

The life, customs, and history of the Parsis of Bombay are so well-known that no special description of them seems required<sup>1</sup>. Let it suffice to remark that the customs of even the lower classes have undergone an immense change during the last hundred years. Formerly early marriage was a common characteristic, with its accompaniment of strife between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, and in spite of a general feeling against polygamy it was not uncommon for a Parsi of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to marry a second wife during the life-time of the first. The medical skill of the community, which is now so well-known, was at that date in its infancy; and, following the Hindu belief, most diseases were regarded as spirit-possession to be obviated and exorcised by the aid of Brahmans and Musalman Sayads. This was particularly the case with hysteria, which was very prevalent among young women as a result of ill-usage<sup>2</sup>. The Parsi dress has also undergone a great metamorphosis during the last fifty years, and most upper-class Parsis have adopted the European

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style of raiment. "In the course of two generations" writes Mr. K. N. Kabraji, "the head-dress of the Parsis has undergone various changes. The orthodox turban of old was a heavy bundle, consisting of many yards of cloth wrapped round the head. The weight of the turban was accounted a measure of the dignity and respectability of the wearer. One can get an idea of it from the portraits now extant of the progenitors of the Dadysett, Wadia, Banaji and other families. But the burden was after all too heavy to bear, and a reduction in weight was gradually made until at last the head-dress took the form of mere skeletons of turbans, made of cloth mounted on pasteboard. Subsequently Parsi merchants from China introduced a round faced turban with a facing of a particular kind of silk cloth. Again the distinguished poet and orientalist, Mulla Pheroze, put on a round *phenta* or shawl wrapped round a blood-red cap, and this fashion was readily adopted by the young. It has undergone quite a transformation in recent years, having been greatly reduced in bulk and weight. At present it is made up of the English hat (*i.e.*, the hard black or brown felt hat) with a ring round it in place of the customary brim. In the old days Parsi turban-makers drove a very good business, among them being Jamsu Pagadiwala, well-known for his skill in conjuring, and Dady the hunchback who in spite of his physical deformity was a skilful gymnast."

Parsi drama is a growth of not more than sixty years, its first promoters being young Elphinstone College students. The Parsi knowledge of the dramatic art was borrowed from the Hindus, who entirely composed the companies playing in the early portion of the nineteenth century. At the present date more than one company of Parsi artistes has acquired a well-deserved reputation among the theatre-goers of the city : but with the exception of one company all the female roles are, in accordance with Hindu custom, played by Parsi youths and boys.