Chapter II

Zoroastrianism and Parsis: Understanding the 'Book View'

Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism is quite a small religious community in this world. Despite this small number its importance to humanity cannot be underestimated because of the following reasons:

- Its ideas and theology has had a great impact on Judaism, Christianity and other later religions, especially on the concepts and the beliefs surrounding God and Satan, the soul, heaven and hell, savior, resurrection, final judgment, etc.

- It is one of the oldest religions of the world which still exists. It is believed that it might be the first monotheistic religion. Timelines are given in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 - A Schematic Diagram of The Creation Story

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (years)</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Ahura Mazda’s creations were in a spiritual state (i.e. unthinking, unmoving ad intangible)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ahura Mazda first perceived the existence of evil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evil attacked unsuccessfully and returned to the abode of darkness, where it mis-created the devs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ahura Mazda fashioned finite time and fixed the contests for 9000 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3000</td>
<td>Ahura Mazda chanted the Ahunavar prayer and evil was stupefied for the next 3000 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6000</td>
<td>All passed according to the will of Ahura Mazda (i.e. world was unafflicted by evil)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ahura Mazda fashioned the 7 creations in a Getig (physical) state, in anticipation of the onslaught of evil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9000</td>
<td>Ahriman attacked Ahura Mazda’s 7 creations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The real conflict begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The soul of the cow pleaded for a redeemer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>Zarathushtra was born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11,000 years Ukhashyat.nemah, the second posthumous son of Zarathushtra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(57 years before the end of time) - Astvat.ereta, the 3rd and last posthumous son of Zarathushtra – the Saoshyant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>Wizarishn – the Separation; time will cease to exist and the world will be restored to a perfect immortal state</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EUNDAHISHN (Creation)

GUMEZISHN (The mixture/Mingled state)

WIZARISHN (The separation)
Zoroastrianism was founded by Zarathushtra (Zoroaster in Greek; Zarthosht in India and Persia). There are debates on origin of religion. Some Conservative Zoroastrians believe that it was founded around 6,000 BC while other followers say that it was founded by about 600 BC. On the other hand, few historians and religious scholars opine that it might have founded between 1,500 and 1,000 BC. Zarathushtra lived in Persia which is the modern day Iran. In the Legends it is said that his birth had been predicted and evil forces tried to kill him as a child. He was the first to preach monotheism in a land of an aboriginal polytheistic religion. He was attacked for his teaching, but finally won the patronage of the king. By 7th century AD, Zoroastrianism had become the state religion of various Persian empires (http://www.eaec.org/cults/zoroastrian.htm).

In 650 AD, Muslim Arabs invaded Persia. A small number of Zoroastrians fled to India at that time. The ones who remained back there have survived centuries of persecution, systematic slaughter, forced conversion, heavy taxes, etc. They are only about 18,000 still living in and around Yazd, Kerman and Tehran in Iran. The 1991 census counted 3,190 Zoroastrians in Canada. The actual number is believed to be much higher (http://www.encyclopedia.com/video/0Yje9ew-qHQ-zoroastrians-in-india-english.aspx).

The number of Zoroastrians, in 2005, was estimated around 128,100, worldwide. David A. Barrett, editor of the World Christian Encyclopedia, 2001 states that the Zoroastrian population had grown by 2000 to 2,543,950. Barrett predicts, “Zoroastrian population in 2025 will be 4,439,930, and in 2050 it will has risen to 6,964,700! It has been reported anecdotally, that there are a number of closet Zoroastrians in the Aryan home countries (Iran, Afghanistan, Northern Iraq, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and neighboring lands) who are outwardly Muslim but who are secretly Zoroastrian” (http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/demographics/index.htm#worldwide).

Though the philosophy of Zoroastrianism remains same, but it is practiced differently in different parts of the world. The brief overview of Zoroastrianism is given in this chapter. The details of Zoroastrianism are too vast to be covered in this chapter. In the preceding pages I have given an overview of the religion. These aspects of religion would help the reader understand the context and terminology used in ethnography of Parsis.
The Prophet Zoroaster

The date of writings of the Old Avestan Gathas, is not known with certainty. But the Current academic consensus believes it to be in the 11th or 10th century BC. On the other hand dates proposed by reputable scholars differ even more widely, between the 18th and 6th centuries BCE (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoroaster).

Zoroaster was born in Bactria (or Aria). He was a son of not very powerful nobleman named Purushaspa and a woman named Dughdhova. Zarathushtra had five brothers and was the third amongst them. He became a priest and showed a great care for humans and cattle. The family was often called Spitama, which was an honorary title meaning 'most beneficent. This was later taken for the family name (http://www.livius.org/za-zn/zarathustra/zarathustra.htm).

He lived in east of the Caspian Sea, on the steppe lands. The war-like nomads threatened people among whom he lived. They plundered their homes and herds. At that time Iran was still in the Stone Age, and reading and writing were unknown skills. So Zoroaster’s teachings had to be memorized. Therefore, his words which had survived are in seventeen hymns which his followers recited during the Yasna. Zoroaster came from the family of priests. It is only him who even after being a priest founded such a great religion.

He was married and had children. Zoroastrians believe that when Zoroaster was thirty he had a series of visions of God. His message was at first rejected and he was mocked at. The mockery then turned to abuse followed by physical attacks on him. He was forced to leave his home and family. However, one day he had an opportunity to preach before the king of another Iranian tribe, King Vishtaspa. There he converted the King and his people. Zoroaster is believed to have been murdered at the age of seventy-seven by a hostile priest of the old religion (Hinnells; 1981:9).

Zoroaster’s teachings

Zoroaster was convinced that God had called him, and chosen him. According to him, God appeared to him and taught him. There is a very strong personal element at the
centre of Zoroaster’s teachings. Whereas his people had believed that only the wealthy and powerful had a happy life after death with the Gods on high. Zoroaster taught that all those who were righteous in thought, word, and deed went to heaven, regardless of their worldly position. Everyone, he taught, had freedom to choose between good and evil in life and at death their thoughts, words, and deeds would be weighed in the scales of judgment.

Zoroaster believed that the world and all that was good in it – truth, life, light, joy, health, beauty, and kindness – was the work of good creator, the Wise God, Ahura Mazda. Zoroaster believed that the material world in which one lives was created by God. It is therefore good, and all good in it comes from God. All evil in this world – untruth, death, darkness, misery, and suffering – comes from the “devil”, the Destructive spirit, Angra Mainyu. Angra Mainyu is separate from God and is a real power and force, seeking to destroy all that is good. Mankind, according to Zoroaster, was created to take part in a cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil. The purpose of his teachings was to show the two forces for what they are – good is wholly positive and creative, evil is negative and destructive. Between the two all men must choose. Just as Zoroaster made his choice, so too must all men. Those who choose righteousness were called the Ashavans, the followers of Righteousness, Asha.

Ahura Mazda created the material world, sun, moon, stars, sky, man, and cattle; he also created the spiritual world. Whereas Zoroaster’s contemporaries believed in a number of Gods, the prophet exalted one above all others, and declared Ahura Mazda to be the creator of the rest. Only Ahura Mazda, therefore, is worthy of absolute worship. Among the created heavenly beings are the six ‘Holy Immortals’ (Amesha Spentas). They are called the ‘sons’ and ‘daughters’ of God. Each of them protected one part of the total creation. But they are not thought of only in human terms; they are also abstract ideas. The holy immortals are not simply beings; they represent parts of God’s nature and of the righteous man.

Their names represent their character. They are both the ideals which men should work towards and the gifts of God. The details are given in Table 2.2.
Table 2.2 - Names of Amesha Spentas and creations they guard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>The creation protected</th>
<th>Later form of name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Wise Lord (Ahura Mazda)</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Ohrmazd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Mind (Vohu Manah)</td>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>Bahman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Righteousness (Asha)</td>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Ardivahist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingdom (Khshathra)</td>
<td>Sky</td>
<td>Shahrevar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devotion (Armaiti)</td>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Spendarmad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health (Haurvatat)</td>
<td>Waters</td>
<td>Hordad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immortality (Ameretat)</td>
<td>Plants</td>
<td>Amurad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These *Amesha Spentas* are aspects of God’s nature which man can and should share on. But man does not become divine. He is never identified with the first Immortal, *Ahura Mazda* himself, who protects the human creation. By sharing the Good Mind, through Devotion, by practicing Righteousness, man achieves Health, Immortality and The Kingdom.

Zoroaster believed that God created not only the Holy Immortals, but also a number of ‘angels’ who carried out his will and aided man. But he and his contemporaries did not think of the Immortals as ‘angels’. Rather they thought of them as powers or forces in hooves, horns and long tails, but rather as the destructive forces of Violence, Greed and above all, the Lie.

Zoroaster taught that if men defeated the forces of evil in world then the world would be resorted to its original ideal state. As a priest Zoroaster appreciated the importance of rituals, so he took more interest than many religious founders have done in organizing ways of worship for his followers. One example of this is the sacred cord which was the symbol of the priest in the old religion, and still is in Hinduism, was made the symbol of all believers in Zoroastrianism. While prayers were offered it is tied three times round the waist to remind the Zoroastrian of his three duties – to practice good thoughts, words, and deeds.

Another religious practice which he adapted was the use of fire. In earlier times fire had been the focus of the rites and offerings to the Gods were put on it. The fire was seen as
the earthy home of the life-giving power in the Sun’s warmth. Zoroaster gave it a new religious significance as the sign, or symbol, of Righteousness, the third Holy Immortal. Through meditation on the Fire and the practice of righteousness the Holy Immortal on the Fire and the practice of righteousness the Holy Immortal would be brought to live in man.

Zoroaster was the first man known to teach a belief in the one creator, the devil, heaven and hell, resurrection of the dead, a final judgment, and heavenly bliss. As his teachings became the official religion of three great empires ruling much of the known world, including at one time Israel, it inevitably influenced other faiths – notably Judaism and Christianity (Hinnells; 1981: 10-15).

Zoroastrian Beliefs

They believe in a single God Ahura Mazda who is all powerful. Humans can communicate with God by number of attributes called the Amesha Spentas, which are personified in Gathas.

- According to a school of thought, cosmic dualism exists between:
  - Ahura Mazda, which is all powerful and worthy of worship
  - Angra Mainyu, the evil spirit, who opposes Ahura Mazda.
  - The cosmic conflict between the Good and the Evil involves the entire universe, because every human being has to choose which to follow. Evil, and the Spirit of Evil, will be completely destroyed at the end of time. Dualism will vanish and Goodness will be omnipresent.

- Another school of thought believes the battle between Good and Evil as an ethical dualism, which exists within the human consciousness.

- Asha is a form of righteous, all encompassing, natural law.

- Some of the legends, which might not be from Zarathushtra’s teachings are:
After death occurs, the *urvan* (soul) is allowed to meditate on his/her past life for three days. It is then judged by *Mithra, Sraoash and Rashmu*. In the lifetime if good thoughts, words, and deeds outweigh the bad, then the soul is taken into heaven. Else, the soul is taken to hell.

The universe goes through three eras:

- Creation;
- The present world where good and evil are mixed.
- A final state when good and evil will be separated, at renovation of earth
- At the end, everything would be pure. The souls in hell would be released and everyone will reach a platform for final judgment (http://www.religioustolerance.org/zoroastr2.htm).

**Zoroastrian Practices**

- Their worship consists of prayers and symbolic ceremonies
- All rituals are performed in front of sacred fire. It is believed that Parsis worship fire. This is not true as for them fire is just a symbol of God not God.
- Converts are not accepted to the religion. Membership is only by birth. This belief is not accepted by few members nowadays.
- The conservatives of Zoroastrianism are against inter faith marriages
- Members are encouraged to a lead a three fold part that is clearly depicted in their motto; “Good thoughts, good words, and good deeds” (http://www.religioustolerance.org/zoroastr2.htm).

**Angels in Zoroastrianism**

Zoroastrianism recognizes various classes of spiritual beings besides the Supreme Being (*Ahura Mazda*):
• Spenta Mainyu (Spenamino, Hormazd)
• Amesha Spentas (Amahraspandan)
• Fravashis (Farohars)
• Yazatas (Yazads)

Spenta Mainyu

Spenta Mainyu (Spenamino, Hormazd) means "The Holy Creative Spirit". He is the spirit of Ahura Mazda, active in the world. He dominions over humans. He is the God of life and personified light and goodness in the world and people. Later, he became identified with Ormazd, while Ahura Mazda (Name synonymous with Ormazd) became known as Zurvan.

Amesha Spentas

Each Amesha Spenta (Amahraspand) personifies an attribute of Ahura Mazda as well as a human virtue. In early Zoroastrianism they were spirits of light and could be considered divine aspects of Ahura Mazda. Later they became fully personified as independent deities.

• Male Amesha Spentas presided over masculine elements: Fire, Metals and Animals.
• Female Amesha Spentas presided over feminine elements: Earth, Water and Vegetation.

Still, they were never worshipped individually. Each Amesha Spenta had a special character and was assigned respective creations to preside over on the physical, moral and spiritual planes of Ahura Mazda's creations to aid in the triumph of the forces of light over darkness. The Amesha Spentas are given in Illustration I.
Illustration I - Zoroastrian Angels

Vohu Manah - Vohu Mano, Vohuman (Animals)

Vohu Manah is the ‘Good Mind, Intelligence, and Good Thinking’. It stands for the discerning wisdom and thorough thinking required for leading a useful life. It is the generator of Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds. He is given the freedom to choose between good and evil, and the responsibility to reap the consequences. He is the Intellectual Principle and was the first Amesha Spenta created by Ahura Mazda, at whose right hand he sits.

Asha Vahishta – Ardwhisht (Fire)

Asha Vahishta means ‘Truth and Justice’. It is the Divine Law which embodies Righteousness, Truth, Order, Justice, and Progress. It is the universal law of righteous precision. Every Zoroastrian strives to follow the Path of Asha in its highest and deepest spiritual sense. Asha is the personification of the ‘most righteous truth’. He was the
second Amesha Spenta created. He is the most prominent of the male Amesha Spentas as the principal adversary of the world against the Daevas.

Khshathra Vairya – Shahrewar (The Sky and Metals)

Khshathra Vairya means ‘Righteous Power’ Denotes the ‘Power’ to settle in peace. It is chosen by free and wise people as their ideal order in spirit and matter. It is the divine dominion. It is democracy in mind and body, in thought, words, and deeds in every social activity. He symbolizes self-control to include one's desires and sensory organs from being stimulated by objects of sense as well as good authority which ushers in prosperity and the Kingdom of God.

Spenta Armaiti – Spandarmad (The Earth)

Spenta Armaiti means ‘Holy Serenity, Devotion’ which also means Tranquility, Holy Compliance. It is peace and prosperity. She is an earth and fertility Goddess and daughter of Ahura Mazda. She was the fourth Amesha Spenta created. She personifies holy devotion and righteous obedience, and also perfect mindedness gained through humility, faith, devotion, piety, and so on.

Haurvatat - Hordad (Waters)

Haurvatat means ‘Wholeness, Integrity, Health and completion’. It is the perfecting process and final completion of our material and spiritual evolution. She is the Amesha Spenta that presides over water and is the personification of perfection. She guards the spiritual and physical natures of water, and she brings prosperity and health.

Ameretat - Amurdad (Plants)

Ameretat means, ‘Deathlessness and immortally’. Together with Haurvatat, it is the ultimate goal and represents the completion of our evolutionary development and the final achievement of our life on earth. She is associated with plants. She personifies
immortality and rules the physical and spiritual aspects of eternal life as are symbolized in plants.

**Fravashis**

Also known as *Arda Fravash* (‘Holy Guardian Angels’). Each person is accompanied by a guardian angel, which acts as a guide throughout life. They originally patrolled the boundaries of the ramparts of heaven, but volunteered to descend to earth to stand by individuals to the end of their days.

*Ahura Mazda* advised Zarathushtra to invoke them for help whenever he found himself in danger. If not for their guardianship, animals and people could not have continued to exist, because the wicked *Druj* would have destroyed them all.

The *Fravashi* also served as an ideal which the soul has to strive for and emulate, and ultimately becomes one with after death. They manifest the energy of God, and preserve order in the creation. They are said to fly like winged birds, and are represented by a winged disk, often with a person superimposed.

**Yazatas**

Means ‘Adorable ones’, a created spiritual being worthy of being honored or praised. Like the *Amesha Spentas* they personify abstract ideas and virtues, or concrete objects of nature. The *Yazatas* are ever trying to help people and protect them from evil. The important *Yazatas* are:-

* Ahan (Avan, Ava), Ahurani, Airyaman, Akhshti, Anagha Raocha (Anagran, Aneran), Apam Napat, Aredvi Sura Anahita, Arshtat (Ashtad), Ashi Vanghuhi (Ashishhwangh, Ard), Asman, Atar (Adar, Atash, Atesh, Adur), Chisti (Chista), Daenc (Den, Din), Dahm, Dahma Afrti (Dahman Afrin), Damoish Upamana, Drvaspa, Erethe, Gaw, Geush Urvan (Gosh, Goshorun), Haoma (Hom), Hauptoiringa, Havani (Hawan, havan), Hvre-khshaeta (Khwarshed), Khwarenah (khwarrah, farrah), Maonghah (Mah), Manthra Spenta (Mahraspand), Mithra (Mehr, Mihr, Meher), Nairysangha (Neryosang), Paoiryaenis, Parendi,
From the Holy Gathas we come to know that Ahura Mazda had promised that His Light would flow on this Earth and indicate His Divine presence. This light, in the beginning of the world emanated from Him as a Divine source and flowed as flood of strong waves of vibrations and generate heat and movement on Earth. As we all know without Heat Energy there can be no existence on Earth. We receive this energy from the Sun. In Zoroastrianism Fire hence assumes a special significance. It is believed to be Ahura Mazda’s son as with the help of it He Created this beautiful creations. The Avestan word for fire is ‘Ah’ which means God and the word ‘thra’ stands for Agency. When we add both we get “Ahura” which means Agent of God.

Burning of Holy Fire is symbolic of ever dynamic nature of the Creation and Renovation which are ongoing processes that never stop. And as fire which is present everywhere in the form of Heat Energy reminds us of God Ahura Mazda who is present everywhere, in every particle.

A devout Zoroastrian can offer the following to fire, as homage:

- Sandalwood (Urvaseen)
- Sweet smelling wood or aromatic gums – looban

The occult science believed that the fragrance of “looban” and the aroma of sandalwood both combined have a very uplifting experience on the senses. It is also known that perfumes have a psychic influencing power. They have a very tranquilizing effect on the mind and can evoke devotional feelings and beneficial in spiritual practices especially those of sandalwood and incense sticks (Nowujee; 58-60).
The main myths

Zoroastrian teachings can be best understood with the help of its myths. These myths date back from the times of Zoroaster and even His teachings are believed to have been inspired and evolved from them. From these we can understand the concepts of Good and Evil, Man and World, and God. It is believed that in the beginning of the World, God, \textit{Ohrmazd} and the devil, \textit{Ahriman} used to live in different zones which were not related in any way to each other. While \textit{Ohrmazd} lived in light and happiness, \textit{Ahriman} lived in the world of Darkness. It was only when once he saw light that he wanted to destroy it. \textit{Ohrmazd} realized the potential dangers of this act so he sought \textit{Ahriman}'s complete submission before him and asked him to worship him. But this was something unacceptable to \textit{Ahriman} as he believed peace is a sign of weakness and was hence not ready to yield. After this they both started to build their own armies for the battle. The timeline is given in Table 2.3.

\textit{Table 2.3- A Schematic Diagram of The Apocalyptic Story}

- **10,000 years**
  - Peshota precursor to the Saoshyant
  - Creation will flourish for 3 years
  - Wolf species will disappear
  - Sun will stand still for 10 days at noon
  - Disaster will strike; men will perish
  - King Jamsheed will be driven back into the underworld

- **11,000 years**
  - Ukhshayt.nemah – the 2nd Saoshyant
  - The underworld will open
  - For 6 years there will be abundance and prosperity
  - Evil creation will perish
  - The sun will stand still for 20 days at noon
  - Men will become gentle; will eat only vegetables. Will have only water
  - Evil will attack the good creations
  - Azhi Dahaaka will break loose and will go on a rampage
  - Keresaaspa will fight and defeat Azhi Dahaaka

- **(57 years before the end of time)**
  - Ashvat.ema – the 3rd Saoshyant
  - Last Judgement will take place
  - Sun will stand still for 30 days at noon
  - All the creations will pass through molten metal
  - All metal will be melted by Airyaman
  - The resurrection will take place
  - The creations will be perfect
  - The final Yasna will be solemnized by Ohrmazd
  - The last sacrifice of the Bull Hakhhayans will be performed
  - The Parahoma libation will be taken
  - The resurrected bodies will become immortal

- **12,000 years**
  - The “Making Wonderful” will be completed and the Gumezishn period will come to an end
  - Wizarishn – the separation, when time will cease to exist
Ohrmazd first created the spiritual world, the Holy Immortals. Then he created the other heavenly beings, the helpers, and the spiritual form of the universe. Then, after three thousand years, he created the universe in material form. In Zoroastrian belief, spiritual and material are different aspects. While spiritual is something invisible and intangible. Zoroastrianism does not believe that there is any evil or flaw in the world as it was created by Ohrmazd and his creation cannot be flawed. Hence it is perfectly beautiful, flawless, happy and in ever eternally blissful state. This view is just similar to the early Christian teachings of the ‘Semitic’ picture of the world. According to their belief the sky is a stony hard sphere inside of which floats the earth just like a yolk in the egg. Below the earth lay the cosmic waters and above it, the sun and moon remained still at the ideal noon day position. At the center of the earth stood the cosmic mountain, Hara. From its peak descended the river which flowed into the cosmic ocean. On the river bank stood the first man and the first beast, Gayomard, the archetypal bull. All was peaceful and still.

It is said that Ahriman attacked and broke the spherical shell through the base of sky. Through this entered a lot of foul creations into the God’s creation with the intentions of destroying it. The vegetation was destroyed and a serious drought ensued. He then targeted the first man and the bull and inflicted on them suffering, misery, and death. When Ahriman was doing all this destruction, the world was devastated, he shook its roots, the mountains were uprooted and it opened up valleys by tearing it apart. The Sun and the Moon were moved away from their perfect positions. The blissful state was lost and what now remained was rot and decay.

When the picture appeared so gloomy, there appeared a ray of hope. And this hope was seen in the sperm released by both Gayomard, the bull before being killed. A plant is said to have grown from the sperm of Gayomard which transformed into the first human couple. It is believed that this world is in a perfect flawless state distorted only by evil. In this world everything was in harmony where man existed in blissful state along with nature and animal world. When Ahriman tried to escape the world he was stopped by fravahars or the guardian angels and this is how evil was thus caught in the
Earthly trap. So unlike other religions whose philosophy says that good spirits suffer in this evil world but in Zoroastrianism it is believed that evil is caught in this beautiful world.

So Zoroastrians believe that the world is nothing but a battleground where forces of evil and good are in constant conflict with one another. This religion began when Zoroaster revealed the Good religion to the world and this was a blow to the evil. While Christian thought believe in the ‘end of the world’ theory when good will win over evil. On the other hand Zoroastrianism believes in ‘renovation of the world’ when God would cleanse all evil and restore this world again into its original flawless state.

It is believed that end of evil will occur but it will be done gradually not suddenly. Nearing its end evil would and make all its efforts to create devastation and chaos in the world. When sun would stop giving light, there would be droughts, improper timing of the rainfall, and deterioration in the values of society like children not showing respect to elders, or not listening to their parents or disrespecting teachers and priests. These all things would be reflective of triumph of evil over good.

It is prophesized that at the end of the world a virgin would bathe in a lake where Zoroaster’s sperm would be preserved and would give birth to Savior of this World. When he would turn thirty he would bring about the last judgment on Earth. On this day the men and women who were in heaven and hell according to their deeds would be raised again and called for final test where they would have to pass through a stream of molten metal. The beings with good deeds would not feel the heat of it but the bad people would be inflicted with pain and after passing it their all sins would be condoned and then they could join the God to stay with him in His beautiful creation.

At the time of this Judgment the good and evil forces would be in constant battle. In the end all demons would finally die and all evil and suffering would vanish. The stream of molten metal would melt all the mountains and everything would turn smooth and leveled, the way it was in the beginning. Then Heaven would come down to the moon and earth would also move up on to the moon. Hence both heavens would finally be together with earth. As Earth was created by God so it cannot be flawed and hence it
cannot be destroyed. Hence the idea of Zoroastrianism is not end of the world but such a perfect place where heaven exists on earth and where God is omnipotent (Hinnells; 1981: 28-31).

Good and evil

In Zoroastrianism, it is believed that God is the creator of both spiritual and material worlds and he cannot make any mistakes so whatever he has made is perfect. They don’t regard him as creator of evil forces and they regard that there is some other identity which created evil. God cannot be omnipotent as this evil Ahriman limits his powers. In some other religions like Hinduism, evil and good are said to be two aspects of the reality just like death is the other name of birth. But Zoroastrianism says that good and evil do not go together. If people believe in good they believe in God also but if they think of evil they are bound to think of devil. In traditional Christian thought the devil is a fallen angel whom God permits to have power for a limited period. Zoroastrians do not agree with this, because that makes God ultimately responsible for evil. Good and evil, God and the devil, in Zoroastrian thought are as different as light and dark (Hinnells; 1981: 31-32).

Zoroastrianism is one such religion on Earth that gives its followers the liberty to choose between good and evil instead of thrusting ideas on them. They are independent to choose what they like, to work towards the path of God Ahura Mazda or that of evil. If they chose to move on the path of God they would have to fight the evil through good actions and thoughts (http://www.zoroastrianism.ee/universal_religion.html).

Man’s role and destiny

Man is a co-worker of God in His fight against the evil. Every human being is born with a destiny but it does not mean everything in his life has been decided. Zoroastrian religion gives full liberty to people to choose between good and evil. He has been given a task to lead a good life by fighting evil but he is free not to accept the task and move on the evil path if he so desires.
When a man dies his soul is believed to move around the dead body for around three days. His good thoughts, words, and deeds would be weighed against his evil thought and deeds. If the good overweighs the bad, the soul is taken to Heaven by a beautiful girl after crossing the Bridge of the Separator (*Chinvat Bridge*). But if a soul has done more of bad deeds, he is taken by an ugly woman (symbolic of his own conscience) towards the Bridge of Separator that gets narrower and narrower and ultimately the soul falls into the darkness of hell.

Zoroastrians believe that the concept of Heaven and hell is not eternal. They think that purpose of all punishment, should be reform. It is not good for a parent to punish his child just for the sake of punishment only. If heaven is believed to be a place of reward, so is hell believed to be a place of punishment, but Zoroastrians believe it must be corrective punishment. If hell was eternal then its punishment could never be corrective. So, Zoroastrians believe, the soul goes to hell not for eternity, but for correction of his evil deeds. On the day of resurrection, men will return from heaven and hell to face the Last Judgment.

In the Zoroastrian thought there are two days of Judgment, one after death and the other on day of resurrection. God is believed to have created everything in duality, the spiritual and materialistic aspects of world, as well as that of Man, his body and soul. Therefore, even the punishment should be different for both body and soul. So when a man dies, the Day of Judgment is for the soul and the Day of Resurrection would be for the body. It is believed that only once both body and soul are corrected by punishment, that they will be perfect to live in the ideal world when heaven and Earth would be merged in unity (Hinnells; 1981: 32-33).

**Ethics**

Zoroastrian thought believes that body and soul are interconnected. It believes that neglecting body at the cost of soul is as big a sin as neglecting soul at the cost of body. So an ascetic is as much at sin as is a glutton. They advocate a Middle Path where body and soul are given equal importance. Zoroastrians fully disagree with the philosophy of giving into your senses like behaving as a playboy and even neglecting the body fully.
like an ascetic. They admonish both extremities. So marriage is a middle path between these two extremes – celibacy and lechery. The evil forces always try to imbalance body and soul but a righteous man knows how to keep them in harmony and unity.

Another ideology of Zoroastrianism is that since this World is creation of God so it is unblemished and flawless. The word ‘Good Creation’ often appears in their texts to describe both spiritual and material sides of life. Since man is believed to be the ‘co-worker’ of God in his all endeavors so it is his duty to marry and play an active part in procreation and growth of this world and also expand his herds and crops. They believe Devil becomes weak when more and more life is added to the world.

Zoroastrian ideology also teaches its members the most ethical behavior with the fellow beings. They believe that telling a lie is sharing the nature of the Devil so many Parsis in India and Iran are reputed to be truthful and honest and they abstain from lying. They are very good in business bargaining but once they agree upon something they would honor it till the end.

Their religion also emphasizes the importance of wisdom and learning. Their God ‘Ahura Mazda’ means the Wise Lord. Hence every Zoroastrian is expected to take good education to develop a good wisdom. Wisdom for them is not bookish knowledge alone but to be thoughtful, sensible, and taking good judgment.

Zoroastrians also believe in the virtue of liberality – the act of giving help and doing charity. In their spiritual texts also it is said that to be generous is the greatest virtue. They believe that it is not wrong to be rich provided the wealth is earned honorably and generously used in charity. Zoroastrians are known over the world for their philanthropy. In modern Iran, many hospitals, schools and housing estates, industries etc, have been opened and being maintained by charitable funds from virtuous Zoroastrians (Hinnells; 1981: 33-35).

**Women in Zoroastrian society**

Women play a vital role in God’s World as they not only procreate and add life to the world, thereby adding to God’s army but also are homemakers when they dust away the
dirt out of the house, they fight against the Devil who tries to blemish this ideal and flawless world.

Except becoming a priest women are given equal rights in the religious matters. A girl also has the same initiation ceremony as a boy. They also wear the same kind of badges of religion - the sacred thread and shirt and perform the same kind of prayers at the Fire Temple as men do.

In the twentieth Century, Parsi women are quite liberalized. About a quarter of them are holding a lot of professional, administrative, and clerical positions. The average marriage age has gone up to twenty eight and one third are not getting married. So this is leading to the problem of lesser children in the community. So some people opine that women liberalization and emancipation can be fatal for the community (Hinnells; 1981: 35-37).

Reincarnation in Zoroastrianism

Reincarnation is one of the most controversial issues in Zoroastrianism. There is nothing explicit in sacred text. In phalavi text there is mentioned from judgment to resurrection, but details are not clearly mentioned. For long scholars have followed phalavi text, scholar like Dr. Tarapore has translated Gatha 49.11, “Those souls who rules badly, who perpetrated bad deeds, who spoke evil words, do come back (paiti-yeinti) on account of their evil record. Verily they are dwellers in this abode of truth.” Summary of nineteen nasks do not contain reincarnation (Boyce; 1984:155-157).

If we look at the sacred text, it can be argued that reincarnation occurs as per Zoroastrian belief. Though, some scholars do not agree to the fact because exact translations of gathas are not done. For example, Spentamad Gathas (49-11) uses a word Paiiiyeinti, which means ‘come back’. Earlier the translation of this word was done in context to demons but many scholars agree that it is regarding souls. Similarly, Gathas (30-10) uses the word Zazente, which is translated to ‘They used to be born repeatedly’. The fact is not discussed much because most of the sacred text is lost and the remaining doesn’t talk much about it. Zoroastrians believe in re-birth because it is universally accepted fact.
Zoroastrian live is struggle with evil and temptation. Therefore, one must do good things if they do not want rebirth (Dabu; 2001: 66-79).

**Zoroastrian Sacred Text**

The Holy Book of Zoroastrianism is *Avesta*. It contains the original words of its founding father, Zarathushtra and a series of Hymns called the *Gathas*. They are the core text of their religion and *Gathas* are abstract sacred poetry aimed to worship of One God. They aim to promote understanding in the human mind towards how to make choice between good and evil. The *Gathas* have a general and even universal vision (http://www.religioustolerance.org/zoroastr2.htm).

In the opinion of Zarathushtra the idea of a personal God who required sacrifices and offerings was repugnant. The bottom line of his *Gathas* shows that there are no Gods (*daeva*), either one or many, either small or big, either good or evil. He emphatically declares that ‘Gods are the brood, the outcome, of the evil mind’. He was extremely dissatisfied with the prevailing conditions of that time. ‘Why has the idea of Gods (*daeva*) become so powerful, holding the living world in bondage?’ he asks himself. He further adds, ‘The living world cries in anguish because of the prevailing violence and oppression with no relief, and no one to whom the people could turn for guidance and protection.’ He emphasized the importance of seeing through the mind’s eye with a sense of right and wrong. He believed he was able to think things out for himself, and how much man in the past had been able to do and achieve only by seeing through mind’s eye. But, he believed with the use of the mind the sense of law and order could be imposed, neither by him nor by anyone else. Their use had to be learned individually, the hard way by deeds shaped by experience, and controlled by reason. The best way to learn is by living life full and learning from individual hard experience alone.

Power, and strength, and glory can come to those who use their good mind (*Vohu Manah*) and sense of righteousness (*Msha*). The gift of good mind, and the sense of right and wrong, law and order, were man’s precious gift. They were the inevitable results of the working of natural law. This led man to the idea of a supreme power that prevailed in
the universe and governed as the result of law and order, the affairs of the worlds of both the living and non-living. This power is called Ahura Mazda, the courteous and Wise.

He then started preaching his new ideas. He preached to pastoral nomadic people going from place to place. He taught wherever he could find country folk gathered together for some festival or some occasion. He delivered his ideas in simple prose, but what he said was later summarized into short verses by him for people to remember easily. These verses, were called the Gathas, are a brief summary of his talks to common folk. This was handed down to future generations verbally. His own notes were probably written down in an unknown script of which nothing is known about. These verses, handed down by word of mouth for generations, were gathered centuries later, and re-written in the old defective Aramaic script, old Arsacid Pahlavi and later in Sassanian Pahlavi. Although the Gatha verses of present times are not in chronological order yet, the main ideas of Zarathushtra are clearly written and from reading them one comes to know what he stood up against for, and what changes he had sought. Old manuscripts have been copied and re-copied, through centuries, so many times that many mistakes and interpolations have crept in, words have been mutilated, and meaning distorted to fit in with the idea of other days of the redactors. A good many versions of Sassanian days are definite misinterpretations of the simple ideas and faith of Zarathushtra (Moos; 1960: 12-16).

Many scholars believe that the remaining parts of the Avesta were written at some later date. These parts mainly deal with laws of ritual, religious practices and with the traditions. The Zoroastrian community is sharply divided between the members who strictly abide the teachings of the original Gathas, and other ones who believed that the later traditions are important and equally divinely inspired (http://www.religioustolerance.org/zoroastr2.htm).

The Sudreh

The word sudreh is made of two words, ‘sud’ meaning ‘good’ and ‘reh’ meaning ‘the path’. This means the good path which every Zoroastrian should follow. Wearing of sudreh reminds a Zoroastrian to take a path of truth and do good to others. Sudreh is also considered the garment of Vohu Manah (the good mind). Sudreh is made of white color,
which symbolizes purity. It is made up of nice parts which are shown in Illustration II (Mistry: 2006).

### Illustration II - Sketch of Sudreh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number in Diagram</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Symbolic Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>Side Seams</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3, 4</td>
<td>Sleeve Seams</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Neck Seam</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Girdo</td>
<td>Storehouse of potential good deeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Gireban</td>
<td>Pocket of good deeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Straight Tiri</td>
<td>Imbalance and difficulties one should overcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Triangular Tiri</td>
<td>Past and future come together in present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Front of Sudreh</td>
<td>Past deeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Back of Sudreh</td>
<td>Future deeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person</td>
<td>Who wears it</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Kusti**

*Kusti* is the sacred thread tied over the *sudreh* and encircled thrice around the waist. It reminds an individual to follow right path by good thoughts, words, and deeds. It symbolizes the direction finder (Mistry: 2006). The symbolic aspect of *kusti* is given in Table 2.4 and *kusti* is shown in *Illustration III*.

**Illustration III - Sketch of Kusti**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Symbolic Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wool of lamb</td>
<td>Innocence and purity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>72 threads</td>
<td>72 chapters of <em>yasna</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6 Sections</td>
<td>6 Gahambars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Threads (strings at end of kusti)</td>
<td>24 sections which make up the <em>Visparad</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>12 threads</td>
<td>12 months in calendar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Hollow</td>
<td>Space between heaven and earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Twisting of the thread in the beginning</td>
<td>Connection between the present and spiritual world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Knots for wearing kusti</td>
<td>Tenets of Zoroastrian religion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Zoroastrians must have sacred thread on his body throughout the day, except while bathing. It is to be tied the following times a day:

- In the morning, immediately on leaving bed.
- After answering the calls of nature.
- Before saying prayers.
- After bath.
- Before meals (http://www.avesta.org/ritual/navjote.htm).
**Doongerwadi**

*Doongerwadi* has five *Dokhmas* and a *chotra*, which are given in the plan. The five *dakhmas* are:

1. *Modi Hirji Vatchagandy Dokhma* – It is the smallest one and was built around 1672-73 A.D. for family use only. It is not in use because it is difficult for the vultures to take off, once they are inside.
2. *Manekji Nowroji Sett’s Dokhma* – built in 1756
3. *Anjuman Dokhma* - Biggest one, built in 1778
4. *Framji Cowasji Banaji Dokhma* – built in 1832
5. *Cowasji Edulji Bisni Dokhma* – built in 1844

The *Chotra* which is used only for the disposal of amputated limbs – build in 1777. It is marked ‘X’ on the plan.

Other *dokhmas* in Mumbai are not in use. They are:
- *Readymoney Dokhma* - Chowpatty
- *Dadiseth Dokhma* – Chowpatty
- *Dokhma* – Andheri
- *Dokhma* - Thane

**Structure of the Dokhma**

An average *dokhma* is around 300 ft in circumference. It has large stone slaps, well cemented on which the bodies are placed. These slabs correspond to Zoroastrian tenets of good thoughts, words, and deeds. The central well is 150 ft in circumference, which is used for is depositing the dry bones.

Clothes of the corpse are striped off when it is taken inside, symbolizing ‘Naked we come into this world and naked we ought to leave it’. With vultures around, the corpse is decomposed within 1-2 hours and bones dried up by atmospheric influences. Holes on the
inner side of well are made to take body fluids and rain water to underground drains and then to underground well. *Dokhma* is made up of seven parts, which are shown in *Illustration IV*.

*Illustration IV - Structure of Tower of Silence*

- **A** Row for male corpse
- **B** Row for female corpse
- **C** Row for child corpse
- **D** Path for corpse bearers to move around
- **E** Central well
- **F** Underground drains
- **G** Underground wells
Dokmenashini

According to Zoroastrians, *dokhma* is the best method of disposal of dead. Burying is not healthy because as compared to vultures, insects take much longer to decompose the corpse. With rapid process of *dokhma*, all the associated evils are prevented. Moreover, natural elements of earth, water, and fire are sacred and should not be contaminated. Therefore, corpse should not be buried, burnt or thrown into seas, rivers etc.

As per opinions of eminent priests in Zoroastrianism - *Dokmenashini* is based on five principles of religion - Goodness, Charity (Self-Sacrifice), Unity, Rationality, and Purity. The advantages of the system are:

- Charity – Offering body to hungry birds
- Speed – Quick disposal
- Economy – Free of cost
- Equality – Body of rich and poor treated the same
- Hygiene – No element of nature is polluted

The Parsis of India

History and Settlement

The Flight from Iran: Zarathushtra started this religion during the reign of King *Gushtasp*’s. He had forecasted the defeat of Iran thrice in the *Avesta* and that the religion would suffer under the King *Sitamgar*. Everything happened the way he had said would occur. Alexander was the first one who burnt their religious books and enslaved them for 300 years. They remained in this darkness till *Ardashir* came and restored the Good

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religion. He sent *Arda Viraf* to gain knowledge of the Worlds of the Spirits. With this, darkness spread and sin and crime started flourishing.

After that came *Shapur*, to restore the religion. At the same time *Aderbad Marespand* underwet hardships, which ended all his doubts of the faithful. This Glory lasted from *Shapur’s* time to the time of *Yazdegrid*. After a thousand years, Zarathushtra’s religion came to an end. Everyone started mocking it and no one feared God.

When foreigners conquered Iran, the people were scattered and some of them were put in prison. But a lucky few were successful in escaping and they became the protectors of *Avesta* and the faith. They left their homes and hid in the mountains of *Kohistan*. They remained like this for over a hundred years. As they were being tortured by non believers so someone advised them to move to *Hormuz*. They went to *Hormuz* and stayed there for around fifteen years but of no avail. At last a wise *Dastur*, who was also an astrologer, read the stars. He told people that the reign was coming to an end. If they did not leave at that point then everything would be destroyed and they would end up in misery. He directed them to go to India (Eduljee; 1996: 48-49).

**Arrival in India:** Zoroastrians were tired of the continual harassment and they were keen to preserve their religion. So they put their women and children into ships and set sail for India. After they reached India, they landed in *Diu*. Their arrival is shown in *Map I*.

*Map I - Parsis Arriving in India*
Parsis stayed in Diu for nineteen years. Again the astrologer priest read the stars and asked them to seek refuge in some other place. They again sailed for Gujarat. On their way they were attacked by storm and their lives were in danger. They prayed to God to help them, and asked him to send Bahman for their rescue. With this they promised God that if they reach India safely, they would light fire to Bahman. Their prayers were answered and the vicious fire of Bahram miraculously stopped the storm and all the Parsis thanked God by saying Kusti prayers. The gentle breeze brought them to the shore and they landed in Sanjan.

The Settlement in Sanjan: The ruler of Sanjan at that time was Jadi Rana. He was a wise and generous King who took care of his Kingdom. The Dastur went to him and requested him to give Parsis protection. Dastur told raja the story and praised the Raja for his royal blood and affection towards others. The Dastur asked him to help. Everyone present in the court was delighted to hear the words, except for Raja. The Raja felt insecurity about his safety and power. He was frightened by their dress and accessories. Raja asked the Dastur, to tell him about their religious beliefs and customs, which were both open and secret. The Raja asked the Dastur to give him some promises:

- Give up their language and adopt Indian language
- Women have to dress like local women
- They must never use their arms
- Their marriage ceremony to be held in evening.

If the Dastur agreed to all the above things, they could stay in the land. Dastur had no option but to accept the conditions. All Parsi rituals, customs, and every little thing about Parsi religion were told to the King by the Dastur. The Raja was pleased to learn all this and asked the Parsis to settle in his land and contribute to its glory. Some wise men were given the duty to find a suitable land for them. Soon a spacious land was found which was shown to the Dastur who liked it along with other people. At this place a town cropped up in place of a forest. The Dastur named this place Sanjan and it was to soon
develop and prosper like Iran. From that time onwards, people of this place were started being known as Sanjanas.

The Building of Iranshah: After this the Parsis constructed their town and settled down in comfort. They went to the Raja and requested him to allow them to install Iranshah, the fire for the Bahman. They requested him that no man from other religion should come so close to the fire that his voice be heard. They wanted to maintain sanctity of the place by concentrating the fire. The Raja agreed to their request and gave them an area where they could do those things. The Rajah got the land cleared and all non-parsis were removed from that area, leaving only Parsis.

After that the well versed priests carried the Ljesni ceremony for many months. The workers worked hard and showed their faith. Raja provided them with material for the building. Parsis knew all art to construct the building; they also had necessary tools for the same. Their task was shared by everyone in the group; they felt that God was with them while it was constructed. Alchemists also came for their help and bought required material to light up the sacred fire. The aged Dastur installed the Iranshah and the occasion was celebrated by all Parsis.

The dispersal of the Parsis: This is how three hundred years passed away. By now many Parsis were scattered throughout India. Wherever they settled, they prospered and were happy. In this way another two centuries passed by. Parsis multiplied and many of their descendents lived there. But some year’s later things turned around and time decided to shorten their stay.

Sultan Mahmud’s attack on Sanjan: After five years of arriving in India, Islam now arrived at the threshold when Sultan Mahumad attacked Sanjan. The Raja heard that thirty thousand brave warriors were approaching him, he was horrified. When Parsis came to know about Raja’s condition, they went to him and asked him to allow them to
fight the Muslims. The Raja asked Parsis to repay the debt of allowing him to stay there and fight the Muslims.

The wise mobed assured Raja that he need not be afraid. They had won battles in past and have killed their enemies. The Raja was delighted to hear that. After convincing Raja, the mobed took count of all Parsi men eligible for battle. The final figure was fourteen hundred. They prepared themselves and marched with Raja’s army for battle.

The battle went on for days and nights. They fought with each other with chivalry. Then the battle turned against Hindus and they fled leaving Parsis to fight the battle alone. Parsis fought like lions and won the battle. The emperor admitted his defeat and withdrew. This defeat raged Alf Khan, he passed orders to kill all the Parsis. With his orders the Raja was killed and his land was taken over by Alf Khan.

Installation of Iranshah at Navsari: With the fall of Sanjan Parsis were homeless again. They took the holy fire and fled to the mountain of Bahrut where they stayed for twelve years. After that Parsis moved towards the town on Bansda, with their families and the Fire.

The people of Bansda were delighted to hear that people of Iranshah were coming to their town. Three hundred horsemen went to escort the refugees to honor and welcome them. With this treatment Parsis were delighted and it was healing for them. Bansda became the land of spring and its people became prosperous. Parsis came from far off places to worship the fire. The days of Sanjan during days of its greatness were realized again, and with this another fourteen years passed.

During this period, a behdin called Changa, son of Asa, lived in Navsari. None was equal to him in purity and love towards the Good Religion. He was a leader and he worked hard to keep the Faith pure. He used to provide sudreh and kusti to those who could not afford them. There was no such man who if in need or in distress had appealed to him his prayer went futile. He was always there to console them.

One day, at the time of the Jashan-i-Sadeh, Changa Asa went to Bansda with several behdins and Dasturs. They adored the Fire and found comfort in its presence. After
spending some time there, Changa Asa called a meeting of the Anjuman. He expressed his desire to build Iranshah at Navsari. He convinced them by saying that during difficult weather, they cannot come to visit Iranshah. If the Iranshah was taken to Navsari then they can worship it there and gain benefit from it.

Everyone was delighted to hear this suggestion as this would save them the trouble of going to Bansa. The Fire was brought to Navsari with great pomp and gaiety, accompanied by three priests and with hundred marks of reverence and was later installed in a fire temple. These priests came with their families and were appointed to serve the Iranshah. They performed all the proper rituals. In this way Iranshah reached Navsari.

**Parsis in Mumbai:** The East India Company had grandiose plans for development of Bombay. They wanted to make it a vibrant trading and commercial centre. For accomplishing their visions they needed to attract Indian traders, merchants, and craftsmen to settle in and develop this coastal land. They gave such irresistible offers to native communities and to an immigrant community like the Parsis and seemed like God-sent (http://www.Parsijourney.com/chapters/intro/intro.html).

It was proposed that all children who would be born in Bombay were to be regarded as natural subjects of England. All communities who were to migrate to Bombay were guaranteed religious freedom and would be permitted to build their houses within the fort walls and live next to the British. They were also assured of their security, whereby they would be protected from any hostile attacks. Parsis were quick enough to jump at such unique historical opportunity and were first ones to migrate to Bombay even before the other communities like Muslim weavers from Ahmedabad, Bohras, Bene-Israeli Jews, Jains, Armenians. The residential area was divided although into the white and native parts, but actually in reality counting houses, markets, docks, everything mingled together as one cooperative entity (http://www.Parsijourney.com/chapters/intro/intro.html).

Parsis did not cluster in one particular location or occupation, but instead they immigrated to the wealthiest cities of the British Empire (all Parsis are well versed in English). They went wherever there were lucrative opportunities for doctors, engineers,
accountants, entrepreneurs, and computer scientists. This dispersal made finding a Parsi soul mate for marriage very difficult. Although arranged marriages are most common in South Asia, but Parsis were always seen to go for love marriages. American Zoroastrians were more acceptable towards the children of mixed marriages as compared to their relatives in Bombay. Zoroastrian religious educator R. Karanjia on behalf of the community when he said, “Zoroastrianism is an ethnic religion. We believe that religion is decided by birth” (http://www.isteve.com/2002_Parsis_Success_Threatens_Survival.htm).

Social Reform

The social changes started getting noticed with time, the first one being a change in the dress, language, food, and religious rituals which were accepted by a group of homogenous people, a close-knit minority community. It is not right to call these changes as social reforms as a social reform is something that replaces a long withheld custom, practice, or tradition, which is found incompatible with or seems harmful or detrimental to the growth, interest, and comfort of the community. However a social change is indicative of how in certain situations, when minority communities started living and working with majority communities, some circumstances compelled them to adapt to changes, in self-interest and for survival. They had to make changes involved with their long-held beliefs, their social relationships, and patterns of behavior, including dress, language, diet, form of address, social status, and religious ritual/ceremonials. Some of these changes were done for comfort and convenience, while others for raising community’s status vis-à-vis the majority community. It is the same example of how backward communities in India resorted to Sanskritization. Some changes were made under compulsion, while some understanding of the changing times, climate and circumstances and the need for a change according to the time.

The Hindu way of life and its social patterns’ significant impact is clearly seen on the lifestyle and behavior of the Parsis. Six hundred years after the arrival of the Parsis in India, they adopted a very significantly large number of names from Hindu names, both for boys and girls. Another new impact on the names was seen with the arrival of the
For nearly a thousand years, the influence of Hindu ideology, morals, customs, and social relationships on the Parsis lasted. This period was not of social reform for the Parsis. But this was a time of adapting to the new social and cultural environment and at the same time preserving the core values of their religion and their religious identity. For a few centuries, their priests had the monopoly over religious learning. For many centuries they had however very few books with them, and mostly prayers and scriptures like Avesta and Pahlavi were memorized. Persian was learnt and spoken for several years, both by the priests and members but was given up later in lieu of Gujarati.

By around the seventeenth century, the Parsis of Gujarat were seen to use Gujarati as the mother tongue. Not only this they also almost adopted the Hindu dress except for trousers for men and ‘ijars’ for women. Their social relationships also were knit around Hindu society. A custom of child marriage became quite common among the Parsis. Girls and boys were not only married in the laps of their parents, but even before birth some parents verbally promised to marry their children to each other if the two turned out to be of the opposite sex when they are born. Polygamy was also prevalent, and widow remarriage was not easy. This practice however was not so stringent even among Hindus. Dowry cult given by the girl’s parents to boy’s parents was quite popular. A very strange phenomenon of casteism cropped up whereby the Parsis came to be referred to as ‘caste’ in written documents. Caste regulations were now exercised by Parsi Anjumans and their Panchayats to excommunicate or throw ‘out of the caste’ individuals who were offenders against caste regulations. Excommunication entailed denial of exchange of ‘Roti and Betti’, i.e., ‘bread and daughter’, and barring them to enter the religious institutions like the Fire Temple and the Tower of Silence. The Parsis also adopted many other religious and superstitious rituals from Hinduism. They started offering coconuts to the Holi Mata...
and oil to the God Hanuman just like Hindus. They started believing in the ‘Goddess of Fate’ who determines the career of the child. Hence the families set aside paper and pen in a ceremonial tray on the sixth night after birth for the Goddess to visit their home and inscribe on that paper the child’s complete destiny till death. Horoscopes were made for Parsi children also by Hindu priests. Ear and nose-piercing came in trend and girls started wearing rings. There influence of Hindu customs can be seen on many of their practices regarding most ceremonials surrounding the crisis of life such as pregnancy, birth, adolescence, betrothal, marriage, and post-nuptial family relations. Only, in situations like death and funeral ceremonies, there seems very little or no alien influence on Parsi customs and practices. It might be due to the fact that in most communities in the world, there is very little or very slow innovation in death ceremonies. Here it may also be worth noted that Parsis did not object to their non-parsi friends and neighbors participating in the initiation or marriage ceremonies and celebrations, even though Parsi prayers are recited by priests on both these occasions. Till some recent years non-parsis could not and did not attend Parsi funerals but even today non-parsi friends or relations are not allowed to be present in the room where the dead body of a Parsi is placed and where the last rites are being performed by the Parsi priests.

Unlike Hindus, Parsis never sanctified their customs which they had borrowed from Hinduism by their scriptures and Shastras. But in case of the Hindus most of their beliefs and practices were either traced to the sacred authority of the Shruts or Samritis, or the Vedas and Dharmashastras, or sanctified by holy traditions. That is why on the arrival of the Moghuls and the Europeans, the Parsis started to slowly shed several of their earlier adopted Hindu beliefs and practices. They then started adopting new ways of life; whereas the Hindu society had to struggle hard and it really took long time bring about basic social reforms because they had to strictly adhere to the sanctity attached to Shastras.

The Parsis, it may be said that they have amply paid back the debt they owned to Indian Society. In the post-European era, they pioneered extensive changes in Indian tradition and very intelligently assimilated and adapted new and useful ways of life. From the history of Parsis and Gujarati’s from 17th century onwards it has been found that Parsis have done great service to Indian society as they were also pioneers in a number of
social, religious and cultural reforms that later led to foundation of secularization in Indian ideology.

When the Portuguese, Dutch, French and British landed on Indian soil and began trade and stated establishing their hold on Indian Territory, the Parsis had already increased in numbers and were settled in substantial communities with around a few thousand members. Some of them flourished as agriculturists, traders, brokers, weavers, carpenters, shipwrights, craftsmen, revenue collectors, and tax gatherers. They were looked up to as a class attained with tremendous reputation and known for integrity and loyalty as well as personal courage.

The credit actually goes to their liberal outlook whereby they stayed in harmony within an alien land yet whenever they got new opportunities like at the arrival of Europeans they seized it and made the best out of it. Thus, they helped the British by intervention with the Mughal Emperor and Provincial Administrators on their behalf and were in turn helped by the British. They helped the British army by acting as suppliers of needy goods and as contractors of military and civil works. They opened profitable trade links with China and collected a lot of wealth. They were liberal towards eating, meeting, or drinking liquor with foreigners. On the other hand the Hindu orthodox avoided these things. Hence their liberal ways of life bought them into closer contact with the British. The contact with westerners greatly helped in changing their outlook towards life. Social reforms were easily adopted by the community which was so used to struggle, upheaval and considerable social changes in the past (Bulsara; 1968: 8-23).

Parsi Religious life

Parsi Daily life: In Zoroastrianism family home holds a very significant role. It is the religious obligation of all Zoroastrians to get married. Since this religion does not have any concept of Institutions like monastery or convent so home is the only institution of religious learning from where Parsis start knowing their religion.
The daily prayer: *Padyab Kusti* prayers are the most important religious rites in daily life of a Parsi which are recited wearing two important sacred clothing symbolic of their religion. The days are divided into five parts and prayers are said five times at the beginning of each period. These prayers are also said before the start of something auspicious. At the Fire temple they are the most important part of Worship. These prayers are said to date back to the times of Zoroaster.

Zoroastrians gave equal importance to physical and spiritual purity and hence washed their hands before praying. The prayers are offered while facing a source of Light- Sun or any other source of light (Hinnells; 1998: 39).

Ceremonies and Customs: In his book *The religious ceremonies and customs of the Parsees*, J.J. Modi has given a comprehensive description of the ceremonies and customs of Parsis. He has divided the ceremonies into five categories which are as follows:

I. The Socio-Religious Ceremonies: These include ‘rites de passage’ of the Parsis.
   - Birth Ceremonies
   - Marriage Ceremonies
   - Death Ceremonies

II. The Purification Ceremonies: These are the ceremonies performed for purification
   - *Nahan*,
   - *Riman*,
   - *Bareshnum*.

III. The Initiation Ceremonies: These include initiation into religion and priesthood.
   - *Naojote* [*navjote*] - Initiation of a child into the fold
   - *Navar and Martab* - Initiation into priesthood.

IV. The Consecration Ceremonies: Which consists of consecration of religious institutions
V. The Liturgical ceremonies: The inner and outer ceremonies performed in Fire temples:

- The Inner Liturgical services - The Yasna, The Visparad, The Vendidad, and The Baj.

The calendar: According to the Ancient Iranian Calendar the year is divided into twelve equal months each of thirty days. The remaining five days are called ‘Gatha’ days from the word Gatha or hymns of Zoroaster. Then months and days are named after God, Ohmazd and his Holy Mortals and Angels. But the 1/4th day which is added after 4 years in the Gregorian calendar is missing in Iranian calendar. This has led to the problem of slipping back by 1 day after 4 years. This was only tried to correct only after 12th Century onwards so for hundreds of years this gap remained and religious festivals were celebrated on other than their actual dates due to this discrepancy.

This slipping in the dates of calendar is one of the reasons of division of modern Zoroastrianism. Until 17th century no changes are made to this slipping calendar by Parsis of Irani Zoroastrians. They were not aware of this and hence they had been celebrating their festivals on wrong dates. There was no problem till 1746 when the Parsis of Surat introduced the Iranian Calendar calling it the ‘Ancient Calendar’. This led to fierce conflict between Kadmi and Shenshahis (people who practiced religion like the forefathers). In 1906 a new calendar based on Gregorian calendar was launched by a community who tried to unite them. But instead of uniting them this led to another division in community making a group called Faslis.

These three groups had no hostile feelings towards each other. The followers of one group could go to others temples and attend their rituals. There was very miniscule
difference in their rituals and rites unlike other religions where each group is significantly different from the other. Largest group among them is that of Shenshahis but in the West there are many followers of Fasli Calendar. Even now the Shensahi and Kadmi calendars are slipping back one day every four years (Hinnells; 1981: 51-52).

When we talk about the religious context of calendar, it should be noted that every month and day of Zoroastrian calendar is dedicated to Amesha Spenta or a Yazata. Only the 19th day of every month and the first month is dedicated to Fravardin (the Guardian Spirit).

God had created seven good creations and Amesha Spentas are their main guardians and protectors. Every person requires wisdom (Hormazd) in order to be aware of the good mind (Bahman). The good mind is Hormazd’s greatest gift to the person, for it is the mind, which helps one to perceive and realize the best truth (Ardibehest). The fusing of wisdom with the good mind and truth gives one the power or the Sovereignty (Shehrevar) to implement the goodness and rule of Hormazd in the world. The goodness is reflected through devotion (Aspandarmad) cultivated within a person in order to experience both Perfection (Khordad) and Immortality (Amardad) so that every thought, word and deed may be purposefully canalized into qualitatively improving our world through the rejection of all forms of evil around us. Moreover, the duty of a person is to understand the inherent nature of these Bounteous Immortals. A person understands the link and balance between all these forces when he deeply respects them and this is what science calls Ecology. Zoroastrianism expects each person to strive and learn how to balance these seven creations. Any form of distortion to these forces is not expected in these creations as that would mean the triumph of evil over the perfection of good. The Yazatas are the co-workers of Amesha Spentas and they help them in preserving the seven good creations. It is believed that whenever someone calls them for help, they give him powers in boon which helps one to combat evil powers. The most powerful Yazata is Hormazd who is then followed by six Bounteous Immortals.
Table 2.4 - Respective Amesha Spenta/ Yazata assisted by its respective Hamkars/Yazatas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amesha Spenta/ Yazata</th>
<th>Hamkars/Yazatas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Hormazd</td>
<td>Dae-Pa-Adar, Dae-Pa-Meher, Dae-Pa-Din</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Bahman</td>
<td>Mohor, Gosh, Ram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Ardibehesht</td>
<td>Adar, Srosh, Behram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Shehrevar</td>
<td>Khorsheid, Meher, Asman, Aneran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Aspandarmad</td>
<td>Ava, Din, Ashishvagh, Mahraspand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Khordad</td>
<td>Tir, fravardin, govad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Amardad</td>
<td>Rashna, Ashtad, Zamad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each divinity may be invoked and remembered on the appropriate day (roz) with a short dedication which is taken from yasna 16.

Table 2.5 - Divinity which represent the day in calendar along with their dedication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Roz</th>
<th>Dedication for Roz</th>
<th>Meaning of Dedication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>Hormazd</td>
<td>Daithusho ahurahe Mazdao raevato kharenanhato yazamaide.</td>
<td>We worship the creator Ahura Mazda/Road radiant and glorious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>Bahman</td>
<td>Vahu mano yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere the Good mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>Ardibehesht</td>
<td>Ashem vashishtem yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere the best truth or Righteousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 4</td>
<td>Shehrevar</td>
<td>Khshathrem vairim yazamaide</td>
<td>We worship the desirable kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 5</td>
<td>Aspandarmad</td>
<td>Spentam vanghusim armaitim yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere the good holy devotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 6</td>
<td>Khordad</td>
<td>Haavatatem yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere perfection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 7</td>
<td>Amardad</td>
<td>Ameretatem yazamaide</td>
<td>We worship Immortality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 8</td>
<td>Daepaardar</td>
<td>Dadivaonghem ahurem Mazdam yazamaide</td>
<td>We worship the creator Ahura Mazda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 9</td>
<td>Adar</td>
<td>Aterem ahurahe Mazdao puthrem Dae-Pa-Adar</td>
<td>We revere fire, the son of Ahura Mazda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 10</td>
<td>A van</td>
<td>Apo vanghusish Mazdagbatao</td>
<td>We revere the good righteous Mazda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Revere</td>
<td>Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Khorshed</td>
<td>Hvar-khshaetem aurvat-aspem yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere the swift horsed radiant sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mohor</td>
<td>Maonghem gaochithrem yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere the cow-seeded moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Tir</td>
<td>Tishtrim starem raevantem kharenagham yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere the glorious radiant star tishtrya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Gosh</td>
<td>Geush hudhaongho urvanem yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere the beneficient soul of cow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Daepameher</td>
<td>Dadvhaonghem ahurem Mazdam yazamaide</td>
<td>We worship the creator Ahura Mazda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Meher</td>
<td>Mihrem vouru ganyaitim yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere meher the possessor of wide pastures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Sarosh</td>
<td>Sraoshem ashim yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere the righteous sarosh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Rashne</td>
<td>Rashnum razishtem yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere rashne, the just</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Fravardin</td>
<td>Ashonan vanghuhish surao spentao fravashayo yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere the fravashis of the righteous, good, strong and holy ones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Behram</td>
<td>Verethraghnem ahuradhatem yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere the ahura-created victorious one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Ram</td>
<td>Rama khaustrem yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere raman, the granter of peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Govad</td>
<td>Vatem spentem hudhaonghem yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere the beneficent wind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Daepadin</td>
<td>Dadvhaonghem ahurem Mazdam yazamaide</td>
<td>We worship the creator Ahura Mazda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Din</td>
<td>Daenam vanghuhim Mazdayasnim yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere the good, Mazda worshiping religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Ashishvangh</td>
<td>Ashim vanghuhim yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere the good giver of wealth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Ashiad</td>
<td>Arshatatem yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere the just one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Asman</td>
<td>Asmanem yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere the sky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Zanyad</td>
<td>Zam hadhaonghem yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere the beneficient earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Mahraspand</td>
<td>Mathrem Spentem yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere the holy words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Aneran</td>
<td>Anaghra raocao khadhatao yazamaide</td>
<td>We revere the self created endless light</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Holy Days: The days whose name is same as that of some month is known as Jashan day. The day when Zoroaster passed away is called Zaorthosht-no-dino and comes on the eleventh day of tenth month.

A community gathering to celebrate some important occasion or in memory of someone is called a Jashan ceremony and is the most popular among Parsis. In this at least 2 priests are required. The number can go up depending on the importance of the occasion like in case of initiation ceremony of a new priest. Jashan is the only function where people gather together and pray. The idea behind this is to reap the benefits of positive vibrations in such ceremonies and not just to participate. This is done in the symbolic presence of God as Fire with a tray of sandalwood or frankincense alongside. There is another tray that carries the symbolic forms of God. Holy Immortals e.g. cattle represented by glass of milk; fire by the ritual fire; earth by what the priest sits on; sky by the metal tray; plants by flowers and fruits and water in pots. God’s creation, ma, is represented by the priest. The right begins with invocation to the greatest of Zoroastrians in the pas. There are three main actions that are highlight of this event where first is to feed the holy Fire, then priests exchange the flowers and then all members end it with a ritualistic handshake. It is not a dynamic ceremony but very solemn and laid back full of prayers by priests.

The Parsis have a different mindset towards the prayer unlike Asian religions. During the ceremonies the prayers that are offered are believed to be a culminated devotion of Parsi belief of thousands of years. These prayers are believed to carry such powerful vibes that they have the power to bless an object or a person. Zoroastrians have belief in the power of watching and sharing prayers (Hinnells; 1981: 53-55).

Ilm-e-Kshnoom: Ilm-e-Kshnoom ('science of ecstasy', or 'science of bliss') is a school of Zoroastrian philosophy which was started by a Parsi named Behramshah Nowroji Shroff. It is practiced by a very small minority of the Indian Zoroastrians (Parsis/Iranis). It is based on esoteric science, rather than literal, interpretation of religious texts. The core of its philosophy is the belief that faith aids in making a connection to consciousness. This
transcends normal experience. Moreover, prayers are means to achieve that consciousness (http://essenes.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=765&Itemid=1175).

This movement took its name from the word 'kshnoom' which occurs once in the Gathas. According to scholars, it means 'Science of Spiritual Satisfaction'. This is exclusively Zoroastrian occult movement. Its doctrines are characterized as a variant of Theosophy. That is belief in one impersonal God and reincarnation. According to Kshnoomic teaching, person's spiritual self is empowered with a material body and enters the material world. This way the spiritual body encounters a series of 'rebirths' in its process of evolution. Attainment of spiritual purity is the ultimate aim. This is achieved through successive rebirths, and after reaching the ultimate aim, the soul is released from the material world. Salvation can be reached by esoteric knowledge of the nature. The significant element of which is effectiveness of prayers, that are recited in Avestan. The right faith is also essential. Kshnoomist Zoroastrians believe that they experience their final rebirth with this knowledge. Purity norms are strictly observed and it advocates vegetarianism and ascetic way of life (http://philtar.ucsm.ac.uk/encyclopedia/zorast/ilmi.html).

**The Present Community**

**Demography**

The number of Parsis in the world is believed to be 100000 which are mostly concentrated in India, particularly Mumbai. It can be called an endangered or dying community. Their death rate exceeds their birth rate. But on this issue Parsis quote what Gandhi had once said, “In numbers Parses are beneath contempt, but in contribution, beyond compare”. According to 2020 Demographic Projections India is projected to have a population of 1200 million out of which only 23000 would be Parsis (0.0002 % of the total population) The Census report finds that there will be a major decline in the Parsi population in the coming years (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parsi).
As per the 2001 census, the Parsi population in the country was 69,601 (33,949 males and 35,652 females) as against their population of 76,382 (37,736 males and 38,646 females) in the 1991 census. According to the last census (1991), there were 76,342 Parsis in India and they were expected to be down to less than 70,000 now. Mumbai, has the largest Parsi population in India (around 56,000). It registers almost 300 births for almost 900 deaths every year. This results in a net reduction of 600 people in the community, according to Dinshaw Tamboly, president of the World Zoroastrian Organization and trustee of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat. By the year 2020, India will have achieved the dubious distinction of being the most populated country on earth. At that point, Parsis, will number 23,000. "The Parsi decline is the price the community is paying for its women's education and emancipation," says Patel (http://www.rediff.co.in/news/2004/nov/11spec.htm).

Marriage

Parsi women tend to study more and marry late. They end up having fewer children. "One cannot push couples to have more children just to ensure a community's viability" points out Patel. Parsi female literacy rate is 97 per cent, the highest in India. There are high number of bachelors and spinsters within the community. An informant said that there are a great number of homosexuals. Too many men and women just marry, claiming they haven't found the right person. In such a small community, even if a few hundreds don't marry, the proportion is very high and this directly impacts the community's growth (http://www.rediff.com/news/2004/nov/11spec.htm).

These days every third Parsi or about twenty percent of Parsis are observed to marry outside his community. Internet is one of the reasons for growth in the number of such inter-religious marriages. Faredun Pundole, a 21-year old engineering student says, “I'm a priest myself and feel that religion is a very personal issue. Just because a person opts to marry outside the community doesn’t mean that you take away his/her religion from him/her. Lord Zarathushtra would have never said no to any human being who would have wanted to marry someone outside the community.”
While the divorces of other communities are taken care of by family courts or district level judges but the Parsi divorces are presented before a High Court Judge. In past years the numbers of such cases is on the rise. "Earlier, the court was set up only once a year when a sufficient number of cases had piled up," says P.R. Vakil, reputed counsel and a member of the Parsi community. Now days many people are not in favor of holding these cases in the High Court as it takes longer time and only cases of Parsi community are held in High Court. Some say that such cases should be heard in family or district courts or other wise increase the number of hearings (http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/msid-519816,prtpage-1.cms).

It is an area of concern for the Parsis that one third of the Parsis are staying unmarried, one-third marrying late (generally after 30-35 years) and the remaining one third are having inter religion marriages. On top of it lies the problem of high divorce rate of 10.5%. There are other problems like lower number of children per couple (around 1.2) and over half of the population above the age of 50. In the last 100 years, there is decline in the population and moreover many Parsis are staying single which is aggravating the problem. Dadi Engineer, solicitor and senior trustee of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat, said that Parsi marriages have gone up marginally, but the divorce rate has shot up substantially. "There are 500-600 Parsi marriages a year nationwide. Ten per cent in the last five to six years ended in divorce." This is an alarming trend and is being attributed to the westernized outlook of the youngsters to do some serious work on this a divorce advisory committee was set up recently (http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/388212.cms).

Recent Attitudes on Death

There has been a drastic decline in the population of vultures in the past few years. Vultures, the scavengers, feed on dead and decaying things are vanishing at an unexpected rate which is the fastest regression of any species in the world and has been a cause of serious concern for the scientists. Shripad Kulkarni, PRO of the BNHS (Bombay Natural History Society) observed the beginning of decline in the vulture population in 1992-93. The numbers had started dwindling. This decline was attributed mainly to the
residue of an anti-inflammatory drug called Diclofenac, used by vets to treat cattle that were consumed by these vultures through the carcasses and it had fatally damaged their kidneys (http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/msid-1960217,curpg-1.cms).

Although no scientific data is available but it is believed that around 95% of vulture population got extinct in the last decade in India, Nepal and Pakistan. This is a great area of concern for the Parsis as there are lots of dead bodies piling up near ‘The Tower of Silence’. The Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) would breed vultures, which would be later transported to various parts of the country.

This piling of bodies was seen not only in Mumbai but also in Tower of Silence at Hyderabad. The vultures have not been seen here since twenty years now and so people are depending on Sun’s rays for decomposition of the corpses. “In the absence of vultures, we have to depend on the rays of the sun to decompose the bodies. This could take weeks in summers and longer in monsoons,” says Awad Vadia of the Zoroastrian Club. “If there are vultures, it will take minutes for the large birds to eat the bodies,” he adds.

The CCMB plan was started a few months ago where white-backed vultures were to be reproduced through artificial insemination. “To this end, the Central Zoo Authority is about to transfer a flock of vultures from Gujarat to the Nehru Zoological Park in Hyderabad”, says S Shivaji, deputy director of CCMB. “We might be a progressive community, but we cannot disown our rituals. A majority of us would still like to be left at the ‘Towers of Silence’ after death,” says Gulbanu Yadgar Chenoy, president, Parsi Anjuman. However, a small proportion of Parsis have begun resorting to burials. “Why not? When there are not enough vultures to eat the bodies, it is an insult to the dead to let their bodies rot for months,” says Farida Tampal, a Parsi and an environmentalist. But the priest at the Fire Temple at M G Road, Keki Dastoor, will not have any of this. “Cremation desecrates the sacred element of fire, burying defiles the earth and drowning pollutes the water,” he says (http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/msid-1996448.cms).
Excommunication

The Baptism ceremony or navjote can only be conducted for children of Parsi fathers and non-parsi mothers not Parsi mothers and non-parsi fathers. But now days this Ceremony had been started even for children of Parsi mothers and non-parsi fathers. Many of the Parsis are reluctant to accept this new trend as it would lead to mixing of blood and affect their society. “Purity is more important than numbers,” says Khojeste Mistree, a Zoroastrian scholar in Mumbai. But some groups have started to accept converts from other religions but are facing a lot of criticism as the one which is run by Ali Jafarey, a Los Angeles-based Pakistani (http://www.jehangirpocha.com/listofarticles/Vanishing_Breed.htm).

Some Parsis have told The Times News Network that they prefer to find their life partner outside their community as they are not able to find suitable matches inside their own community. Some people opine that if Parsi mothers are disowned by the community for marrying a non-parsi at least their children should be accepted to the community in order to protect the dwindling numbers of the community. Some other problems being faced by the community are the erosion of values. No doubt, Parsis have been a set of universal people, happy being passive observers and appreciators of other religions and cultures, but there’s a dichotomy among them regarding their belief systems. Some conservatives are not ready to accept Parsi women marrying outside the community but liberals hold the view that there is no need for Parsi women to change their identity and stay as they were before marriage as such attitude would lead to the end of the community otherwise. Some schemes to increase Parsi population have also been introduced like offering monetary incentives for people who would have more than two children (http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/msid-388212,prtpage-1.cms).

Development and Modern Trends

Parsi community practices very good welfare practices for its members. Newly wed Parsi couples who could not afford to take a rented accommodation are given houses at subsidized rates by Bombay and Poona Parsi Panchayat. The Bombay Parsi Panchayat also takes care of the third’s child tuition fee until he/she turns eighteen. Certain social
gatherings are also arranged where youth are invited so that they make friends among their community and may also mingle together. All these measures are undertaken to help the community prosper and grow.

Many modern Parsees are increasingly pushing for change, but conservatives such as Mistree say their "over-westernization and over-secularization is killing our Parsipanu (way of life)". Many Parsees believe that the best way to secure their community's future is to hold to the past. For example, many Parsees have begun to visit Iran to reinvigorate their affinities with Zoroastrian Persia's grand past. Minorities are often victimized in this world. Parsees did not face threat from other communities, but they do face threat of other communities wanting to marry them.

Housing is one of the instruments of emotional blackmail. Parsee youth delay marriages till they get a flat of their own. The community is spoilt by the generosity and foresight of its forebears. The security problem has created trouble, which is enhanced by emotive factor of religion. The issue of acceptance in the community is disagreed on the basis, that outsiders will influence Parsee youth and marry them for property. The community has gone to the extent that concern over vanishing vultures is projected as lucrative, land-grab opportunity.

Unlike their past, the ratio of Parsee youth in the finest jobs and schools is falling. In Cusrow Baug, many residents, despite their progress into the upper-class, twist laws and ethics to retain hold over these homes. Their children restrict their dreams to buying a Royal Enfield, and a safe job at Jet Airways. Wadias who were once the princes of Indian industry have failed to make to the list of India's top industrialists (http://www.jehangirpocha.com/listofarticles/Vanishing_Breed.htm).

The chapter gives the brief of Zoroastrianism and Parsees of India. In the forthcoming chapters I will discuss works done by various scholars.