

**Seth Maneckji Limji Hataria**  
**The Martin Luther King of Zoroastrianism**  
**&**  
**The Struggle for Zoroastrian Civil Rights in Iran**

The most striking observation about the persecution of Zoroastrians and their subsequent genocide is, that it took place in the birth place of Prophet Zarathushtra, namely in Iran. The impact of this persecution and its legacy is felt even today, as it does with the Native Americans who have suffered a similar faith in their ancestral lands. One of the symptoms of this form of genocide is that it often robs the victim community of natural leadership that is familiar with its cultural heritage. One of the lasting effects of such a vacuum is the eventual disorientation of that society witnessed often by the lack of unity within it, because it has forgotten its past and as a consequence does not know how to proceed forward. However, the end of Zoroastrian persecution in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Iran only happened because the Zoroastrians of Iran, India and Great Britain were united in a common objective.

In 1861, the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe was established by Seth Muncherjee Hormusjee Cama, Dr. Dadabhai Naoroji and other like minded Parsis, with a written constitution thus making the ZTFE the oldest South Asian ethnic minority organisations in Britain. <sup>[1]</sup>

In the archives of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe, at Zoroastrian House in London, there is a letter with a golden imperial crest of the Lion and the Sun of Persia. Under the golden imperial crest, it states;

“From Pahlavi Shah en Shah of Iran”.

The letter is written in Farsi and addressed;

“To the President of the Parsee Association of Europe, London”.

The signatory is Reza Pahlavi!

Incidentally, it was seldom for Reza Shah to personally sign letters unless the person the letter was being addressed was a very important person. Indeed the then President of the Parsee Association of Europe, the present ZTFE, to whom this letter was addressed, was a very important person. <sup>[2]</sup>

This letter was accompanied “with a free translation in English”, and was sent with a covering letter, dated 10<sup>th</sup> December 1926, by His Excellency Prince Nadir Mirza Arasteh, Charge d’Affaires at the Legation De Perse in London.

The free translation in English also has a golden imperial crest of the Lion and the Sun of Persia. The contents read;

“WE have received the letter forwarded by the Parsee Society of London, conveying to US the Society’s felicitations and good wishes for the future welfare and prosperity of Persia and the Persian people, resulting from OUR efforts.

“WE deeply appreciate the sentiments and views therein expressed and WE trust and assure you that by the Grace of Almighty God OUR desires and thoughts, which WE have long cherished, will be realised to complete the happiness and welfare of this ancient country.”

(signed) REZA PAHLAVI.

(dated) is Tehran 17<sup>th</sup> Mehr, 1305.

It is important to note that the terminology used for dating is as per the ancient Achaemenid Zoroastrian calendar and not the Islamic calendar.

The President of the Parsee Association of Europe, as mentioned in Arasteh’s letter, was Sir Mancherjee Merwanjee Bhownaggee.

Who was Bhownaggee? Why did Reza Shah consider him important?

The British General Election of 1900, one hundred years ago, witnessed the re - election with an increased majority of the first non - white MP to win the same parliamentary seat for the second consecutive term. <sup>[3]</sup> The MP was Sir Mancherjee Merwanjee Bhownaggee, ‘Knight Commander of the Indian Empire’ and the ‘Order of the Lion and the Sun of Persia’.<sup>S6</sup> Bhownaggee was born in 1851 in Bombay, India, and belonged to the influential ‘Parsi’ community. <sup>[4]</sup> Due to the growing religious persecution of Zoroastrians in Iran following the Arab conquest in the seventh century, a group of them from Khorasan, North Eastern Iran decided to leave in the tenth century. These Zoroastrian religious refugees landed

in Sanjan, South Gujarat in India around 936 CE. <sup>[5]</sup> They were given permission to stay by the local Hindu King, Jadiv Rana, and their decedents became known as '*Parsi*' or '*Persian*'. Bhownagree came to Britain in 1882 to study law. He was called to the bar at Lincoln's Inn in 1885. <sup>[6]</sup> In 1891, he was elected to the Board of Directors of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe. In 1908 following Dadabhai Naoroji, he was elected its third President, a position he maintained by annual election until his death in 1933. He was interned at the Zoroastrian Cemetery in the village of Brookwood, Surrey. It was said of Bhownagree that "he was an institution in himself!" <sup>[7]</sup>

One hundred years ago Great Britain was the most powerful country in the world, even more powerful than the United States of America. It was said that the sun never set on the vast British Empire. Thus, being an elected representative to the Parliament of Great Britain for the party that not only was in government, but also the party of the British Establishment namely the Conservative Party, meant one was in a position of influence. This influence continued even when one ceased to be an MP! Examining the parliamentary records from Hansard it is noted that, Bhownagree as an MP spoke out vigorously for British investment in Indian industry and education, specifically in scientific, technical and vocational education. In addition, he reminded parliament that Great Britain was not honouring her pledge concerning the equality for all subjects, especially the treatment of Indian labourers in various parts of the British Empire such as Guyana, Fiji, and Africa. In South Africa, Gandhi, was Bhownagree's main informant. <sup>[8]</sup> One of the oldest photographs in the archives of the ZTFE, is titled, "Pateti Banquet 1906" held at the Criterion Restaurant, in Piccadilly London. Seated in far left row, dressed formerly in black bow tie and black dinner jacket is the young Mohandas K. Gandhi, better known as Mahatma Gandhi, accompanied by his wife Kastoorba in a sari, while not far away seated on the top table is Bhownagree. Dadabhai Naoroji, being the President is in the Chair, next to him the young Madame Bhikaiji Cama, and seated next to Cama is the Persian Charge d' Affair, seated next is Goshi Captain, grand daughter to Naoroji and friend of Gandhi, followed by Lord and Lady Reay. <sup>[9]</sup>

The purpose for inviting the Persian Charge d' Affair was because Naoroji, Bhownagree, and others in the ZTFE, together with the Parsis of Bombay made it a high priority to ameliorate the condition of the Zoroastrians in Qajar Iran. Due to the subject matter of this paper, it is not feasible to give an account of the conditions of Zoroastrians, down the ages, after the Arab

conquest of Iran. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that active persecution of Zoroastrians in Iran began with the Abbasid Caliphs in the ninth century,<sup>[10]</sup> and continued under every dynasty before and including the Qajars. G. K. Nariman in the early 1900's was of the opinion, that the persecution of Zoroastrians in Iran overall was not by the Arabs, but by their fellow Iranian compatriots whose recent ancestors had previously converted to Islam, thereby demonstrating their piety to the new faith.<sup>[11]</sup> It is for this reason that many Zoroastrians fled Iran. The best known of these Zoroastrian refugees who fled Iran were the *Parsis* in India. If it were not for the Hindus of India, it is highly doubtful there would be any practising Zoroastrians found in Iran today or in any part of the world! By the time Aga Muhammad Khan became the first Shah of the Qajar Dynasty in 1796, the persecution of Zoroastrians was fine-tuned to such an extent that the Zoroastrians were on the verge of extinction in their homeland. It was only when Reza Pahlavi became Shah on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1925 that all the discriminatory laws against Zoroastrians were finally removed, with a few exceptions. During his reign, policies on equal rights for Zoroastrians were enforced!

Rashid Shamardan in his book, "Tarik-i Zarathushtrian Pas-as Sasanian" estimated that at the beginning of the eighteenth century, there were half a million Zoroastrians in Iran, mainly in Yazd and Kerman.<sup>[12]</sup> By 1854, one hundred and fifty years later, during the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar the Zoroastrian population of Iran had dwindled to 7000.<sup>[13]</sup> Shamardan's estimate obtained from the oral tradition amongst the Zoroastrians is disputed, because official Iranian government figures put their numbers substantially lower. However, as clearly demonstrated in a Florida Court in 1993, relating to the 1920's massacre by the Ku Klux Klan of African Americans in the township of Rosewood, that the official count of the dead dramatically differed with eye witness accounts of the period.<sup>[14]</sup> There is a similar discrepancy relating to the Armenian genocide that took place in Turkey during 1915-1917, prior to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The Armenians state that one and a half million were killed, while the Turkish government puts the figure at three hundred thousand. Furthermore, Turkey claims that the Armenians were guerrilla fighters, on the side of Czarist Russia, which was fighting against Ottoman Turkey during the First World War.

The reasons for this dramatic decline were the total destruction of the Zoroastrian *Gabr - Mahalle* in Ispahan in the era of Shah Hussein during the late Safavid period<sup>[15]</sup>, followed by the two Afghan invasions of Iran that toppled the Safavids in 1722. The Afghan army marched

through Kerman rather than risk the deserts of Seistan. <sup>[116]</sup> In the process, the *Gabr - Mahalle* in Kerman, located outside the city gates, suffered the brunt of these attacks. The Afghans and in turn the Safavids massacred the majority of the Zoroastrian population. Within seven years, the Safavid dynasty was replaced by a tribal Afshar leader, Nadir Qil Beg, who himself became Shah in 1736. Under Nadir Shah, the Zoroastrians had two alternatives, renounce their ancestral faith or face death. <sup>[117]</sup> In 1794, Kerman was plundered by the troops of Aga Muhammad Khan Qajar, as a punishment for sheltering the last Zend ruler Luft Ali Khan. The Zoroastrian population of Kerman were slaughtered, <sup>[118]</sup> their sacred books destroyed, and *Gabr - Mahalle* was laid to waste forever. <sup>[119]</sup> It was reported that in Bam, Aga Muhammad personally tore out Luft Ali Khan's eyes thereby adding to his collection of thirty five thousand pairs of eyes and six hundred skulls, which was witnessed by Sir H. Pottinger in 1810, to mark his victory in Kerman. <sup>[120]</sup> Zoroastrians of Iran suffered gravely from the onset of Qajar rule. However, the Qajars were not well prepared for the European predators, chiefly amongst them Czarist Russia and Great Britain. The prestige of Iran and its place in the world sank. <sup>[121]</sup> Wars with Czarist Russia, during the reign of Fath Ali Shah, reigned 1797 - 1834, ended with defeats for Iran. As a settlement, Armenia and Azerbaijan were ceded to the Russians, together with the substantial loss of land on each side of the Caspian Sea. <sup>[122]</sup> As the nineteenth century progressed, it became apparent that Iran was a backward nation. The Qajar Shahs toured Europe seeking loans to modernise Iran, because the country was virtually bankrupt. <sup>[123]</sup>

Contrast this with the Parsis, who unlike their Zoroastrian co-religionists back in Iran had never been persecuted by the Hindus in India. As the nineteenth century progressed, Great Britain with its Empire was the most powerful nation on earth and India became the Crown Jewel in the Empire. In turn, the Parsis became a very influential community in British India and because of their '*Merchant Princes*', the community became immensely rich. Not only the Parsis built Bombay for the British, but at times had defended the city against the enemies of the British. In fact, Britain's oldest Royal Navy warship afloat is the 46-gun frigate HMS Trincomalee built in 1817 by Parsi Wadia shipbuilders in Bombay. In return the British East India Company promised the Parsis that they will never forcibly convert them unlike the Portuguese, the previous European power to arrive in India. This was a pragmatic policy because missionary activity would have been bad for Company business. In short, the nineteenth century witnessed the meteoric rise of the Parsi community. During the British Raj

in India, five Indians became baronets. The first three hereditary baronets, created within twenty five years from 1857, were all Parsis. Hence, for the first time after the Arabs overran Iran in the seventh century, there was a group of Zoroastrians, who were in a position of real power and were subjects of Great Britain the most powerful country in the world. In addition, every Parsi knew then, as is the case today, why their ancestors had fled Iran in the tenth century and had to seek refuge in an alien land of India. Besides being fabulously rich, the Parsis as per the Zoroastrian doctrine became linked with phenomenal charity work and the phrase developed, "Parsi thy name is Charity". Combined with the fact that since the fifteenth century, as per the Persian Rivayats, the Parsis were aware of the suffering of their fellow co-religionists back in Iran, but at that time they were powerless to help. However, this was no longer the case anymore!

Back in Iran, during the reign of Nadir Shah 1736 - 1747, travel was officially forbidden for the Zoroastrians, but extreme provocation led particular individuals to flee overland to India. Due to the precarious journey, only the successful ones lived to tell the tale. One such case was in 1796 of a Zoroastrian named Kai Khusrau i-Yazdyar, who managed to secretly smuggle his beautiful daughter Gulistan to Bombay. Gulistan had become an object of desire to a wealthy Muslim of Yazd, thus to save her from abduction, which was quite common for Zoroastrian women, she was smuggled to Bombay. It should be noted, that the family of Kai Khusrau was one of only two Zoroastrian families who succeeded in escaping trouble torn Kerman and made their way to Yazd after the death of Karim Khan Zend in 1779, which once again threw Iran into turmoil. <sup>[24]</sup> Gulistan and her father Kai Khusrau were assisted in Bombay by the benevolent Edulji Dorabji Lashkari. Helped by the Lashkari family, Kai Khusrau returned to Yazd three times and smuggled his entire family to Bombay including his other two daughters. Subsequently, the beautiful Gulistan married a Parsi, by the name of Framji Bhikaji Panday. Gulistan had five sons and four daughters, who together with Kai Khusrau inspired them and her wealthy husband Framji to assist fellow Zoroastrian refugees. By the 1830s, increasing numbers of Zoroastrians were fleeing Qajar Iran and coming to Bombay. In 1834, Gulistan's eldest son, Burjorji, started a fund to help these incoming Zoroastrian refugees. <sup>[25]</sup> In 1853, Gulistan's third son, Meherwanji, started another fund in Bombay, for the specific purpose of assisting the Zoroastrians in Qajar Iran. This fund was called "The Society and Fund for the

Amelioration of the Condition of the Zoroastrians in Persia”, better known as the “Amelioration Society”. <sup>[26]</sup>

On 31<sup>st</sup> March 1854 the *Amelioration Society*, despatched their first agent, Maneckji Limji Hataria, on a fact-finding mission to Qajar Iran. Hataria was selected because he was experienced, self reliant and resourceful. He was adaptable, honest and was patient during negotiation. His previous job had required him to travel to Sind and other frontier outposts of British India. Physically he was compact and sturdy and was built to endure the prevalent rigors of life and travel. Hataria was given explicit instructions, to inquire into and report upon the social, political and intellectual conditions of the Zoroastrians in Qajar Iran. <sup>[27]</sup> Hataria landed at Bushire in the Persian Gulf in April 1854 at the age of 41. On 11<sup>th</sup> January 1855, the *Amelioration Society* called a public meeting in Bombay to consider the resolutions to be adopted on the report submitted by Hataria.

The report was extremely distressing and stated that the lives of the Zoroastrians in Iran had no value. Murders and assaults on the Zoroastrians went unpunished, rape and abduction of their women was common. The most alarming content of Hataria’s report was the dwindling population of Zoroastrians resulting from forceful conversions. Only 7200 Zoroastrian individuals remained in Iran, 6658 in Yazd and its villages, Kerman had only 450, while Tehran had 50 and a few in Shiraz. Discriminatory laws existed to pressurise Zoroastrians to give up their ancestral faith. <sup>[28]</sup> For instance, the law of inheritance stated that a Zoroastrian who converted to Islam collected the lion share or all the inheritance of the deceased, while the other brothers and sisters who steadfastly remained Zoroastrians, got nothing. <sup>[29]</sup> This meant that the Muslim husband who had abducted a Zoroastrian woman and forcibly converted her before marriage was now entitled to her inheritance.

An account of forceful mass conversions, was related to Professor Mary Boyce when she visited the Zoroastrians in the villages of Yazd during 1963 - 1964;

“Virtually nothing can be learnt of Sharifabad and Turkabad during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; but in the mid nineteenth century disaster overtook Turkabad, in the shape of what was perhaps the last massed forcible conversion in Iran, possibly during the reign of Fath Ali Shah (1797 - 1834). It no longer seems possible to learn anything about the

background of this event; but it happened, so it is said, one autumn day when dye-madder - then one of the chief local crops - was being lifted. All the able - bodied men were at working teams in the fields when a body of Moslems swooped on the village and seized them. They were threatened, not only with death for themselves, but also with the horrors that would befall their women and children, who were being terrorised at the same time in their homes; and by the end of the day of violence most of the village had accepted Islam. To recant after a verbal acknowledgement of Allah and his prophet meant death in those days, and so Turkabad was lost to old religion. Its fire - temple was razed to the ground, and only a rough, empty enclosure remained where once it had stood.” <sup>[30]</sup>

Zoroastrians were forbidden to have basic education, even on their own religion, or rebuild their places of worship. The height of Zoroastrian houses were restricted and should be low enough for any Muslim to touch the roof with the hand extended. Only two windows per room while *bad-girs* or air-cooling towers were forbidden, without which the summer heat of the Yazdi desert was unbearable. Besides being illegal to trade, all Zoroastrians had to walk in the town, but could not walk in the bazaar. Riding a horse was forbidden, and even in the desert, a Zoroastrian had to dismount from his donkey whenever he met a Muslim. Zoroastrians were forbidden to wear trousers instead had to wear self-coloured tight knickers, while they had to wear a special somewhat peculiarly hideous shoe with a broad turned - up toe. Zoroastrians were forced to wear clothes only of dull yellow, brown and grey colours, had to wear a torn cap and carrying an umbrella was forbidden. Zoroastrians were prevented from wearing rings or even wearing spectacles. The harshest of all these anti Zoroastrian laws, reported Hataria, was the payment of the *jizya* or the poll tax. Initially, the *jizya* was a tax paid by the *dhimmi*s, non - Muslims, to their Muslim overlords as a means of exemption from military service. Nevertheless, in practice and in hands of unscrupulous tax collectors the *jizya tax* was used as a harsh tool of oppression and enforced conversions of Zoroastrians. <sup>[31]</sup>

A decade earlier, in 1843 during the reign of Muhammad Shah Qajar (1834 - 1848), the famous Danish scholar Westgaard, visited the beleaguered Zoroastrian community of Kerman. He noted that the *jizya tax* for the Zoroastrians set by the imperial court in Tehran had risen to 660 tomans. However, since several intermediaries demanded their share, the poll tax had increased by over 200% to 2000 tomans. In 1843 there were 1000 Zoroastrians living in Kerman, out of these only 200 could pay without difficulty, 400 with much trouble and for the rest it was



impossible even under the pain of death. <sup>[32]</sup> The most distressing scenes ensued at the time of collection for those who could not pay. They were mercilessly beaten, their children tortured in front of their eyes and forcibly converted to Islam. <sup>[33]</sup> It is important to note, Westgaard's figure of 1000 Zoroastrians in 1843, while Hataria reported 450 in 1855, therefore within 12 years the population of Kerman had dwindled by over 50%. The impact of Hataria coming to Iran was significant, because by 1878, under the governorship of Vekil ul-Mulk, the Kerman population had increased to 1341. <sup>[34]</sup>

According to information related to Napier Malcolm, who resided in Yazd from 1900 - 1905, the *jizya* had to be paid on the spot whenever the tax collector met the Zoroastrian. He was not even allowed to go home to fetch the money. If the money was not given, the Zoroastrian would be beaten until it was given. Napier Malcolm mentions an incident related to him, of a collector who tied a Zoroastrian to a dog and gave a blow to each one in turn. <sup>[35]</sup> It is important to recognise the dislike of dogs originates from the liking of dogs by Zoroastrians. In Zoroastrianism, the dog is man's assistant, as it helps man in the eternal fight against evil unlike the cat. Hence it was mandatory for Zoroastrians when they converted, to destroy their *kusti*, the sacred girdle worn around the waist, kick the dog and spit into the fire. Incidentally, it was bad manners for a Zoroastrian to spit, especially in the river, while kicking a pregnant bitch was a capital offence in Sasanian Iran. <sup>[36]</sup>

As expected the Parsis in Bombay were shocked upon hearing Hataria's report. Some felt that Hataria should bring the remaining Zoroastrians to Bombay. However, the majority felt that the Parsis of India must not remain indifferent to the harsh treatment of their fellow co - religionists in Iran and more forceful action was required. An article penned by the historian Dosabhai Framji Karaka described the mood of the Parsi community, after being made aware of Hataria's report;

“But can we ourselves do nothing for our unfortunate co-religionists in Persia? Our community possesses considerable weight, and includes, amongst its members, names known all over the world for their exertions in the case of humanity, and the amelioration of the condition of their countrymen generally. A deputation, therefore, of our race to the Persian Court, duly accredited by the British Ambassador at Tehran, might we believe, remonstrate with success against the cruelties now practised upon our Zoroastrian brethren in Persia. The amount raised by the

capitation - tax now levied upon them, and which is attended by circumstances of such cruelty, must be, to the imperial revenue, insignificant in the extreme, and it is not improbable that a dignified representation on the subject, made by a suitable embassy from the Parsis of India, might succeed in abolishing it. Persian princes seldom knew the true state of their subjects, and we cannot but think that our countrymen would reflect honour upon themselves by an effort to relieve the miseries of our Zoroastrian brethren in the fatherland.” <sup>[37]</sup>

During the public meeting, a third fund was spontaneously established, known as the *Persian Amelioration Fund* to finance Hataria’s work in Iran. <sup>[38]</sup> This fund was under the chairmanship of Sir Dinshaw Petit, the second Indian to be made a baronet, who also happened to be the husband of Sakarbai, one of Gulistan’s daughters. The *Amelioration Society* instructed Hataria, that his primary objective must be, at all cost, the abolishment of the obnoxious *jizya tax*, while the secondary objective was the removal all discrimination against the Zoroastrians in Iran. The campaign for the abolition of the *jizya tax* commenced in 1857 and lasted for twenty five years. <sup>[39]</sup> Hataria worked with missionary zeal to achieve his objective. Like all Parsis, Hataria was a British subject, therefore under the protection of the British ambassador to Iran, the well-known Sir Henry Rawlinson, with whom he had excellent relations. He set up headquarters in Tehran and established contacts with people who mattered in Qajar court circles and made respectful submissions and representations. The ministers, court officials and governors were lavished with presents solely with the view to achieving the objectives set by the *Amelioration Society*. With great patience and perseverance, Hataria waited three long years, before he ultimately succeeded, through the offices of Rawlinson, in obtaining his first audience with Nasir al-Din Shah, which took place on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1860. Initially, Hataria was asked to present himself at the Qajar Court with the petition from India on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1860. He was accompanied with Sir Henry Rawlinson, and six other Parsis and waited all day to see the Shah, but in vain. The next morning Hataria was there again and after waiting until 3pm, was summoned alone to meet the Shah.

Later Hataria described the meeting to Rawlinson;

After bowing to the Shah several times, Hataria stood a distance of about 20 steps from the Shah.

Nasir al-Din Shah exclaimed, “Is this Manekji?”

Hataria bowed low and said, “Yes, I am the one who is always willing to sacrifice himself in

the bejewelled dust of Your Majesty's feet.”

At this stage, the Shah had a short conversation with his courtiers.

Meanwhile Hataria advanced step by step towards the Shah and placing the silver casket at his feet, removed the cover.

Hataria opened the address sent by the *akabars*, the leaders, of the Parsi community of Bombay, which was wrapped in brocade, and displayed it to the Shah.

After it was replaced in the silver casket, the Shah enquired,

“Do you know Farsi?”

“Yes, *Kebla* of the World”, replied Hataria.

The Shah enquired, “Do you belong to the Zoroastrian tribe? Is your religion Zoroastrian?”

“Yes, Protector of the World” replied Hataria.

The Shah asked, “What are the main directives of your religion?”

Hataria responded, “The main directives are similar to the *Shariat* of Islam. There is some difference in the prayers. But in essence both are the same.”

At this stage the Shah addressed the *amirs* standing in front right row; “These people are good, pure and holy and have survived from very ancient times”.

Then the Shah asked Hataria, “Are you worshippers of fire?”

Hataria replied, “No, Your Majesty. We consider the *atash*, the fire, as the *Kebla*, in the same way that the followers of Islam consider *Kaaba* in Mecca as the *Kebla*.”

“What, you do not consider fire as God Himself?” enquired the Shah.

Hataria responded “No Your Majesty. One must know God through his creation. Water, fire, sun, moon are all created by Him. Through them we worship the Creator Himself.”

“Then don't you worship the fire?” enquired the surprised Nasir al-Din Shah.

“No Your Majesty. We stand in front of the Fire or the Sun and offer prayers to their Creator” replied Hataria.

“Why do you pray standing in front of the fire?” enquired the Shah.

Hataria replied, “These are *noorani*, lustrous objects. We consider each lustrous ray, a ray from the Holy Creator. Hence we consider it best to offer prayers in front of these manifestations of the Creator Himself.”

“You mean *roshni*, light?” asked the Shah.

“Yes Your Majesty.” informed Hataria,

The Shah enquired, “Do you follow *roza*? Do you fast?”

Hataria responded, “No Your Majesty. We do not remain hungry during the day and eat well after sunset as do the followers of Islam. But, we have directions to eat a few morsels less and give the food so saved to the poor.”

The Shah enquired, “Do you undergo *nekah* while taking a wife?”

Hataria replied, “Yes, Your Majesty. Like the followers of Islam we too have *nekah*.

Our *mobeds* tie the nuptial knots.”

The Shah enquired, “Do you perform *nemaz*?”

Hataria replied, “Yes, Your Majesty, we follow the directions of the Creator and offer prayers six times during the day and night.”

The Shah asked, “Are you a tradesman?”

Hataria responded, “Yes, Your Majesty, I trade on a small scale. But the main work of this servant is to guide the few remaining Zoroastrians of Iran on behalf of the *Parsi akabars* of India.”

The Shah enquired, “In what occupation are the *Parsis* of India mainly involved?”

Hataria responded, “Most of them are traders. A few are writers in the service of the English.”

After asking a few more questions, Nasir al-Din Shah observed, “The people of this group are very loyal and are originally of Iranian descent.”

Concluding the meeting, Hataria made the following submission:-

“I am one who is always willing to sacrifice himself at His Majesty’s feet. Though the *Parsis* of India have, over a long period, been away from the Iranian land, still they consider the Shah of Iran as ‘a shadow of the Creator’ and have kept friendly relations with Iran. Hence, in this royal durbar as splendid as King Solomon’s, this small representation is like an insect flying at night. We pray that it be sympathetically considered by Your Majesty.”

“Very well, very well”, responded Nasir al-Din Shah.

When the Shah saw Hataria following Qajar court practices, he exclaimed, “This person appears to be noble and deserving.”

In this first audience with Nasir al-Din Shah, Hataria created an excellent impression.

By 1860, the *jizya tax* had risen to 1020 tomans. After Hataria’s meeting with the Shah, the tax was reduced by 100 tomans. After a lot of pleading, through his contacts with Rawlinson and the French ambassador, Count de Gobineau, Hataria obtained an agreement for the entire amount to be remitted from Bombay, directly to the treasury in Tehran. Hence preventing the

excesses of the tax collectors in Yazd and Kerman, as earlier reported by Westergaad and Napier Malcolm.<sup>[40]</sup> By 1882 the amount of *jizya* to be collected was reduced gradually to 845 tomans. Finally, in August 1882, during the Muslim month of Ramzan, Nasir al-Din Shah issued the royal *firman* decreeing the immediate abolition of the *jizya tax*. The English translation of the text of the *firman* is the following;<sup>[41]</sup>

“In consideration of the innumerable benedictions which it has pleased the Almighty to accord us, and as an act of grace towards Him who has given us the Royal Crown of Persia, with the means of promoting the welfare of its inhabitants, there has devolved on us the duty of securing tranquillity and happiness for all our subjects, to whatever tribe, community, or religion they belong, so that they may be profited and refreshed by the beneficent waters of our special favour.

“Amongst these are the Zoroastrians of Yazd and Kerman, who descended from the ancient and noble race of Persia, and it is now our desire to make their peace and well being more complete than before.

“That is why, by this royal *firman*, we ordain and command that taxes imposts of the Crown, levied previously on our Musulman subjects of Yazd and Kerman, may be recovered in the same way from the Zoroastrians who reside there. In this manner the impost, which exacts from this community the sum of eight hundred and forty - five tomans, is abolished, and in the commencement of this propitious year of the Horse, we make an abatement of this sum and free the Zoroastrians from it forever. We therefore order and command our *mustaufis* and officers of the debt of the Royal Exchequer to remove it from the revenues, which have to be paid in by the Yazd and Kerman. The governors now in office, or who will be nominated subsequently, at the head of these provinces, ought to consider all the right to the payment of this tribute abolished for ever, and as regards the present year, and following years, if the sum should happen to be extracted, they will be held responsible and will be punished for it. Moreover, in the tribute of the tithes and imposts of water and land, and for all trade duties, the Zoroastrians must be treated in the same manner as our other subjects.

“Given at Tehran in the month of Ramzan, 1299. (August 1882)”

In order to maintain this long struggle of twenty five years to abolish the *jizya tax*, the Parsis of India had donated to the *Persian Amelioration Fund* £109,564 sterling / rupees, or as per current value in 2000 would be just under US\$ 10 million dollars / £5.5 million sterling.<sup>42</sup> During these twenty five years it took to abolish the *jizya tax* Hataria was not idle, as he was not the type of person who spend his time solely on patient diplomacy while practical tasks needed urgently to be done.<sup>43</sup> Besides the *jizya tax* countless other difficulties faced the Zoroastrians. For instance, they were forbidden to renovate their places of worship. In 1855, within one year of his arrival, the first task Hataria undertook, was to restore and extend the ancient Atash Behram building in the city of Yazd.<sup>44</sup> Two years later, in 1857, the Atash Behram of Kerman was rebuilt again from money that was pouring in from the Parsis of India. Snuffing out consecrated fires in Zoroastrian fire temples was very common in the centuries following the Arab conquest of Iran, therefore the fire temple buildings in many villages of Yazd and Kerman from the outside looked similar to any other village houses. At times, for extra protection of the very old fires, only a handful knew where the real consecrated fire was located, so as to prevent a Zoroastrian convert to Islam from revealing the exact location. It is because of such intense secrecy that the oldest fire burning today in Iran is *Adur Farnbag*, that was originally enthroned in Firuzabad, Fars and has been burning continuously since Parthian times for at least two and a half thousand years.<sup>45</sup> For comparison the oldest consecrated on Indian soil has been burning for over a thousand years in the village of Udvada, South Gujarat.

Besides renovating fire temples, Adarians, in the villages of Yazd and Kerman, Hataria built new high walled dakhmas or towers of silence by 1864. Thus preventing desecration by the local thuggish element that would remove the body from the dakhmas and drag it in the streets. Hataria also erected buildings and installed water tanks at the annual pilgrimage shrines at *Pir e-Sabz* and *Banu Pars*, located deep in the Yazdi desert.<sup>46</sup> Both these *Pirs* are named after the daughters of Yazdigard III. They commemorate the event, when Ahura Mazda upon hearing the princess's prayers opened the mountain, hence preventing the Sasanian princesses from being captured by the Arab forces.<sup>47</sup>

Another important area Hataria concentrated, was the setting up of schools for Zoroastrians, because education was forbidden to them. By 1857, only three years after Hataria's arrival, schools for Zoroastrian boys were set up in Yazd and Kerman. The opposition from local Muslims was intense, who saw no reason for the despised *Guebres* to be educated. In 1870 the

ban on Zoroastrian schools was lifted. By 1882 there were twelve Zoroastrian schools set up in Iran and included village schools and a boarding school in Tehran, staffed by qualified Parsi teachers from India offering secular education based on reading, writing and arithmetic.<sup>48</sup> By the early twentieth century, Zoroastrian men of Iran, who had been illiterate for centuries, were the first to be universally literate in secular education. Later, this universal literacy excelled Zoroastrians to new heights under Reza Shah Pahlavi, when virtually all restrictions against them were removed.

In Zoroastrianism there is spiritual gender equality, therefore in India, Parsis were pioneers of schools for girls in the nineteenth century. Thus the Parsi women in India were emancipated decades before the women in Great Britain. Subsequently, in the early part of the twentieth century Arbab Kaihosrow Jehanyan started a school for one hundred Zoroastrian girls in Yazd and here the Muslim opposition was very fierce, especially from the clergy. By the 1930's one third of the intake at the Zoroastrian school for girls in Tehran were high ranking Muslims, because their parents were impressed by the standard of education. Also they would not be indoctrinated as was the case in some Christian mission schools.<sup>49</sup> During the reign of Reza Shah, Muslims children attended the Zoroastrian village schools in Yazd and Kerman. However because the Muslims perceived the Zoroastrians to be unclean, separate drinking water containers were installed for them and even during lunch they would sit in separate areas and food was not shared between them.<sup>50</sup>

In 1854, when Hataria landed in Bushire, fifty Zoroastrians lived in Tehran, while others came for seasonal work. By 1864, within ten years of Hataria presence and notoriety, Tehran had abandoned its contempt for Zoroastrians. Besides building a school, a guesthouse was built for Zoroastrians in Villa Avenue in central Tehran together with a *dakhma* on the outskirts of Tehran, where currently the Zoroastrian *aramgah* or burial grounds are located. As Bombay was for the Parsis, it was Tehran that made the Zoroastrians of Iran wealthy. Due to Hataria's vision, vast amounts of barren land were acquired in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century at very cheap rates, because nobody else wanted it. However, when Tehran experienced the housing boom after the Second World War, these tracks of land were worth millions of tomans.

Besides lobbying the ambassadors of Britain, France, Russia, and USA, for them to bring pressure on the Qajar Court, Hataria dialogued with the religious authorities, stressing the Islamic concept of justice in the hope of softening attitudes towards the beleaguered Zoroastrians. Not unexpectedly, there was no reversal of policy, even when Hataria highlighted specific instances of murder, abduction and persecution of Zoroastrians to their attention. Nevertheless, the clergy were adamant that Islamic laws were not being infringed by the Muslim community of Iran.<sup>51</sup>

Hataria placed a very high priority on the marriage of Zoroastrian women, because of the constant threat of abduction and forced conversions leading to marriages with Muslims and thus the girls were lost to the family forever. Hataria condemned this practice during his dialogue with the clergy. Between 1856 and 1865, over a hundred poor or orphaned girls of marriageable age were wedded to Zoroastrians and the cost of marriage paid by the *Amelioration Society*.<sup>52</sup> At times Hataria personally would bear the cost of these marriages. Even after centuries of persecution, the Zoroastrians of Iran are still proud people and do not accept handouts, therefore noted Hataria that some of these young women chose to remain unwed, rather than somebody else pay for their marriage.<sup>53</sup>

Hataria had also noted that within ten years after his arrival in Iran and despite improvement, five Zoroastrians were murdered, seven wounded and tortured, between thirty to forty severely assaulted, one hundred houses of Zoroastrian were plundered and countless others robbed.<sup>54</sup> Sadly there was no redress for the Zoroastrian victims. Murderers of Zoroastrians were never prosecuted. This can be best described by an incident that occurred in Yazd in 1870. Two *lutis* attacked two Zoroastrians. The head master of the Zoroastrian School in the village of Taft in Yazd was murdered, while the other badly wounded as his attackers tried to cut off his head. By coincidence, Hataria happened to be in Yazd, therefore the criminals were caught. However, the Governor dared not proceed against them in order not to upset the Shia theologians, *Mujtahids*, because one of them happened to be a *Seyid*. Hence, Hataria persuaded the Governor to let him take both the perpetrators to Tehran for trial. In Tehran, the *Mujtahid* petitioned the Shah, they received the bastinado and were freed. Upon inquiring, Hataria was informed by the Vizier that under the law no Muslim can be killed for killing a *Guebre*. Hataria then enquired whether it was true that the blood - price of a Zoroastrian was set at just seven tomans. The official reply he got was that it would be slightly more.<sup>55</sup>



This *Seyid* was seen again in Taft by Napier Malcolm in August 1901, still roaming openly with his gang of *lutis*.<sup>56</sup> Upon intense pressure being brought on the authorities, there was some improvement after the abolition of the *jizya* in 1882, because Yazd had strong governors who were friendly towards the Zoroastrians. Napier Malcolm reports that in 1885, a *Seyid* murdered a Zoroastrian woman in Yazd. He was arrested and upon orders of the Governor of Isfahan, Zill us-Sultan, the elder brother of Nasir al - Din Shah, the *Seyid* was executed before daybreak. When the *Mullas* found out in the morning, they ordered slaughter of every Zoroastrian in Yazd. Luckily none were murdered but many were injured.<sup>57</sup>

Abduction of young Zoroastrian women, followed by forceful conversion and marriage to Muslims was a reality in Iran. Once this happened there was no redress for the victim or her family. Thus many of them, even married women, before leaving their houses, would blacken their teeth and disfigure their faces with dirt.<sup>58</sup> The famous English scholar E. G. Browne, during his travels in 1887 - 1888, reports a case he witnessed in Yazd of the attempted rape of a married Zoroastrian woman, leading to her murder. He was astonished when the two culprits although apprehended, were never prosecuted, because of the intimidation of the witnesses by the local *Mullahs*.<sup>59</sup> In 1899 a Muslim servant was executed by the governor of Yazd for abduction and rape of a Zoroastrian woman. Since the perpetrator was not a *Seyid* there were no disturbances. Even as late as the 1960's this practice continued as reported by Professor Boyce;

“Another example was the village of Abshahi, on the southern outskirts of Yazd where the last Zoroastrian family left in 1961, after the rape and subsequent suicide of one of their daughters.”<sup>60</sup>

“Last Zoroastrian family, four brothers and a sister were tenant farmers, left the village of Biyabanak in early 1900, to save sister from attentions of a local Moslem.”<sup>61</sup>

Professor Farhang Mehr in a recent article titled, “Causes of Decline of Iran's Zarathushti Population since Nineteenth Century”, list abduction of Zoroastrian girls by Muslims as the third reason for the decline of the Zoroastrian population in Iran. Professor Mehr, Chancellor of Shiraz University, was one of the most influential Zoroastrians and held various ministerial positions including that of Deputy Prime Minister during the reign of Mohammed Reza Shah

Pahlavi. As the President of the Tehran Anjuman in 1965, Mehr personally dealt with cases of abduction where the Prime Minister Hoveyda and Muhammad Reza Shah ordered an investigation. Unlike the Muslims, Zoroastrian women were easily distinguishable because of their particular style of clothing and they did not veil their faces. In addition, in Zoroastrianism, men and women freely mix; they dance together and consume alcohol on religious festivals since the days of the legendary King Jamsheed. Due to this lifestyle, a myth developed that Zoroastrian women were promiscuous, hence easy targets for abduction. In reality, as noted by European travellers, the Zoroastrian women were renowned for their chastity in Iran as well as in India.<sup>62</sup>

Being a British subject, Hataria was under the protection of the British Ambassador to Iran. Nevertheless, there were several attempts on his life, but despite these, he managed to survive to the age of seventy seven. Hataria passed away in Tehran on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1890, seven years after the abolition of the *jizya tax*. His body was consigned to the local towers of silence. Sadly, after his death, Hataria's only son Hormusji was murdered in Bander Abbas.<sup>63</sup> Even in his old age, Hataria's commitment to the amelioration of the Zoroastrians of Iran was total, because many of the discriminatory laws against Zoroastrians still remained. By the time Hataria died, majority of these laws were abolished. The memory of Hataria and his work is still remembered today by the Zoroastrians of Iran. His achievements were unprecedented. Hataria had undertaken a task reported to be "beyond human capacity." Gobineau, the French ambassador had said;

"There was needed nothing short of a miracle to save the *Guebres* as the Zoroastrians were called by the followers of Islam. Manekji Limji Hataria performed that miracle!" There should be no doubt that it is because of the work of Manekji Limji Hataria and others like him that Zoroastrianism in Iran continues to be practised today, three and a half thousand years after the advent of the Iranian prophet Zarathushtra. For this reason Hataria can be rightly called Martin Luther King of the Zoroastrians of Iran. As a mark of respect a golden bust of Hataria is placed on a pedestal in the compound of the *Atash Behram* in Yazd for all to see.

As was the case that, after the demise of Martin Luther King, the struggle for African American civil rights continued! Similarly the struggle to ameliorate the Zoroastrians of Iran continued after the death of Hataria. It lasted until December 1925, when General Reza Khan became

Reza Shah Pahlavi. After the death of Hataria, Kaikhosru Tirandaz Khoorsund, an Iranian and a graduate of Bombay University, became the second agent of the Amelioration Society in 1891, followed by Ardeshir Reporter<sup>S</sup> who in time became a very close and influential friend of Reza Shah. It should be noted that the obnoxious *jizya tax* was only one of the laws that was used to persecute the Zoroastrians in Iran. Although the *jizya* was abolished in 1882, there were other laws just as obnoxious that made the Zoroastrians easily identifiable in order to pressurise them to convert to Islam or simply used to humiliate them, especially in Yazd and Kerman, which was the “deep south red neck country” for the Zoroastrians. The list of anti Zoroastrian laws is long and examples are well documented, for instance up to 1860, Zoroastrians could not engage in trade. Later they were allowed to trade in caravanserais or hostelries, but even as late as 1905 they were forbidden to trade in bazaars or in linen drapery. Up to 1880, the Zoroastrians had to wear self-coloured tight knickers and were forbidden to wear trousers. They were banned from wearing white stocking and had to wear a special kind of peculiarly hideous shoe with a broad turned - up toe. Napier Malcolm was informed that in 1860, a 70 year old Zoroastrian was beaten up in Yazd for wearing a pair of white trousers, his trousers were removed and was send home with them under his arm. In 1891, he reported, a *Mujtahid* in Yazd ordered the beating of a Zoroastrian, because the man was wearing white stocking that were taken off. Note this was eleven years after it was permitted for them to wear white stockings. Up to 1882, the height of Zoroastrians houses were restricted and should be low enough for any Muslim to touch the roof with the hand extended. There was a maximum of two windows per room and only single doors were allowed, while the walls had to be splashed with white round the door. As late as 1900, the Muslims in Yazd made sure that not a single Zoroastrian house installed a *bad - gir* or air-cooling tower, without which the summer heat of the Yazdi desert was unbearable. Up to 1885, Zoroastrians were prevented from wearing rings, their girdle had to be made of rough canvass. They had to wear a torn cap and were forbidden to carry an umbrella. Napier Malcolm reports that during his stay in 1905, twenty years after it was permissible, no Zoroastrians would dare be seen with an umbrella in Yazd. Up to 1891, all Zoroastrians had to walk in the town, while in the desert they had to dismount from their donkey, as riding a horse was forbidden, whenever they met any Muslims.<sup>64</sup> By 1900, this law was relaxed and Zoroastrians only had to dismount when they met a high-ranking Muslim. Up to 1896, a Zoroastrian was forced to twist his turban instead of folding it. Up to 1898, the Zoroastrians were forced to wear clothes only of dull yellow, brown

and grey colours. After 1898, clothes in bright colours such as black, blue, green and red were not permitted. Besides colour, there were numerous other dress restrictions.

The Minute Books and Annual Reports of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe highlight that between 1873 and 1926, the Zoroastrians of Britain, on behalf of their co - religionists in Iran, and in conjunction with the Parsis of Bombay made six Deputations to the Shahs of Iran.<sup>65</sup> The first Deputation was made to Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar, at Buckingham Palace on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1873. The Parsi delegation jointly headed by the President of the ZTFE, Dadabhai Naoroji, and Senior Trustee Ardeshir Khurshetji Wadia, who was the first Indian to visit USA and also first to be elected to the Royal Society of Great Britain.<sup>66</sup> It was upon the insistence of the Empress of India, Queen Victoria, that Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar met the Parsi delegation. The address drawn up in the most florid and courteous style such as Oriental etiquette demands, supported by the British Ambassador to Tehran, Sir Henry Rawlinson and Mr. E.B. Eastwick MP was presented to the Shah. Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar, reigned 1848 - 1896, responded by informing the delegation that he was familiar with complaints regarding his Zoroastrian subjects and would consider the means of ameliorating their position in Iran. Sadly, in spite of the friendly promises by Nasir al-Din Shah, the address had little impact compared to later deputations and petitions and the amount of *jizya* was not reduced.

In 1886, Muzaffar al-Din Shah, reigned 1896 - 1907, succeeded the assassinated Nasir al - Din Shah. In 1898, Muzaffar al-Din issued an imperial *firman*, revoking all the remaining discriminating laws against the Zoroastrians of Iran. However, the *firman* had little effect in Yazd or Kerman because of the *Mujtahids* and their feared bands of *lutis* often headed by *Seyids*. The Zoroastrians in Yazd would still be beaten up for accidentally touching with their clothes some fruit exposed for sale in the bazaar, because in the eyes of the Muslims, the fruit was now deemed to be unclean and therefore unfit of consumption by true believers.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, for the first time since the Arab conquest of Iran, the Zoroastrians were not discriminated as noted by the American scholar A.V.W. Jackson.<sup>68</sup>

The second Deputation was at the Royal Palace Hotel when Muzaffar al-Din Shah Qajar visited Ostend during his European tour in 1900. Muzaffar al-Din Shah, like his father Nasir al-Din Shah was visiting Europe to obtain loans for improving Iran. But unlike his father, Muzaffar al-Din Shah was pleased to receive the illuminated address, bounded in a handsome volume with

full oriental protocol from the Parsi delegation, because in 1892 Naoroji became the first Asian and Zoroastrian to be elected a MP. In 1900 Bhownagree was made a Knight, he was also a sitting MP, who had been re - elected with an increased majority, in the parliament of Great Britain, the most powerful country in the world. Hence the Parsis of Great Britain were in a position of influence! Furthermore, the Shah was presented with two more bounded illuminated addresses, one from Bombay through Sir Dinshaw Petit, head of the *Society for the Amelioration of Conditions of the Zoroastrians in Persia*, on behalf of the Parsis of India. The other on behalf of the Zoroastrians of Iran and was send from Tehran through Ardeshir E. Reporter, the third agent of the *Amelioration Society*.<sup>69</sup> Muzaffar al-Din Shah gave his assurance to not only protect but also promote the interests of his Zoroastrian subjects.<sup>70</sup> Due to the constant pressure by the Zoroastrians from outside Iran and also from European powers, the new governors Yazd, after 1882 and more so after 1900, were instructed from Tehran to ensure the security of the Shah's Zoroastrian subjects.

On 6<sup>th</sup> December 1906, a third address was send to the gravely ill Muzaffar al-Din Shah through the offices of His Highness Sadre Azam in Tehran forwarded by the Charge d' Affairs of Persian Legation in London. The address was once again drawn up by Bhownagree, who by then belonged to the 'Order of the Lion and Sun of Persia' and covered an engrossed resolution passed by the Zoroastrians of Britain. It read;<sup>71</sup>

“At a Special General Meeting of Parsees resident in Great Britain invited by this Fund on Monday the 15<sup>th</sup> October 1906, the following resolution was unanimously passed.

Proposed by Dadabhai Naoroji, Esquire,

Seconded by Sir Mancherjee M. Bhownagree, K.C.I.E., Order of the Lion and the Sun.

Resolution: “That the Parsees resident in the United Kingdom, in Special General Meeting assembled, have received with the greatest satisfaction a message from Tehran that the Zoroastrian subjects of the Persian Empire have seen accorded by His Imperial Majesty the Shah-en-Shah the privilege of representation in the Parliament established by the order of His Majesty and that one of their most Distinguished Members, Arbab Jamsheed, has been elected as their representative; and that this Meeting is unanimously of opinion that the best thanks of

the community be respectfully conveyed to His Imperial Majesty for his broad minded act of justice towards his Zoroastrian subjects.”

Once again protocol and care for detail was of the utmost importance, as highlighted in the draft copy of the typed resolution where Bhownagree inserts the words “the Shah -en-Shah”, instead of “the Shah”. Similarly, in the letter to Prince Sadre Azam attached to the resolution, where he reminds Muzaffar al-Din Shah of his previous assurance to protect and promote the interest of his Zoroastrian subjects, the word “Excellency” is replaced by “Highness”. Bhownagree finishes the letter with the words “Obedient Humble Servant”. Furthermore, in the covering letter to the Charge d’Affairs, Bhownagree enquires about the Shah’s health and writes; “I have seen with deepest concern reports about the indisposition of His Imperial Majesty, and also noticed the later news with much relief that His Majesty is now much better. I hope your latest authoritative news is re - assuring on the subject. With best wishes for His Majesty’s complete recovery and long life, and with sentiments of respect for your Excellency, I am Yours very faithfully M. M. Bhownagree.”

The Persian Charge d’Affairs, who a few months earlier had been invited as a distinguished guest for the *Pateti Banquet* on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1906, promptly acknowledges the receipt of the address on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1906.<sup>72</sup> Recognising the importance of this third address to Iran’s image abroad and with it the importance of the Zoroastrians being British MPs he states;

“I am sure that it will be gratifying to His Imperial Majesty to see that his endeavours to further the well being of his Zoroastrians subjects, whose welfare He has so much at heart, are appreciated by their co-religionists in this country (Great Britain).”

The Charge d’Affairs concludes the letter by thanking Bhownagree for enquiring about the health of his “August Master” and informs him that;

“The last news I had on the subject was, I am glad to say of a reassuring nature”. However, within a few months after this reply, Muzaffar al-Din Shah passed away. He was succeeded by Muhammad Ali Shah who, although was hostile to the Majlis, did ensure that in the new Majlis there continued to be a Zoroastrian representative, Arbab Jamshid.

The fourth Address was on the accession of Muhammad Ali Shah Qajar.<sup>73</sup> It was drawn and presented by Bhownagree, to “His Excellency Moshir al-Mulke who was the envoy deputed to the Court of St. James to announce officially the accession of His Imperial Majesty the Shah”. According to the Minute Book, the presentation took place at the Criterion Restaurant on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1907 and records, “at the request of the Zoroastrians of Persia, the Managing Committee of our Fund thought it very desirable in the interest of the Parsees of Persia to give a reception”. Present at this reception was the President of the *Amelioration Society*, Sir Dinshaw Petit, who followed with an address on behalf of the Society based in Bombay. Petit conveyed “to His Imperial Majesty the respectful congratulations of the whole Parsi community on his accession to the throne of our ancient Fatherland”, thereby demonstrating that bonds between the Parsi community and their ancestral homeland are just as strong as they were when they fled Iran for India as religious refugees a thousand years ago. Petit continued, “with our eternal prayer that the Shah may be blessed with health, and strength to rule over his people for many long years, and that the Shah may grant to our co-religionists who are subject to his sovereignty the same rights, privileges, and protection which His Majesty has evinced his desire to extend the Persian nation under the constitution which has been recently inaugurated in his Empire”. Petit recognised the assurances given by the Muhammad Ali Shah, because he mentions the “unmistakable proof already given” to protect the welfare of the Zoroastrians of Iran by granting Arbab Jamshid the privilege of representation in the new Majlis to the gratitude of all Parsis. Petit concludes by assuring the Shah that “every measure of justice, of generous kindness and above all of assured protection of their lives (of the Zoroastrians) and property will be gratefully repaid by their increasing loyalty and devotion to His Majesty’s throne and august person”.

The impact of these deputations to the Qajar Shahs for the Zoroastrians in Iran were significant as witnessed by Arbab Jamshid Bahman Jamshidian becoming the first Zoroastrian representative in the Majlis. Previously, because of his honesty and integrity, Jamshidian was awarded the only contract to supply the Qajar Army with provisions. However, the Qajars were bankrupt, therefore they could only pay for provisions in instalments, through the collection of taxes. The promissory notes issued by the Qajars were lodged with Jamshidian who thereby became the banker to the Government of Iran, bearing in mind at that time the main banks in

Iran were controlled by the British and Russians.<sup>74</sup> Incidentally, it was illegal for Zoroastrians to trade in Iran before 1860.<sup>75</sup>

Another example of the impact of these deputations can be obtained from Arbab KayKhusrow Shahrokh's letters to Bhownaggee. Shahrokh was one of the most distinguished Zoroastrians of the early twentieth century.<sup>76</sup> He followed Jamshidian as the second Zoroastrian representative in the Majlis. By reading Shahrokh's first letter, from Tehran Persia dated 10<sup>th</sup> April 1907, which is an introductory letter to Bhownaggee, it is clear that Shahrokh regarded Bhownaggee as a person of influence in Iranian Zoroastrian affairs. Shahrokh addresses his letter;<sup>77</sup>

“To His Excellency; Sir Mancherji Merwanji Bhownaggerie, Hon. Exmemeber of British Parliament London.”

He begins the letter by stating;

“How much fortunate shall I be to reach to the high dignity of gaining the honour of representing myself as an atom before the rays of the sun of your Excellencies benevolence.”

In the next line, Shahrokh identifies himself not as a Zoroastrian, but more importantly, as “I am a pure Parsi from Kerman, Persia”. In contemporary Zoroastrian community politics, Shahrokh's identification of himself is historically very significant and can be traced back to Darius's inscriptions at Behistun in Kermanshah. In his letter Shahrokh mentions that for eleven years he was a “teacher in the Parsi School in Kerman”, following his leave he travelled through Russia and returned back to Persia and has settled in Tehran since 1905.

Accompanying the letter is a basic book on Zoroastrianism authored by Shahrokh because;

“As I saw generally Mohammedans, Babists and Christians protest with Zoroastrians in Persia and as there was not a special book among Parsis in Persia to peruse and use in their schools to know about their religion, to be able to answer rejecters and protesters, therefore I intended to write something on this purpose and I have published a small book in pure simple Persian language and it has been recently scattered among Mohammedan priests and nobles and protesters, and they themselves run for gaining it and knowing properly about the Parsi religion.”



Once again it is important to note that unlike contemporary Zoroastrians, according to Shahrokh Parsis and Zoroastrians are the same and uses the terms freely. Shahrokh in typical Persian humility mentions;

“Although (the book ) is not worthy of being offered to your Excellency, but as Mr. Ardeshirji Edulji (Reporter), the representative of the Bombay Parsi Committee in Persia lead and urged me to forward one copy, therefore I forward it to be offered to your Excellency. Asking apologies, hoping the acceptance of that book and wishing yours Excellency’s long life, prosperity, glory and successfulness for ever.”

He signs off as “Kaykhusrow Shah Rokh Kermani”.

In another one of Shahrokh’s letters, again addressed to Bhowmagree, dated 19<sup>th</sup> April 1909, Shahrokh stated; “Not a minute one of the Zoroastrians of Persia forgets to ask God Almighty to increase your successions, prosperity and benevolence, from which I am most really one of them. Because, each step your Excellency advances in High ranks, the effects are our happy days and successions here”.<sup>78</sup>

Indeed Bhowmagree was held in high esteem by the Zoroastrians in Iran as can be illustrated by the annual Navroze Greetings addressed to him, written in golden ink, from the Anjuman Naseri Zuruthushtiane of Yazd. The English translations reads;

“As by the grace of God and the graciousness of our Royal Master (the Shah), we are celebrating the advent of the New Year by ringing in the spring and ringing out the winter and there is general rejoice over time honoured feast of Jamsheed. We wish to congratulate you on this auspicious occasion and wish you and yours all the happiness and prosperity. We sincerely hope you will accept this expression of good wishes in the spirit it is offered. It would be overlooked on our part to say anything more on this occasion and we conclude with prayers to God for your long life and prosperity.”<sup>79</sup>

It is also important to note that on the top right hand side of the Navroze Greeting the date, which is Aban Mah 1276 Bastani (Kadmi), or November 1907. The ZTFE archives include similar Navroze greetings also from Kerman.

Shahrokh's letters demonstrate that the impact of these deputations on the Qajar Shahs were considerable! In turn the pressure was put on the masters of Islamic Jurisprudence and the Ulema. On 21<sup>st</sup> February 1910, the *Mujtahid* of Karballa signed a document titled, "A Fatwa on the Rights of Zoroastrians" declaring the Zoroastrian community was under the protection of Islam. The fatwa stated;

"To vex and humiliate the Zoroastrian community or other non-Muslims, who are under the protection of Islam is unlawful, and it is obligatory on all Muslims duly to observe the injunctions of His Holiness the seal of the prophets, respecting their good treatment, the winning of their affections, and guarding of their lives, honour and possessions, nor should they swerve by so much as a hair's breadth from this, please God Almighty."<sup>80</sup>

Even as late as 1913, Zoroastrians in Iran continued to face problems. The Times of India, dated 19<sup>th</sup> April 1913, reported on the Jamsheedi Navroze function held in London on 4th April 1913. The Times correspondent commences the article by stating that, "As Good Friday fell on 21<sup>st</sup> March the customary Jamsheedi Navroz banquet was celebrated a week later at the Frascati Restaurant with Sir M. M. Bhownaggee in the chair. There was a good attendance of Parsis, and the ties of Zoroastrianism were quickened by the reading of letters of fraternal greeting from the Parsis of Yazd and Kerman." A similar report appeared in the National Indian Association Journal for May 1913. On page 131, it states that;

"Out of considerable respect to Good Friday, which this year fell on March 21, the day of the vernal equinox and Jamsheedi Navroz, the celebration of the festival was postponed for a week by the Parsi community and also by the Persian Embassy."<sup>81</sup>

Rev. E. J. Clifton and Mrs Clifton were two of the guest invited for the occasion. The Times correspondent mentions;

"The Rev. E. J. Clifton has been engaged in educational work in Yazd and Shiraz for some years past, spoke hopefully of the future of Iran, and of the part that the Parsis of Iran are destined to play therein. Both Moslems and Europeans were finding the Parsis of Iran were proving themselves worthy of trust; and when Persia could show that it possessed men who would not be moved by bribery the country would come to its own. Referred to the disabilities from which Zoroastrians still suffered, he praised the work of Major Sykes, of the Chairman Sir

M. M. Bhownagree, and of the Bombay Association behalf of their community in Persia. Much remains to be done, for the Parsis of Iran who are persecuted on the slightest pretext. He rejoiced that on some occasions, he had been personally able to protect his Parsi friends and servants from tyranny and persecution. When the constitutional revolution broke out, a leading Parsi merchant's life was threatened in a southern city, whilst his brother was actually murdered in the capital. Fortunately he (the speaker) had been able to give the merchant asylum in his own house and keep him in safety until the danger was over." It is most likely that Zoroastrian merchant referred to is Arbab Kaikhosrow Jehanyan who started the first girl's school in Yazd, because his brother Parvis was murdered in 1907.<sup>82</sup> The Times reporter concludes;

"Following her husband Mrs. Clifton declared the Parsi women of Persia to be sweetest of her sex she had met. She said she had learned from them many lessons of patience and endurance. Though unveiled in a land of veil women they were absolutely trusted by their husbands, and as mothers admirably discharged their duties. She dwelt on the generosity of the Parsi merchants in supporting hospitals and other philanthropic organisations."

The ZTFE, through out the long presidency of Bhownagree continued to work for the amelioration of the Zoroastrians in Iran. Under "NOTABLE EVENTS", the Annual Report of 1920 mentioned the fifth deputation to the Shah in London on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1919. It stated that the "influential deputation", headed by Bhownagree, was received personally by Ahmad Shah Qajar at the Persian Legation. The Address as usual took account of full protocol and "was beautifully illuminated and presented in a massive silver casket."

It stated;

"From time to time in the past the lot of our co-religionists at Yazd and in other parts of your Dominion has been made unhappy and harassing by want of tolerance on parts of neighbours among whom they form a relatively small minority. Our Association and Representative Parsee Bodies in India had to bring these considerations to the notice of the Persian Authorities and especially of your Grandfather, the Shah Muzaffar al-Din on his visit to Europe in 1900. Since then their lot has been steadily ameliorated, and our fraternal interest in their welfare permits the confident assurance that under the constitutional reign of Your Majesty they will receive

equality of opportunity and treatment with all other classes of your subjects, and will suffer no civil or religious disabilities, thus strengthening the attachment to your throne and person of one of the most loyal and devoted sections of your Empire.”<sup>83</sup>

The annual report continues, “His Majesty made the following gratifying reply;

“I am glad to receive you, gentlemen, as the Representative of the Parsees who, as you have well said, remind us of the glorious traditions of the Fatherland. I thank you for the sincere sentiments and good wishes to which you have given expression. It has always been my aim to promote long-standing relations of unalloyed friendship existing between Persia and Great Britain, and I am gratified at the pleasing opportunity offered to me to come over here with the object of strengthening these ancient ties to the mutual advantage of the two Empires. I have always had at heart the well being of my Parsee subjects whose love for the Fatherland, intelligence, probity, perseverance, laboriousness, all of which fit them to contribute very effectively to the common task of increasing the prosperity of the country. Although the constitutional laws of Persia guarantee to the Parsee their full rights as Persian citizens, I am happy to assure you, gentlemen, that their welfare will ever form the object of my personal solicitude.” It is important to note the linking of the welfare of Zoroastrians with better relations with Britain. Referring to the Zoroastrian religion, Ahmad Shah stated;

“The very name of our Persian race recalls the lofty yet Deistic faith which was one of the many gifts of Persia to civilisation before the dawn of history”. Thus, Ahmad Shah Qajar acknowledged the contribution of the teaching of prophet Zarathushtra to the basic foundation of religions, because one of the main reasons of Zoroastrian persecution was due to the failure to recognise Zarathushtra as a prophet by sections of the Iranian society.

A letter dated 25<sup>th</sup> February 1920 from the Anjuman Naseri Zuruthushtiane of Yazd addressed to Bhownaggee, the Zoroastrians in Iran are happy to learn that the Parsis of Great Britain petitioned the Shah about their conditions. Its contents state;

“It is with great pleasure we read the address of the Parsee Association of Europe under your Presidency to His Majesty the Shah of Persia on the occasion of his visit to Europe. With high sense of gratitude we learn that the Members of the Association have been kind enough to make

in that address mention of their co - religionists in Persia, thereby pleading their cause and suggesting the means by which to bring about their welfare and safety.”<sup>84</sup>

In comparison, the Annual Report of 1926 reported the Address to Reza Shah Pahlavi. It stated;

“As it was felt by the Association that some recognition should be sent to His Imperial Majesty, the new Shah of Persia on his accession to the throne of our Fatherland, especially knowing the interest he took in the welfare of our Community. The Committee forwarded to His Majesty, through His Excellency Prince Nadir Mirza Arasteh, the Persian Charge d’Affaires. The Resolution transcribed on illuminated vellum;

“That at this, the first Meeting of the Committee of the Parsee Association of Europe, London, since the Coronation of His Imperial Majesty Reza Shah Pahlavi as Shah-en-Shah of Persia, the Committee begs to leave to convey their congratulations upon his accession. It is their prayer that he may reign long and prosperously over the country with which they have cherished ancestral associations and whose peoples include some thousands of their co-religionists. They rejoice in the many evidences of virility, justice and wise statesmanship, which were afforded by His Majesty during the years of his Prime Minister ship. They trace to this cause in large measure the restoration of good order and prosperity to the country, and in particular they beg to convey, with their felicitations, warm appreciation of the paternal interest His Majesty has shown in the welfare of their fellow Zoroastrians in Iran.”<sup>85</sup>

The Minute Books of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds record;

“The gracious Message of His Imperial Majesty Reza Shah Pahlavi, dated Tehran 17 Mehr 1305, over his own signature” was received with “deep gratification, and the members of the Association were profoundly touched by the solicitude expressed therein by His Majesty for the happiness and welfare of his Subjects.”<sup>86</sup>

As noted at the outset of this paper it was rather rare for Reza Shah to put his own signature on a letter, unless it was being send to a close friend or to someone he regarded very highly. Furthermore Reza Shah, who as Reza Khan had come to power by a coup with British backing and hence replaced the last Qajar Ahmad Shah, was more inclined towards the Zoroastrians

because of his very close friendship with Ardeshir Reporter, who was the third agent of the “The Society and Fund for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Zoroastrians in Persia” and like Hataria had a close working relationship with the British.<sup>87</sup>

Due to the weakness of central government in Tehran, Yazd and Kerman was for Zoroastrians what Southern USA was for African Americans. In 1919, the new governor of Kerman reinstated the hated *jizya* contrary to the imperial firman of August 1882 issued by Nasir al - Din Shah. Upon the urging of the Zoroastrians of Tehran the central government intervened thus reversing the governor’s decision.<sup>88</sup> On the whole treatment of Zoroastrians by the local population and the Muslim clergy was relatively harsher in Yazd than Kerman, partly because of the prominent role played by Shahrokh. Besides Ardeshir Reporter, another Zoroastrian who was close to the new Shah was Shahrokh, who persuaded Reza Shah at the outset of his rule to introduce the ancient Zoroastrian calendar names of the months for national use. Shahrokh was also responsible for building the Firdausi National Memorial to celebrate the poet’s millenary in 1934. It were these millenary celebrations that resulted in many non - Zoroastrian Iranians naming their newly born children after leading figures of the Shahnameh, such as Rostom, Sohrab, Hooshang, Shapoor, Manizeh, Faranghis, Vista etc.<sup>89</sup> But the biggest impact was when in 1934 Reza Shah declared that all foreigners will call the country “Iran” rather than “Persia”, which was name prior to the Arab invasions and mentioned in the Avesta.<sup>90</sup>

Shahrokh was one of the most distinguished Zoroastrians of the early twentieth century. Shahrokh was the first Zoroastrian in modern times that dared to ride a horse in his native Kerman, which until then was forbidden for Zoroastrians. Shahrokh’s great-great grandfather Bahman was the treasurer to Karim Khan Zand, while his grand father Goshtasp was the treasurer to Luft Ali Khan. In 1914, Shahrokh organised the coronation of Ahmad Shah Qajar.<sup>91</sup> During the reign of Reza Shah (1925 - 1941), Shahrokh became nationally known, when he returned from Washington after been successful in re-establishing diplomatic relations with the United States. The break of diplomatic relations happened when a group of American tourists were murdered in Iran. They were onlookers at a passion play, depicting the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and were taking photographs. The crowd attacked and killed the visiting Americans.<sup>92</sup> However, recent research shows that Robert Imbrie, the American who was brutally killed in Tehran on Friday 18<sup>th</sup> July 1924 was not only the United States Consul in Tehran, but a special agent of the State Department.<sup>93</sup> The other two Iranians who

accompanied Shahrokh to the US were Dr. Siddiq Alam and the well known nationalist Dr. Mossadaq. Shahrokh, described by the speaker of the Majlis, Mujtahid Mudarres “as the only real Muslim in the Majlis” because of his integrity, which was later echoed by Ayatollah Khomeini.<sup>94</sup>

The records of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe show that the Resolution of 19<sup>th</sup> June 1926 to Reza Shah was the final address sent to the Shah of Iran by the Zoroastrians of Britain. After this, there were no more, because Reza Shah had kept his word regarding the happiness and welfare of all his subjects. The advent of the Reza Shah era had a particular relevance to the Zoroastrians in Iran, because of the nationalist ideology and vision of the new Shah. It was during Reza Shah that all the discriminatory laws against Zoroastrians were finally removed, with a few exceptions such as becoming a prime minister or a high court judge etc. Policies on equal rights for Zoroastrians were enforced such as the treatment of Zoroastrian farmers and traders. For the first time the Zoroastrians were permitted to join the Iranian Armed forces and subsequently General Nowzari became the first Zoroastrian of the Iranian Army in modern times.<sup>95</sup>

Nine years after the coronation of Reza Shah in 1926, Bhownagree passed away at the age of 82, on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1933 and was interned at the Zoroastrian Cemetery at Brookwood Surrey. In 1940, Shahrokh became a victim of a hit and run car accident and was interned at the Zoroastrian Cemetery in Tehran. The world was at war and it is alleged that Shahrokh was assassinated on the orders of Reza Shah<sup>96</sup>. A year later, on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1941, Reza Shah was forced to abdicate in tragic circumstances and Iran was occupied by Great Britain, USA and USSR. With Reza Shah’s abdications came the end of another chapter in the long history of Zoroastrians in Iran. It started when Seth Manekji Limji Hataria of the *Amelioration Society* landed in Bushire in April 1854, when the Zoroastrians in Iran were on the verge of extinction and numbered only 7000. But within less than a century, like the eternal Simurgh the Zoroastrians had risen again to assist the Fatherland, just like the Parsis were doing in India, their adopted homeland.

In 1990, at a conference organised British Institute of Middle Eastern Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, F. Ershad delivered a paper titled; “The Historical Migrations of India As a Brain - Drain Movement”. He mentions that, “the first

outstanding migration wave from Iran to India occurred in the eighth century, was those of the Zoroastrian groups. They were mostly the religious elites, astronomers and merchants.”<sup>97</sup> Eckenard Kulke, in his book titled; “The Parsis in India; A Minority as Agent of Social Change”, outlines the numerous contributions of the Parsis in the nineteenth and early twentieth century who laid the foundations not only to Indian industry but also to Indian democracy. Thus resulting in modern India becoming a global player by in the end of the twentieth century. Just imagine the heights Iran would have achieved if the Zoroastrians had not been persecuted in Iran, their ancestral homeland.

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