

# Why I Have Chosen To Contest As An AFP Candidate?

By Noshir H. Dadrawala

A number of friends have been asking me why I have chosen to contest the forthcoming elections as an AFP candidate. Friends in the orthodox camp have been wondering how I could even dream of associating myself with AFP, which in their misguided opinion is a 'Reformist' group. And, then, there are friends who are very 'liberal' in their thinking, but fear that AFP is a serious threat to a particular individual contesting this historic election. The latter's fears are, to some extent understandable. However, the prejudice harboured by the former group is totally baseless.

AFP is an acronym for 'Adult Franchise for Progress' - a ginger group of individuals professing various shades of opinion but having one common object - restore the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) to its original position of glory as a 'Leading Charitable Institution' and wean it away from the shadows of commercialization, favouritism and nepotism. AFP does seek reforms, but these reforms are socio-economic in nature and have nothing whatsoever to do with religion.

In any case the BPP is NOT a religious institution. The trustees of the BPP are simply the custodians of the funds and properties of this more than 350 years old institution. Trustees of the BPP, irrespective of their individual views and opinions neither have the authority nor the right to interfere or for that matter even opine (except purely in their private/individual capacity) on matters concerning religion.

I agree that as trustees, certain religious institutions and properties like *Doongerwadi* and a few *Agyaries* do come under their direct jurisdiction. However, once again, despite their individual views and opinions, all trustees are required under law to manage these funds, assets and properties as per the wishes of the original founders or Settlers or as specified under various deeds of settlement.

Some friends have also queried why I did not consider contesting as an independent candidate. There are several reasons. However, the most compelling reason is that one individual on a Board of seven cannot achieve much, especially if a majority on the Board have conflicting views, aspirations and ideology. Fortunately, all the AFP

candidates think alike on issues concerning housing, education, health care and for that matter even protecting and safeguarding the sacred *Doongerwadi* lands.

A certain orthodox group has been accusing me of swinging between orthodoxy and reformism? Nothing could be further from the truth. I have always taken pride in calling myself orthodox, especially considering the fact that the true meaning of the term is, “one who walks on the right path”. I would think this definition is also in sync with *Asho Zarathushtra*’s precept of leading one’s life according to the principles of ‘*Asha*’.

I have certain religious beliefs which I have tenaciously held close to my heart for the last three decades. Only a fool or a knave would think that I would forsake them for the sake of this ‘crown of thorns’ called trusteeship.

My opponents have accused me of being a reformist. In all humility I accept that I am guilty as charged. I am a reformist with a burning desire to reform the BPP’s sagging image, systems and governance structures. However, for the record, my religious views remain unchanged.

- I am not in favour of ‘religious conversions’;
- I am not in favour of inter-caste marriages – irrespective of gender (I guess this makes me more orthodox than even WAPIZ);
- I believe in the system of *dokhmenashini* and I am not in favour of alternate systems for the disposal of the dead at Doongerwadi.

Finally, I am contesting as an AFP candidate. However, from day one I have made it clear to the group that while I am grateful to them for their support, I am in no way whatsoever obligated to them. If elected, I shall exercise individual discretion in all matters concerning the BPP.

Trusteeship for me is a call of duty. The powers that this office will bring will be channeled for doing good. For me, trusteeship is neither about politics nor prestige. It is about service with compassion and humility and carrying forward the noble intentions of the founders, settlers and donors.

I hope I have made myself abundantly clear to all concerned.