

Zoroastrianism in India

JESSE S. PALSETIA

Introduction

THE PARSIS ARE A community in India that trace their ancestry and religious identity to pre-Islamic, Zoroastrian Iran (pre-651 CE). The Parsis presently number approximately 110,000 individuals worldwide, and 57,245 individuals in India according to the *Census of India 2011*. This chapter examines the history of the Parsis and the emergence of a unique religious community in India. The Parsis are the descendants of the Zoroastrians of Iran who migrated to and settled in India in order to preserve their religion. Zoroastrianism is the religion associated with the teachings and revelation of the Iranian prophet and priest Zarathustra (or Zoroaster, as he was referred to by the ancient Greeks). Zarathustra and his religious message date from the second millennium BCE (c. 1200-1000 BCE). Zoroastrianism was the first major religion of Iran and a living faith in the ancient world. Zoroastrianism shares with Hindu (Vedic) religion ancient roots in the common history of the Indo-Iranian peoples.

The oldest Zoroastrian religious works are the *Gāthās*: a collection of esoteric songs, poems, and thoughts composed in Old Iranian, later referred to as Gāthic Avestan or Old Avestan, and ascribed to Zarathustra and his culture. The *Gāthās* intimate a world of good and evil attributed to antagonistic good and evil spirits. Zoroastrianism represents an original attempt to unify the existing ancient Iranian dualistic tradition within an ethical framework. Early Zoroastrianism held human nature to be essentially good, and modern Zoroastrianism continues to summarize the duty of humans as

following the path of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. Zoroastrianism was practiced under all the Iranian dynasties of antiquity, and became the official imperial religion under the Sasanian Dynasty, until its fall in 651 CE. Under the Sasanians, the extant religious texts were canonized, and elaborate religious rituals and a fully developed theology emerged. The Parsis incorporate the entire tradition of Zoroastrianism from Zarathustra through Sasanian Zoroastrianism as part of their religious heritage. They seek to preserve its essential elements while reinterpreting Zoroastrianism in the context of their own evolution as a community.

The Zoroastrians of India came to be known as Parsis (Persians), though the term 'Parsi' was not used by them in their early history in India. Parsi writings prior to the eighteenth century employ the terms 'Zarthoshti' and 'Māzdayasni' to signify their religious identity as followers of the message of Zarathustra and as worshippers of Ahura Mazdā; they use 'behdin' or 'andhyaru' to describe Parsis of lay or priestly background, respectively. The story of the Parsis begins with their arrival in India, which, according to Parsi tradition, was in the eighth century, *c.* 716. The account of the Persian refugees' exodus from Iran and their arrival in India is almost entirely based on two narrative works in Persian: *Qisseh-i Sanjan* (Story of Sanjan), written in 1599 by the Parsi priest Behman Kaikobad Sanjana, and *Qisseh-i Zartushtian-i Hendustan*, written by Shapurji Maneckji Sanjana between 1765 and 1805. These accounts together relate the exodus of the Zoroastrians from Iran in order to safeguard their religion, and their peripatetic wanderings to their arrival in India settling in the Gujarat town of Sanjan. The traditional accounts provide no exact dates or chronology for the Parsis' journey; however, they provide an important source and way to appreciate the Parsis' traditional understanding of their history. By tradition, the members of the Parsi community of India are held to be the descendants of the original Persian pilgrims and refugees who landed on the western coast of India. The traditional accounts do not discount the possibility of more than one migration; and the earliest physical evidence of a Zoroastrian community in India dates from the tenth century.

The arrival of the Parsis in India posed the question of how the small minority would integrate itself into the new dominant social

milieu while retaining its identity. The history of the Parsis may well be interpreted as one of preserving and shaping a common community identity in India in the midst of historical change. Parsi tradition relates that a Parsi priest recited sixteen Sanskrit *shlokas* (distich verses) before the Hindu rajah Jādi Rana. The Sanjan *Shlokas* are the oldest extant Parsi literature in India. Conditions were attached to the Parsis' settlement that included them explaining their religion to the rajah and his subjects, forsaking their weapons and becoming peaceable subjects, adopting the local language and dress, and observing the performance of their marriage ceremonies after sunset. The story conveys the process of acculturation and assimilation that had begun with the Parsis' arrival in India. Moreover, the justification of the Parsis' cultural assimilation, conditional to their compact made in Sanjan, forms part of the cultural narrative and etiology of the community. The settlement of the Parsis in India over the centuries witnessed an emerging pattern of responses, which I characterize as 'accommodation, adaptation, and agency'. The Parsis accommodated themselves to their social environment, adapted the mechanisms of the social milieu to their requirements, and were agents of social change. Above all, this response dictated the Parsis' active involvement in exploiting and shaping those factors that bore directly on their welfare and Parsi identity.

Early Settlement and Religious Developments

The Parsis' acculturation and assimilation in India was actually a long process. The Zoroastrians came to India with their own religious, cultural, and social norms. In particular, the Parsis guarded their religious norms. Over time, the Parsis' religious, cultural, and social norms evolved to meet their circumstances in India. Tradition holds the Parsis consecrated their first *Ātash Bahrām* (sacred fire) in c. 720 at Sanjan in Gujarat. The *Ātash Bahrām* of the Parsis, which they venerated as the symbol of God, was consecrated with ritual objects brought from Iran, signifying the spiritual and physical tie to the sacred fires of Iran. The Parsis have safeguarded the original *Ātash Bahrām* to this day. The fire-ritual belongs to the Indo-Iranian heritage of Zoroastrianism. The kindling and housing of sacred fires by the

Parsis saw the rise of temple-worship in India. The Sanjan fire remained the only sacred fire until 1765 when a second *Ātash Bahrām* and temple were consecrated in Navsari. Until the latter half of the eighteenth century, the Parsis adhered to the practice of worshipping before hearth fires. In the thirteenth century, the Parsis of Navsari built a *dar-e mihr* (house of worship) where they brought a hearth fire for the performance of high rituals, and took the fire back to a home once the ceremony was completed. In the latter eighteenth century, one of the first *Ādarān* fire-temples to permanently house a sacred fire was built in Siganpur near Surat by Lovji Wadia, and another one was built in Surat in 1771. In 1823, the third and fourth *Ātash Bahrām* of the Parsis were consecrated in Surat. By the eighteenth century, the *Ātash Bahrām* of Sanjan had come to be known as the Iran Shah (Fire of the King of Iran). In the fifteenth century, the Sanjan *Ātash Bahrām* was moved to Bansda, Navsari, Surat, and Bulsar before finally coming to Udwada in 1742. In 1829, the present fire-temple was erected through the charity of Dadabhoy Pestonjee Wadia (1802-85).

The fire-temples of the Parsis take their designation from one of three grades of sacred fire they house, signifying the primacy of the fire. The first grade, *Ātash Bahrām*, is collected and consecrated from sixteen kinds of fire, and is kept perpetually alight and attended by the high priests. The *Ātash Ādarān* (literally, 'fires') is consecrated from four kinds of fire. Finally, the *Ātash Dādḡāh* is the fire of the household and requires no special ritual of consecration. The *Ādarān* and the *Dādḡāh* temple or house of worship is also known as an *agiary*, which is the Parsi-Gujarati word for fire-temple.

The Indian religious milieu influenced the development of Parsi temple-worship. The Parsis may well have imitated their Hindu neighbours' form of worship. The nature of temple-worship, however, became unique to the Parsis of India. The fire-temples were reserved exclusively for Parsis, as the Parsis sought to isolate the fire and their religious practice from non-Parsis. The fire-temples remained simple structures until the nineteenth century when Parsi wealth saw the creation of unique temples whose architecture imitated Persian Achaemenid style. At the same time, the fire ritual became elaborate with the rise of temples. The Parsis continued the Iranian practice of

fire-oblation (or feeding the fire), known as the *Būi* ceremony, accompanied by the *Ātash Niyāyesh* (prayer to fire) performed five times a day by the priest. The ceremony became more elaborate within the temple as priests fed the fire with sandalwood and other fragrant materials, and developed unique sacerdotal customs. Parsis also expanded on the practice in Iran of consecrating a fire on a stone slab or plinth, and 'enthroned' the sacred fire upon a large covered urn or censer, called *āfargāniun*, situated on top of a slab.

By the twelfth century, the Parsis had settled throughout coastal and provincial Gujarat in places like Kathiawar, Broach, Variav, Anklesvar, Cambay, and Navsari. In Broach, the Parsis built their first *dakhma* or Tower of Silence. A *dakhma* is a circular, roofless walled structure, enclosing a central well or ossuary (*bhandār*), for which the bodies of the deceased are consigned. The bodies are devoured by vultures and carrion crows or desiccated by the sun as part of the Zoroastrian funerary ritual of *Dakhmenashini*. The term 'Tower of Silence' is a British description coined by Robert Xavier Murphy, a translator for the Government of India. A brick *dakhma* was built sometime before 1300, and a second tower was added in 1309 to service the inhabitants of Broach. Consigning a corpse to the *dakhma* reflected the Parsi practice of not defiling the natural elements, and symbolized the Parsis' sense of equality in resting together. *Dakhmas* built in provincial settings served the needs of local and neighbouring communities. In 1531, a stone *dakhma* was erected in Navsari, and around 1600 the first *dakhma* was erected in Surat (made possible by donations of the Parsis). From the sixteenth century, Surat became a major centre of Parsi settlement and commerce, and saw many additions to the *dakhma*.

Priesthood

The priesthood constitutes a major institution among the Parsis. The traditional Parsi narratives imply the early leadership role ascribed to priests. In India, a more specialized and hierarchically differentiated priesthood emerged than existed in Iran. The Parsi priesthood (*āthornan*) is a hereditary occupational class for men. The Parsi priesthood is ranked according to ritual duties into three grades: the

dastūr (high priest), the *mōbad*, and the *hērbad* or *ērvad*. The Parsi priesthood has no head or pope, though the members of great priestly families are the heads of *panthaks* or ecclesiastical districts. In the thirteenth century, five *panthaks*, centred around Sanjan, Navsari, Anklesvar, Broach, and Cambay, were established. In 1142, Kamdin Zarthosht was the first priest to arrive in Navsari from Sanjan, to service the religious needs of the growing Parsi population. The priests of Navsari descend from two families of priests that settled there in the early thirteenth century. Navsari became the headquarters of the Parsi priesthood and the centre of religious authority. Parsi settlements sent for priests from Navsari as their populations grew. Disputes between priestly centres were settled by an exchange of missives, or adjudicated by convening special conclaves of priests (*anjumans*). The priesthood was also essential in maintaining Parsi religious knowledge. The priests of Cambay first preserved religious texts brought to India by the Iranian priests Rustam Meherawan and his great-great nephew Meherawan Kaikhusro in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Parsis initiated the *Rivayat* correspondence between the Parsis and Iranians on Zoroastrian normative customs and procedures. In the seventeenth century, Hormazyar Framarz, Darab Hormazyar, and Barzu Kamdin classified what were now twenty-two *Rivayats*. Up to the rise of a new lay leadership in Bombay in the late eighteenth century, the Parsi priesthood exercised a leadership role among Parsis. The Parsi priest Dastur Meherji Rana and his family were important leaders from Navsari and were of service to the Mughal Emperor Akbar; and the Dordi family served the Mughal court in the reign of Jahangir. Among the Parsis, select Parsi priests also came to be honoured and venerated for their religiosity and service to the community.

Assimilation and Change

By the medieval period, Parsis had successfully integrated into Indian society, which, in large measure, involved the Parsis' assimilation. The Parsis' adoption of the languages of India was the most conspicuous example of this assimilation. Persian was effectively abandoned and

forgotten in favour of a dialect version of the Gujarati. Parsis took to the majority of local livelihoods and professions. Many of the Gujarati names they adopted, particularly in the nineteenth century, denoted the place where they settled and the professions they took up. It is significant that prayers and religious ritual continued to be recited in Avestan. The Parsis also adapted Indian dress norms, the observance of many festivals and ceremonies, and some of the rules of purity and commensality. For example, the Parsis followed the taboo against the eating of beef or pork, adhered to by Hindus and Muslims, respectively, according to their proximity to either community. Some of the social practices of the Indian setting tested and threatened Parsi identity. Child marriage, bigamy, and the worship and frequenting of non-Zoroastrian religious sites were practices adhered to by some Parsis. The Parsis, as a community, recognized these practices as borrowed from Hindus and Muslims, and that they were in opposition to their traditional norms. Repeated attempts would be made to remove these practices. The Parsis' antagonism to aspects of their social environment, in the midst of their general assimilation, is a theme in Parsi history.

The Indian social milieu also assisted Parsi exclusiveness. Indian caste customs permitted the Parsis to remain peacefully apart from other Indian communities. Whereas the Parsis adhered to local rules of commensality, they also retained the purity laws of Zoroastrianism. Parsis meticulously observed the protection and purification of metal, earth, water, fire, plants, and animals, as well as the rules regarding personal conduct and purity in daily life. Purity rules governed personal hygiene and daily ablutions, bodily excretions, childbirth, and sexual conduct and relations. For example, shorn hair and cut nails were wrapped up and buried, as both substances once removed from the body were considered the tools of evil. The Parsis also continued the practice observed in Iran of secluding women during their menstrual period, in a special room or building known as the *dashtānestān* (place of menstruating women), because they were considered ritually impure during this time. Orthodox Parsis observed the practice until the nineteenth century. Orthodox Parsi females to this day abstain from temple and ritual observances during their menstruation cycle. The Parsis also abstained from consuming meat

for a number of days following the death of a relation, or on special occasions and ceremonies, because it was considered inauspicious at that time.

Rituals of protection and purification among the Parsis included devotional acts and various forms of physical purification. Prayer was a central component of daily life among both the laity and priests. Devout Parsis recited various prayers known as the *bāj* at the beginning of each of the five *gāhs* or divisions of the day, on special occasions, and before and after engaging in many daily activities such as ablutions and eating. The *Kustī* ceremony is the central prayer ritual of the Parsis, and consists in untying and tying the *kustī* (thread cord) around the waist of the *sudrah* (white undershirt) worn by initiated Zoroastrians. Parsis perform the *Kustī* ceremony daily, and the medieval Parsis preceded it with the performance of the *Pādyāb* ritual of washing parts of the body with *gōmēz* or unconsecrated bull's urine before engaging in religious activity. Many of the purity rituals of the Parsis were simplified or fell into disuse over time, but prayer remained or gained particular importance among the Parsis.

The ceremonies surrounding death were particularly important because the greatest pollution resulted from contact with carrion (*nasā*). The Parsis developed a special hereditary class of individuals known as *nasāsālārs* to handle and carry a corpse into the *dakhma*, and maintain the structure. The *Barashnom* (*Barašnūm*) was the most elaborate Zoroastrian ritual purification ceremony among the Parsis, and it ritually purified and reintegrated an individual with other Zoroastrians. The *Barashnom-e noh-shab* (ablution of the nine nights) consisted of a Parsi undergoing successive ritual cleansings in retreat for nine nights in a secluded pit or area. Parsi observances and rituals continued to evolve in India. Elaborate purification ceremonies and rites for relatively minor pollutions were dispensed with, simplified, or were delegated to priests to act on behalf of the laity. The *Rīman* ritual, practiced solely among the Parsis of India, effectively superseded the *Barashnom* ceremony, eliminating the nine days and nights retreat in favour of an individual ritually traversing nine enclosures or 'pure' spaces within a short period of time. It is significant that as the Parsis abandoned many of the purity dictates of their ancestors they composed new customs of community conduct in benefit of Parsi identity.

The use of purification compounds became a central element of Parsi religious and priestly culture. The *nīrangdīn* ceremony was performed to consecrate the *gōmēz*, or bull's urine, and make it *nīrang*. The ceremony is described in the *Pahlavi Vendidād*, the *Epistles of Manušcihr*, and the Pahlavi text *Nērang Nērangdēn Yaštān az Nibištāg Ērān*. In the ceremony, hairs and urine from a sacred white bull called the *varasyō* are gathered with objects also purified for the objective. Upon which two priests who have undergone the *Barashnum* ceremony recite or celebrate a series of *Yasnas* encompassing some seventeen days and perform a final *Bāj* ceremony consecrating the bull's urine or *nīrang*. The consecrated liquid is used in various ceremonies as a purification compound for priests and laity. Overtime, the *nīrangdīn* ceremony would become the principal purification ceremony of the Parsi priesthood. The Indian setting undoubtedly influenced other practices among the Parsis. The Parsis eliminated the ancient Zoroastrian practice of killing *khrafstra* (noxious) creatures such as rats, pests, and insects believed created by the Evil Spirit, while maintaining the theoretical link between certain creatures and evil. The Parsis' increasing veneration of the cow and bull was also clearly evident in the *Nīrangdīn* ceremony.

What is most significant is that the nature of caste-based India influenced the formation of the most important Parsi social pattern: endogamy. Endogamy, the practice of marrying within the tribe or group, defined the social and religious character of the Parsis of India. Zoroastrianism enjoins proselytism and conversion. Since the medieval period and the establishment of Parsi religious institutions exclusively for Parsis, the Parsis used endogamy as a means of group identity, distinguishing themselves as a non-proselytizing community. Moreover, the Parsis of India evolved a strict endogamy along religious and ethnic lines. The protection of the religious identity became identified with marriage within the ethnic group of the Indian Zoroastrian community. For the Parsi, religious identity as a Zoroastrian and ethnic identity as a Parsi became synonymous. At the same time, within the community, the Parsis recognized a moral and religious equality, and endogamy did not translate into strict marriage patterns (e.g. lineal, kinship and clan, and occupational lines) among Parsis as it did among Hindus. The origin of Parsi endogamy has been debated and has been seen as the product of a long history that

stretched from the Zoroastrians of Iran becoming non-proselytizing following the Islamization of Iran and the Parsis of India continuing this practice as well as adhering to caste customs in India. Equally, endogamy seems to have emerged as a particular Parsi response to safeguard and strictly define Parsi religious identity from the Indian religious environment sometime following the Parsis' arrival in India. The adoption of endogamy by the Parsis of India served to foster a sense of a self-conscious and self-defined community; however, it opened a contentious debate within the community over identity and community membership, including to the present day.

Parsis and the Colonial Period

Outside of their religion, the Parsis are known in history as a result of their tremendous accomplishments in the age of empire. Parsi contact with Europeans and the West would transform their social and cultural state, and have an important impact on their religious outlook. In 1322, the French missionary Jordanus gave the first European account of the Parsis of Broach, referring to them as the race of pagans that worshipped fire and exposed their dead to vultures in roofless towers. Portuguese and English accounts of the Parsis followed. In 1615 Edward Terry, chaplain to Sir Thomas Roe, the ambassador to the Mughal Emperor Jahangir from 1615 to 1618, gave the first English account of the Parsis, noting the race of heathens called Parsis, living among the Hindus, but in many ways differing from them. Parsi contact with Europeans led to the rise of Parsi commercial and economic prosperity. The rise of Parsi commercial wealth formed the basis of an economic, social, and religious transformation of the Parsi community, and shaped the perceptions and self-perceptions of the Parsis. One of Parsis' greatest accomplishments was sensing the opportunity for commercial collaboration with the Europeans, and this owed in part to the process of assimilation, accommodation, adaptability, and agency to safeguard their personal interests, community, and identity as Parsis at all times and under all conditions.

From the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the Parsis transitioned from minor hawkers and traders provisioning Europeans to major businessmen controlling great commercial, credit and finance,

shipping, and industrial concerns that stretched from India to Britain, East Asia, and the Indian Ocean Basin. In the late eighteenth century, Bombay became the headquarters of the Parsi community of India, as Parsis took advantage of the security and commercial opportunities of the new English colony. Members of the Banaji, Bharda, Cama, Davar, Dorabji, Jivanji, Modi, Nanabhai, Panday, Patel, Petit, and Wadia, families were some of the first prominent Parsi residents of Bombay. In 1735, Lowji Nusserwanji Wadia came to Bombay from Surat by invitation as shipbuilder and later master builder to the English. Parsi enterprise drew the community to Bombay making the Parsis some of the first permanent inhabitants of Bombay. Bombay emerged as a major entrepôt on the west coast of India, and in 1780 the first census taken by the Bombay Grain Committee showed 3,087 Parsis out of a population of 33,444 individuals. By the nineteenth century, according to the English visitor Maria Graham, the Parsis were regarded as the richest class of inhabitants that controlled an extensive commercial empire in Bombay and western India. Parsis also had a global impact as they were some of the first Indians to be part of the 'country trade' trans-shipping goods between India and China. The trade with China ensured the commercial success of India for the West, and opened a new chapter in Asian globalization. Great Parsi wealth emerged from the China trade, principally in cotton, silk, and opium from the middle of the eighteenth to the first half of the nineteenth century. Parsis also bore the risks associated with an overseas trade including the loss of shipments, the disadvantages of the costs of consignments, delays in credit remittance, and price fluctuations. The Readymoneys, Banajis, Bhardas, Camas, Wadias, and Jejeebhoy were involved in the China trade, and facilitated the rise of the first Zoroastrian communities outside Iran and India. Hirji Jivanji Readymoney was the first Parsi to sail to China in 1756. By the 1830s, Parsi communities appeared in Canton, Amoy, and Shanghai, and the first Parsi burial ground outside India appeared in Macao in 1829. Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy was the premier Parsi China trader, making five personal trips to China from India, and establishing a shipping and commercial family business empire. Jejeebhoy translated his wealth into great charitable projects in Bombay and western India following his trade.

Parsi enterprise in the middle of the nineteenth century built on

the accomplishments of previous generations. Trade wealth provided for the rise of the banking and insurance, cotton, and manufacturing industries partly in Parsi hands. Members of the Banaji, Dadiseth, Petit, Readymoney and Wadia families were all involved in the financial history of Bombay. The Petit, Wadia and Tata families were the largest Parsi business concerns associated with the textile industry. Dinsha Manakji Petit was one of Bombay's wealthiest men. In 1877, Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata introduced new spinning equipment to produce yarns of international quality at his cotton mills, the Empress Mills and the Swadeshi Mills. The Tata business empire would diversify into iron and steel production and many other concerns, and set the standard for industrial growth, technical innovation, and economic self-sufficiency in India.

From the earliest of contacts, the Parsis utilized the ties to imperialism in benefit of identity. In the early nineteenth century, the leading Parsi traders and businessmen formed the new leadership among the Parsis, known as the *shetias*, effectively supplanting the Parsi priesthood. The *shetias* commercial and socio-political ties to the British saw them recognized as leaders of the Parsi community and Bombay colonial society. The Parsi *shetias* utilized the *panchayat* (community council) and their ties to the British to exert authority over the entire Parsi community. At its height between 1815 and 1840, the Parsi *panchayat* of Bombay passed *bundobasts* (rulings) supported by the Parsi *anjuman* (community meeting) on Parsi conduct and norms, and harshly punished wayward Parsis who flouted community standards in order to distinguish Parsi social and religious identity from other Indian communities. The authority of the *panchayat* continued till the 1860s when the Parsis enacted legislation (the Parsi Laws of 1865) to safeguard their personal laws. After 1865, the *panchayat* was transformed into the custodian of the major charities and trusts of the Parsis.

Parsi Charity

The trade and industrial wealth of the Parsis also made for great Parsi charity that benefited Parsi religious identity. Parsi charity was a significant factor in the strengthening of a sense community, self-

image, and community reputation among the modern Zoroastrians. The Parsis forged charitable linkages within the community, within the larger Indian social milieu, within colonial public culture, in post-independence India, and around the world. Between 1670 and 1783, the major religious infrastructure of the community including the *dakhma* and major fire-temples of the Parsis were built in Bombay as a result of individual and collective Parsi charity. Between 1670 and 1675, Hirjibhai Vacha Modi had built the first *dakhma* or Tower of Silence. By 1844, seven more Towers were erected by prominent Parsis. In 1673, Hirji Vacha Modi also built the first *ādash ādarān* or Parsi fire-temple in the Fort district of Bombay, which survived until the fire of 1803. In 1709, Banaji Limji built the second Parsi fire-temple in Bombay; and in 1783, the first *ādash babrām* or cathedral fire-temple of the Parsis in Bombay was built through the charity of Dadibhai Nusserwanji Dadiseth. Furthermore, Parsi charity extended to the larger Indian milieu and included the building of water tanks, dharamshalas (rest centres), land reclamation schemes, and relief efforts in times of drought, famine, and fire for the use of all Indians. Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, the wealth of the industrial era fuelled new Parsi charitable energies. Between 1850 and 1910, the greater part of the religious endowments in the Parsi community was constructed. A fire temple, *dakhma*, or burial ground emerged every year somewhere in India. The greater part of the modern Parsi social infrastructure also took shape. Between the 1830s to the 1930s, over 400 schools, libraries, hospitals, and medical facilities were built or funded, principally for Parsis, with over 200 additional projects and funds going to various non-Parsi causes inside and outside India. The greater part of modern Parsi social housing took shape. Both individual charity and charitable trusts constructed over forty *baugs* (housing colonies), and dharamshalas. The middle of the twentieth century saw another great wave of Parsi social housing building. Between 1909 and 1939, Parsi charities showed a total annual income of over Rs. 1 million, and reaching a one-year record of Rs. 7½ million in 1934. Parsi charity marked a major achievement of the Parsis of India. Furthermore, Parsi charity became a potent symbol of Parsi identity. The charitable persona of the Parsis of India was established as a result of the munificence.

Parsi charity also transformed the relationship with Iran. In 1853, Parsi concern for the Zoroastrians of Iran led to the creation of the Society for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Zoroastrians in Persia and a relief fund under supervision of the cotton merchant M.F. Panday. In 1854, the businessman Manekji Limji Hataria reported on the conditions of the Iranians of Yazd and Kerman, which led to the Parsis mobilizing their wealth and socio-political contacts in India and Britain to materially aid the Iranians. The efforts of the Parsis on behalf of the Iranian Zoroastrians marked a historic change in the relationship between the diaspora and ancestral communities. The Bombay Parsis effectively assumed the leadership of the world Zoroastrian diaspora. The Amelioration Society made evident the Parsis' ability to operate on the international setting. By the second half of the nineteenth century the United Kingdom became the second major centre of Parsi settlement and influence. The first Zoroastrian diaspora in the West took shape in Britain in London and in 1861, the Zoroastrian Association, later to be the Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE), began as the first Zoroastrian community institutional body and Asian association in the Western world.

Educational and Religious Reform

The contact with the West and the economic prosperity of the Parsis made for educational advancement. Education became a marker of Zoroastrian identity, and included the equal educational development of females alongside males. In 1827 Parsi *shetias* contributed to the financing and building of the forerunner of the government-run Elphinstone Institution. In 1849 the Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy Parsi Benevolent Institution was established by the merchant-prince Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy at a cost to him of Rs. 4,44,000, and was the first indigenous educational institution in western India. In October 1849 the Students' Literary and Scientific Society, founded a year earlier by British and Indians to educate Indian students, included females for the first time in school classes. In 1858, the Parsi Girls' School Association was started specifically for the promotion of Parsi female education. In 1863, the Alexandra Native Girls' English Institution started by the Parsi reformer Manockji Cursetji Shroff highlighted the important strides Parsis and Indians had made towards

female education and rights. The balanced education of males and females became a standard among the Parsis. Educated reformers such as Naoroji Fardunji, S.S. Bengallee, K.R. Cama, Cornelia Sorabji, Dadabhai Naoroji, Dinsha Wacha, Pherozezshah Mehta, and Bhikaji Cama would champion social, religious, and political reform within and without the Zoroastrian community.

Religious reform became an essential task for educated Parsis. The reformers were inspired by the rise of comparative religious studies in the West and were often guided by Protestant scholars. The reformers reinterpreted Zoroastrianism as propounding a unique ethical monotheism. They also represented the frustration of many Parsis with the state of their religious knowledge and practices. In 1851, the Rahunmai Mazdayasnan Sabha (Religious Reform Association) was started by Naoroji Fardunji and Dadabhai Naoroji, and was supported financially by K.N. Cama. Reform was put forward through public addresses, circulars, and pamphlets. The reformers' studies led them to understand Zoroastrianism as fragmented religion that had parted from the original authentic teachings of the prophet Zarathustra. For the reformers, the *Gāthās* or original works of Zarathustra became the chief if not sole source of appreciating Zoroastrianism. The reformers regarded Zoroastrianism as a historically founded world religion that propounded a unique ethical monotheism. In 1861, the pre-eminent religious scholar among the Parsis K.R. Cama, who had studied Avestan and Pahlavi in Europe, established a private class for priests in Avestan and Pahlavi at his residence in Bombay; and in 1864, he opened the Zarthoshti Din-ni Khol-Karnari Mandli or Society for Furthering Research on Zoroastrianism towards Parsi religious reform. Through their works and researches the reformers brought about a new understanding of Zoroastrianism that shaped how a generation of Parsis defined themselves. At the same time, the reformers outlook parted from the Parsis' traditional understanding and observance of their religion. The reformers' agenda included simplifying Parsi religious practices and rituals, translating prayers into the vernacular as part of liturgy, changing the Parsi calendar, and better educating the priests. Through their work and research, the reformers brought about a new understanding of Zoroastrianism that shaped how a generation of Parsis defined itself.

Pluralism of religious outlook had emerged among Parsis. Religious

reform and debate led to competing religious outlooks among the Parsis. In 1863, the Rahe Rastnumai Zarathustrian Sabha (True Zoroastrian Way) and its newspaper *Suryodaya* (Sunrise) was started by the orthodox Mancherji Hormasji Cama. The Sabha advocated a defence of orthodox religion. For the first time, orthodoxy and heterodoxy of religious outlook and identity emerged as labels among the Parsis. Significantly, both orthodox and heterodox outlooks existed within the one Parsi tradition, introducing a tension to Parsi identity. Yet for other Parsis, more esoteric philosophies like theosophy, popularized by H.P. Blavatsky, in India became popular. By the twentieth century, the debate over Parsi identity was distinguished by various religious perspectives including reformist, progressive, traditionalist, conservative, orthodox, and ultra-orthodox outlooks, philosophies, and ideologies. To some extent, both reformist and orthodox outlooks were removed from the ordinary religious concerns and practices of the majority of Parsis; at the same time, they highlighted contentious issues within the community without being able to bring about a resolution.

The Debate over Parsi Identity

By the twentieth century, no question was more contentious among the Parsis than the definition of 'Parsi' and the admission of individuals into the Parsi community of India. Since the first half of the nineteenth century, Parsis through their *anjuman* or community meetings had maintained their belief in a strict endogamy. The Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act of 1865 defined a Parsi marriage as between a Parsi male and female. In the twentieth century, Parsis turned to the law courts to settle issues of identity. Major court cases provided legal opinions but no resolution to the debate over identity and religious conversion. In the the *Parsi Panchayat* case of 1906-12 before the High Court of Bombay, the Bombay Parsi Panchayat was challenged concerning the Parsis' exclusion of individuals converted to Zoroastrianism from the use of Parsi community institutions. As the institution responsible for the maintenance of a majority of the properties and charities of the Parsis, including the *dakhma* in Bombay, the *panchayat* played a major role in defining who was a Parsi and who in turn was entitled

to the use of Parsi institutions. Consequently, it became the target of those who sought to open community membership to individuals born non-Parsi but confirmed as Zoroastrians. While the suit involved the validity of the trustees, the underlying case in fact centred around the claim of the French lady, Suzanne Brier, who had converted to Zoroastrianism and was subsequently married in 1903 to Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata, a plaintiff in the case, to use Parsi institutions. Having converted to Zoroastrianism, it was claimed, she and other legitimate converts were entitled to the use and benefit of all institutions and funds, including fire-temples and Towers of Silence, accorded to other Parsis. The High Court, however, ruled that the historical religious institutions of the Parsis such as *dakhmas* and fire-temples established by trusts were reserved for ethnic Parsis. The commentary of the Parsi judge, Dinsha Davar, also provided a working definition of 'Parsi', that included individuals born into the Parsi and Irani communities of India, as well as children initiated into the Parsi fold through the male line. Davar's *obiter dicta* opinion had re-emphasized the Parsis' views on identity and conversion since the nineteenth century. At the same time, in recognizing children initiated into the Parsi fold through the male line, Davar had made a right what had previously been an exception only sanctified by a powerful *panchayat*. Consequently, the judgement left unresolved the issue of females born of Parsi mothers by non-Parsi fathers. Indeed, the broader rights of Parsi females who married outside the community and sought to maintain their and their children's rights as Parsis became acute in the twentieth century. In 1916 the initiation of female children born of non-Parsi fathers became the issue in the *Rangoon Navjote* case. After a judgement in 1918 and two appeals, a final judgement by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in Britain in 1925 upheld the definition and prescriptive standard of who is a Parsi elaborated by Justice Davar. At the same time, the judicial committee left it entirely to the Parsis to determine how to accommodate converts to Zoroastrian with equal rights with ethnic Parsis in India.

The process of defining identity through institution, legislation, and finally the law courts came full circle by the twentieth century. The modern Parsis continue to be a paradox of accomplishment and division. Prominent Parsis—too many to individually name—are

among India's highest cultural, economic, educational, judicial, journalistic, military, political, scientific ranks and institutions. The recitation of Parsi accomplishments has always been a theme of Parsi history and genre of modern Parsi culture that serves to magnify and support minority identity. At the same time, the question of religious identity and community disputes continue into the present day, with news of Parsi disputes reaching the Indian press and general public. In the twenty-first century, such news competes with dire warnings about the Parsis' future due to a precipitous demographic decline, aging population, and the concomitant effects of both on the loss of heritage. Between 2001 and 2011, the Parsi population of India declined by 18 per cent. Some observers believe the Parsis may well have crossed the line from community to tribe and without prospect of reviving their numbers with the Indian community as presently constituted. Increased scholarship on the Parsis of India perhaps attests to the desire on the part of academics and researchers to document a 'dying' community. Amidst the sanguine population statistics, the Parsi and Zoroastrian diaspora communities of North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand are adding new chapters in the history of the Parsis and Zoroastrians, and undertaking new approaches and adopting more inclusive definitions of community membership, and which ultimately will see divergent diaspora communities from the Bombay and Indian communities. Notwithstanding great challenges and diverging paths between the Indian Zoroastrians and the diaspora, the Zoroastrians of India refuse to see themselves as a dying or effete community. The Parsis of India continue to celebrate their rich religious and social culture in India.

Bibliography

- Bausani, Alessandro. *The Persians: From the Earliest Days to the Twentieth Century*. Translated by J.B. Donne. London: Elek Books, 1971.
- Bhatena, B.N. *Kisseh-i-Sanjan, A Palpable Falsehood*, A Paper Submitted to the Twelfth All India Oriental Conference (History Section), Benares, 1943. Bombay: Balsara and Co., 1944.
- Boyce, Mary. 'On the Sacred Fires of the Zoroastrians'. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 31, no. 1 (1968): 52-68.
- . 'The Pious Foundations of Zoroastrians'. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 31, no. 1 (1968): 270-89.

- . ‘On the Calendar of Zoroastrian Feasts’. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 23 (1970): 513-39.
- . ‘On the Zoroastrian Temple Cult of Fire.’ *Journal of American Oriental Society* 95 (1975): 454-65.
- . *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. London: Routledge, 1979.
- . *Zoroastrianism: Its Antiquity and Constant Vigour*. Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers in association with Bibliotheca Persica, 1992.
- . ‘Corpse, Disposal of, in Zoroastrianism’. *Encyclopedia Iranica* 6 (1993): 279-86.
- . ‘Manekji Limji Hataria in Iran’. In *K.R. Cama Oriental Institute Golden Jubilee Volume*. Bombay: K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, 1969, pp. 19-31.
- Buckland, C.E. *Dictionary of Indian Biography*. New York: Haskell House, 1906.
- Burgess, James. ‘Translation of the Sanjan Shlokas’. *Indian Antiquary*, 5 July 1872, pp. 214-16.
- Census of India 2001. The First Report on Religion Data*. New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General of India, 2004.
- Census of India 2011*, <http://censusindia.gov.in/>
- Cereti, Carlo G. *An 18th Century Account of Parsi History: The Qesse-ye Zartoštīān*. Naples, Italy: Istituto Universitario Orientale, Dipartimento di Studi Asiatici, 1991.
- . ‘The Qesse-ye Zartoštīān-e Hendustān and the Qesse-ye Sanjān: Notes on Parsi History’. In *Proceedings of the Second European Conference of Iranian Studies*. Rome, Italy: Istituto Italiano per il Medio e Estremo Oriente, 1995, pp. 141-52.
- Choksy, Jamsheed K. *Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism: Triumph over Evil*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989.
- Commissariat, M.S. *History of Gujarat, 1297-1573*. London: Longmans, Green, 1938.
- Darukhanawala, H.D. *Parsi Lustre on Indian Soil*. Bombay: G. Claridge and Co., 1939.
- Dastur, Faroukh and Firoza Punthakey Mistree. ‘Fire Temples and Other Sacred Precincts in Iran and India’. In *A Zoroastrian Tapestry: Art, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Pheroza J. Godrej and Firoza Puntahkey Mistree, Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 2002, pp. 300-23.
- De Jong, Albert. *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature*. Leiden: Brill, 1997.
- . ‘Purification in absentia: On the Development of Zoroastrian Ritual Practice’. In *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions*, ed. Jan Assmann and Guy G. Stroumsa, Leiden: Brill, 1999, pp. 301-29.
- Desai, Armaity S. and Shalini Bharat, eds. *The Indian Parsis: Themes Old and New*, vol. 1; 4-Volume Series, *The Parsis of India: Continuing at the Crossroads*. New Delhi: Sage, 2017.

- Dhalla, M.N. *History of Zoroastrianism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1938; rpt., Bombay: K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, 1963.
- Eduljee, H.E. *Kisseh-i-Sanjan*. Bombay: K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, 1991.
- Enthoven, R.E., ed. *The Tribes and Castes of Bombay*, vol. 3. Bombay: Government of India, 1922.
- Firby, N.K. *European Travelers and Their Perceptions of Zoroastrians in the 17th and 18th Centuries*. Berlin: Verlag Von Dietrich Reimer, 1988.
- Gajendragadkar, S.N. *Parsi-Gujarati: A Descriptive Analysis*. Bombay: University of Bombay Press, 1974.
- Gazetteer of Bombay City and Island*, vol. 1. Bombay: Times Press, 1909.
- Giara, Marzban J. *Global Directory of Zoroastrian Fire Temples*. Bombay: M.J. Giara, 1998.
- Gignoux, Philippe. 'Dietary Laws in Pre-Islamic and Post-Sasanian Iran: A Comparative Survey'. *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 17 (1994): 16-42.
- Graham, M. *Journal of a Residence in India*. Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Company, 1812.
- Greenberg, M. *British Trade and the Opening of China, 1800-42*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953.
- Grose, John Henry. *A Voyage to the East Indies*, vol. 1. London: S. Hooper, 1772.
- Hinnells, John R. 'The Flowering of Zoroastrian Benevolence: Parsi Charities in the 19th and 20th Centuries'. In *Acta Iranica Hommages et Opera Minora*, vol. 10, *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce*. Leiden: Brill, 1985.
- . *The Zoroastrian Diaspora: Religion and Migration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Hodivala, S.H. 'Jadi Rana and the Kisseh-i-Sanjan'. In *Studies in Parsi History*. Bombay: Shahpurshah Hormasji Hodivala, 1920, pp. 67-91.
- . 'The Kisseh-i-Sanjan Translated'. In *Studies in Parsi History*. Bombay: Shahpurshah Hormasji Hodivala, 1920, pp. 92-117.
- . 'Some Ancient Parsi Documents'. In *Studies in Parsi History*. Bombay: Shahpurshah Hormasji Hodivala, 1920, pp. 189-253.
- Hodivala, S.K. 'The 16 Sanskrit Shlokas'. In *Dastur Hoshang Memorial Volume*. Bombay: Fort Printing Press, 1918, pp. 70-94.
- Humbach, Helmut. *The Heritage of Zarathustra: A New Translation of the Gāthās*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1994.
- Irani, Phiroze K. 'Personal Law of Parsis in India'. In *Family Law in Asia and Africa*, ed. J.N.D. Anderson. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972, pp. 273-300.
- Karaka, D.F. *History of the Parsis*, 2 vols. London: Macmillan, 1884.
- Karkal, Malini. *Survey of the Parsi Population of Greater Bombay, 1982*. Bombay: International Institute for Population Sciences and Trustees for the Parsi Panchayat Funds and Properties, 1984.

- Kreyenbroek, Philip G. 'On the Concept of Spiritual Authority in Zoroastrianism'. *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 17 (1994): 1-15.
- . 'Zoroastrian Priesthood After the Fall of the Sasanian Empire'. In *Transition Periods in Iranian History: Actes du Symposium de Fribourg-en-Brisgau, 22-24 Mai 1985*. Paris: Association pour l'Avancement des Études Iraniennes, 1987, pp. 151-66.
- Kulke, Echehard. *The Parsees of India: A Minority as Agents of Social Change*. Munich: Weltforum-Verlag, 1974.
- Luhrmann, T.M. *The Good Parsi: The Fate of a Colonial Elite in Postcolonial Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Mehta, S.D. *The Cotton Mills of India, 1854 to 1954*. Bombay: Textile Association of India, 1954.
- Modi, Bharati. *Parsi Gujarati: Vanishing Dialect Vanishing Culture*. Munich: Lincom Europa, 2011.
- Modi, J.J. *A Few Events in the Early History of the Parsis and Their Dates*. Bombay: Fort Printing Press, 1905.
- . *A Glimpse into the History and Work of the Zarthoshti Din-ni Khol-Karnari Mandli*. Bombay: M.B. Mithaivala, 1922.
- . 'Qisseh-i Zartushtian-i Hendustan', *Journal of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute* 17 (1930): 1-63; 19 (1931), 45-57; 25 (1933): 1-147.
- . *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees*, 2nd edn. Bombay: J.B. Karani's Sons, 1937.
- Mody, Nawaz, ed. *Enduring Legacy, Parsis of the 20th Century*, 4 vols. Mumbai: Nawaz B. Mody, 2005.
- Naoroji, Dadabhai. *The Manners and Customs of the Parsees: A Paper*. London: Pearson and Son, 1862.
- Palsetia, Jesse S. *The Parsis of India: Preservation of Identity in Bombay City*. Leiden: Brill, 2001; rpt., New Delhi: Manohar, 2008.
- Parsi Panchayet Case: In the High Court of Judicature at Bombay, Suit No. 689 of 1906: Judgment of the Hon'ble Mr. Justice Davar, Delivered Friday, 27th November 1908*. Bombay: Bombay Gazette Electronic Printing Works, 1908.
- The Parsi Panchayat Case: A Verbatim Report Reprinted from The Times of India*. Bombay: Times Press, 1908.
- Patell, B.B. *The Parsee Patells of Bombay: Their Services to the British Government*. Bombay: Printed at the English and Gujarati Job Printing Press, 1876.
- , comp. *Parsee Prakash: Being a Record of Important Events in the Growth of the Parsee Community in Western India, Chronologically Arranged*, vol. 1 [in Gujarati]. Bombay, India: Daftar Press, 1888.
- Paymaster, R.B. *Early History of the Parsees in India*. Bombay: Dharam Sambandhi Kelavni Apnari Ane Dnyan Felavnari Mandli, 1954.
- Ramsay, W. 'The Sacred Fire of the Parsis at Udwarda'. *Indian Antiquary*, 5 July 1872, pp. 213-14.

- 'The Rangoon Navjot Case of 1916', reprinted in *Journal of the Iranian Association* 8, no. 12 (April 1919-March 1920): 73-240.
- Ringer, Monica M. *Pious Citizens: Reforming Zoroastrianism in India and Iran*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011.
- Schmidt, Hans-Peter. 'The Sixteen Sanskrit Sanjan Slokas of Ākā Adhyāru', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute* 21 (1960-1): 157-96.
- Seervai, K.N. and B.B. Patell. 'Gujarat Parsis from their Earliest Settlement to the Present Time'. In *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, vol. 9, pt. 2, *Gujarat Population, Musalmans and Parsees*, ed. J.M. Campbell. Bombay: Government Central Press, 1899, pp. 183-254.
- Shabbir, Mohammad and S.C. Manchanda, *Parsi Law in India*. Allahabad: Law Book Co., 1991.
- Shroff, Zenobia. *The Contributions of Parsis to the Education of Bombay City, 1820-1920*. Bombay: Himalaya Publishing House, 2001.
- Skjærvø, Prods Oktor. *Introduction to Zoroastrianism*. Prods Oktor Skjærvø, 2005, <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~iranian/Zoroastrianism/>
- Stausberg, M. and Y. Vevaina (eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, ed. M. Stausberg and Y. Vevaina with Anna Tessmann. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015.
- Sullivan, R.J.F. *One Hundred Years of Bombay: History of the Bombay Chamber of Commerce, 1836-1936*. Bombay: Times of India Press, 1937.
- UNESCO. 'Preservation of Parsi Zoroastrian Heritage: Campaigns and International Conventions' ('PARZOR Project'; Project 302 IND 4070), <http://unescoparzor.com/> (accessed 12 September 2015).
- Wacha, D.E. *Life and Life Work of J.N. Tata*. Madras: Ganesh, 1915.
- Wadia, R.A. *Scions of Lowjee Wadia*. Bombay: Krishnamurthi at the Godrej Memorial Printing Press, 1964.
- Walker, J. Ferguson. 'Saklat and Others v. Bella'. In *The Law Times Reports*, vol. 42 (1925-1926). London: Law Times Office, 2006, pp. 25-9.
- White, David L. 'Parsis in the Commercial World of Western India, 1700-1750'. *Indian Economic Social History Review* 24, no. 2 (1987): 183-203.

Suggestions for Further Reading

- Desai, Armaity S. and Shalini Bharat, series co-eds. *The Parsis of India: Continuing at the Crossroads*, 4 vols. (New Delhi: Sage, 2017): Shalini Bharat and Armaity S. Desai, eds. Volume 1 *The Indian Parsis: Themes Old and New*; Shalini Bharat. Volume 2 *Contemporary Parsis: Marriage, Family and Community*; Lata Narayan. Volume 3 *The World of Indian Youth: Status and Perceptions*; S. Siva Raju. Volume 4 *The Parsi Elderly: To Live with Dignity*.
- Godrej, Pheroza J. and Firoza Puntahkey Mistree. *A Zoroastrian Tapestry: Art, Religion, and Culture*. Ahmedabad  Mapin Publishing, 2002.