

THE PARSEE VOICE

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When The *Parsee Voice* Went On A Year-Long Sabbatical...

*But 2011 proved to be worse than the preceeding year -
Internecine Strife, Further Rise in
anti-traditional activities by some of our own people,
Increase in Inter-faith Unions, Prolonged,
Infructuous Litigations, Truth, Sincerity & Sobriety
sacrificed at the altar of Bulldozing,
Vilification & Vindictiveness...*

**In Short, the Community cascaded
further downhill,
sans integrity, sans principles, sans values!**

***Har che Khoda Khast, haman mee rasad.*
“What the omniscient Lord has destined,
(that) alone will meet us”**

The year began with Parsee PIOs and NRIs from USA, Canada, Europe and Australia, flying to their favourite haunt – Mumbai, on their annual winter sojourn, like so many flamingoes!

One of them, a regular, was Rohinton Rivetna, an ex-Mumbaikar, settled in the US of A for many decades, who came up once again with

his pet peeve of bringing together Zoroastrians of India and those of the West!

On the face of it, a good idea. But, a little further reflection ... He had tried it in the past, and found a few supporters. But, because of stiff opposition from the majority of our community members, had to beat a retreat. The guy simply does not understand the simple fact that

Parsee/Irani Zarthoshtis of India can never be placed on the same level as the expatriate ones.

But in January 2011, when the pow-wow took place between the yankees and some of the BPP trustees, there were a few takers for the idea of a Global Working Group (GWG), one of them being chairman Mehta of the BPP, who, surprisingly seemed to be convinced of the need for resurrecting some sort of a World Body of Zoroastrians! Coming events had begun casting their shadows...

The Ides of March : Then came the D-Day for the community. 11th of March 2011, when the debatable and disturbing judgment was delivered by a Division Bench of the Bombay High Court.

In June 2009, the Bombay Parsi Panchayet (BPP) had passed a resolution preventing two "renegade" priests from performing religious prayers at Doongerwadi. This resolution was supported by five High Priests of India in August 2009.

Neither of the two priests bothered to move any court of law. Instead, two Parsees, who claimed to be the "beneficiaries" of the BPP trust, filed an Originating Summons in the Bombay High Court, objecting to the above resolution on the ground that the trustees have no power or authority under the Trust Deed of 1884 of the BPP on religious matters, and were, therefore, not competent enough to ban the priests.

They had also submitted that every Parsi Zoroastrian has a right to choose any duly ordained Parsi priest to perform prayers, rites and ceremonies at Doongerwadi, etc.

The matter first came up before a single judge bench. The learned judge in his judgment of 5th March, 2010 averred that it was not possible for the Court to decide the issue only on an interpretation of the trust deed and, therefore, dismissed the Originating Summons. The plaintiffs then went in appeal.

Setting aside the single judge judgment, the Division Bench of JJ Dr. D.Y. Chandrachud and Anoop V. Mohta, allowed the appeal and determined *inter alia*, that, (a) under the Trust

Deed of 1884, the trustees are not entitled to prevent any duly ordained Parsi Zoroastrian priest from performing Zoroastrian religious rites and ceremonies in the premises of the Towers of Silence (Doongerwadi) and the two Agiaries (Godavara in Fort and Jokhi in Godrej Baug).

(b) The trust deed does not empower the trustees to restrain Parsi Zoroastrians in their choice of a duly ordained Parsi Zoroastrian Priest to conduct Zoroastrian religious prayers and ceremonies at the Tower of Silence...

(c) The trustees are accordingly directed to forthwith abstain from taking any action in pursuance of the purported ban or in the implementation thereof...

Thereafter, the BPP trustees went in appeal in the Supreme Court against the Bombay High Court order. The Supreme Court advised both the concerned parties to settle the issue among themselves via a mediator selected by them. But they couldn't agree on anyone. So, the Supreme Court appointed a mediator – a retired judge from Chennai. There have been meetings galore between the two sides and the mediator in Mumbai. The matter is still undecided.

But, why we felt that the Bombay High Court judgment was debatable was because of the (b) part, from where it could be interpreted that at Doongerwadi, Parsees can have a choice of their priests to perform the obsequies. We don't know if the Honourable Court was properly apprised of the scheme prevailing at the Doongerwadi for many decades, namely, that only priests who either belonged to the parish of the mourners or to the Agiary or Atash Behram where the family of the departed had their other rituals conducted through the years, could perform such obsequies. Such is the unwritten rule faithfully followed for donkey's years and even the BPP couldn't interfere with it.

Again, what happens if a High Priest or more than one High Priest writes to the Panchayet trustees not to allow xyz to perform any ceremony at Doongerwadi? Surely, the trustees will have to abide by the directive. Unfortunately, in this case, **after** the trustees passed the resolution, the High Priests complimented and supported them for their

move. But, we strongly feel that it would be chaotic for a **carte blanche** to be given to any member of the community to select his/her own priest to perform the ceremony at Doongerwadi.

In Udvada, Triumph & Turmoil: In March/April, 2011, Dastur Khurshed Dastoor and his men began painting the **gaam** red for the advent of Gujarat CM Narendra Modi on the grand occasion of Holy Iranshah's anniversary on 24th April, with rickshaws moving to and fro with FDU stickers on them (why were FDU stickers, and not Udvada Samast Anjuman's ones pasted on the autos? Didn't we tell you so, long ago?) and the Dastur and his special invitees beaming from ear to ear and giving interviews and posing for pix all round. Why not? After all, the **naath** of Gujarat was persuaded to come all the way from Gandhinagar to Udvada!

But, some weeks before that, the same **Dastur Khurshed was mainly responsible for flouting age-old religious traditions of permitting the use of a Varasia, as an alat, other than the one belonging to Holy Iranshah, for the performance of a Nirangdin ceremony in Iranshah!** So frustrated and disgusted were two veteran members of the Committee of 7 of the Udvada Athornan Anjuman and reputed boiwallas, Mobed Saheb Framroze Munchersha Bhadha and Mobed Saheb Burjor Eruchsha Mirza, that they resigned from the Committee in a huff! Never before, perhaps in the history of the 9-kutumb Sanjana sect, was an outside alat allowed to be used in a very vital pav mahal ceremony performed inside Iranshah! Dastur Khurshed is no novice at torpedoing tradition, as we have pointed out in many of our earlier issues.

We at once sympathise with and applaud the bold stand taken by the two veteran Mobeds of Holy Iranshah. These worthy priests were fully vindicated nearly 10 months later, in February 2012, when a staunchly faithful Parsee couple had the courage to cancel their **Nirangdin** ceremony, after booking it, when they learnt that a **Varasiaji** other than the

original one belonging to Iranshah, was to be used as the chief **Alaat! Touché!**

The BPP By-poll of June-July. High time we bid goodbye to such polls!:

If during the 2008 BPP trustees' elections, one sincerely felt that the democratic process for electing a BPP trustee was a dismal failure, in the 2011 by-poll, one was certain that it was a complete disaster! A complete free-for-all, no holds barred, no discipline, no courtesies! Instead, one witnessed extreme bitterness, vendetta, hitting-below-the-belt, wild, weird accusations, and, worst of all, lies galore! While it's perfectly in order for a High Priest to propose or second any candidate, it was a sight to see the Udvada High Priest, Khurshed Dastoor, ranting against the opposition candidate in Parsee baugs and colonies. To add to the noise decibels was the BPP chairman himself! Dhanush, at that time, was nowhere on the scene. Yet, strains of "**Why this Kolaveri, Kolaveri Di?**" were being heard in the atmosphere! As regards the use of money power, it is so well known, that we needn't waste further space on it. **All this, because none of the BPP trustees for almost three long years (2008 to 2011), bothered at all to introduce checks and balances. Glib talks about having a code of conduct for the elections continue to this day, but when the Chairman himself doesn't seem to be keen about doing anything in the matter...!** Look at this paragraph, published in the December 2011 issue of "the BPP Review", under the Chairman's signature: "We have also proposed a code of conduct to govern the elections as well as the conduct of the candidates to ensure that the use of money power is curbed and that there is a level playing field(?!). We intend to approach the court with the code of conduct, as well as certain amendments to the scheme. While there is no immediate urgency (because, the BPP has "proposed that no new elections be held if there are any further vacancies as long as the number of trustees does not fall below five [Who has decided that? And, for whose benefit? Can this not be challenged in a court of law? We'll wait till the next seat falls vacant], this is under active consideration (Typical bureaucratic

jargon?), and we're giving great thoughts (o, really?) to how this code of conduct should be framed to make it efficacious and effective." At the Samast Anjuman Meeting (and not the Anjuman Committee Meeting as erroneously called by the BPP), Mehta repeated the same crap!

As they say, "Promise, pause, prepare, postpone, and end by letting things alone"!!

The fault lies with the community—indolent, supine and not at all bothered about principles!

The Monk Who Did Not Sell His Ferrari, Because He Didn't Have One!:

One not-so-fine- Saturday morning in October, 2011, we were jolted out of our reverie by a pictorial report in the **Parsi Times**, the weekly launched by Kersi J. Randeria & Co. sometime in April, 2011. The blurb in the "PT" of 8th October read: "Had Vada Dasturji Khurshed Dastoor of Udvada Atash Behram not been in Mumbai enjoying a nice late drive with his family", "Parsi Times" would not have had these first snaps of yet another erupting scandal created by those in authority.

"Suddenly while driving past Doongerwadi, the Dasturji saw bright lights coming from the premises and drove in to find out more. He was stopped by a film crew! The Dasturji called up community members demanding explanations for the cacophony going on at the Doongerwadi and seeking support. The film crew which has been busy doing the night shoot at Khareghat Colony had set up what is called "BASE CAMP FOR SHOOTING" on the Doongerwadi property!!"

The crew, among other things, had placed their mobile toilets on the Doongerwadi land "and threw the garbage and leftovers from the buffet set up right there! Even the wardrobe department had unfolded and was working on the film costumes. After all, they had been given a go-ahead by the BPP!!" Although six months have passed and the V V Chopra film "Ferrari Ki Sawari" is ready to be released, and although allegations and counter-allegations were made by various writers in the "Parsi Times", some uncomfortable and even dangerous questions have either been glossed over or still remain to be answered.

Before we come to them, **The Parsee Voice** has always believed in giving even the devil his due, although there's no 'devil' in any of the **dramatis personae**, mentioned below. Both the "Parsi Times" and one of the two High Priests of Udvada, Khurshed Dastoor, deserve the community's thanks... yet, that *dal mein kuch kaala* doubt keeps nagging us. So, here are the questions:

(a) "Parsi Times" is put to sleep every Wednesday evening. This is on their own admission, and, rightly so. Otherwise it can't hit the stands or Parsee homes by Saturday morning. The whole film shooting episode took place **after 11.00 p.m.** (when even a daily newspaper is about to be put to sleep) on Friday, 7th October, 2011. **Within 6 to 7 hours**, "Parsi Times" was in our homes, with a complete double-spread, entitled, "Shootout at Khareghat Colony. P.T. Exclusive Post-Midnight News". That included pictures, interviews with Khareghat Colony residents, Dastur Khurshed's man-on-the-spot report, etc.! Amazing! Today, Ripley's "Believe it or Not" has become passé, but this feat of "PT" could have been the front runner for the Guinness Book of World Records. Why didn't the "PT" apply for an entry? That's the first question bothering us.

(b) Dastur Khurshed Dastoor's ancestors, including his late father, Dastur Kaikobad, lived in Udvada, bang opposite Holy Iranshah, which is where he should also be, preserving the heritage around the King of Kings. But, not only is he living in Mumbai's Cusrow Baug, but, from the report appearing in the "PT", he seems to be enjoying nocturnal peregrinations in the island city! Is this what we expect of a "High Priest"?

So, here he was cruising around Mumbai's Doongerwadi a little before midnight that evening, enjoying his SUV sawari, when he happened to chance on the spectacle! One more entry perhaps, for the Guinness Book of Records?

(c) Where were the BPP trustees at that time? Well, the "PT" report and Dastur Khurshed talked at length about Khojeste Mistree, being next door, but not turning up, because he was asleep, feeling under the weather. Yazdi Desai

was in Byculla. So were the two women trustees in far away Dadar. But what about Jimmy Mistry, Muncherji Cama and, above all, Chairman Mehta himself? Munchi Cama, we are told, did come to do a dekho at Doongerwadi later. Jimmy Mistry was out of station. Mehta himself was in London. He had gone there not to see the Queen, but to present a "Silver Trophy" to Prince Philip, who was the Chief Guest on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the "Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe"!

What, however, angers us, is Chairman Mehta's disdain, contempt and a lackadaisical approach regarding any legitimate criticism against him and the BPP. For instance, regarding the film shoot, this is what the BPP Review, December 2011, had to say: "Mr. Mehta briefly discussed the controversy regarding the film shooting at Khareghat Colony, as also the needless(??) controversy regarding repairs carried out at the pavilion where non-Parsis sit (sic) at Doongerwadi, through the MLA

funds of Mr. Mangal Prabhat Lodha".

But in the earlier issue of October-November, 2011, in his Chairman's Message, Mehta is at pains to give details about how he had given the permission only for parking vehicles and vanity vans on Doongerwadi land, etc. Vanity Vans of Bollywood actors at Doongerwadi? **Even if Mehta is not aware of what goes on inside actors' vanity vans, the question remains: does he, as one of the trustees, have the autocratic right to take unilateral decisions, which go completely against the very grain of the Trust Deed of 1884?**

We are amazed at the carefree manner in which the Chairman, soon after a genuine problem crops up, very coolly and casually tells the community's Rip Van Winkles, "not to worry", "everything's is amicably settled" or, "the matter is now a closed chapter"!

So, this is how the year 2011 came to and end – not with a bang, not with a whimper, but with a thud!

Desecration of a Dakhma?

If, in the name of digging up history, or under the guise of discovering the past of the Parsees, you "excavate" an old **Dakhma**, from above a mound, as was done in Sanjan about eight years ago, under the auspices of the "World Zarathushti Cultural Foundation (WZCF), founded by Homi Dhalla (who, even today keeps coming up with totally unZoroastrian ideas about experimenting with Mumbai **Dakhmas!**), and after "excavating" it, you find some 400-500-year-old full skeletons, you remove them and send the remains, thousands of kilometres away to Oxford for conducting all sorts of tests, including carbon-dating and DNA tests, wouldn't you call it sheer blasphemy and desecration of a **Dakhma**?

For many readers, this could be a revelation. But when some of our own people start digging up **Dakhmas** and pick up and send bones and skeletons for experimentation, ostensibly to find out the era in which Parsees emigrated to India from Iran, someone should cry a halt. We give a brief story of how and why it started.

Dr. Homi Dhalla of WZCF was apparently keen on a scientific investigation of the history of the Parsees. The real reason could have been different. Anyway, what follows is based on two interesting articles, one by Homi Gandhi of ZAGNY, entitled, "Sanjan Bone's Story", published in the **FEZANA Journal** of Summer 2006, and the other is the more recent lecture given by Dr. Rukshana Nanji, an archaeologist who did her

doctoral thesis from the Deccan College, Pune, published in the **Hamazor** – Issue 3 of 2009.

The Sanjan excavations were carried out between 2002 and 2004 by the WZCF, the main funding being done by the Archaeological Survey of India, the ICHR and the Dorab Tata Fund.

The skeleton, referred to above and the "large number of bones" excavated were "segmented into 10 bundles". The cost of radiodating these bones at Oxford, England, was \$600 per bundle. FEZANA donated \$1200 for the dating, and WZO gave \$2000 and two individuals from London donated \$1600. Thus, 8 bundles of bones of bodies of Parsee Zarthoshtis of yore, residing in Sanjan were sent to Oxford while two remaining bundles were kept at the Deccan College, Pune.

The skeletons were still to be ethnically identified. The bones were found in the **bhandar** or the central well of the **Dakhma**. How old were they? Roughly between 1410 and 1450 A.D. The **Dakhma** could have been constructed between 11th and 12th century A.D.

Before we raise pertinent questions and conclude, we wish to make it abundantly clear that we have nothing personal against any of the men and women including non-Parsee archaeologists from the Archaeological Survey of India. In fact, this editor's imagination was

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A Trend-Setting, Well-Balanced Judgment of the Gujarat High Court

**After almost a century, a 3-Judge Bench of the Gujarat High Court
Upholds the Community's Resolve Not to Allow Parsee Women
Marrying Aliens, Entry Into Places of Worship**

*Brazen Defiance by such Women
To Be At Once Pitied & Condemned*

Kudos to Valsad Parsi Anjuman and its Helpers
For Not Succumbing to Pressure

*All Fire Temples' Trustees, Punchayets & Anjumans
Duty Bound to Follow Court's Orders.*

*BPP, in particular, should Take The Lead and change the
present practice at Doongerwadi, forthwith*

A three-judge bench of the Gujarat High Court delivered a well-balanced and interesting judgment on March 23, 2012 in the matter of Goolrukh M. Gupta vs. Valsad Parsi Anjuman.

The two main issues before the Honorable Court were :

(a) whether the petitioner – a born Parsee woman – by virtue of contracting a civil marriage with a non-Parsee man under the Special Marriage Act 1954, ceased to be a Parsee?

(b) If the answer is in the negative, whether the Valsad Parsi Anjuman is justified in referring the petitioner her rights of being a natural Parsee?

The large bench, dismissing her petition, has given very cogent, convincing and logical reasons for the same. Two judges, Mr. Justice Jayant Patel and Mr. Justice R.M. Chhaya held, in regard to issue No.1 that "A born Parsi woman by contracting civil marriage with a non-Parsi under the Special Marriage Act would cease to

be Parsi and she would be deemed and presumed to have acquired the religious status of her husband unless declaration is made by the competent court for continuation of her status of Parsi Zoroastrian after marriage. After the declaration is made by the competent court after undertaking full-fledged finding inquiry on the aspects as to whether after marriage, she has totally abjured Hinduism, the community to which her husband belongs and she has continued to remain Parsi Zoroastrian and whether she has adopted/continued the religion of Parsi Zoroastrian to gain any benefit or whether the community, viz., Parsi Zoroastrian has treated her as a member of Parsi Zoroastrian (community) for all purposes or not".

As regards the 2nd issue, the judges, after citing various case-laws exhaustively, observed: "In view of the aforesaid observations and discussions, we find issue No.2 as such would not arise but if the action of the respondent (Valsad Parsi Anjuman) is to be tested in light of the petitioner being a natural Zoroastrian

having married to a non-Parsi and consequently, having acquired Hindu religion after marriage, in absence of any declaration of the competent civil court for her continuation to follow Parsi Zoroastrian religion and her status as that of Parsi Zoroastrian, the matter could be examined and we have found it proper to examine, but it appears that in absence of any right claimed as non-Parsi Zoroastrian, subject to the above observations, no final view is expressed about justifiability of the impugned action of the respondent!

The 3rd Judge, Mr. Akil Kureshi, gave a dissenting judgment, in that, the learned judge concluded, "My answer to question No.1, therefore, is in negative. In other words, a woman who is born Parsi Zoroastrian does not cease to be so merely by virtue of solemnising the marriage under the Act of 1954 with a man belonging to another religion.

"In the present case, admittedly respondents are trustees of Valsad Parsi Anjuman. It is not even the case of the petitioner that Valsad Parsi Anjuman Trust is a State within the meaning of Article 12 of the Constitution. The writ would be maintainable if it is found that respondents perform a public function or discharge a public duty or statutory duty.

"My answer, therefore, to question no.2 is that such questions cannot be decided in the present writ petition being purely disputed question of fact."

Finally, Mr Justice Kureshi also averred that "In the result subject to above observations, I am of the opinion that the petition is required to be dismissed".

Brazen Defiance!

After this judgment was out in public, one would have expected Neha (Goolrukh) Gupta to express her distress and sorrow at not being able to get the verdict in her favour. If journalists had asked her for an interview, she could have expressed her displeasure and told them that she would soon be appealing in the apex court.

Instead, what do you think she did? She started giving interviews left and right, blaming all and sundry, **except herself!!** Before we come to that hopelessly partisan and senseless

write-up-cum-interview in the Sunday MidDay of 1st April, 2012, we wish to reiterate that one fundamental question that both Gupta and all the other Parsee women "married" out, to answer. Do you never do some soul-searching and realise before you take the plunge, that you are wilfully flouting one of the most important teachings of our revered Prophet, namely to preserve the **Khoreh** (aura), the Fire Energy operating inside you, which is unique to you and your community, and even your Zoroastrian culture and tradition?

Don't these women understand the simple fact, that by merely signing on the dotted line before the Registrar of marriages and two witnesses, as per some mundane law, there's not the slightest whiff of marital union as per the Zoroastrian religion?

The answer is simple. These women are so hopelessly self-centered, that they don't care a damn for their religion and community. Yet the same women come up with some sort of a pseudo-love for their religion, by stating much later in life that they are still Zoroastrians, because they continue to wear the Sudreh and the Kusti! Pangs of conscience? They have lost all sense of proportion to realise the simple religious fact, that they can't perform the Kusti ceremony even once during the day before a Juddin! **In other words, all of them talk only about their fundamental rights, but conveniently forget their fundamental duties and responsibilities!!**

Coming to that hopelessly biased, partisan write-up published by Sunday MidDay, Gupta states in the beginning why she went to a court of law: "Mind you, that is only because I come from a powerful, rich family. Parsi women who marry outside need this legal sanction because the Punchayet does have the power to stop the ones who don't have political clout". This is rubbish! What political clout is she talking of? We know of Anjumans and managers/Panthakis of Agiaries, who have never bothered about clouts of any kind.

She then makes a wild accusation, which is nothing but a bizarre figment of her imagination. Religion, she feels, is used to play power games and Parsi women stand to lose the most.

Finally comes the **coup d'etat**: "Parsi women who marry outside are treated worse than cattle. But I try telling my children that there's nothing wrong with my religion. Those who abuse it are the problem".

Anyone looking at her photograph printed on the first page of the prejudiced article would have to wonder if something is wrong with his/her eyes! A well-dressed woman, with a cocky, defiant air...! "Worse than cattle"? Then, surely the bovine species should be more glamorous? All this boils down to nothing but, *Pehlan kaam bura karey, aur baad karey faryaad!!*

We sincerely congratulate the Valsad Parsi Anjuman and its helpers and supporters for standing firm against all difficulties and vicissitudes they underwent for nearly two years! Truth finally triumphed.

Vital Message For All Panchayets & Anjumans. BPP, Watch Out!: All the Panchayets, Anjumans, and trustees of Fire Temples and **Dakhmas** are now duty-bound to follow the Court order. Particularly, the Bombay Parsi Panchayet, which, since 1991, has followed a stupid practice of asking for "affidavits" from Parsee women married outside

or their survivors, that, they followed the Zoroastrian religion. It has been pointed out umpteen times by us, that the "affidavit" introduced during Dr. Golwalla's tenure as Chairman of the BPP, has no legal basis. The affidavit was intended for such women **only to vote during an election for a trustee of the BPP**. This came about only because of the Consent Order granted by Justice Sawant, way back in 1981! Ten years later, Dr. Golwalla and his colleagues conveniently converted the affidavit for electing a trustee, into a totally meaningless one for consigning the body of a Parsee woman, "married" to a non-Parsee man into an unused **Dakhma**. **Anyway, now that the Gujarat High Court has categorically ruled that these women cannot be called "Parsee Zoroastrians", the BPP should do away with this senseless affidavit.** Similarly, such women cannot be allowed to sit inside **Bunglis** where the rituals for the departed are being performed!

We are not bothered if Gupta and her supporters go to the Supreme Court. In Nature, there's still a supreme most court, called *Dast-e-Gaeb* = the Hidden Hand. *Jees haath mein aib nahin, woth tau Dast-e-Gaeb hai!*

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fired many years ago, by his mentor Dr. Jamshed M. Unvala, an internationally renowned archaeologist about the various fascinating discoveries of archaeology, which is a very valuable tool in knowing the history of a community, race or country. Archaeologists of the past, including the late Dr. Unvala, had also excavated old **Dakhmas** in and around Iran; and Dr. Nanji deserves plaudits for her doctorate on the subject of ceramics, etc. found in Sanjan.

But, in this case our strong objection is to the marriage of archaeological discoveries with advanced modern technology, which Dr. Dhalla and his team have done. **They had no business to remove the bones from the *bhandar* or the collective *Astodan* and send them all the way to Oxford for experimentation. As good Zoroastrians, the Parsees associated with the project (besides the two mentioned, there was Dr. Kurush Dalal, who was the co-director) should have left the bones in the *bhandar* or buried them nearby.**

But, you may argue, the whole purpose of the investigation into the veracity of **Kisse-i-Sanjan** written by Mobed Boman Kekobad in 1599 A.D. would have been defeated. They wanted scientific proof to show that Parsees did live in Sanjan after their emigration from Iran!

Our counter-argument is, these bones of at least 400 to 450 men and women found in the *bhandar* **belonged to our ancestors!!** Religious tradition dictates that every single atom of ours has to be accounted for, in Nature, after death. How can anyone have the right to make these bones their own property – even after 500 years – and deprive the departed souls – our ancestors – of submitting their bodies' atoms to the Celestial Custodian, Daham Yazad?

No Muslim or Christian cemetery in India or in most parts of the world, can be dug up just to study the historical period in which the bodies were interred. That's then called 'desecration of a cemetery'!

Our Conclusion may seem bizarre to some, weird to a few others and quite appropriate to the remaining. Call it a coincidence, a superstition, a jinx or voodoo. But like the books and movies describing the results of excavating the pyramids – something like the Curse of the Pharaoh, or the Mummy, etc. – we have counted at least four to five deaths (between 2002 and 2009), from among the dozen people directly or indirectly connected with the excavation of and parcelling away of bones and skeletons for so-called scientific authentication, thousands of miles away, from the Sanjan **Dakhma**. Nature is intolerant of any profanities committed on the sacred soil of a **Dakhma!!**

Federation Fracas!

We still remember the days when Keki Gandhi, the erstwhile Secretary of The Federation of the Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India (FPZAI), ruled the roost and the then President of FPZAI quietly acceded to his demands. Though Keki Gandhi has departed from the scene, the current President of FPZAI, Dinshaw Mehta, who is also the Chairman of the BPP, has ably stepped into his shoes! Arbitrariness and bullying still continue to be the preferred methods of dealing with situations! This was very evident at the recent meeting of the Executive Council and the Annual General Meeting of FPZAI held on 11 and 12 February 2012, in the Gahambar Hall, in the compound of Banaji Atashbehram, Mumbai.

The unfortunate events which marred the last BPP elections in 2011, continued to cast their dark shadows! The ruptured relations still persist. Right from the word 'go', President Mehta's attitude was very clear: *'It's my way or the highway!'*

Elections to the Executive Council

Bitter Bickerings – NOT "animated discussion", as reported in the latest 'BPP Review' – marked the opening session

The ball was set rolling by one of the members asking for clarification on the sudden inclusion of certain Anjumans as members of the Federation. This was important in view of the fact that elections were scheduled for the post of Vice-President of West Zone B, for which nominations were received for Areez Khambatta, the current incumbent and Darayes Master of Surat. It was informed by Khojeste Mistree, Hon. Secretary that these Anjumans were accepted without his knowledge and behind his back. FPZAI had been forwarded a letter dated 30 January 2012 from 'Udvada Behdin Anjuman, Sodfalia Udvada' or 'Udvada Sodfalia Behdin Anjuman' (the letterhead and the rubber stamp bearing different names), authorising two persons to represent that Anjuman at the FPZAI meeting. This was submitted by Dinshaw Mehta with handwritten instructions to the BPP staff to accept the cash as arrears towards fees for the last 33 years

upto 2012. (*One wonders what brought about this sudden change of heart and inclination to be members after 33 years??*). All this was done without the knowledge of Mistree. On becoming aware of this, Trustee Yazdi Desai asked Mehta how fees could be accepted from an Anjuman which was never a member of FPZAI without following the prescribed procedure. Mehta's response was that Udvada had a permanent seat on the Executive Council and could, therefore, come in at any time without following due procedure. Desai explained to Mehta that the permanent seat on the Executive Council could be available to Udvada, only if it was a member of FPZAI and it was common knowledge that Udvada was not a member, because of FPZAI's patrilineal clause. But Mehta was adamant and brushed aside all reasoning. So Mistree wrote to the two High Priests of Udvada inquiring whether the above Anjuman represented Udvada gam. He had also clarified to them that by virtue of them coming on the Udvada 'permanent seat', FPZAI would perforce have to deal with them as representing Udvada gam.

High Priests of Udvada clarify

Dasturji Dr. Peshotan Mirza had categorically responded that all issues pertaining to Udvada were taken care of by Udvada Athornan Anjuman and Udvada Samast Anjuman. Udvada Samast Anjuman had not given any authority to any individual to represent Udvada in FPZAI. The other High Priest of Udvada, Khurshed Dastur had also replied that Udvada Samast Anjuman/Udvada Athornan Anjuman were not members of the FPZAI nor were they presently interested in becoming members. **It is obvious from these responses that the so-called Sodfalia Anjuman has no *locus standi* as far as Udvada matters are concerned and did not qualify for the permanent seat in the Executive Council.** But that was a 'triviality' President Mehta could not be bothered with! Each vote was useful to oust Areez Khambatta, and Mehta was not going to let this opportunity go by, rules and regulations be damned! In fact, it was informed by an attendee that *falia* in Gujarati meant 'a street'. Sodfalia is a street in

Udvada. If Udvada Sodfalia Behdin Anjuman was allowed to become a member of the Federation, it would throw open a pandora's box and any and every colony or baug or association in Mumbai would lay claim to become a member of FPZAI. Moreover, any one tomorrow might make a computer-printed letterhead and claim to be representing an anjuman. He questioned whether the FPZAI constitution permitted more than one anjuman in the same town/village or city to represent it in the Federation?

Mistree also brought forth the matter of 5 other Anjumans of Gujarat viz. Shri Surat Parsi Anjuman Punchayat (which is different from the main Surat Parsi Punchayet Board), Bhagwa, Bhatha, Bhesan and Karanj. These Anjumans were managed by the family of Mrs. Roshan Mody, who was very aged and her daughter Mrs. Pervin Sohail Jariwalla (nee Mody) who was married to a Muslim. This had led to the FPZAI officials, under instructions of President Mehta himself, asking detailed questions about the functioning of these Anjumans. Rather than respond, these Anjumans had preferred to resign from FPZAI in August 2009, stating that they were not interested in continuing as members of the FPZAI and had requested FPZAI to return their cheques towards yearly subscription. In September 2009, FPZAI had returned their cheques, recording that it was doing so as the said 5 parties were no longer interested in membership of the FPZAI. Accordingly, the names of these 5 Anjumans were cancelled from the Register of Members of FPZAI.

However, **two days** before the current FPZAI meeting, these Anjumans had sought to pay their membership fees from 2009 to 2011 and, under instruction of Mehta, the BPP staff had accepted the fees!! This clearly violated Rule 3 of the Rules and Regulations of the FPZAI, which require a joinee Anjuman to apply for membership in the prescribed form, which would then be placed before the Executive Council when it met, for approval or rejection by simple majority. None of these procedures was followed, but Mehta had unilaterally decided to include them as members. He insisted that since there was no formal decision of the Executive

Council to remove these Anjumans, they still continued to be members.

Mehta went to the extent of accusing Mistree of hounding out these Anjumans, though Mistree clearly mentioned that all correspondence was done with Mehta's full knowledge and under his instructions. Mehta's arbitrariness did not go down well with member Anjumans who were not willing to take this lying down.

Earlier, during the day, those present were given a copy of a Legal Notice issued by Areez Khambatta to Mehta highlighting all the above irregularities, which, if allowed to continue, would vitiate the proceedings and the elections.

Many members stressed that it was improper to receive fees at the last minute and that proper procedure had not been followed. Dadiba Dalal, President of Madras Anjuman, expressed surprise and said that it didn't seem at all right that fees of 33 years had been accepted in cash a few days before the meeting! Tannaz Parakh repeatedly asked the Chairman "**not to throw the rule book out of the window**". Mehta claimed that he was exercising his ruling under Rule 10. He even asked the delegates to get out if they were not happy with his ruling that these six anjumans were members and continued to be members even though the record, as explained by Mistree, suggested otherwise. Several delegates protested that he could not behave like a dictator and questioned what authority he had to ask the Anjuman representatives to get out!

Realising that his arguments for inclusion for the above Anjumans were not passing muster with many delegates, Mehta tried deflecting their attention by repeatedly asking for a vote first, on the issue of not allowing those who were not trustees of anjumans to be allowed as Office Bearers of the Federation. This was a clear attempt to 'disqualify' Areez Khambatta and muzzle legitimate concerns by vociferous opponents.

The attitude of 'my ship my orders' completely vitiated the atmosphere, and rules of natural justice and fair play were shown the door! It was left to Hon. Treasurer Yazdi Desai to tactfully handle the situation and bring some order to

the meeting. There was a lot of acrimony, arguments and counter arguments, with Chairman Mehta frequently raising the bogey of WAPIZ trying to grab control, and his opponents voicing their protests against his rulings under Rule 10 of the FPZAI rules. Hats off to Areez Khambatta for maintaining a stoic silence all through the proceedings, thereby depriving his opponents of the much sought after opportunity to find fault with him.

The afternoon session started with the announcement that both sides had reached a compromise and that Darayes Master would be Vice-President for the first year and Areez Khambatta would hold that position from the second year onwards.

Parsee Identity – A presentation

In the afternoon session, guest speaker – Mr. Sarosh Maneckshaw of USA made a presentation on the Loss of Parsee Identity and the sad state of affairs in the USA. **He highlighted that Parsees had a unique identity viz. religion, ethnicity and culture and traditions. Even after our first migration and arrival in India, the Parsees had remained a non-proselytising community with strong emphasis on ritual purity.** Though there were different calendars, there was no change in religion or ethnicity. **Religion remained unchanged and there were no inter-faith ‘marriages’.**

His presentation brought to light the unfortunate fact that Parsees who had emigrated to North America had abandoned their rituals and traditions and many had forsaken the Sudreh-Kushti. He also highlighted the role being played by FEZANA by promoting neo-Zoroastrians and encouraging known *deen dushmans* like Ali Jafarey. He lamented that the Parsee identity will disappear in North America in two generations. There were three groups – the Parsees from India, Zarthoshtis from Iran and neo-Zarthoshtis or persons professing the Zoroastrian faith. FEZANA was moving towards a Zoroastrian identity and away from the Parsee identity. We are losing our *Parseepanu*, he lamented. His verdict rang out long and clear that **the Parsee identity in North America was ‘LOST’.**

Global Working Group

The next day witnessed some more acrimony on the issue of elections to the various other posts, between the two factions. Once more, a compromise was worked out and the meeting continued with the various Anjumans giving details of their activities and problems. With the entry of Jimmy Mistry, the President finally set the ball rolling for the much awaited discussion on the proposed Global Working Group (GWG). Mehta mentioned at the outset that there was a lot of misunderstanding on this issue and that the High Priests had also addressed a letter to the BPP trustees in this regard, cautioning them against forming/joining the GWG. Despite the High Priests’ letter, Chairman Mehta advocated joining the GWG, arguing that one shouldn’t throw out the baby (Parsees abroad) with the bath water (Ali Jafarey and his neo-Zoroastrian group)! The Chairman’s argument in favour of the GWG was not accepted by the House.

Jimmy Mistry explained that the attempt was to have a dialogue and a meeting on a common platform for exchange of views and interactions between representatives of FPZAI, FEZANA, ZTFE, Iran and other associations. He informed that WZO had been kept out of GWG. He also mentioned that there would be no formal body or structure, formed.

Tannaz Parakh was quick to point out that as per reports she had read in the Parsee Press, there was a structure already in place where all the four Founder Regions would have one vote, which fact was not disclosed at the FPZAI meeting by those who advocated joining GWG! “The BPP says that it is the apex body of Parsees the world over. If that is so, is it not compromising its position by agreeing to this?” she questioned. Moreover, the GWG was staking its claim to be the Global Voice of the community. Which community is it purporting to represent – Parsee or the all-inclusive Zoroastrian community?

Anahita Desai argued that FEZANA represents Zoroastrians and does not even use the word “Parsee”. GWG would, therefore, represent all the Zoroastrians of the world including converts. This was unacceptable. She also emphasised that in order to safeguard the Parsee

community, it was imperative for any new organisation formed to define who was considered a 'Parsee'.

A week before the FPZAI Meet, Areez Khambatta, Vice-President of the Federation West Zone B, had sent out a letter to all member Anjumans, explaining the dangers of the GWG. He had also sent out the High Priests' letter on this matter to all the members.

Jimmy Mistry explained that this coming together was only for social, cultural and economic issues and not religious issues. Another delegate, Hushang Vakil pointed out that GWG was 'Old wine in a new bottle' and explained the details of the earlier proposed Cosmopolitan World Body. Khojeste Mistree too cautioned that the previous experience with the Cosmopolitan World Body showed that there was a hidden agenda of further weakening the Parsee identity. In North America, conversion rate was high for political reasons. Non-Zoroastrians wanted to become Zoroastrians. He suggested that: 'Do networking but do not agree to form a structure.'

Pervin Jehangir of Ilav, Farokh Govadia of Nargol, Pervez Mandviwalla of Mandvi Mangrole, Bakhtawar Karbhari and a host of other representatives were vociferously critical of the GWG and spoke up against forming such a body.

Ms. Parakh specifically sought the views of the other trustees on GWG. Muncherji Cama mentioned that he was not comfortable with the idea. He said, "Talk but in no way should it be understood that FPZAI accepts Zoroastrians who are not Parsis." In response to a delegate's argument that the GWG could help to teach Parseepanu to the North Americans, who had lost their Parsee identity, **one of the younger delegates, Zarvan Patvi, was quick to point out that it was necessary to first teach Parseepanu to the Parsees of India than to teach Parseepanu to those in other parts of the world. It was first necessary to remove the religious ignorance prevailing here.** This fervour in a youngster drew loud applause.

A counter view was also expressed that Parsees in India should not be isolated from those

elsewhere and there was no need to fear loss of our identity which we were capable of protecting. To that, it was pointed out that it was this very isolation which had saved the community from extinction during the 1300 years of its history in India and helped it to prosper and grow. If the Parsees abroad wanted to liaise with those in India, they would have to do so keeping in mind our rules of Parsee exclusion and separate identity; we should not be expected to dilute our Parseepanu!

The mandate given by the delegates to the FPZAI officials was that while unofficial talks were acceptable, there would be no formation of any body or creation of any official GWG structure or GWG programs/activities, without approval of FPZAI members.

The various Anjumans then highlighted the different issues faced by them and their activities. BPP trustee, Armaity Tirandaz brought out the need for a space in Mumbai to house the Centre for taking care of children with special needs, which would help many parents. Trustee Arnavaz Mistry gave an account of the matrimonial bureau which provided a platform to the Parsee youth to meet and find eligible partners. She lamented that the girls far outnumbered the boys.

What we have to say!

Chairman Mehta must realise that, processes and procedures are put in place precisely to prevent people from being arbitrary. The attempts to enrol erstwhile Anjumans into the FPZAI, in spite of it being clear as daylight that they were not members, just to ensure Khambatta's ouster from Vice-Presidency of FPZAI, smacks of highhandedness and lack of respect for the rule book. And this was repeatedly pointed out by various delegates. His alliance with WAPIZ, which helped to propel him into Chairmanship, has obviously outlived its usefulness to him, which is evident from the fact that he does not hesitate to blame WAPIZ for anything and everything, most of which is too farfetched for even a person with a questionable IQ to believe!

GWG

If the whole idea behind GWG is to network for

the social, cultural and economic welfare of the Zoroastrian community, it becomes all the more essential to define what comprises 'our community'. Dinshaw Mehta, Jimmy Mistry and the other proponents of the GWG must realise that they cannot sweep this all-important aspect under the carpet! Does 'community' for GWG purposes include only Parsee/Irani Zarthoshtis as defined in India? FEZANA and other organisations abroad do not include only Parsee/Irani Zarthoshtis! **So who are we going to network with and for whose benefit? As has been repeatedly pointed out, the various associations which comprise FEZANA have accepted a Zarthoshti as 'one professing the Zoroastrian faith'. How can these people be accepted as Parsee Zarthoshtis? Does it then make sense to discuss anything with them? On the contrary, we run the distinct risk of giving them a say in our matters when they have no such right!**

An attempt to do this in the past almost succeeded thanks to unenlightened leadership. Had it not been for the vigilance of some Parsees, the consequent formation of WAPIZ

and the relentless campaign carried out by this journal, we Parsees would by now have been playing second fiddle to rank non-Parsees, and on the verge of losing our distinct identity.

Further, we fail to understand why FPZAI is being dragged into this "networking" business. If at all any social or economic issues arise, it is the BPP which has the wherewithal to address and deal with them. Do the convenors of GWG really expect us to believe that the various Anjumans of India will have a role to play in this initiative, a majority of which are barely able to hang on to their own properties and meagre resources? **Whose benefit is this whole exercise for? Definitely not for the Parsees of India!**

Would it not be better to expend the same time, energy and resources for betterment of the Parsees of India? If at all any networking is to be done, let it be amongst those who are born and brought up as Parsees, whether abroad or in India. We Parsees in India do not need the GWG. If those abroad need it, let them first accept ground realities of who a Parsee really is, as we in India understand it!

Report compiled by Our Roving Reporter

IDAWALLA AGIARY - REPREHENSIBLE STATE OF ITS ENVIRONS

The Idawalla Agiary, situated at Dhobi Talao in the lane behind Anjuman Atashbehram, is in a sad state of neglect.

The Agiary has three entrances. The main entrance and passage way have become a garbage dump for the two buildings flanking it! Some of the sewage pipes in these buildings are damaged and the contents regularly spill into the passage, resulting in gross defilement of the Agiary! In spite of concerned devotees like Tanaz Kerawalla and Cyrus Irani getting the garbage cleaned, it simply piles up again. There is also encroachment on the property due to wrongful construction of adjoining structures. It is pathetic to see the local residents exhibit a complete lack of respect for the resident Padshahsaheb.

Further, the water from the Agiary well is being pumped by a water tanker contractor. His employees have set up base on the Agiary property and use the Agiary toilet and washroom facilities at another entrance, which is completely unacceptable, and also

depriving the devotees of the much needed privacy for doing their Kushti ritual. The main hall on the ground floor of the Agiary and the mobeds quarters have been renovated by some devotees out of their own funds, but the first floor has a lot of disused furniture and requires to be cleaned up.

We are informed that a new trustee, Silloo Billimoria has been appointed and she is taking interest in putting things right, with help from Anahita Desai, CEO of WAPIZ. She has got the BMC to clean up the main passage way once again. But steps require to be taken to prevent fresh dumping.

One cannot even imagine the untold anguish being suffered by the holy Padshahsaheb in these unclean surroundings. The trustees must wake up to the grave nature of their responsibility and the spiritual consequences of dereliction of the same. We urge right-thinking Parsees, wanting to offer help in any form, to contact Ms Tanaz Kerawalla of R N Kerawalla & Co. or Ms Desai, for a coordinated effort.

From Our Mail Box

Redevelopment or Destruction of Heritage?

A financial journal with wide publication had some time ago reported, that 'since there is shortage of land in the island city of Mumbai, redevelopment is the only available option, and this project must be started first with redevelopment of Parsee residential baugs'. This is indeed a bad omen and a sign of a coming storm, as it is no secret, that such news items are published at the behest of politicians and their builder partners, whose evil eyes are now being cast on community properties of the Parsees, including the lands of our sacred Agiaries and well known baugs, which are used for social and religious functions, as well as the Holy Doongerwadi estate, situated in the most expensive and prime area of Mumbai.

The Zoroastrian community must remain vigilant against any attempt to destroy its heritage coming from within the community. It is a disturbing fact, that there could be a builders' lobby inside the Bombay Parsi Panchayet. While the Community is sure that these gentlemen are honourable people, and while there can be no objections to those Trustees making property business their career in life, it would indeed be a tragedy which will harm the Zoroastrian community and its heritage beyond repair, if these gentlemen preside over the assets of the Parsee community and plan its destruction from within, under the guise of 'Redevelopment' or otherwise.

Our ancestors often lived a simple life, and willingly gave away their hard earned earnings and the properties, acquired by dint of their personal hard labour and sacrifices, for the less fortunate brethren in the community, for housing, social and religious benefits.

It must be acknowledged that these properties were not donated to create an exclusive hunting ground for the later generation of Parsees, to exploit these charities for personal

gains, under the guise of redevelopment, reconstruction or under whatever name called, including the propagation of a 'Robin Hood' theory of exploiting our religious and charitable properties in the city, for benefit of the rich and then using the proceeds to build houses for the poor in the distant suburbs or outside the city limits.

A theory is also put forward that high rise buildings, built on community lands will be for Zoroastrians only. This is fallacious reasoning, because in the present political scenario, no law can protect forever, such a 'Parsee only covenant' and change of law in future, by a political wave or by a court of law, cannot be ruled out at all, and such a reason put forward for liquidating our assets, are devoid of any merits and is nothing but throwing dust in the eyes of the community. This can be seen from the example of a forty storeyed tower, put up at Petit Sanatorium at Kemp's Corner, where the original assurance, that the building will be for Parsee Zoroastrians only, was later thrown to the winds by the builder, who then put up an alibi that there are no Parsee purchasers available, at the price demanded by them. They then merrily approached the authorities to sell the flats to non-parsees and finally succeeded in doing so, at the cost of the Parsee Charity.

This doctrine as falsely propagated, is nothing but what is known in law, as a fraud on the public trust and a clear sabotage of the charitable intentions of the donors. By this method, the community is being hoodwinked into believing the Robin Hood theory of selling to the rich to pay for the poor.

It is well known, as to what is the fate of our religious properties, when the builders or their nominees become trustees of our Charitable and Religious Institutions, and then conspire to destroy the same from within, in pursuant of their wrongful plans to convert our charitable

heritage, meant for our Parsee community, into a cosmopolitan building or project and earn a runaway profit for themselves.

Navroze Baug is already under the hammer, with Parsee tenants being given a bait of ownership flats, in the new towers, gratuitous or otherwise, which is nothing but an invitation to sell the flat later to all and sundry, thus making profit for all, at the cost of liquidation of the philanthropic heritage of our ancestors.

The Parsee Community must be vigilant of

any plans of the builders, trustees and their nominees to rope in the construction division of the prestigious industrial houses like Tata Housing and Godrej Properties, to back up their not very pious plans and it is earnestly prayed that these well known industrial groups, also known for their philanthropy, would stay away, and will not be a party/ collaborator, to some of our builder trustees, in their misguided plans to destroy the Parsee Heritage from within.

Rayomand Zaiwala

All about A Varasiaji

This fascinating creature which has evoked extreme comments – from a *Deen Dastur* (the late Ervad Phiroz S. Masani called him a ‘Dumb Dastur’) to an albino bull – has two etymological derivants: one is the commonly believed one, that the name **Varasia** comes from the Avesta, *veresa*, meaning hair – the hair taken from the pure white, uncastrated bull’s tail for higher Pav Mahal rituals. The other, however, is not at all known to most Parsees. This plausible definition was given by the late Jehangir S. Chiniwalla, who, among other things, was a renowned astrologer. According to him, the word ‘Varasia’, the King of *Gospands*, comes from the Sanskrit “*Vrishabh*”, (the second Zodiacal sign) meaning Taurus, the bull. He has written that our ancestors in Sanjan, who were well-versed in Sanskrit, made use of Sanskrit words for technical terms relating to the Zoroastrian religion. Thus, the Sanskrit *Vrishabh* became the Gujarati *Varasia*.

In Avesta, the word for him is *Ukhshana*, used in the Vendidad. Therein the consecrated bull’s urine, which, after the **Nirangdin** ceremony, becomes an **Alaat**, is called *Gavmaezah* *Gavadatayao* or **Gavmaez** consecrated according to Laws of the White Side of Nature

A Varasia is the rarest of the rare species of animals. One cannot find him readily available in any market. Apart from him being pure white, including the hair of his tail, he is born under

very special circumstances in Nature.

First of all, he is born under special planetary influences – Jupiter and Neptune. A cow whose first offspring is a female calf, and the latter in turn, also first gives birth to a female calf, whose first offspring again, is a female calf, then, the latter’s first offspring is a male calf, who is pure white, who, then can go on to become a **Varasia**. Thus, it is the third female calf that delivers the **Varasia**.

The white uncastrated calf, after being brought to an Agiary or an Atash Behram, has to be checked and examined from time to time for a certain period of time. Only thereafter, when it is found that there’s not a single black hair on him that he is taken for consecration. This consecration ceremony is quite an elaborate one.

But apart from the pure white hair and the bull being uncastrated, there are many other unique characteristics that a **Varasia** should have. Some of the important ones are that, because of the strong influence of Jupiter, he is under the direct gaze of Ohrmazd. His thoughts are always for the betterment of the entire creation for the progress of the universe towards final renovation or **Frashogard**.

Such a **Varasia**, who is in continuous direct contact with the White Forces of Nature, the Divine Beings like Bahman Ahmeshaspand, has to be buried after death and his Varas or hair,

used in the Pav Mahal ceremonies, becomes invalid.

All this clearly and amply demonstrates that if the **Varasia** who has rightly been called one of the most sacred **Alaats**, develops any blemish or deformity, or is injured in any way after consecration, and consequently has to be hospitalised, **his fresh Nirang or urine cannot be taken for use in an ongoing Pav Mahal ceremony!** We may grudgingly concede that in the awful times in which we live, when a pure white, uncastrated bull is extremely difficult to come by, if a **Varasia** has to be hospitalised for any ailment, is completely cured of the disease and returned to the Agiary or Atash Behram, he should undergo complete purification, before his urine can again be used for the inner liturgical ceremonies.

Unfortunately, recently in Surat, these simple common-sense rules have been given the complete go-by. A Nirangdin ceremony was to be performed. Five days before the **Varasia** was to be brought to the Fire Temple for the collection of his urine, he injured himself badly, in that, one of his horns came off, there was a gash and blood oozed out. Naturally, he was rushed to a hospital. This incident was narrated to us by some of the Mumbai Parsees, who were there on the spot, as they had gone to Surat for repairs/renovation etc. to the Atash Behram building.

The vet, who examined the **Varasia** opined that he will have to be operated upon. Drugs were administered to ease his pain. This happened on Saturday, 10th March, 2012. A controversy soon arose about the **Varasia's** validity for the Nirangdin ceremony on the 15th March. While the mobeds and their head were determined to take his urine at the Atash Behram on the 14th March, for consecration, other well-meaning and confident Parsee students of our religion insisted he has to be disqualified for the purpose. A Mumbai High Priest strangely averred that the ceremony could continue. The doctors were reportedly averse to taking him out of the hospital. Finally, the poor **Varasia**,

bandaged and all, was allegedly brought to the Fire Temple around 11.00 p.m., given a quick sponge bath and his urine taken. He was returned to the hospital before dawn!!

What irks us most is the casual, lackadaisical manner in which the Surat Athornan Mandal has written a mail to a Mumbai gentleman. Among other things, it stated that the information that created the controversy was false, that it was an "unnecessary storm... in a tiny tea cup" and that, "all recent allegations regarding **Varasia** made are false, frivolous and discriminating (sic)."

This has prompted us to ask the following questions:

(1) One of the most important **Alaats** or consecrated implements, the **Varasia**, was taken to a hospital and treated by different vets. Shouldn't this by itself be a disqualifying factor for his fresh urine to be used for the Nirang Din ceremony while undergoing treatment at a hospital?

(2) One of his horns had come off. There was a bleeding wound, which was bandaged. In other words, there was a huge deformity. Are we to judge a **Varasia** for blemish or deformity only **before** considering him for the Fire Temple or even after he is consecrated?

(3) Finally, it should be remembered that the **Varasia** was to be used for his fresh **Nirang** in the **Nirangdin** ceremony, which was already on its way. What kind of a final consecrated **Nirang** will you get after the entire ceremony is over, **Nirang** which will be used for making young Athornans, **Navar** and **Martab**, for the **Nahn** administered during Navjote and Wedding rituals, or even for any priest undergoing the **Bareshnum** or nine-nights ablution? Will it not be a cocktail of the urine plus antibiotics and pain-killers administered to the unfortunate **Varasiaji**?

How then can these and similar legitimate questions raised on the internet, be dubbed as 'storm in a tiny tea-cup' or as "false and frivolous allegations"?