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ZOROASTRIAN WOMAN IN KARACHI

Her religious status, its impact and her contribution in the
society

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**I DEDICATE THIS DISSERTATION TO MY BELOVED
FATHER SYED MUKARRAM ALI WHOSE INCESSANT
SUPPORT, PRECIOUS GUIDANCE AND INFINITE TRUST
ARE THE GREATEST TREASURES OF MY LIFE**

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
نبذة مختصرة عن الموضوع

ما هي الزرديشية؟
لماذا ندرسها؟

هذه هي الاستلة التي تبادر الذهن عندقرأه عنوان البحث، الزرديشية، اسم يطلق على اتباع زرادشت الذي عاش في الفارس القديم، وكانت الدين الرسمي لحالي ألف سنة في التاريخ الفارسي، لعبت الزرديشية دوراً هاماً في تطور الفلسفة الدينية في الفارس، فهذه الديانة تؤمن بأن الخير قديم ولكن الشر أيضاً يشارك معه في القدم. هناك إلى الخير، أهور مزداً أو إلى النور، وهناك إلى الشر أهور من أو إلى الظلم و هناك أعمال مختصة لكلا الإلهين. جميع الحركة والأمور في العالم تكون نتيجة عن تصادم أو تشارك بينهما، فانهما يتعاركان للحكم و البقاء منذ القدم.

هناك تقريباً 2 مليون زرديشيين في العالم في الوقت الحاضر والأكثرية تعيش في شبه الجزيرة الهندية. الزرديشيين في باكستان إقليمة بارزة، مجتمعهم متعاون ومتراوحة مع بعضه البعض. الزرديشيين أناس متدينين ووطنيين ويسمون باسم البارسيين، بسبب تسميتهم بهذا الاسم لأنهم هاجروا من الفارس فكانوا يسمون بالفارسيين ولكن مع مرور الوقت تغير الاسم بالباء وظل هذا الاسم إلى الآن.

بسهيل رغبتي في هذا الدين وفي الموضوع المذكور أعلاه عندما بدأت جمع المعلومات الإلبدائية عنه، واحدة من زميلاتي عرفتني إلى السيدة هوشي التي هي زرادشية وساعدتني كثيراً في فهم البدایات لهذا الدين ونظراته المهمة.

هناك عدة أسلحة أساسية التي يجب أن تتساءل عند دراسة الأديان المختلفة مثلاً كيف يتغير الدين مع مرور الزمن وكيف يتتأثر عندما ينتقل من حضارة إلى أخرى أو من بادية إلى مدينة. وما هي العلاقة بين العقيدة والعمل وبين الشعائر والاحكامات وهل يتعلق الدين بالعرق أم لا؟ فمن أسباب دراسة الزرديشية هو مكانه في أديان العالم فكان الإيران وسيظل برجاً بين حضارات الشرق والغرب.

اختارت الزرديشية لأنها ضمن الأديان القديمة بتاريخ طويل وبسبب دوره الهام في تطور دولة إسلامية، إلا وهي باكستان.

كنت راغبة في دراسة الجانب الديني الاجتماعي لهم في دولة بأكثرية النسمة المسلمين، ولأنهم واجهوا ظروف صعبة تحت رعاية الأديان الأخرى، وهاجروا عدة مرات. فالمرأة جزء مهم في المجتمع، وتلعب دوراً هاماً في تطوير وتشكيل المجتمع كما قال البطل الفرنسي نابليون "اعطوني أمهات جيدة سوف اعطيكم مجتمع جيد"، أي لها المسبب تتركز رسالتها على المرأة الزرديشية في كراتشي، مكانتها الدينية وأثرها على الحياة الأسروية والاجتماعية بسبب اختياري لمدينه كراتشي هو أن معظم النسمة الزرديشيين يعيشون هناك منذ قرون وقد اندمجاً في المجتمع والحضارة المحلية ولكن دون أخذ الأثر على الشخص الديني.

إن حركات تحرير المرأة والقول بالمساواة بين الجنسين من القضايا المهمة في الزمن الحاضر، النساء من جميع الأديان والميادين يطالبن بحقوقهن من الرجال. ولكن قلما نسمع عن المرأة الزرديشية وهي تطالب بحقوقها أو تشتراك في حركة من هذه الحركات. وهذا الأمر أثار انتباхи إلى المرأة الزرديشية، ليس فقط أنها بعيدة عن هذه القضايا، بل تعتبر أيضاً من انجح النساء وأكثرهن تأثيراً على المجتمع. المرأة الزرديشية في كراتشي هي مرأة قوية، مجتهدة وناجحة، رغم أنها تعيش في بلد بأكثريّة مسلمة، ومع ذلك استطاعت أن تحفظ شخصيتها الدينية لعبت دوراً هاماً في نمو المجتمع. سبب آخر لاختياري لهذا الموضوع أن اثناء الدراسة، الديانة الزرديشية كانت من الأديان التي درسنا عنها قليلاً. ولكنني كتبت بعض البحوث عن موضوعات مختلفة عن هذا الدين، فوجدته قريباً جداً من الإسلام، و كان هذا سبباً الذي زاد اهتمامي بهذا الموضوع.

سبب آخر لاهتمامي به يتعلق بحركتهم التبليغية لأنهم لا يونمنون بتبلیغ دینهم ومع ذلك استطاعوا حفظ شخصهم الديني بكمال النجاح على المستويين الفردي والاجتماعي.

لقد حاولت في بحثي هذا أن أناقش مكانة المرأة في الزرديشية وكيف أنها لعبت دوراً في المجتمع. نقطة أخرى التي حاولت أوضحها من خلال بحثي هذا إنها كيف يساند الدين الزرديشي المرأة ويساعدها في التطور في شتى المجالات.

أسأل من الله عزوجل التوفيق للهداية والنجاح في محاولتي هذه، ما هو خيراً فمن الخالق تعالى، وما كان هو نقصاً أو خاطئاً فمن نفسي، وأخر دعوانا أن الحمد لله رب العالمين..

PREFACE

What is zoroastrianism?

why study it?

These are probably the first questions which come in mind. Zoroastrianism is the term used for religion of zoroaster, the prophet of ancient Iran.

Zoroastrianism was the official religion of Iran for around 1200 years, from 6th century BC to 7th century AD.

Zoroastrianism made the most remarkable contribution to religious philosophy in the Persian history. According to this religion, truth and goodness are eternal, and the falsehood and the evil also share eternity with them. Both have separate gods who have their own independent commands and ways of management. There is a god of truth and goodness, Ahura Mazda, also called the god of light and there is a god of evil, Ahraman, known as the god of darkness also; each has his own distinct role to play. All activity in the universe is a result the collision and collaboration of these two gods, who are eternally locked in a constant battle of survival and sovereignty. At present time there are about 200,000 Zoroastrians throughout the world. Zoroastrians living in India account for almost half the world's population and they are called Parsis.

Zoroastrians in Pakistan are a prominent minority, they are strongly connected and supportive to each other, and are religious and patriotic people. In Pakistan they are known as Parsis also because they migrated from Iran (Faris), the term Farsees was changed to Parsees with the passage of time.

There are some basic questions in the study of religion. How does, or should, a religion change with the passage of time? What effects does it have when a

religion is transferred from one culture to another or from a village to a city? What is the link between faith and practice, between doctrine and ritual? Is religion largely a matter of race?

To get answers of these questions, I chose topic related to Zoroastrian women, as we all know that women are an important part of the society, without their active role no society can progress or prosper in a balanced way.

The movement of Feminism and feminist reformers is one of the most prominent and discussed issues of the post- modern era, yet we rarely hear about Zoroastrian women involved in such activities, it was a matter of interest and attraction for me that not only a Zoroastrian women are away from this but they are also considered amongst the most influential and successful women of the present era. A Pakistani Zoroastrian woman is a strong hardworking and a successful woman, although living in a Muslim majority country, yet she is able to preserve her religious identity and contribute her part in the society. These were the reasons which compelled me to write a research paper about Zoroastrian woman in Pakistan.

Another reason was that throughout our course Zoroastrianism was not among the major religions which we studied, but it was always a source of attraction for me, I did few assignments related to different aspects of this religion and found it very near to Islam and this observation strengthened as I read more about it for this research paper.

This research paper is has three sections, the first section talks about the Zoroastrian religion generally, beliefs, tenets, worships and holy days.it also talks about the background of Zoroastrians in the subcontinent and Sindh.

The second section talks about the religious status of the Zoroastrian woman, how do the sacred texts treat her and laws related to her.

The third section is about the Zoroastrian woman in Pakistan, how has she contributed for the prosperity of the society, and what is the impact on the Zoroastrian society generally and the Pakistani society specifically. It also discusses that how her religious status helps her to sustain her position in the society and how does the religion builds a society in a way that woman is favored and considered the most essential part. A survey is also included in this section which was conducted in the Zoroastrian society of Karachi.

In the end there is conclusion of the research paper and few suggestions for those who are interested in this religion and want to do further research. Throughout the research I compared its different aspects with other religions wherever it was possible. Socially it has so many resemblances with the Jewish religion, but its beliefs are very much similar to Islam, this similarity becomes very striking sometimes.

I hope my humble effort would be able to add some useful material in the world of research and will open new gates of exploration. For any errors or inadequacies that may remain in this work, of course, the responsibility is entirely my own.

INTRODUCTION

Zoroastrianism is a religion which has its origins in Iran, and was introduced by Zoroaster¹, prophet of Zoroastrians. Scholars have different views about when it started, but now days most scholars agree that its date goes back to 1500 B.C., around 200 years before Moses and thousands of years before Buddha.

It flourished mostly in the Sasanian era (224C.E-642C.E), when the kings tried to unite the nation with the Zoroastrian religion. But after 7th century Islam started to enter Persia and here the difficult time for Zoroastrianism started. We will be discussing this in the next section.

MIGRATION FROM IRAN

In the tenth century AD it became so difficult for the Zoroastrians to practice their religious customs and worship (because of the Muslim rule). So a small group of them decided to migrate to some other land instead of giving up their religion. They travelled all the way to India and were called Parsis.

It is said that they settled in an area they named Sanjan, it is told in a text called The Tale of Sanjan, it was written down in 1600 AD, it cannot be said that it is

¹ The Zoroastrians are also called "Magians" or "Zartushtis", in Arabic they are called "al-Majūs", "majūs" is a Persian word which means wisdom and intellect. It is amongst the oldest monotheistic religions, there were other religions in Persia at that time which had similar rituals but used to worship sun and fire, such as "Manichaeism" and "Mithraism", Zoroastrians or "Majūs" are different because they do consider fire sacred but do not worship it, due to this many Muslim scholars have included them among "ahl al-Kitāb", means people of the book, the most famous scholars are imam Shehrastānī, Ibn Hazm and Imam Abu Hanifa, they have allowed marriages with their women.

historically correct but we can get an account of how the Zoroastrians settled in India.

“The tale tells how a bold few journeyed south across Iran from their home in the north east, then on the advice of an astrologer priest they took to boats and set sail to eastward. They first settled on the island of Div, where they learned to speak Gujarati. Then again on a stargazer’s advice, they set sail. While they were at sea a storm blew up and the small boats were in danger. The priests prayed for God’s help and vowed that if they reached land safely they would, as an act of thanksgiving, build a splendid temple. Their prayers were answered and they came safely ashore in AD 936 at a spot they named Sanjan after a town in Iran. They sought permission to settle from the local ruler and gave him an account of their religion in sixteen statements to assure him that they would be a peaceable community in his kingdom. In these statements the Parsi founding fathers emphasized those parts of their religion which are most like Hinduism, such as reverence for the cow. The prince Jadi Rana, gave them permission to settle on certain conditions which were intended to ensure that the Parsis did not disturb his people’s way of life”¹.

The most prominent and important conditions were that they must speak Gujarati, observe local marriage customs, adopt local dress and not carry weapons. The Parsis were given their own piece of land for their settlement and were permitted to build the fire temple to fulfill their vow to God. The fire consecrated shortly after their arrival has been kept burning ever since. It is kept

¹ John R. Hinnells, *Zoroastrians and the Parsees*, (GB: Davis green printers Ltd, 1981), p. 23.

in the temple at the village of Udwāda¹ which has naturally become a center of pilgrimage.

WHEN DID THEY ARRIVE AT SINDH?

It is difficult to give an answer to this question as we do not have an exact recorded detail about it. Many researchers have looked for it keenly but did not find satisfactory details regarding this query.

A famous Zoroastrian businessman and writer Mr. Jhangir Punthaky writes in his book “Karachi Zoroastrian calendar”:

“The early historical notes regarding Parsis have been examined by me at the offices of the Parsi Prakash of Seth Bomanji Patel, but I found no mention in them of the exact year of the arrival of Parsis in Sindh. However, from the notes of Parsi Prakash it can be substantiated that there was a Parsi community in Sind in the year 916... So it cannot be said exactly that when did they arrive at Sindh, but if we rely on the “Parsi Parakash” for this we can reach to the result that Parsis started settling in Sind between 1820 and 1825.”²

The principal population began to come to Sindh in the beginning of the first Afghan war and especially when Sindh came in British hands. After 1839 Parsis started to come to Sind in large numbers settled businesses and built houses. Before that they had few firms and a community was established in Hyderabad. It was between 1843-1844 when they started owning business and houses.

¹ Udvada is a town in Gujarat, 200 km north of Mumbai, famous for its Zoroastrian Atash Behram. An oldest temple still-functioning example of its kind, and has established Udvada as a pilgrimage center for Zoroastrians all over the world.

² Jehangir Framoze Punthakey, *The Karachi Zoroastrian calendar*, (Karachi: Golden graphics(pvt) Ltd., 1989), p.12.

It is said that the oldest Parsi house was built in 1844 owned by Seth Hormusji Dadabhoy Ghadiali.¹

KARACHI MAKERS

Parsis are also called Karachi makers, as they were the pioneers in building most of the famous landmarks and heritage sites of the city.

Today, their number is very small but Parsis still dominate the social landscape of the city. They have decorated the city and contributed by boasting up top schools, prominent hotels, eminent doctors, educators, bankers and businessman. And more than that, they lay claim to a rich historical connection to the city and own it like a home.

The inflow of Parsis in Karachi increased after the British takeover. Many of them took the opportunity for trade during this era to settle in this city. Some of them had worked with the British army and several Parsi surnames – Contractor, Commissariat, Cooper – grew from association with the British army.

Many of the Parsi families living in Karachi today have ancestors who were among the first settlers in the city of Karachi. “Among the first were Khurshedji(1851) and Muncherji Golwalla who had gone with the British to Afghanistan as “traveling bakers””.² Cowasjee Variawa, after returning from Afghanistan, first worked with Dubash Brothers and then started his own stevedoring business. “He succeeded very well in his business ‘Cowasjee & Sons’, which in time, his descendants enlarged into one of the largest and most famous

¹ Ibid. p.20.

² Compiled by Phil masters, *the pioneering Parsis of Karachi*, [http://parsikhabar.net/history/the-pioneering-parsis-of-karachi,\(26-4-2011\).](http://parsikhabar.net/history/the-pioneering-parsis-of-karachi,(26-4-2011).)

stevedoring houses in the country.”¹ Dosabhai Ghadyali, who came to Karachi in 1850, was the first to introduce the silk trade in Karachi.² Hormasji Pestonji Shroff who migrated in 1852 started a dubash business in Karachi. Jamshedji Rustamji Ghadyali came as the first Parsi watchmaker.³ Byramji Edulji began his career as a purchase officer in the police force and then became a Police Collector.⁴

As time went by, there were various other firsts recorded by the Pārsis and they are known as the pioneers in those fields among Pārsis of Karachi. The first Parsi doctor Bejonji Rustamji arrived in 1858. He was appointed at the Government Dispensary.⁵ Dinshaw Maneckji Minwalla, who used to serve in the Royal artillery and went with it to Punjab in 1849, left it and became a partner with a trading company called W.E. Chamberlain. “In 1859 he purchased a press with its newspaper, *SIND KASED*, becoming the first Karachi Parsi to do so”.⁶ Edulji In 1860, Peshotan Dinshaw Minwalla was the first Pārsi solicitor of Karachi; he was a clerk at the Post Office, joined M/s Cleveland Peel Solicitors as an article clerk and then passed his law exams.⁷

¹ Ibid.

² Alexander F. Baillie, *Kurrachee, past, present, and future*. (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.26

³ Punthakey, *The Karachi Zoroastrian calendar*, p.27.

⁴ Farishta Murzban Dinshaw, *Beyond Compare: Parsi Pioneers of Karachi*, www.vohuman.org(13-06-2010).

⁵ Ahmed Salim. *Role of minorities in nation building with focus on Karachi*, (Pakistan/Afghanistan: Church world service).p.189.

⁶ Ibid p.195.

⁷ Punthakey, *The Karachi Zoroastrian calendar*, p.48.

I would like to quote here words of Alexander Baillie which he wrote about Parsis in his book "*kurrachee*", he mentioned some exceptional qualities of the Pārsis, he writes:

"The community is not large throughout the country, and is said not to exceed a quarter of a million, but that body is compact and entirely self-supporting. There are no Parsi beggars, and there are no Parsi women of bad character. They are extremely charitable; they not only look after their own poor, but they raise a fund for paying the capitation tax levied on their co-religionists in Persia. They are clever at languages, and have a wondrous power of collecting information from all parts of the world. A Parsi in his office at Bombay probably knows more about the current opinions of Muhammadans and Hindus in India and its neighbor countries, than all our commissioners and collectors, put together, and could forecast what is likely to occur with much greater nicety, than our combined intelligence departments."¹

Pārsis played an important role in trade and development of the economy ever since they migrated to India in 7th century, their community is not large but are strong and self- supporting, as it is told in the above mentioned paragraph by Baillie that they are perfectionists in every field they enter, he also mentioned that they are very good traders possessing exceptional skills and qualities, watching every change in market, they do not restrict themselves to few places or markets like most people. Their commercial achievement is certainly well deserved, for they show an amount of dynamism and commotion, which is rarely exceeded by Europeans. Alexander Baillie explains their trade expertise in the following words:

¹ Bailli, *Kurrachee, past, present, and future* ,p.82.

"There are Parsis who have traveled in light marching order round and round the world, searching for new trade outlets. Their baggage frequently consists of a solitary carpet bag, but it is one that emulates that of the great prestidigitator Houdini, for out of it are produced ordinary wearing apparels, books and maps, photographs and plans, and if ceremony demands its use, a suit for the evening dress is never wanting."¹

The number of Parsis in Karachi does not exceed 2000 but among them there is a prominent majority of cultured gentlemen of great wealth and powerful intellect, exceedingly charitable and patriotic, they are always ready and anxious to progress, develop and benefit the country in which they reside, and in which their interest are concerted.

In the twentieth century, the Parsis of Karachi continued to prosper by establishing schools and universities, dispensaries and hospitals, restaurants and hotels. The institutions established by Pārsis are among the best and most successful ones in the city. They are well organized, hardworking and well aware of their professions. The Pārsi community also gave rise to one of Karachi's most distinguished and beloved icons, Jamshed Nusserwanjee Mehta (1886-1952), who has an exclusive distinction of being elected the Mayor of Karachi for twelve successive years and is dotingly remembered as the "Father of Modern Karachi". Mr. Mehta was known as the uncrowned king of Karachi and the prophet of the poor. He is known for constructing wide roads, parks, gardens and playgrounds. He divided the city into wards each of which had at least one primary school, a

¹ Ibid. p84.

clinic and a maternity home. He organized emergency services such as the fire-brigade and ambulances to reach people in emergencies.¹

Pakistan Post Office issued a stamp of Rs 3 denomination on January 7, 1988 to memorialize Jamshed Nusserwanjee 1886-1986.²

ZOROASTRIAN BELEIFS

Teachings of the prophet Zarathustra revolve around three themes, which are:

- 1- The life on earth
- 2- The life hereafter.
- 3- Immortality of Fravashi (soul) and resurrection of the body.

The life on earth shall be spent according to God's will, the main purpose is to dominate and destroy the evil powers, the life hereafter will begin after resurrection of the body and it will depend upon the life in this world, the good will be rewarded and the bad will be punished.

In the upcoming section we shall be discussing the above mentioned beliefs briefly.

One God

Zarathustra preached the existence of one supreme God, whose name, Ahura Mazda, means "Wise Lord." Ahura Mazda is the creator of the universe and all things in it, including humankind.

¹ John R. Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora: Religion and Migration*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. p.134.

²Posted by paknetmag, *Jamshed Nusserwanjee Mehta (1886 - 1986) (1988-1)*
<http://paknetmag.blogspot.com/2009/08/jamshed-nusserwanjee-mehta-1886-1986.html>, (23-4-2011)

Zarathustra taught that Ahura Mazda is all-good and all-wise. He is the father of truth and goodness. He brings love and happiness and is to be loved and respected, never feared. It is part of their belief to have faith in certain qualities of Ahura Mazda, the qualities are that God is not about fear guilt and Denunciation, He is Wise Love and Logic, He does not discriminate on the basis of nationality, race, class or gender, and has no favorites on these bases. He treats humans with dignity and admiration, He is not a slave master, or a dictator, He is man's Soul Mate and Partner, He is not Jealous, Furious or Revengeful, while man is not depraved, fallen or sinful, and that He has no foe or opponent.

These qualities of God are mentioned in sings of God which are called Gathās in the Avestan language; further detail will be in the next section.

THE TWIN SPIRITS: TRUTH AND THE LIE

According to Zoroastrian belief Ahura Mazda first created consciousness and knowledge of perfect good, which is the spirit of Truth, or Spenta Mainyu. He then created the material world. According to Zoroastrian cosmogony good and evil spirits have been in existence since the very beginning of created time, even before the creation of the spiritual and material worlds.

Zarathustra called the Spirit of Evil "The Lie," which later came to be called Angra Mainyu or Ahriman. The struggle between the Spirit of Truth and The Lie, which never agree, governs all human thought and activity.

FREE WILL

Ahura Mazda does not command every aspect of human life. At the time of creation he gave humanity the gift of free will. As Zoroastrians, men and women must think and reason for themselves. They have the freedom to choose good

over evil. Free will and intellect give them the choice to do the will of Ahura Mazda—to live according to the Spirit of Truth.

THE LIFE HEREAFTER

The prophet Zoroaster gave clear teachings about life after death. The soul of the man is immortal and it does not die with the body. Zoroaster also told about heaven and hell, a man's soul has to cross a bridge which is called "Chanvat Bridge", a good soul crosses it easily and resides in the heaven under God's shadow, whereas a bad soul faces difficulty and falls down in the hell, and this will be an individual reward. This concept of the Chanvat Bridge is very much similar to the concept of "sirāt mustaqeem" in Islam. Even the characteristics of the bridge mentioned in the sacred texts resemble incredibly with the ones mentioned in "ahadith", i.e., the bridge is sharp like a sword and thin like a hair, those who are good will be guided by a light and will be able to pass it in a fraction of a second, whereas those who are bad will not be able to pass it and will fall down in the hell.

Zoroaster also said that before the last day a savior or messiah will appear who will destroy all evil powers and good will prevail and this world will come to an end. After that all the dead will be resurrected and a judgment will be passed according to their deeds and people will be sent to hell or heaven forever.

Later on this concept was changed a little i.e., every person will have to go through fire and melt metal which will result in forgiveness of all the bad deeds

and finally every person will enter into heaven and eternal bliss. So the concept of entering in the hell for eternity was eliminated.¹

FRAVĀSHI

The word *Fravashi* is an Avestan word. Parsi (Zoroastrian) scriptures are written in Avestan Language which flourished during 700 BC. Vedas also belong to the same age. Both have their origin from the Aryan Root.

This word comes from **Fra** = forth, ahead, prime & **Vashi** from root **Varti**- Vereti= to choose, meaning "the prime choice". The prime congenital power in a human being to choose, to select very rightly to attain the right goal through the right choice (selection).the idea of the *fravashi* is exactly similar to that of *atma buddhi* There are Fravashis not only of men and animals, but even of gods and Ahura-Mazda.²

In Zoroastrian doctrine a *fravashi* is the guardian spirit of an individual, which sends out the *urvān* (soul) into the material world to fight the encounter of good with evil. On the morning of the fourth day after death, the *urvān* returns to its *fravashi*, where its deeds and actions in the material world are collected.

Jivanji Mody says: "A fortunate man is he, who accepts the guidance of his Fravashi, communicated through his intelligence (*baüdha*), and accepting the guidance, makes use of his five senses which lead to support his life (*ahü*) as would keep his soul (*urvān*) pure and uncontaminated, so that when he has to

¹ Maneck B. Pithawalla, *Introducing Zoroastrianism*, (Karachi: Victoria printing works,1961),p.140

²Nasarvanji F. Bilimroa, *Zoroastrianism in the light of theosophy*, (Bombay: the theosophical publishing society, Bombay), p.74

pass on to the other world, he can present himself before God with a pure conscience (*daena*)". Man becomes flawless when his soul comprehends and reaches his "*Fravashi*".¹

FIRE

Fire is the most essential and vital part of the Zoroastrian religion. Zoroastrians are usually known as fire worshippers, because of the extensive respect, gratitude and sacredness they show towards fire. But if we look in their sacred and religious texts we do not find any verses talking about fire worship. They believe that Ahura Mazda is omnipotent and omnipresent and can be seen through fire. The famous Iranian poet Firdousi Tusi(1020c.e.) in his famous couplet Shah nama declared that "Zoroastrians are not fire worshippers but they are worshippers of one God".² Zoroastrians believe that it is one of the best methods to worship the Almighty through His creations, and in this case, perhaps the best and the choicest of all creations is the fire because it is the son of Ahura Mazda, the Spirit of the Sun - "*atash Ahure Mazdao puthra*". Fire is the purest of all elements on earth, indeed, it surpasses all other elements. It is the seventh and final creation of Ahura Mazda, after the creation of the human being.

Fire is a mysterious element; it is subtle, always striving upwards, compassionate when controlled, but merciless in destruction when out of control. Moreover, it is the most human of all elements, fire is used in the service of the human being, an animal has no use of fire.

¹ Jivanji Mody, *The religious ceremonies and customs of the Parsees*. (Bombay, India: Society for the Promotion of Zoroastrian Religious Knowledge, 1986), p.394.

² Pithawalla, *Introducing Zoroastrianism*, p.27.

SACRED TEXTS

The first and the oldest parts of the Zoroastrian scriptures, known were written in an ancient Persian dialect. They are known as “Avesta”, they include Gathas (psalms), Vendidad (laws), and the Yasts (liturgies). However, during the post Muslim conquest millennium, another literature grew up, now known as the Pahlavi Texts, or commentaries and elaborations of the Avesta, written in the Parthian dialect during the Arsacid (from 3rd century BC till 5th century CE) and Sassanian (ad 224-651) dynasties. European scholars have incorrectly called the whole the text as Zend-Avesta; the correct names are Avesta and Zend, which means revelation and commentary. According to oriental historians the religious texts have frequently been destroyed by Alexander, Mongols and the Arabs. As a result, only five books and some fragments last.

There are many other books which are not revealed but are considered sacred and important for example among Middle Persian religious texts is a group of books called the *Dēnkart*, (Pahlavi: “Acts of the Religion”) also spelled Dinkard, 9th-century encyclopaedia of the Zoroastrian religious tradition. Comprises of nine volumes which talk about theology, metaphysics, history of the mankind, doctrinal history and biography of the prophet Zaradasht.

While the poet Ferdousi's (935-1020 CE) Persian epic, the *Shahnameh* or *Book of Kings* is not a Zoroastrian religious text, it is widely quoted by Zoroastrians many of who believe that Ferdousi's information is based on Zoroastrian sources.

ZOROASTRIAN DAILY LIFE

Family and home play an important role in the Zoroastrian religion, home is important because it is a religious duty of every Zoroastrian to get married.

The religion never developed any institution resembling monastery or convent so there has never been any religious center apart from the home where children might live.

The Zoroastrian daily life is a combination of different religious and social activities, we will be discussing the most prominent and important ones very briefly.

IMPORTANCE OF PURITY:

Among the Zoroastrians, contact with every kind of impure matter is believed to cause defilement. In order to purify the body of its injurious effect, segregation for shorter or longer periods and various kinds of washing (sometimes accompanied by the performance of certain ritual) have been prescribed.

PURIFICATION CEREMONIES:

Keeping in view the importance of purity and cleanliness Zoroastrian texts are full of laws and commands related to purification, which is equally important for men and women.

There are four kinds of purification ceremonies among Zoroastrians:

1. **padyab:** which can be performed without the help of the priest
2. **Nahn:** requires services of some priest.
3. **Bareshnum:** it requires services of two persons, both should be priests.
4. **Riman:** requires services of two persons, at least one of them should be priest.

We will be discussing the above mentioned ceremonies briefly in the next section.

1. PÄDYÄB

Meaning of Padyäb:

It is the simplest form of purification which is performed several times a day. Padyāb is a modern Persian form of Avesta paiti-ap whose Pahlavi translation is padyāv. It means “throwing water(ab) over (paiti) the exposed parts of the body.”

Process of Padyāb:

There process is called padyab kusti and contains three steps:

1. The first step is reciting a short prayer which states “khshanaothra ahurahe mazddo” which means “I do this for the pleasure of Ahura Mazda”. And then recites a small formula in praise of purity and praise Ashem Vohu.
2. Then comes the main part of padyab which includes washing face and bare parts of the body i.e., hands and feet. And then wipes them off.
3. The process is finished by performing the kusti i.e., tying and retying the kusti with the reciting of its formula.

Times of performing padyāb:

There are four occasions on which the process of padyab is performed, which are:

1. Early morning after rising from the bed.
2. On answering call of nature.
3. Before taking meals.
4. Before saying prayers.

2. NAHN

It is a higher form of purification; it is not performed daily like Padyab, but occasionally with the help of the priest.

Meaning of Nahn:

It is a contraction of the word “*snan*” which means “ablution or bathing”. *Padyab* is only washing of the exposed parts of the body whereas *nahn* is purification of the whole body.

Process of nahn:

The process includes four steps, which are:

1. The normal *padyab kusti*.
2. The symbolic eating of the pomegranate leaf and the drinking of the *gomez* (urine of cow) for the sake of convenience. It can be called “symbolic communion”.
3. The recital of the *Patet* (the repentance prayer).
4. The final bath which includes bathing with water, rubbing the body with sand and consecrated body.

Occasions at which Nahn is performed:

The Zoroastrians have to go through this process on the following occasions:

1. The *Navjote* ceremony.
2. The marriage.
3. Women at the end of their monthly cycle.
4. The Farverdigan holidays.

3. BARESHNUM, THE THIRD FORM OF PURIFICATION:

It is the highest form of purification and is different from the two already discussed forms. It differs from *padyab* and *nahn* in the following aspects:

1. Unlike the first two forms it lasts for nine days.
2. It requires help of two priests.
3. It cannot be performed at any place or temple, but in particular open air place.

Process of bareshnum:

In *Vendidad* Bareshnum is said to be performed by those persons who have come in contact with foulest and worst form of impurity like coming in contact with the dead body specially the one who died because of serious disease.

It is said that it is purification for both mind and body, i.e., mental and physical purification.

4. RIMAN

This is the fourth and the last ceremony of purification; it is performed when someone comes in contact with filth from dead bodies. It requires services of two men, one is the priest and the other is the layman. It is performed in a special place which is open but least frequented by people. The priest has to consider the position of the sun and the direction of the air and keep it in mind before performing the ceremony. The person washes his body thoroughly while reciting different prayers; he must wear new clothes after finishing Riman.

THE DAILY PRAYERS

The most important prayers for Zoroastrians are the Südre/Kusti prayers, which are offered in connection with two items of clothing. The prayers are said five times a day, during the five religious divisions of the day. The five divisions are according to the change of time during the day. First when the sun rises, second when it reaches the top, third when it starts coming down, fourth when it sets and fifth when it's night. They are also said before any important venture, including going to fire temple, it is part of the religion which goes back to Zoroaster himself.

The concept of prayer in Zoroastrianism is very much similar to Islam, both have prayer five times a day, a person has to perform ablution before prayer and every prayer has a specific time during which it must be offered. The concept of special prayers is also present in both religions like prayer at holy days, or when someone dies or if a person is in some trouble, there are special prayers for every situation mentioned in the sacred texts.

The südre is a white cotton garment like a vest, which every Zoroastrian must wear next to the skin at all the times once he or she is initiated, it is white as symbol of purity, and the front 'V' is a small pocket, it is believed to be a spiritual pocket, which symbolically must be kept full with good thoughts, good words and good actions.

The kusti is a long lamb wool cord which is tied three times around the waist.

Before praying a Zoroastrian has to wash, as physical cleanliness goes hand in hand with the spiritual cleanliness.

NAVJOTE (INITIATION)

Navjote means the new worshipper of Ahura Mazda, it also means the new birth of the initiate in the spiritual life. It is for both males and females at the equal level. It teaches the affirmation of truth and that the truth is the highest virtue, it teaches the supremacy of one creator, to be a fighter in the cause of truth against evil and right against wrong, it also teaches to bring to the world the kingdom of heaven by protecting the poor. All these lessons are mentioned in different prayers which are recited during the ceremony.

The ceremony starts with purifying the body by bath, pomegranate juice is also used for purification, then the person is clothed in pure white and is taken to the room of the ceremony. Then he or she along with the high priest recites the prayers and then the initiate is invested with the pure white südreh and the sacred thread kusti.

THE THREE PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESS

Every Zoroastrian must follow three principles in order to lead a successful life in this world and the world hereafter. These are *Humata*, *Hükhta* and *hurvashta*.

Humata means good thoughts; God has given intelligence to human being which should be perfected by knowledge and education, till one gets the light of wisdom. When the mind will be good, the words which will come out of the mouth will be good, which is the next principle known as *Hükhta*, and from here we move towards the third principle *Hurvashta* which means good actions. When the mind and the words will be good the action will automatically follow them and altogether they will form a peaceful life.

ZOROASTRIAN FESTIVALS

Zoroastrians do not gather weekly for regular worship services. Instead they recite the basic daily prayers five times daily, either alone, in informal groups, or as a family. They do, however, have holidays or festivals during which they join together for worship and celebration.

There are seven great festivals of the Zoroastrians, they are mostly related to different seasons of the year, the first six holy days are called Gahmbar, the seventh one is the most famous, important and the celebrated one, it is called Navroz, the festival of the beginning of the new Zoroastrian year.

The six Gahambar are:

Maidhyoizarem (Midspring)

Maidhyoishem (Midsummer)

Paitshahem (Harvest)

Ayathrem (Bringing in Cattle)

Maidhyairem (Midwinter)

Hamaspathmaedem Muktad (All Souls)

"The seventh and highest festival is Navruz, the New Year. The festival celebrates the creation of fire and the Beneficent Immortal Asha Vahista, or Highest Truth. It is thus the most sacred and joyous of all Zoroastrian holy days. It is held in the spring, just after the sixth gahambar, and so represents the renewal of life that spring symbolizes. It also represents the new order to come with Frashogard,

world renewal. On Navruz people exchange presents, put on new clothes, settle any outstanding arguments, and visit their fire temple to reaffirm their faith”¹.

PĀRSIS IN PAKISTAN TODAY

Till here beliefs and worships of the Zoroastrians were discussed, these beliefs and worships are common and same among all Zoroastrians around the world. As the research paper is specifically about Pakistani Pārsis, so this section will be ended with few lines about the present situation of Pārsis in Pakistan, particularly Karachi.

Pārsis here have been always played important role in building a strong society, as mentioned before that they are known as the Karachi makers, till now they are a vital part in the society and contributing generously, sincerely and actively in different fields, especially in the fields of education and business.

Small in number though, yet they have a unique quality of preserving their religious identity along with staying loyal with the country they live in. There are many problems which emerged with time the most prominent ones are the issues of intermarriages and conversion. But the Pārsi community is trying hard to come out with some solution without harming the religious or social values. Pārsis are a peaceful nation always ready to contribute and play their role in supporting the Zoroastrian and non-Zoroastrian societies. I would like to conclude this section with words of the famous Zoroastrian scholar Dr. Hinells, he says about Pārsis of Pakistan:

¹ Pula R. Hartz, *world religions, Zoroastrianism*, third edition. (New York: InfoBase publishers, 2009), p.108

“The Zoroastrians’ good wills during partition, their existing small numbers, and their sense of Pakistani identity and contribution to the nation have made the Zoroastrians valuable citizens in Pakistan under modernizing and orthodox regimes.”¹

¹ Hinell, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora, Religion and Migration*, p.380

CHAPTER 1

RELIGIOUS STATUS OF ZOROASTRIAN WOMAN

- STATUS OF WOMEN IN OLD PERSIA.
- WOMEN IN ZOROASTRIAN RELIGION.
- ZOROASTRIAN WOMEN UNDER LAW.
- RIGHTS OF A ZOROASTRIAN WOMAN.
- DUTIES OF A ZOROASTRIAN WOMAN.
- SOCIAL PROBLEMS OF THE ZOROASTRIAN WOMAN

STATUS OF WOMAN IN OLD PERSIA

History records tell us that women in ancient Persia enjoyed all kind of equality and liberty unlike other nations of that time; they were respected as mothers, wives, sisters and daughters. It is because of this reason that we find many famous and successful female rulers in Persia throughout the history, Persian history witnessed many legendary female rulers, queens, warriors and commanders. The central and vital role of women in Ancient Iran both confounded and captivated the male dominant ancient Greek and Roman societies.

Female deities were worshipped in different parts of the Persian lands, Persian people had many goddesses like their neighbor countries. Archeologists discovered several statues in Lorestan,¹ among which a full face of statue of a woman is also discovered. Dr Girschman² believes that this is an Asian goddess which was venerated by people in Asia Minor up to Susa. He also holds the view that this may be the source for the worship of the goddess Anahita.³

Women in Persia were very valuable beings; and were often appointed at important positions in the Courthouse, Ministries, Military, State Department, and other official administrations. Some examples will be discussed here:

DOQDU (1756 B.C.)

¹ A province of Iran.

² A famous scholar of ancient Persian studies.

³ Cf. R. Ghirshman, *Persia from origins to Alexander the great*, (London: the arts of the mankind, 1964), p. 360.

The name “Doqdu” means: Selected. Doqdu was the Mother of “Asho Zarathushtra”. It was around 1737 BCE that Zarathushtra was born. Who is known as the prophet of the Zoroastrians.

PANETEA ARTESHBOD (559 B.C.)

The name “Pantea” means: Strong and immortal. She was the wife of General Aryasb (Achaemenid's Arteshbod), and played a vital role in 547 B.C by looking after the administrative matters in Babylonia after the conquest of the Neo-Babylonian Empire by Cyrus the Great. Pantea evolved as one of the all-time greatest Persian commanders and was an important and profound military commander of Cyrus the great (559-529 B.C), she served as the commander of the elite force of the Persian soldiers.¹

AMESTRIS (404 B.C.)

Amestris was the gorgeous daughter of The Persian King Darius II (423 BC) and the Achaemenid's military commander. Her mother Pari Satis was a General of the Achaemenid's Imperial Army. The name “Amestris” means: Friend.²

YOUTAB ARYOBARZAN (334 B.C.)

The name “Youtab” means: Unique. She was the Commander of Achaemenid's Army, and sister of the legendary Persian Hero, Aryobarzan (Achaemenid's

¹ Brosius, Maria. “The Royal Audience Scene Reconsidered”, Ed. J. Curtis and St. J. Simpson London: *The World of Achaemenid Persia*(2010).

² Ibid.

General), during the invasion of Alexander she made history by standing side by side to her brother and fighting the Greeks and Macedonians to death.¹

ARTADOKHT (34 A.D.)

The name “Artadokht” means: Truthful girl. She was the Secretary of Treasury during Ardavan the Fourth of Ashkanid's Dynasty (Parthian Empire).²

PARIN (488 A.D)

The name “Parin” means: Same as an angel. Princess Parin was the daughter of Qobad, Counselor of the Sassanid Courthouse, and was an extremely intellectual and confident female politician.³

WOMAN IN ZOROASTRIAN RELIGION

We have seen in the previous section that how the women were treated in Persia, they were not only treated with respect but were also given high regards and strong positions to prove their abilities.

So when Zoroastrianism emerged in around 1500 B.C., it encouraged the high regard and respect for woman, and declared her as an important part of the cosmic order, the Zoroastrian religion not only raised her social status but enhanced the spiritual status as well.

Zoroastrian scholars claim that women are treated equally in the Zoroastrian religion; both the sexes have been mentioned equally in the religious texts.

¹ MacKenzie, David Neil. Youtab Aryobrazan, *Encyclopediа Iranica*. (Costa Mesa: Mazda,1990), Vol.6,p. 690.

² Ibid.p .330

³ Ibid.

According to Zoroastrian cosmology God has created six immortal beings, of which three are masculine and three are feminine. According to book of creation i.e., *Bundhahisn*, "sky, fire and wind are male, and are never otherwise, the water earth and plants and fish are female and are never otherwise, the remaining creation consists of male and female".¹

A CONFLICTING THEORY

There are some scholars who claim about gender discrimination and inequality in the Zoroastrian religion, among them the Iranian Muslim scholar Saeed al Nafisi who holds the point of view that the women were never equal to men in the Persian culture, The late Saeed Nafisi in his book, 'Social History of Iran from the Sasanian times to the end of the Umayyad period", writes: "Another interesting feature of the Sasanian culture was that, when a boy reached the age of puberty, his father married him to one of his own numerous wives. During that period, woman had no legal personality. The father and the husband had vast powers over her property. It was the duty of the father or the head of the family to marry a girl when she reached the age of 15 But the age of marriage for the boys was 20. After being married, a girl was not entitled to receive any inheritance from her father or guardian. She had no right to choose her husband herself, but she could contract an unlawful marriage if her father failed to marry her when she reached the age of puberty. In that event also she did not inherit from her father."²

¹ Tr. Edward William West, "The *Bundahishn*", Ed. Max Müller: *Sacred Books of the East* . (Oxford: oxford university press, 1897), Vol.5, Chapter 16, verse 6

² Nafisi, Saeed, 'Social History of Iran from the Sasanian times to the end of the Umayyad period, Tehran: Chap e rangin press, 1949. P 167

also the famous historian Mohsin Fani mentioned in his book "dabistan e mazahib" that women were treated badly during the sassani era, they used to work equally with men but were given less wages, they had no share in inheritance and polygamy was a common practice.¹

But this theory has been refuted by many, Mažhar Siddiqi says in his book "Islam aur mazahib e alam" that this confusion is created because of emergence of too many religions in the Persian lands, there are evidences which prove that women were mistreated but it was practiced in religions other than Zoroastrianism, he says that Zoroastrianism never mistreated women and the Zoroastrian women always enjoyed high status and respect from the society.

This confusion was created because of the similarity between the Persian religions, almost all of them give high respect to fire, and some of them started worshipping it as well, but the Zoroastrian religion was a monotheistic religion since the beginning, but due to small number of followers it was not prominent and scholars confused it with other religions.

CREATION OF WOMAN

According to Zoroastrian theories of creation, both man and woman have created from the seed of Gayomard². When he was attacked by the evil forces, before passing away, he gave this seed. The seed grew and became a male, Matro (mashie) and a female, Matroyao (Mashyane). They developed up from earth like a plant

¹ Fani, Muhammad Mohsin, School of religions doctrines, Tr. David Shea and Anthony Troyer. Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 1901. P. 46

² According to Zoroastrian belief, Gayomart means immortal life, the basic purpose of its creation was to fight with evil forces, but ahriman destroyed him in a battle, yet his seed remained, the nature took care of that seed until it developed into the first man and woman.

joined from below the waist in a way that it was difficult to know who was male and who was female. Ahura Mazada disjointed them from each other and changed them from plant into the shape of man.

The detailed account about creation of man and woman has been told in the book of *Bundhahishn*, in chapter 15, the verses are as follows:

“On the nature of men it says in revelation, that *Gayomard*, in passing away, gave forth seed; that seed was thoroughly purified by the motion of the light of the sun, and *Neryosang* kept charge of two portions, and *Spandarmad* received one portion. And in forty years, with the shape of a one-stemmed *Rivas*-plant, and the fifteen years of its fifteen leaves, *Matro* [*Mashye*] and *Matroyao* [*Mashyane*] grew up from the earth in such a manner that their arms rested, behind on their shoulders (*dosh*), and one joined to the other they were connected together and both alike. And the waists of both of them were brought close and so connected together that it was not clear which is the male and which the female, and which is the one whose living soul (*nismo*) of Ohrmazd is not away. As it is said thus: Which is created before, the soul (*nismo*) or the body? And Ohrmazd said that the soul is created before, and the body after, for him who was created; it is given into the body that it may produce activity, and the body is created only for activity; hence the conclusion is this, that the soul (*ruban*) is created before and the body after. And both of them changed from the shape of a plant into the shape of man, and the breath (*nismo*) went spiritually into them, which is the soul (*ruban*); and now, moreover, in that similitude a tree had grown up whose fruit was the ten varieties of man.”¹

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¹ Muller, *The Bundahishn, Sacred Books of the East*, volume 5, chapter 15, verses 1-6

From the above lines it is clear that Zoroastrian texts do not believe in inequality of man and woman. As it is said that they both were created at the same time from the same seed, even their bodies were the same and were separated afterwards. That is why Zoroastrians do not believe in difference of the two.

And when they were separated by Ahura Mazada, He blew His breath in them which became their soul.

The above verses also say that the soul was created before the body and it was the same soul for both man and woman, so if the essence is same then whatever the body or the attributes are, there will be no difference.

And in the following verses the story of creation of the first couple goes on:

"Ohrmazd spoke to *Mashye* and *Mashyane* thus: 'You are man, you are the ancestry of the world, and you are created perfect in devotion by me; perform devotedly the duty of the law, think good thoughts, speak good words, do good deeds, and worship no demons!'. Both of them first thought this, that one of them should please the other, as he is a man for him; and the first deed done by them was this, when they went out they washed themselves thoroughly; and the first words spoken by them were these, that *Ohrmazd* created the water and earth, plants and animals, the stars, moon, and sun, and all prosperity whose origin and effect are from the manifestation of righteousness. And, afterwards, antagonism rushed into their minds, and their minds were thoroughly corrupted, and they exclaimed that the evil spirit created the water and earth, plants and animals, and the other things as aforesaid. That false speech was spoken through the will of the demons, and the evil spirit possessed himself of this first

enjoyment from them; through that false speech they both became wicked, and their souls are in hell until the future existence.”¹

Zoroastrians often claim that other religions especially the Jewish and the Christian religions have degraded women and her status by putting the responsibility of eating the forbidden fruit. The Christians have exaggerated by calling it the original sin, whereas Zoroastrians do not believe in any such narration. The above verses tell this clearly that none of them was responsible for the first wrong act. The only one who can be blamed is the demon who affected their minds and they thought that it is him who has created the water and other blessings. The evil spirit possessed both of them and it was not the man or the woman who laid other astray.

The first couple was punished and were deprived of clothing and food for 30 days, after that they saw a cow, so they went to it and drank its milk, here again the demons possessed them and they thought that the milk came because of them and forgot that it was given by God. So again they were punished until they asked for forgiveness. After that children were born to them who were divided into different races and generations.

WOMAN IN THE RELIGIOUS TEXTS

As we have seen above that woman is discussed in the book of creation “Budhishn” equally with man. Now we shall see this in the Zoroastrian texts of Avesta and Gathas.

¹ Ibid., chapter 15, verses 7-10

"If thou wantest to cleanse the earth, say these words aloud: "This earth we worship, this earth with the women, this earth which bears us and those women who are thine,¹ O Ahura"."²

"May the beloved Airyaman come hither, for the men and women of Zarathushtra to rejoice, for the faithful to rejoice; with the desirable reward that is won by means of the law, and with that boon for holiness that is vouchsafed by Ahura!"³

"Thither thou shalt bring the seeds of men and women, of the greatest, best, and finest kinds on this earth"⁴

The above verses make it very clear that woman has a very important role in the cosmic battle of good and evil, she is as vital as man, the first verse mentions women especially with earth, and they are associated with water, which is the most fundamental element of life.

Similarly in the second and third verses they are mentioned along with men, both are equally important in attaining salvation. A good woman is a mean towards heaven and eternal bliss.

We will now move to the second volume of Avesta, where there are tens of names of women mentioned who were pious and are role models for other women. Few examples are given below:

¹ Yasna XXXVIII, "Who are thine,' that is,' who are thy wives" these women are believed to be the rivers in heaven, and were considered as the wives of the heaven-god; the rain waters are called 'Ahura's spouses/ Ahurfoifs.

² Tr. James Dateter, *The zend Avesta, the vendidad*, (Oxford: the Clarendon press 1880), Vol.I, P.140

³ Ibid., p. 140.

⁴ Ibid., p.17.

“We worship the *Fravashi* of the holy *Hvovi*.²

“We worship the *Fravashi* of the holy *Hutaosa*.³

“We worship the *Fravashi* of the holy *Huma*.⁴

“We worship the *Fravashi* of the holy *Pouruchista*⁵.⁶

“We worship the *Fravashi* of the holy maid *Gaghrflidh*.⁷

“We worship the *Fravashi* of the holy maid *Franghidh*.⁸

The verses mentioned above are telling about all those pious, holy and spiritually elevated women who lead humanity towards the right path. The Zoroastrian religion pays high regard to maidens who due to any reason fail to get married, yet they keep themselves away from attacks of the evil forces, and take care of their purity. Such maidens are particularly mentioned in the Avestan texts.

The last verse I will mention is from the third volume of Zend Avesta in which Ahura Mazda the God is calling those women who have good thoughts, words and actions:

¹ One of the three wives of Zarathurtra, the daughter of Frashaojtra; she is the supposed mother of Saoshy and his brothers.

² Dasteter, *The zend Avesta, the vendidad*, Vol. II, p.224.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Three daughters of prophet Zarathustra.

⁶ Dasteter, *Zend Avesta*, vol. II, p.224.

⁷ Ibid. p.225.

⁸ Ibid.

“And I summon the woman advanced in her holy thoughts, and words, and deeds, and well subordinated, whose ruler is her lord, the holy one, who is (as) the bounteous *Aramaiti*; (yea), I summon even Thy wives, O Ahura!”¹

There are many other texts other than Gathas in which the human rights and the equality of man and woman are described. A book was composed in the gathic language called *Haptanghaiti* soon after Zarathustra's time, this book confirms the true status of women in the early Avestan era. Whereas In Yasna 39/2 the souls of the men and women wherever they are born who strive for the glory of righteousness are praised. In several parts of the earlier Avestan writings pious men and women are named and glorified together. More than 300 men and women of all over the world are mentioned in an avestan book called In the Farvardin Yasht² and their *Fravahars* are praised, few verses are mentioned in the above lines as an example. Both men or women are glorified for their good deeds and chastity, their integrity for deviation from the path of truth is also equal and they are defendant for sins and deceit.

SEPANDARMAZGAN FIRST WOMEN'S DAY

The 5th day of the Iranian month of Esfand³, is the day of Esfandgan celebrations for Zoroastrians, this whole month and specially day of Esfand is known as the day of women, it marks celebration of women, and can be truly called the oldest of its kind one in the world. This day of the month of Esfand is known as *Sepandarmazgan*, on this day Love, Friendship and Earth in ancient Persian culture are celebrated. In the Iranian tradition, the day of *Sepandarmazgan* was

¹Tr. L. H. Mills, *Zend Avesta*, (oxford: the Clarendon press, 1887) Vol.III, p.342.

² Hymn to the Guardian Angels

³ Esfand is the 12th month of the Iranian civil calendar of 1925. Esfand has 29 days (In leap year 30 days) and begins on February and ends on March. Esfand is the 3th month of Winter.

being held in the Great Persian Empire in the 20th century BC, it was given the national title of the Earth and the Earth is the symbol of Love & modesty. This day is registered on Bahman 29th in the Iranian Calendar, which coincides with 18th February of the Gregorian calendar, Only 3 days after Valentine.

Women were venerated in the feast of *Sepandarmazgan* and the Earth was deified. On this day, Women and girls sat on the throne and men and boys had to obey them and bring for them presents and gifts. In this way, men were reminded to acclaim and respect women.

“*Sepandarmaz* is another name for *mainyu* (earth) meaning Holy, Humble & Passionate”.¹

The name *Sepandarmaz* is also given to the Earth Guardian Angel .It is the symbol of humbleness, and means modest toward the entire creation. These are the qualities attributed to Earth on which we live, thus the symbol of modesty and love. Among the human beings, there are creatures that are unpleasant and revolting, but Earth is not like them. She embraces all creatures the same and loves them the same; like a mother who loves all children alike, even when they are ugly. In the ancient Iranian culture, mother is symbolized by *sepandarmaz* or earth.²

On this special day the family used to wake up earlier, cleaned the house, and celebrated the day by cooking Aash (a kind of Iranian soup like stow) with special Zoroastrian bread.

¹ Achaemenid Women, *Encyclopædia Britannica*,(USA: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 2006), p.1023.

² Dr.S.Karr, *Avestan Womanhood: its high esteem*, (Australia: published in 'Manashni', the voice of the Australian Zoroastrian Association of NSW, Sydney, Jan- Dec 1997).

WOMAN AND PRIESTHOOD

It is possible for a woman to reach the zoot level (become a Mobed¹) in the Zoroastrian religion, it required high degree of religious learning. In the book *Matikan Bezar Dadestan*², it is said that one day several women blocked the way of a famous and high-ranking judge; they wanted to ask him legal questions of him. The judge answered all questions except one. But one of the women responded that the answer to that question can be found in a particular book, and on a particular page.³ This shows that during the Sasanian era women were knowledgeable, even regarding complicated legal matters.

The Book on *Aerpatistān* and *Nirangistān* describes that both, men and women, were asked to perform official duties as Priests and in doing so had to give up there important work of tending in order to fulfil this religious requirement, those willing to become priests had to go through the intensive training like their husbands did.⁴

A festival called *Gahanbār* is celebrated on start of a new season, during this ceremony, eight priests surround the glowing Fire, while the representatives of the community in the village, and the household, including a respected (and holy) housewife of many off-springs, are all expected to be readily available to perform certain obligations during the ceremony conducted by the Priests.

¹ Mobed means Zoroastrian Priest, a religious authority.

² A famous book about History of Ancient Persia.

³ Tooran Shahriari Bahrami. *The social position of women in old Persia*, Tr. Vida Bahrami Keyani. Mehergan journal. (Australia: university of Sydney printing service,1998), p.29.

⁴ Dr.S.Karr, *Avestan Womanhood: its high esteem*.

The book of Sad-Dār¹ 5.5 talks that men and women both are equally proficient in performing the Navjote Ceremony and the *Geti Kharid*² (literally the entry to heaven obtained during worldly existence) by themselves.

Despite many evidences and examples of female mobed in Zoroastrian texts and history, there are many scholars who do not agree with this opinion of female mobeds. A famous Zoroastrian writer Mrs. Parvin Mistri writes in an article, that the Zoroastrian religion gives very high regard to purity and cleanliness. Spiritually woman is equal to man, but biologically it is impossible for her to keep herself clean every time, so technically it is not advisable for her to be a mobed.

But this opinion is not the famous one; generally Zoroastrians have no problem in accepting a female priest. One of the biggest evidences occurred recently when Tehran Mobeds' *Anjuman (Anjoman-e-Mobedan)* in February 2011 announced that for the first time in history of Iran and Zoroastrian communities, 8 women took oath as mobeds (priests) in Iran as Mobedyars (Lady Priests).³

During a magnificent celebration, arranged by the Tehran Anjoman-e-Mobedan at the Khosravi Community Hall, and on a day that coincided with Jashn-e-Esfandgan (considered to be women's day), a unique & historic ceremony had been arranged with a view to glorify the position of women within the Zoroastrian society.

¹ Literally means (*100 doors/openings to knowledge*)

² Tr. E. W. West, *Sacred Books of the East*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), Vol.24, P.682

³ Got this information through an email communication with Dr. Shernaz Cama on 17-05-2011

Eight out of fifteen candidates who had undergone stringent and extensive religious trainings in entire Avesta and who had acquired high levels of religious knowledge were bestowed upon with titles as Mobedyars.¹

ZOROASTRIAN WOMAN UNDER LAW

LAWS RELATED TO PURIFICATION

Purity is one of the main and most important pillars of the Zoroastrian religion, that is why the Zoroastrian texts are full of verses telling about importance and laws related to purification and if we see verses particularly related to women we will find tens of them. This is because first of all a woman is responsible for the family and the household, and it is her duty to take care of everything related to home and family. Secondly the woman goes through processes of the monthly cycle and giving birth, so there are many laws related to these matters, in the coming section we will be discussing particularly these laws.

IMPORTANCE OF PURITY AND CLEANLINESS IN ZOROASTRIAN RELIGION:

According to Zoroastrian texts the health of mind and mental diseases depend upon the harmony and purity of the body. The evil Spirit, Ahriman, come upon the body whose mental and physical harmony are disturbed, so it's the duty of a Zoroastrian not only to protect himself from its attack but also to stay away from that which introduces this disease. That's why purification has high importance in religion. And there are many purification ceremonies in Zoroastrian religion. Purification is intended to keep the body strong and healthy, so that it has a

¹ *Women mobeds in Iran*, <http://www.parsinews.net/iran-women-mobeds/2478.html>. (17-05-2011)

healthy and strong effect on the mind, a famous Avestan verse says "cleanliness is next to Godliness".

Dinkard, which is one of the Pahlavi texts, says: "the removal of the sin pertaining to the soul and rendering it precious depends upon the strength of the body; (for) it is owing to the existence of the body that there is cleansing of the sin of the soul"¹.

Professor Darmesteter says in his introduction of Zend Avesta II, "the axiom that 'cleanliness is next to Godliness' shall be altogether a Zoroastrian axiom with this difference, that in the Zoroastrian religion 'cleanliness is a form itself of Godliness'."²

J.J.Modi says, "such being the case, it is no wonder, that in the Avesta, and among the followers of the Zoroastrian religion, a good deal of importance was attached to health laws and to the purification of the body as a step towards the preservation of health. As religion powerfully impresses upon the mind of masses the necessity of preserving laws of health and purification, their observation has taken to the form of religious ceremonies."³

LAWS OF PURITY FOR WOMEN:

As we have mentioned before that contact with every kind of impure is considered to be the cause of impurity. So if we talk about women particularly she goes through many stages during which she cannot be considered pure. So it is because of this reason that special laws are defined for her in the book of laws

¹ Ed. And Tr. Behramjee, P.D.B. Sunjana, *Dinkard*, (Bombay: 1874-1928), Vol. IV, p.288.

² James Darmesteter, *Le Zend Avesta II*, (Paris : A. Maisonneuve publishers, 1960), p.X.

³ Mody, *The religious ceremonies and customs of the Parsees*, p.86.

Vandidad. This book enjoins that a woman who is pregnant must be kept isolated for a fortnight. During this period she has to submit herself to a strict routine regarding diet, washing and clothing. Her diet is to be light consisting of fresh milk, baked meat, fresh or dry fruits and the like. Her washing is to be regulated to the interval of every three days. At the expiration of fortnight she is considered clean. Women during confinement are to be segregated.

Vandidad also defines rules for monstrous women; they must be isolated, as because of their impurity they are danger for others. The rules are similar to those in other religions, they cannot eat within same utensils, cannot be in much contact with other people etc. they defined monstrous period is eight nights, More than that means that the daēwas¹ are at work, and a purification/exorcism ritual is performed.

RIGHTS OF A WOMAN IN ZOROASTRIANISM

According to Zoroastrian scholars Zoroastrian religion talks about equality of male and female and that is why the Zoroastrian scriptures are full of verses telling about rights and duties of women according to different relationships. We will be discussing the religious status of the Zoroastrian woman by considering rights and duties of each relation i.e., daughter, mother, and wife.

RIGHTS OF A DAUGHTER:

The Gāthic word for the daughter is *Dugkēda* and the Avestan word, *Dukhtar/ Dughtar* (Skt: *Duhitar*).

¹ Evil forces.

Both mean “one, adept at milking cows”. During early times when it was an agricultural soil-based economy it was the early morning duty of the daughters of the house to milk the cows.

“In Gāthā Ushtāvaiti, Yasna 45.5 Zarathushtra uses symbolic language in describing the attributes of the Lord Father, Ahurā Mazda’s attributes - Spenta Ārmaiti and Vōhu Manō as his daughters

Again, in Ashisvang Yasht the divinity, Ashi Vanghui, is described, symbolically, as the daughter of Ahurā Mazda and the sister of Āshā Vahishtā.

In Gāthā Vahishtō Ishti, Yasna 53.3 uses the epithet ‘the last achievement’ for his youngest daughter, ‘*Pouruchista*’ (presumably of an unwed lady), while singing the praise of his great-great-grandfather, Haēchāt-aspā of the family of Spitamā, as per the traditional norms of ancestor worship (Skt: pitris) of those days.”¹

A daughter is a blessing of AhuraMazda, His sign of love and affection for his beloved men. The Avestan text talks about daughters in a very detailed manner. If we arrange the verses chronologically we can get details about rights of daughter since childhood. Among the Iranians in the age of the Avesta daughters were considered blessing of God and were not disliked. Although they were less useful than sons in the extension of the father's race, still they, too, were objects of love and tenderness, tending to help the Zoroastrian race towards the religious object. We shall be discussing it in the next section

¹Dr.S.Karr, *Avestan Womanhood: its high esteem*

The Newborn:

According to the book of *rivayat*¹ the female infant must be breastfed for 15 months, it is an obligation upon the mother and if the father opposes it or acts as a hurdle then he is committing a sin, the mother will be also considered sinful in this case, as it is the right of the daughter to get care and affection of her mother.²

It is right of the child as well that when he/she is born a lamp is lighted and kept burning for at least three days in the room where the mother is confined. The Saddar³ says: "when the child becomes separate from the mother it is necessary to burn a lamp for three nights and days-if they burn a fire it would be better-so that the demons and fiends may not be able to do any damage and harm; because when the child is born, it is exceedingly delicate for those three days."⁴

Age 7

According to the Avestan text a child is immature before he or she gets 7 years old, that's is why they are not responsible for their thoughts words or actions. So their actions will be responsibility of the parents or the guardian. But at the age of seven the girl is considered a grown up child, not fully grown though, but gets responsible for her thoughts actions and words, therefore this age is considered to be right for the ceremony of Navjote (initiation) and gets into good faith by the investiture of Sudreh and Kusti. The ideal age for Navjote told in Rivayat is 7 years 3 months.⁵

¹ This text is dated 1008 C.E

² Tr. Behramgore Tahmuras Anklesaria, *The Pahlavi Rivayat of Farnbag-Srosh, Sacred books of the East*, (Oxford: Clarendon press 1938).p.989

³ Ibid.

⁴ Modi, *The religious ceremonies and customs of the Parsees*, p.5.

Age 9:

The Pahlavi text advises: "a daughter, until she is 9 years old, should not be affianced (*i.e. engaged. Aves: Paradata*) or betrothed to anyone." ¹

Age 12:

When the girl turns 12 (the age of puberty) it is advisable to give her hand in marriage. At this age she turns to a complete Avestan woman (*Charaiti*) and thus a perfect maiden to get married.

DUTIES OF PARENTS TOWARDS AN UNWED MAIDEN:

The Zoroastrian girl throughout her education was taught and qualified for all domestic necessities and house chores in her father's house, at the same time her mind was steadily educated in the fundamental principles of justice, truth and righteousness. "In the list of personages immortalized in the pages of the Avesta, for their sanctity, wisdom, heroism or patriotism, we observe a record of illustrious maidens."²

RIGHTS OF A ZOROASTRIAN WIFE:

Marriage is an important institution and has special importance in the Zoroastrian religion; both man and woman are considered to be incomplete until they get married. It is an institution that is favoured by God. That is why the Avestan text is full of verses telling about importance, significance, process and rules of marriage.

¹ *Sad-där* in Chapter 34.

² Darbar Dastur Sanjana. *The position of Zoroastrian woman in remote antiquity*, (Bombay: education society's steam press, 1892.), p.20.

THE CHOICE OF MARRIAGE

Before a maiden gets married it is her parents' responsibility to find a good spouse for her and she has full choice to accept or reject him. In this context there is a famous story narrated in the last Gathic poem, Yasna 53, features a celebration of the wedding of Zarathushtra's daughter Pouruchista, who is specifically addressed in Yasna 53.3-4¹. These are remarkable verses (3-5) of the 53rd Chapter of the Yasna or of the Gatha Vahishti.

In this poem Zartusht addresses his daughter and says:

“Pouruchista, Oh youngest daughter of Zarathushtra, this gentleman with good thoughts and truthfulness asks your hand in marriage. You consult your wisdom and make your decision based on your good thoughts, in the performance of this righteous duty”².

We do not have much detail about what happened afterwards, but it is clear from these verses that Zarathustra gave free hand to his daughter to decide what is best for her. He trusted her and asked to take help from her good thoughts. It is clear from the above mentioned verses that Zarathustra wanted his daughter Pouruchista to have a free hand in accepting or rejecting the marriage proposal made by the young Jamasp. The important point to be noted here is that Zarathushtra wanted her to use her wisdom and make her own choice. It is also worth noting that Zarathushtra had named his daughter Pouruchista, which means Full of Knowledge.

¹ Muller, *sacred books of the east, Zend Avesta vol.III*, p.92.

² Parvin Shakiba, Status of women in ancient Persia and other ancient countries,

http://ahura.homestead.com/files/IranZaminSeven/Pervin_Shakiba_Women.pdf. (18-05-2011)

RIGHTS OF A ZOROASTRIAN WIFE MENTIONED IN THE BOOK OF DINKARD:

In Book5, Chapter 18 of this book, we come across the following instruction on how to treat married women by their husbands.

- A wife should always be treated with affection and without stinginess.
- A husband should share with his wife all the good gained from righteous deeds.
- A maiden wife should be given good dowry. And a wife who was previously widow should be given lesser dowry.
- One should maintain physical intimacy so that she does not become frustrated or feels deprived, and gets surrounded by evil thoughts.
- Both men and women should try their best to avoid second spouse as far as possible. Such an act is not considered commendable.¹

Status of the Zoroastrian wife:

There is high regard for the wife in the Zoroastrian religion, it is duty of the husband to keep her happy and is considered sinful if he does not take care of her properly, in the Avestan text it is mentioned that if some people keep husband and wife apart and prevent them from meeting and being together they would be punished for that. This is emphasized in Ashi(sh)-svang Yasht, verse 59, as it is mentioned: "The worst deed that men and cruel persons can commit is to wilfully keep asunder woman and man in a state of prolonged separation and to prevent them from meeting."²

¹ Muller, *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 5, chapter 5.

²Ibid.p.281.

Dr. Geiger, in his German work *Ostiramsche Kultur*, mentions the following point: "Contrasted with the foregoing, a stanza in the Gathas, if rightly interpreted, appears to contain a higher and purer idea of marriage, and to regard it as an intimate union founded on love and piety"¹.

On celebrating the occasion marriage, the priest addresses the young people with these words:

"Admonishing words I say unto the maidens, who will enter into marriage"

"And to you (the youth) I, *who know it. Take them to heart"

"Learn to know through religion and of these (the parents), the life of a good mind"

"In piety you shall both seek to win the love of each other, only thus will it lead you to joy"²

There are different words used for wife in avestan language, Darab Dastur Sanjana says in his lecture about position of Zoroastrian women in remote antiquity:

"The common Avesta words which mean the wife are *ghena*, *ndiri* and *nmdnopathni*. The first word means, etymologically, "a begetter of children," "a bearer/" or "a mother." The second is a simple feminine form of the word *nere*, "a male/" "a man," "a hero." The third literally denotes 'the lady or mistress of the house' as the husband is generally called in the Avesta 'the lord or master of the house.

¹ Hinnells, J. R. *Zoroastrian and Parsi studies: selected works of John R. Hinnells*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p.242.

² Dr. S. Karr, *Avestan Womanhood: its high esteem*.

Here in lies a linguistic proof for the assumption that in the Avesta period the position of the Iranian wife was one of equality to that of her husband.”¹

The German studies of the old Iranian culture show that a woman was called *namano pathni* from the day she got married, just as the man called *namano paiti*, which means the master of the house, so the women was equally called the mistress of the house. So she had equal rights and duties along with the husband in building up a family cooperating with him in the direction and management of the house.

Mr. Darab Sanjana further says:

“In the Avesta both sexes appear constantly as possessing equal rights; there is no difference as to their respective importance. Pious men and women are frequently named together. As in this world, so also in the next, they live together, enjoying in common the pleasures of Paradise. Wives are an honour to the house, and the good spirits, particularly Ahura Mazda, are represented as being in the company of female Yazatas.”²

The good wives who possessed good thoughts and practiced good deeds also used to participate in religious and holy ceremonies, they were invited to the Atish kada (Zoroastrian fire temple) in order to ignite the fire and do other religious actions along with the pious and orthodox men.

The Zoroastrian religion gives very high regard to a pious wife and considers her a companion and a co-operator with him in order to play part in not only the prosperity of the humanity but in suppressing every kind of evil from this world.

¹ Sanjana, *position of Zoroastrian women in remote antiquity*, p.35.

² Ibid., p.43.

If we compare this high position of the Zoroastrian woman with non-Zoroastrian women of that time, we can clearly identify quite an opposite condition. For example the Assyrians needed men for their army as they were always in state of war, so they thought about wives just child producing slaves; men used to accept girls in marriage after receiving money. Men were free to sell their wives, and an old woman could be sent anywhere far from her home.

Chinese believed that boys are made by God and girls are made by devil. Girls were sold like slaves and were drown in river if everyone refuses to buy them. They were also given as sacrifice to gods.

In India their condition was good during the Vedic period, but in the post Vedic period they were treated worse than animals. They were burned alive after the death of the husband in the same pyre in which the husbands were burnt.

In Arab before Islam parents used to bury their daughters alive and husbands would give their wives in gamble.

In Rome women were considered troublemakers and were only used to create more soldiers to meet the needs of their endless wars. A Roman could sell his wives just like his slaves. In Greece women were treated like things which can be sold, bought, used or thrown. Aristotle rated women next to slaves and below men. He says 'A male is male in virtue of a particular ability and a female in virtue of a particular inability'. Plato considered men to be above women but was better than his contemporary fellows and gave women the right to conduct the affairs in the house and if a woman had the ability she should have the right

¹ Morsink, Johannes , *Aristotle on the Generation of Animals*, (Washington: University Press of America Inc.1982),p.728.

to even rule. But in his famous discourse timeous he says clearly that women are the reincarnations of unworthy or criminal men.¹

RIGHTS OF A MOTHER

The Zoroastrian religion gives high regard to women who gives birth to children. As it is mentioned above that the main purpose of marriage in Zoroastrianism is religious and moral stability. And if a pious woman holding good thoughts and does good deeds becomes a mother then her children will be pious and good people who will fight against the evil powers. So the status of the mother is very high and precious. In fact it is a blessing of Ahuramazda upon the parents to give them children. It is mentioned at many places in the Avestan text that those who cannot have children are damned by Ahuramazda. For this reason the Old Iranian honors “the mother of many children, of many sons, of many bold talented sons.”

The Greek historians say that the kings used to honor mothers of many children and used to bless them with expensive gifts and valuable awards for helping the nation in increasing the race.²

“Bright children and a direct line of descendants are bestowed upon pious women by Haoma.”³

DUTIES OF ZOROASTRIAN WOMEN:

¹ Plato, *Timaeus*, translated by Benjamin Jowett, (forgotten books publishers, 2008)

² Sanjana, *Position of Zoroastrian women in remote antiquity*, p.11.

³ Muller, *sacred books of the east, Zend Avesta*, vol.III, (Yas. IX. 22.)

DUTIES OF A DAUGHTER TOWARDS HER PARENTS, FAMILY AND HERSELF:

Unlike many other religions and cultures at that time, Zoroastrian religion never discourages daughters or considers them bad omen, instead it gives daughters a great respect and value, woman has own share and great importance in the cosmos and that is why they should be treated with respect love and care. In return there are some duties of the daughters as well towards their parents and family. Only a good daughter is able to be a good wife and a better mother.

When both the girl and boy turn to 7, they are considered to be wise and responsible for their actions and thoughts. When it comes to daughter it is duty of her parents to teach her matters related to household and domestic life, and it is must for the daughter to co-operate with her parents and learn whatever they teach her.

"The Avesta as well as the Pahlavi contains indirect or distant allusions to the condition of a maiden in her father's home. General training in moral and religious precepts, the elementary rules of sanitation¹, the art of tending domestic animals², of spinning and weaving the sacred girdle as well as garments³, of superintending the laborers in the field⁴, and the milking of the cows, formed, as it seems, the principal acquirements useful to the maiden."⁵

¹ Muller, *Sacred books of the east, Zend Avesta* Vol.I(Vend. VII., 60 72).

² Ibid. volume III(Yas. XXIII. 3).

³ Ibid. Vol.I(Vend. V. 67).

⁴ Ibid. Vol.III(Yas. LXVIII. 12).

⁵ Sanjana, *Position of the Zoroastrian women in remote antiquity*, p. 17,18.

It is duty of a maiden as well to choose a good husband for herself, as we have seen above that parents should give her full liberty to choose her husband, so it becomes her duty to think wisely and choose a man as a husband who is able to help her in leading a pious and healthy life in this world and the world hereafter as well. We have the example of Zaratushtra when a gentleman named Jamasp asked for his daughter's hand in marriage. Even as a father he does not force his authority over his daughter but advises her to use her own wisdom and decide whether to accept the standing offer of marriage from the learned Jamasp. There is a verse in Yasna which orders the unwed young boys and girls to be careful in choosing their future spouses.it says:

“Listen attentively to these words (of instructions) as I speak to ye, Maidens and to ye, Youths prepared to engage in the bonds of holy matrimony. Understand them well and bear them in thy Good Minds. Let each one of ye do earnestly strive to surpass the other, both, in Righteousness and in Love, to such a degree as to deserve the more gainful of the reward.”¹

A pious and a noble maiden is very important in the Zoroastrian religion, she is used as a symbol of Ahuramazda's blessing upon His creation. In Vandidad when the verse talks about the *chanvat* bridge which will decide the fate of a person, it also talks about figure of a pious maiden who will lead the pious men.

The vendidad while telling the story of the day of judgment mentions that the pious and righteous men will see their own conscience in a better light in the figure of a pleasant 12 year old Chairita², as attractive and as the most beautiful lady in the land, to hold their hand and escort them across the Bridge of the

¹ Muller, *Sacred book of the east, zand Avesta Vol.I, Gāthā Vahishto Isht -Yasna 53.5).*

² Means pious maiden.

Separator (of the good from the evil). "She, the beautiful, fair Daēnā of queenly stature possessing a skilful confident and distinguished composure, will appear respectfully before them wearing a crown on the head."¹

In the avestan text there is great regard to those maidens who keep themselves away from the evil powers. A verse in Yasna states:

"The unwed women (Aves: aghravō) who have truly revered Yazata Haōma pray that they be soon blessed with honest husbands."²

DUTIES OF A WIFE TOWARDS HER HUSBAND

Marriage is a very important institution in the Zoroastrian religion, unlike other religions which encourage in leaving the worldly life and specially are against marriage. According to the Vendidad, Ahura Mazda says: "O Spitama Zaratushtra! Indeed, I thus recommend hereunto thee, a man with a wife above a Magava who grows up (unmarried), a man with a family above one without any family, a man with children above one without any children." It is mentioned in the Gathas that the ground where the married man lives feels happy and glad. Zaratushtra asks: "O creator of the physical world! Which is the second place on the earth that feels happy?" Ahura Mazda replies: "that (place is happy), over which a holy man builds a house with fire, cattle, wife, children and good followers".³

¹ Tehmurasp Rustamjee Sethna, *Translations of the Avestan and Pahlavi Texts*, (Karachi:Parsi Colony,1976-1977),p.593.

² Yasna : 9.2

³ Muller, *sacred books of the east, Vendidad III*,chapter1

There were other higher purposes of the marriage for the ancient Iranians than the mere producing of children. These were not of an egoistic nature, but were based in the hope of the spiritual elevation of the good creation in the end.

“The motive of marriage for the Iranians was, therefore, sacred. It was a religious purpose which they had in view when the male and female individuals contributed by marital union (*nairithwana*) their assistance,(1) in the propagation of the human race; (2), in spreading the Zoroastrian faith ; and (3), in giving stability to the religious kingdom of God by contributing to the victory of the good cause which victory will be complete about the time of the resurrection.”¹

It is because of the sacredness of the institution of marriage that a man is asked to look for a pious, intelligent and strong woman, who is able to become a good mother of many sons, daughters and grandchildren as well.

One of the most important duties of the wife is to be obedient to her husband; she must be thankful to him and honor and regards him like the goddess *armaiti* and other female angels who are devoted to their deity. She must be chaste and devoted to her guardian.

In Visparad 3. 4 it is mentioned. “Women rich in holy thoughts, words and deeds, are, well informed and, as devoted wives, are, in return, in tune with and pleasantly agreeable and courteous to their husbands.”

In order to be a good wife, a woman should be serene, straightforward in her mind words and action and worthy of respect for her accomplished education. She must be able to stand side by side with her husband and supports him in

¹ Sanjana, *Position of Zoroastrian women in remote antiquity*, p.29.

good and bad times. Both religious and social status of the wife in Zoroastrianism is very high and equal to man. So it is her duty to be wise and strong enough to take decisions with her husband.

"The Avestan texts say that the virtuous and loving wife, who holds an honourable position in society is one who is well taught in her feminine duties by parents of good lineage, is a diligent house-wife, is the rightful lady of the house, is a progenitor, rich in off-springs of many off-springs, is "a strict follower of the laws of purity, is as much proficient in the home as with the domestic cattle in the barn and in the growing fields, does not indulge in the sin of slander, is well principled and not discourteous to her husband whom she assists in creating a life-style of mutual enjoyment. She then becomes qualified to be deemed a respected and loved wife and thus promotes a happy home life."¹

DUTIES OF A MOTHER

As I have mentioned earlier that the Zoroastrian religion pays very high regard and respect to the mother of many children. Mother is the basic institution of the society and has a very important role in developing the society and preparing it against the evil powers of *ahrman*.

It is because of the above mentioned reasons that the role of the mother and her duties has been discussed in detail in different scriptures of Zoroastrianism.

The very first duty begins when she conceives a child; it is must for her to take care of herself and the unborn child. A child is God's blessing upon His good

¹ Dr.S.Karr, *Avestan Womanhood: its high esteem.*

people, so any mishandling with this blessing can make Him angry. "And if a woman tries to kill her child by means of abortion or different drugs, so this will be considered a great sin for which she will be severely punished"¹. She is even prohibited to come in contact with a dead or any decomposing body, or anything even like a toothpick which may contain germs of one's disease.

Once the child is born, she is ought to nurse him/her. The male child must be breastfed for 17 months, and the female child for 15 months. A later Pahlavi book calls it a sin liable to hellish punishment if a mother fails to suckle her baby or to feed it on her pure milk.²

Giving a good name to the child is also the duty of both the parents, the ancient Persians used to wait for few days watching the physical and mental characteristics of the child and then they would decide the name of the child. Naming the child is a religious duty because in all the religious duties like during life and after death a person's name is recited as he or she is named at the time of his or her birth. This name is called is called *janam-nam* or birth name.

Next it is duty of both the parents specially the mother, to play an active part in the education of her children. The Zoroastrian religion emphasises very much on the right and strong training and education of the young children. Zoroastrian texts often advise the parents to inspire their children to adopt the path of knowledge and explain that women have an equal responsibility in the dissemination of knowledge and science.

¹ Modi, "religious ceremonies and customs of Pārsis".p.54

² Sanjana, *Position of a Zoroastrian woman in remote antiquity*,p.39.

“Whatever a man or a woman knows that is good and right, not only should they practice, but inform others to perform accordingly”¹.

CONDEMNATION OF THE BAD WOMAN

After discussing the duties and characteristics of a good woman, I would like to mention traits of a bad wife and how the Zoroastrian scriptures and law condemns her.

It is her duty and obligation to take care of the prestige and reputation of her family before marriage and of her husband after the marriage and does nothing which can be harmful for the respect and honour of the family.

There is a list of the sins mentioned in different Zoroastrian scriptures and specially the book of Vendidad which mostly talks about purification laws.

“Illegal union between the sexes was condemned as a mortal crime.”²

A bad woman was unfit to offer any prayer³, (Stand thou not near her, sit thou not by her side,” is the exhortation to woman in Sec. 57 of the 17th Yasht. Infanticide was strictly prohibited. It was regarded a deliberate murder if the mother destroys the fruit of adultery in the womb, by means of drugs and was by law entitled to punishment. The sinful woman, her partner and the purchaser of drugs, were supposed to be equally guilty of killing the child.⁴

¹ Yasna 41/2

² Vend. XVIII. 62-65.

³ Yasht. XVII. 54.

⁴ Sanjana, *Position of zoroastrian women in remote antiquity*, p.42.

It was duty of the male sinner to feed and take care of the illegitimate offspring, until it becomes seven years of age.

A sorceress is an accursed creature. Disobedience towards the husband is a discreditable crime. Failure to preserve one's health is also a sin, or if she steals the property of her husband or disobeys her sovereign. It is disgraceful if the husband fails to instruct his wife, and does not keep her away from doing evil acts.

"In the Ar^a-Viraf-namak it is related that Ar^a-Viraf saw the souls of a husband and wife, that of the husband destined for heaven, and that of the wife for hell; but the wife clung to her husband and asked why they should be separated, and he told her it was on account of her neglect of religious duties; whereupon she reproached him for not teaching and chastising her.¹ And, afterwards, the man went to heaven and the woman to hell. And owing to the repentance of that woman she was in no other affliction in hell but darkness and stench. And that man sat in the midst of the righteous of heaven in shame, from not converting and not teaching the woman, who might have become virtuous in his keeping."¹

SOME SOCIAL ISSUES RELATED TO WOMAN MENTIONED IN SACRED TEXTS

We have discussed the rights and duties of woman according to different relationships, there are some other issues as well which are particularly related to society and have been discussed in Zoroastrian texts as well like divorce, polygamy, lack of children, widowed women, adoption and most important

¹ Muller, *Sacred books of the east, Pahlavi volume 1*, p. 124.

problems related to inheritance, these issues will be discussed briefly in the next section.

SEPARATION OR DIVORCE

The reasons for divorce mentioned in the book of *Revayat* of *Aturfarnbag Farnbag-Strosh* are if the wife is sinful or cheats on her husband then she is bad and the legitimate marriage dissolves by the wife's consent, but the husband has choice to keep her with the intention of improving her, Because by "doing so he reinforces the truth and goodness of the true faith in this world."¹ This attitude to divorce is reinforced in the later *Riwayat i Emēd i Ašawahīšān*, where the husband is only allowed to divorce his legitimate wife with her consent, unless her wrongdoings and sins have been discovered.²

"In the later *Rivāyats of Hormazyār Frāmarz*, the matter of divorce is again raised, following a detailed discussion regarding the age of marriage, the negotiating of marriage contracts, the five kinds of marriage, the marriage ceremony and the division of the patrimony. The only instance of a lay person (*behdān*) being allowed to take another wife is if the first wife could not bear children, but he is not allowed to divorce her; nor is male impotence a ground for divorce"³.these rivayat also state that if the woman who commits adultery is repentant then she will be still considered a wife and in the custody of the husband, but regarding the condition that the rule is not in hands of Zoroastrians. But if the government is of the Zoroastrians, and a man catches his wife in adultery, or he hears of it from some collaborative source, then she is to

¹ *Zoroastrianism in the light of theosophy*, lectures compiled by Nasarvanji F. Bilimoria, (Bombay: the theosophical publishing society,1937), p. 69.

² Maria Macuch, *Inheritance I. Sasanian Period*, www.iranica.com, (30-05-2011)

³ *The Persian Rivāyats*, (Bombay: K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, 1932),p. 204.

be put to death¹. "These *Rivāyats* seem to recognize that the only Zoroastrian grounds for divorce in a time of Muslim rule were apostasy and adultery. The woman was allowed to remarry with her husband's consent."²

The divorce overall is not a favorable act, and was the person who divorced his wife was not considered a good man. But this concept has changed over the years, and now the Zoroastrian community is accepting it more readily. We will discuss the modern change of trends in the next chapter.

LACK OF CHILDREN

In the Avestan tradition a married couple that remains childless literally has a misfortune and calamity at hand. In *Vendidād* this stands out as a constant reminder: "Certainly the Earth is most unhappy when her soil, which is fit for cultivation, remains uncultivated for a prolonged period. It is almost as if a virtuous and beautiful woman remains childless by her virtuous husband."³

The husband is permitted to remarry if his wife is unable to conceive. It is not clear though that how to arrive at the conclusion, that the wife is barren. But as we have seen before that divorce is not a favourable act so it is not advised that the husband divorces his first wife if such a case occurs. The Book of *Rivāyats* recommends that "when a couple is childless the husband may wed another wife, but the first wife should not be divorced."⁴

¹ Ibid.

² Maria Macuch, *Inheritance I. Sasanian Period*.

³ *Vendidād* 3.24

⁴ Dr.S.Karr, *Avestan Womanhood: its high esteem*

ADOPTION

The Avestan texts do not mention or talk about adoption. Most of the importance given to it appears to date back only to the 9th century CE, when the writing of the Pāhlavi Texts flourished.

"There seems to be an emphasis on the naming of an off-spring (adopted daughter or son, whether a child or a grownup - Dādistan i Dinik 57.3) in the prayer rituals during life as well as in the funerary rites of the deceased "to assist in the safe crossing of Chinvat Bridge on the 4th dawn". Also, "to obtain assistance from the Fravashi of the living adopted person for the propitiation of the soul of the departed, while continuing the lineage in this world so that religious ceremonies and other meritorious deeds may be performed in the name of the deceased" in later prayers on behalf of the departed. The acknowledgment of this tradition was so intense at the time that, according to the Book of Rivāyats, "*the same person could be adopted many times.*"¹"

According to many Zoroastrian scholars especially in India, from a religious point of view, if a Parsi Zoroastrian couple, especially a childless couple, wishes to adopt a child born of Parsi Zoroastrian parents, there should be no opposition. The couple may gladly fill the emptiness in their life and bestow the child with their love, affection and good education. The *Navjote* of such a child should be performed at the proper time.

However, as far as the 'Religious Rights' are concerned, "if a child is adopted from a secular adoption center, The question would arise as to how such a child

¹ Ibid.

can be allowed to enter and worship at a consecrated fire temple"¹ or participate in a religious ceremony. Merely performing the *navjote* ceremony of a child whose parentage is unknown cannot make the child a 'Parsi Zoroastrian'. Yet like the issue of divorce there has been many changes and modifications in this subject as well, we will be discussing in the next chapter.

I would like to conclude this issue of adoption by the following words of Mr. Noshir H. Dadrawala a famous Zoroastrian writer from India and editor of the magazine *deen parast*, he says:

"The position in law is quite clear. There is no legal adoption among Parsis and therefore if a couple decides to adopt a child, the latter would not enjoy automatic rights of inheritance etc., which a biological child born out of the couple's wedlock would have in the natural course enjoyed. The couple therefore would have to make wills and such testamentary documents to confer various rights of inheritance. *Navjotes* of such 'adopted' children, whose parentage is unknown, may be good for the emotional satisfaction of the adoptive parents. However, it cannot confer any legal or religious rights to the child."²

WIDOWS

According to the Book of *Rivāyats*, widowed ladies were capable of remarrying after only 4 months and 10 days, if they was not nursing a newborn. Otherwise, they had to wait for 18 months to marry again.³

Mansoor Shaki mentions the issue of the widows in his article and says:

¹ Legally as by custom and usage restricted to Parsi Zoroastrians only.

² Noshir H. Dadrawala, *Parsis and Adoption*, article posted in April 2007, [http://traditionalzoroastrianism.blogspot.com/search,\(05-06-2011\)](http://traditionalzoroastrianism.blogspot.com/search,(05-06-2011))

³ Dr.S.Karr, *Avestan Womanhood: its high esteem.*

"After the death of the master of the household, the most authoritative member of the family was the guardian (*sâlár*), who was responsible for the care and protection of women and minors. Juridically three categories of guardians, or *stûrs*, were distinguished: *bûdag* (q.v.) "lawful, at law," *kardag* "designated," and *gumârdag* "appointed." Family guardianship devolved on the guardian at law through obligation or kinship status: father, eldest brother, or husband. Should a son hold and administer the estate of the father he had to undertake guardianship over the minors (*Mâdayân*, pt. 1, p. 26). A widowed authorized wife and an unmarried or single daughter were reckoned among *stûrs*-at-law. As a family member the guardian at law was entitled to a portion of the inheritance (*abarmând*) and thus received no stipend."¹

But until recently it is not common for a widowed woman to remarry. And there is no much detail about this matter in other texts.

THE ISSUE OF POLYGAMY

We do not find many evidences which prove that whether polygamy was flourished in Ancient Persia and Zoroastrians or not. The Avestan texts are silent about it. And the only verse which talks about it is the one it is mentioned before which allows the husband to marry a second wife if his first wife is unable to conceive.²

Mr Sanjana in his book "*position of Zoroastrian woman in remote antiquity*" has discussed this matter in detail; he says that he has found no direct evidences of polygamy in ancient Persia. "Even the Zoroastrian texts when talk about wives, they use the term "wife" as a nominative singular term. Even the very nature of

¹ Mansour Shaki, *Family Law in Ancient Iran*, www. Iranica.com (08-06-2011)

² See page 57 above, lack of children

the marriage ideas which are inculcated in the Gathas, do not authorize us to assume any trace of polygamy among nations that flourished among very civilized surroundings. It is possible that in later times associations with foreign nations, Muslims or Hindus, might have introduced the practice of polygamy into the Zoroastrian community, but, as far as the Avesta period is concerned, there has been no mention of two wives belonging to one man nor any allusion even far-fetched to that practice”¹

LAWS RELATED TO INHERITANCE

An inheritance which means "distribution of heritage/estate" might be received either as an ordinary "portion, share" or a residuary "left over" legacy. According to the Mādayān, "If the father allots (*pad bahr dahēd* "gives in shares") the estate (to the heirs) in his lifetime they shall become thereby ordinary legatees to that property and they should discharge the loan/liabilities that he had incurred before allotting that property. If the master of the house on passing away gives property to the wife and children in such a way that it should come down to them in residuary legacy (*pad abarmānd rasēd*), it shall be so, but if he allots them in shares they will become ordinary legatees.

If the father died without defining or distributing the property, the share of an authorized or adopted son, as well as that of the widow who assumed the *chakarīh*, was twice that of a daughter (*Dādestān i dēnīg*, ed. Christensen, chap. 53; *Rivāyat i Emēd*, chap. 23; *Mādayān*, pt. 1).

This section can be concluded at the following lines from an article “*The social position of women in old Perisa*”, by Tooran Bahrami:

¹ Sanjana, *Position of Zoroastrian woman in remote antiquity*. p.44,45.

"Based on information regarding inheritance in the aforementioned book *Matikan Hezar Dadestan*, Bartholomae concludes that "during the Sasanian period, following the father's death, inheritance was apportioned in the following manner: the wife and the sons were to inherit equal portions. Daughters inherited half that amount if married, and were granted a trousseau. If not, they too inherited an equal amount to that of their mother or each of their brothers""¹

CHAPTER 2

IMPACT OF RELIGION ON LIFE OF A ZOROASTRIAN WOMAN IN KARACHI AND HER CONTRIBUTION IN THE SOCIETY

o Introduction of the survey

¹¹ Tooran Bahrami. *The social position of women in old Persia*, p.29

- o **Society and religion**
- o **Ritualistic and spiritual religiosity**
- o **The dress of the Parsi woman.**
- o **Keeping the identity.**
- o **Transfer of the tradition.**
- o **Intermarriages**
- o **Names of some famous Parsi women in Karachi.**

The discussion in the previous chapter revolved around the religious status of the Zoroastrian woman, her importance in the religious texts and some examples from the history.

In this chapter the focus will be particularly on the Zoroastrian woman in Karachi, it will be a brief overview of how the Zoroastrian woman is being able to play her part in the society in the light of the Zoroastrian religion.

Another point which is important to mention here that from now on I will be using the term “Pārsi” woman, instead of “Zoroastrian” woman, because the Zoroastrians of the subcontinent are called “Pārsis”.

The Pārsi woman in Pakistan and especially in Karachi is playing a very important role in building the Pakistani society generally and the Pārsi society specifically. We concluded in the previous chapter that the Zoroastrian religion gives very high status to the female gender and accepts her unique role in the cosmic battle of good and evil, so it is the heavy responsibility of the Pārsi woman to build a strong and healthy society in order to dominate the evil forces.

The Zoroastrian religion has origins in Iran, but they faced difficulties there and were forced to leave their homes for the sake of survival, a large number of them came to the subcontinent and resided here. This migration resulted in changing some of their social norms. The most prominent ones are the dress code, the language and some of the religious ceremonies and festivals. These are mentioned in the famous story of Sanjān.¹ Other developments and changes were developed

¹ See introduction p.1.

with time and place as they shifted from one area to another. A large number of them came to Karachi as well and became the pioneer Karachi makers.

In this chapter the discourse will revolve around some of the famous women who have contributed in different fields. But before we begin with this we will have a quick glance at the developments in the status of Zoroastrian woman with time, especially after their migration from Iran, many changes and developments occurred in different concepts traditions, customs and above all in the religion with time. The most important is the change in language, dress and appearance.

A short survey was conducted in order to have an idea about the present situation of tradition and religiosity among the Pakistani Zoroastrian women. Another reason of the survey was to find out reasons of their successful lives.

The first section of this chapter is mostly based on the survey.

INTRODUCTION OF THE SURVEY

It was a qualitative survey taken from very few common but professional and competent ladies of their fields.

I tried to get this survey filled out by as many ladies as I could, the criteria was that they should be Pakistani and have spent some time in Pakistan, there was no age, education or residence's limit, so the survey was filled mostly by those women who have temporarily or permanently shifted abroad.

The questions which were asked in the questions were open ended and revolving around religious and social life of the individual.

The first point worth mentioning here is that during the course of my research, the Zoroastrian society remained quite helpful and co-operative in providing the

material, but unexpectedly most of them were reluctant in responding to the survey questionnaire. Some ladies answered straightforwardly that religion is a private matter and they are not comfortable in discussing this. Some of them did not answer all of the questions. Few ladies even said that religion is no more an important issue in this modern age; in fact it is a hurdle in acquiring compatibility with the modern age.

During the survey many aspects appeared which are important to mention and few other were observed during the writing of this dissertation, for example change in the dress, tradition, language and customs of the Pārsi woman, yet preserving the religious identity successfully.

Below these aspects will be discussed in detail.

SOCIETY AND RELIGION

An interesting aspect was observed during the survey i. e., dominance of society over religion, a large number of Pakistani Pārsi women hold the view that the Pārsi society is a strong society which strengthens its members. One of the respondents Vahista (who is daughter of the famous Pārsi mobed Dr. Dastur Dhalla) responded when asked about the importance of religion in the social life, that religion is not a very important reason for her success and according to her it did not play a vital or an important role in her upbringing, but she gave the credit to the society which helped her throughout her life. The Pārsi society is a strong and supportive society which takes very good care of its members.

And this answer was a common one among all the respondents; they do have some features which may identify them as Zoroastrians such as the Navjote ceremony, and different religious festivals and traditions. But these features do not have a very strong effect on their daily lives practically.

Talking about the strong society, it is observed that religion does play an important role in uniting its followers, religiosity does not matter, but sense of belonging to the same religion is important and talking about women particularly they are more stick to their cultural values and traditions, no matter to which religion they belong. Almost all of the Pārsi whom I met during writing this dissertation were members of one or more Zoroastrian societies, clubs, gymnasiums, NGOs, or even magazines and newspapers. The children are sent to Pārsi schools and are reminded about their origin and identity now and then.

RITUALISTIC AND SPIRITUAL RELIGIOSITY

Another aspect which was observed during the survey is the growing space between religion and religious activities. Very few people believed in daily prayers, the rest said that religion is in the heart and it is not necessary to perform actions, three famous principles of good thoughts, good words and good actions has changed to spiritual meanings, and they believe that in the modern age there is no need of ritualistic worship.

There was a question about keeping a balance between modern and religious life or compromising one of them, 80% answered that religion is a private matter and the demands of the modern life should not be compromised. These 80% were among the young generation, the remaining 20% which contained mostly elderly (above 60 years) people stated that a balance should be maintained between the both.

During the survey a new aspect of religiosity of the Zoroastrian woman appeared, many of them replied that it is the crux of the religion which not only united them, but also helped them to adapt new environments and cultures throughout the ages. Zoroastrian religion does not dictate its followers, but define the rules and then gives them free choice. Different rituals and rites developed over time as

they became parts of different cultures and environments, but these rituals are never permanent and always have the capacity to change.

One of the respondents explained this question very nicely and said:

“being religious is the process of maintaining a relationship with a Higher Power, whether you call Him Ahura Mazda or God or Allah. It is a matter of the mind and heart, not of whether you kneel or bow or prostrate yourself before Him... I think having a set ritual of prayers helps in focusing on remembering Him, but it is the means, not the end. I consider myself a religious person because I strive to live by the core values of my religion. I believe in “right” over rites, so I am not ritualistic. In my opinion that doesn’t make me less religious.”

There was a question in the survey that how is the Pakistani Pārsi woman coping with modernity in her religious and social life, the answers were similar that they adapt the new demands of the modern world, but not forgetting the spirit of the religion which is to spread the good, a Pakistani Pārsi woman practices religion in her society and home, but when she comes out she is treated like any other woman, she has to struggle like other Pakistani women. I quote here words of Ms. Farishta Dinshaw which she said in response to this question:

“Parsi women have the same advantages of women of higher socio-economic status such as education, opportunities to work, and opportunities to travel. Similarly, she is subject to the same vulnerability to personal safety, the same kind of erosion of rights and gender inequity that Pakistani women on the whole face regardless of religion or class. The disparity between religion and location (living in Pakistan) occur mainly in terms of independence and autonomy.”

Another important incident which resulted in lessening ritualistic religiosity was the creation of Pakistan, as they became part of a Muslim majority country. They

had to leave many religious activities in order to merge in the society and not to be prominent, they adapted the Pakistani language dress and culture, this shall be discussed in detail below.

THE PROBLEM OF LANGUAGE

Other than modernity and globalization there are other reasons which affected the Pārsi society in the subcontinent. The most important one is abandoning the native language. It is said that language is the most important tool of transfer of tradition, when a person studies or speaks some other language; it means that he has already opened the doors for the culture, tradition and customs of the speakers of that language; this is what happened with the Pārsis in the subcontinent too. When they came to Sanjan after migrating from Iran, the Hindu ruler of that time allowed them to stay on certain conditions, the most important one was to leave their and use Gujarati language instead, another condition was that women should wear Sari which is an Indian dress for women, which was another big step for the already growing space between religion and its followers.

THE DRESS OF THE ZOROASTRIAN WOMAN

There is not any particular type of dress or dress code defined for Zoroastrian woman in the scriptures or other religious books, so the Persian Zoroastrians used to wear the traditional dress which was common among the Persian people, but when they migrated from Iran and came to India, this was the among the major developments, as narrated in the story of Sanjān the Indian ruler of that time accepted the Zoroastrian people to live in India under some conditions, and the first condition that women must follow the Indian traditional dress which is *Sāree*, and have to speak the Gujarati language, and Zoroastrians accepted these

conditions easily as it was not contradicting with their religious beliefs or practices.

So it was because of the above mentioned incident that *sāree* became a national and recognized dress for Pārsi women. Even after when a large number of them shifted to Karachi, which is a part of the present Pakistan, they continued with the traditional Indian dress, they do wear Pakistani dresses according to fashion and style, but on religious ceremonies, festivals and celebrations *sāree* is preferred, it has somehow gained a religious importance.

KEEPING THE IDENTITY

An identity is the set of behavioural or personality characteristics by which a person is recognizable as a member of a group. What uniquely identifies Parsis are three aspects, first that the religious aspect, i.e., Mazdayasni Zarathushtis, secondly the ethnic aspect i.e., originally from Iran, thirdly culture and tradition which has Iranian origins but was blended with Indian culture. Although the Parsis lived harmoniously with the local population and were free to practice their religion with no fear of conversion to the local religion, yet the Parsi ethnicity was maintained because they could not inter-marry with Hindus. So the first major change was adaption of the local tradition and customs. Because of the adaptive nature it was not difficult for them to adjust in the subcontinent. The problem of the identity did not arise at that time. It started to appear in the late twentieth century when their number started to decrease.

The followers of the Zoroastrian religion in the present age are very small in number, and this number is decreasing day by day because of few religious and many social reasons, so the task of keeping the religious identity intact and unaffected by the external factors is a difficult one, and is becoming more

difficult day by day with the decreasing number of Zoroastrians. As it is mentioned above that there are three aspects of identity which are religion, ethnicity and tradition. The tradition was changed since the time they entered in the subcontinent, ethnicity is also maintained throughout the time, but now religion is losing its importance and according to Zoroastrian scholars this is the main reason of the identity crisis.

Like all over the world they are facing this problem in Pakistan as well. According to a paper presented by Mr. Dinyar Patel at the North American Zarathushti Congress in Houston, 30th December 2010, the number of Pārsis in all over Pakistan is not more than 2000¹ and among them mostly are senior citizens of age above than 40. And according to Toxy Cowasjee the exact number is 1,766².

Pakistan is a country with Muslim majority and Islamic law, so it is important to study that how the Pārsi community is dealing with this issue of identity, specially the role of women in this regard.

The religious identity means how much a person is close to his/her religious roots, in Pakistan the Pārsi struggles hard to keep this identity. The women specifically are playing an important role in this, by educating the upcoming generation about essentials of the religion. They are also keeping this identity by following the religious teachings which talk about equality of man and woman specifically in the area of education. There are many famous names in the field of

¹ Dinyar Patel, *jaago/Bedari, rescuing our community from a demographic crisis*, (Houston: Paper Presented at the North American Zarathushti Congress, 30 December 2010), p.8.

² Toxy Cowasjee, Demographics of Zarathushtis in Pakistan, *FEZANA Journal*, Winter 2004, p. 50; email communication with Toxy Cowasjee, 11 May 2011.

education which belong to Pārsi community. This shall be discussed under a separate topic.

There was a question about keeping the religious identity in the survey but none of the respondents gave a clear answer, they mentioned few religious ceremonies and festivals which remind them of their religion, and otherwise they are like all other people leading social and professional lives in the modern world. Navjote ceremony and the holy day of Navroz are the important and prominent features which were mentioned by almost all the respondents. Even transfer of the tradition is becoming less day by day; very few ladies among the youth know how to cook Pārsi dishes. The trend of buying food from outside on holy days is becoming common, although elders still try to continue with the old traditions, but this is becoming difficult for the youth to continue them. One of the respondents answered that a religious identity is not written on the forehead of a person, people do misunderstand them many times, especially when they are wearing Pakistani dresses, the religious identity depends upon perception of other people, wearing a Pakistani dress and talking in Urdu is mostly considered a Muslim in Pakistan, she also shared an incident related to religious identity, I will quote her words:

“In Pakistan while I was in college or in the bazaar, especially when you are wearing shalwar qameez, I was usually taken as a Muslim. I remember one shopkeeper telling me that wearing nail polish was *makrooh* in Islam and he was taken aback when I told him I wasn’t a Muslim.”

Coming back to the religious identity, it also contains that how much a person is keen about his/her religiosity, and this is determined by the involvement of religion in different aspects of that person’s life. One of the most important

aspects in my view is the pilgrimage, that how often a person visits the places and areas which hold religious importance.

A household survey was conducted by Mr. David Knaute in year 2010 in the Zoroastrian community of Karachi, and which covered almost all social areas. I would like to quote from that part of the survey which talks about the religious identity. Mr. Knaute says:

“The issue of identity is very broad and complex; however, in this section, it will strictly be defined relatively to the perceived country of origin (India, Iran or Pakistan). It was interesting to first determine the ratio of the community that had ever visited India and Iran, being the main two countries of origin, as well as the purpose and frequency of these visits.

Out of the 73 respondents (representing 196 people) who specified how many of their household members have ever visited Iran, 27 (37%) said at least one household member had, totalling 59 people (30.1%). Out of these, 25 specified the purpose and frequency of their visits to Iran: more than half of these were one-off visits for targeted events (weddings, mother’s death anniversary), visits to historical sites (e.g. Persepolis), and road trips to Europe. Only 6 clearly stated that they are going to Iran on a regular basis for family visits and even work. Besides, several respondents specified that their one or two visits to Iran took place before 1979.

Out of the 108 respondents (representing 299 people) who specified how many of their household members have ever visited India, all said at least one household member had, totalling 241 people (80.6%). Out of these, 92 specified the purpose and frequency of their visits to India: 66 specified having been to Bombay/Gujarat and 45 that they are going for family reunion and family events such as weddings and Navjote 12 used the term ‘pilgrimage’ although here as well

it is possible to guess that all those who went to Bombay/Gujarat visited pilgrimage sites; 2 mentioned work as a reason to visit India, 3 medical reasons and interestingly, 15 mentioned tourism to places such as Goa, Simla, Agra, Nilgiri Hills; finally, 10 specified that they or their relatives have been only once or twice and/or a long time ago, to India. A couple also mentioned they have been there dozens of times...

However it seems that the general trend is of few visits and family connections getting looser as the community is ageing and family relationships getting more distant.”¹

Mr.Knaute also mentioned that in the survey there is a large number of Zoroastrians who are proud of their Indian roots, they mentioned that they visit India often and there they are recognized as Pārsis and not Pakistanis, so it is the religion which is uniting Zoroastrians of different nationalities, and they try hard not to lose or forget those connections which connect them to their ancestors.

However there is a large number who are comfortable in Pakistan, although they are concerned about the integration of the Pārsi community in the Muslim society, yet they say that it's a complex matter, Muslims are generally liberal people specially in city like Karachi, they do not face much difficulty in practicing their religious rituals and festivals, particularly because of the presence of many eminent Pārsis which are part of Pakistani politics, for example Mannora Bandhara, Jamshed Marker, Bayram Avari and few others.

But like other Pakistanis it has become difficult for them now to announce about their religious identity with the present social political and religious situations

¹ David Knaute, *Karachi household survey carried out among the Zoroastrian community of Karachi*, (Karachi: UNESCO Parzor March,2011).p.17.

prevailing in Pakistan, as a minority they are facing difficulty in keeping up with the society and religion together, and because of this reason a large number of young Pārsi boys and girls are going abroad for higher studies or work.

There another interesting observation presented by Mr.Knaute regarding those Pārsi women who have moved to Pakistan from Iran or India after getting married with a Pakistani, he says:

“It is also interesting to mention the viewpoint of Iranian Zoroastrian women who came to Karachi two-three decades ago after their marriage to a Parsi. According to some estimates, there are approximately ten persons in this situation in the whole of Karachi at the time of the survey. Their family history is usually quite complex, as they have relatives in Iran but usually in India as well. Some of them, even speak Gujarati. The main challenges concerning their integration into the Pakistani society are: the language barrier (some do not speak fluent English); the difficult and unsafe environment (as compared with the place of origin in Iran); the impossibility to participate to Zoroastrian festivals that exist only in Iran (such as Chaharshanbe- Suri); a weaker family support network for widows, who have no relatives in Karachi apart from their in-laws (in which case they may rely on community charities);”¹

TRANSFER OF THE TRADITION

One of the root elements of keeping the religious identity is transferring the religious teachings and traditions to next generations. Here again woman has to play an important part to transfer the teachings of the ancestors to her children and grand- children and its part of her duties.

¹ Knaute, *Karachi household survey*.,p.18.

In Karachi this practice decreased day by day and unfortunately at the present day there are very few people who have strong connections with their tradition, most of them are elderly people, the youngsters are comfortable in reinterpreting the religious teachings in the light of the modern world and the trends and necessities of the global village.

Again I would like to refer to the household survey of Mr. Knaute in which he discussed this aspect of the transmission of the tradition in detail.

One of the prominent features of the Pārsi society is the initiation ceremony which is called Navjote. This aspect is still prevailing and is still considered the most important ritual in order to be a true Zoroastrians; the main reason for this is that sense of responsibility of the parents for their children. It is a common social observation that the women are more religious than men, so a Pārsi woman accounts herself responsible in this matter and carries out the process of Navjote before the teen age of her children starts.

Other than the Navjote ceremony, respect for the Zoroastrian religion is also part of the tradition. In Pakistan most of the Pārsis follow the Shaheshahi calendar, which is followed by Iranians. But this calendar is only used during festivals and religious days such as Jashan, Navroz and the Zoroastrian New Year. Normally the Gregorian calendar is used as a result of globalization. It is more likely like Muslims who follow the Muslim calendar only during few months like Muharram, Rabi-ul-awwal, Ramadan and Eid.

Another important part of the Zoroastrian tradition is wearing of Sudrah and Kusti, and this as well is decreasing these days. In the same survey Mr. Knaute mentions comments one of the respondent who has filled the survey form, she says:

“I do not believe that wearing, or not wearing, a sudra and kusti makes you any more or less a Parsi Zoroastrian!! To my way of thinking, it is very hard to separate tradition from religion, and one of the frustrations I have is that for a community that prides itself of being well educated and liberal, the Parsis can be just as conservative and blinkered in their thinking without recognizing the necessity to change and adapt to circumstances”.¹

From these comments we can easily notice the mindset of the present Pārsi youth, like other cultures and traditions they are affected by the modern call towards secularism, enlightened moderation freedom and liberty.

Several respondents called for a renewed focus on the basic ethic tenants of the religion, i.e. *Humata*, *Hukhta*, *Huvarashta*. As the community is small, it should live in total cohesion and according to the Mazdayasian way:

“True religion should be practiced of good thoughts (difficult, but we try!), good words, good deeds, and not mere rites and rituals!”²

Another important Pārsi tradition is to visit the temple, since ancient times this was considered an obligation for every Zoroastrian, the females specially were encouraged to visit the *Atish-kada* on regular bases, because they were considered to be an important opponent to face the evil, mother is the one who raises strong children and prepare them so that they can triumph over the evil powers in the cosmic battler of good and evil. But with time this practice decreased as well, if we talk about Pakistan only it is now limited to few old people who are considered to have achieved everything on their lives. Strangely the number of females is less than males, most probably because of the modern definitions of

¹ Ibid.,28.

² Knaute, *Karachi household survey*.P.29.

religion, worship and the good, the following paragraph is taken from the same household survey, in which the candidates gave different answers when asked about how often they visit the temple:

“One respondent said he was only going to the fire temple once a week to pray, while he would pray daily at home. His wife said that what mattered is the intensity and not the frequency of praying. Another person said, not without humour, that she was going to the fire temple only once a year... probably because she has nothing to be forgiven! In more general terms, several respondents complained that due to the modernization of values, most community members do not even bother visit the fire temple for prayer. Others said that it varies from person to person, as those with a stronger faith would have a “sparkling shine” when visiting... Some respondents also gave more specific reasons why some people visit the fire temple more or less frequently. One of these reasons is simply convenience, as people living far away from the temple or getting old go less frequently to the fire temple, while those living or working near it go more often. One respondent said that his father makes a voluntarily effort to visit the fire temple, even though it is quite out of his way to work.”¹

Other traditional customs like singing Monjät, different prayers and verses of Gathas are also disappearing with time, very few people answered that they still sing the Monjät, most of them did not even remember it.

Another tradition which is related specifically to women is the culinary tradition i.e., cooking the traditional dishes which were famous among Zoroastrians in

¹ Ibid.30.

Persia and then among Pārsis in India for example Ashereshte (Irani), Bakhra¹, Batasa², Dhan Dar³, Dhana-jeer masala, Moridar no patio⁴, Parsi custard, Saas, Curry rice, Paneer⁵, Abakalio, Murabbo, Sagan nisave, Amba Kalyo, Savian, Oosh, Akuri, Sooji Halwa, Paro, Ruvan, Varadhwada, and Wazanu. Only few people know how to cook them, mostly of old age, and they also cook these dishes occasionally and not on regular bases.

So over all we can conclude that the Pārsi community is slowly losing connections with their origins, especially in the religious matters, they do accept that they are Zoroastrians and there are some traditions that are still prevailing and which are important features of the society like the Navjote ceremony, but overall the religious inclinations are lessening day by day, the Zoroastrian woman is finding it difficult to keep alive the religious traditions in Karachi because of two reasons, firstly the instable situation in the country which is affecting both the minority and majority citizens., Secondly the challenge of globalization and modernization which is a challenge for every religion, culture and society.

I would like to quote words from an article written by Roshan Shahani:

"The uniqueness of a culture is marked by its openness to new ideas and to a plurality of thought. Ethnicity and ethnocentrism are near-twin terms but are not identical in meaning. Identities are being constantly refashioned and remolded and it is in these discontinuities and dissonances that a culture and community can live and thrive, however small it might be. True, Parsis are not

¹ A round flat unleavened bread.

² Butter Biscuits.

³ White Rice and Yellow pulse.

⁴ Gujarati pulse.

⁵ Cheese.

the only ones who, today, are confusing ritual with religion. At the same time, resistance to fixed definitions and ideologies has always persisted among those who have refused to be confined by a garrison mentality, although it is that much harder for a small community, constantly under the threat of extinction. Yet, as in larger communities, there has been, among Parsis as well, dialogical debates and dialectical exchanges of ideas.”¹

INTERMARRIAGES

The Zoroastrians do not believe in conversion, and because of those they don't believe in getting married with believers of other faiths. Since the beginning this is a big debate, and the opinions differ in different periods of time at different places, but the general and most recognized idea is that a Zoroastrian never gets married with a non-Zoroastrian.

In Pakistan as well, this problem exists. Talking about women particularly, a woman who gets married with a non-Zoroastrian is abandoned from the Zoroastrian society, but still such cases occur although in a small number.

In the household survey held by Mr.Knaute more than 85% Parsis were against such interfaith marriages. Some even said that it is better not to marry instead of marrying a non-Parsi.

The cases in which a Parsi man or woman married a non-Parsi happened mostly abroad and not in Pakistan. There are liberal people who compromise on this, and accept it as a love wedding, it has been observed that such Pārsis continue to

¹ Roshan G.Shahani, *Parsis: exploring identities, Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 38, Aug. 16-22, 2003, No. 33, pp. 3463-3466

mingle with their families and friends and participate in different festivals, religious events and occasions.¹

But even with such liberal thoughts the issue of the children and their identity exists, Mr.Knaute states in his survey:

“Another delicate issue arises as far as the offspring of intermarried couple are concerned. Such children are not allowed to do their Navjote, cannot enter fire temples and (when the family is particularly orthodox) may not attend all family and social gatherings ceremonies. Therefore it is difficult for them to socialize with other Zoroastrians although their mother or father is born as a full-fledged Zoroastrian.”²

However a new opinion was observed in this survey, and which is held by the parsi women. As a religious duty and obligation the Pārsi girls get very high education and then become unable to find the appropriate match. The educated males prefer going abroad and marrying the Zoroastrians living there, however these educated females are forced to live a single life as there is no other option. Some of such women gave the opinion that intermarriages are prohibited generally, yet there is always possibility for exceptional cases.

It is because of this law that a large number of single Parsi women are found in Pakistan, especially in Karachi.

However, the males have a different opinion in this regard, and they see this problem with a different angle. In the same survey a male respondent stated:

““Parsi girls are very well educated and self-sufficient. They either are more materialistic or more dominating. Among those who are materialistic, many tend

¹ Knaute, *Karachi household survey*,p. 26.

² Ibid.p.26.

to marry outside for sake of money or prefer to remain single. Nowadays I witness more and more girls seeking divorce within a couple of years after the day of their marriage. Your survey should have probed this aspect. How many girls prefer non-Parsi boys and why the trend of divorce is on the increase?"¹

CONTRIBUTION OF PARSI LADIES IN DIFFERENT FIELDS

It was observed in the first chapter that the Pārsi religion gives high regard to women and encourages them to play their vital role in the society. During the survey discussed above the Pārsi woman in Pakistan appeared as a strong, efficient and hardworking person, And for this reason we find lots of examples of Pārsi women who were exceptionally recognized for the services they rendered to the society, they successfully proves their abilities in different fields, some examples will be discussed in the upcoming section.

But before discussing different fields I would like to mention here names and brief introduction of some Parsi women who attained certain achievements and contributed in the society before creation of Pakistan:

Mrs. Dinbai Hormusji Vazifdar

She was daughter of K.B. Cowasjee Katrak and was a brave and courageous lady, she played an important during the war of independence and her services towards the war were so great that she received a certificate signed by the viceroy and was awarded the medal of Kaiser-e Hind² (second class) in 1920. She was the first Parsi lady receiving this award.¹

¹ Ibid.p. 27.

² The Kaiser-i-Hind medal was given by the British monarchy between the years of 1900 to 1947 to honour civilians of any birthplace that showed distinguished service towards advancing the common interests of the British Raj.

Bai BachuBai Dadiba Mehta²

She was the First Parsi lady of Karachi who graduated.³

Bai Najamai A Cama

She was the first Pārsi lady to Matriculate in the earlier period according to Karachi Zoroastrian calendar.⁴

CONTRIBUTION OF THE PARSI WOMEN IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

We have seen in the previous chapter that education holds an important place in the Zoroastrian religion. It is as important for females as for males, rather more important, as woman is the one responsible for upbringing the children.

Parsis in Karachi have not forgotten these teachings and are very keen about giving their children the right education, talking particularly about the females they have excelled in all fields including the field of education.

There are many famous names who have contributed a lot in the field of education and have played a vital role in making it reachable for every child, especially to those who belong to the Parsi community. I will be discussing some

There were three grades of the Kaiser-i-Hind medal with gold given by the ruling monarch, and silver and bronze awarded by a viceroy. Gold was logically the highest honor that could be received and bars could be given although none were distributed during the time period for which it was awarded.

Information from(www.britishmilitarymedals.co.uk/kaiser-i-hind-medal).

¹ Punthakey, *the Karachi Zoroastrian calendar*, p. 137.

² Ibid.,p. 136.

³ Unfortunately I was unable to find other details i.e., year of graduation, school and subjects.

⁴ Punthakey, *the Karachi Zoroastrian calendar*,p. 136.

of the women who have enormously given their services to the society in the field of education.

GOOL MINWALA: THE GUIDGING LIGHT OF PMA 1913-2002

Gool Minwalla was born on May 1, 1913. She started her social work as a volunteer at the age of 17 and worked for the betterment of the sick, the blind and juvenile delinquents.

In October 1939, Dr. Maria Montessori conducted the first teacher training course at Abyar, Madras; Gool Minwalla was one of the students.

In 1941, she started the first Montessori children's Home in the subcontinent which was recognized by AMI.

Later, with the co-operation of Jamshed Nusserwanji Mehta, She was instrumental in inviting Dr. Montessori to visit Karachi in 1946, and once again in 1949, since 1965, Gool Minwalla has been the guiding light behind the Montessori Teacher Training Course, under the auspices of Pakistan Montessori Association (PMA) of which she was a co-founder.¹

Besides the Montessori movement, she had been involved in social work for more than sixty-five years. She was appointed the first chairperson of the National Council of Social Welfare by the Government of Pakistan. She was also nominated by the GOP as the correspondent on the UN Commission of the prevention of Crime and Treatment of offenders. She has been on the Board of Governors of countless social and welfare organizations, schools and NGOs including Karachi Development Authority (KDA), All Pakistan Women's

¹ Toxy Cowasjee, *daughters of Mashyani, Hall of fame*. (Texas: seventh world Zoroastrian congress, 2001),p.16.

Association (APWA), Mama Parsi Girls' Secondary School and Ida Riau Poor Welfare Association.

The Government of Pakistan had recognized her services to the nation by awarding her a *sitara-e-Imtiaz* and *tamgha e Quaid e Azam*.¹

MISS MARY G BOARDMAN - 1919-1932

The Second principle of the famous Mama Parsi School. Miss Boardman, a highly qualified and experienced teacher, took charge as virtually the first Principal of the school, for it was her moving spirit that maintained and raised the tone of the school. Praises and laurels were showered on this Irish Principal who had nursed the new-born Mama School within a decade and placed it as one of the best schools in the Sub-continent. Her old students even now revere the memory of Miss Boardman with love and a profound sense of gratitude.²

MISS IRIS HENRIETTA THOMPSON - 1923-1969

On the retirement of Mr Cowashah in 1941, Miss I Thompson was appointed as Principal and Miss Goola B Shroff who had joined the school as a teacher in 1927 was appointed as the Vice-Principal.

Education of Parsi girls made great advances through the services of Miss Thompson. She was an excellent teacher with an understanding touch. She sought to gear the programs of girls' education to the changing needs of the time. She dedicated most loyally her whole life to the service of The Mama School; in fact it would not be remiss to state that our dear 'Miss Thompson was The Mama

¹ *Gool Minwalla*, <http://pakistanmontessoriassociation.org> ,(29.05.2011)

² Miss Mary Boardman, <http://mamaian.readyhosting.com>, (29.05.2011)

School'; and that the good reputation that the School enjoys today is largely due to her.¹

MISS GOOLA BAPUJI SHROFF - 1927-1974

In 1969 Miss Thompson retired and Miss G B Shroff was appointed Principal. Miss Shroff, a born teacher, by dint of hard work, sincerity and loyalty rose to the highest position in The Mama School. Her whole life was spent as a classroom teacher. It was in her time that the school children took greater interest in science and mathematics. Most of the old Mamaians talk very fondly and with gratitude of her insistence for methodical and perfect work.²

MISS MANI SHERIAR CONTRACTOR - 1936-1991

Miss Contractor served the BVS School from 1969 as Vice-Principal and from 1974 as the Principal. She came to the school in 1936 after taking her BA Examination, as a very young lady-teacher. She was a very able teacher and attended to her duties regularly, loyally and diligently. She completed fifty glorious years of dedicated services to the school. She is still loved by her colleagues and students, who wish her well always.³

MRS DEENA MISTRI

Deena Mistri, the great-granddaughter of the founder of Bai Virbaijee Soparivala (BVS) Parsi High School, and its former principal was Born in 1925 (according to the entry in her passport), Deena Mistri graduated in arts with honors in English literature in 1945 from D.J. College, which used to have both arts and science classes at that time. She got the degree from the prestigious Bombay University.

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

In those days Sindh was a part of the Bombay Presidency and the educational institutions were affiliated to the University of Bombay. later in 1957, Mrs Mistri did her BT (a degree which was later called BEd) from the Government Teachers' Training College in Karachi.

While she was in her late teens, she started training boys in debating and educational institutions at the BVS Parsi School, which was set up by her great-grandfather in the mid-19th century. In 1950, Behram Rustomjee, the principal of the school, asked her to substitute for one Mr Minwalla, who was the school's English teacher, an offer she readily accepted. Her husband Minoo Mistri was a firm believer in women pursuing careers of their choice. She thus became the first female teacher in the high school, which was exclusively for boys, a fact she never failed to recall.

In 1962 she was awarded a one year Fulbright Scholarship to study for a diploma in education in the United States, on completion of which she taught briefly at two universities, one in Ohio and the other at Texas. She and some other teachers were invited to the White House to meet President John F. Kennedy.

On the way back home, Mrs Mistri stopped in London, where on an invitation by the British Council she studied the local teaching methods. This enabled her to compare the systems prevailing on both sides of the Atlantic, an experience that enriched her as a teacher.

In 1965 Mrs Mistri became the Vice Principal of BVS Parsi School and seven years later took over as the Principal, a position she held until her retirement in 2004. Of all the BVS principals Mrs Mistri held the position for the longest period. To say that she served the institution with distinction in different capacities is to state the very obvious.

On March 23, 2002 she was awarded the Pride of Performance by the Government of Pakistan in appreciation of her services in the field of education. When she retired from BVS, Mrs Mistri joined Westminster School and College, another fine though smaller institution, where she was the chairperson until her death. She was also a consultant to Accel School.¹

Her contribution to the field of education accounts for thousands of students who are now reputed names in their professions.

PARSI WOMEN AND HEALTH:

It is a habit of Zoroastrians that wherever they go they build few buildings, it is essential for them in order to establish a society, among these buildings the most important are Dukhma (silent tower), ātash-kada (fire temple), a community center, a school and a hospital. So the Pārsis of Karachi followed this tradition, here I would like to mention a couple of examples of Parsis' contribution in the field of health, particularly related to women's health.

The Lady Dufferin Hospital:

Lady Dufferin Hospital is located in Karachi, and it is the largest hospital in Pakistan which is built specially for women. The hospital was completed in 1898, and was named after the British peeress Lady Dufferin, who performed the foundation laying ceremony on 12th November 1894.

¹Remembering Mrs. Mistri, www.parsinews.com, Posted on February 12, 2011, accessed on 3-06-2011

The hospital was built specially for women, yet the credit goes to Seth Edulji Dinshaw who gave Rs.50.000 for building the Hospital.¹ He made special arrangements to keep a special ward for Pārsis in the hospital.

The GoolBAi Maternity home

In 1908 Dr. Kaikhosroo felt that there is an urgent need to have some maternity home for ladies who experience lot of inconvenience during pregnancy and birth. So he started a small maternity home at his own expense in a small house nearby his home, the fee was very minor, but people did not take much advantage of it, and within a year it got almost impossible for him to keep running the maternity home, so he decided to shut it down and discussed this with his friends, among them was Mr. Jamshed Mehta who said it would be an unjust death to a useful institution, Mr. Kaikhosroo agreed and gave the honorary services to Mr. Mehta, who placed all the facts before his mother Bai Goolbai, the kind hearted and generous lady gave her son all the necessary help, some other ladies and gentlemen also contributed and this institution became a community project under the name Parsi maternity home in July 1901.

The maternity started to flourish, until there came a time that the place was not enough, so once again Bai Goolbai gave Rs.9,000 in memory of her late son Maherji, this money was given on the condition that an operation ward will be built in the new maternity home. This brought confidence to the hospital authorities and other people started donating as well, then K.B. Nusserwanji Mehta donated his land and money together of worth Rs. 60,000 in order to keep alive the memory of Bai GoolBai. The foundation laying

¹ Ahmed Saleem,role of Minorities in Karachi,p. 69.

ceremony was done in Dec. 1917 by the famous Pārsi scholar and Mobed Dr. Dastur Dhalla and was named after the great lady Bai Goolbai Mehta.¹

Some famous Pakistani Pārsi female doctors:

I would like to mention here few names of those Pārsi ladies who have contributed in the field of health, despite all my efforts to contact them, unfortunately I was unable to reach them, I came to know about them through some other Pārsi ladies. Names of the doctors are:

Nargis Talati

She was a famous Gynaecologist / professor at the Lady Dufferin Hospital. Currently she is enjoying her life after retirement.

Gool Talati

She is a famous Plastic surgeon, an important part in Pakistan association of plastic surgeons, and a member of its advisory committee.

WOMEN IN LITERATURE AND JOURNALISM:

There are very few but prominent names of Pakistani Pārsi women in these two fields, it can be observed throughout the research paper that Pārsis are people very keen about education, and the literacy rate among them in all parts of the worlds is 100%, I met lots of Pārsi females during writing this paper and all of them were very well educated and highly qualified.

JOURNALISM

Farishta Murzban Dinshaw

¹ Ibid.p.70.

Farishta was born in Karachi, Pakistan, since childhood she had writing in her genes, and began her writing career at a very young age. She initiated to volunteer at the Friday school for Zarthushti kids when she was fifteen, and continued to write stories and organize activities for children in Karachi until she left for Toronto in 2001. In the year 2003 she served as a research assistant at Ryerson University in Toronto, but she still writes for the famous Pakistani newspaper DAWN.

Farishta Dinshaw is also a social worker with the Toronto based non-profit agency COSTI, and has been active in the settlement and immigration scene of Canada for a long time. She is active in multi-community interactions and is also a well-known author of several publications.

“Discovering Ashavan” is among her famous works which tells the story about a lame orphan Ashavan who lived in Iran 4000 years ago. A midnight brawl leads to him being accused of sorcery by a superstitious community. Ashavan becomes friend of a young Zarathushtra Spitama who helps Ashavan in dealing with the difficulties with confidence and recognizing his strengths, hence the title of the book¹.

Bapsi Sidhwa, an acclaimed author says: “Dinshaw brings the past vividly to life. She also manages to bring Zarathushtra down-to-earth: and, in doing so, makes him accessible. It is creditable that Dinshaw accomplishes this without adopting a high moral tone or sounding the least bit preachy. She has adroitly woven myth and magic into a tension-filled, lively and suspenseful story.”²

¹ Got this information through an email communication with Farishta Dinshaw on 15-07-2011

² http://www.zwin3.net/Books_asharvan.html. (04-01-2011)

Teenaz Javat

She is an experienced writer having international and Canadian experience with several newspapers and magazines in three continents. She has written over 500 articles for the economic/business, lifestyle, health, urban affairs and food sections. She Covered international stories exposing the violation of human rights in Iran and Pakistan, And is currently writing on issues related to engaging and integrating new immigrants into the Canadian Workplace. She has also Covered Urban affairs, Community news and business stories. She is The Toronto Star City Reporter on Staff, The Hamilton Spectator Freelancer, Mississauga News Freelancer, Canadian Newcomer Magazine Freelancer and Halton Multicultural Council Freelancer.¹

She is basically from Indian origin, but has spent some time at Pakistan, and writes regularly for DAWN, the famous Pakistani English newspaper.

Aban Marker-Kabralji²

Ms. Kabralji offers a strategic leadership in 23 countries of the Asia region, as Asia Regional Director of the International Union for Conservation of Nature. In addition, she serves as the IUCN's Director General's Senior Adviser on Regionalization and as Coordinator. For the Regions, Ms. Kabralji co-chairs the Regional Steering Committee for the IUCN-UNDP led Mangroves for the Future (MFF), a multi-partner initiative supporting investment in coastal ecosystems across the Asia region, and a number of other large multi-country IUCN initiatives. She is a committee member of the wildlife trade monitoring network, TRAFFIC; a member of the External Advisory Board, Yale Global

¹ <http://teenazsheridan.blogspot.com/> (09.06.2011)

² Head of IUCN in South East Asia. Stationed in Bangkok.

Institute of Sustainable Forestry; and sits on the Governing Board, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). Ms. Kabraji is part of the McCluskey and has been serving as a visiting Professor, Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. Throughout her career, Ms. Kabraji has negotiated with governments, IUCN members, and partners in the implementation of global conventions such as CBD, Ramsar, and CITES.¹

WRITERS

Bapsi Sidhwa

Ms. Sidhwa was born in Karachi, but spent most of her life in Lahore and which has greatly influenced the locales in her books. When she was a child she suffered from polio, and as a result did not go to school. She was tutored at home, and developed habit of reading, sometimes as much as fifteen hours a day. She graduated from Kinnaird College, Lahore and got married at the age of nineteen and left for Mumbai with her husband. She returned to Lahore after the death of her first husband, and remarried in Lahore later.

Bapsi Sidhwa is considered the first Zarathushti woman who succeeded in achieving a worldwide success as an English novelist. Her famous novel *Ice-Candy Man* (also published as *Cracking India*) was chosen as the Most read Book of 1991 by the New York Times as well as the American Library Association.

Bapsi Sidhwa held the Bunting Fellowship at Radcliffe/Havard in 1986 and was a visiting scholar at the Rockefeller Foundation Center in Bellagio, Italy in 1991. She has also been teaching creative writing and English at Columbia

¹ Got this information by contacting her through an email communication, received on May 21st, 2011.

University, University of Houston and Mount Holyoke College in United states of America. She is the Fanny Hurst writer-in-residence at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, and currently serves on the Board of Imprint, a Houston based organization to support writers.¹

Next I would like to discuss her contribution to the society by mentioning different national and international awards she received, the most prominent ones are:

American

1993 - Recipient of Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Award

2002 - Won the Excellence in Literature Award at the Zoroastrian Congress in Chicago

2007 - Primo Mondello Award in Italy.

2008 - Bapsi Sidhwa is the first recipient of the South Asian Excellence Awards for Literature. Awarded on May 10, 2008 in New York.

2008 - HCC Asian-American Legacy Award

Pakistani

1991 - Recipient of the Sitara-i-Imtiaz, the highest national honor in the arts, Pakistan.

1991 - Recipient of the National Award for English Literature by the Pakistan Academy of Letters.

1992 - Recipient of the Patras Bokhari Award for Literature.

England

1999 - *Cracking India* was listed among the 200 best books in English by The

¹ Toxy Cowasjee. *Daughters of Mashyani, Hall of fame*, (Texas: seventh world Zoroastrian congress, 2001), p.31

Modern Library (Edited by Carmen Callil & Colm Toibin: Picador, June 1999, London)

David Higham award for *Crow Eaters*.

Italian

2007 - Premio Mondello 2007 for *Water*.¹

WOMEN IN BUSINESS:

Franey Irani

She runs her own business in Karachi² and Works in Pakistan France Business Alliance as a director, also runs her own business in Karachi with name Fran International (Pvt.) Limited.

Nilofer Abadan

Wife of the former Pakistani minister of Balochistan Nilofer Abadan managed her husband's business in on Feb. 11th 2002 when he was kidnapped by some unknown kidnappers. She proved to be a strong, courageous, brave and a brilliant business woman.

Niloufar Abadan is a cousin of former Senator Ms Khurshid Barocha. She worked on the board of directors of the Trust for Voluntary Organizations (TVO), and was able to prove her concern, love and sincerity for Pakistan and its poor and needy citizens. She always tried her best and made sure that grants and aids which were given to community-based organizations for executing small development projects in Baluchistan were appropriately and justly spent.

¹ <http://www.bapsisidhwa.com/awards.html>. (25-12-2010)

² The Pakistan France Business Alliance (P.F.B.A) was formed in 1991, with His Excellency Mr. Jean Pierre Masset, the Ambassador of France in Pakistan, as Chief Patron. His Excellency Daniel Jouanneau, Ambassador of France in Pakistan, is the Patron-In-Chief at present.

Along with managing business she did all her efforts to find her husband, she never left any official or any authorities to ask for help. This was the sequence of events when Faridoun Abadan was kidnapped in 2002. Faridoun Abadan was kidnapped in 2002, Niloufar Abadan received the first phone call from the kidnappers speaking Balochi-accented Urdu 10 days after the kidnapping, who asked for ransom, the ransom amount kept rising over the. A time came when the merciless kidnappers told her she must pay one million dollars if she wanted to hear the voice of her husband.¹

Despite all the terrorizations and threats from the kidnappers the brave lady didn't panic. She kept staying in Quetta, singlehandedly running the family's liquor and distillery business and continuing with her efforts to recover her husband.

Nine years and one month after her husband was kidnapped from his hometown Quetta, businesswoman Niloufar Abadan has met the same fate. In March 2011, she was kidnapped when she was going to conduct a speech on women's day. It is possible that the same gang that seized Faridoun Abadan has now kidnapped his wife.²

It is important to mention here that this couple served a lot for Pakistan, especially Balochistan. The couple had chosen to stay and invest in underdeveloped Baluchistan despite the risks and at times even loaned money to the provincial government.

¹ Mrs. Nilofer Abadan kidnapped, <http://pakistan-observer.blogspot.com/2011/03/fareedoon-and-mrs-nilofer-abadan.html>. (24-05-2011)

² Ibid.

POLITICS:

Roshan Bharucha

Roshan is a Parsi lady and an active politician. She has been working as a Provincial Minister for Women, Children's Welfare, Social Welfare, Sports, Information Technology & Information & Culture, and Government of Balochistan. She has a vast experience of teaching country wide from 1968 to 1986. She has been working also as Project Manager, GTZ, Labour and Manpower Department of Balochistan from 1986-2000. Roshan Khursheed Bharucha served as Director of Pakistan Petroleum Ltd. since October 2006. She served as a Member of Senate from March 2003 to March 2006 and a provincial minister in the Balochistan Government from June 2000 to December 2002. She also had held the position of Chairperson, Senate Standing Committee on Health, Member, Senate Standing Committee on Education, Science and Technology, Member, Senate Standing Committee on Sports, Culture, Tourism and Youth Affairs and Member, Senate Functional Committee on Government Assurances.

Mrs. Bharucha is a social worker and had extensively worked in the areas of rehabilitation of special children, eradication of child abuse and bonded labor practices, empowerment of women, strengthening women for self-employment and providing them legal protection against social discrimination, encouraging youth participation in sports and establishment of Information Technology culture in Balochistan. She had been awarded Human Rights Award by Pakistan Human Rights, Lahore Social Work Award by *Taraqqi-e-Niswan*,

Balochistan, Girls Guide Award and commendation from Mayor of Dallas, USA in recognition of her social works.¹

Some major and prominent achievements of Ms. Barukha Administrative Officer, International Labor Organisation, (ILO), Quetta from 1985-1986.

Member of Human Development Commission.

Chairperson of SOS Balochistan.

Advisor of Balochistan FPAP.

Ambassador of Polio Unicef.²

SPORTS

Meher Minwalla

Meher Dossa Minwalla played in the Pakistani women's cricket team in the ODI matches in years 1996/97 and 2000/01, she was born on 10th Dec., 1977 and is a right hand batsman and right arm medium and fast bowler.³

Goshpi Avari

Goshpi Avari is a Pakistani Asian Games gold medalist in sailing. She won the gold medal in 'enterprise class' yachting at the 1982 Asian Games in New Delhi, India with her husband, the famous businessman of Pakistan Byram Avari. she was the only female competitor in the sport. She was the also first and until recently, the only Pakistani woman to have won a gold medal at a

¹Roshan Barukha,
<http://investing.businessweek.com/businessweek/research/stocks/people/person.asp>, date 07-06-11

² Roshan Barukha, <http://www.senate.gov.pk>, date 07.06.2011

³ Mher Minwalla, <http://www.cricketarchive.com/Archive/Players/17/17347/17347.html>. (03-04-2011)

major international competition. Pakistan Government issued a Commemorative Stamp to celebrate this victory.

She was also given pride of performance from the Pakistani prime minister in 2011.

She is also a very famous player of everyone's favorite game "Scrabble", currently she is presiding the Pakistan scrabble club. On the home page of the website, its written:

"She is the one who is keeping this noble game alive and kicking in Pakistan. Her services to the game of Scrabble cannot be over emphasized. Underrated by herself as a player but people who play against her soon realize that her command over the English language is impeccable. It is only those strange foreign words which occasionally give her trouble. On her day she can and does beat the top ranked players with ease"¹.

She has also been nominated for "Tamgha-e-Imtiaz" (Medal of Distinction) for her achievement and will receive this honour at the forthcoming National Ceremony at the Presidency.

OTHER NAMES

There are some other names as well regarding whom I couldn't find much detail except their names, but I would like to mention their names:

Pervin Minwalla is a famous player of table tennis.

Niloufer Patel is DAWN's General Manager for distribution

¹ Home page, <http://www.pakistanscrabble.org/executivecommittee.html>. (15-06-2011)

Pouruchisty Sidhwa is the Country Human Resources Head in the The Royal Bank of Scotland Ltd - Pakistan,

The above mentioned names are only few examples, there are hundreds of other women who have a large number of achievements, and have contributed in the society enormously.

Talking about the Pakistani Pārsi woman, she is a strong, educated active and professional woman, sincere in her work and hard working. Pārsi women are proud followers of *Ashu Zarathustra*. They are not religious though, yet they are of strong moral character and of very good ethics.

No matter in which field they serve they are always role models for other women. It can be said that the meaning of religion has changed for a Pārsi woman, rituals and worships are not important, yet she tries to keep the spirit of the religion alive, talking from this angle a Pārsi woman is very religious and remembers her social and cosmic role very well.

In Pakistan they have to fight for their survival as their number is already small and it is also decreasing day by day, still they played their role and contributed in building a powerful society, it is due to their strong relation with their religious values that wherever they go, they contribute exceptionally, three famous pillars of the Zoroastrian faith are good thoughts, good words, and good actions keep on reminding them about their role in the society and purpose of life i. e. to destroy the evil powers and dominate the good and truth.

CONCLUSION

As I have reached to the end of the research paper, the following points can be concluded.

Zoroastrian scholars and followers of this religion claim since thousands of years about the equality of the gender. The texts and the history present with many evidences supporting this claim. And this gender equality is maintained through the ages. In Persia women delight in the ever peak positions in the history of the mankind. In India, they had to live with Hindus though, yet they maintained these values and Zoroastrian women showed exceptional and extraordinary works in several fields including education, medical, business, arts and even military. Few of the ladies mentioned in research papers belong to the time before creation of Pakistan, and since that time their services always grew without getting affected by changing situations.

Talking about the religious status of the Zoroastrian woman The Zoroastrian women during the time of Zarathustra, as well as during the Achaemenid dynasty, enjoyed the highest form of legal right. As a result of archaeological diggings in Persepolis, tablets were found showing women working side by side with men in the construction of the palace of Persepolis, and receiving wages and benefits, such as bread, wine, etc. equal to the amount given men. These tablets are presently to be found in museums around the world. This was indeed an outstanding historical time for women.

The religious and sacred texts address the pious men and women in the same manner. In the Book of Yashts, it is written: "We praise the *fravahar* of righteous

men, and women"; Thus, in the Zoroastrian religion, neither the man nor the woman has any priority over the other.

As for the managing responsibilities of the man of the family, these were set by the family laws of the time, which anticipated the man to treat his wife and children with love and kindness. Parents and children had rights over each other, it was not legal for any person to give his property to a single person and deprive the rest members of the family. Following the death of the father of the family, guardianship was granted to the mother. In case of divorce or separation, the woman had right to ask for dowry, and for as long as she had not remarried, or obtained an independent source of income, she was authorized to receive alimony from her ex-husband.

According to the Avesta, a woman can own properties, and can manage them herself. A mother can become her children's guardian. A wife can perform religious and social duties on the behalf of her husband, and manage his properties for him (in case of the husband's illness or absurdity). A wife can bring action against a cruel and ill-treating husband, asking the court for penalty. She can become an arbitrator or a judge. Her testimony is accepted in the court of law. A husband cannot marry her daughter off without his wife's agreement. As far as training and education is concerned, girls and boys are treated alike in the Avesta.

Men and women are not equal in the world only but they are at the equal level in the life hereafter as well. Thus, when the Saoshyant (the Zoroastrian Messiah) shall appear from around Lake Hamoon, in the eastern part of Persia, 30,000 righteous and believing will answer his call and join him from every part of Persia. Out of these 30,000 half are men, the other half women.

But there are some problems that rose with time regarding the social status. Biggest and most discussed problem is intermarriages. The Zoroastrians do not allow conversion to and from any other religion, so if a Zoroastrian marries to a non-Zoroastrian then the most important question arises is about the religion of the children, should they be initiated (having Navjote) or not, and if they do perform Navjote then can they be considered Zoroastrians or not. As mentioned in the last chapter that there are many similarities between Jewish and Zoroastrian religion, the problem of intermarriages is faced by the Jews as well. So to solve this problem they have changed the definition of being a Jew. But Zoroastrians are still striving to find a solution for this, and because of this reason the number of unmarried Pārsi women is getting higher, especially in Pakistan because their community here is very small and limited. This situation is alarming because marriage is an important religious institution and married people remain under God's shadow, whereas the unmarried people are said to be shadowed by the evil forces. The scholars are still striving to come up with some solution.

Talking generally about Zoroastrian religion, we can find many similarities with Judaism; I took Judaism into consideration specifically because there are many common features among both religions. Jewish nation was exiled quite like the way the Zoroastrians were forced to leave their origin, Persia. Until now both nations are unable to have an independent government and are living in minorities in different countries. So the feature of staying attached with any religious institution or organization is very similar and evident. Yet the big difference is that Jewish people have concentrated all their resources and energies in attaining their political motives, whereas the Zoroastrians have concentrated upon creative and productive activities.

Talking about the central topic of the research paper i.e., contribution of the women to the society we can say that they have exceptionally contributed to the society. The most prominent feature of the Pārsi women is that they are very hard working, sincere, professional and are aware of the ups and downs of the field they serve.

It is important to mention that the modern Pārsi ladies are not religious though, yet religious beliefs and values have played very important part in their lives, in fact it acted as a supportive force for them, it is because of the religion that Pārsi society is a balanced and harmonious society unlike other male dominant societies, and this is amongst the most powerful impact of the religious status of woman on the Zoroastrian society. It can be said that it is the religiosity of the Pārsi woman which keeps her socially strong and prosperous.

The survey which was conducted showed that religion for them now is just an identity to be protected, its outer form is almost lost, especially in the youth, the old generation still keeps the religious values performing different rituals and worships, whereas the new generation does not believe in conducting religious activities. They believe more in spirituality and inner self cleanliness, the rituals for them are merely meaningless actions.

The dominant and prominent feature of all the answers I noticed is that modernity and globalization have affected the Zoroastrian religion like all other religions, and talking particularly about Pakistan, the Pakistani and Muslim culture also has its effect on the Pārsi society as well. Pārsi religion has an adaptive nature already, so it was very easy for the Pārsi society to warmly welcome different aspects of globalization and modernity.

What I observed throughout the research that knowingly or unknowingly the Zoroastrian women has great support from her religion, perhaps it is the first

ever religion which talked about rights of women and gave her respect, regard and privileges. The Zoroastrian woman is now strong because she never had to fight for her liberty and freedom. Her status was high and it kept on improving with time until the present age. This is the reason that even a common Pārsi woman is aware of her importance and her role in the cosmos, and plays her part in building the society very actively, sincerely, efficiently and professionally.

In the end I would like to suggest few areas of the Zoroastrian society in which good research can be conducted:

- Issue of conversion to and from the Zoroastrian religion.
- Problem of intermarriages, issues, possible solutions and hurdles.
- The decreasing religiosity and what they do in order to keep their religious identity safe and intact.
- Comparison between Zoroastrian women in different countries.
- General comparison between the Zoroastrian societies in several countries.
- The religious and social future of the Zoroastrian woman specifically and of the Zoroastrian society generally.
- Spirituality in Zoroastrianism.
- Zoroastrianism's view about salvation and other religions

APPENDIX

Status of the Zoroastrian woman in Pakistan, her religious status and role in the society

Name (optional):

Age:

Education:

Occupation:

I am an M.Phil. thesis writer, writing about the social and religious life of the Parsi woman in Pakistan, this is a small survey related to my thesis, I will be obliged if you answer the following questions, and if there are any extra comments or observation you are welcome to add them.

All the information will be confidential and will not be used for any external purpose. Please be sure about it. My thesis is strictly unbiased and for research purpose only.

Q1: how do you think your religious identity is maintained in a Muslim majority country like Pakistan?

Q2: do you consider yourself religious? Offering prayers, religious duties and other rituals?

Q3: do you think that religion played an important role in your life? Educational, social and family life?

Q4: what (according to you) is more important, religious beliefs or rituals and customs? Which one of the both can be altered or compromised in order to meet with demands of the modern world?

Q5: what are the features of the Parsi society in Pakistan which make them prominent in the Pakistani society? Specially related to women.

Q6: what is Modernity (according to you)? And how is the Parsi woman in Pakistan coping with this in her religious and social life?

Thanking you in anticipation

Regards.

GLOSSARY¹

Achaemenian: the dynasty which ruled Iran from the time of Cyrus the Great (559 B.C.) to the invasion of Alexander the Great (330 B.C.)

Ahriman (Phl.): the Devil, lit. 'Hostile/Destructive Spirit'.

Ahu (Av.): spiritual lord or master

Ahura Mazda (Av.): God, lit. 'Wise Lord', the Supreme Being of the Zoroastrians.

Angra Mainyu: See Ahriman.

Arda Viraf (Pers.): a priest of the early Sasanian period, author of a Pahlavi book which describes his visions of heaven and hell.

Aredvi Sura Anahita (Av.): lit. 'strong, immaculate Anahita', name of a female yazad; name of a mythical river.

Atash Adaran (Pers.): the middle grade of consecrated fire. **Atash Bahram (Pers.):** lit. 'victorious fire', the highest grade of consecrated fire.

Atash Dadgah (Pers.): the lowest grade of consecrated fire.

Avesta (Pers.): the holy scriptures of Zoroastrianism

barashnom (Phl.): a major ritual of purification lasting nine days.

Bundahishn (Phl.): a ninth-century Pahlavi text.

¹ Ar. Arabic

Av. Avestan

Guj. Gujarati

Pers. Persian

Phl. Pahlavi

Skt. Sanskrit

Chinwad (Phl.): a bridge which souls of the dead cross, and where they are judged.

daeva (Av.): a demon.

Denkard (Phl.) a ninth-century Pahlavi text, comprising a major survey of the religion.

Farohar (Pers.): guardian angel, guardian spirits of the living and dead.

Firdausi (Pers.): author of the Persian epic Shah-nama (Book of Kings) in which many Zoroastrian myths are recorded.

Fravashi (Av.): See farohar.

Gahambar (Phl., Pers.): six major seasonal festivals, named 'maidyozarem' (mid-spring), 'maidyoshahem' (mid-summer), 'paitishahem' (bringing in the corn), 'ayathrem' (homecoming of cattle), 'maidyarem' (mid-winter), and 'hamaspathermaidyem' (coming of the whole group [of farohars]).

Gatha (Av.): the five sacred hymns of Zarathushtra (Yasna chapters 28-34, 43-51, 53), part of the Avesta; the five supplementary days at the end of the Zoroastrian religious calendar and the fireshthes presiding over them.

Gayomard (Phl.): lit. 'mortal life', mythical first man according to some Phl. texts.

Jamasp (Phl.): an early hero of the Zoroastrian religion. He was King Vishtasp's Prime Minister, and the son-in-law of Zarathushtra.

Jashan (Phl. Pers.): a frequently-performed religious service.

Kusti (Pers.): sacred cord worn around the waist by Zoroastrians; the short ritual of untying and retying the kusti.

Mashye-Mashyane (Phl.): the first human couple sprung from the seed of Gayomard, the first man.

Mihragan (Phl.): a festival honoring the yazad Mihr, celebrated on the 16th day of the seventh month.

Mobed (Pers.): a Zoroastrian priest, orig. head priest.

Nahn: ablution, a ritual washing of the entire body, a higher form of purification than *padyab*.

Navjote (Parsi Guj.): initiation into the Zoroastrian religion, a ceremony of investiture of the *sudre* and *kusti*. Also called 'sedra pushun'.

Nawruz (Pers.): New Years Day.

Ohrmazd (Phl.): God, the supreme being; name of the first day of the month according to the Zoroastrian religious calendar.

Osta: lit. 'disciple', a candidate for priesthood.

Osti: a woman of priestly family.

Padyab (Pers.): a ritual washing of the exposed parts of the body.

Padyab-kusti (Pers.): a ritual ablution followed by the ritual untying and retying of the *kusti*. Pahlavi the Middle Persian language used between 300 B.C. and 950 A.C. in which many Zoroastrian writings are preserved.

Parsis: Zoroastrians who settled in India.

Rivayat (Ar.): a collection of letters in Persian from Iranian priests in response to questions by their Indian counterparts on a variety of religious topics, written between 1478 and 1773 C.E.

Sanjana (Guj.): a group of priests headquartered in Udvada.

Spenta (Av.): holy, beneficent.

Sudre-kusti (Pers.): sacred shirt and girdle.

Urvan:soul.

Vendidad (Pers.): one of the books of the Avesta; a high liturgical service in which the Vendidad is recited.

Yasht (Phl.): one of the hymns of the Avesta honoring various spiritual beings.

Yasna (Av.): one of the books of the Avesta; the name of a high liturgical service in which the text of the Yasna is recited.

Yazad (Phl.): a created spiritual being, worthy of being honored or praised.

Zarathushtra (Av.): name of the founder of Zoroastrianism.

Zand: translation and exegesis. The term 'Zand-Avesta' or 'Zend-Avesta' refers to an edition of the Avesta which has Zand interspersed with the Avesta text.

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