



the institute for social and economic research

THE PARSEE COMMUNITY  
IN SOUTH AFRICA

T. Naidoo

occasional paper number 22 august 1987

University of Durban-Westville

**The Parsee Community of South Africa**

T Naidoo

Occasional Paper No. 22

August 1987

Institute for Social and Economic Research  
University of Durban-Westville  
Private Bag X54001  
DURBAN  
4000

ISBN 0 949947 95 4

## CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Acknowledgements	ii
Foreword	iii
Preface	v
Introduction: Preludes in History	1
PART ONE: ZOROASTRIANISM	7
PART TWO: PARSEES IN SOUTH AFRICA	12
i) History	12
ii) Demographic Trends	16
iii) Religious Affiliation and Practice	20
iv) Views and Attitudes	26
v) Distinguished Service	45
PART THREE: CONCLUSION	50
BIBLIOGRAPHY	55

## FOREWORD

Dr Thillay Naidoo of the Department of Science of Religion at the University of Durban-Westville gives in this study a valuable insight into the Parsee community in South Africa, followers of the age-old Zoroastrian religion which had a remarkable influence on the ancient world. This important religion of the Persians has influenced many other religions and civilizations outside the flourishing Persian empire. When Islam entered Persia - this name was changed to Iran in this century - Zoroastrianism became the religion of a minority. A number of followers emigrated to India where they formed a prominent and respected community of Parsees, especially in Bombay.

The author describes this background history of the Parsees and their history since their entry into South Africa during the later part of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. One gets an insight into the difficulties they faced, for example, the race classification issue, the problem of young Parsees who may not marry anyone outside the Zoroastrian circle and who were not allowed to bring in Parsee brides from elsewhere as a result of the Immigration Regulation Amendment Act. This Act prohibited the entry after 1953 of "Asiatic" women, born outside the Union, who had married South African "Asiatics" overseas. This unkind, insensitive, racialistic act has done much harm to this respected community.

Dr Naidoo gives a clear picture of the theoretical and practical application of the Zoroastrian religion by the Parsees in this country, as well as of their social and political life and their contribution to the development of South Africa. Although small in number, Parsees have excelled here as medical practitioners, lawyers, insurance agents, land and estate agents, shippers, forwarding and clearing agents, traders, bookkeepers and so on. Unfortunately, their numbers have dwindled but one hopes that when South Africa becomes more human and balanced in matters of race, these numbers will increase.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer wishes to acknowledge the help of Mr R.J. Davidson who read through the manuscript and suggested several changes. The help of my colleagues at the Institute for Social and Economic Research Professor John Butler-Adam and Mrs WM Venter is also acknowledged as is the work of Mrs Selvie Moodley, the typist. Lastly, my thanks to my friend Professor G.C. Oosthuizen whose constant encouragement is always deeply appreciated.

They are a valuable asset to a country which has not been kind to them, a highly sophisticated people who, as far as race issues and residence are concerned - have had to live with the laws of the jungle, some of which, in commerce, were in operation before 1948.

The undersigned expresses to Dr Naidoo the gratitude and appreciation of those interested in more and clearer knowledge of the many interesting facets of the people of this country. More could be said about the Parsee community, but perhaps this should be done later by one of its members. This, however, does not detract from the fact that the work serves an important purpose in filling a vacuum which should have been filled long ago.

**PROFESSOR GC OOSTHUIZEN**

**Director, Research Unit for the Study of Religion sponsored by the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa under the University of Zululand.**

**PREFACE**

South Africa's Parsee community of less than one hundred people lives under the threat of total assimilation and subsequent disappearance of all identifiable religio-cultural traits and interests. Although Parsees have been associated with Western India for several hundred years, their distinct cultural identity often distinguishes their considerable potential for independent growth and development and sets them apart from the mainstream of Indian society, to the extent that their social and economic standing feature very prominently in Indian national life.

The Parsee community in South Africa is an integral part of South Africa's Indian, and more particularly Gujerati-Hindu, community, but it is also a distinct segment, despite the use of Gujerati as a home and group language by most Parsees.

This study investigates the cultural life of the Parsee community in South Africa, particularly in relation to its adherence to the Zoroastrian faith and the consequent repercussions on its social, economic and political life. Under the gradually increasing pressures of integration with the Hindu community, Parsee cohesiveness is now showing signs of wear, and it is feared that Parsee life in South Africa will not survive the onset of national integration. The task in this study is to identify the possible direction Parsee life in South Africa will take in the years ahead in its social, and more particularly cultural, development.

## INTRODUCTION

### PRELUDES IN HISTORY

The ancient land of Persia has been officially known by its present name, Iran, since 1935, but the two names, one from Pars, homeland of the ancient ruling dynasties, and one from Aryan, are used synonymously in many references. The geographic unit that forms this ancient land comprises a plateau extending from the mountains of what was once Babylon, the present Iraq, in the west to the plains of the Punjab in India in the east. It is also bounded by the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean in the south and by the Caucasus Mountains, the Caspian Sea and the southern Turkmen Province of the Soviet Union in the north. The exacting climate of the region has never been conducive to a happy life for its inhabitants and together with the harshness of the infertile soil and the hostile terrain has made the lot of the nomadic peasants an extremely trying one.

The history of Persia dates back thousands of years to the time when the old Persepolis or Parsa was the ancient capital of the Achaemenian Empire. The greatest of their kings were Cyrus II, who ruled from 559 to 529 B.C., and Darius I (522 to 486 B.C.), who unified, consolidated and added to the conquests of his predecessors. It was as an administrator, however, that he made his greatest contribution to Persian history. Several authorities confirm that the religious beliefs of King Darius, as depicted in his inscriptions, reflect the strong influence on him of the teachings of Zarathustra (Zoroaster) and the subsequent introduction of Zoroastrianism as the state religion of Persia. Persian history is, however, dominated by changes of one kind or another, the most important being that from pre-Islamic conquests to Islamic times as a result of the Arab conquests of the seventh century A.D. Every facet of life in Iran is thus dominated by the impact of Islam, a situation which has remained to the present day.



The Achaemenids gave Iran her first great empire and set the pattern of development for state and government for later dynasties and epochs. Throughout history the Persians have looked back with pride to the golden age of the Achaemenids much as the Greeks today revere the Athens of Pericles and, on a much reduced scale, the French honour Napoleon (Frye, 1960: 31). The pre-Islamic religion of Iran still claims 10 000 to 15 000 adherents in the Yazd and Kirman provinces and, of course, in Teheran.

The Zoroastrian people as such have never had smooth relations with the Arab Muslims of the past. Since the advent of Islam on Persian soil, the overwhelming influence of the new faith has been one of total transformation to Islamic life and, above all, Islamic ideals. However, after the ascent to the throne of Reza Shah Pahlevi, Persians became closely aware of the fundamentals of Persian thought and culture and came to regard themselves as representatives of Iran's ancient heritage, with specific concessions to Islam. However, changes in Persian political life in 1980 introduced new notions to Islamic radicalism, with the beginning of a new and independent non-Arab fundamentalism. The nation now chooses to resort to social changes that radically alter previous conceptions, with Islamic ideals now more firmly entrenched than ever before.

Darius was regarded as one of the greatest architects of the Achaemenid Empire, because of his involvement in the construction of the great city of Persepolis, which still fills visitors to the ancient ruins of Iran with awe and inspiration. Stone carvings and inscriptions found in archaeological excavations provide ample evidence of the reign of Darius, references to his victories in many battles providing evidence of his attempts to preserve the culture of Persia and his belief in Ahura Mazda.

Zarathustra is said to have flourished at the time of Cyrus in the eastern part of the Achaemenid Empire. The term Achaemenid is derived,

like Sassanian, from an eponymous ancestor. Few scholars agree, however, on the actual dates of his life. While the rulers of the Achaemenid dynasty were generally considered successful, this was only true so long as the Darius lineage was sustained. Darius was followed by Xerxes, whose inability to put down a revolt within the Empire considerably weakened it prior to its conquest by Alexander, the genius from Macedonia whose aim it was to conquer the world for the spread of Hellenic culture.

This paved the way for the coming of the Parthians from their homeland in the north. Ancient Persia saw with their coming a composite structure of Hellenism, the old Iranian culture and Zoroastrianism. The later Parthians helped to entrench Zoroastrianism as an organised state religion, later to be perfected by the Sassanians. The latter's attempts to re-establish the empire of pre-Hellenic times marked the advent of a new spirit of nationalism. This replaced the old feudal system with a strong centralised state and a strong state religion, the most important innovation of the Sassanian dynasty which also allowed for the introduction of a Pope, known as the Mobed. The Empire was divided into ecclesiastical districts with a regular priestly hierarchy, a system devised during the reign of Shapur.

Under Sassanian rulers the Zoroastrian religion influenced the lives of many ordinary people. The cult of fire worship, with which Zoroastrianism is so strongly associated, was seen to grow, while the influence of the Mobed also increased. His ascent to the Persian throne was always initiated by the ceremony of a regnal fire, the symbol of the Emperor's divine sanction. The three great fires of Zoroastrian culture were dedicated to the priests, warriors and farmers, while many lesser fires were kept burning in temples or special edifices designed for this purpose and which formed a feature of town and village design in all parts of the land.

During the reign of Shapur, who came to the throne in 260 A.D., the Persian Empire declined until Khurau Anushirvan restored some glory to

it by numerous reform measures. The Achaemenid dynasty appeared set for reassertion, but Persian fortunes in war were never infallible. The days of Sassanian Iran were numbered by the birth in Mecca in 570 A.D. of one whose life and message were to alter, if not totally submerge, the culture of ancient Persia and replace it with a foreign culture of diverse significance.

Of the numerous invasions that Iran endured throughout her early history, that by the Arabs proved to be the most far reaching. Whatever may have been the reason for this, Arab armies proved by their enthusiasm and zeal their penchant for conquest. Their military strength added to the religious degeneration of the Zoroastrian Persians at the time of their loss of national pride. This introduced a state of cultural and social decay that could only be revived by the influence of a new and dynamic religious fervour. The Sassanian armies had to concede defeat in a series of battles they had no hope of winning against the mighty conquerors, endowed as they were with the gifts of missionary zeal and military strength. This gave Islam a power edge over Zoroastrianism, which was never a proselytizing faith. The exclusivity of Persian society and culture, and above all the decadent times in which Islamic armies made their inroad, tilted the scales in favour of massive conversion to the new message of the Koran.

It did not take long for Islam to become the dominant religion of Iran, despite its having to face numerous religious and political revolts. But the largely inept religious affiliation of the local Zoroastrians left them to the mercy of eventual assimilation, despite their desire to preserve a distinct cultural identity that was wholly Persian and free of Arab influence. The choice was clear. Those who sustained their will to win were forced to flee. Eastwards they went to India, which offered them a safe refuge, a haven in fact, and still bears them in her bosom to this day as her very own.

The last of the Sassanian rulers had ascended the throne in 632 A.D. when the might of the Arab forces attacked Iran with impunity. In brief

skirmishes on the eastern frontier, the Arab strength proved too much and the Iranians lost their Zoroastrian faith to a foreign power and above all to a foreign faith.

The first settlement of Zoroastrians in India was established on the west coast, possibly at Kathiawad. But even here there was no real refuge from Islamic persecution. The rulers of Katch and Kathiawad gave them hospitality, but had themselves to prepare in the following years for a persecutive invasion which saw India wither under the might of Islamic power. Islam came in the late thirteenth century, when Gujerat was invaded under the auspices of the Delhi Sultanate. The Zoroastrians, now firmly established in the land they had come to regard as their very own, fought side by side with the Hindus, but were driven south. Many Parsees settled in the region of Bombay, which was destined to become the great emporium of western India and the gateway to the subcontinent from the west.

Until fairly recently, most of the world's Parsees lived in the metropolitan areas of Ahmedabad and Bombay in western India. They remember with some bitterness the humiliation of defeat and conquest of Persia, firstly by Alexander of Macedonia and later, and more especially, by the Muslim Arabs of Arabia in the seventh century. Their flight from the overpowering force of aggression by the conquerors of their ancient land helped them circumvent subjection to the cultural life patterns of the foreign faith. The exact circumstances of their migration are probably more diverse and complex than traditional narratives explain, but their arrival on the west coast of India is recognised as the greatest event in the saga of survival of the Zoroastrian people, their culture and, above all, the religion of their great prophet.

Parsees established themselves in villages and towns in the province of Gujerat and adopted Gujerati as their home language. Known for their enterprising qualities in every walk of life, they flourished, especially in trade and industry, to the extent that India's record of



achievement in those fields acknowledges its indebtedness to Parsee foresight, hard work and commercial acumen. Though still wielding considerable influence, the Parsees in India are to-day a totally urban minority facing a situation of attrition due to emigration and a negative growth rate that threatens their existence as an identifiable cultural minority.

Emigration has taken Parsees to centres of commercial opportunity throughout the English-speaking world. More Parsees now live in England, Canada and the United States than in India and smaller numbers hold strong forts of commercial enterprise in Hong Kong, Singapore, France, Burma and East Africa. South African Parsees have never numbered more than two hundred and their continued existence as a community is now a matter of extreme speculation. The Parsee community of Iran maintains its faith in a Zoroastrian life style, despite the serious problems that arise from its relationship with an overwhelmingly dominant and often aggressive culture. The relaxation of persecutions and greater freedom of worship during the reign of the Shah enabled the Persians to participate in the urban development of the country and many have consolidated their position as Parsees in Metropolitan Teheran. However, Iran's shift to an Islamic republic in 1979 introduced further uncertainties for Zoroastrian identities which reduced the status of the Parsees to that of a tolerated minority with growing uncertainty concerning their future in a sea of Islamic aggressiveness. Present predictions indicate a wish for alignment with Zoroastrian communities worldwide, but wider political and economic pressures at present overshadow cultural considerations.

## PART ONE

### ZOROASTRIANISM

The religion of the Parsees is Zoroastrianism, named after Zoroaster, the Greek form of the prophet of the faith, Zarathushtra Spitama. Although the date of Zoroaster is in dispute, tradition has it that he lived for seventy-seven years, and most experts date him at 628-551 B.C. It is generally agreed that the sphere of influence in which his message was proclaimed was ancient Chorasnia, an area probably comprising what is now Persian Khorasan, Western Afghanistan and the Turkmen Republic of the U.S.S.R. (Zaehner, 1961: 86). The glory of ancient Persian life is widely acknowledged, as is all that Zoroaster's teachings have endowed to it. These teachings are recorded in scriptures known as the Zend Avesta which include the Gathas, certain hymnic passages ascribed to Zoroaster himself. To Persians, God is Ahura Mazda, an Avestan term meaning "Wise Lord" and later shortened in Pahlevi, the language of Persia, to Ohrmazd. He is described as the Supreme Lord of Creation, one and only one. Zoroastrian tradition, however, acknowledges the existence of divine attributes manifested as the Amesha Spentas or Holy Immortals such as Good Mind, Order, Dominion, Devotion, Wholeness, Immortality and the Holy Spirit.

#### Zoroastrian Teachings

The prophet Zoroaster preached as his central doctrine the Oneness of God, the immortality of the soul, life after death and the moral law of total Purity. The final reward for a good and well-lived life is Paradise, derived from the Avestan concept of Pairidaeza and often referred to as "Garonmana", the House of Song. The path to the attainment of Paradise is the path of Purity (Ashoi), or deep sincerity in everything people do. The Zend Avesta is a collection of prayers repeated by the Holy Prophet and represents the supreme example of the gift of righteousness, the Good Mind and the key to perfection for mankind.

The presence of divine attributes or good entities and spirits presupposes the presence too of evil spirits that order the content of good and evil that characterise life on earth. It is imperative for the faithful to choose correctly between the opposing powers, not only that they may achieve the reward of righteousness beyond death, but that good may always triumph in the world. Upon death, the soul has to cross Chinvat, the Bridge of the Separator, which makes passage for righteous persons easy, while those who have lived a life of wickedness are made to cross it as it shrinks to knife-edge width, and thus fall to the abyss of torment below. The presence of an evil spirit named Angra Mainyu in Avestan, or Ahriman as it is known in Pahlevi, characterises Zoroastrianism as a dualistic faith in which the constant battle pervades for all until victory for good is ensured. This does not, however, detract from the ideal concept of Supreme Lordship for Ahura Mazda and the monotheistic tradition which belief in Him engenders.

Zoroastrianism places emphasis on honesty and on striving for harmony among all creatures, both in the world of nature and in human society. It does not believe in asceticism or that the world is characterised by suffering and should be abandoned for a higher and better life elsewhere. It teaches rather that the world should be enjoyed and the happiness of mankind promoted in every way to establish world harmony. All mankind has the duty to promote the welfare of the world and the sustenance of a life of total purity in every form.

Zoroastrianism teaches that the centre of the whole of creation is the Supreme Being - Ahura Mazda. Within all of us there is a divine essence, the cause of all upliftment, the motive force that eliminates from man all beastliness and transforms him in time to the form of an angel. The duty of every man is to recognise the divine essence within, to recognise its capabilities and thereby to elevate himself to, as one of the Avestan fragments says, "The path of Truth".

Zoroaster says that the first attribute of God is the Spirit of Truth and Righteousness known as Asha Vahishta. This refers to an unchanging and unchangeable law which makes not only all life but the entire universe progress towards a goal of perfection. The second divine attribute of the Almighty is Vohu Manah, the Good Mind. This refers to a mind that continually works for the welfare of others. The third attribute of God is Khashthra Vairya, the Holy Sovereign Power, the Kingdom of Heaven that may be established on earth by the use of power for the good of the world. Hence the establishment of Khashthra Varya or Vohu Khashthra, the Kingdom of Heaven upon the earth by the use of God's Grace or Power. The fourth attribute to be incorporated within ourselves is Spenta Armaita, the Spirit of Love and Devotion. Armaita is devotion to God and active and beneficent love for all beings. The divine quality of love is in every heart. Material love is a manifestation of true love and the precursor of its eventual, total unfoldment.

#### Zoroastrian Practices

Ceremonials are conducted primarily by priests who are invariably males. These usually involve the chanting of prayers in the Avestan language, which introduces into every prayer a unique quality of spiritual efficacy. Ceremonials are conducted in a fire temple, referred to as agiary. A fire temple is generally not intended for congregational worship, but is always available as a shrine for use by individuals in times of special need. Since asceticism finds no place in Zoroastrian traditions, priests are permitted to marry and raise families. They are expected to wear white robes, white being a symbol of purity. Three grades of priests are classified by their training: Mobeds (chief priests), Ervads and Dasturs. In South Africa, where there are no Parsee temples, priests are involved in daily, secular activities for the purpose of earning a livelihood. However, they respond to calls for spiritual solace and the conducting of services, which are held in private homes, as occasion demands.

Fire is the symbol of divine power for Zoroastrians. It symbolises power and, above all, purity, the single most important ethical and religious discipline forming the focal point of religious commitment. Thus fire burns constantly in an agiary and forms part of the altar at which worship is conducted. If any worship is to be conducted, such as a Jashan or thanksgiving service in a private home, a fire is kindled in a special receptacle for the purpose and removed at the end of such service.

Before reaching puberty, every Zoroastrian child is initiated into the duties commanded by the religion at a ceremony called Navjote ("new birth"). At this ceremony boys and girls receive two items of religious dress which they are expected to wear constantly under their clothing for the remainder of their lives, except when bathing. They are a white undershirt, called the sudreh, and a woven cord, called a kustî, which is long enough to be tied three times around the waist. The cord is tied and retied several times a day while the wearer chants a special prayer. Tying is also a feature of the Zoroastrian marriage service when the priest symbolically ties the couple together with a long cord as they sit next to each other. At the Navjote, the child is reminded of the three cardinal virtues of the Parsi faith: Humata (Good Thoughts), Hukhata (Good Words) and Huvarshata (Good Deeds).

Zoroastrian funeral practices include the ceremonial washing of the corpse, putting the sudreh and kustî and a white sheet on it, and the filing by of relatives and friends to pay their last respects. The body is then consigned to the Tower of Silence (Dakhma) for disposal, which invariably occurs in the form of prey for encircling vultures. On the third or fourth day after death, prayers are offered for the safe passage of the soul across the Chinvat Bridge, to face judgement of behaviour during life on earth.

Zoroastrianism survives today because of the opportunities granted to Parsees to preserve and protect their faith. The followers of Zoroaster emigrated from Persia after the downfall of the Sassanean dynasty at

the hands of Muslim Arabs, and established a permanent home for themselves in India, where Parsee culture has survived and flourished despite numerous constraints. Many of the Parsee religious customs had of necessity to be modified when Parsees arrived in South Africa, but the religion has remained strong despite the numerous difficulties that have arisen in the wake of social and, above all, political problems.

PART TWOPARSEES IN SOUTH AFRICA(i) History

The arrival of Indians in South Africa in 1860, under a system of indenture, paved the way for the coming of Parsees among contingents of passenger Indians who fell outside the category of indenture. There is no record of the number of Parsees who came between the years 1860 and 1911, when the immigration of Indians was stopped by the government of South Africa following the formation of the Union in 1910. But what is fairly certain is that the number of Parsees who have lived in this country in the 125 year period in which Indians have settled here has been no more than approximately 0,0125% of the total Indian population of the country.

Although Parsees have a historical affinity with the Indian community and have been identified as such for the sake of convenience in matters of national political expediency, their distinct identity has nevertheless been preserved. However, this general feeling of distinction has been perpetuated with mixed feelings and although some of the older generation of Parsees would like to preserve their identity, this desire is gradually being submerged under the political exigencies now dominant in South Africa.

Attempts to claim special status for Parsees were initiated at the turn of the century by a group of people resident in Johannesburg. A petition dated 17 September 1906 was sent to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London by three Parsees, namely P. Dorabjee, P.B. Dorabjee and P. Dhunjibhoy (Bhana and Pachai, 1984: 24). The petition claimed that they in fact enjoyed, unofficially, a status equal to that of whites. Their petition therefore requested that white citizenship be given to them as a matter of course. The petition was in all

probability meant to imply that Parsees, who by appearance are white or could easily be recognised as white people, were often accepted as such in cinemas, restaurants and other centres of social intercourse. Rights and privileges of citizenship usually accorded to white persons had never been extended to people of other races. Parsees however claimed, on the basis of their physical appearance and, more important, by reason of their British citizenship, a special status whereby their subjection to racial laws aimed directly at the Indian community would be obviated. There is no record concerning the extent to which the petition represented the feelings of the whole Parsee community in the Transvaal.

The memorandum submitted in support of the plea for special status listed among others their claim to Aryan heritage. They were therefore "distinct from Asiatics" (Bhana and Pachai, 1984: 24). They claimed further to have enjoyed the same rights and privileges as Europeans as sanctioned in a certificate signed by John Z. de Villiers, Burgomaster of Johannesburg, on 2 May 1899.

The memorandum further claimed that members of the Parsee community were taxed, unlike other Asians, in the same way that whites were taxed and that their names were registered in the field-cornet's books and not in the books of the Asiatic Department. They believed, therefore, that they were not Asiatics.

The British authorities turned down their request, thus perpetuating firstly their status of inequality, as was the case with other Indians, and secondly their state of hardship, which they had in some ways to bear with particular difficulty due to the paucity of their numbers as a separate community. This fact was particularly evident in their failure to rally together in sufficient numbers to present themselves as a community with legitimate aspirations.

Within a short period of the arrival of Indians in Natal in 1860, feelings of tension arose within the colony, escalated into racial

prejudices and culminated in authoritarian rule and political confrontation. The number of laws promulgated against Indians in particular multiplied, beginning with the total denial of political representation and ending with the notorious Group Areas Act in 1950. The history of Indians in South Africa soon evidenced a course of racial tension which has never subsided sufficiently to permit normal living. Prejudices against Indians were seen to grow in the face of their wish to establish themselves in commercial enterprises because they were soon recognised as a threat to white entrepreneurship.

Indians first entered the Transvaal in 1881, but from the very beginning were subjected to harsh legislation which not only severely restricted their trading activities, but also imposed compulsory registration and identification by means of finger prints and restricted immigration by the imposition of educational, health, age and means tests. These various laws and acts are well documented in other publications, but it is of interest here to refer briefly to the Immigration Restriction Act of 1905, which debarred Indians from entering the Transvaal except on production of a special permit. One section of this Act stated that any person not conversant with a European language should be treated as a prohibited immigrant. It was at this time that Mahatma Gandhi, the chosen leader of the Indian people, initiated a programme of passive resistance against the harsh and unfair legislation through his now well-known campaign of Satyagraha: Truth Force. To put into effect the principle of Satyagraha, an Indian could enter the Transvaal only on pain of imprisonment.

Members of the Indian community were quick to realise the implications of the act and smarted under this direct insult to them. A group of Indian men gathered under Gandhiji's leadership to formulate a strategy of response, and decided that a member of the Indian community would test the law and its proposed consequences. From those who volunteered, the person chosen for the task was Sorabji Shapurji Adajania, a Parsee lawyer (Gandhi, 1928: 292).

Mahatma Gandhi held Parsees, on the basis of his knowledge of them arising from experiences in India, in very high esteem, saying that the paucity of their numbers had in fact been responsible for their high moral character. They were, he believed, second to none in their charitable concern for fellow human beings. Sorabji, in Gandhiji's words, "turned out to be pure gold" and "proved himself to be a first class Satyagrahi" (Gandhi, 1928: 292). His views on Satyagraha commanded respectful hearing from many people and he himself suffered perhaps the longest term of imprisonment.

Sorabji entered the Transvaal in defiance of the Immigrants Restriction Act and publicly declared his abhorrence of the law. The officer in charge of the case had no orders to arrest him and, being aware of Sorabji's capabilities as a lawyer, felt unsure of himself. Sorabji informed the Police Superintendent in Johannesburg of his arrival across the border between Natal and the Transvaal. The police summoned him to appear in court, which he did on 8 July 1908. Before the case began, a meeting was held outside the courthouse by his friends and Sorabji made a fiery speech in which he announced his readiness to go to jail as often as necessary for victory and to brave all dangers and risks. He was ordered to leave the Transvaal within seven days and on refusing to do so was sentenced to one month's hard labour. He thereby became the first Satyagrahi in the Transvaal (Gandhi, 1928: 293).

President Paul Kruger of the old Transvaal Republic was sometimes described as having had a certain sympathy for Parsees. He was said to have befriended a Parsee gentleman in the Barberton district of the eastern Transvaal with whom he sometimes discussed matters of cultural interest. But even this friendship was not able to secure any relaxation of the laws relating to Indians and their application to Parsees.

Parsees were thus forced to suffer the same restrictions that Indians had to bear, but, by their willingness to endure these, proved their courage and strength as a small deprived community.

(ii) Demographic Trends

From evidence available it appears that the number of Parsees in South Africa has usually been around 100 - it has certainly never exceeded 200 and, in fact, has now dwindled to about 80.

All the laws promulgated by the Government of South Africa and aimed specifically at the Indian community have had particularly serious effects upon the Parsee community. The most harmful was that preventing new immigrants from entering the country, especially if they wished to come in as brides of men living here. The Immigrants Regulation Act of the Union of South Africa, 1913, consolidated all existing immigration laws affecting people of Indian origin. This Act, as amended in 1937, restricted the immigration of Asians into South Africa. A concession was granted to some men already domiciled here whose wives were temporarily absent from South Africa, but as soon as they had returned all further immigration was totally stopped. Those who had absented themselves from the country for three continuous years forfeited their rights of domicile.

The Immigration Regulation Amendment Act of 1953 was particularly harsh because it prohibited the entry after February of that year of Asian women born outside the Union who had married South African men of Indian origin. The Act also prohibited minor children of such women from entering the country without special permission, which in fact was only granted in very special circumstances, if at all.

With the entire Parsee community numbering about 100 persons, the choice of marriage partners for them was restricted in the extreme, thus imposing severe hardships on individual persons with inevitable consequences for the whole community. Every attempt at securing a relaxation of the measure ended in failure despite many pleas by the community. An intensive effort was made by Dr Dara Randeria, a Parsee leader, whose carefully researched and documented evidence on the

effect of the measure upon his community received only adamantine refusal from the Government to grant exceptions even in very special cases.

A plea by Dr Randeria, submitted in April 1964 in the form of a memorandum supported by statistical evidence on the state of the Parsee community and its diminishing numbers, was rejected by the Government. The plea made no impression whatsoever and met only with the most ruthlessly callous coldness. It was repeated in September 1964 by Mr R.S. Rustomjee and again refused by the Government. In October of that year the community again chose to repeat the request, this time supported by a strong plea by the High Priest of the Zoroastrian faith in London, Dr H.K. Mirza, on behalf of Parsees in South Africa and supported by prominent members of the community. The plea met with the same response as the earlier applications.

As a final measure, several members of the Parsee community, headed by Dr Randeria, made an appeal through a lengthy memorandum drawn up with the assistance of Professor J.A. Lombard, Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of South Africa. The memorandum, entitled "The Dilemma of Marriage as it affects the Minority Parsee Community in the Republic of South Africa" and addressed to the Department of Indian Affairs, was the most comprehensive document on the subject ever compiled. It reflected the agonising torment of desperation endured by the Parsee community in the country regarding the preservation of their religious and cultural identity. The document, however, made no impression upon the Government, which remained steadfast in its refusal to reconsider the position.

The effect on the community was profound. Dr Randeria estimated that no more than four Parsee marriages had been performed in South Africa in the 25 years prior to 1964 - in fact since the Parsees first arrived in 1860 (Randeria: Unpublished Paper). Several members had thus remained unmarried due to the extreme paucity of their numbers. The choice lay between marrying outside the community and remaining unmarried. Many



chose the latter. In his letter of appeal, Dr Randeria gave an assurance that no further request for relaxation of the ban on foreign brides would be made for a period of five years if the wishes of the 22 members of the community who had reached marriageable age were accommodated. The government remained obstinate in its refusal.

The size of the Parsee community enables a relatively clear track to be kept of all its members, except when one or two individuals choose to separate themselves from the rest of the community for one reason or another. Such persons, like those who settled in the Western Cape, were permanently lost to the community. Apart from their isolation in an area far removed from the mainstream of Indian life in Durban and Johannesburg, they were also classified officially as white persons. How this was done is not clear, but their absorption into the white community was never difficult. Parsees are white by appearance and only in exceptional cases would a Parsee have difficulty in falling into this racial classification.

Parsees seldom marry outside the community - hence the many pleas to the Government for serious consideration of their plight in finding suitable marriage partners for young members of the community. Those who succeed in doing so are obviously very fortunate and possibly happy. No divorces are known to have occurred among Parsees. Of those unable to find suitable partners, many have been left to a fate of permanent bachelorhood in deference to the community's feelings concerning the preservation of their cultural identity. Many community members have expressed the desire to seek marriage partners from outside the country because of the wider choice. The problem of marriage was not solved until 1981, when the Government finally reversed its decision and allowed some Indian men to bring their brides into the country after very special consideration was given to their particular applications.

PARSEES IN SOUTH AFRICA: 1964<sup>1</sup>

	Age Group	Males	Females	Total
NATAL	0 - 10 years	5	0	5
	11 - 20 years	2	5	7
	21 and over	15	13	28
		22	18	40

	Age Group	Males	Females	Total
TRANSVAAL	0 - 10 years	2	3	5
	11 - 20 years	5	10	15
	21 and over	29	18	47
		36	31	67

PARSEES IN SOUTH AFRICA: 1985<sup>2</sup>

	Age Group	Males	Females	Total
NATAL	0 - 10 yrs	2	0	2
	11 - 20 yrs	4	5	9
	21 and over	16	11	27
		22	16	38

	Age Group	Males	Females	Total
TRANSVAAL	0 - 10 yrs	1	1	2
	11 - 20 yrs	3	5	8
	21 and over	16	13	29

1. As supplied by Dr Randeria to the Minister for the Interior, Senator J de Klerk, in a memorandum dated October 1964.
2. Compiled by the author with the assistance of Mr Nariman Naval of Durban and Mr Dara Tavariva of Johannesburg.

(iii) Religious Affiliation and Practice

All Parsees in South Africa belong to the Zoroastrian faith. Despite the close association between them and Gujerati Hindus and despite the close affinities they enjoy with many aspects of Hindu ritualism, Parsees maintain a distinct religio-cultural identity that brooks no interference from other influences. Their most popular and widely prevalent customs are discussed and practised with some degree of enthusiasm and interest, although endemic difficulties plague the community interminably. For example, the paucity of their numbers makes the provision of facilities for study and subsequent practice of the faith extremely difficult.

However, most members of the Parsee community in South Africa have some understanding of their religious responsibilities and meet them as circumstances permit. In interviews with two priests and others in the community it was established that the Navjote, marriage, funeral and jashan ceremonies are still performed in South Africa by some members of the community. Each of the interviewees had to rely on memory for this information as no other records, apart from a few photographs, are available.

All Parsees interviewed expressed feelings of concern, although these varied, with some expressing a wish for greater familiarity with their religious customs and traditions and others resigning themselves to the belief that no serious problem ensued from the lack of interest in them. The following ceremonies are known to have been performed in Parsee homes in South Africa over a number of years.

Navjote

The Navjote (sometimes pronounced Naojote) is the ritual of initiation performed on a Parsee child of either sex by which he or she enters into the Parsee faith. The term is a compound of two words, nao,

meaning new, and jote, meaning worshipper. The navjote therefore refers to a new initiate into the Parsee fold. The ceremony is usually performed on a child who has reached the age of seven, but could be delayed for some years. Most parents try to fulfil their obligations before the child reaches the age of eleven. Of the people interviewed, at least three young people said that they were sent to India for their ceremonies to be performed there. Four said their ceremonies were conducted in South Africa. The ceremony is performed on a child when he or she is able to understand the meaning and sanctity of the ceremony and is able to repeat some of the prayers that are chanted during the performance.

The ceremony is usually performed at dawn, but is sometimes delayed to accommodate guests that may be invited. Each ceremony is preceded by a dress rehearsal which entails learning the kustî prayers as well as how to tie the kustî over the sudreh.

The recital of the kustî prayers, by both the priest and the child, is a confession of his or her faith. The child is then responsible for the duty of offering prayers to God, known as Ahura Mazda, and is henceforth referred to as a Mazda-yasnian Parsee. He or she wears the two garments throughout his or her life to remain faithful to the Zoroastrian religion. The child is expected to repeat his faith in Ahura Mazda, saying

"Oh Ahura Mazda, come to my help! I am a worshipper of one God, Ahura Mazda. I choose to be an admirer of and believer in Mazdayasnian Zoroastrianism. I admire all good thoughts, good words and good deeds".

The sudreh is made of pure white cotton, the colour of purity, and is light enough to be worn without serious discomfort even in the heat of summer. Although the entire garment is regarded as sacred, the collar, referred to as girdo, and a small breast-piece, known as gireban, are particularly sacred. The girdo reminds the wearer of the duties and

responsibilities imposed upon him as a Zoroastrian and the gireban reminds him of his vow to perform good deeds always. The sudreh has necessarily to be worn next to the body. The sudreh signifies loyalty to the faith and is a guide to a serious life of religion, which engenders purity in thought, word and deed, righteousness and morality, and belief in the life worthy of Bahesht or Paradise.

The kusti is made of lamb's wool and is symbolic of innocence and gentility. Kusti literally means the girdle of God's service and righteousness. The kusti is girdled thrice round the waist, to remind the wearer of the three cardinal virtues of the ancient religion: HUMATA: Good Thoughts; HUKHATA: Good Words; and HUVARSHATA: Good Deeds.

#### Marriage

Very few members of the Parsee community were married in South Africa. Most were married in India where facilities for marriage ceremonies are readily available. Marriage is regarded by Parsees as a sacred duty. Parsees marry for the sake of the good of the community. In marriage, a couple assist each other in following the laws of righteousness. Thus Parsees see assistance granted to fellow Parsees to marry as a sacred duty. Child marriages are virtually non-existent, although some isolated cases have been traced in India. Parsees are expected to observe the rule of monogamy, and it emerged from interviews that this is strictly adhered to in South Africa.

Parsee marriages are generally performed by two priests in the presence of Anjuma, an assembly of guests. A serious problem for the Parsee community in South Africa is the total absence of a single qualified, ordained priest. Members of the community who are called on to perform priestly duties do so out of a sense of loyalty and responsibility in the absence of a qualified priest. The senior priest is entrusted with the task of reciting the Ahunavar prayers and blessing the couple.

Parsee marriage ceremonies last three or four days. The first day is called mandawsaro, when a twig of a mango tree is planted near the door of the house of the bridal couple to signify their desire for fertility. The second and third days are devoted to Varadh patra, religious ceremonies performed in honour of the dead who are remembered with affection. The fourth day is dedicated to elaborate ceremonies of the marriage proper which involve a sacred bath symbolising a full sacrament of purification and finally an evening wedding. Parsee marriage ceremonies are generally performed just after sunset.

Only two ceremonies of this nature are known to have been performed in South Africa in the last twenty years.

#### Funeral

A Parsee is taught not to fear death, and is not expected to show any great emotion at the loss of a close relative or friend. Death need never be seen as destroying the life of a person, but rather as the mere transformation of life from an earthly form. Life ends on earth at death and awakes again in the spiritual world. At the dissolution of the body the soul is freed from it to take to a life of liberation in spirit. After death the soul hovers round the body for three nights under the protection of the angel Sraosha. These three nights are also a time of anguish and consolation: anguish at the thought of the soul's misdeeds in life and consolation at the thought of its merits. After the third night the soul proceeds to its judgement.

The Zoroastrian concepts of Heaven and Hell and the crossing over the Chinvat Bridge are regarded as symbolical concepts of discrimination and judgement which determine the ultimate destiny of man based on his involvement in sense-bound struggle. The ultimate destiny is always viewed as a form of companionship with Ahura Mazda.

Unlike the practice in India, where dead bodies are always consigned to the Towers of Silence, South African Parsees have been forced to resort to burial and more recently, by choice, cremation. Immediate family members and friends are now expected to perform the last rites such as covering the body immediately with a cotton cloth. A sacred bath is given to it, after which the sudreh and kustī are put on. Relatives are asked to embrace the body for the last time, after which it falls under the influence of Druj-i-Nasush, decomposition.

A fire which burns sandalwood and incense is placed in the room. The scarcity, or often complete non-availability, of sandalwood in South Africa makes the choice of an alternative necessary. This fire has the effect of destroying germs and keeping the atmosphere pure and serene. A small improvised lamp such as that usually lit in the home every day at prayer is brought into the room where the corpse is kept. The lamp usually consists of a wick immersed in coconut oil contained in a glass tumbler. The Gathas are chanted. The prayers normally chanted are the Ahunavaiti Gatha, the first of the five hymns composed by the Holy Prophet Zoroaster.

The South African practice follows the usual course taken by Hindus. The body is placed in a wooden coffin and then transported to a local cemetery or, if preferred, to a crematorium.

#### Jashan

A jashan is a form of thanksgiving and is usually performed on a special occasion. It takes the form of a liturgical service, a special rite performed in the presence of several guests. No public hall is ever hired for the purpose and guests are usually accommodated in the home of a family whose members choose to have a Jashan performed for them. The two priests interviewed claimed to have been helpful to several families in performing these ceremonies for them.

Jashans are usually performed on a special day in the month, the choice of day being determined by the dates in a Parsee calendar. The year 1985 of the Christian era is equivalent to the Parsee year 1355. The first day of the year 1355 coincided with Sunday 25 August 1985. The annual cycle consists of twelve months of thirty days each plus five extra days at the end of the year. Though there is no rhythm of weekly observance and no regular congregational worship, there is a recurring pattern of devotion in the monthly cycle as certain days are sacred to fire, to water, to particular Amesha Spentas, and so on. Principal ceremonial activity comes at the end of the year when, for a number of days, prayers are chanted for the spirits of the departed.

The year consists of the following twelve months: Fravardin, Ardibehesht, Khordad, Tir, Amardad, Shihrevan, Meher, Ava, Ador, Daye, Bahman, Asfandarmad. Each day of the month also has a special name, as follows: Hormazd, Bahman, Ardibehesht, Shehrevan, Asfandarmad, Khordad, Amardad, Daepadar, Ador, Ava, Khorshed, Mohar, Tir, Gosh, Dalpmeher, Meher, Srosh, Rashne, Fravardin, Behram, Ram, Govad, Daepdin, Din, Ashisvargh, Ashtod, Asman, Zamyad, Marespond and Aneran. Thus most month names are also day names, and the choice of a special day for the performance of a jashan ceremony is the day of the month on which the day and month have the same name. For example, the day of Farvadin in the month of Farvadin is regarded as auspicious. Similarly, the day Ardibehesht in the month of Ardibehesht, and so on are all sacred days.

The tendency among local Parsees is to choose, for obvious reasons, a day and time convenient to a working South African calendar. Added to this is the important fact of the availability of a priest, whose work schedule may not be convenient for the carrying out of a religious ceremony. Hence rituals are performed in the evenings, at weekends or public holidays.

(iv) Views and Attitudes

It was felt that the prevalent constellation of beliefs, values and struggles shared by members of the Parsee community could be ascertained only by interviewing as many of their number as possible. The paradigm incorporates views on the possible course of future development of the Parsee people of Southern Africa, including their concern with affiliation to the Zoroastrian faith and culture and possible repercussions in the social, political and economic changes now taking place in this country.

Although most interviewees appeared uncertain and possibly apprehensive about the future, a small number were optimistic despite the extraordinary signs of foreboding present in almost every sphere. The intersubjective picture of the future growth of Parsee life is, however, generally gloomy, most Parsees being resigned to the belief that Parsee life in South Africa is now drawing to a close. The community now stands at the crossroads. No comprehensive viewpoint representing the thoughts of Parsees as a community has as yet been expressed because the Parsees have no representative organisation to assume leadership for this purpose. The Parsee Associations of the Transvaal and Natal are defunct and there is little possibility of their resuscitation now or even in the foreseeable future.

It should perhaps be emphasised here that the views and comments expressed in this chapter are those of the interviewees, not those of the author. A problem of extreme sensitivity surrounds the desire to preserve the cultural identity of Parsees despite the paucity of resources. A Parsee gentleman married to a Hindu confessed to being deeply frustrated by the situation in South Africa where blatant discrimination against Indian people is exercised and which is particularly severe on the small Parsee community. He had been forced to marry a Hindu woman because the absence of Parsee women made it impossible for him to marry within his own community. His family now

suffers the added burden of not being educated to either Zoroastrian or Hindu religious teachings, although the wish of his parents is that the Parsee Navjote ceremony will be performed on them (his children) when they reach the appropriate age.

The family as a whole was keen that all members, including the children, would speak Gujarati, which has come to be accepted as the lingua franca of the Parsees and which best accommodates Parsee cultural aspirations. However, the fact that his wife was not Gujarati speaking further complicated the situation. With regard to his children being accepted into the Parsee faith and community, he did not believe that there would be any serious difficulties. Some controversy has been known to rage and he was aware of problems in that regard but believed that the community in South Africa would be sympathetic to his position. His children are still very young and are not yet aware of the problems surrounding this aspect of community life. While he appreciated that they would later wish to make their own particular choice, the present position is that he and his parents would like the children to be brought up as Parsees, fully accepting Parsee culture as their own. His wife, however, remains a Hindu but is most amenable to her children being raised as Parsees. While she plays no part in their religious upbringing, she is quite happy that her mother-in-law is doing a good job with educating them to the basic elements of Zoroastrian culture.

The writer is aware of other persons seeking to be accepted into the Parsee community. This is not common in South Africa, however, as very few members of the Parsee community have married outside the community. Those who did chose to go the way of the communities into which they married. Because no clear injunction in this regard is available in the Zend Avesta or even the Gathas of Zoroaster, Parsees have of necessity to resort to court action, as has happened on some occasions to settle the matter if it proved particularly contentious. The following is a case in point:

In 1903, Mr R.D. Tata, a famous Parsee industrialist in India, married a French woman after having a navjote ceremony performed on her by a Parsee mobed. Tata claimed that she therefore had the right to the usual privileges granted to Parsees, including the right to enter fire temples and have her body consigned to the Towers of Silence. That the case had to be heard in the Bombay Supreme Court meant only that no other solution lay within the reach of the contending parties. In this case the plaintiffs, Tata, Petit and others, contended that Zoroastrianism enjoined conversion and allowed converts all the benefits provided by Parsee Trust Deeds and other social and religious advantages. The defendants, who represented wider Parsee religious interests, stated that the whole question of conversion to Zoroastrianism lay in doubt as this had never been previously allowed. However, exceptions were made in the case of children born to a Zoroastrian father by an alien mother after the Navjote ceremony had been performed on them. We have not been able to determine the final verdict on the matter, but many Parsees still remain extremely dubious about the possibility of accepting non-Parsees into the Zoroastrian faith. (Parsiana, Vol. 5, No. 7, p. 29).

The general secretary of the Trade Union organisation CUSA, the Council of Unions of South Africa, is a Parsee, now about 40 years old. His efforts on behalf of black workers in South Africa are well known. He said he was keenly aware of the threats now facing the Parsee community and feels deeply concerned that little can be done to save the situation. He was familiar with only some aspects of Parsee religious life. All the prayers that Parsees are expected to recite are in Farsi, the language of ancient Persia, but most Parsees are content with Gujerati, which has been their medium of communication for centuries. He was aware of the difficulties caused by the absence of a temple or similar meeting place and felt that the situation would be greatly alleviated if there was a temple in their midst.

The first Parsee burial in South Africa took place in 1902. Circumstances in South Africa are such that Parsees are forced to resort to this practice in the absence of a Tower of Silence. The presence of Parsees in India and South Africa has forced them to adopt many Hindu customs and perhaps even a few religious practices. Parsees have never felt any antagonism towards Hindus, particularly Gujerathis, because of historical affiliations. Parsee women are known to wear saris and apply the tilak to the forehead - a well-known custom. Even the marriage ceremony now performed by Parsees is largely of Hindu origin and influence.

The conservatism prevalent among Parsees is strongly reinforced by Hindu conservatism with regard to marriage, language, food, eating habits and modes of worship. Strong ties are still held among family and most community members although the obvious difficulties brought about by the paucity of numbers pose a serious problem. The interviewee was aware that a total of 37 Parsees now live in the Transvaal and probably a similar number in Natal. He was also aware that many were leaving South Africa to settle in Canada, the United States and London.

So far as the maintenance of traditions is concerned, he felt committed to the dominant and popular customs of wearing the sudreh and kusti which he never neglected. He was aware of the serious problems facing the young people in the Parsee community, in that five of their members had reached marriageable age, but could find no partners in South Africa. Despite the serious wish among many Parsees to preserve their identity, this was proving difficult under such circumstances. Two of his uncles were known to have been forced to marry non-Parsee women, but the marriage of an aunt to a coloured person had been the cause of deep hurt and consternation, which many in the family and others in the community found very difficult to come to terms with.



His younger brother was interviewed on a separate occasion. He expressed similar views and confessed to wanting to see the Parsee community survive as a distinct cultural unit. He was, however, disappointed that the basic groundwork was itself the starting point of the decay now setting in. He would be very keen to see a youth group started among Parsees and would be prepared to take an active part in it. He was somewhat disturbed that his parents and their peers gave very little direction to young people in matters of cultural importance. He felt that the problem lay not with young people but with the older generation who left little for young people to follow or build on.

Practical difficulties with the wearing of the sudreh and kusti were firstly that young people were not fully convinced that the wearing of these garments was really necessary and secondly they were very difficult, if not impossible, to obtain in South Africa. This, together with several other endemic difficulties, made the preservation of Parsee life and customs almost impossible to sustain.

He felt drawn to the feeling that it is now imperative for him to go to India and there be introduced to a young lady of his choice. He was willing to do this because his family, especially his mother and sister, expressed the desire to see him go fairly soon. However, he is busy working as a computer programmer and analyst, and will go as soon as circumstances permit.

Their sister had now reached her fortieth year and was unmarried. She was unmarried, she said, primarily because there were no eligible bachelors in the community. She had, however, reached the point where she no longer had any serious wish to marry because all her time was now devoted to taking care of her aged mother and she felt no serious desire to participate in any activities other than those of immediate family concern.

Another young person said he was aware of the feeble attempts that had periodically been made to keep alive the Transvaal Parsee Association, which had been formed to promote Parsee cultural interests. However, the organisation was riddled with many shortcomings to say nothing of ineptitude. To his mind, there was no one in the province who was capable of filling, or wished to fill, the role of leader of the community and thereby be accepted as community spokesman. He therefore found it difficult to take any deep interest in Parsee communal interests because no proper foundation existed for them, and had consequently been drawn to wider Indian interests. Since he was opposed to the political system in South Africa he felt drawn to taking an interest in any organisation that worked for the abolition of apartheid.

A medical practitioner who was fortunate enough to have been allowed to bring his wife to South Africa was certain that a Parsee consciousness did exist among young people. He wished to see Parsee culture survive and would be willing to do something in this regard. He was the present President of the Transvaal Parsee Association and as such knew all the members of the community. He was aware of the difficulties created by the smallness of numbers and this tended to have a deleterious effect upon individual Parsee affiliation. In contrast, the 20 000 Parsees in North America are now striving to achieve a new sense of religious and cultural awareness and are succeeding in doing so. The size of the community gave greater stimulus to the consciousness necessary to engender feelings for everything Parsee, a situation which unfortunately did not obtain in South Africa.

A Parsee businessman said that he still had very strong feelings of patriotism for the community and was deeply desirous of saving the critical situation that now exists. He was extremely proud to be a Parsee and wanted this attitude to prevail too among other members of the community. He felt sad, however, that there was little feeling of Parsee consciousness among Parsees. The smallness of the community helped to exclude certain problems which might otherwise arise, such as

caste differences. Although there was no such thing as a caste system among Parsees, economic differences tended to introduce feelings which were seen in terms of caste. Sometimes, lack of interest in the Parsee community was very disturbing. He was aware of a young Hindu who had just returned from India after marrying a Parsee girl. Her arrival in this country made no impression upon Parsees generally because of her refusal to identify with the Parsee community. He felt a certain sense of remorse at this attitude. In addition, he was disturbed about South Africa's political situation and the difficulties it engendered not only for Parsees, but for Indians in general. For this reason, thoughts of emigration were uppermost in the minds of many people.

An elderly Parsee couple whose children had emigrated felt a great deal of remorse over the fact that the South African situation had divided their family. Their eldest son, a brilliant young chemical engineer working with a well known mining house, was forced to leave the country because his wife, a Parsee from India, was not allowed permission to stay. He now lives in the United States with his wife.

The elderly couple was somewhat disappointed that the "Parsee Centre" in Central Road, Fordsburg, was no longer available to the Parsee community. This was a private house that once belonged to the famous Mr Parsee Rustomjee and was used as a meeting place for all Parsees in Johannesburg and the Transvaal. The lackadaisical attitude of Parsees forced the closure and sale of the house to a non-Parsee who now uses it as his private residence. Since the sale of this house Parsees no longer maintain a feeling of unity or community consciousness.

The disappointment is heightened by the fact that Parsees are still a deeply religious community with strong cultural cohesiveness. But the absence of facilities such as a fire temple presents serious difficulties for this consciousness. This is confirmed by the fact that smoking is prohibited by Parsees because it pollutes the image of fire, which is extremely sacred. Parsees are generally deeply religious, they observe all the usual ceremonies that go with Parsee religious life

and, despite the absence of a priest in the community, are still able to maintain a semblance of religious awareness which is seriously threatened.

The writer was able to determine that only two Parsees in South Africa are recognised as priests. Despite their efforts to combine their religious duties with their secular work, they are subjected to considerable criticism by those who consider the two incompatible. This type of internal animosity and ill-feeling in what is a very fluid situation may yet be the forerunner to eventual demise of the Parsees as a separate community in South Africa. The shortage of priests has not always proved to be a religious hazard, because many people know the prayers recited and the ceremonies performed. However, this does not mean that they could do without all the aids that help to promote a healthy religious and cultural life.

The husband of this elderly couple maintains strong links with the Parsee community in India and elsewhere by subscribing to a popular new magazine named Parsiana, published in Bombay. This is an important media of communication among Parsees and helps considerably to sustain contact among Parsees worldwide.

A young member of the community in his late teens was somewhat uncertain of his religious feelings and attitudes. He was aware that both his great grandfather and grandfather were very well-known Parsee gentlemen who played extremely important roles in the affairs of the Parsee and Indian communities. He was proud of this but was not sure that he knew what it meant for him and his peers in the Parsee fold. He would be happy to contribute his share to the maintenance of Parsee cultural life but because of his studies at university he was unable to give too much attention to things that did not immediately concern his scholastic interests.

A young girl aged 14 said that she was very proud to be a Parsee and would do everything to perpetuate community interests. But because she was relatively young she did not yet concern herself too much with

these matters. She and other members of her family were quite happy and content to pray at a Hindu temple and for the present their cultural life was a matter for their parents to be concerned with.

An elderly gentleman who had two teenage daughters was forced to send them to London, where exposure to a much wider Parsee community provided them with greater chances of marrying Parsees than if they had stayed in South Africa. He was also aware that there was little interest in Parsee culture among Parsees in this country and found this very discouraging, but he knew that there was little one could do or even wish to do about it at this stage.

A woman who had long passed her marriageable age was extremely despondent that she has to face her remaining years as a spinster. Her difficulties arose from the absence of eligible bachelors and her determination to marry a Parsee and none other. She felt very proud of her Parsee background and would do everything possible to maintain it, but her opportunities for doing so were now almost non-existent. Her parents were ageing and she was left with little interest in life beyond her own personal well being and care for the home built by her father. She felt it was very unfortunate that more people did not take an interest in Parsee affairs but there was little one could do about it except view it with a sense of despair.

An elderly Parsee gentleman who was sometimes called on to perform priestly duties in the community felt proud of his longstanding association with the wider Indian community in both political and religious affairs and also in other areas of community interest. He was closely associated with the Transvaal Indian Congress and also had the honour of being elected Chairman of a Hindu religious organisation for some years while still maintaining a deep interest in the cultural affairs of the Parsee community. He was now deeply saddened by the fact that there were only 39 members of the Parsee community left in the Transvaal. Of these, 16 were adult males, 13 adult females, 4 young boys and 6 young girls.

What upset him most was what appeared to him to be a form of decadence that had crept into Parsee community life. He was often called on to perform priestly duties and on these occasions he would attempt to discuss religious matters with other Parsees. The response was invariably poor and one of disinterest. He was deeply hurt and suffered even greater personal loss when two of his children married outside the Parsee community.

He was nevertheless aware of the greatness of Parsee life, enriched by its great, though tragic, history. Zoroastrianism and the Zoroastrian people had suffered greatly at the hands of Islam and Muslim invaders. For him, the fact that Parsees were now living in India and had been living there in peace for several centuries was part of the tragedy of Parsee life. Parsees still looked on Iran or Ancient Persia as their original homeland and even viewed the history of the land with a deep sense of admiration. His name was similar to, and derived from, that of the great Emperor Darius and names like Persepolis and Cyrus were still part of the broader greatness of which present Parsees appear to be a lost segment.

His reading of books on Parsee life and thought was fairly extensive, although most of the works at his disposal were by Indian authorities and were not always as objective as one would wish. He felt extremely despondent about the future of the Parsees and had resigned himself to what is obviously destined to be an inevitable fate of total annihilation. Apart from the important factor of marriage to perpetuate the Parsee lineage, the more important fact of interest in Parsee life is being ignored.

A woman who was born in India and came to South Africa after her marriage to a South African had been a schoolteacher since her arrival here many years ago. She felt there was not much point in bemoaning the fate of the Parsees. They had only themselves to blame for whatever deficiencies existed because they are essentially not a community conscious people. Very little was in fact being done to preserve the

cultural consciousness that once existed in greater abundance but was now seen to be part of a dying tradition. This tradition did not affect people very deeply. She saw this even in her parents who came to live in South Africa. Their search for economic stability and independence outweighed their interest in cultural matters.

Her own interests in the teaching profession took up all her time. She spent most of her spare time studying and had acquired several post-graduate degrees and diplomas. Her interests had therefore to revolve around education, which in South Africa took no account of the particular needs of the various communities that are found here. Her contact with other Parsees was so limited that there was no opportunity for discussion to accommodate Parsee interests. This would in any case be thoroughly futile as there was no real justification for it. There was no point, she believed, in being too concerned about the fate of the Parsees. Too much concern with that fate would tend to be limiting and that would engender a sense of narrow-mindedness which ought now to be avoided, as South Africans have a responsibility to pursue wider intercultural interests.

She wore the sudreh and kusti only on certain occasions, because they were not easily worn and were at times somewhat uncomfortable. Her own feelings tended towards greater emancipation from narrow parochialism. She was nevertheless aware of the character of Parsee life in South Africa since their arrival here in the last century. She was even more keenly aware of the part played by people like Parsee Rustomjee and his family but the present day and the future had obviously to accommodate inevitable changes in a developing social milieu.

The young daughter of the schoolteacher held views that differed considerably from those of her mother. She said she never felt influenced by her mother's thinking and was always free to make up her own mind on many matters. She was now 17 years of age and believed that much of what was essentially Parsee in her life was becoming more and more clear to her. Her recent discovery of this identity, that she was

neither Hindu nor Muslim, made her acutely aware of something missing in her life. She was a little shaken to realise that she belonged to a minority community and virtually no other members of her community attended her school.

It was unlikely, however, that she would ever be a fanatic about being a Parsee. She could see what fanaticism does to Muslims, and she never wanted to become a bigot. She did, however, feel strongly about marrying a Parsee and it is quite unlikely that she would change her views about this. She saw some value in being classed into a specific group, and was disturbed that more could not be done about this in the form of an active Parsee Association.

Much of her interest in the Parsee community arose at school, where her peers identified with specific religious and cultural traditions which enhanced their group feelings. The isolation left her with a feeling of emptiness because she knew it was possible to identify with a culture but this was absent in her situation. She therefore wished it was possible to associate with other Parsees and thus build a feeling of community consciousness among her people.

An elderly Parsee gentleman, accepted by the community as a priest, recounted many and varied experiences in respect of the religious life of his community. He had been involved in the performance of numerous wedding, death, navjote and other ceremonies for about thirty years, so has a deep and abiding interest in all that has taken place within the community in that time. He is deeply committed to strong religious values and upholds fundamental religious principles, sometimes to the amazement of those of lesser commitment.

Although deeply desirous of building a strong Parsee community in South Africa he has had to bear witness to the decay, and what appears to be the ultimate demise, of Parseeism in South Africa. He has never been able to influence Parsee opinion even among young people, largely because he holds strong views and more so because he is employed as a

clerk with an insurance agency. This dichotomy engenders some suspicion, because few people appreciate his genuine concern for, and commitment to, Parsee religious idealism. His employment as a clerk tends to lower his religious authority. He is usually invited to perform only religious rituals and is never consulted on more important matters of theological concern. He trained for the priesthood in India but only on an informal basis. Thus his adherence to religious orthodoxy is purely personal, with little or no influence on the community in a wider or deeper sense of authority.

His familiarity with Parsee religious ritual, particularly as it is performed in South Africa, shows strong Hindu influence. Many of the ceremonies now have a bias towards Hindu theological foundations because more Hindu scholars appear to have investigated these and contributed to their performance in ways that Parsee scholars have not. Although the ritual as such is purely Parsee, the embellishment and total methodology of ritual performance are clearly Hindu. He is nevertheless called on to perform these ceremonies and responds out of a sense of duty. There is no agiary in South Africa, so all worship has to be conducted in private homes.

As a priest, he is aware of the confusion in the minds of Parsees generally in South Africa about their allegiances. The most serious problem is that Parsees appear to be uncertain about the actual course of their future development, and although there is much potential for a Parsee consciousness to develop in South Africa, one becomes aware of the variety of opinions prevailing on how Parsees should perpetuate their cultural interests. Personal animosities still run high and Parsees appear to be unable to face certain basic issues in a spirit of co-operation or even common sense. The community is obviously heading towards self destruction in the field of cultural and religious endeavours.

One of the first Indians to enter the life assurance industry in South Africa is a Parsee who still features prominently as one of its well-known Indian agents. He is now in his seventy-fifth year and has

been associated with life insurance for over fifty years. He is aware that as a Parsee his name ranks high among those who serve the industry, but he is also proud of the fact that other Parsees are noted for their contribution to other commercial enterprises in South Africa and play important roles in them.

He said he was aware of the difficulties that plague his community but felt no remorse because, although he disagreed with South African politics, he was deeply appreciative of much that this country had to offer. He felt that it was one of the best countries in the world to live in and despite the problems experienced he was happy to live here. Now that the Government had relaxed its ban on foreign brides for Indians his son would proceed to India and return with a Parsee bride. This had not been possible with his first son, however, who was forced to leave South Africa because of the Government's refusal to grant permission for him to do so. He was immensely proud of his Parsee heritage and wished that it would be possible for the community to remain viable in cultural terms.

A very well-known doctor and community worker attached to the department of community health at Natal University, Durban, was adamantly against the encouragement of any kind of ethnicity. She considered that a study of the Parsee community such as was envisaged in the present report would probably have the effect of encouraging fragmentation of the South African community, which is something that should be curbed in favour of wider South African interests. For this reason, she saw no need to remain rigid concerning the preservation of religious identities. She would be happy if her children maintained their identity but she would also be perfectly happy to accept their decision on marriage partners and how they chose to live their lives. Cultural identities are important, but in South Africa have to take second place to political priorities. She nevertheless observes all the rituals of the Parsee tradition, regards herself as deeply religious and insists that days on which she has some respite from work should be dedicated to the fulfilling of religious obligations. She felt,



however, that such obligations emphasise the various religious backgrounds and in doing so tend to fragment people. There should be no further fragmentation of society on ethnic lines.

Four young members of the Parsee community, aged between 14 and 20, displayed most emphatically the quandary that young persons in the community face with growing concern. In a discussion with them, three young men and their sister, it became abundantly clear at the very outset how the absence of group discussions on the subject of Parsee identity was detrimental to the Parsee cause. This was regarded as of fundamental importance to the preservation of Parsee identity as the absence of concern, due to the paucity of numbers, was probably the most important reason for young persons in the community losing touch with it and hence drifting away from a Parsee consciousness and a Parsee identity.

All four felt that because they had no contact whatsoever with other Parsees of their age they lost all sense of concern for Parsee identity. However, the present discussion gave rise to a traumatic re-appraisal of their position, with the result that they felt forced to review their own standing vis-a-vis the rest of the Parsee community in South Africa and even world-wide. Their difficulties are compounded because they know few Parsees in the Transvaal owing to the difficulty in making contact, formal or otherwise. However, their new-found consciousness of the interests of Parsees has made them realise how necessary it is for links to be established.

For this reason too, they felt that the exodus of Parsees to countries like England and Canada should be discouraged. There is a need to build a strong Parsee community in South Africa. In this respect they felt a certain envy of Muslims in this country who, because of their greater numbers, are constantly reminded of community interests and are able to develop a distinct community identity. Even as children they never listened to elders telling them stories from history or culture or religion, with the result that they have "lost out". Even at school

they never studied Persian history, and names such as Darius and Cyrus were unknown to them. No doubt if they had been told about the history of Persia, their identification with Persian heroes would probably have had a more lasting effect upon their Parsee consciousness than it has at present.

The suburb in which they live has a strong Muslim community and this often makes them feel a certain sense of loss at being left out in the cold. Although this is not entirely true, because they are perfectly happy with their present friends and associates, they do tend to be reminded on occasions about the composition of their peer groups and the absence of Parsees in them provides a sense of emptiness. The loss of contact would ultimately lead to total severance in years to come if not arrested at some stage. This however already appears very difficult because the diminishing numbers, as indicated by the ratio of young people to adults in the community, is an ominous sign. The somewhat feeble attempts made on some occasions in the past are no longer persevered with, thus emphasising the decay. In years gone by picnics were frequently arranged for Parsees as a form of strengthening mechanism, but even this means of maintaining contact with other Parsees and establishing their identity is no longer available to them. This lack of enthusiasm for community ties is recognised as a serious problem within South African Parseeism; only individual Parsees display any real abiding interest. In the past the navjote ceremony was looked upon as an important occasion for Parsees to meet, but this is no longer true. Two of this family of four had their navjote ceremonies performed in South Africa in 1974, while the two younger members were sent to India for the purpose. They were unaware of any navjote ceremony having been performed in South Africa since that year. They had no access to a Parsee calendar, which meant that they were unaware of any important festivals or any other occasion for celebration or observance of any kind.

The present discussion that they were having with the writer reminded them quite starkly that the Parsees in South Africa were in effect not



a strong religious community. The smallness of their number could have been used to some advantage to strengthen ties but this has obviously not been the case. In fact the contrary appears to be more true.

One member of the group considered the thought of marrying into the Parsee community for the sake of maintaining ties with Parseeism ludicrous. He felt that marrying a Parsee merely for that reason was archaic, because marriage had far deeper implications. The others had never given much thought to the question of marriage because they had other more immediate concerns as high school students.

One of the group found the absence of any kind of stimulation into thinking as a Parsee an unfortunate feature of Parsee life in South Africa. Although his own views on the matter were quite fluid, he felt that they could be influenced into thinking more about Parsee cultural interests if they were encouraged to do so. They had quite obviously never been stimulated into thinking that way and hence felt no need for it. One of the group felt that plays like "Jesus Christ, Superstar" reminded people of Christian thinking and the religious purview that obtained among many Christians. As no such stimulation ever came to him as a Parsee he experienced no feelings of oneness with any Parsee religious thinking or authority.

However, each member of the group admitted that the present discussion reminded them how necessary it was to be stimulated into thinking as Parsees. Further discussions of this nature would inevitably help to make their position much clearer and would certainly revive in their minds their lost heritage and identity. They had suddenly become aware of the presence of other Parsees around them, something they had tended to forget because of the lack of contact. More important, however, was their sudden realisation that some of the people discussed were in fact noteworthy contributors to the enrichment of Parsee life in South Africa, with obvious repercussions for the Indian community as a whole.

It was, for them, even more significant that some Parsees had identified with political struggles both within and outside the country. Recent news about the work Zubin Mehta, the famous conductor of the symphony orchestras of San Francisco and Los Angeles, was doing for the anti-apartheid cause brought them feelings of elation and admiration. In 1971, Zubin Mehta, a very well-known Parsee, was invited to join the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra to visit South Africa. He flatly refused the offer because it was made clear that the orchestra would not be allowed to perform before mixed audiences. Few people realised the sacrifice he had made because the financial benefits from the visit would have been very substantial. In the same way, other Parsees had at times made clear their position regarding life in South Africa. The group was therefore stimulated to thinking more deeply about the positive contribution made by Parsees to the struggles of the Indian people and felt deeply that they merited more attention than had previously been given by the Parsee community.

A commercial traveller whose knowledge of the Indian community stems from his contact with Indian people in many parts of the country, spoke highly of several Parsees that he personally knew. There were, he said, basically five Parsee families in Natal, which meant that all the Parsees in the province were members of one large family, all related in one way or other by marriage. He was aware of their diminishing numbers but, in view of the difficulties causing the situation, felt it unnecessary to become too concerned with them. He remembered his own plight some years ago when he was forced to go to India to find himself a wife and appreciated that this had been possible. However, his children were not so fortunate and, except for the youngest daughter, all had been forced to leave the country after marriage.

He felt no real bitterness toward the government, because he was aware of the complexities of the South African problem. There was, however, a very serious need to take into account the serious sacrifices made by many Indian people in this country's cause. He himself was a staff sergeant in the South African volunteer corps between 1939 and 1945,

when he served the country with dedication in North Africa. He was only one of many Indians who served during the Second World War and was obviously grieved that this was not taken into account when the needs of the Indian people, Parsees in particular, were considered. Now that his children were married and well settled overseas they often asked that he, his wife and their youngest daughter leave South Africa for a better life in England. However, they felt no desire to leave this country which had been their home for so many years. They loved it despite the serious lack of concern for their welfare by a government that so often displayed such gross callousness and recalcitrance towards them.

He was aware of the contribution made by several other Parsees to life in this country and felt a certain sense of pride that their services ranged across a wide spectrum of human endeavour. He often believed that Parsees deserved greater recognition for their status as responsible citizens. Many Parsees had worked hard and excelled in a wide variety of services. He himself was a very well-known commercial traveller and felt satisfied that his ability as one received due recognition in the commercial field. In the same way, other Parsees ranked high in the field of commerce because of their long-standing services.

He now looked on with pride at the way Parsees were establishing themselves in several politically stable countries and felt satisfied that Parsee life would continue and ultimately flower in some form of greatness worthy of their ancient tradition and reputation as a proud and courageous people.

(v) Distinguished Service

The small Parsee community in South Africa is sometimes viewed with admiration by non-Parsees in the Indian community, largely because it includes several hard-working persons who have excelled in one or other walk of life. Parsees are admired because of the contributions made by them in India to the economy of that country. The name Tata ranks high on the list of great industrialists, and many others have contributed in similar ways to other sectors of life there. After the growth and development of the Tata industrial empire many other Parsees excelled in several fields, due in large measure to the assistance they received from charitable and religious funds and institutions established by the wealthier members of the community.

Indians encountered difficulties in South Africa soon after they arrived. We have already mentioned Sorabji Shapurji Adajania, who was the first member of the Parsee community to gain distinction for a singularly important contribution to Indian struggles by becoming the first Satyagrahi in the Transvaal and South Africa.

After his term of imprisonment he was awarded a scholarship to study law in London. After being called to the bar in England he returned to Johannesburg where he began his law practice. It was also a wish of Gandhiji himself that Sorabji should succeed him in his law practice in Johannesburg. This, however, was not to be. Shortly after a second term of imprisonment he contracted galloping phthisis and died, leaving the entire Indian community deeply saddened by its loss (Gandhi, 1928: 287-292).

The name Parsee (sometime spelt Parsi) has often been used as a term of respect when applied to a member of that community, especially the head of a first generation family in South Africa. The name was used in one particular instance with considerable distinction. Parsi Rustomjee was a well-known figure in Indian political struggles in South Africa, with the result that the Rustomjee family will always be remembered as one of the most distinguished Indian families in this country. He was born

in Bombay in August 1861 and was named Rustomjee Jivanji Gorcoodoo, but later came to be known in South Africa as Parsi Rustomjee.

Parsi Rustomjee arrived in South Africa at the age of 19 and worked as a storeman's assistant in Verulam. Through hard work he was able to accumulate sufficient capital to establish himself in business. After visiting India with his wife and two sons, he returned to South Africa and joined Mahatma Gandhi in the establishment of the Natal Indian Congress, of which he was elected Vice-Chairman. Then began a political career of remarkable distinction.

He joined the Mahatma in his political struggles, even while succeeding as a businessman. This strengthened his economic position to the extent that he was able to donate very generously to every conceivable cause aimed at the welfare of people in both India and South Africa. While some of his contributions were lauded, such as a generous donation to the Parsi General Hospital in Bombay, others were criticized. One of these was his contribution of a considerable sum of money to the building of a Sufi Mosque in Umgeni Road, Durban.

It was as a loyal supporter of Mahatma Gandhi, however, that he won considerable distinction as an indefatigable worker for the Indian people. He joined in the passive resistance campaign and was imprisoned on several occasions for opposing numerous laws directed at the Indian people. He was first appointed Trustee to the Phoenix Settlement and was then given an opportunity to be of greater service to it.

Despite several hardships he was able to secure enough financial security and independence to enable him to remain generous to a fault. His donation to the Red Cross for medical assistance to South African soldiers in the First World War was acknowledged by the Sultan of Turkey with a presentation to him of a gold medal. He was one of those who assisted Gandhiji in the formation of a stretcher bearer corps to assist soldiers of both armies in the Anglo-Boer War. His generosity extended to the sports field where he donated the Gandhi Trophy for

competition by senior Indian football players and the Sarojini Naidoo Trophy for junior players.

The establishment of the Bai Jerbhai Rustomjee Trust in honour of his wife Jerbhai, who had died in 1904, enabled him to surpass all previous generosity. The Trust Fund supported worthy causes for virtually every racial and religious group in South Africa for the building of religious but primarily secular, educational institutions of service. Hospitals and libraries always received more generous donations than expected. A building in Queen Street, Durban, belonging to the Trust also housed the Rustomjee Hall and the M.K. Gandhi Library and Reading Room. This was for some time the only Indian-owned library in the country and contained a valuable collection of works on Indian life and thought.

Parsi Rustomjee was well-known and well-loved by virtually all the people with whom he came into contact. His death in 1924 was mourned by people of all races in the city of Durban. The then mayor of the city paid generous tributes to him, while other members of the Durban City Council were no less lavish in their praise. He was survived by his three children, Jalbhoy, Sorabjee and daughter Shrinbhai.

His younger son Sorabjee was born in Durban in 1895 and was seen on occasions to walk in his father's footsteps. Sorabjee played an almost equally prominent and significant role in the political life of the Indian community, while with his brother Jalbhoy they continued business ventures of one kind or another. Sorabjee was elected deputy leader of the South African Indian Congress Delegation to India in 1926 to enlist the support of the Government of India in local Indian opposition to the Class Areas Bill, which was passed in Parliament that year. This effort culminated in the First Round Table Conference in Cape Town in December 1926. At the time of the Second Round Table Conference in 1932, held between representatives from India and the South African Government, Sorabjee Rustomjee was the President of the South African Indian Congress.

He was imprisoned in July 1946 for contravening the Riotous Assemblies Act. He was then one of the leading political figures of the Indian community, while as President of the Indian Congress he stood in the forefront of all opposition to discriminatory laws of the Government directed at the Indian community. He went to India in 1946 and consulted with Mahatma Gandhi. He then returned to South Africa to be inspired to fresh struggles on behalf of the Indian people. He met the Indian Government delegation to the United Nations in New York in 1946 to advise them on conditions in South Africa endured by the local Indian people. He emulated his father in his generosity and hosted numerous social functions at his home in Mayville, Durban, which is a landmark in the city and is referred to as "Mayville Castle"; it is the present headquarters of the Mayville Charge Office of the South African Police.

#### Fist Indian Woman Doctor

The Natal Advertiser, a newspaper published in Durban, carried the following article in an edition dated Tuesday, 27 February 1934:

"The charming ceremony of garlanding the first Indian woman to become a doctor and to practise in Durban took place this morning at the Central Railway Station, when Dr Freni Manchershaw arrived and was met by a large and representative gathering of the Indian community. In the bright sunshine the Doctor, a brilliant young woman, presented a delightful picture in her long crimson sari richly encrusted in gold sequins, and on alighting from the train she was garlanded with flowers by Mr Sorabjee Rustomjee on behalf of the Natal Indian Congress".

Dr Freni Manchershaw, L.R.C.P., M.R.C.S., D.T.M., graduated from the Royal Free Hospital in London as South Africa's first ever Indian woman doctor. She was born in Calcutta and came to South Africa with her parents when only two years old. Her parents went to live in Cape Town on arrival, so Dr Manchershaw spent all her early years schooling and studying in the Cape before going to London to study medicine. She did

post-graduate work at the Clapham Maternity Hospital for which she was awarded the Diploma in Tropical Medicine, and continued her studies in this field in Liverpool.

The small Parsee community today counts amongst its members several people who rank high among the Indian community of South Africa for outstanding achievements in various walks of life. One such is Dr J.D. Randeria of the Cancer Research Unit at the University of Durban-Westville. She was the first person in the world to successfully in-breed certain strains of mastomies that spontaneously develop intra-stomach cancer and ductal breast cancer analogous to those found in humans. Her work was a most important contribution to the field of cancer research in South Africa.

Dr Khorshed Jhinwala, a senior specialist and senior lecturer in community health at the University of Natal's medical school, has always had a deep interest in wider community welfare. Dr Jhinwala has been closely associated with welfare work in South Africa and has made a distinct contribution to the field of social service. She is noted for her outspoken views on socio-political issues in South Africa and has often influenced public opinion on these matters.

Her sister, Dr Frene Jhinwala, is a noted historian who was forced to leave South Africa in 1960 because of her strong views on the political situation in the country. Dr Jhinwala is now a research worker who writes for the United Nations and various press agencies and is a fully-fledged member of the African National Congress in exile.

Other members of the Parsee community rank high in the fields of ophthalmology and related studies in medicine. One family has been closely associated with the insurance industry for over fifty years and has built up a reputation that is almost unique in the Indian community. Yet another is recognised for its leading role in the shipping industry. Thus Parsees are known for their enterprising and not inconsiderable contributions to the commercial sector of the economy in South Africa.

PART THREECONCLUSION

Although the small number of Parsees in South Africa have no extraordinary achievements to their name to make them stand out above the other Indian communities, they are generally recognized and appreciated for what they are: hardworking, honest and deeply religious. No Parsee has ever been convicted for a criminal offence in South Africa and most members of this community are respected for their ability to fulfil their social obligations conscientiously. Despite the absence of facilities by which their religious obligations may be fulfilled, such as places of worship, Parsees remain remarkably resilient in cultural affairs and accommodate ritualistic practices within a growing secular milieu with tenacious will. Although some members, if not most, are resigned to the eventual demise of the community, many express the hope that the future will yet provide them with a formula for survival.

Despite their estrangement from any binding cultural orthodoxy they do not face the growing threats of secularization with any sense of fear. Most Parsees are prepared to make allowances for the growing tendencies of the secularization process faced more particularly by the younger members of their community. Their identification with Parsee idealism, limited though it is, is nevertheless a reminder to them of their cultural responsibilities. Philip Bagby (1963: 88), in a summary on cultural responsibilities, makes the point: "Culture is a particular class of regularities of behaviour. It includes both internal and external behaviour; it excludes the biologically inherited aspects of behaviour. Cultural regularities may or may not recur in the behaviour of individuals but, to be called 'culture', they should recur in a regular fashion in the behaviour of most of the members, and ideally in that of all the members, of a particular society."

The Parsee community enjoys a cultural identity in which recurring patterns of religious order bear a positive relationship to social behaviour. The recurring features of relationships contribute to the patterns of personal and corporate identity of which Zoroastrian ethical values form a component of their social structure. Religion and social behaviour comprise the pattern of modernity being stamped upon ideological structures. The pace of change for Parsees, as indeed it may be for all Indians in South Africa, is more rapid today than in any previous stage of social change.

This study, conducted wholly on the basis of observation and interview, revealed the chief currents of religious and social development within the community. While discussion on Parsee culture always tends to hinge on religion as a dependent variable producing an undefined system of religious commitment, members of the Parsee community are also aware of religious values constituting a dependent variable shaped by the socio-cultural setting in which they find themselves. The growth of religious and cultural values has inevitably to be determined by social interaction. Of this there is little deliberate effort, with the result that cultural interaction has diminished in the present socio-political environment of growing uncertainty.

No serious attempt is evident within the Parsee community to reassess its identity within its present socio-political context. The ambivalence of the Parsee position lies in its diverse cultural tradition continuing along with other forms of ethnocentrism. The Parsee community suffers a distinct disadvantage because of its size and therefore employs no strategies of advancement, seeks no power and exercises no measure of influence. No community, however, endures permanently the problem of depressed identity or debased status. Hope for Parsees lies not, therefore, in an increase in numbers but emigration to join Parsee communities in other climes of social, economic and, of course, cultural strength. The Parsee community gives little evidence of any real perception of the complex bond between religious expression and its own history. So, while religious practices

manifest themselves in the context of ultimate concerns, these values for the average Parsee appear to be of far less concern than more immediate socio-political and economic challenges. And while individual Parsees show some private philosophical concern, no social expression of that concern is overtly evident.

Zoroastrianism, like any other religion, is powerfully affected by the social structures in which it is immersed. Its identification with Hindu religious customs is fairly widespread and incontrovertible, although there is no evidence of any serious theological or even philosophical concepts being subject to modification. No serious dialogue ever takes place on theological issues. All Parsee prayer meetings reflect a strong Hindu influence. Most Hindus see no problems in Parsees offering prayers at Hindu shrines or participating in Hindu religious services. It therefore appears that while there is much interaction between Hindus and Parsees, most of the religious variables found within the Parsee faith remain wholly intact and there is compromise only on the fringes of ritualistic practices. Thus identifiable limits of religious influence set the boundaries within which religious interaction and subsequently cultural or even social interaction takes place. There is no record of influence upon the Zoroastrian faith by Islam or Christianity and the absence of any scholars of the Zoroastrian faith considerably reduces the possibility of Parsee influence upon them in turn. The interaction of religious and social structures within the Indian community is unalterably affected by conditions that have prevailed for centuries in India. These conditions, perpetuated in South Africa, form the identical boundaries within which social intercourse takes place in the present context.

The Parsee faith defines very clearly the parameters of religious behaviour that account for Zoroastrian values and the objectives towards which that behaviour is distinctly and preferentially directed. Zoroastrianism remains a primary source of Parsee values, although at the same time it embodies religious modifications affected by the social context of change in the midst of a growing climate of socio-economic and, above all, political variations.

The impact of Zoroastrianism on South African society is recognised in very limited contexts such as inter-faith dialogues which have been, and still are, conducted in specific instances. Notable among these are the departments of religion at various universities which encourage studies in world religions and the frequent discussions they hold on matters of ethical and cultural interest. The Association for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa encourages interest in studies in world religions including matters of Zoroastrian interest. Other organisations such as the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa and more recently the Sai Baba Foundation, entertain multi-religious viewpoints on matters of concern and take a very deep interest in Zoroastrian and other religious points of view. Recognition by other Indians, particularly Hindus, of the relevance of the Zoroastrian faith for South Africa is thus never discounted.

A Parsee never joins the Parsee faith. He is born into it. Instances have been cited, however, in which exceptions were made to the general rule. A Parsee is reared by the community, whose social and cultural unity and life style are symbolised and celebrated in rites and beliefs of the collective faith. The boundaries of religious systems are identified by the boundaries of both multi-religious systems and the secular society which affect both the internal and external relations of the whole community. Parsees are not excluded therefore from consideration as contributors to the wider whole of religious homogeneity found within the Indian community. As Wach (1958) has pointed out, it is not the growing differentiation in the secular structure of society that produces any transition from religion to society, but changes in societal and cultural situations and concomitant changes in personal tendencies that affect the overall pattern of religious commitment. This is obviously true of all communities and societies throughout the world.

South Africa has need of its Parsees as much as the Parsee community feels appreciative of the abundance of South Africa's God-given resources. They choose to live here because of what this country has



given to all its citizens in varying degrees of generosity. Given greater opportunities of advancement, Parsees will inevitably make their valuable contribution to the growth and development of South Africa. Possibilities exist for contributions of religious specialists in specifically designated religious concepts and practice to engage in dialogue to ultimately contribute to the development of a growing nation and its future hope of happiness for all its peoples.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Argyle, M.: The Scientific Study of Social Behaviour, Methuen and Co., London, 1959.
- Bagby, Philip: Culture and History, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1963.
- Bhana, S. and Pachai, B.: A Documentary History of Indian South Africans, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, California, 1984.
- Bode, D.F.A. and Nanavutty, D.: Songs of Zarathushtra, Allen and Unwin, London, 1952.
- Frye, R.N.: Iran, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1960.
- Fanibunda, E.B.: Vision of the Divine, Fanibunda, Bombay, 1971.
- Gandhi, M.K.: Satyagraha in South Africa, Navajivan, Ahmedabad, India, 1928.
- Hill, Michael: A Sociology of Religion, Heinemann, London, 1973.
- Meer, F.: Portrait of Indian South Africans, Avon House, Durban, 1969.
- Sorabji, I.J.: The Religion of Zarathushtra, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar Madras, 1926.
- Wach, J.: The Comparative Study of Religion, Columbia University Press, New York, 1958.
- Waterhouse, J.W.: Zoroastrianism, The Epworth Press, London, 1935.
- Wilbur, D.N.: Iran: Past and Present, Princeton University Press, 1958.
- Yinger, J.M.: The Scientific Study of Religion, Macmillan, London, 1970.
- Zaehner, R.C.: The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism, Oxford University Press, 1961.

OTHER MATERIAL

Parsiana, Vol. 5, No. 7, January 1983.

Randeria, D.N.: Document on Parsees in South Africa. Unpublished Paper, 1964.

Randeria, D.N.: Historical Background of the Origin of Parsees. Unpublished Paper.