

Plain Speak with Mr. Areez Khambatta

With Federation Elections around the corner, Zeenia Wadia and Karl Sahukar talk with Mr. Areez Khambatta, WAPIZ Chairman & Vice President of Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India, (West Zone- Gujarat Anjumans) about WAPIZ's role in the community as well as his pivotal role in the Federation of Anjumans of India.

He is a man of great principles, outspoken and focused. His thinking is positive and his goals well defined. He sees no personal benefits and focuses on the well being of our entire community. Mr Areez Khambatta says "My Community is precious & I will safeguard it" in the interview.



Mr. Areez Khambatta with Karl Sahukar

Q: What in your opinion are the current leanings of the Zoroastrian community in India?

A: Most Parsi-Irani Zoroastrians in India are orthodox. However, the orthodox are not outspoken and are prone to timidity. The reformist members, desiring to bring about change, are vociferous. It is the elite who being intermarried, or having intermarried family members or friends, want to change the religion to suit themselves.

Q: Why is WAPIZ always in the midst of some controversy or the other?

A: It is not us but the liberals who keep raising the controversies. WAPIZ only counters them. We the orthodox wish to practice our religion the way we have been doing since we came to India. WAPIZ was formed when the liberal Zoroastrians wanted to create a cosmopolitan World Body of Zoroastrians, which would accept not only non-Zoroastrian spouses of Parsi-Iranis, but even converts from other religions as members! All we want is to maintain status quo and preserve our religious heritage and Parsi Irani identity so that the community, and with it the religion, is not wiped out. Since the last two decades, the Parsi media has been propagating reformist views. The media has been controlled by a handful of influential people, and they are instrumental in creating and encouraging these controversies. The birth of WAPIZ is about 20-25 years too late. If it was created earlier, it would have been much better. It is the "Java-devo" attitude of the community that has landed us in this mess.

Q: WAPIZ has been embroiled in the controversy surrounding the debarment of the two defrocked priests...

A: If the priests who are the keepers of the faith themselves do not follow the tenets and customs of the religion, what can be expected of the common man? It should be noted that WAPIZ does not claim to have the authority or the power to ban any priest. These renegade priests have been defrocked and banned by their own priestly groups. WAPIZ supports the learned High Priests and is only adhering to the dictates of the learned High Priests. If the community does not follow the learned High Priests, where will this leave us, as a community?

Q: WAPIZ has a membership of over 5000 Parsi-Irani Zoroastrians. During the recent BPP election, why did this not translate into votes for the WAPIZ candidate?

A: Being in the BPP is not a focus for WAPIZ. The only reason why WAPIZ put up candidates for the BPP is because we feel that we could work more effectively from within the BPP to protect and preserve our heritage than from outside the BPP. WAPIZ's aim is to put a brake on the reformist agenda promoted by liberal Zoroastrians and the 'convertists'. Just like Anna Hazare has not been able to stop corruption, but has put a brake on corrupt politicians and the malpractices which have sprung up because of them, WAPIZ strives to put a brake on the reformist's agenda. As far as the last BPP elections go, I think it was the false propaganda against WAPIZ, which we perhaps did not counter strongly enough, that might have been responsible. Unfortunately, truth was not able to prevail. It is also that many WAPIZ members have not even registered with the BPP under the Adult Franchise system.

Q: With the Federation elections coming up, what is WAPIZ's strategy? What has been your contribution to the Federation during the time you have been in office?

A: I don't believe in strategy for garnering votes. My good work from day one, speaks for itself. In the last few years that I have been the Vice President of the West Zone of the Federation, which includes the Gujarat anjumans, I have brought positive change in the Federation. Earlier, prominence was given to foreign Zoroastrians, instead of looking after our own poor brethren here. The smaller Anjumans were ignored, as were the poor humdins from the far flung villages in Gujarat. The Federation was focusing on the wrong things and I have worked to change that.

The **Poverty Amelioration Scheme** initiated by me, now covers 72 needy Parsi-Irani families living in remote areas, without any anjumans to look after them. I persuaded the BPP to match my contribution of Rs. 6 lakhs which I have contributed from my own pocket, towards this scheme. At the Federation meeting in Ahmedabad in 2004, I was instrumental in stopping the formation of the 'Cosmopolitan' World Body. This World Body now lies buried, but not, as I often say in lighter vein, at Doongerwadi! I initiated the **Agiary Repair and Adoption Schemes in the Federation**. The idea is to adopt an Agiary and contribute towards its maintenance. Also, today there are so many defunct Anjumans throughout Gujarat and other states where there are no Parsis left, and encroachments are happening. The value of these defunct properties is more than Rs.500 Crores. I have been pushing the federation to concentrate on recovering funds for the community from these defunct properties.

Q: What are your views on the GWG (Global Working Group)? Why is WAPIZ not able to fill the shoes of a World Body, since WAPIZ claims to be a "World Alliance"?

A: North America will never recognize WAPIZ as a World Body because WAPIZ is for Parsi Irani Zoroastrians only and in North America they accept non-Zoroastrian spouses and Converts as full members of some of their Associations. Any World Body of the community should be for Parsi-Irani Zoroastrians only. Otherwise it cannot claim to be the global voice of our community, as the GWG is claiming to be. Our High Priests have already cautioned us about joining the GWG. **(See High Priests letter re GWG, overleaf of this interview)** The convertists slyly want to open up the community and therefore keep setting up bodies like the GWG, the earlier Round Table Conference and the Cosmopolitan World Body. We cannot compromise on this. We cannot have converts from Brazil, Venezuela, Tajiks, or even non-Zoroastrian spouses of Parsi-Iranis etc. who claim to be Zoroastrians to be a part of our community's World Body.

Q: You and Yazdi Desai are the major patrons of WAPIZ. Considering the amount of charity requests that you receive, do you intend to tap other sources for raising funds?

A: WAPIZ was not meant to be a charitable organization. People perceive WAPIZ to be a charitable organization, because we try to help wherever and as much as we can, but our objectives are different. WAPIZ has been primarily set up to Preserve, Protect and Perpetuate our religious traditions and our religious identity. We will speak out against issues which threaten the tenets and customs of our faith. There are over 100 Parsi Zoroastrian Trusts in Mumbai who do charity. Hence, there are enough capable Trusts which disburse funds. While donations are always welcome, we do not want terms and conditions of the donors attached to it. Funds are of course necessary and appreciated, but not with strings attached!

Q: What are the plans of WAPIZ for the future?

A: Our work will always speak for itself. We do not wish to blow our own trumpet from the rooftops. People know what we are doing. They also know that WAPIZ will always support not only the traditional cause and our religion, but much more! Whenever there is a threat to our religious institutions, WAPIZ will always be there to combat it.



Zeenia Wadia interviewing Mr. Areez Khambatta

We have initiated various outreach programs for the youth and the not so young. We intend to conduct these on a regular basis. Already, our co-Trustee Mr. Homi P. Ranina recently held a talk on Tax Savings For Individuals, which met with a very good response. We intend to have another such talk after the new Code of Direct Taxation comes into effect. We are aware of the malady of drug addiction which is prevalent in our Baugs in Mumbai, amongst some of our youth. We intend to conduct workshops which could spread awareness amongst youngsters and their parents. Similarly, we have many other such informative programs lined up for our community members, and I urge all to take advantage of these initiatives. Most importantly, we expect the community to be more understanding of what WAPIZ does and of our motives to safeguard, preserve, protect and perpetuate our religion. We seek the support of the community in these endeavours.

Q: What message do you have for the youth?

A: Take life seriously. Become responsible. Do eat, drink and be merry, but not all the time, or at the expense of everything else. At one time all top industrialists, doctors, lawyers and engineers were Parsis, but not now. We are beaten by numbers. If you don't put your heart and soul into your profession, you will not be able to achieve success. If you strive and work hard now, you will be able to enjoy your old age. Make an attempt to understand what WAPIZ stands for, what it is doing and why it is doing what it does. It is the religion finally that will make you survive. If you are not faithful to your religion, what will you be faithful to? Bravely and boldly contradict if you see your religion being denigrated or traditions diluted, even if you are called a Taliban. **Remember, Ahura Mazda always knows the Truth!**

Q: Your fight is continuous and so is criticism. Comment.

A: (With a laugh) I have never let criticism in anyway become an obstacle in my journey. As a businessman, I have been through major obstacles but still have moved on in the direction which leads me to what is right. I will fight for what is right and not shy away from spreading my message (Preserving our tradition).

Q: Any message that you would like to spread to our community members?

A: If you know what you want, go get it, don't let anyone demotivate you. **I believe in calling a spade a spade, I can't sugarcoat words so I may be considered brash. However the truth is that when it comes to fighting for my religion I will go all out.** I ask each and everyone to be supportive of our cause and would like the community to believe in us.

**WAPIZ Page continues overleaf
See High Priests' Letter regarding GWG overleaf**

Community protests against Garbage Collection Centre outside Dadyseth Atash Behram after WAPIZ highlights the case

WAPIZ's call, asking for removal of the Garbage Collection Centre, which is situated against the West side wall of the Dadyseth Atash Behram, has snowballed into a strong movement, with hundreds of community members raising their voices against the same. Several individuals as well as community organisations have spoken up as well as written to the authorities to have the dump removed without further delay.

Mr. Nariman Modi, Trustee of the Parsee Vegetarian & Temperance Society, has forwarded to the BMC as well as the Police and other relevant authorities, including the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, his letter signed by 480 community members, asking not only for the removal of the dump but also the nuisance of hawkers at the entrance of the Atash Behram. (See letter below). The Trustees of Dadyseth Atash Behram have themselves also appealed to the authorities to relocate the Garbage Dump elsewhere.

WAPIZ has now sought a personal hearing with the Municipal Commissioner, Mr. Subodh Kumar, to solve this problem.

High Priests ask Community leaders NOT to join the Global Working Group, (GWG) which claims to be a community organization and yet is not restricted solely to Parsi/Irani Zoroastrians

In a letter addressed to the Bombay Parsi Punchayet as well as to all the member Anjumans of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India (FPZAI), our High Priests have cautioned the community about the GWG, which, they have emphasized, is nothing but the Cosmopolitan World Body with a new title and a slightly different form.

Kaikhushroo Dastur Minocher
Jamasp Asa M.A. Ph.D.

14th January 2012

To
Trustees, Bombay Parsi Punchayet,
All member Anjumans of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India (FPZAI)
Dear Sirs/Mesdames,

You will recall that in 2004, under our guidance, all of you had defeated a proposal for FPZAI to form/join a World Body of Zoroastrians. Attached herewith, is our letter, written to you then, explaining the dangers of forming/joining such a Body, which would be open to other so-called Zoroastrians and not just to Parsi/Irani Zoroastrians.

After 6 years of relative quiet on the Cosmopolitan World Body, an attempt is once again being made on this very same front. The proposal put before you to form a Global Working Group (GWG) is nothing but the Cosmopolitan World Body with a new title and a slightly different form, which is nevertheless, every bit as dangerous to our community as the earlier proposal. We are therefore constrained to address all of you once again to provide guidance in this crucial matter.

As you are all aware, the 4 founder participants of the proposed GWG are supposed to be FPZAI (India), ZTFE (UK and Europe) FEZANA (North America) and Iran. While FPZAI and ZTFE are committed to promoting only the Parsi/Irani identity, FEZANA has abandoned the Parsi/Irani identity to accommodate organisations, which accept Converts and in Iran, our religious traditions have already been severely altered. Our religion and its very survival are at stake with such defiance of our religious traditions and practices.

With the inclusion in the GWG of other regions and other so-called "Zoroastrian" organisations over time, as proposed, we Parsis/Iranis will become a minority in our own community. Within no time the majority in the GWG will begin dictating to us, the true Zarathushtis, as to how our religion should be followed and who are considered Parsi/Irani Zarathushtis.

We sincerely hope that as community leaders you realize that although the formation of a Global Working Group may look harmless, our millennia-old unique religious identity and religious survival cannot be safeguarded in any organization like the GWG that shies away from perpetuating the Parsi/Irani identity and is essentially cosmopolitan in nature.

The GWG is being touted as bringing together our global community, but an organisation in which the definition of a Zoroastrian is deliberately kept ambiguous, and one which is not committed to keeping the Parsi/Irani ethnic identity intact, cannot unite the community. It will instead destroy the very fabric of our community and pose a grave risk to the practice of our religion, as there can be no Zoroastrianism without born Parsis/Iranis.

Therefore, in the interest of the Parsi/Irani Zoroastrian community, which all of you are so sincerely serving, we ask you to reject any move to join the GWG or any other Global initiative, which is not restricted solely to Parsi/Irani Zoroastrians.

Yours in His Service,

Kaikhushroo Dastur Minocher
Jamasp Asa

Dastur Dr. Kaikhushroo M. Jamasp Asa (Mumbai)

K. Dastur
Meherjirana

Dastur Kaikhushroo N. Dastoor Meherjirana (Navsari)

Firoze M. Kotwal

Dastur Dr. Firoze Meherji Kotwal (Mumbai)

Peshotan Hormuzdyar Mirza

Cyrus N. Dastur

Dastur Cyrus Noshirwan Dastur (Surat)

Dastur Dr. Peshotan Hormuzdyar Mirza (Udvada)

"Happiness unto him, from whom happiness(is) unto others!" - Ushtavard Gatha.

THE PARSEE VEGETARIAN & TEMPERANCE SOCIETY

(Established January 1907)
(Registered under Act XXI of 1860 in March 1911)

30-Vatsa House (Noble Chambers), 4th Floor,
Janmabhoomi Marg, Fort, Mumbai - 400 001. Tel. No. 2287 0795.

7th January, 2012



To,
Asst. Municipal Commissioner (Ward Officer),
Brihan Mumbai Mahanagar Palika,
C- North Ward, Chandanwadi,
Mumbai - 400 002.

Respected Sir,
We the following signatories who are the devotees of the sacred Dadyseth Atash Behram (fire temple) draw your attention that a Garbage Dumper and Bins are kept behind the boundary wall on the west side of our sacred Dadyseth Atash Behram situated at Dadyseth Agiary Lane, Fanaswadi Mumbai 400 002. This is hurting our religious sentiments. We earnestly request your honor to remove the Garbage Dumper and Bins, and sanitize the place immediately.

An article in the Mumbai Mirror of 03.11.2011 has drawn attention to a Supreme Court ruling that all such garbage collection/loading activity is not permissible near a place of worship.

It is further noticed that four wheeler vehicles particularly tempos are parked in front of the compound wall of the sacred fire temple and the drunkards and other senseless persons go behind the tempos and urinate on the compound wall thus affecting the sanctity of the sacred fire temple. We therefore pray that the space adjoining the compound wall may be declared as No Hawking and No Parking Zone for preserving the sanctity of the sacred fire temple.

We sincerely hope that what is prayed for above, will be granted by the Concerned Authorities.

Yours truly
For The Parsee Vegetarian & Temperance Society.

Jalal
Trustee.
(+ 480 signatories)

- CC To :
1. Deputy Municipal Commissioner, Zone 1, Byculla, Mumbai
 2. Municipal Commissioner, Head Quarter Building
 3. Senior Inspector, L. T. Marg, Police Station, Dhobi Talao
 4. Deputy Commissioner of Police, Zone 1, Mumbai
 5. Commissioner of Police Mahatma Phule Market, Mumbai
 6. Hon. Chief Minister, Maharashtra State, Mantralaya, Mumbai

WAPIZ invites all to

the Cama Baug Gruh Udyog Sale

On Saturday 11th and Sunday 12th February 2012

Good quality clothes for adults and children, sadras, kustis, religious items, household utility items, tasty snacks, gift articles, etc are all available at the Sale

Timings : 1 pm. onwards till 8 pm. on Saturday 11th February
10 am. onwards on Sunday 12th February

- > "I buy all my nighties and housecoats from the Sale every six months. I don't need to shop elsewhere," says Huzan
- > "My stock of readymade sev and rava packets are always bought from the Cama Baug Sale. All the masalas I need are also available there. I call it my one stop shop to buy scarves, diva na kakras, pehramni na envelopes and a couple of gara embroidered tops too!" - Khorshed
- > "I have to go to the Sale - it's a tradition and habit I don't want to break!" - Kashmiria
- > "I go for the food items, which are yummy!" - Neville

Encourage Parsis / Iranis who make their living from home industry

Come Visit the Cama Baug Gruh Udyog Sale

You will not be disappointed!

Find Your Life Partner

- **Mumbai based 28 year old girl, 5'5"**, wheatish complexion, B.Com & IATA, working with a Travel Agency, invites matrimony from an educated, well settled boy from a respectable family. **Matrimonial-Ref. 275**
- **28 year old boy from Mumbai, 5'7"**, B.E., M.B.A., C.F.A. working as an Analyst with a leading Call Centre, earning Rs. 9 lakhs per annum, invites matrimony from a simple, educated, home loving girl from a respectable family. **Matrimonial-Ref. 276**
- **Mumbai based 37 year old boy, 5'9"**, B.H.M. (Gold Medalist) MMS., MBA., JAIIB., CAIIB., AMLKYC., CTF., Certificate course on Credit Cards also. Presently working as a Senior Manager with a Reputed Bank, earning approx Rs. 1 lakh per month, is interested in settling down with a sweet natured, simple, educated girl from a respectable family. **Matrimonial-Ref. 277**
- **Mumbai born 34 year old boy, settled in Canada**, B.Com with Accounting as major, working with a Travel Agency earning approx. Rs.14 lakhs per annum, enjoying a high standard of living, invites matrimony from a slim, sweet natured, working girl, from the age group of 28 to 32 years, coming from a respectable family & willing to settle in Canada. **Matrimonial-Ref. 278**

Responses may be sent to the WAPIZ office in a sealed envelope marked with the correct Matrimonial Reference Number.

WAPIZ, Framjee Cawasjee Inst., 1st floor, Opp. Metro Cinema, Dhobi Talao, Mumbai 400 002. Tel: 65204177 E-mail : wapiz@wapiz.com

