

NO SUGAR, IT WAS A RING!

If this cryptic title baffles you, let's explain. Mrs. Roda Mistry, the erstwhile "cheeroot smoking Minister" of Andhra Pradesh, and now a member of the Rajya Sabha, wrote a letter to the Prime Minister in early 1981, on the Adoption of Children Bill, 1980, in which among other things, it was stated that, "Madam, it pains us to think that whilst we call ourselves secular and have always maintained the position of being an integral part of this great country and some of these same people believed that Parsees merged and became one with India like sugar when it is added to milk which cannot be separated nor cause any harm but would only sweeten the milk, wish now to show themselves as a separate section depriving the right to the community to adopt if they wish to do so as an Indian citizen."

In trying to bolster up her viewpoint Mrs. Mistry has obviously erred. But she is not the only one. Many Parsees in the past have made the same mistake regarding the analogy of sugar - and - milk in our 1200 - year - old tradition. Quite often it is those who believe, like Mrs. Mistry, that Parsees merged with India! Have they? The dictionary meaning of "merge" is "to lose character and identity in..." Have the Parsees lost their separate identity, their individual entity as a distinct community of India! But if people like Mrs. Mistry had their way, "merger" of the Parsees with the other Indian communities, would have been a *fait accompli* by now!

Where has Mrs. Mistry erred? In confusing sugar for a ring. And thereby hangs a historical tale, which should be remembered by all Parsees.

Rad Dastur Dastur Nairiyosangh Dhaval, who, when he landed in Sanjan from Diu, with his retinue of eight Magavs (including a lady-Magav) and many other pious Iranian men and women had a long talk with the ruler of Sanjan, Jadi Rana, most of which is preserved in the one and only Kisse-i-Sanjan. During the conversation, the Raja felt that he should test the veracity of the statements made by the Iranians. He, therefore, consulted his Pundits, who suggested

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that a bowl filled right upto the top with milk be sent to the new visitors. When the leader of the Iranians, who was himself an Ashavan of a very high order, saw this, he immediately removed the gold ring in his finger and very gently dropped it in the bowl. When the messenger returned to the ruler and his Pandits, the latter exclaimed in admiration: "Verily, these are great, good people who have come from the shores of Iran..." They then explained to the King that, "By dropping the gold ring in this bowl full of milk, our worthy visitors suggest that just as the gold ring has settled in the corner of the milk--bowl and yet shines in all its resplendent grandeur from that corner without spilling a drop of milk,

the Iranian Zarthoshtis will live with us in peace and harmony with the myriad of other communities in India, as they have verbally promised, they will live as a separate distinct race, which by its lustre will always illumine the path of truth, honesty and piety."

If, nearly 1200 years ago, they had thought of adding a spoonful of sugar in that milk, it would have been dissolved almost instantly and even people like Mrs. Mistry wouldn't have had a ghost of a chance to make any representation on behalf of the Parsee community!

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