

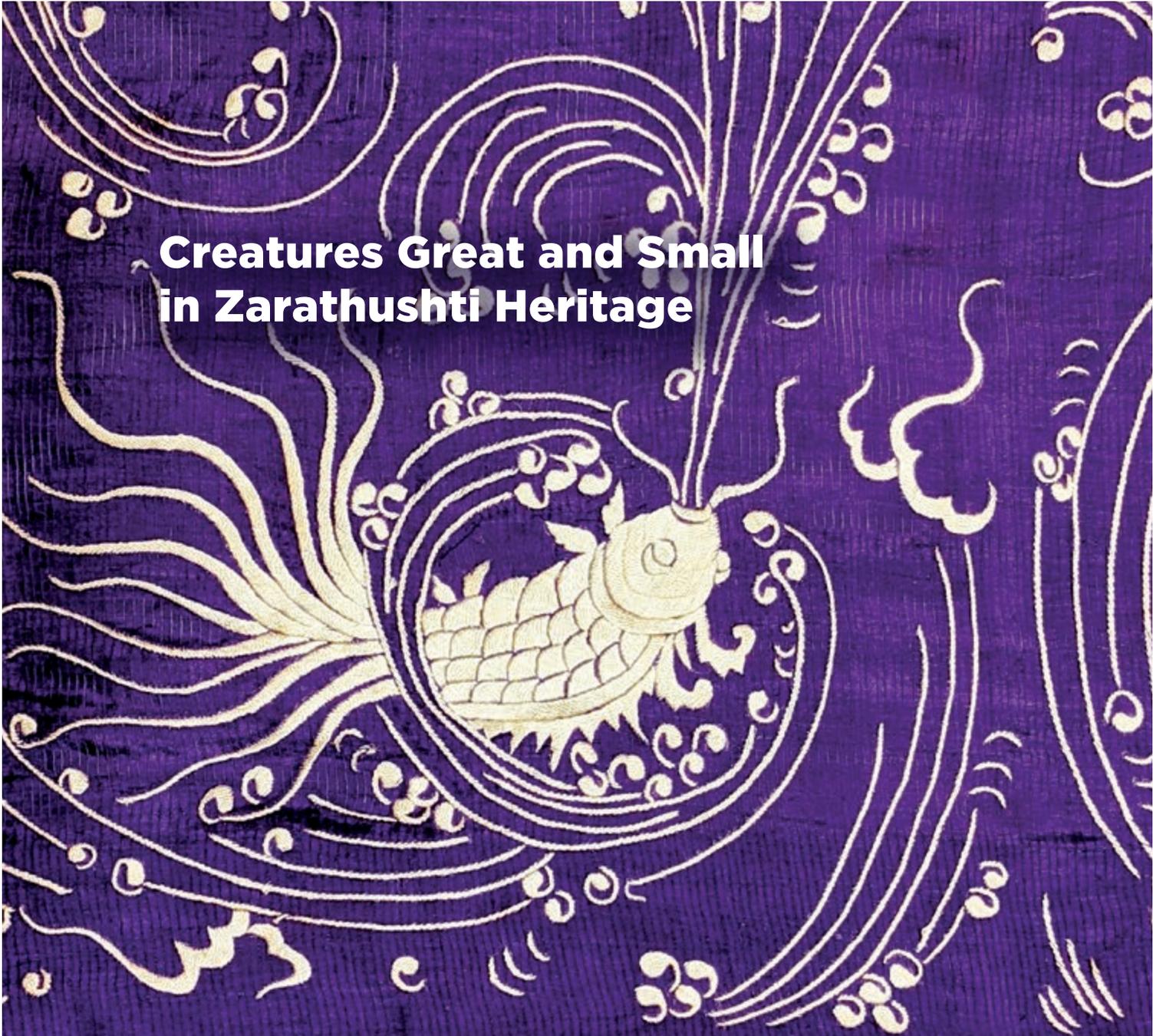
FEZANA

TABESTAN 1391 AY 3760 Z

VOL. 36, No. 2 SUMMER/JUNE 2022

# JOURNAL

Tir – Amordad – Shehrever 1392 AY (Fasli) 3760 Z • Behman – Spendarmad 1391 AY, – Fravardin 1392 AY (Shehenshai) • Spendarmad 1391 AY, – Fravardin – Ardibehesht 1392 AY (Kadimi)



## **Creatures Great and Small in Zoroastrian Heritage**

PUBLICATION OF THE FEDERATION OF ZOROASTRIAN ASSOCIATIONS OF NORTH AMERICA

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Vol 36, No 2 - ISBN 1068-2376

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## FALL 2022

## 12th WORLD ZOROASTRIAN CONGRESS 2022

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(USPS 021-495) published quarterly by FEZANA 8615 Meadowbrook Dr., Burr Ridge, IL 60527. Periodical postage rate is paid at Oakbrook, IL 60523 and at additional mailing offices. Annual subscription US \$35 (US and Canada) and \$80 (air) for other countries; details on subscription form. POSTMASTER: send changes to Fezana Journal, 8615 Meadowbrook Drive, Burr Ridge, IL 60527.



## Lazy Hazy Days of Summer!!

The summer of 2022 is passing by in a flash. The preparation of the World Zoroastrian Congress July 1-4 absorbed the attention and time of not only the members of ZAGNY and FEZANA but everybody else as well. We hardly had time for anything else besides our daily chores and trying to stay out of COVID's path. But it seems COVID is tantalizing us again, making us reach for our masks once more.



But to get back to our busy summer your editorial board has made great effort to keep this issue a little slimmer than usual, But be prepared for the FALL issue which will be the special WZC22 issue full of photos, activities and articles of the much awaited 12th World Zoroastrian Congress, NY. July 1-4 2022.

In spite of all odds, Farishta Dinshaw, our guest editor has done a marvellous job of putting the cover story together on ***Creatures Big and Small in Zarathushti Heritage***. Have you ever wondered about the role of Warasyaji in our religion?. We have seen a pure white bull grazing in many of the agiaries in a special area. Well, Dasturji Dr Firoze Kotwal, in an erudite article explains the significance. Have you wondered why the dog is brought near the body of the dead person before the last funeral rites.? In this issue you will find answers to these and many other perplexing questions you may have had.

Artemis Javanshir had organized once again an essay competition on ***“According to the Gathas, can one be a Zoroastrian without a belief in God?”*** A very philosophical subject. But the young people produced thought provoking and thoughtful essays and the winning essays are published in this issue. Congratulations to all the students who contributed essays. Do read them. You will be amazed

Ervad Dr ArdaViraf Minocher Homji president of North American Mobeds' Council from 2017- 2022 has been profiled in this issue. Read about him and his achievements in the 5 years of his presidency, striving to place the council on a sound financial footing, and for starting religious education seminars. Thank you Ervad Arda and welcome Ervad Tehemton Mirza as the new president.

We are saddened to report on the passing away of Pallonji Shapoorji Mistry, a great benefactor of the Zoroastrian Community with his largess for establishing the Shapoorji Pallonji Institute of Zoroastrian studies at SOAS, London University, for renovating the Udavada Atash Behram and restoring it to its pristine beauty and upgrading the Udavada railway station to facilitate behdins to alight safely from the train, when visiting the Atash Behram on auspicious days.

Enjoy the rest of the summer and take care of each other

  
Dolly Dastoor

# Message FROM THE PRESIDENT

Summer 2022 is here. And it's been a long wait. The world finally seems to have moved ahead of the pandemic, and even as newer variants ebb and flow, society in general is slowly resuming being together in person for work, fun and play. And our communities in North America are the better for it. Religion classes for kids are back in person. And people are meeting to celebrate in person, with reasonable caution.

This will be an epic summer for FEZANA and North American Zarathushtis in general. All roads this summer will lead to New York for the 12<sup>th</sup> World Zoroastrian Congress 2022 in New York. An entire issue of the FEZANA Journal is dedicated to it in the coming months.

FEZANA also awaits the final steps necessary to announce the first ever FEZANA Professor in Zoroastrian Languages and Literature at the University of Toronto, Canada. In a communication recently, the Dean informed us that the President's Office was in final negotiations with the chosen individual and we hope to announce the academic who will take this position.

The FEZANA Religious Education Committee (REC) has been doing great work in revamping syllabus, standardizing curriculum and preparing lesson plans and other aids for teachers all over North America. Artemis Javanshir, Co-Chair of the REC has been working to set up a dedicated web portal where all the information will be hosted and available. This website shall be launched at the 12 WZC.

We are also thrilled to hear about the possible addition of a new Dar-E-Mehr here in North America. The California Zoroastrian Center San Diego has made an offer on a beautiful property. The community in San Diego has been around for many years and their search for such a space has finally borne fruit. However a lot needs to be done before they can close the deal. They are on a massive fundraising drive. If you would like to help them or have ideas to share with them, do reach out to them at [www.czc.org/czc-sd](http://www.czc.org/czc-sd)

Summer is the time for the FEZANA Scholarship Applications. Every year due to the largesse of our amazing donors we are able to give over 80,000 USD in scholarships across disciplines and professions to Zarathushti students in North America.

Since the start of the Scholarship program in the late 1990's FEZANA has been able to impact hundreds of lives. Many recipients, now successful in their careers and businesses, are paying back to the Scholarship Fund. And many others see value in FEZANA's track record and are endowing more scholarships. If you would like to endow one, send an email to [academicscholarships@fezana.org](mailto:academicscholarships@fezana.org)

The FEZANA member associations in a nearly unanimous vote, agreed to move ahead with the amendment of the FEZANA Constitution. This multi-year process will be a once in a generation effort to bring real change to the way our governance documents need to be in this day and age.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the 12<sup>th</sup> World Zoroastrian Congress. A lot of work is happening but even more needs to be done. If you would like to get involved, email me at [president@fezana.org](mailto:president@fezana.org) and let's get the conversation started.

arZan  
Arzan Sam Wadia  
President, FEZANA +212 380 7629



## OFFERING THE BOWL OF MILK

In this issue, the Welfare Committee sits down with Emmy award-winning writer, storyteller and social activist **Kayhan Irani** to spotlight her transformative initiative that flips the script by offering a bowl of milk to Afghans seeking refuge.

### **How did the Afghan Refugee Relocation Project come about? The inspiration behind the initiative?**

The inspiration is deeply personal – historical. Firstly our own Zoroastrian and Parsi migration stories – of fracture, loss, displacement, and eventually making home. Being in the US, now settled for decades, made me realize I have the power to extend a hand to others who – like my ancestors and even my parents – are fleeing political repression and violence. I felt like I had the bowl of milk in my hands, and I could choose to offer it as nourishment, as a welcome, in this version of the tale.

More specifically, I worked in Afghanistan on and off from 2010-2015. I trained theater groups, grassroots community groups, and media organizations from many provinces in participatory theater and storytelling for social change and conflict resolution. The people I worked with had such vision, courage, and love in their hearts. These were people who existed within conditions of war, starvation, and lack of education, yet here they were, choosing art and culture as a tool for rebuilding society and bringing people together. They were the most beautiful and kind people I have ever worked with and I tear up just thinking of how generous and sweet they were to me. When they found out I was Zarthushti, many of them extended themselves to share some part of Afghan culture that was connected to Zoroastrianism. One student told me that his brother started a company providing after-school tutoring and adult English classes which he named “Awista” in honor of the great Zarthosti book of learning (Avesta). They hadn’t erased this part of their ancient heritage and I felt deeply connected to it when I was there. I never would have expected that had I only listened to media accounts that try to define Afghans and Afghanistan. So when my former students and colleagues started reaching out for help, with horror after horror coming in via SMS and WhatsApp and email, my conscience wouldn’t let me turn away. I had to look squarely at the pain, and I had to figure out where I was able to make a difference. Being a freelance artist and teacher, not affiliated with any NGO and not employed full-time anywhere, what I could do was to commit my time, my smarts, my connections, and my love to 5 families who I knew well and respected deeply. I said that I will follow them every step of the way, no matter what. And together, we will make a way out of no way.

### **What are the challenges you have faced? How do you overcome those challenges?**

What I have faced is nothing compared to what these families have faced. Yet, I am a sort of home base for them. Far from them physically, yet always a message or call away. The challenges are endless - from ever-changing government regulations to collecting and finding every document that they might need to verify who they are and what they have been through. Translation and interpretation is a challenge as I do not speak neither Farsi nor Dari and sometimes things have to be explained three and four times to ensure we are all on the same page and that any information I pass on in my advocacy effort is accurate and verifiable. The hardest part has been emotionally supporting them and remaining a soft and kind place for them to share their grief with as they navigate deep loss. I have so much anger and feel calloused sometimes, but I can’t pass that on to them. I must be gentle and always point them towards the good.

The only way to overcome any challenge is to do it collectively. As my dear friend says in Farsi: *Del beh del, rah dareh./ From one heart to another, there is a way/a path.* And this is true. It has been through so many, many hearts that all challenges get smoothed and shared. Though my parents sometimes worry that my chosen career path means variable income and working with all sorts of entities and groups (not one fixed organization), it is this diversity of experience and the wide networks I have built that have helped me get information and source aid and perspectives I would not have had. One former client found a US attorney who took on a family’s very complex case pro bono. Of course, our incredible Zoroastrian network has shown up in so many ways - the Aunty Brigade that always checks in on me, offers me ideas and connections, and advice and guidance to care for my broken heart. Our community has also given me detailed technical advice like the proofreading and step-by-step legal guidance needed to fill out a resettlement application for Canada for a family of 7. The Canadian Zoroastrians lit the way for me to see what I needed to do.



## What is the need of the hour?

We are in a waiting game. Case processing is going at a snail's pace because of the sheer number of cases, but also because the war in Ukraine has put further burdens on these systems that were not set up to support tens of thousands of applicants. Therefore we need to continually raise funds to support the families as they have no livelihood, do not have work permission in the countries they are waiting in, and timelines extend on and on. We need medical expenses to be paid as one family has an epileptic son who needs medicine regularly. And we need ANY contacts and influence to help move folks (if need be) to yet another country. For example, most are waiting in Pakistan because of the shared border. But if we could get them visas to India, and set them up there, their paperwork would move faster because the queue is shorter.

On a larger scale and for a longer-term impact, we need connection, love, and compassion. We cannot write off the country simply because of the oppressive government. Afghans in Afghanistan deserve aid and support, and they want to continue to fight for their rights. We should not think that those who remain are somehow bad or worthless, they simply didn't make the quota or they had vulnerable family members they couldn't leave behind, or they want to stay and try to make a change in their homeland. We need to remember and honor that, while the media casts a dark shadow on the entire land mass. We must remember the good and uplift that spirit too, while we fight and make room for those who are trying to get out.

*Kayhan is a mother of one son and is the daughter of an Irani father, whose parents migrated to Bombay from Yazd, and a Parsi mother. She creates storytelling spaces to build community, offer healing, and to re-connect participants to their innate creative power. Kayhan works internationally and in the U.S. with community organizations, social service providers, educational providers, and government agencies to expand what's possible when we deepen our relationships through story.*



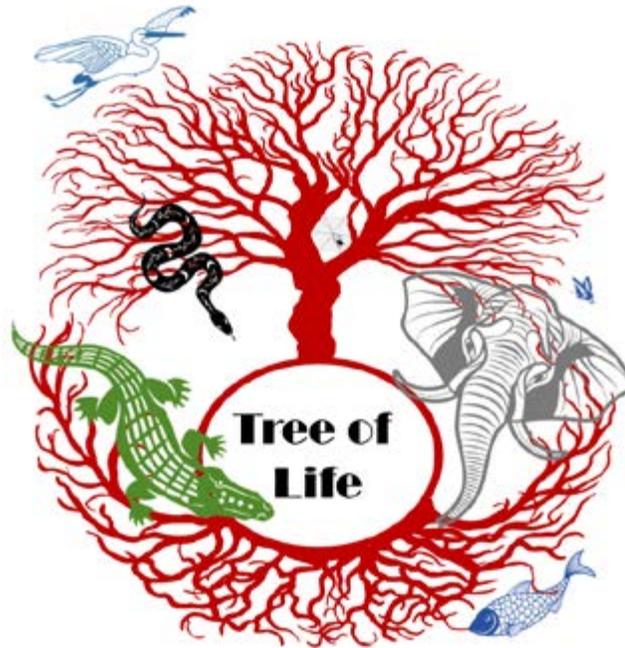
*In 2016 Kayhan was one of ten artists nationally, named by President Obama's White House as a champion of Change for her srorytlling work. She has trained hundreds of groups in Theater of the Oppressed and participatory storytelling tools over the years, both nationally and overseas, in Afghanistan, India, and Iraq. Kayhan was a Fulbright-Nehru Senior Researcher in India (2012-2013) doing research on Parsi embroidery and identity-making with the PARZOR Foundation for her play, Tree of Seeds. Her published work includes a volume of essays, Telling Stories to Change the World: Global Voices on the Power of Narrative to Build Community and Make Social Justice Claims (Routledge, 2008), chapters in Culturally Relevant Arts Education for Social Justice: A Way Out of No Way (Routledge, 2015); Storytelling for Social Justice: Connecting Narrative and the Arts in AntiRacist Teaching, 2nd Ed. (Routledge, 2019) and a chapter on grassroots theater as leadership development model with Afghan refugees in A Grassroots Leadership & Arts for Social Change Primer, (ILA, 2022).*

**Kayhan Irani** is currently working on *There is a Portal*, an immersive digital experience and social justice education project that asks how we can create networks of belonging even when we feel most broken.

- To donate visit the FEZANA website - <https://fezana.org/donate/>
- Under Fund Category, select WELFARE ACTIVITIES
  - In the sub category, select GENERAL Welfare Fund.
  - In the "In Memory/Honour of" box notate KAYHAN IRANI Project.

*The Welfare Committee supports this worthy cause and urges our generous community to support the Kayhan Irani project with any financial contributions they can afford. A tax receipt will be issued from the US on behalf of FEZANA.*

**FEZANA Unity and Welfare Committee, Houtoxi Contractor, Hosi Mehta, Sanaya Master**



# Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage

By Farishta Murzban Dinshaw  
Guest Editor

“...And give us trained beasts for the pastures, broken in for riding, and for bearing, (that they may be) in helpful companionship with us, and as a source of long enduring vigor, and a means of rejoicing grace to us for this.” Y40.3 (L.H. Mills, 1898).

This issue of the *FEZANA Journal* is dedicated to non-human animals as humans are also animals, fitting under the classification of mammals, sub-group primates. In our vanity, we may show our best profiles in selfies, but men and mice, at a physiological and anatomical level are remarkably similar. What makes us different from other animals is the ability for complex thought and self-awareness –

humans are capable of self-reflection, reasoning, logic, creativity and imagination, and morality based on abstract reasoning. All these are the attributes of *Vohu Manah* or the “Good Mind”.

In the Ahunavaiti Gatha, often referred to as “The Cow’s Lament”, *Geush Urvan* (the soul of the cow) complains of the wrath, oppression, and rapine to which her world is subjected. *Vohu Manah* reassures her that the Creator of the World is sending Zarathushtra as a guide and protector (Ha 29). Given that the Gathas were revealed at least 3,000, if not more, years ago, it is predictable that the cow was given the status of

representing humanity and the Earth. In *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (1977) Jared Diamond noted that in ancient times domesticated animals, particularly cattle, represented social wealth and were “crucial to those human societies possessing them.” They provided meat, milk products, fertilizer, leather, goat hair, wool, and cow dung cakes to burn for warmth. They pulled carts and ploughs, and carried loads. It is no wonder then that in Zarathushtra’s time, the cow was considered the ‘voice of the Earth’ and spoke on behalf of the people. A pastoral society without cattle would not survive. The *Denkard*, a 10<sup>th</sup>-century compendium of Zarathushti jurisprudence and customs, states that

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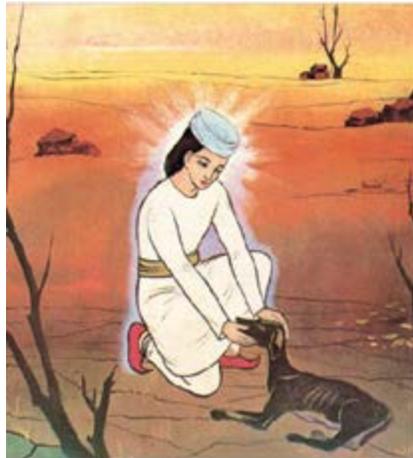
a herder who neglected to provide strong healthy bulls to his cows was to be punished.

The allegory of the cow's lament about those that hurt it through greed and violence is also easily understood at an ecological level – if people continue to harm the 'cow', the one who nourishes and provides for the people, the cow will ultimately perish.

This message is as meaningful today as it was when first composed. In an ironic twist that Zarathushtra likely never foresaw, cattle are the number one agricultural source of greenhouse gases worldwide. A single cow can produce about 220 pounds of methane in a year, leading to climate change-related calamities. Overgrazing lands to produce beef can also degrade soil health and biodiversity. As Zarathushtis, we are obligated to care for the Earth and the environment. These may require significant lifestyle changes – consideration about which house or car to buy, recycling and reducing waste by avoiding disposable items, advocating for less packaging, and buying local.

In his book, *Animal Liberation* (1975) Peter Singer argued that human and animal interests required equal consideration. He described the choices we make that favor human beings over other animals as "speciesism". As human beings, we can communicate complex ideas unlike animals, and, therefore, as Zarathushtis, we have to advocate for the proper treatment of animals and other creations. This may be as small a step as making sure that all grooming products we use are not tested on animals, donating to local animal shelters or wildlife protection agencies, choosing alternatives to meat in our diet, choosing sustainable fashions, boycotting marine theme

parks, circuses, and rodeos, and using natural insect-repellents like cedar chips, peppermint, or bay leaves.



ZARATHUSHTRA - THE GOLDEN STAR (1965)  
By Fareen Lalkaka / Illustrated by P. B. Kavadi

Reducing the amount of meat or dairy we eat is another way to live an animal-friendly life. Animal-based food production has higher greenhouse gas emissions than growing vegetables and grain. Besides the obvious link to food production, the suffering of animals is also linked to killing animals for ivory, silk, and leather.

So, what does this entail for those of us who enjoy a good steak or a silk scarf? As in all things Zarathushti, it is an individual choice. Similar to all major lifestyle changes, forced on us by circumstances or by choice, there is a greater chance for success when the changes are incremental. You can start by joining or donating to a local program working to protect animals from neglect, cruelty, and extinction.

Even a small step counts as illustrated in the story of the boy and the starfish: One day, a man was walking along the beach when he noticed a boy picking up and gently throwing things

into the ocean. He asked the boy, "What are you doing?"

The boy replied, "Throwing starfish back into the ocean. The tide is going out. If I don't throw them back, they'll die."

The man was astonished and said, "Don't you realize there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can't make any difference!"

The boy bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it into the surf. Then, smiling at the man, he said, "I made a difference to that one."



**Farishta Murzban Dinshaw** is an adjunct professor in the Immigration and Settlement Studies, and Criminology and Social Justice graduate programs at Toronto Metropolitan University, Toronto. She also works with newcomers to raise awareness about Gender-Based Violence, addictions, and mental health issues. She enjoys writing and has an eclectic collection of publications, including a young adult novel, "Discovering Ashavan". "Eat, Live, Pray: A Celebration of Zarathushti Cuisine and Culture", a cookbook she edited, is available as a free download at [www.fezana.org](http://www.fezana.org)

Opening quote from Avesta: Yasna (Sacred Liturgy and Gathas/Hymns of Zarathushtra). Translated by L. H. Mills (from Sacred Books of the East, American Edition, 1898) From [avesta.org](http://avesta.org)

Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage

Animals in the Avesta

By Keshwar Mehrshahi

Yashts are a group of 21 Avestan hymns in praise of various yazatas or holy beings (angels) of the Zoroastrian spiritual system. These Yashts though written in Avesta are not from Asho Zarathushtra's era as can be determined by their names which are in Pahlavi e.g. Hormuzd instead of Ahura Mazda or Bahram instead of Verethraghna. Yasht is a Pahlavi word that means veneration or worship. They are closely linked to the days of the calendar providing names of days and months

It would be impossible to go through all the Yashts for the purpose of this article so I am restricting it to the ones that are usually included in the Khordeh Avesta, namely the Smaller Avesta used for daily prayers.

**HORMUZD YASHT**

This Yasht is in praise of Ahura Mazda and it lists many of His names that symbolize His characteristics.

*Ahura Mazda replied unto him: 'My name is the One of whom questions are asked, O holy Zarathushtra! My second name is the **Herd-giver***

In ancient times when most people lived in farming societies, any family who had herds of cattle and other animals was considered affluent. Ahura Mazda, therefore, was considered the deity that bestowed prosperity and riches.

*If thou wantest, O Zarathushtra, to destroy the malice of Daevas and Men, of the Yatus and Pairikas, of the oppressors, of the blind and of the deaf, of the two-legged ruffians, of the two-legged*

*Ashemaoghas, of the four-legged wolves.*

In consequence of the society being largely farm-based, wolves were deemed a menace to the herds and thus were considered in cahoots with the evil daevas or those who were wilfully blind and deaf to the message of Ahura Mazda.

**ARDIBEHEST YASHT**

The Ardibehesht Yazad is considered the angel of healing and, therefore, the Yasht in his honor is about smiting illnesses and diseases, which were considered the work of the devil in the times when the Yashts were written.

*The brood of the **Snake** fled away; the brood of the **Wolf** fled away...He smites Pride; he smites Scorn; he smites Hot Fever; he smites Slander; he smites Discord; he smites the Evil Eye.*

The snake as a conduit of evil was prevalent in that era after the Biblical denunciation of the serpent in the Garden of Paradise.

**TIR YASHT**

Tir Yazad, or Tishtrya as known in Avesta, is honored as the giver of rain,

a big boon to people who lived in farming societies.

*Ahura Mazda...(gave him Tishtrya) the strength of ten **horses, camels, ten oxen, ten mountains (and) waters of ten canals (or rivers)***

*The bright and glorious Tishtrya goes down to the sea Vouru-Kasha in the shape of a **white, beautiful horse, with golden ears and a golden caparison.***

*'But there rushes down to meet him the Daeva Apaosha, in the shape of a dark horse, black with black ears, black with a black back, black with a black tail, stamped with brands of terror.*

Tir Yazad in the form of a white horse with a golden caparison (or cloth covering) battles Apaosha the demon of drought, depicted as a black horse.

**SROSH YASHT**

Sarosh Yazad is depicted as being carried in a chariot pulled by pristine white horses with golden hooves.

*We worship the righteous and the holy Srosh Yazata the beautiful, victorious, bringing-prosperity to the world and Lord of righteousness. Whom **four white steeds** brilliant, beautiful, divine, wise (and) shadowless carry in the wagon in the heavenly spaces. The hoofs of those (horses) are laden and gilt with gold. They (horses) can overtake all those who go in pursuit of them.)*

As Srosh Yazad is the guardian of the soul of the living human (conscience) and also helps the



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individual's soul progress after death, his chariot pulled by speedy steeds is, therefore, able to transport between the earth and "heavenly spaces".

### FRAVARDIN YASHT

This yasht is dedicated to the Fravashi or the inner power in every being that maintains it and makes it grow and subsist, which is within all of us. This yasht is dedicated to fravashis of disciples of Zarathustra and other heroes, such as Faredun who was known for his healing powers.

*We worship the Fravashi of the righteous Faredun, the son of Athawyan, in order to withstand itch, fever, debility, ague, fever, free indulgence of lust, and the evil caused by snake.*

*If the triumphant Fravashis of the righteous (people) are not harmed oppressed or offended by him (but) are pleased, they go for the help of that (Sovereign) (in the shape of) well-winged bird. They fly towards him (for help).*

Once again, the snake is portrayed as villainous, while a winged bird is seen as the creature that brings help, and feather or wing symbolises fravashi or guardian angel of an individual.

### BEHRAM YASHT

The word Behram comes from the Avestan word verethraghna which means "success, victory." He helps humankind in many shapes, both formless like the wind or in the form of humans and animals.



*Verethraghna, made by Ahura, came to him the second time, running in the shape of a beautiful bull, with yellow ears and golden horns; upon whose horns floated the well-shaped Strength, and Victory, beautiful of form, made by Ahura.*

*Verethraghna, made by Ahura, came to him the third time, running in the shape of a white, beautiful horse, with yellow ears and a golden caparison.*

*Verethraghna, made by Ahura, came to him the fourth time, running in the shape of a burden-bearing camel, sharp-toothed, swift ....., stamping forwards, long-haired.*

*Verethraghna, made by Ahura, came to him the fifth time, running in the shape of a boar, opposing the foes, a sharp-toothed he-boar, a sharp-jawed boar, that kills at one stroke, pursuing, wrathful, with a dripping face, strong, and swift to run, and rushing all around.*

*Verethraghna, made by Ahura, came to him the seventh time, running in the shape of a raven that ... below and ... above, and that is the swiftest of all birds, the lightest of the flying creatures.*

The conceptual framework of Behram Yazad as one who uses many forms to aid humankind has built up a long tradition of him being invoked in times of trouble, thus leading him to have the moniker Mushkil Asaan.

### HOM YASHT

Hom Yazad is the caretaker of the plant Haoma, considered to be a boon for health and to keep death away. Thus, Hom Yazad is also another healing angel.

*O Hom, warding off sickness! this (is) the sixth gift (that) I request of thee: may we become aware beforehand of the thief, the murderer (and) of the wolf.*

Once again, the wolf is equated with villainous motives similar to thieves and murderers. The plant used for healing by Hom Yazad has been identified as "ephedra" and is known to stimulate the heart, lungs, and nervous system.

In conclusion, you can observe that the animals given precedence in the yashts are those that were useful to humankind of that era such as oxen, camels and horses, while those that brought destruction such as snakes and wolves were presented as evil.

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Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage

Helpful and Beneficent Animals

By Ramiyar Karanjia

Horses

1. According to Zoroastrianism, horse is one of the most helpful and beneficent *gospands* “beneficent animal”. Since early times Iranians tamed horses and kept them in stables. Herodotus, while talking about Iranian education in the Achaemenian times said that “The Persian children were taught to speak the truth, ride a horse and shoot arrows from the age of five.”
2. There are at least five different words used for a horse in the Avesta. The most common among them is *aspa*. The other words are *aurvant*, *vastāra*, *yukhta* and *hita*. Each of the name gives an idea of the different usages of a horse in ancient times.
3. In the Avesta, the horse is shown to be an animal with amazing powers of strength, health, well-being, and eyesight. The remarkable eyesight of the horse is described as being able to distinguish a hair and its type even in the darkest of nights. Warriors, kings, and devotees prayed to divine beings so that they may acquire the strength of a horse.
4. The use of chariot almost immediately followed the domestication of horse. In the Avesta the word for a warrior is *rathaeshtār* which literally means “one standing on a chariot”. The adjective *aspāyaodha* “fighting on horse-back” is exclusively used for Zarir, brother of King Vishtaspa.

Even in those times, horses wore horse-shoes made of lead, sometimes decorated with gold.

5. The gift of horses was symbolic of the gift of wealth. When compared with the special metals, gold and silver, a horse was compared to silver whereas a camel was compared to gold. Yazads used to bestow their devotees with gifts of horses. Ashishwagh Yazad gives a gift of a thousand horses. Meher Yazad gifts good horses to those who are faithful to him.
6. In the Avesta, a horse is regarded as the vehicle of Avan, Sarosh

7. and Khorshed Yazads. Avan Yazad and Sarosh Yazad ride a chariot of four swift white horses.
8. Tir Yazad assumes the form of a white horse having yellow ears and a golden caparison. In opposition, the demon of drought Apaosha assumes the form of black, ugly and loathsome horse to fight Tir Yazad. This is the only instance where a demon is shown assuming the form of a hideous horse, otherwise, the horse is always associated with good divine beings and heroes.
9. The word for horse was also used allegorically to indicate the ‘senses’ which are originally untamed like the horses and need to be tamed in order to be of any use. There could be no better metaphor for senses than a horse. Though both are very essential, left to themselves both are wild and hence need to be restrained. Both have the ability of harming the person who uses them without proper knowledge but immensely helps those who use it cautiously and wisely.
10. A classic example of the word horse used metaphorically comes in Gatha Ushtavaiti where prophet Zarathushtra asks Ahura Mazda for ten pregnant mares, a stallion and a camel as a reward for his exertions. Dr.I. J. S. Taraporewala was one of the first to point out that there was more significance to the words horse and camel than literally understood. He cited the Kathopanishad (I.3.3-6) where the Soul is called the Lord of the Chariot, the Body is the Chariot



Rustam Captures the Horse, Rakhsh - Folio from a Shahnameh (Book of Kings) by Firdausi.

## Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage

and Senses are the Horses. He suggested a similar explanation for the reference in the Gatha – number ten indicating the ten senses – five senses of perception and five senses of action and the stallion indicating the Mind.

11. Among Zoroastrians, several names are associated with horses. In fact, no other animal is used so much for proper names as a horse. Some of these names are:

- Drvāspa “having a healthy horse”
- Tehmāspa “having a strong horse”
- Jāmāspa “having steady flow of horses”
- Kersāspa “having a lean horse”
- Vishtāspa “having several horses”
- Dejāmāspa, “having abundant flow of horses”
- Haechataspa “having a trained horse”
- Frināspa “having a loving horse”
- Pourushaspa “having many horses”
- Aurovat-aspa “having a swift horse”
- Hitāspa “having a restrained horse”
- Habāspa “having a good horse”
- Raevat-aspa “having an illustrious horse”
- Yukhtāspa “having a skilled horse”
- Fraoathat-aspa “having a foaming horse”
- Āsu-aspa “having a swift horse”
- Hazanghra-aspa “having a thousand horses”
- Renjat-aspa “having agile horses”

12. In ancient Iran, apart from the use of horses for domestic and war

purposes, they were also used for the sport of racing. Special swift horses were selected to and made to run on race-courses. Chariot racing was an also a significant royal sport. In various Yashts, Kayanian king Kaekhushru prayed to different Yazads to help him finish and win long horse races.

13. Several stories connected with horses abound in the Zoroastrian religion. One is about infant Zarathushtra being saved from stampeding horses by a white stallion. The other is about prophet Zarathushtra healing the king’s favourite horse, Aspe-sihā.

14. In the Shahnameh there are various incidents of the bravery and presence of mind of Rakhsh – the powerful chestnut-coloured horse of the great paladin Rustom. He was a very faithful horse and saved his master from certain

death several times. The stories about Rustom finding him and later their brave escapades together form a significant portion of the Shahnameh.

15. Another story is from the Shahnameh about king Kaekhushru being guided by a light near the ear (gush) of his horse (aspa) which helped him win a fortress and subsequently establish his claim over the throne.

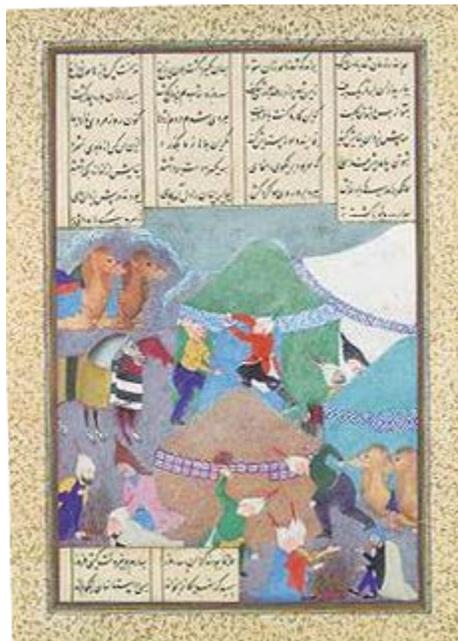
16. The Shahnameh also tells us about Behzad, the favourite horse of king Kaekhushru, which came to him from his father Siyavakhsh. Folklore also tells us about Shabdiz, the favourite horse of Sasanian King Khushru Purviz.

### Camels

1. Ancient Iran, being largely a desert, camel was the main mode of transport and hence was considered a very valuable animal. The camel was described as “having a high hump, abundant thinking power, swift runner and carrier of heavy loads.” Special shelters were built for housing camels.

2. The word for camel in Avesta is ushtra. It is most probably derived from Ōus- “to tame.” Two other words are used in the Avesta to describe a camel, both of which refer to a camel’s hump. They are stvi-kaofa, literally meaning “having a large mountain” and saeni-kaofa, literally meaning “having the peak of a mountain.”

3. As a domestic animal, the camel was regarded more valuable than a horse, a cow, an ox and a donkey. When compared with special metals gold and



*Isfandiyar's Sixth Course: He Comes Through the Snow", Folio 438r from the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasp*

## Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage

silver, a horse was compared to silver whereas a camel was compared to gold.

4. In the Avestan times, wealth of a person was often ascertained by the number of camels they possessed. Those who owned camels were considered wealthy and had great respect in society. Camels were desired as gifts and granted as a boon by Yazads.

5. Some proper names in the Avesta had the word ushtra in them.

- Zarathushtra “possessing mature camels”

- Frashaoshtra “possessing excellent camels”
- Ratushtra “possessing the leader among camel”
- Ranghushtra “possessing healthy camels”
- Ushtra by itself was also used as a name

6. The word ushtra is also used metaphorically in the Avesta to denote higher consciousness, since another derivation of the word ushtra is from Ösh– “to burn, to shine.” In that context the meaning of the name of prophet Zarathushtra is “one having a brilliant and higher consciousness.”



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### KILL THE CREEPY CRAWLIES!

*Guest Editor’s Note: The Bundahisn was compiled as a Creation Story over a thousand after Zarathushtra lived. It is an allegory of Good and Evil, but should not to be considered as a scriptural text. For moral guidance, we should refer to Zarathushtra’s words, which are accepting of all of Ahura Mazda’s creations, even the ones that give us the heeby jeebies.*

According to the Bundahisn, in the beginning, Ohrmazd created from his own essence, from material light, the forms of his own creatures, in the form of fire: bright, white, round, and manifest from afar. The Evil Spirit created his own creatures from material darkness, in the form of a frog: black, ashen, worthy of darkness, and evil, like the most sinful-natured *xrafstar*.

The term *xrafstar* is used specifically for reptiles and amphibians such as frogs, scorpions, lizards, and snakes, and insects such as ants, beetles, and locusts. In general, any animal that crept, crawled, pricked, bit, or stung, and seemed hideous and repulsive to human beings, was a *xrafstar*. Predators such as felines and wolves were also creatures of Evil Spirit, but in the same texts they are referred to as *dadan*, “wild animals, beasts.”

According to the instruction of Adurpad Mahraspandan, the high priest of Shapur II (309–79 CE), one is specially obligated to kill evil creatures on Den roz, the twenty-fourth day of the month. When killing evil animals one should always say: “I smite and kill [them] for the sake of ridding myself of sin, for virtue and love of [my] soul.”

Until the mid-nineteenth century, “the Zoroastrians of Kerman kept up an annual observance called *kharastar-kosi*, when members of the community went out into the plains around the city and slew as many *kharastars* as they could. This observance took place at the feast of Spandarmad, earth goddess, since it is the earth she protects and it is the crops it produces which suffer most from the ravages of *xrafstars*.”

*Mahnaz Moazami. (May 2005). Evil Animals in the Zoroastrian Religion History of Religions, Vol. 44, No. 4, pp. 300-317. The University of Chicago Press*

**Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage**

**Khafajeh Vase - An Animal Calendar**

By Goran Pavlovic



I have seen this picture of the "Khafajeh vase" many times before. Amazing object. It was dated to the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE, and it is called so because it was

allegedly found in Khafajeh, in Diyala region of Iraq in an unsupervised dig.

The vase was made in the so-called "Intercultural style" with stylistic elements from Mesopotamia, Iran, Central Asia, and Indus valley. And it is believed that it was not made in Iraq, but in Iran by the people of the Jiroft culture, an early Bronze Age archaeological culture, located in the territory of present-day Balochistan and Kermān Provinces of Iran.

As I said, it is an amazing object, but just how amazing this object really is, I only realized the other day, when for the first time I saw the whole design that adorns it unrolled into a continuous strip in the book, "Art of the First Cities: The Third Millennium B.C. from the Mediterranean to the Indus Valley" (pg 331).



Rolled-out photograph of a cylindrical vessel with heroes and animals (cat. no. 227).

"Art of the First Cities: The Third Millennium B.C. from the Mediterranean to the Indus Valley" (2003). Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.) Page 331

The design is divided into four "scenes".

1. Two bear cubs sitting on both sides of a palm tree in bloom.
2. A human-looking being with sun and moon crescent, kneels or sits on two zebus, holding two flows of water. Tree branches full of leaves behind.
3. A human-looking being with star or sun, holding two snakes, sits or stands on two lions.
4. Lion, scorpion and vulture attack or eat a dead zebu.

The official interpretation of the image in the book is: "heroes, masters of animals subduing nature". I disagree. And to understand why I am so sure that this has nothing to do with any imaginary "masters of animals" we need to look at climate and animal behaviour in the Jiroft area.

**CLIMATE**

Jiroft culture was centred around the Halil River catchment area in Kerman province. The climatic year in the Halil River (Jiroft) area is divided into a dry season (April/May to October/November) and a wet season (November

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/December to March/April). The wettest month is February while the driest month is July which is also the hottest month. The precipitation falls as rain in the valley and as snow in the mountains which surround it. And it is the snow that fell on the mountains that affected the life of the Jiroft people more than the rain that fell on the valley. The rivers in the mountain areas of Iran, including the Halil river, are fed mostly by snowmelt, which starts in late February or early March, and peaks in late April, or early May. The snowmelt brought sediments with it from the mountains and created rich alluvial plains ideal for agriculture. It also fed the river until the end of June, allowing for intensive irrigation for months after the last spring rains, extending the growing season significantly.

The snowmelt in the surrounding high mountains also fed a shallow groundwater table in the alluvial plains which created many artesian wells and springs. Agriculture and civilization flourish where freshwater is readily available. If the rain and snow ever stopped falling, the river would stop flowing and that would mean the end of life in the Jiroft valley. And this is likely what happened at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE.

### ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR

Now for the animals. On the vase, we have bears, zebu cattle, Eurasian lions, scorpions, vultures, and snakes. What is the meaning of this menagerie?

<p><b>Syrian Brown Bear and Asiatic Black Bear</b></p>	<p>The Syrian Brown Bear is distributed throughout Northern Armenia, Azerbaijan, Abkhazia in Georgia, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Turkey, and Turkmenistan. Asiatic Black Bear is found in the forests of Eastern Asia from Iran to Taiwan and Japan, particularly in hilly and mountainous terrain. They mate in June and July with cubs born in the winter in January and February. Both Syrian Brown Bears and Asian Black Bears prepare their dens for hibernation in mid-October, and will sleep from November until March when they will emerge out of their dens with their cubs. Guess what happens in Iran at the exact time when the bear cubs emerge from their dens? Date palm pollination, which in the Northern Hemisphere takes place in March/April. This is what is shown on the Khafajeh vase - bear cubs next to a blooming date tree.</p>
<p><b>Zebu</b></p>	<p>I couldn't find much information about the natural mating season of Zebu cattle except two notes from "Zebu Cattle of India and Pakistan" which states that the Dhani cattle mating has a slight peak May to August, and the Kankrej cattle mating season is March to August. I would suggest, based on the behaviour of other wild cattle (aurochs, buffalos) which both have a single mating season, and Indus valley depictions, that the wild zebu also had a single mating season which spanned the summer (May-July) which peaked in May.</p>
<p><b>Eurasian lions</b></p>	<p>As for Eurasian lions, their main mating season was and still is August to October.</p>
<p><b>Snakes</b></p>	<p>Snakes are a symbol of the sun's heat. The only true solar animals, they are in our world when the sun is in it too (day, and during the hot, dry part of the year), and in the underworld when the sun is there too (night, and during the wet, cold part of the year).</p>
<p><b>Vulture</b></p>	<p>Vultures in Iraq, Iran, and North India start their mating season at the end of autumn, the beginning of winter (late October-early November).</p>
<p><b>Scorpion</b></p>	<p>As for scorpions, they disappear from the outside nature (and probably appear inside human dwellings) at the end of autumn, the beginning of winter, when the weather gets too cold and damp.</p>

## Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage

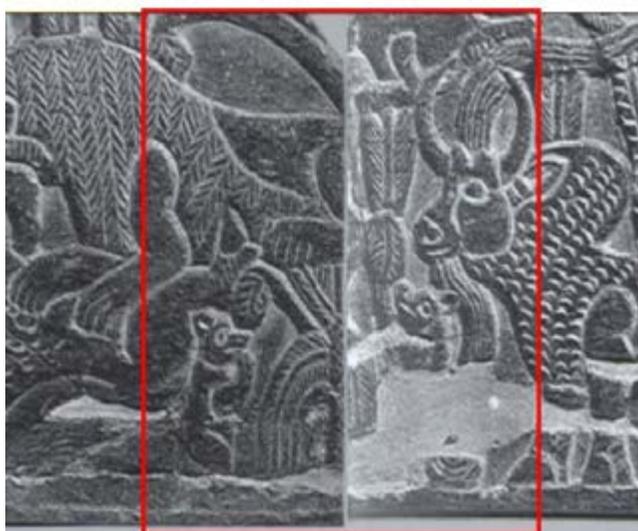


### THE IMAGERY

So, let's have a look at the "Khafajeh vase" imagery again, with all the knowledge about the natural world in which the Jiroft people who made this amazing vase lived.

If we look at the zodiac circle, we can see that each of the seasons either starts or ends with a sign representing a large animal – in solar year markers used during the Bronze Age, spring starts in Aquarius, summer starts in Taurus, autumn starts in Leo, and winter starts in Scorpio.

#### 1. The Bear Cubs Scene



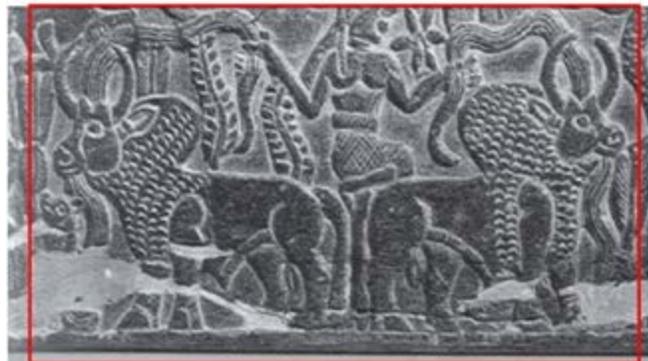
Two bear cubs sitting on both sides of a palm tree in bloom - Khafajeh vase, 3 BCE

Bear cubs are born at the end of Jan beginning of Feb, beginning of spring. They emerge from their dens in Mar, middle of spring, at the beginning of the date palms pollination and the beginning of the snowmelt. So, I would say that the bear cubs scene symbolizes the spring.

#### 2. The Zebus Cattle Scene

Zebu's mating season coincides with the snowmelt flow season which peaks in Taurus, the sign of the bull. This is why the "human looking being" who stands on the zebus is holding flowing water, the rivers among lush vegetation. So, I would say that the zebus symbolize summer. The snowmelt surge starts diminishing towards the end of June, around the summer solstice. Which I would say is the border between the zebu scene and the lion scene. The maximum water flow beginning of summer, Taurus. The

minimum water flow is at the end of summer, in the season Leo represented by the lion.



A human-looking being with sun and moon crescent, kneels or sits on two zebus, holding two flows of water. Tree branches full of leaves behind. - Khafajeh vase, 3 BCE

#### 3. The Lions Scene



A human-looking being with star or sun, holding two snakes, sits or stands on two lions. - Khafajeh vase, 3 BCE

Lion mating season coincides with the driest part of the year in the Halil river catchment area. Not only is this the period with the least precipitation, but also the snow melt flow has stopped, so the river is at its lowest level. And Leo is also the hottest part of the year. This is why the "human looking being" who stands on lions is holding snakes, depicting the height of the heat. And the lions are depicted standing in an arid landscape with no vegetation, so I would say that the lions symbolize autumn.

If you look carefully, the tips of the lions' tails look like wheat ears. Why? Is this significant? I Googled Iran's grain harvest season and (eventually) found that the wheat

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harvest season is approximately 4.5 months in Iran starting in early April up to mid-August, depending on the region and its local climate.

In the photo essay, "Farmers of Deh Ziyar village in Kerman province, harvest wheat using traditional methods" (Mehr News Agency, 13 August 2019), photographs show farmers are harvesting grain in the season of the Leo in the zodiac.

Is this why lions on this vase made by the people of the Jiroft culture from the Kerman province of Iran have tails that end in grain ears? I just looked at the pictures of the wheat being harvested in Kerman province. It looks like one of the old wheat types, such as emmer, or durum, both of which are "awned" (awns are the long, thin structures, which give the wheat heads a bearded appearance). Durum wheat is the predominant wheat type grown in the Middle East. And it is traditionally a "spring wheat" which is sown in February/March and harvested in July/August.

#### 4. The Lion, the Scorpion and the Vulture Scene



Lion, scorpion and snake attack or eat a dead zebu. - Khafajeh vase, 3 BCE

In this scene, the lion (autumn) has killed the zebu (summer) and is now eating the carcass of a long-dead animal. The lion is joined by the scorpion and the vulture. The vulture is the dual zodiac sign for Scorpio. On the zodiac circle, and in general as solar year animal markers, vultures and scorpions both symbolize the beginning of winter. And the arrival of rain and snow. So, I would say that the scorpion and vulture symbolize winter.

So here we have spelled out in animal solar year markers, the climate in the Halil river basin, where Jiroft culture once thrived. This is an extremely complex set of interconnected animal and plant calendar markers, which perfectly describe the climate in Jiroft valley. There is no way this is an accident or coincidence. Which is why "Khafajeh vase" is so important - it proves that the Jiroft culture, like that of the Indus Valley residents, Elamites, Akkadians, Sumerians, Assyrians, Egyptians, Hittites, Minoans, Mycenaeans, also used animal solar year markers. The same ones in the same way.

*For a more detailed account of the Khafajeh Vase and other related posts, please visit the author's blog Old European Culture at [oldeuropeanculture.blogspot.com](http://oldeuropeanculture.blogspot.com).*

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Goran Pavlovic is interested in history and he has maintained a blog "Old European Culture" since 2014. Initially, his posts were primarily about Slav culture, but have expanded to include ancient artifacts and discoveries from many historical cultures.

 [oldeuropeanculture.blogspot.com](http://oldeuropeanculture.blogspot.com)

 Goran Pavlovic [www.facebook.com/serbian.irish](http://www.facebook.com/serbian.irish)

## Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage



### Animals in Our Rituals

#### Sagdid: Confirmation of Death

At a Zoroastrian funeral, the prayers for the deceased - primarily the yasna that includes the Gathas - are recited by two priests. Halfway through the recital of Yasna 31.4, a special dog that is 'four-eyed' (*chatur-chasma*) - a dog with two eye-like spots above its eyes - is brought before the body to confirm death in a ritual called *sagdid* (dog-sight). If the dog stares steadily at the body, then the person is still alive. If the dog does not look at the body, the passing away of the person is confirmed.

In the days before doctor-issued death certificates, the *sagdid* ritual was particularly important to ensure that a coma was not being mistaken for death. The behaviour of the dog was found to be a particularly reliable test when repeated at least three times during the process and once during the start of each *gah* (six-hour division of the day). It stands to reason that in the old days, the first *sagdid* would have been performed as soon as the body was brought to the mortuary. After the *sagdid* the praying of the *yasna* continues.

K. E. Eduljee (n.d.) *After Life and Funeral Customs*. Heritage Institute ([heritageinstitute.com](http://heritageinstitute.com))

#### Chom-e-Swaa

In ancient times, Zarathushtis were pastoralists, and dogs played an important role in keeping herds and households protected. The “herd dog” and the “house dog” are mentioned in the scriptures as worthy of gratitude, and in the ecclesiastical code, the Vendidad (13.28) it is said that a dog should be fed milk, fat, and meat, which was the staple diet of humans in ancient times. The primary principle behind this edict is to acknowledge the interdependence of Ahura Mazda’s creations, and to recognize human beings’ ecological responsibilities.

In the Sassanian times, the tradition of *chom-e-swaa* evolved where it was obligatory, as a gesture of thanksgiving, to save a bit of the meal and feed it to stray dogs. Many Zarathushtis living in urban areas where stray dogs are uncommon choose to feed birds to maintain the tradition.

As a gesture of thanksgiving on special occasions, Zarathushtis also feed cows or, in urban areas, give money to buy feed for the cows. This is in honor of Geush Urvan, the mythological bovine that had both milk and semen and was, therefore, the progenitor of all beneficent animal life.

Farishta Murzban Dinshaw (2012). *Four-Legged and Feathered Friends*. Eat Pray Live: A celebration of Zarathushti culture and cuisine. ([fezana.org](http://fezana.org))



**Creatures Great and Small in Zoroastri Heritage**



**The Beneficent Cattle**

**In the Gathas**

“While the Gatha texts are in many ways difficult to decipher, the extraordinary importance they accord to cattle is clear. This is perhaps natural, given what we suppose to be the pastoral, nomadic social economy of the prehistoric Iranians, who were almost totally dependent upon their livestock for their own survival. Even more significant, perhaps, is that animals in general are described as having souls, and there is no clear hierarchy that places them on a level below that of humans.”

*Richard Foltz. (2010). “Zoroastrian Attitudes toward Animals”. Society and Animals, 18: 367-378*

**The Creation of Cattle**

In the Sassanian era, the Bundahishn was compiled to give the creation story. It is a mythical story with heroics, battles between good and evil, and strange creatures. In this text, Hormuzd (Avestan Ahura Mazda) created the Gavaevodata or the primordial ox, who was a hermaphrodite, having both milk and semen. It was "white, bright like the moon, and three measured poles in height." This unique ox lived on the river Veh Daiti, across from the bank from where Gayomard (Avestan Gayomartan), the mythical first human, lived. Gavaevodata was killed by the devil, and all species of herbs and plants, and animals arose from his marrow and organs.

“First, two oxen, one male and one female, and, afterwards, one pair of every single species was let go into the earth... And, afterwards, the three classes (kardak) of animals were produced therefrom, as it says that first were the goat and sheep, and then the camel and swine, and then the horse and ass.”

The Bundahishn ("Creation"), or Knowledge from the Zand. Translated by E. W. West, from Sacred Books of the East, volume 5, Oxford University Press, 1897. Chapter 14.

**Representation in Rituals**

Milk as a representative of animal life in Zoroastrian rituals such as *jashans* and *afringan* ceremony is common today. This symbolic representation of the animal kingdom is called in Middle Persian *gosudag*, a word derived from Avestan *geus huda*, "beneficent cow." In previous times, the *gosudag* was ghee or butter, and in more ancient times, a piece of meat from a sacrificial animal was common.

*Albert De Jong. (2002). “Animal Sacrifice in Ancient Zoroastrianism: A Ritual and Its Interpretations” Sacrifice in Religious Experience Series: Numen Book Series, Volume: 93.*



**Vitality of Milk**

“Nowhere was this goodness more evident than in the milk of these animals, which conveys the ideal, life-sustaining qualities of moisture, warmth, and light to those who consume it. Numerous texts describe milk as the best of foods, capable of fulfilling all mortal needs and one should also note that, in contrast to most other foods, milk is obtained without causing death to any plant or animal. Infants subsist on milk alone, as did the firstborn humans. Souls are greeted with milk (or butter) as they enter paradise, and when the world’s perfection is restored, people will return to an all-milk diet, then renounce food altogether.”

*Taylor A Nelson. (2021). “Food and Purity in Zoroastrianism: Then to Now.” Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies, 11, no. 1: 47-60.*

**Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage**

**Herd Mentality**

*The Link Between Vohu Manah (Good Mind) and Geush (Cattle)*

By Meheryar N. Rivetna

Illustration by Farzana Cooper

The eleventh month in the Zoroastrian calendar is named Bahman as is the second day of every month. In the month of Bahman and on Bahman *roj* (day) of every month, as well as on the days of the month named after the associates (*hamkars*) of Bahman: Mohr, Ram and Gosh, many Zoroastrians abstain from eating meat.

What is the significance of Bahman in the Zoroastrian religion? And why do we not eat meat in the month and the days mentioned?

Ahura Mazda, in creating the world, established (created) seven attributes known in the post-Gathic scriptures as the Bountiful Immortals or Amesha Spentas — a term that does not appear in the Gathas.

Ahura Mazda heads this heptad, followed by six attributes:

1. Vohu Manah (the Good Mind),
2. Asha (Righteousness or Perfect Order),
3. Khshathra Vairya (Perfect Dominion of Ahura Mazda),
4. Armaiti (Devotion to the laws of Ahura Mazda),
5. Haurvatat (Well Being or Perfection of oneself),
6. Amertat (Eternal Bliss).

The Amesha Spentas are not physical deities as some tend

to believe. They are non-anthropomorphic characteristics humankind must incorporate in its persona to better itself and the world. The Gathas personify and deify these abstract concepts, because as Dastur Maneckji N. Dhalla reminds us: "Man, however, can comprehend abstract ideas and spiritual conceptions when they are put before him in words and expressions clothed in the garb of earthly imagery and compassed in human language."<sup>1</sup>

Zarathustra, therefore, speaks of Ahura Mazda and the Amesha Spentas in figurative language. While all six attributes are important, Zarathustra emphasizes that having a 'Good Mind' is a prerequisite to observing the other five aspects. The quintessence of Ahura Mazda being wisdom, the importance of wisdom is heavily stressed in the Gathas. It takes Vohu Manah to conform to the other aspects. "...O, most beneficent spirit, give me the strength to fulfill Thy declared purpose with the help of the Good Mind". (Ha 51.7).

A 'Good Mind' is one that is imbued with wisdom, intellect and rationality. In Avestan, this attribute is termed Vohu Manah. In Pahlavi, this aspect is referred to as Wahman and in New Persian it becomes Bahman. [Bah=Vohu=Good; Man=Manah=Mind]. Therefore, Bahman and Vohu Manah mean the same thing.

So, what does Bahman or Vohu Manah have to do with eating meat? In the Gathas, Zarathustra announces to Ahura Mazda: "...Thine, with wisdom, the creator of the cow (geush tasha) didst give the cow a free path to the herdsman to choose for itself the cattle-protector with the Good Mind (*vangeush fshenghim manangho*)". (Ha 31.9-10).



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Zarathustra possessed extraordinary poetic skills and so his compositions are rich in allegories. He gives the cow his voice in the Gathas. (Some scholars use the archaic term 'kine' which means cow or cattle). The cow is a metaphor for humankind and Zarathustra uses the herdsman as a metaphor for righteous humans who must be shepherds to protect the cow (humankind) from iniquity.

Vohu Manah literally means the good moral state of a person's mind enabling the individual to perform duties, whether these be worship of Ahura Mazda or care of cows, which in the Gathas is deemed particularly important.<sup>3</sup>

To Zarathustra, the maternal, mild, beneficent cow represented the "good" animal creation upon which human life depended. The cow also symbolizes the righteous humans suffering from evil—as the cattle of the Iranian steppes suffered from marauders<sup>2</sup>. In Zarathustra's time, cattle raiders plundered the settled agriculturists and their livestock causing Zarathustra to use the voice of the cow to lament the wickedness in the world. (Ha 29.1). In the Gathas, Zarathustra calls for a pastoralist or agriculturalist life as opposed to a nomadic existence. A pastoralist, defined as a cattle farmer, tends to have stability and adheres to righteous living, instead of an aimless life. "For the benefit of the cow by (doing) these best actions, we urge those who listen and those who do not, those who rule and those who do not, to provide peace and pasture". (Ys 35.4)<sup>4</sup>. The cow is a metaphor for humankind.

In Zoroastrian scriptures, the cow is seen as a primary nourisher of humankind and is given a revered status.

"We call upon you as the waters, (we call upon) you as the milch cows, (we call upon) you as the mother cows, O Prize cows who care for the destitute, provide drink for everyone..." (Ha 38.5)<sup>4</sup>. [Milch cows are cows with milk-yielding ability and is a metaphor for the waters as are prize cows that are a source of good provisions for the material world in the same way that cows yield abundant milk]<sup>4</sup>.

In the scriptures, cows are seen as being worthy of worship, and along with other animals are said to possess souls<sup>5</sup>. "...we now worship the cow's soul (geus uruuananemca) and her maker. Now we worship our own souls as well as those of domestic animals (uruno pasukanamca) which desire to gain our support.". (Ys 39.1)<sup>4</sup>

Cattle are described in the Gathas as a source of human joy<sup>6</sup>.

"For whom hast Thou fashioned the joy bringing, fertile cow?" (Ha 44.6)<sup>6</sup>.

"Thou art the virtuous Father of this spirit, the spirit that fashioned the joy-bringing cow..." (Ha 47.3)<sup>6</sup>.

"How, Wise One, should that person seek after the joy-bringing cow...." (Ha 50.2)<sup>6</sup>.

The link between the material and the spiritual worlds is an idea that pre-dates Zarathustra. After Zarathustra's passing, each of the aspects came to be identified with physical elements of creation<sup>7</sup> —the Good Mind with cattle, Truth with fire, the Kingdom with metals, Right-Mindedness with the earth, Wholeness with water, and Immortality with plants<sup>7</sup>. This link is disrupted when humans choose the path of impiety.

The allegory of Bahman or Vohu Manah being the guardian of cattle is the reason why not eating meat in the month and on days named after this attribute is practiced. Is abstention

from the meat of land animals the only restriction? While some consume fish and eggs, and not meat, on these days, there are many who abstain from seafood and food items emblematic of life such as eggs. Finally, a Good Mind is one that is free of irrational ideas that are counterintuitive to Zarathustra's teachings.

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## Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage



By Aryenish Birdie

In our religion, one can point to numerous sources calling for compassion toward each other, animals, and the planet. In our most simple and basic prayer *Ashem Vohu* we recite that the individual's responsibility toward our selves and society is paramount. In our most basic tenet - *Humata, Hukhta, Hvarshata* (good thoughts, good words, good deeds) - we remind ourselves to have good thoughts, words, and deeds. In the Gathas (Ha33), we read that justice is the foundation of civilized society. All of these teachings make it impossible for a Zarathushti like me to ignore injustice when I see it.

When I was growing up, my parents emphasized the teachings and lifestyles of the many key Parsi figures of our past who spent their lives working for others and for the progress of humanity. It is with their energy rooted in me that I have dedicated my life to fighting for non-human animals (humans are, of course, animals after all).

People often ask me, "Why do you care so much about animals?" The question calls to mind a harrowing experience I had in my 7<sup>th</sup> grade biology class when my mother vehemently opposed my participation in the frog dissection project. I was curious about her stance and her passion for the issue so I began to investigate what motivated her to fight

against it. It was through this research that I learned how animals suffered and died in laboratories. What I saw moved me to action.

After I learned how animals are used and abused in experiments for chemical, cosmetic, and pharmaceutical companies. I became exposed to how animals are treated behind closed doors throughout society. In puppy mills, they suffer for the human desire to have a pure-bred dog; in fur farms they are exploited so humans can own a fur coat, a status symbol of wealth. We watch them for our entertainment in zoos and circuses, and, of course, the time we most interact with animals is on our plates.

For over 20 years, I've abstained from eating the flesh of animals and their by-products (milk and eggs, including wearing leather, fur, and silk) because I saw videos and images of what was involved to make a once living animal the meat on my plate or milk in my glass and I knew I didn't want to contribute to that.

I also knew I could be equally as healthy — if not healthier — by abstaining from animal products as vegans tend to have lower rates of heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, and obesity.

I know that going vegan is difficult for most people, especially Parsis, so my biggest piece of advice is if you're

interested in making a difference for your health, the environment, or animals focus on reducing your meat consumption and eating more plant-based meals. You can make a commitment to avoid eating meat before 5 pm or pick a day of the week to eat plant-based meals and stick with it. If you make a mistake, it's okay, just try again the next day. Don't expect perfection. Every time you make a choice to avoid eating meat you are making a difference and that's meaningful.

As a Zarathushti, I thrive to embody the core principles of our religion — especially good deeds - and make society a better place for all beings who live on this beautiful earth. I invite you to join me!



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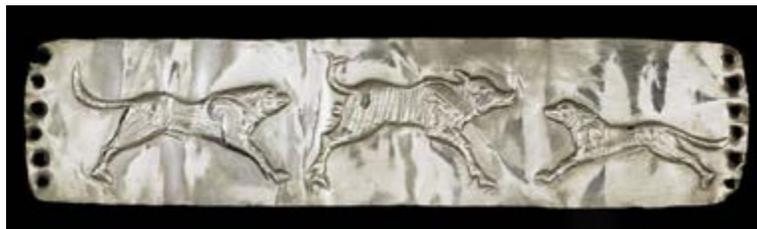
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One-Third Human: Dogs in Zoroastrianism

By Miguel Angel Andrés Toledo

Dogs were and still are highly esteemed by Zoroastrians, who included them among the beneficent creatures of Ahura Mazda. Since



antiquity, as manifest in the Avestan texts, Zoroastrianism exhorted its believers to respect, protect and take good care of dogs, as they would have done with their human fellows.

The oldest mention to dogs in the Zoroastrian literature is found in the Avestan text of the Wīdēwdād or “Law to expel the demons”, which, among other contents, devotes several chapters to narrate Ahura Mazda’s answers to Zaratustra’s questions about the right treatment of dogs and dog-like animals. Ahura Mazda created the dog, as said in Wīdēwdād 13.39 (spānəm. daθəm. zaratustra. azəm. yō. ahurō. mazdā. “I, Ahura Mazda, created the dog, o Zaratustra”), so it must be protected as part of his good creation.

The prescriptions of the Wīdēwdād about dogs can be counted among the first examples in the history of humankind of the existence of certain animal rights. In fact, in these ancient regulations, dogs had a similar juridical status to humans, were likewise treated as subjects of law, and also had their own rights. Thus, killing, mistreating or not properly feeding a dog, apart from being morally condemnable, was a crime implying severe juridical consequences to the offender. This is quite relevant, insofar as this

Zoroastrian text, composed several centuries BCE, was in this regard far more advanced than most modern societies that have not even considered the possibility that animals may have rights.

Dogs were not only loyal friends and companions that helped people in their daily tasks, like protecting the fold, guarding the household or hunting, but also played an important role in Zoroastrian rituals. Dogs, preferably those with yellowish and white hair, yellow ears and two spots on the forehead, were necessary to perform the sagdīd and the baršnūm rituals. Unlike believers of other religions, Zoroastrians considered dogs as pure and beneficent animals, whose gaze expels the nasu, causing extreme impurity, and therefore prevents that this evil entity from polluting people.

Apart from their activity in the material world, Avestan, Pahlavi and Zoroastrian New Persian texts refer to myths about one or two dogs guarding the pass to the afterlife, which are parallel to those of several ancient Indo-European cultures. They generally serve as advice and warning to properly treat dogs in this life, because those otherworldly dogs will not help the souls of those who acted otherwise, as it said, for instance, in

the Pahlavi text known as The Mace of Mihr 7–11: ud sag ī zarrēn-gōš ān ruwān rāy hamān gāh bē ēn rāh pad wēnēd agar andar gētīy sagīgān rāy āzāred ān-išān pad

ruwānī cinwad puhl widardan nē tuwān “And the Golden-eared dog stares at the soul right there on the way. If one hurts dogs in the material world, then he is not able to cross the Pass of Cinwad in spiritual form.”

As we can see, dogs were and are very important animals in the Zoroastrian religion, and the respect for these beneficent creatures can be summarized in the following sentence of the Pahlavi text of the Great Bundahišn 13.28: ēd rāy sag xwānīhēd cē-š sē ēk-ē az mardōmān “This is why it is called dog (sag), because it has one-third (sē ēk-ē) from humans.”



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Image: Hunting dogs on a silver plaque, 6 – 7th century CE, Iran: plaque | British Museum

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One of the creation myths in the Pahlavi *Bundahishn* recounts that many life forms – plants, animals, birds, fish – were generated by a mythical primeval cow/ox. I think the full story originally was a beautiful allegory, but I will not get into that here. This text also says that we, "... changed from the shape of a plant into the shape of man, ..." *Bundahishn* Ch. 15.4 - 5, E.W. West translation). These ideas are not specifically expressed in the Gathas. But they demonstrate that the mind-set of Zarathushtra's ancient culture included the view that all living things are connected -- a view that Zarathushtra did not reject. In his songs, he (expressly and impliedly) links divine qualities with multiple aspects of the material existence -- indicating a mind-set that associates the divine with all that exists. This idea is echoed in the Younger Avestan *Farvardin Yasht*, which speaks of worshipping/celebrating, the fravashi (the Divine) within all things,

"... tame animals, ... wild animals,... animals that live in the water, animals that live under the ground, ... the flying ones, ... the running ones, ... the grazing ones. We worship their Fravashis (§74).  
... That of the sky, that of the waters, that of the earth, that of plants, ..." (§86), Darmesteter translation.

If ancient Zoroastrians believed that animals had fravashis (the Divine within), do you think they would have tried to please the Divine by inflicting on animals the pain of ritual slaughter? True, Avestan rituals included food offerings, intended (symbolically) to nourish the Divine. But there is no ancient Avestan text (composed in Avestan times) which describes slaughtering any animal as part of a ritual (speculations of academic scholars to the contrary notwithstanding). Let us look at the evidence, starting with the oldest text.

## Is There Animal Sacrifice in Our Ancient Texts?

By Dina G. McIntyre

In the Gathas, Zarathushtra speaks of worshipping the Divine with Its Own qualities.

"Yes, praising, I shall always worship ... you, Wise Lord, with truth and the very best thinking and with their rule..." Y50:4.

"I shall try to glorify Him for us with prayers of [*aramaiti*], ..." Y45:10.

Prayers of *aramaiti* are prayers of thoughts, words and actions that embody truth (*asha*-).

And Zarathushtra uses certain ritual food-offerings of his culture -- milk (*eezhaa*-), butter (*aazuiti*-), bread/cake (*draonah*) -- as metaphors for how we nourish the Divine with its own qualities, thereby strengthening It, making the divine in existence increase.

"But that man, Wise One, is both milk [*eezhaa*-] and butter [*aazuiti*-] (for Thee) namely, the one who has allied his conception [*daena*- 'envisionment'] with good thinking. ... Y49:5.

"... Your enduring worshipful offering [*draonah*] has been established to be [*ameretat*- 'non-deathness'] and completeness [*haurvatat*-]." Y33:8.

Here, our own self-realization (the complete attainment of truth, an existence no longer bound by mortality) is the worshipful offering [*draonah*] that Wisdom wants.

The Gathas do not mention any ritual meat offering. And Zarathushtra specifically disapproves of the ritual killing of an animal. He says,

"Even the Kavis have continually fixed their intentions on capturing and plundering the riches of this world, since they have begun to aid [*dregvantem* '(what is) untruthful' ] and to say: '*The cow is to be killed (for him) who has been kindling the Haoma*.'" Y32:14.

The word 'Haoma' is not in the Avestan text -- the Avestan word is thought to have been a ritual intoxicant.

The Gathas do not mention the names of any deities other than "Wisdom", and/or the "Lord" -- mentioned in almost every verse. However, as centuries passed, the worship of pre- and post-Zarathushtrian deities become syncretized with Zarathushtra's religion. Worship once again became highly ritualized, and Younger Avestan (YA<sub>v</sub>.) chants

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show that meat was included in the food-offerings for these deities. Even so, there is no mention of slaughtering animals as part of any ritual. So, this ritual 'meat' could equally have been meat slaughtered for human consumption, a choice part of which was set aside for an offering to a particular deity. These food offerings (after they had been ritually offered to the deity), probably were consumed by the priests and assembled people -- just as the (non-meat) foods in the *jashan* ceremony are consumed today.

Here is a typical description of ritual offerings from the YAv. *Aban Yasht*. Notice, the "sacrifice" includes meat, but the *Yasht* does not describe (nor even mention) any ritual slaughtering of animals. Here, the deity Anahita says,

"... Who will offer me a sacrifice, with libations cleanly prepared and well-strained, together with the Haoma and meat ? ..." *Aban Yasht*, § 8, Darmesteter translation.

Other typical descriptions of YAv. rituals also include "bundles of baresma" – a type of plant. Over time however, these ritual offerings came to include not only food, but also wealth. In that ancient culture, herds of domestic animals were wealth. And in many *Yashts* (repeated almost verbatim), various legendary heroes supposedly offered large herds of domestic animals to a named deity to obtain their wishes for success, power, heirs, etc. Here is an example involving Yima (Jamsheed) from the *Aban Yasht*.

"To her did Yima Kshaeta ... offer up a sacrifice ... with a hundred male horses, a thousand oxen, ten thousand lambs. He begged of her a boon, saying: 'Grant me this, ... that I may become the sovereign lord of all countries ...' Ardvi Sura Anahita granted him that boon, as he was offering libations, giving gifts, sacrificing, ..." *Aban Yasht*, §§ 25 - 27.

When I first read these passages, I assumed (with great disgust) that "offer up a sacrifice" and "sacrificing" meant the ritual slaughter of these animals. But other descriptions of "sacrifice" show us that this is not so. And a moment's reflection makes it apparent, that the ritual slaughter of such large herds could not have been intended for the following reasons. In those ancient communities, neither the priests nor even the entire tribal village would have been able to consume 11,100 slaughtered domestic animals

**Domestic animals were vital to survival. People could not have survived if such huge numbers were slaughtered... Even just gifting a deity with 11,100 animals (without slaughter), would have impoverished any chieftain or ruler, however wealthy.**

at one go. And if they were ritually slaughtered, but not eaten, how would they have disposed of 11,100 carcasses? Domestic animals were vital to survival. People could not have survived if such huge numbers were slaughtered (repeatedly! – with each hero's request). Even just gifting a deity with 11,100 animals (without slaughter), would have impoverished any chieftain or ruler, however wealthy. Horses especially were an indispensable part of any ruler's army – essential to his retaining power, in an age when tribal warfare was endemic (as the YAv. texts show). And not all the named persons who (supposedly) offered such huge herds were rulers. So, these numbers and herds may simply have represented the hopes of the priests (who composed these chants), because they would have been the recipients of the gifts of such living herds (read wealth) in behalf of the deity.

In short, the notion that the *Yashts* describe the sacrificial slaughter of thousands of animals, is simply not supported – neither by specific textual evidence, nor by reality. The problem is that more than one Avestan word has been translated as 'sacrifice' which carries the notion of ritually killing animals. But linguists themselves are not in agreement, or consistent in translating such words. To illustrate: Humbach translates Avestan *yaz-* words as 'sacrifice', 'worship', and 'celebrate'.

I am immensely grateful to linguists who have expended so much time and effort to decode Avestan. Without their work, Zarathushtra's own words would not now be available to us. But we should not blindly accept their translation choices without question, especially since they themselves do not agree.

Even more important: We need to acquire cutting edge knowledge of Avestan (from professional Indo-Iranian philologists). If we do not, knowledge of the Avestan language will once again be lost to us, as such linguists retire or depart this life – which is currently happening.

There is another aspect of how all creatures great and small, factor into Zarathushtra's way of worshipping the Divine. In the Gathas, the links between qualities of the Divine and aspects of the material existence are kaleidoscopic. By Pahlavi times, these links had become rigid – one to one – and each quality of the Divine was

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then believed to be a living entity who cared for the aspect of the material existence with which it was linked.

A *Pahlavi Fragment* text states that we should make these entities happy by taking care of the aspect of the material existence under its care. And the material link for good thinking (Pahl. *Vohuman*) was cattle. This text does not associate 'cattle' with multiple plants, animals, birds (as in the *Bundahishn*). Perhaps between persecution and destruction, the author may no longer have known of that myth (or allegory). His understanding of creatures to be cared for had shrunk to 'the well-yielding cattle' (a homocentric view), but still

worthwhile. And I was touched by his advice. He says: "9. Whoever wishes to propitiate Vohuman in the world, and wishes to act for his happiness, is he who wishes to promote the things of Vohuman; ... the well-yielding cattle ... and should act for their happiness; in the terrible days and the hurried times... which befall them, he should afford them protection from the oppressive and idle.

10. He should not give them as a bribe to ... a wicked tyrant, but should keep them in a pleasant and warm ... place; ... he should provide them a store of straw and corn, so that it be not necessary to keep them on the pastures in winter; ... he should not drive them apart from their young, and should not put the young apart from their milk."

*Fragment Text*, §§ 9, 10, E. W. West translation.

I feel a deep sense of admiration, gratitude, affection, for this unknown author who, despite not having the benefit of Zarathushtra's words, despite living "in the terrible days" of his time period, nevertheless clung to such teachings as were passed down to him – trying to *live* his beliefs (with courage!) and recording them for the benefit of others.

Today, we are so lucky. Zarathushtis in India and in the diaspora are no longer persecuted. And although only approximately 80% of the Avestan language has been decoded, (per verbal advice from Professor Insler a few years ago), we once again have Zarathushtra's own words, enabling us to move past the restrictions in thinking caused by so much loss of knowledge, and discovering once again his inclusive, holistic thought. He tells us to use our good

**He [Zarathushtra] tells us to use our good thinking (*vohu-manah* - the comprehension of truth), to heal – not just cattle, not even just all creatures, but existence as a whole – from all that is false, ignorant, wrong.**

**- Y44:2, Y50:11**

thinking (*vohu-manah*- the comprehension of truth), to heal – not just cattle, not even just all creatures, but existence as a whole – from all that is false, ignorant, wrong.

In the Gathas, good thinking (*vohu-manah*-) is used in ways that include more than just intellectual functions. Its meaning includes the full spectrum of (awake) consciousness – intellectual, emotional, creative, etc. So, we 'heal' existence through reason, through exercising good judgment, and also through loving kindness, generosity, goodness. We heal existence by using our minds/hearts/spirits, (*vohu-manah*-) to search for and understand, the many-splendored faces of truth – factual truths, emotional truths, social truths, scientific truths – truth in all its enlightening glory, and translate it into words and actions. As Zarathushtra says,

"... Through good thinking the [*data* 'Giver'] of existence shall promote the true realization of what is most healing according to our wish." Y50:11;

"...the loving man ... [*spenta*- 'beneficial'] through truth [*asha*-], watching over the heritage for all, is a world--healer and Thy ally in [*mainyu*- '(his) way of being'], Wise One." Y44.2.

*Quotations from the Gathas are from the Insler 1975 translation, but English words in square brackets and black font are translation choices which I now think are more accurate. Quotations from Younger Avestan and Pahlavi texts are from Sacred Books of The East (published in the late 1800s). Please email me at dinamci77@gmail.com if you would like references or have questions.*



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# The History of the Sacred Bull – Warasyāji in Mumbai

By Destur Dr. Firoze M. Kotwal

*This article has been extracted for the general reader from an article titled “Consecration and Importance of the Sacred Bull Warasyāji – A Religious Injunction”, which was published in a Festschrift in honour of Almut Hintze titled, “The Reward of the Righteous, Wiesbaden”, 2022.*

The term warasyāji, commonly used by members of the Parsi community in reference to the sacred Bull attached to a fire temple, is derived from Av. varəsa, Pahl. wars, waras, Pers. gurs, meaning 'hair, curled hair, ringlet'. The Parsis refer to the consecrated white Bull as warasyāji, i.e. one that provides the waras or hair.<sup>1</sup> In Gujarati, the suffix ji is derived from Skt. Jīva 'may you live long' – a blessed term used to honour sacred objects. In high liturgies, three strands from the tail-hair of a consecrated white bull are entwined and tied with a reef knot on a silver or gold finger-ring and placed on the 9-holed saucer through which the hōm-juice is strained and filtered.<sup>2</sup> Using the tail-hair of the warasyāji in the Yasna ritual gives the animal a unique position within the ritual matrix of the faith, and members of the Zoroastrian community view the Bull as sacred and feeding it is seen as an act of merit.

### Hair from the Tail of a Bull

According to the Vendidad (19.21), a young ungelded Bull is chosen for this purpose. To determine whether a white bull is fit for consecration, experienced and able priests assist in selecting a healthy bull which has a glossy white coat of white hair, a pink tongue with no spots, and is without blemishes. In the Nērangestān (Book of Ritual Code) it is stated that the waras can be taken either from the mane of a horse or a bull.

### A Three Hundred-Year-Old Note on the Warasyāji

In the register listing the warasyājis consecrated in the precinct of the Vadi Dar-i Mihr in Navsari, there is a 300-year-old note giving details about how to consecrate a warasyāji for ritual purposes.

The note describes how the Bull is prepared for the consecration process and ends with the pots containing the consecrated nirang tied and secured with white muslin at the end of the ritual.

### The Consecration of the Warasyāji

The selected warasyāji, or the white Bull, is taken into the holy precinct of the Dar-i Mihr, where the consecration ceremony will occur. While being bathed, the Bull has his tail washed with soap, and the hair is inspected and combed. The warasyāji is then tied in a separate ritual precinct (pāwī), where he is fed and looked after in preparation for the elaborate consecration ritual during which hair from the Bull's tail is ritually cut and preserved for ritual use.

The consecration ritual lasts for six days, and on each day, hair from the Bull is ceremonially cut, and the strands of hair are disposed off as it cannot be used for any ritual. The waras or hair tied on the ring and used for the consecration of the warasyāji

also becomes nīst-o-nābūd, i.e. unusable once the ritual is over. Once a warasyāji is consecrated, three strands of hair are taken for ritual use from the box containing the spare hair cut after the Bull's consecration. The three strands are ritually tied around a ring, and the newly consecrated ring is used for the Yasna, Vīšperad, Vendidad and Nīrangdīn ceremonies.

### The First Warasyāji Consecrated in Bombay

In the 17th century, the Bhagariā mobeds were the first to arrive on the islands of Bombay. Mobed Dādā Chīchānā was the first recorded Panthaky of Bombay who served in the Banaji Limji Agiary in the Fort area.

Bombay then was under the ecclesiastical authority of the Bhagarsāth Anjuman of Navsari. The ālāt i.e. waras from the warasyāji, the nīrangdīn (consecrated Bull's urine) required for purificatory rites, and the sacred ash (Guj. bhasam) from the Ātash Bahrām of Sanjan was brought from Navsari. With the Sanjan fire having moved out of Navsari and residing in Udwada, the Navsari priests found it challenging to obtain the bhasam or fire-ash for several years. After the Ātash Bahrām was founded in Navsari in 1765 CE, the bhasam came from the Navsari Atash Bahram. The ālāt was brought to Bombay from Navsari accompanied by two priests who were familiar with

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the roads and physically carried the ālāt. Travelling with them was a Parsi cook and two behdins (lay Parsis) who drove the bullock cart. They arrived in Bombay via Thāne, where there was a sizeable Parsi settlement.

Once in Bombay, the ālāt was handed over to the panthaky (head priest-in-charge) of the Manekji Naoroji Seth Dar-i Mihr, the headquarters of the Bhagariā priests. The ālāt was distributed among the fire temples of Bombay for ritual use. The arrival of the ālāt allowed the priests to continue performing high rituals in their fire temples under the ecclesiastical authority of the Bhagarsāth Anjuman.

As the Zoroastrian population in Bombay grew, the demand for high rituals increased, and as a consequence, there was a surge in demand for ālāt from the Bhagarsāth Anjuman. Hence, the akābars (prominent leaders) of Bombay requested the Navsari priests to allow them to consecrate a warasyāji and perform a Nīrangdīn ceremony. In 1776 CE, the availability of nīrang became an issue when a severe plague epidemic broke out in Bombay, and during the same period, the Pindārā

tribesmen raided Navsari. The situation was so tense that the sacred Navsari Ātash Bahrām Fire was taken in the dark of night to Surat for safety by the Bhagariā priests. The High Priest, Dastur Sohrabji Rustomji Meherji-Rana, also took sanctuary in Surat. The holy fire was moved from Navsari to Surat through underground tunnels built for use during such emergencies. During the chaos and confusion ensuing, the warasyāji was either lost, captured or driven away, resulting in a significant delay in sending the ālāt to Bombay.

The akābars of Bombay requested the Bhagariā priests in Bombay to consecrate a warasyāji. The priests declined to do so stating: 'this task could not be undertaken without the permission of the Navsari Bhagarsāth Anjuman'. The decision was taken by the leader of the Bhagarsāth Anjuman, Khurshedji Tehmulji Desai (known popularly as Khurshedji Bāpā), in concurrence with Dastur Meherjirana and members of the Navsari Bhagarsāth Anjuman. After Desai died in 1779, the Parsi Panchayat once again requested the Navsari Bhagarsāth Anjuman to permit the Bhagariā priests in Bombay to

consecrate a warasyāji, but at that time, the warasyāji in Navsari had died and there was again a scarcity of nīrang. Finally, the Bhagarsāth Anjuman gave authorisation to the akābars of Bombay to consecrate a warasyāji.

The trustees of the Panchayat convened a Samast Anjuman meeting in Bombay and decided to consecrate the first warasyāji for a Nīrangdīn ceremony to be performed. Thus, with the permission of the Navsari Bhagarsāth Anjuman, the first warasyāji was consecrated in Bombay, in memory of Seth Dādībhāi Nusserwanji Mody, at the Manekji Seth Agiary. The ceremony was performed by mobed sahebs Manekji Sohrabji Pavri and Jamshedji Rustamji Dābu. The first Nīrangdīn was in memory of Seth Bomanji Naoroji (Lovji) Wadia, father of Hormusji Seth, the founder of the H.B. Wadia Ātash Bahrām, and was performed by mobed sahebs Jamshedji Khurshedji Vāтчā and Framji Rustamji Rānji.

As long as the warasyāji is living, the waras is used to perform all high rituals. However, once the warasyāji



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dies, all the high rituals come to a standstill until a new warasyāji is consecrated. All priests, including candidates being initiated who may have taken the barašnūm using the waras from the expired warasyāji, have to leave the barašnūm and re-take it after a new warasyāji is consecrated.

### The Qadīmī Parsis and History of their Warasyāji

Some Parsis of Surat belonging to the Shahanshāhī sect adopted the Qadīmī calendar by reciting Qadīmī rūz and mäh in their prayers on June 17, 1743, under the guidance and leadership of mobed Dārāb Sohrābji Kumānā. The Parsis who followed the Qadīmī sect first established the D. N. Dādysēth Atash Bahram (1783) using the indigenous Shahanshāhī ālāt. With the consecration of the Dādysēth Atash Bahram, the Qadīmī ālāt consequently came into existence and the other two Qadīmī Ātash Bahrāms in India viz., the P.K. Vakil Atash Bahram (1823) in Surat and the F.C. Banāji Atash Bahram (1845) in Bombay were established using the Qadīmī ālāt from the Dādysēth Atash Bahram. (See Meherjirana, D.S., Dasturān-Dastur Meherjirānā Yādgārī Granth, vol. 1, Mumbai, 1947, p.182).

According to the Persian Rivāyats of Narimān Hoshang (1478 CE), the Iranian Zoroastrian priests continued to use the old waras consecrated in the first quarter of the 14th century as the priests who knew how to consecrate a new waras had died. However, it is noted in the Persian Rivāyat of Kāmdīn Shāpur (1559) that a new waras was prepared in Navsari by the Bhagariā priests, during the life-time of the first Dastur Meherjī Rana (c.1510-1591 CE). Suggesting that, the ritual of making a new waras continued in Navsari a hundred years later and endures even today.

**Following in the footsteps of Irani Zoroastrian priests, the Qadīmī priests of India started by initially using the old waras imported from Iran at an exorbitant price of 1000 shāhīs. This practice continued until the Banāji Ātash Bahrām was consecrated in 1845 under the guidance and supervision of the learned Shahanshāhī Dastur Jamshedji Edalji Jamaspasa, the head-priest of the Banaji Limji Agiary (1709 CE), the oldest fire-temple in Bombay.**

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decades, another warasyāji was consecrated by the Qadīmī mobeds in the port of Mazgaon, Bombay, at the Faramji Nusserwanji Patel Qadīmī Dar-i Mihr under the supervision of the learned Shahanshāhī Dastur Jamaspji Minocheherji Jamaspasa. A third warasyāji was consecrated at the Dadyseth Atash Bahram under the leadership of the Qadīmī high-priest, Dastur Sohrabji Rustamji Mulla-Firoz.

### The Last Rites of the Warasyāji

In Zoroastrianism the warasyāji is a sacred animal because of its use in the high inner rituals of the faith. Therefore, befitting its status, the warasyāji is accorded special last rites at death. According to Zoroastrian cosmology, just as the human race descended from the first man Gayōmard, the primeval man, domestic animals have descended from the bull Gāwyoḍād 'the primeval ox'. In the Pahlavi Bundahishn, which outlines the Zoroastrian myth of creation, when Ahriman, the evil spirit, killed the Bull Gāwyoḍād, Ahura Mazda entrusted a part of the Bull's seed to the moon, where it was purified. From this one seed, different species of cattle were born on earth.

For this reason, the moon in Avestan is described as gao-cithra (one who holds the seed of the Bull).<sup>3</sup> According to legend, the remaining part of the seed of Gāwyoḍād fell on the earth, and from various parts of its body, different species of grain and useful plants sprang upon the earth. In Zoroastrian theology, the carcass of cattle and its hair is not putrefied matter or evil, so burying the carcass of a sacred bull with due precautions is deemed proper. In the Persian Rivāyats of Hormazyār Frāmarz,

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cattle are not regarded as nasā or dead matter when dead. Hence, the hair separated ritually from a living bull is not seen as 'dead matter (Pahl. hikhr, Paz. heher)', and is therefore used in rituals. This practice continues to be followed by the Zoroastrian community today.

The erroneous practice of performing the gēh-sārnā ceremony on the deceased Bhagarsāth warasyāji was introduced in Bombay a few decades ago, although this was not followed in Navsari. The appropriate manner of disposing of the carcass of a warasyāji, followed by the Bhagaria priests, is to dig a big pit in an isolated place and tie a used, old but clean sudreh and kustī around the horns of the warasyāji as a symbol of the religion. To quicken the process of disintegration, three or four bags of black salt is sprinkled around it before covering it with earth. In 1937 when the Bhagarsāth warasyāji died in Bombay some ignorant Bhagariā priests tried to introduce the practice of performing the gēh-sārnā, but fortunately, the late Dastur Minocher Kaikhushroo Jamaspasa intervened and prevented this from happening. The practice of performing the gēh-sārnā was suddenly resurrected by some Bhagarsāth priests when the warasyāji died sometime after 1937. At the time, there was no High Priest in the jurisdiction in Bombay, as Dastur Minocher Jamaspasa had resigned as High Priest, and there was no Bhagaria High Priest in office to guide the priests. In 1977 Dastur Firoze M. Kotwal (the author) became High Priest of H.B. Wadia Atash Bahram, and Dastur Kaikhushroo Minocher Jamaspasa was the High Priest of the Anjuman Atash Bahram. The Bombay warasyāji died when Dastur Kaikhushroo was a visiting lecturer in Germany. The issue of dealing with the corpse of the warasyāji came before Dastur Kotwal

**Zoroastrian rituals require the use of the dog and the goat. The dog is used for barašnūm and sagdīd ceremonies and goat's milk is required in high rituals. Devout Zoroastrians also consider the crowing rooster as the messenger of Srōsh Yazad, who drives away the evil forces of Ahriman. Because of its Ahuric qualities, Zoroastrians consider the rooster holy.**

who opined that as it came under Dastur Kaikhushroo Jamaspasa's jurisdiction, and as he was not present in India, it should be dealt with as in the past. So some priests took the liberty of performing the gēh-sārnā. Sometime later, when another warasyāji died, Dastur Firoze Kotwal spoke to Dastur Kaikhushroo Jamaspasa and informed him that it was bad practice to perform the gēh-sārnā on the corpse of the warasyāji. Although preparations had been made, the gēh-sārnā was not done. They followed the age-old tradition of the religion and buried the warasyāji by tying a sudreh and kustī around the horns of the warasyāji and lining the pit with black salt. The erroneous

practice of reciting a gēh-sārnā is neither backed by our traditions nor supported by the scriptures. Some people may, without knowledge, be tempted to perform the gēh-sārnā for all creatures used in rituals. For example, Zoroastrian rituals require the use of the dog and the goat. The dog is used for barašnūm and sagdīd ceremonies and goat's milk is required in high rituals. Devout Zoroastrians also consider the crowing rooster as the messenger of Srōsh Yazad, who drives away the evil forces of Ahriman. Because of its Ahuric qualities, Zoroastrians consider the rooster holy. When dead, the rooster is given an honourable burial by wrapping the rooster in an old and clean sudreh (Av. vastra, Pahl. watarag, PGuj. Sadrō, 'sacred garment'). The same reverence is accorded to pet dogs, especially in devout Parsi families living in the Zoroastrian strongholds in Gujarat.

Thus, it is clear that the custom of performing the gēh-sārnā of the warasyāji does not befit the spirit of the Zoroastrian religion as it is not supported in the scriptural texts nor the long-cherished traditions preserved by the old Parsi centres of Navsari and Udwada.<sup>4</sup> If there were a tradition for the gēh-sārnā ceremony being recited for the warasyāji, the records of the Dīsā-Pōthī (the death registers maintained by fire Temples) would have shown it just as the consecration and death dates of the warasyājis are noted in the Vadī Dar-i Mihr at Navsari since 1680 and continues to be noted up to the present day.

### Reflections on the Ritual of Consecrating the Warasyāji

It is worth noting the merits arising from the consecration of the warasyāji. Using the waras of a consecrated warasyāji and the

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performance of the Nīrangdīn ritual is based on authoritative Avestan texts. The immutable law of Asha, which governs the universe's workings, gains renewed strength through the consecration of the warasyāji and is effective against the forces of evil. The reinforcement of Asha (Skt. ṛta), right order, in the universe is brought about through:

- The rite of boiling the waras (Pahl. nīrang ī wars pukhtan) with the holy ash of the Ātash Bahrām fire which spiritually endows the waras of the Warasyāji with a divinely charged force.
- The ritual of cutting and making the waras begins by invoking the blessings of Ahura Mazda and Zarathushtra. The ritual is a reaffirmation of Ahura Mazda as the Creator of the animal kingdom. And the ritual is performed under the protection of the divine fravashis of the Holy Zarathushtra, establishing a link with Ahura Mazda.
- In the pāw-mahal rituals, the inter-woven date-palm leaves are wound around the barsom-rods

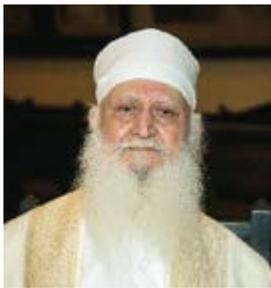
three times with the recitation of the khshnūman of Dādār Hōrmazd. This is similar to tying the kustī around the waist three times while reciting the Nīrang of Hōrmazd Xwadāy for the spiritual protection of a Zoroastrian. For a pious Zoroastrian, the armour of the sudreh and kustī is a living embodiment of the 'Good Religion'.

- The consecration of the warasyāji lays the foundation for all other high liturgies performed within the precinct of the Dar-i Mihr.
- The consecration of the Bhagarsāth warasyāji of Bombay was done from rūz Tir, māh Spandarmad AY 1352 to rūz Rashne, māh Spandarmad (August 3-8, 1983) by ervad saheb Rooyintan Peshotan Peer and ervad saheb Eruchshah Jalejar Katrak at the Seth Hormasjee Bomanjee Wadia Atash Bahram. The author, High Priest of Wadia Atash Bahram, was present at the consecration and had the opportunity to study the book on

pāw-mahal rituals by Ervad saheb Hormazd M. Pavri and examine other important manuscripts written by scholar-priests such as Dastur Erachji Sohrabji Meherjirana on the subject. This article on the warasyāji is a result of this humble study.

### End Notes

1. For a detailed description of the consecration of Warasāyji, see Behram-Kamdin, M.K. 1931: *Pāwmahalnē Lagtī Kriyāō (Qadmī Tariqat Pramāṇē)*. Mumbai, 1931, pp. 36-44; Pavri, H.M.E., 1938: *Bājdharṇānē Lagtī Pāwmahalnī Kriyāō*. Mumbai. (repr., Mumbai 1995), pp. 208-214; for a summarised version, see Modi, J.J., 1986: *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees*. Bombay. (1<sup>st</sup> edition 1922, 2nd edition 1937, reprint 1986), pp. 243-245.
2. This ritual seems to be a substitute for a mesh of hair used for filtering the hōm-juice in ancient times.
3. See Niyāyesh.3, para.5; Sīrōza.1 & Sīrōza.2, no.12.
4. Information from Dastur Khurshed Kekobad Dastur, the High Priest of Iranshah, Udwarda.



**Dastur Dr. Firoze Kotwal** is a High Priest of the Parsi Zoroastrians of India. Dastur Dr. Firoze M. Kotwal trained at the M.F. Cama Athornan Institute, Mumbai. He obtained an M.A. with Distinction in 1961 and a Ph.D. in *The Supplementary Texts to the Shāyest Nē- shāyest*, with English translation and notes, in 1966, both from the University of Bombay. He did his Post-doctoral Research with Professor Mary Boyce on the History of the Parsi Priestly Class from Parsi Prakash, 1973. He was appointed Principal M.F. Cama Athornan Institute, Mumbai, and as High Priest of the H.B. Wadia Atash Behram, in 1977 in recognition of his outstanding scholarship and work in Zoroastrianism.

A Festschrift is a collection of writings published in honor of a scholar. One titled *Gifts to a Magus*, Indo-Iranian Studies, in honour of Firoze Kotwal was published in 2013. Few Zoroastrians have been awarded this award. The volume consists of articles by world-renowned scholars of Zoroastrian, Iranian, Parsi, and Jewish studies. The topics covered range from the prophet Zarathushtra and the ancient Indo-Iranians to the modern Zoroastrians and Jews of Iran and India.

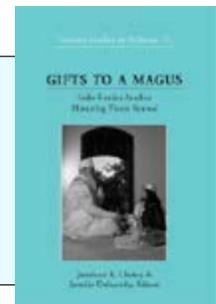


Photo credits: Warasyaji courtesy Hormuz Dadachanji / Dastur Kotwal by Nazneen Vajifdar, Spectravision Labs

**Creatures Great and Small in Zarthushti Heritage**



**Magnificent, Magical, Mythical Birds**

By Diana Dinshaw

There are many mythical creatures in Persian heritage including the *lamassu*, with the body of a bull, wings of an eagle, and the head of a human. As protectors, they guarded palace entrances in Persepolis and we often see them as sentinels outside darbemehers. Another mythical creature is the *azdaha*, which includes all types of snake-like monsters living in the air, earth, or sea. They were mostly demonic, evil creatures who swallowed horses and men, and emitted poison (dragons in English translations). They were often put on war banners to frighten the enemy.

As a storyteller, I am going to focus on two mythical, magical birds in Persian folklore as they have stories attached to them.

**Simorgh**



In ancient Persian mythology, Simorgh is known as the mysterious, gigantic healing bird

and is called Simorgh because it was as large as thirty birds (si = thirty, morgh = bird). The origins of the bird are unknown but it was so ancient that it had seen the destruction of the World three times over. It was believed that the Simorgh lived 1700 years before plunging itself into flames and rising again (which is likely why it is often associated with the Phoenix). It nested on the Tree of Knowledge, and as it had lived so long and seen so much, it had the

Wisdom of the Ages. In the *Bundahishn* or the Zarthushti Story of Creation, it is said that when the Simorgh flew out from the Tree of Knowledge, it shook the leaves and scattered the seeds of all plants embodied in the Tree to take root all over the world.

In Persian art, the Simorgh is depicted as a peacock-like bird with claws of a lion; sometimes it has a dog-head and sometimes a human face, always female. Its feathers are said to be variously the colour of copper or of thirty colours (si-rang). In spite of being classified as a bird, she suckles her young, being part mammal. Its hybrid status is supposed to represent the union between the earth and the sky, thereby the Simorgh served as messenger between the two and was considered to bestow fertility.

Although the Simorgh appears in many stories, including the *Tale of the Woodcutter and Mushkil Asaan Behram Yazad*, the most famous one is in the *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings) by Firdausi.

**Zal and Simorgh**

Sam was a legendary warrior to King Minochehr. When his son, Zal, was born, he had a face like paradise, but white hair like an old man. This was considered an ill omen, so Sam took the baby to the foot of Mount Alborz and abandoned him. Simorgh lived on top of the mountain and when she heard the baby's cries, she brought him to live in her nest, and brought him up as her own. Zal grew up into a caring and strong young man under Simorgh's care. One night, Sam had a



dream after which he went back to Mount Alborz to look for his son. Though Zal was reluctant to reconcile, the wise Simorgh knew he needed to return to live with humans, and while the Simorgh was heartbroken to see him leave, she encouraged him to go with his father and gifted him with two of her feathers instructing him to burn them if he ever needed her assistance.

As time went by Zal married the beautiful daughter of the Chief of Kabul, Rudabeh. When it came time for the birth of their first child, the labour was prolonged and painful. Zal feared that his wife would die so he burned one of the precious feathers that Simorgh had given him. Magically, Simorgh appeared and tore open Rodabeh's abdomen with her talons, but not a drop of blood was shed. Once the baby was retrieved, the Simorgh healed Rudabeh with the caress of her wing. Thus saving Rudabah and her son, Rustom, who grew up to become one of the greatest heroes of Persia.

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### Homa

Homa (Avestan Homāio) is a mythical bird embodying both the female and male within itself, each having it's one wing and leg, but is referred to by its female dimension, likely because it gives birth. In some depictions, the Homa doesn't have legs signifying that it lives its entire life flying high above the earth, invisible to the human eye. The Homa would even breed in the sky, the eggs falling towards the earth at great speed. The chicks would hatch on the way down and would die as they dashed on the ground. Magically, they would be



reborn and takes flight upwards in triumph. Iran Air, the official airline of Iran, uses the Homa as their logo.

The Homa is known as a benevolent bird, who bestowed surprise gifts to humanity, and it was believed that if its shadow fell upon someone that person would be blessed and happy all their lives, and if it rested for a moment on someone's head, the person would become king. This concept was likely why its image was prominent at Persepolis. According to Sufi Master, Inayat Khan, the true meaning behind the concept was not literal but spiritual; if "a person's thoughts so evolve that they break all limitation, then he becomes as a king. It is the limitation of language that it can only describe the Most High as something like a king." In time, the Homa bird would come to symbolize elevation and enlightenment. Like the Simorgh (and the Phoenix in other traditions), the Homa would live for centuries, die in flames, and rise again.

This story about the Homa's benevolence is based on the tale



narrated by Pam Atherton from the book, *The Cultured Chef: An International Cookbook for Kids* by Nicholas Beatty.

### The Golden Eggs

Once upon a time, the Homa bird was drifting gracefully on the wind's current, when she noticed a poor man in ragged clothes lying dispiritedly under a palm tree. She took pity on him and decided to leave him a golden egg as a surprise gift.

When the man woke up, he found the golden egg next to him. He thought, "I am blessed. Now I can feed my family!" Unsure of the value of the egg, the man went to the local market and asked a merchant, "How much will you give me for this golden egg?" The merchant was amazed as he had never seen such a priceless object. He said, "I'll give you a week's wage for this egg. That will be enough to buy your family a grand dinner, as well as buy several small gifts to show your love."

The man was thrilled. "So much money and I didn't even have to work for it!"

The merchant said slyly, "If you bring me another egg tomorrow, I will pay you twice as much for it."

The next day, the man returned to the palm tree where he had slept the day before and lay down. Although he closed his eyes, he stayed alert. He thought, "Instead of waiting each day in the hot sun, I will catch the bird that leaves these golden eggs. I will

become a rich man and will never have to work again".

The Homa saw the man lying under the palm tree, still wearing his ragged clothes, and once again took pity on him. As she dipped down to leave another golden egg, the man reached out and grasped for her leg. The Homa swooped up and vanished into the cloud before the man could blink. And so, the tale shows, how a man, in a matter of two days, lost two fortunes – the first through his ignorance of the worth of his blessings and the second because of his own greed.

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**Diana Dinshaw** works as a software engineer at the University of Phoenix, Arizona. She teaches *The Art of Storytelling* at the *Storytelling Institute* at the *South Mountain Community College (SMCC)* and has told stories in USA and internationally. Her website is [The Third Doll](#). Diana is also the *President of the Zoroastrian Association of Arizona (ZAAZ)*.

## Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage

### The ParZor Foundation

The Parzor Foundation aims to create awareness of the age-old co-existence of cultures through research and revival of India's multicultural heritage. The Parsi-Zoroastrians are a distinct thread in the tapestry of Indian culture, and PARZOR, with its special focus on Parsi-Zoroastrianism heritage, facilitates preservation and education through socio-cultural, scientific research projects, workshops, exhibitions and publications.

ParZor is seeking information about Shameen Island in the Canton Parsi settlement as well as textile links to the Parsis of Shanghai. They would like to rediscover the technique of the 'Sugar Wash', which gave a gloss to Surti satin. They are also looking for paper patterns of textiles for preservation and sharing because they may contain dates and techniques. If you have any information, contact Parzor at [shernazcama@hotmail.com](mailto:shernazcama@hotmail.com) or [parzorfoundation@gmail.com](mailto:parzorfoundation@gmail.com)

## Joyous Creation: Animals in Embroidery

By Shernaz Cama

Embroidery has always been a vital part of the Zoroastrian love of life. Despite their assimilation in India, the Zoroastrians clung to their core cultural beliefs of a love of life and beauty in all its forms. Zoroastrianism celebrates the animal kingdom and bounty of nature in its sacred texts, ceremonies and myths; revels in flowers and gardens, birds and beauty which provide the backdrop, interwoven and embroidered into the costumes of daily life. This 'Spenta' or 'bountiful' world is to be treated with care, each tiny butterfly a manifestation of God's Goodness.



In the Zoroastrian homeland of Iran, women's trousers were accompanied by a long shirt which reached the knees, while the head was covered with a shawl and the entire costume embroidered with rustic, simple embroidery. Fish and bird motifs prevailed as did flowers, roundel like emblems of *Khurshid* or the sun, tiny birds and animals. Even as a conquered people, their love of life continued to be expressed in embroidery. Even when Islam became the religion of Persia and forbade portrayal of live figures, Zoroastrian motifs, animals and birds continued to be portrayed. As Allgrove McDowell states; "The textiles of conquered Persia preserved its original national identity and passed it on to future generations". (McDowell, 1989, 157).

*Sir Percy Sykes procured this embroidered Zarthushti Bridal Shawl, which came into the possession of Professor Ilya and Elizabeth Gersvitch of Cambridge. In this Bridal Shawl you can see peacocks, little dogs, embroidered with the sacred Ariz, or fish, emblem of fertility.*

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In the *Bundahishn*, the Pahlavi “Text of Creation”, each day is dedicated to an angel, symbolized in the material world by a flower. Flowers, birds, and animals are celebrated as emblems of power, protection, and purity. This iconography continuing in Parsi embroidery uses the simurgh, a mythical bird with magical powers, and the rooster as sacred birds which provide health and protection. The Simurgh, or Phoenix, ensures health and faithfulness. The rooster when it crows every morning, thereby slaying the demon of darkness, is sacred to Sarosh, yazata of prayer and protection. These protective powers make them favoured emblems, especially on children’s clothing.

*The Simurgh is a protective figure seen here on a jhabla, which children wore before their Navjote.*

*A close-up of the Simurgh on a black gara.*

*A child wearing a jhabla with roosters embroidered on the border for protection and scattered butterflies symbolizing love.*



The original name for what we call *Garas* today was *Badhi Bhareli* or a fully embroidered sari. In the early stage of development, embroidered yardage was covered on all four sides as if bordered within a frame. This yardage is called *gala* in Gujarati and its enclosed patterned space gave its name to the *Gara*. The colours favoured in the Persian tradition were imperial purple and other vibrant shades. The rich embroidery in white or ivory silk floss on silk or satin highlights the white of the long, handmade lace *sudreh* [sacred vest], which women showcased proudly beneath a white lace European blouse. Birds are a common design in all *garas*, reflecting a love of life and joy in all creation. This includes the Persian Garden with *Gul-e-Bulbul*, as well as other birds like peacocks, swallows, and cranes.



*This joyous gara in red reflects flowers and birds from the Persian tradition of Gul-e-Bulbul.*



*Indian Peacocks combine with Persian trellis and flowers, joined with the Endless Knot, to create a combination of auspicious symbols for this engagement gara.*

## Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage

As Indian influence developed, the auspicious Indian *kunku* red or vermillion became a favourite, particularly for engagement saris. Parsis wear white, symbolizing purity at their weddings, but began a tradition of using red for the engagement sari.

The five Chinese blessings of health, love, long life, prosperity and a peaceful death can be seen across embroidery patterns, but till recently very few Parsis even noticed what they had been wearing across generations. Butterflies, when in pairs, represent lovers and relationships while on their own they symbolize longevity. In China, bats represent good fortune – mainly because the words bat and luck are both pronounced as *fú*. Traditionally, five bats flying around the Chinese symbol *shou* signify longevity. Cranes symbolize long life and loyalty in marriage as cranes mate for life.



*This fish gara was probably an engagement gara which celebrates the world of Ava, Yazata of water, women, and fertility.*



*Butterflies are emblematic across many cultures. They are called 'hu-tieh' in Mandarin Chinese, which means '70 years' symbolizing long life.*



*A bat on a kor. The Chinese word for bat is 'fu,' pronounced the same as the word for good fortune, thus it is a symbol of good luck and happiness.*



*A deer on a kor. The deer alone can find the Divine Fungus, which in Chinese mythology symbolizes protection from the Evil Eye.*



*This crane gara is remarkable because it is in khakha, the intricate seed pearl or 'forbidden' stitch, so called because it led to loss of sight for the women who embroidered.*

## Creatures Great and Small in Zarthushti Heritage



Another animal, common both to Zarthushti mythology and Chinese statuary is the dog; it helps the soul cross the Chinvat Bridge of the Separator while in Chinese the Dogs of Foo/ Fu are actually protective Lion Dogs.



On the kor, in this version of embroidery found in Navsari, the Dogs of Fu look playful and yet fulfill the protective task they symbolize. The Dog on the Bridge is from a jhabla.

Embroidery even carries the oral traditions of the Persian refugees in the form of the *Karolia* or Spider design seen very often in Parsi embroidery. It reflects the story of the little spider who wove a web of protection across the mouth of a disused well in which Zoroastrians were hiding while fleeing from their oppressors during the medieval period of migration to India. Till today, while in the religious texts of Zoroastrianism, the spider and other insects are to be avoided, in Parsi tradition, the spider is lucky and should not be killed.



*Karolia* or spider pattern on a gara.

For far too long, Parsis dismissed their embroidery as if it was all purchased in China, forgetting a great craft tradition commented upon even by Marco Polo visiting Kirman, as ‘a delight to the eye’. (*Travels* tr. R. Latham, 1958; see J. Allgrove Mc Dowell, p.166). While many of us over 50 years of age remember the “embroidery cupboards” of family homes and patterns neatly drawn on butter paper with notations of colour, and even the event for which the embroidery was being created, by the women of our grandmothers’ generation, this all seemed to be easy to forget as time passed. New life styles could no longer maintain either the embroidery cupboard or the laborious, intricate craft. It is, therefore, important to remember that the rich amalgam of Parsi Zoroastrian textiles brings together the Persian, Chinese, Indian and European symbols, stitches and stories. It truly is a Heritage of Humanity and has finally begun to be appreciated as a unique contribution to world textiles.

### Further Reading:

- J. Allgrove Mc Dowell (1989) ‘Textiles’. In Ronald W. Ferrier (ed.), *The Arts of Persia*.
- E.W. West (1977) trans/ed. *Pahlavi Texts: The Bundahisn: Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 5, Part 1.
- Cama, Shernaz. ‘Parsi Embroidery: An Intercultural Amalgam’. In Marie- Louise Nosch, Zhao Feng & Lotika Vardarajan, Eds. *Ancient Textile Series Vol. 20. Global Textile Encounters*, 2014, Oxbow Books: Oxford & Philadelphia.



**Dr. Shernaz Cama** teaches at Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi University. She is the Founder and Honorary Director of the UNESCO Parzor Project for the preservation and promotion of Parsi Zoroastrian Culture and Heritage since 1999. Besides academic publications, she guides researchers in their work in the fields of literature, culture studies and Zoroastrianism.

Photographs featured in this article have been provided by the ParZor Foundation.

**Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage**

**Listening to Elephants in the Forest**  
Studying the Impact of Poaching in Central Africa

By Anahita Verahrami

The harmonic soundscape of the rainforest surrounding me was suddenly interrupted by a thunderous boom. Right in front of me was Dzanga Bai, a natural forest clearing (locally known as a “Bai”) in the southwestern Central African Republic (CAR) where African forest elephants gather to drink from mineral rich water pits. Seconds before the thunder, about 100 forest elephants stood calmly within the Bai. Now, the clearing was rapidly emptying as trumpeting elephants with quickly fleeing footsteps formed groups and then stampedes that went off into the forest in many different directions. I looked up at Bonga and Azobé, two trackers working with me on the Dzanga Bai elephant project and noted their grim expressions. Our remote forest camp was a 30-minute walk through the forest, a walk which had now become riskier than usual as the chance of encountering elephants along our path had increased. The three of us spoke, noting that the sky was still mostly blue over where we were and decided to try to wait for the storm to pass over us as we finished up the last of our data collection, hoping that many of the elephants in the forest would return to the Bai by the time we had to leave.

As our normal departure time approached, the wind began to pick up and the wooden observation platform we stood upon began to sway and creak. A sudden onslaught of rain quickly followed, and it became clear that we had misjudged the storm. We discussed our next steps and decided

to wait for a while longer to see if the storm would let up. Walking through the forest during a thunderstorm was strictly against protocol. The sounds of the rain and thunder would drown out any auditory warning signs of the numerous elephants who had entered the forest previously. As the sun disappeared and clouds settled in, the forest would grow dark and the ground would morph into thick red mud, meaning watching out for snakes or running away from an elephant if needed would be almost impossible.

We waited for what felt like hours until we realized we had reached our hard limit on time. We had no choice



*Anahita’s living quarters, a wooden hut with a roof made of leaves, at the campsite in the rainforest.*

but to leave the Bai at that point if we wanted to make it back to camp before night fell. Mustering up as much courage as I had and sending a wishful plea of protection to the universe, we set off into the forest, attempting to jog through newly formed streams and over slick mud and roots as we strained our ears for any signs of nearby danger as the sound of rainfall and our rapid footsteps dominated the soundscape. Eventually, we reached camp, high on adrenaline, soaking wet, but safe.

**My Research with the Elephant Listening Project**

Memories like this one where I felt so connected to the Earth have become some of my fondest from my journey thus far. As a conservation biologist, I have been lucky enough to have spent the last six years accumulating these memories while studying forest elephants and aiding in their conservation.

While growing up, I had every intention of becoming a veterinarian one day and entered my undergraduate education at Cornell University feeling fully committed to the pre-vet track. Yet, as typically (and valuably) done in school, my horizons broadened. My focus on animal health shifted first to animal research and then quickly to animal conservation. Eager to gain more experience in this realm, I took a position as an undergraduate research assistant with a research lab at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology called the Elephant Listening Project (ELP).

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ELP is focused on using a tool called bioacoustics, which is the study of sounds produced by and affecting living organisms, to study and protect forest elephants throughout Central Africa.

After graduating, I worked for ELP for an additional three years on projects both in the US and in CAR that ranged from exploring forest elephant communication and behavior to investigating how human disturbances such as logging and poaching are impacting their activity. Eager to further develop my research skillset, I pursued graduate school and began a position as a graduate research assistant at Colorado State University (CSU), where I am currently finishing my masters in the Graduate Degree Program in Ecology with a special focus on conservation biology. Here, my research with ELP continues through my thesis work which is focused on studying the impacts of poaching on forest elephants.

### Monitoring Sounds for Poaching

The foundation for much of ELP's research is sound, which is a useful tool to study species that are hard to monitor, or cryptic. Even though forest elephants may weigh anywhere from two to five tons, they still fall under this category of "cryptic" as the forests they reside in are extremely dense, making visually monitoring the species in the forests where they spend most of their time nearly impossible. As a result, ELP has turned to the use of a sound tool called

passive acoustic monitoring (PAM), an observation method where an acoustic recording unit is placed at a point of interest to capture sounds from the surrounding environment.

When used on a large scale, PAM can help answer questions on cryptic species abundance, movement, and response to human disturbance. ELP currently has an acoustic grid made up of 50 acoustic recording units set up in and around Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park (NNNP) in the Republic of Congo. Sound recordings from this grid have been almost continuously collected from a 1,250 km<sup>2</sup> patch of forest since October 2017.

The sound data collected from this grid have given the world a further glimpse into the forest lives of forest elephants as these sounds contain the calls of elephants and the sounds of gunshots, critical information needed to assess the elephant population and monitor poaching events in the region. My thesis research focuses on monitoring poaching events, specifically those involving guns, but

aims to do so at a much finer scale than what has been used in the past.

This past October, I traveled to NNNP and joined forces with the Republic of Congo military, NNNP anti-poaching patrols, local researchers from the Wildlife Conservation Society, and members of the local village to try to develop a way to extract more information from recorded gunshot events. We set up acoustic recorders in the forest at varying distances away from an origin point where we discharged both automatic and non-automatic guns. By using a machine learning approach on these sound data collected from these two classes of guns, my goal is to create an acoustic gunshot classifier that can appropriately label the sound of a gunshot that originates from an automatic vs. non-automatic gun.

Automatic guns are used to hunt larger game such as chimpanzees, gorillas, and forest elephants, all of which are either endangered or critically endangered, meaning monitoring their poaching is especially critical. Non-automatic guns are often used to hunt less

endangered species such as monkeys and duiker, often by subsistence hunters rather than the commercial hunters who mostly hunt larger game for profit from the wildlife trade. When applied to the sounds from ELP's acoustic grid, this classifier will provide more information on where the recorded poaching event occurred and what group of species may be the target, valuable insight to have when determining where anti-poaching patrols should focus their resources to protect endangered species.



*Anahita setting up an acoustic recording unit during fieldwork completed in the Republic of Congo in 2021. The goal was to create an acoustic gunshot classifier that could appropriately label the sound of a gunshot that originated from an automatic vs. non-automatic gun.*

**Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage**



**The Complicated Issue of Poaching**

When I first started working in wildlife conservation, I had a very limited viewpoint on poaching, perceiving it only as a bad act. This viewpoint was further solidified after each gunshot I heard while working in the forest. Emotions would take over and turn to tears as my mind raced through the horrible possibilities of what had just happened to the targeted animal. But as I became more engaged with the field, I realized I was looking at poaching from a very privileged viewpoint. This shift in my perception came from experiences interacting with poachers where it quickly became apparent that some people were participating in poaching because they had no other option.

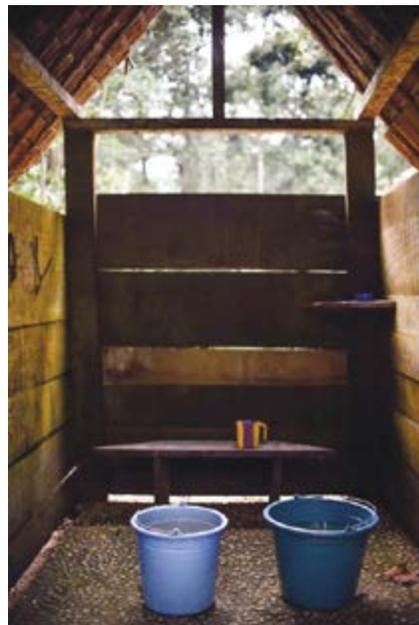
Poaching is a very complicated issue that intersects with deeper, more systemic issues such as Indigenous peoples' land rights, local access to hunting for subsistence (whether that be through direct consumption or acquiring money from sales of bushmeat), and social issues where marginalized groups of people may be directly forced in some way to participate in poaching. Much of the land that protected areas and parks sit upon was stolen from the local communities living nearby. As international NGOs began managing these protected lands, restrictions were placed on these communities, minimizing or even fully eliminating their access to their own lands to hunt for subsistence or as a source of income. Faced with limited options for supporting themselves and their families, it is not surprising that many turn to poaching.

To address the poaching crisis effectively and equitably, it is critical that both conservationists and the

broader public keep the diverse complexities driving poaching in mind so that we ensure we are using a human rights-based approach to species protection.

**Favorite Parts of My Work**

Regardless of my views on poaching, hearing gunshots while in the forest is one of my least favorite aspects of my work, as is the filaria parasite I have managed to pick up from Central Africa twice now. That said, I have numerous favorite aspects that heavily outweigh the downsides. Working and living in the forest is an experience like no other. The research camp near Dzanga Bai where I spent four months in 2018 and two months in 2020 is remote and without running water and electricity. While it took some adjusting to get used to the lack of amenities I am used to in the US, I found the overall experience to be very humbling and fulfilling as I learned to cook over a fire and began to look forward to my daily bucket shower.



*The bucket shower at Anahita's campsite in the rainforest.*

One activity I began to look forward to almost immediately was my daily visits to Dzanga Bai, where I was focused on identifying individual elephants, observing their behaviors, and pairing these observations with recordings of their vocalizations. Elephants are an incredibly interesting species to study due to their high level of intelligence and sociality. It was not uncommon for me to witness behaviors that in my mind, paralleled to those of humans, like when an adult female saw me as a threat to her calf and continued to charge me until her calf was a safe distance away. Other times and when needed, elephants have been much sneakier when near me such as the night when one entered camp and uprooted our moringa tree while everyone was asleep or the night when another stole our dish sponge not more than 10 meters from where I sat!

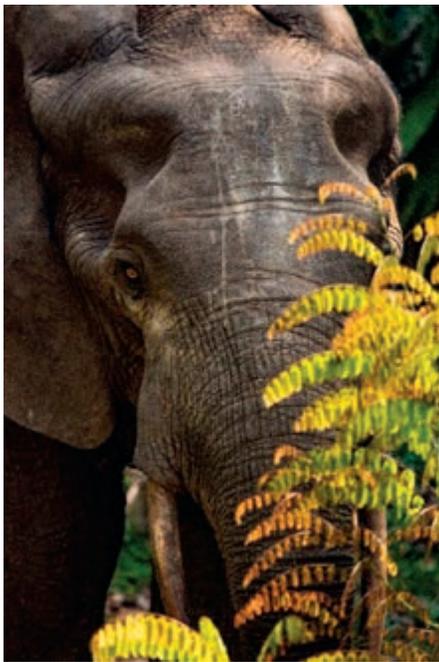
Their ability to be quiet when needed is not just limited to their bodily movements but extends to their vocalizations as well. The predominant type of elephant vocalization is the rumble, which elephants may produce in the infrasonic range, or below the threshold of human hearing (<20 Hz). When standing close to an elephant who is performing an infrasonic rumble, one will not hear the sound but can feel the vibrations from the rumble in their chests as the low frequency sound waves continue to travel far and wide through the forest. This vibrational experience alone has made dealing with the cockroaches, parasites, and intense humidity worth it.

The diversity of forest elephant behaviors and personalities continues to astound and excite me, and I would not be surprised if these feelings never fade away. I am extremely grateful for the opportunities I have had thus far to

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study this incredible species and aid in their conservation. I look forward to continuing on this journey as my knowledge evolves and grows, and hopefully, as I inspire others to join the fight to conserve our planet's beautiful biodiversity before it is too late.



*Anahita Verahrami is currently completing her masters in conservation biology at Colorado State University. Her research focuses on using sound recordings from Central Africa to study and conserve forest elephant populations. She has a strong interest in completing this work through partnership with local communities using an equitable and decolonized approach.*



*Gargantua, an adult female forest elephant, stands among the rainforest vegetation surrounding Dzanga Bai, Central African Republic.*

*Forest elephants covered in different colors of cooling mud at Dzanga Bai, Central African Republic.*

### PERSIAN WAR ELEPHANTS

An interesting piece of trivia is that in the Persian version of *shatranj* (chess), the war elephant (named *fil* meaning "elephant" in Persian) was used as the bishop. Achaemenians and Sassanians used elephants in their army, showing an ancient connection between Persia and India.

Touraj Daryaee writes in "From Terror to Tactical Usage: Elephants in the Partho-Sasanian Period" (The Parthian and Early Sasanian Empires: Adaptation and Expansion, eds. V. Sarkhosh Curtis et. al., Oxford, 2016, pp. 36-41), "First, elephants were used as a psychological weapon of terror against their enemies by successive ancient Iranian dynasties. Early on, they were used as a sort of tank of the ancient world. This trend appears to have been the case from the Achaemenid period onwards in the Iranian domains. On the other hand, by the beginning of the first century AD, the symbolic nature of elephants as a representation of kingship is evident in Iran. This notion, however, was inherited from India and the Indo-Iranian borderland kingdoms (the Greco-Bactrians).

The early Sasanians may have used these beasts as a scare tactic, but by the late Sasanian period they were more than a mere psychological weapon against the enemy's army. Elephants were then used as a logistical tool, from which the battle scene was surveyed by the army commanders and the movements of forces observed. For the very same reason their use outlasted the ancient Iranian dynasties and continued into pre-Modern times in Iran."

All photos in this article are © Anahita Verahrami/Elephant Listening Project.

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**“I Love My Job”**

*FEZANA Journal spoke to Scherezade Pocha a small animal veterinarian located in Mississauga, Ontario. She has a potcake dog named Charlie who loves to go on hikes, and she recently adopted two kittens, Bruce and Peter.*

**FJ: Please tell Fezana Journal about yourself?**

I was born and raised in Mumbai, India, until Grade 10. I then attended boarding school in Kodaikanal. I loved the hustle and bustle of living in a big city like Mumbai, but equally enjoyed the quiet hillsides of Kodaikanal. I completed my undergraduate schooling in Ohio, USA, then moved to Canada to attend veterinary school in Guelph, graduating in 2001. My father is a family physician and my mother is a retired travel agent. I have a brother that currently lives in England with his family.

**FJ: What made you choose to be a veterinarian?**

From a young age, I have loved animals and brought home strays until we got our first dog, a dachshund named Rudolph. Since then, I have had many cats and dogs as pets. I love science, medicine, and animals so this was the career path that combined it all so I always worked toward it.

**FJ: What types of animals do you see in your practice?**

The majority of my patients are dogs and cats, but I also see rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, ferrets, bearded dragons, iguanas, geckos, and rats. The most unusual animal I have worked on is a large python named Alice! The client who raised her ultimately donated her to be cared for at a zoo.

**FJ: What is your favorite aspect of practicing veterinary medicine?**

I love my job! I have been practicing at the same clinic for 21 years so one

of my favourite aspects is seeing multiple generations of a family, from young children coming in with their family pets to becoming young adults coming in with their own families and pets. While caring for their pets I become a part of their extended family.

**FJ: What aspects of veterinary medicine is most challenging?**

As our patients cannot talk, the most challenging part of veterinary medicine is putting it all together when a patient is sick. We have to listen to the history given by the pet owner and do a thorough examination to determine the best course of diagnostics and treatments for the pet. We always want to heal our patients, but we are also restricted by what the pet owner will let us do and sometimes that may be the very minimal.

**FJ: What is your perspective on euthanasia?**

For the entirety of the pet’s life the pet owner in conjunction with their veterinarian makes all the decisions keeping the pet’s best interest at heart. As heartbreaking as it is, as a veterinarian, I can help the pet owner make that final decision and then be there for the pet in those final moments, letting them go surrounded by love.

**FJ: As a vet you may have seen many challenging cases. What actions do you take if there were signs that an animal that you're treating is being abused?**

If we see signs of abuse, we determine as best we can which member of the



family is responsible for the abuse and then find a way to keep the pet in our hospital either admitted for a procedure or boarding until we are able to contact Ontario's Provincial Animal Welfare team.

**FJ: What advice would you give to someone who would like to become a vet?**

Veterinary medicine is an amazing profession. A lot of students believe it is about cute puppies and kittens most days and while there is that, there is also hard, sad, and challenging cases. The hours are long and the work is physically and emotionally tiring. For this reason, I recommend volunteering at clinics to see the different sides of the day-to-day practice. It is important to work hard to achieve good grades as the application process is very competitive all over Canada. This is a profession to get into only because you are truly passionate about it.

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A Vegan Vet

By Armaiti May

As a veterinarian, I have had the opportunity to help non-human animals as well as to help foster the human-animal relationship by providing medical care to animal companions. Educating animal guardians regarding the proper care of these animals is a vital part of what I do.

An Alternative Approach

I was trained in Western veterinary medicine and have treated numerous commonly occurring medical conditions in small animals, such as diabetes, arthritis, hypothyroidism, etc. but there are many options for those who do not wish to pursue traditional medicine alone. We uniquely offer acupuncture and homeopathy. Acupuncture can help with many types of pain, osteoarthritis, vomiting, cancer pain, endocrine disorders, and much more. This technique has been used in various veterinary practices for thousands of years and will treat any ailment. Although acupuncture will not cure every condition, it will work extremely well when there is an issue.

Small dogs and large dogs will actually respond to acupuncture differently. Small dogs will typically come and receive acupuncture because of musculoskeletal problems such as arthritis, intervertebral disk disease, or traumatic nerve injury. They also come in for skin problems such as lick granulomas and allergic dermatitis. Acupuncture can assist in healing all of these problems. Large animals will benefit from acupuncture a little bit differently but for similar problems. Some of these include musculoskeletal problems such as

sore backs, respiratory problems, reproductive problems, and gastrointestinal problems such as non-surgical colic.

In addition to acupuncture, my practice also offers homeopathy (or integrative medicine) to promote the health and welfare of your pet. We can provide alternatives to traditionally processed medications, alternatives for pain, vomiting, inflammation, allergies, and most other conditions. We pride ourselves on treating your pet with wholeness.

Humane Care

I am a strong advocate of spaying and neutering, both to curb the pet overpopulation crisis, as well as for the health benefits to the individual animals. When you spay and neuter your pets, you give them a better chance at a happy life! They often live longer because they are less likely to run away, get in fights, or get hit by cars. They are less likely to get certain types of cancers. Females are less likely to get pyometras and other deadly diseases. Males are less likely to spray and have other behavioral problems!



As an animal activist, I do not perform cosmetic procedures such as ear crops and non-therapeutic tail docs. Additionally, I do not perform cat declaws and encourage people to learn about alternatives to declawing cats. Many people are unaware that a declaw involves amputation of the last digits (bones of the toe) where a cat bears his/her weight. Post-operative complications following a declaw procedure can include severe pain, litter box aversion problems, lameness, and increased tendency to bite. Humane alternatives to this procedure include: the use of soft paws; frequent nail trimmings; and training a cat to use a scratching post.

Euthanasia is a service that veterinarians provide to end an animal's life if and when it is deemed appropriate to do so. Having euthanized many hundreds of animals in my career so far, I do appreciate the privilege of being able to alleviate the suffering of animals in this way, but am also careful to consult with the client to insure the decision to euthanize is one that has been considered carefully and is being done with the animal's best interest in mind.

Vegan Advocate

Feeding meat-based diets to dogs causes unnecessary slaughter of farmed animals, and is both unhealthy for the animals and unsustainable for our ecosystem. Dogs are omnivores and can digest carbohydrates more effectively than their wolf ancestors. Dogs have no nutritional requirement for meat. In fact, dogs can thrive - and do thrive - when fed exclusively plant-based diets. Most of the human-

## Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage



generated greenhouse gas emissions originate from the livestock industry. Switching dogs from meat to plants will help preserve our planet's natural resources and significantly reduce animal suffering.

With cats who naturally hunt mice and lizards, we should not worry too much about the notion of what's natural as there are many common practices for cats that do not happen in nature. For example, living in a house or an apartment VS. roaming the wilderness or regular eating intervals provided by pet guardians VS. gorging in anticipation of long periods of hunger/starvation in nature. When a vegan diet is formulated by a qualified nutritionist as balanced and complete, supplemented with Taurine, contains all of the required vitamins and minerals, and is checked by veterinarians, then the vegan diet is a viable alternative with a number of health benefits for cats (easily digestible, less toxins/lower on the bioaccumulation chain, causes fewer allergies, may be suitable for weight management, reduces lethargy and bad odours).

### Advice for Vet Students

Veterinary medicine is a rewarding profession that allows one to help both humans and animals. Anyone

considering a career as a veterinarian should become acquainted with the profession first by volunteering or working at an animal hospital. The demands of a veterinarian include caring for sick and injured animals, educating and communicating with their human caretakers, as well as euthanizing animals who are suffering. These responsibilities can be challenging to deal with at times, both physically and emotionally.

To gain admission into any veterinary school, you need to get good grades, especially in your science and math classes. Try to get as much veterinary experience as you can prior to applying. While many schools require a minimum of 200 hours of veterinary experience, in order to be competitive and maximize your chances for gaining admission, it is a good idea to get at least 2000 hours of experience before applying.

If you are a vegan or animal rights advocate, unless you are applying to a very progressive school, it is best not to disclose this information in the application or interview process to improve your chances for being accepted into the school. Nowadays, it is possible to obtain your veterinary education without harming or killing animals, and especially so at certain schools. More and more veterinary schools are using humane education methods to teach their students.

I have an interest in promoting the human-animal bond in my practice, as well as to the public at large. I feel that recognizing the importance of the human-animal bond helps improve the status of animals in our society. As a practicing veterinarian, I hope to effectively educate my clients and the public about the proper treatment and care of animals. I founded the non-profit Veterinary Association for the Protection of Animals (VAPA), to

educate the veterinary profession about the benefits of veganism and to encourage veterinary schools to offer humane surgical teaching methods to students. Once people become more aware of animals' needs and interests, many of our attitudes and habits regarding animals will change and animal welfare will consequently improve.

### Credits:

- Armaity May. IMDb Mini Biography by Maynard S. Clark. <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm4129591/bio>
- Vegan Vet. <https://www.veganvet.net/our-team/>
- What's Natural? Comment by Veterinarian Dr. Armaity May (Dec 07, 2020). Vecado. <https://vecado.ca/blogs/vegan-pet-food/whats-natural-veterinarian-dr-may>.



*Armaity May is a mobile vet whose practice serves Malibu, CA and the surrounding areas. As an animal activist and vegan advocate, she speaks about a variety of issues including ethical issues in veterinary medicine, humane veterinary medical training, vegetarian/vegan diets for companion animals, and veganism. She also has a podcast on animal issues on iTunes. Her website is [veganvet.net](http://veganvet.net)*

Images from Dr. May's Veterinary House Calls page on Facebook.

## Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage



### Doggy Heaven

*Xerxes Wania, the owner of Dogtopia, talked to FEZANA Journal about running a daycare for dogs in Kitchener, ON, Canada.*

**FJ: Why did you choose to open a dog daycare centre?**

I always had a passion for animals, especially dogs and horses. After volunteering at the Humane Society and working with a dog rescue, I realized that one of the main reasons people surrender their dogs is because they don't understand their needs. A dog is a social animal, and just like humans, they need physical and mental stimulation to stay out of trouble, especially when they are young. Most people cannot spend several hours each day with their dogs. Dog daycare is a great option. This is why we opened Dogtopia.

**FJ: Please tell us a little about your daycare and the services you offer.**

Dogtopia Kitchener is a family-owned business offering dog daycare, overnight and long-term boarding, spa services, and training. We also offer webcam services that allow pet parents to check in on their pets using their computers or smartphones. Our 6000 sq. ft. state-of-the-art facility comes with three spacious playrooms, where we offer an off-leash, open-play environment. Our dogs are separated by similar size, temperament, and play style. Our playrooms are supervised by certified Canine Coaches.

**FJ: Did you have to undergo any training?**

We went through extensive training and continue to do so on an ongoing basis. Learning about our customers both human and canine, dog behavior, the actual business, and the



day-to-day challenges can be a lot on any given day.

**FJ: How do you handle unruly dogs?**

When dogs come in for the first time, we take them through a series of tests to see if they are suitable for open play daycare. If they pass, they can stay; if not, we guide the pet parent through steps they can take to hopefully get their dogs ready for daycare. We use positive reinforcement training methods to deal with dogs and have processes in place to make sure that dogs don't get to a stage where they fight. Knowing their body language is important and we try to prevent any situation from escalating into a fight.

**FJ: Do you end up having favorites?**

We do. It's hard not to. For me, it's the seniors who hang out, sometimes a bit grumpy, but show their puppy side once in a while, which makes my day.

**FJ: As a business, what is the best part of running a dog daycare? What is the most challenging?**

The best part is to see the dogs playing together happily, cuddling up together for naps, and greeting us with their wiggly butts and happy tails. It truly puts a smile on the faces of everyone who works here.

As for challenges, these days employing long-term staff is a real issue. They either underestimate the job or most of them just want to get their "puppy fix" and move on to do something else, or care for dogs themselves and start their own home-based doggy business. It's tough to keep training new employees.

**FJ: How did the pandemic affect your business?**

The pandemic has been a roller coaster ride. Initially, it was challenging because of the uncertainty, but it soon turned in our favor as many people were getting dogs as companions during the pandemic. Unfortunately, as people return to work, they are also surrendering their dogs. It has become a real issue at the Humane Society and dog rescues.

**FJ: What's next?**

We are thinking of opening two more daycares in the area.

## Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage



### It's a Dog's Life The Blessings of a Dog Guide

By Daleara Hirjikaka

Dogs were always a part of our family growing up in Karachi's beautiful Parsi Colony. Unlike my Muslim friends who would shy away from dogs, most of my Parsi friends and neighbours had much-loved pet dogs. As I got older, I realized that whereas Muslims considered dogs to be unclean animals, Parsis respected and loved dogs as helpers of mankind. My story is about one such canine helper.

#### The Phone Call That Started it All

It all began with a phone call from my sister in California. She excitedly explained that she had found an organization in Ontario that trained dog guides for children with autism. At the time, our son Iyaneh was eleven years old and had just completed the Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI) therapy that helped him become more alert and responsive to his environment. The family decided that a dog guide would be a great companion for Iyaneh who found it difficult to socialize and make friends.

The call was followed by a lengthy application process that involved a letter from our family doctor to confirm our eligibility as well as letters from our son's school and our place of work to certify that they would extend all cooperation to the dog guide and the trainers. There was also an interview with a trainer who brought a dog to our house to see how our son interacted with the animal and to see what kind of a dog would be best suited to our son's temperament.

#### The Big Day

Then came the big day when we were told that our son had been approved to receive a dog guide and that we were on the waiting list. After a couple of months, we got the happy news that a dog had been matched to our son and I was asked to attend the ten-day training at the Lion's Foundation of Canada Dog Guides kennel and training centre in Oakville, Ontario. The facility in Oakville is spacious and has guest rooms for all the clients. There were about eight excited moms and dads who were there for ten days to learn how to handle these intelligent animals and bond with them. The days were long with training scheduled from 9 am to 4 pm with a break for lunch at 12 noon.

The first day was mostly acclimatization and a tour of the facility. Dog Guides Canada train dogs for seven different programs including diabetic alert, seizure response, canine vision, hearing, autism assistance, service, and facility



support. I found the service program particularly fascinating. Dogs in the program were trained to help clients with physical and mental disabilities. They could open doors, fetch items from the fridge, open and shut appliances, pick up objects that were as small as a dime from the floor, and bark or trigger alerts in case of emergencies. These were truly selfless and giving creatures who would devotedly serve clients their whole lives.

#### Meeting Brogue

Even though the parents were eager to meet their dog guides, the identity of the dog selected for the family was not revealed until the afternoon of the second day when the dogs were introduced to the clients. The dog that the trainers matched with Iyaneh was a young, high-spirited black lab. The trainer explained that the dog would draw Iyaneh out of his shell by encouraging him to play. The dog was well-trained, but he was quite frolicsome and because my elderly visually impaired mother-in-law lived with us, I beseeched the trainers to give me a dog with a quieter temperament. The trainers complied by giving us our wonderful yellow lab Brogue.

At the time, Brogue was a two-year-old dog who had been with another family in Vancouver. He was returned by the family after a year because of the family's inability to look after him. The trainers explained that Brogue was more suited to an

## Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage



excitable child and that his quiet solid bulk was particularly helpful when soothing an anxious, high-strung child. However, they agreed with me that due to my present family circumstances, Brogue was our best option.

### The Training

What ensued was a week of intense training with Brogue within the facility and out in the community, riding transit, visiting malls, going into stores and restaurants. The trainers showed us that there was nowhere a dog guide could not go. At the end of the training there was a graduation ceremony where Brogue met the entire family, including Iyaneh, for the first time. There was a joyous moment during the ceremony where Iyaneh jumped up and proudly announced, "This is my dog," when his name was announced with Brogue as one of the new graduates. Iyaneh was one of the oldest children to get a dog guide. Most of the other children were quite young and were not present at the ceremony. Having a dog for the younger kids, meant peace of mind for the parent. Many autistic children are runners who dart away from their parents. However, with a 65-lb dog tethered to their side, a child has little opportunity to run. For Iyaneh, the dog served as a friend and confidant.



roadblocks when we applied for Brogue to attend school. But Iyaneh's home room teachers prevailed, and Brogue started to ride the bus and go to school with his favourite student. When Brogue started attending school, the trainers went to his school for several days to train the staff and speak to the children during an assembly to tell them how to behave when they encountered a dog guide at school. A wonderful thing happened when Iyaneh started to take the dog to school. Children who would not speak to Iyaneh previously, came up and started asking him questions about his dog!

Brogue has now been with us for eight years. He has been with us to movies, restaurants, and live theatre performances. He has accompanied us on road trips and has been a calming influence in Iyaneh's life. He continues to be an integral part of our family and a big support for Iyaneh.

The generosity of the Lion's Foundation of Canada Dog Guides has made it possible for families like us to receive highly trained dog guides free of cost. Dog guides like Brogue enrich the quality of life for clients and their families and make independent living possible for clients who otherwise would not be able to live on their own.

### A Member of the Family

Once Brogue came home, we got additional in-home support and training from the kennel. Surprisingly,

the only time that we encountered any issues was when we decided to send the dog to school with Iyaneh. The principal at Iyaneh's middle school feared dogs and created several

**Daleara Hirjikaka** is a content developer with a large publishing house in Toronto. She loves travelling, reading fiction, and taking walks with her son and his dog guide.

### Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides (LFCDG)

LFCDG empowers Canadians with disabilities to navigate their world with confidence and independence by providing Dog Guides at no cost to them and supporting each pair in their journey together. From breeding to training with a life-time of follow-up services, each Dog Guide team costs approximately \$35,000. The Foundation relies on donations to provide these special matches and does not receive any government funding. For more information about LFCDG, please email [info@dogguides.com](mailto:info@dogguides.com) or call 1 (800) 768-3030.

**Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage**



**The Birds and The Bees**

FEZANA Journal talked to *Shahrokh Khanizadeh*, a retired research scientist, about his hobbies.

**The Birds**

**FJ: When did you become a birdwatcher?**

My wife and I started bird watching when we were canoe camping in the Adirondack Region of New York and North of Quebec, about 20 years ago, when the kids were about six or seven years old.



**FJ: Where do you usually go for birdwatching? Are there any unusual places you have gone to see birds?**

My bird watching is normally around our properties; we live in a very wooded area (St-Lazare) and have a lake house North of Montreal (Wentworth-Nord) which has vast number of trees.

We made several nesting houses for a variety of birds and bats (Note that bats are not birds and are classified as mammals i.e. they produce milk & give birth and have no feathers) and this attracts them to return every year.

One of the most unusual places we have gone for bird watching was the Island of Grand Manan, off the coast of New Brunswick, where we saw puffins and other species.



**FJ: What equipment and knowledge does one need?**

A set of good binoculars and a bird book are all you need to start birding. Anyone can make bird houses to attract the birds, and simple plans can be found on line. We also use an app to identify birdsong.

**FJ: What birds do you normally see?**

Hummingbirds, chickadees, robins, several type of wood peckers, falcons, hawks, gold finches, orioles, morning doves, cardinals, blue jays, mallards, bluebirds, purple and yellow finches, yellow warbler, loons, cranes and herons and more.

**FJ: What popular bird is your favorite?**

One of our favorites is seeing the hummingbirds on our feeder or around the flowers. They fly up and down, back and forth with an amazing



wing beat speed of more than 150 times per second with a soft humming noise. My wife especially likes them when they perch on her hand feeder, drinking the sweet sugar and water mixture that she prepared.

**FJ: Can you explain the importance of these birds in our ecosystem? How can the average person best help birds?**

Birds are vital part of the ecosystem and contribute not only to controlling insect pests but also act as pollinators, which helps maintain our ecology.

Some nourish from plants while others eat thousand of insects each day like warblers, bluebirds and woodpeckers. Some other birds eat small animals, such mice or earthworms while their eggs serve as food for snakes, raccoons and some other animals. Birds, like hummingbirds, that eat nectar, are very important pollinators helping to fertilize flowers and agricultural crops. Birds like orioles, finches and robins, that eat fruits, help to disseminate the seeds in new places.

You will appreciate nature in a different way when you start bird watching; connecting to your natural environment keeps you grounded and contributes to good mental and physical health. It is easy to attract

## Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage



birds, you just need a feeder, a bird bath and nesting boxes.

### The Bees

**FJ: What made you want to keep bees?** I read a book on ants and bees and their behaviour and I became fascinated with honey bees and decided that I would have a hive of my own, to have an opportunity to study them further. They are quite outstanding, considering how small they are.

### FJ: What fascinates you about bees?

Honeybees have a remarkably organized society, lead by one queen, who ensures the survival of the hive; a single bee cannot survive on its own. Honey bees are like a family and have a wide variety of tasks to perform. In fact, their society is divided into the following: the queen, the worker bees, which are non-reproducing females, and the drones, which are male.

The queen is the only reproducing female; she releases pheromones (perfume) which keep the workers sterile and also signals her livelihood so the workers know she is alive and well. A queen might live up to five

years, but she will produce less eggs per day as time goes by. In her young days, she will produce up to 2-3000 eggs per day. An old queen will be replaced by a newer one when the workers start feeding royal jelly to a developing larva.

Worker bees are responsible for foraging for food, guarding the nest and caring for the queen and the offspring; they also clean and keep the hive ventilated. The drones are male, and have only one role - to fertilize the queen's eggs, after which they die. They have no stinger to defend the hive, nor do they have the ability to collect nectar. In the fall, the colony kills the drone bees in order to preserve the food (honey/pollen) for winter. The worker bees can survive for as long as six months during the winter, keeping the hive warm and caring for the queen until the spring.

The amazing part is that the function of worker bees in the hive is guided by a biological clock; i.e., they perform a different task during their development. They work as "cleaners" when they are about two days old, i.e. they clean the cell for the queen to lay eggs. They act as "undertakers" when they are more

than three days old removing and disposing the dead bees/larvae. Between four and 12 days, they act as "nurses" to take care of the eggs/larvae. At about 12 days old, they act as "builders" to produce wax and construct the honey comb, "ventilators" (temperature controllers) by fanning their wings and circulating airflow, act as "hive protectors" by checking every bee entering the hive to ensure it has the same scent (queen's pheromone) and belongs to this hive. After about 14-15 days, they leave the hive to collect nectar and pollen and can travel as far as five kilometres. At approximately seven weeks, they finally die in the field while foraging for nectar and pollen.

If the population in a hive gets too high and they lack space, they swarm. A swarming hive has no desire to sting as they are homeless and has nothing to defend.

### FJ: Did you learn the art of beekeeping from someone?

I took a bee keeping course while I was doing my graduate work and later started working with a friend, keeping bees and selling the honey to cover our costs.

### FJ: How did you get your hives?

I inherited a couple of bee hives from a friend and occasionally buy a queen to replace an older one when she is not able to produce enough eggs to maintain the colony health. Several times, I collected swarmed honey bees and make new hive.

### FJ: Most people do not react well to the sight of swarming bees, were you afraid of the bees when you first started out?

I was not afraid when I started working with the bees. I can walk to the hive, open and check the hive until I find the queen to ensure the health of the hive, without being bothered with



## Creatures Great and Small in Zarathushti Heritage



any protective equipment. I get an occasional sting if I misplace my finger on a bee. A bee hive is more alert to intruders in late fall, due to the impending winter and their intense preparation. During this period, it's more challenging to work with them since they fiercely protect their honey, which sustains them through the winter.

**FJ: What's the most fulfilling part of a beekeeper's job?**

It is fascinating to open a hive and observe the hive structure and how

they communicate/collaborate. The most satisfying, is the fall harvest of honey and watching the hive grow stronger.

Charles Darwin said, “The honeycomb is a masterpiece of engineering and is absolutely perfect in economizing labor and wax”

**FJ: Can you explain the importance of bees in our ecosystem? How can the average person best help bees?**

The most important contribution of the honey bees is their contribution to pollination. No bees, no pollination, no plants, no animals and no humans. It is critical that we humans contribute to the survival of bees. The best way for us to do that is by eliminating the use of chemical pesticides.

There are multiple other types of bees that are equally important in preserving our environment; solitary bees, meaning they are not as social as honey bees, including bumble bees, mason bees, sweat bees, leaf cutting bees, etc. You can help save solitary bees easily by making holes on wood blocks and stack them along with bamboo sticks in a wooden box and leave it in your garden and enjoy observing their activity.



**Editor's Note:** Since 2006, Shahrokh Khanizadeh has been doing the layout of the FEZANA journal as a volunteer. We are grateful to him for his dedicated service and commitment.

*He is a retired research scientist from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and professor from McGill, Guelph, and Laval universities. He is currently working as consultant for a private company involved in the agricultural research industry in the area of genetic improvement of horticultural crops. He was recently appointed by Taylor & Francis as the Editor-In-Chief of Archives of Phytopathology and Plant Protection Journal. Additional information on his career is posted at <http://khanizadeh.info>*

### World's Smallest, Largest, And Weirdest Bees

Bees come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. According to *The Bee: A Natural History* written by our chief and resident bee expert, Noah Wilson-Rich, “Earth is home to more than 20,000 bee species, from fluorescent-colored orchid bees and sweet bees to flower-besting squash bees. Bees are a diverse species that plays an integral role in the life of the planet.

- Perdita Minima bee is the smallest bee in North America. A little less than two millimeters long, this bee species can be found in extremely small nests in the sandy soil found in the desert.
- Wallace's Giant Bee is the largest bee, the size of a human thumb, but has remained elusive since the early 1980's.
- The Domino Cuckoo bee behave like cuckoo birds – laying their eggs in the nests of other bees.
- The Anthophora pueblo drills their nests out of rock

By Paige Mulhern (03/02/2021) <https://bestbees.com/2021/03/02/worlds-coolest-bee-species/>



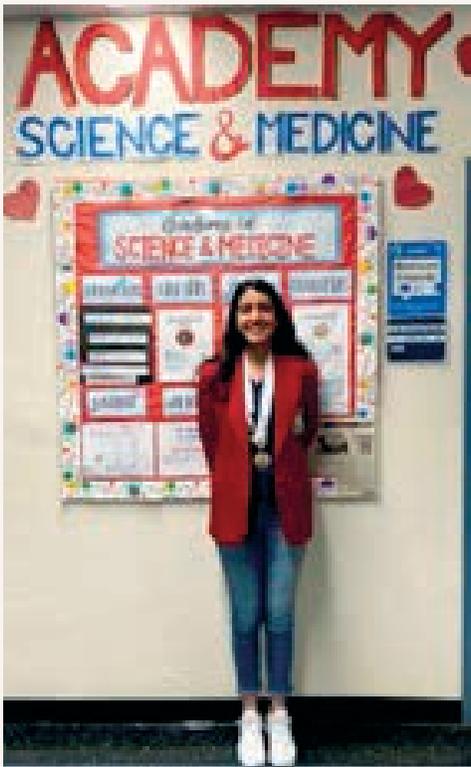
## Mantra Roointan

a senior at Crescenta Valley High school in La Crescenta, California, wins Gold medals for her research.

Parkinson's Disease is a neurodegenerative disease that causes unregulated movement and coordination as the level of dopamine in the brain decreases. There is currently no cure for this disease but there are different medications that can lessen symptoms.

Levodopa is the current main medication and has many drug add-ons that enhance its ability to increase dopamine levels and reduce symptoms for a longer amount of time.

Ms. Mantra Roointan is a senior at Crescenta Valley High School in La Crescenta, California. Her research involved using computer modeling software to test two add-on drugs, opicapone and entacapone, and analyze which would be more effective in inhibiting the COMT enzyme, an enzyme that breaks down the main Levodopa drug, making its effects weaker. To prevent this, inhibiting drugs for COMT like opicapone and entacapone allow more Levodopa to reach the brain meaning that patients experience fewer symptoms for a longer amount of time. To do this, she decided to test the binding affinity of each inhibitor with the COMT enzyme which means how strongly each inhibitor drug is able to bind to the enzyme. She worked on this over her junior year of high school and completed the research independently under the supervision of Dr. Marcelo Coba who is an Associate Professor of Psychiatry & the Behavioral Sciences at USC.



When her research was finalized, she concluded that the more effective drug is opicapone by analyzing the data and visualizations, specifically the greater negative binding affinity which indicates a greater strength of binding to the COMT enzyme. Later, she competed in various science competitions like Skills USA, HOSA Future Health Professionals, and the Los Angeles County Science and Engineering Fair. **At the HOSA State competition, she achieved a gold medal, and at the SkillsUSA championship, she won gold in California and silver at the national level.** She was also given the extraordinary chance to formally present her project to students at her school and received a congratulatory message from Dianne Feinstein, a California Senator, and the Los Angeles County Board of Education. Mantra considers this a remarkable experience that allowed her to explore her interests in science through her contribution to research on Parkinson's Disease which continues to affect millions of people worldwide.

Visit <https://youtu.be/PsN00dVWxuQ> to watch her presentation.

# CONGRATULATIONS

**Justice Jamshed Burjor Pardiwala of the Gujarat High Court, was appointed as a Judge at the Supreme Court on May 9th, 2022.**



He is the fourth Parsi Judge to serve at the Court—and the first minority High Court Judge to be appointed in the last five years after Justice Abdul Nazeer. He is in line to serve a two-year term as Chief Justice of India starting May 2028.

He was born in Mumbai on August 12, 1965 into a family of lawyers rooted in South Gujarat's Valsad. His great grandfather Navroji Bhikaji Pardiwala began his legal practice in the town in 1894. Navroji's son, Cawasji Navroji Pardiwala joined the Valsad Bar in 1929., and his grandson Burjor Cawasji Pardiwala followed in his footsteps, joining the Valsad Bar in 1955,

Jamshed Pardiwala began his legal practice in 1989 after completing his LL.B. from Valsad's K.M. College and by 1990, he had begun practicing at the Gujarat High Court in Ahmedabad. While at the Gujarat High Court, Pardiwala wrote 1,807 Judgments and sat on 2,195 Benches.

In 1994, he was elected as a Member of the Bar Council of Gujarat, a membership he retained until 2000. In 2002 he was appointed as Standing Counsel at the High Court of Gujarat and subordinate courts. He was elevated as a judge of the Supreme Court of India in May 2022.

Congratulations Justice Jamshed Pardiwala, the community is proud of you.

## THE VIRUS

New day dawned  
New Year arrived  
New Decade commenced

There was hugging and kissing  
Singing and dancing  
People living their lives

In the East  
Balls of Spikes  
Nanometer in Size  
Unknown and Unseen  
Airborne and Free  
Carriers of Virus  
Travelled the Globe  
Hidden in Bodies  
Camouflaged in Breaths

An invading army  
A blitzkrieg attack  
Striking with fury  
Storming, Infiltrating, Suffocating  
The lungs to death

Like flies perished people  
Gripped in panic and fear  
Socializing on screens  
Hibernating in bubbles  
Hugging, Kissing, Mating  
In Cyberspace  
Despair, Fatigue, Boredom  
Bonding human race

Cities transformed  
Into deserted landscape  
Wildlife returned  
To their former homes again  
Airwaves and bytes flooded  
With Virus' news

2022 came and the Virus still  
lingers on  
Mutating  
Mysterious and deadly still  
Teasing, Defying  
Human race

The Virus menace will cease one  
day  
Its sojourn seen in graves  
Its memory seared in brains  
Its coming a lesson to human race  
Homo sapiens evolved from Earth  
Fauna and Flora too  
None is stronger than other  
None is superior than other  
All three have equal rights  
To live and prosper together

Poet: **Minoo Gundevia,  
Montreal**



# Kainaz Amaria named Washington Post national visual enterprise editor



Kainaz began her career as a newspaper photographer, driving hundreds of miles a day around the Bay Area covering council meetings, high school sports and breaking news. After nearly 10 years of working as a photojournalist — covering stories from President Barack [Obama's inauguration](#) for the then-St. Petersburg Times, to driving the length of the [Grand Trunk Road](#) in India for NPR — she decided to gradually shift her focus from being an assignment photographer to someone who worked with others to more fully shape the way news stories are told.

National Editor Matea Gold, Deputy National Editor Philip Rucker and Senior Editor for Visual Enterprise Ann Gerhart announced that Kainaz Amaria was joining The Washington Post as the visual enterprise editor for National, pioneering a new role aimed at expanding visual journalism and conceiving of innovative storytelling approaches.

In this key leadership role, Kainaz oversees immersive, visual-first stories on both quick-turn news and longer-term projects. She will work with reporters and editors from all of National's coverage teams as well as partner with the Audio, Data, Design, Graphics, Photo and Video departments to coverage. She will report to the national editor and work closely with Senior Editor for Visual Enterprise and the other visual enterprise editors to develop and share best practices for multidisciplinary storytelling and to drive more collaborative, immersive journalism across the newsroom.

Before joining the Washington post she was the first ever visual editor at VOX bringing with her decades of experience. Before Vox she was an editor on NPR's Visual Team, playing a key role in creating new storytelling formats.

In 2020, Kainaz was honored with the [John Long Ethics Award by](#) the National Press Photographers Association for her [writing](#) and [criticism](#) on the [photojournalism industry](#) and visual language.

Kainaz has a BA in international relations and political science from Boston University and an MA in photography from the School of Visual Communication, Ohio University. In 2010, she was a Fulbright Scholar and completed [a short film](#) on the Parsi Zoroastrian community in Mumbai.

She and her husband, Gene Demby, a host of NPR's Code Switch, welcomed their first child in November 2021. Kainaz was born in Mumbai, India, and grew up in California.

Kainaz is the daughter of Yezdi and Dhun Amaria of Foster City, California and niece of local head priest Ervad Kobad Jamshed.

## Vahisté Sinor

Journalism Student Vahiste Sinor writes about her impressions of the virtual Parliament of World Religions in 2021 where Zoroastrians participated in record numbers.



Vahisté Sinor is a Journalism and Creative Writing Student at the University of Hertfordshire who hopes to have a career in travel journalism. She has a keen interest in poetry and fiction works and hope to have a published collection someday.

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Ceremony which, as deemed by the organisers, is now a dying art, but has been a part of our heritage for over 3,000 years.

'Opening The Doors To The Zoroastrian Fire Temple' was one of the most interesting sessions, which explained -in great detail- the importance and significance of the *Agiyari* (Zoroastrian Fire Temple) and all the other aspects of it. The session hosts talk about the fire that burns within *Agiyaris* all over the world and also about the architecture of both ancient and modern Fire Temples. The contrast between the two is quite stunning. Mr Kersi Shroff showed the floor plan of an *Agiyari* from 10-15 BCE. He went on to mention the layout, with the fire burning inside and also notes that there was a well in the courtyard which ties the elements of water and fire together.

### Parliament of World Religions 2021

'A Peaceful, Just and Sustainable World' was the theme of this year's virtual Parliament of World Religions. With approximately 220 religions and spiritual communities participating in the 8th Parliament, we can gauge that it was a resounding success in bringing together people from all walks of life.

Ranging over three days, the Parliament had around 3138 members contributing to every aspect of the event. There were talks, workshops and activities for people of all religions, faiths and had topics ranging from love and history to music, dance and LGBTQ+ inclusion in faith and religion.

Zoroastrianism was integrated throughout the Parliament and ranged from a dance screening by Zoroastrians of North America to a talk about the Yasna

The beauty of the placement of ancient Fire Temples is that most of them were located at the top of a hill and recent excavation has found one to be as old as 1000 BCE, which just shows how old our wonderful religion is and the reality that we have been able to keep our faith alive for so many years and through so much hardship is really a testament to our religion.

The modern architecture of *Agiyaris*, on the other hand, is simplistic and modest, which is the type of Fire Temples we now see in India and America. There is quite a big contrast in the architectural style of ancient and modern *Agiyaris* but the basic layout and the elements that define the essence of our religion is the same.

Another event that was beautifully executed through a panel discussion was 'Zoroastrian Perspective on Prejudice' which was hosted by Nawaz Merchant,

Sousan Abadian and Shiraz Piroshaw-Tata who work with FEZANA.

The talk was about how we, as a community, have dealt with and adapted to prejudice. It is a well-known fact that Zoroastrians have assimilated well in new environments and have adapted to the countries that they settled in. The history of how Zoroastrians had to flee Iran and come to India is also widespread and well known and these facts were what made it more interesting to hear about the Zoroastrians that stayed behind in Iran.

As children, we were told stories about how Zoroastrians travelled overseas to protect their lives and make sure our religion did not die out with them. What we were not told, was what happened to the people that stayed behind. Nawaz talks about the brutal things that they were subjected to; torture, poverty and were even forced to live, wearing rags and strips of cloth.

This is the harsh reality that we were never told and this talk opened my eyes to all the prejudice our ancestors had to face, all because they did not give up their religion. The theme of this Parliament was 'A peaceful And Just World' which when learning about the horrors of the Zoroastrians back in Iran is quite ironic.

Considering all the things that happened we learn why the community progressively became more orthodox and banned inter-faith marriage. In many places, this is still frowned upon within the community. This is where terms like 'purity' and 'bloodline' became important to people in our community.

All these factors have led to a stigma around other faiths and religions, in my opinion, and is what many people cling to, leading to the feeling of superiority of Parsis and having a pure and clean bloodline.

The sad truth is that if we as a community do not let go of our orthodox beliefs, there may be an unfortunate future for us as we as a community are dwindling in number and trying to hold on to the 'pure Parsi bloodline' is not going to help us grow as a community. Only if we open our minds to integrating properly with other communities around us can we have some peace and prosperity in our lives.



### PARLIAMENT OF WORLD RELIGIONS 2023

The Parliament returns to a heartwarming in-person venue next summer. Watch and participate in vivid presentations, religious observances, art and performances at the [2023 Parliament of the World's Religions](#) hosted from [August 14-18](#) in the city of Chicago which held the first Parliament in 1893.

You can join this event too!

The team is accepting Proposals through October 3, on The theme of "**A Call to Conscience: Defending Freedom and Human Rights.**" Focus will include "Faith and interfaith understanding" and The broad critical issues in the mission statement: justice, peace, and sustainability.

"Writing as Nev March, ZAGNY member Nawaz Merchant has published a second book about gilded age intrigue at the 1893 worlds fair which features the first Parliament of World Religions."

For more information -

Mahrukh Motafram, [mahruk83@gmail.com](mailto:mahruk83@gmail.com) - Trustee, Parliament of the World's Religions.

FEZANA Interfaith Committee - Homi Gandhi, [homidgandhi@gmail.com](mailto:homidgandhi@gmail.com); Bakhtavar Desai, [BFDESAI@aol.com](mailto:BFDESAI@aol.com)

<https://parliamentofreligions.org/parliament/2023-chicago>

# Studying the Gathas through Perspective: The Analogies and Allegories

By Daryoush Jahanian

To comprehend the teachings of Zarathushtra, we must study the Gathas through the Perspective of the Gathas, and avoid searching for concepts that exist in other religions. Most misconceptions are due to researchers with preconceived views, searching to extract from the Gathas, concepts belonging to other religions, for example, an entity of ultimate evil, such as Satan or the Devil, does not exist in the Gathas. This was absent even in the Achaemenian inscriptions, where Ahura Mazda is named and praised for the creation of the earth, sky, humans, and happiness – with no reference made to demons or an evil god. This mistake comes from the mistranslation of “Spenta Mainyu” in the Gathas, to “The Holy Spirit” as identified in the Christian Bible. As a result, Spenta Mainyu became the same as Ahura Mazda, and the other Mainyu (Angra Mainyu) stands opposed to Him. That is how the false notion of two gods confronting each other has evolved; while after a careful review, one must conclude that in Zarathushtra's mindset, no entity like Satan in Semitic religions, nor demons and an evil god exist. Equating Ahriman or Angra Mainyu with Satan in the later Avestan and Pahlavi writings has resulted from the aforementioned influences in research and interpretation.

## What is the Status of Zarathushtra in the Gathas?

In recent years some researchers, have expressed a viewpoint that if we call Zarathushtra a prophet, we have actually lowered him to the level of Semitic prophets. Therefore, it is best to call him Thinker, Teacher, and Philosopher.

## Is he a Prophet; or a Thinker, Teacher, and Philosopher?

To answer this question, we must look at our definition of religion. If we consider religion to be a dispensation of moral and mystical teachings, that make a person live a better life in society, and help him to pass through the hardships of life, then the Gathas cover both these conditions; hence, the teachings of Zarathushtra are a religion and the founder is a Prophet. Various chapters (30, 34 and 45) introduce Ahura Mazda as the only God worthy of worship.

But does Zarathushtra indeed claim divine inspiration? The answer is yes: In Yasna 31-2 he declares that he is recognized as a Teacher by Ahura Mazda: "As there are people in doubt, tempted by falsehood, for them it is not easy to choose the correct path, I, as a teacher known by Ahura

Mazda come to you to lead the two groups, so that all may live according to righteousness".

But here is a difference from the Semitic prophets. Zarathushtra does not claim that he has been appointed by Ahura Mazda to carry the actual Word of God, nor that people must follow him unquestionably and blindly. In Yasna 30 and 45, he recommends that his audience listen well to this message and ponder it with a bright mind - then every man and woman may choose their path freely. He also asserts that he follows the teachings of Ahura Mazda by choice.

## But what about miracles? Does Zarathushtra claim to perform miracles?

Miracles have been attributed to many other prophets, but scientifically, they cannot be proven. Zarathushtra never claims to have performed a miracle.

Despite that, later Pahlavi narratives of the Islamic era (such as Dinkard), inspired by other religions, made attempts to claim that he smiled at birth, and when, as a baby, his enemies placed him before wild animals and they did not harm him, etc. In recent years some researchers, in particular the Iranians who have rediscovered Zarathushtra, have expressed a viewpoint that if we call Zarathushtra a prophet, we have actually lowered him to the level of Semitic prophets. Therefore, it is best

to call him Thinker, Teacher, and Philosopher.

### **What is the Status of God in Zoroastrianism?**

Ahura Mazda is an abstract entity composed of the highest moral and spiritual values which can be attained by a perfect human. At this point, the human becomes God-like and at one with God. In this context, a perfect human is the mirror image of God. In Yasna 47-1, all the Divine Attributes of Ahura Mazda and the Spenta Mainyu are named. Yasna 49-5 reflects the ideal objective of how, by attainment of the Divine Attributes, one becomes God-like and joins with God. Humans, through their creative mind (Benevolent Spirit) or Spenta Mainyu, can recognize God and attain the Divine Attributes.

As God is all good, and no evil emanates from Him, the sources of two phenomena or Mainyu, evil (Angra) as well as good (Spenta) reside in the human mind. We have been granted the Wisdom and Freedom to ponder and make the correct choice between right and wrong with the knowledge of the results. There should be no compromise in this choice. Spenta Mainyu, the Benevolent Spirit, is shared by God and humans alike, but Angra Mainyu, the Malevolent Spirit, is exclusively part of human mentality. In Yasna 30-3 these two phenomena have existed since the beginning of creation and they determine the two paths of life.

In some religions, God is the source of both good and evil and can generate both peace and calamity. God can even mislead a person, then punish him to teach a lesson to others. Consequently, in those religions, relations between

humans and God are based on both love and fear, but in the Gathas, this relationship is founded only upon mutual love. Those who choose the conduct of good deeds as a true act of worship, help the poor and oppressed (34-5), or promote the living world (31-16), are called "Urvato", friend and companion of Ahura Mazda.

Ahura Mazda is universal, the teachings of Zarathushtra are global and all humans regardless of race, gender or nationality are equal, that All may choose and follow this religion at will. This is not the case in many other teachings, where followers have been presented guidance for misled people or for a particular ethnic group; some even teach that their prophet is appointed only for people of the same language, so they may understand him.

### **Who is the Saoshyant or Benefactor?**

This is a general term in the Gathas and applies to those who bring benefit to society and advance human

**As God is all good, and no evil emanates from Him, the sources of two phenomena or Mainyu, evil (Angra) as well as good (Spenta) reside in the human mind. We have been granted the Wisdom and Freedom to ponder and make the correct choice between right and wrong with the knowledge of the results.**

civilization. It can apply to farmers, physicians, scientists, teachers, thinkers, and those who enrich society. There are Saoshyants who lived in the past, are in the present and those who will come in the future. In Yasna 48-9 Zarathushtra is called a Saoshyant, but he makes no reference to a promised future savior. According to the Gathas, every individual is in charge of his own destiny, consequently, believing in a future savior who will come to their rescue, contradicts the concept of Self-Determination. The notion of future saviors, such as Hushidar Mah and Hushidar Bami in the younger Avesta, is based on the misinterpretation of "those Saoshyants who will come in the future." Zarathushtra does not believe in a future world savior. Every individual, man or woman, can be a benefactor or Saoshyant to society and they shape their own destiny and fate.

### **Fatalism or Self-Determination?**

Some religions believe that from conception, the fate of every human has already been determined by God and it cannot be changed, since whatever God wills, happens. The communities that depend on this concept, may enjoy the tranquility and accept the tragedies of life as the will of God, but certainly those believers will neither confront the crisis of life nor thrive to progress.

Zarathushtra's teachings are based on Freedom of Choice and Self-Determination. All humans are the authors of their own life and the architects of their own destinies (30-,3

45-1). Consequently, there is no room for slavery, blind obedience, coercive conversion, nor belief in preordained fate or the concept of reincarnation. The concept of reincarnation is totally alien to the Gathas and it contradicts the teachings of Zarathushtra, founded on freedom of choice, self-reliance and self-determination. There is no trace of this thought in Iranian literature or Persian mysticism. Yasna 48-4 vividly illustrates that every individual is responsible for his destiny and fate: "Whoever sets his mind on the better or the worse, sets his conscience accordingly with actions and words, thus his will follows the choice. But according to Your Wisdom, the destiny of the two will be different."

According to article 18 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, issued on December 10, 1948, every individual should be free to choose his own beliefs and religion, or change them if he wishes, and should be free to express them. 3800 years ago, Zarathushtra recommended that every man and woman should listen and ponder with their bright mind and decide in full freedom, to choose or reject his message.

Freedom of Religion is particularly emphasized in Yasna 31-11. People are also free to announce their decision made by free will: 31-12, "Therefore every person whether right or wrong, wise or unwise should announce his belief freely in words, what is in his heart and mind. Wherever doubt exists, one should ask where the two paths lead, and decide in peace and serenity."

Zarathushtra has stressed that all men and women should decide by wisdom in tranquility, with the knowledge of the end results, to choose the path of

**Yasna 48-4: "Whoever sets his mind on the better or the worse, sets his conscience accordingly, with actions and words, thus his will follows the choice. But according to Your Wisdom, the destiny of the two will be different."**

life and should feel free to announce their decision and belief.

### **Is There Conversion?**

Freedom of Choice, as emphasized by Zarathushtra, leaves the choice of religion at the central core of his teachings. Yasna 31-6 should be next to 31-3: "... may I guide (convert) all the people to the right path (31-3), ...the wise person who spreads my message, shall enjoy bliss (31-6)."

Religions in general desire to have more followers even those bound to ethnicity, under certain circumstances are relaxing the tight rules. In regard to attracting adherents, some religions are aggressive and others, liberal. The first group can be classified into two sub-groups, those that believe in utilizing force, like the imposition of heavy taxes and use of arms to bring in more followers, and for retribution by penalty of death if a follower leaves the religion. The second sub-group insists that the only pathway to Heaven is through following their teachings. The Religion of Zarathushtra, in seeking adherents, is very liberal by giving them the choice to accept or not to accept. That is why Iran was never a totally Zoroastrian country. The

inscriptions of Xerxes (486-465 BCE) and Artaxerxes II (Ardeshir, 405-358 BCE) reflect the fact that the worship of the old Aryan gods continued up to their time, and even today we can find pockets of Mithraism in Iran.

### **What about the Poetical Analogies in the Gathas?**

There are analogies in the Gathas which need to be understood correctly. In Yasna 29, the Earth is treated like a living planet, because our very lives depend upon her sustenance of us. Therefore, for Mother Earth, soul (Geush-Urvan) and body (Geush-Tashan) are considered among her attributes. The soul will lament to God if the body is suffering from aggression, rapine, bloodshed or injustice, asking for a person who can bring justice and peace (1). This is a very beautiful poetical analogy. Unfortunately speaking of body and soul the word, Geush has been misconstrued and incongruously translated as "Cow," causing confusion among readers and researchers to this day.

**Chinvato-Pereta, Sorting Bridge or Bridge of Judgment:** In the Gathas there are no geographic locations for Heaven and Hell (2), both are regarded as two states of mind. Heaven is equated with spiritual relief, whereas Hell is indeed the inner torment (3). Both are discerned in the Conscience. It is interesting that all seven Gathic terms, that refer to the rewards of good deeds and the suffering that evil brings, are terms relevant to the mind and conscience (4). After death, the souls of the righteous and wrongful are guided by the Conscience on the sorting bridge, the souls of the righteous shall pass (46-10), but the souls of the wrongful are upbraided by their Conscience, shall not

pass and will return (46-11). The line of separation of the two groups is likened to a bridge, which later was interpreted as being physical in nature.

### **The nature of God: Ahura Mazda, the Light of Lights and the Oldest and Youngest Entity**

These analogies are truly thought-provoking. In 31-7, Zarathushtra declares that God is the main source of all light from Whom other lights are radiated. In the School of Illumination, founded by Sheikh Shahabeddin Sohrevardi, or Sheikh the Martyr, a 12<sup>th</sup>-century Persian philosopher, Ahura Mazda is compared to the Source of all Light, Light of Lights Who radiates other lights (Amesha Spenta), and the most proximal light to the source is Bahman or Vohu Manah (5-6). This concept is reflected in 45-4 where Ahura Mazda is called the father of Vohu Manah (Good Mind) whose daughter is Armaity (Peace and serenity). In simple words, both Vohu Manah and Armaity emanate from the Source, God. In 31-8, God is the Oldest (in Zarathushtra's words, pourvim, means the most ancient) as well as the Youngest. Here Zarathushtra is declaring that God has neither birth nor death, He is without beginning and endless in perpetuity (in Pahlavi, Abada AbiAnjam).

#### **Mainyu Athra or Spiritual**

**Fire:** The Gathas mention Mainyu Athra or Spiritual Fire, in Yasna 31-3 and 34-4 and in 31-19 speak of Athra Sukhtra or radiant fire. This is an allegorical term and implies the inner fire or the abstract light that emanates from Divine Wisdom or the Bright Mind of God, which is empowered by Asha, or Truth and Justice.

Here, the wisdom or bright mind of God is compared to spiritual fire or an abstract light that will finally deliver justice, hence Asha, or Divine Justice, is realized.

**Fiery Test and Molten Metal:** Just as the fire in the Gathas is an allegory, so are the Fiery Test and Molten Metal. In Yasna 30-7, our life is full of contrasts, success and failure, happiness and sadness (e.g., the birth of a child or the loss of a dear one). This trial period of the hard test of life, is called the Fiery Test, and to pass through this trial, we have to depend on our inner strength and wisdom, to be guided by Divine Wisdom. Those who pass this test successfully, have attained physical and spiritual strength, with Wisdom and Love, and therefore, belong to God (30-7, 51-9). The term Molten Metal, in Yasna 51-9, is another poetical analogy which has entered Persian Mysticism. It is a spiritual purification process by which vices are rejected and virtues attained, as the molten metal becomes solid, a difficult process which one has to pass through in order to join with GOD. The wrongful person will not pass the fiery test and will have frustration. In the philosophy of ancient Iran, Molten Metal, or the glowing and consuming in oven, is an allegorical means for a person

**Ahura Mazda is compared to the Source of all Light, Light of Lights Who radiates other lights (Amesha Spenta), and the most proximal light to the source is Bahman or Vohu Manah (5-6).**

attaining the Ashoi, Truth and Love. This fire, in its broadest mystical term, is the science of discovery and recognition of God (7-8). To this end, Moulavi Rumi vociferates: "I was raw, I was roasted, I was consumed." In the words of Zarathushtra 30-7, such a person who has passed the fiery test, has attained physical and spiritual strength, wisdom, truth and love with serenity and belongs to God.

From the later Achaemenian through the Sassanian eras, the Gathic language had been forgotten and the Gathas had dissipated from common memory, hence these allegorical terms were interpreted simply as physical which were more easily understood by the public. Thus Mainyu Athra or Spiritual Fire, was taken as physical fire, and the fiery test, as reflected in the Shah-Nameh story of Seyavash, was also a physical fire that blazed for the proof of innocence, which only the innocent could pass through unharmed as Seyavash did. The test of molten metal was interpreted as a means to prove the accuracy of the religious texts. It was said about Adharbad Maraspand, a high Mobed or priest of the early Sassanian era, by applying molten zinc on his chest and remaining unharmed, was able to prove accuracy of the religious texts.

#### **Ten Mares, One Stallion and a Camel**

.In 44-18, Zarathushtra states, "How shall I earn, through righteousness, the reward of ten mares, one stallion and a camel, which makes me know how to give these persons wholeness and immortality."

Some commentators have rushed to claim that here, Zarathushtra is asking for these animals as a material reward, but these same writers neglect

the fact that nowhere in the Gathas, does Zarathushtra pray for material gain as a reward for good deeds, neither for himself or others.

The holiest prayer, AshemVohu, states that one should be righteous for the sake of righteousness alone, not for the rewards. In Yasna 46, when Zarathushtra is despondent and in solitude, where he admits to his limited resources and is concerned that his mission is about to fail, he asks Ahura Mazda for Love, not power and wealth. The promised reward for his patron and pioneers of the religion is not materialistic, but rather, they are to be granted wisdom, wholeness and immortality.

His advice to his youngest daughter is to choose a husband who is wise, righteous and united with the Wise God (53-3), but there is no mention of family, class, wealth or power. Taraporewala, by referring to the book of Katopanishad, believes ten mares referred to ten senses guided by the Stallion of Mind, while ushtra or camel, is the end result of illumination.

Fifty years ago, Jafarey wrote that, the true meanings of these terms are obscure, but will one day be

deciphered. Thirty years later he stated that we are now indebted to Insler, who finally decoded these analogical terms. Literally, it states: "How can I earn through righteousness the reward of ten mares with their stallion and a camel which makes me know how to give these persons wholeness and immortality." According to Insler, Zarathushtra yearns for winning the conversion of ten men with their women, whose names end with aspa or horse (such as Vishtaspa and Jamaspa) and one man whose name ends with ushtra or camel (such as Frashoashtra). The concluding sentence that states "which makes me know how to give these persons Wholeness and Immortality," implies that here, humans are intended.

## Conclusion

We need to appreciate that there are important poetical analogies and allegorical terms in the Gathas, some of which, belong to their own era and require research and careful study to be deciphered and brought to our time. That is why Zarathushtra calls his message, mantra or thought provoking. For instance, in the beginning, Yasna

28-1, Zarathushtra states, "with uplifted hands I pray to the Wise God."

Some authors have considered that by raising hands, he is asking for God's assistance. But I believe, there is a good chance that during his era, when people approached each other, did not shake hands, but for a show of respect, uplifted their hands, and here Zarathushtra expresses his reverence toward Ahura Mazda by following the practice of that time.

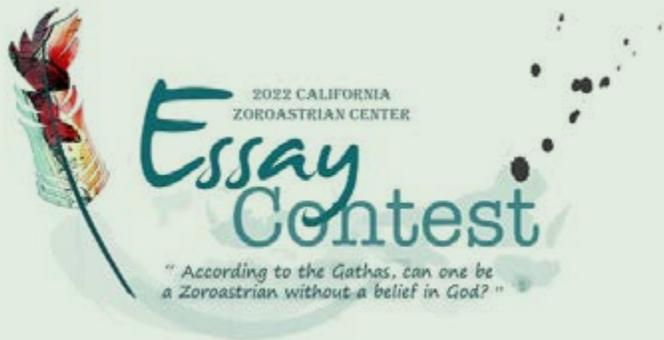
Lastly in the Gathas humans and God share Spenta Mainyu or Benevolent Spirit, by which one can seek to recognize God, and through attainment of the Divine Attributes, can progress to become God-like. In the younger Avesta, we see this quality in the Fravashi or Fravahar which represents the essence of God in humans. It promotes humans towards perfection, never is polluted by evil and after death, returns to the Source-God. Does this concept of Fravahar, in the younger Avesta, indeed original from Spenta Mainyu in the Gathas?

-Edited by Scott R. Nelson

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*Daryoush Jahanian, M.D. was born in Tehran, Iran. He was a founder and the first president of the Fravahar Zoroastrian Youth Organization, Tehran, and founder and first president of Zoroastrian Association of Kansas (ZAKA). He has served as a trustee of the Guiv Trust and then trustee and president of the Trust of Rustam Guiv Foundation. He is the author of two books on: The Zoroastrian Doctrine and Biblical Connections, and Gathas, The Message of Zarathushtra, free translation and comments. He has been a speaker at Zoroastrian congresses of 1996, 2000 and 2014.*



The 2022 Essay Contest was for youth ages 14-18 with the topic, “According to the Gathas, can one be a Zoroastrian without a belief in God?”

Four entries of high caliber were received. The judges decided on one winner and three honorable mentions as follows:

Winner: Mr. Zeyus Spenta from British Columbia (ZSBC)

Honorable mentions:

Mr. Rayhan Driver from Illinois (ZAMC)

Ms. Chista Irani from California (PZO)

Ms. Mantra Roointan from California (CZC-LA)

The winner received \$300 dollars and the honorable mentions \$75 dollars each.

Many thanks to our wonderful contestants, our sponsor Parimarz Firoozgar, contest judges, Mr. Parviz Manoochchri our wonderful web master, Ms. Azadeh Hormozdiari for designing our flyer, California Zoroastrian Center, FEZANA, FEZANA Journal, Chehreh Nama, and all the religion teachers and Zoroastrian organizations for their support.

For inquiries please email us at [zessayentry@yahoo.com](mailto:zessayentry@yahoo.com) and visit us at <https://www.czc.org/contest>

*Artemis Javanshir*

## Based On The Gathas,

## Can One Be A Zoroastrian Without A Belief In God?



The Winning essay

**Mr. Zeyus Spenta from Vancouver, Canada  
Zoroastrian Center of attendance: ZSBC**

guide our moral compass and are an eternal pillar of our faith, steering us towards ‘Daênâ Vanguhi’ (Good Conscience), a reflective way of living in which ‘Vohu Manah’ (Good Mind) reigns supreme.

We can study the Gathas in order to ascertain its stance on whether a follower of Zarathustra must believe in ‘God.’ The illustrious scripture’s perception of ‘God’ varies from the definition in other faiths. While some religions refer to the realization of a saintly lord through an angel from the heavens, or an inexplicable miracle, Zoroastrianism defers from this notion. Zarathustra comprehended Ahura Mazda’s existence by consciously using his ‘Good Mind,’ connecting with a unifying force as a follower of ‘good thoughts,’ which result in ‘good words’ and ‘good deeds.’

Some faiths state that one must show their devotion to ‘God,’ and only then will we be rewarded by him and considered a proper devotee. In contrast, the Zoroastrian way of life is to focus on perfecting our deeds using ‘Vohu Manah,’ where “the reward of actions [are]...given through good mind<sup>3</sup>,” not through pleasing a celestial being. Zarathustra outlined his opinion that “all superstitious beliefs in false gods, goddesses and similar imaginary beings, and

### Biography:

*Zeyus is a Grade 9 student, an avid writer, artist, and reader. In his spare time, he enjoys playing badminton, going the outdoors, and studying music on his piano. In addition, Zeyus takes pleasure in meeting diverse individuals and exploring a variety of scientific concepts. He relishes delving into our Zoroastrian faith, and is grateful for the opportunity to participate in the essay contest.*

The Gathas, a judicious guidebook of seventeen songs (hâtis) and two-hundred-forty-one stanzas, conveys far-sighted messages written by the prophet of the Zoroastrian faith, Ashavan Zarathustra Spitama. They are regarded as ‘thought-provokers,’ in a faith where wisdom is paramount. The Gathas aim to “stimulate one’s thinking faculty and guide it on to the track to think precisely<sup>1</sup>,” stirring us to “move on a clear, straight road<sup>2</sup>” towards righteousness. They

in the performance of rituals to appease them should be abandoned<sup>4</sup>” in Song 5 of the Gathas. Therefore, Zoroastrian disciples are only encouraged to “unite with righteousness and with the Wise One... [and] consult him with your wisdom<sup>5</sup>.”

By choosing ‘Daênâ Vanguhi’ and creating ‘asha vahista’ (the holistic order of existence), we are in accordance with the preaching of the Gathas. Zarathustra “does not see the divine as multiple spiritual essences of multiple material things<sup>6</sup>.” Rather, he views it as “one spiritual essence of all existence which is wholly beneficial, wholly good<sup>6</sup>.”

In the Gathas, our erudite prophet most often refers to ‘Mazda’ (Supreme Wisdom), as a name for ‘God,’ leading some to conclude that our religion does not worship a ‘God’ or other worldly being, but rather the reverence and veneration of wisdom. Zoroastrianism assents to a dogma of personal choice: We have been given the “power of thought, word, and deed, thus leaving us free to *choose our faith* at our own will<sup>7</sup>,” by hearing “the best with your ears and ponder[ing] with a bright mind<sup>8</sup>.”

A faithful devotee to ‘Mazda Yasna’ has the ability to hearken themselves “to these best counsels, reflect upon them with illumined judgment... [and] choose his creed with that freedom of choice each must have at great events<sup>9</sup>.” We are reminded that even at turning points in our life, we are not required to consult with ‘God,’ but use our informed judgement and independent mind to approach verdicts, in addition to the principles of ‘Humata, Hukhta, and Huvarshta.’

One can be a good Zoroastrian simply by performing “his duties best in thoughts, words, and

deeds in accordance with righteousness [granting him] wholeness and immortality through sovereignty and serenity<sup>10</sup>.”

Zarathustra explains that we can aspire to harness ‘Spenta Mainyu’ (the divine spark and ‘invigorating warmth’ within us) and rise upwards through the ‘Amesha Spentas,’ from ‘Vohu Manah’ to ‘Ameretat.’ By working towards ksharathara (the divine dominion), one “earns the choice reward -- the reward of righteousness -- a wish regarded by the Wise God<sup>11</sup>,” and “union with good mind<sup>12</sup>.”

Through the Gathas, we learn that “one who promotes and develops a house, settlement, district or land with righteousness becomes godlike. In fact, as a progressive teacher, he is godlike<sup>13</sup>.” This shows that one can become a person with ‘Vohu Manah’ if they develop their world with virtue and rectitude. As a mortal being, “Zarathustra is in communion with God as any other person can rise to be. It is the inner voice, saraosha, that leads to God, the ultimate goal<sup>14</sup>,” leading one to surmise that offering faith to the Wise Lord is to live by the principles laid out in the Gathas “strengthen[ing] the promotion of good mind through righteousness<sup>15</sup>.”

If one believes in Zarathustra’s teachings, such as rejecting druj (evil), love, equality, living with asha (the natural world), and the vitalness of wisdom, but not in an all-knowing deity, they are still a virtuous Zoroastrian. After all, as our prophet has said himself, we shall only aspire to “master the life which belongs to good mind<sup>16</sup>,” and pray to perform our actions, “based as they are on the wisdom of good mind, precisely according to the laws of righteousness<sup>17</sup>.”

References submitted on request



Honorable Mention of 2022 Essay Contest  
**Ms. Chista Irani from California, USA**  
Zoroastrian Center of attendance: PZO

***Is the fundamental belief of Zoroastrianism the idea of one God? What does it mean to be a Zoroastrian? According to the Gathas believing in God, Ahura Mazda, is one part of being a Zoroastrian. The Gathas convey that being a Zoroastrian is about following the practices of Ahura Mazda. However, there’s much more to being a Zoroastrian.***

There are many ways of becoming or identifying as a Zoroastrian. Getting “Sedrepooshi”, attending or celebrating Nowruz or the main Gahambars, attending Sunday School, and acknowledging and practicing the key values and morals of Ahura Mazda or Zarathustra’s teachings. These practices are important to becoming a Zoroastrian. However, being a Zoroastrian does mean a belief in one God. We are one of few monotheistic religions which makes us prioritize the belief in one God. Therefore, according



Biography:

*Chista Irani is sixteen years old and attends Palo Alto High School. She plays the violin, field hockey, and loves to travel*

to Zoroastrians, devotion to God plays a large role in being a Zoroastrian. We hold the belief that a while ago a creator of existence, Ahura Mazda, taught a man named Zarathustra the morals of good conscience and wisdom. Zarathustra, in turn, wrote the Gathas to guide humans based on these teachings to lead a good life. Zarathustra was able to incorporate these just actions into his life and in return, he asked for protection and support. Zarathustra was thankful for God giving human beings a religion that taught them to lead a good life. This is how the monotheistic belief in Ahura Mazda came to be a part of our religious beliefs. We follow the teachings of Ahura Mazda and use the sentiments to guide us. Zoroastrians allow good thoughts, good words, and good deeds to guide them, integrating the teachings of Ahura Mazda into their daily lives. The two main parts of being a Zoroastrian are believing in Ahura Mazda and incorporating morals such as good thoughts, good words, and good deeds into our life. These main principles and values are taken from the Gathas. Subsequently, the Gathas do not mention that the belief in God is what defines you as a Zoroastrian though rather, the Gathas cover the beliefs that one should

endure in life by practicing good deeds and honesty. As Zoroastrians, we are not taught by Zarathustra to blindly believe and follow, but instead, we must think with our good mind and the conscience given to us to weigh our daily decisions and choices. By being active agents like this, we are able to create a better world. The Gathas, written by Zarathustra, specifically tell Zoroastrians to restore and stand against the unjust with peace “the promotion of good mind through righteousness” (Yasna 47.7 Song 13.7), defend the oppressed, practice wisdom by making decisions using a good mind “Hearken with your ears to these best counsels, Reflect upon them with best judgment” (Yasna 33.1 Song 6.1), to be fair to all “Shall deal perfect justice to all” Yasna 33.1 Song 6.1), and to propagate happiness “happiness be the lot of him who works for the happiness of others” (Yasna 43.1 Song 8.1). These are the vital beliefs held by every Zoroastrian coming from the pedagogy of Ahura Mazda to Zarathustra. Believing in God does have a large presence in Zoroastrian belief though according to the Gathas, believing in God is not what defines you as a Zoroastrian, practicing Ahura Mazda’s guiding principles and morals are what makes someone a Zoroastrian.



**Honorable Mention of 2022 Essay Contest**  
**Mr. Rayhan Driver from Illinois, USA**  
**Zoroastrian Center of attendance: ZAMC**

## The Concept of God As seen through the Gathas

A few years ago, I entered the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican City. I was already mesmerized by the opulence, but nothing compared to the awe I experienced when I was introduced to the painting *The School of Athens*. “There,” said the guide, “holding a globe in the front is Zoroaster, an ancient Persian philosopher.” It was thrilling to hear this, but I didn’t remotely understand why the prophet of my small religion was on a painting of the world’s most influential thinkers and philosophers. As Zarathustra described in the Gathas, Zoroastrianism is a way to lead one’s life, the perfect way to achieve, well, perfection. When related to such a complex religion, the answer to a question, “can one believe in Zoroastrianism without a belief in God,” cannot be a simple yes or no, because it requires a deeper investigation of the very concept of “God.”

It is a marvel that Zoroastrianism, for 3000 years, has remained relevant and active but as all historical ideas are privy to change, Zoroastrianism’s concept of God, Ahura Mazda, has changed throughout its lifetime. At the start of the Achaemenid Empire,

Zoroastrianism was already widespread throughout the kingdom. As Cyrus the Great, Darius I, and other kings modeled the core values of Zarathustra’s teachings - charity, equality and, above all, the mantra, “Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds” their message spread with their conquests, and the original form of Zoroastrianism reached its height. As Herodotus stated, “the Persians have no images of the gods, no temples nor altars, and consider the use of them a sign of folly. This comes, I think, from their not believing the gods to have the same nature with men, as the Greeks imagine.” According to the Gathas, this assumption is correct.



Biography:

*Rayhan Driver is a 15 year old Sophomore at Neuqua Valley High School in Naperville, Illinois. He has been an active member of the Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago (ZAMC) since a very young age and is now taking on youth leadership roles at his community center.*

In song 1.1, Yasna 28.1, the Gathas state that “*I pray that I may perform all my actions,/based as they are on the wisdom of good mind,/precisely according to the laws of righteousness (Asha)/ so that I please You and the soul of the Living World*”. Through this, it can be inferred that Zoroastrians thought of Ahura Mazda as on a different plane than themselves. This shows an intricacy of thought that is unparalleled in other world religions, such as Hellenism, at the time. According to the Gathas, a belief in one main God is necessary to being a true Zoroastrian, but Ahura Mazda’s main goal was to guide others to perfection, not to impose his will on his subjects.

In the Parthian and Sassanid dynasties though, the original version of Ahura Mazda as described by the Gathas, became convoluted and corrupted, as Ahura Mazda was conflated with Zeus and a new version of Zoroastrianism, Zurvanism emerged. In the Gathas however, in song 4.19 and Yasna 31.19, it is stated that “*One who listens and realizes the truth,/becomes a life-healing wise person./He controls his tongue/to express the right words when he wills./He, O Wise One through Your radiant light/proves good to both parties.*” A good Zoroastrian uses Ahura Mazda’s wisdom and teachings to become a good person, not to appease a punitive or vengeful God. But suddenly, in the **Parthian dynasty**, Zoroastrianism wasn’t about following Ahura Mazda to perfection, but was about worshipping him as though

he had the power to change one’s life. In the **Sassanid Empire**, although Zoroastrianism was officialized, the unscrupulous Priests and Magis sought to use the mass’ belief in Ahura Mazda to their advantage. A new cult-like version of Zoroastrianism called Zurvanism surfaced, which emphasized false mythology of Ahura Mazda and Ahriman (evil) being twins. This corrupted the teachings of Zarathustra and Ahura Mazda so much that it fragmented the empire, leading to the final downfall of the Persian empires. Even through these times, a stark belief in God, despite its many transformations, was necessary to be considered a Zoroastrian, perhaps even more so in these empires.

Acknowledging that the idea of Ahura Mazda has changed throughout history, I believe that a belief in God, as portrayed in the Gathas was, and still is a pivotal factor in one’s identity as a Zoroastrian. But over the course of its lifetime, the Zoroastrian concept of God has deviated far from its original ideal. I know now that Zarathustra deserves a spot in the *School of Athens* because he visualized religion as a way of life in which God was never intended to be an all-powerful deity, but something to aspire to, a philosophical ideal. Believing in this ideal of righteousness (Asha), balance (Ushta), humata, hukhta, huvarshata and similar values necessary for a good life is the only way to truly realize the principle of Ahunavar, free will, that is at the core of our religion. Only then can we truly be Zoroastrian.



Honorable Mention of 2022 Essay Contest  
Ms. Mantra Roointan from California, USA  
Zoroastrian Center of attendance: CZC-LA

## Can one be a Zoroastrian without a belief in God?

When defining a religion, it is said to be the belief or worship in a god, spirit, or divine being. The Gathas which is a collection of poems that were written by Zarathustra, the prophet of Zoroastrianism, elaborates on ideas such as the divine truth or Asha, the Vohuman, or good mind, righteousness, and more. Throughout this scripture, we also observe mentions of Ahura Mazda which Zarathustra calls God. With the translation of Ahura Mazda being Lord of Wisdom or Wise Being, Zarathustra describes his realization of God as a result of his intellect and good mind. Although the teachings in the Gathas are universal and can be adopted by anyone, according to the Gathas, the belief in God, Ahura Mazda, is an essential part of Zoroastrianism as a religion.



### Biography:

Mantra Roointan is 18 years old and is currently attending the University of the Pacific in the fall of 2022 for Pre-Dentistry. Her faith and the beliefs of Zoroastrianism are something she holds near to her heart, leading to her commitment and participation in the CZC-LA classes and events. She is proud and dedicated to her Persian culture and faith as a Zoroastrian.

The Gathas include Ahura Mazda throughout the verses and this reference of God, emphasizes it as an essential aspect of the Zoroastrian faith. The Gathas were created by Zarathustra as a form of religious

expression through hymns and poems. At times such as in Yasna 28 Verse 10, Zarathustra prays for guidance asking, “O, Mazda Ahura (Lord of Wisdom and Life) fulfill the desires of those whom you know to be upright and enlightened, because of their purity of mind and truthfulness. I believe that no prayers offered devotedly to Thee by sincere persons with high and noble objectives shall remain unanswered on your part” (Translated by Mobed Firouz Azargoshasb).

In this verse, Zarathustra describes how those who have “purity of mind” and believe in Ahura Mazda shall be granted their wishes and prayers. Those that have good intentions and follow the path of Asha will receive answers to their prayers for Ahura Mazda. According to this verse, Zarathustra emphasizes how the belief in Ahura Mazda is necessary to find one’s right path. With guidance from Ahura Mazda, we can identify the path of righteousness and once we do, our prayers will be responded to. Additionally, Zarathustra alludes to the idea that Ahura Mazda is watching over all the followers of the faith and recognizes those that strive to follow the path of Asha

Therefore, those who do not believe in God or Ahura Mazda are unable to establish the connection that Zarathustra describes in the Gathas.

In a later verse, Zarathustra acknowledges what he calls “daevas” which are beings that are mentioned repeatedly throughout the scripture meaning adversaries of Ahura Mazda. These individuals “separate themselves from Vohuman and Will of

a Mazda Ahura (Lord of Wisdom and Life). They escaped from the path of Asha” (Yasna Hath 32, Verse 4). Zarathustra highlights the daevas or those that do not believe in Ahura Mazda as people who will not be able to find their path of righteousness and goodness. Their lack of belief creates a barrier that prevents them from identifying the good deeds and thoughts without guidance from Ahura Mazda. Therefore, Zarathustra’s message in this verse was to highlight the importance of the belief in Ahura Mazda or God in Zoroastrianism. In addition, Zarathustra later explains that “One who acts with love and justice, O Ahura... and one who fosters zealously the good creation of God, he shall truly enjoy the realm of Asha and Vohuman, that is the paradise” (Yasna Hath 33 Verse 3). Again, Zarathustra recognizes the importance of believing in Ahura Mazda in order to find one’s good mind and the path of Asha. Once this is achieved, Ahura Mazda’s faithful supporters will find happiness and “paradise” within their lives.

Overall, Ahura Mazda’s recognition as the God of Wisdom and Creator of Life throughout the Gathas highlights it as an essential aspect of Zoroastrianism. Without believing in God, the ideas of Zoroastrianism that Zarathustra obtained from Ahura Mazda’s teachings are essentially disregarded. Moreover, Zarathustra, who created this doctrine of “good conscious”, realized Ahura Mazda through his righteous mind and therefore, emphasizes God’s role in allowing him to understand teachings that he shares through the Gathas.

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# Personal Profile

## *Ervad Dr Ardaviraf Minocherhomjee*

**PRESIDENT OF NORTH AMERICAN MOBEDS' COUNCIL (2017-2022) IN  
CONVERSATION WITH MAHRUKH MOTAFRAM**

*Arda Minocherhomjee born in Mumbai, India on August 29, 1953, pursued his Master's in Biochemistry at the University of Mumbai, India, and pharmacology in 1976 at the University of Toronto Medical School and his doctorate in 1982 from University of British Columbia in molecular/cardiovascular pharmacology. While doing his post-doctoral research he graduated with an MBA in 1984 with emphasis in Finance and Marketing.*

*Recipient of scholarships/fellowships from the Universities of Toronto and British Columbia, and a Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Washington, WA Medical School he has published many articles and abstracts in prestigious scientific Journals in both Canada and the USA. He was a Wall Street Journal All Star Analyst and founded a private equity business that managed \$1.2b in assets.*

*In 1964-65, Arda became a Navar and Maratab in Navsari, India. and started his contribution to the North American Mobed Council(NAMC). Since 2017, Ervad Arda has served as the president of NAMC. During his presidency, there were a lot of accomplishments and he worked diligently to bring recognition for the Mobeds in North America believing strongly in encouraging young Mobeds to actively engage with the Zoroastrian community in North America.*

*From 1989-2008, he lived in Chicago and became involved with the Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago and from 2008 he has lived with his wife Hootoxi in La Jolla, CA. They have two children, Adil (Rhea), Farhad, and a grandson Zal.*



**1. What is mission and goals of NAMC (North American Mobed Council)?**Our mission is to serve the religious and spiritual needs of our community. To that end, we serve, guide, and educate our fellow brethren. Our goal is to be a preeminent center in North America for training/education of Mobeds and the laity.

**2. Does NAMC have strategies in place to fulfill those goals?**

Before we formulated a strategy, we did some preliminary “market” analyses-- I asked Zoroastrians, primarily young Zoroastrians, who don't come to the Atash Kadeh, the reason for that.

The prime reasons given were -

*They don't understand what they are praying, and how to apply/use religion in their daily lives. So, we embarked on an education program, for both Mobeds and the laity. NAMC produced a list of top 10 Zoroastrian values and beliefs taken from the Gathas and other books. These were talked about at the 7<sup>th</sup> World Zoroastrian Youth Congress, Los Angeles, CA in 2019.*

*Importantly, I wanted to make sure that we passed on this institutional knowledge and culture from our Senior to our young Mobeds in North America. And, to tap into the significant religious knowledge base and resources of senior Mobeds in NAMC.*

**3. What would you say is your greatest accomplishment in these past 4-5 years of your presidency?**

- Bringing together a solid Executive team that worked cohesively on all programs. *I realized that NAMC had the most underutilized assets!!*

- Establishment of NAMC - *Institute of Zoroastrian Studies* – an education program for Mobeds and the laity.
- Fund raising to support these activities.
- Started Scholarship programs.
- Started getting financial contributions from North American Associations.
- Organized young Mobeds Seminars/Retreats.
- Planned lectures and discussion groups on the ZOOM platform.
- Presenting at various centers including Chicago, LA, Houston, and NY.
- Created a plan for “*How to build an Urvishgah in North America.*”

**4. Do you believe NAMC can evolve as an independently strong religious and educational resource for our community.**

Yes, with good will and co-operation from all sectors of the Zarathushti community

**5. Can you elaborate as to what can be done to increase collaboration with organizations like FEZANA, WZCC, WZO to support NAMC?**

NAMC needs *FINANCIAL, moral support and encouragement* from our community members and associations. There should be no demands made on mobeds from the laity but rather a cohesive and respectful working relationship.

FEZANA/Associations and NAMC should *work together for the betterment of the community*. We are already collaborating with FEZANA but that could be enhanced by working closely together and using community’s limited resources effectively—NAMC should be responsible for all religious activities and FEZANA for all other cultural activities. We sometimes have overlapping roles, seminars etc....Importantly, there must be greater transparency about the funds spent for religious vs cultural activities.

But we must keep *separation of “State” (FEZANA/Associations) and the “Church” (NAMC)*.

*Good news is that both WZO and FEZANA have begun to support and respect us.*

**6. These past few years we have experienced extreme challenges here in North America (NA) and all over the world. The pandemic forced us into isolation we have not seen before. Our organizations had to keep up with the changing environment that would keep us together as a community. How did NAMC help?**

It has been comforting to have been able to connect with everyone virtually with NAMC providing the comfort and solace with regular prayers, talks, seminars, including daily Tandarosti prayers in which we recited over 300 names daily for over a month. Over a hundred (100) Zoroastrians joined from all over.

**7. Can you talk about the various ways in which NAMC was able to pivot to the changing needs of our community? And will that continue?**

Yes. NAMC is very flexible, it does not have any hierarchy or committees. The executive committee does all the work, getting help from our Sr. Mobeds and others whenever we ask them. There was unanimous support from our members including Sr. Mobeds who also recited the prayers during the pandemic. In addition we provided the meanings of those prayers thanks to our late NAMC Distinguished Scholar – Ervad Dr. Soli Dastur.

**8. Follow-up to that question, do you believe that given this opportunity to connect with Zoroastrians virtually world-wide, a virtual platform will bring about a better understanding and harmony between Zoroastrians world-wide?**

We are targeting mostly North American Zoroastrians currently. But we are attracting participation from UK, Ukraine, Kurdistan, and those who want to learn about our religion. And yes, a virtual platform can bring the worldwide Zarathushti community together.

**9. Let’s talk about our young Mobeds. What is NAMC doing for young Mobeds? How will NAMC continue providing support to our young Mobeds? And what does the future hold for our young Mobeds in North America?**

NAMC has taken a lot of initiatives in training and encouraging our young Mobeds to participate in religious activities within their communities and international forums.

For example, we sponsored *Continuing Religious Education Seminars, Scholarships for Avesta Language*, and we just raised \$100k for the Soli Dastur Scholarship Fund for advanced education of young MOBEDS. We have

other dedicated funds/fellowships for young MOBEDS.

NAMC is doing everything under its control to help the next generation of MOBEDS. *All we ask from the community is to support, respect and encourage these young MOBEDS, EMPOWER them...treat them as professionals which they are! Our community needs to focus on things that bring us together rather than things that divide us!!*

**10. Can we talk about the Mobedyar program that NAMC has created and developed to help communities?**

Yes, *NAMC has already trained ~20 Mobedyars including four female Mobedyars.*

The program was created for places in NA where Mobeds were not readily available. All that the applicants need to do is to get a recommendation letter from their association stating that they are contributing members of their association *and* that Mobeds are not readily available in their area. (We need similar recommendations from associations for Mobeds applying for scholarships as well.)

**11. Do you see this program evolving further to accept applications from any interested individual, man or a woman from any area in North America who wants to be a Mobedyar?**

The program will continue to evolve as the needs of the community evolves. Initially we were training only males as Mobedyars, and now we have started training females to be Mobedyars as well. As a need was expressed, NAMC has adapted.

NAMC has to consider the needs of both the Mobeds and the laity. We are not opposed to any Zarathushti to be trained as a Mobedyar provided the guidelines set out by the program are followed. Often, we feel that the laity wants *to force their views* on Mobeds and that causes unnecessary tension.

*All our programs have been well thought out, discussed, debated, and voted upon by a supermajority of Mobeds at the Annual General Meetings. And we expect the Associations and laity to respect those rules just like they expect Mobeds to follow the rules and guidelines of FEZANA and respective associations.*

Unfortunately our community does not have a *long-term vision and strategy* for addressing key issues facing the practice of our religion which include the clergy/Mobeds. Members of the community come up with stop gap measures which are not well thought out but based on *emotion and personal views*—Mobedyars, part-time Mobeds etc. There cannot be a well-functioning religion without Mobeds!! *It seems that the community cannot see the forest from the trees. It's difficult to have a rational discussion with people who have short term vision. (And unfortunately some of them hold offices in the organizations!)*

*My experience during my presidency has been that there are few, if any, issues originating at the center level. Most come from areas that control the funds, and hence the agenda and the narrative. We need to work together harmoniously to move the community forward incrementally rather than make not well thought of demands. Changes will come as they have been coming over periods of time. It cannot happen overnight.*

**12. As I mentioned before, during your time as the president, with increased awareness for our Mobeds, NAMC has raised their contributions considerably. Can you talk about the different religious initiatives that will benefit from the funds raised?**

We have raised over \$250,000 over the last few years. The executive committee members and Mobeds are also contributors to these funds. We will use these funds for Mobed training (Navars, Maratab other ceremonies.), education, and scholarships for advanced courses and education for young Mobeds.

NAMC-Institute of Zoroastrian Studies (IZS), provides education to Mobeds and laity in history, Shahnameh, religious education, Zoroastrian philosophy, etc.

*We need a lot more resources to fund these activities and request our community to donate generously to NAMC—Tax deductible donations!!*

**13. There has been talk for some time now about building a seminary in North America. Has the NAMC given thought to what needs to be done and how it would proceed for such an initiative?**

As a first step we established NAMC-IZS that provides virtual training and education to Mobeds and laity. As our funds increase, we may establish a physical presence. It depends entirely on the donations from the community and an expressed need to have a seminary in North America.

Again, only 4-5 Associations, plus FEZANA and WZO (US) have begun to contribute to NAMC but not consistently.

**14. Let's talk a bit about our history. When we landed on the shores of India seeking refuge and shelter from persecution our forefathers faced in Iran, we were welcomed by the Indian rulers. Due to our ability to adapt to the change in our circumstances we were able to assimilate and thrive as a Parsee community in India. We have now landed on the shores of North America, being welcomed as citizens of the New World. Are leaders of our Zoroastrian community in North America prepared to adapt to the change and progress towards a Zoroastrian community with an American identity based upon equality, diversity, and inclusiveness?**

Yes, NAMC already has. For example, many of the Mobeds in North America perform mixed marriage weddings and Navjotes. I can only speak for NAMC.

*But as in any society, changes should be made thoughtfully and incrementally, and we must work with all the segments of the community—liberals and conservatives—-for acceptance of those ideas/changes (to get a buy-in). On social issues, we do not take extreme liberal or conservative positions. We have all middle of the road policies. To my surprise/consternation the “conservatives” respect the views of NAMC, whereas some extreme liberals do not, and try to force their views.*

*Some people with a liberal viewpoint believe they have an uncanny ability to have all the answers to the complex socio-religious issues facing our community!*

*NAMC on the other hand welcomes an open and honest debate and/or discussions for the betterment of our community. We believe the best way to bring about positive changes in our community is through logic/reasoning (vs force/aggression) while being sensitive to all segments of the community. We will not be influenced by any group—ultra-conservative or ultra-liberal.*

**15. Talking about diversity and inclusiveness, what is NAMC's view on accepting individuals from the LGBTQ community and performing same-sex marriages.**

As I mentioned before we accept everyone. We do not ask anyone about their sexual orientation.

**16. Let's dive deeper and talk about your vision about how Zoroastrianism will be practiced in the future. In America, we find ourselves with Zoroastrians from other parts of the world, like Iran, Kurdistan. Even though we consider ourselves all Zoroastrians, there is a distinct difference in terms of religious education and practices. Does NAMC along with other organizations in North America bear responsibility to learn, understand, and provide solutions to help bridge the divide that exists between these groups in terms of religious and cultural practices?**

NAMC provided all our publications to Ms. Awat Darya in Suleimania, Iraq and to Mr. Andaz Hawyzi in Sweden as well as to others who are interested in our religion.

Awat is also taking part in some NAMC courses and attending NAMC lectures including Gathas.

We trained and initiated an Iranian Zarathusti (Jamshid Pouresfandiary) to become a Mobedyar in Seattle, WA!!

During our discussions we respect all Zoroastrians from different parts of the world. We treat people the way we would like to be treated and always respect everyone and show class—perhaps the way we were brought up.

*Importantly, NAMC never forces its views on anyone. On the other hand, some individuals, behdins want to force their views on us—the way they treated Mobeds in India and Iran.*

**17. What do you believe are the major issues confronting NAMC Mobeds?**

The structure of our religious organization is very different from that of most major organized religions, and this is a major impediment to our cohesiveness and progress, in my humble opinion.

NAMC, FEZANA, local organizations—mix- religion with business and politics. *Mobeds are a minority group and must deal with various constituencies. (And most do the work voluntarily and contribute to our community in NA.)*

Political activism is creeping into our community and attacks on Mobeds in social media are increasing.

*Over the past 100 years, our RELIGION HAS BECOME AN “OUTSOURCED” AND A “TRANSACTIONAL” BUSINESS!! In India and even in North America the good Behdins outsourced specific religious tasks to Mobeds while controlling the association and its finances. They pay the Mobeds for specific service-Jashans, etc.--/ transactional. (And Americans think they started outsourcing!!) We introduced “business” in our religion instead of emphasizing religion in our Centers/associations! We must change that to become a Relationship based Model based on mutual respect!! Or else the next generation of educated/professional Mobeds will be lost!! We must truly empower Mobeds, particularly young Mobeds--they are the real minority group!!Our future!!*

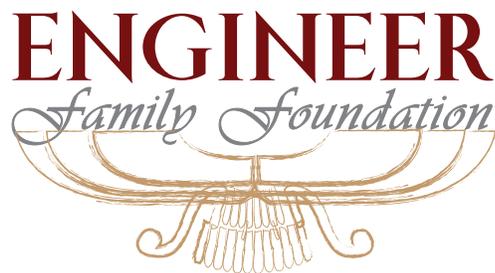
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GOOD THOUGHTS | GOOD WORDS | GOOD DEEDS

### BIRTHS

**Carter Navroze Press**, a boy, to Erin and Carl Press, brother to Clayton, Cameron, grandson to Zarin and Minoo Press, Perveen and Yezdi Guzdar, great grandson to Freny Katrak, nephew to Anna, Amy, Cyrus, Erik, cousin to Raina, Liam, Olivia on January 23, 2022. (ZAMC)

**Darrien Neville Akolawala**, a boy, to Perzen and Neville Akolawala, brother to Vishtasp, grandson to Nadirshaw and Gilda Akolawala (Colombo, Sri Lanka) and late Percy and Kashmiria Polishwala (Pune, India) in Spring, TX on March 14, 2022.

**Leni Moosavi** a girl, to Arianne Namirianian and Bardia Moosavi, sister to Ryan and Kaia, granddaughter to Homayoon and Farzaneh Moosavi (Toronto) and Hushang and Mitra Namirianian (Montreal), in Montreal on April 4, 2022.

**Sebastian Cyrus Cooper**, a boy, to Burjis and Amanda Cooper, grandson to Homi and Nargis Cooper, nephew to Firoze Cooper in Austin, TX on April 27, 2022.

**Zoey Zaran Engineer**, a girl, to Zaran and Greyc Engineer, granddaughter to Kersi and Thrity Engineer on April 27, 2022. (ZAH-Manashni)

**Vesta Dinyarian**, a girl to Firoozeh Roointan & Arash Dinyarian grand daughter to Shirin Izadyar and Fereidoun Roointan (Iran) in Houston on May 7, 2022. (photo right)



### NAVJOTES

**Karl, Kayaan, Kaizad Panthaki**, sons of Dimple and Ervad Dr Zubin Jal Panthaki (Miami, FL), grandsons of Hoofrish Hirji (Mumbai, India) and Ervad Jal M. Panthaki and Nergish Jal Panthaki (Montreal, QUE), performed by Ervad Jal and Ervad Zubin Jal Panthaki in Montreal, QUE in February 2022.

### WEDDINGS

**Dustyn Shroff**, son of Burjis and Hovi Shroff, (Boca Raton, FL) to **Arielle Kahn**, daughter of Jeff and Lynn Kahn (Parkland, FL) on June 19, 2021.

**Rushad Dutia**, son of Noshir and Kashmiria Dutia to **Jessica Brown**, daughter of Patricia and late Andy Brown of Tampa, FL in New Jersey on October 1, 2021. (Picture right)



**Aysha Ghadiali**, daughter of Yasmin and Jamshed Ghadiali (Baldwin, NY) to **Isaac Wohl**, son of Diana Bowman, and her husband Michael Howard (Greensboro, NC) and David Wohl, and his wife Sherry Simmers (Kiawah Island, SC) in Washington DC on May 26, 2022. (Picture right)



### DEATHS

**Sarosh Contractor**, 93, husband of late Thrity Contractor, father of Noshir Contractor, Terzeen Mishra, grandfather of Tripta Holtz, Tarosh Mishra, brother of Dinshaw Contractor and Rustam Contractor on February 5, 2022. (ZAMC)

**Dinshawji Faramroze Fanibanda** (TMZA), 79, son of late Hirabai and Faramroze Fanibanda, brother of late Eruch, Soli, Jalu Bacha, Katy Elavia, Minu, Nariman, Homi, Kersi, uncle of Freny Bacha and Mehernosh Bacha in Navsari, India on February 14, 2022. (ZA-LA)

**Manouchehr Shahriari**, 92, husband of late Mahindokht Soroushian and late Mehrnaz Khosravi Kermani, father of Mahdokht, father-in-law of Shahriar, grandfather of Arash, Kiya (North Vancouver, BC), brother of Pravin, Farangis, Katayoon, Iranbanoo and late Bahram in North Vancouver, BC on February 18, 2022.

**Farrokh Mehri**, 67, brother of Goly Kabeer (North Vancouver, BC), Golrokh (Mobed Shazadi's daughter-in-law), Mahnaz, Parviz (Florida) in Tehran, Iran on February 19, 2022.

**Parivash Goshtasb Khavarian**, wife of Adel Khavarian, mother of Farhad, Roxana (Kout) Ardeshir and Afsaneh (Houshang), grandmother of Natasha, Kianna, Pantea in North Vancouver, BC on March 5, 2022.

**Sarosh Kanga**, husband of Anahita Kanga, son of Viraf and late Shirin, brother of Neville, Kamal (Sarosh) Saher on March 16, 2022. (ZAMC)

**Rustom Warden**, husband of Mani Warden, father of Mehelie and Aspi, brother of Dorab, Palhan, Sohrab, grandfather of Sabrina and Sanaea Warden, in Mumbai, India on March 19, 2022. (ZAH- Manashni)

**Shahkaikhosrow Edalati**, husband of Mahin Bahram, father of Minoo (Sohrab Moobed), Mojgan (Daryoush Niknam), Kouroush (Nooshin Kiani), Mandana (Mehraboon Rahnamoon), grandfather of Nima, Irik, Owjan, Kia, Anita, Tiana, Arwand in North Vancouver, BC on March 25, 2022.

**Ervad Ardeshir (Adi) Rustomji Desai**, husband of Lilian Aranha-Desai and late Hilla Desai, father of Natasha, Shevon, and Yanni Desai, brother of Khorshed Desai (Mumbai), Nargesh Sethna, Katie Irani, Freny Desai, and Ervad Farokh Desai on March 17, 2022. (ZAH-Manashni)

**Shiavak (Savi) Lovji Tengra**, son of late Lovji and late Amy Tengra, father of Shane and Sheroy Tengra in Dallas Fort Worth, TX on March 31, 2022.

**Mehelli Jal Menesse**, husband of Perviz, father of Farzan Menesse (NJ), Noashad, father-in-law of Pinaz, Persis, grandfather of Pirhaan, Yohann, Farzeen, brother of Jamshed in Mumbai, India on April 6, 2022.

**Perin Rustom Sagar**, wife of late Rustom Sagar, mother of Vispi and Porus Sagar, mother-in-law of Pervin and Villy Sagar, grandmother of Zia and Rustom Anklesaria, Ayesha and Jason Wageneck, Carl and Amy Sagar, Zanaida and Paul Conrad, great grandmother of Shireen and Ariana Anklesaria, Cyrus and Roman Wageneck, Quinton and Cyrus Conrad, Mara and Lily Sagar in Mumbai, India on April 12, 2022. (ZAH-Manashni)

**Keyhan Kalanpour**, son of Farangis Khadivi and Cyrus Kalanpour, brother of Jahan and Jamshid in Toronto, ONT on April 23, 2022.

**Dolly Behman Irani (UK)**, wife of late Behman Irani, mother of Anahita (Hoshedar) Tamboli, Marzban Irani, Jal Irani in Tampa, FL on April 28, 2022.

**Hoshang Nanavati**, 93, husband of Frene Nanavati, father of Rashna Cussen, Shireen Preksta, Sarosh Nanavati, grandfather of James, Sheena, Lisa, Darcie, Curtis, Sam, Max, great grandfather of Ava, Tessa, Vayda, Priya, brother of late Frainy Nanavati, Moti Balsara, Kawus Nanavati in Oakville, ONT on April 29, 2022. (ZSO)

**Noshir R.K Sidhwa**, husband of Bapsy Sidhwa, father of Parizad (Khurshed) Sethna, Father-in-law of Khurshed Sethna, brother-in-law of Feroze and Shernaz Bhandara, grandfather of Nozar Khurshed Sethna, uncle of Zersis, Mezdie and Tiraz Birdie in Houston, TX on May 2, 2022.

**Ervad Bomansha Kotwal**, husband of Silloo, father of Veera, grandfather of Yasna, Yazdan, Delnaz in Toronto, ONT on May 5, 2022.

**Rusi Dhunjishaw Kavarana**, husband of late Pervin Kavarana, father of Adi Kavarana, father-in-law of Shyami Goonetilleke, grandfather of Leilah and Ashar Kavarana, brother of Rhoda Kavarana, late Adi Dhunjishaw Kavarana, Homai Gharda, Katy Khambatta in Toronto, ONT on May 8, 2022.

**Borzoo Arghavani**, husband of Parvin, father of Firoozeh, Fereshteh, father-in-law of Shadfar, Shahram, grandfather of Romtin, Ava, Daryon, Kayvon in Irvine, CA on May 14, 2022.

**Dorabji Byramji Daruwalla**, husband of late Bakhtavar Dorabji Daruwalla, father of Zarir (Parveen) Daruwalla, Nilufer (Rohinton) Vadiwalla, grandfather of Freyhan in Toronto, ONT on May 18, 2022.

**Rati Mistry**, wife of Noshir Mistry, mother of Khushroo, Zubin in Toronto, ONT on June 3, 2022.

**Najoo Jal Kalwachwala**, 79, in Mumbai, wife to Jal Cawasji Kalwachwala, mother Homiar (Jayshree) Jal Kalwachwala and grandmother to Natasha, and Shiamak, in Mumbai on July 15, 2022.(ZAPANJ)

**Vispi Sorabji**, husband of Coomi Sorabji, father of Roshan (Zavar), grandfather of Sharon (Farokh), Nina (Faisal), Dinshaw, great grandfather of Zahaan on June 17, 2022. (OZCF)

**Narges Sethna**, 93, wife of Late Aspi P. Sethna, mother of Darayus Sethna, sister of late Ervad Adi Rustomji Desai, Khorshed Desai (Mumbai), Dr. Katie Irani, Freny Desai and Ervad Farokh Desai, and sister-

in-law of late Nari P Sethna and Dinshaw (Perviz) Sethna. Narges was an icon of Zoroastrian Association of Houston, and was one of its original members. She passed away peacefully in Houston, on Saturday, June 18, 2022. (ZAH)

**Nergish Kirolwala**, wife of late Dinshaw Kirolwala, sister of late Ervad Kersi Desai, sister-in-law of Mahrukh Desai (Montreal, QUE), Ratan and Katy Karol (Vancouver, BC), aunt of Fariel (Nee Desai) and Michael (Montreal, QUE) and Erica Kirol (Vancouver, BC) in Toronto, on June 20, 2022 (ZSO).

**Homai Behram Minwalla**, 97, wife of late Behram Rustomji Minwalla, mother of Naomi Farokh Ghadijally, late Rustom (Havovi) and Late Pestonji. Grandmother of Zain, Zavera, Farshad, Shaan, Behram and Narius. Great Grandmother of Sasha and Sophie, in Toronto on June 20, 2022. (OZCF)

**Bahram Behikeesh**, husband of Manijeh Azargoshasb, father of Rostam Behikeesh, Mandana Behikeesh. (CZCZ-LA)

**Jahanbakhsh Varjavand**, father of Bahram, Mahrokh, Tahmineh Farkhani, grandfather of Parisa, Sasan, Saman, Pedram Varjavand, Ashkan Dehghan, great grandfather of Rastin Dehghan. (CZC-LA)

**Makhmal Ardeshiri Cham**, mother of Manoucher, Manijeh, Jamshid, Ardeshir Gowharrizi. (CZC-LA)

**Dr Rostam Kavooosi**, husband of Mitra, son of Dr Mehraban and Khorshidbanoo Kavooosi, father of Nedda Amin and Ava Kavelle, grandfather of Milan Amin, in California, on July 30, 2022 (CZC-LA)



## Matrimonials

**Male, 31, 5' 6"**. BSc (IT) and MCA from Mumbai Univ. MS (Computer Science) from Florida Inst of Technology. Post grad degree course in Project Mgmt - Conestoga College, Toronto. Working on H1B visa as Software Engineer for AMEX USA. Enjoys science fiction, movies, karaoke singing, cars, traveling. Interested in girl from USA/Canada. Contact [dianakadva@gmail.com](mailto:dianakadva@gmail.com). [M22.12]

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## PADMA BHUSHAN

PALLONJI SHAPOORJI MISTRY JUNE 1, 1929- JUNE 28, 2022

A GENEROUS PHILANTHROPIST AND A DEVOUT ZARATHUSHTI

Pallonji Shapoorji Mistry, 93 years old, patriarch of the Shapoorji Pallonji group passed away peacefully in his sleep at his residence in South Mumbai. A traditional funeral was held on June 29, at Doongervadi with complete national and state honours.

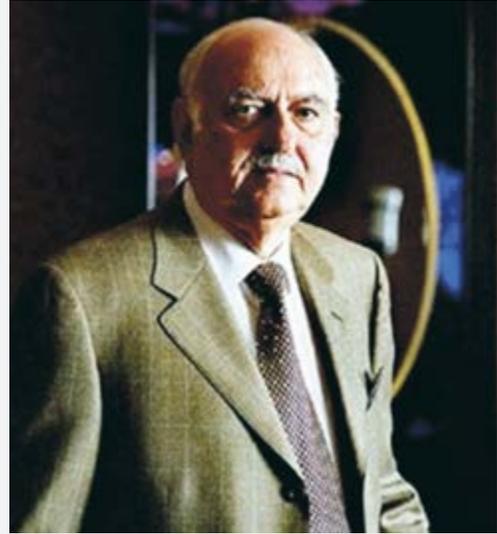
He had completed his schooling and college in Mumbai and then joined his father's business Shapoorji Pallonji and Co Ltd in 1947, at age 18. He took over the reins of the company in 1975 after the death of his father and grew the business manyfold, executing several landmark projects. He has built some of the most iconic building in Mumbai, the Hongkong Bank, the Standard Chartered Bank, Reserve Bank of India, and Grindlay's Bank. He took business overseas by building the blue and gold Al Alan palace for the Sultan of Oman. This opened doors for other Indian businesses to follow and he consolidated the presence of his company in Middle East and Africa.

He served on the board of many large companies and was the chairman of Associated Cement (ACC) for several years. In 2012 he stepped down as chairman of Shapoorji Pallonji & Co Pvt Ltd and handed over the chairmanship to his elder son Shapoor.

In January 2016 he was awarded India's Highest civilian award for his contribution to trade and industry. In 2021 Bloomberg estimated his wealth to be about US\$30 billion!!

Pallonji made significant contributions for the welfare of the Zarhushti community. In 2006 he funded and set up a Senior Citizen's home at the B.D. Petit Parsee General Hospital. His love for education and research led his family to establish in 2017, with a donation of 5 million pounds the Shapoorji Pallonji Institute in Zoroastrian studies at the School of Oriental and African studies (SOAS), University of London as well as a lectureship in Zoroastrian Studies.

A generous donation to Masina Hospital, Byculla, enabled it to set up a modern dialysis facility where 14 patients can be provided with dialysis simultaneously.



But his greatest gift to the community was the restoration and renovation to the 130 years old building which houses the oldest and holiest of consecrated fires at Pak Iran Shah Atash Behram in Udvada. It was truly a labour of love, an everlasting gift to the community. He has supported projects, all over India in education, skills development, environmental preservation, health care and water.

In 2003 he gave up his Indian citizenship to become an Irish citizen, but he spent the final years of his life in India, visiting Udvada.

He is survived by his beloved wife Patsy, sons Shapoor and Cyrus, daughters Laila and Aloo.

FEZANA JOURNAL expresses heartfelt condolences to the family on the loss of this devout Zarthushti and great philanthropist and business tycoon. May his soul rest in eternal peace. ED. Dolly Dastoor



# Between the Covers

## *Who Is A Parsi?*

By Prochi N Mehta

Published by Niyogi Books Price Rs 795, \$20

Pages 488

ISBN 978-93-91125-77-6

Reviewed by Meheryar N. Rivetna, Houston

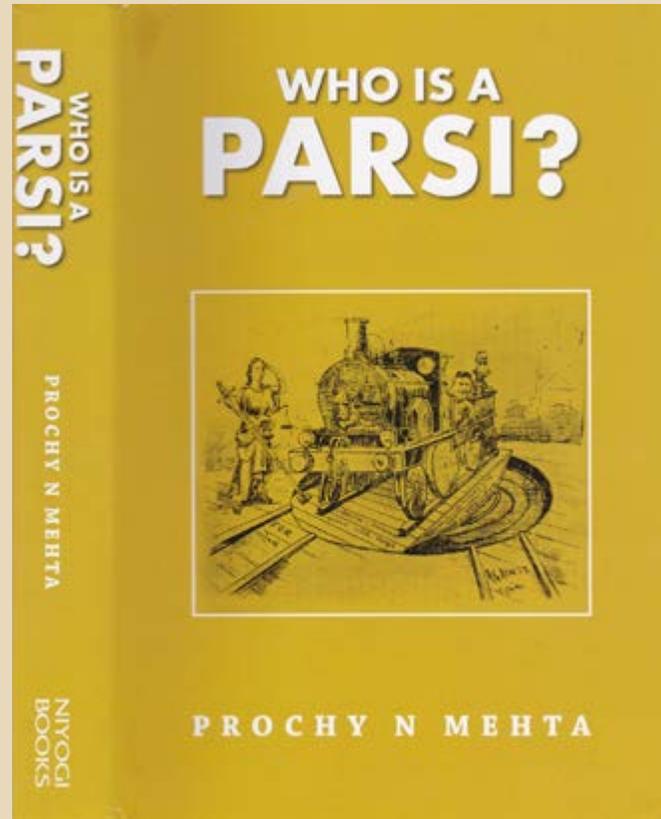
**The** Parsi identity is a conundrum the community has faced for centuries. Is Parsi a race? Is it a religion? Or both? Does one have to be born of both parents of Zoroastrian lineage to be called a Parsi? The answers to these queries are perplexing for many Parsis as they struggle to define their identity.

The solution to this problem is found in a masterful and intelligently written book *Who Is A Parsi?* by Prochy N. Mehta (Niyogi Books, New Delhi, India, 2022. 488 pages). A personal experience was the impetus for Ms. Mehta to write this much needed book for a community steeped in irrational ideas as to who can be identified as a Parsi.

Prochy Mehta's daughter is married to a non-Parsi and is the mother of four beautiful children. Grandma and Grandpa would regularly take their grandchildren to the fire temple, without anyone's objection, until there was a change in the head priest. The new head priest told Ms. Mehta that her grandchildren would no longer be allowed into the temple as children of a Parsi woman who was married outside the community cannot be deemed a Parsi. However, the priest was not opposed to admitting the children of Parsi men who were married to non-Parsis. Appeals to the Trustees of the fire temple were of no avail as they sided with the priest. The head priest and the Trustees were oblivious of Zarathustra's dictum of gender equality.

Ms. Mehta correctly states that the Parsis lived for a thousand years in total ignorance of their religion. There were no laws of their own. Numerous challenges, legal and non-legal, in an effort to define a Parsi ensued over the years. Prochy Mehta offers a detailed account of the legal tangles the Parsis were embroiled in to arrive at the definition of a Parsi. Where appropriate, Ms. Mehta has sought input from the former Solicitor-General of India, Fali Nariman.

In 1830, the Parsi Panchayat introduced a *bandobast* (resolution) that the offspring of Parsi men and women born of extra-marital relationships with non-Zoroastrians would not qualify as Parsis. Acceptance of these children as Parsis was allowed until this resolution.



Then, as now, the Parsi Panchayat was unable to steer the community through the morass of social issues affecting the Parsis.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Ms. Mehta reminds us that the Parsis were fortunate to have stalwarts like Dadabhai Navroji and Khurshedji Cama, as well as High Priests such as Dastur Darab Peshotan Sanjana, Dastur Kaikhushru Jamaspji, Ervad Sheriarji Dadabhai Bharucha, Dastur Maneckji Nusservanji Dhalla, Dastur Darabji Mahyarji Meherji Rana, to name a few of the learned priests, who had grasped Zarathustra's edicts. Based on their learning of scriptures, they were unanimous in their assertion that the Zoroastrian religion is for all of humankind. These Parsi priests and scholars of the Zoroastrian religion affirm that it is undisputed in scripture that 'the Zoroastrian religion not only permitted but enjoined the conversion of a person born in another religion and of non-Zoroastrian parents'. Furthermore, the Rivayats unambiguously state: 'It is a sin' to disallow someone not born in the faith to convert of their own free will to Zarathustra's religion.

A segment of the community, opposed to this fact, labeled these people as "reformists". But as Prochy Mehta rightly points out it is these so-called reformists who are actually conservative and orthodox, while it is

their opponents who are “liberal”. [A conservative is defined as one who *conserves* the founding principles of the religion. Those branded as reformists were calling for *conserving*, i.e., going back to, the original teachings of Zarathustra. A liberal is one who dismisses the directives in scripture].

Another bone of contention among some Parsis is the differentiation between a Parsi and a Zoroastrian. They maintain that a Parsi is a Zoroastrian, but a Zoroastrian is not necessarily a Parsi. Prochy Mehta clarifies this convoluted reasoning by highlighting eminent priests who make no distinction between the two. Even the courts have nullified that controversy, establishing that the two are synonymous.

Prochy Mehta debunks the myth of “racial purity” that some Parsis harbor. The erroneous belief that accepting non-Zoroastrians into the fold will somehow render the Parsi race impure is quashed by the author. Three scientific studies show evidence that

the DNA of extant Indian Zoroastrians markedly differs from that of Iranian Zoroastrians. The Indian Parsis have a preponderance of South Asian genes absent in the Iranian Zoroastrians.

Ms. Mehta wonders if she would be considered a Parsi given that her DNA ancestry report shows 37 percent of her genes come from native Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh populations—no different from many Parsis of India today. Prochy Mehta can rest assured, notwithstanding her gene pool, that she is one hundred percent Parsi by virtue of the fact that she is devoted to and practices Zoroastrian principles without clinging to precepts abhorrent to Zarathustra.

*Who Is A Parsi?* is an edifying book. Prochy Mehta gives the Zoroastrian community an ingenious work vividly expressing the anomalies with which the Parsis of India are encumbered. It is rich in historical facts related to the evolution of Parsi thinking about their identity.

## More Than Just Surgery:

Life lessons beyond the OT

Dr Tehemton Erach Udwadia

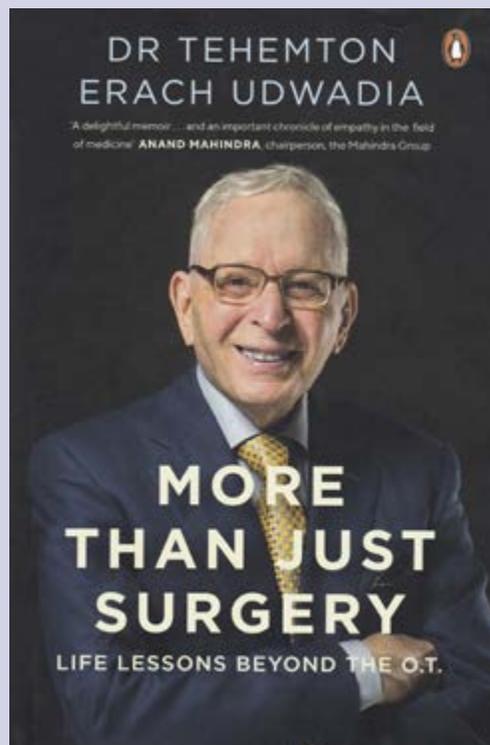
Published by Penguin Random House India Pvt Ltd 2021

ISBN # 978-0-670-09651-0 Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. Price Rs 799 Pages 191

Reviewed by Zal Rohinton Damkevala, M.B.B.S;  
MHA, Washington DC

In his book, “More Than Just Surgery: Life Lessons Beyond the OT,” Dr. Tehemton Udwadia, widely regarded as the father of laparoscopic surgery in India, weaves a compelling memoir filled with interesting anecdotes and experiences that shaped his illustrious career. Dr. Udwadia has been recognized globally for his contributions to the field of surgery and is the recipient of several prestigious awards including the Dr. B.C. Roy Award (the highest Indian award in the medical field), the Padma Shri, the Order of the British Empire, and the Padma Bhushan. In addition, he has received several honorary memberships and lifetime achievement awards from surgical societies worldwide. Despite his many accomplishments, this autobiography is written with a simplicity, candor, and extreme humility which make this a highly engrossing read.

As a child, Dr. Udwadia was not a star student and admits that there was a bit of luck involved in him gaining admission to medical school. He candidly shares details of his first surgery, where he was guided



and given the confidence to successfully complete the procedure by an able OR nurse. His surgical training was guided by great mentors such as Dr. Baliga and Dr. P.K. Sen, both of whom instilled in him a strong sense of empathy towards his patients and shaped his

early surgical career. The book reveals the strong respect and affection Dr. Udwadia had for Dr. Sen, who trained him for several years and collaborated with him on a research project which studied myocardial vascularization in reptilian hearts. The goal of their research was to replicate their findings in the human heart to improve vascularization. While the research paper was published and attracted some initial interest, it was debunked and rejected subsequently. However, 30 years later, long after his mentor passed away, their procedure was credited as laying the groundwork for a commonly accepted method of myocardial revascularization in modern surgery.

Dr. Udwadia's greatest achievement was undoubtedly popularizing laparoscopy in India. He quickly identified laparoscopy as an ideal method of diagnosing patients with abdominal symptoms and traveled to Germany to meet with Karl Storz, whose company manufactured the equipment. He purchased the equipment at his own expense and smuggled it into India, hidden carefully between his wife's sarees in a suitcase, to avoid the prohibitive import duty on medical equipment at the time. While his peers were reluctant to accept the new technology and thought it to be an inadequate tool, Dr. Udwadia persisted, and soon began traveling to small towns and rural areas to promote diagnostic laparoscopy to surgeons who had no access to investigative facilities and could use this as a cost-effective diagnostic tool. In 1990, Dr. Udwadia and his team at Sir J.J. Hospital were later credited with doing the first cholecystectomy (gall bladder removal) in the developing world, but it was only after a few more years that mainstream hospitals decided to invest in and conduct laparoscopic procedures in India.

Dr. Udwadia also pays rich tribute to his father Erach, a General Practitioner who worked in the heart of Mumbai's mill district. Erach led a simple life and most of the patients he saw were poor. It is evident that Dr. Udwadia's humility, passion for medicine, and empathy for patients were all derived from his father. There are also a few references to considerable friction between Dr. Udwadia and his equally illustrious brother, Farokh, a well-known physician in Mumbai. While most of the incidents cited about his brother happened during the initial stages of his surgical career, it is unclear regarding the current state of their relationship.

In summation, this book is a wonderful read filled with interesting personal stories and valuable life lessons not just for aspiring medical students but for young people in any field. Written in an easy and fluent style, it shows that Dr. Udwadia is as adept at handling a pen as he is a scalpel.

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# Suntook, Farrokh, *The People We Know*

Great Britain; Published by Bite-Sized Books Ltd 2021, pages 341 ISBN#9798777575029

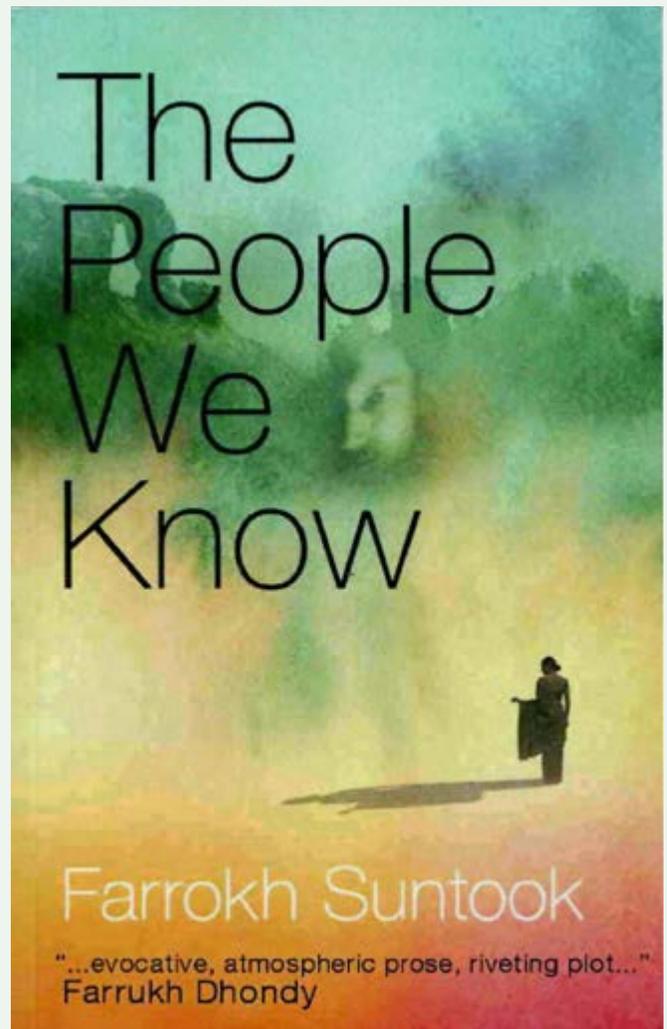
*Reviewed by Emeritus Professor Feroza Jussawalla Ph.D, Department of English, University of New Mexico Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA*

Farrokh Suntook's *The People We Know*, is the quintessential Paris novel, a trope for the community itself. It is a metaphor for a community in decline. The continuously repeated theme of suicide seems to mirror that of the community:

She (Sheela, the main character), felt sad for the Parsi lady, not so much for her personal plight but rather for what she epitomized—a community in decline, its numbers falling so rapidly that short of drastic measures it faced extinction. She was not a Parsi herself, but having married into a Parsi family which had been far kinder to her than her own, she cared for the Parsis with a fervor that endeared her to Cyrus, even though he didn't share her concern for the community. (pg.55)

It is the story of a woman named Sheela, who had apparently inter-married to a Parsi, Cyrus. Sheela, loved Cyrus and his mother Khorshed deeply and felt alienated from her own wealthy Hindu family, especially her mother. Interestingly, while she herself seemed to blame her mother for not caring for her father, the same is true of her daughter who seems to blame her, for Cyrus' suicide in Mahableshwar. Sheela undertakes a journey of reconciliation or healing, but finds herself suffering even more. And once there unfortunately encounters another couple, possible Australian, possibly Anglo Indian, Clarissa and Max (referred to as Claire by her husband who attempts suicide, because of her extra marital affair with Max), undergoing the same angst. There are repeated stories of separation, infidelities, and self-harm, all wonderfully handled through twists and turns of the plot, always keeping the reader on pins and needles. The dialogue however, seems a little stilted, attempting to sound British, rather than more universal. This seems to be an unfortunate feature of recent Parsi novels, trying to sound British or Anglo-Indian. The "Darlings!" get tiresome.

Parsis will enjoy this little book of alienations and psychological explorations. In doing a literary critical analysis, I would say the novel falls in the category of the psychoanalytic novel, explorations of the mind and of inner dialogues and monologues.



That is its genre.

It also explores a very Parsi theme of intermarriage, and its success or not, not only of Sheela's but of her daughter and Sheela's own feelings towards that.

Overall, though, it is a lovely little novel about Parsis navigating intermarriage, lives across borders, between London and Mumbai, love and loss at a mature age, and the ever present issue of mental health.

However, it is most inspiring that Farrokh Suntook, has written this lovely novel, late in life, upon retirement. And for this, he needs to be lauded.

[www.amazon.com/gp/aw/d/B09MYXX9G7](http://www.amazon.com/gp/aw/d/B09MYXX9G7)

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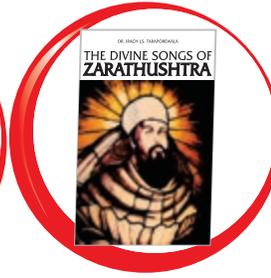
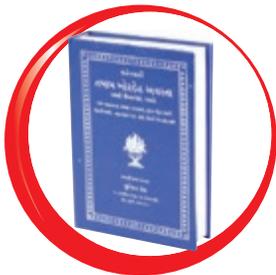
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