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For Private Circulation

THE CONVERSION CONTROVERSY IN THE LAST 100 YEARS – A PERSPECTIVE

Strange as it may seem, the year 1903 marked a peculiar watershed in the annals of the Parsee community in India. As shown in the earlier issues of **The Parsee Voice**, that was the year when the seeds of the **Juddin** marriage controversy were sown. But it was also the year when a prominent student of the school of philosophy in India, Ervad Tehmurasp D. Anklesaria, one of the ace pupils of the late Mr. K.R. Cama, came out with a book in Gujarati with references from different Avesta and Pazend texts, to show that the Zoroastrian religion favours conversion.

Again, in the **same year**, the Bombay Parsi Panchayat received a requisition signed by 2300 Parsees, led by Mr. Jehangir B. Petit and Mr. J.B. Wadia, stating that an influential committee of Parsees of education, wealth and status be formed to give guidance on: (5 points were mentioned, of which the first one was :) "whether looking to the present religious and social condition of the Parsis, it is advisable and proper to admit non-Parsis into the Zoroastrian fold."

In their meeting of 24-7-1903, the Trustees decided that the Anjuman should appoint such a Committee. Hence an Anjuman meeting was called at Albless Baug on 2-8-1903. At the meeting, the President, Sir Jamshetjee Jeejeebhoy advised the Anjuman to deliberate on the question with patience.

The Anjuman appointed a committee of nearly 150 persons, which, in turn, appointed a sub-committee of 35, who, again, in their turn, appointed a smaller sub-committee of 11 scholars. This committee submitted its report in February 1904. It recommended that there was no prohibition against proselytisation. This sub-committee, of course, had, for its study and ready reference, the newly published Gujarati book of Ervad Tehmurasp Anklesaria.

Before we proceed, a legitimate question that arises is, why were a **handful** of Parsees, a hundred years ago, and some years later, keen on converting total outsiders to the Zoroastrian religion? The ostensible reason will surprise most of our readers – it is the same as today – to increase the Parsee population! Can you beat that? Remember, there was no Pakistan or emigration to N. America or Europe, then!

For the record, it should be mentioned that after the sub-committee's report another scholar from K.R. Cama's philology school, Mr. Khodabux E. Punegar, came out with a rejoinder to both Tehmurasp Anklesaria and to that 11-member sub-committee. He demolished all or most of the points raised by both of them. He demonstrated effectively that, both internal and external evidence showed that, when the Mazdayasni Zarthoshti religion was established, **there was no other organised or established religion on earth, as we know it today**. So, the issue of Prophet Zoroaster "converting" anyone, from one religion to another, just did not arise!

Justice Dinsha Davar & Dr. Dhalla

Yet, the canker of conversion kept raising its ugly head from time to time. In 1917, that "Jacksonian Dastur" of Karachi, Dr. Manekji N. Dhalla (so-called, because before he went to study under Prof. William Jackson in the U.S.A., Dr. Dhalla was a strict disciplinarian, in the traditional Zoroastrian mould), wrote his much-publicised book, "Zoroastrian Theology", wherein he tried to show that the Zoroastrian religion was in favour of conversion! The orthodox Zoroastrians were very perturbed, and there was one great man among them, who feared that the arguments put forward by Dr. Dhalla may be proffered by vested interests in a future litigation. **That noble soul was none other than Justice**

Dinsha D. Davar, who had delivered the famous judgment, based on the evidence led before him in 1908, and who, in 1917, was himself a trustee of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet. He prevented his colleagues from giving any patronage to Dr. Dhalla's book and also prevented them from buying a single copy.

But he didn't stop at that. He wanted a reliable Zoroastrian scholar to rebut every single argument of Dr. Dhalla. That scholar, also of the K.R. Cama School, but a keen disciple of the founder of the *Ilm-e-Khshnoom* esoteric school, Ustad Behramshah N. Shroff, whom Nature had sent out in public life in 1905, was Ervad Phiroze S. Masani.

Ervad Masani, who was a staunch orthodox Zoroastrian, was given moral and financial support by Justice Dinsha Davar to examine and refute in an objective manner, all the statements of Dr. Dhalla. Phiroze Masani did this in an admirable way, in his *magnum opus*, "Zoroastrianism, Ancient & Modern".

New Breed of Pseudo-Zoroastrians

Thereafter, from time to time, in the 20th century, the hydra-headed monster of conversion grew new heads as the old ones were knocked down. But the new heads had new features: while the fuddy-duddies went on citing the same sickening Gathic/Avestic stanzas/paras, etc. to show that the religion advocates conversion – so-called evidences which had been convincingly exploded by eminent savants – in parts of USA and Europe, non-Zoroastrians masquerading as Zoroastrians began a proselytising campaign by raising a new breed of pseudo-Zoroastrians, just by asking them to put on some vestments called a **Sudra**, with something like a **Kusti** tied on it!

Barring those who have an ulterior motive, why can't the others realise the following simple facts?

(1) Nature functions and operates according to the Divine Law of **Asha**, which means that there is perfect Order in the entire Universe. It is only **Angra Mainyu** and his deputy, **Ahriman**, who keep throwing a spanner in the works of Nature.

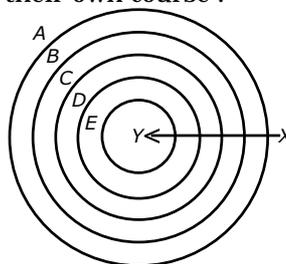
(2) No religion, which enunciates the Laws and Truths of Nature can deviate from this Divine Law and Order.

(3) **Conversion from one established religion to another is a Satanic act.**

(4) There is no accident or chance in Nature, which alone decides the religion in which a person is born.

(5) Imagine, for a while, that in the Cosmos, there are innumerable solar systems with their suns, planets, stars, etc. They all move, rotate, revolve on the path prescribed by Nature. Any deviation, and there'll be cataclysmic clashes and explosions, transforming the whole Cosmos back to Chaos! **This never happens!**

(6) To understand this better, visualise the major religions of the world, with their founders – Prophets, *Avatars*, etc., – specially sent by Ahura Mazda for different people of the world, as, planets moving in their specific, God-given orbits. None of them veers away from its fixed course. The following diagram will illustrate our point. Say, there are five major religions which have to keep on their own course :



These are five concentric circles, that is, each circle is parallel to the other. Each circle indicates one religion. None of them meets the other anywhere. Yet, they all have a common radius (X to Y). Each of them

ultimately leads its followers to the final goal – Y. 'Y' is God or **Mazda**.

(7) You will at once realise how throughout the ages, men have distorted and mutilated the pristine pure religions, given by the Messengers of God, by injecting the *Ahrimanic* element of Conversion! All five religions have their own specific paths chalked out for them. Vested interests who have whopping axes to grind, create violent disorders by trying to pull out one religion from its fixed orbit, and desperately trying to mix it with the other! These artificially laboured attempts, create violent conflicts, disturbances and even wars on our planet!

(8) So many examples from our own co-religionists, who move heaven and earth to show from our fragmentary scriptures, can be given to show, how they end up pleasing the devil himself.

The most recent example that has been published in a Parsee monthly is that of the great Sassanian King Shapur II, who is said to have used force to convert the Christians of Armenia, led by one Vartan, who later, was made a "saint"! The true story of Shapur and Vartan will be given in our next issue.

(To be continued)

Ervad Phiroze Shapurji Masani On An Important Facet of 'Conversion' (1917)

"A religion always has its life, so long as it is put into practice in everyday life by each individual member thereof. Zoroastrianism seems to die out and is dying out at the present day, not because there are only one hundred thousand souls belonging thereto, but because most of these have imbibed very nasty materialistic views from outside, by which their life is guided, and are abandoning day by day all the precepts of Ashoi, or Perfect Rectitude worthy of observance in everyday life...

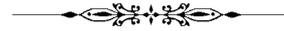
"The vitality of Zoroastrianism can never be expected in the nature of things to be upheld by an addition of some Hindus or Mohammedans or Christians into the community and by making an external stamp on their designation as 'Zoroastrians'.

"The vitality of Zoroastrianism can only be upheld by making faith a living force, and sincerity the basic

virtue in every present member of the Zoroastrian fold, who should be quite willing and ready to observe all the tenets of Purity as taught in that great religion. It is thus by adding to the quality and not to the bulk of the community... First teach your own religion to the members of your own community, 99% of whom are quite ignorant of the tenets of their sacred religion."

"Nature requires truth or intrinsic value of everything, and not mere show of things. **Alien people who are nominally styled Zoroastrians by the 20th century innovators of proselytism would not give life to Zoroastrianism, but on the contrary take away the life therefrom.**"

[This was written 87 years ago! We are saying the same thing today! – Ed.]



Conspicuous Consumption At Parsee Weddings & Navjotes

"What will you have, sir? *Patra Fish*, or *sahs* fish? Chicken Curry Rice or Mutton Pulav Dal? *Sali Boti* or *Sali Murghi*? No, this is not a liveried waiter taking orders at an expensive joint. It is the liveried waiter, no doubt, but at a Parsee function in Mumbai!

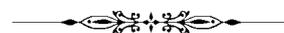
The "feel good" bug had bitten some wealthy Parsees long before the BJP thought of the expression! But the aristocratic Parsees of yore always thought of their unfortunate brethren first! Not so, any more! Today, selfishness rules the roost! A vulgar flaunting of wealth at Parsee functions, like Weddings and Navjotes! "Anything you can do, I can do better," seems to be the theme song of the young **nouveau** rich.

What a colossal, criminal waste of food, flowers and foreign booze! Keeping up with the Tehmulji's is the order of the day. Such garish display of moolah would

put to shame an Ambani or a Singhanian, particularly when just down the road, a couple of our own community members are seen begging for alms!!

"So, what do you want us to do?", one of these moneybags may ask. "If we have the wherewithal, what's wrong in spending our own income?"

Our answer to that is simple: The wealth that you have is God-given. Use it wisely. Never forget the Zoroastrian principle of charity first and last: plain living and high thinking. Don't forget that the Jeejeebhoy's, Petits, Readymoneys and Wadias, first gave all they can. Extravagance and ostentation were never their hallmark! Righteous Charity alone will please the Almighty.



જ્યારે ઘેરનાં ગોઢાઓજ... તોડફોડ અને ભાંગફોડની મનોવૃત્તિ

(ગયા અંકથી ચાલુ)

મુંબઈનીજ વાત કરીએ તો જ્યાં જુઓ ત્યાં ભાંગફોડની વલણજ નજરે પડે! અમારો ઈશારો પારસી કોમની અતિ કિંમતી ધાર્મિક અસ્કયામતો તરફ છે.

કેટલાક વર્ષોથી અમો જોતા આવ્યા છીએ કે મુંબઈની અગિયારીઓ અને ચાર આતશબહેરામોનાં મુતવલ્લીઓનાં કામ કરવાનાં કોઈ ઢંગઢાજ નથી! મૂળ વાત તો એ છે કે જે આતશ પાદશાહઓ પારસી કોમની પારખાની અને રક્ષા કરતા હોવા જોઈએ, તેઓનેજ આપણે પાંગળા બનાવ્યે છીએ! જે પાવમહેલની તલેસમો ને સાચવવાની ફરજ આપણાં વડવાઓ આપણને સોંપી ગયા છે, તેજ તલેસમોની ઉપર ચાલુ પ્રહારો કરી, તેની તરફ બેદરકાર રહી, બેઅદબી કરી, તેઓને નબળી અને સાવ ઢીલી બનાવી દીધી છે!!

આને માટેની સંપૂર્ણ જવાબદારી, આપણી ધાર્મિક સંસ્થાઓનાં વર્ષોથી થઈ બેઠેલા ટ્રસ્ટીઓ, અને ત્યાર પછી, મોટે ભાગનાં મોબેદોનીજ છે!

તમો આજે કોઈ પણ પારસી સંસ્થાનાં ટ્રસ્ટીઓનું માનસ જોશો તો માલમ પડશે કે તેઓ એમજ સમજે છે કે આ સંસ્થાનાં અમો માલિક છીએ, એટલે અમને કોઈ કંઈ પ્રશ્ન પૂછી શકેજ નહિં. મોટી સંખ્યાની

દીનની સંસ્થાનાં ટ્રસ્ટીઓ, જેઓને પોતાની જવાબદારી અને જોખમદારીનું બિલકુલ ભાનજ નથી, જેઓ આતશ પાદશાહ શું અને કોણ, યજ્ઞન ગાહ તે શું, બરશનુમગાહ તે શું, એનો ખાબો-ખ્યાલજ નથી, તેવાઓ વર્ષોથી ટ્રસ્ટી તરીકે આવી પાક સંસ્થાઓ ઉપર પોતાનો અફો જમાવી બેઠા છે. આજે જ્યારે આપણી અમુલ્ય ધાર્મિક મિલકતોની એફ.એસ.આઈ. માં સરકારે છૂટછાટ મૂકી છે, ત્યારે આ ટ્રસ્ટીઓની નજર, વગર મહેનતે અને લ્યાનતી રીતે પૈસા બનાવા પરજ છે! બિલ્ડરો પણ આવા ટ્રસ્ટીઓ સાથે મળી જઈ, હમદીનોને આખ્યાસન આપે છે કે અમો આ આજુબાજુનાં મકાનો તોડી પાડી, નવી બહુમજલી ઈમારતો ઊભી કરીશું, અને આટલી અમુક ધરખમ રકમ, અગિયારી યા આતશબહેરામનાં ફંડમાં આપીશું!

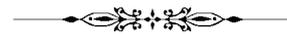
આવા ટ્રસ્ટીઓ, પારસી બિલ્ડરો અને તે પાક મકાનનાં મોબેદ સાહેબો ને ખ્યાલજ નથી કે તેઓ કુદરતમાં પોતાને માથે કેટલી મોટી જવાબદારી બહોરી લે છે! આતશ પાદશાહઓ ઉપર આવા ભયંકર અત્યાચારો કરવા (કારણ કે તેમનાં કશો, ખોરેહ અને તલેસમો, તેમજ તેઓની પવિત્રાઈ, sanctity, સંપૂર્ણ રીતે ખોરવાઈ જાય છે) એ અધમમાં અધમ પાપ છે, જેનેથી કોમની ઉપર જબ્બરજસ્ત બુરા પ્રત્યાધાતો આવી શકે છે! પૈસાનાં લોભમાં ચકચૂર આવા ટ્રસ્ટીઓ, બિલ્ડરો વિ. ને ખુદા સદબુધ્ધિ આપે!

આંતર કોમીય લગ્નો

નવસારીના જાણીતા ધર્મ અભ્યાસી, સાવક શહેરચારજી માદન લખી જણાવે છે કે: “આપણાં 'The Parsee Voice' Vol. I.13 (1-15 Feb. 2004) નો અંક મળ્યો અને માત્ર ઉપલક નજરે બધું જોઈ જતાં, મને દિલ્હીરી-પુશાલી બન્ને લાગી.

દિલ્હીરી કેમ લાગી, તે માટે લાંબુ દાસ્તાન કરવાની જરૂરજ નથી, કેમકે મજકુર અંક અત્રે ટાંકી બતાવ્યો એ ‘પારસી વોઈસ’ નો અંકજ બધુ કહી આપે છે. પેલી દેડકીબેન માફક પુશાલી થી મેં બી જાણે પેટ કુલાવ્યું, કે કોમના આવા ખૂબ ખૂબ અગત્યનાં અને તેટલાજ ગંભીર વિષય પર આ સેવક બેદરકાર રહેજ નહિં.

મારી સમજ મુજબ, ‘જર માદન જ્ઞાનચક્ષમાળા 'Inter-communal Marriage' ’માં જે કંઈ વખતોવખત પીરસી રહ્યો છું, તેમાં આ વિષય પરજ અળગ પુસ્તિકા પ્રગટ થઈ હતીજ, તે હતી, ‘અંતરકોમીય લગ્નો. ઈ.સ. ૨૦૦૧માં પ્રગટ થઈ હતી. તો આપશ્રી એમાંથી જેટલી બાબતોની જરૂર લાગે તેટલી, ‘પારસી વોઈસ’માં વારંવાર પ્રગટ કરતા રહેશો તો મને પરમ સંતોષજ થશે.”



(Our March issue will be a combined one and will be published end-March)

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e-mail: theparseevoice@yahoo.com