xšnaoθra he ahura he mazdâ
Detail from above the entrance of Tehran’s fire temple, 1286š/1917–18. Photo by © Shervin Farridnejad
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Reviews

A Historical Overview of the Parsi Settlement in Navsari and Its Rise as the Bastion of Zoroastrianism

Daštūr Firoze M. Kotwal

I would like to welcome my scholar friends to this historical city of Navsari. Your presence today honours the name of the First Daštoor Meherji Rana Library, which as you know is a veritable treasure trove of invaluable material on the history and heritage of the Parsi and Irani communities of India.

Today thanks to Mr. Nusli Wadia, Chairman of the Wadia Group of Industries, and the Sir Dorab Tata Trust, we have excellent facilities available to any scholar wishing to stay in Navsari. This generous gesture on the part of the Trustees follows a long tradition of encouraging scholarship and learning, and we are grateful to them. As long ago as 125 years ago, in 1887 CE, the great Avestan scholar James Darmesteter commented when he visited the library that he was delighted with the contents of the library and the kindness of the librarians, and these words still ring true today. The manuscripts the library houses can keep teams of scholars busy for many decades.

1- Inaugural Lecture delivered at the Conference for celebrating the 140th Anniversary of the First Daštoor Meherji Rana Library, Navsari on 12th January, 2013.

It is my sincere wish that all of you here today would make full use of the library. Bharti Gandhi, our excellent librarian, is the keeper and guardian of this library and is ever willing to help you in your work. May the name of the Firšt Dašttoor Meherji Rana Library remain forever associated with learning and scholarship.

Navsari as a Fortress of Religiosity

In today’s lecture, I would like to give you an account of the Parsi community of Navsari from the earliest documents which attest the presence of the community in the region, and will trace their history down into modern times. As is well-known, the story of the migration of the forefathers of the present-day Parsi community from Iran to India is told in a Persian work entitled the *Qissa-i Sanjān*, the "Story of Sanjān."³ The original founding fathers of the Parsi community who came from Khorāsān in Iran and settled in the port city of Sanjan in Western India were all members of what is called in Gujarati the *Khorāsānī Mandali*, that is, the *Anjuman* or Congregation of Khorāsān. This term is first attested in a Sanskrit inscription on a sandstone slab written during the reign of the Silahārā King Anantadēva in the year 1081 CE, recording the gift of coins (*dramma*) donated to the *Khorāsānī Mandali* living in Sanjan at that time.⁴

When small groups of Parsis moved out of Sanjan, presumably for economic betterment, they settled in a town which is today called Navsari. In a few old writings, the Sanskrit term *Nāgasārikā* is used as the ancient name of the city of Navsari.⁵ The earliest mention of it is to be found in a copper plate of 821 CE of the tribe of the Rāṣtrakutas. In some Sanskrit colophons and in numerous Gujarati documents, the name Nāgamaṇḍala is also mentioned for Navsari, as are other forms;⁶ yet the city is best known by the name Navsari, a form which already occurs in our oldest Parsi Persian documents. Navsari perhaps was a name which appealed to the Parsi community, which has come to attribute the name to the city of Sārī, a place in Khorāsān, from where they had migrated centuries before. The first priest who arrived in Navsari from Sanjan in 1142 CE was Kāmdīn Zartōsht.⁷ With his arrival, religious ceremonies came to be performed in a modest house which over the course of time became a proper

³- This text has recently been re-edited on the basis of old manuscripts and translated into English By Alan Williams, *The Zoroastrian Myth of Migration from Iran and Settlement in the Indian Diaspora – Text, Translation and Analysis of the 16th Century Qesse-ye Sanjān 'The Story of Sanjān',* Leiden, 2009.

⁴- This inscription is kept in the Bombay Asiatic Society. See Hodivala, S.H. *Studies in Parsi History*, Bombay, 1920, pp. 80-81. The reading *Khorāsānī Mandali* is speculative, based on Hodivala’s suggested improvement to the original reading *Kharāsanī Mandalī* of Paṇdit Bhagvānlāl Indrajī, who first deciphered the inscription. Further, Hodivala postulates that this gift would have been for religious purposes, since in similar inscriptions, gifts of *dramma* coins were given for religious purposes.

⁵- This form already occurs in the plate inscriptions of the Chālukya ruler Karṇadeva from the year 996 Saka, see Modi, J.J. ’A Note on Two Chālukya Plates Found at Dhamadachchha in the Naosari District’, in *Asiatic Papers IV*, Bombay, 1929, p. 95, as well as in the old Parsi documents, for instance, the Sanskrit colophon to the *Pahlavi Vidēvdād* manuscript Pt2.


Agiārī, later known historically as the Vadi Dar-i Mihr, “The Great Dar-i Mihr.”

It would seem that by the early 13th century Navsari had a growing population, and this is why in 1215 CE, two priests, Hōm Bahmanyār and his son Farēdūn, were invited by the descendants of Mōbed Kāmdin Zartōsht to cater to the increasing ritual demands of the Parsis of Navsari. Hōm Bahmanyār accepted on the condition that the descendants of Mōbed Kāmdin Zartōsht agreed to share the ritual workload with him and his son Farēdūn. This formal agreement to share the workload between the families of Kāmdin Zartōsht and Hōm Bahmanyār, gave rise to the term Bhagariā or co-sharers and is used exclusively for priests who owe their allegiance to Navsari.9

By perhaps the early fourteenth century, a formal social structure was developed, known as the pols. The word pol in Gujarati refers to the designated areas in which households belonging to the same family and who bore the same surnames lived in Navsari. The descendants of the firšt Navsari mōbed, Kāmdin Zartōsht, and the descendants of Mōbed Farēdūn Hōm Bahmanyār divided themselves into five pols based on their genealogy. Three of these pols were named for the three sons of Mōbed Farēdūn – Āshā, Māhyār and Chāndā – while the other two pols were named for descendants of Kāmdin Zartōsht, named Kākā Pāhlan and Kākā Dhanpāl. The pols were an equitable way of prioritizing the workload among the Bhagariā priests, and this arrangement allowed the Kākā Pāhlan, Kākā Dhanpāl, Āshā Farēdūn, Māhyār Farēdūn and Chāndā Farēdūn families each to have a specific share in the ritual work. The privileges and authority vested in the heads of the five pols remained intact until the appointment in 1579 CE of the firšt Daštūr Meherji Rana.11

About three hundred years after our founding fathers arrived in Sanjān, the Parsis began to migrate to various ports of Gujarat and formed independent territorial spheres of ecclesiastical control called panthaks. The term panthak is derived from Sanskrit panthan-, cognate with Avestan paṇtå-, meaning “path”. The five original panthaks were carved out by the heads of the various priestly groups in the 13th century, and were demarcated geographically. At a formal meeting in Sanjān, it was agreed that no priest could perform any ceremony in a panthak which he was not officially linked to. Of the five panthaks, the panthak of the Bhagariā priests with their headquarters in Navsari was considered a leading one. From Navsari, priests were sent to serve in Surat, from where they went to Godāvarā, Bharuch and Khambhāt. They, the Godāvarās, Bharuchās, and Khambhātās together with the original Bhagariās and Sanjānās, formed the historic 5 panthaks of priests.12

8- The Gujarati term agiārī derives from the Sanskrit agnyāgara-, lit., the “house of the fire”.

9- This information is derived from Patel, Pārsī Prakāsh, vol.1, p.3, which cites an old Sanjānā Fihrist manuscript. On this early history of the Parsi priests, see also Kotwal, F.M. “A Brief History of the Parsi Priesthood”, Indo-Iranian Journal 33, 1990, pp. 165-175. The term Bhagariā is traditionally derived from the Gujarati expression bhagar vātvi, which referred to the distribution of the consecrated drōn after performing of the bāj-dharṇā (yašt ī drōn) ceremony. Those who took this portion of the drōn were referred to as Bhagar kādhnārā, “those who take out the drōn-portion” or simply Bhagariā for short, see Kutar, M.N. Navsārīnī vadī darēmehrām thaylā nāvarōnī fēhrēšēl, Bombay, 1929, p.4. For an example of the usage of the verb bhagar vātvi in an old document from 1599 CE, see Hodivala, S.H. Studies in Parsi History, pp. 229-230.

10- Gujarati for ‘uncle’ used as term of respect for venerable people.

11- On the five pols, see Kotwal, F.M. A Brief History of the Parsi Priesthood, p. 167.

12- On the five panthaks, see Kotwal, F.M. A Brief History of the Parsi Priesthood, p. 167.
Dakhmas of Navsari

Allow me now to speak briefly about some of the religious buildings found in Navsari. The first dakhma, that is, the Tower of Silence, of Navsari was built by two pious women, Behdīn Māhlan Behrām and her daughter-in-law, who it is said worked ceaselessly spinning the thick cotton bands needed to wrap round wooden bedframes to form a base on which a mattress or quilt could be laid. They sold these bands and collected enough money to build a dakhma. This dakhma is colloquially referred to in Gujarati as the sāsu-vahu dakhmũ or the dakhma built by a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law. A new dakhma was built later in red stone by Minōcher Bahman, the grandson of Mānek Changā Āsā. The last dakhma was built by Nusserwānji Tata in 1878 CE.

The Development of the Great Vadi Dar-i Mihr

The oldest Dar-i Mihr in India is commonly known as the Vadi Dar-i Mihr. In the old documents addressed to the Bhagarsāth Anjuman of Navsari, its name is qualified by adjectives such as juni (Guj.) and qadim (Persian) meaning ‘old’, ‘ancient’; vadi or moti (Guj.) meaning ‘great’ or ‘grand’; or śrī (Guj.), a title generally applied to names of divinities or great men.

Priestly records suggest that Kāmdīn Zartōsht, the great-grandson of Hormazdyār Rāmyār, established the Dar-i Mihr in the twelfth century with the assistance of his two sons, Pāhlan and Mōbed. The building of the Dar-i Mihr was at first a modest one, serving strictly as a place for ceremonial rites, and from its inception, it was without a permanently burning, consecrated fire.

By the sixteenth century, the Dar-i Mihr of Navsari, although without a permanently burning fire, began to be recognised as the centre of Zoroastrian orthodoxy by both the Sanjānās and the Bhagariā priests settled in Navsari. The various priestly groups took pride in initiating their sons into priesthood in the Dar-i Mihr, which also catered to their ritual needs by providing the requisites ālāt “ritual tools” for their panthaks. The institution of the Dar-i Mihr acquired over time a socio-religious status. When fatwās or religious commandments were proclaimed, all such meetings were held by community leaders in the old Dar-i Mihr, indicating that it de facto became a seat of governance for the Parsi community in Navsari. In light of Navsari being seen by all Parsis as the dharamnī tēkrī, “the hillock or summit of the religion”, the leading Parsis of Mumbai also sought guidance from the priests of Navsari. As early as 1323 CE the Iranian scribe Mihrābān Kaikhusrō perhaps referred to the Vadi Dar-i Mihr as stambbha-tirtha, literally a “pillar shrine”, i.e., a fortified holy place, as it is referred to in a copy of his Sanskrit colophon contained in the manuscript Pt2.

With the appointment in 1579 CE of Daśṭur Meherji Rana as the first high priest in India, recognized by both the Sanjānās and the Bhagariā mobeds and the whole Anjuman of Navsari, the ecclesiastical

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13- The date of the construction of this dakhma is unknown, though it must be some five hundred years ago, see Kotwal, F.M. and Hintze, A. The Khorda Avesta and Yašt Codex E1: Facsimile Edition, Wiesbaden, 2008, p.16, n.41. For more references, see Meherjirana, D.S. Daštūr-e-Daştur Meherji Rānā yādgārī grānth, vol. 2, p. 990.


15- For the colophon of the ms. Pt2, see Sanjana, D. P. the Pahlavi Vendidad, pp. xlvii-xlviii. Stambhātirtha is typically used as an epithet of the city of Kambhāt, and Kaykhusraw has also referred to Kambhāt as stambhātirtha in his colophon to manuscript Ks, f. 328a. The reading of Unvala in Collection of Colophons of Manuscripts Bearing on Zoroaśtrianism in Some Libraries of Europe, Bombay, 1940, p.131 of śumbhātirth is incorrect.
position of the *Dar-i Mihr* was further strengthened. The home of Meherji Rana was situated near the old *Dar-i Mihr*, as is attested by a document of 1534 CE, in which the *Dar-i Mihr* is simply termed as an *agiārī* ‘house of fire’; the same nomenclature is used in the documents of 1579 CE, 1580 CE and 1599 CE.\(^\text{16}\)

Despite the *Vadī Dar-i Mihr* being at the centre of all rituals performed in Navsari, the only ever-burning fire at the time was what in *Pārsī Prakāsh* is termed as *Sanjānō Ātash*, “the Fire of Sanjān.” Similarly, the old documents of the Sanjānā mobeds when mentioning the great Sanjān Fire, refer to it as the ātashni *agiārī*, the “*Agīārī* of the Fire”, in order to distinguish it from the *Vadī Dar-i Mihr*:\(^\text{17}\)

It was in the seventeenth century that the old *Dar-i Mihr* began to be called the *Vadī Dar-i Mihr*, the ‘Great Dar-i Mihr’, on account of its ancient status and pre-eminent position. The earliest reference to my knowledge for the use of this term is in a document of 1683 CE addressed to the Sanjānā priests of Navsari by the Anjuman of Surat wherein the Bhagariā priests are called the “co-workers (*hamkārs*) of the *Vadī Agīārī*.”\(^\text{18}\) Even during the period of conflict between the Bhagariās and the Sanjānās, the latter referred to the Bhagariās, in a document of 1732 CE, as the group of priests “belonging to the *Vadī Dar-i Mihr* (*vadī darēmēhērnā*)” in order to distinguish themselves as the sole servitors of the Great Sanjān Fire.\(^\text{19}\) Yet, even though the Sanjānā priests were primarily attached to their Ātash Bahram, the *Vadī Dar-i Mihr* was so sacred that the Sanjānā priests had their own children’s *nāvar* ceremonies and *barašnūms* performed in its precincts.

However, over the course of time, the authority of the Navsari Bhagarsāth Anjuman was challenged, as attempts were made by individual priestly groups to bolster their religious power base independent of Navsari. So, for example, when the Wadia and Anjuman Ātash Bahrāms were installed in Mumbai in the 19th century, this was done without the *parvāngī* (permission) of the Navsari Anjuman, despite the priests involved in the two Ātash Bahrāms being Bhagariās.

Major decisions, such as founding of the second sacred Ātash Bahram of Navsari in 1765 CE, were taken in the *Vadī Dar-i Mihr* after the performance of the *Jashan-i Rapithwin*. It has also been the traditional practice for a successor to the Daśṭurship of Meherji Rānā to be invested with a white cotton sash (*pichhōdī*) within the holy precinct of the *Vadī Dar-i Mihr* on the dawn of the fourth day after his predecessor’s death.

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\(^{16}\) See Hodivala, S.H. *Studies in Parsi History*, pp. 201-204 and Meherjirana, D.S. *Yādgārī Granth* vol.2, pp. 949-50. This document in question refers to the settlement of a land dispute between Rānā Jēsang, the father of the First Daśṭur Meherji Rānā, and his neighbour, a Sanjānā priest named Nāgōj Ruštām, concerning the boundaries of their yards, in which the rain-gutter (*Guj. *varsātnā pāṇī nīkh*) of the *agiārī* is referred to with reference to the boundary between the two men’s properties. The document further specifies that the children of Nāgōj Ruštām, Māṅēk Nāgōj and Jīvā Nāgōj, and the children of Rānā Jēsang, Hōshang Rānā and Māhiār Vāchā (i.e., the First Daśṭur Meherji Rānā) should be satisfied by the position of the boundary-marker.


\(^{18}\) See Trustees of the Parsi Panchayat (eds.). *Navsārīnī pahēlā Daśṭur Meherjī Rānā Library madhēnō... asal daśṭavējō..., pt. 2, p.20.

\(^{19}\) See Trustees of the Parsi Panchayat (eds.). *Navsārīnī pahēlā Daśṭur Meherjī Rānā Library madhēnō... asal daśṭavējō..., pt.1, p.19.
The Arrival of the Great Sanjān Fire

Thirteen years after the sack of Sanjān by the forces of Mahmūd Begadā, the Sanjānā priests brought the sacred Sanjān Fire to Navsari, after having moved it first to a cave in Mt. Bāhrōt and then to Vānsdā, at the behest of the influential behdin Desai of Navsari, Changā Āshā, an event probably dated to c.1479 CE.20 This is recorded in the Persian Rivāyats brought to India by Nōshirwān Khusraw and Marzbān Isfandīār in 1481 CE. The near proximity of these two dates lends authenticity to the arrival date of the Sanjān Fire.

With the coming of the fire from Vānsdā, Navsari now became the headquarters of both the Sanjānā and Bhagariā groups of priests. Under Changā Āshā, an influential leader of the Parsi community of Navsari, the Sanjānās agreed to share the ashes (Guj. bhasam) of the Sanjān Fire with the Bhagariā priests, who in turn provided the Sanjānās with facilities for housing the ever-burning sacred fire. All ritual works concerning the sacred fire were kept in the hands of the Sanjānā priests, while it was agreed that all ritual works related to death, marriage, after-life prayers, jashans, etc., were the responsibility of the Bhagariā mobeds.

The Desais of Navsari

The Qissa-i Sanjān mentions Changā Āshā by name as a behdin who “treated the Good Faith with soothing heart […] who made much provision for the Faith, who went to Ātash Kadeh, […] who was a pious and illuminated dāvar.”21 This is the first reference we have in the text of Changā Āsā, who is described as first Parsi dēsaī or collector of revenues and taxes. The historical role played by Changā Āsā noted in the Qissā-i Sanjān narrative is verified by the mention of his name in the Rivāyat of Narīmān Hōshang in 1478 CE. The name of his son Mānek also occurs in the Rivāyat of 1510 CE, indicating that Changā Āsā and his family members were men of considerable influence.22

The Establishment of the Gādī (Throne, Seat) of the Meherji Rānā Line

During this time, one of the eminent Navsari priests to whom the Rivāyats were addressed was Rānā Jēsang. His name appears in the sixth Rivāyat dated 1520 CE and in the subsequent Rivāyat of 1535 CE.23 He was a man of substantial means and a descendant of Kāmdīn Zarthōsht. He was himself a learned priest and author.

Meherji, the son of Rānā Jēsang was adopted (pālak) in 1563 CE by his uncle Vāchā according to a note made by Dastur Erachjī Sōhrābjī Meherjīrānā in the manuscript F-97. This led to his name being remembered in Zoroastrian rituals along with that of his adoptive father Vāchā. Prior to him being conferred

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20 There is some dispute over the precise arrival date of the Sanjān Fire to Navsari. The earlier date suggested by some would in my opinion render Changā Āshā to a period either before his birth or in the very least when he was very young, and as such, it is doubtful that Changā Āshā could have wielded the kind of influence necessary to insist on shifting the Sanjān Fire from Vānsdā to Navsari. For the most recent discussion of these dates, see Williams, A. The Qesse-ye Sanjān..., pp. 205-221.

21 Quoted from Williams, A. The Qesse-ye Sanjān, pp.127-129.

22 See Dhabhar, B.N. The Persian Rivāyats of Hormazyar Framraz and Others, Bombay, 1932, pp. 603, 607.

23 See Dhabhar, B.N. The Persian Rivāyats..., p. 612.
with the office of High Priest by the Navsari Anjuman, he was honoured as the chief of their priests by
the Bhagariā and the Sanjānā priests, and in appreciation of his religious services to the community,
the laity of Navsari presented him in 1573 CE with a landed property at a place called Pinpaliā Wādī.

Meherji Rānā’s meeting with Mogul Emperor Akbar (1542-1605 CE) and his experiences at the Mogul
Court are well-documented. In recognition of his learning and the fame he brought to his community,
the whole priestly guild of Navsari, both Bhagariās and Sanjānās, honoured him by making him the
First High Priest (daštūr) in India through a proclamation, addressed to the Anjuman of Navsari on
12th March 1579 CE. The first Meherji Rānā died on day Daepādar of the month Spandarmad 960 AY
(November 1, 1591 CE).24

**Times of Conflict and Dissent: The Shifting of the Great Fire of Sanjān from Navsari**

References attesting to the presence of the Great Sanjān Fire in Navsari mention the fire simply
by the Gujarati letter ‘a’ for Agiāri in short, or as Sanjānwalānā ĀtashBehrām, “the Sanjananas’ Ätash
Bahrām” or as Purätām Ātash Behrām, “the Old Ätash Bahrām.” The term Irānshāh was adopted much
later, only appearing in some Sanjānā documents and in the Persian text of the Qissa-i Sanjān (16th
century). For a period of nearly 300 years, the Sanjānās lived in Navsari peacefully and in harmony
with the Bhagariās, tending to the great fire.

Yet, this harmony between Bhagariās and Sanjānās was short-lived. On Māh Bahman, Rūz Rashn
1686 CE, disputes involving the Bhagariās, Sanjānās, and the laity deteriorated into violence in an
incident which came to be known as the Tarotā murders, which took their name from the Tarotā area
where the First Daštūr Meherji Rānā Library stands. Two Bhagariā priests Rustam Shāpur Antiā and
Mānek Behrām Narimān (Shāshtrī) were martyred by the behdīns. A jashan is still held to this day
in their honour. The Bhagariā priests, seething with anger, killed seven behdīns. The twelve priests
accused at random were chained and imprisoned in Surat for three months. Among them was Pāhlan
Farēdūn, the father of the learned Daštūr Darāb Pāhlan who wrote the Khōlāseh-i Din. After three
months, the prisoners were eventually released with the help of Kuverjī Nānābhai Mōdī, the Dāvar
of Surat.25 Nevertheless, disputes continued unabated and at the core was the desire of the Sanjānā
priests to officiate ceremonies at their own houses, and at those of the laity.

Under the later Desaiṣhp of Tehmuljī Ruṣtamji, Pilājīrāo Gāekwād, whose government was based
in nearby Sōngadh, came to power in Navsari, seizing control from the Mughal-appointed nawāb of
Surat.26 In fact, up until the time of Indian independence in 1947 CE, Navsari remained under the rule
of the Gāekwāds, and was only indirectly governed by the British Rāj. The moṣt illūstrious of the Desais
was Tehmuljī’s son Khūrshēdjī, also known as Khūrshēdjī Bāpā (Father, a term of endearment and
respect). His rise to pre-eminence is closely linked to the building of the Navsari Anjumānā Ātash

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24- On the First Daštūr Meherji Rānā’s experience at the Mogul court, see Modi, J.J. “The Parsees at the Court of Akbar
and Daštūr Meherji Rana”, in *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21, 1901, pp.69-245.

25- The history of these events is related in a Gujarati qissa contained in the First Daštūr Meherji Rānā Library manu-
script F-109. See also Cereti, 1991, pp. 103-111.

26- The Gāekwāds, who established their first capital at Sōngadh and later shifted to Barōdā, were a dynasty descended
from a Maratha general who carried out extensive conquests in Gujarat in the early 18th century. On their history, see
Behrām in 1765 CE, whose story I will now relate.

The matter on ecclesiastic rights between the Sanjānās eventually went to court. An elder of the Poliā Desai’s family, Kukā Meherji, who was in his 80s, took up the cause together with Khūrshēdjī Bāpā, Dašturji Jāmāsp Āsā, and Bachājī Mehernoshjī. Bachājī Mehernoshjī was the ancestor of the Dordi family, and the shining gem of the Parsi community, namely Dādābhāi Naorojī, was his sixth descendant. These leaders of the Bhagariā clan went to the Gāekwād Gānjā ji Rāo’s court at Sōngadh to fight the case. Armed with ancient documents they were able to prove that the division of the work as claimed by the Bhagariās had been agreed to by the Sanjānās centuries before. On the 27th of September 1740 CE the verdičt was given in favour of the Bhagariā priests.

The Sanjānās found the verdičt intolerable and in the same year they left Navsari with their Ātash Bahrām, taking the holy fire to Valsād (Bulsār). Their stay there was short-lived owing to a punitive agreement they were forced to sign with the Valsād community. The two main Sanjānā priests involved in the removal of the Sanjān fire from Navsari were Ruštom Sheriyār of the present Mirzā family and Bhīkhā Ruštom from the Daštūr family of Udvada. After leaving Navsari, one of their first acts was to appoint two priests Bhīkhā Ruštom and Ruštom Sheriyār as their High Priests. Ultimately, the Irānshāh was taken to the small village of Udvada and installed there. Nine priestly families from the Sanjānā clan declared their right to care for the sacred fire.

The Consecration of the Navsari Anjumannā Ātash Bahrām

After the Sanjānā priests left Navsari, the Bhagariā priests were disheartened. They had enjoyed the presence of the divine force of the Ātash Bahrām Sāheb for more than three centuries and its absence was greatly felt by all. The installation and consecration of an Ātash Bahrām in Navsari became critical for the continuation of ritual practice. Fire-ash (Guj. bhasam, Pahl. ādurestar) was required on a daily basis for administering barašnūm to the priests and for use by the candidates for nāvar at the Vadī Dar-i Mihr. Apart from the fire-ash, the other required ālāt (ritual implements) were supplied from the Vadī Dar-i Mihr and distributed to all the various centres of Gujarat, including nīrang (consecrated bull’s urine), waras (consecrated bull’s hair) and the twigs of the hōm plant. These were delivered on foot to destinations as far away as Mumbai. Under the circumstances, the Bhagariā priests were compelled to establish the Ātash Bahrām in Navsari. In 1765 CE, under the leadership of Khūrshēdjī Tēhmuljī Desai and with the munificent support of the Seth family of Surat, the Navsari Anjumannā Ātash Behrām was established in the same place where the Sanjān Ātash Bahrām had previously been housed.

The Navsari Ātash Bahrām was constructed with the help of several charitable and devout Parsis who contributed monies and set aside jāgīrs (estates) for the maintenance of the Ātash Bahrām Sāheb. The Daštūr who performed the first bōy ceremony was Daštūr Sohrābjī Ruštomjī Meherjirānā. In accordance with the ritual practice, he took his barašnūm in the Vadī Dar-i Mihr. Ever since its consecration in 1765 CE, the fire has continued to flourish in this location. More recently, a new building was constructed to house the Ātash Bahrām, which was completed in 1925 CE, and it is this same palatial

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27- See the weekly Navsārī Prakāsh, 24th August, 1924, pp. 4-5.

28- On the construction of the Navsari Anjumannā Ātash Behrām, compare the account in Cereti, C.G. The Qesse-ye Zartoštīān-e Henduštān, pp. 112-125.
building which you see today.

The place where the Navsari Ātash Bahrām stands today is a particularly holy site as it is the only place known to have had a continuously burning sacred fire housed there, since the great Sanjān fire was first brought to Navsari in c.1479 CE, a period of more than 530 years.

Conclusion

As I hope to have shown in this brief presentation, the history of Navsari, and in particular, the history of its priestly community and religious institutions, which illustrate the richness of our Parsi heritage showing us how our forefathers impressed the mark of their Zoroastrian religion onto their new homeland in Gujarat. During this lecture, I have discussed some sad episodes which occurred between the Sanjānā and Bhagariā priests some three hundred years ago. Yet, in the beginning, we priests belonged to one and the same family. Today, we have overcome our differences in the spirit of “forgive and forget”. We have come together as one united group of priests working for the betterment of our religion. Indeed, it is the ability of our community to come together in times of need that is truly inspiring. Today, it is truly my pleasure to welcome you all here to Navsari, our dharamnitēkrī. Whether it is your first-time visit to Navsari, or whether you have been here many times in the past, I invite you to appreciate the living Parsi heritage of the city, a heritage which has been continuously enriched by generation after generation of Zoroastrians for many centuries. Thank you for your kind attention, and welcome to Navsari.
Bibliography

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