

Zoroastrianism

An Ethnic Perspective

Khojeste P. Mistree

Dedicated to my wonderful mentor Mary Boyce,
whose wisdom, guidance and inspiration have enabled me
to write this book.*

** Professor of Iranian Studies in the School of Oriental and African Studies,
University of London.*



Stucco decoration — Ctesiphon (c 4th century A.C.)

Foreword

There are many diverse opinions and interpretations of the Zoroastrian tradition, however, it is appropriate that at this juncture a book titled "Zoroastrianism : An Ethnic Perspective" by Khojeste Mistree has been published in the hope that this book will quench the religious thirst of Zoroastrians, both living in India as well as those beyond the seas. The author has eminently succeeded in giving a faithful presentation of Zoroastrian doctrine and rituals, supported substantially by scriptural evidences; more so in view of the fact that there are a number of other self-styled scholars whose credibility as students of this ancient revealed religion remains a matter of doubt.

Currently, there are some ignorant preachers who often take their views from alien philosophies that are propagated by unenlightened Gurus, and then serve these eclectic ideas to their meek gullible flock with hypocritical devotion. Refreshingly, the present author does not fall into this category, as he has drawn from the authoritative and learned works of Professor Mary Boyce as well as a number of other serious scholars, thereby enhancing the scholarship and value of this book. The importance of this work lies in the fact that the author has highlighted the beauty and strength of Zoroastrian doctrine and rituals from a new ethnic point of view. In doing so, he has succeeded in remaining faithful to the traditions of the Avestan scriptures and their Pahlavi translations and commentaries.

Members of the community should learn to guard against the "mediocre muddle" of books as well as the false teachers of the religion, by turning to scholarship in order that they may not be beguiled into supporting alien doctrine extrapolated from heterogeneous sources in a haphazard manner. It is hoped that the intelligentsia of the community will strive to imbibe Zoroastrianism from this valuable monograph in order to mould their lives as the followers of the "good religion".

On a personal note, I would like to wish Khojeste, and his wife Firoza who is also deeply involved in the work, brilliant success in all their religious endeavours and writings. May you both be blessed by Ahura Mazdā and be given the strength and moral fortitude to bear the buffetings of misguided critics with equanimity.

Dasturji Dr. Firoze M. Kotwal
High Priest
H. B. Wadia *Ātash Bahrām*
Bombay.

The Genesis of this Book

The seed for this book was sown in London nearly fourteen years ago when two very special English friends of mine, Patricia Buckle and Warren Kenton, began to ask me poignant questions about my religion and heritage. I soon realized that I was unable to answer their probing queries satisfactorily and thus started my own search for a religious identity, which hitherto had remained dormant. Gradually over the months it dawned upon me that without an indepth serious study of the faith, I was not going to be in a position to seek answers to my nascent religious quest.

The search began with the contacts that I made at grass root level in the remote villages of my distant ancestors in Iran. It was during these visits that I met special Zoroastrians who put me in touch with the traditional source of the religion. The experience of these meetings was very rewarding and deeply moving, for I felt the need to delve deeper into the religious writings and literature of my people. What happened during those formative years of religious discovery is part of history. However, without the guidance, enthusiasm and support of Patricia and Warren, I would never have been channelled into the field of Zoroastrian Studies and therefore it is to both of them that I proffer my innermost "rediscovery thanks".

I would also like to proffer my heartfelt thanks to:

Mr. Dinshah Malegamvala who was instrumental in overcoming a number of hurdles and obstacles in order to help me embark upon my studies at Oxford;

Mehraban Zartoshty and Tehemton Aresh, my two chief Iranian sponsors, without whose encouragement and unconditional support I would not have been able to complete my studies at Oxford;

Elizabeth Bonbright of the Marsden Foundation, New York, who took special interest in my work and supported me during my stay at Oxford;

James Russell and Alan Williams, my two great friends and colleagues, who have been sources of inspiration in helping me to formulate an intellectual appreciation of Zoroastrian doctrine which we all studied together.

It is thanks to visionaries like these, that religious scholarship has continued within our community, allowing the flame of Zarathushtra to be rekindled and transmitted from generation to generation.

Upon returning to India in the summer of 1977, I was encouraged by Freddie and Katy Mehta to take small private study groups in which a number of young Zoroastrians fired a volley of questions of a social and religious nature. The interest shown by the younger generation gained momentum and as an outcome of this interest and enthusiasm emerged Zoroastrian Studies (ZS), a movement which is primarily concerned with both the religious as well as the socio-economic aspects of the community. The main aim of ZS is to encourage, promote and support an awareness of the Zoroastrian tradition and Iranian culture through the right use of scholarship and teaching methods, in order to initiate a spiritual and material renaissance for those who seek it. Over the past four years, Zoroastrian Studies has brought together a number of like-minded Zoroastrians whose quest for a religious discovery has begun.

This book has been written in an attempt to satiate the demand for religious knowledge amongst those on the path of a Zoroastrian re-awakening. It is my belief that this book will go a long way in answering a number of complex questions about the "good religion", which have hitherto remained unanswered in the minds of many educated and thinking Zoroastrians. It is not my intention to provoke unbridled controversies, nor is it my desire to offend the religious sentiments of fellow Zoroastrians, and therefore I have taken due care in attempting to present a balanced overall perspective from a traditional and textual point of view.

The contents of this book have been extrapolated from a series of lectures which were delivered by me at a number of seminars held in Bombay, during which specially prepared handouts were distributed to the course participants as an aid to facilitate a quick study of the religion from an ethnic point of view. Each chapter therefore has been compiled succinctly in order to highlight the salient features of the topics covered during the seminars. It is also hoped that in a progressively secular world, this book will be of use even to non-Zoroastrian university students whose interest in Zoroastrianism may be either in the field of comparative religion, or in the study of the "living faith" as practised by the Parsis and many Iranis in different parts of the world.

It gives me great pleasure to acknowledge the strength, tacit support and encouragement given to me by my mother Nergesh, who inspite of criticism levied against her has allowed me to develop my interest in the field of religious studies; and to my wife Firoza, who has devoted endless hours of her time in the additional spadework, research and indeed in the writing of the manuscript. For personal reasons she does not want the kudos of co-authorship inspite of the fact that this book is the result of a sustained joint effort on both our parts.

In particular, I would like to thank *Dasturji* Dr. Firoze M. Kotwal for writing the foreword as well as for spending numerous hours of his invaluable time with me over the past four years. It is through a series of long discussions with *Dasturji* that I have been able to grasp some of the subtleties and beauty of the Zoroastrian rituals, which in turn has led to a furtherance of my religious quest.

It is hoped therefore that this book which has evolved through the aspirations and efforts of a number of people will generate a deeper interest in, and a greater awareness of the religion so that every Zoroastrian may once again proudly declare:

"Mazdayasno ahmi, Mazdayasno Zarathushtrish".

I am a worshipper of Mazdā, I am a Zoroastrian worshipper of Mazdā.

Khojeste P. Mistree

Signs and Abbreviations

Due to typographical restrictions, the following Avestan letters have been transcribed as below:

ā = ā
 ā = ā
 ɔ = ē
 ŋ = ng

<i>Ardāy Wirūz Nāmag</i>	<i>AWN</i>
<i>Ātash Nyāish</i>	<i>Āt.Ny.</i>
<i>Dādestān-ī-dīnīg</i>	<i>Dd.</i>
<i>Dēnkard, tr. by P.B. and D.P. Sanjana</i>	<i>Dk.</i>
<i>Dēnkard, ed. Mādan</i>	<i>DkM.</i>
<i>The Greater (Iranian) Bundahishn</i>	<i>GBd.</i>
<i>The Indian Bundahishn</i>	<i>In.Bd.</i>
<i>Mēnōg-ī-Khrad</i>	<i>MKh.</i>
<i>Nyāish</i>	<i>Ny.</i>
<i>The Persian Rivāyats</i>	<i>Per.Riv.</i>
<i>The Sacred Books of the East</i>	<i>SBE</i>
<i>Saddar Bundahishn</i>	<i>Saddar Bd.</i>
<i>Shāyest-nē-shāyest</i>	<i>Shsh.</i>
<i>Škand-gumānīg Vīstār</i>	<i>SkG V.</i>
<i>Vendidād</i>	<i>Vd.</i>
<i>Yasht</i>	<i>Yt.</i>
<i>Yasna</i>	<i>Y.</i>
<i>Yathā Ahū Vairyō</i>	<i>YAV</i>
<i>Zand-ī-Vahman Yasht</i>	<i>ZVYt.</i>

Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies,
 London — BSOAS

Journal of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute — JCOI

Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society — JRAS

Arabic	<i>Ar.</i>
Avestan	<i>Av.</i>
Gujarati	<i>Guj.</i>
Middle Persian	<i>MP</i>
New Persian	<i>NP</i>
Pahlavi	<i>Ph.</i>
Persian	<i>Per.</i>
Sanskrit	<i>Sk.</i>

NOTES

1. Many of the illustrations bear no direct relationship to the chapters in which they appear. The illustrations, however, have been chosen on their artistic and historical merit.
2. The Roman transliterations of the daily prayers (Chapter 17) have been taken from the *Khordeh Avesta* published by J.B. Karani, Bombay.

King Darius giving audience — Persepolis (6th century B.C.)



General Introduction

Who is a Prophet?

A prophet is a man who receives a revelation from God.

The Nature of Revelation

A revelation forms the basis of a divinely ordained infrastructure which encompasses within its form the objective principles of life. These principles lead man to an awareness of truth, justice and moral purpose which when realized re-links man to his Maker in the physical, psychological and spiritual worlds. The corpus of the revelation forms the basis of a new conceptual framework, which when accepted and practised by a group of people becomes a new religion.

What is Religion?

Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices which help man to relate to the ultimate conditions of his existence. These beliefs and practices when comprehended and experienced give man the tools to understand himself. As a result of this, an insight may be gained of the role that this "self" plays in the cosmos.

The Need for Religion

Religion helps in bringing together a group of people to form a distinguishable faith and community by giving them an identity of purpose. A religious system helps to express, codify and reaffirm the central values of a group of people in such a way, so as to maintain the devotional as well as the ethical fabric of that society.

