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Back to the Motherland? Parsi Gujarati Travelogues of Iran in the Qajar-Pahlavi Interregnum, 1921–1925

Murali Ranganathan 

Address: B/601, Sai Sanskriti, Neelam Nagar, Mulund East, Mumbai 400081, INDIA
murali.ranganathan@gmail.com

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Abstract

The publication of four Gujarati travelogues written by Parsis traveling to Iran in quick succession in the 1920s marked the intensification of a relationship that had hitherto been based mainly on philanthropy directed towards the Zoroastrians of Iran. The Pahlavi regime, with its assurances of religious tolerance and equity, prompted Parsis to consider deepening their connection with Iran through trade and business investments and also examine the possibility of return to their motherland. The encounters which constitute these travelogues could be framed as experiments which helped the Parsi community in India to construct a framework for developing this relationship. The Parsi travelogues, while attempting to recover a Zoroastrian past in Iran, also try to map the future for the community by addressing its present anxieties and aspirations.

Keywords: Zoroastrianism; Parsi; Gujarati; travelogues; Mumbai; Baha'ism; Iran

In the preface to his 1929 book, *Māri Irānni ḍāyarimā ḍokyu* (A Peek into My Iran Diary), Kaikhosrow Ardeshir Fitter writes about his plans to publish an Iran travelogue:

It was my intention to publish all my notes related to Iran—its history, politics, geography, culture, tradition, economy, religion, archaeology, travels, etc.—in the form of a book, but I have had to suspend this plan for now because, in this era of awakening for Iran, four books by Parsis on travels in Iran have already been published in a short period.¹

Kaikhosrow Fitter was the first and long-time secretary of the Iran League, a Mumbai-based organization deeply invested in the relationship of the Parsis with Iran and Iranian co-religionists.² Believing that the market for travelogues was saturated, Fitter instead published a collection of his articles and essays based on his Iranian experiences which had appeared in Parsi community journals and newspapers in the preceding years. The travelogues which Fitter was referring to were published in Mumbai (except for one from

¹ Kaikhosrow Ardeshir Fitter, *Māri Irānni ḍāyarimā ḍokyu* (Mumbai: Jāme Jamshed Press, 1929), preface. I have translated all the quotations in this essay from Gujarati into English. Any quotations originally in English have been specifically identified.

² Founded on September 10, 1922, the Iran League aimed to help the Parsi community better understand the situation in Iran, raise funds to ameliorate the living conditions of Iranian Zoroastrians, and revitalize the Zoroastrian religion in Iran. For an account of the Iran League's activities and evolution in the interwar years, see Dinyar Patel, "Caught Between Two Nationalisms: The Iran League of Bombay and the Political Anxieties of an Indian Minority," *Modern Asian Studies* 55, no. 3 (May 2021): 764–800.

Karachi) between 1923 and 1928 and were based on journeys undertaken to Iran between 1921 and 1925.³ The first half of the 1920s, the interregnum between the Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties, was a major period of upheaval for Iran.⁴ It was also during this period that the Parsis scaled up the level of their philanthropic activities directed towards the Zoroastrians of Iran.⁵ The Iran travelogues were written by Parsis for an exclusively Parsi audience in Gujarati, then the primary language of the community in India. The writers of these four travelogues, whom Fitter does not identify, came from diverse backgrounds: the wife of a scholar-priest from Karachi traveling with her husband and son; a First World War veteran from Navsari; a well-established community historian from Mumbai; and a Persian language teacher who reinvented himself as a Zoroastrian missionary. These travelogues have received scant attention in modern scholarship.⁶ Conversely, Persian language travelogues, including those about travel from Iran to India, have been well documented, translated into English, and widely studied.⁷

The Parsis had been writing travel accounts in Gujarati from the 1830s,⁸ but never before had one country excited their collective imagination as Iran in the 1920s. They had been traveling to China from the 1750s, and all through the nineteenth century a large number of Parsis visited that country or settled there for extended periods of time. However, not a single travel narrative emerged from this engagement.⁹ From the 1840s, they were

³ Although the country was still officially called Persia, the Parsi travelers uniformly refer to it as Iran in their Gujarati travelogues and I have used the same term throughout this essay. Mumbai has always been referred to as Mumbai in Gujarati and Persian sources and I have retained that name for the city in preference to Bombay.

⁴ Recent scholarship on this period includes Homa Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000); Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); and Abbas Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017): 389–445.

⁵ The impact of these philanthropic activities have been widely studied; for example, see Burjor Avari, “Anglo-Parsi Relations and the Iranian Zoroastrians: Ameliorating the Zoroastrian Condition in 19th Century Iran,” in *Ātaš-e Dorun: The Fire Within. Jamshid Soroush Soroushian Commemorative Volume*, ed. Carlo G. Cereti and Farrokh Vajifdar, vol. 2 (n.p.: Mehrborzin Soroushian, 2003): 7–21; John R. Hinnells, “The Flowering of Zoroastrian Benevolence: Parsi Charities in the 19th and 20th Centuries,” in *Acta Iranica: Papers in Honor of Professor Mary Boyce*, ed. A. D. H. Bivar and J. R. Hinnells (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985): 261–326; and Afshin Marashi, *Exile and the Nation: The Parsi Community of India and the Making of Modern Iran* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020).

⁶ Travelogues written by Parsis have generally not attracted scholarly attention, an exception being Daniel J. Sheffield, “Iran, the Mark of Paradise or the Land of Ruin? Historical Approaches to Reading Two Parsi Zoroastrian Travelogues,” in *On the Wonders of Land and Sea: Persianate Travel Writing*, ed. Roberta Micallef and Sunil Sharma (Boston: Ilex Foundation, 2013), 14–43, which examines two travelogues to Iran, one from the late eighteenth century and the other from the mid-nineteenth century.

⁷ For example, see Mana Kia, “Limning the Land: Social Encounters and Historical Meaning in Early 19th-century Travelogues between Iran and India,” in *On the Wonders of Land and Sea: Persianate Travel Writing*, ed. Roberta Micallef and Sunil Sharma (Boston: Ilex Foundation, 2013), 44–67; Nile Green, “A Persian Sufi in British India: The Travels of Mirzā Hasan Safi ‘Alī Shāh, 1251/1835–1316/1899,” *Iran* 42 (2004): 201–218; Mana Kia, “Accounting for Difference: A Comparative Look at the Autobiographical Travel Narratives of Muhammad ‘Ali Hazin Lahiji and ‘Abd al-Karim Kashmiri,” *Journal of Persianate Studies* 2 (2009): 210–36; and Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For examples of English translations of Persian travelogues about India originally written or published in the early nineteenth century, see Aqa Ahmad ibn Mohammad Ali Behbahani, *India in the Early 19th Century: An Iranian’s Travel Account, Translation of Mir’at al-ahval-i jahan numa*, tr. A. F. Haider, (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1996); and Abu Taleb Esfahani, *Travels of Mirza Abu Taleb Khan in Asia, Africa, and Europe, during the years 1799, 1800, 1801, 1802, and 1803*, tr. Charles Stewart, ed. Daniel O’Quinn, (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2009).

⁸ On the development of the Gujarati travelogue genre (including those by Parsis) in the nineteenth century, see Mehali Bhandoopwalla, “Gujarāti jobānmā safarnāmāoni tavārikh (san 1860 sudhi) [A history of Gujarati travelogues (to 1860)],” *Forbes Gujarati Sabha Traimasik* 78, 2–3 (April–September 2013): 28–64.

⁹ *Chin no ahevāl* [Account of China], published in two volumes in 1844 and 1848, begins as a travelogue but is actually a truncated translation of Charles Gutzlaff’s *China Opened* (1838) and the final chapter from Duncan MacPherson’s *Two Years in China* (1842); for details, see Bhandoopwalla, “Gujarāti jobānmā safarnāmāoni tavārikh (san 1860 sudhi),” 44–48, 62–63. An early Gujarati travel account related to China, albeit not by a Parsi, is Damodar Ishwardas, *Chinni musāfari* (Mumbai: Imperial Press, 1868). It has recently been examined by Michael

publishing travelogues and journals based on their experiences in England but they were few and far between. Travelogues of journeys within India were also being published from the 1860s. However, it was only in the 1880s that the Gujarati travelogue emerged as a literary genre when established Gujarati authors like Jehangir Behramji Marzban (1848–1928) began writing about their travel experiences.¹⁰ During the First World War, a large number of Parsis enlisted in the Indian Army and traveled abroad, but only a single published account of this experience has been discovered.¹¹ Why then was there a sudden proliferation of travel literature on Iran in the 1920s? And why did the Parsis of western India choose this mode of engagement with a country about which they knew almost nothing?

These travelogues were much more than mere travel accounts. The texts were not merely works of literature in the travelogue genre; they were essentially constructed as community manuals for the Parsis of India. They could be read as handbooks by which the Parsis could intensify their involvement in a country with which the entire community had an emotional and cultural attachment. Not only were they guides for travel to Iran, but also handbooks on how to respond to the changing political and economic situation in the country. The writers sought to influence the community's response to the challenges Iranian Zoroastrians faced, actively encourage their readers to participate through donating to initiatives sponsored by various Parsi organizations, and examine the feasibility of Parsi participation in Iran's economic revival through either employment in the upper echelons of bureaucracy or exploiting trade and business opportunities.

Although there had been talk within the Parsi community about migration to Iran, the land of their forefathers, from the 1880s to the 1910s, the conditions in Iran had been too unwelcoming for this proposal to be seriously considered. After the conclusion of the First World War, political agitation in India against British colonial rule intensified, as the colonizers reneged on many promises made during the war regarding devolution of power. While the political future of India was being debated, the Parsi community, which included factions both supportive and critical of colonial rule, foresaw situations where they could be marginalized in any new dispensation. This lent a particular urgency to the migration question. With the emergence of Reza Khan (1878–1944), it seemed that the situation was changing and migration to Iran was perhaps an option which the community needed to seriously evaluate. The travel writers were particularly mindful of this question and every interaction or experience they had in Iran contributed to the opinions they formulated on this subject. Moving to Iran depended not just on security considerations and religious freedom but on the possibility of recreating the same levels of economic prosperity which the community had enjoyed in India in the previous hundred years.

Traveling between 1921 and 1925, each Parsi traveler built on the experiences of their predecessors, often validating their assessments, but sometimes contradicting them, while documenting and interpreting the fast-paced developments of those five years.

The travelers and their travelogues

Although Iranian Zoroastrians had been regularly making the long journey between Iran and India from the 1840s, very few Parsi Zoroastrians had been to Iran in this period. The most prominent among them was Manekji Limji Hataria (1813–1890) who, in 1854, arrived in Iran as the emissary of the Mumbai-based Society for the Amelioration of the Condition of

O'Sullivan, "Vernacular Capitalism and Intellectual History in a Gujarati Account of China, 1860–68," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 80, no. 2 (May 2021): 267–292.

¹⁰ Marzban's travelogues were multi-edition bestsellers and included titles such as *Mumbai thi Kaśmir* (1887) and *Modikhāne thi Mārsales* (1906).

¹¹ Nariman Merwanji Karkaria, *Rangbhumi par rakhaḍ* (Mumbai: The Manek Printing Press, 1922). I have translated this book as *The First World War Adventures of Nariman Karkaria* (Gurugram: HarperCollins, 2022).

Zoroastrians in Persia.¹² Between 1863 and 1865, when Hataria was back in Mumbai, he published an account of his activities in Iran, some sections of which could be read as a travelogue.¹³ Kawasji Dinshahji Keyas (1848–1910), who sojourned in Iran between 1878 and 1880, was the only other Parsi to publish a detailed account of his experiences in nineteenth-century Iran.¹⁴ Traveling at a time when the Zoroastrians of Iran were still experiencing the full force of religious persecution, Keyas had to be very careful while on the road as well as during his extended stays in various Iranian cities. For instance, while spending two months in Shiraz during the summer of 1878, he began to teach English to a few Muslim students to augment his income. This drew the ire of the Islamic clergy, who frowned upon any interaction between Zoroastrians and Muslims, and he had to give up this venture.¹⁵ A few years later, in 1889, Keyas compiled an illustrated book on the antiquities of Iran with captions in Gujarati, English, and Persian.¹⁶

Those who ventured to Iran in the 1920s belonged to the upper echelons of Parsi society. Most were highly educated, had a good knowledge of history (particularly of the Parsi community), and held a deep interest in archaeological antiquities.¹⁷ Many were published authors—in English and Gujarati—and some had experience writing travel narratives. Although all had traveled extensively, both within India and abroad, this was their first trip to Iran. Some of them could read Persian and perhaps understand the language, but none could speak the language fluently. This does not seem to have precluded long conversations with local Muslims and Zoroastrians, as many of the latter had learned Gujarati during stints in Mumbai.

The first Parsi travel party which visited Iran in 1921 consisted of Bai Kunvarbai Manekji Dhalla (1877–1942); her husband Dastur Maneckji Nusserwanji Dhalla (1875–1956),¹⁸ a Karachi-based Zoroastrian priest and scholar of Zoroastrianism; and their son, Nariman, the designated photographer for the trip. Dastur Dhalla had been sponsored by the Parsi community to pursue advanced studies at Columbia University where he completed his doctorate in 1908. Since then, he had traveled frequently to Europe and the United States and Kunvarbai always accompanied him on his international travels. By 1920, Dhalla had established his reputation as a scholar and progressive priest. Although many of his significant publications were still to come, his credentials as a writer were already well established. While many Western scholars of Zoroastrianism—including A. V. Williams Jackson (1862–1937), with whom Dhalla had studied—had visited Iran, no modern Parsi scholar had been to the country yet. The Dhallas were hoping to visit some of the historic sites associated with ancient Persian dynasties and experience their magnificence first-hand. They were

¹² Hataria's activities in Iran have been extensively studied; for example, see: Mary Boyce, "Manekji Limji Hataria in Iran," in *K. R. Cama Oriental Institute Golden Jubilee Volume*, ed. N. D. Minochehr-Homji and M. F. Kanga (Bombay: K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, 1969), 19–31; Michael Stausberg, "Manekji Limji Hatāriā and the Rediscovery of Ancient Iran," in *Ātaš-e Dorun, The Fire Within: Jamshid Soroush Soroushian Commemorative Volume II*, ed. Carlo G. Cereti and Farrokh Vajifdar (n.p.: Mehrborzin Soroushian, 2003), 439–446; 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; and Firoze M. Kotwal, Jamsheed K. Choksy, Christopher J. Brunner, and Mahnaz Moazami, "Hataria, Manekji Limji," in *Encyclopædia Iranica* (2016), <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hataria-manekji-limji>.

¹³ Manekji Limji Hataria, *Risāle ejhāre šīāte Irān* (Mumbai: Union Press, 1865).

¹⁴ Kawasji Dinshahji Keyas, *Irānmā musāfari* (Mumbai: Daftar Ashkara Press, 1882).

¹⁵ Keyas, *Irānmā musāfari*, 78.

¹⁶ Kawasji Dinshahji Keyas, *Qadim nakše Irān* (Mumbai: Education Society's Press, 1889).

¹⁷ Containing detailed descriptions and photographs of all of Iran's major pre-Islamic sites, the travelogues can also be parsed as a Parsi attempt to reclaim their architectural and antiquarian heritage, but this aspect is largely beyond the scope of this essay. For an analysis of the unfolding of this process in 1930s Iran with participants from Europe, America, India, and Iran, see Nile Green, "New Histories for the Age of Speed: The Archaeological-Architectural Past in Interwar Afghanistan and Iran," *Iranian Studies* 54, no. 2 (2021): 1–49.

¹⁸ For more details on Dhalla, see Kaikhosroo M. JamaspAsa, "Dhalla, Dastur Maneckji Nusserwanji," in *Encyclopædia Iranica* (1995), <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/dhalla>.

scheduled to visit the US in 1921 and hoped to route their travel overland via Iran, Syria and Palestine. On conferring with the British consuls in Basra and Bushire, they were discouraged from taking the overland route via Iraq and Palestine although Iran was deemed safe for travel. They changed their travel plans and restricted it to Iran, embarking on the SS *Barpeta* from Karachi on September 4, 1921. Landing at Bushire, they traveled to Shiraz, Isfahan, Tehran, Qazvin, Hamedan, and Kermanshah before crossing the land border to Iraq. They went on to Baghdad and Basra from where they took the steamer back to Karachi. Their short trip did not permit a detour to Yazd and Kerman. They returned to Karachi towards the end of November 1921 and immediately left for Europe and America.

Kunvarbai Dhalla was the designated chronicler for the trip, perhaps her first foray into writing. It seems Kunvarbai intended to publish an account of their travels before setting out for Iran, as she diligently kept notes throughout the trip.¹⁹ She joined a long list of women who wrote about their travel experiences in Persia from the turn of the twentieth century including Ella Sykes (1863–1939),²⁰ Dorothy De Warzée (1880–1963),²¹ and Vita Sackville-West (1892–1962).²² In the 1930s, Freya Stark (1893–1993) traveled to parts of Persia not yet explored or surveyed by Europeans.²³ These European women were closely connected with the British establishment in Iran and their travel narratives were written in a different register as compared to that of Kunvarbai. Although they were able to access the zenana and meet Iranian women, Kunvarbai's interactions were longer in duration, more intimate, and, perhaps, more meaningful for both sides. Yet another Parsi lady, Meherbanu Behramgore Anklesaria, published an Iran travelogue in 1932.²⁴

The Dhallas were among the first Parsis to travel to Iran as tourists after the First World War and had to feel their way through the journey in spite of being in contact with and advised by the most powerful authorities in Iran. In Shiraz, for instance, they met Ebrahim Khan Qavam al-Molk, a powerful figure in Iranian politics, with whom they spent a day and conversed on the political and economic future of Iran. Although the Dhallas seem to have had no budgetary constraints and spent money liberally during their travel, they still had the worst experience of the four tour parties. In 1921, the roads in Iran were hardly fit for travel by automobiles, but except for the first stage from Bushire to Shiraz, the Dhallas opted to hire motor vehicles in the hope of traveling more comfortably and at a faster pace. Instead, the poor condition of vehicles, drivers' inexperience, absence of fuel stations, and a lack of drivable roads led to frequent and long stoppages; so much so that it might have been faster for them to travel by donkey or, in some areas, horse-drawn carriage. For example, for the last stage of their journey, they hired a vehicle at Tehran to take them right up to the Iraqi border but it suffered a major breakdown a few miles outside the city. The Dhallas had to spend two days camping by the roadside waiting for their vehicle to be repaired. And to compound their misery, when things were set right, they realized that their camera bag had been stolen and with it most of the photographs they had taken during the trip.

Even though the roads, especially the stretch between Shiraz and Tehran, were infested with highwaymen in 1921, and the Dhallas considered employing a team of bodyguards, Kunvarbai did not think it advisable for travelers to carry firearms. However, Nariman Karkaria, who visited Iran in 1923–24 after reading Kunvarbai's travelogue, had no such qualms and always kept his Welby revolver close at hand.²⁵ On October 24, 1923, Nariman

¹⁹ Dhalla, *Irān ane Irākmā musāfari*, 93.

²⁰ Ella C. Sykes, *Through Persia On A Side-Saddle* (London: A D Innes & Company, 1898).

²¹ Dorothy De Warzée, *Peeps into Persia* (London: Hurst & Blackett Ltd., 1913).

²² Vita Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran* (London: Hogarth Press, 1926); Vita Sackville-West, *Twelve Days: An Account of a Journey Across the Bakhtiari Mountains in South-western Persia* (London: Hogarth Press, 1928).

²³ Freya Stark, *Valleys of the Assassins and Other Persian Travels* (London: John Murray, 1934).

²⁴ Meherbanu Behramgore Anklesaria, *Pahalvi Irānmā musāfari* (Mumbai: The Fort Printing Press, 1932).

²⁵ Karkaria, *Irānbhumi par rakhaḍ*, 402. However, Karkaria had no reason to use the revolver during his year-long trip except when he was once asked by his Iranian muleteer to shoot a deer.

Karkaria (1894–1949) boarded the SS *Shustar* in Mumbai and embarked on a journey to Iran, accompanied by a friend who later returned mid-way through the journey. Karkaria, not yet thirty, had managed to pack in as many miles as experienced travelers twice his age since he had constantly been on the move from the age of sixteen. In 1910, Karkaria left home unannounced to seek his fortune in China. He spent two years working in Parsi commercial firms in Hong Kong and Peking before returning to India. He went back to China in 1914 and when, towards the end of the year, it was obvious that there was going to be an intense period of hostility and warfare, decided to voluntarily join the British Army. He traveled to London overland by train as the ocean route was considered dangerous. While in the British Army from 1915 to 1919, he was perhaps one of the few soldiers who lived to tell the tale after having seen action on three fronts. During his five years in the British Army, he spent extended periods of time in England, France, Egypt, Palestine, Greece, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey, besides traveling through Russia, Norway, Finland, and Sweden.

After returning to India, Karkaria published his Gujarati war memoirs, *Rangbhumi par rakhaḍ*, in 1922. He adopted a jaunty writing style to describe some of his gut-wrenching experiences during the war. The book was a combination of war memoir and travelogue with long touristy chapters on the cities he visited, including Peking, Irkutsk, St. Petersburg, Jerusalem, Istanbul, Tblisi, and Baku. Writing for a largely Parsi audience, Karkaria never missed an opportunity to stoke Parsi emotions by evoking past glory, however imaginary it might be. For example, on entering Jerusalem, he was reminded:

It was the very city conquered by ancient Persian emperors and I was following in their footsteps. Here I was, a Zoroastrian soldier with a gun hoisted on my shoulder, entering the city over which flew the flag of the great British sovereign; who would not be proud to be here? This was the holy land conquered by the famous Persian emperor Khusro Pervez in 614, who opened, as it were, an account for the Parsis in this city. This clearly demonstrates we Parsis also have a stake in this city.²⁶

If the Parsis could claim a stake in Jerusalem on the basis of this engagement, how much more intense would their relationship with Iran be? Iran, the country to which they traced their ancestry, the region where the roots of their religion lay, a land once ruled by kings who professed the Zoroastrian faith, a place whose architectural antiquities stood witness to their beliefs, was at the heart of any geography constructed by the Parsi diaspora in India. Could they not, Karkaria seems to imply, establish a kingdom of Zoroaster, where the Parsis of India and the Zoroastrians of Iran would be sovereign?

Having proved his Zoroastrian credentials as a traveler and travel writer, Karkaria was the first choice when the Parsi community wanted to send a person to explore Iran. Although not traveling on behalf of the Iran League, he was funded by its president, Hormusji Cowasji Adenwalla (1857–1939), and other functionaries. He was clearly expected to provide an account of his experiences which would match his previous book, both in style and substance. Karkaria seems to have kept extensive notes and his travelogue was published in March 1925, a few months after he returned to India. His book, titled *Irānbhumi par rakhaḍ* (Wanderings in Iran), had an extensive list of subscribers who accounted for nearly 300 copies.

Karkaria adopted a slow mode of travel in Iran, never using a motor car for his entire trip, which lasted nearly a year. Traveling on a shoestring budget, Karkaria chose to ride a horse or mule which was far cheaper than hiring a motor car. He followed the same route taken by the Dhallas in 1921 but also made a detour to Yazd and Kerman. By late 1923, the Iranian highways had become safer and—unlike the Dhallas, who traveled as part of a caravan—he could travel alone with just a guide, a muleteer, and two servants. He stayed for a few

²⁶ Karkaria, *Rangbhumi par rakhaḍ*, 235.

weeks in every city he visited, experiencing the local culture and meeting a variety of people. He seems to have had access to senior officials in the Iranian army and visited numerous military institutions all over Iran, something which none of the other groups were interested in. While Karkaria traveled alone for most of his trip, he was followed by as many as six different groups of Parsi travelers in 1924.

The largest and most prominent group of Parsis to visit Iran in 1924 consisted of people who already held a deep connection with the country through their philanthropic activities. Most were members of the Iran League in Mumbai and were proceeding to Iran to examine the results of their munificence and evaluate the next steps which the community had to take to alleviate the poverty of their Iranian brethren. The group of nine middle-aged Parsis was nominally headed by Pestonji Dosabhai Marker (1871–1965), who perhaps financed the costs of the trip, and included Kaikhosrow Ardeshir Fitter, the secretary of the Iran League; Pherozshah Sorabji Gazdar, one of its vice-presidents; Gustaspshah Kaikhusroo (G. K.) Nariman (1873–1933),²⁷ the editor of the *Iran League Bulletin*; and Manek Fardunji Mulla, a founding member of the Iran League. At Quetta, the group was joined by Kekobad Ardeshir Marker, a nephew of Pestonji Marker. Mulla, who could speak Persian, was the chief interlocutor of the group and wrote an account of this trip.²⁸

On April 21, 1924, the group set off on the mail steamer SS *Vita* to Karachi, where they spent a few days before taking the train to Quetta and then Duzdab (now Zahedan) on the Indo-Iranian border. From Duzdab, they commenced their road journey across Iran in a customized Dodge car they had brought from Mumbai. Although the Dodge was big enough to seat 10, they also purchased a Ford in Duzdab to transport their luggage. The first leg of the journey, from Duzdab to Kerman via Bam, was perhaps the most challenging section. In spite of setting off across a desert in the peak of summer and ignoring the basic rules of travel in Iran—i.e., hiring a guide who knew the route since the roads were not marked, starting out every day before dawn (they often left after lunch), and packing enough food and water for a day or two in case they got stranded—the group managed to reach Kerman in a short six days. After this arduous journey, which they completed easily in spite of getting lost twice, the other sections were accomplished without adventure. The Dodge proved very reliable, never broke down (except for a few punctures), and helped them cover between 50 to 100 miles a day, a blistering pace compared to that of Nariman Karkaria and the Dhallas, who only covered around 20 miles per day.²⁹ From Kerman, they went to Yazd, where they spent a few days inspecting the schools and hospitals they had funded and provided additional funds to the Zoroastrian community. At Yazd, they were joined by Hormuji Cowasji Adenwalla, the president and patron of the Iran League. A businessman with extensive trading interests on the Indian Ocean rim, from Mumbai to Zanzibar via Aden, Adenwalla was traveling with a different group.³⁰ From Yazd, the expanded group went to Isfahan and Shiraz before turning back to go to Tehran, Qazvin, Hamedan, and Kermanshah. At Basra,

²⁷ For a résumé of G. K. Nariman's connections with the Iran League, see Patel, "Caught Between Two Nationalisms," 776–777.

²⁸ Nearly six decades later, Kekobad Ardeshir Marker's English memoirs were published posthumously and included an account of the Iran trip; see *A Petal from the Rose* (Karachi: Rosette, 1985). Some of the details in this book differ from Mulla's Gujarati travelogue; I have relied on the latter, as it is contemporaneous and, therefore, more reliable. Marker's account has been widely used in recent scholarship: Mikiya Koyagi, "Drivers Across the Desert: Infrastructure and Sikh Migrants in the Indo-Iranian Borderlands, 1919–1931," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 39, no. 3 (December 2019): 375–388; Marashi, *Exile and the Nation*, 78–80; and Patel, "Caught Between Two Nationalisms," 765–766.

²⁹ For an account of the improvements in Iran's road travel infrastructure in the inter-war years, see Patrick Clawson, "Knitting Iran Together: The Land Transport Revolution, 1920–1940," *Iranian Studies* 26, no. 3–4 (1993): 235–250.

³⁰ A transcription of a speech Adenwalla gave about his experiences in Iran was included in a book published in 1927 by the Iran League. Although titled *Sar Hormasji Kavasji Di. Eḡānvālāni Irānno anubhav*, the book is actually a collection of speeches delivered by various individuals to raise funds for the Iran League.

they boarded a steamer and reached Mumbai on August 17, 1924, less than four months after they left home.

The experiences of this group were chronicled in the book *Irān bhūmino bhomyo* (A Guide to Persia) by Manek Fardunji Mulla (1880–1938).³¹ Like the other travelers in this cohort, Mulla had substantial travel experience; in his introduction to the book, he claimed that he had traversed 26,000 miles within India before setting off on the Iran trip. Mulla's travelogue, however, was not published until 1928 as he again went to Iran in October 1925 on a two-year stint as a Zoroastrian missionary to work in the villages of Yazd. His 1928 book was divided into three parts: an account of his group's travels in 1924, a description of his activities in Yazd between 1925 and 1927, and a survey of the religious and cultural practices of the Iranian Zoroastrians.

Perhaps the most famous Parsi to travel to Iran during this decade was Jivanji Jamsetji Modi (1854–1933). In a career spanning over five decades, Modi had, by the mid-1920s, established himself as one of the leading historians of Mumbai, not just within the Parsi community but also in international circles. He was also a priest and a Zoroastrian religious scholar. Constantly writing, translating, editing, compiling, and publishing, his literary output in English and Gujarati was copious. Modi was closely associated with many of the learned societies then functioning in Mumbai including the Asiatic Society of Bombay, which was dominated by European scholars. He was elected a vice-president of the Society in 1907 and became its president in March 1929. Focusing mainly on subjects connected with the Parsis and their religion, he spread his net far and wide to hunt down elusive sources, ranging from eighteenth century French travel narratives to Mughal miniatures and *firmāns*. Modi was also prominent in the affairs of the Mumbai Parsi community: for many years, he was the secretary and chronicler of the trust that managed the funds and properties of the erstwhile Bombay Parsee Panchayet, producing two volumes of community history based on archival records. Modi had traveled widely, both within India and abroad. His first long-distance tour was a traverse of Northern India in 1887 extending up to the Khyber Pass at the Afghan border. His account of this journey was published in the form of 33 letters in *Jāme Jamshed*. Two years later, he went to Europe for the first time to attend the eighth International Congress of Orientalists held in Stockholm, Sweden, and also traveled to Italy and Switzerland. He was at Chicago for the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893. In later years, he traveled extensively within India, visited Western Europe numerous times, and also went to Sri Lanka, Burma, China, and Japan. On each occasion, his travel letters were published in the *Jāme Jamshed*, but they were never compiled into a book.

On April 15, 1925, a 70-year-old Modi set off on his final expedition on the steamer SS *Naldera*, which plied the London-Bombay-Australia route. He traveled with his younger cousin, Rustomji Cowasji Modi, and the latter's wife on the outward leg of the journey; while returning he traveled alone before rendezvousing with them in Baghdad from where they proceeded together to Iran. Modi's return journey to Iran, overland via Eastern Europe and Transcaucasia, could be seen as the triumphant culmination of a life immersed in scholarship. Stopping at numerous countries along the way, Modi met with heads of state, delivered lectures, and received accolades and honors. In Paris, he was awarded the Légion d'honneur by the French government. At Budapest, he was given a hero's welcome, treated as a state guest, and awarded the Hungarian Cross of Merit during an audience with Miklós Horthy, the regent of the Kingdom of Hungary. In September 1925, Modi spent a few days in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) and Moscow attending the grand event organized to mark the bicentenary of the Academy of Sciences. From Moscow, he proceeded to Baku, where he delivered two lectures and called on Samad aga Agamalioglu, the president of Azerbaijan. Before entering Iran, Modi was keen to investigate the alleged fire-temple at

³¹ Manek Fardunji Mulla, *Irān bhūmino bhomyo* (A Guide to Persia: Notes of my travels in Persia and Iraq) (Mumbai: The Fort Printing Press, 1928). Besides this book, Mulla had four more to his credit: another travelogue describing his 1929 journey to Sistan, Persian language primers, and an English-Persian dictionary.

Surkhani, near Baku, which had captured the imagination of the Parsis. Although he concluded that the last worshippers at the temple were Hindus, he felt that at some earlier age the site might have been associated with Zoroastrianism. Nariman Karkaria had visited the site earlier in 1919, and though no expert, he had reached the same conclusion.³²

Modi was the only one among the Parsi travelers from India to have entered Iran from the north. Traveling from Baku via Armenia, his first destination in Iran was Tabriz, which he reached on October 2, 1925. Armed with the best references, he stayed as the guest of the local ruling authority wherever he traveled, and they made all the necessary arrangements for his explorations. He visited nearby Urumiah, traditionally associated as the birthplace of the prophet Zoroaster. From Tabriz, he proceeded first to Baghdad to meet his travel companions and, on October 30, 1925, they set off on an Iran tour in the reverse direction of other travelers. His route took him from Kermanshah to Qazvin, Tehran, Isfahan, Yazd, Shiraz, and Bushire, where he boarded a steamer back to Mumbai. He was in Iran for less than a month, but Modi's narrative of this part of his tour accounts for a third of his travelogue.

After the comfortable and predictable travel of the previous six months in ships, trains and motor vehicles, Modi had an unpleasant introduction to travel in Iran: unreliable vehicles which broke down frequently, drivers who would not turn up, unmotorable roads, and nights in cold and draughty huts. The only consolation was that the roads were more secure; there was little risk of being waylaid by bandits in 1925 as compared to 1921, when the Dhallas had to be constantly conscious of robber-infested roads and had even seen a gang being captured and killed on the road from Isfahan to Tehran. Their corpses had been displayed on the road as a salutary warning to other would-be highwaymen.

Modi's travelogue was rather disarmingly titled *Māri Mumbai bahārnī sehel* (My Travels outside Mumbai), with the English subtitle *My Travels: A Series of 101 Letters*. Modi wrote those letters during his journey and regularly mailed them to *Jāme Jamshed* for publication. He had also made arrangements for the letters to be printed in book form simultaneously. Perhaps the same composed text was used to print both versions as the book is printed in small type in a double columnar format. Since he did not get a chance to mail his letters after reaching Yazd, he was able to revise their text after reaching Mumbai. Some letters, especially those related to Iran's historical sites, are supplemented by additional information written after Modi reached Mumbai.

Modi's writing style was characterized by a penchant for prolixity, a ponderous proclivity to quote his sources at length, elaborate digressions, and his dispensation of the services of a critical editor. All these shortcomings are amply evident in the travelogue, which extends to 500 closely-set pages. His book is peppered with hundreds of references to authors of all ages, from Arabic writers of the tenth century to the latest scholarly articles of European archaeologists. Modi's divagations include disquisitions on the etymology of place-names, reminiscences of his earlier visits to these countries, and long descriptions of meetings with famous scholars. Couched in measured tones, his guarded comments require to be read closely to interpret his impressions of Iran.

Preparing for the journey to Iran

All the travelers were extremely well read and had evidently done their research before setting off for Iran. There were no guidebooks or travelogues in Gujarati which could be of practical use to them, but there were a number of books on history and archaeology in English and other European languages which provided information on the antiquities of Iran. Dastur Dhalla and Jivanji Modi, both scholars themselves, could be expected to have read many such books. Nariman Karkaria lists the authors he read in preparation for the journey, whom he also quotes throughout his book:

³² Karkaria, *Rangbhumi par rakhad*, 350.

Professor Jackson, Lord Curzon's two volumes, General Sykes's two volumes as well as his *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia*, Sir Rawlinson, Sir Porter, Sir William Ouseley, Professor Browne, Mr. Neligan's *Hints for [Residents and Travelers in] Persia*, Mr. Shuster Morgan [sic], and Mr. Morier.³³

Although he acknowledges Kunvarbai Dhalla's travelogue, published earlier in the year, he ignores the English travelogues written by women such as Ella Sykes and Dorothy De Warzée. Did he consider such chronicles useless to a single man willing to rough it? After mentioning practically the entire popular Iran library, Karkaria goes on to list his Gujarati sources: the travelogues written by Hataria and Keyas, *Tavārikhe qadim Irān*,³⁴ *Nāmeḥ-ye Khosravān*,³⁵ and the articles on Iranian epigraphy written by Sorabjee Shapurjee Bengallee.³⁶ He also excavated verses from D. N. Patel's Gujarati translation of the *Shahnameh* and used them as chapter headings.

Packing for the journey to Iran proved a challenge for the Dhallas. They had no clue about the situation on the ground in Iran and received advice from many quarters, much of it conflicting. The upshot was, "we packed so much that if we had wished, we could have opened a well-stocked shop in one of the Iranian cities."³⁷ They laid in a supply of cooking essentials including "rice, pulses, onions, potatoes, and masala" alongside canned tins of "butter, jelly, milk, cheese, sardine[s], salmon, green peas, asparagus, tea, coffee, and sugar."³⁸ The trunks which they normally used for their American trips were unsuitable for the Iranian terrain. Instead, they procured custom-made jute bags reinforced with brass rings which could be tied to the back of a mule. To carry water, an essential commodity while traveling through Iran, they commissioned five specially-designed canvas containers which could stand on their base. Both the inlets and outlets of the containers could be sealed with copper screws. As they had been informed that firewood was scarce in Iran, the Dhallas took coal, kerosene, and two Primus stoves of the latest make. For lighting, they had three hurricane lamps, a large supply of candles, and three electric torches. They also carried along three foldable canvas camp chairs. By the time they reached Shiraz, the Dhallas realized that much of their luggage was superfluous. They had paid prohibitive import duties at Bushire and also incurred heavy portage. They gave away most of their consumables to acquaintances in Shiraz. A lot of the fragile items broke during the journey, they lost some of the rest, and by the time they left Iran, they were traveling rather light. The other travelers seemed to have benefited from the Dhallas' experience.

Packing clothes for Iran was also a challenge: it could get very hot and very cold within a matter of hours, washing facilities were minimal, and the roads were very dusty. Mulla laid down the dress code for male travelers:

A khaki shirt matched with short pants and a khaki coat would do very well. Besides an overcoat, a hat similar to those made by Ellwood to protect you from the sun, a balaclava cap to shield your ears from the wind, goggles for your eyes, an army-style water bottle with aluminum glass, a whistle, two pajama suits, two sets of thermal underwear,

³³ Karkaria, *Irānbhumi par rakhaḍ*, introduction, 13.

³⁴ Jamshedji Palanji Kapadia, *Tavārikhe qadim Irān* (Mumbai: Union Press, 1868); a translation of John Malcolm's *The History of Persia* (1815) incorporating updates based on the latest research.

³⁵ Karkaria is referring to the Gujarati translation of Jalal al-Din Mirza's *Nāmeḥ-ye Khosravān* by Ardeshir Dosabhai Munshi, published as *Purātan Pārsioni tavārikh* (Mumbai: Daftar Ashkara Press, 1871); a second edition of the translation was published in 1887.

³⁶ Sorabjee Shapurjee Bengallee's articles were originally published in the Gujarati magazine *Juggut Premi* in 1852–53; they were later included in his collected writings. See Sorabjee Shapurjee Bengallee, *Chunti kahādelo lakhāno*, 2 vols. (Mumbai: Daftar Ashkara Press, 1880).

³⁷ Dhalla, *Irān ane Irākmā musāfari*, 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

nine undershirts, and two colored shirts should suffice. Yet another dust-colored overcoat for rough use would be great.³⁹

Nariman Karkaria carried just one bag for his personal belongings and his camera with a tripod. The other groups were also economical with their luggage. Mulla's group, which brought their own motorcar, was perhaps the best equipped to tackle the challenges Iran posed to travelers. In hindsight, Mulla's advice to any future traveler was "to carry as little luggage as possible while traveling in a mountainous country like Iran."⁴⁰

Encounters in Iran

The travelers were no ordinary tourists. They had come to conduct a series of experiments structured around their encounters with the manifestations of Zoroastrianism—both from the past and in the present—in Iran. These experiments, although not explicitly formulated in the text, undergirded the narrative of the travelogues. They were not only supposed to validate some of the hypotheses which the Parsis of India had postulated in relation to Iran but also provide markers to them about whether to develop a deeper connection with the country; if the answer was in the affirmative, they were to provide guidelines on how and when to structure this relationship. The conclusions which the travelers drew from these experiments, sometimes unambiguously worded, sometimes hinted at, are scattered all through the text.

In the 1920s, the Zoroastrian community in Iran was based largely in and around the cities of Yazd and Kerman which were located in the center of the country. The capital city of Tehran also had a significant population of Zoroastrians, most of whom had migrated there in the previous two decades. It was unlikely that any traveler would meet a Zoroastrian elsewhere in the country unless they sought them out. For example, the travel writer Hermann Norden (1871–1931), imagining himself to be the last European to travel by caravan in Iran in 1927, does not mention meeting any Zoroastrians on his long, slow journey from Shiraz to Tehran.⁴¹ The American painter Harold Weston (1894–1972), who traveled through Persia by caravan in 1918–19, also makes no mention of Zoroastrians.⁴² Ella Sykes, when traveling in the 1890s with her brother Percy Sykes (1867–1945), the British consul at Kerman, had only one encounter with Zoroastrians when a group called on them at Yazd:

Eight venerable leaders of that race arrived; fine old men, but attired in coats and turbans of a hideous shade of mustard brown. Their Mahommedan oppressors will not permit them to wear the flowing *abba*, or Persian cloak, and restrict them to dingy yellows and browns.⁴³

In contrast, Zoroastrians take center stage in the Parsi Gujarati travelogues; the narrative is dominated by encounters with Zoroastrians at every place they visit. Indeed, when traveling by mule as part of a caravan from Bushire to Shiraz, the Dhallas had a serendipitous encounter with a group of Zoroastrians near Dasht-e-Arzhan.

We were making slow and steady progress up the hills when we noticed a very large caravan making its way down towards us from a pass in the mountains. As they neared us, we were delighted to find that the group consisted of about 300 Zoroastrians [headed towards Bushire to catch the steamer for Mumbai]. Some of them were riding donkeys

³⁹ Mulla, *Irān bhūmino bhomyo*, 15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Hermann Norden, *Under Persian Skies: A Record of Travel by the Old Caravan Routes of Western Persia* (London H. F. & G. Witherby, 1928).

⁴² Harold F. Weston, "Persian Caravan Sketches," *National Geographic Magazine* 39, no. 4 (April 1921): 417–468.

⁴³ Sykes, *Through Persia on a Side-saddle*, 66.

and mules while about a hundred men were on foot. A few had been to Hindustan earlier, while for many others this was their first time. As the two caravans passed by each other, we waved out to them. Greetings were exchanged. ... A majority of these Iranian Zoroastrians seemed very poor. All they had with them were three sets of clothes and other personal items bundled up and tied to their waists. After we reached Shiraz, we were informed that another group of 200 Zoroastrians had left the same week [in September 1921] for Hindustan via Bandar Abbas.⁴⁴

Considering the travelers estimated the Zoroastrian population of Iran to be between 10,000 and 12,000 at the time,⁴⁵ 500 men going to India in search of livelihood in a single week was a very large number, nearly 10 percent of the male population. This could well have been the entire season's contingent proceeding to India in a large group at the end of the monsoons. Its size perhaps reflected the lack of employment and business opportunities in Iran, not just for Zoroastrians, but also for the wider population. However, unlike in the nineteenth century, these travelers were not refugees leaving Iran permanently. Most of them hoped to return home after working in Mumbai for a few years. The travelers met numerous men in Yazd and Kerman who had returned to Iran after a stint or two in Mumbai.

Kunvarbai Dhalla repeatedly muses about possible avenues for livelihood for Zoroastrians in Iran and is impressed by the Armenians who controlled the export trade in carpets: "In New York, I have seen Armenian traders who are well established in this business. It is regretful that no Zoroastrian trader has ventured into this lucrative business."⁴⁶ Another new area of opportunity that was just then emerging in Iran, which also the Armenians had entered, was motor travel. Dhalla muses, "Wouldn't it be nice if a few young enterprising Zoroastrian men tap into this opportunity?"⁴⁷

Nariman Karkaria first encountered Zoroastrians in large numbers on the outskirts of Yazd, at a village named Taft which had about 500 Zoroastrian families. He notes, "about half the villagers had been to Mumbai," implying they were endowed with the diligence, industriousness, and capacity for back-breaking work for which they were known in India. "But," he continues, "only God knows why, when they come back to their native villages, they become as lazy and listless as the other villagers."⁴⁸ That Zoroastrians were willing to come back to Iran from Mumbai in the 1910s and 1920s indicated that their living conditions had improved considerably from what they were in the nineteenth century, but employment opportunities were still rare. Also, the money-order economy seems to have made it possible for the community to live more comfortably and invest in public buildings and schools. The narrative in Parsi sources is focussed on their charity initiatives in Iran, but Iranian Zoroastrians also donated money for similar purposes; for example, to build community meeting-houses in one's native village or to refurbish religious edifices.

It was only in Tehran that the travelers could meet Zoroastrians who went about their everyday lives with the casual confidence that the Parsis of Mumbai were accustomed to. The two Iranian Zoroastrians who featured prominently in all the travelogues were Arbab Kaykhosrow Shahrokh and Arbab Jamshid Jamshidian, both of them based in Tehran. Although the travelers enjoyed the hospitality of their co-religionists wherever they met,

⁴⁴ Dhalla, *Irān ane Irākmā musāfari*, 33.

⁴⁵ Karkaria (*Irānbhumi par rakhaḍ*, 580–82), estimates the population of the Zoroastrian community at about 12,000, concentrated mainly in Yazd (7,000), Kerman (4,000), and Tehran (900). Very few Zoroastrians lived in other cities: Shiraz (40), Isfahan (5), Kashan (25), Kazvin (9), and Hamedan (6). Mulla (*Irān bhūmino bhomyo*, 183–86), estimates the Zoroastrian population at 10,050, which he contrasts favorably with Manekji Hataria's 1854 estimate of 7,725. According to Mulla, who made a close survey of the Zoroastrian population, the numbers at the three largest settlements were as follows: Yazd (6,739), Kerman (2,300), and Tehran (818).

⁴⁶ Dhalla, *Irān ane Irākmā musāfari*, 53.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Karkaria, *Irānbhumi par rakhaḍ*, 245.

they were particularly taken by the power and charisma of Kaykhosrow Shahrokh (1874–1940), the head of the Iranian Zoroastrian Anjoman and the Zoroastrian representative in the Majles (the Iranian parliament). He also had executive responsibilities in government and maintained an office in the Majles building. Both Karkaria and Mulla proudly note that the Quran used by members of the Majles for taking oaths was in the custody of Arbab Kaykhosrow.⁴⁹ As a child, he had spent a few years in Mumbai in the 1880s and attended school there for a year or two. Although not personally acquainted, Jivanji Modi had been in correspondence with him for over two decades. According to Adenwalla, Arbab Kaykhosrow held the lucrative concession to operate a telephone service all across Iran,⁵⁰ was a partner in a large manufacturing unit in Tehran which produced sugar from beets,⁵¹ and also owned thousands of acres of farmland in the vicinity of Tehran.⁵² A visit to his Tehran house, with its high fortress-like walls, its extensive gardens and fountains, and large reception rooms adorned with expensive carpets, was a special experience for the visitors. Arbab Kaykhosrow lavished attention on Parsi visitors from India, provided the highest levels of hospitality, hosted formal and informal dinners at his grand residence in their honor, introduced them to the most powerful people in government (including Reza Khan), arranged tours of the private and public sights of Tehran, and ensured that their travel in other parts of Iran was as comfortable as possible.

Arbab Jamshid Jamshidian (1850–1932), a man of advanced years, was considered the richest Zoroastrian in Iran until he went bankrupt in 1913. He had extensive interests in trade and banking but a series of bad debts and dubious real estate investments had precipitated a financial crisis resulting in the closure of his business.⁵³ Although none of the travelers suggest that his religion could have been one of the reasons for his abrupt downfall, it might well have contributed to it. Arbab Jamshid sought out visitors from India, attended all events organized in their honor, and was a constant presence throughout their stay in Tehran.

Of the three Parsis who had been resident in Tehran for decades and married to local Zoroastrian women, Ardeshir Edulji Reporter (1865–1933) was the most prominent and generally hosted Indian visitors at his residence. As a young man fluent in Persian, he had served as an interpreter to Iranian consuls in Mumbai in the 1880s. In 1893, he was appointed by the Society for the Amelioration of the Condition of Zoroastrians in Persia, an organization founded in the 1850s, as its third resident representative in Iran, after Manekji Hataria and Kaekhusru Tirandaz Khorsand (1861–1893).⁵⁴ He was also the Tehran agent of Sorabji Dorabji & Co., the only Parsi firm with trading operations in Iran. Well-connected with the British legation in Tehran, he was rumored to be one of its secret agents. The other two Parsis resident in Tehran had fallen on bad days: Shapurji Morris, who was employed with the Iranian government, had lost his position after the financial affairs of the Iranian government were taken over by the Americans, while Dorabji Mulla was without any means of livelihood for the many years past. Karkaria, the only chronicler to mention the latter two, could not help remarking that the three Parsis had not only set themselves up as three opposing factions but also did not see eye to eye with the Iranian Zoroastrian leadership.⁵⁵ It is difficult to determine how correct Karkaria's assessment was and how these conflicts compromised the position of the Zoroastrians in Tehran. Strangely, he made a similar comment in Peking in 1912, remarking: "Even though there were then only six Parsis in Peking, they were at daggers drawn. All six of them were extremely crabby and one had to be

⁴⁹ Karkaria, *Irānbhumi par rakhaḍ*, 462; Mulla, *Irān bhūmino bhomyo*, 70.

⁵⁰ Adenwalla, *Sar Hormaṣji Kāvaṣji Di. Eḍanvālāni Irānno anubhav*, 15; Karkaria, *Irānbhumi par rakhaḍ*, 458.

⁵¹ Adenwalla, *Sar Hormaṣji Kāvaṣji Di. Eḍanvālāni Irānno anubhav*, 16.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵³ Dhalla, *Irān ane Irākmā musāfari*, 98; Modi, *Māri Mumbai bahārni sehel*, 390.

⁵⁴ Mulla, *Irān bhūmino bhomyo*, 71.

⁵⁵ Karkaria, *Irānbhumi par rakhaḍ*, 477–78.

mindful about encountering them while walking around the city.”⁵⁶ To conclude the Tehran experience, Kunvarbai Dhalla notes:

When we recall the living conditions of our co-religionists in Iran just a few years back, it is certainly heartening to note that there are now a few among them who have managed to acquire the respect and goodwill of the Muslim community.⁵⁷

Being Zoroastrian in Iran

By the 1920s, things may have changed for the better for Zoroastrians in Iran, but they still faced restrictions. Writing in 1913, Dorothy De Warzée notes that, in the 1880s, Iranian Zoroastrians (whom she refers to as Parsees) “were only allowed to ride on donkeys, horses and mules being considered too good for them,” and “they were forced to wear a special color, so that they were easy to distinguish from the faithful.”⁵⁸ She further adds, “The Parsees have always been an object of hatred to the Mohammedans,” but claims to have found no evidence that “they have ever been molested in any way.”⁵⁹ The male Parsi travelers wore mostly western dress: shirts, trousers, and a jacket with a hat, if necessary. This costume, in itself, designated them as privileged visitors and provided a measure of personal security. But, in 1921, even this could have been a problem because relations between the British and Iranian governments were not as cordial as the travelers could have wished. The Dhallas were advised by the Muslims of Bushire and Shiraz not to wear hats in the English style, as it might attract unnecessary attention.

Wearing clothes associated with the Zoroastrian religion was certainly problematic, even in the 1920s. Kunvarbai Dhalla notes that the two *mōbeds* in Tehran could neither wear white robes nor could they grow a beard. Dastur Dhalla occasionally donned the garb of a Zoroastrian priest during his visit to Iran, especially at formal events. When, in Shiraz, he first happened to tie the traditional *paḡḡḍi*, a head-dress consisting of a very long piece of white cloth wound around the head, his Zoroastrian hosts were alarmed. He was requested, indeed beseeched, by his fellow Zoroastrians to refrain from using cloth of that color, as it would incur the wrath of the mullahs of Shiraz. Zoroastrian priests had long been restrained from donning white garments and instead had to don garments of khaki colour. Dhalla, however, insisted on wearing his white *paḡḡḍi* and seems to have gone unmolested.

To impress upon the Dhallas that it was not a casual suggestion, Iranian Zoroastrians informed them about the riots which had broken out in Yazd in just the previous year, 1920. Zoroastrians were strictly forbidden from wearing the black-colored Persian *topi* or *mogal topi*, which was in common use across Iran. However, this restriction was not enforced in other, presumably more liberal cities like Tehran, where Zoroastrians—and indeed followers of other religious persuasions, like the Christians and Jews—regularly donned the same headgear as Muslims. When a young man, recently arrived from Tehran, happened to wear the *mogal topi* in Yazd, the Muslims of Yazd protested this encroachment through widespread demonstrations which culminated in riots. The Zoroastrians continued to insist on their rights and the issue was referred to Tehran, which decreed that no such restriction existed. The protestors, however, did not back off, and eventually the Zoroastrians had to compromise and undertake to refrain from wearing the *mogal topi* in Yazd.⁶⁰ The protests against this supposed encroachment on their headgear rights presaged the hostile reception of the Pahlavi hat, introduced by Reza Shah to remove any distinctions of dress among various

⁵⁶ Karkaria, *Rangbhumi par rakhaḍ*, 29.

⁵⁷ Dhalla, *Irān ane Irākmā musāfari*, 97.

⁵⁸ De Warzée, *Peeps into Persia*, 221.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁶⁰ Dhalla, *Irān ane Irākmā musāfari*, 41–42.

religions.⁶¹ Sartorial restrictions might have been a compromise, but there were more serious issues which could not be wished away. The constant danger to life and property, the unabated destruction and desecration of religious sites, the inability to freely perform their religious rituals, and the lack of access to education and employment would certainly have eroded any confidence the community might have had in leading their daily lives. Even in Tehran, one had to constantly look over one's shoulder. The *dakhmeh*, which had been sponsored by Manekji Hataria, was built on a remote hill on the outskirts of Tehran and was constantly vandalized. In Hataria's time, the *dakhmeh* had no doors and corpses had to be hoisted with ropes. When Jivanji Modi went to visit, he was surprised to see that its tiny gate, installed in recent years, had been sealed with screws; if the gate were to be simply locked, it would be broken down or the locks stolen by the locals.⁶²

The casual and unprovoked attacks on Zoroastrians—some of them murderous in nature—by Muslims of their everyday acquaintance continued unabated even during this period when their human rights were seemingly better protected. Most of the attacks went unreported, especially if they were not fatal, and were typically hushed up at the village itself. Manek Mulla describes one such murder in April 1926 in a village near Yazd, where a Muslim farmer attacked his Zoroastrian neighbor with a spade in full public view. The assailant was not arrested in spite of the relentless pressure exerted by the Iranian Zoroastrians, through complaints, petitions, and public demonstrations. Mulla took it upon himself to bring the murderer to book; telegrams flew between Yazd, Tehran and Mumbai. Parsi organizations in Mumbai working on behalf of their Iranian co-religionists exerted pressure on the Iranian government. They petitioned the British consul and the senior military officer in Yazd promised to take action. At long last, the assailant was arrested, only to be released a few days later, before any trial could take place. In the same year, Mulla became aware of two more attacks on Zoroastrians which did not result in fatalities. If they spent an extended period of time in Iran, like Mulla did during his second trip, the Parsis could not keep themselves apart from the everyday realities of their co-religionists.⁶³

The Parsi travelers, therefore, had pinned their hopes on Reza Khan, whom they expected to significantly change the environment for Iranian Zoroastrians. The Parsi perspective on the rise of Reza Khan during the last years of the Qajar dynasty is summarized by Karkaria in florid prose:

Iran, which had been floundering mid-sea like a ship without a steersman for the many years past, has, to its good fortune, discovered in the person of Sardar Sepah Reza Khan, a captain who has stepped forward to dedicate his life to the country. The last five years have been witness to such tumultuous events as have not been seen in Iran in the last five hundred years. The Sardar Sepah has the key to all power in Iran currently. Though the Shah of Iran is still referred to as the Shah, one could as well venture to say that this Sardar has much more power than the Shah.⁶⁴

An audience with Reza Khan would not only affirm their status as privileged visitors but also help them gain insight into a man who seemed to be making a difference to the fortune of the country and all its residents, irrespective of religion. And likewise, Reza Khan was keen to meet the Parsis, perhaps hoping to score a few diplomatic points and attract investment into Iran from the wealthy Parsi community. During his two-month stay in Tehran in mid-1924, Karkaria managed to wrangle a meeting with Reza Khan, perhaps through his

⁶¹ For more details on this episode, see H. E. Chehabi, "Staging the Emperor's New Clothes: Dress-Codes and Nation-Building under Reza Shah," *Iranian Studies* 26, 3-4 (1993): 209-229.

⁶² Modi, *Māri Mumbai bahārni sehel*, 395; Modi notes that the *dakhmeh* is referred to as *dādghāh* in the affixed inscription.

⁶³ Mulla, *Irān bhūmino bhomyo*, 187-194.

⁶⁴ Karkaria, *Irānbhumi par rakhaḍ*, 432-33.

military connections. Though the Sardar Sepah “was deeply regretful of the miserable condition of the Zoroastrians in Iran,” he was constrained from helping as “their lack of education prevented him from appointing them to any important position in the new dispensation.”⁶⁵ Besides saying there was no religious discrimination in Iran, Reza Khan did not spell out any concrete steps to improve the conditions, but expressed he “would be gratified to see the Zoroastrians of Iran make any kind of progress.”⁶⁶ He expressed similar sentiments when he met Hormusji Cowasji Adenwalla a little later.⁶⁷ On November 11, 1925, just after he had styled himself as the regent of the new Pahlavi dynasty that had just been proclaimed, Reza Khan, through the intercession of Kaykhosrow Shahrokh, also met with Jivanji Modi. Perhaps he was aware of Modi’s status in the Parsi community in India. He was glad “the Parsis of India [had] turned their attention towards Persia and [were] coming to their own dear country,” now in a position to welcome them. He promised to give them all manner of assistance so that “the country may be benefited by the Parsis, and the Parsis may also derive great profits and pleasures from the country.”⁶⁸

One of the raging debates within the Parsi community centered on relocation to Iran, the *mātr̥bhūmi* or motherland of the Parsis. Indeed, as Marashi notes, “this romanticized dream of a Parsi return to Iran animated much of the Parsi-Iranian cultural and intellectual exchange in the early decades of the twentieth century.”⁶⁹ This debate had heated up in the 1920s with the change of regime and the travelers were charged, as it were, with the duty of responding to this question. They had seen the country first-hand, experienced its climate, conversed with common Iranians, and observed the living conditions of Iranian Zoroastrians. They must have had a feel for the business and employment opportunities in the country. They were certainly in a much better position to answer the question than any armchair traveler in Mumbai. When the Dhallas were in Iran, the conditions were so unsettled as to preclude this question. But by 1924, it had to be answered. And the travelers were not remiss in their duty. They seem to have considered this question carefully and provided an unambiguous response.

Jivanji Modi, after his audience with Reza Shah, could not see any reason why the Parsis should move from India to Iran. He framed the question as a choice between benign British rule in India and an unproven Pahlavi government in Iran. Under the former, the Parsis had prospered and were happy. While he characterized the envisioned migration to Iran as “a heartening proposition,” he posited that:

in spite of all these assurances, based on what I have seen, what I have heard, what I have read, and what I know, I humbly submit that India, and especially the Parsi community, is unlikely to get better rulers than the English. We are not going to pack up our bags and come to Iran.⁷⁰

Modi did not give serious thought to Parsi investment and business opportunities in Iran but did suggest:

just as some of our more courageous brothers have ventured out to Europe and Africa and prospered in business, a few brave Parsis could come to Iran. And relying on their business skills as their investment or as one of the components of their capital, they

⁶⁵ Ibid., 434.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 435.

⁶⁷ Adenwalla, *Sar Hormasji Kāvasji Di. Eḍanvālāni Irānno anubhav*, 22–23.

⁶⁸ Modi, *Māri Muṃbai bahārni sehel*, 383–384. The conversation with Reza Khan was in Persian but Modi, for good measure, reproduces Arbab Kaykhosrow’s English translation of Reza Khan’s message to the Parsis. The quotations in this paragraph are from this English version.

⁶⁹ Marashi, *Exile and the Nation*, 5.

⁷⁰ Modi, *Māri Muṃbai bahārni sehel*, 389.

may achieve financial success in these favorable times, at the same time contributing to the growth of Iran and augmenting the good name of the Zoroastrian community.⁷¹

Here, Modi implies that he still views Iran as a battleground where a bridgehead first needed to be established—like the Parsis had done in China in the 1820s and London in the 1850s—before larger numbers could follow. On the other hand, Karkaria had examined the commercial opportunities in Iran minutely. He computed the landed cost of goods in Tehran and other cities if they were imported from India and demonstrated that it would not be a paying proposition for most categories of exports.⁷² He was not impressed by the bombastic business plans which were bandied about in the Parsi community:

There is a lot of ink spilt in our newspapers about Parsis opening large trading firms in Iran, but it is all just idle talk. I have studied the stormy business situation in Iran in minute detail. And I don't see any harm in trading with Iran. However, if the plan is to obtain large contracts and concessions in railways and oilfields and precious metals, or to take over the motor services business, one might as well drop the idea. And if the Parsis hope to obtain senior positions in the new Iranian government, it is best to suppress these hopes for now.⁷³

It is difficult to determine if these blunt assessments poured cold water over the community's plans. Speaking in 1927 about his Iran experiences, Adenwalla outlined the various opportunities—agriculture, minerals, coal, oil, opium, cotton textiles, carpets, sugar, alcohol, and railways—available in Iran, but stopped short of making any concrete recommendation. For the next ten years, Parsis continued to scout credible opportunities in Iran, before making a few investments in the 1930s.

There were, however, things more important than mere commerce. One of the main attractions Iran had for the Parsis was its potential as a religious site, a *ziyaratgāh*. The ancient sites scattered all over Iran related to the Achaemenid and Sasanian periods were the remains of their co-religionists which had to be, in some sense, reclaimed. Both Dastur Dhalla and Jivanji Modi were scholars with a professional interest in these sites.⁷⁴ An offshoot of Jivanji Modi's scholarship was the important and self-conscious role he played in legitimizing images as religious icons for the Parsi community.⁷⁵ The same processes were at work with respect to the supposed image of Zoroaster the travelers were most eager to see in Taq-e Bostan, the location of rock reliefs from the fourth century related to the Sasanian dynasty. In the 1870s, when a few western scholars suggested that the image of a man with a halo could be that of the prophet Zoroaster, the Parsis of India were quick

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Karkaria's computations prefigure those provided by Clawson, "Knitting Iran Together."

⁷³ Karkaria, *Irānbhumi par rakhaḍ*, 422–23.

⁷⁴ Most of these sites involved strenuous climbing up rocky hillocks. Although Modi was remarkably healthy for his age and claimed to walk six miles every day in Mumbai, he did not refuse any help proffered to him, including being precariously hoisted on the shoulders of his guide for the upward climb, as at Behistun. Modi, *Māri Muṃbai bahārni sehel*, 323.

⁷⁵ For example, the memorial column at Sanjan was an idea proposed by Jivanji Modi. When the Mumbai-based Jesuit scholar Henry Heras proposed that an image in a Moghul miniature was that of the sixteenth century Parsi theologian Dastur Meherji Rana, who had met the Mughal emperor Akbar, Modi was quick to commission the leading Parsi painter J. A. Lalkaka to paint a portrait of the priest based on the miniature to serve as a religious icon. However when Heras later retracted his identification, Modi was quick to observe that an icon is merely a representation, need not be based on fact, and continued to promote it among the Parsi community, whose members were delighted to get a flesh-and-bones portrait of a Zoroastrian personality. For more details, see A. C. Ardeshir, "Portrait of Dastur Meherji Rana," in H. D. Darukhanawala, *Parsi Lustre on Indian Soil* (Bombay: 1939): 46–54.

to adopt it as a visual representation.⁷⁶ Within two generations, this image had become the centerpiece of Parsi iconography. When A. V. Williams Jackson visited Mumbai in 1909 and enquired with Parsis about their belief in this icon, Modi was one of the community representatives who reaffirmed that this image represented Zoroaster. Now that he had a chance to actually see the image in its original context, would he change his opinion?

The image of Zoroaster reproduced by Kunvarbai Dhalla in her book was borrowed from the supplement to Friedrich Sarre and Ernst Herzfeld's classic *Iranische Felsreliefs*. Perhaps influenced by her husband, she captions the image with a question mark, expressing doubt as to whether it could be identified as Zoroaster.⁷⁷ Nariman Karkaria, in his breezy manner, takes the identification for granted.⁷⁸ It fell upon Jivanji Modi to consider the image in some detail. Visiting the site twice and spending a few hours there, Modi ventured to make a fresh assessment of the image. He considered the relatively obscure position of the relief in relation to other reliefs on the same site which were better situated, the diminished status of the person identified as Zoroaster, who seems to be "playing the second fiddle;" his costume, which seems very refined and contemporaneous to that of the two kings; and the "wand" in his hand which suggested that he was holding a document or record rather than something which signified his supernatural power.⁷⁹ Modi concluded that the image was not that of Zoroaster but possibly that of contemporary religious figure, a *mobedān mobed* perhaps, who is bearing witness to an agreement between two kings. Notwithstanding this conclusion, however, Modi saw no reason why the Parsis should not continue to revere the icon. It could be considered an artistic re-imagination of their prophet's visage. He bolstered his argument by drawing attention to the fact that artists in Mumbai had already been taking liberties with the image. The travelers noted, with some pride, that various versions of the image, printed in Mumbai, could now be seen in all Zoroastrian religious sites in Iran.⁸⁰

Of all their Iranian encounters, the one with Baha'ism left the Parsi travelers fraught with concern. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Mumbai was the focal point of the Baha'i faith in India and many early Baha'i imprints were printed in the city. In 1920, the first national convention of Baha'is in India was held in Mumbai. The Parsis would certainly have met a few Baha'i adherents in India, but they encountered the faith practically all over Iran. Nariman Karkaria, as he usually does, provides a potted history of the religion, describes how the faith originated, and gives an account of the trials and tribulations of its prophet and his followers in Iran in the nineteenth century. But now the situation had completely changed, as Karkaria notes:

In present-day Iran, a wind of Baha'ism seems to be blowing in all corners of the land, stronger than is generally acknowledged or known. One could say that this has had a salutary effect on the Mohammedan religion, which has been infected by fanaticism to a greater extent than any other religion in the world. Baha'ism has, to a certain degree, leavened its harmful effects and introduced an element of humanity. It has established a foothold in not just the large cities but also Yazd, which is a hotbed of religious fanaticism. ... How far Baha'ism has made an impact in Iran can be estimated by that fact that there are about five thousand Baha'is in Shiraz and similar numbers in every large city. It is particularly attractive to the young men and the fashionable ladies. If you notice a well-dressed man or woman in Iran who endorses liberal

⁷⁶ For a discussion of how the image of Zoroaster evolved in print in nineteenth-century Mumbai, see Daniel Sheffield, "Picturing Prophethood: KRCOI Zarātushtnāma Manuscript HP 149 and the Origins of the Portrait of Zarathustra," *The Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute* 72 (2012): 71-138.

⁷⁷ Dhalla, *Irān ane Irākmā musāfari*, 128.

⁷⁸ Karkaria, *Irānbhumi par rakhaḍ*, 549.

⁷⁹ Modi, *Māri Muṃbai bahārni sehel*, 360-362. The quotations are in English in the original.

⁸⁰ For an examination of how printing in India helped revitalize Zoroastrianism in Iran, see Afshin Marashi, "Parsi Textual Philanthropy: Print Commerce and the Revival of Zoroastrianism in Early 20th-Century Iran," in *India and Iran in the Longue Durée*, ed. Alka Patel and Touraj Daryaei (Irvine: UCI Jordan Center for Persian Studies, 2017): 125-42.

views, you can be sure he or she is a Baha'i. Although no Baha'i places of worship have yet been built in Iran, one would not be surprised if such structures come up with the passage of time.⁸¹

The Dhallas first encountered adherents of the Baha'i faith in the village of Shamsabad-e Borzu, where they had based themselves to visit Persepolis and Naqsh-e Rostam. While returning to the village after a tiring day of sightseeing, they began conversing with the horse-riders who had accompanied them and discovered that the residents of the village were adherents of the Baha'i faith. Kunvarbai recounts: "when the riders discovered that my husband had read books related to the Baha'i religion and had met American followers of the Baha'i movement, they were very curious to know more about it and asked a lot of questions."⁸² As the Dhallas traveled to the northern parts of Iran, they met many more Baha'is willing to declare their faith than they were just a few years back. Kunvarbai was sympathetic about their cause because she felt

The Baha'i faith preaches religious tolerance and discourages fanaticism; it also accords a higher status to women and advocates their education. This has had a positive impact in Iran in the last twenty years and has contributed to loosening the grip of the mullahs on public life.⁸³

However, the attraction the new faith held for their Zoroastrian co-religionists in Iran greatly alarmed the travelers. For Kunvarbai,

it is extremely regretful that a large number of our Iranian co-religionists have become adherents of the Baha'i faith, both in Iran and in Mumbai. They believe the founder of this religion to be the latest prophet sent to earth by God and consider him as Behram Varjavand. We later discovered that many of the Zoroastrians we met in Qazvin were actually Baha'is.⁸⁴

Karkaria tried to understand why the Iranian Zoroastrians were gravitating towards the Baha'i faith: "I was informed that they were unable to understand the Zoroastrian religion and neither was there anyone in Yazd who could properly explain its precepts. They are better able to understand the edicts of Hazrat Bahauallah and therefore respect him."⁸⁵ Many adherents did not distinguish between Baha'ism and Zoroastrianism and considered the former a reformed version of the latter. Hormusji Adenwalla was not sure if Baha'ism could be considered a religion; he felt that identifying oneself as a Baha'i was a strategy to be more acceptable in business circles.⁸⁶ For the Parsis, the drift towards Baha'ism was a direct threat to Zoroastrianism, and an assault on their conception of an unsullied religion which they imagined was still practiced in Iran as it had been a thousand years ago. Karkaria's recommendation to prevent further erosion in Zoroastrian numbers was to depute missionaries from India whose task would be to work among their co-religionists in Iran. They would be based in Yazd, travel frequently to the remote villages surrounding Yazd populated by Zoroastrians, educate them about the tenets and rituals of their religion, revitalize their religious sites, and ensure that a corpus of funds was created to conduct religious ceremonies on a regular basis. This proposal seems to have been endorsed by quite a few Parsis back in Mumbai.

⁸¹ Karkaria, *Irānbhumi par rakhaḍ*, 495–97.

⁸² Dhalla, *Irān ane Irākmā musāfari*, 68.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁸⁵ Karkaria, *Irānbhumi par rakhaḍ*, 496.

⁸⁶ Adenwalla, *Sar Hormasji Kavasji Di. Eḍānvālāni Irāno anubhav*, 19.

The first person to explicitly don the role of a Zoroastrian missionary was Manek Mulla who stayed in Yazd for nearly two years, from October 1925 to June 1927. Mulla's travelogue includes a long account of his missionary activities in the villages surrounding Yazd. Wherever he went, he tried to identify Zoroastrians who had lapsed into Baha'ism. Although he does not claim any success, he does conclude the narrative of his stay at Yazd by noting: "I am satisfied that, in the limited time I spent in Yazd, I could make a positive impression on not just my co-religionists, but also followers of the Baha'i faith, in spite of having to converse in the unfamiliar Persian language."⁸⁷

The travelogues as "homeless texts"

The Iran travelogues, published in quick succession in the 1920s, were just one of the many methods through which information on Iran was disseminated within the Parsi community. The travelers gave lectures illustrated with magic lantern slides across India, especially in cities where there was a sizable Parsi population. They wrote articles in Gujarati newspapers and magazines which had a large circulation. But the impact of lectures and newspaper articles was transient. They wanted to record their experiences in a more permanent form in the hope that they would be useful to the Parsi community in the following decades.

However, that was not to be. The travelogues, based on journeys undertaken between 1921 and 1925, became redundant as guidebooks because the slow mode of travel they described had disappeared by the 1930s. There was no longer any reason to travel on donkeys and mules, and no need to stay in filthy caravanserais and carry a large supply of rations. The mushrooming of hotels in various cities obviated the need to depend on the hospitality of strangers. The detailed costing given in some of these travelogues quickly became outdated.

As the culmination of these travelogues, Kaikhosrow Fitter, the secretary of the Iran League, published *Irān-Irāk musāfarini gaid* in 1931. As its name suggests, it was a guidebook for travel to Iran and distilled all the information which the Parsi community had collected about the practical aspects of travel to Iran in the previous 10 years. Not only did it provide an overview of the land and sea routes to Iran, but it also described the itineraries which could be followed within Iran, the distances and time involved, the cost of travel, and the preparations which any potential traveler needed to make before embarking on this once-in-a-lifetime journey. The book was also a gazetteer of Iran, providing information on the main cities and the principal antiquities. It was a *vade mecum* which made the travelogues themselves redundant.

The political scenario and economic climate in Iran had also evolved. Beginning in 1921, ten years of close engagement had made even die-hard optimists within the community realize that Iran would never be the promised land for which they had hoped. Business and investment opportunities were hard to come by and employment prospects for Parsis did not exist. Reza Shah, after courting the Parsis for a few years, no longer had any use of them by the mid-1930s. And by the late 1930s, war clouds were gathering again and put a stop to any non-essential travel. Perhaps even more importantly, as Nariman Karkaria points out, the underlying assumption informing Parsi engagement with Iran—i.e., that Iranians in general, and Zoroastrians in particular, were without agency and the capacity to act independently and make their own free choices—was wrong. Iranian Zoroastrians were just as capable of scanning the political and economic environment, forming views and identifying opportunities, and making choices for themselves.

After the Second World War, it was only in the late 1940s and early 1950s that the Parsis again began traveling to Iran. They were traveling as tourists and the considerations which had preoccupied their predecessors in the 1920s were no longer important. At around the same time, the status of Gujarati as the primary language of the Parsis began eroding. A

⁸⁷ Mulla, *Irān bhūmino bhomyo*, 179.

slow process which has extended well into the twenty-first century, each succeeding generation of Parsis has had less to do with the language than its previous one. Literature was one of the first casualties of this decline, followed much later by newspapers and magazines. Only a few Gujarati publications—such as *Pārsi Prakāś*, a multi-volume community chronicle, and *Vividh Vāni*, an omnibus cookbook—have survived in public memory, not as books to be read or used, but as cultural icons. The Iran travelogues were soon forgotten and, except for a stray copy or two in community libraries, have not survived.

The historian Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi introduces the concepts of “homeless texts” to describe a body of work forgotten and obliterated by extraneous forces, the recovery of which might help reconstruct “vanished stories”; stories that could revive the history of a land and its people. According to Tavakoli-Targhi,

The convention of history with borders has created many *homeless texts* that have fallen victim to the fissure of Indian and Iranian nationalism. Although abolished as the official language of India in the 1830s, the intellectual use of Persian continued ...⁸⁸

As nations and communities redefine borders—both geographical and imaginary—and recalibrate priorities, numerous texts and even languages once considered important or relevant are rendered “homeless,” irrelevant even to the audience they once addressed. Just as India no longer had any use for Persian in the twentieth century, even though it had previously been one of the most widely used languages, the “Parsi nation” dissociated itself from the Gujarati language. Within a few years of publication, the travelogues—lost to their intended readers and irrelevant to Gujarati literary culture—became “homeless texts,” a classification typically reserved for texts written one or two centuries earlier. The geographical priorities of the Zoroastrians had also moved beyond India and Iran; their “nation” was now a global diaspora with its own preoccupations. The utility of Gujarati to the Parsis, like that of Persian in India from the middle of the nineteenth century, was constantly declining to the point of irrelevance. Losing a language and its texts was a small price to pay in comparison to the gains they made in other areas. As scholarly resources, the importance of these travelogues is considerable, and a nuanced reading and translation of these texts provides additional insight into many aspects of Indo-Iranian interactions in the high noon of colonialism.

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⁸⁸ Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*, 9.

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