

THE PARSEE VOICE

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For Private Circulation

BPP, FPZAI & THE WORLD BODY THE JEKYLL & HYDE SYNDROME

Someone somewhere is obviously lying. That a plot was surreptitiously being hatched for the last one year in the corridors of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) and the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India (FPZAI) to join a World Body of "Zoroastrians", is now very evident. For the benefit of our readers, we shall cover the entire gamut of subterfuges and terminological inexactitudes perpetrated by the "powers-that-be", to hoodwink the community. Although talks to form a world body of "Zoroastrians" have been going on for years – some say even forty years, with BPP being asked to take the lead as the apex body, we shall concentrate more on the events, since the time WZO trustees, one by one, began to occupy the BPP chair. The first to do was Mr. Dadi Engineer. The next WZO trustee – the Major Domo – to join the Board in 1996, was Mr. D.K. Tamboly. That is when things started moving, but in a different directions. The World Council of Zoroastrian Federations, as mooted by Mr. Rohinton Rivetna of FEZANA, met with opposition from the WZO.

Here, we cannot help succumbing to the temptation of quoting a paragraph from an exhaustive, faithful report of the Federation meeting in Mumbai on December 14 and 15, 1996, by Arnavaz S. Mama in the *Parsiiana* of January 1997: "No sooner had Rivetna's rather philosophical address come to an end, than the WZO mounted its challenge. 'Let us know whether it was your personal initiative or of FEZANA. Be categorical', shot Dinshaw Tamboly, WZO Trust Funds managing trustee in India who was elected to the BPP board last October. When Rivetna began softly, 'It can't be one member...' Tamboly crackled, 'Voicing your own opinion, right? ... In what way was the vision not defined in the WZO?' and accused Rivetna of 'creating diversity, disunity.' "

Wrote Mama further, "It seemed to be the WZO's strategy to show up Rivetna as out of step with FEZANA and in search of a new organisation to dominate."

But all this was seven years ago! Incidentally, in the same Federation meeting in 1996, it was voted 12 to 1 to join the World Council of Zoroastrian Federations. The one Anjuman that voted against the formation of the World Council, was Ahmedabad. "The BPP trustees registered their assent at the meeting with a majority of five to two – the two being WZO trustees, Engineer and Tamboly.

Thus, bickerings and ego-clashes stalled the formation of a World "Zoroastrian" Body until...

The Turning Point: Before the crucial meeting held in Mumbai in January 2003, when members of Federations, Associations and Organisations participated, FEZANA had already formed a World Body Working Group (WG) way back in 2001! The meeting in Mumbai in January was hosted by Mr. Minoo Shroff, the Chairman of the BPP. The WG was also invited by Mr. Shroff.

In its report to the FEZANA Executive of **1st August, 2003** (Note the date!) the WG wrote: "One of the positive outcomes of the Mumbai Meeting was the WZO response to the "Sense of the Meeting" that was conveyed to WZO in February 2003 by Firdosh Mehta, Dorab Mistry and Dinshaw Tamboly. The subsequent response by President Rustam Dubash of WZO on March 18, 2003 was most heartwarming. This was followed by the Joint Communique 1 issued by elected principals (Minoo Shroff, Dorab Mistry, Keki Gandhi, Firdosh Mehta) and Rohinton Rivetna (the coordinator) in May 2003. The Joint Communique 1 and response of Rustom Dubash of WZO to the sense of the Mumbai Meeting and the Communique 1 (May 27, 2003) are foundational to the structure, constitution and by-laws for the One World Body with Two Independent Arms embodied in the attached document."

Thus, by May 2003, the "World Body" was almost in its penultimate stage of formation. Any wonder then that at the Federation meeting on 7th and 8th June, the

minutes of which were distributed recently at the Bardoli meeting, "it was resolved that FPZAI become a member of the World Council of Zoroastrian Federations and Mr. Minoo Shroff be and is hereby authorised to take all necessary steps to acquire membership of the WCZF and finalise the constitution of the International Zoroastrian Organisation." (Emphasis supplied)

JEKYLL & HYDE CHARACTER OF THE BPP TRUSTEES

Readers should take a careful note that the goose of the Parsee/Irani community of India was being slowly grilled and barbecued since January 2003. Yet, in reply to two letters written in July 2003, by some of us, (a) expressing our apprehension about the consequences of a World Body for the Parsee Zoroastrians of India, who constitute a unique, separate community, settled in India, for the express purpose of preserving our religion, and our race and culture, and (b) requesting the BPP Trustees to grant us a meeting with them, their CEO and their Dy. Chief Executive, wrote, *inter alia*, that "the formation of the World Body is yet in an embryonic stage"!!! Read the reply of the CEO and judge for yourself!

July 10, 2003

Mr. Adi Doctor & Others
803-C, Dr. B. Ambedkar Road, Dadar, Mumbai 400 014.

Dear Sirs,

Re: Proposed World Body of Zoroastrians (WB)

This has reference to your letter of 3rd July, 2003 addressed to the Trustees, referring to the discussions which took place at the recent meeting of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India held in Mumbai on 7th and 8th June 2003 regarding the formation of (WB).

*The main concern raised by you is about the "definition of Zoroastrian" as the WB will comprise of individuals with varying shades of opinion depending on the Federation/Anjuman they represent and the country in which they operate. Hence the **definition of Zoroastrian** could get diluted from what is traditionally accepted by certain sections of our community.*

Let me clarify at the outset that the formation of the World Body is yet in an embryonic stage. For the last three decades and more in all global fora of Zoroastrians, there has been a strongly expressed urge for one World Body which would be truly representative of the community and project the Zoroastrian Diaspora throughout the world in international meets and gatherings.

*For the first time some convergence did emanate at a meeting held in Mumbai in January this year attended by several leaders of major Federations in UK and USA, from various countries. It was then decided that a genuine effort should be made for forming only one **WORLD BODY** which would be a concrete step towards fostering unity among Zoroastrians worldwide.*

*Your point of view will certainly be carefully considered as and when the concept of one **WORLD BODY** takes a concrete shape. However, we must all very carefully ponder as to whether the envisaged WB would AT ALL see the light of the day unless the local Federations and Representative bodies of Zoroastrians in various parts of the GLOBE play a very pragmatic and statesmanlike role, appreciating the ground realities of strongly entrenched views on sensitive issues.*

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-

B.T. Dastur

Chief Executive

The delivery is to take place tomorrow and the BPP has the cheek to tell us that the project is in the "embryonic stage."

Till date, no meeting has been granted to us. To rub the salt in our community's wounds, the management expert and Chairman of the BPP, M.R. Shroff comes out with a detailed Press Note, as late as 9th November, 2003, wherein he says, among other things, that:

"If the WORLD BODY is formed, it is obvious that only the Federation of the Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India (FOPZAI) will become a member of the WZOF [World Zoroastrian Organisation of Federations]. The BPP will only be indirectly connected with WZOF, being the major constituent of WZOF. "It will, thus, be abundantly clear that the question of any non-Zoroastrians exercising any influence on the functioning of its members (FOPZAI in this case) or, for that matter, on BPP does not arise.

All the members of WZOF will have total autonomy within their regions and will be governed entirely by their own code and practices.

In the light of the above the apprehension of a small section of the community (sic) that non-Zoroastrians will get the vantage position which will influence the functioning of the WZOF is totally unwarranted."

What Mr. Shroff conveniently omits to mention is that, the so-called "total autonomy" of each region is only on paper, to begin with. FEZANA and WZO, even today, are teeming with what Mr. Shroff rightly calls, "non-Zoroastrians" (a Freudian slip?) whom these organisations consider to be "neo-Zoroastrians". **In fact, this is the very crux of the whole opposition to**

any World Body!: non-Zoroastrians being palmed off as legitimate "Zoroastrians"!!

Let us see, for a while, what or who will be the "Founding Member Regions" of the WZOF, from the proposed Constitution by the Working Group:

- "A. India Represented by FPZAI
- B. Europe Represented by ZTFE
- C. North America Represented by FEZANA
- D. Emerging Regions – to account for Zarathushtis living in places that are not covered by the preceding".

"MEMBERS:

- A. Regions represented by Federations or Associations.
- B. Emerging Regions – as described above."

These so-called "Emerging Regions", like Latin America, Africa, Central Asian States, etc. are those places where Mr. Shroff's "non-

Zoroastrians" live and who are made "Zoroastrians" by a totally fake, fabricated "Navjote", by some converts themselves!! The voting rights of all members of the WZOF are:

"Number of Votes.

ON WZOF/WZOI COUNCILS:

- A. One Representative can have one vote; there is no proxy vote.
- B. A Region represented by a Federation, **3 Votes**
- C. A Region represented by an Association or equivalent, **2 Votes.**
- D. Emerging Regions, **1 Vote"**

Very soon, 'C' + 'D' and even 'B' with FEZANA, etc., will swamp and stamp out FPZAI, which is already being influenced by the winds blowing from the West!

(to be continued)

A letter to the organisers of the 3rd World Zoroastrian Youth Congress

9th December 2003

To
Mr Sam S Motafram
A1/25, 26, 28 Kubera Colony
NIBM Road Pune 411 048.

Dear Mr. Motafram,

The Parsee Voice was revived with a view to addressing various issues affecting our religion, its traditions, practices and institutions and to ensure that the voice of the orthodox section of the community was heard and not muzzled.

One such area of concern is the proposed visit to Iranshah Atashbehram, Udvada, by the delegates of the 3rd World Zoroastrian Youth Congress (WZYC), on 3rd January 2004.

As you are aware, Iranshah is the holiest place of pilgrimage in this world for the Parsee/Irani Zoroastrian community. **Consecrated and enthroned as a divine entity, He has reigned as the spiritual monarch for well over a 1000 years and it is under His benevolent protection that we have survived and prospered in our adopted motherland, India.** The priests who have served Him over the centuries have had to undergo much hardships and travails to maintain and keep intact His sanctity and spiritual prowess. As a community, it is our bounden duty to support and encourage their efforts and thus keep Iranshah safe from harm, physical and spiritual.

It is towards achieving this objective that we are concerned about the 400-odd-delegates who are likely to undertake this pilgrimage. Today, it has become a fashion

all over the world for various groups of people to propagate and spread a very spurious brand of Zoroastrianism. There are Latin Americans, Africans, Russians and Tajiks who merrily 'convert' themselves and others of their ilk into Zoroastrianism. **Conversion and intermarriage are spiritually degrading and hence expressly prohibited by our scriptures.** In fact, there are strict rules laid down by the Udvada Anjuman debarring converts/progeny of intermarrieds from entering the precincts of Iranshah, with full authority to debar entry to any one transgressing these rules.

In this connection, we request you to ensure that the sanctity of Iranshah is maintained and only Parsee/Irani Zoroastrians (those who are born of both Parsee/Irani parents) are allowed to undertake this pilgrimage and these delegates are suitably educated about the dress code and decorum to be maintained before paying obeisance to Iranshah.

We also invite your urgent attention to the entry at serial no.157 of the 'Registration Status' which shows the name 'Katsuki Noriko' as a delegate. This is obviously a Japanese name and should not find a place in the WZYC. The entry at serial no.16 shows the surname of the delegate as 'Witt-Irani' which also requires to be checked out.

Yours sincerely,
(Adi F. Doctor) – Editor

- c.c.: Sarosh Palkhivala
- c.c.: Chairman, Bombay Parsi Panchayat
- c.c.: Chairman, Poona Parsi Panchayat
- c.c.: Dasturji Hormuzdiyari K. Mirza
- c.c.: Dasturji Khurshed K. Dastur

All you wanted to know about the Federation Meeting at Bardoli but didn't know where to find it

Exclusive for The Parsee Voice

By Marzban Giara

A meeting of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India was held at Bardoli on 29th and 30th November 2003.

The Federation meeting at Bardoli turned out to be an anti-climax. The organisers could sense that the large number of delegates were not in favour of issues like adoption, changing the Zoroastrian calendar, acceptance of children of Parsi mothers and non-Parsi fathers, etc. Most of the eleven questions raised in the BPP circular were given a quiet miss. The BPP trustees assured the meeting that they have no hidden agenda. To allay the apprehensions of the delegates Mr. Shroff announced that this assembly is not authorised to pass any resolution.

Out of the 69 Anjumans, 19 including Ahmedabad, Allahabad, Bardoli, Borivali, Bharuch, Chennai, Daman, Davier, Hyderabad and Secunderabad, Jhansi, Mumbai, Mhow, Nagpur, Nargol, New Delhi, Pune, Saronda, Surat, Vadodara and Vyara were represented. Residents of Bardoli, Surat, Vyara and neighbouring villages were also present at the Federation meeting. Mr. Jamshed Mohta, President of Bardoli Jarthosti Anjuman, welcomed the gathering.

Youth Affairs: - For the 3rd World Zoroastrian Youth Congress to be held at Pune this December - 400 delegates have already registered including 169 delegates from Mumbai and 101 delegates from Pune.

Gen. Adi Sethna said: "Our folk memories, our roots are in Gujarat. A Parsi event in Ahmedabad is being organized on 12th January 2004. Every major anjuman needs to have a professional who is familiar with government laws. There is a great deal of Parsi lands in Gujarat. These lands are under threat. Individual families need support of the anjumans. There are also life threats, economic threats." Mr. Burjor Antia said, "It is difficult to preserve and protect our ancestral properties. Our lands are being encroached upon by other people." The Federation may kindly consider issuing guidelines as to whom the Anjumans should approach in terms of government officials to ensure that encroachments do not take place. Also how to recover land that has been encroached upon.

Vadodara - Jal Patel said, "Umrigar Agiary status is to be elevated to that of an adarian by February 2004." They have sought the help of Ervad Aspandiar Dadachanji. [What does that mean? - Ed.]

Census Commissioner comments

Mr. J. K. Banthia, IAS, Registrar General and Census Commissioner for India made his presentation on "Parsi Demography - Past, Present and Future". He said: "Parsi community is very vigilant in matters of deaths. Why is the community not vigilant in matters of fertility? Parsis are a healthy people. Since 1951, deaths have exceeded births. We have tolerated excess of deaths to births."

"Preservation of Parsi community is a major concern for our country as a whole. Each Parsi couple who is married must have 4 children to stabilise the Parsi population. Female fertility is from 15 to 45. Male fertility is till death. Ask what is my contribution to the community? You may have the best brains, but what if there are no new Parsis born? The single great service a Parsi can render to his community is to get married and produce children. The institution of marriage and fertility are crucial. "

"In Korea and Hong Kong, fertility rates are low. As there are not enough Japanese women they import Chinese women to marry the Japanese. **But you can't import or convert people into the Parsi community.** The community has to produce more children to survive. Self-interest must be secondary to community interest. The Parsi community has to revise its fertility. The community leaders have a duty and responsibility to educate and persuade its youth." In response to an argument that Parsis do not have more children because of a high standard of living, Mr. Banthia said: " It is better to have less professionals like doctors, lawyers and instead focus on ways and means to increase the Parsi population." The Census Commissioner was thanked for heightening awareness on this issue.

Medical Centre

In the evening the Bai Maneckbai P. B. Jeejeebhoy Medical Centre, a charitable dispensary started by Bardoli Jarthosti Anjuman was inaugurated by lighting a lamp. Dr. T. E. Udvadia declared the center

open. He referred to two traits of the Parsi community. 1) Charity and 2) Living in harmony with sister communities. Starting this medical centre for all communities is in line with these traits of our community. Mr. Rusi Besania was the master of ceremonies. Dr. T. E. Udvardia, Dr. R. P. Soonawalla, Minoo Shroff, Gen. Adi Sethna, Justice Behram Sethna, Dinshaw K. Tamboly, Burjor Antia, Khojeste Mistree, Areez Khambatta, Yezdi Karanjia and members of the Press were felicitated by the Bardoli anjuman. Eminent surgeon Dr. Udvardia released a souvenir compiled by Rusi Besania containing history of Bardoli Parsis. He said, "The past will give us vitality to face the future." Mr. Minoo Shroff said, "Two qualities are required for success in public life - a thick skin and a sense of humour." Mrs Shernaz Rustom Gandhi of Allahabad was presented Excellence in Teaching Award by FPZAI.

Open Forum

At the Open Forum on the next day, Khojeste Mistree said: There is no fasli alat. Alat = apparatus (sacred ash, nirang, vares = sacred hair of the white bull); Iranshah is our spiritual King in exile. The word Shehenshahis means royalists. The Zoroastrian calendar should be divorced from just being linked to seasons. Importance needs to be given to its link with the religious life of the community." **It was decided to drop the issue of unification of the Zoroastrian calendar, after Khojeste Mistree's lucid explanation of the Fasli calendar.**

"In Religions such as Hinduism, Judaism and Zoroastrianism, ethnicity is important. Race is linked with religion. In other Religions e.g. Christianity, Islam and Buddhism race is not adhered to and anybody can be converted into the religion. Our priority should be to increase fertility. In Iran on an average, a Zoroastrian family has 4 children. Spinsters and bachelors are only 3% in Iran. In India, among Parsis, spinsters and bachelors are over 30%. The proposed World Body talks of emerging regions. It talks of Zoroastrianism without ethnicity, without reference to the Parsi /Irani race." He warned of a possible backlash that could occur from other communities if we were to accept converts.

Mr. Antia and World Body

On the issue of the FPZAI joining the proposed world body, Mr. Antia said: "There is no question of joining the World Body right now as even its constitution has not been agreed upon. There are problems yet to be resolved. **(This is in direct contradiction of item 11 page 15 of the Minutes of the meeting held on 7th/8th June 2003 where it is stated "It was resolved that FPZAI become a member of the**

World Council of Zoroastrian Federations and Mr. Minoo Shroff be and is hereby authorised to take all necessary steps to acquire membership of the WCZF and finalise the constitution of the International Zoroastrian Organisation." Such contradictory statements left the delegates confused about the FPZAI joining the world body. - M.G.)

The Parsee Voice Meeting

Messrs. Minoo Shroff and Burjor Antia vented their concern and disgust at the meeting which was held by The Parsee Voice in Mumbai on the 21st of November. They felt that the organizers were misleading the community, as the BPP trustees were responsible and had no intentions of doing anything which was against the general well-being of the community. They were visibly angry with those who were confusing various issues to suit their own agenda.¹

Mr. Khojeste Mistree said that he had a duty to inform the other members of the Federation as to why such a meeting was thought to be necessary. He said that the High Priests Dasturs JamaspAsa and Khurshed Dastur and scholars spoke at this meeting from an informed position and not one based upon ignorance. He also said that some of the Trustees should have attended that meeting to feel the pulse of the community. He declared that the community has the right to know about issues that affect its very survival, as well as the community wanted to know the BPP's position on joining the tentative world body where the nomenclature of being Parsi or Irani has been dropped totally. He advocated that a panel of experts should first have discussed all the contentious issues and only then should these issues have been brought to the Federation members for an intelligent overview to be arrived at.

Mr. Mogrelia from Chennai said that he had circulated to his entire membership the issue of accepting the children of intermarried couples and by a large majority (100 out of 110 respondents) had viewed such an acceptance, favourably. Once again, **Mr. Khojeste Mistree asked as to whether it was the right way**

¹*Both the Trustees, M R Shroff and B H Antia, have not provided a shred of evidence to support their allegations. Their own PRO was present throughout The Parsee Voice meeting on 21/11/03. Seven High Priests of India, the leading Athornans of Mumbai, four ex-Trustees of the BPP and a 700-strong knowledgeable audience of varying ages lent their support. The Resolution put forward was passed WITHOUT A SINGLE DISSENTING VOTE! It's high time somebody called the BPP's bluff! The naked fact is that, for a change, the BPP has been caught with it's pants down! This is gall and wormwood for those Trustees who have no compunctions in breaking their election promises of accountability and transparency. - Ed.*

to poll the views of the community, when those in Chennai did not know all the pros and cons about the correctness of the membership taking such a step.

Mrs. Mahrukh Chichgar said: "We keep on hearing different viewpoints which confuses the youths who do not know which road to take." She suggested making a directory of bachelors and spinsters. Zoroastrian Women's Association of Surat has bio-datas of 50 eligible Parsi boys and 8 Parsi girls. Mr. Marzban Giara mentioned that there is a website www.zoroastrianism.com which has a Zoroastrian Matrimonial Page where biodatas of eligible Parsi boys and girls are featured. It is a free service to the community that needs to be taken advantage of. Mr. Giara also informed that the B.D. Parsi General Hospital in Mumbai is running a Fertility Clinic. This needs to be widely publicized so that members of the community can avail of its expertise and guidance. Mr. Dara Hakim suggested we use the word 'growth' instead of 'survival' of the community. Mr. Minoo Shroff suggested that instead of the word survival we use the words 'Revival' and 'Rejuvenation'.

Godrej Dotivala said: "BPP intends to organize religious functions, gahambars, along with youth groups and social associations singing community songs. BPP also publishes religious books and distributes them. The next set of books will be published in three months' time."

Burjor Antia's somersault

Mr. Burjor Antia suggested: "What the community needs is a change of mindset. Community first, self later. It is our bounden duty to marry and raise children. We have survived because we have not converted. He suggested a new Adoption Law to adopt only Parsi children."

Mr. Antia further said: "The Constitution of India grants freedom of speech. Every individual has a right to express his views." He said that in the last Federation meeting held in June at Mumbai, he had only expressed his personal views that Zoroastrianism

²Looks like Trustee B H Antia has 'converted' himself. After all, he is an Ervad and a WZO Trustee too. Firstly, he attends Federation meetings as a responsible Trustee of the BPP. Where then is the scope for him to air his "personal views" at such formal meetings? Secondly, one would like to know what he means by personal views. Is he a chameleon-like politician? Come Pateti and Jamshedi Navroze, he writes reams of pages on 'Zarthostipanu' and 'Parseepanu' and pontificates on how a good Zoroastrian should live. But at Federation meetings, he perpetrates somersaults to please his colleagues! **Haathi naan daant, Burjorji bawa?** Thirdly, he contradicts himself when, at the Bardoli meeting, he says on the one hand "We have survived because we have not converted." and on the other hand talks about welcoming any one who wants to be a Zoroastrian. – Ed.

was a universal religion, that we should welcome anyone who wants to be a Zoroastrian and help those who want to set up an agiary in Tajikistan. (Mr. Antia needs to be reminded that he attends the Federation meetings not in his personal capacity as an individual, but in his capacity as a trustee of the B.P.P. A responsible trustee of the B.P.P. is not expected to air his personal views at the meetings of the Federation on matters of grave importance to the community. – M.G.)²

Khojeste Mistree questioned Mr. Antia's openness to accept Tajiks who have embraced the Zoroastrian faith. Mistree cautioned the Federation members and Mr. Antia, in particular, that mass conversion of Muslim Tajiks to Zoroastrianism, could quite easily create a backlash upon our Iranian Zoroastrian community as the Muslims would not welcome or encourage any of their co-religionists to join the Zoroastrian fold.

Khojeste Mistree also challenged Mr. Antia about the adoption issue. Mr. Antia suggested that adoption should be permitted amongst Parsi/Irani children, given for adoption and he saw nothing wrong with that. Khojeste Mistree interjected and said that if 7 Parsi children had come up for adoption in the last 10 years, what was the point of changing the adoption law when hardly any Parsi children are available for adoption. He further clarified that a Palak Puthra facility was available for childless Parsi couples and therefore they, (the couples) could enjoy all the privileges of parenthood without going through the process of adoption which was nothing else than back door conversion as Dasturji Dr. JamaspAsa had pointed out in his talk.

Letter of Dasturji Mirza was read out at the meeting stating that the issue of adoption law was shelved in 1982. "Religious ceremonies such as navjotes, marriages can be performed only for those born of Parsi parents. **We have never converted even during the days of our Empire in Iran.**"

Behram Masani suggested, "Marriage counseling for couples intending to get married, as also parents, should be counseled." He felt that opening the doors of our housing colonies to non-Parsis would tantamount to a breach of trust. He cited opinions of Mr. Eruch Desai and Mr. Bomi Zaiwalla on this subject. B.P.P. should liaise with other Trusts to optimize use of resources within the community. Mr. Dotivala mentioned that this suggestion to liaise with other trusts has already been implemented by the BPP.

Dr. Ratan Marshall praised the B.P.P. for its role as

the apex body of Parsis. He appealed to all, **“Do not take any action which will shake the foundations of the community. Do not take any hasty steps.** Dadar Ahura Mazda said to Zarathushtra, “I prefer the married man to an unmarried person, one with children than one with no children.” He quoted a non-Parsi as saying, “Parsis are afraid to marry, afraid to rear children. They look to the Punchayet to provide them a house, aid for children’s education, etc. Aid, aid ,aid is all they want.

Mr. Keki Gandhi said: “Federation has the right to recommend. It is upto the anjumans to accept or reject the recommendations. What the Trust Deed says should prevail. Do what your trust deed says.”

B.T. Dastur's dossier

The circular letter of Mr. B. T. Dastur dated 25th June 2003 was issued on the BPP letterhead and signed by him as Chief Executive. Yet surprisingly at the FPZAI meeting at Bardoli the delegates were informed that these were his personal views. Even at the meeting with High Priests and scholars held at the BPP office on 15/10/2003 they were informed that these were the personal views of Mr. B. T. Dastur and not those of the BPP trustees. (One wonders how the personal views of an employee of the BPP are communicated as official communique on the BPP letterhead as a directive to various anjumans. – M.G.). As per the Minutes of the FPZAI meeting of June 2003 “Mr. Gandhi requested Mr. Dastur to prepare a detailed note on each issue, discuss with experts and circulate the pros and cons of each issue.” One wonders why this exercise has not been done till date?

Mr. Keki Gandhi, honorary secretary of FPZAI said at the meeting of scholars and High Priests on 15th October and repeated his personal views of how ashamed he was of being a Zoroastrian if the community did not accept an open door policy of adopting even non-Parsi children into the fold. (If Mr. Gandhi is ashamed of being a Zoroastrian, he should forthwith step down from being the honorary secretary of FPZAI and allow someone who is proud of his Parsi lineage and religion. – M.G.). Mr. Gandhi also said: “ We have been listening to scholars for many years. Now we must take matters in our hands(by implication disregard them)³. This he said in response to cogent arguments put forth by Mr. Khojeste Mistree on various controversial issues raised in the open forum.

During the open forum discussions revolved mainly

³ As far as Mr Keki Gandhi's silly outburst is concerned, we fully support Mr Giara's comments. You have no right to be an Honorary Secretary of a Parsee Zoroastrian organisation. – **Ed.**

around the issue of improving the fertility within the community and gathering accurate birth data. Nagpur delegates suggested that just as the BPP registers deaths, it may also kindly consider registering births, navjotes, marriages. That would enable the community to obtain an accurate social demographic profile of the community.

Children of intermarried Zoroastrians

On the issue of intermarried spouses bringing their children into the fold, Khojeste Mistree cautioned that only 1/5 of the progeny of intermarried couples marry within the fold and therefore he could not see any advantage for the community of accepting such children in India, particularly in view of what Mr. Banthia had to say about going all out to preserve the Parsi race. Giving sanction to accepting mixed marriage children clearly would not help to preserve the Parsi/Irani race in any way whatsoever, he declared.

Dr. Ava Khullar from Delhi challenged Khojeste Mistree’s contention, by talking about the G6PD enzyme which is deficient amongst the Parsis in India. She said the other communities with similar deficiencies were the Warli tribes and Muslim men and she said, “infer what you may, from this”. She also said that rituals should play a secondary role as versus the philosophy of the Gathas and declared that she was the grand daughter of the High Priest of Nagpur. (Interestingly, Nagpur has no High Priest). **Khojeste Mistree pointed out that a new DNA study of the ‘Y’ chromosome in Parsi/Irani men will show that a genetic profile has been faithfully maintained by the Parsi/Irani men over a 1000 years** and the findings of this report will appear in a reputed scientific journal next year. He added that this study will puncture a big hole in those who believe that the Parsi identity has more or less disappeared due to assimilation through intermarriage. Khojeste Mistree through his erudition and scholarship was able to single handedly gain support for the voice of tradition and reason amongst many of the Federation members who attended this meeting.

Mr. Navroze Davar, the Vice President of the Nagpur Parsi Zartosti Anjuman made some important points. He explained that when he tried to amend the Nagpur Anjuman’s constitution on a reasonable point, his membership rejected the proposal through a secret ballot, showing that the vast majority of Parsis in Nagpur supported the tradition and orthodoxy. He also said that those that marry out do so knowingly of the consequences they have to face. Debating issues like intermarriage, he said, sends out the wrong signal

to those young people who are open and undecided on such a controversial issue. In fact **he emphasized that Zoroastrianism is a religion and not a social club. Furthermore, he did not think that topics such as intermarriage, adoption, calendar unification, and the issue of nassesalars should be discussed at Federation meetings, as he felt that such issues divide rather than unite the community.**

He strongly felt that the Federation must focus its energies on issues such as matrimonial bureaus and fertility clinics, in view of the passionate appeal which Mr. Bantia made to increase the number of Parsi births within the community. His message to the Federation was to focus on economic and cultural activities including the safeguarding of the properties of smaller Zoroastrian Anjumans. All the suggestions made by Mr. Davar were very well received by the general audience, as he spoke with authority and with the voice of reason, basically supporting all the points which Mr. Khojeste Mistree had made earlier, during the morning's deliberations.

Thereafter, Mr. B. T. Dastur said: "I believe in conversion. No one can tell me that there is no conversion in Zoroastrianism." He quoted references from Aivisruthrem Geh and other common prayers. "Adoption of all children Parsi as well as non-Parsis should be allowed in this day and age. I disagree with all that Khojeste Mistree said" (without giving any reasons.)⁴

Mr. Minoo Shroff, BPP Chairman, wound up the meeting with his observations. "Religion is the binding glue. Parents have a great role to play. Marriage counselling in time before the problem becomes acute. The idea of a Sperm Bank and Fertility Clinic was mooted. All youth meets must have on its agenda how religion plays a role, how Parsis can marry Parsis and

⁴CEO B T Dastur is a dangerous man. He just can't help shooting his mouth off, saying wrong things at the wrong time. If he, too, cannot concentrate on the task before him, he should quit forthwith. - Ed.

increase within the fold. (This is in direct contrast to Avan Khullar stating that religion is secondary and not all-important). On socio-economic and religious issues, we need to have more frequent interchange of views. Kudos to the Bardoli Jarthosti Anjuman for their hospitality and for hosting this meeting." Mr. Shroff assured the members that the BPP will not fail in its duty to safeguard the interests of the Parsi community.

Marzban Giara's Suggestions

There are four points of constructive criticism, which may help to make future meetings of the Federation more productive:

1. If an agenda has been given, it should be followed point by point. The meeting should be structured so that everyone gets a fair chance to speak and not just the vociferous few who speak out of turn or interrupt others at every Federation meeting. The discussions must be focussed on relevant issues. The chairman must conduct the meeting keeping the allotted time in mind.
2. Personal attacks need to be avoided and only issues may be discussed.
3. Federation meetings must voice the concerns of the anjumans and not the personal views of those representing them.
4. Minutes of the Federation meetings may be circulated well in advance of the next meeting so that delegates may read and come prepared rather than being handed the minutes at the meeting as is often the case. Under the leadership of Mr. Minoo Shroff who is an acknowledged management expert one hopes that future meetings of the Federation will be conducted in a professional manner.

The next meeting of the Federation will be held in June 2004 in Mumbai. Thereafter, the Federation meeting will be held in the last weekend of November or first weekend of December 2004 at Ahmedabad.

એક દરગુજર

અમો ફરીથી ગુજરાતી વાંચકોની ક્ષમા ચાહિએ છીએ, કે જગાની તંગાશને લીધે અને ભાઈ મર્ઝબાન ગ્યારાના અગત્યના વ્યારદોલીમાં મળેલી ફેડરેશનની સભાનો રીપોર્ટ વિગતવારે આપવાને લીધે, આ અંકમાં પણ અમો ગુજરાતી વિભાગ પ્રગટ કરી શક્યા નથી.

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