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## PERSECUTION AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ZARATHUSHTIS IN IRAN: 6th – 21st CENTURY CE



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## FALL 2021

**CREATING BEAUTY : ZARATHUSHTI ARTISTS AND ARTISANS** Guest Editors Farishta Dinshaw and Nairika K Cornett

**WINTER 2021: AVA PROJECT;** Guest Editor Afreed Mistry, Editor of Children Section Natasha Dungor

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**SUMMER 2021 1**



## Lest we forget!

We have all heard of the persecution and hardships, physical and emotional our Zarathushti ancestors had suffered in Iran after the fall of the Sassanian dynasty, all because they belonged to another religion, although that religion belonged to the people of the land they occupied, and it predated the creation of Islam. But the Zarthushtis outside Iran did not really pay any attention to the past sad history after the return of Manekji Hatari; it was cloaked in darkness. And to quote President Biden “*just because history is silent, it doesn't mean that it did not take place. And while darkness can hide much, it erases nothing. Some injustices are so heinous, so horrific, so grievous they can't be buried, no matter how hard people try.*”

In this issue we get a panoramic view recreated by the father and son team of guest editors Mehrborzin and Viraf Soroushian who have highlighted the past atrocities and point out the present discrimination – and reinforce that the past, dark days should not be forgotten and the injustices that people suffered in those times all for the love of the religion should be etched in our psyche. The religious freedom we in the diaspora are enjoying today is in great part due to the sacrifices of our Zarathushti brethren centuries ago.

Many wrongs of the past in different countries and in different religions have been righted but none has taken up the case and cause of ancient Iran. There is no Iran amelioration society, no influential and moneyed Parsis, no giant figure of Maneckji Limji Hatara who can pull the beleaguered Zoroastrians of today from their economic and social hardships. We have to do it our way, alone keeping the memory alive for generations to come.

This is the second time during the pandemic that the FEZANA AGM was held virtually on May 8<sup>th</sup> 2021. It was very well attended with a voting strength of 64. Highlights of the AGM are mentioned in the Journal with a link to the detailed report. The highlight was the announcement that the total amount needed for the



establishment of University of Toronto professorship in Zoroastrian languages has been achieved. The announcements from NAMC, WZCC and ZDF for their community projects are also mentioned.

This issue also highlights and celebrates Jerry and Celeste Kheradi, Mme Irandokht Soroushian, Vilool Morawala Patell of Avastagenome fame and her daughters, Farah and Sanaya; Pervin Talyarkhan of Chicago, Parshan Patel of New York, Jehan Dastoor of Montreal, Dr. Maharukh Bamji of New York, Janet Allen of Ohio, Tehmi Dinshaw of Pune and Hilla Rustomji of Delhi.

For over 25 years, the North American Zarathushtis had the privilege of having a giant of a man with an encyclopedic knowledge of the religion live amongst us, enriching the community, bringing greater consciousness and appreciation of the Zarathushti Din. On the early hours of May 29, Ervad Dr. Soli P. Dastur departed to his heavenly abode, leaving us with cherished memories and a challenge to carry on his work. Will we rise to meet the challenge?

Atha Jamiyad Yatha Afrinami

Dolly Dastoor Ph.D





# Message FROM THE PRESIDENT

The coming year will have a series of initiatives, planning exercises and other projects leading up to the 12<sup>th</sup> World Zoroastrian Congress that ZAGNY is hosting jointly with FEZANA. As we plan to welcome over a 1000 Zarathushtis from all over the world to New York, it is the perfect chance for all of us to get involved. If you would like to get involved, email me and I will put you in touch with the right person.

FEZANA just completed another fantastic round of scholarship applications. Through our amazing donors, FEZANA gives out over 70,000 USD to students studying in North American Universities. However, we must turn a lot of deserving students away because of our financial limitations. We welcome you to consider setting up a scholarship endowment at FEZANA that will help students for decades to come.

This current issue of FEZANA looks critically at the persecution of our own Zarathushtis in Iran. The hope is that this issue will allow for a dialogue to address the issues and provide long term solutions. Our hope is that these conversations will continue the year through and be discussed in greater detail at the 12WZC in 2022.

FEZANA's Unity and Welfare Committee is starting a pilot project aimed towards alleviating loneliness amongst the elders of our community here in North America. You will hear more about it in the coming weeks. If you would like to get involved, please do drop a line.

I wish you a very fruitful and sunny Summer 2021, and a Happy Shehenshahi New Year in advance.

arZan

Arzan Sam Wadia; [president@fezana.org](mailto:president@fezana.org)



**Water in our World!**

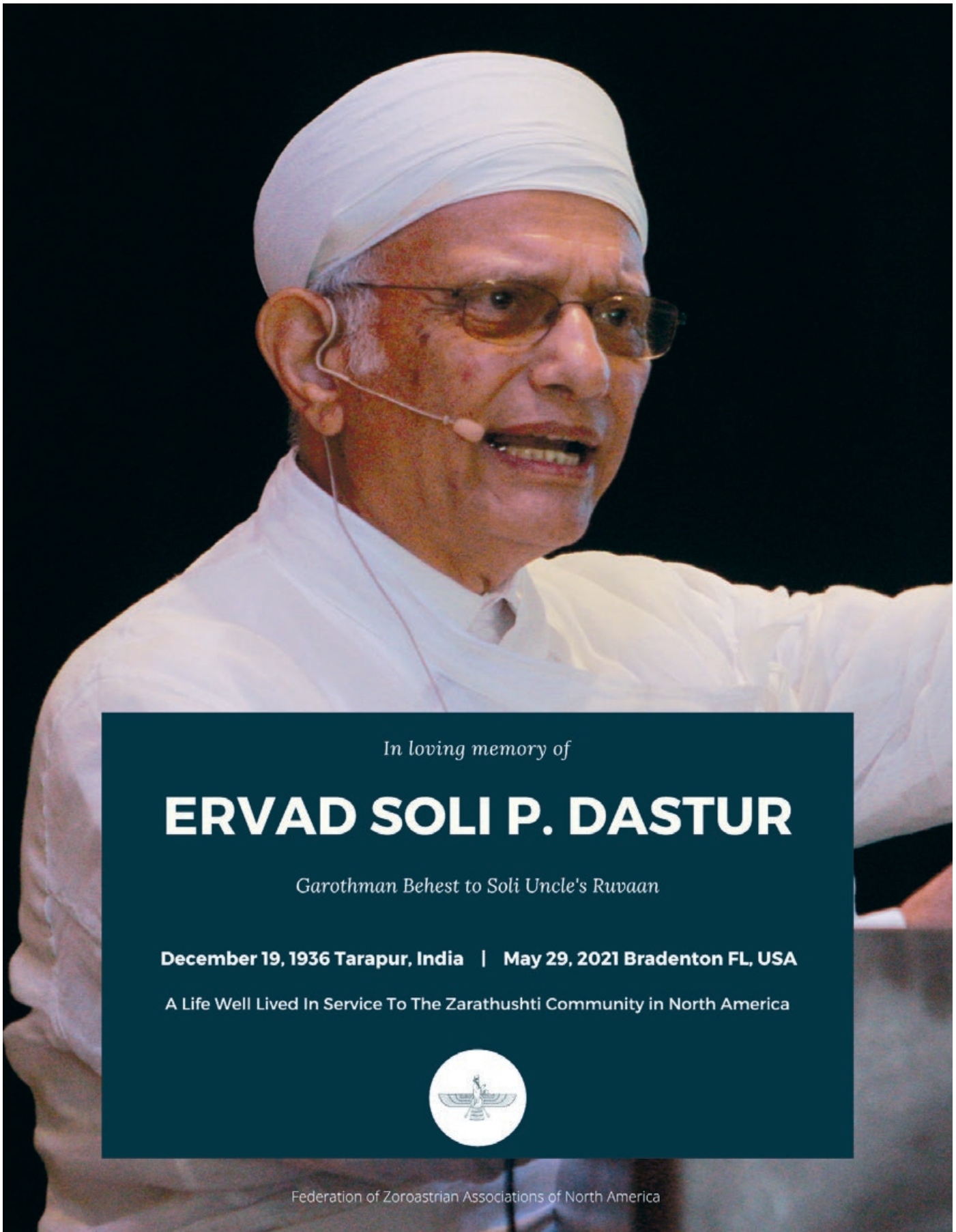
**BE FEATURED IN THE CHILDREN'S SECTION OF THE WINTER 2021 EDITION OF THE FEZANA JOURNAL**

**WHO:** all children & youth up to 18 years old  
**WHAT:** submit any creative arts related to water and the environment (paintings, poems, etc; No essays or articles, please) and the full name, age, photo, and city of the artist/writer  
**WHEN:** submit by August 31, 2021  
**WHERE:** [natashadungor@gmail.com](mailto:natashadungor@gmail.com)

Please note that not all the submissions will be featured in this edition

The cover is adapted from:

page [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0c/Scene\\_from\\_the\\_Shahnameh\\_Welcome\\_L0068897.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0c/Scene_from_the_Shahnameh_Welcome_L0068897.jpg)



*In loving memory of*

## **ERVAD SOLI P. DASTUR**

*Garothman Behest to Soli Uncle's Ruvaan*

**December 19, 1936 Tarapur, India | May 29, 2021 Bradenton FL, USA**

**A Life Well Lived In Service To The Zarathushti Community in North America**



Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America



## PERSONAL TRIBUTE TO OUR DEAR SOLI BHAI FROM THE EDITOR DOLLY DASTOOR

Ervad Dr. Soli Dastur was a human search engine not only for the Zarathushti community of North America but indeed for the world. I have had the good fortune of working with Ervad Soli in many capacities but more specifically on the special issues of the FEZANA JOURNAL (Spring 2010) *Priesthood and Scriptures: Zoroastrian Odyssey to Preservation* and (Fall 2014) *Gahambars around the Hafta Keshwar Zamin*. His enthusiasm, his openness to suggestions, his responsiveness, his in-depth knowledge of all matters of the religion, his resourcefulness to get the correct information and to get things done was without parallel. With his ease and skill of computer technology he could pull up any photo or information I would need, even late at night, and within minutes of receiving the request the information would be in my "in-box". The reply would always be accompanied with a cheery "you call we haul."

But the quality which endeared him the most to one and all was his humility and the unassuming manner with which he accomplished all tasks he undertook, and all tasks were accomplished par excellence! Soli was a motivator, a bridge-builder, and a great team player.

His memory will live forever in our memory, his towering presence in our community and the highest esteem he was held in should be of great comfort to Jo Ann his cherished wife and soul mate and his daughters Shirin and Anahita.

Rest in peace dear Soli in Garothman Behest and look after us and guide us mortals left behind that we may continue the good work you started of reviving the interest in religious knowledge and imparting it to the community.

### A CELEBRATION OF LIFE ERVAD Dr SOLI P DASTUR December 19 1936 - May 29 2021

On the passing away of Ervad Dr Soli P. Dastur, the North American Zarathushti community has lost one of its leading lights. Soli Uncle or Soli Bhai as he was fondly called has left a huge legacy and touched the lives of thousands he came in contact with.



Zain, Taj and Nev Simmons  
Allison, Anahita, Cristina Hodge, Jo Ann & Soli Dastur  
Jimbo Hodge, Shirin & Marv Simmons (FJ Summer 2012)

As the youngest of 11 children Soli was born in Tarapur, a small village, to a priestly family from Udvada. He joined the M. F. Cama Athornan Institute, where he completed all the requirements for becoming Navar, Martab and Saamel and was initiated as a full-fledged Mobed in the Udvada Iranshah Atash Behram.

On completing his B. Chem. Eng. from the Bombay University, and M. S. and Ph. D. in Chemical Engineering from the Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, Soli joined the Procter & Gamble Co. in Cincinnati in 1964 and after retiring in 1994, he worked as a partner in the Partnering Group for five years.

An active member of the North American Mobed

# **Obituary**

Council (NAMC) Soli has been performing Mobed duties all over Florida and North America wherever requested. In 2009, he started and continued for eight years the first ever annual all Florida Muktaḡ Gatha prayers in Miami, has conducted Religious classes in Tampa, Orlando and Miami, started a teleconferencing ZRC and conducted 17 Tele Classes (<https://zoroastrians.net/category/z-tele-class/>). Soli had published 395 Weekly Zoroastrian Scripture

Extracts (WZSE) with translation and audio recitations (<http://www.avesta.org/wzse/index.html>), distributed to over 900 people. He has contributed articles in WZO Hamazor and FEZANA Journals.



His unique style of using technology, highly interactive sessions, and easy-to-understand language, drew his audience to his presentations. He wrote the book of *Hama Anjuman* prayers and distributed it in North America and India. Soli made our ancient Avestan texts and prayers more accessible, by scanning Ervad Kangaji's Khordeh Avesta Ba Maeni (with a word-by-word translation in Gujarati and English) and Sanjana's Pahlavi Grammar, and placed them on Avesta.org.

He was awarded the Outstanding Zarathushti Award in 2010 at North American Zoroastrian Congress, Houston, and the Distinguished Scholar Award in 2018 from NAMC at AGM in Washington DC (Photo left) .and the Ervad Darab B. Unwalla Award for 25 years of dedicated service to ZAF at the 25th anniversary of ZAF in 2019. The total support of his wife was also gratefully acknowledged (photo right)

After retiring Soli lived in Bradenton, Florida with his wife of 54 years Jo Ann. They have twin daughters, Shirin and Anahita, and five grandchildren. An avid tennis player he dabbled with the computer in his free time.



Garothman Behest to Ervad Soli, and our condolences to his beloved wife JoAnn, his daughters Shirin & Anahita, his grandchildren Cristina, Allison, Taj, Zain & Nev, Mahrukh & Patti who he loved like his own daughters, and the entire Dastur family.

*This biography appeared in the last article Ahunavaiti Gatha and Lessons learnt from them written by Ervad Soli in the Spring 2021 issue of the FEZANA JOURNAL.*





# Obituary



In 2009 Ervad Soli started performing the Muktaḍ prayers for all of Florida and continued for nine years .



Ervad Soli was happiest when he was with the young mobeds



## A special Fund has been set up by NAMC

### **Ervad Soli P. Dastur Scholarship Fund:**

The goal is to raise at least \$100,000 for scholarships; to educate, train, and coach Mobeds and encourage them to achieve higher education in Zoroastrian prayers, rituals, and religious studies. The scholarship will be managed and administered by the NAMC. Senior Mobeds will be assigned to award scholarships to deserving candidates to enhance their knowledge and professionalism as Mobeds.

Please contact Vice-president Er. Tehemton Mirza at [tmirza@execulink.com](mailto:tmirza@execulink.com) or President Er. Arda-e-viraf Minocherhomjee at [arda@cgp.com](mailto:arda@cgp.com)  
<http://namcmobeds.org/ervad-soli-p-dastur-scholarship-fund/>

At the request of the Dastur family FEZANA has established the Ervad Soli P. Dastur Memorial Fund (in lieu of flowers). Donations collected will be used for the upliftment of Mobeds in Udvada and for their housing, health and wellbeing needs. <https://fezana.org/soli-dastur/>



## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 34<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF FEZANA MAY 8<sup>th</sup> 2021 via ZOOM



In spite of the social distancing imposed by the pandemic the 34<sup>th</sup> AGM was well attended by 21 of the 27 member associations, giving a voting strength of 64. After the mandatory approval of agenda and minutes of the 2020 AGM the momentous announcement was made by the past president Homi Gandhi that our goal to raise of \$1.1 million for **Professorship at the University of Toronto in Zoroastrian Languages and Literature** was achieved. The University has created the Endowed Fund for this Professorship and will contribute the equivalent in Canadian funds to that Fund. FEZANA transferred our raised funds to the university on Govad Roj, Mah Adar, 1390 YZ (Shenshai), Meher Roj, Mah Ardibehsht, 1389 (Fasli); May 4, 2021.

The journey of this historic quest began, in 2019 when Ervad Dr. Jehan Bagli brought the initial proposal from the University of Toronto to the 30<sup>th</sup> FEZANA AGM in Houston. This was accomplished due to the work and support of several individuals and a team of volunteers - Ervad Jehan Bagli, Aban Rustomji, Nawaz Merchant, Kersi Shroff, Lovji Cama, Ratan Mistry, Shazneen Gandhi – who worked, for over two years to raise funds for the capital campaign, under the guidance of Behram Irani.

Thanks to their perseverance, more than 280 generous donors opened their hearts - and their wallets – to support the cause. The donors come from Australia, Hong Kong, India, Europe, and North America with contributions ranging from \$5 to \$150,000. They are individuals, including scholars of Zoroastrianism, member associations, and Zoroastrian foundations. Twelve FEZANA member associations came forward and generously donated over \$45,000. Even our liaison person at the U of T magnanimously added her family's donation. Without these generous donors nothing would have happened, Homi thanked them profusely. The legal advice and guidance of Sean Elavia, the academic guidance from Professors Jamshid Choksy and Yuhan Vevaina together with the business acumen of Ervad Dr. Arda Minocherhomjee in negotiating contracts were all acknowledged.

Accurate records of all donations received were maintained by the FEZANA Treasurer Rooky Fitter

while the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario (ZSO), president Mashya Amroliwalla and board collected Canadian donations, maintained records, and remitted the funds to U of T.

To quote Homi “this is nothing but “*Hamazori*” in our community. FEZANA appreciates the help from our member associations, volunteers, and community members. It is a day to rejoice when our community comes together and achieves a milestone with grassroots help.

Now the work continues. We wait and hope for our vision to be realized: For a course of study to be created and established that will bring us newfound knowledge and wisdom, inspire future generations which will be a perpetual legacy on this continent for our community”.

*Atha Zamyat, Yatha Afrinami* ~ May it be so even as we wish it!



**FEZANA president Arzan Sam Wadia highlighted the major achievements.**

The year 2020-21 has been an unprecedented year in all our lives and at FEZANA we mourn those in our Zarathushti community and those all around the world, our neighbors, countrymen and

citizens of the world who succumbed to the ravages of the pandemic. Our condolences go out to the families who have suffered and continue to suffer tremendous hardships. The biggest accomplishment of the past year was the establishment of the FEZANA Professorship in Zoroastrian Languages and Literature at the University of Toronto, and the biggest challenge was in getting the word out. Our audience profiles are changing with younger folks getting their news from online and social media platforms. Seeing this Tanya Hoshi was appointed our very first **Chief Social Media Officer** and under Tanya's direction the first Social Media Intern, Aurash Aidun was added. Today FEZANA's social media presence on Facebook, Instagram and





Twitter has established us as the premier Zoroastrian organization on these platforms. To come up with a more unified communication strategy Jim Engineer took over as **the Chief Communication Officer and co-chairs our Public Relations committee**. Jim's experience as a PR professional lends a heft to all our communication strategies across platforms.

Freyaz Shroff as **FEZANA Ambassador to India** with her deep understanding of FEZANA and its functions together with her on-the-ground expertise in India and connections in the community has helped FEZANA to have better representation in India.

The **FEZANA Journal** continues to be the leading Zoroastrian publication and the voice of FEZANA to the world. Plans for next year include a paywall online version of the Journal to complement the PDF online and print versions. **FEZANA Information Research Education System (FIRES)** continued to acquire new and rare old books, photographs, and other material housed at the Zoroastrian Association of Houston and has grown over the years beyond any one's imagination. Plans for the coming year include the oral history project and the Wall of Ancestors online. The **FEZANA Bulletin** continues to grow in content and quality, it hits the inboxes of Zarathushtis in North America and all over the world on the first of every month. Member associations are encouraged to use the bulletin to share their events and news with the larger FEZANA fraternity. **The FEZANA Talks** a new initiative started on July 1, 2020 with over 20 curated talks ranging in a variety of topics, has attracted hundreds of participants across the world. They allow for meaningful discussions and highlight Zarathushtis and their work.

FEZANA gives over 70,000 USD in various **scholarships** to students every year. These scholarships enable our youth in their pursuit of academics, music, performing arts, culinary arts, sports and religious education. Over the years our scholarship programs have grown and administering them has become challenging. A taskforce headed by Dolly Dastoor and Dinsha Mistree has been set up to completely rethink and revamp the scholarship program. This involves new donor guidelines, a unified application process and a transparent judging and award process. FEZANA thanks all our donors and the volunteers who give of their time and expertise to administer and judge the various scholarships.

We are in the midst of FEZANA's golden period of **Congresses**. Between 2019 and 2024 we will have hosted two world and one North American Congress. And the work of keeping all of these coordinated has

been handled amazingly well by Katayun Kapadia and Mahrukh Motafram, the committee co-chairs. The Congress committee also liaises with local member associations for their involvement in the planning and activities of the 12 WZC

**12<sup>th</sup> World Zoroastrian Congress 2022 NYC** will be held in New York City from July 1-4, 2022.. bringing the Zoroastrian world to North America after 22 years, a matter of pride for all of us. All our member associations should get involved in all aspects of planning and fundraising efforts and encourage their members to attend the Congress in large numbers to ensure it's success. For more information please reach out to the Congress Co-Chairs Astad Clubwala and myself at [contact@wzc2022.nyc](mailto:contact@wzc2022.nyc)

Over the past year the demand for **welfare and assistance** has grown manifold and the three co-chairs have continued to be available 24/7 to help support anyone in need. They do this with total professionalism and with complete respect to the privacy of those in need. We thank the hundreds of donors who give freely whenever an appeal is sent out to fund a particular case or cause. Without their donations FEZANA would not be able to do what we do. I thank Dinshaw Tamboly of World Zoroastrian Organization Trust –WZOT (whose objectives is to engage in charities as required by Zoroastrian Faith—a similar objective to FEZANA's) for his assistance. Our relationship with WZOT also helps in identifying the right causes and recipients in India. It helps that Freyaz Shroff who co-chaired this committee in the past and is currently FEZANA Ambassador to India, is also a Board Member of WZOT.

FEZANA continues to be a leader in representing our faith in **interfaith activities** in North America and all over the world. Bakhtavar Desai and Homi Gandhi as co-chairs represented FEZANA at various events and provided opportunities for our youth and young adults to speak about their faith at local activities in their cities and states.

FEZANA has revived **ZYNA**, our youth and young adults committee with the appointment of Parshan Khosravi and Farzin Avari as co-chairs. They are setting up their organizational structure with representatives from every member association and will lead a series of independent initiatives catered for the youth and by the youth in the years to come.

FEZANA thanks Kersi Shroff and Dinyar Patel for continuing to lead **Research and Preservation** committee. Their involvement in various events and representing FEZANA allows us access to a wealth of information



in academia and enables us to be involved in various projects as collaborators.

FEZANA communications co-chairs Arzan Lali and Hanoz Santoke maintain the FEZANA website and the email communication systems. FEZANA website is being redesigned this year.

A taskforce of Kersi Shroff, Arnavaz Sethna, Mahrukh Motafram, Kayomarz Sidhwa (VP, FEZANA) and Xerxes Commissariat (Assistant Secretary, FEZANA) are doing a deep review of the FEZANA Constitution to bring the constitution and all the various amendments over the years to a current state and advise on changes and edits, as necessary, their findings will be presented at the 2022 AGM.

FEZANA continues to be represented on the **Global Zarathushti stage** in various ways and initiatives, specially with **Global Working Group. The Gen Z and Beyond** a Zoroastrian Survey to Strengthen the Future of Our Community will be led Sarah Stewart of SOAS, University of London. FEZANA fully supports the initiative and I have the privilege of being involved in the core planning group. The findings of the survey will provide credible information on the state of our community globally and locally and shall enable leadership at all levels to make informed decisions in all they do for their communities. If you would like to get involved and know more, email Edul Daver at [eduldaver@gmail.com](mailto:eduldaver@gmail.com) or check out <http://genzandbeyond.com/>

At FEZANA we are truly blessed to have the services of Sean Elavia our legal counsel since a few years and who continues to provide his expertise and advice to make sure that FEZANA follow the rules, regulations and norms of the land and his advice is truly valuable in helping FEZANA stay true to its core and ideals. We thank Sean for his service over the years and continue to look for his guidance in the years ahead.

For all detailed reports from the 27 associations, the committees, the Treasurer's report click [https://fezana.org/2021\\_fezana\\_agm\\_report-book/](https://fezana.org/2021_fezana_agm_report-book/)

## The FEZANA BOARD 2021-2022

President: Arzan Sam Wadia

Vice President: Ervad Kayomarz Yezdi Sidhwa (Re elected)

Treasurer: Rooky Fitter

Secretary: Cody Partovi (newly elected)

Asst Secretary: Xerxes Commissariat

## CODY KHODARAHM PARTOVI ELECTED AS THE FEZANA SECRETARY FOR 2021-23



**C**ody Khodarahm Partovi, was born in Tehran, Iran, and moved to California in 2013. He completed his master's degree in Geotechnical Engineering from California State Polytechnic University, Pomona and is currently working in the California

Department of Transportation as a transportation engineer.

Cody brings with him years of experience at various levels of involvement in the Zoroastrian community. He was most recently the Treasurer of the 7th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress and a member of the executive committee, planning the congress in Los Angeles in 2019. He has also been involved at different capacities and activities at California Zoroastrian Center spanning over seven years.

Cody loves planting and enjoys his hobby of building a garden in his family backyard. He also has two beautiful dogs, Darya and Feri, for whom he would do anything.

**WELCOME TO THE FEZANA FAMILY, CODY**

## FAREWELL PERCY, THE OUTGOING SECRETARY

At the end of the FEZANA AGM, Percy Master, who served as Secretary FEZANA for two full terms stepped down from his position. Percy's contribution to the efficient working of the FEZANA Executive over the past years has been invaluable and he will be missed. We are grateful to Percy for his work at FEZANA and wish him the best as he remains involved with community activities in the months and years ahead. Percy can be reached at [percymmaster@gmail.com](mailto:percymmaster@gmail.com)





## FEZANA COLLABORATES WITH WZCC, ZEDF, ZFN, AND NAMC North American Mobed Council (NAMC)

A momentous announcement of the establishment of *The NAMC Institute of Zoroastrian Studies -NAMC-IZS*. was made by the president Ervad Dr. ArdaViraf Minocherhomji and vice president Ervad Tehempton Mirza of the North American Mobeds' Council. The institute will have both NAMC and non-NAMC members on the committee with Ervad Tehempton

Mirza, as the Dean of the Institute. It is in the process of receiving US Section 501(c)(3) in the US

The Institute will provide religious education to Mobeds, training for the performance of rituals and sacred ceremonies, as well as academic education for the community. Regular lecture series and discussion groups on various topics are being held. Classes for the Recital of Ahunavay Gatha with understanding of basic concepts and meaning are organized with nine students at present from US and Canada participating. The teachers are Er. Adi Unwalla, Er. Pervez Patel, Ervad. Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia and Mrs Dina McIntyre. Three students are participating in the Avesta Language classes conducted on line by Ervad Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia. They are being sponsored by NAMC and regular progress report received from Ervad Karanjia.

In 2021, a 5 day on line accredited course "*An introduction to Zoroastrianism, Faith History, Modernity and Connections with Major Religions*", in conjunction with the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago is being planned, a first in North America

*NAMC thanks OZCF, ZAGNY, ZAC, ZAC(LA), ZAMWI, ZAQ, ZANT for their support in developing programs to inform the North American Zoroastrian community of the relevance of NAMC, its activities, to increase awareness, be more accessible and of better service to our community*

## UNITY AND WELFARE COMMITTEE

Ahura Mazda willing, hopefully we will soon be out of the Covid-19 phase and back to some new normalcy. We have learned lots of lessons, health and life take priority. If we do not have good health nothing matters. We have learned that relationships matter, nature is to be nurtured, we can change and adapt to different lifestyles when we have to. Some of us can work from home and also learn from home. We have lost loved ones but life goes on for those who are still around with a heavy heart. Many have had to get along with too little. Our priorities have changed.

We can be connected to the world, but we could still be lonely. That feeling was more pronounced during the lockdown and we noticed a hidden need that we would like to take care of.

We have seniors and others who are lonely and need a phone call or visit to keep them connected with the community. We are asking for volunteers to give of their time, maybe one hour per week. We will pair you with someone in need and you call them up to see how they are doing, if there are any needs that our committee can help with etc. Any age group volunteers are welcome. It would be ideal if we can have some high school, college age or younger folks who can connect with seniors, they could share their youthful optimism and in turn gain some old wisdom.

Volunteering is good for school credits, college admissions and even for job applications.

Our past FEZANA President Rustom Kevala has offered to lead this effort so if interested please reach out to Rustom at [rustom@aol.com](mailto:rustom@aol.com) or (813) 484 8333.

We would also like to have names and contact information of anyone interested in receiving the calls.

Giving your time is giving a small portion of your life, a great sacrifice.

Thank you for your generosity always.

On a very happy note, we are elated to announce the birth of baby Spenta to the newest member of our committee Sanaya. Congratulations

*The FEZANA Unity and Welfare Committee Co-Chairs*

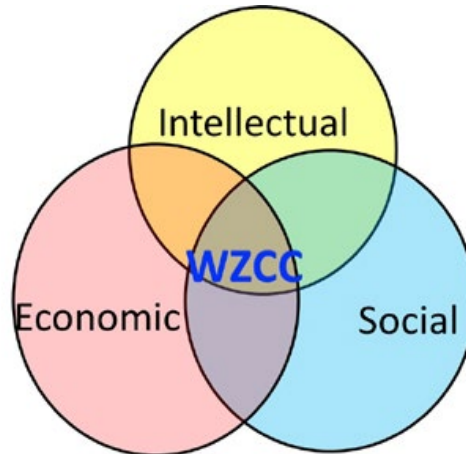
Houtoxi Contractor ([huty.contractor@gmail.com](mailto:huty.contractor@gmail.com))

Hosi Mehta ([hosimehta@aol.com](mailto:hosimehta@aol.com))

Sanaya Master ([sanaya.master@xtra.co.nz](mailto:sanaya.master@xtra.co.nz))



## WORLD ZOROASTRIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE WZCC TO BE SUCCESSFUL HAS TO OPERATE ON THREE DIFFERENT ARMS, INTELLECTUAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL



**Edul Davar, President of World Zoroastrian Chamber of Commerce (WZCC)** informed the AGM that by early March 2020 the World had turned topsy turvy but WZCC was quick to make the scheduled webinars virtual and by May/June we were ZOOMED out. The virtual webinars actually brought the far flung chapters much closer together with record number of attendance -(the pandemic however devastating did have a Silver Lining!!)

### SOCIAL ARM

-Youthpreneur programs for children 9-14 were held in Mumbai, UK & Dubai and North America.

-**Jobs for All Program** was created with youth groups in India working to find jobs for people impacted by COVID. 6 lakh donations was allocated for this program, in India and an HR type person was hired to match qualifications with job openings. In the US WZCC helped find a job for one person and second placement is in the offing. The 2021 AGM originally planned for London, was held virtually in January and even though planning for Global Conclave in October is moving ahead we keep our fingers crossed that we will be able to hold it in person. The 2022 AGM will take place in Pune, India January 6-9, 2022.

### ECONOMIC ARM

#### ZARATHUSHTI ENTREPRENEURS DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

The purpose is to collect funds (donations) which would provide funding to budding entrepreneurs.

The -501(c)3 status was approved in April 2021 in record time. Fund raising was started in October 2020 and to date we have collected \$ 225,000 in account with another \$ 250,000 pledged. First Loan of \$40K was made to Suvio LLC. WZCC would like to receive more applications and those present were requested to spread the word for this excellent program.

### INTELLECTUAL ARM

**ZOROASTRIAN FACULTY NETWORK :** After some growing pains a path was found to get young graduates to talk about their experiences to an even younger audience planning to start school and finding financing sources etc. Outfall of ZFN discussions has been to think in a more inclusive way with Entrepreneurship: Creating Economic, Social & Intellectual value. In any entrepreneurial initiative there will be a component of each in varying degrees. Wider the overlap, bigger the Sweet Spot and more pronounced the combined value. A webinar was held on May 16 @ 10:00AM EST: **Entrepreneurship: Creating Economic, Social & Intellectual Value** with Edul Davar, Ruyintan Mehta, Noshir Contractor and Moderated by Farrokh Mistree.

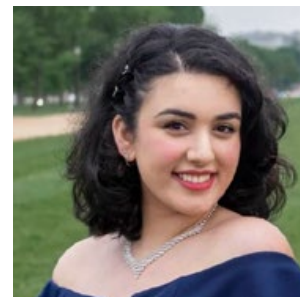




## Join the Fight, One Dance Step at a Time!

By Athra Goshtasbi

In 2016, when my older sister, Yasna, was in tenth grade, she wanted to raise money for a good cause. After some deliberation, she decided her cause was the American Cancer Society (ACS), because she'd seen how cancer touches so many lives and impacts so many families. She wasn't sure how to go about raising funds, but with the encouragement of our parents and then-president of ZAMWI, Navroz Gandhi, she explored different ideas and decided to plan fundraising galas: big parties where people could enjoy each other's company and raise money for a good cause. She put together a committee of ZAMWI members to help plan the first event. ZAMWI provided the venue (our Dar-e-Mehr) and the ZAMWI board helped us with advertising, registration and managing finances, so we decided that half of the proceeds would go to ZAMWI, helping two causes at once! Our first event was a Valentine's party, held in mid-February. We came up with packages such as violin serenades during dinner, auction of a dance for just two people, or a rose and a message delivered to a loved one. These packages helped raise money and make the night fun and different. All proceeds from the night were split halfway between ACS and ZAMWI, unless people donated specifically to whichever cause they wanted. With the first event being such a success, we decided to continue every year with the continual support of our fundraising committee and the current ZAMWI president, Anne Khademian, and board. Until the pandemic, we held annual fundraisers with different themes and continued the tradition of special packages customized to the theme.



When Yasna went to college, I was in tenth grade, and started leading the fundraisers, while she continued to stay involved. By then, we were having our events on Thanksgiving weekends, our friends and ZAMWI members and non-members eager to attend the next party. Organizing the events started in the summer with multiple fundraising committee meetings to decide on the theme, start gathering ideas about raffle prizes, decorations and dinner menu followed by committee members contacting community members and others to encourage registration and donations, coordinating with caterers and DJs to ask for donations or discounts, creating the flyer and program. Yasna and I led meetings, kept



*Yasna (left) and Athra Goshtasbi (right) speaking at the 2018 Red Carpet event. Behind them is a backdrop with roses and ACS sticky notes where people could write a name of someone they know who was touched by cancer to honor them.*



*ZAMWI youth members, Bitu Khadivi and Pouya Parsinejad walking down the red carpet at the 2018 Red Carpet fundraiser to present the award of Best Dancer. Awards were one of the fundraising packages for this event, and people paid for their nominations.*



*Dancing at the 2019 Winter Wonderland Fundraiser.*



(L) The DarbeMeher decorated for the 2019 Winter Wonderland (R) MC Fereydoon Keshavarz speaking with Athra and her friends in the background.



Yasna Goshtasbi presenting a check to an ACS representative (right) for the money raised from the 2016 Masquerade Ball fundraiser.

track of what needed to be done, monitored registration, and created decoration pieces with our friends. Closer to the events, we would have a number of focused meetings with my parents and our MC, Fereydoon Keshavarz, to finalize the packages and decide how the evening would be organized. We also worked with other

young volunteers in the community to involve them with executing the packages. So far, we've held five fundraisers over four years (Valentines Party, Masquerade Ball, Around the World in 5 hours, Red Carpet Event, Winter Wonderland and this year's Zoom event), and raised over \$41K total for the two causes, ACS and ZAMWI!

When the pandemic hit, my entire family's first instinct was that this year, we should raise funds to help families in our North American Zoroastrian community who have been severely impacted by the pandemic. We definitely struggled with how to keep fundraising while ensuring that people will *want* to participate and donate. We were no longer able to host elaborate events where people could enjoy a themed party and dance the night away. So, I worked with the rest of the fundraising committee, to plan a virtual event. The committee met multiple times over Zoom and exchanged emails to brainstorm ideas and plan the event,

hoping to engage all audiences. After we came up with ideas, we mainly worked separately on our own parts. I emailed the Iranian-American comedian Maz Jobrani who, after some back and forth, suggested sending a video specialized for us, which we gladly accepted. Through Dr. Dolly Dastoor and a contact in California who was also working to help COVID-impacted families, we were able to identify a family in North America that we could help while keeping them anonymous. ZAMWI Board members created the registration/donation website, hosted the Zoom, and helped with advertising the event. We held our virtual event on January 2, with Fereydoon Keshavarz as our MC, violin by Artin Aidun, the video from Maz Jobrani, raffle drawings (the raffle prizes were donations as well), and Trivia by Yasna and Shawdi Keshavarz. We raised a total of \$5,641.23 from the event and we've already sent \$2,400 to one family! By the time all pledges arrived and numbers were finalized, it was May.

Considering the government aid and relative improvement of the situation in the US as compared to the state of the pandemic in India, as a committee, we decided to redirect the remaining funds towards FEZANA's aid to COVID relief in India. Thus, with the remaining \$3,241.23, we hope to help many more Zoroastrian families and communities in India who have been gravely impacted by the pandemic.

*Athra Goshtasbi is a rising freshman on the pre-medicine track at the University of Maryland in College Park, MD. She hopes to become a physician so that she can help people have the best quality of life possible. She enjoys spending time with friends, drawing and painting, and tutoring her peers at her high school in her spare time, and looks forward to continuing this in college, along with researching and volunteering with her school's programs.*





## Zoroastrian Association of Houston ZAH CHILDREN AND YOUTH PRAYER TEAM ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY

(BY WELL-WISHERS OF OUR COMMUNITY)

**2020** has been a very unusual and difficult year for the whole world, being gripped by Covid-19, the invisible enemy that is creating havoc globally. At a time when all else does not work, prayers and hope, is what we lean on.

It was at this time a year ago in April 2020, that Ervad Peshotan Unwalla expressed a desire to organize Nirang prayers for the well-being of our community. This desire was quickly set in motion with Ervad Peshotan sending out an email to the ZAH community and priests requesting them to join him to recite Nirangs. The first of the daily Nirang Humbandagi Zoom sessions for the community commenced on 13<sup>th</sup> April '20. The priests who conducted the first session were Ervad Peshotan Unwalla, Ervad Darius B. Dastur (11 yrs.) and soon after joined by Ervad Neville Kanga (14 yrs.), reciting the Nirangs and even doing the translations. The audience were thrilled and requested daily sessions to continue to be held for the Nirangs – the priests obliged!

Both Darius and Neville were being coached by Ervad Peshotan Unwalla to prepare for the daily sessions. Hearing Darius and Neville praying daily, it was not long before their sisters' Mahtab B. Dastur and Natasha Kanga, joined to help with the translations in English and reciting Nirangs. Over the course of the first few weeks of the daily sessions, more and more kids and youth voluntarily joined, to recite the Nirangs and translations. Very soon on any given day there were a team of 10 youngsters (ages 6-16 yrs.) praying & translating, under the tutelage of Ervad Peshotan Unwalla, to provide the community with much needed spiritual and religious support.

After about 100 sessions from April to July 2020, the group of youngsters and Ervad Peshotan Unwalla decided to stop the prayer sessions due to schools starting in September. However, the attendees requested to continue the sessions as COVID was still rampant, so the prayer team obliged again and decided to hold the sessions every weekend instead of daily from September 2020.

The desire and willingness of these kids and Youth to pray and recite translations week after week despite school & busy schedules is a testament to their sense of duty and commitment to their community.

Special shout-out to the current young team: **Ervad Darius B. Dastur (12 yrs.), Ervad Neville Kanga (15 yrs.), Mahtab B. Dastur (15 yrs.), Natasha Kanga (15 yrs.), Sabrina Warden (14 yrs.), Sanaea Warden (9 yrs.), Roshni Chikhliwala (16 yrs.), Natasha Dungor (14 years) and the youngest of the group Cyrus and Neville Masani (7 yrs.),** who are fondly referred to as the 'The Masani Twins'. They joined this team when they were just 6 years!!

The fervor, rhythm and devotion with which these youngsters recite the prayers is amazing – no wonder some refer to them as - Voices from Heaven.

Over the course of this past year, the prayer team has not only recited multiple Nirangs but also completed most of the prayers from the Khordeh Avesta and their translations. The young priests with Er. Peshotan have also recited the entire Ahunavad Gatha with the other kids and youth doing the translations. Their tremendous, sustained efforts are worthy of recognition, applause & appreciation. The continuous support from Ervad Peshotan Unwalla, Kamal Unwalla, Khursheed and Mahtab B. Dastur in organizing, preparing material & setting up these zoom sessions need honorable mention.

On 13<sup>th</sup> April 2021, this group of youngsters with Ervad Peshotan Unwalla celebrate the 1-year anniversary of their spiritual commitment and support to the community and they plan to continue until the pandemic lets up.



## Houston Zarathushti Kids and Youth Prayer Group



Neville & Cyrus Masani (7)



Er. Darius B. Dastur (12)



Er. Neville Kanga (15)



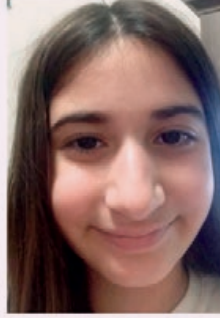
Mahtab B. Dastur (15)



Natasha Kanga (15)



Sabrina Warden (14)



Sanaea Warden (9)



Roshni Chikhliwala (16)



Natasha Dungor (14)

**Kudos and hats-off to this wonderful team! What an astounding and shining example of giving back to the community. You make our community proud!**

**Many thanks to the parents of these youngsters in supporting them with this endeavor.**

Note that these Zoom sessions are open to everyone, on Saturdays and Sundays at 5.30 pm Central time -

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/72166471218?pwd=dWhFamZZVmloQnVnZUZrY2lLOGlXdz09>

Meeting ID: 721 6647 1218; Password: NIRANG

## HOUSTON YOUTH GROUP CONDUCTS DONATION DRIVE

**In** March 2021, the ZAH Youth Group conducted a Toiletries Drive for the Shared Dreams Program that helps Fort Bend ISD students in need. Natasha Kanga and Neville Kanga, under the guidance of Homi Davier, took the lead to organize this event. They collected a total of \$6,200 worth of toiletries in the form of donation checks, direct online purchase through Amazon, and items that were dropped off at the ZAH Rustumji Room. They sorted and delivered these items to the Shared Dreams facility and their staff was overjoyed to see the donations from ZAH. Many thanks to our entire community for making this drive a success!

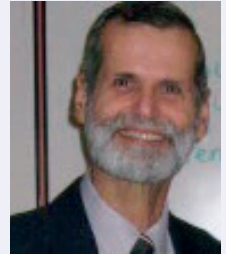






## "WATER WATER EVERYWHERE, NOT A DROP TO DRINK!!!"

**FREDDY MIRZA**



**THIS** thought has gone through my mind several times since the late sixties. The first time was during my maiden foreign voyage from Mumbai to Poland on a cargo ship as a Junior Marine Engineer. I was on the deck looking at the calm Atlantic Ocean along the west coast of Africa. The ship had been at sea for nearly thirty days and the supply of the drinking water on board was running low. We were advised to use the water sparingly until the next port of call. That was the first time I realized the importance of conserving water. This should and must be a universal concern. I was again reminded of this saying during my visit to a small Caribbean island called Saba, near St. Maarten in 2008. It is a five square mile island located in the northeastern Caribbean Sea, 28 miles southwest of its international hub St. Maarten, a 12 minute flight or 90 minute ferry ride away. The island does not have any drinking water and hence it is transported from St. Maarten! The local residents collect rain water in their barrels whenever it rains. There are notices in the hotel toilets advising the occupant to use the flush sparingly. It read: "If it's yellow, let it mellow, if it's brown, flush it down". I took this as a local joke but I was soon corrected by the hotel manager!!! For those of us who live in the diaspora, we may have a false sense of security that the source of water supply is plentiful and will never run dry because we know that three-fourth of our Earth is covered with water. However, in the past years, there have been incidents which made water unsuitable for human consumption due to contamination by bacteria such as e-bola, or pollution, caused by oil, chemical or other noxious liquid substances due to a marine or industrial accidents or due to a Natural disasters such as hurricanes, cyclones and floods.

In the February 2021 issue of the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario's (ZSO) Newsletter, there was an article related to the FEZANA Ava Project.



L-R: Maneckji Appoo with 6 year old son Fram (Beaver-Scout) and Ishaan Prasad (Cub-Scout) from the 100th Toronto-First Zoroastrian Scout Group planting trees.



FEZANA has an UN-NGO Committee. Afreed Mistry and Dr. Behram Pastakia are the Co-Chairs of this Committee as well as the Ava Project. They are looking for participants to join their team for implementing “The Ava Project”. Due to my past experience, I was keen on joining this team. The Ava Project’s goal is to bring together a group of people from across the World to form a working group that exchanges ideas for preserving a sustainable environment. The official logo for this project has been created by one of the volunteers, Delzin Choksey. The Ava Project has already drawn 185 volunteers from 10+ countries. Its goal is to educate, inform, motivate and mobilize our Zoroastrian community over the next ten years in order to have a sustainable eco-friendly environment for the future generations.

The Committee for this Project has made a list of suggested ideas, as follows:

1. Cleaning up of a local body of water by using environmentally friendly products which should be acceptable to the local government authorities as a cleanup device that can be safely used.
2. Educating Children. This can be incorporated in the children religion classes or as a part of the activities for the kids who may enrolled in the local Scout and Guide groups. In Toronto, the ZSO’s Children religion Classes program has a demonstration of the rituals on the *Ava Ardavisur Parabh* day to inform them of the spiritual and physical importance of water. Also, the First Zoroastrian (100<sup>th</sup> Toronto) Scout Group planted beautiful flowers at the Mehraban Guiv Darbe Mehr. A few years ago, the scouts participated in a project called “The Yellowfish Road” where stencils were provided by the City of Toronto. The scouts painted a yellow fish mark near the gutters in order to advise the local residents to refrain from dumping their used engine oil in the gutter which would flow into the lakes. In Canada, nearly thirty percent of the population live around the Great Lakes which provide them with drinking water.
3. Educating the Community by providing or attending the workshops to bring awareness on how not to waste water and keep it pure. These programs indicate ways and means to the environment and provide financial benefits through savings. For example, using a fresh water filtering equipment installed in the plumbing system in lieu of plastic drinking bottles which are fatal to the fishes as well as the birds; providing assistance to the various organizations which are involved in providing clean water to places that do not have it.
4. Encourage our existing or new places of worship to make use of the natural sources such as sunlight and wind to reduce the maintenance cost as well as to plant trees wherever possible with the help of young Zoroastrians. There are various organizations involved in planting trees as well as community gardens for planting vegetables which are then donated to the food banks or to the shelters for the unfortunate homeless people.

On June 5<sup>th</sup> 2021, the United Nations will launch its “UN Decade on Eco-System Restoration” and has declared that day as the World Environment Day on the theme of eco-system restoration. Pakistan will act as the global host for this event. Details of this event can be obtained from the website: [www.detailonrestoration.org](http://www.detailonrestoration.org). The Ava Project is open globally to all who want to participate and volunteer. Our children learn what they see. Hence, we encourage you to carry out any of the above mentioned ideas within your family or the community and join your fellow Zoroastrians within and across our worldwide communities in the Ava Project effort by finding out more on this project from the FEZANA’s website: <https://www.fezana.org/theavaproject> and sign up as a volunteer here: <https://bit.ly/2KMqrur>

The Cover story of the winter 2021 issue of the FEZANA Journal will be on the AVA PROJECT .

*Freddy Mirza has been involved with various committees of the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario (ZSO) since coming to Canada in 1975 from Mumbai. He has been a teacher in the Religious Education Committee of the ZSO since 1980, and one of the founding members of the 100<sup>th</sup> Toronto-First Zoroastrian Scout Group. Freddy has received several awards from Scouts Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism for his voluntary service. He is the current Chair of the Interfaith Committee of the ZSO. Freddy was a Senior Marine Inspector and Engineer Examiner with the Canadian Federal Department of Transport for 35 years. He is presently enjoying his retirement in Toronto with his wife Kety and visiting their children and grandchildren.*





## HOMI DAVIER ON THE BOARD OF FORT BEND INTERFAITH COUNCIL

Homi Davier of the Zoroastrian Association of Houston is a member by invitation on the Board of Fort Bend Interfaith Council representing the Zoroastrian Community, an opportunity to showcase the community. On Sunday evening April 11<sup>th</sup> the Interfaith Council sponsored at the Sugar Land Town Square a prayer vigil *Love Your Neighbour*, to promote love over hate. Leaders from 12 different faith communities spoke about their faith's call for love and kindness towards all people of the world. Kaemerz Dotiwalla spoke on behalf of the Zoroastrian Community. A proclamation was presented by the County judge which is displayed on their website

Homi Davier is active with the Youth group of Houston and they collected toiletries for the needy children in the schools of the county. The youth group collected over \$6,200 in goods and cash (see page 16)



### LATE DEATH ANNOUNCEMENT

**Dr Phiroz Nariman Dastoor, 88 years,  
September 8, 1932—July 2, 2021**

husband of Dr Dolly Dastoor, (Montreal), son of Late Shirin and Ervad Nariman Dastoor; father of Dr Farahad (Dr Jean Macrae) Dastoor (Maine USA), Ervad Zubin (Jasmine Cooper) Dastoor (Singapore), Dr Natasha (Dr Adel) Irani (Houston, USA), loving grandfather of Ervad Jehan and Ervad Zane Dastoor; Roxanna, Isabelle, Dinshaw and Josephine Irani, brother of late Perin (Soli) Pardiwalla; Noshir (Sarosh Zardlia) Dastoor, Sheroo (Minoo) Bhathena; Kety (Freddy) Mirza, all of Toronto. Brother in law of late Roshan (late Dinsha) Bharucha; Bomi Bharucha (Mumbai) Jimmy (Roshan Dastur) Bharucha, (Philadelphia, USA), loving uncle of numerous neices and nephews, died July 2nd 2021, in Toronto after a 6 week bout with cancer.

May his soul rest in eternal peace.

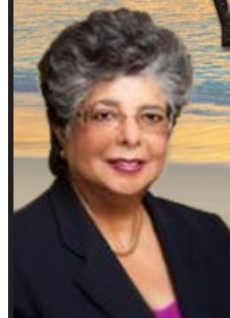
The Dastoor and Irani family sincerely thank family and friends who attended the prayers virtually and in person. Sincere thanks to all for your phone calls and cards of sympathy.

Your support is much appreciated in our time of bereavement

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## ACKNOWLEDGING AND VALUING WOMEN IN PROFESSIONS OF CARE



FEZANA hosted eight delegates to present at the United Nations' 65<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) conference. As the COVID-19 pandemic shadows the world, it also makes us look more closely and reflect on the injustices and inequities faced by women of color in professions of care. The team highlighted professions pertaining to healthcare, childcare, maternal care, mindfulness and wellbeing. They discussed how these areas of care related to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, and how women are intersectionally marginalized, thinking together about reconceptualizing these professions with a lens of equity and justice.

The presentation focused on the following UN Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being, Goal 4: Quality Education, Goal 5: Gender Equality, Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities and Goal 13: Climate Action. Keeping these goals in mind, the delegates began with discussing women in healthcare. This section was led by Sheherazad Kapadia, who is training towards becoming an Occupational Therapist and Anisa Ostad who is an undergraduate student at

George Mason University majoring in Legal Studies. Next, they discussed the role of women in early childhood care and education, which was facilitated by Dr. Ayesha Rabadi-Raol who is an experienced early childhood educator and teacher educator. The importance of maternal care and health was discussed by Anahita Verahrami who is completing her Masters in Ecology at Colorado State University and Adina Mistry who is an undergraduate student at Cornell University, majoring in Biological Sciences with a concentration in Neurobiology and Behavior. Finally, the presentation ended with an important section on mindfulness and wellbeing led by Tenaz Sunavala who is an author. The team was led and guided by Afreed Mistry and Dr. Behram Pastakia.

### Women in Healthcare

Sheherazad Kapadia and Anisa Ostad spent time analyzing the disparities between the representation of women of color within positions of care. The conclusions that they came to reflected that these groups have been hurt by systemic bias which limit them to dangerous, in-person positions of caretaking roles. They encouraged the community to work as units, individuals, and Zarathushtis and others to change these systems.





There is the common stereotype that women are better caregivers as opposed to leaders, and when these expectations are instilled by the patriarchy as women grow up, influences might push them to only seek a certain amount of education that does not allow for much mobility in the workplace. Thus, the patriarchal system and education system intersect in situations like these, leading to a disproportionate danger being presented to women and women of color, especially during health crises. In the Avestan texts, there are several mentions of how women and men are equal and capable of leadership roles, spreading the faith, among other valuable tasks. Our sacred texts advocate for the equal abilities and roles of man and woman, and we should be aware of it in our own communities as well as in societies around the world.

## **Women in Early Childhood Care and Education**

Pertaining to early childhood care and education, Dr. Ayesha Rabadi-Raol engaged the audience in thinking about what it means to be an early childhood teacher and how teachers are often neglected when it comes to discussions about pay equality and equal rights.

The teacher workforce in North America remains overwhelmingly White. This is problematic because classrooms in North America are increasingly diverse while the teachers remain White middle-class and monolingual. Children of color need to see themselves represented in professions of authority and knowledge and White children need to see role models in people of color too. Representation matters! For example, we have seen how inspired people are by the new US Vice-President Kamala Harris because of her intersectional identity being a Black, Indian, South-Asian, Woman of Color in her position.

Finally, Ayesha proposed a few suggestions to think more deeply about intersectionality in early childhood care and education, so that the care of the most vulnerable children can be prioritized and their teachers be adequately acknowledged and valued.

## **Maternal Care and Health**

Throughout the presentation, Adina Mistry and Anahita Verahrami engaged their audience by framing the issue of maternal health, discussing possible solutions, and ending with the environmental benefits of investing in women's education and reproductive health. They addressed the factors that can result in unintended/unplanned pregnancies, which include: poverty, childhood marriage, and a lack of access to and knowledge of contraceptives.

The poorest people are the most seriously affected by the impacts of climate change and the majority of poorest people are women and children. Women often play key roles in managing natural resources for their families and communities. Because of this, women are particularly well suited to find and implement solutions to address climate change, but they are still a largely untapped resource. Lack of access to education, safe and effective health care, financial resources, and limited access to political decision-making spheres often prevent women from being able to play full roles in tackling climate change. Research has found that slower growth can help societies adapt to climate change and investing in family planning, reproductive health services, and girls' education has been shown to improve public health, economic well-being and women's empowerment, which are crucial building blocks of climate resilience.

## **Mental Health and Well-being**

Tenaz Sunavala focused on the concept of spiritual and physical realities and the role mindset and self empowerment plays in helping to achieve the SDGs. She spoke about how mental health and especially depression is often negatively perceived in our society. She discussed how gender discrimination as well as our societal norms and beliefs affect mental health and well-being. She accentuated that depression does not discriminate based on race, color, sex, creed or religion; mental health is very much a physical reality.



Intersectionality

Source: Misty McPhetridge, BSSW

Some empowerment tools suggested were early childhood education on gender equality, mandatory education on gender equality and wellness in schools and colleges, discussions about these topics at community and faith-based centers, and affirmative legislation and laws.

Tenaz stated how the structural inequalities of our society cannot be changed overnight, nor can attitudes ingrained over generations. By cultivating our self confidence, balancing our spiritual and physical realities and empowering ourselves with the right mindset, we can be better placed to have a positive effect on our outer world.

The delegates concluded the presentation and engaged with an international audience in meaningful dialogue about their individual sections as well as gender equality as a whole, thinking together about the next steps and taking substantive action towards this goal. Plans to collaborate with the global Zoroastrian diaspora to raise awareness, reconceptualize and make systemic change are underway.



L-R: Sheherazad Kapadia (London, UK), Anisa Ostad (Northern Virginia, USA), Dr. Ayesha Rabadi-Raol (Toronto, Canada), Adina Mistry (New York, USA), Anahita Verahrami (Colorado, USA) and Tenaz Sunavala (Houston, Texas).





## Introducing Ervad Yazad T Bhadha- 8<sup>th</sup> WZYC Secretary & Speakers Liaison Officer

**M**y name is Ervad Yazad Tehmuras Bhadha and I am the Resident Priest for the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE), London and am taking on the role as Secretary for the 8<sup>th</sup> World Zoroastrian Youth Congress (8WZYC). I graduated in 2012 in the field of commerce from the Byramjee Jeejeebhoy College of Commerce (BJCC) and then completed my Masters in Commerce two years later from Mumbai University. I was then appointed to the position of Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe's (ZTFE) Resident Priest in 2014 and came to the UK in November of that year.

From the very beginning, I have been welcomed by the ZTFE and the Zoroastrian community in the UK with open arms and have been shown a tremendous amount of love and support by all. It has been my privilege to serve the community in both joyous and sad times, and I feel blessed to be able to repay the love and kindness shown to me.



My daily religious duties include performing various ceremonies such as After Death, Jashans, Navjotes, Weddings, Boi, etc. I also advise community members on religious matters as well as run Navjote Prayer Classes for the Zoroastrian youth, and volunteer as a teacher for our XYZ Children's Education Fun Club.

Growing up and studying in India, I have observed both similarities and differences in the way our religion is practiced in the UK, and although many of the fundamentals of our religion remain the same worldwide, there are some noticeable distinctions between life in India and the UK. Zoroastrianism is recognised as one of the nine World Religions in the UK, however due to our low numbers and limited places of worship, it is less known than in India. I am honoured to represent the Zoroastrian Community in the UK and do so by participating in various interfaith meetings and activities, in order to help spread awareness of our beautiful religion as well as network and learn with those from other faiths.

In 2015, as part of my development in my role at ZTFE, I was fortunate to receive the ZTFE Faridoon and Mehraban Zartoshty Scholarship in Zoroastrian Studies, thus giving me the opportunity to study for a Masters in Religions of Asia and Africa at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. The course focused on Zoroastrianism: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives, as well as an introduction to both the Avestan and Pahlavi languages. I am extremely proud to say that I gained my Masters and graduated in 2018.

My role as the ZTFE Resident Priest and my position on the ZTFE Young Zoroastrian (YZ) Committee as a Social Event Organizer means that I participate in numerous community events and activities, which I thoroughly enjoy attending and mixing with my Zoroastrian peers. It is this same enthusiasm that has brought me to volunteer for the next 8WZYC, being hosted by the ZTFE in 2023 in the UK. Here, I am undertaking the role as the Congress Secretary and also central liaison lead of the Speaker Committee.

I am extremely excited to be involved with the 8WZYC, as this will be my first Zoroastrian Youth Congress as both an organizer and an attendee. Being a member of such a dynamic team that is as passionate as I am is very motivational and encouraging. We all share the vision in wanting to make the 8WZYC a great success and this makes me even more proud to see the involvement and dedication of our Zoroastrian youth.

The last time the ZTFE Young Zoroastrians of the UK hosted a World Zoroastrian youth congress was the Second World Zoroastrian Youth Congress (2WZYC) in 1997, chaired by Kerman Yazdi Jasavala. One of the main



reasons why the 2WZYC was so successful was that it had a good mix of UK and international delegates, invited numerous UK and international speakers, including two Vada Dasturjis and scholar priests, who spoke on a variety of topics on our Zoroastrian religion, history, heritage, culture and contemporary matters, and we will endeavour to do the same.

As the Secretary for the 8WZYC, there are many policies and protocols that we need to be aware of such as ensuring General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is abided by and everyone including committee members, volunteers and attendees has given their written consent to be contacted. This is especially tricky as we are very keen to include young members of the community as volunteers on different committees. As the Congress is due to take place in the summer of 2023, many of these potential volunteers, may not currently be over the age of eighteen, but will be eligible to attend at the time of the congress and as such, it is vital for us to communicate and gain their consent and buy in, of both them and their parents.

Both the main committee and all of the sub committees continue to meet during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic virtually, in order to monitor the progress and ensure all milestones are achieved on time. Our monthly speaker committee meetings cover creating speaker schedules/ timetables for group and individual sessions, devising and adhering to a budget, brainstorming about how and in what field the potential speakers will contribute etc. At this early stage we are short listing potential speakers which will be finalized in due course. This in itself is a balancing act to ensure that we are being inclusive for all whether that be religious views, perspectives on the future of today's youth within their communities, etc. as we want to ensure these are represented in a fair and respectful manner.

In addition to inviting inspirational speakers from around the world, we in the UK are enriched with world renowned institutions that link heavily to Zoroastrian studies and its history, including the world renowned British Museum and the British Library, which currently holds a lot of material on Zoroastrianism and Ancient Iran. We also are fortunate to have the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), the only university in the world that has a Chair / Professorship in Zoroastrian Studies - Zartoshty Brothers Professorship funded by our beloved ZTFE patrons and benefactors Faridoon and Mehraban



Zartoshty, together with Professor (Emeritus) Mary Boyce. SOAS is also home of the SOAS Shapoorji Pallonji Institute of Zoroastrian Studies (SSPIS), funded by Mr Shapoor Mistry in the name of his pioneering grandfather Mr. Pallonji Shapoorji Mistry. He was inspired to fund the institute following the success of the *"Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination"* exhibition at SOAS in 2013 core funded by the ZTFE.

It is exciting to see the 8WZYC start to take shape as we progress. It is an incredible opportunity to be a part of this once in a lifetime event and to work alongside so many passionate and creative young Zoroastrians.

We look forward to seeing all of you in London in 2023!



## PERSECUTION AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ZARATHUSHTIS IN IRAN 6<sup>TH</sup> -21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CE

Guest Editorial

### INTRODUCTION TO THEME OF SUMMER ISSUE

“Majus, that’s what the Sunnis call us because they don’t think we are real Muslims.” Ali said. “But here you are, an actual, real life...”, his voice faltered, catching himself from saying something unseemly towards me. It was 2018 in Manama and I was visiting a few of my Bahraini friends. Like most of the country, my friends were Shi’ite Muslim. But the minority Sunni population held the political power and took every opportunity to denigrate and disempower Shi’ites. One way was by referring to them as ‘Majus’ or fire worshippers, a pejorative term originally coined for Zarathushtis.

This was not my first encounter with prejudice; coming of age during 9/11 as a Middle Eastern American, there was plenty of that to go around. But I had never been in a situation where my Zarathushti identity was the focal point of that prejudice. I had been told stories of how we had been discriminated throughout history and what my Bahraini friends were explaining to me was a holdover from those times.

Zarathushtis in Iran have suffered innumerable hardships and atrocities since the fall of the Sassanian Empire in the 7th Century. It is something that persists in the present day both overtly and subversively. The suffering was so extreme, that it almost brought the community on the brink of collapse in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. But right before that happened, the Parsi community of British India intervened, and the sociopolitical circumstances shifted in their favor. The Zarathushti population in Iran grew, prospered, and once again played a prominent role in shaping the country.

What has happened to Iranian Zarathushtis over the past 14 centuries is an incredible story of tragedy, humanity, and resilience. One from which we can draw great inspiration, while serving as another example of why we must all stand against discrimination of any form. The story is not over, as Iranians Zarathushtis still suffer from forms of discrimination.

This issue of the Fezana Journal is meant to educate our community and others about the discrimination and persecution against Iranian Zarathushtis historically and in the present day. It has been divided into three parts:

**-Atrocities committed against Iranian Zarathushtis between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries** with articles written by Viraf Soroushian and Dr. Mehrborzin Soroushian

**-The people and events that revived Iranian Zarathushti community and the community’s contributions to the modernization of Iran** with articles written by Soonu Engineer, Dr. Afshin Marashi, and Artemis Javanshir

**-The state of the Iranian Zarathushti community today** with articles written by Shahin Bekhradnia, Ruzbeh Hodiwala, and Deena Guzder

For the front cover, we have selected an artist’s depiction of a scene from Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh. We found this to be fitting for a few reasons. Ferdowsi’s book of epic poems regales the glories of Ancient Persia; glories towards which the Zarathushti religion also greatly contributed. And much like the Zarathushti faith, the Shahnameh has become a central part of the modern Iranian culture and identity. The scene itself depicts a bloody battle, similar to the ones that led to the downfall of the Sassanian Empire and, by extension, the Zarathushti faith. Moreover, bloodshed and grisly violence were a constant theme of persecution against Zarathushtis over the last 14 centuries.



**Mehrborzin Soroushian** was born in Kerman, Iran. He attended the Zarathushti schools in Kerman through high school and completed his undergraduate studies at the University of London. In 1979, upon completion of his Ph.D. at UCLA, and in view of the Islamic revolution in Iran, he and his wife Mehrbanou decided to stay in North America. Upon retirement from a career in Science and Engineering, he is now focusing on Iranian Zoroastrian history studies. [msoroushian@gmail.com](mailto:msoroushian@gmail.com)



**Viraf Soroushian** holds a B.A. in Economics and Sociology from UC San Diego and a M.A. in International Relations and Economics from Johns Hopkins University. He is deeply passionate about social justice, diversity, and inclusion.

# HISTORY OF PERSECUTION AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ZARATHUSHTIS FROM THE 6TH – 19TH CENTURY CE

VIRAF SOROUSHIAN

Between 12th and 19th Century, the Zarathushti population in Iran/ Persia was decimated. This article explores the conditions during this period that resulted in Iranian Zarathushtis to be discriminated and persecuted for their religion, the nature of their sufferings, and the long-term impact it had on the community in Iran.

At the start of the 7th Century, the Zarathushti religion was the state religion of the Persian Empire and the Middle East. Twelve hundreds years later in 1850, the population had declined to such a dismal level (~7,000 nationwide) that the sitting French Ambassador to Persia stated, “Only a miracle may save them from extinction”. (1) What happened over the course 12 centuries to lead this once large, prosperous, and influential community to the brink of extinction by the middle of the 19th Century?

Two conditions were central to the religion’s demise: (1) the inferior designation given to the Zarathushti religion after the fall of the Sassanians and (2) the rise of Shi’ite Islam in Iran.

The inferior status of Zarathushtis began around 630 CE, when the last Sassanian King of Persia was defeated by the invading army from the Arabian Peninsula under the direction of Caliph Umar. The Arab conquerors, known as the Umayyads, united under the banner of Islam and replaced Zoroastrianism as the state religion with their own. While there is no scholarly consensus regarding how aggressively the Umayyads sought to convert their Persian subjects, they did seek to establish Islam’s superiority over other faiths (2). Other Ibrahimic faiths—Christianity and Judaism—were granted the status of dhimmi, or “people of the pact,” which allowed them to “practice their religion, subject to certain conditions [and requirements], and to enjoy a measure of communal autonomy” that guaranteed their safety and security, in return for paying a tribute and acknowledgement of Muslim supremacy (3).

The Zarathushti religion was also granted the dhimmi status. But because it did not share a prophetic past with Islam and had deep ties to the overthrown Sassanian political structure, Zarathushtis were not afforded the full extent of rights or protections as other dhimmis. Later under the Abbasid rule (9th century), it is believed Zarathushtis lost their dhimmi status and were downgraded to kāfirs, or nonbelievers or heretics (4). As a result, Zarathushtis were considered impure and barred from appearing at the royal court and entering many public places (e.g., mosques, bathhouses, and bazaars). Some of their institutions were destroyed or confiscated (5). It was around this time (8—10th Century) that the first Zarathushti exodus to South Asia took place (now referred to as Parsi Zarathushtis or Parsis).

The adoption of Twelver Shi’ite Islam as the state religion occurred under the Safavid Dynasty (16-18th Century). As the influence of this religious establishment grew, religious freedoms for most minority groups diminished. Zarathushtis, who still made a sizeable portion of the population (est. 3-4 million), were amongst the most harshly punished. This began under Shah Abbas I (1588-1629) and culminated in a royal decree in the 18th century by Shah Sultan Husayn—one of the last Safavid rulers—sanctioning the forcible conversion of Zarathushtis to Shi’ite Islam (6, 1). Though the order was not implemented uniformly throughout the empire, where it did occur it happened with great violence. Zarathushtis who resisted either lost their lives or suffered greatly. Those who publicly converted were given reprieve, though some of them continued to maintain Zarathushti beliefs and customs behind closed doors. Mobeds of Yazd described this period to their counterparts in India as, “[N]o period, not even that of Alexander, had been more grievous or troublesome for the faithful [Zarathushtis]...” (7)

These two conditions set the stage for extreme persecution, discrimination, and violence against Zarathushtis in Iran. It is important to note that the suffering was not uniform across all 12 centuries; some rulers were more sympathetic



to their Zarathushti subjects and others were crueler. Nor was the experience unique to Zarathushtis; other religious minorities also suffered to varying degrees. However, the forms of the injustice suffered by Zarathushtis across those centuries consistently included the destruction of knowledge and institutions, assaults and abductions, economic discrimination, social discrimination, and systematic extermination (8).

## DESTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE AND INSTITUTIONS

During the Arab conquest and the Umayyad rule, some fire temples were converted into mosques and new temples built after the Arab conquest were destroyed (6). Libraries were also razed. When seeking guidance on the fate of the great library of Ctesiphon—the Sassanian Capital—Caliph Umar wrote to the commander in charge: “If the books contradict the Koran, they are blasphemous and on the other hand if they are in agreement with the text of Koran, then they are not needed” (1).

Throughout the 12 centuries, religious books were regularly destroyed while priests and leaders were at risk of assassination or imprisonment. These acts had the effect of erasing thousands of years of knowledge and history and destabilizing the institutions underpinning the community.

## ASSAULT AND ABDUCTIONS



*Figure 1: Ctesiphon Palace under attack by the Umayyad Army*

After the Arab conquest, approximately 130,000 Persian men, women, and children were enslaved and sold in the markets of the Arabian Peninsula (1). In the centuries to follow, women were at great risk of being raped or kidnapped and forced into marriages with Muslim men. In the later centuries, women would protect themselves by staining their faces with pomegranate and walnut skins in order to appear blotched, diseased, and undesirable. Boys were also kidnapped and sold into servitude.

## ECONOMIC DISCRIMINATION

Zarathushtis were regulated in their professional endeavors, by inheritance laws, and through an increasingly

burdensome religious tax, the Jizya.

- Professional: Zarathushtis were barred from many professions and relegated to low-paying manual labor, like farming, portering, silk cultivation, and weaving. Restrictions were also placed on how they could perform their jobs. For example, merchants were not allowed to trade in bazaars and, for some time, in caravansaries. Their inferior social status also meant their goods could be considered impure, thus making it even more difficult for them to sell their wares.
- Inheritance: Inheritance laws were passed to incentivize conversion. If one sibling converted to Islam, they were entitled to receive all the inheritance, irrespective of the deceased relatives' wishes. This also meant that a "Muslim husband who abducted a Zarathushti woman and forcibly converted her before marriage was now entitled to her [and her family's] inheritance" (9).
- Jizyeh: One of the most burdensome practices was the Jizyeh, a religious or poll tax placed on the head of the Zarathushti. It was first instituted under Umayyads (7th Century) but became particularly burdensome under the Qajar rule in the 19th Century. Under the Qajars, the tax was calculated for the entire community, but population figures were not updated. As the Zarathushti population shrunk, an individual's share of the Jizyeh grew (1). Adding to the burden, corrupt tax officials would often collect 2-3 times the official charge so that each intermediary received a cut. By the mid-19th Century, only 20% of the population of Kerman "could pay without difficulty, [40%] with much trouble and for the rest it was impossible even under the pain of death (9).

The tax was also collected in a particularly cruel and humiliating manner to drive home the message of Zarathushti inferiority (10). Tax collectors could demand payment on-the-spot at any time. Those who could not pay were subject to vicious beatings (as were their children), destruction of religious items, and forcible conversion.

## SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION

Zarathushtis were restricted in where they could live and travel, how they could dress, the ways they interacted with Muslim society, and their access to formal education.

During the Safavid Dynasty, Zarathushtis were forced out of urban centers and made to live in religious ghettos on the outskirts (often named using the 'Gabr' root, e.g., Gabrestan, Gabrebad, Gavashir). Not only was this extremely disruptive to their economic prospects and social standing, but living outside of the city walls meant they were more vulnerable to attacks from invading armies. This was precisely the fate suffered twice by the Zarathushtis of Gavashir in Kerman Province, who were decimated by both the Afghan and Qajar armies.

When Zarathushtis did co-exist with Muslims, there were restrictions on the construction of their houses: "The height of Zarathushti houses were restricted and should be low enough for any Muslim to touch the roof with the hand extended. There was a maximum of two windows per room and only single doors were allowed...As late as 1900, the Muslims in Yazd made sure that not a single Zarathushti house installed a bad-gir, or air-cooling tower, without which the summer heat of the Yazd desert was unbearable" (10).

In the 18th century, during the reign of Nadir Shah, travel was officially forbidden for Zarathushtis, effectively cutting off ties between them and their Parsi co-religionists in British India. Still, extreme provocation led some individuals to escape, but the "precarious journey [meant] only the successful ones lived to tell the tale" (9).

The outfits worn by men and women exhibited different kinds of discrimination levied against the community. The medley of patterns and vibrant hues characteristic of 19th century Yazd women's costumes was partly to do with laws prohibiting buying full lengths of cloth. Instead, shop owners "had bins, placed outside their shops, into which were thrown strips and pieces of cloth lengths, for the [Zarathushtis] to eventually purchase. As many as twenty to thirty multicolored strips were joined to form each gathered trouser leg." (11)

For men, a dress code was enforced to "distinguish non-believers from the Muslim population" (11). Zarathushti men were forced to wear unbleached, undyed garments of brown, grey, and yellow woven at home by the women. A patch was required on their clothes to signify they were Zarathushti, akin to the Jewish population in Nazi Germany who had to wear a Star of David patch. Restrictions were placed on footwear described as "hideous shoes with a broad turned up toe." (11) A special headgear, nokhodi, was also required, "which being cumbersome was meant to cause



some discomfort”. (11)

There were also many restrictions on how Zarathushtis could conduct themselves in public. They were forbidden from traveling by horse and had to dismount their donkeys when passing a Muslim, as a sign of deference. Since they were considered unclean, they were not allowed outdoors when it rained so as not to pollute the waters. Similarly, they were required to always carry a cloth to sit on when entering a Muslim’s house to avoid dirtying their floor.

Finally, Zarathushti children were banned from receiving formal education. Illiteracy rates in the community were extremely high, though this was also true amongst the general population.

### **EXHAUSTED, TRAMPLED, AND MISERABLE**

The outcome of these activities was disastrous by all measures. What was once a thriving community—with its people and influence spread across Asia and the Mediterranean—was now poor, uneducated, and alienated, relegated to live in the desert provinces of Yazd and Kerman. A community from which priests in India were seeking guidance on religious matters through the 18th century, was now barely clinging to its faith.

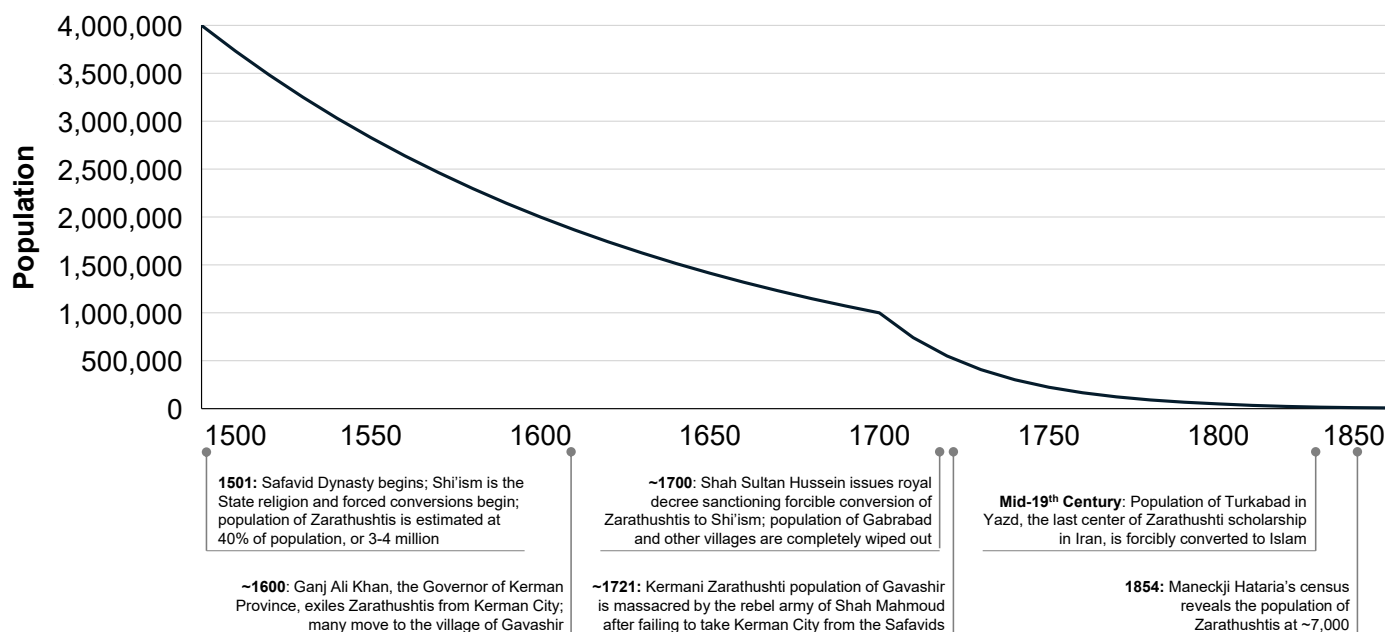
The most significant indicator of the Iranian Zarathushti community’s demise is the collapse in population. In the 250 years leading up to the mid-19th century, the population fell by 98%. In 1855, it stood at just over 7,000. On describing the dismal state of Zarathushtis in Iran to Parsis in British India, Maneckji Limji Hatara states: “I found [them] to be exhausted and trampled, so much that even no one in this world can be more miserable than them” (1).

There are many gaps in our understanding of the nature and degree to which Zarathushtis in Iran suffered over the 12 centuries following the fall of the Sassanian Empire. Parts can be filled in through more research on this topic, but much of this history has been destroyed or intentionally hidden by those who oppressed the community. Yet, from what we know today, there is no question that those who chose to remain true to the Zarathushti faith paid dearly for their decision.

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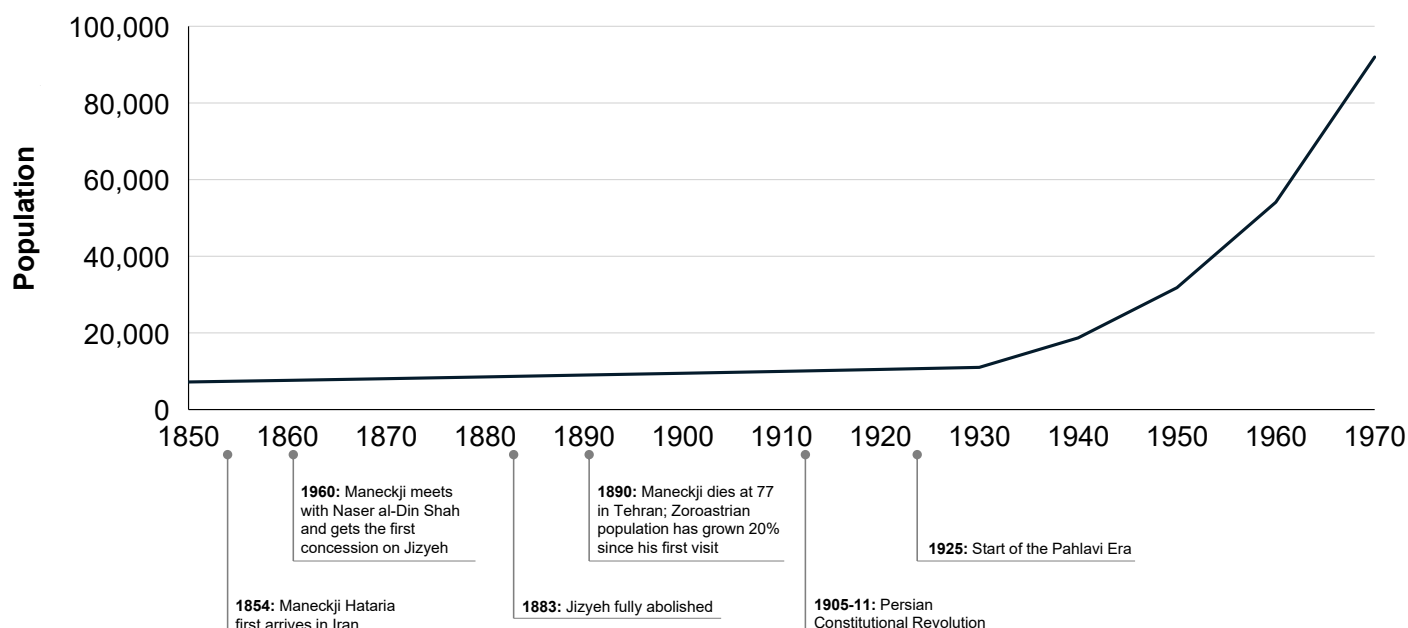
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## The population of Zoroastrians in Iran DECLINED 98% to ~7,000 over the 250 years leading to 1850



Source: Jahanian, Daryoush, "The History of Zoroastrians after Arab Invasion; Alien in Their Homeland", speech presented at the World Zoroastrian congress in Houston, 2000. Jahanian, Daryoush, "The History of Zoroastrians Through Political Analysis and Historical Letters". Boyce, Mary, "A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism", 1975

## The Zoroastrian population in Iran INCREASED 1,200% to ~90,000 in the 120 years leading up to the Islamic Revolution, mainly because of the intervention by the Parsi community, led by Maneckji Limji Hataria, and modernization of Iran under the Pahlavis



Source: Deboo, M. (n.d.). Seth Maneckji Limji Hataria: The Martin Luther King of Zoroastrianism and The Struggle for Zoroastrian Civil Rights in Iran. Retrieved from English Zoroastrian Library: <http://www.zoroastrian.org.uk/vohuman/Article/Seth%20Maneckji%20Limji%20Hataria.htm>; Zoroastrian census reports



# BRIEF HISTORY OF PERSECUTION IN KERMAN

***Summary:** Kerman, in Iran's southeast, is one of two provinces to have consistently maintained a Zarathushti presence since pre-Achaemenid times. Despite the colossal adversities of Iranian Zarathushti after the fall of the Sassanian Dynasty (c. 633), Kerman city, the provincial capital, and the surrounding villages remained a stronghold for the community. This article will share key moments of the history of Zarathusthis in Kerman between the 7<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> Centuries.*



## EARLY CENTURIES OF MUSLIM RULE

The end of the Sasanian Dynasty witnessed the Arab armies focusing on conquest of the neighboring provinces of Pars, Khorasan and Sistan. The Umayyads decided against invading Kerman based on the advice that the province would not easily be captured; they were told a small force would be annihilated, while a larger one would likely starve to death. Hearing that Hujaj stated, “we shall leave it to the people who live there.”

The first known enforcement of Jizya in Kerman—the religious poll tax enforced on non-Muslims—occurred during the rule of the Seljuks in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

## THE SAFAVIDS, HOTAKS, AND MASSACRE OF GAVASHIR

The Safavids Dynasty rose in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, consolidating power over the Iranian plateau and adopting Shiite Islam as the state religion to distinguish themselves from the Ottomans to the West, which had adopted Sunnism. The Shiite-ization of the Persian Empire came at the expense of systematic massacres and persecution of Zarathushtis, Sufis, Sunnis, Jews, and other minorities. Although indigenous Kermanis tended to be tolerant of minorities, the instigation for harming minorities typically came from outsiders implanted in Kerman.

In the year 1606, GanjAli Khan, a Kurdish man appointed as Governor of Kerman, is confronted with a case of a murdered Muslim foreman at the hands of two young Zarathushti laborers and asks the high ayatollah (religious leader) of Kerman to issue a verdict. The Ayatollah orders a jar of honey and a sack of millet to be brought to him. Dipping his arm in the jar and thoroughly coating it with honey, he then sticks it into the sack and pulls out an arm covered with millet.

He asks a court official to count the grains on his arm. His verdict is to kill as many Zarathushtis as the counted millets to avenge the death of one Muslim. Since there are not enough Zarathushtis within the city, GanjAli Khan orders Zarathushtis across the province to be rounded up. He is told it will take several weeks to get the required number of people.

A domestic spy of the Persian ruler Shah Abbas based in Kerman hears about the order and immediately departs for the capital of Isfahan to report this, arriving rapidly within three days. At midnight, he is at the designated spot in the bazaar where the spies would meet the Shah, who would slip out of his palace in disguise, and gives their report. Distressed by the report, the Shah pretends he had a nightmare about Kerman and orders his courtiers to get ready for immediate departure to the city. Within record time, the Royal entourage arrives in Baghin, a village close to Kerman. Shah Abbas asks a villager what is happening in Kerman City. On hearing the Governor's Zarathushti round-up order and wishing not to show he is interfering with a religious order, he states: if that is the event, then there is no need to proceed to the city. He tells his entourage to rest and get ready to return to Isfahan. In the meantime, he pulls a trusted courtier aside, and gives him his ring and asks him to go to the city and inform the governor of the Shah's presence nearby. With the Royal party ready to travel back, GanjAli Khan arrives on horseback, and at the feet of the King asks him to grace the city. Abbas tells him, there is no need for that, and asks him to walk with him for a chat. Away from others, Abbas tells the governor the massacre cannot happen. He can only hang the two young Zarathushtis but cannot physically harm the others.

GanjAli rescinds his order, but expels all Zarathushtis from the city, confiscating all their city properties, including temples in the bazaar that becomes part of his civic building complex. Most Zarathushtis move

to the villages in the northern part and are no longer protected by the fortification of the walled city. This vulnerability proves to be fatal.

The end of the Safavids in 1722 came at the hands of Sunni Pashtuns from Qandahar, under the command of Mahmud Hotak. On his first attempt to conquer the Persian Empire in 1719, Mahmud marched on Kerman. Unable to penetrate the fortified city, he turned his aggression on the surrounding villages. Countless Zarathushtis were killed in what became known as the Massacre of Gavashir. A small number of the young Zarathushtis were able to take shelter inside underground aqueducts (Qanats) connected to the city. They were given shelter in the city and allowed to stay.

### THE LEGEND OF MULLA SHIRIN

The legend of Mulla Shirin remembered by older Kerman Zarathushtis from the time of the Gavashir Massacre. Mulla Shirin, her sick and elderly husband, a teenage daughter and a younger son are in their small village house, while Mahmud's forces are at the foot of the city. At night, they hear footsteps on the roof and suddenly three armed Afghans burst into their room. Without hesitation, one murdered him. Horrified, the three survivors huddle in the corner. The assailants talk while eying their victims, arguing over the division of their human spoils for the night. In the morning, the assailants leave after taking whatever they could and plan to return to burn the place down. The older soldier rejects the idea, arguing the troops need places to stay at

night.

The shattered family drags the dead body and buries it outside the village. Later the daughter commits suicide by jumping into a dry well. The young son declares he is leaving for India with friends, never to be heard from again. More footsteps at night, and Afghan assailants descend on her house. They force themselves on her. As she goes through that dreadful experience, her thoughts drift to two buried barrels of wine, her husband had made on the birth of each child to be unearthed on the occasion of their marriage.

Next day she unearths the older barrel. At night, when another assailant enters to violate her, she offers him the aged wine. Drinking it, makes the assailant drowsy. Without hesitation she takes the assailant's dagger and cuts his throat. She keeps something of the assailant as a reminder and drags the remains to the dry well outside and dumps the body. In the morning, she drives away the assailant's horse secured outside her house. Each night when a new assailant would come to her house, she would use the same tactic. Years later, Mulla Shirin shares that despite so much tragedy and suffering that had befallen her, what motivated her to continue living was taking revenge against those who destroyed everything dear to her, which she did by killing 11 assailants.

### MOHAMED QAJAR'S MASSACRE OF KERMANS AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY ASSAULTS

The small Zarathushti community in Kerman city



*Figure 1: Kerman's Shah Vahram Izad prayer Hall built on the site of the opening to the underground water aqueduct from which the Zoroastrian youth were able to escape on the day of Mahmud Hatok's invasion of Kerman in 1719*

sustained itself through 1794 when Mohamed Qajar seized Kerman, which was harboring the last Shah of the Zand dynasty, LotfAli Zand. After brutally killing him, the Qajar Khan then ordered the destruction of Kerman City for harboring LotfAli. Due to the destruction, the city population, of Zarathushtis, dwindled sharply. In 1803, Ebrahim Khan Qajar as the governor of Kerman launched a reconstruction program. Outsiders, most of the Zarathushtis were brought in from Yazd, who settled in Kerman.

Based on Maneckji's census of Zarathushtis taken in the 1850s, the population in Kerman had shrunk to 875, most of them within the city. By then the population in the rural areas had largely been lost due to forced conversion and massacres. The condition of the Zarathushtis in Kerman as in the rest of the country started to improve thanks in part to Maneckji's efforts, the influence of colonial powers, and the modernization of Iran. Pride and prosperity returned to Iran and the Zarathushtis after 1922 with the rise of Pahlavi Dynasty to power.

Vulnerabilities of minorities manifested itself during two national crises in 1944 and 1952. In 1944, the Allied Forces occupied Iran and Iranian security

forces were neutralized. An individual who had stolen the identity of an Azerbaijani carpet merchant named Dilmghani—and had taken over his holdings in Kerman—had multiple run-ins with well-established Kerman businessmen, including Zoroastrians. One evening while returning to Kerman city, his car was ambushed, and he was shot. Immediately, the Mullahs blamed the Zoroastrians. Mobs from the mosques were incited and descended on the Zoroastrian quarter. Fortunately, there were no major casualties aside from a few Zoroastrians on the streets getting roughed up. Years later, the actual murderer was caught and confessed that a Muslim businessman had paid him to kill Dilmghani.

The 1953 constitutional crisis involving Premier Mosaddeq saw the Shah temporarily leave Iran. His departure was a green light to religious fundamentalists and leftist mobs to attack and rob minorities, including Zoroastrians. One family, the Kasrais, had gathered in Kerman for a wedding during this period. The mobs broke into their house and assaulted family members. By the time security forces arrived, the mob had fled with the gifts and other household items. Once the Shah returned law and order was restored.

**CONCLUSION:** The tale of survival of Zoroastrians of Kerman as told in this article typifies the heroic struggle of the Zoroastrians of Iran who managed a miraculous survival against incredible odds. The help they received from fellow Zoroastrians of India was critical, but ultimately it was their will to survive and to become a force for rebuilding their shattered community and their shattered nation under the Pahlavis that will be their everlasting legacy.

i Bastani Parizi, Muhamed Ibrahim. "Commentary on Memoirs of Arbab Keikhosrow Shahrokh", Memories of Keikhosrow Shahrokh (Farsi), Edited by Mobed Dr. Jahangir Oshidari, Parcham Publisher, Tehran, 1975, Page 1  
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ii This move was likely to avoid the appearance of favoring minorities.

iii Kerman Zoroastrians to this day Observe a Gahanbar in honor of Shah Abbas.

iv Present Southern Afghanistan, a hotbed of Sunni fanaticism

"Shahin Kavir" (Phoenix of the Desert), Ali Asghar Mazahari, Kermaneology Institute Publication, 1380 (2001) pps 29-42, 342

vi Despite all her Zoroastrian neighbors being killed or having left, Mulla Shirin stayed in the same house for the remainder of her life. She was asked by her new neighbors to accept Islam, but stayed a fervent defender and spokesperson for her Zoroastrian faith. Some 45 years later, when she died, the Moslems refused to hand over her remains to the Zoroastrians, and buried her in the Moslem cemetery bestowing high distinctions upon her. A memorial for her at an Islamic mosque drew over 1,500 attendees. The memorial at the Zoroastrian fire temple was attended by many distinguished Moslems as well as a majority of Zoroastrians.



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# The Extraordinary Seth Maneckji Limji Hataria

By Soonu Engineer



Seth Maneckji Limji Hataria (1813 – 1890) is a legend amongst the Zarathushtis of Iran. He is revered as a man of vision, action, and moral courage who made a unique contribution to the survival and emancipation of the Zarathushti communities of Yazd and Kerman in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Maneckji's story, like the epic tales of ancient Persia, is one of heroic destiny. The son of *humdeens* who fled to India returns, after a thousand years, to rescue those who stayed on in Iran.

Maneckji was born in 1813 in a small village near Surat, from where his father, Hushang Limji, migrated to Bombay when Maneckji was 5 years old. His family traced its roots to

Kerman and Maneckji was brought up to take pride in his cultural heritage and in the history of ancient Iran. He received a good education in Bombay and became fluent in Gujarati, English, Urdu and Farsi. On leaving school he got a job as clerk/accountant with the British administration, handling military disbursements in Sind. Later, in 1846, he worked as the representative in Sind of a Bombay company owned by Jehangirji Jasavala. He was married to Hirabai and had two children, Hormuzji and Dosibai. After the death of Hirabai, he married Farangis Kosrobandar, an Iranian Zarathushti from Kerman.

By the age of 40, Maneckji had an impeccable record in financial accounting with the Bombay Presidency, and had the reputation of a being a well-travelled businessman, with an interest in the history and literature of Iran. When the Parsis were looking for a reliable person, someone of courage and enterprise to travel to Iran on a dangerous social mission, Maneckji seemed to them the obvious choice to fulfil that role.

Maneckji arrived on the shores of Iran in the Spring of 1854, as an emissary of the 'Society for the Amelioration of the Conditions of the Zarathushtis of Iran'. The Society had been set up by the Parsis of Bombay in response to distressing accounts brought by refugees of the suffering and humiliation of their fellow Zarathushtis in Iran. They had also heard that the Zarathushti population of Iran had declined dramatically and was in danger of disappearing

completely under the Qajar dynasty's oppressive and chaotic rule. It was Maneckji's task to establish the truth behind these reports.

## THE CONDITION OF ZARATHUSHTIS UNDER QAJAR RULE

During his first year in Iran, Maneckji carried out a census in those areas known to have the largest population of Zarathushtis: some 22 communities residing mainly in and around Yazd, Kerman and Kermanshah. He discovered that there were only about 7000 Zarathushtis left in the region. In his Report to the Society in 1865, he attributed this decline in numbers to institutionalised discrimination and exclusion, which systematically undermined and impoverished the community, rewarding those who converted to Islam and putting the rest beyond the pale of civilised society. He gave a graphic account of the brutality and abuse that had shattered the confidence of the community, so that Zarathushtis lived segregated, on the margins, and in a state of constant fear.

It is worth noting that Maneckji's detailed reports, on the causes of the decline in numbers of the Zarathushtis of this region, did **not** contain any suggestion that there was a policy of systematic extermination carried out by either regional or national forces, as was feared by some Parsis at the time. In his view, the single most debilitating cause of impoverishment, terror, and the decline in numbers was the draconian *jizya* or poll tax levied on non-Muslims.



Since most Zarathustis were share-croppers and labourers they could not afford to pay the tax. Moreover, *jizya* was extracted in the most brutal fashion by local officials who added a mark-up for themselves. To escape the flogging and humiliation it was not uncommon for men to flee, abandoning their homes and families. To escape the horror and destitution, many families were compelled to convert to Islam.

Second only to the dreaded *jizya*, wrote Maneckji, was a body of law and edicts that created demeaning distinctions between Zarathushtis and the rest of the population and institutionalised their inferior status. In Qajar times, Zarathushtis were not included amongst the *ahl al-kitab* or 'people of the book' but reviled as *najis* or 'unclean': their touch deemed polluting to water and food, their inferior status formalised by myriad restrictions. Zarathushtis were barred from certain trades; their men were required to wear distinctive clothing that marked them out from the rest of the population. They were likely to be refused medical and other personal services including access to barbers' shops, bathhouses, water fountains, and tea houses.

The third major cause of the decline and disintegration of Zarathushti communities during the Qajar period, in Maneckji's view, was the lack of leadership within the community. This resulted in the neglect of religious customs such as *sudreh pooshi*, or *navjote*, and encroachment of social practices alien to Zarathushti culture.

Zarathushti elders had neither the means nor the status to negotiate with local ulema (Muslim religious councils) to ensure the safety of community property or gain permission for running Zarathushti

schools. Lack of community funds and the fear of persecution had resulted in places of worship and burial falling into disrepair.

### PARSI SUPPORT FOR MANECKJI'S VISION

Maneckji's report caused dismay and indignation amongst Parsis. Some

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thought that the entire Zarathushti population should be assisted in emigrating to India. But Maneckji himself had faith in the future of Zarathushtis in an Iran that he believed would one day rediscover and value its ancient past; it would then honour this small community that had suffered for more than a millennium to maintain its ancient cultural and religious identity.

At a meeting held in Bombay to discuss Maneckji's report, a second fund was set up, the Amelioration

Fund, for the revitalisation and uplift of the community. The relative strength of the Indian economy meant that the Indian rupee would go far in 19<sup>th</sup> century Iran.

### MANECKJI'S MASTER PLAN

The Amelioration Society gave full support to Maneckji's proposals for tackling the root causes of the community's decline and for laying the foundations for the sustainable development of the *whole* community. To this end, Maneckji put forward four strategic aims:

- Ending *jizya* and other forms of social and legal discrimination;
- Building educational institutions and reforming religious practice;
- Fostering leadership and community organisation;
- Raising the status of the Zarathushti religion and community in Iran.

The achievement of these aims would require careful planning, the energetic implementation of remedies, diplomacy, gifts, persuasion, and political pressure through contacts in India, Iran and Britain.

In order to maintain a degree of autonomy, Maneckji did not draw a salary from the Amelioration Fund after 1868, supporting himself through his mercantile activities. Politically, Maneckji had the protection of the British Crown in Iran and therefore did not suffer the social restrictions faced by Irani Zarathushtis and other religious minorities.

Maneckji embarked on a comprehensive plan of action, using generous funds donated by the Parsis of India. His first few projects aimed to raise the morale of the community

and hopes for the future. The crumbling *Atesh Bahram* in Yazd was restored and new *Dar-e-Mehers* and *dakhmas* were built in the villages near Yazd and Kerman. Maneckji liaised with local Muslim clerics, persuading them to certify these and other Zarathushti properties, thus safeguarding them against arbitrary confiscation and random attacks by mobs.

## ENDING JIZYA

The focal point of Maneckji's Master Plan was the abolition of *jizya*. Parsis were asked to use their influence to persuade the British to bring pressure to bear on the Persian monarch, Nasr-al-Din Shah. Maneckji befriended the British ambassador in Iran, Sir Henry Rawlinson, and impressed the French ambassador at the Court of the Shah.

Within two years of his stay in Iran, he was able to gain an audience with Nasr-al-Din Shah, presenting him with a silver casket and a scroll addressed to the Shah from the 'Akabars of Bombay'.

Maneckji won a concession: the *Jizya* was reduced by 11% and it was agreed that the payment would come from India, directly into the royal coffers. He neutralised the provincial intermediaries by arranging some payment for them as well.

It took a further 26 years before the tax was abolished altogether. Maneckji mobilised influential Parsis residents in England at the time, including Dadabhai Naoroji, as well as other notables to lobby and petition Nasr-al-Din Shah on his visits to London. Allegedly, a handsome contribution was also made to his private purse. Finally, in August 1882, the Imperial *firman* arrived in Mumbai, via the British ambassador, and was received by Sir Dinshaw

Maneckji Petit, President of the Amelioration Society.

The discriminatory inheritance rules prevailed, however, and the humiliating restrictions persisted in the provinces where Qajar authority

**Between 1860 and 1882, a dozen Zarathushti free schools (including a few for girls) were set up... Initially Parsi teachers were brought from India and local teachers sent there for training. The schools had a secular curriculum, emphasising Science and English, with Farsi as the medium of instruction – not Dari.**

was weak. The Shah's *firman* to end *jizya* took a long time to take effect and, some decades later was reversed in Kerman for a brief period by the governor.

## EDUCATION

Maneckji's goal to eradicate illiteracy was achieved for Zarathushti men by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century – remarkable in a country where illiteracy was common in the 1950s. His long-term goal was more ambitious: to achieve a standard of education for the community that would enable Zarathushtis to prosper and participate as equals in Iranian society.

Between 1860 and 1882, a dozen Zarathushti free schools (including a few for girls) were set up, for which Maneckji secured royal approval in 1870. Initially Parsi teachers were brought from India and local teachers sent there for training. Within two decades, the schools became self-sustaining. The schools had a secular curriculum, emphasising Science and English, with Farsi as the medium of instruction – not Dari.

Considerable resentment against these schools arose amongst the local Muslim population (itself without educational opportunities). In the village of Taft the new headmaster was murdered.

A boarding school was set up in Tehran to provide secondary education for the most able boys. Since many families depended on their children's help with farming, Maneckji arranged generous grants, made by Parsi philanthropists like Merwanji Panday, to compensate them for loss of the child's labour. Many young men were sent for further studies to India, returning as doctors, engineers, teachers, administrators, scholars of religion, and entrepreneurs.

## RELIGIOUS REFORMS

Maneckji had campaigned in India against practices that he believed were not in keeping with original Zarathushti teachings. He continued this in Iran, persuading *anjumans* to put an end to animal sacrifice, which Parsis had given up centuries earlier. He reinforced Zarathushti laws of marriage and divorce and advised *anjumans* to discourage polygamy. Maneckji used Amelioration Society funds to provide dowries for very poor or orphaned Zarathushti girls,



through the newly established *anjumans*.

Zarathushti religious festivals were reinstated, including the six *gahambars*. As Zarathushtis gained confidence and status, he promoted the wearing of *sudreh kusti*, which many had discarded for fear of humiliation at the hands of a hostile mob.

## LEADERSHIP AND ANJUMANS

Maneckji identified a lack of strong community leadership and the absence of formal representation in dealings with local and regional authorities. He established the first *anjumans* in Yazd and Kerman, formalising traditional groupings of elders who adjudicated over community matters. He became the first elected president of the *anjuman* in Kerman, where he was living at the time. *Anjumans* were formed in Isfahan, Tehran, Karaj, Shiraz and in Zarathushti villages.

To get the *anjumans* officially recognised and their property protected, Maneckji used his influence with the Qajar ruler Nasr-al-Din Shah to secure his support, shrewdly renaming them *Nasseri Zarathushti Anjumans*.

This enabled *anjumans* to set up *waqfs* or religious trusts, focusing charitable giving by Parsis, and by Iranian Zarathushtis who became prosperous in later years. The *anjumans* maintained schools, hospitals, places of worship, *dakhme* etc.

Maneckji oversaw a programme of building and refurbishing community facilities: prayer halls, *atesh qadehs*, *badgirs* (air conditioning towers) for community buildings, *ganats* or underground irrigation channels for

villages. At pilgrimage sites he built prayer halls and water tanks. A *Mehmankhane* was built in Tehran, giving refuge to those fleeing their villages or just seeking a better life. He encouraged Parsis to fund medical clinics and send doctors from India.

**At the Court of Nasr-al-Din Shah, Maneckji asserted that the Zarathushtis of Iran were the true descendants of the pre-Islamic 'Parsis' and that their emancipation was a prerequisite for restoration of the cultural heritage of Iran. This argument had some appeal amongst the progressive Muslim elite.**

## RAISING THE STATUS OF THE RELIGION

Maneckji adopted a layered approach to raising the status of the Zarathushti religion: he argued for its inclusion by the Qajar state as one amongst the 'revealed' religions, as well as for its acceptance by the nascent nationalist movement as a link to the memory of an authentic Iranian past. Meanwhile, his programme of education would raise the standing of Zarathushtis amongst the emerging secular Iranian middle-class and intelligentsia - in turn lessening religious prejudice.

At the Court of Nasr-al-Din Shah, he asserted that the Zarathushtis of Iran

were the true descendants of the pre-Islamic 'Parsis' and that their emancipation was a prerequisite for restoration of the cultural heritage of Iran as a whole. This argument had some appeal amongst the progressive Muslim elite. In a letter to Maneckji, the nationalist intellectual, Fathali Akhundzadeh, acknowledged Zarathushtis as the "*reminder of our ancestors.... from whom we have been separated.... and who have suffered eclipse for 1280 years.*"

Gradually, as Zarathushtis became successful in many walks of life and Zarathushti merchants, especially, played their part in the struggle for civil and political rights, Maneckji's efforts to raise the status of the community began to show positive results. It is a tribute to Maneckji that the Zarathushti faith gained a measure of acceptance and respect in the land of its birth.

## REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENTS OF AN UNSUNG HERO

Maneckji's achievements were remarkable. Mixing advocacy and action, he helped reverse the fortunes of the community. From being, in his words, '*totally alien to knowledge and science*', Zarathushtis achieved universal literacy and their schools were sought after by the Iranian-Muslim elite. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Zarathushtis held responsible positions in various state institutions and thrived in commerce and the professions.

While the exceptional personality of Maneckji was crucial to effecting social change, unstinting financial and political support of the Parsis of India for this programme were significant factors; so too was the bravery and willingness of the Zarathushti men and women of Yazd and Kerman to

take up the opportunities offered. Outstanding young Zarathushti merchants joined in the demands of their guilds for an end to arbitrary rules and the corruption of state actors.

The rise of secular nationalist forces in the country, demanding *qanoon*, the rule of law, and equality before the law, assisted Maneckji to gain a favourable hearing for his demands

for justice and equal rights for religious minorities. In the decades after Maneckji's death, Zarathushti merchants in Isfahan, Kerman and Tehran took an active part in movements that led to the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 - 07.

It is clear from his writings that Maneckji was driven by a passionate belief in the justice and humanity of

his cause and sustained by the faith he had in the Zarathushtis of Iran. Freed from the fetters of discrimination, deprivation and the fear of violence, the community prospered and grew. Maneckji himself witnessed much of that change. Though his name and achievements might have been forgotten by the Parsis of India, his memory remains fresh in the hearts of many Iranian Zarathushtis.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## Editor's Note

### ANIMAL REPRESENTATION IN RITUALS

Maneckji Hatavia advocated for abandoning animal sacrifice. In "Animal Sacrifice in Ancient Zoroastrianism: A Ritual and Its Interpretations" Albert De Jong writes that a representative of animal life in Zoroastrian rituals such as *jashans* is common even today. "This representative of the animal kingdom is called in Middle Persian *gosudag*, a word derived from Avestan *geus huda*, "beneficent cow." In modern rituals, the *gosudag* most often is a piece of *ghee* or butter, but from Irani Zoroastrian rituals and ritual texts concerning pre-modern Zoroastrianism, it is clear that a piece of meat from a sacrificial animal was common. One of the distinctive differences between the modern Irani and Parsi Zoroastrian communities, based in the Islamic Republic of Iran and India respectively, is the fact that Irani Zoroastrians preserved the rites of animal sacrifice [till the 1960s], whereas Parsi Zoroastrians have abandoned them, probably under pressure of the local Hindu population...the comparative rarity of the rite in modern Zoroastrianism should not blind us to the fact that in ancient Zoroastrianism, animal sacrifice was a normal and regular part of religious life." (pg128).

From "Sacrifice in Religious Experience Series: Numen Book Series, Volume: 93" (2002). Brill.

# "THE ROLE OF THE PARSIS IN REKINDLING PRE-ISLAMIC IRANIAN NATIONALISM IN EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY IRAN"

*Between the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century to mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, Parsis and Iranians Zoroastrians collaborated closely to revive Iran's pre-Islamic national identity and to raise awareness for the Zarathushti faith among the general public and specifically the Iranian intelligentsia. This article highlights some of the key individuals involved in these efforts and the activities performed to enable this.*

Observers of modern Iranian history have long recognized the important role that Iran's pre-Islamic cultural heritage has played in shaping modern Iranian national identity. Beginning in the Qajar era, and increasingly during the decades of the Pahlavi dynasty, the culture of modern Iranian nationalism drew creative inspiration from the legacies of Iran's ancient history and Zarathushti religion. Virtually no segment of modern Iranian culture — including literature, film, music, art, and architecture — were left untouched by modern Iran's growing fascination with its ancient past. Most dramatically, in October of 1971, Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's (r.1941-1979) 2,500 year anniversary celebration of Cyrus the Great's founding of the Persian Empire represents the culmination of modern Iran's pre-Islamic revival. What is less often recognized, however, is the substantial role that the Parsi community of India played in encouraging, fostering, and actively promoting this neo-classical revival inside modern Iran.



Figure 1: Peshotanji Marker



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**Maneckji Limji Hataria (1813-1890)** is perhaps the best-known figure in this history. His thirty-six years of residence in Iran, from 1854 to 1890, pioneered Parsi efforts to strengthen the Zarathushti community inside Iran and initiated a new era of contact between Parsis and Iranians. Despite these beginnings in the nineteenth century, it was during the early decades of the twentieth century that the Parsi community's outreach to Iran entered its most active and sustained period. These early twentieth century efforts are



less often remembered, acknowledged, or detailed, but they played the most important role in helping to encourage a revival of Iran's classical heritage.

The first of these twentieth-century Parsi initiatives took the form of educational charities sponsored by Bombay-based philanthropists. The most significant of these efforts was initiated by **Peshotanji Dossabhai Marker (1871-1965)**. The Marker family, with deep ties to the Parsi communities of Bombay, Karachi, and Quetta, had enjoyed success in a number of industries, including commercial, industrial, pharmaceutical, and banking enterprises. After hearing reports of the poor social and economic conditions of Iran's Zarthushti communities, P.D. Marker decided to expand the educational opportunities in Yazd and Kerman, the Iranian cities with the highest concentration of Iranian Zarthushtis.

Chief among Marker's intermediaries in his charity efforts was Ardeshir Edulji Reporter (1865-1932). Though less often remembered than Maneckji Limji Hataria, Ardeshir Reporter likewise lived and worked in Iran as the Parsi community's official emissary, devoting more than three decades to the cause of reviving the heritage of the Zarthushti religion inside Iran. It was with Reporter's assistance that P.D. Marker began construction of what became the Marker Orphanage in Yazd in 1923, as well as what became the Marker Boys' High School and the Marker Girls' High School. The Marker charities also sponsored smaller primary schools in the villages surrounding Yazd and Kerman.

**Ardeshir Reporter's** educational fundraising efforts also extended to his collaboration with **Ratanbanu Bamji Tata**, another charity-minded Parsi philanthropist. During one of his trips to Bombay in 1930, Reporter solicited donations from Tata for the expansion of the Anushirvan Dadgar School and the Firuz Bahram School in Tehran. Both schools were originally established through earlier Parsi charities, but as Iran's Zarthushti community began to increasingly settle in Tehran, it became necessary to expand these schools to meet the demand of the growing Iranian Zarthushti student-age population in Iran's capital city.

Significantly, the Parsi educational charities were never restricted to Iranian Zarthushtis but were instead open for enrollment to students from all of Iran's religious communities. As a result, these Parsi-sponsored educational charities encouraged a culture that appealed to Tehran's increasingly diverse and cosmopolitan middle class. In the years that followed many notable non-Zarthushti Iranians attended these Parsi-sponsored schools, including Princess Fatimeh Pahlavi (1928-1987) and Prime Minister Hassan Ali Mansur (1923-1965), as well scholars including Iraj Afshar (1925-2011) and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1933- ). The curriculum that was taught at these schools encouraged a culture of pluralism and diversity, emphasizing an interpretation of Iran's shared classical heritage that was inclusive of all of Iran's religious communities.



*Figure 2: Ardeshir Reporter*



*Figure 3: Marker Boys and Girls High School*



*Figure 4: Ratanbanu Bamji Tata*

There were a number of important books that served as the basis of the curriculum at these schools. Two books in particular, *Forugh-e Mazdayasna* (The Light of the Mazda Religion) and *Ayneh-ye A'in-e Mazdayasna* (Compendium of the Mazdayasna Belief) were central in introducing students to a modernized interpretation of the Zarathushti faith. Written by **Keikhosrow Shahrokh (1875-1940)**, the most important Iranian Zarathushti civic leader of early twentieth century Iran, both books were also sponsored by Parsi-funded philanthropies.

Among Shahrokh's most important civic achievements was his work as president of the Zarathushti Anjoman of Tehran and his service in the Iranian Majles (Parliament) from 1909 to 1940. It was during his long career as a Majles deputy that Shahrokh participated in many aspects of Iran's modernization efforts, including his work in drafting constitutional guarantees to protect the rights of Iran's non-Muslim communities. Shahrokh's own family background was rooted in Kerman's Zarathushti community, where he was born into poverty in 1875. Despite his humble background, it was through the efforts of Parsi charities that Shahrokh gained access to modern education, including learning the English language, first in Tehran, and then through his further education at Bombay's Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy School.

Shahrokh's education in Bombay was instrumental in shaping his modernized understanding of the Zarathushti faith. His two influential books reflect a new interpretation of the Zarathushti religion as part of the larger cultural heritage shared by all Iranians. Published originally in 1907 and 1909, both the *Forugh-e Mazdayasna* and the *Ayneh-ye A'ineh- Mazdayasna* appeared in multiple editions throughout the twentieth century. The publishing costs of these two books were supported by Parsi philanthropies, and both books were taught as part of the curriculum at the new Parsi-sponsored Zarathushti schools.



Figure 5: Dinshah Irani

The other central Parsi figure who worked closely with Keikhosrow Shahrokh during the early decades of the twentieth century was the Bombay-based civic leader **Dinshah J. Irani (1881-1938)**. Between 1918 and 1922 Irani worked with a group of likeminded Parsi philanthropists to establish two civic organizations, the Iranian Zarathushti Anjoman (est. 1918) and the Iran League (est. 1922). Fluent in Persian, and a scholar of Persian literature — in addition to his legal work as a partner in the Bombay law firm of Mulla and Mulla — Dinshah Irani was instrumental in leading both of these civic organizations. Under his leadership the Iran League and the Iranian Zarathushti Anjoman were remarkably successful in their goal of fostering cultural ties between the Parsi community of Bombay and Iranians who were now increasingly eager to learn about their pre-Islamic history and Zarathushti religious heritage.

Among the most important cultural projects sponsored by the Iran League and the Iranian Zarathushti Anjoman was the initiative to publish a new series of Zarathushti-themed books, produced under the auspices of Parsi printing houses in Bombay, and slated for export to Iran. These books were intended as introductions to the Zarathushti faith for general audiences inside Iran with the goal of dispelling many long-held prejudices about the religion. Dinshah Irani himself authored several books in this series, including *Akhlaq-e Iran-e Bastan* (The Morality of Ancient Iran), published in 1930, and *Falsafeh-ye Iran-e Bastan* (The Philosophy of Ancient Iran), published in 1933. All the Zarathushti-themed books sponsored by the Parsi civic organizations, which were circulated widely, went through numerous editions during the 1920s and 1930s and provided the Iranian public with a new interpretation of the Zarathushti faith as the common heritage of all Iranians.

The most important publishing collaboration sponsored by the Iran League and the Iranian Zarathushti Anjoman was a series of books published by **Ebrahim Purdavud (1886-1968)**. Regarded as a talented poet of the Persian language, by the early 1920s Purdavud also gained international recognition as the first modern Iranian to have mastered the ancient Avestan and Pahlavi languages, having devoted himself to many years of study in both France and Germany. Purdavud's unique combination of literary and scholarly talents compelled Dinshah Irani and

the leadership of the Parsi civic organizations to invite Purdavud to embark on a large-scale translation project of the ancient Zarathushti texts. Purdavud accepted the invitation, and beginning in 1925, worked closely with the Iran League and the Iranian Zarathushti Anjoman to produce a series of books that made the ancient Zarathushti texts available for the first time to readers of the modern Persian language. Most important was Purdavud's Persian translation and commentary of the *Gathas*, published originally in Bombay, in 1927, with the sponsorship of the



Figure 6: Ebrahim Purdavud

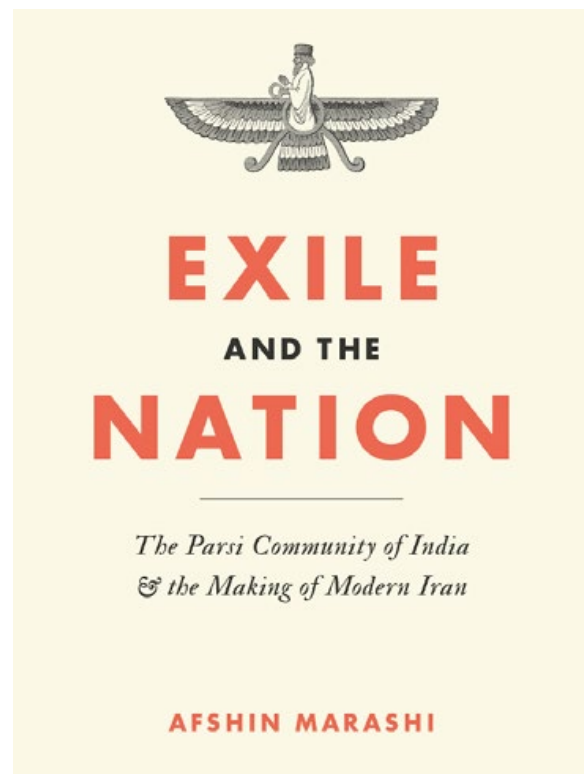


Figure 7: For more information on this topic, please buy Dr. Marashi's book: *Exile and the Nation*. More information is available at <https://utpress.utexas.edu/books/marashi-exile-and-the-nation>

Parsi civic organizations. Purdavud's translations received wide acclaim and profoundly redefined the way modern Iranians understood the Zarathushti religion.

The Parsi community's partnership with Ebrahim Purdavud represented the most important collaboration in the early twentieth-century Parsi-Iranian exchange. This collaboration was, however, the product of a more comprehensive engagement between Parsis and Iranians during that period. The Parsi charity, educational, and publishing efforts worked to improve the social and economic status of Iran's Zarathushti community, but these Parsi efforts also worked to provide Iranians of all religious backgrounds with a new understanding of a shared national heritage rooted in Iran's ancient past.

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- 3 Kekobad Ardeshtir Marker, *A Petal from the Rose*, 2 volumes (Karachi: Rosette, 1985).
- 4 Keikhosrow Shahrokh, *The Memoirs of Keikhosrow Shahrokh*, translated and edited by Shahrokh Shahrokh and Rashna Writer (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1994).
- 5 Afshin Marashi, *Exile and the Nation: The Parsi Community of India and the Making of Modern Iran* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020), chapter 2.
- 6 Ibid., chapter 4.
- 7 Ebrahim Purdavud, *Gatha: Sorudha-ye Moqaddas-e Payghambar-e Iran*, Marker Avestan Series vol. 1 (Bamba'i: Anjoman-e Zartoshtian-e Irani va Iran Lig, 1927).



# PROSPERITY OF ZARATHUSHTIS IN IRAN DURING THE PAHLAVI DYNASTY

*The aim of this article is to examine how the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925-1979) created the conditions for the Zarathushti community in Iran to prosper and modernize and, in turn, how Zarathushtis played a role in modernizing Iran during this era.*

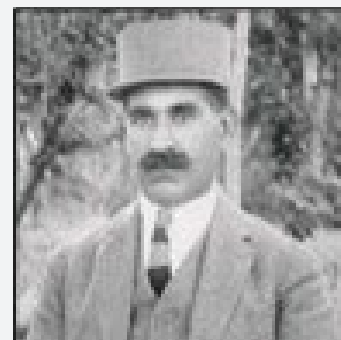
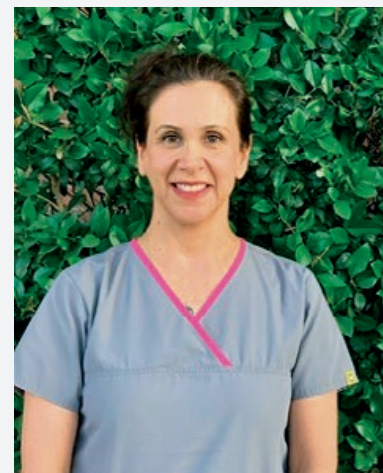
Artemis Javanshir

Centuries of persecution, discrimination and coerced conversion left only a small Zarathushti population concentrated in the desert provinces of Yazd and Kerman without much means of improvement in standard of living. Through the benevolence of Parsis in British-India, Zarathushtis of Iran began to find renewed opportunities to prosper. Later, during the Pahlavi Dynasty, key factors such as migration out of rural areas, education, commerce, and reforms helped lift all minority groups out of poverty. The Pahlavi's sympathetic view of the Zarathushti religion—due to its tie to the glorious Iranian past—further contributed to improving the community's welfare and affording them the opportunity to play an instrumental role in building a modern Iran.

## Urban Migration

During the late Qajar Era (1858-1925), Zarathushtis slowly migrated from rural to urban areas, especially to the capital city Tehran. With less persecution against religious minorities and greater economic vibrancy in urban centers, this migration gave them the chance to flourish and take advantage of the increasing opportunities in a modernizing country. Naming a few notable individuals successful in business who were involved in this wave:

- **Jamshid Bahman Jamshidian** (1850-1932) moved to Borujerd in Western Iran when he was 11 years old and later built businesses in Bandar Abbas by the Persian Gulf and Tehran, playing an instrumental part in establishing the first Iranian national bank, “Bank e Melli” (1). (Top [11])
- **Keykhosrow Mehraban Keykhosrowi** moved to India in 1856 and expanded his business. He later gave back to the community by donating to charitable causes including establishing the “Dabirestan-e-Keykhosrowi” school in Yazd in 1890 (2).
- **Rostam Guiv** (1888–1980) in 1908 moved to Tehran and prospered in real estate and trade. His contributions to the Zarathushti community are evident in many Dar-e-Mehrs funded by him and his trust (2).
- **Goshtasb Firoozgar** left Yazd for Tehran at age 14, building a real estate empire and establishing the Gilan Shareholder's Power Company (“Sherkat-e-Sahamy-e-Bargh-e-Gilan”), which provided electricity to many parts of Northern Iran. His best-known contribution is the Firoozgar Hospital (est. 1951), which at the time was the most modern hospital in Tehran. Even today, it is recognized as one of the largest hospitals in the country, with a full range of care facilities (3). (Bottom [12])



The success these individuals realized through urban migration was only possible through the benevolent efforts of Parsis to create the conditions for Zarathustis in Iran to prosper. This included access to high quality education, assistance/ connections to British India, and relief from the burdensome Jizya (religious poll tax).

## Paying it Forward

Those Zarathushtis who prospered in turn helped the community by creating educational and employment opportunities for others. For example, the Firoozgar Hospital had a policy of favoring employment for Zarathushtis. It stated that among candidates in equal standing, employment should be granted to a Zarathusti. As more Zarathushtis prospered, more were able to migrate from rural to urban areas, send their children abroad for education, and start their own businesses and ventures.

## Education and Scholarship

Zarathushti schools in Tehran, including Jamshid-e-Jam, Firooz Bahram, and Anoushirvan Dadgar, were among the highest ranking schools of the time. Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925-1941) ordered the formation of a special elementary school class in Anoushirvan Dadgar to provide his daughter Fatimeh with exposure to religious diversity. Parimarz Firoozgar, a Zarathushti student in the class, recalls it included 20 girls: 4-5 Christians, 3-4 Jewish, 5 Zarathushtis, and the rest Muslims. She further states that this was done at a time when having different religious backgrounds in one school was not prevalent.

Scholarly pursuits and literary publications on the Zarathushti religion, which was once meager within Iran, began to rise under the Pahlavis. Individuals such as **Ebrahim Pourdavoud** (1886-1968) (top [13]), **Ali Akbar Jafarey** (1921-2020), and **Bahram Farahvashi** (1925-1992) (bottom [14]) are among the scholars whose books and articles about the religion and culture are still popular today. Tehran University even offered courses on the religion, including the Avestan language, thus placing major institutional support behind such efforts.

## Zarathushti Women and their Accomplishments.

Under the Pahlavi Dynasty, universities were built, starting with Tehran University in 1934. A year later, the university was opened to women. Female faculty members were added in literature, law, science, medicine, and pedagogy (4). Through the Second Family Protection Law of 1975, the Pahlavis created the opportunity for women to advance in public service; they were allowed to

become judges, join the Majlis, and hold cabinet-level positions in government (5).

**Parimarz Firoozgar** (left) was one of the first women to graduate law at Tehran University. She became the first female mayor in modern Iran—serving the City of Motel Ghoo in the Tonekabon district—and served as a small claims court judge in Northern Iran. During her tenure as mayor, she provided drinking water and fire engines to Kelar Abad and Motel Ghoo in the North. To achieve such professional success, not just as a woman but as a Zarathushti woman, is a testament to the reforms under the Pahlavis.



**Farangis Shahrokh Yeganegi**, (right [15]) following in the footsteps of her benevolent

father Keykhosrow Shahrokh, was instrumental in establishing three organizations still operating today: Women Zoroastrian Association, Association of Ancient Iranian Culture, and Iranian Handicrafts Organization (6). The establishment of the Iranian Handicrafts Organization was specifically at the request of Prime Minister Ali Mansour (1964-65) (7)

Farangis Shahrokh is also a testament to Pahlavis support for capable women to lead Iran towards modernization and improvement. When faced with the poor conditions in government-run facilities—like orphanages—she and other benevolent women successfully got the support of



Prime Minister Ali Razmara (1950-51) to take control and improve the conditions of these organizations.

### Modernization of the Iranian Identity and Zarathushti Faith

The progress of Zarathushti community under the Pahlavis was not limited to business and public service. There was also serious discourse around the Zarathushti religious identity, which paved the way for ideological modernization of Iran as well as the faith.

The Pahlavis saw an intermingled connection between the Zarathushti religion and the glory of Iran's past with the task of modernizing Iran. For example, the equality of gender in Zarathushtra's teaching was consistent with the women's rights movement in Iran. The religious tolerance of pre-Islamic era was brought back under



the Pahlavis. The promotion of agriculture and pursuit of individual and communal happiness were a few of the universal, progressive and humanitarian values in Zarathushtra's teachings which the Pahlavis aimed to implement (8).

Secular traditions and festivities started borrowing from Zarathushti religion. Reza Shah adopted the Zarathushti calendar names and placed the symbol of the Faravahar on National Bank (1934 1,000 Rial banknote) right [16] and Ministry of Justice. His heir, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi encouraged Nowruz and Mehregan as national holidays. Mobed Rostam Shahzadi and Ardeshir Mobed were invited to the palace for these holidays. Coinciding with the 2500-year anniversary of Iranian monarchy, the Iranian Zarathushtis and Parsis took the opportunity to organize events bringing awareness about Zarathushti religion and Iran's glorious past (8).

The Pahlavis' reverence for the Parsi community was very strong. In 1932, Reza Shah invited **Dinshah Irani**—the founder of Iranian Zoroastrian Anjoman—from India to Iran, bestowed on him honors, and offered to facilitate the Parsi re-settlement in Iran. During the event the Shah stated: "you Parsis are as much the children of this soil as any other Iranians and so you are as much entitled to have your proper share in its development as any other nationals." (9)

How the Zarathushti religion was practiced by its adherents also went through modernization. Religious leaders sought to eliminate practices that it thought were not in tune with Zarathushtra's teachings—particularly outdated rituals that predated Zarathushtra's time or were developed much after—and instead, emphasized the ethical teachings of the Gathas. The importance placed on *Nirang*—an elaborate 18-day ritual, *Padyab*—customary washing, and wearing of the sudreh and kushti before entering the Fire Temple were de-emphasized. Consigning the dead to *Dakhmas* (i.e., Towers of Silence) was replaced by burial in Zarathushti



Araf Ghazvini and Dinshah Irani (17)



cemeteries (*aramgah*) starting in mid-1930's in Kerman and Shahr-e-Rey (10). While other religions in Iran actively practiced animal sacrifice, Mobeds forbade it within the Zarathushti community, arguing it was against Zarathustra's teachings (5).

While traditions were being modernized, Zarathushti youths were sent abroad for education. Initiation into Zarathushti religion, which was not practiced for hundreds of years, was now on rare occasion performed by individuals, like Rashid Shahmardan, who believed in the universality of the Zarathushti religion (9).

## CONCLUSION

There have been many Zarathushtis, both Parsi and Irani, who have been influential in improving the community's socio-economic status and played an instrumental role in modernizing Iran. This article only names a few of them with an understanding that all such benevolent individuals are cherished and appreciated. A complete and detailed analysis of the prosperity and influence of the Zarathushti community during Pahlavi Dynasty is out of this article's scope, but the author hopes that a seed has been planted for further reading and research.

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*Artemis Javanshir spent her early childhood in Iran and is proud of her strong roots in Iranshahr. She believes learning about history, our cultural, religious identity, and using the beneficial examples of the past will make us stronger as a global community and help us towards prosperity and healing.*

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# Stories of Oppression, Harassment, and Intimidation Since the Islamic Revolution

Shahin Bekhradnia

*In this article, Shahin Bekhradnia recounts real examples of discrimination, persecution, and targeted violence against Zoroastrians in Iran from before and after the Islamic Revolution. To protect the identities of the people in these stories, names have been removed.*

In the past Zarathushtis have been very circumspect—perhaps overly so—in publicly discussing problems of persecution and discrimination in Iran. Despite our reticence, nothing has improved for the community in Iran. If anything, they are even more vulnerable as their numbers dwindle. The range of current difficulties include harassment, intimidation & oppression. But this is nothing new for the Iranian community. I draw from the experiences of my parents, who grew up in the early 20th century.

In 1924, when my father was eight, he fell quite sick. His grandfather put him on a donkey to take to a doctor in Yazd. As they passed through the Bazaar, my father was knocked off the donkey by a man who shouted that it was outrageous that an infidel should be mounted in the presence of Muslims who were on foot.

My father also recounted story about his great, great grandmother; when she could not pay the jizyeh (the religious poll tax)—as she simply did not have any cash—they carried off

her youngest son as a hostage until she paid. My mother's tasks included fetching water in heavy glass or metal urns carried on her head or shoulders. Before going off she and her sister and friends would first apply pomegranate or walnut skin to their faces to make them appear blotched and diseased to minimize the always present danger of abduction, forced conversion, and marriage.

Another incident recounted was about my grandmother from the late 1920s/early 1930's from fruit market in Yazd. When my grandmother picked up a watermelon to examine it, the



shop owner became enraged and knocked it out of her hands and overturned the whole section of the stall. In touching the fruit, he believed, she as an “unclean” Zoroastrian had polluted the entire stock.

## STORIES OF VIOLENCE AND INTIMIDATION FROM AFTER THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION

Things improved in the following 50 years. But then came the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, after which they deteriorated again. On top of the many new restrictions on freedom, pressures on children to attend Islamic classes, and many other insecurities, Zoroastrians were treated as second-class citizens. A friend, F1 recounts that when it was her turn to do the tea for her office colleagues, some would not accept the tea she offered, whereas prior to the Revolution they did. This was so demoralizing that she left her job. The reason for the increased hostility to Zoroastrians is partly revealed by the public statement of an Iranian Mullah that

**When my grandmother picked up a watermelon to examine it [at a market in Yazd], the shop owner became enraged and knocked it out of her hands and overturned the whole section of the stall. In touching the fruit, he believed, she as an “unclean” Zoroastrian had polluted the entire stock.**



Zoroastrianism represents the greatest threat to the status quo (1). And while the above anecdote is a relatively minor example of discrimination, there are many other cases of brutality and violence leveled against Zoroastrians by the Iranian government and its agents.

At least two well-known Zoroastrians have been murdered outside of Iran (i.e., Paris and Madrid) because of their belief that our religion is open to anyone to convert into if the moral values and message seem acceptable to them.

When a married couple (M and N) were approached to provide clandestine information and literature to what they thought was a genuine group of curious and admiring enquirers, a member of the group betrayed them. The female M was taken from her flat in Tehran, physically and sexually abused by her captors. After 10 days, she was thrown out onto the street, bleeding. A passerby discovered her and took her to a hospital where her baby was born prematurely. The couple were understandably keen to leave Iran and found smugglers to help them do so.

A similar story of an agent provocateur posing as a disenchanted Iranian wishing to find out more about the Zarathusthi religion, made his approaches to H during his military service. There he befriended H over several months and repeatedly asked for literature about our religion which H willingly provided. Then H was introduced to his friend who appeared to be similarly motivated. Soon after, H was summoned to an interrogation, beaten up, and imprisoned. When

released he was told he would be watched, and a file had been opened on him. H also escaped with the help of people smugglers.

Some years before the revolution, a group ceremony in Ahvaz and Abadan initiated around 30 would-be Zoroastrians, who maintained the fire temple and held community gatherings to celebrate festivals and other special occasions. Immediately after the revolution, the neighbors of one of the converts – a doctor – denounced him as an apostate. One day he did not come home, and it was



only sometime later that a hospital contacted his family to collect his corpse, claiming he had died from a heart attack. However, his body was clearly damaged and bruised. The intimidation did not stop there. The children too were threatened and bullied. They are all now in the UK while their poor mother is in Iran, totally alone to deal with her day-to-day problems.

I had a personal experience of intimidation in Tajikistan in the early 1990s at a conference on Persian

culture common to Iran and Tajikistan. Following two days of reiteration by the official delegations of the brotherly ties between the two countries based on their common Islamic faith, the conference chairman asked me to speak. I pointed out the wealth of pre-Islamic art and architecture in both countries was evidence of a rich pan-Iranian and pre-Islamic culture as the original foundation that united the two countries. My very short speech was broadcast on TV, which caused a very angry Iranian delegate to shout that a good Muslim should respond. About 6 months later, I received an anonymous letter with a Farsi newspaper clipping reporting on the Tajik conference claiming that I had insulted Islam and naming me as a so-called Zoroastrian. This was clearly an attempt at intimidation—suggesting that I was being watched and that my address was known.

Another friend T emigrated in the middle of his medical studies because his two sisters had fallen foul of the authorities. One was an outstandingly clever girl, not only getting top marks in her main discipline, but also excelling so much in the compulsory Islamic guidance exam that during the degree ceremony, the presiding dignitary—a religious cleric—commented that even a fire worshipping infidel had seen the light that Islam brought. She respectfully replied that the fact that she had studied hard did not mean that she accepted what she had been forced to learn, and that she felt it inappropriate to insult her religion. She was immediately taken to prison where she was beaten and abused. Her sister was also imprisoned. Frightened for himself, T fled the country.



## OTHER CASES OF DISCRIMINATION

And then there are discriminatory laws, most notable beings:

- Compensation for the accidental death of a Zoroastrian is less than that of a Muslim.
- If one sibling converts to Islam, then that person carries off all the inheritance which the other siblings were due to receive. The only way for them to secure their entitled share is to embrace Islam (2).

Our religious sites have been under watch with plain-clothed security forces, observing those entering and occasionally demanding people to produce ID cards to prove entitlement to be there. Sacred places like the Dakhmeh (Tower of Silence) or Atashkadeh (Fire Temple) are required to be open to non-Zoroastrians, who frequently take the opportunity to humiliate and taunt.

These sites have de-facto become tourist sites. Some years ago, there were reports of motorcyclists making a point of riding their noisy machines up and down the paths leading to our main pilgrimage site, Pir-e-Sabz, which was intended as a sign of disrespect and an invasion of the privacy the community normally enjoyed there in safety away from outsiders.

Finally, the lack of respect for private property is an ongoing concern. In the years of the Iran- Iraq war, J from Tehran went to Dubai to secure a visa to visit her children in the UK. Within a few days she returned to Tehran, only to find her family home occupied by a high-ranking cleric who had posted armed guards on the entrance. J was too frightened to argue or demand the return of her home. She knew she could not win. More recently—despite going to court to challenge the illegal claim to his land by the local mosque and having

been assured that they should fear nothing and carry on as usual—C, his son, and a builder were physically attacked on his own land. He was then visited at his home and told that this was just the start for his family and the Zoroastrian community. They fled to the first nearby non-Muslim country they could get to.

## CONCLUSION

As a result of the persecution, discrimination, and targeted violence, Zoroastrians have steadily been leaving Iran to countries where they can have more opportunity and be free to practice their religion. At the same time, their numbers in Iran are beginning to dwindle.

From these anecdotes, it is evident that our ancestors' experiences of discrimination and persecution are being repeated. The signs are abundantly clear that despite our historical claim, the authorities in Iran don't want us around.

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*Shahin Bekhradnia, the granddaughter of a renowned Yazdi priest, poet, stargazer and mathematician, was born and grew up in England, obtained her undergraduate degree in Modern Languages and post-graduate degree in Anthropology (focusing on Iranian Zoroastrians) from Oxford University. and has published and lectured on Zoroastrianism at various institutions. Shahin started the Pourchista Foundation in Yazd for young Zoroastrian ladies to enable them to earn a living, she helped to open a senior citizens' day center there. Her involvement with the community involves assisting with immigration matters where she can and organizing traditional Zoroastrian festival events. She has been a long-standing advocate for environmental policies and stood as a Green Party candidate in the UK General Election back in 1992. She sits as a magistrate in the criminal and family courts in Oxfordshire, UK.*



**Editor's Note:** In the Spring 2021 issue, on page 70 under Author's Note, the following information was credited to Dina McIntyre instead of K.E. Eduljee on page 23.

Further details at <http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/westernauthors/index.htm>. Excerpted from a post by Irach Taraporewala at Zoroastrian Heritage, Facebook, July 7, 2018.

See my monograph *Were Ancient Zoroastrians Vegetarian?* found as a pdf at [zoroastrianheritage.com](http://zoroastrianheritage.com); also *The Farohar/Fravahar Motif* as a further example of how Gathic principles are developed in the rest of the Avesta and Zand.

Apologies to K.E. Eduljee and Dina McIntyre. The error is regretted.

# Exploring the Origins of the Iranian Zoroastrian Resurgence and Degree of Religious Freedom for Its Adherents

By Ruzbeh Hodiwala

## SUMMARY

The advent of social media has resulted in the formation of numerous virtual communities centered on Iran and Zoroastrianism. These platforms are often flooded with content about and by people who are not born within the fold but identify as Zoroastrians. The phenomenon has overwhelmed the tiny community of those born within the Zoroastrian fold in respect to the motivations and the kind of Zoroastrianism practiced by those often speculated to be in thousands. This article briefly discusses the origins of the phenomenon known as 'Back to Roots' among those in Persianate society, as well as its limitations.

In 2020, a Dutch research foundation published a report titled 'Iranian's How Iranians identify their religious belief and faith.' (Courtesy: GAMAAN) attitude towards

Religion'. The study gathered 40,000 responses from adults living in Iran to examine their attitudes toward religious belief (Figure 1: How Iranians identify their religious belief and faith. Courtesy: GAMAAN: see below left) and practice, matters which are sensitive to be discussed in a public forum within Iran. [1]

What is noteworthy about the statistics is the fact that 8% of respondents identified as Zoroastrians – a figure if extrapolated to the entire country's population is substantially higher than the global population of Zoroastrians born into the religion. The findings also place the Zoroastrian identity as the third most popular in Iran after Shi'ism and Atheism. By contrast, official government data shows that 99.5% of the population is Muslim. [2]

It is difficult to determine how strong a religious conviction the respondents held. But given the sensitive nature of the subject in Iran, the volume of responses is compelling enough to warrant investigation. [3] As a start, this article aims to understand the origins of this

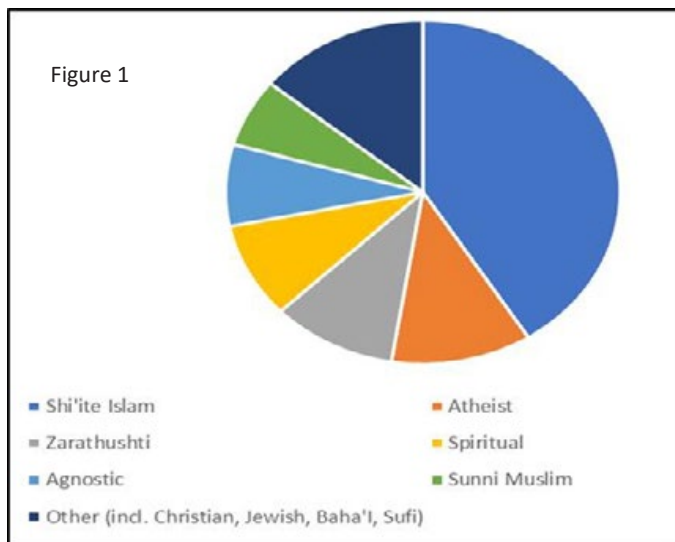


“Zoroastrian Resurgence” and how freely its subscribers can practice the faith in a country where blasphemy and apostasy laws are strictly enforced.

## THE ROOTS OF THE ZOROASTRIAN RESURGENCE: A THEORY

The recent phenomenon of people identifying as Zoroastrians can be best understood in the context of multiple events that have occurred in Iran and its neighboring territories over the last four decades. The Revolution of 1979, followed by the Cultural Revolution (1980-83) when political Islam was institutionalized, led to an influx of Iranian migration to the West. This included many political and religious refugees—forced into self-exile due to opposing ideologies with the state—as well as businessmen, academics, judges, journalists, military officials, and others who found themselves at odds with the newly formed Islamic Republic. This diverse group of migrants participated in large-scale political, socio-cultural, and religious

Figure 1



activities and movements in exile in the liberal Western countries, one of which was espousal to their ancestral Zoroastrian identity. The recent surge in extremism in the Middle East has acted as a further catalyst for those disillusioned with political Islam and seeking alternate socio-cultural and religious identities.

Parallel to events in Iran, the emergence of a discourse on Zoroastrianism in the post-Soviet world can be attributed to the period of Perestroika (mid-1980s) and the Soviet Union's disintegration. It was during this time that a Russian astrologer amassed a large audience on television and sparked interest in Zoroastrianism in the post-Soviet world. The movement was further solidified by legislative reforms allowing registration of the community and the involvement of a Zoroastrian-born Iranian priest settled in Europe.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the opening of society in Central Asia and the Caucasus—particularly those culturally and linguistically close to Iran brought about instances of resistance to foreign influence. This took the form of a search for a historical identity free of Soviet atheism and theocratic Islam [4] — the latter which was gradually cementing its presence in the region. Though the scale of these reversions is unknown, the practice appears to have gained traction since the last quarter of the twentieth century, more freely among the diaspora in the West, and more cautiously—if not completely covertly—in the home countries. The acceptance of Zoroastrian identity among Iranians and those in Asiatic countries of the former Soviet Union and the Middle East must be viewed separately for a nonpartisan understanding of their

motivations, origins, practices, and their interaction with the Zoroastrians globally. However, these groups share an underlying disillusionment with the region's growing sectarianism and fundamentalism which unites them in their search for an alternate socio-cultural and religious identity that is native to their homeland. Though the Zoroastrian Resurgence is known to have occurred in several regions —

**Though the scale of these reversions is unknown, the practice appears to have gained traction since the last quarter of the twentieth century, more freely among the diaspora in the West, and more cautiously—if not completely covertly—in the home countries.**

including Kurdistan, Central Asia, and the Caucasus— this article will focus on the movement in Iran and the Iranian diaspora. What motivated the spate of reversions to Zoroastrianism among Iranians—in comparison to identifying with other religions, can be traced back to the larger 'Back to Roots' movement, the tenants of which can be found in the nineteenth century literary works. These works by the Qajar literati acted as catalysts to the twentieth century's Iranian nationalism under the Pahlavis. During this time, the state fostered a nationalist discourse by revisiting the country's pre-Islamic past and

developing nationalistic policies that were disseminated through media, symbolism, and other means.

The country's ancient past, which was re-imagined as a secular and historical national past, was ethnically Persian but religiously Zoroastrian. [5] Despite the portrayal of nationalism as inclusive and beneficial to all, Zoroastrianism was more closely associated with the glories of the past. [6] When I asked a Zoroastrian-born Iranian based in Europe and involved in the Zoroastrian Resurgence what his message would be to those who want to return to their roots, he replied, "For example, if we have a good doctor (metaphorically) in the city that we are proud of, we have a good prophet among our nation (that) the whole world respects. So why should we not be proud of that prophet? I am not saying that other religions are good or bad. But if you want to have a religion and have a good one at home, you don't need (an) imported religion". [7]

Despite the elevated status of Zoroastrianism, there was not a surge of people identifying as Zoroastrians during the Pahlavi era. There were isolated instances of initiation ceremonies by priests in their individual capacities; and, at one point in the 1970s, the Anjoman in Tehran received over sixty applications from people who wanted to accept Zoroastrianism. [8] However, the Anjoman refused these requests—providing only literature and citing laws that forbid apostasy from Islam. Moreover, centuries of persecution and being forced to the fringes of society, the Zoroastrians had redefined their socio-religious boundaries. Therefore, such instances were frequently viewed with skepticism, and resistance from the community was not uncommon. The



establishment of the Islamic Republic has only strengthened this stance, and Zoroastrians have become even more cautious.

The pre-Islamic fervor have remained entrenched in the Iranian identity even under the Islamic Republic. For instance, in recent years, every October, the internet is flooded with visuals of people gathering at the Cyrus Tomb in Pasargadae to celebrate the Cyrus Day. In 2016, an official letter banning gathering at Pasargadae went viral online, but people still gathered in large numbers in defiance of the decree. [9] It can be argued as signs of a resurgence of twentieth-century nationalism to oppose the fundamentalist interpretation of Islam and its growing dominance in daily lives of the people.

### **STORIES OF PERSECUTION TOWARDS ZOROASTRIAN REVERTS AND THOSE WHO AID THEM**

While the constitution grants 'limited' rights to those born into the Zoroastrian fold, the plight of those wishing to revert, or who have reverted, is frequently overlooked, and their stories are rarely made public. People abandoning or distancing themselves from Islam may be viewed as a "cultural invasion" and "ideological decline,"[10] undermining the very foundations of the Revolution and the Republic's existence and hence can be reprimanded. [11]

A Zoroastrian-born Iranian, Rostom, described how he was forced to flee the country for being involved in the resurgence. According to his account, in the late 1990s an individual from a neighboring country who had accepted the Zoroastrian identity by choice overstayed his visa in Iran. During the interrogation, authorities

discovered he was carrying a trove of Zoroastrian literature, photos, and other items. This material revealed the person's connections in Iran, including with Rostom, who was instrumental in sharing the material. Prior to his deportation, he was able to communicate with his associates, informing them that the authorities had discovered their activities. Rostom claims that he went into hiding for months before fleeing to a

**... except for a few centers around the world where both the groups [those born into the fold and those who have chosen to adopt the Zoroastrian identity] use shared spaces, most of the rapidly increasing interaction between the two groups takes place over the internet.**

neighboring country with the assistance of a Baluch friend from Zahedan. [7]

The plight of those Iranians who have accepted the Zoroastrian identity by choice and those who officiate at the Sedreh-Pooshi ceremony is exacerbated because Iran does not recognize dual citizenship. As a result, regardless of whether they have relinquished their Iranian citizenship, those born in Iran are treated as Iranian nationals upon arrival. Hence, they may be arrested, tried under Iranian laws for apostasy and working

against the government, and denied consular assistance from foreign missions. As such, many Iranians accepting the Zoroastrian identity abroad may not want to be identified publicly out of fear of repercussion if they return to Iran in the future. Those who openly declare having accepted the Zoroastrian identity are almost always those who have no plans to return.

While a born Zoroastrian can face discrimination and is not afforded opportunities reserved for Muslims, a Zoroastrian revert may be reported to authorities and persecuted or denied future opportunities. Subsequently, they are often unable to freely express their Zoroastrian identity at work and beyond their immediate social circles. One such uncorroborated account comes from a mother-daughter duo. The mother was raised in an orthodox Muslim family and married off into an unsuccessful marriage as an adolescent. As a young girl, she was subjected to strict societal norms, which only intensified when she had to return to her parents' home after the marriage failed. After remarrying and having a daughter, she was introduced to Zoroastrianism and began identifying as one without her family's knowledge and a Sedreh-Pooshi ceremony. Except for her daughter, to whom she taught the religion, she kept her decision a secret. However, her daughter befriended a Baha'i girl at school and was reprimanded by a teacher who stated that Muslims should not interact with people of that religion. The mother was summoned to the school after her daughter responded to the teacher's diktat that she is a Zoroastrian, not a Muslim. The mother, aware of the consequences, denied the claim. The principal, who was adamant that she was lying, produced a register showing that her daughter had not

attended a single prayer class in months. As a result, the daughter would be expelled at the end of the school year and a report would be sent to the educational department. Shortly after, the mother-daughter duo fled the country to avoid further scrutiny or worse. The daughter briefly returned to Iran after to complete her schooling but was denied admission by various schools. [11]

Discrimination also occurs in other countries where Zoroastrianism is regarded with contempt. During my interactions with Iranian refugees who have accepted Zoroastrian identity and are based in a country whose constitution asserts secularism, I was told by a lady about being fired from her new job at a kindergarten when her superiors realized her Zoroastrian identity. Her husband, an archaeologist, informed that, while his boss was understanding of his Unlike the nineteenth century when Parsis in India with their overarching resources and political clout under the British Crown were able to send an emissary to ameliorate the condition of Zoroastrian brethren in Iran, the challenges of today are far more complex and interwoven to the new world order. religious identity, other workers would repeatedly insist on him to visit the mosque during prayer time. He added that this was especially the case among the less educated. Another said that despite identifying as a Zoroastrian, his son was forced to take compulsory Islamic Studies classes at school. However, because he does not want his child to attend these classes, he picks him up from school during those times. When I asked him how his child would pass the exams to advance to the next year, he said he had no idea and would see when the moment arrives. [11]

Those who have voluntarily accepted the Zoroastrian identity are not eligible to join the Anjumans in Iran. Except for a few cases, most Zoroastrian converts I have interviewed have demonstrated knowledge of the consequences that the Zoroastrian community may face in Iran if their initiation is recognized. Because of the inherent fear of repercussions, Zoroastrians may be suspicious of

**Unlike the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Parsis in India with their overarching resources and political clout under the British Crown were able to send an emissary to ameliorate the condition of Zoroastrian brethren in Iran, the challenges of today are far more complex and interwoven to the new world order.**

anyone who expresses an unusual interest in Zoroastrianism. Hence, there appears to be very little effort on their part to seek recognition within Iran. However, strict laws and the threat of persecution also prevent those religiously and socio-culturally inclined Zoroastrian converts from forming their own community and practicing their faith. As a result, their religious freedom is stifled, and are deprived of a sense of community they may long for.

## THE QUESTION OF AMELIORATION

The discussion on social media forums demonstrates awareness among internet savvy Zoroastrians of various ages about the prevalence of those wishing to accept Zoroastrian identity. Prior to the internet, the Zoroastrian Press frequently published instances of people embracing Zoroastrian identity. However, the dawn of the digital age has provided unrestricted access to interactions between those born into the fold and those who have chosen to adopt the Zoroastrian identity globally. In fact, except for a few centers around the world where both the groups use shared spaces, most of the rapidly increasing interaction between the two groups takes place over the internet. This has introduced those born into the fold to testimonies of individual new-adherents' in or with links to countries where abandoning Islam is punishable. Unlike the nineteenth century when Parsis in India with their overarching resources and political clout under the British Crown were able to send an emissary to ameliorate the condition of Zoroastrian brethren in Iran, the challenges of today are far more complex and interwoven to the new world order. The 'acceptance of Zoroastrian identity' is a multifaceted phenomenon that spans geographies, cultures, and languages. As it does in its spatial characteristics, the phenomenon encompasses varied motivations, convictions, and practices among those who have accepted the identity. One important lesson to draw from the Maneckji Limji Hataria's nineteenth-century mission is the importance of developing a strong account for the situation and circumstances of these groups. Before deploying assistance as desired by segments of the born Zoroastrian community, a well-

informed decision should be made that prioritizes the safety of community members born into the fold both inside and with ties to

countries where apostasy from Islam is prohibited. Its defiance can lead to not only persecution or intimidation, but also confiscation of property and

harm to the tangible heritage of the community by miscreants.

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- 2) [https://www.amar.org.ir/Portals/1/census/2016/Census\\_2016\\_Selected\\_Findings.pdf](https://www.amar.org.ir/Portals/1/census/2016/Census_2016_Selected_Findings.pdf).
- 3) According to the study, 78% of Iranians believe in God, 37% believe in life after death, 30% believe in heaven and hell, 26% believe in the coming of a savior. Similarly, the study found that 61% of the population grew up in a family that believed in God and was religious, while 32% grew up in a "believing but not religious" family. In contrast, less than 3% were raised in a "unbelieving" or "anti-religious" family. Therefore, it would be prudent not to assume that those who identify as Zoroastrians are completely devoid of religiosity.
- 4) Tessmann, Anna., *On the Good Faith, A Fourfold Discursive Construction of Zoroastrianism in Contemporary Russia*. Stockholm: 2012.
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- 11) Anonymous., Multiple virtual interviews April 4-7, 2021.

**Ruzbeh Hodiwala** is a Ph.D student at SOAS, University of London, working on his doctoral thesis, *The Origins and Development of the Neo-Zoroastrian Movement: An ethnographic study of Neo-Zoroastrian settlements in North America and Europe*. He holds a B.A. in Economics from St. Xavier's College (Ahmedabad, India) and M.A. in Iranian Studies from SOAS. He has conducted field work and interviews in nine countries between 2015-2021 to study the phenomenon.

### Spotlight: Tajikistan

Religious analyst Faridun Khodzoda believes that Zoroastrians exist in Tajikistan, but they hide their religious identity, otherwise the society may not accept them or even endanger their lives. According to Afshini Mukim, the press secretary of the Committee of Religion under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, there is currently no community that would officially declare their status as Zoroastrians and no one has made an official statement to the Committee.

Expert Nazri Asadzoda believes that the main reason for the non-registration of the community is the fear of public opinion of the predominantly Muslim population of the country. According to him, Zoroastrians fear not just moral disapproval, but also the potential threats to physical security. According to Asadzoda, to register as a legal entity, a religious organization must necessarily indicate the exact location of its organization, that is, the building in which it will carry out its activities. In addition, they must have basic religious literature and draft regulations of their religious organization, must reasonably explain the cause for the transition to Zoroastrianism, and should be aware of the philosophy, rules, principles and practices of this religion. Currently, in Tajik society, even the first steps have not been taken to legally register the Zoroastrian community.

Source: Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting (July 30, 2019). *Why Do the Zoroastrians in Tajikistan Hide Their Religious Identity?*



# VACCINE PASSPORTS: THE NEW THREAT OF DISCRIMINATION

DEENA GUZDER



While Zoroastrianism was once the dominant religion in a swathe of territory in the Middle East and Asia, the number of adherents has dwindled exponentially over the centuries. Although the City of Yazd is one of the centers of the religion, a small proportion of its over 500,000 people still practice Zoroastrianism because migration, forced conversions, and centuries of oppression have diminished the population. Worldwide, there are 190,000 Iranian and Parsi Zoroastrians at most, and perhaps as few as 124,000 by some estimates. A highly esteemed priest in Iran told me he worries about the community's survival. "Zoroastrians have lived in Iran for over 3,000 years," he says, "but there are so few left today."



As a community, we are no strangers to discrimination and persecution. Despite our history, today many Zoroastrians in the diaspora are thriving in resilient communities that have flourished across the globe, from New Zealand to Singapore, from the United States to Hong Kong. Yet, in this unprecedented year, all of us have suffered greatly in our own way with the arrival of the Coronavirus Pandemic. Life has been upended – from school to work to family visits – and the reality of our interconnectedness has never been more pronounced: a viral case in one, means a threat to all. Now, thanks to the arrival of astonishingly effective vaccines like Moderna and Pfizer, the world has its first hope for a relatively normal future in years to come. However, that future is not guaranteed equitably across the globe given the grossly inequitable distribution of vaccines. Already richer nations are proposing mandatory “vaccine passports” that may further create a two-tiered global community where those with the least resources are discriminated against while those with the most resources resume life as normal. The Zoroastrian community must be on the forefront of combating this looming new form of inequity given its own history of surviving discrimination and persecution. The new frontier in discrimination is closed borders, and the new form of persecution is life-threatening illness.

As people in wealthier nations search for safe ways to travel during the pandemic, there is growing interest

in documenting who has been vaccinated or tested negative for COVID-19. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson recently said his government will consider the use of COVID-19 status certificates. Israel has already implemented a “green pass” system to allow vaccinated people into restaurants and large-capacity venues. In the United States, New York state has piloted a digital vaccine passport app made by IBM called the Excelsior Pass.

While these measures are tempting to those of us fortunate enough to have access to effective vaccines, the World Health Organization warns so-called vaccine passports are highly problematic given the inequitable distribution of vaccines. A system of vaccine passports could lead to discrimination on a level never seen before: global vaccine apartheid. The prestigious *Lancet* medical journal published an editorial arguing vaccine certificates threaten to exacerbate vaccine inequality and risk, “generating hierarchical societies in which vaccinated individuals have exclusive privileges that are denied to those who have not received the vaccine.”

The reason why vaccine passports should raise alarm bells for anyone concerned about discrimination and prejudice is because of the inequitable distribution of vaccines. A new report finds as many as nine out of 10 people in dozens of poorer countries may not have access to the coronavirus vaccine until at least 2022, because wealthy countries, including the United States, are stockpiling enough doses to vaccinate their entire populations between three and five times over. The report was issued by the People’s Vaccine Alliance, which includes Amnesty International, Frontline AIDS, Global Justice Now and Oxfam. According to Oxfam, rich countries, with just 13% of the world’s population, have bought up more than 60% of vaccines even before their production. The People’s Vaccine Alliance has pointed out that rich countries are vaccinating one person every second, but the majority of poorer nations have yet to administer a single shot even to their frontline healthcare providers. That’s over a hundred nations that have no access to life-saving vaccines. Some nations, including many in the African continent, may have to wait years before getting enough vaccines to protect their populations.

Some may think: Yes, we don’t want a world where access to restaurants, cinemas, and travel are based on where you’re born and if you’re lucky enough to be vaccinated... but we need to stop the spread of the pandemic, so discrimination against the least among us is a “small” price to pay. However, there is another obvious solution that benefits all of us while discriminating against none of us: insist that Big Pharma to waive their patent rights so all nations can develop the CoVid-19 vaccines. South Africa and India had pushed the proposal at the World Trade Organization as part of an attempt to increase the availability of vaccines in poorer countries, but wealthier nations are blocking the effort.

Human rights activists have successfully pressured the United States to stop blocking efforts within the WTO to waive intellectual property rights related to COVID vaccines. Many of the pharmaceutical companies developing these vaccines have benefited from tax-payer dollars and massive government subsidies, so they have a moral imperative to make the vaccine’s intellectual property open-source and equitably available. In early May, the Biden administration heeded the call of activists and lived up to its campaign promise when it announced it now supports temporarily waiving the intellectual property rights for COVID vaccines, in what the World Trade Organization is calling a “monumental moment.” The European Union must now follow suit. Those of us in the United States, must continue to pressure the Biden Administration to support the originally proposed October 2020 waiver (not a watered-down version) and back the waiver with additional massive technical aid and raw materials to make it effective. The world must come together to make safe vaccines equitably available for all.

We, as Zoroastrians, are not strangers to discrimination and should take a stand against it whenever we see it. The new frontier is vaccine access and making sure our brethren in Pakistan—who have not a single dose of Pfizer or Moderna (as was the case when the article was submitted for publication in April 2021)—are not discriminated against while those of us in the U.S. are getting our first and second doses of the most effective vaccines on the market. We must demand every nation has access to effective, peer-reviewed vaccines, so that reentry into society is based on equity and compassion. We must make sure the much-needed public health effort to curb this virus does not discriminate against the poorest and more marginalized people in our global community.

# Conclusion to Theme of this Issue

**We**would like to thank all the authors and illustrators for their contributions to this issue. They have selflessly dedicated their time to raising our collective understanding on a very important topic.

We would also like to thank you, the reader. With countless other demands for your attention, we are gladdened that you found this topic important enough to dedicate time towards learning about it.

We would like to leave you with two final thoughts:

**Learn and share the story:** This journal issue only scratches the surface of the topic. Read and research what you can and form your own opinion on the topic. There is also much that has not been documented, creating a great opportunity for further scholarship on the topic. There is also an immense amount of information passed down by oral history that we should codify before it is lost forever.

As we learn more about our story, we need to do a better job in how the story is told. Artists and writers can help to create more captivating and compelling narratives. Raising greater awareness—whether it be in your family, your community, or on a much larger stage—is also an important step to take. It ensures we honor those who have suffered, helps the present-day community heal from the lingering trauma of these experiences, and keeps us alert to new cases of discrimination that may emerge.

**Stand up against all persecution and injustice:** Our story is a clear example of the destructiveness of discrimination and persecution. It also provides an excellent case for how a downtrodden community can be lifted back into prosperity. This experience should be a call-to-action for all Zarathushtis; to ensure what happened to our community never happens again to anyone.

*Mehrborzin Soroushian and Viraf Soroushian*

## TRUTH SEEKER

How do I redress the wilderness  
of the homeless  
while living under a sturdy roof?

I weep with those who were driven from their lands,  
my invisible footprints limping beside them on the  
long trail of tears.

I have not fought for my country  
but can envision the value of peace.

These are stillborn tears  
for the sudden dead  
though I have not lost a beloved to a bullet.

Liberty, never to be taken for granted,  
an immigrant, I kissed  
the shores of this country, making in it a home,  
secure in its hallowed institutions,  
order, and the rule of law,  
the symbol of my enduring dream.

Now the myth, this “single garment of destiny”  
is shredded by unpredictable winds

with increasing differences among neighbors  
reality questioned  
and truth disbelieved,  
dialogue, bereft of persuasion,  
filled with hoarse coarseness  
when the ideal is abandoned  
and my beloved country’s walls crumble

where do I find solace?

I hunger  
to touch that inner music,  
to conjure up  
the truth.

I must seek out the truth  
as a poet  
for who am I as a poet  
if not a truth teller?  
Who am I as a poet  
if not  
a healer?

*Deenaz Coachbuilder, Oct. 6th. 2019*







## Personal Profile

*“The More You Give, The More You Get”* **The motto of the Kheradis**



*Over the years, Jerry and Celeste Kheradi have financially supported the FEZANA Scholarship Program more than anyone else in the community. To celebrate their commitment to the Program, three scholarships bear the Kheradi name: The Rostam and Homai Kheradi Endowed Scholarship for Undergraduate Students, the Jerry and Celeste Kheradi 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Endowed Scholarship for Graduate Students, and the Mehraban and Morvorid Kheradi Endowed Scholarship for Academic Excellence, also known as the FEZANA Scholar. Jerry and Celeste were the first donors to endow a scholarship for \$100,000.*

*Jerry and Celeste recently spoke about their lives and what makes them support young Zoroastrian students.*

**J**ehangir (Jerry) Kheradi was born in Yazd, Iran to Mehraban and Morvorid Kheradi. At a very young age, Jerry and his family moved to Bombay, where Jerry's parents opened up a restaurant, Café Ballard, in the Fort area of the city. Throughout his childhood, both of Jerry's parents stressed two traits that parents in our community seem to always champion: the value of a good education and the importance of charity. Jerry has committed his life to these virtues.

Jerry's brother, Rostam, played an important role in getting him into St. Mary's Senior Cambridge High School in Bombay. Jerry would later reward his brother's efforts by endowing an undergraduate scholarship in his brother's name. It was at St. Mary's in Jerry's eighth grade when he came across a biography of Albert Schweitzer. Schweitzer was a medical doctor from Germany who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952. He used his medical training and celebrity as a musician to establish hospitals throughout French-controlled Africa. Reading this biography, Jerry was inspired to become a medical doctor.

After St. Mary's, Jerry moved on to study at St. Xavier's College, where he excelled. Despite his grades, Indian medical colleges in Bombay were reluctant to admit Jerry on the grounds that Jerry was born in Iran and he therefore did not have Indian nationality. Jerry found a medical college in Bangalore that was prepared to admit him. Jerry studied there for a week before the president of Grant Medical College in Bombay called him to let him know that they would overlook his nationality and admit him there. Once again, Jerry excelled.

Many people who endow scholarships do so because they benefited from scholarships during their own studies. Jerry never received such support during his studies. He had to rely on support from his family. Upon finishing his studies at Grant Medical College, he and his parents decided that he should migrate to the United States, where Jerry's brother lived. That is how in the early 1970s, Jerry found himself stepping off of a plane in the United States with \$100 to his name.

Jerry came to pursue a Gastroenterology Fellowship at the Rhode Island Hospital, which is part of Brown University. Jerry would then become a Fellow of the American College of Gastroenterology and enter into private practice in Rhode Island.

One day, while working at Our Lady of Fatima Hospital in Rhode Island, Jerry observed a nurse with an amazing ability to connect with her patients. Smitten from the get go, Jerry quietly asked her out on a date.

It turns out that this nurse, Celeste, had a similar upbringing to Jerry. Like Jerry, she discovered what she wanted to do at a young age as well. When she was three, she decided that she wanted to be a nurse just like her favorite aunt. Like Jerry, she also grew up in a close-knit and supportive family. She and her six siblings were all given little jobs to do around the house. As the future nurse, she was entrusted with giving her father his daily diabetes shot.

Celeste also excelled academically. She was the valedictorian of her class at Cumberland High School. She then received scholarships to study nursing before joining the hospital where she would meet Jerry.

Celeste would become what Jerry describes as “the wind beneath my wings.” Over 40 years of marriage, it is clear that Jerry and Celeste have formed a loving and solid partnership. Celeste joined Jerry’s private practice. They went into business together. And they got involved in the Zoroastrian Association of the Greater Boston Area (ZAGBA) along with FEZANA.

Upon retiring, Jerry was approached in 1998 to become the Funds and Finance Chair of FEZANA. As with everything that he did, Celeste was by his side, serving as silent member of the committee. Jerry served as long as he could until his back gave out, literally. Between two major operations and a fusion of the lumbar spine, Jerry stepped down from his responsibilities with FEZANA.

Over the years, Jerry and Celeste have continued to support the FEZANA Scholarship Program. When asked why he chooses to support young students, Jerry recalls a mantra of his mother’s: “the more you give, the more you will get.” Both Jerry and Celeste believe that it is important to help others and they believe in the value of celebrating academic achievement.

*Dinsha Mistree is a Lecturer and Research Fellow at Stanford Law School and was awarded the Mehraban and Morvorid Kheradi Endowed Scholarship for Academic Excellence in 2012.*

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# Ms. Irandokht Soroushian (Djahanian)



*I was honored when asked to interview Ms. Irandokht Soroushian (Djahanian). Her many years of volunteer work and dedication to the community has always been very admirable. For many years, since the inception of the California Zoroastrian Center (CZC) in Westminster CA, community members could always rely on Iran Khanoom to be present and available when needed. After many years of hard work and devotion, she is still very active, positive, and full of life.*

*My phone conversation with her confirmed all that I had heard about her and more. Her positive attitude and her philosophy about life is a model for all to follow. Hope you enjoy my interview with Iran Khanoom*

*"I keep myself happy by singing, playing the piano and going on long walks"*

**ARMITA DALAL (JAHANIAN)**

## **PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY.**

I am Irandokht Soroushian (Djahanian) the oldest of eight children by Ardeshir and Sarvar Jahanian (Sarfah-niya). I was born in the city of Yazd in Iran and I lived there until my father and his three brothers who were merchants and business partners throughout their lives decided to move their families to Tehran. In Tehran, I attended the Bersiabeh Preschool, then Iraj Elementary school followed by Anoushiravaan Dadgar all girls' Zoroastrian high school

## **CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE LIVING IN IRAN?**

My life in Iran was very joyful. Since my father and his brothers were business partners and very close, they decided to build four homes next to each other sharing a large yard. This is where I had my happy childhood growing up with my cousins .

I had just graduated from high school when a 29-year-old Mr. Keikhosrow Soroushian came visiting with his mother to ask for my hand in marriage. He had just moved back to Iran from America after graduating with an Agricultural Engineering degree and serving in the US Armed Forces. We wed shortly after and moved to Kerman. My husband who was a kind and loving man always supported and guided me in life. We lived a happy life in Kerman, he was always busy with his agricultural work and I with being a full-time mother, blessed with three children: Parviz, Fereidoon and Parvin. As busy as life was, I was still able to study and pass the entrance exam to the university of Kerman and obtain a bachelor's degree in Business Administration. Later, when we lived in the US, the biggest tragedy of my life happened at the age of 58 when I lost my husband of 40 years.



## PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOUR HUSBAND'S ROLE IN WWII.

At that time, my husband was a student in the US. Upon completion of his education, he volunteered to join the United States armed forces. The war ended after he served for one year and he moved back to Iran.

## HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH THE WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION OF IRAN?

In 1966 the Women's Organization was established in Tehran with the hard work of many volunteers and donors. Simultaneously other branches were established in different cities and provinces of Iran including Kerman where I became involved with this organization. One of the active and dedicated founders of this group was **Ms. Farangis Yeganegi (Shahrokh)** whose daughter, Firoozeh was my high school friend. Ms. Shahrokh was an amazing lady, who was one of the active and dedicated Zoroastrian founders of the women's organization in Iran (Tehran). She was a great leader and a teacher directing us with different projects. With her guidance we provided literacy programs, legal advice, handicraft as well as cooking and other classes in different villages. With the help of my Zoroastrian and non-Zoroastrian friends we started fundraising for this worthy cause. After three years of volunteer work, the government of Iran, dedicated a budget for the women's organization at which time I was selected and hired by the organization.



This picture depicts me shaking hands with Empress Farah Pahlavi's at one of her visits at the Women's Organization in Kerman. I am very proud of this photo. Being involved with the women's organization also gave me the opportunity to attend two training programs, one in Israel for four months and the other in Japan for one month.

## HOW DO YOU SEE THE SITUATION WITH WOMEN THEN AND NOW?

Unfortunately, I have been away from my homeland for 40 years, but I always try to get the news, especially about the women. From what I understand, women's situation has been worse. They have tried to keep the rights they had gained but everything depends on the government and the laws of the land which makes it harder and harder for the women to do so.

## WHEN AND WHY DID YOU MOVE TO THE US?

My children were already in the US studying. My sons were attending University when my daughter moved to the US in 1978 to attend high school while living with one of her brothers. In 1981, she was accepted at USC and moved to Southern California, at that time I moved to the US to be with her.

## **WAS IT DIFFICULT FOR A ZOROASTRIAN TO MIGRATE FROM IRAN TO AMERICA AT THAT TIME?**

At that time people could travel, leave, and come back especially the youth who were studying abroad. I did not have any difficulties moving here and my children were already living in America.

## **TELL US ABOUT YOUR INVOLVEMENT WITH THE ZOROASTRIAN COMMUNITY AND YOUR VOLUNTEER WORK.**

When I arrived to United States, I lived in Los Angeles, where my daughter had started her university studies. Across from our apartment there was a kindergarten that accepted my application for a job. I worked there for three years until my husband visited us in America and moved our daughter to an apartment close to USC and bought a house in Huntington Beach before returning to Iran for his work. At the same time, the California Zoroastrian Center with the effort of several generous people, including Ms. Farangis Shahrokh was established. They started their religious and social programs for the Zoroastrian families at a temporary location on a small property in Anaheim, CA. Ms. Farangis informed me about these activities and hired me as the administrative staff for the Center. Simultaneously, the first building of the Zoroastrian Center in America was built in Westminster, CA and upon completion we moved to the new location.

Ms. Farangis was always very supportive and would come to the office to help me with my work such as: writing the Center's newsletter, assisting with organizing a variety of programs and bulk mailing of the invitations and announcements.

To stay updated with technology for my work at the Center, in the evenings, I would attend computer and English classes at Golden West College.

## **MAY I PLEASE ASK YOU HOW OLD YOU ARE?**

Yes, I am 87 years old.

## **WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE SECRET TO A HEALTHY AND HAPPY LONG LIFE?**

I have always been busy with learning and taking classes until I realized that the most important thing for one's health is exercise. Therefore, I started attending workout classes at the gym at the age of 70. This has been the medicine and cure for my calcified heart. Good attitude is also very important. I am fond of everyone and I like people. I have always been very forgiving, and I don't know what resentment is. To me, the past is in the past and I never spent time thinking about it. I only think about now and the future. When I wake up in the middle of the night, I always recite Ashen Vohu and Yatha Ahu prayers to fall back to sleep. I keep myself happy by singing, playing the piano and going on long walks.

## **DO YOU HAVE ANY MESSAGES FOR OUR READERS?**

I pray to Ahura Mazda to help us serve our community just like our ancestors in Iran and all over the world who with their hard work and donations, gathered the Zoroastrian community together. I hope that through strong chains of unity, we preserve our Zoroastrian religion and keep it strong and alive and pass it on to our next generation as best as we can.

In the end, I would like to add that I worked for 37 years in Iran and in the United States, mainly to serve others and with minimal financial rewards.



## THE AVESTAGENOME PROJECT® & THE

## *Morawala-Patell family*



**Dr.** Villoo Morawala-Patell, Founder and CMD of Avesthagen Limited and The Avestagenome Project® is an innovator, and serial entrepreneur involved in international biotechnology development, academic and corporate leadership with a longstanding interest in global development leading to establishment of global networks and alliances with academia and industry.

“I was born in Navsari, as the first child of my parents Daulat Sohrabji Kasad and Dara Dinshaw Morawala. My father ran a commodity business in Nizamabad, a district of today’s Telangana. At the age of six, I was sent to St. Anne’s high school, a boarding school where I spent the next 9 years of my school life with Italian nuns, where I learnt to live with different cultures, varied experience as the girls there came from many parts of India. We spent much time reading and that is where I devoured books and learned about the larger bigger world, history and geography. We went home for vacations, Diwali in Nizamabad and summers in Navsari in my grandparents house in Malesar Charpool eating mangoes and gharab (fish roe). All these experiences made me deeply, culturally rooted in the soil of these two small towns and India and my education made me a global citizen.

My daughters and I are a team and all that happens at Avesthagen is shared and decisions are made together on matters of importance. Sanaya is on the Board of Avesthagen and Farah participates in some of the

company science projects”

**Dr. Farah Patell-Socha** has had a long and diverse career in science, starting with a PhD in Molecular Biology from Cambridge University in Biotechnology as a recipient of the prestigious Cambridge-Nehru Scholarship and was awarded the prize of Best PhD Student by the Institute of Biotechnology. She then returned to the TATA-founded National Center for Biological Sciences (NCBS) in Bangalore for her Post-Doctoral studies focused on muscle stem cell biology. Not long after she returned to Cambridge to further her career joining Horizon Discovery as Senior Product manager, then as the Business & Technology Development Lead. The team launched industry-defining diagnostic products for lung and colon cancers. She then co-founded **Amilon**, a company that specializes in translational science where they take Life Science products to market through a number of business-centric strategies including, but not limited to molecular diagnostic development, clinical trial strategy, innovation, productization and executive management.



Farah says “From the earliest years, I was always surrounded by science and people passionate about discoveries making a material difference, and the leaps of faith undertaken to achieve one’s goal,” about her growth she says . “What drives me is using science to



find tangible solutions for patients and populations in need by continuously raising the bar and setting new industry standards. Enabling early detection of diseases or providing personalised treatments to patients inspires me to keep going.”

With three generations of fundamental researchers, Farah says that: “... [fundamental research] runs deep in our family. My earliest memories are associated with my grandmother, Dr Rashida Reporter, who travelled around the Cape of Good Hope on a Nizam’s scholarship to University College London, to pursue a PhD in Physical Chemistry. Her mis-adventures as a biochemist during 1940s, post-war London, left a lasting impression on my sister and I. That was further solidified when visiting my mother [Villoo’s](#) labs in countries like France, India, and watch the building of Avesthagen, since the age of five and coming to realize that this what I wanted to do. I knew that this was for me.”

Today, Farah leads the research product division at a growing biotech in Cambridge, UK. The team develops novel cellular products soon to be used across applications in drug development and cell therapies. Farah is married to Pierre Socha, an early-stage tech VC investing in life sciences, quantum computing and human-computer interfaces. They live in Cambridge with their son Zahaan (11y).

**Sanaya Patell-McGraw** has a Masters from Boston University, USA and Ph.D from University of Cambridge, UK. Sanaya graduated as a recipient of multiple scholarships including the Cambridge Commonwealth Trust, the Bristol Myers-Squibb Scholarship for Biosciences from Pembroke College, and is an alum for the JN TATA scholarship. Her strong background in molecular microbiology had her research focus primarily on antibiotic resistance and biofilm formation in the bacterium *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*. A Boston University graduate with an MA in Biology, she specialized in the tryptophan pathway of *Arabidopsis thaliana* and worked on shark neurobiology and chemical sensing in a DARPA-backed project with the Boston University Marine Program (BUMP) at the Marine Biological Laboratories, Woods Hole.

Her love for curating culture, food and photography led her to one of her current projects, one close to her heart: an evocative and nostalgic journey of the Parsi Zoroastrians through food, customs, and culture culminating in a book entitled *The Borkhadi Table*. Along with the team at Avesthagen, she is also curating a book for The Avestagenome Project™ where Genetic Sequence meets and links with the community and human personality. She is a Member of the Board of Directors of Avesthagen, supports and advises Villoo

Patell her mother when necessary.

“My mother is an extremely charismatic, inspirational and positive individual. I have never met anyone quite like her. In fact, she is what is described in Malcolm Gladwell’s book as an Outlier. Farah and I have journeyed with her on all her triumphs, trials and tribulations. This has given us access to an unparalleled understanding of global systems, structures and growth. While Farah and I are both involved in different capacities with the exquisite repository that our mother has created, we have also had a strong urge to create our own stories and this is where we are at right now. I get inspiration from my family, whose core values of honesty, quality and handwork resonate in everything I try to do. Also, from three generations of scientists starting with my grandmother, Dr. Rashida Reporter,



and following on through to us. However, the most seminal influence on who I want to be comes from my mother and sister who continually raise the bar with their drive and belief in the betterment of humanity.”

Sanaya is married to a Serial IT Entrepreneur, Tucker McGaw, and they have two children, Aara (7) and Xerxes (5). They are currently based in Bangalore, India.

# *Pashang Patel* :Recipient of the CIO.com & Drexel University 2021 Analytics 50 Award Polaris and Perseverance



“It is somewhat surreal to me, that 25 years ago I was literally fighting for my life with my brain tumor, which was diagnosed in 1996, with over 25 surgeries stretching throughout much of the next five years. Now I have been granted this honor, I am truly humbled, that something that I created, and built, is instrumental to the betterment of mankind. About six weeks ago I was informed that a project that I architected, developed, and led a team of designers and software engineer has been chosen as one of the Top 50 Analytical projects across the USA by CIO.com magazine and Drexel. The project is used by Global and US Order Management teams, Global Supply Chain Leadership Teams at Pfizer in response to the COVID-19 Global Distribution and Logistics problem.”

I am truly humbled by this award and recognition. Never, ever, did I even fathom to think that something I would have done, would ever be worthy of being in the top 10 million projects of this amazing country.”

## **Award Background**

Drexel University’s LeBow College of Business and CIO.com magazine have partnered to create the Analytics 50 — a ranking that recognizes the top 50 analytics executives who are leading the effort in implementing innovative solutions for business challenges.

This annual ranking provides the opportunity for 50 analytics executives and their companies to be listed on CIO.com and for select companies to be featured in a CIO.com article. All 50 companies are, invited to a recognition event at the Philadelphia campus of Drexel University’s LeBow College of Business. which may be virtual this year because of the pandemic

The criteria for judging applications is based on how the individual solved a specific problem through data analysis, including: the complexity of the challenge faced, the innovativeness of the solution used, the impact the solution had on the organization, and the metrics used to evaluate the impact of the solution.

## **Business Challenge:**

The COVID-19 pandemic these past 18 months has ravaged our fundamental lives. In navigation, the star Polaris, is termed to be the guiding star, in terms of Pfizer, finding a resolution and delivering it to humanity was our Polaris. This crisis required scientists, engineers and data analytics professionals to work together to address this challenge. Although designing and developing the vaccine was a huge accomplishment, we also faced logistical challenges with manufacturing and distributing hundreds of millions of doses as quickly as possible. We needed analytics to make processes more efficient, to ensure quality and safety in every dose and to provide timely information to the people who are depending on it.

## **The COVID Project:**

This project, the Pfizer COVID Dashboard, captures and presents at a global level and in almost a real-time view, the movement of a sales order through all of the

various checks and holds; through the process of delivery creation, the picking, the packing, the shipping; and then captures the carrier shipping details, and finally the delivery receipt and confirmation.

Pashang created an interactive dashboard visualization system, that allows members of the COVID team in Pfizer to see what orders have been placed for each country, the delivery status, and also drill down to the minutiae level of a package being delivered to a local CVS, or a pharmacy in Mongolia, or a health center in Bolivia. It also became a central repository for sharing information with external partners and the US Government. This solution helped Pfizer’s all internal teams process enormous amounts of complex and rapidly changing data. The project has been operational since the very first shipment of the vaccine in early Dec 2020 to the UK.

<https://www.lebow.drexel.edu/faculty-and-research/centers-institutes/center-business-analytics/analytics-50/2021-honorees>

Pashang Patel is a full-time employee of Pfizer for the past 15 years and now serves as Senior Manager SAP Global Business Intelligence: SOM & Finance Analytics and Visualizations. He is the son of Armaity and Framroze Patel of ZAGNY, past president of FEZANA. He is married to Khushnuman (Muncherji) and has two sons, Rayomand and Cyrus.

The community is very proud of your work Pashang and what you have achieved after a significant setback in your life, 25 years ago

# Mahrukh Bamji, MD



Dr Mahrukh Bamji, was appointed to the prestigious position as Chair of the Department of Pediatric Medicine at Metropolitan Hospital Center in Manhattan.

Dr. Bamji has had a versatile career at Metropolitan as a senior clinician, an able administrator, a researcher, and an educator. She is the Professor of Clinical Pediatrics at New York Medical College, Board-certified in Pediatrics and in Pediatric Hospital Medicine. At Metropolitan, she has served in a number of leadership positions, including Deputy Chief of Pediatrics and Chief of Pediatrics Inpatient. She has also been the hospital's Director of Pediatric AIDS services.

Dr. Bamji is nationally recognized as a researcher in pediatric AIDS. She has been the recipient of several grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (CDC) Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), and the New York State AIDS Institute. She was the site Principal Investigator (PI) for the CDC-funded maternal infant transmission study, and for over thirty NIH-funded clinical trials, including the landmark study of prevention of perinatal transmission of HIV Infection, which changed the trajectory of the pediatric AIDS epidemic. Dr. Bamji has also been the recipient of several teaching awards.

Mahrukh and her husband Dinshaw live in NY and they are active members of ZAGNY



## Dr. Ziba Aspi Colah

Ziba Aspi Colah graduated with Highest Honors from Baylor College of Medicine in the top 10 of her graduating class of 200 students. She was inducted in Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society and received the Dean's Distinction in Service Learning and Medical Education. In addition, she received the Lambert Award for Excellence in Medicine and American Medical Women's Association Award for academic excellence. She matched at Baylor College of Medicine for Psychiatry residency and will continue to train in the Houston area.

Ziba was the recipient of the FEZANA 2017 Mehraban and Morvorid Kheradi Scholarship- The FEZANA Scholar and the recipient of the Young Zoroastrian Award at the 11th World Zoroastrian Congress, Perth 2018

"I am extremely grateful to my wonderful Zoroastrian community in Houston and FEZANA for always supporting and encouraging my educational goals. I would not have gotten this far without the countless wonderful Zoroastrian friends who turned into family. It truly takes a village and I cannot wait to continue to serve those around me and be an advocate for mental health awareness. I hope to mentor many future physicians to honor those that guided me on this journey."



# PERVIN TALEYARKHAN

RECOGNIZED AS CRAIN'S NOTABLE WOMAN IN  
LAW. CRAIN COMMUNICATIONS, AN AMERICAN  
MULTI-INDUSTRY PUBLISHING CONGLOMERATE  
BASED IN DETROIT, IS ONE OF THE LARGEST PRIVATELY HELD BUSINESS MEDIA  
PUBLISHERS IN THE WORLD.

Pervin Rusi Taleyarkhan is a Legal Counsel with Whirlpool Corporation, one of the world's largest appliance manufacturers, headquartered in Michigan. As part of the company's 100-member legal department, Pervin handles patent acquisition, litigation, open-source software, international patent filings and third-party agreements. She is the youngest member and only woman on Whirlpool's global patent team.

Pervin is also an Adjunct Professor & Director of the Intellectual Property Clinic at the Indiana University School of Law, which operates under the US Patent & Trademark Office's Law School Clinic Certification Program. She teaches and supervises law students in providing local businesses and inventors trademark and patent related legal advice and services.

Pervin graduated from Purdue University in Chemical Engineering, where she spent five years as an undergraduate researcher in cardiovascular engineering under the late Professor Leslie A. Geddes, one of the pioneers in the field of biomedical engineering and winner of the National Medal of Technology in 2008. She earned her Juris Doctorate / Law degree from Indiana University, where she was the Editor-in-Chief of the *Indiana Health Law Review*.

Pervin is an active volunteer in her Zoroastrian community in Chicago, currently serving as a co-Director of the Society of Scholars of Zoroastrianism, Board Member of the WZCC—Chicago Chapter, Board Member of the Zoroastrian Association of **Chicago**, and Trustee & Secretary of the Zarathushti Entrepreneurship Development Foundation (ZEDF).

Her father, Prof. Rusi P. Taleyarkhan, a Professor of Nuclear Engineering at Purdue University, was the recipient of the 2004 WZCC Outstanding Zarathushti Professional of the Year Award. Fifteen years later, daughter Pervin was the recipient of the **2019 Outstanding "Young" Zarathushti Entrepreneur/ Professional of the Year Award**.--It was definitely a source of Zarathushti pride in the Taleyarkhan household.



Pervin is actively involved in her legal and intellectual property ("IP") communities holding leadership positions in globally based organizations like the American Bar Association ("ABA") and the Association of Corporate Counsel ("ACC"). Her efforts have earned her high-level recognitions, including the ABA's "Star of the Year" and "Outstanding Leadership Contribution" awards. Pervin was also part of the leadership team that in 2019 earned the

"Best Member Strategy Award" for ACC's Michigan Chapter, where she currently serves on the Board of Directors as the Treasurer. As a Trustee of the [Foundation for the Advancement of Diversity in IP Law](#), she helps provide much-needed opportunities for STEM (science, technology, engineering, & math) students from underrepresented backgrounds to enter the patent law arena.

Pervin was born in Pennsylvania and was raised with her two sisters in Tennessee. Her parents Professor Rusi Taleyarkhan and Navaz Taleyarkhan, are from Mumbai who now live in Indiana. Pervin is now based in Michigan as an inhouse Legal Counsel with Whirlpool Corporation.

## Vice President for Research and Partnerships Award for Excellence in Applied Research and Engineering to Professor Janet K. Allen

Janet K. Allen, John and Mary Moore professor at the University of Oklahoma received the *Inaugural Award for Excellence in Applied Research and Engineering* in recognition of career long, exceptional research contributions in engineering that are characterized by their impact in addressing major technical, social, and economic problems in society, and have garnered international visibility and recognition. Professor Allen is known for her work in decision-based design and especially formulating problems and modeling uncertainty. She has co-authored one textbook, four research monographs and over 400 technical papers dealing with dealing with the co-design of materials, products and associated manufacturing processes and addressing issues related to

Industry 4.0, and systems design of mechanical, thermal and structural systems; ships and aircraft; and engineered networks; rural development in India.

Professor Allen is a Fellow of American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME). In 2019, she was recognized by ASME with the Ruth and Joel Outstanding Design Educator Award, and in 2020, she was recognized as one of the top 100,000 most impactful researchers in the world in a study by faculty at Stanford University <sup>1</sup>.

Professor Allen co-directs the Systems Realization Laboratory with her husband Professor Farrokh Mistree. Their current research focus is on the simulation of evolving cyber-physical-social systems



to support policy making in diverse fields such as rural development, healthcare, energy and education. The award includes a onetime cash supplement of \$US10,000.

*Congratulations Professor Janet K. Allen!*

<sup>1</sup> PLOS Biolog <https://ou.edu/research-norman/news-events/2020/new-study-finds-ouresearch-well-cited-impactful>

## JEHAN ZUBIN DASTOOR WINS GOLD MEDAL AT MCGILL UNIVERSITY.



Ervad Jehan graduated from McGill University, Montreal with a Bachelor of Science in Physics and a minor in Economics. He graduates with a 4.0 GPA in all his three years, and is the recipient of the Anne Molson Gold medal, an academic award for “outstanding performance during the course of your undergraduate studies in the Faculty of Science.” His research was on “The theoretical description and experimental verification of the fundamental noise that arises due to thermal interactions present in nanoscale fluid flow.”

Jehan now moves to Georgia Tech for a Masters of Science degree in Aerospace Engineering. Jehan is the son of Ervad Zubin Dastoor and Jasmine Cooper of Singapore.

*Congratulations Jehan, the community is proud of you.*



# HAMKARS: FELLOW WORKERS FOR HUMANITY

SHERNAZ CAMA Ph.D

Zarathushtra in the *Gathas* addresses men and women equally; his teachings transcend gender, nationality, and race:

*“The man or woman, Mazda, who doth bring  
To life what Thou hast as the best decreed...  
All such I’ll teach to worship Thee and Thine  
With them, I’ll march across Thee Judgment Bridge”*

(Ustavaiti Gatha 4: 10, Yasna 46: 10)



Parsi Girls' School in India - c.1880. Note Scull caps on children and similarities with toki caps worn in Tajikistan. Prior to the 1900s, all Zoroastrians in India covered their head in public?

In Yasna 41:2, part of the *Haptanghaiti*, complete equality of man and woman's rights and their status in both material and spiritual worlds is expected. Here, the issue of a good leader, regardless of gender, is addressed:

*“May a good ruler, man or woman,  
reign in both the material and spiritual  
existences.”*

Women in Persia often held influential positions in the Courthouse, Ministries, Military, State and Treasury Department. The significant role of women in Ancient Persia both horrified and fascinated the ancient Greek and Roman male-dominated societies. The Fortification tablets at the Ruins of Persepolis reveal

that men and women were represented in identical professions and received equal payments as skilled laborers; new mothers and pregnant women even received wages above those of their male co-workers in order to show appreciation of their efforts in difficult physical conditions. In Sasanian times, the law book *Madigan-i- Hazar-Dadestan*, shows how a girl and boy shared equal rights; unlike Hinduism, she entered the faith with the same initiation ceremony, wore the same badges of the religion, the kusti and sudreh, attended Fire Temple prayers as an equal of the male sex and had rights of choice in marriage and life, unusual, if not unique, in ancient society.

*Dr Shernaz Cama is the founding director of the UNESCO ParZor Project. She invites young researchers to take the study further as a Ph.D project of pioneer women as Karishma did for Hilla Furdoonji. ParZor would help with access to all archives in India and abroad*



# Mrs Hilla Rustomji Faridoonji (1872-1956)

KARISHMA KAVITA KOKA PH.D



My aim in this talk was to increase the knowledge of the contribution of this lady and urge more research be done on her contributions and achievements to society worldwide.



Mrs. Hilla Rustomji Faridoonji was a lady who sought to serve unconditionally. As she said in her AIWC Presidential Address in 1935, 'with a reverence for learning and devotion to great principles'. Her goal in her own words was to '*bring a greater humanitarian ideal into the world*'. In her I see an expression of the Universal and Zoroastrian tenet '*Service before Self*'.

In 1931-32 Mrs. Rustomji Faridoonji and her team proposed a resolution for removal of schools for different castes and removal of details of caste in application forms for admission to educational establishments - a beginning for equity of opportunity- a theme we all work for today.

In 1932 she was the administrator of the Lady Irwin College and became its convenor and treasurer. At this college years later in 1954, she inaugurated the Postgraduate accommodation (with the main hall named after her) when she served as the President of the All India Women's Education Fund Association.

Her 1935 address as the President of the AIWC was covered in the Waipa Post, 1935 (and the Good Old Karachi Post and The Evening Star). In this address, she said '*the time has come to take our God granted position in Society*' ...to Share equally with men in welfare work. She saw it as the right time to enter legislature to make laws for bringing a great humanitarian ideal into the world. She said '*with a reverence for learning and devotion to great principles.... Let us build surely, if slowly*'.

She worked with several different teams for the good of society worldwide. In 2018 the UK Zoroastrian All Party Parliamentary Group mentioned her in a talk by Dr. Sumita Mukherjee – and was reported by Ms. Shazneen Munshi in the Zoroastrian Trust of Europe (ZTFE) Annual Report.

Her artistic nature and spiritual vision – were clear in her many schemes and commented upon in a book published in 1941 '*Indian Womanhood*' in which Margaret Cousins has written about her positive beautiful personality. (page 156)

She represented in the Reforms Committee (Simla, 1924), and in the Committee for the Reorganisation of

Education in the Hyderabad State: Report of the Sub Committee by A.H McKinzie and Mr. F.M Khan. The extent to which there should be a distinction between the types of education was discussed.

‘In the Selection from Memoranda and oral evidence (Punjab, Bihar and Orissa, Central Provinces, Assam, North-West Frontier Province, Delhi and Miscellaneous Memoranda) Indian Franchise Committee Vol V, her team submitted that *‘adult franchise constitutes the only way by which both men and women can come into their own.’*

Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru writes of an incident in ‘Selected works of Jawaharlal Nehru, Second series, Vol. 10, edited by Shri S. Gopal (page 73-74). When he was invited to speak at the Lady Irwin College, Mrs. Rustomji counselled him to speak in English, while Mr. Nehru wanted to speak in Hindi. One can understand this best when one reflects upon an incident in the late 1960s or early 1970s when Indira Gandhi visited Bangalore. When she spoke in Hindi, the audience hurled stones at her. My Mother Mrs. Jerou RamMohan, then Miss Panthaki, advised her to speak in English, as Hindi was not well accepted in many parts of India including Karnataka. The moment Mrs. Gandhi spoke in English, people understood her ideas and applauded her work. Thus one can appreciate that the advice from Mrs. Hilla Faridoonji Rustomji to Mr. Nehru, was most appropriate.

In the Joshi Rathbone Papers held in the London School of Economics library, there is another quote from the 1935 AIWC conference address of Rustomji Faridoonji *‘Women in India have been more fortunate than their Western sisters: we have no suffragette question, ..... we should show, by real work for the welfare of others, that we are ready for the equality of status we deserve’*. This clearly demonstrates the noble attitude of this lady and the teams she worked with for the good of Society. This report also quotes her statement regarding the resolution 8 years earlier which deplored the effect of early marriages on women’s education. They had demanded that the age of consent be raised to 16. She and her team supported a deputation to H.E. the Viceroy resulting in a committee being appointed, upon whose recommendation the *Child Marriage Restraint Act also known as ‘Sarda’ act* was passed.

In 1932 she contributed to the Indian Franchise Committee Report Vol I. Page 1145 throws a lot of light on her thought process. When commenting on education in different colleges, she says the difference is not due to the generally accepted wrong notion of the quantity of funds but on the level of value placed on aspects of higher education. She also encouraged people to express their views as evidence in the Joint Conference of the International Council of Women (page 47).

Hilla Rustomji Faridoonji was part of a dedicated couple. James Henry Cousins and Margaret Cousins (Page 758) note that Hilla and her husband the Nawab Rustomji Faridoonji lived for a time in a Palatial home just outside Hyderabad. Both of them were silver medalists of the Kaiser-e-Hind. The Nawab Rustom Jung Bahadur worked in the Indian Civil Service and was customs commissioner. An interesting observation is that the Hyderabad state in that time followed the Fasli Calender.

In conclusion, Hilla Rustomji Faridoonji was as an intellectual and social entrepreneur who worked in different teams and had follow-through economic entrepreneurship and sustainable development through her work towards an educated and empowered Society.

*Information for this presentation was shared by Dr. Shernaz Cama, Dr. Mythili Jagannathan, Mrs. Sharon Irani, Mr. Yazdi Tantra, Dr. Dinyar Patel, Mrs. Rekha A Sali and also sourced from the Internet.*

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# COVID-19: ONE YEAR LATER

By Farishta Murzban Dinshaw



Summer usually represents the holiday spirit in Canada and the USA - school vacations and Independence Day celebrations, trips to the beach and cinematic blockbusters. This summer will also represent the one-year mark since FEZANA Journal produced a keep-sake Summer edition, "Corona Virus Pandemic: Tragedy and Hope in the Zarathushti Community" on the challenges and silver linings of coping with the pandemic. As the Summer 2020 issue's guest editor, it seemed fitting to look back over the year to see where we are today.



## MASKS AND VACCINES

One of our contributors, Nawaz Merchant, writes, "It's been a year since I sewed 460 cloth masks on my sewing machine. None were available this time last year. I stopped making them in June once they became plentiful. Now much has changed, COVID numbers are down, the long COVID year draws to close as spring turns our world green again. I look forward to meeting friends again, to dinner gatherings and in-person events. Soon--the promise of adventure is buried in that word! With admiration for those who held the frontline, heartfelt sympathy for those who suffered loss, respect for what we've learned, thankful for quiet hours and those who stood by us, aid to those awaiting relief, let's meet again and rejoice!" At the point of writing, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has lifted the mask requirement for fully vaccinated individuals.

Vaccines have been a game changer. In the 2020 Summer issue, we had published the breaking news at that

time about the work of Adar Poonawala and his team at the Serum Institute of India. Since then, multiple vaccines have come up in North America, although, unfortunately, Poonawala's AztraZeneca-University of Oxford vaccine has come under scrutiny for possible side effects and delays in production. According to both American and Canadian governments, we can look forward to outdoor summer gatherings if vaccine targets are met.

## TRAVEL AND FOOD

Nilufer Mama, a travel agent who has organized popular tours across several continents, gives vaccines as a reason to be hopeful. "What a difference a year makes! The travel industry has been in a coma for the past one year, and looking back I was naive to believe that we would see travel movement starting in the fall of 2020 as I had written in the FEZANA Journal. With the vaccine roll out, by the third quarter of 2021 travelers will be dusting off their suitcases and digging out their passports to venture out of the solitary and isolated world we have experienced. However, all of

us at Millenium Travel firmly believe that the carefree on-line 'book and go' days are gone. Travelers realize what a pivotal role their agents have played procuring refunds and negotiating with suppliers during the first turbulent few months of the pandemic. Travel agencies may charge booking and cancellation fees and travel insurance will take on a whole new meaning. Travel insurance companies are introducing creative, all-inclusive policies. We are also seeing flexible cancellation policies being offered by travel suppliers to motivate travelers to book in advance, and extend the final payment date as far out as possible. Initially, we are likely to see travelers travelling locally both from the comfort perspective as well a desire to support the local economy. Airlines and countries may require "vaccine passports". We shouldn't worry too much about this as this was not uncommon even pre-pandemic for certain countries." The restaurant and hospitality industries were knocked out by the pandemic. In the USA, more than 110,000 eating and drinking



establishments closed in 2020 (Rachel King, January 26, 2021, Fortune.com). Of restaurants that closed permanently, the majority were established businesses and fixtures in their communities; these eateries had been in business, on average, for 16 years, and 16% had been open for at least 30 years. This is a significant loss. Local governments pushed for people to support local restaurants by encouraging take outs through campaigns like Take Out Tuesdays. This raised public consciousness about app-based delivery networks such as DoorDash, Skip the Dishes,



and UberEats charging high middlemen fees and hopefully will lead to more regulations in the future. The pandemic also created a huge impetus to bake and cook at home giving a boost to sales of recipe books and cooking supplies. There is a brighter outlook for restaurant owners in spite of this. According to the National Restaurant Associations' *2021 State of the Restaurant Industry Report*, eight in 10 adults said their favorite restaurant deliver flavor and taste sensations that they can't duplicate when cooking at home.

## MENTAL HEALTH AND RESILIENCE

One of the underlying issues of the pandemic's health catastrophe has been mental health. The financial shock that COVID-19 has had on the economy has not been seen since World War II. There is no debate that the pandemic has worn us down, illustrated in rising numbers of divorce, domestic violence incidents, and prescriptions for anxiety-related medications. Mehreen Bhajiwala had raised the issue of an "echo pandemic" of mental health in our Summer issue. In 2021, she writes, "It is glaringly clear that the mental health of everyone, children, parents, caregivers and humanity in general, has deteriorated at alarming rate and we will be dealing with the repercussions long after we have beaten COVID. I recently read an article which perfectly described the general sense of malaise seeping into all our lives. Languishing. We are all languishing. Slowly but surely, just languishing in our own despair. A lot has to do that we are all recognizing that this is not ending anytime soon and its hard to be optimistic when hope seems like an afterthought. However, where this despair, there is also strength and fortitude and that speaks to our adaptability. As a human race we have survived unforetold calamities and we will survive this too and that on a macro level is something to be grateful for. So yeh human race!"

It is difficult to measure the enormity of what has transpired over the past year, the tragic loss of life (more than three million deaths globally and counting) the incredible efforts of frontline staff and essential workers, and the resilience of people as they combat uncertainty and isolation with humour and compassion. Zarathushtis from around the world had contributed to a section on the

positives of the pandemic situation in the Summer 2020 issue, ranging from a renewed appreciation for family and social connections, for the healing aspect of nature whether through gardening or walks in the woods, for the basics rather than the trappings. An exemplary example of resilience is Tehemi Dinshaw. Her son Naush shared her story with the Journal. "Tehemi Dinshaw had the opportunity to learn the piano as a teenager under the tutelage of the accomplished composer, conductor and pianist Walter Kaufmann. Kaufmann fled persecution in Nazi Germany in the mid 1930s to work in Mumbai as director of music for All India Radio, for which he also composed its signature tune. Western classical music has been Tehemi's passion since that time and, now retired and living independently in Pune, she continues to play the piano as her hobby at the grand old age of 97. A few years ago, Tehemi's eyesight deteriorated so much so that she could no longer read books, magazines or newspapers. Not wishing to allow her mind to deteriorate through having the TV on all day, she discovered luckily that she could still read printed music. She thus focused her efforts on relearning pieces that she played as a young lady but had since forgotten. Prior to Covid-19, Tehemi would practice music in the mornings, but then spend an hour or two each evening visiting her friends, particularly those that were house bound. But with the threat of Covid-19 infection more severe on the elderly, she took social distancing seriously and since March 2020 has more or less stayed put in her apartment. She took the opportunity to redouble her efforts on the piano, often practicing two hours in the morning and another two in the evening. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, her regular piano tuner could not travel from Mumbai, and as the

monsoon arrived her piano started warping, notes went out of tune and keys got sticky. Refusing to let this get her down, she bought a hair dryer and spent some hours over several days drying out the insides of the piano until all the keys worked. While the piano remained out of tune, at least she could play and hear the notes!

Her favorite composers for the piano are Beethoven and Chopin although her repertoire encompasses many others. In particular, she loves Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 14 (the "Moonlight" sonata) so we requested her nurse to record her performance. However, Tehemi found that while the first two movements came back to her more easily, the third more complex and longer movement needed much more work. So, the piece was recorded in two sittings, a month apart. Ever the perfectionist,



she wore the same clothes for the recording of the last movement as she did at the first session!" (Editor's Note: You can view the recital at <https://youtu.be/r6teWjyL7f4>).

Tehemi Dinshaw's recording is only one example of how technology has been a boon during the pandemic. As the virus prompted cinemas and

sporting events to shut down and with "stay at home" lockdowns the world over, millions of people had more time to watch movies and shows from their living room. Netflix, Amazon, Zee5 and other streaming services saw their viewership rise. Museums and theatres the world over pivoted to showcase their exhibitions and productions online, reaching a whole new global audience. And the world would not have survived socially without Zoom, the leader in videoconferencing software that emerged during the pandemic. From everyday interactions like classroom projects, cooking classes, and business meetings, to special events like Thanksgiving family meals, Nowruz jashans and weddings, Zoom created a platform for the world to get together. The digitization of culture has opened up the world to our fingertips and our post-pandemic world will never be the same again.

**Farishta Murzban Dinshaw** is an adjunct professor with the Immigration and Settlement Studies, and Criminology and Social Justice graduate programs at Ryerson University, Toronto. She works with newcomers to raise awareness about Gender-Based Violence and mental health issues, and to encourage help seeking. She regularly contributes to *Fezana Journal* and other community publications.

## SPOTLIGHT: DR BEHRAMSHAH MAZDA, "THE FLYING DOCTOR"

Health care workers around the world have shown that they are superheroes in the fight against the COVID-19 virus. None more so than Dr Behramshah Mazda, who lost his life to the virus on May 27, 2021 at the age of 62.

For decades, he would fly his ultra-light aircraft to serve the people of Dahanu and Gholvad on the Maharashtra coast, treating the underprivileged for free. According to a report in Mid-Day news, adivasis (tribal people of India) in Palghar district where Dahanu falls faced difficulty getting to a health centre, which meant walking miles, so Dr. Mazda flew in to serve them. Awareness around the pandemic and how infection spread had not reached them so infection numbers were high. This did not stop Dr. Mazda. According to Tinaz Nooshian, the Mid-Day reporter, Dr. Mazda had shared with him, "For the past one year, I feel like the violinist on the deck of the sinking Titanic. But I am loving every minute. It's like playing Russian roulette."

Source: Tinaz Nooshian (May 28, 2021). *Wait for Dahanu's doctor saheb ends in prayer*. Mid-Day.com

# PEHCHAAN

FREYAZ SHROFF

*Pehchaan and its highly replicable model of youth mentorship was presented at the United Nations' CSW in March 2021*  
*To view this presentation please visit the KurNiv Foundation Channel on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FB1CHBeCK-8>*



Pehchaan quite literally means “identity,” but a more figurative meaning suggests having the ability to see a person for who they are beyond the characteristics you notice at first glance; such as, color of skin, income, race, caste, class, where one lives etc.

The phrase “pehchaano hume” (recognize us) asks the world at large to see the person’s heart, courage, values, capability, dreams and that basically at the core, we are all the same.

KurNiv Foundation runs an initiative called ‘Pehchaan.’ At Pehchaan we bring together students between the ages of 14 years to 24 years from two different sides of the income bridge.

## STUDENTS AS PARTICIPANTS

The first set of students come from homes where the **annual income** is Rs. 250,000 (\$3,400) or less. Most of our students, from these homes, live on less than \$2 per day. They have completed high school, primarily from schools where the primary languages of instruction are not English and homes where the primary language of communication is not English. They live in neighborhoods without running water, limited access to electricity and are surrounded by nefarious activities. The irony about the children who live in these areas is that the elders, parents and community believe that education is the way to a better life, but education is not a core value nor a priority. At Pehchaan these students join us as **participants**, in their final year of high school so that we can get them college ready.

## STUDENTS AS LEADERS

Our second set of students come from homes where they are income comfortable. They are not only able to meet their needs, but, are more than often, able to have an excessive list of their wants, also met. They live in well-established neighborhoods and buildings. They have graduated from schools where the primary language of instruction is English. Not only is education a core value in their homes, but well-rounded education is a priority. Many of the students are part of sports teams, extracurricular clubs and are consistently provided opportunities which give them the ability to expand their knowledge base, build their social network and curate opportunities for growth in their areas of interest. At Pehchaan these students join us as **leaders**; they can join us right from the first year they enter college through their graduate studies.

## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Each leader has to complete an intense ‘**Leadership Development Program**’ where they are sensitized to the realities of the current inequities in our Indian education system, what poverty actually looks and feels like, the impact of poverty on mental health and education, the power of privilege. Leaders learn to recognize and create



a true appreciation for their privileges. Leaders are challenged to look at their belief systems around poverty and poor people. Leaders are taught to step into their courage, build confidence, create successful thought patterns and above all to be mentors and friends to their participants.

Each leader is assigned between two to four participants. The journey, between leader and participant, usually begins during our ‘College Prep Week,’ where a carefully created set of activities helps the youth bond with one another, build trust between one another and prepare the participant for college. *(photo right, team work and mentoring)* These activities help the participants build their confidence and find their courage. This is also the time where they get a clear feel for the power of education and the fundamental steps, they can take to make education a priority in their homes and communities. Leaders speak with parents who are apprehensive about allowing their participants to get a college education and in every way support their participants to prepare for success in college.

### WHY IS COLLEGE PREP WEEK IMPORTANT?

The primary language of instruction in college is English; most of our participants come from non-English medium schools. Due to lack of income, our participants generally walk between school and home and have generally never, in their lives, been any place beyond walking distance. Most colleges are not located in neighborhoods where our participants live. It begins with giving our participants the confidence they need to literally courageously step out into the world, take buses and find their colleges, otherwise this in itself, for many young girls, especially becomes a deterrent from going to college.

Participants learn how to read time tables and check announcement boards, because unlike school where everything is announced in the classroom, and they are completely dependent on teachers, in college students are expected to be independent of the professors and students have to seek out the workings of the exam schedule and more on their own.

Our participants learn how to navigate the administration office, understand the admissions process, understand how to choose a major (Arts, Commerce or Science), the implications and job possibilities of each major. Participants learn how to make friends; because, when you speak a different language, dress differently and don't have the financial means to “just quickly grab a coffee” with someone, it's not as easy to make friends. It's also not easy to ask professors questions to clear their doubts, especially when some professors may not want them



*(Photo above leader working in a home doing the chores done by the participant)*



in their colleges or the participants themselves come from environments where they are taught not to speak to professors because they are “bade lok” best translated in English as “from a higher strata.”

### TRANSFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

**The transformation of our participants**, within this one week, is something to witness. It is almost unbelievable how participants find their voices, define their dreams, build their social networks, bring their parents on board and within a week transform into young men and women with a vision to step into better futures for themselves and India.

### TRANSFORMATION OF LEADERS

**And the transformation of our leaders?** It is just wow! Young men and women now grateful for what their parents have provided them, many rebuild strained relationships with their parents, their grades in college improve, they become both more responsible and respectful. They help around the home more, are more kind to the house help and overall take less for granted. They emerge as leaders in every right, they manage committees and teams, learn about accountability, know how to follow and support teams led by other leaders and know how to build camaraderie and trust in the teams they lead.

Today, we have participants who return to Pehchaan as leaders. This means, students living below the internationally accepted poverty line are now mentors and role models to their peers. Our participant-leaders are coached and trained to serve as committee heads, project leads and youth coaches. Leaders and Participant-Leaders work hand in hand to run and manage all aspects of our Pehchaan. Everything from the application and selection process to mentorship programs and outreach is managed by the leaders and participant-leaders. Pehchaan is a program for the youth, run by the youth! (photo left, a participant now a leader doing his CA, coaching a high school student in the slums helping her pass her finals)



If you would like to learn more about Pehchaan please visit us at [www.kurniv.org/pehchaan](http://www.kurniv.org/pehchaan)

If you are a **youth between the ages of 16 years to 24 years** and would like to **volunteer** with us to **teach English** or **conduct interactive classes online** in your field of interest, please email us at [pehchaan@kurniv.org](mailto:pehchaan@kurniv.org). We are also looking for volunteers who can help us with outreach and administrative work. Please do email us at [pehchaan@kurniv.org](mailto:pehchaan@kurniv.org)

***Freyaz K Shroff*** Founder Trustee of the KurNiv Foundation, the parent organization of the ‘Pehchaan’ initiative has a Masters in Business Administration specialising in International Business and Marketing. She worked in Corporate America and Corporate India before moving in 2011 into the non profit world, and volunteered as a teacher in Hindi and Marathi medium municipal schools in Mumbai. Today Pehchaan serves close to 200 leaders and participants each year and had impacted close to 1,000 youth. Freyaz serves as FEZANA Ambassador to India and has been a member of the FEZANA family for 20 years [freyaz@kurniv.com](mailto:freyaz@kurniv.com)





The 2021 Short Story Contest was sponsored by Ms. Parimarz Firoozgar and supported by California Zoroastrian Center. The top three short stories and the honorable mention will each be offered in separate FEZANA Journal issues for your enjoyment.

There will not be a Short Story Contest in 2022 but we are looking forward to receiving thought provoking essays for the 2022 Essay Contest designated for 14–18 year old, with the topic, *“According to the Gathas, can one be a Zoroastrian without a belief in God?”*

Many thanks to those who support these contests.

**Artemis Javanshir, contest organizer**

For information please visit [www.czc.org/contest](http://www.czc.org/contest) or email [zessayentry@yahoo.com](mailto:zessayentry@yahoo.com).

## AN INJECTION OF INNOCENCE



A click and a squeak awoke Troy Davis, as the cell door rolled open. Sunlight was not visible through the grapefruit sized hole in his wall, Troy was now used to the darkness it had been his home for the past 33 years. As he slowly opened his eyes he saw 3 prison guards at the door, ready to attach the shackles to his arms and legs.

### \*33 YEARS BEFORE\*

The boom of the judges gavel rang through the courtroom. After 7 hours of deliberation, the jury returned with their verdict of guilty and the room fell silent. Troy struggled to keep focus as he was washed with a panic he knew he would not be the first nor the last to face. The last words he heard on the 30 of August 1991, two years after his arrest, was from the first juror.

His voice was shaking as he read the words “ We the jury, find Troy Anthony Davis guilty of murder in the first degree and we recommend the penalty of death ”.

As these words fumbled out of the first juror’s mouth, all went blank for Troy Davis.



As Troy passed the grey brick walls surrounding him, his thoughts raced past, a mind full of questions like those 33 years ago. Even though nobody had told him Troy already knew where he was going. Cell block 27 section B. The guards removed the shackles from Troy’s legs and closed the door behind him. Across the small stone room stood a man in his late 40s, his hair had grown grey compared to the last time Troy saw him 2 years ago. David Bruck motioned to the chair next to the table and Troy sat.



“Mr. Davis I’m not here with another date” in contrast to his appearance David Bruck spoke softly, “No, no you have already had 3 of those. I wanted to speak with you about another appeal for your case”

The gloomy look on Troy’s face flashed with hope for only a second. He had appealed many times before and each time the judge saw the color of his skin and assumed his soul was charred.

Davis crossed his legs and barely lifting his head he looked towards Bruck. “You really think it will work this time, because that is what you said the past 5 times. We brought them the evidence or lack thereof”. A sad smile spread across Davis’s face as he reflected on his court cases, the only books he had for the entire time of his never-ending nightmare. “You know I have gone over that case more times than I can count. I had no weapon. I had no motive. They didn’t find any physical evidence. And yet I have been stuck here so long that I cannot remember the feeling of grass on bare feet. I can’t even imagine it. All they had were seven witnesses, all of whom saw me without seeing me. Can you tell me how that works, Bruck? Can you tell me why no one batted an eye when the same seven witnesses took back their original statements, denying ever seeing me there? Tell me Bruck was it even mentioned in the papers?”

As David Bruck opened his mouth to answer, Troy answered for him, “No, I know this, they could have put my name in obituary on August 30, 1991. It would have saved them some time. Bruck, I know I’m a dead man walking. I know it is just because I was born Black in America. But I don’t care” Troy’s voice was surprisingly calm and still “I will fight until the needle pierces my skin and I leave this wretched place for good. I understand that nobody is left alive to call me innocent. My family wasn’t allowed to testify for me during my trial and now they will never get the chance. I accepted this long ago. But now we have to continue fighting. This war is far bigger than the both of us. It may be my life but it will be somebody else’s after mine.”

David and Troy sat in the room for another hour in silence, communicating with only meaningful glances, until the familiar buzzing sound of an opening door ran through the room. Troy Davis was shuffled back to his cell, as David Bruck slowly exited the Georgia prison.

The moment David stepped into his silver Honda, tears ran down his face. As much as he had hoped to save his client’s life, he knew it would never happen. The drive home David was in a trance. He was shocked when he arrived home, for all he knew he was still sitting in the prison’s empty parking lot.

David passed through his hall lined with photos of all the appeals he had won, stopping at the empty frame at the end of the hall. He stood there looking at the plain black frame, before removing it from the wall and carrying it to his desk. And as if he was hit with a burst of energy, he rose and prepared file after file. His living room turned into a map of witness statements and responses. He researched until dusk rolled around and feeling a sense of satisfaction he made his way up stairs, leaving his computer on, collapsing on his bed, asleep.

David awoke to the chime of his computer, announcing the arrival of a new email. He was pleased to read that he would have his appeal heard at the Georgia Supreme Courthouse on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December, 2011, only five months away. “The Georgia Supreme Court” he thought “we might have a chance this time”.

Two weeks after telling Troy the news, David scheduled a press conference.

David approached the podium, blinded by the flashing of reporter cameras, where he spoke. “I was arrested on the 23 of August, 1989 for crimes I did not commit. I was brought in for questioning and was told that I had killed a security guard ,Mark MacPhail, with a gun they could not find and could not put in my hand. They refused to hear from my family during trial and only gave seven witness statements all of which were retracted years after. I know the odds of being appealed is low. But I will not stop fighting. **The struggle for justice doesn’t end with me.**

**This struggle is for all the Troy Davises who came before me and all the ones who will come after me.** So we must keep fighting, that way others do not suffer at the hands of our justice system like I have. I am a black man therefore I am seen as a target and a threat. I will not stop fighting until my body rests in its shallow grave”. The flashing of photos had paused for the scribbling of pens.

David Bruck stepped forward and spoke with confidence, “The prosecutor does not have a proper case but when it comes to justice on the lines of race we know that the story will not end the same for a white man. We fight for justice in a new world, one which is not available here. We will not stop fighting for we cannot stop fighting. We have received a date on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December this year to appeal with the Georgia supreme court and we can only hope this will lead to some change hopefully in the sentence but more so in the system as a whole.” The sound of

pen against paper fades away as both Troy and David are ushered back.

When the morning paper was dropped off the next day, David felt accomplished seeing both his and Troy's faces illuminated in the light of the flashing cameras. With a proud smile he placed the newspaper on the table next to him.

On August fifth Bruck and Davis received the long awaited news that filled them with dread. "The final execution date of Troy Anthony Davis has been set for the 21 of September 2011 by lethal injection". As the email was read aloud, Troy's heart sank. His last chance to speak out for true justice was now unattainable. He had to do something. As Troy opened his mouth to request a meeting with David, the busing of the jail cell door showed that he was already there. This time, the walk down the hall seemed to take longer than ever. His last chance was taken from him, stolen in an act of political anger. With the date less than two weeks away, David and Troy immediately reached the Georgia Supreme Court to protest this change.

Slowly the news got out and the streets were crowded with protesters, people of all colors standing shoulder to shoulder with signs reading, "if there is even a sliver of doubt you cannot execute". Petitions and waivers were at the door of the Georgia supreme court, over 663,000 signatures asking for clemency. David and Troy worked tirelessly to make the people's voice heard in court through his case, but the time never came.

The clock struck midnight as the 20th became the 21st. David lay awake in bed as Troy was taken to a new cell where he would remain until his execution. Knowing this, David left his home and headed towards the prison. He met Troy there with a pastor by his side asking him if he had any final repentances. However, Troy remained silent, still in disbelief of his current situation. He had done nothing and yet he was soon to be killed. At ten o'clock he was guided towards a new room which seemed like it was out of a nightmare. The room looked like a regular hospital room, except for the green colored bed lined with straps that stood in the center. Troy was laid down and strapped into the ominous bed. He looked to his side, where a giant window revealed a private room filled with hundreds of seats. Every chair was now filled, and almost 2,000 people stared back sympathetically. Troy's eyes flooded with tears. Not at the fact that he knew he would die but because he knew he would not die in vain. His life would go towards movements of reform, those who would fight to make a difference could use his story and his words.

Troy spoke clearly except now with a slight tremble in his voice, "Well, first of all I'd like to address the MacPhail family. I'd like to let you all know, despite the situation...I know all of you are still convinced that I'm the person that killed your father, your son and your brother, but I am innocent. The incident that happened that night was not my fault. I did not have a gun that night. I did not shoot your family member. But I am so sorry for your loss. I really am...sincerely. All I can ask is that each of you look deeper into this case, so that you may finally see the truth. I ask of my family and friends that you all continue to pray, that you all continue to forgive. Continue to fight this fight. For those about to take my life, may God have mercy on all of your souls. God bless you all". The monitor next to him groaned flat as the clock read 11:08 p.m. But everyone knew that even if he was dead, his voice would live forever. When David Bruick arrived home he placed the photograph from the news conference in his empty photo frame, adding it to his hall of victories.



*Yekta Hormozdiari is a freshman at Chaminade High School. She loves spending time with her family and dog, Magno. At school, she spends her free time in Concert Choir*

### BIRTHS

**Spenta Kayras Irani**, a girl, to Sanaya Master and Kayras Irani, granddaughter to Farida & Khushroo Master and Nilufer & Darayush Irani, niece to Bezan Irani and Paulina Nassab in Richmond, BC on April 11, 2021. (Photo right)



**Armaiti Rayomand Collector**, a girl, to Sarah and Rayomand Collector, granddaughter to Sarosh and Pearlina Collector, sister to Sarosh Jr, Asha Lynnea on April 12, 2021. (ZAH-Manashni)

**Ryan Desai-Sam**. A boy to Fariel Desai and Michael Sam Tion, grandson to Maharukh and Late Ervad Kersi Desai (Montreal) and, André Sam Tion and late Mylène Chan Lei Ye, in Montreal, on May 22, 2021. (photo right)



**Raiden Rajkot** a boy to Sean & Michelle Rajkot. The Rajkot and Paul families are both thrilled with the arrival of their grandson in Houston on May 24, 2021. (ZAH Manashni) Photo right.



### NAVJOTES/SUDREH-PUSHI

**Cyrus and Neville Masani**, sons of Karl and Simin Masani in Houston, TX on March 19, 2021.

**Aanya Kharas**, daughter of Noshir and Arnavaz Kharas in Sugarland, TX on March 26, 2021.

### WEDDINGS

**Jessica Kapadia**, daughter of Hanoz and Mary Lou Kapadia (Edmonton, Alberta), granddaughter of Rati and Bomi Kapadia (Montreal, QUE) to **Tyler Thompson** in Calgary, Alberta, on December 30, 2019.

**Ervad Kurush Dastur (ZAMWT)** and **Mitchelle Kavasmaneck** in India on April 3rd 2021 (photo below)



### DEATHS

**Keki Pirojshah Illava**, 100, father of Aspi, father-in-law of Tanaz, grandfather of Sherezad, Nekzad, ex-husband of Lily Aftab Sheikh in Mississauga, ONT on February 2, 2021.

**Roshan Burjor Bhesania**, wife of late husband Burjor, mother of late Thrity, mother of Shernaz, grandmother of Rayomand, Parizad in Prince Rupert on February 22, 2021.

**Rostam Behi**, 90, husband of Parichehr, father of Ardeshtir, Anahita, father-in-law of Mandana Namdari, Bahram Ourmazdi, grandfather of Avina, Ario, Cyrus, Soroush in North Vancouver, BC on February 28, 2021.

**John Norwood**, 84, husband of Ruby Malva, father of Erica and Daniella, father-in-law of Brian, grandfather of Ruby, Shelley in College Point, NY on March 6, 2021

**Azita Samya**, wife of Hoshang Samya, mother of Neda Samya, Saum Sanya in Gaithersburg, MD on March 18, 2021.

**Aflatoon Ashooian**, husband of Pravin Dinyari-Ashooian, father of Mahbanoo Mehr in Kirkland, WA on March 28, 2021.

**Roshan Savakshah Adajania**, 91, mother of Viraf (Zarine) Adajania (Mumbai, India), Ruby (Rajesh) Salvi (Glendale Heights, IL), Rashna (Jehangir) Mistry (St. Louis, MO), sister of Jamshed Sadry, grandmother of Yazad and Rayomand Adajania, Monil and Nehal Salvi, Natasha and Cyrus Mistry in Mumbai, India on April 1, 2021 (ZA-Chi)

**Soli Nicholson**, husband of Viloo Nicholson, brother of Alou and Rohinton Nicholson in Scarborough, ONT on April 1, 2021.

**Mehraban Khodaei**, husband of Shahnaz Khodaei, father of Nasim (Richard) Fortune, Noshin (Razagh) Vaseghi, Minoo (Alistair) Thornton, grandfather of Aiden, Artin, Melina, Christopher, Charlie in Toronto, ONT on April 6, 2021.

**Akhtar Shojazadegan**, 94, wife of late Kodarhm and mother of late Shervin, mother of Pari, Siamak, Behrooz in Beaverton, OR on April 7, 2021.



**Jimmy Jal Vajifdar**, husband of Dhun, father of Kayzad, father-in-law of Rashna, grandfather of Ryan in India on April 9, 2021. (ZAH-Manashni)

**Farrokh Irani**, father of Thrity Engineer, father-in-law of Kersi Engineer, grandfather of Zubin, Zaran, Zarius in Pune, India on April 12, 2021. (ZAH-Manashni)

**Rohinton Shahpurji Mirza**, husband of late Shireen Mirza, son of late Shahpurji and late Coomi Mirza, brother-in-law of Hutoxi and Rustom Mulla, late Alice and late Hoshang Behrana, late Veera and Adil Bharucha



- (Houston, TX), Kashmira and Faredun Bhader, (Houston, TX), Gulmohr and Meheryar Bharucha (Houston, TX)), uncle of Jehanara, Amy, Naomi, Lyla, Lillian, Zarmina, Zarah, Kiyan, Charlene in Karachi, Pakistan on April 12, 2021. (Karachi Obituary)
- Dorab Pirojsha Deboo**, father of Zarin Karanjia, Hoshi, Manchi, father-in-law of Neriosang Karanjia, Sunny Deboo, grandfather of Mehrab Deboo, Zarvan Karanjia, Sherry Belani, Kureshaan Roman, great grandfather of Camran Deboo, Zarius and Joshua Karanjia, Anaya Belani, Ariana Deboo, Olivia Karanjia, great-great grandfather of Layla Karanjia on April 19, 2021. (ZA-Chi)
- Sudhir Mathur**, father of Sharul, father-in-law of Percy Daruwala, grandfather of Shehzeen, Meherzeen, Tahsheen, in Markham, ONT on April 18, 2021.
- Mahrokh Behruzi**, wife of Ferdos Farhadi, mother of Khosh and Pauzash Farhadi, mother-in-law of Deniz and Beyhan on Monday, April 19, 2021. (ZSO)
- Amy Dara Madan**, wife of late Dara, mother of Homayar, Xerxes, mother-in-law of Pearl, Jeroo, grandmother of Zeenia, Jehan, Anaisha, Kevan on April 22, 2021. (ZSO)
- Doris Lynn Homji**, wife of Kavasji Homji, daughter-in-law of late Villie and Homi Homji, sister of Dawn Briggs, Dixie Jones, late Paul Jones, sister-in-law of Rashna Jeffries, Coombi Karanjia on April 23, 2021. (ZSO)
- Homan Dadnam**, husband of Banoo Hajieh Dadnam, father of Shaham Dadnam, Shahram Dadnam, Shahrzad Dadnam on April 25, 2021. (ZSO)
- Mehraboon Irani**, husband of Parveen Irani, father of Khodabakhsh and Katayun Irani, grandfather of Zane, brother of Kaiser Gollwala (Toronto, ONT) on April 26, 2021. (ZAH)
- Dali Kavasji Gai**, 82, husband of late Nargis Dali Gai, father of Neville, father-in-law of Roshni, grandfather of Nush and Meherzan in Mumbai, India on April 26, 2021. (ZAMWI)
- Banoo Rusi Bharucha**, 93, mother of Zarrin (Zarir) Dadinatha, Kersasp (Tazeen) Bharucha, grandmother of Zahra, Anaita, Cyrus in Port Moody, BC on April 30, 2021.
- Feroze Pallonji**, 83, husband of Anne Pallonji, father of Adil and Vanessa, father-in-law of Elizabeth Dos Santos and (future) Federico Sanmartin, grandfather of Lara and Xavier Pallonji in Toronto, ONT on May 6, 2021.
- Rohinton Dorabji Minwalla**, husband of late Guloo Minwalla, father late Asfandiyar (Tinaz) Minwalla, Aderbad (Zenia) Minwalla (San Francisco, CA), grandfather of Taimur Minwalla, Zara Minwalla in Pakistan on May 9, 2021. (Karachi Obituary)
- Shahriyar Khanideh** of Irvine, Orange county, husband of Mehri, father of Shabnam and Shirin in Sirjaan, Iran, on May 11, 2021 (CZC)
- Sandy Sribnick**, wife of Howard, mother of Ethan, Jessy, Jon, mother-in-law of Zenobia, Nate, Shanna, grandmother of Gabe, Kaizad, Zarina, Evie, Marin on May 13. (ZA-Chi)
- Banoo Darius Mobedjina**, 61, on May 15, 2021. (ZAMWI)
- Shirin Jamshed Wania**, wife of late Jamshed Wania, mother of Hormuzshaw and Shireen Wania, Niloufer and Adil Mavalvala, grandmother of Shamineh, Yazad, Nasha, Jamshed, Freya, great grandmother of Zahaan in Mississauga, May 15, 2021. (ZSO/OZCF)
- Soonu Dali Mama**, wife of late Dali Dadabhoy Mama, mother of Danny (Nilufer) Mama, Adil (Margaret) Mama, grandmother of Michelle, Darius, Sophia in Brampton, ONT on May 23, 2021.
- Morvarid Dinyarian**, mother of Parvin, Jam, Golchehr Demmoubed, Mehraban Mehrain, Mahwash Mehrain on May 23, 2021. (ZSO)
- Homai Dara Sethna**, 88 wife of late Dara Rattansha Sethna, mother of Dinaz Bengali (Minoo Bengali), sister of Baji Avari, (Shernaz), Perviz Kapadia and late Rusi Avari, grandmother of Shawn Bengali and Pearl Bengali, and aunt of Kamal Kapadia, Anahita Kotwal, and Eric Avari, in New York on May 25, 2021 (ZAGNY)
- Adi Hataria**, husband of Rati Hataria, son of late Merwanji and late Doasamai Hataria, son-in-law of late Dinshawji and late Dinamai Anklesaria of Bharuch, India. (ZSO)
- Zarintaj Farahmand**, wife of Keykhosrow (Kika) Kermanizadeh, mother of Kambiz and Kamya. (CZC)
- Ervad Soli Ervad Pirojshah Dastur**, 84, husband of Jo Ann Dastur, father of Shirin (Marvin) Dastur Simmons, Anahita (Jimbo) Hodge, grandfather of Cristina, Allison, Taj, Zain & Nev in Bradenton, Florida, May 29, 2021.
- Neville Furdoonji Vatcha**, 81, husband of Jo Ann, father of Chanaya (Mark), Dina (Gurraj) (Chicago) grandfather of Evan, Will, Arjun-Cyrus, brother of Tehemton (Roshan), Khushroo (Montreal) in St Louis, Missouri, June 2, 2021.
- Khodadad (Khodu) Shahbehram Irani** husband of late Shera Khodadad Irani, father of Ken, Sharon, Jason and Ron, brother of Shireen Dinyar Irani and Vamard Shahbehram Irani, in Maryland.
- Zarnosh Nainshad Manecksha**, 43, son of Nainshad (Nick) and late Yasmin, brother of Zahin (Seema), uncle of Zakary and Mason, Fort Washington, PA, 21 June 2021..
- Paridokht Mavandad-Zartoshty**, 87, wife of Late Mobed Mehraban Jamshid Zartoshty, daughter of late Mehrabanou and Mobed Rostam Mavandad, mother of Homa, Vida (Jamshidian), Mehrabanou (Soroushian), four grandchildren and four great grandchildren, in San Diego, June 22, 2021.



# Matrimonials

**Female, 39**, beautiful, good looking, from reputed, affluent Parsi family. MBA (Finance), working. Enjoys music, traveling and reading. Parents invite correspondence from well-placed family of similar status. Contact [parsimatch@yahoo.com](mailto:parsimatch@yahoo.com). [F17.33]

**Female, 31**, 5' 7". Masters in Visual Effects from SCAD USA. Working as compositor in Montreal. PR in Canada. Enjoys travel, hiking, music. Boy must be from Canada. Contact [bpsavai@gmail.com](mailto:bpsavai@gmail.com), +91 9374 7130 60. [F18.20]

**Female, 25**, 5' 5", J.D. from Georgetown Law School in 2020, working at a law firm in Washington, DC. Interested in meeting highly educated, professional boy from well-placed family. Must be from USA. Contact [anaht2021@gmail.com](mailto:anaht2021@gmail.com). [F18.47]

**Male, 28**, 5' 10", Doctor of Medicine, working as a Resident Physician in Florida. Parents seeking matrimony for their son (born in USA) from professional (Medical/Dental preferred) educated Zoroastrian girls **under** 28 years old, from USA only and willing to settle in Florida. Contact: [anaht2021@gmail.com](mailto:anaht2021@gmail.com). [M18.56]

**Male 26**, 5' 7", B.Sc Hospitality Mgmt (Mumbai University), post-grad studies PGDM in Hotel Management and Business administration (Niagara College, ONT). Currently working with major Hotel group in Niagara, ONT, Canada. Good personality, caring, dedicated, tolerant, cheerful, good family values. Interested in life partner where both would complement and support each other to pursue respective careers and hobbies. Contact [vispywadia@gmail.com](mailto:vispywadia@gmail.com). +91 98213 46601. [M21.10]

**Female, 22**, 5' 6". Completing B.Sc. Working part time as sales rep. Family resident in Vancouver, BC, Canada. Outgoing, honest and enjoys hiking and having fun. Contact [amsporuskd@gmail.com](mailto:amsporuskd@gmail.com). [F21.11]

**Male, 45**, 5' 9". Certified Medical Assistant Diploma (Ohio), working as Technical Partner/Medical Assistant at hospital in PA. Born in Mumbai (family in Mahim, Mumbai), came to USA as student. Divorced, with 2 grown children. Enjoys reading, music, travel. Contact [xkirani@gmail.com](mailto:xkirani@gmail.com). [M21.13]

**Male, 33**, 6'. B.E. Mechanical Engineering and MBA (Pune), working as Senior Analyst in Pune.

Divorced. Open to moving, especially to Canada. Contact [bandyaviraf@gmail.com](mailto:bandyaviraf@gmail.com). [M20.15]

**Female, 25**, 5'. M.Com, worked as Business Executive in Rural Solutions (CSR dept) with Shapoorji Pallonji Group, Mumbai. Enjoys traveling, cooking, reading. [parwanaz@gmail.com](mailto:parwanaz@gmail.com). [F21.17]

**Female, 33**, 5' 3", BA (Mumbai University), self-employed in food business, family settled in Dubai. Good natured and caring, open to moving. Contact [wadihira@gmail.com](mailto:wadihira@gmail.com). [F21.19]

**Female, 27**, 5' 3", Chartered accountant from ICAEW (Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales), MSc Accounting and Finance (University of Warwick). Working as Assistant Manager at Deloitte, London. Interests: meeting people, traveling, music, reading and a new found interest in trying out new recipes. Interested in meeting educated Parsi boy settled in the US, Canada or Europe. Contact [faridastata@gmail.com](mailto:faridastata@gmail.com). [F21.23]

**Female, 53**, qualified in Film Production Management and Export Management, working in India. Creative, artistic personality, fantastic chef for Parsi and Indian cuisine, home-loving and pleasant, good photographer and a blogger. Willing to relocate. Contact +91 98214 12320, [jasmin.u.sp@gmail.com](mailto:jasmin.u.sp@gmail.com). [F21.26]

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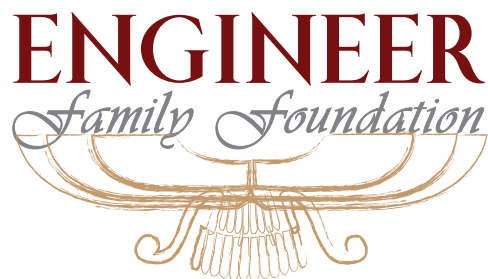
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# Between the Covers

## Zarathustra The Man and The Message

Meheryar Rivetna

Pgs 335 Self Published March 2021

Price US \$10 (plus mailing) also available on Amazon ([www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com))

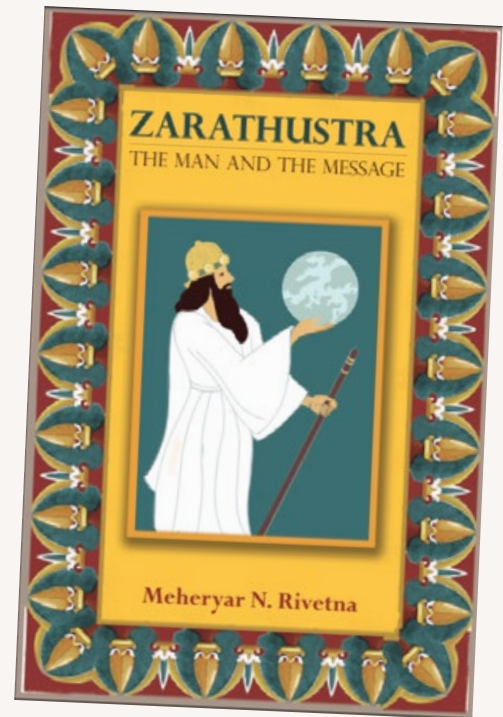
The ISBN is: 978-0-9998462-1-6

Reviewed by Nina Kalyaniwala

*Zarathustra The Man and The Message* written by Meheryar Rivetna is a great read, but it is not light reading. It has 335 pages and is divided into thirty-one chapters. The cover, an image of a Zoroastrian missionary carrying Zarathushtra's message to the world, is designed by Delzin Choksey.

The chapters cover an array of topics beginning with the historical background of the times before Zarathustra, dispelling the myths that shroud this ancient, yet still applicable religious philosophy, an explanation of the *Amesha Spentas* and their application in our daily lives, a very detailed explanation of the *Gathas* (chapters seven to twenty-seven), ending with a discussion on what the Zoroastrian philosophy is all about.

Meheryar very obviously has a profound respect for Zarathustra as a human being. He depicts Zarathustra as a thoughtful, wise, intellectual, and fearless person. For Zarathustra to take on powerful tribal chiefs, kings, and influential priests was quite a feat for that time. The book is thoroughly researched and the information portrayed is understandable, practical, and so based in fact that it is hard to argue unless one just refuses to truly hear an opinion different from one's own. Some words from the book that capture its essence: "... Zarathustra understands that truth, wisdom, and a rational mind are the tools to make the world a better place for all of humanity. A



conscientious human effort to cultivate those traits is critical to rid the world of all that is antithetical to Ahura Mazda's laws to accomplish that task. ... Zarathustra is cognizant that nature has left human beings to make a conscious choice between right and wrong. No one is born in sin. Zarathustra, therefore, asks that all human beings be engaged in educating themselves as well as others about right and wrong...."

As I read more and more on Zarathustra's life, the *Gathas*, and ancient Persian history, I marvel at the extraordinary intelligence and wisdom of one person who lived thousands of years ago in a pastoral world where people led very simple lives. Then I am given this book written by a person whose views seem to echo my thoughts. What better time than now to challenge ourselves to go back to the basics of Zarathustra's message?

*Nina Kalyaniwala is a middle school teacher living with her family in Fort Worth, Texas. Nina is a member of the Zoroastrian Association of North Texas, and teaches religious education classes to the teen group.*

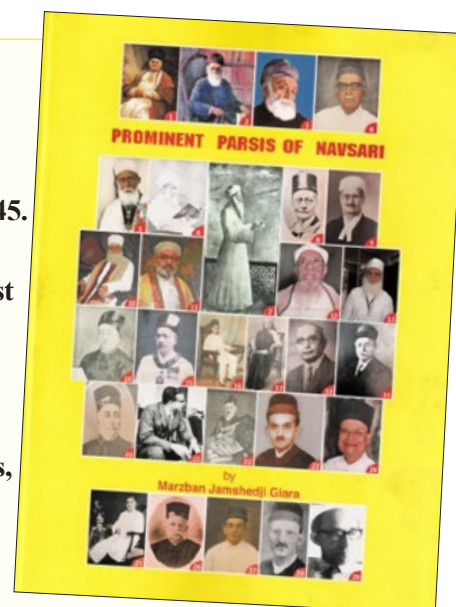
# Prominent Parsis of Navsari

A new book written by historian Marzban Giara with a forward by Dasturji Firoze Kotwal and sponsored by WZO Trusts has just been released. 500 copies are for free distribution. To obtain a copy please write to WZO Trust Funds Senior Citizens Centre, Pinjar Street, Malesar, Navsari 396445. E-mail: [scnavsari@gmail.com](mailto:scnavsari@gmail.com)

Due to postal service restrictions in India, books will be mailed only after the post office begins to accept Foreign Airmail parcels.

Navsari is considered “Dharam ni Tekdi” seat of the religion and few know that Parsi nation builders, doctors, lawyers, philanthropists, business men and scholar priests were all born in Navsari and have impacted the religious and economic development of the community in India and have through their efforts, contributed to enhancing the profile of the Parsi Zoroastrian community which aided in the critical preservation of the faith.

Mr Marzban is the author of many books on the Parsi community including Parsi Statues and Global Directory of Zoroastrian Fire Temples.



## ANAHITA: A History and Reception of the Iranian Water Goddess Paperback (2021), pages 251

[Manya Saadi-Nejad](#) (Author)

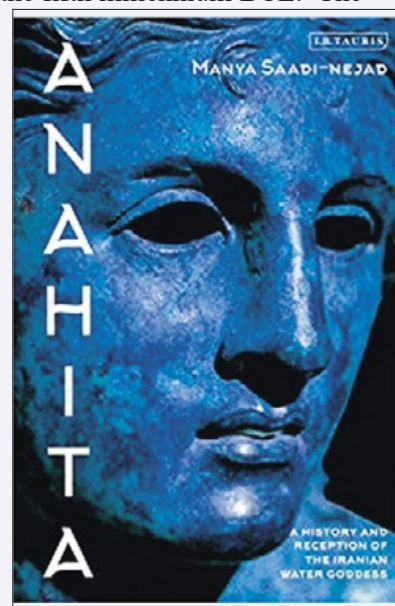
Reviewed By Davood N. Rahni Ph.D Professor of Chemistry, Pace University in New York as visiting Fulbright professor in Denmark, Oxford, Florence and Rome, adj. prof environmental science and law, and dermatology (NYMC)

I.B. Tauris/Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, New York 2021  
ISBN HB: 978-1-8386-0159-1

The book is the retro *de novo* pluralization of decades' long scholarship commenced with Professor Manya Saadi-Nejad's doctoral dissertation and proliferated since through her scholarship rather voluminously. Professor Saadi-Nejad traces the righteous path of *Anahita*: the *Persian Goddess of Waters (and Healing, Fertility and Protections)*, and as venerated in the Iranian hemisphere since at least fifth millennium BCE. What makes her scholarship impeccably distinct from her former or contemporary peers is her multi-disciplinary approach relying on a large plethora of published work in many languages and historically drawn from various cultures. In doing so, she has illuminated insights on Anahita

and her kin not only in the Iranian hemisphere since antiquity, but also throughout the Eurasian world since as far back as 30,000 years ago! Most what we have known about south-central-west Asian (i.e., the Orient) history has been grudgingly recorded by Herodotus, Xenophon and Strabo of 2500 years ago to today in the post-colonialism era by “Western” scholars in the Occident. However, native scholars from west Asia (e.g., Iran) whether they reside in their country of birth or abroad and as typified by Professor Saadi-Nejad, have ushered in a new era of probing the history of the region and its influence on human civilizations. Although one should not dare steal her show, I wish to highlight a few book passages just to demonstrate how pleasantly gratifying the reading of this book for us all is. The author traces the mythological presence of Anahita, (*Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā*) the maternal Persian Goddess of Waters, Healing, Fertility and Protection along with the other principal deity Mithra and the creator Ahura Mazda. This in fact constituted the first Triad trinity, as preceded by many duality deities. The Trinity as in Abrahamic faiths as Christianity emerged millennia thereafter. The

middle name *Sūrā* harmoniously resonate with *Sur* or *Suri* another name for *Mithra* or *Mehr*; the *SUN*. The ancient Irano-Indo-European “Aryan” peoples revered the said triad Iranian pantheon deities since the fifth millennium BCE. The



author discerns the significance of Anahita and her Goddess-ly myths, symbolisms, images, forms and contents on peoples' faiths and beliefs, daily psyches and life rituals and afterlife surmise through Eurasia-in particular on the Iranian Plateau. Manya eloquently describes

the perception of Anahita by diverse peoples as she traces Anahita's possible emergence from a precursor figurine (*i.e.*, a pregnant "[Venus of Willendorf](#)" found in today's southern Austria from as far back as the upper Paleolithic age of 30,000 years ago). Whether or not foragers, hunters and gathers traversing to Europe from Mesopotamia or the Iranian terrains brought with them the figurine of "Venus" as a protector to today's Austria or that the locals sculpted it still remains a matter of intrigue and debate.

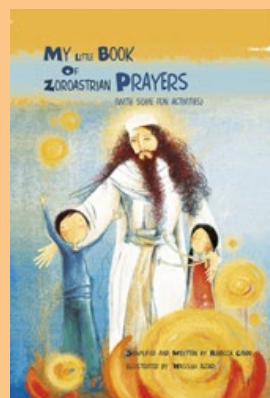
Manya illustrates similar figurines among mythological and faith references to goddesses, deities and divas excavated from the regions of the Ganges and Sindh Rivers to the east, Oxus, Jaxartes, and Araxes Rivers to the north, Tigris, Euphrates and Nile Rivers in the west, and Karun and Karkheh Rivers and the Persian Gulf to the south. In fact, these same riverbanks constitute the greater Iranian plateau on which the indigenous peoples energetically existed for as long as 100,000 years. There are, similar to Anahita, other Goddesses of Water from the Celts and Scandinavians as well. It is not, henceforth, surprising that most historians referred to the Iranian plateau as the Cradle of Human Civilization, as it in particular led to agricultures as well as domestication of plants and animals. Over time, goddesses-above all Anahita and Mitra-were perceived to have dual gender or have a male complementary or competitor god. These deities aligned with

the interacting four fundamental elements of water, air, earth and fire/sun to sustain life; sustainability of life and mother earth still today remains anchored on sustaining the healthy balance among this quad of elements.

Although goddesses were absorbed into Zoroastrianism as cited in Avesta's *Aban Yast*, nonetheless, Anahita's stature was relegated to back stage amid the rise of the Sassanid Empire. It was at this time that Zoroastrianism became the official state religion, the priestly male dominated Mobadon/Magi ascended to that of royal stature and thus perceived as the "shadows" to God. With the involuntary and horrific advent of Islam in Iran in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, the nostalgic populace preserved thousands of Mithraism and Anahita temples by disguising them as Islamic *Emamzadeh*-shrines and mausoleums of Fatima's descendants. That notwithstanding, all celestial objects, above all, sun (gold), moon (silver) and earth remained have retained their female gender in Persian languages and vernaculars. Even the Persian name for god, *Khoda* meaning the ultimate self-actuation, is at least gender blind too. Perpetual quest for finding or making philosopher's stone and, or elixir to drink from a fountain of youth becoming eternal-which had laid the foundation for alchemy, and scientific and technological breakthroughs-still remains most relevant today. Iranians forced to adopt Islam be it a Shiite version it,

have retained many of their historic Zoroastrian cultural rituals such as celebrating seasonal changes as Nowruz, Tirgan, Mehgan and Deygan, as well as many water and fire ceremonies. Absolution or baptism in water is rooted in the belief to Anahita. A recent [BBC report](#) on "Wonder Woman" movies traces them to heroic Persian women warriors of over 2000 years ago. Finally, the traces and metamorphism of the Persian Goddesses as Anahita through Zoroastrianism has also diffused through the three Abrahamic religions as well.

The tactful integration of archeological findings, historical accounts, mythological beliefs, religious rituals and scriptures as in Gathas and Yasnas but also in Vedas, linguistic and etymological traces, royalties, commoner's perceptions, folkloric and artistic expressions toward shedding much light on Anahita and her other Persian gods and Goddesses peers, is startlingly remarkable. More research on the Zodiacal 12 divine deities is in order: Hence, the book Anahita merits reading by all enthusiast and experts including those with cultural heritage in the region of south-west-central Asia, as well as others intrigued by this region and her diverse peoples. In Particular, this book should expand the prospects for scholars and researchers working on the origin of humans in the northern hemisphere, with emphasis on the historical and contemporary contributions to human civilizations by those from China and India, through Iran, to Egypt of the past 50,000 years.



This is a first colorful Zoroastrian prayer book designed specifically for children containing more than 40 simple prayers chosen from the Avesta.

The second part of the book contains more than 30 questions on God, prayers and different Zoroastrian concepts followed by simple answers.

Price \$14.95 pages 74 Illustrated by Nassim Azadi

ISBN 9780615374598

Publisher Asha Publications, Los Gatos, CA (January 2011),

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# 12TH WORLD ZOROASTRIAN CONGRESS

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The 12th World Zoroastrian Congress provides a tremendous opportunity for Zarathushtis from all over the world to come together to collaborate and engage in an exchange of ideas, inspire the next generation, and create a sense of pride that will further the wellbeing of our community, its identity, aspirations and future.

Organizing an event of this scale requires substantial funding and we invite you, our philanthropic members and businesses, to support the WZC through sponsorship and advertising. WZC Sponsorship levels are detailed below.

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*Project Launch: Monday, 2nd August, 2021*

Led by SOAS, University of London



[www.genzandbeyond.com](http://www.genzandbeyond.com)

*What constitutes a Zoroastrian identity and creates a sense of belonging?*

*What are the views of Zoroastrians across the world on important community issues?*

*How do beliefs and practices compare across different regions and generations?*

Gen Z and Beyond will provide up-to-date, accurate and authoritative data to help answer these questions.

The project, based at SOAS, University of London, will be led by Dr Sarah Stewart, Shapoorji Pallonji Lecturer in Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrians around the world will be invited to participate in an online questionnaire. All responses will be completely anonymous, with questions designed to avoid personal identifiers.

**More information on participation and eligibility, data collection and protection, and research outcomes and benefits can be found at:**

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