklatwala (75), 1/2, Anirudha Soc, Dixit Rd Extn, Vile Parle (E), 400057; September 29
Aloo (Viloo) Fali Bhoot (58), Room no 3/1, Petit Sanatorium, Cumballa Hill, 400026; September 30
Nariman Nussurwanji Mistry (63), 7, Qureshi Mhl, Station Rd, Mahim, 400016; September 30

CALCUTTA

Born
 A girl, *Spenta*, to *Kamal and Noshir Wadia*; September 11
 A girl to *Manekami and Rohinton Ghiara*; September 17

POONA

Died
Coomi Maneckshaw Wadia (86), 83, Thomas Vijay Chawk, Bombay 400014; September 8
Behram Jehangir Irani (62), Laxmi Ice Factory, Sangli, 416416; September 10
Jinny Jamshed Aga (83), 172, Chinchwadagaon, 411033; September 25
Mani Eduljee Bisney (78), 526/9, Koregaon Park, North Main Rd, 411001; September 25
Khorshed Dadabhoy Sethna (85), River Crist Apts, Boat Club Rd, 411001; September 25

SURAT

Born
 A girl, *Khushnum*, to *Havovi and Afroze Patahwala*; September 8

Died

Minocher Fakirji Siganporia (62), Bibini-wadi, Saiyedpura, 395003; September 7
Eruchshaw Nowrosji Nalladaru (81), Wadia St, Maachli Pith, 395003; September 9
Sohrabji Ratanshaw Dastur Kumana (75), Rustom Bldg, Shahpore, 395003; September 16
Minocher Kaikhushroo Contractor (74), Palia Mohallo, Main Rd, Nanpura, 395001; September 19
Homai D. Dalal (74), Nariman Home and Infirmary, Shahpore, 395003; September 23
Khurshed Nadersha Doctor (73), Nariman Home and Infirmary, Shahpore, 395003; September 25
Manijeh Peshotan Bhungara (83), Pushpa Apts, Maachli Pith, 395003; September 26
Manekbai Pallonji Karanjia (72), Nariman Home and Infirmary, Shahpore, 395003; September 26
Aluben Framroze Tipri (87), Swami Satyanand Soc,

TOTALS FOR 1992						
	Bombay		Other Indian cities		Foreign cities	
	A	B	A	B	A	B
BORN						
Boys	17	112	1	5	1	14
Girls	8	99	3	4	—	15
MARRIED						
Parsi	3	146	—	3	—	5
Intercommunal	—	45	—	2	—	5
DIED						
INTERRED						
Male	49	328	8	57	5	31
Female	52	387	8	61	2	20
CREMATED						
Male	4	4				
Female	2	2				

A: Total numbers in this issue

B: Running totals for 1992 (February-October issues)

These figures pertain to information provided to or collected by *Parsiana*. They do not represent the total number of births, marriages and deaths in the Zoroastrian community in India and abroad.

Ramnagar, 395003;
 September 26
Rustomji Framji Fitter (73),
 Nariman Home and Infirmary,

Shahpore, 395003;
 September 28
Dinshawji Behramji Vesuna
 (93), Nariman Home and

Infirmary, Shahpore, 395003;
 September 29

VADODARA**Born**

A boy, *Meherab*, to *Ruxana* and *Firoz Dumasia*; August 28

KARACHI**Born**

A boy, *Jamshed*, to *Najoo* and *Mehernosh Dumasia*; August 8

Died

Rustom J. Gandhi (83); August 1
Rustom P. Ogra (77); August 3
Framroze Cursetji Patel (79); August 13
Ardehsir F. Irani (77); August 17
Dina Hormusji Khursigara (82); August 17
Avabai Rustom Irani (85); August 23
Behram Sheriyar Hormozdyan (58); August 30

Compiled by Roxana A. Mirza

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october 92

MARSHAL OF THE AIR

Parinaz Gandhi

"Fight for the nation, not for the rank," believed Air Marshal Minoo Merwan Engineer who soared above the rest in the Indian Air Force (IAF) "for his acts of gallantry in the presence of the enemy." It was on the death of the 71-year-old intrepid flyer in Bombay on July 16, 1992 following cardiac arrest that many learnt that he was the most highly decorated officer in the Indian Air Force who, during his 33 years of association with the services, played a significant role in the wars India fought and in strengthening the air defence of independent India.

As recalls retired Air Chief Marshal Arjan Singh, "I really got to know him when I was the Chief of Air Staff and he was my deputy as Air Marshal. In this job as the deputy chief of the Air Staff, the responsibility for making an overall operational plan fell on his shoulders. Much of the credit for the success of those plans and operations during our wars with Pakistan in 1965 and 1971, therefore, goes to him." In fact, his efforts in the '71 war earned him a Padma Bhushan decoration from the government the following year. The citation for Engineer who was then the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Western Air Command, commends: "The outstanding performance of Western Air Command was due, in great measure, to Air Marshal Engineer's deep understanding of military aviation, the leadership that he gave his officers and men, and his meticulous planning and the detailed operational training of his combat squadrons."

Prior to the Pakistan wars it was the Chinese aggression that Engineer had to cope with as senior air staff officer of the new operational command in the Eastern Sector. The Vishisht Seva Medal (rede-

signed Param Vishisht Seva Medal as of 1967) that was conferred on him in 1964 acknowledges: "To infuse confidence in his pilots in landing at difficult helipads situated at considerable heights, he flew in the first helicopter to land at Tsangdhar (16,000 ft) and organized the evacuation of casualties. On another occasion he remained at Walong till the last moment and flew out only when the landing ground was being shelled by the Chinese forces. He set a fine example to his officers and men by his indomitable courage."

Known to have flown "every prop-driven fighter and transport aircraft in



Air Marshal M. S. D. Wollen in his tribute in the *Indian Aviation Civil and Military* for the week ending July 24, 1992.

Whether it was taking off in a Hurricane aircraft from an isolated beach without a helipad, or setting out in a Liberator in search of a missing boy from his

squadron during the monsoons when visibility was poor and flying had to be done at a low altitude, Engineer enjoyed challenges, mentions Commodore Keki Gocal. As relates Ms P. C. Lal, widow of the late Air Chief Marshal, it was on the strength of Engineer's accurate appraisal that air transportation was undertaken and Ladakh "saved from being run over by the Pakistanis" in 1948. This was when "the Army desperately

wanted Leh to be reinforced from the air (and) the only transport aircraft available with the Air Force was the Dakota which had serious ceiling limitations in crossing mountain ranges with peaks over 20,000 feet and landing and taking off in the rarified atmosphere on a hastily prepared airstrip at 11,500 feet." The Maha Vir Chakra crowned Engineer's effective control of all air operations in Jammu and Kashmir in 1948. Prior to that he had been assigned the task of forming the first operational

air base in Jammu and Kashmir, mentions his bio data.

Born in Hyderabad, Sind, Engineer's early education was at the Murree Convent, and thereafter at the convent in Panchgani. He was studying science at Bombay's Elphinstone College when he felt the urge to join the armed forces following in the footsteps of his elder



Engineer (center) with Gul and Indira Gandhi (far left) after the Indo-Pak war

IAF inventory in his time... (Engineer was equally conversant with) most fighter jets and startled experienced pilots... with his ability to fly low, navigate accurately over long distances and strike targets on a practice range," notes retired



Engineer (center) with immediate family

brother Aspi. Frontline combat duty in World War II was the first posting for 19-year-old Engineer when he joined the services in 1940. He commanded the first Indian Air Force Spitfire Squadron in Burma, a region feared for its impenetrable jungles that are hazardous to the flyers. But his efforts were rewarded with a Distinguished Flying Cross (a British decoration). Thereafter he commanded the only Indian Squadron in Japan in 1946, records his curriculum vitae. Only last year Engineer had been specially invited to the Battle of Britain celebrations in London when all heroes of the Spitfire Society were felicitated.

"Minoo belonged to a distinguished family of aviators whose contribution to the defence of the country is really significant," informs Singh. "During World War II, four brothers were in the Air Force and one in the Army." The eldest, Aspi, became the chief of the air staff but that did not mean that the siblings — Jungoo, Minoo and Rohinton, all of whom won the Distinguished Flying Cross, and Rashid who was in the Army — were favored. "(He) rose to every rank by sheer merit in the field of command and operations," credits Vice Admiral Rusi Ghandhi, "and (he was) loved by his officers and men for his totally unassuming nature."

Former flight lieutenant Madhu Sawant gratefully records how Engineer, his commanding officer, believed in judging "us by our duties which we would do as officers rather than the main duty for which we were paid." He also remembers Engineer participating in the Air Force cricket team. As an officer he felt responsible for improving the moral fiber of his men and "liked to do his bit for welfare also," states Gocal who cre-

dits Engineer with raising funds for a bus for the children of serving officers. "The cooperative and tactful man could never be abrasive," Gocal clarifies. "Looking at him (podgy face and dimpled chin notwithstanding, Engineer enjoyed high popularity with the ladies in his bachelor days) one got the impression of him being a softy but he was very tough and very determined." Always willing to assist the sister forces and in turn elicit support from them, his strategies were marked by a rare understanding of their problems, it is commonly acknowledged.

It was not all battle for Engineer. He did serve terms as commanding officer of a training establishment, as senior air staff officer at the headquarters training command planning the expansion of the IAF, as air officer commanding-in-chief of different operational commands entrusted with control of forces and resources worth crores of rupees. He had plans to write his memoirs, mentions his wife Gul.

Only last year he was conferred the Maharashtra Gaurav Puraskar for being the most highly decorated military officer. But in his exemplary career, the rank of air chief marshal eluded him. Nevertheless on the popularity charts he won a high rating and many of his colleagues and juniors were present to pay their last respects at the traditional military farewell accorded to him at the Doongerwadi to the accompaniment of a volley of gunshots and bugle notes. More than he, it is his family and friends who regret that he was never given the merit he deserved. Since his retirement from active service in 1973 he applied himself to the affairs of Selvel, the advertising agency managed by his wife, to which he gave tremendous ad-

ministrative support as director till his last days, informs his stepson Kekoo Nicholson who apparently missed his dad's presence in the office.

Jocularly wont to remark that "it is easier to fight a war than to fight teen-aged children," Engineer was a disciplinarian at home, mentions Gul. Even if his stepdaughters were expected to return late, he would insist on staying up for them. Disco music was forbidden in the house but each of the girls was bought a piano to sustain their interest in music.

Having enjoyed wildlife shooting at one time, he later gave it up realizing it was wrong to kill animals for personal pleasure. There was a time when there were 11 dogs in the house, adds Gul. Vintage cars offered another source of fascination to Engineer.

While not a staunch follower of religious practices and customs, he respected his mother's orthodox wishes in that he should find himself a Zoroastrian wife. He believed in supporting community institutions, says Gul, explaining how he would opt to be hospitalized at the B. D. Petit Parsee General Hospital and generously contribute to the donation box there rather than avail of the almost free services for the defence staff at Asvini Hospital. But the community failed to recognize his heroism, regrets Gul. There was reference to the Engineer brothers' heroism at the function organized by the Delhi Parsi Anjuman in 1990 as a mark of tribute to the contribution of Parsis to the defence services. Yet, this war hero was never invited to functions in connection with the war memorial at Khareghat Colony. When Gul offered his treasures for the Parasika exhibition, they were not interested. She feels his mementos, medals and other treasures could fill a room.

This pilot par excellence enjoyed undertaking aircraft feats: bringing his plane dangerously close to ground level to salute the head of the nation on Republic Day, or commanding a brilliant air show at Bombay's Marine Drive in 1961 which many citizens remember to this day. A project that Engineer was very keen to introduce was an air-taxi service so that others too could reach for the sky.

The aviator is survived by his wife Gul, and her children by her first marriage, Kekoo, Ms Feroza Saran and Ms Roxanne Nicholson.

Reaching for the Sky



Two landmarks in Bombay – the Commerce Centre of the World Trade Centre Complex and the new Reserve Bank Building.

Both built by Shapoorji Pallonji of course!



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HAPPY BIRTHDAY

R N 9474/64
MHBY/S-01

On my Birthday there was a fancy dress party.
We were all looking for Ustaad.
Do you know what he dressed
up as? As Jumbo! And

through a long
straw in his
trunk he
drank up

everyone else's Rasna! And what
did he say when we caught him?
"Happy Birthday. I love you Rasna!"



**SORRY
I FINISHED ALL THE
RASNA**



Orange • Pineapple • Lime • Shahi Gulab • Kala Khatta • Kool Khus • Kesar Elaichi • Masala Soda (Jal Jeera) • Cola Cola • Mango Ripe
One glass = 180 ml