

THE PARSEE VOICE

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"WORLD HERITAGE SITE" WHAT IT MEANS KEEP UDVADA OUT!

In its enthusiasm to proceed with the Gujarat Government's and the erstwhile Central Government's munificence, the Foundation for Development of Udvada, is all agog to go ahead with declaring Udvada **gaam** a heritage-cum-cultural-cum-tourist centre, as reported in our last issue.

What is even more disturbing and deplorable is that, the "Foundation" has dashed off a letter to the Collector of Valsad, wherein a desire has been expressed that once Udvada has been declared a 'Heritage Precinct', it could make way for it to be declared a 'World Heritage Site'!!!

Very, very few readers will understand the extremely dangerous and potentially crooked thinking behind this game-plan of some WZO leaders, converting Udvada into a 'World Heritage Site'!

In our last issue, we had stated that if Udvada **gaam** is made a 'heritage site', there need be no objection. But now we strongly feel that if preserving the heritage also means, besides maintaining the milieu and ambience of the place, and saving the old heritage homes of the Parsees and preserving and protecting the sanctity of the Holiest of Holy Iranshah, making it an official "Heritage Precinct or Site" and placing it in the control of a Heritage Conservation Committee as is done in Mumbai, strong objection should be taken against that too!

Wider ramifications of an official Heritage Site

For, what will happen is that Udvada **gaam** with its old houses and bungalows, alongwith Holy Iranshah will be graded! Many of them will be graded as say, I or II. So, then, everything about them will be official.

We feel that the Government of Gujarat like those of other states, must be having a Heritage Conservation or Preservation Committee. Such a Committee will then wield **the authority** to decide what should or should not be done to the heritage structures, according to the guidelines provided.

In short, while possession and ownership will remain with the original proprietors (the Wadia Trust, in case of the building that houses Holy Iranshah), the AUTHORITY will vest in the Heritage Committee! It will be the Heritage Committee then which will call the shots if any changes are to be made, including, say, painting of the building or the Gumbaz (the dome), etc., which till now is jointly decided by the Udvada Athornan Anjuman and the Wadia Trust. Permission will first have to be taken from such a Heritage Committee, say, to remove the soot from the Gumbaz and give it a coat of paint! One shudders to think of the other consequences that will follow therefrom. Preservation of heritage buildings is one thing and transferring the authority to preserve them is totally another!

Disastrous Consequences of Converting Udvada 'gaam' into a "World Heritage Site"

The Managing Trustee of the "Foundation", D.K. Tamboly, has made his intentions very clear: once Udvada is officially declared a "Heritage Precinct", the way will be clear for making the spiritual citadel of Parsee Zoroastrians for nearly three decades, a "World Heritage Site"!! In other words, both Udvada and Holy Iranshah will be under the tutelage of a totally foreign institution, called the UNESCO! [Incidentally, this is completely outside the parameters provided by the Gujarat Government!]

We are not sure if there is any precedent in Parsee history where a handful of wayward, foolish Zoroastrians have handed over on a silver platter the very soul and lifeblood, the very source of Spiritual Strength and Sustenance of the Parsee Zarthoshti community of India, whose ancestors specially came to this country from Iran, 13 centuries ago, so that the Mazdayasni Zarthoshti religion could thrive, so that the Flame of our Faith could burn in all its glory and, so that Parsee Zoroastrians, the only true

followers of Prophet Zarathushtra could survive and prosper by preserving their race!

What It Means For An Institution/Place To Be Under The Authority of UNESCO

Some of you may, at this stage, feel that we are overshooting the mark and talking of a very distant future. Some may even remark that we entertaining irrational fears or are unduly biased against some individuals, and that, nothing of the sort we have described, can ever happen! We don't blame you. So, we have decided to make it easy for you to digest what we want to talk about, and take you step by step to the final stage of putting both Holy Iranshah and Udvada **gaam** in the hands of UNESCO! We shall also amply demonstrate by giving examples of the fate that awaits other religious and secular institutions of India, which are already "World Heritage Sites".

Firstly, you must be thoroughly convinced that a letter, as late as June 2004, has gone to the lady Collector of Valsad by the Managing Trustee of the "Foundation for Development of Udvada", appealing to her to list Udvada as a "Heritage Precinct", which would finally lead to making this "Heritage Precinct" a "World Heritage Site".

Secondly, what is the exact meaning of a "World Heritage Site"? The United Nations has an agency which is in charge of cultural, social and educational of all countries of the world, who are members of the U.N. Thus, UNESCO stands for United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation.

It is this organisation which takes charge of and wields full authority on any place, monument or structure, if such a place, monument or structure, falls within the purview of the 38 clauses or articles of the World Heritage Convention, which came into effect in 1972.

Some illustrations of World Heritage Sites

Two of the latest "acquisitions" by UNESCO, which are labelled, "World Heritage Sites", in India, are the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus of Central Railway, Mumbai and two small towns of Gujarat, Pavaagadh and Chaanpaaner. In the case of CST, Mumbai UNESCO officials had visited the site in September, 2002. In all 26 monuments/sites in India and 788 in the whole world have been given the status of World Heritage Sites.

Is this status something to be glad or proud of, or is it something to be wary of and even apprehensive about?

In Bihar, the famous Boddhgaya temple was granted the World Heritage Site status in 2002. Immediately thereafter, the whole temple has been taken out of the control of the Boddhgaya sadhus and has come under the direct control of UNESCO. [Udvada Athornan Anjuman, are you listening?] No changes/modifications whatsoever can take place in this temple without the permission of the UNESCO Committee! All shops, big and small, outside this temple, which used to sell religious trinkets and knick-knacks have been removed!!

Once a place/monument has been declared a World Heritage Site, even the Government of the country has no authority over it, but UNESCO becomes the *de facto* owner of such a site!

Let Parsees all over the world realise this hard fact that labelling a place, World Heritage Site, means that it goes straight into the hands of foreigners of the West, who are ever keen and ready to wield complete control and authority over ancient treasures, monuments and wonders of the world. It is world hegemony at its worst: without conquering or vanquishing a nation, you become the sole controller of the place or object concerned!

Look at the gross injustice in all this. Even a smallest tack or nail that one wants to drive in the wall of a World Heritage Site monument, cannot be done without the permission of the committee appointed by UNESCO!! And yet, UNESCO does not pay a single rupee for the preservation and upkeep of the sites or monuments!! This responsibility is that of the respective governments of the countries, but control vests in UNESCO!! If any amount is required for major repairs or renovation, UNESCO just looks the other way!!

Rest assured that once a place or monument is declared a World Heritage Site, it is the beginning of the end for it. Swarms of foreign tourists descend on it like locusts. To welcome them, there has to be minimum basic amenities, like an airport nearby, a four or five star hotel, cinema theatres, restaurants, shopping complexes etc., etc.

And yet, Parsees have already gone ga-ga over UNESCO, when at Tajikistan's request, last year, UNESCO decided to celebrate the 3000th(?) anniversary of Zoroastrian Culture.

Why Is The Managing Trustee Keen On Making Udvada, a World Heritage Site?

Surely, the Managing Trustee of the "Foundation for Development of Udvada", D.K. Tamboly is well aware of these facts. But then, he is also supposed to be an "International Marketing Consultant". Does he want to market Udvada (Holy Iranshah) to the world? What benefit will accrue to him, as WZO's International Board Member and Chairman of the WZO Trust, Mumbai, India?

Chew on the fact that for years, one of the e-mail addresses of the WZO office in India, has been "Iranshah@vsnl.com"!

The Demonic Dragon

In umpteen issues, **The Parsee Voice** has strongly objected to the formation of any World Body of Zoroastrians. **We have just learnt that on the 2nd and 3rd July, 2004, the fate of the Parsee community of India has been sealed in London, when even some trustees of the BPP agreed that a World Body be formed, with only the officer bearers being Parsee Zoroastrians, for the first 10 years!** (Complete details with comments will appear in our forthcoming issues).

Now, in the context of what we have said about Udvada being made a World Heritage Site, consider this shocking scenario vis-a-vis such a World Body of "Zoroastrians":

**INTERNATIONAL ZOROASTRIAN ORGANISATION
(The Umbrella Body)**

World Body of Individuals World Body of Federations

Common Function

(Preserve Houses of Worship & Learning [Madressas, etc.] and other facilities relevant to Zoroastrianism, Zoroastrian communities and Zoroastrian Priesthood)

Represent the **religious**, social, cultural, educational, legislative and other interests of Zoroastrians in governmental and non-governmental International forums and regional forums, through the Member regions)

[In the Preamble to the WZOF (World Zoroastrian Organisation – Federations – (in the above illustration, we have simplified the exact names of the branches of the "World Body") Constitution drafted by the Working Group of the World Body a year ago, it was stated inter alia: **"Believing that the principles of faith and unity among Zoroastrians can be preserved by responding to changing times, based on the teachings of our Prophet Zoroaster..."**]

**Proposed World Heritage Site
Udvada & Paak Iranshah Under the
Control of UNESCO?**

Who will represent the World "Zoroastrians" at UNESCO? Of course, the World Body!

Wake-up calls have been repeatedly given by "The Parsee Voice" to all concerned in the last few months. This is the last alarm bell that is being sounded. If you don't apply the brakes and act now, if you think all this is far-fetched, a day may come, when all of us will have to sit on the stool of repentance and cover ourselves with ashes!!

DESECRATION OF IRANSHAH? VETERAN ERVAD JAL BIRDY OF CALIFORNIA'S COMMENTS

Dear Sir,

Ever since I read about the Indian Government providing funds to make Udvada into a tourist center some years back, I felt this was not going to be a good move for the Parsi community. Iranshah holds a special place in the hearts of Parsis; it is spiritual place for them. For tourists it will merely be a curiosity; a place where they will come to take some pictures and show them off to their friends back home.

If Government funds are being used, how are we going to stop non-Parsis from entering Iranshah? How will we stop it from becoming a commercial enterprise, with Iranshah souvenirs and trinkets being sold to all and sundry? Are we going to allow tour companies to conduct tours to Iranshah? Where is it all going to stop? Instead of spending the funds on a tourist center, we should strive to improve train and road access, encourage Parsis to return to Udvada, provide schools and economic

opportunities for the residents and make it into a vibrant Parsi town once again.

This idea of a tourist center is a recipe for desecrating our centuries-old Iranshah and will destroy the spiritual reverence Parsis hold for Iranshah. In fact I will go as far as to say it will eventually destroy the Parsi community. We are surprised that elected officials of our community are going ahead with this unwelcome plan without receiving approval from the community. The Parsee Voice is right to raise its opposition to this ludicrous proposal and we support your efforts all the way.

May Ahura Mazda grant you every success in your endeavours to preserve and protect the Parsi community.

With best wishes,

Ervad Jal N. Birdy
TMZA, California

Shaabaash Dr. Jokhi! Shree Vyara-Songadh Parsi Zarthosti Anjuman Shows the Way...!

[We have been repeatedly requesting Punchayets and Anjumans of India to speak up at the Federation meetings. At last, at the Federation Meet on 12th and 13th Shree Vyara-Songadh Parsi Zarthosti Anjuman's President and Managing Trustee, the venerable **Dr. Bahadur P. Jokhi**, not only objected to the present goings-on in the Federation, but also roundly reprimanded the Hon. Secretary, Keki Gandhi, for his irreligious outbursts, setting an object lesson for other Anjumans to follow!

In a letter to "The Parsee Voice", Dr. Jokhi states that he also read out the Anjuman's various objections, a copy of which was earlier sent to Mr. Gandhi. The objections of Shree Vyara-Songadh Parsi Zarthoshti Anjuman are given here. All emphases ours. – Editor]

Shree Vyara-Songadh Parsi Zarthosti Anjuman, Vyara

We the undersigned trustees and members of the Vyara-Songadh Parsees Zarthosti Anjuman, Vyara hereby remind you, all members of the Federation of Parsee Zarthosti Anjumans of India, the fact that the Federation meeting of 15-7-1978 had passed a resolution to the effect that 'controversial issues of the Parsee Zarthosti community, like Dakhma, conversion etc. shall not be discussed at any Federation meet in future'. In spite of this, in the last few issues of the FD News Letter, under the heading of 'Creating Awareness' the editor misguides the people that 'conversion for Parsee Zarthosti is 'legal' and tries to influence the community to enforce it enthusiastically. The editor has no right to publish this most controversial issue and that he should not misuse the FD Newsletter for expressing his personal views. We feel sorry to state that history of Federation should not be repeated as we were forced to quit the Federation in the past, somewhere around 1976.

FD News Letter is not for expressing objectionable personal views and it should not be a medium for anti-Zoroastrian propaganda. In reality FD News Letter is only for reporting the working of the Federation and the problems of the member Anjumans.

Thus this propaganda for Anti-Zoroastrian ideology and misuse of the FD news letter is highly objectionable. It is defaming our Zarthosti religion; it will destroy our religion and our community and wipe it out from the face of this earth.

After nearly a century (i.e 95 years) the judgement, which was in hibernation is dug out. And put before the public with deliberate wrong interpretation and with piece-meal parts of it. In this way, he has exhibited his gross ignorance of our religion. We do not understand why this hibernating judgement was dug out from the archives?

Some persons, who have a personal axe to grind have by their nonsense babbling have insulted and debased our prophet, Asho Spitman Zarthost. His interpretation of the judgement is totally wrong.

An executive of BPP CEO B.T. Dastur has declared that from "the very beginning, Zarthostis were converts". It is the height

of impudence. The executive has no right to express his insulting and abusive language for this august body of the Federation. He has crossed the limit of his jurisdiction. He was there as an executive, not as a member of the Federation and therefore has no right to express his personal views, and abuse the parsee community like that. This is an unauthorised act. We strongly condemn it and look down upon it with high contempt.

From the religious point of view, the lady from Delhi who has left our religion by her own action, had expressed her anti-Zarthosti view. She said, 'Manashni, Gavashni, Kunashni are the only essence of Zarthoshti religion; other customs, traditions and religious rituals are not the real essence of our faith. It means that the basic rituals of our religion i.e. Amal of "Sadro-Kashti" is to be done away with. She seems to have done that and has left the great Zarthoshti religion. She is trying to rectify her anti-Zoroastrian babbling by telling us that her father and grand father were of the Athornan clan. We may believe her but that does not mean that it gives her any right to speak against our august religion. Such babbling exhibits her grave ignorance about Zarthosti history and our great Zarthosti religion.

And last but not the least, the honorary secretary of the Federation himself has insulted and ridiculed our Parsee community by advising us to use the services of hijras. By that, implying that all Parsees are hijras! This is the height of horrible blasphemy!

We, all the undersigned, propose that all these objectionable and offensive utterances by persons ignorant about our great religion should be removed from the minutes of the last Federation meeting at Bardoli. It has hurt our feelings. It is an act of *Deen Dushmani*.

We the undersigned members of the Anjuman oppose it, strongly condemn it and look down upon it with high contempt. It has given us severe heart pangs.

We pray to Dadar Ahuramazda, that may saner counsels prevail!. Amin.

(Various Signatories)

એક દરગુજર

જગ્યાની તંગાશને લીધે આ અંકમાં અમો ગુજરાતી વિભાગ રજુ કરી શક્યા નથી, તે બદલ વાંચકોની દરગુજર ચાહિએ છીએ. - તંદ્રી

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