

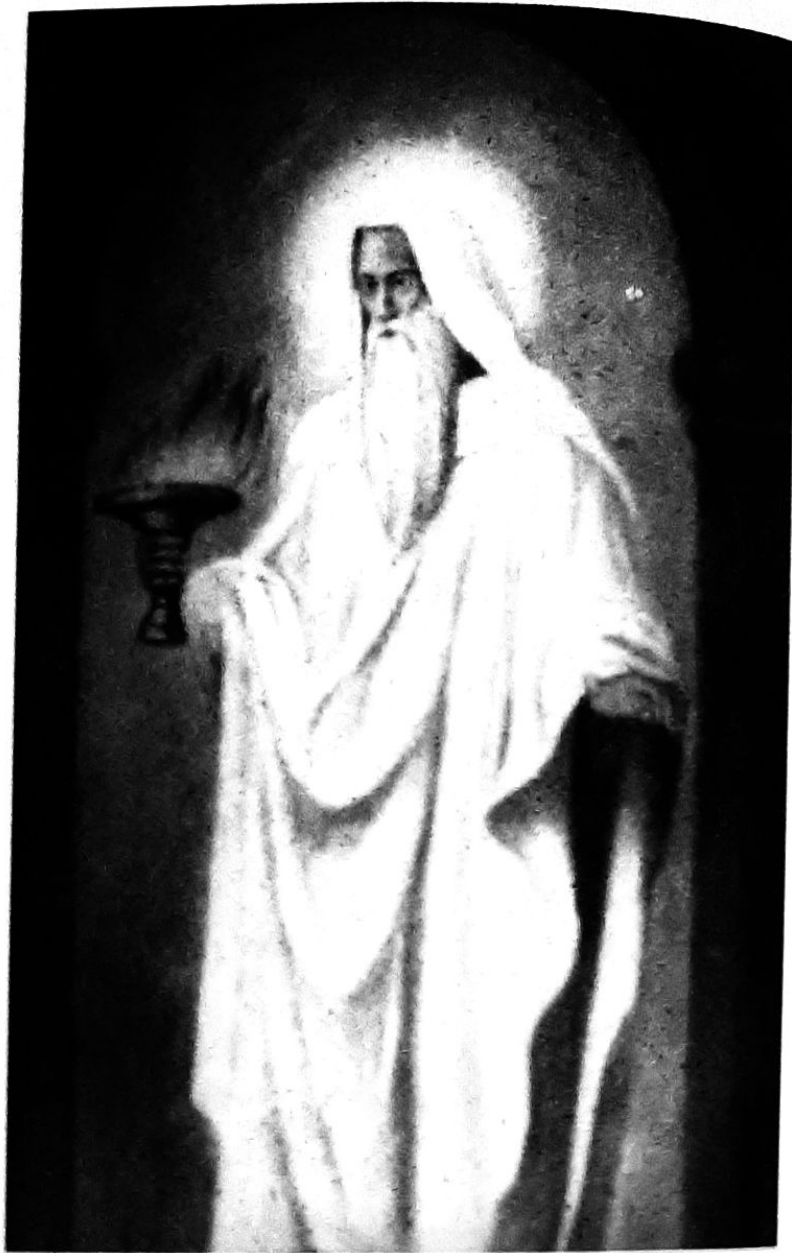
WE THE PARSIS

CAN WE ORGANIZE OUR REVIVAL ?

Compiled by: Kersee Kabraji



Dedicated To The Revival of
'The Refreshed Community'



Oh what a blessing!
For us, is born the Divine Helper
Zarathushtra the Spitama

WE THE PARSIS

Hope for Revival of a Refreshed
Community of "ZOROASTRIANS"



Compiled by:
Kersee Kabrajee

INDEX

- Preface
- Acknowledgements

Section A : General Overview

1. List of Parsi 'firsts' 01
2. Salute to all Parsis 04
3. Our brief history 05
4. Some findings about our 'true' Persian blood 08
5. Navjotes of 9 'Juddins' in Mazgaon in 1882 11
6. Navjotes of 77 'Juddins' in Vasda in 1942 13

Section B : Religious Matters

7. A few words about Shams-Ul-Ulma Dastur Maneckji Dhalla 20
8. Acceptance into Zoroastrianism- what our scriptures say 21
9. Our Religion and which Period it is from 24
10. What is Vendidad 27
11. The Great Divide; Parsi-ism v/s Zoroastrianism 28
12. ARZs response to Vada Dasturjis and a letter from 1903 from our High Priest on Conversion 33
13. The role of High Priests of Parsis in India 39
14. Historic Vada Dasturjis Council formed 42
15. The highs and the lows 43
16. Conversion/Acceptance- myths and realities 45
17. Tenets and Traditions 47
18. Letter from High Priests to the Trustees of the BPP 51
19. An open letter to the High Priests 52
20. Community versus Religion 54
21. Why our Dasturjis are shying away from responding 56

Section C : The Dokhma System

22. Our Dokhma system-what does Vendidad say? 57
23. Some facts and understanding about Dokhma System 59

Section D : Decline of the Parsi Community

24. Decline of our strength 62
- Some suggestions on arresting the decline of Zoroastrian Population in India

Section E : Panchayet and Anjuman

25. Challenges to the Chairman of BPP 65
26. Ban on two Community Priests 68
27. Russian Mikhail being ordained a Priest 69
28. Something to think about 70
29. Concluding remarks 72

PREFACE



Thoughts and Thanks

There is a joke that does the rounds that when four 'Bawas' and 'Bawis' meet and discuss the Community there are at least four different points of view! The reason is simple and very clear, we are an educated Community and no one can stop anyone of having her/his own opinion! (Mercifully, like in other small Communities, we do not have a 'Vada' or a 'Chief' whose diktat we all have to follow!).

Our diverse views and opinions are often seen surfacing during discussions (often holly pursued) as well as in the Parsi Press, Parsiana, Parsi Times, Mumbai Samachar and Jame Jamshed to name a few publications.

I have, from time to time sent in my views to these publications. Sometimes views I have expressed have not been published. This book includes some of these letters and articles, some published, some unpublished and some re-edited over the years. I trust the material will be interesting and thought provoking for Community members.

It must be said at the onset, that I do not consider myself either 'Orthodox' or 'Reformist' in leaning. I am an engineer by profession and have spent most of my working life in the marketing, manufacturing and general management arenas of engineering firms. Hence, I consider myself, above all else, a person driven by logic and reason.

Over the last 20 years I have read various religious scriptures and literature and consider myself a student of our Religion.

Amongst the books I have read, I have found 'Zoroastrian Theology' and other writings by the Late Dr. Maneckji Dhalla, Ph.D., Litt.D. (High Priest of Parsis, Karachi) very educative and enlightening. While I read these scriptures, two significant points emerged:

1. Zoroastrianism, as our Asho Zarathushtra proclaimed it, has passed through many phases over 3000 years. Its scriptures, as well as its practices have been influenced not only by the earlier (pre-Zarathushtra) primitive faith of Iran, but subsequently also by Christianity, Islam and other theological concepts and practices.
2. What Asho Zarathushtra proclaimed as his philosophy is primarily available in 238 stanzas called 'Gathas'. Some of the later religious scriptures composed by different persons at different times, *are not in line with* the 'philosophy of life' as proclaimed by Zarathushtra in his Gathas and therefore need to be approached with scepticism and caution.

There is a difference between 'Religiosity' and 'Religion'. Religiosity means following rituals, customs and ceremonies etc. Religion means practicing the philosophy or the way of life, based on certain principles, in our thoughts, words and actions in everyday life. As one reads Gathas, one realizes that Zoroastrianism is indeed a practical and humanitarian Religion—it is an enlightened way of life and not something to be followed with blind faith.

I quote an apt paragraph from Dr. Dhallas' autobiography

After the Prophets depart, their disciples turn everyone into the blind followers of the faith. Religiosity replaces Religion. Socio-religious customs take the place of pure ethical and devotional faith and ethics, turning it into tradition-ridden Religion.*

*(*Religiosity means mere practice of rituals & ceremonies)*

I realize that this line applies to the state of Zoroastrianism today. We, the Parsis, have become followers of 'socio-religious' customs and traditions in the name of Religion. These have taken the front seat while the real teachings of our Asho Zarathushtra have gone to the back bench.

Readers who are interested in knowing our Asho Zarathushtra's proclamations are advised to read the Gathas. There are a few books (English) available for the same. Dastur Sahib Dhallas' 'History of Zoroastrianism' gives a comprehensive view of our various scriptures. If time is of the essence, I suggest reading a small booklet, 'A Gathic View of Zoroastrianism and Ethical Life' compiled by me, with the assistance of scholars of our Religion.

As an individual a Parsi is known for his honesty, truthfulness, sincerity and helpful attitude. He generally follows the tenets of Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds and practices Zarathushtra's Religion.

However as a collective, we Parsis want to cling on to outdated practices. Practices like, use of a non-operating Dokhma system, out-casting of Parsi girls marrying non-Parsis, non-acceptance of others into the fold of our Religion, fall under the guise of following 'traditions'.

We, a minuscule Community, have pointlessly divided ourselves into 'orthodox' and 'reformist' groups, each side hankering for power. This division is seen at elections for Panchayet and Anjuman and is even at the centre of quarrels between the Federation and the Panchayet.

We claim to be 'Zarathostis' but as a group we ignore Zarathost Sahib's proclamations! We seem to have evolved our own unique brand of Religion which is neither based on scriptures nor on common-sense!

In the middle of all this in-fighting, what really is our need of the hour? Is it not to address the biggest problem we face, that of our fast declining population? Can we not approach this in a logical and rational way which also falls in line with the teachings of our Asho Zarathushtra?

Some suggestions on solving this problem have been put forth in this booklet.

What we need to do, perhaps, is to focus our attention on how to keep the flame of Zoroastrianism spreading. To shift our focus from saving the Community to spreading our Asho Zarathushtra's Religion further. If we can do this, 'a Refreshed Community of Zoroastrians' will automatically emerge and continue to bring happiness in today's troubled world. It is generally understood that our forefathers came to India to keep our Religion alive—so, in spreading our Religion, we will only be fulfilling their mission.

I hope this small booklet will help create awareness about our current situation and arm us with the tools to discuss and debate our problems in a rational and practical way. I hope some angry and not so angry (and not so young) men and women will get together and take on the issue.

And lastly, I must also clarify here that, as a member of the Parsi Community, I do not have any personal axe to grind or any ambitions at the ripe age of 82 (I am keeping quiet about my arthritis). The only idea of compiling this booklet is to generate awareness of the differences within the Community and how these can be resolved through open discussions (using, of course a generous dose of practical sense). What I express are my personal views, open for your opinions and discussion.

May Ahura Mazda always be our guide.

KERSEE KABRAJI

September 2012 (Yes this Started about a year ago!)

78 Lulla Nagar, Pune 411040

kerseekabraji@gmail.com

+91 020 26832730

+91 9371006685

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe sincere gratitude to Dr. Homi Dhalla, for painstakingly going through the draft and making very valuable suggestions.

I am also thankful to Ms. Freyan Bhatena for editing the book and her suggestions. When I asked her whom I should contact for editing work, she readily volunteered herself saying 'I am an 'Editor', you know!' (Freyan is the Editor of Parsi Times). My sincere thanks dear Freyan, for so readily taking up this task in spite of your busy schedule.

My sincere gratitude to dear Farzana Cooper for designing the cover of the booklet and for providing sketches to make it lively and attractive. Farzana too, is extremely busy with her job but because of her commitment to the Community and our Religion, she has been lending me great support. She had also designed the cover and provided excellent illustrations for my first booklet 'A Gathic View of Zoroastrianism and Ethical Life'.

And last but not the least, I wish to express my heartfelt thanks for the ongoing support of both Kerssie and Vispy Wadia, Trustees of Association for Revival of Zoroastrianism (ARZ) for their participation, guidance and advice in this venture.

KERSEE KABRAJI

CHAPTER 1: List of Parsi 'firsts'*

Section A General Overview



- Hirjee Readymoney was the first Parsi to go to China in 1776 to build up trade connections.
- Lowjee Wadia was the first Parsi to build Dockyard in Mumbai in 1750.
- Dadabhai Noshervanjee was the first Parsi to open a Cotton Screw in Mumbai in 1776 giving fillip to cotton textile industry.
- The 'responsible broker' to the East India Co. was Rustom Maneck.
- The first mint established by British appointed Ratanjee of Surat as a good coiner and an able workman.
- During the French War when the Bombay Government was in financial difficulty a Parsi named Pestonjee Bomanjee Wadia stood by the British.
- The honor of introducing gas light in India falls to the lot of Parsi- Ardeshir Khurshedjee Wadia who for the first time lit his Mazagaon house with gas on 20/02/1834.
- Similarly the first private residence in Mumbai to be installed with special electric dynamo was grandson of Honorable Nawroji Wadia in 1897. Jamshedjee Tata was the first Indian to own an automobile in Mumbai.
- The distinction of establishing the first Spinning and Weaving Mill in India goes to Cowasjee Nanabhoy Davar who opened the Bombay Spinning and Weaving Mill in 1854.
- The inauguration of Hydro Electric Works and of Iron and Steel Works in Bihar was by industrialist Jamshedjee Tata. It completely revolutionized Indian industry and the illustrious founders name will be chronicled in letters of GOLD in the economic history of modern India.
- Rustomjee Kersaspjee published the first calendar for the year 1780 in the first printing press established in India. Similarly the Bombay Samachar Press—the first vernacular press was published first by Furdunjee Merazban.
- The first Indian to obtain a certificate in Pitmans Shorthand was Nanabahy Chichgar—a reporter of the Times of India.
- Parsis had a hand in the establishment of the Indian National Congress and in shaping the constitution of India. Men like Dadabhai Navroji, Mancherjee

- Bhownagaree, Shapurjee Saklatwala, the only Indians who have been hitherto returned to British House of Commons have enhanced the reputation of the Community by voicing the grievances of Indian people before the British Public.
- > Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, the father of Bombay Corporation rendered yeoman service to India.
 - > Men like Sorabjee Bengalee, Navrojee Fardunjee, Dossabhai Karaka, Maneckjee Cursetjee, Byramjee Malabari, Kaikhshru Kabrajee, Dinshaw Wacha, Phiroze Sethna, Cawasjee Jehangir, Hormusjee Mody, Khoorshed Nariman and others did their best to uplift the inhabitants of this country.
 - > Dastur Meherji Rana (whose adoptive name was Mahyarbin Vachcha) was head of the Navsari Parsis and the leader of the party that had gone to Akbar's court and was granted two bigha of lands under a special "furman" (document of grant).
 - > Sir Jamshedjee Jejeebhoy's numerous act of benevolence like setting up hospitals, educational and religious institutions, dharamshalas etc., have earned him a worldwide reputation. He was bestowed with Knighthood in 1842 followed by his bestowal of Baronetcy.
 - > Mrs. Avabai Jamshedjee Jejeebhoy became a Lady, the first Indian woman to be bestowed with the honor.
 - > Cawasjee Jehangir, a great Parsi Philanthropist founded several public institutions such as hospitals education institutes, public fountains, asylums, dharamsalas etc.
 - > Pestonjee Bomanjee Wadia a well-known merchant who owned about 13600 square yards of land in Fort area was the owner of a number of ships; Hero-Anne-Taj Bux-Milford-Bubmaniar and Gangaveer. He built the Tower of Silence in Ankleshwar, the Dharamshala in Pardi and the steps from Mumbai Chowpatty to the Tower of Silence.
 - > Merwanji Mancherji Cama founder of Mancherji F. Cama Athornan Institute set aside 25 lacs to set up the institution for creating a Priestly class.
 - > Dadabhoy Pestonjee Wadia (J.P.) the adopted son of Pestonji Wadia built bridges at Kim, the Fire Temple structure of Udvada, two Agiaries in Mumbai, two in Surat, a Dharamsala at Bassein and one at Pardi. He was a founder member of the Bombay Chamber of Commerce, the only Indian appointed to a Committee to create and establish the Bank of Bombay and a promoter of the Oriental Bank. He was one of the first Justice of Peace appointed in 1834.
 - > Harnabai J.K. Mehta (J.P.) the granddaughter of Dinshaw and Nusserwanji Petit inherited valuable jewellery estimated at about 12 lacs which she sold, the proceeds of which she donated towards the foundation of the Parsi Girls Orphanage at Bandra, dedicated to the memory of her mother. She was a sportswoman, a keen rider and owned horses. She was one of the first Lady Motorists to tour around the world and visit its remotest parts.
 - > Jamssetjee Fardoonjee Parekh was the Founder of Parekh Dharamsala at Chowpatty for blind and disabled Parsis. He was also a Trustee of the BPP in 1859.
 - > Cursetjee Furdoonjee Parekh (J.P.) was also a Trustee of the BPP and the Sheriff of Bombay. He constructed Flora Fountain.
 - > Byramjee Jejeebhoy established a high school in Thana and the Mumbai Medical School at Poona and Ahmedabad.
 - > Seth Rustomji M. Kooka was the founder of the Parsi orphanage in Surat in 1912

- and donated 3.5 lacs to the Surat Education Scheme.
- > Ratajee Manekjee Enti built a Fire Temple at Srimari and a Dharamsala at Surat. He left 25 lacs for charitable purpose in the year 1804.
 - > Sir Cawasjee Jehangir Bart was knighted in 1895 and received Baronetcy 13 years later. He had the honour of receiving knighthood directly from Her Majesty, Queen Victoria. He built Cawasji Jehangir Hall and gave large sums to hospitals, schools and other charitable institutions.
 - > Bai Dinbai Nusserwanji Petit gave more than 25 lacs to charity in 1898. She created the Bai Avabai Petit, Parsi Orphanage at Bandra.
 - > Seth Framji Dinshaw Petit built the Sanatorium at Cumballa Hill.
 - > Manekjee Cawasjee Damanwalla started a free dispensary at Udwada in 1867 for which he donated his own house.
 - > K.R.P. Shroff (J.P.) was the President of the Bombay Stock Exchange.
 - > Pestonjee Hormasjee Cama established the Cama Hospital in Mumbai.
 - > Sir Cusrow and Sir Ness Wadia along with their mother spent 20 lacs for building Navroz Baug, 35 lacs for building Rustom Baug, 15 lacs for Jer Baug and 27 lacs for Cusrow Baug.
 - > Sorabji Pochkhanawala was the first Indian to start an Indian bank which came to be known as the Central Bank of India.
 - > Homi Bhabha was the pioneer of India's Nuclear Power programme.

I first received this information in an email. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the content but I am sure readers might find the information useful and contribute if they find any errors or have any additional information.



CHAPTER 2:
Salute to all Parsis
(Reproduction of an Article)

Section A
General Overview

A Salute to All Parsis
By Aakar Patel, (The News, October 05, 2008)

No Indian community internalized the civilizing mission of the British as did the Parsis. Only 50,000 remain in Bombay today, mainly in South Bombay, the most disciplined and cultured part of India.

In South Bombay, the cutting of lanes by drivers is punished, jumping a red light is impossible, parking is possible only in allotted areas, roads are clean, service is efficient, the restaurants are unmatched - civilization seems within reach. South Bombay has some of the finest buildings in India, many of them built by Parsis.

The Parsis came to Bombay after Surat's port silted over in the 17th century. Gerald Aungier settled in Bombay and gave Parsis land for their Tower of Silence on Malabar Hill in 1672. The Parsis made millions through the early and mid-1800s and they spent much of it on public good.

The Ambanis built Dhirubhai Ambani International School, where fees are Rs. 348,000 (US \$8,000 a year in a country where per capita income is \$ 600 per year) and where the head girl is Mukesh Ambani's daughter!!!

The Kingfisher Malliyas gilded the insides of the Tirupati temple with gold.

Lakshmi Mittal, the fourth richest man in the world says he's too young to think of charity!! ... He's 57 and worth \$45 billion.

The Birla Family built 3 temples in Hyderabad, Jaipur and Delhi.

Hindu philanthropy means building temples. They do not understand social philanthropy.

The Hindus' lack of enthusiasm for philanthropy is cultural. The Hindu cosmos is Hobbesian and the devotee's relationship with God is transactional. God must be petitioned and placated to swing the universe's blessings towards you and away from someone else.

They believe that society has no role in your advancement and there is no reason to give back to it because it hasn't given you anything in the first place. Two centuries of British education was unable to alter this.

The Parsis, on the other hand, understood that philanthropy - love of mankind - recognizes that we cannot progress alone, that there is such a thing as the common

good. They spent as no Indian community had ever before, on building institutions, making them stand out in a culture whose talent lies in renaming things other people built.

The Parsis built libraries all over India. They built the National Gallery of Art. The Indian Institute of Science was built in 1911 by Jamshedji Nusserwanji Tata. The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research was built by Dr Homi Bhabha. The Tata Institute of Social Science was built in 1936 by the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust.

The Wadias built hospitals, women's colleges and the five great low-income Parsi colonies of Bombay. JJ Hospital and Grant Medical College were founded by Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy.

By 1924, two out of five Indians - whether Hindu, Muslim or Parsi - joining the Indian Civil Services were on TATA scholarships.

They gave Bombay the Jehangir Art Gallery, Sir JJ School of Art, the Taraporevala Aquarium. The National Centre for Performing Arts, the only place in India where world-class classical concerts are held is a gift of the Tatas. There are 161 Friends of the Symphony Orchestra of India (SOI) - www.soimumbai.in. 92 of them are Parsis. For an annual fee of Rs 10,000, Friends of the SOI get two tickets to any one recital in the season, they get to shake hands with artistes after the concert and they get to attend music appreciation talks through the year.

The Parsi dominates high culture in Bombay. This means that a concert experience in the city is unlike that in any other part of India. Classical concerts seat as many as two thousand. Zubin Mehta, the most famous Parsi in the world, is Director of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra since 1969. He conducts the tenor Placido Domingo, the pianist Daniel Barenboim and the soprano Barbara Fritoli. Four concerts are held at the Jamshed Bhabha Opera House and then one at Brabourne Stadium with a capacity of 25,000.

No other city in India has this appetite for classical music and in Bombay this comes from the Parsis. Despite their tiny population, the Parsi presence in a concert hall is above 50 per cent. And they all come. Gorgeous Parsi girls in formal clothes- saris, gowns, children, men and the old as well. Many have to be helped to their seats. Most of them know the music.

The people who clap between movements, thinking that the 'song' is over, are non-Parsis. Symphony Orchestra of India concerts begin at 7 PM. Once the musicians start, latecomers must wait outside till the movement ends. The end of each movement also signals a fusillade of coughs and groans, held back by doddering Parsis too polite to make a sound while Mendelssohn is being played. No mobile phone ever goes off as is common in cinema halls: his neighbours are aware of the Parsi's insistence of form and his temper.

The Parsis were also pioneers of Bombay's Gujarati theatre, which remains the most popular form of live entertainment in Bombay. Any week of the year will see at least a

half dozen bedroom comedies, murder mysteries, love stories and plays on assorted themes on stage.

The Parsis were the pioneers of this, writing and acting in the first plays of Bombay. They also built the institutions that supported this. Bombay's first theatre was opened by Parsis in 1846, the Grant Road Theatre, donations from Jamshetjee Jejeebhoy and Framjee Cowasjee making it possible.

The Parsi in Bollywood caricature is a comic figure, but always honest, and innocent as Indians believe Parsis generally to be, rightly or wrongly. In the days before modern cars came to India the words 'Parsi-owned' were guaranteed to ensure that a second-hand car listed for sale would get picked up ahead of any others. This is because people are aware of how carefully the Parsi keeps his things. His understanding and enthusiasm of the mechanical separates him from the rest. Most of the automobile magazines in India are owned and edited by Parsis.

The Parsis are a dying community and this means that more Parsis die each year than are born (Symphony concert-goers can also discern the disappearing Parsi from the rising numbers of those who clap between movements).

As the Parsis leave, South Bombay will become like the rest of Bombay - brutish, undisciplined and filthy. Preserve this race... You are privileged if you have a Parsi Bawa as your good friend.

Chapter One and Chapter Two establish facts that would make any Parsi proud to be born into our great community. However, unfortunately a few poignant questions arise.

1. Are we a 'has-been' people?
2. Demographic evidence points toward our extinction within a few decades. Are we going to do anything about that?

If so...

- Will Parsi businessmen and industrialists take the lead and put their heads together to resolve this problem?
- Will the youth of the community take on the challenge?
- Will the Trustees of the Anjuman and Panchayet take some initiative?

As I mentioned in the Preface, the idea of compiling this book is to bring about awareness of the present situation and wake Community members up from their slumber.



CHAPTER 3: Our brief history: After arriving in India

Section A General Overview



There are a few books on this subject which could provide any interested reader with some good material.

The first batch of migrants from Iran is supposed to have come to India around the 10th or 11th century and then other groups must have followed. There is hardly any written history about them for nearly four to five centuries. One may term it as the 'Dark Age'. The only available source is 'Kisse-e-Sanjan' compiled by Dastur Bahaman Kaikobad in 1599 A.D. The contents of this composition are currently being questioned by historians as they are not able to trace, in history books, any king by name of Jadi Rana as mentioned in the Kisse-e-Sanjan.

Parsis actually come into prominence in the 17th century and onward after the British arrived in Surat for trading.

The recent excavations at Sanjan, carried out with the assistance of World Zoroastrian Cultural Foundation have shed some new light on the earlier settlers. These archaeological excavations tend to point out that these settlers in India were basically traders who migrated to this port for carrying out their trade activity.

I quote below an extract taken from their views on the subject.

'It would be correct to say that the early settlers at Sanjan were traders and more specifically that they were familiar with maritime trade and the sea. Nowhere in the Kisse-i-Sanjan do we find reference to farming or agriculture but there is specific mention that the migrating group had left behind 'their gardens and palaces'. It may also explain why they chose to settle along the coast of Gujarat when they moved from Sanjan. The sea was obviously very important to them. Other professionals and perhaps agriculturists may have formed part of future migrations but it appears from the literary and the archaeological records that the original settlers were traders. Sanjan

was known to the Arabs and Persians as Sindan and was one of the most important ports in the Indian Ocean at the time, trading with China on the one side and the Persian Gulf on the other. A rich collection of ceramics from both these extremes of the Indian Ocean has been found during the excavations.'

When Sanjan started silting up, these traders moved to other ports like Surat, Bharuch, Khambhat etc; on the western coast.

This discovery also seems to explain the rise of the Community only after the British landed for trade in Surat in the 17th century. Since Parsis were already engaged in overseas trade, we could easily collaborate with them in business by playing supporting/complementary roles. Also we could eat and drink with them without any inhibitions (unlike other Indian communities). So, we could get along with them rather easily and certainly seem to have enjoyed social advantages. A good number of Parsis joined the newly started railways, textile mills and also joined the Army and the Government. A number of Parsi families developed trade with China and other countries and brought in immense wealth. This wealth was further used in starting textile mills and other industries, apart from setting up large charity trusts.

We also understood the importance of education, including the girls' education (not suffering from any sexual bias) which gave us a head start in all fields. There is no doubt that we were amongst the first to get westernized.

Thus having got the initial advantage, we built on it through our honesty, sincerity, diligence and hard work. In the history of India, one will find many 'firsts' by Parsi women and men. We have contributed immensely in all areas like politics, social welfare, judiciary, administration, health, education, defence services and in commerce and industry.



CHAPTER 4: Some findings about our 'true' Persian blood

Section A
General Overview



Many of us seem to believe that our blood is 'Pure Persian Blood' which will get mixed up if we marry outside our Community.

I had requested Mr. Behram Deboo to give his researched findings on the subject.

Behram Deboo, He is a graduate of University of Washington and was the chief clinical microbiologist in a clinic of 180 physicians. He took graduate courses Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Mayo medical School, Rochester MN and attended numerous scientific conferences few to mention at Harvard Medical College, University of Utah Medical School and others. He has published papers as well as done research for the pharmaceutical company. He is retired and lives in Southern California. Given below is his response:

Purity of Parsis, what's the fact!

Parsis belonged to the Indo-European group linguistically as well as genetically in many ways. However, since their migration from Iran, this equation did not remain the same. **Population affinities of Parsis in the Indian subcontinent** as submitted Aria David in Science Index suggests that the comparison and analysis of dental excavation at Sanjan and the extant Parsi population show the dental trait frequencies between Sanjan and extant Parsi samples significant differences in incisor morphology, Carabelli cusp and Hypocone development. Eleven discrete dental traits were selected and scored using the Arizona State University Dental Anthropology System. Extant Parsis show closer affinity to low caste Mahars and tribal Madia Gonds than South Central and Asian groups.

One study supported that they have maintained their Persian roots by avoiding intermarriage with local populations. In that 2002 study, Y-chromosome (patrilneal) DNA of the Parsis of Pakistan suggests that the Parsis are genetically closer to Iranians

than to the non-Parsi population. However, a 2004 study in which Parsi mitochondrial DNA (matrilineal) was compared with that of the Iranians and Gujaratis, indicates Parsis are genetically closer to Gujaratis than to Iranians, and suggests "a male-mediated migration of the ancestors of the present-day Parsi population, where they admixed with local females, leading ultimately to the loss of mtDNA of Iranian origin." According to Undevia and other scholars, blood group study suggests that the Parsis showed ABO gene frequencies similar to occupational caste groups from Western India. "Z. Iranis from Bombay and Iran showed an altogether a different ABO gene frequency pattern when compared with the rest of all the Iranian Muslim, Armenian and tribal populations. They appear to be migrants from Southern parts of Russia."

The historical evidence is found in the Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency Parsi population on page 189, note 1, tells us that during the prosperous time in Sanjan, it seems that a large population of Hindus near Thana was converted in the Zoroastrian faith.

The science of genetics is very complicated and as such to write in a lay man's language is not possible to forward many scientific points that deserve to be discussed. Therefore, it is up to the reader to do research and draw own conclusion.

Behram Deboo

The following report throws some light on the subject.

Parsi DNA Report

A 2004 study in which Parsi mitochondrial DNA (matrilineal) was compared with that of the Iranians and Gujaratis determined that Parsis are genetically closer to Gujaratis than to Iranians.

Taking a 2002 study into account, the authors of the 2004 study suggested "a male-mediated migration of the ancestors of the present-day Parsi population, where they admixed with local females, leading ultimately to the loss of mt DNA of Iranian origin" (Quintana-Murci et al. 2004, p. 840)

[REF: Quintana-Murci, L.; Chaix, Raphaëlle; Wells, R. Spencer, Behar, Doron M.; Sayar, Hamid; Scozzari, Rosaria; Rengo, Chiara; Al-Zahery, Nadia et al. (May 2004), "Where West Meets East: The Complex mt DNA Landscape of the Southwest and Central Asian Corridor", American Journal of Human Genetics 74 (5): 827-845.]]

It is a fact, that for centuries after we landed in India, children of Parsi fathers and non-Parsi mothers have been initiated into our Religion and have been accepted as Parsis. So the above report is not at all startling! Our blood does not seem to be all that 'pure'!

And really, does it matter at all in today's world!?



CHAPTER 5: Navjotes of 'Juddins' in Mazgaon in 1882

Section A
General Overview

On the next few pages Readers will find accounts of Navjote Ceremonies of 9 children of Non-Parsi mother and Parsi fathers performed in Mazgaon in 1882 by Dasturji Jamaspaji Jamaspasha (grandfather of present Vada Dastur Jamaspasha), Dastur Sahib Jamshedji Kukadaru (one of our most respected priest, whose photograph you see in most Agiyaries) and 7 other Dasturjis.

ACCOUNT 1:

Under here is printed, a translation of the account as it appeared in the Parsi Prakash.

Parsee Prakash; 26 June 1882
Volume 3 Pg:41

Some Zarathoshtis over here, under the leadership of Seths Navroji Nasharwaanji Wadia and Naanaabhaai Dhunjeebhaai Banaaji, donated into a fund to help perform Sudreh and Kusti (Navjotes) Ceremonies for 9 poor families, living in the Mazgaon vicinity.

The Navjotes were of children born of Non-Zoroastrian women married to Zoroastrians men, and performed today, June 26 1882 at the Late Maneckjee Sheth Garden (vaadi) in Fort, Mumbai.

The respected Mobeds who performed these 9 Navjotes were:

Dastur Jaamaaspi Minocheherji Jaamaasp Aashaa, his son Ervad Ferojji Dastur Jaamaaspi, Dastur Jamshedji Shoraabji Kukaadaaru and Ervads Khurshedji Minocheherji Kateli, Kaawasji Maaneckji Kaatrak, Khurshedji Rustomji Maadon, Rustomji Burjorji Raanji, Daadaabhaai Faraamji Paavri, and Hormujji Tehmulji JaamaaspAashaa.

This time Dastur Peshotanji Behraamji Sanjaanaa published a hand bill stating, that until he agreed that the ceremonies were performed correctly and according to the accepted practices, these 9 children wearing Sudreh and Kusti were advised to stay away from entering Late Sheth Hormujji Wadia Aatash Behram.

Within the Parsi community, many Parsis were for this event and many were against it. This was reported in the Mumbai Samachar on the 27th of June 1882.

ACCOUNT 2:

Under here is printed, a translation of the account as it appeared in the Parsi Prakash.

**Parsee Prakash; 13th September 1882
Volume 3 Pg:46**

Dastur Peshotanji Behraamji Sanjaanaa published an informative booklet on the subject: "Neerang-e-Zaveet-Deenaan" meaning "How to initiate Non-Zoroastrians into the Zartoshti Deen (Religion) performing what ceremonies".
[Neerang-e-Zaveet-Deenaan, meaning the explanation about how to initiate Non-Zoroastrians into the Mazdayasni Zartoshti Deen (Religion), with what ceremonies, was published by Dastur Peshotan Dastur Behraamji Sanjaanaa, Mumbai, at the Daftar Aashkaaraa printing press, printed by Rustomji Navroji Khambataa in 1251 Y. Z., 1882 A.D.]

ACCOUNT 3:

Eravad Tehmurasp Deenshaah Anklesariaa, Head Fellow of Late Sir Jamshedji Jarthoshti Madressa and the current Sanskrit Teacher, published a booklet - "Non-Zoroastrians are allowed to be initiated in Maazdayasni Deen" demonstrating using 37 examples as the evidence from Zand Avestaa, Pahlavi and Reevaayats.

ACCOUNT 4:

"It is okay to initiate Non-Zoroastrians in the Maazdayasni Deen (Religion). The proofs for this, for the benefit of the Zoroastrian Community, were published by Tehmurasp Deenshaahji Anklesariaa, Mumbai, Fort Printing Press, with Ratanji Nasharwaanji Printer as the publisher, Y. Z. 1251, 1882 A. D." Its second edition was printed in August 1883 with corrections by Eravad Tehmurasp.

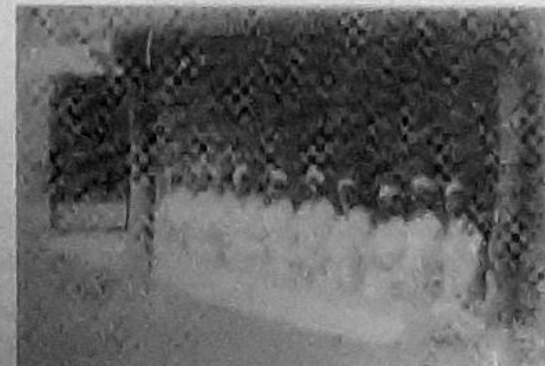
We salute those Dasturjis of 1882 who had the courage and conviction and were bold in following our religious scriptures. They said and did what was right, without fear and were not under the influence of any Orthodox lobby.



**CHAPTER 6:
Navjotes of 77 'Juddins'
in Vasda in 1942**

**Section A
General Overview**

We also salute the 11 Dasturjis who, on the 25th and 26th of June 1942 performed Navjote Ceremonies for 77 children of mixed parentage. They included Dasturji Framroz Ardshire Bode.



File pictures of the Navjotes and the new Zarathushtis with the Dasturjis



જીવદીનાને આપણી અવે દીનમાં લેવા વિષેના માનવંત
દસ્તરજીઓના અભિપ્રાયે

વાંસદા નવજોતો

fgk

તેમની

મજાગામવાસીઓની ૧૮૮૨ માં થયેલી નવજોતો સાથે સરખામણી

કેટલીક ઘોટી વિગતોના જવાબે

સઘળા કોમના વડીલોએ એ નવજોતોને આપેલું ઉત્તેજન

‘જામે જમરોદ’ના ૧૮૮૨ અને ૧૯૦૫ ના વિચારો

‘હામ મજદયસ્તનામ’ અને ‘સત્ય મિત્ર’એ એ નવજોતોને
આપેલો ટંક

૧૮૮૨ માં મજાગામ ખાતે રહેતા પારસી છુનનાં પુરુષ, સ્ત્રીઓ અને બાળકોની નવજોતની હસ્તલેખીત તવારીખ આ પુસ્તકમાં આપી છે. જે ઉપરથી પારસી કોમની ખાતરી થશે કે ઉપલી નવજોત કરવામાં મરહુમ જલજાઈ અરદેશર રોડ, મરહુમ નવરાઈ નશરવાનજી વાડીયા અને મરહુમ નાનાજાઈ વનજાઈ બનાજીએ આગેવાની લીધી હતી. આ નવજોત માટે એકે દેડ લિખરાવવામાં આવ્યું હતું જેમાં સર્વ પક્ષના પારસીઓએ નાણાં જર્પાં હતાં, અને એક મેટા મેલાવડા સમક્ષ ઘોટની માણકજી રહેતી વાડીયા આ ૧૧ જણાંની નવજોત મરહુમ દસ્તુર જામારપજીએ અને ખાંજા દસ્તુર સાઈબો અને આશ્રવન સાઈબાએ કરી હતી. જે વખતની મિજલસમાં હાજરમ હજાર જરતોસ્તીઓ યાગેલ થયા હતા.

શુદ્ધે પેદેરાવાની ડીરીઆમે દશતુરેનાં નાંમ તેની વીગત.

દશતુર જામારપજી મીનોચેદેરજી જામારપઆશાના

” જમરોદજી યોરાવજી ક્રાઘર (કપાવાલાની અગીઆરીના પંચડી)

” હોરમજી તેમુલજી જામારપઆશાના

” શીરોજી જામારપજી જામારપઆશાના

મોખેદ ઘાદાજાઈ ફરોનજી પાવરી તથા ખેરન (મિયાવાલાની અગીઆરીનાં પંચડી)

” ખરોદજી મનચેરજી કતેલી (થર જમરોદજી જાંદ મદરેશાનાં શીક્ષક)

દશતુર ઠાવજી મણ્જીકજી કાતરક (કપાવાલાની અગીઆરીના)

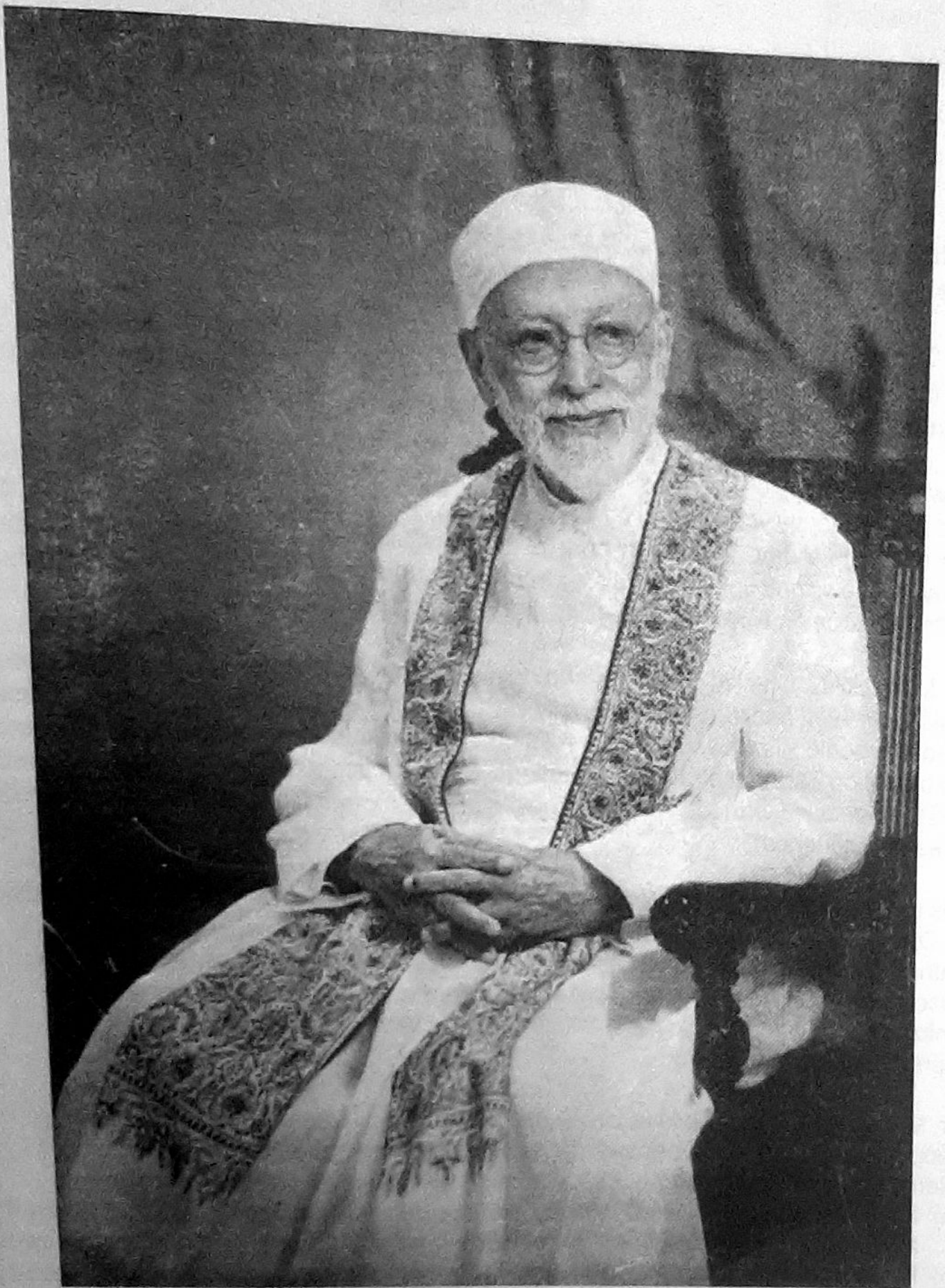
મોખેદ ખરોદજી રશતમજી મંદન (શીક્ષી દરેમેદેરના)

” રશતમજી ખરોદજી રાંનજી (ખેતપારીવાલા)

Dastur Jamshedji Sorabji Khatadsky
(Lanbarky of Kappavala Ahimsy)

Seen above is a write-up in Gujarati mentioning the support given by prominent Parsis and the priests to the Navjotes.





Shams-ul-Ulma Dastur Dr. Maneckji Naserwanji Dhalla
[M.A., Ph.D., D.Litt. High Priest of Parsis, Karachi]
(Born : 27-9-1875 Died : 25-5-1956)

CHAPTER 7:
A few words about
Shams-Ul-Ulma
Dastur Dr. Maneckji Dhalla

Section B
Religious Matters

Dr. Maneckji N. Dhalla, Ph.D., Litt.D., High Priest of Parsis, Karachi was, and is, an all time great intellectual amongst Parsi Priests.

His 'Zoroastrian Theology', published in New York in 1914 is the most outstanding text on the subject. It covers the history of our religion and its scriptures from pre-Zarathushtra time to the present time. This book is out-of-print.

However, with minor changes, it was published as 'History of Zoroastrianism' in 1930 and subsequently was printed by K. R. Cama Oriental Institute in 1963. Copies of this are available today. These are pure text books, devoid of Dr. Maneckji N. Dhalla's personal views and opinions and are strongly recommended reading for the students of our religion. Ordinary readers may find these rather 'heavy reading'.

Dr. Maneckji N. Dhalla's views and opinions are in his Autobiography, published in Gujarati in 1942 and translated in English in 1975. This is an enjoyable and a very easily readable book. His views about our religion, as a down to earth philosophy or a way of life based on Zarathushtra's proclamations, were not accepted by some of our Priests and the so-called Orthodox people. They took a stand that Dr. Dhalla had come under 'Western' influence!

It is to be appreciated that during his study stay in Columbia University, Dr. Maneckji N. Dhalla also attended classes (apart from Theology), in ethics, sociology, anthropology and philosophy, classes that eradicated his earlier religious misconceptions. He started preaching an 'enlightened faith' of Asho Zarathushtra which of course seemed to have offended the followers of the 'blind faith' represented by the Orthodox.

Dr. Maneckji N. Dhalla believed in an open-door policy when it came to accepting people into our faith. His reasons for denying performing the Navjote ceremony of aliens, he gives in Chapter 40 of his Autobiography. They were:

- Most of the requests were for children born out of illegitimate relations, which if accepted perhaps would lead to problems of inheritance later on.
- If the Community was not prepared to 'accept' them what meaningful purpose would be served?

Dr. Dhalla's writings have encouraged many of us in the Revival Movement of Zoroastrianism in India and abroad. In fact we credit him largely for the Revival Impetus.



CHAPTER 8:
Acceptance into
Zoroastrianism-what our scriptures say

Section B
Religious Matters



The following extracts from our various religious scriptures throw light on the subject of acceptance into Zoroastrianism.

Some of our Community members and the Dasturjis are under the impression that conversion/ acceptance is not permitted as per our Religious Scriptures.

Trust the following excerpts will help them see things from a knowledge based perspective.

EXCERPT 1 and 2 are from **Zoroastrian Theology** by Dr. Maneckji N. Dhalla.

Extracts from Avesta Period (from about 800B.C. to 200 A.D).

- Yasna 42.6; These Zoroastrian missionaries travelled to distant lands for the purpose of promulgating the Religion, and their homeward return from their sacred mission is celebrated by the faithful.
- The Fravardin Yasht commemorates the Fravashi of Saena, an illustrious convert to Zoroastrianism. We learn from the Pahlavi works that this apostle of Faith left behind him 100 disciples who preached Mazdayasnian Faith in the land of Siestan. Armenia came under the Zoroastrian influence at a very early date and a corrupt form of Zoroastrianism prevailed in the country for several centuries. Cappadocia, Lydia and Lucila was the scene of active Zoroastrian propaganda. The proselytizing* work on the part of Zoroastrian ministers of the Faith was carried on with a considerable amount of success.
(* means converting)

Let us see the extracts from the Pahlavi scriptures i.e. around 300AD to 800 AD (pg198).

- 3 Dinkard (Vol 10, bk.5.14, Pg.12); Zarathushtra first preached his new Religion to the people of Iran where he was born; but Ormazd has commanded that the excellent Religion should be spread among all the races of mankind throughout the world.
- 4 Sacred Books of the East (Vol.18, Appendix, Pg. 415); It is said that the act of highest merit that a non-believer can perform in his life is to renounce his Religion and embrace the Mazdayasnian faith.
- 5 Dinkard (Vol.9, Pg. 579); The great Sassanian monarch Shapoor II zealously worked for the restoration and promulgation of the faith among the un-believers with the aid of his illustrious Dastur Adarbad.
- 6 Sacred Books of the East (Vol.37, bk.8.26, Pg 88, 89); The Dinkard sanctions even the use of force for the conversion of the aliens.
- 7 Nirangistan ed.Sanjana (Folio 16a, 17a); A Pahlavi Treatise devoted mostly to the Zoroastrian rituals attests the practice of admitting outsiders into the Zoroastrian fold.
- 8 Another Pahlavi tractate treating of the social and legal practices of the Sassanians, states that if a Christian slave embraces the faith of his Zoroastrian master, he should be given freedom.
- 9 Fargard IV, 40(137) and 41(142) of Vendidad; The grave sins committed by a non believer are pardoned if he accepts the Religion of Mazda and resolves not to commit such deeds again.

Coming closer toward this day and age, we have the Rivayats or the codes of usages and rituals compiled between 1478 and 1766AD. These are in Persian and in question and answer format. These provide a wealth of information on liturgical and social matters. Let us see what they have to say on this subject.

- 10 Number 237. On peaceful and forcible conversion: Kaus Mahiar:
Question: Can a grave-digger, a corpse-burner and a darvand (one of foreign faith) become Behdin (i.e. be converted to Mazdayasnian Religion)?
Answer: "If they observe the rules of the Religion steadfastly and (keep) connection with the Religion, and if no harm comes on the Behdins (thereby), it is proper and allowable."

- 11 Nariman Hoshang; "If slave boys and girls have faith in the good Religion, then it is proper that Kusti should be (given to them to be) tied, and when they become intelligent, attentive to Religion and steadfast, they should give them Barashnom and it is also proper and allowable to eat anything out of their hands.

All the above extracts show that there is simply no bar against acceptance of anyone in our religious scriptures. It is a matter of interest that these extracts were published in Parsiana some time ago but failed to invoke any response from any of our High Priests! What can one infer from their silence?

An average Parsi fails to see the difference between Community and Religion. Parsi is a Caste-a sub-race of Aryans. One can only be a Parsi if born to Parsi parents. But Zoroastrianism is a Religion that anyone is free to follow.

If a Reader wants to learn more on the subject, I recommend he/she read 'Conversion in Zoroastrianism: The truth behind trumpery' by Kaikhosrov D. Irani and Farrokh J. Vajifdar –both very eminent scholars of our Religion. (You are welcome to ask me for a copy of the essay.)



CHAPTER 9:
Our Religion and
which Period it is from

Section B
Religious Matters



We are often told of many things as 'it is so mentioned in our Religion' (*Aapra dharmama em lakheloon chhe*) by our elders and Priests. We generally accept most of it without question.

However, if you want to know for yourself what our Religion entails, I recommend you read the 'History of Zoroastrianism' by Late Dastur Dr. Maneckji Dhalla. Dr. Dhalla, had over the 40 years of his study, covered all our scriptures in old and younger Avesta, Pahlavi, Pazand, Persian and Gujarati. He covered the subject thoroughly and gave detailed backgrounds like where, when and by whom the scriptures were composed, if possible.

I consider Dastur Saheb Maneckji Dhalla an all-time great intellectual amongst Parsi Priests. This note, which is prepared based on 'History of Zoroastrianism', will certainly help the Reader to go through the book as well as obtain some information on the subject.

To start with, we have to appreciate that the Religion of Asho Zarathushtra is about 3500 years old. The Religion and its various scriptures (composed in different languages) over this vast period, have passed through many 'Avatars', as suggested by Dr. Dhalla.

The most outstanding revelation is that except for his Gathas (about 238 stanzas), very little is available which has come directly from our Asho Zarathushtras' mouth. Most of the scriptures are composed by many people over the centuries before and after him. Some of them cannot even be considered in line with his proclamations.

Let us visit the phases or 'Periods' as Dr. Dhalla describes them. This division is mainly based on the language in which the scriptures are composed.

Before Zarathushtra i.e. prior to about 1500 B.C., the people of Iran, who were Aryans, believed in ancient Aryan divinities like, Mithra, Vayu, Usha, Baga, Yazata etc (just like the Aryans who came to India did), and the ritual of animal sacrifice to appease these divinities. Society was dominated by Kavis (the princelings) and Karpans (the mumblers priests) and Sorcerers. This is described as the Pre-Gathic Period.

Then came Zarathushtra, who preached his brand new Religion based on morality and Monotheism—one supreme Ahura Mazda, God of Wisdom and Happiness, supported by six arch-angels the 'Amesha Spenta'. (He totally disregarded various Yazatas and other divinities

of the earlier period). Zarathushtra is known to be the first prophet to preach Morality as the basis of a Religion. The Gathas, comprising of about 238 stanzas, in Gathic Avesta (similar to old Sanskrit) reveal his proclamations. His Religion was spread into the neighboring countries by the Dasturs from Iran visiting these regions. This period lasted from about 1500 B.C. to 800 B.C. and is known as the **Gathic Period**.

Whilst Zarathushtras' Religion was accepted by King Vistaspa and became the state Religion, people also continued to follow the earlier Indo-Iranian Religion, paying homage to Mithra and various Yazatas. Thus Zarathushtras' Religion became a mixture of both—his proclamations as seen in Gathas and the beliefs of the earlier Religion. Most of our scriptures composed in later Avesta are in praise and adoration of various Yazads (whom Zarathushtra did not even acknowledge in his Gathas). The practice of old rituals and ceremonies also returned. This was described as the **Avestan Period** and lasted from about 800 B.C. to about 200 A.D.

Around 330 B.C., Alexander invaded Iran and various scriptures and libraries were destroyed. After about 500 years of foreign rule, the empire was once again taken over by the Sassanian Dynasty. The old scriptures were translated into Pahlavi, which was the spoken language of the day. However since 1500 years separated Zarathushtras' time from these, the pristine teachings of Gathas was hidden. Priests taken on the Cabinet of Kings and strict Dogmatism in the name of Religion marks this period which lasted from about 200 A.D. till the 8th century and came to be known as the **Pahlavi Period**.

In 652 A.D. Arabs conquered Iran and many Zoroastrians had to accept Islam. Some migrated to India subsequently around 900 A.D. to 1000 A.D.

The religious practices, we brought to India with us, belong essentially to the Sassanian Period. Various scriptures had been composed in Pahlavi by various people as per their understanding and misunderstanding of our Religion, most of these indicating popular beliefs of the Period and coloured with the influences of Christianity and Islam. Rituals and ceremonies took centre-stage in the Religion. This was described as the **Period of Decadence** and lasted from the 8th Century and right up until the present time.

With the emergence of the study of ancient scripts, called Philology, in Europe in the late 18th / early 19th Century, it became possible to decipher and translate our Asho Zarathushtras' Gathas into present day languages. Today about 18 different translations / interpretations are available for one to understand what exactly our Asho Zarathushtra proclaimed as his Religion. And hence it is described as **The Period of Revival**.

It is heartening to note that today Zoroastrianism is fast spreading in the world (outside India) with people wanting to live their lives based on enlightened faith by following the rational principles in Gathas.

So, when one hears our elders and the priests saying, 'We have to preserve our Religion' (*aprey apro dharmama sachav-vano*), questions arise in one's mind, which avatar of Religion mentioned above are we to preserve?

The old Religion prior to Zarathushtra?(Some of the ceremonies and rituals seem to have come from that period.)

OR
The Religion of Zarathushtra in his Gathas? (A philosophy of life meant for whole humanity, based on strong ethics and morality.)

OR
The subsequent avatars of practicing of rituals and ceremonies? (Where we blindly follow Dogma and recite prayers in Avesta and Pahlavi without understanding a word of what we are saying.)

Dastur Saheb Dr. Maneckji Dhalla answers this question in the last paragraph of his book. He says, and I quote:

"With sublime confidence Zarathushtra foretold to the evil spirit that his Religion will ever live and his followers will do battle with the forces of evil up to the end of the world."

His noble faith has weathered the heaviest of storms and survived them; and the Religion which stood these trials in the past will stand any trial in the future. Zoroastrianism will live by its eternal verities of the belief in the personality of Ormazd, an abiding faith in the triad of Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds, the exorable law of righteousness, the progress of the world towards perfection, and the ultimate triumph of good over evil through coming of the Kingdom of Ormazd with the co-operation of man.

These are the truest and the greatest realities in life. They are valid for all times. They constitute the lasting element of Zoroastrianism.

In the midst of the accretions that have gathered around it during the long period of its life, these immortal truths have remained substantially unchanged, and by them Zoroastrianism will live for all time.

Dogmas and rituals are based upon the needs of the times, and as such they are subject to the natural laws of growth and decay. They have their place in the spiritual development of man. They are the accompaniments of the Religion, but not Religion itself.

Man may fall away from dogmas and from rituals, and yet may remain religious.

Righteousness rests on the individual's piety and not on a scrupulous observance of the ceremonials or a practice of elaborate lustrations.

Let the Parsi individually, and his Community collectively, abide steadfast in the path of righteousness, and they will be practicing true Zoroastrianism."

One can see easily that Dr. Dhalla is suggesting following and spreading the 'Zoroastrianism of Gathas'



CHAPTER 10: What is Vendidad?

Section B Religious Matters



Our Priests often quote saying that "it is so mentioned in Vendidad". It is interesting to note that Vendidad is not our Asho Zarathushtra's creation. In fact the Vendidad is supposed to have been created by Magi, the Priest class of Medes, whom Cyrus the Great defeated. Thus, Vendidad was created nearly 800 years after Zarathushtra!

The following lines from the Autobiography of great scholar Dr. Dhalla (Pg. 213) throw some light on the subject.

"If we were to express an unbiased opinion about Vendidad, which is considered the most important book on ceremonials, it can be stated that there is nothing like prayer or ceremony in it. It's 22 chapters contain completely irrelevant topics like the principal cities of Iran, King Jamshed, Agriculture, taxation, systems of disposal of the dead, defilement, purification, bareshnum, physicians dues, social and economic laws, regulations regarding comfort and happiness, punishment ranging from 50 whippings to 10,000, other military crimes, care of dogs, customs of cutting the hair or nails and reciting prayers prior to burying them, pregnancy, menstruation, confinement, narration about Ahriman's torment of Zarathushtra, mantras to cure illness etc. And yet the Community squanders lakhs of rupees every year over these supposedly incomparable prayers of the Vendidad."

Trust my Community Members will be wiser now after reading this.



CHAPTER 11: The Great Divide; Parsi-ism v/s Zoroastrianism

Section B Religious Matters



An attempt has been made in this article to understand the great divide in thinking and beliefs amongst Parsi Community members, mainly in India and to a much lesser extent outside India.

TO BE NOTED: The author is an avid Reader of history books and religious literature and is a staunch believer of the way of life as proclaimed by Asho Zarathushtra in his Gathas. He is an engineer by training and has over 45 years of experience as a professional manager and a management consultant. In this article he puts on his professional manager cap and tried to find the root cause of the present controversies amongst Parsis, suggesting possible solutions. He has tried to be totally rational and objective and in the least bit emotional or sentimental.

When one reads Community publications like *Parsiana*, *Parsi Times*, *Jame-Jamshed*, *Mumbai Samachar* etc; and when one discusses Community matters with other Parsis, one thing comes across very clearly and that is that, the root cause of the controversies is due to the fact that a healthy number of Parsis have a 'mind-set'.

A 'mind-set' can be defined as a deep-seated belief not based on reason, logic or rational thinking. For an example, in ancient times people believed that the earth was flat like a table. This was their 'mind-set'. When Copernicus (or was it Galileo?) suggested that the earth must be round like a ball, people did not want to listen to his reasoning or logic and to top it off, he was even persecuted for his proclamation!

Another example of 'mind-set' is that of the fate of the Hindu widow about a 100 years ago. Once widowed she could not remarry, had to shave off her hair, wear black clothes and do all the menial work in the house. There was no logic that supported this ritual that consumed the Hindu Community. The subject of her re-marriage was not even open for discussions!

The 'mind-set' that a healthy number of Parsis (including some High Priests) seem to be suffering from is that "A Parsi is a Zarathushti and a Zarathushti is a Parsi and that one has to be borne by Parsi parents to be a Zarathushti."

What needs to be understood clearly by all of us is that Parsi is a sub-race of Aryans and Zoroastrianism is a Religion, a way or philosophy of life. The two are completely separate things. If a Parsi can follow the Religions of the Christians, Muslims and Buddhists, if he so desires, why cannot anyone else follow the Zoroastrian Religion, if he wishes to? The race or the Community is on one side, and the Religion (a way or philosophy of life) is on the other side and the two are separate things.

This is not being understood by those having the 'mind-set'. They seem to overlook the fact that there are Zoroastrians elsewhere in the world including Iran, South America, Russia, Tajikistan, parts of Europe and even amongst Kurds who are not born through Parsi parents!

Now let us explore the possible reason behind this 'Parsi mind-set'. It is easy to understand the simple fact that when our forefathers came to India, they entered a land which had a very rigid and water-tight 'caste' system. Since we came from Faras (as was Iran known here) we came to be known as Farsis or Parsis. So, like all other castes in India, we did not marry outside our caste or the Community, to preserve our identity and our Religion. With inter-caste marriages our identity would have been lost and also we would have become idol-worshippers. Thus, 'maintaining the Community identity' attained a very high position in our thinking and can be seen as the root-cause of the 'Parsi mind-set'. 'We have to preserve our Community, we have to preserve our Religion' became our dogma. Though inter-caste marriages were not performed, it is a fact that Navjotes of the children of Parsi fathers through non-Parsi mothers (generally farm labour and house help) have been performed over the centuries.

Thus the concept or the 'mind-set' that 'loyalty to Parsi Community is equal to loyalty to the Religion' seems to have taken root against this historical background. (Our religious scriptures, however, do not prohibit accepting people of other caste, Community or race in to our Religion as is given in the earlier article).

Thus we have some Parsis with the above 'mind-set' on one side and there are some, though smaller in number, who believe that the Community and the Religion are two separate identities. Based on this, we seem to have developed two separate groups of people in our Community—those primarily loyal to the Community (believing in, shall we say, Parsi-panu or 'Parsi-ism') and those primarily loyal to the Religion (believing in, shall we say, Zoroastrian-ism) creating this great divide.

A follower of 'Parsi-ism' believes...

1. We have to follow practices laid down by our ancestors and do not deviate from it. These are our holy traditions (including use of non-functional dokhma system).

2. Zoroastrian Religion is our 'property', which we have to protect and we cannot admit others into it. On all issues relating to the Religion, our high Priests only can decide.
3. We are a pure race from Iran and we should not marry outside our Caste. (However, a man marrying outside can retain his Religion, his children can be initiated into the Religion but a woman marrying outside the Community will forsake her right of admission to Fire Temples etc. and her children will not be initiated into the Religion. No reason is necessary for these double-standards—our high Priests have decided this.)
4. Our way of life, 'rehni-karni' (cannot find a suitable word in English), is very dear to us and we do not want it to be diluted or lost by accepting others into our Community.
5. We have huge Charitable Trusts, the benefit of which will go away to 'others'—who are actually non-Parsis, if we start accepting outsiders into our Religion.
6. It is true that our numbers are dwindling, but we have no solution to this problem.

A follower of Zoroastrian-ism believes and counters the above as follows...

1. The times and situations have changed considerably in the last century and it is not proper or correct to cling to the ideas and practices of the past which were perhaps right for those times and situations. These out-dated ideas and practices do not become 'holy' by calling them 'traditions'.
2. Zoroastrianism is no one's 'personal property'—anyone who believes in the teachings of Aho Zarathushtra should be free to follow the Religion and should not be denied initiation into the Religion—perhaps with proper screens / filters—the details of which can be separately worked out.
3. In matters relating to the Religion, there are learned scholars who must be consulted. The High Priests in India do not seem to be fair and just in their opinions and do not support their views with valid reasons or quoting religious scriptures. They seem to be supporting Parsi-ism. (and aren't they really the cause of it?)
4. Whether our blood is pure Iranian is questionable. Some reports indicate our DNA being closer to Gujarati DNA. Inter-caste marriage between two adults is becoming a normal thing in the present times—it is happening in all communities—and it is not correct to deny any of the spouses, an initiation into the Religion of the other if he or she so desires. Off-springs of such inter-cast married couples should be initiated into our Religion, if so desired by the parents.
5. We may have to establish separate 'Universal' Fire Temples and places of worship for the use by such non-Parsi followers of the Religion, if they are not permitted to use existing Fire Temples. We follow teachings of Zarathushtra as a pure Religion, an ethical philosophy of life and consider it as our bounden duty to spread it into all corners of the world by accepting all those who believe in these teachings. We consider denying initiation into the Religion, to one voluntarily wanting to follow our Religion, as a trespass on one's fundamental human right.

6. Our 'rehni-karni' will continue to change as per the environment we are living in. It is neither possible nor correct to cling on to it and make it a major focus in life.
7. There is no fear of the benefit of Charitable Trusts going away to others as almost all of these, are meant for 'Parsi Zoroastrians'. The newly accepted persons will not be Parsis and hence not eligible for the benefit of these Charities. (Parsis should also start thinking about the fact that one day, when there are no Parsis left, what will happen to these funds?)
8. Whilst accepting others into our faith, we are fulfilling the mission of our fore-fathers who primarily came to India to save and preserve our Religion. ('Maintaining Community identity' was used only as a means, or as a system to preserve the Religion.)

So, this is 'the great divide'—one hears arguments and sees letters from both sides, arguing and counter-arguing against each other. Both sides seem hell-bent on convincing the other that 'we' are right and 'you' are wrong! Hardly anyone seems to suggest any solution.

Interestingly, the story of Jadiv Rana and the authenticity of the Kisse-Sarjan in fact are being questioned by historians and history students today, but this is something we won't discuss at this point.

Having understood the problem and the background under which it is created, let us look at some possible solutions:

1. Do nothing: Time will solve the problem, if at all. Let the debates and arguments continue. Ultimately it will be 'the survival of the fittest' and the law of nature will take over. (A question remains whether we will survive that long.)
2. Work toward bridging the divide: Call meetings (perhaps a series of them) of both the groups to try and make each side understand the other's view point. This could be done under Chairmanship of a neutral person, perhaps a retired Chief Justice of a High Court or the Supreme Court.
3. Arrange a Panel comprising of Priests and scholars of our Religion: (the position of the so-called High Priests being hereditary, not all of them may be real scholars), social scientists, and prominent members of the Community to discuss and resolve the issue in a time-bound program. Separate Out: It is suggested that those of the second group start calling themselves as 'Neo-Zoroastrians' or 'Gathic Zoroastrians' or some such name to distinguish themselves from 'Parsi-Zoroastrians', thus respecting the sentiments of the Parsi-Zoroastrians. Some of the Parsis and their families, who do not need Charities and who consider Religion more precious than the 'Community', can also join this group. This group will have to put up their own Fire Temples and places of worship open to all.

In the opinion of this author, the last one seems to be the only option since no one is interested in calling meetings for discussions (2 above), or interested in forming a panel (3 above).

Let us not waste any more time on arguing and counter-arguing against each other—nothing new, which has not been said so far, will come out of it. It takes many years to change the 'mind-set' of the people and we have sufficient number of mad 'bawas' and 'bawis' on both the sides to continue fighting forever!

Lastly, do we not have factions like 'Kadmi', 'Shenshai', 'Fasli' etc? One more faction will not make our Community weaker but only stronger (in all respects, including genetically) and who knows, ultimately, maybe we will be left with just two factions or even become one?

P.S. Since writing the above in 2008, I am having second thoughts- I now think that perhaps we should give option 2 or 3 a fair trial. Maybe, the 'mind-set' of some 'choost' Parsis may have changed!



CHAPTER 12: **Section B**
Religious Matters
ARZs response to
Vada Dasturjis and a letter from 1903 from
our High Priest on Conversion

There was a letter published by two of our Vada Dasturjis in the WAPIZ Page of the Free Press Journal of 22nd Feb. 2008 and in the Jame-Jamshed of 24th Feb. 2008. Printed under is the response to these given by a letter written jointly by Kerssie N. Wadia and Vispy N. Wadia, Trustees of the Association for Revival of Zoroastrianism (ARZ)

**Respected Vada Dasturji Sahib Dr. K. M. JamaspAsa,
Respected Vada Dasturji Sahib Dr. Firoze Kotwal,**

We at the **Association for Revival of Zoroastrianism (ARZ)** were at great pain to read your letter published in the WAPIZ Page of the Free Press Journal of 22nd Feb. 2008 and in the Jame Jamshed of 24th Feb. 2008 with regard to your views and comments on the issue of "Acceptance / Conversion in Zoroastrianism", in which certain unfounded and baseless allegations have been made on us.

We are therefore compelled to address this letter to you both, to clear our stand. As students of the Zoroastrian religion we seek answers and clarifications from learned Vada Dasturjis like your good selves for which, we are sure, you will not disappoint us.

We at ARZ have studied and are studying our various holy scriptures like Avesta, Yashts, Gathas, Vendidad, etc. Whatever level of religious knowledge we have gathered or will gather in future, we shall always remain students of religion because learning, we are sure you will agree, is a continuous process that can never stop. We firmly believe that the day a person declares himself a 'scholar', his learning stops. **We can assure you we shall never make such a mistake. We are students of the Zoroastrian religion and will forever remain students of this wonderful religion.**

In your letter we have been accused of being "*...religiously ignorant, ...misguided individuals with no proper scholastic training, ...exhibiting complete ignorance of Imperial Zoroastrian history, ...misrepresentation of scriptures, ...re-moulding the religion, etc.*".

We therefore as students of religion are compelled to seek your guidance and answers to the following concerning our Zoroastrian religion:

1. **In 1903 the very learned and respected, late Vada Dasturji Kaikhushroo Jamaspji JamaspAsa of the Anjuman Atash Behram Mumbai, had performed the Navjote of a French Lady and had also solemnized her marriage with Mr. Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata (parents of Mr. JRD Tata) according to the Zoroastrian**

rites. This great Vada Dasturji was Dasturji K. M. Jamaspasa's own grandfather !!

The late Vada Dasturji Kaikhushroo Jamaspji Jamaspasa was a highly learned religious and pious High Priest of the Anjuman Atash Behram. He was certainly not "religiously ignorant", he was not "a misguided individual with no proper scholastic training", he also did not "exhibit complete ignorance of Imperial Zoroastrian history", he was not indulging in "misrepresentation of scriptures" and last but not the least, he certainly did not try to "re-mould the religion". Would you both, very learned gentlemen, agree with us at least on this count?

*The late Vada Dasturji Kaikhushroo Jamaspji Jamaspasa had also made his views very clear with regard to "Acceptance / Conversion in Zoroastrian Faith", vide his letter of 1903 addressed to the Bombay Parsi Panchayet (BPP).

The learned and respected Vada Dasturji Kaikhushroo Jamaspji Jamaspasa very clearly states in his letter that "there is no bar in our religion, to accept non-Zoroastrian converts". In his letter the late Vada Dasturji also mentions about Ervad Tehmurasp Anklesaria's book titled "Treatise on the Conversion of Juddins into Mazdayasni Religion".

In this book, the Ervad Sahib has quoted examples from Avesta, Pahlavi, & Persian Texts, and has also mentioned about the book by Vada Dasturji Jamaspji (Great Grandfather of the current Vada Dasturji K. M. Jamaspasa) published in 1883 titled "Passoxi Nirangi Javit Dinan" in which further examples / quotations have been given concerning the acceptance / conversion of juddins into the Zoroastrian faith.

Were these learned and respected Dasturji Jamaspji, Dasturji Kaikhushroo Jamaspji Jamaspasa and Ervad Tehmurasp Anklesaria 'religiously ignorant', or were they "misguided individuals with no proper scholastic training" or were they "exhibiting complete ignorance of Imperial Zoroastrian history" or were they "misrepresenting scriptures" or were they trying to "re-mould the religion"?

Dasturji Dr. K. M. Jamaspasa, your forefathers have always stood for the cause that we stand for today. If the allegations made on us by you are correct, the same allegations could be levied on your very own grandfather and great grandfather. Are you willing to make the same allegations on them?

Dasturji Dr. Firoz Kotwal, are you too willing to make similar allegations on Dasturji Dr. K.M. Jamaspasa's forefathers?

ARZ would like to inform both of you worthy high priests that we at ARZ have been working strictly according to what has been opined and written by the fore fathers of Vada Dasturji Dr. K. M. Jamaspasa.

In our opinion these highly learned and noble Dasturjis were doing and saying the right thing, as is mentioned in our holy scriptures. We would like to have your

learned and valued opinion on the above referred religious dignitaries.

We are attaching herewith, for your ready reference and perusal, a copy of the letter written in 1903 by learned and respected Vada Dasturji Kaikhushroo Jamaspji Jamaspasa addressed to the BPP.

2. The famous Navjotes of respected Mr. Neville and Mr. Nusli Wadia were performed, blessed and approved by prominent Priests / High Priests of our community, including you both worthy high priests.

As we all know, the members of the great industrialist Wadia family were Christians for three generations, and over the generations were inter-married to European Christians and Indian / Pakistani Muslims.

We at ARZ are indeed very happy and grateful that at that time a correct decision was taken by all those concerned and no heed was paid to the tantrums thrown by the so called orthodox.

But do you think that at that time the prominent priests, including both of you, who performed and/or blessed and approved the Navjotes were "...religiously ignorant", or were "misguided Dastors with no proper scholastic training", or were "exhibiting complete ignorance of Imperial Zoroastrian history", or were "misrepresenting the scriptures", or were "re-moulding the religion"?

In our opinion all the concerned priests, including both of you highly learned religious scholars, did the right thing by performing/blessing/approving/not opposing the Navjotes of respected Mr. Neville and Mr. Nusli Wadia. ARZ salutes you all for the same.

We may further inform you both learned gentlemen that we at ARZ are strictly following your own footsteps, by accepting intermarried Parsis and their families into the Zoroastrian fold, if and when they so desire, even if a few generations have already passed, like in the case of the Wadia family.

Respected Vada Dasturji Sahebs, you will agree that our noble religion does not have two sets of rules for entry into the Zoroastrian religion - one for the super-rich and another for the common inter-married Parsi. Do you have any religious justification for this selfish discrimination?

3. Most of the Agiaries/Atash Behrams/Dokhmas have employed helpers who are of mixed parentage, and /or are themselves intermarried. Our so-called orthodox groups and priests do not object to this because no other so-called "Pure Parsi" would be ready to work in the dokhmas and / or clean and mop the floors in the Agiaries /Atash Behrams.

Please note we are not against them, we are for them. It is because of these Parsis that our Atash Behrams, Agiaris and Dokhmas are being served, as no other so-called "Pure Parsi" would be ready to work there as a *chasniwala* or as a *nasesallar*. The Parsi community should be grateful to these people for the wonderful job they have been carrying out.

But at the same time, other inter-married Parsi couples and their children are barred and stopped from following the Zoroastrian religion.

Respected Vada Dasturji Sahebs, which religious scripture of ours justifies this double standard of "take them in when required and throw them out when not"?

Do you have any religious justification for this selfish discrimination?

KHSNAOTHRAAHURAHE MAZDAO

Kerssie N. Wadia and Vispy N. Wadia
Trustees, Association for Revival of Zoroastrianism (ARZ)

*The late Vada Dasturji Kaikhushroo Jamaspji JamaspAsa had made his views very clear with regard to "Acceptance / Conversion in Zoroastrian Faith", vide his letter of 1903 addressed to the Bombay Parsi Panchayet (BPP). A copy of which is reproduced here.



Acceptance / Conversion Allowed in Zoroastrianism

A letter to B.P.P. written by Vada Dasturji Kaikhushroo Jamaspji JamaspAsa of Anjuman Atash Behram, (Grandfather of the current Vada Dasturji K. M. JamaspAsa), who had performed the Navjote of a French lady and also solemnized her marriage with Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata (parents of JRD Tata), as per the Zoroastrian rites in 1903.

Bombay

5th Gatha 1272 Y.Z.

14th September 1903

Dear Shams-Ulema Ervad Jivanji Jamshedji Modi
Secretary of the B.P.P.

Dear Sir,

You have requested me to give my opinion on whether or not to allow non-Zoroastrians to convert to Zoroastrianism.

In reply, I have to state that there is no bar in our religion, to accept non-Zoroastrian converts. Every Zoroastrian reciting his obligatory daily prayers, such as Khorshed & Meher Yashts, prays that our Mazdayasni religion may spread to all the *Haftekeshwar Zamin*. (i.e. the seven regions of the world).

The Athornans of days gone by did not just sit around wishing this (spread of religion) to come true, but traveled to distant lands to spread the Zoroastrian religion (Refer to Yasna 41.6). Such Athornans met with opposition from many people (see Yasna 9.24). We have referred to only two passages from the innumerable in the Zoroastrian Scriptures confirming that the conversion of *Juddins* to Zoroastrianism is permitted.

The second edition of Ervad Tehmurasp Dinshahji Anklesaria's "Treatise on the Conversion of *Juddins* into Mazdayasni Religion" has just been published, in which this able Ervad Saheb has quoted examples from Avesta, Pahlavi, & Persian Texts and we totally agree with quotation / examples. In the second edition of "Passoxi Nirangi Javit Dinan" published in 1252 Y.Z. (1883 A.D) by our dear departed Dastur Jamaspji, further examples / quotations have been given concerning the conversion / acceptance of *Juddins* into the Zoroastrian religion.

From the writings of Ervad Tehmurasp Anklesaria and our departed Dastur Jamaspji, it can be said that there is hardly any material left on this matter for further research by any scholar. Therefore rather than state more quotations / examples it is best that we

give to your Sub-Committee these books referred to above.

Yours Sincerely,

Dastur Kaikhushroo Jamaspji JamaspAsa

Have our 'kom-choost' (Community-loyalist) members and their priests read this or know about it or even are interested in reading it? It does not say anywhere that only Navjotes of children with Parsi fathers is permitted as opposed to children with only Parsi mothers.



CHAPTER 13:
The role of High
Priests of Parsis in India

Section B
Religious Matters

This chapter was written as an article in my capacity as a professional manager, trying to find out the structure and the management of our Religion and Religious Institutions. I have tried to be totally rational. I have no hidden agenda or any personal motive. The idea is to make the Community aware of the situation and hopefully generate a healthy dialogue which should result in a better future for the Community and the Religion. I repeat the aim of this article is only to generate awareness and constructive discussions.

To start with I asked a few questions and got the answers from the fellow Community members as given below:

Question: How are the High Priests appointed? How does one become a High Priest?

Answer: Generally the Dasturjis of the Atash Behrams (there are 8 of them?) are considered High Priests. Also understand that any Anjuman can present a shawl and appoint the Dastur as a High Priest (as it happened in Bangalore—perhaps with the consent of the other High Priests).

This position is supposed to be hereditary and the son of a High Priest automatically become eligible to be a High Priest.

Question: Is it necessary that one must have proven record of having studied religious literature or published essays, books on the Religion etc. to qualify for being a High Priest?

Answer: It appears no such requirements are mandatory.

Question: Do other Priests 'report' to the High Priests and are bound to follow their diktat?

Answer: All the Priests are independent and are supposed to follow the diktat of their conscience.

Question: Whom do the High Priests 'report' to?

Answer: To no one, it seems, in religious matters. They can decide for the Community what is right or wrong. Their decision may or may not be based on our religious scriptures or shared by other scholars of our Religion. They, themselves, are known to have made exceptions to their own diktats.

Question: Are they the High Priests of the Community or the High Priests of Zoroastrianism? Is this not a question of 'lack of role clarity'?

Answer: It does appear that their 'role' is not defined anywhere. In their thinking they seem to be serving the Community and seem to take their stand in the interest of Community (as perceived by them), and not necessarily based on Religious scriptures.

Question: Can the High Priests be considered responsible for dividing the Community into 'the orthodox' and 'the reformist' groups?

Answer: Though they alone cannot be considered to be responsible, they certainly seem to have played a significant role. Based on the reality of the situation and based on scriptures, nothing stops them from coming out openly and state that:

1. It is not proper to deny anyone the right to follow our Religion and we will perform the Navjote (of anyone wishing to follow our Religion), as ordained and suggested in all our Religious scriptures.
2. As there are no scavenging birds, any alternate method can be adopted for the disposal of the dead body and we will perform all the required ceremonies. (In towns where there are no dokhmas, an alternate method is used and our Priests perform all the ceremonies. Why should we have double standards?)

If Priests take bold and sensible stands such as these, it will certainly result in fostering unity and harmony in the Community. Till then, they have to share the blame for dividing the Community.

Question: Why are they not taking the stand suggested above?

Answer: One has to ask them only this question. The possible reasons could be:

1. They have not read our Religious scriptures (or prefer to ignore them because they wish to be of loyal to the Community?)
2. Why should they worry about the Community being divided—how does it affect their income or bother them?
3. May be they are trying to toe the line with the Trustees of Panchayats and Anjumans and are under their influence?
4. Having taken the opposite stand earlier, it may be difficult for them to retract now?

Question: Do the High Priests and other Priests work towards educating the 'behdins' about our basic Religion as proclaimed by our Asho Zarathushtra in his Gathas?

Answer: One hardly comes across a Priest who is also a religious teacher. They are not trained to be teachers in the Madaressas. What they profess and practice is 'Religiosity'—which means the rituals and ceremonies.

Question: If the situation requires to be changed, what can be done and who will do it?
Answer: The total transformation of the system is a very big task. Perhaps to start with, the education and training being imparted in Madaressas, needs to be suitably revised. Instead of churning out commercial 'prayer chanters' or 'ceremony masters', as is being done now, they may like to groom Priests to be teachers of the Religion first and foremost. They may of course be trained to perform various ceremonies also.

Only a person genuinely desirous of teaching the Religion and performing ceremonies may be selected— he need not be from the Priestly family—(why women should not be eligible need to be discussed). Understanding and spreading the Religion of Zarathushtra as given in his Gathas should be his/her life's sole mission.

Question: How can these changes be brought about? Isn't there a forum for discussions on this subject?

Answer: It is a sad situation that no formal or informal forum exists where open discussions can take place in a civilized manner. Who will call for such a meeting and provide a forum for a healthy dialogue and expression of views? The trustees of BPP? The High Priests? They seem to be sitting on their high chairs of power and do not indicate any openness on this subject.

One doubts that even Ahura Mazda can help this Community which refuses to help itself.

And what can be the fate of the Community when its members and the Priests are ignoring the message of their own Prophet?

I would certainly appreciate views from fellow Community members on this topic. Please do email me on kerseekabraji@gmail.com.

(This letter was originally written on 8th April 2012.)



CHAPTER 14:
Historic Vada Dasturjis
Council formed

Section B
Religious Matters

(Reproduced below is a letter I wrote in to the Jame Jamshed Weekly on 20th February, 2011)

I have read with interest the above news (Formation of the Historic Vada Dasturji Council) in the 'Jame Jamshed' of 20th February 2011.

From what is reported, it is understood that "the idea behind the newly formed Council is to assure the Community that all the High Priests can come together on one platform and speak in one voice."

May I, as one humble Community member, point out that what we are seeking is the 'Truth' and not your 'opinions'. Everyone is free to have his /her opinion. What is important is what is the 'Truth'?

Can we expect this Council to support their 'opinions' with relevant quotes from the Religious scriptures?

On the two issues facing the Community (and dividing the Community):

1. Acceptance into Zoroastrianism by anyone who voluntarily wishes to be initiated
2. Performing last religious rites for those not opting for 'Dokhma' system

Some of us have been crying hoarse for last few years, 'kindly show us the Religious Scriptures which supports your stand'. In response what we have received so far is just a stony silence.

How will forming of this 'Historic Council' resolve these issues, whether these Dasturjis are united or divided?

Are they not able to realize that:

1. 'Truth' will prevail in the end?
2. The time to fool gullible behdins with 'fatwas' is over? They are only losing respect by coming out with such fatwas.
3. Their being 'united' does not automatically buy them respect?

Sincerely looking forward to their response.



CHAPTER 15:
The highs and the lows

Section B
Religious Matters

(Reproduced below is a letter I wrote in to the Parsiana on 7th March 2010)

Your Editorial Viewpoint (Parsiana 21st February, 2010) on the above subject discussed the state of our clergy and Priesthood. Your last sentence—"Without any research and analyses of what ails the clergy, it does appear the Parsi Priesthood will die out well before the Community does" set some thoughts running in my mind which I want to share with your readers and the Community at large.

We also hear that about eleven Agiaries in Mumbai have almost closed down as the Trusts have little funds to manage them. One hears similar plights of Agiaries in other smaller cities, to say nothing about smaller towns. What has happened in last 50 to 70 years? Has an average Bawa / Bawi become less Religious? Our dwindling number is certainly one major reason.

The other major reason is the impact of liberal education being imparted in our Schools and Colleges, where we are taught that all human beings are equal and creation of one God, where we are taught to think more rationally and logically. This has caused a major shift in our thinking.

It is my contention that an average Parsi is far less a visitor to Agiary today, than those of earlier generations. It was not uncommon then, that some Parsis would visit an Agiary daily before going to work and leave a small change there (my dear late brother Phiroze was one such person). Some others would be visiting at least 3 to 4 times a month if not more. The cost of living was low and this 'small change' contributed considerably towards the upkeep of the Agiary and the Mobeds there.

The times have changed but our Orthodox Priesthood (both high and low!) has refused to change. Can one say that their 'fatwas' about not initiating children of mixed marriages in to our Religion or against performing last rites for those opting for alternate method—these 'fatwas', which are neither based on common sense nor on Religious scriptures—are the cause of their downfall?

Who would feel sympathetic towards their plight, brought on to them by themselves? Thinking rationally, what exactly is their role other than being 'prayer chanters' and performing rituals for money? They thrive purely on the 'blind faith' of most Behdins.

So, now let us come to what can or needs to be done. Your editorial states, "Priesthood is a calling. But it is one which few are answering." What is the reason?

Perhaps to start with, the education being imparted whilst grooming the Mobeds in

Madaressas, needs to be modified. Instead of churning out 'commercial prayer chanters', as they are doing now, they have to groom a Priest based on:

1. Selecting a person genuinely desirous of serving the Religion, he need not be from Priest family. (Why women should not be eligible to take on the duties of Mobeds need to be discussed rationally)
2. Understanding and spreading the Religion of Zarathushtra as given in his Gathas, should be his/her life's sole mission
3. Realizing that the Priest has to be selfless person, dedicating his life in furtherance of the Religion, not to work for money only (or self-conceived ideas of 'Community's interest') but for the love of the Religion and humanity—that he has to be a friend-in-need of all human beings in their hour of sickness and difficulty, similar to what is seen being done by Christian Missionaries.

In short, work towards establishing Zarathushtras' Religion as an enlightened Faith, as a highly rational and ethical philosophy of life as proclaimed by him in his Gathas, rather than work towards Religion based on blind faith, rituals and ceremonies only. Let us not forget that our children and grandchildren will be products of 'computer age', strongly following reason / logic and rationality. And the days are numbered for the brand of 'blind faith' as our Priests are trying to keep alive.

Very frankly, in present times, which sane person would want to be a 'Mobed'(in the role that he is required to play as of now) notwithstanding the monetary aspect?



CHAPTER 16: Conversion/Acceptance myths and realities

Section B
Religious Matters



(Reproduced below is a letter I wrote in to the Jame Jamshed Weekly on 21st October 2008)

I have seen the above-captioned article by Mr. Desai in your recent issue and would like to comment as follows:

1. Mr. Desai uses words like 'Dr. Antia's newly propounded theory of Acceptance'. Is he not aware that off-springs of Parsi father from a non-Parsi mother have been 'accepted' by the Community for last so many centuries? What is so new about this word 'acceptance' and what is really meant by using word 'theory' by him when the 'acceptance' has been in actual 'Practice' for last many centuries? By using such words, is he not being just a 'clever lawyer'?
2. What Dr. Antia and some of us have been proposing and suggesting is that if the Community is accepting children of Parsi father, why not accept children of Parsi mother also (if the non-Parsi father has no objection to it), since in our Religion there is absolutely no discrimination of sexes? Why such double-standards? Why this injustice? Can one expect a specific answer to this?
3. Mr. Desai mentions about the meeting at Framjee Cawasjee Institute where he claims that Dr. Antia's contentions were rebutted. From the reports I have read, the High Priests were not able to quote any specific scripture to support their stand. If I recollect rightly, it was also so mentioned on the front page of your issue covering this meeting.
4. During the last two years a number of letters have appeared in Jame Jamshed and Parsiana, quoting specifically from our scriptures indicating that conversion / acceptance is permitted in our Religion. It is sad that not once have these quotes been refuted specifically. What we hear from them is a very general tirade "it is not permitted in our Religion". How long do we wish to fool ourselves and our innocent Community members?

5. Mr. Desai then goes on to indicate that even if such children of Parsi mothers were accepted, it will not significantly matter. There are two points which deserve some attention:

- A. Our girls marrying out is on the increase. About 60 years back when my dear cousin married a non-Parsi, it had been a very rare occasion. Now I believe the ratio is about 1: 4 or 1:3. The trend is very clear, the ratio will keep getting worse and no one can stop it.
- B. We should not be looking at number of their children only. What about their grand children and their great-grand children? If these numbers are compounded, we will understand the real impact of losing out on the large number of the future Community members.

In the penultimate paragraph, Mr. Desai mentions in one breath

- A. Love for Religion
- B. Traditions ('customs and traditions rule the world!')
- C. Preserving Community.

My comments on the above:

- A. If he really loves his Religion, he should be doing everything possible to spread it in all corners of the world, as is prescribed in our Religious scriptures.
- B. The world and the humanity have progressed because of people who were willing to break traditions. Otherwise we would still be travelling in bullock-carts or even living in caves. One also wonders whether this word 'tradition' is not used by people suffering from a 'mind-set' (believing in something not based on logic or rationality). It should be clearly understood that 'Tradition is not Religion and non-conformance of tradition does not mean non-conformance of Religion'.
- C. What specific solution does Mr. Desai propose to preserve the dwindling number of the Community, when the demographic figures are a clear writing on the wall—that by the year 2050 or so, our population will be down to 20,000?

The time has come to make our choice. Either try to preserve the dwindling Community (likely to reach extinction one day) or preserve and even spread our Religion by accepting people who are willing to join it and are eligible.

Lastly, on the subject of Acceptance, I like to quote the following which has come straight from the mouth of none other than our Asho Zarathushtra:

But that man, positively any-one-so-ever, who has mastered the true faith by praise and invocation of Vahu Mana, can become through Asha, a good companion of Aramaiti, and with the help of them all dwell in Thy Kingdom, O Ahura.

[Ys.49.5—Bode & Nanavutty—also in 47.6,44.7,10,48.12]



CHAPTER 17: Tenets and Traditions

Section B Religious Matters



Letter from a Vada Priest to Parsiana

Reproduced below is a letter printed in the Parsiana issue dated 7th September 2012 written by Late Dastur Nadirshah Unvalia of Bangalore. Dastur Unvalia was one of the Vada Priests in India.

One has to compliment him for opening his mind unlike other Vada Dasturjis who believe in keeping mum or total silent. One can see that the content of the letter brings out, perhaps the beliefs of our Dasturjis and many Behdins too. My response to this letter follows immediately.

Tenets and traditions

The Zoroastrian Religion is based foremost on righteousness. From its moral teachings spring the tenets, traditions, customs and ceremonies which are revered, respected and followed by all concerned. Indeed even those not of our faith accept these as sacrosanct and respect our customs and beliefs without reservation and with due respect. If some misguided members do not accept or respect these customs and beliefs, so be it. However, in such circumstances, should they continue to remain Parsi Zoroastrians and claim to profess the Zoroastrian faith? Should they stoop so low as to give the time-tested and nature friendly system of disposal of our dead the title of *druj-nashini*? This is absurd! It is very clearly enshrined in our scriptures that our dead shall be disposed of only through the system of dokhmenashini to the exclusion of any other mode of disposal. Its rejection is a sin and an affront to the teachings of Asho Zarathushtra.

The High Priests, scholars and the knowledgeable are of the opinion that certain customs and traditions should continue. But some others feel that Religion and its dictates should be changed. It is noteworthy that Prophet Zoroaster and his disciples, known as 'Zarathushtra-temo,' had issued certain firmans, but when the Persians lost their empire at the hands of the Romans and Arabs, it led to the destruction of our holy scriptures. With the rise of the Sasanian dynasty, our holy saints Ardaviraf, Maraspand, Dastur Tansar, revived the original Zoroastrian Religion, keeping in mind the message of Zarathushtra, and thus enabling the Community to survive for centuries. Are the

Trustees of the Association for the Revival of Zoroastrianism (ARZ) and the common people capable of bringing about a change in the customs and traditions? Are they holier and more evolved than the Rainidar Dasturs of the Sasanian dynasty?

Some people are highly critical about our customs and ask if the Priests and lay Parsis follow all that is preached in our scriptures. This is irrelevant. The scriptures lay down the laws which all are expected to adhere to. Those who choose to ignore or dismiss these laws do so at their own peril. May I educate them that there are two categories of customs – individual and collective? If an individual does not follow a custom his soul (*kerdar*) is answerable after death. The collective customs are *dakhmenashini*, wearing the *sudreh-kusti*, etc. The implications are clear! Those who profess to be Parsi Zoroastrians may choose not to wear a cap, or even the *sudreh-kusti*. But if they enter any of our consecrated places of worship like *Atash Behrams* or *Agiaries*, they will have to cover their heads and wear the *sudreh* and *kusti*. These customs become collective. And on these Religious dictates there are no compromises.

Some peoples' aim is to pander to the reformists and satisfy their egos. I appeal to all Zoroastrians and more so to the Priests to steadfastly adhere to our customs and Religious practices for the faith to survive and flourish in India, particularly in Bombay. Amongst these practices, strict adherence to the system of disposal of our dead through the time-honored system of *dakhmenashini* is of great importance. Its abandonment constitutes a grave sin, and could possibly lead to other departures from our holy edicts. Please consider the consequences even as you ponder over these notes of caution.

Some people question the relevance and importance of *dakhmenashini* on the ground that in many cities and towns where *dakhmas* are not available the resident Parsis would make do with burial or cremation. Was this not against the Religious practice? The answer is very simple and explanatory. In the years gone by, whenever Parsis migrated to an intended place of abode where they planned to settle, their first priority would be a place of worship. Therefore, a Fire Temple would be constructed first, and this would be followed by a *dakhma* for the disposal of the dead. This explains the large number of *dakhmas* in Gujarat where the first settlements came up. In places where the migration was not large or even reasonable in numbers, burial was the only alternative as prescribed by the book *Shayest-la-Shayest*. As the population increased, *dakhmas* were built. Bangalore and Rajkot are two such cities.

I am ashamed to call persons urging a departure from the old customs and traditions true Zoroastrians because they will poison the minds of the youngsters who, being ignorant about the Zoroastrian scriptures, can be easily led astray.

Dastur Nadirshah P. Unvalla,
Bangalore

My response to the letter by Dastur Unvalla printed in the Parsiana Issue dated 13th September 2007

I have read Dastur Nadirshah Unvalla's letter (Parsiana, September 7) on this subject and wish to offer the following comments for the benefit of your readers.

1. Nadirshah states: 'Zoroastrian Religion is based on righteousness. From its moral teachings spring the tenets, traditions, customs and ceremonies which are revered, respected and followed by all concerned'.

I fully agree Nadirshah, that Zoroastrian Religion is based on righteousness.

This righteousness is to be practiced in thoughts, words and actions every hour, every minute, every second of our life. It has nothing to do with the traditions, customs and ceremonies. A person may practice righteousness all the time but may not observe traditions, customs and ceremonies. Would you say he is not observing our Religion? Conversely, a person may follow all the traditions, customs and ceremonies but may not practice righteousness in his/her thoughts, words and actions. Would you dare to say that this person is following Zoroastrian Religion? Practicing righteousness and following rituals, ceremonies and customs have nothing to do with each other.

By mixing up these two, Mr. Nadirshah, you are misleading the Community members.

To quote Dastur Sahib M.N.Dhalla, (PhD. Litt.D), "**Man may fall from Dogmas and from rituals, and yet may remain Religious. Righteousness rests on individual's piety and not on a scrupulous observance of ceremonials or practice of elaborate lustrations. Let the Parsi individually and his Community collectively abide steadfast in the path of righteousness and they will be practicing true Zoroastrianism.**"(Page 511, History of Zoroastrianism).

2. Nadirshah questions whether those not accepting such customs and traditions should they continue to remain Parsi Zoroastrians and claim to profess the Zoroastrian faith? Well, the answer to that question is given above by none less than Dr.Dhalla, one of the greatest scholars of our Religion and Religious scriptures. I have nothing more to add.
3. Regarding *Dakhmenashini*: One wonders that by calling the *dakhma* system (as is existing today in absence of scavenging birds) 'nature-friendly and time-tested', whom is Nadirshah trying to fool apart from fooling himself. Nadirshah mentions that 'it is clearly enshrined in our scriptures that our dead shall be disposed off only through the system of *dakhmenashini*'. Well, is he aware that this is only half the truth? May one draw his attention to *Fargard VIII* of *Vendidad*, paras 4(11) to 10(23)? It is clearly stated therein that when there are

no birds, the body should not be consigned to dokhma. Instead a temporary grave be made and body kept there for a period even up to a month, and then consigned to dokhma only when one is sure of the presence of 'corpse-eating dogs and corpse-eating birds'. What does he have to say to this other half of the truth?

4. In our Zarathost Sahib's Gathas, Asha Vahishta stands for Righteousness and Truth. Facts and Reality (which cannot be ignored or wished away) are parts of Truth. If one sees hundreds of rotting bodies crying out for help in our dokhmas in Mumbai and still talks about that system in glorifying words, if one ignores the other half of the truth in scriptures, a question arises as to what kind of righteousness, truth and the Religion is being observed by such a person.
5. Nadirshah mentions that Zarathushtra and his disciples known as 'Zarathushtra-temo' had issued 'certain' firmans. One does not know today what these firmans were. Request Nadirshah to throw more light on this subject. Surely he does not mean that Dokhma system was one of these. As the History tells us, after Cyrus the Great defeated the Medes, their Priests called the Magi were brought in to our Religion.

To quote from page 135-136:

'It seems that Magi took a long time to supplant the Religious practices of the Persians by their own. The two races differed very widely on some of the main Religious observances. For example, the Magi held the elements of nature sacred. The earth was to be kept pure from defilement. Hence they exposed the corpses of the dead to be devoured by the birds; though the Persians, on the contrary, enclosed the corpses in wax and interred them in the earth. ...The Persians continued this practice for a considerable time until finally with the complete fusion of the two races; they seem to have exchanged burial for the exposure of the corpses'

So, the dokhma system came in to practice a good 600 to 800 years after Zarathushtra and is not his or Zarathushtra-temo's creation !

Needless to say, there was no response to this letter.



CHAPTER 18:
Letter from High Priests to the Trustees of the BPP

Section B
Religious Matters

Regarding Navjote of Roshni Maloo's children:

Dasturs Khurshed Dastur, (Drs) Kaikhusroo JamaspAsa, Peshotan Mirza and Firoze M. Kotwal wrote to the Bombay Parsi Panchayet (BPP) Trustees condemning the Navjote and asking the trustees to "prevent" the Navjotes. The letter is reproduced here.

It has been brought to our notice that the Navjote ceremonies of Zinatra and Tushar D'Souza, followed by a reception will be held on Friday, April 16, 2010. The ceremony we understand is being done on the two children whose father is a Mr Savio D'Souza. Clearly as the name suggests, he must be a Christian and probably a Roman Catholic.

As per the customs and traditions of the Parsi Zoroastrian Religion, the children of a Parsi mother married to a non-Parsi cease to be Parsis and therefore cannot be initiated into the Zoroastrian faith.

We the High Priests of the Parsi Community strongly condemn this irreligious act. Navjotes of children belonging to non-Parsi/Irani Zoroastrian fathers are not considered to be part of the Zoroastrian faith or Community and we view such practices as an open act of conversion — a practice which is not followed by the Parsi Community. This view is also held by all the Trustees of the BPP.

We urge the BPP to take the necessary, firm and immediate action against this Religious farce which is being performed by renegade Priests who in our opinion have been debarred, by not only their respective 'tolas (sects),' but by all the High Priests of the Zoroastrian faith.

We believe that this sort of farcical initiation/reception will undoubtedly upset the Religious sentiments of our Community and therefore create a law and order situation which we would, in all sincerity, like to avoid.

We therefore request you to take this matter up urgently with the necessary authorities in order to prevent this irreligious act from taking place on Friday, April 16, 2010 at St Joseph's Primary Section Grounds (full address stated). We believe Savio D'Souza lives at (full address stated). We enclose a xerox copy of the invitation.

The next Chapter contains my response to the above letter.



CHAPTER 19: An open letter to the High Priests

Section B Religious Matters

I sent the letter printed below to the High Priests and to Parsiana on the 12th of May 2010. I do not know whether it got printed in the Parsiana and I also never got a response from the High Priests.

Dear Respected Dasturjis,

I have seen your letter addressed to BPP Trustees about the Navjote ceremony of children of (née) Ms. Roshni Maloo married to Mr. Savio D'Souza.

You mention, "As per customs and traditions of Parsi Zoroastrian Religion, the children of a Parsi mother married to a non-Parsi cease to be Parsis and therefore cannot be initiated into Zoroastrian faith."

I am only a student of our Religion and would urge you to kindly reply to my following questions—it will help me and certainly other members of the Community also.

1. Kindly enlighten what you have meant by 'Parsi Zoroastrian Religion'? Is it different from the Zoroastrian Religion followed by others in Iran, Central Asia or by other Zoroastrians anywhere in the world?
2. My understanding is that 'Parsi' is only a Community (a sub-caste of Aryans), whereas Zoroastrianism is a Religion, a way or Philosophy of life as proclaimed by our Asho Zarathushtra in his Gathas. Therefore in the minds of some of us, it is very clear that Parsi Community and Zoroastrianism Religion are the two are separate entities. I believe there is some court Judgment stating the same. Kindly enlighten us on what exactly you mean by 'Parsi Zoroastrian Religion'.
3. We believe 'Navjotes' are performed in Uzbekistan, Russia and other parts of the World and persons with different background (not being Parsis) are initiated in to Zoroastrianism. What is your reaction to these Navjotes? How are these accepted by you? Can you or can anyone stop these? The possible reason of your keeping silent is that they are not Parsis. But surely, the D'Souza children do not wish to claim to be Parsis—they simply want to follow the Zoroastrian Religion, like other Zoroastrians in Iran, Russia and other parts of the world. What exactly is your objection, one fails to understand. Can you state this in clear words?
4. And by writing to the Trustees of BPP, what purpose is being served? One understands that BPPs job is to look after the estates of the Panchayet and manage the charity funds. No more and no less. Who has given them authority to meddle in anyone else's Religious matters? This country is governed by our constitution which gives freedom to all individuals to profess and practice whatever Religion one likes. Surely you are not asking Trustees of BPP to be the 'guardians' of this Universal Religion? It is not supposed to be or can ever be BPPs job.

5. If a Parsi man marries a non-Parsi woman, their children are being initiated in to our Religion, but if a Parsi woman marries a non-Parsi man, why should her children be denied initiation in to our Religion? Especially if she has not relinquished her Religion and the father is in agreement of such Navjote? Why such double-standards, when in all our Religious scriptures, there is no discrimination against women and equality of sexes is a fundamental teaching in Zarathushtra's Gathas?
6. And lastly, if on performing Navjote or initiating one in to our Religion, your stand is, that one has to be born to Parsi parents only (having 'Parsi blood'), then, any Parsi girl having been so born and so initiated, how can she become 'non-Zoroastrian'—just because she has married a non-Parsi? The 'Parsi blood' has not changed or just cannot change? Can you explain your reasoning or logic?
7. Can I request you to respond to the above questions by referring to our scriptures like Zarathushtra's Gathas etc...? Kindly avoid usage of words and phrases like our 'time-tested traditions' or 'our customs' and such vague words which have no Religious sanctity. You know very well that customs and traditions have their life period and are subject to change with circumstances. Traditions and customs are not Religion. Request quote very specific paragraphs or stanzas from our scriptures supporting your stand.

I cannot close this letter without quoting the following from Zarathushtra's Gathas which indicate that our Religion is a Universal Religion and not restricted to be practiced by 'Parsis' only! Kindly note what Zarathost Sahib prays to Ahura Mazda:

Come hither to me, in Thine own self, O Mazda!

Come unmistakably, O Thou best one,

With the spirit of Truth and Good Mind!

Let my message be heard beyond the limits of Community adherents.

Let the brilliant offerings of the reverential prayers be manifest to all

(Ys. 33.7—D.J.Irani)

But that man positively anyonesoever,

Who mastered the true faith by praise and invocation of Vohu Mana, Can become through Asha, a good companion of Armaiti and with the help Of them all dwell in

Thy kingdom O Ahura.

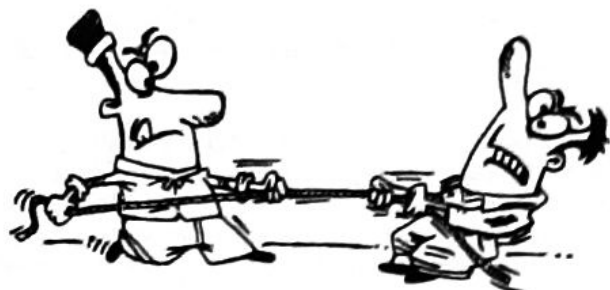
[Ys.49.5—Bode and Nanavutti]

I wish to thank you for your patience in going through this somewhat long letter but I am sure you will respond for the benefit of our Community members. Your silence will only mean you have no answers and your stand is neither based on rationality nor on Religious scriptures.



CHAPTER 20: Community versus Religion

Section B Religious Matters



Should the formation of a Parsi Community be based on the Religion of their Prophet Asho Zarathushtra or should the Religion be adapted to suit the thinking of the Community or its Priests?

What is paramount?—the Religion as proclaimed by the Prophet or the one the Community wishes to follow as per diktats of their Priests?

An average Parsi, individually, generally follows Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds (and practices our Asho Zarathushtra's Religion). A Parsi is known to be an honest, truthful, sincere and a helpful person.

However as a group, we Parsis want to cling on to outdated practices like use of non-operating dokhma (in absence of scavenging birds), out-casting our girls marrying a non-Parsi, non-acceptance of others into our religion etc;—all in the guise of following the 'traditions'. We claim to be 'Zarathost'i's but as a group we ignore Zarathost Sahib's proclamations!

We seem to have evolved our own unique brand of Religion which is neither based on scriptures nor on common-sense! Our Vada Dasturjis have termed it as 'Parsi Zoroastrian' Religion. So it seems the diktats of these Priests have overruled the proclamations of our Asho Zarathushtra!

It is high time All Parsis know:

1. Our Asho Zarathushtra wanted his good Religion, given by Ahura Mazda, to be spread in all corners of the world.
2. None of our scriptures are against accepting any one in to our Religion.
3. The Dokhma system is only traditional—actually Vendidad prohibits the use of Dokhma in absence of birds.

So, my dear Parsi friends, you have to make your choice between following the diktats of the Priests or to follow the good philosophy of life as proclaimed by our Asho Zarathushtra. The first one leads to the extinction of the Community and the other to immergence of a refreshed Community of Zoroastrians.

Will the readers come out openly to respond to this letter? With a constructive debate, perhaps we may be able to reach some solution to our dwindling numbers.



CHAPTER 21:
Why our Dasturjis are
shying away from responding

Section B
Religious Matters

(Reproduced below is a letter I wrote in to the Parsiana on 5th May 2013)

I must thank you for publishing my article 'Community vs Religion' in your issue of 21st April 2013, under the heading 'Zarathushtra's Religion' in the Readers Forum. A decision on whether to follow Zarathushtra's religion or not has to be taken by the members of the Parsi community—it is already too late?

I had written to a Dasturji in Mumbai (who I was told is a very sensible person), asking for a meeting to discuss this topic as follows:

Some of us, Parsis / Zarathustis, are concerned about the fate of our Community (with dwindling numbers—approaching extinction), as well as about continuance of our Religion in India thereafter.

Request you to give us some time from your busy schedule for this meeting and discussions. If you can persuade some of our Vada Dasturjis and other Dasturjis also to join, it would be more effective.

The whole idea is to find solutions to this problem through constructive discussions. The community is at the cross-roads and needs some guidance.

I trust it will be possible for you as a member of Vada Dasturji's Council to organize such a meeting.

Looking forward to your positive response.

To this I received the reply as follows:

"As far as my understanding goes, there was an attempt to create the Vada Dasturjis Council, but it does not seem to be functional now. The issues outlined by you have already been discussed and debated umpteen number of times, and I do not wish to state anything further. The Vada Dasturjis have already given their opinions and guidance on these issues. Kindly excuse me."

The letter did not say who the participants in the discussions were and where and when these discussions took place. Needless to say I was most disappointed with the response.

My simple question is : Why are our Dasturjis shying away from responding to our queries on Religious Matters?

I believe strongly that all problems can be resolved by people sitting across the table and trying to understand each other. I am trying to seek some way of having this dialogue. Is it feasible at all? Will some prominent members of the Community initiate this dialogue? Will someone help me?



CHAPTER 22:
Our Dokhma system
what does Vendidad say?

Section C
The Dokhma System



Our Community members believe that according to our scriptures the only way to dispose off a dead body is by dokhma system. This is half the truth.

The other half of the truth is that our scriptures prohibit the use of dokhma system when there are no corpse-eating dogs and corpse-eating birds. It recommends that a special temporary grave be made and the dead body kept there till one is sure of the scavenging animals and birds are present to eat up the body, as the following extracts from Vendidad show

EXTRACTS— FARGARD VIII

II

4(11). O Maker of the material world, thou Holy One! If in the house of the worshipper of Mazda, a dog or a man happens to die, and it is raining, or snowing, or blowing, or it is dark, or the day is at its end, when flocks and men lose their way, what shall the worshipper of Mazda do?

5(14). Ahura Mazda answered: 'The place in that house whereof the ground is the cleanest and the driest, and the least passed through by flocks and herds, by the fire of Ahura Mazda, by the consecrated bundles of Baresma, and by the faithful;

8(18). 'On that place they shall dig a grave, half a foot deep if the earth be hard, half the height of a man if it be soft; [they shall cover the surface of the grave with the ashes or cow dung]; they shall cover the surface of it with dust of bricks, of stones, or of dry earth.

9(21). 'And they shall let the lifeless body lie there, for two nights, or three nights, or a month long, until the birds begin to fly, the plants to grow, the hidden floods to flow, and the winds to dry up the earth.

10(23). 'And when the birds begin to fly, the plants to grow, the hidden floods to flow, and the wind to dry up the earth, then the worshippers of Mazda shall make a breach in the house, and two men strong and skilful, having stripped their clothes off, shall take up the body from the clay or the stones, or from the plastered house, and they shall lay it down on a place where they know there are always corpse-eating dogs and corpse-eating birds.'

Will our High Priests, the Trustees of Panchayet and Anjuman and Parsis at large take note of the full Truth as given in the scriptures and stop this most unhygienic practice under the absence of scavenging birds? When will they stop defaming the religious scriptures to justify this most anti-social practice?



CHAPTER 23: Some facts and understanding about Dokhma System

Section C
The Dokhma System

It is understood that the idea of breeding of vultures is once again being considered by the BPP. It seems that the Trustees of the BPP, our Priests and some Community members are simply obsessed about using the dokhmas at Doongerwadi. An attempt has been made in this chapter to look at the issue from all different angles.

The Religious Angle:

The practice of Dokhma was brought in to Iran by Magis (the priest class of Medes after Cyrus the Great defeated Media—around 350 B.C.)

An extract below from 'History of Zoroastrianism' page 135, gives some details.

"It seems that the Magi took a long time to supplant the religious practices of the Persians by their own. Two races differed very widely on some of the main religious observances. For example, the Magi held the elements of nature sacred. The earth was to be kept pure from defilement. Hence they exposed the corpses of the dead to be devoured by birds; though the Persians, on the contrary enclosed the corpses in wax, and interred them in the earth. We gather from Arrian that Alexander sent the body of Darius to be interred in the Royal mausoleum by the side of the remains of the departed ones of the Royal family of Persia. The Persians continued this practice for a considerable time, until finally with the complete fusion of the two races they seem to have exchanged burial for the exposure of the corpses."

Our Priests refer to Vendidad (which is supposed to be composed by Magis), as a Religious scripture. Vendidad does mention the use of Dokhma in normal situations. However it prohibits the use of Dokhma when there are no scavenging birds and animals. (Please see Fargard VIII Para 4(11), 5(14), 8(18), 9(21) & 10(23)—which even suggests a temporary grave be made and dead body kept there till the scavenging bird and animals are available).

From the above it will be clear that Dokhma system came in to being nearly 1000 years after our Asho Zarathushtra and was 'imported' in to Iran by the Priests of the defeated country. Also, its use is not recommended by Vendidad in the absence of scavenging birds. So, there is nothing sacrosanct in our Religion about its use—it has nothing to do with our Zarathost Saheb, the proclaimer of our Religion.

Once we understand that the use of Dokhma is only 'traditional' and not Religious, we will be able to think clearly on the subject. First, let us see two extracts:

The first one is from 'The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees' by Dr. Sir Jivanji Jamshedji Modi. This book which may be considered as our Bible on rituals and

ceremonies has a full chapter on Death Ceremonies. What is rather interesting in our today's situation are the Authors own comments on page iv of the Preface:

"The times are rapidly changing. The 'new' has been springing rapidly upon the 'old'. As often said, the heresy of today becomes the orthodoxy of tomorrow: the liberalism of this year, the conservatism of the next. The reader will find that many a ceremony, ritual and custom has been spoken of as having become obsolete or as being more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Many more will be obsolete in the course of next few years. **Customs are often as despotic as fashions, but they also change as fashions.**"

Does this not bring out clearly, the acceptance of the fact that customs and rituals cannot be permanent and that they will have to keep changing as per needs of the time and other compulsions?

The second one is from the Autobiography of Dastur Dr. M.N. Dhalla, Late High Priest of Parsees in Sind and North-West Provinces (page 601).

"Dokhmanashini is not a system created by Almighty—it is a man-made system. The system of disposing the corpse has been rendered sacred custom because of its practice for three thousand years. Yet, even its three-thousand-year-old tradition of sanctity has not endowed it with immortality. With the change of times and circumstances its sway has come to an end. Dokhmanashini is **merely a tradition. The demolition of tradition is not destruction of religion. Tradition is not religion. In understanding, digesting and acknowledging this fact lies the wisdom of all concerned.**"

The Individuals Wish:

In principle, should not the wish of the deceased be honoured and respected? Surely, our priests should be agreeable to perform the death ceremony whichever be the mode of disposal of the corpse, since it is not against our religion. In any case, abroad and in cities like Delhi, Nagpur, Chennai and other towns where we have only burial systems, priests there are performing the ceremonies. Why should there be any objection here, since there is no right or wrong mode of disposal of the dead mentioned in our religious scriptures.

The Practical Angle :

What we can do? So, now, having a good birds-eye view of the dokhma system and de-linking it from the religion, let us explore what we need to do in Mumbai.

World over, there are four known main systems employed for getting rid of the dead body.

1. Burial or Aram ghah,
2. Dokhma or also known as sky burial

3. Cremation, by wood (directly) and by electricity (indirectly)
4. Modern Mausoleums (more about this later).

Which one of these can we adopt?

- (a) The soil at Doongerwadi is rocky but perhaps part of it may be useful as burial grounds.
- (b) If the BPP can put up an electric crematorium, it would really be a blessing and some members may opt for it also. The money saved from the experimental breeding of vultures can be used for this. Let us be clear that in Electric Crematorium, there is no fire. The furnace is heated up with the embedded coils in its walls and when the body is put in the furnace, it catches fire on its own. No fire comes in direct contact with the body. It is an extremely clean and hygienic system—suggest every member of the Community visits an electric crematorium for her / his satisfaction. This system does not defile the earth or fire.
- (c) Another option is to put up a modern mausoleum. We can get more details on this from online. It is basically a building with large number of concrete chambers—(one can picture it like a safe deposit vault) —each chamber is big enough to accommodate a corpse. The side lid is put on after laying the body and sealed up. The corpse degenerates over a period of time. It remains sealed forever. The relatives can visit and put flowers etc, whenever they wish to. (This is now a practice used in the Western World where they are running out of space for burial grounds). Those not wishing to defile the mother earth can opt for it and also it does not defile the fire!
- (d) Another option: Let us donate our body to the hospitals who will take away the healthy organs for transplantation to save someone's life.

And lastly, our dokhmas are still standing there for those who may like the use of it even in absence of birds.

Trust this small write-up has been of some use to the Community members, its Priests and the Trustees of the Panchayet and Anjuman. I will be most happy to provide any further information.

May Ahura Mazda be our Guide.



CHAPTER 24: Some Suggestions for Arresting the Decline of Zoroastrian Population in India

Section D Decline of the Parsi Community

A Demographic study published by Mr. Dinyar Patel indicates that our population will reach to about 30,000 by the year 2050 from our current figure of about 64,000.

I do not wish to go into reasons for the decline, namely, late or no marriages, low sperm count, families restricting to having only one or two off-springs etc which all look irreversible on face value.

In my personal opinion, the communities only become extinct when they lose their 'vision' or 'mission'. If we become extinct, it will be because we have lost our 'vision' or 'mission' in life.

With exception of very few, most of the Parsees (who claim to be Zoroastrians) may talk about how to save the 'community'. There are only a few amongst us who are talking about how to spread our great religion as proclaimed by our Asho Zarathushtra in his Gathas. It was Zarathushtra's vision that this best religion, given to him by Ahura Mazda, be spread to all the corners of the world. How correct are my Hamdins in calling themselves Zoroastrians if they are not sharing his vision? Should it not be a duty of every Zoroastrian to be proud of his religion and spread it for the benefit of all mankind?

For some strange reason or perhaps due to lack of it, we do not 'accept' others in our religion, though all our religious scriptures are in favor of it.

Our dwindling number is not a new story. It has been going on for at least last 70 years. I like to quote from the Autobiography of Late Shams-ul-Ulma, Dastur Dr. Maneckji Dhalla, Page 395. The book was first published in 1946 and the quote is in reference to inter-caste marriages.

'At the moment, until the social atmosphere of the community undergoes a change, it is understandable that, due to high death-rate consequent upon living in a congested centre like Bombay, the high cost of living, the restriction in the number of marriages because of the dowry system, the fall in birth-rate due to family planning and other reasons, the strength of the community shows a downward trend. When we or our generations to come, become aware of the danger of our decreasing numbers, then answers will be found to suit the changing circumstances. It is just possible that after decades the community may create an enlightened and educated priest class and a popular understanding that to spread the good faith and to increase our strength is not only commensurate with the precepts of our religion but also in the interest of our social well-being. The old order may then change yielding place to the new....Laws of the greatest nations are liable to change-no laws are infallible or permanent....Let the future community decide for itself what is in keeping with the conditions fifty years hence.'

(Very well-said, Dear Dastur Dr. Dhalla. But who was listening to you then and even today who is listening? **Where is 'the enlightened and educated priest class' you were hoping will emerge?**)

Sad it is to say that Parsees seem to have lost vision and mission in life and seem to behave like 'frogs-in-the well', along with their ignorant priests, who believe in propagating their own brand of religion— religion of rituals, ceremonies (which bring them income) and 'fatwas'—which are neither based on common sense nor on scriptures!

Having said the above, I like to put up the following suggestions for consideration of our community members, Trustees of all Panchyets & Anjumans and all our Priests, as follows:

(i) **For our community members:** Let each couple (or a single mother), rich or poor, adopt at least one or two children and bring them up as true Zoroastrians based on precepts of Good thoughts, Good Words and Good deeds with honesty, integrity, truthfulness, hard work and fighting against all that is evil—hallmark of Parsees with which we are known and respected.

Adopted children can be preferably from the home of destitute children. This way we will be doing great service to humanity and get benefit of love and gratitude from these unfortunate beings. Kindly shed all your fears, inhibitions and apprehensions. A good deed is a reward in itself.

Those not having sufficient space in their house can put the adopted child in our orphanages (I am told about 300 vacancies in Surat and Pune orphanages are going unutilized) —the child can visit the parents during the vacations and be a part of the family. The orphanages have system of imparting religious knowledge. About the cost and expenditure, my suggestion follows.

In this Computer Age, inter-caste marriages have become common practice among all communities and no force can stop it. Therefore if our daughter wants to marry non-Parsi, allow her to do so with a hope that her off-springs will be initiated into Zoroastrianism. For God's sake, please do not out-caste her, let her remain a devout Zarathusti, if she prefers it that way.

(ii) **For our Priest Class:** Shed the undue high importance you are giving to rituals and ceremonies. Start religious classes teaching children and adults the True Religion as proclaimed by our Asho Zarathushtra in his Gathas. The syllabus of your Madaresa's may have to undergo a suitable change.

Initiate all the adopted children into our religion by performing their Navjotes after satisfying that they have learnt the teachings of Zarathushtra's Gathas. Your role should not be limited to being 'prayer-chanters' as it has become now. It should be your duty to make every community member aware that her/ his role in life is to spread our religion and not limited to being loyal to the community only. It is only with the spread of the religion, the community will prosper. It just cannot be the other way around. We seem to be holding the stick from the wrong

end. Our High Priests of Parsees need to become High Priests of Zoroastrianism; they are not to serve the community alone but to serve the religion also. What is true as per religion should take precedence over what is good for the community.

(iii) **To the Trustees of various Panchayets and Anjumans:** In case the couples adopting the children need financial help, it should be your duty to allocate good sum of money towards bringing up of these children. I am suggesting a sum of Rupees 15,000 per month per adopted child. We have large charitable trusts and assets. what better use can they be put to than to generate new community members who are brought up as true Zoroastrians? (Imagine, ultimately there will be hardly any Parsi left to take benefit of these funds and assets!) Some legal hurdles will have to be crossed to use the funds for purpose other than mentioned in the Trust. A proper legislation will be necessary for making adoption legal. However since we have become a micro community, we will get assistance from the Minority Commission and other Government bodies.

In fact let us open our doors (and hearts too) to any one voluntarily wishing to join our religion—may be a small committee can be formed to decide on what 'filters' should be used. Some kind of metamorphosis in the blood line will take place which of course is very much desired for our inbred community.

Request all readers to put on their thinking caps and come up with their positive and concrete suggestions—think of only 'what we can do' avoiding negative thinking of 'this' or 'that' cannot be done!

We need to ensure that Parsis and Zoroastrian Religion continue to contribute in many ways in India as it has done so far. We owe it to this land which gave us asylum and total freedom.

All difficult problems need some radical solutions and this is one.

We simply can not keep waiting for Shah Behram Verjavand!

I would also be happy to take part in discussions or debate on this subject.

best wishes to all my dear Hamdins,

Kersee Kabraji

Pune, 29th Nov.2008



CHAPTER 25: Challenges to the Chairman of BPP

**Section E
Panchayats and
Anjumans**

Reproduced below is a letter I wrote in to the Parsiana on 30th April 2010

The above-titled article by the Chairman of BPP made an interesting reading. It also raised some interesting questions. I trust Mr. Mehta will respond to the same.

I wish to raise questions only on the following points mentioned by Mr. Mehta:
(1)adequate housing for all (2)Ensuring our Parsi Irani Zoroastrian ethnicity and Religion by adhering to our time-tested customs and practices (3) ensuring survival of our Community, (4) declining number of Priests and a need to enhance their wages and income.

Adequate Housing for all

Mr. Mehta states that at present 50% of our Community members reside outside Baugs and are isolated from 'mainstream Community affairs' and wishes them to be brought within 'the colony culture'

When it is an established fact that our Community strength is rapidly dwindling, estimated to be around 30,000 in next 30 years, why spend money on buildings which will last for minimum 80 years? There will be very few claimants for these after some years? Surely there must be some other way to provide accommodations to the needy and deserving people? Can we not just subsidize rents for the needy, instead of incurring capital expenditure?

What makes Mr. Mehta think that living in Baugs will make the Community more enterprising and progressive? (one supposes this should be the aim?) Can some study by Social scientists be carried out to support such assumption? One also hears views that those staying in Baugs and Colonies tend to develop 'Ghetto mentality' and tend to become easy-going which may not be good for the Community in the long run?

Also what makes Mr. Mehta think that by giving flats to young couples our population will go up? One view is that an average Parsi couple does not want more than one or at the most two off-springs. A number of independent males and females do not wish to get married. Dwindling number has perhaps very little to do with lack of housing.

Ensuring our Parsi Irani Zoroastrian ethnicity and Religion by adhering to our time-tested customs and practices

Why are 'Parsi Irani ethnicity' and 'Religion' bundled into one? Religion of our Asho Zarathushtra is a universal Religion meant for all human beings. All our scriptures endorse accepting anyone wanting to follow it. The Religion of Asho Zarathushtra has nothing to do with 'Parsi Irani ethnicity'.

And what are these 'time-tested customs and practices'? Does Mr. Mehta defend the use of 'Dokhma' in this statement? Then he is fooling himself or trying to fool the Community members. It is the 'time' which has failed the dokhma system—time has

come that there are just no scavenging birds (the heart of dokhma system) and to call this system 'time-tested' is self deception. Actually Vendidad prohibits use of Dokhma when there are no birds. What other 'time-tested' customs is Mr. Mehta talking about? Can these be really spelt out and put on paper? Otherwise these are just nice sounding words, meaning nothing.

Ensuring survival of our Community

Mr. Mehta mentions, 'A universal complaint is that of our declining population in India', and would welcome any suggestion and ideas. (It is interesting to note that he mentions this as 'a complaint' and is not ready to accept it as 'a fact'). Well, Mr. Mehta, if you wish to cling on to your 'ethnicity', one doubts if there can be any solution. You can go on constructing Baugs and colonies but find one day ultimately there will be no one to make any use of it. If you are open to the suggestions on how to have more followers of Zoroastrianism, well there will be many suggestions. Perhaps you and your high Priests are not aware that it was our Asho Zarathushtra's vision and mission that his Religion of Ahura Mazda be spread in the far corners of the world. (Please read Ys.33.7; 49.5; 47.6; 44.7 etc.). If the leaders and the Priests of the Community want to stray away from our Prophets' mission, who can save our Community? A question that has been dividing the Community is: 'Does the Community come first or the Religion comes first?' As long as the Trustees of BPP and our so-called high Priests of the Parsis keep putting the Community first, it is doomed to meet extinction as all demographic figures and indications show. The day you all (mentioned above and the Community members), think of how to spread our Religion, there is some hope for the Community to survive. To begin with why not just start with accepting children of mixed-married couples in to our Religion and Community? It is not against the Religion of Asho Zarathushtra?

Declining number of Priests and a need to enhance their wages and income

Can we not think of some measures for them to earn their living to support a good standard of living? Training in Madarassas which gives them another skill like accountancy, teaching etc.? Why can they not be helped to take up some part-time work to augment their income? Why should they be made to look as parasites on the Community? This whole idea or the concept of looking after them life-long does not seem healthy, honest, respectable and wholesome. Also, let us understand clearly that our children and their children are going to be product of computer age and they will be strong believers of rationality and logic. The days of 'blind faith' are numbered. One hears that about 11 Agiaris in Mumbai are almost closed. More will meet the similar fate. How long will you keep supporting the Priest class when their utility to the future Community members is doubtful? You are mentioning a figure of Rs. 100 crores needed for this. Surely this money can be put to some good constructive purposes. (Some of them mentioned below).

Some of us also feel —of course, not based on any study— that the sons of our Dasturs and Mobeds do not opt for following the foot-steps of their fathers is because they do not find it satisfying to their innate intelligence and abilities. Perhaps the job is not considered sufficiently 'respectable' in present times? Perhaps it has nothing to do with

the remuneration or money? An in-depth study of the problem is certainly called for, before we decide to collect funds and start spending them.

Lastly, it is really surprising that Mr. Mehta mentions about disruption caused by him with 40 other followers to the initiation ceremony of a Russian Zoroastrian into Priesthood in Sanjan. He tries to justify the seemingly criminal offence created by him along with some 40 miscreants. They are lucky to have escaped the criminal charges and the least that is expected is for them to keep quiet and let the matter be forgotten. All one can say is that the whole incident is sordid and does not make any Parsi or a Zoroastrian proud—the less said the better.

As an ordinary member of the Community, I give below the following suggestions to Mr. Mehta and the BPP

1. Generate funds to buy seats in Medical, Engineering, Law, Commerce and other colleges (those giving courses in professional fields), so that our students can get into these colleges.
2. Any expense spent on such a project will bring many fold results. The prosperity of the Community will definitely go up.
3. Generate funds to see that every student of the Community can get higher education of his / her choice.
4. Generate funds and programs to ensure that every Community member gets 'a fishing rod' and not a 'fish'!
5. Find ways to finance our young entrepreneurs— Some of it can be as loans or on returnable basis.

Kindly invite suggestions from other members of the Community. Please think of ideas which will pep-up the Community members and not make them parasites. Please stop spending money on housing projects. The money spent will not have any re-generative effect.

It was indeed a very nice gesture on your part to spell out the challenges facing you.

Trust you will take the above views from an 80 year old man not as critical but as constructive suggestions.

Thank you for your time and patience.

Note: I think this was published in Parsiana —but no response from any one! Someone once said, "We Parsis have become believers only of 'Khavasni, Pivasni and Suvasni' (Good food, Good drinks and Good sleep)—one only hopes he is wrong.



**CHAPTER 26:
Ban on two
Community Priests**

**Section E
Panchayats and
Anjumans**

Re-produced below is the letter addressed by me to the BPP on the subject of the ban of two Community Priests

Sub: "Hope Better Sense Prevails with the BPP."

As you may be aware, an on-line petition "Hope Better Sense Prevails with the BPP" is initiated by the undersigned on behalf of the Parsi Irani Zoroastrians, against your Trusts' decision to approach Supreme Court against the Bombay High Court judgment, involving the ban on two Community Priests.

This is a petition to show our dissent against spending large amount of money from the Community funds on litigations and also an earnest appeal to accept the High Court verdict and stop further wastage of the Trust funds by approaching the Supreme Court over a seemingly non-issue.

What is BPP trying to achieve and at what cost & purpose? Are there not better ways to use the funds instead of wasting the finances of the Community on a non-issue? These are the question as members of the Community & as beneficiaries, have a right to ask & have a right to know.

The on-line petition received, at the last count, over 1250 responses supporting the Petition which are attached herewith. I consider it my duty to share the results with you and the other Trustees on our august Board. As you will observe the response comprises of the broad cross-section of our Community, including some eminent personalities. Also some of the comments are rather thought provoking.

It is also to be observed that the Petition was on E-mail only, if signatures were collected personally on paper and by post, the response would have been may be 25 to 30 times the figure.

I am confident that you and other Trustees will look at the result rather objectively and take a decision respecting wishes of a large number of Humdins.

Enclosed with the letter were:

1. The Copy of the on-line Petition "Hope Better Sense Prevails with the BPP."
2. List of all the endorsed signatures & the comments therein.

Needless to say, the letter has had no effect! The 'chosen ones' will carry on doing whatever is their wish. This letter does not state some of the scathing remarks from the respondents, like 'let the Trustees put the money from their own pockets' etc.



**CHAPTER 27:
Russian Mikhail being
ordained a Priest**

**Section E
Panchayats and
Anjumans**

Reproduced below is a letter I wrote in to the Jame Jamshed Weekly on 25th February 2001

I have read in recent Jame Jamshed the report on what happened in Sanjan last week. It makes a very sad reading.

The way Mr. Mehta and his 45 supporters gate-crashed in to a private property and caused damage to it does not in the least make our supposedly cultured Community any proud. It is a criminal offence and needs to be pursued.

The incident also throws up a number of questions which I trust some of our Community members will respond to:

1. If Ms. Meher Master Moos, or anyone runs private Religious classes, for foreigners or for anyone else, how does it affect a member of the Community?
2. Is Zoroastrian Religion any ones' private property? How and why should anyone try and stop the spreading of this wonderful Religion?
3. 'Zoroastrianism is a Universal Religion' and all our scriptures indicate that acceptance in to it is allowed. Over last two years, articles giving quotes from Zarathushtra's Gathas as well as from Avesta and Pahlavi scriptures have been published in "Jame" and 'Parsiiana'. It has failed to invoke any response from any Dastur or a scholar. All that we hear is a general tirade 'conversion is not allowed in our Religion'.
4. Just to mention one of the quotes from the article mentioned in earlier para: "The Fravardin Yasht commemorates the Fravashi of Saena, an illustrious convert to Zoroastrianism. We learn from the Pahlavi works that this apostle of faith left behind him 100 disciples who preached Mazdayasnian faith in the land of Siestan. Armenia came under the Zoroastrian influence at a very early date and a corrupt form of Zoroastrianism prevailed in the country for several centuries. Cappadocia, Lydia and Lycia was the scene of active Zoroastrian propaganda..... The proselytizing work on the part of Zoroastrian ministers of the faith was carried on with a considerable amount of success." (For full article, contact me on 'kerseekabraji@gmail.com').
5. Why should anyone prove his parentage to be ordained as a Priest? Why should Ms. Meher Master-Moos take permission from Mr. Mehta or anyone else? Anyone in this country is free to do whatever he/ she wants. Only the Government can interfere when the action is against the public interest i.e. it is anti-social or violating any law.

I look forward to responses to the above from your enlightened readers.



CHAPTER 28: Something to think about

What follows is an excerpt from an e-mail written by Mr. Homee Dalal

Today 44% of marriages are interfaith. Please note that I am not in favour but I accept the reality. Next year it will be 50%+. Can anybody stop this? We were 69000 some ten years back & now it is estimated below 50000. Can anybody change this? We have to accept with a pinch of salt that we are sinking- in quantity & quality. Now give thought to some of these points. Now please note that Parsis have always opted for the change - for good or bad.

The following are few points to ponder-- the list is not complete.

- 1) Previously all Parsis male or female are supposed to cover their head with caps & Mathabana (scarf) 24 hours a day—now please let me know what numbers are following this religious practice. Even Priests are not wearing the Parsi caps.
- 2) Previously all Parsis were having Fire in their house 24 hours a day.- Please let me know how many Parsis house are having Fire today in their houses.
- 3) Muktdad were for 18 days which are now for 10 days.
- 4) Boywalla used to wear Pavri (Wooden Sandles) in comparison of wearing leather Sapat which is made of skin of dead animals which is supposed to be Naso.
- 5) Inside of Kebla used to be cleaned by Boywalla with cloth instead of brooms.
- 6) Smoking, inter faith marriages, not wearing Sudreh & Kusti were supposed to be sin.
- 7) Navjotes & Weddings were supposed to be done in the Fire Temple instead of Baugs.
- 8) Ladies in their menstrual periods were not allowed to touch anything & supposed to be untouchables. How many Parsis, leave aside behedins, how many Priests' families follow this religious practice?
- 9) During Muktdad, Priests were staying in Fire Temples for 18 days. No Parsi was supposed to shave or stitch. Today we see clean shaven Priests during muktads.
- 10) Ashodad was supposed to be tips to Priests & Late Dasturji Khurshed Daboo used to take only Rs. 1/- for respect's sake compared to our Wada dasturs who fix the Ashodads to be paid to them well in advance!!! .

11) Today Navars are made by knowing one or two HAA instead of 72 HAA just for the colour of money for which no one has any say.

12) Today we see Photos of Sai Baba, Ganeshji & other saints in our houses not only of Behdins but also in Priests' houses. We see Parsis everywhere -In Mandirs, Mosques, Churches, etc.—Any comments on that?

13) We Parsis have changed in dress, language, culture, religious practices etc for which surprisingly there is no objection, but objection to cremation & burial. WHY?

With best wishes,
Homee Dalal

So dear 'traditionalist' friends, have we not said good-bye to so many traditions ?

Can out-dated habits, customs and rituals become 'Holy' by calling them 'traditions'?

And what will be achieved by clinging on to them?

Real 'Traditions' can only be of 'Values', values that we stand for. Traditionally, a Parsi / Zarathosti is known for his straightforward attitude, honesty, sincerity, helpfulness.

What can we do to preserve these 'values', cling on to them and spread them all over the world? Don't you think that these values, given to us by Asho Zarathushtra, are really Holy—and propagation of these will bring peace and happiness to all humanity?



CHAPTER 29: **Concluding Remarks**

Dear Reader,

I have come to the end of my book finally and tried to convey all my thoughts here.

1. All our scriptures show clearly that there is no bar in accepting others in to our Religion.
2. There is enough evidence to indicate that our blood is reasonably mixed up. Clinging on to maintaining ethnicity of our Community is not going to take us anywhere or help us. In fact a fresh influx of outside blood should be most welcome to off-set some diseases like G6PD deficiency etc prevalent amongst us.
3. For a very small Community like ours, we do not have to divide ourselves into groups like Orthodox and Reformists.
4. We need to be united and focus our attention on what we all can we do together to increase the number of Zoroastrians. We need to be practical and not emotional or sentimental.
5. Our thoughts and practices of our Religion need to be refreshed- we perhaps need to go back to our Asho Zarathushtra's Gathas for guidance.
6. Over the last 50 years, we have already said good bye to a number of practices which were followed as 'traditions'. Now we need to follow only value-based Traditions (of being honest, sincere, helpful etc) and not follow some of the out-dated habits, customs and rituals as traditions. .
7. We need to consolidate our Charitable Funds and use them to increase our population. Surely our legal luminaries will be able to find ways.

As mentioned in the preface, the effort behind this whole exercise is to set a platform for open discussions to do something to save us from extinction.

No Shah Behram Varjavand is going to come to our rescue—we only will have to revive ourselves.

Herodotus, the father of history, wrote of our two thousand five hundred year old ancestors--the Hakaemaniens-- that

"They were valiant and courageous in envisaging changing times and circumstances and conditioning their lives according to the country and the age in which they lived".

Then let us, as their rightful heirs, follow their foot-steps and learn from their leadership that...

THERE IS GRACE, DIGNITY AND WISDOM IN FASHIONING OUR LIVES ACCORDING TO THE DEMANDS OF THIS CENTURY

(Quoted from the Autobiography of Dastur Dhalla Pg. XV)

THE END



NOTES

GANDHIJI ON PARSIS



"In numbers, Parsis are beneath contempt, but in contribution, beyond compare."

Apart from your being fellow-countrymen, I am bound to you by many sacred ties. Dadabhai (Dadabhai Naoroji)was the first patriot to inspire me. He was my guide and helper when I did not know any other leader. It was to him that I bore, when yet a boy, a letter of introduction.(This was in 1888 when Gandhiji went to England to study for the Bar).

It was the late uncrowned king of Bombay, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta who led me in 1896 and showed me the way to work. It was he who, (when I wanted to give battle to a Political Agent as far back as 1892), restrained my youthful ardour and taught me the first practical lesson in ahimsa in public life. He taught me not to resent personal wrongs if I would serve India.

A Parsi merchant in Durban, Rustomjee Ghorkhodoo, was among my most valued clients and friends in South Africa. He gave freely to the public cause, and he and his brave son were the first among my fellow prisoners. He gave me shelter when I was lynched, and now, too, he is following the swaraj movement with considerable interest and has just donated Rs. 40,000 to it.

In my humble opinion, probably the first woman in India today is a Parsi woman (presumably Gandhiji refers to Mrs. Jaijee Petit, wife of Jehangir Bomanjee Petit) gentle as a lamb, with a heart that holds the whole humanity. To have her friendship is the rarest privilege of life.

M. K. GANDHI

Young India, 23-3-1921