



## BHAGARIAS

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**BHAGARIAS**, the name of a group (*panth*) of Parsi Zoroastrian priests. Sometime after the Parsi settlement at Sanjan (q.v.) in Gujarat (a.d. 936), the laity began to spread out. Some moved a little north to the small port of Navsari (q.v.); and as their numbers grew they asked Sanjan for a priest. Zarthošt Mōbed with his son Kāmdīn went there, according to tradition, in 1142/511 *Yazdegerdī*; but the true date may be about a century later. In 1215 (or ca. 1315?) his descendants invited another Sanjan priest, Hōm Bahmanyār, to join them. Since Zoroastrian priests live from dues for services performed, it was agreed eventually that certain priestly duties should be divided among five *pols* or family groups, two descended from Zarthošt Mōbed, three from Hōm Bahmanyār, and that the income from other religious ceremonies should be shared equally among them. Thereafter the Navsari priests called themselves Bhagarias, lit. “Sharers.” When the Parsi priests agreed to divide the coastal areas of Gujarat between five ecclesiastic *panths*, each *panth* to be autonomous, the Bhagarias were allotted the region between the rivers Pār and Variav (modern Tāpi). (*Qeṣṣa-ye Zartūštīān-e Hendūstān*, ed. and tr. J. J. Modi, *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute* 17, 1930, text pp. 20-21, tr. p. 58).

The Bhagarias performed “inner” religious ceremonies at their Vadi Dar-e Mehr, which contained no ever-burning fire, embers for ritual fires being brought daily from the priests’ own houses (see F. M. Kotwal, “The history of the Parsi Dar-i Mihr,” *BSOAS* 37, 1974, pp. 665-66). The only Parsi perpetually burning consecrated fire was the Ātaš Bahrām (see [ātaš](#)) at Sanjan. When that



town was sacked by a Muslim army in 1465, its priests rescued the fire, and fourteen years later a leading Navsari layman, [Changa Asa](#), invited them to bring it to Navsari (*Qeṣṣa-ye Sanjan*, ed. M. R. Unvala, in *Dârâb Hormazyâr's Rivâyat*, Bombay, 1922, II, p. 354, tr. S. H. Hodivala, *Studies in Parsi History*, Bombay, 1920, p. 113). Navsari thus became the center of Parsi religious life. Matters continued harmoniously for some two hundred years; but then, the Sanjanas' numbers having grown, they found it hard to live from services and offerings for their sacred fire, and began to encroach on the Bhagarias' right to do all other religious work. Quarrels arose, and in 1740 the Sanjanas left Navsari, with their Ātaš Bahrām. In 1765, with great expense and effort, the Bhagarias consecrated their own Ātaš Bahrām (*Qeṣṣa*, ed. Modi, *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute* 17, 1930, pp. 39ff. [text], 19, 1932, pp. 49ff. [translation]).

Earlier, in 1758, a learned Bhagaria, Dastūr Meherjī Rāna, was among those summoned to Akbar's court to expound their diverse faiths. His account of Zoroastrianism greatly impressed the emperor; and the Parsis of Navsari elected him their Great Dastūr, making this title hereditary in his family. Still today the Bhagarias are led by one of his descendants.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Bhagarias produced a striking number of learned priests and scribes. During that time many lay Parsis left Gujarat for the developing port of Bombay, to the south. Their priests followed, from the various *panths*, and no one ecclesiastical authority succeeded in establishing itself there. The Bhagarias were, however, strongly represented. In time numerous Bhagaria *agiarys* were founded, and the city's two Shenshai Ātaš Bahrāms were both consecrated by Bhagarias, the Wadiajī in 1830, the Anjoman in 1897. The Bombay Bhagarias are led by a descendant of Manekji Seth, who in about 1735 founded the *agiary* named after him there; but the Bhagaria Anjoman in Navsari has been consulted by Bombay Parsis generally on religious matters, because of the strength of its traditions; but in recent decades even in Navsari the number of qualified *mōbads* has been dwindling sharply.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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(Mary Boyce and Firoze M. P. Kotwal)