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BRIDGING THE GLOBAL ZARATHUSHTI EXISTENCE

PUBLICATION OF THE FEDERATION OF ZOROASTRIAN ASSOCIATIONS OF NORTH AMERICA

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WINTER 2022

MAZDAYASNI FESTIVALS GUEST EDITOR: FARIBORZ RAHNAMOOON

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July 1 2022 will forever be etched in our collective memory as the World Zoroastrian Congress came back to North America after 22 years. It will be remembered by the 1200 people who attended the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress, braving the looming presence of COVID. For those who could not, attend we have tried to capture the essence and the significance of the congress in the pages of this journal to the best of our ability. The procession of mobeds and mobedyars male and female inaugurating the congress with the recitation of the Atash Niyash in unison, the parade of flags from representative of 16 countries was a sight, never before seen. Remarkable indeed!!.

All Congresses since 1960 and we now have 12 of them, have tried to discuss same issues facing the community, barely scratching the surface, not trying to dive deep into the causes to try find solutions. So what was different in this congress.? The co-chairs Astad Clubwala and Arzan Sam Wadia together with their Program committee Co-chairs Aban Rustomji and Keki Dadachandji, posed the questions which have been troubling the community but never openly expressed. The question of Zoroastrian identity of men and women of diverse upbringing with either two, or one or no Zoroastrian parents, or having partners of different faiths and their acceptance into the community, has been of a significant concern. They found speakers of diverse upbringing who reflected this reality and who were willing to talk in front of an audience of 1000+ people about their experiences. The growing presence of people in our ancestral lands wanting and are in fact reclaiming their heritage was discussed.

The global mobeds had a platform with Ervad Dr Arda Viraf, past president of the North American Mobed Council as moderator

and our Vada Dasturji Khurshed Dastoor on the panel with others from Australia, England and India. The role and position of women in Zoroastrian civil society and religious arena was also very openly discussed. The speech of the Keynote speaker Justice Nariman reflected that. The youth took centre stage with 300+ strong, expressing their concerns and their achievements. The LGBTQ reality was very tastefully interwoven in the program, in the diversity awards and in the fashion show.

For the first time there were two parallel congresses, figuratively, one for adults and another very successful set of sessions, organized for children between the ages of 5-16 years whose parents were attending the congress. It was conceived organized and executed by Vehista Kaikobad and Tashan Mistree Byramji together with their very able volunteers, giving the children an opportunity to meet other children in their age group and to learn about the religion and traditions in a fun way. The responses from the children were very positive.

The keynote speaker Justice Nariman and the distinguished speaker Lord Bilimoria were of very high calibre, articulate, with a depth of wisdom. A real treat for the audience to listen to them.

But it was not all serious stuff. There were home grown musicians, a fabulous Zoroastrian orchestra and singers. There is no dearth of talent in the international community. The spectacular performance by 45 ZAGNY members of the story of creation was a sight to remember, the costumes, the music, the script were all very professionally done. It must have taken hours to train the performers of all ages to produce such a magnificent show. And not to forget the trendy fashion show produced by our



very own Ashdin Lilouwalla. The clothes were lovely so were our own 60 models, who paraded like professionals!! The quick turn around of gorgeous outfits was mind boggling. The hotel provided delicious meals and even catered to the Zoroastrian palate under the supervision of Chef Jehangir Mehta.

Over the 4 days there were 45 sessions with 125 speakers, panelists, moderators, we have tried to capture the presentations of as many as we can, the whole congress was recorded which will be up on FEZANA You Tube Channel.

The FEZANA Journal thanks all the behind the scenes volunteers and the organizers who made this congress happen without missing a beat, and even if there were mishaps nobody was any the wiser!.

May you enjoy reading this issue as much as we enjoyed attending in person.

Dolly Dastoor

PRE-CONGRESS RECEPTION AT DAR-E-MEHR, THE MAJESTIC SAFE SECOND HOME OF ZAGNY June 30, 2022 KHURSHEED PHIROZE NAVDER, President ZAGNY

A pre-Congress Reception was held at the New York Arbab Rustam Guiv Dar-E-Mehr (DM) prior to the start of the World Zoroastrian Congress (WZC) on Thurs., June 30th to honor and thank the dignitaries, donors and speakers. Arrangements had been made for five buses to bring in guests from the NYC midtown Hilton. Even the NYC rush hour traffic that doubled the travel time to an hour and a half did not dampen the excitement and anticipation of our guests who were looking forward to seeing the beautiful DM they had heard so much about. They were awestruck at the first site of the magnificent gleaming building, with the distinct Persian style façade and Zoroastrian ambiance. The beautiful flower *torans* adorning the main doors and the colorful *chowk* decorations on the doorsteps greeted our guests reminding them of the Indian influences on our culture, as they entered the impressive colonnaded portico of the building.

Once inside the beautiful foyer, some guests headed into the prayer hall to attend the Atash-Niyaesh prayer, while others entered the main hall to enjoy drinks and appetizers, and still others stopped by the Persepolis Bas Relief stone mural and other prominent areas to take a picture or two.



ZAGNY President Khursheed Navder, and First Gentleman, Shailendra Dusaj

Below ZAGNY volunteers at the prominent Persepolis Bas Relief stone mural in the foyer as they wait for busloads of guests to arrive. L to R: Jasely Dukandar, Dilnaz Shroff, Gulcher Khambatta, Nina Mistry, Soonoo Aria, Khursheed Navder, Meherzeen Daruwala, Smita Antia, Dilnaz Nalladaru, Ferzin Patel, Percis Bansal.



In her welcome address, the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York (ZAGNY) President, Khursheed Navder welcomed guests stating that as co-hosts (along with FEZANA) of this 12th WZC, it was only fitting to hold this special event here at our DM, providing our out of town guests the opportunity to visit our beautiful second home. She thanked Edul Daver, for working tirelessly to raise funds for this new building to help make their collective dream a reality. Taking guests for a quick walk down memory lane, she asked them to make sure to stop by the photograph of Arbab Rustam Guiv and his wife Morvarid Guiv, that has a prominent place in the majestic foyer. She mentioned that ZAGNY was first recipient of Arbab's benefaction, and that generous financial assistance had allowed

Zoroastrian faith and in our legacy to our children.

Khursheed mentioned that amidst all the pandemic uncertainties, it was only about 15 months ago, at the 2021 Jamshedi Navroze, when the Executive Committee decided to finally take the plunge to move ahead with the WZC. They kicked off the planning with a virtual *Jashan* on this auspicious day and had prayer offerings from all across the world over Zoom, to seek Ahura Mazda's blessings for a safe and successful Congress. Before introducing the two co-hosts of the WZC, Astad Clubwala and Arzan Sam Wadia, she thanked Dinyar Wadia, the award-winning architect who had designed this beautiful building and his wife Gool for sponsoring this pre-Congress event.

Below Guests catching up with friends in the main hall of the DM



us to have the very *first* DM in North America. She spoke of Arbab's opening ceremony speech on December 3, 1977 when he had beckoned members to ***"...be united... broad minded and welcome new comers who desire to know, study and follow Zoroastrianism. Our prophet did not ever put any restrictions on anyone who willingly wanted to follow his principles..."***

Her pride could not be contained when she mentioned that "the amazing ZAGNY community, vibrant and rich in its diversity of thought, has done just what Arbab challenged us to do 45 years ago, and we are proud of being a welcoming, and inclusive association." She spoke of the DM not just being a place where "we dress up, gather for functions, eat and make merry, but *living* the principles of the religion is what we are all about." She added that this DM is our safe second home where we agree to disagree respectfully, connected by the common belief and pride in our

She extended her gratitude to her fellow ZAGNY and DMZT Board members for all their dedicated efforts toward the planning of the WZC and gave a big shout out to the Parsi caterer, Mehernosh Daroowalla, for the delicious appetizers and Parsi *bhonu* that was to follow.

A group picture was taken by a drone (courtesy Arzan Sam Wadia). Guests were given a tour of the building, mingled and caught up with friends over dinner and by 8:30 started their way back to the hotel on buses to make sure they were rested and ready for the early morning opening session and the 3.5 day Congress.

INVOCATION BY VADA DASTURJI KHURSHED DASTOOR



DEAR HUMDINS

We have gathered here today because of His Mercy and His Love.

Let us not take His blessings for granted.

I wish you strength, courage, patience, and good health to all who have become direct and indirect victims of the pandemic.

Be guided by Vohu Mano to spread righteousness, merit, and harmony and smite evil so that sins may be eradicated.

Dasturji Khurshed Dastoor is the High Priest of Pak Iranshah at Udvida since 2002.

A dedicated proponent of World Peace. .



Mobeds and mobedyars male and female praying the Atash Niyash in unison
Parade of flags of 16 nations present



A CONGRESS NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN

THE 12TH WORLD ZOROASTRIAN CONGRESS 2022, NEW YORK

Arzan Sam Wadia . Congress Co-Chair, President FEZANA

It's nearly three months since the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress ended in New York, and I would be lying if I said that it has not been a serious case of withdrawal symptoms. WZC2022 and all the planning leading up to it had become a part of my life for over three years. It had what kept me busy through the pandemic, and over the last 8 months it became my life, much to the disappointment of family and friends. However I was not the only one. Our core group of over forty co-chairs of committees and committee members made the Congress their priority, over work, family and personal lives, and that to me was one of the most rewarding feelings. The seed for hosting a World Congress began with a conversation at the 2014 NAZC in Los Angeles. And when bids opened up ZAGNY and FEZANA pitched to the Global Working Group and we won the bid to host. In hindsight, that turned out to be one of the easiest tasks. Once we all returned from the 11th World Congress in Perth, the real work began. We did a large survey of venues, visiting a half dozen places and finally locked down on the one Hotel with the largest ballroom in New York city. The contract was signed in December 2019, when no one besides scientists had heard the word COVID.

As the pandemic unfolded and the world was sucked into a once-in-a-century event, we carefully began preparation and planning for the event. Committee Co-Chairs were onboarded, committee members joined and systems and protocols were put in place to give the participants the best experience of their lives. The vagaries of COVID continued to affect us. Every variant and its aftermath made us course correct, sometimes pause, and a couple of time nearly pull the "Abort Mission" cord. But wiser counsel and our collective prayers being answered by Ahura Mazda kept us on course. And on July 1, 2022, we opened to a full house and welcomed 1200 people to New York City. North America has the singular advantage in the Zoroastrian world of having hosted over 20 Congresses, and planning this Congress allowed us to bring that

collective knowledge to the fore. ZAGNY, my home association and one of the founding members of FEZANA had the experience of having hosted three North America Congresses. And luckily, those in leadership at those past events stepped up to advise and lead this time around too. The collective strength of FEZANA and its 27 member associations and small groups helped add organizational expertise like never before.



The pandemic made us learn new ways to communicate. Zoom meetings became the norm, and except for the entertainment practices, mostly everything else was planned virtually till people met at the hotel a day before to set up registration desk. This is where the power of community came through.

The last decade and more has been probably the most active decade for ZAGNY. From having hosted the 16th NAZC in 2012, followed by a huge 4 year push to fundraise, build and open its new Dar-E-Mehr in 2016, and then the planning for the Congress that started as early as 2017, has allowed for a large pool of volunteers to be cultivated. Community members worked to their strengths, whether it was in logistics, hospitality, program, entertainment or a myriad of tasks that needed help. And this time around we could leverage the reach of FEZANA and get passionate folks from all over North America to take leadership positions. The power of Zoom made it all possible.

Personally I had the amazing chance to work with my mentors, peers and young adults on nearly a daily basis over the last two years, and that is a priceless takeaway for me.

As Co-Chairs, Astad Clubwala and I had many common areas which we wanted addressed at this Congress.

The focus areas were current and contemporary issues facing the Zoroastrian community worldwide, a focus on youth and young adults with a thrust on empowering them for leadership and bringing in all members of the community to truly make it inclusive in all respects.

In any event of this size, there are two areas that have oversize impact. Fundraising is the first one and program is the second one.

Fundraising was a huge hurdle as we were competing with more valid and urgent needs of the pandemic.

However we had probably the best and most experienced leadership in fundraising who pulled out all stops to make this a financially positive Congress. That they could reach out to sponsors all over the world and get them to believe in what the Congress stood for, says a lot about the amazing Zarathushti community worldwide.

We also knew that once we got people to show up, we have to deliver programs both in the formal part of the day events and in the entertainment every evening to make it worth their while. And our Program and Entertainment leadership cast the net far and wide. The Congress had over 120 speakers and panelists from all over the world. And the multiple entertainment shows over the three days had over 150 people aged 5 years to 85 years from all over the world wowing the audience with music, song, dance, and fashion. Our community is blessed with amazing professionals who gave freely of their time and talent to perform and teach the large amateur force of performers who put on the

performances of their lives.

Logistics, hospitality, pre and post Congress events, IT and Web, Kids Program and the Visual Exhibition all put their best steps forwarded and the resultant symphony of effort was a sight to behold.

A year before the Congress we were seriously considering calling it off. By the grace of Ahura Mazda we didn't go down that path. And we all came out the better for it.

The Congress taught us many things as organizers. We realized that the time to bask in our past glory was long gone. We had to address some tough new circumstances, meet them head on, and do the right thing. Sometimes that meant doing the hard things that would disappoint someone or the other. But collectively we all did what was best for our faith and community, and the comments from the attendees attested to the fact.

To pull off an event of this magnitude with a complete volunteer force was always going to be a huge task. To do it at the tail end of a pandemic was short of a miracle. My personal gratitude to everyone who played a part in making the Congress a success. To all of our supporters and sponsors, we could not be more thankful for their unstinting support that made the Congress financially viable. And to the attendees who showed up in droves, we are ever grateful, because without your presence we would had no Congress.

It would not be wrong to say that the Congress has been one of the biggest endeavors I've been involved with in my life. The lifelong friendships I've made will be something I cherish. The issues that were raised and addressed at the Congress becomes the next course of action for me to continue forward over the next two years at FEZANA.

In conclusion, having my family and loved ones from India be present at the Congress was deeply satisfying. To see my niece Ava walk up on stage waving the Indian flag, and then announcing that she had such an amazing time and can't wait for 13th WZC in Singapore in 2026 made it all worthwhile. All the countless hours, hundreds of zoom calls, and sleepless nights all were worth it, as everything we all do is to leave a legacy for the next generation to take on and grow it and make it their own when their time comes. I think the Congress succeeded in doing that. And we could not have asked for more.

Arzan Sam Wadia
President, FEZANA and Co-Chair, 12WZC2022

WHAT IT TAKES TO RUN A WORLD ZOROASTRIAN CONGRESS

-Of This Magnitude

ASTAD J CLUBWALA
Co-chair WZC2022



“The World Congress in New York was a big success and participants had a great time. Arzan and Astad and team deserve our heartiest congratulations on the execution and smooth running of every aspect” - *Dorab Mistry.*

“It was the best ever and I don’t think there will be another like it” - *Zerbanoo Gifford.*

“Congratulations to you and your team for a fabulous Congress. Attendees around the world can’t just stop raving about it! Great Job!” – *Yazdi Tantra.*

“It was so good to hear, unprompted, from so many people, praising the arrangements that you had made for the Congress – thank you for all the hard work and effort you have all put in over such a long time to enable this.” – *Lord Karan Bilimoria.*

“The presence of almost 400 youth is a testament to the congress being relevant and focusing on our future generation” – *Rumi Sethna.*

Successful, awe inspiring, beautiful, inspirational, thought provoking, entertaining, seamless, flawless, educational, spectacular, enlightening, fun, - *And the complements kept pouring in.*

So, what does it take to conceive of and run a World Zoroastrian Congress?

Starts with giving thought to the Main Objective. What do we want to achieve? What do we want the participants to take away? And accordingly develop the Theme of the Congress.

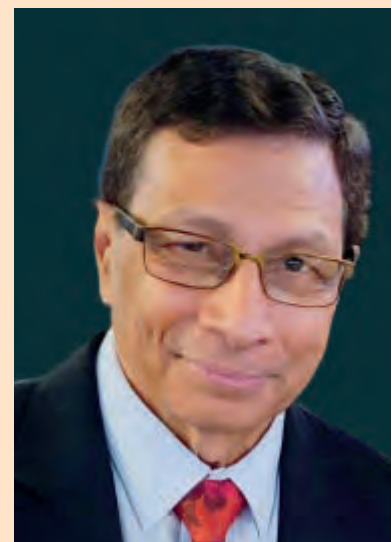
We considered our status as a community.

The Zoroastrian population in India, Iran and Pakistan has been steadily declining and this trend is unlikely to change. The population in the diaspora is gradually increasing. However, our third generation is now being born and the percentages of mixed marriages will keep increasing. We have no choice but to face this reality.

Astad J. Clubwala born in Karachi, Pakistan and grew up in Mumbai and Chennai, India. Since 1975 he has lived with his family in the New York / New Jersey area. Actively involved in Zoroastrian community affairs, he served as the President of the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York (ZAGNY) from 1990 to 1994 and from 2014 to 2020. and on the Board of Trustees of the Arbab Rustom Guiv Dar-e-Mehr Zoroastrian Temple (DMZT) from 1993 to 1995 and from 2006 to 2012.

During his tenure as President and Trustee he led the five year effort, against a legal challenge, to successfully retain ownership of the Dar-e-Mehr property for the community. He helped in drafting the new Constitution and By-laws of DMZT, to be in accordance with the Religious Corporation Law of New York.

Professionally, Astad is President of his own company, Hudson Ethics 2 LLC, which provides consultancy services to Ethics Offices of a number of UN Agencies.



We asked our young adults.

At the Perth congress, four years earlier, we gathered a group of about ten young adults and asked why the youth representation at congresses is so poor.

- There is nothing in it for us.
- All we hear about is the constant bickering.
- The same tired topics are discussed at every congress. Topics of concern to our generation are never on the program.

With this background we decided that our Congress would be dramatically different from previous Congresses. – A sea change if you will! As a result, we gravitated to our theme, “Bridging the Global Zarathushti Existence.”

Goals:

Age: We would strive to achieve a major shift in the average age of attendees. Our admittedly overly ambitious goal was that at least 50% of attendees, as well as speakers and panelists would be young adults (Age 35 and below). Well, we achieved 33% - not a bad beginning!

Gender Equality: An equal balance of men and women on our committees. Or should I say women and men!

Inclusive Content: To move away from the repetitive, expected topics of past congresses and create a dynamic, varied thought provoking program that would resonate with the younger generation, and not hesitate to discuss previously considered controversial subjects.

Key Components: (There are so many – only major ones are highlighted below)

Programing: Absolutely without doubt, the success of any congress depends largely on the program content. We were fortunate in having the very best as our Program Co-chairs. Keki Dadachanji and Aban Rustomji who put together an extraordinary and efficient committee consisting of a balance in ages, genders, and makeup of Iranians/Parsis. Our congress over four days had 45 different sessions and events with about 125 speakers and panelists. The mammoth task of brainstorming topics/issues, identifying and inviting speakers, panelists, moderators, coordinating, following up, scheduling, monitoring, cajoling, satisfying bruised egos, managing last-minute changes due to travel restrictions and illness (covid), unavoidable scheduling changes, falls to this team. The experience of the leaders and the harmony, enthusiasm, dedication, and time availability of this team is essential.

Program Content:

As mentioned earlier we set out for a sea change. The idea was, not to advocate a particular stance or position, but to present an unbiased status of Zoroastrianism as it exists today. Here are just a few examples of sessions you would not have seen at earlier congresses:

- Identity, Belonging and Community in Zoroastrianism. Included panelists who shared their personal experiences as members of interfaith Zoroastrian families, including one who is a Zoroastrian by choice.
- The Era of Divine Awakening: Hear from our Female Mobedyars.
- One Zarathushtra, Many Zarathushtis: Iraqi Kurds Reclaim their Heritage.
- Our youth/young adults were given the opportunity of conceptualizing, planning, and executing their own sessions on each of the days of the congress without any input from the others. It was heartening to see four hundred of them in attendance.
- For the first time, the World Zarathushti Community Awards included the Diversity Award which seeks to recognize leaders driving towards improving racial and gender inclusion, equity, and diversity.

As appreciated by Rumi Sethna, Chairperson, The World Zoroastrian Organisation, “It is also gratifying to learn that the broad theme of inclusivity and acceptance of diverse groups of Zoroastrians was so wholeheartedly embraced by the vast majority of those attending the meetings.” “We thank you for giving all groups an opportunity to share their side of the truth, their stories and creating a platform to constructively discuss what would be deemed as controversial topics.”

Finance: What makes the congress host most nervous is the possibility of a monetary loss. It needs a Finance Committee with the ability to collaborate with all other committees to set up a reliable budget, monitor expenses, negotiate contracts with the hotel/venue, audio-visual teams etc., and most importantly calculate the fund raising amount to break even. ZAGNY, having held three North American Zoroastrian Congresses, was fortunate in experienced Co-chairs Gev Nentin and Nina Mistry with Kerman Dukandar as Treasurer, heading this important team.

Fund Raising: Every Congress needs a strong fund raising team since registration fees alone will never cover the costs of running a three to four day congress. In our case the challenge was greater since holding the Congress in the center of Manhattan would ensure that it would probably be the most expensive Congress so far. Registration fees must be kept reasonable if we want to attract a large audience. We have been lucky to have with us our Fund Raising guru Edul Daver. Edul was instrumental in fund raising for our new Dar-e-Mehr and he surpassed himself by exceeding our goals, especially through the difficult Covid times.

Logistics and Operations: Over 1200 registrants, in the

center of Manhattan! Who wants to tackle this? Again, we went to the well and our experienced Co-Chairs once again stepped into the breach, Ferzin Patel, Piroja Press and Pam Shroff. They managed it all. Registration forms, answering zillions of questions from Covid issues, visa problems, travel concerns, cancellations, refunds, each one answered with politeness and grace. Continuous dealing with the hotel, monitoring hotel room blocks, handling reservation problems, seating arrangements for the Gala Night and Awards Luncheon, the list is endless. Here you need a dedicated team, willing to spend endless hours, tackling a myriad of issues and remaining unruffled through it all.

Catering: With us Zoroastrians, food is obviously a vital component. To help us we had our Iron Chef runner-up, Jehangir Mehta who worked with the hotel catering management in finalizing all the menus. Here it is important that the selected venue is willing to be flexible in their policies. Many hotels will allow you to bring in an outside caterer, however, will charge and exorbitant labor fee which makes it unviable. As a work around, the Hilton allowed Jehangir to provide menus and to advise their staff. This enabled us to serve an authentic menu for our sit down luncheon for 1200 people at the Awards Event consisting of Chicken curry and rice, papad, and even Parsi custard!

Entertainment: Entertainment needs to be relevant, exceptional, and different - lending to the theme of the Congress and as far as possible bring in Zoroastrian talent from around the world. In working with and managing a cast of 45 for the "Story of Creation as told in the Bundahishn", and about 60 models for Ashdeen's fashion show, "One World - One People" Behroze Clubwala was unbelievably focused, tireless, persistent, and needed to use all her management and persuasive skills in coordinating countless issues. Of course, the ZAGNY community stepped up, incredibly outdid themselves and made us believe! Kudos to Shahnaz Shroff, Ashdeen, Piroozi Cooper-Wittlin, Khursheed Navdar and Mahrukh Motafram.

Promotion and Public Relations: You can plan a fabulous congress, but it is crucial to have a well planned campaign to get the word out, or as we would say in New York, "Start spreading the news". Our Arzan Wadia, Co-Chair of the Congress did a masterful job of sending out superbly designed, eye catching announcements periodically over 12 months prior to the congress which contributed greatly to generating interest and increasing registrations.

Legacy Projects: Legacy projects are creative endeavors with the intention to leave something meaningful to those who come after us. It is essential that each congress strive to conceive and achieve this. Ours is Zoroastrian Footprints Worldwide, a multi-lingual, global system that will collect, preserve, organize, and

share all things Zoroastrian from all available sources to provide a rich resource for the community and ensure that this information is available for posterity.

Another extremely worthwhile endeavor that should become the norm at every congress is Zoroastrian Youth Across Borders which finances 25 young adults from around the world, who normally would not have been able to attend the congress. This program recognizes the unique ways that our youth build bridges between regions and make lifetime connections within our communities.

Other Intangibles.

Sense of humor. With so many committees, non-stop meetings, various personalities, a million ideas and opinions, a well-timed joke, at times "kohila," creates a temporary burst of laughter which goes a long way to dissipate tension and regenerate camaraderie.

Don't sweat the small stuff. An event of this magnitude will have its difficulties, and it is normal to feel that some items are not progressing according to the "perfect" vision you might have in mind - don't let it bother you. Concentrate on the big items and don't sweat the small stuff. It is amazing how the trivial things have a way of working out in the end.

The audience does not know you messed up. We as organizers are aware of every nitty gritty detail of each session and at times minor things may not go exactly as planned. Do not worry about it at all. You know something went wrong - but the audience does not! As mentioned by Nazneen Spliedt, "Even though you may have felt the programs were 'running late', the audience did not get that impression."

You will never please everybody - don't even try. Various issues of all kinds will crop up from time to time. You need to judiciously decide when to compromise and bend; when to cajole; when to stand firm; and when to just say "no."

The time for new ideas is over. When you have such a large team of eager, motivated, volunteers, all contributing their best, new ideas on what has already been planned and decided, keep cropping up. You must set up a cut-off-date when you establish that the time for new ideas is over.

In the end, all that matters is that you did your best and that people had fun! Yes, we certainly know how to do that!

Astad J. Clubwala
Co-Chair, 12th World Zoroastrian Congress, New York

12th World Zoroastrian Congress From Vision to Realization

Keki Dadachanji Ph.D

This umbrella article gives a panoramic view of the vision that motivated the program for the 12th Zoroastrian Congress, and how that program was realized. Details on individual sessions can be found in articles elsewhere in this Journal.

1 The Theme

Zarathushtra conceived of an ideal world in which all creations of the Wise Lord, Mazdā Ahurā, live in perfect harmony. We have drifted away from that vision. We live in a divided world. We live in divided countries; we live in divided communities. In this atmosphere, many people, especially the young, believe that religion has become irrelevant. Some believe that Zoroastrianism is slowly disappearing. We do not believe that. We believe that the monumental problems facing humanity call for a spiritual renaissance, and that religion can, and must, restore the perspective of people. We believe that Zoroastrianism is more vibrant than ever, and that the strength of a religion is measured not by numbers but by the spirit of its followers.

It is with this optimism that we chose the theme of this Congress:

“Bridging the Global Zarathushti Existence”. The program of this Congress is woven around this theme.

To make this happen, we needed a creative and enthusiastic team.

Potential members were suggested by various people. We interviewed a number of them, sharing our vision, and asking them to share their thoughts on that vision, suggest improvements, and ask questions. Often the most promising candidates were hesitant because they did not have time. We had to cajole them by pointing out the exposure and learning experience this role would bring. After many weeks of searching, we assembled a great team.

Diversity inevitably leads to friction. However, by patiently working through those moments of conflict, we arrived at a program richer than what any of us would have been able to individually create.



The Architecture of the Program

The major building blocks of the program evolved organically from the theme of the Congress.

- Understanding and Bridging Divisions in Global Zoroastrian Community
- Reimagining Religious Education
- Vision of Young Zoroastrians
- Wisdom of Zoroastrian Scholars and Subject-Area Experts
- Zoroastrians in Sciences, Arts, Humanities and Businesses
- Enjoying delicious food and entertainment with friends old and new

The following section expands on all the program elements that relate directly or indirectly to the theme.

1. Understanding and Bridging Divisions in Global

Zoroastrian Community

- **Custodians of Zamyād: The Spirit of the Earth**

One of the divisions we need to bridge is between humans and the environment. This is a religious, moral, and existential imperative. This session presented the work done by Zoroastrians to protect the environment, and suggested future directions. To illustrate this point, the Congress pledged to make a donation to an environmental cause instead of giving gifts to individual speakers and panelists.

- **We, the Zoroastrian Women: Voices of Today, Leaders of Tomorrow**

Zarathushtra saw no difference between men and women in following his path to attain the supreme goal of life. In the session “We the Zoroastrian Women – Voices of Today, Leaders of Tomorrow”, the Congress celebrated the achievements of Zoroastrian women, and made a call for all of us to commit to treating women as equal partners in all walks of life.

- **The Era of Divine Awakening! Hear from Our Female Mobed-Yārs**

Although gender equality has been a central tenet of the religion, traditionally priestly duties have remained a male-dominated role. Over the last few years, however, this has started to change with some women choosing to pursue intensive training and religious study to become Mobed-yārs. This panel discussed spiritual journey of these remarkable female Mobed-yārs.

- **Identity, Belonging and Community in Zoroastrianism:**

This was one of the most challenging sessions to realize. Its success depended on the panel we assembled. We wanted each panelist to represent a different experience, to be reflective and articulate, and be willing to share very personal, and often traumatic, experiences with an audience of over 1000 people. It took several months to find the final 4 panelists. Once the panel was formed, we had to build trust among the panelists and the moderator. This was accomplished through several months of preparatory sessions. Even so, the actual session in the Congress had many extemporaneous moments. This was a unique experiment that in the end achieved its purpose.

- **Zoroastrians across the Globe: Established and Emerging Regions**

“One Zarathushtra, Many Zarathushtis: Iraqi Kurds Reclaim Their Heritage” explored the resurgence of the Zoroastrian movement in Iraqi Kurdistan. Matthew Travis Barber, an American researcher studying the religious minorities in the region, and Faiza Foad, an activist from the region, discussed the on-the-ground realities and challenges of this movement in the region.

- **The Global Working Group (GWG) shared their mission, guidelines, and progress with the audience.** (page 103)

- **Making the Impossible Possible: Enhancing the Global Zoroastrian Experience through Entrepreneurship** (page 105)

- **Global Mobed Community: Serving Zoroastrians Worldwide** (page 78)

2. **Reimagining Religious Education** (page 70)

3. **Vision of Young Zoroastrians** (page 93)

An extraordinary feature of the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress was the sheer size and engagement of the youth. Well over 300 young Zoroastrians attended the Congress and actively participated in various sessions, asking questions and challenging paradigms.

Young Zoroastrians had dedicated sessions each of the three days, culminating in “**Leaders Asking Leaders**” (Q&A with youth leaders from around the globe) in the main ballroom on the 3rd day. Anyone who came to this Congress with anxieties about the future of Zoroastrianism was reassured that the future of Zoroastrianism is secure in the hands of these enthusiastic, committed and thoughtful young Zoroastrians.

4. **Wisdom of the Scholars and Subject Area Experts**

Congresses offer a unique opportunity to hear from, and interact with, brilliant scholars. There were Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman, Lord Karan Bilimoria, Yuhana Vevaina, Jamsheed Choksy, Mahzarin Banaji, and Sarah Stewart. They were very generous in sharing their time with members of the audience throughout the Congress.

- (a) **The Keynote Lecture: Ervad Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman**

Gender Equality: The Rights of Parsi Women after the Advent of the Constitution of India

(b) Lord Karan Bilimoria: *Leading through Crisis the Zoroastrian Way*

In addition to delivering this inspiring lecture, Lord Bilimoria participated in *the session* “Making the Impossible Possible: Enhancing the Global Zoroastrian Experience through Entrepreneurship.”

(c) Khorshed F. Jungalwala Memorial Lecture
A Conversation with Dr. Jamsheed Choksy and Dr. Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina

(d) Dr. Mahzarin Banaji: *Blind Spot: Hidden Biases of Good People*

The theme of the Congress relates to divisions in the community, and divisions arise from beliefs and biases. We are often not even aware of the biases we have. Dr. Mahzarin Banaji is a foremost authority on the subject of such “implicit bias.”

(e) Dr. Sarah Stewart: *Zoroastrian Voices from Iran*

Dr. Sarah Stewart has conducted many interviews in Iran over the years, and has published her findings in her magnum opus “Voices from Zoroastrian Iran: Oral Texts,”

Other sessions which were held in other rooms and not in the ball room are not mentioned in this overview but are all included in this special issue of the Fezana Journal.



What is the purpose of a World Zoroastrian Congress, and what does it leave behind that will endure? We would like to close this short summary with reflections on these questions.

What brings people to a Congress is the opportunity to connect or reconnect with people, and have a good time. In informal conversations with people we were told, “Don’t make it too serious. People come to a Congress to have fun.” We agree that connecting, networking, and entertainment are important. However, we question the premise that people coming to a Congress are not ready for serious discourse. The overwhelming approval expressed in a flood of unsolicited emails after the Congress validated our confidence that our audience is ready for serious discourse at these Congresses. This is

a good reassurance for future Congresses to continue exploring difficult issues.

We also heard that these Congresses are discrete and unconnected events, and very little happens in-between. There are few follow-ups. We would like to see this corrected. With that intention, we suggest some areas where progress could be made between this Congress and the next.

- (a) There needs to be an ongoing dialogue between the Mobeds leadership (e.g., NAMC in North America) and laity to understand mutual perspectives and make steady progress. FEZANA (and similar organizations in other regions) could facilitate to make this happen.
- (b) While some people had reservations about the idea of the “Our Beliefs” survey, a significant majority thought it was a great initiative to understand where the community stands, and many provided detailed comments. The survey was limited to the registered attendees of the Congress. We received many requests to broaden it to a wider base. FEZANA and comparable organizations in other regions may want to consider how to do this. Also, there needs to be some discussion on how to use the results of this survey.
- (c) Religious education needs to be continually reimagined. This Congress brought together religious educators from various regions. They should continue to share their innovations, and progress could be reported at future Congresses.
- (d) There needs to be a concerted effort to bring Parsi and Iranian Zoroastrians together. Perhaps this could be best achieved if it became an objective for young Zoroastrians. This opportunity could be picked up at one of the Youth Congresses.

This Congress attempted to openly discuss some difficult and divisive issues. It attempted to promote understanding and inclusion. The large and enthusiastic audience in New York city embraced these intentions. If these intentions translate to ongoing progress, and are further enriched at future Congresses, this would be remembered as an important moment in our history.

Program Committee

Keki Dadachanji	Co-Chair
Aban Rustomji	Co Chair

Visit <https://wzc2022.nyc/video/>
for videos and links to all Congress Programs



THE INAUGURAL BAPSI SIDHWA LITERARY PRIZE JULY 2, 2022



To celebrate the accomplishments of Bapsi Sidhwa with this prize and honor literary expressions that represent the rich characters, setting, laughter, and thoughtful topics found in her novels and essays.



The Bapsi Sidhwa Literary Prize has been established by the Library Committee of the Zoroastrian Association of Houston (ZAH), home of the FEZANA Information Research and Education System (FIRES).

TANAZ BHATHENA WINS INAUGURAL BAPSI SIDHWA LITERARY PRIZE

In a glittering Award Ceremony at the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress 2022, in New York, Tanaz Bhatena received the Inaugural Bapsi Sidhwa Literary Prize for her book, 'Hunted by the Sky.' The Prize generated significant interest in the Zoroastrian literary community worldwide. After receiving entries from India, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the US, an independent panel of three recognized judges selected the winner.

The first-of-its-kind prize will be awarded once every two years to a writer who best captures the mood, spirit, and settings that were the essence of Bapsi's novels. Established by the Zoroastrian Association of Houston (ZAH) and FEZANA Information Research Education System (FIRES), this award is named after Bapsi Sidhwa, a globally recognized Zoroastrian writer with an international reputation who lives in Houston, Texas. The winner received a medal and a 2000 USD cash prize.

Accepting the award, Tanaz shared Bapsi Sidhwa's inspiring influence on her as a writer. "I'm so honored to be the recipient of the inaugural Bapsi Sidhwa Literary Prize... I hope this award will inspire more Zoroastrian writers to tell stories and shine a light on our community so that young people will find these books and realize that they are not alone," she said. Born in India and raised in Saudi Arabia and Canada, Tanaz lives in Mississauga, Ontario, and is working on her fifth book, 'Of Light and Shadows', which will be released in 2023.



2022 WORLD ZARATHUSHTI COMMUNITY AWARDS



CONGRATULATIONS
TO ALL THE
WINNERS



WE THANK ALL THE
NOMINEES FOR THEIR
PARTICIPATION

The Awards Ceremony is made possible by the generous contribution of
THE ZOROASTRIAN CHARITY FUNDS OF HONG KONG, CANTON & MACAO

THE AWARDS CEREMONY IS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE GENEROUS CONTRIBUTION OF ZOROASTRIAN CHARITY FUNDS OF HONG KONG, CANTON & MACAO

As Co-Chairs of the 2022 WZC Awards Committee, under the leadership of Noshir Langrana, we are honored to bring this very prestigious and important awards process that seeks to honor the best of the best from our community.

This year, there were seven award categories, including the newly created Diversity Award which seeks to recognize leaders driving towards improving racial and gender inclusion, equity and diversity.

67 nominations for seven categories from across the world were received – all outstanding candidates. We would also like to thank our panel of distinguished judges whose task to select the Award winners was not made easy by the achievements of each and every nominee. Considering the very rich pool of high achieving candidates, the Awards Committee decided to offer multiple awards in some categories to recognize the contributions of excellent nominees.

Noshir Langrana was responsible for coordinating the entire award selection process that was fully online

including submitting nomination forms, preparing evaluation packages for the judges, receiving evaluations, informing recipients and preparing this document. Arzan Sam Wadia and Arzan Lali developed the awards website and need special recognition. Their collaboration and creativity resulted in a first-ever entirely online, seamless, transparent and user-friendly awards nomination process.

The co-hosts of the Congress, ZAGNY & FEZANA, Global Working Group, are thanked for their support in this important event.

CONGRATULATIONS to all the winners! Your accomplishments are truly impressive! Warm deep appreciation,

Meher Bhesania, Noshir Langrana, Adil Mistry & Yezdi Tantra

The Awards Committee Co-Chairs

Visit <https://wzc2022.nyc/awards> for full description of achievements of each award winner

Iconic Zarathushti Award



Fali & (late) Bapsi Nariman

Khursheed Nariman collected the Award on behalf of her grandfather. Award presented by Framroze K. Patel, Past-President of FEZANA.

Dr. Cyrus Poonawalla

Lord Karan Bilimoria collected the Award on behalf of his dear friend Dr. Cyrus S. Poonawalla. The award presented by Dinyar Devitre



COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARDS



Dr Shernaz Cama

Niloufer and Rukshana sisters of Dr Cama collected the Award on her behalf. Award was presented by Rusi Dalal, Past-President of ZTFE.

Edul Daver

Award presented to Edul Daver by Dr Dolly Dastoor, Past-President of FEZANA & Chief Editor FEZANA Journal.



Science/Technology/Engineering/Medicine Award



Dr. Firusa Parikh

The Award was presented by Dr. Ali Makki, Past President of the California Zoroastrian Center to Dr. Rajesh Parikh on behalf of Dr Firusa Parikh

Social Entrepreneur Awards

Zerbanoo Gifford

Award presented by Roshan Rivetna, past editor of the FEZANA Journal



Award presented by Toos Daruvala to Ruyintan E. Mehta

Unable to attend



Creative Art/Design/Literature/Culture Award



Bapsi Sidhwa

AWARD PRESENTED BY RAKESH BANSAL TO PHEROZ BHANDARA, BROTHER OF BAPSI SIDHWA

DIVERSITY AWARD

Farah Bala

Award presented by Shahriyour Andaz



Michelle Mama

Award presented by Khursheed Navder, President, ZAGNY

RISING OUTSTANDING YOUNG ZARATHUSHTI STARS AWARD

Tanya Hoshi

Award presented by Aban Marker-Kabraji, Co-chair Zoroastrian Return to Roots





Parshan Khosravi

Award presented by Aban Marker-Kabraji,
Co-chair Zoroastrian Return to Roots

Ervad Sheherazad Pavri
Award presented by Aban Marker-Kabraji,
Co-chair Zoroastrian Return to Roots



Unable to Attend

Unable to Attend



SCENES FROM THE CONGRESS



The Show Goes On! Entertainment at the Congress



Behroze Clubwala



It was December 2019, when planning of the Congress began and we had signed an agreement with the Midtown Hilton in NYC as the venue of the Congress. While Program content is critical and was being debated, discussed, and planned, around the theme of the Congress, there were intense discussions within the teams on Entertainment as well. Entertainment is the second critical component of a Congress. It is what most attendees look forward to and

often it is discussed back at home and when recalling Congress events. We decided on the following:

Must Haves

- “Wow” components
- High caliber professional performances and meaningful content
- Final production should be outstanding and memorable, with a Zarathushti thread, weaving in Persian & Parsi talent
- Links to our cultural heritage and

- Relevance to the Congress theme “Bridging the Global Zarathushti Existence.”

Entertainment Management

We looked for:

- Vision and leadership to deliver that vision
- Tenacity and unending energy to ride the difficulties and manage the performers – in this instance many based globally and the Pandemic was at its peak in 2020 and 2021
- Passion to excel and stay the course
- Capacity to convince the community to unite and participate.

What We Achieved

THE OPENING CEREMONY

All Mobeds (including Mobed-Banus) registered for the Congress were invited to participate in the Opening Prayer Ceremony. 45 participated walking in majestically, with lighted candles into a dark ballroom, in two rows led by Ervads Pervez Patel from ZAGNY and Tehemton Mirza, President, North American Mobed Council (NAMC) to the music of “Khan Ashem Vohu” sung by ZAGNY’s Soprano Tara Jamshedian, with a piano arrangement developed and performed by Neville Dusaj. The atmosphere was serene. All Mobeds, standing in front of an Afargan, on Behram Roj, on the stage, led the Atash ni Nyaesh prayer while the

audience rose and participated. Everyone felt a sense of pride that our “mantravani” filled the air in the Ballroom.



THE PARADE OF NATIONS:

Representatives of 16 countries carrying their national flags represented by an elder and younger member of each delegation walked in, to the instrumental music of “We are the World.” While all countries were on the stage, Soprano Meher Pavri sang the USA national anthem with Jamshed Turel on the piano. The cheering from member representatives of each of the 16 countries was very enthusiastic.

Following welcome speeches by the Co-Chairs of WZC, Astad J. Clubwala and Arzan Sam Wadia, and a welcome



and blessings by Ervad Khurshed Dastoor of the Iranshah Atash Behram, and a pre-recorded message from Mobed Ardeshir Khorshidian, the head of Tehran Association of Moobedans, the best talent of New York City performed.

THE ZANDIEH BROTHERS

These brothers of Iranian heritage, premiered the “Persian Rhapsody” an original composition by Charlie Zandieh based on a novel theme first created by his brother Christopher when he was 9 years old. We had Cameron Zandieh on the Violin, Charlie Zandieh on the Cello, Christopher Zandieh on the Piano, and they were joined by Peyman Zandieh their father on the Clarinet. The Zandieh brothers study music at the world-renowned Julliard School in New York City. The audience appreciation was amazing.



THE WORLD ZOROASTRIAN CONGRESS 2022 ORCHESTRA

ZAGNY’s own Piroozi Cooper-Wittlin and Cyrus Mehta led this effort. The goal was to reach out to Zarathushti talent globally. It was exhausting for Piroozi to keep replenishing the strings and winds members after their signups and cancellations. The Pandemic and Zoom practices were difficult and this effort to bring global musicians together was incredibly challenging.

The Orchestra Nite on 2 July 2022, at 7.30pm attracted close to 800 in the Ballroom. The goal was to bring most elements of NYC entertainment to the program. Classical Music from an Orchestra, Opera and Ballet from Lincoln Centre and Broadway musical themes. It was an evening with much applause for an hour of superb, enjoyable, and pure Zarathushti talent and entertainment. The talents of Piroozi and Cyrus, Sopranos like Meher Pavri, Tara Jamshedian, Tenors like Malcolm Cooper, Vocal performers like Pia Sutaria and Ardavan Taraprewala

(who was the ultimate entertainer), Tina Siganporia and Kerissa Lalkaka, Ballet by Pia Sutaria, and Classical music by Piroozi, Cyrus and Liley Mehta were highly entertaining and excellent.



From left Malcolm Cooper, Tara Jamshedjian, Meher Pavri, Ardavan Taraporewala

Jamshed Turel got tremendous applause for his accompaniment on the Piano for many of the performers above and for his role in collaborating with us to piece this well-rounded entertainment. “Encore” led to a final piece: “It is time to say Goodbye....by the entire group of performers. It was an evening to remember. It is important to give credit to the professionalism of those that did participate with just one rehearsal on stage prior to their final performance.



THE STORY OF CREATION AS TOLD IN THE BUNDAHISHN

Looking now for a religious-themed performance, I recalled a panorama performed by the children of Chennai, back in the 1990s, which was written, directed, and produced by Perviz Bhote. As luck would have it, I found a cassette of the performance, tucked away among old files. Eureka.... I thought I was discovering the light bulb!! A sense of “This is it” came to my mind. Perviz Bhote was serendipitously in the audience.

An idea and script are worth nothing, until we can find a Director from our own community with their own vision. Nina Mistry recommended *Shahnaz Shroff*, Director of the Westchester School of Voice, and Drama in NY. Amid her high-powered Madison Avenue job, as Senior Vice President of a leading global advertising company Shahnaz said to me, “I see myself visualizing its production like the opera “Satyagraha.” I was jumping with joy.

Vision is primary, but without tenacity and the ability to bring the whole community along no success is possible. Be accommodating, be flexible and keep the faith. To me the hardest part was to recruit the 45 participants. It was a constantly changing scenario and the recruiting took a lot of time, convincing and encouragement. Then it seemed hard to get a consistent group of 5 & 10-year-olds and teach them their roles – they wiggled and laughed and could never be put in a serious mood. Some candy bribes helped. The not so young, were challenged as scenarios and moves were ramped up or changed. Choreography by **Kamal Bellihomeji** was developing albeit with difficulty as many of the performers were not professional dancers. Creating a bonded community of people who were committed was the key, even if it came through bringing Batasas, Khari Biscuits, Chevra with Chai for 11.00 am or Biryani, Shrimp Curry Rice, Kheema na puff, Kheema Pulav, Dhansak, for lunch.

Typical Bawa and Bawi style, everyone wanted to share in the “directing” of the performance. So, we had to lay down “ground rules.” The Director would make decisions. Managing these groups was escalating into a challenge. A lot of research had to be done on costumes. I needed help. I talked to “my friend” Dadaji. It has been my go-to practice throughout my life’s journey. I fractured my right ankle and was in a boot from mid Feb to end May. Along came this dynamic lady Prema Cassad who gravitated to me as I looked distraught with developments at each practice. And I thought I concealed my feelings well!!



From that day on **Costume Coordinator, Prema Cassad** was like an angel - very understanding, resourceful, prompt, and efficient and with an enthusiastic shared sense of let's make this event superb. Prema and her husband Rushad Cassad offered to fund all the Costumes for the Story of Creation. God works in mysterious ways. The performance was developing well now in June 2022. My go to advisors and friends Nina Mistry and Percis Bansal helped me with ideas and motivation. And on 3 July we produced the most fantastic performance of the Story of Creation, greeted with endless applause. Everyone performed their best. The young kids amazed us. This will go down in history as an exceptional, extraordinary, and unique production.

I heard repeated applause as Zarathushtra appeared on stage, some in the audience told me they were moved to tears as the resemblance was so authentic. The moments created on stage were surreal. Everybody at the Congress would stop to tell me this.

Brilliantly narrated by **Kaika Clubwala and Xerxes Kotval** and with **Shehriyar Antia** as Zarathushtra and his voice, and live music by Piroozi Cooper-Wittlin and Cyrus Mehta... the multi-media presentation will live on in everyone's minds for a long, long time.

GALA NIGHT: ONE WORLD – ONE PEOPLE

Ashdeen Lilaowala (with the mike in the photo below, with his mother on the right) is known for his research and revival work on the Parsi Gara through his eponymous label ASHDEEN. He created a script and story about the Gara embroidery, how craft binds a community and builds its cultural heritage while embracing communities, the early Chinese influences on the embroidery, its

transformation onto the Indian fabric and saree, the Persian and Mughal flowers and fauna influences.

My enthusiasm perked and before I knew it, I was deep into the organization of the show for the script he wrote. Ashdeen's show was a different kind of challenge. Ashdeen was based in New Delhi, India and the only introduction and planning we did was on Zoom calls. Again, we worked within Zarathushti communities and found 60+ models from Florida, Houston, India, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

Once we had categorized the models into the 6 Scenes conceived by Ashdeen – (1) *The Story of the Craft* (2) *Environment and its reverence in our community* (3) *The Indian and Persian Influences* (4) *The Great Gatsby Era* (5) *A World for All* and (6) *Bridging the Global Zarathushti Existence*, we tried to slot the models into each scene. Here again, constant changes, people volunteering and then changing their minds.

We shared photographs so Ashdeen could visualize the models in his various creations. After two months of intense communications, Ashdeen conducted his feedback and expectations to the groups by Scenes through WhatsApp. Music was again coordinated with the World Zoroastrian Orchestra via Zoom.

Ashdeen packed six suitcases of outfits and NONE of them arrived at JFK Airport on 29 June. Uggggh. Everyone was in a panic zone. No outfits, no show. False promises that the suitcases will be delivered by noon on 1 July to the hotel only made all of us more anxious.





Three previous events had to be delivered, so I scheduled my anxieties. Ashdeen was the true professional --was calm externally. I could not measure his heartbeats and those of his parents, sister and family who stood next to him each day. They are always beside him, which I admire.

It was only on 30 June that the models, dancers, Sopranos, and Tenors met with Ashdeen. Outfits were assigned late July 1, after the suitcases finally arrived at the Hilton. One suitcase was still missing. Ashdeen choreographed the event 1st July night with lights, music and media that he had developed. Practices began at 10.00 pm and went into the wee hours of the morning for two nights. My much laughed at expression was: "Ladies, come on stage confidently and strut your stuff, walk like a professional model." I could hear the "burbur" among the Parsi Bawis, but I was determined to make this another memorable performance and to work with the talent and beauty within my community. We do have a lot!

Flowing with events and occurrences, and people's moods, as you put together performances, is also an important part of managing entertainment events. Easier said than done. Sometimes I felt I was climbing Mount Everest.

On Gala night – the Ballroom was packed: The talented Soprano Meher Pavri narrated the story, all the Bawis and Bawas did "strut" their stuff, Pia Sutaria danced to "The



Earth Song" making everyone yearn for the beautiful embroidered Ashdeen outfit, Prema Cassad did a classical Indian Performance with grace and charm, Tara Jamshedian sang "All that Jazz" perfectly dressed in one of Ashdeen's Sarees with a feather in her hair, long white gloves and a fancy white fan for Scene 4 of the Gatsby era. Malcolm Cooper boomed out "We are the Champions" by apro Freddy Mercury for Scene 5 which recognized the LGBTQ+ community and the exceptional Jamshed Turel was on the piano.

The audience was swept off its feet, moving to the music and there was nonstop applause as Ashdeen took the stage with his mom, sister and niece adding to the final scene – where we communicated that families could play an integral part in building bridges.

We had done it– Bravo, Bravissimo, Bravo Tutti.... WZC 2022 will go down in history for its brilliant entertainment. A feat hard to match, and entertainment "par excellence" said many. My sincere and deep gratitude to my Co-Chairs Khursheed Navder and Mahrukh Motafram.

Behroze Clubwalla was the Entertainment Co-Chair

THE CREATION STORY IN THE BUNDAHISHN

At the beginning of time Ohrmazd created the universe out of his own substance, which is eternal light; resplendent, all-encompassing. From the Abyss, the station of darkness rose Ahriman, the hostile and evil spirit who chose to destroy Mazda's light and attack all that was good. At first Mazda offered peace, He assured Ahriman of living in continued usefulness; but the offer was rejected, and Ahriman chose to fight. The cosmic battle waged on. Malicious and destructive was Ahriman's power. Finally, Ahura Mazda destroyed Ahriman by reciting the Ahunavar Manthra.

3000 years lay Ahriman, unconscious in the station of darkness while Mazda prepared for a renewed fight. Mazda was all knowing, but not all powerful yet. He had to trap Ahriman, so he created the physical world and brought forth his attributes who helped design creation, the Amesha Spentas. Ahriman woke up from his 3000-year-old sleep and decided a deadly destruction to Mazda's glorious work. This time, through vile deception, disguised as a serpent, he gave Mazda an unforgettable fight.

Then did Mazda send forth his chosen one – Zarathushtra to bring redemption to everyone. Humata, Hukhta, Huvarashta: Good thoughts, good words, good deeds; this is the only golden rule that would ensure Ahriman's defeat.

Man is blessed with a conscience; He has the gift of free will too. To strengthen the hands of Mazda against Ahriman; he must choose to be good and do good. This struggle between good and evil, says the Bundahishn, for three thousand years more shall continue, till man evolves as perfectly good and helps Mazda's golden rule to return.

This is the circle of life, wherein all shall live in perfect harmony. The Bundahishn reveals the mystery and justifies the need for Ahura Mazda's creation in the struggle of evil against good, wherein good shall finally prevail. The Bundahishn thus envisages a perfect harmonious world for the future.



BEHIND THE SCENES

Ferzin Patel, Piroja Press, Pam Shroff
Logistics Co-Chairs



Where and how does one begin the journey to plan for a world class congress? It all started in 2019 when we were informed that the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York (ZAGNY) was selected to host the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress in 2022.

Once the Congress Co-Chairs picked the location and selected the Midtown Hilton Hotel in New York City as the venue for our Congress, our work began. In October 2020 Committees were established, and Co-Chairs were invited to lead their teams.

The Logistics Committee was co-chaired by Ferzin Patel, Piroja Press and Pam Shroff. Mehru Cama who chaired the Logistics Team in 2012 at the 16th NA Zoroastrian Congress was the first person invited to join the team. Her experience and guidance was invaluable. Other members from the ZAGNY community were invited to join and we started with a group of 20 eager volunteers.

Our primary mandate was to coordinate with the Program, Entertainment, Finance, Fund Raising, Awards, Pre-Post congress events, Public Relations and the ZYAB (Zarathushti Youth Across Borders) Program Committees for the seamless execution of a successful Congress.

The Logistics Team performed “behind the scenes” groundwork over three years, with countless hours that culminated in a memorable Congress. Weekly zoom meetings tapered off during the Pandemic as we were not sure if and how we would be able to continue with planning for the Congress., not knowing how the world would respond to attending a Congress was very unsettling. Yet we continued working in what we called “a bubble” hoping that the situation would improve as

the congress date approached.

As soon as Registration was launched in November 2021 over the Thanksgiving Weekend, momentum picked up and it was full steam ahead. Allocating space to accommodate the different sessions, the Children’s Programs, and Vendors for three-and-a-half-day Congress, weekly zoom meetings, late night and weekend phone calls kept us all extremely busy.

To our surprise and delight, post pandemic did not deter our ever-enthusiastic Zarathushti community across the globe to register in great numbers and they were brave enough to travel from various parts of the world bridging to join the community at large in friendship and in search of reflecting upon our identity, faith, religion and ethnicity.

With registration came the task to ensure that our Zarathushti brothers and sisters from Iran could also join us. Zenobia Damania, of FEZANA Administrative Office, was instrumental in issuing invitation letters in the hope that it would facilitate applicants to obtain a visit visa but that did not happen. During the pandemic, the visa process had shut down. Even when the Consulates and Embassies re-opened visas were issued for work-related, compassionate cases and family emergencies only.

Registrations poured in and with the numbers increasing, we needed to ensure that every aspect of the congress ran as smooth as possible. We received countless email inquiries and requests, which we replied to every one of them!! And as if we didn’t have enough to do, we decided to invite attendees to send us a list of people with whom they would like to sit at the Awards Lunch and on Banquet Night. A daunting task we took

upon ourselves but we did it!

Arzan Sam Wadia was not only the Co-Chair of the Congress, but he was also our go-to-person for all technical hiccups, and we cannot thank him enough for always being there for us at the other end of a phone call or a sent email – problem always solved!

There were 1,200 registered attendees.

Children: (0-4) 12;
(5-9) 23
(10-14) 51
(15-17) 38
Youth (18-35) 300+

Registration opened at 1:00 pm on June 30th. We had a wonderful band of volunteers who had signed up to help us in shifts till 10 pm on the first day. At times, it was quite busy and so it was heart warming when a few out of towners, offered to help at the Registration Desks. It brought us all together unified in the idea that it was truly everyone's World Congress. A Big Thank You to all the Volunteers who offered their help at the Registration Desk on the first couple of days.

Hotel rooms booked fast but more rooms were needed. Pam Shroff waved her magic wand and made it all happen. Pam was also instrumental in getting us a fantastic deal with the Parking Garage next door to the Hilton and which was perfect for all those who drove in.

We are thankful to the Hilton Team for their cooperation and assistance every step of the way. Our point of contact was none other than Mala Gopala, Assistant Director of Events, who was also our point of contact at the Hilton in Westchester, Rye, New York in 2012. She was very familiar with our Team and our needs so it was a wonderful working relationship ensuring that everyone was well taken care of.

The meals were absolutely delicious thanks to Hilton's Chef Peter and his team who did an outstanding job of ensuring that all were well-fed. To add a special ethnic touch to the Awards Lunch, our very own Chef Jehangir Mehta helped in guiding the Chef on how to prepare a delicious Parsi style *Marghi na Curry Chaval* and *Luganoo Custard*.

The Logistics Team also undertook to coordinate the Children's Programs that was brilliantly planned and coordinated by Vehishta Kaikobad and Khursheed Dastur from Zoroastrian Association of Houston. Vehishta ran both the programs for ages 5-9 years and 10-13 years with the help of a wonderful group of volunteer teachers. As the program started two younger students, Kaizeen Medhora (PA) and Zara Commissariat (CA) who were attending the program took an interest in wanting to help and were a great asset to the 5-9 age group and their teachers.

A Child Care program for toddlers under the age of five was run by three very dedicated ladies led by Kamal Merchant (NJ), Pearl Bengali (NJ) and Avan Patel (NY) who decorated the playroom with posters, soft toys, games and lovingly cared for the little ones whilst the parents attended the congress sessions.

Pre and post events were also planned, and these were spear-headed by Sam Shroff. On June 30th, the ZAGNY Board and DMZT Trustees hosted a welcome reception and dinner to showcase our new Dar-E-Meher. Sam arranged for four buses to take the invited guests to the Dar-e-Mehr where they were greeted by Congress Organizers and Committee Chairs. The event was meticulously organized and planned by Nina Mistry, Khursheed Navder, Ferzin Patel and Sam Shroff.

We thank two youngsters Cyrus & Zarah Shroff (NJ) who were with us the whole week preceding the Congress helping with sorting supplies for the Children's Program, assembling badges for the registration packets, sitting at the Registration Desk ensuring that all those who had signed up for the Cruise got their tickets. Kerbanoo DRozario and Tesshtar Irani helped at the Registration Desk and at a Vendor's Table, throughout the duration of the Congress. Hinata Mehta made sure that all the transportation needs of our VIP guests were taken care of.

Sam Shroff and Jehangir Mehta were our constant companions making sure that we had all we needed at the Registration Desk and helped make sure that the entry to the Grand Ballroom at the Awards Lunch and on Banquet Night went smoothly.

Special thanks to Hoshi Merchant and his team of volunteers for organizing and coordinating with the AV team and hotel, the daily room sessions ensuring that a team of volunteers were checking all the AV, podium, tables and chairs needed for each session on a daily basis for each room.

The Congress wrapped up mid-day on July 4th but it was not the end for many who decided to stay on and join almost 300 other attendees for a July 4th Fireworks Cruise.

The seamless execution of the Congress would not have been possible without behind the scenes efforts of dozens of volunteers and a heartfelt thanks to our Spouses without whose love, support and endless help we could not have made it through. We thank them all!

A big thank you to all the attendees for making this such a successful Congress – to be well-remembered for years to come.

*Ferzin Patel, Piroja Press, Pam Shroff
Logistics Co-Chairs*



Registration Day 1



Logistics Team & Volunteers - July 1, '22

From left Sam Merchant, Kerbanoo DRozario, Kamal Merchant, Annette Hopkins, Mehru Cama, Cyrus Merchant, Piroja Press & Rusi Press



Piroja Press, Nina Mistry Pam Shroff

12TH WORLD ZOROASTRIAN CONGRESS

BRIDGING THE GLOBAL ZARATHUSHTI EXISTENCE

Excerpts from the closing remarks of Zal Shroff
and Anahaita Kotval



The 12th World Zoroastrian Congress took place in New York City in early July. The theme for this Congress was: “Bridging the Global Zoroastrian Existence.” It was a call to action for us all to do the work of defining for ourselves what Zoroastrianism means to us as individuals, and how our shared religious identity should shape both our community and our broader world. A world that desperately needs our engagement now more than ever.

In the weeks leading up to the Congress, the Congress organizers distributed a survey to capture the community’s diverse perspectives on a series of questions about our individual beliefs as Zoroastrians. The survey was sent to all 1100 Congress registrants and over 300 +Zoroastrians responded with their thoughts on the 20 belief statements set forth in the survey.

We wanted to share with you the key themes that emerged from the Congress and the survey in this article.

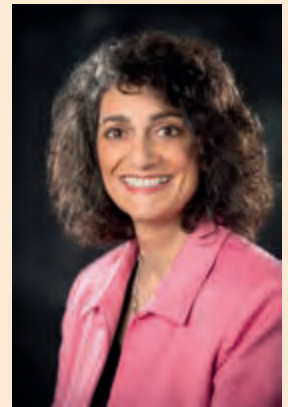
CORE BELIEFS v. EVOLVING PRACTICES.

A central question at the Congress was how to distinguish those quintessential elements and values of our faith – those things that are immutable and without which we would no longer be Zoroastrian– from those elements that are secondary and can and should evolve with time and context.

A number of the Congress panelists stressed the importance of looking to the Gathas to determine core Zoroastrian beliefs. Justice Nariman pointed to the Gathas’ clear expression of Zarathustra’s intent to accept new believers into the faith. The Custodians of Zamyad panelists noted the Gathas repeated emphasis

Authors

Anahaita N. Kotval is the Chief Executive Officer of Lifting Up Westchester, Inc., a nonprofit that provides community based services to Westchester County residents experiencing homelessness and hunger. Anahaita began her career as a prosecutor for the Enforcement Division of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission and then spent 13-years at the Royal Bank of Scotland ultimately serving as Managing Director and General Counsel of its investment bank in the Americas. She received a B.S. magna cum laude in Applied Math and Economics from Brown University in 1988 and a J.D. cum laude from Harvard Law School in 1991.



Zal Kotval Shroff is a Senior Staff Attorney at the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area (LCCRSF), where he leads litigation against local municipalities for violating the civil rights of people of color and low-income communities. Zal received a B.A. from Brown University, magna cum laude, in Latin Literature in 2014 and received his J.D. from Columbia Law School in 2017, where he was a James Kent Scholar.



on respect for the natural world and the gifts of the earth as evidence that environmental conservation is an important Zoroastrian value. And on the panel on Zoroastrian Women Leaders, Professor Bekhradnia noted the compelling language in the Gathas affirming the role of women as valued, independent and equal members of their communities.

Survey respondents also agreed that the Gathas are the foundational text of our religion and should be our primary source for defining Zoroastrian beliefs with 73.8% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that: **The Gāthās known to us are Zarathustra’s teachings in his own words, and are the first source of learning about Zoroastrianism.** (Only 6.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed.)

Survey respondents and Congress speakers and participants were in agreement that non-Gatha based beliefs and practices are secondary and susceptible to change. In fact, 84.1% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that **We should be willing to periodically re-examine our beliefs and modify them to reflect the changing environment, perspective, or greater understanding.** (6.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed).

The Congress highlighted several important examples of the community making such changes to its practices in an effort to adapt to modern times. Our religious educators from around the world—many of them professionally trained teachers and professors—shared their creative new approaches to teaching Zoroastrian history and religion based on advances in our understanding of how children’s brains process information at different ages. The rote memorization that characterized our parents and grandparents religious education has now been replaced with a multi-sensory, experienced-based learning designed to enhance student’s comprehension and grasp of Zoroastrian principles. A session on Wellness and Mental Health, focused on the mental health challenges facing our society, acknowledged the stigma our communities have historically placed on those struggling with mental health issues, and discussed the need for us to provide tools to restore our health and build our resilience. And the panel on Digitizing our Sacred Texts provided an ideal example of how embracing the modern can be essential to preserving our history and our faith—and to make it accessible to all for the future.

CULTURE v. RELIGION

The definition of culture vs. religion was another

important theme of this Congress. Many Parsi-Zoroastrians have had a tendency to treat these concepts as one and the same. And there is a particular historical, narrative, and political context that leads to that often blended identity. But we also know that Iran and the rest of the world do not define Zoroastrian identity the same way. And as we learned from researcher Ruzbeh Hodiwala, there are hundreds of people around the world – from many different cultures - adopting Zoroastrian teachings.

The survey asked about our understanding of what it means to be Zoroastrian— and in particular—what role ethnicity should play in the practice of our faith. 69.8% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that **Zarathustra gave his religion to all the people who willingly and freely choose it for themselves. Anyone who studies Zarathustra’s teachings, and makes a commitment to live in accordance with them, through Navjote or Sudreh-Pushi ceremony, should be considered a Zoroastrian. No other qualifications, such as being born of Zoroastrian parents, should be required for a person to be recognized as Zoroastrian.** (12.7% disagreed or disagreed strongly).

These survey results were entirely consistent with the view expressed at the Congress that no person has the power to tell someone else what their religious belief is. That is a choice we all make within ourselves—and is not to be governed by the opinions of others. Whether the community allows us all to *belong*, however, is another matter entirely.

INCLUSION/BELONGING.

That brings us to the most profound, emotional and challenging theme of this Congress— inclusion, belonging, and empowerment.

In a specific session on Identity, Belonging, and Community – and in almost every other panel - we heard the stories of community members who have not fit the mold in one way or another. (Among them those who married outside of the community, those who are Zoroastrian but not Parsi or Iranian and LGBTQ+ identifying Zoroastrians.) They are all Zoroastrian, but each of them had a lived experience that opened them to the possibility of exclusion or rejection from this community. Some were embraced, but others were also rejected and deeply wounded by the community. Their experiences are not unique. So many of us have an identity or an experience that makes us doubt whether we belong here. This theme particularly resonated with the younger people at the Congress who have complex,

layered identities and often feel they cannot bring their whole selves to their Zoroastrian communities.

An yet a full 90% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that **Zoroastrianism should make no distinctions between genders, regions of residence, sexual orientation, or any other criteria that divide people. (4% disagreed or strongly disagreed).** This is an extraordinarily strong statement of welcome – so why do so many Zoroastrians feel unsure of their place in our community?

We heard over and over again: “Belonging is not something we can just feel within ourselves. The community has to do the work to show us that you are ready to accept us.”

The practice of excluding non-Parsi Zoroastrians from fire temples in India drew particular criticism. 71.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that: **Future consecrated Ātash Kadehs should be open to all who have made the commitment to follow the faith through Navjote or Sudreh-Pushi ceremony. Rules of proper conduct in future consecrated Ātash Kadehs should be clearly communicated, and those who do not respect those rules should not be admitted.** (Only 12.7 disagreed or strongly disagreed) While this may seem like progress, let’s be clear what we are talking about. These are fully navjoted individuals being excluded from houses of worship because they have not met a racial purity test. Many at the Congress felt that, as long as this practice stands, our efforts to present ourselves as an inclusive community will fail.

So how do we create a sense of belonging for the many different members of our community who feel marginalized or unheard?

As Dr. Banaji so entertainingly told us - first and foremost we must acknowledge that often it is our own subconscious biases that may be leading to certain voices being excluded or feeling unwelcome. Once we accept this, we must take conscious and practical steps to counter the effects of these biases. Here were some practical suggestions made by the Zoroastrian Women’s panel:

1. Actively look for those who are not included and invite them in. It is not enough to open the door, or say you are welcome – and then leave it up to them to walk through or not. We need to affirmatively create a place, a role or a connection so they feel truly wanted.
2. Ensure that every decision-making body, committee

or working group has representation from those who are usually missing. Again, you may have to go find them.

3. When they are in the room make sure they get to say something and actually listen to it.
4. Be an ally. This is a popular term but what does it mean? Finding ways to support the efforts, interests and inclusion of others without taking over or taking center stage.
5. Share your power – provide leadership opportunities for them, as co-chairs, heads of committees or projects where they can learn and engage. Let them take the stage, give a presentation or make a speech you were asked to give.

While we clearly have work to do to make sure all Zoroastrians feel welcome in our communities, we were deeply heartened by what we saw at this Congress. Both in the way our younger Zoroastrians took to each other and bonded and in the way our older community leaders intentionally built space for the youth to come together and for all of our perspectives to be heard and honored.

THEME 4: THE ROLE OF PRIESTS

Most of the issues that arose over the course of the Congress were also the subject of survey questions so we know how the community feels about them.

Two issues arose, however, that were not addressed in the survey, so we want to highlight them here for further discussion in the aftermath of the Congress. And they revolve around the role of priests in our community.

First - there was a strong appeal from a number of speakers and countless Congress attendees - both men and women, mobeds and non-mobeds - to allow women to become full-fledged priests. We heard from our women mobedyars in their session that they are proud to serve our community, and yet even to this day the few of them who have achieved this status are not authorized to perform navjote or wedding ceremonies. This is deeply offensive to many in the community.

Second - our mobeds from across the globe asked us to invest in them and their education, to invest in the role of the priesthood, and to ensure their inclusion at the tables of decision-making so that they can feel respected and valued as spiritual leaders. They seek the funding to sustain themselves on a livable wage and to be consulted about the matters that impact them.

Both of these are topics that are worthy of specific follow-up in our respective communities.

The Good Life

Last but not least, we were reminded by several speakers that one of the central tenets of Zoroastrianism is the quest for the Good Life or Happiness. We highlight this point because happiness can be an elusive concept in these complicated times and we should celebrate the fact that our faith gives us permission - even a mandate - to be happy.

So what does Zoroastrian happiness - or the Good Life - look like? Unsurprisingly, the Zoroastrian definition of happiness is linked not to material comfort but to our relationship with others and the world around us.

Lord Billimoria, Dr. Choksy and our entrepreneurs panel all reminded us about the importance of selecting a calling that we love and that is meaningful to us. Success in that chosen field is not complete unless we conduct ourselves consistent with our Zoroastrian beliefs - thinking not only of our own personal and economic goals but of the needs of the larger community and society in which we live.

Happiness also comes from service to others. Many of you expressed this as a key element of our faith in your survey responses with 92% agreeing or strongly agreeing that **Community should support those who need assistance. Community resources (such as community-owned housing and educational scholarships) should be given to those who need them most. (3.4% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing)** and 78.9% agreeing or strongly agreeing that **The generosity of the Zoroastrian community should extend to non-Zoroastrians who need help (e.g., for health, education, and calamities). 6.4 % disagreeing or strongly disagreeing)**

Happiness may seem like a frivolous pursuit for a religious community and yet we cannot contribute to the wellbeing of our families, communities, nations or the world if we are not ourselves strong, grounded and at peace with who we are, how we are living our lives and what we are bringing into the world.

Ushtate

Children activities at the Congress



RETROSPECTIVE OF WORLD ZOROASTRIAN CONGRESSES



From little acorns, mighty oaks grow. So, from the seeds sown in 1960, the World Zoroastrian Congress has evolved over the years to become a physical and spiritual meeting ground for Zoroastrians from around the globe. The first six Congresses alternated between India and Iran. The North American diaspora was recognized when the Seventh World Congress was awarded to FEZANA and held in Houston, Texas. Since then, several other countries with significant Zoroastrian populations have hosted Congresses.



THE EARLY YEARS

The First World Zoroastrian Congress in Tehran in 1960 was an offshoot of a historic event. The Teheran Zoroastrian Anjuman was planning to celebrate the 2500th anniversary of Cyrus the Great and invited Zoroastrians worldwide to participate in the celebration. Thirty-four delegates from India, Pakistan, and Europe attended the conference. The highlight of the Congress for all the delegates was an audience with his Imperial Majesty Reza Shah Pahlavi. The two main items on the agenda were the participation of Zoroastrians in celebrating Cyrus the Great and holding future World Congresses.

Building on its success, the **Second World Zoroastrian Congress** was held in India in 1964. Nine hundred ninety-five delegates attended, out of which 42 were foreign delegates. The theme of the Congress was to

promote the solidarity, welfare, and progress of the community worldwide. Distinguished speakers from across the globe presented papers on a variety of subjects. Among the topics addressed were ways to promote the study of the Zoroastrian religion and culture, ameliorate the priestly class's plight, and bring about cohesion and unity among Zoroastrians.

Unfortunately, the momentum was temporarily lost, and there was a decade gap before the **Third World Zoroastrian Congress** was held in Bombay, India, in January 1978. The theme was *'Unity, Understanding, and Strength – the Zoroastrian Community in the Changing World.'* Delegates discussed the establishment of research foundations, a world library, and a free and constant exchange of information on religious matters. The main threats to the community were outlined: late marriages, the absence of a world body, Zoroastrian couples having fewer children, and parents not taking much interest in religious education for their children.



The venue of the **Fourth World Zoroastrian Congress** held in January 1985 was again Bombay. With 'Awakening Consciousness' as the theme, delegates reviewed the prevailing conditions in Zoroastrian communities. Of concern were a higher rate of certain types of cancer observed among Parsis, the low birth rate resulting from lack of housing, emigration of youth, and low fertility levels. Parsi associations were urged to establish

separate youth wings where youngsters between 15 and 30 could come together.

The **Fifth World Zoroastrian Congress** was held five years later, in January 1990, and again in Bombay. Living up to its theme of 'To 2000 and Beyond' the conference looked to the past and present as a means of building a glorious future. Youth involvement and participation in community organizations were discussed at length. The Congress emphasized that the delegates were not mere spectators but architects of the community's future and members should 'feel like a trustee but act like a



community servant.' This Congress also focused on the demographic trends of the community. A white paper listing recommendations were suggested to ensure the survival of Zoroastrian traditions in the 21st century.

The **Sixth World Zoroastrian Congress** was back where it all began – in Tehran in June of 1996. The theme was 'Unity with Purity'. 200 Zoroastrians from all over the world and 500 Iranian Zoroastrians attended. The political landscape of Iran had changed since 1960. Formal audiences were granted with Ayatollah Khamenei and President Rafsanjani.

On the agenda were familiar topics of preservation of the Zoroastrian religion and cultural heritage, the welfare of the mobeds, resolution of the religio-social and economic concerns of the youth, and greater collaboration between *anjumans* throughout the world. The Congress also stressed that «the World Congresses should continue to be held every four years in one of the countries where many Zoroastrians live.» This opened the doors to Congresses held in various other countries.



2000 AND BEYOND

The **Seventh World Zoroastrian Congress** was awarded to the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) and the Zoroastrian Association of Houston (ZAH). 2,200 Zoroastrians from 18 countries gathered in Houston in December 2000. The theme of the Congress was 'A Zarathushti Odyssey.' The Congress had several legacy projects: The 'Unity Quilt', logos from 75 worldwide associations was unveiled. 'The Zoroastrian Chamber of Commerce' and the 'World Zoroastrian Orchestra' were launched. A 'Time Capsule' to



be opened after 50 years was placed, the Zoroastrian Field Service, a student exchange program, an International Book exhibit and Daughters of Mashyani were highlighted. A World Zarathushti Sports Festival preceded the Congress for two days. The issues discussed were assimilation, whether children of interfaith marriages should be accepted in the community, and whether to overturn the ban on proselytizing.

After the success of the World Congress in Houston, it was logical for the **8th World Zoroastrian Congress** to be held in London in July 2005. Hosted by the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE), which takes pride in being the oldest *Anjuman* in the western world. The theme of the Congress was 'Paving the way to ensure our future is as great as our past'. 70% of the 450 delegates attended from



outside the host country, and a large 90-person delegation attended from Iran. Talks and discussions on issues requiring the community's attention were: the formation of a World Body, mixed faith marriages, converting out of Zoroastrianism, emerging Zoroastrian nations, female and *behdin* priests, safeguarding the Iranshah, racism, and problems faced by Parsis in Interfaith meetings.

The **9th World Zoroastrian Congress** was held in Dubai in December 2009. The theme of the Congress was 'Unity through the Sands of Time'. 700 Zoroastrian delegates from six continents met in the spirit of Hamazori. There

are many firsts this Congress achieved. It was sold out twelve weeks in advance. A state-of-the-art Congress website, online registration, a Congress logo, a Congress flag, a Congress song, a coffee table book, Youth



Leadership Enhancement Program (YLEP), and Vision 2010 program were unveiled. The 10th anniversary of the World Zarathushti Chamber of Commerce. Topics for daily discussions ranged from business opportunities to science, technology, medicine, arts, culture and women.



The **10th World Zoroastrian Congress** returned to Mumbai after 23 years in December 2013. The theme of the Congress was 'Zoroastrianism in the 21st century: Nurturing Growth and Affirming Identity'. 1250 people attended the Congress. There was a lot of turmoil within the organizers, and the Congress finally took place after direct intervention by the sponsors. The Congress dealt with a host of issues like decreasing population, religious identity, the debate between traditional values and liberal approach towards the practice of the



Zoroastrian faith, youth affairs, and history. Two exhibitions, 'Across Oceans and Flowing Silks: from Canton to Bombay 18th-20th centuries' and 'No Parsi is an Island', were held at the National Gallery of Modern Art. A horse race, a sport often associated with Parsis, was held at the Mahalaxmi Racecourse.



Perth, Australia, was the **11th World Zoroastrian Congress** venue in June 2018. 'The theme was *'Together Towards Tomorrow.'*' It was organized by a small team of members but had a youth participation rate of 35%. A memorable souvenir book with articles from learned scholars in English and Farsi was introduced to create awareness in the general public. Kurdish leaders spoke of their issues in their region.

The **12th World Zoroastrian Congress** was held in NYC in July 2022. The articles in this FEZANA Journal cover the issues of importance and relevance to a widely scattered community that seeks to preserve its unique identity.



Compiled by Aban Rustomji, Program Co-Chair

FEZANA Journal and Parsiana have been the major source of information and images on each World Zoroastrian Congress. Photo credit Jasmine Driver. Delshad Karanjia is credited for the write-up on the first six congresses featured in the 7th World Zoroastrian Congress program book.

COVER STORY WORLD ZOROASTRIAN CONGRESS



12TH WORLD ZOROASTRIAN CONGRESS 2022 NEW YORK

Gender Equality: The Rights of Parsi Women after the Advent of the Constitution of India



Ervad Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman

This talk was sponsored by FEZANA and the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York (ZAGNY) for Professor Kaikhosrov Dinshaw Irani Memorial Lecture.

Introduction



Aban Rustomji, Program Co-Chair, introduced Justice Nariman.

Recently retired from the Supreme Court of India, (July 7, 2014 - August 12, 2021), Justice Nariman was hailed as a “Lion of a Judge”. He was the apex court judge in 2014, disposing of 13,565 cases and delivering historic verdicts including the declaration of privacy as a fundamental right, setting aside of IT Act provision empowering arrests, decriminalizing consensual gay sex, and permitting women of all ages to enter Kerala’s Sabarimala temple.

He obtained his LLM degree from Harvard Law School with his thesis on Affirmative Action. He was one of the four distinguished alumni worldwide to be selected by Harvard Alumni Association for an interview in December 2020.

As a young lawyer, at the age of 37, Justice Nariman was designated as a Senior Advocate at the Supreme Court of India, for this, the rule had to be amended as the minimum

age for being made a senior in the Supreme Court was 45. He held successively significant positions, including the Solicitor General of India from July 27, 2011, to February 5, 2013.

A compelling speaker, he has delivered many lectures over the years on a remarkable range of topics. On April 15, 2022, he launched a YouTube channel, ‘Justice Nariman Official Channel’ which showcases 48 full-length videos of his lectures on law, history, religion, music, spirituality, and other topics.

An Ordained Priest (Navar) he has authored three books: *The Inner Fire: Faith, Choice, and Modern-Day Living in Zoroastrianism*; *Zoroastrianism in Other Faiths* and -



Discordant Notes: The Voice of Dissent in the Court of Last Resort.

Besides being passionate about Western classical music, he is an avid reader of history, philosophy, literature, and science, and enjoys nature walks.

Report of the Speech

On July 1, 2022, Justice Nariman delivered an erudite talk to a spellbound audience of 1,200 people at the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress, without a piece of paper in front of him. This speaks volumes to his acumen of legal knowledge and ease of delivery.

He traced the history from 1903 of the genesis and development of the Davar-Beamon judgment and the resulting controversy of not allowing Parsi women married to non-Parsi men from practicing their religion. The legal battle took twists and turns with no conclusive result. There were three interesting instances of conversion on Indian soil –the court proceeded on the footing that Zoroastrianism is a religion that says that you must convert - the question was whether you can convert on Indian soil.

The first instance of Hindu pandits in the times of Nairasang Dhaval over 1,000 years ago, the second was in the case of Emperor Akbar who it is said was so enamored by Dastur Mayyaji Rana, head priest of Navsari that he was invested with the sudreh and the kusti by Mayyaji Rana. This is documented by the Portuguese priests who attended the ceremony and recorded by many historians. Justice Davar discredited both these arguments though Justice Beamon accepted them. The third case was entitlement to community membership by Suzanne Tata the French wife of Bombay Parsi Ratan D. Tata in 1906-9. Davar decided that the suit itself was not maintainable, as Suzanne Tata was not made a Plaintiff and if she is not a plaintiff she would not be bound by any judgment or decree that followed.

He concluded a Parsi was one of the original descendants of those who came to India, the father and mother both had to be Parsi; second, Irani Zoroastrians who come to India whether temporarily or otherwise, and third, a child of a Parsi father with an alien mother.

He [Davar] concluded a Parsi was one of the original descendants of those who came to India, the father and mother both had to be Parsi; second, Irani Zoroastrians who come to India whether temporarily or otherwise, and third, a child of a Parsi father with an alien mother.

This brought in the question of race or ethnicity in a purely religious matter, where every person who wishes to enter an agiyari must ethnically or racially first be a Parsi only from the Father's Side and must be Navjoted. This leads to many complications, which he elaborated on in great detail.

The constitution of India addresses gender equality issues, but how it might be interpreted in the context of Parsi women has not yet been tested in courts.

Quoting Justice Nariman “The vision of the Gathas is very clear on this point, in Yasna Ha 30 and Yasna Ha 45 of the Ushtavaiti - firstly the Ahunavati and then the Ushtavaiti - in Yasna 30 verse 2 each person is told to choose for themselves - the expression *narem narem khakhyāi tanuye*, that is, each person for person, choose for yourself in chapter Yasna 46. But before we come to 46, there's a

very, very important verse which I consider perhaps the most important verse in the entire Gathas – 45.8 – because that tells you that when the Prophet actually saw God with his Mind's Eye. He says *Chashmaini vyadaresem*, which is Mind's Eye or *man*. What did God tell him?

God told him to follow the path of Asha through Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds. - this is where we get the Genesis of *Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds* and it is then that ultimately you seek company with the almighty in *Garo demand*. *Garo demand* again is two words which are in common use - *gavanu* to sing and *demand* domain so the Abode of Song, which is heaven in which Ahura Mazda resides.

But in Yasna 46, you have a direct verse that speaks of women. 46.10, talks of *Na* and *Gana* - *Gana* is a woman and says that whichever man or woman is to follow the Zoroastrian path, that is the path of Asha, I, Zarathushtra will be there to ferry them across *chinvat pul* - the expression used is *chinvato ... paretum* which is the path of the separator. So, if your deeds are good the path broadens if your deeds are otherwise, down you go.”

He ended his talk on a positive note, hoping that the constitution bench of the Supreme Court looks at Zarathustra's Vision and the great transformative vision of the Constitution of India as well, to clarify the question for the Parsi women.

LEADING THROUGH CRISIS THE ZOROASTRIAN WAY



Lord Karan Bilimoria

Lord Bilimoria was introduced by Dorab Mistry, Past President of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe, London.

Introduction

Lord Karan Bilimoria of Chelsea is the first ever Zoroastrian to be a member of the House of Lords. He was ennobled in 2006 and sits as a Crossbencher. Founder, Chairman, and CEO of COBRA Beer. Karan is a Patron of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe and chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group for International Students in the UK. He served as the first non-white President of the Confederation of British Industry for two years 2020 to 2022, and serves as Chancellor of the University of Birmingham. A Chartered Accountant, he also has a Law degree from Cambridge University and is an Alumni of Harvard.



Report of the Speech

One of the highlights of the 12WZC was the Keynote Plenary session speech by Lord Karan Bilimoria on the topic “Leading through Crisis the Zoroastrian Way”.

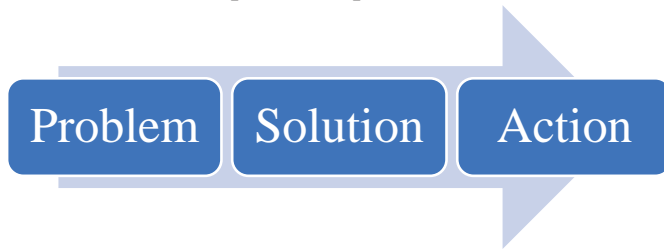
Karan’s highly personal but extremely relevant and thoughtful address was

greeted with frequent applause and brought the house down at several junctures.

He started by tracing the history of Globalization over the last 200 years, its rise after the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, its interruption by World War I, and finally its premature demise with World War II. Then its revival after 1945 and strong rise until 2015 when Brexit and the election of Donald Trump brought it to a screeching halt.

Karan spoke of the leadership he had to deploy during his two-year term as President of the Confederation of British Industry from July 2020 to June 2022, which coincided with the COVID pandemic.

His Mantra of Entrepreneurship was



His major initiative during Covid in the UK was to obtain a 100% UK Government guarantee for emergency loans advanced by banks to Small & Medium Enterprises to tide them over the COVID-led recession. Eventually, 1.6 million businesses took out such loans and that helped them survive the pandemic

He also instituted a plan called Change the Ratio to encourage private sector businesses to increase the representation of Female, Black, and Asian as well as LGBT managers and directors.

He spoke of the contribution of the CBI in mobilizing oxygen-generating plants and medical supplies during the very deadly Second Wave of COVID in India in 2021.

Similarly, in February 2022, upon the outbreak of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, he organized a massive effort by the private sector in the UK to send aid and supplies to Ukraine.

As regards his personal journey, he said the journey of COBRA beer (perhaps the best-known Indian Brand in the UK) was:

*“Spot a gap in the market (have a passion for something or hate something passionately)
Find your product to fill that gap
Execute efficiently and professionally”
He used the term “Be Humbitious” – humble yet ambitious.*

Speaking of his own pride in being a Zoroastrian, he referred to the 2500-year-old Cyrus Cylinder and said he would constantly compare the durability and strength of the Declaration of Human Rights enshrined in the Cyrus Cylinder with the 800-year-old Magna Carta in the UK

Referring to the contemporary UK, he brought the house down with his mention of the UK’s great Zoroastrian icons – Freddie Mercury, Tata Motors (Jaguar Land rover), the vaccine – Astra Zeneca & Poonawalla, and of course Cobra beer.

Karan journeyed down memory lane and spoke of having met Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu (a fellow Cambridge graduate from the same Sidney Sussex college) and been inspired by them. He quoted a famous 1988 speech by Archbishop Tutu when he addressed the then-South African Government and proclaimed that they had already lost.

He also spoke of his association with Harvard University where he had attended 16 executive education terms and became an Alumni. He recalled that he had learned the 7 Cs of handling a crisis – *Calmness, Confidence, Communication, Compassion, Collaboration, Community, and Cash.*

He focussed on the twin values of industry and integrity. His own Court of Arms says: *“To aspire and achieve against all odds with integrity”.*

He referred to his friend the Nobel Laureate Professor Amartya Sen writing that today we have multiple identities – Karan regarded himself as an Indian, a British Asian, and a UK Zoroastrian. He felt enormously proud of being all three.

Finally, it was time to pay tributes. Karan congratulated ZAGNY and FEZANA on organizing such a large World Congress with such success. He also paid tribute to his own home Federation the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe and the work undertaken by it. He spoke of his deep admiration for the Royal Family and their recognition of Zoroastrians and our faith. In 2006, when appointed to the House of Lords, he was its 3rd youngest member and even after 16 years, he was one of the youngest. He had insisted on taking his oath of office on a copy of the Zoroastrian Prayer Book which remains in the Speakers Box to this day. He spoke admiringly of two fellow members of the ZTFE – his friend Sir Ron Kalifa who had recently been knighted for services to Fintech and the City of London,

and Zar Amroliya, one of the most successful Fintech entrepreneurs in London.

Karan rounded off with remarks on Climate Change and his own participation in the COP 26 conference in Glasgow leading a

delegation of British Industry, on Brexit and his Chancellorship of the University of Birmingham.

In the end Karan received a standing ovation and everyone agreed it was a speech to remember.

**“Be Humbitious”
humble yet ambitious.**

Cultivating Conscience Through Wisdom



Mobed Dr. Ardeshir Khorshidian

On Jashn-e Tirgan of the Zoroastrian year 3760, 10th Tir 1401 and July 1st 2022, a recording of an address by the Mobed Dr. Ardeshir Khorshidian, the Head of Tehran Anjuman e-Moobedan, was played. It was recorded in Tehran Anaram Izad, Ordibehesht month of the Zoroastrian year 3760 -19th May 2022.



Greetings from our glorious prophet, Asho Zarathustra Spitaman to all the organizers and participants of this Holy World conference.

As the Head of Tehran Anjuman of Mobedan, the Highest Official and Legal Organization managing Zoroastrians' for Religious, Traditional and Cultural activities, it is my duty and social responsibility, from religious and legal 'undertaking to thank you and to request you to consider these vital points.

The greatest concerns of our society today more than ever before: even though our Zoroastrian society is making significant progress in the acquisition of intellectual science at specialized and sub-specialized levels and are serving the society well, unfortunately, due to various reasons, our beloved youth, and the future-founders of our society are moving away from their original religion, more than ever in our history, are being influenced by numerous sectarian and religious beliefs from east, west, north, and south; and hence at a loss to correctly distinguish "right from wrong" and "good from bad", and have fallen away to a large extent from their original culture which is full of humanity and good morals based on Human Rights.

All the Ahuraye Mazdayasni religion teachings, brought by our prophet Asho Zarathustra in the holy book "the Gathas", the nine principles of religion which even now

after four thousand years do not need any updating, it is perfect “in the realm of the knowledge of the religion which is for cultivating conscience through wisdom. The young are trapped in routineness and have turned, towards alienation of religion, even challenging the religion itself. I humbly request you, the respected and honourable people of the Zoroastrian Society – including the Parsis and Iranians – to try more than before., together to find the reasons and difficulties for this alienation. By finding a wise solution and more scientific and practical planning at this golden opportunity, will resolve all these inadequacies and failures of the society, by forming specialized groups and providing sufficient funds donated and supported by benevolent people.

We hope to witness by the next four years when the thirteenth World Zoroastrian congress is held in Singapore,

with your continuous efforts and with Ahura Mazda’s support, you can proudly announce, based on the figures and statistics, that you have truly been able to increase the religiosity level of our seemingly small but great in concept, community, by institutionalizing all the necessities and merits of the Ahuraye Zoroastrian religion, rite and culture, and unite all the Zoroastrians more and more towards fulfilling our prophet Asho Zarathustra’s goal.

In Yasna 30, he says “We wish to be among those who guide the people towards Truth (Ashoi) and Goodness (Vahuman) and the world towards Prosperity and Progress”

May Truth win and Goodness increase!



“We hope to witness by the next four years when the thirteenth World Zoroastrian congress is held in Singapore... unite all the Zoroastrians more and more towards fulfilling our prophet Asho Zarathustra’s goal.”



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Faith Matters: Bridging our Global Human Existence



Ervad Tehemton Mirza



From left Astad Clubwalla; Swami Sarvapriyananda, Bhai Sahib Satpal Singh Ji; Dasturji Khurshed Dastoor, Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, Father Brian E. McWeeney, Ervad Tehemton Mirza. All holding the book, "Zoroastrianism in other faiths" authored and gifted by Justice Nariman.

The theme of the World Zoroastrian Congress 2022 was "Bridging the Global *Zarathushti* Existence." In the spirit of this message of unity, representatives of five great faith traditions addressed the Congress participants and shared their perspectives on the

opening day of the Congress. Their mission was to attempt to bridge our Global *Human* existence, regardless of people's faith or lack thereof.

These leaders reaffirmed that faith remains relevant in our ever-changing contemporary world and that all the world's great religions are grounded in common truths. Through spiritual awakening, humankind will be able to overcome global challenges, such as climate change, pollution, war, and aggression.

By emphasizing the commonalities among various faith traditions, they promoted harmony among their followers. They recommitted to working in harmony with each other for the betterment of humanity.

Dasturji Khurshed Dastoor of Iranshah Atashbehram at Udvada started the segment by putting forward a compelling case for cooperation between the various religious and faith traditions. He stated that the teachings of all the world's great religions are grounded in the common basis of the betterment of humanity. He emphasized the importance of developing and executing goals for the betterment of humankind. Dasturji challenged the participant to live by the Zoroastrian teaching of HuVarshta and act for the betterment of humanity.

Father Brian E. McWeeney, Director of the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and Community Outreach for the Archdioceses of New York, shared his words of wisdom, acquired over some 50 years of religious service. He stressed the Mosaic approach, where all the faiths operate for a common goal while maintaining their uniqueness. He reminded the participants of the camaraderie amongst all the faith traditions during the aftermath of 9/11 in NY. He drew participants' attention to the "throw-away" society that we have become and impressed the importance of respecting the elements of nature by reducing waste and landfills. His call to "Bring back the TV Repairman instead of throwing away a non-working TV" was seconded by the participants with cheers and applause.

Swami Sarvapriyananda, Spiritual Leader of the Vedanta Society of New York (founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1894), reminded the audience of the

close connection between Swami Vivekanand and Sir Jamshedji Tata. He marveled at how a faith leader was a catalyst for Sir Jamshedji Tata's decision to establish Institutes for higher learning in India that has benefited the world through its graduates. He spoke of Anquetil-Duperron, who was involved in bringing Bundahishn and Upanishads to the West. He quoted the Upanishads, "Truth is one, the wise speak and express it differently."

Rabbi Potsnik, the Executive Vice President of the New York Board of Rabbis and host of the TV Program "Faith to Faith," reminded the audience that those who hate me today would hate you tomorrow, and thus we should all stand together against hate in this world. He informed the audience of his close connection with leaders of other faiths in NY and their help for each other in their time of need. He stated that humanity is alive and well by quoting instances when people helped each other in their time of need, regardless of their faith convictions. His stress of "Never Again" drew the commonality of Jewish and Zoroastrian genocide.



Bhai Sahib Satpal Singh Ji, former Chairperson of the World Sikh Council – America Region and a Founding Trustee of the Sikh Council for Interfaith Relations, reminded the audience that "Just as God made one earth, He made one Spirit." He stressed that all of us are children of the same God. He acknowledged that religious leaders have a unique role to play in dealing with the world's problems – particularly climate change. He admitted that much needs to be done toward this goal. He emphasized the diversity and interconnectedness in the world in all the elements of nature. He stressed that as we share our primary human components (blood, bones, muscle, etc.) regardless of our religions, so do we share our humanity. He called on all to be respectful of all humans, irrespective of their gender, religion, or other aspects that distinguish us.

Ervad Tehemton Mirza *President of the North American Mobeds Council moderated this session.*

WE THE ZOROASTRIAN WOMEN VOICES OF TODAY, LEADERS OF TOMORROW



Benafsha Shroff



When I joined the programming committee for the 2022 WZC in the fall of 2020, it was on the heels of attending the World Zoroastrian Youth Congress the previous year. At that congress, I had the privilege of facilitating a dialogue between eight young, passionate, and ambitious Zoroastrian women from around the world who shared their stories about what they

had learned about gender, tradition, and progress. As we collectively discussed several hot-button issues, we got to the heart of what it means to be a contemporary young woman living out their faith. In turn, that session made way for a larger conversation that I didn't realize we weren't openly having in our community.

That conversation was about how the diversity of women in our community is overlooked when forming ideas about who the Zoroastrian woman is in today's world. During the session, we recognized as young adults that by acknowledging this diversity, leadership in our community would be truly reflective of our entire community. It was then that many of us began to really question why there weren't more women in roles of leadership. The energy and passion from the other young adults engaging in this topic reaffirmed to me that this was a conversation that

needed to happen on the global platform on a much larger scale.

As the programming work began for the WZC, this topic was pitched as 'women's empowerment' during the early stages of planning, but the true essence of what we wanted the session to encompass was much more ambitious. It took many attempts to outline the objectives for this session. Women's issues cannot be narrowly labeled as inequality or ill-treatment or even underrepresentation. Understanding the diversity of our women means that the issues we inherently face are also diverse.

There were 3 key objectives initially defined by Mantreh Atashband, Viraf Soroushian, and myself.

1. Understanding and learning about the female mobeds journey
2. Defining and redefining the modern Zoroastrian women
3. Form an active women's networking group by partnering with ZWIN (Zoroastrian Women's International Network) and WZCC WE (World Zoroastrian Chamber of Commerce- Women Entrepreneur) as well as any other established groups that needed bolstering

Very clearly, these were three ambitious objectives but nonetheless achievable to us all.

We had a clear vision for how to accomplish the first and last objective, however, we knew our primary challenge would be hosting a session around women's issues (defining and redefining the modern Zoroastrian woman) that needed a lot of structure but at the same time allowed for honesty and vulnerability. With this in mind, we assembled a global planning group to further develop the concept. As we got to work, several contributors argued that women in our community are - by and large - already empowered, so what would be the purpose of such a passé topic to be woven into the fabric of how we approached defining and redefining the modern Zoroastrian woman?

Defining the Themes

Instead, the focus shifted to providing women in our community an opportunity to define the topics and the issues that were most relevant to them by themselves. Despite how diverse our planning group for this session was, we all found it very challenging to narrow down the topics that could be covered in a 60–90-minute congress session. Therefore, we thought it best to host small group round-table discussions allowing participants a safe space whereby they would be able to freely discuss any

conversation that organically arose. Naturally, we spent a great deal of time developing a few leading questions that would help facilitate the conversation.

- ❖ *What is it that women are doing that sustains the Zoroastrian faith and way of life?*
- ❖ *What would you not want to pass on to the next generation in terms of gender roles?*
- ❖ *How can we better harness Zoroastrian women's diverse and rich talents and gifts to enrich the community and the wider world?*

In my mind, the main purpose of having this dialogue was to encourage members of our community to truly recognize the diversity and strength of our women and their importance in how we organize ourselves and grow our community. To dig deeper and discuss why our elected representation (worldwide) is very much lacking the presence of women. Where is the disconnect when



The working group from left Shazneen Munshi; Aban Rustomji; Katayun Kapadia, Shahin Bekhradnia; Benafsha Shroff; Freny Nina Pavri; Mantreh Atashband; Rashna Writer; Arzan Sam Wadia. Zerbano Gifford, Moderator, not in picture).

Zoroastrian women as global citizens are conquering their professional industries and personal lives?

During these session planning meetings, we all worked tirelessly to put together an execution plan committed to creating a truly unique and meaningful experience for participants. All of this was before registration opened. I mention this because, in addition to registration numbers superseding our initial estimates, there was an overwhelming response for this session to be accessible to more attendees. Ironically, we had underestimated the level of interest there would be in a women's session.

Unfortunately, it became clear that facilitating small group discussions (among potentially upwards of 700 people) would not be an easy task in a room full of opinionated and strong-willed Zoroastrian men and women. Beyond that, there was no fail-proof method to create a safe space to converse in the way that we had envisioned. Although I am confident that this preliminary structure can and will work at a future congress, it simply was not the best structure to serve the purpose at this congress due to the sheer number of participants.

The Working Group then agreed that the most effective way to still honor our vision of creating awareness around the importance of more women in leadership roles was to showcase the diversity and strength of our existing dynamic female leaders. We all agreed that a panel of experienced women (and men) presenting their stories and perspectives would provide the greatest example of solidarity and possibility. Each panelist, with their own journey and ideas, voices their challenges and triumphs while encouraging the audience to think differently about a variety of issues that affect us all.

Call to Action

We also wanted there to be a call to action to take the next step forward towards having more representation of

women in elected leadership positions globally. We crafted a letter for congress attendees to sign which has been distributed to community organizations and the press for support and endorsement. This collective effort is to demonstrate that we are hopeful about the change that will take place.

Women's Network

And serendipitously, our third objective was achieved by the grace of Zerbano Gifford who gifted the community with a beautiful, well-designed, inclusive, and functional website to support the network of Zoroastrian women worldwide, aptly named ZASHA (Zoroastrian Alliance of Sisters Here and Abroad). Her gift ended up becoming the timeliest compliment to the session (to the entire congress as a matter of fact) and unquestionably made it possible for dialogue to be turned into action. To find out more and to be a part of ZASHA, please visit www.ZASHA.info



I am proud to say that, through this session, we accomplished the mighty task of shedding light on why we need more women in roles of leadership and authority in our local organizations. We conveyed the importance of our diversity, the value of our perspectives, the strength of our solidarity, and the growing need for an uprising from more women to be the elected leaders our community wants.

Benafsha Shroff has worked as a Political Strategist and Communications Specialist for over a decade. She has developed unique experiences by living and working in the United States, India, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Benafsha was born and raised in Denver, Colorado, and graduated from the University of Denver. She now lives in Vancouver, Canada.





ZASHA – WEBSITE OF ZOROASTRIAN WOMEN WORLDWIDE

Zerbanoo Gifford



younger generation and those that want to know about our faith.

The website was my gift to the brilliantly successful 12th World Zoroastrian Congress at New York. It was to complement the ground-breaking debate titled "Womens' Voices of Today, Leaders of Tomorrow", which I was actively involved in.

The new ZASHA website represents the strength, intelligence, and generosity of spirit of Zoroastrian women worldwide. The idea of ZASHA came to me during meditation. I saw an attractive, accessible, website that showed the talents and goodness of Zoroastrian women. I believe it was a timely idea. It would be a platform for us to interact with each other, to inspire a

Conferences impact on people's actions but a website that is interactive, evolves and is a catalyst for true and good change is also important. The ZASHA website is there to celebrate the various and magnificent achievements of Zoroastrian women worldwide. It is to connect and empower our women to take their rightful place leading our community. The days are over when women can be marginalised and made to feel unwanted and awkward in positions of power.

Nothing good is achieved without input of others, and I have many people to thank for helping me make ZASHA a reality. They contacted Zoroastrian women around the world and encouraged them to send their biographies and photos for the new website. The success of the ZASHA site is due to their input and hard work. In years to come when researchers look at the site, they will see the paper trail of all the men and women who sent names in and helped this project happen. A special thank you to Toxy Cowasjee the past editor of the WZO's Hamazor publication. Her energy

and determination to see ZASHA come into being was fabulous.

We also needed a ZASHA Facebook page. I can confirm that the universe really does work in mysterious ways at the right time to make marvellous things happen. It conjured up the wonderful Dilnavaz Shroff who is a Director of the "World Zarathushti Chamber of Commerce" and Yazdi Tantra the founder of "Zoroastrians.net." They immediately set up the social media so that we could all be connected and bring our ideas and work to light. They signed me up to Facebook and explained that a website only thrives if used by people. So, it is up to you all to make the ZASHA site flourish with your inputs, ideas, and stories. The ZASHA team will work to promote social campaign, businesses, books, upcoming events and educational opportunities. The site will also house archives for those researching the Zoroastrian faith and heritage. But it needs you to make it lively and relevant.

I named the website ZASHA. Z for Zoroastrian and Asha is the name of the centre I founded in England for the enrichment and enlightenment of people especially the young. Asha is the basis of what we believe brings truth, order, righteousness, and justice to our world. In Russian ZASHA means "The defender of People" and in South Africa "The Spirit of Fire" which we revere. ZASHA also neatly spells "Zoroastrian Alliance of Sisters Here and Abroad." I also love the sound of ZASHA which is both feminine and fun.

I hope this new website will bring joy and be used to bring unity and happiness to our women and the communities they have always guided with love. I am in awe of them. They are unbelievably talented, and have a sense of giving back as well as being highly motivated and successful themselves. Reading about our women on the ZASHA site you wonder who are these supersonic women who are leaving such an incredible legacy. Why have we never heard of so many of them and what they achieve? They have their faith in common, but it is in different ways they have challenged and overcome the restrictions placed on their gender by society and those that under value women and the feminine principle. By refusing to be bound by social, legal, political, or domestic conventions of their time, they are shaping our modern world into something more inclusive, vibrant, and healthy. I am confident that future generations will thank all of them for being courageous and for keeping the Zoroastrian goodness and magic alive throughout our shared world.



Already there are many wonderful stories of how ZASHA women have interacted and started to put their visions into action. Freny Pavri, the actor had lost contact with her Zoroastrian sisters but is now using the ZASHA site to reconnect. She has been inspired to start the Zoroastrian Arts Council. Freny is using the site to initiate talks with other gifted artists so they can work together across countries. This will lead to a creative fusion of ideas that everyone will benefit from for years to come.

The ZASHA site is there to support women in their determination for equality which is everyone's birth right. In the Gathas it clearly states that men and women should use their good mind to decide how to live a virtuous life. No one should be given credence to dictate backward looking ideas that openly discriminate against women. It goes against everything our prophet preached. He was the

first feminist who extolled the need for everyone to be treated the same, welcoming of all who wished to live good lives. Therefore the ZASHA team will proudly support the work of our female mobedyars who have been side-lined and excluded from their priestly duties. We will support the right of Zoroastrian women to bring their children up as proud Zoroastrians. Our children are the foundations of our beautiful faith. No longer can we allow them to be excluded because of bigotry and outdated notions. We will give a platform to our writers, artists and entrepreneurs who bring pride to our community. We will highlight the ground-breaking work of those that teach and inspire our young to approach life with a kind and creative way of living.

I hope that we will campaign for the rights our women and stand in solidarity with our sisters everywhere who are still being violated and victimised. The ZASHA website is the international face of Zoroastrian women who are redefining our important role in a fastmoving world which demands true equality and respect for all women.

Zerbanoo Gifford *author, human rights campaigner and founder of ASHA Centre, holds the Nehru Centenary Award and the International Woman of the Year Award for her humanitarian work. Authored seven books, including Dadabhai Naoroji-Britain's first Asian MP and Confessions of a serial womaniser- Secrets of the World's Inspirational Women, she interviewed 300 exceptional women from 60 countries for Britain's prestigious NESTA fellowship.*

Women's Role in Securing the Zoroastrian Community's Future

Rashna Writer



On 1st July 2022, at the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress in New York, a feisty group of Zoroastrian women, led by Zerbanoo Gifford, took part in a session on 'We, the Zoroastrian Women: Voices of Today, Leaders of Tomorrow'. Zerbanoo was the keynote speaker who brought the team together and spoke, in the

strongest terms for more women office-holders in community associations, and the strict limit of two terms in office. The launch of the ZASHA website, Zerbanoo's brainchild, is a gift that will keep on giving. It is and will continue to be a repository of Zoroastrian women's contributions to their community and the wider world.

The participants came from diverse backgrounds and shared their insights in their distinctive ways. Katayun Kapadia, a chartered accountant, spoke of her experiences at the top of her profession. Shahin Bekhradnia, a granddaughter of a renowned Iranian Zoroastrian priest, emphasized the equality of women in our tradition as laid down in the texts. Freny Nia, an accomplished actress spoke of the need for a Zoroastrian cultural heritage center; while Arzan Sam Wadia, President of FEZANA and a most welcome male representative on the panel addressed the issue of listening to and supporting women.

In the many months of preparation that went into putting this multi-national panel together, we worked alongside – and enjoyed many lively moments – with our young, enthusiastic facilitators: Mantreh Atasband a public health professional; Shazneen Munshi, a policy advisor in the UK, and Benafsha Shroff, a political strategist and communications specialist. The future of the Zoroastrians is safe in the hands of these immensely capable young women.

As importantly, our group was gently shepherded by Aban Rustomji who, in addition to her duties alongside Keki Dadachanji as Co-chair of the Program Committee was an integral member of the Women's Panel.

I spoke on 'Women's Role in Securing the Zoroastrian Community's Future' and began with the Gathic verse Y53.3:

Do thou preserve, Pourucista of the lineage of Haecataspa and Spitma, thou young one among Zarathustra's daughters. To thee shall He grant the firm foundation of good thinking and the alliance of truth and wisdom. Therefore, come to terms with thy will, and bring to realization the most virtuous and blessed (acts) of piety.

Zarathustra's endorsement for womankind is arguably, the template for all time, and encapsulates the centrality of women in society.

The unique historical vicissitudes faced by Zoroastrians has led to our spread across the globe. Moving away from the Old Countries, in Iran and India our way of life and distinctive identities were nurtured over generations, whereas today, we are establishing ourselves in our new homes, often in environments where our hosts don't really know who exactly we are.

When people are separated by time and space, the redrawing of their identity is challenging. In meeting this challenge, our Zoroastrian women must take their place to spearhead the next, vital chapter of our story: the coming together of Iranian and Parsi Zoroastrians to galvanize our community.

All Zoroastrian women – mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, grand-mothers, aunts – have a role to play. True, there will be distinct Parsi/Iranian attitudes to almost every aspect of life: language, religious interpretation, pronunciation of the prayers, understanding of our history, food, music, humor and more. We must admit that these seemingly irreconcilable differences are the result of our millennial separation.

Some of our misunderstandings over religious interpretation – prayers, calendar etc. – are not unique to the 21st century Zoroastrian fraternity. Thus, we learn from the *Letter of Tansar* that the local king of Tabaristan, a certain Gushnasp, accused Ardeshir, the great Sasanian monarch:

“of forsaking tradition; and right though this may be for the world, it is not good for the faith.”

What a rebuke to the founder of the Sasanian dynasty!

Equally contentious are questions relating to the distinctive Zoroastrian calendar. This was a matter of immense debates under Achaemenid and Sasanian monarchs, and calendar controversies raged during the reigns of Ardashir, Hormizd I, Kavid I, and calendar controversies continued. Today we may think of ourselves as Parsis and Iranian, but even at the height of empire, there were regional differences within the Zoroastrian fraternity.

The compartmentalization of the community in the diaspora – Parsis and Iranians – is understandable. To seek familiarity in an unfamiliar environment is a natural response of the immigrant and explains the early groupings. But now we must look ahead and plan for the future.

As the size and contours of the Zoroastrian world change, we need to project confidence in who we are. We define ourselves in terms of our Zoroastrian religion. In reality, we are more than *just* a religious grouping. We are very aware that our history stretches back millennia, which automatically suggests that we have a distinctive historical/cultural background. It is this, together with our religion that we must re-acquaint ourselves with, and hand down to the next generation(s). When we know who we are, it gives us a sense of self-confidence, which we can then project to the world.

Perhaps an Action Plan could help. In the cities and towns where there are Zoroastrians, women should come together to teach and learn from each other: Parsis learn from the Iranians and vice versa. A few committed women kick-start this undertaking, which becomes the flagship town where both groups talk/share all matters Zoroastrian with the aim of galvanizing the community. This success will encourage other towns to follow suit.

This re-learning and re-acquaintance will solidify our foundations as a community. We will come to understand that India never forgot Iran and vice versa. The *Persian Rivayats* – the corpus of letters exchanged between 1478 until 1768 – demonstrates how the Parsis turned for



Women on a Sasanian silver hemispherical bowl from the 5th-7th century AD.

guidance to the *mobads* of Iran. Later, from 1854, the establishment of the *Amelioration Society* led the Parsis to fight vigorously on behalf of their Iranian kinsmen not just for the removal of the hated *jizya* poll tax, but much more. Our ancestors did what the times called for, because they saw themselves as the

custodians of our heritage. Now it is our turn to craft our own path and come together as one Zoroastrian peoples.

Take language which is a marker of identity. In the diaspora we should avail ourselves of the opportunity to teach our children Farsi, and if we are genuinely ambitious, Dari. As a Parsi myself, perhaps our generation may be prepared to admit that English is our thinking language, therefore the community-wide acceptance of Dari/Farsi should be given serious thought. To those who say this is an idealistic platform that defies success, I ask you: do we want to become atomized into two distinct and irreconcilable groups: Iranians and Parsis? Separation must not be allowed to become acceptable. We lack the critical mass of numbers. Therefore, entrenched fragmentation poses a real danger to the survival of recognizable Zoroastrians. It is imperative that we consolidate the base.

In the process of becoming American, Canadian, British Australian etc., we are forging new identities. Our 21st century Zoroastrianism will be crafted onto these new, evolving identities. Change and changing circumstances are features of our times. How we accept this, and the provisions we make for it will define our future.

Rashna Writer holds a doctorate in *International Relations* from the *London School of Economics*. A political scientist who commenced her career at the *International Institute of Strategic Studies, London* and pursued a parallel career in academia and authored *Contemporary Zoroastrians: An Unstructured Nation*; co-authored with *Shahrokh Shahrokh* *The Memoirs of Keikhosrow Shahrokh*, and authored “*The reshaping of Iran from Zoroastrian to Muslim, producing an audio book* *The story of the Zoroastrians: An historical Perspective*. As senior research fellow at *SOAS University of London* from 2008-2019, she lectured on Zoroastrianism in ancient and modern worlds.

The Era of Divine Awakening: An Interview with Mobedyār Armita Dalal

Mantreh Atashband



The 12th World Zoroastrian Congress that was held in New York City in July 2022 was unparalleled with its diverse programming, capturing the many conversations within our ever evolving community. With

over 1200 attendees from all over the world, participants had the chance to discuss and debate issues facing our community in a safe and nurturing setting.

In an overflowing conference room, for the first time on a global stage, a panel of esteemed women Mobedyārs led the audience through their journey of spiritual awakening and the calling to become religious leaders in their communities.

Sessions dedicated to Mobeds and Mobedyārs are a staple at most Zoroastrian congresses but normally lack the presence of women Mobedyārs. Although gender equality has been a central tenet of the religion, priestly duties have remained a male-dominated role.

However, this tide is shifting. An era of awakening is upon us with more and more women choosing to

pursue intensive training and religious study to become Mobedyārs.

One such woman is Mobedyār Armita Dalal from California. At the session, she led the audience through a lively conversation with fellow *Mobedyārs Panteha Soroushpour and Mobedyār Teshtar Irani*. (photo below left, *Mobedyar Armita Dalal, Mantreh Atashband; Mobedyar Teshtar Irani; Mobedyar Panteha Soroushpour*) The audience laughed, cried, and cheered while these Mobedyars shared their enlightening journey of becoming ordained, the ups & downs of being a woman Mobedyār and why having more women in religious leadership is essential for the advancement of our faith.

Post-congress, after a few days of rest and recuperation from spending almost 2 years in Congress planning mode, Armita (photo below) and I sat down to chat about that Mobedyār session (a retrospective of sorts), and what's next for this growing movement of women leaders.

Armita jaan, congratulations on a successful session! The Congress was buzzing about the women Mobedyār session with discussions carrying over onto social media and beyond. How does it make you feel to have this conversation at the forefront?



Armita: Thank you for your kind words Mantreh jaan. This was a group effort and the congratulations goes out to all the ladies, including you who worked many hours behind the scene to make this event happen. I am ecstatic that this subject was broached at the 12 WZC. The time to discuss this matter and return to our roots is now.

In the Avestan text, Shayest-ne-Shayest it states that women can assume priestly roles:

ŠnŠ 10.35 zan pad zōtīh [ī] zanān šāyēd

A woman is allowed to assume the office of women's chief priest.

Also, we are taught that our religion promotes gender equality. And still, many people in our community are surprised that women can become Mobedyārs. Why do you think over the years we've moved to a male-dominated clergy? And, how do you see this shifting?

Armita: Throughout the centuries, as our community strived to survive and keep the faith alive, we somehow forgot some of our core teachings by Ashu Zarathushtra. We were also a minority living among those who followed male dominant cultures and religions, thus influencing some of our ways. In my opinion, this further contributed to our already male dominant clergy, toward the end of the Sasanian era. Today, there is a lot more awareness about the Avestan language. The number of linguists who can translate these texts is growing. There is more

awareness about our scripts and more access to the learnings that demonstrate the pure essence of Zarathushtra's teachings and way of life.

Why do you feel it is essential for women to become religious leaders and be ordained as Mobedyārs?

Majority of religious class leaders are women. And in a home, the woman is normally the one who implements customs and ceremonies. And historically in small villages in Iran, it is the woman who carries out many of the religious customs and makes sure the children know their prayers and are following certain practices. Women have been religious leaders in their communities for centuries. Being trained and welcomed as a Mobedyār is a natural next step for those who seek it.

What perceive as a woman do you provide that is different from a male Priest?

Armita: For me, to be accepted as a woman Mobedyār, I am somehow required to go beyond what a male Mobedyār does. Why is that? As long as I am capable and trained, I am entitled to be a Mobedyār. Our presence, our willingness, our devotion and our ability is what qualifies us.

The tides are shifting. In North America, women are welcomed to become Mobedyārs. In Iran, they are welcomed to become Mobedyārs. However, there are other Zoroastrian communities who are not open to



having women in the clergy. How do you think we can set an example so more communities can be inclusive in their clergy?

Armita: Education. Understanding. Respect. Communication. Practice. Sharing experiences that demonstrate women Mobedyārs are as qualified as their male counterparts. In time, I believe our modern global diaspora will embrace and welcome women Mobedyārs.

What do you require from male Mobeds & Mobedyārs in the form of allyship?

Armita: To remember and truly live Zarathushtra's original teachings. To welcome, recognize, and empower women as equals in all facets of our community.

What support do women Mobedyārs need from our community-at-large?

Armita: To welcome and involve more women Mobedyārs to take part and facilitate ceremonies at their events and functions.

Armita Jaan, thank you for taking the time to have this discussion with me. Lastly, if a woman is interested in becoming a Mobedyār, who can they contact to start the conversation?

Armita: An account has been set up to address any questions and guide them to the right people. The email address is: mobedyars@gmail.com As a woman, witnessing our distinguished women Mobedyārs take the stage with their male counterparts during the opening prayers of the 12th WZC is an image I will never forget. The chanting of our beautiful prayers in shared voices, the united front of our religious leaders and mentors, gave me hope. Hope for a future, where our little girls can aspire to be leaders in our community, in any way they choose.

Mantreh Atashband is a public health professional, focusing on alternative and Ayurvedic health, and holistic health care. She was the co-founder of NextGenNow, marketing lead for the 2003 North American Zoroastrian Youth Congress, communications lead for the 2007 North American Zoroastrian Congress and on the programme committee for the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress.



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Identity, Belonging and Community



James Ball



From left Keki Dadchanji, James Ball, Narges Kakalia; Anne Khademian; Homa Dashtaki

The presentation on Identity, Belonging and Community at the World Zoroastrian Congress in New York City was wonderfully received and I am grateful to our moderator

Keki Dadachanji for bringing together such a special panel. I was humbled to join Homa Dashtaki, Narges Kakalia, and Anne Khademian to share our personal experiences with

Zoroastrian identity, belonging, and community. Our life stories represented the full diversity of upbringings, with either two, one or no Zoroastrian parents. Some of us found our Zoroastrian identity later in life, others chose partners of different faiths. We all identify as Zoroastrian.

While our presentation at the congress attempted to share the fullness of our life experiences, we were only able to convey part of the deeper discussion that went into preparing for our talk. We spent multiple evenings exploring and discovering together what these universal ideas meant to each of us. It became clear in our early conversations that while we were brought together due to our unique perspectives on interfaith marriage, this theme didn't fully convey the subtleties and complexities of each of our experiences. Through the time we spent listening to each other's stories we gained a deep compassion and connection with one another's Zoroastrian journeys. I hope that this article helps expand on the fullness of those journey's and continues to spark conversations in each of your homes about what these ideas mean to you.

IDENTITY

A common trait of each panelist's identity is that it evolved throughout our lives, sometimes by choice and sometimes by forces outside of our control. The identity of being Zoroastrian never stood in isolation; it was connected to our identities of race, nationality and family. To varying degrees each of us struggled and persevered through these changes in our identity. There was a weight to our discussions about some of these changes, an internal wrestling with who we wanted to be, the lives we wanted to live, the people we wanted to love, and the way we wanted to raise our children. Despite each of us answering these questions in different ways, I think we all felt the need to find answers that were authentic to ourselves. This meant choosing paths that each of our Good Minds told us was right and not taking other's opinions with blind acceptance. Asking the hard questions and taking the time to reflect on the path of Asha for me is an enriching part of what it means to be Zoroastrian.

BELONGING AND COMMUNITY

There was at times a contradiction in the way we talked about our sense of belonging in the Zoroastrian

community. We frequently enumerated the welcoming and kind acceptance we received from our communities and at times our families, while at the same time each of us expressed a sense we didn't belong. In retrospect I wonder if this was more about our own sense of belonging than something the community projected on us. Perhaps it is a messy combination of both. Belonging to me speaks to an alignment of personal identity and community identity. If our community identifies itself narrowly, only those that share that specific identity will feel a sense of belonging. Of course, to define our community identity too broadly loses all definition. Perhaps this is an issue that is also fluid. We are a global community; surely it is expected that different countries, cities, anjumans, and families will feel they belong more or less in different parts of our broader community. Is that as it should be? For the panelists, we discussed a much more intimate feeling of belonging—the one we felt when we found the person we loved and chose to marry, a single person with whom we felt fully accepted and seen for who we truly are.

MOVING FORWARD

It was a ground rule for our panel's discussions that we were not there to pass judgment or even find 'takeaways' we all agreed on. We showed up to share and to listen; letting our stories speak for us about the challenging topics of Zoroastrian identity, belonging and community in today's global diaspora. I hope that vulnerability helped humanize this conversation that is often more ideological. We all have such unique experiences to inform how we approach these themes, let's keep the conversation going. I want to end by expressing my deepest gratitude for the congress organizers and fellow panelists. It was incredible to show up to the first conversation with Keki, Narges, Homa, and Anne thinking we would just be 'preparing for a talk' and to have taken instead an unexpected personal journey exploring these important ideas with friends.

James Darius Ball lives in Hyattsville, MD with his wife and kids. He is the Senior Sustainability Manager for Juno Residential, a start up company working to scale sustainable living. He holds a Bachelors in Industrial Design from Pratt Institute and Master's of Environmental Management from Yale.



THE CHILDREN OF INTERMARRIAGE AND THE FORMATION OF IDENTITY

Nazneen Engineer, Ph.D

The topic of intermarriage has stimulated fierce debate within the Zoroastrian community for centuries, but the offspring of intermarried couples have largely been forgotten in the discourse.

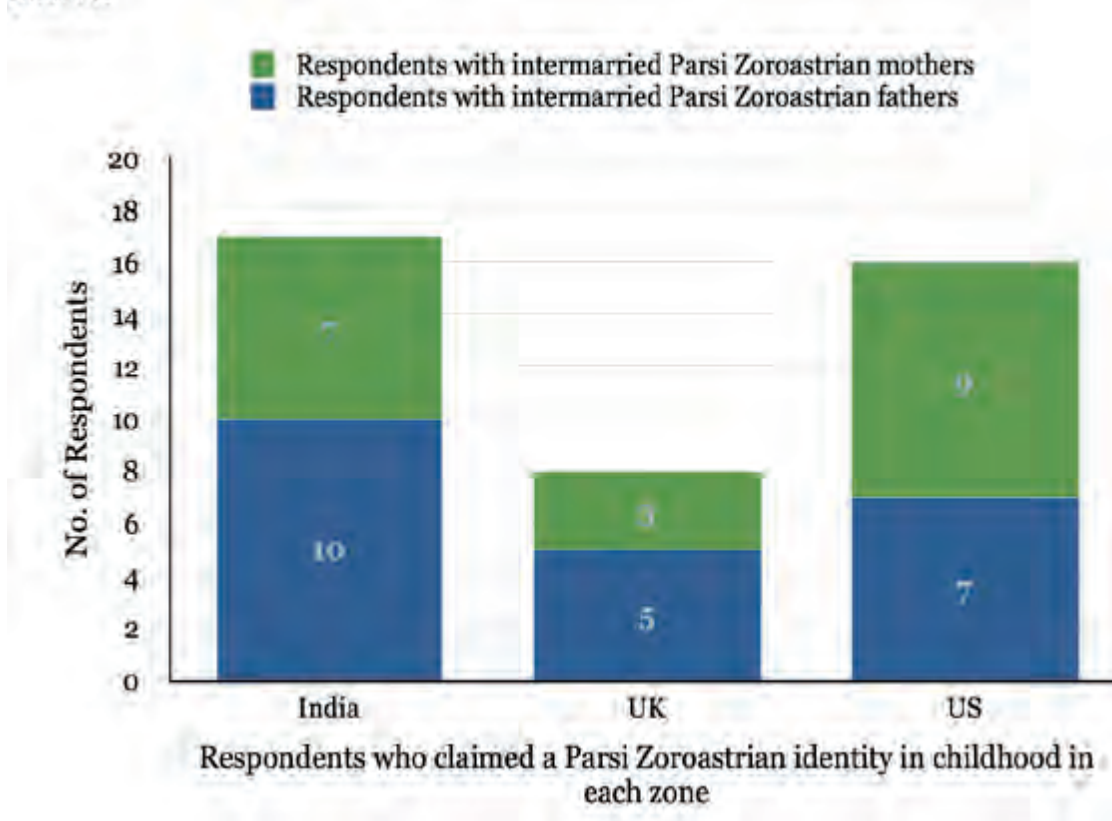
This talk was based on a research project that explored the pathways to an ethnic and religious identity for the offspring of mixed heritage of, specifically, one Parsi Zoroastrian parent and one non-Parsi non-Zoroastrian parent. Through sixty-five in-depth interviews conducted across three zones — India, UK, and US — the study assessed the level of inclusion, involvement, and integration experienced by the children of intermarriage in their extended families, their local and global Zoroastrian communities, and their countries of residence.

The Parsi community are unique insofar as historically they have had a combined ethnic and religious identity, but there is a growing separation between the two. So, what role, if any, did the Zoroastrian religion and Parsi culture play in their lives and identities? What are the reasons behind the disparity, across the three zones, in the number of people who identify as a Parsi and/or Zoroastrian.

In this talk, I concentrated on two of the most important themes of identity formation — family (parents and grandparents) and community (interaction and acceptance). Quotes from the respondents' interviews were used to highlight their own voices and key elements within each theme were compared across the three geographic zones to also showcase the importance of location. During the talk, I showed that in childhood, familial influences led many respondents, especially



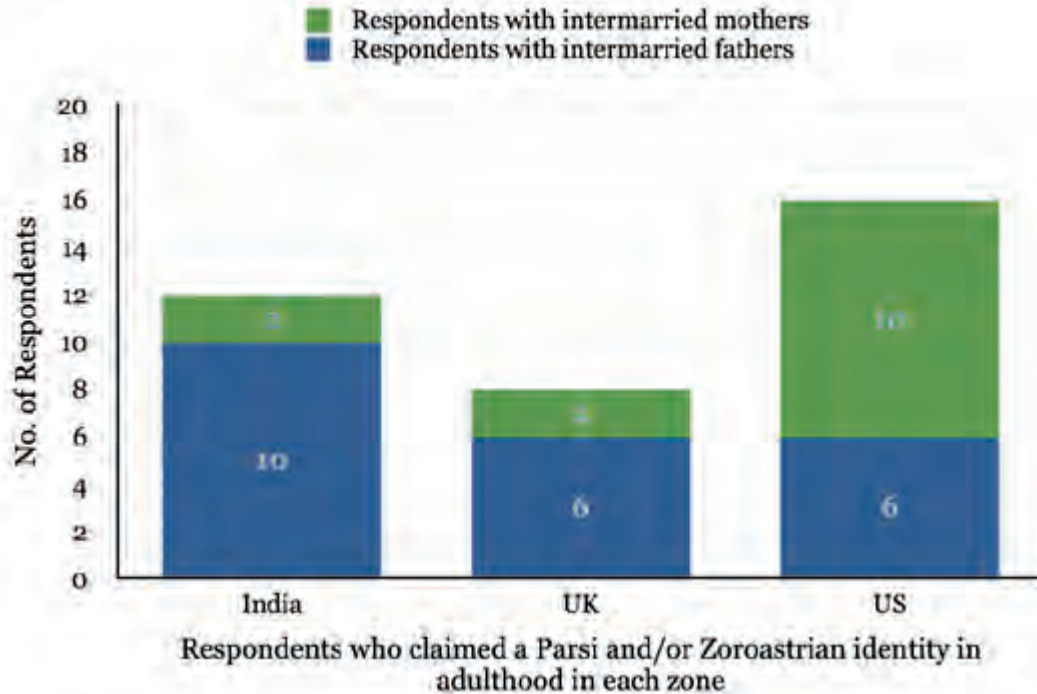
Chart 1:



in the India and US zones, to claim a singular Parsi Zoroastrian identity (see Chart 1).

The uneven implementation of patrilineal social norms ensured that very few respondents in the UK identified with the Parsi Zoroastrian identity during childhood.

Chart 2:



As they grew older, respondents in all zones experienced a variety of influences from sources outside their families, causing some to change their identity over time and into adulthood (Chart 2).

The way the wider Parsi Zoroastrian community perceived respondents' self-identity was crucial. The most dramatic shift in identity occurred in the India-zone for the children of intermarried Parsi Zoroastrian women, reduced from 7 respondents to 2 in

adulthood (one had a Parsi Zoroastrian identity, and one had a Parsi but non-religious identity.)

Furthermore, As Gen Z and Beyond: A Survey for Every Generation is open to people with a singular Parsi Zoroastrian parent, I decided to include some preliminary data to showcase why the survey is important and the way it can be used by community leaders to increase engagement with people with a singular Parsi Zoroastrian parent.

For example, those who always, often, seldom or rarely participated in local community events were asked: "What do you like about participating in these activities, events and functions?" (Chart 3) If we know what people like, maybe we can do more of it and increase engagement. No prizes for guessing the top response: it was of course FOOD. In second, and third place were a sense of belonging to a wider community and celebrating and preserving my roots and heritage,

respectively. This shows that children of singular Zoroastrian parents also feel a part of the community and cherish their Parsi Zoroastrian heritage. On the other hand, those who never participated in community activities stated they did not participate because they did

Chart 3:

What do you like about participating in these activities, events and functions?





not feel like they belonged, felt a sense of difference to the others, or felt left out because they did not know anyone or have any friends within the community (Chart 4). There is little doubt that with the current rate of intermarriage, children of intermarriage will be a significant proportion of children born in the coming years. This research project gave them a voice for the first time, and I was very happy to share that voice and my findings with the wonderful audience at the World Zoroastrian Congress in New York.

Nazneen Engineer is a post-doctoral researcher at the SOAS Shapoorji Pallonji Institute of Zoroastrian Studies. For her doctorate she produced an annotated translation of a Parsi Gujarati text written in 1883 by a prominent high priest of the Parsi Zoroastrian Community after the Mazagon navjotes that took place in Mumbai in the 19th century. Her first post-doctoral research project assessed the pathways to an ethnic and religious identity for the offspring of mixed marriages, specifically of children of a Parsi Zoroastrian parent and non-Parsi, non-Zoroastrian parent. She is currently project manager for *Gen Z and Beyond: A survey for Every Generation* (www.genzandbeyond.com), a once in a life time survey that will collect and analyze data on the global Zoroastrian community.



Becoming Zoroastrian: Contemporary Research on Modern Narratives to a Zoroastrian Identity



Ruzbeh Vistasp Hodiwala, a doctoral researcher at SOAS, University of London shared preliminary findings of his Ph.D. project on the 'Zoroastrians-By-Choice'. Ruzbeh's Ph.D. project which is provisionally called,

Ruzbeh Vistasp Hodiwala

The Historical Origins and Development of the Neo-Zoroastrian Movement: An ethnographic study of Neo-Zoroastrian settlements in Europe and North America investigates the socio-cultural practices and religious beliefs of Zoroastrians by choice; their ethnolinguistic background and migratory patterns; doctrinal and non-doctrinal appeals for accepting and identifying as

Zoroastrians, and their interactions with Zoroastrians by birth to define the lived experience of 'Zoroastrians-by-choice'.

In academic and non-academic literature, the terms neo-Zoroastrians, new-Zoroastrians, Zoroastrians-by-choice, and para-Zoroastrians have been used to refer to individuals who were born to both non-Zoroastrian parents and, as a result, were assigned a non-Zoroastrian identity at birth and later in their lives accepted or publicly identified as Zoroastrians. According to Ruzbeh, the term Zoroastrian by choice or neo-Zoroastrian is used in his study to avoid misrepresenting the referred group(s) of Zoroastrians while communicating with the readers. Hence, any Zoroastrian who falls outside the ambit of traditional nomenclature of Parsi Zoroastrian(s) with roots in the Indian subcontinent, Irani Zoroastrians whose ancestors migrated to the subcontinent in recent years, and Iranian Zoroastrians from Iran, are referred to as 'Zoroastrians-by-Choice' or 'neo-Zoroastrians.' As a result, Kurds who identify as Zoroastrians, as well as purported closet Zoroastrians in the Persianate world, are all referred to as neo-Zoroastrians or Zoroastrians-by-choice in his study.

Ruzbeh's Ph.D. is a multisite study that spans multiple countries in Europe and North America, and it employs both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative data is gathered through interviews, informal interactions, and participant-observation methods at socio-cultural and religious gatherings attended by Zoroastrians-by-Choice and Zoroastrians-by-Birth, including Navjote/Sudreh-Pushi ceremonies of 'Zoroastrians-by-Choice.' Over the last seven years, he has visited locations in Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway, Belgium, France, the United States, Sweden, Georgia, and Azerbaijan to undertake qualitative fieldwork for the purpose of the project.

The project also includes anonymous survey responses to two ongoing surveys for 'Zoroastrians-By-Choice' and 'Zoroastrians-By-Birth' in English and Persian, which were launched globally (except for Iran) in July 2021. The survey that is open to 'Zoroastrians-by-birth' aims to understand how the lived experiences of Zoroastrians by choice are shaped by the attitudes and knowledge of Zoroastrians by birth toward Zoroastrians by choice as well as the larger phenomenon of acceptance of non-Zoroastrians, especially in light of boundary maintenance among the members of the ethnic Zoroastrian communities in India, Iran, and the diaspora.

Ruzbeh informed that, as part of his Ph.D. project, he is also attempting to conduct an anonymous demographic study of Zoroastrians-by-Choice, which may form part of

the appendices of his thesis. According to Ruzbeh, determining the precise number of 'Zoroastrians-by-choice' globally is nearly impossible due to various claims to Zoroastrian identity in various forms, but most importantly also because not all those who fall under the ambit of the term 'Zoroastrians-by-choice' which he uses in his project have undergone a Navjote/Sudreh-Pushi ceremony. He stated that he contacts the facilitators who officiate Sudreh-Pushi/Navjot ceremonies for those born to both non-Zoroastrian parents and requests anonymous information on the number of participants they have initiated. He adds that it is a difficult undertaking because it requires building trust due to the sensitivity around the subject, while also expecting the facilitator to fill in the details of numerous ceremonies they have conducted without compensation for their time and effort.

The talk was followed by an inaugural screening of a short documentary titled 'Becoming Zoroastrian' which has been jointly produced by Ruzbeh Hodiwala and Leah Rustomjee, a filmmaker from London, UK. The work features 'Zoroastrians-by-choice' from a variety of socio-cultural backgrounds and nationalities, as well as past religious identities, who share their experiences of becoming Zoroastrians. It combines participatory and interview-based genres and provides a first-hand account of the 'Zoroastrians-By-Choice', who speak about their lives as Zoroastrians. The participants were asked to share their stories about five broad themes for the film, namely, how they were introduced to Zoroastrianism; what appealed to them about the Zoroastrian identity; some personal moments of their life as a Zoroastrian; what signifies the Zoroastrian identity to them; and their thoughts on the sense of community and acceptance in the context of the ongoing debate on acceptance and non-acceptance among Zoroastrians.

Ruzbeh remarked that academic studies, particularly ethnographic studies, have primarily focused on ethnic Zoroastrian communities in India and Iran, as well as their diaspora groups. However, very little research has been conducted to provide an academic and non-academic audience with an insight into the lived experience of those born to both non-Zoroastrian parents and who identify as Zoroastrians. Therefore, this study should add to the body of knowledge about contemporary Zoroastrians and aid in informing the laity about the phenomenon, which according to the researcher, has social, cultural, religious, legal, and geopolitical implications.

You can read more about the project and undertake the anonymous survey by visiting www.neozoroastrianproject.com/surveys

Ruzbeh Vistasp Hodiwala is a doctoral researcher at SOAS, University of London and his Ph.D. project on the 'Zoroastrians-By-Choice'. is provisionally called, *The Historical Origins and Development of the Neo-Zoroastrian Movement: An ethnographic study of Neo-Zoroastrian settlements in Europe and North America*

Quotes from the Study

Verbatim quote I:

"We don't want that this group (of new initiates) is isolated or separated from the other communities (of Zoroastrians). We have to groom them as per Zoroastrian way and ensure they mix up with Zoroastrians across the world". – (A Zoroastrian-By-Choice, Europe)

Verbatim quote II:

"It was my dream to become a Zoroastrian before I die. And I was afraid that I won't become one. But I am glad I was accepted". - (An elderly Zoroastrian-By-Choice, Europe)

Verbatim quote III:

"I did (my) Sedreh-Pushi three times. The first time I did it myself, when I was seventeen years old. I did it myself because there was nobody to do it for me. I did my Sedreh-Pushi, not (with) real Sedreh or Kusti, but I found the text on the internet and I tried to do the ceremony for myself. And I had a sad feeling because nobody else was with me". (A Zoroastrian-By-Choice, Europe)



Gen Z and Beyond: A Survey for Every Generation



Nazneen Engineer and Sarah Stewart

The World Zoroastrian Congress took place from 1-4 July in New York City. Around 1,200 Zoroastrians and their families attended from all over the world, making it the perfect opportunity to promote *Gen Z and Beyond: A Survey for Every Generation* and share some interesting interim results. The theme of the Congress was 'Bridging the Global Zarathushti Existence' and the survey fits right into the spirit of the Congress.

The online survey was launched on the 16th of August 2021 with the aim of finding out information about the global Iranian, Parsi and Irani Zoroastrian population and their families, including their religious beliefs and practices, their thoughts about the religion and community, and basic demographic data. When we launched the survey, we did not believe this would be a hard task as everyone knows Iranian, Parsi and Irani

Zoroastrians love discussing all aspects of their religious and community lives!

Sharing stories which make them proud, such as the community's historic and contemporary entrepreneurship and philanthropy or discussing its concerns about the future of the community in relation to traditional language skills or levels of community participation. People often debate the challenges facing the community, but also its greatest strengths and how they envision the community of the future. However, collecting surveys has proved challenging. The Congress was therefore an important event for the team to promote and publicise the survey. We were very excited to have the opportunity to showcase this once-in-a-lifetime survey to the Congress delegates who would then promote it within their own communities around the world.

The day before the Congress officially kicked off, we were invited to the Arbab Rustam Guiv Darb-e Mehr Zoroastrian Temple in New York. There was a prayer ceremony followed by a tour of the special building. After speeches and dinner, we returned to our hotel to prepare for a hectic three days ahead.

The next morning, we set up our info-table, right next to the Fezana book stand where we connected with our North American Ambassadors, Roshan Rivetna and Dolly Dastoor. After months of Zoom meetings, it was wonderful to meet them face to face. We were also delighted to meet for the first time our Melbourne Ambassador, Nergish Udwadia and our New Zealand Ambassador, Farida Master. *(photo below, Ambassadors*



from left, Roshan Rivetna, (USA) Sarah Stewart, (SOAS) Dolly Dastoor, (Canada) Nazneen Engineer, (SOAS) Nergish Udwadia, (Australia)



The following days went by too quickly. In between attending and giving our own talks, we helped people sign up or take the survey at our info-table. The talk on the interim results of Gen Z and Beyond: A Survey for Every Generation given by Sarah Stewart was well attended. (photo left) Importantly, it highlighted the importance of the survey by 1) connecting the survey results to Zoroastrian theology, and 2) showcasing the way results can be utilised by associations and community leaders to connect meaningfully with their members. At the time of the presentation approximately 3500 responses were received from around the world, but we hope to receive many more in the coming months before the survey goes offline on 30 September 2022.

Sarah's talk on her research in Iran was a beautiful reminder of the community's resilience amidst the many challenges they face.

During the evening of the second night, we were entertained by the delightful Zoroastrian Philharmonic Orchestra. The Gala dinner at the end of day three was a joy, from the awards ceremony to the fashion show of Ashdeen Lilaowala's spectacular gara designs. On the fourth and final morning, we distributed the remainder of our leaflets which had passwords for easy access to the survey.

Many people asked us over the course of the Congress (and indeed over the last few months) what the survey was about. We can explain it, but to truly understand you will have to take the survey yourself.

Sign up at tinyurl.com/GenZSignUp for the full survey experience!

Videos of both talks will be uploaded on the Congress website at <https://wzc2022.nyc/video/> for those who did not attend.

ONE ZARATHUSHTRA, MANY ZOROASTRIANS: IRAQ KURDS RECLAIM THEIR HERITAGE

A Personal Overview of the Kurdish Zoroastrian Movement



Kersi B Shroff

A duality of especially arranged programs at the 12th WZC, 2022 examined the movement of the revival of Zoroastrianism in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. In previous fora, including at the 11th World Zoroastrian Congress in Australia, leading Kurdish Zoroastrians conveyed the general picture of the revival. To further expand knowledge and understanding of the movement, the Program Committee of the 12th Congress invited another notably active practitioner of the faith. She was accompanied by a highly qualified scholar who has studied the movement and interviewed an array of persons in Iraq.

The following are the highlights of the first of the two programs, *“One Zarathushtra, Many Zoroastrians: Iraqi Kurds Reclaim Their Heritage”* presented as a “fireside chat” between the activist and the scholar. The Kurdish Zoroastrian was carefully selected for being a committed individual who would expand on the many features of the



movement, while also narrating her personal experience on accepting the mantle of the faith.

The Discussants

- Ms. Faiza Foad, from Kirkuk, (on right, photo above) outside of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, who has actively promoted knowledge about Zoroastrianism. She began to publicly identify herself as a Zoroastrian in the 1990s and underwent a *kushti* ceremony in 2018. Faiza has published a Kurdish translation of the Gathas and is currently working with the Alliance of Iraqi

Minorities to reform Iraqi educational curricula to make it more inclusive of religious minorities, including Zoroastrians. She considers Zoroastrianism as being “about the search for light for all humanity.”

- Mr. Matthew Earl Barber, (on left in photo above) a Ph. D candidate at the University of Chicago whose research and publications have dealt with political and human rights issues facing minorities in the Middle East. Having long followed the Kurdish Zoroastrian movement, Matthew is completing a book that explores its history, literature, and the personal journeys of its members. While carrying out research, Matthew has cumulatively spent more than two years in Iraq, spread over twelve years. *An overview of the Kurdish Zoroastrian Movement* was his second talk.

The Discourse

In response to a series of questions designed by Matthew to elicit personal and general information about the movement, Faiza spoke movingly about her journey towards Zoroastrianism.

Faiza’s first awareness of the faith came to her from her father who told her about his mother’s knowledge of “a prophet called Zerdesh.” She also noted some features of

Kurdish culture as being derived from Zoroastrianism. Kurdish men wear a belt that is like the *kushti*, which is also referred to in a common phrase, *kushti kotua*, said at the time of the loss of a dear one, meaning the bereaved person has lost his *kushti*. At the age of fifteen, Faiza came across a book written by a Lebanese author which discussed Zoroastrianism and she precociously translated a part of it into the Kurdish language. A few years later, she learned about the *Gathas* from an article published in the US, and she translated them into Kurdish.

Upon reading the *Gathas*, Faiza found them to convey many parallels to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At the time, Faiza was working in a committee to defend the victims of the *Anfal*, involving the looting and capturing of women and children and selling them in slave markets. She noted that *Anfal* twice resulted in the killing of Kurds, the first in the battle of *Qadisiyyah* 1400 years ago when many Zoroastrians were killed, and again in 1988 under Saddam Hussain. Reading the *Gathas* made her self-question: “How is it possible that you believe in a religion that is killing you?” Zarathushtra’s teachings touched her heart and showed that God is our friend, women’s rights are important, and how to become a person who is good with nature, animals, and with other human beings.



From left Arzan Sam Wadia, Mantreh Atashband, Kersi Shroff; Faiza Foad; Aban Rustomji. Mathew Travis Barber; Astad J Clubwala

The most powerful message Faiza received from the *Gathas* is the way Zarathushtra dealt with humanity, without forcing people to believe in his teachings. She noted: “You think, then you believe. He gives me the right to choose ... and to become a positive human being.”

The concept of the *Amesha Spentas* also holds a powerful meaning for Faiza, by allowing the six abstract elements to become “the foundation of every Zoroastrian person”. The concept acts like a map for her to follow in her life and work. To her, the best use of *vohu mana*, the good mind, will aid all humanity.

The historical places associated with Zoroastrianism in the region are where ceremonies are celebrated on the first wearing of the sacred *Kushti* and for weddings, and during *Gahambars*, *Yalda*, *Naoroz* and *Mehrgan*. Those places also remind the Kurds that to build their nation, they must first act in the way Zarathustra teaches mankind to remove negative thinking and to improve the way they deal with each other.

Zoroastrians ceremonies are freely held in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and the community is protected by a 2015 law on minority rights. Faiza participated with the Alliance of Iraqi Minorities in successfully advocating for the approval of the law. An unresolved Iraqi issue, however, prevents Zoroastrians from registering themselves as such in national identity cards.

Outside the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the murder in 2016 of a member of the Zoroastrian center in Kirkuk resulted in a serious situation making Zoroastrians more cautious and to work only quietly for the community. From time to time, Islamic leaders are critical of Zoroastrians, but the government has prosecuted several of them and even dismissed some from their mosques.

Faiza also reported that in a meeting that she attended with representatives of other minority religions, the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region announced plans for the building of a Zoroastrian temple. A financial crisis has caused a delay in the implementation of the plan.

The discussion concluded with a pictorial display of Faiza’s progress in her activities relating to Zoroastrianism, including photos of:

- Faiza with the members of the Alliance of Iraqi Minorities who worked on the 2015 law and their meeting with the representative of the President of the Kurdistan Regional Government.
- Zoroastrian representatives from all major cities in the Kurdistan Region who formed an assembly, called the Anjuman of Kurdish Zoroastrians.
- Faiza’s presentation on Zoroastrianism made at the University of Kirkuk before an audience of scholars and students.
- An introductory book in Arabic on Zoroastrianism, authored by Faiza.
- An award given to Faiza by the office of the Prime Minister.
- A meeting of leading Zoroastrians during *Mehrgan*, held at an ancient Zoroastrian site.
- The Pope’s meeting in 2021 with religious communities, including Pir Kamil and other Kurdish Zoroastrians.
- Faiza’s *Kushti* ceremony held in a surviving Sasanian temple structure.

As to the size of the population, Faiza personally believes that there are more than 100,000 Zoroastrians, but Matthew noted that an official record is not maintained.

To conclude, it is noteworthy that the Kurdish Regional Government officially acknowledges the presence of, and the protection extended to followers of minority religions, including Zoroastrianism. Mr. Nechirvan Barzani, President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq recently proclaimed: “We are not only Muslim, we are also Christian, Jewish, Yezidi, Sabean-Mandean, Zoroastrian, Kaka’i, and Baha’i.” (in “A Kurdistan for All, Embracing Faith and Diversity”, September 2021). The publication also notes that “[t]here are thought to be around 15,000 Zoroastrians in Iraq.”



Kersi B Shroff, Attorney at Law, is co-Chair of FEZANA’s Research & Preservation Committee, and a member of the Program Committee of the 12th Zoroastrian Congress. In

2017, Kersi published an article, “Kurdistan Reclaims Its Ancient Zoroastrian Faith” in *HAMAZOR*, the publication of the World Zoroastrian Organization.

The session One Zarathushtra, Many Zoroastrians: Iraqi Kurds Reclaim Their Heritage, can be viewed on the link below or you can search for it on the FEZANA You tube channel by title.

<https://youtu.be/fOvWVLNcSgA>

Reimagining Religious Education



Persis Driver

Formal and informal educators of the Zoroastrian faith share a common purpose of strengthening knowledge, raising awareness, and improving relational ties for their community members. Yet, there is often a perception that learners lack a sense of enthusiasm or depth required to truly engage with the philosophical, spiritual, and practical teachings of Zoroastrianism. Traditional methods such as lectures may seem out of sync with the high-tech realities of students' lives. Concepts that require deep reflection and analysis may seem incongruent with the quick bites of (mis)information on individuals' news feeds. And expecting youth to passively accept ritualistic traditions

may be counterintuitive to their need for control and meaningful action.

The purpose of the Reimagining Religious Education track was to highlight innovative methodologies and frameworks for teachers, parents, and community members to design religious learning experiences that are fundamentally sound, developmentally appropriate, and practically relevant. Effective religious education nurtures children, youth, and adults who not only learn about Zoroastrian religion, culture, and history, but actively participate in, contribute to, and live it.

Session 1: Engage, Educate, Empower: Religious Education for All Developmental Stages

To provide a foundational framework, presenters, Persis Driver and Artemis Javanshir used audience engagement, live simulations, & FEZANA's web-based resource to demonstrate how learning, that is optimally designed at the intersection of person, environment, & religion has the power to nurture an engaged and empowered generation with a uniquely Zoroastrian identity. Using an asset-focused structure

A Potential Framework for Reimaging Education



designed by ZAMC, Chicago's religious education program (Figure 1 above) that capitalizes on the developmental strengths of students at different ages, audience members engaged in thinking critically about the value of designing lessons and activities in ways that students find meaningful, stimulating, and empowering. A snapshot of the key take-aways included:

Kindergarten to Grade 2 – Teaching is most effective when engaging students' senses using multiple modalities, making them the focal point of stories, and enhancing their perspective taking skills.

Grades 3-5 - School, friends, and classmates are central to this age group so making religion relevant to the different facets of their life can help in generating a sense of pride in being a Zoroastrian and in developing empathy.

Grade 6-8 – As critical thinking and argument skills evolve, improve engagement for this group by raising critical consciousness of the world around, providing a greater sense of control, and nurturing the value of community.

Grades 9-12 - The search for "Who am I" is key during adolescence, so encourage an empowered Zoroastrian identity through history lessons that connect them to their roots and through community service projects that demonstrate religion as critical for sustaining social and environmental justice.

To accomplish this goal, presenters demonstrated the power of FEZANA's path-breaking, newly developed website, an intensive collaboration between over 25 Zoroastrian religious and accredited educators across North America to design, curate, and offer a treasure trove of developmentally appropriate lesson plans accessible through www.fezana.org/education. The lessons, categorized by age group and topics, and embracing both, the Iranian and Parsi perspectives, provide a freely available resource for educators globally. A multimedia presentation of children and youth involved in immersive learning and in internalizing their Zoroastrian identity through a variety of engineering, environmental, social justice, and humanistic projects validated the effectiveness of this model.

Session 2: Global Innovations in Religious Education: From the Land Down Under to the Swinging City.

Educators from across the world showcased and brought alive their innovative and inspiring teaching methods while elevating global challenges and solutions for actively educating children and youth, and for building local and global communities that play, grow, and learn together. This international collaboration of highly accomplished religious educators, facilitated and moderated by Persis Driver, demonstrated firsthand the power of educating the mind, heart, and soul through programs that engage, educate, and empower.

Kainaz Shroff from India began by addressing the important question of how religious educators can ensure that the flame of learning continues through generations and how children can become religious ambassadors. A digital narrative wove the story of the Delhi Farohars, an educational program that creates strong intra- and intercommunity bonds through inter-city camps, publication of *The Joyous Flame*, and musical presentations on Zoroastrianism by children and youth at local and national events. Children develop a sense of pride in their religion and in sharing details about their heritage and culture.

Havovi Antia, a coordinator of religious education in Melbourne, Australia, was driven by how religious educators reconcile multiple identities and challenges when educating across boundaries of place and space such as when teaching immigrant v. native born children or in isolated rural v. urban centers. Melbourne's answer was to embrace a highly experiential learning model that uses learning by doing, making real life connections to cultural traditions, and exploring the purpose and meaning behind



From left: Shazneen Munshi, Havovi Antia, Kainaz Shroff, Khurshid Choksey, & Persis Driver

religious beliefs and customs in ways that children and youth feel empowered to conduct religious traditions themselves, proudly display their Zoroastrian artifacts to their peers, and engage the larger community in a dialogue about Zoroastrianism.

Khurshid Choksey, from Singapore then challenged the audience to think about how educators can transform students from passive absorbers of information to active creators of knowledge. Using storytelling as a tool for understanding religion, culture, history, & identity, she demonstrated how stories can become conduits for active learning. Students take on multiple roles such as scriptwriters, authors, and actors, and leverage technology and teamwork to connect with their cultural roots, with family and community members, and to take on the mantle of educating the larger community regarding aspects of the Zoroastrian faith.

Shazneen Munshi, a coordinator of the UK Fun Club program finally addressed the integral question of how learning about religion can become an integral part of everyday life that informs one's authentic and ideal self. A developmentally appropriate curriculum in London engages children, youth, and adults in role-playing, hands-on projects, and community connections through stories and art to find the optimal balance between challenge and fun. Yet applying knowledge to everyday life as students engage in topics like youth and mental health, climate change, social media, and identity keep learners coming back for more.

Session 3: Living Zoroastrianism, an Immersive Experience

Finally, to truly reimagine educating individuals by modeling the very essence of this track, audience members were treated to Tashan Mistree Byramji's creative visualizations in a museum style learning exhibit that highlighted the ethical and ecological principles in Zoroastrianism by giving attendees an immersive sensory experience. Visuals provided by posters, items that one could feel and touch, food that one could taste, and a

mixture of Iranian and Parsi folk music enlivened the idea that the most powerful learning is sensory. Intricately detailed models and artifacts displayed how people celebrate our many cultural and religious festivals while allowing the audience to understand the meaning behind these traditions. One of the many pièce de résistance was a model of an Agiary/Atash Kadeh accompanied by fire temple models built by the children's classes at the WZC. Visitors were gifted with a bookmark, inscribed with their name written in Din Dabireh (Avestan) script, along with the FEZANA lesson plan and global glossary links on the back.

The teachings of Zarathushtra as embodied in the Gathas, were never meant to be prescriptive but to provide a guiding force for human existence. In line with this essence, the three sessions attempted to reimagine education as a dialogue between teacher and student rather



than a unilateral transmission of knowledge.

THIS SESSION WAS SPONSORED BY THE FIRUZ MADON FUND UK.

*We would like to thank the **Reimagining Religious Education Program Committee** members Keki Dadachandji, Aban Rustomji, Poras Balsara, & Karl Khambatta. They were thought partners and instrumental in making sure we were able to create the connections we needed.*

Persis Driver is a professor of developmental & educational psychology at Dominican University, Chicago. She is a religion teacher & co-chair of the Children & Youth Religious Education committee at ZAMC, Chicago, developing curriculum, lessons, and activities that are developmentally appropriate. She also contributes to the FEZANA educators' group through workshops, validating age-appropriate lesson plans, and compiling teaching guides for working with children and youth.



Living Zoroastrianism - An Immersive Exhibit

Tashan Mistree Byramji



As someone who teaches Zoroastrianism at ZAPANJ (Zoroastrian Association of Pennsylvania and New Jersey), I have always believed that to enhance learning, various mediums need to be used to engage all five human senses – sight, touch, hearing, smell and of course, taste! This approach alters the nature of the traditional teaching methodology, making religion class more engaging, while imprinting valuable information about Zoroastrian doctrine, practices, history and culture, on young minds. The *Living Zoroastrianism* Exhibit at the recent World Zoroastrian Congress, was a natural product of this thinking process and was designed to be a walk-through museum exhibition to highlight the ethical and ecological principles of Zoroastrianism knitted to its theology by creating an immersive sensory experience.

While a congress offers one the opportunity to hear many speakers, lectures and discussion panels nevertheless offer a unidimensional approach in which the content flows from the speaker to the participant. The idea in the exhibition, *Living Zoroastrianism*, was to curate a space where individuals could absorb relevant information compactly packaged and visually displayed, through self-paced learning. The visual posters on display lead visitors systematically through the experience in combination with the immersive elements that linked to the five senses. This meant that implements or items could be seen, touched and physically handled; ethnic Parsi and Iranian folk music created a festive atmosphere as it was played in the background; a strong fragrance of flowers, rose water and *Esfand* (sweet smelling dried wild rue)

infused the senses, transporting one into another time frame; traditional delicacies offered for tasting - *daar ni pori* (a Parsi pastry stuffed with sweet cooked lentils), nuts, rock sugar and chocolates added to an individual's experiential learning within our community's living tradition.

To create a common thread across the exhibition, the names of the twelve months of the Zoroastrian calendar and what each month represents, provided the framework that helped develop and interconnect the various elements of the exhibition. The fundamental role of the calendar is to set structure to a Zoroastrian's life, by giving each day of the month a Zoroastrian attribute to be remembered and cared for and to remind one to live by the ethical and ecological principles of the religion. The attributes associated with each day forms a daily link to Ahura Mazda, through the Amesha Spentas (seven creations), the Yazatas (holy divinities), our festivals and practices, enabling one to live the Zoroastrian way.

For visual effect, each month was highlighted, with the name of the month written in English, Farsi and Gujarati accompanied by a specially designed graphic (by designer Rovina Ghadially Sethna) that provided a pictorial representation of the name of the month. For example, the first month Fravardin, which stands for the Guardian Spirit, the Fravashi/Asho Farohar, was



Agiary Model built by Yezdi Engineer of Houston



The Iranian *Haft Sheen* table juxtaposed against the Parsi *Sagan ni Ses*

complemented by a pictorial representation that included an image of the Fravashi.

Each month was accompanied by an explanation of the name of the month, highlighting the important doctrinal principle. Within each month, significant days were also highlighted that linked to key festivals or practices within the Parsi and Iranian living tradition. For example, for the month of Fravardin, Hormazd Roj/Ruz, the first day of the month and calendar year, celebrates Navroz/ Norooz (the start of the new year). In the Iranian culture the laying of the Haft Sheen table is an important rite, while Parsis celebrate the festival by lighting a divo, performing *sagan* (to mark a celebration) and by visiting the Fire Temple. To help bring this day to life, the exhibition showcased a beautifully laid Haft Sheen table and a Sagan ni Ses, detailing the different elements, their significance and the similarities between the two

practices. Participants were able to fully immerse themselves by recreating key actions when experiencing a Haft Sheen table by splashing their hands with rose water and looking into the Sheeshah (mirror), as well as enjoying a sweet sugary treat, just as they would do on Navroz/ Norooz. Similarly, one could have *tili* done to them during the *sagan* experience.

Some highlights from the rest of the months on display included:

- Ardibehesht – dedicated to the creation of fire, Asha Vahishta, included a full-scale model of an Agiary/Atash Kadeh, showing its internal and external structure. The model was created and built by Yezdi Engineer of Houston. This was juxtaposed with the creative Agiary models made during the congress by the children participating in the tween and teen track programs.



Adar roj nu parab display



Mehrgan Sofreh display

- Khordad – dedicated to the creation waters, Haurvatat, highlighted the use of water in Zoroastrian ceremonies and rituals, including the Yasna/Ijeshne ceremony. This display showcased the actual metal implements used in the ceremony accompanied by pictures of the Yasna ritual.
- Tir – dedicated to the Yazata Tir, the bringer of rain, highlighted the great Iranian water festival, Tiregan. Visitors collected wrist bands made from seven brightly colored threads that are traditionally worn by Iranians during the festival.
- Shehrevan – dedicated to the creation of the sky, Khshatra Vairya, is represented in Zoroastrianism by metal. This month included a fascinating display of replica Zoroastrian coins from the Achaemenian, Parthian and Sassanian dynasties, creating a link to our historic civilizations. This month proved to be a participant favorite, as one child exclaimed, “it’s like touching history!”
- Meher – dedicated to the Yazata Meher, the divinity of contracts and friendships, highlighted the ancient festival of Mehrgan with the laying of the *sofreh* (cloth on which food is served) and the autumnal foods, grains and fruits to celebrate this harvest festival.
- Avan –the divinity dedicated to the creation of the waters, Haurvatat, had on display the Parsi festival of Avan *roj nu parab*, with pieces of delicious dar ni pori for visitors to taste.
- Adar –dedicated to the creation of fire, Asha Vahishta, included a table display of all the implements and items used in the Parsi Adar *roj*

nu parab celebration, with *mithai* (sweets) and fruits.

- Dae – a month dedicated to our creator included a live painting by artist Leea Contractor who ‘created’ through art the existential concept of creation.
- Bahman – the divinity dedicated to the creation of animals, Vohu Manah, identified different animals, real and mythical, that are central in Zoroastrianism, either in rituals or through stories.
- Aspandarmad – dedicated to the creation of the Earth, Spenta Armaiti, allowed participants to learn of holy talismans written in Avestan on the day of Aspandarmad to safeguard the earth and home.
- Finally, visitors were gifted with a specially designed congress bookmark with links to the FEZANA lesson plans and Global Glossary. On the bookmark, visitors could try writing their name in Avestan or have it written by calligrapher, Vera Dinshaw Springett.



The overall goal of the exhibition was to allow participants the opportunity to engage in Living Zoroastrianism through a see, feel, hear, smell and taste way and this was achieved with the exhibition being extended to Day 3 of the Congress, by popular demand.

The Living Zoroastrianism exhibition was truly a labor of love for me and could not have been possible without the many individuals who dedicated their talents, time and efforts to help create Living Zoroastrianism and the support of the congress co-chairs and program committee!

Tashan Mistree Byramji is a member of and teacher at ZAPANJ and believes in teaching Zoroastrianism the “fun way” through activities, songs, arts, crafts. She is currently on the FEZANA Religious Education Committee in their efforts to create lesson plans for teachers.



Children learning Zoroastrian history through ancient coins.

The Boi Ceremony

Ervad Vispi Neville Karkaria



This presentation was part of the sessions offered to tweens and teens.

If you want to learn about our religion, and the activities going on in our religion all over the world you should attend the World Zoroastrian Congress, (WZC) and I did. My experience at the WZC was incredible where I was able to meet fellow Zoroastrians and learn about their extraordinary activities. I met many interesting people and learned about the life of Zoroastrians in different countries. In this process, I made lifelong relations and friends.

At this conference, I gave a small talk about the holy Boi ceremony to young Zoroastrians. The boi ceremony is conducted by the priest in a Fire temple five times for the purification of the holy fire. The Boi ceremony helps in the collection of the *Asere Roshni* blessings for the Atash Padshah, and then these A person should stand while the Boi ceremony is conducted, and if possible, recite his or her prayers. Additionally, a person may provide sandalwood to the Atash Padshah, as sandalwood is considered a sign of purity. After performing all the rituals, a person gets the Atash Padshah's blessings.

In the end, I would like to conclude by saying that the Boi ceremony is one of the most important

blessings are bestowed to us. The boi ceremony also signifies the change of time and the message that the universe is moving forward. In the past, we Zoroastrians used to stay together, and the nearby Agiary Boi ceremony would be performed, to make the people know that the geh has changed.

The Earth goes through 5 jolts in 24 hours; therefore, the boi ceremony signifies the re-powering of the Padshah Saheb. The Boi ceremony is conducted in 5 geh which are Havan Geh, Rapithwan Geh, Uziran Geh, Aiwisuthrem Geh, and Ushahen Geh.

The priest before giving Boi performs the Kusti ritual and then prays Srosh Bāz, Geh Prayers, and Nyāyesh. The then Priest prays Ātash Nyāyesh in which he recites dushmata, duzhukhta, and duzhvarshta at every third bell for keeping the bad thoughts, bad words, and bad deeds away from us. After that the Ātash Nyāyesh, Doā Nām Setāyeshne, and Tandarosti prayers are performed. During this ritual, the priest offers sandalwood to the holy fire.

A person should take bath before entering an Agiary or Atash Behram (fire temple). Then the person should cover their head and do Kusti when they enter an Agiary. This is done for the spiritual purification of our soul and body. This procedure should be followed whenever a Zoroastrian enters a Fire Temple. This world is the battlefield for humans and life between good and evil. A Zoroastrian wears Sudreh and Kusti to fight the forces of wickedness and evil. By wearing a Sudreh and Kusti, we become true soldier who sides with the kingdom of Light and Truth.

Zoroastrian rituals, and all Zoroastrians should have basic knowledge about it, and attend a Boi ceremony in a fire temple whenever possible

Ervad Vispi Neville Karkaria, is a Ph.D. student at Northwestern University in AI-driven design in the Mechanical Engineering Department.

the Z miracle

Arman Ariane

What is a Religion without miracles? That would be a Cult, according to many followers of the Abrahamic traditions. Because as some say, what sets the divinely revealed religions apart from the cults are the supernatural events that could only be performed by a divine god and not human beings.

After presenting an intro about Zoroastrianism to a group, I was once asked if there were any miracles in Zoroastrianism. The easy answer could of course be found in *Denkard*, and how Zarathushtra revived the partly paralyzed black horse of King Vishtaspa, the miracle which convinced the king to join Zarathushtra's religion. But this story was meant to protect the Zoroastrian minority from being stereotyped as a cult by the Abrahamic majority; in addition, too "small" of a miracle compared to other prophets who had turned a staff to snake, had divided the sea, turned water to wine and raised people from death! So, I had no choice but to reveal the mother of all miracles! *Ashem Vohu*, a Zoroastrian invocation.

Here is the text before we explore the qualifications for granting the miracle status to it:

Righteousness is the highest Virtue

***It leads to Enlightened happiness
This Radiant happiness comes to the person, who is righteous for the sake of righteousness alone,***

and not for any rewards or fear of punishment.

While exploring the purpose and the sophistication of this invocation we should keep in mind that it was composed a few thousand years ago!

- The entire message is in the present tense. It is Real-Time! not past or future, but the only time that we can be effective, the power of now!
- The message is timeless! It has no expiration date! No dos and don'ts, but fundamental principles that were relevant 3000 years ago and will be relevant in the future.
- Being the motto and the most frequently recited Zoroastrian prayer, it does not mention or praise the prophet! The name of the religion is not there! God itself is not mentioned! The only purpose is the message itself and not to convert and sell you a religion!
- It is universal and not tribal! It can be adapted and practiced by any culture and race!
- "Fear" may be man's greatest motivation, and reward in the afterlife most appealing to masses, but the Enlightened person would find the reward in the result of having taken the right action itself.
- There is an antivirus built into the original language of this invocation! It is poetry composed as a song with a rhyme, so that the wording and



the objective is not changed and misinterpreted. In addition, as a song it is inspiring to recite!

- Inspired by the *Gathas* of Zarathushtra, who conveyed his entire message/religion in seventeen songs, they could be memorized and passed on to the future generations as written scriptures and libraries were destroyed by the invaders.

Over the past two decades, I have challenged many study groups in the field to come up with prayers that would be relevant to today's challenges and be able to withstand the impact of time, but nothing compared to the magic and miracle of *Ashem Vohu* yet!

Arman Ariane has been an active board member of the California Zoroastrian Centre (CZC) for 30 years and the President of the Board of Trustees for five years. During his presidency, CZC hosted the seventh World Zoroastrian youth Congress and FEZANA AGM. Arman is a fashion designer and retailer under three brand names *Xerxes for Gents*, *Susa Boutique* and *Persepolis Indulgence*

Global Mobed Community: Serving Zoroastrians Worldwide



From left Vada Dasturji Khurshed Dastoor; Ervad Yazd Bhada, Ervad Sheherazad Pavri , Ervad Dr Arda Viraf Minocherhomji, Ervad Kaiwan Antia

Ervad Cawas Desai introduced Ervad Dr. Arda-e-viraf Minocherhomjee as the moderator for the discussion on “Global Mobed Community - Serving Zoroastrians Worldwide.” He is the immediate Past President of the North American Mobeds’ Council (NAMC). He was ordained Navar and Martab in Navsari and provides priestly services to Zoroastrians on United States and Western Canada. Ervad Arda has an M.Sc in Pharmacology from University of Toronto and a Ph.D

and MBA from the University of British Columbia. He is the founding and managing partner of Chicago Growth Partners (CGP) a private equity firm that manages 1.2 billion in assets.

Preamble

Ervad Dr Ardaviraf Minocherhomji

Mobeds provide tremendous value to our community's religious/spiritual needs. However, the number of full-time practicing Mobeds in India, Pakistan and Iran have declined steadily over the past half a century due primarily to poor compensation and lack of focus on the real issues facing the Mobeds and the community.

In NA and Australia/New Zealand we do not have a full time practicing Mobed even though we have established many Dar-e-Mehers/Atash Kadehs --costing millions of dollars. UK/London is the exception where they have a full-time paid practicing Mobed. Our community leaders lack a clear focus and tend to find stop gap measures---rather than find real solutions to these problems.

There cannot be an organized religion without full-time practicing priests/Mobeds. Thus, it is incumbent upon all of us, Mobeds & laity, to offer appropriate incentives/compensation to attract and retain educated and knowledgeable Mobeds to serve our communities. *We believe based on past experiences in Asia and NA, Australia/NZ, and Europe that the first step is to empower Mobeds.*

Empower Mobeds

What is empowerment?

"Authority or power given to someone to do something" or

"The process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in *controlling one's life* and claiming one's rights"

Empowerment may have slightly different connotations/undertones in diverse cultures. (e.g., US vs India). If we want to have an Educated, Intelligent, Knowledgeable and Articulate group of young Mobeds, the first thing to do is to truly empower them. No self-respecting person with these attributes ---Mobed or laity---will excel in their profession without true empowerment.

Recommendations for Empowerment of Mobeds

1. **Mobeds should have autonomy over all religious matters** with input from the boards. Boards should oversee all cultural activities. It is important that Mobeds are consulted on all religious/socioreligious matters/events before crucial decisions are made. (We are often told to execute a plan formulated by non Mobeds.) Mobeds should have the **autonomy** to make their own decisions in religious matters. We are often "empowered" to execute decisions made by non-Mobeds!!
2. **All Boards should have a Mobed representative** who could both advise the board on religious matters and represent the Mobeds interests. **Mobeds are a minority group.** Mobeds, like their fellow brethren, pay dues to the Associations and provide service to the community, often for free, but sometimes have no voice in their associations.
3. **Respect your Mobeds.** Respect usually refers to paying due regard for the feelings, wishes,

rights, or traditions of others (and recognizing/ appreciating their contribution to society. Respect is a way of treating or thinking about someone the way one would expect to be treated.

- a. **When Athornan Mandal/NAMC/ Council of Mobeds of Iran (or any Association of Mobeds) passes resolutions, others must respect those rules just as Mobeds are required to respect rules of Associations/FEZANA/other.** Laity &/or Mobedyars should not use their privilege/leverage at Boards and Congresses to undermine those regulations.
- b. Mobeds believe that the best way to have a happy and prosperous society is to have a **synergistic relationship** between the Mobeds and the associations/laity. And that requires mutual respect. We can disagree but never become disagreeable.
4. **All Associations must have a well-defined budget for religious and cultural activities.** Importantly, **whenever funds are raised a portion (at least 33%) of those funds should be allocated/reserved in a separate "Mobed Fund".**

These funds could be used for performing regular religious activities at the Dar e Mehers at the discretion of the Association's Mobeds.

5. All Dar-e-Mehrs/Atash Kadehs in NA and Australia/NZ should have a full time practicing Mobed (NAMC certified in case of NA).

Athornan Mandal in India and NAMC in NA are offering scholarships to young Mobeds for education (and training) in our religion/history/Avesta language. Many courses are also offered to the laity *free of charge* through NAMC Institute of Zoroastrian Studies. It is incumbent upon the Associations to find the means/finances to provide the opportunities to these young Mobeds to practice their skills!!

In NA associations/laity often complain that they do not know much about NAMC, but we are not provided the platform to show/demonstrate our programs, achievements at congresses. The platform is provided to others who do not agree with some of our proposals, and we are supposed to defend our positions. They come up with an agenda and a narrative. There is no platform for open and honest debates and discussions and consequently, no meaningful changes can occur. We cannot have a few people (ultra-liberal or ultra-conservative) impose their views on the majority.

An Empowered Mobed will bring tremendous value (tangible and intangible) to the Zoroastrian Community!!

Ervad Sheherazad Pavri, Mumbai, India

The Global Mobed's Panel at the 12th WZC in New York brought together a group of Mobeds, each sharing their narrative and experience. The panelists involved Vada Dasturji Khurshed Dastoor from Udvada, Er



Pavri from Mumbai and Er Arda-e-Viraf Minocherhomjee from California. The flow of the panel highlighted how migration has interestingly brought about a contrasting problem - the homeland and diasporas with fire temples have to work on how to keep the community engaged and increase participation in religious functions and activities whereas a younger diaspora like Melbourne craves to have a centre or Dar-e-Meher of its own as a hub for religious and cultural activities.

In an ever-dynamic world, the Zoroastrian population globally faces various challenges unique to each region with regards to the way religion is practiced, especially with differing views. The priesthood has been looked towards time and again for answers. It may be surprising to think that in spite of surviving the odds for a few thousand years against persecution, to date there is no established support system for our clergy who shoulder the responsibility of keeping the laity engaged in the practice and theology of our religion.

I am grateful to ZAGNY and FEZANA for pulling off such a marvelous congress through all uncertainties. Recordings of our panel are available on the FEZANA website

Ervad Kaivan Antia, Melbourne, Australia

Ervad Kaivan Antia presented the challenges facing Mobeds in

Yazad Bhadha, the resident Mobed of London, Er Kaivan Antia from Melbourne, Er Sheherazad

Melbourne, Australia and made recommendations to resolve these.

Brought up in a traditional priestly family where serving the Padsha-Saheb was the passion and family occupation, yet my dad and both his brothers encouraged their children not to be full-time Mobeds.



Some of the Melbourne specific challenges are:

- Low community numbers: ~100 individual/family memberships.
- Lack of priests (3, none full time).
- Lack of a dar-e-meher resulting in first generation migrants being unable to connect to their roots;
- Many children have never prayed in front of an atash;
- Many families are time poor and do not have the knowledge/skills to train their children, however they are genuinely interested in imparting knowledge of our history, culture and religion to their children;
- Lack of priests who can mentor new/inexperienced priests or train priests' children to do navar prayers.

Worldwide challenges are:

- Why become a priest?
- Mobeds are not respected or given the due they deserve;
- Priests have the practical knowledge on how to perform a ritual but sometimes are lacking in theory (significance of ritual, meaning of our prayers etc.);
- Very hard work;
- No scope of advancement or financial security.

To address these challenges we run the following programs:

- Friday night prayers: with all lights switched off to provide a spiritual experience, but more importantly to provide the children the opportunity to pray in front of a fire.
- Sunday School: run by my wife and another Zoroastrian, who are both qualified teachers, teach the children in a fun and engaging way our religion, history and culture.
- Mukta / Gatha prayers: performed by my son and myself for the community for all 10 days.
- Prayers on significant days: Adar mahino Adar roj, Zarthost no Deeso prayers etc.
- Celebration of Gahambar+jashan: followed by lunch, children activities like coloring competition for Ses or Farohar etc

Solution?

- Think outside the box – look at the issue as a whole
- Migration patterns show that young Zoroastrian families are leaving the Indian sub-continent and migrating to Australia, NZ, USA, UK and other places. Where can we get the best bang for the buck? **For example, setting up Dar-E-Meher where young families with children are settling. This will ensure that Zoro children from an early age are connected to and identify with our religion.**
- Better support for Mobeds – a worldwide Mobed organization – **run by Mobeds for Mobeds.** Managing Committee should have representatives from each region, maximum 5–9 to ensure global representation.
- A Priest mentoring program which can provide training/mentoring through

technology e.g., Zoom. Offline resources like FAQ etc.

- Respect is a two-way street: we should not demand respect, rather earn it by our actions and service to the community.
- Associations must endeavor to engage the youth more; this will assist in encouraging young mobeds to be part of the association and perform their priestly duties.
- We should consider whether the Navar ceremony should also include teaching the Navarias on meaning of the ceremony: Rituals (How to conduct them and their meaning), prayers: (Relevance, Pronunciation and Meaning), Presentation Skills: (Grooming, Tone of voice, Decision making), Soft Skills: (Confidence, Problem solving, Teamwork, Leadership), Connecting with Laity: (Interpersonal skills, Being relatable)

The goal as Vada Dasturji has mentioned is to empower mobeds:

- so, we are perceived as trusted partners to the community whose advice is sought on religious matters
- a budget for religious activities set aside by the association
- full time practicing mobeds is a requirement and not a luxury

The situation is dire and unless we as a community work together, the decline in Mobed numbers will continue. It is a fact that mobeds and behdins are dependent on one another and when we work in harmony it will be a great outcome for our Zarthostidin.

Atha Jamyaat Yatha Aafreenaami!

Ervad Yazd Bhada, ZTFE, London

I was privileged to represent ZTFE, London as one of the priests on the

session ‘Global Mobed Community: Serving Zoroastrians Worldwide’ (on Day 3-

Sunday, 3rd July) along with Vada Dasturji Khurshed Dastoor, Ervad Kaiwan

Antia of Australia and Ervad Sheherazad Pavri of India. The panel was wonderfully moderated by Ervad Arda E Viraf Minocherhomji of US.



The session began with the talk of Ervad Sheherazad Pavri on the successful implementation of the ‘Empowering Mobeds Scheme’ conceptualized in Mumbai, India. This program emphasizes on how the Zoroastrian community worldwide has started to come together to support the Mobeds by training them in Zoroastrian rituals, soft skills required to deal with the laity and providing monetary support to enable the Mobeds to render their religious services.

After Ervad Sheherazad Pavri’s interesting and engaging talk, I then elaborated on how my association ‘Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe’ (ZTFE) has successfully empowered me as a Resident Mobed at the ZTFE.

My role includes engaging with community members of all ages, performing religious ceremonies such as Navjotes, Jashans, Afringan, Farokshi, Weddings and After-Death ceremonies for the Zoroastrian community in the UK, representing the Zoroastrian community at various Interfaith sessions and conducting religious educational classes.

My suggestion to other Zoroastrian associations in the diaspora is to evaluate their own religious systems and wherever feasible, to try and

adapt the ZTFE model to encourage and empower our young Mobeds to take up Mobedi as a full-time profession and serve our dear Zoroastrian community.

Ervad Kaivan Antia, then drew on his own experiences to talk about being a part time practicing Ervad Saheb in Melbourne, Australia. He outlined that Ervad Sahebs in the modern-day world are facing challenges due to lack of monetary incentives, employment benefits and future prospects which has made it difficult for Ervad Sahebs to take Mobedi as a full-time profession. He also explained that due to the absence of a Zoroastrian Community Centre in Melbourne, it is difficult for them to

have the religious and social community events on a bigger scale, but still have been actively participating in community programs such as Friday night prayers, Sunday schools, Mukta/Gatha prayers and organizing prayers on significant days like the Celebration of Gambhars etc.

The session ended with an inspirational message from our very own Vada Dasturji Khurshed Dastoor on how we can work together to build respect for our Mobed Sahebs by listening and understanding our Humdins and imparting correct knowledge to them. He further explained that respect must be mutual.

To achieve this, we the Mobeds must serve our Humdins with

dedication, commitment and most importantly by acquiring proper knowledge and education regarding our religion and the religious texts. The best way to have a happy and prosperous community is to have a synergistic relationship between the Mobed Sahebs and the Humdins!

Atha Zamyad, Yatha Afrinami. May it be so, as we pray! Oh, Ahura Mazda.



Summary

Ervad Cawas Desai

Dadabhai Naoroji, in a speech before the Liverpool Literary and Philosophical Society in 1861 said: *"I will first give some account of the present state of the knowledge of the Parsees about their religion. The priests are a separate caste, and the priesthood is thus hereditary. As a body, the priests are not only ignorant of the duties and objects of their own profession, but are entirely uneducated, except that they are able to read and write, and that, also, often very imperfectly They do not understand a single word of these prayers or recitations, which are all in the old Zend language. From the state of their education and knowledge, they are quite unfit for the pulpit; nor do they aspire to it or seem to have any notion of the necessity of such teaching."*

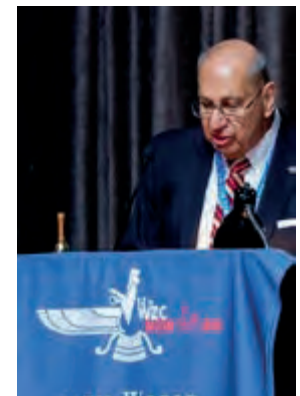
We have come a long way since these words were written as our priests,

especially in the Diaspora, have rendered yeoman service to the Zoroastrian communities in their various jurisdictions, to extend the knowledge of our religion, history and culture. The panel discussed the challenges faced and the hurdles overcome in meeting the religious and cultural needs of the Zoroastrian diaspora in their adopted homelands.

The consensus view of the panel was that the Mobeds were not adequately compensated for their services, which has resulted in a dearth of practicing priests and a loss of respect for the priesthood. Without an adequate social foundation which would ensure a viable financial future, there is nothing to attract the younger generation to make a career of the priesthood. There are virtually no educational institutions to teach the aspiring priest about the history of our

religion, the meaning of our prayers and an explanation of our rituals.

Respect cannot be requested it must be earned, and it is only if the community creates such a foundation that we will have scholar priests who the community can respect.



FUN & LEARNING FOR TWEENS AND TEENS



Vehishta Kaikobad

For the first time in the history of Zoroastrian Congresses we had two simultaneous Congresses for Kids and Tweens being conducted with day-to-day exciting agenda, successfully managed by our “Dream Team”. The Youth and Adult volunteers of our Team were truly outstanding mentors who worked with discipline, a deep sense of responsibility and above all, enthusiasm and motivation. The Youth were truly an inspiration in creating a unique experience for attendees ages 10 to 14 years.

The aim of the Kids and Tweens Congress was to create global bonding and a learning experience that included cultural and spiritual awareness. The Tweens Program, ages 10-14 years was based on activities involving art (“Gathic Mandalas”), architecture, interactive discussions and drama. All sessions provided a variety of themes woven together through Zoroastrian precepts. There were 55+ Tweens attending each day.

The younger students, ages 5 to 9 years enjoyed discovering the Silk Road through a variety of global projects. Puppetry and hands-on activities based on Zoroastrian traditions further enhanced their joy of learning. There were 20 + children attending each day.

The program was co-ordinated by “*The Dream Team*” under the leadership of Vehishta Kaikobad and Khursheed Dastur. It included: Tanaaz and Khushru Medhora, Neville Cursedji, Nina Dinshaw, Kaizeen Medhora, Zane Commisariat, Farhaan Shroff, Mahtab Dastur, Natasha Dungor, Sabrina Warden, Freyaan Vimadalal, Farzad Sarkar, Sanaea Warden.

Below is a brief synopsis highlighting the activities for both groups.

Kids Congress (Ages 5 to 9 years) aimed at:

- Introducing religious and cultural concepts through cognitive and tactile activities based on the Montessori Method and teacher made material.
- Encouraging social bonding at a global level through games etc.
- Developing creativity with projects involving diverse mediums such as clay, fabric, etc.
- Encouraging role play through masks, clothes and other props.
- Creating a joyful learning experience

Tweens Congress (Ages 10 to 14 years) aimed at:

- Introducing age appropriate religious and cultural concepts related to Zoroastrianism.
- Developing cultural pride through historical topics based on art and architecture and Literary media.
- “Identity through architecture” encouraged creativity through Constructive creations such as Agiaries which were proudly displayed in the Immersive Exhibition.
- Team building through healthy competitive activities and Round Table discussions.
- Allowing freedom of expression through dramatic creativity and storytelling/writing.
- Paving the road with opportunities in volunteering for future Zarthushti leadership.

The Agiary Activity



Vehishta Kaikobad has been an educator for over 25 years working in the field of early childhood education based on the Montessori Method. Vehishta also conducts educational programs at Asia Society Texas Center both in capacity of an educator and a volunteer. She has been a Senior Docent at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston for over 15 years earning the prestigious "Mary Benedict Docent of the Year" award in 2008. Vehishta continues to serve her community in the capacity of a Sunday School Educator at the Zoroastrian Association of Houston and beyond, since the 1980's. She has conducted Sunday School Workshops at national and international level using innovative teaching

The AVA Project

Mahtab B. Dastur



The Tween/Teen's Program at the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress

The FEZANA Ava Project initiative that partners with the UN to address the Sustainable Goals that are due in 2030, specifically goals 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and 13 (Climate Action), had multiple sessions that represented the difference they are making. There were 2 sessions presented to the younger attendees of the Congress.



Natasha N. Dungor with Afreed Mistry

how to save water, and different initiatives the children could take to preserve the resources they were given on earth. Questions included what the children thought were different types of water and how they could conserve water on a daily basis.

The first session was presented by Natasha N. Dungor in the Tweens/Teens Congress Track. Natasha led an interactive session and discussed the types of water,

The children had much to say and were excited to give their input/answers! When asked different kinds of water, they answered, clean, dirty, washing, and drinking water, to name a few. The answer was clean, grey, and black water - they got several categories in those groups! The second session presented to the Kids Congress, which consisted of children ages 5-9, was an easier-to-understand presentation in which Natasha led the teens through a folder filled with relevant word puzzles and coloring pages.

Throughout the Congress, the Ava Project was in continuous representation mode, with reusable Ava metal water bottles, activity packets, brochures and the 2021 Winter edition of the FEZANA Journal (dedicated to the Ava Project) being passed out continuously. The metal bottles were a great reminder to conserve water and use environmentally friendly resources. Furthermore, AVA Project members were given an Ava Project sticker to put on their shirt or lanyard to help



Ava Project Bottle

raise awareness and spread the word. Since the Congress, multiple people have stepped up, and joined the initiative!

The Ava Project has seen much activity since the Congress. Freddy Mirza has continued his efforts to build a Perpetual Haft Sheen Garden, which had pamphlets passed around the Congress. Bakhtavar Desai, with many around the globe, has taken a pledge to reduce plastic usage in her daily life, by even going completely plastic free for the entire month of July. Using Glocalization, the AVA project looks forward to addressing the UN World Water Conference in March of 2023 hosted by Tajikistan and the Netherlands.



The Perpetual Haft Sheen Garden brochure

The Ava Project at the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress, made a name for itself, with multiple sessions, handouts, and even “souvenirs” for people to take home. This helped raise awareness of importance of water in our religion, and helped people realize that all of us have a role to play in conserving this scarce resource for the survival of future generations. I am so proud to be a part of this wonderful initiative, the Ava Project, and look forward to making a difference that matters in the world.

Mahtab Dastur is a 16-year-old from Spring, Texas. She is immensely involved in her community and is extremely proud of her Zoroastrian faith. Mahtab and her brother have founded their own non-profit organization called Books2Smiles which sends books around the world to those who need do not have access to them, particularly children. Mahtab believes the environment is a precious resource that must be preserved for future generations and that helping those less fortunate than her is her duty. In her free time, Mahtab enjoys reading and dancing. Mahtab's lifelong goal is to make a lasting difference in the world.

Editor's Note: 200 copies of the FEZANA Journal Vol 25 No 4 focusing on The AVA Project was donated by Marzi Byramji of Regal Press, Mississauga, Canada Ltd. for distribution at this session.

VOLUNTEER VOICES

Khursheed B Dastur



It was very rewarding to see the vision for the Tween/Teen Congress come to fruition very successfully after months of planning with our leader Vehishta Kaikobad. The Tween/Teen Congress was run by our Youth Volunteers with support from our Adult Mentors. The best part of this Congress was seeing how well our Youth Volunteers engaged with the Tween/Teen attendees to enable a fun and enriching experience for all. I enjoyed making new connections and lasting friendships in the process. My sincere thanks to the WZC team notably Piroja Press for all her support and encouragement.

Tanaz and Khushru Medhora



As first-time congress attendees, the sheer number of Zoroastrians under one roof, interacting and discussing life events, was exhilarating! Being a part of the team, ably led by Vehishta and Khursheed, (albeit as late entrants) was an eye-opening experience, seeing the meticulous planning and absolute attention to details for each and every project planned for the kids. Seeing the youth mentors engaging with the kid congress attendees and displaying their leadership skills was a joy to behold! Guiding the enthusiasm and effervescence of the children congress attendees was a fulfilling experience.

As adult mentors, surrounded by the expertise and enthusiasm of the young generation of Zarathushtis was, in equal measures, an exciting and empowering experience and we are extremely grateful and humbled to have been included in this program!

Nina Dinshaw



The enthusiasm with which all volunteers gave their heart and soul was truly inspiring. The entire experience was enriching and fulfilling

Neville Cursedji



The energy and enthusiasm from all the participants and volunteers was extremely contagious!! Loved the creativity and participation from all!

Looking forward to the next congress!

Mahtab B Dastur



Gratifying. Being a volunteer at the Tweens/Teens Congress was a gratifying experience. I enjoyed connecting with the kids participating in the Tweens/teens track, and I feel (or at least I would like to believe) that they too enjoyed having us around. I think, as younger people, we were able to connect with the Tweens/Teens more, which made their experience more enjoyable, which in turn made my experience more enjoyable. It warmed me inside to be able to make their day better, and to teach them something new while filling them with excitement for the next thing to come. Thank you to all our teachers and mentors! We were all one big happy family! :)

Sabrina Warden



The Teen/Tween Congress was an absolute grand success and an unforgettable and incredible experience! I met so many people my age from all parts of the world, and I am still in contact with all of them. My favorite memory was watching the Shahnameh plays which were recreated by the various groups with their own thoughts and expressions, the plays were very interesting, yet hilarious and light-hearted. Additionally, I enjoyed the Identity Through Architecture, where tweens designed Agiaries with their own creativity and imagination.



Zane Commissariat



Working and collaborating with the teens and tweens from across the globe was indeed a once-in-a-lifetime experience! The amount of energy, joy, and fun I had as a volunteer is unmatched. The WZC 2022 in New York enabled me to have the time of my life and meet new Zoroastrian friends :)

Farhaan Shroff



Congress in New York City was my first congress and I absolutely loved it. I thoroughly enjoyed volunteering and mentoring the Tweens and Kids Congress. During the congress, I met new people and built friendships with them. The congress truly is the highlight of my summer.

Natasha N Dungor



I'm glad I had the opportunity to be a part of the Kids and Teens/Tweens Congress. Seeing the participants unite and work together to have a great time was amazing. I loved seeing how we, as youth mentors, connected with everyone and how they connected with us, not to leave out how many friendships were made over the duration of the Congress."

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Kaizeen Medhora



It was my first time at a Zoroastrian Congress, and I had a great time there! As a youth volunteer I was helping out with the younger kids with their crafts, and they were so sweet. We also made Sudras and learned about the Kusti and the various prayers. We colored masks and took lots of pictures with the kids in their masks and all dressed up with crowns and robes. I made a lot of new friends at the Congress, and I am looking forward to meeting my new friends soon and attending other Congresses.

Farzad Sarkari



The tween teen congress, in my opinion, was absolutely outstanding. I came into the volunteering realm thinking that I would be the oldest volunteer and that I wouldn't really fit in with the others since they were high schoolers. Yes, I was the oldest, but I stand corrected about not fitting in. It was truly amazing working with the other volunteers because we bonded quickly well and almost instantly with one another. To this day, we still keep in touch with one another and joke as if we have known each other since we were young.

If there had to be one thing I tell people about the tween teen congress, whether it is to volunteer, participate, or just be there it would be (in the words of Nike) - JUST DO IT. It is an experience of a lifetime that I won't forget and that I am glad I didn't miss. Very grateful for the other volunteers and their charismatic personalities.

Sanaea Warden



I met a zillion new friends and created long lasting memories through all the fun- filled activities. The best part of the Tween/Teen congress was when they made us choose a Shahnameh story and we had to act it out as a play. We all had loads, loads and loads of fun!

Freyaan Vimadalal



Acknowledging his volunteering on the team at the Tween/Teen Congress at the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress, New York City 2022.

My Impression of the Kids and Tweens Program

Shiraz Austin

In July of 2022, FEZANA and ZAGNY organized the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress in New York City. This international gathering of Zarathushtis was the first congress I'd ever taken part in. The theme was "Bridging the Global Zarathushti Existence", in other words, as a community, connecting our different beliefs to important issues.

My Experience

I truly enjoyed attending my first Zoroastrian congress. The first day of the congress (July 1st) was probably my favorite of the four days. All the attendees were invited to the grand ballroom to introduce everyone to the congress. In my opinion, the most fascinating part of the opening ceremony was the gathering of all the 16 nations who came to participate in the congress. One person from each nation held the flag of their country, representing the diverse Zarathushti community. Personally, traveling has always been one of my passions. Therefore, the sight of those flags made me realize how large the Zarathushti community still is, despite being approached as a religion going extinct. After the heartwarming opening ceremony, I joined the "10 to 14-year-old" Kids and Tweens Program conducted by Vehishta group.

On the first day, everyone in the room was introduced, which allowed everyone to get to know each other more. Many were from different states of the U.S. However, I was pleasantly surprised to find a fair share of kids from countries overseas, including India, Singapore, Dubai, Iran, and Pakistan. We then recited the Hambundagi prayer, which would be the first thing we would start with every day of the congress, to remind us of how we can all help each other, be kind to each other, and be good-minded Zarathushtis. We were fortunate enough to receive pertinent information about Zoroastrianism; its traditions, its history, the principal meanings behind it and so much more. I enjoyed learning more about my religion.

On the second and third day of activities, we were invited to build an **Agiary** from cardboard. This construction was an opportunity to build teamwork and to be able to organize ourselves. It also gave us a better understanding of the components of an Agiary and an idea of how people build temples like these. During the afternoon, the group mentors told us Shahnameh stories so that we could then create a skit about one of them. Listening to

these stories interested me deeply because most of the values that we currently use in Zoroastrianism were used in these legends. At the end of the second day, we were given a useful lecture about success. I learned that achieving success is quite simple; the key is happiness. We were asked about what makes us happy. Doing my hobbies or receiving rewards here and there makes me happy. However, making others happy with the good mind of a Zarathushti brings as much, if not even more, happiness to me. This learning experience made me get to know myself better in terms of what brings me happiness and what I can do to be successful in the future.

Final Thoughts

I believe that my first congress experience went very well and smoothly. It was a very organized and well-planned event, considering how many people attended. The decision to hold this event in New York City was a great one, because of its tourism activities, its accessibility, and its welcoming atmosphere. Many connections and reconnections happened, as well. My brother and I were even able to see a remarkable Broadway show with our family.

This congress was full of opportunities in terms of self-expression, explaining your thoughts and opinions about certain topics that aren't always discussed. The whole theme of the congress was well thought out and explored in many different forms for different age groups. In my opinion, "Bridging the Global Zoroastrian Existence" was an expandable theme that we could break down into many different categories while remaining an interesting topic for all the 1200 Zarathushti attendees. Finally, thank you to all the members and volunteers of the congress who made this whole congress possible. Your dedication and hard work are truly appreciated.

My name is Shiraz Austin, and I live in Montreal, Canada. I am a grade 9 student at Collège Sainte-Anne de Lachine in a program called DéfiMonde, meaning "global challenge" in French. The main objective of this program is to learn different languages, express our thoughts and opinions on global issues, and to travel in order to help communities. I am passionate about dance (classical ballet, contemporary) and music. Some of my hobbies include playing various instruments, alpine skiing, creating art, and spending time with my pets. I would describe myself as a happy and hardworking person.



Overview from a Youth Perspective: A Pandemic That Pushed Us Apart, A Congress That Brought Us Back Together...



Parshan Khosravi



From left to right (top): Mantreh Atashband, Rozmin Irani, Zamyad Meherji, Darayus Bharucha, Vista Khosravi, Pearl Mistry, Shazneen Munshi, Benafsha Shroff, Tanya Hoshi, Delzin Irani Banajee, Sheherazad Kapadia, Layla Mazeyasni, Sanaya Khambatta, Parshan Khosravi, Farzin Avari
From left to right (bottom): Jim Engineer, Sanaya Master, Sheherazad Pavri, Kayrus Irani

The 12th World Zoroastrian Congress (12WZC) was a gathering unlike any other at a time when our Zarthushti youth needed a sense of community like never before. That is why so many of our youth and young adults still talk about it months out from its conclusion. In this brief, I will walk you through some of features of this momentous event that captivated our minds and connected our community, and why the 12WZC will always have a special place in my heart.

In 2019, when the 7th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress concluded its convening in Los Angeles, very few people could have ever imagined it would be another three

years before any of us could host a major convening again. Perhaps that's why so many of us had taken the space that these congresses provide for granted. Yet, with the COVID-19 pandemic wreaking havoc around the world and forcing our communities apart, there was a great sense of longing for connection that brought a lot of excitement about the 12WZC. With over 1,200 attendees from 14 countries around the world, the New York Congress created the single largest gathering of Zoroastrians in one space in the past decade. It brought families together, reunited old friends, and created new ones. Indeed, the 12WZC will always be seen as what turned the page on one of the most difficult and lonely periods of our lives during the last 3 years, and despite the continued pandemic, we have once again found our sense of community thanks to the 12WZC.

Making the Most of Our Time Together...

One of the most important features of the 12WZC was its creativity in creating spaces for open dialogue and discussing some of the most sensitive issues facing the Zarthushti community. This was especially true in the youth spaces and programs that were held there. On the first day of the Congress, the youth session focused on connecting our youth together through interactive activities that encourage team building and strategizing. The activities of this day remained as one of the most talked-about highlights of the Congress throughout the weekend. Photo right, *Zoroastrian youth competing in an activity on the first day of the Congress.*



We continued to build on this in the days that followed, with a series of roundtable discussions on day two that focused on discussing issues facing the future of Zoroastrian community. These discussions were held among youth, with the intention of giving agency to youth to discuss issues relevant to their future among themselves. The discussion series were met with great reception and praise by youth, who felt that they were able to share and discuss their issues in a much more vulnerable and safe setting, while also being challenged to think about creative solutions to address those issues. Having such a communal space is indeed quite rare for Zarthushti youth of today, and perhaps one of the main reasons it was so appreciated by our youth. (photo right) *Kimiya Shahzadi and her team presenting their new business, "Love Story Unicorn" on the second day of the Congress.*



On the third day of the Congress, we held our last youth programming, a panel of young Zarthushti leaders reviewing the culmination of discussion sessions from day two and talking about the most pertinent issues facing youth at the full session of Congress. *Photo right Panelists and young Zarthushti leaders discussing the issues facing youth of today and tomorrow on the third day of Congress* I was honored to be one of the panelists to speak on behalf of the Zoroastrian Youth of North America alongside four other incredible young leaders of our community.



During this panel, we were further joined by over a dozen different youth leaders from various regions of the world who asked target questions from the panelists. This set the scene for a powerful show of force for the current and future leaders of our community, with all of us coming together to take on the task of keeping our faith alive and thriving.

Throughout the three days, we also held several social events that included a rooftop bar night, picnic day, ZoroBuddies program, and several social activities that were organized organically through the [Youth WhatsApp group](#). These events created an ideal space for youth and young adults to bond with each other, connect professionally, meet old friends, and make new ones. These programs were so popular, in fact, that the youth attendees collectively decided to keep the WhatsApp group going and it has since turned into a networking space among youth.

Connecting Youth Across Borders...

One of the features of this congress was the Youth Across Borders program, which enabled youth from hard-to-reach regions of the world to be able to connect with other youth as well as access and participate at the Congress, while taking back what they learned to their local communities as future leaders of our diaspora. This was a very unique approach to increasing accessibility to Congresses and a program I surely hope will be continued by the future Congresses as well. *Photo right, Participants of the "Zoroastrian Youth Across Borders" Program pose for a photo at the awards ceremony".*



A Final Word...



Hosting Congresses is not fun. In fact, even planning for the youth portion of the programming could be quite daunting at times. That is why I would be remiss if I did not give a shoutout to all of the youth volunteers, planning team members, and especially the unsung hero of our 12WZC youth programs Benafsha Shroff. *(photo left) Parshan Khosravi, Benafsha Shroff, and Delzin Irani, co-organizers of the first youth*

program of the Congress. There were a lot of things that happened behind the scenes in order to make sure everyone had a good time and a memorable Congress experience, and all of those things root back to the work Benafsha did within the planning committee. I was honored to be in that committee and get to work with Benafsha and others in planning the events, and even more honored to receive the Outstanding Youth Award at the Congress alongside my dear friends Tanya Hoshi and Sheherazad Pavri. (photo above right)

All in all, after seeing everything take place, I can say without doubt that the future of our community is brighter than ever, and I am deeply honored to have been able to experience this journey with the 12WZC. I'm excited to see how the planning team of the next youth congress in the UK will continue to build on the momentum of the 12WZC. London, here we come!

Parshan Khosravi is the co-chair of the Zoroastrian Youth of North America. He is a double alum of the University of California, received his bachelor's degree in Political Science and Education Science from UC Irvine and his Master's degree in Public Policy from UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs. As a first-generation Iranian refugee and a former English as a Second language (ESL) student, he has seen the power of education as a mechanism for community empowerment, as well as the numerous roadblocks that face non-traditional and low-income students

VISION OF YOUNG ZOROASTRIANS ZARATHUSTHI YOUTH ACROSS BORDERS – A STORY OF FRIENDSHIP AND COMMUNITY



Nerina Rustomji



The Zarathushti Youth Across Borders (ZYAB) program brought young Zarathushtris from around the world to the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress 2022 in New York City. In its design, ZYAB took inspiration from the Zoroastrian Field Students Program at the World Zoroastrian Congress in Houston in 2000. In reality, the

ZYAB program was a story of visa and COVID challenges that demonstrated the very best of our community.

Twenty-six exemplary awardees from India, Iran, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom were chosen through a global, competitive process that included a formal application focused on academics, leadership potential, community involvement, and economic need. Donations to the ZYAB program included substantial funds from The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe, support from The WZO Trust Funds, India and the Zoroastrian Association of Quebec, and also the 40 amazing individuals worldwide who are committed to youth and wanted to make the program a reality.

There were major challenges in running a global youth program during a pandemic. The first major challenge was acquiring visas. This process was involved, with scores of support letters for the candidates, many visa interview attempts, and bureaucratic negotiation and wrangling. Over

a period of 6 months from January to June, there were a few victories and also heartbreaking denials. The students who applied from India had the difficult situation of not being able to obtain interviews for consideration. Ultimately, only 10 awardees were able to travel to New York City.

The design of the ZYAB program was two-fold. It aimed to provide students the opportunity to attend the Congress and to learn about how Zoroastrians build communities in cities in the United States. For this reason, the itinerary involved attending WZC2022, staying in New York City while being introduced to the city by local families, and then traveling to Washington D.C. (ZAMWI), Greater Pennsylvania and New Jersey (ZAPANJ), and Boston (ZAGBA).

The 10 students soon arrived in New York City and became accustomed to the sights, sounds, and even smells of midtown Manhattan. Often, they were amazed by the scale of the buildings, taking pictures at the most random and mundane moments. ZAGNY volunteers led them on a walking tour of the city, and they also visited the Dar-e Mehr in Pomona, New York.

Once the Congress started, the ZYAB awardees attended and absorbed the wide range of sessions. Arezoo Gharibshahi of Yazd, Iran, the *sole* WZC2022 attendee from Iran, was inspired by the sessions “Women and Leadership” and “Entrepreneurship” since speakers openly discussed their challenges. She noted that “another best

part of WZC was a youth program that provided more interactions between youngsters. Totally providing a wide variety of opportunities for socializing with people in any contents (friendship, academy, business, religion and even environmental issues) was wonderful. At that moment, I began to understand that I was becoming familiar and making friends with Zoroastrians with different nationalities and breaking the isolation.”

Kamand Faramarzi Far of London / Mumbai enjoyed sessions on “Identity and Belonging” and “Zoroastrian Women.” “One leadership quality that I hadn’t considered before and that cannot be taught to a person is that of perseverance. I saw perseverance in all the speakers and the smile that they had at the end of sharing their story is what stood out to me. Their stories will always come to my mind when I am in a situation of difficulty and I will be inspired to not give up, just like they didn’t.”

Meherwan Patel of Singapore / Karachi noted that “we were exposed to Zoroastrians of all ages and backgrounds and were united together in a welcoming space. From cultivating old friendships, to creating new ones, our team noticed the enthusiasm and warmth of the attendees to reach out, engage, be curious, and open minded regarding the issues and perspectives discussed throughout the Congress.”

Meanwhile, Sheherazad Pavri of Mumbai shared that “the session on global innovations in religious education was an eye opener for me. I learnt about how things can be done better for educating young Zoroastrians in a fun and engaging manner.”

After the Congress ended, the ZYAB students toured New York City from the United Nations to the Metropolitan Museum of Art where they identified the Sasanian artifacts. Then, the second great challenge emerged. On the

night before leaving for Washington D.C., two students tested positive for COVID. Working with the ZAMWI hosts, the decision was made to keep the positive students and their roommates in New York City, while the others traveled to Washington D.C. The ZAMWI team modified their arrangements, and the students had a wonderful time visiting the Library of Congress and having a personal tour of the Iran antiquities in the Smithsonian before two students in that group tested positive.

At that point, ZYAB turned into two COVID operations, one in New York City and one in Washington D.C.

Ultimately 5 of the 10 students tested positive. Students stayed in individual rooms in a hotel, while volunteers delivered food and medicine and checked on the students throughout their recovery. Eventually, all the students sailed through this great trial of being sick in another country. Community members in Washington D.C. and New York City were supportive, resourceful, and caring, while the parents of the ZYAB students nervously awaited news of a negative test result.

Through the course of the COVID phase, the students bonded even closer and were able to see ever more clearly what makes a community. COVID was the guest we did not invite. Yet, in managing a trying situation, we were given the great opportunity to care for each other. As the COVID-phase ended and the isolations were completed, everyone gathered for a celebration of true thanks.

As Kiana Piltan of London concluded, “I gained lifelong friends, learned more about Zoroastrianism, grew in confidence and have unforgettable memories... We became one big family.”

Co-Chairs:

Behroz Clubwala, Nerina Rustomji and Katayun Kapadia

Photo montage by Behnaz Nanavatti of Pune





From right to left Meherwan Rohinton Patel, Vipsi Karkaria, Bezan Nanavatti Professor Nerina Rustomji, Behnaz Nanavatti, Manaz Nariman, Kiana Piltan, Arezoo Garibshahi, Hinata Aunty, Ervad Sheherazad Pavri, Behroze Clubwala, Katayun Kapadia, Kamad Faramarzi. Not in photo Dina Rohinton Patel (the author)

Dina Rohinton Patel, an 18-year-old aspiring Business and Technology Student, was one of the three youth from Pakistan selected for WZC-2022's Zoroastrian Youth Across Borders program. She shared her experience and thoughts about Congress with "What's On", a publication of the Karachi Zarthoshti Banu Mandal. Her write up is reproduced below with acknowledgment to "What's On".

The World Zoroastrian Conference commenced in Midtown New York City on the 1st of July 2022 and reached its conclusion on a perfect 4th of July 2022.

Three days seemed like such little time for the world's Zoroastrian community to gather, deliver talks, have lunch together and attend a gala night yet due to hard work, discipline and the organization of the heads of this year's conference not a moment went by where we felt that this event was not a "smashing success".

On landing and reaching the hotel, we were given a detailed itinerary of the events of the days following and what the suitable attire would be for the events. Since this was my first international conference, my expectations were a blank slate and have, after attending it been changed completely only to be matched in Singapore in 2026.

An array of talks by vibrant members of our global community were ongoing through all three days, talks covered topics ranging from religious education and the origins of Zoroastrianism to women in the business landscape and the role of the youth in modern day Zoroastrian society. There was something for everyone.

While the conference concluded on the 4th of July with a cruise on which we overlooked the New York City Skyline, my ZYAB (Zoroastrian Youth Across Borders) companions and I were invited to stay on and explore the city's heritage and fine attractions while meeting youth from across the world. My companions were individuals from the United Kingdom, Iran, America, India and Pakistan. As a strong believer in New York being a city that is best explored alone, I did have the guilt of sneaking out of a few gatherings to Walk down Billionaires Row, watch Phantom of the Opera on Broadway - an unforgettable performance, and a visit to Columbia University.

It was at these locations and many more that I made connections and companions with a wider range of individuals residing in New York City but belonging to countries as diverse as Malaysia, Mexico, France and Canada. The Conference in New York City was truly an experience in itself. WZC-Singapore 2026, looking forward to you.

Zoroastrians at the United Nations: Opportunities to Engage

Mahtab B. Dastur



Mahtab B. Dastur,
youngest moderator at
the Congress



Afreed Mistry,
FEZANA's Main
Representative to the
UN

The FEZANA UN-NGO Committee sponsored a session on "Zoroastrians at the United Nations: Opportunities to Engage". The moderator for this session was Mahtab B. Dastur. The speakers at this session were Afreed Mistry, FEZANA's main representative to the UN, and Freyaz Shroff from KurNiv Foundation.

Afreed Mistry spoke about how FEZANA has sent over 100 participants to the United Nations since 1997. Delegates have participated in UN conferences and meetings in New York, Paris, Rome, Bonn, Geneva, Tokyo and Melbourne. The participants have come from Canada, USA, UK, Pakistan, India, Australia and New Zealand.

Afreed further went on to say that representing the Zoroastrian community at the UN is a privilege. They like to see

motivated, dedicated and responsible individuals to be part of their team. The skill sets valued are the ability to speak and write well, and knowledge of other languages. The committee members have over the years been proficient in English, French, Urdu, Hindi, Spanish, Japanese, Bengali, Farsi, and Gujarati.

The Committee's focus is to encourage our youth to become world citizens and to care for our environment. The funding for travel, visas and housing is raised by participants who represent Zoroastrians at the UN.

Afreed then talked about the FEZANA Ava Project whose objective is for people all over the world to contribute towards taking care of the environment. They are creating a learning community where each of them can learn from

each other. The ancient Iranian Zarathushti culture is to care for all creations. The intent is to execute these dreams by promoting the concept of **Glocalization** - To Think Globally and Act Locally. This project will continue until 2030, which is when the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are also due. To join the Ava Project, please connect: <https://bit.ly/2KMqrur>

Freyaz Shroff was the next speaker who organization is the



Freyaz Shroff, KurNiv
Foundation

KurNiv Foundation. They mentor, tutor and support students living below the poverty line, who have primarily graduated from vernacular language schools to become college graduates.

Many are the first in their families to graduate college, speak English and get jobs in offices and clinics that provide them an equal seat at the decision-making table.

The KurNiv students living below the poverty line are mentored by students who live in circles of affluence and influence. Today, 3 years since they first began, many of their beneficiaries also return to serve as mentors.

In essence, the KurNiv Foundation empowers India's youth into becoming leaders who can create equitable and sustainable platforms in education, allowing all youth an opportunity to eliminate poverty, live lives of dignity, and contribute equally to the growth and success of India, while succeeding themselves.

With this view, they run three initiatives:

- ❖ **Pehchaan:** A program to bridge the Gap between the Private and Public Education sectors.
- ❖ **Shabd:** A nine-day Public Speaking Challenge to encourage confidence and fluency in English.
- ❖ **Youth Diaries:** A podcast, that gives the youth a platform to share experiences and build a safe-space for important conversations.

They are a 100% Volunteer run organization. 100% of donations received go to the needs of their students, they don't pay salaries. As their organization grows, they need support in various areas. Please connect with them to volunteer or donate at freiaz@kurniv.com or at 843.597.8518.

The session was well received by a multitude of attendees with several people coming up to ask how they can take action and move the projects forward.

Mahtab Dastur is a 16-year-old from Spring, Texas. She is immensely involved in her community and is extremely proud of her Zoroastrian faith. Mahtab and her brother have founded their own non-profit organization called *Books2Smiles* which sends books around the world to those who need do not have access to them, particularly children. Mahtab believes the environment is a precious resource that must be preserved for future generations and that helping those less fortunate than her is her duty. In her free time, Mahtab enjoys reading and dancing. Mahtab's lifelong goal is to make a lasting difference in the world.

Zoroastrian Return to Roots: Looking Back to Move Forward

Kayras Iran



From left Mahfrin Santoke; Kayras Irani; Lea Contrator; Nerissa Mavalvala

Over the past decade, the Zoroastrian Return to Roots (RtR) program has supported nearly 100 Zoroastrian youth from around the globe and brought them to India to explore their religion and community. The idea of this program was born out of the increasing disconnect between those Zoroastrians in the diaspora with their ancestral communities in Iran and India. It is a unique means of fostering community links and identity by taking small groups of youth on trips to explore their religious, social and cultural heritage.

This talk was one of the final sessions hosted at the congress on day 3, just before the evening gala. Speakers Nerissa Mavalvala (RTR 5 alumni), Mahfrin Santoke & Lea Contractor (RTR 6 alumni) went down memory lane speaking to an audience of youth and hopeful parents who wanted their children to explore this unique opportunity. Kayras Irani (RTR alumni & one of the program coordinators) moderated this session by beginning with a

three minute video montage created by Tanya Hoshi (also an alumni and coordinator) that was very well received.

The speakers then provided a retrospective on their experiences of the program. They spoke about several instances during their journey and how a particular event or encounter with someone during the program reignited a sense of their belonging within the community. Following their respective trips, it left all of them in withdrawal and so they aspired to get more involved by pursuing important volunteer roles in their local organizations back home.

Kayras' take on RtR was that each program produced promising leaders that were clearly 'changing the game' amongst the North American Zarathushti community. In fact, during the congress, three of the award recipients for outstanding youth were given to past RtR alumni. Kayras was proud to come back year after year since his first trip

on RtR 2 in 2015 because the program invests in youth and RtR produces outstanding results with youth that get involved and give back.

RtR 6 has been the last trip since the COVID-19 Pandemic was declared in March 2020 (literally during the trip) and although there has been a two-year hiatus, the program aims to return in December 2023 with hopes to have a foundation established in North America before the seventh instalment of the program. The foundation will be primarily run by past youth alumni and will focus on everything from choosing future participants, trip planning and even fund alumni with their own community initiatives.

For more information on the Zoroastrian Return to Roots program please visit: <https://zororoots.org/> or contact: contact@zororoots.org.



Kayras Irani lives in Richmond, British Columbia, Canada and is a paramedic with the British Columbia Ambulance Service. For thirteen years he has served members of his own community as a volunteer with the Zoroastrian Society of British Columbia (Z.S.B.C.). He has proudly helped run four Zoroastrian Return to Roots trips by providing logistical and medical support for the participants. He currently serves as the President of Z.S.B.C. and is happily married to Sanaya Master. They are both the proud parents of their 18-month-old daughter Spenta.

Photo credit Mahfrin Suntoke

Youth Presence at the Congress



WZC 2022 JUNGALWALA LECTURE: Appreciating the Richness of Zoroastrian Studies

A Conversation with Dr. Jamsheed Choksy and Dr.
Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina



For the Zoroastrian World Congress, the Khorshed F. Jungalwala lecture, a hallmark for the North American Zoroastrian Congresses, was reconfigured from a formal presentation to a highly engaging dialogue between two scholars Dr. Jamsheed Choksy (Distinguished Professor, Department of Central Eurasian Studies, Indiana

University) and Dr. Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina (Bahari Associate Professor of Sasanian Studies, Wolfson College, University of Oxford). Both scholars have established a platform to build and advance Zoroastrian Studies. The session was moderated by Dr. Nerina Rustomji (Associate Professor and Chair of the History

Department at St. John's University in Queens, New York).

Dr. Choksy (on left of the moderator) is an authority on Iran, the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Islam, and of religious minorities in the Middle East and Central and South Asia. A consulting editor for the monumental *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Dr. Choksy is the author of *Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism: Triumph over Evil*, which lays the basis for the study of ritual and cosmology. *Conflict and Cooperation: Zoroastrian Subalterns and Muslim Elites in Medieval Iranian Society*, which offers a compelling account of how Zoroastrians navigated the shifting social and cultural environment from a Sasanian to Abbasid Iran. *And Evil, Good, and Gender: Facets of the Feminine in Zoroastrian Religious History*, which reminds us that the Zoroastrian past has its own gendered perspective.

Dr. Vevaina's (on right of the moderator) academic specialty is the study of hermeneutics, or theories of interpretation, with a focus on the interpretations of the *Gathas* in the Sasanian and early Islamic centuries. Last year, he completed a long-awaited two-volume book project on the ninth book of the Denkard, our largest surviving Pahlavi text. Dr. Vevaina is the co-editor with Michael Stausberg of *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, which is just now being reissued in a paperback version. *The Wiley Blackwell Companion* was 7 years in the making with 33 contributors. At 696 pages and a 70-page bibliography, it is the largest single reference work on Zoroastrianism that exists. This riveting, accessible volume offers a glimpse into the exciting field of Zoroastrian Studies.

The session started with Dr. Ferzin Patel, daughter of Khorshed Jungalwala, in whose memory this lecture series was established by FEZANA. Dr. Patel spoke of the vision of the lecture series and her mother's capacity as "a deep listener who honored others' differences to others' point of view."

As the session moved to the dialogue, moderator Dr. Nerina Rustomji shared her deep commitment to history and the impact that the idea of Persians had on early American history. The fascination with the Persians at that time was evident in various historical sites, but also in English language primers where X was not for xylophone but for Xerxes.

The session then moved to the two scholars who conducted their doctoral training in the United States. Both Dr. Choksy and Dr. Vevaina provided insight on why they personally chose their career path and the different challenges and opportunities that Zoroastrians, across the

world experience when it comes to appreciating their histories. Their main message was that Zoroastrian Studies is far broader and engaging and should be understood within different historical contexts and methods and approaches.

In particular, Choksy and Vevaina highlighted the vital role of historical and religious education for community members, provided ideas of how to foster and grow Zoroastrian and Parsi Studies, and shared ways that Zoroastrian Studies could be better communicated to communities around the world. At the same time, they lauded the successes in North America, including the establishment of a Zoroastrian Studies Chair at the University of Toronto.



During the session, the scholars emphasized that it was an exciting time to engage with Zoroastrian Studies, and you do not have to be in an institute of higher education to do so! Dr. Choksy advised people to "do something that keeps you interested all your life" and advised that people "cherish" their histories. Meanwhile, Dr. Vevaina said, "we can write books but you have to read them and get the information." Dr. Vevaina further advised that there be a commitment to bringing the excitement and success of higher education into the level of religious classes for youth.

And the youth were excited, lining up to talk to scholars after the session.

Reported by Aban Rustomji, Program Co-Chair



All books mentioned in the write-up are available on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Zoroastrian Digital Humanities: From Sacred Texts To Digital Data



Aban Rustomji

Digital humanities, an umbrella term for the application of digital technology to traditional humanities studies was a field that started in the 1950s; however, it has recently gained popularity and emerged as a research field in archaeology, linguistics, music, and cultural history.

And keeping with the current trend, an exciting session was moderated by Kersi Shroff "to bring to light forgotten or neglected aspects of history and culture that were suppressed or overlooked during periods of the demeaning of the culture or misinterpreted information."

In this session, four speakers presented the varied ways digitization is aiding research, education, and preservation.



Ruzbeh Hodiwala, a doctoral researcher at SOAS, University of London, presented the *Multimedia Yasna* (MUYA), a project headed by Professor

Almut Hintze of SOAS.

The Yasna ceremony is a core ritual tradition composed in Avestan, whose oldest part dates from the second millennium BCE. The existence of this ceremony is now under threat; it continues to be performed mainly in India and lasts around two and a half hours. Ruzbeh shared a video recording, a segment of the ceremony, explaining the role of the two performing priests.

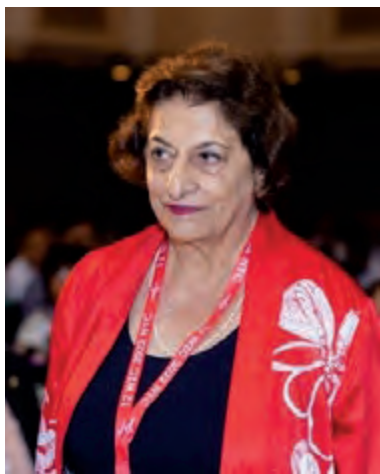
(To view the Yasna ceremony in its entirety, please see <http://www.muya.soas.ac.uk/>.)

The second speaker, **Jerry W. Beardsall II**, a Research assistant at the Archives and Special Collections at the City College of New York (CUNY), shared an exciting project to preserve and promote archival material from the life and works of Prof. Kaikhosrov D. Irani.



Professor K D Irani's personal and professional papers highlight the intellectual development of K D Iranis' ideas. The collection contain handwritten lecture notes, photographs, artifacts, and other memorabilia, and coincide with the early arrival of Zoroastrians in North America. While physically organizing materials in the group, the archives staff are classifying Professor Iranis' material in the JSTOR FORUM so that researchers can access and navigate the display remotely.

Aban Rustomji,
Founder and Co
Chair of FEZANA
Information
Research Education
System (FIRES), a
community-
established
institution in
Houston, Texas, to
record and preserve
the Zoroastrian
heritage of religious
and cultural materials, talked about the preservation
and digitization of damaged manuscripts and
lithographs.



She also discussed the digital recordings or oral histories completed by the Zoroastrian Association of Houston.



Kersi Shroff
presented the potential
for gathering
Zoroastrian artifacts
scattered worldwide in
a single digital
collection.

He shared vivid
images of Sasanian silver ewer to a title page from
Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron's original
edition of Zend Avesta 1771, pictures of artifacts from
Central Asia. The aim is to promote knowledge,
collaboration, and dialog by enhancing access to
wide-ranging resources from sacred Zoroastrian
scriptures and ancient inscriptions to virtual reality
and graphic arts. Imagine being able to walk through a
gallery of old Zoroastrian arts and artifacts in faraway
museums or excavations all in one place from the ease
of your computer.

The session unlocked future possibilities and fired up
the audience with what lies ahead.

This session was made possible with contributions from Sam Vesuna



Linking Arms Across the World: Global Working Group



Dorab Mistry

On Day 2 of the 12WZC, we participated in a Session titled “Linking Arms Across the World “. The objective of this session was to give the assembled delegates an idea of how the Global Working Group

(also known as Global Zoroastrian Community Trust) operates and strives to achieve its mandate of bringing together the Federations in various geographies.

The session was chaired by Dorab Mistry of ZTFE, UK in the absence of the GWG chair Neville Shroff who unfortunately could not attend the congress.



From left Arzan Sam Wadia, Xerxes Dastur, Sherri Kapadia, Katayun Kapadia, Alayar Dabastani, Rohinton Rivetna, Dorab Mistry, Shanaya Khambatta, Sam Balsara

Rohinton Rivetna, the first President of FEZANA and father -figure of the GWG gave a time- line of the evolution of the GWG. Leaders of the various Federations had been meeting periodically at World Congresses and also between Congresses to try and form a Body of Bodies. The time line becomes stronger from the 8th World Congress in London in 2005 which led to an agreement reached in Dubai during the 9th World Congress in 2009. Thereafter the Group met almost every year and finally in 2016 at the 11th Congress in Perth, Neville Shroff of Hongkong was elected as Honorary Chair of the GWG. Rohinton and Roshan Rivetna took the audience through a slick slide presentation that included photographs of various meetings held over the last 3 decades.

At this stage, a 9-minute film on the history and purpose of the GWG was to be shown but the constraint of time meant priority had to be given to the remaining speakers. The landmark film was made and funded by Mrs Meher Bhesania and her team in Dubai.

It was then the turn of Arzan Wadia, Co-chair of the 12WZC and FEZANA President to elucidate the charitable work undertaken on behalf of the GWG mainly through the generosity of donor organization such as Hongkong and the painstaking relentless efforts of Dinshaw & Bachi Tamboly and their dedicated team under WZC Trust Funds of India. Sadly, Dinshaw and Bachi Tamboly could not attend the Congress. Arzan pointed out that the GWG would like to work with individuals and organizations in Iran that can help and advise on Appeals for medical and other assistance originating from Iran. This vetting and confirmation of genuine need was very important and an organization like WZOTFI (World Zoroastrian Organization Trust Funds of Iran) was necessary for GWG to pursue welfare work in Iran.

Our Iranian Zoroastrian veteran leader Alayar Dabestani then took the platform and spoke of the situation of the community in Iran and the need for welfare assistance for Iranian Zoroastrians to be coordinated. He suggested it may be possible to prepare a list of 5 to 6 families in selected areas through whose good offices it may be possible to undertake welfare projects. A country-wide Zoroastrian organization like WZOTFI was unfortunately neither feasible nor possible. Alayar

emphasized the need for strong unity between Zoroastrians hailing from the Indian sub-continent and those from Iran and paid tribute to the great bridge-builders of the past.

The platform was then shared by Sherrii Kapadia and Sanaya Khambatta – Co-chairs of the 8th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress to be hosted by ZTFE in London in July 2023. They spoke eloquently about youth participation in the GWG (under whose auspices the Youth Congress will be held) and explained the arrangements that had been undertaken – including a very attractive Inclusive Registration price



which covers the 6-day congress, 5-night hotel stay, and most meals. The presentation by the Co-Chairs elicited excellent applause and interest, particularly from younger delegates.

Katayun Kapadia, former President of FEZANA and communications coordinator of the GWG then spoke about how the different Federations work together and are expected to strengthen their joint work with the formation of the Global Zoroastrian Community Trust.

At this juncture, a 4-minute film containing Goodwill Messages from GWG Chair Neville Shroff and well wishers like Lord Bilimoria, Burjorji Antia, Dinshaw Tamboly and Meher Bhesania who could not be present, was shown.

Xerxes Dastur Trustee of the Bombay Parsee Panchayat described the multi-faceted work including poverty alleviation, educational assistance and medical relief undertaken by the BPP, not forgetting its role as the community's housing workhorse.

Finally, Sam Balsara, India's most prominent Zoroastrian in the field of Advertising and Marketing, spoke on how the GWG is expected to publicize its work and raise awareness. Sam is the long standing chairman of India's largest Indian owned Advertising Agency Madison World and drew upon his rich professional background to explain the importance of Communications and how this will facilitate the work and success of the GWG.

Time was a constraint, as mentioned earlier. Chairman Dorab Mistry quickly summarised the contributions of all the speakers. Sadly, the session took up all the allotted 60 minutes and the Hall had to be vacated to enable arrangements for the Zoroastrian Orchestra to rehearse and set up for the evening entertainment. It was felt that the session had succeeded to some extent in de-mystifying the GWG and its work, particularly to a North American audience.

Dorab Mistry is the Past President of ZTFE - The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe in the United Kingdom

MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE: ENHANCING GLOBAL ZOROASTRIAN EXCELLENCE THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP



Karishma Koka



From left Karishma Koka, Poras Balsara; Daryush Mehta, Percy Master, Jehaan Kotwal; Ruyintan Mehta; Mira Mehta

The World Zoroastrian Chamber of Commerce (WZCC) strives to create economic, social, and intellectual value and maximize domain overlap through networking and collective action. In the context of the theme of the World Zoroastrian Congress—Bridging the Global Zarathushti Existence—the organizers, Edul Daver, Rustom Engineer, and Farrokh Mistree put together a session that bridged generations and continents: *Making the Impossible Possible*.

Each panellist, in their opening remarks, with a view to generating questions focused on their journey in creating economic, social, and intellectual value, identified principles to *Make the Impossible Possible*.

Farrokh Mistree (photo left) moderated the panel. He explained that the objective was to highlight six entrepreneurs who are successful and happy and are clearly committed to giving back to the community.

He recognized that *Entrepreneurship is the pursuit of opportunity beyond resources available* and highlighted the importance of transferring knowledge and information between generations. Hence, each pair of



panellists included speakers from different generations. He stated that each panellist was a role model to emulate.

The mission of the WZCC was introduced by President Percy Master. He described how the WZCC has strived to nurture and promote entrepreneurship and, going forward, to tap into the power of the youth to drive entrepreneurship and foster the creation of economic, social, and intellectual value. He detailed how the WZCC seeks to maximise the nexus among the three values and how each panellist has worked to transfer skills and competencies to the next generation.

Poras Bulsara and Daryush Mehta spoke to intellectual value as a foundation upon which the other values of economic and social entrepreneurship can be built. To succeed, the entrepreneurial business cannot stand stagnant and must evolve and grow with increased efficiency and new products, and for this, intellectual value has to be continually created.

Poras spoke of how radical change can be brought about by synthesising, integrating, and harmonising intellectual and economic values. He gave gratitude to his mother, who instilled in him the pursuit of excellence. He also spoke of the importance of being focussed while integrating knowledge to apply it effectively.

Daryush highlighted his focus on giving people a voice, both literally (through his research on voice disorders) and figuratively (the voice of reason and service). He gave credit to his grandfather Dasturji Nowrooz D. Minochehr-Homji for inspiration. Bridging skills in music, engineering, and science, Daryush has created a holistic overlap among intellectual, social, and economic values.

Both speakers demonstrated how they have been able to amplify their work through the training of students and businesses that have brought the results of academia to create solutions in all three areas of entrepreneurship.

Piruz Khambatta and Jehaan Kotwal proposed Economic value as the foundation for strengthening of Social value while utilising Intellectual development. For any entrepreneurial business to survive and flourish, it has to

generate economic value to allow monies to be re-invested into generating intellectual value, for environmentally friendly operations and community/social citizenship, and for its stakeholders.

Piruz desired to impact society positively through partnerships in Economic, Social, and Educational disciplines. He explained the importance of Economic value together with Corporate Social Responsibility underpinning economic development – while promoting scholarship in a secular manner, especially for the physically challenged.

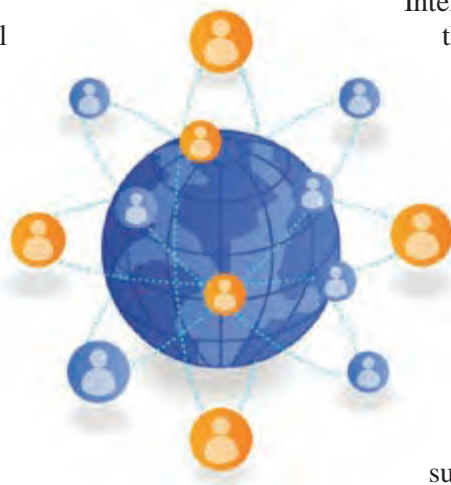
Jehaan demonstrated how the value of The Good Mind has been the foundation for rescuing his father's company. This has improved the lives of people in Society and those of the workers in his company. He has catalysed creating solutions utilising Artificial Intelligence, while also focussing on empowering the Youth through the WZCC.

Ruyintan Mehta and Mira Mehta described Social value as the foundation and discussed how they are creating Economic value and enhancing Social value. The entrepreneurial business to be successful in the long run must create Social value by being environmentally friendly and giving back to the community. A Social entrepreneurship business could also be a standalone entity providing products and services which support the community and humanity.

Ruyintan detailed his journey starting in the Intellectual domain, building a series of successful companies, and creating wealth and then sharing his wealth to build a better society while empowering employees. He credited his mother with instilling a sound Zoroastrian value system in him that has helped good actions in a secular manner.

Mira described the importance of the role of parents in building one's destiny. Following her education, she identified an opportunity and went back to university to strengthen her knowledge. Combining her drive for excellence with caring for employees has proven a winning formula by minimising risk by taking small and measured steps.

The concepts from each panellist were synthesised by Karishma Koka in the context of Zoroastrian values, the Amesha Spentas and the Gathas of Asho Zarathushtra to build development that sustains. The emergent property



of the nexus between Intellectual, Economic and Social Development was explained as the 'Fravashi' – the symbol of which is at the heart of the WZCC, which empowers each one to become the 'Vastarem' as in the Ahunavar – 'caretaker' – which is the meaning of the term 'Entrepreneur'.



Lord Karan Bilimoria concluded the session powerfully by re-emphasising what each speaker put forward. He highlighted how these tied in with creating solutions that helped us cope through crises by utilising the essence of the Zoroastrian values. He emphasized the

importance of empowering the next generation of entrepreneurs as suggested by Percy Master and reinforced the observation by Farrokh Mistree that the panellists are people to be emulated. Karan explained

how creating solutions that are driven by values and integrity can take us forward to make a better World in which individuals and organisations can thrive.

The organizers decided to seek written questions from the audience. Seventeen questions were received. Four were answered during the 90-minute session. All who have submitted questions and included their email addresses will have their questions answered by the panellists. This fulfilled the objective of creating a dialogue to support the quest for knowledge through Listening, Reflecting and making Decisions to bring about Frasho.Kereti in Ahura Mazda's world.

Karishma Koka is the United Kingdom Coordinator for the WZCC Zoroastrian Faculty Network and a member of the ZTFE Management Committee. She is co-founder with her mother Jerou, of Ba-Humata, a webinar series promoting respect for mobeds and increasing awareness of Asho Zarathustra's messages. She holds a Ph.D from University of Cambridge, UK.

This session was made possible with contributions from Dinyar and Nahida Mehta and family.

From the FEZANA JOURNAL Archives

Lord Bilimoria's 10 Ps for Building a Successful Business



1. **Product:** We have a super-premium product.
2. **Price:** Being a premium product we are relatively expensive.
3. **Place:** Cobra is now distributed in restaurants – Indian / curry, Chinese, Thai, Turkish, Lebanese, gastro pubs, casual dining, wine shops, cash and carries, supermarkets, pubs and hotels; it is exported to over 40 countries around the world.
4. **Promotion:** Starting with one flimsily green-and-black printed table tent card for the restaurants (we could not afford full-color printing nor even a branded beer glass!), we now have an integrated marketing program including advertising, social media, public relations, and point of sale.
5. **People:** The most important thing in any business whether you are business-to-business, business-to-consumer, manufacturing or services - we have always had a People First approach.
6. **'Phinance':** Raising money, particularly in the early days, was one of our biggest challenges;
7. **Passion:** You have to love what you do. Follow your passion, not your pension.
8. **Partnership:** Partner with all of your stakeholders – suppliers, customers, advisors and investors.
9. **Principles:** It is better to fail to do the right thing than to succeed in doing the wrong thing.
10. **Profit:** You may make losses in your early years, but you eventually have to make a profit.

Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People



Dr. Mahzarin Banaji



This session was made possible with contributions from the Arcot family and is reported by Rohan R. Arcot who is a PhD student at Boston University studying Counseling Psychology. He holds a Masters in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Johns Hopkins University, a Bachelors in Psychology from Hamilton College, and is a Nationally Certified Counselor. His research focuses on Asian mental health, culturally sensitive therapy approaches, positive psychology, and multicultural education.



Introduction

Dr. Mahazarin Banaji is the Richard Clarke Cabot Professor of Social Ethics in the Department of Psychology at Harvard University, was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the British Academy, the National Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Philosophical Society. She has received among many others a Guggenheim Fellowship. Awards for teaching excellence at both Yale and Harvard, the American Psychological Association Award for Distinguish Scientific Contribution. She is the recipient of five honorary degrees and the Golden Goose Award from the United States of America, and the Atkinson Prize from the National Academy of Sciences. Mahazarin is the co-author of the widely known book *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*.

Report on the Presentation

What does it mean to have implicit bias? Are we all biased? And, if we are all biased, how can we fulfill the Zoroastrian goal of “good thoughts, good words, good deeds”? These were all questions that related to [Dr.](#)

[Mahzarin Banaji](#)'s presentation *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People* at the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress.

Usually given in academic or corporate settings, it was quite the treat to have a front-row seat in the packed ballroom to hear from a world-renowned psychologist walk through decades of groundbreaking research on implicit bias and what it means in our world today. The crux of implicit bias is that there is a difference between what we consciously believe about our attitudes and values and the implicit, automatic, and unintentional ways our brains process information.

Telling people not only that this disparity not only exists, but they may not realize it can be fraught and difficult. After all, who would want to admit they hold bias? Showing the audience in a gentle and engaging way that we all likely have some implicit bias is the true power of Dr. Banaji's presentation. An audience member shared, that Dr. Banaji's energy does not let people fall asleep, and that was especially true during her impression of a Valley girl accent! She walked us through exercises such as "[The Monkey Business Illusion](#)", which is a famous selective attention test that shows us under the right conditions, a human-size gorilla can walk across a screen without us knowing. For those who had never seen the video before, it was a hilarious and instructive experience in how much information we may never process because of a preexisting belief or instruction.

Another seminal exercise we did was a modified [Implicit Association Test](#) (IAT) which is a way to measure implicit bias. By measuring reaction times, the IAT helps uncover the automatic, implicit, and unintentional associations our brain makes. In this example, we found that as a group we implicitly associated liberal arts with females and science with males, indicating an implicit bias along stereotypical gender-career norms. One audience member described this collective experience as "memorable because people were audibly surprised by how it went."

As a psychology student, I have seen and used this research before which made it all the more gratifying to see audience members accept implicit bias without becoming defensive. Other audience members shared how the message that we may all have some bias and need to account for that in our daily lives got through to them in a way they had never thought of before. To me, that is the take-home message that answers the questions from the beginning. Being open to the idea that implicit bias exists in all of us is a huge first step towards addressing it. From there, Dr. Banaji discussed several implications and strategies to account for various biases in the workplace, hiring practices, and in everyday life. The main message is

to recognize what biases may be at play in a given situation and focus on the unbiased information you need. In other words, do not miss out on seeing the human-sized gorilla because your biases have your focus elsewhere. By doing so, we can still live up to the ideals of "good thoughts, good words, good deeds."

Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People



*I know my own mind.
I am able to assess
others in a fair and
accurate way.*

These self-perceptions are challenged by leading psychologists Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald as they explore the hidden biases we all carry

from a lifetime of exposure to cultural attitudes about age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, social class, sexuality, disability status, and nationality.

"Blindspot" is the authors' metaphor for the portion of the mind that houses hidden biases. Banaji and Greenwald question the extent to which our perceptions of social groups—without our awareness or conscious control—shape our likes and dislikes and our judgments about people's character, abilities, and potential.

The title's "good people" are those of us who strive to align our behavior with our intentions. The aim of *Blindspot* is to explain the science in plain enough language to help well-intentioned people achieve that alignment. By gaining awareness, we can adapt beliefs and behavior and "outsmart the machine" in our heads so we can be fairer to those around us. Venturing into this book is an invitation to understand our own minds.

From Amazon.com

Custodians of Zamyad - The Spirit Of The Earth



Custodians of Zamyad - the Spirit of the Earth was a compelling and informative session on the environmental challenges we face today, and our commitment as Zoroastrians to maintain the purity of the earth and its elements.

Aban Marker Kabraji is a biologist and a scientist who served as the regional director of the Asia Regional Office of



the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), was the moderator. She pointed out that the topic was incredibly vast and complex, and somewhat overwhelming for most people. United Nations describes it as a triple planetary crisis - the crisis of climate change, the loss of biodiversity, and pollution. So then, what can we, as Zoroastrians, do to address this crisis?

To address this question, three panelists shared their thoughts

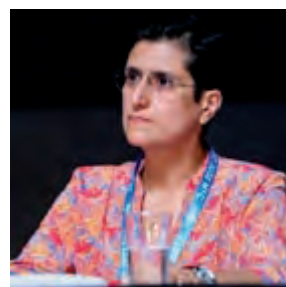


and their work. **Dan Sheffield**, Assistant Professor at Princeton University explained why nature is so essential in Zoroastrianism by quoting from ancient Zoroastrian liturgical texts down into the literature of medieval and early modern times. To face environmental challenge, each generation of Zoroastrians must renew the commitment to the earth and maintain the purity of the earth and its elements that are succinctly enshrined in the statement “we worship the earth which gives good gifts” (Yasna 16.60).



The next panelist was **Ana Verahrami** who shared her deep

commitment to bioacoustics and the study of sound that is produced by and affects living organisms, and how Zoroastrianism played a fundamental role in her development as an activist conservation biologist. She provided an overview of her ongoing fieldwork with the Elephant Listening Project. Sadly ivory poaching is still a crisis where 3.4 elephants are being poached each hour and there is also habitat destruction.



Rashneh Pardiwala, founder and director of the Center for Research and Education

(CERE), who has been creating successful models of environmental sustainability for the past fifteen years, shared her work through innovative prototypes, field projects, and public awareness campaigns. Her successful campaign of urban afforestation, greening Mumbai's dumberwadi, water harvesting, and

solar electrification were all examples of conserving precious natural resources and generating less pollution and waste. “Zoroastrianism teaches us to respect every element of nature and recognize the importance of maintaining an ecological balance.”

Our natural environment makes human life possible, and our cultural environment helps define who we are. A lively question and answer followed.

Aban Rustomji
Co-Chair, Program Committee

This session was made possible with contributions from the Return to Roots program



From the FEZANA Journal archives

TEACHINGS OF ZARATHUSHTRA & IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Ervad Dr. Jehan Bagli

At the “Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders,” held in Moscow during 1990, one of the world’s foremost astrophysicists, the late Prof. Carl Sagan said, “... there was a general consensus that humans have become predators on the biosphere, always taking never giving. We have NOT inherited the earth from our ancestors, but have borrowed it from our children.” We need to take extreme care how we use something that does not belong to us. In bridging creation and religion, the professor continued, “... there is nothing in the Judeo-Christian, or Muslim tradition that approaches the cherishing of nature, as in the Hindu-Buddhist tradition or among Native American. Indeed both western religion and science assert that nature should not be viewed as sacred.”

He further concedes that, “... a poignant metaphor of stewardship has emerged recently... The idea that humans are the caretakers of the earth, put here for the purpose and accountable now and into the indefinite future, to the landlord ...”—the Wise Lord.

These are the words of a highly regarded astrophysicist that echoes the message of the Prophet Zarathushtra. Zarathushtrian theology directs humans to be stewards of Creation and the co-workers with the Creator. Divinity in this physical world manifests itself through the divine and benevolent actions of mankind. Therefore, it is our duty and responsibility to maintain the environment and climate control of this world in a state so that our children and their children can enjoy safe and happy lives. Zarathushtrian faith demands that we appreciate and hold sacred, the elements of nature—sun, moon, stars, water, earth, plant, and animal kingdom—and use them with moderation and reverence. Never to abuse them with excess, defile them with pollution, or diminish them with greed.

Beyond question, climate change is a global problem. We must not underestimate the fact that it would take actions from all nations to solve the problem. But, solve we must, before it gets beyond repair.

However, each one of us must contribute our share by modifying our thinking and live a greener life through better choices. It is interesting to note that what we Zoroastrians have been saying for years that “humans are the stewards of the creation and coworkers of the Creator;” today, this very statement resonates from almost all of the faith groups in a multi-faith chorus. We must act now, not because I am saying so, not because we want to join the climate change bandwagon, but because it is the message of our beloved Prophet Zarathushtra who teaches us to do so. We need to do this as the last line of Ashem Vohu prayer *Ushta Ahmai hyat ashâi vahishtâi ashem* directs us that it is the RIGHT thing to do. We need to start in a small way to show our readiness not just for ourselves, but also to help mankind at large.

Zoroastrian Voices from Iran: Funerary Rituals and Ceremonies



Sarah Stewart

My talk at the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress focused on Zoroastrian funerary rituals and ceremonies with reference to a project I undertook in Iran with my colleague, Mandana Moavenat. It entailed collecting over 300 interviews with Zoroastrians in urban centres and villages surrounding the city of Yazd where an ever-diminishing number still live or own property and/or land.¹

Of the many challenges faced by Zoroastrians in Iran, one of the most significant concerning funerary rituals and procedures was the transition from the *dakhmeh* system to burial in a cemetery. The first cemetery established in Tehran in 1933 was the subject of debate between those who thought the former system unhygienic and drew on contemporary claims of medical science to justify their view. Those who opposed burial put forward scientific ideas, claiming that cemeteries were unhealthy places likely to harbour disease. Some of our interviews reflect these views. For example, a gentleman in Kerman (now deceased) described how in the 1940s, during the war, there was a terrible outbreak of cholera. The Muslim cemetery was near the *Gabr-Mahalleh* (Zoroastrian quarter). He observed that whereas the Zoroastrian method of disposal did not allow



¹ The interviews have been digitized and deposited in the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR) at SOAS and recently published in two volumes

microbes and viruses to survive, the earth allowed them to flourish and became contaminated by them.

Several people expressed their dislike of the grandiose grave architecture and expensive funeral ceremonies that some aspire to today. There is a strong sense among many Zoroastrians, both in Iran and India, that death is a great leveller, and there should be no hierarchy or display of worldly wealth in the legacy of a graveyard. It might be noted that in the diaspora, the opposite is true insofar as epigraphic commemoration on gravestones and tombs establishes a record for the community as a whole within the host establishment. In Britain, the Zoroastrian burial ground in Brookwood cemetery is a good example.

Further challenges faced by Zoroastrians in Iran include those to do with adapting funerary rituals within a predominantly Muslim environment.

An interesting example relates to those Zoroastrians who are commonly referred to within the community as *jadid ul-Islam* - descendants of people who converted, either willingly or unwillingly, to Islam but who continued to practice Zoroastrianism. Their children might be brought up as Zoroastrians but were officially Muslims with Muslim names. When they died, they were not accepted into the *dakhmeh*, or later into the Zoroastrian cemetery. Though obliged to have the last rites performed by a mullah, they would also have the entire death ceremony performed by a *mobed* before death. If this wasn't possible, then they would take a stone to the *mobed*, who would perform a death ceremony over it. The day before the burial, a grave was dug and lined with pebbles. The stone was placed inside together with a *sudreh* and *kusti* and a solid convex structure was built over the top. The next day, the body was placed inside the grave, and a mullah would recite the prayers. (Photo below: graves in the (old) Jadid cemetery showing the niche for a divo).



The second example refers to the Iran/Iraq war (1980-88) when the question arose over whether or not Zoroastrians should be obliged to fight. Some interviewees mentioned that they see themselves as Iranian first and foremost and share a common identity with all other Iranians, both Muslim and non-Muslim. The notion of martyrdom is quite complex in Zoroastrianism. The idea that you can buy yourself a place in Paradise through sacrificing your life does not exist in Zoroastrian doctrine.

The martyrdom advocated by Khomeini was contentious for Zoroastrians because it was openly associated with the Shi'a narrative of Kerbelā and the martyrdom of Hossein. However, Zoroastrians felt that dying for a just cause, should that be the unfortunate outcome on the battlefield, then that deed would be rewarded. Iran pays tribute to those who died in the war during the annual Ten-Day Dawn Celebrations to commemorate the Revolution of 1979.



Zoroastrians have their own ceremony, held on Farvardin day, Farvardin month. On this day, they will take traditional foods such as *lorik*, *sirug* and *sir o sedow*, to leave at the graveside of family members who died. Zoroastrians use the term: *jān-bakhtegān*, when referring to those who died in the war, rather than the Islamic term *shahid*, martyr. (Photo above: farvardigan prayers for the martyrs who died in the Iran-Iraq war. Photo below: *dakhmeh* in the village of Cham, near Yazd).



Sarah Stewart holds the SOAS Shapoorji Pallonji Lectureship in Zoroastrianism and is Co-Chair of the Institute of Zoroastrian Studies, London.

Pillars of Health



+

Conquering the Unquiet Mind: A Guide to Mental Well-Being

Zarene Hakim Austin

The subject of mental health is at the forefront of today's world stage more than ever. As we navigate through the pandemic, we continue to look for ways to cope, to help ourselves and our children digest the sudden changes that were brought upon us, and to move forward in a "new normal". It seems that anxiety, depression, and a host of other mental health challenges are on the rise, due to recent circumstances, or it could be that more attention is being given to these issues, thankfully.

I was drawn to attend the session *Conquering the Unquiet Mind* on day two of the congress. I decided to take a break from the main hall and ventured downstairs to the smaller Beekman-Sutton North. I was pleasantly surprised to find a fully packed room with Zarathushtis of all ages, but especially the younger generation. It was clear that mental health is a topic that many are interested in, especially from a Zarathushti viewpoint.

Dynamic speakers presented interesting and relevant information on the importance of mental well-being. Everything from following a healthy diet to stress management to exercising both body and mind was addressed. Someone even asked a question about naturalistic psychedelic treatments for anxiety and depression.

All speakers are highly accomplished in specific fields of mental health. Their bios are extensive, but a few highlights are included below:



Dr. Firdaus Dhabhar is a professor in the Departments of Psychiatry, Immunology, and the Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, at the University of Miami. He also directs the Laboratory of Stress and Resilience. Firdaus is a Zarathushti priest and has received numerous honours for research and teaching. (Photo left)



Delna Palia is a lawyer and is passionate about change for growth and betterment. She has studied various techniques on principles of metaphysics, meta-linguistics, hypnosis, timeline paradigm for trauma and negative emotional release, and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). (Photo left)



Dr. Khushro B. Unwalla is a board-certified psychiatrist and Distinguished Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association. He is also a Zarathushti priest and treats patients using the Bio-Psycho-Social-Cultural-Spiritual model in a multidisciplinary setting. (Photo right)



Dr. Farin Bakhtiari did an excellent job of moderating the session. (Photo left) She is an assistant professor of Developmental Psychology at California State University, Fresno. Her general research interests focus on the well-being and development of adolescents and young adults in context (e.g., family, peers, school), particularly among those in immigrant families.

Thanks to their incredible work and passion to help others, discussions on mental health and well-being can continue to have a place in Zarathushti forums. I am hoping to see more presentations like these on the main stage in the future.

This session was made possible by contributions by Dr Smita Antia and Ervad Xerxes Antia.

Zarene Hakim Austin is the President Zoroastrian Association of Quebec.

Zoroastrian Genes & Susceptibility And Healthy Aging

Parmis Khatibi

Health status and susceptibility to disease vary considerably between ethnic groups. Ethnic groups differ in their genetic susceptibility to diseases. Historically, Zoroastrians have been shown to be genetically susceptible to specific diseases. Dr. Saroja Voruganti talked about the importance of a personalized nutrition study of metabolic diseases in Parsi Zoroastrians to



From left Ushtavaity Canteenwalla; Dr Villoo Morawala-Patel; Dr Saroja Vorunganti

further determine genetic, epigenetic, microbiome and lifestyle factors affecting the risk for metabolic diseases in our community.



Genetic Counselor Ushtavaity Canteenwalla discussed how common the *G6PD* Gene is in the Zoroastrian population and the importance to get screened for it and using the knowledge from your genetic testing to modify lifestyle factors and possible management of your health condition.



Dr. Freny Mody (photo left) talked about how there is a high cardiovascular disease risk and prevalence of risk factors (diabetes and hypertension) in Zoroastrians. She talked about how lifestyle and environment play larger roles in risk factor mitigation than medical therapy and reducing the burden of disease and that Prevention is the BEST medication!

This panel was moderated by Dr Villoo Morawala-Patel whose Avestagenome Project is a drug discovery company focusing on the global Parsi-Zoroastrian population to develop novel biomarkers and drugs for cancers and neuro-degenerative conditions. They are looking at 10,000 Zoroastrian Genomes to further understand the interplay between personal disease and disease conditions as generations of marriage within the community have resulted in increased

evidence of both traits, greater longevity and certain diseases (specific cancers, heart disease, stroke).



This led into our Healthy Living and Aging panel with **Dr. Nikan Khatibi** (photo left) and Dr. Firuza Parikh. Dr. Nikan Khatibi discussed how many factors influence healthy aging. Some of these, such as genetics, are not in our control, but others, like exercise, a healthy diet, taking care of our mental health and social relationship are within our reach. Dr Khatibi talked about reverse engineering your longevity. The basic denominators for living a long, healthy and fulfilling life are:

1. Having the right outlook (by having a sense of purpose and downshift to lower your stress)
2. Eating wisely (80% rule of eating clean, eating more plant-based, and drinking a glass of wine in the evening)

3. Connecting with your community and loved ones and having a sense of belonging

4. Exercise (get moving and doing strength training). To make it to the age of 100, you must have won the genetic lottery. But most of us have the capacity to make it well into our early 90's and largely without chronic disease. The average person's life expectancy could increase by 10-12 years by adopting these lifestyle modifications.



Dr. Firuza Parikh (photo left) reiterated these important points when talking about male and female infertility. She stated that health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. She talked about how one's lifestyle can contribute to infertility (work pressures, environmental pollutions, lack of sleep and exercise and excessive alcohol). As a reproductive health and infertility expert, Dr. Parikh stressed the importance of sexual health and having these important conversations with one's partner. She also discussed how more women are halting their biological clock by freezing their eggs and having children later in life. Whether it is for healthy eggs, a healthy mind, a healthy soul, or a healthy body, the takeaway message was that the best investment of your time and money is in yourself and your health. Investing money in your health will save you the cost of medications, hospitalizations; prevent loss of income. Investing time in your health will allow you to live a

longer and healthy life. Investing in your health will prevent suffering as you get older. Small changes to a healthier life will make a huge difference and it is never too late to get started!

This session was made possible by contributions by Khursheed Navdar and Shailendra Dusaj

Parmis Khatibi is the COO of a healthcare corporation in California that provides comprehensive and interventional pain medication services and recently expanded to include mental health and wellness services

Participate in the Avestagenome Project

Volunteer by donating a blood sample to further understand the interplay between personal genetics & disease conditions. Creation of the world's first systems biology led biorepository of the genetically well defined Zoroastrian-Parsis. Housing 4500+ samples. Samples are collected from volunteers and stored at -80°C. DNA, RNA, plasma, and stem cells are extracted for further analyses. All samples are barcoded and anonymized upon receipt. Visit the website: theavestagenomeproject.com

The Joyful Centenarian: Reinventing Oneself, Aging Across The Zoroastrian World, Resources & Opportunities



Bomi Parakh and Linda Blanchard

During Act One of our lives, we focus on careers to support ourselves and our families. With lifespans expanding over 90+ years we need to plan for a productive Act Two. Neville Sarkari, Firdaus Jhabwalla, Xerxes Madon and Fereshteh Yazdani Khatibi created successful Act Two changing the definition of “retirement” to a productive life of purpose. They switched careers mid-life by leveraging their talent, interest in hobbies, philanthropy, and volunteering. They maintained deep personal connections and found their inner sense of engagement.

The link below shows two joyful centenarians Xerxes Madon and Firdaus Jhabwalla, and Zarathushtis Aging in India and across the Zarathushti world Iran, England, Australia New Zealand, Pakistan, Oman).

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1vPmWxsgMSAePdIL0l7voH4UITMF5iSlo?usp=sharing>

Helpful Insights

The WZC lecture focused on 4 helpful insights and opportunities for seniors in the Zoroastrian community.

1. **You are not alone.** In America, 10,000 people are turning 65 every day. Roughly one in six Canadians is over the age of 65. For the first time in the history of the world, people over 65 now outnumber kids under 5. By 2030, there will be more seniors in China and India combined than the entire population of the US. There is comfort and strength in being part of this large and rapidly growing community.
2. **Significant and detailed information is now available on the needs of the senior population.** Seniors have medical, non-medical and psycho-social needs. Medical needs relate to the care of acute and chronic conditions. Non-medical needs are associated with deficits in activities of daily living (such as bathing, dressing, transportation, meal preparation and housekeeping). Psycho-social needs are higher-level needs that focus on such things as being productive, being able to contribute, and self-esteem.
3. **Seniors have a choice of settings and services to meet these needs.** In North America, the needs of seniors can be met in the home or in a range of senior housing settings (such as independent living, assisted living, or nursing home). Medical needs of seniors are mostly covered by Medicare. Almost two-thirds of seniors rely exclusively on care by family members and/or friends for their non-medical needs. More importantly, a wide range of services (like transportation, meals, laundry, cooking, shopping, housework, socialization, respite for caregivers and adult day care) are available for free or a nominal charge. Several state and local welfare agencies can guide seniors through these choices and services.
4. **Zoroastrian Senior Housing may be a concept whose time has come.** Recent surveys indicate high interest in Zoroastrian senior housing. It is an excellent opportunity for any Zoroastrian entrepreneur with an interest in helping seniors and offers an excellent way to earn an income, build wealth, and employ family and friends. This industry is dominated by mom-and-pop operations with low barriers to entry. Zoroastrian associations can support these startups by subsidizing fixed real-estate costs

For these reasons, there has never been a better time for seniors to plan for, expect and enjoy a more joyful, secure, and healthy future.



From left Nawaz Merchant, Nevile Sarkari, Dolly Dastoor; Nikan Khatibi (for Feresteh Khatibi who was unable to attend), Freyaz Shroff.

This session was made possible with contributions from Sam Bhadha.

Bomi Parakh has over three decades of work experience in all parts of health care continuum in some of the nation's health maintenance organizations, hospital systems, multispecialty physician practices and post-acute providers

Linda Blanchard has been a social worker with Adult Protective Services in New Mexico helping elders and persons with disabilities. She works with adults and their families and collaborates with community providers to ensure adults can remain safe and have their needs met.

Moderators: Nawaz Merchant and Dolly Dastoor

From the FEZANA JOURNAL Archives

AGING GRACEFULLY



In 2016, FEZANA commissioned Nawaz Merchant, Dolly Dastoor, and Piroja Press to conduct a Needs Assessment of Zarathushti seniors and associations. Recommendations included:

- Senior activities committees should offer seniors excursions and fitness activities. A Transportation Coordinator role can be modelled on best practices by OZCF and ZSBC.
- Care Committees are needed for inter-generational support for both seniors and caregivers.
- Associations can subsidize events for seniors and many do. A voucher or nominal fee (plus donation on honor system) could be explored. Seniors frequently wait to register, because of uncertain health, so a few seats can be reserved for late responses.
- Associations should recognize and support caregivers.
- Encourage senior social groups to connect using newsletters to disseminate information about free entertainment resources, like old movies, songs, pictures, coloring books, crosswords, Sudoku, short stories, book recordings.
- FEZANA and WZCC may wish to maintain a Senior Services Directory, and include non-Z providers and services for a fee. This can help Z seniors locate services where they can be together. Seniors want local "Bhonavala" services, (people who supply food to homes). This can support small businesses like Parsi Pantry. Sharing financial education resources can help seniors use public programs like free tax filing services and senior centers.
- Associations can expand their infrastructure to include Senior Housing. Z seniors want to live near a Dar e Mehr where they can enjoy each other's company and attend activities.

Bridging the Global Zarathushti Existence

AN ARRAY OF IMPRESSIONS



Impressions of a Zoroastrian Youth Across Borders

Arezoo Gharibshahi

As I like to mix business with engineering, I graduated in mechanical engineering and currently studying Master of Business Administration at Sharif University of Technology. My values is keeping Ashu Zarthust messages alive and through my knowledge, helping develop the young Zoroastrian generation."

"As an Iranian ZYAB awardee, I attended the 12th WZC for the first time. The theme of Congress was "Bridging the Global Zarathushti Existence". The interesting point I

found was that the congress covered a wide range of topics and one of the most important ones was Women's leadership and women's empowerment.

As a young woman who is enthusiastic about entrepreneurship, I found the lectures presented by successful Zoroastrian women very inspiring. Climate change, as another significant and trending topic was presented by Zoroastrian scientists and this attention to the environmental issue shows Zoroastrians respecting for Ashu Zarthust's message about conserving our nature and God's creations. A large number of attendees from 16 countries around the world created the opportunity for me to socialise with different people from Professors and Businessmen to Moobeds and Moobedyars. Despite of some negative ideas about Iran, I tried to introduce Iran in a more positive light to my peers and other Zoroastrians and invite them to visit Iran for expanding international community relations and breaking the isolation Iranian Zoroastrians are trapped in."

Arezoo Gharibshahi, Yazd, Iran was a ZYAB Awardee (Zoroastrian Youth Across Borders)



A Positive and Educational Experience

Rushad Austin



This past summer, I attended my first World Zoroastrian Congress. I had been looking forward to it for weeks and was very excited when we left our home in Montreal for New York. The congress spanned over four days, each one filled with interesting lectures, activities, ceremonies and much more. My experience at the congress was both positive and educational.

Day One

Although I'm sixteen years old, I decided to attend the teen/tween track with my sister on the first day. Upon entering the room, I was greeted by enthusiastic and welcoming Zarathushtis. For the first time, I was surrounded with people that looked like me and shared the same core Zoroastrian values as I did. We started off with introducing ourselves, then moved on to Zoroastrianism 101, and finally, listening to Shahnameh



stories. I found the Zoroastrianism 101 class to be particularly helpful because it taught me how much I really don't know about my religion and how much I have still to learn. On that first day, I also made new friends that I remain in contact with today.

Day Two and Three

On the second day of the congress, I decided to split my day in half. I started the day in the teen track where we built models of Dar-e-Mehrs and ended the day with some adult lectures. On the third day, I attended the adult lectures. I started with the "leaders asking leaders" Q&A in the morning. I listened to young Zoroastrians from around the world talk about their own experiences as leaders in their respective communities. Hearing incredible Zarathushtis only a couple of years older than me describing the differences they've made by way of Zoroastrianism was truly inspiring.

After eating lunch, which for me was made up of mostly dessert, I returned to the main hall to listen to my favourite lecture on Zoroastrian entrepreneurship. The panel included successful entrepreneurs with different backgrounds and education but were all united by their Zoroastrian faith. I was able to ask questions and get answers from more than one of the panelists. What really impressed me was when I went to the stage afterwards, Mirza Mehta, CEO of Tomato Jos, took time out of her busy schedule to talk to me about her experiences and answer all my questions and much more. Overall, I had a lot of fun and learned a lot. I'm looking forward to the London Youth Congress and Z Games in 2023 and the Houston North American Congress in 2024.

My name is Rushad Austin and I live in Montreal, Canada. I'm an avid mountain biker and basketball player. I'm a grade eleven student at College Bourget and I play on the varsity team and on an intercity traveling team. I like to invest the money I make from shoveling driveways into the stock market. I would describe myself as a responsible, respectful, and fun-loving teenager. My other interests include spending time outdoors, politics and making my famous smoothies.

Impressions of a Family from Michigan

Ardeshir Irani

This was our very first Zoroastrian Congress. We attended as a family, my wife Shekufa & children Sanaya (25yrs) and Sarosh (23yrs).

It was a great experience attending all the presentations and panel discussions on a variety of topics that included religious & cultural issues, issues of identity & belonging, leadership & entrepreneurship, women's rights, unconscious biases, role of stress in everyday life, health and aging. I was able to learn a great deal about the work many Zoroastrians are doing to better the world and the environment.

Ardeshir Irani is a physician from Detroit Michigan.

An Amazing Experience

Natasha N. Dungor

Walking into the Hilton Midtown lobby during the afternoon hours of June 30th, all one could see were Zarathushtis. Some from the United States and some from around the world; WZC participants came from 16 different countries around the globe. Zoros clogged the lobby of the hotel with the check-in line snaking around multiple times. It was loud and full of conversation in many languages: English, Gujarati, Farsi, and more. At first, it was a scary sight, but then I saw familiar faces smiling in my direction.

The registration room opened around 2:00 PM on June 30th and there was a constant flow of people walking into and out of the room. Each family received a bag filled with important information such as name tags and tickets to the Gala Night along with a few goodies. The evening was spent in multiple ways. While some went to the Dar-e-Mehr to a dinner organized by ZAGNY, others went to

Broadway shows, and the youth found themselves at the ZYNA Youth Mixer.



Doors to the Opening Day Celebration welcomed attendees at 8:00 AM on July 1, 2022, and the ceremony began around 30 minutes afterward. Around 1,200 registrants gathered in the Grand Ballroom to witness the first moments of the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress. The rest of the day was filled with multiple interesting sessions. There were special sessions for the kids and teens led by Vehishta Kaikobad of Houston along with her team of youth volunteers and adult mentors, and special sessions for the youth/young adults which were organized by ZYNA. Lunch was full of socializing and making plans with old and new friends. Sessions continued after lunch and ended around 6 in the evening. Friday evening was a gift to do whatever one wanted;



many explored New York City while others stayed back in the hotel to spend time with family and friends.

Saturday morning started early with continuous sessions throughout the day with a wide variety to choose from. Everyone was constantly shifting from room to room as sessions started and ended. Lunch was accompanied by the World Zarathushti Community Awards; Multiple awards were presented and awarded to the recipients. The day continued after the Awards Luncheon and a highlight of the day was Tashan Mistree-Byramji's 'Living Zoroastrianism, an Immersive Experience' exhibition. The busiest station at the exhibition was the station in which we got our names written in Avesta on bookmarks. The day's sessions ended again around 6 in the evening, but the activities of the day were not complete yet.

Around 2 hours later, hundreds of Zoros crowded the lobby outside the Grand Ballroom waiting for the doors to open. Everyone was excited to witness the World Zoroastrian Philharmonic Orchestra along with the individual instrumentalists, singers, and other performers. People flooded into the Grand Ballroom as the doors opened and rushed to find the best seats to see the stage. Once the musical night began, the applause never stopped. The night retired around 10:30 PM, and everyone began preparing for the next day.

Activities and talks started at around 8:45 on Sunday morning (July 3, 2022). Just before lunch, we were treated to a multi-media presentation: 'STORY OF CREATION – as told in the Bundahishn'. The play was put together by the members of the ZAGNY Community. All the months of effort that was put into the production shined through with the beautiful presentation. This was followed by lunch and more sessions afterward. The informational sessions of the day concluded at around 5:30 PM to give everyone enough time to get ready for the Gala Night Celebration.



Once again, the lobby of the Grand Ballroom was filled with Zoros of all ages waiting for the doors to open. Eventually, everyone was welcomed into the Grand Ballroom and took their seats at their assigned tables. The entertainment of the evening was a fashion show presented by Ashdeen Lilaowala. All the models presenting Ashdeen's work were Zarathushtis. The fashion show was followed by dinner. Many gathered outside the Ballroom after dinner to view the sarees, salwar suits, lehengas, and more, made by Ashdeen, that were on sale from the fashion show.

After more sales and socializing in the final hours with friends old and new, music began to flow out of the Grand Ballroom with Singer Nauzad Sadry and DJ Zubin Chichgar, from Los Angeles, California on stage. The dance floor was officially open and became packed with energized dancers in the first few seconds. Eventually the dance floor overflowed, and we decided to make our way to the stage. The dancing ended around 1 in the morning, but it was hard to separate from the discussions taking place in the lobby outside of the Grand Ballroom. As time passed, the number of people decreased, and the last conversations ended at around 3:45/4 in the morning.

The events of Monday morning, July 4, 2022, were scheduled to begin at 9:00 but started slightly later than scheduled due to the wake-up delay caused because of all the fun experienced in the Gala Night the evening before. The day began with a recap of the Congress followed by a quick presentation about the Zoroastrian Footprint. The Closing Ceremony began next along with the Passing of the Torch. Representatives of the next North American Zoroastrian Congress gave a brief presentation and formally invited the audience to join them in Houston in December of 2024. Followed by this, representatives of the next World Zoroastrian Youth Congress took the stage and invited all the youth to London next summer. Finally, the Closing Ceremony concluded with the Passing of the Torch from the United States (ZAGNY

and FEZANA) to Singapore, where the next World Zoroastrian Congress will be held in 2026.

Many new connections had been made over the past few days, but the time had come for everyone to say goodbye. As expected, it was hard to part ways after all the great memories created over the past weekend, but many had already begun making plans to meet again soon. The youth began making plans for London while others wait for Houston and Singapore; It's hard to keep the Congress Junkies waiting for too long.

Ending on a successful note, the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress fulfilled its promise by truly bridging the global Zarathushti existence. With participants of all ages and backgrounds all coming together under the same roof, everyone walked in with the expectation of an amazing experience and walked out with the feeling that the Congress should've never ended.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to FEZANA and the Zoroastrian Association of Houston (ZAH) for subsidizing my registration fee towards attending the Congress. It was truly an amazing experience, and I can't wait to give back to both the associations through my service and community involvement.

Natasha Dungor, age 15, is a 10th grader in Houston, Texas. She has been an active participant in the Houston Zarathushti community since childhood and has served in numerous positions on the Middle Group and Youth Group Officer Boards over the years. Natasha shares a deep passion for the Zoroastrian community, religion, culture, and its history and is part of the Educating the Children group of the FEZANA Ava Project. She is interested in medicine as a future career, and passionately enjoys dancing and spending time with family and friends.

Impressions of an Outsider

Paulina Niechciał

Much has been said at the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress about the value of building a community and keeping old and making new friends, and those were happening outside of the stages of the event. Immediately after crossing the threshold of the hotel lobby, the Congress attendee was immersed in building relationships and creating a sense of inclusion and belonging, greeting and hugging those known better, often not seen for a long time, and those known less or hardly, but still having common points: an acquaintance of a wife, husband, or cousin, a member of a distant family, a friend from a former school in Bombay who had lived on another continent for years, sisters of a friend who used to dance at our wedding, or just someone with a familiar-sounding last name. As a non-Zoroastrian from Poland, not belonging to any religious or ethnic minority scattered throughout the world, I watched it with great interest. Thus, the Congress, according to its motto *Bridging the Global Zoroastrian Existence*, became a 'bridge' connecting the members of the transnational Zoroastrian community.

This was my second Congress. I found it to be a space to observe the changes that are taking place in the modern Zoroastrian community. Organized in New York by American Zoroastrian institutions, it reflects what is

happening in the diaspora—home to an increasing number of followers of this religion at a time when their traditional communities in Iran, India, and Pakistan are drastically shrinking. 'What I see here now, will take place in India in the generation of my grandchildren,' told me a middle-aged man who traveled to the Congress from India with his family, adding that he is, however, a pragmatist and knows that such a change is inevitable.

What does this change concern? Much space was given to those whose voices up to now were not necessarily well heard or not heard at all: intermarried Zoroastrian women and children from such unions, young Zoroastrians not necessarily sharing the visions of the older generation, or those for whom Zoroastrian identity is not simply obtained by birth and upbringing among Parsis or Iranians, but is a matter of choice. Furthermore,



there were voices from the audience who spoke about the need to improve the situation of Zoroastrians identifying with the LGBTQ community who feel unaccepted by their co-religionists.

'It's unbelievable! It was completely impossible at previous congresses,' an Iranian living in the US told me, commenting on the fact that Dr. Anne Khademian, a former President of the ZAMWI Board of Trustees and a Zoroastrian by choice, from the main Congress stage talked about her personal search for a Zoroastrian identity. This, in particular, seems to be a revolutionary step in redefining Zoroastrianism and Zoroastrian identity. The presence of Kurds at the Congress was also part of this trend: Although the Kurdish representation appeared four years ago at the World Congress in Perth, this time we were able not only to hear about their experiences but, thanks to a lecture by Matthew Travis Barber from the University of Chicago, to learn that this movement is not uniform and that contemporary interest in Zoroastrianism in Kurdistan counts many decades.

What I consider the greatest weakness of the Congress was the slight attention to actually connecting Zoroastrians scattered all over the world and those who remain in Iran. The choice of a venue largely blocked their path to arrival, and even Mobed Dr. Ardeshtir Khorshidian, the head of Tehran Association of Priests, was not able to obtain an American visa. Furthermore, organizers did not attract Iranian attendees from the diaspora and panelists representing this group were very few, not even reflecting the actual demographic proportion between Iranians and Parsis. This weakness was revealed, in particular, by the session with young leaders: It showed in a fascinating way how young Zoroastrians, through new technologies and social media, build bridges all over the world, but unfortunately, these bridges bypass the youth in Iran.

I observed the Congress as a sociologist interested in contemporary Zoroastrians for years, curious how Zoroastrian life and practices are transferred to the American continent and how this ancient religion corresponds with modernity and changes under its influence. Not less important as my observations were my personal experiences of many conversations and relations concluded or deepened during the Congress, and the most touching I found the panel *We, the Zoroastrian Women: Voices of Today, Leaders of Tomorrow*, moderated by Zerbano Gifford—an author, award-winning women's activist, and human rights activist. Many difficulties affecting women in the male-dominated world, which the panelists talked about,

concern not only Zoroastrians but to a varying degree every woman: Each of us needs respect, empowerment, support from family and friends in everyday life, gender equality, and fair treatment in the public sphere.

As an academician, Dr. Rashna Writer emphasized, women are guardians of heritage and keepers of memory, and they should learn from each other and support each other. This panel is followed by the website www.zasha.info and the book *Z to A of Zoroastrianism 2022: Ancient Wisdom for Modern Living* (2022) by Zerbano Gifford and Farida Master.

In my opinion, Congress was building a bridge not only between different people but between various Zoroastrianisms: between the Zoroastrianism of the young and of the older generations; between the official, traditional Zoroastrianism of priests who on the main stage tried to tone down the changes by invoking the authority of what they had been taught for generations, and the Zoroastrianism of female modeb-yars, who on a small stage talked about how slowly but stubbornly they are making their way to change their marginal position and actively work towards what they call "awakening"; between Zoroastrianisms of groups sharing different national, ethnic, or gender identities. The crowning glory of this bridge construction at the end of the Congress was the great applause of the audience, delighted with the conclusion of Dasturji Khurshed Dastoor, the High Priest of Iranshah Ateshbehran at Udvada, not to be divided into 'Parsis' or 'Iranis,' but simply be 'Zarthushtis.'

Paulina Niechcial is an assistant professor in the Center for Comparative Civilization Studies at Jagiellonian University. She completed her M.A. degree both in Ethnology (2006) and Iranian Studies (2008), and a Ph.D. degree in Sociology (2012). In her dissertation, based on field research conducted among contemporary Zoroastrians in Tehran, she analyzed issues of collective identity. Her research interests focus on minority issues, anthropology and sociology of religion as well as contemporary cultures of Persiant societies of Iran, Afghanistan and Tajik. In 2019, as a recipient of the Kosciuszko Foundation Fellowship, and hosted by Department of Central Eurasian Studies at the Indiana University in Bloomington, she conducted fieldwork within her research project 'Lived Religion' in the Context of Migration: The Case of Zoroastrian Women in the USA. She is the author of many articles published in scholarly journals, book chapters and the book *Zoroastrian Minority in Modern Tehran: On Collective Identity in the Context of Shi'a Domination* (in Polish; Kraków: Nomos, 2013).



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Volunteers: **The Beating Heart of Every Zoroastrian Congress**

An Interview with Sam Shroff

Vahiste Sinor

The 12th World Zoroastrian Congress, which took place in 2022, was held in New York City, giving Zoroastrians from all over the world a chance to see the beautiful city and all its fantastic elements. Broadway tickets to the shows, 'The Lion King,' 'Aladdin,' 'The Tina Turner Musical, and a 4th of July Fireworks Cruise were arranged as additional ticketed events at the congress. Most of these additional events along with the events before and after the Congress were handled by Mr. Sam Shroff: the Chair of Pre- and Post-Congress Events. His enthusiasm, good humour and casual manner made it a joy to interact with him.

How did you hear about the World Zoroastrian Congress and the volunteer position?

I was asked to help by the Co chair of the Congress, Mr. Astad J. Clubwala, who was known to me a family friend .

What were your duties during the Congress?

My duties were mainly to help the delegates who had booked either of the ticketed events to the theatre as well as the smooth operation of those events, but I enjoyed helping the delegates and volunteers for all their needs throughout the 4 days of the congress.

How did you manage to balance your professional life and the work of the Congress?

I am a media analyst by profession, and I took the necessary days off from work before the long weekend of July 4th. I stayed at the Hilton in New York with the other volunteers for the Congress as well as the 1,200 delegates from all over the world. Taking care of such a multitude of people is not an easy feat, but because of the hard work of all the volunteers, that the entire Congress "came together seamlessly."



Vahiste Sinor is a Creative Writing and Journalism student at the University of Hertfordshire with experience in writing for various magazines and companies as either part-time jobs or volunteer work.

During the congress, I worked as an “all-rounder” helping people from all different committees. I did whatever the team required and was always ready to take on any task, from emptying the rooms out in the hotel to deliveries for the logistics team!

Was your family involved with the World Zoroastrian Congress as well?

My wife -Zarine - and children Zarah 14 and Cyrus 16, were also volunteers for the World Zoroastrian Congress., They follow in their father’s footsteps as the youngest yet most helpful and enthusiastic volunteers at the event! They were “an amazing support” throughout the event and helped out tremendously by doing all the odd jobs assigned to them by various other volunteers. (photo above)

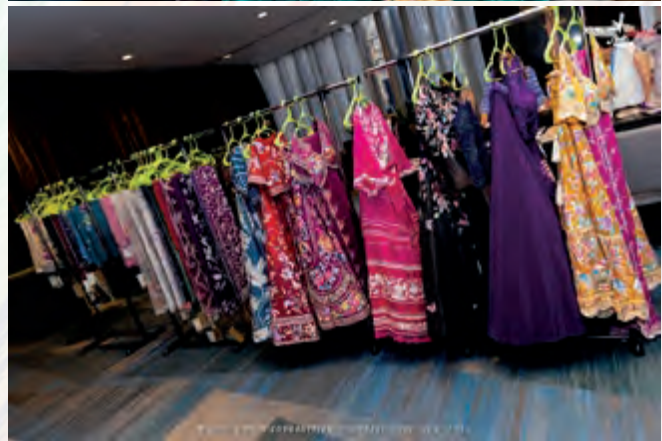
It was wonderful to hear about Cyrus and Zarah’s involvement in the Congress as it shows how much Zoroastrian youth care about the community and would like to be involved in the workings of community events if given the chance to do so. Occasions such as the Congress are a spectacular platform for Zoroastrian youth to network and make friends -and get some insight into the Zoroastrian heritage - just as Sam Shroff’s children did.

Co-hosted by ZAGNY (Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York), and FEZANA (Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America), the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress was successful in providing outstanding entertainment, information about our religion, as well as giving Zoroastrians from all over the world a chance to network and form friendships and connections that would hopefully last a lifetime.

At the heart of the congress were the volunteers who worked tirelessly before, during and even after the four-day Congress. Paired with the fantastic turnout of delegates, that led to a very successful event where everything just “fell into place,” according to Sam Shroff.

Editor’s Note “Sam. Shroff definitely surpassed the expectations of all those involved in the Congress by keeping things moving fluidly and lightening the mood of all the volunteers and delegates with his humour”.

Displays at the Congress

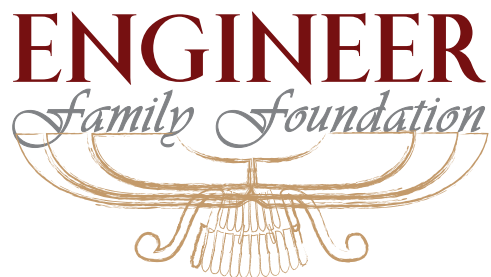


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BIRTHS

Sam Dustyn Shroff, a boy, to Arielle and Dustyn Shroff of Parkland, FL. Grandparents are Lynn and Jeff Kahn of Boynton Beach, FL and Hovi and Burjis Shroff of Boca Raton, FL. Nephew to Kevyn, on October 27, 2022.

NAVJOTES

Anusheh Divecha, daughter of Shireen & Behram Divecha, granddaughter of Dinaz & Noshir Divecha and Vera & Adil Kaikobad, in Richmond, BC. Canada, on September 17, 2021. Navjote performed by Ervad Firdos Balsara (photo right)



Zeenia and Zia, daughters of Navaz Nekoo and Adil Gheewala, sisters of Zoey, in Bellevue, WA on May 14, 2022. (photo right)



Karl and Cyrus Contractor, children of Dinaz and Behram Contractor in Ladera Ranch, CA on May 28, 2022.

Rehan and Darius Mistry, sons of Shireen and Farhad Mistry. Ervad Firdos Balsara and Mobed Ardesheer Behi performed the ceremony in Vancouver, BC, Canada, on July 2, 2022. (photo below)



Finley and Ruby Bastani, children of Sara and Zuben Bastani (Denver, CO) and **Leo Ttoester**, son of Ashesh and Matt Troester (Scottsdale, AZ), grand children of Shoba and Jehangir Boman Bastani (Phoenix, AZ). Navjote performed by Ervad Vispi Karanjia, Shyamuk Sidhwa, and Jamshid Tata in Phoenix, AZ on July 2, 2022.

WEDDINGS

Rishad Daroowala, son of Rukhshana and Sharookh Daroowala of Vancouver, BC. to **Dr. Jabeene Bhimji**, daughter of Kaneez and Hamid Bhimji of Vancouver in Whistler, BC. on June 24, 2022.

Rohaam Daroowala, son of Rukhshana and Sharookh Daroowala (Vancouver, BC) to **Benafsha Shroff**, daughter of Phiroza and Kayomarz Shroff, Denver, CO, in Puglia, Italy, on July 22, 2022.

DEATHS

Roshan Ramesh Maniar, wife of Ramesh, mother of Rashmi (Paul), grandmother of Tyler, Kayla, Jordan in Vancouver, BC on April 16, 2022.

Keikhosrow Soroosh, 83, father of Christa (Fariborz Azarkeyvan) Soroush, grandfather of Armaeti, Raeita Azarkeyvan in North Vancouver, BC on April 21, 2022.

Kersi Motaji Anklesaria, father of Kaizad Anklesaria, father-in-law of Banu, grandfather of Cyrus Anklesaria in Mumbai, India on May 18, 2022. (ZAC-LA)

Shahjahan Dehmobed, 91, husband of late Iran Soroushi and Golchehreh Kooshesh, father of Azita Dehmobed, father-in-law of Farhad Iranfar, grandfather of Tandis, Yasmin, Yasaman Iranfar in Tehran, Iran on May 27, 2022.

Aloo (Alami) Vaghaiwalla, 92, on May 27, 2022. (ZAC-LA)

Viloo Sam Batlivala, 79, wife of Dr. Sam Batlivala, mother of Niloufer (Jamsheed Pesi) Banaji, Zubin Sam (Eva) Batlivala (Boston, MA), Khushnooma (Cyrus) Khambatta (New Zealand), grandmother of



MILESTONES

Jennifer (Jim) Dhima, Zenia Banaji, Karishma in Mumbai, India on June 19, 2022. (ZAGNY)

Khodabakhsh Marzbani, 97, in North Vancouver, BC on June 22, 2022.

Bapsy Guard, mother of late Vispi, Jasmine (Farshogar), Yezdi (Farida), grandmother of Farzeen (Mython), Armine (Firoz), Zehaam, Farishya, Tiana Guard, great grandmother of Nolan, Miles, Leial Manapul, sister of Pervize (late Eruch), Aspi (Thrity), Hoshi (Jean) in Toronto, ONT on June 30, 2022.

Rashnavi Kolah, daughter of Mani (nee Wadia) and late Zarir Kolah on July 3, 2022. (ZSO)

Fali Engineer, father of Kersi (Thrity) Engineer, Nina (Rustom) Challa, Jimmy Engineer, grandfather of Zeenia, Shahveer, Karrie, Saroasha, Cyrus, Zubin, (Mona), Zaran (Gracy), Zarius, great grandfather of Mia, Zane, Zoey on July 17, 2022. (MANASHNI)

Iran (Yasmeen) Jarrah (nee Yazdani), wife of late Kaikhosrow Jarrah, daughter of late Rustom and Homayun Yazdani, mother of Rostam (Lisa) and Romin (Shani) Jarrah, grandmother of Yana and Arya Jarrah, sister of Sohrab, Meherdad, and Jehangir Yazdani, sister-in-law of Mehri, Nancy, and Ninaz Yazdani in Toronto, ONT on July 21, 2022.

Rohinton Shohrehkuda, husband of Shahnaz, father of Behzad and Farzad Shohrehkuda, father-in-law of Shahrzad, Shirin, son of late Daulat and late Gustad Shohrehkuda, son-in-law of Pervin and late Mehraban Dehmeri in Toronto, ONT on July 23, 2022.

Aspi Sapurji, 78, husband of Katy, father of Sunaya (Keith) and Jasmine (Xerxes), grandfather of Danika, Katy, and Charlie, brother of Farokh and Zarine in Vaughan, ONT on August 1, 2022.

Jer Behmann Irani, wife of late Behmann Irani, mother of Dilshad Irani (Karachi) and Jamshed Gustavsp (Canada), mother-in-law of Aspi Irani and Tushna Gustavsp, grandmother of Behnaz and Vispi Byramji (Canada), Sheroy and Vahishta Irani (Australia), Behmann Gustavsp, Shayain Gustavsp and Zorast Gustavsp, great grandmother of Nerina and Zain Byramji on August 4, 2022. (Karachi Obituary)

Mehri Abesteh, mother of Geeti Abesteh, (Karachi), Shahryar Abesteh (Toronto, ONT), and Bahman Abesteh (Chicago, IL), grandmother of Azeen Irani (Montreal, QUE) in Pakistan on August 7, 2022.

Dinshaw Cooper, brother-in-law of Porus and Zarin Dadabhoy on August 16, 2022. (ZAMC)

Villoo Nadirshaw Cama, 82, sister of Dhun Gazder, sister-in-law of Sam Gazder (Mississauga, ONT), sister of late Hilda Cama, Firooza Kerawalla (Mumbai, India), sister-in-law of late Farrokh Kerawalla, aunt of Hanoz Kerawalla (Mumbai, India), Roy (Diana), Aban and Nina Gazder (Mississauga, ONT), great aunt of Natasha, Kashmira, and Nina Gazder (Mississauga, ONT) in Mumbai, India on August 21, 2022.

Daisy Sohrab Patel, wife of late Sohrab Savaksha Patel, mother of Jessica Karanjia, Jamshed Patel, Mahrezban Patel (Toronto, ONT) on September 3, 2022. (Karachi Obituary).

Pervez Minocher Vatcha, son of late Guloo and Minocher Vatcha, husband of Arnita Vatcha in Toronto, ONT.

Soonoo Engineer, 96, wife of late Homi Engineer, mother of Merwan, Rukshana. (ZSBC).

Noshir Sorab Irani, 89, father of Youtaz and late Cyrus Noshir Irani, brother of late Jeevan Irani, late Dolly Divecha, late Mani Patel and Rustom Irani passed away in St Catherines, Ontario, Canada, on October 27, 2022.

Parizad Ardeshtir Ardeshtiri – Hamsayeh. (CZC-LA)

Kiandokht Kaymanesh, wife of Soroush Mehdad. (CZC-LA)

Dr. Deenaz Phiroze Coachbuilder, 82, daughter of late Burjor and Freny Paymaster, wife of Ervad Phiroze Coachbuilder, mother of Sharukh and Sarvin, grandmother of Barjor Coachbuilder, mother-in-law of Shaumika and Lisa, sister-in-law of Parveen and Soli Modi on October 6, 2022 in California, USA.

Soli Pardiwala, 93 beloved husband of the late Perin (nee Dastoor); loving father to Zenobia (Harry), Shehnaz (Joe), and Tanaz; adoring grandfather to Aiden, Rachel, Lilah, and Daniel, brother of Godrej Pardiwalla on November 1, 2022

Female, 27, MBA (finance), working as a Lead Analyst in a financial services firm, in Mumbai. Interested in meeting an educated and fun-loving, good-natured boy. Willing to settle in Mumbai or abroad. Parents of boy should be Parsi Zoroastrians. Contact: matrimony1222@gmail.com. [F21.34]

Female, 41, 5' 3". Ph.D in Industrial Organizational Psychology from Roosevelt U, Chicago. Senior Manager, Talent Development and People Analytics for a Technology Services organization, based in Chicago. Avid reader, enjoys movies, writing, running, hiking, traveling. Contact ayesha.jamaspi@gmail.com or nenshadirani@hotmail.com. [F21.36]

Male, 52, 5' 6", BE and MBA, financially independent Management Consultant (after 24 years of corporate work experience with MNC's) from Mumbai. Divorced, seeks non-smoking Parsi lady (including divorcee or widow with/out children) as life partner to settle in Mumbai or anywhere, globally. Foodie who enjoys travel, music, movies and looks forward to building pleasant memories. Contact khushroots@gmail.com. [M21.37]

Female, 29, 5', M.B.B.S, M.S in Obstetrics and Gynecology, from Mumbai(India). Giving an entrance exam to apply for residency (MD/MS) in the USA. Simple, down to earth and dedicated. Enjoys reading, travelling and watching movies. Correspondence invited from well settled boys in the USA. Contact tanazm992@gmail.com. [F21.39]

Male, 25, 5' 10", Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) from McMaster University, currently doing his residency in Mississauga, ONT, Canada. Contact bhathena@yahoo.com. [M21.41]

Male, 27, 5' 10", Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm D) from University of Toronto. Working as a Pharmacist in Toronto, Canada. Contact bhathena@yahoo.com. [M21.42]

Female, 29. Originally from New Delhi, educated in the U.K (MSc Environmental Economics & Climate Change from the London School of Economics), and recently settled in Canada. Currently working as a policy analyst at a reputed think-tank based in Ottawa. Enjoys traveling, hiking, movies and reading. Looking

to meet an educated, well-settled life partner based in USA, Canada or U.K. Contact +1 6475625775, soniapatel910@gmail.com. [F21.51]

Male, 70, biological age would be much younger, due to healthy living and fitness regime. Divorced, living in New Zealand. Currently working as a broker for selling businesses, which is challenging and interesting as you learn daily. Enjoys nature, music and socializing. Two grown children have their own lives. Earnestly looking for a compatible female. Open to adjustments for a happy union. Neville_9@yahoo.com WhatsApp + 64 2105 99519. [M11.53]

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Between the Covers

ZOROASTRIANISM IN OTHER FAITHS

Rohinton F. Nariman

252 pages Published 2021
No ISBN: Private Circulation and
Reference Purposes only.

Reviewed by: **Nawaz Merchant**



BIO: Nawaz Merchant writes under the pen name Nev March. Winner of two national awards and an Edgar finalist, her historical mystery *Murder in Old Bombay* portrays themes of feminism and race in an action-adventure story. Her sequel *Peril at the Exposition* explores gilded age Chicago, while a third mystery novel is scheduled for Fall 2023. She's a board member of Mystery Writers of America- NY Chapter and teaches at Rutgers University's Osher Institute. A lifelong writer, she has been published in *Writer's Digest*, *Mystery Tribune*, *Crime Reads*, *Parsiana*, and other magazines. She's edited the *FEZANA Journal* and written articles on politics and history for *The South Asian Times*.

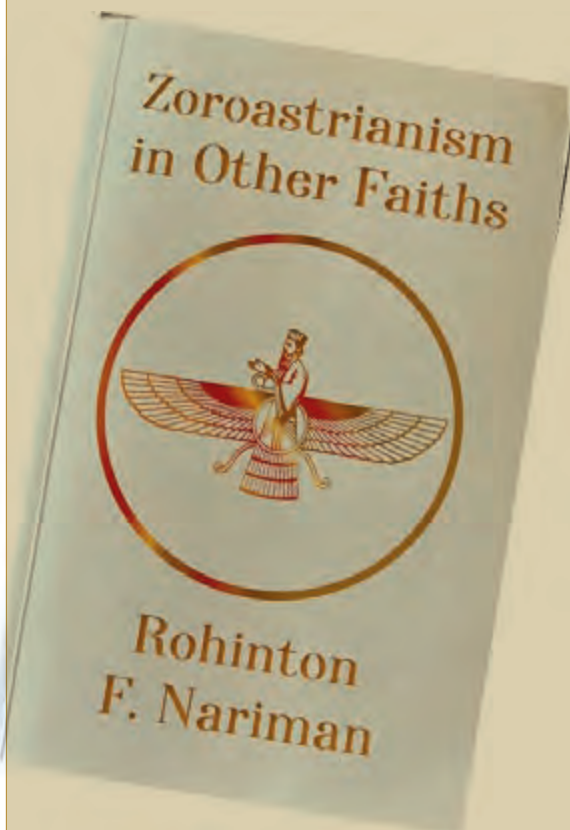
With detailed quotations from religious texts, Justice Ervad Rohinton F. Nariman's book covers historical interactions of Zoroastrianism through the three Persian dynasties (Achaemenid, Parthian and Sassanid) with the religious cultures of Hinduism, Judaism, Roman Christianity, and influences on Islam, Buddhism and in Emperor Akbar's court.

King Cyrus (and Darius) are mentioned in many source documents for rebuilding of a New Temple with Persian funds, return of the treasures taken by Babylonians, and permitting enslaved Jews to leave Babylon in 539 BC. This generosity appears to have strengthened the bonds between these two

cultures. For example, after living under Zoroastrian rule for 200 years, there evolved two distinct Judaic groups: first the Pharisees who had adopted Zoroastrian beliefs of Heaven and Hell, Judgement Day, and Resurrection, while the second group the Sadducees retained the belief in "Sheol".

Nariman also traces the origin of Purim, a Judaic festival to the ambush of Mordecai by Haman (an Amelekite, traditional enemy of Jews). This altercation in the court of Xerxes, was resolved when Queen Esther interceded for Mordecai, allowing Jews "slaughter into destruction" their enemies, which is now enshrined in the monthly Purim days.

Though some of the religious texts are complex and cumbersome reading for a lay person unaccustomed to the stylistic language of these texts, Nariman indicates exactly where he finds parallels between the belief mentioned, and the Zoroastrian belief or quotation. This allows a reader to follow his line of thought without necessarily absorbing the complex original document mentioned.



Nariman does not question narratives like the promises made to Jadi Rana. Nor does he pass editorial comment on the atrocities of history. He leaves it to the reader to determine how they feel about these events. He mentions lawgiver Ezra whose “drastic reform forced Jews married to foreign women to divorce them,” without condemnation, while pointing out it was drastic. In this he eschews Presentism, the interpretation of historical events with today's moral standards.

Nariman rather traces how historical interaction between kingdoms and cultures changed the beliefs incorporated into these religions. “Whereas in Persia anyone can become a priest even today, in India, only one born in a priestly family can aspire to become a practicing priest.” This shows the impact of caste (Hinduism) into the practice of Zoroastrianism in India, which differs from the original practice in Persia.

His conclusion points to how Parsis of India have become a tribe through adopting patriarchy from Hinduism. “(Whereas) the Zoroastrianism of three great Persian empires influenced the course of Judaism, Roman Paganism, and Roman Christianity, and to some extent practices in Islam. (Just so) the Parsis of India as a refugee community in this country have done what the Jews did in Achaemenian Persia--assimilate with the religious practices of their overlords.” This well researched book prompts introspection and leads the reader to question why we continue to follow practices that are serving us so ill today.



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Peril at the Exposition by Nev March

Published by Minotaur Books copyright 2022, Pages 339, ISBN 978-1-250-85503-9 (hard cover)

Cost US\$27.99, Can \$36.99; Kindle \$14.99; Audiobook \$22.32

Mystery book lovers are sure to be captivated by Nev March's latest novel, *Peril at the Exposition*. The setting of the book is Chicago in the 1890s: The city has recently reconstructed itself after a terrible fire that destroyed most of the city. Now in 1893, Chicago proudly hosts the world's grandest Exposition with the latest in art, industry, and inventions. Thomas Edison is present, with exciting possibilities using electricity; also, Nicola Tesla exhibits his latest designs of the modern alternating current electrical system. The Exposition boasts of a dazzling new future.

But not all is well in Chicago. Poverty is great while the rich are getting richer at the expense of child labor, twelve-hour work days, and dangerous work conditions that leave men, women, and children mangled with fingers and toes missing. This is referred to as the Gilded Age in America, but the plight of the destitute laborers is not forgotten as *Peril at the Exposition* spins a web of murder and mystery. The catalyst that jumpstarts the mystery is the discovery of a document stating that eight hundred pounds of ballistite, a highly explosive chemical used to create bombs, has been delivered to the Chicago docks. Who is responsible for these explosives? What will these explosives be used for? Is there peril awaiting the great Exposition?

Nev March, has expertly sequelled her new novel after her award-winning book, *Murder in Old Bombay*. Jim and Diana Agnihotri have recently arrived in Boston from Bombay, where Jim will work with the Dupree Detective Agency. The first pages describe their cozy home

in Boston where the newly-weds are creating a new life in America. *Peril at the Exposition*, is not only a who-done-it mystery but a tender love story between Jim and Diana. Also moving through the novel is a beautiful narrative of Diana's heritage as a Parsi Zoroastrian. Repeatedly Diana mentions values of goodness, truth and compassion that have been handed down to her by her Zoroastrian mother and father. Throughout the novel, author Nev March, interjects Zoroastrian prayers and wisdom even during the most harrowing and trying times and conflicts.

Readers of March's first novel will remember Jim Agnihotri as the dashing, brave detective who solved the murder in Bombay. In this sequel a refreshing twist in events finds us following Diana Faramji, sometimes known as Mrs. O'Trey, Lady Diana or Diana Agniholtry, as she daringly takes on the role of the primary detective. Her husband Jim has been sent to Chicago to investigate a murder and Diane is at her wits end as she has not heard from Jim in over six weeks. She travels to Chicago; her motive is to find Jim, her beloved husband, who has gone undercover with the dock workers. She is motivated by a mysterious message regarding ballistite and its impending menace to the Exposition and she will not resign her search for Jim until she is sure of his safety.

Author March weaves historically accurate events taking place in Chicago and in America in the 1890's. Bombs have recently become a source of violence in other parts of the world. The first Parliament of World Religions takes place in Chicago in 1893 (our own esteemed Mr. Jamshedji Tata was present).



Review by Pearl Satarawala Ball

Nev March has done extensive historical research to enlighten readers of the general spirit of the times, adding an intriguing element to the narrative.

Thus, the novel proceeds: there are threats from anarchists, devious abuse of the impoverished by wealthy corporate owners, deceit by politicians, racial discrimination, the dangerous exploits of a deranged general and, of course, murder! Who are the true enemies with eight hundred pounds of ballistite ready to blast the Exposition, and how can their plan be thwarted? Can they be stopped by our Parsee Zoroastrian heroine and her stalwart husband?

Hop on the roller coaster (or maybe the newly invented Ferris Wheel of the Chicago Exposition) of this exciting tale, and your questions will be answered.

Nev March is a pen name for Nawaz Merchant who has been an active member of ZAGNY for many years. Zoroastrian readers will enjoy references to Parsi life experiences, for as Nawaz points out, "The immigrant's journey of Diana mirrors mine and those of many friends."



Explanation of the Khordeh-Avesta¹

by

Behramgore Tehmuras Anklesaria

(Translated from Gujarati by Meheryar N. Rivetna)

1. A lecture was presented on this subject at the ‘Rahnumae Mazdayasnan Sabha’ on 17th September, 1906.

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Translator's Foreword

A large number of Zoroastrians have an imprecise understanding of the Zoroastrian faith, particularly the meaning behind the prayers they assiduously recite. Unquestionably, much of the religious literature was destroyed by unprovoked invasions on Iran, the birthplace of the Zoroastrian religion leading to a poor knowledge of this great faith.

However, the practitioners of the faith are blessed with eminent scholars, contemporary and from the not too distant past, who have painstakingly brought to light an understanding of the exegesis of the scriptural texts. They have given the faithful an appreciation of the true meaning and purpose behind the prayers, beliefs and practices. Some Zoroastrians cling to illogical beliefs that have no basis in the pristine teachings Zarathustra gave to humankind.

Behramgore Tehmuras Anklesaria brings to attention some of the deviations from the true meaning that have occurred. Anklesaria gave a lecture to the 'Rahnumae Mazdayasnan Sabha' in 1906 dispelling the myths surrounding the prayers in the Khordeh-Avesta in a talk titled: "Explanation of the Khordeh-Avesta" given in Gujarati.

Through fortuitous circumstances I came across this article and was enamored by it, not only because it explained the origins of the prayers, but also because it dismissed, with rational explanations, the superstitions and unfounded beliefs and practices that a vast number of Zoroastrians take as essence of the religion. I could not resist translating this work into English in an effort to reach as many Zoroastrians as possible and share with them this magnificent work.

Behramgore Anklesaria was the first student to obtain an M.A. degree in the newly established Avestan and Pahlavi courses at the University of Bombay. He was appointed as lecturer at the Sir J. J. Zarathoshti and Mulla Firoz Madressas, and later Principal at these institutions. He was a prolific writer and translator of Zoroastrian literature from Pahlavi texts. Notable among his works are: *Zand-Akash*, *Iranian or Greater Bundahishn*, and *Dastur Hoshang Memorial Volume*.

In this translation, I have attempted to give as precise as possible an English rendition of the Gujarati article. If I have erred, I am solely responsible for the error.

It is my ardent hope that the reader who seeks a deeper understanding of Zarathustra's principles will take to heart Behramgore Anklesaria's scholarship and masterful explanations of our prayers.

I trust the reader will enjoy reading this treatise as much as I enjoyed translating it.

Meheryar N. Rivetna

June 8, 2022.

Explanation of the Khordeh-Avesta

by

Behramgore Tehmuras Anklesaria

(Translated from Gujarati by Meheryar N. Rivetna)

There must be very few people at the present time who are not knowledgeable about our Parsi prayer book the Khordeh-Avesta. Our daily obligatory prayers are preserved in this book. What does the Khordeh-Avesta mean? What prayers should be included in the book of Khordeh-Avesta? Currently, there exists the small and the large Khordeh-Avesta. The large Khordeh-Avesta comprises all the prayers; all prayers that are prayed at different times as occasioned by every ritual. Today I shall speak regarding the small Khordeh-Avesta meaning about all the daily obligatory prayers.

Regarding the small Khordeh-Avesta it is imperative to know from the start that currently, after fifty years of education in languages and expertise in linguistics, with one exception, all the Khordeh-Avesta books are incorrectly produced! With the exception of our community's late Avesta scholar Ervad Kavasji Kanga who lucidly explained the Khordeh-Avesta with great effort, all other (Khordeh-Avesta) works produced by uninformed athornans or behdins, printers or shopkeepers are full of errors. In some places, one word is split into two, in some places two words are jumbled, and the letters re-arranged to create new words. Punctuation marks are not where they should be, they are incorrectly placed and words are improperly joined and written—such is our small Khordeh-Avesta. It is our wish that in the coming days those who read the Avesta prayers, without knowing the meaning, will have authentic books available and that all books containing errors will be discontinued.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OFFERED BY HINDU TEACHERS!

Now, uninformed athornans and Hindu gurus get the children of our religious community to memorize parts of our Khordeh-Avesta prayers! What is not understood is the questionable benefit of this method of teaching the obligatory prayers without knowing their meaning. It is important for a community that prays its religious prayers in a dead language, to study the alphabet of that language and then recite the prayers of the ancient religion.

Secondly, there is no advantage to the religious individual just to read and pray the prayers. Due to the ignorance of the language on the part of the one who prays, the meaning of the prayers preserved in the Khordeh-Avesta is poorly understood and lessens the ability to understand the translations and to ponder on matters related to the prayers.

WHAT DOES THE 'KHORDEH-AVESTA' MEAN?

Having presented this important matter to you, we shall examine the meaning of 'Khordeh-Avesta.' 'Khordeh' is a Farsi word; its original Pahlavi word is found to be 'Khurtak.' It means a "portion" or "one part of a whole." From this it is understood the Khordeh-Avesta as 'Avesta Sadeh' means incomplete selected sections, selected paragraphs, selected gems from a collection of "the total ancient Avesta." It appears that the selection is put together in a distant age at different times, for use on different occasions for the use of every behdin. In our 'Patet Irani'¹ it is said '*Avesta-e chamesh va avesta-e khordeh va avesta-e darusht*'; also in the same 'Patet Irani' the writing '*khoshed niyaesh na kardam har roj se bar va meher niyaesh na kardam har roj se bar va mah niyaesh na kardam ba har nav mahi ba kamest se bar*' is found, and in 'khud patet'² there is a hint of '*na yashtne khoshed va na yashtne mah va na yashtne atash*.' This means that if the one who prays the patet does not also pray the Khoshed Niyaesh and the Meher Niyaesh three times, daily, and in every new month the Mah Niyaesh, at the very least three times, will repent for that sin. From this it is determined that the selection of the sections of praise from the Avesta in the Khordeh-Avesta are very ancient. These selections are chosen from Asho Zarathusht's Gathas, as well as the Yasna and the Vendidad; in addition, these prayer selections are also from the Pahlavi and Pazand languages, and some are even written in the

1. Translator's note: In Zoroastrian prayers, there are prayers for penitence of sins and they are called Patets meaning confession of wrongdoing. There are four Patet prayers: Patet Pashemani, Patet Rawani, Patet Irani and Khud Patet.

The Patet Irani is a prayer that originated in Iran and is not part of Indian Zoroastrians' Patet prayers. It is an atonement prayer of the Iranian land.

2. Translator's note: The Khud Patet is a Pazand repentance prayer for one's own sins. The individual praying this 'Patet' with a contrite heart is believed to receive divine forgiveness.

prevailing Arabic vernacular mixed with Farsi language after the fall of the Sasanian empire. Moreover, the many Avesta sections used as prayer include the beginning and the ending in the Pazand language. From this it appears likely that the sections of the Khordeh-Avesta were not compiled in one era, at one time, by one Dastur, but rather that additions and subtractions and alterations were made by different Dasturs at different times.

Now we shall see from where in the Gathas and other Avesta writings the selections of these sections were made:

1. Ashem Vohu—This is a very ancient Gatha prayer. It is unknown from what Gatha chapter this verse is taken. From the summary of the Nasks in the Pahlavi Dinkard it appears from the given twenty-one Nasks that 'Ashem Vohu' is placed in three Nasks, 'Sutkar', 'Varshtmansar', and 'Bag'. According to the third chapter in the 9th book of the Dinkard, the second chapter of the 'Sutkar' Nask is said to be Ashem Vohu; in the 26th chapter of the same book it states the third chapter of the 'Varshtmansar' Nask is the 'Ashem Vohu'; and the 48th chapter in the same book states the second chapter of the 'Bag' Nask is 'Ashem Vohu'!

Again, how ancient the three lines in the Gathas are can be known from the first section of the extant Avesta Hadokht Nask, in which the beauty of the Ashem Vohu is described as 'Ash-Stuiti' meaning "praise of Asha". Also, in the Yasna Ha 20 the commentary on 'Ashem Vohu' is written in the Avestan language! Knowing that the small Gathic verse is written in Avesta, it becomes apparent that these three Gatha lines are indeed ancient!

2. Yatha Ahu Vairyo—This, too, like the 'Ashem' is made up of three ancient Gathic lines. It is possible that this could be an early writing of the extant Gatha chapters or it is likely that the 'Ahunavar' is the key to the origin of the Gathas. According to the Dinkard [Book 9, chapters 2, 25, 47], 'Ahunavar' is the first chapter in 'Sutkar', second in 'Varshtmansar', and first in the 'Bag' Nasks. The long commentary of the 'Ahunavar' written in the Avestan language is found in the Yasna Ha 19 where it is made known that Ahura Mazda announced to Asho Zarathusht His recitation of 'Ahunavar' before all of creation came into being.

3. Yenghe Hatam—Similar to the two Gatha prayers above these three lines are also an ancient prayer. According to the Dinkard [Book 9, chapters 4, 27, 49], the Yenghe Hatam is in the third chapter of the 'Sutkar' Nask, the fourth chapter of the 'Varshtmansar' Nask, and the third chapter of the 'Bag' Nask. The Avestan commentary on this prayer is in the Yasna Ha 21. It certainly appears that someone has introduced this prayer after making slight changes in the 22nd verse of the Vohukhshatra Gatha.

At this time we shall hint at a novel thought. The community now and then speaks of the twenty-one Nasks of the Avesta. But if we search for the three small Gathic writings as well as all the chapters of the Gathas in these twenty-one Nasks we see that in giving the summaries of the Nasks the summaries of the Gatha chapters occur three times, in three different Nasks. What does it mean? It is likely that in the Zoroastrian community three different schools of thought held three different views, and that the heads of these three schools of thought individually devised the Gatha commentaries and in later times gave each commentary importance and preserved them in the three Nasks. This logic is supported in the writings of the Pahlavi Rivayats where a lot is said about the diverse thoughts of the students of three Dasturs named Afarg, Maidhyoma, and Pishkasir.

4. Kem-na-Mazda—This profound prayer is put together by selecting sections from various places. The first section is from the 7th section of the Ushtavaiti Gatha [Yasna Ha 46] starting with 'Kem-ne-moi Jam': from 'Kem-na' up to 'Fraocha.' The second section 'Tat thva peresa' is from the same Gatha 16th section of [Yasna Ha 44]: from 'Ke-vereghthrem' up to 'kamaichit.' The third section from 'Pat-no' up to 'Astvaitish-Asha' is taken from Vendidad Fargard 8.21. It is likely that this portion may be taken from some other writing not currently part of the Vendidad. And the fourth section 'Nemescha-ya-Armaitish-yajacha' is from one line of the 10th verse of the Spentomard Gatha's 'At-ma-yava' [Yasna Ha 49]. In its entirety, this prayer, for the most part, is taken from the profound verses of the Gathas.

5. Mazdayasno Ahmi—Long after the ancient Gathas were composed, the 'Din-no-Kalmo' was written in recent times. This prayer is from the end of the 12th Ha [Yasna Ha 12.8-9] when the 72 Has were constructed.

6. Baj before meals—In ancient times, the 'Yasna Haptanghaiti' (meaning Yasna containing seven Has) was composed in the

Gathic style, comprising of Has 35-42 as part of the Yasna. According to the Dinkard, this Yasna is taken as part of chapter 11 of the ‘Sutkar’ Nask, 12th chapter of the ‘Varshtmansar’ Nask, and 11th chapter of the ‘Bag’ Nask. This means that the writers of the Dinkard assume that these compositions are Gathic writings. From this writing it appears that the short, but effective initial prayer is taken from Yasna Ha 37 to express gratitude to Ahura Mazda and is recited before meals, as a ‘Baj before meals’.

7. Baj after performing bodily functions—This prayer is adopted from the two sections [Yasna Ha 35.2, 5] of the above mentioned ‘Yasna Haptanghaiti’ and the latter part from the fifteenth section of Yasna Ha 27, which is also present in Yasna Ha 18. The relationship of this prayer with bodily functions is not apparent.

8. Sarosh Baj—The words in this prayer are from Yasna Ha 12.1 from ‘Fravarane’ up to ‘Ahura-takesho.’ Subsequent lines are taken from the first section of Sarosh Yasht and given as Sarosh’s ‘Khsnuman’³ In later times the summary of these words was added to the earlier portion, in the Pazand language, so that those who unfortunately lacked knowledge of the Avesta and whose language was Pazand would understand the meaning of the Avesta prayers.

9. Ahmai Rascha—Yasna Ha 68.11. This prayer is partially selected from its original place. No thought is given to use the relationship of the section with the upper line from where this prayer is taken. This prayer is taken from its original source without altering the original rendition. This prayer is not for the devotee’s own well-being, but a profound benediction for the well-being of another person.

10. Hazengharam-Besche Janam— Yasna Ha 68.15. This prayer is also a very short benediction.

3. Translator’s note: Khsnuman means joy, pleasure or satisfaction.

11. Hosh-bam—‘Ushi-Bamya’ meaning prayer in praise of a “brilliant dawn” is taken from six different chapters of the Avesta. The part from ‘Ath-iman-vacho’ up to ‘tanum-paiti’ is taken from the Vendidad chapter 11.3. (The first word in ‘Nemase-te Hushbami’ is in accordance with the tradition of the Avestan grammar and the second word is in accordance with the Pazand grammar, making it clear that this was added in the Sasanian era or later). The section from ‘aetat-dim’ up to ‘damanan ashaonam’ is from Yasna 27.1-2. (From these two sections, the first section was added much later in our time in the Farsi language and noted to be prayed during the baj. This is evident from the word ‘leanat’ in this section). From ‘vanghucha vanghuyaoscha’ up to ‘vispayao dravato stoish’ is from Yasna Ha 52.1-4. The words, following this, ‘stavas asha ye hudao yoi henti’ are from the 6th verse of Ushtavaiti Gatha’s [Yasna Ha 45] known as ‘At fravakhsya’. This string is also found in Yasna Ha 52. From ‘Vasascha-tu Ahura Mazda’ up to ‘ahuirish Zarathushtrish’ is from Yasna 8.5-7, which is also found in sections of Yasna Ha 52, 60 and 71. From ‘Yatha no aongham’ up to ‘hamem thwa hakhma’ is from Yasna Ha 60.11-12 [=Ha 71.29-31].

13. Avan Niyaesh—The first sections of the Avan Yasht, sections 0-6, are up to the words ‘fradathai...dangheuscha’⁴; sections 1-5 of the Avan Yasht are from the Yasna Ha 65.1-5; in this Niyaesh the ‘A Hatamcha’ sometimes prayed is also from Yasna Ha 65.6-14; it certainly means a large portion of Yasna 65 is prayed in this Niyaesh. Moving forward in this Niyaesh, the words ‘hathra ana gathwya...jasat paoiryo’ are from chapter 5, section 39 of the Vishtasp Yasht. The remaining portion is from the Avan Yasht section 19.

14. Khorshed Niyaesh—In the era after losing our sovereignty, in matters relating to the Avesta prayers an explanation of the meanings was given in the Farsi language in later times. In this prayer, the section from ‘ferastuye’ up to ‘khvakhyaoshtanem’ is from Yasna Ha 11.17-18, the portion we refer to as ‘Patet of the Avesta.’ From ‘nemo ahurai’ up to ‘bushyanithyaicha’ is from Yasna Ha 68.22. The line ‘vohu ukhshya’...‘ushta tanum’ is from the third line

4. Translator’s note: The Avan Niyaesh contains the first six sections of the Avan Yasht up to ‘fradathai...dangheuscha

of verse 10 of the Ahunavati Gatha’s ‘Yatha aish’ Gatha [Yasna Ha 33] which is prayed during the Havan Geh. ‘Ima...barezenam’ is from the sixth verse of the Yasna Haptanghaiti [Yasna 36] which is prayed during the Rapithwan Geh. The line ‘Yehmi spenta...jaso’ is the first line in verse six of the Ushtavad Gatha ‘ushta ahmai’ [Yasna Ha 43]. From ‘mithrem vouru-gaoyaotim’ up to ‘jaghaurvanghohem’ is from the Meher yasht section 7. From ‘mithrem vispanam’ up to ‘mainyavanam yazatnam’ is from the Zamyad Yasht section 35. All the remaining Avestan portion is from the Khorshed Yasht section 1-7

and the final section from ‘ahuranish ahurahe...dahmo-pairi-anharshthbyo zathrabyo’ and the following Ahmai-rascha stanza is from [Yasna Ha 68.10].

15. Mah-Bokhtar Niyaesh—(We mistakenly say ‘Bokhtar’ instead of ‘Bakhtar.’ The word ‘Bakhtar’ comes from the Pahlavi verb ‘Bakhtan’= “to divide,” “to establish fortune”. During the Pahlavi era the word moon was defined as ‘Bakhtar’ meaning ‘bakht’ or ‘giver or distributor of fortune.’) Much of the ‘Mah Yasht’ is included in the ‘Mah Niyaesh’ and in later times what remained was added in the second chapter of extant Vishtasp Yasht’s paragraphs 6-7.

16. Meher Niyaesh—For the most part it is from the Khorshed Niyaesh and additionally from sections 144-145 and 4-5 of the Meher Yasht.

17. Havan Geh—In this Geh, sections from Yasna Ha 1.23, Ha 1.3, Ha 71.2-3, Ha 71.12, Ha 71.23-24 [Visperad 7.5] are selected and put together.

18. Rapithwan Geh—In this Geh, sections are taken from Yasna Ha 1.4, Ha 71.2-3, Ha 71.23-24.

19. Uzirin Geh—In this Geh sections are taken from Yasna Ha 1.5, Ha 71.2-3, Ha 71.23-24.

20. Aiwisruthrem Geh—Sections from Yasna Ha 1.6, Ha 71.2-3, Ha 71.23-24 are taken in this Geh

21. Ushhain Geh—Sections from Yasna Ha 1.7, Ha 71.2-3, Ha 71.23-24 are taken.

22-28. Namaskars—The Avestan sentences in the Cherag-no-Namaskar⁵ are taken from the introduction to the Atash Niyaesh. The Avestan sentences in the Muktaḍ Namaskar are from the Siroja section 2 ‘fravashinam’ Khsnuman. A prominent sentence from Yasna Ha 26.7 is taken for the Dokhma Namaskar; grammatical rules were transgressed by putting ‘nemse-te’ before this sentence which shows that in the age of ignorance someone devised a tradition regarding this homage and put together this prayer. Homage to the mountains is from Yasna Ha 6.13. Homage to water is praise of Avan⁶. Homage to plants is from Vendidad 19.18. Homage to the four directions is from Yasna Ha 1.16.

29. Din-no-Kalmo—The sentence in our Din-no-Kalmo is praise of Din Yazad. These words of later Farsi prayer were written after our sovereignty⁷.

30. Patet Pashemani—The entire Patet Pashemani is composed in the Pazand language; but towards the end starting from ‘ferastuye’ is from the Avestan Yasna Ha 11.17-18. In the commentary of the same Avestan sections the Pazand translations starting with ‘faraj shetayam’ up to ‘faraj pa aanichi khesh jan’ occur.

An examination of the approximately thirty Setayeshes and prayers in the Khordeh-Avesta reveals that for the most part they are taken from selective Gatha sections. In many places, in times not long after the Gathas, essential writings are taken from the ‘Yasna Haptanghaiti’, and similar to prayers regarding praise of nature, writings regarding remembrances of the Creator were included in later chapters.

WHO COMPILED THE PAZAND PRAYERS?

Now if we shift our focus on the Pazand prayers it becomes known that with the exception of ‘Nam Setayesh’, to date no other known [prayer] can be found in the Pahlavi Pazand literature. From this it can be seen that all prayers were compiled essentially as Setayeshes⁸ in the Sasanian era for the

5. Translator’s note: ‘Cherag –no-namaskar’ means Homage unto lamp.

6. Translator’s note: The reference is to Avan *yazad*.

7. Translator’s note: After our sovereignty implies after the Arab invasion of Iran.

8. Translator’s note: Setayesh means praise.

use of the behdins by learned priests. The prayer termed ‘Nam Setayesh’ is found in chapter 81 of the third book of our known Pahlavi Dinkard, nine books of which are published by the late Dastur Saheb Peshotanji.

It becomes obvious that these later prayers and Nirangs being in the Farsi language were put together after the end

of the Sasanian era. As an example, at the beginning of the Khorshed Niyaesh Dadar Ahura Mazda is addressed as ‘khaleke makhluq al-razzak ruzzi-dehandeh, kader o kavi o kadim’; all the words currently in the Farsi language are derived from the Arabic language. Similarly, in our excellent prayer ‘Doa Tandarosti’, in which the devotee wishes good health to his/her leaders, Anjuman and community is from a later period.

Many of the Pazand prayers in the Khordeh-Avesta were put together after the era of the Mobedan Mobed Adarbad Marespand who formalized these prayers nearly sixteen hundred years ago. One proof of this is our ‘Patet Irani’ in which it is written that ‘Ashi Arastar Adarbad Marespand came across the Zarathoshti religion through Shah Vishtaspa and Asfandiyar.’

THE MEANING OF ALL THE PRAYERS

Looking at the meaning of all the prayers together it becomes known that the Khordeh-Avesta book comprises of the following: The Setayeshes done at the time of day particularly the Setayeshes of the five Gehs; Atash, Ardavisur, Khorshed, Mah and Meher Niyaeshes; namaskars of the four directions, cherag, muktaḍ, dokhma, mountain, water, plants; blessings; patets; similarly, the many prayers defined as manthras include off and on prayers such as ‘ashem’, ‘yatha’ ‘jas me’, ‘ahmai rascha’, ‘hazanghrem’, ‘kerfeh-mazda’ at the end.

The **Setayeshes** of the Five Gehs makes it clear that in ancient times when there were no timepieces, in an era when the hours of the day were not counted to be twenty-four, in which the period of the day was divided based on sunrise, overhead sun and sunset, in this era the early Zarathoshtis prayed at the five fixed divisions of the day and the Setayesh of that portion of the day was definitely recited.

The meanings behind the **Five Niyaeshes** come from an era when Zarathoshtis realized Ahura Mazda, sang praises of His great creations and recited the Setayeshes. In that era Niyaeshes were written and initiated as prayer. From this it is alleged that fire, water, sun, moon and stars were combined for worship by the Zarathoshtis. When in reality looking at the five Niyaeshes it becomes known that no prayers or devotion describing the blessings of the beauty of Ahura Mazda’s revered bounties such as fire, water, sun, moon and Meher can be found anywhere except in the Setayeshes.

A similar meaning can be drawn for the **Namaskars** found in the Khordeh-Avesta.

The Zoroastrians entered these **Namaskars** as a new tradition in the Khordeh-Avesta after arriving in India. In the earlier Kadimi Khordeh-Avesta only two Namaskars, of the muktaḍ and dokhma, are found. The very word ‘namaskar’ is a Gujarati language word taken from Sanskrit. In these namaskars, the ‘muktaḍ’ namaskar is to offer respect to the individual asho farohar and not, as according to current tradition, to flowers and leaves. Similarly, the dokhma namaskar is a ‘niyaesh’ for the asho farohar and not for the man-made worldly stone structures.

What is the meaning of Niyaesh and Namaskar? The word ‘niyaesh’, Avestan ‘Neme-he’, is the Sanskrit translation of ‘namas’ and from ‘Neme-he’ comes the Pahlavi word ‘Namaj’ which has a similar meaning to the ancient word ‘Niyaesh.’ The contemporary Zarathoshti ‘salam’ is the ancient Zarathoshti word ‘Neme-he’, ‘Namaj’ or ‘Namaskar.’ Having learnt the Arabic word ‘salam’ from Muslims, when one Zarathoshti meets another Zarathoshti and the word which was to be rightfully used, inherited for the greeting, is forgotten and the word ‘Namaj’ which the Muslims use, the contemporary Zarathoshtis wrongfully mean it as ‘Niyaesh’, ‘Namaj’, and ‘Namaskar.’ As an example, when one Zarathoshti on meeting another greets him with ‘salam’ that is, one human being in nature’s creation inquires about the well-being of another, in the same way as the devotee who prays the niyaeshes and namaskars, in the Khordeh-Avesta, praises the mute creations of nature, apart from humans, delivers his ‘salam’ inquiring of their well-being⁹. The tradition of bowing while reciting the niyaesh, namaj or namaskar does not derive from these worships, but derives from ‘salam.’

9. Translator’s note: The well-being refers to the of the elements of nature, i.e., to keep nature’s elements in a ‘healthy’ (or undefiled) state.

The Khordeh-Avesta prayers are certainly praises in poetic form, and it seems that the Dasturs who compiled the Khordeh-Avesta for the devotee made it to praise nature’s creation; and it seems they made a religion to teach the devotee the greatness of Ahura Mazda the Creator of nature. It is because of this that we find namaskars to water, vegetation, mountains, directions, and burning fires in the Khordeh-Avesta. If, in later times, the Zarathoshtis themselves took the niyaeshes meaning namaj or namaskar to mean the actual worship of these elements then that belief is seen as an error, because the Zarathoshti religion does not teach worship of these creations.

Of all the prayers that acknowledge our religion, the **Din-no-Kalmo** is a short compilation in Avesta as well as Pazand.

The prayer named ‘Mazdayasno Ahmi’ as we know was written long after the Gathic period, and the optimal knowledge we possess as a Mazdayasni Zarathoshti is demonstrated in these very short effective words.

Now from the above described prayers remaining is one very excellent prayer known as ‘Kem-na-Mazda.’ This prayer is essentially the promises of Asho Zarathosht. This shloka is selected from the Gathic verse Asho Zarathosht composed when he was unsuccessful in his effort to spread his religion and is placed here, and the reciter of this shloka does not sing the praises of nature’s creations or the praises of nature’s creator, but with these words makes it known that Ahura Mazda is the only one to save humankind from evil by one’s own good deeds.

COMPOSITION OF THE PATET PASHEMANI PRAYERS

Our very short ‘Patet Pashemani’ prayer in the original Avestan language is found in Yasna Ha 11. Currently, the Patet Pashemani prayer we have in the Pazand form is in a corrupt state. It can be summarized by an examination of the composition of these prayers that in earlier times Zarathoshtis confessed their transgressions in the presence of the priest ‘Sroashavarez’¹⁰.

10. Translator’s note: Sroashavarez: From the Visperad we understand that at one point more than two priests were required for the Yasna ritual. The Visperad mentions seven priests. In addition to the chief priest, Zaotar, there is one priest called the Sraoshavarez. The Sroashavarez priest also had the role of confessor. As penance for a wrongdoer, the Sraoshavarez got the offender to perform (*varez*) acts of obedience (*Sroasha*).

These priests would make them¹¹ repent for their offenses, and with remedial action free them of their transgressions, on condition that the penitent will not deliberately repeat the offense. The meaning of the very word ‘Patet’ teaches us that the penitent must act in such a way that any ill deed committed was not done, meaning that with a sincerity of thought, word and deed the offensive act must be atoned for and destroyed. There is certainly one absolute criticism in our ‘Patet Pashemani’ prayer in our Avesta religion regarding all the offense laden deeds. This criticism is that it is a mistake to have innocent children and young men say this prayer due to every known immorality and irregularity detailed by name in it. It appears that the different ‘Patets’ available to us were written in the later Sasanian era and particularly after end of the Sasanian era. There is no reason for any Zarathoshti, who conducts himself ethically and who knows that he has never committed any sinful acts, to say these prayers. These prayers are really a text of answers to questions regarding confessions made to priests.

With this we see that if we examine the meaning of the Khordeh-Avesta prayers we come to know that what we call our daily worship is dressed as praise of nature’s creations. We sing their worship (Yasna), praise (Vahm), as well as of their propitiation (Kshnothra) and hymns of fame (Frasist), but in these prayers an element of worship is very rarely seen.

WHAT IS THE REASON TO PRAY CERTAIN PRAYERS IN CERTAIN GEHS?

When Zarathoshtis, aroused with understandable curiosity, started inquiring about their religion in the days of limited knowledge, the question arose why certain prayers are recited during certain gehs? What is the objection if the prayer is prayed in a different geh at a more convenient time? As an example, the Khorshed and Meher Niyashes are prayed only during the time of Havan, Rapithwan, and Uzairin geh; in the later Farsi Rivayats it is ordained that the Mah Niyash must be prayed on the day after the New Moon day, day of the full moon and the new moon day. It is urged that the Avan Yasht must be prayed on the following rojs (days): Aspandard, Avan, Din, Ashishvang and Marespand; it is thought that to pray these Niyashes after sunset is wrong.

11. Translator’s note: ‘them’ refers to the transgressors.

It is ordained that the Atash Niyash should particularly be prayed on Hormazd, Ardibehest, Adar, Sarosh and Behram roj; besides, what is the reason that the short beneficial prayer ‘Vispa Humata’ is ordained to be prayed only in the Havan Geh?

We shall try to give a brief answer to this. In ancient times every Zarathoshti on awakening at dawn said a very effective prayer ‘Vispa Humata’ to start the day with a determination to agitate evil. This is indirectly understood from the Pahlavi

book ‘Ganje Shayegan’ published by the late Dastur Saheb Peshotanji. By saying this prayer on awakening at dawn the devotee makes it known that all good thoughts, words and deeds lead to the best life, and from this he determines that through his own thoughts, words and deeds he will encounter the best in life and for that will distance himself from all bad thoughts, words and deeds.

The reason to pray the Khorshed and Meher Niyaesh only during Havan, Rapithwan and Uzairin gehs is also clear. It is reasoned that to sing the praises of Khorshed (sun) during its presence over earth is the right occasion, because ‘Mithra’ meaning the brightness that appears to the world at dawn, before the sun travels, stays until the light is invisible at sunset. Its praise is therefore rightfully observed from sunrise to sunset¹².

It is ordained that the Mah Niyaesh must be prayed on the day after the new moon, at full moon and on new moon day; the reason for that is it appears that in the Avestan era the divisions of the month were made which in the Pahlavi period was understood to mean that the month was divided into six parts. The first part is called ‘Andermah’, the second part is called ‘Patirak Andermah’, the third part as ‘Purmah’, the fourth ‘Patirak Purmah’, the fifth ‘Vishptas’ and the sixth ‘Patirak Vishptas’. Three of these parts, the first, third and fifth are called ‘Panje-i-Veh’ meaning “good parts”, and the other three, the second, fourth and sixth are considered neither bad days nor good days. Of the six parts it is likely that one is expected to pray the Mah Niyaesh on the days of first, third and last part. This is because on the last part the moon is barely visible and to show that the devotee eagerly awaits its return, on the first part to welcome the moon, and to show happiness on the fifteenth day

12. Translator’s Note: The *yazata* Khorshed presides over the sun and the sun is up from dawn—the beginning of Havan geh—until sunset when the Uzairin geh ends. The *yazata* Meher (Mithra) presides over the light or brightness of the sun.

when the full moon appears, it is ordained to recite the Mah Niyaesh these three times.

The reason behind the thinking that the Avan and Atash Niyaesh are ordained to be recited on five certain days is that there are other Yazads, ‘Hamkars’, associated with Avan Yazad and the Avan Niyaesh should be prayed on the days named after these Hamkars¹³, and Atash Niyaesh should be prayed on the days named after the Hamkars of Adar Yazad, so that it appears to be structured. It is ordained that the Avan Ardvisur Niyaesh should not be done after sunset can be understood according to the Vendidad. It is a sin to extract water from rivers, drains or wells after sunset for holy rituals and because of this it is considered wrongful to say the Avan Ardvisur Niyaesh in the Uzirin geh.

WHAT IS THE REASON TO PRAY THE KHORDEH-AVESTA PRAYERS?

We shall now address a very important question: What is the reason for the Khordeh-Avesta prayers? To date, amongst us Zarathoshtis numerous myths prevail. On the basis of these myths many of the Khordeh-Avesta prayers become meaningless. By adding these myths to other irrelevant matters in this book it confuses the superstitious devotee as the ordained number of times to pray ‘Yatha Ahu Vairya’, ‘Yenghe Hatam’, ‘Ashem’ varies from place to place. It appears on this subject that during the reign of the emperor Ardeshir Papagan in the Sasanian era certain rules for rituals were established. At this time the structure of the rituals was re-arranged and all the basic doctrines were abolished. Whatever view was agreed upon, according to that view the number of manthras to be prayed was fixed.

BAJ RECITATION

In the middle of the prayers a notification ‘Bajma Padhe’¹⁴ appears and it seems this was introduced in the Avesta prayers during the Pahlavi period. The reason behind it seems that the priests in later years added Pazand verses between Avestan prayers. In order not to break the continuity these notices were placed for mental recitations.

13. Translator’s note: Hamkars are associates or helpers of the yazads.

14. Translator’s note: ‘Bajma Padhe’ means ‘recite during the Baj’.

Presently many zarathoshtis believe that if they pray the 'Bahman Yasht' then any desired wish is fulfilled. Presently, given the absence of the 'Bahman Yasht' from all the printed books, it can be surmised that in earlier times Zarathoshtis would pray the 'Bahman Yasht' expecting their ill wishes to be fulfilled. Because of that the pious priests deliberately abolished the 'Bahman Yasht'!! In some books of the athornans the 'Bahman Yasht' was discovered written in Pazand and they assumed it was in ancient Avestan and started praying the Bahman Yasht even introducing it to some of their behdins. Another myth is that if an individual prays the 'Haptan Yasht' with piety then any dagger or weapon piercing the body of an enemy cannot be removed thereby making the mind of the enemy unstable!! If someone's horoscope shows the course of the moon is weak they should pray the 'Mah Yasht' or 'Mah Niyaesh', if the house of the planet Mars is in a bad place they should pray the 'Ardibehest' or 'Behram' Yasht. If the course of Mercury is weak then 'Khordad' and 'Tir' Yasht must be prayed, if the course of Jupiter is weak (in the horoscope) then 'Hormazd Yasht' must be prayed. For weak Venus the 'Avan Yasht' and the 'Haptan Yasht' must be prayed. For the weak planets Rahu¹⁵ and Ketu¹⁶ the 'Haptan Yasht' must be prayed. To spread such a Zarathushti religion, applying such weak thoughts, ill-educated Hindu astrologers and their Parsi students were successful in returning matters related to the religion to the dark ages. It is assuredly necessary to destroy such beliefs. It is an absurd thought that any Zarathoshti would praise Ahura Mazda and His creation as a give and take rule with the intent to get some benefit. To think that the planets will forego their course and change their laws to strengthen the fate of a Zarathoshti whose fate is weak, to believe that a Zarathoshti can change, by selfish prayers, the rules of the fixed laws of creation are foolish thoughts.

15. Translator's note: Rahu is a mythological monstrous planet (or considered to be the northern node of the moon) causing eclipses by swallowing the sun or the moon. Some Parsis have bought into these myths borrowed from other cultures.

16. Translator's note: Ketu is the southern node of the moon and is considered to be responsible for the lunar eclipse in mythology and astrology.

It is wrong to believe that a religion that profoundly teaches everywhere that one receives according to one's deeds would run to the aid of one seeking favors by prayer or that one who prays without seeking favors but improves his lot by being steadfast in his deeds, would remain unfortunate.

NIRANGS AND MAGIC

Again, a section of the Zarathoshti community believes that according to the Avesta religion it is ordained that by praying certain Nirangs any wish is granted and all desires are fulfilled!! To be rid of any serious illness the *dron* must regularly be prepared along with the Yasna!!! Certain Nirangs must be written on paper with ink made from saffron, that must then be made into an amulet and wrapped on the side or that the Nirang must be washed and that water drunk as a perfect cure for any kind of illness!!! If any Mazdayasni encounters any difficulty or trouble then all obstacles can be dispelled by having rituals performed of the Yasna, Baj, Afringan, etc.!!! To ease stomachache, a Nirang must be prayed or a magic charm written then washed and the water drunk!!! Nirangs and amulets must be done for fever, illnesses of the eye, headaches, nose, mouth, ears, neck, back, spleen, waist, nails!!! Anyone who is childless can get children by prayers, nirangs and amulets!!! Amulets to keep ghosts, evil spirits, magic(!) at a distance!!! This and all such weak thoughts full of baseless ideas were never included in our co-religionists' holy book Khordeh-Avesta, and should not be done. Our Zarathoshti religion based on the rules of good deeds does not teach anywhere to have such inferior beliefs.

The aim of the Khordeh-Avesta prayers is not for the fulfillment of selfish desires; but as our forefathers of long ago have instructed us, in the dutiful compositions of their era, of one dutiful prayer that he who performs his duty and seeks from Ahura Mazda blessings for himself and not his neighbor is to ask for a shameful blessing; one profound example of this is completely given in the 'Atash Niyaesh'. The 'Atash Niyaesh' in the Khordeh-Avesta is one solitary prayer in which one worshipping in prayer asks for something or requests something from the one revered. After wishing for many virtues the one praying asks for progeny who would increase the honor of his home, neighborhood, city and country. Such a request is so self-less! One who prays must wish for such a blessing that progeny be born in his home that brings prosperity to all the people of the country.

NEGLIGIBLE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE SHENSHAHI AND KADMI—A HINT AT UNITING THE TWO GROUPS

Now we shall tackle an important question: The difference between the Shenshahis and the Kadmis. Over the last 100 years, there have been two factions between the Parsis of India. Between the two factions there is discrepancy in rituals, some customs, and the relationship between days and months. Not only this, but for the Behdins of the two factions alterations are seen in the small Khordeh-Avesta prayers. From an overview of the prayers of these two factions it appears there is a difference in the pronunciations in certain places. While the Shenshahis pronounce ‘Yatha Ahu Vairyo’, ‘Ashem Vohu’, ‘Surao Spentao Fravashyo’, the Kadmis say ‘Yatha Ahi Vairyo’, ‘Ashem Vohi’, ‘Siraye Spentaye Fravashyo’. On this matter the justification offered by the Kadmis is that according to the teachings of a proficient Dastur Jamasp Hakim who came here from the shores of Iran as well as the late Mullan Kaoos and Mullan Firoze obtained knowledge of the Avesta from the shores of Iran; accordingly, what was done and said in the ancient homeland must be right. But it is a real challenge to prove if the pronunciations are right or wrong based on current philology, from which it is known that the Shenshahis have the right standing. From other sources, it appears by an examination of the Pazand prayers that the Kadmi Pazand prayers are more correct than the Shenshahi Pazand prayers, and that reasoning is clear. The mother tongue of the Irani Zarathoshtis being Farsi, they have preserved the Pazand prayers in a good state, while in the Pazand prayers of the Shenshahis the errors in the grammar and language are very clear to the learned, and it is the obligation of the learned Shenshahis to correct those mistakes. Similarly, it is the obligation of the Kadmi masters to correct the wrong pronunciations where they are clearly found. There is nothing to be achieved by the wrongful reading of ancient writings just out of pride.

But there is barely any discrepancy between the Kadmi and Shenshahi prayers. Another difference in the prayers is in the method of the Pazand introduction. It appears from a minute examination of these alterations that before the end of the Shenshah Yazdegard’s reign there must have been varying views in the matter of prayers. One group holding a firm view came to India while another group holding a different view stayed in Iran; and that difference continues to this day. Nevertheless, it is likely that different opinions were added to the ancient views. For example, in the prayer of the ‘Baj for meals’, while the Shenshahis pray the Avesta words ‘Itha At Yazmaide’, the Kadmis have a very efficacious paragraph after the Avestan words written in the new Farsi. The Irani devotee who understands the Farsi language is considered very knowledgeable.

THE ALLEGATION FOR THE AVESTA EDUCATED YOUTH TO BECOME ATHEIST

Thus, from this very short analysis of our Zoroastrian ‘Khordeh-Avesta’ we come to know there are profound gems in the collection of prayers in the Avesta literature. In this collection many verses include dedications to the praise of nature’s creations. Also, many important changes in the later Pazand prayers need to be made at the present time. It is inconceivable that the Avesta educated youth become godless and forego the prayers in the Khordeh-Avesta because of this. The reason for this must be sought elsewhere. It is appropriate to believe that as more and more of the incomprehensible meanings are uncovered then today’s educated youth will have a greater faith in the religion.

Behramgore Tehmuras Anklesaria

THE SUBSTANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF BEHRAMGORE TEHMURAS ANKLESARIA'S THOUGHT PROVOKING MESSAGE

Behramgore Tehmuras Anklesaria recognizes that the Khordeh-Avesta is the quintessential Zoroastrian prayer book. However, he wants the Zoroastrian, devoted to the religion, to understand the origins of the prayers and, more than that, the significance of the prayers recited.

Anklesaria's intellectual learning of the Avesta and Zarathustra's teachings compel him to enlighten the Zoroastrian community of the facts. He aims to dispel the many misconceptions prevalent among contemporary Zoroastrians regarding the prayers in the Khordeh-Avesta.

With scholarly evidence, Behramgore Anklesaria points out that the compilation of the prayer book is disjointed with numerous grammatical and linguistic errors. He wants the reader to know that many of the extant Zoroastrians beliefs in the efficacy of these prayers are rife with myths which do not form any part of the prayers. These prayers were assembled during the Sasanian era, at the whims of the clergy, with a disregard for the basic doctrines.


The Khordeh-Avesta prayers, Anklesaria states, are not meant to seek boons for the one praying. Praying certain Yashts and Niyaeshes are not meant to seek fulfillment of any wishes the devotee desires, but rather they bring solace to the faithful worshipper. Similarly, the prayers in the Khordeh-Avesta are not meant to alleviate ailments with which the devotee is afflicted. Behramgore Anklesaria is categorical that such beliefs have no basis in the religion and contravene Zarathustra's teachings.

The premise of the Zoroastrian religion, Anklesaria rightly says, is that one receives according to one's deeds. Nature or Ahura Mazda is not whimsical, willy-nilly changing established fixed laws, because one seeks, through prayer, advantages from a higher power.

The Khordeh-Avesta prayers, gathered from a variety of sources, are meant to inculcate in the devotee the greatness of Ahura Mazda, the Creator of nature. The Zoroastrian does not worship the created elements, but appreciates creation and promises to nurture it for a healthy, productive life.

Behramgore Tehmuras Anklesaria provides a rational, intelligent, wisdom-laden understanding of the Khordeh-Avesta.

Meheryar N. Rivetna



The Khordeh-Avesta is the quintessential daily prayer book of the Zoroastrians. In addition to the kusti prayers, the prayer book includes prayers adopted from extant Avesta literature such as the Gathas, Yasna, Vendidad, and Visperad. Behramgore Tehmuras Anklesaria provides an exegesis of the Khordeh-Avesta outlining not only the origins of the numerous prayers but also the purpose for the compositions and compilations. With great clarity, Anklesaria illumines the devotee of the many misconceptions, associated with these prayers, that is pervasive amongst many devotees of the religion. This is a must for the Zoroastrian who wants to understand the rationale and the meaning underlying the Khordeh-Avesta prayers.

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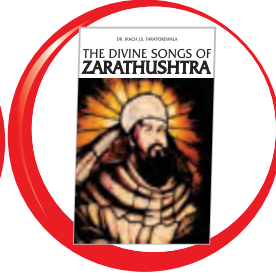
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