PROTEST MEETING AGAINST CONVERSION, FILM ON PROPHET ZARTHUSHTRA, FEDERATION AND W. Z. O.

Curset M. Patel

A Public Protest Meeting was held on the 10th June, 1983, at Jivanji Modi Hall (Cama Oriental Institute), Bombay, under the auspices of the Council of Vigilant Parsis, Dini-Avaz Committee, and Dadar Jashan Committee, when Ervad K. N. Dastoor Presided. The Hall was completely packed with 'Humdins', and the meeting was a success. ("Bombay Samachar" carried a figure of 150 persons attending the meeting which as per 'Samachar's normal practice, is absolutely false inspite of their own reporter attending the meeting. Every body knows that the capacity of the Cama Hall is three times their figure of 150).

At the outset, Mr. Cursetji Patel informed that we would have had no reaon to call this meeting, if the Bombay Parsi Panchayat Trustees, cared even a little to look into the burning problems facing the Community. More than three months have passed since the alleged 'Navjote' of an American named Peterson was performed, but up-to-now not a single word as protest has emerged from the so called 'Akabars' of the Community. Do we take it, that this question is not in the interest of the Community?

(Six days after the meeting on 16th June, 1983. Jame-Jamshed carried a paragraph from the Bombay Parsi Panchayat stating that they disapproved of such Navjotes, rather then saying outright that they condemned strongly such Navjotes, and the Priests who are involved in it). Mr. Patel further stated that the Bombay Parsi Panchayat has deemed it fit

to join the redundant Federation of Anjumans by 4:3 Votes, although the majority of the Community had strongly protested by way of various meetings, resolutions, letteres in papers etc. Our Colleague Mr. Behram Mistry has filed a suit against the Bombay Parsi Panchayat. Let us wait and see what happens.

Speaking about the film which is being made on Prophet Zarthustra, he regretted that some few are misguiding the Community by the bait of celluloid glamour, and the Community has remain placid when their own Prophet is being termed as a mere philospher or a herb doctor. Remember that Asho Zarthust Sahib was not only a Prophet, but he was the **Prophet of Prophets**, — Vakhshure Vakhshuran.

Mr. Patel then introduced the Chairman Ervad K. N. Dastoor, and the subsequent speakers before their speech.

Ervad K. N. Dastoor first referred to the supporting and encouraging messages and letters received from up country organisations and read the message sent by Vada Dasturjee Phirozee Kotwal of the Wadiaji Atashbehram. Mr. Dastoor said that this meeting's aim is two fold; first to clear your minds regarding any doubts about the various topics taken up by us, and to condemn all acts injurious and harmful to the existence of our Parsi Community. The main question which faces us to-day is there is a clear cut reference in Gatha yasna 31:11 that Dadaar Hormuzd has sent to

mankind more then one religion according to his plan (Ahunavairya) and the word Dainao found in the Gathas also bears testimony to this. To convert is to oppose the plan, desire, wish Manta of the Almighty God, who in his wisdom, places one in certain religion, according to ones stage of evolution. It is the duty of each individual to follow the tenets and live in the religion he is born. Who are we to choose? What the heterdox bring forward is the opinion of the Committee of 1904-5 of 11 Scholars, which has also stated that even force should be used, inorder to convert others! Is this possible?

Can this be done? The label of "Fanatics" is given to us, but it fits them better! The promotion of conversion, at present, is nothing but a garb to protect mixed marriages and their progenies. Those who quote Justice Davar, should know, that in his judgement he has recorded that Parsee Community is against both conversion and mixed marriages.*

Mahamahopadhyaya Faribourze Nariman said that Mr. Kersi Antia was a 'genuine phoney' like some of the replicas of great painters that hung in the art galleries, and said that the main reasons for this alleged Navjot of Peterson, and similar acts lie in

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blind-fold following by Parsees of the materialistic European civilization, increasing ignorance about the religion, failing clergy, and heterdox views of some scholars and Dasturs. We are reaping the harvest of the seeds sown by some upper rich class of Parsis who with their money power had bought over some Dasturs and even some scholars. The preservation of "Tokham", "Bunak Pasbani" was not done as our forefathers used to do, and this has resulted in the creation of the children of mixed marriages, and conversion. Dr. Paramroze Chiniwala has written in detail on this question of conversion in his book "Vatlavano Vad-Vivad, and in its preface Ervad

Phiroze Masani has aptly called this question of conversion a hydra-headed monster. Mr. Nariman spoke very strongly in no uncertain terms against the policy of the paper "Bombay Samachar" and its Editor who has the habit of terming, any Tom, Dick, or Harry, "Profound Scholar", "Progressive and Dynamic Personality", "Enlightened Soul" etc. In the end Mr. Nariman recited some couplets from Findausi's Shahnama, and supported the resolution put by the Chairman.

*The Chairman then put before the house. Resolution (No. 1).

Mr. Behram Mistry, the next speaker, first referred to the case he had lodged

against the Bombay Parsi Panchayat for joining the Federation, as per the request of many people present there. He said that he would not go into the merits or demerits of the case, but will clear only one false news given out, as usual, by "Bombay Samachar". As the honourable judge was not present, on the appointed date, Mr. Nariman the counsel of the B.P.P. requested his counsel, and it was mutually agreed that Bombay Parsi Panchayat may join the Federation without prejudice. In other words he was free to go in for injunction any time, he wanted.

Coming to his subject, Mr. Mistry showed his suprise at the dual policy of the daily "Bombay Samachar", who at a drop of a hat, is out to blame and malign orthodox, and orthodoxy, for any and every matter facing the community, but who conveniently encourages and favours mixed marriages, conversion, and many other matters in opposition to our tenets and customs of Zoroastrian Religion. The Bombay Parsi Panchayat are able to get time, and spend money running into thousands for the "Tamashas" like the recent meeting held at Patkar Hall, feliciating some sixteen individuals at B. Stadium etc., but for the last three months they haven't had any time to speak about the burning problem facing the community on account of the alleged 'Navjote'. It is learnt from a reliable source that the priests in foreign countries, who perform such alien Navjotes, are getting 500 dollars, and some so called priests are ready to fill their pockets with the same, thereby selling their religion to the highest bidder. Speaking about the film on Zarathushtra, Mr. Mistry said that this film is going to encourage and abet the false idea that there is "freedom of choice" given in the religion. This 'Choice' theme has led many a youngster astray and on the wrong path, which will

increase after this film and its "freedom of choice". In the end Mr. Mistry strongly supported the resolution moved by the Chairman.

Mr. Adi Doctor, the last speaker, inquired if the lamp posts in the street could be called "Zoroastrians" if they were invested with the Sudreh and Kushti? He then said that a "Navjyote" ceremony has certain basic requirements, which are indispensable:—

(i) According to the "Vendidad" only a shild between 7 and 15 can undergo the "Navjote" ceremony. Joseph Peterson a Christian is 27 years old! (ii) During the 'Navjote' ceremony, the child undergoes the "Nahan" ceremony when 'Nirang' is administered to the child. According to Zoroastrian tradition, even if a 'Juddin' were to cast a glance at the 'Nirang', it would become invalid. What was then administered to Peterson? Coca-cola? (Derisive laughter from the audience and comment from the Chairman of the meeting: "Perhaps, Scotch!") (iii) At the end of the 'Navjote' ceremony the TANDAROSTI of the child is recited, when the child's name is prefixed by the words, 'Behdin', 'Osta', or 'Ervad', what title did Kersey Antia use? "Behdin Joseph ra?" If Peterson desired that since he wasn't be able to make use of the Dakhma, he should have his Jeenday Rawan ceremony performed. How will Kersey Antia or his colleagues from Chicago recite his name: "Naam Chesti Jeenday Rawan Behdin Joseph Behdin Peterson?" It is heard that those connected with this farce of a Navjote may bring Peterson to Bombay, and try to take him to one of the Atash Behrams or Agiaris. Parsees Beware! Mr. Doctor further said that Peterson's alleged 'Navjot' and other such movements against the Religion are based on the wrong notion of "Freedom of Choice" theme, which is being further encouraged and

propagated by the forth coming film "Quest for Zarthushtra." The director of the film has categorically said that 'Freedom of Choice', is "the fundamental concept of the Zoroastrian Religion." Moreover the film is going to portray Prophet Zarathushtra whose status is that of a yazad, as an ordinary mortal, the role to be played by foreign actor Terrance Stamp. Terry has now performed this role.) It is also very surprising that Mr. William Humble, the script writer of this film writes that he was not knowing anything about the Zoroastrian Religion, but going through "four mind blowing" days, he understood it, Can this be possible? Mr. Doctor enquired, and said that many have spent an entire lifetime trying to acquire this vast knowledge of our Religion, which Mr. Humble claims to have done in four mind blowing days, and with the help of some literature. In this film, Prophet Zarathushtra is being projected as a thinker prophet who lived in the Bronze age.

Also there will be some dialogue in the film, casting doubt as to whether Dadaar Ahurmazda is all powerful or not! Mr. Doctor read out extracts from the interviews given by William Humble and proved to all present beyond a shadow of a doubt that if this film 'Quest for Zarthushtra' is made as it is, it will lead to the creation of half-a-dozen Petersons and the reaction on the community for caricaturing the Prophet of Prophets will be disastrous.

Mr. A. Doctor moved one resolution against the film "Quest for Zarthushtra", seconded by Mr. N. Dadrewalla, and unanimously passed by the house.

The first resolution proposed by the Chairman Mr. Dastoor and supported by Mr. B. Mistry was passed with the exception of one person.

Another Resolution opposing Pombay Parsi Panchayat joining again the Federation was moved by the Chairman, seconded by Mr. C. Patel, and was unanimously passed by the House.

RESOLUTION No. 1

This meeting of the Parsi Zoroastrians held on 10th June 1983 at Sir Mody Hall, Cama Oriental Institute, Bombay, expresses its strong indignation and resentment towards the alleged conversion by means of an alleged Navjote of one non-Parsi Zoroastrian in America.

The Parsi Community has throughout its stay in India opposed any kind of conversion. This fact has been recorded by Justice Davar in his Judgement in 11 Bom. L. R. 85. He has also stated:

"That the Parsi Community of Bombay at a public meeting held on 16th April 1905, expressed its disapproval of any conversion being allowed, and are strongly opposed to any such conversion in the present times, and resolved henceforth not to admit even the children of Parsi fathers by alien mothers."

The aforesaid Resolution has been followed by several other Resolutions from time to time wherein the Parsi Zoroastrian Community has continuously gone on expressing its disapproval towards conversion and any genetic mix-up whether through a Parsi father or a Parsi mother, by a non-Parsi spouse. Such Resolutions were passed inter alia in 1945, 1947, 1977, 1978.

This meeting reiterates and confirms all the aforesaid Resolutions.

This meeting whole heartedly supports the views recently reiterated by the three Dastoorjis in Jame Jamshed of 9-6-1983 and 10-6-1983 — that the Zoroastrian Religion does not preach conversion.

RESOLUTION No. 2

This meeting of the Parsi Zoroastrians held on 10-6-1983 at Sir Mody Hall, Cama (Continued on Page No. 12) Oriental Institute, Bombay, expresses its resentment towards the proposed film on the Prophet Zarathushtra mainly on two grounds namely (i) that the Prophet's stature of Yazata as evidenced by our holy scriptures and writings has been ignored and he is proposed to be depicted as a mere thinker or rationalist or philosopher, and (ii) that the film is to propagate the alleged doctrine of freedom of choice which carries the great danger of encouraging and even inviting conversion and mixed marriages.

RESOLUTION No. 3

This meeting of Parsi Zoroastrians, held in Bombay at the Sir Jivanji Mody Hall on Friday, 10th June, 1983, notes with deep distress, that, in spite of opposition by a majority of the Parsi Community and by three of its own Trustees, the Bombay Parsi Panchayat has rejoined the Federation of the Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India on the 29th May, 1983. However, this meeting notes with satisfaction the action taken by Mr. Behram K. Mistry, a member of the Parsi Community, in filing a suit in the High Court to restrain the Bombay Parsi Punchayat from rejoining the Federation. By this resolution, this meeting extends its full and whole-hearted support to Mr. .Mistry and wishes him every success in his efforts.

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