CHAPTER III

Ahriman and the Path of the Kabiseh

Towards the anatomy of a conflict among the Parsis, c.1768 – c. 1800

About April 1768 a ‘sectarian’ controversy surfaced among the Parsis of Surat on the question of the Parsi New Year: the “proper time of beginning the Feast or Celebration,” as stated in a petition to the English Chief at Surat by one of the contending parties in the dispute. Documentary evidence suggests that the controversy could have been simmering for quite a while, before bursting out into the open and turning violent – sporadically, and in fits and starts. At its peak, groups of Parsis aligned to opposing camps not only clashed with each other, they also came to blows with the sepoys of the Nawab and mounted pressures on the English with fervent appeals for intervening on their behalf. The ramifications of the contestation covered an extensive territory which included apart from Surat the towns of Bharuch, Navsari, and Bombay in its ambit throughout much of the second half of the eighteenth century. What we witness here is not just a clutch of intra-community riots but processes which interspersed and fielded them, deeply laid out in the social-civic order of Surat and other cities with large Parsi settlements.

At its heart, this wide ranging conflict was about a dispute among Parsis over the Parsi New Year: the “proper time of beginning the Feast or Celebration,” as the English documentation would have it. However, as Parsi-Gujarati and other indigenous sources seem to suggest, this was just the sharpest edge of the conflict which swept across wider areas of religious and social observances in the community. Tension had been brewing among the Parsis since at least 1722 A.D. on what constituted dimensions of their “authentic” belief:
The customary/traditional or the ancient/original? While the majority of the Parsis seemed to be in favour of continuing features of religious belief and practice as they had been handed down the generations, a smaller but apparently more resourceful section was determined to route some of these core elements back to what was presumed to be their pristine, ancient, form—prior to their contamination and loss of 'essence', or at least essentials, in an alien society after the Parsis arrived in western India “[s]even hundred years ago.”

Sectarian community leaders of the Parsis seemed inclined to press for a choice among the believers between two divergent paths: the rasmi, i.e. the ‘customary’ path (Persian rasm = custom/tradition) as opposed to the qadimi, i.e. the ‘ancient,’ and also supposedly the ‘original-authentic’ path (Persian qadimi = ancient). The claims and counter-claims were pitched on the basis of revayets: these were a corpus of ‘authentic’ texts, traditions, and answers to queries relating to religion which the Parsis in India obtained from the old centres of Zoroastrianism in Persia (Kerman and Seistan, and Yezd), in a continuing and steady stream that flowed into Surat and the other Parsi cities in western India. This inflow of venerable information had been sustained over some three hundred years prior to the conflict\(^{136}\), and, in fact, even during its passage as we shall see. The revayets constituted vital reference points, often polemical arsenal, in the burgeoning dispute.

In c.1768, the ongoing debate, public contests, and initiatives at cultural-normative positioning/relocation among the Parsis came to a head in the form of an aggressive controversy over the Kabiseh, also termed as ‘the intercalation controversy.’ It pertained to differences in the operative conception of the Parsi calendar in India as compared to Iran. In its deeper outreach the controversy appears to have touched a sensitive chord of popular Parsi concerns regarding the attributes of ‘sacred time,’ at the very moment that some groups of Parsis found themselves driven by the urge to

redefine the appropriate order of significance to be attached to their sacral calendar.

What then, precisely, was the Kabiseh? We take our clue from the authority of M.S. Commissariat\textsuperscript{137}, whom we will cite occasionally in the course of this account:

The Parsi calendar consists of twelve months of thirty days each, to which five days, called 'Gathas', are added at the end of the year. In order to accord with the correct solar year, the ancient Persians are believed, at the end of every one hundred and twenty years, to have effected the Kabiseh, that is to say, inserted a month to their calendar. After the fall of their Empire, the Zoroastrians who remained in Iran somehow discontinued the Kabiseh, while the ancestors of the Parsis who migrated to India are reported to have made the intercalation once only, during their residence in Khorasan. The result was that the Parsis of Gujarat were a month behind their co-religionists in Iran in commencing their new year.\textsuperscript{138}

To make the sense clear, given the Parsi calendar of 12 months of 30 days each, the gathas made up annually for the shortfall of 5 days, bringing up the Parsi calendar to 365 days. However, in terms of the exact duration of the solar year there still remained a shortfall of a quarter day per year, which in the current Georgian calendar, for instance, is made up with the addition of an extra day in a four year cycle (a "leap" year). Unlike the latter, the ancient Persians made this adjustment in a cycle of 120 years by adding an extra month of 30 days. In practice this meant that in the calendar of the ancient Iranian Zoroastrians the New Year started a month later than in the previous cycle, every 120 years.

However, the practice had fallen into disuse among the Iranian Parsis in the course of the disruption of the Sassanid empire. This was also true of the Parsi population which migrated from Iran in bulk, and

\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Ibid.}, p.715
eventually settled in India/Gujarat. But the latter did observe the Kabiseh once in their extended journey out of Persia, effectively putting Indian Zoroastrians a month behind their co-religionist in the original homeland. In the controversies that raged in Surat and other places about 1768, the rasmis stood for continuing with the calendar as it was, i.e. with the Kabiseh as an accomplished internalized fact of their received history/custom; the qadimis, on the other hand, pressed for change so as to bring their calendar in line with what was prevalent among Parsis in Iran. It is important to remember though that the categories rasmis and qadimis, as markers of a sense of difference within the community were of older vintage. As Commissariat informs us, they had cropped up as early as 1722 A.D. in circumstances associated with the arrival of a prominent Parsi priest from Iran, Jamasp Vilayati, to India. This was time when the “discrepancies” in the two calendars first came to view. Parsi families who opted to continue with the customary calendar came to be called rasmis, while the others who decided to go over to the ‘ancient’ version came to designated qadimis. The former constituted the majority. There was, in other words, nothing startlingly new in what occurred in c. 1768 A.D. with perhaps a couple of important exceptions - the pitch of religious fervor that came to bear on this inherited sense of difference, hardening the pre-existing division in the furrows of theology; and instances of collective violence. As we shall see, with these transformative elements thrown in, conformity to the Kabiseh and its defense became inter alia a battle against Ahriman, the Devil.

This chapter takes a close look into events and issues involved in this conflict, such as to reveal the social, political, and discursive environs in which community concerns, stances, and relationships were aired and

---

139 Cf. ibid, p.715 n. for the view that the “intercalation” could have been made some time after the Parsis arrived in India.
140 In fact discrepancies in the calendar as compared with those of Yezd and Kerman had come to attention much earlier, in 1635, eighty-seven years before the visit of Jamasp Vilayati (cf. S.H. Hodiwala, Studies in Parsi History, pp. 32-33. Cited in Commissariat, op.cit., p. 715 &n).
shaped in Surat during the second half of the eighteenth century. As in the preceding chapter, the methodological and theoretical exercise here is to develop a study of an event, or rather a series of inter-linked micro-events, that is detailed enough to expose to view the grains of the ‘social,’ in an abiding, anthropologically informed sense of the term: A barely visible but dynamic terrain of intra-psychic integration and dissonance, which silently determines the field of action-cognition, energizing the “lifeworlds” of participants engaged in mortal combat over issues that mattered to them greatly. Without attempting to pursue any particular theoretical model, insights from different traditions of critical theory, in particular from the developing field of communicative action, implicitly inform the narrative in the chapter and have helped have helped in accessing and evaluating the empirical record in parts at least.141

In building up this account the chapter uses three principal sources: (1) The records of the English East India Company, principally the Surat Factory Diaries and the Public Department Diaries142, which furnish evidence on key moments of the disturbances in 1768 A.D. as seen and presented to the officials of the East India Company, the English Chief and members of the Surat Council. The Diaries have preserved these in some essential details. Important as these documents are, they slice up only as much information as entered the portals of the political establishment, their own and that of the Nawab, seldom if ever going beyond what was strictly necessary from the perspective of ‘law and order,’ or the protection of their brokers and contract merchants caught in the fray. Furthermore, keeping aloof from the religious affairs of the natives was a guiding principle of the Surat Council officials and also of their superiors in Bombay, both of whom affirm it in their communications with each other. This tended to

---

141 In particular we may mention here the refreshing theoretical insights available in the writings of Jurgen Habermas, Victor Turner, Clifffird Geetz, and Paul Ricoeur
142 Surat Factory Diary, No. 656 (Parts I & II) of 1767-68; and Public Department Diary, No. 51 (Part I) of 1768. Maharashtra State Archives, Bombay. Henceforth, respectively, SFD and PDD.
effectively confine the conspectus of the Factory records to exigencies of trade and politics, taking a note of ‘religious affairs’ (always referred to in a caveat) only in extraordinary circumstances when the Chief or his Council were pressured by their agents and clients to respond to the situation, or when disturbances emanating from it made peace in the city precarious to the point of threatening to cut into their profits or reducing their political presence in the city. Both these were inescapable in Surat by the mid-eighteenth century, especially after 1759 A.D. when the Company became a joint partner, and increasingly the more important partner, in the governance of the city.143

All the same, the English documentation allows one a top-down view of the developments, which is not in the least dispensable but rather critical because of its occurrence at the point where the ‘political’ intersected the ‘popular’. One may consider here some valuable transcripts of communications received from the Nawab on the subject, as also copies of contentious petitions submitted to the Chief of the Surat Council by the rival groups which find a place in the Diaries but are not available in the other sources.

(2) *Qissa-i Ghamgin*144, a contemporary account in Urdu composed in 1779 by Munshi Sayyid Abbas Ali, a courtier of the Nawab of Bharuch, Muaziz Khan. Written in the form of an extended elegy in metrical verse, the *Qissa* mourns the takeover of Bharuch by the East India Company in 1772 A.D. and the tragic end of its last Nawab. It falls in the genre of literature called the *shehar ashob*, typical of the eighteenth century, lamenting the dissipation and decline of the ‘city,’ taken as an extended form of the affinal - the focus of attachments and concerns of the gentry and the literati

---


residing therein, in late medieval India. Although primarily focused on Bharuch, the *Qissa* devotes a brief but important section to the Parsi conflict in Surat from the point of view of its repercussions on Bharuch through the agency of Dhanjishah, the most prominent leader of the Qadimis, holding him responsible for embroiling the city in the expansionist politics of the English and leading to the extinction of the Nawabi regime in the city.¹⁴⁵

Being a work of poetry, the *Qissa* submits its 'narrative' to the principle of poetic condensation – recalling events and issues in their barest lineaments, and leaving out in the process enough of the 'empirical dross' for one to suspect distortion in the picture it presents. However, its poetic license remains well short of any deliberate or covert move in that direction, quite apart from the overtly sympathetic, perhaps a trifle lachrymose, account it generally presents of the Nawab. In particular, the latter's response to the reverberations of the *Kabiseh* upsurge in his own domain is put across in a rather simplistic, stark, and straight manner. The *Qissa* depicts this episode in sharp antinomies of character and response of participants in the evolving power play between the contending ruling groups – the Nawab, the acquisitive East India Company hungry for revenues of trade, and the latter's nexus with emerging entrepreneurs like Dhanjishah – and the conflict over sacred traditions between mobilized communities, quite unmindful of the grays of empirical reality. While this obviously limits its usefulness in reconstructing a nuanced event-based history, it transposes onto the subject some of the richness of textual imagination which was an integral, and, perhaps the more important, part of the reality we attempt to investigate or reach out to with the instruments of history.

¹⁴⁵ Commissariat *op.cit.*, p. 714 & n. for a reference to the work. Commissariat calls the elegy *Jang-i Gamgin*, translating the title as 'Battle of Sorrow.' He states that no Urdu copy of the poem was known to exist and refers to an excellent Gujarati translation of the work, entitled 'Kisseh Muaziz Khan Bahadur' made by a Parsi priest named Byramjee Fardunjee Vakil.
(3) A rare and anonymous Manuscript of sixty-nine pages written in Parsi-Gujarati in the Modi script, preserved in the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris. The internal evidence of the manuscript leaves no doubt that it was compiled at the end of the eighteenth or, more likely, the start of the nineteenth century; and, secondly, that its account is culled out of the recall of actual witnesses and participants in the controversies over the Kabisheh. The document is explicit in citing Dashtur Aspandyar Kamdin of Bharuch, a major figure in the affair and a front ranking priest of the Rasmis, as the inspiration behind the compilation of the document. It accords him, along with his father, Dashtur Kamdin, the status of chief protagonists defending the true faith of Zarathustra from its enemies and saboteurs, the leaders of the Qadimis. It is forthright in stating the purposes of the document to be didactic, and it evinces no self-doubt or restraint in the pursuit of its sectarian objectives. It nonetheless remains by far our most important and interesting source by sheer virtue of the span of issues and events it takes in its stride, and by the manner in which it recounts them in copious, vivid, and often tedious detail. But its central merit is that it takes us into the heart of what Douglas Haynes calls the 'Inner city,' opening up a tucked away slice of reality, in the inner quarters of the city, absent from the other more formalistic records mentioned above. It has the feel of reporting the cause of the rasmi partisans form a rumbling battlefront of emotive pieties, arcane religious concepts, notions of good and evil, of abrus (normative concerns of self-worth in society) bruised and put to extenuating circumstances, and of raw politics in arenas marked by intrigues and murder plots, on the one hand, and public debates, negotiations, contests, and fabrication of evidence and texts in pursuit of parti pris, on the other. The document therefore provides us access into some of the more intimate

and crucial domains of the lived and the experienced, as neither of our other sources do. (We shall henceforth refer to this important text as the Rasmi Narrative, or, in brief, the Narrative.)

Fortunately for us, all our three sources – in English, Urdu, and Parsi-Gujarati - concur on the central episodes and important personages of the c. 1768 conflict, but, of course, do so within the limits of their preoccupations and angle of vision, or, as Erving Goffman would say, their 'span of attention.' In this respect they complement each other. The chapter will make an effort to interweave them for a more cohesive view. However, this may not be uniformly possible. In terms of space as well as time, the Rasmi Narrative has a larger spill and goes much further beyond the other two sources. It dwells on the specifics of c.1768, but only as a kind of promontory jutting out from a sea of troubles besetting the followers of the true faith. The narrative is concerned with mapping dimensions of the latter, expansively, for the benefit of those in danger of being led astray by the preposterous ideas in circulation, and as a guide for posterity. That is the didactic force guiding its mode of recall and formulation. The Narrative therefore begins from a little before, about 1767 A.D., and after spending a few important moments in Surat, at the height of the tensions and violence that had split the community apart in that city, it traverses a much larger canvas of space and time, covering Bharuch in the 1780s, followed by Mumbai later, and then returning again to Surat towards the close of the eighteenth century, wherever the controversy seems to have raised its head. All these diverse places and moments are in the Narrative’s perspective an integral part of the story; a story wherein the Rasmis were subjected to perfidies and persecution by the ahrimanic forces working to undo the good faith (deen) and the manner in which they were able to hold on in these trying circumstances, often turning the tables on their devious, devilish opponents.
The narrative attempted in this chapter is anchored in this admittedly partisan, polemical tract. This has its advantages as well as disadvantages. The former we have already outlined above. As regards disadvantages, the most obvious is the bias in the tract of representing the opposition in dark and negative hues. In order to overcome this, the chapter makes the effort of interrogating its account with the other sources, \textit{wherever this is possible}. However, given the concerns of the thesis, the bias itself becomes a methodological advantage, serving as a heuristic device to explore the world of contest and self-definitions in which notions of 'otherness' came to be framed. This gives us, one presumes, an interiorized view of the sense of difference articulated in the milieu of the late eighteenth century, and of which the text and its narrative structure are but a cultural artifact.

We begin the account of the Parsi conflict at its most tangible – the point where it appears to have reached a crescendo and the political establishment has little choice other than turning to it with all its attention. These moments, as noted before, are recorded by the establishment of the East India Company. We shall go over these materials quickly and as briefly as possible to eavesdrop into the conflict at its most audible, when the chips are down and little is left to chance.

The first mention of the Parsi disturbance occurs in the \textit{SFD}, datelined 4\textsuperscript{th} April 1768\textsuperscript{148} in which the Nawab of Surat, at this time Hafiz-ud Din Khan (1763-90), informed a delegation of officials of the Surat Council of a build up of tensions in the city among the Parsis. These he observed had “risen [so] very high in regard to some points of their Religion” that “the Peace of the City was disturbed,” and compelled him to place guards “\textit{in their several streets to prevent any ill Consequences ensuing therefrom...}”

\textsuperscript{148} \textit{SFD, No. 656(Part I), 1767-68, ff. 128-31.}
The officials were visiting the Nawab to seek clarification on a complaint lodged with them by the Chief of the Dutch East India Company in Surat against the Nawab, who, they said, had forcibly removed his guards placed at the house of “their broker” Muncherji Khorsheedji on “account of a certain sum he owed the Dutch Company.” The Dutch claimed this was an infringement of their established prerogative - as given in “their Phirmaund [Persian firman = royal order] Privileges & ancient Customs.” Without going into the details of this issue, which have a bearing on the ticklish question of civic jurisdiction in the city and the discord surrounding it, as we have seen in the previous chapter, we may note that the Nawab’s answer to the charge was made in reference to these very disturbances. He said, “a very few hours after his Guards were placed a Detachment of the Dutch sepoys entered the street in which their Broker Munchur lives & placed themselves as a Guard at his Door.” Since his officer knew “Munchur to be the Head of one of the Parties [in dispute, he] immediately brought the said Dutch sepoys to him in the Durbar & he [the Nawab] caused them to be returned [partially illegible] to the Dutch Chief...” The Nawab also dismissed the reason given by the Dutch for posting their soldiers at the house of their broker. He thought this to be a mere subterfuge. There the matter seems to have rested, at least as far as the English and the Nawab are concerned.

The reference here is to Muncherji Khorsheedji, a leading figure on the side of the Rasmi group of Parsis who features prominently in all our three sources, although under slightly varied versions of his name. The Qisseh styles him as Minocheher; the Rasmi Narrative as Manmeherji, at

---

149 See D.F. Karaka, *History of the Parsis Including their Manners, Customs, Religion, and Present Position*, vol. II, London, 1884, pp. 18-19 for a brief biographical account of Mancherji Sheth. He was born in Surat in 1715 A.D. and had an extensive business as broker to the Dutch. He is also described as “the head of the Shehanshahis in the Kabiseh controversy with the Kadmis.”
times also just Manmerji; and the English documents Muncherji Cursetji. We shall have more to say about him at the appropriate time.

The next few entries on the Parsi disturbance do not appear till well after a month and-a-half. When they do, they relate overtly and primarily to scuffles and collisions between the Parsis and the sepoys of the Nawab, revealing almost nothing about the religious dissensions among Paris to which the Nawab had made a pointed reference at the beginning of April. Moreover in this round, it is appears it is the turn of the English to feel aggrieved with the Nawab.

The entry, datelined 27th May, is about a complaint made by Dadabhai Manackji and Sorabji Mancherji, “two of the principal Parsee Merchants under the protection of the Honble Company,” against the Nawab’s sepoys. They had entered the house of Dadabhai and assaulted him and Sorabji, “detaining them at the Door as prisoners a considerable Time & also wounding one of his sepoys.” The most truculent of the lot was “one Abdul Rahim a servant of the Buxy.”151 The record says nothing about what was it that brought on the scuffle. However, since the insult to its merchants translated into “a very gross affront to the Honble Company,” two officials of the Surat Council, Stratton and Perrott, were asked to see the Nawab and “demand Satisfaction” from him. The Nawab confirmed the episode, but squarely blamed the Parsi merchants for its occurrence, affirming that what he stated was based on “a very strict inquiry.” He told the officials that it was his guards, posted to quell disturbances, who had been beaten up by the Parsis. The latter then took refuge in Dadabhai’s house. When the sepoys went to take the “criminals,” they found Dadabhai, Sorabji, and some twenty others sitting in front of Dadabhai’s house.

---

150 SFD No. 656 (Part II) of 1767-68, ff. 160.
151 Incidentally, this Abdul Rahim seems the very man whom we have earlier met in the thick of the 1795 Riot in the previous chapter, the only difference being at this point in time he must have been younger by over a quarter century.
holding bludgeons in their hand, blocking their way. This led to a clash. The English officials departed after expressing their reservations on the matter: the Nawab had transgressed their prerogatives in the city. The Nawab averred to the contrary.¹⁵²

Dadabhai Manackji and Sorabji Mancherji’s names do not find a mention in the *Qissa*, but stack the pages of the *Narrative*. They are the do-gooders who remained steadfast in the battle for the good faith, providing logistical support to *Dashtur* Kamdin during the critical period of his stay in Surat under duress and in a perpetual trial of strength against the deceitful stratagems of the *qadimis* working for Dhanjishah. However, the episode recounted above (or rather a series of them, to be precise) from English sources are configured in the *Narrative* in a light altogether different.

The two subsequent entries in the *Diaries*, ending 27th June,¹⁵³ continue to be seized with the matter, lending credence to the impression that the intra-Parsi affair had perhaps reached equipoise, or subsided; and the flare-ups on record now were collisions of the Parsis (the more important of whom were brokers and contract merchants of the East India Companies) with the Nawabi regime, for reasons not immediately accessible to view. Transactions recorded under the dates do not advance the picture any further, even as they include an important paper delivered by the Nawab providing a fuller account of the clash between his sepoys and the Parsis. This, too, we may return to later.

But with the *Diary* entry datelined 28th June the specific Parsi conflict returns centre stage, removing presumptions that it could have blown over in the interval. Entitled as “The Chief’s Minute for the Council

in Regard to the late Dispute among the Parsees about the day of Celebrating their New Year," it mentions an important communication from the President pertaining to the conflict, and also includes in its proceedings petitions filed by the two rival groups of Parsis, stating their differences with each other and giving vent to mutual recriminations.  

To begin with, first the President’s letter: this we learn was dispatched as early as 11th May, and was received by the Chief at Surat on 20th May though he could act on it only after the next three/four days on account of an illness. The President’s letter contained the important disclosure that:

[H]e had it from many quarters that Dunjeesaw gave great Molestation & Caused much trouble to the Parsees at Surat, Broach & Nuvsaree. That the Affair being of a religious Nature it was proper that it should be adjusted amongst themselves without the Government interfering therein & advised him [the Chief] to put an End to it as soon as possible.  

Even at this supposedly early stage, the dimensions of the conflict had a reach beyond Surat, into other important urban centres with large Parsi settlements. This is confirmed by the patchy evidence we have from the *Public Department Diaries*, and in full measure by the *Rasmi Narrative*.

Without offering one a clue as to why a crucial dispatch from the President received on 20th May was being tabled more than a month later, the Chief informed the Council that he had:

set about concerting measures for terminating the unhappy differences [but] as every prospect of a reconciliation seemed utterly impossible & the Tranquility of the City much disturbed it was determined that a message should be sent to the Nawab to desire he would issue a *Proclamation strictly forbidding the Parsees in general to molest each other on the Score of Religion*

---

154 Ibid., ff. 224-31.
155 Ibid., ff. 224.
but everyone permitted to act according to the Dictates of his Conscience. That whoever was found transgressing herein would be severely punished.\textsuperscript{156}

The proclamation, we are informed, came into execution on 29\textsuperscript{th} May. The date appears to be more formalistic than accurate. The deployment of sepoys by the Nawab had occurred somewhat earlier. Among its first consequences, as one can now see clearly, retrospectively, was the collision between Parsis under Dadabhai–Sorabji and the Nawab’s sepoys recorded under 27\textsuperscript{th} May. For the very first time here the \textit{Diary} brings on record this \textit{vital connection}, although it does so, one might say, inadvertently and perhaps under the weight of the communiqué from the higher ups in the establishment. While making a reference to the episode, the Chief further states that on receiving a complaint about it from Dadabhai and Sorabji he had “\textit{immediately sent a guard of twenty men to their House.}” This, too, enters the record for the first time well after the event, leaving one somewhat intrigued about such lapses. There is after all a ‘passage of incomprehension’ in the \textit{chronological sequence} in which our source at this point appears to be recording events of no small significance, and in a city where the English East India Company is already more than a \textit{de facto} power. It is not unlikely that such departures from the usually meticulous record-keeping characteristic of the English were the result of a certain degree of ‘double standards,’ resulting from the pull of circumstances: the exigencies of protecting their own and their client’s interests. The business of record-keeping in other words is not exactly neutral, as one might suppose, but bears the imprint of ‘circumstances.’ One cannot, for instance, help observing a difference in the manner in which the English officials acted with determination in this case, which involved their own “principal merchants,” compared with their lack-luster response to a similar complaint addressed to them by the Dutch.

\textsuperscript{156} \textit{Ibid.}, ff.224-25.
However, our immediate concern here is the evidence the Chief furnishes on the level of aggression that had come to prevail among the contesting groups of the community. This he had the opportunity of seeing for himself when it first occurred. The Diary records:

*When the first Squabble happened amongst the Parsees & Munchur [,] Dunjeesaw, etc. came to the Chief, in a tumultuous manner complaining loudly of each other & both Parties being agitated by a furious Religious Zeal which if not timely put a stop to might be attended with very serious & bloody consequences [,] the Chief did send immediately to acquaint the Nabob of what had happened [,] desiring him to place guards in the Parsee Streets to prevent Disturbances & procure Peace & Tranquility which had the desired Effect. The Chief solemnly declares that he did not in any other Respect meddle or interfere in their Disputes tho[ugh] frequently pressed thereto by both parties.*

What was it that animated the upsurge and confrontation recorded above? The two petitions make it abundantly clear that the dissensions were primarily doctrinal in nature and related to contested aspects of the sacred. The petitions are framed in terms of the rasmi-qadimi conceptual dichotomy which infused the controversy, though without invoking the categories as such.

The first of these is a petition by Dhanjishah, who we may recall is identified in the President’s letter as the source of trouble to Parsis, not just in Surat but also in Bharuch and Navsari. Without subscribing to the element of ‘blame’ expressed in this assessment, the importance ascribed to Dhanjishah in the Parsi affair *per se* is amply corroborated by the other sources. The *Qissa*, no less than the *Rasmi Narrative*, appears burdened by his machinations, part actual part fictional, in the realms of both religion and politics - the ‘politics of trade and revenues’ to be more specific, typical of our period, as Christopher Bayly, for instance, would

---

157 Ibid., ff. 225.
158 Ibid., ff. 226-29.
These matters apart, of the two petitions the one submitted by Dhanjishah is by far the more significant. It puts across the *kadimi* position with considerable clarity, and in greater detail, as compared with the petition of the Rasmis. More importantly, it makes specific proposals to resolve the conflict, something missing completely from the other petition. It is worth quoting the text of this petition in its entirety, but we will resist the temptation and only state the essentials here. The preamble to the petition itself explains a fair amount:

The humble Petition of Dunjeesaw Manjeesaw [and other] Parsees at Surat who desire to follow the order of their Religion as contained in their holy Books but for which they have lately been much injured [,] troubled & persecuted by Muncherjee Cursitjee & his followers.

The principle the petition valorizes is ‘conformity to holy books,’ and not to mere ‘custom’ as was the wont of the Rasmis. It applied to the specific issue of “the proper Time of beginning the Feast or Celebration of their New Year,” on which the present dispute between Dhanjishah and Mancherji and his followers hinged, but the petition also advances this as a *general* principle applicable to all other aspects, not just religious rituals and ceremonies but also to matters of conscience. It argues that:

In this great City & all places where Parsees are in India every Cast has leave from the Government to wor[ship] God & make all their Religious Ceremonies & feasts after their way without any Body’s hindering [sic.] or troubling [?] them on that [account.] Your present Petitioners in the present Case desire only the Liberty that they may make all their Ceremonies & keep their Feasts according to what is wrote in their Book & not be obliged to obey Muncherji & his Side [and] their present orders...

The position advanced above is predicated on a vision spelt out in the preceding part of the petition. It speaks of the forced migration of

---

Parsis “seven hundred years ago...from their own Country,” and the loss of valuable parts of their living tradition - their “wise Men” and “proper Books” – in the afflictions that attended this massive exodus. As they settled down “among a strange People [in India]...numberless bad & improper Customs” crept in, “which in Time entirely corrupted their Religion so that it became very different in many respects from that pure & holy religion practiced in their own country.”

Convinced that they were “walking in the Dark” the Parsis launched a resolute search for authentic texts and traditions. This began some three hundred years ago, when they sent men to “their own country” (the old centres of Zoroastrianism, that is) to make particular inquiries. The men returned to Surat with answers to 1550 questions (to be exact). According to the petition, ever since then these have been “considered by all good Parsis as their Bible” and it is to this they would like to adhere to in all disputes and doubts.

The vision outlined by Dhanjishah has a ‘historicist’ kernel to it for two good reasons: one, it looks back to a quantifiable, not a fictive, past of the displacement/relocation of an entire religious community from its original environs within a well-remembered and documented past; two, the vision is articulated around a substantive tradition of at least three hundred years of the accumulation and codification of sacred knowledge resulting in a corpus called revayets. This too is well established. As stated earlier in the chapter, the revayets provided a powerful reference point guiding religious debate and dialogue in the community, and also generating contests and dissensions. Does one have here a case for studying what Eric Hobsbwam describes as an “invented tradition”?

---

161 This Qadimi standpoint is faithfully reported in essentials in the Rasmi Narrative in the words of Rustam Adhiaaru (also Padshah and Langro, as his alternative sobriquets). Doc. Ind. ff. 8.

162 For revayets going back to 1498A.D. see B.P. Ambasthya, op.cit.
The preoccupation to rid Zoroastrianism of the accretions and adaptations it had supposedly imbibed in the Indian environment is explicit in the document. It distinguishes the group from the Rasmis who, as the petition brings forth, “insist on going on as their forefathers did tho[ugh] they well know & have often confessed their Ways were full of Error.” The reason for persisting in this “error” is ascribed in the petition to “their Pride of Heart.”

Ensconced in this particular viewpoint deemed sacrosanct - a matter “of their Conscience & Religion” - the petition accuses Mancherji Khorsheedji of persecuting the Qadimi:

Your Petitioners on account of their Conscience & Religion suffer very much & all Men Women & Children on Muncherjee’s side are taught to call them Naves & spit at them as they pass calling them M[ussulmans] illegible & Caffirs which occasions frequent disputes & quarrels tho[ugh] your Petitioners truly desire to live in Peace & obey the Orders of Government like good Subjects.163

The qadimi account of the terms in which the Rasmis attached stigma to the Qadimis is interesting in itself. Minimally speaking, the use of islamist notions to conjure the ‘other’ by the Parsis bespeaks the interpenetration of diverse religious traditions into the making of what goes under the rubric of ‘popular culture’ in the city, at this point of time at least.

We may now take a look at the other petition, submitted by the rivals of Dhanjishah and his followers. In sharp contrast with Dhanjishah’s petition, the one filed by Mancherji Khorsheedji, and signed by two hundred and seventy three Parsis, raises no doctrinal issues - except for a brief, stolid but unequivocal assertion that they were people “of the Law” as opposed to Dhanjishah with whom they were in dispute. The term “law” is

163SFD, op.cit.
commonly used in English records of the period as the equivalent of the 
legitimate, validated path of faith. The assumption here is that Dhanjishah and others of his ilk stood outside the circle of religious consociates. The rest of the petition recounts sundry acts of violence perpetrated by him against them. In particular, the petitioners appear greatly agitated over an instance where a woman had been mercilessly beaten up by some Parsis, who then hid themselves in Dhanjishah’s house. And a detachment of the Nawab's sepoys, posted right in front of his house, did not apprehend the criminals. The petition states that there was collusion between the Nawab and Dhanjishah.

The rasmi position, however, finds a more pointed, laconic delineation in a letter sent by Parsis of Navsari, signed by their Dashturs and adhiaroos, i.e. holders of sacerdotal offices of the community, to the Governor at Bombay, dated 15th September 1768. It complained to him about continuing instances of violence against Parsis in Surat, stating that:

"Dunjeesaw wants to make our People at Surat accept a new Religion by force and to put our Forefathers Rule of Religion aside."

Counter-positioning the category of "new religion" with that of "forefathers’ rule of religion" is what orients the polarities at work in this discourse of ‘self’ and ‘other.’ Importantly for us, this is also the first place in our English documentation where the term chorigar, which is widely used in the Rasmi Narrative to characterize/stigmatize the Qadimis, finds a mention. The categories kafirs and new Mussalmans, which Dhanjishah in his petition states as being hurled at them by Muncherji and his followers, admitted to be in a majority, find their mirror reflection (and thereby confirmation) here. They now begin to acquire a resonance of their own – conjointly naming a mode of conceiving religious anathema, and directing

---

164 PDD, No 51 (Part I), 1768, ff.538-39
it as a conceptual-moral resource to mobilize populations for extirpation of what is seen to be deviant in the behavioural conscience of others.

Notwithstanding the confrontational stance of these discourses towards one another, and their differential capacities to exclude (rather than include), it is Dhanjishah who made the effort of offering the terms of peace, or “Accommodation” as the English put it. Towards this goal, his petition proposes three alternative conditions, the acceptance of any one of which by the two contesting groups, he thought, would allow tranquility to prevail:165

One, that “wise men of the Moor Law [Muslims],” well versed in the Persian language may be “appointed to examine strictly our Parsi Law Books” and on that basis pronounce a judgment on the present dispute. Dhanjishah affirmed his commitment to abide by this judgment even if it went against them, and to “entirely give up their present Custom” in deference to it. He also expressed a forthright willingness to “bind themselves by any penalty” decided upon by the Chief in case they were found henceforth wanting in this commitment;

Two, that the disputing parties send a delegation, comprising “proper people from both Parties, to “Carminia [Kerman] the true Country of the Parsees” to make inquiries and seek clarifications from “wise Parsees” regarding the points of difference in the present dispute and “whatever, they determine let [that] be the Law to guide both Parties in future; and, finally

Three, if none of these were acceptable to Mancherji and his followers, then in the interest of peace the two groups may be left free to go their own separate paths:

165 SFD op.cit. ff. 228-29.
“Muncherjee’s side...on the Way of their forefathers as they may Judge proper & your Petitioners according to what they think wrote [sic.] in their Book.” But there should be no “Disputes[,] Quarrels[,] calling of Names[,] or Hindrance.” All of this should be made public through a Proclamation. And, anyone going against it should be severely punished.

The Chief’s minute of 28th June records that Dhanjishah’s proposals were “communicated to the [p]rincipals of the other [f]action.” They rejected the first two articles and accepted the third - minus the clause of penalty attached to it. This is crucial.

Expectations that this would have brought a closure to the issue are belied by subsequent developments. Instances of violence in the city continue to be reported till at least mid-September 1768 A.D. The letter from the Navsari Parsis, cited above, indicates their severity and also their spill over into other towns. Relating an incident of 10th August, 1768 A.D. the letter says that Dhanjishah brought the sepoys of the Nawab along with his own people and attacked “our Parsis.” Out of fright Muncherji’s followers concealed themselves inside houses and fastened the doors. But the sepoys and Parsis of the antagonistic camp were not to be deterred. They climbed in using ladders and fell upon the ones who were hiding; after delivering them blows they tied them up [with ropes] and threw them out of the windows into the street, and then carried them to the Nawab “beating them all the way.” At the Nawab’s they were again beaten and fined three hundred and seventy-five rupees. The violence was severe enough to cause the death of one of the victims immediately, while his brother, the letter says, was in a critical condition. As a result many of the Parsis allied with Muncherji fled to Navsari and some others went into hiding in Surat.166

---

166 In 1782-83 Bharuch erupted in violence around a conflict over notions of the sacred as defined in the rasmi-qadimi division. See Commissariat, op.cit. pp.715-16.
In view of this, the Navsari Parsis sought fair play and protection from the English. They also warned that if this did not happen:

Dunjeesaw will assuredly not let our people live in Surat. He can persuade all the head officers of Surat to act in what manner he pleases; and intends to make our people quit their Forefathers Old Rule; but Sir how can we leave it off [sic.].

To get an insight into the overt manifestations of violence recorded in our English sources, we will need to step back a little to get a view of the hitherto unseen backyards of the civic arenas, where some important parts of the conflicts were forged. This was a zone of vital but contentious communications and exchanges within and between the two groups. The Rasmi Narrative\textsuperscript{167} will be our guide into this tumultuous area of communicative actions.

Taken in its entirety the Narrative is a detailed, empirical demonstration of how the principle of choosing one of the three articles, proposed in Dhanjishah's petition, as the condition for peace between the rival groups, did not come into force. This in any case seemed to be a very likely outcome given the fact of the rejection by the Rasmis of the clause of penalty attached with the third article. What the Narrative brings into view is a prolonged phase, between c.1767 and c.1800 A.D., which is marked by the staging of contests, aggressive public 'debates,' intrigues and back-hand manoeuvres to outwit one another, in not just Surat but also Bharuch and Mumbai. In terms of the articles proposed by Dhanjishah, this effectively meant foregoing the third proposal, which was essentially about 'agreeing to disagree,' and bringing to the fore the first two, sequentially and even simultaneously. Practically speaking this meant turning the prospects of a resolution into a chimera. The spurt of violence that we see in the period following the submission of the petitions by the two camps was perhaps

\textsuperscript{167} Note: The thesis carries a full translation of the manuscript in English as Annexure I. However, the references in the chapter will be to the original Mss.,Document Indien, No. 864 (henceforth Doc. Ind.) the folio numbers of which are indicated at the appropriate places within the English text.
owing to the breakdown of efforts at conflict-resolution around these very themes in the socio-political order in Surat. The Narrative lends substance to this view and helps us dilate on themes related with it in detail.

The account of the Narrative can be schematically divided into six segments, three of them dealing with developments specific to the cities of Bharuch, Surat, and Mumbai, and three interspersed as links between them. In terms of the structure of the Narrative there is no separation between these several accounts, all of which fall within its ambit in equal measure, as integral parts of the one and same story: the battle for the Kabiseh in its larger investments, which the Rasmis deemed sacred and inviolate in their scheme of things, and, which had come to be threatened by the forces of evil - the followers of Heraman, the Devil. The chapter follows the sequence in which the tract recounts them, concentrating attention to parts of the Narrative relating to Surat.

The tone of the Narrative's special recall is set in the preamble. Invoking the name of God (Parvardigar), it casts the conflict in the symbolism of good versus evil and draws a sharp distinction between the righteous followers of the faith, Maajdiasni,168 (who it declares have always been nurtured and assisted by Him), and the “impure ganims,” who put obstacles in His work. It then points a sharp finger at Dashturs and mobeheds169 who “on the promptings of their bellies have taken the path of Heraman”170 and have been “strewing impediments in the path of Khudatala and sowing doubts in the hearts of behdins” and thereby turning them away from the true faith. At this point the Narrative discloses its didactic objectives and its sources of information, stating that its account is based

168 Maajdiasni is the term used for Zoroastrianism throughout the tract, derived from Ahura Mazda, the creator of the cosmos and humanity, who presides on the Day of Judgment. See Doc. Ind. ff. 1
169 The terms refer to different categories of sacerdotal offices among the Parsis, as distinct from “behdins, or laymen. Mobeheds are priests and Dashturs the high priests.
170 ‘Heraman’ for the standard Ahriman
on “what was recounted to Dashtur Aspandyar by [his father] Dashtur Kamdin, and by so many mobeheds and old behdins who had either seen or heard about the dispute,” and, finally, that the contents of the Narrative were “authenticated and made public\textsuperscript{171} by Dashtur Aspandyar,” so that it “may be read and considered in the proper manner by the faithful who may thus be enlightened about the ways of mobeheds working for Heraman.”

With the names of Dashtur Kamdin of Bharuch and his son and successor to the sacerdotal office, Dashtur Aspandyar, the cast of central figures so far mentioned in the Kabiseh disputes is complete. All of them - Mancherji Khorshedji, Dhanjishah Manjishah,\textsuperscript{172} Dadabhai Manackji, and Sorabji Mancherji - populate the pages of the Narrative, along with several others. Inexplicably, however, Dashtur Kamdin of Bharuch who is the key figure (along with his son) in the Narrative, and is recounted as being associated with significant moments of the Kabiseh controversy in Surat, does not find a mention in the Surat Factory Records, despite the fact that the events relating to the conflict which it records, as discussed above, do figure in the Narrative with many additional details. On the other hand, the narrative of Qissa gives the Dashtur an important place in connection with the overtures of Dhanjishah to the Nawab of Bharuch, but without in any way positioning him directly in Surat during the upsurge.

Immediately after tracing the contours of the battle with a single broad stroke, the Narrative turns to Surat, in order to recount the initial circumstances in which the controversy got going. The year is 1767 A.D. and the fair named Parsi, Sheth Manmeherji Khorsheedji, has sallied forth to stem the creeping rot. He proceeded on the mission with determination, by

\textsuperscript{171} The term used is jahair karu chheou Doc. Ind. ff. 1

\textsuperscript{172} Cf. D.F. Karaka, op.cit. pp.18-19. Dhanjishah Manjishah is called the head of the Kadmis and described as a substantial jagirdar who also traded with Bombay and China and owned a large number of ships as well as small country crafts for the coastal trade.
first “bringing under his constant supervision/vigil\textsuperscript{173} mobeheds and Dashturs of the Dar-i mehers and the Agiaris,” who one presumes were betraying signs of going astray. In the course of this “good work” the Sheth ran into two adhiarus, Dada Dharu and Kavash Dharu, who had been spreading views germane to the creation of differences (tafavat) in the path of faith. These views, we are old, had been emanating from the Faredun Marzban Printing Press in Mumbai. The Sheth therefore called the two and advised them to desist from their activities. But since they continued in their wayward course, the Sheth punished them “in accordance with the requirements of Deen.”\textsuperscript{174} This set the ball rolling for a bigger conflict, bringing Dhanjishah into the picture. The account, incidentally, furnishes corroboration of Dhanjishah’s charge that his people were persecuted by the Rasmis.

A contact man of the two recalcitrant adhiarus, who had the advantage of knowing Persian, approached Dhanjishah and his brother Ratanjishah, and entered into a pact with them. He impressed them by declaring that the “Rojmaha of Vilayat,” \textit{i.e.} the Persian calendar, was indeed correct and, also (more importantly), that he could prove this to Mancherji and the other Dashturs, provided Dhanjishah extended him his patronage and supported him with money. The two brothers were quick to understand the potential the adhiaru’s scheme had of converting all the Parsis of Hindustan into “chorigars”. This term recurs frequently in the \textit{Narrative}, and the several contexts of its use make the sense quite clear: it connotes acts of religious impropriety or theft, the word being derived, literally, from the Hindi word, \textit{chor} meaning thief. Dhanjishah took the man under his wings and Ratanjishah executed the plan. They extended him large amounts of money to carry the project through, and the Persian-

\textsuperscript{173}Doc. Ind., ff.1. The word used here is \textit{taakid} (Persian/Urdu) which means to caution or instruct. In the context of the text the sense hovers in the range of instruction plus caution plus supervision. It is an amalgam of all three.

\textsuperscript{174}Ibid, ff.2
knowing adhiaru set about diligently the task of fabricating books, so we are told. Furthermore, he summoned from Bharuch two other adhiarius, Kavashdharu Jalal, and Rustamdharu Langro (Rustam the lame) “whom people addressed as Padshah and who had learnt magic from somewhere,” “to start a riot” (Persian *fasad*). Both arrived in Surat in response to a letter dispatched by Rustam Langro. In the aftermath, bitterness ensued between Sheth Manmerji and Dhanjishah and a great *fasad* (disturbance/riot) occurred in Surat. In its wake Dhanjishah spent a large amount of money and made several people into *chorigars*, but he failed to deceive those who were wise and believed in God.175

With the outcome of this effort not being terribly successful, Rustam Langro, the Bharuch adhiaru, threw his net of deception over Dhanjishah, and gave him another scheme to attain his objectives. He asked him for a sum of two thousand rupees which he said he would use to convert Dashtur Kamdin, and with him the whole of the Bharuch Parsis, into *chorigars*. What Langro is suggesting here is the tremendous advantage that will accrue to the cause of Dhanjishah by having for an ally a man with the reputation and distinguished lineage of Dashtur Kamdin. A reference to this effect figures a little later in the *Narrative*, but one can decipher the import of the scheme even better with the benefit of the historian’s hindsight. Dashtur Kamdin belonged to a line of *Dashturs* of Bharuch that is traceable at least six generations back to Dashtur Kamdin Padam, in the time of Akbar, when the great scholar of Pahlavi and Zoroastrianism, Ardeshir, visited India at the invitation of the Mughal Emperor. *Dashturs* Kamdin Padam was in contact with this significant and powerful figure during his stay in India in the 1590s.176

175 *Ibid.*, ff.2-3 where the whole episode is described
176 See J.J. Modi, “Parsis at the Court of Akbar” in B.P. Ambasthya, *op.cit.* p.23. Dashtur Aspandyar Kamdin wrote a book, *Kadin Tarikh Parsiyoni Kasar* (published 1826), which makes a reference to Ardeshir’s presence and work in India. According to Modi the Persian *revayets* contain a letter from Ardeshir to Dashtur Kamdin Padam of Bharuch on the subject of fire-temples. While at Lahore, Ardeshir who was returning to
Rustam Langro’s scheme met with approval. Giving him two thousand rupees, Dhanjishah dispatched him to Bharuch. Langro’s initial exploits towards the mission he had set out on occurred on the outskirts of the city. He stayed there for a while in the house of Bahmanshah, a behdin, and having cast his spell on him he spent the money on throwing sumptuous feasts, to which he invited many Parsis whom he served dry fruits, meat and other delicacies (like chashni) and used the occasion to the utmost to promote the calendar of Vilayat (Persia) at the expense of the calendar of Hindustan. Many of the gullible behdins were taken in by his talk and became chorigars, though, as the Narrative says, without them being aware of the transformation he had wrought on them. Evidently this was a matter of finer distinctions and not yet a part of the popular perception. It did not, however, take long for the news to reach the ears of Dashtur Kamdin, and for him to rapidly put ameliorative measures in place. He held assemblies of the behdins of the city, imparting them guidance “from the books.” The controversy was now in the air.177

The second exploit of Rustam Langro recorded by the Narrative178 can be appropriately described as bizarre, that is in terms of our sensibilities. It also appears somewhat intractable to account for within the cannons of established modern Indian historiography. However, we recount it here by way of suggesting the universe of meanings in which actions either actually occurred or were configured in the imagination of the text. Langro met a friend of his called Naushervan Badi, a man who seems unusually distressed being saddled with a difficult wife. Or rather, because the wife had a mind of her own - as seems more likely to be the case from the miniscule description the Narrative devotes to her:

Kerman, received an invitation from the Dashtur to visit Bharuch, which Ardeshir was unable to despite being inclined to.

177 Doc. Ind., ff.3-4
178 Ibid. ff. 5-7 for the incident as a whole
it observes in passing that she was “very bright and clever.” Naushervan unburdened his heart to Rustam, complaining that, instead of it being the other way round, it was his wife who controlled him! He solicited Rustam’s help as a friend to reverse this deplorable situation, and Rustam Langro was quick to rise to the occasion. He assured Naushervan that he had the requisite skill to bring about the desired change. If he could have been successful at bringing Sheth Dhanjishah under his spell, he could surely help Naushervan to establish control over his wife, provided he acted as Rustam asked him to. Naushervan agreed instantly.

Calling him over on the coming Sunday, Rustam handed him a small bundle of cloth and told him what to do with it. It should be placed atop a burning lamp by the side of his bed, he instructed him, while he copulated with his wife, and the ash from the burning potion should collect in a vessel placed beneath the lamp. Naushervan was to bring him the ash on the following day. He would then prepare a magic potion out of it which Naushervan should serve to his wife as a drink. She would then fall under his spell and become obedient to him. Taking the bundle Naushervan went home. He sat at the door of his house and thought over the matter, in doubt and trepidation:

The task that has been assigned to me will land me in hell, for it will be asked that [whereas according to religious prescription] one who is forbidden to as much as even look towards a lamp during sexual intercourse, you placed one next to yourself! His hands trembled, but he opened the bundle to see what it contained. He saw that it contained hair, nails, the wings of the green fly, and of a bat (such as inhabit abandoned houses). [His hair stood on end], a shiver ran down his spine, and he had visions of Hell...As usual, even down to this day, there was water collected in front of his house. He threw the bundle of potion into the swamp and stamped it with his feet.

Naushervan had still to account to Rustam Langro. So on the following day he took ash from the cooking-fire and handed it to Rustam hoping to pass it off as the ash from the magic potion. Rustam held it to his nose, took one whiff at it, and declared that it was not the stuff it was meant to be. Naushervan persisted with the lie for a while but Langro too was
insistent to know the truth. Naushervan had to give in, but as he blurted the truth he let fly his pent up fury at Rustam, calling him the accursed one for having put him on such a dastardly course:

...why will I do such a thing, my wife would beat me with a shoe [if she were to know of it]; that is acceptable, but why will I do something that will land me in Hell?

Rustam now knew well that he was in trouble. He tried to find his way out of it by placating Naushervan, telling him that it was alright if he did not do what he did not want to, “but if he talked about what had passed between them to others it would be the end of our friendship.” Naushervan did precisely that:

The Parsi got up from there and recounted the story in the presence of five men. Then the adhiaru [Rustam Langro] realized that his scheme had not made headway, although he had come from Surat with a firm resolve (to turn the tide in his favour). So what he did (next) was to meet Surat’s Nawab, Hamd Beg.

Leaving aside the question of exaggeration/invention/bias, or of how much purchase we are ready to put on the episodes described above in the Narrative, in particular its version of the instigation of a riot in Surat by Dhanjishah and his cohorts, it is important to take in the levels of objective truth that are built into the Narrative. The reference to Rustam Langro, under the sobriquet Padshah, is not fiction. An independent source like the Qissa while mentioning him under this very name, depicts him as the representative of one party among the ahl-i majusan (the community of fire-worshippers) of the city, and Dashtur Kamdin that of the other. The Nawab according to the Qissa had sought from both answers to queries that had been addressed to him by Dhanjishah regarding the finer doctrinal issues involved in the controversy, and also someone called Mulla in the Qissa.179 Thus in both accounts Dhanjishah does establish a contact with

179 Qissa, couplets 126-30. The reference to ‘Mulla’ is to Mulla Kaus Rustam Jalal of Bharuch who according to Commissariat (op.cit. p.716 n.) was sent to Persia in 1768 by
the Nawab of Bharuch on the subject in question. Secondly, the attribution of skill in magic to Padshah in the Narrative is also not pure fantasy and connects with prevalent tantric practices. While it may not find corroboration with reference to the man specifically, magic potions, incantations, necromancy and other para-psychic phenomena seem to have been rather common in Bharuch and other places in Gujarat, around this time. James Forbes talks about them at some length, particularly with reference to Bharuch, from his personal observations as an English magistrate posted in the area during the early 1780s. This is what he records in his Oriental Memoirs:

It would be endless to repeat the variety of instances relating to spells and incantations which were continually brought before the court of adawlet in Baroche and Dabhoy, where they could neither be refuted nor counteracted. Those brought to light in the public court were generally more intended for destruction by poison, than for the creation or revival of the tender passion.180

Finally, that Dhanjishah could have been seriously into the business of creating a religious following in support of the doctrinal ideas he subscribed to is also a distinct possibility. Quite apart from the charge leveled against him of promoting conversions to his 'faith', anathematized in the Rasmi account as an exercise in religious theft (chorigari), there is a frank avowal in Dhanjishah’s petition of the legitimacy of entertaining the hope that some day the qadimi beliefs he upheld would be the belief of the “majority,” and not of a mere “minority” as the contemptuous Rasmi taunt against them so often had it.181 A clear teleological incline is discernible in Dhanjishah’s plea in the petition, otherwise couched in terms of humility and commitment to arrive at a reasonable compromise with his diehard

---

181 SFD (Part II) of 1767-68, ff. 127.
opponents, of seeking to convert a position of weakness to one of strength, in a foreseeable future.

The great variety of instances described in the *Narrative*, its episodic mode of tedious recall and preoccupation with minutiae, underline the quotidian structures of this engagement and assertions of contrary viewpoints.

Having drawn a blank so far, as we know, Rustam Langro proceeded to entice the Nawab.\textsuperscript{182} This is what the *Narrative* reports:

Making a packet of 1000 rupees from the 2000 rupees [which he had brought] he presented it to the Nawab as *nazar* and told him that from Surat Sheth Dhanjishah has sent me in your service... and asked me to tell you that there is a difference of one month in our calendars [that is,] between the ones followed in Vilayat and in Hindustan. The Iranian people have been following the correct calendar [derived] from the original and the ancient. The Parsis of Hindustan having come in catastrophic circumstances forgot the authentic calendar. For this reason so many people in Surat have accepted the calendar of Vilayat. So that the others, too, may do likewise, please be kind to call the *Dashtur* of Bharuch, Kamdinji, to accept the calendar of Vilayat. If he accepts it the *rayyat* of the whole of Bharuch would also accept it. The Nawab understood this devious thought and said that Dhanjishah is a good man! Keeping away the one thousand rupees, he said 'I will call *Dashtur* Kamdinji and get this work done.' The lame Adhiaru thereupon said...Dhanjishah would do you considerable service. The Nawab was pleased with this talk and gave the Adhiaru leave to go to his house.

Soon after, a *cobdar* was sent and *Dashtur* Kamdin was brought to the Kechheri. Courtesies over, the Nawab brought up the conflicted issue of the *Kabiseh* to the *Dashtur's* attention and asked him, "*if it was true there was a difference of one month in the Parsi calendars of Vilayat and Hindustan?*" The *Dashtur* answered in the affirmative and justified the latter (i.e. the Rasmi calendar), saying that:

\textsuperscript{182} Doc. *Ind.*, ff. 7-9 for the exchanges between the Nawab and Rustam Langro
...the Parsis of Vilayat were left without sohbatdari whereas the Parsis of Hindustan had dar-o sohbat.  

The connotations of the categories used by Dashtur Kami for drawing the distinction between the two calendars is important, and offers further elaboration of the polarities defining the rasmi and qadimi positions discussed earlier in the chapter. The term sohbat (literally, company) stands for social intercourse. What the Dashtur is underlining here is the loss/absence of ‘living communities’ of faith in sufficient strength in Vilayat, in their country of origin (owing, of course, to the dispersal of Parsis from the original homelands of Zoroastrianism), as compared with Hindustan where the Parsis had dar-o sohbat, a domain of living traditions based on actual contact within an extensive community of Parsis, or simply an extended domain of (Parsi) social intercourse. The category has obvious resonance with the Islamic notions of dar-ul islarn and dar-ul hurb, which counterpoise two distinct domains, of which the first signifies territories that had capitulated to Islam and could be governed under the terms of ‘Islamic peace,’ and the other, where Islam was obliged to wage war. One could always argue that the resemblance between dar-o sohbat and dar-ul islarn is structural and not substantive, that it serves the purpose of setting up an order of significance in the Indian-Parsi discourse without necessarily entailing the transference of the specific content of the donor categories to the recipient categories. However, the use of terms like new-Mussalmans and kafirs by the Rasmis for the Qadimis as forms of moral indictment suggests the borrowing to have been more substantial. Minimally speaking, the concept exposes an avid site for contestations within Indian-Parsi discourse, tending to privilege traditions and beliefs that were current among the existing communities of Indian Parsis, as opposed to those deemed authentic simply by virtue of belonging to the original land of the Parsis; and, further, the deployment of this principle at

183 Ibid. ff. 9
points of conflict as the criterion of exclusion to re-negotiate community boundaries.

Not content with the explanation offered by the Dashtur and his reiteration of his stand by saying that what he said was no hearsay but stated in books, the Nawab asked for these books to be brought to his attention. He issued orders for a high profile council, consisting of the Qazi, the Mufti, the Shastri, and five other knowledgeable men, to sit in the Jama Musjid and examine the basis of the Kabiseh. The council met and went over the matter in great detail. Dashtur Kamdin led the discussion, elucidating his position by reading out from many papers, documents and books in Persian and Arabic, as well as the Zend-Avesta. After a thorough examination the Dashtur’s stand stood vindicated in the eyes of the Council and they informed the Nawab accordingly.\(^{184}\)

The Qisseh, too, lends veracity to the proceedings and its outcome:

\[Kiya khub tahqiq jab Kamdin
Kaha hai Minocheher ber rahe din\]

\[Ki tajviz hum Kamdin se kiya
Likhe yonhi nawab tub zood ter\]

\[Ki Dhanji galat chai per hai yakin
Minocheher sabit hai ber rahe din^{185}\]

Two circumstances stand out clear from these proceedings: \textit{one}, the settlement of an intra-community religious dispute was open to an inter-community reference/consultation; the Jama Musjid itself being the chosen venue for such a consultation; and \textit{two}, the basis for such a reference was the high texts of the faith and other classics. ‘Medieval scholasticism’ is a powerful presence in such dialogues and disputations. This also explains the emphasis in Dhanjishah’s petition on seeking the verdict of experts of

\(^{184}\) Ibid. ff. 9-10

\(^{185}\) Qissa.,op.cit., couplets 131-34.
“Moor Law” with knowledge of Persian as the first of the three options for resolving the dispute among the Parsis.

Notwithstanding the verdict of his own council, according to the Narrative, the Nawab was insistent that the Dashtur should give up the calendar of Hindustan and accept the calendar of Iran. He first tried to cajole Kamdin, asking him to concede to him this much as the Hakim of the city. The Dashtur remained firm declaring that the change he asked for “had no place in Deen or Ain. Why should I be a thief (chor) in the eyes of God by conceding you this?” Finding him unbending on the issue, the Nawab ordered for his arrest. Following this he had it conveyed to Dhanjishah, through Rustam Langro, that he will ensure the Dashtur accepted the new calendar. After three days in captivity, however, Dashtur Kamdin was set free after signing a penalty bond for twenty-one hundred rupees. This had come about at the intervention of the Nawab’s court jester, a man called Kavash Vanderu, who claimed Dashtur Kamdin to be a nephew of his. Vanderu acted not out of any generosity for the Dashtur, but because he had an axe to grind, which the Narrative dwells upon later when the scheme came to fruition, describing it as a crass commercial input with an eye on making a profit in the future.

The Dashtur’s freedom, however, proved to be short-lived. The traffic between Dhanjishah and the Nawab had been kept alive through Rustam Langro. He soon arrived with gifts and a letter from Dhanjishah for the Nawab, profusely requesting him to manoeuvre and dispatch the Dashtur to Surat, and also to ensure that once he was there he would speak in accordance with Dhanjishah’s scheme. The request was premised on a frank admission of the great utility of Dashtur Kamdin to the Qadimi cause in Surat:

\[\text{186 Doc. Ind. ff. 10-11.}\]
\[\text{187 For a take on this issue later in the Narrative, ibid., ff. 35-38.}\]
If *Dashtur* Kamdin comes to Surat and makes a public announcement that the calendar of Vilayat is correct and authentic, the whole of Surat will accept it - reason being that unlike the *Dashtur* of Surat who is not *khandani*, *Dashtur* Kamdin belongs to a *khandan* which has had *Dashturs* generation after generation.\(^\text{188}\)

Taken over by the scheme, the Nawab bided his time. Past midnight he sent two of his *cobdars* and had *Dashtur* Kamdin brought to the *kechheri*, which was vacant at this late hour with only the Nawab in office, and told him to leave for Surat. Shocked and dismayed, the *Dashtur* protested and pleaded against the decision, calling it an act of oppression. While conceding that it indeed was so, the Nawab did not relent, not even as much as permit him to go home and inform/console his people. This would have negated his basic concern of preempting resistance from the community, which would have rallied round its threatened leader. He had the gates of the city opened, and dispatched the *Dashtur* escorted by the two *cobdars*. They took him out of the city to the riverfront where a boat was waiting to receive them. They took him across the river and left him on the other side. The *cobdars* went back leaving him alone in the wilderness. He passed the night in mortal fear and then set off for Surat.\(^\text{189}\)

\(^{188}\) *Ibid.* ff. 11-12.

\(^{189}\) There is no mention of this entire episode in the *Qissa* which is perfectly understandable in a panegyric devoted to the Nawab. What is significant, however, is that its depiction of the transaction between the Nawab and Dhanjishah is contrary to the *Narrative*. In the *Qissa*, Dhanjishah’s animosity towards the Nawab is seen to result from the fact that after holding a consultation with *Dashtur* Kamdin and his opponent, Padshah, he had concluded that the *Dashtur* was right on the basis of *Deen* and *Ain*, and had it conveyed to Dhanjishah that nothing much can be done in the matter. This, coupled with the fact that the Nawab had confiscated a consignment of Dhanjishah at the *furza* of Bharuch till he cleared the requisite customs duty at the port, ignited the hostility between them. It propelled Dhanjishah to instigate the English to claim rights over the *furza* as a dependency of Surat Fort of which they were the *aqledar* and partners in the dual government of Surat since 1759 A.D. On that basis, the English laid a claim of Rs. twenty-eight lakhs as arrears accumulated over a period of forty years. On this see Syed Maqbool Ahmed, *A History of Broach. Based on the Persian Manuscript Majmua-e Danish* (Delhi, 1985), pp. 64-7 where he discounts the idea of the enmity borne by Dhanjishah against the Nawab.
Fortunately, on the way near Ankleshwar a behdin who happened to be going to Bharuch spotted him. He quickly turned back to Ankleshwar and informed all the behdins that the Dashtur was strangely alone on the way:

Upon this all the behdins came up to find out what prompted Sahib to come alone. Then Dashtur Sahib recounted all the facts (haqiqat). The behdins consoled him. He stayed in Ankleshwar for three days and sent for all books and papers from Bharuch that were required to reject [counter and disprove] the Vilayati Calendar and called for (his) clothes. Ten behdins came most courageously from Bharuch to Dashtur Sahib at Ankleshwar and said we will come with Sahib. (Thus) coming together they started for Surat from Chardaar-i Ankleshwar. Coming to Wariaadadh they sent a paper from all of them addressed to Sheth Manmeherji Khorsedji.190

With this passage we enter a realm of activities in which a sense of ‘public’ is engrained, meeting its primary if embryonic requirement of imposing restraints on the realm of the sovereign.191 As in the case here, the writ of the hakim, taking the word at its broadest, including its linkages with established or emergent socio-political elites, had met with its counter in the resourcefulness of a religious community, and its capacity to mobilize and protect its sensitive interests. The thumb impression here is that the politics of the “sovereign” could be popularly contested.

Dhanjishah’s scheme of bringing the Dashtur under cover and coercive control, as the Narrative purports, had run into serious trouble. Advance information of his arrival had activated community networks in the city and Sheth Mancherji Khorsedji and his band of committed Rasmis were prepared to take the Dashtur under their protective umbrella the moment he reached Surat. The grounds of a stable in Machhlipeet were cleared and five people deputed to accompany the Dashtur to the place on

---
190 Doc. Ind., ff. 14-15
his arrival. Once he had settled down, Nasalkars\footnote{The only class of people among Parsis recognized to be a caste. In the normal course, nasalkars acted as corpse bearers among Parsis and on that count deemed polluting. However, both in Surat and Mumbai they are also deployed for disseminating messages and making public announcements, for reasons that are not clear.} were sent round to announce publicly "in the whole of Surat":

[T]hat since the chorigars are falsely creating a new strife, the Dashtur of Bharuch, Kamdin Sahib, has come and is present in Machhlipeet at the stable for the purpose of clarifying the issue in the light of the books. Many people turned up and gained awareness from the books, in the path of faith. The deceit of the chorigars was exposed...\footnote{Doc. Ind., ff. 15}

This, however, was only the first step in a protracted struggle to counteract the chorigars and their ‘false and deceitful creed’. The Narrative refers to three such gatherings held subsequently in the house of Modi Dadasahib, one of the leading families of Surat. Dashtur Kamdin of Bharuch was the focal point of these gatherings, which included in its audience the Dashtur of Surat, Bhikaji. Dashtur Kamdin addressed what look like extended sessions of the gatherings wherein he read out from texts and documents to clear the air of the misgivings about the ‘true faith’ spread by the chorigars and substantiate/reaffirm the rasmi stand through his exegesis. The Narrative uses the terms panchayat, anjuman, (and later in other passages, majlis), interchangeably to characterize the gatherings. From the description it is clear that these were popular assemblies engaged in the serious business of religious dialogue and disputation, and although organized by the prominent Rasmi Sheths of Surat they did not go unattended by leaders of the opposite camp, at least initially. The passage is seminal for what it reveals and contains, namely, the essential frame of many other instances of meaningful communications reported in the rest of the Narrative:

Thereafter the Panchayat met thrice at (the house of) Modiji Dada Sahib of Surat. All people, big and small, as well as Dhanjishah Sheth and Barehman Khan, came to the Panchayat
at the house of Modiji. At that place Dhanjishah brought along with him that Langro Adhiaru, Rushtamdharu. He had a chair brought for him to sit and made him sit on it. At this the mood of the panchayat at large was spoilt – that this man who knew nothing, did not even know Farsi (was being so honoured). So Sheth Manmeherji got up and kicked the chair and picking it up from there placed it behind. That place had Barehman Khan, etc., and several bedins who knew and had knowledge of Farsi. In their presence and the presence of the entire Anjuman, Dashtur Bhikhaji Sahib sat and Dashtur Kamdinji Sahib consulted books in Farsi and Arbi and studied the papers of Vilayat from all angles, thereby the entire Anjuman became wholly aware (?). Then the Akaabars of the Panchayat said to Sheth Dhanjishah that Kavashdharu Jalal has come with you... he became a chorigar at your behest, this everyone knows (?). You explain to the Surat Adhiarus, Kavashdaru and Dadadharu, to come to this assembly of Farsi knowing people and to raise questions with Dashtur Kamdinji Sahib. Thereupon Sheth Dhanjishah said to the Panchayat that it is not necessary to call them, I will come to the Panchayat after three days... at this everyone got up, but he did not turn up.194

The passage lays bare the character and composition of these assemblies which may be briefly stated here. In the first place, it is evident that the gatherings depicted above were not elite or specialist clubs but popular assemblies, attended by a large number of Parsis across distinctions of class, rank, or religious hierarchy, and included in their folds behdins or laymen. Secondly, a certain level of literacy in the high texts is not just assumed but privileged, (somewhat aggressively, in the instance above), in the functioning of such bodies. A deficiency in that respect could de-legitimize a statement of position; it could cause tempers to rise, disrupting the process of consultation. And, finally, that a form of scholasticism with its underpinnings in Persian and Arabic texts informs and directs the proceedings of panchayats, anjumans, and majilises – there is a ‘medieval’ haul in the constitution of these organs of expression and communication that is essentially pre-colonial, and which has yet to find recognition, let alone elaboration in medieval studies.

194 Ibid, ff.15-16.
These features of the assemblies as informed and energized forums for broad participation, nourished at their core by specialists and representatives of “knowledge communities” honed in traditions of medieval scholarship, were neither exceptional nor confined to the city of Surat. We find them replicated in Mumbai when the Narrative moves there tracking the plight of Rasmi Parsees from Bharuch arrested in the wake of a violent uprising against the chorigars and sent to Mumbai, along with Dashtur Aspandyar, in the 1780s to be tried in response to a fariyad placed by the Qadimis with the Bombay Council. The description of the network of community support, and the events organized to counter the Qadimi standpoint and its politics by supporters of the beleaguered Parsees of Bharuch in Mumbai, make the association of panchayats majlises and anjumans with things public even more explicit, and one can see them vividly broadening out into a mass of people gathered to be informed and to participate in the contest.

Dialogue and scholarly disputation through assemblies in the light of textual exegesis, however, was only one, albeit crucial, aspect of the protracted struggle between the Rasmis and Qadimis in Surat, as also in Bharuch and Mumbai for which we have evidence. It had other manifestations ranging from intrigues and attempts to bribe a key opponent, and failing that, to try and eliminate him with poison; manipulations to seize books vital to the opponent’s viewpoint, concoction of evidence to bolster one’s own position, to violent collisions in streets and neighbourhoods. All of these are recorded in the Narrative in sufficient detail. While one may not have the time to go over and build upon all of these episodes in this thesis, their salience as expressions of different moments of the same conflict, as it was lived and experienced by a considerable section of the Parsees during the second-half of the

---

195 Ibid. ff. 43-48.
196 Ibid. ff. 52-57
eighteenth century, can hardly be over emphasized. It is important, however, to spend some time on the subject of the outbreak of violence.

The eruption of violence, in the structure of reportage the Narrative adopts, is preceded by three specific episodes which are suggestive of a breakdown of communications between the entangled groups, certainly at the level of the broad, open public assemblies. The Qadimis shrank away from participating in them, perhaps because they found them to be heavily weighed against them. We record the episodes here in the sequence in which they are presented in the Narrative, featuring after the reference to the Panchayats addressed by Dashtur Kamdin:

**Episode One:** The Qadimis put into circulation a table of mathematical calculations which sought to demonstrate the veracity of the Vilayati calendar vis-à-vis the Hindustani. The table was supported with facts and figures culled from the books Jalali and the Farhang-i Jehangiri, the latter being the celebrated tract prepared by Mir Jamul-ud Din under Akbar's patronage and completed in 1608-09 A.D. during the reign of Jehangir (hence the title) involving an arduous labour stretched over 30 long years. Devoted to the objective of collecting and preserving Pahlavi, Dari words in danger of extinction, the great frahang drew upon what one might call an international scholarship, including important inputs from the learned Zoroastrian priest from Kerman, Ardešir, who spent time in India in 1591-92 at the invitation of Akbar to collaborate on the project. Thus, even the learned among the Parsis, like the behdin Pestonji, a straight, educated man as the Narrative puts him across, were much taken in by the table owing to its impeccable roots in the famous and much revered tract. With serious doubts in his mind now about the rasmi stand on the calendar, Pestonji confronted Dashtur Bhikaji. The latter took a look at the references in the table, pulled out the works and demonstrated to Pestonji that there was nothing in them to lend substance to the table and that the citations it held forth had been faked. Pestonji seemed keen to double check, so he next went to

---

197 Cf. B.P. Ambasthya, op.cit, pp.12-13. It may be noted that Mir Jamal-ud Din settled in Bharuch after seeking retirement from the Mughal imperial service and a live contact between him and the ancestors of Dashtur Kamdin and his son, Aspandyar, seems almost a certainty. We have already cited reference to Persian Revayets which have preserved a letter written by Ardešir to the Dashtur of Bharuch from Lahore. The reference to the first work, Jalali, could not be tracked.
Dashtur Kamdin and took the same posture. Like Bhikaji, Dashtur Kamdin too reached out for the books and showed Pestonji the hollowness of the claim. Pestonji now declared that he had seen light and declared his commitment to the Hindustani calendar. Deeply contrite for having so grievously misconceived the truth, Pestonji underwent penitence (petate) and offered ashodad (a penalty in kind), but not before he had salvaged his honour by tricking Kavash Jalal into reversing his stand, in a manner of speaking. Proceeding carefully in the matter - by hikmat as the Narrative observes, i.e. through a wise but wily recourse - he cornered Kavash Jalal into admitting that the table indeed did not find corroboration in the works, which incidentally Kavash too had copies of. Furthermore, Pestonji had him inscribe this admission in black and white at the back of the table. This was combustible. The table of which Kavash Jalal was the author now carried a certification of his own disavowal of its authenticity on the other side! In fair recompense, Pestonji passed on this document to the Rasmis who used it to lambaste their opponents, putting them so much on the defensive that Dhanjishah according to the Narrative turned up at the panchayat in person to make a confession of guilt, but was prevented from doing so at the last moment by his brother, Ratanjishah. This presumably could have been the last appearance the leader of the Qadimis in Surat made in a Panchayat dominated by the Rasmis. If the story had ended here one could have breathed a sigh of relief, but it was not to be. Subsequently, the Qadimis went into damage control and launched manoeuvres to retrieve the table from the clutches of the Rasmis. And they succeeded, though after a long wait and after much water had flown down the Tapti, one might add.  

Episode Two: This is about a rare book in Arabic, called Bahar-ul Anwar, which we are told belonged to Abdullah Isfahani, a Mughal saudagar who was a friend of Mancherji Khorsedji. It contained confirmation of the Rasmi position on the issue of the calendar, though we are not told exactly how. Mancherji and the Rasmis in general were upbeat having come by this important work. Abdullah Isfahani passed it on to Mancherji. On the other side, the Qadimi camp was in a state of consternation having heard about it. Anxious to examine its contents, they could not lay their hands on the book until two Qadimis, Ratanjishah and Ratanji Dalal, contrived to strike a friendship with Abdullah Isfahani. “[O]n the pretext of some

---

198 Ibid., ff. 17-20. After more than a decade the fake table traveled to Mumbai with Dashtur Aspandyar and was still found useful by the Rasmis to debunk the claims of the Qadimis. Cf. ibid., ff.
trade, and showing him great cordiality and respect, and binding him with ties of affection" they duped him into procuring the book from Sheth Mancherji on a loan for just a few days, instructing him not to divulge their names to him. Abdullah Isfahani must have been a gullible fellow to have fallen into this scheme, but unfortunately he did! Once the book was with them and their expert in Arabic had ascertained that it did contain materials that militated against the qadimi argument, they refused to part with it; first with excuses and dilatory tactics, then with a brazen denial in the face of the Saudagar that they had ever received the book from him. There was now uproar in the camp of the Rasmis for letting a valuable work that lent them support in substantiating the Kabiseh slip out of their hands. In particular, Abdullah Isfahani felt extremely sheepish and small about his folly. To make up for it he drew up a mehzar (an affidavit) pledging that the book contained proof in favour of the Kabiseh and that it had been seized from him through fraud by the wretched Qadimis. Not unlike the mishap over the table, the mehzar too supplied the Rasmis plentiful ammunition to flay the Qadimis and their perfidies. If the Narrative is to be trusted, the mehzar carried conviction and served well to discredit the Qadimis in the eyes of the people.199

Episode Three: The last episode in sequence is about an attempt by Dhanjishah to bribe Dashtur Kamdin, now a force to reckon with in Surat. A man called Behram Mashidi was set to task. He approached the Dashtur while in he was in the midst of a group discussion. Taking him aside, Mashidi conveyed to the Dashtur Dhanjishah’s expression of bandigi towards him, and offered him one-thousand one-hundred rupees in the name of ashodad. This was followed by a request to the Dashtur from Dhanjishah to bring the fasad to an end by declaring to the people that the Vilayati calendar was correct, but “leaving you free to follow whichever Rojmaha you follow.” The Dashtur was aghast at the audacity and hypocrisy of the proposal: How can I, he said, “continue practicing the Rojmaha I have been practicing but declare publicly that the Rojmaha of Vilayat is the one which is authentic. To say one thing and to do another is the path to Dozak [Hell]...,” the equivalent of eating in the house of a married daughter, etc. This is, however, an opponent’s version of what the leader of the Qadimis said, and one must be wary of possible distortions in at least the nuances of what he might have

199 Ibid., ff. 20-24. The Narrative makes a comparison between this episode and the enterprise of Mulla Feroze in Mumbai: the publication of books by replacing the original words in texts with other words (for ulterior ends).
actually conveyed through a middle man. Nonetheless there is a 
ing of truth about the incident because it carries reflections of 
Dhanjishah's proposal in his petition. What the episode suggests 
is probably a last ditch effort on the part of the Qadimi groups to 
work out a *modus vivendi* and prevent the escalation of conflict 
among the Parsis in the city and beyond.  

Instances of collective violence in Surat between April and 
September 1768 A.D., which we have gone over earlier in the light of our 
English documentation, are amply corroborated by the *Narrative*, which 
has the added advantage of furnishing us a wealth of details not to be found 
in the English records. Surprisingly, there is a perfect fit in the two sources 
regarding the specifics of one major episode: the scuffle between the 
Nawab's sepoys and the Parsis with Dadabhai at his house. Beyond this the 
accounts diverge, particularly with reference to two issues: the prelude, or 
the initial circumstance, leading to the collision; and the precise nature of 
the bone of contention around which it had occurred. For a more cohesive 
view we need to factor in both. To recount from the Nawab's paper in 
*SFD*,  

200 Ibid. ff. 24-27.  

201 *SFD*, No. 656 (Part II), ff. 219-21.
latter, the sepoys came to the house of Dadabhai where they had taken refuge. The collision came about thus.\textsuperscript{202}

The \textit{Narrative}, on the other hand, excludes any mention of the outbreak of violence among the Parsis in the depths of the city, and the involvement of Mancherji Khorshedji’s family folk in them, but it replenishes us some crucial details. It informs us that a \textit{chowki} of three hundred sepoys, under Gulzar Khan Jamadar, was posted in Machlipeet at the stable where \textit{Dashtur} Kadm in was putting up since his arrival, and which we may presume in the light of the discussion so far had become a bastion of Rasmi assertions in the city \textit{contra} the Qadimis. Going by the two petitions discussed before and our interpretation of the record, these affirmations were no longer innocuous statements of religious belief but had a fair degree of belligerence and animosities built into them. The \textit{Narrative} alleges that the purpose of this deployment was to isolate \textit{Dashtur} Kadm in from his lines of communication and support with the wider community of Rasmis, in particular Mancherji Khors hedji and company; and, further, to eliminate him:

Any Parsi approaching him was (ordered) to be beaten without being asked anything. If Dhanjishah’s people moved in Machlipeet no one ought to disturb them, this is the order for you. Then break open the door, pull out \textit{Dashturji} and kill him. This is what Gulzar Khan Jamadar was told (and) given 300 \textit{sipahis} placed in Machlipeet. This \textit{chowki} stayed for 3 days...The sipahis attached with the three-day \textit{chowki} created great \textit{fasad}.\textsuperscript{203}

It was equally a part of this conspiracy, according to the \textit{Narrative}, to ensure that Mancherji did not stay home, at the time the \textit{Dashtur} was being done away with, to organize a counter-move in his defense.

\textsuperscript{202} That the prelude indeed was the infighting among the Parsis is confirmed by the Nawab by citing the English doctor who had visited the Parsi quarters to examine the woman alleged to have been grievously assaulted by Dhanjishah’s people in the petition signed by two hundred and seventy Parsis. As the doctor was getting into his palanquin, after having examined the woman, fight broke out among the Parsis and he was a witness to it.

\textsuperscript{203} Ibid., ff. 27.
Information about this plot had reached Mancherji beforehand through his spies in the Nawab’s court. The Narrative provides a long account of how resistance to this conspiracy nevertheless came to be mounted. First, Mancherji himself escaped from the clutches of sepoys sent by the Nawab to his house on the pretext of conveying to Mancherji a message that he wanted to see him; he then had representations sent from a section of merchants seeking permission for taking Dashtur Kamdin to their house, using to his advantage an old tradition through which merchants asserted their corporate rights in the city; finally, he assembled Parsis in support of the cause through extended family/brotherhoods (bhaibands), and by holding a majlis at the ola of Sheth Sorabji prior to the initiation of the act. Thus organized they proceeded in a body to the place where the Dashtur was virtually under house-arrest, and then used the stratagem of calling out to the Dashtur to conduct the Parsi ritual of behramajdani afargan. The ploy worked: the chowki was taken by surprise, enabling them to seize from them the custody of the Dashtur and carry him to safety. The Narrative describes this encounter in mystical terms invoking metaphors from Zarathustra’s escape from the magicians. Once this clever escapade had successfully broken through the cordon of the ‘state,’ Dashtur Kamdin was put in the safe hands of Dadabhai Manackji. The scuffle with the Nawab’s sepoys had occurred in this context.\textsuperscript{204}

The paper submitted by the Nawab makes no mention of Dashtur Kamdin, elusively referring instead to “criminals” who had taken refuge in Dadabhai’s house after assaulting the Nawab’s sepoys. In the light of the Narrative this seems to be only a half-truth. The paradoxical silence of our English sources over Dashtur Kamdin notwithstanding, the account offered by the Narrative seems the more cogent in this respect. In parts its reportage also stands corroborated, in particular by the reference to “Relations of Muncherji” being in the mob in the Nawab’s communiqué on

\textsuperscript{204}Ibid. ff. 27-30, for the entire episode; for the scuffle between the sepoys and the Parsis of Dadabhai, ff. 31-32.
the subject. It still, however, remains an enigma why there should be silence around the name of Dashtur Kamdin?

Without making an attempt to unravel the tangle, it is necessary to consider the stages through which the conflict over the Kabiseh passed to reach the high point where an attempt was made on the life of its most venerable figure. Going by the Narrative, the conspiracy was the brainchild of Dhanjishah who spent large amounts of money, one lakh rupees in a single day, it notes, to get the Nawab and the English Chief to collude with his designs. This came about at the end of attempts to get the better of the Rasmis, of which the episodes discussed before were the expressions. Once these had failed and it was clear that the Rasmis had carried the day, the conflict turned to violent conspiracy and subsequently to violence. Victor Turner has persuasively argued for a four-phase model in the study of social conflict as a process, where the “phases” embody the temporal structure that governs a conflict in its passage. To quote Turner, the phenomena of social conflict, envisaged as ‘social drama’ consists of a four-stage model, proceeding from breach of some relationship regarded as crucial in the relevant social group, which provides not only its setting but many of its goals, through a phase of rapidly mounting crisis in the direction of the group’s major cleavage, to the application of legal or ritual means to redress or reconciliation between the conflicting parties...The final stage is either public and symbolic expression of reconciliation or else irremediable schism. The first stage is often signalized by the overt, public breach of some norm or rule governing the key relationship which has been transformed from amity to opposition. As Turner goes on to emphasize, the phases are flexible, more suggestive than water-tight compartments.205

---

Seen from this perspective, one might suggest that the departure of *Dashtur* Kamdin under duress from Bharuch to Surat, and the pressure on him to recant what was an article of faith with him and the Rasmis in general, namely, the calendar of Hindustan, and to publicly announce the validity of the *Vilayati rozmaha*, constituted a powerful moment of 'breach' in the ongoing debates among Parsis on the *Kabiseh*; the second and third phases in the conflict are represented by the consultations/disputations in public assemblies followed by the three episodes of the table, the book, and the bribe (as the *Narrative* characterizes it, although it may well have been, from the point of view of the Qadimis, a desperate recourse to reach an equipoise to contain the escalation of the crisis among the Parsis). The three episodes collectively signify a breakdown in purposive communications between the entangled groups. They also take off from the point where the Qadimis stayed away from appearing at the assemblies. The *Narrative* notes that although Dhanjishah had declined to bring his friends to the *panchayat*, as asked for by the *akabars* (the group of peers present in the assembly) who held him responsible for making them *choriqars*, he had promised to come himself, but did not return until the embarrassments over the fabricated table apparently impelled him to. This too proved to be an anti-climax in terms of a resolution. The conspiracy to kill Kamdin and the outbreak of actual violence between the rival groups and also the Nawabi regime were the culminating points of this stretch of the conflict – all of these dovetail, step by step into a temporal order, into what Turner describes as “*the phase of rapidly mounting crisis in the direction of the group’s major cleavage.*” On the other hand, since Turner’s insight also harps on the tenacity of social deposits left overtime by long-term processes as constitutive of social dramas, and which can subsist silently for quite a while, growing by small invisible increments, one could also extrapolate his model of phases onto a more extended historical frame. One could, for instance, locate the ‘breach’ around the beginning of systematic efforts by the Rasmis to enforce moral
correctness on *mobeheds* seen to be walking on the path of Heraman and becoming *chorigars*. Turner's model is flexible enough to admit of these possibilities as well.

To conclude the discussion: in the aftermath of the conspiracy and the collision between the Nawabi regime and the Parsis, Dadabhai Manackji, an important merchant connected with the English Company, lodged a complaint with the Chief of the Surat Council, Andrew Price; and, since he had doubts about the neutrality of Price in the matter in any case, Dadabhai wasted no time in following the first complaint with another to the Bombay Council. The letter was sent by speed dispatch (*fatemari*), and within five days of the clash, according to the *Narrative*, a stinker arrived for Andrew Price asking him to settle the dispute without much ado or get ready to pack up and leave for home.206 One does not quite know if the missive from Bombay went quite so far, but there is little doubt from the Chief's remonstrance on the subject, recorded in *SFD*, that he had come under the scanner of his superiors in Bombay. He sought the Nawab, and a Council of five was announced forthwith to intervene in the dispute and establish peace. All the major sharers of power in the city were included in it: the Nawab, the English chief, Zafaryab Khan Sahib, the Bakhshi, and Kedar Rao, the official heading the Peshwa's revenues in Surat. The Council met in the Chief's establishment. It resolved that Dhanjishah will not come in the way of Mancherji and the followers of the "customary religion," and likewise the latter will not put obstacles in the path of the Qadimis. Secondly, that *Dashtur* Kamdin should be given a send off to Bharuch. Finally, a general proclamation was made that anyone found spreading disturbance would be held responsible for violating the conjoint authority of the Nawab and the Chief.207

---

206 *Doc. Ind.*, ff. 31-32.
The resolution was made into an official document signed by both the Sheths who had been at loggerheads with each other over the Kabiseh, Mancherji Khorsheedji and Dhanjishah. Mancherji accepted the resolution but called for another document before affixing his signature to this one: a document ensuring the safety and the religious honour of Dashtur Kamdin who, the Sheth said, had left Bharuch and come to Surat under coercion. Zafaryab Khan, who was interceding with the two camps as a representative of the Council, agreed with his concern. The same council, with the exception of the English Chief who was substituted by Sayed Zain, "the pirzada of all the Mussalmans," again went into consultation. They looked into the relevant literature and pronounced a verdict in favour of the Kabiseh and the Dashtur. A mehzar was drawn up in accordance with this conclusion and signed by the Council. It was then sent to the Nawab of Bharuch for his endorsement. The latter prepared a letter in Persian for Dashtur Kamdin, expressing his acquiescence in the council's verdict and stating that he had sent the Dashtur to Surat "for the purpose of dialogue and for providing guidance to all on the difference regarding the calendar..." Ensuring him security of his person, he declared that henceforth anyone who created a tumult on that count would be held guilty of committing an offence against the sarkar. Stamped with his seal the letter was sent off. Once it had been received, preparations were set afoot to give Dashtur Kamdin a send off. He was felicitated at a grand assembly of all the anjumans. The attendance at this function, or perhaps, several of them, must have been considerable. Recalling an eye witness account the Narrative records that at the moment of his departure so many anjumans had come to see him off that "if one were to fling a coin in the air it would not have touched the ground." Colourful metaphor, but it does convey the immensity of the crowd and the popularity of Dashtur Kamdin and the cause that he represented. There was also grandeur. The Dashtur had an

208 Ibid., ff. 33-34.
209 Ibid., ff.34-35.
210 A clear indication that there were multiple anjumans in the city.
escort of ten sepoys each from the Nawab, the Bakhshi, and Kedar Rao; in addition twenty behdins accompanied him. At every stage of his journey from Surat to Bharuch Parsis came out to greet him and then set him going on his journey with some of them accompanying him until the next stage. At Bharuch a similar reception awaited him, which included two of the Nawab’s cobdars.

At the end of this story, which has left out much, if one were to ask after Victor Turner if the fourth and last phase of his model of ‘social drama’ ended in “reconciliation or irremediable schism,” the answer unfortunately would be the latter. From the slant of the Narrative, tensions and conflicts continued in all the three cities, alternating between moments of low intensity frictions -like intrigues, battle over written media, the veracity of books and publications of the Faredun Marzban Printing Press of Mulla Feroz in Mumbai, etc. - and high-intensity collisions as in Bharuch in 1782 A.D. leading to attacks on the Qadimis and burning of houses of prominent chorigars;211 and in Surat again in 1798 A.D. following manipulations by chorigars to install a pliant Dashtur through whom they attempted to enforce the Vilayati rozmaha, entailing in the bargain crucial departures from established Parsi liturgy.212 Down till c. 1800, when the Narrative shuts its doors on us finally, the battle between the path of the Kabiseh and the “forces of Heraman” continued to raise its head and remained unresolved.

211 Ibid., ff.43-47. The Narrative explains this as having come as a response to the cumulative perfidies and other acts of oppressions Dashtur Kamdin had been subjected to by the chorigars. Dashtur Kamdin, however, had died before this upsurge of the lower classes of Parsis.

212 Ibid., ff.59-64. A series of smaller episodes, including intrigues around documents and manoeuvres at public assemblies, are built into this account.