**Zoroastrians and Bombay**

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Today we're used to say Mumbai

It wasn't quite that way

So please forgive if I don't try

And stick with old Bombay.

Though somewhat shrouded in a mist

The roots of both are same

Bombay has a Portuguese twist

Mumbai's the original name.

By any name these seven isles

Did not amount to much.

The Portuguese with all their guiles

Could see no future as such.

But Parsis came in the early days

And helped the Portuguese,

Began to learn European ways

And learnt to sail the seas.

Now Charles was looking for a Queen.

A wedding was in the works

From Portugal came Catherine

And one of many perks

The British gained from the deal

Were the isles of Bombay.

In retrospect one might feel

That they would rue the day

They gave away all those mud flats

But what imagination

Could have foreseen a city that's

The power of a nation?

And Parsis right from the start

With the Portuguese came in

And on their own they played a part

In a military win.

Now shortly after the British came

A plague made them withdraw.

Bombay looked like easy game

But Parsis came to the fore.

They bravely fought the rowdy raiders,

Held on with determination,

Drove away the fierce invaders

And rose in the estimation

Of the British, when they returned.

Perhaps it was their gratitude

Or the respect the Parsis earned

Or enterprising attitude.

The reason might be all of these

The facts are very clear

Everywhere one sees Parsis

While others don't come near.

The British brought the rule of law

Which made the Parsis strive.

They seized the chances that they saw

And they began to thrive.

They started off as go-betweens

Dubash, Dalal or Shroff.

But soon became men of means

But critics would often scoff

That Parsis were just compradors.

But they traded on their own

And quickly reached far off shores.

And soon the trade had grown

And spread quite wide both East and West.

And often they succeeded

But China was by far the best.

Much offered, little needed

The Chinese then had it all.

But you must take and give

We then got them in Opium's thrall.

We should have let them live.

Though this indeed was quite a blot

Much charity ensued.

No matter how the gains were got

Good progress was pursued

And Canton's loss was Bombay's gain

As hospitals were built

And causeways spared commuter pain.

They gave not from their guilt

But feelings of Noblesse oblige.

Asceticism was disdained

Their storied wealth gave them prestige

But only if they deigned

To share their wealth for public good

To satisfy a need.

Their wealth, they always understood

Was not for private greed.

Zoroastrians were always taught

That for the good they stood,

In a cosmic battle that is fought

Between the bad and good.

And education was a cause

Dear to the Parsi's heart.

New institutes without a pause

Played a major part

In ensuring that our nation

Would ultimately rise.

Parsis then led in education

And nobody denies

For years they had the major share

Of degrees in every field.

The explanation would lie there

For the influence they wield.

They gave their money and their time

And no example's better

Than the one I celebrate in rhyme

Sir Pherozesha Mehta.

From Lincoln's inn to the bar

He quickly honed his skills.

As a lawyer he went very far

But then gave up those thrills.

In politics he played a role

He chose the middle road.

Freedom then was not his goal

But all the same he'd goad

The British to allow self rule

As Mayor he played his part.

He was astute and no fool

Saw through the British art

Of keeping Parsi's on their side

With excessive praise

And claiming there's a big divide

With Parsi and Indian ways.

Sure some Parsis were allured

And believed in this divide.

But there were others who ensured

That India would keep her pride.

Madame Cama comes to mind,

The first to raise our flag.

No greater patriot one could find

Quite safely we can brag.

There is the moderate patriot school

That saw some British good.

They merely sought dominion rule

By that they understood

On local matters we would vote

Within Imperial sway.

It is important that we note

This was the British way.

Now Canada went that way

And then Australia too.

And Naoroji was the first to say

Something that's very true

The British didn't walk the talk

And had Unbritish rule.

They talked of cheese but gave us chalk

And always tried to fool.

The next Parsi to be MP

In the British Parliament.

Sir Muncherjee Bhownagree

Would readily assent.

The benefit of doubt, you see,

The British got from him.

They called him, "Sir Bow and Agree!"

But he wasn't quite so dim.

So army spending was protested

And the Africa campaign.

While Science training was suggested

He often did complain

That economic exploitation

Made India very weak.

His defence of our nation

Shows he wasn't meek!

Both these MPs worked with the Shah

For brethren in Iran.

Their efforts went very far

The Jizya saw a ban.

And thanks to them Iranis came

And brought us fine Cafés.

They added to Zoroastrian fame

And do as well these days.

I welcome all from our homeland

And the diaspora as well.

And governments from any land

Where we are treated well.

And some might think that we would claim

Back our ancestral land.

But that we're sure is not our aim

For Bombay's in our hand.

In 1900 six percent

Of Bombay were our tribe.

We punched above our weight, that meant

That almost every scribe

Who wrote a piece about Bombay

Would laud our contribution

But now this is a different day

We look for a solution.

Our share in Bombay took a drop-

Much less than one percent.

We fear we may reach a full stop

But our Government is bent

On well ensuring our survival.

Do learn what they propose.

Can we hope then for a revival

Only Ahura Mazda knows!

Two ways have often been proposed

And you can take your pick.

The traditionalists have supposed

That we should only stick

To partners found within our fold

And quickly start to breed.

The other camp, now I am told,

Believes that what we need

Is to accept many more

Into the Parsi pool.

Of course, it is hard, to be sure,

Deciding on a rule.

Now should our pool be shallow and wide

Or narrow but quite deep?

And can we bravely turn the tide

Or let the water seep?

Maybe we are destined to last.

Or maybe we'll disappear.

But we can glory in our past

And hope the world will cheer

Our contribution to mankind

Whether we're here or not.

Our influence you'll always find

We will not be forgot.

In museums we will be preserved

And you can have a look

At the many ways we have served

In both the aisles and book.

So come and visit NGMA

And CSMVS

The first has something new each day

The second I have to guess

My Parsi audience will be lost.

I'll call it Prince of Wales!

Please visit both at any cost

And understand the trails

That Zoroastrians left far and wide

But Bombay was the hub.

To this city we are tied

And that to me's the nub.

In Bombay, Parsi thoughts were made

And Parsis then gave back.

Much was gained and dues were paid

And I have tried to track

The linkages between the two

And much has now been told.

Much more could be said, it's true

But now it's time I fold.

I'm sure that you will all agree

Bombay's a special place

To hold this WZC.

And so I rest my case.