

# “You’re Parsi, I’m Goan – We Live in Different Time Zones”

The incredible lightness of being Mario Miranda doubtless wove a very special spell, making sure we were all touched by it



Meher Marfatia

**M**ario Joao Carlos do Rosario de Britto Miranda loved Parsis. He was amused by them, admiring of them, charmed with them. Not only did the country’s greatest illustrator sketch the community with abundant affection, he was ready with apt quips for those privileged to know him. “My full name,” he joked, “stretches further than your longest surnames like ‘Soda Water Bottle Openerwala’.

Shouldn’t Parsis have as many children as there are words in that family name?” In her tribute to the master of wry humour — who considered British cartoonist Sir Ronald Searle his mentor and worked with Peanuts creator Charles M Schulz — journalist Bachi Karkaria wrote of her relationship with Mario starting in the 1970s when she was a sub-editor with *The Illustrated Weekly of India*...

Fifteen years later, I found myself interacting with him, in that same sub-editorial post and the exact fourth floor magazine space in the *Times of India* bastion. Though he sat home in his Colaba flat instead of occupying the Staff Illustrator cubicle in Bachi’s time, he sent out the most distinctive drawings typifying his take on events from Lutolim to Lisbon.

After sending a crisply edited bunch of manuscripts down to the typesetting department, it was one of my duties to ensure two things: that the Letters double-spread was completed and a pair of half-page cartoon strips came in time for issue closing each Friday.

One, of course, had to be from the man who famously drew — ex-Weekly editor Khushwant Singh, curled in a bulb. He titled it “Laff It Off”. The other was Hemant Morparia’s “Jest A Minute”. Finding every minute of my job interesting, although the youngest around, I was still pretty dogged about dead-

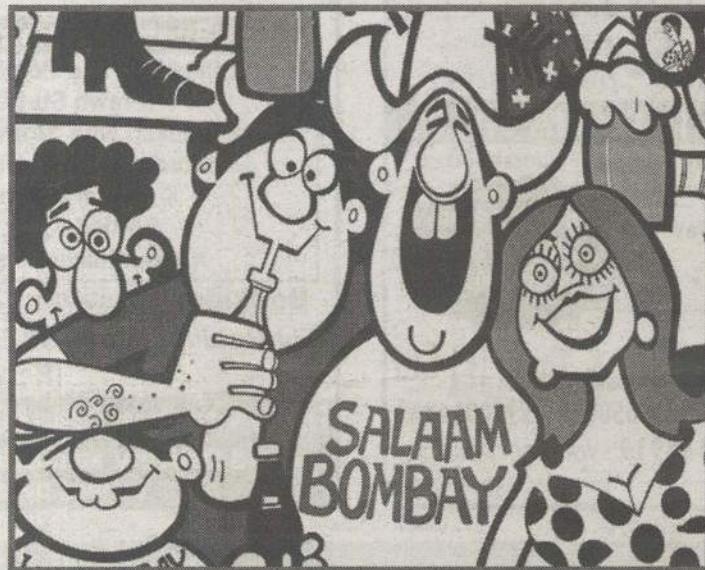
lines. I welcomed Hemant’s contribution floating in bang-punctual, by Tuesday, faithfully delivered by either his Man Friday or by his father, Dr Krishnaraj Morparia, a general physician who obligingly popped by while his young radiologist-cartoonist son was busy studying sonograms at city hospitals.

Mario’s was another story. National treasure as he was, the man who gifted Goa to

line. Then the teasing punchline: “You’re Parsi and I’m Goan — we live in different time zones!”

That was just one of a stream of gently ribbing comments that strung together the *Bawa* banter Mario effortlessly engaged in. The wisecracks brimmed with genuine bonhomie and hawk-eyed observation of a people he hugely enjoyed.

“You live in Bandra and your *jaat* hasn’t yet learnt



the world in the sparkling style he alone could, equally embodied some good old Goan “*susegado*” — “It means ‘Relax and live a little’,” he’d say to me, the invariable Thursday morning the installment of his outstanding wit would arrive in its envelope.

**“Mario Miranda was the last non-politically correct celebrity with humility and humanity intact”**

Conscious that I shouldn’t be hounding genius, no matter how laidback, I’d request he try getting a bit Tuesday rather than Thursday-inclined the following week. “I’ll work on that, but can’t promise,” came the response, with the kind of warm yet wandering tone that made me swear he wore a wide and wicked grin at the other end of the phone

anything from mine?” he posed. I soon settled to laughing out loud with him, thinking of the superbly rendered series of Parsi statues and Parsi wedding frolic he pixel-filled on blank paper that was no challenge to him. And admit that I actually didn’t want his brilliant work to reach on time. Simply so I could dial that number ringing in Dolphin Apartments and treat myself to the couple of minutes’ fun which surged forth from him. “I’m going to ask Pritish (Nandy, my poet-editor) to promote you. Get another sub-editor in your place who won’t mind my relaxed pace.”

Never, I vowed. Elevated or not, I wanted to continue handling the Cartoons page. “Chase Mario, remind him early in the week,” urged my seniors. I didn’t. What would it really be like to receive his half-sheet dot on deadline — boring, uncommunicative, numbing routine. Instead, go with the flow, free and easy, he taught. When he noticed the change, there was twice the teasing, naturally.

Bumping into me in the Matheran bazaar on a rainy Sunday, he slyly queried, “Hey, won’t you worry I might extend my holiday here, not feel like finishing work at all?” I scrunched eyes tight to giggle enough to unseeingly tilt into a pony standing beside. “He doesn’t mind,” Mario said as we heard soft, startled neighing. “Matheran horses are used to Parsis doing what they always do best. Laugh.”

His other-half-of-that-page colleague in the profession, Hemant, and I spoke the evening after Mario passed away. Having declared Mario’s an ADHD (Attention to Detail, Hyperactive Disorder)-dipped pen, Hemant so correctly also observed, “He was the last non-politically correct celebrity with humility and humanity intact.”

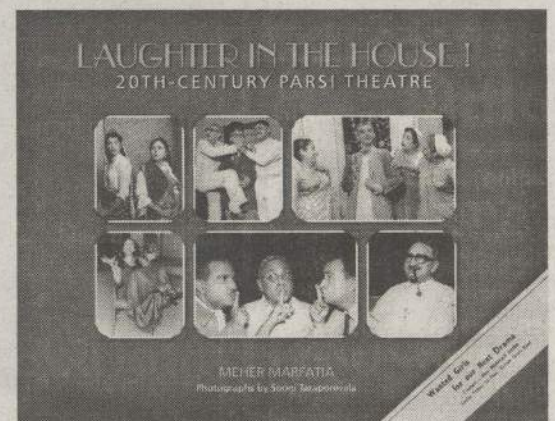
We agreed on another som-

bre point. From Jehangir Sabavala and MF Husain to MAK Pataudi and Bhimsen Joshi, from Bhupen Hazarika and Jagjit Singh to Shammi Kapoor and Dev Anand, from Mickey Correa to Mario Miranda, this has been the year of exit for far too much formidable grace and talent, leaving the arts and entertainment scene quite bereft.

The incredible lightness of being Mario doubtless wove a very special spell, making sure we were all touched by it. Right from Class 1 when we first met on the pages of the *Bal Bharati* prescribed English textbook you scrumptiously illustrated to the delicious digs at *Parsipanu*... Many thanks for the laffs.

Meher Marfatia, a freelance writer with a special interest in the arts, is the author and publisher, in association with the *Jam-e-Jamshed*, of ‘*Laughter In The House*’, 20th-Century Parsi Theatre’

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