

## 6 Months and Counting - The Worli Prayer Hall

As the Prayer Hall at Worli completes 6 months, Parsi Times catches up with Dinshaw K. Tamboly, one of the moving forces behind the initiative, to share details about its functioning and acceptability by the Parsi Irani Zoroastrian Community of Mumbai.



**P.T.** How many Parsis have utilized the Prayer Hall during its foundational six months?

**Tamboly:** A total of fifty obsequies have been performed at the Prayer Hall so far.

**P.T.** How many Mobeds come to the Prayer Hall for performing prayers? Do they come willingly or do they have apprehension that they would be punished by the Fire Temples with which they are associated or be prevented by BPP from praying at Doongerwadi?

**Tamboly:** During the initial months of September and October, the Prayer Hall was dependent only on their co-ordinator Er. Framroze Mirza, along with Er. Khushroo Madon, his son Er. Fali Madon and Er. Jal Balsara (aka Tilak as there are two Mobeds with similar names) who performed all the obsequies. November onwards, other Mobeds began to indicate interest in praying at the Prayer Hall. We informed them we would not have any objection if they came and performed ceremonies, but as we do not believe in doing anything surreptitiously, it would be in their interest if they first took the permission of the Trustees of the Agiaris with which they were attached. We now have a total complement of 13 Mobeds on our roster, whose services are used from time to time!

**P.T.** Can the family of those opting for cremation have the ceremonies performed by Mobeds of their choice or do they have to use the services of these 13 Mobeds only?

**Tamboly:** Parsi / Irani Zoroastrians intending to use the Prayer Hall facility can indeed have the ceremonies performed by Mobeds of their choice, but it would be obligatory for them, before bringing the cadaver to the Prayer Hall, to first convey to our co-ordinator Er. Framroze Mirza on telephone No.8691012488 their intention to use the facility. This is to ensure that an available time slot can be arranged for and conveyed to them.

**P.T.** Have there been any changes made at the Prayer Hall since its opening in September 2015?

**Tamboly:** A few additional facilities have been provided for the convenience of families of the deceased, including:

- ◆ Sandalwood sticks, divas are now available on sale.
- ◆ Flowers are arranged for by the co-ordinator.

- ◆ An Aquaguard machine has been installed for providing free drinking water.
- ◆ A tea/coffee vending machine has been installed making the beverage available at a nominal Rs.20/-.
- ◆ Electric points are available for the use of family members of the deceased, who wish to relay via Skype (from their own equipment) the obsequies to those family members residing in other cities or overseas and unable to attend.
- ◆ Requests have been received from some families of the bereaved that 'bhoi' prayers be performed in the intervening period between the cadaver being brought and the gehsarna ceremony. As Mobeds are not readily available for these prayers, we are in the process of having the appropriate prayers recorded which will be played through speakers. This facility is expected to be introduced by end of March 2016.

**P.T.** Can the Mobeds charge as they wish or has any amount been fixed for the four day ceremonies?

**Tamboly:** The charges have been fixed. For four day ceremonies to be performed by 2 Mobeds, the charges to be paid are Rs.22,000/- whereas if 4 to 5 Mobeds are requested for the family, the charges have been fixed at Rs.25,000/-. An additional amount of Rs.3,600/- is levied as tips for the security, housekeeping and crematorium staff.

**P.T.** What about charges for the use of the Prayer Hall?

**Tamboly:** Use of the Prayer Hall is gratis. However, members of the bereaved family are welcome to make voluntary donation by cash or cheque in the name of 'The Prayer Hall Services & Maintenance Trust'. Nearly all who have used the facility have made donations in keeping with their capacity.

**P.T.** What would be the position if someone could not afford to pay the charges of the Mobeds and yet wish to be cremated?

**Tamboly:** In December, non Parsi neighbours of an elderly poor Parsi who lived alone in chawl in the far suburbs, upon his passing brought his cadaver to the Prayer Hall for cremation as per his wishes. Being economically challenged themselves, the obsequies were performed with co-ordinator Er. Framroze Mirza gratis, while the fees for the second Mobed were paid for by one of our Trustees.

**P.T.** Do you think the community has accepted the concept of the Prayer Hall and cremation as an alternate mode of disposal?

**Tamboly:** If one observes the usage of the Prayer Hall during the first 6 months the answer is obvious. There is always some resistance to change when an alternative is presented. In this

case the usage has exceeded our expectations. The Prayer Hall has become an acceptable and sought after facility for the ever increasing number of Parsi / Irani Zoroastrians who are gravitating towards alternate modes of disposal.

**P.T.** Do you think the prayer Hall will ever be able to compete with Doongerwadi in terms of numbers consigned?

**Tamboly:** The Prayer Hall was not established to compete with Doongerwadi but to fulfill a growing need that many in the community were awaiting for many years. It is not our policy to recommend or propagate the use of the Prayer Hall to anyone. This is a personal choice for individuals and families to take. Those who wish to use the facilities created are most welcome to do so.

Details about the Prayer Hall facilities, usage, booking procedure can easily be downloaded from the website [www.prayerhalltrust.org](http://www.prayerhalltrust.org) or requested from prayerhalltrust@gmail.com.