

Practice, Faith and Forgetting in Pakistan's Zoroastrian Community

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The Parsi Zoroastrian community is a small minority in the Indian subcontinent, descended from Iranian Zoroastrians who migrated to the west coast of India around the 10th century. There they cultivated a syncretic ethno-religious identity by interweaving Iranian and Indian elements and maintained it over centuries through strict adherence to endogamous marriage.¹ The Parsi Zoroastrian community is known for its successful integration into host societies, but in recent years, discourse within the community has focused on preserving its unique identity and conserving at-risk cultural heritage.[¶] This is because of a steep and possibly irreversible population decline in once-thriving communities in South Asia due to an ageing population, low birth rate, migration, intermarriage, and late or no marriage. Today, in India, the Parsi Zoroastrian population is estimated to be between 45,000 and 50,000, approximately 1,000 in Pakistan, and 45 in Sri Lanka.[∅]

The challenge of preserving tangible and intangible heritage has been taken up primarily by the Parsi-Zoroastrian (Parzor) Foundation. Established in Delhi, India in 2002, the Parzor Foundation is a UNESCO New Delhi initiative that aims to 'make known and preserve Zoroastrian culture' by 'conserving tangible heritage and places of memory, ensuring continuity of knowledge, traditions and community well-being.'² For the Parsi Zoroastrian community, cultural preservation is time-sensitive and the Parzor Foundation acknowledges that some of its most critical work—to capture and record intangible heritage from priests, artists and musicians, traditional medical practitioners and others—is a 'race against time' before knowledgeable people are lost forever.³

[¶] Cultural heritage is defined by the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as 'monuments and collections of objects' but it also includes intangible heritage such as 'traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.' See UNESCO, "What is intangible cultural heritage?"

[∅] As no national census was conducted in India in 2021, we do not have an accurate figure for the Indian Zoroastrian population. We estimated India's Zoroastrian population range by taking the 2011 population figure of 57,264 and subtracting it by 17.73% which was the rate of population decline from 2001 to 2011. Pakistan's Zoroastrian population was estimated by rounding down from 1067, the population figure in the 2020 A&T Zoroastrian Directory published by the Karachi Zarthoshti Banu Mandal (KZBM), a women's organisation established in Karachi in 1912. Sri Lanka's Zoroastrian population statistic was noted in an article on the Parsi Zoroastrian community in Sri Lanka. See "The dwindling Parsis of Sri Lanka," NewsIn Asia.

Although demographically the community is small, there is a significant amount of tangible cultural heritage present in books, artefacts and archaeological sites, as well as intangible cultural heritage in the form of oral histories, social practices, and cultural and religious rituals. However, there is 'apathy and disinterest toward efforts to help preserve their culture' within the community which impedes the speed of preservation.⁴ As a result of the efforts of the Parzor Foundation and other concerned community organisations and people, there is a reservoir of material on various topics of interest (which are increasingly being digitised for broader accessibility), but many in the community are either unaware of the material or choose not to engage with it.[¶] Dispersal of existing knowledge has also suffered due to migration and intermarriage, fueling concerns that vital cultural heritage and knowledge is at risk of being forgotten by the community, especially the younger generation.

One recent initiative to gather statistical information from Zoroastrian communities around the world was *Gen Z and Beyond: A Survey for Every Generation* (hereafter called *Gen Z and Beyond Survey*).^θ The survey was conducted from August 2021 to January 2023 and was the first of its kind conducted within the Zoroastrian community. It was open to persons aged 18 and over with at least one Zoroastrian parent, grandparent, or spouse of Iranian, Irani, or Parsi descent.[□] The data for each category was collected, analysed, and presented in the final report separately so as to not conflate the findings. At the end, the online, globally accessible multiple-choice questionnaire yielded a total of 4893 valid responses.[‡]

The Gen Z and Beyond Survey aimed to understand all aspects of Zoroastrian life today, including the many positive aspects of belonging to a tiny global minority. The survey also provided an opportunity to quantify, verify, and examine the many challenges the community faced. The

[¶] Another unique programme of cultural dissemination and preservation is 'Return to Roots' which takes small groups of Zoroastrian youth from the diaspora to ancestral communities in India (Iran is currently not possible due to the political climate) for two weeks. Established in 2012, the programme ran its seventh program from the end of December 2023 to the beginning of January 2024 in India.

^θ The survey was led by Dr Sarah Stewart, the co-chair of the Shapoorji Pallonji Institute of Zoroastrian Studies at SOAS, University of London. For more information about the survey and its outcomes, see the project website: www.genzandbeyond.com.

[□] In the questionnaire, Iranian Zoroastrians are defined as those who live either in Iran or have migrated to the diaspora from Iran. Irani Zoroastrians are defined as descendants of Zoroastrian settlers who migrated to India from approximately the 18th century onwards living in India or the wider diaspora. Parsi Zoroastrians are defined as descendants of Zoroastrian settlers who migrated to India from approximately the 10th century onwards, living in India or the wider diaspora.

[‡] The majority (4481 of 4893) of respondents who participated in the survey were from the first category and had two Zoroastrian parents. As this was such a large group, all analysis (apart from one chapter which covered the other four categories) in the final report was conducted on this group. Thus, all data included in this essay has been from respondents of this category with two Zoroastrian parents. The full survey report is available at www.genzandbeyond.com.

questionnaire was divided into three sections: demographics, behaviours, and attitudes. There was one open-ended qualitative question at the end of the questionnaire asking respondents for their thoughts on how the future of the community could be strengthened and most multiple-choice questions had an option for respondents to enter their own answer if they could not find the relevant answer in the options provided. The survey addressed a wide range of topics and identified instances of collective or cultural forgetting.

In this conversation, Nazneen Engineer and Veera Rustomji discuss some key findings from the *Gen Z and Beyond Survey* that highlight aspects of cultural heritage with an emphasis on Zoroastrians based in South Asia, focusing on Pakistan. To add more contextual detail, Veera interviewed community leaders and priests of the Karachi Zoroastrian community to understand their current predicament with regard to preserving cultural heritage. She wanted to examine their awareness of and interaction with artefacts associated with the Zoroastrian religion such as Sasanian-era coins, which were excavated at a site an hour outside Karachi and are on display at two public museums within the city, the State Bank Museum and National Museum of Pakistan. Archeological assessments of these artefacts, as discussed below, attest to a Zoroastrian presence in the province of Sindh—a presence that is neither widely known nor integrated in the culture of the Zoroastrians living in Pakistan today. Artefacts physically preserve and transmit cultural traditions, and the coins are highlighted here because they provide evidence of Zoroastrianism in Pakistan that predates the 10th-century migration of the Iranian Zoroastrians to Gujarat, India.[§] While there is little reliable data about the migration of Iranian Zoroastrians to and their subsequent settlement in India, this is a foundational story that is at the core of a Parsi Zoroastrian identity, especially in South Asia.[¶] Archeological discoveries that precede this story are important because they offer tangible evidence of an alternative way of looking at Zoroastrian expansion from Persia into South Asia.

One of the main purposes, therefore, of the *Gen Z and Beyond Survey* was to discover what community members perceived about their history, cultural identity, religious beliefs and traditional practices. Multiple strategies were used to collect as many survey responses as possible, including sharing the survey's purpose, potential benefits, and updates on social media. Ambassadors and volunteers from communities around the world publicised the survey and collected responses within their regions. They assisted those who were not tech-savvy to take the survey online and addressed queries about privacy, research outcomes, eligibility criteria, and so on. The volunteers' presence was especially important in communities such

[¶] It is believed that Iranian Zoroastrians landed in India in around the 10th century, working as artisans and agriculturists in villages and settlements along the western coast of Gujarat.

as India and Pakistan where there is a large, ageing population. We prioritised this because responses from the older generation were an integral part of the survey and enabled thought-provoking generational comparisons. Veera was one such volunteer, based in Karachi, Pakistan and experienced first-hand the complexity of conducting community-based research.

Veera: It quickly became clear to me that the real task at hand was getting Pakistani Zoroastrians to sit down and take the survey. We had plenty of neighbourhood volunteers to reach out to the community of around 1000 members in Karachi and publicise the survey. The challenge was guaranteeing that busy Karachi Zoroastrians would fill out the 20-minute online survey. My first experience with this was at a community tombola event at the Karachi Parsi Institute in November 2021. The annual event featured *curry chawal* (rice served with Parsi-style curry), *jhinga kavabs* (prawn kebabs) and lucky dip, which led us to think that a crowd of about 70 Zoroastrians with full bellies would be merry enough on tombola night to engage with us volunteers. Even after being presented with a detailed presentation on why the *Gen Z and Beyond Survey* was important, the majority declined to sign up without giving concrete reasons for their non-participation and showed significant apathy towards the project.

Nazneen: Many community leaders joked with us that to gain the maximum number of respondents we should have organised a *gahambar* or community feast! Your volunteer experience and our data suggest it wouldn't have worked to raise participation numbers. We realised that there was a dichotomy within the Zoroastrian community, whereby most people were enthused about academic research taking place within the community but few wanted to engage with it, and this showed up in the survey findings. If we consider participating in the survey as a form of volunteering time for a community cause, then we can understand the challenge better as people were much less likely to volunteer time than donate money or in kind. For example, the survey showed that respondents in Pakistan were twice as likely to say they never volunteered time (21.3%) compared to never donating money (11.7%) and four times more likely than never donating in kind (4.6%).

When we embarked on the project, it was important for us, as researchers, to understand what information the community needed from the survey. Thus, while working on the questionnaire design, we interviewed several community leaders about specific findings that would interest them and their constituents. One issue that was repeatedly mentioned was why people, especially the youth, were reluctant to attend community activities and events. This was important to know, as intangible cultural heritage is passed down through active learning and cultural osmosis—being present for rituals, ceremonies, and community-based activities. As families migrate and community members disperse or disengage, learning from each other diminishes, and young people risk forgetting their cultural heritage. To get as much detail as possible about this issue, we first asked respondents if they participated in activities and events organised by

their local Zoroastrian community, community association, or community centre. Half of the respondents said they participated 'always' or 'often', and an almost equal percentage said they 'seldom', 'rarely', or 'never' participated.

When we analysed this participation by age, we found that younger respondents were indeed more likely than older respondents to say they 'seldom', 'rarely', or 'never' participated. However, the likelihood of their engagement also depended on the type of activity: we found that younger respondents were less likely than older respondents to attend general community get-togethers, outreach activities, inter-faith events, or educational lectures on Zoroastrian history and culture, but much more likely than older respondents to attend a sporting event, a meet-and-greet meant for young people, or camps and classes for children. When it came to musicals, dramas, art performances, and business events, younger respondents were as likely to attend as older ones. This showed us that the youth were interested in social interactions with other community members, but they needed a more focused, activity-based purpose for attending.

When we analysed participation by region, we noted another point of interest. We found that in South Asia, respondents' participation was less frequent compared to those in North America, the other significant region in terms of large respondent numbers.[¶] For India it could be because community members often live close to each other in colonies and *baugs* (compounds), and social interactions take place within that setting rather than being organised by a community association. In the diaspora where the community was more scattered, the community association played a more active role and the community centre, if there was one, became a religious and social hub to which members travelled for more formally organised classes, ceremonies, and events. Pakistan, however, looks more like Australia, in that both are small, close-knit communities with many communal facilities and active associations, and participation rates tend to be higher in both. This is possibly due to the efforts of community spaces such as the Karachi Parsi Institute, the Cyrus Minwalla Hall and the dedicated Entertainment Committee of the Karachi Zarthoshti Banu Mandal, offering ample amenities, activities, and events throughout the year.

Before the *Gen Z and Beyond Survey*, we had no information about the kinds of events that were popular and most likely to engage community members. It was not surprising to learn that celebratory occasions like Navroze were the most popular not just in South Asia but around the world. However, only 30.2% of respondents globally said they attended lectures on Zoroastrian

[¶] Respondents in North America were more likely than respondents in South Asia to always participate (18.0% vs 12.5%). Respondents in South Asia were more likely than respondents in North America to rarely (18.5% vs 14.0%) and never (10.7% vs 7.7%) participate.

history and culture, and this figure was even lower amongst young and middle-aged ones. Respondents in South Asia were significantly less likely to attend educational lectures on Zoroastrian history and culture compared to North Americans. For the successful dissemination of knowledge, the community must debate the usefulness of educational lectures and how they are delivered, while also exploring alternative modes of teaching and learning. This is one instance where cultural heritage and collective knowledge are at risk of being lost. As Anh Hua (2005) states, 'forgetting is an act, a creative invention, a performance, a selective loss.'⁶

Veera: The difficulty of getting community members to sign up often made me think about why they weren't participating. It seems that most Pakistani Zoroastrians avoid activities that involve learning about religious history or challenging their foundational childhood knowledge because they are comfortable with what they already know. This issue constantly came up at our volunteer meetings as Karachi Zoroastrians didn't seem to want to provide any reason at all for not signing up. Perhaps the survey was a very new activity or the value of the research did not resonate with them. Having said that, due to the dedication and the persistence of volunteers and the KZBM, we got a total of 141 respondents from Pakistan—14.1% of the total estimated population.

While the survey was open, I had simultaneously joined the Maritime Archaeology Heritage Institute (MAHI) which was an organisation dedicated to research and investigation into Pakistan's maritime archaeology and heritage. My first field visit was in July 2021 to Banbhore, a coastal site in the province of Sindh. Before the visit, I read through archaeologist Dr. Fazal Ahmed Khan's 'A Preliminary Report on the Recent Archaeological Excavations at Banbhore' which analysed findings from eight excavation sessions from the years 1958–1965.⁷ His comparison of varied artefacts, structural material, and skeletons were both fascinating and bizarre. How was it possible that a site which stratigraphically dated all the way back to the first century BC was just an hour and half drive east from the concrete jungle of Karachi?

The site is strategically located at the edge of the Indus River Delta and is a citadel with a prominent southern gate opening up to the northern bank of Gharo Creek. Scholars have drawn connections between Banbhore and the port of Daybul,⁸ which is mentioned in the *Chachnama*⁹ as well as many other stories around the River Indus.

Among Khan's Banbhore findings, the ones that made me think most about my relationship with the site were related to the presence of Sasanian-era coins, which Khan used to support his argument of Zoroastrianism having links with Sindh. We know that Karachi's Zoroastrian population is primarily culturally Parsi, hailing from Gujarat. However, the Sasanian coins from Banbhore/Daybul connect the coastline of Sindh to the geographic origins of Zoroastrianism

in the northeast of Iran and present-day Central Asia. Daybul might have been brought into the realm of the Sasanian kings through King Bahram V (420–438 AD), who is said to have taken an Indian bride and received Daybul and the littoral regions of Sindh and the Makran as part of her dowry.¹⁰ Daybul was clearly a prosperous Sasanian port that was later taken over by the Umayyads. This can be seen through one of Khan's Banbhore coins where the Pahlavi verse transcribed around King Yazdegerd's side-profile is superscribed with a Kufic style 'Bismilliah' or 'Allah', marking Arab suzerainty over the Persian Empire.¹¹

The Sasanian-era coins are indexed under the 'Kushano Indo-Sasanian' and 'Arab Sasanian' eras in numismatic studies found in Pakistan Archaeology journals.¹² Original hemidrachm coins from Peroz I, Khusraw II, and Yazdegerd III's reigns, collectively ranging from 457 AD to 652 AD, are part of the State Bank Museum's collection. Replicas of coins dating from the reign of Khusraw Parvez II (591–628 AD) are on display at the National Museum of Pakistan. The design on the obverse of Sasanian coins features the side profile of the ruler with a full coiffure of abundant curls, thick beard, and an elaborate crown bespoke to the king, making identification of rulers and their regnal periods easier for archaeologists.¹³ An inscription in Pahlavi (Middle Persian) venerates the Sasanian ruler by name and describes him as a worshipper of Ahura Mazda and King of Kings of the Iranians and non-Iranians, thereby cementing Zoroastrianism as the state religion. Most Sasanian-era coins on the reverse depict the Zoroastrian fire altar (*atash*) flanked by two attendees. After seeing images of the coins and tracking them down in the museums, I wondered how as a Parsi having lived her whole life in Karachi, with a genuine interest in matters of religion and research, I had never heard of Sasanian and Zoroastrian artefacts in Sindh.

Nazneen: This highlights the importance of disseminating relevant academic scholarship widely within a community, especially a tiny religious minority like the Zoroastrians. Unfortunately, this does not happen. If we think about religious education, what and how is taught in childhood plays a crucial role in determining what knowledge is retained or lost going into adulthood. In the survey, only 0.5% of respondents said that they were never taught the religion as children. This suggests a high level of religious and ritual literacy, but most religious learning was informal with respondents most likely to have been taught by members of their family, particularly by their mother for 75.2% of the respondents.[¶]

A more structured, community-wide educational system might provide a more accurate transmission of knowledge than one might get at home. We noted in the survey that the

[¶] Respondents were able to select multiple responses and only 31.4% (32.4% in India and 28.4% in Pakistan) of respondents said they were also taught by priests and 28.6% (23.6% in India and 41.8% in Pakistan) said they were also taught by teachers at a group community religion class.

youngest respondents (18–25 year olds) were the likeliest of all age groups to say they liked participating in community activities and events because they liked 'learning new things,' and were in fact more likely to be interested in attending educational lectures on Zoroastrian history and culture than 26–45 year-old respondents. This is a positive sign.

Veera: This issue is very much at the forefront of community leaders' minds. I spoke to Burjis Bhada, a *mobed* or Zoroastrian priest originally from Mumbai who has been serving the Karachi community since 2003. He emphasised that Sanjan, Gujarat, as a geographic location played an important role in anchoring and continuing Zoroastrian traditions in South Asia. Bhada underwent rigorous priestly training at the Dadar Athornan Institute in Mumbai—the only Zoroastrian priestly school remaining in the world where young boys receive secular and religious education while boarding on campus. He explained that historically, in Iran, the priests inhabited the uppermost echelons of society, imparting education as well as conducting prayers. In fact, Iranian priests of Yazd and Kerman were consulted by the Parsis in India during the 15th–18th centuries through a series of letters called the *Rivayats* (questions and answers) in navigating ritualistic practice and maintaining knowledge of traditions which were integral to their survival in their new homes in India.¹⁴ However, according to Bhada, Zoroastrian priests in South Asia are now in a financially weakened position and have to prioritise officiating religious ceremonies over education and pastoral care. The formation of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat (BPP) in the last quarter of the 17th century contributed to this change in the priests' status.¹⁵ The BPP was created to address Parsi Zoroastrian community affairs and welfare, but with the rise of mercantile and industrial wealth amongst the Parsi Zoroastrians in the 18th century, power and authority shifted sharply from priests to wealthy businessmen. Soon, members of the mercantile class sitting on the BPP outnumbered the priests.¹⁵ The fire temples in South Asia to which the priests devote their lives are also sponsored, built by, and named after wealthy Zoroastrian families and run by laymen trustees. When it comes to paying the *mobeds* a salary for their dedication towards keeping the *atash* aflame, most Parsi Zoroastrians today struggle to justify why someone officiating religious services should be paid the same as an employee in a profitable business.

Currently, one of the few organised forums for religious education for children in Karachi is the Child Chapter's Saturday class conducted by KZBM. Committee members Meher Cawasji and Farahnaz Marker explained that their curriculum focuses on prayers while providing a framework to help understand Ahura Mazda's significance in Zoroastrianism. The classes also

¹⁴ A traditional *panchayat* is a council of five (*panch* in Hindi) members, but today, the BPP has seven members after reaching a peak of eighteen members (twelve merchants and six priests) in 1818.

cover the story of migration, the importance of *sudreh kusti* garments[¶], *navjote* customs[∅], and stories which have Persian origins aligning with the *Shahnameh*. A substantial goal of the classes is to provide 'prayer refreshers' as most children fall out of practice after their *navjote* ceremony. While Bhada isn't affiliated with the Child Chapter classes, he believes that it is the lack of consistency and engagement with reciting prayers after the *navjote* that has led to a growing disconnect with religion. Similar to the findings of the *Gen Z and Beyond Survey*, Bhada and the KZBM committee members emphasised that the main source of religious information for Zoroastrians globally is through a treasured family member. Once that individual passes away or has limited time to share, the scope and practice of prayers and rituals in the home, in particular, are adversely affected. To address this issue, KZBM has shortlisted textual resources for children and has to date conducted 23 sessions with around 13–18 children attending each class. Bhada, Cawasji, and Marker hope that if these children continue praying and engaging with religious texts, they'll help preserve religious knowledge for future generations. There is a plethora of resources in and around Karachi; in addition to the aforementioned museums, the site of Banbhore, and the two consecrated fire temples of Karachi, there are many publications in the Dastur Dhalla Library that are accessible to Pakistani Zoroastrians.

Nazneen: I agree. Literature also plays an important role in illustrating where collective or cultural memory loss has already taken place. Teachers at community religious classes such as KZBM's Child Chapter would be familiar with hallmark texts such as the *Qisseh-ye-Sanjan* and the *Shahnameh*, which are often viewed as foundational or origin stories for the community. The *Qisseh-ye-Sanjan*, or *Story of Sanjan*, is a Persian epic poem written in 1599 by Bahman Kaikobad Sanjana, a Parsi Zoroastrian high priest. It narrates the obstacles faced by Iranian Zoroastrians during their journey from the shores of Iran to the time of their settlement in their adopted homeland in India. An even older text, the *Shahnameh* or *Book of Kings*, is an epic poem written by Iranian poet Abul-Qasem Ferdowsi Tusi in 1010. It describes the mythical and historical reigns of Persian kings during the pre-Islamic and post-Islamic periods. We believed these texts to be an integral part of the community's cultural consciousness, and indeed South Asian respondents were more likely than their North American counterparts to view them as both historically accurate and important to their cultural and religious identity. However, the survey found that nearly a fifth of Pakistani respondents had never heard of the *Qisseh-ye-Sanjan* and 27.8% stated it was not important to their cultural and religious identity. In addition, almost a quarter of the respondents in Pakistan had never heard of the *Shahnameh* and 40.2% said it was not important to their religious and cultural identity.

[¶] *Sudreh Kusti* is ritual clothing.

[∅] *Navjote* is the Zoroastrian initiation ceremony.

Globally, the youngest respondents (18–25 year olds) were more likely never to have heard of the *Qisseh-ye-Sanjan* and *Shahnameh* compared to respondents over the age of 45. And respondents who stated they or their parents were migrants were more likely to say the texts were not important to them. This lack of knowledge of foundation texts might be putting the collective identity of the global Zoroastrian community at risk. Like many stories, the importance of these texts does not lie in their factual accuracy, but in the lessons they teach, the understanding they foster, and the sense of collective identity they confer upon the community.

Veera: While the Karachi interviewees did acknowledge and talk about the migration from Iran to Gujarat as a narrative that binds the historical identity for Karachi Zoroastrians, none of them categorically referred to the text by its name *Qisseh-ye-Sanjan*. Nor were the interviewees aware that artefacts related to Zoroastrianism such as the Sasanian-era coins were on display in local museums.

Pakistan's Zoroastrian population includes a handful of first-generation migrants from Iran. Sohrab Henghami arrived in 2021 from Tehran to counter the critical shortage of *mobeds* in Karachi. Henghami speaks minimal English and Gujarati so our conversation was limited. However, upon seeing images of the Sasanian coins from the State Bank Museum, Henghami immediately recognised them; the evident stylisation employed to depict the hair and angular features of the Sasanian kings is synonymous with contemporaneous Iranian visual imagery. Henghami identified the script around an enlarged photograph of the coin as Pahlavi (a Middle Persian dialect) which is not in common use. Today's Iranian Zoroastrians routinely speak Farsi which differentiates them culturally from the Gujarati-speaking Parsi Zoroastrians. In my interview with Henghami, it became clear to me that his Iranian identity helped him to recognise the Sasanian-era coins that the Parsi interviewees could not. For Bhada and the KZBM committee members, the Parsi Gujarati language is the anchor for collective memory and cultural preservation.

Nazneen: It is interesting they said this because John Hinnells, an eminent scholar on Zoroastrian studies, observed that for the Parsi Zoroastrian community the Parsi Gujarati language is:

a language acquired after migration to India and was not part of their [Parsis'] ancient heritage. But in losing this linguistic facility, some parents fear that the young are missing out on an important part of their culture, from the fun of *nataks* (theatre plays) on the history of the religion and other cultural features of their history in Gujarat.¹⁶

The survey found that language proficiency was declining globally. Overall, only 30.2% of respondents were able to speak, read, and write Gujarati fluently. Respondents in the diaspora

were much more likely to be able to only understand the language (not speak, read or write it) compared to respondents in South Asia. Even though language proficiency was very high in India and 95.7% of respondents could speak Parsi Gujarati, it was surprising to us that only 65.5% stated that Parsi Gujarati was the main language spoken at home. Similarly, in Pakistan 99.3% of respondents stated they could speak Parsi Gujarati, but only 75.2% said it was the main language spoken at home.

Migration impacted the use of traditional language in interesting ways. Among those respondents who stated they have migrated at some point in their lives, 28.4% shared that they spoke Gujarati at home. This was 21.6% for respondents whose parents had migrated, but 27.9% for respondents whose grandparents had also migrated. The impact of grandparents on the use of traditional language by their grandchildren was also noted by Hinnells: 'few Parsis use Gujarati extensively in their home, except when conversing with grandparents.'¹⁷ I can relate to this statistic because my parents and I migrated to the Middle East when I was a child, and although they made an effort to speak Parsi Gujarati at home, our conversations were (and still are) in 'Gujlish', a combination of English and Parsi Gujarati. However, my Parsi Gujarati language skills improved after spending the summer holidays with my grandparents and other elderly relatives who did not speak any English. I also came to understand and appreciate Parsi Gujarati's many unique, irreverent, and witty words and phrases.

Parsi Gujarati is a quirky language and if we are not speaking it at home on a regular basis, we are at risk of losing quintessentially Parsi Gujarati words and phrases including endearments and insults. This crucial intangible heritage has been memorialised in two (often hilarious) books, *Parsi Bol* and *Parsi Bol 2* by filmmaker Soonil Taraporevala and journalist Meher Marfatia. The loss of traditional language should not be underestimated by the community, as it could have a knock-on effect on other aspects of cultural knowledge and feelings of community belonging. It was not surprising that the survey found a connection between use of traditional language and better engagement with the community, as we noted that respondents who spoke Parsi Gujarati at home were also more likely to 'always' participate in activities and events organised by the Zoroastrian community.

Veera: I have been thinking about arranging tours to the State Bank Museum or Banbhore as a community event, but from my experience and research I suspect that the Karachi Zoroastrian community would not be interested. I often wonder if the steadfast belief in hailing from Gujarat has led the Parsi community in Karachi to disparage sites and antiquities that directly connect Sindh with Zoroastrianism and Iran's imperial history. Are Pakistani Zoroastrians deliberately not considering the possibility that their current homeland was part of an extended Zoroastrian empire? After I learnt about the Sasanian coins, I have become interested in the opportunity to include Pakistan in the larger landscape of scholarship on Zoroastrian heritage.

Since that very first visit to Banbhore, my concern has been how the pendulum on Zoroastrian evidence swings between Iran and India but doesn't pause at Pakistan. Karachi's Zoroastrian community is miniscule, but its contributions to the city are immense. Karachi's development into an all-weather port by 1873 in British India brought more Parsis to the coast of Sindh for entrepreneurship and trade.¹⁸ In terms of their historical identity, Parsis are well known for their adaptability to new environments, with migration being a part of their past and very much a route to their future as they continue to exit Pakistan. However, is the community's trepidation of learning about Zoroastrianism through unfamiliar resources and physically venturing beyond their comfort zone going to define them?

Nazneen: Tours of the State Bank Museum and to Banbhore are a great idea and I would love to join you one day! Keeping abreast of new research that pertains to the community and religion are crucial for expanding knowledge and understanding one's identity, which could enhance feelings of belonging. For that reason, I believe that the community has a worthy resource in the *Gen Z and Beyond Survey*. As it was the first of its kind, the team wanted to provide a substantial amount of data to Zoroastrian communities so they could learn about themselves and each other with reference to changing family structures, personal identity, communal interaction, contemporary religious beliefs and levels of practice, and future aspirations for the community. In this conversation, I have touched upon the areas in which I believe cultural forgetting is ongoing or has already taken place. The survey report and accompanying data provide community leaders in Pakistan and around the world with easily accessible information to engage meaningfully with communities and brainstorm ways to reduce the risk of forgetting and loss of heritage.[¶]

Veera: Thanks to the generosity and commitment of local trusts such as the KZBM, not a single member of the community in Pakistan is left without access to education or a home. It is safe to say that there is a commitment to preserving the religion and the community. For me, the main issue is the interpretation of the region's religious history. Archaeological studies on the Sasanian-era coins from the Banbhore citadel and data from the *Gen Z and Beyond Survey* may not carry the emotional resonance of the *Qisseh-ye-Sanjan* connecting the Indian and Pakistani Parsis to each other, but they do highlight the expansiveness of Zoroastrianism. The linkages between Sindh's coastline and the Sasanian Zoroastrian dynasty is definitely something that Pakistan's Zoroastrian community can and should explore further.

[¶] The survey's raw dataset is held by the UK Data Archive, the UK's 'largest collection of social, economic and population data for over 50 years' which can be accessed and utilised for a more in-depth analysis on certain topics or specific regions. For those interested in submitting an application to access the raw dataset from the survey, please visit <https://www.data-archive.ac.uk/>.

Notes

1. Lopez et al., "The Genetic Legacy of Zoroastrianism," 360-361.
2. Parzor Foundation, "About Us."
3. Parzor Foundation, "Heritage and Cultural Studies."
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