

The Y.C.Z.A. - 50 Years In Retrospect

In 1952, when Nader Modi and I were young lecturers at Jai Hind College we noticed that colleges had several linguistic groups such as Gujarati, Marathi, Sindhi and Hindi Associations which catered to the needs of specific linguistic groups of students but our Parsee boys and girls felt left out. We therefore decided to bring our youngsters together and make them interested to work for their overall welfare and in turn for the welfare of our community. I take this opportunity to pay a humble tribute to a fine gentleman who helped us to make this dream possible. He was late Principal T. M. Advani of Jai Hind College. He was a man more English than an Englishman and was fond of Parsees. He preferred Parsee teachers and gave admission to Parsee students. He not only permitted us to start the Association but gave us the use of the college premises including the auditorium. Thus, YCZA was started with the help of a small group of dedicated students.

Initial activities of the YCZA were such that youngsters would love, which included debates, quiz programmes, elocution competitions, musical and social evenings, picnics, hikes and out of Bombay tours. Right from the beginning, the activities were organized and managed by the elected group of students called 'Trustees'. Within a year, the YCZA of Jai Hind College became so popular that the Zoroastrian students and teachers from other colleges approached us to take them with us. It was again the magnanimity of Principal T. M. Advani that he allowed the students and the teachers of other colleges to join us. Thus, an intercollegiate YCZA took shape in 1954. As the years rolled by, we had hundreds of students from various Arts, Science, Commerce, Law, Medical and Engineering Colleges joining us, hence some of our activities were organized at the Cama Oriental Institute Hall. We made our activities more broad-based with emphasis on Zoroastrian culture and religion with activities viz. Shahname recitals, religious talks, religious question/answer and quiz sessions and very popular the annual pilgrimage to eight Atash Behrams.

With an idea to help less privileged members, we started a Book Loan Scheme wherein old students would donate their books to the following lot. Soon with the efforts of our students, a regular Book Fund was created, managed by the students themselves. Today, we have a very large collection of text books and study books loaned to our members and several non-Parsee applicants of all faculties viz. Arts, Science, Commerce, Engineering, Law, Medicine and Computers. To manage the distribution and collection of books throughout the year is a Herculean task. I would like to express our gratitude to Mr. Ahmed Bharucha and his team of dedicated workers for efficiently managing the Book Fund. I also take this opportunity to express our thanks to Mrs. Homai Modi who helped us in organising the activities of the YCZA for 25 years. For the first twenty-five years, our activities were centered around the welfare of our members alone which by then numbered in thousands. During the Silver

Jubilee year our think tank of ex YCZA'ites decided to do something concrete for the community, hence put up programmes to collect funds and a YCZA Educational and Charitable Trust was established. The seven trustees of the Educational Trust are all old YCZA'ites and I am proud to say that through the generosity of Parsee hearts, today, we have a fairly good corpus. We are different in one way from other Trusts, we personally meet every applicant and guide them in matters academic. Annually we give out scholarships and free-ships for educational aid and occasionally for sports and medical aid to the tune of Rs. 3 to 4 lacs.

Over 50 years, our membership has run into thousands. In many instances children of the first generation YCZA members have followed in the footsteps of their parents. Over the years these young boys and girls came together, worked side by side and developed close friendships, many of them becoming life-time partners. On the whole, these marriages are happy ones.

At the end of 50 years, we all at the YCZA ask ourselves: What have we achieved? What has the Community gained?

- 1) It seems to me like the continued, active and harmonious existence of any organization for a long span of 50 years is by itself an achievement.
- 2) We have tried to make the young people aware of their culture and religion and proud of their "Parsee panoo".
- 3) We have enthused in many the desire for service and developed in them the leadership quality. Their response over the years has been heartwarming.
- 4) It is indeed a matter of pride that our members are spread not only in Mumbai and other parts of India but also abroad in U.K., U.S.A, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and in Gulf countries. Many of them are Senior executives, highly successful professionals, senior officers in the Armed Forces and also Community Youth leaders.

A very large number of dedicated youths and colleagues in various colleges have played a major role. YCZA is indeed a successful story of youth empowerment.

At the personal level, to-day I feel happy and satisfied not only because we could do a little for community youth but for the respect and affection we have received from each one of them.

For the overall success of the YCZA the main credit goes to my dear friend Nader.

We have a Book Fund for which Nader has given a part of the ground floor of his bungalow exclusively for the storage and distribution of books. Again, every week 50 to 75 students take part in a variety of activities. Nader has made a part of the ground floor exclusively available for YCZA activities. But for him, YCZA would not be what it is to-day.

— Prof. Khurshed Sheriar