

THE HISTORICAL PARSEE MEETING OF 16TH JULY, 1933

Deplorable Attempt To Belittle It Today.

By ADI DOCTOR.

To what extent some people can stoop to vindicate their point of view, when they find that such a viewpoint goes a-begging, was illustrated recently, when at least two Bombay Parsees, Mrs. Meher Master-Moos and Mr. Jal Vakil while trying to run down the Samast Anjuman Meeting of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat held on the 28th August, 1981, in protest against the Adoption of Children Bill, 1980, in their infinite wisdom (!) thought it fit to fling mud at the Samast Anjuman Meeting held on the 16th July, 1933!! Their contention, briefly, was that three legal experts of those days had opined that because the Chairman of the said meeting had disallowed any amendment to the resolutions passed at the meeting, the meeting was null and void and the resolutions passed at the meeting were not in any way binding on the community. All this they had to rake up, simply because at the latest Samast Anjuman Meeting, thanks to the intransigence of one of them, the Chairman did not allow any one to speak on the resolutions. That the circumstances and conditions prevailing at both these meetings were dissimilar did not weigh with them at all!

Anyway, our purpose is to show our readers how even self-proffessed orthodox Parsees, at times, act so

stupidly that they unwittingly, jeopardise, the very Cause for which they are supposed to fight! So, let's find out what the 1933 meeting was about, what were the resolutions passed and who were the stalwarts, who proposed and seconded them.

It all began with a requisition signed by 4323 Parsees to the Bombay Parsi Panchayat, requesting it to call a Samast Anjuman Meeting in connection with Parsee girls marryiug Juddins. The meeting was called on the 16th July, 1933 and it was attended by three Trustees of the Panchayat—Mr. Mancherji P. Khareghat (I. C. S.), was in the chair, Sir Cowasjee Jehangir and Sir Shapurji Bilimoria. When the Chairman concluded his opening remarks, he added that, "No amendment will be permitted to the resolutions to be passed in today's meeting, which were announced earlier."

The first resolution was proposed by Dastur Rustomji Edulji Sanjana and seconded by Ervad Phiroze S. Masani (Solicitor) and Mr. Vicaji A. Taraporevala;—"This Samast Parsee Anjumn Meeting hereby declares that those ignorant, thoughtless girls of the Parsee community, who have ignored the great Zoroastrian Religion, the Parsee community and Parsee Society who have deeply

hurt the general feelings of the Parsee community, by marrying men of other communities; have aroused strong feelings of anger and disgust in all sections of the community; and just as the (Samast Anjuman) Meeting of 1905 had acted in regard to Parsee men marrying alien women, (this Meeting) demonstrates its utter disgust at the myopic women who have cast a blight on the community and Religion and at all those who have directly and indirectly encouraged them. . . .” This was the main resolution.

The 2nd resolution was proposed by Mr. Dinshaw J. Irani (Solicitor) and seconded by Ervad Kaikhushru M. Kutar and Ervad Rustom D. Dastur. It stated, inter alia, that, “this meeting requests

parents and guardians that they should keep a check on their children/wards, girls. . . for the sake of the purity of the Parsee Society and for the Sake of the Parsee name and reputation. . . . Again, they should have a reasonable control over the mixing of our women with non- Parsee men. . . .”

The 3rd resolution was proposed by Mr. Fredoon K. Dadachanji (Solicitor) and seconded by Dastur Dinshahji J. Garda (the Head Priest of the Kadimis of Bombay) and Mr. Khodabux E. Punegar. It said, among other things, “Since Juddin marriages severely damage the Parsee community and Religion, such marriages with aliens should in all circumstances be stopped and prevented altogether. . . . In this

connection, attention is invited to the resolution passed at the Samast Parsee Anjuman Meeting of the 2nd February, 1919."

The 4th resolution was proposed by **Mr. Eruchshah R. Hirjeebehedin (Editor: Kaiser-e Hind)** and seconded by **Mr. Mancherji E. Joshi** and **Mr. Pestonji P. Kapadia**. This resolution dealt with the manner in which the 1919 resolutions were to be implemented. For this purpose a Committee was to be appointed to submit a Report to the Parsi Panchayat. 61 persons were appointed on the Committee.

The 5th resolution was moved by **Mr. Jehangirji S. Chiniwalla (Advocate)** and seconded by **Mr. Pestonji D. Marker**. It resolved that a copy of each of the resolutions be sent to upcountry Parsee Anjumans.

The 6th and final resolution, which was a vote of thanks, was proposed by **Dr. Mehllashah E. Pavri** and seconded by **Capt. Sohrab R Bamji**.

A few days after the Meeting, one Ervad Jamaspji M. Billimoria, asked for the opinion of three leading legal experts of those days, Sir Jamshed Kanga, the Advocate General of Bombay, Mr. Bhulabhai Desai and Mr. F. Coltman, as to whether the resolutions of the above Samast Anjuman Meeting were in order, since the Chairman of the Meeting had not allowed any amendments to be moved. All the three opined that these resolutions were not legally binding on the community.

Again, the Trustees of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat themselves asked for the opinion of the Advocate General, who said that while the resolutions may be of social and moral importance, they had no legal validity.

On the 7th July, 1937, that is after four years, the Committee of 61, which had become the Committee of 53, as 8 members had resigned, submitted its detailed report to the Bombay Parsi Panchayat, on what steps the community should take to prevent Parsee girls from marrying outside the community, and if they did, what steps should be taken against them. Incidentally, the **Jt. Hon. Secretaries** of this Committee were, **Mr. Pestonji P. Kapadia**, **Mr. Jehangirji S. Chiniwala** and **Mr. Rustom A. Gagrat**. What beats us is that Mr. Rustom Gagrat (Solicitor) had in his prime of youth, about 50 years ago, acted as the Jt. Hon. Sec. of a Committee, which, among other things, had recommended to the Bombay Parsi Panchayat that a constitution for the Parsee community should be prepared; that **Parsee girls, who have married non-Parsee men do not belong either to the Parsee Society or the Zoroastrian Religion; and that any such girl, who, later repents and wants to come back to the fold, should in no circumstances, be permitted to practise the Zoroastrian faith or be a member of the Parsee community.** Today, the same Mr. Gagrat, highly advanced in age, not only sings a totally different tune, but makes his firm initiate a suit against the Bombay Parsi Panchayat, in February 1981, to allow Parsee girls married to non-Parsees, to register themselves as Parsee

voters for the election of the Anjuman Committee ! **O tempora ! O moves !**

Coming back to the 1933 meeting, our readers will have seen by now how extremely vital and important the 16th July, 1933 was for the very preservation of the Parsee community. The true champions of the orthodox comprised, (1) Mr. Mancherji P. Khareghat-I. C. S., a Judge of the Bombay High Court, about whom Mr. Rustom A. Gagrath himself said, even as late as the 4th October, 1981, in "The Bombay Samachar", "the man who from morning till night drudged for the suffering down-trodden masses of our community after his retirement (or resignation) from his high post of a Judge", and above all, a Trustee of the Bombay Parsee Panchayat from 1911 (after the new scheme for the election of the Trustees came into force) onwards -- probably the longest stint enjoyed by any trustee so far! He had passed through the chiarioscuro of various Samast Anjuman Meetings and he knew, therefore, how to conduct such meetings better than any other Trustee of the BPP and obviously better than the abovementioned present-day Bombay duo, who gleefully brandish the opinions of three legal men against the Meeting of 1933, just to suit their whims ! **Did the two critics not realise that any amendment big or small as far as the main resolutions at the 1933 Meeting were concerned, would have vitiated and negated the very purpose and cause of that historic Meeting ?** Or did the Bombay duo rush to the press in 1981 without even bothering to find out what the meeting was all about ?

(2) Then again, besides Justice Khareghat, there were at least **three solicitors and one advocate** who, moved or seconded the resolutions ! There was also a 4th solicitor (Mr. Gagrath) on the special committee appointed by the 16th July, 1933. **All of them obviously endorsed the Chairman of the Meeting that no amendment would be allowed. Were they not legal luminaries in their own right ?** Or does our duo believe that it alone is the repository of all legal knowledge ?

(3) Then there were top-ranking scholars of our religion on the dais in that historic meeting, viz, Mr. Khareghat himself, **Dastur Sanjana, Ervad Phiroze Masani, Mr. Dinshaw Irani, Ervad Kutar, Ervad Dastur, Mr. Dadachanji, Dastur Garda, Khodabux Punegar** and of course, **Mr. Jehangirji Chiniwalla.**

It's time our latter-day detractors realise that by an unwarranted, unjustified criticism of the 1933 meeting, they cause incalculable harm to such 'old Samast Anjuman Meetings where amendment of any kind would have defeated the very purpose for which these meetings were summoned ! We want our readers and through them the majority of the orthodox Parsees to realise that they should be wary of every speaker or writer who professes to be a genuine, orthodox **Deen-daar** Zarthoshti. Many a times, with some such speakers or writers, self-interest and self-conceit rule the roost and the **CAUSE** is thrown overboard !

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