



SORUSHIAN, JAMSHID

SORUŠĪĀN, Jamšid Soruš (b. Kerman, 8 November 1914; d. Tehran, 28 February 1999), a Zoroastrian community leader and author. He was born in a wealthy Zoroastrian family of Kerman, as the son of Soruš and of his first cousin Iranbānu. At the time of Jamšid's birth, the Sorušiān family counted among the more prominent ones in Kerman and could trace its history in that town through four patrilineal generations: Soruš, Šahriār, Ƙodābakš, and Jam. It is believed that Jam moved to Kerman from Yazd in the early 19th century, but family archives preserve no exact details of his life. Ƙodābakš lived in the Zoroastrian quarter (*gabr maḥalla*) of Kerman around the middle of the 19th century, and made his livelihood as a petty commodity merchant traveling south to Jupār, a village at about 25 km south of Kerman, and the neighboring area. A severe cold winter claimed his life while he was at the utmost in his early thirties, leaving his wife and his oldest son, Šahriār, then nine years old, to provide for the family's economic needs. Šahriār grew into a successful merchant and joined the respected business house of Arbāb Goštāsp Dinyār, whose daughter, Bānu, he eventually married. Arbāb Goštāsp was a pious man, and at his death many of his properties were donated to communal charities, and were used for the improvement of the life of Kerman's Zoroastrian community. At the same time, Šahriār had also built up a small agricultural enterprise, managing several small holdings around Kerman. The social prominence achieved by him is reflected in the title "the father of the [Zoroastrian] community" (*pedar-e mellat*), by which he was popularly referred to. Faridun and Soruš, sons of Šahriār, developed and expanded their father's agricultural business, especially by acquiring lands that were being



sold by the Qajar nobility. Thanks to the mediation of Arbāb Kaykosrow Šāhroḳ, who in that period served as the representative of the Zoroastrian community in the parliament (Majles), and therefore spent long periods of his life in Tehran, the enterprising brothers were able to acquire agricultural lands in the capital's surrounding. By the time of Jamšid Sorušiān's birth, his father had accumulated considerable wealth and achieved a notable social status.

One of the most formative and difficult periods in Jamšid's life was when, still in his youth, he traveled to Germany, to accompany his ailing father to Berlin, where they stayed for a few months while his father was receiving treatment for his bad heart. Europe was on the verge of conflict, therefore, to avoid the breakup of war in Eastern Europe, they took a southbound road, from Germany into the Balkans and down to the Mediterranean Sea, then eastward, planning to reach Iran through Syria and Iraq. In Syria, then under French mandate, they were arrested on the suspicion of being German spies. They were segregated in a cast-off village and deprived of all their possessions. Thanks to a helpful villager, they managed to get word out to Arbāb Kaykosrow Šāhroḳ, who pleaded their cause at the French embassy in Tehran and was able to have them released. Soruš died shortly after their return to Kerman, leaving Jamšid in charge of the family business. Jamšid ran the family business from Kerman throughout the years of World War II, when Iran was under the military occupation of the Allied forces. He once contracted typhoid fever but recovered and continued to manage the family business, while at the same time dedicating time and efforts to community issues. He eventually became one of the most authoritative members of the Zoroastrian community even at a national level.

In 1946 Sorušiān married a girl from Yazd, called Homāyun, the daughter of Arbāb Sorhāb Kiāniān, a leading member of Yazd community. She bore him five children. The eldest child and daughter, Māhvaš Gudarz, was followed by two sons, Soruš and Mehrborzin, and by the twin sisters Armaiti Šahriāri and Anāhitā Siošānsi. This marriage strengthened Jamšid's ties with Yazd, and deepened his knowledge of the Yazdi variant of the Zoroastrian "*dari*" dialect as well as of the religious and social customs of that community. His links with Yazd were additionally reinforced through his study of the history and culture of the Yazdi community, and of the traditional ties existing between the two old Zoroastrian strongholds. Moreover, in both towns he thoroughly imbibed and vigorously propagated the precepts of Behdin (Good Religion), that is, the



Zoroastrian faith. He was among the founding members of both a society for the study of Yazd, its traditions and culture, and a society pursuing studies relative to the town of Kerman. The latter is still active and thriving, but the former, unfortunately, never became operational.

Sorušīān received his elementary education in Kerman at a school run by the Zoroastrian community. He then attended the school that was established by the Christian Missions in Iran, and following that, as a border, at a school run by the Church Missionary Society in Isfahan. His loneliness as the only Zoroastrian student in the entire school reinforced his resolve to be actively involved in the affairs of his community and, at the same time, to study and learn as much as he could about his own faith and its heritage and history. Particularly important in Jamšid Sorušīān's life and intellectual adventure was his encounter with the writings of [Dinshah J. Irani](#), a Parsi scholar and solicitor who twice visited Iran, once in the company of the illustrious Bengali poet and *savant* Rabindranath Tagore. Jamšid never met Dinshah in person, but he was greatly impressed by the intellectual vigor and fervent passion that his co-religionist felt for Zoroaster's message, as well as by his deep knowledge of the religion and of its practices. He was still in the formative period of his intellectual life when he became acquainted with Ebrāhim Pur-e Dāwud, the renowned Persian scholar of ancient Iran, who harbored a passionate interest in the ancient history of his country and the Zoroastrian religion. The young Sorušīān soon adopted Pur-e Dāwud as his intellectual mentor and elected him to be his revered teacher. In fact, even in his late years, he would remember Pur-e Dāwud as a spiritual and intellectual guide endowed with outstanding qualities of heart and mind. Another significant factor in his intellectual pursuit was the friendship that tied the young Jamšid to another intellectual of about his age, Moḥammad-Ebrāhim Bāstāni Pārizi, with whom he shared a fervent passion for the history of Iran, and particularly for the culture and traditions of the Kerman area.

Scholarship and passion for serving the community always went side by side in Sorušīān's mind, and he was always willing and ready to devote both his mind and energy to the service of the community. He was also a fervent nationalist, though, at the same time, kept an open mind vis-à-vis other cultures and their scientific and intellectual accomplishments. He was earnestly inquisitive about scholarly activities in foreign countries, particularly in areas concerning the history of Iran, and, as such, he often offered his hospitality to Western scholars visiting Iran, who would find a



welcoming hostel in his home and a knowledgeable guide to the society and its customs in his person. He was always fond of introducing appreciated visitors to the Zoroastrian community and familiarizing them with its rituals and its daily life. He also kept active correspondence with foreign scholars and would visit them during his trips abroad.

Sorušiān was by nature a curious scholar, but, even more, a man of religion and a devoted leader for his community. His leadership quality was readily acknowledged by the Zoroastrians of Kerman when they elected him their official leader as the chairman (*ra'is*) of their society, ([Anjoman Zardoštiān](#)). He was the tenth Zoroastrian to be elected to that office, in which capacity he served for several years, but the community kept asking for his council even when he was not its official leader. Sorušiān suffered a stroke on 28 February 1999 during a visit to Tehran and died there. His body was taken to his hometown Kerman and buried in the family plot between his parents.

Sorušiān wrote all his works in Persian, since his primary objective was to make them readily accessible to his community and the people of Iran at large. His most significant scholarly work is undoubtedly his *Farhang-e Behdinān*, a detailed dictionary of the *Dari* dialect as spoken by his co-religionists in Kerman and Yazd, with a long Preface by Ebrāhim Pur-e Dāwud. It contains about 4500 lemmata arranged alphabetically with transcriptions in Latin letters and translations in standard Persian, and the provenance of each item is clearly mentioned. It also includes a very useful list comparing the lemmata from the two sub-dialects. He also authored a number of books that were meant for the general public and, as such, necessarily more discursive. They include *Sawād-āmuzi wa dabiri dar din-e Zartošti*, a long excursus on the literature and literary culture of the Zoroastrians through the ages, bespeaking early universalistic education and touching on a range of historical and cultural phenomena, which are not necessarily confined to the author's religious community but are an essential part of the cultural history of the Iranian people. Of special interest is the *Tāriḵ-e Zartoštiān-e Kermān dar in čand sāla*, mainly a history of the Zoroastrian community of Kerman from the Safavid period to the present time. In *Ba yād-e pir-e moḡān*, he deals with some fundamental tenets of Zoroaster's theology, comparing them with those of other creeds and discussing the significance of the legends built around the lives of religion founders as a mean to spread their faiths and clarify religious precepts. The book entitled *Pand-nāma-ye Moḡammad* is an attempt to defend the author's community against the prevarication of certain Muslims, by



presenting some putative instructions of the prophet Moḥammad on the treatment of vanquished peoples, including Zoroastrians. Since the subject treated in the book was both sensitive and controversial, the Ministry of Islamic guidance (Wezārat-e eršād-e eslāmi) refused permission for a mass distribution of the book, so only a few copies could be circulated. His next book, the *Šāh-nāma-ye Haḳāmanešiān* recounts events related to the history of the [Achaemenid dynasty](#). He also wrote two informative books, *Rowšanibaḳš* and *Āb-e garmāba wa pākizagi nazd-e Zartoštiān-e Irān*, on aspects of the spiritual life of his own community. In *rowšanibaḳš*, he discusses early Zoroastrian esoteric traditions, and in *Āb-e garmāba* he presents interesting aspects of traditional ritual cleansing and purity rules among Zoroastrians of Iran. Closely linked to the latter is a short booklet, entitled *Pāk-tan*, in which the religious prescriptions mentioned in *Āb-e garmāba* are related to ancient Iranian traditions. Here the author also uses the *Šāh-nāma* of Ferdowsi as a source to refute the accusation that only few enjoyed privileges in the pre-Islamic Iranian society. This was the last of Sorušiān's completed works. It was published posthumously, as was his other work, *Čāšt*. *Čāšt* is arranged into a number of short chapters, many of which concern dietary habits and certain products of Iran and other countries, while others are devoted to historical subjects such as the maltreatment of Zoroastrians living in Baluchistan at the hands of the Arabs and some European travelers' reports on the community. He is also the author of a few contributions to Persian journals.

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