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Patron and Patriot: Dinshah J. Irani and the Revival of Indo-Iranian Culture

This article examines the life and work of Dinshah Irani, a prominent Parsi scholar, lawyer and philanthropist who was a key intellectual intermediary between the Parsi community of Bombay and the intellectual community of Iranian nationalists during the 1920s and 1930s. The article details the role played by Irani in patronizing the publication of Zoroastrian-themed printed works in Bombay that were intended for export to the reading market in Iran. By focusing on the life and work of Dinshah Irani, the article details the important role the Parsi community of Bombay played in the revival of Iranian antiquity during the early twentieth century. The article also highlights the transnational cultural and intellectual history of Iranian nationalism during the Reza Shah period.

When the prominent Parsi scholar, lawyer and philanthropist, Dinshah Jijibhoy Irani (1881–1938), died in early November of 1938, the outpouring of tributes acknowledging his lifetime of service to the Zoroastrian communities of India and Iran took place almost simultaneously in both Bombay and Tehran.1 In Bombay, the city where he had been born to parents of Iranian-Zoroastrian extraction, it was the Parsi Panchayat—the long established governing body and charity foundation of Bombay’s prosperous Zoroastrian community—that organized a memorial service in his honor.2 Bombay periodicals also published front-page obituaries marking the passing of one of the founding members of the “Iranian Zoroastrian Anjoman” (est. 1918) and the “Iran League” (est. 1922), organizations he had


2Coyajee, “A Brief Life-Sketch,” xiii.

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helped to establish years earlier for the purpose of improving the social condition of Zoroastrians in Iran through the building of schools, orphanages and hospitals, while also working to expand broader cultural, commercial and political ties between Iran and India. Both were also organizations to which, as Irani’s obituary in the Iran League Quarterly stated, “he spared goodly time for numerous acts of public benefaction.”

The small but growing Iranian expatriate community in Bombay was also much saddened by the passing of Dinshah Irani. Iran’s consul-general in the city, whose office had worked closely with Irani over the years in facilitating travel and scholarly exchanges between Iran and India, sent a letter of condolence to the Iran League stating that the passing of this key figure represented “a great loss to the Iranian and Parsi communities” and adding “his patriotic services in the cause of Iran will never be forgotten.” Within Iran, news of Dinshah Irani’s passing also spread quickly through the Zoroastrian community, as well as among Iran’s modernist and nationalist intellectual milieu which had come to know Irani through his popular Persian-language writings on Zoroastrianism and pre-Islamic Iranian history, as well as through his collaborations with important Iranian intellectuals such as Ebrahim Purdavud and Mohammad Qazvini. The Zoroastrian deputy to the Iranian Majles, Kaikhosrow Shahrokh, organized a memorial service at the Firuz Bahram School in Tehran where he and others paid tribute to their friend, colleague and patron. Following the memorial Shahrokh sent a telegram to the offices of the Iran League informing the Bombay community of the memorial held in Tehran:

On receiving the sad news on the 7th of November, a ceremony was performed in his honor in the Firooz-e Bahram High School Hall, and the whole community, eminent persons of high positions and the President and a great number of members of the Parliament were present at it ... newspapers also showed their feelings in announcing his death. Also telegrams were sent to Kerman and Yazd, and they too have done their duty towards the esteemed deceased.

These expressions of sympathy in both India and Iran at the moment of Dinshah Irani’s passing demonstrate the recognition that he had achieved by 1938

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5Coyajee, “A Brief Life-Sketch,” xiii.

6The Firuz Bahram School was itself built with funds donated by Parsi benefactors. See Keikhosrow Shahrokh, The Memoirs of Keikhosrow Shahrokh (Lewiston, NY, 1994), 23.

7Iran League Quarterly 9, no. 2 (1939): 97–98.
as an important cultural interlocutor between the Bombay Parsi community and Iran’s modernist and nationalist intellectual milieu.

And yet, despite this record of affection expressed for Dinshah Irani, and despite an equally explicit record of the important role he played in the revival of interest in antiquity among Iranian intellectuals of the early twentieth century, it is surprising how minor a place Dinshah Irani has come to occupy in the historiography of interwar Iranian and Indian cultural and intellectual history. Resituating Dinshah Irani within this history brings to the surface a number of overlooked themes that characterized India and Iran’s cultural history at the beginning of the twentieth century. Most importantly, acknowledging Dinshah Irani’s contribution to the history of Iranian nationalism helps to redefine that history as a transnational cultural and intellectual enterprise. The rediscovery of Iran’s pre-Islamic heritage was to a large extent tied to currents of thought circulating among the Zoroastrian community of South Asia, re-imagining a common classical past shared by Indian Parsis and Iranians. This simultaneous and transnational process of cultural re-articulation was carried out across a broadly conceived “Indo-Iranian” cultural and territorial zone. Dinshah Irani’s life and work perhaps best represent how this transnational cultural and intellectual history took shape at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Others have rightly pointed out important elements of this transnational project. Monica Ringer, for example, has detailed the religious exchange between Parsi and Iranian Zoroastrians as part of a project of “transplanting religious reform.” Mohamad Tavakoli—in his seminal writings on the subject—has likewise detailed the roots of this transnational project in currents of thought circulating between Iran and India as early as the sixteenth century. Dinshah Irani’s life and work fits within this pattern of transnational cultural exchange, and helps to illustrate the great extent to which this project accelerated during the early twentieth century, reaching its cultural and ideological culmination during the 1920s and 1930s. This acceleration was fueled to a large extent by growing resources of patronage from the Bombay-based Parsi charitable foundations, as well as through the efforts of the newly established Pahlavi state, which had by the interwar period adopted Iran’s “Indo-Iranian” classical heritage as the ideological basis of its official nationalism.

What also fueled the acceleration of this transnational exchange was the increasingly important role played by the city of Bombay in what Nile Green has called “the economy of enchantment” characterizing the commercial system of the western Indian Ocean. As Bombay’s industrial and commercial activities expanded

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8Monica Ringer, “Reform Transplanted: Parsi Agents of Change amongst Zoroastrians in Nineteenth-Century Iran,” Iranian Studies 42 (2009), no. 4: 549–60; Monica Ringer, Pious Citizens: Reforming Zoroastrianism in India and Iran (Syracuse, NY, 2011).


10For the revival of antiquity and official nationalism in the Reza Shah period see Afsin Marashi, Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State, 1870–1940 (Seattle, 2008).

during the course of the nineteenth century, and as linkages between Bombay and Persian Gulf trading cities became more formal and regularized, especially through the proliferation of steamships that now sailed regularly between Bombay, Bushehr and Basra, the flow of commercial goods, including printed works, circulating between India and Iran became greatly facilitated. This pattern of commercial exchange in newly printed materials—what Benedict Anderson has called the phenomenon of “print-capitalism”—began slowly in the early nineteenth century, but accelerated by the end of the century. By the 1920s and 1930s—the decades of Dinshah Irani’s greatest intellectual and civic activity—this system of economic exchange of printed texts had become part of the mainstay of commercial relations between Bombay and Iran’s rapidly expanding reading market.

Dinshah Irani’s most significant contribution to the history of Indo-Iranian relations was precisely to facilitate this intellectual exchange of printed texts via his tireless efforts in writing, translating and patronizing the publication of books meant for export to the reading public of Iran’s modernist intellectual milieu. Ultimately, the role played by Irani—though still largely overlooked and unacknowledged in conventional accounts of Iranian cultural and intellectual history—not only facilitated this intellectual exchange between India and Iran during the interwar period, but also reinforced the Pahlavi state’s nation-building project by helping to bring to the attention of Iranian readers newly available neo-classical texts that vividly portrayed Iran’s pre-Islamic Zoroastrian heritage.

Iranis and Parsis in Bombay

The larger context of the Iranian expatriate community in Bombay during the nineteenth century played an important role in setting the stage for this commercial, cultural and intellectual exchange. Dinshah Irani was born in 1881 to a family of Bombay Zoroastrians with relatively shallow roots in India. The “Irani” designation of his name was one that he himself adopted in his early adulthood as he embarked on his formal schooling. “Irani” as a family name had become an increasingly common designation in Bombay during the nineteenth century, and came to distinguish a sub-community within Bombay’s larger Parsi-Zoroastrian community, who had immigrated to India from Iran beginning in the late eighteenth century and increasingly in the nineteenth. As Bombay’s economy flourished during this

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12. Ibid., 125.
15. The total population of Parsis in Bombay, according to the 1872 census, was 44,091, or 6.8 percent of the urban population. See Dobbin, “The Parsi Panchayat,” 157. The exact number of “Iranis” is difficult to estimate but likely numbered a few thousand. On Iranian migration to India more generally in the nineteenth century see John R. Hinnells, The Zoroastrian Diaspora: Religion and Migration (Oxford, 2005), 79–81; Janet Kestenberg Amighi, The Zoroastrians of Iran: Conversion, Assimilation, or Persistence (New York, 1990), 129–37. For a firsthand account of Iranians in nineteenth century Bombay see Safarnameh-ye Haji Muhammad ‘Ali Pirzadeh, ed. Hafez Farmanfarmaian (Tehran, 1963), 1: 130–33.
period—especially the opium trade and textile industry—and as the visible prosperity of the much older Parsi community became known to Zoroastrians in Iran, Bombay became an attractive destination for Iranians seeking to leave their ancestral home in search of a better life. By the time of Dinshah Irani’s birth, the “Irani” segment of the Bombay Zoroastrian population was beginning to find success as a distinct sub-community within the social, cultural and economic landscape of late nineteenth century cosmopolitan Bombay.

The “Irani” community of Bombay also played an important role as advocates for the Zoroastrian communities still residing within Iran. By the mid-nineteenth century members of the Irani community had married into some of Bombay’s most prosperous Parsi families, including the Petit family. It was “Lady Sakarbai” (1826–90), the Irani wife of Sir Dinshaw Manekji Petit (1823–1901)—perhaps the most prominent scion of the Parsi textile industrialist families of nineteenth century Bombay—who encouraged her husband’s philanthropy for the cause of Iranian Zoroastrians. It was in part because of these personal familial ties that Sir Dinshaw Petit worked to establish the “Persian Zoroastrian Amelioration Fund” in 1853 for the purpose of sponsoring social services for the Zoroastrian communities in Kerman and Yazd. It was also this fund that sponsored the journeys to Iran of the famous nineteenth century Parsi emissary, Manekji Limji Hataria. Despite their own recent immigration to Bombay, the “Irani” sub-community had by the middle of the nineteenth century already come to play an important role as intermediaries between the Zoroastrian communities of Iran and India.

The complex position of the Bombay Iranis within the increasingly transnational networks of exchange across the Indian Ocean made the community ideally situated to act as intermediaries. On one level, the status of the Irani-Zoroastrian sub-community within the larger Parsi community of Bombay came to make the

19The “Irani” community of Bombay even developed its own migration narrative reminiscent of the Qesseh-ye Sanjan, in which a Kermani Zoroastrian, Kaikhosrow Yazdyar, fled to India with his daughter “Golestan Banu” in the late eighteenth century, who in turn became the founder of the “Irani” community in Bombay. This narrative of “Irani” origins in Bombay came to circulate increasingly from the mid-nineteenth century onwards and may have first found its way into written form in Manekji Limji Hataria’s account of his first decade in Iran, written in 1863. See Mary Boyce, Zoroastrians: Their Beliefs and Practices (London, 1979), 209–12; see also Mary Boyce, “Manekji Limji Hataria in Iran,” K.R. Cama Oriental Institute Golden Jubilee Volume (Bombay, 1969), 20. On the travels of Manekji Limji see also Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, “An Emissary of the Golden Age: Manekji Limji Hataria and the Charisma of the Archaic in Pre-Nationalist Iran,” Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism 10, no. 3 (2010): 377–90. For the “Irani” migration narrative see also Shahmardan, Farzanegan, 495–498; Coyajee, “A Brief Life-Sketch,” vii–viii.
“Iranis” a minority within a minority. This minority or marginal status has perhaps worked to obscure the important role played by members of the “Irani” community—including Dinshah Irani—in the cultural and intellectual history of Iranian nationalism. At the same time, however, this marginal position worked to make a person like Dinshah Irani ideally positioned as a figure who could imagine new configurations of culture, religion and national identity that came to reposition the Parsis—and the “Iranis” in particular—as a diaspora community that could mediate between currents of thought in India and Iran. It was precisely because of his position as a diasporic “marginal Iranian” that Dinshah Irani was able to conceive the possibility of forging connections between currents of thought circulating among the Bombay Parsis and those emerging within a maturing Iranian search for national “authenticity.”

Education and Early Career

Two important institutions in Bombay helped Dinshah Irani to serve as an intermediary between the Parsis and Iranians. The first was Elphinstone College of the University of Bombay. When he graduated in 1901 with a bachelor’s degree in English and Persian literature, his linguistic skills had so distinguished him that he was offered a teaching fellowship at the University of Bombay’s St. Xavier’s College as instructor of Persian.20 By the end of the nineteenth century the established Irani community had largely ceased using Persian as a vernacular language in favor of Gujarati and English. Dinshah Irani’s interest in pursuing the study of Persian at Elphinstone College was very much grounded in mastering it as a “classical language.”21 The time that he spent at Elphinstone College and St. Xavier’s College ultimately led to his collaboration with his colleague Khodabakhsh Irani on a number of translation projects of classical Persian texts.22

Unlike Dinshah Irani’s later work, these early translations were not texts intended for Iranian audiences; rather, they were texts intended as pedagogical handbooks for students learning the Persian language at the colleges of colonial Bombay. Ultimately,  

21The gradual decline of Persian as both a vernacular and administrative language began after the 1835 English Education Act, which made English the administrative language of India and the language of instruction in Indian schools. Persian gradually became a literary language studied by “academic specialists” like Dinshah Irani; see Muzaffar Alam, “The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan,” in Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia, ed. Sheldon Pollack (Berkeley, CA, 2003), 188–89.
these works are important in establishing a pattern of scholarly collaboration, which in Dinshah Irani’s later career would lead to his more important collaborative efforts in publishing translations of Zoroastrian texts intended for the reading public in Iran.

The other key institution that came to inspire Dinshah Irani’s later literary and scholarly collaborations was the Jamshedji Jijibhoy Zartoshti Madressa. This institution was originally founded in 1863 through the philanthropy of the Jijibhoy family for the purpose of training a new generation of Zoroastrian priests. By the 1880s the school took on a broader liberal arts mission in order to attract students from the growing constituency of modern middle-class Bombay Zoroastrians. In the process the mission became one of educating students—like Dinshah Irani—who would become part of a new Bombay-Parsi intelligentsia consisting of middle-class lay scholars of a reformed Zoroastrianism. By 1902, when Dinshah Irani began studying Avestan and Pahlavi at the J.J. Zartoshti Madressa, Kharshedji Rustomji Cama (1831–1909), the great Parsi social reformer and pioneer in the modern Parsi study of Zoroastrianism, was in his final years as head of the school. It was under the directorship of Cama that the J.J. Zartoshti Madressa became a major Parsi academic institution for the teaching of a modern Parsi re-interpretation of Zoroastrianism. It was also during his tenure that the teaching of the Avestan and Pahlavi languages became the major focus of the school’s curriculum. The logic of this emphasis was rooted in Cama’s reformist interest in encouraging modern Zoroastrians to go back to the sources and reinterpret the textual foundations of Zoroastrianism from a modernist perspective. It was to this intellectual, literary and theological enterprise that Dinshah Irani came to devote himself under the direct influence of K.R. Cama.

In an autobiographical fragment written in 1922, Dinshah Irani describes the encounter he had with Cama, an encounter that came to radically change the direction of his intellectual curiosity,

One Sunday evening, about twenty years ago I saw standing a venerable old sage, with a silver-grey beard, explaining to a band of University students some points in a passage of the Holy Gathas ... He was the late Mr. K.R. Kama. The great Parsi Orientalist was trying to bequeath to the younger generation the fire which burned in his old heart ... I will never forget the sight nor the zeal of that veteran scholar. My love for the study of the Gathas took its birth that day.

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25D.J. Irani, Gems from the Divine Songs of Zoroaster (Bombay, 1922), i.
This encounter with Cama came to shape much of the course of Irani’s subsequent scholarly endeavors. It was from this point that Irani began the serious study of the Avestan and Pahlavi languages. It was also from this period that Irani came to increasingly associate himself with reformist currents of Parsi thought in Bombay, such as the “Gatha Society,” the “Zoroastrian Reform Society” and the Parsi calendar reform movement. All of these Zoroastrian reform movements advocated a simplified and modernized understanding of Zoroastrianism, emphasizing its universalist values, its essential monotheism, a de-emphasis of ritual and a growing romantic association of Parsi religious and cultural life with the classical history of Iran. It was from this period in his career that Irani turned his focus towards publication efforts in the fields of Zoroastrian and Iranian studies.

As early as 1920 Irani began experimenting with simplified poetic renderings of the Gathas into English. His first experiment in this direction was a small privately produced collection of English-language translations of selected hymns from the Gathas that circulated among a group of friends and associates in Bombay. He went on to publish this small collection as Gems from the Divine Songs of Zoroaster at a small, local Bombay publishing company. As he states in the preface to what became the 1922 edition of this work, “[t]he appreciation the [collection] ... received [from friends] has prompted me to issue the present edition to the public.” Significantly, however, Irani states that his initial intention in experimenting with an English translation of the Gathas was for the purpose of producing a modern Persian-language edition. As he states,

More for helping the publication of a Persian rendering of the Holy Gathas than from any other motive, I prepared my [English] version of the Divine Songs. The manuscript was open to my friends, [and] to the enthusiasm and insistence of one of them ... I owe the publication of these selections for private circulation.

His earliest translation efforts of the Gathas into English seems therefore to have been intended as a linguistic and translation exercise for the ultimate goal of rendering the hymns into Persian. His intention it seems was to prepare a simplified English translation—in what he describes as “simple and appealing English”—which he would then re-translate into the poetic style of classical Persian. While he had

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26 Coyajee, “A Brief Life-Sketch,” iii. For these reform groups see Boyce, Zoroastrians, 200; Ringer, Pious Citizens, 72–74, 112–14.
27 Irani, Gems, ii–iii. Two years later in 1924 Irani published another edition of this work for a wider English reading audience in Europe and North America, complete with an introduction by the now internationally famous Indian poet and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, as Divine Songs of Zarathustra (New York, 1924). Irani experimented with other simplified English translations of the hymns for the remainder of his life. An additional collection of previously unpublished translations were published posthumously in 1999, edited by his son as The Gathas: The Hymns of Zarathustra, trans. D.J. Irani, ed. and intro. K.D. Irani (Bombay, 1999).
28 Irani, Gems, ii–iii.
29 Ibid.
studied modern Persian and Avestan for many years, these were ultimately his third and fourth languages, after English and Gujarati. Translating the hymns from Avestan into simplified English before rendering them into classical Persian may have been part of an effort to bring the hymns into a language he had better command of, before translating them into Persian. If this was his method, and if his ultimate intention was to produce his own Persian-language edition of the Gathas, then he never completed that task himself; this early effort is nevertheless important as a literary foreshadow of his longer-term goal of making the Zoroastrian hymns available to modern readers of Persian. That goal was ultimately accomplished through his collaboration with Ebrahim Purdavud later in the 1920s.

More important than any of these early translation efforts was Dinshah Irani’s first direct literary effort of mediating between the Iranian nationalists and the Bombay Parsi community. This first effort also came in the early 1920s with his translation into English—again in a small issue meant primarily for private circulation among Bombay Parsi literati—of Mirzadeh ‘Eshqi’s operetta, “The Resurrection of Iran’s Kings” (Rashtakhiz-e Padeshahan-e Iran). ‘Eshqi’s operetta, written originally around 1915, is a poetic meditation on the lost “golden age” of Iranian antiquity. In the literary history of Iranian nationalism the work marks an important stage in the symbolic re-inscription of Iranian antiquity as part of an emerging Iranian nationalist consciousness. In the context of Dinshah Irani’s intellectual rediscovery of Iranian antiquity ‘Eshqi’s operetta made a profound impression as an indication that Iranians, like the Parsis, were rediscovering their ancient cultural heritage.

The opera begins with a traveler who falls asleep amidst the ruins of the Sassanian arch of Ctesiphon. When the traveler awakes in a still-dreaming trance he comes into the living presence of apparitions embodying mythic and historical figures from Iranian antiquity. What follows is a series of lyrical lamentations on the sad state of Iran’s present condition as voiced by each of these ghostly figures. This cycle of characters, each emerging from the ruins of Ctesiphon as ghostly apparitions, continues through Cyrus, Darius, Anushirvan and others. Towards the end of the operetta Zoroaster himself appears. As described in ‘Eshqi’s staging, Zoroaster, “like an angel, clad in white, and wearing long silver-grey locks and beard appears.”


32 Ishqi, Rastakhiz, 13; Moshir-Salimi, Kolliyat, 239.
In this ancient soil lie hidden
Seeds, from which a future race
Springing shall replace the living
Corpses that Iran disgrace
These shall help Iran to raise
Her head to heights ne’er reached before.  

What is striking is the keen interest shown by the Parsi community in ‘Eshqi’ s operetta.  

It was Dinshah Irani who first brought ‘Eshqi’ s Rastakhiz to the attention of Bombay’s literary and intellectual community, when he produced an English-language translation in a small limited-edition issue published in 1924.  

The interest in ‘Eshqi’ s operetta among the Parsis gained wider public attention when another Parsi scholar, Irach Taraporewala, collaborated with Dinshah Irani to rework and improve Irani’s original translation for publication in the more widely circulating Calcutta Review. “Mr. Irani’s excellent English version,” Taraporewala wrote in the preface to the second English edition, “only lacks meter and rhythm, which I have ... with his kind permission, supplied in this translation.”  

Irani and Taraporewala’s collaboration in making ‘Eshqi’ s operetta more widely available to Indian audiences very much fits within Irani’s larger project of mediating between those cultural, literary and political trends inside Iran and those among the Indian Parsis. Part of the goal of that mediation was in making the Parsis aware that a new generation of Iranians were discovering their Zoroastrianism heritage:

33 Ishqi, Rastakhiz, 13; Moshir-Salimi, Kolliyat, 239.
34 ‘Eshqi’ s poem came to the attention of Irani through the notice it received in Persian-language periodicals of the time. On this issue see Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, “Mohammad-Reza Mirzada Esqi,” Encyclopedia Iranica, online version: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/esqi-mohammad-reza-mirzada (accessed 7 December 2011); Moshir-Salimi, Kolliyat, 5; Mohammad Sadr Hashemi, Tarikh-e Jara’ed va Majallat-e Iran (Isfahan, 1985), 4: 105–108.
35 The original 1924 edition of this translation does not appear to be extant. Irani’s original English translation of the “Resurrection of the Sovereigns of Iran in the Ruins of Madayen” was reprinted, however, in his Poets of the Pahlavi Regime (Bombay, 1933), 465–83.
36 Irach Taraporewala (1884–1956) was a prolific scholar of Zoroastrianism whose life and work in some ways parallel to that of Dinshah Irani. His monumental 1,100-page free English translation and commentary of the Gathas, published in 1951, was the culmination of Irani’s own efforts in making the Gathas available in a readable, yet critical, edition. See Irach J.S. Taraporewala, The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra: A Philological Study of the Gathas of Zarathushtra Containing the Text with Literal Translation into English, a Free English Rendering and Full Critical and Grammatical Notes (Bombay, 1951).
38 Ishqi, Rastakhiz, 2.
Iran has felt its invigorating breath, and is waking in response. One of the great signs of the new life has been the re-awakening of interest all over Iran in her ancient glory, in her ancient Kings, in her ancient Religion, and in her great Prophet Zarathustra. The Irani today has begun to understand that all her national greatness must be rooted in her past... Now she [Iran] wants to build up afresh, in a new synthesis, her national life. The sympathies of India and especially of the Parsis, are with her.39

It is with these words that `Eshqi’s Rastakhiz was introduced to the readers of the Calcutta Review in 1924. Dinshah Irani and Irach Taraporewala’s translations of `Eshqi’s Rastakhiz were the most important initial efforts in publicizing for a Parsi and wider Indian audience the renewed interest in Zoroastrianism among Iranian nationalists. In the context of Dinshah Irani’s own life and work, the 1924 English translation of `Eshqi’s Rastakhiz marked the beginning of Irani’s most active period as an intellectual and cultural intermediary between Parsis and Iranians.

Collaboration with Ebrahim Purdavud

The most sustained and productive period in this regard took place between 1925 and 1933 when Dinshah Irani began his collaboration with Ebrahim Purdavud (1885–1968). Very few figures have come to occupy as central a place in the intellectual history of Iranian nationalism as has Purdavud. His participation in the important group of expatriate nationalist intellectuals in Europe during the years of the First World War, and his contribution to important early nationalist periodicals, is in itself enough to secure for him a permanent place in Iranian nationalism’s intellectual pantheon. Beyond his early career, however, Purdavud went on to become one of the great scholars of Iran’s pre-Islamic revival, becoming the first modern Iranian to learn Avestan and Pahlavi, master the German, English and French orientalist traditions of Iranian studies, and collaborate with the well-established Parsi scholarly community of Bombay.40 By the middle of the twentieth century Purdavud became a central figure in the intellectual history of Iran’s pre-Islamic revival, serving as professor of Iranian studies at the University of Tehran, publishing scholarly translations of Zoroastrian texts into modern Persian, and producing popular works that became the intellectual foundation for much of what the Pahlavi state came to promote as Iran’s official nationalism.41

While the centrality of Purdavud’s position in Iran’s twentieth century cultural and intellectual history is generally acknowledged, his collaboration with Dinshah Irani is,

39Ibid., 1–2.
41For a bibliography of Purdavud’s work see, Mostafavi, Zaman, 387–463; Nikuyeh, Purdavud, 65–95.
by contrast, generally ignored.\textsuperscript{42} Dinshah Irani was a profoundly important figure in Ebrahim Purdavud’s early career. It was during Dinshah Irani’s presidency of the “Iran League” and the “Iranian Zoroastrian Anjoman” that he funded Purdavud’s travel to Bombay, in 1924.\textsuperscript{43} Irani collaborated closely with Purdavud during Purdavud’s stay in India over the course of the next two and a half years. During this period of Purdavud’s career, Irani facilitated his activities, as he studied with a wide array of Parsi scholars, lectured at Parsi-sponsored gatherings across western India, and, most importantly, helped Purdavud to publish a series of works that became foundational texts in the history of Iran’s pre-Islamic revival. It was under Irani’s direction, and through the financial sponsorship of the Iran League and the Iranian Zoroastrian Anjoman, that Purdavud’s Persian-language writings were published in Bombay during the 1920s and 1930s and exported to Iran.\textsuperscript{44}

The first text in this important collaboration appeared, in 1926, with the publication of Ebrahim Purdavud’s \textit{Iranshah}, a short Persian-language pamphlet of approximately a hundred pages, named after the \textit{atash bahram} at Udvada, which is considered by Parsis to be the sacred fire consecrated upon their arrival in India.\textsuperscript{45} The slim volume was a general history, intended for a broad audience of Iranian readers. It contained Purdavud’s discussion of the Zoroastrian exodus from Iran following the seventh century Arab-Muslim conquest of the plateau, and the Zoroastrian migration to the coast of western India. By the 1920s most Iranians were only beginning to learn of the Bombay-Parsi community’s existence, and had very little detailed knowledge of the history of Zoroastrianism or a feeling of shared history with the Parsis. Purdavud and Irani’s collaboration in publishing the \textit{Iranshah} was therefore carefully selected as a suitable initial text that worked to introduce Parsis to the Iranians.

Later in the text, Purdavud again shows his gratitude to Irani and the Bombay charitable groups that supported the social services, schools and hospitals that the Parsis had established in Kerman and Yazd since the mid-nineteenth century. He writes,

\begin{quote}
in these last two centuries the Zoroastrian population [in Iran] has gone from one hundred thousand to nine thousand and maybe this nine thousand would have
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{42}An important exception is Patel, “The Iran League,” 17.


\textsuperscript{44}Hinnells, “Flowering of Zoroastrian Benevolence,” 283.

\textsuperscript{45}Ebrahim Purdavud, \textit{Iranshah: Tarikhcheh-ye Mohajerat-e Zartoshtian be Hendustan} (Bombay, 1926).

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., dedication.
become nonexistent by now if no one had heard their screams and come to their aid ... two anjomans ... have been of great service to Iran. One is the Iran League ... and the other is known by the name of the Iranian Zoroastrian Anjoman under the leadership of Dinshah Irani.47

This will not be the last time that Purdavud acknowledges Irani and the Parsi charitable foundations. Purdavud and Irani in fact make occasional references to one another in their various writings. It is clear why Purdavud dedicated the text of the *Iranshah* to Irani; not only had Dinshah facilitated Purdavud’s travel to Bombay in the previous year, and not only had he financially sponsored the publication of the pamphlet, but the subject matter of the *Iranshah* also echoed much of Purdavud and Irani’s shared cultural and national interest in reviving the historical memory connecting Iran and India.

The main text of Purdavud’s *Iranshah* begins with what will become by later in the twentieth century a rather conventional Persian-language prose rendering of the Islamic conquest of Iran, describing the invasion of the Arab-Muslim armies, for example, in terms of a military conquest in which “the Kiyanid flag fell to the enemies.”48 The decisive Arab-Muslim victory at the 636 CE battle of Qadisiah is likewise described as “a dark day for the kingdom.”49 Purdavud’s account of the immediate post-conquest history of Islamic Iran continues by emphasizing the movements of resistance on the part of Iranian Zoroastrians in the face of the Arab-Muslim conquerors, and the internal migrations to remote regions and mountainous zones within Iran in order for the Iranian Zoroastrians to find refuge and to “preserve their ancient faith.”50 These internal migrations continued for a century, until, as Purdavud states,

... that time when this refuge also came into the clutches of the enemy and in desperation they [Iranian Zoroastrians] were forced to flee once again. A group of them found their way to the island of Hormuz on the Persian Gulf. Since even there the enemy would not grant them safety they were forced to say goodbye to Iran and their ancestral homeland and set out for India.51

Purdavud goes on to describe the sources that are used for narrating this history. Most importantly, he describes in some detail the *Qesseh-ye Sanjan*, the sixteenth century Persian text written in India that is believed to be the first written account of the Zoroastrian exodus from Iran.52 Purdavud is careful to closely evaluate the historicity of this text. He compares the account narrated in the *Qesseh-ye Sanjan* with

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48 Ibid., 1.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., 2.
51 Ibid., 2.
52 For a critical analysis of this text see Alan Williams, *The Zoroastrian Myth of Migration from Iran and Settlement in the Indian Diaspora* (Leiden, 2009).
details found in other sources describing the same period, such as the histories of Maš'udi and Tabari. Purdavud also shows a very detailed knowledge of both the Parsi and European scholarship on the Qesseh-ye Sanjan and the Zoroastrian exodus generally, citing sources with which he came into contact during his stay in Bombay, such as Dosabhai Framji Karaka’s History of the Parsis (1884), Jivanji Jamshedji Modi’s A Few Events in the Early History of the Parsis (1905), as well as key European texts on the early history of the Parsis, such as those of Ménant, Jackson and Gieger and Kuhn. What is most interesting in Purdavud’s rendering of this history is precisely the way in which he combines a detailed scholarly knowledge of the modern historiography, with a tone in his own telling of this history that is clearly shaped by the demands of Iranian nationalist ideology. The ultimate goal of Purdavud and Irani’s collaboration was not a detached humanistic project of historical research, but rather their common goal was to revive a lost Zoroastrian identity and a shared Indo-Iranian heritage.

What also worked to bring this shared heritage to life in the pages of the Iranshah was the over fifty pages of photographs contained in the pamphlet, which visually represented the principal figures and key institutions of the Parsi community of Bombay. These photos include not only portraits of Parsi benefactors—such as Dinshaw Petit, Dorab Jamshedji Tata and Peshotan Dossabhoy Marker—but also photographs of key Parsi institutions, such as fire-temples in Bombay, the “Iranshah” atash bahrin in Udvada and an architectural rendering of the “Sanjan Column” which had been erected in 1914 in Gujarat to memorialize the assumed original landing site of the Iranian Zoroastrians in India. There are also photographs of hospitals, schools, hotels, charitable institutes and factories, all of which had been built through the efforts of the Bombay Parsi community. This visual referencing of the Parsis, and in particular the visual referencing of the great prosperity achieved by the Parsis in India, followed Purdavud and Irani’s larger aim of introducing Iranian readers to what was now portrayed as their distant compatriots.

Following the publication of the Iranshah, Irani and Purdavud continued their collaboration on several other works. As with their first collaboration, their principal goal remained not only the production of significant scholarly, historical or academic publications, but more importantly the production of works that would popularize the heritage of Zoroastrianism for an audience of Iranian readers. Their second collaboration in this regard was a collection of essays written by Dinshah Irani. This work, published in 1927 by the Iranian Zoroastrian Anjoman of Bombay, came to be known in its Persian form as Peyk-e Mazdayasnan (Messenger of Zoroastrianism).
The slim collection consisted mostly of essays that had originally been delivered as lectures in English to audiences of Parsi youth in Bombay. As part of his civic activities within the Parsi community, Dinshah Irani was also a frequent lecturer to community groups, in particular to Parsi youth groups, on Zoroastrian subjects. The introductory nature of the lectures made Irani and Purdavud conclude that a Persian-language edition of the lectures would serve as a suitable sequel to the *Iranshah*. To produce the lectures in Persian form, Purdavud served—as he would on several later occasions—as Irani’s translator. As Irani states in the introduction to the work, “[t]he beautiful Persian language in which these thoughts are clothed, is his and not mine.”

The *Peyk-e Mazdayasnan* is a remarkable work in a number of ways. Like the *Iranshah* its purpose is to speak directly to an Iranian reading audience in a pedagogical tone, intending to inspire and provoke a renewed curiosity about Zoroastrianism. “Do you know anything about your religion?” Irani writes pointedly as he introduces the book, addressing an Iranian audience of Zoroastrians. Unlike the *Iranshah*, however, the voice of this text is unmistakably that of an Indian Parsi-Irani speaking from a perspective that assumes cultural authority over his Iranian audience. He writes in the introductory chapter:

in the olden days it was the custom that the Zoroastrians of India would go to Iran to consult with the wise sages of Zoroastrianism in order to learn of their faith. Today a different situation prevails in which the Iranian Zoroastrians have become ignorant of their religion and beliefs and it is the Parsis who have achieved knowledge of the faith and produced great scholars.

The exchange of religious views between Iranian and Indian Zoroastrians had indeed taken place for many centuries in the form of epistolary exchanges (known as the revayat literature), as well as occasional exchanges of priests to discuss matters of religion and scripture. During the premodern history of this religious exchange, the Iranian Zoroastrians had generally been seen as the caretakers of the religious tradition and the ultimate arbiters of orthodoxy. By the early twentieth century, as Irani writes, this situation had changed, and “[i]t is today proper that you [Iranian Zoroastrians] study with these scholars and send your future priests to India to study the most advanced knowledge.” India, and Bombay in particular, had now come to be regarded by Irani as the center of Zoroastrianism. And yet

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58 Ibid., preface.
59 Ibid., 8.
60 Ibid., 8–9.
61 Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 190–91; the shifts in the balance of religious authority between Iranian Zoroastrians and Parsis began as early as the eighteenth century. On this issue see also Ringer, *Pious Citizens*, 143–47.
Irani is also careful to present himself and the Parsis as part of a larger transnational community tied to a continuing loyalty to the Iranian nation:

Iran, our homeland, is in need of knowledge and national feeling. It is because of a lack of national devotion that we have succumbed to these dark days. You who still belong to the ancient faith of Iran must not have any less devotion to your homeland than others. It is true that prejudice is a sin ... but devotion in relation to a homeland like Iran must be a duty to all the offspring of this land. So in relation to the homeland we should not withhold ourselves but should work with our heart and soul for its improvement and independence.63

The Parsis are here presented as a diaspora community, sharing a common identity but residing outside of Iranian territory. Their mission, he suggests, is to make use of their more advanced position in Bombay to help their perceived compatriots inside Iran. “[I]n order to show you that we are in India but from Iran,” Irani writes, “we published the book Iranshah ... [and] sent it to you.”64

He continues by describing for his Iranian audience the other educational and publication initiatives underway, as of 1927, through Parsi philanthropy. He writes,

we are also working to teach the important languages to your scholars so that you can know your own faith, which is so long in its history and honorable and worldly, so that you will be reminded of the past in your hearts so that you will commit yourselves to the work of knowledge.65

Among these initiatives he describes other books that are “in press,”66 including the Khorramshah, another of the books authored by Purdavud and published under the auspices of the Iran League. The Khorramshah was, like Irani’s Peyk-e Mazdayasnan, a collection of introductory essays on Zoroastrian topics based on lectures originally given by Purdavud to Parsi audiences in Bombay and western India.67 This pattern of multi-lingual collaboration would continue in the following years with Purdavud’s translation into Persian of two more short books written originally in English by Irani, the 1930 work Akbllaq-e Iran-e Bastan68 (Ethics of Ancient Iran) and the 1933 work

63Ibid., 11.
64Ibid., 12.
65Ibid.
66Another scholarly collaboration between Irani and Purdavud from this period was the publication, edited by Purdavud, and with an English-language introduction by Irani, of Mohammad Qazvini’s, Bist Maqaleh-ye Qazvini (Bombay, 1928). This publication was also published under the auspices of the Iran League and Iranian Zoroastrian Anjoman of Bombay.
67Ebrahim Purdavud, Khorramshah: Konfransha-ye Purdavud dar Hendustan (Bombay, 1927). As Purdavud notes for his Iranian readers, these short essays were also translated into Gujarati and published in popular Bombay periodicals.
68Dinshah Irani, Akbllaq-e Iran-e Bastan (Bombay, 1930). A second edition was published in Tehran in 1932 because the first edition had sold out quickly. See Andisheh-ye Ma, 5.
Like the earlier works, both of these books were also written as introductory texts intended for general audiences, and emphasized themes of Zoroastrianism’s compatibility with modern science as well as its compatibility with the religious values of a universal monotheism. Like their earlier collaborations these works were also published under the sponsorship of the Bombay-based Iranian Zoroastrian Anjoman and the Iran League. Irani also promised his readers in the pages of the Peyk-e Mazdayasnan that the Iranian Zoroastrian Anjoman was working diligently to publish a modern Persian translation of the Avesta along with an extensive Persian-language commentary on the text for general readers. This work, Irani states, “will be published soon.”

It was precisely the publication of Ebrahim Purdavud’s Persian-language translations of the Gatha (1927) and the Yashtha (1928) that marked the most important achievement of the collaboration between Irani and Purdavud. By the mid-1920s, Irani had already abandoned his own efforts to produce a Persian-language edition of the Gathas. When he came to know Purdavud it became clear that Purdavud was the ideal person to render the service of making the Avestan scriptures available in a modern Persian translation. These two initial translations—the Gathas and the Yashths—along with the translation of virtually the entirety of the Avestan-language scriptures into modern Persian during the course of Purdavud’s subsequent career, marked a major step towards making the Zoroastrian texts available for the first time to modern Iranians. Long neglected and inaccessible to modern Iranians, because of the loss of the ability to read Avestan, these new translations suddenly made the Zoroastrian scriptures available for the first time in a modern Persian translation that not only rendered the religious content of the original scriptures accessible to modern Iranians, but also produced a text that lyrically conformed to a Persian poetic sensibility. Purdavud’s talent as a poet made him the ideal translator of these texts. It was this synthesis of Purdavud’s linguistic skills in Avestan combined with his poetic talents that made his translations so successful as foundational texts in Iran’s twentieth century pre-Islamic revival. The 1927 and 1928 translations of the Gatha and the Yashtha marked the beginning of a series of scriptural translations, which Purdavud would also render into modern Persian. With the exception of the Visperad, the Vendidad and fragments from the Gatha, all of the remainder of the Avestan-language scriptures were translated by Purdavud, under the sponsorship

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69 Dinshah Irani, *Falsafeh-ye Iran-e Bastan* (Bombay, 1933). Abdolhoseyn Sepanta, the pioneer Iranian filmmaker and resident of Bombay, contributed to the translation. Irani explains that he wrote the Falsafeh as a sequel to the AkhlAQ because of “the welcome given to my last book” (*AkhlAQ-e Iran-e Bastan*), see Irani, Falsafeh, preface.


of the Parsi charitable foundations, and published in Bombay between 1927 and 1934.\footnote{Coyajee, “A Brief Life-Sketch,” i–ii. Coyajee states that Irani personally donated 10,000 rupees of his own money towards the publishing costs of Purdavud’s translations. Additional funds were procured from Seth Pestonji Dossbhoy Marker and published under the joint auspices of the Iran League and Iranian Zoroastrian Anjoman as the “P.D. Marker Avestan Series.”}

Dinshah Irani’s role in these translation efforts was central to their success. The close-knit community of Parsi scholars in Bombay was an important resource for Purdavud in producing his translations. Dinshah Irani facilitated Purdavud’s engagement with Parsi scholars such as J.J. Modi, G.K. Nariman and Behramgore Anklesaria, whose work Purdavud cites extensively in his own writing. Purdavud was in fact effusive in expressing his gratitude to Irani for helping to make the publication of his translations possible, “if I had not the good fortune of encountering this man [Irani] I would never have reached my goal and would not have been able to overcome the obstacles to publish this work,”\footnote{Purdavud, \textit{Yashtha}, II, 24.} he states in the introduction to the second volume of the \textit{Yashtha}. Purdavud’s gratitude to Irani was due not only to the latter’s efforts in facilitating his encounter with the Parsi scholarly community, or to Irani’s efforts in securing financial sponsorship for the publications, but also to his larger efforts in bringing to fruition their common goal of making available to Iranian readers the heritage of Iran’s pre-Islamic past. In the most direct expression of his gratitude, Purdavud writes:

If our fellow countrymen have come to know the Avesta and have access to thousand-year old texts, and if they come to know the religion of their ancestors in a way contrary to that posed by enemies and impostors, and if the followers of this ancient faith in Iran and those who like the texts of their forebears to appear after a thousand years in their own native vernacular language in a few volumes dealing with Zoroastrianism, then these people are indebted to the work and labor of this great man [Irani]. It is clear that anyone who likes knowledge and learning as well as the glory and greatness of ancient Iran is grateful to Dinshah Irani for publishing and bringing to life the lost past of our nation.\footnote{Ibid.}

Purdavud’s acknowledgment of Dinshah Irani is an indication of the importance of not only Irani, but of the broader network of textual and intellectual exchange that became possible between Iranians and Parsis by the 1920s and 1930s.

\textit{Later Work and Collaborations}

Irani’s work in promoting Indo-Iranian contact did not end with his collaboration with Ebrahim Purdavud. Until his own death, from kidney disease in 1938,\footnote{Andisheh-ye Ma, 6.} Irani...
continued to foster interaction between Iranian intellectuals and Indian Parsis. By 1930 and 1933 he devoted himself to collecting specimens of contemporary Persian poetry for the production of an anthology that ultimately became *Poets of the Pahlavi Regime*. The monumental 700-page anthology was intended to serve, in Irani’s own words, as “a volume which might supplement the work of Browne” by focusing on Persian poetry produced in Iran since the publication of volume four of E.G. Browne’s *Literary History of Persia* in 1924. The consolidation of the Pahlavi state in 1925, Irani came to believe, produced a commensurate shift in the literary history of Iran, and therefore justified a new volume on poetry produced during the new Pahlavi epoch. “[T]he ornate and artificial style, which has for centuries prevailed in Persia,” Irani wrote in the extended introductory essay to the volume, “has been replaced during this wave of patriotism and freedom, by a sweet, simple and natural style.” The bilingual edition included selections from ninety-eight poets, presented in the original Persian, along with a parallel English translation. The collection was carefully selected, indexed and categorized, in part, along familiar themes of classical Persian poetry such as “love” and “mysticism,” but also cross-referenced with new themes that emphasized Iran’s new national awakening and “patriotism.”

The significance of Irani’s 1933 anthology was not in working to canonize a modernist tradition of Persian poetry. The process of canonizing Iran’s twentieth century Persian poetic tradition was certainly underway as early as the 1930s, and Irani’s anthology may have played a role in that canonization. More important, however, is the significance of Irani’s *Poets of the Pahlavi Regime* for the production of a broad introductory anthology that would present the cultural and political changes taking place in Iran to the reading public of Bombay Parsis. It is with the publication of this anthology that the cultural traffic in Indo-Iranian nationalist texts became

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77 Dinshah J. Irani, *Poets of the Pahlavi Regime* (Bombay, 1933).

78 Irani, *Poets*, v.

79 Ibid., 124.

80 Irani states that Abdolhoseyn Sepanta helped with the acquisition and selection of the poems and K. B. Irani helped with the English translations.


82 Irani’s anthology was not the only collection of modern Iranian-Persian poetry to appear in India. Mohammad Eshaq, of the University of Calcutta, also produced an anthology: *Sokhanvaran-e Iran dar ‘Asr-e Hazer* (Calcutta, 1937).
reciprocal. Rather than producing texts in Bombay for an audience of readers in Iran, the anthology was intended to make the nationalist cultural and literary revival underway in Iran accessible to Indian readers. Like the earlier publication of 'Eshqi’s Rastakhiz and the textual collaborations with Ebrahim Purdavud, the Poets of the Pahlavi Regime was produced with the intention of reinforcing the national idea of a shared cultural genealogy that extended across the Indo-Iranian cultural, territorial and national space.

The culmination of Dinshah Irani’s effort to foster these connections came in May of 1932 when he traveled to Iran, along with the Indian poet and Nobel Prize laureate Rabindranath Tagore. The visit was organized in part through Irani’s own contacts with Iranian diplomats who were likewise eager to foster Indo-Iranian cultural, commercial and political relations. Dinshah Irani was keenly aware that the newly established Pahlavi state was reviving Iran’s Zoroastrian heritage, and the prospect of renewed Parsi–Iranian relations had not only cultural and political implications, but also promised commercial opportunities. These opportunities were made clear by Ardeshir Edulji Reporter, the Parsi resident and emissary who had lived in Iran since the late nineteenth century, when he wrote to his Parsi compatriots in Bombay describing “Persia’s re-Iranization.” In a letter published in the Iran League Quarterly on the eve of Tagore and Irani’s visit to Iran in 1932, Ardeshir Reporter described the changes taking place in Iran:

in the next few decades the results [of Persia’s “re-Iranization”] will find full expression to the amazement of the civilized world ... Iranism [is] striving hard to revive the noble ideas and ideals of ancient Iran ... as true Iranians we [Parsis] must ardently share and participate in this.

This goal was very much at the heart of Irani’s mission when he arrived in Iran with Tagore in 1932. The highlight of Tagore and Irani’s tour of Iran was an audience with Reza Shah at which Irani presented to Reza Shah a specially commissioned portrait of the monarch painted by the Parsi artist Minoocherji Pithawala. In return Dinshah

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83 Two further collections of translations by Irani also contributed to this cultural traffic into India. They were the English translations of Ebrahim Purdavud’s Purandokht Nameh, published in English as Ibrahim Pure-Davoud, Pourandokht Nameh: The Poems of Poure-Davoud, trans. D.J. Irani (Bombay, 1928); Aref Qazvini, The Poems of Aref: With English Translation and Introduction by Dinshah J. Irani (Bombay, 1933). Both of these texts, like the Poets of the Pahlavi Regime anthology, were published under the auspices of a new Parsi publication fund, the Pestonji D. Patel Memorial Iranian Series, for the purpose of publishing works that “promote the studies in the History, Literature and Philosophy of Ancient and Modern Iran.”


86 Ibid.

87 Dinshah Irani, “Regenerated Iran,” Iran League Quarterly 2, no. 4 (July 1932): 191. Pathawala is also famous for producing oil paintings that have become some of the defining visual representations of Zoroaster.
Irani received the order of the Neshan-e 'Elmi from Reza Shah for his scholarly services towards the revival of antiquity and Iran’s Zoroastrian heritage.\textsuperscript{88}

On his return to Bombay Irani wrote an account of his journey to Iran in the pages of the \textit{Iran League Quarterly}. In the published account Irani seriously conceived of the possibility of a migration back to Iran and the establishment of a Parsi colony in Khuzestan. In describing the newly built schools in Shiraz, Ahvaz and elsewhere that he visited, he states “[i]n my dreams I could not have thought of the sight I saw there.”\textsuperscript{89} He continues, “[t]he school building was a modern up-to-date one built in the Achamenian style, with a Foruhar at the top, and the guards of Darius done in the tile work on the sides.”\textsuperscript{90} He then goes on to reflect on the possibility of a Parsi return to Iran:

In the history of the Parsi community today we are face to face with a crisis. Both because of the economic crisis in the world and in the political situation in our country, the ground on which the edifice of our prosperity rested seems to be giving way. It is for the leaders of our community to give it a wise guidance in these times. In such a situation it is always better not to have all our eggs in one basket. To find out other safe baskets is the work of those who should lead us. I am not a pessimist about Bombay, but at any rate the events of the last five years should make us pause and think. Of course nothing should be done through hurry or over-enthusiasm ... To my mind a golden opportunity is coming. There is something providential in the fact that at this juncture the old and beloved country of our forefathers, Iran, makes such friendly gestures to us ... steadily and wisely let us think and act.\textsuperscript{91}

The Parsi community’s prosperity had been closely aligned with the British Raj. As the Indian independence movement gained momentum in the interwar period, some members of the Parsi community became increasingly anxious with respect to their status in a post-independence India. The Great Depression had also affected Bombay’s commercial economy and textile industries, which were also central pillars of Parsi prosperity. As Irani’s reflection on his visit to Iran indicates, the mutual rediscovery of Parsis and Iranians had very real political implications not only for Iranian nationalists, but also for the Parsi community. The pages of the \textit{Iran League Quarterly} include articles and notices about procedures for purchasing land in Iran.\textsuperscript{92} While a large-scale “return” to Iran was never organized in a serious way during this period, Irani’s public reflections following his visit to Iran in 1932 are suggestive of new possibilities that had grown out of the creative reconfiguration of Indo-Iranian identity since the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{88} Coyajee, “A Brief Life-Sketch,” v.
\textsuperscript{89} Irani, “Regenerated Iran,” 206.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} “Acquisition of Land in Khuzestan,” \textit{Iran League Quarterly} 2, no. 2–3 (January–April 1932): 175.
\textsuperscript{93} There is also discussion of establishing a Parsi “colony” in Khuzestan in Shahrmandan, \textit{Forzane\textsuperscript{e} Zartoshti}, 499. The idea was first articulated among the Parsees as early as 1886, according to Kulke. See Kulke, \textit{The Parsees}, 144.
Conclusion

From the vantage point of the early twenty-first century the life of Dinshah Irani may seem strangely familiar. He was born into a family of exiles and expatriates living in an age of global commercial and cultural exchange; he considered himself as both an Iranian and an Indian; he was a member of an ethno-religious minority within a minority; he achieved success as a middle-class professional living in the cosmopolitan city of Bombay; and yet he came to feel a displaced attachment to a “homeland” that he largely knew only through texts. Dinshah Irani’s life in many ways reflects the transnational nature of identity that defined an age when the modern nation-state system was evolving into its twentieth century formation. The multiplicity of his loyalties, identities and attachments were evolving and taking shape in experimental new ways at a time when nationalism was demanding new forms of collective identity throughout the world. In that sense his life may also foreshadow a later age when the rigid identities of territorial nation-states are beginning to recede, and new experimental configurations of loyalty and identity are again taking shape. Dinshah Irani was in that sense very much a person of his time, as well as of ours.

What is also clear is that his disappearance from the historical record of Iranian modernity and nationalism likely reflects a historiographic tradition that came to emphasize the narrowly Iranian origins of Iran’s modern history. After his death a bilingual English-Persian memorial volume was published in Bombay in 1943. The volume included contributions from Indian and Iranian intellectual luminaries who collectively wished to pay their respects and document the important intellectual role that Irani had played in reviving Indo-Iranian culture in the early decades of the twentieth century. Since the publication of the volume, however, the name of Dinshah Irani has only rarely found its way into histories of this period. Figures like Dinshah Irani, who can be described as “marginal Iranians”—exiles, expatriates and diasporic creatures whose connections to Iran were distant, conflicted and liminal—were easy to overlook in the writing of Iran’s history of nationalization. As a careful accounting of his life and work suggests, however, despite the tenuous connection that he had to Iran, the role that Dinshah Irani played was in fact central to modern Iranian cultural and intellectual history.

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