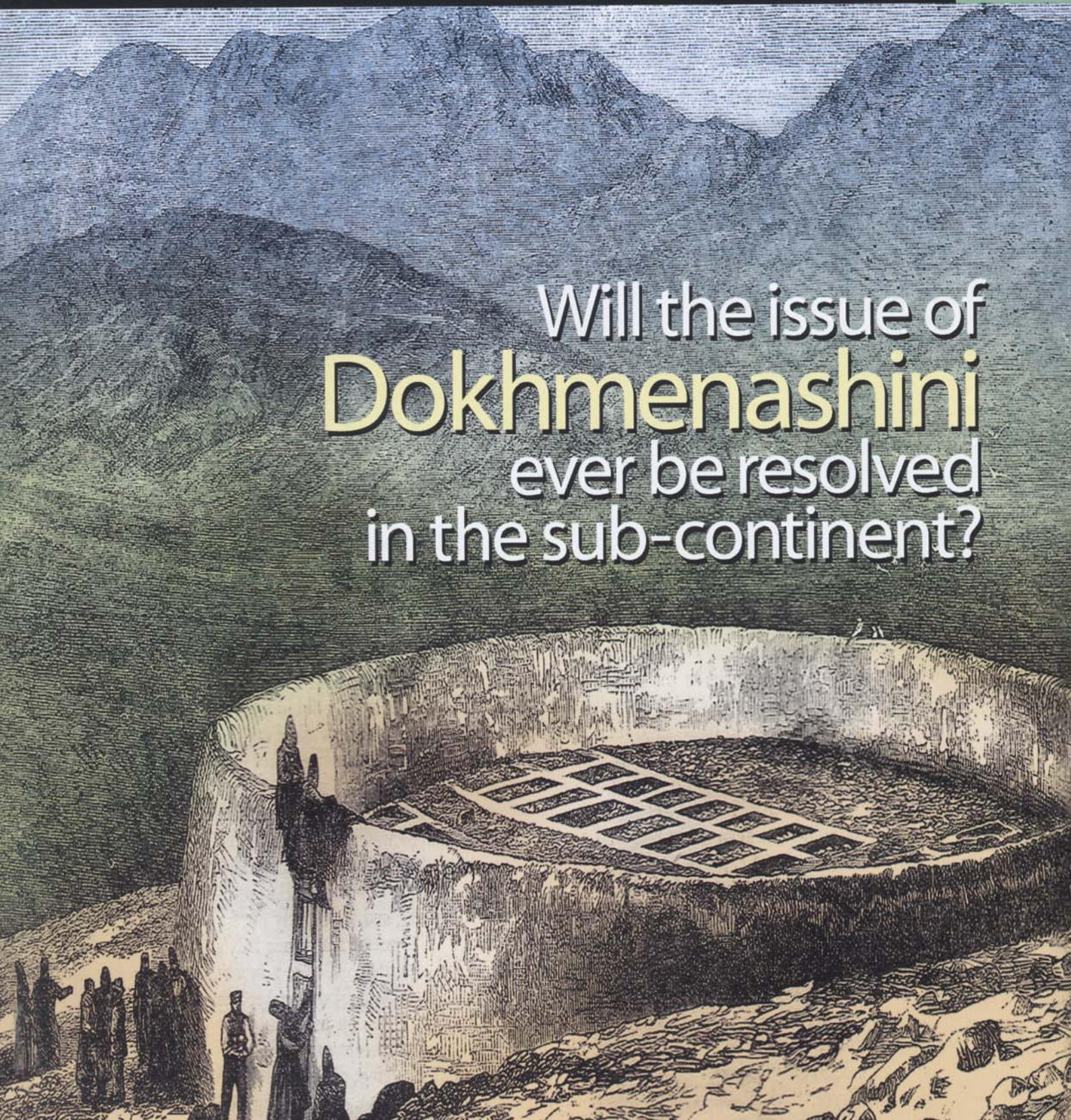


publication of the world zoroastrian organisation

# HAMAZOR

3  
issue 2006

Will the issue of  
**Dokhmenashini**  
ever be resolved  
in the sub-continent?





Early 20<sup>th</sup> century postcard, p 11

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## COVER

Etching "Exterior of a Parsee Burial-ground near Teheran" in Harper's Weekly May 25, 1872, courtesy of ZAH Library collection

## PHOTOGRAPHS

Courtesy of individuals whose articles appear in the magazine or as mentioned

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## From the Editor

The issue of Dokhmenashini is once again on a high note especially in Mumbai, since Dhun Baria make public knowledge of the facts prevailing in the Towers of Silence. In all fairness to Ms Baria, she does say her grievances were first voiced by her to the BPP and to the High Priests, but when ignored, she chose to go public. Her story has been picked up by the media not only in India but in the West, which to my mind of thinking is rather unfortunate, as there is always a way of doing things in a more dignified way, to obtain results.



Initially I had not intended in sharing this controversy in the Hamazor as so much has been said in the Parsiana already but on the other hand many of us live in other parts of the world and though not affected with the practise of Dokhmenashini, most of us wish to be kept informed of what's going on elsewhere.

The problem of Dokhmenashini has been there for quite a few years and until the BPP solve this issue, which is not going to go away, people will rightly protest. Only a few cities observe this method of disposing of the dead in the sub-continent now; surely it's time to accept the fact this system has stood the test, but now we need to move on?

To relieve the pages of printed script on the above subject, graphics of various dokhmas and vultures have been inserted. There is no intention intended of offending any persons sensibilities.

Roshan Rivetna's last issue of the Journal, Winter 2005 before she retired as Editor-in-Chief, expertly covers the doctrine and practice of "Death and Beyond" - a source for those who wish to know more on this subject.

A centre pull-out has been included in this issue of the Hamazor as our service to the community, on the request of the Zoroastrian Association of Florida, which has been compiled by Daruwala and Bhadha, though we take no responsibility of it's contents.

*Toxy Cowasjee*

Toxy Cowasjee, 2A Mary Road, Bath Island, Karachi 75530, Pakistan

# The Fourth Estate

by dinshaw tamboly

In May 1789, Louis XVI summoned to Versailles a full meeting of the 'Estates General'.

The First Estate consisted of three hundred nobles;  
The Second Estate consisted of three hundred clergy;  
The Third Estate consisted of six hundred commoners.

Some years later, after the French Revolution, Edmund Burke, the Irish philosopher and statesman, looking up at the Press Gallery of the House of Commons said, "***Yonder sits the Fourth Estate, and they are more important than them all.***"

In all countries around the world, wherever and whenever the occasion has demanded, freedom has been imperilled, or injustice and abuse of the law have reared their ugly heads, the *Fourth Estate* has risen to the occasion and played a stellar role in restoring sanctity and the rule of sanity.

As a community, we Parsis may be small in numbers but we certainly are very long in achievements. Our past successes in various spheres of human endeavour have probably transformed us into an army, which has more generals than it has soldiers. Most of us are intelligent enough to analyse issues and form opinions. Whether we are intelligent enough to learn to respect the opinions of others is another issue altogether.

The abundance of intellectual wealth in the community, is probably the *raison d'être* why discussions turn into debate, debate into differences, differences into dissent.

We pride ourselves on believing that we are an educated and an intelligent community; if that is really so, then the various issues facing the community should make all right thinking Parsis sit up and take notice.

When sensitive issues engulf our minds the atmosphere becomes surcharged with emotion. Whenever efforts have been made to highlight critical issues, there has been a backlash from those who feel that the 'feel

good' factor should not be disturbed and issues however crucial or decisive must best be left unsaid. Be that as it may, one should never shy from associating with the truth, however unpalatable it may be.

Wherever and whenever emotion is introduced when considering critical issues, rationality is known to take a back seat. Our community has groups of individuals who pursue traditional or liberal thought processes, all firmly and unequivocally committed to the causes that they espouse. Traditionalists are perceived to be pessimists about the future and optimists about the past, whilst liberals regard man to be improvable but not perfectible. Those who tread the middle path have to accept the buffeting from both sides.

When a community is faced with such sensitivities, the *Fourth Estate* by the manner in which it performs during such fragile situations, displays maturity or the lack of it. *The Fourth Estate* can be neither passive nor proactive; it has to be balanced. The functioning of the *Fourth Estate* is not enviable. It has a very vital role to perform in reporting and projecting the truth, however difficult it may be, however many brickbats they may have to endure.

**The issues that our community faces at present can manifest into a situation whereby the very fabric of the community can very easily be torn**

asunder. This cannot and should not be allowed to happen.

The *Fourth Estate* is saddled with the responsibility to not only present the truth, but also through the power of the pen, to create an environment of harmony and unity in which men can discuss and debate issues objectively and rationally, and if need be even agree to disagree without becoming disagreeable.

At this juncture, I feel it would be in order to rephrase suitably, the words of Abraham Lincoln from the speech that he made on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1858, known as 'House Divided' –

***A community divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this community cannot endure, permanently, half as traditionalist and half as liberal. I do not expect the community to be dissolved, but I do expect it will cease to be, for divided we shall fall.***

The future belongs to those who fuse intelligence with faith and who with courage and determination march forward from chance to choice, from blind compliance to creative development.

The *Fourth Estate* has its role cut out for itself. I for one repose confidence in the maturity of the *Fourth Estate*, for going by their track record, they have not found to be wanting.

In conclusion, I leave my friends from the *Fourth Estate* with the words of Walter Lippman – “*There can be no higher law in journalism than to tell the truth and shame the devil.*”

*Hamazor Hama Asho Baad* – Let us be one in strength and righteousness.



Dinshaw K Tamboly lives in Mumbai and is currently providing consultancy service in management and marketing. He is Chairman of WZO Trust Funds of India, a Trustee of Bombay Parsee Punchayet and of various hospitals, and charity trusts and foundations. Till September 2004 he was a Member of the International Board of WZO.



## Report presented at the WZO AGM on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> September 2006 by Chairman Sammy Bhiwandiwalla



past Chairman,  
Mrs Ruby Contractor  
and Mr Shahpur Captain,  
President Rustam Dubash,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today marks the conclusion of my second year as Chairman of WZO. As expected the organisation faced many new challenges through the year. I would like to commence by saying

that the help and guidance provided by the International Board members past and present and many good friends who care a great deal about WZO, has been for me a vital cornerstone in evaluating and weighing up my own thoughts and actions.

WZO, as the world body for Zoroastrians, continues to serve and protect the community's interests globally. It has a commitment to remove many of the social and communal injustices that are prevalent. Often, orchestrated misinformation is directed towards the community, creating misguided perceptions which need to be eradicated. I believe that we can achieve this through our record of achievement and a willingness to speak up where necessary.

Throughout the years WZO has endeavoured to create a spirit of togetherness and comradeship throughout the world and in the UK with our bi-annual Navroze functions, seminars and Gala dinner dances. We rely extensively on the generosity of the community to implement successfully all our projects and we are indebted to them for continued support.

If our charitable functions of assisting the poor, sick and infirm, are to be sustained, housing and employment improved, refugees assisted, then we must endeavour to create awareness and seek wider public support.

At the tail end of last year, South East Asia was hit by a massive earthquake with its epicentre in the northern regions of Pakistan. WZO put out a world wide appeal to its membership and with the cooperation of many global Zoroastrian and non-Zoroastrian organisations and individuals raised nearly £80,000 towards this humanitarian tragedy. Praise must be directed to one outstanding individual, Toxy Cowasjee, our Board Member and Editor of Hamazor, who moved heaven and earth to implement a spontaneous relief programme which has helped to secure the lives of many hundreds of destitute women and children. Our sincere thanks to Toxy for all her effort. In India, WZO Trust Funds, so ably managed by Dinshaw Tamboly, also raised substantial funds for the benefit of the earthquake hit regions.

On 10<sup>th</sup> February 2006, WZO finally achieved its Certificate of Incorporation for the N Zealand Chapter of WZO. This was another milestone for WZO and we must thank Rustam Dubash for bringing to a conclusion all the protracted negotiations with N Zealand lawyers and also Committee Member Farah Unwala and Darius Mistry, two dynamic young entrepreneurs for getting the chapter off the ground.

As part of its Zoroastrian religion, history and cultural programme, WZO held its annual conference on 25th June with three excellent international speakers.

Prof Ivan Steblin-Kamensky spoke on the "Mysteries of Ancient Aryans". He teaches classical Persian, Pahlavi, Old Persian and Avestan at the Oriental Faculty of St Petersburg University. Ivan specialises in the history of Iranian and Pamiri languages and the Avesta. He is also the author of numerous scientific treatises.

Burzine K Waghmar spoke on "Mazdeans and Muslims during and after the Conquest of Iran". At SOAS, Burzine is presently Temporary Lecturer in Urdu and Gujarati and Book Review Editor of numerous research publications and newsletters on languages, history and religions of Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Xingjian.

Ms Mitra Mehr presented a paper called "Against All Odds: Achievements of Zoroastrian Women in Iran". Mitra, an Iranian-Zoroastrian, is a graduate of Brown University (BA) and University of Pennsylvania Law School (JD). She has participated as a speaker in several conferences, including the 2000 World Zoroastrian Congress in Houston. She also served as representative of FEZANA at the United Nations NGO conference in 2002.

The formation of an inclusive world body seems to have evaporated into thin air. Those aspiring to create a new organisation had to battle against inflated egos, diversionary tactics and unrealistic demands from sections of the global community they had never anticipated. In spite of the lack of success I would like to thank Rustam Dubash, and past members of the International Board Rumi Sethna, Adi Davar and Farhang Mehr for their commitment and unstinting effort in striving to achieve an understanding amongst the various factions to create a truly global organisation encompassing the associations and individuals. We must reflect, what legacy are we leaving for the future generation, and will all our efforts to bring forth unity be diminished.

During the early part of the year WZO Trust Funds in India embarked on a new phase of replacement homes in the villages of Gujarat. The programme, spread over a period of five years, is to replace 150 mud huts with brick built cottages. Our application to the Erach & Roshan Sadri Foundation UK to support this project was successful.

With this procurement we will be able to proceed with the construction of nine replacement cottages as soon as the monsoons have subsided. We convey our immense gratitude to the Trustees of the Erach & Roshan Sadri Foundation for their generosity.

On 6<sup>th</sup> August, Rohinton and Pervize Irani and their family, opened their beautiful home and garden to nearly 220 guests for a truly enjoyable BBQ. A veritable feast of endless food and drink accompanied by live music throughout the day was the background to Rohinton's fund raising skills. By the end of the day we raised the largest single collection at a BBQ of £10,000 towards the Gujarat Farmers and Medical Relief Fund. We offer our thanks to Rohinton, Pervize and Sarosh and to all the donors and the attendees for providing the food, drink and prizes.

Last year Past Chairman Rumi and Hilda Sethna, now residents of the Isle of Man, organised the Annual Gala Dinner Dance and a large contingent of friends and business clients travelled all the way to the Isle for a weekend treat of entertainment. This year we move back to the UK and preparations are well in hand with table bookings already pledged. On past experience we anticipate an eager crowd participating in our fund raising, combined with an evening of good food and entertainment. To Rumi and Hilda we convey our sincere thanks for their constant commitment to WZO.

WZO's financial resources are limited and I would like to acknowledge the constant support provided to WZO by the World Zarthushtrian Trust Fund, Dasturji Sohrabji Kutar Benevolent Fund and the Firuz Madon Foundation to carry out our charitable activities throughout the year. The Noshirwan F Cowasjee Medical Benevolent Fund, so ably conceived by Noshirwan, continues to assist towards the numerous applications received each year for medical/surgical treatment. Through the Fali Chotia Foundation, USA, we donate 50% towards the Scholarships that the Foundation gives from its resources to deserving students in America.

WZO Trust Funds in India, raise substantial amounts of money to rehabilitate Zoroastrian farmers, for rural housing, self-employment, education, medical support and assisting the Mobeds. We also assist the senior citizens in Navsari and help the poor and needy with their housing requirements. The most recent addition to a long list of residential homes, senior citizens centres and sanatorium is the Dolat & Hormusji Vandrewala Senior Citizens Centre, Navsari which opened its doors at the start of 2006. To Bachi & Dinshaw Tamboly our sincere appreciation for implementing so many worthwhile projects in India.

Our sincere thanks to Dadi Engineer President of WZO India and also to Keki Bhote, Vice-President of WZO, for managing the WZO Chapter in the USA.

International Board members and I are sorry to see Rustam Dubash leave us. With his legal background Rustam has played a pivotal part in the protracted discussions for the formation of WZOI/WZOF. He has served for nearly 15 years on the Board and was President for the last six years. A robust debater at meetings, he combines these skills with the ability to read between the lines, statements made by dubious individuals, leading to one line replies which are not easily repeatable in print. We wish him all the success in his career; he occupies the senior position as Head of India Unit in a major firm of solicitors in the city.

I now turn to my fellow committee members here in London and offer them my sincere thanks for their commitment and constructive approach during all our discussions at our regular meetings. There is a sense of shared camaraderie and I know that I can always look forward to them fulfilling their allocated assignments & functions. Their devotion and participation in all our activities will keep the ethos of WZO burning bright forever.

I thank you all for taking the time to attend today's AGM.

Thank you.



## *The Dokhmenashini Debate*

The following feature has been collated by Farishta Dinshaw from various publications and electronic mails given, to provide an overview of the current controversy over the method of disposing the dead. Dokhmenashini (*Hvare Darasya* in Avestan or *Khurshed Niganshni* in Persian) refers to the ancient practice of leaving the dead in places far away from civilization in order for scavengers and the rays of the sun to dispose off the remains without polluting earth, air, water or fire. Later, dokhmas poetically referred to as 'Towers of Silence', were specially built to accommodate this practice. It should be kept in mind that this controversy only affects Parsis of India and Pakistan, specifically those residing in Mumbai, as other countries with Zoroastrian populations do not follow this practice. As the purpose of this article is to inform readers, the debate over whether Dhun Baria's action to publicize the photographs in the public media was appropriate or not has not been addressed. – Editor.

### BACKGROUND ON DOKHMENASHINI

"Natural Dokhmenashini" is perhaps the best mode of disposal of the putrefying matter, when the Dokhma towers are located in the desolated wilderness AWAY FROM CIVILIZATION. It is also clear that *Khorsheed Nigershna* is without a doubt the ideal mode of cleansing the decomposing organic matter, when an ABUNDANCE OF SUN RAYS ARE ACCESSIBLE in the elevated deserted areas. It must be assumed, that when the estates, on which the dokhma towers were constructed centuries ago, in Bombay, Bangalore, Calcutta, Poona and other places, were significantly distant from civilization in the wilderness. Then, they served their purpose. Time however does not stand still, even for the oldest tradition and the system today is atrociously inadequate for several reasons: 1) surrounded by advancing civilization 2) changing weather conditions 3) depletion of scavenger birds, 4) shortage of nassessalars and last by not the least 5) shortage of funds.

*Dr Jehan Bagli*

Parsiana Volume XXX



Two ancient Dokhmas, away from civilization. On the left in Iran, the other at Kerman.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION

Parsis have placed their dead in a “dokhma”, or Tower of Silence, to await the vultures at Malabar Hill – now the city’s [Mumbai’s] wealthiest neighbourhood – since 1673.

*Ramola Talwar Badam, India Funeral ground photos stir anger*

Associated Press, September 7, 2006



The fall of the vulture numbers have been linked to the widespread use of a bovine pain killer, diclofenac, which poisons the birds when they feed on the carcasses of fallen livestock.

The introduction of solar panels to speed up the desiccation and decomposition of the bodies has only partially solved the problem as during the long monsoon months there is insufficient sunshine for them to be effective.

*Peter Foster, In the Towers of Silence, an ancient ritual of death comes under threat.*

The Daily Telegraph, September 12, 2006



Only six out of ten solar panels [at the dokhma in Mumbai] appear to be working efficiently. The solar panels collect dirt and bird droppings and require to be regularly cleaned. The Trustees have imported a hydraulic ladder with a strap-in mechanism (after a terrible fall of one of the supervisors who miraculously survived) to clean the panels. They have also imported a water gun for cleaning. This should considerably enhance the efficiency of the solar panels.

Each solar panel can, at a point of time, focus only on one body. It usually takes 3-4 days [not in the monsoon] for the panel to dehydrate the body almost completely. Some of the DDD-AG doctors believe that such panels can never dehydrate the internal organs. However, Dr Dhalla, who is not an armchair critic, and is aware of the day to day going ons [sic] in the Dokhma, is quite confident that even the internal organs are dried up, save except the skin. In order to prevent, the unseemly sight of bodies sticking to the pavi (due to melting of the body fat and subsequent cooling), the bodies are now placed on an iron stretcher. Someone suggested that in another city they were placing two bodies side by side on a *pavi* for quicker disposal under the solar panels. In any event, the Doongerwadi staff seemed to suggest that logisticswise, this was difficult to achieve.

The problem, therefore, is that other bodies have to wait their turn until the focus of the solar panels turns on them. There are about three funerals daily in Mumbai and thus about 90 bodies to dispose in a month, ie. Around a 1000 bodies in a year. Exclude the monsoon season and certain cloudy days, add in the number of pavis available, the

time taken by the solar panel to dehydrate a body and you roughly reach a conclusion that it takes about six months for disposal. Although the Trustees [of Bombay Parsi Punchayat] maintain that this figure is about three months, it was evident to us during the meeting that the average period cannot be less than six months.

After the dehydration process, the skeletons are placed in the *bhandar* once a year, the Dokhma is cleaned and the bones from the *bhandar* are buried in the ground.

*Baria Shatters BPP Silence but Things Are Not So Bad At Doongerwadi*



Solar concentrator at Doongerwadi.  
photo courtesy Homi Dhalla &  
FEZANA Journal



Dhun Baria  
Bombay Samachar May 7, 2006

## THE CONTROVERSY

The Parsi community is now divided over how to dispose of their dead. Under community law, the Towers of Silence are forbidden to members of the Parsi community. However, many Parsis are now alleging that the Towers are becoming unhygienic and succumbing to decay. The vultures, who are supposed to eat the bodies, are in fact disappearing and as a result, dead bodies are rotting for years. Recently, photographs [taken by Dhun Baria, a 65-year old social worker] that show the inside of the Towers of Silence have surfaced. These photographs – though forbidden – are creating ripples in the small community.



The white-backed vulture - one of the species at risk due to the use of diclofenac - The Independent, 31 Jan 06

Baria's pictures from inside the Towers of Silence reveal a shocking story of hundreds of dead bodies lying in a heap decomposing inside the well. *"The bodies are lying in a heap, decomposing. These were our people, our loved ones. They ate, drank and laughed with us. How can we tolerate them being robbed of their dignity after their death,"* says Baria in her defense. **Dignity for the Dead: Parsis want to bury their dead instead of letting them rot in the Towers of Silence.**

Email received, published by which press in New Delhi is unknown. Available on [in.news.yahoo.com/060904/211/679ax.html](http://in.news.yahoo.com/060904/211/679ax.html) – dated September 4, 2006



She [Dhun Baria] wanted an Aaramgah [a cemetery] at the Doongerwadi [a colloquial term for Dokhma]. A separate Bungli [small house] for those who preferred cremation. She was distributing pamphlets and photos in the baugs [Parsi localities]. She was threatening to approach TV channels and the national press.

Baria tells us that she has been receiving death threats from highly upset zealots on the other side of the spectrum. We shall bury you but not in an Aaramgah, they told her. However, Baria has now become too high profile to harm, without serious consequences.

**Baria Shatters BPP Silence But Things Are Not So Bad At Doongerwadi**

Bombay Samachar May 7, 2006



Towers of Silence, Bombay - The Daily Telegraph, 12 Sept 06

## THE REFORMIST PERSPECTIVE



Over the past 15 years, millions of South Asian vultures have died from eating cattle carcasses tainted by a painkiller given to sick cows. And with three to four Parsis dying daily in Mumbai, a city of 16 million, it is clear that there are nowhere near enough vultures to consume the corpses.

While bodies are coated with lime, scattered complaints are now heard about smells wafting through the affluent neighbourhood. Baria and other reformists are demanding that the Parsi Panchayat, or council governing the community's affairs, permit burial or cremation with the funeral grounds.

**Ramola Talwar Badam, India funeral ground photos stir anger**  
Associated Press, September 7, 2006



Adds editor, *Parsi*ana Jehangir Patel, *"It's a hygienic issue, not a religious one. As long as you're following the Parsi prayers, the method of disposal should not be the subject of controversy."*

**Dignity for the Dead: Parsis want to bury their dead instead of letting them rot in the Towers of Silence.**

Email received, published by which press in New Delhi is unknown. Available on [in.news.yahoo.com/060904/211/679ax.html](http://in.news.yahoo.com/060904/211/679ax.html) – dated September 4, 2006



*"The system has failed miserably and people are getting upset,"* said Jehangir Patel, editor of *Parsi*ana magazine. *"More people are asking questions about bodies lying and rotting and left there."* Patel, like other reformists, wants an alternative – some want to be allowed to pray over the dead within the funeral grounds and then cremate bodies elsewhere.

Many are worried, *"It's not as if death is something you can control,"* said Homi Mehta, a 32-year-old Parsi architect whose faith in the funeral rites has been shaken by the controversy. *"If someone I loved died during the monsoon, I wouldn't want them to be left hanging there."*

**Ramola Talwar Badam, India funeral ground photos stir anger**  
Associated Press, September 7, 2006



Early 20<sup>th</sup> century postcard - courtesy Ellen Goldberg

## THE TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVE



The lands at Doongerwadi have been bequeathed to the community in sacred trust for Dokhmenashini. If reformist Parsis want a change, who is stopping them from buying their own burial grounds or a state-of-the-art crematorium? Go right ahead and consign your dead to thousands of maggots in a graveyard or roast them in a furnace.

*Noshir H Dadrawala, Parsis Should Exercise Restraint And Avoid Providing Grist To The Media Mills*



Our Avestan scriptures refer to our system as "*Hvare darasya*" (Persian: *Khurshed Niganshini*) which means exposure to the powerful and purifying, rays of the sun. Agreed, vultures play an important catalytical role. However, it is the sun which plays the primary role. This primary source of energy and purification, with the Grace of Dadaar Ahura Mazda, has not failed. How, then, can we say that our time-honoured system of *Khurshed Naganshini* has failed?

[It is] alleged that bodies are periodically taken out of the towers and buried in mass graves. This is incorrect. Even a hundred years ago and more, when reportedly, there were more than a hundred vultures at doongerwadi, the contents and the "bhandar" (central well of the dokhma) had to be periodically emptied of bones and other dried remains. At no point of time, did the vultures devour even the bones.

Even today, the dried remains which are swept into the bhandar (central well) from the "*pavis*", (consecrated stone slabs) are taken out after about a year and buried in pits which are lined with stone and layers of salt and lime. The question arises, is this doctrinally tenable? The answer, happily, is in the affirmative. The Zoroastrian tradition distinguish between "*lilo nasu*" (green/fresh nasu, with water content, which should be exposed to the sun for purification and cannot be buried for fear of contamination) and "*sukho nasu*" (dried nasu, which may be buried without fear of spreading pollution).

In Vendidad, Fargard VIII 33 (107) Zarathushtra questions, "*O Maker of the material world, Thou Holy One! Shall the man be clean who has touched a corpse that has been dried up and dead for more than a year?*" 34 (108) Ahura Mazda answered "*He shall. The dry mingles not with the dry.*"

Vendidad, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 4, translated by James Darmesteter pg 103 Introduction V (pg XCV) of the aforesaid book states, "*... wet matter is a better conductor of uncleanness than dry matter, and corpses cease to defile after a year.*"



Further, on the issue of health hazard, it may interest you to know that the scientific medical reality defies conventional logic. According to a press release of the World Health Organization (WHO) the health hazard associated with dead bodies is negligible. (Press Release WHO42;20-8-1999 WHO warns against Health Misconceptions in the wake of Turkish Earthquake WHO, Dept of Emergency and Humanitarian Action) in its Technical Briefing Note (Geneva, 18-8-1999) states, "*a relationship between cadavers and epidemics has never been scientifically demonstrated or reported.*"

*Noshir H Dadrawala, Dokhmenashini Controversy*

Article/Email forwarded by Mr Mehernosh P Fitter



Sepulchres des Gaures, engraving of a tower of silence, B Picart, 1730. Collection Cyrus Rivetna, courtesy FEZANA Journal, Winter 2005

## THE ALTERNATIVES

*Burial*

In the absence facility of Dokhmenashini, Dastur Firoz Kotwal, in his true wisdom, has said, “the method of choice should be cremation over burial as Zarathushti tenets forbid the preservation of dead matter (nasa-neganih).

*Fezana Journal, Winter 1998*

*Cremation*

Dr M D Disawalla (Readers' Forum *Parsiana* - February 2000, August 2000) suggested, “The only logical solution is to erect a modern electric crematorium at Doongerwadi”. The idea is entirely rational and worthy of discussion from the vantage point of Zarathushtrian theology.

Mention of Fire in the Gathas of Zarathushtra has brought immense sanctity to this element of Nature, that was already used in the religious rites, long before the time of the prophet. In fact Asho Zarathust elevated this element to the incarnation of Mazda in the physical world. This we recognize in the metaphor of *Athro Ahuremazdao Puthre* in liturgy of Atash Niyaesh. The liturgy clearly distinguishes the fires that are worthy of worship viz, Athash-e-Behram, Atash-e-Aderan and Atash-e-Dadgah. These are the consecrated fires that are sanctified through prayers rituals and are elevated to usher in them the credence of the embodiment of Ahura Mazda. Their authenticity must be completely preserved to avoid their pollution in any way. They are the very representation of Absolute Purity and Absolute righteousness, the very implication of the concept of Asha in the physical. They command the spiritual respect, in the sacred spaces where they are entroned.

The generalization that, “fire is sacred in Zarathushtrian religion” and that act of cremation is a desecration of the Holy Fire is an erroneous notion that is grossly overrated and demands understanding. It is a recorded history that fat from sacrificed animals, and pieces of omentum, together with dry wood, was a customary *Zaothra* (offering) made to the hearth fire to keep it aglow (Boyce, History of Zoroastrianism Vol I, pg 153-155). It must be understood, that the fire, outside of the Zarathushtrian theology, by its very nature is a preserver and a destroyer. It can destroy good as well as evil. It has the awesome power to transmute the organic matter fully to gases and to reduce the inorganic matter completely to ashes.

This duality is also reflected in the Holy Fire of Mazda, mentioned in the Gathas. The great Manthran, Zarathushtra reveals, in the Gathas (Ys 31.19, 20; 34.4) that the Sacred fire is the preserver of the Righteous (Good) and the destroyer of the Deceitful (evil).

“they fire Lord, which possesses strength through truth and which is the swiftest, forceful thing to be of clear help to thy supporter but of visible harm, with the powers in his hands, to Thy enemy, Wise one”. (Insler, Ys 34.4)

A fire that engulfs a house of another human being, is not sacred by any measure and must be swiftly extinguished. In contrast, a pile of waste matter that is being put ablaze must be allowed to incinerate until all the polluting matter is converted to gaseous element. Beyond the limits of personal emotions, a human dead body is nothing more than decaying waste matter, and a source of contagion. Any contagion by Gathic precepts must be removed from the environment of living as it violates the Gathic principle of ASHA. The purity laws of Zarathushtrian religion demand that such a source of pollution be destroyed promptly and with dignity.

An analysis of the present system reveals that we have been using the Natural source of that Eternal fire – the Sun – that is continuously aglow in the universal space to destroy the evil of putrefying matter. The surface temperature of the sun is 10,000-12,000°F. It is the heat of that Natural fire from an average distance of 93 million miles, that carried out a slow degeneration of the decaying matter. The birds of prey only selectively removed some portions of the carcass, while much of the cadaver was left to be slowly cremated by the heat of the sun. Thus the age old tradition of *Khorsheed Nigerishna* is nothing more than a process of slow cremation.

The modern electric crematoriums are designed to provide sufficient heat to cremate the organic matter to ashes within a short period. The concept that such act is a desecration of Holy Fire has no doctrinal bases. The flames, if any involved is not of a consecrated fire by any measure. More importantly, any flames emitted, are being fully utilized to destroy the evil of contagion, to prevent pollution, to purify the environment for the living and to refresh the world. All this is entirely consistent with the Zarathushtrian canon. The use of the heat of fire in cremation can be visualized as analogous to the fire that will arise out of the molten metal to affect the final purification and resurrection to *Frashokereti* (Bd, Ch 34.18-20).

It is sinful to drag this unhealthy situation to its extreme in the name of Zarathushtrian tradition, to endanger the lives of those who work in the vicinity. The distressed community in India needs clear guidance. This must come in unequivocal terms from the custodians of our Faith. The facilities in India are fast approaching extinction and time is here, for the prelates to show the Divine wisdom in their guidance.

*Ervad Dr Jehan Bagli*  
Parsiana Volume XXX



## Green Burial

Traditional funeral practices harm the environment: green burial let the earth rest in peace. Scientist Susanne Wiigh-Masak, a consultant in Sweden, says this type of green burial requires only a few steps: Freeze and then immerse the body in liquid nitrogen to dry it, let it crumble into an odorless, hygienic fine powder, then slip it into a biodegradable coffin. Within a few months, the coffin and the remains are compost. "This is an ethical way of giving back to nature, and of understanding that death is a possibility for new life," Wiigh-Masak says.

The new method is part of a growing green burial movement that advocates natural burials, and might someday replace crematoria with compostoria – turning dead bodies into organic mulch and burying them in economical cardboard coffins that quickly degrade.

Traditional methods of burial are not environmentally friendly: Toxic embalming fluids, as well as the copper or lead in expensive caskets, can leak into the ground and water supply. Wiigh-Masak says it may take as long as sixty years for an embalmed body in a coffin to decompose.

Crematoria release harmful chemicals into the atmosphere – including carcinogenic hydrocarbons from coffins and mercury vapour from dental fillings. A 1990 Swiss study by the Electric Power Research Institute found that mercury vapour during cremation of a person with the average number of amalgam fillings was toxic enough to poison the fish in five 10-acre lakes. Cremation "turns the body from an organic to an inorganic form. Ashes are not food for living soil," Wiigh-Masak says.

*Jill Neimark, Body and Soul*

Science and Spirit, 2002 at [www.science-spirit.org](http://www.science-spirit.org)



## ZTFE honours Lord Bilimoria of Chelsea



photograph from ZTFEs newsletter

**t**he ZTFE have organised a Jashan and reception to honour Lord Bilimoria on Sunday 15 October, 2006 at 3:45pm. Their newsletter informs, "The reception will be attended by dignitaries from all the major political parties and leaders of other faiths. This function will be a landmark in the history of the ZTFE and the Zoroastrians of Britain."

"In order to create a Zoroastrian flavour for this landmark historic event," writes past president Dorab Mistry, "we are requesting all Zoroastrians attending this function to please come dressed in traditional Zoroastrian attire. *Garas* and *duglee pheta* or *paghari* are most welcome. Persian attire will be highly appreciated."

*Hamazor* carried in its last issue 2/06, pp 4-5, the announcement of Lord Bilimoria's appointment, but at the time of going to print, which was the first week of June, the ceremony had not taken place at Parliament House.

ZTFEs newsletter of September informs -

"at a ceremony held on 24<sup>th</sup> July at the Parliament House, Karan Bilimoria joined the Upper House of Parliament as Lord Karan Bilimoria of Chelsea – a momentous event in his life" ... [His] "name was forwarded to Mr Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister for approval before being put to Her Majesty the Queen for final ratification. Karan's

peerage was granted on 16<sup>th</sup> June and Karan took his seat in the House of Lords on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2006 as Lord Karan Bilimoria of Chelsea."

Lord Bilimoria "joins the House of Lords as a 'Cross bencher', that is he will attend and deliberate in the debates of the Upper House Chamber of the British Parliament without any political party affiliation. Lord Bilimoria at 44 shall be one of the 10 youngest members of the 753-member House of Lords." His focus will be "on entrepreneurship, enterprise, business, trade, investment and higher education."

We wish Lord Bilimoria well and are very proud of his achievement.



*Kindness is more important than wisdom,  
And the recognition of this is the beginning of wisdom*

Theodore Isaac Rubin

## Gatha translations - Modes & Credibility

by sam doctor

The Gathas, or 'Hymns' composed by Prophet Zoroaster, are the earliest and most sacred of the Zoroastrian scriptures. Composed in Old Avestan, a dialect akin to Old (Rig Vedic) Sanskrit, the Gathas thus present several problems of decipherment and interpretation. Again, being of the nature of 'Revelation' to the Prophet by Ahura Mazda, the Gathas are characterized by a certain high degree of spirituality and profundity of philosophy, being recondite or abstruse in content and style, but for that matter certainly not highly 'mystical' or obscure. They may be evasive, but certainly not unfathomable, being essentially doctrinal and even down-to-earth in some of their portions.

Now, it is my observation over the past few decades that whenever a new Gatha translation comes on the scene, the same is invariably viewed with some degree of suspicion or misgiving, or even outright derided, especially by lay persons and immature scholars, who tend to pass hasty judgments, bereft of any norms and ethics of scholarship. In this monograph I have made an attempt to lay down briefly some criteria for evaluating the credibility of a Gatha translation.

There has been observed among scholars, linguists as well as lay ones, a certain attitude in regard to the Gathas in general, namely an unwarranted and misleading expression of opinion or estimation whereby it is contended that the Gathas are impossible to decipher or translate. Such remarks or opinions are expressed on the basis of a situation wherein we have a number of scholars putting forth their various translations, naturally differing from one another. But it is essential to realize that translations may, and have to, differ in regard to details, at times even innocuous (eg words like joy, happiness, delight,

exultance, as used by different translators, all bearing almost identical meaning), but the underlying idea or theme of any particular verse remains essentially the same in most translations. This is not to say that there are no hapax legomena (words occurring only once in the text) and no obscure etymologies in the Gathas. Except on such very rare cases, most of the stanzas (over 90 percent of the totally 238) as translated by different scholars differ only in regard to minor details, the more important or main details hardly if ever exhibiting any differences. Exceptions are very few, perhaps 20 to 25 verses. And the worst part of it is that this supposed undecipherability of the Gathas is trumped up as an excuse or artifice to defend certain popular or supposedly esoteric and cultic ideas and theories, which would not stand the test of true scholarship. For instance, it is argued by quite some self-opinionated Parsee scholars, subscribing to some esoteric school, that there are allusions in a number of Gatha verses regarding reincarnation or rebirth, that too in spite of the presence of several references in the Gathas to heaven and hell, the heaven-hell-purgatory concept having developed more fully in the later Pahlavi books. Such scholars read their pet ideas into the Gathas, either by ignoring the rules of grammar and philology, or as in most cases mischievously picking out a word here or a phrase there out of context and coherence.

### Some criteria for judging the credibility of Gatha translations :

The right attitude and approach to be adopted in judging Gatha translations involves a thorough analysis, based on the application of certain criteria: First, one must determine whether the translator has had any specialized training, not only in the Iranian languages and Sanskrit, but in a

protracted and judicious study of the Gathas in particular, preferably backed by some articles or research papers on the Gathas proper, to his/her credit. Needless to state that his work or writings on the Gathas should be precise and analytical, and hence acceptable to the scholarly world. A translation should be characterized not only by precise etymologies but by proper and adequate attention to grammar, regarding which it must be stated that there has been observed of late a certain degree of indifference on the part of many scholars in the matter of correct application of rules of grammar, such a situation being often the outcome of a subjective element, or in other cases just plain negligence in attending to details. Objective and dispassionate translations are few, and can be produced only by scholars who have matured with long experience and study in the specialized field of Gatha translation and exegesis.

#### Modes of translation :

These have changed over the last few decades. Leaving aside the modes followed in the distant past, let us begin about a fifty or more years back from the present. Prior to and till mid 20<sup>th</sup> century it was a practice among most Gatha scholars, and rightly so, as of necessity, to quote from the Gatha translations of other scholars. Such a practice renders possible the comparison of etymologies in a translation with those of others. However, it is observed that the practice is of late being abandoned by modern scholars, partly perhaps due to reasons of space (the bulk of a work on the Gathas increasing beyond proportion), and possibly also because comparison of one's work with others' could raise further problems, and in some cases expose the veracity of a translation to severe tests. Then again, few scholars would risk or afford to spare the time and labour (a period of a decade or more is not uncommon) to produce a detailed translation. The present writer has for instance produced research papers on the Gathas, with months of labour spent on each paper, a single paper usually treating only one or two related Gatha verses in

great detail and hence running into 10 or more pages.<sup>1</sup>

However, in the case of a few scholars of exceptional erudition and experience one may make concessions as and when they neglect to quote other scholars, in view of their own translations being complete or almost so in respect of most features or aspects. To name two such scholars, we have the Gatha translations of Humbach and Insler, and earlier, of Taraporewala. This is not to say that there are no scholars other than those just named, capable of producing good translations. However, we have hardly witnessed a scholarly or viable translation since Insler's.

In regard to the viability of Gatha translations, I would like to draw the attention of scholars to H P Schmidt's critical works.<sup>2</sup>

#### Credibility of Rig-vedic parallels :

Recent times have witnessed a rather free employment of parallels from the Rig Veda, not to mention an unprecedented large number of text-reconstructions. To cite some scholars, we have for instance Insler and Humbach, both rather overenthusiastic in employing such parallels. In this regard I must state that an indiscriminate and excessive or unwarranted use of Vedic parallels is at times damaging and misleading. The brief compass of the present monograph does not permit me to illustrate with actual examples, which I have done elsewhere in an unpublished thesis. However, at this juncture it would be pertinent to make mention of what Gershevitch had to say about Humbach in his review of the latter's work on the Gathas.<sup>3</sup> "He (Humbach) confuses form and meaning when it comes to Vedic parallels. If two passages have certain words in common, Humbach calls them parallels. But this kind of parallelism is not binding on the meaning." Likewise too does Taraporewala, in his monumental work on the Gathas (1951), caution us regarding the Gathas to be interpreted "in their own light", independent of influence from the Younger

Avesta and later Zoroastrian literature. He also cautions us against producing unnecessarily involved and ambiguous translations, when he states (ibid., p.xii) "The language of the Gathas is ancient no doubt, but the construction is fairly simple and free from any complexity or verbosity." Hence also the present writer's preference for a literal mode of translation. Free translations tend to become subjective. A literal translation, and one free from all embellishment should be the one aimed for. Supplying glosses (or rather just the essential word or two introduced for proper idiom and grammar) within the translation, or explanatory notes, comments, immediately below, can make up for any deficits, semantic or interpretative.

#### The metaphysical element :

There is very little of the metaphysical that can be found in the Gathas, as characterized by the down-to-earth, practical message of the Prophet. Even metaphors are few, especially as compared to a large number of the same that figure in the Rigveda. The metaphysical or 'philosophical' (technical sense of the term meant) interpretation of the Gathas would be best left to specialists in the field of philosophy, who alone perhaps are qualified to interpret and write philosophic discourses on the Gathas. The philologist or linguist should as far as possible steer clear of the tendency to read metaphysical or philosophical ideas or interpretations into the Gathas, where the same are not relevant or clearly intended by the Prophet.

In the academic field of 'philosophy', especially as applied to the Gathas, Prof (Emeritus) K D Irani has done commendable work and written extensively on the subject, especially during the last two decades. His writings may be referred to by scholars seeking a broader vision on the Gathas.<sup>4</sup>

The list of names of Gatha scholars figuring in the above various sections would be incomplete if mention is not made of the following<sup>5</sup> :

- ✓ B Schlerath, for his work on textual parallels (1968)
- ✓ W Hinz, for his Gatha translation (1961)
- ✓ Kellens & Pirart, for their fine work in French (1990)
- ✓ P O Skjervo for his critique of K & P's work
- ✓ Martin Schwartz, for his work on lexical concatenations, in continuation of Schmidt's work on the same (mainly 1991).

#### Role of the Pahlavi version in Gatha exegesis :

Up to about the third quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Gatha studies had happened to postulate two schools of Gatha exegesis in general, viz., the Sanskrit (Vedic) and the Pahlavi. This sort of categorization had lost its importance during recent decades. However, it is disheartening to observe that the Pahlavi version (transn.) of the Gathas has of late been practically ignored, while the Vedic has found a number of proponents among Gatha scholars.

It is natural that initially the accent was on the Pahlavi, which was when the Sanskrit school was in its formative stages. In the later or recent decades the accent had begun to gradually swing over to Sanskrit, but sadly to the almost complete exclusion and neglect of the Pahlavi translation. This state of affairs is due to a certain prejudice of late nurtured by western scholars towards the Pahlavi version. It is necessary to realize that the Pahlavi, being the perpetuator of the Avestan and in the same tradition (though far removed from the Gathas in point of time) does merit its share of attention. The Parsi scholars in particular, to whom Zoroastrianism was and still is a living tradition, extended due attention to the Pahlavi version, promoting excellent Pahlavi research in general. As Duchesne-Guillemin (1973)<sup>6</sup> had well observed: "*The two approaches (the traditional Phl. & the Vedic) reflect an old rivalry between schools. ... They should complement each other, but it is rare to find a scholar having the double disciplines of Sanskrit & Pahlavi. One of the methods always tends to dominate over the other.*"



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2. H P Schmidt: Form & meaning of Yasna 33 (Connecticut, 1985); his Critique on the Gathas (1979).
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4. K D Irani: Understanding Zarathushtra to interpret the Gathas – paper appearing in the Proceedings of the First Gatha Colloquium, London (1998); 'Foreword' to Pallon Ichhaporia's Gatha translation 1993; articles in Journal of the K R Cama Oriental Inst., Vol 53, Bombay (1986, 1-73).
5. W Hinz: Zarathustra (in German) Stuttgart (1961). M Schwartz: Sound, sense & 'seeing' in Zoroaster – in Proceedings of the First International Congress, Bombay (1989), and others. Kellens & Pirart: Les Textes viel-Avestiques, Weisbaden (1990); P O Skjervo: The state of Old Avestan scholarship, in JAOS, 117,1 (1997).
6. J Duchesne-Guillemin: Religion of Ancient Iran (Eng. transn. by K M JamaspAsa, Bombay, 1973).



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*Oriental Studies (Berkeley Univ., USA), D.Litt.*

*Sam Doctor is Professor & Head of the Department of Iranian Studies, Zoroastrian College, Mumbai, Retd. teacher: Andheri Madressa (Seminary). His studies and writings cover a wide range of Orientalia, inclusive Ilr history, archaeology and specialized astronomy.*

"My heart is so small its almost invisible. How can You place such big sorrows in it?"

"Look," He answered, "your eyes are even smaller, yet they behold the world." - Rumi

## Shirin Ebadi writes on 5 August, 2006 -

“ I conduct my human rights activities through the Defender of Human Rights Center (DHRC). I am the president of this center and we have three important responsibilities:

a. We report the violations of human rights that take place in Iran

b. We defend political prisoners pro bono — about 70% of the political prisoners in Iran are clients of our center and we do not charge them for our services.

c. We support the families of these prisoners both financially — if they require financial aid — and spiritually.

This center is a member of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and has been registered there. It has also been awarded a human rights prize by the Human Rights National Commission in France. This center is very well known and credible in Iran. Two days ago the government of Iran announced that this center is illegal and provided we continue our activities, they shall arrest us. Of course me and the other members of the center do not intend to shut down the center and we shall continue our activities. However, there is a high possibility that that they will arrest us. The government's action in this regard is illegal.

Therefore, I kindly request that you broadcast this message by all mean and gather spiritual support for our center. This center has been established and working for more than four years now. I believe this decision of the government has been triggered by my memoir being published. In any case, I am happy that my memoir has been published, for the truth must be told.

Many thanks, Shirin Ebadi

”



Shirin Ebadi was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2003, for her efforts to promote the rights especially for women, children and political prisoners in Iran. She is the first Muslim woman to receive the Nobel Prize in any field.



photo, courtesy Roshan Rivetna, FEZANA Journal, Summer 2005

## Zoroastrians affected by floods in Surat

The devastating floods that ravaged South Gujarat early August, has caused immense hardship and misery to those residing in Surat city, its suburbs and district. Innumerable Parsis, irrespective of their financial status have been affected by this natural calamity.

The raging floods have swept away houses in the semi urban areas, wrecked havoc on the buildings in the city, destroyed warehouses containing food grains and other essential commodities. There is a severe shortage of even drinking water and milk.

The flood waters began to recede from 10<sup>th</sup> August 2006, but have left in their wake acute despair and distress. The first signs of water borne diseases have also begun to manifest, which will accentuate the suffering even further.

As soon as the flood water began to recede, WZO, through its volunteers, based at Navsari were amongst the first to reach the affected areas on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2006. The task of providing relief to some of the Parsis affected by the calamity has already commenced.

WZO has established contact with the local leaders at Surat. The first consignment of essential items, such as drinking water, milk powder, pulses, grains, oil and other commodities such as potatoes, onions, tomatoes etc has already been distributed. The second consignment has been

organised and will be despatched as soon as we hear from the team in Surat.

Some areas are still under 2 1/2 to 3 feet under water and are not accessible. It has been estimated that many more such consignments will be required to provide succour and relief to the members of our community.

At present we are focussing only on providing relief to community members affected by nature's fury. It is only after the situation returns to some form of normalcy, will it be possible for us to assess the actual extent of damage to property and the rehabilitation that will be required to be undertaken to get our affected brethren back on their feet.

Massive funding will be necessary to meet these humanitarian objectives. The WZO appeals to individuals and institutions to lend a helping hand by making funds available generously for the relief and rehabilitation of the poor Zoroastrian affected by nature's fury.

Please send your donation, however large or small, to WZO in your country, as indicated on page 64. Please remember that WZO has local charitable status in the USA, India, New Zealand and the UK and therefore your donation will be tax deductible.

Thank you.



*Shri Rabindranth Tagore wrote -*

*Go not to the temple to put flowers upon the feet of God,  
First fill your own house with the Fragrance of love...*

*Go not to the temple to light candles before the altar of God,  
First remove the darkness of sin from your heart...*

*Go not to the temple to bow down your head in prayer,  
First learn to bow in humility before your fellowmen...*

*Go not to temple to pray on bended knees,  
First bend down to lift someone who is downtrodden...*

*Go not to temple to ask for forgiveness for your sins,  
First forgive from your heart those who have sinned against you...*

*(Rabindranth Tagore received the Nobel Prize in literature)*

## Ancient religions clash in modern Iran

Robert Tait, writes on 4 October, 2006, Guardian Unlimited, online, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/elsewhere/journalist/story/0,,1887288,00.html>

The boisterous scenes of wine, unveiled women and song confounded the popular stereotype of religious worship in contemporary Iran. In an isolated and awe-inspiring mountain setting, followers of an ancient faith were communing with God in festive and time-honoured fashion.

But when the government VIPs arrived, normal order - as defined by the country's stringent Islamic laws - was restored. The merriment ended, women were ordered to cover up - and grumbles of discontent (albeit muted and discreet) began.

*"This is the only time during the year when we are allowed to do what we want, but even here they don't leave us alone,"* said Giti, 55, reluctantly putting on her headscarf.

She was one of thousands of Zoroastrians gathered at Chak Chak in the central Iranian desert for a five-day pilgrimage that is the biggest annual event in the religion's calendar.

Pilgrims had climbed to the shrine where Nikbanou, the daughter of the country's last Zoroastrian monarch, King Yazdgerd III, is said to have sought refuge in 652AD from the Arab conquerors who brought Islam to Iran. Lighting candles in line with the Zoroastrian belief that fire symbolises God's light, they worshipped the credo of "good thoughts, good speech, good deeds" which the faith's founding prophet, Zoroaster - also known as Zarathustra - propounded at least 3,000 years ago. They also conversed noisily in a pre-Islamic form of Persian stripped of the modern Arabic loan words used by their Muslim compatriots.

But the sense of refuge worshippers traditionally enjoy was tested by the unprecedented government attention paid to this year's event, in the form of a visiting delegation sent by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, along with interior and culture ministry officials.



photograph taken by Robert Tait during the festivities

By requiring worshippers to observe Islamic dress in their own sacred place, the high-level visit illustrated the second-class status of Zoroastrianism - believed to be the world's oldest monotheistic faith - in its land of origin.

Kourash Niknam, the sole Zoroastrian MP in Iran's parliament, insisted the gesture was voluntary. *"We just wanted to show respect because it is they who rule and we are living in their community,"* he said.

Yet it highlighted the difficult plight of Iran's estimated 25,000 Zoroastrians under the country's Shia Islamic governing system.

Officially, Zoroastrians - along with Jews and Armenian and Assyrian Christians - are

a constitutionally protected religious minority with guaranteed parliamentary representation.

In practice, complaints of discrimination are widespread. Access to high-level posts in the government and armed forces is blocked. Some Zoroastrians say they are pressured to change their religion. A law awarding Zoroastrians who convert to Islam their entire families' inheritance at the expense of non-converted relatives has caused misery and bitter resentment. Despite legislation decreeing that all religions are entitled to equal blood money (compensation) awards, Zoroastrians say that, in reality, they still receive only half the sums given to Muslims.

Nor do they feel wholly free in a land where their faith was the majority denomination until the forced mass conversions to Islam that followed the seventh century Arab invasion.

*"We don't have the right to make programmes about our religion," complained Mr Niknam. "I have no platform on radio or television to go and speak about Zoroastrianism. We cannot get any budget for building a new fire temple when mosques are being built one after another."*

Yet many Zoroastrians say they feel better treated by their Muslim fellow-countrymen than under the last shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. Paradoxically, they attribute this to the uniform dress code imposed by the 1979 Islamic revolution, combined with a decline in religious prejudice among younger Muslims.

*"Before the revolution, all Muslim women in my home town of Yazd wore chadors and only we Zoroastrians didn't," said Goharbanoo, 40. "The Friday prayer leader ruled that on Fridays, Zoroastrian men had to wear white and women traditional clothes. It meant people could recognise us easily and they would be very rude to us. When we went into a grocer's shop, we wouldn't be allowed to touch the fruit. We even sat on separate benches at school and had separate drinking water."*

*"Thanks to the revolution, everyone dresses the same now. People back then were more religious. Today's generation is ashamed of the prejudice of their ancestors."*

Some Zoroastrians have sought refugee status in America under an officially backed programme to help Iranian religious minorities. But Behzad, 31, an unemployed computer graduate who complained of being denied a gun during his national military service, rejected that option. *"Why should we leave? This is our mother country,"* he said. *"Iranian culture is wonderful. Western culture is stress, stress, stress."*



Continued from page 16

and walked long distances to save money which he would send to his family in Karachi. Quoting extensively from his writings he said Dr Dhalla was the right man but at the wrong time.

Dr Hutoxi Bhola described him as a most humane and noble person. She recalled how during the ten days of muktad at Karachi there was daily a humbandagi at 7 am for ten minutes after which Dasturji spoke clearly and lucidly. Born in a poor athornan family at Surat, he was the epitome of simple living and high thinking. She suggested that young athravans undergoing training at Athornan Madressas be imparted the knowledge about the lives and teachings of eminent Dasturjis. He learnt the lesson of tolerance at Columbia University.

Dr Viraf Dhalla, grandson of Dasturji Dhalla said he was a lover of nature. He was an embodiment of love and compassion.

Mrs Homai Mody proposing the vote of thanks, mentioned that it was Dasturji Dr Dhalla who had inaugurated this K R Cama Oriental Institute building in 1937.

There was an exhibition on Dasturji Dhalla.



# Zoroastrian Theology - From the earliest times to the present day

by Maneckji Nusservanji Dhalla, Ph D - New York 1914

(Dr S M S Mody, FRCP, of the N M Wadia Institute of Cardiology, Poona, India, has sent this chapter written by our Dastur Dhalla as far back as 1914, saying *"I feel it merits publication in your magazine and trust that it will have a sobering influence on the warring factors in our community."* Dr Mody is referring to the controversy regarding children of inter-communal marriages and conversion. – Ed)

## Chapter XLVI : Zoroastrianism ceases to be a missionary religion

The causes that have led the preponderating number of the community to decide against any kind of proselytizing. The era of unprecedented prosperity of the Parsis during the last century has intensified the more their spirit of communal exclusiveness. Zoroastrianism has come to be regarded, more and more, as the communal heritage, and overwhelming number of the Parsis have determined to make it exclusively their own. It is their cherished possession, and none outside their fold shall share it. Theirs is a close corporation. One has to be born a Zoroastrian, he cannot become one.

Though no serious attempt has ever been made by the Parsis of India to organize a proselytizing movement with the sole object of propagating their faith, worldly motives on the part of some members of the community have from time to time prompted them to open the question during the last century. Among such motives has been the desire of a matrimonial alliance with an alien woman; the wish to have the children born of such union invested with the sacred shirt and girdle; or again the desire to include in the faith those children born of the Zoroastrian fathers by illegitimate intercourse with non-Zoroastrian mistresses. So bitter have been the controversies thus arising that they have stopped just short of physical violence. The collective conscience of the community has recently declared that it shall not legalize the marital connection with alien women, it shall not consecrate the investiture with the visible emblem of their faith of the children of alien mothers, it shall not legitimize the

conversion of illegitimate children, and for the matter of fact it shall have nothing to do with proselytizing at all.

How the decision of the Parsis not to accept any converts affects the future of the community.

Of all the ancient prophets of the great religions of the world, Zoroaster has the smallest following at the present day. Only one hundred thousand souls, at the most, acknowledge him as their prophet. If Zoroastrianism is to live in this world as a living faith, we must have sufficient numbers in its fold to keep up its vitality. When such a small community deliberately resolves to erect a huge barrier against all outsiders, it raises various problems of great concern and grave anxiety for its future. It falls in the domain of the social sphere to consider these problems that demand solution from all thinking members of the community. In this present work of religious study, we shall only passingly refer in the next paragraph to some of these vital questions that confront us, leaving their discussion for another volume chiefly devoted to the treatment of the social and economic problems of the community, which I hope to publish at some future time.

The growing cost of living, the increasing inclination in the community for higher standard of living, the custom of dowry, and similar causes, contribute towards the fall in the proportion of marriages among persons of marriageable age. The disinclination to

marriage steadily increases. Both bachelors and spinsters try to put off marrying till very late in life. The consequence is fewer in children. Besides, there is a growing unwillingness among the married couples of the upper and middle classes to assume parental responsibility. The ratio of births to wives of potential ages shows a decline. Modern civilization is wedded to an insatiable hunger for comfort, and an inordinate devotion to luxury. Children come to be regarded as a source of hindrance to the enjoyment of the social amenities of life on the part of their parents. Hence the restriction on their production. The mode of living of the Parsis as taught by Zoroastrianism, which enjoins bodily cleanness and hygienic principles as religious duties, contributes greatly towards the preservation of young lives, and keeps infant mortality at its lowest.

**But for all that, the decline in the birthrate in a community of about a hundred thousand souls that stubbornly repels all proselytes and closes its doors against all aliens threatens its very existence.**



*(For those of us who were fortunate to know Dr Dhalla, who had the benefit of learning from him, we know what a forward thinking and enlightened man he was. Well before his time, he suffered many a time for his ideology, had his fair share of critics, but always remained gentle, kind and full of wisdom. He*

*has left for us a wealth of knowledge but so many of us are ready to believe what is dictated with authority, without thinking for ourselves.*

*When will the majority of our community, who are neither orthodox nor reformists wake up and speak? – Ed)*



### ***As reported in Jame-Jamshed Weekly of Sunday, 2nd July 2006***

Rich tributes were paid to late Dasturji Dr Maneckji Nusservanji Dhalla on Thursday 25th May, 2006 at a function organised by the K R Cama Oriental Institute to commemorate his 50th death anniversary. The function began with a Jashan ceremony. Mr Muncherji N M Cama President of the Institute welcomed the gathering.

Dasturji Dr Peshotan Hormazdyar Mirza gave the invocation. He eulogized Dasturji Dhalla as a Zoroastrian scholar and author of several books who served the Parsi community in Karachi for 48 long years. He was trained under Professor William Jackson of Columbia University. He was a mediator between feuding groups. He drafted the present constitution of Udvada Athornan Anjuman. He was conferred the title of Shams-ul-Ulema.

Mrs Armaity Desai (whose parents had translated Dasturji Dhalla's autobiography into English) highlighted two of Dr Dhalla's characteristics of duty and devotion. Dr Dhalla did not take sides in a controversy. He gave information and wanted the people to show compassion and love. To him life was duty, religion was duty.

Jehangir Patel spoke about the vision of Dasturji Dhalla and his relevance today. He gave examples of Dr Dhalla's austere and thrifty lifestyle. Even while at Columbia University he washed his own clothes



please turn back to page 22

# Events that shaped our religion

by rustom j kevala

## Part III – The Parthian Phenomenon

### Introduction

In this series of papers highlight the major turning points in history that have shaped present-day Zoroastrian religion and worldview.

### Summary of Parts I and II *(appeared in Hamazor issues 1/06 & 2/06)*

Zarathushtra's message (c 1300BC) spread from the Bactrian highlands to the western Indo-Iranian tribes without fanfare for over 700 years. Recorded history of Zoroastrian religion starts with the Achaemenian king Cyrus the Great (558BC), who exhibited great tolerance for all the local religions within his empire. Darius (581-486BC) left detailed inscriptions declaring that he was a follower of Ahura Mazda. Darius's successors continued to follow the Mazda-yasna religion, but included the worship of other divinities such as Mithra and Anahita. The Achaemenian Empire included Greek Asia Minor and Ionia, but the Persian and the Greek religions remained distinct.

After Alexander defeated Darius III at Gaugamela in 331BC, a period of Hellenization began, which lasted for less than 200 years. Many of the surviving Zoroastrian scriptures were lost because Zoroastrian scribes were no longer supported by the rulers. Religion now became pure rituals for propitiating divinities and warding off pollution and the demons, recited orally in a language that was already out of use.

## Part III

### The Rise of the Parthians

The Parths were a group of nomadic tribes from central Asia (some scholars believe that they were Scythians from the Russian Steppes), who migrated into the region east of the Caspian Sea (today's Turkmenistan and Khorasan). Parthians were expert horsemen: *"On horses they go to war, to banquets, to public and private tasks, and on them they travel, stay still, do business and chat."*<sup>1</sup> Sun, moon and stars had a strong influence on Parthian religion before they accepted Mazda-yasna. They were also known as Pahlavas. Their language was Pahlavi.

In 256BC, Ashk (Arshak) overcame the Seleucid governor and declared himself as

the king of Parthia. The Ashkanians ruled Parthia for over a 100 years. Then in 141BC, Mehrdad I (Ashk<sup>2</sup> VI) imprisoned the Seleucid king Demetrius II and established the Parthians as the rulers of all of Persia. His capital was at Nysa, a heavily fortified city near modern Ashkabad in Turkmenistan, east of the Caspian Sea. Excavations have revealed a great cultural diversity in architecture as well as artifacts, classically Greek in some instances and in the oriental mode in others. Around 120BC, Mehrdad the Great (Ashk IX) moved his capital to Ctesiphon (pronounced Tish-phoon), on the opposite bank of the river from Seleucia (Susa), which was still essentially a Greek enclave.

### Armenia and Pontus

Because of Armenia's strategic importance, the Parthian rulers installed their cousins, the Arshakuni, to rule over Armenia<sup>3</sup>. In 88BC, Armenian king Tigran (the Great) formed an alliance with Mithradates<sup>4</sup> I, warlord of Pontus, an independent kingdom to the south of Armenia. Mithridates Eupator<sup>5</sup>, son of Mithradates I, wrested control of the Mediterranean with the help of the Greek sailors of Cilicia. The Romans sent General Pompey to capture Cilicia and destroy the Mithridatic navy which was obstructing Roman trade with Africa. Pompey defeated Mithridates in 74BC and reorganized the Roman Empire in the east. Now the Roman and Parthian empires came face to face, with only Armenia as a buffer.

In 53BC, Roman general Crassus allied himself with the Armenian king Artavazd. Immediately, the Parthian king Orod (Ashk XIII) led his infantry against Armenia. Artavazd offered a treaty with Orod by arranging a marriage between the two royal families. Meanwhile, the Parthian cavalry, under the command of General Suren, moved fast to face the Roman army. The Romans retreated to Carrhae, where Crassus was killed. His head was cut off and sent to Armenia where Orod and Artavazd were watching a Greek play by Euripides. Instead of the reward that Suren was expecting, Orod saw Suren as a threat to himself; and ordered him to be executed.

### Treaties with Rome

Orod abdicated in 37BC, and his son Farhad was crowned as king of Persia. Farhad killed all his 30 brothers, and when his father intervened, he killed him too. Farhad successfully repelled several Roman attacks, until Octavius (who became Caesar Augustus in 27BC) sent a beautiful Italian woman, Oriana Theamusa, for Farhad. In return, Farhad sent his two sons to Rome. This meant that the two leaders trusted each other. But in 2BC, Farhad was killed by poisoning by Farhadak, his son

from Oriana. Farhadak gave Armenia to the Romans, but the Romans did not accept Farhadak as the Parthian king.

The Mogh's assembly or Maheshtan, which consisted of religious leaders and elders of the Parthian tribes, demanded that Rome send Vanan (Vonones), Farhad's son, back to Parthia. Vanan turned out to be more Roman than Persian. So in 16AD, the Maheshtan replaced Vanan by Ardavan, king of Azerbaijan.

Blash I (Valkash) was crowned king in 51AD. He installed his son Tigran on the throne of Armenia. While Blash was busy quelling some tribal incursions, the Roman emperor Nero sent general Paetus to retake Armenia. Paetus pillaged and burned Armenia, but was eventually overcome by Blash. Finally in 63, Rome signed a treaty with Blash, under which Blash's son Tigran would receive the throne of Armenia in Rome from Nero's hands! Tigran left for Rome with his family members and 3,000 Parthian horse archers. He chose to travel by land to avoid defiling Aredvisur Anahita<sup>6</sup>. His journey lasted four months. He stayed in Rome for one month to receive the crown from Nero and took another four months to return to Armenia. Rome paid all the expenses. This clever peace treaty lasted for nearly 50 years.

In 115, Trajan entered Armenia, killed the Armenian Prince and entered Ctesiphon. But the surrounding regions revolted and cut off his supply lines. Trajan installed a pro-Roman Parthian prince on the throne and hastily returned to Rome. Soon after, Khosrow (Ashk XXIII) entered Ctesiphon, causing great joy in the population, and removed the puppet prince. Hadrian, who succeeded Trajan in 117, signed a peace treaty with Khosrow.

### The Last Years

In 148, Blash III (Ashk XXV) attacked Armenia, but he was beaten back. Romans entered Ctesiphon in 165, and burned Blash's palace. Most of the western

regions, including Syria were ceded to Rome. The Parthians were now very disorganized and the Romans entered Ctesiphon again in 197, selected 100,000 women and children and took them to Rome as slaves.

In 208, a civil war broke out and the Mahestan decided that the empire would be ruled by two brothers simultaneously, Ardavan V and Blash V. The Roman Emperor Caracalla arrived with a huge army, camped outside the gates of the capital and asked for the hand of Ardavan's daughter. He invited Ardavan and other Parthian clan chiefs to a banquet. When Ardavan arrived, his party was ambushed, but Ardavan managed to escape with the help of some local servants hired by Caracalla. On their way back to Rome, the Romans desecrated the royal burial grounds in Media and the sun temple near Adiabene.

This barbaric act now united the Parthian armies, and Ardavan advanced towards the Roman borders. Caracalla was murdered and the Romans offered to return all Persian prisoners and to sign a new peace treaty. Ardavan sent the following demands:

1. Return of all prisoners
2. Rome should rebuild all cities that Caracalla had destroyed
3. 50 million dinars as punishment for desecrating the holy graves
4. Return lower Mesopotamia to the Parthian Empire.

The Romans did not accept the demands and war broke out again. In what was the last war between Rome and the Ashkani dynasty, the Parthians came out victorious. The Romans accepted all the demands. However, when the Romans wanted to return Lower Mesopotamia, the Parthian government was in such disarray that there was no one to receive back the territories.

### Religion during the Parthian times

The Mahestan Assembly, which consisted of Zoroastrian religious leaders and clan elders exerted great influence over the

administration of the kingdom. At any given time, there were 200 or so Ashakanian princes who ruled over the different provinces of the Empire in a loose confederacy. During the 400 years of Parthian rule, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Greek religion existed side by side without significant interference from the central authorities. Then during the last 100 years, Mithraism, Zurvanism, Christianity and Buddhism developed in different parts of Persia.

#### Zoroastrianism –

The Parthian kings were the nominal heads of the Zoroastrian faith, but left the management of religious affairs and rituals to the Magi. Until the advent of Christianity, there were no major threats to the religion. But the gospel of Christ in Aramaic and Greek was difficult to counter with Zoroastrian rituals in poorly understood languages. In about 60 AD, Blash (Valkash) ordered the re-assembly and transcription of Zoroastrian scriptures in the Pahlavi script<sup>7</sup>. This task continued intermittently until the dynasty ended in 224 AD.

#### Judaism –

The notion of the cosmic Messiah (like Saoshyant) entered Jewish thinking between 200BC and 100AD. The sect of Pharisees had added to their beliefs the Zoroastrian idea of the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, and a future retribution<sup>8</sup>. The Old Testament was translated into Greek. When the Seleucid emperor of Syria, Antiochus IV installed a Greek altar in the temple court of Jerusalem in 167BC, an uprising began that led to the founding of the Jewish state of the Maccabean priest-kings. A civil war ensued among the Jewish tribes. In about 80BC, the Maccabean king Alexander Jannaeus crucified 800 Pharisees who had opposed him. The ensuing terror is believed to have led to the founding of the desert retreat of the Dead Sea Scroll community of the Essenes, who believed that the end of the world had finally arrived. The Dead Sea Scrolls are permeated with Zoroastrian apocalyptic thinking. One of the largest scrolls gives detailed instructions on how

the War of Sons of Light with the Sons of Darkness will be fought.

#### Roman Religion -

Cicero (106-43BC) considered the love and expansion of the fatherland to be man's highest pursuit<sup>9</sup>. Romans also believed that the stars represented souls returning to heaven after they leave the body. Each soul is thus divine. Augustus instituted a policy of the veneration of the emperor, since his soul would be the most divine of all.

#### Christianity –

With the arrival of Christ, the Christians believed that the “War of the Sons of Light with the Sons of Darkness”, as prophesied in the Dead Sea Scrolls, was over. Christ had proven that Love was the answer for conquering evil. Three contending views developed side by side; those of the Jewish Christians of Palestine, who simply considered Christ as the Messiah, the Gnostics, who incorporated the pre-Christian spiritual concepts of inner illumination and the return of Christ as the Saoshyant, and those presented in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, the Roman armies were spreading another religion with Greco-Persian overtones, Mithraism.

#### Mithraism -

According to Plutarch, Mithraism emerged as a religion in 64BC among the pirates of Cilicia, and from there it spread to the soldiers of the Roman army. Perses, the son of Perseus, was the patron god of Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia and Mithradates of Pontus, who claimed descent from Perseus, was their patron. The temple drawings of Mithra show him slaying a bull, wearing loose Iranian garb and wearing the characteristic forward-pointing Phrygian<sup>11</sup> cap. Mithraism had seven secret initiation rites, each rite leading up to a higher level of inner consciousness. The final rite identified the initiate with the Savior, Mithra, who renovates the Creation. The existence of Mithraic temples throughout the Roman Empire attest to its presence up to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.

#### Zerwanism -

Another concept, Zerwan-e-Akarna, boundless time, was also entwined into the rites of Mithraism. Zarwanism was ultimately declared a heresy by the Sasanians as it went against the Zoroastrian belief in a finite time, at the end of which the world would be renovated by the Saoshyant.

#### Buddhism –

Buddhism entered Bactria (Afghanistan) from India. The Bactrian rulers were patrons of Buddhism. The Kushan king Kanishka became a Buddhist. Ahsoka (262-232BC) sent Buddhist missionaries into Persia and all the way to Rome. A distinctly Iranian influence to Buddhism, which later entered China and Japan, is observed in the sects of the Solar Buddha Amitabha- Amitayus: immeasurably radiant, forever-enduring Buddha<sup>12</sup>.



6 ft 4 in bronze statue of a Parthian prince, found in the village of Shami, after its discovery in 1933. Ruins of a Parthian shrine were found nearby. (from *The Roman World*, *The Oxford History of the Classical World*).

## The Rise of the Sasanians

Ardeshir Papak defeated the last Parthian king Ardavan V in hand-to-hand battle in 224. Over the next 300 years, the Sasanians continually faced the Romans in the West, but their main adversary was the rise of Christianity and other Zoroastrian heresies within its own boundaries. This is covered in Part IV, The Sasanian Theocracy.



### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Justin, quoted in "Persians – Masters of Empire," p. 133

<sup>2</sup> All Parthian rulers took the name Ashk upon accession to the throne. The dynasty is known as the Ashkanian Dynasty.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Bamban, The Military History of Parsiks, p.136

<sup>4</sup> Mithradates - gift of Mithra

<sup>5</sup> Eupator is a hereditary title given to a Greek aristocrat. The horticultural genus eupatorium is named in honor of Mithridates Eupator

<sup>6</sup> An-ahita - un-defiled, pure

<sup>7</sup> According to Denkart (written in 6<sup>th</sup> century AD)

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Campbell, Occidental Mythology, p. 276

<sup>9</sup> Supra, p. 328

<sup>10</sup> Supra, p. 375

<sup>11</sup> Phrygia is a province in Asia Minor

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Campbell, Oriental Mythology



*Rustum was born in Mumbai. Today, like many of us, he is intrigued by the questions: "Why is our religion so little known or understood throughout the world? Why do we seem so powerless to resolve the issues facing us?" He firmly believes that the answers can*

*be found by taking a dispassionate look at our history. Rustum lives near Tampa, Florida, with his wife, Yasmin.*

***The choice you make today, will usually affect tomorrow. - unknown***

## Kevala, President of FEZANA

Rustum Kevala was elected as the president of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) at its Annual General Meeting held in Atlanta, Georgia, on May 27-28, 2006.

Rustum came to the USA as a Tata Scholar in 1964 and received a PhD in aerospace engineering in 1967. He has been active in the Zoroastrian community since the 1980s. From 1991 to 1998, he was the chairman of the Information Receiving and Dissemination Committee of FEZANA, which publishes the FEZANA Journal. Then from 1998 to 2002, he served as Treasurer of FEZANA. He has spoken and published articles on issues facing our community. His passion is to explore the interface between history and mythology, and how this influences the thinking and living philosophies of various peoples around the world. To relax, he grows bromeliads and orchids in the balmy Florida air.

Rustum ran for FEZANA President on a 3-point platform:

To build unity, increase education and knowledge of religion, and develop much-needed FEZANA infrastructure.

Since becoming president, he has been listening to different viewpoints and suggestions to define issues and set goals. On the weekend of September 2-4, he organized a workshop to develop a plan of action based on the priorities of the community.

Rustum is hopeful that with open dialogue focused on finding commonalities and defining and resolving issues; and by working closely with the North American Mobeds Council (NAMC), we will find an effective course of action to become a viable and thriving religious community in North America.

## The Agiary at Zanzibar

Rustom Kevala, President FEZANA received the press cutting regarding the status of the Zanzibar agiary. Immediate past president Firdosh Mehta was requested to make inquiries on this matter by approaching Rusi Dalal, past president of ZTFE London, who shares this information with us.

**a**fter the revolution in Zanzibar in 1964, most Zoroastrians left. During my visit in 1968, there were still some 30 odd Parsis left mainly Asad Talati and family as they had business and properties there. Tehmtan Bhungara - he was manager of ETC (Cable & Wireless) and Thrity & Rusi Madon, who carried on the brunt of managing the property. Incidentally the Fire was gone at the time of the revolution as the mobed left the Agiary in fear.

When Asad and Thrity (brother and sister) packed up for Canada as late as the turn of this Century they could not be expected to take the burden. We had a problem and I called a meeting of Zanzibari Parsis in London and discussed options. We chose to raise donations and maintain. Otherwise the property would have disappeared from our control and would have been vandalized and desecrated. We have single handedly remitted funds and held the property till today. All our finances have gone through ZTFE and accounted for.

Through the good offices of Cowasjee Dinshaw in Mumbai I came to know of a fund BPP holds for Zanzibar and thankfully I have managed to tap it just recently which has helped. I have personally monitored the situation over the last five years in close

coordination with Asad Talati and other old Zanzibari colleagues. But the time has come when there is nothing more one can do.

We had offers for the purchase of the land with the dilapidated buildings on it. At last, only last month we have accepted an offer to sell, but safeguarding the Aramgah - this was the main reason to keep going till today.

We were planning to bring the *afargan*, the bell and all other retrievable items to London for our Dadgah project but due to delays of planning and other hitches we exceeded to the request of our Canadian Zoroastrian brethren from OZFC, Mississauga, Toronto, and have transferred the same to them. We hope OZFC will soon have the honour of rekindling the flame in the same *afargan* which we together revered for so many years in Zanzibar.

This decision to wind up affairs in Zanzibar was our own. All this has come about only during the last month or so. (*August 2006*) Many of us do not have the complete picture yet. I was approached by media probably sensing something was happening and I was a bit apprehensive. Nevertheless, I permitted our man on site, an old friend of Asad and I - Cornell Pereira, who looked after our affairs for years - to allow access to our property.

Vanessa Beddoe reports in a newspaper, but unfortunately the name is unknown.

"A crumbling temple for an ancient religion lies hidden from the street, just beyond the fields of Mnazi Mmoja. All but forgotten, its doors are rarely opened; the once prominent Zoroastrians have disappeared from Zanzibar.

... Movie reels now lie scattered around the buildings, relics from the days when Zanzibar had an operating cinema run by a Zoroastrian family. Prayer books, coated in dust and debris from the falling ceiling, are littered about the temple room. Photographs and paintings of prominent Zoroastrian families from the past 100 or so years are stacked against the walls, still in their elaborate frames. ...


The religion may have first swept into Zanzibar with monsoon dhows from India and Arabia, over 2,000 years ago. More recently, during the 1940s, many Parsis moved to Zanzibar from India, to work as civil servants for the British colonial government. This is what brought the parents of Farokh Bulsara, (commonly known as Freddie Mercury, the late megastar singer in the band Queen) to Zanzibar's shores.

I last went to Zanzibar in 1999 after attending the Parliament of Religions in Cape Town. That was the last time I lit the Fire and recited my prayers there. There is only one Parsi family left there but even ringing them up and asking them for some help does not seem to materialize.

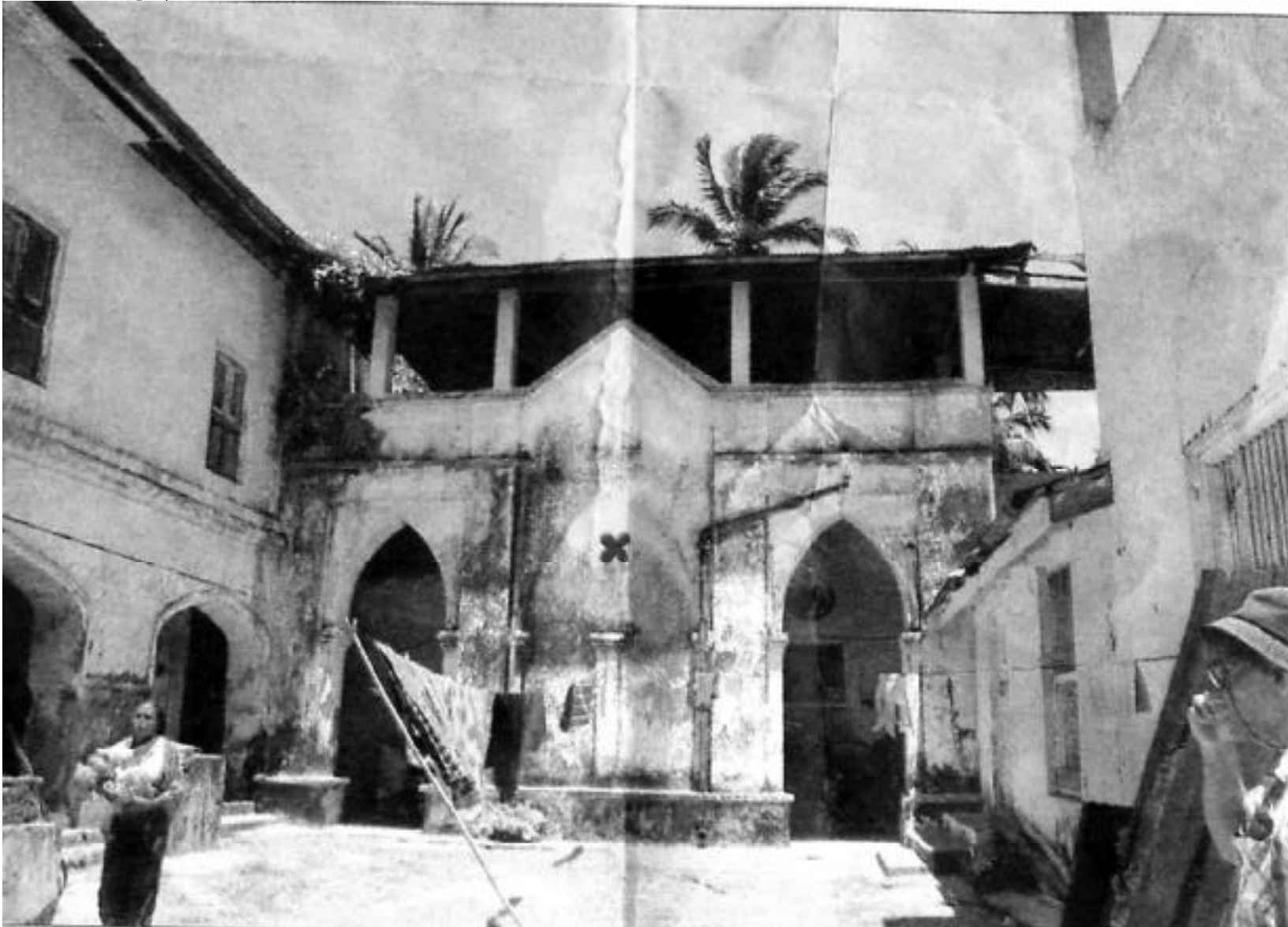
Of and on ex Zanzibar Parsis have visited and given me first hand information. The Amrolia family is going there next month (October).



Today most of the Zoroastrian tradition in Zanzibar has been wiped out by a millennium of Islam, the one exception being the annual Mwaka Kogwa festival, 'Year of the Washed', which is a traditional Zoroastrian New Year celebration. Mwaka Kogwa is celebrated by the building of huge bonfires, the staging of fights, men dressed as women, and a high consumption of alcohol. Zanzibar is the only place in the world where this celebration is officially observed and celebrated by most of the population, if somewhat reinterpreted.

The future of Zanzibar's Fire Temple is uncertain. It's rumoured to have been sold, but restoration is urgently needed to stop it from falling to the ground. A short stroll from Stone Town along Nyerere Road, the temple is closed to visitors, although it is possible to catch a glimpse through the wrought iron gates. If you're passing by, it's worth pausing outside this hidden relic of Zanzibar's past, if only to contemplate an all but forgotten religion that has influenced so many." 

Entrance to Agiary at Zanzibar



## *Non-Zoroastrians in Zoroastrian percepts: Do they have a place?*

by adi davar

(In Hamazor's last issue, Jamsheed Kanga sought answers to queries on "acceptance". Readers may not know that they were given some 25 years ago at the Montreal Congress, in a paper addressing the topic publicly for the first time in North America. Responding to the initial uproar, its organizers sought worldwide comments on it from eminent non-Zoroastrian and Zoroastrian scholars, priests and community leaders. Except for Indian dasturs, everyone, including Iranian dasturs, endorsed its analysis and proposals. So did majorities in FEZANA associations. The outcome was reported to the next Congress. Navjotes of children of mixed marriages, mixed marriages under Zoroastrian rites and occasional acceptance of non-Zoroastrian spouses then quietly began in North America. Despite some dissent, they gradually became generally accepted practices. The paper thus initiated a change over time, in its community outlook. I am therefore reproducing it in three parts, for Hamazor readers. - Ed)

### PART I

#### *Prologue to the Montreal Paper:*

At most community gatherings, debates over the issue of "acceptance" divided the North American community of some 30,000 Zoroastrians. Adherence to the ethnocentric view of the faith long advocated by eminent Parsi-Zoroastrian priests and leaders, was turning a majority of its young Zoroastrians away from community involvement and even, participation in its meetings and functions.

The courageous Dolly Dastoor, Chairperson of the Montreal Congress, therefore decided to open public discussion of the issue on that continent. She invited the young to present their views. She asked the author to analyse the issue and make Zoroastrians particularly aware of the weight of evidence not normally available to them, so they could weigh it in the balance of their thinking against the evidence they knew.

Convictions of the young Zoroastrians were perhaps most eloquently articulated at that Congress by:

*"We, the young Zoroastrians, are disillusioned. We have few hopes left for our religion, which preaches free will, universality and tolerance of others' beliefs, but which allows our non-Zoroastrian spouses and friends a peripheral involvement in our faith, regards children of mixed marriages as*

*marginal Zoroastrians, and considers women marrying outside the faith as no longer Zoroastrian. ...Most of all, we feel defeated by our fellow Zoroastrians who will not stand behind us, refuse to open the gate and use their collective strength to prevent entrance. For a road not taken, leads to nowhere."*<sup>1</sup>

#### *The Montreal Paper:*<sup>2</sup>

#### **Introduction:**

I am aware that the theme of this paper is controversial, and emotive. I can understand why. Conditioned by their forebears' and parents' teachings since childhood, many Zoroastrians have deeply ingrained beliefs on it. It must therefore be explored with respect and scholarly analysis.

They have grown-up believing that:

- (i) one has to be born of Zoroastrian parents, or at least of a Zoroastrian father, to practice our faith;
- (ii) those born of Zoroastrian mothers married to non-Zoroastrians, cannot be initiated into it;
- (iii) such mothers can indeed no longer be regarded as Zoroastrians;
- (iv) the tiny number of Zoroastrians in the world today, indicates that Ahura Mazda ordained the faith to be the creme-de-la-

# ZOROASTRIANS (Zarathushtis) & Parsis

Farohar / Fravashi / Fravahar



Essence of Divinity within each one of us

**History:** Zoroastrians, also known as Zarathushtis, are followers of the Prophet Zarathushtra (ancient Greeks called him Zoroaster) who started the faith in ancient Persia (present day Iran). Scholars believe that Zoroaster existed from before 6000 BC to 600 BC! Greek historians have placed Zoroaster in much earlier times whereas European sources quote later dates, typically around 1400 BC to 1200 BC (1). Other sources, place Zoroaster's life approximately at 1000 BC (2) or before the rise of Achaemenid dynasty in Persia ~ 550 BC (3). See details in Appendix on page 4.



From a chronological perspective, Zoroaster preceded Jesus Christ, Gautama Buddha and Prophet Mohammed by several centuries. Because of a great discrepancy in reported dates, it is not clear whether Moses (1500 BC to 1200 BC) received the Ten Commandments before, during or after Zoroaster's existence. The Hindu scripture, *Bhagvad Gita*, was written around 1000 BC (1).

*"Zoroastrianism is the oldest of the revealed world religions, and it has probably had more influence on mankind, directly and indirectly, than any other single faith ... some of its leading doctrines were adopted by Judaism, Christianity and Islam ..."* — Mary Boyce, Professor & Zoroastrian Scholar, Univ. of London (1,7).

**The Parsis:** Zoroastrians of Persian decent, who migrated from Persia to India under the threat of religious persecution from Islamic invaders, became known as the Parsis. Although, originally, the Zoroastrian inhabitants of Iran were known as Parsis (from the province of Pars in Iran) the term today is commonly used to describe the immigrants who landed in India in the seventh century.

**Arrival in India:** Hindu India was kind to Parsis. Upon landing, the Parsi high priest, Neriosang Dhaval, approached the local Hindu rajah, Jadav Rana, for refuge. The rajah sent them a bowl of milk filled to the brim, signifying there was no more room in his kingdom. The high priest stirred a spoonful of sugar in the milk and said:

*Just as this small amount of sugar has sweetened the milk, without spilling it, so will my people live harmoniously amongst your people and strive to enrich your community!*

The essence of this event still holds true today. Like the *Moghuls*, the Parsis belong to a class of people who migrated to India and stayed to contribute to its diverse history and culture.

**Contributions by Parsis of India:** Although accounting for only 0.01% of India's population, Parsis have played a vital and pioneering role in India's industrial, political, scientific, and military development as well as philanthropy, establishing and funding many hospitals, subsidized housing projects, and charitable foundations, while never asking for a special or minority status from the Government.

## Industry & Commerce:

- **Lovji Wadia** (1702-1774) started the merchant and naval war shipbuilding industry and turned Bombay (Mumbai) into the busiest seaport in Asia in his days (1). The Wadias built over 350 ships, including sixteen for the British Navy, four of which saw action under Admiral Nelson in the Battle of Trafalgar (9,10).
- **Sir Jamsetji Jeejeebhoy** (1783-1859) rose from humble beginnings to pioneering a trade empire with China (1).
- **Jamshedji Tata** (1839-1904), the patriarch of the industrial conglomerate, the house of Tatas, laid the industrial foundation of India. He was the first to start the iron & steel industry in Jamshedpur, Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore and the hydroelectric works in Lonavla. Today, the House of Tata commands over 50 companies including steel, chemicals, locomotives, power generation, commercial vehicles, consumer goods, hotels, tourism, tea plantations and computer consultancy services. So far-reaching was his vision that India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, called him the "One-Man Planning Commission" (1).
- **JRD Tata**, a descendant of Jamshedji Tata and a keen aviator himself, was the first Indian to start a national airline (Tata Airline) that later became Air India, the flagship airline for the country (4).
- **Sir Dinshaw Petit** (1823-1901) laid the foundation of the textile industry in India (1).
- **Fardoonji Marzban** started the first Indian newspaper, *Bombay Samachar*, in 1822 (1).
- **Pallonji Mistry** and his flagship company, Shapoorji Pallonji & Co., Ltd (founded in 1865) is a colossus in international construction, having built power plants, airports, highways, palaces, industrial townships, residential and commercial buildings. (11).



Jamshedji Tata



Pallonji Mistry

*"As a community, we have been greatly involved in building the country. We need to get together and build on what we have achieved, despite demographics being against us..."*—Pallonji Mistry, Construction Magnate (11)



- **Sir Sorabji Pochkhanawala** established the first Indian commercial bank (Central Bank of India) in 1911, which was wholly owned and managed by Indians and is still today one of the largest banks in the country (6).
- **Ardeshir Godrej** (1868-1936) became the hallmark in the manufacture of household products and furniture (1).
- **Sohrabji Shahpurji Bengalee** (1831-1893) as Justice of Peace was the first Indian to advocate the well-being of factory workers, long before the idea caught the imagination of social reformists in England (10).

#### Politics:

- **Dadabhai Naoroji** (1825-1917), the "Grand Old Man of India," was the first to fight for Indianization of the Indian Civil Service. He was the first Indian to be elected to the British House of Commons in 1892 (4).  
*"Whether I am a Hindu, a Mohamedan, a Parsi, a Christian, or of any other creed, I am above all an Indian. Our country is India; our nationality is Indian."* — Dadabhai Naoroji (1893)
- **Madame Bhikaiji Cama** (1861-1936) was India's radical firebrand and a propagandist for Indian independence. She was exiled from India and after her impassioned speech in Stuttgart, unfurled a flag (in tricolor) that became, with some changes, India's national flag, forty years later (4).
- **Sir Pherozshah Mehta**: The pioneering mayor of the Bombay (Mumbai) Municipal Corporation and president of the Indian National Congress warned his countrymen of the British tactics of divide-and-conquer (4).
- **Feroze Gandhi**: A lawyer and former husband of the late Prime Minister Shrimati Indira Gandhi and father of the late Prime Minister Shri. Rajiv Gandhi.
- **Nani Palkhiwala** (1920-2002) was at one time India's ambassador to the USA. India's prime minister, Vajpayee, said that Palkhiwala was India's best Law minister and also the best finance minister India ever had (12).



Maestro Zubin Mehta

#### Science:

- **Dr. Homi Bhabha** (1909-1966) was the prime architect of India's nuclear and space program and the first chairman of the Indian Atomic Energy Commission (1948) (1).

#### Arts:

- **Mehli Mehta** (father of Zubin Mehta) founded the Bombay Symphony Orchestra (9).
- **Zubin Mehta** is renowned as the conductor and director of the New York and Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestras (1,4).

#### Military & Armed Forces:

- Head of Air Force: Air Marshal **Aspi Engineer**. Head of Indian Navy: Admiral **Jal Cursetji**.
- The first and *only* Field Marshal in the Indian Army, **Sam Maneckshaw**, now in his nineties but still going strong. He was named *Bahadur* by his troops because of his bravery in combat. While a major in a World War II battle in Burma in 1945, the British commanding major-general removed his own Military Cross (Britain's highest award for gallantry) and pinned it on Maneckshaw (13).



The Field Marshal at Ninety (2003)

#### Philanthropy:

- Jeejeebays, Cowasji Jehangirs, Wadias and Petits were great benefactors in the past few centuries.
- Mehraban & Faridoon Zarhosty, Jokhis (notably Shapoorji Fakirji), Guivs (notably Arbab Rustom) are renowned present-day benefactors of charitable projects in many countries.
- At a speech in England in 1940's, Mahatma Gandhi once said:

*I am proud of my country, India, for having produced the splendid Zoroastrian stock, in numbers beneath contempt, but in charity and philanthropy perhaps unequalled and certainly unsurpassed — Gandhiji (1).*

**Demographics:** Most of the original immigrant Parsis of India remained in the state of Gujarat and prospered. They eventually spread their presence, mostly southward to Surat, Navsari, surrounding villages, and eventually to Mumbai (Bombay). The population of Parsi Zoroastrians in India, according to a 2001 census, was 69,600 (5). Although the Parsi population continues to decline in India (5,9), it is encouraging to note the community starting to flourish in other countries. Although official worldwide or regional census data aren't always available, the world Zoroastrian population in the year 2000 was estimated to be 276,600, of which Iran may have 157,000 (according to the Iranian government census); USA: 18,000; Canada: 7,000; UK: 7,000; continental Europe: 4,000; Pakistan: 2,500; and Australia: 2,100 (1). There is also some information suggesting that there are Zoroastrians in some of the countries of the former Soviet Union.

**Core Values and Teachings:** Zoroaster is believed to be the world's *first monotheistic* religion based on one Supreme Creator and wise Lord of the Universe "*Ahura Mazda*". Zoroaster proclaimed that the wisdom (of *Ahura Mazda*) is inherent in each one of us because he gifted us with a good mind. It is perhaps difficult to appreciate the originality and courage of Zarathushtra's thoughts, today. Many prophets have come after Him with similar proclamations. However, if we place ourselves in the antiquity in which He lived, His teachings were radically different from anything that man had dreamt up, thus far. Prior religious practices were often based on fear and the need for propitiating and appeasing several gods (1,4).



Zoroaster's teachings emphasize a free-thinking, rational mind, and its proper use in daily life (1,4). He taught that life is a constant struggle between two opposing forces - good and evil - in every individual and in nature in general. Each one of us must make the right, moral, and wise choice to discern what is good and to defeat the evil through Three basic tenets and practices: *Humta, Hukhta, Huvrashta* — Good thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds. When we exercise our mind — *Vohu Manah* - (our God-given ability to think), we draw Ahura Mazda and his divine powers towards us and Good prevails over Evil (1,2,3,4). Costly material sacrifices or rituals will not change the way the individual is judged. Making our own choices, we alone have to bear the responsibility for our souls (7).

According to Zoroaster, Ahura Mazda created not only the physical universe consisting of sky, water, earth, vegetation, animals, mankind and fire; he also created, with all His wisdom, six spiritual powers called *Amesha Spentas*. They are: *Vohu Manah* (good mind), *Asha Vahishta* (best righteousness), *Kshatra Vairya* (divine kingdom), *Spenta Armaiti* (bountiful devotion), *Haurvatat* (health / wholeness) and *Ameretat* (immortality) (3,8). A combination of these physical and spiritual creations of Ahura Mazda is what Life is about — according to Zarathushtra. These concepts have stood the test of time and are precursors to issues (and hopefully, answers) of more modern times, such as human rights, freedom of speech, and environmental protection (Zoroastrianism forbids polluting the air, water, fire, and the earth).

*"The Zoroastrian ideal is strictly ethical. It sends its call to men and women to work together with the eternal Spirit of God in spreading and maintaining Khsatra, the kingdom of Righteousness, against all attacks of evil. This ideal gives us our place as collaborators with God in distributing His blessings over the world."* — Rabindranath Tagore.

**Holy Book (Avesta):** The Avesta consists of hymns, narratives and laws, all composed and written over a long period of time. It has many parts: *Yasna, Gathas, Vispered, Vendidad* and *Yashts* (3). Among these, the *Gathas* represent the core values and the original teachings of Zarathushtra, Himself (3,8).

**Holidays & Calendar:** Two main holidays are the spring festival in March, called Navroz, and the Parsi Zoroastrian New Year at the end of August. For example, on August 20, 2005, the year changed to Y.Z. 1375 (commemorating Yazdegard-III, the last Zoroastrian king of Iran). The calendar has 12 months of 30 days each, plus five special holy days at the end of each year, when prayers and special ceremonies are performed for the deceased loved ones. The last day of the year is called Pateti, a day of atonement; the New Year is celebrated on the next day.

**Ceremonies:** Parsis have many different types of ceremonies. There are ceremonies for initiation (*Navjote*), marriage, and ceremonies for the departed, consecration, thanksgiving (*Jashan*), ceremonies of maintaining the Holy Fire and several inner liturgical ceremonies. A traditional silver tray (*ses*) containing a cone (*soparo*) representing Mt. Hara (the mountain of sweetness), a rose-water sprinkler (*Pigani*) symbolizing fragrance and happiness, and a container (*kumkumdan*) for vermillion powder is always displayed on joyous occasions, such as birthdays, *Navjotes*, and weddings (10).



*Ses with Soparo & Pigani*

**Place of Worship:** Although commonly called *Agiyari* (meaning abode of fire), Zoroastrian temples are more accurately referred to as *Atash Kadeh*. They are of three different hierarchical levels — *Atash Behram*, *Atash Adaran*, and *Atash Dadgah*. The inner sanctum of the temple contains an eternal flame that never goes out. The holy fire in an *Atash Behram* is a very special fire that comes from 16 sources, including a lightning strike (9). It is important to note that Parsis don't worship the fire, *itself*. Fire symbolizes the energy and the origin of the earth's creation (the Sun).



A priest (*mobed*) is always on duty (24 hours a day) to attend to the consecrated flame and place offerings of *Barand* (barand), *Barand* (barand), and *Barand* (barand).



## APPENDIX (The History of Zoroastrians)

- **The Origin — Bronze Age — Kayanian Dynasty:** Zarathushtra retreated from life to a cave on a mountain, where He meditated for 10 years, communicating with nature and His inner self; He finally received enlightenment from Ahura Mazda (the Supreme and Wise Creator). He left the life of seclusion and descended from the mountain at the age of 30 to reveal his religion. It took Zarathushtra 10 years to gain his first disciple, his cousin. Hence, he went to another tribe where he was granted an audience with King Vishtaspa (1400-1200 BC) who became an ardent supporter and follower and from that time, within two years, the religion spread (1,4). Other sources place this key meeting in a much earlier time period with Vishtaspa (of the same name) who was a chieftan of the tribe.
- **The Growth — Achaeminian Period:** It was the official religion of the mighty Persian Empire including the Achaeminian emperors, Cyrus II the Great (559-530 BC), Darius I the Great (522-486 BC) and Xerxes I (486-465 BC) (1,4). Cyrus the Great conquered the mighty kingdom of Babylon (in today's Iraq), freed the Jews from bondage and helped them build their own temples, consistent with his belief of religious freedom and human rights in his empire. Cyrus II is often listed as Koresch in Jewish scriptures and referred to as the "Anointed of the Lord." Under Darius-I the Great, the empire and its official religion, Zoroastrianism, spread across Asia Minor, Turkestan, Uzbekistan, the Tadjik, part of Kirgiz soviet republic, parts of Greece, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, northern Arabia, Mesopotamia, Persia (Iran), Afghanistan, west Pakistan and the Indus Valley (4). The glorious Achaeminian Empire and its dynasty came to an end with the invasion of Alexander the Great in 334 BC. His armies defeated Darius-III and destroyed the temples, sanctuaries, and religious texts and massacred the priests in the city of Persepolis, which was the epicenter of Zoroastrian culture, literature, and original religious texts (1,3,4).
- **Dormant — Parthian Period:** For the following five centuries, Zoroastrianism remained dormant during the times of the Seleucid Empire (312-250 BC) and the Parthian empire (250 BC-224 CE\*). On a brighter note however, Vologeses – I (aka Valaksh) in 51-78 CE, ordered the collection and preservation of all the Zoroastrian scriptures scattered after the ravages of Alexander, perhaps for historical value. The Parthian dominance ended after long drawn out battles with the Romans to the west and Kushan to the east (1,4).
- **Resurgence and Decline — Sassanian Period:** From 224 CE to 651 CE, there was a resurgence of Zoroastrianism once again (and for the last time) as the official religion of a vast empire during the rule of Sassanian emperors who replaced the Parthian legacy (1). Many of the scattered texts that had been preserved orally were written down, translated and compiled. Although the early Sassanian emperors, such as Ardeshir – I (224-249 CE) were zealous about their own religion, they were tolerant of other faiths. In contrast, the last years of the Sassanian dynasty seem to be a period of extremes. The Sassanian answer to the threat of the Roman church was to proclaim Zoroastrianism as the only true and good religion. Ironically, the end to the Sassanian empire and that of Zoroastrianism as the official religion, came not by conflict with the Romans but by the invasion of the Arabs, united under the banner of Islam. The sovereignty of Persia (Iran) passed from the last Sassanian king Yezdegard-III (632-651 CE) into the hands of Islamic caliphs (rulers). So completely was Zoroastrianism routed out from the country of its birth that in current popular thinking, the thought of Iran that was not always Islamic is almost inconceivable (4).
- **Migration to India & Iranian Zoroastrians:** From being the preponderant faith of diverse nations for two millennia with adherents in the millions, within a few centuries, Zarathushtris were reduced, by some accounts, to a miniscule core numbering less than 11,000. Seeking refuge from the oppression that offered them Islam or the sword, some groups of Zarathushtris made their way to the port of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf and set sail in seven ships towards the shores of India. They landed on the island of Diu in Gujarat on the West coast of India and after 19 years set sail again and arrived at a place called Sanjan. This was the year 716 (or 936 according to other scholars) (1,3,4). Some of their co-religionists remained in Iran and have managed to practice the faith in Yazd, Kerman, and other locations, regardless of the adversities through the centuries. The last Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1919-1980) encouraged Zoroastrianism, once again. After the fall of the Shah in 1979 and the reversion of Iran to an Islamic Republic, the late Ayatollah Khomeini is said to have made an announcement that Zoroastrianism was one of four "acceptable" religions.

\* CE refers to the period after the birth of Christ.

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creme of religions into which persons are been given their last reincarnation;  
 (v) acceptance of non-Zoroastrians into it, would therefore be against His ordained will;  
 (vi) Zoroastrianism is Zarathustra's heritage bequeathed only to fellow-Aryans to whom he preached in ancient Iran, and their descendents;  
 (vii) that heritage would be adulterated by accepting non-Zoroastrians, or spouses and children of mixed marriages into the faith;  
 (viii) such influxes would weaken, and eventually destroy, the basis on which the faith has survived for over 3,800 years;  
 (ix) non-Zoroastrians seek entrance, merely to secure economic and social benefits of being regarded as Zoroastrians or avail of Zoroastrian trust funds, not because they subscribe to the faith's teachings.

One can decide for oneself whether the roots of such convictions reflect, or do not reflect, continuing confusion between being a Parsi, an ethnic concept, and being a Zoroastrian, a religious one.

These beliefs, supported by erudite writings of respected Parsi-Zoroastrian priests and leaders, are strongly held by many Parsi-Zoroastrians on the Indian sub-continent. Most Iranian-Zoroastrians and those who migrated abroad, believe that Zarathustra wanted mankind to voluntarily embrace his universal teachings, and accept non-Zoroastrians, mixed marriages and navjotes of their children. That conviction seems to be shared, silently, by increasing numbers of Parsi-Zoroastrians settled abroad (except perhaps in UK) and some adults and youth on the Indian sub-continent. Divergent views based on doctrinal, social or political rationales, prevail in all faiths, not in Zoroastrianism alone.

But ours convince non-Zoroastrians that they have no place in Zoroastrian percepts or practice. Even reputed non-Zoroastrian scholars are so convinced, despite their conclusion that Zarathustra envisioned a universal faith.

Questions to be explored and the approach:

Given the passions aroused by the topic and its relevance to the future of North American Zoroastrians, I will briefly explore it from several inter-related aspects:

✧ Do the Gathas composed by Zarathustra, support parochial or open beliefs?

✧ Did the prophet discriminate between men and women regarding the pursuit of his faith?

✧ What do religious scriptures subsequent to his days, including Haptanhaiti Gathas, say?

✧ What practices did Zarathustra and his immediate disciples follow?

✧ What were the practices after them, over the centuries?

✧ What were the anthropological antecedents of those who espoused Zoroastrianism, before and after his times?

✧ Do current beliefs have roots in his teachings, or in social traditions adopted by the community to prevent its absorption by larger religious groups on the sub-continent?

The crux of the answers must be found in Zarathustra's vision and percepts, and subsequent historical practices. Historical evidence, while ample, is scattered and must be pieced together. It should therefore be treated with some circumspection. Many scriptures composed by Zarathustra are lost. Detangling intricacies of syntax of their ancient language makes the scholars' task of translating, difficult. They have therefore given different interpretations of his concepts, many expressed in allegorical and metaphysical terms. This is the case with individual translations of older scriptures of all religions. Even the standardized Bible, Torah, Upanishads and Koran have differing versions. Zarathustra's Gathas and subsequent scriptures are no exceptions.

For this reason, it is also unwise to interpret any scripture literally, rather than in terms of

the underlying unity of its thoughts and teachings. Moreover, all leading faiths have survived because their scriptures have been, and are still being, interpreted over the changing ages. So should ours.

### Zarathustra's Gathas

The surviving portion of the Gathas, the name given to hymns composed by Zarathustra himself, have some 6000 words set in 238 verses - collated in 17 chapters called Haitis or Has. When incorporated intact, at some later time, into the 72 chaptered liturgical prayer of the Yasna, they were identified as Has. of the Yasna. Thus, we today have the 17 Has. of his Gathas as: Yasna 28-34, 43-46, 47-50 and 51. This odd and disjointed serial order resulted from rearrangements made by the clergy, when compiling the Avesta-Zand in the early Sasanian era. Nevertheless, scholars unanimously agree that these Yasnas stand distinctly by themselves from the remaining 55 chapters of the Yasna liturgy, and were composed by Zarathustra as he propagated his faith. They reflect the kernel of his vision and concepts, and constitute "the foundation" scriptures of Zoroastrianism.

Composed in the Gathic dialect of the ancient Old Avestan language, their poetic style and meter - reminiscent of the language of the Rig Vedas - appear ideal for oral transmission. They were so transmitted for over a thousand years after Zarathustra, until early Achaemenians put them in written cuneiform Aramaic script. Zoroastrians are generally unfamiliar with Zarathustra's Gathas. They may want to become less so, if they only realize that they convey their prophet's teachings in his words. No other major faith enjoys that good fortune: the Bible is based on writings of four apostles after Christ's death; Jewish captives in Babylon compiled the Torah, centuries after Moses; and Mohammed's contemporaries recorded his teachings as the Koran. The 17 Gathas composed by Zarathustra, thus constitute a unique legacy to Zoroastrians. Our later scriptures, however valuable, can only supplement them.

Gathas, let us keep in mind that there were no Zoroastrians or non-Zoroastrians when the prophet preached. His utterances therefore cannot be read in today's sense of "accepting" someone from another monotheistic faith into his. Our purpose is simply to understand whether he envisioned a universal faith and wanted mortals, of their freewill, to choose or not to choose the path Ahura Mazda had revealed to him.<sup>3</sup> Hence, while reviewing translations of modern Gathic scholars for this paper, a critical question was whether they could convey, in summary, the gist of his teachings in a manner understandable easily by laypersons. The reliable poetry-prose translations selected,<sup>4</sup> might convey that as also a sense of the persuasive power of Zarathustra's poetry and vision.

### What Do His Gathas Say?

While preparing himself for his ordained mission of propagating Ahura Mazda's revelations to mankind, Zarathustra asks Him fundamental questions about His creations, in the lyrical Yasna 44. He particularly asks:

"This I do ask Thee, tell me truly, O Ahura;  
About Thy Revelation, *which (is) the best for living beings*,  
Which ... in union with Asha, *advances the World of Life*." (Yasna 44.10)

During those preparations, Zarathustra yearns to see Ahura Mazda, to gain in-depth comprehensive understanding of His divinity:

"When will I see Thee, Asha, Lord of Truth?  
When wise in love, shall I see Vohu Mano?  
When shall I, guided by Sarosh's voice,  
Walk on the path to mighty Ahura?  
Thy sacred word proclaiming, so we may ever  
*Convert with force of tongues, those gone astray*." (Yasna 28.5)

While so dialoguing with Ahura Mazda, he offers to become His instrument for conveying key tenets of His revelations to mankind, including those of divine justice

and fight against wrongful thoughts and actions. By doing so, Zarathustra wants to help humans decide if they should or should not follow the path of Asha (Righteousness) through conscious use of their Vohu Mano (Good Mano). At the same time, he wants to alert them to the consequences of their choice:

“... All that to us, O Mazda, clearly explain  
In words of inspiration from Thy mouth,  
*To help us convert all living men.*”  
(Yasna 31.3)

“Therefore let us reverently give an offering  
to Thee, Lord,  
And to Truth, *all of us creatures under Thy rule.*  
Whom Thou has nourished with good  
thinking.  
Indeed, *let salvation be granted to the  
beneficent man*  
By all those among your kind, Wise One.”  
(Yasna 34.3)

“The satisfaction, which Thou shalt give to  
both factions  
Through Thy pure fire and molten metal, O  
Wise One,  
Is to be *given as a sign among living beings,*  
*In order to destroy the deceitful and to save  
the truthful.*” (Yasna 51.9)

When he feels sufficiently prepared to  
embark on his mission to teach mankind  
about a new way of life for regenerating  
themselves and the world, Zarathustra  
addresses the great universal public thus:

“Now I will speak; give ear and mind as well,  
*All ye, who come from near and far to learn.*  
Remember well these clear Truths, I teach  
...” (Yasna 45.1)

“Now *to those eager,* shall I speak of the  
Two  
Who (are) created by Mazda ...  
So we may attain Perfection in His Realms  
of Light.” (Yasna 30.1)

“And I will teach the First Truth of your life,  
Which from All-Wise Ahura I have learnt;  
I will explain as Mazda taught to me.”  
(Yasna 45.3)

While carefully expounding those Truths, he  
first explains whom these “Two” are and  
what a choice between them implies:

“The first created were the spirits  
 (“mainyus”) Twain,  
As Twin Co-Workers they reveal  
themselves;  
Yet, in each thought and word and deed,  
these two  
Are n’er agreed: one’s Good (“Vahyo”) and  
the other Bad (“Akem”);  
And of these Two, *the Wise do choose aright,*  
*The Unwise choose not thus, and go astray.*”  
(Yasna 30.3)

“And I will explain what the Holiest hath  
revealed unto me,  
*Through His word, which is best for mortals  
to hear,*  
*‘To those who obey them truly in their  
hearts,*  
*To these shall come Perfect Immortal Life;*  
And Vohu Mano shall lead them on to deeds  
Of Love, and  
thus they reach Ahura’s light’.” (Yasna 45. 5)

Well-known Gathic scholars explain that “var”  
in Ahunavaiti Gatha (Yasna 28) stresses the  
principle of Choice through the use of the  
Good Mind gifted by Ahura Mazda to human  
beings. Placing the concepts of their  
salvation and damnation in parallel with the  
motif of Good or Bad, Zarathustra explains  
that by using that gift they are free to choose  
their faith and indeed, whether they want to  
follow Ahura Mazda’s path or not:

“Since for us, Mazda, from the beginning  
Thou didst create Bodies and also Souls.  
*And (mental) powers* through Thine own  
Thought;  
Since Thou didst place Life in flesh  
encaged;  
Since Powers to act and also Words to  
guide  
(Thou didst bestow).  
*Whereby one may hold whatever Faith one  
wills.*”  
(Yasna 31.11)

“If ye will only know and learn these Laws,  
Which Mazda hath *ordained, for ye, mortal men.*

The laws of happiness and laws of pain.  
That Falsehood brings on age-old  
punishment.

That Truth leads to fuller higher life.  
*Upon all shall the Light Divine dawn.*  
(Yasna 30.11)

Having explained these basic principles and  
concepts of his revelations, Zarathustra then  
proclaims:

"Listen with your ears to the best things.  
Reflect with a clear mind – *man by man  
himself*,  
Upon the choices of decision,  
Being aware, to declare yourselves to Him  
Before the great retribution." (ie. final  
judgment) (Yasna 30.2)

*"The wise, who follow the soul-healing Lord,  
The Light Eternal shall be their abode;  
But the false ones shall for ages, long reside  
In light obscure, uttering words of woe;  
To such lives, reft of hope, are they  
condemned  
By their own selves, through their own  
wicked deeds."* (Yasna 31.20)

In course of his teachings, Zarathustra  
informs humans about Ahura Mazda's six  
attributes or aspects (in later scriptures  
deified as "Amesha Spentas"). As  
Zoroastrian scholar Irach Taraporewala  
explains: "With Ahura, are associated the  
three aspects of the Father-side (Vohu  
Mano, Asha and Khshastra.). With Mazda,  
are associated the three aspects of the  
mother-side (Armaiti, Haurvatat and  
Ameretat). ... also note that Asha-Armaiti is  
a notable (male-female) pair throughout the  
Gathas."<sup>5</sup> He thus accentuates equality  
and unity between man and woman by  
attaching male and female attributes to the  
two words of the name he gives to the  
Supreme Creator. That equality is implicit in  
his words like "mortals", "mankind",  
"creatures under Thy rule", and the like.  
Sometimes, he makes that explicit, for  
instance:

*"The man (na) or woman (gena), Mazda  
who doth bring to Life  
... All such, I'll teach to worship Thee and Thine,*

*With them, I'll march across Thy Judgment  
Bridge."* (Yasna 46.10)

Some Parsi-Zoroastrian believe that Ahura  
Mazda reincarnates them into  
Zoroastrianism as their last birth on earth.  
Hence, accepting non-Zarathustis would be  
against His will. Indeed, there is a verse, Ha.  
49,11, that speaks of the return of the souls  
of "evil rulers, evil doers and evil speakers ...  
evil egos, evil thinkers and followers of  
Untruth" to Drujo Demane. Dr Taraporewala  
however comments that persons "whose  
souls have to return, can only imply our  
earthly environment" and "every indication  
seems to point that this Abode of Falsehood  
(Drujo Demane) is where we, human beings  
live ..." Also, since Has. 34.6, 50.9 and  
particularly 51.12 clearly state that it is  
possible to achieve perfection and  
immortality "within one single life on earth",  
he and most scholars agree that  
reincarnation is not Zarathustra's teaching.<sup>6</sup>

#### Summarization:

The "listeners" of all the above-cited  
teachings were, of course, people living in  
places where he preached, or those who  
came to hear him from regions that later  
became Persia. Yet, it is important to note  
that Zarathustra does not specifically  
address them or any particular class, race,  
region or country throughout his Gathas..  
Nor do his words, unless deliberately  
interpreted otherwise, indicate that Ahura  
Mazda wanted His messages to be  
espoused only by those whom he  
addressed, much less by Aryans on the  
ancient Iranian plateau or their descendants.

Rather, he constantly talks of: "all of us  
creatures under Thy rule", "the best for living  
beings", "all ye, who come from near and far  
to learn", "convert all the living", "word which  
is best for mortals to hear", "convert ... those  
gone astray", "the wise", "the false", "let  
salvation be granted to the beneficent man",  
"given as a sign among living beings",  
"decide man by man himself" and the like.  
He thus clearly envisions adoption of his  
teachings "far and wide", by "all mortals"  
who have the choice to "hold whatever faith

one wills", even "wicked unbelievers" who may become followers by leading righteous lives. Further, there is no concept of reincarnation in his teachings. He also emphasizes non-distinction between men and women in the choice and pursuit of his faith by attaching an equal number of male and female attributes to the two words, Ahura and Mazda, his chosen name for the Supreme Creator.

Some Zoroastrians may prefer translations other than those used here. But will they be able to find utterances supporting the non-availability of Zarathustra's faith to those who choose to embrace it? One wonders. As Professor Miles and many Zoroastrian and Western scholars conclude: "It is impossible to doubt that the author of Gatha 31 had in mind, the hope of a universal conversion of mankind."<sup>7</sup>

(to be continued)



#### Notes:

1 Record of the 10<sup>th</sup> N. American Congress, Montreal, 1985

2 Original paper recast and has fewer references, in the interest of brevity and current context

3 Hume R., World's Living Religions, 1959, p 20 and most scholars of the Gathas and Zoroastrianism concur that the Gathas are replete with that vision

4 These are not those of a non-Zoroastrian scholar quoted in the Montreal paper. To ensure credibility with all Zoroastrian readers, the same but more extensive excerpts are drawn here from the Internationally renowned Parsi-Zoroastrian Gatha scholar/philologist Irach Taraporewala's, Divine Songs of Zarathustra, 1993, tested by (and including) those of perhaps the best Gathic philologist today, Stanley Insler's, The Gathas of Zarathustra, 1975. Translations consulted included: Irani D., Gems from the Divine Songs of Zarathustra, 1922, Bode F. & Nanavati P., Songs of Zarathustra, 1952 and Duchesne-Guillemin J., The Hymns of Zarathustra, 1956

5 *ibid* Taraporewala, I, p.12. Dasturji Dhalla M., History of Zoroastrianism, 1985, P. 40, echoes the same point

6 *ibid* footnote 6, p.p 729, 730

7 Mills L., An Exposition of the Lore of the Avesta, 1960, p. 164

## Religion & Science

by shahrokh vafadari

It is the general belief that religion and science are opposite poles of the magnet. However, we know of some prominent scientists who are, in a wider sense of the word religious or at least believe in an 'intelligent design'. Religion established itself in primitive human minds as a result of fear – fear of hunger, sickness, death and many unfathomed natural phenomena such as: thunder, lightening, storms, earthquakes, droughts etc. It became natural to relate all the events that the early humans could not understand, stop or avoid to one superior force. This force, at times of anger could roar and send devastating cyclones and in times of kindness provide abundant fruit for sustenance. So if appropriate we could say that early man, as a necessity became a monotheist.

With progress and sophistication, the early man developed a pantheon of superior forces, each assigned a certain responsibility. Polytheism replaced early monotheism. Gods were numerous according to their function and very often had more than one role, such as destruction and construction. The gods were male, female, related and at times at war with each other. The pantheon had a chief that was the 'god-head' who kept order and continuity. Some of the gods were assumed to have human or animal forms, in need of food, drink, and propitiation to grant favours. Ancient religions show the above general scenarios. Further development brought back the early monotheism. The godhead established a place far above the other deities and in fact the deities were assigned smaller parts and demoted to the position of archangels and angels, receiving orders from the godhead, who had the authority to send earthquakes, pests and pestilence or provide a comfortable atmosphere, peace and tranquillity. The angels were not always



*Shahrokh Vafadari was born in Kerman, Iran in 1932 into a Zoroastrian priestly family. He received his early education in Kerman and Alborz College, Tehran. Shahrokh is a graduate of the University of London, a chartered engineer with postgraduate studies in business management. He has worked as a petroleum consultant. In 1975 in recognition of his contribution to education he was made a life Freeman of the City of London. Shahrokh is now living in London with his family. He is devoting his time to strengthen the chair established in the University of Kerman in honour of his ancestor Dastoor Jamasb Velayeti.*

adorable cherubs. In some religions these were evil angels, the unseen genies.

The godhead had a split function, he could inflict harm or provide favours, and again propitiation was necessary by sacrifice, prayer or charitable work. Charitable work and good behaviour gradually replaced the initial attitude of the God-fearing people. Blood sacrifice, human and animal gave way to 'offerings'. A moral God emerged, one who judges acts of 'good' and 'evil'. The concept of soul, after life, resurrection, reward and punishment and heaven and hell establishes itself.

The destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple in Jerusalem in 70AD by the Romans was a blessing in disguise. Without a temple, blood sacrifices almost disappeared for a while. The Old Testament gave way to the teachings of religious teachers, the rabbis. Later on, after about 600 years, Islam resurrected the tradition of blood sacrifice again. Primitive man rightly believed that blood was 'life'. There were two things specifically for the gods or the Godhead, the blood and the smell of the roasting flesh. Blood was to be drained from the meat, and then eating meat drained of blood (kosher& halal) formed one of the essential tenets in Judaism and later on Islam. Opportunity was created for two groups, rulers and the religious leaders. At times the church and the state, hand in hand controlled the masses. Religion as a 'comforting force' became a 'controlling force'. Holy wars were declared, human blood was shed in the name of the great Godhead.

Another blessing in disguise, the Moslem Ottoman Empire invaded Constantinople in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, leading to the collapse of the Byzantium (Eastern Roman) Empire. The refugees from the area took asylum in European countries like Italy. Here the philosophical writings of classical philosophers like Plato and Aristotle were dissected and perused again and again. The 'Renaissance' was born. Europe was shaking itself from the chains of enforced beliefs and eventually the age of enlightenment arrived.

Up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in Europe no body dared to oppose the hierarchy, the establishment's absurd behaviour. In parts of the world the taboo is still in force. Old habits are hard to give up. Progressive thinkers from the East and West questioned the contents of the holy books at the risk of losing their life. The force of science helped to dismantle some of the unknown world. Copernicus and Galileo challenged the sayings of the Bible that 'the earth was the centre of the world'. Philologists started to doubt, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, whether all the approximately 6000 different languages of the world had been invented by the 3 sons of Noah (Hem, Shem and Japheth).

Darwin, mindful of his religious wife Emma, struck the lethal blow. The story of Adam and Eve was to be assumed only as a story copied from the ancient world. Cane, the agriculturalist son had been angered with his nomadic brother Abel and kills him. Seth kills his brother Osiris in the Egyptian fables. Noah's flood turned out to be a copy of the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh that in turn had been borrowed from the Sumerian myths. The theory of 'evolution' challenged seriously the traditional story of 'creation'. Human DNA is closer, in some aspects, to some primates rather than to some human races. However old habits die hard and in a number of States of the United States, the theory of evolution is banned! Science little by little is eroding the religious fables. However the spirituality and moral values of the holy books are not easily replaced, only possibly by an elevated human conscience.

Landing on the moon and future possibilities of interplanetary travel has shown the importance of understanding the laws of geophysics. To some the vastness of the Universe, oceans of galaxies, numerous stars in each galaxy, billions and billions of stars, all point to an intelligent design. No doubt, with the expansion of the borders of science, some concepts of the holy books have to be revised. Were the religious stories to be accepted from a scientific point of view, some of the burning and looting done in the name of the Godhead are well out of date. Hand picked flowers from the

natural garden of history could help the human race.

'Let us turn the swords to ploughshares'. (Bible)

'Let us reduce our desire to increase happiness'. (Buddha)

'May we be of those who have contributed to the betterment of the world'. (Zoroaster)

It is not surprising that the applied scientists working in laboratories, performing experiments, oppose the ideas produced for controlling the primitive man. Science is at home in the laboratories and the religious leaders still issue edicts from the pulpit. The Indian government as well as the Chinese, for decades have become aware of their over population. A catholic priest advises the Catholics in India to produce more offspring so that the number of its congregation is increased. How far do we go to protect our own interest and not to think of the well being of the human race? In one of the Holy books it has been said, go and multiply, eat all the birds and animals that are not flesh eating. We know that uncontrolled birth would bring starvation to millions. Uncontrolled slaughter of birds and beasts would shrink the vastness of creation.

It could be concluded that religious beliefs have to become more rationalized and interpreted more metaphysically. Religion should become a comforting individual matter rather than a controlling force in the hands of fanatical priests. Science, step by step helps the human race to progress. It shows how things change and how change is eternal, but it does not tell us why these continuous changes take place so persistently and orderly. One aspect of science is to be revered; it is its fairness to progress with the ever-increasing daily knowledge. Newtonian physics gave way to atomic physics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The father of theory of relativity did not agree with some aspects of quantum mechanics. The author of the 'History of Time' reviewed some of his own mathematical proposals. Science accepts progress; if religion could do the same there would be complete coexistence.



## *International Woman of the Year*

Zerbanoo Gifford, born in India, came to England at the age of three. She lives in Harrow with her husband Richard, an international human rights lawyer.

On 5 August, 2006, Zerbanoo was named the *International Woman of the Year*. She has championed for the rights of women, children and minorities across the world. A human rights campaigner, Zerbanoo was flown to Mumbai to receive the Award from the international Asian television channel, Zee TV. She has a long history of working with Mumbai's street children and has helped fund a home for them in Mumbai. Two television programmes have been made by her for Channel 5, on the plight of the street children. Zerbanoo also set up a national appeal in UK, that helped fund the rebuilding of one home that was damaged by the last monsoon.

Zerbanoo has brought awareness to the cause of Asian women in Britain through her writings, campaigning and philanthropy, she has empowered women worldwide to play their role in public life, for which she was nominated as the European woman of the year (1990).

Herself a former Liberal Democrat Councillor for Harrow Council, she played an active role in the Parliamentary Centenary Celebrations in 1992. She campaigned against child slavery and set up Asha Foundation for charity at the time of the Millenium celebrations. She also holds the Nehru Centenary Award for her international work, championing the rights of women and children and those of the minorities. She has been an advisor to a former British Home Secretary and was a member of the Race Relations forum, chaired the commission for "Looking into the ethnic minority involvement of British Life".

(source - ZTFEs newsletter)



میباشد. بیشتر بهاء دهند به اتحاد مختلف اقل را تشویق نمایند. شایسته است که بهدینل به موبدزادگان بیشتر بهاء بدهند و آنها را که موظف هستند که خط و زبان اوستا و چگونگی اجرای مراسم و آیین ها را بدرستی یاد بگیرند را تشویق نمایند که پیش از سن 20 سالگی به مقام تئوزوتی برسند و راموردینی و منوی جامعه زرتشتیای شرکت فعال داشته باشند تا انجمن موبدان در اختیار الهادی غیر کارشناس و خدای تکرره غیر مسئول و منافع طلب قرار نگرفته و به جامعه دینی بهدینل لطفه ای جبرل تابذیر وارد نشود. افراد انجمن موبدان تهران که نهاد مذهبی تلقی میشود بایستی همیشه از موبدان اوستا دل و آشنا به باورهای انزور زشت و کساتیکه تشکیل شود که از ره موبدی کسب درآمد نمایند تا خدای تکرره به شکل انجمن صنفی در نیاید.

ما زرتشتیان در مرحله بسیار حساس تاریخی بسر میبریم به تعداد بسیار کم و به معنی بسیار زیاد هستیم و فرهنگ ما در بین جماعتی به وسعت پنج برابر ایران امروز گسترده و جای کار بسیار زیادی دارد. باید بخود اتم دیگر خمودگی بی است. موبدزادگان بایستی پیش از پیش به مسئولیتی که تاریخ و عرف بردوش ایشلی گذاشته است و بدقتش به خوبی و حتی بطور مایور تکررتی ازل پاسداری کرده اند که همه ای ازل بعرض رسید. بی برتد و پایند باشند. بالاخره هر مانی به زبلی و فرهنگش شناخته میشود و رتده و بابر جاست. و چنانچه اینچنین که هست ادامه یابد. حقیقتا بیم آن میرود که دین و فرهنگ که تیاکل موبد و بهدینل باطل و دل و گزند و فلان کاری بسیار بدستارش بودند. براحتی فراموش شود و یا در فرهنگ اکثریت حل شده. به تاریخ سپرده گردد. دیگر تامل جائز نیست.

خدای بی نیاز را نماز میبریم که مارا از تکی سرشار و ازیدی دور سازد. در پناه انور و زدا - ایدی یاد

موبد دکتر اردشیر خورشیدی - رئیس انجمن موبدان تهران

اردیبهشت 1385 - 3744 دینی. خورشیدی



Mobed Dr Ardeshtir Khorshidian was born in Yazd where he did his schooling. He graduated as an ophthalmologist in 1975 from the Isfahan University & Medical College. After completing his two years mandatory military service he qualified as an eye surgeon and specialist. He has been practicing in Tehran and is well known for his expert cataract operations using the "Topical Cold Phaco" eye drops technology and the carving of the needed lens range on the retina (p.r.k.Lasek) which allows the patient to, literally, walk home an hour after the operation.

He is an ardent teacher and has been teaching the "Philosophy of the Religion of Zarathushtra" at weekly classes conducted by the Anjuman e Moobedan, of which he is currently the President. He gives fiery speeches at almost every community gathering or Inter Religious Conferences.

His first publication "A New Light Over The Persepolis", first in Farsi and later translated to English, covers extensive research on the subject. The second edition is sold out.

Besides numerous articles and interviews, in Farsi, that are published in the mass media, in Iran, his second publication "The Universality of the messages of Zarathushtra" is a very detailed layout of the teachings of our Prophet.

Ancient Persian drawing found in Afghan Buddhist cave TOKYO, July 25 (AFP). Japanese researchers said Tuesday they found a seventh-century painting of a mythological Persian bird in Afghanistan's Bamiyan ruins, showing the region's Buddhism was influenced by pre-Islamic Iran. The team unearthed an image of what appears to be a Simorgh, the giant and powerful bird that figures prominently in Zoroastrian-era Iranian legends. "This is the first time a vivid image of this creature was confirmed" in Bamiyan, an expert said. Inside the same cave, researchers also found a design of a boar and a lion facing each other.

10- نقش موبدان در درک بهتر تعلیم اشوزرتشت و تشریح تئانی تعصبات بی جا و سازش با سایر فرهنگهای درست و منطقی قومهای مختلف در ایرلین بزرگ موجب شده که با پیروان بسیاری از ادیان در ایرلین زندگی مسالمت آمیز داشته باشند و در دین زرتشت با وصف اینهمه گستردگی که از شرق (چین) تا غرب (مصر و ترکیه) و از جنوب (گریسل) تا شمال (مرز روسیه) داشته است، فرقه های کوتاهی مذهبی شکل نگیرد.

11- موبدان دین زرتشت را با خردورزی و تبلیغ بدوی جنگ و خونریزی در سرتاسر ایران آنروز که پنج برابر ایرلین امروزی بود گسترش دادند. و مردم را از یکاربردن زور و شمشیر برای گسترش دین برخوردار داشتند.

12- موبدان پس از اسلام نیز در نگهداری سنن و آداب و باورهای ایرانیان و پیرایه وادار تازی ها از ایرلین و تملطیف کردن رفتار و آئینهای بدوی آنها و تعصبات های مختلف مذهبی ایرانیان و عرب تشبیه آنها نقش بسیار مهمی به عهده داشته اند.

13- موبدان همواره نقش پیشوای معنوی و ارشادی جامعه را بعهده داشته اند. بطوریکه "موبدان هوش" با هم از زوری با سایر ارکانها، بسیاری از مشکلات مردم را بصورتی که خدامنشانه حل و فصل مینمودند.

14- موبدان همواره تکیه کله و ششونه روحانی و روانی جامعه بوده و نقش "ماتره پزشکان" را به عهده داشته اند بطوریکه حتی بسیاری از موبدان غیر زرتشتی نیز برای شفایابی از بسیاری از گرفتاریهای رملی تنائی به نزد موبدان مراجعه میکردند تا با سرون کلمات "ماتره اوستا" توأمید در دلهایشان روشن و بیایاری گرفتن از اهورامزدا ی پاک بیماریهای آنها شفا یابد.

15- همسر و فرزندان موبدان نیز به این رسالت موبدان واقف بوده و باکم کردن خواسته های گیتیوی خویش به این مهم کمک مینمودند. همیشه منزل موبدان خانه امید مردم و مکتب خانه ای برای فراگیری علم و هنر بوده است و به ویژه زنان موبدان در این امر اساسی نقش بسیار مهمی را به عهده داشته اند.

و در یک کلام همیشه موبدان "دین باور" و "دین یاور" بودند و کوشش کرده اند که از مقام خود سوء استفاده نکرده و دین ساز و "دین باز" نبوده و با عمل کرد خود سرمشق دیگر بهدینان باشند و حتی آنها که مسلمان شدند هم بعد از اسلام با تقویت در دربار خلایق اموی و عباسی توانستند که کارهای دیوانی را بعهده گیرند و نقش مهمی را در حفظ تمامیت ملی و ایجاد تعصبات مذهبی و نگهداری سنن باستانی ایران باستان بازی نمایند.

بهدینان نیز همیشه با جل و دل موبدان را ارج مینهادند و آنها را در کارهای فرهنگی و دینی یاری میرسانیدند. بطوریکه زرتشتیل تنها در شهرهای کرمان و یزد که موبدان را در مرکز خود قرار دادند، دوام و بقا یافتند. بی شک این همبستگی و همکاری صادقانه و گذشتها و جانفشانی بیدریخ زرتشتیل (ایران و هند) حافظ این دین لعورائی بوده و خواهد بود.

... و تا همین کمتر از صد سال پیش همه موبدان کل کار موبدی را مهمترین وظیفه خویش میدانستند. ممکن بود که موبدان ای به کار دیگری از قبیل کشاورزی و تیزو و بیایورد ولی هرگز وظیفه اصلی خود را فراموش نمیکردند. از همل دوری کودکی اوستا را از والدین خود می آموخت و با سنها از نزدیک آشنا میشد. بسیاریه آئینها پایبند بود و متعصب بارمی آمد. بعد که کمی بزرگ تر میشد دین دبیره و سنانخوانی را فرا میگرفت و در حدود 10 سالگی سدره پوش میشد و به همراه پدرش کارهای موبدی را عملاترین میکرد. اغلب بخشی از اوستا را با خط خوش مینوشتند. و رساله هائی را تنظیم میکردند. همه موبدان کل در 15 تا 20 سالگی پس از گذراندن چند دوره مراسم "برشوم" «توزوت» میشد و رسماً به مقام موبدی میرسید و بار بار خویش سرمشق دیگر بهدینان بود و کوشش مینمود که نقش ریش سفید را در جامعه بازی کند. بهدینان نیز احترام زیادی برای موبدان کل داشتند و بسیاری از مسائل و مشکلات خود را از طریق ایشان حل و فصل مینمودند. ولی امروزه مسائل مادی نقش بسیار مهمی را بازی میکنند. تفاوت درآمد زندگی موبدان و بهدینان شدت زیاد شده است. زندگی دیگر محدود به کارهای کشاورزی و صنایع دستی نیست. همه مایل هستند که بدنبال شغلای تل و آب نایروند. دیگر بهدینان ارزش و احترامی مانند سابق برای موبدان کل نیستند و به سنها مانند گذشته پایبند نمیباشند. و... و خلاصه یک سیکل معیوب درست شده است و به هر حال موبدان کل دیگر این بار فرهنگی و تاریخی را که به دوش داشته اند را حداقل کم رنگ می بینند و به خطایقی که دارند کمتر توجه مینمایند و تمایلی به موبدشناس و انجام کارهای موبدی ندارند ... امیدوارم که در شرایط امروزی نیز که جامعه زرتشتی در مرحله بسیار حساس تاریخی خود قرار دارد، همگی با درک بیشتر مسئولیت های خود، دست در دست انجمن موبدان در تعالی بخشیدن و تکامل شخصیت معنوی، فردی و اجتماعی این دین پاک لعورائی کوشا باشند. شایسته است که جامعه زرتشتی به کسانی که بلال و جل و عشق امورائی به دنبال فراگیری دانش دین و امور معنوی و بخشهای مختلف اوستا و کتابها و خط دین دبیره

حوادث حفظ نموده اند. اینجانب در حدود 11 سال تحقیق و بررسی تاریخی بهمدارک مسند به این باور رسیدیم که اگر امروزه بهدینیل و ایرانیل برخودمی باند که جزو معدومعلی هستند که باوصف داشتن تاریخی پرماجرا زیل و هویت فرهنگی خودرا حفظ کرده اند. مرطوب عمل کرد موبدانی هستند که به باورخودسخت پایند بونه و کتاب و باورهای اشوزرتشت راباتحصی باورتکردنی توشنه. ازبرکره و باوسولسی عجیب پاسداری نموده و ازگزندحوادث دورنگه داشته اندتاریخ گواهی است که بسیاری از آنها را پوست کندند و دست و پا بردند و تنهین و تحقیر نمودند. چراکه میبایستند که اگر یک موبد از دین خارج شود. مسلمانان زیاد از پیروان آنها نیز ترک دین خواهند کرد به هرحال این از خود گذشتگی ها به علت وظیفه تاریخی مهمی بوده است که بردوش خود احساس مینموده و شانه خالی کردن از بار این مسئولیت بزرگ را گناهی بزرگ میبایستند. لازم است به شمه ای از این از خود گذشتگی ها در طول تاریخ پرتشیب و پرازرتشیل اشاره بنمایم:

- 1- موبدل تمام عمر خود را به فراگیری دین و دانش مینوی میگذرانیدند. بخش های مختلف اوستا را از بر داشتند و با خط تیکومینوشند و با صوتی خوش میسرودند و به مقلیم ل عمل میکردند. بطوریکه به جرات مینوال گفت که اگر باورها و ازجل گذشتگی های ایشل نبود. امروزه هیچ اثری از کاتاهای و اوستا که مهمترین بخش زیل و فرهنگ ایرانیان میبایست در دست نبود و هیچکس حتی به یاد زیل و تاریخ و فرهنگ ایران نیز نمیتوانست باشد.
- 2- موبدل با استخراج خط دین دبیره که هنوز هم کامل ترین خط چهل است و توشن کتابهای مقدس دینی و فرهنگی بالین خط گویا و بیوا. توانستند کاتاهای و اوستا را به همان تلفظ دقیق باستانی و آهنگین خود نگهداری و پاسداری کنند.
- 3- موبدل در طول تاریخ با درک دشواری اهورائی کاتاهای سن و آتاب بسیار شایسته ای را بنیاد نموده و پاسداری کرده اند تا بهدینیل بنوفند. عملا پیامهای اشوزرتشت را بزبانی ساده و مرهمی درک و وارد زندگی خود کنند. رسوم و آیین های زیبا و ارزشمند پنجه و جشنهای توروژی و گهنبار و خیرات، سنت وقف، تشویق مردم به بنیاد نهانی موسسات علم المنفعه و... و انجام درست و اصولی سنبا و جلوگیری و خنکی کردن فرهنگی تادرست یگانه. نموده بارز است.
- 4- تعیین و استفاده از تماندهای بسیار منطقی و پاسداری از این سمبلها. حافظ باورهای دین زرتشت بونه است. بنقدی تمام بهمس. آتش تمام راستی. سکه و فلزات تمام تسلط بر نفس. خاک و لبرک که از زمین بدست می آید تمام مهر و فروتنی. و آب تمام دانش اندوزی و راستی. و گیاهان تمام بی مرگی و جاودانگی استفاده از سرو به شانه سربیزی و پر بار و طول عمر در شادبیا و گله مورت به شانه جاودانگی در عزاداری ها و بسیاری از تماندهای دیگر که جلارد به همه آنها توجه مخصوص داشت.
- 5- موبدل در طول تاریخ هرگز از خود سن (saint) و پاپ و مقدس تساخند و دست و پا بوس نداشتند و مرجع تقلید نشدند. و هر چند در طول تاریخ مانند همه انسا بها انبعلاتی هم مرتکب شده اند ولی این کمال بی اتصالی است که هر کارشناسی که از برخی از شاهل سلسانی و پرتزدانشان و معدودی از موبدل درباری به ا تجام رسیده راه حساب همه موبدل گذاشت.
- 6- جای شگفتی بیشترینکه باوصفیکه موبدل نیز خوی انسانی داشته و از پهل و جله و مقام بدشلی نمی آمد ولی به علت وظیفه ای که در خود احساس میکردند و رسلانی که داشتند شاید تنها روحانیان متاهب باشند که در طول تاریخ هرگز قسمی از درآمد مردم را بعنوان خمس و زکات و غیره... برای خود از بهدینیل طلب نکردند. و همیشه به "شوداد" راضی بونه و سعی کرده اند با حداقل درآمد زندگی توام با اکونومی و پاکی و راستی داشته و زیستن برای دستیابی به زندگی مینوی را بر خیرات گینوی فرینده ترجیح دهند.
- 7- موبدل سعی میکردند که آتشکده ها را ساده بنا کنند و پاک نگاه داشته محیطی روحانی ایجاد نمایند. بطوریکه هرگز حتی در دوره سلسانی که فردی از موبدل به پادشاهی رسیده بود و در ول موبد شعلی نامیده میشد نیز آتشکده ها. بازرق و برق و آئینه کاری و مجمر آتش و درب و پنجره های طلا ساخته نشده است.
- 8- لباس موبدل همیشه از پارچه ساده سفید که تمام و هموس (تیک منشی) است تهیه میشده تا کوچکترین پلیدی و ناپاکی را تشل بعد و سادگی و انشویی را به نمایش بگذارند و گشورش دهند.
- 9- روشن نگه داشتن آتش آتشکده ها. که پرچم دینی و ملی زرتشتیان بوده و بزرگ یا "مس" کردن سالیانه آن با مخلوط کردن با 16 آتش طبقات مختلف مردم. یکی از مهمترین وظایف موبدل بوده است. حقیقتا که چه تیکو وظایف خود را به انجام رسانیده اند. تاریخ بهترین گواه است.

به خشنودی اهورامزدا

چگونگی زیاد کردن موبدان در ایران (increase of priests in iran)

بسیار متخیرم که از سوی سردیرگرامی مجله وزین هم‌آزور سرکار خاتم تاکسی کاوشی . از اینجانب خواسته شده است که در مورد منی بالا مقاله ای دینی و علمی برشته تحریر درآورم . این جمله را می‌توان از چند جنبه مورد توجه قرار داد . همانطور که هر جمله به نسبت جمعیت نیاز به تعدای پزشک . مهندس و غیره دارد همین‌طور به تعدای روحانی یا موبد نیز نیاز دارد. موبدان در طول تاریخ دوطبقه مهم را به عهده داشته اند که همگی معنوی یا فرهنگی بوده و هیچ کدام اجرایی یا مدنی نبوده است. یکی درک درست پیام کاتاکا و بردن این باورهای اهورائی در فرهنگ مردم که توسط موبدان اوستا دانان و انجمن موبدان وقت به انجام می‌رسیده و دوم انجام آئین های سنتی ضروری دانسته شده توسط انجمن موبدان ارتونک تاسی سال پس از مرگ که توسط موبدان اوستا خول به اجرا گذاشته می‌شده است و امروزه نیز به این ترتیب عمل می‌شود که انجمن موبدان تهران از روز نخست تشکیل از موبدان اوستا دان و غیر شاغل تشکیل شده و پشت از اینکه خلعت صنفی به خود بگیرد و منافع موبدان را بر مصالح بهدینل ترجیح دهد بشدت گریزان بوده و می‌باشد. و تنها و تنها در خدمت مصالح معنوی جامعه زرتشتی در چهارچوب اساسنامه خویش است. و همه ساله تعدادی موبد و موبدیار تربیت می‌نماید . در مصالح بهدینل و جامع عمومی دولتی و غیردولتی که دعوت می‌شوند شرکت کرده و با ایراد سخنرانی های دینی بایسته شایستگی باورهای اهورائی دین مزدیسنی را برای شنوندگان بازگو می‌کنند و با تشکیل کلاسهای دینی و فرهنگی سعی در فرهنگی کردن این باورها مابین مردم به ویژه جوانان دارد.

سرمزمین ایرل یا به قول اوستا « آریل ویج » سرزمینی بود که نژاد آریادان سکنی داشتند و 3744 سال پیش ( 1738 پیش از میلاد ) اشوزرتشت درس سی سالگی از بین این قوم آزاره به پیلجیری برگزیده شد و دین اهورائی خود را در کتاب کاتاکا به جهاتیل ارائه داد و چون باور به خردمندی انسل و آزادی انتخاب راه داشت و از جنگ و خونریزی گریزل و مخالف جهاد (به مفهوم کشتار در راه گسترش دین ) بود . بعد از سالها تلاش پی گیر بالاخره گشتاسب شاه کیانی وزیر پادشاهی جاماسب دیگر موبدان دین او را پذیرفتند . اشوزرتشت بلافاصله برای گسترش دین خود مجبور بود که قوانین مذهبی را بنیاد گذارد تا بتواند باورهای دینی او عملاً وارد دینزدگی روزمره مردم شده و آئین های مختلف مهری و زروانیسم و هندوئینی و غیره که اشوزرتشت در کاتاکا آنها را بنام « دیو یسنی » تلمیذ است و در زمان او سرتاسر سرزمین ایرل را فراگرفته بود . با توراتش و خرد از صحنه زندگی مردم خارج سازد . و آئین (سنن ) اهورائی تأیید شده بوسیله پیلجیر جای سنن بدوی آنها را بگیرد . او در راه پیشبرد دینش تلاش داشت تا باید خود شریعت می‌گذاشت و قوانین مذهبی (شریعت ) را در کتاب خود وارد می‌کرد و جاودل می‌نمود و یا انجمنی تلمیذ می‌کرد و خود تابع جمع می‌گردید تا همه آئین ها بر پایه باورهای موجود در کتاب کاتاکا بطور انجمنی باتوجه به زمل و مکل پایه ریزی شود . ولی وارد در کتاب دین نگردد . تا در آینده نیز که مسلمانا وضعیت سیاسی و اجتماعی و اقتصادی مردم تغییر خواهد کرد . همیشه فرستکرد باشد و با زمانه به جلو رود . اشوزرتشت این پیام آور راستی . بلارایی که داشت . راه دوم را انتخاب کرد ( که آخرین بر او باد ) و اولین بنیاد نموکراسی در جهان بطور رسمی و قانونی را پایه گذاری نمود و انجمن مکل یا مقام با ریاست خود پیلجیر در مورد کنارش قوانین مذهبی لازم . برای گسترش . تداوم و ساختن جامعه ای منطقی بر اساس باورهای اهورائی کاتاکا تاسیس گردید . ( چه تدبیر فرخنده ای ) و بعد از او ایسد و ایسنر سربزرگ او این انجمن را اداره نمود تا به امروز که این وظیفه شرعی به عهده انجمن موبدان مرکزی وقت شد که پاسدار این دین و فرهنگ باشد و و جرح ( فتواهای ) لازم را بایسته به شرایط زمان و مکان انطور که با باورهای کاتاکا معایرت نداشته باشد را به بهدینان پیشکش نمایند و راهنمایی و ارشاد نمایند .

گسترش دین اهورائی زرتشت با تبلیقات بتدریج سرتاسر ایرل بدستش را که چند برابر ایرل کنونی بود . فراگرفت . و 2500 سال پیش یا حدود 1300 سال پس از برگزیده شدن اشوزرتشت به پیلجیری . کورش زرتشتی با اتحاد قوم ماد و پارس دولت هخامنشی را بنیاد نهاد و کشور ایرل را بصورتی فدراتیو گسترش داد و ...

پی تردید این سرزمین اهورائی به علت موقعیت جغرافیائی و دانش منابع مادی و معنوی بسیار در همیشه تاریخ مورد رشک و حسد جهاتیان بوده و یکی از پرمخجراترین تاریخ جهان را پشت سر گذاشته است هر زمل که مختصر قدرت این کشور رو به کاهش نهاده است . دشمنهای لغریص صفت خارجی فرصت طلب . از هر طرف با تمام تیرو و با شقاوت بسیار به جل این ملت زحمت کش و بیرواندیشه و گفتار و کردار نیک افشانه و کشور مارا به شدید ترین و بی رحمانه ترین طریق ممکن به خاک و خهی کشیده و هسنی و تیسنی ما را به غارت برده اند . و همیشه این موبدان بوده اند که با کمک سایر بهدینل فرهنگی به یاری آمده اند و دین و فرهنگ ایرانیان را از گزند

## *The Rangoon Navjote Case (1914-25): Adventures in Parsi Legal History*

The Ninth Memorial Dasturji Dr Kutar Lecture, School of Oriental and African Studies, London. Lecture given on 24 April 2006 by Mitra Sharafi who has abridged the same for *Hamazor*.

It is a great honour to have been invited to give the ninth memorial Dasturji Dr Kutar lecture. The subject of my talk today is the topic of my PhD dissertation: the Rangoon *navjote* case, also known as *Saklat v Bella* or Bella's case. The case was the most extensive judicial investigation of Parsi identity of the colonial period. At its heart was an allegedly Indian girl named Bella who was adopted by Parsis in Rangoon. The question was whether, as an ethnic outsider, Bella could be initiated into the Zoroastrian Parsi community. The final answer was that she could not. The litigation began in Rangoon shortly after Navroze 1914, and ended eleven years later on Downing Street in 1925 before the highest court of appeal in the British Empire, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. On the way, there was a judicial commission created in Bombay that produced some 1,300 pages of evidence. There were spin-off defamation trials resulting from the Bombay newspapers' coverage of the case. Meetings held at Allbless Bagh produced petitions bearing thousands of Parsi signatures. Many of the lawyers involved were Parsi themselves, and were as invested in the controversy outside of the courtroom as inside.

The facts of the case were as follows. Some time in 1899, a young South Asian couple named the Jones arrived in Rangoon. They were very young—Mrs Jones was just 17. They seemed to have fled from Bombay, and were destitute. Mr Jones, who was a Goan Christian, looked for work on the tramway and found it. Mrs Rebekah Jones sought the charitable aid of prominent Parsis in Rangoon. She found a generous benefactor in the person of Bomanji Cowasji

Captain, a Parsi barrister and the youngest of three brothers in the well known Rangoon Parsi family called the Cowasjis or Captains, as they are called in the legal sources. Merwanji was the eldest - the "Grand Old Man of Burma." He was an unofficial member of the Provincial Council, a delegate to the Parsi Matrimonial Court, a magistrate, Municipal Commissioner, and the only Parsi from Burma to be selected to do homage to the King of England at the Durbar of 1911. Shapurji was the middle brother, and a merchant in Rangoon. The youngest brother, Bomanji, was a barrister. In 1899, Bomanji was 47 and married. He was so wealthy that he singlehandedly funded the reconstruction of the Rangoon Zoroastrian fire temple in the late nineteenth century. Because he could do so, he was made the sole trustee of both the temple and the Rangoon Zoroastrian cemetery.

Why did Bomanji agree to help Rebekah Jones? His answer fourteen years later was: because she was Parsi—or at least, because she claimed to be Parsi, and because Bomanji believed her. Mrs Jones told Bomanji that her parents were Parsi and that they had died when she was very young. She told him that she could not remember their names, and that she had been raised by Presbyterian missionaries in Surat. According to Bomanji, she had insisted that she was ethnically Parsi and religiously Zoroastrian. Like many others, Bomanji doubted her story. He suspected that Mrs Jones was a Parsi girl who had fallen in love with the Goan Mr Jones and had run away from Bombay in order to marry him. Others still believed she was not Parsi at all, but a former servant from a Parsi household who had learned to imitate

the Parsi way of speaking Gujarati and dressing. This was the first big question in Bella's case: was Mrs Jones "passing" as Parsi?

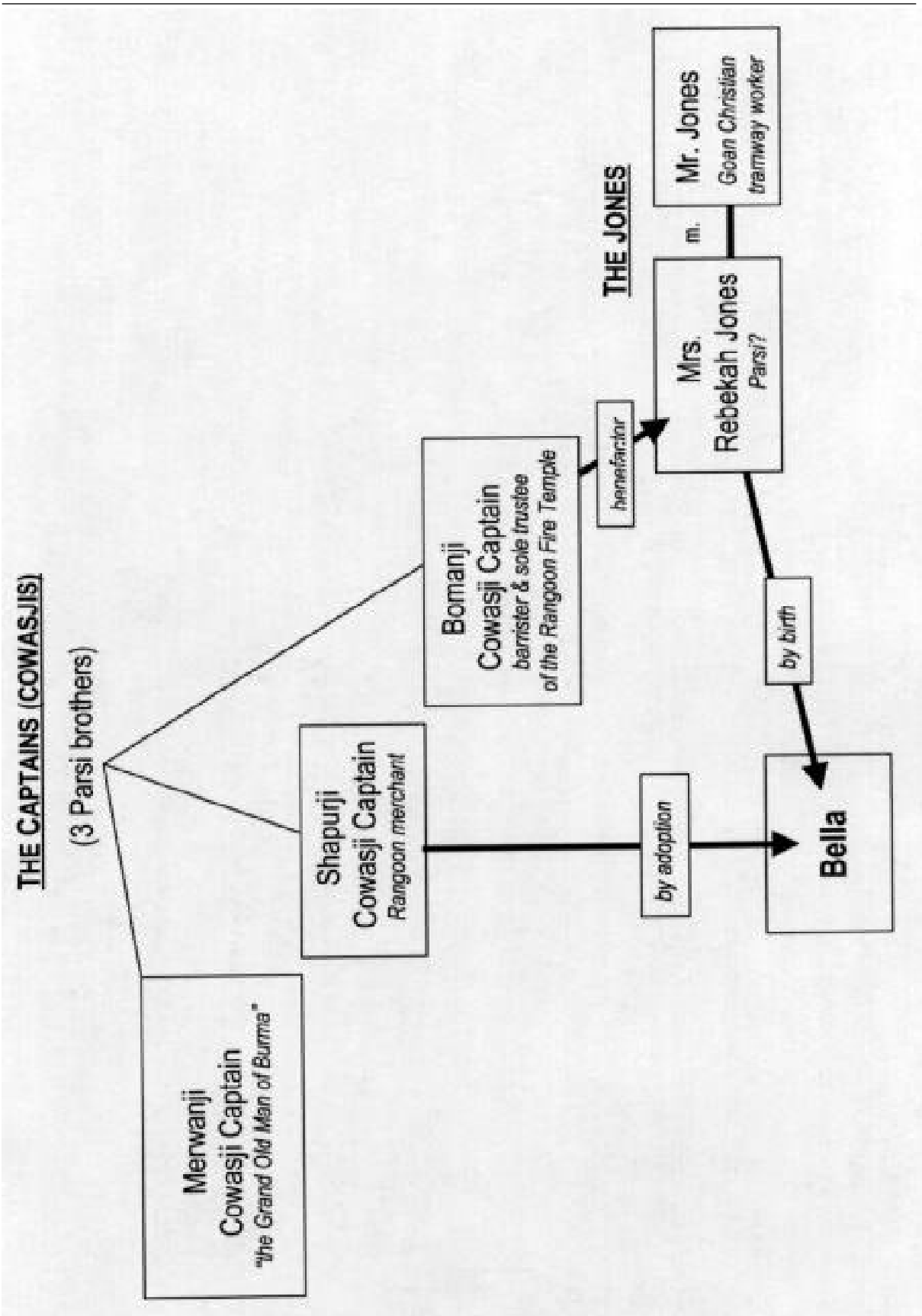
Some time in 1899, Mrs Jones got pregnant. Also around the same time, Mr Jones developed tuberculosis and died. Bomanji was extremely generous to Mrs Jones—there were frequent visits and even free accommodation in a house Bomanji owned. Bomanji left for Britain around the time that Mrs Jones gave birth, but he asked his brother Shapurji to take care of the mother and baby, covering their medical care and living expenses. The baby born was Bella. Within a few months of Bella's birth, Mrs Jones fell ill, also probably with tuberculosis. Shapurji sent a physician to her bedside, and Bella was put into the care of a string of wetnurses. Despite the medical care, Mrs Jones died in Rangoon General Hospital. Her body was not claimed within a few days—a strange thing because until then, Shapurji and the doctor had been checking on her on an almost daily basis. The hospital dumped her body in a paupers' mass grave. Her burial record identified her first as "other caste." This was subsequently crossed out and replaced with "Eurasian". In death, as in life, Mrs Jones was a mystery. Almost immediately, Shapurji and his wife took Bella in and cared for her like their own child. They had had two children, but both had died by this point. When Bomanji returned from England, he saw that his brother had effectively adopted Bella, and left the situation as it was.

Bella grew up as a *de facto* member of the Parsi Zoroastrian community. Her childhood was filled with visits with her Parsi cousins, including the children of her eldest uncle Merwanji. Merwanji always seemed to dislike the girl—she was like "a red rag is to a bull," according to one witness. On 21 March 1914, Bella's adoptive father Shapurji and uncle Bomanji arranged to have her given the *navjote* and taken into the Rangoon fire temple. She was 14. The local priest had refused to perform the ceremony, anticipating opposition by the Rangoon community because Bella was a

*juddin*. In response, the two Cowasji brothers hired the high priest of the Deccan, Dastur Kaikobad, to do the job. By telegram, orthodox Parsis in Bombay, Calcutta and Rangoon threatened to sue the dastur if he performed the ceremony. He ignored them. Orthodox Parsis accused him of being corrupted by the Rs 3,000 he was paid to perform the *navjote*. The sum was ten times the normal fee.

Bella was initiated and then taken into the Rangoon fire temple. Parsis worshipping inside did not protest at the time. Soon after, though, Rangoon's orthodox Parsis began proceedings against Bella. They were led by none other than Bella's adoptive uncle Merwanji. The plaintiffs asked the Chief Court of Lower Burma to issue an injunction prohibiting Bella from entering the temple again. Their argument was that, as one whose father was not Parsi, Bella had desecrated the temple by her presence. Her initiation was invalid for the same reason: her ethnic origins.

Bella won in the court of first instance and on appeal in Rangoon. She was not a trespasser—and here it is crucial to remember that Bomanji, her youngest adoptive uncle and Mrs Jones' original benefactor, was the sole trustee of the Rangoon fire temple. He wanted Bella to enter the temple as a Parsi Zoroastrian. He refused to support the orthodox Parsis who were suing her in trespass, and it was a procedural requirement that for an action in trespass, the trustee had to back up the plaintiffs. As a result, Bella won on this point. She was also held not to have violated the other Parsis' "right of exclusive worship"—the right to worship in the presence of one's own kind. The judges ruled that one's "own kind" meant others of the same religion, not of the same ethnicity or "race." As a result, Bella could not be excluded on this basis. The judges felt she had successfully converted to Zoroastrianism, even if she could not be said to be ethnically Parsi. Bella's uncle Merwanji and his supporters appealed a second time—this time to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London.



This time, they won. It was held that Bella fell outside of the intended class of beneficiaries of the fire temple trust. The trust was established for the benefit of “Parsis,” not Zoroastrians. Even if she could become Zoroastrian by religion, she could never become Parsi by ethnicity—her father was taken to have been the Goan Christian, Mr Jones. (The terms *Zoroastrian* and *Parsi* were definitively distinguished by Dinshaw Davar in his Parsi Panchayat case ruling.) The Privy Councillors went on to say that it was still within the trustees’ discretion to let Bella enter, if they felt that it would not cause harm to others. Despite the massive opposition to her 1914 entry, the judges rather surprisingly implied that harm would not be caused. If Bomanji remained the sole trustee, Bella would have effectively won her case in London in 1925. But in 1919, several others were added to the one-man board of trustees because Bomanji was believed to be using his powers in a dictatorial fashion. These new trustees were orthodox in persuasion. When the Privy Council gave its ruling, then, Bomanji was outnumbered by trustees who opposed Bella’s entry into the temple. In practice, Bella lost in London.

Over the course of the proceedings, Bella married a Parsi man named D J Kolapore in a Zoroastrian ceremony. Her marriage was not declared invalid following the Privy Council ruling, and it has been suggested that this was the main reason her adoptive father and uncle pushed so hard for her to be recognized as a Parsi: they wanted her to be able to marry a Parsi. As it turned out, she did so anyway—despite losing her case. After 1925, Bella cut herself off from all things Parsi. She refused to attend any Parsi social events, and saw only a few of her Parsi former friends. From oral accounts, Bella became a bitter, chain-smoking young woman who rejected everything Parsi. Her adoptive mother had been half-Burmese, and Bella herself was fluent in Burmese and wore only Burmese dress after losing her case. Her health deteriorated in the decade after the Privy Council ruling, and she died young—in her 30s, some time before 1937. Several years

later, her husband fled Rangoon during the Japanese invasion in the winter of 1941-2. Like many Parsis from Burma, he came to Bombay as a war-time refugee. The Rangoon fire temple itself was bombed during the Japanese invasion. The shops along the outer wall of the temple were rebuilt, but the temple itself was never reconstructed.

This is the primary story. Now let me tell you the secondary story—that is, the story of my adventures in legal history as I attempted to reconstruct another version of Bella’s case. For three years, I had found a number of details surrounding Bella’s conception and birth suspicious. I knew that the Goan Mr Jones had died “many months” before Bella was born, but the sources did not mention *how many* months before. I wrote to the Rangoon (now Yangon) General Hospital asking for Mr Jones’ death date. If he had died more than nine months before Bella’s birth, I could be sure that he was not in fact her real father. I received no reply from the hospital. It was surprising to me that Bella’s adoptive father Shapurji and his younger brother Bomanji had been willing to fight so long and hard to gain for Bella the right to be a part of the Parsi Zoroastrian community. It was also striking that Bomanji and Shapurji had been so generous to Rebekah Jones from her pregnancy up until the end of her life, and that Shapurji had almost instantly taken Bella in and treated her as his own after the mother’s death. It was also strange that, despite the generous and close care Shapurji had provided for Rebekah Jones up until her death, he and his doctor friend were suddenly absent when she died, such that her body was considered abandoned by the hospital, and deposited in a pauper’s grave. Equally odd was the death register’s identification of Mrs Jones as “other caste” or “Eurasian.” If Shapurji and his doctor friend were such regular visitors to Mrs Jones’ bedside at the hospital, why did they suddenly disappear when she died and allow this erroneous information to be entered in the register—particularly given their insistence in court that she had been Parsi? Many Parsi communities across British India had funds

established to pay for proper Zoroastrian death rites for poor Parsis. For a start, Shapurji and Bomanji were wealthy, so one would have thought providing proper Zoroastrian death rites for Mrs Jones would have been no problem for them financially. But there was also the fact that Bomanji was the sole trustee of the Parsi burial ground: he and his brother would have known all about the practicalities of arranging death rites for Zoroastrians in Rangoon. My theory all along was that Mrs Jones was not in fact Parsi. I also suspected that Bella's biological father was not Mr Jones at all, but Mrs Jones' benefactor, Bomanji Cowasji Captain. This alternate account appeared nowhere in the legal record. There were references to some shameful and embarrassing accusations that had been made by Bella's opponents, but Bella's lawyers had succeeded in having these removed from the legal record, and the newspapers had only alluded to the accusations in vague terms. I suspected that this version of the story could be valid, but had not a scrap of written evidence to back it up.

Early in 2006, I had the good fortune of meeting the son of Bella's lawyer in Mumbai. He was a retired Parsi lawyer who had practiced law in Calcutta for most of his professional life. When I met this gentleman, he told me about rumours that Bella was the result of a relationship between a sweeper woman and a member of the Parsi family that adopted her. Subsequently, two other Parsis from former Rangoon Parsi families told me the

same thing without any mention of this hypothesis on my part. Apparently it was common knowledge at the time of the case. But it did not make it into the written record.

What lessons flow from Bella's case? First, that the case stands alone; or rather, that it stands in line with a series of eighteenth and nineteenth-century conflicts relating to the children of Parsi men and non-Parsi women, usually outside of marriage. It should not be taken to be part of the discussion of ethnic outsiders, usually wives, who want to join the Parsi Zoroastrian community by conversion. *Saklat v Bella* should be cordoned off from the Parsi Panchayat case, and from the modern debate on conversion. Second, the case carries a lesson for historians who privilege written sources and fail to seek out living people who may retain some knowledge of the event in question. It may be collective memory that provides the final piece of the puzzle—that crucial bit of information that explains everything that was baffling about the written sources. It was certainly oral history, rather than archival research, that made Bella's case comprehensible to me as I attempted to reconstruct it almost a century after it happened.



Old postcard of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century - courtesy Ellen Goldberg



Mitra Sharafi is a Junior Research Fellow at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge University. She holds degrees in law from Cambridge (BA 1998) and Oxford (BCL 1999), and in history from McGill (BA 1996) and Princeton (PhD 2006). In 2007, she will take up an appointment as Assistant Professor in Law and History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA.

# When Iran was Zoroastrian: From the Medes to the Muslims

by magdalena rustomji

The ZAH Library Lecture Series

*We need history, not to tell us what happened  
or to explain the past, but to make the past alive  
so that it can explain us and make a future possible.*  
(The Closing of the American Mind - Allan Bloom)

Over Labour Day weekend, for three days, the main hall of the ZAH Center in Houston, Texas was the venue for the ZAH Lecture Series with Rashna Writer from London, England, as the guest lecturer. Aban Rustomji opened the lecture series by speaking about the ZAH Library mission. The lecture for this event was titled, *"When Iran was Zoroastrian: From the Medes to the Muslims"*. Each day had a morning and afternoon session, with a specific focus. There were over eighty participants for each session, including ZAH members and members of the greater Houston community.

Rashna Writer heads Global Risk and is also a Senior Assistant Director of Merchant International Group in London, England. Ms Writer has a BA in Political Science from Calcutta University, an MA in International Relations from Jadavpur University in Calcutta and a PhD in International Relations from the London School of Economics.

Rashna says about her career, *"I have pursued a parallel career to that of a political analyst. Invited to conduct research at Manchester University on the Zoroastrians of Britain, I went on to publish books on the community, specialized in pre-Islamic Iran and have lectured on the subject."* Ms Writer has been a presenter at various international conferences and symposia in the USA, Canada, the Indian sub-continent and Europe. She is also a frequent contributor on CNBC and



Bloomberg television, Reuters Television and the BBC World Service.

Ms Writer took the lecture participants on a three-day journey to get a glimpse of each of the three Iranian dynasties. She cautioned that history does not have straight lines and that it has to be examined in light of new research, and findings. Rashna's passion for history ignited an interest in the participants and for three days, the door to the past was opened.

## Programme:

### Day One

Morning Session - *The Achaemenians: Founders of the Iranian State*

Afternoon Session - *The Achaemenians: Society, Administration, Culture*

### Day Two

Morning Session - *The Parthians: Wrongly Overlooked by History*

Afternoon Session - *The Parthians: Society, Administration, Culture*

### Day Three

Morning Session - *The Sasanians: The Apogee of Zoroastrian Iran*

Afternoon Session - *The Sasanians: Society, Administration, Culture*

Here are just a few of the salient points. First and most importantly, Iran was indeed a Zoroastrian land during the period of the three dynasties, and the beginning of Zoroastrian Iran was with the Achaemenid dynasty. This dynasty was also the first

multilingual, multicultural empire. The Parthian Dynasty followed and Rashna emphasized that this period is the one where much information has been “buried” and there are many gaps. Research into this dynasty is greatly needed. During the Parthian dynasty Iran became a world power. Also of great significance during this dynasty was the act of Valkash I who issued an injunction to Mobeds so that the text of Avesta was collected and compiled during his reign. Of great interest to those who love stories and storytelling is that the great storytelling tradition was highly elevated during the Parthian Dynasty.

In the third and final Zoroastrian Dynasty, the Zoroastrian religion became the state religion of Iran. Sadly, this dynasty was the beginning of the downhill slope for the nation. Among the factors that Rashna mentions as those which weakened the fabric of the nation, were the turmoil in the country brought about by famine, economic disruption, economic uncertainty, and social revolution. However, *“the core weakness of the Sasanian Dynasty was that it never managed to centralize power”*.

Each dynasty made great and lasting contributions which even now serve as models for social structures such as the principle of women’s rights and the concept that laws are needed to have a functioning society. Each dynasty also advocated Zoroastrian values such as “be a friend to right; not a friend to wrong,” to use Vohu

Manah at every step and turn of your life, to practice personal responsibility, and to value truth above all. However, as Rashna emphasized, *“The Greatest Single Contribution of Iran was and is Zarathushtra - the man and his message.”*

Aban Rustomji, esteemed chair of the ZAH Library Committee

presented Rashna Writer with a Lecture Series Award, which reads “Presented to Rashna Writer, PhD In recognition of enhancing knowledge of Zoroastrian Religion, History and Culture.” Other

highlights of the event were a beautiful children’s art exhibit from Vahishta Kaikobad’s Sunday School Class and an announcement of donations to the ZAH Library for this Lecture Series’ recommended bibliography. Addition of books and artifacts continues to be one of the priorities and objectives of the Library Committee.

Written evaluations of the programme and comments from the attendees suggest that the lecture series made a great impact. People walked away with an increased awareness of that time period from 559 BC to 651 AD when Iran was indeed, a Zoroastrian land. The emotion of the moment is best expressed in the words of Jose Ortega & Gasset,

*To excel the past we must not allow ourselves to lose contact with it; on the contrary, we must feel it under our feet because we raised ourselves upon it.*  
“In Search of Goethe”, 1949



Rashna, delighted with her gift of a stetson

#### Rashna Writer’s Works:

Contemporary Zoroastrians: An Unstructured Nation.  
The Memoirs of Keikhshrow Shahrokh.  
From Zarathustra to Muhammad: The Re-Shaping of Iran. (In Press)



L to R: Rashna & Aban



Magdalena Rustomji was born in San Luis Potosi, Mexico and immigrated to Texas as a young child. For over 20 years she has been a licensed professional counselor (psychotherapist) working with “recent arrival” immigrant high school students, in group and individual sessions. Magdalena’s other interests include gardening, poetry and the cinema. She is the coordinator of an annual Writing Festival for immigrant high school students that celebrates Poetry Month and has also written a poetry module for use in Group work with adolescents. Magdalena’s occasion poem was selected as the Conference Poem for the Twelfth North American Zoroastrian Congress in Chicago in July of 2002

## *The Pallonji Shapoorji Home for Senior Citizens of the B.D. Petit Parsee General Hospital*

Information given by Daisy H Mehta

The age profile of the Zoroastrian Community is a cause for concern as also the tendency of the younger generation to migrate to far-off lands leaving behind old relatives who may be well-off yet unable to live in their relatively large homes due to health and security reasons.

Recognising these twin needs, the Pallonji Shapoorji Trust has, at its own cost, constructed The Pallonji Shapoorji Senior Citizens Home of The B D Petit Parsee General Hospital in the precincts of the hospital at Cumballa Hill, Mumbai and equipped the same.

The Home consists of a structure of ground and three upper floors constructed with superior specifications by the reputed and experienced building contractors Shapoorji Pallonji & Co., Ltd.

The Home is situated amongst sylvan surroundings with its own dedicated gardens filled with fruit trees, fragrant flowers and medicinal and insect repellent plants.

### **Ground & First floors:**

The ground floor is intended to house the poor and needy senior citizens entirely free of charge. The first floor is intended to house needy senior citizens at a concessional charge which will be about Rs3500/- per month. This includes morning tea, breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea and dinner.

### **Second & Third floors:**

These are designed for senior citizens who can afford payment. A separate entrance with lift serves them and an exclusive section of the garden will be reserved for these residents.

The second floor has eight double rooms and three single rooms with large attached

bathrooms and is fully furnished. Each double room will be charged around Rs18,000/- per month and each single room will be charged around Rs12,000/- per month. There is a common living room, dining room and even a writing room.

The third floor consists of six apartments of 800/900 sq feet each, consisting of a living cum dining room, a kitchen, a bedroom and a large bathroom with all superior amenities. These will be charged at around Rs50,000/- per month which is still far less than the market demands.

Residents of the second and third floors may either order food from the main kitchen or make their own arrangements for food. There is an attendant's room on each of these floors with its own bathroom for the use of servants employed by the residents. Laundry and cleaning facilities can be provided at an extra charge.

All these floors are targeted for senior citizens above the age of 65 years without any serious disabilities. Medical help will be available to the residents due to the proximity of the hospital they can pursue their leisure activities either within the Home or outside it.

Equal members of Pallonji Shapoorji Trust and members from the Managing Committee of The B D Petit Parsee General Hospital will manage this Home jointly.

The idea behind this scheme is to give senior citizens the comfort of living in a good locality with congenial surroundings amongst members of their own community.

Feelings of loneliness and apprehension will be averted. The underprivileged can spend their twilight years in comfort, peace and dignity. ■■■

Interested parties please apply to:

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General Hospital, Bomanjee Petit Road,  
Cumballa Hill, Mumbai 400 0036 - INDIA  
Fax: 011 91 22 2367 6652



## *The Pallonji Shapoorji Home for Senior Citizens*

From the top :

Living Room

First floor portico

Facade of the Home

Two views of the bedroom

(photos courtesy of Parsiana)



# Old Persian Literary Tradition

by touraj daryae

It is amazing that the Achaemenids, who once ruled over the largest empire in the ancient world, have left us very little in their own native language, Old Persian. The most obvious reason may be their political and philosophical ideology on how to govern. They allowed each of the peoples of the empire to worship their own deities and to continue their own traditions, and they also allowed them to speak their own languages and conduct their lives with little interference from Persian overlords. A second reason is that Aramaic had become so widespread in the ancient Near East that using Aramaic scribes was the logical choice for royal correspondence. Elamite was used as the economic and administrative language of the Achaemenid heartland, the province of Persis/Fars. What was important to the Achaemenids was a smoothly operating empire, not the imperialistic imposition of language and tradition. However, the ancient Persian kings did leave us several royal inscriptions which are important not only for the study of Achaemenid religion, politics and world views, but also for understanding the history of Persian language and literary traditions. In this brief essay I would like to outline the important literary currents in the surviving Old Persian texts and to explain what these inscriptions say and what their intent was.

In the Achaemenid period, the Old Persian language came to prominence, written with the use of cuneiform script. The content of the Old Persian inscriptions is important because it gives us a glimpse into the Old Iranian literature in the historical period. At that time, the oral tradition was still strong and writing was not common among the Persians, as it was not among most peoples. Darius himself may have been unlettered, since he mentions in his Behistun inscription that it was read back to

him aloud (DB V 88-91) (Malandra 1996; 147). The content of these inscriptions are mainly royal views. While there are few minor inscriptions mentioning such overlords as Ariaramnes and Arsames, scholars now believe that these are forgeries made during the time of Darius I, in the second half of the sixth century BC (Lecoq 1974; 102). These minor inscriptions, including the Cyrus inscriptions, were

made to place Darius I in the family of the Achaemenids, as scion of a collateral line of Cyrus the Great's family (Stronach 1990). There are several shorter inscriptions by Darius which gives us some basic ideas about Persian views and literary history. For example in one of his minor inscriptions, the theme of Persia having "good people (and) good horses" (*uvasp umarti*) (DPd 8) is reflected by Ariaramnes (AmH 6) in the same manner, but Arsames gives the same idea as *ukram uvaspam*, where *kra-* is mentioned instead of *marta-* (AsH 9-10). In Darius' DPd inscription there is the theme of protecting of his family (*Vi -*) from the following: (enemy, bad year [famine], and Lie" (*hainaya, dusiyara, drauga*) (DPd 16-17). Here, too, we have the boundaries of the Achaemenid Persian Empire given in a diagonal way, where Persis/Fars falls at the center of the axis. The limits are given as beyond Sogdiana to



Darius' seal impression

Ethiopia, and from Sind to Sardis. Darius also presents the theme of helping the weak, treating them with justice, and protecting them from the strong. He emphasizes his truthfulness, mild manner, and fortitude in ruling. He calls himself a good fighter, horseman, bowman, and spearman, and tells others to follow his example. This inscription is important in that it informs us of the personal views and attributes of Darius.

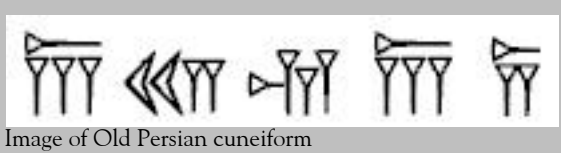


Image of Old Persian cuneiform

Darius I also left us the longest Achaemenid inscription, the Behistun

inscription in what is today known as Kermnah. This trilingual text (Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian) may be considered Darius' autobiography and is one of the earliest detailed self portraits in the ancient world. The Behistun inscription is important because its content is aristocratic and, to a lesser extent, theological in places where Darius' physical and moral superiority is emphasized. There is a binary opposition between the followers of Truth/Order and Lie/Chaos, which goes back to the Zoroastrian tradition. The inscription also suggests that the Persian society is centered around the king and that loyalty was of paramount importance (Momigliano 1990; 8-9). The inscription may also be considered an epic rendition of historical events, since it contains some pieces of verse (DB II 73) (Malandra 1996; 145). It appears that the Elamite version was written first, followed by the Babylonian and then the Old Persian translations (Huyse 1999; 58). Darius discusses his lineage, the lands that he ruled, how he came to power, the revolts that took place which he or his agents suppressed, his reordering of the empire, and finally his religious zeal. More than seventy times he mentions that he accomplished what he did with the aid of Ahuramazda (Ahura Mazda). He instructs the people to disseminate the story of what Darius did and not to keep it concealed. In setting himself alongside of Ahuramazda and the Truth/Order, he places his enemies on the side of Angra Mainu and

the Lie/Chaos. These ideas, along with the name of Darius' father, ie., Wisataspa, suggest the Achaemenids' deep devotion to the Zoroastrian tradition. Darius, in some of the earliest poetic lines of the Old Persian language, reveres Ahuramazda for creating good men and good horses, the earth and the sky.

Xerxes' inscriptions, on the other hand, focus on his building activity (XPb, XPc, XPd), mainly because these inscriptions are from Persepolis monuments. In the XPf Xerxes gives us the story of how he was



selected from among the many sons of Darius, and how he carried the building activities of his father. His most famous inscription is the XPh, commonly known as the Daivadna Inscription. This text gives us evidence of mass revolt and of Xerxes' endeavor to eliminate the worship of false gods (*daiva ayadiya*). By the time of

Artaxerxes II, the names of other deities beside that of Ahuramazda: Anahit and Mithra are invoked to protect him, and what has been built by him, from evil. Thus, here we have mention of other Indo-Iranian deities, Mithra and Anahita, which along Ahuramazda made up the triad deities worshipped in the ancient Iranian empires. The inscriptions also mention people and territories in a formulaic language which suggests the precedence of Mesopotamian tradition. Thus, while the concepts and agendas are Iranian, they are embedded in Mesopotamian formulas and script. We should not forget that some of the sentences also harken back to the Gthic (Malandra) and Avestan hymns which again suggest the existence of a strong oral tradition (Skjærvø 1999; 1-64), and which continued into the Sasanian period (Skjærvø 1985; 593-603).



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Touraj Daryaee's elementary and secondary schooling was in Tehran, and Athens. Daryaee took his PhD in History at the University of California, Los Angeles in 1999. He specializes in the history and culture of Ancient Persia. He has numerous articles and books to his name. He is also the editor of the *The International Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies* and the Associate Professor of Ancient History California State University, Fullerton.

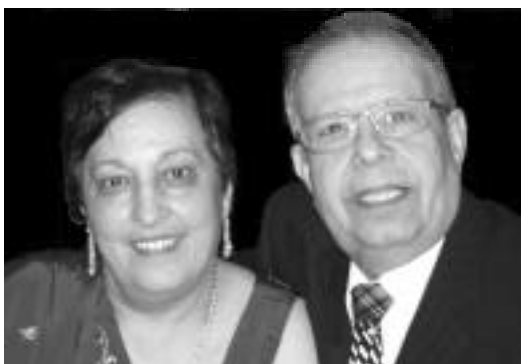
## WZO's BBQ held at London on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2006

Sammy Bhiwandiwalla, WZO's Chairman thanks ...

It is with immense happiness and joy that we record our gratitude to Pervize & Rohinton Irani for organising on behalf of WZO a summer BBQ filled with music, dance and the customary selection of BBQ chicken, Lebanese lamb with rice, sheesh kebab, corn on the cob, a selection of sweets and as much wine, beer, fruit juices you could possibly drink.

On a hot summer's day, Rohinton with his fund raising skills had worked the crowd to a level of excitement and with the enthusiastic bidding for the wide array of offers towards hotel accommodation and restaurant bookings and raffle prizes brought the evening to a successful close.

Totting up the amount last thing in the evening we could see the anticipation on the faces of all those around the table as the figure neared £9,000. Fatigue at the end of the day had taken its toll and it was only the following day, barring any last minute mishaps awaiting all the auction payments to come in, that the grand total of £10,000 became apparent. This was the largest collection ever made at a WZO BBQ and all funds will go towards Gujarat and the Medical Benevolent Fund.



Pervize & Rohinton Irani

Our thanks to Pervize, Rohinton and their family for their hard work in planning from start to finish the programme for the day and opening up their home and gardens to a crowd of nearly 225, which not many would ever countenance. Our

sincere thanks also to all the immensely generous donors so willingly supporting us each year, the army of helpers and all the attendees for digging deep into their pockets towards a good cause. ■■■■



## Zubin Mehta, to be honoured in December

**T**he John F Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts announced the selection of the individuals who will receive the Kennedy Center Honors of 2006. Recipients to be honoured at the 29th annual national celebration of the arts are: musical theater composer and producer Andrew Lloyd Webber; conductor Zubin Mehta; country singer and songwriter Dolly Parton; singer, songwriter and producer Smokey Robinson; and film director and producer Steven Spielberg.

*This year we honor five extraordinary international artists whose abundant contributions to their fields are remarkable. They have transformed the culture of our country and of the world,” said Kennedy Center Chairman Stephen A Schwarzman. “Andrew Lloyd Webber has led a seismic change in our musical theater becoming the most popular theater composer in the world; **conductor Zubin Mehta’s profound artistry and devotion to music make him a world treasure; Dolly Parton’s creativity and spirit make her country music’s best international ambassador; Smokey Robinson’s song and voice have created the soundtrack for the lives of a generation of Americans; and Steven Spielberg’s films make him one of the most successful and accomplished directors of all time.”***



Zubin is on the right with his father. Photograph taken by Parastu Dubash (Zubin’s cousin), at the final concert performed by Mehli Mehta, in March 1998 at Royce Hall, Los Angeles. It may be of interest, father and son performed together only twice during a 35 year span.

On 3 December 2006, the gala performance will take place at the Kennedy Center’s Opera House and will be attended by the President of the United States and Mrs Bush, and by artists from all over the world. The recipients recognized for their lifetime contributions to American culture through the performing arts — whether in dance, music,

theatre, opera, motion pictures or television — are selected by the Center’s Board of Trustees. The primary criterion in the selection process is excellence. The Honours Gala will be recorded for later broadcast on the CBS Network as a two-hour prime time special. (From information appearing in the Washington Press, sent by Shahrukh Mehta)

### The Maestro

Zubin Mehta, a resident of Los Angeles, was born in Bombay in 1936. He received his early education in music from his father Mehli Mehta, a violinist and co-founder of the Bombay Symphony Orchestra and later music director of the American Youth Symphony in Los Angeles.

Zubin initially intended to study medicine but eventually became a music student in Vienna at the age of 18, under the eminent instructor Hans Swarowsky.

In 1958, he made his conducting debut in Vienna. In the same year he won the International Conducting Competition in Liverpool and was appointed assistant conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

His career as a conductor soared - from the LPO to music director of the Montreal Symphony Orchestra and then of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. In 1978, he became music director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, where his 13-year tenure would become the longest in the orchestra’s history. In 1981, the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, with whom he had been associated with since 1969 in various capacities, made him their music director for life. He has conducted over 2,000 concerts with this orchestra.

Since 1985, he has been revitalising opera as chief conductor of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino. A recipient of the Padma Vibhushan, India’s second highest civilian honour, his life has been documented in Terry Sanders’ film Portrait of Zubin Mehta and in a book by Martin Bookspan and Ross Yockey entitled Zubin: The Zubin Mehta Story. This year saw the publication in Germany of Zubin Mehta’s autobiography, *Die Partitur meines Leben: Erinnerungen* (The Score of my Life: Memories).

“It all comes from the music,” Mehta has said. “I do whatever the music demands. What is conducting? Conducting is communication. And what I communicate at the moment is what I feel and what my musicians need.”

**Book Launch/Discussion : *Sadak Chhaap* by Meher Pestonji****Wednesday 11th October at 7 pm****Nehru Centre of the Indian High Commission, London**

Rahul, who is growing up in the streets of Mumbai, alone, finds an abandoned baby on a railway platform and his life changes. The baby becomes his emotional anchor. He visits her regularly at the hospital and the orphanage. But he is devastated when she is adopted by a non resident Indian couple.

**Meher Pestonji** has been a freelance journalist from the mid-seventies actively participating in the social movements of the times - the campaign to change rape laws, housing rights for slum-dwellers, the special needs of street children, anti-communalism campaigns. Among her journalistic highs was detailed coverage of the Justice Srikrishna Commission instituted to probe the Bombay riots of 1992-93. She has also written extensively on art, theatre, cinema, was a columnist reviewing books by and about women for *Eve's Weekly* in the seventies and theatre

critic for *Midday* and the *Independent* in the late eighties/early nineties.

Growing disillusioned with the market driven journalism of the nineties she switched to creative writing. Her first book, a collection of short stories *Mixed Marriage and Other Parsi Stories* was published in 1999 followed by *Pervez*, a novel (2003) featuring a Parsi girl's political maturation against the backdrop of the post Babri Masjid riots of 1992-93. Both were published by HarperCollins (India).

In August 2005 Penguin (India) published Meher's second novel *Sadak Chhaap* whose protagonist is a ten

year old street kid called Rahul. Much of the narrative is based on her journalistic reports and her interactions

with streetkids over twenty years. Meher has also written a play *Piano for Sale* which opened at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Mumbai in June 2006 with further shows at Mumbai's Prithvi Theatre in August 2006.



**Marzban Giara** is the author, publisher and distributor of books on Zoroastrian religion and Parsi history. He has authored the first-ever illustrated *Global Directory of Zoroastrian Fire Temples*, *The Zoroastrian Pilgrim's Guide*, *Parsi Statues* and a dozen other books. He informs of his latest publication.

**Gaavo Mari Saathe Singalong**

- A treasure trove of Parsi songs, 208 pp., paperback. I have compiled 265 Parsi songs - 60 Zoroastrian devotional songs in English, over 100 religious songs in Gujarati, 40 songs for festive occasions and 65 Parsi humorous/folk songs. It contains a bibliography of books on Parsi music. On the backcover are names of music audio cassettes/CDs of interest to Parsis as also from whom they are available.

Comic songs like *papri-papetana lagan*, *soonabai lamba*, *kaka kalingar jeva*, *goolan maari gol gol*, *hun chhu uptodate fashionable naari*, *My name is Jeejeebhoy Jamshedji* are included. You will also find Parsi *garbas*, *monajats*, and many songs that will rekindle pride in being a Parsi and revive our rich tradition of Parsi music. Wherever possible, below the title I have mentioned the tune for the song.

This book was released on the evening of 4th September 2006 at

K R Cama Oriental Institute at a music programme where several singers sang selected songs featured in this book.

The book is priced at Rs150/- and available from me. My address is Dhunmai Building, Ground floor, 667, Lady Jehangir Road, Mancherji Joshi Parsi Colony, Dadar, Mumbai 400 014.

Those residing outside Mumbai can order from Parsiana book shop. e-mail: [parsiana@vsnl.net](mailto:parsiana@vsnl.net)



## The battle for the “Zoroastrian Ashes”

Report received from ZTFE, London, through the courtesy of Paurushasp Jila

The Zoroastrian Cricket Club of Great Britain (ZCC-GB) have recreated history with the battle of the “Zoroastrian Ashes” against the Zoroastrian Cricket Club of Canada (ZCC-Canada).

Late July 2006 saw the arrival of the Zoroastrian Cricket Club of Canada to England for a two week tour with their matches arranged at venues as far as Manchester. As part of their tour two matches were played against the Zoroastrian Cricket Club of Great Britain on 29th July and 12th August 2006.

The games would be the first meeting between the two sides since ZCC-GB's tour to Canada in 1990. Earlier on in 1986 the ZCC-Canada were the visiting team to London. The games were eagerly awaited by the players on both sides with the contest being dubbed as the “Zoroastrian Ashes”! As well as the normal rivalry the games took on an added twist, with the former Captain of ZCC-GB, Rumi Jasavala now playing for the Canadians!

The task of reuniting the GB team fell to Kerman Jasavala and the initial task was to pull together a team capable of competing against a strong Canadian side. ZCC-GB had last played together approximately 10 years ago and although some of the original squad still played and were available, others had retired. It was clear that some new players would be required. A call for players resulted in an overwhelming response with over 35 people expressing an interest to play in at least one of the games.

The first match was played on 29th July with Jimmy Vapiwala captaining the GB side. The day was blessed with bright sunny weather. The Canadian team batted first and posted an impressive total despite some good bowling from the GB team. ZCC-GB then went into bat and put up a

brave fight in attempting to overhaul the total set by the Canadian's. The innings was underpinned by a solid batting performance from Man of the Match, Darius Vapiwala. Unfortunately, the GB team were unable to catch up with the total and the Canadian's ended up victorious.

The ZCC-GB team on 29th July 2006 match was made up of the following players:

Jim Vapiwala - Captain: Darius Vapiwala:  
Veraf Khambatta: Kersi Tamboly: Keki Wadia:  
Kio Bozorgi: Meherwan Bozorgi: Ron Kalifa:  
Shaen Palkhiwalla: Fabian Saverimuttu:  
Behzad Karkaria: Jahangir Sadri.

The day was rounded off with a dinner of *Dhansak, Kebab & Kachumber* for both the players and the spectators.

The second match on 12th August took on a different format. Due to the large number of people wishing to take part in the matches, two Twenty20 games were organised in order to maximise the number of participants. News of the contest had spread far and wide, with the GB team managing to draft in a player from Switzerland!

Unfortunately the weather was less kind on this day with conditions being overcast and decidedly cool. In the first game the Canadians opened the batting and almost every player in the GB team took part in the bowling attack. There were some excellent catches taken during the Canadian innings, notably a caught and bowled by Cyrus Amaria. The GB team set off after the target in hot pursuit and were on target for victory with some hard hitting from the top order, unfortunately wickets fell at regular intervals and the game ended with the Canadians winning by 12 runs.

After a quick lunch the second game was underway, with the GB team batting first on



The team members of the ZCC-UK & ZCC-Canada

this occasion. This time the batting performance was solid throughout the order and a formidable total was posted. The Canadians came into bat and made a good start, however the hosts fought back taking some wickets and the game was set up for a close finish.

With two overs to go the Canadians hit the winning runs and the game ended, yet again with a win for the Canadians. The GB players on the 12th August match were:

Kerman Jasavala - Captain: Keki Wadia:  
 Veraf Khambatta: Shaen Palkhiwalla: Kio  
 Bozorgi: Meherwan Bozorgi: Jahangir Sadri:  
 Cyrus Amaria: Burzin Rustomji: Kersi  
 Dholoo: Aryameher Dholoo: Khushroo  
 Daruwalla: Cyrus Khajotia: Rustom  
 Kapadia: Reshad Dotivala: Khushroo  
 Daruwalla: Darius Billimoria: Behram  
 Billimoria.

The game ended with the presentation of 'man of the match' awards for both days, sponsored by Kersey, Silloo and Paoroosh Jasavala.

The exhausting day was rounded off with a dinner of lamb biryani and dal for both the players and the spectators. Tea was provided by Gul and Rusi Billimoria and Cobra beer was provided by Lord Karan Billimoria of Chelsea.

Well Done, lads. Despite loosing the series 3-0 all the players thoroughly enjoyed the games and there is renewed enthusiasm in England to try and play some more games next year.



## A Religion in Decline

**Laurie Goodstein - Article originally published in The New York Times on September 6th, 2006**

...“We were once at least 40, 50 million — can you imagine?” said Mr Antia, senior priest at the fire temple here in suburban Chicago. “At one point we had reached the pinnacle of glory of the Persian Empire and had a beautiful religious philosophy that governed the Persian kings.

“Where are we now? Completely wiped out,” he said. “It pains me to say, in 100 years we won’t have many Zoroastrians.”

There is a palpable panic among Zoroastrians today — not only in the United States, but also around the world — that they are fighting the extinction of their faith, a monotheistic religion that most scholars say is at least 3,000 years old.

... While Zoroastrians once dominated an area stretching from what is now Rome and Greece to India and Russia, their global population has dwindled to 190,000 at most, and perhaps as few as 124,000, according to a survey in 2004 by *Fezana Journal*, published quarterly by the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America. The number is imprecise because of wildly diverging counts in Iran, once known as Persia — the incubator of the faith.

“Survival has become a community obsession,” said Dina McIntyre, an Indian-American lawyer in Chesapeake, Va., who has written and lectured widely on her religion.

The Zoroastrians’ mobility and adaptability has contributed to their demographic crisis. They assimilate and intermarry, virtually disappearing into their adopted cultures. And since the faith encourages opportunities for women, many Zoroastrian women are working professionals who, like many other professional women, have few children or none.

Despite their shrinking numbers, Zoroastrians — who follow the Prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster in Greek) — are divided over whether to accept intermarried families and converts and what defines a Zoroastrian. An effort to create a global organizing body fell apart two years ago after some priests accused the organizers of embracing “fake converts” and diluting traditions.

“They feel that the religion is not universal and is ethnic in nature, and that it should be kept within the tribe,” said Jehan Bagli, a retired chemist in Toronto who is a priest, or mobed, and president of the North American Mobed Council, which includes about 100 priests. “This is a tendency that to me sometimes appears suicidal. And they are prepared to make that sacrifice.”

In South Africa, the last Zoroastrian priest recently died, and there is no one left to officiate at ceremonies, said Rohinton Rivetna, a Zoroastrian leader in Chicago who, with his wife, Roshan, was a principal mover behind the failed effort to organize a global body. But they have not given up. “We have to be working together if we are going to survive,” Mr. Rivetna said.

Although the collective picture is bleak, most individual Zoroastrians appear to be thriving. They are well-educated and well-traveled professionals, earning incomes that place them in the middle and upper classes of the countries where they or their families settled after leaving their homelands in Iran and India. About 11,000 Zoroastrians live in the United States, 6,000 in Canada, 5,000 in England, 2,700 in Australia and 2,200 in the Persian Gulf nations, according to the *Fezana Journal* survey.

This is the second major exodus in Zoroastrian history. In Iran, after Muslims rose to power in the seventh century AD, historians say the Zoroastrian population was decimated by massacres, persecution and conversions to Islam. Seven boatloads of Zoroastrian refugees fled Iran and landed on the coast of India in 936. Their descendants, known as Parsis, built Mumbai, formerly Bombay, into the world capital of Zoroastrianism.

The Zoroastrian magazine *Parsiana* publishes charts each month tracking births, deaths and marriages. Leaders fret over the reports from Mumbai, where deaths outnumber births six to one. The intermarriage rate there has risen to about one in three. The picture in North America is more hopeful: about 1.5 births for one death. But the intermarriage rate in North America is now nearly 50 percent.

Soli Dastur, an exuberant priest who lives in Florida, is among the first generation of immigrants who started the

trend. Mr Dastur grew up in a village outside Mumbai, where his father was a priest, the fire temple was the center of town and his whole world was Zoroastrian.

He arrived in Evanston, ILL., in 1960, where he knew of no other Zoroastrians, to attend college on a scholarship provided by one of the Parsi endowments in Mumbai, which have since provided scholarships to many others. He earned a PhD, worked as a chemical engineer and married an American Roman Catholic he met on a blind date 40 years ago.

... The very tenets of Zoroastrianism could be feeding its demise, many adherents said in interviews. Zoroastrians believe in free will, so in matters of religion they do not believe in compulsion. They do not proselytize. They can pray at home instead of going to a temple. While there are priests, there is no hierarchy to set policy. And their basic doctrine is a universal ethical precept: "good thoughts, good words, good deeds."

"That's what I take away from Zoroastrianism," said Tenaz Dubash, a filmmaker in New York City who is making a documentary about the future of her faith, "that I'm a cerebral, thinking human being, and I need to think for myself."

Ferzin Patel, who runs a support group for 20 intermarried couples in New York, said that while the Zoroastrians in the group adored their faith and wanted to teach it to their children, they in no way wanted to compel their spouses to convert.

"In the intermarriage group, I don't think anyone feels that someone should forfeit their religion just for Zoroastrianism," Ms Patel said. Despite, or because of, the high intermarriage rate, some Zoroastrian priests refuse to accept converts or to perform initiation ceremonies for adopted children or the children of intermarried couples, especially when the father is not Zoroastrian. The ban on these practices is far stronger in India and Iran than in North America.

"As soon as you do it, you start diluting your ethnicity, and one generation has an intermarriage, and the next generation has more dilution and the customs become all fuzzy and they eventually disappear," said Jal N Birdy, a priest in Corona, Ca., who will not perform weddings of mixed couples. "That would destroy my community, which is why I won't do it."

The North American Mobed Council is so divided on the issue of accepting intermarried spouses and children

that it has been unable to take a position, said Mr Bagli, the council's president. He supports accepting converts because he said he can find no ban in Zoroastrian texts, but he estimated that as many as 40 percent of the priests in his group were opposed.

The peril and the hope for Zoroastrianism are embodied in a child of the diaspora, said Rohena Elavia Ullal, 27, a physical therapist in suburban Chicago.

Ms Ullal knew from an early age that her parents wanted her to marry another Zoroastrian. Her mother, a former board president of the Chicago temple, helped organize Sunday school classes once a month there, enticing teenagers with weekend sleepovers and roller-skating trips.

The result was a core group of close friends who felt more like cousins, Ms Ullal said recently over breakfast.

Both of her brothers found mates at Zoroastrian youth congresses, and one is already married. Ms Ullal stayed on the lookout. "There were so few," she said. "I guess you're lucky if you find somebody. That would be the ideal."

Ms Ullal's college boyfriend is also the child of Indian immigrants to the United States, but he is Hindu. [They married on Saturday and had two ceremonies — one Hindu, one Zoroastrian.] But Ms Ullal says that before they even became engaged, they talked about her desire to raise their children as Zoroastrians.

"It's scary; we're dipping down in numbers," she said. "I don't want to hurt his parents, but he doesn't have the kind of responsibility, whereas I do."



[Roshan Rivetna, recently retired editor of FEZANA Journal, informed "Goodstein and a NY Times photographer spent a couple of days in Chicago during the muktad days and interviewed a lot of people for this article." Tamina Davar, a New Yorker, introduced Laurie, with whom she has been communicating with about Zoroastrianism for over three years, to Tenaz Dubash. Tenaz talked to Goodstein at length and connected her with the Chicago community culminating with this article appearing on the front page of the New York Times. - Ed]



# The World Zoroastrian Organisation

135 Tennison Road, South Norwood, London SE25 5NF

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Incorporated 1980

## APPLICATION FORM FOR MEMBERSHIP

The Joint Honorary Secretaries  
The World Zoroastrian Organisation

\_\_\_\_\_ 20 \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Sirs,

As I desire to become Grand Patron / Patron / Life Member / Ordinary Member / Student (delete as appropriate), I request you to submit this application to your Committee.

I am born of Zoroastrian parents / Non-Zoroastrian spouse of a Zoroastrian (delete as appropriate), I agree to abide by the Memorandum and Articles and Rules and Regulations so long as I remain a member of The World Zoroastrian Organisation.

I note that the annual subscription for Ordinary Membership is payable on 1st January of each year. In case of arrears, I understand that my membership will be terminated after three months of sending the reminder.

Yours truly,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

**Block Capitals please** FULL NAME \_\_\_\_\_

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Ordinary Assoc Member	£10 pa	Life Member	Rs2,500	Student	Gratis
Ordinary Member	Rs450 for 3 years				till 21 years of age

Please send application form to: The World Zoroastrian Organisation (India) to Union Press,  
13 Homji St, Fort, Mumbai 400 001. Tel: (022) 2660357 or 2665526

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Ordinary	NZ\$30	Student	Gratis till 25 years of age		

Please send application form with your cheque payable in NZ Dollars as "WZO, New Zealand", to:  
Mrs Farah Unwala, 39 Buckingham St, Whakatu, Hawkes Bay 4250. Tel: +64 6 870 1171

# “Let those of good rule

rule over us with actions stemming from  
good understanding, and with (aramaiti)”

yasna 48.5  
Insler translation

