



## FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

**Subject Category (circle one):** Religion/Ceremony Celebration **History** Prayer  
Gathas Comparative Religion Shahnameh

**Age Group (circle one):** PreK-K Grades 1-3 Grades 4-5 **Grades 6-8** Grades 9-12

**Lesson # (if applicable):** Post-Sassanid Empire- Lesson 1

**Subject of the Lesson:** Migration to India and the Sacred Fire

### Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

#### Background:

After the death of Yazdgerd III, the last Sassanid King, and the fall of the Sassanid Empire in 651 CE, the invading Muslim Arabs killed many people, burned books, took Iranians to the slave markets of Mecca, and destroyed fire temples. Their aim was to erase any sign of Iranian culture and heritage and instead install an Islamic one. Zoroastrians were forced to either accept Islam, be killed, or pay a high tax called Jizya, to the Islamic overlords. Furthermore, they were socially and economically persecuted. Below are just a few examples of such persecutions:

- They were not able to do business with any Muslim.
- They could not touch any Muslim products touching one item would make the whole lot dirty and non-useable for a Muslim.
- They could not buy long pieces of cloth but had to buy the scraps that were of no use anymore, sewing them together to make clothes.
- They could not leave the house while it rained as the rain touching their body and falling on the ground would dirty the earth.
- Young Zoroastrian women were abducted, converted to Islam, and forced to marry a Muslim (usually a Mullah).
- Unfounded accusations against a Zoroastrian would result in the death of that individual and many other Zoroastrians as a result of religious association.

#### Migration to India:

The Iranians fought the Muslim Arab invaders for many centuries and at times found small victories but short-lived. Under the existing extreme persecutions of Zoroastrians in Iran from the Muslim Arab invaders, Zoroastrians sought refuge in different corners of Iran. Some initially wandered to Khorasan and stayed there for about 100 years, further troubled, they fled to Hormoz for 15 years. A small group of Zoroastrians decided to leave Iran and seek refuge elsewhere. About 18 ships traveled the trade routes to China, Russia, Africa, and India.

**Locations related to the early Zoroastrian (Parsi) migration from Iran to Hind (India)**  
 Image credit: Base map courtesy Microsoft Encarta. Additions copyright K. E. Eduljee



Above: Zoroastrians leaving Iran from Hormoz to Diu and finally to Sanjan

From Hormoz, a group of Zoroastrians set sail for India, taking the holy fire from the Atash Behram with them. They landed on the island of Diu where they lived for 19 years. Then they set sail for the mainland of India. On the way, they were caught in a terrible storm. The Dasturs (priests) on board the ship prayed to Ahura Mazda for help and promised that if they landed safely, they would build an Atash Behram in India. The Zoroastrians landed safely at Sanjan and were given shelter by the Hindu King Jadav Rana.

There is a famous story of milk and sugar told by the Zoroastrians about their arrival in Sanjan. The story is:

Zoroastrians, upon arriving in Sanjan, were taken to the Hindu King Jadav Rana. Due to the language barrier the two groups could not communicate with each other. The King asked for a pot filled with milk, showed the pot to the Zoroastrians, and said that his land is already full like the pot of milk and has no more room. One of the wise Zoroastrian Dasturs, asked for a spoonful of sugar. He slowly added the sugar to the pot of milk and gently stirred. Then he told the King that Zoroastrians will be like the sugar in his land. They will not take up much space but will make the land sweeter. The King admired the Dastur's wisdom and agreed for the Zoroastrians to live in Sanjan.

In Sanjan, the King gave the Zoroastrians land in order to build a fire temple in fulfillment of their promise to Ahura Mazda. The Zoroastrians lived in Sanjan for 500 years. They made 5 promises to Jadav Rana so that they could stay in Sanjan:

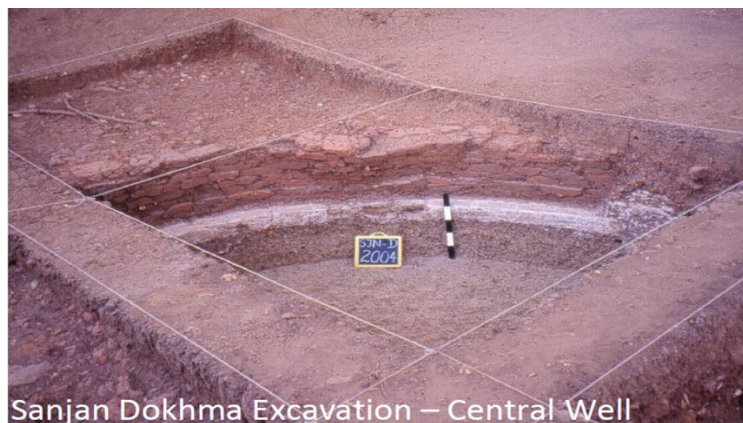
1. Zoroastrians would explain their religion
2. Zoroastrians would learn the native language, Gujarati
3. Zoroastrian women would learn to wear an Indian dress, the sari
4. Zoroastrians would lay down their weapons
5. Zoroastrian marriage ceremonies would take place after sunset

**\*Note:** In depth research has shown no evidence of a King by the name of Jadav Rana. At the time the Zoroastrians arrived in Sanjan, the area was run by a tribe and the head of the tribe spoke to the Zoroastrians and put these 5 conditions. Marriage ceremonies were to take place after sunset to keep the Zoroastrians separated from the tribe members.

The Zoroastrians came to be known as Parsis because they had come to Sanjan from Pars in the Province of Khorasan (Persia). Keeping their Zoroastrian tradition, the Parsis developed a distinct identity with a sense of pride in the many centuries of struggles and successes in the new land and hence today many consider being Parsi as a race.

#### Keeping the Atash Behram Fire Safe:

In the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, Sanjan was attacked by the Muslim King Mahmud Bagada (r. 1458-1511 CE) who defeated the Hindus. The Parsis then fled Sanjan with the holy fire to the Bharot Caves for 12 years. A Dakhma (Dakhmeh) for the deceased, is evidence of the Parsis who lived in Sanjan. In 2002-2004, Rukshana Nanji, an archaeologist, found a Dakhma on a Sanjan farmer's land. During the digs around that area coins, glass, beads, metal, terra cotta objects, and glazed ceramics from West Africa and China were found proving that the local Parsis in that area were trading goods along routes to Africa and China.



Above: Sanjan Dakhma excavation

Sanjan has a small modern Agiary (a Zoroastrian temple); an old Dharamsala (a shelter or rest house near pilgrimage destinations) and a well-maintained Sanatorium (a medical facility for people who have chronic illnesses) which today functions as a guesthouse for Zoroastrians.

The Sanjan Stambh or commemorative column which was erected in 1917 and the time capsule buried beside it are major attractions for visitors. The Stambh is made of Vadodara granite. Its height, including the leaping flames of fire is 50 feet. The column rests on a square platform. There are 23 decorative rosettes. At its apex is the sacred fire. Mr. J. Mercer was the architect and construction was done by Pallonji Edulji and Sons. Three acres and 31.5 gunthas (40 gunthas=1 acre) of land were purchased from a Muslim at a price of Rs. 1,621. The first Parsi time capsule was embedded in the site in 2000 CE. Commissioned by the Trustee of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat and donated by the House of Godrej, this time capsule contains replicas and miniatures of items that exemplify the heritage of the community both in India and abroad. Another attraction for most visitors is the “Chalto Ambo” or the Walking Mango Tree. This botanical anomaly is part of the local folklore which claims that the tree was planted by the first Parsis to land in Sanjan and that it has walked several kilometers to its present location. In reality, the tree puts down very low branches, one of which gradually takes root and grows while the main trunk dies out.

When the Parsis fled Sanjan to the Barot Caves in hiding, they took with them the holy fire of Atash Behram. The Barot Caves are about 22 kilometers south of Sanjan. The caves are in a 1,500 feet hill. The Parsis climbed up the caves and hid the fire and lived there for 12 years.



Above left: The Bahrot caves



Above right: plaque near the caves remembering the Parsis who took refuge in the caves

When it was safe, the Zoroastrians moved out of the Bahrot Caves to Bansda/Vansda which is about 80 kilometers east of the caves and took the Atash Behram fire with them. The local Zoroastrians welcomed them, and the fire was housed there for 14 years. Bansda became the place to go for a Zoroastrian pilgrimage. Priestly families are assigned to manage the Atash Behram and so in Bansda the fire was managed by the head priests of the Sanjana family.

One person named Changa Asa, used to travel from Navsari to Bansda to make his pilgrimages. He was tired of traveling there during monsoon season, so he negotiated and persuaded the Zoroastrians in Navsari to bring the Atash Behram fire to his town. In 1477, with approval of the Sanjana priests, the fire was moved from Bansda to Navsari. Changa Asa built the Navsari Atash Behram to house the Holy

Fire. Between 1733 to 1736, the fire was temporarily moved to Surat to keep it safe from a band of lawless people roaming the area.

Sanjana priests from Bansda worked with local Navsari priests from the Bhagaria family. The families shared the duties of managing the Atash Behram and performing religious rituals and observances. Eventually a dispute rose between the two Sanjana and Bhagaria families and a lawsuit was brought before the Hindu court. The result of the dispute ordered by the court was that the Sanjana priests must only serve the fire and no other tasks, but the Sanjana family did not like the resolution. The Sanjana family took the fire and left Navsari in 1741.

The fire was then housed in one of the two Agiaries in Valsad. The Sanjana family again had issues negotiating the management of the fire with the local Valsad priests and how to divide the tasks of looking after the fire rituals. The Sanjana family again took the fire and left for Udvada which was a local coastal fishing village. The Surat leader Bhikhaji Eduljee founded the building of the Udvada Atash Behram. In 1742 the Atash Behram was consecrated and officially opened on October 28, 1742. The fire has remained there until today.

Nine priestly families who are descendants of the 3 priests who rescued the fire from Sanjan manage the fire at the Udvada Atash Behram. The high priest position rotates from the head of one of the nine families.

<b>CHRONOLOGY: SANJAN – UDVADA ATASH BEHRAM LOCATIONS</b>		
Place	Stay in Years	Start-End Year
Sanjan	515 years	936 – 1451 C.E
Bahrot Caves	12 years	1451 - 1463
Bansda	14 years	1463 - 1477
Navsari	256 years	1477 - 1733
Surat	3 years	1733 - 1736
Navsari	5 years	1736 - 1741
Valsad	1 years	1741 - 1742
Udvada	271+ years	1742 – Present



Above: Chronological locations of the Atash Behram

Above: Udvada Atash Behram, 1909





Note: Return to Roots is a program where youth from all over the World, travel to India and visit the important Zoroastrian sites and fire temples, meet important Zoroastrian people, and network with other youth of roughly the same age. If interested, view their website for more information:  
<https://zororoots.org/>

### **Lesson for students:**

1. Make a PowerPoint of the lesson or use the accompanying Power Point to present the lesson (suggested discussion questions are indicated in blue font at appropriate sections in the PowerPoint slides)
2. Present the above history in the form of storytelling.

### **Activity for Students:**

1. Have students research what criteria are used to make an Atash Behram Fire.
2. Act out the migration of the Zoroastrians from Iran to India while keeping the Atash Behram fire safe.
3. What would you put in a time capsule to tell the story of the Zoroastrian people?
4. Possible discussion starters:
  - a. What do our ancestors' sacrifices and hardships teach us about the strength of their belief in the importance of our religion and culture?
  - b. How can we preserve this legacy?
  - c. What does Zoroastrian religion and culture mean to us today and what can we do to pass it on to our children?
  - d. Use the opportunity to talk to students about the Return to Roots program.
5. Give students a blank map of Iran and India and have students mark the route the Zoroastrians took from Khorasan to Hormoz to Diu and then to Sanjan.

### **Sources:**

1. <http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/history/qissa3.htm>
2. Zoroastrian Return to Roots Handbook, 4th Edition, RTR4, 2017.
3. Lectures and talks by archaeologist, Rukshana Nanji, 2016.
4. <https://iranshahinitiative.com/>

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