



Zarathushtra and the legendary dynasties

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Pishdadian Dynasty

The history of Persia and that of the Zarathushtrian Faith is deeply intertwined. The story begins with a legendary House of monarchs known as Pishdadian. The word Pishdad is a later modification of the ancient word Paradhata meaning the ancient lawgiver.

The founder of this dynasty was Kayomerz (in ancient Persian) or Gayo-maretan (in Avestan) or Gayomard (in Pahlavi). These words essentially refer to the first mortal man, Gayo- meaning life and – maretan refers to mortal human. In principle the dynasty is believed to have started with the inception of the creation of the mortal man.

Kayomerz with his two successors Hushang and Tahmurus is believed to have laid the foundation of cultural civilization in Iran. In the prayers of Dibache for afringan we recite az Gayomard anda Sosyos. Here we remember the fravashis of the entire mankind starting with Gayomard and ending with Saoshyant. In Fravardin Yasht (13.87) where we revere the fravashi of Gayomard, we are told Ahurai Mazdai manascha gushta sasnaoscha. This means he was the first to have heard the intentions and admonitions of Ahura Mazda.

It is believed that he and the creation of the good God lasted for some three thousand years, at which time there was an onslaught of evil on the good creation. This brought an end to the era of Gayomard and his life. Mythology speaks of the legendary evolution of the Rivas plant from the slain body of Gayomard and the first man Mashya and woman Mashyani sprang forth as flowers from that plant. They are believed to be the legendary parents of the human race.

Legendary history speaks of Siyamak, Hushang and Tahmuras as the three sons of Gayomard. The era of Hoshang who followed can be viewed as the inception of the Iranian civilization. Firdausi who completed Shahnameh that was started by Abu Mansur Daqiqi describes Hoshang as a just and wise ruler who ruled for 40 years.

Hoshang is credited with the discovery of fire. The legend goes that one day when he was out hunting with his party they viewed a huge python. A stone was hurled at the creature, and in the words of Firdausi,

“ The world consuming worm escaped the stone,
struck on a larger, and they both shivered.
Sparks issued and the centers fleshed. The fire
Came from its stony hiding-place again
When iron knocked.”

In simple words the dry brush in the surrounding area, caught fire. Hoshang was the first to recognize Fire as the Divine energy and the Divine Glory of Mazda. In the words of that Iranian poet Firdausi, Hoshang proclaimed, “This luster is Divine and thou if wise must worship it”.



The traditional Iranian festival of Sadeh which is observed a hundred days after the beginning of winter or fifty days and nights before New Year, is associated with and celebrates the discovery of Fire. Tahmurus followed Hoshung on the throne of Iran and ruled for the next thirty years and kept the evil spirit out of his kingdom.

Next we arrive at Jamsheed, the most illustrious monarch of the dynasty. It was during his rule that the primitive lawless society of Persia, was transformed into a law-abiding civilized culture. The era of his rule was believed to be perfect. The time stopped moving, it was neither cold nor hot and there was no sickness nor death. He was believed to be in direct communion with the Spirit of the Creator through Khvarenah, or Khoreh or the Royal Divine Glory.

He was instructed and Guided by the Divine to till the soil and to cultivate the earth. It was in his time that mineral wealth was discovered and the process of winemaking was initiated. In Vendidad (Vd 2.4-20) he has been hailed as the protector, preserver and sustainer of the creation of man and animals.

We are told that he was Divinely inspired by Sraosh Yazata, to initiate the custom of wearing the Sacred garment of Sudreh and the girdle of Kusti. It was in his time that the society was grouped by profession into Athravans (priests), Rathestarans (warriors), Vasteryosans (farmers), Hutokhshan (artisans). These groups are analogous to the class system of the early Vedic society that consisted of the Brahmana, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras.

Jamsheed was the king, who initiated the celebration of Naurooz, to start the new year on the day of the Vernal Equinox. This was later recognized and associated with his name as Jamshedi Naurooz. Today this new year day is celebrated not only by Iranians but also across many nations in North Central Asia.

Through his Divine inspirations he was cautioned of the coming of the impending danger of the glaciations by the devastating winter and built refuge for the preservation of the Creation. He built enclosures called the varas (Vd 2.22-43) to protect and preserve the male and female of all the species of plants and animals. In a modified form, this myth also appears in the Vedic literature, and also finds an analogy in the biblical story of Noah's Arc. The reference to these varas is also made in the Dabache when we recite Kangdez, ashoan verezum kerdan meaning we revere the fravashis of those who built the varas with Jamsheed.

The last ice age by scientific calculations is believed to have occurred some 10000-12000 years ago. Based on the association of the glaciations with Jamsheed, the era of the Pishdadian dynasty is dated around 10,000 years ago.

Over a long period of time, he became over-zealous with the Divine Grace he was endowed with by the Creator. He was intoxicated with power, and began to claim for himself, the glory, prosperity and success of creation. In doing so he digressed from the path of Asha and Global Truth. These false claims as the creator brought about his downfall. The Divine Glory departed him in the form of a bird (Zamyad Yt 35-38). His direct relationship with the Creator was interrupted, and his reverence among his people declined.

Zahak , a Babylonian tyrant of Syrian origin, induced the brother of Jamsheed to kill him and took over the kingdom of Iran from the Pishdadians. Thus started the era of tyranny, cruelty and violence in Iran. Zahak was known as Aji-Dahaka meaning primeval serpent. Yasna 9.8 vividly describes him as a monster



with three snake heads growing out of each of his shoulders. These creatures required a daily ration of two brains of young human beings.

Kawah, a blacksmith whose two sons were sacrificed to feed those monstrous creatures, assembled an army to incite a revolt against Zahak, under the war standard called Drafsh-e-Kawayani made out of his own work apron.

Kawah sought out Faridun, son of Athwya, of the royal decent, who was living with his mother on mount Alburz. It was under the leadership of Faridun that Kawah fought and defeated Zahak, captured him and chained him in a secluded site on Mount Demavand and left him there to die.

This victory of Faridun over Zahak is celebrated during the festival Mehrگان on day 16 of the 7th month. Faridun had three sons Iraj, Sam and Tur. The king chose his youngest son Iraj to succeed him. He divided his kingdom into three sectors, the east sector, the west sector and Iran. He gave east to Tur, an area that later evolved into Turkistan. The west sector was presented to Sam and Iran was given to his youngest son, Iraj. This was the act that sowed the seeds of enmity between Iran and Turan. There were numerous conflicts between Iran and the kingdoms of Sam and Tur. The two brothers were so outraged that they contrived and succeeded in killing Iraj. Minuchihr the son of Iraj invaded the kingdom of his uncles and they were killed in the conflagration. The dispute of the boundary between Iran and Turan was settled by an arrow shot by the famous archer Araksh from mount Demavand. This historical event is associated with the celebration of the jashan-e-Tirgan.

Kyanian Dynasty

Sam was the patriarch of the family of Iranian heroes who rendered a yeoman service to the Kyanian monarchs. Kay Kobad the founder of the Kyanian House, lived a pious and secluded life in mount Alburz. Rustom the grand son of Sam, requested Kay Kobad to return to the throne of Iran to reestablish the monarchy.

These kyanian monarchs assumed the royal title of Kavi or Kai that is identified their Khoreh – the Kingly glory - that established a communion of the ruling monarch with the Divine. This is the same Spiritual entity that left Jamsheed, the Pishdadian; when he turned away from the path of truth and goodness.

The genealogy of the Kyanian is as shown below:

Kay Kobaad - the founder
Kay Kaus
Kay Khushroo -, the pious
Kay Lohraaspa
Kay Vishtaaspa

In Gahta Ushtavaiti we first read of the link between Zarathushtra and the last Kyanian king Vishtaaspa. The prophet in his hymn laments in the beginning, "To what land shall I go? Who shall I turn to, my family and friends exclude me." (Ys 46.1) and later in verse 14 we read of Vishtaaspa as a committed ally of Zarathushtra. The Prophet also speaks of Vishtaaspa in endearing terms on other occasions (Ys 28.7; 51.16; 53.2) indicating his association with the monarch. It is believed that Zarathushtra elaborated his teachings in the court of Vishtaaspa for some two years before they were convinced and accepted his tenets. Jamasp the minister of the king, his brother Frashotra and the Royal family then promised to



spread the words of the Prophet in their kingdom and in the neighboring nations.

All this time the famous heroes Zal and Rustom were present in the court of the king advising him on various matters. This was the era of escalating animosity between the Iranians and Turanians that started at the end of the Pishdadian times. Rustom's son Sohrab had left Iran and grew up under the care of Turanian king Afrasaib. Sohrab had fought many wars on behalf of Turanians against Persians. Sir John Malcolm describes Sohrab's achievements and his battle with his father Rustom in following terms:

"He had carried death and dismay into the ranks of Persians and had terrified the boldest warriors of that country, before Rustom encountered him, which at last that hero resolved to do, under an assumed name."

"They met three times. The first time they parted by mutual consent though Sohrab had the advantage. The second time the youth obtained a victory but granted life to his unknown father. The third was fatal to Sohrab, who when writhing in the pangs of death, warned his conqueror to shun the vengeance that is inspired by parental woes."

Earlier we mentioned about the Gathic link between Zarathushtra and the last Kyanian monarch Vishtaaspa. Let us finish this legendary history with what we can discern about the life of the prophet from our religious texts. Fravardin Yasht (13.93/4) celebrates the coming of the prophet in the following words:

" In whose birth and growth
the waters and the plants were pleased
In whose birth and growth
the waters and the plants flourished
And In whose birth and growth
The entire progressive Creation shouted with joy"

**ushta no zashto athrava yo spitama zarathushthro
fra-no yazaite zaotrabyo stereto-baresma zarathushthro**

Good fortune to us that a spiritual leader is born:
Zarathushtra Spitama!

Henceforth the Good Religion of worshipping the Wise One
Will spread all over the earth.

The short eulogy, throws significant light on the birth and growth of the child. We are told, Zarathushtra was a cheerful child born on the New Year day (selections of Zadsparam) to Dughdav and Pourushaspa Spitâma on a fine morning of an early spring some 3,500 years ago. He was their third of the three brothers, and was named ZARATHUSHTRA to rhyme with the names of his two elder brothers -- Rataushtra and Rangaushtra.

The Spitâmas were a prosperous cattle-raising family and lived near the bank of river, Dâiti, in northeastern Iran. Dughdav his mother, was an exceptionally open-minded bright lady. She brought up the young child Zarathushtra in education and provoked in him the desire to search and discover and set



him on the path of the quest for Truth. The Prophet had difficulty finding answers to his queries, and being dissatisfied with the society he went into isolation to ponder over the questions himself. It was fifteen years of meditation and communion with God that he had a revelation through his Spiritual consciousness. He visualized in Nature the presence of a unique order that governed and advanced the course of the cosmos through the Supreme Intellect. He identified that intellect as Mazda Ahura – the Wisdom personified.

His first disciple was his cousin Maidyomaah, and for a long time the Prophet did not have a big following. The corrupt rulers and priests planned to destroy him and turned his friends and family against him. It was not until he arrived at the court of King Vishtaaspa where his teaching found their roots. Even here he was falsely accused of magic and sorcery and was thrown into Prison. The story goes that through his Spiritual consciousness he was able to cure the King's personal horse. Since that time he won over the favour of the monarch and over a period he succeeded in convincing the courtiers of the king and his family of his teachings.

Zarathushtra was married to Havovi, and had three sons Aesatvaastra, Urvatatna, Khurshedcheher and three daughters Freny, Thrity, and Pouruchista. In Yasna 53 Zarathushtra celebrates the wedding of his youngest daughter Pouruchista with the chief minister Jamaaspa of the Kyanian monarch. He passed away at the age of 77 years and 40 days. The era of Zarathushtra is uncertain. However scholastic community generally dates him around 1300-1700 BCE.

This concludes the legendary history of our Faith. The talks that follow will describe the recorded history of our Faith.

(The above text was composed for the seminar by Ervad (Dr.) Jehan Bagli from a power point presentation prepared by Ervad Soli Dastur)

EVOLUTION AND PRACTICE OF ZOROASTRIANISM DURING THE ACHAEMENIAN AND PARTHIAN DYNASTIES

By Ervad Cawas Desai

In order to fully understand and appreciate the development, evolution and practice of the Zoroastrian religion during the Achaemenian Dynasty, it is first necessary to establish a time-line of that Dynasty in relation to that of the religion and consider it in the proper perspective of the time and place of the establishment of Zoroastrianism.

The Achaemenian Dynasty takes its name from Achaemenes (Avestan Hakhamanish) the patriarch of the Median tribe into which Cyrus the Great was born. In 558 BC, Cyrus II (The Younger, also known to history as The Great), overthrew his maternal grandfather, Astyages, and established the Achaemenian Dynasty which lasted for 228 years, till 330 BC.

The date when Zarathushtra lived and preached is one of great speculation. However, we must establish some criteria to establish a time-line to compare it with the founding of the Achaemenian Dynasty in 558 BC. The ancient Greek historians, particularly Xanthus of Lydia, Plato, Pliny and Plutarch place



Zarathushtra in eras varying from 7,000 BC (6,000 years before the Trojan War) to 2,000 BC. The Vedic Sanskrit scholars place Him before 3,500 BC. Others claim a date of 1,000 BC would be more acceptable. Some 19th century scholars, contending that a date of 7000 BC would place Zarathushtra in the Stone Age, and relying on the "so-called Parsi tradition" of 258 years before Alexander, assigned a date of about 600 BC. Some western scholars, confusing the Kayanian King Gushtasp, the royal patron of Zarathushtra, with The Achaemenian Hystaspes, the father of Darius I, also accepted a date of 600 BC. Most modern scholars now believe that Zarathushtra could not have lived any later than 1,800 BC.

The "so called Parsi traditional date" of 588 BC as the birth date of Zarathushtra, (258 years before the defeat of Darius III in 330 BC), would make Zarathushtra a contemporary of Cyrus the Great, and place the establishment of Zoroastrianism in the Achaemenian Dynasty rather than the Kayanian Dynasty. Therefore, one of the key questions regarding the Achaemenian Dynasty, "Was Cyrus the Great a Zoroastrian?" becomes moot. A date of 588 BC would also make Zarathushtra contemporaneous with the establishment of Buddhism. As Chatterjee puts it, "To seek to make Dharmaraj (Prophet) Zarathushtra more or less a contemporary of Gautama Budha is the height of frivolity".

If the date of Zarathushtra is open to debate, so too is His birth place and the place of His first ministry. There is a tradition that Zarathushtra was born in Raga, mediaeval Rayy, near Teheran. The Avesta contains several place names, but there is no mention of any place west of Rayy. Most scholars, therefore, agree that the Zoroastrian religion not only began, but also developed, in Eastern Iran and that Zarathushtra lived and taught in the eastern reaches of the Iranian Empire, specifically in the Herat area with connections south to Seistan, east to Bactria (Balkh) and north to Merv.

Linguistically also, Gathic Avesta appears to be a language of the communities of the Inner Asian Steppes. The transition of Gathic Avesta, the language spoken by Zarathushtra, to the Avesta of the Yashts and then to the "Younger Avesta" the forerunner of the "Old Persian" language of the Achaeminids, would have taken several centuries.

Even if as late a date of 1,800 BC is accepted as the Prophet's time of birth, twelve centuries passed before Zoroastrianism first entered western recorded history. As the gospel of Zarathushtra traveled westward from its original homeland (the Airyan Vej of the Kayanian Dynasty), the language and practice of the religion was bound to change. Through the legendary Huafritan and Kudurvand Dynasties, of which all traces are lost, nothing is known about the then practice of Zoroastrianism.

Let us see if we can part the mists of time and get a glimpse at some of the changes which occurred in the religions westward migration.

Greek historians indicate that Zarathushtra composed some two million words of verse. Unfortunately, a large portion of Zarathushtra's own words have been lost to us and to history. Unfortunately also, shortly after Zarathushtra's time, elements of the old polytheistic beliefs began to creep back into Zoroastrianism as can be seen from the content of the Yashts.

Although the content of the Yashts is clearly considered to be pre-Zoroastrian, the language of the Yashts, except for the Yasna Haptanghaiti, is post-gathic Avestan. Today, every scholar agrees that all of the Yashts, except for the Yasna Haptanghaiti, were composed and written centuries after the time of Zarathushtra. The Yasna Haptanghaiti is composed in gathic-Avestan, the language of the Gathas. The striking difference between the Gathas and the Haptanghaiti is that the Gathas are composed in metrical verse form and are to be sung, whereas the Haptanghaiti is composed in prose. There is considerable disagreement among scholars as to the authorship of the Haptanghaiti. Mary Boyce contends that some



parts of the Yasna appear to be composed by Zarathushtra himself, while Robert Zaehner unequivocally contends that the Yasna was composed by Zarathushtra's disciples shortly after His death and not by the Prophet himself.

Be that as it may, the names of Indra, Varuna and Mithra are mentioned in the Haptanghaiti, and there is absolutely no question but that these are pre-Zoroastrian divinities, which today continue to hold prominent positions in the Vedas. Indra evolved into Verethragna or Behram Yazata, Mithra evolved into Meher Yazata and Varuna, in the female form of Varunani evolved into Avan Ardivisur Yazad, more commonly known as Anahita. The names of these and other pre-Zoroastrian divinities subsequently evolved into the Yazatas whose names are incorporated as the days of the month in the Zoroastrian calendar. The fact that these pre-Zoroastrian divinities now occupy and hold important positions in our liturgy, points to the fact that these are later additions to the religion introduced after Zarathushtra's life time. Clearly, these portions of the Avesta conflict with the strict and unambiguous monotheism preached by the Prophet Himself.

According to Ghirshman, the event which dominated the history of Western Asia during the second millennium BC was the appearance of elements of Indo-European origin in this part of the ancient world. At first, the new-comers, who left their homeland, which in all probability lay in the Eurasian plains of southern Russia, played a relatively small part on the scene. In the course of their migration they apparently split into two groups. One, the western branch, rounded the Black sea, and after crossing the Balkans and the Bosphorus, penetrated into Asia Minor. Settling among Asiatic peoples who appear to have been the original inhabitants of the country, they rapidly became the dominant element in the population, and formed the Hittite confederation. The Eastern branch, known as the Indo-Iranians, which apparently consisted of the warrior element, moved eastward around the Caspian Sea, crossed the Caucasus and pushed as far as the great bend of the Euphrates. There they settled among the indigenous Hurrians, another people of Asiatic origin and after some time formed the kingdom of the Mitanni, ruling over northern Mesopotamia and the valleys of the Zagros and keeping the expansionist Assyrians at bay. In approximately 1450 BC, a treaty concluded between a king of the Hittites and a ruler of the Mitanni mentions Mithra, Varuna and Indra.

Since history has never been able to establish any Indian influence in the Middle East, it seems reasonable to assume that these names were in common use among the Aryan tribes which settled on and around the Iranian Plateau.

The Zoroastrian religion, at the time of its establishment first flourished in Bactria. Several millennia later, a tribe of Zoroastrians, misnamed "Medes" by Berosus, conquered Chaldea in 2458 BC. History makes no further mention of Zoroastrians till we come to the 9th century BC, when we find Zoroastrianism flourishing in the Median Kingdom.

About the end of the second millennium and the beginning of the first millennium BC, the Persians from Southern Iran moved eastwards and conquered a tribe known as the Elamites, becoming the rulers of the Kingdom of Anshan (near Pars, north of modern day Shiraz), ruling as vassals of the Medes for over a century. Also in this same time period, Zoroastrianism heavily influenced the Indo-Iranians who had moved eastwards around the Caspian Sea and settled in the valleys of the Zagros Mountains. These included the five Median tribes, one of which was the Magoi (Magi), a sacerdotal tribe, who are believed to have been literate and provided the priesthood for the Medes and Western Persians.

For the development of the Zoroastrian religion in the west, we have to rely on the inscriptions of the Achaemenian kings and the Greek accounts of the Persian religion, particularly by Herodotus. Two of the



most vexing problems in the study of Zoroastrianism are that of the religion of the Achaemenian kings and the part played by the Magi in the development of the religion.

None of the Achaemenian inscriptions include the name of Zarathushtra. Also, the Greek historians, in describing the religious customs of the Achaemenids do not mention any rituals with which the Zoroastrians of today are familiar. These are the prime reasons why scholars debate whether the Achaemenians were Zoroastrians or not. However, the name of Ahura Mazda constantly appears in the inscriptions and it must be remembered that this was the name given by Zarathushtra to His God.

The oldest Achaemenian object yet discovered is a gold tablet engraved in cuneiform and in Old Persian, giving the titles of Ariaramnes (Old Persian, Aryaramna, meaning Peace of the Aryans c. 640 to 590 BC), probably the son of Ctespes and a brother of Cyrus I (the Elder). "This land of the Persians which I possess, provided with fine horses and good men, it is the Great God Ahuramazda who has given it to me. I am the King of this land".

As mentioned previously, the Achaemenian Dynasty was founded by Cyrus II (the Great) in 558 BC, when he revolted against his maternal grandfather Astyages. The "Nabonidus Cylinder" discovered in Babylon says, "His troops he collected, and against Cyrus, king of Anshan.....he marched. As for Astyages, his troops revolted against him, and he was seized and delivered up to Cyrus. Cyrus marched to Ecbatana, the royal city. The silver, gold, goods and substances of Ecbatana he seized, and to the land of Anshan he took the goods and substance that were gotten". Cyrus united the kingdoms of the Medes and the Persians and after wresting Babylon from Nebuchadnezzar, went on to conquer most of Central Asia and the Mediterranean colonies of Greece.

Little is known about the religion followed by Cyrus himself. After the conquest of Babylon, in a political move, he accepted all the Babylonian Gods to forestall any opposition from the Babylonian priests and gain the acceptance of the conquered population. However, from his actions and decrees, in which he epitomized the religious creed of Zarathushtra, one can have no doubt that he was a Zoroastrian.

Cyrus will be remembered for his forbearance against the rulers and the populations of all the nations he conquered, from Lydia to Sardis and the Greek colonies of Phrygia, Mycenae and Ionia. It is common knowledge that Cyrus' decree on the rights of peoples forms the basis of the Charter of the United Nations. But history's greatest remembrance of Cyrus will always be the freeing of the Hebrews from the Babylonian Captivity by the "Edict of Cyrus" in 538 BC, which allowed the Jews to take the gold and silver vessels, captured by Nebuchadnezzar, back to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. This act is forever immortalized in the Old Testament Book of Isaiah. "Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him, and ungird the loins of kings, to open doors before him, that gates may not be closed. I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut asunder the bars of iron, and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name".

This freeing of the Jews from the Babylonian exile was the start of five centuries of close contact between Judaism and Zoroastrianism, and the influence of the religion of Zarathushtra on the religion of Moses.

Prior to the Babylonian captivity, pre-Exilic Judaism had no concept of heaven or hell. According to the religion of Moses, souls stayed in a dreary place called "Sheol" for eternity. There are even questions



about just how monotheistic Judaism really was. These concepts dramatically changed in post-Exilic Judaism.

As Boyce puts it, "Isaiah celebrates Yahweh for the first time in Jewish literature as Creator, as Ahura Mazda had been celebrated by Zarathushtra: "I, Yahweh, who created all things...I made the earth and created man on it...Let the skies rain down justice...I Yahweh have created it." The parallels with Zoroastrian doctrine and scripture are so striking that these verses have been taken to represent the first imprint of that influence which Zoroastrianism was to exert so powerfully on post-Exilic Judaism".

It may be well to repeat what Dr. Lawrence Mills, Professor of Philology at the University of Oxford has to say: "If God was anywhere present in any human event, He was active at the taking of Babylon. Had Cyrus failed there, where would our post-exilic Judaism and pre-Christianity have been now. Cyrus and his successors not only saved the Jewish national existence, but restored Jewish worship with its very Temple. To ignore what Persia did under the hand of God for the Jews and for ourselves would be more than ingratitude – to deny it would be sacrilege, impugning either Divine omnipotence or benevolence in one of its most glorious manifestations".

The last reported words of Cyrus were "God is the protector of this lasting and unchanging organization of the universe. His majesty and grandeur are beyond description". Except for the inscriptions on his tomb, "Adam Kurush Kshayathiya Hakhamanishya" ("I am Cyrus the King, the Achaemenian"), Cyrus the Great left no other inscriptions behind. According to Plutarch, the tomb was desecrated by Polymachus after the invasion of Alexander. Pliny the Elder is quoted by Professor A.V.W. Jackson that "The Magi hold the fortress of Pasargadae in which is the tomb of Cyrus and that the Magians were hereditary guardians of the tomb, dwelling near it, and offering a sheep a day, and a horse each month, as sacrifice".

With Cyrus' successor, Darius I (The Great), we come to the truly Persian succession of the Achaemenian Dynasty. In one of his inscriptions, "King Darius says, my fathers name was Vishtasp, Vishtasp's father was Arsham, Arsham's father was Aryaraman, Aryaraman's father was Chispash, and his father was Hakhamanish. For this reason we are called Achaemenian; we have come down from a very remote antiquity; from the ancient times our family is a royal one. Before me eight kings have flourished who were of my family; I am the ninth one".

At this point, it may be worthwhile to give the genealogy of the Achaemenian Dynasty:

Hakhamanish (Achaemenes, after whom the dynasty is named);
Chishpish (Teispes);
Kambujiya (Cambyses I);
Kurush (Cyrus I);
Kambujiya (Cambyses II);
Kurush (Cyrus II, founder of the Achaemenian Dynasty, 559-530);
Kambujiya (Cambyses III, 530-522);
Bardiya (Smerdis or Gaumata the Magian, 522);
Darayawush (Darius I, 522-486);
Khshayarsha (Xerxes I, 486-465);
Artakhshatra (Artaxerxes I Longimanus, 465-424);
Khshayarsha (Xerxes II, 424-423);
Darayawush (Darius II Nothus, 423-404);
Artakhshatra (Artaxerxes II Mnemon, 404-359);
Artakhshatra (Artaxerxes III, Ochus, 359-338);



Arsha (Arses, 338-336);
Darayawush (Darius III Codomanus, 336-330).

Starting with Darius I, the Achaemenids left some 47 inscriptions, the most famous of which are at Behistun, Naksh-i-Rustum, Persepolis, and Susa. Let us start with Darius' inscription at Naksh-i-Rustum: "Martiya hya Auramazdaha framan hauvatiya gasta ma thadaya, pathim tyam rastim ma avarada, ma starava". "O man do not go contrary to the precept of Ahura Mazda, do not leave the path of truth, do not sin".

At Susa, one of Darius' inscriptions says "A great God is Ahura Mazda, who created this earth who created that heaven, who created man, who created happiness for man, who made Darius King, the one King of many, the one Commander of many. I am Darius the King, the Great King, the King of Kings, the King of countries having all kinds of human beings, the King in this great earth far and wide, the son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenian, a Persian, the son of a Persian, an Aryan of Aryan lineage". It should be noted that in the original language of the inscription, the words are, "...a Parsua, son of a Parsua". In the late 19th and early 20th century, some Parsi translators, deliberately translated this word as "...Parsi, son of a Parsi", to establish that the word "Parsi" was in usage in ancient Iran, rather than it being used for the first time after the migration to India, most probably during the Mogul era.

It is interesting to note that the earliest inscriptions of Darius the Great refer only to Ahura Mazda and His will:

- "By the will of Ahura Mazda I am King";
- "By the will of Ahura Mazda these nations have become my slaves and my tributaries";
- "That which has been done, I did it all by the will of Ahura Mazda",

clearly indicating that everything depended absolutely on divine will.

In Darius' later inscriptions, we see the introduction of the "Other Gods", "The Gods of the Clans" and "Mithra and Anahita". In an inscription at Behistun, Darius says "Ahura Mazda came to my aid – as well as the other Gods". At Persepolis, Darius says "May Ahura Mazda and the Gods of the Clans come to my assistance". As the Reverend Casartelli puts it, "This co-existence of subordinate divinities who are local deities belonging to the clans, has nothing analogous to it in the Avesta. It probably indicates a prudent policy on the part of the Great King in reconciling certain of the subject tribes to his religious reform by taking over, in the capacity of inferior deities, their local gods".

By the time of Artaxerxes II (Mnemon) and Artaxerxes III (Ochus) we find Mithra and Anahita named alongside Ahura Mazda. At Susa, an inscription of Artaxerxes II (Mnemon) reads "By the will of Ahura Mazda, I have raised a temple to Anahita and to Mithra" adding "May Ahura Mazda, Anahita and Mithra protect me". In an inscription of Artaxerxes III (Ochus) at Persepolis we find Mithra alone in association with Ahura Mazda, and treated as a God, "May Ahura Mazda and the God Mithra protect me, myself, this land and all that I have done".

It is accepted that Cyrus and Darius acknowledged other gods out of political expediency and that Xerxes and the later monarchs were influenced by the interaction of Greek religious ideas in having anthropomorphic gods. In any event, the practice of Zoroastrianism began to change during the later Achaemenian Dynasty, most probably under the influence of the Magi, who became the hereditary guardians of the religion and were entrusted with the performance of all religious rituals and the safeguarding of all religious practices. They became the advisors to the Achaemenian Emperors and were in the forefront of the Iranian armies as they went into battle.



The Babylonian scholar-priest Berosus, writing some 70 years after the reign of Artaxerxes II (Mnemon), records that the emperor was the first to make cult statues of divinities and had them placed in temples in many of the major cities of the empire. Berosus also substantiated Herodotus when the latter says the Persians knew of no images of gods until Artaxerxes II erected those images. On the means of sacrifice, Herodotus adds "they raise no altar, light no fire, pour no libations". Altars with wood-burning fires and the Yasna service at which libations are poured are clearly identifiable with modern Zoroastrian rituals, but were apparently practices that had not yet fully developed in the 5th century BC.

Herodotus emphasizes three things which every Persian male above the age of five was taught: to ride a horse, to become adept in the use of the bow and to speak the truth. To speak the truth was a highly required virtue and to tell a lie was considered a cardinal sin. Speaking of the Magi, Herodotus observed that "no prayer or offering can be made without a magus present". Although the unequivocal identification of the Magi with Zoroastrianism came later during the Sassanid era, it is from Herodotus' Magi of the mid-5th century BC that Zoroastrianism became subject to doctrinal modifications that are today considered to be revocations of the original teachings of the prophet. Some of the ritual practices described in the Vendidad, particularly the exposure of the dead, were already practiced by the Magi of Herodotus' time. Although Herodotus describes the Persian religion and practices in some detail, it is interesting to note that nowhere in his works does he describe the Navjote ceremony or even that a sacred thread was worn around the waste by the Zoroastrians of the time.

It is during the later Achaemenian empire that we see the introduction of the cults of Anahita, which was subsequently embraced by the Greeks as Artemis or Aphrodite and the Romans as Venus or Diana, and Tishtrya, the divinity associated with the bringing of rain. It is also at this time that the cult of Mithra had its beginnings, which would reach its height during the Roman Empire, when the Emperor Diocletian would proclaim Mithra as the Protector of the Roman Armies and the First Deity of the Roman Empire.

Zarathushtra speaks of two primeval forces, opposed to and at war with each other, "Spenta Mainyu", the giver of life, and "Angra Mainyu", the harbinger of non-life. These two forces, principles, powers or spirits, do not emanate from Ahura Mazda and do not exist independently, but each in relation to the other, they meet in the higher unity of Ahura Mazda. These two forces existed before the beginning of the world as we know it and are eternally in conflict with each other. The Magians re-interpreted this concept of two opposing powers, as "Ohrmazd" (good) and "Ahriman (evil) and introduced the concept that God is not yet omnipotent and all powerful. They posited that at the end of time, good will defeat evil and at that time God will become omnipotent. This concept gave rise to the premise that Zoroastrianism is not a monotheistic religion but is based on dualism. This same concept, later gave rise to Zurvanism, one of the so-called Zoroastrian heresies, which had its beginnings during the Seleucid era in Iran's history and reached its zenith during the Sassanian Dynasty.

The calendar followed by the Achaemenians consisted of 12 months of 30 days each. An intercalation, to bring the calendar back into phase with the seasons, took place every 6 years by adding an additional month to the year. At the time, different Zoroastrian tribes celebrated different first months of the year, although, in all cases, the year started with the first day of spring. It must be remembered that at the height of the Achaemenian Empire, the Empire stretched from Greece in the west to the Indus River in the east, and from the Steppes of Central Russia in the north to Egypt and Sudan in the south. According to Rawlinson, "The Zoroastrian tribes, (among whom were included the Persians proper, the Medes, the Bactrians, the Sogdians, the Cappadoceans, the Chorasmians, the Parthians, and others), scattered over so large an area, could not have agreed with one another in all points of religion. In fact, when Ardashir



Babakan took in hand the Reformation of the Religion, there were seventy different sects in existence. The religious calendar was likely one of the points on which they differed”.

During the Achaemenian period, the month of Fravardin officially became the first month of the year. Also, following the Egyptian custom, one of the Achaemenian Emperors, probably Cambyses II, after his conquest of Egypt, introduced the intercalation of 5 days after the last month, bringing about a 365 day year. The Egyptians tacked on 5 holidays celebrating the birthdays of Osiris, Isis, Horus, Nephthys and Set after the last month of the year. Following the Indo-Aryan custom of reverence for the dead, the Achaemenians tacked on the 5 Gatha days as part of the days of remembrance. However, it fell to the Sassanians to finally intercalate one month every 120 years to account for the correct solar calendar.

It is an interesting historical side line that after the French Revolution, the short lived French Revolutionary Calendar adopted the exact same concept of 12 months of 30 days each, with 5 intercalatory days at the end of the 12th month.

It remains an open fact that Zarathushtra’s religion was distorted and reinterpreted in many respects by the Magi after they took over the reigns of the religion during the sovereignty of the Achaemenians. The reintroduction of pre-Zoroastrian divinities, the concept of dualism, the timeline of creation, the coming of the Saoshyant, and the consecration of fire can all be attributed to the Magian leadership. After the defeat of Darius III by Alexander the Accursed, the Magi, except for some sporadic appearances, seem to have faded from history until they are seen again at the birth of Christ.

History will always remember the enlightened rule of the Achaemenids, who welcomed men of science and learning to their courts. Pythagoras of Samos was a prisoner of war under Nebuchadnezzar and was given his freedom when Cyrus liberated Babylon. Upon gaining his freedom, Pythagoras chose to live in Persia for some 20 years. Seeing the Persian system of underground “ghanats” or water channels, he studied geometry and formulated what we know today as Pythagoras’ Theorem. It is worthy of note that the majority of the so-called Greek Scholars were either born or lived outside Athens, away from Greek influence, and most of them lived in the Persian Empire. Socrates, and his students, Plato, Antristhenes, Euclides and Xenophon all lived in the Persian Empire and were welcomed, from time to time, at the court of Persepolis. When it came to the spread of knowledge, the Persians knew no boundaries, since they believed that with the spread of knowledge and the change in the way of thinking, the world would be a better place for everyone to live.

In 330 BC, Alexander the Macedonian brought down the curtain on the greatest land empire that the world had seen, exceeded only by that of Genghis Khan in the mid- twelfth century, some 1500 years after the Achaemenians. At its height, the Achaemenian Empire encompassed the Greek Islands, Libya, Egypt and Sudan, all the lands east of the Danube (Danae Aab in Persian) in Hungary to those west of the Indus River in Pakistan, and to the lands west of Mongolia, including Kirgizstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. The administration of so vast an empire was not equaled until the British established their empire some 2000 years later.

There is a Middle Eastern tradition which maintains that Alexander was the natural son of Darius III. According to this tradition, Olympia (Alexander’s mother) was part of the tribute paid to Darius III by the previously conquered Greek City States. Darius, like Philip of Macedon after him, did not care for some of Olympia’s more exotic practices, and returned her to Greece. When Olympia married Philip, she was already carrying Darius’ child. Alexander’s subsequent claim of Divine descent and the conquest of Persia



were not to avenge the Greek defeats at the hands of Xerxes a century and a half earlier, but to claim what he considered was his birthright.

There is another tradition and belief that the contents of the Royal Library at Persepolis were, in their entirety, systematically removed to Greece and Egypt and that the torching of the library, instigated by Thaōs, a courtesan and camp follower of the Greeks, was a cover up for an already empty library. It is said that Alexander looted some 2,500 tons of gold and silver from the Treasury in Persepolis. 3,000 camel loads of treasure were taken to cities more firmly under the control of the Greeks, mostly in Egypt. Credence to this tradition is given by the fact that the "Hellenistic Age" of Greek culture began after Alexander's conquests and flourished after his death. Flush with the plundered wealth of the Persian Empire, Ptolemy I of Egypt established a library in Alexandria, which supposedly contained the wisdom of the ages, and became a centre of learning in the Hellenistic world. Western scholars are silent on the point of where all the manuscripts in the library originated, but Iranian tradition holds that they came from the plundered library of Persepolis.

Alexander attempted to destroy Persian culture through the forcible mass marriages of Persian women to Greek soldiers, but it is the attempted destruction of the Zoroastrian religion, its clergy and its writings that earned him the sobriquet, "The Accursed", and ranked him as the third of the three arch-enemies of Iran, following Zohak the Tazi and Afrasiab the Turanian.

Of the Hellenistic age, Mary Boyce says, "Every inch of territory conquered by the Macedonian Alexander had been held before him by the Achaemenians, so that wherever Hellenistic culture established itself in his wake, it was on soil where Persians had been living, as members of the ruling people, for generations, and where accordingly their religion had long been represented." She further states that, "The respect felt for Zarathushtra by certain Greeks, notably those of the Platonic school, and the keen interest in the study of the heavens in Hellenistic times, combined to make Zarathushtra a much revered figure".

After the death of Alexander in 323 BC there was a falling out among his generals. Ultimately, the conflict was settled at the Battle of Ipsus in Phrygia in 301 BC. Alexander's empire was first divided into four major portions: Cassander ruled in Macedon, Lysimachus in Thrace, Seleucus in Mesopotamia and Persia, and Ptolemy in the Levant and Egypt. Antigonus, who ruled for a while in Anatolia and Syria, was eventually defeated by the other three generals at Ipsus. Control over Indian territory passed to Chandragupta Maurya. By 270 BC, the Hellenistic states were consolidated, with:

- The Antigonid Empire in Macedonia and Greece;
- The Seleucid Empire in Mesopotamia and Persia; and
- The Ptolemaic Kingdom in Egypt, Palestine and Cyrenaica.

The Greek Interregnum of Iran lasted for some 60 years. The Seleucid Empire itself lasted from 323 BC to 64 BC. However, the Seleucids lost control of northern Iran to the "Parni" a nomadic Zoroastrian group which had settled in the satrapy of Parthia in 247 BC, when Arsaces I revolted against the Seleucids and established the Arsacid (or Parthian) Dynasty which ruled over Iran for 455 years till it in turn succumbed to the Sassanians in 208 AD. A tentative List and Dates of the Arsacid kings is shown in Table 1.

The religion of the Seleucids shows influences of Zoroastrianism. Even after the ascent of the Arsacids in Iran, we see Zoroastrian influences in Eastern Turkey. At Nimrud Dagh, the Seleucid king, Mithradates Callinicus and his son, Antiochus of Commagene proclaimed their descent from the great Darius in a series of colossal ancestor statues and inscriptions. In one relief, Zeus is identified with a Semitic Bel and



an Iranian "Religion of the Mazdayasnians" perhaps a euphemism for Ahura Mazda. There are also statues and inscriptions dedicated to "Mithras Apollo" at Nimrud and "Anahita-Nanai" in Armenia.

Although the Parthian Dynasty lasted far longer than the Achaemenian one, history seems to have passed it by, probably due to the fact that there are very few written records by the Parthians themselves. According to Richard Frye, "In Mesopotamia Semitic languages were in use, and as we know from the documents of Nisa and Avroman, Parthian was written heterographically with Aramaic words as well as letters. From this awkward way of writing one would not expect an extensive written literature in Parthian, but there was a flourishing oral literature at the courts of nobles and rulers in Parthian times. It is only now, with new research, that this dynasty is being given the recognition it so richly deserves.

After the decline of the Seleucids, a reaction began to set in against the penetration of Hellenism. Various powers began to emerge on the world stage, the Iranians and the Kushans in the east, and in the west, Carthage and Rome. These powers were on the fringes of the Hellenistic world and were, to a great extent, affected by Hellenism. The last century BC and the first century AD witnessed the greatest expansion of the Iranian world since the Achaemenians. Under the Parthian kings, Iranians again advanced to the frontiers of Egypt, the Kushans occupied the whole of North India, Russian Turkistan and part of Chinese Turkistan, the Iranian-Sarmatians, who swarmed over the Eurasian Steppes, became masters of a great part of the northern shore of the Black Sea, reached the shores of the Danube and spread into Central Asia. The Iranians took their revenge on the Macedonians by attacking its two eastern outposts. The Greco-Bactrian kingdom disappeared under the onslaught of the later Kushans, and the Greek settlements on the Black Sea coast were over-run by the Sarmatians.† Iran maintained its pressure against the Romans when the latter appeared in Asia. The wars of the Seleucid Emperor, Mithradates of Pontus represent the resistance of the easterners under Iranian leadership against western expansionism. In the titanic duel between Iran and Rome, Iran under the Parthian emperors emerged victorious over the Romans.† At the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BC, the Parthian forces, particularly the mounted bowmen, dealt the Romans under Crassus a stunning defeat.

The first signs of a new Iranian renaissance appeared under Vologeses I (Valaksh I, AD 51 to 80), whose coinage depicted a fire altar with a sacrificing priest on the reverse. For the first time, Iranian money bore letters in the Pahlavi alphabet. According to later tradition, the text of the scattered Avesta began to be gathered and compiled in his reign. Tradition also holds that the contents of the Dinkart began to be gathered and assembled during the same period, although it was finally written centuries later.

As mentioned above, in the absence of an extensive written literature, oral literature and tradition flourished under the Parthians. According to Richard Frye, "There is evidence that the Parthians gave the Iranian national epic the basic form in which the Sassanians recorded it and passed it on to Firdausi. Parthian poet-musicians not only created many of the heroic-feudal characteristics of the epic, but they probably preserved the old legends of the Kavis of eastern Iran, the Kayanians of the epic who were the ancestors of Vishtaspa, patron of Zoroaster".

It seems that under the Parthians, the religion of Zarathushtra which was the official state religion under the Median and Achaemenian Dynasties retained its hold on the populace and it was the "semi-official" religion during their rule. Certainly, four of the Arsacid kings used the prefix "Mithra" in their names. As with the Achaemenians, the Parthians worshipped Anahita and Mithra. Anahita, enjoyed great popularity beyond the western frontiers of Iran, with her cult spreading to Lydia (where she was called "the Lady of Bactria"), and further west to Pontus, Cappadocia and Armenia. But Mithra, proved even more popular than Anahita, when the prisoners captured by Pompey took the cult to Rome, from where it was carried by the Roman armies as far as the Rhine and the Danube and to Brittany and to Great Britain.



The earliest references to Zurvanism, (the Zoroastrian heresy which gained full ascendancy under the Sassanids), can be traced to its beginnings during the Parthian dynasty. Eudemus of Rhodes, a disciple of Aristotle and the Magi wrote, "call the whole intelligible and unitary universe either Space or Time from which a good god and an evil demon were separated out or, according to others, light and darkness before these. Both parties, however, suppose that this dual constitution of the higher powers is subsequent to and differentiated out of an undifferentiated being. One of these higher powers is ruled by Ohrmazd, the other by Ahriman".

History records that during the five centuries of Parthian rule there were a variety of religious sects and practices concerning the worship of several deities with Graeco-Iranian features and nomenclature, most famous being Verethragna-Heracles, Tir-Apollo, and Anahita- Athena. The early Parthians followed a policy of tolerance toward all sects and creeds, including Paganism, Judaism and Christianity, and the religious customs of their citizens. This policy of religious tolerance eventually pitted the Zoroastrian clergy against the growing power of a proselytizing Byzantine Christian Church, which culminated in the eventual loss of Armenia, a loss which would play a leading part in the weakening of the Iranian Empire under the Sassanids, contributing to its overthrow by the Islamic Arabs. Gradually however, in the first two centuries AD, there is a noticeable change on the part of the Parthian monarchy in favoring the Zoroastrian religion. In any event, long before the Parthian Dynasty gave way to the Sassanians, in fact, at the time of the birth of Christ, Zoroastrianism, in one form or another, was the most prevalent religion in the then known world. Had Constantine not opted to convert to Christianity on his death bed in 337 AD, Zoroastrianism would not be the forgotten religion that it is today.

It is an accepted fact that the religion of Zarathushtra has had a profound impact and influence on every other major religion. Starting with the Cult of Fire and ending with individual accountability leading to the judgment of the soul and the after-life, Zoroastrianism influenced Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Hinnels, in his treatise on Zoroastrianism, says "To Hinduism and Buddhism it is said to have given the belief of a savior to come. But it is Judaism, Christianity and Islam which owe the most to Zoroastrianism. Beliefs in a devil, heaven, hell, the end of the world, the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment, all these are thought to have developed in Jewish, Christian and Muslim thought as a result of Zoroastrian influence. Perhaps no other religion has influenced so many people in so many continents over so many centuries".

One can only hope that with the burgeoning renaissance of Zoroastrianism, and as more and more people become aware of its timeless and universal principles, Zoroastrianism will once again reclaim its rightful place as the oldest revealed monotheistic faith in the pantheon and history of world religions.

REVIVAL OF ZOROASTRIAN FAITH IN SASANIAN ERA (226-651 AD)

BY ERVAD BRIGADIER BEHRAM M. PANTHAKI

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen:



I shall take over from where Erwad Cawas Desai left off before lunch.
The topic of my presentation is "Revival of the Zoroastrian Faith in Sassanian Era".

In next half an hour or so, I shall cover important features of the Sassanian Rule that directly relates to the subject of my talk.

To begin with I shall give an overview of the last Persian dynastic rule in Iran that lasted for over four centuries.

I shall talk about the founder of the Dynasty. How Ardashir came to become the first ruler of the Sassanian Dynasty? And his accomplishments.

This will be followed by the political history of the Sassanian rule in chronological order highlighting the achievements of those rulers and their military, bureaucratic and religious heads who substantially contributed to the revival of the faith, interspersed with a brief account of a couple of heresies that had sprung up in between. During this part of my talk I shall also draw your attention to the significant role played by the clergy.

Then I shall very briefly briefly go over:
The Avesta in Sassanian Times
Priesthood
Sassanian Society, Family Life and Position of Women

And finally conclude with my comments and observations.

Introduction

The Sassanian dynasty founded by Ardashir I (226-241 CE), began in 224 AD after the defeat of the last Parthian (Arsacid) king, Artabanus IV and ended after four centuries of rule in 641 AD when the last Sassanian ruler Yazdegard III (632–651), lost the struggle to quell the Arab incursion. The Sasanian Empire's territory encompassed all of today's Iran, Iraq, Armenia, Afghanistan, eastern parts of Turkey, and parts of Syria, Pakistan, India, Central Asia, Caucasia, and Arabian Peninsula. During the latter part of the dynasty, (Khosrau II, 590–628), Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon were also annexed to the Empire.

The Sassanian rulers consciously sought to resuscitate Iranian traditions and obliterate Greek cultural influence. The early rulers of the Dynasty worked tirelessly to make the Zoroastrian religion the chief symbol of national and cultural unity.

Ardashir established a full-fledged theocracy in Iran which took firm roots as the Sasanian rule progressed. The Achaemenians had ruled over an empire much more extensive than that of the Sasanians, but their religious policy had been one of tolerance towards other faiths of their subjects. The Sassanians, on the other hand, sought to achieve unity of faith through means fair and foul, and assigned grand importance to Zoroastrianism and its religious practices. One of the later Sasanian kings (Yazdegard II: 438-457) resorted to persuasion, bribe and force in his attempt to win over Armenian Christians to Zoroastrianism.

It may not be out of place here to mention that the Dinkard sanctions the use of force for the conversion



of the aliens. A Pahlavi treatise devoted to the Zoroastrian rituals attests the practice of admitting outsiders into the Zoroastrian fold. Another Pahlavi tractate on the social and legal practices of the Sasanians lays down that if a Christian slave embraces the faith of his Zoroastrian master, he should be given freedom.

The favoured position granted to Zoroastrianism by the monarchs led the Zoroastrian clergy to think themselves as "chosen people" of God and become intolerant for all other beliefs. The position and power that the clergy held was clearly evident on the coins minted throughout the Sassanian period. On the obverse of many coins we see a fire-altar flanked on either side by a human figure fully armed. One of these represented royalty, the secular power; the other represented the Mobedan-Mobed (the High-Priest of the Empire), representing spiritual might.

During the Sasanian regime the spread of Christianity and Judaism throughout Iran was a constant and growing menace to the newly revived Zoroastrian religion. Just as the Romans were promoting Christianity the Sasanians were determined to establish Zoroastrianism throughout their empire. The zeal of the priests on both sides fomented communal strife, which often resulted in the destruction of Zoroastrian fire-temples and Christian churches.

All through the four centuries (39 rulers) of the Sassanian rule Zoroastrianism continued to be the "official state religion", but there were a couple of "heretical sects" that found considerable following among the masses. However, these were ruthlessly suppressed with their perpetrators meeting violent ends. One such heresy at the very beginning of the Sasanian Era was promulgated by Mani and came to be known as Manichaeism and another was preached by Mazdak called Mazdakism during the mid point of the Sasanian rule.

How Ardeshir came to be the Founder (224-241 AD)

Papak was the governor of Pars during the reign of Artabanus IV, the last Parthian monarch. A man named Sassan was in the employment of Papak. It is believed that Sassan had lineage to King Vishtasp of the Kayanian Dynasty. Papak raised him to a high position in his court and married his daughter to him. Ardeshir was the outcome of this union. Since Papak did not have a male progeny, he adopted Ardeshir as his heir. This is how he came to be known as Ardeshir Papakan and in namgaran we take his name with that of his maternal grandfather – Ardeshir Papakan. Can it be said that the concept of adoption started from there?

Ardeshir defeated Artabanus in the battle of Hormuz in 226 AD and established the new dynasty of the Sassanians, named after Sassan. He made Istakhr, near Parsipolis, his capital. Ardeshir married Artabanus IV's daughter, Gohar Afrid.

On the political side, Ardeshir brought the old Achaemenid system of Satrapis back and divided his empire into provinces. He abolished feudal rule and introduced the appointment of the governors and local officials. One of his famous sayings, as per Firdousi, was "There can be no power without an army, no army without money, no money without agriculture, and no agriculture without justice."

On the religious side, Ardeshir established Zoroastrianism as the official religion of the empire and gave senior clergy enormous authority and power by appointing them as representatives of the court. The head priest, i.e. the mobadan mobad, became one of the three most important political entities of his



administration; the other two being the commander-in-chief (Iran Sepahabed), and the head of the bureaucracy (Dabirbed). The high priests were official representatives of the king to the satrapies of his empire.

Ardashir I introduced a major change in the calendar that was inherited from the Achaemenian times. Five additional Gatha days were added at the end of the 12th month.

It was during Ardashir's rule that his high priest Tansar got the scattered portions of the ancient Avesta literature collected, compiled, translated and commented upon in Pahlavi.

Shapur I - (241-272 CE). He continued the task of the resurgence of Zoroastrianism in that he loyally carried out his father's admonition, regarding Faith and Monarchy: as per Firdosi, "Never forget that as the King you are the defender of the Faith and the Nation. Consider the Fire Altar and the throne as inseparable; they must always sustain one another. A sovereign without religion is a tyrant."

A strong willed and volatile priest who helped Shapur in his mission was Kirdar. Kirdar called for the persecution of adherents of other religions. He attacked Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Manichaeans and Christians alike during the five successive regimes, from Shapur I to Narseh. He destroyed pagan monuments and established fire-temples in their places. Then can Kirdar be called Osama Bin Laden of Zoroastrian Persia? He was granted the royal privilege of rock carvings of his own at Naqsh-e Rostam for his contribution in cleansing of the Zoroastrian faith.

It is said that Shapur I enlarged the re-edited Avesta by collecting and incorporating with it the non-religious treatises on medicine, astronomy, geography and philosophy. Surprisingly, there is no mention in any of the literatures that Kirdar was responsible for this.

Manichaeism

It was during Shapur's regime that Manichaeism took roots in Iran. Mani was born at Acbatana (Hamadan) in southern Babylonia (now in Iraq) on 14th April 216 AD (during the reign of Artabanus IV, the last of the Parthian kings.) He was Persian by birth and was probably also brought up as a Zoroastrian. It is interesting to note that The Shahbargan, Mani's only treatise in the Middle Persian language, is dedicated to Shapur, who was favourably inclined to Manichaeism.

Manichaeism extolled celibacy as the greatest virtue. It forbade sexual intercourse and considered it the worst type of uncleanness and placed virginity as life's highest state. All these contradicted the teachings of Zarathushtra. In no period of the history of the Zoroastrian religion, was celibacy ever held to be a virtue. Both the Church and the State encouraged married life in Iran. Mani advocated abstinence from food as a means of expiation for sin. Neither fasting formed part of the religion of ancient Iran.

These new teachings were not well received by the Zoroastrian clergy. Opposition to Mani's views grew stronger as time went on and Mani was made to leave Iran.

Mani remained in exile till the death of Shapur I in 272 A.D. He returned to Iran and was well-received by Shapur's son Hormazd I. But when Hormazd I died after a very short reign (272-273 A.D.) of one year his successor, his brother, Bahram I, showed strong dislike for Mani and put him to a horrible death. One very notable Manichaean was St. Augustine, who was brought up in this faith in his youth before he took up active work for the Church of Christ.

After the dynamic regimes of Ardashir I and Shapur I of almost 50 years, a succession of weaker men ruled the empire for next 40 years (from 272 to 309 A.D., six rulers in a span of 39 years).



Shapur II (309-379 CE), (great grandson of Shapur I) the 9th king was a unique figure in the Iranian history. He succeeded to the empire before he was born. When his father, Hormuzd II (302–309), sought refuge in Roman court, the Persian nobles killed his eldest son, blinded the second, and imprisoned the third (Hormazd, who afterwards escaped to the Roman Empire).

At that time, the Queen consort of Hormazd II, who was Jewish, was expecting a child. The nobles decided that the throne should be given to the child when it was born. It may be said that Shapur II may have been the only king in history to be crowned in utero: the crown was placed on his mother's belly. Shapur II was therefore born king.

He pursued a harsh religious policy. As per Dinkard, Shapur II zealously worked for the restoration and promulgation of the faith among the unbelievers. It is very surprising that though he was born out of interfaith marriage he took active interest in proselytizing the Mazdayasnian Faith. It was also during his time Dastur Adarbad Mahraspand, brought the compilation of the Avesta to its definitive conclusion.

Shapur II founded the town of Neyshapur (Nishapur) in Khorasan (eastern Parthia). If you recollect, there is a direct reference to Neyshapur in the introductory passage of the extant Ashirwad prayers. There is a question put to the witness of the groom: "Ba paimane do hazar dirum seeme sapeed vijeh do dinar jarre sorkh sare Nishapuri, padirafteh budi ?" "In consideration of this match, have you therefore agreed to give two thousand Nishapur dirhams and two gold dinars?" This reference raises a question. Is there a possibility that during Shapur II's rule the capital of Persia had shifted to Neyshapur?

Another interesting fact is that the great poet Omar Khayyam was born in Neyshapur (in 1048) and died there and is buried a few miles outside the town.

As we have seen that it was during Shapur II's regime and at his instance the Avesta in most part was put together by Adarbad Mahraspand. Yet we do not remember him in our prayers. His name does not appear in the list of Namgarans. Is it intentional? Did Dastur Adarbad Mahraspand not want to give credit to Shapur? Or for that matter there is no mention of Dastur Tansar either who was the torch bearer of this effort during Ardeshir Papakan's regime.

After Shapur II, again came a long succession of very ordinary kings (9 rulers) during the next hundred years (379-487 A.D.).

There is one king who deserves a mention and that is Bahram V (Bahramgore, the Hunter of the Wild Ass), the 14th king. Bahram V was the product of an interfaith marriage. His mother was of Jewish origin named Sashoondokht. He had any number of wives (as per Firdowsi in 1097 he married four daughters of a miller, in 1108 he married a village chief's daughter, in 1113 he married a jeweler's daughter and in 1156 he married an Indian king's daughter).

Yazdegerd II (438–457), son of Behram V, again a product of interfaith marriage, practiced a harsh policy towards minority religions, particularly Christianity. To displace Christianity with Zoroastrianism in Armenia, he sent his prime minister and commander-in-chief Meher-Narses with instructions to attract the Armenian nobles to the Mazdayasnean Faith. The nobles were promised high positions, court distinctions, royal favours, and the remission of taxes, if they accepted the national faith of Iran. But when they refused to give up their religion they were apprehended and under threat of life were compelled to accept Zoroastrianism. These nobles, in turn were sent to the interior with instructions to convert their subjects. This proselytizing movement was not confined to Armenia, but extended further to Georgia, Albania and other neighbouring countries. Then can it not be said that during the Sasanian rule the Zoroastrians had launched a 'jihad' with tacit approval of their religious heads and political masters?



During the next 50 years the conditions in the empire deteriorated rapidly. The population was exploited relentlessly by vested interests and had sunk to the deepest depths of poverty and misery. The decades of oppression were soon to be visible in the revolutionary preaching of Mazdak, who began his work around 488 A.D.

Mazdakism

I would term Mazdak the first Bolshevik in history. He preached communistic doctrines as the main principles of his religion. With equality, austerity and abstinence, he inculcated joint holding of property including women, as the only solution to all ills of mankind. It is very rightly said that poverty and misery are the fertile breeding grounds for communism. It was a famine in Iran at the end of the 5th Century which gave Mazdak the opportunity to give expression to his socialistic views.

More significant was the extreme rapidity with which Mazdak's teachings were accepted by the masses. Within the course of a few months his followers grew by the thousands: and they were drawn from every strata of society from the king downwards. The king at that time was Kobad I (488-531 A.D., except for two years in 496 & 497 CE) who openly declared his sympathies with the new preaching.

However, Mazdak's ideology was considered to be a menace both to society and the state religion. It threatened the very existence of the Zoroastrian priesthood. The well entrenched clergy was seriously perturbed and they forced the king to leave his throne.

When Kobad I was restored to the throne in 498 AD he became wiser by experience and withdrew his open support to the Mazdakites. But he was not strong enough to remove the root causes of Mazdakism. That was reserved for an illustrious man than Kobad I.

It was his son Khusro I, (531 - 579 CE), known to us by his title Noshiravan, who freed Iran from the Mazdak frenzy. He clearly saw the imminent danger from Mazdak's teaching and the first thing he did was to suppress the movement with an iron hand. Mazdak was treacherously murdered followed by a systematic repression of all Mazdakites often with much bloodshed.

The reign of Khusro II Parviz (591-628 CE), grandson Khusro I (Noshirwan), was the last stable rule of the Sassanian Dynasty. Intrigue, deception and lust for power became rampant following the his death. The beginning of the end of the Sassanian Dynasty had commenced.

The princes instigated and actively supported by their mothers of foreign extraction and foreign faith played havoc in the royal family, in aristocracy and in state affairs. Kings and queens were proclaimed and most of them were deposed or murdered in quick succession.

Over a period of next four years there were 14 successive kings, including two daughters of Khusro II. Out of these except for one all others were murdered.

In such deplorable conditions and disastrous circumstances Yazdegerd III, grandson of Khusro II, ascended the throne in the spring of 632 as the last Sasanian emperor . Yazdegerd was incapable of uniting a vast country crumbling into small feudal kingdoms and left the throne in 641 AD and to be assassinated by a miller in Merv in 651 AD.



The mighty Persian Empire, with its military command structure non-existent, its army decimated, its financial resources effectively destroyed, was now utterly helpless in the face of the invaders. The local population either willingly accepted Islam, thus escaping from various restrictions imposed on non-Muslims, including the requirement to pay a special poll tax (jizya) or was forced to convert by the invading Arabs.

Avesta in Sassanian Times

As per Denkard (3-4), the first two Sassanian kings, Ardashir I (224-240) and Shapur I (240-272) are traditionally considered to be the founders of Mazdayasnian orthodoxy. These two kings, it is said, continued the work of collecting the dispersed writings of the Zoroastrian scriptures that Valakhsh had begun (Denkard 4.25).

When the Sasanians came to power, the Avesta, the sacred language of Zoroastrianism, has ceased to be a living tongue. The daily prayers continued to be recited in the dead language. The need was evidently felt to supplement the Avestan prayers by some additional prayers in the vernacular. It was Dastur Adarbad Mahraspand, the high-priest and prime minister of Shapur II, who composed such supplementary prayers in Pazend.

Several benedictory, thanksgiving, and expiatory prayers composed during this period have come down to us and are recited as supplementary prayers to the Avestan prayers even to the present day.

The important Pazend prayers that are extant consist of the Afrins, Patets, Nirangs, the introductory and closing parts of the Avestan Nyaises and Yashts. Also, the original Avestan wedding hymn is extinct. What we now recite is a Pazand hymn, composed during the Sasanian period, embodying three Avestan passages.

Priesthood

In Sassanian times, the clergy also acted as judges, had their own courts and had a hierarchy. At the lowest rung were Magi. Above them were the Herbeds (Chief of fire) and Mobeds (Chiefs of the Magi) among who were the priests reciting prayers (Zaotar) and the assisting priests who tended the fire (Rathvishkar). At the top there were two dignitaries the Herbedan – Herbed, who was the Chief Justice and Mobedan Mobed, the High priest.

The hierarchy in priesthood is confirmed from the inscriptions of Kirdar where he says that he first came to power under Shapur I -when he was a herbad. Under Hormazd I he was given the title of mobad, probably the first to hold this title. In the reign of Baharam II he received the rank of Herbadan Herbad, and was made chief judge of the empire, and Mobadan Mobad, chief of the royal fire at Istakhr.

The priests tended the fire, prepared the sacred Haoma juice, recited prayers with offerings, heard confessions, granted forgiveness, and performed ceremonies relating to birth, investiture, marriage and death. So, in olden days there must have been the practice of confession as we see in Christianity.

This is borne out by the introductory passage of "Patet Pashemani". We recite " Yatha Ahu Vairyo – 5. Yatha Ahu Vairyo panj az hama gunah patet pashemanum, az harvastin dushmat, duzukhta, duzuvarashta mem pa geti mani PISHE SHUMA VEHAN manashni, gavashni, kunashni tani ravani". Ervad Kavasji Edulji Kanga in his *Khorddeh Avesta*, translates " Oh good (religious high priest), I, in your presence having recited 5 Yatha Ahu Vairyo repent of all sins by means of Patet." He further elaborates in the foot note "From this it appears that the sinner confesses his own sins and makes suitable atonement in the presence of high priest fully versed in the Zoroastrian religion. After composition of this Patet even from the Persian Rivayets written in later times similar writing is found,



that a sinful person should confess his sins and atone in presence of the just, learned and well versed person in religion, in Dastur of that period.”

Sassanian Society, Family Life and Position of Women

Society was divided into four classes: the priests, warriors, farmers, and artisans. There is a distinct reference to this in the latter part of the Dabache of Afringan: we recite “Hama athornan, hama rathaestaran, hama vastrayoshan, hama hutokhshan.” The social system was very rigidly followed and membership in a class was based on birth.

The general principles of the Sassanian family life were similar to those of a joint family system.

Sassanian society was patriarchal, tracing lineage from father to son. A family was under the guardianship of a male elder and family affairs were conducted by him. Even under male guardianship, a woman could hold and manage property, lead a prayer, and act as a senior member of the family. In history, there are two instances where in the absence of a male successor, female members acceded to the throne. Daughters of Khosro II, Purandokht ruled for a year in 630 AD followed by her sister Azarmidokht in 631 AD.

Different forms of marriage prevalent during the Sasanian times:

(a) a girl marrying by her choice, with the consent of her parents;

(b) a girl, the only daughter of her parents, marrying by her choice with consent of her parents, but there was a stipulation that the first male child shall be the adopted son of her father after the father’s death;

(c) widow remarriage or second marriage – There is a provision in Ashirwad prayers for such marriages – In the introductory paragraph where we recite the names of the bride and the groom, if the girl is marrying for the first time then her name is recited as “In kanig in shah-zan ‘falana’ namvar” where as if the girl is a widow or getting married for the second time her name is recited as “In zanig ‘falana’ namvar”.

(d) a girl marrying by her own choice but without consent of her parents.

This amply goes to show that Zoroastrian women even in ancient times enjoyed equal status and had their say in the male dominated society in all aspects of life including marriage. A question therefore arises – was there a custom of arranged marriage or was it adopted at a later stage!!!!!!

Conclusion

The Sassanian regime was afflicted by political and religious tensions throughout four centuries of its rule. Of the 39 rulers who ruled Iran during this period, there were just six regents who substantially contributed to the revival of the faith.

To begin with, it was Ardashir I who laid the foundation for restoration of the Zoroastrian faith. He was followed by his son Shapur I, who not only added additional scriptures to enlarge the Avesta but also undertook a vigorous movement to proselytize local populace in the Zoroastrian fold, ably helped by his head priest Kirdar. Bahram I can be remembered for elimination of Manichaeism.



After a lull of almost 4 decades came Shapur II, the longest ruling monarch of the Dynasty, who with the help of his head priest and prime minister Adarabad Mahraspand completed the task of compiling the Avesta. Yazdegard II who followed after six decades, with strong determination proselytized the population of neighboring countries. In his dedicated effort he was helped by his prime minister and commander-in-chief Meher-Narse. Khosrow Noshirwan I, who came on the throne almost 70 years after Yazdegard II, decimated Mazdakism.

In the last 70 years of the Sassanian rule no effort was diverted towards the welfare of the religion. There can be two reasons – first, a positive reason could be that the Zoroastrian faith was strongly rooted and did not foresee any danger. The second, negative reason could be that the kings did not rule for a considerable length of time and were more concerned with palace intrigues and holding on their thrones than in the religion.

Manichaeism and Mazdakism were two well-known Zoroastrian heresies during the Sasanian Dynasty. Mani came within one generation of the establishment of Sassanian rule in Iran. Mazdak came about a century before the empire was overrun by the Arabs. However, as we know, these were ruthlessly suppressed with violent ends.

Can it be said that in order to establish a centralized political structure, the Sasanian rulers used religious persecution as a tool for political convenience and necessity?

During the last century of the Dynasty, the Sasanians were weakened through economic decline, heavy taxation, religious unrest, rigid social stratification, intrigues, fratricidal killings, palace intrigues, coups and counter coups, weak and frequent changes in regency: factors that facilitated the Arab invasion. The victorious progress of the Arab conquests was evidently so catastrophic that we, to this day, speak of “the ruin and devastation that came from the Arabs.”

There have been a number of instances where monarchs had contracted interfaith marriages. And it is some of these rulers and their progeny who took measures, at times severe, to revive the Mazdayesnian Faith.

Can it be assumed that the practice of interfaith marriage was followed by the populace, too. If the answer is in the affirmative then it can be safely said that interfaith marriages were prevalent and were approved by clergy and accepted by the society. As per Firdousi, Behram V (Gor) went to the extent of taking his would be Indian bride, Sepinoud, to the Fire of Adar Gushasp for the Nahn ceremony before his wedding.

The Zoroastrian calendar, which is still in use today, uses the regnal year of Yazdegerd III as its base year. Its calendar era (year numbering system), which is accompanied by a Y.Z. suffix, thus indicates the number of years since the emperor's coronation in 632 CE.

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Shahnameh – Firdousi

Name From – To No of Years # Years Firdowsi Relationship

- 1 Ardashir I 224-241 17 Son of Sassan, grandson of Babakan – Parthian wife
- 2 Shapur I 241-271 31 Son of Ardashir I
- 3 Hormoz I 271-272 1 Son of Shapur I
- 4 Bahram I 272-275 3 Son of Shapur I
- 5 Bahram II 275-292 17 19 Son of Bahram I
- 6 Bahram III 292-293 4 months Son of Bahram II
- 7 Narseh 293-300 9 Son of Shapur I – Abdicated his throne
- 8 Hormoz II 300-309 7 9 Son of Narseh – Wife was Jewish Consort
- 9 Shapur II 309-379 70 Son of Queen consort of Hormoz II - Jewish
- 10 Ardashir II 379-383 4 Brother of Shapur II (since Shapur II's son was a minor)
- 11 Shapur III 383-388 5 Son of Shapur II
- 12 Bahram IV 388-399 11 14 Son of Shapur II– Had no sons, only 1 daughter
- 13 Yazdegerd I 399-420 21 30 Son of Shapur III – Wife was Jew
- 14 Bahram V – Gore- Hunter 420-439 18 70 Son of YZ I – Mother was Jew
Had seven wives
- 15 Yazdegerd II 439-457 19 Son of Bahram V – Mother was an Indian - Sepinoud
- 16 Hormoz III 457-459 2 1 Younger son of YZ II
- 17 Piroj I 459-483 25 11 Elder son of YZ II, brother of Hormuz III
- 18 Palash 483-487 4 5 Son of YZ II, Brother of Firoze I
- 19 Kobad I 487-496 8 Son of Firoze I, Nephew of Balash
- 20 Jamasp 496-498 2 Son of Firoze I, Younger brother of Kobad I
- Kobad I 498-531 33
- 21 Khosrow I Anoshirwan 531-579 48 Son of Kobad I – Had Christian wife – One of his sons became Christian
- 22 Hormoz IV 579-590 11 Son of Khushrow I
- 23 Bahram Chobin 590-590 General in Hormoz IV's army
- 24 Khosrow II Parviz 590-628 38 Son of Hormuz IV, grandson of Khushrow I. Had two wives – Christian who bore him Kobad II (Other name Sheroy). Persian wife – Shereen – Killed by his son Sheroy
- 25 Kobad II 628-628 Son of Khushrow II, Killed his father
- 26 Ardashir III 628-629 1 Son of Kobad II, Killed by his general Shahrbaraz General 629-630
- 27 Porandokht 630-631 16 months Daughter of Khushrow II
- 28 Azarmidokht 6 months Daughter of Khushrow II, slained
- 29 Hormoz V 630-632 2
- 30 Yazdegerd III 632-651 19 Grandson of Khushrow II, Nephew of Purandokht, his father Shehriyar was son Khushrow II



Zarathustrian Religion & its evolution in the post-exilic era in India

by Ervad Gustad Panthaki

Battle of Qadesia (in Mesopotamia) in 634 A.C.Iranians lost
Battle of Madayan (.....) in 637 A.C.Iranians lost
Battle of Nehavand (in Hamadan, a province of Iran) in 641 A.C.Iranians lost
Yazdegard was murdered on 23 August, 651 A.C. in Merv

There were small independent Parsi kingdom for 150 years after the defeat of the Sassanian Empire in the mountainous districts of eastern Iran.

A band of the Zoroastrian priests ruled in the mountainous region of Damavand in Tabristan district in past Sassanian times. There is an oblique reference to it in the Afrin-I Haft Ameshaspands:

"Damavand mountain, where the devil with 10 000 horses has been tied, may we be united."

Parsis In Iran After the Arab Conquest

The Arabs invaded Iran for propagation of Islam –"the holy war".

Therefore after the conquest the Arabs fanatically proselytized either by persuasion or force or combination of both.

There are very few historical resources for the first 150 years after the Arab conquest upto the beginning of the 9th century. The Pahlavi books of the 9th century, vaguely refer to "evil times" and "wicked rule".

The Arabs presented three (3) choices ---death, Islam or the payment of tribute.

The doctrines of early Islam were simple; and some of the most important --- such as belief in Heaven & Hell, the end of the world and the Day of Judgement --- derived ultimately from Zoroastrianism, and hence were very familiar, also were certain Muslim practices: the five times of daily prayer, the rejection of images, and the injunction to give alms.

By accepting Islam a Zoroastrian freed himself from the many rites and obligations which bound him to his own priests from cradle to grave.

Women, though in the long run losers under Islam, found an immediate benefit of conversion through freedom from those laws of purity which pressed so heavily on them in their daily lives.

What held the Iranians back from the Semitic faith ----

- Usage, familiarity, loyalty to the religion. Islam was alien:



- Imposed by conquerors
 - With scriptures in a foreign language
 - Brought strange customs to the Iranians----Circumcision, Rules about clean & unclean meats (Halal & Haram), Abstention from wine, Veneration of a distant sacred stone; the Kaba;
 - Change from reverence of a wise Lord who was Just & accessible to Reason, to one which demanded Submission;
 - The radical difference in theology ---- the Zoroastrian standing erect while offering prayers to the Lord, The Muslim kneeling or prostrate with forehead in the dust;
 - There was much to lose for whom Rituals had meant more than Theology;
 - Friday prayers & sermons at the mosque, confronting a stone "Qibla" instead of a bright leaping flame;
- Therefore it is not surprising that Iran tried to remain Zoroastrian under the Muslim/Arab rules.

The Caliphates (Sunnis) (632 – 661 A.C.): Abu Bakr, Omar, Osman & Ali

Iran remained predominantly Zoroastrian.

The Umayyads (Sunnis) (661 – 749 A.C.)

This era has been called one of Arab Imperialism. There was little serious pressure to adopt Islam. An Arab governor appointed a Commissioner to supervise the destruction of Fire Temples throughout Iran. The Commissioner left all those Fires whose congregations could give him a sufficient sum –thus he is said to have extorted 40 million dirhams.

- Ibn Muquaffa (the Mutilated), a Zoroastrian scholar was compelled to embrace Islam and write his numerous works of translations in Arabic. In 747 A.C. was put to death. One of his books, the Khwady Namag of Sassanian chronicle translated into elegant Arabic, later became the basis for Firdausis' Shahname.
- The Umayyads around 700 A.C. introduce Arabic language and script in the government to abandon the use of Middle Persian written in Pahlavi script. Arabic, the holy tongue of Islam, soon became the language of polite letters, and a process of translating Pahlavi works into Arabic began.

Revolt against the Umayyads was brewing for some time due to the Shiite cause under the leadership of the house of Abbas, which led to an Abbasid victory in 750 A.C.

The Abbasids (Shias) (750 – 1258 A.C.)

The rule of Abbasids change the centre of the Arab government; which was Medina during 632 to 661, and Damascus during 661 to 750, to Baghdad.



Since the new caliphs relied largely on Iranian supporters, the status of Iranians altered from despised to influential. Persians occupied posts in government and advancement now open to Iranian Muslims.

It was during the Abbasids that Islam took root and flourished in Iran. Islam grew steadily more Zoroastrianized, with adaptations of:

funerary rites & purity law;
a cult of saints (in place of veneration of yazads); and
of the Saoshyant (the Abbasids believed that the descendants of Ali were the Imams, and of the nine imams, eight died violent deaths, but the last one miraculously disappeared in 878 A.C. He is hidden and like Saoshyant will appear at the end of time to restore faith).

There are evidences that during the Abbasid rule, the Parsis were practicing Zoroastrian religion & its practices. There were fire temples in which the sacred fires continued to burn. In the north-west Adur Gushnasp was tended to at least middle of the 10th century; and in the south-west Adur Karkoy was maintained until the 13th century. The Zoroastrian high-priests were called Hudinan Peshobay; "Leader of those of the Good Religion".

The 9th century was Golden Period for Pahlvi Literature. The Sasanian Avesta contained 21 books; but by the 9th century only 19 books wholly (with Avesta & Zand) survived, and one was survived only in Avesta of which its Zand was lost. Much of the surviving Pahlavi literature were composed or re-edited during this time. A few examples:

"Dadestan-i dinig" (Religious Judgement) by Manushchihr Goshnjam;

"Epistles of Manushchihr" (Letters to his younger brother Zadspram) by Manushchihr Goshnjam;

"Wizidagiha" by Zadspram. This deals with cosmogony & cosmology, the Life of Zarathustra, the physiology & psychology of men, and eschatology.

"Dinkard" (Acts of the Religion; the longest extant Pahlavi work) begun by Adurfarnbag Farrokhzadan and was re-edited and enlarged by Adurbad Emedan.

"Shkand Gumanig Vizar" (Doubt – Dispelling Exposition) By Mardanfarokh.

Among the 20 surviving books of the Avesta was the Vendidad. During this time (9th century) a practice was established to read it entirely as a night ceremony solemnized after a death. This is the only ceremony when the use of text reading is permitted to a priest ----- all other services must be known by heart.

Seljuqs, Mongols & Turks (1055 – 1500)

The Seljuk came into Khorsan from Central Asia (North of Caspian & Aral sea), and stormed the whole of Iran, exterminating every local dynasty, early in the 11th century (1055 A.C.). They embraced Islam with fervour.



The information about Zoroastrians under their rule (1037 – 1157) is very limited, but many must have died in the wars of conquest, or have been forcibly converted to Islam.

Then came the even more dreadful Mongol invasions. Chingiz Khan (1220 –1221) and Hulagu Khan (1258) were bloodthirsty, who slaughtered Muslims, Zoroastrians, Jews & Christians. They stabled horses in the mosques, burn the libraries, used priceless manuscripts for fuel, and often razed cities destroying every living thing within it.

From 1370 – 1384 another devastations and massacres were brought in Iran by the Tarter Timur Lang.

The Safavids (1502 – 1747)

The Safavids dynasty came to power in Iran in 1502 and ruled up to 1747.

Another massacre and devastation took place during the Afgan Wars (1722 – 1729).

The Zand (1750 –1794) & The Qajar (1795 – 1924)

In the rule of Karim Khan Zand, the Zoroastrians began to settle in and around Yazd & Kerman. They sought and received reduction from the heavy poll-tax.

Aga Muhammad Khan Qajar revolted and usurped power from Karim Zand in 1795. The Zoroastrians were compelled to wear "taylasan" as a distinguish badge, and were not permitted to ride a horse. Even when riding a donkey, they had to dismount when a Muhammadan passed near them.

References to the oppression in Pahlavi & Persian texts

The authors of the Pahlavi texts and the Persian Rivayats refer to the religious persecutions of the Zoroastrians in Iran in veiled language and guarded terms. Many times these references were presented in the form of prophesies about misfortunes and calamities that would befall Iran after the downfall of the Empire.

We find such veiled references in the 9th century Pahlavi texts; Dinkard, Bundahishn, Epistles of Manushchihr, Zand-i Vahuman Yast and Jamasp Namak. The Persian Rivayats of the 15th – 17th centuries were comparatively more outspoken ---- see Nariman Hoshang (1498) & Faridun Marzban (17th century).

The Pahlavi Dynasty (1925 – 1979)

Founded by late Reza Pahlavi, who had risen from the army ranks to defense minister after a coup d'etat in February 1921. Later he became a prime minister, before being elected Shah by the Majlis (National Assembly), so starting the Pahlavi dynasty. The Majlis deposed the absentee monarch, the last of Qajar dynasty, Ahmad Shah.

Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was the last Shah of Iran ruling from 1941 to 1979. He fled Iran on January 16, 1979.



Republic of Iran (1979 to date)

Ayatollah Khomeini the father of the Iranian Revolution returned to Iran on February 1, 1979; and the Provisional Government was elected on February 11, 1979.

Exodus to India

After the downfall of Sassanians the Iranians (Parsis) resolved to leave Iran in quest of a home, where they could freely practice their faith.

The Iranians now streamed to India in successive waves. Here they found an asylum.

The main source for the history of settlement in India, after the exodus from Iran, is the Qissa-i- Sanjan, a narrative poem composed largely from oral traditions by a mobed Bahman Kekobad Sanjana in Persian verse. It was completed at Navsari on roz Khordad mah Fraverdin 969 Y.Z.; December 1, 1600.

The Parsi group settled in Div under the leadership of Dastur Nairyosang Dhaval. They remained in Div for 19 years, and once again due to difficult circumstances they left Div with Nairyosang Dhaval to find refuge some-where-else. They set sails and drifted towards Gujrat.

A heavy storm tormented the Parsis who were already in trouble. They all prayed to Ahura Mazda and pledge to establish the holy fire, if they are saved.

The storm vanished and the Parsis landed on the shores of Sanjan on roz Bahman mah Tir 85 Y.Z.; August 25, 716 or 936 A.C. They sent back messengers by land to Khorasan to fetch the necessary "Aalat" for the consecration ---- notably consecrated "nirang" & ash from an existing Atash Behram ---- and these gave their new fire a link with the sacred fires of Iran. On roz Ader mah Ader 90 Y.Z. (721 A.C.) the Atash Behram was enthroned under the guidance of Dastur Dhava, and called it Iranshah.

A quick glance at the movement of Iranshah from Sanjan to Udvada:

Sanjan 672 years (721–1393)

Bahrot 12 " (1393-1405)

Vansda 14 " (1405-1418)

Navsari 313 " (1419-1732)

Surat 3 " (1733-1736)

Navsari 5 " (1736-1741)

Valsad 1 " (1741-1742)

Udvada 265 " (Sunday, October 28, 1742 to date)

The Sanjana mobeds came to Udvada with Shree Iranshah on roz Khordad mah Farvardin, 1112 Y.Z.

Estimate of the Number of Parsi Immigrants in India



There is no direct or indirect evidence which can arrive at even rough estimate of the number of Parsis arrived in India. The oldest available source for the history of the Parsi immigrants is the Kisse Sanjan composed largely from oral traditions; after about 750 years.

The Kisse Sanjan simply states that Parsis came to India with women and children by sea-route. This may be attributed as the principal record of Parsi's arrival to India.

The Parsis in early Centuries

The Atash Bahram at Sanjan remained the only sacred fire among the Parsis for the next 800 years or so. During that time priests and laity prayed and performed rites before their own hearth fires, as their forefathers had done in earlier days.

During the first 300 years the Parsis learned to speak Gujrati, and adopted dress ---- e.g. the women took to the coloured sari.

As the Sanjan settlement prospered, group of laymen left to make new homes for themselves elsewhere, mainly along the coast. The main centres of settlement according to the tradition were Vankner, Broach, Variav, Anklesar, Cambay and Navsari. As they prospered, they sent back to Sanjan requests for priest to minister to them. As the priests grew numerous, they divided the work among themselves, each priest taking a group of lay families to minister to. This group was called his "panthak", he their "panthaki", and the "panthak" to become hereditary.

Further on they agreed, sometime in the 13th century, to divide Gujrat ecclesiastically into five (5) groups or "panths": the Sanjanas in the original area of settlement; the Bhagarias or "Sharers" in Navsari; the Godavras in Anklesar; the Bharuchas in Broach; and the Khambattas in Khambat or Cambay.

The first and the last intercalation, after the migration, was very probably done during the years 1129 to 1131, when the spring equinox had come to correspond roz Hormazd of mah Ardibehst. The Parsis of India intercalated a 13th month in order to restore the roz Hormazd of mah Farvardin to this position. They called this 13th month simply Second Aspandarmad. This was never repeated, so thereafter the calendar receded against the natural year.

By 950 there was a Parsi settlement at Thana, and about the beginning of 11th century (1009 A.C.) Parsis must have been around Bombay as seen from the inscriptions of Kanheri Caves near Borivali.

Parsis in the 12th to 14th centuries

Neryosang Dhaval, a Sanjana priest translated Zoroastrian texts into Sanskrit from Avesta and Pahlavi, in about 1166 A.C. He further transcribed the original Pahlavi into the clear Avesta alphabet. Since this re-writing in Avestan alphabet was a form of interpretation, it came to be referred to as "pa-zand" that is, "by interpretation", and then simply as Pazand.

In 1206 a Muslim sultanate had been established in Delhi, and in 1297 an army was dispatched to conquer Gujrat. The Muslims began to kill and slaughter unmercifully. The sultanate brought Arbo-Persian



culture, and the Parsis proud of their Persian lineage and traditions regarded the Persian language as part of their own inheritance. Its spread through Gujrat as a learned tongue, and contributed to decline in Sanskrit studies among the priests. They began at this period to make Gujrati versions of Avestan and pahlavi texts from the existing Sanskrit renderings.

The priests continued scribal activity, through this troubled time, of copying Avestan and Pahlavi texts, and manuscripts.

A tragedy took place at Variav, perhaps in 1401 (the date is uncertain) in which the Parsis were slaughtered by the local Hindu rajah for refusing to pay exorbitant taxes.
Parsis in the 15th Century

Around the end of the 14th century, Sanjan was attacked and destroyed. The story of the Parsis fighting side by side with their Hindu benefactors, is told in the Qissa-i Sanjan. Many lost their lives; but the priests managed to rescue the Atash Behram, and carried it to a cave in Bahrot. Hence the first of the many moves of the Iranshah began, before finally arriving at Udvada.

In the middle of 15th century (circa 1476) Changa Asa, the leader of the Parsis at Navsari, persuaded the community to send a messenger to Iran to consult the priests there about certain details of rituals and observances. The first envoy, Nariman Hoshang, sailed from Broach. He returned in 1478 with two Pazand manuscripts and a long letter. Later a number of such missions continued till 1778 to bring letters and treatises or Rivayats of instruction. This collected literature came to be known later as Rivayats.

The Rivayets contained mainly of advised asked for and given on matters of observance of rituals for the elaborate ceremonies such as Nirangdin, consecrating a dakhma, administering the Barahnoom etc. It devoted much attention to details of the purity laws.

The clear benefit derived from the description of details of ceremonies which had become neglected in the circumstances of their forefathers' migration.

All the messengers for the Rivayets were laymen, for the mobeds were prepared to undergo the loss of barashnoom entailed in travelling by sea.

Parsis in the 16, 17 & 18th Century

Beginning of 16th century marked the arrival of Europeans – first as traders then settled as rulers. Among them Portuguese, Dutch and English respectively starting from 1534 with Portuguese and by 1759 established East India Co. at Surat by the English. The English traders finally became rulers of India for 150 years, ending their rule in 1947. This period in the Mughal rule including of Akbar.

In 1578, a learned Bhagaria priest, Meherji Rana, from Navsari, went to discuss the Zoroastrian religion at Akbar's court between the adherents of various religions. Akbar was favourably impressed from the rites of the Parsis, and he ordered that the fire should be kept burning at court by day and night. Akbar abolished the jizya (tax) and granted freedom of worship to all. The Parsis of Navsari conferred on Meherji Rana and his descendants the office of High Priest in perpetuity. To this day the Bhagarias are led by a Dastur Meherji Rana.



In 1597 Dastur Ardashir Noshiravan of Kerman was received by Akbar to help in compiling a Persian dictionary. He and two other priests were accorded the title of "mulla" by the emperor for their religious learning.

When the Europeans established trading factories in Gujrat, Parsis readily entered their employment. This was the period for Parsis exploring different traders and occupations.

Early in the 17th century (1606 A.C.) Surat had already taken over the trade and prosperity, and during the next century and half (by 1750) it became the largest centre of Zoroastrian population in the world.

As the Parsis became more prosperous they mingled with other communities, and employed more Hindu servants at home. Their houses thus became less secured for Zoroastrian purity and ritual ceremonies, and they began to establish deremeher fires locally. The first of these was probably established in Surat (not sure because Surat was often destroyed by fire and flood).

In 1661 the British possessed Bombay, and entrusted to East India Co. for administration from Surat. The success of Bombay and Parsis thereon is a well known history.

The first Dar-i Mihr was built in Bombay in 1671 by Hirji Vaccha, and soon afterwards the first Tower of Silence (dakhma).

In 1709 an Atash-i Adran was consecrated in Bombay. During the 18th and 19th centuries more and more Fire Temples were founded in new and old settlements of Gujrat.

There was still only one Atash Behram in the mid 18th century; the Sanjana fire in Navsari. Due to work related friction between the Sanjanas and Bhagarias, the Sanjanas decided to leave Navsari, taking the Atash Behram with them, in 1741. A year later in 1742 the Sanjana installed the fire at Udvada.

Distressed by the removal of Atash Behram from Navsari, the Bhagarias resolved to consecrate their own Atash Behram. With the help of other Parsi communities, mostly from Surat, the Bhagarias consecrated the new Atash behram in 1765 at Navsari.

It was during this time, due to rivalry, to enhance dignity of Udvada Atash Behram, the Sanjanas put about the story that their fire was brought, by the first Parsi settlers, from Iran, and it was somehow linked to the Khoreh of the old Persian kings. They started calling the Atash Behram by the name Iranshah.

Bombay due to its commercial and industrial growth attracted Parsis from every part of Gujrat, so priests from all different "panths" came to serve the laity and the Fire-temples. Therefore there was no one ecclesiastical authority at Bombay.

A Parsi Panchayat was first formed in 1728 at Bombay, which had no working priests among its first 9-members. Since Bombay did not have a separate priestly body, like Bhagarsath Anjuman at Navsari, the ecclesiastical affairs were dealt with in Bombay by this lay Panchayat (such as upkeep of the dakhmas).

Even the Fire-temples, endowed by wealthy laymen, were in the control of lay trustees, who appointed the priests.



The Panchayat exerted a considerable authority not only in the 18th but throughout the 19th century and 20th century. The work of the Panchayat:

- maintaining the strict morality;
- tried to uphold the stability of marriage, and to regulate divorce;
- sanction of bigamy on stringent conditions, if the first marriage was barren;
- discourage visiting of Hindu shrines;
- celebration of gahambar;
- tried to curb extravagance in the ceremonies of the dad;
- maintain the purity laws (as late as 1857 a man and his daughter were forbidden to enter any fire temple until they had undergone barashnom, because they had eaten a meal cooked by a Muslim);
- resolutely forbid proselytizing or accepting "juddins", they also opposed to perform navjote for the children of Parsi fathers and alien mothers;
- administer charity from fees for weddings and funerals, fines and charitable bequests – provided for sick, destitute, widows and orphaned, and for the funerals of the needy;
- maintain the dakhmas etc.

The first Atash Behram in Bombay was Kadmi Dadiseth, and the first Shanshai Atash Behram was consecrated in 1830 by Bhagarias, and the first high priest was Dastur Edulji Sanjana (despite his surname, a Bhagaria priest). Atash Behram is Wadiaji.

Parsis in 19th Century

The 19th century saw great changes for urban Parsis due to commercial and industrial growth, and the impact of Western education. In 1813 the East India Co. had its charter renewed only on condition that ban on missionaries was lifted. The first missionaries arrived in Bombay in the 1820s, and in 1827 Elphinstone College was founded to teach "the languages, literatures, sciences and moral philosophy of Europe". In 1840 a school was added to form the Elphinstone Institute, and most of the students were Parsis. Thus a Western-educated Parsi middle class was formed consists of doctors, lawyers, teachers, journalists, accountants etc.

By 1834 the British Government became ruler of most of India. The teaching of English literature brought students into contact with Christian ideas. Western sciences collided with traditional Zoroastrian beliefs. Parsi children knew only fundamental doctrines and its observances, but the Avesta was a mystery.

A Scottish missionary, John Wilson, arrived in Bombay in 1829, and prepared a campaign to bring young Parsis into Christian fold. This caused a great stir in the Parsi community.

Wilson studied Anquetil's translations of the Avesta and Bundahishn, and other European writings. Then he attacked with sermons, pamphlets and articles in the daily newspapers. He made hostile attacks on dualism, the cosmogonic material in the Bundahishn and the prescriptions in the Vendidad about the purity laws, contrasting these, unfairly, with the Christian Gospels rather than with Leviticus. Most Parsis had never heard of the Bundahishn, and they were shocked by Wilson's summaries.

The parsis persuaded (3) priests; Mulla Kaus, Mulla Firoze and Dastur Edul Sanjana of Wadiaji Atash-Behram, to refute Wilson, but they added more confusion by providing different defenses.



Wilson gained few converts among the Parsis, and the Parsis felt the disintegrating effects of Western education on the community.

The educated laity felt that their priests had failed them. This was the beginning of contempt came to replace the age-old respect for the priesthood as the learned class.

A sense of lay superiority was due to chance; the reasons are two:

the lack of corporate priestly body to exercise authority, and that individual laymen made huge fortunes while their family priests only had the modest incomes derived from the rituals they performed.

Parsis in 19th Century

The 19th century was the advent of religious reforms mainly due to Western education and industrial enterprise. One after another purity laws were broken in pursuit of trade, or through sheer impatience and lack of time. The rich and enterprising led, and the rest of the Parsis generally followed. With the result, today we find only a small number of priests (mostly in the Atash Behram), and a few devout and highly conservative people, who keep and follow the old purity laws.

One of the early and prominent reformers was Navroji Ferdoonji who founded in 1851 the Rahnumaye Mazdayasni Sabha. Its purpose was to fight orthodoxy without rancour or malice.

In 1854 the Bombay Kadmis founded the Mulla Firoze Madressa for young priests. At first the teaching there was traditional with some works such as Persian Rivayets and the basic learning Avesta by rote. The first Zarthosti who brought scientific Western scholarship was Kharshedji Cama --- a layman. Cama while visiting Europe in 1859, studied Avesta and Pahlavi under leading scholars (Spiegel, the German scholar).

Returning to Bombay Cama gathered a small class of gifted young priests and continued the study of Avesta, Pahlavi and grammar, doctrines and history. One of the youth priests was S.D.Bharucha. During this period another Madressa was founded --- Shenshais Sir J.J.Zarthosti Madressa for teaching Avesta, Pahlavi, Sanskrit, English and Persian to young priests.

In 1860 a brilliant German philologist, Martin Haug, was teaching Sanskrit at Poona University. He made the crucial discovery, that of all the Zoroastrian scriptures only the Gathas represented the actual words of Zarathustra. Haug later collaborated with an Englishman, E.W.West, who was chief engineer on one of the Indian railways. West took up the study of Pahlavi literature, and carefully translated and edited.

Parsis in 20th & 21st Century

Early in the 20th century, we find the erosion of ruler life, and by the latter half most Zoroastrians became city dwellers. Another blow to this came from the independence movement against the British rule in India, which brought Prohibition --- Parsis were famous in Gujrat for toddy business. This brought a severe economic blow to many ruler Parsis.

By the middle of 20th century the golden age of prosperity for the Parsis was over. Hindus and Muslims



now compete strongly where Parsis once led. Rugged virtues of faith, honesty and hard work been softened. It has become a vogue for younger generation to criticize the religion and its practices --- not to understand and not to learn, but to ridicule and to discard. They began to shun hard work, and fashionable office-work became preferable to hard labour in mills and factories of economic benefit.

This is the century in which we face the acute shortage of qualified priests who could perform higher liturgical ceremonies. This in spite of 2-Madressas were founded early in 1900 --- Cama Athornan at Andheri, and Athornan Boarding at Dadar. The community asked for an educated priesthood; but the fact that after double schooling --- secular and religious ---- the economic benefits were the lowest. The result ---- all bright young qualified priests acquired other professional qualifications to better their family life. Those who have practiced mobedi in India would tell us that even respect was in short supply. Since there was little provision for the scholarly study of Zoroastrian history and religion, those who pursue them, they did it in their spare time.

Among them were a few fine examples of scholarship:

S.K.Hodivala – "Zarathustra and His Contemporaries in the Rig Veda (1913)"

"Parsis of Ancient India (1920)"

J.J.Modi - "The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsis (1922)"

M.N.Dhalla - "History of Zoroastrianism (1938)".

The best known was J.J.Modi who was the panthaki of Colaba-Agiary, a graduate of both Elphiston Institute and J.J. Madressa, and for 50 years full-time secretary of the Parsi Panchayat. He was a prolific speaker and a tireless writer.

The first Fasli Atesh-kade was established in 1937 at Bombay. It was done under the leadership of a young budding scholar and a yoazdathregar --- later a Dastur --- F.A. Bode. Among all controversies he led to install and enthroned Fasli Aalat & Atash.

1947 brought the end of British rule in India, and the partition into 2-different states India & Pakistan. It was the beginning of emigration from India & Pakistan to U.K., U.S.A. and Canada. Although the emigration increased later on, the majority of Parsis remained, either as Indians or Pakistanis, and played a great part in the life of two nations. Their contribution (in proportion to the size of the community) was a phenomenal ---- public service, armed-forces, scientist, engineers, lawyers, industrialists, writers, newspaper editors etc. India being a secular state, there was no planned discrimination against Parsis. Whatever they suffered at all as a religious community was incidental. It was not government actions, which began the steady decline of Parsi prosperity, but the enticements of new interests and diversions encouraged increasing neglect of religion and an ignorant indifference to religious customs and ceremonies accelerated the process.

This in essence is a quick glance at the history of 20th & 21st century. I consider, for our generation, it to be News-Stories albeit stale news.

Introduction to the Western Method of Zoroastrian Scholarship in India

As we know, that after Alexander conquered Iran (330 B.C.), the Avesta language began to decline and soon died. Two new languages were born – Pahlavi and Pazand – which lived upto about three (3) centuries after the final overthrow of the Persian – Zoroastran Empire, in the 7th century.



The Pahlavi version of the Avestan texts was made when the Avesta language was on the decline.

The Sanskrit version of the the Avesta was done by Neryosang Dhaval in India about 1200 A.D.

The Persian rendering appeared between 1600 and 1800 A.D.

The last independent native version of the Avestan texts, before the penetration of the influence of Western scholarship into India, was in Gujrati. Two separate versions of the Khordeh Avesta appeared in 1818; one by Dastur Faramji Shorabji Nosharivala and other by dastur Eduji Darabji Sanjana. Ervad Faramji Aspandiarji Rabadi published his Gujrati translation of the Vendidad in 1824. His son Ervad Aspandiarji Faramji Rabadi rendered (translated) the Yasna in Gujrati in 1849.

All these versions were from the Pahlavi, as the original Avestan texts were generally unintelligible. Firdausi and other Muslim writers were the sole source of the ancient history of Iran for the Parsi scholars. Since these did not include Achaemenian dynasty, the Parsi community remained ignorant of the greatness and glory of the Persian kings. It was the European scholarship which startled the English-educated Parsi youth with the information about a mighty dynasty of kings. Such was the deplorable state of Parsi scholarship, when comparative philology came to its aid from the West.

After Anquetil du Perron in 1771 published his first European translation of the Avesta, great strides have been made in Europe and America in the realm of Iranian research, replete with texts, grammars, dictionaries, translations as well as exegetical philological and archeological researches. (Rusk, Burnouf, Westergaard, Spiegel, Mills, Geldner, Jackson, Bartholomae, Darmesteter)

It was K.R. Cama, who introduced in India during 1860s the science of comparative philology and Iranian studies on Western lines. I have briefly introduced Cama's activity and his first few students under the 19th century review.

Revelation & Back to the Gathas

The first outcome of Iranian studies on Western lines was to open a can of worms, which divided Zoroastrians into Orthodox and Reformers. The new knowledge revealed:
the Gathas to be the oldest and the only composition of Zarathustra;
the Younger Avesta departed in certain respect from the Gathas;
the Later Avesta showed signs of degeneration both in substance and style;
the abstract idea spirit of the Gathas was blurred into later texts of concrete transformation.

The young Parsi scholars hailed that the Gathas as self – sufficient religious system, and the Later Avestan texts introduced exuberant outgrowth of dogmatic theology and ceremonial observances, which Zarathustra never preached. They advocated a return to the original purity of the Gathas by removing the growth that had gathered around the teachings of Zarathustra.

This was highly sacrilegious to orthodox, and brought severe protests from priests and laymen alike. Fortunately more sober opinion intervened to declare that the Gathas should be taken as the norm, and the later scriptures which are in accord with the Gathic spirit be admitted into the Zoroastrian canon.



Scriptural & Secular Literature

According to the tradition, the complete Zoroastrian literature was contained in the twenty-one (21) Nasks, which are made to correspond to the twenty-one words of Ahuna Vairya --- Yatha Ahu Vairiyo, the most sacred Zoroastrian prayer (like Gayatri, Kalma & Lords prayer).

The contents and summary of the Nasks preserved in the Pahlavi and Persian works are from the Pahlavi version of the Avestan texts.

Twenty (20) Avestan Nasks of which nineteen (19) were along with their Pahlavi commentaries, still existed in the 9th century, when Dinkard was completed.

Dinkard compiler had both the original Avesta texts and their Pahlavi version. The Avestan language had become obsolete, and he had the difficult task to interpret the Avestan texts, so he depended solely upon the commentaries of the original Avestan texts. Naturally he did not deal with the Avestan text of which the Pahlavi version did not exist.

The Extant Avesta Scriptures

The Yasna including the Gathas (72 has)

The Visparad(t) (23 kardas)

The Videvdat or Vendidad (22 pargarads)

The Yashts (22 and fragments of some more)

The Khordeh Avesta including Afringans

The Pahlavi and Pazand Texts

The Pahlavi translations with commentaries of the following Avesta texts are extant:

Yasna

Visparad

Videvdat

Niringistan

Aogemadaecha

Khordeh Avesta including short Yashts

Pahlavi translations of the longer Yashts are not extant; but the passages quoted in Denkart, Bundahishn and other Pahlavi books show that the longer Yashts were also translated, but these have been lost.

Zand i Vahuman Yasht is the Pahlavi translation of the Vahuman Yasht, of which Avesta text is lost.

Pahlavi Texts on Religious Subjects

E.W. West has listed 82 Pahlavi texts on Zoroastrian religious subjects. A few examples are:

1) Denkart (Knowledge of the Religion) completed in 881 A.D.

An encyclopedic work on religious, philosophical, historical and other subjects; including the contents of



19 Nasks. It originally had 9-books, but the first two books and the initial portion of the 3rd have been lost.

2) Bundahishn (Origin of the Creation, the Genesis)

It is the Pahlavi version of Avestan Damdat Nask. It mainly contains an account of spiritual and material worlds.

3) Dadistan I Denik (the Religious Decision)

A book containing 92 questions asked by Mihr Khurshed and replied by Manuschihr on various Zoroastrian subjects.

4) Namakiha I Manuschihr (The Epistle of Manuschihr)

Three (3) epistles written by Manuschihr on the Barashnum, in a controversy with his younger brother Zadspram.

5) The Pahlavi Rivayats (The religious Traditions)

Compiled by different authors.

Vichitakiha i Zadspram (The Selection of Zadspram)

The text contains selections from the Pahlavi works on cosmogony, life of Zarathustra, scriptures, astrology, anatomy, life after death.

Shayast La Shayast (The Proper and Improper)

It deals with religious, scio-religious customs, rituals, purity and impurity, merit and sin, and other miscellaneous subjects. Its author is not known.

Shkand Gumanik Vichar (Doubt-dispelling Decision)

It is the only work that has reached us which can be termed philosophical. It is written by Mardan Farokh at the end of 9th century. It has reached in Pazand version, and is incomplete. The original Pahlavi text is lost. The book refutes theological and philosophical views of other religions.

Danak u Menok i Khrat (The Wise man and the Spirit of Wisdom)

A book of questions and answers on Zoroastrian religion and tradition.

Arda Viraf Namak

An account of a journey to heaven and hell undertaken by Arda Viraf.

Jamaspi

This book is attributed to Jamasp, the minister of Kayanian king Kay Vishtasp and of the immediate disciple of Zarathustra. Zarathustra bestowed the gift of prognostication; foretelling future.

Pahlavi Texts on Semi – Religious, Social & Secular Subjects

Madigan i Hazar Dadistan (A code of Thousand Laws)

It is a digest of the social, civil and criminal laws of the Sasanian times.

Karnamak i Ardashir i Papakan (A History of Ardashir Papakan)

Farang i Oim (An Avesta – Pahlavi Glossary)

Farang i Pahlavik (A Glossary of Pahlavi ideograms with Iranian equivalents)

Vicharishn i Chatrang (The explanation of Chess)

Pazand Texts

Majority of all the extant Pazand texts are transcriptions from Pahlavi and have been collected and published in the book "Pazand Texts by Ervad E.K. Antia.



The extant Pazand texts may be divided into four (4) groups:

Pazand Afrins, prayers and Nirangs

Pazand texts transcribed by Neryosang Dhaval; Mino Kherad, Arda Viraf Namak and Shkand Gumanik Vichar

Rest of the Pazand texts e.g. Bundahishn (shorter version), Vohuman Yasht and Aogemadaecha)

The Pazand Rivayats which are Modern Persian texts transcribed in the Avesta script.

Literary Works In & After 13th Century

The unsettled times that followed the first settlement of the Parsis in India were unfavourable to literary activity.

Our very limited resources do not provide the precise scope of the literary activity of the first 5 or 6 centuries (upto 1200/1300 A.C.) of Parsi settlement in India.

Persian, Sanskrit & Old Gujrati Zoroastrian Literature

Persian Literature

In and after the 13th century A.C., Zoroastrian literature in Modern Persian and in Arabic – Persian script came into existence. A few example:

Zardusht Nameh by Behram Pazdu, 1278 A.C.

Saddar (prose), 15th century, " A Hundred Subjects"

Shayast la Shayast, 16th century, "Proper & Improper"

Arda Viraf Namak, 16th century

Jamasp Nameh & Minokherad both 16th century

During 15th and 16th century many of the extant Pahlavi books were translated into Persian.

Sanskrit & Old Gujrati Writings

During 12th century A.C., a number of books were translated from Pahlavi into Sanskrit by Neryosang Dhaval and others.

Neryosang Dhaval translated during 12th century A.D.;

Khordeh Avesta, Yazishn (incomplete), Mino Kherat, Shkand Gumanik Vichar and Arda Viraf Namak.

Dinidas Bahman translated Marriage Benediction into Sanskrit from Pahlavi-Pazand text before 1415 A.C. We do not know when he lived.

Aka Adhyaru wrote the well known "16 Sanskrit Shlokas" explaining Zoroastrian tenets, customs and manners; 15 shlokas to explain to Hindu king at Sanjan and the 16th shloka was addressed by the king granting permission to the Parsis to settle in his kingdom.



Other Sansrit Translators & Writers

In 1486 A.C. a mobed Shri Arddhasera of Bharuch wrote "Ashtanga – Yoga – Hridaya", a medical text.

In 16th century A.C. Mobed Chanda composed Sanskrit Shlokas on intercalation and Parsi, Hindu and Mohammedan calendars. The book is known as "Chand Prakasha".

Aogemadaecha was translated into Sanskrit by an unknown author.

Apparently "Videvdat" was also translated into Sanskrit, but is now entirely lost.

Rare Manuscripts & Their Whereabouts

The oldest and most important Avesta, Pahlavi and Sanskrit manuscripts are presently in the public and private libraries of Europe and India. The richest collection is in the University Library of Copenhagen in Denmark.

Ilm i Khshnum, Zoroastrian Occultism

From very early times some theologians in the East and the West have maintained that the sacred texts are written in a way which contains a double meaning; the one is the surface meaning for the masses, and the other is the inner or hidden meaning meant for the initiated. This is the foundation of occultism and mysticism.

During the 17th and 18th century, we come across a group of Parsi, who were not satisfied with the formal side of religion, searched for esoteric, occult and mystic interpretation of Zoroastrianism. Two books Desatir and Dabistan provide some background and history. One of the early Zoroastrian mystic was Azar Kaivan who came from Iran and settled in Patna.

In the beginning of 20th century, we find an exclusively Zoroastrian occult movement; Ilm – i Khshnum. The name is taken from the Gathic word khshnum (Ys 48:12 & 53:2). It lays emphasis on orthopraxy, and founded by Behramshah Shroff born in 1858. At the age of 17/18 he went to Peshawar to join with an uncle, and there he was taken by a caravan of Muslims, who secretly wore the kusti. He travelled with them to Iran, and was led to a place on Mount Demavand where he met the Great Zoroastrian sages called Sahebe – Dilan, and for three (3) years he was taught the esoteric meaning of the Avesta. He returned to live in Surat, where he kept silence for 30 years. Then in 1902 he began to preach, interpreting the Avesta on an elevated plane.

Behramshah gradually gained a following, including a number of Sanjana mobeds at Udvada. Three (3) well known disciples Framroze Chiniwalla the author of "Essential Origins of Zoroastrianism", Phiroze Tavariva the author of "A Manual of Khshnum", and Phiroze Masani the author of many books and translator of Pazand Literature were tireless workers to propagate Ilm – i Khshnum.

Matters of Controversy



Among the many controversies of 18th, 19th, and 20th century we will briefly look at the three (3) most vocal ones.

Conversion

Irani Zoroastrians have never been opposed to conversion. The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz provides the answer that it is proper to tie the kusti and insturct (Hindu) servant boys and girls, if they have faith in the Good Religion. It further states to administer the barashnum. However there has been much controversy concerning the matter among Parsis of India and Pakistan. The orthodox maintain the traditional position, that blood and faith are a linked heritage, which can be transmitted through the male line alone. Some even refuse to accept the child of a Zoroastrian father and a non – Zoroastrian mother. The question is of considerable practical importance, since it affects admission to Fire Temples and to all major institutions and religious observances.

The three (3) famous court cases:

Saklat vs Bella case in Burma, judgement of 1915;
Sir Dinshaw Petit vs Jeejeebhoy, judgement of 1906; &
Vansda case, judgement of 1943.

The controversy still engulfs Zoroastrians on all continents.

Reincarnation/Rebirth

Reincarnation or Rebirth is a most controversial doctrine amongst Parsis. The proponents argue that throughout the scriptures there is nothing explicit to denounce the doctrine of rebirth, and out of 21 Nasks, we have barely the contents of about three (3) Nasks.

The opponents refute that the Rebirth is one of many solutions put forward by the human mind to solve the mysteries of the life after death, and while 21 Nasks are lost, the contents of 19 of them are known in the form of extensive summaries in the "Dinkard".

The two fore most proponents are Dastur K. S. Daub and S.J. Bulgaria, and two opponents are Dastur M.N. Dallas and I.J. Taraporewala.

The scriptural evidence from the Gathas as given by the proponents are mostly based on two (2) Gathic verses; Yasna 30:10 and 49:11, and the pointed words Jajenti and Paiti yainti respectively. They translate Jajenti as "repeated" and Paiti yainti as "do come back". The opponents translate them "continuously strive" and "go (forth) to meet" or "come back"; no specific place is mentioned.

Kanga's translation too, differs from the proponents.



Calendars (Qadimi & Shenshai)

Even before Dastur Jamasp Vilayati or Kerman, Iran arrived in 1720 at Surat to resolve the controversy of funerary practices; the Zoroastrians of India were aware of the month's difference in the calendar between Iran and India.

In 1746 a group of priests and laymen in Surat decided to adopt the Irani calendar, calling it as the Qadmi or "ancient" one. Thus the Qadmi movement was born, which in general gave preference to Irani over Parsi usages. Most Parsi held to the calendar of their forefathers, calling it as Shenshais or "royalists".

At its height the dispute between Shenshais and Qadmis produced so deep a schism that it necessitated the founding of separate place of worship. Thus in 1783 Dady Seth had a Qadmi Atash Behram consecrated in Bombay, with Mulla Kaus as its first high priest. In 1823 two rival Atash Behrams, one Shenshai and one Qadmi, were installed in Surat.

In Bombay Kharshedji Cama became convinced that the original Zoroastrian calendar must have remained in harmony with the seasons. He stressed that the intercalation of one extra day every four years had simply been neglected in the confusions of past history. Accordingly in 1906 Zarthosti Faslī Sal Mandal was founded. Its aim was to persuade the whole community to adopt such a calendar, with a fixed Navruz and leap – day every fourth year, but its members increased only slowly. Cama's effort to persuade the whole community fell short, and Zoroastrians now have three (3) calendars.

Conclusion

We have now reached the completion of our historical account down to the present day; albeit briefly. Nearly four thousand years have elapsed since Zarathustra gave his first sermon to the people of Iran. After withstanding the exodus from Iran, we survived with pride and brought back fame of our illustrious forefathers. After landing and sought asylum in India, they secured a place in the social, intellectual and industrial life of teeming millions of India. They made vast fortunes and have given equally vast sums in charity without distinction of caste, colour or creed. But we can not always live on past glory.

Many burning issues of yesterdays and today's are the flash – points; ritual and ceremony, mixed marriage, navjote of children of mixed marriage, conversion of spouses and juddins, funerary rites etc. We are faced with variety of opinions from extreme reformist to strict orthodox.

We need open mind and wisdom to steer away from ultimate empathy. Ceremonies, rituals and certain restrictions are part and parcel of almost all the established religions. Even modern societies have them. Although righteousness does not rests on observance of ceremonies, rituals etc., it is difficult for human beings to live by philosophy alone.

Modern civilization, along with providing comfort, renders man with suffering, restlessness and discomfort. Zarathustra's religion is the best sedative for mankind. It is the solace and compass in distress and difficulties. It was a comfort before, it is now and so will be forever. May saner minds prevail.

Atha Jamyat Yatha Afrinami, "May it be as I entreat".