

Collegian camaraderie

For 50 years The Young Collegians' Zoroastrian Association has brought the youth of the community together

Hilla P. Guzder

Reliving their salad days and mingling with their mentors Prof Nadir Modi and Prof Khurshed Sheriar, the past and present members of The YCZA (Young Collegians' Zoroastrian Association) celebrated with zest and *en famille* the golden jubilee of their Association at the Allbless Baug on March 30, 2002.

"A jubilee is a time to jubilate, to exult. It is also a time to look back, and forward. With an average of 50 functions per year for 50 years, i.e. 2,500 functions, the YCZA has a batting average any association can be proud of," stated Modi, the chairman and co-founder (with Sheriar) of the YCZA, both of whom attended the function in crisp, white *duglis* and *ervad* headgear.

Noshirwan Modi and Dr Nozer Sheriar (Modi and Sheriar's sons, respectively) have recently been made YCZA trustees, announced master of ceremonies Zarine Commissariat, adding joyfully that it was through the YCZA that she and her chartered accountant husband Kersi had met, embarking on "the happiest 30 years of our life." For 50 years, we have tried to inculcate harmoniously and actively through the YCZA a spirit of *Parsipanu*, an appreciation of Zoroastrian culture and religion and many YCZAites have become bosom friends or life partners, stated Khurshed Sheriar.

On the anvil is an Alumni Association of the YCZA, where founder members will be required to make a one-time payment of Rs 500. Ex-members of the Association are today prosperous and well-established professionals — doctors, judges, senior defense officers, managing directors, etc in all parts of the world, noted Nadir Modi, adding

that they had received New Year greetings from the world's highest battlefield (Kargil), "from his (ex YCZAite) heart into our hearts."

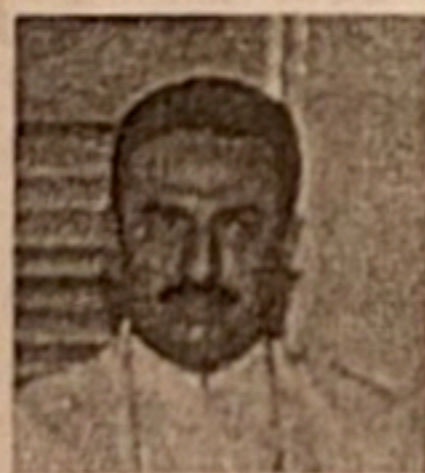
Eulogizing Nadir Modi and the time, money and energy he has given to the YCZA, Zarine Commissariat informed the gathering that he had thrown open his bungalow at Udvada for outstation visits and 33 youngsters from Baroda recently spent three days there, with religious sessions being conducted for two-and-a-half days by *Ervad* (Dr) Ramiyar Karanjia. YCZA meetings are regularly held at his ground floor premises at Modi Lodge at Gamdevi and a part of the first floor has been given to the YCZA Book Fund to house their

vast collection of books on engineering, medicine, arts, science, commerce, etc donated by old students, with Ahmad Bharucha and a band of volunteers handling for three decades the herculean task of distributing the books to students.

With a Rs 50 lakh corpus, the YCZA Educational and Charitable Fund disburses up to four lakh rupees annually by way of scholarships, freeships, medical aid, sports scholarships, etc, with the trustees personally meeting each candidate to guide him/her and monitor progress, Khurshed Sheriar informed the gathering. Bakhtiar (Bucky) Bhesania, Kersi Commissariat, Nadir and Noshirwan Modi, Khurshed and Nozer Sheriar and D. E. Tata are the trustees of this Fund.

"It was in 1952 that my friend Nadir and I were young teachers at Jai Hind College," narrated Khurshed Sheriar. While the College at that time had many linguistic groups — Gujarati, Marathi, Sindhi, Punjabi, Kannada — which provided entertainment for the students, Parsi boys and girls were seemingly left out. Principal Advani "loved the Parsis" and willingly gave permission for a Zoroastrian association, even making the College auditorium available for its activities. Elected representatives called trustees worked collectively to organize musical evenings, picnics, debates, etc and within two years YCZA went inter-collegiate with Parsi students from other colleges clamoring to join!

"Fifty years of continuous association with the YCZA and I've been given five minutes to recount (my experiences)!" quipped Bhesania who is a senior partner in the solicitors' firm of Mulla and Mulla and Craigie Blunt and



Clockwise from top left: Khurshed Sheriar, Nadir Modi, invitees with Zarine (far right) and Kersi Commissariat

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Caroe. Among the first batch of YCZA members, Bhesania recalled that the fee at that time was one rupee fifty paise per year (the annual fee today being Rs 15)! Bhesania narrated the fun and frolic of trips to Agra, Ajanta-Ellora, etc, the sharing of belongings and hardships, the tragedy of finding that someone had lost his wallet at the station at the very start of an excursion, the first mixed group trip to Matheran where the boys and girls were more interested in each other than in the scenic beauty! Another of YCZA's earliest members, well-known orthodontist Dr Keki Mistry, narrated the comic and the profound, while solicitor Gool Kotwal (then Damania) recalled the pleasures of living in the open (and the pain of being attacked by red ants!) and cooking a meal over firewood fetched by the boys.

Chartered accountant Jimmy Khan remembered the talent parades and fancy dress, the classical music appreciation evenings where even non-members could join at a 50 paise fee! "If my knees are not knocking today as I address you, it is because of the umpteen opportunities provided by the YCZA," he stated, in keeping with its motto

"YCZA must lead and not follow."

Sharing his erudition in a straightforward, thought provoking address, Nadir Modi touched upon the ground realities of being a member of the Parsi community today. While there has been a qualitative and quantitative decline, he noted, it is necessary to roll back that decline. Every major business and industrial group faces and solves its problems, and it's as simple as that for our community too. "It is no vain boast that we have in the past exerted an influence on society beyond our numbers, and our community has produced a field marshal, admirals, air marshals, top industrialists, doctors, scientists, etc," he asserted. Ours has often been an ungrateful community (*khaasraa no' haar apéch*), at other times apathetic or uninterested. To some youth, the community is even distasteful, he noted.

Like the melting polar ice caps which float as icebergs in solitary splendor, among Parsis too individuals are doing well, but the community is dissolving. "It is late, but there is still time to put out the lifeboats and row to safety. We need to commune, to think, speak and act together," he said. The proliferation of

youth organizations like the HPY [Holiday Programme for Youth and the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) Youth Club], the YCZA, the Young Rathestars, etc need to band together, with older organizations like the BPP providing central support, he advised. We have to pick up the challenge at the macro level and think out solutions at the organizational level.

"We ain't what we ought to be, we ain't what we wanna be, we ain't what we gonna be, but thank God we ain't what we was," he said, quoting Martin Luther King's famous words and proffering the advice, in Theodore Roosevelt's words, that you have to start where you are, with what you have. "Let us look upon the community as an extended family, if we don't look after it, who will?" he queried.

While the community spirit was fostered by a jashan and the rendering of monajats by a few girls of the Avabai Petit School's Zoroastrian choir led by their superintendent and ex-YCZAite Yasmin Charna, the golden jubilee function ended on a note of merriment with skits, music and dancing and a Tanaz Godiwalla repast.

With Best Wishes From

Mr Rusy M. Shroff, M.B.E.

and

Mrs Purviz R. Shroff