

Bhika Behram Well Defaced

Angry over the police's failure to nail the culprits responsible for vandalizing the 279-year-old Bhika Behram well a month ago, the Parsi community is taking part in a candlelight vigil at Azad Maidan tomorrow evening.

The well, a grade-I heritage structure and a place of worship for the community, was vandalized by unidentified miscreants on the night of March 11. Rare stained glass panels in the canopy covering the well were broken; some even stolen.

The community is generally not known to take to the streets to make its grievances known. Some of them recollected that the last time they publicly protested was in 1985, when they demanded that the dead bodies of Parsi women married to non-Parsis should be allowed to be disposed of at the Towers of Silence.

Khojestee Mistry, a scholar in Zoroastrian studies, said, It is not typical at all of Parsis to stand at maidans in protest. But this public vigil indicates the anguish that the incident has generated in us. The well, that has been a sanctuary for the community for three centuries, has been vandalised.

Our agiaries could be targeted next. The Azad Maidan police have registered a case under Section 297 (trespassing a place of worship/insulting a religion) and Section 425 (damaging a property in mischief). A police official said that they have not arrested or detained anyone in the case yet.

The Mumbai police have cracked crimes like this in a day or two. We are surprised that they are taking such a long time, said Dadar resident Mehernosh Fitter.

The police have said that investigations are going on. But community members are angry about the lack of progress in the case, said Dr Viraf Kapadia, member of the Bhika Behram well trust.

Trustees of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat (BPP) are expected to take part in the vigil along with NGOs like Public Concern for Governance Trust.

Community members said that they had initially wanted to go on a protest march from Flora Fountain to the well, but the police did not allow this.