



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 2

Subject of the Lesson: Parsis in India from 1700-2023

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

Background:

After the 636 CE invasion of Persia by Islamic Arabs and the fall of the Sassanid empire in 651 CE, the country fell into chaos. Iranians actively fought the Arabs for 300 years. Many were killed, sold at slave markets, or converted to Islam to save their lives. The heavy social, and economical persecutions enforced by the Islamic Arabs including heavy taxes (Jizya for non-Muslims), confiscation of properties and homes, social degradation, economic limitations, burning of the fire temples and religious and cultural books, forced many to migrate to other countries. Because of these circumstances, a large group of Zoroastrians left their homeland and settled in India and came to be known as Parsis since they came from the province of Pars in Persia.

Their migration to India and the preservation of the Atash Bahram has been discussed in the previous lesson. This lesson will focus on Zoroastrian history in India from 1700 to 2023.

Overview:

Parsis lived for 800 years in India as an agricultural community. With the establishment of British trading posts at Surat and other areas in the 17th century, the Parsis' circumstances altered dramatically. This success in part can be attributed to their being well known for their honesty, talent in commerce, and openness to European influence more than the Hindus or Muslims living in India. Bombay became a part of the British Empire in 1662 when it was ceded by Portugal as part of the dowry of Catherine of Braganza when she married King Charles II and was governed by the East India Company. Many Parsis from Gujarat moved to Bombay as it became the dominant port city on the western coast.

Parsis' success in India

Bombay came under the control of the East India Company in 1668 and since complete religious tolerance was decreed soon afterward, the Parsis from Gujarat began to settle in Bombay. The expansion of the city in the 18th century was owed largely to their industry and ability as merchants. In the 19th century they were a wealthy community, and from about 1850 onward they had considerable success in heavy industries particularly those connected with railways and shipbuilding.



For centuries, prominent Parsis have shared their success through philanthropy—their religion encourages wealth creation as well as charity—so the names of top Parsi traders and industrialists are plastered on the hospitals, schools, libraries and streets of Mumbai and other cities.

The Parsi community flourished under British rule; by the early 1800s, although fewer than 10,000 Parsis lived in Bombay, they owned more companies than either the Hindus or the Europeans. They were also known for their emphasis on education and charity, which included the establishment of schools for girls.

While at the same time in Iran, many Iranian fire temples were being converted into mosques, the Parsis began to establish fire temples, or *agiaries*, in the Indian subcontinent. Absence of intermarriage and a low birthrate kept the community small, but their contributions to the area were considerable, and the small religious community enjoyed great economic success.

Around 1779, Kai Khusrau Yazdyar, a Zoroastrian living in Yazd fled Iran to India, to save his beautiful daughter Gulistan Banu from abduction by a wealthy Muslim who had become interested in her. In Bombay, Gulistan married a Parsi and became a well-loved member of the community. She encouraged her family and others to help Iranian Zoroastrians who sought refuge in India. In 1834, her eldest son and later her third son initiated a fund that became the Society of Amelioration of the Condition of Zoroastrians in Persia. This society funded the expedition by Maneckji Limji Hatara to Iran to evaluate the socio-economic and living condition of Zoroastrians in Iran. This expedition and funding by Parsis to help Zoroastrians in Iran led to the survival and then the opportunity for success of Zoroastrians in Iran.

Parsis established businesses and community colonies in Bombay. Below is an example of such a colony.

Dadar Parsi Colony

The Dadar Parsi Colony was established in the mid-1890's after bubonic plague in Bombay which claimed thousands of lives. To ease congestion the city's British colonial leaders expanded Bombay's limits to Dadar and then to a low-lying marshland. Mancherji Edulji Joshi, an engineer, persuaded British authorities to set aside plots for lower middle-class Parsis and drew up a blueprint of a model neighborhood with flowers and trees on the streets. Joshi was given a 999-year lease for 103 plots. The community has a library, a functional hall, sports grounds, seminary, a school, and a temple. It is the largest Parsi colony in Mumbai. Today, the apartments maintain a low rent for those living in the same apartments since 1947 due to the Rent Control Act from 1947. Despite the demand for housing and long waiting lists, one quarter of the flats in the colonies remain empty. The occupants have settled overseas but continue to pay the rent to ensure they don't lose the flat. In 2009 some plots were sold to a developer by Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP). When the developer tried to sell the lots to non-Parsis, the Parsi Central Association (PCA) won a six-year battle against the developer and court ruled that the developer was not allowed to sell flats inside the colony to a non-Zoroastrian.



Photo above: Khursheed Villa, one of the oldest buildings in Dadar Parsi Colony-Photo by: Hormuz Bana

In 2016 Wall Street Journal printed, “India’s Parsis are one of the most successful minority and migrant groups in the world. They make up less than 0.005% of India’s population but three out of the country’s top 10 billionaires.”

A few examples of successful Parsis are:

1. Ardeshir Godrej- Born 1868-1936
The Godrej company was established in 1897 and began by manufacturing surgical instruments, but soon branched off into home and office equipment, e.g. locks, safes, refrigerators, soaps and office equipment like typewriters. Today they have entered the housing industry and are known for their honesty and reliability.
2. Sir Byramjee Jeejeebhoy-1822-1890
A businessman and philanthropist who founded two colleges and several educational institutions.
3. Homi Jehangir Bhabha – 1909-1966
He was a nuclear physicist who played a key role in creating the country’s nuclear program and was the founder director of The Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, the Atomic Energy



Commission of India and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. In 1955 he presided over the UN's Conference on Peaceful uses of Atomic Energy.

4. Jamsetji Tata – 1839-1904

Established in 1868, Tata was a pioneer industrialist who set up the Tata Iron and Steel works and the Tata Group of industries – India's biggest conglomerate company, that had a key role in India's steel and power industries and helped move India up to the ranks of the developed nations. The Tata Group is also famous for its philanthropy and further involved in software, autos, hospitality, and airlines.

5. Cyrus Poonawalla-Born in 1941

Founder of the Serum Institute of India in 1966, in involved in biotech and is the world's largest vaccine manufacturer.

6. Shapoorji Pallonji Group

Established in 1865 is involved in property development, construction, and energy. The SOAS Shapoorji Pallonji Institute of Zoroastrian studies was launched in 2018 through donation of Shapoor Mistry in the name of his grandfather.

7. Wadia Group

Established in 1736 and involved in textiles, property, food, and health.

Decline in Parsi Population in India

Below are some reasons for the decline in Parsi population:

1. Low fertility

- a. About one third of the Parsis don't marry
- b. The average Parsi woman has one child compared to a national average of 2.5 children.

2. The exclusion of children born to women who marry non-Parsi men.

a. 1908 Petit vs Jijabhai case ruling

- i. Suzanne Briere, a French woman, and wife of the Parsi industrialist Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata was initiated to Zoroastrian religion by a Mobed. This initiation was up for dispute among the orthodox Parsis who believe one can only be a Zoroastrian if born into a Zoroastrian community. Suzanne wished for her body to be left in Bombay's dakhme (Towers of Silence) per traditional Zoroastrian death rites but was not allowed. She took her case to the Bombay High Court where Justice Dinshaw Davar and Frank Beamon concluded that the Parsi community consist of Parsis who are born of Zoroastrian parents who profess the Zoroastrian religion, Iranis from Persia professing the Zoroastrian religion,



- the children of Parsi fathers by “alien (non-Parsi) mothers who have been duly and properly admitted into the religion. The legal definition excluded the children of the Parsi mothers by “alien” (non-Parsi) fathers.
- ii. The BBP follows the 1908 judgement and do not allow anyone not deemed Zoroastrian by the ruling to be part of the Dadar Parsi Colony
 - iii. In 2019, the son of Sanaya Dalal a Parsi woman married to a half-Parsi man, and a resident of Dadar Parsi Colony was not allowed membership to colony’s gym and until today he cannot enter the clubhouse unless a member signs for him.

Parsis have migrated from India to different parts of the world with largest population residing in North America where they continue practicing their religion and grow.

Lesson for students:

There are two options for “lesson for students” offered.
One is for the virtual classroom and the other for in person.

Lesson for students: Virtual Classroom

Objective:

By the end of the lesson, students will:

1. Understand the deep connection between Zoroastrianism and the Parsi community.
2. Recognize the historical events that led Zoroastrians to migrate from Persia to India.
3. Identify significant contributions and challenges of the Parsi community in India.

Duration: 50 minutes

Materials and Technology Required:

- Virtual classroom platform (like Zoom or Google Meet)
- Digital maps of Persia and India
- Digital slides with photos of Zoroastrian rituals, festivals, and significant figures
- Digital whiteboard or shared document for collaboration

Procedure:

Introduction (10 minutes)

- Start the virtual class with a poll: “How many of you have relatives or ancestors who identify as Parsis?”
- Present a brief slideshow introducing the beliefs of Zoroastrianism and its connection with the Parsi community.
- Show the digital map to point out Persia and India.



Historical Background (10 minutes)

- Through a slide presentation, discuss the reasons Zoroastrians left Persia and sought refuge in India.
- Use the digital map to trace their journey and emphasize the promise they made to the local ruler in India.
- Discuss the significance of fire temples in Zoroastrianism and show images.

Living as a Parsi in India (15 minutes)

- Present slides showcasing Parsi landmarks, rituals, and festivals in India.
- Discuss Parsi contributions to India, highlighting figures like Jamsetji Tata, Freddie Mercury, and Homi Jehangir Bhabha.

Challenges and Preservation (10 minutes)

- With the help of visuals, discuss the decline in Zoroastrian population and the community's efforts to preserve the culture.
- Use the chat feature to allow students to share if they are aware of any unique Parsi traditions practiced in their families.

Discussion (5 minutes)

- Open the floor for students to verbally share experiences or stories from their families about Zoroastrianism and the Parsi community.

Assessment:

- **Group Activity:** Divide students into breakout rooms. Each group will collaborate on a shared document to create a timeline highlighting significant events in the Zoroastrian journey from Persia to India. Groups will present their timeline in the main session.
- **Short Quiz:** (optional) Use an online quiz platform (like Kahoot or Quizizz) to administer a short quiz. Questions could include:
 - Reasons Zoroastrians left Persia?
 - Naming two Parsi traditions or festivals.
 - Listing prominent Parsi figures in India and their contributions.

Homework/Extended Activity:

Direct students to research one Parsi tradition, ritual, or festival online or by interviewing a family member. They should then create a short digital presentation or video explaining what they learned. Students can share their findings in a subsequent virtual class.

Lesson for students: In person

This lesson can be presented in two class sessions or one.

If the lesson is presented in one session:



1. Use the provided PowerPoint to present the lesson. At the appropriate sections have discussions to enhance the learning experience.
2. Break the class into groups and give each group a printout of a section of the lesson. For example, one group will get the section about the successful Parsis, another group about Dadar Parsi Colony, and so forth. Give students about 10 minutes and then have each group present the lesson to class. After each section ask questions to start discussion to enhance the understanding of the subject at hand.

Activity for Students:

1. Discussion:
 - a. Read the brief biography of each of the successful Parsis and discuss as a class how their contributions benefited the Zoroastrian community, India, or had a global impact. Do students think Zarathushtra's teachings had an influence on their success?
 - b. Why after so many centuries in a different country, Parsis kept their religion? What are the similarities or differences between them and Zoroastrians in NA? Do you think we are as strong in keeping our religions and traditions as they were?
 - c. Discuss the limitations in acceptance of non-born Zoroastrians into the community and how we can change that in NA.
 - d. What are the deep connections between Zoroastrians in Iran and India?
2. 1908 Petit vs Jijabhai case ruling
Break the class into two groups and give each group the Petit vs Jijabhai case and ask them to read it among themselves and discuss the case and come up with a verdict. Then share the results of the case with them and discuss.
3. Poster
Have students do deeper research on one of the successful Zoroastrians and make a poster or have all the mentioned successful Zoroastrians on one poster.
4. Share
If one or more of the students have been to India and Parsi residents, have them share their experience with the class.

If the lesson is presented in two sessions

Lesson Plan: Understanding Parsis & Zoroastrianism - Part 1

Objective:



Students will explore the contributions of successful Parsis and ponder on the preservation of their cultural identity.

Duration: 45 minutes

Materials Required:

- Simplified PowerPoint slides with visuals and age-appropriate language.
- Printed sections of the lesson with bullet points and graphics.

Procedure:

1. Introduction & PowerPoint Presentation (10 minutes)

- Kick off with an engaging question, e.g., "Have you ever heard of Parsis or Zoroastrians?"
- Use age-appropriate slides to provide an introduction.

2. Group Learning & Presentation (20 minutes)

- Divide students into groups, giving them different sections of the lesson containing short, bullet-pointed info and images.
- Each group will discuss and later present their section. Use prompts and guiding questions to keep them on track.

3. Activity: Group Discussions (10 minutes)

a. Successful Parsis & Their Impact (5 minutes)

- Use engaging stories of Parsis, like Ratan Tata or Freddie Mercury, to highlight their influence and contributions.

b. Parsis & Their Identity (5 minutes)

- Frame a story-like scenario, e.g., "Imagine moving to a new country and trying to hold onto your traditions. How would you feel? How challenging would it be?"

4. Conclusion of Part 1 (5 minutes)

- Review main points using interactive techniques like quick quizzes or flashcards.

Lesson Plan: Understanding Parsis & Zoroastrianism - Part 2

Objective:



Students will delve deeper into the Petit vs. Jijabhai case, analyzing its impact, and employ their creativity to explore the stories of notable Parsi personalities.

Duration: 45 minutes

Materials Required:

- Printout of the Petit vs. Jijabhai case (simplified and summarized if possible).
- Art materials for the poster activity.

Procedure:

1. Recap of Part 1 (5 minutes)

- Use a rapid-fire Q&A or interactive quiz to refresh the content from the previous lesson.

2. Petit vs Jijabhai Case Analysis (20 minutes)

- Distribute printouts of the Petit vs. Jijabhai case. Give students 10 minutes to read.
- Divide the class into two groups. Allow each group to discuss their understanding and perspective on the case. Ask them to come up with what they believe would be a fair verdict, given the facts they read.
- After discussions, share the actual outcome of the case and highlight its significance in simple terms. Allow for a brief Q&A or discussion.

3. Poster Creation Activity (15 minutes)

- Distribute art materials. Guide students to choose one notable Parsi personality. Encourage them to create a poster showcasing their chosen figure's achievements and influence.
- If time permits, allow a couple of students to briefly present their posters.

4. Conclusion & Takeaway (5 minutes)

- Engage students in a brief discussion about the significance of understanding different cultural cases and histories.
- For homework, ask students to write a short paragraph about a cultural or family tradition they value and its importance to them.

Sources:

1. <https://www.scrollroll.com/most-famous-parsis-of-india/>



2. https://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Religions/iranian/Zarathushtrian/manekji_limji.htm
3. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Parsi>
4. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/04/india/india-parsi-colony-intl-hnk/index.html>
5. <https://medium.com/@blindNelephant/a-short-history-of-zoroastrian-migration-to-india-4ec19ca29951>
6. <https://pluralism.org/zoroastrians-in-india-and-iran>

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