



DHABHAR, BAHMANJI NUSSERWANJI

DHABHAR, BAHMANJI NUSSERWANJI (b. 1869 in Navsari, d. 1952 in Bombay 1952), eminent Parsi scholar of [Bhagaria](#) stock. He received his schooling at the Sir Cowasjee Jehangir Madressa and trained at the same time as a Zoroastrian priest. He was initiated *ervad* (the 1st priestly qualification) and *marāteb* (the 2nd and final priestly qualification) at the Wadi Dar-e Mihr in Navsari, and matriculated in 1890. He then enrolled at Elphinstone College, Bombay, and in 1893 received the B.A. with distinction in mathematics, his optional subjects being English and Persian. He gained the M.A. from Mulla Firoze Madressa in 1898, having studied Avestan and Pahlavi, and was at once invited to conduct classes in these languages at the Madressa, which he continued to do until almost the end of his long life. At the same time he held full-time teaching posts in French, English, and mathematics, first at the Fort High School and then at the Sir Jamshetjee Jeejeebhai Parsi Benevolent Institution. He was deeply respected for his clear and sound methods and his care for his students. He studied Sanskrit and German privately, but his chief devotion was to Iranian languages, literature, and history. Not long after obtaining his M.A. he began to teach Zoroastrian studies at the Sir Jamshetjee Jeejeebhai Parsi Benevolent Institution, and from 1914 to 1940 he was superintendent of Zoroastrian studies for the various schools in Gujarat administered by the Bombay Parsi Panchayat. He visited each of them annually, advising and examining their pupils. He was a member of the governing board of his own old school in Navsari, its honorary secretary for nearly twenty-five years, and



an active member of the managing committees of the two Bombay schools for priests' sons—the Athornan Madressa in Dadar and the M. F. Cama Athornan Institute in Andheri. Everywhere he won regard for his abilities, quiet devotion to his duties, and total lack of ostentation. He was generally active in the affairs of his community and a member of its various learned societies. He seldom took part in any of the current religious controversies, but when he did, he argued with courtesy and great soundness of judgment.

Dhabhar's lasting fame rests on his numerous fine scholarly publications. His editions of Pahlavi texts, all published in Bombay, have earned him the reputation of the best of all Parsi editors. They include the *Saddar Naṣr and Saddar Bundelesh* (1909), *The Epistles of Mānūshchīhar* (1912), *The Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the Dādīstān ī Dīnīk* (1913), *Zand-i Khūrtak Avistāk* (1927), *Andarj-i Aōshnar-i Dānāk* (1930), and his last work, the *Pahlavi Yasna and Visperad*, with an invaluable glossary (1949). He was also a meticulous and lucid translator into English. In 1932 he published his masterly *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz and others*, including in it a rendering of the *Saddar Bundelesh*, and in 1943 he completed *Translation of the Zand-i Khūrtak Avistāk* (publ. posthumously in 1963). The former work was provided with an admirable index, and both were elucidated by learned notes, in which he drew not only on his deep knowledge of Pahlavi and Avestan texts, but also on his priestly familiarity with rituals and observances. His patient scholarship is also shown in his *Descriptive Catalogue of some manuscripts bearing on Zoroastrianism ... in the Mulla Feroze Library*, and his *Descriptive catalogue of all manuscripts in the First Dastur Meherji Rana Library, Navsari* (both published in 1923). He also edited or indexed works of other Parsi scholars. He wrote some studies in Gujarati, and a number of his learned articles in English and Gujarati were reprinted as a tribute in a single volume as *Essays on Iranian Subjects*.

Dhabhar married Shirinbai Rājā, who bore him a son and daughter. He lived in Parsi Colony, Dadar, Bombay, but kept his ancestral home in Sāngā Wād, Navsari, where he took his family during the Christmas and summer holidays. He then indulged temperately, like many another good Bhagarīa, in his favorite drink, palm-wine toddy. He lived a life of quiet simplicity, dressing regularly in white trousers, long black coat, and white priestly turban. His width of learning in no way shook his orthopraxy, and the octogenarian Ervad Eruch D. Daboo of Navsari recalls him officiating at *navjotes* (initiations) and marriages with scrupulous recitation of all the traditional prayers. Failing



sight led him to pass his last few years in seclusion, and he died, as he was born, on the day Bahman of the Zoroastrian calendar.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anonymous life-sketch in B.N. Dhabhar, *Essays on Iranian Subjects*, Bombay, 1955.