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 Unsigned letters or those without an address will not be published.

"The three Parsi myths"

I refer to the letter by Pervin J. Mistry of Toronto on "The three Parsi myths," *Parsiana* (June-July 2000). She has her own theories both medical and scientific regarding the suitability of dokhmenashini and hence I, being a professional, do not wish to enter into further controversies.

The important issue is not the comparison of dokhmenashini vis-à-vis other methods of disposal of the dead viz burial, cremation, etc but the prevailing conditions in which dokhmenashini is being practiced. I understand that the Zoroastrian population in Toronto is far more than at many places in India where dokhmas are in existence to cater to the wishes of the few Zoroastrians.

Perhaps Mistry may consider the construction of a dokhma in the center or periphery of Toronto. The response and views of the Canadian government

would be worth knowing.

Dr D. M. DISAWALLA
Bangalore

The purpose of this piece is to arouse and persuade people to do what is rational, and if they themselves are not in power to do it, to persuade those who are in power.

Are religion and rational behavior in mutual opposition? True religions extol truth as the highest good, the highest virtue. Obviously therefore, to perceive the truth of a matter and to adhere to it in conduct can only be the duty and the mark of the religious individual as of the rational human being. Consequently no mutual opposition can exist between religion and rational behavior.

Is it rational to go against nature? Only if man has the means. Natural phenomena can be overcome by man by the application of scientific knowledge and method. When science provided the means, airplanes could defy gravity and fly.

Suppose that customs once enjoined by religion (customs dependent on natural phenomena) are found by change of circumstance, and on grounds of failure to achieve their object while creating conditions prohibited by religion, demand their abrogation until the original natural circumstance is reestablished. Which human being can acquiesce in the uninterrupted continuation of such a custom? Certainly no rational person.

Laws of public good must take precedence where good sense, integrity fail a person or persons, perpetuating in the name of religious freedom customs that have become indecent, irreligious and harmful to the environment and to citizens, both the living and the dead.

There was one particular custom of one particular religion in one particular city which received airing in the entire world on August 13, 2000, in two separate BBC programs, one science program and one program on religion.

The listener heard about the scientific basis of the custom of dokhmenashini and its historic origin. The listener heard about the religion of Zoroaster and about the Parsis of Bombay.

The listener also heard from a BBC researcher, (not on religion, but on birds), head of the National Birds of Prey Centre in Gloucestershire, England, who

had visited Bombay, that she went to see where, at one time, "the sky was darkened by flying vultures" ready for the swoop, not one vulture now appears. She described the parapet of the dokhma, where at one time the vultures sat in full circle, "shoulder to shoulder," ready for their job, now none sits. She said that she had talked to people from the Bombay Natural History Society and learnt that no nests can be found in Bombay. The listener heard that a disease affecting the Indian vulture is being studied and investigated overseas (for example, at the London Zoological Society). It appears to be a disease that dehydrates, and within a couple of weeks, kills the bird. The listener heard that the national prohibition on "export" of birds strikes down any attempt to have the disease in the live bird investigated overseas.

The listener heard a very matter-of-fact description of the rotting corpses lying for months unscavenged. Now this last item is not new to the ears of Indian Parsis. It has been spoken and written about for years. I too remained deaf and dumb.

Only now, as I listened to the matter being solemnly discussed in the world forum of fellow listeners, was I shaken out of my lethargy on this subject. I don't have an eternity to live, but heaven forbid I must die of shame. That surely is what will happen if I and the rest of us, the Parsis of Bombay, fail within weeks to persuade the Parsis who manage Parsi affairs in Bombay of the religious imperatives:

- to stop defiling the environment, as all who are laid in the dokhma willy-nilly do and whose relatives as well as those in charge of Parsi affairs must knowingly do;
- to stop indignity to the dead, while falsely taking the name of religion;
- to stop hawing and ha'ing about options on offer at the beautiful garden on the hill for the spirit of the dead to depart;
- to provide necessary options at Doongerwadi as part of their religious and social duty.

After hearing the airing on the BBC as I have described above, I shall be slow hereafter to shout from the rooftops "I am a Parsi Zoroastrian of Bombay." Parsi, Zoroastrian, indeed! What about you? FEROZA H. SEERVAI

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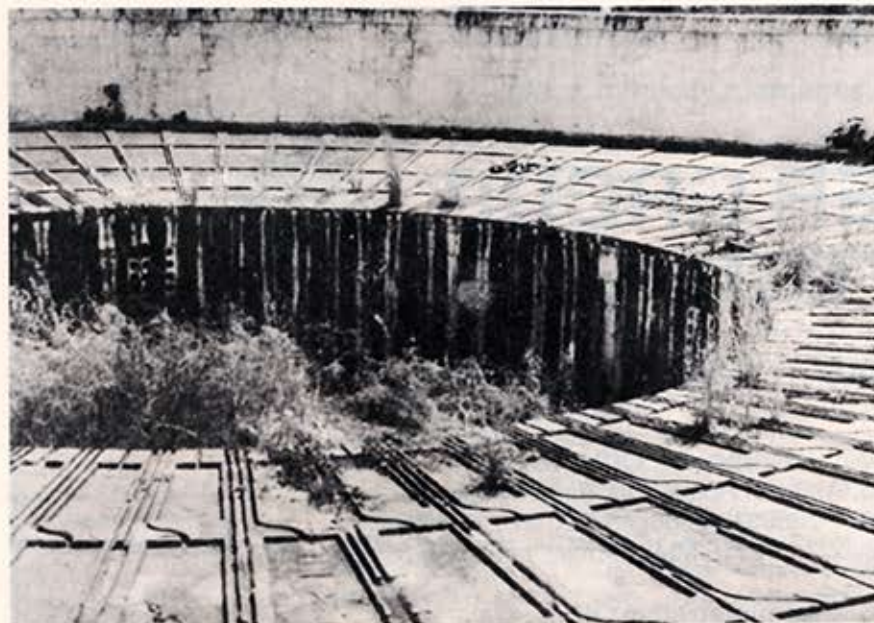
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A dokhma in disuse: a sign of the times?

During their discussion on the problem of dokhmenashini or khurshednagishini as it is also known, caused by the absence of the natural scavengers, vultures, the most important, underground consecration of tana-ni-kriya at the bottom of the Tower of Silence has crept out of sight.

Tano serves as a protective alaas to prevent unhygienic situations like foul odor.

I had discussed this underground 'atomic bhoomi puja,' the tano ceremony, with an electronics engineer who is well conversant with power, nuclear energy and solar energy. He was shocked when he was shown the map of the tano circuits created by cotton threads, connected with the central big nail and wound around 301 small nails making a powerful circuit. He confirmed it being similar to the ultra modern electronic science of circuits prevalent in the present age.

Appreciating the system of dokhmenashini, a powerful solarium, he explained that the central life force stores sun energy and distributes it around. This storage works like a miracle even during the rainy season when there is not much sunshine. This electronic network of the tano controls infections, foul odor, unhygienic conditions and biological deterioration of the dead body.

Our revered scientist, the late Ervad (Dr) Minocher Karkhanawala had supported the efficacy of circuits in atomic inventions. The resemblance of tano circuits to that of the nuclear net helps solar

energy to work efficiently, to create a hygienic atmosphere without spoiling any natural elements like land, water, fire, air and sky, maintaining the ecological balance of nature. This ultra-modern system will work till solar energy exists. Absence of vultures should not create much of a problem.

This confirmation will help to open the eyes of those going against dokhmenashini and favoring pollution of air and fire by cremation.

NOSHIR DABOO

Ahmedabad

We are all seized of the recent hue and cry generated by the lack of vultures and other birds of prey at our Doongerwadi. The media is agog with news of the problems faced at Doongerwadi.

Why can't we just import some vultures and breed them in captivity? I hear that the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) has on the anvil an ambitious plan of starting an aviary. One fails to understand as to what environmental and governmental clearances the BPP needs, even if one were to accept that vultures are a protected species. We are going to breed them and create an ecosystem that will sustain them and help them grow. We don't plan to kill them or put them to commercial use, so what's the harm anyway?

The amount of time the whole aviary project is taking to take off is far too long. With a climbing death rate, our little community can ill afford such bureaucratic delays. Just goes to show how much influence we enjoy with the government considering that it takes no more than a couple of days for the gov-

ernment to sanction a Ganesh pandal during the Ganpati festival.

This is literally a life and death question.

KAYOMARZ PATEL

Shortage of vultures in the vicinity of Doongerwadi is not a new phenomenon. It had begun around 30 years ago but had gone unnoticed. Numerous other controversies on different matters such as intercommunity marriages, initiation of children of non-Parsi mothers and last rites for Zoroastrians married outside our faith have gone on and on. But this time the matter is rather serious as a few non-Parsis have started interfering and writing provocative articles and comments on religious matters pertaining to the community. Such controversies like the recent one involving the shortage of vultures are initiated by our own community.

More than 50 years ago the whole area in and around the Doongerwadi was surrounded by forests and tall trees with hardly any skyscrapers in the vicinity. Now the scenario has changed. The presence of foliage prevented pollution and was a safe home for the birds. The same does not hold good at the moment.

Some of the Zoroastrians in the nearby colonies started a unique practice of feeding the great Indian scavenger, the common crow, believing that he was a messenger of God. This practice led to a rise in the population of crows, and vultures being basically shy birds, disliked their presence and the noise. This diminishing tribe found it difficult to survive and whenever a dead body was offered there was no chance for the vultures to come near as the crows nearly drove them off!

This resulted in bodies lying undisposed for a long time, maybe months, although solar energy does perform a major role in disintegrating the dead bodies. Coupled with that, plenty of pollution, cloudy weather, especially during the monsoons and myriad other factors make it very difficult for the disposal of bodies through our time-honored practice.

Also since the last few years it has been noticed that the khandhias who carry the body into the Towers do not tear off the clothes before sliding the body onto the pavis. What is the reason behind it? This is an important ritual and should be followed. Also when an unexposed body is kept inside, how would the vultures know that it can be con-

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Sah & Sanghi Group

sumed?

So how is one to deal with the problem? Breeding of young vultures is not possible on account of environmental changes. Even if they are reared, their survival chances are minimal.

The thought of a crematorium at Doongerwadi and solar panels was also mooted but that will mean that the Parsi Punchayet will lose acres of land, with the government eager to build houses on this site. Besides, it is against Zoroastrian principles as we are fire-worshippers. All said and done, I feel that dokhmenashini which is the oldest method is also the most scientific system for disposal of the dead.

DINSHAW D. NATERWALLA

Behram Dastur, chief executive of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet, replies
The pallbearers remove the clothes of the corpses once they are laid to rest in the dokhmas.

"Millennium man"

I refer to Bhikhaji M. Adenwalla's letter on the "Millennium man," (Readers' Forum, *Parsiana*, June-July 2000). I agree that it is time someone wrote a biography of my father, Sam Manekshaw and am now looking at the possibility of doing so.

If any of your readers would like to send me any personal experiences or anecdotes they would be most useful.

They can e-mail me at sherryb@eth.net or write to me at PH 4, Alsa Manor, 72 Harrington Road, Chennai 600031.

SHERRY D. BATLIWALA

Madras

Common calendar

Those who are opposing the introduction of a common calendar are doing disservice and harm to the Parsi community. It is a pity that a simple, straightforward, proved and accepted phenomenon, the time taken by one revolution of the earth around the sun to complete a year—365¼ days and not 365 days—is politicized. The Fasli calendar is known to be most accurate and time tested. A question arises as to why the same has not been adopted for the entire Parsi Zoroastrian community even after knowing that the other calendars are not accurate. The correct Fasli calendar, if adopted, would not only have allowed us to celebrate New Year days on fixed dates with the onset of the spring season, but more importantly, would have helped

us to foster oneness and brotherhood among the different groups.

DALI J. GUNDEVIA

No screen standards?

I have lived in Bombay and elsewhere amongst our Parsi community, and at present am residing in Canada. Hence I can comfortably state that we are no different from any other community at large. But of late, I am beginning to notice a trend, which to me seems brazen and unrepresentative. Has anyone lately noticed the kind of image of our

community depicted in films globally? I might be old-fashioned and prudent, however, I would like to attempt being open-minded, as I am an avid film addict and critic. In the golden era of films, Parsis were much respected in spite of taking on roles that were not necessarily depicting the person's own community. Sohrab Modi hardly ever played a Parsi in movies. Then came the sidekick times, with the advent of Pilloo Wadia type Parsi characters. They were in essence innocent depictions of members of our community. *Khatta Meetha* was a clean drama with Parsi characters. There were some sour notes in the years following, but the most commendable performance came from Sujit Kumar who did full justice to portraying a Parsi gentleman in *Avtar*, along with Rajesh Khanna and Shabana Azmi. There were many other such portrayals as well. Now of late, we have been witnessing a mixed bag, some good and some not so good display of Parsi characters in films.

I read the novel *Such A Long Journey* by Rohinton Mistry which I thought was very interesting. However, I did not like the screenplay by the same title. The movie could not carry the emotions and narrative of the story in full dimensions which was understandable. But what was most disturbing was the needless addition of scenes which could have easily been toned down a bit. I am referring to the nude scene of Kurush Deboo. Are Parsis getting bold these days? I really admired Deboo's performance in *Percy*, hence I cannot hold him solely responsible for that portrayal.

Percy was another straightforward

film, along with the likes of *Pestonjee*, *Sixth Happiness* and of late, *1947 Earth*, which portrayed the image of Parsis as being normal and dignified, like any other community.

Films like *Bombay Boys* are really disturbing. What was Kaizad Gustad



A scene from the film *Pestonjee* released in 1987. Photo: Homiyar Mistry, Homz Prints

achieving by displaying such zany characters, aptly played by artistes like Roshan Seth and Alexander Gifford. In my viewpoint, *Bombay Boys'* Parsi characters fall out of limits. I have not come across anyone who is anything like Xerxes Mistry, as played by Gifford, or worse yet, Pesi, as played by Seth. Such characters may exist, but why do they need to be made the focus of a story line?

Is there someone authoritative/representative watching what is being stated about our community at large? Or are there no standards anymore? I have nothing against the portrayal of gay Parsis, even Parsis being shown in the nude. But is there a need to bring out the dark and callous issues instead of better concerns? There are better things to show than that, in my opinion. Not everything has to be like the portrayal of cute, seven-year-old Sasha, ably played by Benaf Dadachanji in *Halo*. I have seen commendable performances on the satellite, depicting Parsis in TV soaps. Why then is the cinema not capable of showing a better side of our community? We can all be modern and open-minded, yet remain within the boundaries of dignity. Does anyone share my opinion? Have the morals of our community changed? The freedom of expression might be the real cause of this change in morals.

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TOXY COWASJEE
Karachi, Pakistan

Simple salvation

Pride is a great inventor of religion. We set up ourselves and our needs and then select religious beliefs which cater for them: our souls are fed a diet of self-satisfaction. We seek a Prophet of Ahura Mazda who will flatter our self-esteem; who will grant our wish to find meaning and purpose in life; who will preside over a personal universe of ordered and uninterrupted happiness; whose ways are our ways; whose provisions meet our wants; whose laws we can easily obey without personal cost. The religion of modern people demonstrates their exercise of individualized sovereignty: it is the aspiration of those who recognize no discipline beyond their own judgement. This is a religion fashioned by emotional indulgence, selected from available beliefs by chance decision. It is the projection of a craving for generalized and sentimentalized regard for

humanity — not as it is, corrupted and morally frail, but as people yearn for it to be: an idealized extension of their own self-worth.

Today's Zoroastrianism hopes to achieve a sense of beauty and spiritual repose; a therapy exercise derived from an interior world hugely at variance with the actual world experienced by our predecessors in traditional society who were not insulated from reality by the comforts of modern lifestyles and sanitized death. Human life envisaged by today's Zarathushti entrepreneurs is all goodness and truth and human virtue: detached from the nastiness of living and breathing people, and unrelated to the possibilities of evil lurking in daily social exchange. It is astonishing that after millennia of human development, the men and women of today, with all their knowledge of the material workings of the planet and their intellectual resources, should reveal themselves to be so juvenile in their understanding of what authentic Zoroastrian religion is all about. They do seem to think it is a phenomenon of the emotions, a matter of beautiful experience rather like bourgeois appreciation of art.

True Zoroastrian religion is about

sacrifice and personal pain, discipline and offering, the disgusting yet spiritually cleansing service of the unclean and rejected. It is about the things we do not want to do, and it derives from beliefs that are not pleasant to believe. Zoroastrianism is very far from the therapy religion of modern society: there we are confronted not with conventional beauty and serene experience. This is not the easy vision of the moralists and their human panaceas: it is the world we are called by Zarathushtra to serve face-to-face. The greatest service Zoroastrians can offer to others is not the short-term palliation of material applications but the knowledge of salvation. This is Zoroastrianism with real demands, for it goes against our self-regarding instincts and causes us pain. The gate is narrow and the way is hard; those who try to discern the way need the help of Zarathushtra himself, and it is the profundity of His teaching which, in the act of acceptance, is converted into joy.

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cerned adults it is our responsibility to touch their lives with loving hands, guide and tune them to develop positive social behavior. In today's packed academic curriculum and pursuit of higher degrees, there is no scope to offer value based skills to children.

Keeping this in mind, Lions Club International in collaboration with Quest International has introduced a program for building self-confidence, self esteem and a sense of responsibility in children to help them emerge as good citizens. The program "Lions Quest — Skills for Adolescence" (SFA) launched in India in 1991 focuses on children in the age-group of 10 to 16 years since that is a critical, vulnerable stage of physical, mental and emotional development, a period when many forms of negative behavior are likely to begin and develop especially due to over exposure to media and computers.

What parents, teachers and students don't realize is that skills involved in effective study habits are not restricted to academic performance only but go much beyond to building character, interpersonal relationships which affect every aspect of one's life. SFA teaches young people specific strategies and skills like setting and achieving goals for a healthy environment at school, home, community, commitment to a vice free life with integrity. It is better to "build a child than repair an adult," is the philosophy.

Quest is a comprehensive educational program that helps young people deal with the challenges of our changing world. It teaches them to build and blend knowledge with students and friends. Teachers are the key in creating rapport and confidence. The program calls for a mandatory teachers' training policy. The teachers, counselors, parents, social workers are trained at a three-day workshop conducted by trained members of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences and are given reference materials and teaching aids. This means that Quest programs are not for sale to schools. The program is now actively supported by the Education Department, Brihan Mumbai Municipal Corporation, not only in schools having English medium but even in municipal schools having Marathi medium. The lessons in Quest fit under the topic "Value-Based Education Policy" of the government.

The SFA program consists of 40 one-hour sessions spread over a period of

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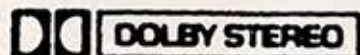
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Events and Personalities

Dentists reunite

"The dental procedures in demand today represent services that most practising dentists have had limited opportunity to learn. The objective of this conference is to provide a common venue for presentation of research and clinically oriented papers on these aspects of dentistry in a congenial atmosphere," declares the promotional literature for the Fourth World Zoroastrian Dental Congress at Bombay's Hotel Taj on September 30 and October 1, 2000.

"We have planned an interesting and stimulating scientific program featuring subjects of interest to the specialist as well as the general practitioner," announces the registration form. The two-day program is to accommodate eight scientific sessions with one session devoted to papers presented by students and the final, open session inviting views and suggestions of all delegates. They plan to hold a trade fair so that the delegates could buy dental materials and equipment at bargain prices. An evening of entertainment followed by a gala banquet was also on the cards.

The hosts of the Congress, the Zoroastrian Dentists Organisation, was formed 43 years ago by Bombay's senior dental surgeons with the aim of promoting goodwill and fellowship amongst dental surgeons, organizing and promoting scientific meetings and literature, promoting public health awareness, assisting students to take up the dental profession, raising funds for fulfilling the above objectives, states the literature.

The team of dentists who will help "Light the way with knowledge" (the theme of the Congress) are doctors Keki Mistry, chairman, Fali Driver, co-chairman, Daisy Sidhwa, organizing secre-

tary, Ooshin Shroff, joint secretary, Porus Turner, scientific chairman, Burzin Khan, treasurer, Karen Vazifdar in charge of the souvenir, Rusi Baam, trade fair, Framroze Antia, cultural, Sam Sahukar, registration, Xerxes Umrigar, reception and accommodation, Mehroo Turner on the ladies committee, Ferzin Turner, Ashdin Turner, Rohinton Billimoria and Hufiz Suraliwalla on the students committee, and Sarosh

Master, Cyrus Daruwalla, Aspi Surveyor and Firoze Mirza on the advisory committee. Sidhwa (who can be contacted on 2816735 or 2816736) was expecting dentists from all over the world to join the Congress.

The welcome annexe

A large garlanded picture of Jamsetji Tata had pride of place in the room. Hearing the voices of nine priests rising and falling in unison as they chanted the jashan prayers on June 29, 2000 marked the culmination of a dream — the inauguration of the annexe of the J. N. Tata Parsi Girls High School, Nagpur. Like one united family, principal Fizza Hamza and all the teachers enthusiastically supported the idea of having a jashan and worked hard to make it a meaningful celebration although only 13 of the 2,000 students and 15 of the 60 teachers are Zoroastrians, according to Kaikhushroo Madan, managing trustee of the School. Khursheed Masani, a senior teacher, welcomed the guests by applying a *sagan ni tili* on their foreheads.

Loved and respected by Nagpurians because of his past association with the city, Ervad Aspandiar Dadachanji presided over the jashan. He was assisted by Nagpur's head priest Ervad Darius Karanjia, Ervads Adil Bhesania (of Bombay), Rusi Dastur and Shapoor

Govadia. Among the younger priests, there was Ervad Kaizad Tarapore, sitting in on his first ceremony after recovering from the burns accident at the agiary (see "Of fire, faith and friends," *Parsiana*, June-July 2000) earlier this year, Ervads Rusbe Bhada, Hormuzd Godha and 11-year-old Nazban Dastur making his debut.

A road runs between the main School building and the annexe. The two are joined by a 45-foot overbridge which avoids the danger of the children crossing the busy road each time. "This is the first and only time in Nagpur that special permission was given by the concerned authorities to build a connecting walkway over the road," explained Rusi Jamaji, contractor and builder of the annexe. All the women of his family are products of the Tata School so Jamaji has a special concern for the institution!

The annexe consists of 11 spacious, airy classrooms, each equipped to seat 50 students and a staff quarter on the ground floor. The extended premises would be utilized to space out the existing pressure on classes and not be filled up with new admissions, declared the principal.

"The total expenditure on the new building has been approximately Rs 70 lakhs," said Madan. "Of this the contribution of the Tatas has been Rs 30 lakhs through the Ratan Tata and Dorab Tata Trusts. The remaining amount was raised through the willing and generous donations of past and present students, teachers and well-wishers of the School," he added.

Established in 1920 largely through the munificence of the Tatas, the School has been furthering the cause of female education. It has always been open to all communities, the only rider being that a Parsi should not be refused admission. With its high standard of education,





Nagpur's J. N. Tata School with the newly built annexe



percent held by the M. B. Eduljee Cassinath Sons group, whose managing partner Khushroo P. Byramjee is an NSICT director as well as a trustee of

ethics and extracurricular activities over the years, the demand for admissions has outstripped the space available. Therefore, in the platinum jubilee year of the School in 1995 it was decided to build an annexe to ease the pressure on the existing facilities. Dilnavaz E. Bhagwagar

First private port

"Jimmy Sarbh of NSICT (Nhava Sheva International Container Terminal) has indeed shown to the world how dedicated and single-minded determination can bring about the best results in the shortest possible time," said Rajnath Singh, union minister of surface transport, at NSICT's official inauguration on June 6, 2000.

Developed at the Jawaharlal Nehru Port (JNP), Nhava Sheva, across the harbor from the island of Bombay, NSICT is India's first private container terminal put into operation 15 months ahead of schedule. It is built by a consortium in which P&O Ports holds 95 percent of equity, with five

Bombay Port, according to company sources. Present at the inauguration, besides the union minister and his entourage, were Richard Hein, chairman of P&O Australia and Douglas Anderson, managing director of P&O Ports who had flown in from Sydney. A large group of invitees and press corps had been ferried by catamaran from Bombay over a sea surprisingly free from the heavy swells of a Bombay monsoon. At the pier, NSICT executives in smart jackets, walkie talkies in hand, ushered the crowd into buses for a quick drive down the 600 m quay, past dark blue giant gantry cranes, including India's first super post panamax crane, towering over berthed ships and stacked containers.

"I have waited five years, two months

and 20 days for this," said an elated Sarbh, NSICT's managing director and regional director, South Asia and Middle East, P&O Ports (see "The challenging port-folio," *Parsiana*, May '99). Dynamic and determined, Sarbh had arrived in India from Sydney five years ago to take up this project with a development cost of Rs 850 crores. "From a dream NSICT has become a reality. From construction to commissioning, detractors and competitors had said it would be impossible, but we have shown that it is possible in India to achieve and deliver a mega project. Right from the beginning, NSICT has set its own high standards, not benchmarked with other terminals in the country. NSICT is a gem in P&O's crown, our own Kohinoor on Indian soil...I say thank you to India."

Complimenting his "dedicated and spirited staff" who worked from small offices and lofts through the planning and construction stages, Sarbh declared that 50 percent of the over 400 strong workforce were project affected people who have been provided employment. "Rarely have I seen anywhere such a well presented and well trained workforce," Hein commended the employees smartly turned out in orange uniforms, fluorescent jackets and colored helmets. "Sarbh has been a very important part of all this," he said, "often at the cost of strain and stress on himself and his family." Stated Anderson, "The benchmark (in productivity) set by NSICT shows what can be done in other parts of the world too."

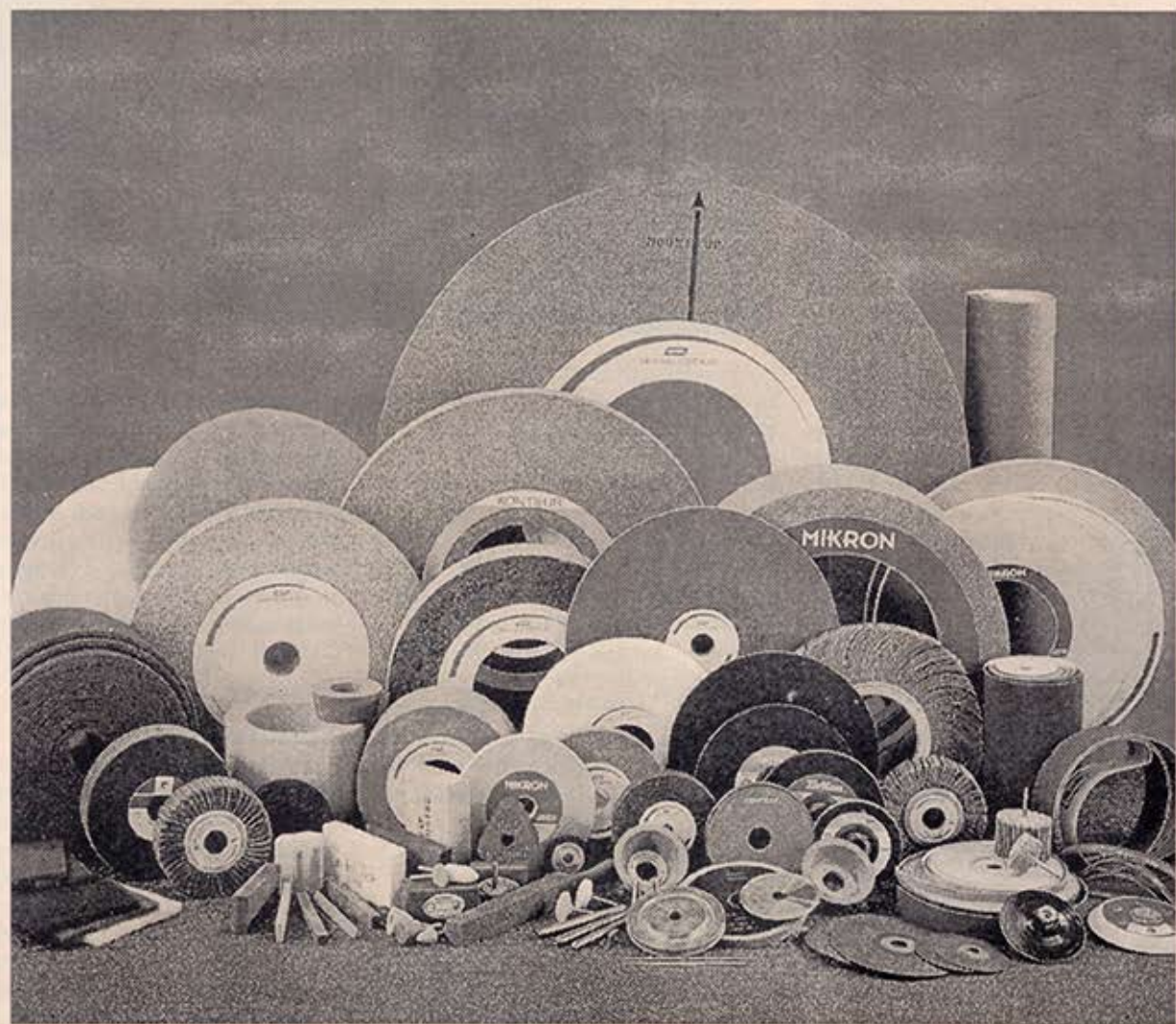
During its first 12 months of operation (the first 300 m of quay line was in operation by March '99), NSICT handled 351, 475 teus (twenty-foot equivalent units), more than double the 175,000 teus throughput guaranteed to its neighbor, the JNP Trust under the concession



From left: Hein and Singh lighting the lamp, Anderson and Sarbh; giant cranes on the quay Photos: Nazneen K. Vajildar



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Vultures perched on a dokhma wall

agreement, states their company profile. The NSICT's current clients include the world's major shipping lines like Maersk Sealand, P&O Nedlloyd, United Arab Shipping Company, etc. It has established record vessel turnaround times and achieved a gross ship rate, according to company sources, of over 100 moves per hour—a new benchmark for Indian ports long known for prolonged delays and lethargic movement.

"I am aware that there are certain constraints in bringing larger vessels to this port. There are restrictions on draft...we are committed to the deepening of the main navigational channel of the port to enable it to handle the most modern fourth and fifth generation vessels," promised the union minister, reiterating the government's commitment to the port privatization process.

P&O Ports, headquartered in Sydney, Australia, has 21 container terminals in 19 countries and interests in a further 30 ports, according to their company profile. The 30-year-old BOT (build, operate and transfer) license to NSICT was granted in July '97. The local partner, the Eduljee Cassinath group established as far back as 1857, is a leading stevedoring concern, with over 500 trained staff handling containers, break-bulk, steel and other bulk cargoes and has expanded its network to Goa and Kandla port, according to their press release.

Nearly 18 months after issuing a letter of intent to P&O Ports and drafting a



concession agreement for the development of the Rs 300 crore container terminal at Kandla, the port authorities suddenly decided to take up the project afresh themselves, reports *The Times of India*, September 11, 2000. "Even as we finalized the concession agreement with dock authorities after agreeing to absorb dock labor, the Kandla port board of trustees, in a sudden move on August 24 scrapped our proposal without citing any reasons," Sarbh told the paper. P&O Ports is, however, "determined not to lose the project" for which they have worked very hard for three years, states a faxed message to *Parsiana* from Sarbh.

P&O Ports' bid to operate the Rajiv

Gandhi Container Terminal at Cochin was approved on September 7 and is now awaiting ministerial sanction. Negotiations are ongoing for a concession agreement to operate a container terminal in Madras port as well. P&O Ports also aims to present a concrete proposal in October to the Iranian government for the development of 1,000 m of container quayline in Iran's premier port, Bandar Abbas, states the regional director.

Hilla P. Guzder

Vulture virus?

It is not only the Zoroastrian conservatives in Bombay who are alarmed by the declining strength of the vultures. The nature conservationists too now fear that these predators may soon become an extinct species. While originally it was speculated that the absence of vultures from around the Doongerwadi area was because of the easy availability of flesh around the abattoirs in Chembur, it has now been reported that the whitebacked vultures are dying fast in Keoladeo Ghana National Park near Bharatpur as also the Ranthambhor National Park after showing signs of Drooping Head Syndrome. Once the Syndrome is detected, the vultures die within a month, mentioned an article in *The Hindu* of May 1, 2000 which was forwarded to *Parsiana* by former municipal commissioner and ex-trustee of the Bombay Parsi Panchayet (BPP) Jamsheed Kanga upon receiving the news clipping from former solicitor general Tehmtan Andhyarujina.

"The country's national parks are fast turning into graveyards of vultures. Gyps vultures, particularly the white-

President of the Indo-Australian Society Godrej Dotivala (at the mike) welcoming the chairman of the India Australia Council Lt Gen (Retd) Adi Sethna (third from left) at a function in Bombay on July 7, 2000. Speaking on "India-Australia relations," Sethna advocated the need to dispel preconceived notions and develop a greater openness in political, economic, social and cultural ties between the two countries, notes a press release.





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backed vultures (*Gyps bengalensis*) are affected on such a large scale that the forests in Rajasthan are littered with their carcasses," stated *The Hindu* adding, "the birds have largely disappeared — 90 percent or more — from Delhi, Corbett and (Bombay)."

Whilst 24 nests were spotted only four birds could be found at the Ranthambhor Park, observed Dr Munir Virani, research biologist of The Peregrine Fund. The "droopers" were found on peepal (*ficus religiosa*) and palash (*Butea monosperma*) trees but all the dead birds were on or around the palash trees. According to Dr Robert Risebrough of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the vultures have been hit by a new virus. He feared this could become an international problem if it spreads to Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and the Middle East, if it has not already. The vultures have reportedly largely disappeared from countries in South-East Asia. "The disease factor must be found and identified before any studies can be undertaken to determine whether it is confined to vultures alone or is present in other species," Harsh Vardhan, former general secretary of WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature)-Rajasthan, was quoted in *The Hindu*.

Every effort at this time should be made on an emergency basis to identify and characterize any virus or other disease factor detected in the tissues of affected birds. Risebrough's counsel was quoted in the January-February 2000 issue of *Pitta*, the bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh. *Pitta* also reported that the liver and other internal organs of two birds found dead or dying were covered with whitish crystals assumed to be uric acid, deposits of which cause gout in humans.

"Particularly because of the recent identification in the USA of a virus of African origin that has produced deaths both of people and of wild birds...without provoking any undue alarm, public health authorities both in India and in other countries should be alerted to the probability that a new disease factor has appeared in the environment," stated *Pitta*.

In light of this viral speculation, the feasibility of installing an aviary to breed vultures at the Doongerwadi will thus be questioned once again by the rationalists. Earlier the critics had faulted the exorbitant expenditure and energies to be invested in this effort considering that the BPP consultant Jemima Parry-Jones herself was not sure of the out-

come of this experiment.

Distinctive application

Scoring 75 percent at the final year Bachelor of Business Administration examination, Hanooz Rustomji Postwala of Ahmedabad earned the third rank at the Gujarat University, notes a certificate



Postwala:
rank holder

from his college principal R. H. Vyas. In the external examination he scored the highest marks in taxation.

Described as "a regular, hard working and conscientious student" of the Somlal Institute of Business Administration, the principal commended him for possessing "charming manners and good moral character," adding, "I have no hesitation in recommending him either for pursuing any further academic program or for any job suitable to his qualifications where such qualities will stand him in good stead."

In the first year as well as second year examinations, Postwala had secured distinction marks, writes Porus Karanjawalla, president of the Federation of Zoroastrian Youth Associations of In-

continued on page 43

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Soviet Zoroastrians

Eight speakers addressed the first ever Zoroastrian Congress of CIS countries (Commonwealth of Independent States comprising Russia and some other members of the erstwhile Soviet Union) in St Petersburg on May 28, 2000 in a bid to bring various Zoroastrian groups together and spread the knowledge of Prophet Zarathushtra. More than 100 delegates from Moscow, Minsk, Kiev, Paskov, Novgorod, Zaporozhye, Poltava, Perm, etc, attended to partake of the discussions in Russian, reports Burzin Atashband from Moscow in a letter to *Parsiana*. The local TV and media covered the Congress. Atashband together with Renaz Atashband and Ruby Irani were guests of honor from India.

"The Congress meeting opened with the Avesta prayers *Ashem Vohu, Yatha Ahu Vairyo* and *Kem Na Mazda* recited by Mikhail Chistyakov, the junior dean of the Zoroastrian community in St Petersburg. A candle was lit and pictures of Asho Farohar, Tir Yazad and an astrological chart were displayed. The registration form had the Asho Farohar and the Russian translation of good thought, good word and good deed," writes Atashband.

Globa Pavel Pavlovich of Moscow, who travelled from place to place over eight years to form Zoroastrian communities in various towns of Russia and is recognized as the dean of the Zoroastrian community there, was elected chairman of the Congress.

The theme of Pavlovich's address was "Zurvanism — innermost doctrine of Zoroastrianism" which was said to be based on a secret text that once belonged to his great-grandfather and dated back to the late Sassanian period. Pavlovich believes that Zurvan, the concept of eternal time, was incorporated by Zarathushtra who preached his religion more than 2,000 years ago in the Ural Mountains, notes the report. Claiming Russia as the geographical birthplace of Zoroastrianism, Pavlovich said it will be revived there again in its full glory.

Chistyakov summarized Zoroastrian activity in his native St Petersburg since 1994. Authorized by Pavlovich to perform navjotes, Chistyakov spoke on the importance of the Amesha Spentas in our daily lives and the freedom of choice

in accepting Zoroastrianism in the present Aquarian age. "To be a Zoroastrian is to encounter evil within us and to convert it into good. As a Zoroastrian who wears the divine kusti, (his) responsibility as a soldier to fight evil is much higher," Atashband reports the kernel of his speech.

Vokynkin Pavel Alexandrovich of St Petersburg spoke on "Epochs and time," straddling astronomy, geography and astrology. Discussing "The most ancient Aryan places in the Urals," Lushnikov Oleg of Perm spoke of the Urals as the homeland of the ancient Aryans and displayed some white stones which he maintained are from the Var of Jamshid and the place of birth of Prophet Zarathushtra, reports Atashband.

Martseniyuk Pavel of Zaporozhye premised that when the scriptures are understood carefully, one learns that all religions emanate from a single source. Hence men should live peacefully with each other.

Kuchma Alexander Alekseevich of Minsk spoke of the prospects of development of Zoroastrianism in Belorussia where it is a cherished dream to be a Zoroastrian because the ancient Russian culture resembles the Zoroastrian religion. One should not merely study it but live by its principles, he said.

Concentrating on the basic Zoroastrian trilogy, Samodelov Julia of St Petersburg noted that every thought, word and deed has to be in accordance with free choice, should be in the right form and be incorporated from childhood, albeit within the limits of one's horoscope, as reports Atashband.

Atashband explained the religion as a practising Zoroastrian, emphasizing complete faith in Ahura Mazda and the holy manthras. Speaking about the navjote ceremony, the calendar, the different grades of fire-temples, the towers of silence, he underlined the need to live life in accordance with the teachings of the Amesha Spentas, leading to the final goal of Frashokereti (union of each soul with Ahura Mazda).

Group discussions after the talks which were in Russian led to the enunciation of the following goals:

- To form a common system of Zoroastrian rites and rituals to be followed by them
- Creation of a common information basis

- Preparation for the World Zoroastrian Congress to be held from December 28, 2000 in Houston, USA

- Preparation for the Second Zoroastrian Congress of CIS countries

- Creation of a common print publication

- Preparation of religious professionals

- Creation of an institute for priests

- Contact with other Zoroastrian organizations

- Creation of a common site on the Internet

- Coordination of scientific research with the Zoroastrian religion and dissemination of accumulated knowledge

- Research in the Zoroastrian religion

- Construction of a fire-temple

A tour of the "golden ring of the Aryans," named "By way of Zarathushtra 2000," organized by Pavlovich and the Permskaya Avestiyskaya School of Astrology, was due between July 1-13, 2000. Starting from the city of Perm, the route included the mountain of Zarathushtra (Belaya), the Belogorskiy Svyatonikolaevskiy Monastery, the Kungurskaya Ice Cave, Bashkortostan, Slatoust, Miass, the Lake of Turgoyak, the Lake of Vera, Ilmenskiy mineralogical museum, Arkaim, Chelyabinsk, Polevskoy, Ekaterinburg and back to Perm — a 13-day tour at a cost of approximately US\$ 100 inclusive of board, lodging and seminar.

Readers interested in tours of Ariyana Vaeja, the Belaya mountain, etc, may contact Perm-asha@mail.ru. Their web page is <http://perm-asha.chat.ru>

Pavlovich, who claims Zoroastrian descent through his maternal grandfather, performs the navjotes of those who believe in the Zoroastrian doctrines. Though their interest is generally sparked via their interest in astrology, as writes Atashband, the Zoroastrians of St Petersburg say that the Zoroastrian manthras are the answer to all their problems, linking their faith to happiness, charity, progress and positive thinking. Strong in their beliefs, they disapprove of group members believing in other religions and have ceased visiting churches.

Selected men and women become priests called herbads who perform navjotes at any age. They make their own kusti from three different colors — yellow, blue and red — tied over a white



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Chistyakov, the Russian Zoroastrian priest, is surrounded by lady priests as he performs the navjote of new members. Below: Group photograph of First Zoroastrian Congress of CIS countries

garment. On festivals like Navroz, they have the holy fire burning, people dress in white and everyone, including women, wear padan i.e. the mouths are covered. They believe it to be a good practice, describes Atashband.

Community meetings are held weekly in some Zoroastrian homes. They know their kusti prayers, *Srosh Baj*, *Srosh Yasht Hadokht*, etc, which are available in the Russian and English script. A translation of the *Khordeh Avesta* is awaiting publication and the *Bundahishm* is under translation. The current issue of their astrological journal *Mithra* includes articles on the *Stoat Yasht*, *Studkar Nask*, Asho Ravans, Zoroastrian astrology, stars and planets, special days and holidays, fire-temples, Navroz, caps of Persia, strong Aryan men, e.g. Kersasp, etc, notes the report.

Writes Atashband, "According to them Parsis are the original Zoroastrians but they too can follow Zoroastrianism,



When asked what will be their reaction if in India the doors of the agiaries are closed for them, they said that it will be the Parsis who will be at a loss in not letting them pray, because they have realized Zoroastrianism and will follow its doctrines all their life as they have been given the right to do so by Lord Zarathushtra.

"Mikhail Chistyakov is one of their priests who enthusiastically spreads Zoroastrianism among Russians. He wants to learn all the fundamental duties of a priest and also present a paper in Houston for the coming Zoroastrian World

Congress. Due to economic problems it may be difficult to visit Houston but hopefully he may be able to get some sponsorship that will enable him to take part in the Congress.

"Their immediate need is to form a strong group of believers and to build a fire-temple. They require funds, religious books, priestly clothes, photos of Lord Zarathushtra, barsam, afargan, sudreh-kustis, Avesta dictionary, etc. They have planned to do jashans on festive occasions, for house cleaning, good health and general prosperity.

"It will be most surprising to know that we were the first original Zoroastrians who they have met and they were very courteous to all of us."

"The above article is about my visit to the Congress meeting and what I have mentioned is what they have discussed, what has been told to me by them and what I have seen. I found them to be sincere, very interested in our religion, trying to gather all information about



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Zoroastrianism and sincerely trying to follow and spread it. They staunchly believe themselves to be Aryans and are proud of their Zoroastrian ancestry."

Readying for the Congress

The Zoroastrian Association of Houston (ZAH) is determined to repair its parking lot at its Zarathushti Heritage and Cultural Center before the Congress delegates reach there. Planned to accommodate 90 vehicles, 32 parking spaces will be reserved against donations in order to generate the necessary funds, notes ZAH executive committee member Kersi Engineer in the August issue of their newsletter, *Manashni*. So far commitments totaling \$35,000 have come in, but the total estimated cost needs \$ 30,000 more.

ZAC plans expansion

The Chicago chapter of the Zarathushti Chamber of Commerce (ZCC-CC) inaugurated a couple of months ago under the auspices of the Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago (ZAC), meets on the third Thursday each month at the Darbe Mehr. Currently the emphasis is on finding job assistance, mentoring, providing immigration assistance and networking with the possibility of venture capital projects.

One of its first major projects under consideration is the acquisition of two parcels of land adjacent to the Darbe Mehr property. According to the feasibility study conducted by Dara Rivetna, the land — 2.58 acres and 1.2 acres — is offered for sale at a total of \$ 850,000. Depending on the collateral offered, two local banks would be willing to finance up to 80 percent of the project. Coming up in the vicinity is a strip mall with the possibility of a multi-use senior citizens center being incorporated, informs the ZAC's August newsletter.

Phase two of the Darbe Mehr expansion is also proceeding rapidly, notes the newsletter. Thanks to the involvement of the Rivetna family (design by Cyrus, execution by Rohinton and Dara), the framework has been completed, including the external walls and roof. Pouring the concrete floor, putting up the dividing walls, installing the windows and the fireproof doors is the next stage envisioned, requiring another dose of time and money. The group in charge of kitchen equipment is expected to visit local stores to identify additional appliances, storage cabinets, etc,

notes the update in the newsletter.

ZAC's Dasturji Kotwal Research Fund to support his research and translation of the classical texts. *Herbedestan* ("The Book of the advanced priestly studies") and *Nerangestan* ("The Book of Ritual Directions"), has so far netted \$2,200, informs the newsletter. The goal was to collect \$18,000. The newsletter acknowledges the generous support to the high priest from the London based Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe which has enabled Kotwal and his collaborator Dr Philip Kreyenbroek, professor of Iranian Studies at the University of Gottingen, Germany, to publish volume one of the *Herbedestan* and volume two of the *Nerangestan* in Paris under the series of *Acta Iranica*, Cahier 10 and 16 respectively.

Kotwal, who is currently on a research-cum-lecture tour of Europe and America, is said to be on the verge of completing volume three during his current Chicago stay with Zubin and Zenobia Tantra, chalking up 85 percent of his project. The fourth and last volume will take another couple of years. Volumes III and IV are expected to be published in the *Studia Iranica* series edited by Prof Philippe Gignoux.

Karachi's mobed Bhadha

Mehernosh Bhadha, 11, has become an instant celebrity in Pakistan. Having completed his navar and maratab ceremonies at Bombay's Vachaghandhy Agiary under its proficient panthaky Aspandiar Dadachanji, Bhadha was feted by the community in Karachi, written about in *Dawn Magazine* and featured on Zee TV — Europe.

The son of Shernaz and Minoos Bhadha studying in the sixth standard at the B. V. S. Parsi High School, Bhadha holds the School's junior shields for elocution in English and Urdu, is a keen swimmer, sportsman, computer bug and boy scout. The selection committee of Xth Star Awards 1999 chaired by scholar



Bhadha: Karachi's youngest mobed



was not initiated by his parents but sprang spontaneously in the lad when he saw Bombay-based cousins of his age who had become navars. Initially concerned about the strict preparations that such an undertaking required, his parents were won over by the boy's enthusiasm as well as the support and advice they received from priests in Karachi and Bombay.

Prominent dentist of Pakistan and author of Preventive Dental Measures for Handicapped Children, Dr Rumi R. Sukhia (left) received the Pierre Fauchard Academy Shield USA from Dr Nasim Hasan Shah (right), retired



chief justice, Supreme Court of Pakistan, who was the chief guest at the International Dental Convocation held in Lahore on August 3, 2000. Looking on is Prof (Dr) M. A. Soofi. The shield commemorating Fauchard (born in 1678), the French father of dentistry, is presented worldwide to dentists outstanding in their promotion of the profession. Sukhia is the first Parsi in Pakistan to be so recognized, notes a press release.

Compiled by Arnavaz S. Mama

Reaching for the Sky



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

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Marrying out, staying in

Parsis married under the Special Marriage Act cannot be deemed to have renounced their religion even if they opt for a subsequent *saptapadi* ceremony

Rustom S. Gae

Inter-caste marriages among the minuscule community of Parsis, specially highly educated and economically independent Parsi women, are increasing day by day. A large number of Parsi boys going to foreign countries for higher studies do not return to India but settle down in those countries to improve their prospects in life. Thereby the community in India loses the educated youth. This causes dearth of suitable spouses for educated Parsi women, ultimately leading them to engage in inter-caste marriages.

Inter-caste marriages (commonly known as "civil marriages") almost invariably take place under the Special Marriage Act, 1954 (S. M. Act). Such marriages can be solemnized between any two persons, irrespective of their religion, caste or community. Normally persons belonging to different religions, castes or communities have their marriage solemnized under this Act. It is, however, open to two persons belonging to the same faith or religion (e.g. two Parsis) to solemnize their marriage under the S. M. Act. It is not necessary that parties to the marriage should renounce their religion at the time of marriage which was a condition precedent under the Special Marriage Act, 1872 (since repealed). A Parsi continues to remain a Parsi even after he or she marries a non-Parsi.

Any two persons of age must give notice in the prescribed form to the marriage officer of the district in which at least one of the parties to the marriage has resided for not less than 30 days preceding the date of such notice. Marriage must be solemnized within three months from the date of such notice. Objections, if any, to the marriage must be taken within 30 days of the date of publication of the notice, specifying the grounds of objection. The marriage officer disposes of objections after hearing the parties concerned. After expiry

of 30 days the marriage may be solemnized, unless previously objected. Before solemnization of the marriage, parties thereto and three witnesses shall in the presence of the marriage officer sign the declaration in the prescribed form and it will thereafter be countersigned by the marriage officer. He then issues the marriage certificate signed by the parties to the marriage and three witnesses. Such certificate serves as a conclusive evidence as to the solemnization of the marriage under the S. M. Act.

Provisions contained in the S. M. Act prevail over those contained in any other law (e.g. the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936 or the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955). Rights, obligations and status of parties to such marriage are regulated only by the provisions contained therein and not by any other law. Succession to the property of a Parsi whose marriage is solemnized under the S. M. Act shall be regulated by the provisions of the Indian Succession Act, 1925 and "Special Rules for Parsi Intestates" (Parsi dying without making any will) will not be applicable in the matter.

On solemnization of the civil marriage of a Parsi, parents or other close relatives of parties to the marriage usually desire that some Zoroastrian prayers (e.g. *ashirvad* and *Tandarosti* prayers) be also offered. There can be no objection to the adoption of this course aimed at giving mental satisfaction and solace to the relatives of the marrying couple. It is desirable that ceremonies and rituals attendant on such prayers are avoided. This cannot, however, alter the position in law that the marriage is for all purposes a civil marriage governed by the provisions of the S. M. Act and does not become a Parsi marriage. For a valid Parsi marriage both parties to the marriage must be Parsis (see "Judicial meaning of Parsi," pg 52) and such marriage must be solemnized according to the Parsi form of ceremony called *ashirvad*

by a Parsi priest in the presence of two Parsi witnesses.

A Parsi female marrying a non-Parsi male under the S. M. Act and continuing to follow the Zoroastrian religion after such marriage remains a Parsi Zoroastrian entitled to all rights, privileges and benefits available to members of the Parsi community. She is entitled to enter and offer prayers in an *atash behram*, *agiary* or *dar-e-meher* and attend, and participate in, all religious ceremonies (e.g. *jashan*, *afrikan*, *geh sarna* and *uthamna* ceremonies) and to be present and partake in community functions (e.g. *gahambars*, *Pateti* and *Navroz* functions). Trust deeds relating to these institutions almost invariably provide that they are for the benefit of Parsi Zoroastrians. She has also the right to avail of *Doongerwadi* facilities on her death. This is now recognized by the trustees of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) by passing the historic resolution following the demise of Roxan Shah (née Nazir) whose body was denied funeral rites at the *Doongerwadi*. (The obtaining of an affidavit from a near relative as to her professing the Zoroastrian religion at the time of her death is really unnecessary and should be dispensed with.) This led to the formation of the Association of Inter-Married Zoroastrians to safeguard the religious and social rights of Parsis married to non-Parsis. It is now well settled that Parsi females have in similar circumstances an equal right of franchise with the rest of the community at the election of trustees of the BPP.

Several Parsi females marry Hindu males under the S. M. Act and have the *saptapadi* (taking of seven steps by the bridegroom and the bride before the sacred fire) ceremony performed according to Hindu rites. The question arises whether such marriage becomes a Hindu marriage.

A "Hindu marriage" solemnized un-

continued on page 52

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READERS' FORUM

continued from page 10

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J. R. D. Tata Scholarships

The trustees of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet have instituted two J. R. D. Tata Scholarships for postgraduate Parsi Zoroastrian students, one each for a male and a female. Similarly, the Jamshed and Shirin Guzder Trust has instituted two such J.R.D. Tata Scholarships.

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ing opted for postgraduate studies preferably in social sciences, population study, nuclear/geophysics, mathematics, education, cancer research or microbiology.

Applications giving details of academic and extracurricular activities should reach S. D. Master, Sr Executive (Welfare), Bombay Parsi Punchayet 209, Dr Dadabhai Naoroji Road, Fort, Bombay 400001, latest by October 6, 2000.

R. K. ANKLESARIA

Hon Advisor (Projects), Bombay Parsi Punchayet

Edited by Parinaz M. Gandhi

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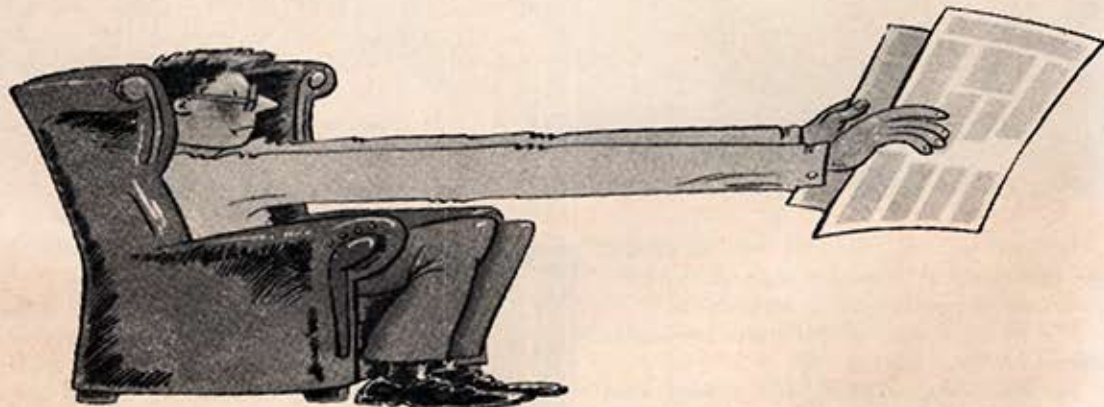
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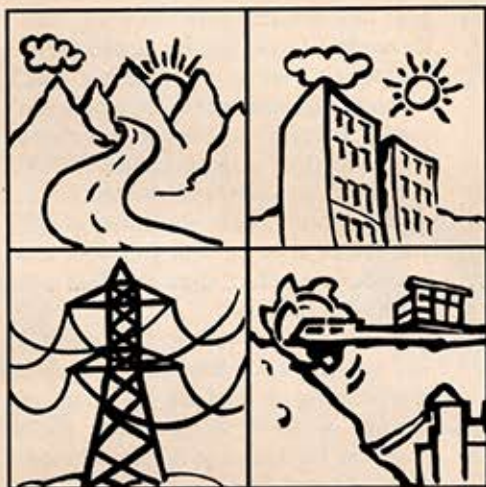


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Paths to progress

The BPP's Holiday Programme for Youth laid emphasis on information technology and the message for a clean and green environment

Hilla P. Guzder

It was a sign of the changing times. The 14th HPY (Holiday Programme for Youth), the first in the 2000s, had eco-friendliness as its theme and the prizes for project work were saplings! Student groups fanned out to railway stations, petrol pumps, etc. to create awareness about the advantages of unleaded petrol, vermiculture, separation of wet and dry waste, etc. Amongst its sports activities were the hitherto unknown bowling and pool. On May 25, 2000 as a *mélange* of trendy teenagers, boys in smart jackets with ties, girls in stylish, backless blues and blacks, stepped up smartly on stage to receive their prizes at the valedictory function, program coordinator Diana Marfatia declared: "Never before at HPY have I seen such an enthusiastic, energetic and committed lot of participants and young organizers." She made special mention of the blood donation drive which succeeded in collecting 125 bottles of blood — a figure unsurpassed so far. "It left even the medical personnel at the drive speechless," she said. HPY is held each year under the auspices of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP), with chief executive Behram Dastur and senior executive Sheroo Master being members of the organizing committee.

Eminent neurosurgeon Dr Keki Turel, who was the chief guest, advised the teenagers to avoid a herd tendency while chalking out their careers. "Do not, for example, go in for information technology if you have no aptitude for it. I chose neurosurgery at a time it was virtually unknown in India. Everyone tried to dissuade me," said the doctor, a navar and maratab, and a worldwide authority on brain surgery who has presented 125 papers in all corners of the globe. "Choose the career that suits your temperament and abilities. Youth is the most beautiful age in life, though full of flaws and fragility." Young people to-

day want instant success, instant money, he observed. "I see in medical practice patients 35 years old, suffering heart attacks, being tended by their parents or even grandparents though it should really be the other way around. Divide your time sensibly between work, family needs, hobbies and social causes, he counselled. Part of one's income must "silently and deliberately" be donated to charity. Parsis through history have been known for this "magnificent trait." Possess and practice virtue, asserted Turel, so that "in the noisy confusion of life you can be at peace with your soul and have the strength of spirit to shield you in times of distress."

HPY this year saw an enrolment of 185 students (101 boys and 84 girls), representing a total of 74 different schools — 59 in Bombay and 15 in places as far distant as Ajmer, Ahmednager, Ahmedabad, Lucknow, etc. The BPP puts in a substantial subsidy to sponsor the program, and also bears boarding and lodging costs for out of Bombay students who do not have family or friends to reside with, stated Marfatia. With students fresh out of school and often undecided which path to take, HPY seeks to arm them with informative talks on different careers. "Talks on careers ran concurrently, so students interested in, for example, commerce and not in science did not have to sit through talks in that field," explains Marfatia. "There was a special emphasis on information technology. For a profession like advertising, we encouraged students to visit an advertising agency, prepare a portfolio, etc. Talks progressed beyond the theoretical to the practical level as well." Aptitude tests, self-awareness and leadership programs are an integral part as are a gamut of group activities like debates, elocution, lexicon quiz, talent contest, and the ever-popular fashion show and personality

contest. Talks on religion by Zoroastrian Studies, visits to the Parsi ward at the J. J. Hospital and the F. S. Parukh Dharamshalla (old age home for needy Parsis), performance of a navjote of a poor child, cleaning of agiaries, etc kindle the community spirit. A sense of healthy competitiveness is fostered through indoor and outdoor sports which include football, cricket, basketball, etc.

Eminent educationist Dr Nawaz Mody, Sir Pheroze Shah Mehta professor of civics and politics and head of the department of civics and politics at Bombay University who was the guest of honor at the valedictory function, called upon the BPP to take the initiative in providing Parsi youngsters the opportunity to enter professional colleges in the medical, engineering and management fields. "Some years ago it was fashionable to say that the Parsi community should integrate into the plural nature of Indian society and not ask for any special favors. Times are unrealistic for that now. Among the 300 or so colleges of Bombay University there is only one college for the community — the BJPC (Byramjee Jeejeebhoy Parsi Charitable) College of Commerce," remarked Mody. The late Roshen Driver, former principal of the BJPC Institution had mooted to her (Mody) the idea of commencing Bachelor of Management Studies courses there, and applying for recognition for the Master of Management Studies course as well, in which Parsi students would have access to 50 percent of seats. It is very disheartening that in the last few decades hardly any Parsi has entered the civil or police cadres in Maharashtra, she noted. Even in a mundane profession like teaching, there are very few Parsi teachers at the University level, declared Mody, adding that it was mainly in the legal and medical professions that the "community has taken care of itself."

The inauguration of the 25-day HPY on May 1, 2000 saw guest of honor and well-known solicitor Rusi Sethna, partner of Romer, Dadachanji, Sethna and Company remark that as a trustee of the R. D. Sethna Charity Trust, which disbursed interest free loans to students proceeding abroad for higher education, he had noticed "not even two percent of the loans have gone sour." Very disturbing however was "the total disil-



From left (first row): Sethna, Marfatia, Rustom Anklesaria, Dinshaw Tamboly, Guzder, Subedar and Shroff; Subedar (top) and Marfatia (below) 2nd row: Khursheed Mistry, Turel and Irani; Beza Khambatta and Mody



3rd row: Youthful organizers (seated) Jim Vimadalal, Bhujwalla, Marfatia, Jehangir Bhadha, Khorram Siodia; (standing) Dilber Devitre, Vahbiz Engineer, Fabian Panthaki, Vinifer Gandhi and Shirzad Khory (Photo: Hilla Guzder); On the dais: Rustom Tirandaz, Dinshaw Mehta, Dastur, Mehli Colah and Master Bottom: A section of the audience





Top row (left to right)
Spenta Patel, Palia,
Mody, Pearl Mistry;
Rehaan Bharucha, Turel
and Nozer Bhadha; Ms
HPY Kavarana with Mr
HPY Dastoor
2nd row: Kavarana with
Turel; Nazban Mistry
and Mody with Mer-
chant (center)

Photos: C. C. Gandevia

lusionment with life in India among the student community." Sixty percent of students who take the scholarships never return to India, he maintained. In the new liberalized India of the 21st century it is up to us to create conditions to invite them back. At top corporate levels, he believed, salaries here are higher than abroad if one looks at the cost of living, taxation is lower, there are benefits like employee stock options, etc. Parents should impress upon children that this was their home and that they should take up the challenge of building a career here.

Speaking with legal conciseness and clarity, Sethna stated that he would characterize Parsis not as a dying, but as a diminishing community. "I do not wish to raise a hornet's nest or create a controversy," he noted, "I am merely expressing my views when I say it is time the community gave serious thought to the question of admitting not just the children of Parsi fathers and non-Parsi mothers, but of Parsi women married out as well." As of now, we are losing on the swings and the roundabouts, he declared, adding that if the decline is not arrested Parsis will soon become an endangered species like the great Indian bustard or the white tiger.

Reversing the traditional order of salutation and greeting the HPYites first, before the VIPs on the dais, as "this program is for them," Sethna encouraged the assembled girls and boys to develop entrepreneurial skill. "There is no substitute for integrity and application. Have ambitions but do not cloud your vision with envy or greed," he counselled, also calling upon the students to do community work. "More than your money, the community of your birth requires your time and attention. Otherwise trust funds will stagnate or dry up," he said.

Endorsing Sethna's views, Farokh Subedar, vice president, finance, Tata Sons Limited, who was the chief guest at the inaugural, believed Parsis "must get over talking of the glorious British days. We can be that way now too." What is required is to bring back the values of the past, to reignite the entrepreneurial spirit. The infrastructure of the venture capital fund spearheaded by the BPP is in place, he stated, but the few proposals for projects received thus far were "not the kind we expected." Parsi entrepreneurs have not partaken, for example, in the IT (information technology) revolution in India, nor for that matter in the US where Indians have been particu-

larly successful in that field. Just being a graduate is no longer enough, we need specialized skills in a specialized age. "Match your skills to what the demand is and try to tap the niche areas that are opening up," exhorted Subedar who believed that Parsis should look to recreate the right to get a few seats in educational institutions set up by our ancestors which may have been handed over to the government or to autonomous bodies.

Through HPY's 14 years, over 2,200 Parsi students have reaped its benefits, stated BPP trustee Minoo Shroff who chaired the inauguration. BPP chairman Jamshed Guzder who presided over the closing function remarked that it was his pride, privilege and good luck to be the only existing (BPP) trustee who was present at the very first HPY. "At that time I never expected to be here for the 14th one," he stated. The program's prime mover, Marfatia, secured a standing ovation as did senior most organizer and master of ceremonies Priya Bhujwalla. Marfatia commended the HPYites of previous years who worked as organizers despite their studies and impending exams. The steering commit-

continued on page 43



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Dhondy's Percept-ions

As CEO of Percept Advertising, New Delhi, Navroze Dhondy aims to take the agency into the country's top 20

Hilla P. Guzder

He was a young management student in Allahabad when he, along with a friend, wrote and published *Key to the Cube*, a book on Rubik's Cube. His collection of poems, *In black and white and other jottings* is to be published shortly. Photography is his passion, advertising his profession.

Navroze Dhondy, chief executive officer (CEO) of Percept Advertising Limited, New Delhi, jocularly describes advertising as the art of holding a person's attention long enough to get money out of his pocket. Advertisements often end up like passing ships in the night, soon forgotten. To achieve one's goal, advertising has to strike either at the heart or the head, he declares. When the movie *Titanic* was released, his agency at that time brought out a prominent advertisement for Kelvinator refrigerators: "For once we wish there was no ice. In memoriam of the *Titanic*." The advertisement was a great success, he relates.

"The challenge of converting Percept from a plain vanilla ad agency into an integrated marketing communications agency was too good to resist," Dhondy told *Business Today*, September 22, '99 when he quit TBWA Anthem Private Limited, New Delhi around a year ago to join Percept. Dhondy catapulted Anthem's billings from Rs 12 crore to Rs 60 crore in just five years, noted the magazine. "My task is to see that Percept gets its place in the sun, to break into the top 20 of the country's ad agencies, aim for a sharp growth in a stagnating industry. Managing growth is the biggest challenge," Dhondy told *Parsiana*.

It was chance that first brought Dhondy to Lintas' door almost 18 years

ago. "Though I had put in an application to their head office in Bombay, I was in Delhi to appear for interviews with other companies like Apollo Tyres, Modi Xerox, etc. At Nehru Place I happened to pass by Lintas' office and on an impulse I walked in. The place was in absolute chaos as one wing of the office was being done up and everything was crammed into the other wing. The branch manager looked through my work and, suitably impressed, gave me the

job on the spot to fill a vacancy that existed," grins Dhondy. Advertising today has come into its own with much 'respectability' attached to the job, but at that time it was one of the most poorly paid professions, he notes, and a job with any other big corporate house would have fetched him a much higher salary.

His parents, Dinyar and Meher in Allahabad, thought he had "gone bananas" to go in for a lower paid job! "But I have never regretted it," he smiles.

After postings in Bombay, Bangalore and Delhi where he set up the office of Karishma Advertising (a Lintas company), Dhondy left Lintas to join HTA (Hindustan Thomson Associates). "That was the maverick in me coming to the fore," he laughs. "For eight years I had been a hardened HTA (rival agency) hater!" From account director to associate vice president and client service director, Dhondy promoted business with prestigious clients such as Hero Honda, Horlicks, Nestle India Limited, etc. In a profession notorious for job-hopping, Dhondy moved after four years to TBWA Anthem as CEO/executive director handling brands like Sony, Kelvinator, Oriflame, Lee Cooper, etc.

His initiation into the world of teaching took place when, during his years with HTA, his boss once asked him to substitute for him at the last minute to make a presentation at a seminar at the Times School of Marketing in New Delhi. He worked "like a maniac," the presentation went off well, and Dhondy soon found himself taking regular sessions at the Times School, Indian Institute of Mass Communications, New Delhi, BITS, Pilani, etc. Dhondy is also on the visiting faculty at Symbiosis, Poona and Mica, Ahmedabad. "Students today question you, throw ideas back at you," he asserts, an attitude which invigorates Dhondy's Gemini spirit!

Dhondy's impulsiveness often finds expression in penning poetry. "I write anywhere, anytime — on paper napkins or backs of magazines," he explains, adding that the title of his to-be-published collection of poems is because he hates ambivalence and likes everything in black and white! Another black and white passion is photography. His great-grandfather Maneckshaw B. Mistry had



Adman Dhondy (above and alongside) with wife Nilufer and children Anahita and Kurush

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*Please make sure the reply envelope bears the reference number cited here.

a summer studio in Nainital and a winter studio in Allahabad and used to go to England to teach photography! His maternal grandfather, Jamshed M. Patell, was a professional photographer with a studio in Allahabad which had a roof and sides of glass to let in the light. Embedded in Dhondy's mind are memories of his grandfather's huge old camera, the big black hood he would put over his head, the big lenses with the bellows and the plunger with the rubberized air release. His mother and grandmother, her remarks, were very good at touching up and coloring photographs, so photographic genes are very much in the family! Starting with a few pictures of his young cousins

taken on a box camera he found lying around in the house in the '70s, Dhondy "mustered up enough courage" in 1986 to buy himself a second hand Pentax, a simple manual one which has been around the world with him. "Although I have a Nikon today and a fancy lens and a lot of filters and gizmos and all that stuff, I still feel that some of the best pictures I have ever taken were from that Pentax... manual cameras make you think...that's what really makes a good picture," Dhondy told *Better Photography*, January 1998.

With children and nature being his favorite subjects, some of Dhondy's photographs have been published in *Better Photography's The Black Book*, a collection of work by Indian photographers brought out by Tata Donnelley in May 2000. His first solo exhibition, Sunny Cyprus, was held at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi in November '99.

The adman with a "wicked sense of humor who tries to be a nice guy" has a quick and unconventional vision which captures on camera a sadhu sitting outside the Babulnath Temple in Bombay reading *The Economic Times* or photographs the clouds floating by Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi lying prostrate on the road, to

the stupefaction of the sentries guarding the presidential abode!

Combining his writing and photography skills, Dhondy has contributed travelogs to magazines. "Celebrating Christmas in Singapore" published in *Touchin' Heights* described, not run-of-the-mill tourist sights of Singapore, but

the decorative displays that brighten shop fronts at Xmas in that shoppers' mecca. The lordly splendors of the Nalagarh fort in the Simla foothills were highlighted in an article in *Holiday Travel India*.

"I love visiting unusual places like Argentina, for example, and am just dying to go to Iran," says the man who describes himself not as a Delhi Parsi, but as a north Indian Parsi, having spent

much of his early life in Allahabad, schooling in St Joseph's and doing his BCom and MBA from Allahabad University.

His father, an ex navy man, was "a terror, who firmly believed in the dictum 'spare the rod and spoil the child,'" smilingly narrates Dhondy. "Yet we fully experienced the joys of childhood," he adds, playing cricket, hockey, badminton, billiards, or cycling for hours to go to the *mandi* (market) to buy mangoes for the whole family who were mango freaks! A junior champion in billiards in Allahabad, Dhondy still picks up a prize occasionally when time permits a game of billiards or snooker.

Wife Nilufer (née Ghandhi) utilizes her culinary skills in Kitchen Secrets, a business she runs from home, taking orders for Parsi and continental cuisine including cakes and desserts, and markets masalas as well. Schooling in Delhi are children Anahita (10) and Kurush (five).

"The Parsi community in Delhi is young and vibrant, and we do a fair bit to keep tradition alive," observes Dhondy who believes Parsis in Bombay have a softy approach to life! "Parsis are an amazing clan, with a high level of talent in almost all fields — professions, politics, art, music, etc, and I most sincerely hope we survive!"

His great-grandfather
Maneckshaw B.
Mistry had a
summer studio in
Nainital and a winter
studio in Allahabad
and used to go to
England to teach
photography

A restaurant and catering business thrives on its reputation. And Dorabjee and Sons Restaurant has an outstanding reputation. Its list of satisfied customers reads like a Who's Who...But its most valued customers are the common citizens of Poona who eat, enjoy, and keep coming back for more and more.

The unpretentious Dorabjee and Sons, housed in an old cantonment building on Dastur Meher Road, has been a well-known spot for the gourmet and the gourmand. The restaurant is so evocative of Parsi culture that people of all communities from all over India associate Poona with this restaurant and catering business. "Fifty percent (of our clients) are Hindus and 50 percent Muslims," says Darius, the fourth generation from the Dorabjee family to join the eatery as he shares the responsibilities with his father Marazban. For many of the non-Zoroastrian diners, this is their first encounter with reasonably priced Parsi food (among the most expensive items on the menu card are the mutton and chicken dhansak priced at Rs 60). Are there no Zoroastrian clients? Actually 10 percent of the patrons would be Parsis, admits Darius.

The most popular items on their menu are mutton biryani and dhansak dal. "We make dhansak dal everyday but mutton and chicken dhansak only on Sundays," mentions Darius. Open from 9.30 a.m. till 10.45 p.m. "we serve kaleji, kheema, eggs, bheja for breakfast," states Marazban, with rates varying from Rs 12 to Rs 40. Lunch is offered beginning 11.30 a.m. and many customers like to carry food parcels

Dorabjee's delectable dishes

Danesh N. Kalyanivala

Specializing in Parsi food, the restaurant and catering business of Dorabjee and Sons is patronized by all communities

home. Since there is no telephone at their restaurant, viewed as "a headache" by the Dorabjees, patrons have to personally place an order. "Our daytime business is still doing well," declares Darius although competition has eaten into their dinner profits. "People these days like to go to some open-air place (for an evening out)," he observes.

The Dorabjee father-son duo are also involved in catering for functions where they find greater competition. At the gahambars in Poona, it is invariably the Dorabjees who are entrusted the catering. At the functions organized by the Zoroastrian Youth Association too, the catering is by

Dorabjees. However, "a lot of non-Zoroastrian caterers are hired for Parsi functions, even inside the Agiary grounds," laments Marazban. "This does not happen in Bombay. For that matter other communities do not allow Parsi caterers in their jamatkhana or for their religious functions. So why should we?" he argues. The furthest that Marazban has ever gone for a catering job is to Mysore for a dinner hosted by Farokh K. Irani of Ideal Motors.

For other Zoroastrians desirous of entering the food business Marazban advises, "If you want to open a restaurant you must know cooking. That is essential. I have trained my son Darius the same way that my father Jal taught me. And my father had been trained by my grandfather Dorabjee."

The younger brother of Pestonji Chindy who had started a catering business, Dorabjee stepped into the elder brother's shoes when he died unexpectedly, just before a dinner he had to cater for. From that night Dorabjee, later known as Dorabjee Sorabjee Hotelwala, expanded the business, added the restaurant and later moved to bigger premises. His sons changed their surname from Chindy to Dorabjee and the name is now synonymous with good food and the Zoroastrian ethos. When the restaurant was started in 1918, Dorabjee was assisted by his son Jal. The old man was blessed with eight sons. After Jal, another son Savak joined them, and then Eruch. In 1936, Jal opted to start Edward Hotel. Marazban started running the restaurant from July 14, 1970 after it had

Marazban (left and alongside) and Darius Dorabjee at the Poona eatery





The dining area and kitchen at the popular Dorabjee restaurant



been closed for six months, Marazban relates. Savak is now involved with the running of Jimmy Lodge, located behind Dorabjee and Sons, while his son Hoshang runs Hotel Heritage in Bombay. Dorabjee and Company which now houses the famous Westside store is located just diagonally across Dorabjee and Sons but the two are independent ventures.

During the years he has been in charge 64-year-old Marazban has rarely taken

a holiday although two years ago he did visit his daughter Daisy who is settled in Sydney, Australia. A body builder during his younger days, Marazban likes to frequent the Parsi Gymkhana whenever he can absent himself from work. Describing himself as a moderate who has "full respect for my religion," Marazban reasons, "Nowadays many people marry outside the community. One cannot stop them. One of our priest's daughters got married to a non-Parsi. What can anyone do?" Thirty-year-old Darius who used to be a popular model and now handles a major part of the business is

the father of two little boys, Ryan and Dallas, both under three years of age.

While the Dorabjees have about a dozen loyal employees at their restaurant and hire temporary labor for their catering business, marketing on every single day is done by either the father or son. All ingredients have to be absolutely fresh, they believe. To this day, almost all their cooking is done on coal, gas stoves being used only for frying. And reposing faith in their culinary skills and largesse are their valued customers and labor force. The recipe for their continuing success is dedication to values.

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Author Bapsi Sidhwa's view, translated to celluloid by filmmaker Deepa Mehta, describes the pathos of the

1947

Down to Earth

Parinaz M. Gandhi



The priceless plate is deliberately broken by the little girl. The crash and the clang cause the domestic staff to rush in. But little Lenny refuses to lift her eyes. She is busy observing the fragments and splinters until the arrival of her mother on the scene. "I did it," confesses the girl, prompting her mother to envelope her in a warm embrace: "Maari mitthi (sweetheart), you spoke the truth."

The smashing of one plate was no significant loss to the mother when the ingrained Zoroastrian emphasis on honesty surfaced. She does not even enquire how and why it happened but the child interpolates: "Can a country be broken in the same way?" Aghast, the mother can only offer a halfhearted, unconvincing denial. The film *1947 Earth* thus attempts to depict the tragedy and agonies accompanying the Partition of India as seen through the eyes of Lenny, an eight-year-old Parsi girl (played by Maia Sethna, daughter of the late thespian Farida Peddar and Jamshed Sethna) staying in a luxurious bungalow in Lahore, surrounded by her well-meaning parents, Bunty (Kitu Gidwani) and Rustom (Arif Zakaria), a supportive ayah (maid,

Nandita Das) and her brood of admirers of different castes and creeds. Little Lenny has a soft corner for ice candies as also the effusive and genial ice candy man (played by Aamir Khan) who ultimately betrays her trust.

The Parsis per se did not directly get embroiled in the political conflicts arising out of Partition for they were willing to stay on where they were residing and support whoever came to power, as tactfully explained by Lenny's father. While a disruption in their business and disturbance around them was inevitable, there was no lasting destruction, dismembering of bodies and debasing of human and religious values as was the case for the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs.

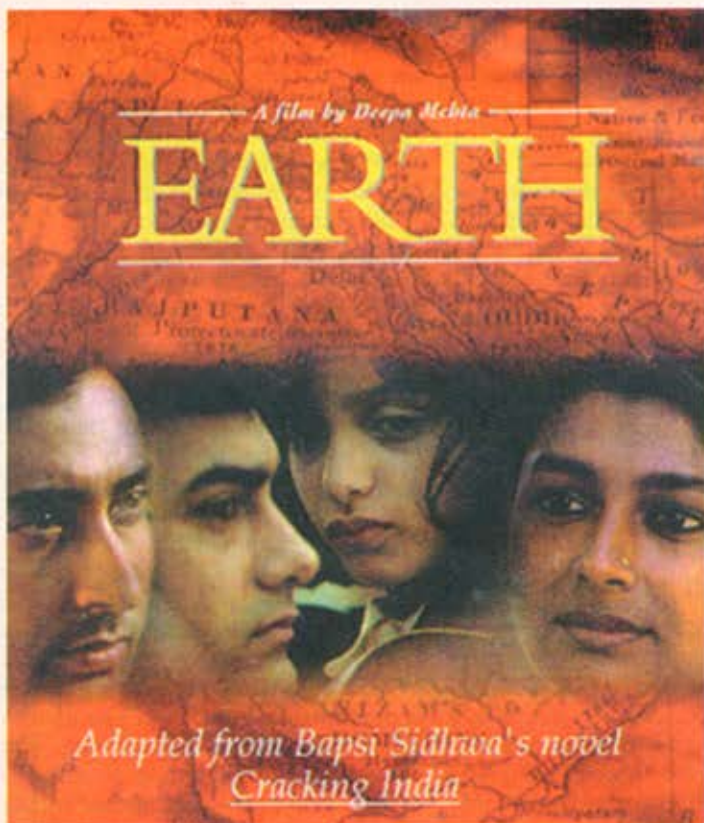
And yet the impressions of the mindless carnage were significant to remain as a lasting memory for even the peripheral observers. For Lenny was in real life the author Bapsi Sidhwa whose book *The Ice-Candy-Man* published in 1990 and republished as *Cracking India* had inspired Deepa Mehta to film it. The \$3.2 million celluloid epic won the Grand Prize at the Deauville PanAsian Film Festival in France, was chosen as the



Indian entry for the Oscar Academy Awards for the Best Foreign Film for 1999, and was nominated as one of the top 10 films of 1999 by London's *Timeout* magazine, according to information displayed on different websites.

Reported Mehta on the website "1947 Earth": "Lenny's was an entirely unique perspective. It came from within an impartial community, but was also the point of view of a child who learned about love, war, destruction and betrayal within a span of a few months. I wanted desperately to make *Cracking India* into a film...which would be the second in my trilogy of the elements of *Fire*, *Earth* and *Water*. Tracing Bapsi was no easy task but persevere we did and soon I was talking to Bapsi on the phone, hoping that the film rights to her book were still available. Two months later, thanks to David Hamilton's unwavering belief in the project, we owned the rights, had development funds, and I was sitting at my kitchen table, writing the screenplay of 1947...

"During this phase Bapsi became a friend and was exceedingly generous with information and old photographs. She would talk with me for hours about what it was like growing up in Lahore during those times...The irony of our situation hasn't escaped Bapsi or myself. Bapsi is from Pakistan and now a US citizen, I'm from India and now living in Canada. If neither of us had moved from our respective homelands, the film just wouldn't have been possible... My father and his family were some of the 11 million people that were uprooted from their homes during Partition. I grew up hearing stories about this particular holocaust, the carnage, the rapes and the mindless acts of violence



The women behind the film: Mehta (left) and Sidhwa with stars
Middle row (from left) Zakaria and Khan;
Bottom (from left) Khanna, Das, Sethna and Gidwani



Facing page (left):
Gidwani flees with
Sethna during a riot
scene;
(right): Sidhwa
(seated) on the sets



that people who had lived together in relative harmony for centuries committed against each other — all in the name of religion and nationalism.”

“I never thought anyone would take up the daunting task of making it a film,” stated Sidhwa in an interview with *Outlook*, January 17, 2000, adding, “But Deepa did, so she was ready for the challenge. It needed an act of courage. I’m very pleased...A film stands on its own merit, integrity and rhythm. It can’t be the book. And this one in particular was not easy to translate. It’s very complex and layered.” Initially Sidhwa and Mehta worked on the script together until Sidhwa felt she should not interfere for Mehta had “her own vision, different from my own more nebulous one... The book’s written from a child’s perspective and so I felt a voice-over was needed, but Deepa wanted the child’s presence throughout with low camera angles for perspective. And the little girl, Lenny, did splendidly.”

In fact, young Maia “who is utterly natural and uninhibited in front of the camera,” was declared “the find of the film,” by *Sunday Mid-Day*, September 12, 1999. “It was audacious of Aamir Khan to take on the role of Dil Nawaz (ice candy man) and he has given a remarkably balanced performance. Rahul Khanna (son of actor Vinod Khanna) has a striking screen presence and charming demeanor (as Hasan, the masseur), but he needs to loosen up a bit...Nandita Das suits her role (of ayah) perfectly and gives Shanta an attractive pertness...” added the *Mid-Day* critic. *The Sunday Times of India* (September 12, 1999) described *Earth* as “a tragic romance, cleverly and conscientiously constructed, leaving you with the feeling of getting your time’s, money’s and intelligence’s worth.”

While the film reduced the ice candy man to a villain, in the book Sidhwa had conceptualized him “as a representative of the common man and tried to show how evil lies close to the surface of normalcy in ordinary individuals. When there is anarchy, the evil spurts, but as soon as things settle down, he reverts to his natural, normal state of goodness,” she had related in an interview with *The*

Times of India early this year. The grandmother who guides the little girl in the book through the horror and violence of Partition was also missing in the screen version, pointed out Sidhwa.

When asked whether she’d like her other books to be filmed, Sidhwa replied in the affirmative, adding that Shyam Benegal has evinced an interest in adapt-

“We hoped that the collaboration on the film would be the beginning of a much needed non-political dialog between the two peoples”

ing *The Crow Eaters* while Ismail Merchant is keen to make a film based on *The Bride*. Working on her next book, a collection of short stories, she was concurrently involved in converting *The Crow Eaters* and *An American Brat* into plays.

“We have to put Partition behind us,” the Karachi-born author was quoted in *The Times of India*, especially since vindictive efforts to destabilize each other “will only bring ruin to both” India and Pakistan, observed Sidhwa, an active social worker among Asian women. In an interview with *The Earth Times*, Mehta noted, “We hoped that the collaboration on the film would be the beginning of a much needed non-political dialog between the two peoples. A greater grassroots awareness from the people who live in the countries and then a commitment to ensure that mindless violence doesn’t happen again. Politicians have their own agendas (and sometimes war is good for the economy!) — this type of change must come from the people.”

A willingness to change and adapt, an attribute that characterizes the Parsis, earns an amusing reference in *Earth* too. As Bunty tries to initiate her polio afflicted daughter to the ecstasies of ballroom dancing, an innocent looking Lenny repeats to her mother a comment she has heard on the community: “Parsis are bum-lickers of the British.” “*Soo* (what)?” says the mother agape and then recovers her composure to explain to Lenny that due to their paucity of numbers, the Parsis have to adapt to the

changing environment, a little bit like the chameleons or lizards in their garden. She also goes on to repeat the famous sugar-in-the-milk story wherein the Parsis on landing in India had promised the local ruler to dissolve like sugar while enriching the environment. Now knowledgeable, Lenny gives a nod of understanding: “We are not bum-lickers, we are invisible.” Barring these few interludes between the family members in English and Gujarati, the rest of the film is in Hindi.

The grim realities and profound philosophies are mouthed by all and sundry for Partition is going to touch them all. The smug British officer who will soon be departing from the shores of the colony warns his Indian friends at a dinner table, “You won’t be able to blame everything on us for long.” On the issue of whether Lahore would go to India or Pakistan, a commoner speaks up, “Who listens to the people? It is money which will talk.”

To protect their own lives or of those they loved there were countless who were compelled to forsake their family, their religion, their land. And even after making sacrifices they had to face the ignominy of torture and ridicule. Fortunately for the Parsis they were spared this mindless devastation in their adopted homeland but the scenario was all too familiar, reminiscent of the persecution the Zoroastrians had faced at the hands of the Muslims in Iran over a millennium ago.

Their education and value systems had set apart the Parsis in India from the other communities. Lenny does not know that caramel custard is not on the menu of a roadside stall; nor can she understand why her little Hindu friend is made to marry a man more than five times her age. Yet, as she seeks help from her cousin to tear her favorite doll into two, she can comprehend that the rift will create irreparable damage. So even while they were cocooned in their comfortable lifestyle, Parsis were able to empathize and share in the joys and sorrows of others. And any role that they had consciously or unwittingly played to support or stifle members of sister communities was to remain a haunting memory for the rest of their lives.

PATHS TO PROGRESS

continued from page 32

tee met every week between July 1999 to April 2000 to prepare the ground-work for the program, she declared and so much do they enjoy the program that many an HPYite has put to her the question, "Can I be an organizer next year?"

Wearing the crowns as Mr and Ms HPY this year were Shehzad Dastoor and Tina Kavarana. Rathushtra Merchant, Dilzeen Tantra, Armin Palia and Kavarana were the winners in their respective groups. "I have made so many friends at HPY it is really upsetting to leave." Palia, a boarder at Bandra's Avabai Petit School, whose family resides in Dhranghdra in Gujarat, told *Parsiana*. "The program has taught me to be a leader," opined tall Rayumand Irani from Poona.

"After 14 years, the program is in its prime, well-seasoned and tempered," stated Marfatia, as always crisp in dress and speech and in control of almost 200 noisy youngsters. Next year, HPY will have a new logo, a new motto and a new T-shirt design, she promised, for the HPY of the new millennium.

EVENTS AND PERSONALITIES

continued from page 18

Zoroastrian Youth Associations of India.

Dogged relief

"If a dog gets love, most of his problems will be solved," is the philosophy adopted by Bombay-based Zawareh Daruwala who rescues abandoned pedigree dogs, trains them as guard dogs and gets them 'employment' in companies like Siemens, Nicholas Piramal and Colour Chem. During the six years he has been 'hiring' dogs he must have trained over 45 abandoned canines, notes an article in *Outlook*, May 29, 2000. "There is never a bad dog, only bad owners," stated Daruwala who has observed that abandoning a dog could cause it to turn hostile and start biting people because these domesticated creatures cannot survive on the streets.

People from Bombay, Poona, Goa and Baroda have dumped their dogs on 35-year-old Daruwala, a professional trainer. While he has been training dogs since 1983, since 1994 he has taken it up as a full-time profession, signing contracts with reputed companies to provide them

capable dogs. He has known of dogs being discarded because of their hostility to one of the family members, or because of a serious skin problem or when they contract *erlichia*, a disease similar to AIDS,



Daruwala:
trains guards

not sexually transmitted but caused by tick bites which ruin the dog's immune system.

He is aware that street dogs too can be trained as good guard dogs but he rues that corporates don't want strays, only good-looking dogs.

Earlier mistaken for a smuggler for he always has a dog at his heels, an image reinforced by Hindi films, Daruwala had to set right the misconception, he joked. Training them, he believes, is a divine gift bestowed upon him. His residence at Dadar (604-C, Lakshmi Niwas, Lady Jehangir Road, Dadar, Bombay 400014, Tel: 4120433) therefore serves as an unusual school, one that takes in canines as pupils.

Compiled by Parinaz M. Gandhi

CORRECTION



In the August 2000 issue of *Parsiana* there was an inadvertent mistake in the identification of Soli Shapurjee in the photograph published on page 44 ("When religions unite," Zoroastrians Abroad).

The correct caption should read as: From left: Rohinton Rivetna, Dolly Dastoor, Khorshed Jungalwala, Roshan Dalal, Rusi Dalal, Ervad Parvez Bajan and Soli Shapurjee.

The error is regretted.

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Hail Halo

Parinaz M. Gandhi

The children's film *Halo* starring Benaf Dadachanji has won eight national and international awards

That charismatic smile could well be little Benaf Dadachanji's trademark. The same endearing grin we had seen on the screen, the same cherub face that had regularly peered out of newspapers announcing the release of the award winning, tax-free, children's film *Halo*, greets us on the day of our interview.

Yet, "many people don't recognize me because I've grown big and fat. My teeth have also grown," says the unassuming 13-year-old Benaf who had played the star of the movie when she was but six years old and now "finds it awkward" if she is identified as the heroine.

She mentions that director Santosh Sivan had seen a video snippet of hers as a child model at Bala and Karnikar's advertising agency. Then he asked to see Benaf in person when "he just told me to smile and took photos," she recalls. Benaf is aware that it was her disarming smile that won her the plum role in *Halo* in 1994. She relates in a matter-of-fact way that the following year she was declared the best child artiste at the Ninth International Children's Film Festival in Hyderabad, that she won the V. Shantaram Award for best child artiste, also the special jury award at another films festival and yet again recognition at the Canada Children's Film Festival. Thereafter, on every Children's Day (November 14) the film has been telecast on Door-darshan, she adds.

Scenes from Halo: Dadachanji enjoying the puppy (above) and being grilled by the police (right)

She was not however able to explain why the screening of *Halo* for over 10 weeks in several theaters in Bombay during the summer holidays this year

was announced as the launch of the film. Nor did she know why it had been granted a tax-free status this time.

After *Halo*, Benaf was also signed for films like *China Gate* where she plays the role of a village girl in a starcast that included box office names like Naseeruddin Shah, and *Nazrana* where she portrays a girl from a Catholic family during Christmas. Although she keeps getting offers to do roles in teleserials, presently Benaf has opted to concentrate on studies.

Which of the three movies did she enjoy shooting for? "*Halo*," prompt comes the reply. "It was my first, and the best." During the 29 days of shooting

she enjoyed the camaraderie with the unit which was "like a small family. Everyone was so sweet and down-to-earth. There was no spotboy (adolescents who run minor errands on the sets) or anything...Sivan is more a cinematographer than an art director," she adds knowledgeably.

When the film was being shot she had to report at the sets every day after school got over and return home around 9 p.m. She enjoyed portraying the character of a charming little girl Sasha in a household that dotes on her. The absence of a mother was meant to be compensated with the arrival of a pup, Halo, in her life. It made sense in the story line. But to little Benaf the pup proved to be the bane of her life. "I hate dogs. I'm scared of animals," she says vehemently. "They kept telling me I would get used to it, but I didn't," she still recalls.

How then did she manage to relate with the canine and play the cuddlesome, frolicky parts? She was petrified of the first pup who was brought on the sets, she frankly admits. "It was teething and wanted to bite into everything." So they replaced that dog with another one who, fortunately for Benaf, was content to doze through most of the scenes. Of course, the major portion of the 100-minute film dwells on her search for Halo who just disappears one day.

She summons help from family and friends, the editor of a newspaper and the police commissioner as she stoically encounters riots and even a mad dog catcher, moves over bridges and rocks, through tunnels and pipes to find the impossible. During the search which seems unending there are moments of comic relief as when



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one of her friends impresses on her the need to "be political" when she means "be practical." And the irony is that while the police look on helplessly, it is the street urchins who keep her optimistic. The children's movie is brought to a close with a message of sacrifice taught not by words, but by the deeds of young Sasha.

Mugging the dialog in Hindi was not difficult for Benaf. It was the crying that she was supposed to do in the last scene that did not come naturally. Finally, her mother Maharukh gave her a pinch, the first time in her life, that reduced Benaf to tears and evoked the pathetic expression that Sivan was seeking.

How much did all this effort earn her? "My mom handles all that," she reports. "She doesn't tell me and I don't even want to know. If I want something, I ask for it and get it," Benaf is content with her lot.

Already the film has inspired the creation of a website (www.halo.thefilm.com) where one can access the story, the trailer, obtain information on



An anxious Dadachanji (left) summons help when her puppy disappears

the director, make trade enquiries, and even have fun with the puzzles and maze pieces which have to be solved.

An VIII standard student at Bombay's St Anne's School facing considerable academic pressure, Benaf says presently she wouldn't be able to cope with both lessons and acting since most of the shooting is done in the suburbs. She does though make time for games, playing basketball, football, carrom, handball, cricket, throwball, representing St

Anne's at inter-school or district level meets. Table tennis is one game she has not been able to master as she hits the ball too hard, she points out. Training with Shiamak Davar's dance troupe is a must every vacation time. She is fairly regular with her swimming too either at the Radio Club or at Body Rhythm, she mentions.

A daily visit to the agiary comes naturally to this teenager who stays in the compound of the Jeejeebhoy Dadabhoy Agiary at Colaba, her father Farokh being the manager there. Mother Maharukh works for J. M. Morgan Stanley and younger brother Bezaad studies in standard IV at Champion School.

She would like to find her niche in the world of films and advertising where there are very few Parsis. "I want to open my own advertising agency and direct films. Ad shooting doesn't go on and on. After two days it gets over," she explains the rationale. Blessed with a face that could help launch a film, Benaf may well dare to dream and wake up to the realities of a new medium.

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This issue of *Parsiana* publishes intercommunity marriages registered both at the Old Customs House and at the MHADA office in Bandra (East) for the nine-month period of December 1999 to August 2000. However, names that could not be confirmed as Zoroastrian have been omitted from the list.

The Old Customs House registered 39 intercommunity marriages plus one civil marriage, whereas the figures at the MHADA office were 26 and two respectively.

A scanning of the Chandanwadi crematorium registers revealed the names of 16 Zoroastrians cremated between April 1999 and August 2000.

As per the data collected by *Parsiana* there were 78 Zoroastrians who were consigned to the Towers of Silence as compared

to 19 babies born in the month of August 2000. The major killer — heart disease — took a toll of 21 lives of whom nine were 80 years and above. Pneumonia and lung disease felled 12 victims whereas six fell prey to septicemia. Five Zoroastrians each died due to cancer, brain disease and hypertension. Liver disease and old age/general debility claimed three patients each and asthma, diabetes, urinary tract infection, multi organ failure and obesity, two each. The isolated cases registered for August were hypokalemia (abnormally low potassium level of blood), kidney failure, Alzheimer's disease, osteoporosis (loss of bone density due to excessive absorption of calcium and phosphorus from the bone), pyometra (pus retained in the uterus and unable to escape through the cervix), athero-

sclerosis (deposition of fatty substances in the arteries), filarial elephantiasis (infestation with a parasitic, thread-like worm causing swelling of a limb, usually a leg), hemiplegia (paralysis of one side of the body), head injury due to drowning and paralysis. Three youths, all in their early thirties, were lost to the community. The eldest to breathe his last was a 103-year-old male. The Zoroastrian life expectancy at birth for August, in Bombay, was 75 years.

The data on births, marriages and deaths has been compiled from information supplied by various newsletters and anjumans in India and abroad, courts and hospitals. This information is not always complete or consistent: we are unable to carry data from areas where the anjumans do not fur-

nish the particulars; the birth figures for Bombay are supplied by two 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. There may be an inadvertent repetition of names in the marriage list when a civil marriage precedes a religious ceremony. 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.

BARODA

BORN

A boy, *Jahan*, to *Nancy* and *Vispy Patwa* on May 24, 2000
A girl to *Shernaz* and *Minoo Patel*; July 2

MARRIED

Ruby Dhanjishaw Pardiwalla and *Kerus Pheroze Talati*; May 7
Jennifer Dhanjishaw Pardiwalla and *Yezdi Pheroze Talati*; May 7
Katy Firdosh Bavaadam and *Farokh Yezdi Anklesaria*; June 15

BOMBAY

BORN

A girl to *Binaz* and *Samy Choksey*; August 1
A girl, *Mehernaaz*, to *Niloufer* and *Darayus Panthaky*, sister to *Arish*; August 1
A boy to *Zeenaz* and *Dinyar Tatar*; August 1
A boy, *Mehrezad*, to *Navaz* and *Parvez Dariwalla*; August 2
A girl to *Meher* and *Cyrus Nariman*; August 2
A girl, *Ranai*, to *Kashmira* and *Karl Daboo*; August 7
A girl to *Dilshad* and *Ruzbeh Gandhi*; August 7
A girl to *Zarin* and *Percy Rustomji*; August 10
A girl to *Firoza* and *Zarir*

Dalal; August 11

A girl to *Jasmine* and *Kazad Kasad*; August 12
A girl to *Persis* and *Zubin Mody*; August 14
A boy, *Zal*, to *Ayesha* and *Jamshed Madon*; August 19
A girl to *Benaifer* and *Ruzbeh Parbhoo*; August 20
A boy to *Anahita* and *Farrokh Taraporewalla*; August 20
A boy to *Nazneen* and *Jamshed Patel*; August 22
A boy to *Shernaz* and *Zubin Engineer*; August 23
A girl to *Bachi* and *Tempton Hathiram*; August 24
A girl to *Farzana* and *Manan Munim*; August 24
A girl to *Meher* and *Tehmtan Damania*; August 28

MARRIED

Zarina Jamshed Delvadavala and *Nilesh Dilip Ashar*; December 1, 1999
Tanaz Phiroze Kanga and *Gerard Prashanth Fernandes*; December 3
Binaifer Fakir Bam and *Nilesh Chandrakant Jani*; December 3
Daisy Manek Mahudawala and *Manishkumar Damji Shah*; December 3
Sejal P. Matalia and *Hoshedar Homi Sukhia*; December 3
Nilufer T. Dubash and *Riyaz I. Chagla*; December 4

Aban Jehangir Daver and *Sayed Riyaz K. Hussain*; December 4
Avimay S. Hakim and *Vinay H. Deshmene*; December 5
Farzana Saifuddin Jariwala and *Sarosh Kersi Parakh*; December 5
Thelma Jal Doctor and *Kapil Kailash Suneja*; December 9
Nandita Girish Gupta and *Mahbakh Aspi Kotwal*; December 13
Pramila Raghunath Gosavi and *Hoshang Pirojsha Wadia*; December 14
Minaxi B. Kishnadwala and *Noshir N. Dinshaw*; December 15
Sunita Shyam Narang and *Sharukh Homi Bhaeka*; December 17
Kashmira Irani and *Ajay L. Rathod*; December 18
Tanya Techen Tseng and *Jehangir Pheroze Unwalla*; December 20
Yasmin Nariman Khambata and *Nikhil Harshadray Shastri*; December 21
Janine Jeejeebhoy and *Sandeep Tara*; December 21
Azarmie Dara Dotiwala and *Rehmat Ali Baig*; December 23
Poonam Sunder Khanna and *Vicky Minoo Bengali*; December 23
Tanaaz P. Mama and *Sai Krishna Bharathan*; December 24

Farahanaaz Sohrab Dastur and *Rahul Dhawan*; December 24
Molina Rohinton Patel and *Dhimat Prabodh Poladia*; December 26
Armita Namirya and Jitendra V. Sharma; December 27
Armita H. Mistry and *Jitendra D. Shukla*; December 27
Meghna Shenoy and *Jehan Sarkari*; December 31
Ritu Swarup and *Burjor J. Bugli*; January 4, 2000
Khushman Noshir Italia and *Hasan Habib Merchant*; January 17
Behroz D. Pardiwalla and *Viswakumar Menon*; January 21
Tanaz Pochkhanawala and *Manav Dhanda*; January 27
Minal M. Divecha and *Khushrav Jilla*; February 2
Inderjeet Kaur and *Mehernosh Kersasp Meherhomji*; February 4
Binaisha Dodhy and *Ravi Sundaram*; February 7
Vahishta Irani and *Bishnu Deb Ghoshal*; February 9
Melagrine Anthony Fernandes and *Farrokh Rusi Kelawala*; February 10
Persis H. Mistry and *Amit M. Sharma*; February 10
Khursheed B. Dariwalla and *Swadheen Sharma*;

February 10
Yasmin Adi Bhesania and
Hoshang Homi Parekh;
 February 14
Ferzin Khambatta and *Ashok*
Julian Farias; February 21
Shahdokht Godrej Namdarian
 and *Deepak Ramchandra*
Mundakavi; February 21
Laila Adi Nazir and *Raouf*
Andre Kazilbash; February 26
Shailja Yadav and *Jimmy*
Pilloo Patel; March 7
Tarana Ramakrishnan and
Zubin Karkaria; March 9
Hutokshi Faramroz
Sunariwalla and *Rajnish S.*
Sood; March 24
Nooshafreen Irani and *Sunil*
Alvis D'Souza; March 27
Pooja B. Shrivastava and *Nari*
N. Talaty; March 27
Anita R. Uchil and *Firoz G.*
Divecha; March 28
Armine Soli Irani and *Aziz*
Moezali Dungarpurwala;
 March 31
Vrinda C. Pai and *Merzyan*
Dosu Bhangara; April 11
Bena (Benazir) D. Irani and
Ajay Mishra; April 11
Ritu Prakash and *Noshir*
Jehangir Desai; April 23
Ferzin Soli Patel and *Ashok*
Virbhan Lalla; May 17
Kavita M. Patel and *Farook R.*
Irani; May 20
Anuja Tandon and *Farhad N.*
Vakil; May 21
Nazneen Homi Dalal and
Porus Noshir Randeria;
 May 22
Hirabai Pote and *Adil*
Ranikhetwala; May 26
Rukshana Patel and *Indrajit*
Pakrasi; June 4
Natasha Dara Khodaiji and
Mathew Ignatius; June 17
Ruby Pavri and *Satish*
Lakshman; June 21
Lavina Lasrado and *Percy*
Agreras Dastur; July 7
Sudesh Singh and *Malcolm R.*
Printer; July 11
Monica Rustom Mullanfiroze
 and *Ketan Dattaram Sawant*;
 July 14
Yogeta Ashok Chhabria and
Zubin Keki Patel; July 15
Sona Sharad Mane and *Zubin*
Jal Daruwalla; August 4
Shavin Gustad Irani and *Viraf*
Noshir Chiniwala; August 21
Kamal Kersi Anklesaria and
Zubin D. Dumasia; August 22
Sampada S. Khatu and *Cyrus*
N. Jogina; August 24
Patricia Mondain and *Darius*

Noshir Nagarwalla; August 25
Chinnakkannan Mahalakshmi
 and *Hormuz D. Master*;
 August 30

DIED
Homi Fanibanda (79), residing
 at 6, Nowroji Mans, 31,
 Wodehouse Rd, 400005;
 April 25, 1999 (cremated)
Roshan Ratan Khambatta (60),
 Laxmi Niwas, West Field, East
 of Warden Rd, 400026;
 April 25 (cremated)
Khurshed Rustanji Dastur
 (77), 8/B, Il-Palazzo, Little
 Gibbs Rd, 400006; May 23
 (cremated)
Jehangir Faramroze Gazdar
 (65), H/2, Palacino, Silver
 Oaks Est, B. Desai Rd,
 400026; June 10 (cremated)
Soli (Sohrab) Shavaksha Talati
 (87), Theosophy Hall, 40, New
 Marine Lines, 400020; July 29
 (cremated)
Kaikobad Siavakshah
Goghavala (86), Krishnabad,
 43, B. Desai Rd, 400026;
 October 26 (cremated)
Gool Khurshedji Bamanji (98),
 9, Meher Bldg, Dadaysheth
 Rd, Chowpatty, 400007;
 November 11 (cremated)
Piroja Ardeshir Narielwalla
 (89), B/7, Ben Nevis, B. Desai
 Rd, 400026; December 4
 (cremated)
Darab K. Dastur (76), B/24,
 Navjivan, 20, Napean Sea Rd,
 400006; February 16, 2000
 (cremated)
Hirji Cawasji Jehangir (86),
 Readymoney Hse, 49, Napean
 Sea Rd, 400006; February 24
 (cremated)
Jamshed Moos (74), Ark
 Royal, 50/B, Peddar Rd,
 400026; March 30 (cremated)
Piloo Homi Dastur (85), 11,
 Rajesh Mans, Dinsha Vacha
 Rd, 400020; April 13 (cre-
 mated)
Faramroze (Fali) Rustom
Nariman (89), Ivanhoe,
 Foreshore Rd, 400021;
 April 16 (cremated)
Adi Bomanji Nadir (82), 5,
 Mohmadbhai Mans, 7, N. S.
 Patkar Marg, 400036; April 19
 (cremated)
Sheila J. Malbari (79), 21/28,
 Sugarsamganj, Bandra Recl,
 400050; July 31 (cremated)
Khodadad Ardeshir
Parvareshi (76), Motibai
 Bhavan, Proctor St, Grant Rd,
 400007; July 31

Seru Dali Wadia (73), 22,
 Wadia Bldg, Marzban Clny,
 Dr Nair Rd, 400008; July 31
Darius Parvez Bhathena (30),
 742, Road no 5, Parsi Clny,
 Dadar, 400014; August 1
Katy Shapurji Bhesania (71),
 10, Bai Sonabai Hirji Banaji
 Bldg no 1, Gowalia Tank,
 400036; August 1
Soli Faramroze Daruwalla (70),
 117, Trinity Hse, Bora Bazar,
 Fort, 400001; August 1
Piroja Sorabji Doctor (94),
 G-2, Shirin Apts, Grant Rd
 (W), 400007; August 1
Daulat Dinshaw Gandhi (86),
 91, Meherdad, Cuffe Parade,
 400005; August 1
Dara Homi Dastur (59), Gold
 Coin, 602, Tardeo, 400034;
 August 2
Sherin Rustom Gandhi (91),
 Dossibai Home, Masina Hosp
 Complex, Byculla, 400027;
 August 2
Mani Jamshed Jijibhoy (89),
 Rubans Apts, Setalwad Rd,
 Off Napean Sea Rd, 400006;
 August 3
Tehmina Fardoon Khandadia
 (84), 11/6, Tata Clny, Tardeo,
 400034; August 3
Dhun Dali Dastur (67), M/57,
 Cusrow Baug, S. B. Rd,
 400039; August 4
Nariman Jamshedji Khambatta
 (57), 8/9, Old Khareghat Clny,
 Hughes Rd, 400007; August 5
Ghaver Dhunjishaw
Darukhanavala (87), 70-C,
 Gowalia Tank, 400036;
 August 6
Jer Dady Karbhary (69),
 1, Sethna Bldg, Khan Est,
 M. M. C. Rd, Mahim, 400016;
 August 7
Jehangir Phirojshaw Mistry
 (70), D-5, Shapur Baug, V. P.
 Rd, 400004; August 7
Piloo Maneckshaw
Pardiwalla (82), 797, Jesia
 Bldg, Jame Jamshed Rd, Parsi
 Clny, Dadar, 400014; August 7
Adi Framji Patva (73), Shakti
 Sadan, Lamington Rd, 400007;
 August 7
Rumi Ratanshaw Daruwalla
 (80), E-16, Godrej Baug, Off
 Napean Sea Rd, 400026;
 August 8
Dara Kuverji Deputy (77),
 Navroze Bldg no 1, 66, Pali
 Hill, Bandra, 400050;
 August 8
Naval Rustomji Shroff (63), 6,
 Ibrahim Mans, J. Petit St,
 Balaram St, Grant Rd, 400007;

August 8
Nergish Jal Anklesaria (84),
 A/102, Seashell, Seven Bglws,
 Versova, 400061; August 9
Fali Merwanji Antia (71),
 Fiona, 176, Juhu Tara Rd,
 Juhu, 400049; August 9
Maharukh Firoze Fitter (46),
 5A, United Chmbs, Grant Rd,
 400007; August 9
Rashid Behram Irani (79),
 12/9, Rustom Baug, Victoria
 Rd, Byculla, 400027; August 9
Nergis Cavas Khatow (85),
 Sunajee Mans, Forjett St,
 400036; August 9
Dady Nanabhoy Siganporia
 (84), 4, Rama Prasad,
 Babulnath, Chowpatty,
 400007; August 9
Pirojsha Jalejar Karanjia (78),
 573, Umrigar Hse, Opp
 Chandanwadi, Chira Bazar,
 400002; August 10
Aloo Darabshaw Master (80),
 524, Commissariat Bldg,
 Adenwalla Rd, Matunga,
 400019; August 10
Mehelli Rustomji MullaPhiroze
 (91), Pehelvi Bldg, 315,
 Lamington Rd, 400007;
 August 10
Roshni Zahl Tantra (30), A/19,
 Army Officers Flats, R. C.
 Church, Colaba, 400005;
 August 10
Tehmi Sorabji Daruwalla (85),
 Sentina Hse, Arthur Bunder
 Rd, Colaba, 400005;
 August 11
Pestonji Ratanji Khambata
 (94), N/14, Nowroz Baug,
 Lalbaug, 400012; August 11
Maneckji Kharshedji Vajifdar
 (103), P-26, Cusrow Baug,
 S. B. Rd, 400039; August 11
Khodaram Boman Kocheck
 (64), 221, Hajikasam Bldg,
 Bellasis Rd, 400008;
 August 12
Erin Homi Malesaria (64), 9/3,
 Tata Clny, Tardeo, 400034;
 August 12
Rusi Shavaksha Mulla (60),
 M-58, Cusrow Baug, S. B. Rd,
 400039; August 12
Jamshed Bhikaji Bachana
 (79), 407, Anand Sagar, Sector
 17, Vashi, New Bombay,
 400703; August 13
Gool Pirojsha Driver (78),
 Dhunbad, Sleater Rd, 400007;
 August 13
Nargish Jehangir Gagrati (65),
 Dr Dossibai Home, Masina
 Hosp Complex, Byculla,
 400027; August 13
Bakhtawar Rustomji

Manekshana (53), 784-A, Readymoney Bldg, M. Joshi Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar 400014; August 13

Jer Phiroze Popat (94), 1-B/17, Tata Mills Co-op Hsg Soc, Elphinstone Rd, Parel, 400012; August 13

Medyoma Savaksha Tanksallwala (64), 14, Grand Paradi, August Kranti Marg, 400036; August 14

Nergish Rusi Writer (68), Room no 40, Ahmed Bldg, Gunpowder Rd, Mazagaon, 400010; August 14

Margaretha H. M. Wadia-Hendriks (70), 23, Thakur Nivas, 173, J. Tata Rd, 400020; August 15 (cremated)

Minoo Edulji Wadia (87), D1-85, S. B. Bharucha Baug, Andheri (W), 400058; August 15

Shahbehram Boman Kermani (80), 1, Kanga Bldg, Dr Ambedkar Rd, Dadar, 400014; August 16

Hossi Cawasha Hansotia (72), B/45, Meghdoot, Koldongari, Off Sahar Rd, Andheri (E), 400069; August 17

Alamai Darabshaw Mistry (90), 6/9, Tata Clny, Tardeo, 400034; August 17

Behramji Rustomji Udwadia (91), B/286, Tambawalla Bldg, Corner of Grant Rd, 400007; August 17

Nargish Adi Avasia (67), E-32, Jer Baug, Dr Ambedkar Rd, Byculia, 400027; August 18

Homai Dhunjisha Driver (88), 387, Mohta Mans, Grant Rd, 400007; August 18

Keki Boman Irani (75), Empress Bldg, N. Petit St, Grant Rd, 400007; August 19

Dina Behram Kapadia (76), Navyug Chmbs, 165, Lamington Rd, 400002; August 19

Phiroze Ardeshir Kapadia (74), B-703, Milton Apt, Azad Rd, Juhu Koliwada, Santacruz (W), 400049; August 19

Khorshed Firoz Khan (87), 8/12, Tata Bldg, Tata Clny, Tardeo, 400034; August 19

Navroze Hormusji Mehta (66), Pundole Bldg, Sleater Rd, 400007; August 19

Khorshed Minoo Shroff (79), E-4, Cusrow Baug, S. B. Rd, 400039; August 19

Aloo Naval Engineer (82), 614, Bachubai Bldg, Jame Jamshed Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; August 21

FIGURES AT A GLANCE*									
	Bombay			India			World		
	This issue	1999*	2000 ^o	This issue	1999*	2000 ^o	This issue	1999*	2000 ^o
BIRTHS									
Boys	6	77	46	1	13	5	—	30	11
Girls	13	94	49	2	8	4	—	37	10
MARRIAGES									
Parsi	4	261	83	3	18	9	—	16	11
INTERCOMMUNAL									
Males married out	29	37	20	—	2	2	—	6	1
Females married out	36	37	19	—	—	1	—	6	—
DEATHS									
CONSIGNED									
Males	39	455	304	8	91	42	—	57	29
Females	41	477	310	4	71	39	—	43	23
CREMATED									
Males	10	8	5	—	1	—	—	—	—
Females	6	5	3	—	—	—	—	—	—

*Running totals for 1999 (January 1999-September 2000 issues)

^oRunning totals for 2000 (January 2000-September 2000 issues)

Overseas deaths are listed in the consigned column as Parsiana does not have a breakup of those cremated.

*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.

Pesi Pirojsha Patel (65), 5/104, Firozgar, Behram Baug, Jogeshwari (W), 400102; August 21

Jamshed Nowroji Vazifdar (81), 17, Beach View, 93, B. Desai Rd, 400026; August 21

Khorshed Minocher Arsiwalla (89), 7/C/6, Sir C. J. Clny, Tardeo Rd, 400034; August 22

Tehmina Dadabhai Mistry (91), 171, Persepolis, Cuffe Parade, 400005; August 22

Eruch Dadabhoy Vakil (82), Hormaz Bldg, Sleater Rd, 400007; August 22

Hoshy Pesi Kapadia (50), 32, Sheetal, Opp Dunlop, Dr Annie Besant Rd, Worli, 400025; August 24

Villoo Khurshedji Lali (79), Jer Mans, Gowalia Tank, 400036; August 24

Dinshaw Hormusji Udwadia (87), 11, Windsor Chmbs, Cawasji Patel St, Fort, 400001; August 24

Erach Dorabji Kotwal (85), 8/204, Behram Baug, Jogeshwari (W), 400102; August 25

Adi Jamshedji Postvala (67), C/o Doongerwadi Supervisor's Office, Kemps Corner, 400036; August 25

Meheramai Jehangir Deboo

(92), A-51, Meherzin, Wodehouse Rd, 400005; August 26

Nergiz Framroze Kaikobad (81), 304, Mehta Court, Gilder Lane, Off Lamington Rd, 400008; August 26

Parvez Ardeshir Palsetia (65), 28/11, Raghunath Dadajee St, Fort, 400001; August 26

Dhun Peshotan Taraporewalla (77), Ben Coover Mans, Wadia St, Tardeo, 400034; August 26

Kaivan Burjor Mistry (32), Pearl Mans, 91, M. Karve Rd, 400020; August 27

Minocher Cawasji Sarkari (94), 811, Jame Jamshed Bldg, Jame Jamshed Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; August 27

Khorshed Pestonji Alloo (80), 2/A/5, Tata Mills Co-op Hsg Soc, Elphinstone Rd, Parel, 400012; August 29

Villoo Jal Dadinath (89), Room no 19/20, G/6, Jesal Park, Bhayander (E), Thana, 401105; August 29

Najoo Eruch Edulji (Gheewala) (85), 19/6, Panthaki Baug, Andheri (E), 400069; August 30

Jimmy (Jamshed) Dadiba Gonda (78), B/207, Jiten Co-op Hsg Soc, J. P. Rd, Andheri (E), 400058; August 30

Sunnu Hoshung Kotwal (74),

615, Dhun Villa, Jame Jamshed Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; August 31

Dinshaw Munchershaw Oomrigar (57), 12-A, Sethna Bldg, Golanji Hill, Parel, 400012; August 31

CALCUTTA

BORN

A girl, Tanaz, to Maharukh and Kersi Gyara; August 6

DIED

Behram Darabshaw Wadia, husband of Khorshed and father of Navaz Gherda and Minoo; July 3

Jal Burjorji Medhora, husband of late Nergis and father of Dorab, Burjor and late Vera; July 13

Erach Dorabji Punivala, brother of Perviz B. Tarapore, Rhoda P. Mogrelia and Mani R. Langrana; August 11

Homai Surti, wife of Dinsha and mother of Burjor; August 25

Tehmtan Cowasji Parakh, husband of Bachoo and father of Nawzer and Bapsey; August 26

GOA

DIED

Pheroze Sarosh (68), husband

Bombay: The Telling Figures

Intercommunity marriages down to 22 percent

SECUNDERABAD

DIED

Keki Ratansha Pilcher (67), husband of Najamai and father of Cyrus, Faliboze, Jahangir and Behroz Vispy Patell; August 2

Minocher Temulji Markar (84), husband of Perin and father of Guloo, Coomie and Bapsi; August 28

SURAT

DIED

Pirojshaw Cooverji Dordi (84), Pandole Charity Block, Village Siganpore, Dist Surat; July 17

Homai Maneckji Umriger (83), Athuger St, Nanpura, 395001; July 25

Alamay Rustamji Dadina (73), 12/2897, Bibini Wadi, Sayedpura, 395003; July 31
Perin Keki Dariwala (73), Archit Apt, Kotwal St, Nanpura, 395001; August 1

Compiled by Roxana A. Driver

The number of intercommunity marriages registered by Zoroastrians in Bombay in 1999 were 74, down by 45 from the preceding year's total of 119. There were an equal number of males and females, 37 each, who opted for non-Zoroastrian spouses. The number of community marriages, 261, declined by just one from the 1998 total of 262. Thus the percentage of intercommunity marriages which was 31 in 1998 has reduced to 22 in 1999 if calculated as a ratio of intercommunity marriages to the total number of marriages (74:335). If calculated as a ratio of intercommunity marriages to community marriages (74:261), the percentage has come down to 28 from last year's 45.

Not only have the total number of marriages declined in 1999 in Bombay, the number of births and deaths too have fallen. As compared to last year's total of 208 births, there were only 171

births in 1999, fewer by 37. For data on births, only two hospitals in central Bombay assist us collate data. While the number of females born were 94, up by two from last year's total of 92, the number of males born were 77, a decline of 39 as compared to the preceding year's total of 116.

The death count in the community in 1999 was 945 as compared to 1,012 in 1998, a decline of 67. There were 455 males and 477 females consigned at Bombay's Towers of Silence against last year's total of 481 and 513 respectively. There were fewer males, eight, and females, five, who opted for cremation in 1999. The figures for 1998 were 11 and seven respectively. Our data on cremation though is restricted to the records accessible at the Chandanwadi crematorium.

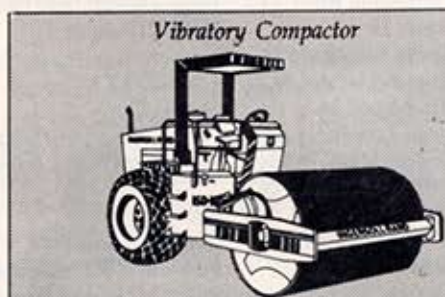
Just as deaths among the females, 482, were higher by 19

than the male count of 463, girls born, 94, exceeded the count of boys born, 77, by 17.

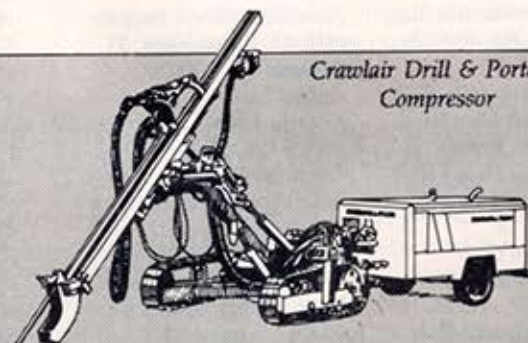
Since the list of those consigned at the Doongerwadi, sent to us by the Bombay Parsi Punchayet, mentions the age at death, we have been able to calculate the Life Expectancy at Birth (LEB) as 76. The highest LEB, 80, was in the month of May, and the lowest, 73 in the month of August 1999.

Mentioned below are the 1999 figures pertaining to the Bombay Zoroastrian community as collected by *Parsiana*.

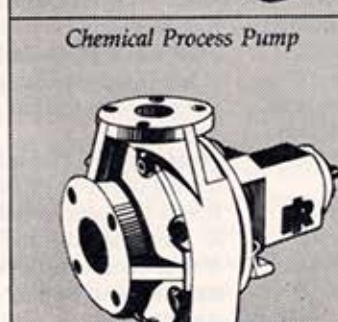
Born: 171
Boys 77, Girls 94
Marriages: 335
Parsi 261
Intercommunal 74
Died: 945
Consigned: 932
Males 455, Females 477
Cremated: 13
Males 8, Females 5



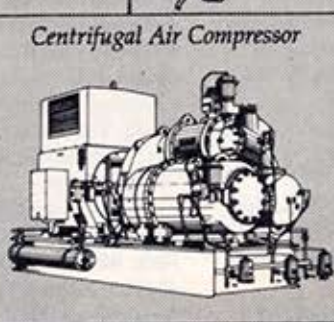
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Feared and favored

Parinaz M. Gandhi

Died: Jal Bomanji Contractor, 78, former deputy commissioner of police and founder of Jals' Detective and Protection Services as also Jals' Consultancy Services, on May 19, 2000 in Bombay following a prolonged illness complicated by diabetes, kidney failure and gangrene.

Many are the stories told of how Contractor nabbed gangsters and dacoits, quelled riots and mobs during his 38 years of duty to emerge as one of the most respected police officers in Bombay. And many are the people who would attest to his timely help and wise counsel.

Recalling his "kind and considerate" nature, in their condolence letter Banoo and Dhunji Sidhwa of Regal Theatre referred to his "guidance (which) was a great help to us and to our business." Noted social worker Scylla Vatcha wrote, "I will always remember Jalbhai's immense help, so willingly given...my gratitude to him is everlasting." She also referred to the visionary's role in the development of the Salsette Parsis' Association housing colony at Andheri commenting, "It was his conception whereby so many families have wonderful homes, where a new generation of children can grow up with dignity."

Corroborated his friends Jimmy and Khorshed Mody of UK, "A kind, gentle and generous human being...he would help any Zarathushti. There was no work too (troublesome) for him."

A tribute in the *Afternoon Despatch and Courier* of June 5, 2000 noted, "Contractor...was an example of what a police officer should be. Big, broad, tough as nails, fearless, down-to-earth, incorruptible, he was our favorite policeman...Most of his years he spent with the elite crime branch and he was in charge of what was known as the Anti Goonda Branch. The very name created fear in the minds of the underworld. As deputy commissioner, a rank to which he rose through hard work and efficient perfor-

mance... he was in charge of zone 1 which meant handling all the political and trade union processions to the Council Hall, a task he handled with great finesse. In fact, on his very last day in the police force...we saw him controlling a Datta Samant morcha of 5,00,000 people moving towards the Council Hall. His service record shows 27 appreciations, 110 good entries, 163 commendatory letters and cash awards of Rs 2,500..." The highest recognition he had won from the police was the Indian Police Service Medal in 1966, according to a family source.

Among the notorious criminals successfully nabbed by Contractor was one impostor who posed as a prominent Marwari merchant and duped the city's diamond merchants of eight lakh rupees. In the Kedia murder case, he traced the killer as a hireling of a mill magnate. Contractor had come to the notice of the Bombay public as early as 1946-47 when a tribal gang of 140 members committed 40 dacoities and 60 burglaries in the city and mofussil areas, as reported in the *Free Press Journal* in 1980.

When he retired from the force in 1980, Contractor had confessed, "I feel as if I have been released from prison... Every minute of my life was shackled to the constant demands made by my profession. Even if I took a quick lunch at a hotel, I had to leave behind a call number." As Contractor had acknowledged in an interview with *Afternoon* in 1987, "When I was with the Bombay police...I don't think I took more than 10 days off at a time, and that too very, very seldom. But there was satisfaction in doing what I did. And the rapport I shared with people was tremendous." On his retirement from service, his special relationship with the Press earned him honorary membership of the Bombay Crime Reporters' Association.

His line of duty did not stop with his dissociation from the police force. He started his business, Jals' Detective and Protection Services and Jals' Consul-

tancy Services accepting security assignments, investigation work, surveillance, advisory and consultancy jobs... As he had candidly admitted in *Afternoon*, "Actually it was more or less what I used to do when I was with the Bombay police. The difference is that then I was paid a salary by the government, now I charge for the services." Describing his work as "a gentleman's business," he added, "we take no chance of infringing the rights of people or the law..." Referring to his long working day, he had disclosed to the paper, "My wife gets angry because even now I seldom reach home before 7.30 p.m. and even then I may get down to some work or try and catch up on my reading."

"He was a workaholic," confirms his wife Suber whom he had married in 1984, four years after his retirement. As dedicated as he was to his official responsibilities, he was equally conscious of his familial commitments. His three younger brothers, Nari, Dorab and Dinyar to whom he was more a father than a brother, were married and settled in life before he thought of his own comfort, mentions Suber. "He was like a real father to Binaifer (Suber's daughter by her first marriage)," she states.

Their marriage accorded them several enjoyable travel opportunities which he had denied himself during his bachelor days, says Suber. Earlier the religious minded Contractor's out-of-Bombay trips were restricted to his regular sojourns to Udvada. Daily prayers for half an hour were a must for Contractor notwithstanding his busy schedule. With his conservative leanings, he was always advising Binaifer to marry within the community, recalls Suber.

Contractor, whose father was a farmer in Madhya Pradesh had reminisced about his humble beginnings in an interview with *The Times of India*. His life in Bombay had started in a one-room tenement and during his teenage years he would repair punctured cycle tyres at his grand-uncle's shop. He studied at the Byramjee Jeejeebhoy Parsi Charitable (BJPC) Institution and did two years of science at St Xavier's College. When



Contractor: in command in the '70s

World War II broke out, "Many of my friends joined the army or navy. I joined the police force as the sparkling white uniforms were attractive and so was the basic pay of Rs 125 which in those days was a lot of money." From the day he joined the force as a sub-inspector at the age of 20 until his retirement (he was granted a six-month special extension) "I have managed to maintain my jolly good nature and also my strong physique," he noted. He had continued to retain his ties with the BJPC Old Boys' Union and the Marker Physical Culture Institute, says Suber.

"I'll always be a policeman," Contractor had been quoted in one of the interviews. He was therefore disillusioned with their falling standards in the subsequent years: "Now I see what is happening in the police force and I get sad, as if I have lost something I spent time to build up... The fear of law has totally disappeared. Now many antisocial elements come from decent, middle-class homes," he had regretted.

The law-respecting policeman is survived by his wife Suber and daughter Binaifer Hormazd Billimoria.

MARRYING OUT, STAYING IN

continued from page 26

der the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 can take place between any two Hindus. A "Hindu" under that Act does not include a Parsi Zoroastrian. Thus a marriage between a Hindu male and a Parsi female is not a Hindu marriage, even if the saptapadi or such other ceremony relating to a Hindu marriage was performed at the time of the marriage. It may unequivocally be asserted here that the belief that on performance of such ceremony the Parsi female becomes a convert to Hinduism or a Hindu is unfounded and not justified in law.

The position would be different if a Parsi female becomes a convert to Hinduism before the marriage and the saptapadi ceremony is thereafter performed at the marriage. In such a case the marriage would be a valid Hindu marriage if it otherwise complies with the requirements of Hindu law applicable in the matter. For a Parsi female to become a Hindu on her marriage there must be a clear act of renunciation of the Zoroastrian religion and adoption of the Hindu religion. Bona fide intention to be converted into the Hindu religion, accompanied by an assertion unequivocally expressing that intention, may be

sufficient evidence of conversion. If she makes a public declaration that she has ceased to belong to the Zoroastrian religion, that she has renounced the Zoroastrian religion and has accepted the Hindu religion, she will be taken as professing that religion. Marriage thereafter performed according to Hindu rites (e.g. the saptapadi ceremony) will be a Hindu marriage governed by the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955.

Accept even these children

Though the children of a Parsi father by a non-Parsi mother are accepted into the Zoroastrian faith by performing their navjote ceremony, it is ironical that the children of a Parsi mother by a non-Parsi father are not so accepted! This issue is at the core of the controversy in the community. On principles of justice and equity and equality of sex guaranteed as a fundamental right in the Constitution of India this looks paradoxical and incongruous. This is the main cause of gradual diminution of population of Parsis in view of the increase in the number of Parsi women marrying outside the community. Fear is entertained that Parsis are an endangered species just like tigers and lions in India and their survival is at risk. This threatens to tear apart what was once a close-knit community in the country. To arrest diminution of population it is the sine qua non for the survival of our small community that such children are accepted as Zoroastrians on performance of their navjote ceremony with the consent of their parents.

The trustees of the BPP, as akabars of the community, should give a lead in the matter by accepting children of a Parsi mother and a non-Parsi father as Zoroastrians on performance of their navjote ceremony and thereby open the doors for enhancing the dwindling population of Parsis. It may be added here that in Delhi such children are accepted as Zoroastrians and allowed the right to offer prayers in the Dar-e-Meher. It is considered that if the matter is agitated in a court of law the judgment would very likely be in favor of recognizing such children as Zoroastrians, more so after the commencement of the Constitution of India providing for the equality of sex. Every effort should therefore be made to ensure the survival of the small, but still unique, ethnic group of Parsis in India by recognizing such children as Zoroastrians.

Judicial meaning of "Parsi"

The Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936 defines "Parsi" as meaning Parsi Zoroastrian. The definition does not clarify the position in the matter. The absence of precise definition of the term "Parsi" has caused genuine difficulty in practice. The term only denotes racial significance and has nothing to do with his religious profession. In common parlance the term "Parsi" contemplates a double qualification of being a Zoroastrian, a follower of the Zoroastrian religion, as well as being a Parsi by race (racial Parsi).

The term "Parsi" has been the subject matter of judicial decisions. In 1908 the Bombay High Court in Sir Dinshaw Petit's case held that the Parsi community in India consists of:

- Parsis who are descended from the original Persian emigrants and who are born of both Zoroastrian parents and who profess the Zoroastrian religion,
- Iranis from Persia professing the Zoroastrian religion, who came to India, either temporarily or permanently, and
- children of Parsi fathers by alien mothers who have been duly and properly admitted into the Zoroastrian religion. Children of Parsi mothers by non-Parsi fathers are excluded.

In 1926 the Privy Council in Bella's case took the similar view regarding the term "Parsi" when it held that Parsis are racial Parsis or people deemed after a long lapse of ages to be racial Parsis.

The law on the subject as judicially interpreted above and followed since then applies to the Parsi community even today. The decision of the Court on the subject is in the nature of *causa cèlebra* applicable to the Parsi community in India and has virtually the force of law in the absence of any statutory precise definition of the term "Parsi."

The position emerging from the above is that a Parsi can only be a Parsi by birth and not by absorption or conversion.

Though proselytization is not forbidden but is enjoined by the Zoroastrian religion, it is not recognized by custom or usage prevailing in the community in India. Thus if a Parsi adopts a non-Parsi child and has his or her navjote performed, such child does not become a Parsi. Similarly the marriage of such child cannot be solemnized under the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936 which requires both parties to the marriage to be Parsis.

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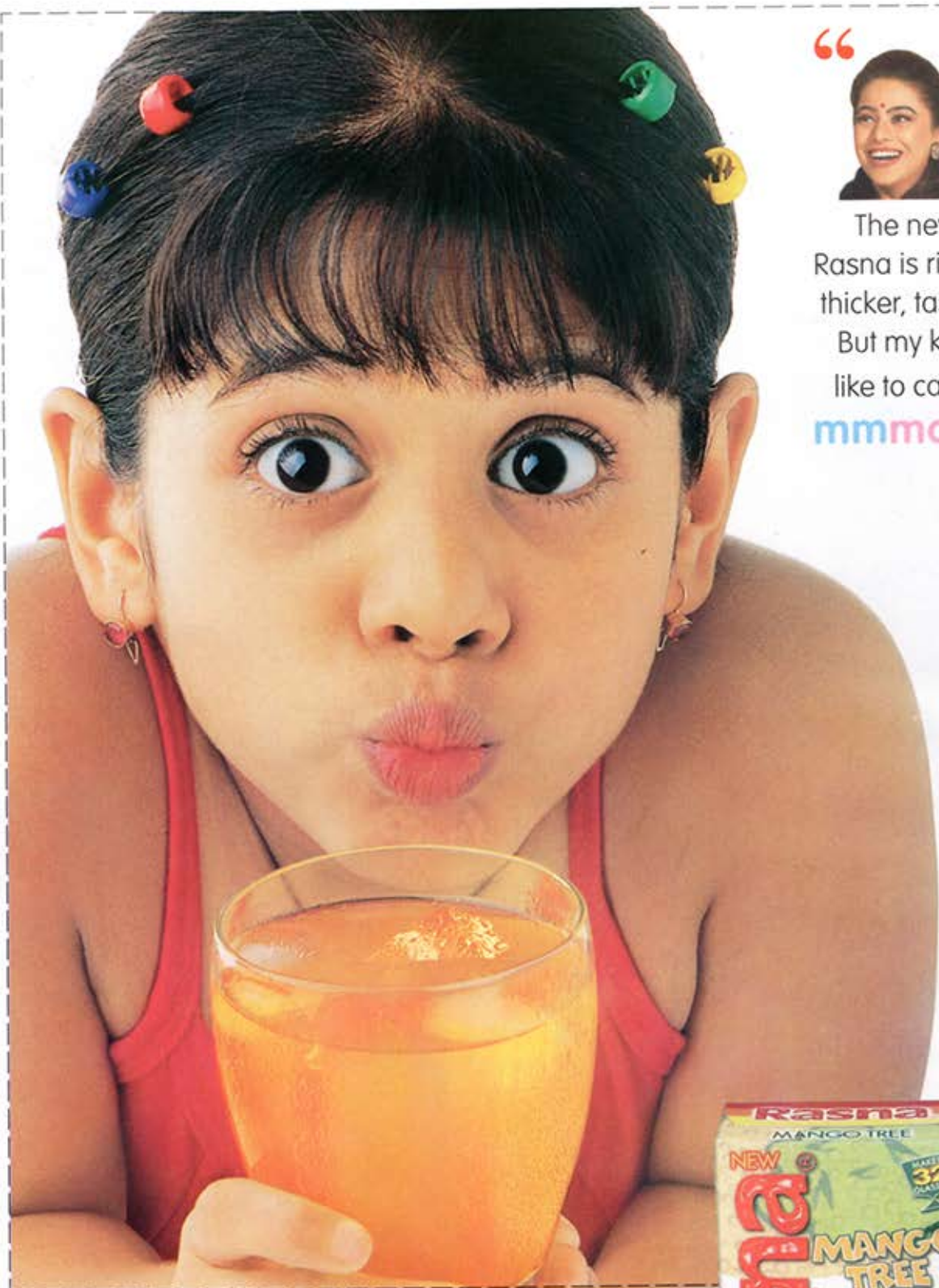
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