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DESPITE SHĀHS AND MOLLĀS:
MINORITY SOCIOPOLITICS
IN PREMODERN AND MODERN IRAN

Abstract

A historical perspective is combined with more recent developments to understand the position of Zoroastrians among minority communities in premodern and modern Iran. When that community's political, economic, demographic, social, and religious experiences are investigated and its members' responses to those situations are determined, development of compliant behaviors by Zoroastrians in Iran as a response to minority status emerges as an adaptation meant to ensure survival under regimes that are indifferent at best and repressive at worst. It becomes clear as well that those behaviors may be changing and that such transformation could benefit Iranian society as a whole. What emerges is a trajectory and a process of transition. Historically, Zoroastrians have been the most tolerated of Islamic Iran's minorities. So the parameters within which they can function has governed and still determines the limits of behaviors accepted by the majority Shi'ite populace, its clerics, and rulers from other minorities including Jews and Christians.

Issues

A most miniscule of minorities, Zoroastrians (known in the Persian language as Zarathushtis, Zartoshtis, and Zardoshtis) – best recognized through historical characters like Cyrus, Darius I, and the three magi of

¹ For a succinct overview of the religion and its adherents see Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Zoroastrianism," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 2005), vol. 14, pp.

the Christian adoration – are followers of the religion called Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrianism (also called Mazdaism after Ahura Mazdā a god of wisdom) traces its tenets to words attributed by tradition to an eponymous devotional poet named Zarathushtra (now pronounced Zardosht) or Zoroaster (who may have lived sometime during the second or first millennia BCE) who came to be regarded as a prophet in later centuries. It developed into a major religion in ancient and early medieval Iran. After the Arabs conquered Iran in the seventh and eighth centuries, the number of Zoroastrians declined gradually through conversion to Islam. Zoroastrian communities have survived not only in Iran but also on the Indian subcontinent (where they are called Parsis) and more recently in several countries around the world.¹

With the exception of their religious life, limited attention has been devoted to analyzing the historical, political, socioeconomic, and communal situations of Zoroastrians living in premodern and modern Iran. The same is generally true for the Jews and Christians of Iran as well. This situation is in stark contrast to that of the Parsis – descendants of Zoroastrians who emigrated to the west coast of India around the tenth century to avoid conversion to Islam.² Because the Parsis prospered there especially as the ultimate subalterns under British rule, then emerged as the English-speaking, westernized, economic elite in post-independence India, and now have settled in small numbers in many other nation states, their history, beliefs, praxes, economic conditions, and sociopolitical relations have been accessible for repeated examination by both indigenous and western scholars.

The Parsis or Persians of India have maintained sporadic contact with their coreligionists in Iran, but largely with devotional and communal focuses rather than intellectual and scholarly ones. For example, in the mid-nineteenth century the Paris community, through the Society for the Amelioration of the Conditions of the Zoroastrians in Persia, dispatched an official emissary, Manekji Limji Hataria, to Iran to report on the condition

9988–10008. Details of conversion to Islam are discussed in Jamsheed K. Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation: Zoroastrian Subalterns and Muslim Elites in Medieval Iranian Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 70–109. Globally the number of Zoroastrians is currently between 125,000–200,000 individuals, on which see *FEZANA Journal* 17, 4 (2004), pp. 22–25.

² Concisely see Jamsheed K. Choksy, “Parsis,” *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 2005), vol. 10, pp. 6997–7001.

of Zoroastrians at Yazd, Kerman, and other locales and to enhance the latter's lives through western-style education, emancipation of women, and restoration of religious institutions. In addition to completing those undertakings, Hataria and other Parsis working together in Iran, India, and England were successful in convincing the Qajar dynasty (1779–1925) to eliminate the poll tax or *jizya* a few decades later.³ During the Pahlavi period (1925–1979), when Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi drew upon Iran's ancient past with its Achaemenian (550–331 BCE), Arsacid or Parthian (238 BCE–224 CE), Sasanian (224–651), and Zoroastrian themes, many Parsis journeyed to Iran as tourists and a few families worked there until 1979.⁴

Over the past two decades, religious and historical tourism has continued with Parsis – particularly from India, Pakistan, Australia, England, Canada, and the United States of America – visiting archeological sites such as Pasargadae, Persepolis, and Naqsh-e Rostam to recall their heritage, praying at fire temples or *ātash kades* at Esfahan, Kerman, Sharifabad, Shiraz, Tehran, Tehran Pars, Yazd, and the villages surrounding Yazd to strengthen their faith, and making pilgrimages to six important shrines or *pirs* like Pir-e Sabz, Set-e Pir, and Pir-e Bānu Pārs to seek revelation.⁵ Parsi communities and organizations, worldwide, also have been involved in assisting Iranian Zoroastrians to immigrate to the United States of America, Canada, and Australia (about which see further below). In parallel developments, the state of Israel has fostered immigration of Iranian Jews. However, unlike the Iranian Jewry which has garnered at least sporadic scholarly attention, very little research has been conducted on the Iranian Zoroastrian community by the Parsis of India. For instance, Khojeste Mis-

³ Manekji L. Hataria, *Rishāle Ej Hāre Shiyāte Irān* (Bombay: Union Press, 1865) in Gujarati. Abridged English translation in *Parsiana* 13, 2 (1990), pp. 60–64; *Parsiana* 13, 3 (1990), pp. 34–35; *Parsiana* 13, 4 (1990), pp. 39–42; *Parsiana* 13, 5 (1990), pp. 25–26; *Parsiana* 13, 6 (1990), pp. 29–32; and *Parsiana* 13, 7 (1991), pp. 14–18.

⁴ Noted by Tanya Luhrmann, *The Good Parsi: The Fate of a Colonial Elite in a Postcolonial Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 103.

⁵ See for example the guidebook by Asfandyar S. Gotla, *A Guide to Zoroastrian Historical Places in Iran* (Mumbai: Jenaz Printers, 1997), pp. 51, 55–78, 81. Note also the comments on this Parsi longing for their ancestral homeland by Luhrmann, *The Good Parsi*, pp. 103–104. Parsi recollections of recent such journeys are described in Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Shehnaz N. Munshi, ed., *Living Zoroastrianism: Urban Parsis Speak about Their Religion* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001), pp. 134–135, 142, 169.

tree, a Zoroastrian community leader and scholar in Mumbai (Bombay), who is well qualified to write about conditions among the Zoroastrians of Iran because his organization's (Zoroastrian Studies) activities result in ongoing contact, has done so only briefly.⁶

Iranian Zoroastrians writing about their own coreligionists, both within Iran and in western countries, display a bifurcation in approaches to documenting communal issues – a divide that is based chronologically before and after the Islamic revolution. Jamshid Soroush Soroushian (1914–1999) produced a detailed dictionary of the Dari dialect that had developed, over centuries, among the Zoroastrians. His investigation revealed the subtle ways in which Zoroastrians employ language to mask communications which could instigate negative actions against the community by Muslims. Soroushian documented the recent, at times, tumultuous, social history of Zoroastrians in Kerman. He also compiled a historical survey of Zoroastrianism. The data and insights proffered by Soroushian are extremely valuable for understanding the situations of Zoroastrian groups within different locales of Iran – but for periods prior to the Islamic revolution.⁷ Along a similar theme, Timsar Oshidari compiled a brief political history of Iranian Zoroastrians – a source particularly useful for the community that formed in Tehran during the twentieth century before the Islamic revolution.⁸

On the other hand, after the revolutionary upheaval of the late 1970s, Iranian Zoroastrian authors delve into the past while largely avoiding contemporary issues. Thus, Fariborz Shahzadi, now a member of the Council of Iranian Mobeds of North America, concluded his survey of the Zoroastrians in Iran at the fall of the Pahlavi regime in 1979 with the words: “In a short span of sixty years, the Zarathushtis began to excel in all walks of life spanning government, business, industry, including the arts and the sciences. The Pahlavi dynasty was brought to an end by a people's revolution led by Imam Khomeini in 1979.”⁹ Farhang Mehr, formerly Iran's repre-

⁶ Khojeste P. Mistree, “The Breakdown of the Zoroastrian Tradition as Viewed from a Contemporary Perspective,” in *Irano-Judaica*, vol. 2, ed. S. Shaked and A. Netzer (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1990), p. 251.

⁷ Jamshid S. Soroushian, *Farhang-e behdinān* (Tehran: Fravahar, 1956), *Tārikh-e Zartoshtiyān-e Kermān dar in chand sad sāle* (Tehran: Fravahar, 1992), *Tārikh-e Zartoshtiyān farzānegān-e Zartoshti* (Tehran: Fravahar, 1984).

⁸ Timsar Oshidari, *Tārikh-e Zartoshtiyān* (Tehran: Sazman Fravahar, 1976).

⁹ Fariborz S. Shahzadi, with Khojeste P. Mistree, *The Zarathushti Religion: A Basic Text* (Hinsdale: FEZANA, 1998), p. 157.

sentative to OPEC, deputy Finance Minister, deputy Prime Minister, and Chancellor of the Pahlavi University at Shiraz during the Pahlavi era, ex-president of the Tehran Zoroastrian Anjoman, and now a professor emeritus at Boston University, focuses mainly on a traditional interpretation of the faith's doctrines and on the community under the Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties in his writings. Only in Mehr's biography can readers glimpse his own experience of the austerity of post-revolutionary Iran and of escape to safe haven in the United States of America. Likewise, more recently, in meetings with senior Iranian leaders, at gatherings of Zoroastrian coreligionists, and through succinct reports has Mehr begun to comment briefly on the adverse conditions of Zoroastrians in Iran while urging "constructive engagement" to "make every effort within the legal framework to attain equality."¹⁰ But even in such writings, actual events are treated laconically with stock phrases of blame for the premodern Safavid and Qajar dynastic periods, praise for the modernist Pahlavi one of the recent past, and ambivalence toward the present. Essentially the changed sociopolitical situation resulting from the rise of a Shi'ite theocracy to power in Iran seems to have caused the Zoroastrians there, and immigrants now residing in other countries, to eschew incisive discussions.¹¹

Western scholars who visited Iran chronicled the history, religion, and socioeconomic conditions of Zoroastrians. Such travelogues by Edward G. Browne and Andrew V. Williams Jackson, for example, provide valu-

¹⁰ Farhang Mehr, *The Zoroastrian Tradition: An Introduction to the Ancient Wisdom of Zarathustra*, 2nd ed. (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 2003); and "Men Who Made a Difference," *FEZANA Journal* 13, 4 (2000), pp. 35–39; plus Lylah M. Alphonse, *Triumph over Discrimination: The Life Story of Farhang Mehr* (Mississauga: Regal Press, 2000), pp. 185–208, especially the comments on p. 203. Farhang Mehr's "Zoroastrians in Twentieth Century Iran," in *A Zoroastrian Tapestry: Art, Religion, and Culture*, ed. P. Godrej and F. P. Mistree (Mumbai: Mapin Publishing, 2002), pp. 278–299, provides important insights into the premodern and contemporary communities. For a brief overview of Mehr's career see John Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora: Religion and Migration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 503–504. Quotations from Farhang Mehr, "Fruits of Constructive Engagement in Iran," *Humata* 12–13 (2002), p. 29; and Parichehr Mehr, "A Conference with the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Humata* 3 (1998), p. 66.

¹¹ One exception is the survey by Shahin Bekhradnia, "Zoroastrianism in Contemporary Iran," *International Journal of Moral and Social Studies* 6 (1991), pp. 117–134; and "Decline of the Iranian Zoroastrian Priesthood," *British Society of Middle Eastern Studies Proceedings* (1991), pp. 449–457. But even she focused more on religious issues rather than thorny sociopolitical ones.

able glimpses into the lives of Zoroastrians as a generally hard pressed minority during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹² But such writings, by genre and authors' intentions, are largely descriptive. In the 1960s and 1970s a triad of detailed, pioneering, studies finally were undertaken about the Zoroastrians of Iran – by Mary Boyce at the village of Sharifabad near Yazd in 1963 to 1964, by Michael Fischer at the city of Yazd in 1970 and 1971, and by Janet Amighi at Tehran in 1972.¹³ Their data and conclusions are a vital sociohistorical record both of the tenacious preservation of a religious heritage and of the transformations experienced owing to enhanced education, urbanization, and westernization. In-country studies by non-Iranians came to a halt with the Islamic revolution of 1978 to 1979. Only during the past few years, with reestablishment of relations between Iran and western nations providing new opportunities for scholars, such as Nile Green in 1996, to conduct research in Iran has the study of the social, political, and religious experiences of the Zoroastrian minority there gained renewed interest.¹⁴

Iranian governmental regulations – such as requiring permission from various ministries to photograph communal activities – still abound, and access to members of that religious minority and to their communal gatherings, religious ceremonies, and communal records varies greatly. As a result the political and socioeconomic conditions and the degree of freedom of worship for the Iranian Zoroastrian minority remained largely undocumented, especially within the Jomhuri-ye Eslāmi-ye Irān or Islamic Republic of Iran and its immediate national precursors. During the

¹² Edward G. Brown, *A Year Amongst the Persians* (London: A. and C. Black, 1893, reprint New York: Hippocrene Books, 1984), pp. 314–315, 394–500; and Andrew V. Williams Jackson, *Persia Past and Present: A Book of Travel and Research* (New York: Macmillan, 1906), pp. 273–275, 336–338, 354–400.

¹³ Mary Boyce, *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977); Michael M. J. Fischer, “Zoroastrian Iran Between Myth and Praxis” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1973); and Janet K. Amighi, *The Zoroastrians of Iran: Conversion, Assimilation, or Persistence* (New York: AMS Press, 1990).

¹⁴ Nile Green, “The Survival of Zoroastrianism in Yazd,” *Iran* 37 (2000), pp. 115–122. See generally S. D. Nargolwala, “Zoroastrians of Iran,” *Realist* 3 (1994), pp. 16–20. On the other hand, the account by Michael Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2002), pp. 165–196, is largely based on the published scholarship of others.

summer of 2003, I conducted research on many aspects of the lives of Zoroastrians in the cities and villages of Iran.

Based on both archival research and fieldwork, this article suggests that in order to comprehend the situation of Zoroastrians in premodern and modern Iran it is necessary to determine why members of that community generally attempted to avoid public attention until recently. It is demonstrated that apprehending historically how and why that pattern of behavior developed during premodern and early modern times to impact on contemporary affairs is equally important. With that information in hand, the full magnitude of the past and its constant interconnections with the present is discussed in relation of the situation of the Zoroastrians as an officially recognized religious minority within the Iranian kingdoms of the past five hundred years and in the current theocratic. Essentially, this study examines not only the ways Zoroastrians of Iran regard their situations but also how the Islamic state and its majority Shi'ite citizens view them.

Tumult of the Safavid Through Zand Periods

Sources for the early premodern period are mainly travelogues. Most prominent among those travelers were Garcia de Silva y Figueroa (1550–1624), Pietro della Valle (1586–1652), Arakel of Tabriz (lived 17th century), Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689), André Daulier-Deslandes (lived 17th century), Jean-Jacques Chardin (1643–1713), and Carsten Niebuhr (1733–1815). All have been discussed by other scholars in detail and so need not be examined again in detail.¹⁵

¹⁵ Garcia de Silva y Figueroa, *L'ambassade de D. Garcia de Silva Figueroa en Perse*, trans., A. de Wicquefort, 2 vols. (Paris: Lovis Billaine, 1667); Pietro della Valle, *Les fameux voyages de Pietro della Valle, gentilhomme romain*, trans., E. Carneau and F. le Comte, 4 vols. (Paris: G. Clouzier, 1661–1670); Arakel of Tabriz, *Livre d'histoires*, trans., M-F. Brosset, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: Académie impériale de sciences, 1874–1876, reprint Amsterdam: APA-Philo Press, 1979); Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Six Voyages en Turquie, en Perse, et aux Indes*, 3 vols. (Paris: R. Ribou, 1724); André Daulier-Deslandes, *Les Beutez de la Perse* (Paris: G. Clouzier, 1673); Jean-Jacques Chardin, *Voyages du chevalier Chardin en Perse et autres lieux de l'Orient*, 4 vols. (Amsterdam: Compagnie, 1735); Carsten Niebuhr, *Travels Through Arabia and Other Countries in the East*, trans. R. Heron, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: R. Morison, 1792). See further Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 164, 177–182; and Vera B. Moreen,

Under the Safavids, Muslim religiosity in Iran was transformed by imperial direction from Sunnism to Shi'ism. Iran itself came to embody the notion of being the only Muslim nation in which Shi'ites constituted the religious majority. Institutionalization of Shi'ism, often violently, during the Safavid period (1501–1736) did little to strengthen relations between the Muslim and Zoroastrian communities. Essentially, members of the latter community increasingly experienced, and feared, the specter of forced conversion to Islam under the religious zealotry of newly empowered Shi'ite clerics or *mollās*. Many of those clerics were not even Iranian, having been brought into the Safavid kingdom from Shi'ite villages in southern Iraq and Lebanon. Zoroastrians living in the cities of Yazd and Kerman plus the villages surrounding those urban centers seem to have borne the brunt of religious persecution which forced many of them into adoption of Shi'ite Islam. At the same time, the transformation of fire temples into mosques or *masjids*, and desecration or even demolition of funerary towers or *dakhmas* took place there. As a result, fire altars or *ātashdāns* came to be hidden in inconspicuous side chambers of fire temples to protect the flames which smoldered under piles of ash from being desecrated, as occurred when a governor of Kerman spat upon the fire there, or squelched by Muslim zealots or by new converts to Shi'ism.¹⁶

The rise in sectarian intolerance had an even more widespread affect. The New Persian designation *gabr* (plus its variant pronunciation *gawr*) “hollow, empty, cavity” hence “one lacking faith, infidel,” came to be widely used by Muslims to scorn those few Iranians who remained Zoroastrian as nonbelievers in god despite the latter claiming that their scripture – the Avesta – was a holy book just like the Bible and the Qur'ān.¹⁷

“The Status of Religious Minorities in Safavid Iran,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 40, 2 (1981), pp. 119–120, 133–134.

¹⁶ Tavernier, *Six Voyages*, vol. 1, p. 167, recounted the incident at Kerman. In general see Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, p. 179.

¹⁷ This term, whose origin is from Middle Persian or Pahlavi *gabr*, *gawbr*, paralleling Manichean Middle Persian *gabr*, and reflecting Old Persian *gaub-*, ultimately derives from Indo-European **ghāi-*, **ghēu-*, “yawn, gape, chasm, empty space,” also reflected in **ghau-*, “chaos, gas.” Contra the inconclusive and imprecise discussions by Alessandro Bausani, “Gabr,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 2, CD-ROM version, ed. H. A. R. Gibb and others (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), pp. 970–971; Michael G. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 314; and

Likewise the term *ātashparast*, “fire worshipper,” became another slur directed against Zoroastrians by Shi‘ite Iranians, despite the formers’ protestations starting centuries earlier that: “We worship god. We have our fire temples and the sun. But it is not the fire or the sun that we worship. On the contrary, those are to us as the prayer niche and the Ka‘ba are to you.”¹⁸ Similarly, despite themselves being victims of attacks by Shi‘ites, Armenian Christians were also encouraged to scorn Zoroastrians for supposedly *moxrapasht*, “worshipping ash.”¹⁹ Shared minority status and hardships that went along with it did not necessarily bond the smaller religious communities in common causes as each jostled for better treatment from Muslim overlords and were encouraged to do so by Shi‘ites.

European visitors to Iran during the reign of Shah ‘Abbas I (ruled 1587–1629) noted that, in 1608, a number of Zoroastrians were forcibly relocated from Yazd and Kerman to the capital city Esfahan as laborers. In other cities of Safavid Iran, they also served as a manual workforce and as textile weavers. Outside the cities, they were forced to toil for meager ages on farmland owned by Muslims. Despite those hardships, the Zoroastrian population that continued to reside in the neighborhoods – including a locality specifically reserved for them as a despised minority – and villages of Kerman was estimated very conservatively at around 10,000 during the year 1654. At Esfahan, the community was more directly at the mercy of royal officials and largely forced to reside only within the neighborhood specifically designated for non-Muslims. That neighborhood lay outside the city’s protective walls, exposing the Zoroastrians and their meager assets to brigands and invaders. Shah ‘Abbas even had a high priest or *dastur dasturān* executed together with other Zoroastrian notables for failing to deliver to the royal court a legendary manuscript ascribed to the biblical Abraham that the Zoroastrians were, incorrectly, thought to have possessed.²⁰ As Shi‘ite orthodox notions were reinforced in Iran’s capital

Mansour Shaki, “Gabr,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 10, ed. E. Yarshater (New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 2001), pp. 239–240.

¹⁸ Mehrdad T. Bahar, ed., *Tarikh-e Sistan* (Tehran: Zavvar Publishing House, 1935), and Milton Gold, trans. (Rome: IsMEO, 1976), pp. 93–94.

¹⁹ For earlier periods see James Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 1987), p. 484.

²⁰ Chardin, *Voyages*, vol. 2, p. 179. Tavernier, *Six Voyages*, vol. 1, p. 163, gives the population estimate. See also Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, pp. 163–182, 191.

city, intolerance toward other religions grew. Eventually, in 1658, mass expulsion of Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians from Esfahan's city center took place – on account of their presence being deemed detrimental to the orthodox beliefs, ritual purity, and day-to-day safety of Muslims.²¹

Forcible conversion of Zoroastrians to Shi'ism, execution of community elites who refused to comply and thereby set an example for the rest of the Zoroastrians, coupled with destruction of their fire temples and other places of worship was decreed by Soltan Hosayn (ruled 1694–1722) the last Safavid king. Luckily, the disintegration of Safavid authority at that time resulted in only sporadic enforcement of the royal commandment. Hope that their faith and its adherents would experience better conditions in the future provided comfort and fortitude for Zoroastrians according to western travelers who discussed those issues with them. Therefore it is unclear how significant the population decline actually was for Zoroastrians especially as their numbers were at least around 100,000 in the middle of the eighteenth century.²²

Several groups of Zoroastrians had emigrated from Iran in earlier centuries to avoid persecution by Muslims and conversion to Islam. Some Sasanian noble families and their retainers relocated to China via Central Asia. Their descendents survived there, even building fire temples, despite proscription in the year 845, until the thirteenth century. Other groups moved to the Caucasus and the Russian steppe with limited success during the Middle Ages. On the other hand, the Parsis adapted to Indian culture and flourished – retaining their beliefs by giving up the New Persian language and many Iranian customs in favor of the Gujarati language (and more recently the English language) and numerous Indian mores. By and large, Zoroastrians in India found themselves free from religious persecution due to the more nebulous nature of Hinduism.²³ Thus, for many centuries, rituals and tenets brought from Iran were conservatively preserved through intense training of priests. But during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as the community in India secularized under British influence, have ritual practice and clerical training began to

²¹ Moreen, "The Status of Religious Minorities in Safavid Iran," pp. 133–134.

²² On the issue of hope see Chardin, *Voyages*, vol. 2, p. 182. Dosabhoy F. Karaka, *The Parsees: Their History, Manners, Customs, and Religion* (London: Smith, Elder, 1858), p. 31, gives the population estimate.

²³ Compare Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, pp. 166–223.

undergo simplification in the wake of science and modernity. This transformation of traditional society among the Parsis produced, among other changes, enhanced roles for women.²⁴

In Iran, however, the faith's members suffered considerably as a result of the Afghan invasions led by Mahmud Khan Ghilzai and other tribal chiefs from 1719–1724. At Kerman, for example, records preserved by local Zoroastrians plus communications sent to the Parsis indicate the community had been forced by the Safavids to reside within a suburb designated as the neighborhood for infidels or *gabr-mahalle* located outside the city's protective walls. Other Zoroastrians resided in prosperous villages to the northeast of the walled citadel. According to those accounts, when Mahmud's army approached the city of Kerman, the local governor commanded that the city gates be shut and defended against intrusion. Mahmud's claim that his troops needed provisions were rebuffed perhaps because the governor felt that it was a ruse to enter and occupy Kerman city. In retaliation, Mahmud turned his soldiers upon the occupants of the surrounding countryside. Zoroastrians in the *gabr-mahalle* and villages were executed for being non-Muslims by the Ghilzais, it was claimed by members of that minority community. Some Zoroastrians are said to have survived by fleeing via the *qanāt* or subterranean irrigation system and managing to enter the citadel through those waterways. Priests and laity who lived adjacent to the fire temple within the city survived the slaughter as well, and it is said that they had to construct a makeshift funerary tower to expose the mass of corpses.²⁵

²⁴ Jamsheed K. Choksy, *Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism: Triumph over Evil* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), pp. 53–110; Tanya M. Luhrmann, "Evil in the Sands of Time: Theology and Identity Politics among the Zoroastrian Parsis," *Journal of Asian Studies* 61, 3 (2002), pp. 861–871; Jamsheed K. Choksy, *Evil, Good, and Gender: Facets of the Feminine in Zoroastrian Religious History* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002), pp. 108–110, 112–114.

²⁵ Karaka, *Parsees*, pp. 33–35, provides details. See further Mehrborzin Soroushian, "The Last War Dakhma of Iran," with photographs of the *dakhma*, at www.vohuman.org/Article/The%20Last%20War%20Dakhma%20of%20Iran.htm and www.vohuman.org/SlideShow/Last%20War%20Dakhma%20of%20Iran/Last%20War%20Dakhma%20of%20Iran.htm, both last accessed on May 1, 2006. Percy M. Sykes, *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia or Eight Years in Iran* (London: John Murray, 1902), pp. 67, 193, however, cites other local Zoroastrians there as claiming the devastation occurred around the year 1747 and so would have been part of the turmoil surrounding the end of Nader Shah's reign.

However it is also clear that, desperate for better living conditions, Zoroastrians eventually did side with the Afghans who “by the aid of the oppressed Zoroastrian community captured Kerman.”²⁶ Indeed, a diverse array of non-Zoroastrian contemporaneous accounts noted that the hardships which Zoroastrians had experienced under the Safavids often led to their cooperating with invaders against both the Iranian authorities and the local Shi‘ites. Regarding the events in Kerman, Yazd, and Esfahan during the second and third decades of the eighteenth century, specifically, letters sent to and from Armenian representatives of the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) or Dutch East India Company, a Dutchman named Bartholomeus Lispen who was in charge of the VOC office at Kerman from 1720–1722, and Persian staffers of the VOC, reveal a complex picture of events. In October 1719, the governor of Kerman employed Zoroastrians among the workman fortifying the city despite the scorned status of that confessional minority. In early November 1719, upon reaching Kerman with his troops, the Afghan commander Darab Shah took hostage two prominent Zoroastrian men to ensure that the other Zoroastrians provided food and lodging for the invaders. Eventually, Darab Shah appointed one hostage as the *nāzer*, “commissary,” and the other hostage as the *vakil*, “agent,” to the Afghans. Mahmud Khan Ghilzai, upon arriving at Kerman, imposed a tax of 10,000 tomans upon the local population – including 3,000 silver coins from Zoroastrians who had converted to Shi‘ism and 2,000 from those who had remained faithful to their ancestral religion. As relations developed with the Afghans, approximately five hundred Zoroastrian men joined the Afghan forces attacking Kerman eventually slaying many Iranian Muslims in a garden called the Baq-e Nasr. Collaboration notwithstanding, before the Afghans retreated they demolished and burned much of Kerman city – destruction that spread to the *gabr-mahalle*. Nearly two years later, in October 1721, Afghan troops recaptured the outskirts of Kerman city, including the area of Gabrabad or location of the infidels, without much resistance because they received assistance from Zoroastrians there. Moreover when the Afghans stormed the city itself one day later, they discovered that most of the Shi‘ite residents had fled into the citadel and mosque whereas the Zoroastrians has remained behind. A similar pattern of cooperation by at least some members of the religious minorities may have prevailed at Esfahan in March 1722, for Mahmud Khan Ghilzai and his Sunni Afghan troops did not harm Zoroastrians and Christians there

²⁶ Percy M. Sykes, *Persia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), p. 86.

even though many Shi'ite Iranians were executed. Likewise at Yazd, in September 1724, Afghan leaders reached a deal with their Zoroastrian counterparts in order to launch an attack against that city's Safavid citadel.²⁷

Working with the enemy came at a steep price, though. The Afghans were not consistent in their disposition toward the Zoroastrians – sometimes treating them as allies against the Shi'ites, at other times persecuting them as infidels. Local Shi'ites at Esfahan, Yazd, and Kerman did retaliate harshly against the Zoroastrians once the Afghans had withdrawn. Subsequent Iranian rulers viewed the Zoroastrian minority as an unreliable group and, so for example, members of that community experienced the wrath of Nader Shah (ruled 1736–1747) for having collaborated with the enemy. They supposedly were “presented with the alternative of death or conversion (to Islam)” as means of paying for having worked with the Afghan forces.²⁸

A similar pattern prevailed when Zoroastrians pinned their hopes on the more religiously tolerant Zand dynasty (1750–1794), that made pretensions to ancient Iranian tradition. In this latter instance, the Zoroastrians were branded traitors yet again and faced punishment at the hands of Aqa Mohammed Khan Qajar (ruled 1779–1797) when that tribal leader brutally ousted the final Zand ruler Lutf 'Ali (1789–1794) at Kerman city. It has been noted by a later Parsi writer, Dosabhoy Karaka, that many Zoroastrians at Kerman “were put to the sword by that merciless” new ruler and his administrators. All in all, the considerable negative impact of the “yoke of the Muslim Persians” upon the Zoroastrians of Iran during the Safavid period and the turbulence of the eighteenth century was noted, in hindsight, by Carsten Niebuhr in 1764.²⁹

Surviving the Qajar Dynasty

Eyewitness accounts suggest that the Zoroastrian community of Iran was at a nadir during much of the Qajar period (1779–1925). In early Qajar times, as in the few hundred years previously, a major occupation among

²⁷ Details in William Floor, *The Afghan Occupation of Safavid Persia 1721–1729* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), pp. 43, 46, 49–50, 57, 93, 227.

²⁸ Noted by Karaka, *Parsees*, p. 35.

²⁹ Niebuhr, *Travels*, vol. 2, p. 429. Yet the community's tenacity is evident in *Persian Revāyats* (1478–1773) sent to Parsis.

Zoroastrians was agriculture. Some of those individuals found work outside the agrarian sector as laborers, carpenters, weavers, bankers, and traders. The *jizya* had to be collected by the notables of each local community, and paid to the regional Muslim authorities, who were beaten if payment was not made in full on time. Despite technically holding the status of a protected minority or *dhimmi* community, Zoroastrians were considered unclean or *najes* and therefore experienced hostility from the Muslim majority populace. Conversion to Islam was enforced periodically with transformation of fire temples into mosques. As result, a majority of Zoroastrians continued withdrawing to rural settings – for example, the urban community at the royal capital Tehran numbered only about one hundred and community membership at Esfahan declined to approximately four hundred households. Demographic estimates of Zoroastrians varied widely during this period, however, and another source, namely the Parsi emissary Manekji Limji Hataria (1813–1890), placed the number at about 7,200 in Tehran, Yazd, Shiraz, and Kerman collectively.³⁰

What is clearer is that actions both significant and petty by Shi'ite Muslims made Iranian Zoroastrians feel unwelcome in their own country. Based on prior experience, most Zoroastrians living during the middle of the nineteenth century feared that their homes would be raided and possessions – especially religious texts, trade items, and personal valuables – seized or burned.³¹ Homes, therefore, had hiding places with food and water for persons plus discreet cubicles where valuables and religious items could be kept safe. Religious rites were performed indoors, out of view of Muslims, so as not to attract hostile action. The British educationalist Rev. Napier Malcolm noted that, in 1865, Zoroastrians were required to follow essentially demeaning medieval rules for non-Muslim protected minorities. They had to identify themselves publicly through yellow or similar colored clothing, could not utilize umbrellas for shade from the sun nor eye glasses for better vision, were not permitted to ride animals in the presence of Muslims so the latter individuals would not seem shorter than the former persons,

³⁰ Details are provided by Karaka, *Parsees*, pp. 31, 39–42, 49; and Napier Malcolm, *Five Years in a Persian Town* (London: John Murray, 1905, reprint New York: Dutton, 1907), p. 47. See further Farhang Mehr, "Zoroastrians in Twentieth Century Iran," p. 281.

³¹ Heinrich Petermann, *Reisen im Orient 1852–1855*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Verlag von Veit, 1865, reprint 1976), p. 204.

and were required to dwell in low roofed homes with poor ventilation.³² Given that Qajar authorities enforced those rules, the community did not complain of its hardships directly to the monarchy for fear of retribution although they did communicate their sufferings to the Parsis in India.

When the Qajars ruled Iran, members of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat and other wealthy Zoroastrians in British India began to look to the needs of their coreligionists in Iran, seeking to transform the lives of their male and female coreligionists there just as had happened in India. The question of religious freedom in Iran also occupied the thoughts of Parsis. So, in the mid-nineteenth century, they sent agents to Iran to act as catalysts of social change. As subjects of the British Raj, Parsi agents were not governed by Qajar regulations that bound the native Zoroastrians but by Iran's treaties with Britain. Hence they enjoyed freedom of speech, action, worship, custom, and movement – even though they were visiting, dealing with, and living amongst Iranians who were covered by Iranian imperial laws and Shi'ite religious regulations. So the Parsis who went to Iran could act to enhance the lives of their coreligionists in very public ways. Here was a fascinating situation where colonial power could extend across national borders to impact directly on the lives of individuals who were not citizens or subjects. Hataria reported that the majority of Zoroastrians in Iran endured considerable poverty – living in small huts and subsisting on a diet of bread, rice, and vegetables. He lived there for four decades, married a local Zoroastrian woman named Farhangis Hormazdyar Khusrobandar, and even visited the Qajar court in 1857 to intercede on behalf of those Zoroastrians. British colonial influence via ambassadors like Sir Henry C. Rawlinson (1810–1895) also was exercised upon the Qajar regime to ensure a greater degree of human rights for the Zoroastrians. Parsis funneled money to their Iranian counterparts to subsidize the poll tax.

After several unsuccessful attempts, one of which produced a partial reduction of the *jizya*, the Zoroastrians of India succeeded in having the tax abolished by Qajar royal decree or *farmān* in 1882. Success came not only via Hataria's mission but also through pressure on the Qajar dynasty from the British Raj on behalf of prominent Parsis, like the Liberal Party's Member of Parliament Dadabhai Naoroji (1825–1917), who were among the leadership of the Society for the Amelioration of the Condi-

³² Malcolm, *Five Years in a Persian Town*, pp. 36, 45–47.

tions of the Zoroastrians in Persia that met with Shah Naser al-Din Qajar (ruled 1848–1896) at London in 1873.³³ Yet, removal of the poll tax did not end other forms of discrimination, and so Parsis from India and England continued to plead the case for socioreligious equality on behalf of their Iranian coreligionists. Another delegation, including Naoroji and the Conservative Party's Member of Parliament Sir Muncherji Bhowmagree (1851–1933), met with Shah Mozaffar al-Din Qajar (ruled 1896–1906) in Ostend, Belgium, during 1899 on behalf of prominent Bombay Parsis including Sir Dinshaw Petit 1st Baronet (1823–1901). Yet another petition was made, this time at a reception for the Iranian ambassador to England in 1907 when Shah Mohammed 'Ali Qajar (ruled 1906–1909) was coroneted. One more petition, written by Bhowmagree, was presented to the last Qajar ruler Ahmed Shah (ruled 1909–1925) in 1919.³⁴

Parsi efforts created a bond with the Zoroastrians of Iran, making the latter more open to western values and ideals. However, unlike older Parsis in India who still speak nostalgically of benefits they regard as produced by colonialism, ties so strong never developed between the British and the Zoroastrians of Iran. Four major reasons can be elucidated. Firstly, the British were far less pervasive and negative responses to colonialism far more pronounced in Iran.³⁵ A widespread sentiment among Iranians of that period was that the British Empire's concern about Iran's people extended only to the extent that the latter served as a

³³ Hataria, *Irān*; Mary Boyce, "Manekji Limji Hataria in Iran," in *Golden Jubilee Volume* (Bombay: K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, 1969), pp. 19–31; Arnavaz S. Mama, "Manekji Limji Hataria: Redeeming a Community," *Parsiana* 12, 11 (1990), pp. 26–30; George N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 2 (New York: Longmans, Green, 1892), p. 241; Rashna Writer, *Contemporary Zoroastrians: An Unstructured Nation* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994), pp. 39–41, 42–49; John R. Hinnells, *Zoroastrians in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 111–114. For details on the Society for the Amelioration of the Conditions of the Zoroastrians in Persia consult Jesse S. Palsetia, *The Parsis of India: Preservation of Identity in Bombay City* (Leiden, E. J. Brill: 2001), pp. 169–170. Ardeshir Wadia, Naoroji Fardunji (1817–1885), and Rastamji Bahadur were present at the meeting in Buckingham Palace with Shah Naser al-Din Qajar as was Rawlinson. See further Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, pp. 350–351.

³⁴ Details in Hinnells, *Zoroastrians in Britain*, pp. 112–113, and *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, pp. 351–352.

³⁵ For a recent summary of the general Iranian response consult Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America* (New York: Random House, 2004), pp. 13–26.

buffer between Russia and the British's geographical jewel in the crown or colonial India. Secondly, Zoroastrians in Iran felt that the British would choose self-interest and cooperate with the Qajar dynasty and the Shi'ite majority, if necessary, rather than jeopardize commercial and diplomatic gains to assist the local Zoroastrians.³⁶ That viewpoint persisted even though the events surrounding abolishment of the *jizya* should have suggested otherwise. Moreover, those Zoroastrians thought British cooperation with the political elites facilitated Shi'ite control over the population with maintenance of a discriminatory socioreligious system. Thirdly, the diplomatic and political intrigue of that period did not facilitate goodwill. Finally, World War I (1914–1918) and its aftermath were “tough for minorities” in Iran because of political flux and economic decline – much of which was blamed on foreigners such as the British and local elites such as the Qajars for exploiting the Iranian people.³⁷

In connection with the abovementioned issues, one incident at the city of Kerman, loomed large as an example in the minds of many Iranian Zoroastrians. British governmental presence in southeastern Iran was funded via the colonial administration in India. The British Consulate at Kerman was located within the eastern quarter of that city in close proximity to the *gabr-mahalle* or neighborhood of the infidels as the Zoroastrian area of town was still called. The consul there in the 1890s, Major (Brigadier-General later Sir) Percy Sykes, established a dialogue with Kerman's Zoroastrians based in part on excellent relations between the British and the Parsis of India on the one hand and between the Parsis and the Zoroastrians of Iran on the other hand. Yet in Iran periods of good will ebbed and flowed with periods of ill will based largely on British involvements in Iranian politics and society. As a result, many Zoroastrians at Kerman, and at Yazd also, were pleased when the British were ousted from southern Iran by a German organized tribal revolt in April 1915. Essentially, Zoroastrians hoped that Iranian sovereignty would benefit from removal of the British presence. But British control was restored a year later when, in March 1916, Sykes led “a force of 500 rifles of the 124th Baluchis, a squadron of cavalry, and a section of mountain guns, and marched inland to restore the situation in Kerman.”

³⁶ I am grateful to Mehrborzin Soroushian for this observation.

³⁷ The quotation is from mobed Mehraban Firouzgary who was interviewed by Arnava Mama, “Even a Priest has to Use Logic,” *Parsiana* 28, 2 (2005), p. 60.

Assistance was provided by Bakhtiari and Arab tribes in the region, nomads who were open to selling their services to the colonial power.³⁸ During the British absence, items from the Kerman consulate had been auctioned to local buyers. Upon their return to Kerman, the British under Sykes' command took retribution against those buyers – threatening lives and levying substantial fiscal penalties – including many Zoroastrian elites. Kermani Zoroastrians who could be identified as having cheered the ouster of the British suffered as well. Consequently, mistrust lingered between the two groups.³⁹ The gap in understanding between Iranians and Britishers seems to be reflected in Sykes' account of those events: "The (military) column reached Kerman, where it was warmly welcomed by all classes, among whom I had lived for many years as consul... and as the anarchist elements which had made life and property unsafe had disappeared when the Germans fled, Kerman soon settled down into its customary state of tranquility."⁴⁰

On the other hand, owing to good relations between coreligionists, Parsis could build upon Hataria's endeavors as emissaries from India – especially Kaykhusro Tirandaz Khursand (died 1893) and Ardeshir Edalji Reporter (1865–1933). Khursand helped establish the Zoroastrian association or *anjoman* at Yazd in 1892 (figure 1).⁴¹ Other civic associations followed, laying the framework for modern governance of the community in various cities. Reporter even involved himself in setting up a women's society for the community. The *anjomans* became leadership units offering guidance and at times enforcing community guidelines in religious and social matters applicable to the Zoroastrians of Iran. However, the authority of those associations was held in check by the Muslim state according to reports submitted to the Bombay Parsi Panchayet by its emissaries.

³⁸ For a firsthand account see Percy Sykes, *Persia*, pp. 156–159 (quotation from p. 159). On those events see further Nikki Keddie and Mehrdad Amanat, "Iran under the Late Qajars, 1848–1922," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7, ed. P. Avery and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 208.

³⁹ I am grateful to Mehrborzin Soroushian for this information, preserved by his family.

⁴⁰ Percy Sykes, *Persia*, p. 159. See further, Percy M. Sykes, *A History of Persia*, 3rd ed., vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1930), pp. 447, 450, 455–459.

⁴¹ Photograph taken in 1903 by Jackson, *Persia Past and Present*, p. 360. On the *anjoman* at Yazd see further Jackson, *Persia Past and Present*, p. 376. Also consult Farhang Mehr, "Zoroastrians in Twentieth Century Iran," p. 287.



Figure 1



Figure 2

As part of the restoration of the community, Parsi philanthropy directed in part by Hataria and subsequent agents resulted in the renovation of dilapidated institutions inside the *gabr-mahalles*. Fire temples, community halls, retirement homes, and funerary towers at Yazd, Kerman (figure 2), Ray, and other locales were renovated and new ones constructed despite opposition from Muslims in surrounding neighborhoods. Clinics with doctors and nurses who practiced western medicine were set up. An orphanage was established at Yazd for children whose parents had died of malnutrition, disease, and attacks by Muslims. Hostels were opened so that Zoroastrians traveling from one *gabr-mahalle* to another on professional and personal journeys could find room and board in safe settings. Parsi funds plus monies collected by local Zoroastrians helped build thirty-eight schools after permission to provide secular education was received from Shah Naser al-Din Qajar – such as the Kaykhusro Boys Primary to High School (figure 3), between 1879 and 1927, and the Peshotan Marker Boys and Girls Schools, between 1912 and 1923, both at Yazd. The Firuz Bahram Boys High School was established at Tehran in 1923 for the capital city's slowly growing Zoroastrian neighborhood where the population can be estimated at under one hundred families.⁴² The curriculums at such institutions combined western secular knowledge and traditional religious instruction, stressing English as a language for societal advancement. That education gave both boys and girls of the Zoroastrian community intellectual and professional advantages over their Muslim counterparts, a development that did not go unnoticed by Shi'ite feminist activists.⁴³ The increasingly congenial conditions within *gabr-mahalles* led to certain problems however. Occasionally Muslims sought to loot those neighbourhoods, converts to Islam from among Zoroastrian families living in there were increasingly reluctant to find homes elsewhere, and foreigners would rent residences there and situate their consulates and businesses on the outskirts – so the religious and ethnic composition of once-scorned areas began to change.

⁴² Mehraban Firouzgary, "Zoroastrian Schools in Iran" (Tehran: Unpublished, 2003), pp. 2–5. On these schools also see Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, p. 218; and John R. Hinnells, "The Flowering of Zoroastrian Benevolence: Parsi Charities in the 19th and 20th Centuries," reprinted in *Zoroastrianism and Parsi Studies: Selected Works of John R. Hinnells* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 233–234. Regarding the community in Tehran consult Alphonse, *Triumph over Discrimination*, p.11.

⁴³ Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution 1906–1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, and the Origins of Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 200.



Figure 3

Iranian magi or *mobeds* began traveling to and residing in India for clerical training – a trend that last until the latter part of the twentieth century (when the priesthood within Iran was able to strengthen its organizational and didactic bases during the reign of Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi).⁴⁴ Priests and laity who could not travel to India communicated by letters and via emissaries on issues both religious and secular. So while in earlier periods it had been the Parsis who sought advice from the Iranian Zoroastrians when shaping beliefs and practices in India, after the advent of the Society for the Amelioration of the Conditions of the Zoroastrians in Persia the roles would be reversed and it was the Iranians who sought and trusted guidance from the Indians. Parsi merchant capital was having very direct impacts on the lives of the Zoroastrians of Iran and on intercommunal relations. It was also serving as a model for Iranian Zoroastrians to emulate in terms of economic growth and in terms of the sociopolitical impact that fiscal resources can provide.

Zoroastrians, hoping for more equitable treatment under a secular national government, participated actively in the Constitutional Reform movement. Prominent Zoroastrian bankers and merchants, such as Jamshid Bahman Jamshidian (1850–1932), provided weapons and funds for revolutionaries including those among the Azerbaijani Union who were founders of the Tehran *anjoman* such as Parvez Shahjahan and Feraydun Khusro

⁴⁴ Initially noted by Jackson, *Persia Past and Present*, pp. 379–380.

Ahrestani (also known as Gol Khorshid).⁴⁵ As in the earlier cause to abolish the poll tax, a concerted effort both politically and financially by many prominent Zoroastrians within Iran and among the Parsis became necessary to gain the public support of initially reluctant and even nonsympathetic Shi'ite Muslim leaders such as *āyatollāh* 'Abdollah Behbahani (1840–1910).⁴⁶ In Behbahani's case financial incentives had to be provided both inside Iran and in England. Eventually, Behbahani spoke in the legislature or *majles* favoring Zoroastrian self-representation. Due to this support, the community was allocated its own seat in the *majles* – establishing precedent not only for itself but also for other religious minorities in Iran especially Jews and Christians. Two scholarly estimates, clearly impressionistic and quite possibly based on narrow samples, had placed the Zoroastrian population of Iran at around 7000–10,000 in the Yazd area plus a few thousand elsewhere in 1888 and 11,000 in 1903.⁴⁷ Yet another estimate put the population at 15,000 in 1913.⁴⁸ Clearly a larger, non-counted, Zoroastrian population was present – as would be evidenced in subsequent demographic surveys. That electorate supported Jamshid Jamshidian in his successful bid for election to the first *majles* during 1906. He was followed by Kaykhosrow Shahrokh (1875–1940) in 1909 at the second *majles*. Shahrokh served as an independent rather than a member of any particular political party. Both representatives eventually played fundamental roles in enhancing the sociopolitical stature of the community at cities like Tehran, Esfahan, Shiraz, and Yazd beyond its premodern economic bases of agriculture and crafts to major roles in the trade of commodities such as cotton and opium, and in banking – but not on the vast scale that the Parsis achieved in India.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Farhang Mehr, "Zoroastrians in Twentieth Century Iran," pp. 281, 284, with references and figs. 3–5b; Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, pp. 39, 138.

⁴⁶ Behbahani had even rejected capital punishment for the pro-monarchist Muslim assassins of Ahrestani on the basis that the deceased was a Zoroastrian. See further Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, pp. 70–71, 138; Hamid Algar, "'Abdallāh Behbahāni," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. E. Yarshater, vol. 1 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 192–193.

⁴⁷ Browne, *A Year Among the Persians*, pp. 96, 404; and Jackson, *Persia Past and Present*, p. 425.

⁴⁸ Samuel K. Nweeya, *Persia: The Land of the Magi*, 5th ed. (Philadelphia: N.p., 1913), p. 251.

⁴⁹ Browne, *A Year Among the Persians*, pp. 314, 372, 408, 480; Jackson, *Persia Past and Present*, pp. 274, 336, 374, 413, 426; Farhang Mehr, "Zoroastrians in Twentieth Century

Zoroastrian politicians, activists, and writers – male and female – championed legal reform for equality of all Iranians irrespective of faith under civil law both within the *majles* and in the press. Prominent Iranian scholars including Sayyed Hasan Taquezade (1878–1969) even credited the Constitutional Revolution for bringing social and religious freedom to that minority. There can be little doubt that events of the Qajar period set the stage for Zoroastrian integration into emergent notions of the modern nation state of Iran. Yet, at that time the affects were not always felt positively at local levels. Although the 1906 Constitution claimed “all citizens are equal before the law,” the legal standing of Zoroastrians vis-à-vis Muslims remained unequal as evidenced by Article 8 of that Constitution. Members of various conservative Muslim clerical organizations could still target minorities for mistreatment.⁵⁰ Thus, beyond socially innovative urban areas, as in previous centuries under Muslim rule, Zoroastrians still were forced to wear yellow colored clothing to distinguish themselves from the rest of the population. At times they could not use horses for personal transportation. Access to public bathhouses was periodically closed to them. Permission to erect wind towers for ventilation and upper levels of homes for dwelling usually was stalled by local municipalities. Even wearing of spectacles for better vision was blocked. Women still had to veil their faces when in the presence of Muslims, even though they did not do so among other female and male Zoroastrians.⁵¹ Women also did not have the right to vote. The designation *gabr*, plus its dialectical variant *gawr*, were used widely by Muslims to scorn all Zoroastrians – male, female, old, and young – as infidels.

Iran,” pp. 281, 285, 287, with fig. 6; Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, pp. 263, 386 n. 30; Luhmann, *The Good Parsi*, pp. 130–131; Sooni Taraporevala, *The Zoroastrians of India: Parsis, a Photographic Journey 1980–2000* (Mumbai: Good Books, 2000), pp. 114–119, with photographs; and Writer, *Contemporary Zoroastrians*, pp. 49–52.

⁵⁰ Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, pp. 77, 88, 104–105, 230.

⁵¹ On medieval slurs and discrimination consult Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, pp. 127–133. For similar events in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Browne, *A Year Among the Persians*, pp. 395, 409, 415; Jackson, *Persia Past and Present*, pp. 274, 336, 355, 374–376; and Ella C. Sykes, *Persia and Its People* (New York, Macmillan, 1910), p. 180. On the veiling of faces when Muslims were present see Ella Sykes, *Persia and Its People*, photograph facing p. 208; and Nweeya, *Persia*, p. 251. However, the women routinely covered their hair and limbs.

So, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some Zoroastrians continued to adopt Islam voluntarily – often after marriage to a Muslim spouse. Others, especially women were kidnapped by Muslim men, converted to Islam, and married to their abductors. Most cases of forced marriages remain poorly documented. But some parents did seek safe return of their daughters through the intervention of local Zoroastrian anjomans and of government authorities. Others complained in letters to the Parsis. Rarely were such efforts fruitful, but those endeavors produced valuable records for posterity, a handful of which can be cited here – for example, in 1884 at Naymabad, in 1927 at Hosaynabad, in 1935 at Mazar (or Mazra') Kalantar and at Mahalle Yazd, in 1937 at Nosratabad. Yet others adopted Islam to retain their employment in the government bureaucracy and in private Muslim owned or administered companies. Some of the latter individuals continued practicing Zoroastrianism covertly while professing Islam overtly.⁵²

Seeking refuge from unemployment, assault, abduction, rape, and the attempts to force Zoroastrian men and women to marry Muslims and adopt Islam thereby taking over the Zoroastrian families' assets, other Zoroastrians chose to relocate from Iran to British India to live amidst the Parsis.⁵³ They came to be known as Iranis. Carving out a distinctive economic niche, several families became restaurateurs and liquor merchants, then moved into professional and industrial fields. Descendents of those Iranis still live in India and Pakistan intermarrying with the Parsis. Intermarriage between the newcomers and the Parsis proved important in spurring the latter's actions on behalf of Zoroastrians within Qajar Iran. One notable case was that a family who had left Kerman in 1796 because of unwanted amorous acts directed by some Muslim men at their daughter named Golestani. In India, she married a Parsi merchant named Framji Panday. The couple provided funds, safe haven, and companionship for other Zoroastrian refugees from Iran. In 1853, one of their son's, the cotton industry

⁵² Details cited by Farhang Mehr, "Causes of Decline of Iran's Zarathushti Population," pp. 74–78.

⁵³ Refer to Browne, *A Year Among the Persians*, pp. 405–408, 416–417, for incidents of conversion, asset transfer, and molestation plus other physical violence. Farhang Mehr, "Causes of Decline of Iran's Zarathushti Population," pp. 71–73, provides additional details and specific instances. On the migrations see also Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, p. 79.

pioneer Merwanji Framji Panday (1812–1876), was instrumental in founding the Society for the Amelioration of the Conditions of the Zoroastrians in Persia discussed previously. Iranis founded the Iranian Zoroastrian Anjuman at Bombay in 1918. Its valuable functions included establishment of schools and orphanages at Yazd, including the Peshotan Marker School, and spreading information to the Parsis of India and England about the conditions in Iran.⁵⁴ Yet another association, the Iran League, was established in 1922 again at Bombay to further strengthen ties between the two major communities of Zoroastrians across national borders.⁵⁵ Focusing on cultural and commercial bonds, the Iran League sponsored visits to India by leading and up-and-coming Iranian Zoroastrians including Kaykhosrow Shahrokh.⁵⁶

Dashed Hopes During Pahlavi Times

Although much stated to the point of cliché, it is accurate that a brief period of respite for Zoroastrians in Iran from socioeconomic hardship and pressure to adopt Islam was experienced under the Pahlavi dynasty (1925–1979). Attempts to secularize Iranian society resulted in citizens of many faiths generally being regarded as equal under secular law. As an officially recognized minority, Zoroastrians participated in the process through which communal customs were modified for codification into state law by the Ministry of Justice during the late 1920s and again in the late 1960s. Again, a fairly tolerable status had been gained for the Zoroastrians of Iran owing to Parsis in India and England petitioning Reza Shah Pahlavi (ruled 1925–1941) directly and via their governments in 1926 with words such as “they beg to convey, with their felicitations, warm appreciation of the paternal interest His Majesty has shown in the welfare of their fellow Zoroastrians in Iran.”⁵⁷

The Uniform Legal Code or *‘ayn nāme* for Zoroastrians was put into practice by the Iranian royal state during the mid 1930s, establishing a

⁵⁴ See briefly Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, pp. 79–80.

⁵⁵ Also noted by Luhrmann, *The Good Parsi*, p. 103.

⁵⁶ Shahrokh Shahrokh and Rashna Writer, ed. and trans., *The Memoirs of Keikhosrow Shahrokh* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1994), pp. 17, 18; Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, pp. 80–81.

⁵⁷ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, p. 352.

nationally approved framework for their rights in personal matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance.⁵⁸ The Family Protection Law of 1967 and its revisions of 1975 were another central part of the restructuring of the community's legal relationship with the nation. So as in the (by then) independent nation of India, the judicial aspect was state based and not community decreed.⁵⁹ As a result, Shi'ite stipulations regarding issues such as division of inheritance among familial heirs vis-à-vis wills and European regulations on civil union granted the last word to the Iranian state even in the private lives of Zoroastrians through statutes and courts. However, the uniform national nature of these civil codes gradually (and especially between 1970 and 1978) brought greater physical safety, increased access to education, enhanced opportunities for employment, and provided freedom of expression of religious and cultural practices for Zoroastrians.

Veiling was abolished by an imperial decree of Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1936. However, throughout the entire Pahlavi period many Zoroastrian women wore colorful headscarves in public as a concession to Muslim norms of modesty. Yet, simultaneously, by means of the use of vivid colors Zoroastrians distinguished themselves from the gender specific confessional and societal praxes of women in the Shi'ite majority.⁶⁰ On a more fundamental issue, all Iranian women were granted full civic rights included that of universal franchise in 1963 under an edict by Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi (ruled 1941–1979).

⁵⁸ Michael M. J. Fischer, "On Changing the Concept and Position of Persian Women," in *Women in the Muslim World*, ed. L. Beck and N. Keddie (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1978), p. 212 n. 26.

⁵⁹ On legal developments in Pahlavi Iran see further Farhang Mehr, "Zoroastrians in Twentieth Century Iran," pp. 291–295; and more briefly Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Ancient Iranian Ideas in a Modern Context: Aspects of Royal Legitimacy under Muhammad Riza Shah Pahlavi," in *Views from the Edge: Essays in Honor of Richard W. Bulliet*, ed. N. Yavari, L. G. Potter, and J.-M. R. Oppenheim (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 84–85. Contra Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, vol. 2, pp. 34–44, 66–67, 170–179, who is mistaken about state administrative processes when claiming that legal developments were largely community based rather than part of the well documented judicial apparatus set into place by the colonial British administration, the independent Indian government, and various Iranian monarchies and theocracies. While the communities' elites and attorneys played central roles in shaping the applicable laws, the statutes and rulings that defined legal stipulations and the authorities who enforced those lay outside Zoroastrian control.

⁶⁰ Fischer, "On Changing the Concept and Position of Persian Women," p. 208.

Glorification of Iran's pre-Islamic past for sociopolitical reasons by the state – including introduction into the official calendar, in 1925, of Zoroastrian names for the months – also raised the status of Zoroastrians in the eyes of many other Iranians by seeking to establish a bond between all confessional groups based on nationalism and history.⁶¹ As a consequence, Zoroastrians were promoted and elected to positions of authority within the state. So Rostam Bahman Guiv (1888–1980), Esfandiyar Bahram Yeganegi (1918–1982), and Bouzardjomehr Mehr continued along the political path delineated by Jamshidian and Shahrokh.

Multinational factors too were shaping the Iranian Zoroastrian community's outlook within the realms of national and provincial politics. Misgivings about establishing close ties with westerners, especially the British, lingered due to memories of colonial interference, self-serving authority, and at times indifference to the hardships experienced by Zoroastrians. At Kerman, for example, many Zoroastrians expressed nationalistic pride when the then Prime Minister Dr. Mohammed Mossadeq closed the British Consulate there during the early 1950s and took on western countries in a standoff over control, pricing, future payments, and back royalties for Iranian gas and oil. Even more of them felt outrage when Mossadeq was ousted from power by an Anglo-American financed uprising at Tehran in August 1953.⁶² Like the Shi'ite citizens, the Zoroastrians of Iran too felt powerless to reverse those events which powerfully etched memories that shaped future actions and responses to the West. As a result, they increasingly were weary of the Parsis admiration for western – especially English – culture and society, even though they readily acknowledged that the westernization of Iran brought them societal, legal, political and religious

⁶¹ Choksy, "Ancient Iranian Ideas in a Modern Context," pp. 79–83; Gavin R. G. Hambly, "The Pahlavi Autocracy: Riza Shah, 1921–1941," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7, ed. P. Avery and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 234; Writer, *Contemporary Zoroastrians*, pp. 41, 52–53; Eliz Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 49.

⁶² On the events surrounding Mossadeq and the struggle for control of oil see briefly Amin Saikal, "Iranian Foreign Policy, 1921–1979," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7, ed. P. Avery and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 438–442. For a personal account of the American role in the restoration of Mohammed Reza Pahlavi to power consult Kermit Roosevelt, *Countercoup: The Struggle for the Control of Iran* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), especially pp. 1–19, 186–197. He was a grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt, a cousin of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and the head of the Central Intelligence Agency's Middle East division.

benefits. It should not be concluded, however, that the Zoroastrians of Iran (like the Parsis of India) were anything but overwhelmingly in favor of Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi's reforms. In fact, in Kerman itself, supporters of Mossadeq had attacked the *gabr-mahalle*, looting at least one home there, before being dispersed by soldiers led by a Zoroastrian officer.⁶³ Rather, tensions between the acknowledgement of Iran's need for independence from neocolonial and foreign intervention, on the one hand, and the tangible changes that westernization and secularization brought to minorities, on the other hand, constantly competed in shaping the views and reactions of the Zoroastrians in Iran during the Pahlavi period.

The Pahlavi period was also marked by rapid urbanization for the Zoroastrian community as employment and business opportunities burgeoned – drawing persons to the cities from the villages.⁶⁴ Homes in the Zoroastrian villages and in the *gabr-mahalles* of the small towns in the Yazd and Kerman regions were sold by families moving to the cities – often those sales were to Muslims who then moved into the neighborhoods. Other homes became ancestral and vacation residences visited occasionally by their urbane owners. Yet other homes were donated to Zoroastrian *anjomans* for use as community halls, hostels, retirement centers, and orphanages. Municipalities began enforcing zoning and construction codes. As a result, the dusty, narrow, winding alleyways that once provided residents of *gabr-mahalles* with security by leading Muslim attackers astray were transformed into paved, broad, direct roads. The protective walls that surrounded Zoroastrian quarters with homes sharing common public spaces were in many, but not all, cases replaced by walled homes and gardens. Shopping centers, movie theatres, and other commercial institutions were located nearby.⁶⁵

⁶³ See further Mehrborzin Soroushian, "Legacy of Kerman's Gabr-Mahalla," www.vohuman.org/Article/Legacy%20of%20Kerman's%20Gabr-Mahalla.htm, last accessed on May 1, 2006.

⁶⁴ The urbanization of Iranian society during the 1960s is analyzed in B. D. Clark, "Iran: Changing Population Patterns," in *The Population of Iran: A Selection of Readings*, ed. J. A. Momeni (Shiraz: Pahlavi University, 1977), pp. 83–111; and Julian Bharier, "The Growth of Towns and Villages in Iran, 1900–66," in *The Population of Iran: A Selection of Readings*, ed. J. A. Momeni (Shiraz: Pahlavi University, 1977), pp. 331–341.

⁶⁵ See photographs in Mehrborzin Soroushian, "Legacy of Kerman's Gabr-Mahalla," www.vohuman.org/Article/Legacy%20of%20Kerman's%20Gabr-Mahalla.htm, last accessed on May 1, 2006.

One impact of demographic relocation and urban restructuring was that Zoroastrian men, in particular, began to assimilate notions of modernity, while seeking at the same time to ensure the welfare of the community. Consider for instance the case of Mehraban Zartoshti, whose childhood and early education at Yazd led to university-level studies in India and the United States of America before he returned to Iran to become a prominent entrepreneur, member of the Mobed Council, philanthropist, and a founding member of the World Zoroastrian Organization.⁶⁶ Reflecting both the community's newly enhanced stature and its acceptance by the Pahlavi monarchy as a loyal and pliant element of society, permission was granted by governmental authorities for the first Zoroastrian World Congress to be convened at Tehran during 1960 to highlight Iran's long imperial history.

Sixteen elementary, middle, and high schools were founded for edification of Zoroastrian children during the Pahlavi period. Those institutions, together with ones that had been established earlier, made secular, western-style, education normative. Unfortunately, statistics for education – especially post secondary – among the Zoroastrians of Iran, particularly for women, are less readily available than for the Parsis.⁶⁷ Statistics suggest that in Iran, during the first half of the twentieth century, the ratio of schools per Zoroastrians was approximately 1:334 compared with 1:15,000 for Muslims.⁶⁸ While Zoroastrian women had open access to secular education even in villages, the same was far less frequent for Shi'ite women owing to their own religiocommunal restrictions.

Westernization, urbanization, and secular education led, in turn, to religious change. Shahrokh, Soroushian, and Ebrahim Pur-Davoud (1885–1968, the noted Muslim scholar of Zoroastrianism), among other social leaders and scholars, championed Zoroastrianism as an early form of monotheism. Conversion to Zoroastrianism by Muslims was tacitly permitted. The community's leaders revamped the regressive liturgical cal-

⁶⁶ Roshan Rivetna, "Two Men of Vision," *FEZANA Journal* 14, 1 (2001), p. 88. A list of other notable professionals is provided by Farhang Mehr, "Opportunity for Iranian Zartushties to Enter Professions," *FEZANA Journal* 10, 2 (1997), pp. 89–90.

⁶⁷ On the impact of secular education see further Choksy, *Evil, Good, and Gender*, pp. 110–112.

⁶⁸ Jamshid S. Soroushian, *Savād āmuži va dābirri dar din-e Zartosht* (Fountain Valley, California: Fountain Valley Printing, 1988), p. 275. I am grateful to Mehrborzin Soroushian for providing me, in August 2000, with a complete set of his father's publications. Likewise, my gratitude is extended to Hodayun Sohrab Kianian, the late Jamshid Soroushian's wife, for her hospitality during my field research in Kerman.

endar. They simplified or replaced rites deemed antiquated in favor of ones regarded as more suitable for a community with new-found societal and economic aspirations. Reform gradually spread from the community in Tehran to other urban settings such as Kerman city and even Yazd. One important case in point is the practice of burial within cemeteries or *aramgāhs*. Its practice by the modern Zoroastrians of Iran began when land was purchased near the southern suburb of Ray in 1935 by Kaykhosrow Shahrokh and other members of the Tehran Zoroastrian Anjoman for a cemetery. At Kaykhosrow Shahrokh's urging, Jamshid Soroushian then purchased land for a cemetery outside the city of Kerman in 1936. Yazd also gained a burial ground for Zoroastrians (figure 4).



Figure 4

During the 1960s and 1970s funerary towers in which the bodies of deceased Zoroastrians had been exposed for desiccation at cities like Ray, Kerman (figure 2), and Yazd and villages like Cham fell into disuse and were closed.⁶⁹ The change in funerary praxis met with approval from the Pahlavi state which viewed burial as far more socially appropriate. Like-

⁶⁹ Shahrokh and Writer, *Memoirs of Keikhosrow Shahrokh*, pp. 13–16. See further Farhang Mehr, “Zoroastrians in Twentieth Century Iran,” pp. 287, 291; and mobed Firouzgary in Mama, “Even a Priest has to Use Logic,” p. 60. Changes experienced by the community at Kerman are thoughtfully chronicled and amply documented by Soroushian, *Tārikh-e Zartoshtiyān-e Kermān*, with photographs of members, changing dress styles, rites, and edicts. Several ritual reconfigurations, such as the replacement of exposure of corpses with burial (now in a white shroud following Muslim praxis), hearken back to very early Zoroastrian rites of the first millennium B.C.E.

wise, in part due to state pressure and in part due to the westernization and secularization of Iranian Zoroastrians themselves, access to most fire temples in Iran was opened in the 1960s to members of all faiths who are requested but not required to cover their heads and remove footwear as signs of respect for the fires. Again, the change did not occur rapidly, but formalized a practice that had been noted with infrequency by Parsi travelers to Iran for at least a century prior – justified on the basis that the nonbelievers' ancestors had once been Zoroastrians forced to adopt Islam.⁷⁰



Figure 5

⁷⁰ Kekobad A. Marker, *A Petal from the Rose*, vol. 1 (Karachi: Rosette Press, 1985), pp. 171, 175.

Together with open access, yet another change occurred wherein the *pādyāb* purificatory ritual and *koshti* (*kusti*) or cord rite came to be ever less frequently performed prior to entering the presence of a holy fire. Thus an attenuation in notions of purity and pollution with regard to fire took place. However, several holy fires such as Adur Farrobay at Yazd and the *dādgāh* or third (lowest) ritual grade fires at Kerman, Shiraz, and Esfahan came to be housed within chambers, closed to public access against possible defilement, to be viewed through glass windows. The Sasanian-era regnal flame Adur Anahid was placed within an inconspicuous side chamber at Sharifabad that was and still is usually locked while a vacant pillar-style fire altar stands in the main precinct or *ātash-gāh* under a domed roof or *gombad* (figure 5) – a practice reflecting Zoroastrian fears that zealous Muslims would pollute or even extinguish that flame as occurred with other fires in medieval and premodern times. So despite modifications, attempts at maintaining some orthodox praxes continued on a limited scale, especially in suburban and rural settings like the Zoroastrian traditionalist strongholds of Sharifabad (now part of the city of Ardakan) and Cham village on the Yazd plain.⁷¹

Association membership combined with census data placed the overall population of Zoroastrians within Iran at approximately 60,000 in 1966. The 1960s and early 1970s were a period of increased opportunity for Zoroastrians to travel outside Iran. As a result, by 1979, relocation to France, Germany, Canada, and the United States of America for educational and vocational training followed by resettlement in those countries had reduced the community's numbers.⁷² Relocation to Britain was less frequent because memories of past ill will over interference in Iran's politics and sovereignty influenced the decisions of Iranian Zoroastrians.⁷³ Another factor that contributed to demographic decline was the increased socioreligious liberalism itself – which led some Zoroastrians to espouse the Baha'i faith, with its offer of universalism, just as members of the Iranian Jewish community had done. Voluntary conversion to Islam also took place. More ominously, the Pahlavi period was not completely free of religious persecution and forced conversion to Islam, es-

⁷¹ As observed and recorded by Boyce, *A Persian Stronghold*, especially pp. 53–67, 92–138, 143–156. See also Fischer, "Zoroastrian Iran," pp. 155–263.

⁷² However, the estimate provided by Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, pp. 37, 50, 183 note 88, of between 30,000–35,000 is conservative.

⁷³ I am grateful to Mehrborzin Soroushian for this observation.

pecially for young women who were still abducted and married to Muslim men on occasion – although government authorities were more likely to act to rescue the women.⁷⁴ Zoroastrian villagers, at Sharifabad and elsewhere in Yazd province periodically experienced insults and jostling from Muslims. At Yazd and Kerman, they would perform religious ceremonies within their own walled gardens and homes so as not to experience desecration by Muslims.⁷⁵

Advent of the Islamic Republic

By 1978, the Zoroastrian reputation for deference and loyalty to the nation and its prevailing authorities was well known to the Iranian populace. So too were the notions that most Zoroastrians were personally honest and god-fearing. As a result, no major anti-Zoroastrian views seem to have emerged among the diverse groups that participated in the revolution against the Pahlavi dynasty. Therefore, the community was not directly targeted for violent attacks by Islamic militants. Nonetheless, *āyatollāh* Rohollah Khomeyni (1902–1989) had himself chastised the Pahlavis as an “anti-Islamic regime that wishes to revive Zoroastrianism” in a sermon issued from Najaf on February 27, 1978.⁷⁶ Not surprisingly, Muslim revolutionaries entered the main fire temple at Tehran to replace an image of the prophet Zarathustra with a portrait of Khomeyni – an event viewed by some Zoroastrians as a harbinger of impending religious intolerance. Members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps or *Sepāh Pāsdārān Enqāleb Eslāmi* and the Committee or *Komite* for public morals and behavior slowly began targeting Zoroastrians among other minorities.⁷⁷ On the other hand, symbols of the past partially associated with Zoroastrianism – such as the archeological sites of Pasargadae and

⁷⁴ Extensive details on the liberalization and its affects are provided by Shahrokh and Writer, ed. and trans., *Memoirs of Keikhosrow Shahrokh*, pp. 9–46; Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, pp. 218–223; Fischer, “Zoroastrian Iran,” pp. 60–69, 96–109, 353–359; and Amighi, *The Zoroastrians of Iran*, pp. 213–322. See also Farhang Mehr, “Causes of Decline of Iran’s Zarathushti Population,” pp. 77–78.

⁷⁵ Noted for example by Boyce, *A Persian Stronghold*, especially pp. 96–97, 180.

⁷⁶ Hamid Algar, ed. and trans., *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), p. 230. See also Choksy, “Ancient Iranian Ideas in a Modern Context,” pp. 89–90.

⁷⁷ Sattareh Farman Farmaian, *Daughter of Persia: A Woman’s Journey From her Father’s Harem Through the Islamic Revolution* (New York: Anchor Books, 1992), p. 380.

Persepolis – had come to hold national, Iranian, valence and were protected, even by Shi'ite clerics and laypersons in those areas, from destruction as pagan items and now are actively conserved by the state.⁷⁸

The two events – substitution of portraits and protection of monuments – reflect the duality with which the new regime approached the Zoroastrian community and the historical association of Zoroastrianism with Iran. Most prominent Zoroastrians, even individuals who had been active in the Pahlavi regime, generally were subjected to relatively more humane treatment than their Christian, Jewish, and Baha'i counterparts even when interrogated by the revolutionary guards. In certain cases they were ordered to pay compensation to the state for having participated in the old regime, but their payments were directed to Zoroastrian charities. In other cases they were denied the right to leave Iran, but were not imprisoned. Change was greater in the government bureaucracy where Zoroastrians found themselves isolated by Muslim colleagues and, often, pressured to resign their positions.⁷⁹

Prominent individuals, like Mehr and Zartoshti, eventually and in some cases surreptitiously left Iran for the United States of America, Canada, and England. In their new homes, Zoroastrian émigrés from Iran established communal and ecclesiastical organizations. They funded construction of fire temples and cemeteries at many locations there to continue beliefs, praxes, and mores. Members of the middle and lower classes of Zoroastrian society also fled Iran as and when possible (on which see below). Integration between the Zoroastrians arriving from Iran and the Parsi émigrés already settled in the west proved challenging – in part due to differences of language and cuisine, occasionally due to Parsi notions that Iranians are not industrious and cultured, and often as a result of disparate religious praxes such as conversion to the faith which Iranians accept but Parsis reject. On the whole, Zoroastrian immigrants from Iran and their western-born children have tended to maintain socioeconomic links and interact communally with other Iranian settlers along cultural and national lines,

⁷⁸ Amighi, *The Zoroastrians of Iran*, pp. 228–229; and Michael M. J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 229. Initially, some ideologues of the revolution had suggested demolishing those heritage sites.

⁷⁹ Compare Amighi, *The Zoroastrians of Iran*, pp. 361–362.

especially in North America and Europe, rather than create new ties with Parsis along religious lines even when the two groups share facilities.⁸⁰

The advent of the Islamic Republic of Iran witnessed a return to strict socioreligious minority status for Zoroastrians. Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians are protected, at least by words of statute and law, as minority communities under Article 13 (Recognized Religious Minorities) of the 1979 (amended 1989) Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran: “Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognized religious minorities who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform the religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education.” The community is allocated one representative position among the two hundred and seventy members or national representatives of the legislative branch of government, i.e., the unicameral Islamic Consultative Assembly or *Majles-e Shurā-ye Eslāmi*. The relevant articles of the Constitution include: “The term of membership in the Islamic Consultative Assembly is four years” (Article 63), “The Zoroastrians and Jews will each elect one representative; Assyrian and Chaldean Christians will jointly elect one representative; and Armenian Christians in the north and those in the south of the country will each elect one representative” (Article 64.2), and “Members belonging to the religious minorities will swear by their own sacred books while taking this oath (of office)” (Article 67.2).⁸¹ The seat for Zoroastrians in the *majles* has been held, among others, by Parvez Ravani, then by Dr. Khusro Dabestani, and presently held for a four-year term of office by Mobedyar (or lay preacher) Kourosch Niknam who is a veteran of the Iraq-Iran War, teacher at the Firuz Bahram School in Tehran, member of the Iranian Mobed Council at Tehran, and member of the Faith Council based at Qom.

⁸⁰ See also John R. Hinnells, “The Zoroastrian Diasporas,” in *South Asians in the Diaspora: Histories and Religious Traditions*, ed. K. J. Jacobsen and P. P. Kumar (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004), pp. 322–324, 330, 325; Hinnells, *Zoroastrians in Britain*, pp. 136, 143, 241–242; John R. Hinnells, “Migration and Its Impact on Zarathushtis in the Diaspora,” *FEZANA Journal* 13, 4 (2000), pp. 67–69; Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, pp. 489, 703–709; Luhrmann, *The Good Parsi*, p. 51; Ron Kelley, Jonathan Friedlander, and Anita Colby, ed., *Irangels: Iranians in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 141–148.

⁸¹ Consult Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, pp. 65–71, for a detailed discussion on these articles of the Constitution and the tensions generated between the various religious minorities. On the issue of representation see further, Parichehr Mehr, “A Conference with the President,” p. 66.

Official representation with dhimmi status clearly is a legacy of medieval Islamic jurisprudence. That status has been reaffirmed by Iranian leaders through pronouncements in recent years. For instance, the former Iranian President, Mohammed Khatami, is on record as having commented in September 1998: "It was his holiness 'Ali who, quoting from the Qur'ān, said Zoroastrianism is a religion with a book; Zoroaster is a prophet and the Avesta is a holy book. Thus a disaster which might have happened was in fact prevented; and since then, the Zoroastrian religion stands as one of the great heavenly religions: Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Islam."⁸² More recently, in December 2003, in conjunction with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) 3000th Anniversary of Zoroastrian Culture, Mehdi Karroubi, Speaker of the Consultative Assembly, noted: "Zoroastrians are well aware that in accordance with Iran's situation, divine beliefs such as the monotheistic Zoroastrian faith have been recognized officially."⁸³

Discrimination by the Theocracy

Article 14 of the 1979 Constitution states: "The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and all Muslims are duty-bound to treat non-Muslims in conformity with ethical norms and the principles of Islamic justice and equality, and to respect their human rights." However, official recognition as a minority with rights guaranteed by the Constitution notwithstanding, Zoroastrians in Iran often are offered only limited security against hostile actions by their Muslim neighbors. As a result, they sporadically have been targets for persecution.⁸⁴ For example, community records list cases of Zoroastrian women being compelled to marry Muslim men in the presence of Shi'ite *mollās* and to publicly adopt Islam. More important, on a daily basis, are the legal distinctions between Muslims and Zoroastrians – which echo, for a large part, ordinances that Zoroastrians experienced under many Islamic regimes since the middle of the seventh century. So, for instance, a Zoroastrian who converts to Islam is regarded by Iranian law as the sole inheritor of his or her family's assets under section 810 of the Civil Code passed in 1991. That particular provision of

⁸² Parichehr Mehr, "A Conference with the President," p. 67.

⁸³ Quoted in *FEZANA Journal* 17, 1 (2004), p. 22.

⁸⁴ Consult the report by Human Rights Watch, *Iran: Religious and Ethnic Minorities, Discrimination in Law and Practice*, vol. 9, no. 7 (New York, 1997).

Iranian law was upheld, when appealed, by Iran's supreme religious and political leader *āyatollāh* 'Ali Khamenei.⁸⁵ Likewise, a Zoroastrian who even accidentally causes the demise of a Muslim faces the possibility of capital punishment – but not vice versa – under Article 30 of the Islamic Criminal Code. Nor was compensation or *diya* (technically, the blood price) for such harm set on par with that for Muslims.⁸⁶ When these issues were discussed by Zoroastrian exiles including Farhang Mehr with Mohammed Khatami in September 1998, the then Iranian president acknowledged that: "So long as a law is on the books it will be implemented."⁸⁷

The concept that Zoroastrians are *najēs* has been revived, affecting their socioeconomic lives in daily interactions with Muslim for now items they touch including electrical appliances and clothes, especially food, may be regarded as unclean. Pragmatism does prevail, however, in many daily circumstances especially when Muslims benefit commercially or socially through ignoring the concept of *najasa*. The insult *gabr* continues to be used against them as does the slur *ātashparast*.⁸⁸ In a turn of events especially distressing to Zoroastrians, Iran's supreme leader *āyatollāh* Khamenei referred to members of that minority as *kāf-ers*, "ones who do not acknowledge the truth," hence "infidels." Interestingly, while ex-president, Khatami rejected that classification although he did not have the authority to override Khamenei.⁸⁹ Codes for dress, such as use of the veil or *chādor* and *hejāb* by women, and rules for socialization, especially across genders, plus public enforcement of such stipulations by the revolutionary committees are viewed by many Zoroastrians both as restrictions of their fundamental rights and as Islamic praxes alien to them.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Parichehr Mehr, "A Conference with the President," p. 66; Farhang Mehr, "Fruits of Constructive Engagement," pp. 28, 30.

⁸⁶ See further Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, pp. 133, 135.

⁸⁷ Parichehr Mehr, "A Conference with the President," p. 67.

⁸⁸ More details relating to the uncleanness of recognized religious minorities are given by Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, pp. 84–87; and Amighi, *The Zoroastrians of Iran*, p. 293.

⁸⁹ Khamenei's comment was reported by Farhang Mehr, "Zoroastrians in Twentieth Century Iran to Present Times," Lecture presented at the Eighth World Zoroastrian Congress, London, June 25, 2005. On Khatami's reaction see Farhang Mehr, "Fruits of Constructive Engagement," pp. 28–29.

⁹⁰ Amighi, *The Zoroastrians of Iran*, pp. 362, 365; Hinnells, *Zoroastrians in Britain*, pp. 3, 145–146.

Chronic unemployment has become prevalent among members of both genders – particularly the youth – despite appropriate education and training. One major cause appears to be discrimination by the government in access to state jobs (which serve as a major portion of the economy in Third World countries) including the state-run oil industry and the state civil service on the basis of not following Islam. Again, political and legal guarantees seem to have been applied only to very limited extents despite the constitutional proclamation that: “Everyone has the right to choose any occupation he wishes, if it is not contrary to Islam and the public interests, and does not infringe the rights of others. The government has the duty, with due consideration of the needs of society for different kinds of work, to provide every citizen with the opportunity to work, and to create equal conditions for obtaining it” (Article 28.1–2). Lack of employment has led, in turn, to varying degrees of poverty.⁹¹ Immigration documents and political asylum petitions presented to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) of the United States of America both directly by U.S. citizens and via the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) record not only discrimination against Zoroastrians seeking employment but also attempts to convert them to Islam and, occasionally, even sexual assault when at job interviews.

While employment opportunities are withheld, Zoroastrians feel they have been targeted for especially hazardous assignments when performing the military service required of all young men including transfer to suicide brigades during the border war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s.⁹² Zoroastrians who were slain during that war are honored by their portrait photographs being placed on so-called “martyrs walls” in community

⁹¹ See also Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, p. 88; Farhang Mehr, “Fruits of Constructive Engagement,” p. 28. These issues and others impacting on the community are discussed on Zoroastrian internet chat-rooms and websites by Iranian immigrants with more limited participation by Zoroastrians still residing in Iran. The community’s rapid fiscal decline during the past two decades is particularly noticeable when compared with its economic strength during the 1960s and 1970s. See further Amighi, *The Zoroastrians of Iran*, pp. 233–234.

⁹² I am grateful to Rohinton and Roshan Rivetna for making available relevant documents. Compare also Writer, *Contemporary Zoroastrians*, pp. 190–192. On the issue of deliberately placing Zoroastrians, Christians, and Jews (members of the officially recognized religious minorities) in harm’s way during the Iran-Iraq War see also Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, pp. 87–88.

buildings and fire temples at the cities and villages where they had lived, including at the Khusravi communal hall (figure 6) at Tehran and the *ātash kade* at Shiraz. Such private commemorative displays indicate not only the final sacrifice made by each one of the deceased for their nation but also a sense that they had been singled out for death but not for public honor as war dead by the state. Indeed, although city walls and village courtyards throughout Iran are adorned with monumental paintings of war heroes from that period, none of the public images depict a Zoroastrian slain while serving in the Iranian military forces. Such honor for non-Muslims comes not from the Shi'ite theocracy or its public offices but in the small gathering halls and places of worship for the minority communities.



Figure 6

Official pressure upon the Zoroastrian community to conform to Islamic norms and requirements, politically and socially, is not confined to military service. Another case in point is the Iranian Zoroastrian Women's Organization, established in 1945–1946, which has given up its Pahlavi-era goals of gender equality through education and employment to now champion the Islamic societally-acceptable roles assigned to members of the feminine gender by listing “sewing, handicraft, cooking, design, and calligraphy” in addition to “caring for the needy” as its main focuses. This organi-

zation also stresses “adherence to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran” and even maintains an electronic link on a website organized by the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Ottawa, Canada.⁹³ Yet, other more mainstream women’s organizations are also part of the daily life of Zoroastrians (albeit at a lesser publicly visible levels) in Tehran with headquarters adjacent to the city’s main fire temple and community center.

Another means of ensuring conformity within the Islamic republic is via education. The Islamic Republic’s Ministry of Education and Training has taken over administration of the community’s schools – even ones such as the Dinyari school (established between 1905 and 1916) in Yazd where the students are still mainly Zoroastrian children. At other schools such as the Kaykhusro or Khusravi school, pupils now are Muslim and Zoroastrian in approximately equal numbers.⁹⁴ The missions of some educational institutions have transformed – for example, the Kaykhusrow Shahrokh Girls High School of Kerman (established 1940) has been reconstituted as a high school for boys.⁹⁵ Two more schools have been established since the Islamic revolution, the Goshtasp Girl’s High School in 1994 and the Rostam Guiv Girl’s School (funded by the US-based Rostam Guiv Foundation) in 1998, both at Tehran. On the other hand, the Marker School complex at Yazd has lost portions of its property over the years through sale to generate operating funds, acquisition by the Yazd municipality, and incorporation into the university. The curriculum at all those schools is a standard national one, with additional classes for Zoroastrians in their religious tenets permitted by the state when properly trained teachers are available. Zoroastrian religious education is not completely at the discretion of the schools’ teachers, however, for the basic textbook on religion (with considerable Islamic content) is produced by the Ministry of Education and Training for all students of recognized religious minorities and its use dur-

⁹³ www.salamiran.org/Women/Organisations/izwo.html, last accessed on May 1, 2006.

⁹⁴ Amighi, *The Zoroastrians of Iran*, pp. 233–263, provides details of the community *anjoman*, schools, women’s organizations, youth clubs, and publications from the 1960s though the mid 1980s. More recently see Green, “The Survival of Zoroastrianism in Yazd,” pp. 117–119, 120.

⁹⁵ See Firouzgary, “Zoroastrian Schools in Iran,” p. 6, for its founding. Transformation into a boys school is noted by Mehrborzin Soroushian, “Legacy of Kerman’s Gabr-Mahalla,” www.vohuman.org/Article/Legacy%20of%20Kerman's%20Gabr-Mahalla.htm, last accessed on May 1, 2006.

ing instruction in the Zoroastrian religion is mandated by the state.⁹⁶ The same holds for religious education among Jews and Christians. Again, practice has attenuated the constitutional guarantee that Iranians who are Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians can “act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education” (Article 13). Compulsory public affirmation at these private schools of the fundamentalist Muslim basis of Iranian society includes monumental portraits of the Shi‘ite clerical leadership such as the late *āyatollāh* Khomeyni and the current supreme leader *āyatollāh* Khamenei hung prominently at the main public entrances (see for example figure 3). So even symbolically, the watchful eyes of Muslim clerics gaze upon Zoroastrian students entering the schools each day – reminding them of their minority status and of the requirement to accept Islamic regulations as national ones. Many young Zoroastrians have begun to master the English language which they view as leading to enhanced economic and travel opportunities, in contrast to their parents and grandparents.⁹⁷

During the revolution and the early period of the Islamic Republic, delegates from institutions such as the World Zoroastrian Organization (WZO) made contact with Iranian authorities in attempts to safeguard the lives and rights of Zoroastrians. One decade later Iran’s former president Khatami acknowledged: “Mindful of the prevailing interests in the society, our laws should be more encompassing and citizens of whatever religion, because they have accepted their citizenship, must benefit from all the rights of citizenship.... and if it seems that in some cases there are any sort of coming, they must be resolved through discussion and dialogue.”⁹⁸ More recently, Khatami proposed that laws be revised to eliminate tacit and overt discrimination based on religiocommunal status – but change remains to be instituted.⁹⁹ What steps if any the current President, Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, will take to redress the situation remain to be seen. At the urging of the Iranian government and the local *anjoman*, the Sixth World Zoroastrian

⁹⁶ Extensively discussed by Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, pp. 76–84.

⁹⁷ On limitations in English language fluency among older Iranian Zoroastrians see comments by Farhang Mehr, “True Belief,” *Parsiana* 28, 2 (2005), p. 611; and Mehrangiz Shahzadi, “The Iranian Experience,” *Parsiana* 28, 2 (2005), p. 186.

⁹⁸ Parichehr Mehr, “A Conference with the President,” p. 67.

⁹⁹ Regarding possible changes in the legal statutes see an interview with Dr. Khosrow Dabestani by Arnavaz Mama in *Parsiana* 23, 8 (2001), p. 96.

Congress was held in Tehran during June 1996. The Congress was intended to demonstrate the Islamic Republic's commitment to ensuring the welfare of Iranian Zoroastrians. In that respect, it succeeded with ample participation of Iran's Shi'ite leadership. However, Iran's financial crisis resulted in visa and conference fees for participants and observers from outside Iran having to be paid upfront, several months in advance and in major western currencies, at the time of registering for the conference. Even after long-distance registration and identity checks had been completed, visas proved difficult to obtain or were issued just days before the Congress began. The Indian delegation was expected to provide a financial subvention for the Congress – a task that proved problematical due to the foreign currency regulations of the Indian government. The *Congress Proceedings*, although published in Tehran, also have proved relatively difficult to obtain and shed little light on the actual day-to-day lives of contemporary Zoroastrians living in Iran.¹⁰⁰

Persistence of Identity, Religious Revivalism, and Retrenchment

Despite discrimination, Zoroastrians continue to live not only in the central Iranian city of Yazd which has been their stronghold for several centuries, but also at Tehran, Esfahan, Shiraz, and Kerman among other locations. Clerical and lay associations or *anjoman* remain active within the community – especially at Tehran and Yazd. Those organizations supervise communal governance, raise funds for maintaining fire temples, and oversee training of priests. However, state oversight is constant because each association “has to be registered with the Iranian government” and permission has to be obtained from the government before any association can enter into formal contacts with foreign organizations.¹⁰¹ In neighborhoods once controlled by those associations, the traditional single-level and bi-level houses of the *gabr-mahalles* with wind towers are giving way to multistory apartment complexes. Although construction is financed by funds from the *anjomans* themselves, the buildings must now be made available to Zoroastrians and Muslims alike for residence.

¹⁰⁰ *Sar zamin-e jāvidān: yādvāre-ye sheshomin konge-ye jahāni-ye Zartoshtiyān* (Tehran: Zoroastrian Anjoman, 1999). See further Hinnells, “The Zoroastrian Diasporas,” pp. 332–333.

¹⁰¹ Noted by mobed Firouzgary in Mama, “Even a Priest has to Use Logic,” p. 60.

Estimates had placed the number of Zoroastrians in Iran at between 32,000 and 50,000 during the mid 1980s and mid 1990s.¹⁰² The Islamic Republic of Iran's national census in 1986 initially produced an estimate of 90,500 Zoroastrians, a number subsequently revised downward first to 45,000 and then to 32,589.¹⁰³ The Iranian national census of 1996 initially produced an estimate of 157,000 Zoroastrians, a number subsequently officially revised to 27,920 – comprising 14,173 males and 13,747 females – or 0.0465% of Iran's population. So as a recognized religious minority in Iran, Zoroastrians now number less than Christians (0.1311% of the population) but more than Jews (0.0212% of the population).¹⁰⁴ The initial census estimates for 1986 and 1996 appear to have incorporated a large Baha'i constituency, including Zoroastrians who adopted that faith, whose members declared themselves as Zoroastrian to the Iranian government's census takers so as to avoid subsequent identification for persecution as heretics by Shi'ite Muslims.¹⁰⁵ The revised population numbers from the 1986 and 1996 censuses suggest that the Zoroastrian community in Iran continues to decline numerically. It is possible, however, that the revised data involves underreporting by some Zoroastrians who are still largely cautious about their public position as a *dhimmi* minority within the Islamic theocracy and so reluctant to publicly acknowledge their faith to government officials. Evidence may be found in the wide range of community population estimates during 2004 produced by Zoroastrian leaders and clerics – numbers that range from 24,000 to 90,000.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² An estimate of 32,000 individuals in 1986 by Eric Hooglund, "The Society and Its Environment," in *Iran: A Country Study*, ed. H. C. Metz, 4th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, 1989), p. 129, and an estimate of 50,000 in 1993 by Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, pp. 37, 50, 183 note 89.

¹⁰³ *FEZANA Journal* 13, 4 (2000), p. 10, and 17, 4 (2004), p. 26.

¹⁰⁴ The initial estimates were reprinted in community journals such as *Hamazor* 3 (2003), pp. 68–69, and *FEZANA Journal* 13, 4 (2000), p. 10. For the revised demographics as stated by the Islamic Republic of Iran consult data from the Statistical Center of Iran at www.unescap.org/esid/psis/population/popin/profiles/iran/popin1.htm, [.../popin3.htm](http://www.unescap.org/esid/psis/population/popin/profiles/iran/popin3.htm), and www.iranworld.com/Indicators/isc-t143.asp, all last accessed on May 1, 2006. See also *FEZANA Journal* 17, 4 (2004), p. 26.

¹⁰⁵ On conversion from Zoroastrianism see Juan R. I. Cole, "Conversion. v. To Babism and the Bahai Faith," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. E. Yarshater, vol. 6 (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1993), pp. 236–238; Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, p. 51; and Susan S. Maneck, "The Conversion of Religious Minorities in Iran," *Journal of Baha'i Studies* 3 (1991), pp. 35–48.

¹⁰⁶ *FEZANA Journal* 17, 4 (2004), pp. 23–24, 26–27, 29–30.

In part because many of their fellow citizens, even though Muslim, may have distant ancestors who were Zoroastrian, Iranian Zoroastrians still do accept converts covertly although they do not proselytize for fear of retribution from the majority Shi'ite community. Indeed, attempts to seek converts would result in legal proceedings against the individuals involved and state sanctions against the Zoroastrian community.¹⁰⁷ In this regard they are different from the Parsis who now act as a pseudo-caste within Indian society and so do not accept converts to Zoroastrianism. When marriage occurs between a Muslim and a Zoroastrian in Iran, sometimes – but not always – there are attempts to incorporate the couple into the Zoroastrian community, even without conversion of the Muslim partner, and thus forestall the Zoroastrian spouse's conversion to Islam and further decline in the community's demographics.¹⁰⁸

Religious revivalism has spread from Islam to Zoroastrianism, although not in any fundamentalist or militant aspects. Rather, mirroring the Iranian population at large, the post-revolutionary period has witnessed a rise in devotional interest among Zoroastrians. As awareness of faith and community spreads, adult Iranian Zoroastrians have displayed renewed vigor in teaching the religion's tenets to their children. In this sense, the re-formalization of minority status has served to galvanize the community, strengthening its sense of identity, purpose, and continuity. Rites of passage are practiced regularly by priests and laity. *Sudre pushi* "donning the white undershirt" or initiation, usually occurs between the ages of seven and fourteen for boys and girls. The rite of initiation into the priesthood or *navezut* – which had fallen into abeyance during the 1950s when Iranian priests were trained and initiated in India – has been revived by the Mobed Council of Tehran. Marriage rites are conducted in the traditional manner, but western suites and gowns now are customary of the bride, groom, and guests. Funerary rites continue as modified during the Pahlavi regime, when exposure of corpses in funerary towers was phased out and burial introduced along Muslim lines.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ As noted in *FEZANA Journal* 17, 4 (2004), p. 48.

¹⁰⁸ See briefly, Amighi, *The Zoroastrians of Iran*, pp. 228–231, 286–290; Pargol Saati, "Conversion. vii. To the Zoroastrian Faith in the Modern Period," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. E. Yarshater, vol. 6 (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1993), p. 243; Hinnells, *Zoroastrians*, pp. 18–19; and *FEZANA Journal* 17, 4 (2004), pp. 27–28, 29, 30.

¹⁰⁹ Bahram Shahzadi, "A Short Summary of Zarthostis Rituals in Modern Iran" (King of Prussia, Pennsylvania: Unpublished, 1994), pp. 1–5; Choksy, *Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism*, pp. 53–62, 107–110; Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Zoroastrianism," in *How*

Among the religious rituals, thanksgiving services or *jashans* remain popular on festival occasions such as the celebration of the hundredth day or *sade* before the new year and the new year's day or *nav ruz* itself. The six ceremonial feasts or *gāhānbār* (*gāhāmbār*) are celebrated by large gatherings. The major fire temples, especially those at Yazd and Sharifabad, attract devotees from across Iran who are drawn there by a self-professed mixture of personal piety and communal zeal. Visits to the important shrines around Yazd and to a host of minor votive sites, discouraged as primitive by the Pahlavi regime, have boomed after the return to Muslim governance. Offerings spread upon cloth or *sofres*, often in conjunction with the *gāhānbār*, also have renewed popularity especially among women.¹¹⁰

Communal gatherings such as weddings and festivals serve as situations where Zoroastrians can gather and mingle across gender boundaries according to their community's etiquette – and often wearing western-style clothing – rather than the Muslim majority's segregationist practices.¹¹¹ Those events, however, are occasionally targeted by officials of the Ministry of Islamic Guidance on the basis that, although Zoroastrians as members of a recognized religious minority may follow their own customs, all citizens of Iran should adhere to Islamic mores such as women covering their hair, men and women abstaining from consuming alcohol, and having physical contact between the genders during dancing. In fact those issues were addressed in a public warning to the non-Muslim communities by 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in 1986 while he was leader of the *majles*.¹¹²

Return to ritual piety should not, however, be equated to the rise of a new theological orthodoxy as has occurred among some segments of the

Different Religions View Death and Afterlife, 2d ed., ed. C. J. Johnson and M. G. McGee (Philadelphia: Charles Press, 1998), pp. 252–256.

¹¹⁰ Laal Jamzadeh and Margaret Mills, "Iranian Sofreh: From Collective to Female Ritual," in *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, ed. C. W. Bynum, S. Harrell, and P. Richman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), pp. 25–34, 53–56; and recent fieldwork by Robert Langer, "From Private Shrine to Pilgrimage Center: The Spectrum of Zoroastrian Shrines in Iran," in *Zoroastrian Rituals in Context*, ed. M. Stausberg (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004), pp. 563–592, with photographs.

¹¹¹ Amighi, *The Zoroastrians of Iran*, pp. 363–367; and Writer, *Contemporary Zoroastrians*, pp. 192–193, 197.

¹¹² Consult Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, pp. 90–91, for additional details and a translation of Rafsanjani's speech.

Parsi community in India.¹¹³ Rather, the late nineteenth century rationalism that once reshaped Parsi religiosity and reached Iran from British India still holds sway among the Zoroastrians of Iran. Whether notions such as a fundamental duality between order (regarded as righteousness) or *asha* and confusion (regarded as evil) or *drug*, faith as the basis of individual happiness, and ritual as directly connected to both ancient and medieval theology return to Iranian Zoroastrian religiosity remains to be seen, in part because the sociopolitics of recent decades has disconnected some of the intellectual ties between the religion's practitioners in Iran and India. So clergy and secular leaders of the Iranian Zoroastrians discourage discussion of theological issues such as dualism and practice of purification rites involving fluid other than water, because it could result in Muslims regarding the Zoroastrians as polytheists and pagans.

While those ties were still in place, before the Islamic Revolution, the mid 1960s had marked a period of major transformation in Zoroastrian rites – changes that still persist among Iranian Zoroastrians. Rapid urbanization, enhanced access to secular western-style education at community schools in Tehran and Yazd leading to professional employment, exposure to then current Parsi notions that the textual corpus of the devotional poems or *Gāthās* attributed to the prophet Zarathushtra should take precedence over other scriptures and rituals, and tendencies to assimilate or follow the cultural mores of the Muslim majority and the Christian minority were fundamental factors in bringing about change at that time. Now, the magi draw upon those influences to keep the more traditionalist views and practices of orthodox Parsis at bay when pilgrims from India are encountered.

More recently, after the Islamic revolution, as immigration to the United States of America, Canada, and countries of western Europe like England has accelerated among Zoroastrians, the number of priests to conduct rites has declined precipitously.¹¹⁴ As a result, although worship continues at fire temples and shrines, there is constant simplification of rites to: (a) Meet the needs of a laity serviced by an increasingly smaller number of

¹¹³ On the situation among the Parsis see Luhrmann, "Evil in the Sands of Time," pp. 875–879, 881–882, 884–885.

¹¹⁴ See further Shahin Bekhradnia, "Decline of the Iranian Zoroastrian Priesthood: Its Effect on the Iranian Zoroastrian Community in the Twentieth Century," *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Proceedings* (1991), pp. 449–457; Shahzadi, "A Short Summary of Zarhostis Rituals," p. 1; Amighi, *The Zoroastrians of Iran*, pp. 213–218, 291–307; and Hinnells, *Zoroastrians*, p. 242.

priests; (b) Fulfill ideals of westernized devotees; and (c) Satisfy the need not to attract undue attention from the Muslim population. For example, a ritual fire often is replaced with an oil lamp or candle during basic praxes. Likewise, modern technology has ensured that firewood is supplemented or even replaced with pipe-borne natural gas as fuel for the fires in some temples, especially ones constructed or renovated during the Pahlavi period and in the twenty-first century – such as at Esfahan, Shiraz, and Kerman. Such innovations often are based on earlier precedents.¹¹⁵ Most new temples are built within the boundaries of the old *gabr-mahalles*, even though roads now connect those locales directly to the rest of each city. The *koshti* and *sudre* increasingly are worn only when attending religious ceremonies or in the presence of other Zoroastrians – so as not to provide any means of visual identification that could indicate religious minority status to Muslims and thus possibly expose devotees to harassment.¹¹⁶ Interestingly, and reflecting the circumstances of their founding, many of the fire temples and schools are located not only close to one another but also near synagogues and churches – reflecting the sense of security provided by minority communities to each other from earlier times when they were required to dwell in close proximity.

Migration from Iran

However, in the opinions of many Iranian Zoroastrians, constitutional guarantees of ensuring “political and social freedoms within the framework of the law; the participation of the entire people in determining their political, economic, social, and cultural destiny; the abolition of all forms of undesirable discrimination and the provision of equitable opportunities for all, in both the material and the intellectual spheres” (Article 3.7–9) remain only partially fulfilled. As a result, not all Zoroastrians find the Islamic Republic to be a hospitable place and some of them have chosen to leave that country permanently. The initial exodus was by elite fami-

¹¹⁵ For example, Zoroastrians at Surahana near Baku in Azerbaijan utilized natural gas for a holy fire until the late nineteenth century. When the number of Zoroastrians there dwindled, the temple was taken over by Hindu merchants.

¹¹⁶ Shahzadi, “A Short Summary of Zarthostis Rituals,” pp. 1–2, 5; Mehraban Firouzgary, “From Nowrooz to Nowrooz,” (Tehran: Unpublished, 2000), pp. 8, 11, 31–32; and Katalayun Mazdapour, “Kontinuität und Wandel in den Ritualen der iranischen Zarathustrier,” in *Zoroastrian Rituals in Context*, ed. M. Stausberg (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004), p. 635.

lies who had been associated with the Pahlavi state and therefore feared retribution. More recent relocations have been by young men and women who are growing increasingly pessimistic about the possibility of a viable socioeconomic future for their families and themselves in Iran. Many immigrants flee Iran overland to Turkey, Pakistan, and India where they spend many months to a few years in refugee camps or under the protective welfare of Parsi communities. Some eventually receive permission to resettle in the United States and Canada where they now number about 5,500 (of a total Zoroastrian population of approximately 16,800 in both nations). Others go to the European Union where they now number around 2,575 (of a total Zoroastrian population there of approximately 6,010).¹¹⁷ Many who remain in Iran do so reluctantly, focusing on an “increasingly materialistic and complicated” life while choosing to not bear children or have only small families. As a result, “immigration and small families are diminishing the Zarathushti community in Iran.”¹¹⁸

The ordeals of escape from Iran have been chronicled by members of Zoroastrian communities who shelter the refugees. Because non-Zoroastrian Iranians have attempted to pose as Zoroastrians in order to gain assistance from Parsis, each refugee seeking assistance in India has been required to produce his or her identity card issued by an *anjoman* in Iran, have in his or her possession a *koshti* and *sudre*, and be able to recite from memory certain basic Zoroastrian prayers in the Avestan language like the *Ashem vohū*, “Order is good,” and *Ahunawar* or *Yathā ahū vairyō*, “As is the will of the lord.” In India, Parsi organizations and families at Mumbai and other cities have contributed toward the financial expenses for housing, clothing, and educating individual refugees. Priority has been given to ensuring that each refugee has an adequate command of the English language plus professional or vocational training so that he or she can be sponsored and selected for resettlement in a western nation.¹¹⁹ Yet, the wait for immigrant visas to western countries can prove to be lengthy. So, despite the best efforts by Parsi hosts to ensure the physical and emotional wellbeing of the Iranians, refugees facing an

¹¹⁷ Composite statistics and commentary in *FEZANA Journal* 17, 4 (2004), pp. 22–24, 28, 48, 53–60, 63–68. Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, pp. 703–704, gives brief details on these migrations.

¹¹⁸ Mobed Firouzgary quoted in Mama, “Even a Priest has to Use Logic,” p. 60.

¹¹⁹ See further Writer, *Contemporary Zoroastrians*, pp. 186–188; and Hinnells, *Zoroastrians*, p. 74.

unresolved future and possible deportation back to Iran often have experienced emotional despondency, depression, and sporadically even suicide, even though they have been fed, clothed, housed, educated if necessary, and occasionally employed. Similar conditions have prevailed among Zoroastrian refugees hosted by coreligionists in Pakistan. Seeking the possibility of swifter processing for immigration to the United States, Canada, and Australia, Iranian Zoroastrian refugees even reached Sri Lanka via India. They were ferried across the narrow Palk Strait by members of the secessionist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who then demanded payment before the refugees are released.

Changing Modus Operandi for Survival: Past and Present

Yearning for a renewed period of Iranian national prominence by Shi'ite Muslims, resulting in nostalgia for the ancient, pre-Islamic, past of dynasties such as the Achaemenians and the Sasanians, should not be equated to a quest for comprehending the Zoroastrian religion nor for enhancing the lives of its surviving followers in Iran.¹²⁰ The basic parameters of harsh attitudes and actions by Muslims toward Zoroastrians in Iran were set in premodern times under the Safavids and the Qajars, then reinforced by Shi'ite law and traditional customs. Neither the current Iranian constitution or legal system made any fundamental changes in those respects.

Summarizing the questions, issues, and events involving the Zoroastrian minority community in Iran, specific points may be noted. The community as a whole has interacted with central governmental authorities. Particular groups have interacted with provincial and local governments. There have been conjunctions and disjunctions with regimes ruling Iran such as the Safavid, Qajar, Pahlavi, and Islamic regimes of Iran and with external multinational powers such as the British Raj. There are conjunctions and disjunctions with the majority group in Iran namely the Shi'ites, and with other minorities such as Jews, Christians, and Baha'is. The precarious position of minorities inside Iran in social economic, and religious terms becomes evident as well as does the limited ability of such individuals to control those issues in their lives. Attempts at margin-

¹²⁰ Also commented upon by Amighi, *The Zoroastrians of Iran*, pp. 231–232, 366. More recently see “Cyrus the Disputed,” *The Economist* 376, 8444 (2005), p. 48.

alization of minority populations in geographic, economic, and social terms has occurred, yet disjunction between discriminatory regulations and pragmatic praxis was also present.

If their condition may be summarized broadly, it appears that when faced with social, economic, and religious changes from the sixteenth through the middle twentieth centuries, Zoroastrians seem to have been compelled to place self-preservation at the forefront of their individual and collective activities. So allegiances were made and switched, occasionally even on the basis of “my enemy’s enemy” for instance during the Afghan invasion of the second and the third decades of the eighteenth century. Such actions did not, however, prove beneficial in the long run, leading both Shi‘ites and Sunnis to view those Zoroastrians as unreliable. When conditions permitted, as during the final decades of the nineteenth century and in the early decades of the twentieth century, they attempted to utilize trade and the financial capitalism garnered through trade to at least influence and at most redirect some sociopolitical events to the benefit of minorities. Another means of shaping the parameters of their lives developed through external actors, namely the Parsis and the British Raj, as in the events that lead to the abolishing of the poll tax during the middle of the nineteenth century. Here the Iranian Zoroastrians’ ability to capitalize on colonial positive disposition, where by they became a favored group like the Parsis, looms large. The many factors which came together for a process of gradual transformation during the nineteenth century set the stage for the Zoroastrians to become active players during the Constitutional Revolution, espousing and disseminating western ideas of equality. Thereafter, in times of relative socioreligious liberality, most notably from the 1950s through late 1970s, members of the community sought and gained public prominence.¹²¹ While some remained distrustful based on the history of their community’s experiences under Muslim rulers, the public gains made under the Pahlavi regime gradually did fuel the imagination of many Zoroastrians that genuine lasting change for the better was there to stay through a secularizing Iranian state. That their gains were the result of monarchist aspirations based on claims to an imperial past with which Zoroastrianism

¹²¹ On acquiescence for the sake of survival see further Ekehard Kulke, *The Parsees in India: A Minority as Agent of Social Change* (Delhi: Vikas, 1974), pp. 133–144; and Cyrus R. Pangborn, *Zoroastrianism: A Beleaguered Faith* (New York: Advent Books, 1983), p. 134.

was associated, rather than concern for Zoroastrians, did not deter those individuals from seeking to ensure individual and communal wellbeing.¹²² Hence, leading members of the community at Tehran, Yazd, and Kerman still recount that Iran's reversal in 1979 to a political system where Islam predominated (rather than simply the loss of monarchy as the governing system) once more deeply shook the foundational psyche of the Zoroastrian community bringing back communal memories of harsh times from centuries past and triggering survival responses.

Minority status coupled with intermittent repression already had conditioned the collective awareness of the Zoroastrians of Iran. Communal stress, specifically, and societal tumult, generally, brought about by the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Iran, the establishment of a theocratic Islamic Republic grounded on Muslim law or *Shari'a*, and the periodically violent struggles by some sectors of the Iranian Muslim population to re-secularize the society, triggered a conscious reaction among Zoroastrians. Based on their community's experiences, most of them have chosen minimization of conflict with the Muslim majority and its political and socioreligious authority through limited cooperation and extensive disengagement.¹²³ Unlike in the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1911, fewer Zoroastrians seem to be active in the present struggles for democracy in Iran. In sum, members of the Zoroastrian community, when presently faced with situations that could threaten their welfare or survival seem to have chosen to react in a manner initially enjoined by one of their high priests writing in Middle Persian during the tenth century: “act in a manner that is most cautious and least harmful.”¹²⁴ So, despite exposure to democratic values and secular education via the Parsis, plus the experience of modernity, professional careers, and economic success during the Pahlavi period, Zoroastrians in contemporary Iran have developed a survivalist mindset of ducking and keeping their heads when necessary even at the same time as they developed a propensity to work incrementally toward change.

Nonetheless, the differential yet complimentary mechanisms developed by the Zoroastrians of Iran may make it difficult for those members now living under the theocracy of contemporary Iran to be able or willing to

¹²² Choksy, “Ancient Iranian Ideas in a Modern Context,” pp. 48–56.

¹²³ Compare a similar observation by Amighi, *The Zoroastrians of Iran*, p. 366.

¹²⁴ Behrangore T. Anklesaria, ed., *Rivāyat of Ēmēd ī Ashawahishtān* (Bombay: K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, 1962), 4.8, p. 12.

maintain compliancy in the information age. Zoroastrian websites and internet chat rooms have been established recently, reconnecting members of the community in Iran to the rest of the world through electronic means that have proved difficult for the Iranian government to censor.¹²⁵ Consequently, avoiding the spotlight may prove difficult, especially as some Zoroastrians in Iran, immigrants now in the west, and the Parsis of the Indian subcontinent hesitantly, but determinedly, begin drawing attention to issues of freedom within the Islamic Republic. Indeed casting spotlights upon discrimination is emerging as a means of rectifying social injustices.

One minority specific situation, that serves as an example of changing responses, began in January 2001 when the leader of the Tehran Zoroastrian Anjoman, an individual named Rostam Gohari, criticized the Iranian government for discriminating against Zoroastrians seeking employment in state organizations. Gohari went on to raise the issue of inequities in the civil and criminal codes – that favor Muslims on matters of marriage, inheritance, and crime, and that disbar Zoroastrians on sectarian grounds from serving on state institutions like the judiciary. Interestingly, Gohari's comments were public ones – made in part to the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) – and so were clearly intended for wide dissemination. Gohari's remarks were quickly transmitted globally. His comments were posted on websites by Iranian Zoroastrians and even reported by official news media including the web site of the IRNA. His criticisms of the Islamic regime have been followed by similar ones usually made at meetings with governmental officials by Zoroastrian community representatives utilizing the relative security provided by their official statures.¹²⁶

More recently, Zoroastrians in Iran and among immigrant communities in western nations have overtly voiced their opposition (in conjunction with concerned Iranian Muslims and international organizations such as UNESCO) to the Sivand Dam project. That project, begun in 1992 and overseen by the Iranian Ministry of Energy, involves flooding the Bolaqi valley containing the portion of the ancient royal road that connected the

¹²⁵ On communication via internet list-serves and chat-rooms connecting Zoroastrians in Iran to their counterparts around the world see *FEZANA Journal* 13, 4 (2000), pp. 107, 110.

¹²⁶ Gohari's comments were posted on January 13, 2001, at www.payvand.com/news/01/jan/1073.html, last accessed on May 1, 2006. It was also reported at www.irna.com, last accessed on May 1, 2006. In addition see Farhang Mehr, "Dialogue against Discrimination," *FEZANA Journal* 25, 4 (2002), p. 40.

Achaemenian capital cities of Pasargadae and Persepolis, the outskirts of Pasargadae itself, and other archeological sites including an Achaemenian period village and a couple of Parthian period cemeteries. Salvage archeology, with collaboration between Iranian and international teams of scholars, has occurred under the auspices of the Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization (ICHTO). Zoroastrian leaders have been grateful for the archeological surveys that may never have taken place under other circumstances. They have publicly acknowledged the economic necessity and benefit for irrigation and electricity that are derived from the dam, as well. However, many Zoroastrians wonder if a degree of indifference was displayed by their Muslim government officials because a majority of the affected sites date to the ancient period of Iranian civilization when the state religion and majority faith was Zoroastrianism.¹²⁷

Such activities suggest that at least a few leaders of the community have begun to cast off their reticence in favor of working toward social change by at least occasionally directing national and international attention to the problems which Zoroastrians encounter as a minority in Iran. Yet outside Iran, Farhang Mehr who also has begun to voice his concerns both orally and in writing (as discussed previously) recommends caution. Overall, believing that “reacting emotionally endangers the community’s survival,” Mehr advocates a more traditional approach where “we must be active and exercise our discretion wisely” with “the necessary awareness and maturity to act accordingly.” He traces that approach of negotiating with Muslim regimes to Hataria, Jamshidian, and Shahrokh among others who influenced change during the Qajar period.¹²⁸

One positive result of publicizing discriminations present within the Islamic Republic of Iran has been a partial modification of those laws by the sixth Consultative Assembly via a decree in January 2002 from then President Khatami and First Vice President Mohammed Reza Aref to the benefit of all the recognized religious minorities. An administrative circular also was directed at government ministries, foundations, provincial authorities, and other bureaucratic offices “to ensure the rights of religious minorities in all areas including employment and engagement in various professions.” Then in February 2002, Article 30 of the Criminal Code dealing with homicide and involuntary manslaughter was modified

¹²⁷ Brief overview in *Parsiana* 28, 3 (2005), p. 12.

¹²⁸ Farhang Mehr, “Fruits of Constructive Engagement,” p. 29.

to place Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians on par with Muslims. Yet, that particular provision was not ratified by *āyatollāh* Khamenei in his capacity as Iran's supreme leader. Ravani, Gohari, and Dabestani campaigned publicly within the Iranian majles and privately in meetings with influential Muslim clerical politicians for those legal changes, while Mehr did so in private meetings with Khatami.¹²⁹ Another positive outcome has been greater freedom for Zoroastrians to participate in the electoral process. During the national elections in February 2004, nine candidates vied for the single seat allotted to the Zoroastrians in the seventh Consultative Assembly. Long lines of Zoroastrians formed at eleven polling places in the major cities of Iran to cast their ballots.¹³⁰ These legal and political gains were in sharp contrast to failures experienced when Zoroastrian representatives such as Parviz Malekpur had lobbied within the *majles* against discriminatory codes during the late 1980s.¹³¹

The public approach is not without hesitancy and backlash, however. Dabestani lost his reelection bid in 2004 for the *majles* seat, with the winner Niknam campaigning on a platform for non-separation of religion and state – a theme central to Iran's Islamic theocracy as well. It seems that a majority of Zoroastrians are still reluctant to espouse public demands against the powerful and numerous *mollās*, preferring the more guarded approach based on the experience of tradition as suggested by Mehr. Yet, even individuals who have traditionally been among the more reticent portion of the Zoroastrian community have found it increasingly necessary to speak out publicly. Remarks by *āyatollāh* Ahmed Jannati, secretary of the Council of Guardians or *Shurā-ye Negahbān* of the Constitution, a close aide to Khamenei, and a mentor of Ahmedinejad, comparing non-Muslims to “animals who roam the Earth and engage in corruption” garnered a sharp response from *majles* representative Niknam. Niknam rebuked Jannati for that “unprecedented slur against religious minorities,” adding “non-Muslims not only are not beasts, but if Iran has a glorious past and civilization to be proud of it owes this to those who lived in the country before the advent of Islam.” Niknam commented

¹²⁹ See further Parichehr Mehr, “A Conference with the President,” p. 66; and Farhang Mehr, “Fruits of Constructive Engagement,” pp. 27 (quotation), 29–30.

¹³⁰ As noted in *FEZANA Journal* 17, 2 (2004), p. 17, based on internet postings by Zoroastrian journalists and others in Iran.

¹³¹ Discussed in Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, p. 88.

further “those who sully the Earth are humans who do not show respect for the other creatures of God.” In a warning to members of religious minorities not to question the state’s fundamentalist Shi‘ite leaders and their views, Niknam was summoned before a tribunal of the Revolutionary Courts to answer charges that he had display lack of respect for Iran’s Muslim leaders and had spread false information.¹³²

Clearly, recent hard-line political developments in Iran seem to mark a return to greater intolerance by the state toward its religious minorities – casting a pall over freedom of speech and worship. Moreover as a legacy of violent populist reactions by the Muslim majority to foreign interference in Iran’s internal affairs during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Zoroastrians there are vary of seeking assistance from the West for the cause of religious freedom. They fear being branded agents and spies of the United States, Israel, and England, and they shudder at the possibility of having to face charges of treason resulting in imprisonment and execution – as have members of the Jewish community in Iran.¹³³ Indeed, Article 14 of the 1979 Constitution concludes by restricting the rights of members of the recognized religious minorities to individuals “who refrain from engaging in conspiracy or activity against Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran.” Given the broad interpretive range possible for that passage in the Constitution, it is not surprising Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians in Iran are vary of allegations against them. This same reason has hitherto contributed to hesitation on the part of most Zoroastrian expatriates, especially those now living in the United States of America, Canada, England, and France, to intervene with the Iranian regime. Only the Parsis have dared occasionally exerting persuasive influence via the Indian government on the current regime in Tehran to liberalize restraints on basic rights and to enforce protection under the law. In a sense, while the Zoroastrian community of Iran serves to set the

¹³² The events in question date to November 20–28, 2005. Brief reports and discussions at www.adnki.com/index_2Level.php?cat=Religion&loid=8.0.234116648&par=0 and www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1526186/posts, both last accessed on May 1, 2006. The authority of Revolutionary Tribunals within the Iranian judicial court system is officially outlined at www.iranjudiciary.org/revolutionarycourts_en.html, last accessed on May 1, 2006.

¹³³ For the precarious situation of Jews in Iran consult Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, pp. 110–114. For instance, eleven members of the Iranian Jewish community were convicted by an Iranian court in July 2000 on charges of espionage for Israel.

outer limits of acceptable behavior by minorities, prominent members of the Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian communities are used by the Islamic state as examples for all minorities to realize that dissent still will not be tolerated.

The Zoroastrian minority situation provides insights into the chronology and mechanisms of an extended period and a diverse process of national and sectarian transition. As the Zoroastrian situation suggests, changes in response to minority status, and deprivations that come with such classification with Iranian society, have begun to gather momentum. Despite hesitancy, there is no indication that the trend can be stifled or reversed by internal or external forces. The quest of Zoroastrians for societal, economic, political, and religious equality is likely, therefore, to gradually become part of broader attempts to democratize Iran and grant equality to all citizens irrespective of their faith in Islam, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Baha'ism. Consequently, the aspirations of Zoroastrians for equitable participation could very well prove beneficial for Iranian society and for Iran's presence within the international community of nations.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ A preliminary introduction to the topic was published in Farsi or New Persian as "Sarvesht-e Zartoshtiyān-e Irān moruri tārikhi (The Fate of Iranian Zoroastrians over Time)," *Iran Nameh* 19, 1–2 (2001), pp. 61–78. Fieldwork in Iran during 2003 was funded by Indiana University. A concise English version was presented at a workshop on "Iran and History from Below" at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, in January 2004, with sponsorship from the London Middle East Institute and the Iran Heritage Foundation. Materials relating to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were discussed at a conference on "New Elites, Old Regimes: Trajectories of Imperial Change 1700–1850" at Yale University in April 2006 with sponsorship from the Kempf Fund and the Stavros Niarchos Foundation. Additional fieldwork in North America during 2005–2006 was subsidized by an Individual Research Grant from the American Academy of Religion. Ongoing research on this topic has benefited greatly from a generous fellowship awarded by the American Philosophical Society. Figures 2–6 are reproduced by permission of *Archive J. K. Choksy*.