



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 5

Subject of the Lesson: Zoroastrians Around the World

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

Background:

Since the birth of humanity, people have been migrating from their place of origin due to different reasons, including favorable lands for agriculture, better living conditions, and escape from persecution.

Zoroastrians have been migrating since long ago and today they are residing in different corners of the world. Some examples include:

- The Aryan tribes' migration to the Iranian plateau.
- The expansion of the Achaemenid Empire and safe trading routes encouraged migration to different parts of the Empire and beyond.
- The Silk Road provided travel route and new trading opportunities, and some Zoroastrians found new settlement in the new lands.
- The Islamic Arab invasion of Iran in 636 CE (Battle of Qadisiya) forced many to migrate to other lands such as India to avoid extreme persecution.
- The Zoroastrian migration continues today, whether the reason is to seek better education, improve living conditions, or escape from persecution under the Islamic Republic of Iran.

These migrations at times have happened in waves and other times more subtle and in lesser numbers.

The goal of this lesson is to familiarize students with the extent of the Zoroastrian settlement around the world and their positive influence where they may have settled. In addition, with the new settlement comes the opportunity to introduce the teachings of Zarathushtra to others.

Most of the information for this lesson has been obtained from two issues of FEZANA Journal with the links provided below for further detailed study.

https://fezana.org/fjissue/FEZANA_2013_03_Fall.pdf

https://fezana.org/fjissue/FEZANA_2004_04_Winter.pdf



Lesson for students:

Zoroastrians in Iran

Zoroastrians have been migrating out of their original homeland of greater Iran since the time of Ashu Zarathushtra. The most extensive migration of Zoroastrians occurred after the Islamic Arab invasion of Iran. Many Zoroastrians left Iran for China, Africa, and other countries but most migrated to India.

Many Zoroastrians decided to stay in Iran under extreme harsh conditions. The Zoroastrians who remained in Iran settled mainly in the desert cities of Yazd and Kerman. Due to migration genocide, economic, political, and social pressures, the once predominant religion of Iran had fallen to only a few thousand by the end of the Qajar era (around 1854). With the aid of the Zoroastrians in India and the start of the Pahlavi Era, Zoroastrians in Iran were able to flourish, and their numbers began to rise. They became some of the influential and productive members of the community. The following are just a few examples, (please feel free to add more or other examples to your lesson) Keikhosrow Shahrokh was the director of the coronation of Ahmad Shah Qajar and Reza Shah Pahlavi. He was also the supervisor of the building of the Ferdowsi Mausoleum in Tous, Iran, and head of the Audit Department and managing director of the Telephone Company in Iran. Among other contributions, Goshtasb Firoozgar donated the Firoozgar Hospital in Tehran which today serves as one of the largest and modern hospitals in Iran. Parimarz Firoozgar served as the first woman mayor and small claim court judge in Iran. Farangis Shahrokh Yeganegi was another noteworthy Zoroastrian woman who was instrumental as a founding member of Zoroastrian Women's Organization, Iranian Handicraft Organization, and improving the poor condition of orphanages and women's prisons in Iran.

Zoroastrians in Iran became educated and entered professional fields such as medicine and engineering, in addition to sectors of industry and trade. After the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979, due to persecution and seeking better living conditions and job opportunities, many Zoroastrians migrated to other countries such as USA, Canada, European countries, and Australia. Today the Zoroastrian neighborhoods in Yazd and Kerman are gradually being sold by outgoing emigrants. Most Zoroastrians in Iran live in Tehran and Karaj. The census by Islamic Republic of Iran shows that the Zoroastrian population in Iran is in decline, however, the surge of Iranians seeking to return to their ancestral roots is on the rise.

Zoroastrians in India

The exact date of the Zoroastrian migration to India is not known but they arrived in India around 8th century CE. They first settled in Diu in Kathiawar but soon moved to Gujarat in western India where they remained for 800 years as a small agricultural community. They came to be known as the Parsis since they migrated from Pars or Persia.

With the establishment of the British trading post in Surat and elsewhere in the early 17th century, once agriculturalists community, the Parsis now became largely involved in commerce and gained



higher positions with the British trading post. This may have been due to them being more receptive to the Europeans than the Hindu and Muslim Indians. As European factories were set up to supply the demand for export commodities in the 17th century, some Parsis became middlemen or traders who traveled the coastal-inland caravan trading route between Surat and Berhampur. They proved to be talented in commerce.

In 1668, Bombay came under the control of the East India Company and soon after complete religious tolerance was established and encouraged the Parsis to settle in Bombay. By the 17th to 18th century, some Parsis who lived in the western coastal city of Surat in Gujarat became brokers, traders, bankers, and moneylenders. These Parsis offered the British credit facilities and financial services and were important collaborators in the development of British trading interests. The Parsis then extended their trading interests in Southeast and East Asia and were heavily involved in shipping and trading goods such as cotton, textiles, porcelain, and opium. Beginning in mid to late 18th century many Parsis moved from Surat to Bombay (present day Mumbai) which became the major shipyard for the British on the west coast of India. The expansion of Bombay in the 18th century is largely owed to the Parsis industry and their ability as merchants. By the 19th century they were a wealthy community. From about 1850 onward they had considerable success in heavy industries, particularly those connected with railways and shipbuilding.

The contact between Zoroastrians in Iran and those in India seem to have been mostly non-existent until the end of 15th century. Between 1477-1768 letters were exchanged on matters of ritual and law. Seventeen of these letters known as *Rivayats* have survived.

Today, Zoroastrians who migrated to India and remained in the area live chiefly in Mumbai and surrounding areas, but also in Karachi, Pakistan, and Bengaluru (Karnataka, India).

Some notable Parsis include, Fali S. Nariman who contributed to jurisprudence and public affairs; Ratan Tata a global business giant; JRD Tata was the first licensed pilot of India, and Homi Bhabha who was a physicist and instrumental in starting India's nuclear program.

Since the 1971 census, there is a steady decline of the population of Zoroastrians in India, this is due to migration of Parsis out of India and intermarriage of non-Zoroastrians with the Zoroastrian community. A non-Zoroastrian female spouse and the children from her marriage to a Zoroastrian male are admitted into the community, however a Zoroastrian female marrying a non-Zoroastrian male is not accepted. This is limited to the Parsi culture and not practiced in Iran.

Zoroastrians in Singapore

The first known Parsi in Singapore was a convict (assaulting a British officer at the time was a felony) by the name of Muncherjee in 1827. This was during a time when Singapore was a penal colony (a settlement used to exile prisoners and separate them from the general population by placing them in



remote places) for the British convicted felons (1825-73). His death led to the need for a burial place for Zoroastrians in Singapore, and the Parsi Cemetery was created.

As more Parsis came to Singapore, an area near Mount Palmer and Palmer Road became the center for their activities with the creation of Parsi Lodge to house merchants and hold Zoroastrian religious ceremonies.

By 1881, it was recorded that there were 22 males and 6 female Parsis in Singapore. The Parsi population in Singapore grew to about 350 in 2017. The Parsis who first came to Singapore in the 19th century were largely traders and agents, with the known Parsi firm Frommurze Sorabjee established in 1840.

The Parsis were also involved with setting up the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company, which later became the Port of Singapore Authority (transshipment hub in Singapore, regulating port licenses, manages vessel traffic in the Singapore port). Several British ships such as *Ann* were built by Parsi master builders in Bombay dockyard and Singapore was a regular port of call as part of their trade route between Bombay and China as early as 1827.

In late 19th and 20th century, Parsi theatre groups such as the Victoria Theatrical Company from Bombay went on tour in many parts of Southeast Asia including Singapore. These Parsi theater acts inspired the creation of several theatre forms including the *bangawan* (Malay opera) in the Malay Peninsula. In 1902, the first cinema film was shown in Singapore by a Parsi traveling showman named Basrai.

Today, Parsis work in many professional sectors in Singapore. The Parsi Zoroastrian Association of Southeast Asia, Singapore (PZAS) was founded by Phirozshaw Manekji Framroz, Behramgore Vakil, Keki Medora, and Rutton Patel on May 29, 1954, to promote the Parsi-Zoroastrian residents in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Brunei.

Zoroastrians in Africa

It is suggested that the Parsis came to East Africa, first to Zanzibar and then across to the mainland, as part of the network first developed by Sultan Barghash (second Sultan of Zanzibar who was instrumental in abolishing slavery in Zanzibar) and this was continued by the British between Bombay and the East Coast of Africa. However, accounts of foreign travelers to Zanzibar mention a few Parsi inhabitants even before Barghash invited members of the community to settle in there.

British explorer and writer Richard Francis Burton wrote about two Parsi trading agents in Zanzibar in 1859. He wrote that the Arabs and Africans in Zanzibar viewed the Parsis without prejudice. Kased wrote that the first member of the community to settle in Zanzibar was a trader from Surat, named Manekji Mistry, who moved in 1845, after building a successful business in Zanzibar.



In 1870, Barghash took the initiative of expanding trade with India to obtain food and extend his clove sales which encouraged more Zoroastrians to the region. The Zoroastrian Anjuman was founded in 1875, well before there was a significant community. In 1882, Sohrabji Darukhanawala brought with him from India the first Zanzibari priest, Ervad Bhicaji P. Sidhwa from Udwada. The same year the trustees of the Anjuman purchased some land on which community buildings were to be erected and Sultan Barghash gave them land for a cemetery. The earliest arrivals were professionals who for a decade grew into a business community. Barghash's personal physician was a Zoroastrian by the name of Dr. Prestonji B. Nariman.

Freddy Mercury was born in Zanzibar as Farrokh Bulsara. He migrated with his family to the UK.

For a more personal recall, read Jaloo Camay's article using the link below:

<https://zoroastrians.net/2021/02/20/the-lost-tribe-parsis-of-south-africa-jaloo-camay/>

Zoroastrians in Pakistan

Settlement of Zoroastrians in Pakistan span over a long period of time. In the 16th century, a Zoroastrian settlement existed in Sind, which had been a part of the Achaemenid Empire. Around 1830-1840, some Zoroastrians left Gujarat and went to Sind for trade or better livelihood. In 1947, at a time of political divide in India, a sizable Zoroastrian community flourished in Sind having anjumans (an organization or association), charitable trusts, schools, hospitals, centers of social, cultural and sports, fire temples and towers of silence. Over the years the Zoroastrians in Pakistan moved up from a lower middle-class community to an upper middle class. According to a census taken by Karachi Zarthoshi Banu Mandal, the population of Zoroastrians in Pakistan has decreased steadily since 1995.

Zoroastrians in Sri Lanka

Over time, Zoroastrian settlers from India migrated to Sri Lanka. Gravestones attest that Parsi sailors and maritime merchants reached British colonial island of Ceylon around 1603 because of trade between India, the Maldives, Africa, and China. This migration continued during the 18th century, adding to the number of community members there. The first well documented presence of Parsis in British Ceylon dates to 1803. The Parsis played an ever-increasing role in Ceylon's administration, economy, and society. They initially worked as planters on coffee and tea estates in the province near Kandy and Nuwara Eliya and as merchants in the Fort of Colombo. Then they moved into professions such as law and medicine, becoming socially prominent and financially affluent. After Ceylon became independent in 1947, 50% of the community chose to return to India and gain Indian citizenship while the other 50% remained and became citizens of Ceylon.

When Sinhalese became the official language of Ceylon, many Zoroastrians not fluent in the language migrated to Australia. Ceylon became the Republic of Sri Lanka in 1972. This immigration is ongoing as more and more Zoroastrians seek education and economic opportunities in USA and Canada.



The Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) Parsi Anjuman was established in 1939 to control and administer the trust funds such as those for priests and rituals, funerary sites, and sports. It is the location of a community prayer hall. The total number of Zoroastrians within Sri Lanka in 2004 was approximately 51.

Zoroastrians in USA and Canada

The first known Zoroastrian who came for permanent settlement to North America was Pestonji Framji Daver in 1892. He settled in San Francisco. His son Jamshed was the first known Zoroastrian born in North America. Jamshed died in 1982 as James Edward Daver. Driven by the Gold Rush in 1866, Parsi Prakash records Maneckji Framji Javeri came to California in prospect of gold. In 1904, Phiroze Dorabji Saklatwala came to New York. He started his own business and became the majority owner of an oil company's share on the Big Board of New York and was known as the 'Parsi Oil King'. He was the first Parsi Consult-General for Persia in the USA. The first Zoroastrian Association of New York was established in Phiroze Saklatwala's living room on Nov. 10, 1929. The first Zoroastrian naturalized citizen of the US was Bhicaji F. Balsara in about 1900. In 1905 when Dastur Dr. Dhalla came to New York for Avestan studies at Columbia, he noted that there were eight Zoroastrian businesses in the US and the population does not exceed 12 or 15 individuals. Increased immigration to the US happened in the 1950's and the 1960's. After the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979 the influx of immigration has exponentially increased with most Iranians settling in California. Some of these immigrants came to the US with about 20 dollars in their pockets and have put themselves through college, raised families, and have built their community structure. In a short period of 40-50 years, Zoroastrians have built communities and Darbe Mehrs across US and Canada largely through the donation of Arbab Rustam and Morvarid Guiv. Many Zoroastrians in North America have successful businesses and careers such as music conductor Zubin Mehta and author Rohinton Mistry.

South America:

A small community of Zoroastrians exist in South America. Dr. Jose Luis Abreu born in Venezuela is the director of Latin America Spenta University Foundation where his teachings are based on ethical dimensions of management. He has written several books on Zarathushtra's teachings and has given lectures on the subject.

Zoroastrians in the United Kingdom:

In 1724, Nowroji Sett became the first Asian as well as the first Zoroastrian to visit the UK. About one hundred years later, in 1855, the first Asian firm and Zoroastrian firm, 'Cama and Company' was set up by Mancherjee Hormusjee Cama. During 1890 to 1935, the Zoroastrians in UK enjoyed great success in Britain's political life and were elected to the House of Commons (ex. Dadabhai Naoroji, Sir Muncherjee Bhownagree, and Shapurji Sklatwala). Today, Zoroastrians in the UK are involved in many different businesses such as hospitality and catering. Karan Bilimoria was voted Asian of the Year 2002 whose Cobra Beer has put him into the Britain's best-known names. The Zoroastrian community in UK



is organized under The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE) which was founded in 1861. This organization aims to teach and familiarize Zoroastrians with their own tradition and to let others know about who Zoroastrians are. The first Children's Education Club for children 1-10 years old was conducted by this organization in Switzerland. The vision of a World Zoroastrian Organization (WZO) came to realization in 1980 and today WZO location is in London.

Zoroastrians in Europe and Central Asia:

In 2004, a census was done and printed in FEZANA Journal estimating the Zoroastrians in Europe and Central Asia to about 1,000. However today with the increased migration of especially Iranian Zoroastrians from Iran to the European countries this number has greatly increased. The Zoroastrian Children's Education Club in Switzerland had its first gathering in 2023 and annual lunch gatherings of families in Lucerne. Zoroastrians reside in Sweden, France, Germany, and many other countries in the area.

Zoroastrians in the Persian Gulf

Today there are Zoroastrians residing in United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait specially since the 1979 Islamic revolution of Iran more and more Zoroastrians migrated to the Persian Gulf area. In FEZANA Journal 2004 article estimates the number of Zoroastrians in the Gulf to about 2,200. Today, most of the Zoroastrians living in the Gulf have migrated from India, Pakistan and Iran working in such areas as accountants, engineers, doctors, software experts and alike. Zoroastrians mainly follow the religion in their private homes.

Zoroastrians in Australia

Zoroastrians migrated from UK and Maoist China to the New South Wales section of Australia before the 1950s. In 1968, there were only 3 migrant families in Sydney. The earliest Zoroastrians who migrated to Melbourne, Australia has been dated back to 1890, and the first modern day Zoroastrian migrants migrated to the area in the early 1960s and from then on, a steady and growing population of Zoroastrians have called Melbourne their home. In 1978 a group of early migrants formed the Zoroastrian Association of Victoria Inc. The Australian Zoroastrian Association (AZA) with members migrated from India, Pakistan and Iran, Zoroastrian Association of Sydney (ZAS), Zoroastrian Association of Western Australis (ZAWA) are among today's Zoroastrian centers in Australia.

Zoroastrians in New Zealand

The first Zoroastrian migrated in 1877 to New Zealand with his wife and 3 children. He set up a hardware supply business 'Shroff and Sons' in Auckland, New Zealand which is still run by his descendants. Since 1960, there has been a steady increase of Zoroastrians migrating to New Zealand. In 2004 census about 840 Zoroastrians lived in the area. There are two associations in New Zealand:



The Zarathushtrian Association of New Zealand (ZANZ) and the Traditional Mazdayasni Zarathustee Anjuman of New Zealand (TMZANA).

Zoroastrians in China, Hong Kong, and Japan

The first recording of Zoroastrians in China is around 100 BCE as emissaries of the Parthian Dynasty. In the 6th century CE, Zoroastrian merchants began sailing to China. During the 7th and 8th centuries Zoroastrians including the son of Yazdegard III took refuge in China to avoid Muslim persecution. The number of Zoroastrian refugees is unknown, however there were many large Zoroastrian villages including temples in southern China. Zoroastrian tombs have also been unearthed in central China. The number of Zoroastrians probably grew until the late 9th century when China began suppressing foreign religions. There are no records of Zoroastrians in China past the mid tenth century.

In the 18th century, the Zoroastrian merchants of India traded along the China coast. Parsi firms established warehouses and residences around Canton as far back as the 1790s. Parsis began settling in Shanghai in 1847 after it opened to foreigners. In the first 25 years of Hong Kong's history as a British colony, as many as a quarter of all foreign firms in Hong Kong belonged to Parsis. As the center of trade moved from southern China to Hong Kong, the Parsi population increased in Hong Kong. Zoroastrian settlement in Singapore began in the mid-19th century. Notable Parsis of the late 1800s and early 1900s served on the Grand Jury, opened an English school, had a Masonic Lodge named after them, started a Chinese newspaper, and became editors of a press syndicate. Zoroastrian charity can also be seen in this part of the world. Pesi Davar's trust annually disburses about \$200,000 for charitable and educational purposes. Navroji Mistri who died in 1953 donated a million dollars to build the Mistri Wing for children at the Singapore General Hospital.

The Parsi Association formed in 1954 took over the management of the Parsi Lodge Charity and the annual income from the trust is spent on the improvement and upkeep of the burial ground, religious ceremonies, deserving charities and scholarships of both Parsi and non-Parsi children of Singapore. As Singapore's fortune took off in the 1960s and 1970s more Parsis arrived to work in shipping, aviation, and engineers with Singapore Airlines. In Singapore Zoroastrians became productive members of community. For example, Dr. Pesi Chacha became head of Orthopedic Surgery at National University of Singapore; Jamshed Medora was awarded the Public Service Medal and Public Service Star for social service; and Roshen Daruwalla was a tireless fundraiser for the Dyslexia Association. FEZANA Journal 2004 census reports over 200 Zoroastrians living in Hong Kong. A small Parsi presence exists in Japan since the late 19th century.

Zoroastrians in Kurdistan

Kurds are descendants of the Medes that currently reside in western Iran (provinces of Kurdistan and Kermanshahan), southern Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. The Kurdish language has Avestan roots and is close to the Pahlavi language spoken during Sassanid era, however there are different Kurdish dialects.



Majority of Kurds today are Sunni Muslim with 15% Shiites, with a minority of Kurdish Jews, Christians and nowadays Zoroastrian. In June 2015, the government of Kurdistan announced that 100,000 citizens have recently accepted the Zoroastrian religion and have asked for assistance to build twelve temples. The Zoroastrian population among Kurds continues to rise. There have been sedreh pooshi and wedding ceremonies conducted in the Zoroastrian tradition and the government of Kurdistan has officially recognized Zoroastrian religion and has a Zoroastrian representative in the ministry of religion and one deputy in Parliament. The Zoroastrian Cultural Center has been founded by Pir (Mobed) Luqman Haji Karima and inaugurated in Sulaymaniyah. The Zoroastrian Kurds have composed their own anthem (the translation provided below) companion to the Kurdistan National Anthem. In 2012 the first Kurdish Zoroastrian temple was inaugurated in Stockholm, and it is reported by Pir Andaz Hawezi that 3,000 Kurds have joined the religion. The Kurdish translation of the Gathas by Dr. Khosro Khazai, Mobed Firooz Azargoshasb, Dr. Ali Jafarey and Dr. Jalil Doostkhah are among the translations available.

The Zoroastrian Kurdish movement is not new. In 1962 a Kurdish leader wrote a letter to the Tehran Zoroastrian Anjuman including a map of several tribes and requested teachers to be sent to the area to teach about Zoroastrian religion, however, due to the possible ramifications the Anjuman did not act. Today, the Zoroastrian Kurdish population is steadily on the rise, and they take part in Zoroastrian congresses.

Kurdish Zoroastrian Anthem:

O'belief and guidance of Zartusht
O' Son of unequalled paradise
You recognized the source of all good
You brought the message of justice
For thousands of years, you have taught us how to fight against falsehood
We are the forgotten Kurds; we are the divided land
Our past and future, our goal and desire will remain unrecognized if we do not understand well
We were born with the religion of Zartusht
We were raised in this pathway with his guidance
Religion of Zartusht is the beacon of peace for all
It is our guidance for living in peace together

The anthem was translated from Kurdish to Persian by Ms. Shilan Sepehri and then to English by Dr. Daryoush Jahanian.

The URL of the Zoroastrian anthem: <https://www.facebook.com/462570357158871/videos/883762271706342/>

For more information refer to: https://fezana.org/fjissue/FEZANA_2016_01_Spring.pdf



Activity for Students:

1. Start-up conversations:
 - a. Where were Zoroastrians first originated?
 - b. Where do you think Zoroastrians live today?
 - c. What constitutes one to be a Zoroastrian?
 - d. What kind of impact have Zoroastrians had across the globe?
 - e. Is it important for Zoroastrians to increase in number?
 - i. If yes, how can this be achieved?
 - ii. Is acceptance a good way of welcoming newcomers into the religion?
2. Use the accompanying PowerPoint to introduce the lesson or make one of your own.
 - a. Emphasize the productivity of Zoroastrians in the country they resided or worked.
 - b. How do Zoroastrians practice their faith as they migrate?

Answers can include through their good deeds, being productive members of the community, building, becoming educated, transferring Zarathushtra's teachings to their children, etc.
3. Provide students with a world map and have them mark all the areas talked about in the lesson where Zoroastrians live.
4. Give a copy of Kurdish Zoroastrian anthem to students and discuss what it means to them and to the Kurdish Zoroastrians.
5. Have students choose one of the Zoroastrians listed in the lesson or any other Zoroastrian who first emigrated to one of the countries and create a presentation about that person.

Sources:

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