

2008

Religious exiles and emigrants: The changing face of Zoroastrianism

Tara Angelique Migliore
University of South Florida

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd>

 Part of the [American Studies Commons](#)

Scholar Commons Citation

Migliore, Tara Angelique, "Religious exiles and emigrants: The changing face of Zoroastrianism" (2008). *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*.
<http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/407>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

Religious Exiles And Emigrants: The Changing Face Of Zoroastrianism

by

Tara Angelique Migliore

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Religious Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Danny L. Jorgensen, Ph.D.
Paul G. Schneider, Ph.D.
Dell Dechant, M.A.

Date of Approval:
July 10, 2008

Keywords: zarathushtra, parsi, bahdinan, diaspora, zoroaster

© Copyright 2008 , Tara Angelique Migliore

for SamEmma

Thank you, Duband

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION	01
CHAPTER TWO HISTORY OF THE FAITH AND ITS REDUCTION IN NUMBERS	06
A Brief History of the Faith and How It Has Changed Over Time	06
Zarathushtra and His Revelations According to Tradition	10
The Magi	17
Zoroastrians: The Bahdinan and the Parsis	21
The Bahdinan	21
The Parsis	25
CHAPTER THREE TENETS CAUSING DEBATE AND DISUNITY	31
Community Boundaries	32
Preservation of Traditions	36
The Demographic Problem	38
Conversion	40
CHAPTER FOUR SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES	45
Steve Bruce	47
Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz	51
CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION	54
WORKS CITED	57
BIBLIOGRAPHY	58

**RELIGIOUS EXILES AND EMIGRANTS: THE CHANGING FACE OF
ZOROASTRIANISM**

Tara Angelique Migliore

ABSTRACT

Zoroastrianism was founded by the prophet Zarathushtra ca 1400 to 1200 BCE and is generally acknowledged as the world's oldest monotheistic and revealed religion. It dominated three great Iranian empires, and influenced Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Mahayana Buddhism. At one point in time, their numbers surely seemed limitless. Today, however, roughly 150,000 Zoroastrians are scattered all over the globe in very small numbers. The faith is at a crossroads, and its very existence is threatened.

This is an examination of the decline and subsequent change of this previously influential and vital religion. Zoroastrians have been able to maintain the major tenets of their practices and beliefs without much interruption for millennia. However, with more and more Zoroastrians moving into the global economy and the Western culture, secularization, modernity, and loss of an extensive, immediate community are causing new beliefs to be adopted and/or advanced by some of the faith. This shift in beliefs and

values is causing disunity among members of the faith.

Today Zoroastrian communities are on all inhabited continents and many different countries within those continents. This has forced the Zoroastrian communities worldwide into introspection, definition, and clarification. Contemporary Zoroastrians differ over how to keep their beloved faith alive and how to best remain true to its heritage and sustain its “purity.” There are currently two substantial efforts to maintain the identity of Zoroastrianism, characteristically reflecting an orthodox and a liberal approach.

As criteria for evaluating the Zoroastrianism of modern day, I will utilize Steve Bruce’s discussions of secularizations and its effects on religions as reasons for the current changes of the Zoroastrian faith. I will also explore the meaning of ethnicity as related to religion as provided by Ebaugh and Chafetz for a prediction for the future of the faith. Zoroastrians worldwide must acknowledge the cultural differences that exist in their one faith—and the subsequent needs there of—if they are going to organize and map a course of survival.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Zoroastrianism appears to be on a path to extinction with an estimated membership of 150,000 or less in the world today.¹ Internal prohibitions against conversion and intermarriage with outsiders combined with low birth rates among members are reducing these numbers even further. With more and more Zoroastrians moving into the global economy and the Western hemisphere, secularization, modernity, and loss of an extensive, immediate community are causing new beliefs to be adopted and/or advanced by some of the faith. There are even some completely outside of the traditional faith who are adopting the teachings of Zarathushtra and claiming them as their own. This shift in beliefs and values is causing disunity among members of the faith. Because the Zoroastrians have been able to maintain the major tenets of their practices and beliefs without much interruption for millennia, the declining membership of Zoroastrianism, one of the world's oldest religions, is a matter of genuine scholarly interest. The purpose of this thesis is to explore reasons for the decline and change of this previously influential and vital religion.

Zoroastrianism was founded by the prophet Zarathushtra—or Zoroaster as he is known in the West—ca 1400 to 1200 BCE, and it is generally acknowledged as the

¹ Rashna Writer, Contemporary Zoroastrians: An Unstructured Nation (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1993), 245.

world's oldest monotheistic and revealed, creedal religion.² From the sixth century BCE to the seventh century CE it flourished and dominated in Persia, modern-day Iran, to include much of the Near and Middle East, became the state religion for three great Iranian empires, and influenced the development of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Mahayana Buddhism.³ The traditional Zoroastrian communities were disrupted and dispersed with the rise and spread of Islam. In order to avoid persecution and oppression, many of the Zoroastrian population sought refuge in Bombay, India (now Mumbai), and subsequently it has been dispersed even further. Today Zoroastrian communities can be found on all inhabited continents and many different countries from the United States and Canada to East Africa, Hong Kong, and Australia.⁴

Therefore, in the context of other nations' more dominant religions and cultures (not to mention nationalities), Zoroastrianism can be stated to be in diaspora. This has forced the Zoroastrian communities worldwide into introspection, definition, and clarification. Contemporary Zoroastrians differ over how to keep their beloved faith alive and how to best remain true to its heritage and sustain its "purity." There are currently two substantial efforts to maintain the identity of Zoroastrianism, characteristically reflecting an orthodox and a liberal approach.

According to orthodox Zoroastrians, they believe that their religion was given to them as a race from the one true god, and that it was not meant for anyone else. They also believe that all religions are a path to righteousness; therefore, if everyone follows the

² Mary Boyce, Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices (London: Routledge, 2001), xiii.

³ Ibid, 1.

⁴ John R. Hinnells, The Zoroastrian Diaspora: Religion and Migration. The Ratanbai Katrak Lectures, the Oriental Faculty, Oxford 1985 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6.

good path of their inherited faith, they will go to Heaven. Consequently, there is no need to convert.

Liberal Zoroastrians counter that after his revelation Zarathushtra himself began as a convert and that everyone had to be converted. Liberals also say that the anti-conversion tenet came about after the Islamic invasion (and many forced conversions) when Zoroastrians moved to Bombay and became such stellar citizens that the class-stricken and underprivileged of India were drawn to Zoroastrianism and wanted to convert. The Zoroastrians in Bombay were also seeing their children and grandchildren intermarrying with the citizens of India, and thus diluting their Persian bloodline.

The sociology of religion provides two or more different ways of accounting for and understanding these divisions within Zoroastrianism and its likely consequences. Steve Bruce holds that secularization is a social condition manifest in the declining social significance of religion that causes a decline in the number of religious people and the extent to which people are religious.⁵ Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz maintain that religion is the central element in the maintenance of ethnic identity which subsequently becomes even more important when speaking of second and following immigrant generations.⁶

My thesis examines the likely consequences of the current divisions within Zoroastrianism based on the sociological theorizing of Bruce and Ebaugh and Chafetz. Zoroastrianism has survived now for millennia, and looking back will help to not only understand a history of change, but also to predict an outcome of survival. As criteria for evaluating the Zoroastrianism of modern day, I will utilize Steve Bruce's discussions of

⁵ Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 3.

⁶ Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz, eds., *Religion and the New Immigrants: continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations* (Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 2000), 18.

secularizations and its effects on religions as reasons for the current decline of the Zoroastrian faith. I will also explore the meaning of ethnicity as related to religion as provided by Ebaugh and Chafetz for an understanding of the current divisions. I will also provide a recommendation for a successful survival.

The methodology of my research will entail using the data from scholarly sources such as John R. Hinnell's *The Zoroastrian Diaspora: Religion and Migration* as a basis of the current state of the faith worldwide in its diasporic communities. Because there is much debate as to the historical accuracy of Zoroastrianism, I will use Mary Boyce's almost exhaustive work on the Zoroastrian faith to describe the foundations and beliefs, and I will use several other scholars to account for the changes of the religion throughout time.⁷

Although there are few very real possibilities for the future of the world's oldest monotheism, I believe that ultimately the liberal Zoroastrians will survive and the orthodox form of Zoroastrians will quite literally die out. The liberal branch will tire in its attempts to claim authenticity of heritage, culture, and race and instead will claim authenticity according to the teachings of Zarathushtra, and they will accept not only the spouses and children of "intermarriages," but also converts. Because of their inability to accept outsiders and to prevent membership loss due to intermarrying, low birth rate, and secularization, the orthodox group will not survive but for a couple of more generations in the West although they will continue for several more in the East. Community of faith will ultimately become more important to the liberal branch than community of heritage and culture: they will continue to convert and grow. Based upon the evidence of my

⁷ With all of the debate surrounding the early and unrecorded history, I have focused on traditional history as believed by Zoroastrian adherents, and for the following 2000 years, I have focused on the effects of history on their dwindling numbers.

research, my thesis is although they will probably always be a minority religion, I expect the liberal community to grow and prosper, and I expect the traditional community to eventually disappear.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY OF THE FAITH AND ITS REDUCTION IN NUMBERS

A Brief History of the Faith and How It Has Changed Over Time

In order to understand how Zoroastrianism has changed throughout time, it is enlightening to take a glimpse at the era into which it and its founder were born. Prior to Zarathushtra, the proto-Indo-Iranians (the ancestors of both the Indians and the Iranians) were semi-migratory pastoralists who herded their sheep, goats, and cattle on foot over the south Russian steppes.⁸ Because the horse had not yet been tamed for these people, development and change were slow in this orderly way of life. Nevertheless, where there is little time to change, there is great opportunity to solidify traditions—religious and otherwise. According to Mary Boyce, that is exactly what happened from roughly the fourth to the third millennium BCE.⁹ So strong are the traditions that descendants not only in Zoroastrianism but also in Hinduism to this day can account for them.

Later, in the earlier part of the third millennium the proto-Indian-Iranians migrated apart from one another in geography as well as speech, thus becoming distinctly

⁸ Boyce, 2.

⁹ Ibid.

two peoples: Indians and Iranians.¹⁰ This period also began the use of bronze and the taming of the horse. Horses had their greatest use early on as the power for wooden carts used in trade routes over long distances (presumed by scholars with the settled people of Mesopotamia to the south of them).¹¹ They would later be used for chariots of war and pillage.

The addition of horses, chariots, carts, and fashionable metals began to change the structured, slow-paced pastoral life into one of quick gains of raiding and pillaging. The mighty slaughtered the weak and the unprotected, and justice and law had become scarce. These turbulent times were an affront to the established cult of order for the people of the steppes. Zarathushtra was born into this era.¹² Due to more recent archaeological discoveries in Kazakhstan, it is believed that Zarathushtra lived between 1400 and 1200 BCE, which is contrary to the more popular date of about 1700 BCE held by adherents and to the date of 700-600 BCE held by many scholars for several decades now.¹³

Prior to his revelations, Zarathushtra was a priest of the old religion, a position into which he would have been born according to his family. The old pagan religion made offerings to that which sustained and protected its adherents: fire, water, animals (domestic and wild alike), and their nature gods.¹⁴ It held that there was a law of nature that preserved order, righteousness, justice, and harmony, and the people called it “asha.”¹⁵ The ethical human conduct that was also believed to be a part of this natural law

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, 3.

¹³ R.C. Zaehner, Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, and David S. Noss all place the birth of Zarathushtra between 700-600 BCE.

¹⁴ Boyce, 6.

¹⁵ Ibid, 8.

was called Wisdom, or “Mazda.”¹⁶ Truth, honesty, loyalty, and courage were also natural laws for human kind. Virtue was a natural order of conduct, and vice was its unlawful betrayal. Thus, people of the world could easily be divided into those who upheld morality, the “ashavan,” and those who were considered wicked, the “drugvant.”¹⁷

Behavior according to asha and social relations were so important to these steppe-dwellers that the enforcement of a man’s given word was recognized greatly by two types of pledges: the solemn oath of either action or abstinence, and the covenant or compact between two parties.¹⁸ These spoken pledges were regarded as having so much power that eventually this power became one of two divinities who would either uphold the honest party or smite the liar. Due to the sacred elements that were used in rituals to settle disputes, Varuna (water) became lord of the oath & Mithra (fire) lord of the covenant, and they are regarded as personifications of loyalty and truth respectively.¹⁹ Varuna and Mithra were not only lords, “ahuras,” of their laws but they were also bound by the very laws that granted them authority.²⁰ Because these rituals were very dangerous and life threatening, it usually required a priest or king to agree to the need of one because of the “Wisdom” that they held in their position. Eventually, Mazda, Mithra, and Varuna would make up the original trinity of ahuras and three would become a very important number to this faith.

The immoral, however, were not to be outdone. Indra became the divinity of the warrior of the heroic age who was not concerned with loyalty and truth but only with material gains. Indra was bountiful to his followers, amoral, reckless, valiant in combat,

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid, 9.

and a heavy drinker of haoma—soma to the Indians.²¹ He required only lavish offerings, which he promised to repay on Earth. As the hereafter evolved from a dark, dusty place to a possible paradise for those who were worthy, those who chose to worship Indra and other amoral warlike divinities still had a chance of spending paradise with their god (in addition to pillaging prosperity in this life) by performing enough offerings that were satisfying to Indra. Later Zarathushtra drew a deeper line in the sand by restricting the term “Daeva” to Indra and other amoral divinities and reserved the term “Ahuras” for the ethical forces,²² thus setting the stage for the cosmic battle between good and evil that mimicked his life and times on the steppes of the Bronze Age.²³ Therefore, as the Bronze Age developed superior weapons and new warriors, for the Indo-Iranians it also developed an even stronger sense of justice and injustice, and a moral battle between good and evil.

²¹ Ibid, 11.

²² Ibid.

²³ According to David S. Noss, this terminology for the good and bad spirits is completely opposite of that which was used by not only the Vedic Aryans in India, but also the Romans and Celts, 359.

Zarathushtra and His Revelations According to Tradition

Zarathushtra was born to the Spitama family, the son of Pourushaspa. He is most known for composing seventeen great hymns, many of which are addressed directly to Ahura Mazda, called the Gathas. The style in which the Gathas were composed was a very formal, rich, and complex form that could only have been understood by the learned.²⁴ However, because Zarathushtra believed Ahura Mazda had entrusted him with a message for all humankind, he also would have preached in the ordinary vernacular of his time.²⁵ His teachings survived initially via oral tradition and finally were recorded in writing during the reign of the Sasanians, the rulers of the third great Iranian empire.²⁶ Together with the “Yashts,” sacrificial hymns, and the “Vendidad,” the law against the demons, Zarathushtra’s writings and revelations are collectively referred to as the Avesta.²⁷ (The language of the Gathas is extant nowhere else, therefore it has become known simply as “Avestan.”)²⁸

In the Gathas, Zarathushtra refers to himself with several different titles: “zaotor,” a fully qualified priest; “manthran,” one who is able to compose inspired utterances of poems; and “vaedemna,” one who possesses divinely inspired wisdom after seeking even higher knowledge from other teachers.²⁹ Interestingly, he is the only founder of a creedal

²⁴ Boyce, 17.

²⁵ See Boyce, page xiv, for further explanation.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ R. C. Zaehner, *The Teachings of the Magi: A Compendium of Zoroastrian Beliefs*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 13.

²⁸ Boyce, 18.

²⁹ Ibid, 19.

religion who was both a prophet and a priest. According to tradition, Zarathushtra spent years wandering in a quest for truth that led him to witness the acts of violence brought on by war bands and worshippers of the Daevas. From his journeys he became filled with a deep yearning for justice and for the moral law of the Ahuras to prevail over the evil that he saw.

Both the Gathas and the Pahlavi work of Zadspram speak of the revelation that he received when he was thirty: Zarathushtra went to collect water for a haoma ceremony at a spring festival, and when he had emerged from the purifying element of water, a shining Being named “Vohu Manah,” Good Purpose, led him into the presence of Ahura Mazda and five other radiant Beings: “Asha Vahishta,” Best Righteousness; “Spenta Armaiti,” Holy Devotion; “Khshathra Vairya,” Desirable Dominion; “Haurvatat,” Health, and “Ameretat,” Long Life.³⁰ Zarathushtra had many revelations of Ahura Mazda, some visual, some auditory, and some just a feeling of presence. The Yasnas make it very clear that he not only obeyed enthusiastically, but also elevated Ahura Mazda as the greatest of the three Ahuras, worshipped Mazda as the master of asha, and proclaimed Ahura Mazda as the Creator of all of the other beneficent divinities and all else that is good.³¹

The prophet’s travels had led him to conclude that nature did not apparently work as one, but that wisdom, justice, and goodness were utterly separated from wickedness and cruelty. As if to confirm this, he received a vision of an Adversary to Ahura Mazda, “Angra Mainyu,” the Hostile One.³² This spirit co-existed with Ahura Mazda and although it was equally uncreated, it was ignorant and wholly malign. These spirits were

³⁰ Ibid, 19, 22.

³¹ Ibid, 19.

³² Ibid.

twins and each chose between good and evil (according to his nature).³³ This choice further sets the stage for all humanity: every man must choose between good and evil in this universe or as the prophet put it, between life and not-life. For Ahura Mazda was so wise that he knew that if he became Creator and fashioned this world then Angra Mainyu would attack it (simply because it was good), and it would be a battleground that Ahura Mazda would use to destroy evil once and for all, and rid the universe of it forever.³⁴

So the stage is set for a new sacred drama, but with very familiar characters. According to Zarathushtra, Ahura Mazda, through his Holy Spirit, “Spenta Mainyu,” evoked the six radiant Beings who were present in his first revelation. The six great radiant Beings then in their turn evoked other divinities, who at that time, made up the pantheon of the beneficent pagan Iranian gods. All of these divine beings have the one sole purpose of helping Ahura Mazda further good and defeat evil and are collectively known as the “Yazatas,” Beings worthy of Worship, or “Amesha Spentas,” Holy Immortals.³⁵ Zarathushtra also gave his followers an ethical code for life: to cherish the immortals, take care of his own actions, and care for his fellow man.³⁶ Alternatively, as they are more commonly known: good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. Not only are these the pillars of the faith, but Boyce also takes them to be, “a generalization of the code of the Iranian priest who to perform an act of worship effectively needed good intention, right works and correct rituals.”³⁷ Thus common man, priest and nature alike (by instinct) all work in harmony to do good and to defeat evil.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid, 20.

³⁵ Ibid, 21.

³⁶ Ibid, 24.

³⁷ Ibid.

According to the Pahlavi books, Zarathushtra also gives us the story of the creation of the world (a re-interpretation of the old pagan creation story), but this time it has a new time frame to go along with it. Ahura Mazda divided creation into two acts: the “menog” (spiritual, immaterial) and the “getig” (material), and they are collectively known as “Bundahishn.”³⁸ The Pahlavi books tell us that Ahura Mazda intentionally fashioned the immaterial into the material in order to create a battleground in which Angra Mainyu would attack and be able to be defeated.³⁹

Creation is the first of the three acts of the drama that is the cosmic time span of the universe. As soon as Angra Mainyu attacked the material world, act two began, and this second time period is called “Gumezishn,” the Mixture, in the Pahlavi texts.⁴⁰ The world is now a mixture of good and evil. The battle rages on during which Angra Mainyu and all of his Daevas continue to oppose the Yazatas. Therefore, in order to end this cosmic battle, all men must fully venerate Ahura Mazda and the six Amesha Spentas to leave no room in his heart for darkness or weakness because Angra Mainyu not only inflicts physical ills but also moral and spiritual ills as well.⁴¹ The moment in which this battle is won and the world is restored to its perfectly created state before the attack is called in Pahlavi the “Freshegird” (known today as the Frashokereti). The third act of time will be then be ushered in; history will cease, and the Separation will begin. Good will once again be separated from evil, and Ahura Mazda, the Yazatas, men, and women will live together in peace and goodness without evil for all eternity. Thus from Zarathushtra’s revelations, the world heard for the first time that it not only had a

³⁸ Ibid, 25.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid, 26.

beginning, but it also has an end.⁴² So man and God no longer worked together to simply continue cyclical life (ensure that the sun would rise and the rain would fall), they now work together to bring it back to its state of perfection before evil attacked. Therefore, Zarathushtra's revelations also elevated man to a being who was created in order to be God's ally—not just another part of nature.⁴³ In addition, Zarathushtra was able to offer an explanation of why bad things happen to good people (one that did not point to their beloved creator): Angra Mainyu is now the full-time professional bad guy. Blame him.

The separation of good and evil begs the question of how is it decided who is good and who is evil, and what happens to all of the souls after the separation? Zarathushtra taught that each soul (man, woman, master, or servant alike) is judged on its accomplishments to the cosmic battle and how well it aided the forces of good.⁴⁴ The Bridge of the Separator of pagan days now became a bridge of judgment: the "Chinvat Bridge." Mithra presides over the tribunal, flanked by Sraosha and Rashnu, who holds the scales of justice.⁴⁵ In these scales are weighed the soul's thoughts, words, and deeds—the good on one side, the bad on the other. If the good outweighs the bad literally, then the soul is led to Paradise by a beautiful maiden (which is the personification of its own good deeds) across the broad bridge and up on high; if the bad outweighs the good, then the bridge contracts to the width of a blade edge, and an ugly hag (the personification of its own evil deeds) grabs the soul and plunges it down to Hell.⁴⁶ The dwelling-place of Worst Purpose is dark, smelly, the food is bad, and it is a long age of misery and woe. Oddly enough, for the few souls whose scales are completely balanced, there is even a

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 27.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

place for them—the mixed ones—to go. There “they lead a grey existence, lacking both joy and sorrow.”⁴⁷

For those who reached paradise before the final cosmic battle, the long taught belief of bodily resurrection (of both the pagan Iranians and the Vedic Indians) would have to wait until the Last Judgment which will divide all of the good souls from the evil souls, past and present. Airyaman and Atar (Friendship and Fire respectively) will melt all the metal in the mountains and create a flowing river over the earth, which all mankind must pass through.⁴⁸ The righteous will pass as if walking through warm milk, and the evil will feel the molten metal as if they were feeling it with their human flesh.⁴⁹ The evil souls then will have died a second death to be abolished completely, and the river will flow down into Hell destroying Angra Mainyu and any other remnants of darkness on the earth (the Daevas will have died in the last great battle). After a final ritual by Ahura Mazda and the six Amesha Spentas, humankind will drink a white haoma and become like one of the Immortals to live on the restored creation that is earth.⁵⁰

The last great cosmic battle is ushered in by a savior, a “Saoshyant.”⁵¹ The One Who Will Bring Benefit will lead humanity in the final battle against evil. Because Zarathushtra was given the revelation of truth for all humankind, it came to be a belief by his followers that the Saoshyant would be from the prophet’s own bloodline. A virgin would bathe in Lake Kasaoya (where the prophet’s seed was being miraculously

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 28.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 28.

⁵¹ Ibid, 42.

preserved), she would become pregnant, and she would bear a son named “Astvat-ereta,” He Who Embodies Righteousness.⁵²

Thus, from Zarathushtra’s revelations we are given the first doctrines of an individual judgment, Heaven and Hell, the great Last Judgment, and life eternal for the resurrected body reunited with its soul. Zarathushtra’s sense of justice was so profound, that each person bore not only the responsibility for his own soul (no interventions were allowed) but also a shared responsibility for the fate of the entire world. His ideas of the sharing of the responsibility and the sharing of the glory, however, did not sit well with the aristocratic priesthood who traditionally believed that their hereafter was heaven while the rest of the mere mortals went to that gray, shady subterranean place.⁵³ There was also a fear of the wrath of the Daevas who were now being rejected. Not surprising, Zarathushtra became a prophet who was not welcome in his hometown. He preached for years and managed to convert only his cousin, Maidhyoimanha.

Zarathushtra then decided to travel to another tribe and was there heard by the queen, Hutaosa, and her husband Vishtaspa. Vishtaspa was converted, and his neighboring princes chose to violently and forcibly return him to the old pagan faith.⁵⁴ They lost, and Zarathushtra’s teachings won. Little is known of Zarathushtra’s personal life before or after this battle.⁵⁵ We know that Zarathushtra had three wives, although the names of the first two were never recorded. His first two wives bore him three sons and three daughters, and his third wife, Hvovi bore him no children.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, 30.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 31.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

The Magi

Because Zoroastrianism was already an ancient faith by the time it entered into recorded history, many of the historical aspects of the faith are heavily disputed by scholars. For instance, the dating and exact location of the prophet are contested, but the fact that Zarathushtra wrote the Gathas is not. Scholars have agreed to disagree about the unknowns of Zoroastrianism because the likelihood that new information will surface regarding such an old faith is rather minute. Generally accepted also is the understanding that the Zoroastrianism of today is remnant of the later Sasanian period as was recorded in the Pahlavi Books. Even though the greatest gap of information exists from the period of Zarathushtra to the priestly class of adherents, the Magi, what is also not contested among scholars is that the Magi forever changed the faith (although the more orthodox adherents do not necessarily agree).

Our understanding of the differences between the old pagan faith and the new religion of Zarathushtra come from the prophet himself via hymns that he wrote which make up the Gathas.⁵⁶ Zarathushtra eliminated almost all of the old rituals that used magic and idolatry and kept only the ceremonies that were most focused on worship.⁵⁷ He also vehemently disapproved of the use of the sacred haoma juice. The one ritual

⁵⁶ David S. Noss, *A History of the World's Religions*, 11th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 361.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

however, that he did keep was the fire ritual. Although he no longer worshipped the fire, he still thought of it as a gift from Ahura Mazda and a symbol of his one true god.⁵⁸

What we do not know is how the religion progressed, evolved, and traveled from the Gathas of Zarathushtra to the Yashts and Vendidad of the Magi. What we do know is that sometime during the Achaemenid dynasty (559-330 BCE), the first of the three great Persian dynasties, the Magi, “dominated the religious scene, and the Ahura Mazda in their rites was not the preeminent figure of the Gathas.”⁵⁹ It is believed that in this period, the Yashts were composed and recorded. The Yashts resurrect the myriad of pagan ahuras that Zarathushtra rebelled against and stripped their titles from save Ahura Mazda.⁶⁰ There are also many references in the Yashts to animal sacrifice, a practice that Zarathushtra vehemently spoke against in the Gathas.⁶¹ The Magi returned the faith to much of its polytheistic pagan roots, and it remained as such through the Seleucid-Arsacid dynasty (312 BCE-226 CE) and into the beginning of the Sasanian dynasty (226-651 CE).⁶² During the reign of the Sasanids, the teachings of Zarathushtra and of his monotheism once again regained prominence in the faith. The polytheism that had sometimes even forgotten the name of the prophet (although not that of Ahura Mazda) now revered him once again, and many new myths elevating the prophet began to circulate.⁶³

However, the polytheism that the Magi had worked back into the faith could not be completely ousted. The Holy Immortal Ones of the Gathas that were merely “modes

⁵⁸ Ibid, 362.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 363.

⁶⁰ Zaehner, 14.

⁶¹ Ibid, 15.

⁶² Noss, 363.

⁶³ Ibid.

of divine action” were now archangels, and about forty other popular deities now became angels—the greatest of whom was Mithra.⁶⁴ It was during this time that the doctrine of evil was so intensely developed that the faith almost reached the “complete ethical dualism” that many scholars today still refer to it as. Instead of either being eliminated, magic and ritual were also made a place for during this time. The Vendidad provided instruction to counteract ceremonial impurity by using the prophet’s writings in the Gathas as mantras (Vedic mantras).⁶⁵ This is quite contrary to the moral and ethical instruction of Zarathushtra’s teachings. Also according to the Vendidad that was written at this time, the greatest source of defilement was the human dead—so much so that they are not even allowed to enter the earth, lest they defile her.⁶⁶ The corpse would also pollute the water and the sacred flame, so it cannot even be burned on a pyre. Thus, the Zoroastrians have towers of silence. This long lost era clearly shifted the focus from Zarathushtra’s ethical battle of good thoughts, words, and deeds to one of ceremonial purity and then almost back again to one of good versus evil.

As mentioned earlier, the surviving Zoroastrianism of today is most reminiscent of the “Pahlavi Books.” These are the books of the theology of the later Sasanian period as the spirit of the Gathas was returned to Zoroastrianism. They are called so because the language in which they were written is arbitrarily call “Pahlavi,” but it is in fact a dialect of Middle Persian.⁶⁷ The evidence suggests, however, that these books were not actually written down until after the Muslim invasion of 651 CE.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Ibid, 364

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Zaehner, 11.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

The rituals that were in place at the writing that had been reintroduced by the Achaemenid Magi (albeit altered by the Sasanian Magi) have survived to the present today. The last of the Sasanian rulers was overrun in 651 CE by invading Muslims, and the religion of the three great Iranian Empires was nearly immediately conquered along with it.⁶⁹ Although extant, Zoroastrianism was forever changed.

⁶⁹ Noss, 369.

The Zoroastrians: The Bahdinan and The Parsis

Almost a millennium prior to the Puritan's pilgrimage to the New World, the Zoroastrians of Persia began to flee their native country and its new religious persecutions for a tolerable land. The majority who chose to flee eventually settled in India, and they became known as the "Parsis," meaning "from Persia." Those who chose to stay in Persia began to call themselves "Zardushtians" (Zoroastrians) or "Bahdinan" (those of the good religion). The Arab Muslims also gave them a new name: "Gabars," loosely meaning "infidels."

The Bahdinan

Unfortunately, the Bahdinan's persecutions had just begun. After several generations of Islam taking hold and Persian children being raised in the faith of Muhammad, Persian Muslims now took over the persecutions of the Zoroastrians from their Arab conquerors. According to Mary Boyce, "the ninth and tenth centuries have been called the Persian intermezzo, 'between the Arabs and the Turks.'"⁷⁰ The Seljuk Turks conquered all of Iran in the early part of the eleventh century, and once settled they passionately embraced Islam.⁷¹ After the Turks, the Mongols universally slaughtered Muslim, Zoroastrian, Jew, and Christian alike as they made their way across the land

⁷⁰ Boyce, 161.

⁷¹ Ibid.

conquering the Seljuks and all that they held.⁷² This was the greatest blow thus far to the followers of Zarathushtra who decided to stay in the home country.

The Mongol conqueror, Ghazan Khan, eventually converted to Islam and the Mongol converts were replenishing the Muslims numbers that they so carelessly slaughtered less than half a century before.⁷³ To the Bahdinan this only meant more persecutions at the hands of the newly converted. Not willing to leave their homeland the Bahdinan did the next best thing and sought refuge in the remotest parts of Persia that had the greatest natural borders: Yazd and Kerman. Who was left of their high priests took up residence in ordinary village homes, and the sacred fires that they had rescued they now kept in small mud houses so to be indistinguishable and left alone in poverty.⁷⁴ Even this was not far enough away to stave off the persecutions of the faithful, which continued for the next several centuries.

In 1587, Iran Shah Abbas the Great took the throne and ruled until 1628.⁷⁵ He had, in 1608, Zoroastrians from Yazd and Kerman brought to this capital to work as laborers.⁷⁶ He settled them in a suburb of about 3,000 houses of poverty so that they might labor about Isfahan, and life for the Bahdinan only became worse. Abbas II (1642-67) wanted their suburb for a new pleasure resort so he moved all of them to a new quarter outside of the city walls. Under the last Safavid king (Abbas the Great was the first Safavid king), Sultan Husayn (1694-1722), a decree was signed soon after he took power to forcibly convert the Bahdinan to Islam. A few who neither converted at sword

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid, 162.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 163.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 177.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

point nor “stained the river with their blood” escaped.⁷⁷ The Yazdi region still houses families to this day who trace their descent from these escapees.

In 1719, the Afghans invaded and slaughtered almost all of the men, women, and children who had no protection outside the city walls.⁷⁸ Seven years after the Afghans overthrew the Safavids, the Qajars overthrew the Afghans. Nadir Kuli proclaimed himself shah, laid waste to Iran, and two years later invaded India. In 1747 he was assassinated, and one of his “kind and just” captains took power.⁷⁹ Karim Khan Zand reigned from 1750 to 1779, and granted the Bahdinan instant relief from the jizya burden (tax for not being Muslim) that had not changed since the Afghan massacre.⁸⁰ The Zand dynasty unfortunately did not survive past 1796 when Qajar Agha Muhammad took Kerman violently as punishment for sheltering his enemy. He was proclaimed Shah and the Qajars ruled Iran again until 1925 from Tehran.⁸¹ It was during this epoch that the Irani Zoroastrian population plummeted to their lowest numbers. In 1854, a traveler from India recorded their numbers as 6658 in Yazd and its villages, 450 in Kerman and its villages, 50 in the capital of Tehran, and a few in Shiraz.⁸² This was a shock from the millions that used to make up the old empires.

This Parsi traveler, Manekji Limji Hataria, chose to stay in Iran and lobbied for the rights of the Bahdinan. Although most victories were small and slow forthcoming, he did manage to have the jizya completely abolished in 1882.⁸³ This aid that began to flow in from the prosperous Parsis allowed the Bahdinan an opportunity out of poverty

⁷⁷ Ibid, 182.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 191.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid, 210.

⁸³ Ibid.

and into industrious, honest commerce like their brethren in India. Not only did the Bahdinan advance monetarily, but politically as well with the establishment of the first parliament in 1906. For it was a Bahdinan who not only fought for the parliament, but was also one of its first elected: Jamshid Bahman Jamshidian.⁸⁴

In 1925, the Parliament, “the Majles,” enthroned Reza Khan, the prime minister of the last Qajar (whom they ousted), set out to modernize Iran, and unite the country via its heritage of an empirical past. National pride and identity were established in various places, the least of which not being Zoroastrian names for the months of the new solar calendar. Ibrahim Pur-Davud was championing interest in the old faith of Iran along with interest in the old empires. Although he was born a Muslim, he espoused that Iran would do best to “abandon a philosophy of submission to fate” and adopt one instead of a struggle between good and evil.⁸⁵ Most Bahdinan overtime moved to Tehran where the jobs and industry were, and as westernization grew in the country, prejudice declined, and security increased. This “renaissance” allowed their numbers to grow once again to about 30-35,000, mostly concentrated in the capital city.⁸⁶

In 1979, The Pahlavi regime of 1925 came to an abrupt end with the Muslim revolution that overthrew the Shah of Iran and established the Islamic Republic.⁸⁷ The Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini installed a strict Islamic rule over the country, and many Bahdinan fled to the West for fear of persecutions once again returning to pre-1925

⁸⁴ Ibid, 219.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 220.

⁸⁶ Shahin Bekhradnia, “History of Zoroastrianism,” New Statesman, The Faith Column [magazine online] posted 12 January 2007, accessed 19 November 2007; available from <http://www.newstatesman.com/200701120001>.

⁸⁷ Lewis M. Hopfe (1935-1992), Religions of the World, 9th ed. revised by Mark R. Woodward (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson, 2005), 236.

conditions. Prejudice and harassment have indeed returned, and the number of faithful Zoroastrians in Iran has once again plummeted to about 10-15,000 today.⁸⁸

The Parsis

The first emigrants from Persia were from a small town called Sarjan in southwestern Khorasan, and they traveled south to Hormuzd, a port city on the Persian Gulf.⁸⁹ From there, the migrants eventually traveled overseas, and according to Parsi tradition, landed first on the island of Div, stayed for nineteen years, and then traveled to the city of Gujarat in 936 CE.⁹⁰ There they decided to stay.

As remote and inconspicuous as the communities of Yazd and Kerman were at this time, there is evidence that links were retained between the two groups via letters. The Parsis founded a small settlement on the seashore of Gujarat and named it Sanjan after their hometown in Khorasan.⁹¹ They eventually adopted Gujarati as their native language and began dressing in traditional Indian garb with a few subtle differences. The Parsis were successful in their settlements, and they grew along the coast of India. Although the Parsis through the twelfth to fourteenth centuries suffered various persecutions from warring Muslims, they still managed to prosper and grow in numbers. They have even been called the Jews of India.

Letters preserved from the fifteenth century show that losing their native tongue of Middle Persian did not prevent the Parsis from maintaining orthodox doctrine and asking advice on such issues as exact rituals and ceremonies from their brethren in Persia (the Persians at this time even began to send the Parsis supplies of the hom plant to make

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Boyce, 157.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid, 166.

the sacred haoma juice).⁹² In addition to receiving letters over the centuries, the Parsis also received visiting priests and a steady trickle of more Bahdinan who chose to flee Iran.

Fleeing to India did not however free the Parsis from persecution. In the sixteen century, the Portuguese rounded the Cape of Good Hope and decided to make trouble for the Gujaratis. Over a half of a century later, Emperor Akbar, a Mughal, defeated the Portuguese, their pirates, and the Roman Catholic missionaries that they had brought with them. It is written the Emperor Akbar dealt so graciously with the Parsis that this would mark a true beginning of prosperity for them. Additionally, he proved to be quite beneficial to them. He took away the jizya and granted freedom of worship to all. This allowed the Parsis not only to flourish, but also to record their successes. Moreover, when more Europeans began to rival the Portuguese in trade along the coast of India, the Parsis were as eager as their Hindu neighbors to be employees of the Europeans and had an especial liking taken to them by the British Government.

There is also evidence that in 1720, Parsis in Surat invited a priest from Kerman, Dastur Jamasp Vilayati to settle disputes about funeral rites.⁹³ He did, and then proceeded to address issues of the calendars of the Irani and Indian Zoroastrians, as they had now become a month different since the pilgrimage. In 1746, a Surati group of priests and laymen decided that the Irani calendar, the “Qadimi,” or “ancient one,” should be adopted.⁹⁴ Thus began the first signs of disunity in the faith that were not merely geographical. The Qadimi movement was small, yet staunch enough to retain a bitter dispute against their rivals, the “Rasimis,” or “traditionalists,” for a least a century.

⁹² Ibid, 173.

⁹³ Ibid, 189.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Although the calendar issue eventually faded, some of the feelings of anger were now being directed against the Bahdinan, who, after this were no longer looked to for counsel regarding matters of the faith.

As the Parsi population grew, matters of the faith were also not solely sought resolution for with the high priests; more and more laymen were now deciding matters for themselves. In 1728, a “Parsi Panchayat” was constituted as essentially a council of elders in Bombay with no priest listed as one of the nine founding members.⁹⁵ (The Panchayats—a common Hindu term—were encouraged by the East India Company for each ethnic group in the area so that they might govern themselves and the company would not have to.) The eighteenth century Panchayat tried to uphold the strict morality of the faith in such issues as marriage, divorce, burial rites, purity laws, and celebration of feasts. They ruled against accepting “juddins” (those of another religion) and against allowing children of Parsi fathers and Hindu mothers into the faith. The Panchayat remained a “considerable authority” throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and its approval is still sought after today.⁹⁶ With the help of secularization and Western education gaining popularity, this authority in the hands of the laymen also helped change the perception of the priestly class from one of the most learned to one of the ignorant and poor. The Parsi middle class began to gain great fortunes of wealth while their priests continued to live off the unchanged income that they received from the rituals that they performed for the laity.

Also in the nineteenth century, Nairobi Feerdoonji established the “Young Bombay Party” and the “Rahnumai Mazdayasnan Sabha” (Zoroastrian Reform Society)

⁹⁵ Ibid, 192.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 193.

in 1851.⁹⁷ His intent was to “fight orthodoxy” that he saw as holding back the Parsi community from “progress and civilization.”⁹⁸ It was mostly the middle class who readily accepted the call for social change and advancement. The loudest of these voices wanted the simple monotheism that Zoroaster preached—with virtually no rituals—to be the way to which the community should return. The debate between the reformers and conservatives spawned a new calling on both sides for an educated priesthood. This priesthood would become one not only based on traditional education of sacred texts but also based on new science emerging from Europe called philology.

As Westernization progressed in India and the British Government completely took control over the East India Company, subtle new changes took hold in the Bombay Parsi community. Bombay grew into a bustling metropolis, her people of all ethnicities now had equal opportunity to rise in wealth and stature, and ethnic neighborhoods were no longer the norm. Consequently, the Zoroastrians of a certain geographical area did not live in an immediate community. They were dispersed into different neighborhoods all over Bombay. While religiously they still acted as one, socially they began to separate. They all still celebrated the same gahambar, but now rather than rich and poor all dining together at one large community festival, the religious festivals were reduced to friendly social dinners with people of the same income level. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, women were also now attending the gahambar. Women were also being educated equally at their own schools and taking part in other aspects of public life.

As the nineteenth century grew to a close, Bombay was no longer a unique community for the Parsis, and the Parsi Panchayat had become a model for many other

⁹⁷ Ibid, 200.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

community councils. By this time, the functions of the Panchayat (or Anjoman, the Persian term) had become more of a religious trustee for the people. It took in funds and then disbursed them for the needs of others in the community such as, “relief from poverty, assistance with education, providing medical care, housing, and other social needs.”⁹⁹ As new communities were founded, so too new Anjomans soon followed with the funding, blueprints, and connections provided by the Parsi Panchayat. By the late nineteenth century, it is estimated that there were about 120 local Anjomans in India (with as many dakhmas).¹⁰⁰ By this time, Tehran also had a functioning Anjoman that paralleled the Bombay Panchayat.

The year 1947 saw the first great wave of Parsi emigrants to the West (mostly to England, Canada, and the United States) as British rule in India came to an end, and the Parsis of Karachi, Lahore, and Quetta became citizens of the Islamic nation of Pakistan.¹⁰¹ These roughly 5000 Parsis were now also forced to learn Urdu in preference to Gujarati.¹⁰² Consensus show the total Parsi Indian population from 1941 to 1991 steadily decline from 114,490 to 76,382.¹⁰³ Thus in a mere fifty years, the Parsis of India have lost almost 33.3% of their community. In addition to emigrating to the West, Parsi death rates are vastly exceeding their birth rates. Moreover, as independent India becomes more secular, Parsi women are being more educated and gainfully employed and at a higher rate than their Indian compatriots. Consequently, they are marrying later, marrying less, and having fewer children. Wars, defeats, and forced conversions aside,

⁹⁹ Ibid, 208.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 209.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 223.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Hinnells, 45.

secularization may very well prove to be the end of Zoroastrianism as the world has known it for millennia.

CHAPTER THREE

TENETS CAUSING DEBATE AND DISUNITY

Who is a Zoroastrian? What do Zoroastrians do? Who are allowed to call themselves Zoroastrians and by whose authority? In addition, where exactly is the authority located? These are the difficult questions facing today's Zoroastrians worldwide. Unfortunately, members of the faith around the world cannot reach a consensus to any of these questions. Additionally, until any of these tenets are resolved, the looming issue of their dwindling membership cannot be addressed.

For instance, a Zoroastrian woman who chooses to marry outside of her faith, to some, can no longer call herself a Zoroastrian regardless of the fact she still considers herself a Zoroastrian, still faithfully prays, and still keeps her rituals. She would also like to teach her children the ways of her faith that she feels they are entitled to by blood, but others say no. Her husband might also wish to join her faith community. Some welcome him; others shun him. Additionally, there is a man born in America—of Caucasian blood and Christian parents—who wishes to become a member of the Zoroastrian faith community. He makes his interests known to a group of Zoroastrian priests who wish to reform their faith, and they perform his “naojote” (initiation ceremony). Not least of all, there is a Hispanic man in the library of his university reading about the teachings of the Prophet Zarathushtra. Believing in the teachings of the prophet but not in the rituals of

the tradition, he joins a small “Zarathushtrian” community and boldly professes his faith in the teachings of the prophet found in the Gathas only. Who are the Zoroastrians, and who are not?

Due to the diasporic nature of the faith, the answers to and the intensity of these questions vary around the world. According to John Hinnells, the Parsi Zoroastrians seem to focus on three core issues that are at the center of this debate: “community boundaries, preservation of traditions, and the demographic problem.”¹⁰⁴ All of these issues overlap and are related, and I believe they are but mere sub-categories of a larger issue that exists on the global scale and may collectively be considered as one major argument for the preservation of the faith: to convert or not to convert.¹⁰⁵ These issues—if resolved—would help not to only answer the difficult questions but also to curb the current wave of disunity and allow for organization and growth.

Community Boundaries

Because many Zoroastrians are “twice or thrice” migrants, it is feasible and appropriate to speak of Zoroastrians as being in diaspora.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, defining community boundaries becomes even more difficult. If a community is made up of a group of people who are scattered all over the world with no shared physical boundaries, then community boundaries can be reduced to a mere “us versus them” mentality. For the majority of Zoroastrians worldwide, the “us” are those born into the faith and the “them”

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 137.

¹⁰⁵ Conversion in this argument is in no way an argument for proselytism. Zoroastrians only consider the argument for those who come forth of their own volition and ask to join the faith.

¹⁰⁶ Hinnells, 699.

are everyone else.¹⁰⁷ Few boundaries, however, are rigid and impermeable, and not all Zoroastrians agree with these boundaries.

Gender and community/economic status have allowed decisions to be made inconsistently about the faith of others by the same priests. Zoroastrian men who become “intermarries” are allowed to stay active in the faith and continue their rites and rituals more often than Zoroastrian women who marry outside of their faith. Community politics are even affected by this perception as intermarried Zoroastrian women can no longer vote in matters of the Bombay Parsi Panchayet. Traditionally, the offspring of Zoroastrian men and non-Zoroastrian women are also still considered Zoroastrian “by blood” whereas the children of Zoroastrian women who have intermarried are not. There were two mass-initiation ceremonies of offspring recorded (one in 1882 and the other in 1942), that accepted the children of Zoroastrian fathers and non-Zoroastrian mothers—eleven members and seventy-seven members respectively.¹⁰⁸ Yet in 1915 when a girl named Bella who was born of a Parsi mother and non-Parsi father had her *naojote* ceremony and entered a temple, a court case ensued.¹⁰⁹ These are the “traditions” by which the Orthodox argue their case. Over-stepping boundaries continue, oppositions persist, and privileges are bestowed—but not equally.

Merely marrying outside of the faith has stripped many women of their privileges and their rights to count themselves among the Zoroastrian membership. In 1990, Roxan Shah was killed in car accident, so her Parsi-Zoroastrian parents wished a *dokhma* funeral for her.¹¹⁰ The trustees of the Bombay Parsi Panchayet refused their request because

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 14.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 121.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 125.

Roxan had married outside of the community even though she continued to practice her religion and was married under the Special Marriages Act of 1954.¹¹¹ The BPP even recognized that other intermarried women in the past had been allowed a Dokmenashni (and its fault thereof).

The inconsistencies of the decisions sparked thirty-two intermarried women to write to the BPP to ensure that upon their death they would receive a dokhma funeral. Inevitably, intermarried women rallied and organized and began fighting for the return of their rights. In 1991, they formally established the Association of Intermarried Zoroastrians, and in 1992, they held their first meeting.¹¹² By 1996, they began publication of their newsletter, *Aavedan*, and by 1998, their membership claimed fifty-seven full female members, twenty-one full male members, fifty spouses, and a supporting group of seventy-four.¹¹³ Most of their support and praise comes from the West.

Conversely, when J. R. D. Tata died in Switzerland in 1993 an Orthodox priest from London performed the “gehsarna” (the first part of the Zoroastrian funeral) and sent the body to Bombay where two high priests and ten other priests performed the “uthamna” (the fourth-day ceremony for his soul) before it was laid to rest in a Parsi mausoleum. Not only was J. R. D. Tata the offspring of an intermarriage, but he had married out of the community. He was also a wealthy industrialist and philanthropist.

¹¹¹ Ibid. The Special Marriages Act of 1954 is an Indian law that states if you marry outside of your religion, you cannot be forced to give up the faith of your birth. Orthodox Zoroastrian priests counter by saying that marriage in their faith is a sacrament, and although they accept the civil union as legal, they do not accept it as sacramental, and Zoroastrians who consummate a marriage with a non-Zoroastrian can no longer be considered “pure.”

¹¹² Ibid, 132.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Another wealthy industrialist Parsi family who resided in Switzerland, the Wadias, caused much debate within the community. Sir Ness Wadia, born a Parsi, married a Christian woman and converted to Christianity. Their son, Sir Neville Wadia, was therefore born of Christian parents and baptized into the Christian faith. Sir Neville Wadia married the daughter of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. So, when his son, Nusli was born, he was born of a Christian father and a Muslim mother. In 1994, much later in life than the usual fifteen years, Neville Wadia received a naojote—as did his son, Nusli, one year later.¹¹⁴ Sir Neville Wadia was also granted a Zoroastrian funeral. What is most disturbing about this case is not that the Wadia gentlemen wanted to convert to the religion of their ancestors, but that the most outspoken High Priest Dastur Kotwal against Roxan Shah having a dokhma funeral was the very one who permitted the Wadia family their myriad of rites of passage.¹¹⁵ Consistency of community boundaries was amiss.

Many members of the faith might not have given much thought to the issue of the conversion for people other than the spouses or children of intermarried Zoroastrians or to the issue of community boundaries prior to March 5, 1983. On that fateful Saturday, Joseph Peterson, a Caucasian American born of Christian parents, was given a naojote ceremony and was converted to the faith by four Zoroastrian priests.¹¹⁶ Kersey Antia, the high priest of a suburban Chicago fire temple and Noshir Hormuzdyar, the Senior New York priest, took the lead and blasted a hole in the perceived wall of the Zoroastrian community boundary. Although much debate and controversy followed, there is no

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 130.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 478.

hierarchical body within the faith that can officially deny that Joseph Peterson is a Zoroastrian. There are only opinions.

Preservation of Traditions

As mentioned earlier, a shift in the perception of authority first happened in the late 1800's from the Bahdinan of Iran to the Parsis of Bombay. For quite some time, the Parsis have been able to maintain their position and opinions of council, but the wave of post-independent Indian emigrants slowly began to change that perception. Faced with the new challenges of Western culture, Parsis in the West and elsewhere around the world are forced to make adjustments to their religion by their own authority, and it has just not been possible for some traditions to be kept, e.g. Dokmenashni. It is not possible to have a Dokmenashni without a dokhma, and there are no dokhmas in North America. Consequently, Zoroastrians who have emigrated to such countries as Great Britain, the United States and Australia, have had to vote within their immediate communities to accept other forms of corpse disposal such as cremation and burial within concrete chambers.

Other traditions of the faith have not been static either. When the first Persian emigrants landed in India, the naojote ceremony was traditionally performed at age fifteen. It eventually was changed to age seven, which reflects the effects of Hinduism in that religions are social and changes in tradition do happen.¹¹⁷ Loss of tradition happens as well. Perhaps the biggest and most important tradition that globalization and secularization are threatening right now in the Zoroastrian faith is that of the priesthood.

¹¹⁷ Boyce, 184.

The dwindling priesthood has been felt a problem for the faith since the mid-1800's.¹¹⁸ As the Parsis progressed under British rule, so did their desire for greater material earnings. With the priesthood's, "repetitive work, relative meager income, and dwindling community standing," fewer sons desired their inherited calling.¹¹⁹ Even in Mumbai their numbers are dwindling. In addition, most of the priests that have migrated to the West did so for secular careers although they found themselves working as part-time priests. Additionally, when they arrived, they found pressures from various sources to make the rituals, "shortened, modified, and more meaningful to the new environment."¹²⁰ With fewer and fewer priests to officiate ceremonies, many are simply not being performed, i.e. there are several rituals that traditionally require more than one priest. This is stressing the traditions of the priesthood in other arenas: does the priesthood have to be hereditary? This question was posed to the 1982 Montreal Congress by senior Chicago priest Kersey Antia.¹²¹

Likewise, if there are not enough priests around the world to perform necessary rituals for the communities, then are certainly not enough to teach potential millions of converts the proper traditions and exact rituals of being a Zoroastrian. Dilution is expressed as the greatest fear of the orthodox. They are afraid that if converts are allowed not only their Persian bloodline but also their practices will be diluted.¹²² Orthodox Zoroastrians would rather Zoroastrianism not be visible than not look like the Zoroastrianism that they have known throughout their lifetimes. Thus, they oppose intermarriage and conversion vehemently in the name of preserving their traditions.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 202.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Hinnells, 469.

¹²¹ Ibid, 471.

¹²² Ibid, 474.

Many of the extreme reformists are ready to do away with the rituals altogether, and live by the teachings of the prophet as found in the Gathas only. There is, in fact, an entire community in southern California and elsewhere around the globe who call themselves “Zarathushtrians” who have done just that. Although this community is led by a former Muslim, Ali Jafrey (who receives much criticism) being far away from Mumbai makes his efforts much easier. The internet also makes it much easier for him and his followers to argue their positions against traditions and rituals. The audience is also global.

The Demographic Problem

There is no doubt that moving into a global society is stressing the Zoroastrian religion in the areas of community boundaries, traditions, and demography. Iran lost its sense of authority to Bombay, and that is currently being challenged by the diaspora. Although most major diasporic Zoroastrian communities have already established a local association, those living in the diaspora have been feeling the need for quite some time to create a type of bond with their co-religionists around the globe. They desire a world body that will link them all together for support and assistance.

Since the first World Congress in 1962, like pleas have originated from various locations around the world urging the BPP to establish an organization headquartered in Bombay for the benefit of all Zoroastrians worldwide.¹²³ Proposals and appeals followed at each subsequent World Congress. After eighteen years of being ignored, “seventeen people from Britain, four from Iran, two from India, two from the United States, and one from Canada,” held the first meeting of the World Zoroastrian Organization on July 18,

¹²³ Ibid, 606.

1980¹²⁴ at the Zoroastrian House in London, and no longer looked to India as their source of religious authority.¹²⁵ The vision of the founders of the WZO was to have a grass roots, democratic organization that truly feels the pulse of the people worldwide. Consequently, individuals as well as Anjumans and Associations were invited to join. Almost immediately, the BPP saw its authority being challenged and began its opposition campaign. The arguments for and against the WZO continue to today despite the successes of global assistance for needy members of the faith. Its largest support comes from mainly outside India, and the BPP and other more Orthodox oriented followers do not wish to be associated with the WZO because some of the WZO's member associations allow for intermarriage and conversion. Consequently, although there has been a world body established (and it has grown), it has not been allowed to be as representative of the global community as it wished at founding.

Globalization, however, does not have to be all damning. Yes, communities are scattered, but the technology of recent years has allowed these communities to keep better contact and to exchange ideas and concerns. They can even exchange themselves. For those Zoroastrians who choose to keep the traditions of their ancestors, finding that corresponding spouse has gotten easier. There are at least two “singles registry” websites for Zoroastrians looking for potential mates of the same religion:

<http://matrimonial.zoroastrainism.com> and www.theParsiMatch.com. On the orthodox www.Zoroastrianism.com website, there are also the names and telephone numbers of thirteen matchmakers (in Mumbai) listed—if assistance is so desired. The majority of the

¹²⁴ Ibid. The founding members decided they could wait no longer for the BPP to act when the Shah was overthrown in Iran in 1979. One of their first orders of business was to aid Iranian Zoroastrians with refugee status in the West, and to plea to the new government to treat the existing community justly.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 607.

singles registered, however, are in the hub of Mumbai, and it is more difficult for those who do not live there to find a spouse of the same religion. Finding that Zoroastrian partner also requires enough desire and belief to adhere to calling of the orthodox ways. More and more Zoroastrians are preferring to marry for love versus the preservation of the faith.¹²⁶

There is far more to do on Zoroastrian websites than potentially finding a mate. One can get daily prayer devotions and instruction, and one can find the date on all three different Zoroastrian calendars. One can find sacred texts that have been posted, translated, and even interpreted. Not least of all, one can debate. Although most sites do clearly make known whether they fall into the traditional or liberal category, discussion sites and/or chat rooms are where the real arguments emerge over how members feel about such issues as intermarriage, conversion, and the preservation of the race. There are also directories of Zoroastrians worldwide so that businesses and professionals may be patronized, and most Anjumans/Associations have their own websites that tell others about their community. Due to the generally higher educated status of the Zoroastrian community on the global scale, it is no surprise how well the internet is used as a tool for the advancement of the faith and all the arguments therein.

Conversion

Although many worldwide would like to convert to the faith of Zoroastrianism and many inside the faith would like to allow them, the numbers of followers are dwindling every year, and the faith faces extinction. Since the death toll is outnumbering the birth rate almost six to one (in Mumbai), the current leading source of concern

¹²⁶ I have seen varying statistics on the issue of inter-marriages—from 1 out of 4 in Mumbai to 1 out of 10 in the diaspora marry out of the community.

worldwide in the Zoroastrian faith is membership numbers.¹²⁷ Whether or not to allow converts from the offspring of intermarriages, the willing spouses, those of Persian blood of another faith, or even those from completely outside the traditional community boundaries is the great question. From the outside perspective, it would seem that allowing converts would be the simple answer to keep the Zoroastrian population from inevitable demise. Nevertheless, it is not that simple to many of those within the faith. The more liberal members debate that conversion is allowed by the teachings of Zarathushtra, while the more orthodox members argue that it is not allowed by tradition, and only those of Persian blood born into the community can be a Zoroastrian. Unfortunately, history tells a convoluted story.

According to Mary Boyce, although Zarathushtra professed his vision of a great world faith meant for everyone, by the time the religion reached western Iran (and recorded history), it had come to be regarded by the Iranian peoples as part of their racial heritage.¹²⁸ This, however, has not prevented conversion from happening. During the mid Sasanian period, it is written that King Vahram V gave his Indian princess bride to the high priest so that she might undergo the purification ceremony and then be converted.¹²⁹ King Khosrow of the later Sasanian period also allowed for a group of invading Turks who voluntarily surrendered to be converted “provided they were instructed and willing converts.”¹³⁰ Even though fleeing Persia and becoming a caste of their own within a larger Hindu society only strengthened the notion of Zoroastrianism being a religion for those of Persian blood, it did not prevent Parsis from historically taking converts. As late

¹²⁷ Hinnells, 49.

¹²⁸ Boyce, 47.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 124.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 134.

as the fifteenth century, letters exchanged between the Bahdinan and Parsi communities demonstrate Parsis consulting their Iranian brethren on whether or not to allow their Hindu servants who wished to convert into the faith.¹³¹ The Bahdinan responded positively.

Conversions in India were common, but they only seemed to receive much opposition when they were made quite public. John Hinnells tells of two cases that were not only made public due to the conversions, but also due to the subsequent lawsuits. In 1906, J. R. D. Tata and his French bride, Suzanne Briere, along with several other Parsi dignitaries filed suit to fight for “properly initiated” persons to be recognized as Zoroastrians, and receive full benefits thereof, e.g. temple access and a dokhma funeral.¹³² At about the same time, a Rajput woman of very ill health married a Zoroastrian and declared she also wanted a dokhma funeral. Since the two women did not appear and state their claims in court, it was decided that their claims “could not be judged.”¹³³ Although no ruling was made, prior to the cases ever going to a court of law a committee was formed to determine the case. When its subcommittee researched the issue and found that upon arriving in India the Zoroastrian immigrants had accepted converts, the report was blocked from publication and dispersion.¹³⁴ Consequently, the lawsuits were filed.

Most orthodox members do not concern themselves with speaking gently when they assert that they do not want converts because they want to keep their religion “racial pure” by only allowing those of Persian blood. Yet there are entire communities of

¹³¹ Ibid, 174.

¹³² Hinnells, 118.

¹³³ Ibid, 119.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 118.

Yazidis and Kurds who, since the 1960's have been claiming to be Zoroastrians by Persian blood.¹³⁵ More recent archaeological finds also show that communities in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and other small pockets of Russia can claim authenticity of Persian blood (and Zoroastrian heritage), and they also want to convert to the faith of their ancestors. Allowing these communities into the Zoroastrian fold would exponentially increase the number of followers from the thousands to the “millions.” The orthodox Parsi community, regardless, is not interested in allowing them to join their ranks.¹³⁶ As mentioned earlier, the orthodox members of the faith claim tradition as well as blood as their reasons to not accept converts. Not only do they want to remain “racially” pure, but they also are concerned with converts not keeping their traditions properly—if they keep them at all.

Although Zoroastrians after Zarathushtra have never been proselytic, conversions have taken place throughout history, and although there have been many protests and even a few law suits, conversions, in reality, cannot be stopped. There have never been any written mandates against it in the sacred scriptures, and no official governing body has ever been created to deal with such issues. Therefore, conversions can be reduced to the preference of the priest. Whether or not to grant these converts access to rituals also seems to be a preference.

It is this very difference of preference that is dividing the adherents of Zoroastrianism into clear liberal and orthodox branches. The orthodox find support for their position from traditions that were instilled by the Magi long after Zarathushtra. Recognizing this, many liberals want to take the religion back to the teachings of

¹³⁵ Ibid, 9.

¹³⁶ <http://tenets.zoroastrianism.com/deen33f.html>

Zarathushtra and the Gathas exclusively. The community is split as to how exactly it will be able to come together in order to progress.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

Migrating from India, Pakistan, and Iran into a global diaspora has put Zoroastrianism on the defensive from Western culture, secularization and even other faiths. Christianity and Islam are of particular concern due to their evangelical and what Zoroastrians consider to be zealous nature. Zoroastrians admittedly are not as outwardly zealous as Christians and Muslims, and Zoroastrians are not at all proselytic. Likewise, Secularization poses a threat of refocusing the authority and importance of the lives of the membership on other things. In addition, Zoroastrians do not congregate for worship with their co-religionists on a regular basis unlike their neighbors of other faiths. Most of their worship is done at home which positions them as easy targets for secularization. They gather for festival celebrations and special ceremonies provided there is somewhere [available] for them to meet and someone willing and able to officiate. The sacred spaces of the religion are fire temples, and they are the usual locations for festivals and ceremonies. Fire temples, however, are sparse—especially outside of India.

Lack of communal worship is not the only factor that is giving secularization an easy grip on the religion; lack of religious authority is contributing as well. According to surveys done by John Hinnells, for most of the followers of the “good religion” who practice good thoughts, good words and good deeds, the highest religious authority to

which they answer is their own consciences.¹³⁷ Priests are not only dwindling in numbers, their secular careers are taking precedence in their lives. For instance, as of the year 2000, the Zoroastrian Center of Houston has twelve priests; all of them have full-time secular careers, and all of them volunteer their services to the community.¹³⁸ Even the twice-mentioned Kersey Antia, High Priest of the Suburban Chicago Fire Temple, has a full-time secular career as a psychotherapist. Full-time clergy are rare in the twenty-first century, especially in the West. There is also no hierarchal religious body that educates and “produces” priests (although there are schools). Priests are born into the calling, accept the meager ceremonial fees, and are educated if they choose to be. They do not have potential career paths with paid salaries, health benefits, or pensions like religious leaders in other faiths. Neither does there exist any religious authority of the Zoroastrian faith that mandates or outlines who can or cannot be a Zoroastrian. Some priests use tradition; some priests use preference. Consequently, the inconsistencies are dividing the faith into groups of followers with different needs and priorities, and the religion is losing its authority over its members. Steve Bruce and Helen Rose Ebaugh with Janet Saltzman Chafetz both provide sociological theories of religion that can account for the changes in membership and priorities of the Zoroastrian faith.

¹³⁷ Hinnells, 143.

¹³⁸ Ebaugh and Chafetz, 248.

Steve Bruce

In 2002 Steve Bruce published God is Dead: Secularization in the West and presented a summary of the standard sociological secularization paradigm in an attempt to explain that “modernization creates problems for religion” and why.¹³⁹ He holds that secularization is a social condition that is caused by the declining social significance of religion. In this theory, Bruce asserts that there are three interrelated issues: “the social importance of religion; the number of people who take it seriously, and how seriously anyone takes it.”¹⁴⁰ Bruce also clarifies that the paradigm does not require secularization to be universal or even and that it is not a single theory but a set of associated explanations.¹⁴¹ Additionally, what the theory does require is a long-term decline in the power, popularity, and prestige of religious beliefs and rituals.¹⁴²

Chapter Two of this thesis briefly discusses how the number of Zoroastrian followers has declined over its history from what was most likely in the millions during its empirical peak to less than 150,000 today. Yet it has been in the last sixty-seven years that the faith has lost a shocking number of followers as its adherents have moved into Western culture (which has even more recently become global). With no external government, persecution, war, acts of nature, or forced conversions of another faith to blame, the only explanation left is secularism. According to Bruce, as modernization

¹³⁹ Bruce, 2.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 3.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 43.

¹⁴² Ibid, 44.

changed Western culture from one that focused on society to one that focused on the individual, and the production of a society gave way to the consumption of an individual as a means of self-definition, the religion of one's community became less authoritative.¹⁴³ Although this is most evident from 1947 onward when India gained its independence, there are clear signs that the seeds of secularization had been planted as early as the beginnings of the East India Company's encouragement to establish the Panchayat. Furthermore, in the face of religious pluralism in Western culture, Zoroastrianism would not be defined as a "strong" religion. Bruce summarizes Dean Kelley's characterizations of strong religions by stating that those considered strong are those that not only view their beliefs as authoritative over their lives and lifestyles, but also require high commitment and high sacrifice.¹⁴⁴

As mentioned earlier, most of the Zoroastrian worship is done at home, alone, and not as part of a larger community. The community only gathers for special celebrations and festivals. However, prior to electricity commonly entering the home, a hearth fire that mimicked the sacred fires in the temples was the focal point of prayer. Some families now choose to light a small oil lamp, called a "div," in its place, but most fires have been extinguished. Zoroastrians in the diaspora are becoming religiously indifferent due to their lack of constant background affirmation of beliefs and lack of religious socialization compared to their brethren in India.

Reiterating the points of Chapter Three of this thesis, community boundaries, preservation of traditions, the demographic problem, and conversion are at the forefront of Zoroastrian concerns worldwide. As the priesthood of the faith decreases rapidly, so

¹⁴³ Ibid, 231.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 238.

does the sense of authority that the religion carries for its followers. The issue of community boundaries and who can and cannot be considered a follower is not defined in sacred scripture anywhere, and the preference of the priest is now giving way to the preference of the community. Conversions and the allowing of non-Zoroastrian attendees at ceremonies vary from community to community. Many traditions are not being preserved in the diaspora, which is yet another sign of the declining significance of the authority of the religious beliefs. Finally, the demographic problem is shifting the concerns of followers from that of the cosmic battle of good versus evil to that of the social concerns of the impact of Western culture.

Chapter Ten of John Hinnells' book discusses globalizing trends and the responses of surveys sent out around the globe. When given the choice among the three labels of Orthodox, Liberal, and non-practitioner, 14% of all Zoroastrians surveyed considered themselves non-practitioners with the diaspora, overall, considering itself Liberal (70%).¹⁴⁵ The three Western countries of Canada, USA, and Britain held the most members who were more likely to say that they were either Liberal or non-practicing.¹⁴⁶ Those who were also more likely to consider themselves non-practitioners are those who: have lived in the diaspora for less than one year, were under twenty-five years of age, were single or separated, had married out of the faith, were English-only readers, were post-graduates, had executive-level careers, and rarely met with other Zoroastrians.¹⁴⁷ Steve Bruce clarifies for us that most believers do not give up being committed to their

¹⁴⁵ Hinnells, 685.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 686-687.

religion because they become convinced that their faith is false; they become indifferent because their faith merely “ceases to be of any great importance to them.”¹⁴⁸

Although religious beliefs and practices may be losing their authority over the lifestyles of Zoroastrians, there remains a great struggle to keep it alive. Steve Bruce’s theory can account for this also. He states that if religion can find work to do “other than relating the individual to the supernatural,” it can still retain its social significance.¹⁴⁹ Zoroastrians strongly debate who can or cannot be a Zoroastrian because the religion helps to ethnically define them. Regardless of where in the world they might dwell today, they all consider themselves historically of Persian blood, and that consideration is a major determinant of their identity. The title “Zoroastrian” is not just religious; it is cultural, ethnic, and personal as well.

¹⁴⁸ Bruce, 235.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 30.

Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz

Most Zoroastrian communities in Western Cultures estimate that only half of the Zoroastrians in their area participate or have any contact with the association or community center.¹⁵⁰ Half still consider their faith to be important to their lives and lifestyles while half do not. Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz believe that for half of the immigrant Zoroastrians their religion has found other work to do for its followers: provide a community and provide reinforcement of its ethnic identity. As the Principal Investigator of the Religion, Ethnicity, and New Immigrants Research (RENIR) project, Ebaugh set out to “learn more about the religious communities formed or joined by new immigrants.”¹⁵¹ Ebaugh and Chafetz led field research in thirteen congregations over eighteen months—the Zoroastrian Association of Houston being one of them.¹⁵² They discovered that all religions exist in environments which they cannot control yet these environments still influence them, and that these environments offer both opportunities and constraints.¹⁵³ Ebaugh and Chafetz also discovered that regardless of how a religion’s brethren abroad function and structure themselves, adapting to Western culture requires immigrants to redefine their institutions in terms of not only as a

¹⁵⁰ Hinnells, 458.

¹⁵¹ Ebaugh and Chafetz, 5.

¹⁵² Ibid, 12.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 32.

congregation, but also as a community center.¹⁵⁴ These necessary adaptations are the main cause of disunity among Zoroastrians worldwide.

According to John Hinnells, these adaptations came quickly to the young Zoroastrian communities of North America (the USA and Canada) because they knew that they had come to stay and there was no “myth of return.”¹⁵⁵ Additionally, because they understood the need to provide a community for themselves and for their children, the highly-educated and professional members set to organizing and structuring their faith communities. They democratically elected lay boards and councils who have ultimate authority.¹⁵⁶ The founders also devoted their time and energy (not to mention money) into building a community, and in turn they became an essential of its operation and they feel as if they all “own” it.¹⁵⁷ As an example, the Zoroastrian Association of Houston was established in 1975, and the Zoroastrian Center opened its doors in 1998 without any full-time, employed priests.¹⁵⁸

Although only men are allowed to be priests, women—who were not so long ago barred from even the *gamhambars* in India—comprise half of the elected board members. Typical of most religions, women also ensure the religious education of the youth. They provide a sense of community by just being themselves. Cooking and serving traditional meals that are enjoyed by all reinforces not only a sense of community, but also one of ethnic identity.¹⁵⁹ The Zoroastrian Center in Houston hosts events centered around all of its ethnic people in an attempt to show solidarity in the faith. There are festivals such as

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 49.

¹⁵⁵ Hinnells, 541.

¹⁵⁶ Ebaugh and Chafetz, 50.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 52.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 243.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 80.

No Ruz that boasts Iranian food, music, and dance as well as other festivals for the Parsi and Pakistani groups that showcase their native food and culture.

Ethnic identity is also provided by the religious rituals held at the community centers. Life cycle events such as initiation ceremonies, weddings, and funerals are of great importance to the Zoroastrian communities. Since most of the worship is done at home, these events help to reiterate the religion. Simply socializing (with ethnic food, music, and dance) is also an event that reinforces ethnic identity. For instance, The Zoroastrian Center is the only location in Houston for Zoroastrians to do just that which contributes to the importance having the center for the Zoroastrian Association of Houston.¹⁶⁰

The ever-present number of women in the communities of the West is not the only noticeable difference to those abroad. The high numbers of non-Persian blood participants is a reality of Western cultures. The ever-present “inventory issue” of potential spouses in the West allows for more leniency of inter-marriages than in the East. Children of inter-marriages are also more readily accepted.

For the Zoroastrians of Western cultures, total exclusion equals religious suicide, and they know it. They also know that although change traditionally comes slowly for those of the good religion, they do not have the luxury of time to broaden the horizons of their faith if they are going to win the battle against secularization.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 89.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Before there can be disunity, there must have been unity. At some point in history, racial purity must have become an issue of greater concern to the Zoroastrians, but no one is really certain of when that was. Today there is no shortage of debates and proposals about who is and is not a Zoroastrian. These debates rage on the internet, at conferences, in new letters, and even in person, and they are global in scope. Throughout this thesis I have examined the evolution of Zoroastrianism over time as it has related to its diminishing membership. I have shown that although historically the followers had little control over their losses, from the twentieth century and beyond, they have had almost total control, yet their numbers still decline. I have also focused on the current issues that the membership is claiming as reasons for disunity. Furthermore, I have evaluated the decline and disunity using the sociological theories of Bruce and Ebaugh and Chafetz.

In order to survive globalization and secularization I believe that the Zoroastrian faith world wide must complete three more steps on its journey:

1. Introspection—recognize and acknowledge cultural needs across the globe without either imposing ones own culture or restricting another. Followers of the faith worldwide must honestly recognize and acknowledge that their

different locations around the globe do not illicit similar responses to the cultures at large and they must allow each other to act accordingly for the sake of preserving the faith.

2. Definition—provide a comprehensive and agreeable umbrella definition to include all Zoroastrians that recognizes the common religiosity that focuses neither on the cultures or the nationalities of its members and organize on a global scale. Being honest about the origins of traditions is also necessary. Zoroastrians all over the globe must be included and accounted for under one faith. Brethren in different cultures need to be included and supported by everyone.
3. Clarification—decide which is more important and worth preserving for a global society: a Persian bloodline (that is also shared with Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Ba’hai) or the teachings of the Prophet Zarathushtra about a cosmic battle of good versus evil that requires a global commitment of justice over injustice. The world needs to see Zoroastrians as a unified force of the ethical religion that it claims to be—not one that is tearing itself to pieces over labels.

If the Zoroastrians can organize on a global level then secularization does not have to kill the faith, or it does not have to become secularized, and the Zoroastrians may continue the good fight against evil. Currently, this fight is clearly not about religion. It is about pride, power, and prejudice. Zoroastrians do not have to proselytize to add to their numbers and potentially reverse or at least slow the decline. Allowing interested spouses

and children of inter-marriages to convert into the folds of the faith would not only increase numbers, but could also potentially increase the extent to which members are faithful. Taking seriously the desires of the masses of Persian blood who wish to return to the faith of their ancestors will also change the statistics. Accepting those of other races is also necessary to present a unified faith to the world.

Although for millennia Zoroastrianism has been able to maintain its major tenets, the faith has clearly evolved throughout the centuries and around the globe. The academic study of religion recognizes that that this is true of all religions. Therefore, remaining true to its heritage means remaining true only to the teachings of the Prophet Zarathushtra as given to him by Ahura Mazda.

WORKS CITED

- Bekhradnia, Shahin. "History of Zoroastrianism." *New Statesman*, The Faith Column. Magazine online. Posted 12 January 2007; accessed 19 November 2007. Available from <http://www.newstateman.com/200701120001>.
- Boyce, Mary. *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Bruce, Steve. *God is Dead: Secularization in the West*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002.
- Ebaugh, Helen Rose, and Janet Saltzman Chafetz, eds. *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations*. Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 2000.
- Hinnells, John R. *The Zoroastrian Diaspora: Religion and Migration. The Ratanbai Katrak Lectures, the Oriental Faculty, Oxford 1985*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Hopfe, Lewis M. (1935-1992). *Religions of the World*. Revised by Mark R. Woodward. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson, 2005.
- Noss, David S. *A History of the World's Religions, 11th Edition*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003.
- Writer, Rashna. *Contemporary Zoroastrians: An Unconstructed Nation*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1993.
- Zaehner, R. C. *The Teachings of the Magi: A Compendium of Zoroastrian Beliefs*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956.
- www.zoroastrianism.com. Orthodox Zoroastrian website on which a proposal of tenets was accessed through a link: <http://tentes.zoroastrianism.com/deen33f.html>.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Choksy, Jamsheed K. *Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism: Triumph Over Evil*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1989.
- Duchesne-Guillemin, Jacques. *Symbols and Values in Zoroastrianism: Their Survival and Renewal*. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.
- FEZANA Journal*. Hinsdale, Illinois: Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America.
- Glick, Rachel. "Hope and Conflict in a New World: The Zoroastrians of America." Pluralism Project Research, 1992.
- The Good Life: An Introduction to the Religion of Zarathushtra*. New Rochelle, New York: The Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York, 1994.
- Greeley, Andrew M. *The Denominational Society: A Sociological Approach to Religion in America*. Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman, 1972.
- Greeley, Andrew M. *Ethnicity in the United States: A Preliminary Reconnaissance*. New York: Wiley, 1974.
- Hinnells, John. *A Handbook of Living Religions*. "Zoroastrianism." New York: Viking Penguin, 1984.
- Hinnells, John R. *Zoroastrianism and the Parsis*. London: Ward Lock Educational, 1981.
- Hormazdyar, Dastur Kayoji Mirza. *Outlines of Parsi History*. Bombay: Mirza, 1974.
- Irani, Kaizad. "A Brief History of an Ancient Faith." *India Abroad*. April 16, 1993, pp. 30-35.
- Kreyenbroek, Philip G. *Living Zoroastrianism: Urban Parsis Speak About Their Religion*. Richmond, England: Curzon, 2001.
- Nigosian, S. A. *The Zoroastrian Faith: Tradition and Modern Research*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993.

Mehr, Farhang. *The Zoroastrian Tradition: An Introduction to the Ancient Wisdom of Zarathushtra*. Rockport, Massachusetts, Element Press, 1991.

Mistree, K. P. *Zoroastrianism: An Ethnic Perspective*. Bombay: London Zoroastrian Studies, 1982.

Pavri, Jamshed. "Contributions of Zoroastrians to the North American Society." Presented at the 4th North American Zoroastrian Congress in Montreal, April 10-11, 1982.

Zoroastrians: Followers of an Ancient Faith in a Modern World. Hinsdale, Illinois: Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America.

Association or Organizational Sites

www.fezana.org

www.w-z-o.org

www.zac-chicago.org

www.zagba.org

www.zagny.org

www.zamwi.org

www.zanc.org

Cultural Sites

www.TheMissingParsi.com

www.TheParsiChronicle.com

www.TheParsiDirectory.com

www.TheParsiMatch.com

www.TheParsiVideo.com

www.Zoroastrians.info.ca

Liberal Sites

www.avesta.org

www.VohuMan.org

Orthodox Sites

www.zoroastrianism.com

Zarathushtrian Sites

www.zoroastrian.org

www.zoroastrainism.cc

www.zartoshti.org