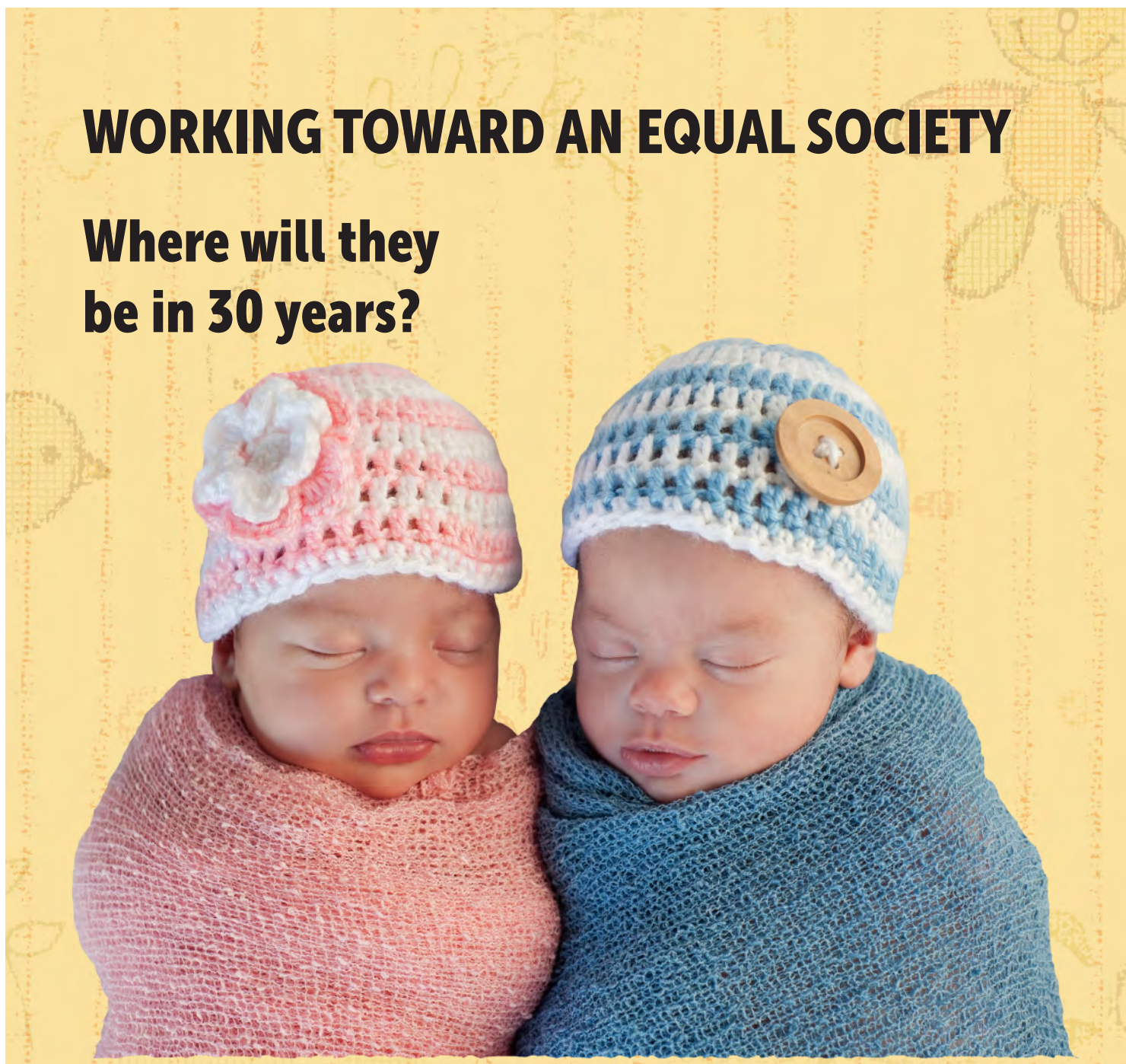


# JOURNAL

Dae–Behman–Spendarmad 1385 AY (Fasli) • Amordad–Shehrever–Meher 1386 AY (Shenshai) • Shehrever–Meher–Avan 1386 AY (Kadimi)

## WORKING TOWARD AN EQUAL SOCIETY

**Where will they  
be in 30 years?**



**PUBLICATION OF THE FEDERATION OF ZOROASTRIAN ASSOCIATIONS OF NORTH AMERICA**

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# FEZANA JOURNAL

www.fezana.org



PUBLICATION OF THE FEDERATION OF ZOROASTRIAN ASSOCIATIONS OF NORTH AMERICA

Vol 30 No 4 Winter / Zemestan December 2016 1385 AY 3754 Z

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SPRING 2017

FEZANA 30TH ANNIVERSARY

SPECIAL ISSUE

SUMMER 2017

HAPPINESS

Guest Editor Farishta Dinshaw

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**Published at Regal Press, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada**

FEZANA Journal Vol 30, No 4 ISSN 1068-2376

(USPS 021-495) published quarterly by FEZANA 8615 Meadowbrook Dr., Burr Ridge, IL 60527. Periodical postage rate is paid at Oakbrook, IL 60523 and at additional mailing offices. Annual subscription US \$35 (US and Canada) and \$80 (air) for other countries; details on subscription form. POSTMASTER: send changes to Fezana Journal, 8615 Meadowbrook Drive, Burr Ridge, IL 60527.



# Editorial

## A Word from the Editor

In September 2015, United Nations in New York adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will guide world leaders to realize human rights for all people, men and women. Nine of these 17 goals explicitly mention women and one goal (SDG 5) is dedicated entirely to gender equality and women's empowerment.

How did we come to this? How is it that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we need to have a special goal to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere. How come we have, to have a goal to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private spheres including trafficking? How come we need to have a goal to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights? How come we have to undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources and access to ownership and control over land?

When did all this change from the time women were warriors, generals in the army, were equal partners in marriage? Persian and Indian women of ancient times held high positions; they were queens, leaders in government, law and even the military. They owned and managed property, ran family businesses and farms.

In order to explore the change in perceptions and mind set towards women, we decided to explore the subject of gender equality or gender discrimination; how it started and how it is still perpetuated in daily life and in the corporate world. We could not have got a better guest editor than Zerbanoo Guifford, an activist for women's rights and combating slavery, a winner of the International Woman of the Year 2006 for her humanitarian campaigns. She was the first non-white member of the British Liberal Party executive and the founder of the Asha Centre in Gloucestershire, for empowerment of girls. We have seasoned contributors from the British political scene, young professionals from the corporate field who still bang their head against the proverbial glass ceiling, we have contributors who have portrayed inspiring women and those who have shattered the myths of religious taboos. We gain perspective of



women in Iran. Contributions from men and women have enriched this issue and we thank everyone of them.

In this issue we also have a very interesting article from Allison Betts, a researcher in Australia on the excavations of Akchakhan kala (fortress) in Chorasmia giving us insights into the early expressions of the religion in Central Asia. We thank Dinyar Mistry, also from Australia, for making the connection with the author. Fariborz Rahnamoon gives us his first hand report on his visit to Kurdistan.

Our North American community continues to forge ahead in building new dar e mehrs- the latest being in California. The Society of Scholars of Zoroastrianism, the library committee of Zoroastrian Association of Houston, the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York all hold seminars, discussion groups and lectures to spread religious knowledge and bring awareness of social issues confronting the community.

2017 is the year FEZANA celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The celebration was kicked off on November 5, 2016 in Chicago where it all began and the celebrations will continue throughout the year culminating with a Gala Dinner at the Annual General Meeting in Houston in April 2017.

We wish you all a very happy and successful 2017.

Dolly Dastoor, Editor in Chief.

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# Editorial

## A Message from FEZANA President

As I write this missive on Thanksgiving Day in the USA, I realize that the North American Zarathushti community has a lot to be thankful for this year. In early spring 2016 we opened the doors of a new Dar-e-Mehr in New York, and we are winding down the year with the opening of a new Atash Kadeh - the first of its kind in North America – in the Los Angeles area. Plans are underway to open more places of worship and congregation for our community, and some may be ready for use as early as 2017. These ventures show the abiding commitment of our community to its ancient religious roots.

This past summer, the Zoroastrian Association of Chicago and the FEZANA Sports Committee organized a very successful Zoroastrian Games in Chicago. Young and old participants from the world over came to play. They competed with passion but accepted the results of the contests in the true spirit of sportsmanship. We are thankful for these gatherings that show a commitment among Zarathushtis to strengthen the bonds of friendship within our community.

Over the course of the year, our member associations have held many interesting religious education seminars and organized many events to celebrate Gahambars, Zarathushti Festivals, the Shahensahi New Year and Navroze. This is evidence of a community that seeks to learn more about itself and nurture its *vohu manah* (good mind).

We will continue to see many reasons to be thankful for our community. In March 2017, the FEZANA UN-NGO team of young Zarathushti participants will share their ideas on improving the lives of women in our world at the 61<sup>st</sup> Commission on the Status of Women Conference. at the UN headquarters in New York. This is indicative of a community that has passed on its values to the next generation. We must remember to be thankful for these types of virtuous attributes that our community nurtures every day. Because “gratitude can transform common days into thanksgiving, turn routine jobs into joy and change ordinary opportunities into blessings.”



In this spirit of gratitude, we must take a little time out of our festive lives now and reflect on how, as Zarathushtis, we can leave the world better than we inherited it, to gift to our children and grandchildren and to future generations. As Zarathushtis, how do we help in creating a culture of compassion so that we help our sisters and brothers who are in less blessed circumstances?

Share your thoughts with good words... put your words into action... come forward to shape the world. After all, we should live the words of *Ashem Vohu* we so regularly pray... “In righteousness [Ashoi] lies real happiness, for it is God's finest gift; Happiness is his who is righteous for true righteousness' sake.”

With these thoughts, I wish you all a happy and healthy 2017, living in peace, harmony, and happiness with our fellow human beings. May Ahura Mazda's choicest blessings be showered on all humanity.

Homi D. Gandhi  
President, FEZANA



## A SPECIAL CELEBRATION OF FEZANA'S 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY AT ZAC CHICAGO

**BACHI DAMKEVALA**

Thirty years ago, in May 1986, following a mandate from delegates at the 1985 North American Congress in Los Angeles, representatives from nine North American Zoroastrian Associations met for three tempestuous days, at the Arbab Rustom Guiv Darbe Mehr in Chicago, to hammer out a Constitution for a Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America. A lot of issues were at stake, but slowly and surely, the representatives arrived at consensus on a Constitution that maintained the autonomy of each member Association, and at the same time, gathered strength under the banner of a federation. After a number of iterations, the Constitution was signed by all 16 Associations, FEZANA was formed, and the rest is history. Thanks to the foresight and efforts of these visionaries, we now have a highly respected federation, FEZANA, coordinating 26 Associations, 15 corresponding groups, and 15 Centers/Darbe MehRs serving the Zoroastrian diaspora in the USA and Canada, which has grown from about 10,000 in 1986 to an estimated 21,000 today.

To commemorate this historic landmark for Zoroastrians on this continent – the founding of FEZANA - ZAC hosted a Gala Celebration on Saturday, November 5, 2016, with 50 percent of the proceeds going towards ZAC's Infrastructure Fund and 50 percent going towards FEZANA's Infrastructure Fund. All those who had participated in the formation of FEZANA along with all past and present ZAC and FEZANA executives were invited to join in the celebration.

The day of the celebration was a bright, sunny, mild, fall day (unusual for Chicago at this time of the year). The hall was set up with *'panth'*-style seating and banana leaves, looking resplendent with traditional *'chowk'*, *'toran'* and flowers overflowing from large vases, courtesy of our artistic director Roshan Rivetna.

The guests started arriving, with the ladies showing off their beautiful, colorful *garas*, and men in their *daglis* and bowties. After the introductory speeches, the ZAC children took to the stage for **"FEZANA is Born"** outlining the early history of FEZANA and ending with a song **"We are FEZANA."** This was followed by a hilarious skit by Aban Daboo (ZAC's version of Adi Marazban), taking us back in time to May 1986 when representatives gathered in the ZAC library and argued over the draft Constitution.



Aban introduced the FEZANA Presidents: Rohinton Rivetna, Dolly Dastoor, Framroze Patel (in absentia), Firdosh Mehta, Rustom Kevala (in absentia), Bomi Patel, Katayun Kapadia, and Homi Gandhi, the current President, who presented a slide show of Darbe MehRs/Centers in North America. This was followed by cutting of the 3-tier Marzipan cake (Roshan Rivetna's culinary masterpiece) and singing of **"WE ARE FEZANA"** under the baton of Farobag Cooper, by the ZAC children, ZAC choir, and FEZANA and ZAC execs, each holding a banner of the 26 FEZANA Associations. (photo page 5)

Champagne toasts, including video messages by Shapoor Irani and Furrokh Dastoor, followed. Homi Gandhi spoke of how proud he was that FEZANA "had articulated the ageless message of Asho Zarathushtra in this

new diaspora.” and called upon all “to build a stronger partnership to help make this planet a better, happier, and peaceful world.”

**From left. Roshan Rivetna, Firdosh Mehta, Dolly Dastoor, Ervad Rayomand Ravji, President ZAC, Bomi Patel, Homi Gandhi, Bomi Damkevala (past president ZAC); Katayun Kapadia, Rohinton Rivetna, Dilshad Antia (past president ZAC)**



Then came the announcement that is synonymous with Parsi weddings and navjotes:



*“Jamva Chaloji.”* Dinner was a gastronomic delight, the traditional ‘*lagan nu bhonu*’ (traditional wedding feast) served on ‘*kera na patra*’ (banana leaves) flown in from Florida -- *achar* (pickles), *rotli* (flat bread), *wafer*, *kada-kothmir par eenda* (savory eggs), *lagan-nu-custard*, *sali ma murghi* (chicken), *kolmi* (shrimp) *no saas*, and *pullav dal*, followed by cake and mango kulfi for dessert – all served by our “celebrity servers” (see photo below). The post-dinner magic and mind-reading show was enjoyed by all.

We are deeply grateful that six of the eight FEZANA Presidents as well as several FEZANA execs and out-of-town guests had taken the time from their busy schedules to come from across USA and Canada, to grace this special event.

Kudos to Roshan and Rohinton Rivetna, Roshni Kharoliwalla and Dinaz Weber for organizing the event; to Kiku Engineer, Aban Daboo and ZAC volunteers for catering the delicious appetizers and dinner; and to dozens of volunteers who helped to make this such a successful and memorable event. Congratulations TEAM ZAC!



*Photos courtesy Ken Weber*

**Bachi B. Damkevala** (along with her husband Bomi) is a long-term active member of ZAC who works as a legal assistant in an insurance defense litigation firm in Downtown Chicago.



### Design A FEZANA Logo AND WIN A PRIZE

In 2017, the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations will celebrate 30 years of its founding. To mark the occasion, FEZANA announces a competition to design a logo for the organization. The new logo will become the official logo of FEZANA and will be used on the FEZANA website, social media sites, business cards, letterhead, posters, souvenir trinkets and gifts, or anywhere else FEZANA chooses.

The contest is open to citizens of any country but not open to FEZANA Executive Council members, members of the judging panel and their immediate family members.

DO NOT WAIT. The contest closes at 11:59 p.m. February 28, 2017 US Pacific Standard Time. All entries must be submitted electronically to FEZANA by email at [logo@fezana.org](mailto:logo@fezana.org) Late submissions will not be considered.

The prize for the winning entry is US \$501. The winner(s) will be announced at the unveiling of the logo at the FEZANA 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala in Houston on Saturday April 29, 2017

For inquiries, clarifications, questions or comments email

**Arzan Sam Wadia**, Vice-President, FEZANA at [vp@fezana.org](mailto:vp@fezana.org) Website: <https://fezana.org/logodesign/>



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## Zoroastrian Association of California, Orange Inauguration of Atash Kadeh



Six years after the Zoroastrian Association of California Center was opened, the dream of having a prayer hall was finally turned into reality. A unique building in many ways was completed and a long-awaited celebration was about to begin.

At 9:00 am on a beautiful sunny morning on Sunday, November 13, 2016, Roj Mahrespand, Mah Khordad, the beautiful edifice was opened for the use of the community and their guests. The building was sanctified for 48 hours by prayers offered by **Mobeds Zarrir and Zerkxis Bhandara**.

The morning of the 13<sup>th</sup> witnessed the beautiful Atash Kadeh decorated inside and out with festive torans and balloons with community members dressed in their finery of daglis and garas/saris awaiting the ribbon cutting ceremony. To the sounds of a joyous rendition of "Chhaiye Hame Zarathosti" the ribbon was ceremoniously cut by 2 couples together – **Arda-e-Viraf and Hootoxi Minocherhomjee and Sohrab and Sharon Charna**. The very first Boi ceremony was then performed by Mobed Zarrir Bhandara, (photo page 8) followed by a Hama Anjuman Machhi and a Jashan of 6 kardas was performed by 12 Ervads of the community.(photo page 8) Since the hall could only accommodate about 100 guests, arrangements were specially made to stream the entire proceedings live in the main Arjani Hall of the center where the overflow were seated. After the jashan people made their individual offering of sandalwood and lit tea lights followed by chasni and refreshments.

The Felicitation ceremony took place in the Arjani Hall. **Perinne Medora**, Vice President of ZAC welcomed the audience of 250 present in the Hall and emceed the proceedings. The event started with beautiful songs cutely





sung by 13 Zarathosti tiny tots, directed by Houtoxi Contractor, which got a standing ovation from all present.

FEZANA president, **Mr. Homi D. Gandhi** who now resides in California addressed the congregation and congratulated ZAC on this great achievement. He mentioned that Fezana encourages all Zoroastrian Associations worldwide to have a prayer Hall constructed for the use of their members and to keep the flame of our noble religion alive and well.

**Mobed Zarrir Bhandara** read out a congratulatory message from **Dasturjee Dr. Firoze Kotwal** and talked about the importance of fire and prayers in the lives of Zarthushtis

everywhere.

President of ZAC-LA, **Tehmi Damania** then felicitated all involved in the creation of the Atash Kadeh: the **Architect Sohrab Charna, Feridoun Ghostasbi, a Zarathosti Builder (NIPA Construction) and various other individuals like Firdosh Mehta who was responsible in getting the Aalat of the Jalna Agiary, India and Ervad Kobad Zarolia, Ex-President of the NAMC who guided ZAC on what a true Atash Kadeh should have. Major donors like Arda and Houtoxi Minocherhomjee and key persons involved like Tehemtan Arjani were also mentioned and acknowledged.**

The celebrations were followed by a delicious parsi lunch of Dhan Dar, Kolimi-no patio, Sali murghi and lagan-nu-custard all prepared by community volunteers and cooked by **Bomi Patel** (past FEZANA President) in the new role of Master chef (in photo right below, second from right wiping hands) Thank you Bomi and Binu for being such a great help and making this possible for us.

At the end of the day every member of ZAC had one single thought ... Our Atash Kadeh is finally complete and how proud we are of our community's achievement.  
**Report by Tehmi Damania, President of ZAC-LA**







**Thursday 4/27/2017**

**Pre-AGM Activities**

9:00 am WZCC Regional Meeting

7:00pm pre-AGM FIRES Exhibit and Dinner

**Friday 4/28/2017**

9:00am – 5:00pm  
**FEZANA AGM**

7:00 PM FEZANA Showcase Dinner

**Saturday 4/29/2017**

9:00am – 5:00pm  
**FEZANA AGM**

7:00 PM Gala Dinner celebrating FEZANA's 30<sup>th</sup> & ZAH Legacy Scholarship's 10<sup>th</sup>

**Sunday 4/30/2017**

AGM continues until 1:00 pm

**RSVP BY MARCH 15, 2017**

**REGISTER ONLINE AT**

**OR CONTACT FEZANA SECRETARY, Percy Master at**

<http://zah.org/?event=fezana-agm>

[percymmaster@gmail.com](mailto:percymmaster@gmail.com)

**More details coming in the FEZANA Bulletins**

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Please Note: Rooms will be available for Wednesday, April 26 check in.

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# WORKING TOWARDS AN EQUAL SOCIETY

## Historical Background

GUEST EDITOR ZERBANOO GIFFORD

When Dolly Dastoor, asked me to write this editorial and to bring together some remarkable women to write articles on the status of our sex, I just said yes.

I believe my feminism comes from our prophet Zoroaster, who was the first true feminist. He expected men and women to be equally responsible for their own thoughts and actions. Women had to take control of their lives as there would be a day of judgement when they would have to be accountable. They couldn't say 'my father and husband decided for me'. They had to be proactive for the good and be able to tell Ahura Mazda that they have left the world a better place than the one they had inherited.

The world I was born into was very static and women were the forgotten sex. We were valued, if at all, on our looks and sweetness of nature. We were expected to keep a comfortable home and our husband's bed warm. Lovely, but it did not acknowledge the violence that billions of women endured or the potential that was being crushed. Nor did it allow for the desire of women to actually take part in the public arena and be treated equally.

The modern situation is not much better. Women might be reaching positions of power, sitting on boards of companies, fronting television programmes and becoming Prime Ministers and Presidents. But they are still woefully underrepresented in public life. There is still horrendous violence against women, trafficking, honour killings, bonded labour, low pay, low expectations of women's achievements and gender stereotyping as even portrayed in video games. Today it is more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in modern conflicts. Women are raped every 14 seconds in South Africa and over half of rapes worldwide are still not reported. In 31 states in the USA rapists have legal permission to claim for child visitation rights. Females foetuses are aborted because boys are still valued more highly than girls. Three million girls suffer from sickening genital mutilation. Two million are victims of sex trafficking. The terrible genocide, rape and slavery of Yazidis girls is a modern horror story. I could carry on; my husband says I should have been the Minister for Women's Complaints! I tell him women have a lot to complain about.

There's no doubt that things have improved for women in my lifetime, and those who are gifted will always



shine once they conquered their self doubt. But I am concerned about the billions of women who have been silenced, forgotten and are unable to really express their potential. They still need champions of change. Whenever I am asked to speak to the young people at the ASHA Centre in Gloucestershire, which I founded for their empowerment, I remind them that a great deal of talent is lost to the world for the want of a little courage. The world is changed by courageous people.

I believe there are different ways of being a courageous change maker. There are those who are busy changing the narrative of our present world, whether in science, arts or social, economic, political thinking. Others are busy in small 'change laboratories', trying out new values and ways of living in organisations, NGOs and communities which will one day hopefully have an impact on the wider world. The third group are changing the existing structures, mainstreaming revolutionary ideas in society at large. To put it simply for us Zoroastrians, whose DNA has been tuned from ancient times for transformative action, we can



# WORKING TOWARDS AN EQUAL SOCIETY

## Historical Background

- 1) change our world by challenging outdated assumptions of how things should be.
- 2) try out new things in small ways, for instance in the home or places of work like the ASHA Centre, where we practice community and sustainable living.
- 3) infiltrate the system, which is often sadly corrupt, and try to introduce new understandings, meaningful change and certainly more kindness without getting contaminated ourselves in the process.

I state these things because I feel that it is important to know where you are making conscious change and that each way has a value in the whole. I think women have a head start in change making, simply because we have recently entered the power system without too much past baggage. We can more easily make a fresh start and embrace the much longed for values of creativity and compassion. We also have an innate understanding of community and an obvious stake in the future through our families.

The women who have written in this edition of the Fezana Journal are all change makers in their own right.

Our own **Shahin Bekhradnia** of WZO fame has written a thought provoking article on if women are really the weaker sex?. Shahin for me is a true Zoroastrian warrior. Bold and brilliant.

My gifted friend **Professor Alison Donnell** is an example of the first kind of change maker. Her life has revolved around her family, writing and her teaching. Through the influence she has had on her readers and students, she is a globally acknowledged, change maker. Her fascinating article on whether literature can make a better place for women, highlights our own **Bapsi Sidhwa**, as well as Egyptian feminist

**Nawal El Saadawi**, both of whom have stayed with me and influenced my views on the real experience of women subjected to disregard and humiliation. As Professor Donnell said, they use literature to tell a story to awaken our awareness of gender injustice. But that is not a guarantee the world will be a better place. We also need those who translate these narratives into action, as our prophet Zoroaster advised.

Someone who has done this is in full measure is the inspirational **Dhun Adenwalla** and her eldest daughter **Dinaz** who was born deaf. Through their joint courage they have changed the way that the deaf are educated

and are seen by others. Dinaz, in her role as a head mistress of a school in New York and advisor to the politicians in America, is to me a great change maker.

Another Zoroastrian who works in a 'change laboratory' is **Meher Banaji**. I have seen her quietly in action, guiding and championing the blind in Mumbai. She changes lives for the better.

**Jeroo Roy**, a talented artist and another dear Zoroastrian friend of mine, challenges violence against women through her art, which is used by Amnesty International and the Metropolitan Police to illustrate the reality for millions of women in a creative, nonviolent way. Her passion for equality is infectious.

Another woman who helped changed the system was the late **Avabai Wadia**. She founded the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the Family Planning Association of India to promote sexual health and family planning. I met her at a lecture on Zoroastrianism and we talked about one of the greatest issues women faced today, the need to decide the size of their family and to realise the impact this has on our ecology, economy and emotional wellbeing.

Someone in the third category of change makers is my dearest friend and honorary Zoroastrian **Baroness Jan Royall**. Jan was the Leader of the House of Lords and is someone who has infiltrated the system at the highest level! Jan is a remarkable role model for a whole generation of political women that follow her.

Another political friend of mine is the formidable **Lesley Abdela** who has dedicated her life to the empowerment of women. She will go down in history having set up the '300 Group' and campaigning for equal numbers of women in parliament and public life. Today she champions the need for women to be present when peace initiatives are resolved. As she says there is a parallel universe where formal hierarchies of men rule and women are side-lined. One of the main obstacles preventing women becoming equal partners is a lack of bold leadership and commitment from men in power.

The acclaimed historian **Dr. Kusoom Vadgama** is another admired friend whose pioneering research was instrumental in highlighting many outstanding Indians who had been written out of European history. My favourite is the Indian freedom fighter **Madame Bhikaji Cama**. She died at the Parsee General Hospital in Mumbai on August 13, 1936 in isolation. The leadership of the Indian congress party did not pay homage to her extraordinary life and Gandhiji did





# WORKING TOWARDS AN EQUAL SOCIETY

## Historical Background

not shed a tear for the loss of the greatest Indian women warrior since Rani of Jhansi. Her own Zoroastrian community sighed a sense of relief that she was no longer causing havoc with her speeches and unconventional behaviour.

I am fascinated by Bhikaji because she broke all the rules, and publicly stated that she had no faith in the men that dominated the Indian congress who only wanted to plead, petition and pray to the British for independence. She refused to be cowed by social mores, and those that insisted she should stay at home and be a good little wife. She was determined to see a free India. She believed her life was for something heroic and not just to be filled with tea parties and gossip. She sacrificed her own wellbeing for the millions of Indians who were deprived of their freedom. Her photo hangs in the Indian Parliament and is featured on a postage stamp, but her own Zoroastrians have never really claimed her. (see page 51)

Another Zoroastrian freedom fighter that I both love and

admire and am fortunate to know is the extraordinary **Frene Ginwala**. Like Madame Cama she came from a wealthy Parsee family and could have spent her life in luxury. Instead she fought apartheid in her South Africa and became its symbol abroad. She is a modern day heroine of mine, as well as millions who hail her courage, brilliance and selflessness.

I think that Madame Cama's famous quote '*Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God*' applies to all who claim to be feminist freedom fighters. Throughout my life I have been blessed with having worked with and interacted with some of the world's most inspirational, dynamic women. Women who are proud to claim their feminism and their own power. All these women have one thing in common: Each in their unique way, have been conscious change makers. They have been an inspiration not just to me, but to millions of others, opening up new horizons and challenging the way we accept inequalities. I'm in no doubt that, even though they are women, on the Day of Judgement their life's work will merit some attention!

*Born in 1950, **Zerbanoo Irani Gifford** spent the first four years of her life in India with her paternal grandmother before moving to London, England, where her parents Bailey and Kitty Irani had a boutique hotel. From a young age, she was described as both friendly and headstrong, once running away from boarding school with a group of friends. She married an English law student Richard Gifford, and had two sons. Her brush with politics was accidental in 1981 but in 1982, after months of grassroots campaigning, and facing racial slurs, Zerbanoo was elected as the Liberal councillor of the Harrow Park constituency by a margin of five votes – the first non-white woman to ever win such an election.*

*She was chair of the Community Relations Panel for the Liberal party in 1984 and the only female member of the panel. In 1988 she wrote her first book *The Golden Thread: Asian Experiences of Post-Raj Britain*, determined to create a bigger platform for Asian women. By 1990 she was seen as a threat to her male contemporaries who were not used to seeing strong women and was elbowed out of politics. After more than fifteen years in politics, Zerbanoo decided to change and dedicate herself to projects. The formation of the ASHA foundation to build an intercultural, multi-faith centre where people could celebrate their differences and rejoice in their similarities was one such very successful project.*

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### OP-ED EDITORIAL

#### Stepping Off The Corporate Ladder

In the United States, women make up over 50% of the population, earn almost 60% of all undergraduate and between 45% and 48% of all of masters, law and medical degrees. Women also control a whopping 80-85% of *all* consumer spending in America. That's a lot of power in the hands of women. Right?

Not even close. Within the Fortune 500, fewer than 15% of corporate executives and 5% of CEOs are women. Fewer than 17% of corporate board seats are occupied by women. Fewer than 15% of equity partners at the top 200 law firms are women. And even though women make over 80% of consumer spending choices, fewer than 3% of advertising creative directors are women.

In other words, the media image, buying choices and, yes, even men still overwhelmingly control the net worth of women. Is it because women at the helm are bad for business? On the contrary, a recent Catalyst study found that Fortune 500 companies that retained at least three women on their boards for a sustained period saw 84% higher returns on sales, 60% higher return on capital and 46% higher returns on equity, than similarly-sized companies with no female directors. So why aren't women climbing corporate ladders at nearly the same rates as men? And if women are good for business, why aren't men helping them do so? In large part, the answer is because of unconscious biases in how women are perceived and promoted.

A large percentage of women drop out of the corporate race because they feel unappreciated, undervalued and treated less favorably than men. And because there are so few women role models in the United States, the road to the top is unmapped, full of landmines and torturous. Women are judged based on the men who went before them. Therefore, they are often limited to the binary options of being more male than the men, or "too female," to succeed. Either way, their leadership styles are pounced upon, criticized, dissected, and largely condemned. As Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg points out, women are considered either too soft, or too tough, and it is impossible to strike a balance. They are expected to be at once approachable, but not easy; talkative, but not chatty; assertive, but not that dreaded b-word; accommodating, but not a pushover; consensus-seeking, yet decisive; competent or likeable, but not both; the list of schizophrenic tendencies goes on and on. Men have no such limitations.

Considering these biases, corporate women often have to walk a razor-thin line between being heard and being condemned (speak up; but softly; contribute to the meeting; but don't take over, the list goes on). When women don't



NARGES KAKALIA





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speak, they are unlikely to succeed. But when they *do* choose to speak, they often are not heard. In fact, women find their ideas being interrupted, spoken over, condescended to or simply appropriated by the men in the room. Social scientists have documented these biases in politics, the law, big business and medicine. And in the context of recognizing the problem, emerged the critical practice of naming the problem – albeit in feminist slang. There is now a term for almost every gendered transgression in the corporate conference room -- women being chronically interrupted (“maninterrupted”); having their ideas ignored and then appropriated by men (“bropropriated”); and having important ideas explained to them condescendingly by men who most likely know less about the idea than the woman (“mansplained”).

Until there are sufficient women in positions of power to call attention to these issues, mansplaining, bropropriating and maninterrupting will continue to go unchecked. Most culprits (bros) are not even remotely conscious of making the offensive assumptions that keep women from succeeding. Decisions to promote women and men are similarly inconsistent and suffer from biases as well. Joan Williams, Distinguished Professor of Law at UC Hastings, points out that women are promoted after they’ve established a substantial record of accomplishment of being able to perform the better job; while men are promoted because they are perceived as having the potential to succeed in the future. This is a function of women being presumed incompetent until proven otherwise, while men are presumed competent until they mess up. What’s more, “women’s mistakes tend to be noticed more and remembered longer, but women’s successes tend to be attributed to luck,” says Williams. Put a different way, the assumption is that “he’s skilled; she’s lucky.”

Finally, no piece on gender bias would be complete without a note about the enormous emphasis placed on women’s appearance. In the 2016 election, Hillary Clinton’s hair (style and color), makeup (or lack thereof) and her pantsuits (labeled everything from “frumpy” to “ugliest outfit in human history”) were discussed and debated *ad nauseum*. Not once did the media pounce in the same way on the appearance or apparel of President Obama, Bernie Sanders or Donald Trump. This obsession with a woman’s appearance is not limited to politics. In 1994, a young prosecutor landed the case of her life in a courtroom in southern California. Instead of focusing on the quality of her oral advocacy, the press mercilessly skewered her for her haircut, her makeup and her “off-the-rack” suits. Over twenty years later, Marcia Clark (OJ Simpson’s prosecutor) *still* hears near-constant commentary about her appearance in that courtroom. Yet no one ever mentions (or likely remembers) the male defense counsel’s appearance from the same case.

In light of some of these biases, it comes as no surprise that women have trouble staying the corporate course. While there are many other, varied and complicated reasons why women don’t keep their foot on the corporate accelerator (varying degrees of ambition, the need to prioritize family care, contentment with less responsibility, etc.), the fact remains that in addition to hard work and intelligence, it takes very thick skin and a lot of resilience to become a high-powered woman in corporate America. The fact also remains, that when women reach the upper rungs of the ladder, everyone – the company, its shareholders, and communities (including men) – benefits. Therefore, it is incumbent on all of us to help more women reach the top and to check the unconscious biases that prompt us to judge people by differing and frankly discriminatory standards, often without realizing it. Women CEOs like PepsiCo’s Indra Nooyi already have very full day jobs; but they nevertheless work hard in their free (hah!) time to empower other women to succeed. But most corporations don’t have a Nooyi at the helm. Until more companies follow PepsiCo’s suit in providing meaningful role models and pathways to success, stereotypical and harmful perceptions of women will continue to keep some women from making meaningful progress for reasons entirely devoid of merit.

**Narges Kakalia** is a partner at a corporate law firm, practicing commercial litigation in New York. She lives in South Orange, New Jersey with her husband Marc, sons Cyrus and Zane, and dog Vincent.



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## THE EGALITARIAN IDEAL OF ZOROASTRIANISM

ERVAD Dr. JEHAN BAGLI

Gender equality is firmly rooted in the teachings of Prophet Zarathushtra. This egalitarian ideal of recognition of women as “men’s partner in the common struggle against evil” (M.Boyce History of Zoroastrianism, Vol I, pg 308, fn 83) has served to sustain the dignified status of women in Zarathushti community.

This message of equality is clearly defined in the Holy hymns of the Prophet as well as in post Gathic compositions. We notice in Yasna *Haptanhaiti* the words *nar* meaning ‘man’ and *nairi* meaning women are assembled four times in Ys 35.6, 41.2, 37.3 and 39.2.

One of the most pertinent example in the Holy hymns of the Prophet is that of Ys 30.2 when Zarathushtra asks of the entire mankind to judge for themselves in following words:

***sraotâ gêushâish vahishtâ avaênatâ sùcâ mananghâ  
âvarenâ vîcithahyâ narêm narem hvah’yâi tanuyê  
parâ mazê yânghô ahmâi nê sazdyâi baodañtô paitî.***

Hear the best with your ears  
and decide with the strength of your will.  
Let each person judge for themselves and choose wisely.

The profound stress on the equality of gender is demonstrated when the learned savant Taraporewala addresses the first three *Amesha Spentas Vohu Manah, Asha Vahishta* and *Kshshthra-vairyâ* as male and the other three *Aramaiti, Haurvatat* and *Ameretat* as female. (Gatha I.J.S. Taraporewala 1962 pg 73-76)

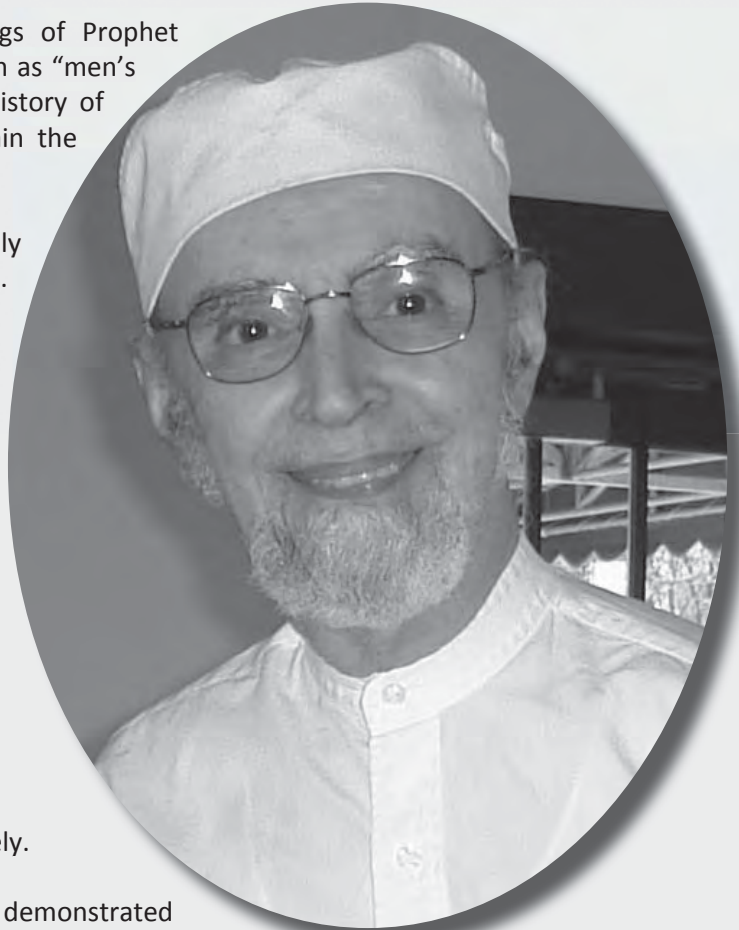
Of the three Holy Manthras that have come down to us from the time of the Prophet we notice in the prayer of *Yengeh Hatam* the last line clearly addresses both the genders when it says;

***mazdâo ahurô vaêthâ ashât hachâ  
yâonghâmchâ tâscâ tâoscâ yazamaide***

Mazda Ahura recognizes the excellence  
by reason of Righteousness  
Both these men and women do we revere.

***Atha jamyât*** yatha âfrînâmi.

**Ervad Dr. Jehan Bagli** is a retired scientist, an ordained priest, a member of the International Board of World Zoroastrian Organization (WZO) and president of WZO Canada. He has lectured worldwide and written extensively on Zoroastrianism and related topics.







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### FEMALE, AS DIVINE NATURE, NOT GENDERED-CONSTRUCT

DR NEVILLE PANTHAKI

The sociology of a subject, examines individual relationships and structures within society. The philosophy of a subject, examines the epistemology of how knowledge is manufactured and the inspirations which inform worldview. It is important to note, that the history of a subject is a combined study of these and other contexts.

I begin with this because it is extremely relevant to distinguish between theory and practise within religious traditions. Theories are the inspiration of one or a few individuals regarding ideal-types, meaning how they believe society should be. However, the shape of societies represents collective behaviour, in pursuit of politics, commerce, and many other realms of activity.

Regarding the position of women within Zoroastrianism, we must also take into account chronology. Are we asking 'what is' or 'what was'? Moreover, it is important to note that there are multiple pasts, as in 'was, when?'

Such a question also betrays our contemporary logic regarding how our world view and behaviour is governed by absolutes of category. We seek to investigate everything in the past, and to know it, within the strict confines of our presuppositions regarding value and importance. We tend to project current categories of importance within our society and its politics, backward through time.

However, an examination of the philosophy of Zoroastrianism will indicate that there is no 'place' for women. I mean that if one attempts to locate a specific gendered construct, the category of 'women', one will not find it within most textual sources. **This is because the philosophy of Zoroastrianism appreciates the female as part of divine nature.** The female is considered an expression of the multiplicity that is a core feature of creation. Meaning, that the female is not an 'other to maleness', or an accessory or extension to principle male form.

The **Bundahishn** (West translation, [avesta.org](http://avesta.org)) which is one account of creation, indicates this clearly. Animal pairs, together male and female, are born concurrently (chapter 14:4). Similarly, man and woman are birthed from the primordial plant/tree of life simultaneously:

*...Matro [Mashye] and Matroyao [Mashyane] grew up from the earth in such a manner that their arms rested, behind on their shoulders (dosh), and one joined to the other they were connected together and both alike. And the waists of both of them were brought close and so connected together that it was not clear which is the male and which the female, and which is the one whose living soul (nismo) of Ohrmazd is not away. As it is said thus: Which is created before, the soul (nismo) or the body? And Ohrmazd said that the soul is created before, and the body after, for him who was created; it is given into the body that it may produce activity, and the body is created only for activity;' hence the conclusion is this, that the soul (ruban) is created before and the body after. (Bundahishn, 15:2-4)*

The passage above enlightens us to important aspects of philosophy: man and woman are inseparable; man and woman are indistinguishable with regard to their worth; man and woman are embodied variants of divinity; there is no difference in character or form of the soul of man and woman.

Moreover, it is extremely important that these accounts are from the **Bundahishn**. The Bundahishn is a compilation of various source materials throughout Zoroastrian history. It therefore represents an overview of multiple eras of Zoroastrian philosophy. However, even more important is that the Bundahishn was collated in the period after the Arab conquest of Persia. The Bundahishn therefore, is also an expression of sociocultural spiritual resistance to the imposition of Islamic monotheism and its accompanying reductionism and categorization.

It is within Western tradition monotheistic philosophies, that one finds clear and repeated distinctions between male and female, and a clear preference for male as 'pure', 'best', and 'godly' creation. Accompanying this worldview are strict divisional categories, and a single (Male) creator, who is solely responsible for everything, without aid, equal, or opposition. It is clear how sociopolitical paternalism, patriarchy, singular truth, intolerance, and hegemony may derive from such a philosophy of dominion. By contrast, Zoroastrianism represents a cosmology of reciprocity and interdependence between individuals, their environment,



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and their creator who has many facilitators.

M.N. Dhalla in *Zoroastrian Civilization (1922)* notes that women were central to both family, and ritual life. The most important fire was the family hearth. The hearth functioned as a ceremonial object through which connection and commemoration with divinity could occur. However, the hearth was simultaneously the instrument of cooking and warmth for the residents of the home. It was the job of the woman of the home to cover the fire when the family retired for the night. Upon waking, it was her job to revive the fire as well (Dhalla, 1922, p.66).

One should note that Zarathustra's exaltation of fire as the 'son of Ahura Mazda', meant that the woman was functioning in a capacity as 'nurse' and 'elder' to divinity. Rather than invested with authority to conduct ceremony before the sacred fire, perhaps an alternate deconstruction of the male is someone requiring blessing and protection from the fire to which he paid ceremonial offering.

In *Kianian times*, Dhalla notes that women were companions. Women did not wear veils or other forms of clothing specifically for minimizing the representation of their biology, or for the sake of modesty. Women were part of religious functions and honoured for their opinions of what they "believed to be true and good" (Dhalla, 1922, p.74; Yasna 35:6).

In addition to domestic chores, which were not considered either lesser in importance or conducted by those with less strength, capability and intelligence; women owned and managed property (within Denkard vol.15 and 16; quoted by Dhalla, p.74). Women were also allowed to conduct legal action and act as executors of property (*ibid.*). In contemporary terms, women were 'legal persons' with 'active-citizenship rights'. Women could charge their spouse with cruelty and seek material redress (Denkard vol.15, book 8). The testimony of a woman was considered equal to that of a man. Women could become judges and preside over males (Denkard vol.15, book 21).

Marriage of children could not be conducted without the consent of mothers. Women also performed their own homage, ritual sacrifices, and "we gather from the sacred books that on certain occasions they acted as officiating priestesses" (Dhalla, 1922, p.74 quoting Denkard vol. 16, book 8). ***In prayers of commemoration and remembrance, names of heroic, benevolent and righteous females are noted alongside men.***

The distinction of gender categories within *Avesta* grammar is markedly different from our contemporary understanding. A cursory glance at the several attempts to literally as well as figuratively translate our scriptures, will yield an illustration of the complexity of Avesta in general. This arises not just from our detachment to an ancient language, but from our contemporary detachment from the cosmology and worldview of Avestan composers.

Simply put, those living in a time when *Avesta* was spoken, believed certain things about their environment and relationships to nature, divinity, and each other, which were self-evident enough to be represented within patterns of speech and expression. *Avesta* shares affinity, as a framework for the expression of global indigenous cosmologies, where gender is neither a category of separation nor a diminutive grammatical element.

Hence, contemporary translators of Avesta are not only dealing with an alien language, but alien concepts. For although Avesta is 'ours', we approach it from our association with languages and sociopolitical histories which shape our gaze of Avesta. We have difficulty for example in denoting which deities and what nouns are female and male. But our approach to the investigation presupposes that there must be such an association, or indeed, a singular classification as either male or female.

***Our scriptures refer to women as partners to men, in a common struggle, against evil. In certain instances, the words 'man' and 'woman' are written from an English perspective in Avesta as 'manwoman' which would indicate the compounding of terms to create concept.*** The Bundahishn also does this in many instances, for example, stating that Dog or Bear was created. Grammatically and emphatically, this means that male and female are equal parts of a single creation, emanating simultaneously.

Here's a reference, for Gujarati speakers. You might say that you know something "thoru-ganu", which would translate in English as "(a little)-(a lot)". This is used as a colloquialism to express 'somewhat', but in fact expresses a concept that one knows a lot of a little bit of something. The literal English translation does not immediately make sense to us as an inherent concept. We are prone to ask, do you know 'a lot' or 'a little'? Depending on who is translating Avesta, 'manwoman' appears as 'man or woman' as well as 'man and woman'. I would posit that it might more accurately convey 'humanity' or 'beings'.





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In this way, gender is a construct of language, after which within a medium of expression the concept of separation is reinforced. And language is used to transmit legal codes and scripture.

In Persian history, there have been tales of Empresses and female warriors. The latter, it has been claimed, are the inspiration for what the Greeks termed the “Amazons”. One can only imagine that from the Greek (Western) perspective this was not only ‘un-natural’ but ‘mis-conduct’. Such thinking is not too far a leap towards the codification of women as the source of the fall of man, the root of evil, or the personifications of temptation.

By contrast, Zoroastrian scriptures express the idea that women are both capable warriors, and required combatants, if evil is to be defeated. ***That women are intellectual and spiritual equals is manifest by investing and celebrating females via the navjote ceremony.*** Having said this much, it begs the question: “then how do we explain other textual, scriptural, and tradition based citations, which provide argument for misogyny and gender discrimination within Zoroastrianism?”

There are several reasons for this. “**Zoroastrianism**” was created during the **Sasannian** period (circa 225 - 640 CE). Like all other accounts in history when state and church work to justify each other, officialdom was accompanied by patriarchy. **The Vendidad** for example (the Laws) was compiled during the Sassanian period.

The Arab invasion further served to remove Persian women from civic life. This was accompanied by the customary attire which women living within the Caliphate were expected to adhere to. Without public guarantees of dignity, women were no longer citizens or persons under law, but subject to patrimony.

In India it was not Hindu emulation, but a siege mentality that is responsible for Parsis enforcing/creating/emphasizing aspects of Zoroastrian history that suited justification for their behaviour. One has only to compare contemporary immigrant settlements and self-ghettoization to understand the analogy.

During **British imperialism**, **Mazdayasni Daena** was re-cast as a Protestant fellow-traveller having ‘rationality’, an ‘iconoclast’ mentality, and ‘progressive’ tendencies. But the British were classist, and imperialism was hyper-masculine, and racist. Women and children were to be seen, not heard. Acculturation, when it is subversive or undertaken uncritically, erases memory and history. The stories we tell make a difference.

Persian women, Zoroastrian women everywhere, are the great-great-great...daughters of female-warriors, female-priests, empresses, and noble beautiful strong smart women who didn’t require Western modernity to give them equality.

*Dr. Panthaki has a Doctorate in Transnational Comparative History with a focus on Eurasian Studies and in International Development Education with a focus on South Asia. In addition he has a Master’s degree in History and Security Studies, a Bachelor of Education degree, and an undergraduate degree in Philosophy and Religion. Dr. Panthaki began his research in Zoroastrian Studies under the guidance of the late, Dr. Willard Oxtoby.*

### DR KHOSRO E MEHRFAR, APPOINTED TO THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA BOARD OF ENERGY AND EFFICIENCY

*Dr. Khosro E. Mehrfar has been appointed to the State of California Board on Energy & Efficiency, specifically on Renewable Energy & Solar Technology. The State Board covers the policy and procedure for qualifications of individuals and corporations in renewable energy and solar technology. The decisions of this board will be state-wide, for after finalization & approval by state authorities, it will be applied to all Counties and Cities within the State of California as a mandate. This is the first time a Zoroastrian has achieved this high level of success in any State which makes us all proud of Khosro.*

*Best wishes and much success to Khosro and the California Board on this critical and important task.*



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### WOMEN – ARE WE REALLY THE WEAKER SEX

Are women inherently weak in body and mind or is this a construct that has been foisted on to half of the human population by the other half?

Clearly the answer is not simple. For a start, the two ideas of body and mind have to be separated. Then we should ask if it is actually true that men have created this image of women to suit their own purposes as many “feminists” would argue?

Gender studies and anthropology departments are flourishing in different academic establishments around the world, so this short article is hardly going to provide the definitive answer. Nevertheless it may allow further reflection on the purpose and role played in society by gender, and we should not forget that in some societies there is recognition of not just two clear genders but also those rarely acknowledged liminal statuses that we nowadays call gender fluidity.

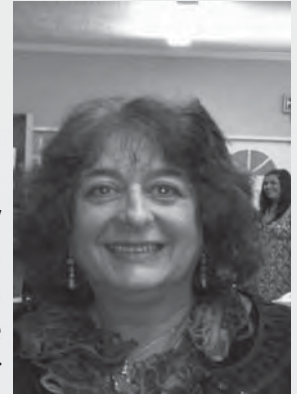
We are taught at school that prehistoric humans lived in caves and before the knowledge of agriculture became widespread (at the earliest around 7000 BC around Sumeria), food supplies were wholly dependent on the men hunting, fishing and foraging for edible matter, while the women were dedicated to child birth and rearing of the young.

The idea of the macho man creating animal traps and having to wrestle with wild boar and the like to bring home the food undoubtedly carries historical truth. The men took on the danger leaving the women in the safety of the caves to constantly get pregnant and give birth. And we should bear in mind that the women may have been shared by male partners as we really do not know for sure whether monogamy or pair bonding was a natural state of existence; though it is generally thought that once property ownership, inheritance and religion came into societal organisation, monogamy became established with few exceptions throughout the human race.

The material/physical dependency until recently of women on men for their survival and that of

#### SHAHIN BEKHRADIAN

their offspring is undisputed, and according to some, has led to an unhealthy economic reliance, for even successful career women may prefer to take up the role of the nurturing mother which comes to some more



naturally than pursuing a profession. Additionally, it happens to be a reality that men are stronger and where a dispute exists and cool discussion does not resolve the issue, brute force can impose an outcome in favour of the stronger partner. Sadly this method of settling issues is not confined to the past, but domestic violence is still very much part of everyday business within the legal system, and emotional and psychological bullying can be the less visible but equally manipulative form of controlling behaviour. It is a biological fact that women in face of a threat will try to appease, while men in face of a threat will become aggressive. The physical superiority of males over women can be used as a method of warfare as ISIS has cruelly but effectively shown in recent times.

The ability of women to give birth has exercised enormous fascination over men. This ability should not be underestimated nor understated since the survival of the human species is totally in the hands or rather the uterus of the women, and not all men at all times have wanted simply to treat women as vehicles for them to manipulate. Among the earliest testimonies for such fascination, we need only look at the statuettes scattered around Europe, whether it be the *Cucuteni cultures of Romania*, or the *Cycladic Islands of Greece* or the *fertility cults of Malta*, all of them dating back at least five if not fifteen millennia, to see how important women were considered to be. Each of these cultures produced outstanding statuettes of rotund and sometimes svelte women which are believed to demonstrate reverence and awe of the reproductive ability of women and probably represent some sort of fertility cult. So clearly women wielded power and fascination over men even in





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those remote times.

The power of women to inspire admiration and physical lust or love in men and to cause them rivalry to compete for the favours of women by preening, dressing and showing physical prowess through dancing, sports and superiority in strength, can be likened to the animal world where the male species have to be more beautiful and dance to win the favours of their female counterpart. And in classical literature, mainly written by men and therefore from their perspective (but with occasional exceptions such as the love poems of the poetess Sappho from Lesbos), women are constantly upheld as paragons of beauty, such that they have the power to launch 1000 ships (Iliad re Helen) or in the legends of the Persian Shahnameh, Khosrow's perfect Shirin.

So we find that throughout history men have used their physical and economic power over women to control them, but also to worship and revere them. The degree and balance of these two attitudes tend to vary from culture to culture, but in "Western" civilisation, the power of women to influence their public status was significantly lagging behind men until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, giving men serious advantages over them in virtually every sphere of a female's existence, and legitimised by laws made by men to benefit men. Pericles in his 5<sup>th</sup> C BC Funeral Speech, immortalised by Thucydides stated that the highest praise for a woman was not to be spoken about, and the cultural values of modesty and shame, thrust upon women throughout the world are only slowly being challenged and shaken off. Islam perhaps embodies the subservience of women to men most profoundly, and it is in these societies where men have so much to lose, that women are only slowly gaining small freedoms such as the right to drive, or not to walk 4 steps behind their spouses, or to uncover their faces. The threat of physical violence and destitution underlies the fear to challenge such controls.

Many men, if not all, are perfectly capable of affection, respect and empathy with their female counterparts. Women in the west have certainly achieved phenomenal progress since Victorian times.

So might it simply be a matter of inculcating young boys with respect and understanding to minimise their reliance on brute force? Is this something achievable?

We know from old texts that in Zoroastrian Iran we used to have female priests (now a revived practice in Iran) and the Gatha texts (c.1300 BCE) explicitly refer to both men and women followers of Zoroaster as equal helpers (which is highly unusual in ancient texts which tend to only use the masculine pronoun). Women have always enjoyed equal status to men in inheritance rights, management of the household budget and decisions about education and we have had Zoroastrian queens in pre-Islamic Iranian history. European travellers from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards also give examples which demonstrate that the status of Zoroastrian women was high. Boys have been raised in households where women are shown respect and therefore they do not normally witness mistreatment or coercive behaviour by men – of course not ALL men refrain from the application of brute force but on the whole this is frowned on as a societal value. Is this fanciful or possibly true?

Parsis are Zoroastrians who derive their values and philosophy from those given in the Gathas. So how can Parsis justify the illogical and bizarre deviation from our cultural values and norms whereby women who marry out are denied access to all religious facilities as are their children, in contrast to the males who do the same?

This one fact alone vexes me so much that I can only conclude that so called Zoroastrians who uphold the correctness of this aberrant mindset have simply not grasped what it is to be Zoroastrian. It seems they would rather congratulate themselves in pursuing lengthy rituals instead of reflecting on the enlightened approach found in Zoroastrianism. Any thinking Zoroastrian must realise that women in a Zoroastrian context should be accorded the same respect and the same rights as men – and if we were to search out the people insisting on differentiating between the two genders, we will not be surprised to find that it is men who control and decide such matters.

Coincidentally with the writing of this article, four years after the 2012 ruling from the Gujarat High



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Court which came up with this un Zoroastrian imposition (reflecting *de facto* practice by the orthodoxy) , it has been announced that the practice is being examined in the Indian Supreme Court under the Special Marriages Act 1954. This Act allows couples whose religious affiliations are different to each retain their own faith. It was described as India's first tentative step towards a uniform civil law.

For those concerned about dwindling numbers of Parses, a favourable verdict will help to stem the drop in the population.

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### A ROLLERCOASTER RIDE: WOMEN'S ROLE IN ZARATHUSHTI HISTORY

**FARISHTA MURZBAN DINSHAW**

"Gender role" refers to society's expectations of the way men and women look, talk, and act. They are influenced by factors such as environment, economics, political, geography. This article highlights interesting facts about Zarathushti women's role over the last 4000 years.

#### THE KIANIANS 2000 BCE – 700 BCE

Zarathushtra is believed to have lived during King Vishtasp's reign, thus this era is reflective of the way he accepted, and promoted the role of women. Zarathushtra's mother, Dughdov, his wife, Havovi, and the reigning queen, Hutoxi, embodied women of that time.

#### ROLE IN THE FAMILY

Although the position of wife and mother was highly considered, they were also seen as a helpmates and had autonomy. Marriages as a rule were contracted at fifteen years, after both parties consented.

#### ROLE IN SOCIETY

Women held positions of power. It was said that "a woman learned in law is to be preferred, in the office of a judge, to a man ignorant of it." (Dhalla, page 85). They participated in ceremonial rights, sometimes acting as

officiating priestesses. They moved about freely and unveiled.

#### ACHAEMENIANS 550 – 330 BCE

The Achaemenians created the first Persian Empire and were influenced by other cultures. It was a class-conscious society. The descendants of six chief families formed the nobility and enjoyed extraordinary privileges.

#### ROLE IN THE FAMILY

*Bundahishin*, a Pahlavi text compiled later in the Sassanian era, suggests that Darius invoked birth of sons. It is known that royalty and nobility practiced polygamy to produce numerous male heirs in case of premeditated or accidental death, and to forge alliances through marriages with the daughters of political allies. However, son preference was not overt in the larger population as the number of births of boys only slightly exceeds that of girls. The common people were generally monogamous.

#### ROLE IN SOCIETY

Upper class women were not permitted to move about







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freely or unaccompanied and went out veiled or in curtained litters. According to Strabo, a Greek traveler over 200 years after the end of the Achaemenian dynasty, Achaemenian noblewomen took pride in not sullyng their hands. However, Strabo's *Geographica* was based more on his readings and less upon his personal observations. Maria Brosius counteracted the impression of women depicted by Strabo and other Greek writers. In her book, *Women in Ancient Persia: 559-331 B.C.* she wrote, "We cannot overestimate the implications of the action royal and nobles wives could take. Their independence can be observed in the (Persepolis) Fortification texts. Royal women enjoyed a position which allowed them free disposition of the produce of their estates reflected in their ability to give their own orders to officials, to use their own seal and to employ their own bureaucratic staff to execute their affairs. These women had their own centers of manufacture and their own workforce and engaged the same officials as the kings" (page 199). For women of working classes, records indicate that male and female supervisors worked together and received similar amount of rations. Wages were not differentiated based on gender but on skill as the rations for unskilled women workers was one third less than men. Rental and ownership records also show that working women owned land and could own, sell or lease their properties.

### SASSANIANS - 224 CE - 651 CE

This era is considered by the Iranian people to be a highlight of their civilization, for there weren't many "Iranian" dynasties after the fall of the Achaemenian Empire about five hundred years earlier.

### ROLE IN THE FAMILY

There was a significant shift in women's autonomy and their place in the public sphere. Women were defined by their role as wives and mothers. An ideal woman was an ornament for her husband. The *Dinkard*, a compilation of texts written circa 9<sup>th</sup> century, says a wife was to be guided by her husband, did not have wisdom, and was not to be trusted with secrets. A husband could divorce his wife for disobedience or refusal to have sex with him, which was deemed a sin.

The *Rivayats*, a collection of letters between Iranian and Indian priests in the 1500s, indicate that a wife's primary obligation was to bear sons. Barrenness left her open to taunts and widows who had passed the child bearing age

were not encouraged to remarry. The *Book of Arda Viraf*, a Sassanian era book that narrates a fictional vision of heaven and hell (similar to Dante's *Inferno*) reflects the norms of the period - a mother who neglected to nurse her infant or hired a wet nurse, would be damned in hell to dig a hill with their breasts, place her breasts on a hot frying pan with her own hands, and be perpetually hungry and thirsty.

### ROLE IN SOCIETY

The effect of idealizing women as wives and mothers resulted in women disappearing from the labor force, the exception being slaves and domestic servants, and women who worked in agriculture. Even so, women worked for minimum wages with a promise of reward for their work in the hereafter. Women could not be a witness in the court of law, segregating their position to private space.

In glaring contrast, the Sassanians had two ruling queens, Pouron Dokht (photo below) and Azarme Dokht. Also, female warriors rode in the cavalry, fighting with bows, lances, and swords just like the male counterparts, and served in positions of power in the armies as well as governors of provinces. However, these women came from nobility.



Coin of Queen Pourondokht



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Parsi Woman circa 1860

### PARSIS IN INDIA circa 716 BCE - present

The Sassanian Empire was defeated by Arabs in 652 CE. Many Zarathushtis fled the persecution over land and by sea. A few refugee ships from Pars landed in Gujarat, India, and they came to be known as "Parsis".

### ROLE IN THE FAMILY

In the early years after the exodus, women's domain of activities continued to be constrained to the home, no doubt cemented by local norms. In 1884, Dosabhai Karaka wrote, "The highest ambition and most earnest wish of a Parsi girl is to obtain a good husband. When that object has been attained her position is assured and her happiness may be considered complete" (Vol.1, page 129). Strict purity laws, child marriages, a ban on remarriage of widows continued to keep women suppressed.

The status of women changed through access to British-influenced secular education, leading gradually to economic emancipation. Women began choosing careers over domesticity; by the 1980s close to twenty-five percent of the women remained unmarried. Even for those who married, family structures changed due to late-age marriages, fewer children, and increase in divorce rate. Remarriage after divorce or the death of a spouse is now common for both sexes.

### ROLE IN SOCIETY

Parsi women's entry into the workforce in the 20<sup>th</sup> century introduced them to unfettered social interactions with people of other faiths resulting in interfaith marriages. Guestimates suggest that one of four marriages amongst Parsis in Mumbai is an interfaith marriage. In many such cases, unlike a Parsi man who marries outside the fold, the woman is excluded from accessing community resources and her children are not accepted. The "acceptance" issue has created deep division in the community. In 2009, Mumbai priests, Khushroo Madon and Framroze Mirza were taken to court by the Bombay Parsi Panchayat for performing 'unreligious ceremonies'. They won, but as things stand, Parsi women in India continue to fight for equal rights on this issue.

### ZARATHUSHTIS IN IRAN 651 CE TO PRESENT

The Zarathushtis who remained in Iran after the Arab invasion faced varying degrees of religious oppression under the new rulers. This ranged from paying *jizya*, a special tax for non-Muslims to obtain certain privileges during the Ummayyads to violent persecution under the Qajar rule. There was a brief resurgence of favor during the Pahlavis in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, but in modern times many Zarathushtis have again fled to the West to escape religious oppression.

### ROLE IN THE FAMILY

The life of Zarathushtis under the Arabs was largely as second-class citizens with laws that prohibited them from drinking from public water sources, riding on horseback, receiving an inheritance, or even carrying an umbrella. This factored into paternalistic attitudes towards keeping the women inside the home.

### ROLE IN SOCIETY

The spread of Western culture and education at the end of the nineteenth century, spearheaded a change as women became a part of the public sphere. One example was the fight in the mid-1950s that led to women being able to vote in the community councils, the Anjomans. The first female members of the Anjoman in Tehran were La'l Jamshidiyān and Manizhe Shāhrokh. (see page 43) Full rights to participate in the councils were given to women in 1966. A lot of gains in women's rights were lost after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Women's choices, regardless of their faith, are closely regulated





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from subjects they can study in university to what they must wear in public. For instance, Zarathushti women are expected to observe Islamic codes of dress even when they are in their own sacred space like Peer e Sabz. These are legal requirements, punishable by fines or imprisonment for repeat offenders.

Yet, there has been a monumental change in women's roles. In a remarkable step-aside from millennia-old tradition, in 2011, the Anjoman-e-Mobedan [Council of Priests] in Tehran announced the initiation of eight Iranian women as mobedyars [female priests].

### CONCLUSION

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Zarathushtis from India, Iran and Pakistan immigrated to the West in great numbers creating diaspora communities. Zarathushti women in these communities share the same advantages in private and public spheres as men (at least as much as is possible in patriarchal societies).

The take-away from this article should be that the role of women is ever changing, impacted by external factors. Also, historical "facts" are based on observations and texts available to historians. Think about it – if a thousand years from now the only sources available to scholars would be tweets from Kim Kardashian and Donald Trump, what would be their opinion of the role of women in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century? If the *Dinkard* was upheld as a source for determining the role of Zarathushti women, they would all be in their rights to distance themselves from such "religious" texts. However, if one knows that it was compiled many centuries after Zarathushtra lived by several authors over a period of 600 years, it is easier to gauge its credibility. Fortunately, Zarathushti women have the fundamentals of which they can be justifiably proud. The *Gathas* testify that women were accorded social, moral and religious agency equal to that of men. Zarathushti women have come back full circle.

### SOURCES

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### THE BOOMERANG EFFECT.

DINA G. MCINTYRE.

The idea of whether or not menstruating women are spiritually unclean in our religion has been the subject of discussion in which historical facts are conspicuous by their absence. We have a lot of opinions, a lot of ancient-sounding words thrown about (many of which are not Avestan) but few facts in support of this tradition. Yes, we have such a tradition in Zoroastrianism. But no one seems to have examined when and how this idea came into being in the long history of our religion.

Over the centuries, the underlying idea has resulted in many different practices in dealing with this phenomenon. Today, in 'orthodox' and Ilm-i-khshnoom circles, a menstruating woman cannot attend religious ceremonies (because she is a spiritual pollutant). In 'liberal' circles, she may attend a ceremony -- so long as she does not touch anything of religious significance (because she is a spiritual pollutant) -- she cannot go up to the fire urn (afargan) to add sandalwood and incense to the fire, or touch its instruments or the ashes, or do any one of the things others are encouraged to do -- which naturally signals her 'condition' to everyone present. Many are embarrassed to publicly discuss this tradition, (while still enforcing it). But we can no longer ignore this ten-ton elephant in the room. We cannot continue to teach this tradition to our children and enforce it -- however quietly -- without hurting them and

ourselves, and failing to follow the path of the truth. We need to look it in the eye, and decide. Are menstruating women a source of spiritual pollution? - I can only tell you what our ancient texts say. -- with the best available evidence -- when this tradition arose, and on what it was based, so that each Zoroastrian community can make an informed decision on whether or not it wants to let this tradition go.

Our most ancient texts are the Avestan texts -- the oldest being the Gathas and later the Yasna Haptanghaiti (both composed in Old Avestan), then the other Yasnas, the Visperad, Yashts, Nyaishes, Gahs and Afrigans (composed in Younger Avestan (YAv.) -- just as today's English is different from older versions). These YAv. texts have been translated in *Sacred Books of the East* (SBE) Vols. 31, and 23, with the Avestan texts in Geldner's *Avesta*. None of them teach that a menstruating woman is spiritually unclean, nor prescribe exclusionary rules to avoid her spiritual 'pollution'.

So far as I am aware, the first mention of this idea occurs in the *Vendidad* (*Videvdad*), a text composed in what purports to be YAv. But scholars (who are linguists) have long since concluded that it was written after Avestan times, when our priests were no longer fluent in the Avestan language, because its Avestan is full of grammatical errors. *Zaehner* speaks of "the appalling



grammatical confusion that characterizes that ... work."<sup>1</sup> *Humbach* and *Faiss* mention in passing "...the well-known fact that the grammatical endings found in the *Videvdad* are notoriously doubtful..."<sup>2</sup> *Hintze* thinks the *Videvdad* (*Vendidad*) was composed in the post-Achaemenian period.<sup>3</sup>

So where does the *Vendidad* fit (time-wise), in the history of our religion? Zarathushtra's date is not precisely known. Estimates range from the earliest, around 6,480 B.C.E. to the latest around 589 B.C.E. Some linguists and writers think he lived around 1,000 B.C.E. or 1,700 B.C.E. or earlier. From Zarathushtra's date through the centuries of the Younger Avestan texts (which even then regarded him as very ancient) through the fall of the Achaemenian Empire around 331 B.C.E., we have a period of several centuries. There is no textual or other evidence that the religion considered menstruating women as spiritual pollutants, or practiced resulting exclusionary traditions during all those many centuries.

Then how did this idea come into being? Well, in some YAv. texts, we see the idea of cosmic dualism





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-- two uncreated Entities -- an all good God, in conflict with an all evil Devil (there is no Devil in the Gathas, except for interpretations personal to the translator). The Pahlavi text *Sikand Gumanig Vijar*, explains that if Ahura Mazda is all good (as He is in the Gathas), he cannot have created anything evil. Therefore (the ancients reasoned), there would have to be another creator of everything evil. And thus, was born the idea of the Devil -- an all evil Entity. In the Gathas, the only spiritual pollutants are things that are intrinsically 'evil', such as lies, cruelty, violence, anger, tyranny, bondage, murder, theft, harming, injuring, et cetera. In later Avestan texts, what is 'evil' was extended to anything that was harmful to man (although not intrinsically 'bad') -- wolves, disease, sickness, etc. and these 'evil' things were considered the creation of the all bad Entity -- the Devil. At the time of the *Vendidad*, the cause of menses was not understood, but in their experience bleeding was caused by harming someone, and the Devil was the source of all harm. So menstruation (which could not otherwise be explained) was thought to be caused by the Devil (harming the woman). How do I know this? Because the *Vendidad* and ancient commentaries say so. The following references to the *Vendidad* are from Darmesteter's translation in SBE Vol. 4, pp. 181 - 184. In Fargard 16.7, the question is asked, how much food should be brought to a menstruating woman (who is in isolation). The answer is that she should not be fed too much, because any strength she might gain from the food would strengthen the Devil

(who was causing her to bleed).

"How much food shall he bring to her? How much bread shall he bring?

(Only) two danares of long bread, and one danare of milk pap, lest she should gather strength." Fargard 16.7.

The Pahlavi Commentary explains,

" 'Soshyos says: For three nights cooked meat is not allowed to her, lest the issue shall grow stronger.' As the fiend is in her, any strength she may gain accrues to Ahriman." Darmesteter ft. 4.

There is a very lovely Avestan maxim repeated in Younger Avestan texts. It does not appear in SBE translations, but appears (in Avestan script), in identical form, in Geldner.<sup>4</sup>

aevo pantao yo ashahe  
vispe anyaesham apantam  
(There is) one path, that of  
truth, all others (are) non-  
paths,  
(my translation).

Under this teaching, a 'tradition' is nothing -- a non-path -- if it is not in accord with truth. The idea that menstrual bleeding is caused by the Devil is untruth. A non-path. Today, we know that the menses is just the lining of the uterus, which is enriched to nourish the fetus, and is sloughed off (as menstrual bleeding) if no fetus attaches to it. That is truth. Many other reasons have been proposed to justify the exclusion of menstruating women (by people unaware of the original reason). One is that it allowed

women to rest. Kindly, but not supported by any text. The ideas that the auras of menstruating women snatch power from a man or his aura, (an Ilm-i-khshnoomi thought), or that the touch of such a woman draws power from a man, or sours milk, or makes pickles turn out badly, are not found in any ancient Avestan text. These are all fear-driven (or control-driven) superstitions that have neither a factual, nor textual, basis. The idea that menstrual bleeding is caused by the Devil is the *only* textual basis for the exclusion of women during their menses. If indeed, menstrual bleeding were caused by the Devil, we should ask: Who vanquishes the Devil every month like clock-work? Women do. So are women spiritually superior to men? Of course, not. Spirituality has nothing to do with gender. In Avestan texts (which were composed during Av. times), men and women are treated as equals. Indeed, according to the *Aerpatastan & Nirangistan* (believed to be part of the lost Avestan *Husparam Nask*),<sup>5</sup> both men and women were priests.

Those ancients in the *Vendidad* were not afraid to use their minds to arrive at conclusions (although faulty), based on then available knowledge (although incorrect). Do we have their courage? If menses is not caused by the Devil we should stop practicing any exclusionary traditions against such women. If you believe that menses is caused by the Devil, then you should practice all of the *Vendidad's* exclusionary mandates -- anything else is hypocritical. I will summarize these



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mandates here (in addition to feeding such women only a little bread and milk) -- all of which are ignored today. The *Vendidad* mandates, -- that menstruating women be kept in a separate building "... and they shall erect a building there, higher than the house by a half, or a third, or a fourth, or a fifth part, lest her look should fall upon the fire." And that she should be kept "Fifteen paces from the fire, fifteen paces from the water, fifteen paces from the consecrated bundles of baresma, three paces from the faithful." §§ 2, 4; -- that a person bringing her food should keep his distance -- "Three paces from her shall he stay, who brings food to a woman who has an issue of blood, either out of the ordinary course or at the usual period."; that her food should be brought "in vessels of brass, or of lead, or of any common metal." §§ 5 - 6; -- and that after her "infirmity" is over, she must undergo a purification ritual in which 3 holes are dug, and she is washed by gomez in 2 holes, and by water in the 3d §§ 8-12.

No Zoroastrian community today -- not even Ilm-i-Khshnoom -- follows any of these mandates. Yet the *Vendidad* is clear that it is not just a such a woman who is spiritually impure, her spiritual pollution is infectious -- to everything -- it infects the space around her, what her glance falls upon, and any person or non-metal thing she touches. So if the *Vendidad* is true, then the whole Zoroastrian community today (in fact the whole world!) is spiritually pollut-

ed because at home and outside it, such women live, cook, eat, sleep, go to work, shop, look upon and touch people and things in 1,001 ways -- in total disregard of the *Vendidad*. Why? Because it is convenient. Yet such women are still excluded from touching religious things, or attending religious ceremonies. Why? Because that inconveniences no one else (except young girls and women).

The *Vendidad* classifies many things as spiritual pollutants -- worse than menstruating women! -- which today, we totally ignore. For example, hair and nails (once cut) were spiritual pollutants. The following references are to Fargard 17, Darmesteter translation, SBE Vol. 4, pp. 185 - 189. Allowing a person's hair and nails to fall into the earth without protective rituals (the *Vendidad* says) produces Daevas on earth, and causes corn in the fields, and "clothes in the wardrobe" to be eaten up by insects. To prevent such dire consequences, hair and nails were required to be buried in the earth at a depth of 10 fingers if the earth is hard, or 12 fingers if the earth is soft, while performing various ritual actions, recitals and dedications (§§ 2 - 10). Those who did not, were sinners.

Today, we do not regard hair and nails as sources of spiritual pollution. They are just material rubbish which we dispose of in the garbage without protective rituals. Yet in the *Vendidad*, hair and nails are a source of spiritual pollution worse than menstruating women in that such women must be kept only 15 paces away from sacred

things (16.4), whereas,

"...whenever ... thou shalt comb thy hair, or shave it off, or pare off thy nails thou shalt take them away twenty paces from the fire, thirty paces from the water, fifty paces from the consecrated bundles of baresma..." Fargard 17.4,

Why do we still believe that menstruating girls and women are spiritual pollutants, when we have stopped believing that hair and nails are spiritual pollutants? Could it be that if everyone menstruated, the *Vendidad's* ideas would have long since gone the way of hair and nails?

### IN CONCLUSION.

Menstruation is part of the process that generates the miracle of new life. If we believe in 'God', then we believe that the process which creates new life was designed (or set in motion) by Him. Can anything He designs (or sets in motion) be a spiritual pollution? To see any *material* thing as a source of *spiritual* pollution is a contradiction in terms -- an oxymoron. So the choice that confronts us is this. Do we wish to be the prisoners of a 'tradition' unsupported by any evidence during the first several centuries or our religion's existence, a tradition which first appeared after the fall of the Achaemenian empire, which is demeaning and hurtful to young girls and women, which has no basis in truth? If we keep this 'tradition' will we keep our millennials? Can any community so humiliate young girls and women without humiliating itself?





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### ENDNOTES

- 1 *Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, 1961, Phoenix Press reprint 2003, p. 162.
- 2 Humbach & Faiss, *Zarathushtra & His Antagonists*, (Wiesbaden 2010) p. 31.
- 3 Hintze *Zamyad Yasht*, (Wiesbaden 1994) p. 9
- 4 In Geldner 1Part p. 239 (for Yy72.11), and 2Part p. 31 (for *Visperad* 24.3); and 3Part p. 139 (in the concluding paragraph of the *Vendidad*).
- 5 *Aerpatastan & Nirangistan* translated by S. J. Bulsara, published by the Bombay Parsi Panchayat in 1915, pp. 17 - 23.

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## Current Situation

### THE ELUSIVE QUEST FOR A WORK-LIFE BALANCE

ROSHEEN KABRAJI



As I sat down to write this article about the state of women's work-life balance in post-election Washington D.C., I found it difficult to know where to start. Leadership and equality have been on my mind so I Google image searched for 'women leaders' in the hope of some visual stimulus. What popped up? Marie Curie? Michelle Obama? Margaret Thatcher? Tina Fey? Maya Angelou? Oprah Winfrey? Toni Morrison? Angela Merkel? Indira Gandhi? Ruth Bader Ginsberg? Rosa Parks? Malala Yusufzai? Hillary Clinton? Some of these women were sprinkled in the search results but most of what I saw were women in sterile office environments wearing dark pantsuits mimicking "confident corporate man" poses. The Internet was an inspirational wasteland but a significant indicator of the images and ideas being projected into the world about women and their relationship to the workplace.

So I decided to start looking closer to home. Having grown up in Pakistan I am acutely aware of the inequality, discrimination, and abuse many women face on a daily basis. This was always a stark contrast to being raised in a Zoroastrian home where the women have always been a formidable and respected force. I have been extremely fortunate for the exceptional female role models in my life from my great-grandmother to grandmother, mother, and aunts who have taught me that forging your own path forward with conviction, hard work and determination with the support of loved ones is a tried and tested formula that wins over time and space. And yet, I feel that forging this path has become more complicated for my generation of Zoroastrian women, especially as we move away from the home and countries we have grown up in or are born in countries our parents migrated to. We now have to balance different sets of cultural values and norms in the workplace and our homes.

Millennials, those born between 1979 and 1994, have more possibilities and choices than ever, thanks to the women and men who fought for those rights before us. The struggles of our parents have allowed millennials to ask for more flexible working conditions and paid parental leave from their employers indicating a shift in traditionally defined working conditions to achieve a better work-life balance. According to a survey of global executives by Harvard Business Review (March 2014) "... both sexes consider the tension between work and family to be primarily a women's problem" (HBR March 2014). This survey drawn from a group of highly skilled, well-paid global executives has its limitations, but it is indicative of cultural narratives that permeate across countries and have embedded themselves in our conversations, including millennials, about managing a work-life balance.

When Anne-Marie Slaughter published her 2012 article about '*Why Women Still Can't Have It All*' in the *Atlantic* it went viral. It was lauded and critiqued by different corners; some argued it was setting women back and indulging a privileged viewpoint while others applauded her for finally saying what many women think and feel. I shared it with my mother and my aunt, both successful women who have also worked on gender issues for their insight into the South Asian and Zoroastrian perspective on women finding a 'work-life' balance. They suggested I start by thinking about what 'having it all' actually meant for me before I began a futile life-long expedition. Their advice was "you can have it all, just not all of it all of the time". They reminded me of the importance of family values, my Zoroastrian faith, sacrificing without resentment at home and in the workplace, and taking care of the young and the old. They emphasized the importance of creating a support network that works for you and the crucial choice of a life partner in sustaining these goals. They also underscored that the lifestyle of many Zoroastrians in India and Pakistan, especially those who can afford domestic help and maids to help manage the household, were crucial in creating more time to devote to career, children and family which would have otherwise been extremely difficult to do.





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In the diaspora, these support networks of family and community become even harder to maintain and all the more important. While building this crucial support network there are certain societal pressures that need to be addressed. At a structural level, at least in the United States, legislators across all states can start by giving families what most of the developed world takes for granted – paid maternity and paternity leave. More paid leave for all employees would perhaps also relieve some of the pressure on families giving them more time with each other. Having spent my entire working life in the United Kingdom, I took for granted the average three weeks of paid leave most employees received. You were also encouraged by most employers to take all of your leave making me feel like time-off was not just a luxury but served a purpose. That time away from the office certainly helped me recharge, spend time with family and friends, and explore the world so I could come back to my work with energy and drive.

On a plane ride across the Atlantic I couldn't help but indulge and watch the movie 'Bad Moms'. The basic premise: mothers (in America) are juggling way too much and are tired of being told how to raise their children, how to prioritize work, how to please their husbands etc. The not so subtle message was that a lot of this pressure comes from other women, not just men. The comparisons women make with each other will never disappear but a little less judgment would go a long way. It would also be helpful to avoid generating labels to describe a type of mother like "soccer mom", "tiger mom" or "elephant mom". Labeling (and hence stereotyping) is often counter-productive especially if it compels women to define themselves primarily through motherhood, which may or may not be the way they see themselves.

In my generation of Zoroastrian women, I see the pressure some of us face when we are constantly told by certain quarters within the community that we are too focused on education and our careers and not having children early enough. Many parents want their daughters to be high-flying career women but the dilemma they face is the trade-off that comes with that—marrying and having children later in life, if at all. However, achieving this precarious balance between work and a family life is not just a women's issue. The men in our lives need to feel they are part of this process from the beginning.

What could help? Personally, exposure to a wide-range of role models especially those that upend traditional gender roles at home has been helpful for me. For example, my mother does not cook. My father is a gourmand and was taught how to cook by his mother. When I cook, people assume it was my mother who taught me. When I tell them, especially South Asians, that it is my father who I go to for cooking tips, it still surprises them. To me, it's pretty normal. My mother is the one who when an elderly South Asian man at a dinner party questioned how she let me study anthropology at university instead of something more practical like economics retorted with "my daughter can choose to study and be whatever she wants." Looking for those role models inside and outside family, in the community, in the workplace can be invaluable in shaking up traditional gender roles.

The role of other women in helping manage this balance is an integral part of my support network, especially as I have moved away from my family home. The sisterhood of friends I have created for myself will last me a lifetime if I continue to cultivate and nurture it consistently. In that sisterhood, it is not about one-upmanship. It is not about hiding the losses and failures and feeling shame and guilt. It is not about judging other women for the choices they make. Stay at home, travel the world with your baby on your back, be at the head of the table in the boardroom, choose not to marry. My hope for my generation of women is to feel empowered by their decisions, respect those of other women, demand more of society, ask for more help when they need it, and be kinder to ourselves and each other along the way.

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### IRANIAN WOMEN AND THE POTENTIAL FOR ECONOMIC PROGRESS

It is a largely accepted fact that closing the gender gap in education for women and girls, particularly in developing countries, will have a positive impact on improving a country's economic prosperity. Time and again it has been shown that when women are educated, they and their families are healthier, they make better decisions about their careers and personal lives, and they participate in the economic workforce and generate income to a greater level.

Iran first began offering formal education for women and girls in 1907. As the Iranian culture is one that places high value on education in general, and with women gaining more equality across the board through the first half of the last century – including the right to vote, increased wages, and better access to educational and employment opportunities – women made great strides in the Iranian workforce through the years.<sup>1</sup>

Following the 1979 Revolution however, due a change in the political climate and a contested and debated role that women played under the new regime, Iran implemented numerous policies restricting equal access to education for women. These limitations had negative consequences and created substantial setbacks for women in education and workforce settings.

Recognizing the need – and also the potential benefits to the economy – to alleviate these limitations, starting in the late 1980's through the 1990's, Iranian leaders set out to once more provide expanded educational opportunities to women. Programs allowing women greater access to education, and hence the workforce, were once again implemented. During the last decade, Iran began to witness an increased number of Iranian women enrolled in colleges and universities – giving many hope about the potential for translating into greater economic participation by women and hence a stronger economy for the country.

Some in the government even touted this as an achievement which shows the country's commitment to providing women greater rights and equal

opportunities. And despite the historical ups and downs, by proportion, Iranian women are among the most educated in the world, and the ratio of Iranian women enrolled in post-secondary education is higher than that of Iranian men.<sup>2</sup>



Yet, even today, persisting old and new restrictions serve to limit women from meeting their full potential on this front. Strict quota systems and affirmative action policies that favor men are in place that prevent women from admission to a large number of universities and numerous fields of study. A 2012 report found that 36 universities across the country prevented women from admission to 77 majors – including chemistry, engineering, and accounting. The officially provided rationale for these restrictive measures is that a woman's main role is in the home as a wife and a mother. Some even link the high rate of university-educated women to increasing divorce rates and the decreasing rate of fertility in the country. These policies have no doubt had a significantly detrimental impact on the ability of women to be fully prepared for and gain access to jobs in the Iranian workforce.<sup>3</sup> Despite these and other obstacles that Iranian women have faced through the years, they still comprise 60% of all those who enter universities, and make up nearly 70% of those in the science and engineering field – sectors often dominated by men in the West.<sup>4</sup>

But even working women in Iran must face and overcome numerous obstacles. The public sector is Iran's biggest employer, but women only hold 10% of the jobs within it. Last year, for example, of the 3,703 open positions in this sector, only 630 were open to women. Recently, Iran's President Rouhani, halted public sector hiring and ordered a review of the sex-based hiring quotas that have for years restricted





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women's access to jobs.<sup>5</sup>

Exacerbating the negative impact of these limitations, and the unequal access to education for women, are recent policies that were introduced under Iran's previous president to support working women in maintaining a balance between work and their role as mothers and wives at home. The costs associated with these policies fell heavily on the shoulders of private sector employers who hired women, therefore providing a disincentive for considering and employing women applicants. In fact, data shows that since 2005, the number of women in Iran's workforce dropped from 3.96 million to 3.1 million – a drop of nearly a million workers. Today, the rate of participation of women in the labor force for Iran ranks amongst the lowest in the world: only 17% – below that of Saudi Arabia, a fact that many find surprising.<sup>6</sup> The decreasing number of women currently participating in the Iranian workforce in recent years, and what that means for the country's prosperity, has alarmed economists and policymakers alike and is the topic of much public debate and scrutiny.

To be sure, entrepreneurship in Iran has been rife with obstacles for everyone. These include: international sanctions, lack of full access to telecommunications and other technology, policy uncertainties and corruption. But for women, these obstacles are multiplied because they face differential treatment and discriminatory policies that deny them full access and opportunity both in education and in employment.<sup>7</sup>

But, as many economists have pointed out, true to

form, Iranian women continue to remain engaged and push for progress despite the obstacles they face. Women's business ownership, for example, is on the rise and this growing sector is often centered on more innovative business models and ventures.<sup>8</sup> The undeniable fact is that women still account for half of Iran's population, making up half of the country's potential talent pool. If properly supported, Iranian women can be the key to greater economic prosperity in Iran – which can have both national and international benefits for the country.

## ENDNOTES

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Dr. Kasravi was the Director of the Criminal Justice Program for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She was the Deputy Director for the Anti-recidivism Coalition in Los Angeles, a Lead Researcher and Associate for the Domestic Human Rights Program of Amnesty International USA, worked as Director of Community Relations for the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian-Americans, was Policy Associate for Stop Prison Rape, as well as researcher and advocate at a number of organizations working on human rights



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**Shevolution™**

My early career was as an advertising executive in London. After a career break to have my son I became a parliamentary researcher; Liberal Party parliamentary candidate; advocacy NGO leader; and women's rights activist, journalist, and broadcaster. As a consultant, gender advisor, NGO activist, and journalist, I have worked in over 50 countries during immense change, including states in conflict and transition.

When I founded the all-party 300 Group from The Mill House in the tiny Cotswold backwater of Burford in 1980, I had no idea of the "ride" life was mapping out for me in the years ahead. I would have stared incredulously at anyone who told me I would be anything on the national or international scene, under fire from mortars and rockets in Iraq, and have a seat on the Global Board of the British Council, with luminaries like the UK Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Chair of the BBC, Consultant on Women to Project Liberty (a project based at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University).

I stood for Parliament for the Liberal Party in the 1979 election—the election when Margaret Thatcher became Britain's first woman Prime Minister. I was shocked to discover she was one of only 19 women MPs out of a total 635 MPs, less than 3%. I decided we needed to do something about it. A small group of us met in Gingerbread's HQ in Soho and formed the 300 Group. Its goal was to get at least 300 women elected to Parliament—about half of the Members.

The 300 Group had a marketing challenge: it needed to create a "market demand for more women politicians from the public, political parties, and the media. It also needed to ensure a supply of good products; by which I mean women groomed for success and armed with self-confidence and the campaigning, research, debating, and communication skills they would need for the political *mêlée*. Within four years, the 300 Group had 43 branches across England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland even though we were all unpaid volunteers. Having worked in more than 50 countries, it became clear that a series of universal, invisible barriers prevented women from proper access to promotion on *merit* in politics and public life. The obstacles were partly a consequence of *traditional cultural attitudes* and partly a consequence

of *institutional procedures*, I call them "**The 6 Cs:**" **Culture, Cronyism (the old boys' networks), Candidate selection processes, Cash, Chronic lack of time, and Confidence.**

In the early 1980s training for women prospective candidates was pioneer territory. Much of the training for women in politics used around the world today is based on the 300 Group's workshops we developed in the early 1980s.

Since those early days, the number of women elected to the House of Commons has increased at each election. It has taken 9 General Elections to go from 19 women MPs to 191. Teresa May became our second woman Prime Minister this Summer. The Leaders of the Scottish Nationalist Party, Welsh Nationalists Party, Green Party, and N. Ireland Democratic Unionist Party are women, but Labour and Liberal Democrats have never had women Leaders.

In the rest of the world, since the 1995 UN Conference on Women, in Beijing, women have gained ground in parliaments in 90% of countries, many with the help of quotas. In the past two decades, the number of countries where women occupy more than 30% of the Parliamentary seats has increased from five to forty-six. Fourteen Parliaments have more than 40% women. Bolivia and Rwanda have over 50% female MPs. <sup>1</sup>

### CAREER CHANGE TO JOURNALIST

After working full time unpaid for five years as the 300 GROUP campaign leader I needed to earn my living. One feature I wrote was for *Cosmopolitan* magazine and was called "Stand Up and Be Counted." The article called for readers to take action and demand what women need to make successful out-of-the-home careers, such as flexible working hours, paid maternity leave, and childcare facilities. I told Cosmo readers which relevant government departments to contact. *Cosmopolitan Magazine* got plaintive phone calls from two government Ministries saying, "What have you written in

**LESLEY ABDELA**







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*your magazine? Our switchboards are jammed."*

Soon after that, Marcelle D'Argy-Smith, then editor of *Cosmopolitan*, appointed me the magazine's Political Editor. This was the first time any British women's magazine had a Political Editor. The Sergeant-at-Arms at the House of Commons nevertheless refused me a House Press Pass on the grounds no women's magazines had ever been allotted a press pass!

### WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY

My first "boots-on-the-ground" experience in a conflict zone was when, at my request, Cosmo sent me as a War Correspondent to interview women in the besieged Bihac enclave in Bosnia in 1993. I wrote a six-page feature titled "*Bosnia: women are fighting back.*" Since the 1990s my focus has mainly been to change the long-held view that women in conflict zones are exclusively *victims* rather than prospective partners for bringing deadly conflicts to an end and helping build long-term sustainable peace.

**Peace-making and peace-building** ought not to be left so overwhelmingly to men, for one practical reason: evidence shows that men, on their own, are not good at it!

On October 31, 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1325. It calls for everyone to ensure the participation of women and civil society at all levels in peace processes and in the implementation of peace agreements (and to improve the protection of women in conflict situations).

To date, 58 countries have adopted a National Action Plan for implementing UNSCR1325 including Canada, the US, and my own country, the UK. But, when it comes to inclusion of women at top level peace talks, Resolution 1325 is more honoured worldwide in the breach than in the observance. Women were only 2% of chief mediators, 4% of witnesses and signatories, and 9% of negotiators in a representative sample of 31 major peace processes.<sup>2</sup>

**Ceasefire and peace agreements** rarely include women's specific security, financial and peace-building needs. Only 5% of Peace funds are directed to women and Gender. Women's ownership of land, or their stake in other wealth-sharing provisions almost never appear in the text of peace agreements. Everyone talks about sexual violence in conflicts but in just 6 out of 45 Cease-fire agreements in major conflicts, sexual violence was included as a prohibited act.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, this reflects the near-total lack of women at the peace tables.

The reason persuasion and advocacy has failed is simple: UNSCR 1325 contains no carrots and no sticks— no incentives, no penalties, no sanctions and no time-frames.<sup>4</sup>

### PARALLEL UNIVERSES

A major obstacle to women participating meaningfully in peace processes is the existence of what I call my *Theory of the Parallel Universes* in which women and men operate.

My Bosnia and Kosovo experiences and a visit to Sierra Leone a few weeks after the rebels were driven from the capital Freetown, and to Afghanistan and Iraq, led me to realise the existence of the phenomenon I call the "**Parallel Universes.**" One universe is composed of formal hierarchies. This is mostly male and is mainly inhabited by senior diplomats, political party leaders, high-ranking military officers, warlords, Mafia, and government ministers who hold or have access to political and economic power. These men mostly have contact with counterparts of the same rank. Too often, male negotiators are ready to sell women's rights down the river in their effort to achieve a quick fix and look good. The current practice is that if you are a man responsible for blowing up people, maiming, murdering, raping, bullying, intimidating, and grabbing power, money, and assets, you will be included at the peace-table. Except for a few decent honourable men, those invited to the negotiating tables include warlords, business mafia, and extremist religious leaders because it is held they are essential to achieving peace.

Meanwhile, in the parallel universe, women leaders are found in civil society, community-based organisations, NGOs, advocacy groups and women's wings of political Parties. They are active in informal peace initiatives.

I have watched this pattern repeated in country after country. For the tenth anniversary of UNSCR1325 International, the **NGO CARE** asked me to research and write a Case Study on "**Women's Meaningful Participation in Post-conflict Governance in Nepal.**" Peace talks took place in Nepal after a decade of armed conflict. Approximately 14,000 people were killed and around 200,000 people displaced. Appalling crimes of violence and rape were committed against women by all sides.

During the conflict, women took on leadership



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roles across the country. Women became leaders of households and risked their lives negotiating for survival with armed combatants, both Government security forces and Maoists.

One of the main obstacles preventing women from becoming equal partners with men at top level peace tables is the lack of bold leadership and political commitment from the men holding senior posts in formal international and institutions and national governments. For example, on the fourteenth anniversary of UNSCR 1325, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon issued a statement at UN Headquarters in New York [announcing](#) the establishment of a High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, which will, “draw together individuals with a wide range of experience and expertise...”—however, Ban Ki-Moon appointed 11 men and just 3 women to his panel.

### SOLUTIONS

My recommendation is that funding and resources should only be given by the international community for peace talks where at least 40% women and at least 40% men from the conflict countries are participants at all levels of negotiation, including the top tables.<sup>5</sup>

I would like to see a strong injection booster of **Gender Equality** administered into the practices of international organizations, starting with a UN Secretary General, with a strong feminist streak. What is needed from world leaders is the type of boldness and vision shown by **Canadian PM Justin Trudeau** when he appointed his first cabinet of ministers, 15 men and 15 women across ethnic diversities<sup>6</sup>

A successful peace process can only result if there is a genuine, equal partnership between men and women focused on justice, education, health, human security, and the fair distribution of resources. A sustainable peace process lays the foundation for resilient institutions that promote economic, political, and social emancipation for all.

The other reason women should be equal partners in peace-building is to ensure issues of importance to women's lives are high on the agenda, such as personal human security; infrastructure and services; livelihood and employment; property and inheritance rights; food security; needs of widows and female former combatants; political representation and decision making; and preventing impunity for rape.

A piece of positive news is a rise in the number of references to women in the text of peace agreements. 50% of peace agreements signed in 2014 included references relevant to women, peace and security (up from 22 per cent in 2010).

Things may be moving in the right direction at last. Recent peace talks to resolve conflicts in Colombia and the Philippines have seen a greater participation of women as delegates or signatories in the formal processes.

**Photo credit Rob Anderman**

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### END NOTES

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- 3 (over the quarter of a century since 1989).
- 4 In November of the same year, 2000, a similar resolution in support of 1325 was passed by the European Parliament (EP). A recommendation accompanying the EP resolution calls for at least 40% women's representation in all levels of decision-making in peace-making
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**Lesley Abdela** MBE is a senior partner in Shevolution, a successful consultant, journalist, broadcaster, trainer, public speaker, NGO leader, and author. She has travelled to more than 50 countries for issues on gender; women's rights; women, peace and security, and women in politics issues.

Currently, she is a member of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency's gender Help-Desk team, providing advice for mainstreaming gender into SIDA international development cooperation. As a member of the European Union Gender Facility for Neighbourhood South (MENA region), she advises the EC staff working in Middle East and North Africa. Concurrently, she is a member of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) Gender Advisory Services Expert Panel.





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### VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

**AJIT JAIN**

The gruesome manner, in which 23-year-old Jyoti Singh was raped by six men in New Delhi in December 2012, shook the conscience of the entire civilized world. "She wasn't your sister. She wasn't your daughter. But she could be. The brutality has to stop right here," one report said.

That tragedy and the headlines in the media that it generated created a perception that violence against women is India-specific which is not a fact. Violence against women is all pervading.

There's no community, no country in the world where women are not being subjected to physical, emotional, and sexual violence by their intimate partners, by other family members. "Violence against women happens in all cultures and religions, in all ethnic and racial communities, at every age, and in every income group," says a report on 'The Facts about Violence against Women,' released by the Canadian Women's Foundation.

According to the UN Women, it is estimated that "35 percent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives. Some studies show that up to 70 percent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime."

Canadian women are not immune from such physical and/or sexual violence. The Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, in its report, revealed that from 2002 to 2007, 212 "women have been killed by their partners, that's 42 women killed every year."

During 2009, 67 Canadian women were murdered by their intimate partners, their boyfriends, neighbors, and others.

On an average, every six days a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner. Each year, over 4,000 arrests result from domestic violence – that's about 12 percent of all violent crimes in Canada. Only 22 percent of all incidents are reported to the police.

A report in the Toronto Star reveals that less than 0.5 percent of sexual assaults result in conviction in Canada. There were 460,000 sexual assaults in

2004 of which the police recorded only 21,821. Only 8,279 people were charged, there were 1,994 sexual assault prosecutions per year.

According to the Canadian Department of Justice, Canadians collectively

spend \$7.4-billion each year to deal with the aftermath of spousal violence: This astronomical amount includes "immediate costs, such as emergency room visits and related costs, such as loss of income; and other tangible costs.

Domestic violence against women is "pandemic," says a UN report. "It primarily happens in the context of home where women are overwhelming targets of intimate partner and domestic violence and everyone suffers."

Figures of women victims globally vary between 4,000 to 5,000 killed each year as a result of domestic violence. Of these 75 percent are killed as they try to leave the abusive relationships.

Recent figures reveal that since 2002, there have been 12 honor killings in Canada. We should remember how 16-year old Aqsa Parvez of Mississauga (Ontario) was strangled to death in 2007 by her own father and brother, simply because she wouldn't agree to their dress code – wear a hijab, and not use western clothes. "It is a twisted pathological male sense of honor," says a column in the Globe and Mail. It is an execution "by men who feel they haven't received their due deference, men who consider 'their' women, whether daughter or partner, to be their chattel, to do with as they choose."

Honor killings are more prevalent in the South Asian communities in Canada and in South Asian countries, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and in some Middle Eastern countries as well.





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Aruj Butt migrated to Canada from Pakistan. At a recent symposium, she related the story of her own parents saying she was 13 years old when she told her mother to leave her father as he was always abusive to her. She's now 32. So Butt's mother struggled for 19 years to save her marriage. And even after leaving that abusive relationship, she's still "being abused as what happened to her still has psychological ramifications. And my mother still agrees with my father's code without him being there," explains Butt.

One report suggests people should "treat rape as a desecration against mothers, irrespective of race, nation, and culture, caste. It stems from the imagined 'power' of males over females."

What's the root cause of violence against women? Some experts say in the South Asian sub-continent and in Muslim countries, women and girls are deemed inferior to men. That explains why families celebrate the birth of a boy and don't do anything when a girl is born. It is widely known that in India, as well as in the South Asian community in Canada, US, etc, women in growing numbers are aborting female fetuses.

This bias against women is widely spread and not simply confined to India. And it's because of this bias against women that men develop their superiority complex and take it as their right to abuse women.

One Indo-Canadian woman I recently interviewed, says her husband would beat her if she didn't cook the food he liked. He would pick up the telephone and make a long distance call to her parents in India to complain about her poor cooking.

One shudders to think that such an act, as was perpetrated against Jyoti in Delhi in December 2012, could happen to any innocent human being. But the sad reality is that such occurrences are taking place in various forms all over the world.

In her autobiography, former Canadian Member of Parliament Olivia Chow, explains how her own mother was constantly abused by her father. In her own first relationship, she too encountered violence and so also in her second relationship. When in her third relationship, she again encountered abuse; she once held the hand of the man who tried to hit her. She forcefully hit him back and then called the police.

In this brief article, I am not teaching violence but women have to have courage and determination that they wouldn't under any circumstances accept physical and sexual violence. They will respond forcefully when it happens. They have to say to themselves enough is enough. For Heaven's sake – raise your hand and say in unison: NO MORE!

*Ajit Jain is a well-known author and journalist. He is currently Canada Editor of the Indian Diaspora; was managing editor of India Abroad for 28 years; weekly columnist of Toronto Sun (2006-08); has written several reports for the Globe and Mail; Editor of latest book 'Violence Against Women: All Pervading (2014)*

### THE FIRST TIME

It happened on a gentle mote flecked day:  
he told me it was over.  
Running  
I hid my eyes against the baby's chest.  
Sensing  
he curled his little fingers in my hair  
but could not comfort me.  
Sitting  
beside the waters of the pool,  
missing  
my mother's warmth,  
knowing  
there was no going home.

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### A WOMAN'S PLACE IS IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS.

A few days ago I was at the beautiful ASHA centre, a haven of peace and tolerance founded by the extraordinary Zerbanoo Gifford, a Zoroastrian who is the embodiment of an empowered woman and also a fantastic role model.

I had the privilege of having tea with a group of girls from Pune and Kerala who were spending three weeks at ASHA where, thanks to various courses and the freedom to enjoy life without any burdens, they will grow in confidence and self esteem, enabling them to return to India believing that they have the capacity to be leaders. These wonderful young women, who in the next couple of years will be engineers, nurses, pharmacists and IT specialists will be role models to the girls in their villages. The friendships that will be nurtured thanks to shared experiences whilst in the UK will provide them with a network of mutual support that could continue throughout their lives. The fragile, humble and hesitant girls that I met will soon have the confidence and skills to be the leaders of tomorrow.

It is a good year for women leaders - **the Queen at 90**, **Hilary Clinton** who would have been -but God was not willing - the most powerful person in the world, **Theresa May** the second British female Prime Minister and my good friend **Baroness Scotland** elected Secretary General of the Commonwealth. Then of course we still have **Chancellor Merkel** in Germany who is by far the most important European politician, **Federica Mogherini**, EU's foreign policy chief, **Michelle Bachelet** in her second term as President of Chile, and **President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf** of Liberia who was first elected in 2006 and shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for amongst other things the non violent struggle for the safety of women. All superb role models whose presence on the world stage means that girls at primary school in many countries can grow up knowing that their sex is no longer a barrier to their aspirations.

BARONESS JANET ROYALL



We have come a long way, and people like me stand on the shoulders of countless women who have struggled for equality in the last century, but there is much more to do, including in the United Kingdom. I have fought for social justice and equality throughout my life, and I had foolishly hoped that with my daughter's generation we would have a more equal society, but sadly the work must continue and I now have to hope that my granddaughter's generation will be truly empowered. The distance we have to travel is graphically illustrated by the fact that in the UK there are more men called John leading FTSE 100 companies than women, likewise in the USA where there are more men called John leading major companies than women. In the British Parliament, the number of women who have been elected since 1918 is fewer than the number of men who were elected in 2015. Since 1929 when the first woman cabinet minister, **Margaret Bondfield**, was appointed there have only been 43 women in cabinet posts. In the UK fewer than a third of the leaders of our universities are women and whilst we have some brilliant woman scientists only about 13% of the STEM workforce are women. And yet some sectors which are crucial for the well being of our citizens are dominated by women, for example, the care sector. Without women carers, society would collapse, yet this is one of the most poorly paid professions and there are





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## Current Situation

about 7 million carers, predominantly women, who are unpaid. I am absolutely certain that if most carers were men, the situation would be very different.

Bias, both conscious and unconscious plays a huge part in sustaining inequality in terms of gender, race, disability and sexual orientation but there are also issues of cultural change and changes in mindset. In the mid 90s when I was a senior member of a team in the European Commission, for a while my husband looked after our three children. This was terrific both for him and the kids but whenever we went to receptions or parties and the inevitable question was asked “*what do you do*”, people always found others to speak to when Stuart said that he was a house husband. I thought that things had changed until I recently spoke to a very senior business woman whose husband kept the home together but who had stopped accompanying her to functions because he

was ignored and it made things very uncomfortable for his wife. Women also have to change their mindset - if your partner is at home looking after the kids, it really does not matter if the kitchen surface has crumbs, if there are toys all over the house or if the sauce he has made for the pasta does not include the sundried tomatoes that you always add. We need to focus on the things that are important to us and our families, not try to retain control of the minutiae.

We have a duty to the next and future generations. We must not be like **Mrs. Thatcher** who in 11 Years of government only promoted one woman to her cabinet and that only for one year. We must ensure that all the organisations to which we belong - large and small, at local, regional, national and international level - mentor, nurture, promote and employ women. When headhunters, recruitment agencies and people throughout the public, private and voluntary sectors say “*we want to recruit or promote women to the highest levels but there are none available with the appropriate skills*”, we must question and counter that. It is probably absolute bunkum. It’s just that those who are searching are either not looking hard enough, or they are placing the wrong sort of ads that do not attract women or that they are white, middle class men who are prone to appoint people who look and sound like them.

In addition we should be proud to be role models, go into schools, colleges, universities and the places that hard to reach young people go, to talk with young women, share our experiences, give them confidence to reach for the stars.

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

My wife Nelly joins me, in thanking you for publishing our daughter Zileena's tribute to her Grandmother, Parin Jehangir Maneckshaw in the Obituary column of the Fall 2016 issue of FEZANA JOURNAL

My late Mother-in-law was a lady full of life and vigor. Single-handedly, she brought up, in a remote town called Batu Gajha, in Malaysia - five brilliant children, four lawyers and one economist. She taught them our religion, and took them to Bombay for their Navjote ceremonies. They were the only PARSI family in Ipoh, where they eventually settled down.

Every morning, we would see her sitting in front of the entrance door, facing the sun, and saying her morning prayers. She was a person to look up to, and emulate. A very generous person, a GEM we shall miss forever. Thank you again,

**Nelly and Jimmy Doctor, Singapore**

**Baroness Royall** served as leader of the Labour party in the Lords when in opposition and then she was leader of the Lords when Labour was in power. So she led the Lords for all parties. Her work is now focused on young people, housing, foreign policy, diversity and social inclusion.



# WORKING TOWARDS AN EQUAL SOCIETY Inspiring Women

## ARYAN WOMEN WARRIORS – THE AMAZONS

K. E. EDULJEE

### 1. GENDER EQUITY IN BATTLE



Amazons battling Greeks. A scene on a lekythos (oil vase) like the Darius Vase c.420 BCE attributed to the so-called Eretria Painter. Patterned leggings and short tunics together with crescent shaped shields were considered 'Persian' attire. Credit: Wikimedia.

There is perhaps no greater manifestation of gender equity than the ability to fight and die for one's nation on the battlefield – and to rise to the highest ranks in a nation's military, assuming command of an army of both women and men. Aryan history is replete with such a norm from ancient times to the present.

In this article, we will briefly focus on one example, the little known tradition of the Amazons and the modern heirs to that tradition – Kurdish women warriors.

### 2. ORIGINS OF THE WORD 'AMAZON'

The English word 'Amazon' comes to us via a similar Greek word. According to fourth century CE Greek grammarian Hesychius of Alexandria, the Greek word is derived from the Old Persian 'Amazakaran' meaning 'to make war'. 'Amazakaran' is in turn derived from the Old Persian 'ha-mazan' meaning 'war' or 'warriors' and 'kar' meaning 'to do'/'to make'.

Setting mythology aside, our research shows that the Amazons of old were not a tribe or sub-group of the Aryans. Rather, they were a tradition within several Aryan groups especially in the western Aryan lands.

### 3. GREEK DEPICTIONS OF THE AMAZONS

Greek art and friezes are replete with the Greeks battling 'Amazons' –



Map showing the region inhabited by the Amazons: from the SE Black Sea, the Thermodon River, S. Caucasus Mtns, to the SW Caspian Sea.



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Kurdish SDF Commander Rojda Felat with her fellow soldiers.

Credit pbs.twimg.com

from the Battle of Troy onwards. Herodotus cites the Battle of Troy as the genesis of the Greco-Persian wars.

In Greek art, the 'Amazons' are frequently shown wearing clothing that Greco-Roman artists used to depict 'Persians'. One such artifact is the 'Darius Vase' that shows Achaemenid Persian King Darius the Great being counselled to go to war with Greece. Another similar artifact is the 'Eretria Painter Vase'. Given that Greeks did not permit their women to become soldiers, encountering women who were

their equal in battle gave rise to a considerable mythology that clouds our perceptions even today.

#### 4. LOCATION OF THE AMAZONS

Roman soldier and historian Ammianus Marcellinus (c.320-c.390 CE), a native of Antioch, Anatolia (today's Antakya, Turkey, close to Kurdish enclaves), states that the Amazons dwelt in lands that stretched from the south-eastern shores of the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea – lands that were once part of western Aryana and perhaps just north of and adjacent to the Kurdish lands of today.

#### 5. THE TRADITION CONTINUES IN KURDISTAN

Rojda Felat, a Kurdish woman general, commands the Syrian Democratic Forces, a coalition of Kurdish, Arab, Assyrian, Armenian, Turkmen and Circassian militias fighting the Islamic State and Al-Nusra Front in the Syrian Civil War. Kurdish women make up a large part of the forces.

#### END NOTES:

In the gloss to the lexicon of obscure Greek words compiled by 4th century CE Greek grammarian Hesychius of Alexandria, we find Ἀμαζακάρων πολεμεῖν. Πέρσαι (amazakáran: polemeín. Pérsai) meaning "amazakaran: 'to make war' in (Old) Persian". q.v. Xenia Lidéniana Lagercrantz (1912) 270ff, cited in Hjalmar Frisk's Greek Etymological Dictionary (1960–1970) and Wikipedia. A. Shapour Shahbazi (1942-2006) in an 1989 Iranica article notes that the word 'Amazons' was derived from Old Iranian '\*maz-' [i.e. '(a)maz' meaning 'combat'] leading to the folk name or ethnonym '\*ha-mazan' meaning 'warrior'. Shahbazi cites J. Pokorny in *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Bern) I, p. 1959.

A more complete explanation is at <http://zoroastrianheritage.blogspot.ca/2015/06/amazons-kurdish-women-warriors.html>.

Herodotus' *Histories* 1.1-5.

Roman History of Ammianus Marcellinus 8.18-27.

*K. E. Eduljee of British Columbia, (BC) Canada has been researching Zoroastrianism and Zoroastrian/Zarathushti texts for about forty years which includes translating original Avestan, Middle Persian, Greek and Latin texts. He is the author of the Zoroastrian Heritage website at [www.zoroastrianheritage.com](http://www.zoroastrianheritage.com), the Zoroastrian Heritage blog at <http://zoroastrianheritage.blogspot.com/> and the Zoroastrian Heritage Facebook page. Eduljee is a past director of the Zoroastrian Society of BC and a founding trustee of the Arbab Rustam Guiv Darbe Mehr trust for BC.*





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## Inspiring Women

### IRAN-DOKHT – DAUGHTERS OF IRAN

#### ARYAN WOMEN WARRIORS

K. E. EDULJEE

#### 1. WOMEN AS LEADER-WARRIORS IN TRADITION

The Iranian-Aryan professional group that included leaders and warriors were the khshathra/rathestaran – leaders who were warriors as well. Examining the annals of history, it would seem that while Aryan women were not necessarily and consistently warriors in a standing army, they answered the call for warriors and leadership when most needed by the nation. A modern example helps us flush out the concept. Today, we notice that there are a large number of Kurdish women warriors battling the Islamic State – but these women were not necessarily warriors in a standing army prior to the attack on their lands and people. When faced with an existential threat, regardless of their occupation at the time, Kurdish women and men answered the call to take up arms in unison with both women and men rising through the ranks to become commanders and generals. Today, fighting together, Kurdish women and men have all but pushed the Islamic State out of all occupied lands and this is particularly significant in Syrian Kurdistan where they were initially overrun by the Islamic hordes. Such is the efficacy of gender equality.

While Persian-Aryan history does not provide us with many narratives about regular soldiers be they women or men, what we have are stories about royalty and nobility – shahnamehs if you will. The following are a few examples of royal or noble women leader-warriors, some of who are called Iran-dokht (Iran's daughter).

#### 2. QUEEN PENTHESILEIA – ANSWERING THE CALL

Our first example of the tradition we have outlined above is found in early history. Queen Penthesileia organized an army to come to the aid of the Trojans after Troy was attacked by the Greeks around 1,200 BCE. The Greeks called her an 'amazon' and in typical fashion developed a melodramatic myth around her. While the Greek warrior Achilles killed Penthesileia in single combat, he is tragically supposed to have fallen in love with her – after he had killed her.

#### 3. IRAN-DOKHT ARTEMISIA I

It the same Asia Minor region to which Penthesileia belonged, one of the early queens named by some as Iran-dokht is Artemisia I. She was queen or satrap (governor general) of Caria/Karka under Persian King Xerxes (486-466 BCE). As admiral of her navy, she undertook naval expeditions against the Greeks.

**4. IRAN-DOKHT APRANIK** Apranik was the daughter of Piran, Yazdegird III's General. She was a military commander in her own right, fought against the Arab invaders and continued to lead a resistance after the Arab conquest of Iran - thereby becoming a symbol of Iranian resistance against Arab oppression and domination.<sup>1</sup>



Syrian Kurdish son and mother.

Credit Forum Stripovi.com.



Achilles killing Queen Penthesileia at the Battle of Troy (c. 1200 BCE). Penthesileia is wearing 'Persian' i.e. Aryan attire – an elaborately patterned tunic and trousers. The scene is painted by the artist Exekias on a c.540-530 BCE amphora (wine jug) found in S. Italy, then part of Magna Greece. Credit: showme.co.



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### 5. ORDINARY WOMEN OF COURAGE

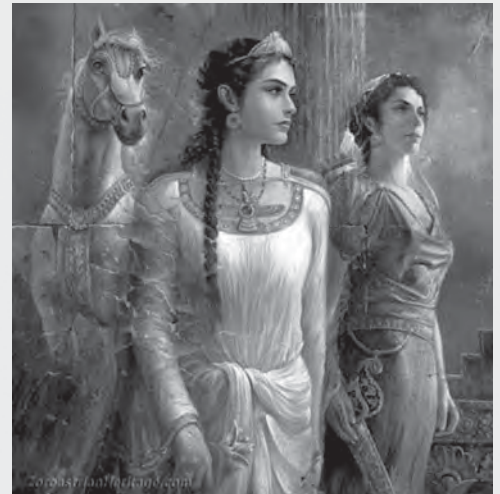
While our examples above are nobles (khshathra/rathestaran), the women of Kurdistan who have taken up arms are ordinary people.<sup>2</sup>

### 6. IN CLOSING

In the process of building communities, human beings tend to assign roles to men and women. However, when it comes to roles that serve or work with the community, more often than not, these assignments are artificial social constructs and are not intrinsic to a gender. Culture and tradition play significant roles in how a community perceives the public role of men and women.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 The Nisibis War (337-363 CE) by J. S. Harrel (MA thesis) (Northridge, 2002), p 76. The author acknowledges his source does not follow scholarly protocols
- 2 A more complete explanation is at <http://zoroastrianheritage.blogspot.ca/2015/06/amazons-kurdish-women-warriors.html>.



Likeness of Apanik by H. Shakiba. Credit: [slide-share.net/michaelasanda](http://slide-share.net/michaelasanda).



## MANIJEH: A ZOROASTRIAN WOMAN PERSIAN PIONEER

SEPTEMBER 17, 1898 - JANUARY 23, 1984

On September 17, 1898, a daughter was born in Bombay to Arbab Rostam Kermani and his wife Almay. They named her Manijeh. Earlier, Arbab and his brother Keikhosrow had left their motherland of Iran, due to severe hardships imposed on them because of their religious belief, by their zealot Moslem countrymen. They came to Bombay in pursuit of a better life and higher education. They both succeeded, in spite of the many limitations they faced.

After marrying Almay, a young Zoroastrian girl, and beginning their family, Arbab Rostam, along with their three children, sailed to Shanghai, China, and started a business trading silk and tea. Due to his honesty, hard work and wisdom, deeply rooted in his strong belief in his Faith, Arbab Rostam became one of the most famous businessmen of Shanghai.

Manijeh finished her elementary and high school education in British schools in Shanghai, and became fluent in English and French. Her talent in

### KHOSRO ESFANDIAR MEHRFAR

music was unmatched. At

a very early age, Manijeh accomplished mastery of classical violin, the “Virtuoso” classification.

When Manijeh was twelve,

she performed so professionally, that the mayor of Shanghai presented her with a special award.

At the age of 18, Manijeh married Aflatoon Keikhosrow Shahrokh in Bombay, and they moved back to their motherland of Iran with their newly born son, Shahrokh. At that time, Iran was an underdeveloped country with a lot of poverty. It was a big change for the young Manijeh. Nothing was even comparable to the prosperous life that she was used to in Shanghai. But there was something that could not be bought, nor influenced by any wealth. And that was the hidden force in young Manijeh’s heart, her true love for her motherland, Iran. This hidden true love was so strong





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that in spite of her limited knowledge about Persian culture, language and the unknown environment, she decided to stay and contribute to the welfare and progress of the lives of her fellow Iranians.

Manijeh learned Farsi. This was very hard, as almost all of the women of her time were not allowed to learn anything new, except for what was told to them by their mothers in the comfort and security of their homes - how to cook for the man of the house and how to provide pleasure for him as he wished. These teachings were far from her religious and social teachings. She could remember very well, that since childhood, her parents had taught and explained to her one of the main principles of their faith: the equality of all men and women in all aspects of social life. It was very strange, and sometimes unbelievable for her to see that in the land of her Prophet, where the faith was born, this grave injustice was being inflicted on many women of her time, just because they were not male. Injustice against women was widespread across the country and especially very severe in small towns and villages where the level of education was poor. She could see that in some cases, even the very life of a woman, being a wife or a sister or a daughter, was in the hands of the man. But what was she to do? She started with the Zoroastrian community and decided to teach young girls and women, as her parents in Shanghai had taught her.

### THE FIRST FEMALE TEACHER

It took a lot of hard work and dedication to pass the first hurdle and get the permission of the Zoroastrian Anjuman to allow her to start teaching light Swedish sports to the young Zoroastrian girls. The problem was not with the Anjuman, but the governmental procedure that the Anjuman had to follow, to convince the authorities of the time to allow a woman to teach her fellow women, one of the very many points we take for granted these days.

As far as historical documents show, this was the very first time in recent Iranian history that a woman was teaching at a school, and it was the very first time that someone had dared to teach sports to young girls. Manijeh knew well that the only way to break the mould is to regain forgotten or lost pride. She knew well that one day, the self-confidence that is

an integral part of that lost or forgotten pride will eventually arise. It was up to individual leaders like her to lead the way and awaken the community.

It took a short while for the Anjuman to realize the tremendous value put forth by Manijeh. Banking on her leadership and added value to the community, she requested to start two more classes, of English language and the art of quilting and sewing. The highest level of education that a Zoroastrian boy could have achieved in Iran, at that time, was 6th grade of elementary school.

Manijeh needed a capital investment to pay for the costs involved. With the help of some other progressive Zoroastrian women of her time, she planned and organized a theatrical play at the Zoroastrian center. The play was boycotted by some Iranian men, but the net profit from the sales of tickets was large enough to give Manijeh and her friends funding for the very first girls' junior high school, with only one class of the 7th grade. Eighth and ninth grades were added the following year. This was happening even prior to the opening of a Zoroastrian boys' junior high. A few years later, with the help of the Anjuman, and following the leadership of Manijeh, boys also got their first junior high classes.

### SPECIAL AMBASSADOR TO ALL ZOROASTRIAN SCHOOLS

Soon after, the Zoroastrian Anjuman, realizing her leadership and vision, asked Manijeh to be the special ambassador and trusted envoy of all the Zoroastrian schools. Recognizing the importance of education in the tiny community of Iranian Zoroastrians, she accepted the responsibilities of the new position and performed well for many years.

In addition to this critical task, and following up on the great tradition of our Parsi brothers and sisters, rooted in our Zoroastrian belief, she also started to help the Iranian population in general, by going to hospitals and infant health care organizations and providing a variety of services for the welfare of her Iranian fellow citizens, specifically women and children. If there were something that needed to be done to help a family, but was beyond her capability, she would contact any and all authorities to make sure help would come to the needy family. Recognizing her





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honesty, sincerity and love for the Iranian people, they would seldom reject her requests.

During the time, when the women of Iran were covered from head to toe with the black veil or “Chador,” Manijeh Shahrokh was the first to appear in public with the “Sari,” which is the special dress of Parsi women. She would do that with utmost courage and without any fear. Soon, her way of dressing became yet another symbol of her leadership and vision. This was years before Reza Shah of the Pahlavi Dynasty, ordered the removal of the veil from the women of Iran.

### FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF ZOROASTRIAN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION

Manijeh Shahrokh was one of the founders of the **Zoroastrian Womens' Organization** (ZWO). She knew that for women to prosper and contribute to society, they had to have their own organization to receive various kinds of services, and in times of desperate need, to focus on specific problems and help each other to resolve them. The most basic of these services was to have different kinds of classes, such as sewing, quilting, flower design, social affairs, cooking, home planning, English and many conferences and seminars for public education, thus awakening the sleeping pride of Iranians.

It was not easy to establish such an organization with the word “Women” in it. And Manijeh and other progressive women encountered many severe problems and various objections from all-male organizations. Many times they were tempted to just give up. But that was not Manijeh's way, nor that of her colleagues. It took more than three years of day-to-day effort, many sleepless nights and inch-by-inch advancements to bring about the existence of the ZWO.

It was in the month of Bahman 3678 Zoroastrian, or 1329 Khorshidi or 1940 AD that the ZWO was registered and started its services to the community. This organization was established on a non-political basis and from its inception on day one to this day, it has not indulged in any political activities nor any political discussions. Its mission was and is to promote the welfare of the Iranian community in general and Zoroastrian women in particular. It has been very

successful in fulfilling its mission as witnessed by many achievements over the years, such as several earthquake relief funds and services, relief to flood victims, educational seminars, health services to any and all Iranians, and other good works.

Manijeh was elected as the first president of the ZWO by unanimous decision. She held this position for many years. This organization is still an integral part and a vital member of the overall Iranian Zoroastrian society providing expanded services to all aspects of Iranian life by its hard work and the dedication of its past and present leaders, who were educated under Manijeh's leadership and direction.

It must be noted that at the time of writing this article, the ZWO is still the only Zoroastrian Womens' Organization in the world that was founded and is managed by Zoroastrian women. And in 3734 Zoroastrian, 1996 CE, the United Nations, acknowledging the pioneering and progressive spirit of the organization and of the founding members, and realizing the various services that have been provided by the organization, bestowed a special recognition; **an “Accredited” member of the United Nations for the advancement of humanity.**

### PIONEER FOR ALL AGES

Manijeh was the first Zoroastrian woman who participated in the regular meetings of the Zoroastrian Anjuman of Tehran, and in addition to discussing the needs of the ZWO and various initiatives, provided the vision and the foresight for the necessity of getting women involved in all aspects of Iranian Zoroastrian's social lives. One of the very first of these initiatives was to secure for the Zoroastrian women the right to vote. This crucial task, as part of her never-ending zeal to promote Zoroastrian womens' lives was soon achieved. For the first time in more than 1300 years, a small portion of Iranian women achieved the crucial right of voting. The awakening process had been started.

Manijeh Shahrokh was a woman of steel. She was a noble, progressive, visionary, highly educated, honest, straightforward, down to earth and a very courageous woman. She was afraid of nothing, and achieved what she had envisioned early in her life. Manijeh was a dedicated wife and a mother who raised four



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very successful children; one boy and three girls, one of whom I personally know: the late Mrs. Katayoon (Katy) Farin, wife of the beloved the late Dr. Farin of Iran. Katayoon is a woman of the same strength and character as her late mother. Shahrokh, Manijeh's eldest son, (photo left) was also renowned for his numerous lifetime achievements, particularly in Britain, in his honorary capacity of architect of

the Zoroastrian Centre, London, former President of the ZTFE and a dedicated Zoroastrian who helped his

fellow Zoroastrians in untold ways.

Manijeh was a Zoroastrian in a true sense. The everlasting, ever-fresh principles of Zoroastrian religion taught to us by the Good Prophet himself, the golden rules of "Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds" were always her guiding light in all of her prosperous life of eighty six years.

***May Ahura Mazda bless her soul and may the path she paved be followed by many young Zoroastrian girls who are reading this biography, across the world.***

***Dr. Khosro E. Mehrfar*** was born in Tehran, Iran. He moved to U.S. in 1979 to pursue his higher education. Dr. Mehrfar has served the Zarathushti community in many capacities. Author of many articles he has been interviewed by local, national & international media regarding social and cultural issues.



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### CAN LITERATURE MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE FOR WOMEN?

It is probably well-known that the acclaimed Parsi novelist, **Bapsi Sidhwa**, is an advocate of women's rights. Across her five novels - *The Crow Eaters* (1987), *Pakistani Bride* (1987), *Cracking India* (1989) *An American Brat* (1993) and *Water* (2008), she has represented and thereby confronted the particular oppression that women in South Asian societies face. More than this, although often tender and funny, her works have refused to shelter readers from the often spectacular yet silenced violence that women have endured. Sometimes this is as a consequence of huge political dramas played out on a national stage, such as Partition, which Sidhwa herself witnessed as a child. No one who has read *Cracking India* could forget her depictions of the brutal price that women paid with their bodies for the hatred stirred by this civil war. Other times, her writing is tuned to the frequencies of intimate oppression on a domestic scale and the ways in which women's lives are constrained by those who care for them as well as those who don't.

Sidhwa was an avid reader as a child and cherished the lives she inhabited via books, especially during her long recovery from a bout of polio. All the same, her writing career was not prompted by this attachment to stories alone. Her first piece of writing, *Pakistani Bride*, was directly motivated by wanting to make known the story of a young girl's brief life that she heard whilst traveling in Northern Pakistan in 1964. Although she had not known the girl, hers was a story that Sidhwa described as having haunted her. Bought as a wife and effectively living as a slave, the girl was murdered by her husband when she sought to run away. Sidhwa's calling as a novelist was therefore entwined from the start with her desire to make a difference to women's lives by naming the injustices done to them and enabling the reader to feel what a life of suffering might entail. The power of that story, passed through her hands and amplified by her literary talents, went on to raise awareness about twentieth-century bride slavery for both local and international audiences. Although Sidhwa has always also devoted her energies to social and government programmes dedicated to improving women's rights, safety and well-being, her literature has reached millions of readers and given each one a better understanding of the human consequences of injustice. Literature is a special form of engagement because it promotes emotional access

to lives that we might otherwise be aware of but be unable to empathise with.

**ALISON DONNELL**



Despite the mistaken idea that feminist writing began in the global north, the same strong association between the deplorable realities of enslaved women's lives and the compelling power of storytelling that catalysed Sidhwa's career can be traced back to the remarkable narratives of their own lives that African enslaved women took heroic steps to make heard. When *Mary Prince's* life story was published by the Anti-Slavery Society in 1831, it was the first published account of female enslavement and escape and it made compelling reading for those opposed to the brutalizing realities of the slave-trade which was not yet illegal in the Caribbean. For Prince, as for other former slaves, writing was a vital way of making themselves known as fellow human subjects. The stakes of her storytelling were incredibly high and her main literary appeal was to be understood and appreciated as a feeling subject - as a woman like other women. For the great cause of abolition, she appealed personally to each of her female readers, 'I have been a slave - I have felt what a slave feels, and I know what a slave knows, and I would have all good people in England know it too, that they may break our chains, and set us free.'

This project of telling women's stories to improve their lives and contest systemic and entrenched injustices is certainly no less relevant or compelling today. In *Half The Sky*, published in 2010, the Pulitzer Prize winning journalists, **Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn**, took up the call to engage social sympathy for subjugated women across China to India, Korea, Japan and Africa by circulating their life stories in print. As journalists they had researched the nature of the abuse, discrimination and negligence that women faced. They had even coined the term "gendercide" to convey the catastrophic scale of human loss that negatively gendered societies effectively sanction. Yet, having identified that 'in this century the paramount moral challenge will be the struggle for gender equality in the developing world', they also knew that the most effective strategy was not to tell the readers about





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their research findings but rather to share the women's stories directly. Almost echoing Mary Prince's call to her readers two centuries earlier, they make an appeal for action against gender injustice on the basis of the reader's emotional connection to the women whose lives they have imagined themselves into via the act of reading: 'Just open your heart and join in'.

For **Katherine Boo**, also a Pulitzer Prize-winning American journalist, this tug of fiction over fact was even keener. Having dedicated years to researching the lives of those living in the large slum of Annawadi, adjacent to Mumbai airport and the opulent residential areas nearby, Boo recognised that journalism was not the best tool for her task of representing their lives. In an interview with **Mira Ptacin** she explained the genesis of her remarkable first novel *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death and Hope in a Mumbai Slum* (2012): 'The only certainty I had when I started work in 2007 was that there was a lack of depth to the reporting on how India's phenomenal growth was affecting daily lives in low-income communities—and particularly the lives of ordinary women and children. It took two years of immersion and investigative reporting before I began to sense what the larger story might be'. Boo's novel is deeply informed by her research of the realities of women's lives lived in this makeshift, and often merciless place. But what carries the urgency of her

message about the cruel proximities of poor and rich lives and about the need to humanise those we too often want to relegate to the edges of our consciousness, is the power of her storytelling and the flawed, vulnerable characters she describes. They, like the child bride that Sidhwa never forgot, are haunting.

The literary works by these women, as well as many others by writers as diverse India's **Arundhati Roy**, Egypt's **Nawal El Sadawi**, Senegal's **Mirama Ba** and Haiti's **Edwidge Danticat**, all answer a pressing obligation to narrate women's lives that are still unseen or unacknowledged by the societies in which they live. They too draw attention to the practices that maintain their oppression and enable us to imagine how such a life must be. Of course, if reading is a pleasurable way of better understanding gender injustice it is not a guarantee that the world will be a better place, only that it could be. Writers can re-describe the world and help us to identify the changes that need to happen but once we have put down our books we need to translate empathy into action, feeling into fighting injustice. **George Eliot** was only partly right when she said 'Our good depends on the quality and depth of our emotion'. It also depends on commitment to translate that emotion into good words and good deeds.

**Alison Donnell** is a Professor of Modern Literatures in English in the Department of English Literature at the University of Reading, UK where she is also Head of the School of Literature, Creative Writing and Drama at the University of East Anglia. She has researched and taught postcolonial women's writing for more than twenty years. She is a Founding Editor of *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, and is on the editorial board of the *Journal of West Indian Literature*, and *Chair of Directors of Wasafiri*, a contemporary writing magazine.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alison\\_Donnell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alison_Donnell)

### I CORRECTION

In the Fall 2016 issue one of the cover pictures was described as  
"Rusi Sorabji towing a twin engine plane".

In fact the plane was a single engine **Cessna 172 Skyhawk** which he was taking for refueling. We regret the error, and applaud Rusi for his enjoyment of flying, which is an inspiration to many seniors.

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### THE INSPIRING STORY OF BHIKHAIJI CAMA (1861-1936)

MOTHER OF THE INDIAN INDEPENDENCE REVOLUTION

LEADER IN THE STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

K. E. EDULJEE

#### 1. MADAME CAMA THE DEDICATED LEADER

Madame Cama, as Bhikhaiji Cama came to be known, was a leader in the Indian independence movement as well as a leader in the movement to emancipate Indian women. Her story is one of absolute commitment and the sacrifice of her life to her causes.

#### 2. ERA OF CHANGE & WOMEN'S EDUCATION

Bhikhaiji Cama lived at a time when a great rethinking of the role of Indian Zoroastrian women in community life was taking place. Before her time, Indian Zoroastrian women devoted themselves, for the main part, to managing the family and household. Together with a change in attitude, it was education in English that would enable them to participate professionally in British India.

The groundwork for education in English was prepared in the mid-nineteenth century by Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, Manockjee Cursetjee Shroff and Dadabhai Naoroji. Initially, a fierce opposition from certain sectors of the Indian Zoroastrian community greeted their pioneering efforts.

#### 3. BHIKHAIJI CAMA'S EDUCATION

Born on September 24, 1861 to a wealthy Bombay couple, Sorabji and Jaijibai Patel, Bhikhaiji Cama was schooled at the first Parsi English medium school – the Alexandra Native Girl's English Institution, a school that had been built by Judge Manockjee Cursetjee Shroff (1808–1887) in 1863.

#### 4. BHIKHAIJI CAMA'S MARRIAGE

In 1885, Bhikhaiji married lawyer Rustam Cama son of the famed Kharshedji Rustomji Cama, patron of the K. R. Cama Institute of Oriental Studies.

#### 5. BHIKHAIJI ATTENDS THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

In 1885, she also attended the Indian National Congress' first meeting – a political action assembly and harbinger of the cause to which she would dedicate her life.

#### 6. SOCIAL WORK NURSING PLAGUE VICTIMS

In September 1896, a famine followed by a plague epidemic struck Bombay. Bhikhaiji joined a team caring for the afflicted. Unfortunately, she contracted the plague and survived only to be so weakened that in 1902, she had to move to London for medical care.



Madame Cama holding her flag of Indian Independence. Painting by Cumi Dallas (1972). Image credit: Dadi Pudumjee.



Photograph taken during Bhikhaiji Cama's wedding. Standing second from left is Bhikhaiji's husband Rustamji Cama. Perhaps the woman sitting in front of him is Bhikhaiji.





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### 7. BHIKHAJI'S POLITICAL ACTIVITIES IN LONDON

In London, Bhikhaiji met Indian nationalists Shyamji Varma and Dadabhai Naoroji. Naoroji was President of the Indian National Congress' British Committee and had moved to London to work in the Cama's London office – the first Indian business firm in England. Naoroji was soon elected as a member of the British House of Commons. In February 1905, Bhikhaiji and Naoroji supported the founding of Shyamji Varma's Indian Home Rule Society.

Now a committed nationalist, Bhikhaiji delivered fiery speeches advocating Indian independence and freedom at London's Hyde Park. Her slogan found in a letter to Maxim Gorky was, "Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God."



Caring for victims of the plague in Bombay/Mumbai.

### 8. BHIKHAJI'S FLAG OF INDIAN INDEPENDENCE. CALL FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



Bhikhaiji Cama's flag being feted at the Kesari-Maratha Library in Pune, India. Credit: Savarkar.org.

On August 22, 1907, Bhikhaiji attended the International Socialist Conference in Stuttgart, Germany, where she described the political context of the devastation wrought by the famine and plague she had experienced in India. When she appealed for support for human rights, equality and Indian independence from Great Britain, she wrapped

herself with a flag she had made and proclaimed, "This flag is of Indian Independence! Behold, it is born! It has been made sacred by the blood of young Indians who sacrificed their lives. I call upon you to rise and salute the flag of Indian independence. I appeal to lovers of freedom all over the world to support this flag." Indulal Yagnik, the socialist leader of Gujarat, smuggled Bhikhaiji's Flag into India. It is now kept in the Kesari-Maratha Library in Pune, India and eventually evolved into the national flag of India.

### 9. GENDER & CULTURAL BIAS IN THE FLAG'S DESIGN CLAIMS

It is quite unfortunate that some male Hindu nationalists seek to deny that a woman or a Parsi could have played a leadership role in the Indian independence movement. After assigning credit for designing the flag to a Hindu male, they relegate Bhikhaiji's role to the gender stereotypical role of a seamstress and a supporting or public relations role – a 'mother' if you will, who tended to the housekeeping and nurturing needs of the male Hindu revolutionaries, the 'real' warriors.

While others may have designed other flags, no other copy of Bhikhaiji's flag exists and no other person is shown holding her flag.

### 10. BRITISH MOVE TO ARREST BHIKHAJI

The British government now threatened to arrest and deport Bhikhaiji to India (and jail there). The British



Bhikhaiji Cama holding her flag of Indian Independence. Location and other details not known. Cumi Dallas' 1972 portrait of Bhikhaiji may be based on this photo.





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eventually confiscated all of Bhikhaiji's Indian assets.

### 11. BHIKHAIJI MOVES TO PARIS

As a result, Bhikhaiji moved to Paris on May 1, 1909. Her home at 25 Rue de Ponthieu became the headquarters for Indian independence advocates and revolutionaries.

#### A. BHIKHAIJI BECOMES A REVOLUTIONARY

After the 1907 Stuttgart conference, Cama traveled extensively delivering lectures on Indian independence and women's rights. She now espoused Indian independence through a violent revolution and received comments that this was not woman-like.

Her response: *"Some of you say that as a woman, I should object to violence. Well, I had that feeling at one time, but that feeling is gone. If we use force, it is because we are forced to use force. Struggle for freedom calls for exceptional measures. Successful rebellion against foreign rule is patriotism... we want back our own country. No English oak is wanted in India. We have our own noble banyan tree and our beautiful lotus flowers... let our motto be 'We are all for India, India for Indians.'"*

Bhikhaiji became a member of the revolutionary Abhinav Bharat group and took an oath under its banner to fight the "British tyrants until death or victory". Bhikhaiji and Munchers Shah Burjorji Godrej co-founded the New India Society (later, the Paris India Society) a Paris-based revolutionary group similar to Abhinav Bharat.

#### B. BHIKHAIJI BECOMES THE INDIAN REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT'S PUBLISHER

In Paris, Bhikhaiji also launched, wrote, published and distributed revolutionary literature. In September 1909, she launched 'Bande Mataram', a weekly periodical, as also the weekly 'Madan's Talwar' (Madan's Weapon) targeting the British Indian Army's Indian sepoys. Bhikhaiji's prolific publishing of revolutionary material made her Paris home a hub for the publication and promotion of Indian revolutionary literature.

#### C. ADVOCATE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS & FOR WOMEN TO RAISE THEIR VOICES

Bhikhaiji Cama continued her passionate support for gender equality. When speaking at the 1910 National Conference in Cairo, Egypt, she pointedly asked the male Egyptian delegates, "I see here only the representatives of half of Egypt. The assembly is full of only men. Where is the other half of Egypt?"

#### D. BHIKHAIJI'S INTERNMENT

After the start of World War I in 1914, France – now



Bhikhaiji Cama holding her flag while posing with Indian lawyer and political activist Sardarsingh Rana in Paris.





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Britain's ally – jailed Bhikhaiji in October 1914 when she tried to instigate troops of Punjab Regiment who had just arrived in Marseilles on their way to the battlefield. After being released and rearrested, she was finally released in November 1917 on the condition that she report to the police weekly. After the war ended, Bhikhaiji returned to her Paris home and resumed her revolutionary activities.

### 12. BHIKHAJI'S MYTHICAL REPUTATION GROWS

Bhikhaiji soon earned a mythical reputation. The Russians called her India's Joan of Arc while Indians called her the "Mother of the Revolution". In 1913, the Indian Government's Criminal Intelligence Office named Bhikhaiji as a leader of the Paris based Indian revolutionary movement. Further, Hindus regarded her "as a reincarnation of a deity, presumably Kali."<sup>1</sup>

### 13. BHIKHAJI & WOMEN'S RIGHT TO VOTE

Bhikhaiji's call for women's rights included a call for the right to vote. In 1920, she exhorted two fellow champions of women's voting rights, Herabai and Mithan Tata, to "work for India's freedom and independence. When India is independent, women will not only [have] the right to vote, but all other rights."<sup>2</sup>

### 14. A LONELY BHIKHAJI MISSES HOME

Banned from returning to her beloved India, Bhikhaiji was lonely and homesick as she turned sixty. Cut off by the British from her wealth, she depended on her brother Ardeshir Patel for funds. When he died, she sank into poverty. Then fate dealt her a final cruel blow. An accident cracked her skull and left her face paralysed.

### 15. BHIKHAJI'S LAST DAYS

Through Sir Cowasji Jehangir, Bhikhaiji petitioned the British government to permit her to return home to die. They acceded to the request on the condition that she renounce her nationalist activities – a demand that was entirely moot given her worsening ill health.

Accompanied by Cowasji Jehangir, Bhikhaiji arrived in Bombay in November 1935. On August 13, 1936, largely ignored, Bhikhaiji, aged 75, passed away at the Parsi General Hospital.

#### Endnotes:

This article is based on 'The Inspiring Story of Bhikhaiji Cama at [http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/reference/Madame\\_Cama\\_Complete-Eduljee.pdf](http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/reference/Madame_Cama_Complete-Eduljee.pdf)

1 Her correspondence with Gorky during September and October 1912 is now in the "Gorky Archives" together with a photograph of her and her flag of the Indian Revolution [Nawaz Mody in *The Parsis in Western India, 1818 to 1920* (New Delhi, 1998) p. 67].

2 Gupta & Gupta in *Concise Encyclopaedia of India* Vol. 3 (New Delhi, 2008) p. 1014 & the German Socialist paper *Vorwärts* (August 1907).

3 Dr. Jyotsna Kamat in an article at <http://www.kamat.com/kalranga/itihasa/cama.htm> dated January 15, 2016.

4 An online Marathi periodical called The Daily Kesari continues to be published, edited by Lokmanya Balgangadhar Tilak's great grandson, Deepak Tilak.

5 The Hindu Janajagruti Samiti website: "Madam Cama and Bhanumatiji, the wife of Shri Shamji Krishna Varma, themselves stitched this flag, using rich satin and silk cloth of the same three colours. Three such flags were made."

6 S. Lal in *50 Magnificent Indians of the 20th Century* (Mumbai, 2008).

7 Article dated September 23, 2006 in Parsi Khabar 'Madame Cama's call for Bande Mataram in...' by V. Sundaram.

8 G. *Forbes in Women in Modern India* (Cambridge, 1999) p. 100.





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### PARSI WOMEN

#### KUSOOM VADGAMA

The Parsis are like no other community in India. They do not have a caste system nor do they have a geographical place in the country they can call theirs. It is these differences that have influenced the way they see society and the reasons why they treat everyone as equal and faithful to the place where they live. Added to this is the fact that as a community, the Parsis have adapted to the Western life style which, on the whole, the Hindus and the Muslims have not. Theirs has also been a public spirited approach for the good of all. It is this very unique attitude that led some remarkable Parsi women, who, with patience and formidable persistence became a single force in politics, medicine, society, and education. They are the heroines who turned reforms into reality that helped to shape the destiny of India.

The two extra ordinary women at the peak of political and legal pyramids are **Madam Bhikaji Cama** (1861-1936) and **Cornelia Sorabji** ( 866-1954). Bhikaji Cama, 'the mother of all Indian revolutions holds a very unique and special position in the history of the struggle for Indian independence, and that too on the doorstep of the enemy, in Britain and often at great personal risk. She demanded that the British rule of India had to cease. Unlike Bhikaji, Cornelia was not a radical but a defender of the British status quo which often created her enemies in India and friends in Britain.

Cornelia was the first female law student at Somerville College, Oxford in 1889 and the first female to practice law in India and Britain. The book of her edited letters, **AN INDIAN PORTIA**, is an unique record of an Anglophile and a social worker, defending the rights of women in purdah in India. She is to letters what **Samuel Pypes** is to diaries. During World War II, she compiled a book of tributes to the Indian soldiers from eminent British in public life, including Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister, with a Foreword by Queen Mary. The sales proceeds were for the Indian Soldiers Comfort Fund. Cornelia's 150 birth anniversary on 15 November 2016 is being marked with the launch of Cornelia Sorabji Post-graduate Scholarship for an Indian student at Somerville College, Oxford.

The honour of being the first Indian woman called to the Bar goes to **Mithan Tata** in 1923. She was associated with the All India Women's Conference and helped to draft



the Hindu Code Bill and other acts that became law. She represented India at U.N.Seminar on Women in Family Law in Tokyo and was a delegate to the U.N. on Status of Women. Mithan was appointed Justice of Peace in 1971.

A notable politician and law maker, outside India was **Frene Ginwala** (1932- ) elected member of South African Parliament in 1994 and its first woman Speaker of the House.

Among a generations of women who became active in social work was **Mary Rustomji** ( 1909-1975), who was elected the first Sheriff and Magistrate of Madras. For the boys who were brought to her in the court, she founded the Boy's Home for their rehabilitation. A different kind of help came from **Jai Vakeel**, who started the first school for disturbed children in her own home in 1944 and **Meher J. Banerjee** (1934- ) who established a Happy Home in 1935 for the visually impaired children.

In the field education, **Amy H.H. J. Rustomji** (1806-1976) and **Mithan Choksi** ( 1911- ) played an active role. Choksi was the first Asian woman to be appointed principal of the Secondary Training College in Bombay and the first woman to be elected Vice-President (1956-1959) of the International Federation of University Women. Women in airways communication were unheard of until **Mehra Masani** (1913-) was appointed the first woman State Director of All India Radio. She later became a member of the International Broadcasting Institute and finally the first woman Trustee and it's Vice-Chairman.

Two of the most influential women in the printed media have been **Bachi Karkaria**, and **Coomi Kapoor**, both journalists and both remarkable communicators. Karkaria





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was an Editor of the Times of India and the first Indian on the Board of the World Editors Forum. She is currently on the advisory board of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Kapoor, a leading columnist of the Indian Express and other major publications, is on the Executive Committee of the Editor's Guild. In her Foreword for the book, AN INDIAN PORTIA, the edited letters of Cornelia Sorabji, she comments on the western influence on the Parsees.

One woman who made medical history travelling to the west was **Dr. Dossibai Dadabhoy**, the first Parsee woman to study medicine in London. She was also the first Indian woman President of the Association of Medical Women in India in 1937. Women were just as anxious as men to go into the medical profession and the first woman Parsee surgeon was **Dr. Shirin Commissariat**.

The world's first woman anaesthetist was **Rupabai Furdoonji** in Hyderabad between 1889 and 1917. **Moti Bai Kapadia** (1889-1930) another doctor in Ahmedabad, was presented the Kaiser-e- Hind award for her contribution to medicine.

Care for the patients in hospitals was left to the nurses and **Tehmina. K. Adranvala** ( born 1908 ) became the most revered nurse, an inspiration to nurses in India. She became the first Indian woman Chief Nursing Superintendent, office of Director General of Health Services in India, becoming the first Indian nurse to hold that position. In 1939 she became a Matron and in 1966 was appointed a member of the WHO Committee and became the Vice-President of International Council of Nurses.

In the early days of family planning it was left to **Avabai Bomanji Wadia** (1913-2005) who founded the government backed International Planned Parenthood Federation and the Family Planning Association of India which brought about a social revolution.

For all their interactions with other Indians for centuries, the Parsis never took on Indian classical dance and music. They were more attracted to the

western dance and music. The exception being **Roshan Vajifdar** and her two sisters, **Shirin and Khurshid**, who performed in India and the west for over four decades.

One of the first India woman to study at the Royal Academy of Music in London was **Tehmie Gazdar**, pianist, who became well known for her All India radio programmes, winning popularity and prizes. **Coomi Wadia**, another western trained musician became a well known conductor touring Europe, and winning awards. Not a musician nor a dancer herself, the one woman who made Indian classical dance popular in the west is **Shireen Isal** (1946- ). Her mission has been to create awareness in the west of Indian cultural heritage by presenting India's finest classical performing arts. This she has done successfully and professionally for decades in France and Britain as India's art Ambassador in the West.

Political history was made in Britain when **Zerbanoo Gifford** became the first Indian woman to stand in parliamentary election in 1983 and elected the first ever non-White member of the Liberal Party's Executive. Campaigning for the rights of women and combating slavery, Zerbanoo has won international reputation and presented awards, including the International Woman of the Year 2006 for her humanitarian campaigns.

Zerbanoo Gifford's family motto was: **we are in this world to serve others**. It would be no exaggeration to say that with the establishment of the ASHA Centre in England, Zerbanoo has shown how it is possible, something that no other Indian woman has been able to do. The Centre crosses all national, religious and cultural boundaries, focusing only on the empowerment of the young for better understanding and respect among people from all over the world. Her dedication and determination to work on an international level, unique and unheard of, is as amazing as it is admirable.

These remarkable women deserve to be honoured and recognised for their lifelong and selfless contributions. They have brought about social revolutions in every aspect of life and represented India abroad magnificently. They are as much the pride of India as they are of the Parsis.

**Kusoom Vadgama**, born in Kenya, is a Doctor of Optometry. She attended the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York, and the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts. In 1961 she set up her optometry practice in London. To mark the 400 years, (1616-2016) of Indo-British relations she founded the Indo-British Heritage Trust. She is an authority and author on the history of the Indian peoples in the British Empire, She has published three books : *Indians in Britain (1852-1947)*; *British-Indian campaigns in Britain for Indian reforms, justice and freedom 1831-1947*; and *"An Indian Portia: Selected Writings of Cornelia Sorabji (1866-1954).*



## MY FIRST STEP AT WOMEN EMPOWERMENT – Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 60), 2016

FARHAD MALEGAM, Sydney, Australia



*[Photo above from left) Behram Pastakia, Co-Chair, FEZANA UN-NGO Committee from Metropolitan Washington DC; Farhad Malegam, from Sydney, Australia; Tanya Bharda, recently returned from Mumbai, India, after working with underprivileged children and women in Maharashtra and Goa; Nurelle Mehta, from the Greater Toronto Area, with college classmate, Ayehsa Dumasia, both students in Political Science at Brock University, Canada; Adina Mistry, from Scarsdale High School, with her chaperone, and supportive father, Adil Misty from Scarsdale, New York.*

**Photo Credit Adina Mistry**

*(Team members for CSW 60, not shown in the photo above, are Delna Weil, Shekufeh Zonji, Mantreh Atashband, Homi Gandhi, Delzin Choksey and Afreed Mistry – the main Representative of FEZANA at the United Nations.)*

I was born into a nation and society where gender inequality was a norm and patriarchy was the way of life. This was evident in school, in university, at workstations and most obviously in the distribution of labour and in the rights of owning the means of production. Through both personal as well as religious beliefs, I have always stood for equality and development of society as a whole and not just one section of it. This belief of mine lead me to apply for a spot as a FEZANA delegate to the 60th Commission Status of Women (CSW) in New York city.

Over the span of ten power-packed days in March 2016 (14th-24th March 2016), also, my first delegation to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at the United Nations, I had the incredible opportunity



to engage in official events sponsored by country missions, NGOs and UN agencies on diverse matters, including but not restricted to sustainable development and women empowerment.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the premier global intergovernmental body solely dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. You can always read up more about it on <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw>. The idea of the 60<sup>th</sup> Commission was to create a plan of action to empower women in order to achieve sustainable development. In order to measure progress, the UN uses the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) as its key KPIs. The UN believes that, for the goals to be reached, everyone needs to do their part: governments, the private sector, civil society and people like you. CSW60 sheds light on this pathway of achieving sustainable development through women empowerment.

During the commission, UN member states negotiate and produce an [outcome document](#). At the same time, numerous parallel events take place. These events range from planned parenthood, study of methodologies in the examination of roles of women in culture, economics and politics. This year, FEZANA organised a parallel event to discuss the role of women in culture, economics and politics. In the presentation, cultures were examined, the marketplace was reflected upon, politics was looked at with a magnifying glass and role (the lack of it) of women in all aspect of life was highlighted. Under the guidance and support of Dr. Pastakia, Adil Mistry and his wonderful family, Dastoorji Bharda, Afreed Mistry, Shekufeh and the FEZANA family, the Zarathushti team not just pointed out obvious problems, but also spoke on the solutions towards these severe issues. My talk on politics and women was focused on the participation of women in politics, the hurdles they face and the capitalist structure we live in. With a wide variety of audiences present (which was possible thanks to the eye catching posters designed by our dear Delzin Choksey), the FEZANA presentation went better than expected.

Apart from the FEZANA event, I attended a number of other parallel events. In my opinion, the parallel events seemed more energized than the official events. The panel on rural women empowerment, the African Women for Good Governance event on forced marriage, and the UNA Women event on sustainable development and maternal mortality rates were some of my favourite events.

In addition, I had the pleasure and honour of celebrating my favourite festival, Nowruz, at the UN alongside delegates and UN ambassadors from around the world. This would not have been possible without the support of the ever-ready-to-help, Mr. Homi Gandhi.

The highlight of my trip though was the [opening ceremony of the Arbab Rustam Guiv Darbe Mehr](#) in the Greater New York. The event was one of the most beautiful displays of Zarathushti culture, festivity, unity and love. From the beautiful and holy Jashan to the musical performances by young Zarathushti kids, the opening ceremony showcased our culture in the most magnificent ways. However, the most iconic moment here was listening to Professor K D Irani speak. His knowledge on Zarathushtra is unique and spectacular. The ceremony not just charged me up religiously, but also increased my personal and professional network as I met people from all fields of life. If it weren't for the CSW60 conference and support of the team I would never have had the opportunity to experience what I did, and for this I thank the FEZANA UN team.

It doesn't really matter how small or simple your ideas are; if you have the conviction and the determination to strengthen the weak and practice a life of making the world around us a better place, we will see a better place.

**Farhad Malegam**, a post-graduate student at Macquarie University, is passionate about international affairs, doing business, travelling and drinking beers, wines & good teas. He is a massive foodie and loves deep sea diving



# Personal Profiles

## Guloo Austin — A Pioneering Priestess

FARISHTA MURZBAN DINSHAW

Guloo was born in Mumbai, India, into a loving family. “My father Kaikhushru Kavarana was one of 15 kids so we had many cousins to give us company and we were spoilt rotten by my two kakas (paternal uncles) who were bachelors. My mother, Silloo, was a homemaker and her talents only emerged after my father passed away. Since my brother Farrokh and I were studying abroad she had to find something to occupy herself so she immersed herself in volunteering; Red Cross, member of the Petit Sanatorium committee and, finally, two terms as a Parsi Punchayat trustee. I have to credit my Mom for choosing my profession as she wanted to give me the same opportunity that my brother had to study abroad. My Dad on the other hand, had the typical Parsi attitude about this, “Eh to panni jasse ne apra paisa badha pani ma!” (*She’ll just get married and all the money spent will go down the drain*). At that time there was a rule in India that you could only go abroad for studies provided that the course was not offered in the whole of India, or on a business permit. So, my Mom was flipping through a woman’s magazine on a Sunday afternoon and came across Speech Therapy as a profession. She thought this would be ideal as I loved children and was always interacting with my younger cousins.”

Guloo and her husband Marzban studied in the U.K. and subsequently worked in London. Their first two children, Pheroz and Navroze, were born in the U.K. In 1975, they immigrated to Ottawa, Canada, where her husband’s sister lived. Guloo recalls her first years in Canada, “We were kind of isolated in Ottawa as we were just a handful of Zoroastrians, and as new immigrants we had to focus on the new job, children’s schooling, etc. Then, we moved to London, Ontario, in 1981. Being closer to Toronto, we started going to Toronto functions for New Year, Navroze and so on. In London, we were the second Zoroastrian family to arrive and then gradually others came and

today we have approximately 10 families. We used to take our boys to Toronto for Sunday classes once a month. After a couple of years, parents in London



Mobedyar Guloo Austin with FEZANA President Katayun Kapadia

*asked me if I would start religious classes for their children so the first Sunday of each month we would have the class. While I taught [the children] the adults had their own discussion. I taught for 10 years, and we are still continuing with the discussion group led by our very own mobed, Ervad Tehemton Mirza.”*

The seeds of her journey to become a mobedyar were sown at Zarathushti congresses in North America and around the world. “At these congresses, we hammered the question of why women who had reached menopause could not be trained to be mobedyars. A few years ago, I was pleasantly surprised to read that the North American Mobed Council (NAMC) had passed a resolution to allow females to be trained. A mobedyar is an assistant to the mobed; he

# Personal Profiles

*or she primarily plays the role of the Rathvi (assistant). In a jashan (thanksgiving ceremony), the main mobed prays most of the Afrigans and the mobedyar joins in for some parts. I don't think there is any difference between a male mobedyar praying and a female. We pray the same prayers."*

Guloo became excited when she heard NAMC resolution as this allowed her to pursue what she had advocated for many years. *"I could not have asked for a better opportunity than having a resident mobed, Ervad Tehemton Mirza, agree to train me. He met with us every weekend practically for two years. He taught us pronunciations, where to pause and encouraged us to memorize some parts. In addition, we learnt how to do a jashan, the flower rituals, and say the prayers for the deceased. The final test was, when we invited five mobeds from Toronto who witnessed our performance doing the jashan, and were given a certificate. Every year, we do the mukhtads (prayers for departed souls) on the five Gatha days. I have been lucky in the support I have received from family members, friends and the priestly class, both in India and North America. In fact, my cousins in India, who pester me to do the jashan in their houses, get disappointed when I say I can only do it in North America as I have to follow the NAMC guidelines." One of the highlights of her practice as a mobedyar was the "Jashan in the Bagh", when thirty Zarathushti mobeds and mobedyars from across North America gathered at the Ontario Zoroastrian Community darbemeher on 21 June 2015 to perform a "khushali no jashan" (a celebratory ceremony). Guloo says, "It was really an uplifter as mobeds and mobedyars were equally recognised."*

Besides her commitments as a mobedyar, Guloo is an active senior in London and sits on different committees focussed on health care and directing London to be an age-friendly city. She was responsible for producing a brochure for seniors on how to navigate the health system. She also makes time to spend with her family. "Marzban and I have three wonderful sons, Pheroz, Navroze and Arshes and their equally wonderful spouses, Zareen, Lisa and Vanessa, and altogether we are blessed with five grandchildren."

In looking to the future of Zarathushtis in North America, she is congratulatory of the contributions of forward-thinking co-religionists who started the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) thirty years ago. "FEZANA would not have come to this point if it hadn't been for the founder members, like Homi Homji, Rohinton Rivetna, Lovji Cama, Kaikhushru Irani, Dolly Dastoor, Ervad Jehan Bagli and so many others who gave their valuable time and so many now, especially the youngster generation, who are getting involved. These individuals truly make us proud. I think FEZANA has done a wonderful job keeping various communities together as well as being progressive in encouraging associations to build dadgahs and dar e mehrs so that Zoroastrians can come together for a common purpose. These meeting places have now blossomed to conduct religious classes, sport events, fundraisers and anything else when one wants to get together as a community."

## A New Navar in New York

Erv Porus Pavri, the youngest priest in the Greater Metropolitan Area of New York was felicitated on his accomplishment of successfully completing the requirements of being ordained a Navar at an acknowledgement



ceremony held at the newly opened Arabab Rustom Guiv Dar-e-Mehr in New York. on Sunday, anuary 8, 2017

Lovji Cama, Dean of Religious Studies at ZAGNY and Chair of Fezana's Religious Education Committee gifts a copy of the book, "The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra

- Translation of the Gathas into English", the opus by Irach JS Taraporevala to Erv Porus Pavri, as a token of appreciation from the community for his commitment in preparing himself in perpetuating our faith in the Western Zarathushti Diaspora.

Photo credit Edul Davar. J

# In The News

## THE ZOROASTRIAN ASSOCIATION OF HOUSTON LIBRARY, HOME OF FIRES, HELD TWO VERY INTERESTING LECTURE SERIES ON OCTOBER 29<sup>TH</sup> 2016 AND DECEMBER 1<sup>ST</sup> AND 2<sup>ND</sup> 2016. BELOW ARE THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE TWO PRESENTATIONS BY DR DANIEL SHEFFIELD AND K.E. EDULJEE.

DR. DAN SHEFFIELD VISITS THE ZOROASTRIAN ASSOCIATION OF HOUSTON. OCTOBER 29, 2016

MEHERYAR N. RIVETNA

What does a young American student from Harvard University with a Fulbright scholarship do for eight months in Navsari, India? He reads. He pores over and intensely studies rare manuscripts, books and the vast literature on the Zarathusti religion at the Meherji Rana library in Navsari. That is the stuff scholars are made of. That is what one scholar, Dr. Daniel Sheffield,



did to augment his knowledge of the Zoroastrian faith while working towards his doctoral thesis in that area. At the Meherji Rana library, Dan discovered a world of literature open to scholars and those interested in studying and understanding varied aspects of this great religion.



**Exploring Zoroastrian Identity** was the theme of a lecture program that the library committee of the Zoroastrian Association of Houston (ZAH) instituted on October 29, 2016. The committee invited Dr. Dan Sheffield to speak to the Houston Zoroastrian community for this event. Dan Sheffield (photo left) holds a Ph. D. from Harvard University; his doctoral dissertation is titled: *In the Path of the Prophet: Medieval and Early Modern Narratives of the Life of Zarathustra in Islamic Iran and Western India*. Dan is currently Assistant Professor in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. Dan presented two talks to an audience of over 60 attendees at the ZAH center.

The morning session was titled: ***“Yearning to See You: Friendship and Alliances Between Iranian and Indian Zoroastrians.”*** This talk highlighted the interconnected histories of the Zoroastrians in India and Iran and how they are two facets of one community. Today, Zoroastrian literature exists in five languages, Dan explained. They are: **Old Avestan** which is the language of the *Gathas*; **Young Avestan** which comprise the language of the *Visperad*, *Vendidad* and *Khordeh Avesta*; **Middle Persian (Pahlavi)**; **New Persian**; and **Gujarati**. Interestingly, while more texts on Zoroastrianism are available in later languages, scholars have written the most on which there is the least amount of material i.e., earlier languages.

Dan pointed out that after the fall of the Sasanian empire and the subsequent migration of some Zoroastrians to India there was only sporadic communication and interaction between the Indian and Iranian Zoroastrians. A revival of Zoroastrian history occurred when the Parsis in India started writing in Persian and Gujarati. Communication between the Iranian and Indian Zarathushtis renewed around 1478 and lasted until about 1773. Zoroastrian priests from India were encouraged to travel to Iran to meet with their Iranian counterparts with questions on religion. It was the Qadami priests and not the Shahenshai priests who maintained contacts with



# In The News

the Iranian priests. This made Iran the center of Zoroastrian religious authority. Over two thousand texts on these priestly exchanges are extant and are known as the Persian *Rivayats*.

Priests from India voyaged to Iran where they learned Pahlavi from their Iranian co-religionists and became knowledgeable in Zoroastrian works such as *Shāyist va nā Shāyist* which is a compendium of what is proper and improper in the Zoroastrian religion. (Writer's Note: Dastur Firoze Kotwal, High Priest of Bombay, obtained his Ph.D. on this work.)

Dan talked about a rare text called *The Story of Ka'us and Afsad* that he discovered during his research in Navsari. The story narrates how two Iranian Zoroastrian merchants who were shipwrecked on the shores of Gujarat during a trading excursion to India made the acquaintance of a very prominent and wealthy Parsi gentleman in Navsari named Manecksha Changa Asa. Manecksha was very hospitable to the two Iranians and this hospitality cemented a friendship between them.

These historical vignettes that Dan shared with his audience illustrate that differences between communities geographically and politically separated, but bound by the common thread of religion, can be bridged. It behooves us to learn from each other.

The afternoon session was titled ***"Mother Tongues: Language, Education, and Zoroastrian Identity."*** It was very heartwarming to hear Dan Sheffield say that the interest in Zoroastrianism is a "global interest."

Dan started this talk with some very thought provoking questions. What is the mother tongue of the Zoroastrian tradition? What relation do Zoroastrians have to language? Dan spoke of how language relates to religion. He drew attention to the fact that references to Pahlavi remind one of the language spoken during the Sasanian reign. No one thinks of Pahlavi as a scholarly language used by priests.

Dan emphasized that the importance of language in religious studies cannot be underestimated. One word can have a subtle difference when translated from, say, Pahlavi to Gujarati to English.

One has to marvel at the meticulous scholarship of students of Zoroastrian literature. While there are a few Zoroastrian scholars, past and present, from within the small community, Zoroastrians owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the western scholars not born and bred in the religion. But for the devotion and enthusiasm of these scholars to study in depth the wondrous teachings of Zarathustra, much of this knowledge, historical and religious, would be lost to the followers of the Zarathusti faith. Ervad Kavasji Edulji Kanga, a scholar in his own right, said it best in the preface of his translation of Anquetil du Perron's book: *Extracts from the Narrative of Mon. Anquetil du Perron's Travel in India Chiefly Those Relating to His Researches on the Religion of Zoroaster*.

**Ervad Kanga** wrote: *It has been with the study of Zend as it has been with the study of the inscriptions and architecture of the caves. Philological light has in the former, as magnesium light in the latter, illumined many dark places in the structure of Zend, and in the philosophy and ethics of Zoroaster. For this we are indebted to European scholars who have been and are the only expounders of the Zend Avesta.*

It was an honor to have Dr. Dan Sheffield in Houston and a privilege to learn from him.

**Meheryar Rivetna** is a member of the Houston Library Committee.

# In The News

## EVENING WITH EDULJEE DECEMBER 1 and 2, 2016

JANGOO MISTRY

**K. E. Eduljee**, a notable scholar, historian, and author of the much-acclaimed Zoroastrian Heritage website came from Vancouver to address our members. With a long list of accomplishments and intense involvement in Zoroastrian religion, immigration and community affairs worldwide. Mr Eduljee is also a founding trustee of the Arbab Guiv Darbe Meher Trust for British Columbia.



December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 Eduljee talked on **SILK ROADS, ARAB INVASION AND THE FLIGHT TO CHINA**. He traced trade routes from the early Aryan days about 12,000 years back that eventually came to be known as the Silk Roads. Trade among the Aryan nations later expanded to China in 2000 BCE. Driven to acquire Persian wealth, the Arabs (and the Mawalis in particular) persecuted Iranians who dispersed and fled to various neighboring regions, including China. Though Iranians flourished in China, their last traces disappeared gradually over many decades, and ended completely by the 17<sup>th</sup> century CE. December 2<sup>nd</sup>, K.E. Eduljee (photo below) spoke about **YALDA MITHRAISM, AND CHRISTMAS DAY**. Although the Romans considered Mithra as distinct from the Sun God, the general population equated Mithra with Sol, the Sun. In Zoroastrianism, Mithra is included in the scriptures as an angel or a friend. The Iranian festival celebrating the passing of the winter solstice is now widely known as Yalda. The day has astronomical, cultural and religious significance. But Yalda has never been an orthodox or traditional Iranian or Zoroastrian festival.



In modern times Christians all over the world celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ on Christmas Day, which falls on December 25. It was only around the 4th century, when Christianity was being established in Rome, that the Pope arbitrarily chose December 25 as Jesus's birthday. Surprisingly, in Ancient Rome the Winter Solstice festival, Saturnalia, was observed at that same time – a festival that eventually degenerated into a week-long spree of

unrestrained debauchery and crime.

Attendees on both evenings listened with rapt attention, and showed their interest by asking several insightful questions. ZAH is grateful to K. E. Eduljee for taking the time to come to Houston and share with the community, the results of his extensive research.

**Jangoo Mistry** is a member of the Houston Library committee and the webmaster of FIRES.

# In The News

## SOCIETY OF SCHOLARS OF ZOROASTRIANISM (SSZ)

### CONFERENCE – SEPTEMBER 3, 2016

REPORT BY MOBEDYAR BOMAN DAMKEVALA



The 11th SSZ Conference was held at the Arbab Rustam Guiv Darbe Mehr in Chicago on Saturday, September 3, 2016. The mission of the Society is to revive the tradition of scholarship within our community and to promote interaction among academicians, theologians (priests), educationists, lay scholars, and practitioners of Zoroastrianism through round table discussions, conferences and publications. All community members, students, scholars, and members of inter-faith communities are invited and encouraged to participate. The theme of this year's conference was "Zoroastrian History: Pre-Achaemenian Times to the Present Day".

Over 60 persons attending this conference were treated with a sumptuous breakfast followed by benediction by **Mobedyar Boman Damkevala** and a Monajat by **Mani Rao**. The participants were then welcomed by **ZAC VP Afshan Barshan**, **FEZANA President Homi Gandhi**, and **WZO US Chapter President Kayomارش Mehta**. Homi Gandhi pointed out that SSZ furthers one of the goals of FEZANA, namely sharing the knowledge of the Zoroastrian religion. He stressed that conferences like this furthers our quest for knowledge. **Rohinton Rivetna**, who has spear-headed this annual conference since 2006, gave a brief introduction to SSZ and expressed his vision of SSZ that one day it will be accepted by other scholarly organizations such as the American Society of Religions. He also expressed the need of SSZ conferences to be held in other parts of USA and Canada, and the need of such conferences organized by our next generation of Zoroastrians.

The morning session, "**Pre-Nihavand History**", was chaired by **Eric Elavia**. Next generation speakers Sarosh Irani, Khursheed Ichaporia, Persis Driver, Kamal Saher and Afshan Barshan (photo left below ) presented the history of the Pre-Achaemenian, Achaemenian, Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Empires, respectively. Their presentations covered the influences and impacts on surrounding areas, economies, calendars, scriptures, religious diversity, etc., prevailing in those times. Prof. Richard Payne of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago (photo right below) discussed how through kinship, religion and jurisprudence the Sasanian Empire successfully integrated disparate populations into



enduring political networks and institutions.

During lunch, Tina Mistry read a poem "Achaemenian Empire" by Farida Bam. Also, during lunch, Kersi Shroff (photo page 63) presented interesting findings from his travels through Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and archeological sites in ancient Sogdiana. His presentation included photographs of many archeological objects.

The afternoon session, "**Post-Nihavand History**", was chaired by **Dastur Dr. Kersey Antia**.

**Dr. Daryoush Jahanian** gave an impassioned talk highlighting the persecution, discrimination and financial pressures on Zoroastrians in Iran after the Arab invasion. These pressures not only targeted individuals, but also libraries, universities and schools. **Dr. Dinyar Patel**, Asst. Professor of History at University of South Carolina, talked (via Skype) about the development of diaspora communities, with special focus on the Parsis, and how Zoroastrians can maintain their identities as the community becomes increasingly scattered around the globe.

After enjoying tea, the participants were treated with the keynote address on "**The Concept of Friendship in Ancient**



# In The News



*Iran”* by Distinguished Professor and Professor of Iranian Studies at Indiana University, **Prof. Jamsheed Choksey**. He pointed out several Persian terms related to mercy, forgiveness and balance in judgment used by the ancient Iranian society.

The program closed with a benediction by Dastur Dr. Kersey Antia for the 33<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of the Arbab Rustam Guiv Dar-e-Mehr, Chicago.

**Mobedyar Bomi Damkevala** has lived with his family in the Chicago area for the past 47 years. He has served the Chicago Zoroastrian Association in various capacities including its Secretary, Vice President and President

## INTERESTING RESOURCES FOR ZOROASTRIANS WORLDWIDE.



**TheParsiDirectory.com** started 10 years ago has more than 78,800 live registrations, making it **the Largest, Free, Worldwide Listing of Parsis, Iranis, Zoroastrians across the world.**

Over the years, thousands of Zoroastrians have connected with family and friends using this medium and many non-Zoroastrians have found long lost Zoroastrian relatives and friends, by requesting information from this valuable resource. Innumerable businesses have been discovered and valuable trade and commerce has been generated online. You may find Tour Operators, Caterers, Accountants, Lawyers, Film Makers, etc. etc.

**TheParsiInstitutions.com** incorporates Institutions like Agiaries, Associations, Baugs (reception halls) for Wedding and Navjotes, Dharamshalas, Sanatoriums, etc., across the world. Both these extremely valuable resources are now available on your mobile phone as an Android App - just follow this link (<https://goo.gl/XNDVBN>) to download it from the Play Store. Once the app is installed and you have registered you can connect with any of the 78,000+ registered users based on name, location, profession or using any combination, and can access more than 750 Parsi Institutions from across the world. You will also have the option to subscribe to Daily Roj, Salgarehs, Uthamna and Z-News from all over the world. Don't wait download the app now! (<https://goo.gl/XNDVBN>)

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# In The News

## IN SEARCH OF ZARATHUSHTI KURDS

FARIBORZ RAHNAMOON



While in Iran we decided to pay a visit to the Zarathushti Kurds and get to know them. We went to Marivan, the Kurdish border town in Iran and from there crossed the Bashmahk border into Suleymania in Iraq. We had our own car and had planned to drive across the border to be mobile. At the border, we were told that we need to get the 'Green Slip' for the car from the Iranian customs, who required the original papers of the car and the presence of the owner. Since we had neither of them we were forced to park our car at the border and travel without it.

The no-man land between the two border gates was over a kilometer long with duty free shops and immigration and custom offices of both countries. We were made to buy health insurance from a guy sitting in a container and then buy some other slip from another container before we were allowed to enter the immigration office. The immigration officer made us pay 25,000 Dinars each which converts to about \$30. The result was a 30-day visa to stay in Iraq. Then we walked out of the building and there was a sign that said '**Entry to Iraq**' it was a caged corridor that led us to a container where our bags were X rayed and our passport stamped. On the other side, we were back on the same road that had the duty-free shop. We walked about half a kilometer and we were at the Iraqi gate which was unmanned. The Iranian gate we entered was unmanned too. We wondered if it were not for the signs could someone just walk in and out? Outside the gate taxis were available some of the drivers spoke Persian other didn't. We showed them the address of the fire temple, whose inauguration just a few months ago, was all over social media. We had through friends contacted the people involved, who were happy to invite us and had sent us the address and contact numbers.

A younger driver, who as a child had taken refuge in Iran during the 8 year Iran-Iraq war and knew Persian well, was assigned to us. It was a 120 km drive through the mountain passes before we reached Suleymania or Sulamani as the locals call it.

Kurdistan is a mountainous area with cities developed in lush valleys, entry to the valley is through narrow mountain passes, which has helped the Kurds preserve their language and culture in the safety of these cities. The entry to the Kurdish area begins in Iran from Hamadan (ancient Hekmataneh) where we find the 'Ganjnameh' two stone tablets carved into the mountain, side by side, by Daryush the Great and his son Khashayar. Here they proclaim their achievements in the name of Ahura Mazda, it is the gateway to the west with a lovely waterfall where every traveler that passed by would naturally stop here and read the tablets. The first valley is the city of Sanandaj and the next is Marivan with a beautiful lake and tasty fishes.

(see photos 1,2,3,4)

On the Iranian side, the border to Iraq was only 15kms from our lake side hotel in Marivan but on the Iraqi side Sulamani was 120 kms and took us an hour and a half. We had plenty of time to talk with our driver. It was the month of Moharam, the first month of the lunar year according to the Islamic calendar. While the Sunni Muslims celebrate their

# In The News



New Year the Shia Muslims wear black and flog themselves with chains and mourn the death of Imam Hussain over a period of 40 days. They also go on a pilgrimage to Karbala in Iraq where Imam Hussain was martyred. The Kurds are mostly Sunnis, so I asked the driver if there were Shias among the Kurds. He said ***"We are first Kurds and everything else comes after that, but yes we have Shias we also have Jews, Christians and Aryans"***. I asked him what he meant by 'Aryan' he said 'Zardashti'. He further explained that ***"We Kurds are all ethnically Aryan but Islam was forced upon us, but I am not religious"***. I told him the address we were looking for is a Zardashti temple and we were to meet some people there. We then discussed a little about the Zardashti religion. He then asked me if I had the phone number of the people, which I gave him, the next moment he was calling them and asking for direction. When we reached the city, he called them again and managed to drop us off across from where our hosts were waiting for us with their cars.

To greet us were **Mrs. Awat Darya**, she is the representative of the Zarathushtis in the Kurdish Provincial Government, her husband **Jamal** a retired officer of the Kurdish Army, **Mr. Azad** the director of the Yasna organization and **Mr. Esam** a representative from their Syrian chapter. We got into two cars and drove to their temple, where we met **Mr. Qadr, the Atravan (mobed)** (photo 5) and a group of officials of the Yasna organization. We presented them with a Khorda Avesta which Qadr the Atravan accepted with tears in his eyes, kissed it and held it close to his heart. He wore a white Kurdish dress with a red shawl tied around his waist with three knots in the front representing the Kushti. (see photo 6) The temple was in a rented average size house, they had a small prayer room with a huge Fravahar on the wall and benches for the people to sit on. The other rooms were converted into an office, a meeting room and of course a



# In The News



kitchen. They had a small yard by the prayer room where they lit the fire. We gathered in the prayer room where the Atravan prayed by reciting the Gathas in Kurdish language. (photo 7)



We then discussed various matters and they said ***“We do not need any financial help but we need lots of help to increase our knowledge”***. They would also love to have an Afrigan – Afargani, for their North American style Dar e Mehr (photo 8) . ***Qadr the Atravan (mobed)*** spoke Persian and it would be good if he could visit the Iranian mobeds to learn some of the rituals and how to perform prayers. We may need to teach them a lot but I believe we should not disturb their concept of the Kushti.

## KURDISH CONCEPT OF THE KUSHTI.

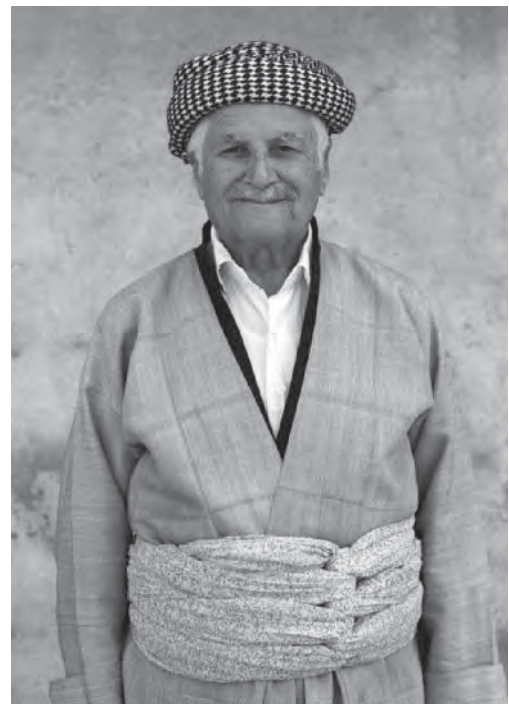
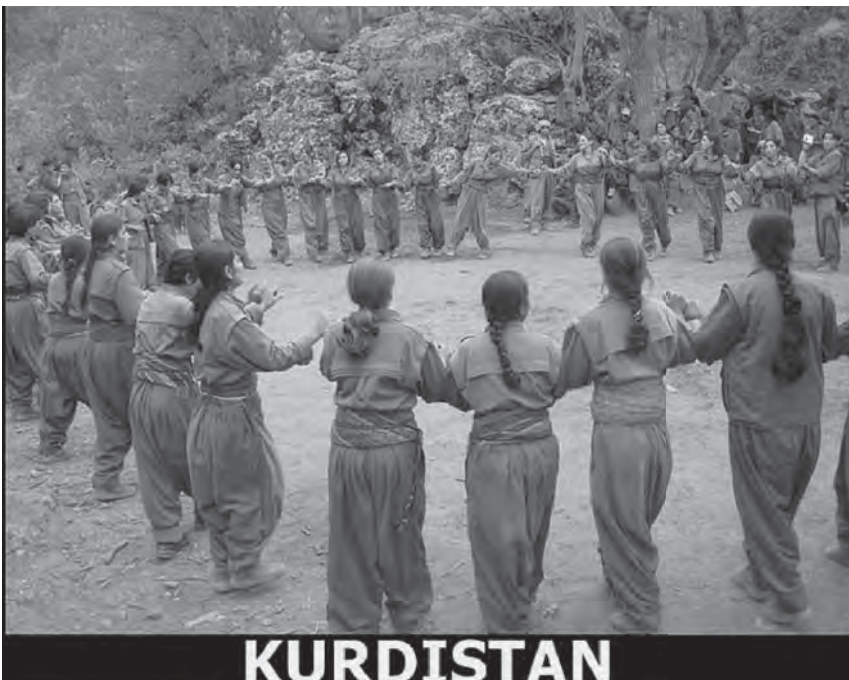
The Kurds are from the ancient Median tribe and they believe that Zarathushtra was from Media and so also were the wise man who went in search of baby Jesus. The dress that we see in pictures worn by Zarathushtra is an adaptation of the Kurdish national dress proudly worn daily by every Kurd in all walks of life. The shawl similar to the one around the

# In The News

waist of Zarathushtra is what they use as their Kushti. They tie three knots to represent Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds which is a public manifestation of their belief. Every Kurd walking the streets of Kurdistan irrespective of their religious belief has this shawl around his waist. Even the women wear it on their native and ceremonial dresses. **To brand the shawl as a Kushti is a very important movement.** Every individual Kurd, every single day, while getting dressed to leave the house, while tying the shawl around their waist will look at the shawl and debate what it represents and if she/he should return to her/his ancestral religion.

## ANCIENT RELICS

After about a 45 minutes' drive from the city into the mountains we came across what they call the '*Qz Qapan*' caves. It is exactly like the graves of Daryush and Khasayar and others **at Nagshe Rostam** in Shiraz. High up on the face of the mountain they have carved pillars and the bas relief of a king with a bow in hand and a priest with the fire burning in an urn in the center. There was a small opening and inside they said there were three chambers. They thought it was a temple but it is exactly a replica of Nagshe Rostam. (see below)





# In The News



Atravan Qadr led us in prayers.

When we returned to our cars we had a major problem with them and had to wait a few hours to get help. As a result, we had just enough time for a late lunch and had to return back to Marivan in time to retrieve our car. We missed meeting the other group called the 'Zand' organization. If we had not taken our car to the border we could have stayed an extra day.



# In The News

It was a successful trip for we came to know our fellow Zarathushti Kurds and how sincerely they are trying to revive their ancient faith. Mrs Awat has established a link with the Provincial Government of Kurdistan In Iraq and has obtained permission to practice their faith and build for themselves a fire temple. She has dedicated her time and energy and has succeeded towards establishing a healthy relation with the officials. **Atravan Qadr** is busy translating the books into Kurdish and needs help. They are respectful of all other religions and do not consider themselves as converts but consider it a revival of their ancient faith. Conversion from Islam could bring dangerous consequences. So, they do not attribute their revival to the deeds of ISIS. They have established links with other Kurdish cities and have members even in Syria whom we also met. This trip was arranged spontaneously and we did not know what to expect. Now that we have the information we hope to visit them again and stay longer, we invite others to do the same, and help them in whatever way they can, while being respectful of their culture and their type of Kushti. [www.ancientiran.com](http://www.ancientiran.com)



Credit for ALL photos Fariborz Rahnamoon except where indicated .

## ENCOURAGING & MOTIVATING YOUTH, "13<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL PRIZE DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM ORGANIZED BY THE WZO TRUST FUNDS, NAVSARI"

The 13th Annual Prize Distribution Program organized by The WZO TRUST FUNDS was held on December 17, 2016, at Seervai Party Plot, Bai Dosibai Kotwal Parsee Orphanage, Navsari.

Mr. Percy Rusi Engineer, Principal, Faculty of Architecture, SCAT College, Surat was the Chief Guest and the Guest of Honor was Mr. Sam Sachinwala, in charge Principal, S. S. Agrawal Institute of Management & Technology, Navsari

In his welcome address the WZO Trust Funds Local Committee Member Mr. Cyrus Vandriwala outlined the various activities of WZOTF during the year, and invited the dignitaries on stage. 62 student from standards 1-12 out of a total of 245, and 34 students from college level & those pursuing higher studies in various fields of education like M.Tech, LL.B., M.B.A. & Ph. D. were awarded cash prizes and gifts as a token of appreciation and motivations for having excelled in their studies. Mrs. Gulshan Vandriwala and Mr. Rohinton Contactor announced the names of students, and cash prizes and gifts were given to the top 3 achievers of all categories by the dignitaries on the dais.

All dignitaries in their motivational addresses, shared their examples & experiences, encouraged the students to adopt a positive attitude, to have a focused vision and rise to their full potential.

On behalf of WZO Trust Funds Local Committee members, Mr. Aspi Ambapardiwala proposed a vote of thanks to The Trustees, Bachi and Dinshaw Tamboly for their financial support, to the Chief Guest, the Guest of Honor, the dignitaries on dais, the Trustees of Bai Dosibai Kotwal Parsee Orphanage Mr. Yezdi Kasad and Mr. Khurshed Desai for providing the venue free of cost, as well as all the volunteers for their commitment and dedication for the execution of the program. The singing of 'Chhaiye Hame Zarthoshti' and National Anthem concluded the evening.

# In The News

## THE AKCHAKHAN-KALA WALL PAINTINGS: A ZOROASTRIAN SURPRISE FROM ANCIENT CHORASMIA

### AKCHAKHAN-KALA

Akchakhan-kala (kala is a fortress) is a massive fortified site in the delta of the Amu-dar'ya (Fig. 1), ancient Chorasmia (Khorezm). Chorasmia formed part of the Achaemenid Empire until around the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE when it became largely independent. As part of its Persian inheritance, Chorasmia was rich in Zoroastrian traditions: exposure of the dead, ossuary burials (Grenet 1984), cult buildings for the veneration of fire (Betts and Yagodin 2008) and Chil'pyk, a large, well-preserved *dakhma*. Excavations are conducted at Akchakhan-kala by a collaborative team from the Karakalpak Research Institute of Humanities of Karakalpak Branch of Uzbek Academy of Sciences and the University of Sydney (Yagodin et al. 2009; Betts et al. 2009).



ALISON BETTS



FRANTZ GRENET

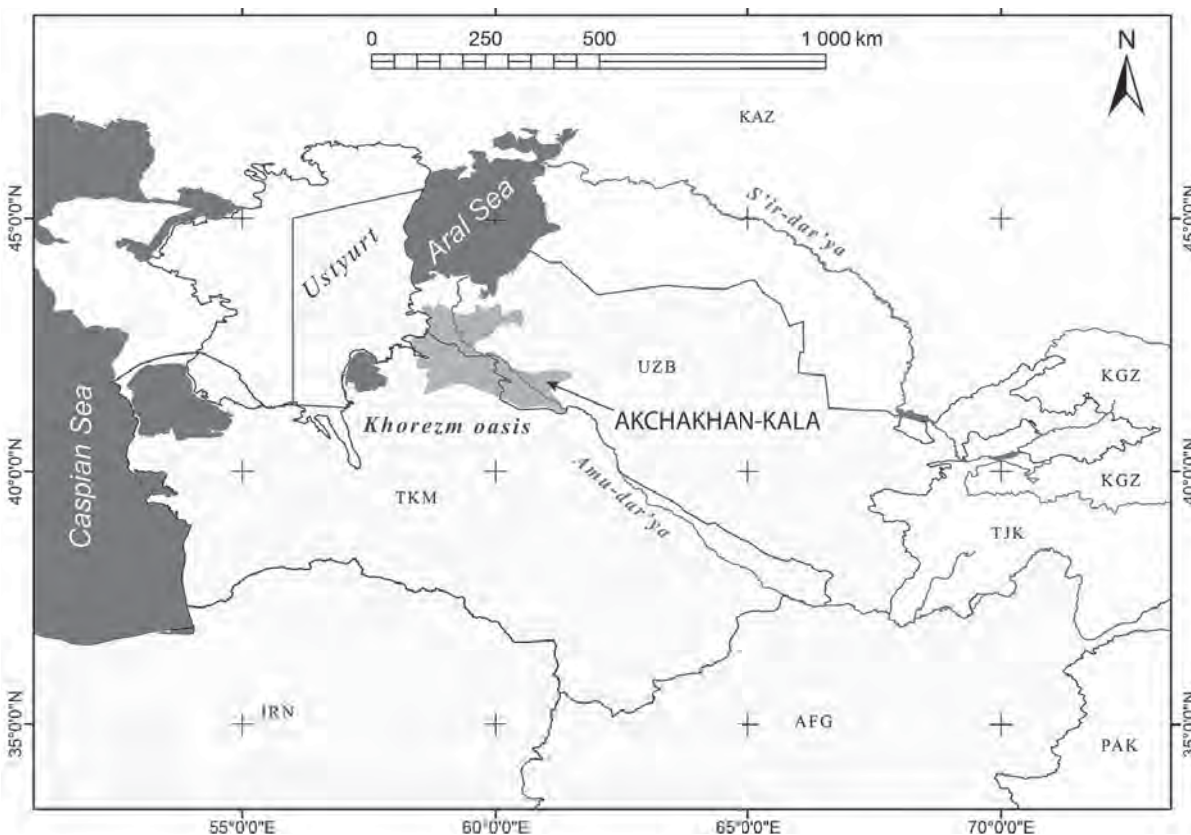


Figure 1. Map of Central Asia showing location of Akchakhan-kala

Akchakhan-kala was founded in the early 2nd century BCE and was abandoned around the 2nd century CE (Betts et al. 2009). The site consists of two heavily fortified mud-brick enclosures, one within the other (Fig. 2). The first to be built, the Upper Enclosure, contained a richly ornamented Ceremonial Complex. We know that Akchakhan-kala was a royal seat thanks to the recovery of fragments of painted texts written in the Chorasmian language using Aramaic script. A provisional reading by V. A. Livshits identified the ideogram for

# In The News

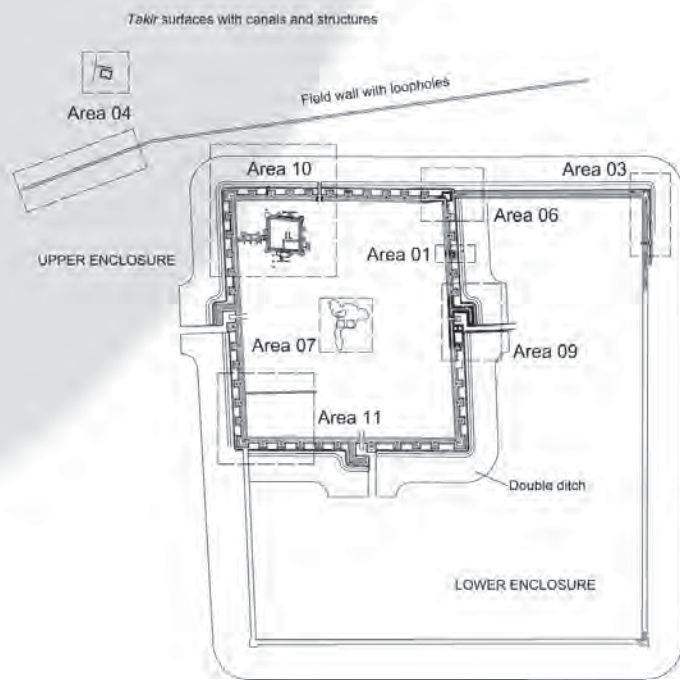


Figure 2. Plan of Akchakhan-kala

"king", with fragments of personal names and the ideogram for "son". Additional provisional readings by P. B. Lurje have identified at least one or more references to "king". This implies not only a royal seat but a dynastic one.

The Ceremonial Complex (Area 10) consists of an elaborate, roughly square Central Building surrounded by a series of walls, chambers and walkways. In its final stage, the Central Building had a double wall forming a surrounding corridor, with towers on the corners and flanking the gates. The south-west quadrant of the Central Building (Fig. 3) was occupied by a columned hall, open to the north. The roof was supported by wooden columns and the walls and ceiling of the hall were elaborately painted.

To the east of the Central Building was an altar complex with many fragments of wall paintings and painted mud-plaster sculptural fragments (Minardi 2015).

## THE WALL PAINTINGS

The surfaces to be painted were covered in a layer of mud plaster which was then overlaid with a 1-5 mm thick layer of gypsum plaster. The pigments comprised mainly charcoal and a variety of iron

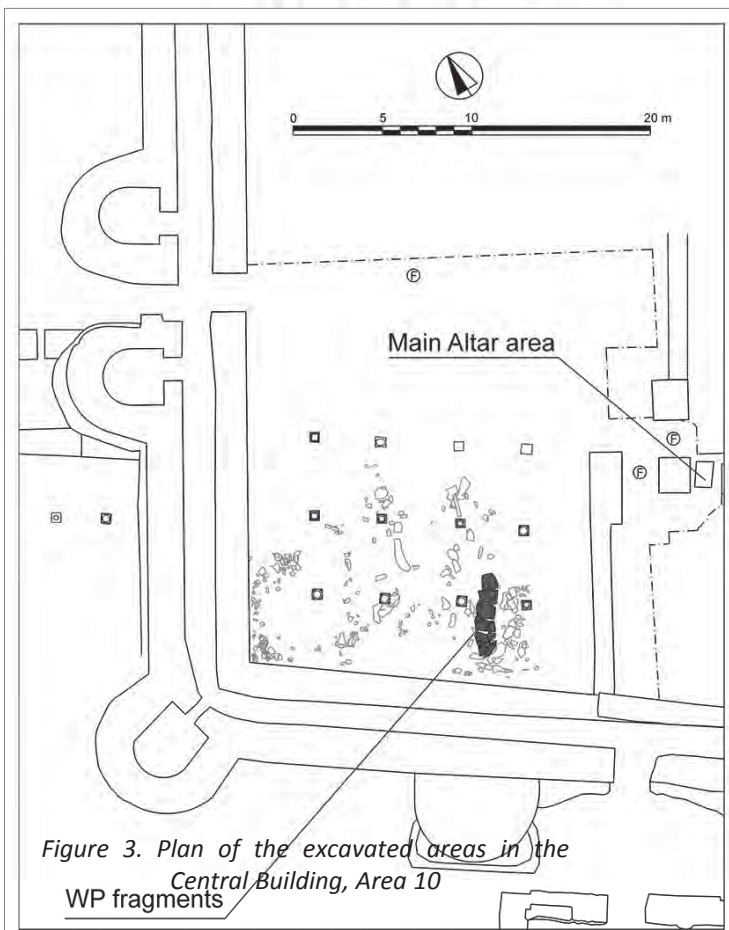


Figure 3. Plan of the excavated areas in the Central Building, Area 10  
WP fragments

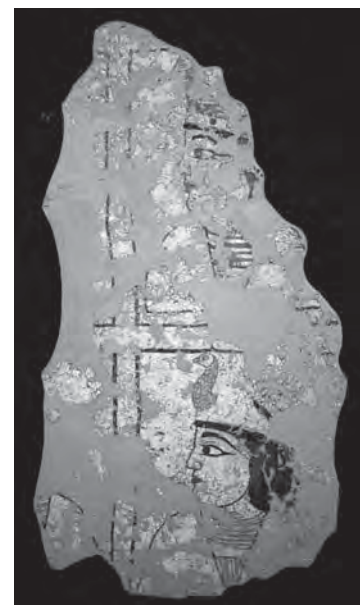


Figure 4. Painted portraits in the western corridor of the Central Building.



# In The News

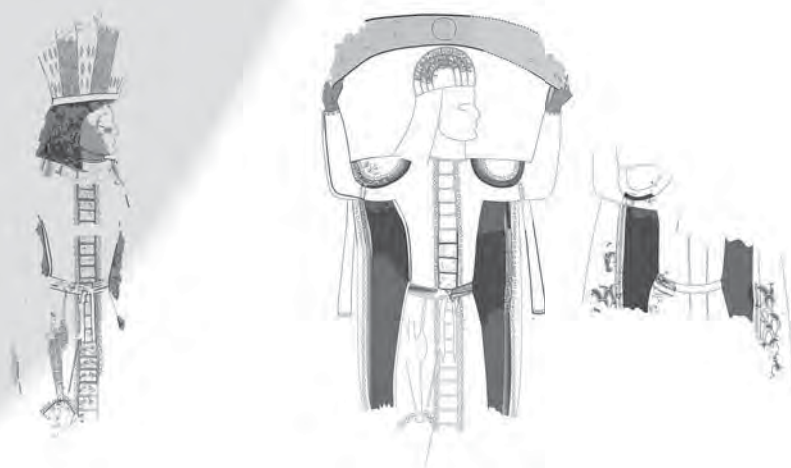


Figure 5. Reconstruction of the three painted figures from the Akchakhan-kala columned hall

oxides, creating a palette dominated by reds, browns, and yellows (Yagodin et al. 2009). Paintings have been found in the corridor of the Central Building, in the columned hall and in the rooms surrounding the Central Building. In the south section of the western corridor was a procession scene with animals, mostly horses, and human figures walking between them.

In the north section of the western corridor was an extensive series of portrait heads (Fig. 4). These figures, framed by black rectangles, have colourful V-necked garments. Most wear a gold spiral torque with animal head finials, some have earrings,

and several wear a diadem, some of which are adorned with zoomorphic emblems in the form of the haunches of a crouching beast and a bird-headed frontispiece. One curious and significant aspect of these portrait busts is that there are no obvious clues as to their gender.

## THE COLOSSAL FIGURES

The greatest yield of paintings has come from the columned hall. The collapse of the walls and ceiling have created a mass of painted fragments that are only slowly being cleaned and pieced together. So far three extraordinary images have been identified (Fig. 5).

The first image to emerge has been an anthropomorphic figure wearing a massive mural crown and with a short sword (Persian *akinakes*) strapped to his right thigh (Betts et al. 2015) (Fig. 6). He wears a white tunic with a central decorative panel running down the front, and a double belt is knotted around his waist. On the right thigh, the tunic is lifted by the strap supporting the sword to reveal white trousers decorated with a repeated pattern of long-necked birds. Around his neck is an elaborate

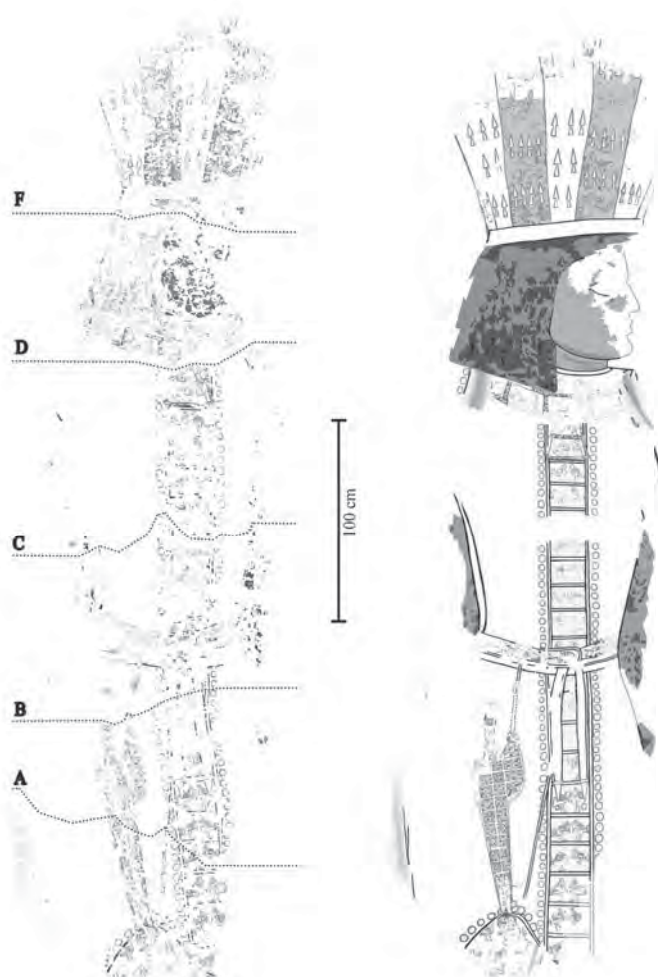


Figure 6. Original tracing and reconstruction of first and best preserved figure

# In The News

collar decorated with scenes of humans and animals engaged in diverse activities. The central panel of the tunic is divided into a series of rectangular frames; in each one is a repeated motif of two opposing human-headed roosters wearing masks (*padām*) that designate them as Zoroastrian priests and holding in one hand the bundle of *barsom* twigs associated with Zoroastrian ritual.

The mural crown represents city walls. Such mural crowns are normally associated with female images, most frequently the goddess Tyche. A more common form worn by men of high status in Persian contexts is the 'crenelated' headdress that appears in the Persepolis reliefs and on Achaemenid seals and coins (Betts et al. 2015).

Two more or less well preserved colossal figures have been found (Betts et al. 2015). The second figure is partially preserved from the waist up (Fig. 7). The figure has a similar belt to the first figure and wears a cloak and a tunic, also with a decorative pattern of rectangular panels down the front. The face is missing but the headdress is preserved as a rounded arc. The arms are upraised, holding an arc of blue, scattered with small red circles. A large red circle sits over the top of the head of the figure. The images on the tunic show a figure wearing a *padām*, seated in front of a low platform with a raised step (Fig. 8). Opposite him is a smaller figure, also wearing a *padām*, but with an entirely human body. We suggest (Betts et al. 2015) that the smaller figure is a Zoroastrian priest, but that the seated figure might be a king, as priests are never seated during ritual ceremonies. The figures alternate down the panels. Of the third colossal figure, only the mid-section of the body has so far been reconstructed (Fig. 5). Again, it has a belt and wears a cloak, this time with elaborate, possibly vegetal, decoration on the exterior. The arms are upraised. The clear image of a gazelle can be seen in one of the rectangles preserved on the costume.

Figure 7. Original tracing and reconstruction of second figure

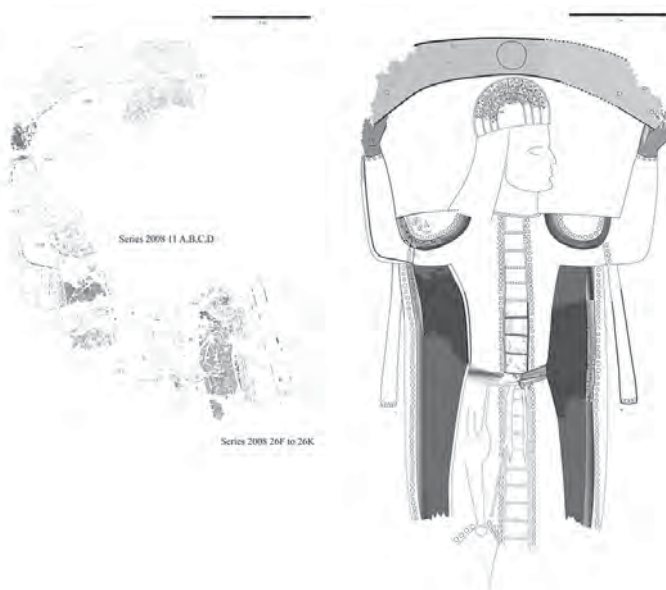


Figure 8. Detail on costume of second figure



## THE IDENTITY OF THE FIGURES

In Betts et al. 2015 we have presented an hypothesis for the identity of the first figure. In Iranian art, the figures which are depicted oversized, or at least greatly oversized, are generally divine beings (*yazatas*). A fundamental element of the image is the exclusively Zoroastrian character of the symbol on the central vertical band of his tunic (Fig. 9). This facing pair of "bird-priests", up until this discovery, were known only in much later (6<sup>th</sup> century CE) contexts in Sogdiana, (in south-eastern Uzbekistan around Samarkand) on Sino-Sogdian sarcophagi and funerary beds, and at Bamiyan on both sides of Mithra in the painting which surmounted the head of the giant Buddha (Riboud 2012). Skjaervø (Grenet et al. 2004) has identified the meaning of this curious hybrid figure from the Avestan passage, Vd.

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18.14-16: in the office of the last third of the night, *uṣahina*, presided over by Sraosha (Middle Persian *Srōsh*), the rooster assumes the function of his assistant-priest (*sraoṣāvarṇza*), because he perceives the coming of the sun before all other creatures and warns them by his cry. The motif of the bird-priest as it appears at Akchakhan-kala predates by five or six centuries the same motif in Sogdiana and related regions, and the possibility that it was first elaborated in Chorasmia must be seriously considered. In all contexts where the bird-priest motif is subsequently attested it refers either to *Srōsh* (in his function of guardian of the soul during the three days after death, hence its use on funerary objects) or to the watch *uṣahina* (hence its association with Mithra's dawn epiphany at Bamiyan, and again the funerary contexts as the soul is judged at the dawn on the fourth day). Ahura Mazda is not associated with *uṣahina*



Figure 9. Detail on costume of first figure

The mural crown is most commonly associated with female figures, but the stylistically related 'crenellated' crown has wider usage. On Sasanian reliefs and coins such a crown is characteristic of Ahura Mazda (Ohrmazd), and also of Anāhīd, the other main divine being. In later Sogdian art an iconography of Ahura Mazda is difficult or impossible to detect; the only Yazata who appears with a crenellated crown is *Srōsh* on the only certain and complete image we have of him, a Samarkand ossuary from the seventh century or thereabouts. The cartoons on the neckband also provide further possible clues (Fig. 10). The lowest panel of the pendant shows a boat, with at the stern the figure of a bird and a man pushing a pole. The curved svastika-like motif on the hull may be a rendering of whirlwinds. Another navigation scene is also recognizable in the main part of the neckband. In the Avesta, yazata *Srōsh*, appears in connection with the crossing of waters: according to his Yasht (Yt.11.4), protection is granted to those who recite the *Ahuna vairya* prayer "on a great water, or in a great danger, or in a dark, misty night, or on a ford (/bridge) on waters in spate, or on the bifurcation of roads". All the situations enumerated imply a risk (being drowned, or getting lost at night on a track, or encountering robbers at crossroads), against which the natural protector is *Srōsh*, chief fighter against all demons. Another passage, in the other hymn to *Srōsh* (Y. 57.14), says that he keeps the "floods (*vōiynā*)" away from the houses of his worshippers.

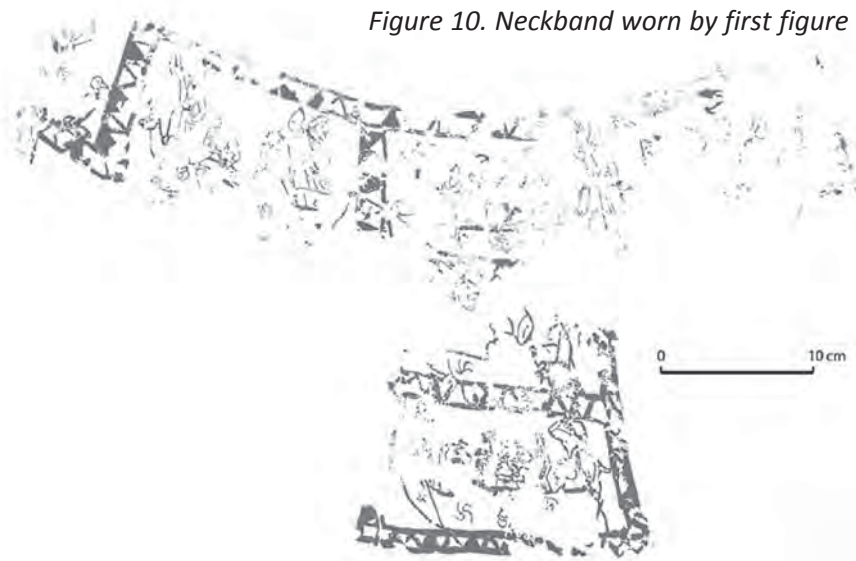


Figure 10. Neckband worn by first figure

Some other Avestan passages related to *Srōsh* appear characteristic or at least compatible with the figure under discussion. *Srōsh* is qualified as "fair of form" (*huraōda*), "young" (*yuuan*), "tall" (*bṛṛzaṭt*), epithets



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not specific to him but never used for Ahura Mazdā. He is also “swift” (āsu), like some other yazatas His swiftness is expressed by a comparison with birds, Y.57.28 : the steeds drawing his chariot are “faster than two well-winged birds” (āsīian̄ha vaiiaēibiia hupatar̄taēibiia). On our painting the trousers of the yazatas are decorated with a repeated motif showing probably a bustard, a bird renowned for its speed both on the ground and in flight. Positioned on the legs, this image obviously functions as a symbol of velocity. Admittedly, two other yazatas, Khvarenah (Farn) and Verethraghna (Wahrām), can appear as a bird, but in both cases it is specified as a hawk (vār̄yina).

Identification of the other two figures is a little harder. However, on the basis of the blue band with red circles held up by the second figure, we propose to identify the figure with an individual personification of the Fravashis, a group of female yazatas of whom it is explicitly said in the Avesta that they hold up the sky from below (Yasht 13, 29). For the third figure we suggest that the apparently natural themes of the decoration are compatible with Spandarmad (Avestan Spenta Ārmaiti), the Earth Mother. A triad of Srōsh-Fravashi-Spandarmad would make sense in calendrical terms: the ten days dedicated to the Fravashis (the days of Frawardīgān) correspond to the end of the month of Spandarmad, the last month of the year, and to the five additional days that follow (Betts et al. 2015). During each of the days of Frawardīgān there is a celebration for Srōsh.

## ZOROASTRIANISM IN CHORASMIA

The significance of the Colossal Figures lie in their remarkable Zoroastrian attributes. Practices such as fire cults and exposure of the dead have not in themselves been sufficient to prove the centrality of Zoroastrian beliefs in Ancient Chorasmia, particularly at such an early date. The discovery that the purely Zoroastrian symbol of the ‘bird-priest’ existed in Chorasmia five or six centuries before it is attested anywhere else comes as a great surprise and it should certainly provoke a re-evaluation of Chorasmia’s role in the history of Central Asian Zoroastrianism.

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**Frantz Grenet** is Chair in History and Cultures of Pre-Islamic Central Asia at the Collège de France, Paris. He is an international renowned expert in Zoroastrian studies including religion, texts, archaeology and iconography, and former Director of the Franco-Uzbek Sogdiana Expedition. He is President of the European Society for the Study of Himalayan and Central Asiatic Civilizations (SEECHAC).



## HONG KONG HOSTS WORLD ZOROASTRIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE GLOBAL AGM 2016, AWARDS GALA NIGHT 2016 GLOBAL WORKING GROUP



Over 125 people gathered in the ballroom of the Regal Hotel in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong at the conclusion of the World Zoroastrian Chamber of Commerce Annual General Meeting 2016. The finale was the Awards Gala Night where four Zarathushtis would be presented awards for outstanding contribution as entrepreneurs and to their profession.

**THE OUTSTANDING ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR** award went to **Delna Bhesania** of Vancouver, Canada. Delna is the co-founder of Bardel Entertainment Inc. an animation and movie production studio that has done pioneering work with Hollywood firms like Disney and Pixar. Delna was present with her husband and daughters to receive the award.

**THE OUTSTANDING PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR** award was given to two co-awardees **Dr. Arnavaz Havaewalaa** is a leading Oral Dental Surgeon based in Mumbai India. Dr. Havaewalaa has been in private practice since 1987 and currently affiliated with various hospitals in the city and teaches at the University level. She has been the winner of numerous awards and has spoken about her work at international forums. Dr. Havaewalaa could not be present to receive the award.

**Arzan Sam Wadia**, an architect and urban designer is based in New York USA. Arzan has worked on architecture projects in Austria, Latvia, USA and Cambodia. His experience spans commercial skyscrapers, private housing, hospitals, and institutional projects. He runs his private design practice specializing

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in sustainable architecture and interior design. Arzan has a Technology consulting business catering to small and medium design firms with offices in New York, Hong Kong, Delhi and Mumbai. (Photo left Arzan receiving the award from Yazdi Tantra, VP WZCC)

Arzan serves on the Board of the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York and is the current Vice-President of FEZANA. He is the founder of Parsi Khabar ([www.parsikhabar.net](http://www.parsikhabar.net)) and a core team member of the *Zoroastrian Return To Roots Program*.

## THE OUTSTANDING YOUNG PROFESSIONAL/ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR

award was presented to **Hanoz Tarapore of Mumbai**, India. Hanoz is a certified Supply Chain Professional with over five years' experience in managing supply chain in the healthcare sector in the Asia Pacific region. He is currently the Asia-Pacific Supply Chain Planning Lead at Ortho Clinical Diagnostics. Hanoz could not be present to receive the award in person.

Before the Award presentation, various eminent dignitaries addressed the audience. **Nader Godrej** spoke in his distinct style and gave a very interesting state of affairs on the world today. The President of the Hong Kong Anjuman **Neville Shroff** spoke about the long history of the Parsis in Hong Kong. **Thomas Ung**, the President of the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce and CEO of Wharf Holdings spoke about his company's ties with Parsis going back a few centuries. **Mr. Y K Pang** the CEO of Jardine Matherson also spoke about the Jardine Connection with Parsis going back to the early 1800's and their business relationship with **Sir Jamshedjee Jeejeebhoy**.

**Behroze Daruwala**, Chair, WZCC Woman's Empowerment Wing was the MC of the evening.  
Report by Arzan Sam Wadia

## THE GLOBAL WORKING GROUP (GWG) MEETS IN HONGKONG DECEMBER 15 AND 16, 2016

GWG brings representatives of Federations in the diaspora together. The meeting was presided by the chair of the host Federation **Mr Neville Shroff of Hong Kong**. The meeting coincided with the AGM of the WZCC also graciously hosted by Hong Kong. The GWG regretted the absence of any representative from the Bombay Parsi Panchayat (BPP) though Mr Farokh Rustomji from FPZAI was participating. The GWG meeting was started with a jashan performed by the resident mobed of Hong Kong Ervad Homiar Nasirabadwala.

Those attending and not in the photo are Dorab Mistry, ZTFE, Russi Ghadlani, Singapore, Behroze Daruwala Women's group, Farokh Rustomji FPZAI, Rustom Engineer, invitee, Kersi Bhesania, Invitee.

The GWG discussions reviewed the meeting in December 2015 at Udvada which preceded the landmark 1st *Iranshah Udvada*



Neville Shroff, presiding, Rohinton Rivetna, Roshan Rivetna, Homi Gandhi, President of FEZANA, Bomi Patel, Sam Balsara of Madison Advertising, Arzan Wadia, Firoz Pestonjee, Perth, Australia, Jimmy Medhora, Sydney, Australia both of 11<sup>th</sup> World Congress organizing committee, Katayun Kapadia, Dinshaw Tamboly, Yazdi Tantra, Meher Bhesania.



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**Utsav (IUU)** . The GWG reiterated that the 1<sup>st</sup> IUU had been a great success and congratulations were tendered to the Organising Team led by Vada Dasturji Khurshed. The next IUU is scheduled for 23 and 24 December 2017. Mr Dinshaw Tamboly briefed the GWG about preparations and the progress in the regeneration of Udvada, with help from the dynamic Central Minister Mrs Smriti Irani. The GWG welcomed the proposal to establish a Museum in Udvada as a milestone towards regeneration. Mrs Meher Bhesania was delegated with progressing this idea, based on suggestions received from the Prime Minister himself and Mrs Irani. The suggestion to establish the museum in Mumbai rather than in Udvada was not found feasible because of the high cost of land in Mumbai. The Museum Project would be developed in conjunction with Dasturji Khurshed and Mr Tamboly while calling upon the technical expertise of Dr Shernaz Cama, Mrs Pheroza Godrej and Mrs Firoza Mistree.

Mr Firoz Pestonji and Mr Jimmy Medhora on behalf of the Organising Committee for the 11<sup>th</sup> World Congress to be hosted in Perth, Australia gave an update on preparations. Details will be released shortly.

It was felt that GWG should appoint an Administrator to oversee progress on its decisions and be a central point for communications. Mr Neville Shroff of Hong Kong was requested to take this assignment subject to the agreement of the Hong Kong Board.

The GWG has initiated the following sub-committees with reporting their work;

**Women** Mrs Behroze Daruwalla and Mrs Katayun Kapadia

**Youth** Mr Arzan Wadia

**Resettlement and Information** Each Region to appoint one Coordinator and report the name within the next 30 days

**Arts & Culture** Mrs Meher Bhesania

**Education** Mr Farokh Rustomji

**Entrepreneurship** WZCC to progress this initiative. Several members and well-wishers continued this dialogue and will be taking forward initiatives to Change the mindset of Zoroastrian youth and more importantly their parents towards Risk Taking.

A committee headed by Meher Bhesania, was appointed to handle the 11<sup>th</sup> WZC Awards programme and Homi Gandhi headed a committee to select the venue for the 12<sup>th</sup> World Zoroastrian Congress. It was decided that Mr Yazdi Tantra will expand the portal **Zoroastrians.net** to disseminate information on **Demographics, Opportunities, Activities and related Developments** worldwide. The Regional Federations will publicize this portal to their memberships, this should ensure a **Single Window of Information**.

The GWG reiterated the view that it was most important for leaders and in particular elected officers from the diaspora to meet and talk periodically because the contacts and **friendships that are made in such interaction serve dramatically to improve relations and tackle problems**.

Neville Shroff and his team were profusely thanked for their hospitality and for hosting these twin events with great warmth and professionalism. A New Navar in New York

Erv Porus Pavri, the youngest priest in the Greater Metropolitan Area of New York was felicitated on his accomplishment of

successfully completing the requirements of being ordained a Navar at an acknowledgement ceremony held at the newly opened Arabab Rustom Guiv Dar-e-Mehr in New York.

**Report by Dorab Mistry OBE**

## BOMAN RUSTOM BASTANI as told by his son

JEHANGIR BOMAN BASTANI MD PHOENIX AZ (FORMERLY OF POONA, INDIA)

This article was prompted by the lack of personal stories as to why the Irani Zoroastrians left Iran to emigrate to Indian subcontinent. We know that India was relatively, wealthier to Iran and we assumed that it was for material reasons that they cast their eyes and their trek to the East.

### INTRODUCTION:

Yazd became the refuge for Iranian Zoroastrians after the fall of the Sassanid dynasty alongside Kerman. Think of Phoenix with its irrigated canals, desert, mud brick homes, infernally hot summers and sandstorms that come in from the North with cold winters and you get a picture of why the Arabs invaders let the people of Yazd be for centuries. It is only toward the early eighteenth century that the Muslims crept into this area. The native Zoroastrian had to wear a distinct yellow garb to identify themselves as Gabr ("infidel") and avoided contact with their Muslim neighbour- they were not allowed to ride horses, dismounting from the donkey when passing a mullah, not touching fruit in marketplace or walking across a Muslim's field as that could cause the field to be barren by their act!!!. The hostile act by the Muslim was intended to cause the Zoroastrian to convert to Islam when they would be treated as equals. Hence families evolved ways of coping with their persecutors and the Dari, was born, a dialect unique, to the area, so their Muslim oppressors could not understand what was being discussed.

### HISTORY:

It was in this hostile environment for Zoroastrians that my father, **Boman Rustom Bastani**, was born in 1912 and raised in Kucha (Little) Kibyog near Yazd.. His father Rustom (the father's name being the middle name), was a farmer and owned pistachios trees as well as orchards of apricots and almonds. By local standards, **Rustom Bastani** was a prosperous farmer and had seven sons and two daughters, my father being the fifth oldest of his siblings. Boman never spoke much about his family except on occasions such as the Thanksgiving festival of "Mehridad" when an animal (most time chicken or lamb but one year a camel) was sacrificed as an offering to God for protecting us through the winter-months.



Boman with sons Rusi, Faroukh and Jehangir, the author

Growing up in Yazd, he would mention the harshness of winters and the livestock in the lower (visualize walk-out basement) level of the house which would keep the upper house floors warm with their body heat. We often asked him if they smelled bad and how often they bathed.? In turn, as children, we would use it to rationalize unsuccessfully to mother why we did not need to bathe. He attended the local Zoroastrian School where his older brother was a teacher. Their school was composed of the local Zoroastrian children as well as the local children of Muslims, Armenian Christians and Jews in Kucha Kibyog. With the older brother watching over his younger siblings, my father said he had little chance to misbehave as he was doubly reprimanded, at school and later at home by his parents.

He said he was a good student and with pride would state it was by choice he applied himself and not because of the presence of his older brother. He particularly enjoyed mathematics and Persian literature which we recall as children with awe how fast he could calculate, even the multiplication without writing down. In his pre-teen years, the son of the local mullah (Muslim priest assigned to the village) joined his class. He was neither older than his

# Oral History

classmates nor bigger in stature compared to his classmates. Since the boy was a Muslim, the non-Muslim classmates were afraid of his father's action on their family and so would not stand up to him. This was taken as weakness and the Mullah's son continued to make school life difficult for my father and his classmates. In order to avoid the bullying, Boman began playing truant from school. His teacher- brother discovered about the truancy but Boman did not share the reason of his problem. The bullying behaviour by the mullah's son escalated to physical violence and blows on his non-Muslim classmates, which was unchecked by the teachers who were unaware of its occurrence. On one such occasion, Boman responded in kind, as he could not restrain himself any further, he rained blows on his tormentor. As a result, he was threatened by the boy with ***"I am going to tell my father and see then what happens to your family"***.

Assaulting a Muslim and especially the family member of the local Mullah (local arbiter/ judge of local laws and spiritual matters for the village even though the Muslim community was in minority there) spelled hard-times for Boman's family. As a young lad and the horror story of atrocities committed by the Muslims on the minorities created a nightmare picture in his mind. He was afraid to bring shame or worse to his family and even before school was over for the day, he left school and walked over to his maternal uncle's home in an adjacent village, about 10 miles away. The uncle in turn sent word to his parents that Boman was safe with them and would like to keep him with them. His uncle and his wife had no children of their own and Boman was relieved he did not receive any further punishment only understanding. This endeared them to him, especially his aunt. Throughout his life, he continued to speak fondly of her as his foster mother. He was treated well at their home and he continued to read and apply himself to learning on his own volition since his uncle was a scholar.



A few months later, they asked if he would like to join them on their upcoming travel to India. His uncle traded in dried fruits, almonds and pistachios that grew there locally. It was a long journey that could be perilous and after his parents consented, he made preparation for the trip.

Travel to India was undertaken periodically for trade by his uncle. As his aunt had no familial obligation at home by virtue of being childless, she would always accompany him as well on his journey. They joined a caravan of camels and donkeys that were headed for the port of Bandar Abbas, Iran. They waited there till they found a ship heading for Mumbai (Bombay) India, and arrived a few weeks later in 1922. In those days, passport and travel papers were non-existent outside of Europe. Those were required for travel around Europe after the end of the First World War. His Iranian passports, which he would obtain much later in the 1940's, gave his port of embarkation as Bandar Abbas and arrival as Bombay.

In Bombay he stayed with relatives his uncle knew and remained with them under their supervision working initially in restaurants and later in bakeries where he learnt the trade as baker. He prospered when he moved to Poona where he settled down as owner of Imperial Bakery.

On his passport, his dates of embarkation and arrival were listed as unknown. He always insisted on maintaining his Iranian passport, hoping, one day he would return to Iran. As part of the Indian diaspora, it is only now I can appreciate what he felt, even though home was a desert without the conveniences of modern day Phoenix. Hence, by default my mother and his children became Iranian nationals, even though we had never been to Iran. His love of reading continued to the end of his life, teaching himself to read Urdu and Hindi and English but he never was able to grasp the Gujrati grammar.



# M I L E S T O N E S

## BIRTHS

**Riya Arnaz Khambatta**, a girl, to Arnaz and Godrej Khambatta, sister to Rohan, granddaughter to Hoshang and Katy Khambatta (San Diego, CA) and Sheriar and Gity Haveliwala (Toronto, ONT), great granddaughter to Villu Motishaw in San Diego, CA on July 25, 2016.

**Cybele Kate Kim**, a girl, to Dianne Viraf Udwadia and Michael Kim, sister to Aleksandra Zarina Kim, granddaughter to Katy and Viraf Udwadia, in Hackensack, NJ on August 30, 2016.

**Shanaya Kotwal**, a girl to Zeenia and Zubin Kotwal on September 15, 2016. (Manashni)

**Kasra Aflatooni**, a girl, to Armita and Aflatoon, sister to Sarina on October 7, 2016. (OZCF)

**Ryan Moosavi**, a boy, to Ariane and Bardia Moosavi, grandson to Mitra and Hushang Namiranian, and Farzaneh and Homayoon Moosavi in Ottawa on November 11, 2016.

**Naahid**, a girl, to Anahita Khodadadi and Arman Falahati in Montreal, QUE on November 18, 2016 (photo below)

**Zarina Rose Becker**, a girl to Natasha and Tom Becker, sister to Aven, and fourth grandchild to Shirin and Bahadur Sarkari in Houston, TX on December 9, 2016.



## NAVJOTES

**Arman Sidhwa**, son of Riah and Shahroukh Sidhwa, brother to Jahan

and Kashmira, grandson to Dinoo and late Bejan Sidhwa and Nani and Roshen Wadia in Weehawken, New Jersey on August 6, 2016.

**Liam and Kai LeMay**, children of Ayesha and William LeMay in Toronto, ONT on August 24, 2016.

**Elian Anklesaria**, daughter of Elaine and Abish Anklesaria in Toronto, ONT on August 24, 2016.

**Zane and Zara Commissariat**, children of Diana and Xerxes Commissariat, grandchildren of Aban and Nauzer Commissariat and Shireen and Dinyar Irani in Laguna Woods, California on November 26, 2016. (Photo below)



**Shayan and Jedd Gandhi**, children of Shazneen and Hanoz Gandhi, grandchildren of Roshan and Nadir Rabadi, and late Villy and Homi Gandhi, in Los Angeles, on October 2, 2016. The initiation ceremony was performed by Ervads Zarrir and Zerkxis Bhandara and Ervad Khushroo Vimadalal.

**Darayus Kalwachwala**, son of Karishma Contractor and Dinyar

# Winter 2016

Kalwachwala, grandson of Zubin and Kersi Contractor (Vancouver, BC) and Najoo and Jal Kalwachwala (Mumbai, India) in New Jersey on October 7, 2016.

**Emma Kolah**, daughter of Darayus and Debra Kolah, in Houston, TX on December 10, 2016. Her grandmother, Godi Kolah, watched the entire Navjote online in Mumbai!!.

**Kaizeen and Zal Medhora** children of Tanaz and Khushru Medhora (New Jersey) in Mumbai on December 24, 2016.

## WEDDINGS

**Kaikhushroo Banajee**, son of Hormazd Banajee and Meher Banajee (Metairie, LA) to **Monaz Kanga**, daughter of Roshni and Percy Kanga (Cherry Hill, NJ) in Mumbai, India on July 31, 2016.

**Neville Sadry**, son of Addy and Dhun Sadry to **Delna Press**, daughter of Rohinton and Firuza Press in Toronto, ONT on July 24, 2016.

**Sharon Arnavaz Sadry**, daughter of Addy and Dhun Sadry to **Akshay Shetty**, son of Rathnakar and Geeta Shetty in Niagara Falls, ONT on August 5, 2016.

**Aashkon Rohinton Irani**, to **Manichey Sarosh Tampal** in Vaughan, ONT on August 21, 2016.

**Zareen Kasad**, daughter of Homai and Arvand Kasad (Belmont, CA) to **Danesh Irani**, son of Shahrokh and late Hooty Irani (Toronto, ONT) in Atherton, CA on September 10, 2016.

**Xeryus Divecha**, son of Sami and Dilnawaz Divecha to **Farah Ghadially**, daughter of Sohrab and Amy Ghadially in Vaughan, ONT on October 7, 2016.

**Natasha Langdana**, daughter of Noshir and Rashna Langdana to **Dallas McGivera**, son of Steven and

# MILESTONES

Sherry McGivera in Toronto, ONT on October 8, 2016.

**Zane Sethna** son of Roshan and Zarir Sethna, to **Marina Ashley Zamora**, daughter of Dr. Mario Zamora Rodriguez in Houston, TX, on November 25, 2016

## DEATHS

**Armaity Jamula**, 71, wife of Bomi Jamula, mother of Cyrus (Anhaita) Jamula (Kirkland, WA), Havovi (Farish) Bardoliwala (Toronto, ONT), and Tanaz Jamula, grandmother of Iyanah and Aarish Jamula and Farzan and Ravaan Bardoliwala in Mumbai, India on September 12, 2016.

**Russi Patel**, husband of Nergesh Patel, father of Roshan (Zarir) Sethna (Houston, TX), Meher Rustomji and Rati in Dubai on September 28, 2016.

**Gool Hormusji Patel**, mother of Soli (Pervin), Khurshed (Katy) and Villie, grandmother of Percy, Dinci, Darius, Farah, Cyrus, Kaezad, Vicki, Nareeman, Tian, Goolnar, Justin, Parandis, Zarophee, great grandmother of Zane, Tanya, Zahra, Alina, Natasha, Alyssa, Kassaundra, Sanaea, Fiona and Danieala, in Toronto, ONT on October 7, 2016.

**Jamshed Vazifdar**, husband of Perin Vazifdar, father of Avan Bhathena (Houston, TX), and Kurush Vazifdar (Australia), grandfather of Zal and Shayan Bhathena (Houston, TX) and Yohann (Australia) in Mumbai, India on October 12, 2016.

**Sarosh Kasad**, husband of Piloo Kasad, father of Winifer (Viraf) Karai (Toronto, ONT), grandfather of Behzad and Yazad in Mumbai, India on October 16, 2016.

**Khursheed Minocher Bharucha**, husband of Roshan Bharucha, father of Kaiwan Bharucha, Sharaine Bharucha Vakil and Thrity Bharucha Engineer, grandfather of Shanaya, Cyrus, Nadia, Darian and Aaron in

Quetta, Pakistan on October 21, 2016 (Manashni)

**Jimmy Mistry**, husband of Pervin Mistry, father of Nauzer (Zenobia) Mistry, Pervez (Tinaz) Mistry and Percy Mistry, brother of Armaity Kanga in Mumbai, India on October 21, 2016. (ZSO)

**Kaikhosrow Shahrokh**, 74, husband of Helga, grandson of Arbab Kaikhosrow Shahrokh, brother of Shirin Persson, Rostam and Jamshid Shahrokh in Ajijic, Mexico on October 4, 2016.

**Farangis Pouladian Maneshi**, 86, wife of late Mehraban Maneshi, mother of Morvarid, Shirin, Bahram and Behrouz Maneshi, mother-in-law of Farangis Zardoshty, in Arizona on October 6, 2016.

**Khurshed Jehanbux Karanjia**, mother of Percis (Vispi) Daruwalla, grandmother of Ashish in Navsari, India on November 4, 2016. (ZAGNY)

**Dhun Nariman Dastur**, 97, wife of late Nariman Dastur, mother of Shirley (Yezdi) Godiwalla, Khorshed (Sam) Katrak, Rohinton (Ferozi) Dastur, grandmother of Parizad Batliwalla, Ervad Shiamak Katrak, Ervad Neville Dastur, Farah Engineer, Ervad Yazad Godiwalla, Tinaz Godiwalla, great grandmother of Vishtasp Godiwalla, in Pewaukee, WI on November 5, 2016.

**Simin Hormozdi**, mother of Sohrab and Behram Khosraviani, grandmother of Parisa, Nima and Moobedyar Mahshad Khosraviani on November 12, 2016. (ZSO)

**Gulzarine Rustom Vania**, daughter of Peroja and Rashid Irani, wife of Rustom Minocher Vania, mother of Farhad (Bekka), grandmother of Lola and Darius Vania, in Orlando, FL, on December 11, 2016.

# Winter 2016

**Maneck (Mickey) Rustomji Driver**, 82, husband of Aban, father of Farida and Jennifer Bhandari (Hamish Whitefield) in Montreal, QUE on December 11, 2016.

**Shahjahan Keykhosrow Shahriyari**, husband of Iran Sarooshpour, father of Shohreh, Fariba, Laleh, Shabnam Shahriyari. (CZC)

**Dina Godrej Sidhwa**, 85, wife of late Godrej Dinshaw Sidhwa, mother of Farhad (Fareez) and Pouruchisty (Kavasji) Dadachanji, grandmother of Anaheeta and Kayan Sidhwa, Cyrus, Kaivan, Faridun Dadachanji, in San Diego, on December 21, 2016.

**Kiomars Sorooshyari**, 74, husband of Parvin, father of Siamak and Nahid, in New Jersey, USA on December 25, 2016.

**Dhun Palia**, 88, wife of late Ervad Keki Jehangirji Palia, mother of Meher/Zeubin, Khursheed (Noshir) Bapasola, Rumi (Erzaan), grandmother of Danesh, Neville, Delna, Sam/Liz, Sherry, Freya and Carina. in New Jersey December 25, 2016.

**Parvez Mistry**, 80, husband of Freny, father of Ratan (Pervin), grandfather of Zehan and Jamsheed, all of San Jose in Mumbai, January 4, 2017

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# Obituary

**Jimmy Mistry 1942 – 2016**

**Kiomars Sorooshyari 1942-2016**

Founding member 100<sup>TH</sup> Toronto-First Zoroastrian Scout Group,  
died October 21, 2016.

The 100<sup>th</sup> Toronto-First Zoroastrian Scout Group would like to dedicate this obituary to one of its founding members, Jamshed, ("Jimmy") Mistry, who passed away on October 21, 2016 in Mumbai, after a short but extremely intensive battle with cancer. Jimmy was a cub and a scout in Mumbai in the early 50s with our sister Group, the ex-100<sup>th</sup> Bombay, now 11<sup>th</sup> CBDA Scout Group, also known as the Homavazir's Scout Group in Parsi Colony, Dadar, Mumbai.



Even as a young boy, Jimmy had excellent leadership qualities and quickly became a Sixer in Cubs and a Patrol Leader in Scouts. He was one of the few scouts from the 11<sup>th</sup> CBDA to attend an All-India Scouts Jamboree in Bangalore, in 1956. Jimmy joined the Training Ship Dufferin after high school and sailed as a deck officer on board the Scindia Steam Navigation ships for several years.

He immigrated to Canada in the summer of 1969 with his wife Pervin and his son Nauzer; his second son Pervez was born in Toronto and the youngest son Percy in Edmonton. After years of working overseas, Jimmy and his family came back to Toronto and Percy was one of our first scouts when we started in 1990. Jimmy was the Treasurer of ZSO when our Group was established and he was one of our Group's founding members. He was the liaison between our Group and the ZSO Executive Committee (ZSO EC) when Sam Vesuna was the President and Russi Surti was the Executive Vice-President.

Jimmy was instrumental in obtaining the start-up funding for the Group from the ZSO as well as obtaining a subsidy from ZSO for the scouts to attend the Canadian Jamboree in Alberta in 1993. He continued his role as the Liaison between the Group and the ZSO EC even when he was elected President of ZSO after Sam. He was extremely keen to encourage the Irani and Parsi youths to join the Scouts as well as the Religion Class and because of his efforts and the respect he received from Kanoun and the ZSO members, the number of youths almost doubled in the Scout Group as well as the Religion Classes.

Since the 1980's, Jimmy did extensive travelling due to his job and lived in various places (Vancouver, BC; Edmonton,

AL; Saint John, NB; as well as Miami, Houston, Algeria, Japan, Saudi Arabia, oAustralia, Papua New Guinea, Italy, South Africa, kraine, China, South Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia). Whenever he was in Canada, he kept himself informed and contributed to the Scout Group fundraising activities and made regular donations. He made it a point to attend the Group's Silver Anniversary Picnic and Prize Distribution in July 2015.

We think of Jimmy as a personification of the old Scout Law poem:

*"Trusty, loyal, helpful, brotherly, courteous, kind, obedient, smiling, thrifty, pure as a rustling wind".i*

In scouting language, Jimmy has "Gone Home" to Ahura Mazda's House of Lights, Garo-demana. May his soul rest in eternal peace, Amen.

*(Submitted by Freddy Mirza on behalf of the 100<sup>th</sup> Toronto-First Zoroastrian Scout Group).*

**KIOMARS SOROOSHYARI**

**FEBRUARY 1942- DECEMBER 2016**

***A visionary and philanthropist died at age 74 years***

Born in Yazd, after completing his Electrical and Electronic Engineering degree in Leicester Polytechnic in Leicester, England, Kiomars worked as a facility engineer for ten years in the hospital of Bank Melli, Iran, before he moved his family to the U.S. in the late 80's.

He was a true practitioner of increasing *Kherad*, i.e., wisdom, *Daad*, advocating for justice, and *Abadani*, building community. He served on the Boards of IZA and DMZT, and was so gratified to witness the completion of the new Zoroastrian Temple in New York this past spring.

He died of sudden gastroenterological complications at Morristown Memorial Hospital in New Jersey. Our condolences to his wife Parvin, daughter Nahid and son Siamak. May his soul rest in peace.

***Submitted by Shirin Kiamenish, President of IZA and David Rahni***



## A PRINCE WITHOUT A KINGDOM: THE EXILARCH IN THE SASANIAN ERA

Geoffrey Herman, Mohr Siebeck,

Tübingen, Germany, 2012. Pages 432; Price: \$111.71 ISBN 3-16-150606-5

Reviewed by Dastur Dr Kersey Antia

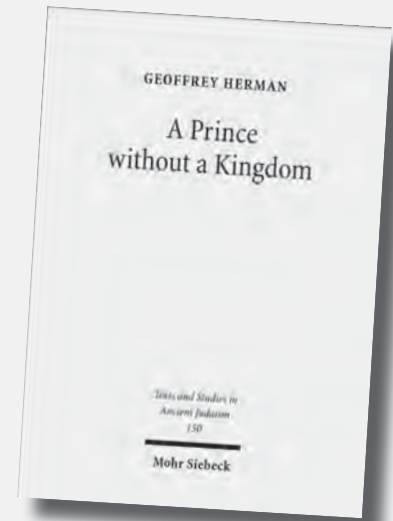
The Exilarch as the head of the Jewish community in Iran began as an inner Jewish phenomenon but was eventually recognized by the Sasanian rulers (206 to 657 ACE.) who ruled over Iran with its capital in Ctesiphon, just south of present-day Bagdad. He served as an intermediary between the Jews and the Sasanian kings. Geoffrey Herman has provided an exhaustive and empirical study of the Sasanian Exilarchate — *A Prince Without A Kingdom: The Exilarch in the Sasanian Era*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, Germany, 2012. The publication in 1879 of the section of Tabari's *Annals* by Theodor Nöldeke as well as Nöldeke's own observations about the Babylonian Jewry paved the way for very authentic views on this subject.

As pointed out by Herman and other reviewers, Professor James Darmesteter, while visiting the Parsis in India, circa late nineteenth century, discovered in an extant Pahlavi text that the Sasanian King Yazdgird I had married Sisinduxt, the daughter of the Exilarch. Herman quotes scholars who regard the Exilarch as belonging to the fourth rung of the Sasanian nobility. He has included critical reviews of the Talmudic, post-Talmudic, and other sources. *"Integration of the Exilarchate into the wider field of scholarship on the Sasanian Empire,"* maintains Herman, *"has hardly entered*

*scholarly discourse."* He attributes the reason for it to the paucity of sources on the Sasanian Empire as well as on the Babylonian Jewry.

The Jews were found in great numbers throughout the vast territory of Sasanian Iraq, especially along the great rivers of the Tigris and the Euphrates, and their innumerable canals, "the nerves of the region." Herman finds evidence that even the government administrators "of the highest rank" were not Zoroastrians and many Persian Christians also held high offices in this region. Even the clergy and the nobility often married into one another.

Herman is very critical of earlier scholars' views, led often by their *"over-reliance on the Arabic material,"* that there was a bond between religion and state, which Herman regards rather as a late, or even as a post-Sasanian view, *"possibly of Muslim inspiration,"* since *"the contemporary sources suggest a slightly different and complex reality."* Nevertheless, commitment to Zoroastrianism by the earlier Sasanian kings is self-evident in their extant rock inscriptions, concedes Herman, but he holds that *"it did not, however, automatically imply confrontation with other religions,"* since the Sasanian kings had nothing to gain from fomenting or even allowing to foment friction with the Empire's



various

minorities in the fertile region of Iraq heavily populated by non-Zoroastrians.

Herman finds no evidence of any adverse action taken against non-Zoroastrian subjects by the early Sasanian rulers. He posits that *"a zealous manifestation of Zoroastrianism was not determining royal policy"* and provides copious evidence for it. Despite the Talmudic references in the late fourth century to disapproval of Jewish burial practices by Zoroastrians who regarded burial as polluting the earth and, therefore, a major sin, Herman finds *"no evidence of actual persecution."* Rather, he describes the period of Shapur II *"undoubtedly as an era of unprecedented intellectual flourishing for Babylonian Jewry as is evident from the Bavli,"* the Jewish sacred text written in Persian Babylonia during the Sasanian times.

Claims for the persecution of the Jews are often linked to the Mar Zutra revolt during the reign of Kawad (or Kobad, the Sasanian King). **“And yet,”** maintains Herman, *“the evidence for religious persecution against the Jews in this period is problematic. In the first period of the reign of Kawad, at least, there are clear signs that he behaved with moderation, both with respect to his own religion and towards those of other faiths.”* He even commanded each faith to deliver to him a book detailing its belief-system. Herman concludes, *“It is hard to find a historical reality in which to integrate the revolt account.”* The extensive research of the University of Chicago Professor, Richard Payne not only corroborates Herman’s finding but it also heralds a new chapter in viewing the Sasanians as generally quite tolerant of their non-Zoroastrian subjects and in refuting the contrarian view of earlier scholars.

Herman locates the seat of the Exilarchate (the institution) in Neharde at first, and later in Mehoza in easy proximity to the center of the government of the Sasanian empire and adds: *“Its importance as the capital city of the empire also emerges from the Talmud.”* Mehoza, the famous round city, was situated close to the Selucid capital, Seleucia and had Jewish settlements surrounding it. Also, in Ctesiphon, the Sasanian capital, which lay across the bridge from Mehoza, there was a Jewish community. Mehoza was established by the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, King Ardashir I.

Herman finds no evidence for the Exilarch’s involvement in either collecting taxes for the Sasanian rulers or in imposing direct or indirect taxes on the Jews. However, he received money from the Jews serving under his authority and from appointing local judges. He also received money for providing additional services such as issuing documents, tax on ritual slaughter, etc., through the judges appointed by him. Though Herman finds no “supportive evidence” to prove these assumptions, I have come across conflicting evidence in this regard as noted in my forthcoming book, *Jews and Zoroastrians in History*.

Even though Herman states, *“the Exilarchate possessed considerable judicial powers,”* he finds it quite unlikely that the Jewish judicial system as a whole was subordinate to the Exilarchate. He even cites a story in Bavli that mentions that Rav Shela *“acquired the right to serve as a judge directly from the King of Persia.”* While the Zoroastrian clerics criticized Catholico (the Christian counterpart of the Exilarch) Mar Abba for using the Christian rather than the Persian judicial system, the Exilarch expressly stated *“the law of the kingdom is the law,”* giving no reason to the Magi to complain in this regard.

While Herman finds little evidence to substantiate the claim of Davidic descent for the Exilarch, which would have significantly promoted his status among the Jews, he asserts *“it was the Exilarchate’s Persian connection (which he*

*explores at length in pages 215-217) that accounted for any tangible power it might have possessed.”* The Bavli highlights the fact of the Exilarchate’s affinity to Persian culture in so many areas. Herman cites just two aspects where it was quite evident, the Persian language and the expression of his nobility in the form of the privilege of being carried in a golden sedan chair.

Out of over 300 Persian loan words in the entire Bavli, 20 pertain to Exilarchal traditions, which Herman finds as “disproportionately large.” The Bavli identifies with the Exilarchate a quintessential symbol of Persian nobility, transportation on a sedan chair, made (or covered) in gold. *“This and other distinguishing signs of the Exilarchs described in the sources,”* observes Herman, *“are readily recognized in the Sasanian culture as marking the privileged classes. Furthermore, wearing a special crown, the right to use a golden bed/couch, and wearing a special belt, all mentioned for the exilarchate, served as distinctive emblems for nobles even in the Parthian era. Armed with these visible symbols of authority, the Exilarchs would appear well equipped to exercise their authority over the Jews of Babylonia.”*

The Exilarch, observes Herman, represents “a Philo-Persian trend.” He concludes: *“Addressing a concern that Persian finesse might override rabbinic, it is noteworthy that in this source, as with many others that we have seen, the Exilarch is firmly aligned with the Persians.”* Later legends even speak

# Books & ARTS

of Exilarch Bustanay marrying the daughter of Khusrow II or Yazdgird III.

What Herman observes in his concluding remarks speaks for itself, leaving no reason for me to add anything to it: *"The ambiance in the Exilarchal house is familiar from the typical depictions of the wealthy. Similarly, a number of sources hint that horses were kept at the Exilarchal residence, such as would be fitting for a freeman*

*(āzād), and this might even allude to some military component in his standing. Furthermore, there are various allusions to status symbols, such as the qamara, and the crown. "It seems that the main position of the Exilarch was as the leadership of a religious community by the crown. Lazarus and others had dubbed the Exilarch 'a king without a kingdom, a prince without a people'. It would seem more precise to understand the Exilarch as a leader on behalf*

*of the kingdom, by virtue of the kingdom—the Sasanian kingdom, for he owed his standing to the crown.*

With the demise of the Sasanian Empire the historical chapter in the relationship between the Exilarchate and the Sasanian kingdom was closed," and, I may add, history never again witnessed such a sublime symbiosis between the Jews and their rulers during their entire dynasty.

**Dastur Dr Kersey Antia** is the High Priest of the Zoroastrian Association of Chicago. He is a practicing psychologist.



## ‘PRISON NOTEBOOK’

Author: Dinshaw Patel, Publisher: Dinshaw Patel (2016)  
Format: Kindle Edition, File Size: 402 KB Print Length: 244 pages  
Availability: Amazon.com, Price: CDN\$ 3.88 , Language: English  
ASIN: B01INM9DHM

Reviewed by: Sheeraz Wania

The ‘Prison Notebook’ by Dinshaw Patel, is the story of Sam, who is convicted for killing an intruder in his home. The chapters in the book flow in a reverse chronological order with Sam being seventy years old and fifty-eight days away from his ultimate freedom: death.

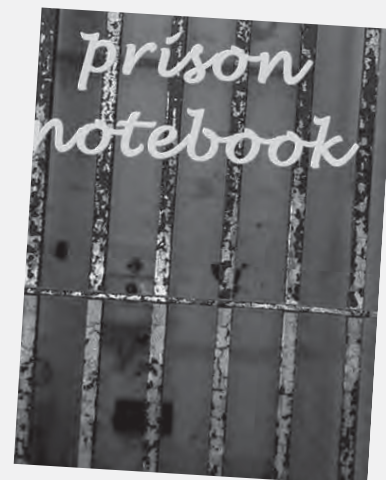
*‘The moment consciousness goes nothing matters.  
It will be my ultimate freedom.’*

He writes this notebook serving his time in prison. This is Sam’s story in Sam’s words. To existentialists like Sam, each individual creates their own identity and value, to make their existence more significant and to derive their own meaning of life.

Albert Camus’ ‘The Fall’ and its protagonist seems to be Patel’s inspiration here and the Prison Notebook also explores themes of innocence, imprisonment, non-existence, and truth, along with the shared perception

*of the protagonists in reference to ethics as they both view morality and virtues as something relative rather than an absolute. Sam also shares some personal qualities with ‘Roquentin’, the protagonist in Jean-Paul Sartre’s ‘Nausea’, in his love and desire for solitude, his lack of interest in people and dealing with them and being in sync with nature. The book starts with Sam being moved to the isolation cell, for the killing of an intruder in his home. It is very obvious from the first few lines that he is very comfortable with his loneliness and at peace with his solitude.*

*‘No mundane communication with other inmates anymore.  
Neither any need to indulge in purposeless pleasantries.  
Nor hollow salutations.’*





# Books & ARTS

*In its style of writing, Patel has used the 'stanzaic' verse form. It is simple in its language but deep in its concepts of life and the human being at its core. It takes the reader on an emotional and edgy journey, pushing him, at times, out of his comfort zone, forcing him to question and deliberate as the plot builds and the story line becomes more convoluted. Sam, the protagonist was imprisoned earlier in life on a false accusation of the rape of his sister. Human sexual desires and incest are some themes that are tackled in this book. Incest as a theme is still not very commonplace in our literature today.*

*'Nature had bestowed in me this relentless desire.  
It also set the age.  
But the constraints were from society.  
My natural right was taken away.'*

In the frame of reference to what we have accepted as the societal norm, the story line is dark and somber in a lot of places but not without the familiar hope and some promise. The chapter where Sam meets this beacon of light in his dark world, the professor, from whom he gets direction and purpose, albeit for a short while, the reader sees a temporary shift in Sam's emotions, giving the reader hope and conviction to grip on and some relief from the intensity otherwise expressed in the book. In terms of setting, the story remains nameless and placeless symbolizing Sam's own unadulterated psyche. No character is mentioned by name and Sam's own name, is also only revealed by the author in the epilogue. The location though not clearly identified, yet given that there are references

to the Bible, Shakespeare and Orwell, it seems to be set somewhere in the West.

Some aspects of the book where Patel refers to societal conformity, concerns over social acceptability and the constraints of society left an impression on me. In my reading, I felt that the prison was probably also used as a metaphor for constraints society puts on us, and the controls imposed by institutions, like our academic bodies and the media. It very openly and intensely questions the foundation of cultural conventions and values and how we as human beings are gripped in the tentacles of what is considered to be the norm; where essence supersedes existence.

The

Prison Notebook is a short, quick, and deep read. It is a commentary on society and will force you to think, even though you may not agree with everything the author has to say. Patel has created a philosophical thriller, which is a recommended read. You might love it or you might hate it, but you won't be able to leave it. Nonetheless, a warning would be appropriate here; the book contains themes like incest, rape and animal cruelty and violence, and hence may not be suitable for all readers. Reader discretion is advised.

**Sheeraz Y. Wania** is a Graphic Designer and a photographer, with a master's degree in Education from the University of London. Originally from Karachi Pakistan, she now resides in Toronto and teaches courses related to Design, Culture and Technology, at OCAD University, Sheridan College and George Brown College.

## UPDATE

Remembering the Magick of the Light  
Kavasji H. Homji [homji@sympatico.ca](mailto:homji@sympatico.ca)

The book is self published., 256 pages

Price US\$30 if purchased and shipped to an address in Canada or the US

The ISBN number is 978-0-9936221-1-3

Book reviewed by Farishta M. Dinshaw published in the FEZANA JOURNAL 2016 Vol  
30 No 3 Page 92

# FEDERATION OF ZOROASTRIAN ASSOCIATIONS OF NORTH AMERICA

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