

# "THE ALIEN INFLUENCE"

• By NOSHIR HOMI DADRAWALA

"Further, from and after this day, no woman shall venture to go to "Mama Devi" Bhooleshwar, "Mahalaxmi", "Walkeshwar" or to any other place where there are Hindoo Pagodas; nor attend at the rites of the Holee for the purpose of throwing coconuts into the fire. Nor allow any of her infants to go in company with other individuals (to such places of Hindoo worship) for the purpose of making or performing any vows or ceremonies. In like manner no woman shall venture to go or cause her infant or other individuals to be sent on her behalf, to any of the places of the Mahomedan worship such as "Mama Hajanee" the "Durghas" at Mahim and "Bavabismilla" or any other of their sanits' places nor to their Taboot processions for the purpose of making or performing any vows or ceremonies. Nor shall any one in

her house, or elsewhere perform and celebrate the (Hindoo and Mahomedan) rites of "Chuhtee", "Randel" or "Huzrut" under any circumstances; nor offer, make or perform any kind of vows or ceremonies appertaining to the religion of the Hindoos and Mahomedans."

The above is an extract from a "BUNDOBUST", passed at an Anjuman meeting, called by the "Adhikaris" (leaders) of the Parsee Community in the year 1819.

In those days "BUNDOBUSTS" were the rules or the laws, framed and passed by community members, periodically at the various "Anjuman" meetings. These rules were both Mandatory and prohibitory and breaches of any of these rules, by any member of the community, rich or poor, would subsequently lead to

that rebellious individual's Ex-communication, or other such humiliating punishment.

Ofcourse, now times have changed and today the Trustees of the Panchayet are merely the custodians of certain funds and properties. However, as far as the practice of worshipping the various "Davis", "Babas" and "Peers" is concerned; Parsees on the whole have remained unchanged. It is not an uncommon sight to see an average Parsee today adorned with the various charmed and so called magical rings, beads and amulets, provided by the "Babas" and "Peers". The Parsees have begun to feel that the "Sudreh-Kushti" is inadequate, (if not ineffective) and hence for the purpose of additional protection they much adorn and arm themselves with the various beads, lockets, rings and strings.

Indeed, it has become a sorry state of affairs. Parsees have made it compulsory and obligatory to flock to a certain Baba's Shrine on Thursdays, a certain church on Wednesday and a particular "Devi's Mandir" on Fridays. As if this was insufficient some have even begun observing fasts on Tuesdays and Fridays, with a view towards appeasing a certain Devi or a Baba (as the case may be).

All these practices amongst the Parsees are indicative of the fact, that communal health is failing. It has become their conviction that boons (if any) can be granted only by a certain "Devi", and that too only if one maintains a fast, for sixteen Friday at a stretch. They have been convinced to the hilt that none but a certain "Baba" can cure them of the various diseases afflicting mankind. A few are of belief that unless and until they pledge their allegiance to a certain "Holy mother", (no sarcasm) they can never be blessed with wealth or children.

This then is the Religious stand of the Parsee community today. How and Why it has come to this state is a long story. However, **TOTAL IGNORANCE** of the very religion

they belong to, is perhaps the root cause. So many Parsees today feel that the Zoroastrian religion is nothing beyond the mandate of Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds (and to add insult to injury even this mandate is sparingly observed).

Most Parsees have never been told, that the "Sudreh-Kushti" is the best weapon that they, as Mazdayasni Zoroastrians possess, against fighting all the forces of evil. The Prophet Zarathushtra had never recommended the use of amulets or magical rings, for the purpose of defending one's self from the evil influences of stars, planets, spirits and magicians.

Most Parsees are not even aware of the fact that Fasting and other such tormentations have been deplored by the Zoroastrian religion let alone recognize them.

Most Parsees have never been explained the efficacy of the "Avesta Manthras." How many Parsees today are aware that a solemn, faithful and proper recital of the "Ardibehest Yasht" can cure various illnesses and even protect the devotee and his family members against all forces of evil? How many Parsees are aware that a solemn, faithful, and proper recital of the "Behram Yasht" can help the individual overcome various difficulties and problems?

Now let us attempt to analyse why a Parsee should refrain from worshipping the various "Davis," "Babas" and "Peers" Perhaps the following Buddhist story will illustrate this point better :

One fine morning the illustrious Gautam Buddha was confronted by a villager. "I am a great believer in God" he said "Please let me have your views about it". In reply the Buddha calmly denied the very existence of God. The villager went away, pondering deeply over the illustrious one's statement. Buddha's faithful disciple ANAND, who always accompanied the enlightened one, smiled inwardly.

By afternoon the Buddha was confronted by another villager. "I do not believe in God" he said. "Kindly give me your views". The Buddha promptly replied to him and in no uncertain terms explained that there exists nothing in this world but God. The villager walked away, pondering over the statement. However, by now the disciple, Anand was very much disturbed. He however maintained a dignified silence.

By evening the Buddha was approached by yet another villager. "I am an agnostic" he said. "I neither believe nor disbelieve in God, have you anything to say about it?"

The Buddha remained silent. The villager went away, but ANAND was greatly disturbed. He blurted out "Master, you have shaken all my peace, all my convictions, all my attitudes. I am at a loss! What do you mean by all these absurd and contradictory answers?"

To this the Buddha replied calmly (attention Parsees) "NONE OF THEM WERE GIVEN TO YOU. WHY HAVE YOU TAKEN THEM TO HEART? EACH OF THESE ANSWERS WERE GIVEN TO DIFFERENT PERSONS. WHEN ASKED, WHY DID YOU HEAR THEM?"

This than has been the difficulty with the Parsees all along. Like Anand they have made it a habit to hear and put into practice all that, which has never been meant for them.

The Vedic religion permits a Hindu to observe fasts and throw coconuts into the fire, but a Parsee should know, that the Zoroastrian religion has prohibited such customs. A Hindu may be permitted by his religion to worship stone idols, but a Parsee should know that Zoroastrianism prohibits him from worshipping

idols. It is indeed unfortunate that the Parsees are themselves digging their own grave.

Agreed that all religions ultimately lead to the same God. But, what is blissfully forgotten is the fact, that each individual must keep to his own source and faithfully follow the "Golden mean Path" of his own religion only. What is good for a Hindu may not necessarily be good for a Christian and what is good for a Muslim may not necessarily be good for a Soul born in the Parsee fold. Each has to struggle along his own path, although the ultimate goal is common to all.

It has been rightly explained in an ancient sanskrit hymn that "As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O, Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to thee."

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