



JĀMĀSPASA, DASTUR JAMASPJI MINOCHERJI

JĀMĀSPASA, DASTUR JAMASPJI MINOCHERJI (b. Bombay, 1830; d. Bombay, 26 September 1898; [FIGURE 1](#)), Parsi priest and Iranologist. Dastur Jamaspji Minocherji JāmāspAsa was the offspring of a priestly family from the Bhagaria group/lineage (*panth*) from Navsari in Gujarat, India. Throughout the 19th century, the Jāmāsp-Asa family rivaled with the fellow Bhagaria Sanjana family for priestly pre-eminence in Bombay. His paternal grandfather, Khurshedji Jamshedji (1749-1829), had arrived in Bombay in 1801 and became the leading Zoroastrian priest of his time there. Unlike the Sanjana family, whose authority was grounded in the Wadia Atash Bahram Temple (consecrated 17 November 1830), the JāmāspAsa family were referred to as *Anjuman Dasturs*, that is, high priests for the entire Parsi community, as they were not yet bound to any particular fire temple.

Dastur Jamaspji began his studies in Zoroastrian language and literature under the supervision of his grandfather and father. Sponsored by Sir Jamsetji Jijibhoy (1783-1859), he studied Avesta (q.v.), Pahlavi, Persian, and Sanskrit (the latter under the guidance of a Pundit). In 1861, he succeeded his father as *Anjuman Dastur*. As a high priest, Jamaspji became controversial, when, in 1882, he took an active part in nine initiations (*navjote*) of children of Parsi fathers and non-Parsi mothers from Mazagon, which became a contentious issue in the community (Patel, III, p. 41). His rival, Dastur Peshotanji Beh-ramji Sanjana (1828-98), published a pamphlet to show that the ceremonies “were



not properly performed” (Desai, p. 12), which was followed by Dastur Jamaspji’s rejoinder. Despite this incident, he was nominated high priest of Parsis of Aden in 1883, of Surat in 1898, and of Lahore and Punjab in 1893 (Patel, III, p. 573).

From the age of 30, Dastur Jamaspji gave religious instructions in schools. He also regularly held religious discourses in and outside Bombay (Patel, II, pp. 131, 169, 184, 196, *passim*). As a high priest he guided and supervised the consecration of several fire temples, not only in Bombay but all over India (Patel, II, pp. 305, 309; III, pp. 432, 554). In this respect, his crowning achievement was the consecration of the Anjuman Atash Bahram Temple in Bombay in 1897, for which in 1898 he was appointed the first Dastur (Patel, III, pp. 651-55), a position inherited by his offspring ever since. For the consecration of this fire temple not only were there financial difficulties to overcome, but public opinion was not entirely in favor of the venture, and Dastur Sanjana objected that the new temple was located much too close to the other Shehenshai Atash Bahram Temple in the city. The two families of priests had many clashes, some of which had to be resolved by civil courts.

Dastur Jamaspji also acted as the Officer of the Parsi Law Association (1861), worked for the Directorate of Public Instruction of Bombay region (1864), and was a delegate of the First Parsi Chief Matrimonial Court (1866-74; see Patel, II, p. 164). As *Anjuman Dastur*, he prayed for royalty and high-ranking dignitaries. In 1875, for instance, he honored the Prince of Wales (later His Imperial Majesty King Edward VII, r. 1901-10) with an address in Avestan, specially composed for the occasion of the latter’s visit to India (Patel, II, p. 545). Dastur Jamaspji was a member of the working committee of the World’s Parliament of Religions (1893), but because of his age and health he was not able to travel to Chicago to attend its first formal gathering.

Dastur Jamaspji possessed a vast collection of important Zoroastrian manuscripts. His publication of the *Pahlavi texts* (1897-1913) made these manuscripts available to a larger audience. Among his contributions to Pahlavi philology, mention should be made of his decipherment and translation into Gujarati of the Pahlavi inscriptions at the Kanheri caves in 1866 and a Pahlavi Dictionary in Gujarati entitled *Pehelvi, Gujarāti ane Ingreji shabdakosh* (Pahlavi, Gujarati and English Dictionary, 3 vols., 1877-78). The work is incomplete and goes up to the word *omānāg*. In 1881 he published an annotated Gujarati translation of the Persian Saddar entitled *Saddare behre tāvil, yāne so bāb athwā so darwājāni kitāb* (Saddar-e Behr-e Tavil, that is, the



book of a hundred chapters or doors). His other publications include: *Radiyā ī farmān ī dīn* (On the disqualification of the injunctions of religion, 1867); *Jeh Shekan, yāne badfelinā felavāne todnār, jarthostione vākef thavā sāu* (Jeh shekan, that is, annihilating the spread of evil, for the information of Zoroastrians, 1870); *Khurdeh Avesta (Khurdād, Behrām tathā āvā yasht sāthe)* (Khordeh Avesta [with Khordad, Behram and Avan Yashts], 1873); and two collection of sermons, one comprising three Gujarati sermons and entitled *Yazdānparasti ane jarthoshti dharma pālvāni agat* (Worship of God and the necessity of practicing the Zoroastrian religion, 1874), and the other containing seven sermons and entitled *Vāejo, Dastur Jāmāspji Minicherji Jamaspāsānāe gayā farvar-degān nā divaso par kidheli* (Sermons delivered by Dastur Jamaspji Minicherji Jamaspasa on the previous Farvardegan days, 1874; see Patel, II, pp. 336, 462, 504, 510, 589; III, p. 7).

Dastur Jamaspji was in close touch with Western scholars, like Martin Haug (1827-76, q.v.) and Lawrence Mills (1837-1918). He was a member of such scholarly associations as the German Oriental Society (as of 1884), the American Oriental Society at Baltimore (as of 1887; see Patel, III, p. 231), and the Italian Oriental Society (as of 1887). Moreover, he attended and read a paper (“A study of certain important Avestan words”) at the International Congress of Orientalists held in London in 1883. In 1884 he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the University of Tübingen in Germany for his contribution to Pahlavi philology and for the generosity in sharing his rich collection of ancient manuscripts (Patel, III, p. 103). He was also awarded the honorary degree of D.C.L. (Doctor of Civil Law) by Oxford University in 1889. Since he had presented a manuscript of the Pahlavi translation of the *Yasna* dated 1323 C.E. to the Bodleian Library in Oxford, his portrait was installed in the Reading room of the Indian Institute at the Bodleian Library.

Dastur Jamaspji Minocherji JamaspAsa passed away in Bombay on 26 September 1898, at the age of 68, on account of illness resulting from kidney stones, as well as general debility (Dasturna, p. 277).



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Selected works (more works are mentioned in the text). *Farhang i oīm yak/An Old Zand-Pahlavi Glossary*, Bombay, 1867; repr. Osnabrück, 1973.

Pahlavi, Gujarâti and English Dictionary, 3 vols., London, 1877-82.

A Short Treatise on the Navjot Ceremony: Compiled into English from the Original Zoroastrian Scriptures ..., Bombay, 1887.

Pahlavi Texts, ed. J. M. Jamasp-Asana and B. T. Anklesaria, 2 vols., Bombay, 1897-1913; repr. Tehran, 1969, 2 vols. in 1. *Arda Viraf Nameh: the Original Pahlavi Text*, Bombay, 1902.

Studies.

Anonymous, *A Brief History of Anjuman Atash Bahram—Mumbai (1897-1996)*, n.p., n.d. Meher-vanji Behram Kamdin Dasturna, *Athornan Namu* (The Book of Priests), Bombay, 1923.

S. P. Desai, *History of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (1860-1960)*, Bombay, 1977.

Bomanjee Byramjee Patel, *Parsee Prakash, Being a Record of Important Events in the Growth of the Parsee Community in Western India, Chronologically Arranged from the Date of their Immigration to India*, 3 vols., Bombay, 1888-1920.

The portrait of Jamaspji Minocherji JamaspAsa is taken after: Anonymous, *A Brief History of Anjuman Atash Bahram—Mumbai (1897-1996)*, n.p., n.d., p. 26.