

## **Report of FPZAI meeting of Sept. 2009**

A meeting of the **Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India** was held after a lapse of three years at the Banaji Atash Behram Hall, Mumbai on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> September 2009. 49 out of 69 anjumans of India participated. Those represented included Agra, Ajmer, Allahabad, Ankleshwar, Badnera-Amravati, Bardoli, Belgaum, Bharuch, Bhopal, Billimora, Bombay Parsi Punchayet, Borivali, Chikhli, Dahanu, Daman, Davier, Delhi, Deolali, Dumas, Elav, Gandevi, Hyderabad, Indore, Irani Zoroastrian Anjuman, Jabalpur, Jhansi, Khergam, Kolkata, Lucknow, Madras, Mahuva, Mandvi, Mhow, Nagpur, Nargol, Neemuch, Panchgani, Pardi, Poona, Rajkot, Ratlam, Saronda, Satara, Solapur, Thana, Valsad, Vesu, Vizag, Vyara and Zai Bordi.

Mr. Dinshaw Mehta, President of Bombay Parsi Punchayet who is also the President of FPZAI presided. He urged all to work harmoniously. "A house divided cannot stand." Besides him five other BPP trustees Khojeste Mistree, Mrs. Arnavaz Mistry, Mr. Jimmy Mistry, Mrs. Armaity Tirandaz and Yazdi Desai were present.

**Election of office bearers:** Five Vice-Presidents were elected, one for each zone Tehemton Anklesaria of Ratlam, V.P. North Zone; Numazar Mehta of Kolkata, V.P. East Zone; Pourushasp Mehta, of Poona, V.P. West Zone 'A', Areez Khambatta of Ahmedabad, V.P. West Zone 'B'; Kerfegar Antia, of Hyderabad, V.P. South Zone.

Election of Zonal representatives 5 from North Zone –Allahabad, Indore, Jabalpur, Jhansi and Mhow. 2 reps from West Zone A Maharashtra – Dahanu and Irani Zoroastrian Anjuman, 2 reps from West Zone B Gujarat – Bardoli and Nargol, 1 from East Zone- Kolkata, 1 from South Zone Hyderabad.

Five BPP Trustees on the Executive Council of FPZAI are Dinshaw Mehta, Khojeste Mistree, Jimmy Mistry, Armaity Tirandaz and Yazdi Desai. Co-opted members are Dadi Mistry, Keki Gandhi, Navroz Davar, Mani Clubwala and Noshir Paghdiwalla. Khojeste Mistree and Pervez Mehta are Jt. Hon. Secretaries. Yazdi Desai and Merwan Irani are Jt. Hon. Treasurers. Arnavaz Mistry is the Executive Secretary.

### **Poverty Amelioration Scheme**

This is the brainchild of Mr. Areez Khambatta who as contributed a substantial sum along with the BPP. **FPZAI** will give monthly financial aid to poor and needy humdins throughout India. Local anjumans will verify the genuineness of the applicants. Funds made available from sale of properties of defunct anjumans will be utilised for needs of PAS applicants. Commodore Maediomah Bhada suggested making people self reliant rather than giving doles. "Teach people how to fish rather than giving them a fish."

**Agiary adoption scheme** was suggested by Jimmy Mistry. Wealthy Parsis as also rich anjumans can adopt an agiary. Agiaries should be the epicentre of community activities. Mr. Areez Khambatta offered to adopt two agiaries. Adopt an Agiary committee was constituted with three members Areez Khambatta, Jimmy Mistry and Khojeste Mistree.

**Matrimonial meets** Mr. Areez Khambatta suggested that matrimonial ,meets should be organized once every quarter. Mr. Dinshaw Mehta mentioned that the BPP is refurbishing Khareghat Hall where marriage meets will be organised. Youth wing of the BPP is setting up a marriage bureau online where Parsi youths can register.

BPP is promoting ZYNG Zoroastrian Youth for Next generation. It will have its website and promote networking. It will be launched in a few months. BPP's Holiday Program for Youth

HPY has completed 23 years. Among its varied activities the participants this year collected 224 bottles of blood for the B. D. Petit Parsee General Hospital in a single day.

**Fertility Project** started by BPP Over 500 Parsi couples in the past 3 years have undergone fertility treatment. 236 couples have produced children. BPP gives financial assistance of Rs.3,000 per month for 3<sup>rd</sup> child till the child attains the age of 18 years to 138 Parsi families. BPP also gives Rs.1,000 per month for 2<sup>nd</sup> child which is envisaged to be increased to Rs.3,000 per month from January 2010. This assistance is extended to Parsi families from all over India.

Mr. Khojeste Mistree: “BPP envisages an agiary, a senior citizens’ centre, a medical clinic facility and a crèche in every newly built colony/baug.” “Parsi media are biased and use adjectives to villify our High Priests.” “BPP has started counseling for Parsi boys at the hostel at Gamadia Colony. As most boys are from rural areas vocational guidance is necessary for them.

Mr. Yazdi Katpitia from Surat narrated about irregularities of Surat Parsi Panchayat and alleged that Parsi properties were neglected or sold off at less than their market value. A 20 page pamphlet in Gujarati about the alleged wrongdoings of the SPP was circulated at the meeting. The chairman responded that it would not be fair for the Federation to deliberate on this without hearing the SPP who were not present at this meeting.

### **Defunct Anjumans**

Mr. Soli Katpitia detailed the steps taken by him to retrieve properties of defunct anjumans. He will coordinate with Vice Presidents of different zones. Bomi Hirjee suggested exploring the possibility of an Act, a central legislation similar to Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act by which any Parsi property would vest in FPZAI if there are no Parsis left in an area. Parsi legal eagles could draft such a legislation to protect the interest of minority community. Jimmy Mistry suggested a meeting should be held every month to review the progress on defunct anjumans and to document/videograph the records.

**World Zoroastrian Congress** at Dubai will be held from 28<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2009 for which the approximate cost is Rs.60,000/- BPP will sponsor youths between the ages 18 to 35 to the extent of 50% of the cost.

Dr. Mehru Bengalee, Parsi member of National Minorities Commission said: “Five religious minorities are accepted by the Constitution of India – Parsis, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Buddhists. Of the 17 State Minorities Commissions Parsis are represented only in West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Mr Dinshaw Mehta has been appointed as our representative since August 2009 for Maharashtra. There are ample opportunities for distance education. 95% of the Parsi population in India is in Gujarat and Maharashtra. Parsis are also a linguistic minority. **Parsis must seek representation at the local punchayet level and state level. Only if we have representation can we have bargaining power.** A model Act has been prepared by National Minorities Commission that every State must have a minorities commission with members of all five minority communities. Prime Minister’s 15 point program allocates 7 crores rupees for minorities. Each minority community has a quota for allocation of funds. In the recruitment boards of Central Govt. corporations 15% jobs are reserved for minorities in government, defence, semi-govt. bodies. Please send schemes for repairs to fire temples, building community hall, libraries, education programs, fees for coaching classes. Under the priority sector lending scheme loans are available to minorities at 6% interest.

**We have a right to ask for seats in colleges established by Parsis. Colleges established by Sindhis, Gujaratis and even Jesuits accept Parsi students as linguistic minorities. A certificate is issued by BPP certifying that the Parsi student is from a linguistic minority.** Ministry of Human resources has issued a circular that colleges run by minority communities can admit Parsi students within the 50% quota reserved for the minority community.”

Marzban Giara suggested that information about job opportunities/scholarships, financial assistance available to minority communities needs to be widely publicised through notice boards at Parsi colonies/baug/agiaries.

Mr. Eruch B. Desai, ex-President of BPP and FPZAI said: “FPZAI is a link between various anjumans. It is a meeting place where community problems are discussed. FPZAI suggested amendments to Indian Succession Act. The proposed Adoption Bill was dropped due to representation by FPZAI. **We cannot and should not change the use of doongerwadi lands for purposes other than dokhmenashini.** The rich and affluent in our community are averse to what happens in our community. The present BPP trustees should be supported by all for the progress and prosperity of the community. The trustees should work as a united team.”

**Priests** Many anjumans are finding it difficult to get priests. On the question of priests not willing to go to moffusil areas Khojeste Mistree said: “There are 375 priests in Mumbai. They interact, network with other priests and their family members. They are reluctant to move out of Mumbai as they feel isolated. Over the past 50 years our community has treated our priests as slaves. We need to give them respect and pay them decent remuneration. Priests are finding it difficult to find marriage partners.”

A voluntary group of Parsis has been silently helping to clean and repair our places of worship such as agiaries as also dokhmas. These are the unsung heroes of our community.

Mrs. Arnavaz Mistry appealed for cooperation and commitment. “We need harmony in our community” she said.

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