

# The Y.C.Z.A. Story And Its Contribution To Communal Welfare

by Prof. Khurshed C. Sheriar

The Young Collegians' Zoroastrian Association (Y.C.Z.A. to its members and well-wishers) was founded in 1952.

In 1952, the writer was a Lecturer in Biology in the Jai Hind College and Mr. Nadir Ardeshir Modi was a Lecturer in English Literature in the same College. We were both young Zoroastrians, both Ervad Maratabs, both proud of our community, culture and religion, both having the desire to and aware of the need to do something for our community, culture and religion. We are both (and have continued to be for 50 years) close friends, closer and friendlier to each other with each passing year. Both of us wanted to bring the young people of the community in all colleges closer together and to make them interested in and dedicated to work for the welfare of the community, culture and religion in general and for the youth section of it, in particular.

Patterning ourselves upon the Lions, the Rotary and other such organisations we started having and have continued for 50 years regular functions, most of them free, on an average 3 to 4 times a month and with an average attendance of about 30 to 50 members per function. With even an average of 3 functions a month, and an average attendance of 40 you have a monthly attendance figure of 120. Multiplied by 12 you have a yearly attendance figure of 1440. Multiply it by 50 years and you have a figure which modestly compels me not to work out.

Our members have been drawn from all Colleges in Mumbai - Arts, Science, Commerce, Law, Medicine and Engineering. Our

activities have included from the beginning cultural activities like Shahnama Recitals, Religious Talks, Debates, Quizzes, Religious Question/Answer Sessions, Literature and Classical Music Functions, an annual 8 Atash Behram tour and an additional annual Iranshah tour at unbelievably low subsidised rates. In order to sugarcoat the pill and realising that it is in the interest of the community that its young people should keep meeting each other in a city where even meeting each other has become increasingly more difficult, we have also had a "mix" of functions like picnics, socials, hikes, parties, antakshree competitions, games evenings, treasure hunts, Bhel and Sail parties, moonlight cruises and so on and on.

Gender-wise, our membership has been fairly divided and social class-wise while we have had young people from the upper strata of the community, the majority have been from the upper and lower middle classes and also the less privileged ones for whom we have been specially concerned.

For all of these for many years we have had a rolling **Book Fund** from which textbooks and study books have been given for the asking to all members as well as to non-Parsi applicants of all faculties, namely, Arts, Science, Commerce, Law, Medicine and Engineering. However, certain wear and tear charges are collected for these books from which books are replaced and new books added.

We started with an annual membership fee of Rs.5/- only which after 50 years has become Rs.15/-. Except for a combined fund of intentions, goodwill and determination we had no other funds when we started. Since many years now, thanks to the generosity of the Parsi heart we have established the **Y.C.Z.A. Educational and Charitable Fund** with a corpus of over Rs.50 Lacs. We are a registered

Public Charity Trust with an exemption under S. 80-G of the Income Tax Act for all donations made to us.

The Trustees of this registered Charity Trust who are all old Y.C.Z.Aites themselves personally meet and screen all Applicants for educational aid. Annually, we give out Scholarships and Free-ships mainly to applicants for educational aid and occasionally to Sports and Medical aid applicants to the tune of about Rs.3 to 4 lacs per year.

Over 50 years our membership forms run into thousands. Our membership numbers have ranged annually from 200 to 700. In many instances the children of original Y.C.Z.Aites have followed in their footsteps. Our members are spread not only all over Mumbai and India but also abroad in U.S.A., U.K., Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Those members who took an active part in the Y.C.Z.A. learnt the basics of management and organisational skills and learnt how to deal with human beings and how to get the best out of them. Over the years we have had **student "trustees"**/voluntary helpers and have had no paid staff/minimal paid staff. Active participants have in their future lives achieved high positions in life - some of them being Managing Directors, Senior Executives and Professionals. Many of them carry warm memories of their young days and their young experiences in the Y.C.Z.A.

Now that we are entering into our **Golden Jubilee year** we first of all thank Ahura Mazda for His many kindnesses and for having blessed us, guided us and helped us through the 50 years of our existence which had their triumphs and their sorrows, their roses and their thorns.

At the end of 50 years the writer asks himself: What have we, who have been in the Y.C.Z.A. and working for it in our different ways for the last 50 years, achieved? What

has our community gained? What have we ourselves gained? What have our children gained?

It seems to me that the continued active existence of a communal non-profit organisation for 50 years is by itself an achievement. The facts and figures we have set out above further tell their own story. Perhaps among the more important aspects of our work has been firstly that we have tried to make the numbers of young people who pass through our portals aware of and proud of their "**Parsipanoo**". We have enthused in many of them the desire for service. To the extent that we could, we have given them guidance, leadership and encouragement. Their response over the years and up to date has been heartwarming. For the personal growth and development of our Parsi youth we have tried to fill a gap that the average formal education and the average home experience and training does not fill. We have tried to make our youths health conscious, wealth conscious, spiritually conscious and communally conscious. We have tried to help them in their personal lives and in their professional/business lives. In a phrase, we have tried to help in their welfare and their growth.

An unexpected but thought-provoking windfall has been the fact that over the years thousands of Parsi young people came together and, above all, if they worked together for Y.C.Z.A. programmes and projects several of them began to appreciate each other. Lifetime friendships developed many of which have continued for decades. The marriage list between the members is a long (and on the whole) a happy one.

In a gratifying measure the young generation in turn has thrown up a large number of dedicated youth leaders too numerous to mention (whom I do not mention by name so that any left out do not feel hurt or neglected), who in turn have carried the good

work forward. For all such people at the end of 50 years I can only say, "Well Done! You good and faithful servants of your community, culture and religion. Like the Olympic Torch you have carried the Zoroastrian Torch forward down the runways of history".

Over the years a large number of dedicated young men and women have given and several are continuing to give their time, energy and in many cases dipped into their own limited pockets to give, in some cases at the expenses of their studies and personal careers, months and years of devoted free service for organising, activating and successfully effectuating a large number of projects and programmes for the Y.C.Z.A. For all of these merely a word of thanks would be wholly inadequate. To them goes our heartfelt gratitude and sincerest appreciation and admiration for being Zoroastrians of the finest type.

In our Golden Jubilee year we desire:

(a) to renew old contacts for the benefit of the individuals and the organisation;

(b) to re-think our mission for the next 50 years and to re-shape our activities and programmes to better meet the needs of 21st century youth; and

(c) to increase our financial base so that the Y.C.Z.A. Trustees and leaders of the future go on from strength to strength and make an effective contribution for increasing the quantity and quality of our community.

I urge those old Y.C.Z.Aites and other persons who may be interested in helping us to send us their names and addresses (including E-mail addresses and Tel. Nos.) at the writer's under-noted address or contact Mr. Percy Master c/o Mr. N.A. Modi at R-11, Central Bank Building, 3rd Floor, Sir Homi Mody Street, Mumbai-400 023. Tel. No. 2642874 or Mr. Kersi K. Commissariat at Suleman Chambers, 2nd Floor, Battery Street, Mumbai-400 039. Tel.: No.: 2873888.