

# **SOME RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS FACING THE PARSI COMMUNITY**

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## **PREFACE**

The contents of this book formed the subject-matter of the lecture delivered by the author on April 26, 1978 at the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University. The subject of the lecture was selected by the Center.

It is believed that the subjects treated in the lecture are of general interest to the Parsi Community. It is therefore published here with additions and alterations.

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# CONTENTS

		Page
	LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.. .. .	iv
	INTRODUCTION .. .. .	1
	Parsis in Ancient Writings – Present Parsi Population – Parsi Religion – Migration to India – Main Problems Facing the Parsi Community.	
I.	DWINDLING PARSI POPULATION .. .. .	5
	Estimate of the Parsi immigrants – Low Birth-rate – A Dwindling and an Ageing Community – A Hundred Years Ago – A Grim Reality – To Marry and Multiply as a Religious Duty.	
II.	INTER-COMMUNAL MARRIAGES .. .. .	10
III.	CONVERSION OF NON-ZOROASTRIANS .. .. .	11
	Remedy More Dangerous than the Disease – Conversion unknown in Avesta and in Ancient History – Liberal Religious Policy.	
IV.	PROBLEMS OF THE PRIEST CLASS .. .. .	.. 13
	A religious Ideal – The Ideal is not Entirely forgotten – During the Achaemenian Times – Religious Dignitaries in Sasanian Times – In Post-Sasanian Times – Conditions in India – Inadequate Priestly Education – Institutions to Educate Parsi Priesthood – Precarious Economic Condition – Higher Studies and Research – Apathy and Antipathy to Higher Scriptural Studies.	
V.	DISPOSAL OF DEAD BODIES .. .. .	22
	Burial, Cremation Forbidden – Sun-Exposure.	

	Page
RESUME' .. .. .	23
Not Encouraging or Heartening – The Candle is Blazing!	
APPENDIX I .. .. .	24
Remuneration for Ceremonies.	
APPENDIX II.. .. .	25
Avesta dakhma- – Various Uses of the word – Avesta uzdana- – Pahlavi azan – Astodan of the Achaemenian Times – Sasanian and Post-Sasanian Ossuaries – Datistan i Denik on Astodan – Pahlavi daxmak "a Dungeon" – Persian daxme "a receptacle" – Persian daxme "a structure" in General.	

### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Av.	: Avesta.
BSO(A)S.	: Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies, London.
EHP.	: Early History of the Parsis in India, by R. B. Paymaster, Bombay 1954.
OPH.	: Outlines of Parsi History, by H. K. Mirza, Bombay 1974.
PhI.	: Pahlavi.
V.	: Videvdat.
Vr.	: Visparad.
Wb.	: Altiranisches Woerterbuch, by C. Bartholomae, Strassburg 1904.
Y.	: Yasna.
Yt.	: Yasht.

# SOME RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS FACING THE PARSI COMMUNITY

## INTRODUCTION

### PARSIS IN ANCIENT WRITINGS

1. The ancient name of the country of the Iranian people, as it appears in the oldest Iranian writing, is Av. **airya-**, **airyana-**, **airyana- vaejah-**. This ancient name of the country was applied to various lands and countries to which the Iranian people migrated in their long and chequered history. The Avesta term **airyana-** appears as **eran**, **iran** in later speech. Hence the term Iran is generally used for the country.

2. The term "Parsi" literally means "a resident of Pars", an ancient province in south-western Iran. Hence originally it is an ethnic term. Earliest reference to the Parsis is found in the Assyrian inscription of Salmanaser III (854-824) as **Parsua**, along with **Amadi**, the Medes. The Medes and Persians are frequently mentioned in the Old Testament. The Achaemenian emperor Darius I (521-486) mentions Parsa and Mada (the Persians and the Medians) in the inscriptions on the rock of Bahistan. He takes pride in his Parsi ancestry and Iranian lineage, and states in the inscription at Naqush i Rostam (R. G. Kent, **Old Persian**, pp. 137-138) :

"I Darius the king . . . Achaemenian, a Parsi,  
son of a Parsi, of Iranian lineage."

3. As noted above, Pars was an ancient province of Iran. At present it is known as Fars. The people of Pars were known to the ancient Greeks as "Persis". In the sixth century B.C., Cyrus, a resident of Pars, rose to power in his ancestral kingdom in his home province. Later he extended his sovereignty over the whole of Iran. Since those days, the term Persis was applied to the whole of the country of Iran. Hence, since the days of ancient Greek writers the whole country was known as Persia. In 1935, the late Imperial Majesty Razashah Pahlavi decreed that the country should be named Iran. Hence the ancient and more appropriate name was revived, and the name is now officially used for the country.

4. As explained above, Parsi is originally an ethnic term, and was generally applied to the people of Pars. It appears that later on the term acquired a religious connotation also, and that the term was used for the Zoroastrian residents of Iran. According to **Karnamak i Artakhshir i Papakan** (ed. D. P. Sanjana, Ch. XI.6) the Indian astrologer recognizes Artakhshir, the Sasanian king and the founder of the empire, as **khvatay parsikan** "the king of the Parsis". In **Darkht i Asurik (Pahlavi Texts)**, ed. J. M. Jamasp Asa, p. 111. 1; J. M. Unvala, BOSOS. II, Part 4, 1922, p. 651) : **\*awd-saxvan i parsik**: "miracle-word of the Parsi". Evidently this is a reference to Av. **manthra-** "holy word" of the Zoroastrians.

5. The Arabs conquered Iran about the middle of the 7th century; and the term **Pars** was arabicised into **Fars**, and **Parsi** was pronounced **Farsi**. The Arabicised term Fars, occurs as **ai-furs** in the Arabic books written in Iran by the Iranians. Regarding the term, J. H. Kramers writes (**Encyclopaedia of Islam**, III, p. 1038) :

"Equally the appellation ai-furs, found in early Arabic sources, denoted the whole of the people of Persia, but was restricted in use to the Persians of pre-Islamic times or to those who had kept to their ancient traditional and religious views."

Professor A. V. W. Jackson travelled in Iran in 1901. Regarding the Zoroastrians of Iran he notes (**Persia Past and Present**, p. 274) :

"They (the Zoroastrians of Iran) designate themselves as Zardushtian "Zoroastrians", sometimes as Bahdinan "those of the Good Religion" or again Farsis i.e. Parsis from Fars, Pars, the old province of Persia proper."

6. The Iranians had close contact with India in very ancient times. The Iranian people were living in India in those days. They are mentioned in Sanskrit writings as **Parasika** along with other Iranian peoples **Parthava** (Parthians) and **Bahalika** (Bactrians) then living in India.

7. According to Parsi tradition, when the ancestors of the Parsis migrated to India their leader explained the Zoroastrian religious tenets to the ruler of the land. The ruler is known in the tradition as "Jadi Rana" or "Jadu Rana"

(perhaps from Yadava Rana). It appears that these tenets were later composed in sixteen Sanskrit Shlokas. In these Sanskrit Shlokas the Zoroastrian immigrants to India are mentioned as **Parasika**. The corresponding word used in the **Qisse Sanjan** (composed in Persian verses in 1599) is Behdinin.

The European travellers who travelled in India in the 17th and 18th centuries generally refer to the Zoroastrians as Parsis. Maneckji Limji Hataria, a Parsi missionary sent by the Zoroastrians of India, travelled in Iran in the middle of the 19th century, and stayed there for many years. In his report on his travels and his mission in Iran (Published in Gujarati in 1865) he frequently refers to the Zoroastrians of Iran as Parsis.

In the writings of G. K. Nariman (died 1933) on various Iranian subjects, based mainly on the Arabic writings of the 9th and later centuries, the term **Parsi** is frequently used for the Zoroastrians of Iran of the Sasanian and post-Sasanian times (**Writings of G. K. Nariman**, published by R. B. Paymaster).

#### PRESENT PARSI POPULATION

8. The Parsi community is one of the smallest communities of the world. The total Parsi population of the world at present may be estimated at 1,40,000 persons, living mostly in India (about 1,01,000), Iran (about 20,000), Pakistan (about 6,000), and the rest (about 13,000) scattered in various cities and countries of the world, particularly United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada, East Africa, South Africa, Singapore, Hongkong, Japan, and Australia.

#### PARSI RELIGION

9. The Parsis are the followers of the Zoroastrian religion, preached in ancient Iran by their prophet Zoroaster (Zarathushtra in their oldest scripture, Avesta). They recognize Ahura Mazda "Wise Lord", or simply Ahura "Lord", or simply Mazda "Wise" as one Almighty God, and the creator of all creations. Hence the proper religious designation, as it appears in the Avesta, is **Mazdayasno Zarathushtrish** "Mazda-worshipping Zoroastrian", or later simply **Mazdayasni**, or simply **Zarthoshti**. As explained above, the term Parsi indicates both race and religion. The Parsis are also known by a double appellation "Parsi-Zoroastrian".

The oldest Zoroastrian scripture is generally known as **Avesta**. It is composed in an Old Iranian language, which may be regarded as a sister-

language to Vedic Sanskrit. The Avesta, as it is preserved at present, is only a small part of the Avesta of the Sasanian times. The extant Avesta has preserved the sermons, teachings; tenets and prayers composed by Zoroaster and by his disciples and followers in ancient times. The later Zoroastrian scripture is generally known as Pahlavi literature. It was composed in Sasanian and post-Sasanian times (mainly in the 9th century) in the Pahlavi language (one of the middle-Iranian languages) and written in the Pahlavi script, which is derived from the ancient Aramaic script through the intermediaries. The later scriptures are composed also in pazard (a special mode of writing Pahlavi), in Modern Persian, Sanskrit, and Old Gujarati.

#### MIGRATION TO INDIA

10. As noted above, after the Arab conquest of Iran about the middle of the 7th century, the ancestors of the Parsi community of Iran migrated to India in order to escape persecution, and in order to preserve their religion and their community.

#### MAIN PROBLEMS FACING THE PARSI COMMUNITY

11. There can be no worldly life without difficulties and problems. Man has to face them as best as he can. In their long and chequered history, the Zoroastrians had to face innumerable difficulties, problems, and unbearable hardships. They heroically and stoically faced them, and survived through the ages. At present there are difficulties and problems facing the Parsi community, which require serious consideration. Mainly they are:

- (1) Dwindling Parsi Population.
- (2) Inter-communal Marriages.
- (3) Conversion of Non-Zoroastrians.
- (4) Problems of the Priest Class.
- (5) Disposal of Dead Bodies.

These problems are discussed in the light of existing circumstances, and briefly summed up in the Resume. Appendix I is based on old Gujarati writings. Appendix II explains the uses of the word dakhma and allied words in Avesta, Pahlavi, and Persian writings.



## I. DWINDLING PARSI POPULATION

### ESTIMATE OF THE PARSI IMMIGRANTS

12. Attempts have been made to estimate the number of Parsi immigrants to India. (OPH. pp. 237-242). Reading the earliest available evidences of **Persian Rivayats** (15th and later centuries) and **Qisse Sanjan** (1599) along with the accounts of the European travellers of the 17th and 18th centuries, we can arrive at the following conclusions:

(1) The Zoroastrians (priests and laymen; men, women, and children) landed first at Diu; after 14 years they left that place, and finally landed at Sanjan.

(2) Parsi immigrations to India were gradual. The Qisse Sanjan relates the story of principal immigration. Subsequent immigrations are indicated by later writers.

(3) The traditions noted by European travellers of the 17th and 18th centuries indicate that the Parsis migrated by the sea route in "seven junks" or in "five junks".

(4) Some stray references in Zoroastrian writings suggest also the land route.

(5) Their number was 18,000 men, women, and children.

(6) Besides Sanjan, they landed at various other places on the west coast of India-Variav, Cambay, Surat, Gandevi, and Daman.

This shows that the principal band of Parsi immigrants landed at Sanjan. Subsequently they scattered and settled in various places on the west coast of India. In later times more Parsis immigrated to India and landed at various coastal towns of Parsi population. These various and gradual migrations might be the source of conflicting traditions regarding the date of the arrival and the landing place. The details of various migrations might have been mixed up resulting in confusions, contradictions, and conflicting statements.

13. In 1964, S. F. Desai read a paper on "Statistics Of World Zoroastrians **with Special Reference to Indian Zoroastrians**". In this Paper Desai remarks:

"Since their entry into India some 1,200 years ago the Parsis have multiplied very slowly. According to the Book of Exodus 70 Israelites who came to Egypt with Jacob grew into six hundred thousand in a little over 200 years. If we take only 10 pairs of Parsis to start with 1,200 years ago and assuming six children to a pair and further assuming normal biological growth and decay ( $1^{1/2}$  p.c. net increase every year) the Parsis should have been 26 lacs or 2.6 millions by the end of the 19th century."

This is a very important matter to be considered. It draws our attention to some stray references, to some grievous events and tragic destructions and massacres in middle ages in India. These are noted below (EHP. pp. 53, 78, 79; OPH. pp. 235, 243, 279) :

- (1) Tragedy at Variav.
- (2) Battle of Sanjan.
- (3) Tragedy at Cambay.
- (4) Massacre by Timur Lang.
- (5) Famine, plague, and other epidemics in Gujarat.
- (6) Possible conversions under the Moslem and Portuguese rules.

#### LOW BIRTH-RATE

14. Coupled with these tragic events, persistent low birth-rate among the Parsis is also a contributory factor. Explaining the cause of low birth-rate Desai observes:

"The Phenomenon of falling birth-rate is not dependent on one but many factors. They may be one or more operating at one and the same time or at different times in their logical sequence, or they may be a causa causans which again may be dependent on several other causes. The factors operating may be either biological or socio-

logical or both; or there may be economical or psychological factors operating or assisting the above factors. Unfavourable age distribution, fall in marriage frequency and fecundity, reorientation or sex relationship, education and advancement of women, their emancipation from various disabilities, literacy and change of mental outlook, advent of relative prosperity and anxiety to keep up the acquired position in life by limitation of births, desire to afford better education to a smaller number of children than just educating a large number of them, extreme urbanization, etc., are some of the factors which in their turn or assisted by one another tend to create a fall in birth-rate."

#### A DWINDLING AND AN AGEING COMMUNITY

15. According to the census reports, the Parsi population in India is dwindling as indicated below:

Years	Parsi Population
1941	114,890
1951	111,791 (after partition of India)
1961	100,772.

The fall noted in 1951 is mainly due to the partition of India (1947). The fall in 1961 of about 0.9 p.c. may be due to various reasons as indicated below. The Parsis in India have been an ageing community in this century. The mean age of the Parsis in 1901 was 29.4 years. This has risen to 37.3 years in 1961. The reasons for this dwindling population and rising mean age may be enumerated as follows:

(1) Modern trend of family planning or family welfare as it is known at present.

(2) Late marriages, particularly because of the desire on the part of boys and girls to marry after they are sufficiently well provided and earning a very good income.

(3) Celibacy due particularly to reluctance on the part of earning boys and earning girls to surrender independence. Generally the girls working as doctors, nurses, and teachers remain unmarried or marry at an advanced age.

(4) Shortage of housing accommodation particularly in big cities. This is a very acute problem in Bombay. Dozens of couples, who are engaged to be married, remain unmarried for five, ten, and in some cases even more years due to lack of housing accommodation.

(5) Marriage outside the community.

(6) Emigration of younger generation to foreign countries of Europe, America, and Canada since the end of the World War II. This has particularly resulted in the rise of the mean age of the community.

#### A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

16. An interesting article appears in the Times of India, of Tuesday, 7th March 1978, under the caption "A Hundred Years Ago." The article gives the following quotation from the Times of India, Thursday March 7, 1878:

"In his speech at Noesaree, Sir Richard Temple dwelt upon the fact that the Parsees, who were once an agricultural and military race, are now neither cultivators nor soldiers. They are merchants, shopkeepers, and clerks, most of them being anxious to live by their brains rather than by their hands. If they continue to increase in numbers, His Excellency said, this state of things cannot continue. Parsees must take to agriculture, to handicrafts, even to soldiering. To this statement we take the primary objection that it is very doubtful whether the Parsees are 'continuing to increase'. They are said to have ceased to increase and multiply, and now in some danger of experiencing a slow decline. For marriage is looked upon by many of the younger generation as a perilous venture not to be entered into until the future is made more or less certain. A certain standard of comfort, or, if the word is thought more applicable, of luxury, has been set up by the community, and habits of extravagance and display have been acquired which will possibly have the same effect in encouraging a proneness to celibacy amongst the Zoroastrian community that the progress of nineteenth century civilization has had upon our middle class at home."

This shows that about 100 years ago it was believed that the Parsis had ceased to multiply, and were in some danger of "a slow decline". At that time

there was no tangible proof, but the present conditions show that it was not an idle talk. We have now seen the results after a period of 100 years, and it is disheartening and distressing to envisage what the condition would be after 100 more years.

#### A GRIM REALITY

17. Generally the urbanized aristocratic Parsi families had few children. This seems to have prompted the editor of the Times of India in the last century to pass the remark about "a slow decline" and "a standard of luxury". Only the lower and middle class Parsis, living mostly in villages, had large families.

In this century, nearly whole (about 95 p.c.) of the community has been urbanized, and influenced by city life. As a result thereof dwindling Parsi population has become a grim reality. It is reflected by the following harsh facts :

(1) About 25 years ago, the number of Parsi children in Sir J. J. Group of Schools in Bombay and in towns and villages of Gujarat was about 1200. Gradually the number dwindled, and about 1974 it came down to about 375, and at present (in 1978) it might be about 200.

(2) It is stated that there are very few patients in the Children's ward of the B. D. Petit Parsi General Hospital in Bombay. The reason is obvious: There are very few children in the Parsi community.

This indicates the general trend of the rising generation of the lower and middle class, which forms the backbone of the community.

#### TO MARRY AND MULTIPLY AS A RELIGIOUS DUTY

18. The remedies one can suggest in the existing circumstances may be : To provide suitable housing accommodation, and to encourage and induce young males and females to settle early in life, and to marry and multiply as a religious duty. The Parsi community must discard the so-called "standard of luxury" and "habits of extravagance and display". They should be urged and induced to settle in life at an early age even when they earn a modest income and can live a moderately comfortable life. The Parsis should adopt the principles of simplicity, frugality, honest hard work, service and dedication, as the principles of their daily life as inculcated by the Zoroastrian religion, and practised by the ancestors.

## II. INTER-COMMUNAL MARRIAGES

19. As stated above, one of the main causes of Parsi population dwindling is marriage outside the community, that is, inter-communal marriages. The Zoroastrian religion forbids such mixed marriages. M. N. Dhalla writes (**Zoroastrian Civilization**, New York 1922) :

(1) "**Aversion to marrying outside the Mazdian pale.** In the pre-Zoroastrian, as well as in Zoroastrian Iran, marriages were contracted between the members of the Mazda-worshipping community only. Mixed marriages between Zoroastrians and non-Zoroastrians were discouraged, and those between the faithful and Daeva-worshippers were detested as subversive of the purity of Zoroastrian fold. Though this was the established custom of the people, the Shah Namah mentions that several kings and heroes brought alien maidens from foreign lands, and mate with them." (p. 78)

(2) "Mixed marriages looked upon as detrimental to social solidarity. There were social and religious barriers raised against the intermarriage of a Zoroastrian with a non-Zoroastrian. The Dinkard condemns such unions in strong terms. The barriers, however, do not seem to have been impregnable for the kings and for men of upper classes." (p. 304)

This shows that inter-communal marriages are viewed with disfavour from very ancient times. It is so not only in the Parsi community. Such marriages are viewed with disfavour by other communities also. The Parsi society is a close society, and the Parsis are living in India for centuries with the Hindus, who are also a close society. In this century the situation has changed to a great extent. The circumstances at present are not only favourable and conducive to mixed marriages, but, whether one likes it or not, they are aggravating both socially and legally.

This question of mixed marriages is fiercely agitating the mind of the community since a long time. Generally a majority of the community has expressed its views strongly against such marriages even in recent times. Inter-communal marriages are against the Zoroastrian religion, and such marriages

are also detrimental to the very existence of the small community. Unfortunately the question becomes acute day by day. The number of such mixed marriages is growing, and it has assumed alarming proportions. A majority of the community is seriously apprehensive that if Parsi boys and Parsi girls marry outside the community without any restriction, the small community would be swamped and wiped out, and thus it would lose its identity, characteristic, and individual existence in a few generations. If any restriction is imposed, on what principle would it be? Further, who is there in the present circumstances to impose and to exercise such restriction?

The Parsi community, unless miraculously saved, is in real danger of losing its identity and individual existence after a few generations. It is in the danger of sharing the same fate as that of Parasikas, Parthavas, and Bahlikas mentioned in the ancient texts, and referred to above (§ 6).

### III. CONVERSION OF NON-ZOROASTRIANS

#### REMEDY MORE DANGEROUS THAN THE DISEASE

20. The present circumstances - education, freedom, individualism, working conditions, independent incomes, economic conditions, migrations, and such other factors coupled with ignorance of religion and history, and apathy towards the community - have largely contributed to such a dangerous state of affairs in which the Parsi Community finds itself. As a remedy to check the downward trend of the population graph, it is proposed that the Parsis should admit into the Zoroastrian religion the non-Parsi spouses, their children, and also their non-Parsi relations. To propagate and popularize this new proposal a phrase has been specially coined. It is : Conversion by Marriage! This new phrase is significant, because it indicates that in this proposal religion is only a handmaid to inter-communal marriages. In this proposal the religion plays a secondary role, and the religion has been dragged into this proposal just to serve the purpose of mixed marriages. The proposed remedy is even worse and more dangerous than the disease. It is dangerous also from the view point of communal harmony and relations with other communities.

To boost the idea of "Conversion by Marriage" it is argued that the Zoroastrian religion is open to all, and that all those who are willing may be

admitted to the Zoroastrian religion. To propagate this idea, various other verbal devices have also been employed: "progressive ideas, humanitarian views, liberal outlook", as if mixed-marriages are the only pinnacles of all these virtues of life, and as if the forefathers of the Parsis had no progressive ideas, no humanitarian views, and no liberal outlook!

#### CONVERSION UNKNOWN IN AVESTA AND IN ANCIENT HISTORY

21. If "conversion" means to discard one's own ancestral religion and to adopt an alien religion, then conversion is unknown in the Avesta, in the Zoroastrian religion, and in ancient Iranian history.

During the long and chequered history, the ancient Iranian rulers never adopted a policy of proselytization. On the contrary, the Iranian rulers have become famous in history for their liberal administration and liberal religious policy. They granted freedom of religion, belief, and worship to the subject peoples. This is too well known to detain us here particularly in connection with the Achaemenian and Parthian emperors. Some explanation, however, in connection with the Sasanian emperors is necessary.

#### LIBERAL RELIGIOUS POLICY

22. The Iranians had come in contact with the Jewish people in very remote periods. During the Achaemenian times the Jews were an influential people in Iran. During that period the Greeks had also come in contact with the Iranians. During the Parthian period, the Jews, the Greeks, the Romans, and the Buddhists had settled in Iran. In Sasanian times, the Jews and Christians had their colonies, settlements, and religious institutions in Iran, and they were managing their own civic and religious affairs. Christianity came to Iran and Armenia about the beginning of the fourth century; and since then the Christians were living peacefully in Iran enjoying political and religious freedom. Thus **Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics** 11, p. 203 records:

"Christianity spread widely and was well organized in the Persian Empire under the Sasanians, especially in the Nestorian form. At the moment of the Musalman invasion it counted seven metropolitan provinces and 80 bishoprics, stretching from Armenia to India. Not infrequently Christians enjoyed high favour at the court, especially during the great reign of the first Chosroes."



The Sasanian emperors were not only tolerant, but some of them were influenced by Christianity. Ghirshmann notes that the Sasanian king Yazdgard I was "so well disposed" towards the Christians that they called him "the Christian King". Regarding Yazdgard, I, Ghirshmann notes (**Iran**, p. 298) :

"He convoked a council, installed a Catholicos at Seleucia and five metropolitans in the provincial towns, and permitted the free movement of clergy through out the country. But the Christians apparently abused their privileges, and were guilty of violent demonstrations against the Zoroastrian sanctuaries and clergy. In view of this attitude, the king was compelled to revise his policy."

#### IV. PROBLEMS OF THE PRIEST CLASS

##### A RELIGIOUS IDEAL

23. It appears that in ancient times there was a religious ideal that sacerdotal services could not be valued in terms of material wealth; and hence such religious sacred services (scriptural studies, literary work, instruction, preaching, prayer, ceremony, and social services) must not be a source of worldly income. It was the duty of the priest to do priestly functions and to render priestly services, without any expectation of worldly reward or return. A layman might offer to a priest anything he could and he liked as a present, which must be accepted with thanks by the priest in good grace. Such a gift is known as Av. **Ashava-data-** "given by the holy (Ahura Mazda)", and in later speech **ashodad**. It was not a fee or remuneration.

Evidently this religious ideal has come down from very ancient times as can be gleaned from the Avesta. Various scales of fees to be paid to physicians for their services to various members of society are mentioned in terms of the value of animals. For instance, the fees for healing the head of a family were a cattle of smallest value; and for healing a ruler of the country, a carriage with four horses (V. 7.41-43). The list begins with an **athravan-** "a fire-priest" : "One shall heal a fire-priest (in return) for blessing of the pious". This shows that no fees are to be charged for the services rendered to a priest, and the priest in return for the services should pronounce blessings. It is significant to

note that no fees for priestly services are prescribed as it is done in the case of other members of society. This indicates that the priest must be rendering religious services without expectation of any fixed monetary or worldly return. This assumption is supported by Av. **fraraiti- vidisha-** "liberality (and) instruction" (Av. daes- Wb. 672) used in juxtaposition and in some cases in the dual number, and in connection with prayer and religious services (Y. 55.3, 58.4; Vr. 21.3–Wb. 1021, 1444).

#### THE IDEAL IS NOT ENTIRELY FORGOTTEN

24. As stated above, a present or a gift offered to a priest for his services is known even to-day as **ashodad**. At present it is a gift in cash or in kind, or partly in cash and partly in kind. The corresponding term occurring in old Parsi-Gujarati writings is **adhyapan**. Evidently this word is derived from Sanskrit **adhyapana-** "instruction, teaching". Hence the old Parsi-Gujarati word secondarily means "a gift for (religious) instruction".

Another Parsi-Gujarati term used even at present is **akhyana**. At present it consists of a small quantity of rice or wheat, a coconut, and some money (a rupee or two or more). This word is derived from Sanskrit **akhyana-** "telling, teaching, instruction". At present such **akhyana** is offered as a gift to the priest during the **Navjote** (thread ceremony), **Navar** (initiation ceremony), and wedding. It is offered in addition to some present in cash. A similar ideal is found also among the Hindus as can be gleaned from Sanskrit **dakhshina-** "instruction, initiation" used also in the sense of "a small fee for instruction."

25. This ideal is not entirely forgotten, it is practised to some extent even at present both by the priests and laymen. Parsi doctors, lawyers, accountants, businessmen, do not charge fees or charge only nominal fees, for services rendered to a priest and his family, or to, religious institutions and trust funds. The priests practised this ideal to some extent up to the last generation, and in some instances they do practise even at present, particularly in mofussil towns and villages, by doing honorary work, and by not accepting any remuneration offered for religious services rendered.

#### DURING THE ACHAEMENIAN TIMES

26. Although coinage was introduced in Iran about 493 B.C., it appears that payment was made in kind during the reigns of Darius I (521-486) and

Xerxes I (486-465). According to the inscriptions of the treasury tablets found at Persepolis, as deciphered by G. Cameron, the priests used to receive remuneration for religious duties in kind (sheep, wine, grain, flour) at the rate of 1 sheep = 3 shekels, and 1 jar of wine = 1 shekel of silver (**Persepolis Treasury Tablets**, by G. Cameron, Chicago 1946, pp.2-8). This shows that although coinage was introduced payments were made in kind, and they were calculated on the bases of coined money.

#### RELIGIOUS DIGNITARIES IN SASANIAN TIMES

27. It appears that in Sasanian times the priestly affairs were controlled by the priestly officers appointed by the Government. Among the official dignitaries of the Sasanian times we find those who were exercising authority over education and training of priests, and management of holy fires and religious trusts. The Pahlavi literature mentions the designations of the Sasanian officials. Among them we find one called **handarzpat** "chief of instruction", perhaps director of public instruction. Another is **dar-handarzpat** "the court counsellor", and also **dar-handarzpat i vaspuharkan** "the court counsellor of princes". Besides these, we have **magav-handarzpat** or **magavagan handarzpat** "the priest-counsellor" or instructor of priests. This shows that priestly education and training was under control and guidance of a minister specially appointed for the purpose.

In Sasanian times holy fires were installed by the royal family and also by other Zoroastrians, and endowments were founded for maintenance. This appears from the inscriptions of Shahpur I, and the Pahlavi texts of **Karnamak i Artakhshir i Papakan** and **Matikan i Hazar Datistan**.

The post-Sasanian writers mention the offices of secretaries of state of Sasanian times. Among them we find the following:

- (1) **din dibireh** "secretary for religion".
- (2) **atas-hamar dibireh** "secretary for keeping accounts of fires".
- (3) **ravanagan-hamar dibireh** "secretary for keeping accounts of endowments for soul (i.e. trust funds)".

This indicates that in Sasanian times priestly education and training, and maintenance of the priests as well as management of holy fires and religious

trust funds were under the control of the officers specially appointed for the purpose, and as such the expenses therefor were borne by the royal treasury and the trust funds concerned.

#### IN POST-SASANIAN TIMES

28. It appears that in post-Sasanian times the priests used to receive remuneration for priestly duties generally as at present. Writing in the later half of the 9th century, Dastur Manushchihr, Zoroastrian high priest of Iran, says that priestly emoluments should not be reduced, and that proper emoluments should be paid to the priests who actually perform the ceremony. Manushchihr further exhorts the faithful that the priests should be deserving and trustworthy, and they should perform ceremony properly, and should thereby deserve greater emoluments. In connection with this matter Manushchihr uses two terms: **ehrpāt** "a religious teacher" and **havisht** "a religious disciple". The context shows that these terms semantically correspond respectively to the modern terms: **panthaki** "a diocesan priest, a family priest", one who arranges ceremonies on behalf of a customer; and **mōbed** "a priest", one who actually performs ceremonies (**Datistan i Denik**, ed. P. K. Anklesaria, Pursishn LXVI).

#### CONDITIONS IN INDIA

29. There must have been some priestly organization in Sanjan, the first Parsi settlement in India, to manage the religious affairs; but we have no knowledge of the same. It appears that in old days the religious affairs were managed by the Anjumans (congregations) of the respective places in India. The main duties of the priests were to perform ceremonies, to impart religious knowledge to the Zoroastrian children for Navjote, and also to the young sons of priests for priestly initiations of Navar and Martab. In those days the priests devoted their leisure hours also to priestly studies. Besides scriptural studies, astrology, geomancy, and medicine formed the subjects of their study. Sanskrit was also an important subject of study. They were also doing the important work of copying ancient manuscripts of Avesta, Pahlavi, Pazand, Persian, Sanskrit and Old Gujarati texts.

In those days, particularly in villages and towns of Gujarat, a priest was treated as a family member by laymen, and he used to render social services also. The priests and laymen mutually shared their joys and sorrows, they helped one another in every respect, particularly in times of difficulty, danger, and emergency.

Generally, a priest in those days was a friend, philosopher and guide in religious as well as in social matters. Although there were instances of strife, quarrel, and more serious incidents, generally relations between priests and laymen were cordial and admirable in the towns and villages of Gujarat.

A priest in those days did not receive any fixed salary. Generally remunerations for performing ceremonies were fixed by the Anjumans; but such remunerations were meagre (see Appendix I). Such meagre emoluments were supplemented by certain portion of **myazd** (offerings in the ceremony), which was regarded as the share of the priests. On certain occasions (Navjote, Navar, Martab, Marriage) the priest received **ashodad**, generally in cash.

This shows that for centuries Parsi priests lived in a precarious financial condition. There was no economic stability in life. But that did not matter much in those good old days when living was cheap and simple, requirements were few, and people led a simple, contented, and disciplined life of faith, hope and devotion.

#### INADEQUATE PRIESTLY EDUCATION

30. About the 12th century, priestly studies were prosecuted in India through the medium of Sanskrit and Old Gujarati. Translations of Avesta-Pahlavi texts in these languages were meant for priestly religious studies. After the coming of the Persian Rivayats in the last quarter of the 15th century, Persian became predominant. Thereafter Pahlavi and Persian became the media of religious instruction. The priests were prosecuting religious studies on traditional lines. Avesta was understood through the medium of Pahlavi translations. In the 18th century several religious controversies cropped up, particularly regarding ceremonial disposal of dead bodies, intercalation and calendar. In the last century the community had to encounter the attacks of foreign missionaries. In these controversies both offensive and defensive wordy weapons were freely used, a number of articles, periodicals and books were published, but scriptural studies were found inadequate. These controversies served a good purpose; they gave an impetus to religious learning.

With the advancement of English education and secular studies, the priestly traditional learning could not satisfy the educated Parsis. Further, the

materialistic wave of the last century had its effect on the Parsi community. The educated Parsis began to find fault with social and religious customs and practices. The priest was derided and degraded; and his ignorance in secular subjects became an additional disqualification and a source of humiliation.

In these circumstances sensitive members of the priestly profession preferred to remain aloof and to quit the profession. They were unwilling to give this profession to their own sons. The sons of practicing priests were not willing to join their fathers' profession. The priestly profession generally became the occupation of those who could not do any other work, it became a mere source of income. Consequently the priestly class degenerated in quality and in moral tone, and degraded in the eyes of the laity.

#### INSTITUTIONS TO EDUCATE PARSI PRIESTHOOD

31. Various attempts have been made during the last 125 years to educate and train Parsi priests. Long ago, in 1854, the Mulla Firoze Madressa and in 1863 Sir Jamshetjee Jeejeebhoy Zarthoshti Madressa were established for higher studies of the Zoroastrian scriptures, particularly for the priestly class. In the later half of the last century, K. R. Cama (1831-1909) studied Avesta and Iranian languages and literature in Europe under Spiegel, Oppert and Mohl. When he returned to India he introduced this method of studies in the Parsi community. He encouraged and educated young Parsi priests on the modern lines of study, and initiated them into the Zoroastrian studies on the principle of modern science of philology. Through various institutions Cama produced a very good crop of deserving and erudite priest-scholars of international repute. These learned priest-scholars assiduously prepared a band of worthy and learned scholars-both priests and laymen-of the second generation. But hardly there was any arrangement for maintenance of these learned scholars. The priest-scholars, prepared and trained by Cama, did not initiate their own sons into the scholarly profession. The learned scholars of the second generation-both priests and laymen-also did not care to prepare and train their own sons for their own profession although they educated and trained a good number of students in the said Madressas.

In 1920 the Athornan Boarding Madressa was founded in Bombay to Educate and train young sons of priests particularly for priestly vocation of

performing religious ceremonies. The great patron of the priestly class, Meherwanji Mancherji Cama announced a princely donation for establishing an institution to produce enlightened priesthood, and he founded the Mancherji Framji Cama Athornan Institute in 1923. After some years the Trustees found that they could not utilize the whole proceeds of the trust for the object for which the trust was created. Therefore, with legal sanction, they diverted half of the proceeds for general secular education.

These institutions have rendered valuable services to the community, and they have improved the general intellectual and moral tone of the priestly class. Although a very great number of priests have been educated and trained in these institutions, unfortunately, very few of them remained in priestly profession. Consequently the community at present experiences acute shortage of educated, trained and deserving priests. The reasons may be varied, but one of them is : No provision was made for the maintenance of qualified priests.

As explained above, many of the educated and qualified priests left the priestly profession, but they are serving the community in other ways. These priestly youths are qualified also for other professions, and they are at present working as lawyers, doctors, engineers, accountants, businessmen and in other various professions in India and in foreign countries, particularly is Pakistan, United Kingdom, United States of America, and Canada. At present the Parsi population in these countries is growing. Whenever occasion arises these educated and trained priests, although engaged in other professions, render priestly services. They perform Navjote and Jashan ceremonies, funeral rites, and they impart religious instructions to the children and prepare them for initiation ceremony in India and abroad where no regular priests are maintained.

#### PRECARIOUS ECONOMIC CONDITION

32. As explained above, Parsi priests lived in precarious economic condition for centuries. In 1915, J. J. Modi writes about meagre priestly emoluments, and observes (**Parsi Priesthood, Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute** No. 31, 1937, p. 126) :

"Such being the case with reference to emoluments-and to some extent, the question of status and position is connected with the amount of emoluments- the vocation of priesthood has little attrac-

tion. A priest would like to see his intelligent and educated sons; taking up professions other than priesthood."

This was written as long ago as 1915 by a leading Parsi priest and a great scholar of international repute. The community is discussing this matter since the beginning of this century. Particularly during the last two decades dozens of meetings, discussions, and deliberations were held at various levels, facts and figures were collected, schemes were formulated, but without any result. In one instance, after numerous meetings and long drawn-out discussions and deliberations, a scheme was framed, finances were arranged from the trust funds of similar objects, the scheme was publicly announced, was officially adopted, and a beginning was made. After sometime the promised and assured finances were withdrawn for reason or reasons known only to the authorities. The community is still in dark in this matter. Due to such bitter experiences a feeling prevails at present in some quarters that it is advisable not to discuss this matter.

#### HIGHER STUDIES AND RESEARCH

33. As noted above, there are two institutions founded specially for higher scriptural studies : The Mulla Firoze Madressa and Sir Jamshtetjee Jeejeebhoy Zarthoshti Madressa. These institutions impart instructions and guide research work in Zoroastrian and Iranian studies at University level. Formerly these studies were appreciated and encouraged. Arrangements were made to prepare, print and publish scholarly works. Books were presented to scholars. All these activities have now been stopped and facilities withdrawn.

#### APATHY AND ANTIPATHY TO HIGHER SCRIPTURAL STUDIES

34. At present higher scriptural and religious studies have been sadly neglected both by the authorities and also by the Parsi public. As it has been already pointed out to the authorities, the trouble is: Those who hold the string of the purse do not understand the problem. At present there is something more than that.

As noted above, half of the proceeds of the funds specially endowed for religious and priestly studies was diverted to the general secular educational purposes. Similarly, a part of Sir J. J. Z. Madressa fund was utilized, with legal sanction, for establishing and conducting a commerce college. When a part



of the Madressa fund was thus diverted for commerce college, the teachers of the Madressa were very miserably paid. It was so till as late as about 1966. The revised scale also falls far short of salaries received by teachers in other fields even in India.

Suggestions for betterment and improvement of higher religious and scriptural studies have been ignored. Most of the Parsi Public do not even know that there are such Madressas for higher religious and scriptural studies. A simple suggestion, repeatedly made, to advertize the activities of the Madressas more frequently is simply ignored.

The once famous Fort Printing Press, which was the only well-equipped and efficient printing press in India for Avesta, Pahlavi, and Iranian materials, has now disintegrated. Avesta and Pahlavi types, purchased by the trust funds for another press, simply disappeared. As a result thereof there is no suitable printing press at present for Iranian and Zoroastrian studies. There are "no sufficient funds" for printing and publishing research works accepted by the University, and they, therefore, remain unpublished or are published abroad. It is difficult to say whether higher religious studies are neglected or ignored. Anyway they receive lip-sympathy and step-motherly treatment.

There is another aspect of the present situation of religious studies. At present there is a dangerous trend of making show of learning. There is a growing tendency to lift ready-made translations and to make changes therein at one's sweet will to suit one's purpose, and to pass them off as "translations" with a show of scriptural authority! Intricacies of grammar, linguistic peculiarities and other considerations are thrown overboard.

Further, there are some persons at present, who, with the alleged "divine authority", propound the pernicious doctrine that translations of the Avesta texts engender atheism! Evidently they have imbibed Sufi ideas, and they propound Sufism in Zoroastrian garb. Although the alleged "divinely inspired persons" are very few, their tentacles have been widely spread.

## V. DISPOSAL OF DEAD BODIES

### BURIAL, CREMATION FORBIDDEN

35. Disposal of dead bodies has become another problem facing the Parsi community at present. According to Zoroastrian religion, physical body after death begins to decompose, and it is, therefore, regarded as a source of pollution and contamination. In Avesta it is called **nasu**- "pollution, contamination". Hence it is enjoined that a dead body should be ceremoniously disposed off as soon as possible, and with the least possible contamination and harm to the living beings and to other creations of Nature.

According to the Zoroastrian religion, all good creations of God are sacred and useful, they must not be spoiled, abused or wasted. Pollution of dead body must not come in contact with these good creations of Nature. Hence Zoroastrian religion forbids burial, water burial, and cremation, because by these systems land, water, fire, and air are polluted and contaminated. They are, therefore, harmful and a source of health-hazard to the living ones and to other creations.

### SUN-EXPOSURE

36. Zoroastrian religion, therefore, enjoins the system of sun-exposure. This system is known as Av. **hvare-daresya-**, PhI. **xvarshet-nikirishn** "sun-exposure". In the Sanskrit translations of the Pahlavi texts, the corresponding terms are: **surya-avalokya** "sun-gaze", and **surya-nirikhsha** "sun-inspection". In this system dead bodies are exposed to the rays of the sun. The dead bodies are placed on isolated high places, and are exposed to the rays of the sun. Flesh is eaten up by vultures, and bones are dried up by the sun. Avesta mentions also "corpse-eating dogs" along with "corpse-eating birds" (V. 6.45; 7.29). After flesh was eaten up, dry bones were deposited in a receptacle, ossuary, known in Avesta as **uzdana-**, PhI. **astodan**, also **azan** "bone-receptacle, ossuary" (V. 6.50; 8.72). The place of exposure of dead bodies is generally known as Av. **dakhma-**, PhI. **dakhmak** (Appendix II).

At present a dakhma is a raised platform on which dead bodies are exposed. The platform is surrounded by walls. Formerly, particularly in Iran,

such platforms were square or rectangular; at present they are circular. These circular platforms with surrounding walls are commonly known as "Towers of Silence".

The Avesta enjoins that the places of disposal of dead bodies must be high isolated lands, away from human habitation and cultivation. Accordingly the towers of silence were erected on open lands, preferably on hills, away from populated places outside towns and villages. Most of the towers of silence, which are in use in India at present, were erected in the last century. The position has changed in this century, when towns and villages grew up very rapidly into big cities. Consequently at many places in India the towers of silence are at present in the middle of big towns and cities and in the midst of human habitation. The vast open lands originally surrounding the towers of silence, which were specially kept open and vacant by the ancestors, became liable to be requisitioned under town-planning and other government and semi-government schemes. In these circumstances the number of vultures has decreased. This is a serious problem in some places in India.

Where there is no facility of sun-exposure, the Parsis have generally adopted burial system. In the countries of Europe, burial system has created many serious problems. By this system vast precious land is occupied without any fruitful use, and this system creates also serious health problems.

All systems of disposal of dead bodies are gruesome, but the sun-exposure is less so in comparison to other systems.

### **RESUME**

#### **NOT ENCOURAGING OR HEARTENING**

37. Some of the religious and communal problems facing the Parsi community at present are discussed above. Unfortunately the picture does not seem to be happy. On the whole the general conditions prevailing at present in the Parsi community are not encouraging or heartening for the long-term existence of the community.

Besides dwindling population, that too scattered in all five continents of the world, growing number of mixed-marriages, dearth of qualified and

deserving priests, general ignorance and false show of religion and history, neglect and tacit hostility to religious studies, there are other subterranean trends which are highly dangerous and detrimental to the very existence of the community. What is going on in the name of "religion" and "orthodoxy" may be soul-satisfying, but it would not be helpful. Complacency in the name of "faith" and "belief" is growing in certain quarters, which would in the long run prove deceptive. All sorts of queer views, ideas, and practices, gaily propagated and advocated under the guise of "divine revelation" or under the garb of "religious studies", would prove to be divisive and harmful. False show of religious knowledge and studies would be highly perilous. For obvious reasons, religion is becoming day by day a profession of undeserving and ignorant persons, a mere source of income, a means of exploitation. This state of affairs would not inspire confidence and faith among the general public, particularly the educated younger generation. This seems to be the greatest danger.

#### THE CANDLE IS BLAZING:

38. If the present trend prevails, the long-term future of the community is bleak unless it is miraculously saved. Formerly the Parsis were talking about "preservation". This seems to have been changed, and they are now talking of avoiding the inevitable. At present we hear the ominous cries: "Procreate or Perish", also "Racial Suicide", and even "Extinction" !

In short, so far as long-term existence of the Parsi community is concerned, the proverbial candle is not only burning at both ends, it is blazing on all sides!

### APPENDIX I (§ 29)

#### REMUNERATION FOR CEREMONIES IN EARLIER CENTURIES

39. According to the old Gujarati writings, remunerations fixed for performing religious ceremonies in the 16th-18th centuries were meagre. They are given below (approximate value in American currency is shown in brackets) :

(1) In 1555 at Anklesar :

Marriage ceremony	..	..	..	7 fadiaz (10 cents).
In 1599, to be paid by bridegroom				11 fadiaz
to be paid by bride	..	..		10 fadiaz
				-----
				21 fadiaz (30 cents).

(2) In 1632 at Valsad: Two interesting items :

Ceremony at the time of laying a ship's keel Re. 1 (11 cents).  
 Ceremony at the time of launching a ship Rs. 3 (33 cents).

(3) In 1719 at Mahuva:

Annuity to a priest .. .. . Rs. 32 (3.50 dollars)  
 In 1733 the said annuity was reduced Rs. 21 (2.30 dollars)

Marriage ceremony:

To be paid by bridegroom .. .. . Rs. 2 (22 Cents)  
 To be paid by bride .. .. . Rs. 1 (11 cents)  
 Ijashni, for two priests.. .. . Rs. 0.50 (6 cents).

(4) In 1733 at Gandevi :

Four groups according to financial position were made, and remunerations to be paid to a priest for marriage ceremony were fixed as shown below:

1st group (rich) .. .. . Rs. 4+5=9 (1 dollar)  
 2nd group (middle class) .. .. . Rs. 3+3=6 (66 cents).  
 3rd group (poor) .. .. . Re. 1.5+2=3.5 (38 cents).  
 4th group (very poor) .. .. . Free of charge.  
 Ijashni, for two priests.. .. . Re. 0.50 (6 cents).

(5) In 1734 at Navsari :

Marriage ceremony .. .. . Rs. 2 (22 cents).  
 Gehsarna, for two priests .. .. . Re. 0.50 (6 cents).  
 Ijashni, for two priests.. .. . Re. 0.50 (6 cents).

**Note:** It must be remembered that besides the remunerations, the priests used to get **akhyana** and a share in **myazd**, as explained in § § 24 and 29.

## APPENDIX II (§ 36)

### AVESTA **dakhma-**, **uzdana-** AND PAHLAVI **azan**

#### AVESTA **dakhma-**

40. Generally Av. **dakhma-** is understood to be a place or a raised platform for exposing dead bodies to the rays of the sun and to be devoured by vultures. Etymological explanation proposed by Bartholomae indicates that Av. **Dakhma-** was the place of cremation (Wb. 675-676). It appears that in very remote ages, in pre-Zoroastrian times cremation was one of the modes of disposal of dead

bodies. Among the ancient Aryan peoples three modes of disposal of dead bodies were known as mentioned in the Vedas (**Indo-Iranian Religion**, by S. K. Hodivala, Bombay 1925, pp. 105-107) : (1) Cremation, (2) Burial, and (3) Exposure "on high seats".

Evidently the last named system corresponds to the Zoroastrian system of sun-exposure advocated in the Avesta, and generally current at present among the Zoroastrians of India. The words 'on high seats' are significant, and they indicate a raised platform for exposing dead bodies to the sun as at present, and Avesta **barezishtaeshva paiti gatushva** "on the highest places" (V. 6.45).

If the etymological explanation proposed by Bartholomae is correct, it appears that Av. **dakhma-** was originally used for the place of cremation, and later on the word was applied to the place for exposure. Definitely Av. **Dakhma-** is never used for the place of cremation. The word is never used with the verb for "to burn, to cremate" or any verb suggesting that mode of disposal. Further, cremation is expressly forbidden in the Avesta (V. 8.73-74).

#### VARIOUS USES OF THE WORD

41. It appears that the Avesta word **dakhma-** is variously used in the Avesta as indicated below:

(1) It is enjoined to erect three chambers (Av. **thrayo kata**, V. 5.10-11) "in every house in every street" for temporary depositing dead bodies during severe winter when it was not possible to carry dead bodies to the place of sun-exposure. Avesta **kata-** originally means "what is dug, a trench, a ditch, a chamber, a cellar", (Wb. 432). Hence the word indicates an underground chamber. Regarding the size of the chamber it is stated (V. 5.11) :

"Erect-sitting, head would not strike (the ceiling)".

This also indicates an underground chamber. This is supported by Av. **avakana-** "digging up, trench" used for the same purpose (V. 8.4-9; Wb. 169).

In these chambers dead bodies were temporarily deposited for two or three days or for a month during severe winter till winter ended; and in the beginning of spring dead bodies were removed and sun-exposure was made (V. 5.12-13). If the Mazdyasnas would not remove the dead bodies, would not make Sun-

exposure within a year they were liable to punishment till "dead bodies were worked on (that is, processed, disposed off by exposure), dakhmas were worked on (cleansed), impurities were worked on (removed) (and till) "devouring by birds" (V. 5.14).

Note: Av. **aiwi-varshata-** "worked on", Av. **verez-** with the prefix **aiwi** (V. 3.25). Bartholomae (Wb. 93) : "beregnet", Av. **var-** "to rain" (Wb. 1410), perhaps influenced by V. 5.15-18.

This indicates that Av. **dakhma-** was applied to the chamber, most probably underground cellar, used temporarily for depositing dead bodies if and when it was not possible to dispose off and sun-expose the dead bodies due to severe winter.

(2) Av. **dakhma-** is often specially used in apposition to Av. **Uzdaeza-** "a structure", and it is expressly stated : " . . . the **dakhma-** structure . . . wherein dead men are deposited" (V. 3.9, 13; 7.54).

(3) Rain water could fall on **dakhma-** (V. 5.15-18). This suggests that **dakhma-** was also an open place or structure, or a platform, without a roof.

(4) If one places a dead body on "(open) ground covered with light exposed to the sun", then that piece of ground could normally be used again after a year (V. 7.45).

If one buries a dead body underground, evidently without a super-structure, then that piece of ground could normally be used again after 50 years (V. 7.47-48).

If one places a dead body in a dakhma-, then that ground could not normally be used till the dead body mingles with dust, and thereafter "extirpation in the dakhmas" has been made. The Avesta words are : **aetaeshva dakhmaeshva** "in those dakhmas" (in the locative case, V. 7.49-50). In this case Av. **Dakhma-** is used for a place of burial with a superstructure. It is not enjoined to pull down the structure, as it is generally understood, but it is enjoined to extirpate, to exhume, the dead body buried under the structure. This is expressly stated : "Of the dakhmas one shall extirpate so much (piece of ground) as was the (dead) body" (V. 7.51).

Hence one of the meanings of Av. **dakhma-** is "an underground cellar, a dungeon". The word is used in this sense also in later literature (see below, § 47).

#### AVESTA **uzdana-**

42. Avesta enjoins that after the sun-exposure, after flesh is eaten up and bones are dried up, the bones should be deposited in a receptacle called Av. **uzdana-**, PhI. **Astodan** : "bone-receptacle, an ossuary" (V. 6.50; 8.74). Av. **uzdana-** is thus described (V. 6.50) :

"uzdana- . . . out of (the reach of) dog, out of fox, out of wolf, without letting rain on (it) from the upper side when rain waters (come)".

#### PAHLAVI **azan**

43. Frahang i **Oim** (Reichelt, XIV) explains Av. **dakhma-** by PhI. 'z'n : **azan**. In Pahlavi, particularly in the Pahlavi translation of Videvdat, PhI. **azan** is frequently used for PhI. **dakhmak**. Hence Av. **dakhma-** is semantically same as PhI. **azan**. The PhI. word **azan** is explained : **\*astadana-**↳ **\*azd-dana-** > **azdan** > **azan** (Henning, BSOAS. XI, pp. 478-479), same as PhI. **astodan** "an ossuary". That the PhI. word was so used in the sense of "an ossuary" appears from the funerary inscriptions on stone-ossuaries of the late Sasanian and early post-Sasanian times, as noted below (§ 45).

#### ASTODANS OF THE ACHAEMENIAN TIMES

44. The description of Avesta **uzdana-** given above compares favourably with the description of the ossuaries (generally known as "tombs") of the Achaemenian emperors - Cyrus I at Pasargadae, and of Darius I, Xerxes I, Artaxerses I, and Xerxes II at Naqsh i Rostam. As it is well-known, the ossuary of Cyrus I is a gabled stone-structure on a stone-platform about 11 metres high above the ground surface. The ossuaries of other Achaemenian emperors are carved in living rock about 20 metres high above the ground surface. Hence the deposits in these structures would indeed be out of the reach of dogs, foxes and wolves, and rain waters would not enter.



## SASANIAN AND POST-SASANIAN OSSUARIES

45. No traces of any place connected with disposal of dead bodies of the Zoroastrians in early Sasanian times have been found. Scanty remains, however, of such places of late Sasanian and early post-Sasanian times have been discovered. Professor Menasce has interpreted a Pahlavi inscription in cursive Pahlavi script on sarcophagus, which is evidently an ossuary, of late Sasanian times, discovered in Istanbul. Remnants of other ossuaries have also been discovered. They are described as "a fragment or broken drum of a fluted column" (Sprengling, **Third Century Iran**, p. 70), or as "a carved fashioned rock which looks like the base of a pillar", or "a large slab of stone", or a stone on a mountain called Tell-i Qalat (R. N. Frye, **Funerary Inscriptions in Pahlavi from Fars**, in **W. B. Henning Memorial Volume**, pp. 152-156), bearing funerary inscriptions in cursive Pahlavi script. The earliest dated inscription belongs to the 6th year of Yazdgard III (637). Another dated inscription belongs to the 33rd year of Yazdgard III (664). In other inscriptions the year is either destroyed or not mentioned. It is interesting to note that in these inscriptions the ossuaries are expressly called **en dakhmak** "this **dakhmak**". It appears that "the carved fashioned rock' with three funerary inscriptions, and a stone on Tell-i Qalat (Frye, Plates II, V) were the platforms where dead bodies were exposed to the sun; and other places, "column", and "base of a pillar" (Frye, Plate I) seem to be **astodan**, although all are known as **dakhmak** in the inscriptions.

DATISTAN I DENIK ON **astodan**

46. The Pahlavi text of **Datistan i Denik**, composed in the later part of the 9th century, describes **astodan** (edited by T. D. Anklesaria, Pursishn 17) :

" . . . (when) that which (is) flesh is eaten up, then that which (is) bone should be lawfully carried to ossuary (**astodan**), which is so kept high from the ground, and on which stands a roof, so that any kind of rain does not rain on the dead matter, and its water does not stand on it, and its moisture does not come to it, dog and fox would not be able go therein, and for coming of light on it a hole has been made thereon – (this) is very authoritatively said.

"That ossuary should be made and arranged, which is made from one stone, and its lid from one (separate piece of) stone, having a hole, and its surroundings should be filled in with stone and mortar."

Evidently, the first part of this description is based on V. 6.50 quoted above. Hence the words "very authoritatively said" used in the description. Further, it corresponds to the description of the ossuary of Cyrus I, as noted above. The second part corresponds to the stone ossuaries of Sasanian and post-Sasanian times, as described above.

#### PAHLAVI **dakhmak** "A DUNGEON"

47. As explained above, Av. **dakhmak-** was used in the sense of an underground cellar, a dungeon. In the same sense the word is used also in Pahlavi, although only in two instances. In the *Denkart*, Book VII, PhI. **dakhmak** is used along with **razm** "battle" and **shkaft band u patfras** "grievous imprisonment and punishment", which Zartust had to suffer in the court of Vishtasp:

(1) *Denkart* VII, Dresden (missing passages, p. 120 8-10) p. 51. 810:  
Sanjana, XIV p. 23. 11-12; Madan, p. 637. 16-17 :

**pa an i ohrmazd handarz u framan evtak O dar i vishtasp  
u var (wI) i an dakhmak u razm franaftan**

"By admonition and order of Ohrmazd, proceeding (by Zartusht) alone to the ordeal of that dungeon and battle."

(2) *Denkart* VII, Dresden (missing passages, p. 119.3-4), p. 53.3-4; Sanjana, XIV, p. 25. 7-8;  
Madan, p. 638. 13-14 (when Zartusht was put in 33 fetters) :

**u etar hac takikih i zartusht pa evtak o \*var  
(written 'ysh) i dakhmak u razm raftan**

"And here by bravery of Zartusht (his) going alone to the ordeal of dungeon and battle."

Note: (1) Written 'ysh for 'yyy' : var "breast", wrong use of ideogram : In the corresponding 1st passage the word is clearly and correctly written wl : var "ordeal".

(2) In both passages the text is dxmk wlzm **daxmak u razm**. Sanjana changes to read shmknw : **sahmgun** "terrible". Mole (*La Legende de Zoroastre*, p. 54.7, 24) follows Sanjana : **sahmak** "terrible, violante".

PERSIAN **dakhme** "A RECEPTACLE"

48. Persian dictionaries generally explain **dakhme** in the sense of "a tomb, a catacomb, a mausoleum". But in the early Persian writings the word is used, although in exceptional cases, in the general sense of "a structure, a building, a receptacle, an underground cellar" (**Oriental Conference Papers**, by J. J. Modi, Bombay 1932, pp. 66, 67) :

(1) Kazwini (about 1263) :

"When Gushtasp went to Istakhar, he ordered a receptacle (**dakhme**) to be prepared and placed therein Zend books with all reverence and he appointed some people to look after them".

(2) Mirkhond (1432-1498):

"He (Gushtasp) ordered that 12,000 cow-skins may be tanned and prepared like the skin of deer . . . and when Gushtasp came to Istakhar, he ordered, that a subterranean receptacle (**dakhme**) was made and they placed there books of Zend with all possible respect."

In these instances, Persian **dakhme** corresponds to Pahlavi **diz i nipist** "fort of writing". Hence PhI. **diz** (same as Av. **daeza-** in **uzdaeza-** used in apposition to Av. **dakhma-**, as noted above), Old Persian **dida**, Persian **dez** corresponds in meaning to Persian **dakhme** "a receptacle, an underground chamber".

The said receptacle (**dakhme**) may now be identified with the tower (known as **ka'ba i zardusht**) near the Achaemenian ossuaries at Naqsh i Rostam. The said Achaemenian tower was used in Sasanian times as the receptacle, a store-house, for the Avesta scriptures. It appears that due to vicinity of the ossuaries the place was called dakhme - see **Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute** No. 47, 1979, pp. 87-90.

PERSIAN **dakhme** "A STRUCTURE" IN GENERAL

49. Professor A. V. W. Jackson travelled in Iran in 1901. Regarding his travel from Shiraz to Yazd, he writes (**Persia Past and Present**, p. 342) :

"On the right of the road (from Shiraz to Yazd) as we approach from the northwest there is a large fortress-like ruin called **Dakhmah-i Darab** "structure of Darab", after the name of Darius Codomannus, the last of the Acheamenians. The term **dakhmah**, which is applied to it, is used as also in Turkish, for a structure in general, and is not to be confounded with the usage of the word **dakhmah** in the technical sense of "Tower of Silence". The ruin looks like a deserted stronghold of considerable antiquity."

Jackson mentions also **Dakhmah-i Gabraha** "the Structure of the Gabras" (p. 342).