Becoming an Athravan

A study of the training of Zoroastrian priests in India

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Abstract

The Zoroastrian tradition distinguishes between the priestly class (Athornan) and the laity (Behdins). Only sons belonging to a priestly family are eligible to be initiated as priests, and upon initiation, gain the right and qualification to perform the rituals and ceremonies for the community members. There are two stages of initiation, the Nāvar and the Marātab, for which the candidates are required to memorize the texts in Avestan language and learn the accompanying ritual actions.

Based on Gujarati language sources and on extensive fieldwork conducted in India, including filming the contemporary training at the Dadar Athornan Institute in Mumbai, this thesis documents the training of the Zoroastrian priests in India and its evolution over the past two hundred years. The core of the thesis examines the methods employed to commit to memory the large corpus of Avestan texts which is required to qualify as a full ritual-performing priest. The study contrasts the training methodology used at the only two resident priestly seminaries, the Athornan Institutes, with that employed outside of these schools.

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Section I: Orientation

1 Introduction

The Zoroastrian priests follow a long-standing oral tradition whereby all the ritual texts are learnt by rote and recited from memory during liturgical performances. Only sons belonging to a priestly family are eligible to be initiated as priests, and upon initiation, gain the right and qualification to perform the rituals and ceremonies. The ritual texts are composed in the Avestan language, which is one of the oldest surviving branches of the Indo-European group of languages. Avestan ceased to be productive by the mid-first millennium BCE, implying that the oral transmission of Avestan religious texts is nearly three thousand years old. Since these texts were committed to writing at a much later date, presumably around the sixth century CE, this oral transmission was critical for the survival of the extant Avesta. This oral tradition, usually passed on from father to son within a priestly family, has survived up to the present time.

However, since the last few decades, this age-old system has been breaking down rapidly and is in danger of collapsing as very few new priests are being trained to continue the tradition. In Iran, where Zoroastrianism flourished until the seventh century CE, this system has already broken down and the oral tradition has been irreversibly lost. Thus, the priestly training schools in India are the only places where the tradition of memorising the large corpus of Zoroastrian ritual texts has still survived. This has necessitated the documentation of the practice and the methods used in committing such large volumes of texts to memory. This study will also investigate the archival sources which shed some light on the training of Zoroastrian priests in the past and the techniques used when memorising the texts.

1.1 Research topic and Definition of key terms

The term 'Athravan' from Avestan *āϑrauuan-/aϑaurun-*, which corresponds to the Vedic *atharvan-*, is not attested in the oldest layer of the Avestan language (i.e., in the OAv. Gāthās and Yasna Haptaŋhāiti). In the later Young Avestan texts, it appears as a generic term for a priest, as in Yt 13.89, where Zarathustra is referred to as the first priest (*paoiriiō āϑrauua*) and in Hērbedestān 4.1 (*nā āϑrauua* 'a man who is a priest').[1] The equivalent Pahlavi term is *āsrōn* [ʾslwnʹ] 'priest' whose plural form *āsrōnān* [ʾslwnʾn] yields the Pāzand term Athornan, which is used interchangeably to refer to 'a man of the priestly class' or to 'the priestly class' itself. This usage of Athornan has continued in the Parsi Gujarati tradition.

The phrase 'becoming an Athravan' in the thesis title refers to the process of creating a priest whereby the young male of a priestly family undergoes the requisite training and the initiation ceremony to be invested with the authority to function as a priest. The core of the present study is focused on this process.

The 'training' refers to the requirements to be fulfilled to be eligible for initiation as a priest, which is a combination of memorisation of texts, learning the ritual actions and imbibing religious education. This training is imparted either at home or at a fire-temple or at a priestly training school. The

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[1] Hintze (2009b, p. 177), Skjærvø (2015, p. 419).

candidates undergoing training to become 'Zoroastrian priests' are boys belonging to priestly families typically between the ages of six to sixteen years.

The study is focused on the priestly training within the Indian Zoroastrian community, particularly, in the traditional Parsi strongholds of Mumbai and certain towns in South Gujarat. The earliest documented priestly schools date from the early-nineteenth century, hence the study is focused on the last two-hundred-years period, i.e., from the beginning of the nineteenth century up to the present time.

1.2   Rationale for the Study

The aim of this study is to document the evolution of Zoroastrian priestly training in India from the nineteenth century onward and conduct an in-depth investigation into the training of the priestly candidates at the only two surviving priestly schools (Athornan Institutes), both located in Mumbai.

The written sources on both pre-modern and modern Zoroastrian priestly training are conspicuous by their absence. The topic is usually given a passing reference and only in a few cases, devoted one or two pages of discussion. This is in contrast to the closely related, albeit much more expansive and better preserved, training of priests in the Vedic tradition in India. Recent monographs on the training of Vedic priests include the works by Scharfe (2002), Knipe (2015) and Larios (2017). It is the aim of the present study to be the first of its kind dedicated to the training of priests in the Zoroastrian tradition.

A comprehensive study of the training of Zoroastrian priests has never been undertaken and consequently, apart from anecdotal accounts, very little is known about how trainee priests learn the rituals and memorise their text in a millennia-old tradition. The study will entail gathering first-hand information from the people at the core of the system viz. the principal and instructors at the priestly schools, the practising priests, both those who have been trained at a priestly school and those who have been trained at home, as well as the newly graduated and current students at the priestly school. This will give an all-round perspective of all the important stakeholders, and add an important dimension to our overall understanding of how the Zoroastrian tradition was handed down from generation to generation.

1.3   Scope of the research

At the start of the research, the scope of work was defined as the 'study of the training of priests in the Zoroastrian tradition'. It was envisioned in the initial year that the study would encompass the priestly training as it was imparted in the traditional Zoroastrian communities of both India and Iran. However, after the initial year of study and undertaking a short fieldtrip to Iran during October 2017, it was felt that including the study of the training in Iran within the scope of work would be infeasible.

This was mainly on account of two factors. The first was the astonishing transformation of the ritual sphere in Iran, and along with it the priesthood, during the course of the twentieth century. There was limited trace found of the priestly practices which had been prevalent up to the 1940s, and newer

forms of devotional practice had evolved.[2] The responsibilities of the priests and the expectations of the community had undergone a change, which consequently was reflected in the way new priests were trained. A systematic study of this process was thought to be a full project in its own right.

The second factor was on account of language; a thorough investigation of the historical sources and effective collection of data from key informants would require a level of proficiency in both written and conversational Persian. This was thought to be difficult to achieve within the time constrains of the study, and hence a decision was made to limit the scope of the work to the priestly training imparted within India.

For the study of the Indian tradition, the geography was delimited to the areas with a strong sustained presence of the Zoroastrian population, i.e., Mumbai and selected towns in South Gujarat. Hence this study excludes the other settlements of the Zoroastrian communities within India and the Indian sub-continent, as well as the new diaspora communities, mainly in the western world.

1.4   Aim and objectives of the study

In order to study the training imparted to priestly candidates, it is first necessary to understand the role and responsibilities of a priest within the Zoroastrian community. The primary role of a priest is to perform the various rituals and ceremonies commissioned by the community members. While the newly ordained priest needs to have basic knowledge about the religion and its ceremonies, he is not expected to provide religious guidance to the community. This latter task is the prerogative of the learned high priest (Dastur) who, after the initial ritual training, has studied the religion in detail. Thus, the first objective is to survey the ritual landscape and its evolution during the period under study.

The priestly training is imparted either at the home of a priest or at a training school. The priestly training schools vary in size and structure from a small semi-formal school run by a single priest to a full-fledged formal training institute. For this study, a listing of all the known priestly training schools that have been in existence during the selected period is attempted. The intention is not to prepare an exhaustive list of all schools, but to capture the diversity in size and geography of these schools.

After mapping the different categories of training schools, the training methodology at these schools can be analysed. The objective is to record the curriculum and teaching methods employed at the different schools. The focus will be on ritual training and the memorisation process of the texts recited within the ritual.

Thus, in summary, the following aspects of the priestly training are intended to be studied:

- Zoroastrian rituals and ceremonies which constitute the duties of a priest;
- Priestly training schools in existence and their organisation;
- Pedagogical methods employed in imparting the training.

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[2] The findings of the fieldtrip and the initial period of study were published in Daruwalla (2017).

1.5 Studies of the training of Zoroastrian priests

The review of the scholarly literature presented here is organised based on the three objectives discussed in the preceding section.

Zoroastrian priestly rituals and ceremonies

The most comprehensive survey of Zoroastrian priestly rituals in India is presented by J. J. Modi (1937). It provides a detailed description of the prevailing state of religious ceremonies during the early decades of the twentieth century. Modi systematically classifies the ceremonies into five categories viz. (1) Socio-religious, (2) Purification, (3) Initiation, (4) Consecration, and (5) Liturgical ceremonies. In the ensuing years however, since this work was published, the ritual landscape has undergone significant changes, wherein certain complex ceremonies like the consecration of the Ātaš Bahrām (temple fire of the highest grade) have fallen in disuse, and some newer forms of worship have evolved.[3] The only updated study of these changes in the ceremonies is given by M. Stausberg (2004a) who presents a thorough compilation of the scholarly sources, supplemented by some anecdotal accounts. However, a comprehensive survey of the ceremonies presently performed by priests in India based on a detailed field study is desirable.[4]

There are, however, several individual detailed studies on a particular ceremony or group of ceremonies. Kotwal & Boyd (1991) and Karanjia (2010) present an in-depth account of two important solemn ceremonies, the Yasna (along with the Paragṇā) and the Bāj-Dharnā. Choksy & Kotwal (2005) deal with the recitation texts viz. the Niyāyišns ('invocations of praise') and the Yašts ('devotional poems') and their performative aspects. Lüddeckens & Karanjia (2011) cover the death ceremonies in significant detail. Their work also includes the various commemorative ceremonies performed subsequently in memory of the soul of the deceased person. These studies provide a good context and provide a basis for seeking information from priests regarding their performance.

For theoretical and comparative approaches to the topic, Stausberg (2004b) is the only compilation of its kind to cover various aspects of Zoroastrian rituals. It brings together different contextual approaches within which the rituals and ceremonies can be studied, and in the words of its editor 'may claim to be the first collective attempt devoted to the topic of Zoroastrian rituals'.[5]

Using the above studies as groundwork, the aim of the present study is to fill in the gap of practical knowledge by providing a composite survey of the priestly rituals performed presently in India.

Priestly schools and training methodology

While there has been a reasonable amount of scholarly attention given to Zoroastrian priestly rituals and traditions, the literature pertaining to the training of priests is fairly scarce.

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[3] Stausberg (2004c) is a detailed study on the evolution of the congregational *hambandagi* ('prayer together') at the Banaji Ātaš Bahrām in Mumbai during the 1990s.

[4] Er. Rooyintan Peer, the former Principal of MFCAI, has written a recent entry in the Encyclopaedia of Indian Religions book series (Peer, 2018), which reproduces an excerpt of all the rituals covered in Modi (1937), however it does not provide an updated view of the current ritual landscape.

[5] Stausberg (2004b, p. 1).

The sources for the priestly training fall under the following two categories:

- Historical sources: mainly biographical accounts of priests, but also directory listings of important events of the Parsi community; and
- Institutional sources: publications pertaining to the two resident priestly training institutions in Mumbai.

The historical sources providing some information about the priestly training during the 19th and early 20th centuries are mostly in Gujarati language and generally provide only a brief reference to the topic. Patell (1888) is a comprehensive chronological listing of events pertaining to the Parsi community. It provides entries for the Zoroastrian Madressas or priestly training schools which were setup in Mumbai and in Gujarat during the 18th and 19th centuries. Further, Vacha (1874) lists more details about the priestly schools in Mumbai in the 19th century. Modi (1912), one of the early sources in English language, gives an account on the priestly training practice prevailing in the towns of Gujarat during the nineteenth century. Mirza (1957) gives important insights into the traditional mode of memorizing the texts as part of the priestly training. Choksy & Dubeansky (2013) in their tribute volume to Dastur Firoze Kotwal provide a rare glimpse into the training at the home of a priest in Navsari at the beginning of the 20th century. More recently, the biographical note on Dastur Firoze Kotwal in Mistree & Bengalli (2018) provides anecdotal references into priestly training during the course of the 20th century. On the basis of these sources, the present study will aim to prepare a systematic description of the priestly training methods employed during the period under study.

The institutional sources pertain to the two resident training schools, the Dadar Athornan Institute (DAI – established in 1919) and the M. F. Cama Athornan Institute (MFCAI – 1923), which for the past one hundred, have been the principal centres for obtaining priestly training. The golden jubilee volume of the DAI (Dadar Athornan Institute, 1970) gives a detailed history of the formation of the institute and its functioning. Similarly, for the MFCAI, the in-house periodical *Athornan* and newspaper articles from its golden jubilee in 1973 provide glimpses of the priestly training during the early decades of the institute. The recent twin publications Karanjia (2019a) and Karanjia (2019b) are valuable sources of information on the priestly training at DAI over the course of the past century.

For a comparative study on the institutions imparting priestly training in the closely related Vedic tradition, Larios (2017) is a very good ethnographic study of the Vedic schools of Maharashtra. The approach of the author to map the schools and study the pedagogical methods will serve as a good reference point for the present study. A systematic study of the Athornan Institutes has not been undertaken thus far, and filling this gap is one of the primary aims of the present study.

1.6   Progression of Research study and Fieldwork

The groundwork for the research was laid during the initial year of the PhD (2016–17). The dissertation completed for the present author's MA degree in the summer of 2016 on 'Studies in the Zoroastrian Priestly Tradition' was used as the foundation to plan the course of the research. The year was utilised to prepare the theoretical framework for the study and to chalk up the fieldwork plan.

The second year (2017–18) was dedicated to fieldwork in India. While being based in Mumbai for the entire year, research trips were undertaken to other towns in the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat.

These included roughly a two-week stay each in Udvada, Navsari and Surat, and additional shorter trips as required. Further, a few days each were also spent at Dahanu, Bordi-Gholvad, Valsad, Bilimora and Bharuch to collect field data. A three-week fieldtrip was undertaken in Iran in October 2017 to the cities of Tehran, Kerman and Yazd. In Mumbai, roughly two weeks were utilised at the M.F. Cama Athornan Institute (MFCAI) in Andheri to gather information about its history and operations. However, a major part of the fieldwork year was devoted to the study of the functioning of the Dadar Athornan Institute (DAI). This included a month of initial observations during August-September 2017 to gain familiarity with the institution and its staff and students. The key stakeholders at DAI (Principal and prayer teachers) were interviewed to formulate the plan for documenting the training. The bulk of the observations and interviews were conducted during the November 2017 to February 2018 period. The initial two months coincided with the recording of the Yasna ritual at the DAI for the Multimedia Yasna (MUYA) project, and the subsequent interviewing of the staff and students for creating a documentary about the DAI. The filming of the interviews and hours of footage of other routine activities were recorded by the duo of Remi and Anna Sowa of Chouette Films, and this audio-visual material was immensely helpful in this research study. The remaining part of the fieldwork year was utilised for interviewing priests belonging to different priestly groups and having diverse training backgrounds. A select number of priests who had trained outside of the two Athornan Institutes were interviewed in order to prepare a study on the priestly training at home or under a local priest, and contrast it with the institutional training.

The third year (2018–19) in London was employed for collating the fieldwork data and coding all the interviews. A significant amount of time was dedicated to the conversion of the data from the DAI student lesson books into a database, which enabled an in-depth analysis leading to interesting insights into priestly training at the DAI. The fourth year (2019–20) was utilised for the writing of the thesis. Due to the COVID-19 imposed lockdown, most of the year was spent at home in Mumbai. While the lockdown did not permit any face-to-face meetings, many observations and findings were refined by talking to research participants more informally on the phone or by email. An extension of the submission date allowed some additional observations to be made, the most important of which was the conducting of the DAI training class over an online medium. Some of these interesting developments are summarised in the penultimate chapter of the thesis.

1.7   Naming and Spelling Conventions

For place names, Mumbai has been preferred throughout the thesis in favour of Bombay for two reasons: first, it is the current name of the city, and second, more importantly, it is the term found in most of the Gujarati sources used for the early history. However, Bombay has been retained when it appears as part of an association such as the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP), Bombay Parsee Association (BPA) and similar terms. For other places, Udvada has been chosen over Udwada, as it is more commonly used and also because the name of railway station is spelt Udvada.

The Dadar Athornan Institute (DAI) was known as the Athornan Boarding Madressa from the time of its inception (1919) up to the year 2009 when it was changed to the former. Here the term Dadar Athornan Institute has been used throughout, except while referring to records from the time of its establishment. This term (DAI) was preferred as it could be clubbed together with the M. F. Cama

Athornan Institute (MFCAI) and both institutes could jointly be referred to as the Athornan Institutes. Also, the term is uniformly spelt as Athornan and not as per its pronunciation as Athornān since it is mostly used as part of the name of the institutes.

For priestly titles, only Ervad and Dastur have been used throughout, unless a different title such as Mobed was used explicitly in the written sources. The title of Dastur has been used for the elected high priests of the community who are conferred this title. The title of a Dastur is also applied for the era during which the person may not have been a high priest. As a rule, all other priests, i.e., anyone having undergone the priestly initiation of Nāvar and who is not a Dastur, were addressed with the title of Ervad, abbreviated to Er. This title encompasses the entire range from a fully trained ritual performing priest to one who has just undergone the priestly initiation with basic training and is not a practising priest.

1.8   Thesis Outline and Chapterisation

The thesis is divided into four main parts: orientation, historical perspective, contemporary priestly training, and emerging trends, followed by an epilogue which presents a comparative perspective with the Vedic tradition.

Part I – Orientation

The present chapter, the Introduction has set the context of the thesis by giving a background of the priestly training in India and the rationale for this study. The scope and delimitations define the boundaries of the study. The aims and objectives of the study are followed by the literature review. An overview of the progression of the research is given with details of the fieldwork conducted. Finally, a note on the naming convention followed in the thesis is included.

The next chapter is on the Design of the Study (chapter 2), which gives a detailed description of the research methodology. From the initial groundwork, this emerged as a two-part study: the first part on the training of priests requiring historical and descriptive research methods, and the second part as a case study of the two main priestly training schools, the Athornan Institutes. Both parts required a different set of research participants, and distinct research tools and techniques. The list of interviews conducted is summarised in this chapter, and reference is made to this list from the other chapters whenever an interview is quoted.

Part II – Historical Perspective

This part consists of two chapters that delve into the historical aspects of priestly training. The first chapter in the section (chapter 3) starts by reviewing the early sources which throw some light on the training of priests at the beginning of the nineteenth century and traces its development into the twentieth century. This is followed by a discussion on the reasons for the marginalisation of the priesthood at the beginning of the twentieth century, which gave the impetus to the formation of the two Athornan Institutes. After a section on the early history of these institutes, the concluding section of the chapter presents four case studies of pre-modern priestly training.

The second chapter of this part (chapter 4) maps the priestly ritual landscape and its evolution in the twentieth century, with detailed case studies of the traditional centres of the Zoroastrian priesthood.

The next section identifies some of the important structural changes in the priesthood during this time. The impact of these changes on the training of priests, especially at the Athornan Institutes, is analysed in the final section of the chapter.

Part III – Contemporary Training

This part is comprised of four chapters which delve into the details of priestly training imparted to candidates for initiation and forms the core of the thesis. The opening chapter in this part (chapter 5) details the functional aspects of the Athornan Institutes, which includes details of the organisational structure, curriculum, academic year and daily timetable.

The next chapter is dedicated to the training process at the institutes (chapter 6), especially the factors that impact the memorisation of the texts. These factors are divided into four categories based on their association to the learning process, as pre-learning, actual learning, associated and post-learning factors.

The third chapter in this part (chapter 7) is based on the quantitative study of the data obtained from the bhantar (recitation) lesson books of selected DAI students who have completed their curriculum. It presents an in-depth analysis of the data, which provides insights into a student's progress through the curriculum.

The final chapter of contemporary training (chapter 8) deals with the training imparted outside the Athornan Institutes, mainly at the home of the priestly teacher or the student, or at the fire-temple. Using the case study method, the different grades of priestly training are highlighted, and the methods employed are contrasted with those at the Athornan Institutes.

Part IV – Emerging themes and Conclusion

The final part of the thesis is comprised of two chapters. The first (chapter 9) looks at a few key developments that have taken place in the twenty-first century, and their impact on the present priestly training methods and implication for the future.

The final chapter brings together the main findings from the thesis in a conclusion. Some of the new areas in which this thesis makes a contribution, but are otherwise relatively unexplored, are highlighted for future research.

Part V – Epilogue

This is a single chapter at the end which presents the reflections of the Zoroastrain priestly training on the closely related Vedic tradition of India.

A Glossary of the technical terms along with a brief explanation is included after the Appendices and just before the Bibliography.

2 Design of the Study

During the planning phase of the project, it emerged that the study comprised two parts, each of which required a different approach and methodology. The first part was the documentation of the training of the priests, which required a combination of historical and descriptive research methods; and the second part was more specifically the functioning of the Athornan Institutes, which was a case study of an institution. Though both parts were not mutually exclusive, the choice of methodology, subjects and tools for the study for each were distinct. The design of both parts of the project is described sequentially in this chapter.

2.1 Part 1: Training of the priests

Before delving into the details of the methodology followed for studying the training of priests, it is necessary to define some important parameters related to the training. While most of these factors will be described in greater detail in their respective chapters, it is useful to briefly explain them here.

- Ritual classification: The Parsi priests bifurcate the rituals into two categories, viz. the *pāv-mahal* ('purified place') ceremonies performed within a consecrated ritual area, and the *hošmordi* ('standard', 'calculated') ceremonies, which can be performed within any demarcated clean area. Following J. J. Modi (1937, p. 207), these ceremonies are commonly referred to as inner and outer ceremonies, respectively.

- Priestly qualification: This refers to the level of training a priestly candidate has reached by the time of his initiation into priesthood. A fully trained priest is one who has completely memorised the main ritual texts and has learnt the ritual performance. Conversely, a partially trained priest is one who has undergone the initiation without completely memorising the ritual texts and learning the ritual actions.

- Ritual practice: For the purpose of this study, the priests are split into two categories based on whether they perform the solemn inner rituals (i.e., *pav-mahal* ceremonies) or only the basic outer, *hošmordi* rituals.

2.1.1 Methodology

On the basis of the two criteria of priestly qualification and ritual practice, the practising priests can be grouped into a 2 x 2 matrix:

	Fully-trained	Partially-trained
Performing inner rituals	A. Fully-trained priest performing advanced inner rituals	-NA-
Performing only outer rituals	B. Fully-trained priest but not performing inner rituals	C. Priest with basic training performing outer rituals

Table 1: Matrix of priestly qualification and ritual practice

The top right quadrant is blank, because a partially-trained priest who has not memorised the complete curriculum does not have the capability to perform the complex inner rituals. The other three categories are discussed below:

A. Fully-trained priest performing advanced inner rituals:
    This is the smallest subset among the three categories, with around fifty active[6] priests in India in 2020. A majority are full-time priests who have trained at one of the two Athornan Institutes and are affiliated to a fire-temple in either Mumbai or in Gujarat. This category was given priority for the study as these priests had completed the entire training curriculum and were among the few who could perform the entire gamut of rituals from the simple to the very complex intercalation ceremonies. Further this group was deemed a priority as its size is shrinking rapidly with time. Out of the total number of priests in this category, only seven were below the age of thirty years, and another thirteen between the ages of thirty and forty years.

B. Fully-trained priest but not performing inner rituals:
    The priests belonging to this group are mostly former students of the two Athornan Institutes, who are either full-time priests or pursuing a secular profession while practising priesthood on a part-time basis. Though they have obtained comprehensive priestly training and memorised the complete ritual texts, they are not engaged in the performance of the long liturgical ceremonies. This group is significantly larger than Group A and by a rough estimate consists of around three hundred priests.[7]

C. Partially-trained priests performing only outer ceremonies:
    This is the largest category which includes all priests who have undergone the priestly initiation without completing the curriculum and ritual training. A majority of the priests who serve at the fire-temples on a full-time or part-time basis belong to this category. They are typically engaged with the tending of the consecrated fire and the performance of the daily outer ritual ceremonies commissioned by the community members.

For the purpose of the present study, the highest weightage in selecting participants for interviews was given to group A followed by group B and finally group C. The selection was based on multiple criteria which are discussed in the next section on Sampling.

2.1.2   Sampling

The priestly population examined in this study on their priestly training comprises all the ordained priests, i.e., anyone who has undergone the Nāvar initiation in India. As seen in the preceding section, this group encompasses priests with different levels of training and different engagement with ritual performance. In order to select a representative sample, the technique used for the selection of

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[6] A priest in this category is considered to be 'active' if he has performed the Yasna or its longer variant ceremonies regularly in the last five years (2015–20). See the table in Appendix 1.

[7] During the fifty-year period from 1960 to 2010, there have been approximately four hundred students passing out from the two Athornan Institutes. Excluding the students who belong to group A (i.e., performing inner rituals), and adjusting for students who either do not practice the priesthood or have left the Institutes without completing the curriculum, we can estimate the number to be between two and three hundred. The number of students who are fully trained outside of the Athornan Institutes is considered to be negligible.

interview participants was purposive sampling. This entails that the candidates were not randomly chosen from the overall population, but instead were selected on purpose on the basis of multiple criteria. As will be shown below in detail, the criteria were geographical spread, training diversity, historical division into priestly groups, and fire-temple affiliation.

Table 2 below shows the list of forty priests who were interviewed on their priestly training. Some of the initial interviews were conducted with priests known to the author, and they in turn were instrumental in providing the leads for further interviews.[8] This process of selection was also facilitated by the availability of the register listing all the students enrolled at both the Athornan Institutes.[9]

The list of interviewees includes three high priests viz. Dastur Firoze Kotwal of the H. B. Wadia Ātaš Bahrām in Mumbai, Dastur Kaikhushroo JamaspAsa[10] of the Anjuman Ātaš Bahrām in Mumbai, and Dastur Kaikhushru (Keki) Ravji, who was appointed as the Dastur Meherjirānā in June 2019[11].

On the basis of the matrix of priestly qualification and ritual practice, twenty-five priests belonged to group A, i.e., they were fully-trained and were actively engaged in performing inner rituals, ten priests (#2, 10, 14, 16, 19, 22, 25, 32, 35 and 40) fell under group B being fully-trained but not performing inner rituals, and the remaining five (#5, 18, 29, 31 and 33) were part of group C.

On the basis of the historical division of the priesthood into Panthaks[12], twenty-two priests (55%) belonged to the Bhagariā Panthak, ten priests (25%) to the Sanjānā Panthak, and three to the Godāvarā Panthak. This is representative of the overall priestly class where the Bhagariās make up the majority, followed by the Sanjānās. The Godāvarās are a minority, and the remaining two Panthaks (Bharuchās and Khambātās) cease to exist and have been assimilated mostly within the Bhagariās. These thirty-five priests are classified as Shenshahis, and the remaining five priests identify as Kadimis, which is also roughly in proportion to the split in the overall population along the calendar division.

In terms of the geographical spread, out of the forty, twenty-eight (70%) identified Mumbai as their primary base for ritual practice. Five priests performed rituals in Udvada and three in Surat. While there was only one active priest (#21) from Navsari, two of the head priests (#1, 3) now based in Mumbai, had mainly practised in Navsari in the past. There was one priest each from Valsad and Bharuch, and finally one based in Ontario, Canada, who trains priestly candidates for initiation in India.

A majority of the interviewed priests were presently affiliated with an Ātaš Bahrām or had been in the past. All the eight Ātaš Bahrāms in India were represented in the list; among the four Bhagariās Ātaš Bahrāms, Wadiaji by five priests (#1, 4, 14, 22, 30), Anjuman – two (#2, 23), Bhagarsath Anjuman,

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[8] In particular, the references from Er. Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia, Er. Dr. Parvez Bajan, Dastur Keki Ravji, Er. Dr. Rooyintan Peer, Er. Adil Bhesania and Prof. Almut Hintze were very useful.

[9] The list of students at the DAI from its inception in 1919 up to the year 2012 is available on the website of the Institute (http://www.dadarathorananinstitute.org/dai_alumni_complete_list_jul_12.xls). The student roster for MFCAI from its inception in 1923 up to the year 1999 was kindly shared by the ex-student of the Institute, Er. Dr. Soli Dastur.

[10] Dastur Kaikhushroo Minocher JamaspAsa passed away in May 2019, and was succeeded by his son, Dastur Jamasp Kaikhushroo JamaspAsa.

[11] The interviews with Dastur Keki Ravji were conducted prior to his appointment as Dastur Meherjirānā.

[12] Ecclesiastical grouping of priests based on geographical divisions; see section 3.2.3.

Navsari – two (#3, 21) and D. N. Mody, Surat – three (#9, 13, 36); the Sanjānā Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām, Udvada – four (#12, 15, 28, 39); and the three Kadimi Ātaš Bahrāms, Banaji – three (#7,19, 20), Dadiseth – two (#25, 34) and Vakil Ātaš Bahrām in Surat by one (#20).

In terms of the place of priestly training, eighteen priests (45%) had received their main training at the DAI and eight priests (20%) had mainly trained at the MFCAI. There were five priests who had partially trained at one of the Athornan Institutes and then outside (#12, 14, 16, 22, 28). The remaining nine priests (23%) had trained outside of the Athornan Institutes; the training was imparted either at the home of the candidate (#36, #39) or the instructing priest (#2, #31), or at a fire-temple (#5, 33), or at a semi-formal priestly training school (#15).

There were a few other interviews conducted which pertained to the priestly training and initiation outside India and hence have not been included in the primary list. The primary informants for the training and practice in Iran were Mobed Mehraban Firouzgary and Mobed Ramin Shahzadi, and Er. Soli Dastur for the diaspora communities in North America.

#[a]	Interview Participant	Title / Role	Location[b]	Priestly Faction	Training location[c]	Recorded [d]
1	Dastur Firoze Kotwal	Dasturji, Wadiaji Ātaš Bahrām	Mumbai	Bhagariā	MFCAI	Video
2	Dastur Kaikhushroo JamaspAsa	Dasturji, Anjuman Ātaš Bahrām	Mumbai	Bhagariā	Home	Video
3	Dastur Keki Ravji	Dastur Meherjirānā, Navsari; Panthaki, Cama baug Agiary	Mumbai	Bhagariā	DAI	Video
4	Er. Adil Bhesania	Bōywālā, Wadiaji Ātaš Bahrām	Mumbai	Godāvarā	DAI	Video
5	Er. Arish Pundole	Bōywālā, Cama baug Agiary	Mumbai	Sanjānā	Home	No
6	Er. Asphandiar Dadachanji	Panthaki, Vatcha Gandhi Agiary	Mumbai	Bhagariā	DAI	Video
7	Er. Bahadur Nalladaru	Bōywālā, Banaji Ātaš Bahrām	Mumbai	Kadimi	MFCAI	No
8	Er. Bomanshaw Sanjana	Ex-Mobed, Valsad Daremeher	Valsad	Sanjānā	MFCAI	Email
9	Er. Burjor Aibada	Mobed, D. N. Mody Ātaš Bahrām	Surat	Bhagariā	DAI	Video
10	Er. Burjor Antia	Trustee, Wadiaji Ātaš Bahrām	Mumbai	Bhagariā	MFCAI	Video
11	Er. Cyrus Darbari	Bōywālā, Thoothi Agiary	Mumbai	Bhagariā	DAI	Audio
12	Er. Dara Bharda	Bōywālā, Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām	Udvada	Sanjānā	DAI[e]	No
13	Er. Faredoon Turel	Ex-Bōywālā, D. N. Mody Ātaš Bahrām	Surat	Bhagariā	DAI	Video
14	Er. Farzad Ravji	Bōywālā, Wadiaji Ātaš Bahrām	Mumbai	Bhagariā	MFCAI[e]	Audio
15	Er. Framroze Bhadha	Ex-Bōywālā, Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām	Udvada	Sanjānā	Home	No
16	Er. Hormuz Dadachanji	Panthaki, Mithaiwala Agiary	Mumbai	Bhagariā	DAI[e]	No
17	Er. Hoshedar Panthaki	Panthaki, Banaji Limji Agiary	Mumbai	Sanjānā	DAI	No
18	Er. Jal Panthaky	The North American Mobeds Council	Ontario	Sanjānā	Home	Email

#[a]	Interview Participant	Title / Role	Location[b]	Priestly Faction	Training location[c]	Recorded [d]
19	Er. Jamshed Behramkamdin	Bōywālā, Banaji Ātaš Bahrām	Mumbai	Kadimi	DAI	Video
20	Er. Jehanbaksh Chitthiwalla	Bōywālā, Banaji Ātaš Bahrām; Ex-Bōywālā, Vakil Ātaš Bahrām, Surat	Mumbai	Kadimi	MFCAI	Audio
21	Er. Kaizad J. Kotwal	Bōywālā, Bhagasath Ātaš Bahrām	Navsari	Bhagariā	MFCAI	Video
22	Er. Kaizad Karkaria	Bōywālā, Wadiaji Ātaš Bahrām	Mumbai	Bhagariā	DAI	Video
23	Er. Kaizad M. Kotwal	Bōywālā, Anjuman Athashbehram	Mumbai	Bhagariā	DAI	Video
24	Er. Keki Panthaki	Ex-Mobed, M. J. Wadia Agiary	Mumbai	Sanjānā	DAI	Video
25	Er. Khurshed Behramkamdin	Bōywālā, Dadiseth Ātaš Bahrām	Mumbai	Kadimi	DAI	Video
26	Er. Khushravi Palia	Panthaki, Sethna Agiary	Mumbai	Bhagariā	DAI	No
27	Er. Khushru Kanga	Mobed, Banaji Limji Agiary	Mumbai	Bhagariā	DAI	No
28	Er. Kobad Bharda	Bōywālā, Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām	Udvada	Sanjānā	DAI[e]	No
29	Er. Marazban Gonda	Bōywālā, Bharuchā Agiary	Bharuch	Bhagariā	Home	Video
30	Er. Nozer Mehenty	Ex-Bōywālā, Wadiaji Ātaš Bahrām	Mumbai	Bhagariā	MFCAI	Audio
31	Er. Pakzad Katpitia	Ex-Panthaki, Mithaiwala Agiary	Mumbai	Godāvarā	Home	Video
32	Er. Parvez Bajan	Panthaki, Mevawala Agiary	Mumbai	Bhagariā	DAI	Video
33	Er. Pervez Dordi	Ex-Panthaki, Sethna Agiary	Mumbai	Bhagariā	Home	No
34	Er. Pervez Nalladaru	Ex-Bōywālā, Dadiseth Ātaš Bahrām	Mumbai	Kadimi	DAI	No
35	Er. Ramiyar Karanjia	Principal, Dadar Athornan Institute	Mumbai	Godāvarā	DAI	Audio
36	Er. Rooyintan Mehenty	Mobed, D. N. Mody Ātaš Bahrām	Surat	Bhagariā	Home	Telephonic
37	Er. Rooyintan Peer	Ex-Bōywālā, Dadiseth Agiary	Mumbai	Bhagariā	MFCAI	Audio
38	Er. Sheherazad Pavri	Mobed, Banaji Limji Agiary	Mumbai	Bhagariā	DAI	No
39	Er. Tehmton Sidhva	Bōywālā, Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām	Udvada	Sanjānā	Home	Video
40	Er. Yazad Bhadha	Priest, Zoroastrian Centre, London	Udvada	Sanjānā	DAI	Video

Table 2: List of participants interviewed for priestly training

Notes on Table 2:

a. The serial number refers to the interview participant and not to the interview itself. Multiple interviews were conducted for a few participants, which in some cases were taken more than a year apart. The table in sorted in alphabetical order of the title and then the name of the participant, and does not reflect the order in which the interviews were conducted.

b. Location refers to the primary place of reference for the context of the interview; it does not refer to either the location where the interviewee is based, nor the place of the interview. For example, #8 is based in Houston, USA but served at the Valsad Daremeher in the 1960s and 70s.

c. The training location entry 'home' is a generic term for the priestly training imparted outside of the two Athornan Institutes.

d. Video was the preferred mode of recording the interview wherever it was possible and allowed by the participant. For interviews within a fire-temple (#14, #20, #37), an audio recording was made as filming was not possible, as also in cases of an impromptu interview when filming equipment was unavailable (#11, #30). For long distance communication when in-person interviewing was not possible, it was done over a telephone call (#36[13]) or via email (#8[14], #18[15]). In cases where any recording was not possible, detailed notes were taken during the interview. These were mainly interviews conducted within the fire-temple premises where any recording devices were prohibited (#5, #7, #17, #26, #33, #34). In two instances, two separate sets of priests were undergoing the 9-day Barašnum before a Nīrangdīn ceremony, at the time of the interviews (#12 and #28 in Udvada, #27 and #38 in Mumbai).

e. In a few cases, the training was partly imparted at one of the Athornan Institutes and then completed outside. #14 was enrolled at the MFCAI for two years and then continued the training with his father at Cama baug Agiary. #16 left the DAI after two years of study. #12 and #28 were enrolled for a few years at the DAI before quitting and training under Er. Faredoon Turel at Surat.

2.1.3 Data collection tool – Personal Interviews

The information regarding priestly training to be collected from the selected sample was envisaged to be qualitative and anecdotal in nature. The questions also needed to be tailored to the background and situation of each participant, and hence a survey with a fixed set of questions was not viable. A semi-structured personal interview was identified as the most appropriate tool to collect the data from the participants.

An interview questionnaire template was designed which consisted of three parts. The first part of the questionnaire was fixed and was intended to capture the background information of the participants. These included questions on the place and year of birth, family's priestly background and Panth, whether the father practised priesthood and if any priestly training was imparted at home, and place and year of the Nāvar and Marātab initiations.

The second section was semi-variable depending on the place of priestly training. If the training was received at the Athornan Institutes, then information about the teachers, the peer group and the annual progress through the curriculum was sought. If the training was obtained outside, specific information on the location, teacher, duration of training and typical schedule of study was captured. This was followed by a set of questions pertaining to the process of memorising the texts and learning the ritual performance. Finally, if the participant was or had been a practising priest, details of the location and ceremonies performed was requested.

The last section of the questionnaire was variable where questions were discretionary and usually based on the background and present situation of the participant. These included questions on various aspects such as the balance between priestly duties and secular career, responsibilities as a priest, remuneration of priests, future outlook on the priesthood. The completed questionnaire from one of

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[13] Er. Rooyintan Mehenty is based in Deolali, a town with a small Parsi population in Maharashtra, about 170 kms from Mumbai. See case study under section 8.2.1.
[14] Er. Bomanshaw Sanjana now lives in Houston, USA.
[15] Er. Jal Panthaky resides in Mississauga, Canada. See case study under section 8.2.2.

the interviews (#38 in Table 2) which was conducted in May 2018 is included as a sample in Appendix 2.

Depending on the time available for an interview session and the amount of details furnished by the participant, more than one session was required for many interviewees.[16] In some cases, an updated list of questions was prepared on the basis of an earlier interview, and then a second interview was scheduled. When some clarification or limited information was required, some of the participants were very accommodative and answered queries over a telephone call or by phone messaging.[17]

2.1.4   Document sources – Record of ceremonies

In addition to the personal interviews, other sources of information on the state of priestly rituals were explored. An important resource was documents which recorded the ceremonies being performed. These documents are either registers maintained at the fire-temple in which an entry is made for every commissioned ceremony, or personal diaries where the priest maintains a record of his work. In many cases, detailed entries are available only for the important ceremonies such as the Nāvar, Marātab and Nīrangdīn, however in a few instances records of the individual Yasna and Vidēvdād ceremonies are also found. An example of the latter are the archival records maintained at the Udvada Athornan Anjuman office in Udvada, where all the inner ceremonies that were performed at the Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām were recorded. Other notable documents include the file maintained by the M. N. Sett Charities office in Mumbai for the ceremonies performed by the Bhagariā priests, and the ritual registers maintained at the D. N. Mody Ātaš Bahrām in Surat, and the Banaji Limji Agiary in Mumbai.
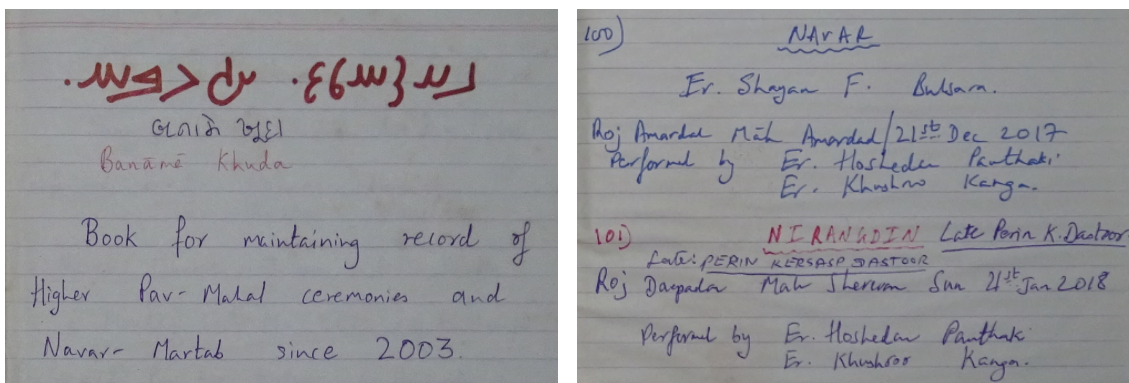
Figure 1: Er. Hoshedar Panthaki's register of ceremonies performed at Banaji Limji Agiary

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[16] Multiple interview sessions were conducted for participants #1, 3, 4, 32, 35 and 39.
[17] Participants #4, 16, 17, 22, 30, 36, 37, 39 and 40.

Figure 2: Listing of the ceremonies in the D. N. Mody Ātaš Bahrām register for 1989–1990

As seen in Figure 2, each line entry provided information on the type of ceremony, names of performing priests, name of patron, day and month of ceremony and some additional details. The current register had records for the ceremonies performed from the year 1986 onwards. Using such data, it is possible to infer how the ritual landscape has evolved over time.

Another source is the personal notes made by the priests in their own diaries or notebooks. While some priests make only a brief note, a few like Er. Burjor Aibada of Surat have maintained a very detailed record of the ceremonies performed by him.

Nīrangdīn No. 5 entry	
Nīrangdīn Patron:	Parvez Rabadi
In memory of:	Osti Daulatbanu Osta Parvez
Day of starting Nahn:	Roj Ašišvangh, Mah Tir – Thursday 15/12/1994 (1364 AY)
Last day of Nīrangdīn:	Roj Khoršed, Mah Amardād – Saturday 31/12/1994 (1364 AY)
Performing priests:	Er. Burjor F Aibada (jotī)
	Er. Faredoon J Turel (rāthvī)
Nahn giver Mobeds:	Er. Noshir P Turel
	Er. Aspi N Surti
Location unless stated:	D N Modi Ātaš Bahrām, Surat

Figure 3: Entry from the personal diary of Er. Burjor Aibada of Surat

Among the interviewed priests who had performed many long ceremonies like the Nīrangdīn, access to their diary listing was shared with the author by Er. Adil Bhesania, Er. Asphandiar Dadachanji, Er. Burjor Aibada, Er. Bahadur Nalladaru, Er. Faredoon Turel, Er. Hoshedar Panthaki and Er. Pervez Nalladaru.

In this section, the methodology for data collection for priestly training has been documented. Since a majority of the selected interview participants were former students of one of the two Athornan Institutes, the training imparted there was covered in detail. However, in order to gain better understanding on the history and functioning of these institutes, an in-depth case study of the institutes was undertaken. In the next section, the approach to this study has been explained.

2.2   Part 2: Case Study of the Athornan Institutes

At the beginning of the study, it was established that the Dadar Athornan Institute (DAI) and the M. F. Cama Athornan Institute (MFCAI) were the only two resident training schools in existence for Zoroastrian priests, and a majority of the fully-trained priests had trained at one of these schools. Since these institutions were such a pivotal part of the priestly training, in-depth case studies covering their history and present operations were to be undertaken.

2.2.1   Methodology

In order to document the institutional priestly training, both the training schools (DAI and MFCAI) were first contacted in 2016 at the commencement of the research. Permission to conduct fieldwork was sought from the principals of both schools, Er. Ramiyar Karanjia of DAI and Er. Khushru Panthaki of MFCAI, and also the managing trustee of MFCAI, Mr. Camaji Cama. The initial meetings were important for identifying the philosophy of the school, and preparing the research plan. At the time, there was only one resident student at the MFCAI and hence for purpose of this study, the DAI was considered to be the only fully functional school.

The fieldwork year commencing in the summer of 2017 was the main period of study. The initial meetings with key informants were conducted in September 2017, and were followed by a week of observation in order to map the physical space as well as to gain familiarity with the weekly routine of the school. This initial period was also important to gain acceptance at the school which would facilitate the observation process.

Conducting observations on the routine functioning of the institute was the crux of the study and a significant part of the fieldwork year was dedicated to it. The baseline observations conducted during the mapping period was used to prepare a draft of the observation schedule. The observations were to be conducted on the classroom sessions as a non-participant. An extended period of observation of two to three months was planned in order to gain insightful data. The main findings of the study are based on observations conducted during the period from November 2017 to January 2018. Some further observations were conducted sporadically in the years 2019 and 2020 in order to corroborate the findings, and also to check on the progression of the students.

2.2.2 Sampling

At the DAI, in addition to the Principal, Er. Ramiyar Karanjia, who also doubles up as a bhantar (prayer recitation) teacher in the absence of the regular teachers, some other staff members were identified as key informants. These resources included the two regular bhantar teachers, the matron in charge of the students' welfare, and an external examiner who conducts the bhantar exams for the students. A senior member of the Athornan Mandal[18], the managing body of the DAI was also approached in order to understand the organisational structure. Further a few parents of the current students, some of whom were themselves former students of the DAI, were solicited for interviews. For information on the MFCAI, in addition to the current Principal, Er. Khushru Panthaki, three former staff members were identified for interviewing. The list of interviewees is tabulated below.

#[19]	Interview Participant	Role	Recorded
1	Dastur Firoze Kotwal	Ex-Principal and teacher, MFCAI	Video
32	Er. Parvez Bajan	Trustee, Athornan Mandal	Video
35	Er. Ramiyar Karanjia	Principal, DAI	Video
37	Er. Rooyintan Peer	Ex-Principal and teacher, MFCAI	Audio
41	Er. Khushru Panthaky	Principal, MFCAI ; Ex-Headmaster, DAI	Audio
42	Er. Kersi Karanjia	Bhantar teacher, DAI ; Ex-Principal, MFCAI	Video
43	Er. Sarosh Behramkamdin	Bhantar teacher, DAI	Video
44	Er. Darayus Bajan	Bhantar examiner, DAI	No
45	Er. Keki Dastoor	Ex-Bhantar teacher, DAI	Audio
46	Ms. Kamal Karanjia	Matron, DAI	Video
47	Er. Mehernosh Gulestan	Parent and ex-student, DAI	Video
48	Er. Sarosh Dastoor	Parent and ex-student, DAI	Video
49	Er. Yezdi Turel	Parent and ex-student, DAI	Video
50	Ms. Meenaz Bhesadia	Parent, DAI	Video

Table 3: List of participants interviewed for training at the Athornan Institutes

Out of the combined list of fifty interview participants, thirty-one completed their entire priestly training at one of the Athornan Institutes. These students had enrolled at the institutes in different decades going back to the 1940s. Using this data, it was possible to document the evolution of the training and the changes undergone by the institutes over the past 75-year period. The table below lists the interview participants and their years of enrolment at the institute.

Admission year	DAI	MFCAI
Pre-1960	#34 (1946), #6, #24 (1948), #3 (1954), #32 (1958)	#10 (1944), #1 (1947), #8 (1959)

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[18] Lit. 'Priestly Guild', an association created in 1915 for improving the status of the priestly class. See section 3.3.1 for details.

[19] The first four participants in this list (#1, 32, 35, 37) are part of Table 2, and their number is retained from that list. The remaining participants do not appear in the previous list, and are serially ordered based on their relevance to the study.

1960–1980	#4 (1968), #42 (1970), #43 (1976), #49 (1979)	#7 (1960), #31 (1961), #20 (1973), #30 (1975)
1980–2000	#23, #44 (1981), #9, #47 (1983), #26 (1988), #19 and #25 (1999)	#21 (1988)
Post 2000	#40 (2000), #38 (2001)	–

Table 4: Admission year of the interview participants at the Athornan Institutes

2.2.3   Data collection tool – Personal Interviews

The questionnaire for the personal interviews conducted with the current and former staff members of the two Athornan Institutes, was similar in structure to the format discussed in Part 1 (section 2.1). The first part of the questionnaire was fixed and captured the general information of the candidate and his or her association with the institute. The next semi-variable part had questions mainly related to the roles and responsibilities of the candidate at the institute, and how these had evolved over time. The last part of the interview was left open for any discussion emerging from the previous questions, and on topics such as the culture and future outlook of the institute.

2.2.4   Data collection tool – Observation Schedule

Observations were used as the primary tool for gathering data on the day-to-day functioning of the DAI. The mode of observation was informal during the early stages while documenting the daily routine of the students. After the initial period of familiarity, the classroom sessions were observed more formally using a structured observation schedule. The sample for observation was the group of around twenty students of the DAI during the bhantar class. The initial period of baseline observations was used to identify some of the important variables to be observed. The variables that were determined to be significant were the texts being studied by the students, the face-to-face time dedicated by the teacher to each student, and the proportion of the time dedicated for revision.

An initial draft of the observation schedule was prepared and tested for its validity over a few sessions. The output of the tool was found to be consistent for the classes conducted by different bhantar teachers, implying that the output of the tool had good validity. In order to check the reliability, the inter-rater reliability test was applied. To check the reliability of the tool, a senior student who had finished the curriculum was requested to fill the observation schedule, and the results were compared. Based on the findings, the final version of the observation schedule was prepared, as shown in Figure 4:

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Directions:	Observe the progression of the class, attendence, teaching methodology, individual attention to student
Name of observer:	Kerman D. Daruwalla
Type of observation:	Non-participant
Method of recording:	Event / time sampling

Date:	
Time:	
Class:	
Teacher(s):	
Total students:	
Students present:	
Students absent:	

Event #	Student	Time from	Time to	Duration	Text	Stanza(s)	New/Revision	Notes
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
10								

Figure 4: Observation Schedule to record data in the DAI classroom

The observation is conducted as a non-participant in the class, and the method of sampling information is event based, i.e., it records one line of information for each instance of a student being called to the teacher's desk for giving his recitation or for learning a new part. Some samples of the filled observation schedules are included in Appendix 3. The output of the observation schedules was collated to derive insights on the teaching methodology at the DAI.

2.2.5   Document sources – student lesson book

For each student at the Athornan Institute, a dedicated notebook is maintained in which an entry is made every time the student completes an assigned study. This notebook known as the bhantar lesson book starts recording the progress of the student from his very first week at the institute and continues all the way up to his final year of study. This lesson book provides a quick snapshot of the progress of the student through the curriculum. But the granular details recorded in the lesson book can also be data mined for a much deeper and nuanced understanding of the training at the institute. A detailed discussion on the lesson book is covered in section 6.2.1. At the DAI, access to the lesson books of the senior students was granted to the author, which enabled a thorough study of the progress of these students. The design of this study and the insights gained thereof are discussed at length in chapter 7.

The information collected using the above research tools and sources, enabled the systematic study of the Athornan Institutes. The establishment and early history of the institutes forms the subject of section 3.3, the priestly training offered there is detailed in chapter 6, and a case study on the memorisation of the texts is presented in chapter 7. However before proceeding further, it is important to address the ethical considerations and the issues related to the objectivity of the study.

2.3 Ethical considerations

2.3.1 Informed consent

Since the primary mode of data collection was through personal interviews, it was important to gain consent from the participants before fixing an interview. The participants were briefed about the purpose of the study, why they had been chosen for the interview, and how their data would be used in the study. If the participant did not have any reservations and was comfortable with participating, then the place and time for the interview was fixed. Usually at this time, it was expressed to the candidate that the interview session would be filmed for the purpose of studying it again at a later date. If the participant had an objection to being filmed, then the option to audio record the conversation was explored. Before the start of the interview, the permission for recording was again explicitly taken before the recording was started.

2.3.2 Identity of minor subjects

During the course of multiple visits to DAI, there were many interactions with the students on various aspects of their life at the institute. Since all the students at the DAI are below the age of eighteen years and hence minors, adequate care was taken to protect their identity. While quoting any reference from them in the study, their identity was completely concealed. In the section on memorisation of the texts, there is an in-depth discussion of the progression of the students through the curriculum. In order to maintain confidentiality and avoid any bias, the student names are completely anonymised throughout the study. Wherever it is relevant, the basic profile of the students which includes age, standard at school, hometown and priestly lineage is mentioned to provide a reference to the reader about the cohort.

2.3.3 Reporting findings of the study

Since all the students are under the guardianship of the Principal at the DAI, Er. Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia, the findings from the study pertaining to the students' progress were shared with him prior to the submission of this work and any concerns that were raised were addressed.

2.3.4 Issue of Objectivity

At the outset, it is important to recognise this author's position on the insider-outsider axis. Being a Zoroastrian from India, the author was able to access the priests and the rituals in a manner which would have been difficult for an outsider. However, there was a likelihood of the author's beliefs and upbringing colouring the observations of the study. Conversely, by not hailing from a priestly family, the author was an outsider to the priesthood, which was the primary subject of the study. It was hoped that the strong academic background of the author and the training received in research rigour and objectivity, would be adequate to distance the research findings from personal biases.

This concludes the discussion on the design of the study along with the tools and procedure for gathering the data. A wide array of participants was chosen for interviewing through the purposive sampling process, which yielded a broad perspective on the topic of priestly training. A prolonged period of observation at the DAI together with multiple interviews with the key informants, was instrumental in improving the credibility of the findings.

Section II: Historical Perspective

3 Historical Priestly Training

This chapter traces the history of Zoroastrian priestly training in India from the late eighteenth century and its subsequent evolution over two centuries. The chapter is divided into four subsections. The first part reviews the early sources which throw light on the training schools in the nineteenth century and traces their development into the twentieth century. This is followed by a discussion of the reasons for the marginalisation of the priesthood at the beginning of the twentieth century, a development which gave the impetus to the formation of the two resident priestly schools that are still in existence in Mumbai today, the Athornan Institutes. The third part of the chapter presents a brief history of the formation of the association of priests, the Athornan Mandal, and the two Athornan Institutes. The concluding part of the chapter presents four case studies to highlight the different aspects of priestly training in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

3.1 Priestly training during the 19th and early 20th century

The sources for the training of priests prior to the twentieth century are fragmented and only give a brief account of the training process. Most of the sources for this period are in Gujarati. The Parsee Prakash ('light, splendour') series[20] is the most detailed historical record of events pertaining to the Parsi community. The chronological listing contained in volumes I and II of that series provides information on priestly schools which were operational in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Other Gujarati sources for training schools include the historical compilations on certain cities and towns such as for Mumbai (Vacha, 1874), Udvada (Hodiwala, 1927) and Bilimora (Bilimoria, 1901). Besides these sources, some details on the training methods can be gleaned from biographical accounts of priests who were trained in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

From the above sources, it emerges that there were three different types of training centres where the boys from priestly families were coached to become future priests. The first type was the private class[21] run by an experienced priest at his own home exclusively for learning the priestcraft. The second type was the local school (Guj. *niśāl*) which was devoted to the study of either Avestan recitation only, or Avestan recitation in combination with other subjects. The final category was the formalised institution or *Madressa* (Pers. 'school, academy') which was created specifically to impart priestly training. The boundary between the categories is often blurred, with many common elements shared between two or all three of them. However, an attempt has been made in this study to classify them based on the prominent features of the training. These three types of training centres are elaborated below with examples.

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[20] A total of ten volumes were published between 1888 and 1973 covering the period from 999 to 1962 CE. Volume I for events prior to 1860 (Patell, 1888) and volume II for 1860–1880 period (Patell, 1910) are important sources for the early history. A brief account of their compilation is given at:
http://www.humancomp.org/prakash/parsee_prakash_intro.pdf.
[21] J J Modi uses the term 'indigenous priestly school' (Modi, 1912, p. 30).

3.1.1 Private class run by a teacher priest

The private training class of the early nineteenth century was typically run by a master who was addressed as an *ustād* ('expert, maestro'), and the pupil was referred to as his *śāgird* ('disciple'). The classes, conducted usually at the home of the master, were exclusively attended by priestly candidates, who were trained in both recitation and ritual actions.

According to Modi (1912, p. 30), the students were generally taught the Zand Avesta[22] free of cost and, in return, were expected to do some household work for their master, such as sweeping the house, cleaning the utensils and fetching things from the market. This system was reminiscent of the traditional Indian education system of a *gurukul* (Skt. *guru* 'master' and *kula* 'home, family') where the *śiṣya* ('student, disciple') assisted the *guru* by carrying out the routine household chores. Like the *dakṣiṇā* ('honorarium') given to a *guru* at the completion of the study, the Parsi *ustād* was compensated in the form of a lump sum amount and offerings in kind when the *śāgird* had completed the memorisation of the necessary texts and gone through the qualifying Nāvar ceremony.

The early lessons of the alphabet were taught in these indigenous schools by spreading dust on *pātis* ('wooden boards'), as described by Bilimoria (1901, pp. 27-28). Ordinary sand or dust was spread over the wooden boards and then characters were inscribed on it with fingers or wooden sticks. The process of learning was described using the phrase *pāti par dhul nākhvi* 'to throw dust on a wooden slate'. A description of this process of learning is given for the *keḷavṇī khātāo* ('training centres') in Bilimora, a town in southern Gujarat which then held a substantial Parsi population. During the early nineteenth century, instead of a slate and pen, a small wooden *pātlo* ('footstool') was used. On it, fine sand was spread which would act as the slate, and the function of the pen would be performed by the finger or a wooden bradawl; on the *pātlo*, the letters or words which were to be memorised would be written. Once the writing area was full, the candidate had to commit the text to his memory. Once he could successfully recite from memory, the dust was wiped away and a new slate was created in the same way.

Modi (1912, p. 31) gives a description of the recitation study at these classes in the nineteenth century. The students made use of the *pothā* (large volume) of the Vidēvdād or book of Zand Avesta. The first printed edition of the Vidēvdād appeared in 1831 and the Yasna in 1850,[23] hence before this time, handwritten manuscripts would likely have been employed for the study.[24]

One such class was run in Surat by Er. Aspandyar Palia, who was a strict disciplinarian and employed the cane to ensure that the students completed their assigned tasks.[25] The classes were conducted in the early hours of the night and morning, by employing oil lamps. This practice of reading the Vidēvdād text at night in the dim light of an oil lamp mimicked the actual ritual setup of the Vidēvdād ceremony

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[22] The term meant the study of the Avestan corpus along with its commentary (*zand*). However, *zand* came to be more loosely used to refer to the Avestan script. Hence, the term Zand Avesta was incorrectly used to refer to the study of the Avestan recitation with the aid of the Avestan script.

[23] *Vandidād* (1831) and *Ijaśne bā Neraṃg* (1850), both prepared by Behdin Peśtanjī Maṇekjī. For details see Redard & Daruwalla (2021, p. 3).

[24] Numerous exemplars of these first printed Vidēvdāds as well of the many handwritten Vidēvdāds produced in the early 19th century are still preserved in fire-temples and Zoroastrian libraries of Mumbai and Gujarat today.

[25] Modi (1912, p. 31).

performed at night. In order to prevent the students from falling asleep and to keep them attentive, their *chotli*, i.e., tuft of long hair which candidates for the priesthood were enjoined to maintain, was tied to a string, whose other end was fastened to a rafter of the house. If the student drowsed, the straining of his hair instantly roused him from his sleep. The *ustād* frequently stirred his dozing students with the words "*sutra gan*" ('count/recite the verses'). This practice of students counting the verselines on their finger was common while reciting metrical texts like the Gāthic verses.

At Navsari, Er. Hormasji Narimān, also known as Hormusji Kamāl ('remarkable') and Er. Rustomji Kotewāl were well-known as *ustāds* to many Parsi priests. In Udvada, Er. Farāmji Gondā started classes for *yaozdāthregari* ('priestly practice') in the year 1905, and similar classes had been operational in Udvada for many years before that.[26]

Such classes were known in all principal towns of the Parsis as well as in some of the smaller villages. Parsi (1879) gives a glimpse into the recitation training in a rural setting in Gujarat during the mid-nineteenth century. The boarding and lodging school was run by a Parsi priest named Mancherdaru, who is described as a leading priest and reputed religious teacher. The resident students would squat on the floor on either side of the master and, for half an hour in the morning, recite the daily Nīrangs, which was followed by ablutions and then breakfast. After that, the regular recitation training was conducted. Each boy in turn was asked to recite what was memorised on the previous day, with the requisite accent and constant forward and backward swinging of the body. After each student had recited his lesson, the master taught a new lesson. Mancherdaru had run this school single-handedly and many generations of priests had been trained under him.

Thus, these indigenous classes were run by a single master and usually remained operational only for the master's lifetime. The students either resided with the master for the duration of their training, or spent a major portion of the day at the class. They were typically responsible for performing the daily chores in exchange for the training received.

3.1.2 Local school (Niśāl) for religious and secular studies

This category comprised schools started in the nineteenth century to provide secular as well as religious education. Typically, such a school, called *niśāl* in Gujarati, would offer classes for Zand Avesta and Gujarati up to a certain grade to all Parsi boys including those from non-priestly families. The basic prayer curriculum would likely have been imparted in a common class for all students, and then in later years, boys from priestly families would have continued their advanced training separately under the teacher. In many aspects, these schools were operated like the private classes seen above; the primary difference being that these Niśāls were not exclusively aimed at training priests but at providing basic education to (male) students belonging to both the priestly class and the laity.

One of the earliest recorded Niśāl was financed by Dadibhai Nosherwanji Dadiseth, the founder of the Dadiseth Ātaš Bahrām in Mumbai.[27] It was started in 1796 for teaching Zand Avesta to the Zoroastrian boys belonging to the Kadimi *tolā*, under the guidance of the elder Kadimi priest of that time, Dadabhai

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[26] Hodiwala (1927, p. 639).
[27] Vacha (1874, p. 311).

Faramji. The Niśāl was run by Mobed Dadadaru Velati for 36 years after which it was shut down in 1832. Another renowned Niśāl was started by Er. Rustamji Dādābhāi Bhapoo, who had come to Mumbai from Surat in 1844 for the consecration ceremony of the Banaji Kadimi Ātaš Bahrām. From the year 1846 onwards, he started teaching Zand Avesta and Gujarati to Parsi boys in the Kavasji Patel locality of Fort area in Mumbai, which he ran for 26 years till the time of his death in the year 1872.[28] From a fund raised in Mumbai, the *Navsārinī Zarthostī Madresā* was started in 1856 in the Mota Falia locality of Navsari to teach Avestan, Pahlavi, Persian, Gujarati and English to sons of local Zoroastrians.[29]

Many Niśāls inside and outside of Mumbai were funded by wealthy benefactors in Mumbai and operated in most places with a sizeable Parsi population. At his demise in May 1849, Jijibhai Dadabhai had endowed a sum of Rs. 200,000 to set up a Madressa to teach Zand Avesta in the Court area of Mumbai, and also in the villages of Sumali, Elav, Randel, Siganpore and in the Gopipara locality of Surat.[30] In 1859, the Surat Zarthosti Farsi Madressa was started by Edulji Kharshedji Modi to train the sons of Zoroastrians in Avestan, Pahlavi, Persian and other languages.[31] A Niśāl was started in 1863 in the Camp area of Pune to teach Zand Avesta and Gujarati language up to the fifth grade to Zoroastrian boys, from the funds allocated for the Poona Anjuman.[32] In Udvada, the Jijibhai Dadabhai Zand Avesta School had been operational for many years, when in 1864, a new one, the Sir Jamshedji Jijibhai Zand Avesta School was opened.[33] In 1872, upon the birth of his son, Dinshaji Maneckji Petit of Mumbai donated a sum for the maintenance of the Niśāl of Zand Avesta for the Zoroastrian boys of Nargol, a small town near Sanjan within the jurisdiction of the Sanjānā priests.[34]

Thus, from the period of the late eighteenth century onward, local schools were set up in many towns for teaching Zand Avesta to Zoroastrian boys. The required funding was commonly received from Parsi philanthropists based in Mumbai.

Most of the sources only provide information on the years of operation of the schools without shedding much light on the training methodology followed there. There are, however, a few accounts which give some idea of the way these schools functioned. Among the few schools that survived into the twentieth century was the Kāngā ni Sār ('Kanga's school') in Navsari.[35] It remained operational until the 1940s and thus was the last school of its kind to exist in Navsari. It was run by Er. Sohrabji Kanga, who was completely blind, and his son Er. Nariman (Nallabhai) Kanga. Nallabhai was nicknamed Bālistar (barrister), alluding to his sharp mind and phenomenal memory.[36]

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[28] Patell (1910, p. 414).
[29] Patell (1888, p. 716).
[30] Patell (1888, p. 528).
[31] Patell (1888, p. 782).
[32] Patell (1910, p. 79).
[33] Hodiwala (1927, p. 636).
[34] Vacha (1874, p. 760)
[35] The word *sār* is a shortened form of *niśāl* (Dastur Kotwal, personal communication).
[36] Dastur Firoze Kotwal's brother Kershasp was the last student at the Kāngā ni Sār in the early 1940s. It had presumably been shut down by 1945, since Nallabhai's son Rustomji was sent to the Dadar Athornan Institute in 1946 at the age of ten years. Information about the Kāngā ni Sār was kindly provided by Dastur Kotwal and Er. Khushru Kanga, the grandson of Nariman Kanga.

At the Kāngā ni Sār, young mobeds were trained in breathing techniques required to recite the Avestan prayers in the adequate rhythm and with perfection.[37] Classes were held for a duration of three hours in the morning, and the time in class was mainly reserved for the revision and testing of already learnt texts. New material was introduced in the class – first recited by the master and then repeated twice by the pupil. However, the memorisation was expected to be done at home. The students used Anklesaria's edition of the *Yasna bā Nirang* in Avestan script[38] for memorisation. The instruction was rigorous with corporal punishment being meted out when the expected standard was not met; hence at the time of admission only hardy students who could handle the physical punishment were accepted. The students who concentrated hard and memorized well acquired a pure and accurate diction, with a thorough knowledge of the texts and a solid grounding the technicalities of the ritual.[39]

However, unlike the other Niśāls functioning at that time, where students were taught a variety of subjects, the Kāngā ni Sār imparted training only on the Avestan recitation and ritual practice.[40]

3.1.3 Formal priestly training schools (Athornan Madressa)

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, formal schools (Madressa) were created to impart complete training to boys from priestly (Athornan) families for their Nāvar and Marātab initiations. As seen in the preceding sections, the first two categories of schools were highly dependent on the teachers involved and it was observed that often the schools did not survive beyond the lifespan of the responsible priestly teacher. Hence, with the help of larger funds raised from single or multiple donors, sustainable institutions dedicated to priestly training were created on the lines of the modern schooling system. These schools typically had a principal and a staff proficient in all aspects of priestly training. Many components of these schools were to be incorporated into the structure of the two resident Athornan Institutes still in existence today at the time of their founding. Two of the formerly well-known but now defunct Athornan Madressas in the towns of Navsari and Udvada are described below.

3.1.3.1 Nusserwanji R. Tata Zend Madressa in Navsari

Nusserwanji Ratanji Tata (1822–1886) institutionalised priestly education by establishing the Nusserwanji R. Tata Zend Madressa in 1883 for training young priests. This was the first institution of its kind and it was an important step as earlier young priests were trained at home or privately, by individual priests having expertise in specific areas of priestly learning. Dastur Curset Erach Pavry was appointed as the first principal of this Madressa in 1889.[41]

Modi (1932, p. 72) mentions that Tata Madressa not only taught the Avestan texts by heart, but also imparted to its students the required training on the performance of the rituals. According to Modi, the training for memorising the Avestan texts at the Tata Madressa was superior compared to the other, private teachers in the town of Navsari, as their pronunciation was not accurate. According to Dastur Firoze Kotwal, who attended the Tata Madressa for a few years in the mid-1940s, the training

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[37] Mistree & Bengalli (2018, p. 53).
[38] Anklesaria (1888).
[39] Choksy & Dubeansky (2013, p. 3) and insights on training methodology by Dastur Kotwal (interview #1).
[40] Mistree & Bengalli (2018, p. 59).
[41] Jackson (1934).

classes were held in the morning from 7 AM to 9 AM, after which the students went on to attend a regular day school.[42]

The Tata Madressa (often referred to as the Athornan Madressa of Navsari) was still operational in the 1950s when Dastur Keki Ravji was enrolled there for two years and was taught by Er. Dorabji Kotwal. Dorabji's father, Er. Hormusji Kotwal had earlier trained Dastur Ravji's father, Er. Kavasji Ravji at the same Athornan Madressa.[43] At Dastur Ravji's time, there were around twenty students in the class. Since each student had reached different levels of study, the teacher Er. Kotwal would train each one individually. Unlike at the two Athornan Institutes, the Khorde Avesta training at Tata Madressa included the study of only one or two Yašts and the Yasna was not taught using the Avestan script but instead the Gujarati script.[44]

3.1.3.2 Damanwala and Zand Avesta Madressas in Udvada

The Sohrabji Manekji Damanwala Madresa was started in the year 1925 under the lead of Dastur Firoze Khurshedji and Dastur Kayoji Mirza at the house of Bai Cooverbai Jalbhai Dorabji Bharda in Udvada.[45] The Damanwala Madressa and the Sir Jamshedji Jijibhai Zand Avesta School, which had been operational since the 1860s, functioned independently and had moved to different locations within Udvada. The former high priest Dastur Peshotan Mirza had begun his priestly studies at the Damanwala Madressa in the 1950s. The Damanwala Madressa and the Sir Jamshedji Jijibhai Zand Avesta School were later amalgamated into a single entity, which was housed at the Dastoor Baug in Udvada town until it was shut down in the 1970s.

Dastur Hormazdyar Mirza gives details on the training at such fully institutionalised schools during the early twentieth century.[46] Printed books or manuscripts were not exclusively used by students memorising the ritual texts. A small wooden tablet (Guj. *pāti*) was given to each student. The subsequent steps in the memorisation were as follows:

1. The student copied the segment of text to be memorised from a printed book or manuscript onto the wooden tablet using liquid chalk and a reed pen.
2. Then, the teacher gave oral instructions on the correct reading of the text with proper pronunciation and observance of pauses and stops.
3. Then, the student had to learn by heart the portion of the Avestan text from the tablet.
4. After memorising, the student was made to recite the text from memory before his teacher.
5. If the student was successful in this test, he could clean his tablet and proceed to the next portion of the text.

This process of learning one *pāti* at a time was repeated until the student had memorised the entire Yasna, Visperad and other required texts. Mirza further states that this traditional method had been discontinued at the time of his writing (1957), and printed books were generally used for memorising the texts. Though the method was no longer used, the terminology of learning one *pāti* remained

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[42] Mistree & Bengalli (2018, p. 49).
[43] Interview #3 with Dastur Ravji (min. 1–5).
[44] The textbook used for the Yasna memorisation was the *Yazaśne bā Niraṅg* (Kuṭār M. N., 1917).
[45] Hodiwala (1927, p. 640).
[46] Mirza (1957, p. xxii).

current among the teachers and students at the Athornan Institutes, where the phrase *pāti moḍhe karvi* 'memorise the *pāti*' was used to refer to each stanza from the book given for memorisation.[47]

The above two Madressas in Navsari and in Udvada had to be shut down in the second half of the twentieth century due to a paucity of students, as parents increasingly preferred to send their sons to the two residential Athornan Institutes in Mumbai. This was driven mainly by two factors, viz., the training at the Athornan Institutes was considered much superior, and the career opportunities in the city of Mumbai were vast compared to those in Udvada and Navsari.

This concludes the section on the priestly training centres that were prevalent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These centres acted as precursors to the two resident Athornan Institutes which were founded in Mumbai around the year 1920. In order to better understand the differences in structure and methodology of training among them, these centres were categorised into three types. The boundaries between the three categories are not always clearly marked, and there are many common elements among them. In some cases, a training centre could easily be classified under two different categories. However, to generalise, the salient features of the three categories are summarised in the table below.

Differentiating criteria	Private class	Local School (Niśāl)	Athornan Madressa
Location	At home of master (*ustād*)	At a designated place usually donated by a benefactor	Dedicated premises of the school
Mode of study	Full-time or part-time resident	Non-resident day school	Non-resident part-time for a few hours
Curriculum	Zand Avesta recitation + ritual	Zand Avesta + Gujarati + other subjects	Zand Avesta recitation + basic ritual training
Secular studies	None or limited	Combined with religious training	Pursued at a different school

Table 5: Differences between the three types of priestly training centres

3.1.4   Madressas for scholarly training

Besides the category referred to as Athornan Madressas above, there was another category of Madressas which were started in the second half of the nineteenth century. These were not the traditional schools for training students for their priestly initiation, but for the further education of already initiated priests and even lay community members. The curriculum went beyond the traditional memorisation of texts, to also cover the study of languages, mainly Avestan, Pahlavi, Persian and Sanskrit, and subjects pertaining to the doctrines and history of Zoroastrianism. The two main schools of this type were the Mulla Feroze (MF) Madressa and the Sir Jamshetji Jejeebhoy Zarthoshti (JJZ) Madressa in Mumbai.

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[47] Term mentioned in interviews with Dastur Kotwal (#1), Dastur Ravji (#3) and Er. Peer (#37).

In April 1854, at the death of the Kadimi head priest Dastur Rustomji Kekobadji, who was the nephew of the previous Kadimi Dastur Mulla Feroze, it was proposed that a Madressa teaching Avestan, Pahlavi and Persian, was to be started for Kadimi priests. On 27th August 1854, the opening ceremony of the Madressa, named in memory of Mulla Feroze son of Mulla Kaus, was performed at the D. N. Dadiseth Ātaš Bahrām in Mumbai.[48] The Mulla Feroze Madressa and its associated Mulla Feroze Library operated in the building opposite the Dadiseth Ātaš Bahrām for many decades.[49] Both entities were subsequently moved to the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute where they were operational at least up to the 1960s.[50] At the Mulla Feroze Madressa, the study of Avestan was based on the traditional method via the translation of Avestan texts into Pahlavi and Persian, with perfunctory regard to the rules of Avestan grammar and philology.[51]

The Sir JJZ Madressa was created from the endowment made by Lady Avabai in memory of her late husband, the first Sir Jamshetji Jejeebhoy Baronet. The fund stipulated the formation of a Madressa for the sons of priests and, if feasible, the sons of laymen to learn the Avestan and Pahlavi languages and subjects pertaining to the Zoroastrian religion. The languages were to be taught using the improvements brought by the Western philological methods, which were pioneered in India by K. R. Cama, over the traditional way of teaching. The Sir JJZ Madressa began functioning in Mumbai in 1863 using an amalgamation of both systems of learning. The stated aim of the institution was to provide religious instructions to the intelligent members of the priestly community to enable them to obtain the title of a 'Dastur', a learned high priest.

The Mulla Feroze and the Sir JJZ Madressas were subsequently merged in the second half of the twentieth century. Classes of the combined entity known as the Sir JJZ and Mulla Feroze Madressa are presently conducted at the Sir JJ Boys High School in Fort, Mumbai, teaching Avestan, Pahlavi and associated languages to both the priests and the laity.

One more school deserving mention in this list was the Sir Cowasjee Jehangir Zarthoshti Madressa in Navsari, which taught Avestan, Pahlavi, Persian, Sanskrit and religious studies to the practicing priests of the Vadi Daremeher and to their children in the second half of the nineteenth century.[52]

All of these schools were conceived specifically to impart scholarly training to competent priests to turn them into the religious guides and community leaders of the future, roles that the existing priesthood of the time was inadequately prepared to handle. The next section reviews the state of affairs of the priesthood at the beginning of the twentieth century, which eventually led to the formation of the two resident Athornan Institutions.

3.2   State of priesthood at the beginning of the twentieth century

Over the course of the recorded history of the Parsis in India, the priesthood had always been accorded a preeminent role on most community matters. Even after the overall increase in prosperity

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[48] Patell (1888, pp. 635, 647).
[49] Patell (1910, p. 500).
[50] Kanga & JamaspAsa (1990).
[51] Mentioned in the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute's Congress Souvenir 2000.
[52] https://iranicaonline.org/articles/bharucha-sheriarji-dadabhai-parsi-scholar-born-at-broach-in-1843.

of the Parsis by the eighteenth century, the priests maintained their pivotal role in the community. However, things started changing in the nineteenth century and by the beginning of the twentieth century, the priests had been significantly marginalised. Some of the important factors that contributed to this loss of standing of the priesthood are discussed in this section.

3.2.1   Degraded standing of the priestly class

The first half of the nineteenth century was a period that ushered in many social changes in the Parsi community. In search of better prospects, the Parsis left rural Gujarat in great numbers to settle in Mumbai, where the community rose to a preeminent position, both economically and politically. According to the census of 1826, the Parsis in Mumbai at that time numbered 10,738.[53] By 1864, this number had ballooned to 49,201,[54] a whopping 350% increase in a short span of 38 years.

From the 1820s onward, western style education started to become available in Mumbai. The burgeoning Parsi community of Mumbai, especially the laity, were among the first to jump at this opportunity and enthusiastically sent their sons to schools offering this western style education. Prior to this time, learning to read and write had remained a prerogative of the priesthood, and most lay community members did not study beyond rudimentary levels. The increasing schooling rate in the middle of the 19th century raised the general education level of the lay community members, who for the first time were at par and even surpassed the priestly class in learning.

In the 1830s, John Wilson, a Scottish Protestant missionary, strove to convert Parsis to Christianity. His criticism of Zoroastrian teachings started to appear in the Parsi newspapers. In 1843, he published his opus on the Parsi religion[55] in which he contrasted it with Christianity and attacked certain elements of Zoroastrianism, especially its dualistic and polytheistic aspects. The Parsi community looked up to the priests to refute the claims made by Wilson. The counter response from the priesthood was ineffective: two priests introduced occultist ideas and interpreted the Avesta using Hindu and Sufi concepts, while a third one, Dastur Edal Sanjana stressed the prevailing orthodox view. As a result, a sense of disappointment prevailed in the community that they had been let down by the priests, and consequently the reputation of the priests as learned men declined further.

The level to which the perceived standing of the priesthood had fallen can be gauged by the view expressed by one of the prominent community members of the time. Dadabhai Naoroji, an ordained priest[56], was a leading reformist of that time. He was one of the founders of the *Rahnumāi Mazdayasnan Sabhā* (Assembly of Guides to the Worshippers of Mazdā), which was established in 1851 with the aim of restoring the Zoroastrian religion to its original purity and simplicity. Also in 1851, he also founded a Gujarati fortnightly publication, the *Rāst Goftār* ('Truth Teller'), to clarify Zoroastrian concepts and promote Parsi social reforms. In 1855, he became the first Indian to be appointed as a

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[53] Quoted in Boyd & Kotwal (1983, p. 313).
[54] Census of the Island of Bombay taken 2nd February 1864 (Census, 1864).
[55] Wilson (1843).
[56] Dadabhai Naoroji underwent the Nāvar initiation at the H. B. Wadia Ātaš Bahrām in 1839. I thank Dinyar Patel for providing this reference.

professor at the famed Elphinstone College in Mumbai, and after a few years he became a professor of Gujarati at the University College London.[57]

He read a paper on the Parsi Religion before the Liverpool Literary and Philosophical Society in March 1861 in which he expressed the following views regarding the Parsi priesthood:[58]

> "As a body, the priests are not only ignorant of the duties and objects of their own profession, but are entirely uneducated, except that they are able to read and write, and that also often very imperfectly. … Their work chiefly consists of reciting certain prescribed prayers on various religious occasions; to go to the fire-temple or seashore, and say a prayer for anybody that chooses to give a halfpenny; and to depend upon charities distributed on various joyous or mournful occasions. They do not understand a single word of these prayers or recitations, which are all in the old Zend language.
>
> From the state of their education and knowledge, they are quite unfit for the pulpit; nor do they aspire to it, or seem to have any notion of the necessity of such teaching. … Far from being the teachers of the true doctrines and duties of the religion, the priests are generally the most bigoted and superstitious, and exercise much injurious influence …
>
> The priests have, however, now begun to feel their degraded position. Many of them, if they can do so, bring up their sons in any other profession but their own."

This assessment by Naoroji summed up the sentiment prevailing among the progressive members of the Parsi community regarding the priesthood in the second half of the nineteenth century.

3.2.2 High proportion of priests in the population

The Parsi population in India at the beginning of the twentieth century was just over one hundred thousand.[59] Since it was customary for most sons of priestly lineage to pursue the family profession, the proportion of priests in the Parsi population was significantly high. The 1911 census report for Mumbai recorded the following comment on the high proportion of Parsi priests compared to priests in other religious groups:

> "The number of Parsi ministers of religion is 733, which appears to be rather a large number to look after the spiritual welfare of 50,000 people."[60]

The table below lists the number of priests in the overall population for different religious groups in Mumbai in 1911. The Zoroastrians had the highest proportion of its population engaged in the priestly profession among all the religious groups (over 14 priests per 1000 people vs. an average of only 2 priests for the remaining population). There was one priest for every 69 Parsis, compared to one for every 500 people for the remaining population.

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[57] Masani (1939).

[58] Naoroji (1864).

[59] The 1911 Census of India recorded the Parsi Population as 100,096 out of which 50,931 or 51% were resident in Mumbai.

[60] Mead & MacGregor (1912, p. 39).

Further, Parsi priests had a larger number of dependents to support compared to priests in other religious groups. The Parsi priests and their dependents numbered 37 per 1000 people, more than ten times the average for the remaining groups (3.5 per 1000 people).

Religious Group	1911 Population		Male Priests				Priests + Dependents	
			Total	/'000 Pop.	Pop./ priest		Total	/'000 Pop.
Hindu	664,042		1326	2.0	501		2309	3.5
Muslim	179,346		402	2.2	446		685	3.8
Christian	57,355		104	1.8	551		188	3.3
Zoroastrian	50,931		733	14.4	69		1887	37.1
Others[61]	27,771		41	1.5	677		60	2.2
Overall	979,445		2606	2.7	376		5129	5.2
Excl. Zor.	928,514		1873	2.0	496		3242	3.5

Table 6: Religion-wise share of priests based on the 1911 census of Mumbai city

Thus, in Mumbai there was an abundance of priests to meet the religious needs of the Parsi population. This led to increased competition and undercutting of fees charged for performing the rituals. The situation was similar in smaller towns and rural areas. Mobed Darabsha Sidhva mentions that in Udvada, which was the headquarters of the Sanjānā priests, there was not much work for priests in the 1920s, and he would get a chance to perform the Yasna only once in four or five days.[62]

Similarly, in Navsari, the priests were plentiful and the employment opportunities in the fire-temple were scarce. In the 1940s, Er. Kershasp Kotwal could not find suitable work despite being a fully qualified priest, and hence decided to travel to Mumbai to seek full-time work as a priest there.[63]

The priests who had experienced the difficulty of finding adequate work to sustain themselves and their family did not want their sons to have a similar career and increasingly started sending them to other professions.

3.2.3   Divergent ritual practices among the priests

After the early centuries of their advent to India from Iran, the Indian priesthood ceased to remain a homogeneous entity, and fragmented into different priestly groups with varying traditions. The primary differences stemmed from the divergent traditions of the five geographical jurisdictions or Panthaks among which the priesthood was historically split, viz. the Sanjānā based in Udvada, the Bhagariā of Navsari, the Godāvarā around Ankleshwar, the Bharuchā of Bharuch and the Khambātā of Khambhat (Cambay).[64] Each of these Panthaks had retained their unique priestly customs and ritual practices, which differed from those of other priestly groups, usually in minor details. Typically, priests served only within their own Panthaks and the awareness of these differences was limited. However,

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[61] Others include Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs and Jews.
[62] Karanjia (2018, p. 77).
[63] Mistree & Bengalli (2018, p. 59).
[64] Modi (1934, p. 72), Mirza (2000, pp. 158-160).

they became apparent when priests migrated to other towns and encountered those from other jurisdictions. A cursory comparison of the ritual directions of the Yasna ceremony as performed by the Sanjānā priests with the mainstream Bhagariā practice, yielded numerous minor differences between the two traditions.
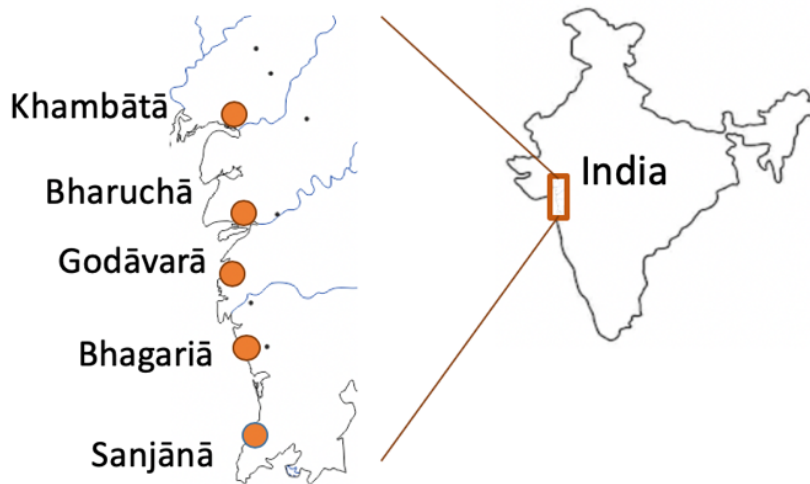
Figure 5: The five priestly Panthaks based on the west coast of India

Another important difference was steeped in the long oral tradition of the Avestan recitations. Historically the priestly training imparted at home or at the numerous small schools was mainly by way of oral transmission. Centuries of oral transmission had affected the fidelity of the recitation, and consequently the diction and accent differed from school to school. There also existed a parallel written tradition of manuscripts, which were used in the training of priests. However, rather than being one-to-one copies of their predecessors, these manuscripts were often influenced by the oral tradition as practiced by the school to which the scribe was affiliated.[65] Thus the training that the priest received and his intonation of the Avesta would be distinctive based on his place of priestly training.

The nineteenth century saw the migration of many young priests from the towns of Gujarat to Mumbai, which had a thriving Zoroastrian population. Most of them had received their priestly training at the numerous small Niśāls and Madressas operational in the towns and villages in Gujarat, and their knowledge of the ritual depended on their respective Panthak and school. This had led to a lack of uniformity in ritual performance and divergent practices coexisting especially in Mumbai. This situation was aggravated by the fact that Mumbai did not fall under the geographical jurisdiction of any Panthak, and priests from different backgrounds commonly performed rituals together at the fire-temples. The lay community, when asking for guidance on matters of religious observances, were

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[65] For example, the Indian Yasna Sade manuscript 100_B3 at the University of Mumbai Library, is suggested to be based on an oral dictation, rather than on another manuscript (Cantera, 2014, pp. 49–50). The influence of scribal schools on the transmission of a text is seen in the case of the Pahlavi Vidēvdād after the arrival of Jāmāsp Velāyati from Iran to Surat (Cantera & Andrés-Toledo, 2008).

often disconcerted when they received conflicting advice from different priests. These variations were perceived to be the result of distortions introduced due to the ignorance and lack of learning of the priests, which further affected their credibility.[66]

3.2.4   Poor remuneration of the priestly profession

Jivanji Modi, in his article on the Parsi Priesthood[67] written in 1915, mentions that the remuneration received by the Dasturs (learned priests) and the other regular priests were rarely fixed. The Dastur received a share of the fire-temple collections and a certain percentage of the fees for the liturgical ceremonies (usually 5%–10%), resulting to an annual emolument of Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 4,000 (~£ 250 in 1915). The compensation of the other, lower grades of priests was much below that of the Dasturs, amounting to an annual income of Rs. 300 to Rs. 1,200 (£ 20 – £ 80), which translated to an average monthly pay of only Rs. 50 (£ 3). This was barely enough to support the typically large families of the priests and put them in a precarious position.

The remuneration in the smaller towns and villages was even lower. Mobed Darabsha Sidhva described the situation prevailing in Udvada in the 1920s. At that time, the priests could not get much work. A performance of the Yasna ceremony would cost Rs. 2, which would be shared by both the priests. Since Mobed Darabsha was a junior priest, he would only get to perform one Yasna every four to five days, hence in a month he would earn only Rs. 7–8. Since this was not sustainable, Mobed Sidhva was compelled to leave Udvada in search of better opportunities and ultimately settled in Mumbai.[68] According to Modi, due to this low level of emoluments and the resultant lack of status and position, the priesthood as a profession had little attraction; and a priest would have liked his intelligent and educated sons to take up professions other than the priesthood.[69]

All the above factors together forced the leading priests of the day to come together and work towards the upliftment of the priestly class, the result of which was the founding of an association of priests, the Athornan Mandal.

3.3   Establishment of the Athornan Institutes

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the general sentiment prevailing among the Parsis was that the priesthood had been failing in its duty to cater to the spiritual needs of the community and to provide religious guidance. The priests, which during earlier centuries had been at the top of the social strata and had garnered much respect from the laity, were increasingly pushed down the social order and, being less educated than the average Parsi layman, they consequently lost the respect and privileges they once enjoyed.

To add to the already fomented situation, several acts which were perceived to be irreligious by the priestly fraternity were performed either ignorantly or blatantly within the community. The 'Rangoon Navjote' of 1906, in which Bella, a girl born to a Parsi mother and non-Parsi father, was initiated into

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[66] Situation described by Er. Parvez Bajan (interview #32).
[67] Modi (1937, p. 125).
[68] Karanjia (2018, pp. 75–79).
[69] Modi (1937, p. 126).

Zoroastrianism by a priest from Mumbai, was the case that triggered the community at large to take notice of the disjointed situation. Leading priests and lay community members came together to deliberate and realised the need for a unified priestly organisation.[70]

3.3.1   Formation of the Athornan Mandal

Two influential lay community members, Mr. Jehangir Vimadalal and Mr. Faredun Dadachanji conceived the idea of forming an association of priests to manage the economic and social interests of the priesthood. This suggestion was received enthusiastically by many priests and led to the establishment of the Athornan Mandal ('Association of Priests') on 9th May 1915. The senior priests who played an instrumental role in the founding of the Athornan Mandal included Dastur Darab Peshotan Sanjana, Dastur Minocher Jamaspji JamaspAsana and Ervad Mahiar Navroji Kutar. The primary objectives of the Athornan Mandal were identified as the following:

- Securing the interests of the priesthood by being their spokesperson on religious, moral and social issues.
- Working towards ameliorating the economic condition of the priesthood.
- Providing guidance to the community in religious and ecclesiastical matters.
- Safeguarding the traditional aspects of the Zoroastrian religion.

In the initial years, membership was limited to practising priests who wore the priestly headgear, the white turban known as *pāghdi*, however in later years any male member belonging to a priestly family could become a member even if he had not undergone the priestly initiations of Nāvar or Marātab. Within a couple of decades of its existence, the Athornan Mandal established itself as a representative not only of the priests of Mumbai, but also of those from all over India as well the priests from places outside India such as Karachi, Hong Kong and Shanghai. Presently, after more than one hundred years of its founding, the Athornan Mandal remains the primary association for the welfare of the priestly clan in India.[71]

One of the first problems identified by the Athornan Mandal to be tackled, was the scarcity of well-trained priests for performing higher liturgical ceremonies. Since the late nineteenth century, many priests had started discouraging their sons from taking up the priesthood as a full-time vocation in favour of other secular professions. This had led to a decrease of qualified priests, and an increasing concern among the community that over time, there would be very few priests left to uphold the elaborate ritual tradition. As a result of these concerns, the Athornan Mandal decided to set up a residential school for the training of priests. At its Managing Committee meeting in May 1918, a resolution was passed to start a boarding school for priests. The chief officer of the Athornan Mandal, Mr. Jehangir Vimadalal started a scheme to collect money for the establishment of the school, and a sum of Rs. 50,000 was collected from several donors.[72]

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[70] Karanjia (2019a, p. 1).
[71] Karanjia (2019a, pp. 2–3).
[72] Dadar Athornan Institute (1970, p. 1).

3.3.2   The Dadar Athornan Institute

On 9th November 1919, the Athornan Boarding Madressa was inaugurated by Dastur Darab Peshotan Sanjana, the high priest of the Wadia Ātaš Bahrām and trustee of the Athornan Mandal. Initially, the Madressa was started in the bungalow of Seth Bomanji General in Parel. Subsequently, on 21st April 1924, it was moved to its present location in the Dadar Parsi Colony.
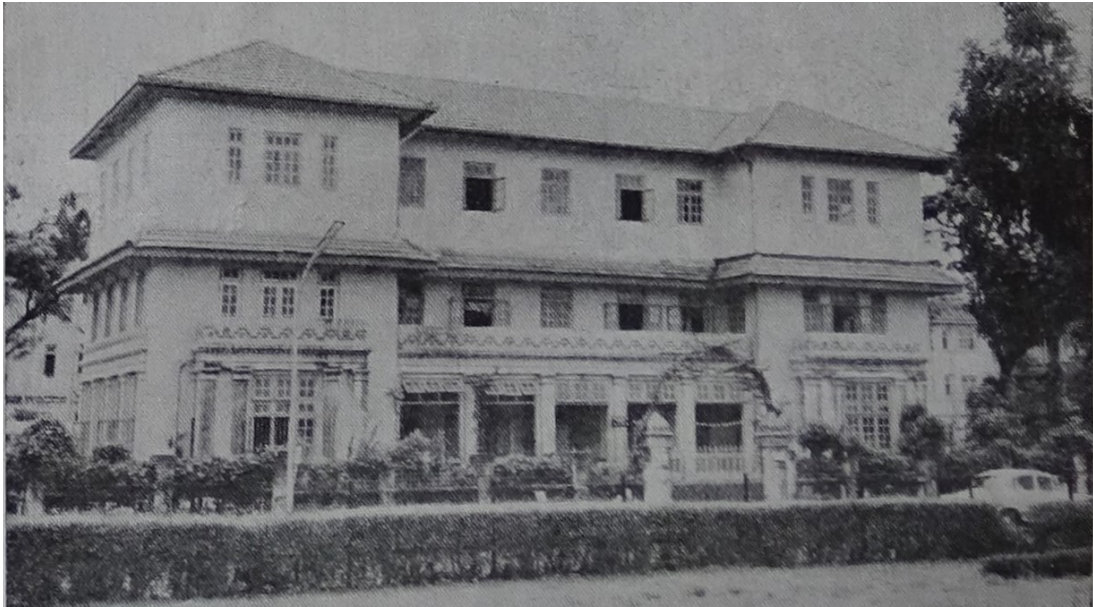
Figure 6: The Dadar Athornan Institute building shown in its golden jubilee volume in 1970

During the initial years of the new school, ten new students were admitted every alternate year. The curriculum was designed to give *bhantar* (recitation) and *kriyākām* (ritual) training along with a basic secular education. Classes were conducted on *dharmagnān* (religious knowledge), *tavārikh* (religious history), the meaning of prayers, a basic study of Avestan, Pahlavi, Persian, English and Gujarati languages, as well as Mathematics and Geography. The first batch of eleven students finished their six-year curriculum in November 1925.[73]

Since its inception, admissions to the school were allocated to accommodate students belonging to different Panthaks, from the Shenshahi as well as the Kadimi sects, and from within and outside Mumbai. Students admitted as boarders were usually between the ages of 9 to 12 years. Students were expected to complete the curriculum within six years, and if required an additional period of six months to one year was given as an extension.[74]

During the first three decades of its establishment, the institute was financed through various donations and functioned to its full extent. The DAI did not have a large endowment to manage its operating expenses, and instead was reliant on regular donations from individuals and institutions. By the mid-1950s, many of its original donors had passed away and the financial state of the DAI had started deteriorating due to a lack of monetary aid from other sources. These problems intensified in the early 1960s, when the institute was so severely cash-stricken that even food bills and staff salaries

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[73] Karanjia (2019a, pp. 50–51).
[74] Karanjia (2019b, pp. 3–4).

were not being paid. Ultimately, in March 1965, a decision was taken by the Athornan Mandal to close the institute immediately due to a lack of funds and students.[75]

The DAI was restarted in June 1966 after a break of one year, with a new management and a new principal, Er. Rustomji Panthaki. In the interim period, fundraising appeals were made in community newspapers and some important changes were introduced in the functioning of the institute. The most important change was the arrangement with the Dadar Parsi Youths Assembly (DPYA) High School, where the students would pursue their secular education along with the priestly training at the DAI. The important differences before and after the brief closure are tabulated below.

Criteria	DAI prior to 1965 shutdown	DAI after re-opening in 1966
Training focus	Majority time for priestly training	Equal split between priestly training and academic studies
Secular education	In-house with limited subjects	Affiliation with DPYA High School
New admissions	Every alternate year	Every year
Curriculum structure	Six years divided into three classes of two years each	Seven years with each year aligned to the school academic calendar
Duration of study	Students had to leave after completing six years	Students were encouraged to stay and complete their entire schooling
Fees	Charged from students	Both priestly training and secular schooling imparted without any fee

Table 7: Changes in the functioning of the DAI after its temporary closure in 1965

After its reopening in 1966, the institute passed through a difficult decade getting its finances in order. However, from the mid-1970s, the financial condition improved significantly, and the institute started making good progress. In the last fifty years since reopening, more than 250 students have enrolled at the institute, and most have graduated and gone on to serve as full-time or part-time priests.[76]

In December 2008, a discussion was undertaken to change the name of the institute from 'Athornan Boarding Madressa' to 'Dadar Athornan Institute', and the new name was officially adopted in March 2009.

3.3.3 The M.F. Cama Athornan Institute (MFCAI)

The MFCAI was the second resident priestly training institution opened in Mumbai at the beginning of the twentieth century. Unlike the DAI, which was founded with donations collected from numerous community members, the MFCAI was endowed by the largesse of one benevolent person, Meherwanji Muncherji Cama.

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[75] Karanjia (2019b, pp. 160–161).
[76] Karanjia (2019b, p. 164).

3.3.3.1 Meherwanji Muncherji Cama (1849–1935)

Meherwanji hailed from the distinguished Cama family, named after his fifth ancestor Camaji Cooverji, who had accompanied the renowned shipbuilder Lowji Nasarwanji Wadia to Mumbai from his hometown of Tena near Surat in the year 1735. The Cama family became one of the leading business families in Mumbai, with strong trading links with China and Bengal. Cooverji's son Mancherji had one son, Faramji who was the grandfather of Meherwanji Cama, and another son Hormusji, who was the grandfather of the noted Parsi orientalist Kharshedji Rustomji Cama.

Meherwanji was born on 13-10-1849 and after finishing his education from Bombay University, he chose to take up the teaching profession. After working as a headmaster for a few years at a Parsi boarding school in Bandra, Mumbai, he turned his attention towards business, which was very successful and generated much wealth.

In February 1901, he was appointed as one of the trustees of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP), a role which he fulfilled for ten years until January 1911. During this first decade of the twentieth century, the BPP was involved in many high-profile court cases, chief among which was the Dinshaw Manockji Petit vs. Jamsetji Jeejeebhoy[77] case in 1908. As a trustee, Meherwanji had played an important role in the preservation of the community institutions. Along with Jivanji Modi, Meherwanji played an instrumental role in the founding of the *Zartoshti Dharam Sambandhi Kelavni Apnari ane Dnyan Felavnari Mandli* (The Society for imparting training and distributing knowledge about the Zoroastrian religion).[78]

At the turn of the twentieth century, Meherwanji observed that many bright but impressionable sons of veteran priests were turning away from the priestly profession due to its stringent observances and restrictions in religious matters, and instead opting to enter business, trade or other jobs. He believed that for the religion to be preserved, it was imperative for the priestly class to be nurtured, which required an institution where the sons of priests could obtain excellent training.

Meherwanji was also profoundly influenced by the activities of his second cousin, K. R. Cama, activities which had led to the emergence of foremost religious scholars such as Kavasji Kanga, Tehmuras Anklesaria, Sheriarji Bharucha, Jivanji Modi and Edulji Antia.[79] Meherwanji recognised that such enlightened scholar priests were necessary to service the spiritual needs of the Zoroastrian community. His motivation to raise the profile of the priestly class is summarised in the brochure of the MFCAI[80]:

> "Mr. Meherwanji Muncherji Cama realized that the members of the Athornan class had considerably degenerated materially and intellectually and their remuneration and prospects as priests were so poor that it made their sacred calling unattractive to the educated and intelligent members of the community. He also realized that their education was so much neglected, their intellectual attainments so low and their qualification for advancing the

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[77] In this case, the trustees of the BPP were accused of being improperly appointed following their opposition to the attempted conversion to Zoroastrianism of the French wife of Ratanji Dadabhai Tata (Sharafi, 2007).
[78] Jam-e Jamshed newspaper article on 16-7-1973 (Turel, 1973b).
[79] Jam-e Jamshed newspaper article on 14-7-1973 (Turel, 1973a).
[80] 'The M. F. Cama Athornan Institute Beckons You' published by the MFCAI in 2008.

spiritual welfare of the Zoroastrian community so poor, misconceived and misdirected that they never could command that respect and regard, which as the spiritual leaders and guides of the community, they were entitled to expect."

In a letter dating from 1912, he exhorted the trustees of one of the leading philanthropic trusts in Bombay, the N. M. Wadia charities, to take up the cause of ameliorating the Parsi priesthood by setting up an institution which would have a 'lasting effect upon the social, moral and religious welfare of the Parsis'. However, his efforts did not lead to any fruition.

In 1915, the Athornan Mandal was formed, and subsequently the first resident priestly training school, then called the Athornan Boarding Madressa, was established in 1919 (see section 3.3.2 above). Based on the same model of resident priestly training, Meherwanji singlehandedly laid the groundwork for an additional priestly school, which was to enable his vision of creating enlightened full-fledged ritual priests who could service the spiritual needs of the Zoroastrian community.

3.3.3.2 Establishment of the Muncherji Faramji Cama Athornan Institute

In March 1922, Meherwanji created a trust, the Muncherji Faramji Cama Athornan Institute named in memory of his father, with an endowment of Rs. 2,500,000. The main objectives of the trust were the following:

- To establish an institute for sons of priestly families to gain ritual, religious and secular education.
- To encourage young Athornans who have graduated from the institute to pursue the priestly profession and become good religious leaders, by offering them a monthly incentive.
- To implement whatever suitable schemes are required for the progress of the priestly class.
- To offer scholarships to those students graduating from the institute after completing their training who opted to continue their religious study, so that the community would continue to get religious guidance.

A meeting was subsequently called by Meherwanji in September 1922 to formulate a plan to meet the above objectives. A decision was made to take some premises on rent where the school could commence, while the trust would procure a property to build a new structure for the institute. A bungalow was rented in Amboli village at Jogeshwari, a suburb in north Mumbai. Two scholars, Jivanji Modi and Behramgore Anklesaria, were tasked with the responsibility of selecting the principal and the teachers and setting up the selection process of the students. A renowned religious scholar, Sohrab Bulsara, was appointed as the first principal of the school. Athornan boys, mostly between the ages of nine and twelve years, were selected, and thirty-three were admitted as students in the first batch. On 15th July 1923, the institute was started with complete facilities.[81]

In October 1925, a decision was made to purchase a plot of size 43,500 square meters on Guzder Hill in Andheri. The foundation stone was laid in March 1927 and the building was completed in the next year. On 13th October 1928, the seventy-ninth birthday of Meherwanji, a glittering opening ceremony of the building was performed, and the school was shifted to this sprawling new location. The palatial building (see the figure below) could accommodate many resident students. The second batch in 1929 comprised of fifty-six new enrolments pushing the total student count to over seventy. After that year,

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[81] Turel (1973a).

new admissions were given every year to maintain the batch size at around seventy students. On average, a student took seven years to complete the priestly training curriculum, while some stayed longer to complete their entire schooling.

Figure 7: The M. F. Cama Athornan Institute building in Andheri, Mumbai

Meherwanji did not restrict his philanthropy to the MFCAI. After his announcement to start a new school for training priest, the Athornan Mandal approached him for a donation and invited him to visit the newly started Dadar Athornan Institute. In response, the Athornan Mandal was given a monthly donation of Rs. 100 for the operations of the DAI starting in the 1920s. This regular donation continued up to 1954.[82] Meherwanji Cama continued to take a keen interest in the workings of the MFCAI and the progress of its students, until the time of his demise on 21st July 1935 at the age of eighty-five years.

3.3.3.3 Progression of the MFCAI from inception to the present

As laid down by Meherwanji Cama, the primary objective of the MFCAI was to create enlightened priests who could become religious leaders in the future. To that end, the institute focused on providing not only priestly training, but also religious and secular education. From the time of its inception, classes for teaching academic subjects were held in-house. There were resident teachers, both for the recitation (bhantar) and ritual (kriyākām) training, as well as for the academic subjects included in the curriculum, such as English, Gujarati and Persian languages, and Maths, Science, History and Geography. In addition, the students were given an introduction to the Avestan and Pahlavi languages and had classes on religion (dharmagnān) and ancient Iranian history (tavārikh).

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[82] Karanjia (2019b, pp. 165–166).

There was a fixed daily school timetable comprising of eight study periods which included classes for both bhantar and secular subjects.[83]

At the time of admission, the students were enrolled to a school standard based on their age and prior education. The priestly training curriculum typically took seven years to be completed, after which the student would either choose to exit the institute or continue and complete his schooling. From the 1940s onward, the students who opted to complete their academic education attended the nearby Madhavdas Amarsey (MA) High School for their final year of matriculation.

This arrangement with the MA High School was continued up to the mid-1970s. In the year 1977, a decision was taken by the MFCAI trustees to discontinue the inclusion of secular studies in the curriculum, as increasingly students were opting for other careers rather than pursuing the priesthood. This had a disastrous impact on the enrolments, which fell drastically as most parents did not wish to limit their sons' future only to the priestly profession. In the 1980s, the MFCAI restarted the academic arrangement with a different institution, the Bhavan's A. H. Wadia High School. However, the student strength remained well below the level prior to the 1970s. The trend of student enrolments at both Athornan Institutes is analysed in detail in the next section.

3.3.4   Student enrolments at the Athornan Institutes

Both the DAI and MFCAI maintain a register of all admitted students with their entry and exit dates.[84] The chart below shows the decade-wise student admissions of the students at both the institutes since their inception. During the first five decades (1920s–1960s), the total admissions across both the institutes were around 150 students per decade, peaking in the 1940s at close to 200 students. From the 1970s onward, there was a steady decline to about 70 admissions during the 1990s. The first two decades of the new millennium have seen a drastic reduction to about 30 students per decade.
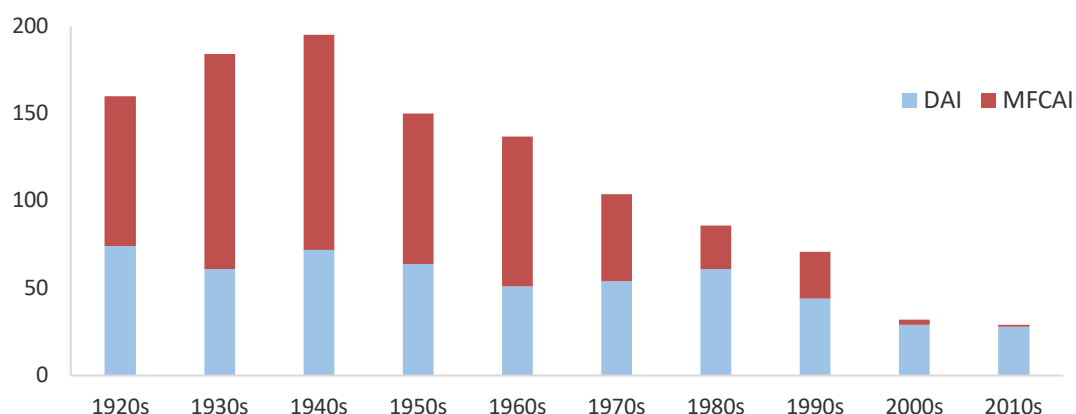
Figure 8: Decade-wise admissions at the DAI and the MFCAI

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[83] Covered in detail in section 5.5.2.
[84] Information for DAI at http://www.dadarathornaninstitute.org/dai_alumni_complete_list_jul_12.xls for the 1919–2012 period. The MFCAI roster for the years 1923–1999 was shared by a former student, Er. Soli Dastur (1945–1954). The data for the recent years has been obtained from the respective institutes.

The second chart below shows the year-wise trend of total number of students enrolled at each institute. Here, it is observed that in the initial decades up to the 1950s, the enrolments at the MFCAI were almost twice of that at the DAI. This was possible due to the large premises of the MFCAI where more than a hundred students could be accommodated comfortably, whereas the space constraints at the DAI limited the student strength to around forty. The 1950s saw a sharp drop in the MFCAI enrolments to almost half their strength compared to preceding years. This was followed by a steep decline at the DAI in the 1960s when it shut down for one year due to a lack of funds. The enrolments at both institutes were at par during the 1970s, when in 1977, the MFCAI trustees decided to discontinue the schooling arrangement and focus only on priestly training. This led to a precipitous fall of enrolments at the MFCAI to a point where it was temporarily shut down in the early 1980s due to a lack of students.[85] The parents of the affected MFCAI students tried to enrol them at the DAI, pushing its student strength to its highest level. In the 1990s, there was a brief revival at the MFCAI, after which the latter has seen a steady decline to a point where there have been no new enrolments at all in the last few years. The DAI enrolments, too, have dropped during the 1990s and in the first decade of the new millennium. However, the student strength has remained steady at around twenty in the last few years.
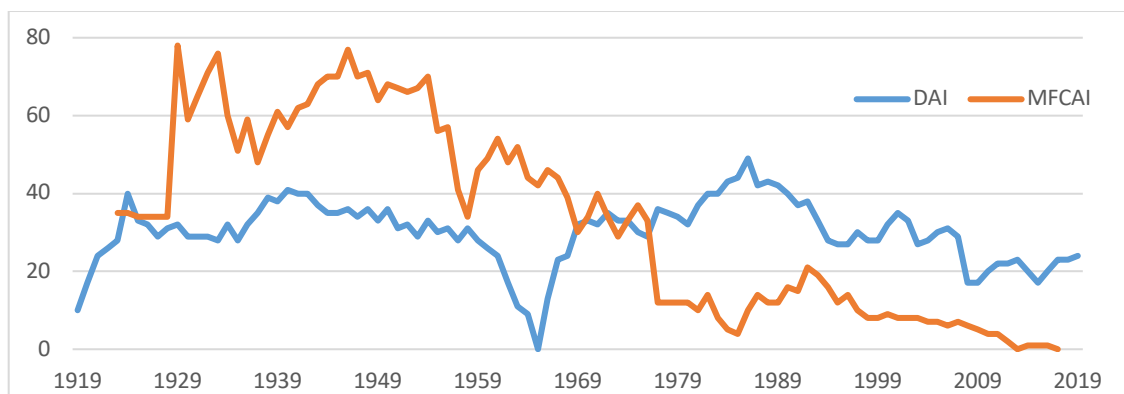
Figure 9: Total enrolled students at the DAI and the MFCAI

During the early decades, the DAI had a reputation for being more focused on memorisation training, whereas the MFCAI had an equal focus on both priestly training and secular education. Since students at the DAI did not have an option to pursue secular studies, many chose to enrol at the MFCAI to complete their schooling. At least 40 students had completed their priestly training at the DAI and then enrolled at the MFCAI to continue their secular school and college education, and hence are listed under both institutes.

In the last hundred years since the establishment of the two institutes, a total of about 1150 student admissions have been recorded. However, accurate information is not available regarding what proportion of students exited the institutes after completing the entire course curriculum. Based on the incomplete information available in the file, around three hundred students at either institute completed their entire priestly training curriculum. Thus, it can be estimated that during their span of operation, both institutes together have yielded about six hundred to seven hundred fully qualified priests. The average output was much higher in the early decades, and has dropped steadily to about

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[85] Karanjia (2019b, p. 169).

two students per year presently. This falling trend in admissions is the result of multiple factors (covered in section 9.1), chief among which is the demographic decline of the entire Parsi community in India.

3.4 Case Studies of priestly training

The preceding sections of the chapter have covered the institutions of priestly training and their evolution from the private classes of the nineteenth century run by a single teacher to the residential Athornan Institutes with a full array of teaching staff and other facilities. However, the training of a student was typically not confined to a single institution, but he instead went through various stages of learning. The priestly training is seen to have three distinct stages, and most candidates progress through these stages sequentially:

- Initial basic training received at home.
- Subsequent memorisation training usually at a training institution.
- Ritual training as an apprentice working with a senior priest.

The initial training was imparted at home usually by the father or another member of the household. The primary aim was to prepare the child for the *Navjote* ceremony[86] by the memorisation of basic prayers and to lay the foundation for the study of more advanced prayers. The mode of teaching was generally through oral instruction and repetition.

After the initial period of learning basic prayers at home, the priestly candidate started his memorisation training for the Nāvar initiation. In some cases, the student continued this study at home, but mostly he was sent to train under a senior priest or at a priestly training school.

In the final stage, the young priest generally enrolled as an apprentice with a senior priest at a fire-temple to complete his practical training on ritual performance. After completion of the ritual training, he could start officiating as a junior priest in ceremonies along with senior priests.

The above three stages are a generalisation and individual cases were dependent on the time, place and circumstances of the family. In some cases, the entire training was completed at home itself, while in other cases the student was sent to a school at an early age, bypassing the training stage at home. To better illustrate the three-stage training, four case studies of priestly candidates who trained in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century period are presented below.

3.4.1 Ervad Tehmuras Dinshaw Anklesaria of Anklesar (1842–1903)

Tehmuras Anklesaria was born in the town of Anklesar, which formed the northern limit of one of the ecclesiastical divisions of the Parsi priests, the Godāvarā Panthak. His father Er. Dinshaw had begun giving Tehmuras priestly training at home from his childhood.

After some years of preliminary education at home, Tehmuras was sent to Surat to the school of Er. Aspandyār Paliā (section 3.1.1) at the age of about nine years. Er. Paliā was a strict disciplinarian, and his class was a well-known centre for training boys for the priestly initiations. On learning by heart,

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[86] Investiture ceremony of a child aged 7–9 years into the Zoroastrian religion.

the required texts of the Avesta and the necessary ritual, Tehmuras went to Broach to go through the initiation ceremonies of Nāvar and Marātab.

Er. Dinshaw passed away when Tehmuras was eleven years old, by which time he had become a full-fledged priest. After his father's death, Tehmuras moved to the town of Deesa to assist his maternal uncle, Er. Pirozji Rustomji Dhāman, who was the resident priest there.[87]

Thus, Er. Tehmuras had his initial training at home, his advanced training under the *ustād* Er. Paliā, and finally his ritual practice was consolidated under his uncle Er. Pirozji.

3.4.2   Mobed Darabsha Bomanji Sidhva of Udvada (1905–1997)

Mobed Darabsha[88] was born in Udvada in a family of Sanjānā priests. While living at his father Bomanji's house, Darabsha learnt the Yašts, Nyāišes, Yasna and the Vidēvdād. He was fifteen years old at the time and completed his Nāvar in 1921. Er. Darabsha described his daily routine at home during this time as follows:[89]

> "In the morning at 6 AM, I did the morning *farajyāt* (obligatory) prayers. In that the 101 names of Ahura Mazdā, Sroš Bāj, Hošbām, Hāvan Gāh, Khoršed and Meher Nyāišes, Nām Setāyišn, Čār Dišā no Namaskār and Tandorosti – all these prayers I used to recite from memory. Then after having tea, I sat on the *otlā* (Guj. 'porch') to memorise the *bhantar* prayer that was assigned; then at 9 AM, I would get ready, have tea and then go off to school.

> At 4 PM, I returned from school and again sat for studying. From 4.30 PM to 8 PM, I used to learn the prayers, and then in the evening when the lamp was lit, after performing the kusti, my father used to make me pray the *farajyād* prayers; and then after 8 PM, I ate dinner, and then at 9 PM I used to sit on the table in the hall and do my lessons, and I used to go and sleep at 10 PM."

Thus, it is seen that for Er. Darabsha the entire memorisation training for the Nāvar ceremony was completed at home under his father. After this, he was deputed as a trainee under senior priests at the Zai-Bordi fire-temple[90].

> "In 1921, my father discontinued my secular schooling since I needed to memorise the *bhantar* prayers and become a Marātab. In order to learn the prayers correctly, he sent me to the Zai-Bordi Agiary, under Mobeds Kersaspji Katila and Pestonji Katila from Udvada.

> There the work schedule was to wake up at 5 AM, sweep the Agiary premises, water the plants and then do the household chores. After tea, the two Mobeds sat down to perform the Yazašne, and at 7 AM, I would sit on the veranda to study the *bhantar* from the book. After finishing the

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[87] Modi (1912, pp. 29–32)

[88] Mobed Darabsha Sidhva is the maternal grandfather of Er. Ramiyar Karanjia, the current Principal of the Dadar Athornan Institute (DAI) and the paternal grandfather of Er. Cyrus Sidhva, the resident teacher at the DAI.

[89] Based on a letter written by Er. Darabsha in Gujarati and published in Karanjia (2018). I am grateful to Er. Ramiyar Karanjia for sharing a copy of his grandfather's original letter with me. See section 12.6 (appendix-6) for the translation of this letter.

[90] The Zai-Bordi Agiary is in Gholvad village, which is situated on the border of Maharashtra and Gujarat states, about 130 kilometres north of Mumbai.

Yazašne, they came to the kitchen and after taking the *Bāj*, partook of the tea and breakfast. Then I would perform the kusti and recite the *farajyāt* prayers, and at 9.30 AM again sit down for memorisation. We ate lunch at 11.30 AM and then took a nap up to 2.30 PM. After tea, I would sit on the porch to study. After dinner, everyone sat on the porch and they asked me to recite what I had memorised during the day.

To properly learn the Vendidād, they would wake me up at 3 AM in the morning and I would sit on the *idhorā* (stone seat), light an oil lamp in a bowl and study in its light until 5 AM. In this way, they made me extremely proficient in the Yazašne, Vendidād and taught me the accompanying *kriyā* (ritual actions). I also learnt a few Yašts and the Āfrīnagān, Faroxši and Āširvād. Within one year I had memorised all the *bhantar* very well, and in 1923, I returned to Udvada for my Marātab ceremony."

Er. Darabsha's routine at the Zai-Bordi Agiary is reminiscent of the training at the private classes run by *ustāds* (section 3.1.1), wherein the students performed all the household chores. Here, he was given time to memorise and perfect the texts learnt at home prior to his Nāvar besides being given practical training in the performance of rituals. Thus, in Er. Darabsha's case, the entire training was completed in two stages, viz., initially at home and then as an apprentice under senior priests.

3.4.3   Ervad Kershasp Meherji Kotwal of Navsari (1930–2000)

Ervad Kershasp received his initial training at home from his paternal grandfather Ervad Pirojshah Kotwal, while simultaneously pursuing his secular studies at the Dadabhai Kavasji Tata Anglo Vernacular School.

In 1943, Ervad Pirojshah died suddenly and Kershasp, then thirteen, was made to quit secular studies and enrolled at the Kāngā ni Sār (section 3.1.2) in Navsari, where only boys who intended to become fully qualified working priests were taught. Under the tutelage of Nallabhai Bālistar, Kershasp received rigorous training on recitation and ritual performance, and every day he was sent home with a new prayer to learn by heart. Kershasp was the last student to pass out of the *Sār* before it shut down around the year 1945.

After finishing the memorisation of the entire prayer curriculum, as the next step, Kershasp was entrusted to Mobed Heeraji Fardunji Kanga for training in ritual practice. Mobed Kanga was well versed in rituals and was known for the exactness with which he performed the high inner rituals at the Vadi Daremeher. Er. Kershasp worked under Mobed Kanga for a few years before moving to Mumbai in the role of a full-time priest.[91]

Thus, Er. Kershasp underwent all the three stages outlined above, viz., the initial training at home, the advanced memorisation training at the Kāngā ni Sār, and the apprenticeship with a senior priest at the Vadi Daremeher.

3.4.4   Dastur Firoze Kotwal of Navsari (b. 1935)

Dastur Kotwal began attending the Nusserwanji R. Tata Zend Madressa for children from priestly families at the age of seven. After studying the Avestan recitation there from 7–9 AM, he attended

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[91] Mistree & Bengalli (2018, pp. 58–59).

the D. K. Tata Anglo-Vernacular School for secular education. By the time of his Navjote he had learnt by rote most of the prayers from the Khorde Avesta, as well as eleven chapters of the Yasna liturgy.[92]

After his Navjote, Dastur Kotwal enrolled at the M. F. Cama Athornan Institute in Mumbai in 1947 at the age of 11 years. He completed the entire curriculum and passed out in the year 1954. At the MFCAI, besides memorising the Avestan recitations, he studied Avestan, Pahlavi and Persian languages, religious studies and history, and other academic subjects. He completed his Nāvar in 1950 and Marātab in 1951.

In order to enhance his ritual performance skills, Dastur Kotwal visited Navsari during vacations from the MFCAI and practiced there as a trainee priest. He continued his practice after passing out from MFCAI, performing around ten Nāvars and several Yasna ceremonies at the Vadi Daremeher.[93]

Thus, Dastur Kotwal, like his elder brother Kershasp, went through three stages of priestly training, first at the Tata Madressa in Navsari, then at the MFCAI and finally as a practising priest again in Navsari.

The three stages of priestly training for the four case studies are summarised in the below table.

Case Study	Basic Training (Stage 1)	Advanced memorisation (Stage 2)	Ritual training (Stage 3)
Er. Tehmuras Anklesaria	At home in Anklesar (age < 9 years)	Er. Aspandyār Paliā's class in Surat (9–11 years)	With uncle Er. Pirozji in Deesa at age 12
Er. Darabsha Sidhva	At home in Udvada (Navjote at 9 years)	Continued at home under father (9–15 years)	With Er. Kersaspji and Er. Pestonji Katila At Zai-Bordi (16–18 years)
Er. Kershasp Kotwal	With grandfather in Navsari (< 12 years)	At Kāngā ni Sār in Navsari up to Marātab initiation	With Mobed Heeraji Kanga at Vadi Daremeher, Navsari
Dastur Firoze Kotwal	At Tata Madressa in Navsari (< 11 years)	At MFCAI in Mumbai (11–18 years)	At Vadi Daremeher in Navsari (> 15 years)

Out of the four priests profiled above, three received their basic training at home under their father or grandfather. In the case of Dastur Kotwal, since this initial training was not possible at home, he was sent to the Tata Madressa. For the advanced memorisation stage, all four priests took a different path, viz., either at home (case 2), under an *ustād* (case 1), at a Niśāl (case 3) or at one of the Athornan Institute (case 4). For the ritual practice, each worked as a trainee under the guidance of senior priests.

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[92] Choksy & Dubeansky (2013, p. 3).
[93] Mistree & Bengalli (2018, pp. 76–77).

This concludes the chapter on the historical priestly training as imparted over the last two-hundred-year period. The smaller private classes of the early nineteenth century run by a single priest using traditional methods gradually gave way to the formal Madressas structured on the pattern of Western schools in the late nineteenth century, and finally led to the resident priestly training institutions of the twentieth century. While the Parsi community in general underwent a period of economic growth and increased prosperity in the nineteenth century, the condition of the priesthood worsened due to several factors including lower educational attainments, poor emoluments due to a disproportionately high supply of priests and lack of a unified leadership. All these factors came together at the beginning of the twentieth century to reach an inflection point. Within a short span of ten years, three key institutions for the amelioration of the priests' situation came into being, viz., the association of priests (Athornan Mandal) and the two Athornan Institutes. For the first fifty years after their inception, both of the Athornan Institutes delivered many fully trained priests every year. However, in the ensuing period, the output rate dropped to a trickle and presently only one or two qualified priests step out of the institutes each year. This severe drop in the supply of well qualified priests has consequently altered the ritual landscape over the course of the twentieth century and into the new millennium. This is evaluated in more detail in the next chapter.

4 Changes in the Ritual Landscape

This chapter gives an overview of the Zoroastrian priestly rituals and their evolution during the twentieth century up to the present time. The questions attempted to be answered in this chapter include:

- Which priestly rituals have survived, and which have ceased to be performed?
- How does the performance of certain rituals correlate with different grades of fire-temples? And between those in cities versus smaller towns?
- Has the training of priests adapted to the changes in the ritual landscape?

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section introduces the extant Zoroastrian priestly rituals and the texts recited therein. The next section presents case studies of the ritual practice at the traditional strongholds of the Zoroastrian priesthood and the evolution of that practice during the last century. The third section analyses the structural changes in the priesthood and the concluding section discusses the impact of these changes on priestly training at the Athornan Institutes.

4.1 Zoroastrian priestly rituals

The performance of Zoroastrian priestly rituals is normally accompanied by the recitation of Avestan texts.[94] The extant Avestan texts are generally classified into the following five groups:[95]

1. Yasna, a text of 72 chapters (*hā* / *hāiti*) including the Gāϑās
2. Visperad, divided into 24 sections (*karde*)
3. Vidēvdād or Vendidād, divided into 22 portions (*fragard*)
4. Yašts, consisting of hymns to various divinities
5. Khorde Avesta (includes the 5 *Gāhs*, 5 *Nyāišes*, *Sirozā*, *Āfrīnagān*)

Most of the above texts are recited within a ritual context. The contemporary rituals performed by Parsi priests can be divided into various categories, based on the purpose and place of performance. A description of these categories along with the details of the texts recited within these ceremonies is given below. This categorisation is undertaken on the lines of Modi (1937), however it has been updated suitably to reflect the changes that have occurred in the past hundred years since its publication.

4.1.1 Category 1: Ceremonies pertaining to the fire-temple

In India, there are over one hundred and fifty fire-temples with eight belonging to the highest grade of consecrated fire, i.e., an Ātaš Bahrām. The rest belong to either the second (Ādarān) or third (Dādgāh) grade.[96] Out of the eight Ātaš Bahrāms, the Iranshah in Udvada is tended by the Sanjānā priests, four Ātaš Bahrāms, viz., the H. B. Wadia and the Zarthosti Anjuman in Mumbai, the Bhagarsath Anjuman in Navsari and the D. N. Modi in Surat are under the jurisdiction of the Bhagariā group of

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[94] Most ritual texts have an introductory section in Pāzand known as the Dibāčo, followed by the Avestan texts. There are also Pāzand texts like the Patet and the Āfrīns which are recited within a ritual.
[95] Hintze (2009a) provides a summary of the extant Avestan literature.
[96] Giara (1998) provides a short note on the history of each Indian fire-temple.

priests, and the remaining three, viz., the D. N. Dadiseth and the C. B. Banaji in Mumbai, and the P. K. Vakil in Surat belong to the Kadimi faction.

The ceremony most regularly performed in the fire-temple is the ritual feeding of the fire at regular intervals accompanied by the recitation of Avestan texts and the tolling of a bell. This is known as the Bōy ceremony, from Av. *baoiδi* / Pahl. *bōy* 'smell, scent, incense', as it is a ceremony to offer fragrant fuel to the fire. The Bōy ceremony for the Ātaš Bahrām and Ādarān fires is performed at the change of each of the five watches (Gāhs) of the day, whereas for the Dādgāh fire, it needs to be performed at least once in a day.[97]

The *Bōy* ceremony is performed by a single priest, who is referred to as the *Bōywālā* ('having the Bōy duty'). There are certain prerequisites for a Bōywālā that need to be fulfilled before tending the consecrated fire. After the change of Gāh, the Bōywālā needs to perform the *pādyāb kusti*, i.e., the ritual untying and retying of the girdle, after washing his face, hands, feet and any other exposed parts of the body. He then needs to recite the obligatory prayers of the Sroš Bāj and the appropriate Gāh, before he can enter the sanctum of the fire. For a Bōywālā tending to the Ātaš Bahrām, there are additional requirements. At the Iranshah and the four Bhagariā Ātaš Bahrāms, the Bōywālā is required to actively hold the power (Guj. *amal*) of the Barašnum, i.e., to have undergone the nine-day long Barašnum ablution and conform to the various observances needed to retain its efficacy. In addition, the Bōywālā needs to acquire the *khub* 'ritual power', which is either the *nāni* 'small' or the *moti* 'big' *khub.* The *nāni khub* is obtained by performing the Bāj ceremony with five barsam wires (Guj. *pānč tāe nī bāj*), which includes the recitation of parts of Yasna chapters 3–8. The *moti khub* is obtained by the performance of a complete Yasna ritual dedicated to the divinity Mīno Nāvar. After meeting this twin requirement of the *barašnum no amal* and *khub no amal* (i.e., holding the ritual power obtained from the Barašnum and Yasna or Bāj performance), the Bōywālā is eligible to tend to the Ātaš Bahrām fires.

The Bōy ceremony for the Ātaš Bahrām is generally more elaborate and involves multiple recitations of the Ātaš Nyāiš (Ny 5), whereas in that for the Ādarān or Dādgāh it is recited only once. The main ceremony for an Ātaš Bahrām is preceded by the washing of the fire stand and the marking of the eight cardinal and intercardinal directions into the ash of the fire censer. Then, the priest feeds the fire with fresh fuel in the form of regular and fragrant wood and starts the recitation of the Ātaš Nyāiš. There are slight variations in the number of times it is recited at each Gāh among the different priestly traditions. The Sanjānā priests at the Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām generally follow a sequence of 11–9–7–9–11 repetitions, i.e., eleven times in the first Gāh (Hāvan), nine in the second and fourth Gāhs, seven in the third and again eleven in the last Gāh[98], whereas the Bhagariā priests at the Ātaš Bahrāms in Mumbai, Navsari and Surat follow a sequence of 11–9–7–7–9 times.[99] At the three Kadimi Ātaš Bahrāms in Mumbai and Surat, the tradition is to pray only one Ātaš Nyāiš at each change of the Gāh, which is also the case for most of the Ādarān and Dādgāh fires. After finishing the main recitation, the priest completes the ceremony by reciting a short Pāzand text, the Doā Nām Setāyišn.

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[97] https://ramiyarkaranjia.com/boi-ritual/.
[98] Information provided by a Sanjānā priest, Er. Yazad Bhadha.
[99] Information for the Mumbai practice provided by Er. Adil Bhesania (personal communication), and for Surat by Er. Burjor Aibada (Interview #9, min 43).

If the Bōy ceremony is supplemented by additional wood offerings sponsored by a patron, then the priest usually recites an additional Pāzand prayer, which is either the Doā Tandorosti recited for the wellbeing of the patron's family, or the Patet Ravān-ni, recited in memory of a deceased soul.

The Bōy ceremony is the primary ritual for the regular upkeeping of the fire, and most full-time priests at fire-temples are mainly engaged in this duty. The ceremonies of consecrating a new fire-temple are not discussed here, as these are extremely elaborate and have almost ceased to be performed since the past many decades.[100]

4.1.2 Category 2: Death-related ceremonies

This category can be split into two parts, viz., the death ceremonies of the first three days up to the dawn of the fourth day, and the commemorative ceremonies performed thereafter in memory of the deceased.

Death ceremonies of the first three days

The first ceremony performed after a person's death is the funeral service known as the *Geh Sārnā* from Av. *gāϑā srāuuaiiaṇt* ('chanting the Gāthās').[101] It is performed by two priests who recite the entire *Ahunauuaitī Gāθā* (Y 28–34) standing in front of the corpse and holding a *paivand* ('connection') between them. After the funeral, the three-day ceremonies dedicated to Sroš are performed. Until the mid-twentieth century, these ceremonies included the performance of the Yasna in honour of Sroš on each of the three days, and also at least one Vidēvdād ceremony. The Yasna is preceded by the preparatory Paragnā ceremony, in which the various required constituents of the proper Yasna ceremony are procured, prepared and arranged on the ritual table. The Paragnā is performed by a single priest, who then assumes the role of an assistant priest (Rāthvī) during the following Yasna ceremony.[102] However, this practice of performing multiple Yasna ceremonies has largely been abandoned due to the lack of qualified priests. At select fire-temples, one Yasna ceremony dedicated to Sroš is performed in memory of the deceased on any of the first three days after death. Presently, only the *Sroš no kardo* ('section in honour of Sroš') ceremony is performed on each day after sunset in the Aiwisruthrem Gāh. A pair of priests recite the Āfrīnagān with the dedication to Sroš and a part of the large Sroš Yašt (Y 57). The Pāzand Patet Ravān-ni is also recited on behalf of the deceased person as part of the *Sroš no kardo* on each of the days.

The *Uthamnā*[103] ceremony is performed in the afternoon on the third day and repeated just prior to dawn on the fourth morning. It consists of the recitation of the *Dhūp Nirang*, preceded by the Khoršed and Mihr Nyāiš (Ny 1 and 2) in the evening ceremony, and Māh Nyāiš (Ny 3) and the Sroš Yašt Hādoxt (Yt 11) in the pre-dawn ceremony. In addition, four Bāj rituals are performed on the third night in honour of the divinities Siroz, Rām-Khvāstra, Ardāfravaš and Sroš. The last ceremony performed at the

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[100] The last new fire-temple was the Ādarān fire installed at the Kukadaru Agiary in Sanjan in 1990.
[101] Modi (1914, p. 415).
[102] A detailed description of the Paragnā is given by Kotwal & Boyd (1977).
[103] According to Modi (1937, pp. 341–342), the word *Uthamnā* comes from the Guj. verb *uthvuṃ* 'to get up, to depart', as this ceremony on the fourth morning is when the soul is supposed to depart from this material existence.

dawn of the fourth morning is the *Daham Yazad Jašan*, which is an Āfrīnagān ceremony dedicated to the divinity Daham. This concludes the first three-day ceremonies for the deceased person.

Commemorative death ceremonies

The Pāzand Dibāčo (introduction) of the Āfrīnagān gives the important days for commemoration of the dead as the following: *čāhrom* (fourth), *dahom* (tenth), *si-roz* (thirtieth day) and *sāl-roz* (annual anniversary day). In addition to the above days, optionally, families choose to have ceremonies performed on all days between the fourth and tenth day, and on each monthly anniversary for the first year. The ceremonies performed on each of these days are the Āfrīnagān, Faroxši, Bāj and Satūm (or Stom). The Āfrīnagān ceremony comprises of the recitation of the selected Avestan Āfrīnagāns followed by the Pāzand Āfrīns, the Faroxši consists in the recitation of the Fravardin Yašt (Yt 13), the Bāj is mainly taken from Yasna chapters 3–8, and the Satūm text corresponds to Yasna chapter 26.

In addition to the above regular ceremonies, depending on the availability of priests, the family usually commissions a performance of a Vidēvdād in memory of the deceased within the first year. In a few cases, additionally a longer combination ceremony such as the Nīrangdīn or Getīkharīd is also requisitioned.

4.1.3 Category 3: Initiation and Life cycle ceremonies

Among the life cycle ceremonies which all community members are entitled to undergo are the investiture ceremony of Navjote and the Wedding ceremony. The Navjote[104] ceremony is typically performed for a child aged between seven to eleven years. In the course of this ceremony, he or she is invested with the white muslin vest (*sudreh*) and the sacred girdle (*kusti*). The priest first makes the child undergo the ritual ablution (*nahn*). The main ceremony comprises the recitation of the *Patet* and the *Nirang-i kusti* which itself consists of the tying of the kusti around the waist with the recitation of the *Ahura Mazda Khodae* prayer, followed by the *Jasa me auuaŋhe Mazda Mazdaiiasno ahmi* prayer. The wedding ceremony, too, requires a priest to administer the *nahn* to the bride and groom before the ceremony proper, which consists of the Pāzand recitation known as the Paivand-nāmeh or Āśirvād ('benediction'). Optionally, the same wedding benediction is also recited in Sanskrit, which is referred to as the Sanskrit Āśirvād.

The two levels of priestly initiations, which only the sons from priestly families can undergo, are the Nāvar and Marātab. While the Nāvar initiation qualifies the candidate to perform the basic outer rituals, the Marātab initiation endows the candidate to perform all the higher liturgical ceremonies. The Nāvar ceremony consists of the candidate undergoing two Barašnum ablutions, after which the two priests initiating the candidate start the Gewrā, i.e., the performance of one Yasna ceremony each for six days, with the chief priest and assistant priest alternating each day. The Gewrā, which qualifies the priests to initiate the candidate, is followed by the proper Nāvar ceremony lasting four days. On each of the first three days, the candidate performs one Yasna ceremony as the chief priest, and then

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[104] Commonly accepted to be formed from Pahl. *nōg* / NP *no* 'new' + *zōt* 'chief priest' (from Av. *zaōtar* 'pourer of libations'). The *no-zōt* ceremony in the past was likely connected to initiating priests who could function as *zōt*, which is still the case in Iran where *Nozud* is the term used for the initiation ceremony for priesthood. In India, however, the term is used to denote the investiture ceremony of a child into the Zoroastrian religion.

the Bāj and Āfrīnagān. On the first day, the ceremonies are dedicated to Mīno Nāvar, on the second day to Sroš, and on the third day to the Sirozā. On the final day, a Visperad ceremony is performed and the Bāj and Āfrīnagān are recited in honour of Ahura Mazdā.

The Marātab initiation requires the candidate to undergo one complete Barašnum, after which the candidate performs the Yasna dedicated to Mīno Nāvar to gain the greater ritual power (*moti khub*). On the next morning, the candidate performs the Yasna dedicated to Sroš, and in the night, he performs the Vidēvdād ceremony, which completes the Marātab initiation.

4.1.4 Category 4: Combination ceremonies

The final category is formed by ceremonies which are created by combining two or more performances of the same or different ceremonies. These can be of two types, viz., ceremonies which are combinations of outer rituals only (such as the Jašan and Farestā), and ceremonies such as the Nīrangdīn, Getīkharīd and Hamāyašt, which consist in multiple performances of combined inner rituals.

Combination ceremonies of outer rituals

The New Persian word Jašan corresponds to Av. *yasna-* 'worship, sacrifice'. The Jašan is performed on cheerful occasions such as birthdays, foundation anniversaries, during the seasonal festivals (Gāhānbārs), etc., as well as on solemn occasions such as death anniversaries. It is a customary practice among the Parsis to commission a thanksgiving Jašan ceremony at homes and at offices during the Zoroastrian calendar month of Dae, which is dedicated to Ahura Mazdā. The Jašan ceremony is usually performed by two priests, but any number of priests can participate in a Jašan as assistant priests. This is especially observed on the anniversary day of an Ātaš Bahrām, wherein sometimes nearly fifty priests take part. The main Jašan ceremony comprises of the recitation of the Āfrīnagān and, if performed at a fire-temple, the Bāj. On important occasions, a Yasna ceremony may be included as part of the Jašan celebration, though it usually performed separately, both in time and space, from the proper Jašan ceremony.

The Farestā is a specialised ceremony akin to a Jašan, which is dedicated to the thirty-three divinities (thirty Aməša Spəntās and Yazatas of the Zoroastrian calendar month plus three additional Yazatas) and is generally commissioned on a joyous occasion. The ceremony comprises of an Āfrīnagān and a Bāj ceremony for each of the thirty-three divinities. Since the ceremony is intensive for only one pair of priests, usually the recitation is divided between two or three pairs of priests, each of whom perform the Āfrīnagān for a subset of the total.

The ceremony for the six seasonal festivals, the Gāhānbārs, follows a similar structure and is performed on any one of the five Gāhānbār days. It is comprised of the recitation of the Āfrīnagān and the Bāj for the Gāhānbār. In the past it also included a Visperad ceremony, but the latter is now rarely performed.[105]

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[105] Only one informant, Er. Hoshedar Panthaki of the Banaji Limji Agiary in Mumbai mentioned that the Visperad ceremony was being performed at his fire-temple during the Gāhānbārs.

Another important time for priestly activity is the Fraverdegān period during the end of the Zoroastrian calendar year. The last ten days of the year are dedicated to the souls of the deceased and ceremonies are requested by family members especially for those who have passed away during that year. The ceremony includes the daily performance of the Āfrīnagān, Faroxši, Bāj and Satūm, and one Jašan ceremony on any one of the ten days. During these ten days, the requests for ceremonies from the community is so high that ordained priests who normally do not pursue the priestly profession, are also called forth to serve at fire-temples.

Combination ceremonies of inner rituals

The main combination ceremonies comprising of multiple performances of inner rituals are the Nīrangdīn, Getīkharīd and Hamāyašt ceremonies, out of which only the first is routinely performed.

The Nīrangdīn is the ceremony for the consecration of water and of the Nirang, i.e., the urine obtained from a white consecrated bull, the Varasyā. The consecrated water (*āp*) and Nirang thus obtained in the ceremony are then used for other ritual purposes. The Nīrangdīn ceremony is performed by two priests who first undergo the nine-day Barašnum culminating on the tenth morning by each priest performing a Yasna dedicated to Mīno Nāvar to obtain the greater ritual power (*moti khub*). Then both priests perform the Gewrā over the next six days, and finish by each priest performing the Bāj and sharing the consecrated bread (*drōn*), which invests them with the power of being *ham-kalām*, i.e., 'united in word'. The apex of the ceremony is the all-night Vidēvdād ritual performed on the last night, during which the water and Nirang are consecrated. Thus, the entire ceremony comprises of the performances of nine Yasna and one Vidēvdād. As the practice of performing standalone Yasna and Vidēvdād rituals has declined to a handful performances every month, the Nīrangdīn ceremony is a major reason for the continuing performance of both of these inner rituals.

The Getīkharīd (from NP *gētī* 'world' and *kharīd* 'purchase') is a ceremony for the salvation from sins committed in this world.[106] It is similar in structure to the main Nāvar ceremony performed for the first-grade initiation of priests. Two priests who hold the power of the Barašnum perform the six-day Gewrā ceremony. Then, like during the last three days of the Nāvar ceremony, the priests perform one Yasna dedicated to Sroš, followed by a Yasna to the Sirozā, and then a Visperad on the final day. Presently, the Getīkharīd is performed only occasionally, averaging about one or two per year, usually in Mumbai and Surat.

The Hamāyašt[107] is a ceremony for the worship of twelve important divinities.[108] The ceremony is divided into twelve Karde or sections, each dedicated to one divinity. The ceremony is performed in two variants, viz., the large (*moti*) Hamāyašt in which each Karde comprises of the performance of twelve Yasna and twelve Vidēvdād ceremonies, totalling to a hundred and forty-four of each, and the small (*nāni*) Hamāyašt with each Karde comprising of twelve Yasna and one Vidēvdād, thus totalling to one hundred and forty-four Yasna and twelve Vidēvdād ceremonies. Due to the sheer amount of

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[106] Modi (1937, p. 337).
[107] This commonly used name of the ceremony in question suggests a derivation from Pahl. *hamāg* 'all' and *yašt* 'worship, celebration'.
[108] Modi (1937, p. 336).

priestly work force and resources required, the large Hamāyašt has only been performed once in the past many decades, namely in Surat in 2003. The small Hamāyašt, in contrast, is still performed occasionally.[109]

The only other combination ceremonies currently performed are the consecration ceremonies of the Varasyā and of the fire-temple sanctum. These are performed only when the need arises, that is, when a temple's old Varasyā has died and when the consecrated fire is shifted to renovate the fire-temple sanctum, respectively.

This completes the description of the extant priestly ceremonies. These are tabulated below by category along with the texts recited as part of the ceremonies.

#	Category	Ceremony	Recited texts
1	Pertaining to fire-temple	*Bōy* ceremony	Ātaš Nyāiš (Ny 5)
		Pre-requisite: Big or small *khub*	Complete or partial Yasna
2	Death ceremonies of first three days	*Geh Sārnā* (funeral service)	Ahunauuaitī Gāϑā (Y 28–34)
		Sroš no kardo (3-day ceremonies dedicated to Sroš)	Patet, Āfrīnagān, Sroš Yašt (Y57)
		Uthamnā (third evening, repeated prior to dawn on fourth day)	Ny 1, Ny 2, Ny 3, Sroš Yašt Hādoxt (Yt 11), *Dhūp Nirang*
	Commemorative ceremonies (4th, 10th, 30th day and annual anniversary)	Āfrīnagān	Āfrīnagān, Pāzand Āfrīns
		Faroxši	Fravardin Yašt (Yt 13)
		Bāj	~ Y 3–8
		Satūm or Stom	Y 26
		Yasna	Paragṇā + Y 0–72
		Vidēvdād	Yasna, Visperad, Vidēvdād
3	Initiation and life-cycle ceremonies	Navjote	*Nirang-i kusti*, Patet
		Nāvar	Yasna, Visperad, Āfrīnagān
		Marātab	Yasna, Visperad, Vidēvdād
		Marriage ceremony	*Āśirvād* (benediction)
4	Combination of outer ceremonies	*Jašan*	Āfrīnagān, Bāj
		Farestā (also *Firešte*)	Āfrīnagān, Bāj, Sirozā
	Combination of inner ceremonies	Nīrangdīn, Hamāyašt, Getīkharīd, and other consecration ceremonies	Different combination of the Yasna, Visperad and Vidēvdād

Table 8: Contemporary rituals among the Parsi community

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[109] A small (*nāni*) Hamāyašt was performed in Surat at the D. N. Mody Ātaš Bahrām in March 2021.

The above table gives an idea about the texts that a practising priest needs to have memorised or be at least proficient at reciting. In most of the ceremonies listed above, the prayers are recited from memory. This includes the entire Khorde Avesta, most of the Yašts, the Yasna, the Visperad and other texts like the Āfrīnagān, Āśirvād, etc. However certain other texts like the Vidēvdād and the *Faroxši* (Fravardin Yašt) prayers are only to be fluently read and not required to be committed to memory. The complete priestly training curriculum covers all the texts in the above table.

A comparison with the ceremonies listed in Modi (1937) reveals the changes in the priestly rituals performed over the past hundred years. The primary difference observed is that the long intensive ceremonies have largely ceased to be performed or are only occasionally undertaken nowadays. Ceremonies like the consecration of a new Ātaš Bahrām or a Dakhma have not been performed during recent times and, given the lack of appropriate occasions and their requirement of priestly manpower, are unlikely to be performed again in the future. Similarly, long combination ceremonies such as the Fravardiān[110] and Sroš[111] have been discontinued due to the unavailability of enough priests. Another similarly intensive ceremony, the Hamāyašt, has been performed occasionally in the past few decades, but only in its shorter format and only at Surat. This reduction is also seen in the standalone performances of the inner ceremonies of Yasna and Vidēvdād, which were part of the daily routine at most fire-temples in the past but are now limited to special occasions.

However, when it comes to outer rituals, the frequency and coverage of performance has largely remained the same. Most fire-temples have a daily request for performances of the Āfrīnagān, Faroxši, Bāj and Satūm ceremonies. Thus, it is observed that, while there has been a reduction across the board in the inner rituals and the long combination ceremonies, the routine performance of the shorter outer rituals has remained largely intact.

4.2   Trends in ritual performance

The priestly ritual landscape in India has constantly evolved over the past century. Overall, the magnitude of ritual performance has significantly reduced over this time. In order to get a sense of the ritual practice prevalent around the mid-twentieth century and its subsequent evolution over the past seven to eight decades, case studies are presented below of places which have been the traditional strongholds of the priesthood. The study focuses on four of the most important centres of priestly activity, viz., the cities of Mumbai and Surat, and the towns of Navsari and Udvada. For each place, the rituals performed in the past decades are mapped and contrasted with the present scenario, and the changes are analysed.

The case studies focus on the principal centre of priestly activity at each location, such as the Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām in Udvada, the Vadi Daremeher in Navsari and the Modi Shenshahi Ātaš Bahrām in Surat. Only in Mumbai, the situation is somewhat different since the ritual activity is not centred at one particular site, but at a number of different places. However, the Bhagariā Panthak priests have been the most dominant group and hence the study will focus on the ritual activity at the seat of the Bhagariā priests in Mumbai, the Anjuman Ātaš Bahrām.

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[110] Modi (1937, p. 373).
[111] Modi (1937, p. 338).

Also, for the purpose of this study, the focus is on the evolution of the inner rituals such as the Yasna and Vidēvdād, and the longer combination ceremonies of these inner rituals such as the Nīrangdīn and Getīkharīd since these are well documented compared to the basic outer rituals.

4.2.1 Case 1. Navsari – Vadi Daremeher

The Vadi Daremeher (lit. 'big court of Mithra') in Navsari is the designated ritual precinct of the Bhagariā priests within Navsari, and it is also known as the Bhagarsath Anjuman Daremeher. The traditional year of its founding is accepted to be 551 YZ (i.e., 1182 CE), making it nearly 850 years old. It did not house a perpetually burning fire until a Dādgāh fire was installed there in 1796 CE.[112]

Up to the late nineteenth century, the Nāvar and Marātab ceremonies of all priests belonging to the Bhagariā Panthak were mandatorily performed at the Vadi Daremeher, irrespective of whether they would practise within Navsari or outside. Kutar (1929) is the most comprehensive listing of all the Nāvar ceremonies performed at the Vadi Daremeher and lists 7,892 Nāvars performed during the period of 1633–1928 CE, based on the records maintained by the Bhagarsath Anjuman.[113] On average, this translates to twenty-seven Nāvar ceremonies per year for the nearly three-hundred-year period. In 1928, the last year of the list, there were forty-one Nāvar ceremonies performed at the Vadi Daremeher. Mobed Pirojshah Adarji Kotwal (d. 1943), the grandfather of Dastur Firoze Kotwal, was one of the prolific priests of that time who performed over 700 Nāvars during his lifetime at the Vadi Daremeher.[114] Since most ordained priests at the turn of the twentieth century still followed their father's footsteps into the priestly profession, this indicates the high availability of priests available for ritual performance at that time.

This large supply of newly ordained priests fulfilled the large demand for ceremonies generated by the community, at least until the mid-twentieth century. Kutar (1929), who also gives a list of the Nīrangdīn and Varasyā consecration ceremonies at the Vadi Daremeher, shows that between six and eight Nīrangdīn ceremonies were performed there each year at the beginning of the twentieth century. This intensity of ritual activity continued for many subsequent decades. As per Dastur Kotwal, in the 1940s, multiple Yasna ceremonies were performed every day at the Vadi Daremeher usually in memory of the departed souls, especially during the first year after death. The Vadi Daremeher hummed with activity throughout the year – Yasna and Vidēvdād ceremonies in honour of divinities, Visperad for the Gāhānbār, and Nāvar and Marātab initiations. On important occasions such as the Gāϑā-Gāhānbār days, all the thirteen pāvīs there overflowed with priests performing inner rituals.[115]

An annual calendar of ritual events was followed by the Bhagariā priests as certain ceremonies were only performed at particular times of the year. For instance, the Nāvar initiations and Nīrangdīn ceremonies were not carried out in the monsoon season, as both these ceremonies required undergoing the Barašnum, which would be vitiated by contact with rainwater. Hence there was a slack period which started after the Gāhānbār celebrations in June for the duration of the monsoon months. During this time, the Bhagariā priests from other places like Mumbai would send requests for

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[112] Kotwal (1974, pp. 665–666).
[113] The current whereabouts and the state of preservation of these records are not known. As a consequence, the records of the ceremonies performed in the ensuing period is unavailable.
[114] Mistree & Bengalli (2018, p. 35).
[115] Mistree & Bengalli (2018, p. 51).

ceremonies like the Hamāyašt[116] to be performed for their clients at Navsari since it was not possible to perform these with the limited number of priests available elsewhere, while the Bhagariās in Navsari had surplus capacities during this time.[117] A tentative schedule of a typical ritual year in Navsari during the 1950s is tabulated below.[118]

Season	Māh	Month	Gāhānbārs	Main ceremonies
Monsoon	Fravardin	September		Hamāyašt
	Ardibeheŝt	October	Maediozarem	Nāvar, Gāhānbār
Winter	Khordad	November		Nāvar, Nīrangdīn
	Tir	December	Maedioshahem	Nāvar, Gāhānbār
	Amardad	January		Nāvar, Nīrangdīn
	Šeherevar	February	Paeteshahem	Nāvar, Gāhānbār
Summer	Meher	March	Ayāthrem	Nāvar, Gāhānbār
	Avan	April		Nāvar, Nīrangdīn
	Adar	May		Nāvar
	Dae	June	Maediārem	Gāhānbār
Monsoon	Bahman	July		Hamāyašt
	Aspandamard	August	Hamaspathmaedaem	Hamāyašt, Fravardegān

Table 9: Ritual calendar followed in Navsari during the mid-20th century

Dastur Keki Ravji, a Bhagariā priest hailing from Navsari, completed his priestly training at the DAI and then his secular education at MFCAI, and returned to Navsari as a full-time priest. For the period from 1962 to 1982, he was engaged in the regular performance of inner rituals in Navsari and served as a Bōywālā at the Navsari Ātaš Bahrām for many years. In an interview, Dastur Ravji spoke about the sheer quantum of inner rituals performed during his time as a ritual priest in Navsari.[119] There were ten to twelve Nīrangdīn ceremonies performed every year, and he completed fifty-one Nīrangdīns during his time there. Further he participated in fifteen small Hamāyašts, typically one every year during the monsoon season. The Hamāyašt was usually performed by three pairs of priests, with each pair performing two Yasna ceremonies daily, so that the entire ceremony would be completed within one month.

Apart from the combination rituals, Dastur Ravji also performed about twenty Yasna and eight to ten Vidēvdād ceremonies in a typical month in Navsari. Over his entire twenty-year tenure as a fulltime ritual priest in Navsari, he estimated that he would have performed nearly five thousand Yasna and two thousand Vidēvdād ceremonies.[120]

This he contrasted with the present day, when barely one or two Yasna ceremonies are performed in a month, and the Vidēvdād has ceased to be performed completely in Navsari. A Nīrangdīn ceremony

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[116] A small Hamāyašt comprising of 144 Yasna and 12 Vidēvdād would typically be performed by two or three dedicated pairs of priests over a month, which was difficult to assemble at one location in Mumbai.
[117] Mistree & Bengalli (2018, pp. 77–78).
[118] Constructed based on conversations with Bhagariā high priests, Dastur Firoze Kotwal and Dastur Keki Ravji.
[119] Interview #3 (min 4–10).
[120] Interview #3 (min 52–55).

was last performed at the Vadi Daremeher in November 2015, when two priests from Mumbai travelled to Navsari to perform the ceremony.[121] The main reason cited by Dastur Ravji for this radical change in a relatively short period of thirty to forty years was that priests like him left Navsari and came to Mumbai for better opportunities. Dastur Ravji became the Panthaki at the Cama baug Agiary in Mumbai, where he has served for the past three decades.

In Mumbai, he now performs a handful of Yasna and Vidēvdād ceremonies and occasionally a Nīrangdīn in a year. In June 2019, after the demise of the previous Dastur Meherjirānā, he was appointed as the eighteenth in line to the seat of the Meherjirānā, thus as the head of the Bhagariā priests. Dastur Ravji has since tried to revive the regular performance of the Yasna at Navsari, and is presently training two young Bōywālās of the Navsari Ātaš Bahrām in the performance of the Yasna and the Nāvar initiation ceremony.

4.2.2   Case 2. Udvada – Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām

Udvada, a small town on the coastline of South Gujarat, has been the base of the Sanjānā priestly *Tola* ('group') since the enthronement of the Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām fire there in the mid-eighteenth century.[122] Nine families of Sanjānā priests brought the Iranshah fire from Navsari to Udvada, after the Sanjānās' rapidly deteriorating relations with the Bhagariā priests reached a tipping point. Since their arrival there, Udvada has remained the principal seat of the Sanjānā priests. Even after a sizeable population under the Sanjānā priestly jurisdiction had moved to Mumbai in the twentieth century, the ritual request from these families still continued to be fulfilled at Udvada.

There are two buildings in the Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām complex, one housing the Ātaš Bahrām fire is known as the *Wadiā nu makān* (Wadia building), and the second housing the Dādgāh fire known as the *Petit nu makān* (Petit building).[123] Both the buildings have a Yazišn Gāh (ritual precinct) which houses eight full-size pāvīs for performing the inner rituals, and an additional one or two small pāvīs. Thus, taken together the complex houses sixteen full size pāvīs. The magnitude of ritual activity prevalent in the mid twentieth century, as still reflected by the number of pāvīs at the Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām complex, was highlighted in interviews with Sanjānā priests.

Er. Framroze Bhadha was born and brought up in Udvada, and practiced as a ritual priest at the Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām during the 1960s and 1970s. In an interview conducted with this author, he mentioned that in his early years, there were about twenty priests attached to the Wadia building, and another eighteen priests at the Petit building. He added that getting a free pāvī to perform a ritual was extremely difficult. At that time, every morning two to three Yasna ceremonies were performed

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[121] This event was covered in the Parsi news at https://parsikhabar.net/religion/a-nirangdin-in-navsari-at-the-vadi-dar-e-mehr.

[122] The accepted year of the shift of the Iranshah fire to Udvada is 1742. For details see Hodiwala (1927, pp. 307–308).

[123] The Iranshah fire was installed in the newly constructed Wadia building on 31 October 1894, while the adjoining Dinshah Petit Daremeher was inaugurated on 3 June 1891 (Hodiwala, 1927, p. 633). The Iranshah fire had been temporarily shifted to the Petit Daremeher on 12 May 1893, when the new building was being constructed at the site of the previous building (Homji, 1966, pp. 116–119). Recently, the Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām fire had been shifted to the Petit Daremeher during the 2017–2021 period when the entire Wadia building was being renovated.

in each pāvī, totalling to around thirty Yasna ceremonies each day across both buildings. Hence, in a typical month close to one thousand Yasna ceremonies would be performed.

This point was corroborated by the two brothers, Er. Kobad and Er. Dara Bharda, who presently serve at the Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām. They mentioned that during their father Er. Jehangir Bharda's time, on one instance, a Vidēvdād ceremony had to be performed in the ninth and only small pāvī in the building because all the other eight pāvīs were occupied. This implied that there were nine simultaneous Vidēvdād ceremonies being performed during that night, which demonstrates that there was a huge demand for inner rituals to be performed.

A Sanjānā priest based in Mumbai, Er. Tehmton Sidhva, shed some light on how the demand for these rituals was generated.[124] He mentioned that even at the highpoint of ritual activity in the mid-twentieth century, the resident population of Udvada was limited[125], and most of the ritual work was commissioned from Mumbai. Most of the fire-temples in Mumbai were operated by Bhagariā priests; the Sanjānā priests maintained their *ālāt* ('ritual implements') at just one fire-temple, the Boyce Dhanapatel Daremeher, located in South Mumbai. However, as Er. Sidhva noted, most Sanjānā families preferred to have their commemorative rituals performed at the Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām.

In the same interview Er. Sidhva threw some light on rituals performed in honour of the deceased within the first year after death. He cited an example of his maternal grandmother who expired in 1960 to illustrate the magnitude of rituals performed within the first year following her death. As soon as the news of death was received, the *Sroš ni kriyā* ('ceremony of Sroš') was commenced. This comprised of three Yasna ceremonies, one on each of the first three days, and a Vidēvdād ceremony before the dawn of the fourth day. If the deceased person had been married, as in the case of his grandmother, the entire set of three Yasna and one Vidēvdād was also performed for the spouse, who may either be alive or deceased.

On each monthly anniversary for the complete first year, two Yasna[126] and one Vidēvdād would be performed. Further, within the first year, a Nīrangdīn ceremony was performed and if that was not feasible, a Getīkharīd ceremony was performed. Also, during one day of each of the six Gāhānbārs, the Visperad ceremony was performed. Finally, the Fravardiān ceremonies were performed during the Fravardegān days, lasting for eighteen days at the end of the Zoroastrian calendar year and the beginning of the next year, wherein a Yasna was performed everyday in memory of the departed soul. Thus, accounting for all the above days, a total of over fifty Yasna ceremonies and around ten Visperad and Vidēvdād ceremonies were performed during the first year, as tabulated below.

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[124] Interview #39.

[125] Hodiwala (1927) gives the size of the Parsi community in Udvada in the 1920s as three hundred members, with an equal division between the priestly families (Athornan) and the laity (Behdins). The population would have remained around this number for much of twentieth century, but has reduced to fewer than one hundred members in the past few decades.

[126] The two Yasna ceremonies would be performed by the two priests interchangeably as the Zot (chief priest) and Rāspi (assistant priest) in order to gain the *moti khub* (higher ritual power) required to perform the Vidēvdād ceremony.

#	Days of rituals	Yasna	Visperad	Vidēvdād
1	First 3 days after death	3 x 2 = 6	–	2
2	11 monthly anniversaries	11 x 2 = 22	–	11
3	Nīrangdīn ceremony	8 or	–	1
	or Getīkharīd ceremony	8	1	–
4	Gāhānbār days	–	6	–
5	Rapithwin consecration	2 Yasna-i Rapithwin[127]	–	–
6	Muktād Fravardiān	18	–	1
	Total	56	7	15

Table 10: Ceremonies performed in the first year after death in Udvada during the 1960s

The ritual landscape of Udvada has seen a decline similar of that of Navsari. At present there are only a handful of priests in Udvada who perform inner rituals. The two brothers, Er. Kobad and Er. Dara Bharda are the only Sanjānā priests to regularly engage with inner rituals. They typically perform one or two Yasna ceremonies each month, and about one Nīrangdīn ceremony every year at Udvada. Most of the regular daily ceremonies are now limited to outer rituals like the Āfrīnagān, Faroxši and Satūm. Thus, a drastic reduction is seen in the performance of inner rituals at Udvada within a period of five to six decades.

4.2.3   Case 3. Surat – Modi Ātaš Bahrām

In Surat, inner rituals are only performed at the Dadabhai Naoshirwanji Modi Shenshahi Ātaš Bahrām, which is the seat of the Surti Bhagariās (i.e., Bhagariā priests historical settled in and around Surat).[128] In an interview, Er. Faredoon Jamshed Turel, the seniormost priest at the Modi Ātaš Bahrām, described the ritual activities prevalent there in the first half of the twentieth century. Whenever there was a death in a Parsi family residing in Surat or the adjoining *Chorasi* (Guj. 'eighty-four') *talukā* ('sub-district')[129], an intimation was sent to the Modi Ātaš Bahrām for the performance of the required inner rituals for the first four days. If the deceased person was single, then one set comprising of four Yasna and one Vidēvdād ceremonies was performed. However, if the person was married, then the *jorā* 'pair' of ceremonies were performed, one set each for the deceased and the spouse. The following table summarises the number of inner rituals commonly performed in Surat in connection to a person's death during the first half of the twentieth century:

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[127] The Yasna-i Rapithwin is a variant of the Yasna ceremony dedicated to second Gāh of the day, Rapithwin. It can be performed in that Gāh during the first seven months of the Zoroastrian calendar (māh Fravardin to māh Meher), especially once each at the start and end of this seven-month period.
[128] The seat of the Bhagariā Panthak priests is the Bhagarsath Anjuman Ātaš Bahrām in Navsari. The geographical area under the jurisdiction of the Bhagariā priests includes the city of Surat, which is 35 kilometres from Navsari. As Surat became an important centre for trade and economy from the 16th century onward, the Parsi population of the city swelled and so did the priesthood. The two Ātaš Bahrāms, the Shenshahi D. N. Mody and the Pestonji Kalabhai Kadimi Vakil, were both established in the year 1823.
[129] So named because it was comprised of eighty-four villages.

Day	Ceremony for deceased	Ceremony for spouse if married[130]
1	Yasna dedicated to Sroš, if funeral completed	Yasna to Sroš
2	Yasna to Sroš	Yasna to Sroš
3	Yasna to Sroš + Vidēvdād at night	Yasna to Sroš + Vidēvdād at night
4	Yasna to Ardāfravaš	Yasna to Ardāfravaš

Table 11: Inner rituals performed within the first 4 days after death (Surat, early 20th century)

Thus at least three Yasna ceremonies plus one Vidēvdād was performed if the person was single, and potentially up to eight Yasna ceremonies would be performed if the deceased had been married. Er. Turel specified that this was the customary practice in Surat prior to the 1950s. He pointed out that the ritual intensity has reduced since that time; however, even presently at least one Yasna dedicated to Sroš is performed on request within the first four days of death.

Among the existing Ātaš Bahrām temples in India, the Modi Ātaš Bahrām has the distinction of having the highest number of inner ritual performing priests affiliated to it. There are at least seven full-time priests attached to the Modi Ātaš Bahrām capable of performing inner rituals, and in addition, two or three visiting priests who are called upon whenever there is an excess demand for ritual performance.[131] This large number of qualified priests at one location enables the Modi Ātaš Bahrām to host the highest number of inner rituals performed anywhere within the country.

As per Er. Burjor Aibada[132], one of the current priests serving at the Modi Ātaš Bahrām, there are one or two Yasna ceremonies performed daily, and about 15–20 Vidēvdād ceremonies every month. In addition, about ten Nīrangdīn ceremonies are performed there every year, and this trend has remained fairly constant since the past twenty-five-year period.[133] At least twelve different priests have been involved in the performance of these higher liturgies in the past ten years, indicating the large breadth of available priests. Due to this sheer presence of a large body of ritual priests, it was possible to undertake a large Hamāyašt ceremony spanning close to three months at the Modi Ātaš Bahrām in 2003. It involved five to six pairs of priests and included 144 performances each of the Yasna, Vidēvdād, Āfrīnagān and Bāj ceremonies. Er. Faredoon Turel, who organised this performance, conceded that a ceremony of such colossal magnitude was unlikely to ever be performed again, given the paucity of qualified ritual priests.[134]

At no other single location in India are there more than three or four qualified priests available at the same time to perform the inner rituals. A long ceremony like the Nīrangdīn requires two dedicated priests for the ceremony's entire duration of eighteen days, during which time they need to delegate their regular duties to other available priests. At most fire-temples where inner rituals are performed,

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[130] If the spouse was alive, the *zinde-ravān* ('of the living soul') ceremony was performed, and if the spouse had pre-deceased, the *anoshe-ravān* ('of the immortal soul') ceremony was performed.
[131] See appendix-1 (section 12.1).
[132] Interview #9.
[133] Sourced from the D. N. Mody Ātaš Bahrām ritual register shared with the kind permission of Er. Faredoon Turel. A total of 240 Nīrangdīn ceremonies were performed at the D. N. Mody Ātaš Bahrām during the twenty-five-year period from 1993 to 2017.
[134] Interview #13. A small Hamāyašt ceremony was being performed at Surat in March 2021.

there is little leeway for the priests to delegate their regular duties, and hence only one or two Nīrangdīn or similarly long ceremonies are carried out within a year.

4.2.4   Case 4. Mumbai – Anjuman Ātaš Bahrām

The Anjuman Ātaš Bahrām in Mumbai has been the seat of the Bhagariā priests in Mumbai since its inception in 1897 CE, with the head priest belonging to the JamaspAsa family. The present head priest is Dastur Jamasp JamaspAsa who succeeded his father, Dastur Kaikhushroo JamaspAsa in May 2019. The Anjuman Ātaš Bahrām is unique for the fact that presently it is the only fire-temple across India which requires the Bōywālā priest to have the greater ritual power (*moti khub*) obtained by the performance of a Yasna ceremony as the chief priest.

There are four resident priests presently serving as Bōywālā at the Anjuman Ātaš Bahrām – Er. Kaizad Kotwal, Er. Jamasp Tarachand, Er. Tehmasp Jijina and Er. Farhad Shroff. Each priest serves for one complete day, on every fourth day. Er. Kaizad Kotwal explained the sequence followed in every four-day cycle.[135] On the first day, Er. Kaizad arrives at the Ātaš Bahrām for his turn as the Bōywālā priest for the day. In order to prepare for the greater ritual power, he first needs to perform the Bāj with five *barsam* wires (*panj tāe*) to gain the small ritual power (*nāni khub*). The small ritual power remains valid up to the dawn of the next day, whereas the greater ritual power retains validity up to the noon of the fourth day.

Then he performs the Yasna ceremony with a dedication to Mīno Nāvar, by officiating as the chief priest (Zot). The assistant priest (Rāspī) for the ceremony, who also performs the Paragnā, is the priest who performed the Yasna two days prior and hence has already retained the greater ritual power. The Yasna performed for obtaining the *moti khub* is generally concise in performance and is termed as *dhārā pramāne* ('as per custom'), which consists of the recital of all the chapters accompanied by significant ritual actions, and discretionary recital of the remaining portions.[136]

After gaining the greater ritual power, Er. Kaizad starts the Bōy duty from the Rapithwin Gāh, which starts at midday. He performs the Bōy ceremony for the five Gāhs and finishes in the Hāvan Gāh, which is the morning on the second day. He remains present at the Ātaš Bahrām to handover the duty to the incoming priest for that day, and to perform outer rituals. On the third morning, he has to perform the Paragnā and then the Yasna officiating as the assistant priest, with the incoming priest for that day serving as the chief priest. After the Yasna, he becomes free to assist with other ritual work at the Ātaš Bahrām. The next day, which is the fourth day of the cycle, is an off day, and Er. Kaizad arrives at the Ātaš Bahrām only if requested to perform the Bāj ceremony by one of the priests who commission the daily rituals on behalf of the clientele.

The tight schedule of this four-day routine allows limited time to engage with the performance of inner rituals such as the Yasna and Vidēvdād, which require both priests to have the greater ritual power. Er. Kaizad accepts requests for performing only a few Yasna and Vidēvdād ceremonies each month, in addition to his above fixed schedule. Er. Kaizad has also performed one Nīrangdīn ceremony

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[135] Interview #23.
[136] Er. Kaizad M. Kotwal mentions that Y 1–16, Y 22–27 and most parts of Y 54–72 are normally recited, whereas the entire Gāϑās (Y 28–34, Y 43–51, Y 53) are almost always omitted, unless someone has requested a *sampūrna ijasni* (complete Yasna), in which case all the seventy-two chapters are recited.

in each of the past three years, usually with a visiting priest. During these eighteen days, he cannot attend to his regular duties and this is possible only because his three colleagues share the additional duties among themselves. Thus, even with four resident priests, only a limited number of inner rituals can be undertaken. At most other fire-temples, there are only one or two in-house priests, and they rely on priests visiting from other places to be able to accept requests for the longer ceremonies.[137]

A record of the Nīrangdīn ceremonies performed at the Bhagariā fire-temples of Mumbai is maintained at the office of the Maneckji Navroji Sett Charities in Fort, Mumbai.[138] The listing of the ceremonies in the past thirty years shows that an average of five Nīrangdīn ceremonies a year were performed in the 1990s, however, this average has dropped to two and a half after the year 2000. A closer inspection of the record reveals that in at least half of the ninety ceremonies performed between 1990 and 2018, one of the priests had come from the Modi Ātaš Bahrām in Surat. This illustrates the reliance on priests from Surat when it comes to the sustenance of the longer inner ceremonies in Mumbai.

4.2.5   Observations

The four cases presented above portray the change in priestly ritual landscape within India over the past century. A declining trend in the performance of inner rituals is observed, though in varying degrees at different locations. Navsari and Udvada were the traditional strongholds of the Bhagariā and Sanjānā priests respectively, and most of the important ceremonies such as the Nāvar initiation and the consecration of the Nīrangdīn were commissioned to be performed there by the community based in Mumbai and other places. However, both these places saw an exodus of the ritual priests to bigger cities and to different professions for better opportunities, especially during the 1980s and 1990s. Consequently, there was a precipitous drop in the rituals that could be performed at both places, to the extent that most of the longer ceremonies ceased to be performed there in the new millennium.

Surat, while still seeing a reduction in the amount of ritual activity compared to the early twentieth century, is the only place with a consistent record of performance over the past three decades. On account of having close to ten ritual performing priests, longer ceremonies like the Nīrangdīn can still be taken up by the local priests without affecting the duty of tending to the Ātaš Bahrām fire and the daily performance of routine ceremonies.

Mumbai has benefitted from the movement of priests like Dastur Keki Ravji who relocated from Navsari and has since been performing inner ceremonies in Mumbai. However, it is observed that most fire-temples in Mumbai do not have the critical mass of ritual priests necessary for the regular performance of higher liturgies, and there is a reliance on visiting priests from Surat for the longer Nīrangdīn ceremony to be performed.

Based on the above cases, it can be inferred that the variety and the frequency of performing the higher liturgical ceremonies is directly proportional to the number of available ritual priests at a given

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[137] Er. Burjor Aibada of Surat is an example of a visiting priest. Every year, he performs two to three Nīrangdīn ceremonies in Mumbai with the resident priests of the respective fire-temples.
[138] I would like to thank the trustee Er. Burjor Antia and the staff of the M N Sett Charities for allowing me to photograph these records.

location. To perform any inner ritual like the Yasna, Visperad or Vidēvdād, two priests carrying the greater ritual power obtained by celebrating the Yasna as the chief priest are required. This means that, in essence, to undertake one Yasna ceremony commissioned by a community member, the two priests would essentially need to perform three Yasna ceremonies in total. Since the ritual power thus obtained lasts for three full days, the priests could technically perform a few inner ceremonies on the second and third day of their *khub*. But in order to do so, they would have to delegate their regular duties like the Bōy ceremony to other available priests.

The table below summarises the type and frequency of inner rituals possible depending on the number of capable priests available at a location.

Number of ritual priests	Inner rituals that can be performed	Examples
< 2	None possible	Most small fire-temples in India
2–3	Occasional Yasna	H. B. Wadia Ātaš Bahrām, Mumbai
4–5	Regular Yasna and Vidēvdād	Anjuman Ātaš Bahrām, Mumbai
6–7	In addition, some Nīrangdīn / Getīkharīd	D. N. Modi Ātaš Bahrām, Surat
> 7	All the above + Hamāyašt / Fravardiān	D. N. Modi with visiting priests

Table 12: Type of inner rituals possible based on availability of ritual priests

This section has highlighted the changing ritual scenario at the important Ātaš Bahrāms[139] which have had a continuous history of housing performances of inner rituals. Most of the smaller fire-temples have seen similar developments over this time. There are anecdotal accounts of the Yasna ceremony being performed daily at most of the local fire-temples, both in cities and in small towns and villages, in the first half of the twentieth century.[140] All fire-temples were constructed in a way as to provide the facilities required for the performance of inner rituals: a Yazišn Gāh containing at least one or two pāvīs replete with the ritual table (*idhorā*) and the chief priest's seat (*zod gāh*), as seen in the figure below from a small fire-temple in Valsad, Gujarat.

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[139] The inner ceremonies by the Bhagariā priests of Navsari have traditionally been performed at the Vadi Daremeher and not at the Navsari Bhagarsath Anjuman Ātaš Bahrām.
[140] See section 4.3.2 for ritual practices prevalent in towns and villages of Gujarat in the twentieth century.

Figure 10: Ritual area with ritual table, seat for the priest and stand for the water container

Presently, however, the pāvīs at most of these small fire-temples are not in use or are employed for performing only the Bāj ceremony. The Yasna, Vidēvdād and any other solemn ceremonies have ceased to be performed at almost all such small fire-temples.

4.3 Structural changes in the priesthood

The above changes in the ritual practice have occurred alongside the change in the structure of the priestly class itself. In this section, the factors that have affected the constitution of the priesthood in the twentieth century and the resultant changes are analysed.

4.3.1 Consolidation as a predominantly urban community

Over the course of the past century, the Parsis in India have consolidated as a mainly urban community. The share of its rural population has dropped to less than 4% as per the 2011 Indian Census.[141] In the first half of the twentieth century, the migration was mainly from villages and towns in Gujarat to Mumbai. The share of the total Parsi population of India that lived in Mumbai city increased from 51% in 1901 to 71% in 1971[142] and has remained around that mark since then. In the last fifty years, there has been further dispersion of the community to other cities within India, and significant emigration to other countries.

This urban shift and dispersion have caused a breakdown in priestly practice at the traditional stronghold towns like Navsari and Udvada in Gujarat, as seen in the previous case studies. Up to the 1970s, there was still a critical mass of priests present in these towns, which was able to meet the demand of ceremonies generated locally as well as from Mumbai and other places. The priestly quarters such as the Dasturwād of Navsari and the Turel Wādi of the Turel priestly clan of Surat abounded with priests engaged with the daily performing of the inner liturgies.[143]

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[141] Census of India 2011 report on minority religions at http://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/DDW00C-01%20Appendix%20MDDS.xlsx.
[142] Visaria (1974, p. 1737).
[143] Mentioned by Dastur Firoze Kotwal and Er. Faredoon Turel respectively.

However, from the 1980s onward, most priests from these towns followed the rest of the community into cities and to other professions for better opportunities. This dispersion to different places meant that unlike in Navsari and Udvada where many priests were available at one location, now most of the fire-temples had access to only one or two ritual priests. Thus, the decline in inner rituals during this period can be attributed to the dispersion of the laity and then also of the fully trained priests due to increased urbanisation.

4.3.2   Change in the ritual expertise of priests

The Yasna is commonly considered as the fundamental inner ritual, whose performance is a prerequisite for all the other longer ceremonies like the Visperad and Vidēvdād. As seen in the previous section, it used to be performed multiple times daily at Ātaš Bahrāms up to the middle of the twentieth century. Its daily performance was not limited to large centres of the Parsi population, but also included small villages and towns in the states of Gujarat and Maharashtra. Er. Ramiyar Karanjia's grandfather, Mobed Darabsha Sidhwa documented the daily performance of Yasna ceremonies in the 1920 at the Agiaries at Zai-Bordi and Tarapore, both small villages with a Parsi population of about 100 families. Er. Sidhwa, who relocated to Mumbai in the 1930s, mentions about the daily Yasna and frequent Vidēvdād performance at a small fire-temple, the Mithaiwala Agiary.[144] Er. Soli Dastur, who was born and raised in Tarapore, talks about the daily morning Yasna at the Tarapore Agiary performed by his maternal uncles in the 1940s to 1950s.[145] Er. Bomanshaw Sanjana from Valsad in Gujarat mentioned that both his grandfather and father had each performed over ninety Nīrangdīn ceremonies in Valsad during a period extending from the 1930 to 1970, and he continued this tradition in Valsad before he shifted to Mumbai in the 1970s.[146] Thus, for a good part of the last century, the performance of the Yasna and its allied ceremonies were part of the regular duties of most priests serving at a fire-temple, and they were expected to execute these proficiently.

However, over time, the performance of the Yasna ceremony has declined radically, and has completely ceased to be performed at most fire-temples. Requests for a Yasna or Vidēvdād ceremony are only made at selected fire-temples where a pair of trained priests are available. The regular ceremonies performed at most fire-temples are limited to outer rituals like the Āfrīnagān, Faroxši and the Jašan. Most priests today have never performed a Yasna ceremony since the time of their initiation, and do not envisage having to perform it again in the future. Thus, the dominant component of the priesthood has changed from those proficient in inner rituals to those only engaging in the basic outer ceremonies.

4.3.3   Decline in priests initiated with complete training

Up to the mid-twentieth century, the norm was for most priests to be ordained as *sampūrna* ('complete') Nāvar, i.e., they were initiated only after being fully trained and having obtained the ability to perform the Yasna ritual with proficiency. As mentioned in section 4.1.3, the Nāvar initiation consists of the performance of the Yasna ceremony for three days followed by a Visperad ceremony on the fourth day. Thus, a well-trained Nāvar initiate, having memorised the entire Yasna and Visperad

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[144] Karanjia (2018). See Appendix 6 for the English translation of the letter written in Gujarati by Mobed Sidhwa.
[145] https://parsikhabar.net/everyday-parsi/everyday-parsi-ervad-soli-p-dastur/
[146] As per email communication with Er. Bomanshaw Sanjana from Houston, USA on 30-9-2018.

texts, would gain confidence and experience by performing the entire ceremony multiple times during his initiation. This would lay a strong foundation for a career as a *Yaozdāthregar* Mobed ('purifier priest') capable of performing all the solemn ceremonies.

However, the demand for inner rituals declined significantly in the past few decades, and consequently the requirement for fully trained priests fell proportionately. As a result, most parents did not find the justification to invest six to eight years of their son's life in priestly training, when these skills would remain under-utilised in the future. Thus, most parents now make their sons undergo the initiation as an *adhuro* ('incomplete') Nāvar, the training for which is normally completed within a year. As per Er. Ramiyar Karanjia, only one in about twenty candidates becomes a *sampūrna* Nāvar, with the rest being initiated with limited training.[147] This fact is corroborated by the number of Nāvar initiations in Mumbai, where 15–20 Nāvar ceremonies are performed in a typical year, out of which only one or two candidates are fully trained, mostly at the Athornan Institutes.[148]

4.3.4   Change in priesthood from a predominantly full-time to part-time profession

Over the past hundred years, the priesthood has changed from a predominantly full-time occupation to a mainly part-time profession. Presently, most practising priests are engaged in a full-time professional job or pursue alternate careers, while dedicating some hours to performing priestly services. Full-time priests are mainly limited to those serving at an Ātaš Bahrām or engaged as a Panthaki, a priest cum manager overseeing the day-to-day functioning of a fire-temple. Most other priests work only a few hours in the morning to perform outer rituals like the Āfrīnagān, Faroxši and Satūm at a fire-temple before proceeding to their day job, and pursue priesthood on a full-time basis only after retirement.

This transformation of the priesthood to a part-time occupation has augmented the need for good academic education in parallel to the priestly training. Most parents are willing to send their sons to the priestly training schools provided they can simultaneously avail of a good academic education.

These factors have impacted the training imparted at the Athornan Institutes, which has been adapted to strike a balance between various competing objectives. This is discussed in detail in the next section.

4.4   Impact on the training at the Athornan Institutes

The changes in the structure of the priesthood have had a bearing on the training methodology at the Athornan Institutes. The principal changes that have taken place include increased emphasis on secular studies, limited time given to ritual training, and overall reduction in the strictness in imparting bhantar training. The available pool of potential entrants has also declined considerably, thereby limiting the ability of Athornan Institutes to choose between candidates at the time of enrolment. These issues are discussed in detail below.

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[147] Interview conducted in Dec 2017, minutes 57–59.
[148] Based on data collected from priests at the Wadiaji Ātaš Bahrām and the Vatchagandhy, Cama baug, Rustomfram and M. J. Wadia Agiaries in Mumbai where most of the Nāvar initiations are performed.

4.4.1 Change from pure priestly training to balance between academics and bhantar

The training philosophy at the Athornan Institutes, especially at the DAI, has undergone a change from the 1960s onward. In the initial decades, the focus of the training was on the creation of a fully trained ritual priest with adequate knowledge of the religion, who would be able to serve any priestly requirement immediately on passing out from the institute. However, to complete his basic schooling, he had to enrol again either at the MFCAI where he could continue his academic education while staying in touch with the prayer curriculum, or at any other regular high school.[149]

Over time, the focus has shifted to providing a more rounded education to enable the student to pursue any profession of his choice while simultaneously equipping him with the tools for pursuing the priestly profession in the future. This change has also been compelled by the parents who do not wish to limit their son's future to the priestly profession. Some parents of current students at the DAI candidly expressed that their choice was driven by the expectation that their sons would be able to avail of a much better academic education than it was possible for them to provide in their hometown. This tilt towards academic education has consequently led to a decline in the total daily time dedicated to bhantar study.

4.4.2 Reduction in the practical training component of priestly training

Prior to 1965, a significant amount of time was dedicated to kriyākām, i.e., ritual training. A student passing out from the DAI then, was very well-grounded in the know-how required to perform rituals beyond the mere memorisation of the texts to be recited. He was thus ready to serve at any fire-temple as a full-time ritual priest without needing an extended apprenticeship period. During the early decades of the Athornan Institutes, the kriyākām training was conducted every day in the morning for three hours. However, over the years, the time dedicated to ritual training declined significantly. The current practice is to impart ritual training once the student has nearly completed the memorisation of the required text, and when he is ready to undergo the Nāvar and Marātab initiations. The ritual demonstration is usually done on weekend mornings only for a few weeks before the initiation. Thus, the scope of the ritual training is to familiarise the student with the ritual actions during the initiation ceremony, and excludes the rigorous training formerly imparted to prepare for a priestly career.

4.4.3 Limited pool of candidates available for enrolment

In the early decades of both of the Athornan Institutes, the number of applicants far exceeded the number of available seats, and hence a selection mechanism to choose the most eligible candidates was set in place. When Dastur Firoze Kotwal was seeking admission at the MFCAI in the 1940s, there were forty applicants competing for a few seats and the selection was based on an entrance exam to screen the best candidates.[150]

Similarly, at the DAI, multiple rounds of short-listing based on student interviews and admission tests were conducted to decide the successful candidates. The number of applicants and admissions to the

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[149] In an interview, Er. Parvez Bajan mentions that he was demoted and had to repeat three years of his education when he enrolled at the J.J. English School for boys, primarily because his education medium at the DAI had been Gujarati and he had very rudimentary training in English.

[150] Mistree & Bengalli (2018, p. 62).

DAI during the 1930s to 1950s period shows a reduction in the number of applicants over time, while the number of admissions remained somewhat constant.[151]

Year	Applicants	Admissions	Admission %
1934	19	13	68%
1936	42	12	29%
1938	36	13	36%
1940	36	15	42%
1942	26	14	54%
1944	17	7	41%
1946	21	13	62%
1948	15	13	87%
1950	14	11	79%
1952	13	12	92%
1954	18	17	94%
1956	20	12	60%
1958	11	11	100%

Table 13: DAI applicants and admissions during 1934–1958

In the past ten years, there have been between one to four entrants per year at the DAI, while there have been no admission seekers at the MFCAI. This situation exists despite both schools conducting some forms of outreach programs for suitable candidates. Thus, the admission process has gone from one where the institutes could filter out all but the best candidates, to one where there is limited choice and any interested candidates, irrespective of their suitability, are welcome.

4.4.4 Reduction in stringency leading to drop in finesse achieved by students

Among the past students of the Athornan Institutes who were interviewed, almost all who had studied during the 1940s to 1970s period, testified to being at the receiving end of corporal punishment regularly during their student days.[152] The punishment included forfeiture of meals and play time, and in exceptional cases, slow learners were made to skip school altogether to focus on memorising prayers. The punishment was not limited to only the weaker students, but even fast learners would be at the receiving end of the stick.[153] The students were given no laxity in their bhantar study, and the stringency ensured that most students attained at least an acceptable benchmark regarding the quality of their recitation. In exceptional cases where students were unable to cope with the study altogether, they were asked to leave the institute.[154] Due to this, any student passing out from the Athornan Institute was considered to have far superior recitation skills compared to priests lacking the same kind institutional training.

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[151] Karanjia (2019b, pp. 7–9).

[152] Dastur Kotwal, Er. Peer, Dastur Ravji, Er. Mehenty in interviews.

[153] Er. Rooyintan Peer mentioned despite his being among the brightest students in the class, he was also beaten whenever there were lapses in his preparation (interview #37).

[154] Karanjia (2019b, pp. 21–22)

Over the years, the level of strictness has reduced considerably, and any form of corporal punishment is disallowed. One of the current bhantar teachers at the DAI, Er. Sarosh Behramkamdin, said that unlike the time when he was a student at the institute, now he must coax and convince his student to study their assigned portion rather than resorting punishments. In an interview, Er. Ramiyar Karanjia mentioned that he has consciously fostered a more relaxed culture and manages the DAI like a close-knit family.[155] This has enabled more parents to entrust their children in his care, at a time when most priestly families have desisted from sending their sons to the Athornan Institutes. However, Er. Karanjia mentioned that one major fallout of this relaxation and reduction in strictness is that the students rarely achieve the finesse and level of proficiency in recitation that was normally attained in the past.

This concludes the chapter in which the structural changes in the priesthood during the twentieth century and the challenges faced by them in the evolving ritual landscape have been covered. In the last subsection, the impact of these changes on the training at the two Athornan Institutes was studied. The reduced demand for the more solemn inner rituals has forced many fully trained priests from the Athornan Institutes to compete for priestly positions which require limited proficiency and can also be performed by priests with minimal training. This parity in the priestly profession is a cause for significant discontent among the Athornan Institute graduates, who see their years of training being given little or no premium over the other priests. This frustration was voiced by Dastur Khurshed Dastoor when he exhorted the Parsi community to desist from banding the racehorses (fully trained graduates of the Athornan Institutes) together with the carthorses (priests initiated with minimal training).[156] However, it seems unlikely that community members would readily pay a premium for the same ceremonies, which are performed by a priest with superior skills. Hence, the only recourse would be to create more opportunities for the racehorses to put their special skills into action (i.e., by the commissioning of more inner liturgical ceremonies), thereby leading them to be commensurately compensated.

In the forthcoming chapter, the functioning of the Athornan Institutes and the priestly training imparted there is analysed in detail. The challenges faced by the institutes due to the changed ritual landscape, and how the training has evolved to overcome these issues, are also addressed.

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[155] Er. Ramiyar Karanjia, 2016 interview.
[156] Dastur Khurshed Dastoor, the current president of the Athornan Mandal and one of the high priests, mentioned this during his speech at the annual gathering (*melāvdo*) of the DAI in December 2018.

Section III: Contemporary Training

5   Functioning of the Athornan Institutes

This chapter presents the details of the functioning of the two Athornan Institutes, and the next chapter covers various aspects of the training imparted there. It will be observed that the working of the Dadar Athornan Institute (DAI) is better documented than the M. F. Cama Athornan Institute (MFCAI) in this study, which can be attributed to several factors. The primary reason for the disparity is that most findings are based on observations of the routine operation of the school, which was possible only at the DAI.[157] In addition, there were larger number of research participants from DAI compared to MFCAI, which is proportional to the number of full-fledged priests from both the institutes currently engaged in the profession.[158] Also the published material about the DAI is more substantial than that for the MFCAI.[159]

5.1   Organisation structure of the Athornan Institutes

As seen in the previous section, the two Athornan Institutes have a different governing structure. The DAI was established by the Athornan Mandal and comes under its purview, while the MFCAI was setup as a private institute, directly governed by the trustees of the institute. The organisational structure of both schools has nevertheless been similar and has undergone only slight changes over time. In the past when schooling was in-house, academic staff members were responsible for teaching secular subjects as well as imparting religious training within the institute. The in-house schooling at the DAI was discontinued in 1965. Further the student batch size was significantly higher in the past, especially at the MFCAI, which required a strong administrative staff.

Er. Rooyintan Peer, who was a former principal at the MFCAI described his role as a three-in-one responsibility.[160] The principal was the head of the in-house academic school, with the resident teachers for all school subjects reporting to him. Secondly, he had to manage the entire bhantar education (i.e., recitation and ritual training), which required optimum allocation of the residential teaching staff since every student learns at an individual level. And thirdly, the principal was responsible for the boarding school administration and the welfare of the students. There was a position of an administrative head at MFCAI during earlier decades, who reported to the principal, and oversaw the activities related to admissions, examinations and results, and was also in charge of maintaining order and discipline among the students.[161] However, with the reduction in the number of students, the role of the administrator has largely been merged with that of the principal.

Presently at the DAI, the resident principal Er. Ramiyar Karanjia directly manages all the activities detailed above. The priestly training staff comprises two residential bhantar teachers, who are

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[157] At the time of this study, there was only one enrolled student at MFCAI, who had completed his priestly training curriculum by that time.

[158] See details of the selection of the research participants in the Design of Study section 2.1.2.

[159] Sources include the golden jubilee, platinum jubilee and centenary volumes of DAI, the in-house periodical Knowledgiate, and the recent publication on the 100-year history of the institute (Karanjia, 2019b).

[160] Interview with Er. Rooyintan Peer (#37, min 19–21).

[161] As cited in interviews by Dastur Firoze Kotwal (#1, mins 7–8) and Er. Burjor Antia (#9, min 5).

supported by the principal himself.[162] An external bhantar examiner affiliated to the DAI visits the DAI during the annual examination period for testing students on their readiness to undergo the Nāvar and Marātab initiation ceremonies. The students attend an external day school for their academic education; however, they are supported in their secular studies by one resident and two visiting faculty members of the high school. In the past, there was a separate position of a headmaster who was responsible for the academic studies. That role was later merged with that of the principal. There is a resident matron at the DAI, who oversees the well-being of the students, and is supported in this role by the two bhantar teachers. The bhantar teachers also fulfil the role of a house master to supervise the students in various activities throughout the day. There is one administrative staff member, who manages all operations of the School and is responsible for the upkeep of the premises.

5.2 Curriculum at the Athornan Institutes

Er. Ramiyar Karanjia emphasized that the primary role of the Athornan Institute has been the same over the past hundred years since it came into existence, which is to give the Parsi community fully qualified priests, who are capable of performing the most exalted rituals. [163] He added that it was important to foster a love for the religion within the students, and build their character and temperament, so that they understand the significant role to be played by them in the future. He summarised that the essence of the training curriculum is to create a good human being and priest capable of performing the highest rituals impeccably.

The curriculum is crafted to meet this goal of imparting proficiency in ritual performance and to simultaneously inculcate a good value system and impart knowledge of the religion. The former is achieved by a detailed year-wise bhantar curriculum which includes the texts recited within rituals, ranging from the routine minor ones to the long intricate ceremonies; and the latter through regular classes conducted on religious history (tavārikh) and religious knowledge (dharmagnān), including topics on ethics, morals and character formation.

The bhantar ('prayer') curriculum is structured such that the student can complete both his Nāvar and Marātab initiations within the prescribed time period of seven years. For the Nāvar initiation, the student needs to be well-versed with the Yasna, Visperad and the Āfrīnagān ceremonies, and for the Marātab initiation, in addition with the Vidēvdād ceremony.

In order to prepare for the intercalation ceremonies such as the Visperad and Vidēvdād, the students undergo a period of training on the intercalated parts, after the memorisation of the text has been completed. For example, once the student finishes memorising the Visperad text, which typically takes two to three months, the next three to four weeks are dedicated to the study of the intercalation, where the student has to memorise the parts where the Visperad text is inserted within the Yasna. This study of the Visperad intercalation is termed the *Visperad nu Bāj Dharnu* (Bāj Dharnā of the Visperad). This similar process is followed after the student completes the study of the Vidēvdād text, after which he is taught the intercalated parts of the ceremony.

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[162] Er. Ramiyar Karanjia substitutes as the bhantar teacher on the weekly holidays of the regular bhantar teachers and oversees the overall progress of each student.
[163] Interview #35 (hr 1:49).

Year	Bhantar Curriculum[164]
1	- Learn Gujarati script - Khorde Avesta (Kusti prayers, Sroš Bāj, Hošbām, 5 Gāhs, 5 Nyāišes, Satūm, Patet Pašemāni)
2	- Sroš Yašt Vadi, Sroš Yašt Hādoxt, Hom Yašt, Vanant Yašt, Sirozā Yašt, Ardibehešt Yašt, (optional Hormazd Yašt) - Learn Avestan script - Yasna (Ch. 0–10)
3	- Yasna (Ch. 11–34)
4	- Yasna (Ch. 35–53)
5	- Yasna (Ch. 54–72) - Visperad (Karde 1-24) - Bāj Dharnā of Yasna and Visperad - Dron Yašt and Āfrīnagān
	Student ready for Nāvar Ceremony
6	- Āfrīnagāns (Ardāfravaš, Gatha, Gahambar, Daham, Sroš) - Āfrīns (Ardāfravaš, Bozorg, Hamkāra, Gahambar) - Faroxši fluent reading - Vidēvdād (Fragard 1–12) reading
7	- Vidēvdād (Fragard 13–22) reading
	Student ready for Marātab Ceremony
8	Allied prayers and ceremonies – Paragnā, *dhūp* nirang, wedding Āśirvād, and *geh sārnā* ceremony

Table 14: Year-wise curriculum of the DAI

While the timelines listed in the above table serve as a reference point, each student progresses through the curriculum as his own pace based on his memorisation capability.[165] The seven-year programme is well suited to students who enrol in the 1st or 2nd standard of school, i.e., when they are 6–7 years old, so that they can complete the entire curriculum and proceed for their Marātab initiation by the time they finish the 8th standard. This is important since the secular school study is more intensive in the final two years viz. the 9th and 10th standard, leaving less time to devote to bhantar studies. For this reason, if a student enrols at the Institute in the 3rd standard or later, the bhantar curriculum may be fast-tracked.[166]

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[164] Curriculum available at the DAI office and at http://www.dadarathornaninstitute.org/history.htm.

[165] Students generally take between six to eight years for completing the entire curriculum. See Table 31 for a snapshot of the current students.

[166] See section 7.4 for case studies of students enrolling at the DAI in a higher standard. An example of fast-tracking is when a student is made to skip the memorisation of a certain text, and instead made to only read it fluently.

The above curriculum has undergone a few changes since the inception of the DAI in 1919. During the early decades, admissions were accorded every two years. The curriculum was divided into three classes of two years each, and the students had to finish the entire curriculum within six years. The student was expected to complete memorising up to Yasna 11 by the end of the first class, up to Yasna 53 by the second class, and finish the entire Yasna and Visperad by the fifth year. One further year was required to train for the Marātab, and the performance of other rituals like the Āśirvād (wedding benediction) and the Dhūp Nirang (ritual performed on third day after death). This six-year coursework was followed until the temporary closure of the DAI in 1965.[167] After the reopening in 1966, the six-year time stipulation was removed and more flexibility was introduced in the curriculum so that students could continue at the institute and complete their prayer study, while simultaneously pursuing secular schooling.

There were other minor changes introduced in the curriculum from time to time. In the 1940s, in order to enable students to complete their coursework on time, they were made to fluently read all the required Yašts except the Sroš Yašt Vadi[168] (i.e., Y 57), instead of memorising them. Then, the student directly proceeded to learn the Yasna, thereby saving almost six months. These skipped Yašts would then be memorised, if time permitted, after the Nāvar and Marātab curriculum was completed.[169] This practice has been discontinued and presently the students learn the selected Yašts before proceeding to the Yasna study.

The training for ritual performance (kriyākām) was started once the student had completed the memorisation of certain parts of the Yasna text.[170] In addition to bhantar and kriyākām, religious knowledge (dharmagnān) and Iranian history (tavārikh) have been part of the curriculum from the inception of the school. The syllabus of these subjects is elaborated in the next section which is on the textbooks in use at the Athornan Institutes.

5.3 Textbooks used at the Athornan Institutes

During the bhantar study, the student is first made to read a passage from a book and once he can do it flawlessly, he is asked to memorise it from the book. As the student progresses through the curriculum at the Athornan Institutes, the appropriate prayer books are given to him. First, the student starts with the Khorde Avesta in Gujarati script and once it is completed, he is sequentially given the three books of the Yasna in Avestan script. After the Yasna study is completed, the student is made to fluently read the Vidēvdād in Avestan script from the large, printed versions available at the institute. There are also reference books for the allied subjects like dharmagnān and tavārikh. A detailed description of the textbooks in use at the Athornan Institutes is given below.

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[167] Karanjia (2019b, p. 23).
[168] Since the Sroš Yašt Vadi is the complete chapter 57 of the Yasna, it would have to be memorised as part of the Yasna study if not done earlier.
[169] Karanjia (2019b, p. 24).
[170] Ritual training is dealt in detail in section 6.2.6.

Khorde Avesta in Gujarati script

A new student at the Athornan Institute commences his study with the Khorde Avesta curriculum. The version presently in use at the DAI is the *khurdeh avastā śuddha uccārnī* ('Khorde Avesta of pure pronunciation') in Gujarati script, published by the Bombay Zoroastrian Jashan Committee. It contains the Khorde Avesta texts and the important Yašts required to be learnt by the student before starting the Yasna curriculum. All the Yašts printed in the book are not memorised, for example the Behram Yašt (Yt. 14) is not studied at all, while the Hormazd Yašt (Yt 1) is only taught to be fluently read and is memorised only if there is time after the completion of the entire curriculum.

Yasna in Avestan script

Right from the time of the inception of both the DAI and the MFCAI, the *Yasna bā Nirang* by Er. Tehmuras Dinshaw Anklesaria[171] has been the standard textbook for teaching the Yasna ritual. The book gives the recitation text in Avestan script as per N. L. Westergaard's edition[172] and includes the variant readings from K. F. Geldner's edition[173] in the footnotes. The ritual directions of the ceremonies are given in Gujarati.

The first edition of the book was published in 1888 and the second edition in 1926. The third and final edition was published in 1957, and this edition has been reprinted multiple times and is the one presently used at the Athornan Institutes. The edition is divided into three parts and bound individually and is identified by the colour of the binding as the blue, green and red Yasna. Alternately these are also referred to among the students as the *pellī* (first), *bījī* (second) and *tījī* (third) *ijaśnī* (Yasna) books. When the student completes the Khorde Avesta curriculum, he is first taught the Avestan script and given the blue Yasna book, which contains the Paragnā and Y 0–13 (pages 1–128). Once he completes memorising this part, he is handed the second Green Yasna book with Yasna 14–56 (pages 129–272) and then finally the final Red Yasna book with Y 57–72 and the complete Visperad and Yasna ī Rapithwin ceremonies (pages 273–454).[174]

This third edition of 1957 contains a detailed introduction by Dastur Hormazdyar Kayoji Mirza on various aspects of the ritual as well as some historical topics such as the oral transmission and traditional mode of memorising the Avestan texts in India. It was jointly published by the Trustees of the Parsi Panchayet, Bombay and the Trustees of the M. F. Cama Athornan Institute and M. M. Cama Education Fund, mainly for use in the training of priests at the two Athornan Institutes. In the third edition, the original cover page was replaced by the one shown in Figure 11, which does not feature the name of original author, T. D. Anklesaria. As a result, over the years since its publication, the book is now well known among the teachers of the Athornan Institutes as Mirza's edition of the Yasna.[175]

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[171] Anklesaria (1888).
[172] Westergaard (1852-1854).
[173] Geldner (1886-1896).
[174] Redard & Daruwalla (2021, pp. 1-2).
[175] Er. Rooyintan Peer, former principal of the MFCAI, in an interview mentioned that the Yasna bā Nirang by Dastur H. K. Mirza was the standard book in use there, and that it was based on the ritual performance according to the Bhagariā tradition, even though Dastur Mirza himself belonged to the Sanjānā Panthak. Similarly, at the DAI, the book was referred to as Mirza's edition by the Principal and the bhantar teachers there.
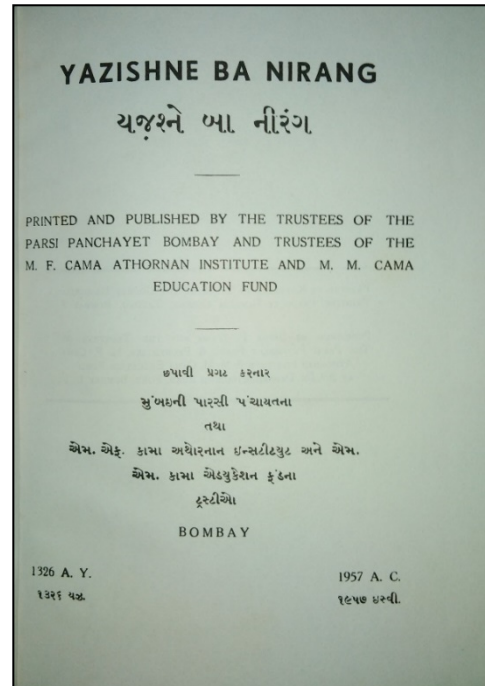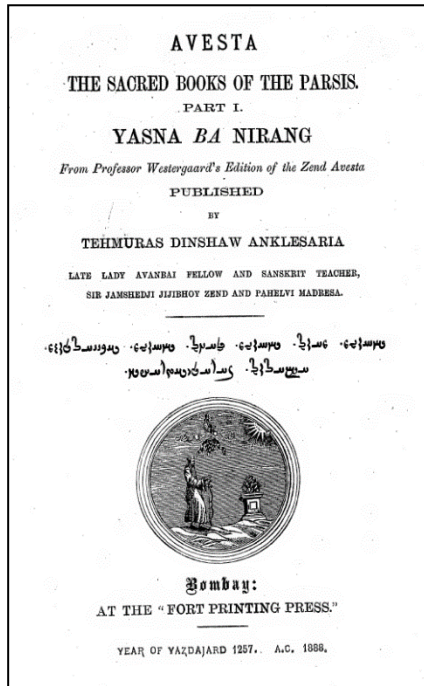
Figure 11: The cover pages of the first and third editions of the Yasna bā Nirang

Vidēvdād in Avestan script

After the student has completed the Yasna and Visperad, he needs to acquire the ability to fluently read the Vidēvdād text. He is made to practise from the large Vidēvdād book normally referred to as the *potho* (big volume) at the Athornan Institutes. The edition in use at the DAI is the 1967 reprint of the *Vandidād bā Nirang* by Ervad Peśtanjī Kāvasjī Rabaḍī published in 1885.[176]

Within the actual Vidēvdād ritual, which is an all-night ceremony, the Vidēvdād text is read from the book. The ritual precinct where the ceremony is performed, is frequently lit up only with oil lamps, and without any electrical lighting. The priest who recites the Vidēvdād is seated on the ritual seat and reads from the book which is kept on an adjacent stand at about two to three feet from the seat. Thus, in order to be able to read the book in the dim lighting from afar, the text is printed in an especially large font.

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[176] Rabāḍī (1885).
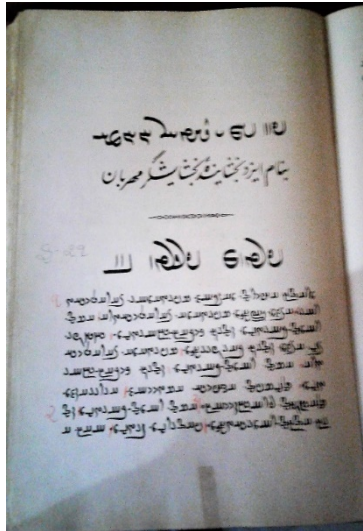
Figure 12: Large font of the Vandidād bā Nirang edition used at the DAI

Study of Religion and Iranian History

Besides the bhantar study, the curriculum at the Athornan Institutes includes classes on *dharmagnān* (religious knowledge) and *tavārīkh* (Iranian history). The most popular books on these subjects have been authored by Er. Edalji Faramji Madan, the former Principal of the DAI (1934–1947).

***Dharmagnān* (religious knowledge) book by Madan**

Zarthostī Dharmaprakāś 'Zoroastrian religious light' (Madan, 1951) includes chapters on various religious topics such as Ahura Mazdā, the Amesha Spentas and Yazatas, the spiritual (*mīno*) and material (*getī*) entities, prophet Spitaman Zarathushtra, the Yasna ritual and its explanation, etc.

***Tavārīkh* (history) books by Madan**

The history of the Iranian dynasties and the arrival of the Zoroastrian in India was published in two volumes as follows:

1. *Purātan irānno itihās: peśdādīan ane keānīan vanśo tathā hindustānmā pārsīonā āgmannī ṭuk tavārīkh* (Madan, 1950)
   'History of Ancient Iran: Peshdādian and Kayanian dynasties, and a brief history of the arrival of the Parsis in India'

2. *Purānī pārsī śahenśāhato: hakhāmīan ane sāsānīan* (Madan, 1967)
   'Old Parsi Empires: Achaemenian and Sasanian
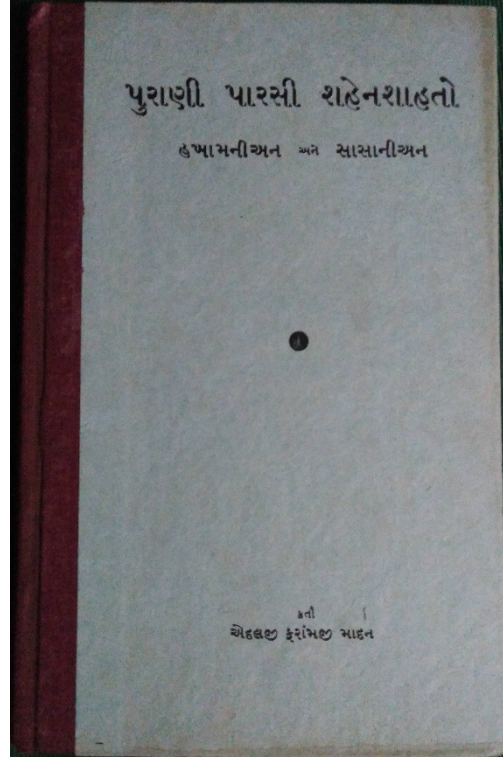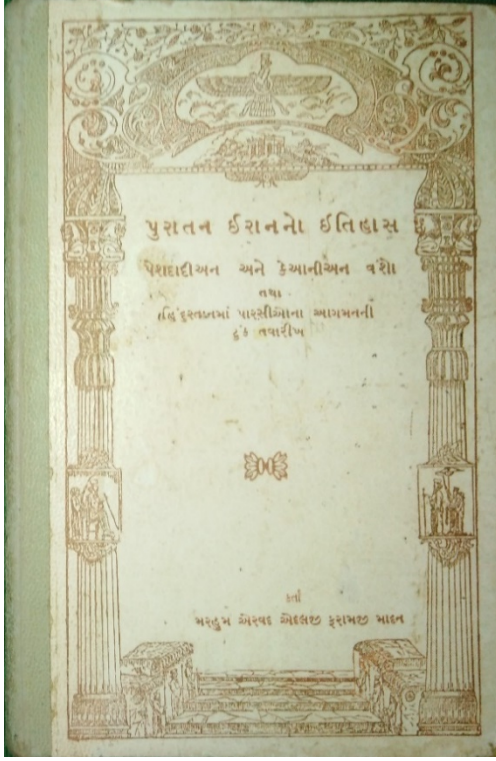
Figure 13: The religious history (*tavārikh*) books by Er. Edalji Madan

The above books were used as textbooks for the teaching of religion and Iranian history at both the Athornan Institutes at least up to the 1990s.[177] There were also textbooks in Gujarati by J. J. Modi for children like *dharma sambandhit bhāśano* ('lectures pertaining to the religion'), *dharma ane krīyā* ('religion and ritual'), *dharma nītī* ('religious policy') in use at the MFCAI during the early decades.[178]

Presently at the DAI, classes for both religious knowledge and Iranian history are held on Saturdays and Sundays so as not to interfere with the weekday school and bhantar study routine. Since there are only 2–3 students in every standard, there is a common *dharmagnān* period for all students. Depending on the content, they are either divided into two separate classes for the juniors and seniors or there is a combined class.

The classes are presently conducted by the Principal, Er. Ramiyar Karanjia once a week on Saturdays for forty-five minutes (3.30–4.15 PM). Er. Karanjia, who is a learned priest and religious scholar, gives out printed notes prepared by himself on a wide range of topics related to Zoroastrianism and Parsi religious traditions, which he also regularly updates on his comprehensive website[179] The students are required to maintain a notebook and take down notes in class. Shown below is the index of topics covered in the *dharmagnān* class from a student's notebook.

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[177] Karanjia (2019b, p. 121). Also cited by Er. Rooyintan Peer as textbooks at the MFCAI (interview on 13-1-2017).
[178] Mentioned by Dastur Firoze Kotwal in an interview (Dec 2016).
[179] https://ramiyarkaranjia.com/
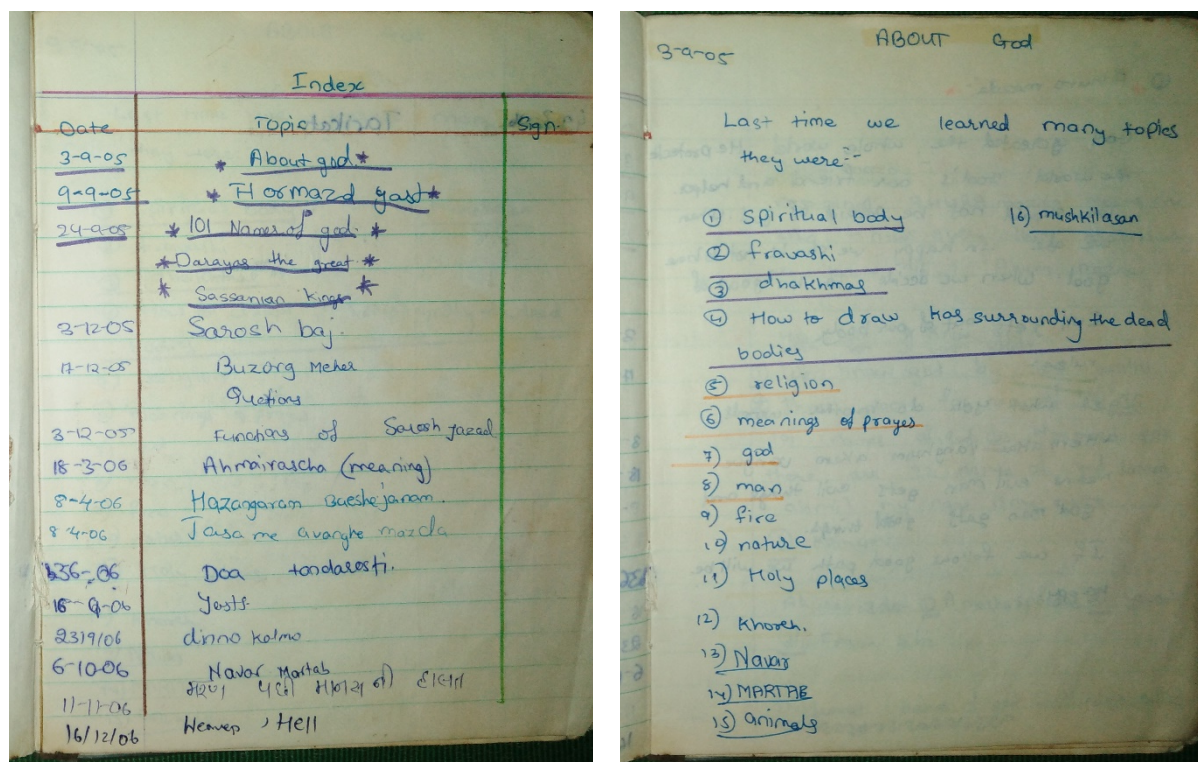
Figure 14: The index page of student's notebook for the religious knowledge (*dharmagnān*) class

As seen from the above figure, the topics are a combination of religious knowledge (God, Sroš Yazad, *khoreh*, etc.), Iranian history (Darayas the Great, Sasanian kings, Buzorg Meher), rituals and ceremonies (drawing *kas* 'boundary' around dead body, Nāvar, Marātab) and interpretation of prayers (Sroš Bāj, Hormazd Yašt). An annual examination is conducted to assess the students' knowledge on the topics covered during the year.

In addition to the above books, the student is also given prayer books for the other outer ceremonies which are not covered in the Khorde Avesta and Yasna books, such as those for the Āfrīnagān and Faroxši rituals.

5.4   Academic Year at the Athornan Institutes

During the first two decades after the establishment of DAI (1919–1938), the academic year was aligned to the Parsi Shenshahi calendar, i.e., the new term began in September after the Parsi New year and the final exams were conducted in July or August, before the Muktād break. However, after 1938, the academic year at the DAI started in June and the annual exams were conducted in April, a practice which has remained constant till date.

After 1966, students at the DAI pursued their secular schooling at the Dadar Parsee Youth Assembly (DPYA) School, and the academic year at the DAI is aligned with that of the school. The school year starts in mid-June and finishes for the summer holidays in mid-April. Through the course of the academic year, there are three shorter breaks for the Parsi New Year, Diwali and Christmas festivals, when the students go back home.

The academic year is divided into two terms on either side of the Diwali break. There is a one-week break in August within term 1 for the Muktād days prior to the Parsi New Year, and a ten-day break for Christmas within term 2. The table below summarises the number of study days in each term in the last eight academic years at the DAI.

Academic year	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19
Term 1 Start	12-Jun	12-Jun	13-Jun	14-Jun	14-Jun	12-Jun	11-Jun	11-Jun
Term 1 End	22-Oct	10-Nov	01-Nov	18-Oct	07-Nov	27-Oct	14-Oct	03-Nov
Study days	118	139	129	118	138	129	114	135
Term 2 Start	13-Nov	29-Nov	18-Nov	02-Nov	22-Nov	14-Nov	29-Oct	18-Nov
Term 2 End	21-Apr	23-Apr	19-Apr	19-Apr	17-Apr	20-Apr	21-Apr	20-Apr
Study days	147	132	139	157	132	147	162	141
Annual study days	265	271	268	275	270	276	276	276

Table 15: Daily timetable at the DAI from inception to 1965

Thus, on average 270 days are available for study during a typical academic year at the DAI. These include a few days when the student is engaged in extra-curricular activities, and hence is unavailable for his daily study. These activities may pertain either to the high school or the DAI (Annual day, Sports day, Picnic, etc.) or external events such as prayer and elocution competitions. In addition, there are a few sick days when the student is exempted from studies. After accounting for all these off days, on average the student has about 250 days in a year when he is engaged with the memorization study.

5.5   Daily Timetable at the Athornan Institutes

The Athornan Institutes have had a fixed daily routine for all days of the week. In order to understand how the student routine has evolved over time, the daily timetables from three different time periods have been analysed, viz. the DAI timetable during the early decades (1920s–50s), the MFCAI timetable from the 1960s, and the current timetable of DAI.

5.5.1   DAI timetable during the early decades

From inception up to 1965, the students at the DAI attended the in-house school, where only a few necessary academic subjects were taught. These included Mathematics and Geography, and a basic study of languages such as Avestan, Pahlavi, Persian, English and Gujarati. At that time, a major portion of the daily routine was dedicated to religious studies and prayer memorisation, so that a student could complete the entire curriculum within the allotted six years. The daily timetable at the DAI prior to 1965 is summarised below.[180]

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[180] Karanjia (2019b, pp. 27–28).

Time	Activity
4.30 / 5 AM[181]	Wake-up, Kusti[182], Bath and Tea
6.15–6.45[183]	Morning Prayers
6.45–8.00	Bhantar study
8.00–8.45	Breakfast and Gardening time
8.45–10.00	Prepare lessons & get ready for in-house school
10.00–12.15 PM	In-house school – 3 periods of 45 minutes
12.15–1.45	Lunch break and rest time
1.45–4.00	Bhantar learning – 3 periods of 45 minutes
4.00–7.00	Group prayers, snacks, games and play time
7.00–7.30	Evening Prayers
7.30–8.00	Dinner time
8.00–8.30	Free time, brief night prayer
8.30 PM	Bedtime

Table 16: Daily timetable at the DAI from inception to 1965

As seen in the table, there were two periods for bhantar study, an hour and fifteen minutes in the morning and two hours and fifteen minutes in the afternoon, for a total of three and a half hours of daily study.

5.5.2   MFCAI timetable during the 1960s[184]

Up to the 1970s, the MFCAI ran an in-house school on weekdays which included class periods for both secular academic subjects as well as for religious study. The school hours were divided into eight periods, each with a duration of 35 minutes.

The religious studies were composed of three distinct subjects, viz. bhantar or memorization of prayers, religious knowledge and Iranian history. For a junior student (standard 4th to 6th), there was a higher proportion of daily classes dedicated to bhantar studies – on average around 3 out of the 8 periods to promote faster progress, while for senior students this was progressively reduced to incorporate a larger school workload.

On a typical school day, a junior student at MFCAI would spend a total of an hour and fifteen minutes on his morning and evening *bhantar* sessions, and three periods of thirty-five minutes each, which is an hour and forty-five minutes during school hours for memorisation. Thus, a total of three hours of daily time was dedicated to the learning and revision of prayers.

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[181] The wake-up time was 4.30 AM prior to April 1927, when it was delayed to 5 AM.
[182] The ritual untying and retying of the sacred girdle (Kusti) around the waist.
[183] As per turn, everyday a few senior students had ritual training from 5.30 AM to 8.30 AM.
[184] Described in detail by Ervad Rooyintan Peer during his time at MFCAI, first as a student in the 1960s and then subsequently as the principal of the institute.

Session	Time		Duration	Activity
	From	**To**	**(minutes)**	
Morning (Before School)	–	5.15 AM	–	Student wake-up time
	5.15	6.15 AM	60	Bathing and getting dressed
	6.15	6.30 AM	15	Morning tea
	6.30	7.00 AM	30	Morning farajyāt prayers
	7.00	7.45 AM	45	Morning bhantar study session / Ritual training session
	7.45	8.30 AM	45	Morning academic study session
	8.30	9.15 AM	45	Breakfast
	9.15	10.00 AM	45	Changeover to school uniform and report to assembly
School hours	10.00	10.20 AM	20	Assembly prayer followed by oration by one student
	10.20	10.55 AM	35	School Period 1
	10.55	11.30 AM	35	School Period 2
	11.30	11.50 AM	20	Tea break
	11.50	12.25 PM	35	School Period 3
	12.25	1.00 PM	35	School Period 4
	1.00	2.00 PM	60	Lunch break
	2.00	2.35 PM	35	School Period 5
	2.35	3.10 PM	35	School Period 6
	3.10	3.20 PM	20	Tea break
	3.20	3.55 PM	35	School Period 7
	3.55	4.30 PM	35	School Period 8
Evening (After School)	4.30	5.00 PM	30	Changeover to games uniform and Physical Training
	5.00	6.00 PM	60	Games on the MFCAI grounds
	6.00	6.30 PM	30	Changeover and snack time
	6.30	7.00 PM	30	Evening academic study session
	7.00	7.30 PM	30	Evening bhantar study / Ritual practice session
	7.30	8.00 PM	30	Evening farajyāt prayers
	8.00	8.45 PM	45	Dinner
	8.45	9.00 PM	15	Singing of Monajat[185] together
	9.00	–	–	Student sleep time

Table 17: Schedule of a typical weekday at the MFCAI during the 1960s

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[185] A devotional song generally composed in Gujarati incorporating Zoroastrian religious terminology.

5.5.3 Present DAI timetable

From the year 1966 onward, all DAI students were required to attend the external DPYA High School for their academic studies. Since that time, the daily routine at the DAI during the weekdays is structured around the school hours. The senior students (Standards 8th–10th) attend school in the morning and pursue bhantar studies at the DAI in the afternoon, whereas for the junior students (Standards 1st–7th) it is vice-versa.[186]

Time	Juniors: Standard 4th–7th	Time	Seniors: Standard 8th–10th
5:30 – 6:20	Wake-Up, Kusti, Brush, Bath, Tea		
6:20 – 6:50	Morning Prayers	6:20–6:40	Morning Prayers
7:00 – 8:00	Bhantar Study	6:40–6:55	Breakfast
8:00 – 8:20	Breakfast	7:00–1:00	D.P.Y.A. High School
8:20 – 8:55	Indoor games		
9:00 –10:30	School Study		
10:45–11:45	Bhantar Study		
11:45–12:30	Kusti, Lunch, Change		
12:30 – 6:00	D.P.Y.A. High School	1:00–1:30	Kusti, Lunch, Break
		1:30–3:00	Bhantar Study
		3:00–3:30	Break
		3:30–5:00	School Study
6:00 – 6:15	Snacks	5:00–5:40	Tea, Biscuits, Games
6:15 – 7:30	School Study	5:45–7:30	School Study
7:30 – 7:55	Evening Prayers		
7:55 – 8:45	Dinner, Change, Indoor Games, TV		
8:45 – 9:00	Kusti, Brush Teeth.		
9:00–10:00	School Study		
10:00	Sleep time		

Table 18: Current timetable on a typical weekday at the DAI

During the weekdays, the juniors have two sessions of an hour each for bhantar, while the seniors have a single session of 1.5 hours. On Saturdays, Sundays and other public holidays, when the school is off, all students have two hours of bhantar study. Thus, during a typical school week, the junior students dedicate about 14 hours per week to memorising prayers, whereas the senior students spend 10–11 hours on it. However, once the student completes the entire bhantar curriculum, typically by the time he is in the 9th Standard, only some discretionary time is spent on revising the prayers while the remaining is diverted to other academic subjects.

Two activities of the above daily routine will be analysed in greater detail in the next chapter: the morning and evening prayer sessions (section 6.3.1) and the bhantar study sessions (section 6.2.2).

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[186] Timetable shared by the principal Er. Ramiyar Karanjia. The complete timetable is included in Appendix 5.

5.6   Summary and observations

In the past hundred years since the establishment of the Athornan Institutes, there have been some notable changes which have impacted the training of the students. These are summarised below.

Decreased flexibility in the daily routine

During the era of in-house schooling, the Athornan Institute had more flexibility to tailor the timetable as per the requirements of the bhantar study. The MFCAI dedicated more class periods to memorising bhantar for the junior students (three to four out of the eight classes, or effectively half the school time), whereas for the seniors this was reduced to one or none. This enabled channelling time resources efficiently to where it was needed most, viz. towards completing the vast bhantar portion in time for the Nāvar initiation during the earlier years, and towards academic subjects during the final years of school. However, once the students started attending a day school, the Athornan Institutes have had to adjust their daily routine around the school hours.

Reduction in time allocated to bhantar study

Over the past five to six decades, the daily time dedicated to bhantar study has declined, mainly on account of the increased academic workload. During the early years of the Athornan Institutes with in-house schooling, 3.5 hours were devoted to bhantar study at the DAI and 3 hours at the MFCAI. After the advent of external full-time schooling, the time for bhantar has reduced to 1.5–2 hours during the school days. This reduction in daily bhantar time is somewhat compensated by the increased number of years spent by the student at the Athornan Institutes. Prior to 1965, a student at the DAI was allowed a maximum of six years to complete the curriculum, whereas post that, the curriculum was spread over seven to eight years to allow more time for school studies.

Change in training philosophy

The shift from in-house to external schooling represents a paradigm change in the philosophy of the Athornan Institutes. During the in-house schooling era, the goal of the Athornan Institute was to create a fully proficient priest, while providing him with a few basic language and life skills necessary to pursue the priestly profession successfully. This mindset has undergone a change, especially at the DAI after its temporary closure, when it was realised that parents did not wish to limit the future prospects of their sons only to the priesthood, and instead were interested in a more rounded education for them. Thus, after its reopening in 1966, the DAI placed equal emphasis on priestly training and academic education with the goal of creating well-trained priests who were equally well qualified to pursue other vocations if they so desired.

This concludes the chapter which has touched upon the functional aspects of the Athornan Institutes. In the next chapter, the various aspects of the priestly training imparted at the Athornan Institutes are presented in detail, with a focus on the memorisation process.

6 Training at the Athornan Institutes

In the previous chapter, the fixed aspects of the two Athornan Institutes were covered such as the structure of the organisation, academic year, curriculum textbooks used, and the daily routine of the students. In this chapter, the actual training process will be explained by analysing its individual components in detail. Answers to the following primary questions will be attempted in this section:

- What are the important parts of the memorisation process?
- How is the new bhantar material memorised, and the old material refreshed?
- What are the associated factors responsible for the training mechanism to work efficiently?

The training at the Athornan Institute can be defined as the process by which the large Avestan ritual corpus is made to be partly memorised and partly read fluently by the student, while adequately preparing him to perform the rituals and gain knowledge about the important aspects of the religion and its history.

The training process is a combination of various factors which can be analysed by breaking it down to its constituent parts. They can be grouped into the following four categories:

1. Pre-learning factors: Factors preceding the actual learning process but having an impact on the memorisation process.
2. Actual learning process: Different aspects of memorising the texts and learning the rituals.
3. Associated factors: Factors not directly linked to memorising, but which facilitate the process.
4. Post-learning factors: Activities typically occurring after completion of training but serving to continually reinforce the studied material.

The complete training process is a summation of all the above factors, as summarised in the figure below. Each of the blocks will be subsequently analysed in detail in this chapter.

Pre-learning Factors	Actual learning process	Post-learning Factors
1. Foundation of basic prayers 2. Proficiency with Gujarati script 3. Passive learning from seniors	1. Memorisation in bhantar class 2. Continuous revision cycles 3. Prayer examinations 4. Ritual training	1. Prayer competitions 2. Apprenticing during vacations 3. Becoming a trainee teacher

Associated factors
1. Daily prayer sessions 2. Reward & Punishment

Figure 15: Block diagram of the learning factors at the Athornan Institutes

6.1 Pre-learning Factors

An important part of how a student fares at memorising prayers at the Athornan Institute is dependent on his readiness at the time of enrolment at the institute. Some of the important factors that come into play during the initial months at the institute and prior to the actual memorisation process are discussed in this section.

6.1.1 Foundation of basic prayers from home

Not all students arrive at the Athornan Institute at the same level of knowledge – some students have learnt their Navjote prayers and in some cases even completed some additional prayers from the Khorde Avesta, while some other students arrive with a completely blank slate. In the past when gaining admission to the Athornan Institutes was very competitive with more applicants and fewer seats, the selection was based on an entrance examination to determine the most eligible students. This selection process to a large extent ensured that the admitted students were likely to complete the entire curriculum within the maximum allowed duration of six years. At the DAI, this entrance exam to select the most suitable candidates was followed from the time of its inception at least up to the 1950s.[187]

In the past, students typically enrolled at the Athornan Institutes between the ages of nine to twelve years. Before their enrolment at the institutes, the students would likely have spent between two to four years on basic bhantar training, either at home or under another priest. Thus, when they arrived at the Athornan Institute, many students would have already completed a significant part of the Khorde Avesta, which would serve as a foundation for their future study.

While it was generally advantageous of have learnt some basic prayers at home, the situation was different when it came to more advanced texts like the Yasna. In a few instances, students who had progressed to advanced texts had to undergo a process of unlearning due to their inferior pronunciations. Dastur Keki Ravji studied at the Athornan Madressa in Navsari run by Er. Darabji Kotwal for two years (1952–1954), before enrolling at the DAI. At the time of his admission at the DAI, he had finished the entire Khorde Avesta curriculum and completed memorising the first twelve chapters of the Yasna. When he arrived at the DAI and was tested for his intonation of the prayers, his pronunciation of the Yasna text was found to be wanting by the bhantar teacher, Er. Minocher Oonwala. In order to rectify this situation, Dastur Ravji was put on a six-month period of unlearning during which time he was asked not to revise and recall any of the previously learnt text, and then made to start again afresh.[188]

However, barring a few such cases, usually the students who come to the Athornan Institutes with prior preparation tend to be better placed to complete the entire curriculum within the stipulated time, than those students who come completely fresh. Presently when students enrol at the institutes by the age of seven or eight years, they tend to have very little or no prior training, and thus require more years to complete the curriculum. This factor is observed in the case study of a current student

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[187] Karanjia (2019b, pp. 7-9).
[188] Described by Dastur Ravji in interview (#3).

at the DAI (section 7.4.1), who saved at least a couple of months of study time with prior preparation at home.

6.1.2 Proficiency in reading the Gujarati script

The bhantar teaching process combines aspects of both audio and visual techniques. When learning a new stanza, the aural aspect is important when the teacher first recites a new line and asks the student to repeat after him. Simultaneously, the student is expected to visually follow the text being recited in the prayer book. This process is repeated until the student can read the text from the book without any pronunciation mistakes, after which the student returns to his desk and memorises the text on his own.

The Khorde Avesta texts are taught from the prayer book in Gujarati script. Hence it is important that the student can read Gujarati fluently before commencing the Khorde Avesta memorisation. This is highlighted by most bhantar teachers as a key step in the learning process. The principal at the DAI, Er. Ramiyar Karanjia, who also substitutes as a bhantar teacher at the DAI during the weekly off days of the regular bhantar teachers, mentions three important steps of memorisation to be the following[189]:

a. Breaking down the text by line, and by quarter-line;
b. Being able to read it fluently; and
c. Focusing on the text for at least ten minutes.

The ability to read the text becomes significant as after the initial reading by the teacher, the student mainly relies on the written text for his memorisation. If he misreads any word, he will tend to learn to pronounce it incorrectly. In order to avoid this, the bhantar teacher spends additional time and makes the student read the new stanza multiple times until he is satisfied that the student is correctly reading all the words.

When a student first arrives at the Athornan Institutes, his ability to read the Gujarati script is tested. Some students, mainly those hailing from towns in Gujarat, where Gujarati is the state language, may already be able to read the script, whereas most others must be taught from the basics. The bhantar teachers spend the first month to teach the Gujarati script so that the student can read the text proficiently. During that time, the basic prayers are taught mainly by oral transmission since the student is yet to gain the ability to read from the book.

Shown below is a lesson book entry for one of the students from Mumbai who started his study at the DAI on 13-6-2012. The study of the Gujarati script normally commences together with the bhantar studies which is noted in the lesson book. At the bottom of the page is an entry after the date 24-7-2012, which states *gujrātī nathī āvaḍtu to prektīs kareche gujrātīnī …. prīnsīpol.* 'does not know Gujarati, hence is practising Gujarati …. Principal'. This entry appears about 40 days after the start of school by which time the student should have gained reasonable proficiency over the Gujarati script. Since he is still not adept at it, the Principal has made him focus exclusively on learning the script for a few days, which explains the six days gap in the next bhantar lesson given on 30-7-2012.

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[189] Interview #35b, min 15–17.
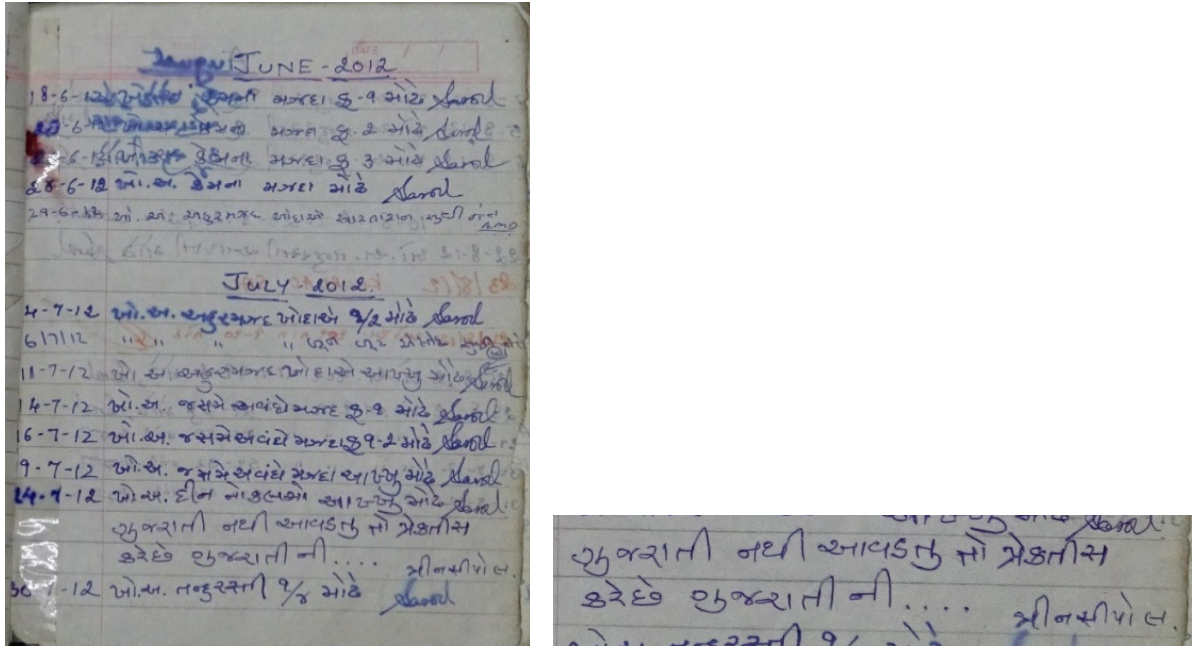
Figure 16: Page from lesson book of a student KZS along with the entry on Gujarati study

Almost all students arriving at the Athornan Institutes understand the Gujarati language even if they do not know the script, since it is spoken in most Parsi homes. However, in some extreme cases, there are occasionally one or two students who arrive with little or no comprehension of Gujarati. One such example was of the present leading Bōywālā of the Anjuman Ātaš Bahrām in Mumbai, Er. Kaizad M. Kotwal[190], who hailed from Bhusawal, a town in Maharashtra state near the border with the state of Madhya Pradesh. Since Er. Kaizad's family had settled in Bhusawal for the past two generations, and since only Hindi and English were used at home, he did not have any knowledge of Gujarati. When Er. Kaizad first arrived at the DAI, where the medium of teaching is Gujarati, he found it extremely difficult and was made to repeat the second standard so that he could catch up with the language. Er. Kaizad conceded that he took five years to complete the Nāvar curriculum instead of the four years due to his slow start. Thus, it is observed that a lack of knowledge of Gujarati can delay the progress of the student during the early months at the Athornan Institute.

Similarly, once the student is ready to begin the Yasna study which is taught from the book in Avestan script[191], he needs to be able to recognise all the letters of the Avestan alphabet well. The bhantar teachers dedicate six to eight weeks before starting the Yasna to teach the 'zand', the term used for the Avestan script at the Athornan Institutes. As in the case of Gujarati, the ability to correctly and fluently read the Avestan script aids in the memorisation of the Yasna.

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[190] Interview with Er. Kaizad M. Kotwal (#23 on 22-9-2018).
[191] See section 5.3 on the details of the textbook.

6.1.3   Ability to passively learn from seniors

One of the advantages at the Athornan Institutes is being in a setting favourable to learn by listening to the seniors. Er. Rooyintan Peer highlighted this aspect of learning from his days as a student at the MFCAI during the 1960s:[192]

> "Generally, since all the students prayed together, the juniors would already have heard all the prayers from their seniors. The more eager students would go to their seniors and ask them to teach the upcoming bhantar lessons. … And the environment itself was very conducive for such learning."

As the bhantar study class is common for all students and praying aloud is emphasized during these sessions, the students tend to passively hear prayers from their classmates. Some of the often-repeated lines are registered in the memory subconsciously and become easier to learn when the student has to memorise them.

This is especially the case for the morning and evening prayer sessions (section 6.3.1) during which all the students recite the same prayer. While the student would have completed memorising most of these daily prayers from the Khorde Avesta, some prayers like the large Hom Yašt (Y 9–10) and the Haptan Yašt (Y 35–42) are not learnt as part of the Khorde Avesta curriculum but as part of the Yasna study. Both these prayers are recited aloud and in unison, two to three times every month, during the evening prayer session. The loud recitation helps the student to register the text in his memory, and the pauses while reciting help in breaking down the long text into smaller recitation units. Thus, even before the student starts to memorise these texts, he is able to recite it fluently from the book by virtue of having heard it many times over.

In this section, three factors which are helpful before beginning the memorisation of the text have been discussed. In the next section, the different parts of the actual learning process are analysed.

6.2   Actual learning process

The core of the priestly training consists of two parts, the major component which is memorisation of the bhantar curriculum, and the minor component of ritual training. Memorisation forms a major part of the training both in terms of the time and effort expended on it. A student will spend the bulk of his time at the Athornan Institute engaged with rote learning of the texts, and only a few months on learning the ritual performance. The memorisation process comprises learning new material as well as continually refreshing the previously learnt material. As the student progresses through the curriculum, he carries an ever-increasing load of the memorised texts and adds to it one stanza at a time. This aspect of the training of a Zoroastrian priest is akin to the training of a Vedic priest in the Indian tradition, which has been described aptly by Knipe (2015) in his study of the Taittiriya Brahmans of the Godavari river delta in eastern India. The following description by him about the 'weight' of the Vedic syllabus, is equally applicable to a student at the Zoroastrian Athornan Institute:

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[192] Interview with Er. Rooyintan Peer (#37 on 13-1-2017).

'The process of retaining successive phrases of text, however, is familiar to outsiders only in part. The small boy with impressionable brain cells has a calling and faces a *syllabus unbelievably daunting in its totality*. True, he is adding but one line at a time. Nevertheless, *pressure from the cumulative weight of successive days is enormous*, the task being so formidable that the dropout rate is high.'[193]

The syllabus that a student at the Athornan Institute must memorise is similarly formidable. In order to be able to complete it in the stipulated time, one or two stanzas of the text are to be memorised every day, which is to be achieved within the daily bhantar classes. Revision of the learnt material is taken up every few days so that the student does not dissipate from his memory what has already been studied. This is achieved by conducting a continuous revision cycle starting from the basic prayers and going right up to the last memorised text by the student, and then again from the start. Further, annual bhantar examinations are held to grade the performance of the student during the year and as a checkpoint for their progress through the curriculum. The students are also tested for their readiness before the Nāvar and Marātab initiations by conducting an oral examination. Finally, ritual training is imparted once the student has completed memorising the complete text. Reciting the text along with the accompanying ritual actions further aids in better recall of the text. These factors of learning are explored in detail in this section.

Before delving into the core memorisation process, one important device for tracking the student's performance, the bhantar lesson book, is described in detail. The lesson book records the daily progress of the student and throws light on many aspects of the training. Many learning concepts are explained here with examples cited from the students' lesson books.

6.2.1   The bhantar lesson book

When the student first arrives at the Athornan Institute, a notebook is made in his name which will remain with the student for the entire duration of his stay there. It is a running register which records the progress of a student starting from the basic prayers and going all the way up to the last session before leaving the institute. A line entry is made in the book each time the student completes the memorization of an assigned stanza(s) and recites it in front of the instructor satisfactorily.

The following figure shows the oldest and most recent entries from the lesson book of a student (PYT) who arrived at the DAI in June 2012. At the top, the first line entry on 16-6-2012 is for the completed memorisation of the kusti prayers. At the bottom is a snapshot of the last entry in the same lesson book from October 2019, which shows the completion of the Vidēvdād study on 1-10-2019, after which the student can proceed for the Marātab ceremony. Thus, the student has taken seven years and three months to go through the entire Nāvar and Marātab curriculum.

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[193] Knipe (2015, p. 144). Emphasis mine.

Figure 17: PYT's bhantar lesson book – oldest and most recent entries

The lesson book is a rich source of information on various aspects of the training. Based on the lesson book, one can determine the exact date that a stanza was first memorised and subsequently revised. It also provides historical information such as the dates of opening and closing dates of the institute for vacations, bhantar teachers and student teachers at that time, the Nāvar and Marātab dates of the students, how the student fared in a particular month based on his points tally, etc.

The point system essentially measures the student's performance during a period of ten days or a month and enables the teacher to take corrective action if required. Shown in the figure below are a few line entries from a student's lesson book, with details on each category. The total marked in pencil on the top of the page shows the number of lessons completed by the student in that month. Out of the total thirty-one study days in July 2015, the student has given his lesson twenty-eight times to get 28 points. Among this there were six revision entries, each of which earn the student one additional point. Thus, the student's total points for the month were 28 + 6 = 34 points / 31 days in the month, which was graded as 'excellent' performance.
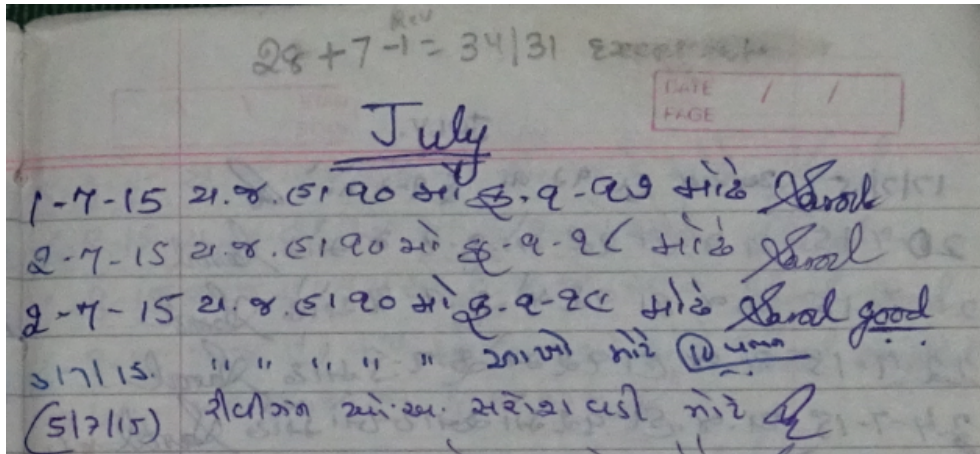
28 + 7 − 1 = 34 points / 31 days in month − excellent						
July						
Date	Text	Chapter	Stanza	How studied	Teacher sign	Comments
1-7-15	Yasna	*hā* 10	*fakrā* 1–17	memorised	Er. Sarosh B	
2-7-15	Yasna	*hā* 10	*fakrā* 1–18	memorised	Er. Sarosh B	
2-7-15	Yasna	*hā* 10	*fakrā* 1–19	memorised	Er. Sarosh B	good
3-7-15	Yasna	*hā* 10	complete (1–21)	memorised	Kurush M D	
(5-7-15) Revision	Khorde Avesta	Sroš vadi (yašt)	complete	memorised	Er. Kersi K	

Figure 18: Description of line entries in the lesson book of KZS

Each line entry consists of seven variables, which are explained in the table below with their possible range of values.

#	Variable	Explanation	Possible values
1	Date	The date on which the study is completed and given back to the teacher	- Regular date indicates study of new stanza(s) - Date in parenthesis indicates a revision of previously learnt text
2	Text	The text which is being studied	- Kh. A.: Khorde Avesta - Y. Z.: Yasna (Yazišn) - Vī. S.: Visperad - Vandī: Vandīdād (Vidēvdād) - Others: Āfrīnagān, Āfrīn, Faroxšī, Bāj Dharnā, etc.
3	Chapter	The chapter of the Yasna/Visperad/Vidēvdād, or specific text of the Khorde Avesta	- *hā* (chapter) for Yasna - *kardo* (section) for Visperad - *pargarad* or fragard (chapter) for Vidēvdād
4	Stanza	The stanza(s) being studied	- *fakro* (stanza) or pl. *fakrā* (stanzas)
5	How studied?	Whether the text is memorised or read fluently	- *moḍhe* ('by mouth' i.e. memorised) - *vāčtā* (fluent reading)
6	Teacher	The signature of the teacher or the senior student who takes the lesson of the student	- Er. Sarosh Behramkamdin (bhantar teacher) - Er. Kersi Karanjia (bhantar teacher) - Er. Ramiyar Karanjia (Principal / bhantar teacher) - Other student teachers
7	Comments	This is an optional entry. It is commonly used to mark good performance. The 10-day score is also written here.	- Good: for second lesson given on one day - Very good (third lesson) - Excellent (fourth lesson) - Very excellent (fifth lesson)

Table 19: Explanation of variables used in the bhantar lesson book

The bhantar lesson books of eleven DAI students who had completed the Nāvar curriculum were made available for the present study.[194] The information from these books in used in the subsequent sections to highlight the different aspects of the training, and it is also the basis of the detailed analysis of the Yasna memorisation presented in the next chapter.

6.2.2   Memorisation within the bhantar class

As detailed in section 5.5.3, there are two timeslots on all days of the week dedicated to the memorisation of the prayers, the first slot from 7 AM to 8 AM and the second slot from 10.45 AM to 11.45 AM.[195] Thus the students have two hours daily dedicated to bhantar study, and it is in these two sessions that almost the entire memorisation exercise takes place. In order to better understand the memorisation process, first a description of the contemporary bhantar class at the DAI is provided, and then the individual elements of the process are analysed in greater detail.

At the time of this study (academic year 2017–18), there were a total of 23 students at the DAI, out which only three were senior students who had completed their Nāvar and Marātab curriculum. The remaining twenty students were at various stages of their study, and were divided into two groups of ten students, each of which was assigned to one of the two resident bhantar instructors, Er. Kersi Karanjia and Er. Sarosh Behramkamdin. During the weekly off days of the bhantar teacher and if otherwise required, the Principal Er. Ramiyar Karanjia, fills in the role of a back-up bhantar teacher. The assignment of the student to either instructor is already done at the time of admission, and thereafter that instructor is mainly responsible for the entire progress of his student.

Figure 19: DAI students at the bhantar class headed by the two instructors

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[195] The senior students in Standards 8th–10th have school in the morning hours and have usually completed memorising the entire curriculum by this time, hence they have a single bhantar study session in the afternoon from 1.30 PM to 3 PM mainly for revision and for learning some ancillary prayers.

<u>Progression of the bhantar class</u>

The sequence of events is similar for both bhantar sessions. On entering the classroom, the students first stand on the southern side of the classroom, and, facing the East direction[196], perform the kusti ritual. After finishing the kusti, they get seated on a bench in the row which faces their bhantar teacher. The two bhantar teachers are seated at a desk at the head of the two rows. Each student has two books with him, his prayer book and bhantar lesson book, in which his daily progress is recorded.

Every student has an assigned portion to memorise for each day, which is marked in his prayer book. If the student has already finished memorising his assigned part, he goes and leaves his lesson book on the teacher's desk in a pile and returns to his place. He remains seated and continues to practise the assigned stanzas by reciting them aloud, until he is called by the teacher or he volunteers to go himself. The teacher first glances at the lesson books at his desk to check for students who have not given their study in the previous one or two sessions and prioritises them over the others. He proceeds to call them one by one to his desk, ensuring that all the students assigned to him are at least called over once between the two bhantar sessions for the day. Special attention is given by the bhantar teacher to the new students who are yet to habituate themselves to the expected daily assignment. In the above figure, the youngest student of the batch and new entrant for that year (2017), six-year-old ARR (extreme right) was made to sit at the desk of the teacher, Er. Kersi Karanjia, who kept constant supervision over him, even as other students came and recited their assigned parts.

<u>'Take-up' of the previous lesson</u>

After selecting a lesson book from the pile, the bhantar teacher calls that student to his desk. Then the student is asked to recite the stanza or multiple stanzas which had been previously assigned to him and marked in the prayer book. The students refer to this as 'take-up', as the memorised lesson is taken up by the bhantar teacher.

At the time of take-up, the student is not only asked to recite the stanzas learnt in the previous session but expected to recite all the stanzas from that chapter starting from the first to the last one that he has studied. For instance, as shown in the below figure, a student who has completed stanzas 1–9 (on 2/10/14), is not asked to recite just stanza 10, but all stanzas from 1–10 during the take-up on 3/10/14.
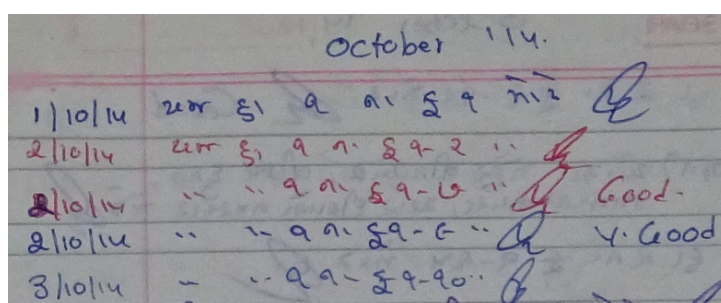
1/10/14	Y 1, stanza 1
2/10/14	Y 1, stanzas 1–2
2/10/14	Y 1, stanzas 1–7
2/10/14	Y 1, stanzas 1–9
3/10/14	Y 1, stanzas 1–10

Figure 20: FMG lesson book with assigned stanzas for memorisation

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[196] The prayers are to be recited facing the direction of the sun, hence the students perform the kusti facing the East since the two bhantar sessions are in the morning. While performing the kusti in the afternoon, they face South, and in the evening, the West.

If the student recites all the stanzas satisfactorily without many mistakes and without requiring much prompting, the teacher deems this lesson as completed. He makes a line entry in the lesson book and signs next to it, and then the next stanza is then taken up for study. However, if the student is unable to recite any part of the assignment well, he is sent back to his desk to prepare it and come back again. Thus, the student has not only to learn the new stanzas but also to revise the previously learnt stanzas from that chapter before he goes to the teacher to give his lesson.

Assignment of new lessons

While teaching a new stanza, the teacher starts by having the student open his textbook to the appropriate page. Then he begins by reciting aloud the first recitation unit which normally comprises of three to five words and asking the student to repeat after him while following the line in the prayer book. After every recitation unit, the teacher marks a vertical line ('|') in the prayer book as a separator to indicate the place where the student needs to momentarily pause while reciting.[197] The teacher reads the stanza to the student one or two more times, and then asks the student to read the stanza aloud from the book by himself. If any of the words are misread or mispronounced, they are corrected by the teacher. Once the teacher is satisfied that the student is reading the text correctly, he assigns this text to be memorised for the next session. The student returns to his seat, and the next student is called by the teacher.

Memorisation of assigned lessons

Once at his desk, the student is expected to recite the stanza aloud and commit it to memory. There is not one standard technique for memorising, but generally a combination of a few tried and tested methods. Er. Ramiyar Karanjia stresses that after the text is broken down into manageable units and each part can be read correctly by the student, the most important element is to focus on each unit for about ten minutes, and slowly imbibe the order of the words. This ability to focus is especially important as all students are seated together and each student is loudly reciting his text, which creates a cacophony in the classroom. Er. Kersi Karanjia and the other bhantar teachers emphasize that this loud recitation, in which the words should fall on one's own ears, is a key aspect of memorisation. In addition, counting and other gestures are used as an aid to memorisation. Counting can be in simple form by using one finger for each recitation unit, or more complex using phalanges of the fingers for higher counts.[198] Other use of gestures include the rocking of the head in a back-and-forth motion while reciting each unit of the text and chopping of the hand in mid-air to aid in recall. However, this usage of gestures is somewhat arbitrary and is not linked to any specific intonation of the text. This is unlike the training in the Vedic tradition, where specific head and hand gestures indicate a particular accent.[199]

However as noted above, the student is required to not just learn the new stanza, but also to revise all the stanzas in the chapter that have been memorised before he can return to the teacher. For the

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[197] The markings in the textbook by the teacher are detailed in section 6.2.3.

[198] The method of counting on fingers is detailed in Case Study 2 in section 8.2.1.

[199] Scharfe (2002, p. 241) describes the Ṛgveda training at Trichur in Kerala where the students are taught the proper pitch accents which the teacher indicates also with a movement of his right hand (up, down, and sideways for *udātta*, *anudātta*, and *svarita*) and the students indicate with a movement of their head (up, down, sideways) respectively.

chapters with many unique stanzas (such as Yasna chapters 19, 31, 44 and 51 which have twenty or more stanzas), the initial stanzas undergo multiple rounds of revision, and become very well memorised by the time the chapter is completed. The final few stanzas on the other hand are revised only a few times and are solidified in the mind only during the subsequent revision cycles. Below is an example from a student's lesson book for Y 31, which shows the previous stanzas being revised and recited several times, while the last stanza is recited only on the last day.

(29/8/15)	(revision) Y 10
31/8/15	Y 31, stanzas 1–9 memorised
	September 2015
1/9/15	Y 31, stanzas 1–10
3/9/15	Y 31, stanzas 1–11
4/9/15	Y 31, stanzas 1–12
(6/9/15)	(revision) Y 11–12
7/9/15	Y 31, stanzas 1–13
8/9/15	Y 31, stanzas 1–14
9/9/15	Y 31, stanzas 1–15
11/9/15	Y 31, stanzas 1–16
(12/9/15)	(revision) Y 13–15
13/9/15	Y 31, stanzas 1–17
14/9/15	Y 31, stanzas 1–18
15/9/15	Y 31, stanzas 1–19
16/9/15	Y 31, stanzas 1–20
17/9/15	Y 31, stanzas 1–21
18/9/15	Y 31 complete (1–23) memorised
(19/9/15)	(revision) Y 16–18

Figure 21: SRS lesson book with assigned stanzas for memorisation

This difference in preparation of the stanzas within a chapter, however, diminishes with every subsequent round of revision, in which the entire chapter is to be recited. This important part of the memorisation process is covered in section 6.2.4.

6.2.3   Marking of the textbook

When the student is called by the bhantar teacher to his desk to be taught a new stanza, the student carries his prayer book with him. The book is opened to the page with the new stanza and read first by the teacher and then repeated by the student. At the time of this first reading, the teacher makes relevant markings in the textbook, which are detailed in this section. These markings indicate that the stanza has been taught, and act as a mnemonic in aiding the student in memorisation. There are different markings used by the bhantar teacher for indicating specific aspects of the text. Some of these important markings are discussed here in greater detail.

Marking of pauses in recitation

After every few words which form one recitation unit, a '|' (vertical stroke) or '/' (slash) is marked by the teacher to indicate the place where the student needs to momentarily pause.
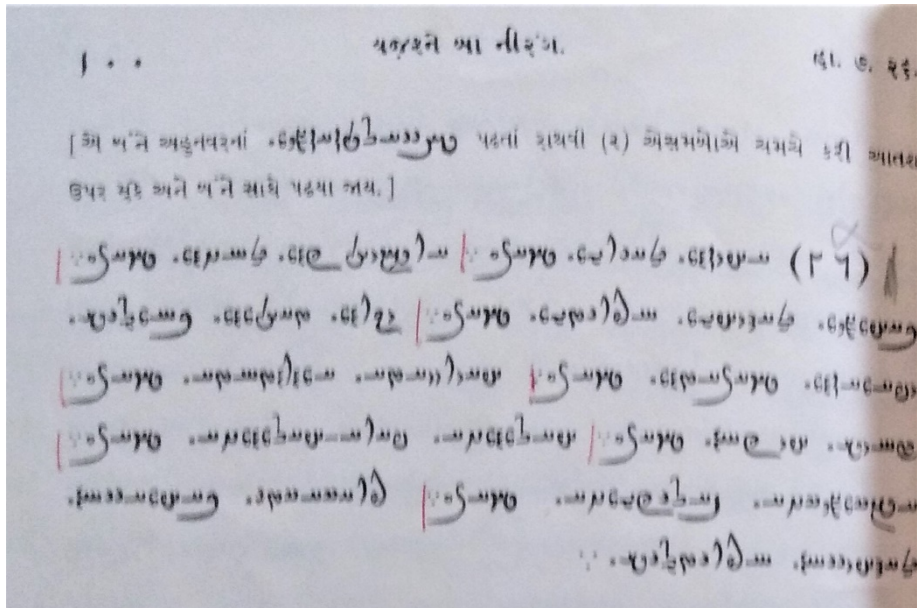
Figure 22: Marking of pauses in Y 7.26 in Yasna book (p.100) by teacher Er Kersi Karanjia

(Y 7.26) *ahunəm vairīm yaz*(*amaide*) | *aršuxδəm vācəm yaz*(*amaide*) |
dahmąm vaŋuhīm āfritīm yaz(*amaide*) | *uɣrəm taxməm dāmōiš*
upamanəm yazatəm yaz(*amaide*) | *hauruuata amərətāta yaz*(*amaide*) |
gāuš huδå yaz(*amaide*) | *haoməmca para.haoməmca yaz*(*amaide*) |
aēsmąsca baoiδīmca yaz(*amaide*) | *frasasti dahmaiiå*
vaŋhuiiå āfritōiš

The vertical stroke is marked by the bhantar teacher during the first reading of the text together with the student. These units of recitation when correctly learnt by the students ensure that their group recitation of prayers is in synchronisation, and all students pause at the same point in the text.

Marking text important for memorisation

The teacher underlines the words which tend to be forgotten or mispronounced by the students, or those which are a spot for potential errors. In the following example, the teacher uses a combination of circling and underlining to indicate these words.
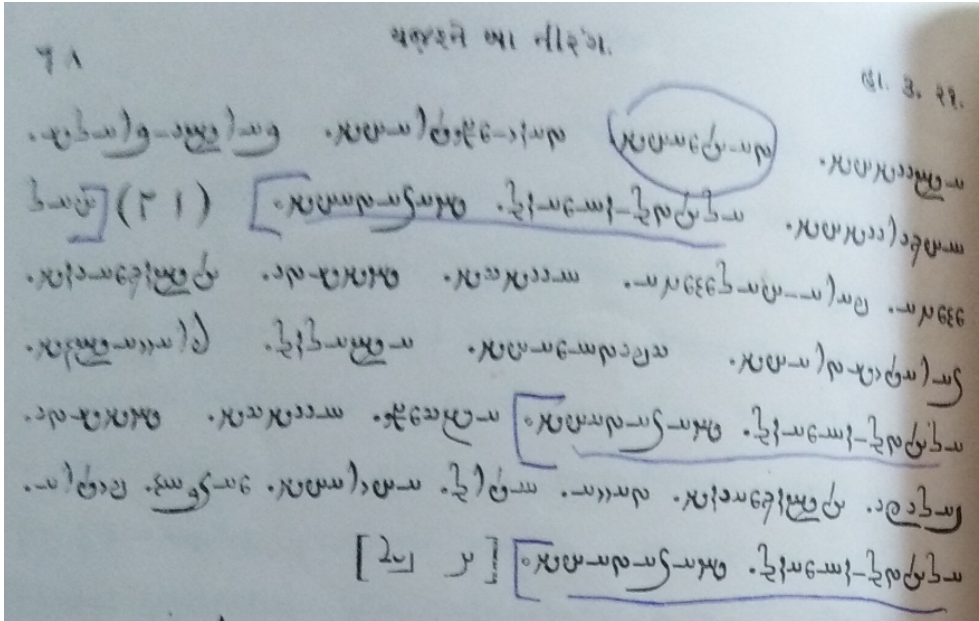
Figure 23: Circling and underlining key words in Y 3.21 on p.48

(Y 3.20) *... ašiiehe* taxmahe *tanu.mąθrahe darši.draoš āhūiriiehe* aoxtō.nāmanō yazatahe]

(Y 3.21) *haoməmca para.haoməmca āiiese yešti xšnūmaine zaraθuštrahe spitāmahe ašaonō frauuašѯe* aoxtō.nāmanō yazatahe]

aēsmą āiiese yešti baoiδi xšnūmaine tauua āθrō ahurahe mazdå puθra aoxtō.nāmanō yazatahe]

In the above example, the word *taxmahe* is circled in the textbook by the teacher as it is an important pivot word. In the initial chapters of the Yasna, the dedication to Sraoša appears in one of the following two forms:

a. (Y 3.1, Y 3.9 etc.) *xšnūmaine sraošahe ašiiehe ašiuuatō vərəθrājanō frādaṯ.gaēθahe*
b. (Y 3.20, Y 4.23, etc.) *xšnūmaine sraošahe ašiiehe taxmahe tanumąθrahe darši.draoš …*

The word *taxmahe* is the marker to indicate that it is the second form of the dedication, and hence it is marked prominently for the student to note this fact while memorising.

In the same passage above, the words *aoxtō.nāmanō yazatahe* are underlined in stanza Y 3.20, since these are the differentiating words in the otherwise identical stanza Y 4.23:

(Y 4.23) *… sraošahe ašiiehe taxmahe tanumąθrahe darši.draoš āhūiriiehe xšnaoθra yasnāica vahmāica xšnaoθrāica frasastaiiaēca*

Example from the Khorde Avesta

In the following three passages of Pāzand (i.e., Middle Persian written in Avesta script) from different Khorde Avesta texts, the same cluster of words *tavānā u dānā* is followed by different text. This is a potential spot for error, where a student if not careful can crossover from reciting one text to the other. The phrase *tavānā u dānā*, which is common to all the three passages, is highlighted by the bhantar teacher in the student's textbook:

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a. Xvaršēd Nyāiš (Ny1), stanza 0
    … baxšāiṇda i baxšāišgār i mihirbān <u>tavānā u dānā</u> u pāk parwardagār ādil pādišāhī i θō bāzavāl bāšat

b. Nām Stāyišn, stanza 1
    … hōrmazd-ac x^vōdāy mahēst u <u>tavānā u dānā</u> u dādār u parvartār u pānā u x^vâvar <u>u kerfegar u awaxšīdār</u> u awizhe vēh-dātastānī u hamāzōr

c. Ardibehešt Yašt Nīrang
    dādār-e jehāndār <u>tavānā u dānā</u> u parvartār u āfridegār <u>u kerfegar u awaxšīdār</u> ahereman hich nādān …

In the above example, there is a further spot for a potential error. The phrase *kerfegar u awaxšīdār* is repeated in texts b. and c. and can cause a crossover if the student is non attentive. Both these spots are also marked in the textbook by the bhantar teacher.

<u>Leaving repeated passages unmarked</u>

In many instances, the same stanza or group of stanzas are repeated in another chapter of the same text, or in a different text. The repeated stanza may have already been learnt earlier, or there may be some minor differences. The teacher instructs the student that the section is either exactly the same or similar to an earlier memorised part, and then leaves the repeated stanzas unmarked in the textbook.
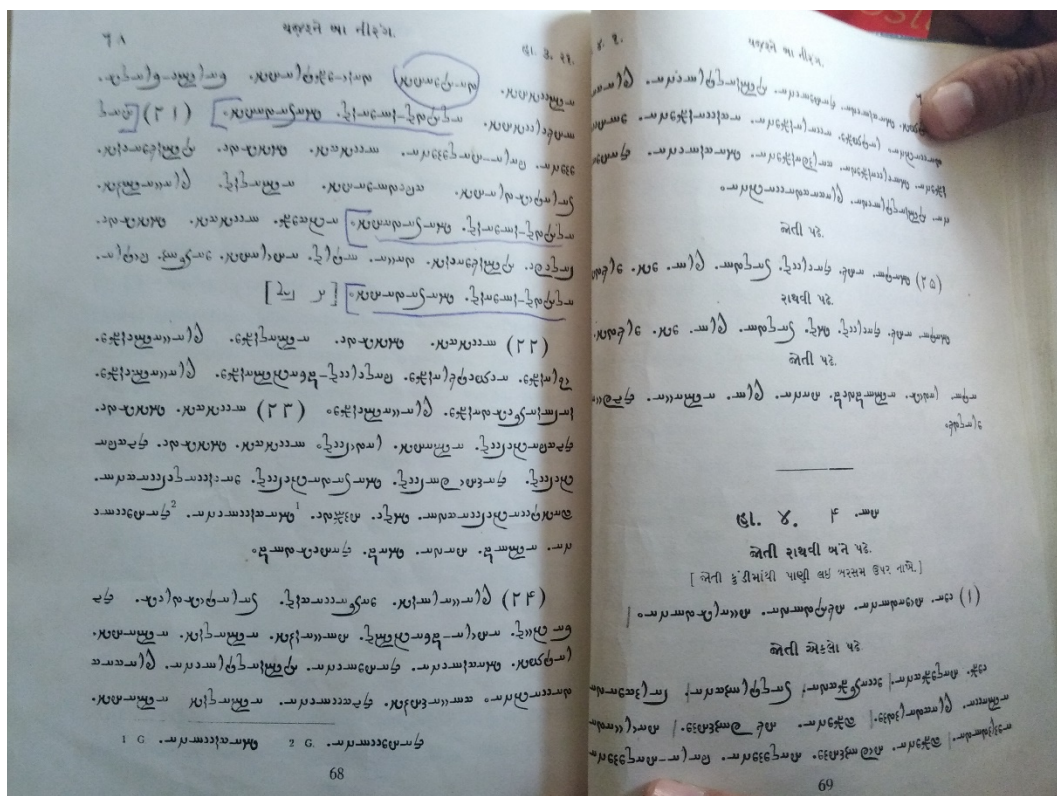
Figure 24: Unmarked stanzas Y 3.22–24 on pp. 48–49 indicating repeated text

The above figure shows the last few stanzas of Y 3 and the first stanza of Y 4. Stanzas Y 3.20 and Y 3.21 are marked on the top left page as they are new for memorisation. Stanzas Y 3.22 and Y 3.23 are repetitions of Y 1.18 and Y 1.19 with a minor modification, and stanza Y 3.24 is the commonly repeated *frauuarāne* formula; hence these have been left unmarked by the teacher. The student is expected to be prepared with these repeated sections, which are taken up by the teacher along with the new stanza assigned for memorisation.

These markings in the textbook are not only useful at the time of first memorisation, but especially during the subsequent rounds of revision, to know where mistakes are likely to happen. Often these prayer books are still used by the students when they go on become full-fledged ritual performing priests. At least a few priests mentioned in interviews that when they have to perform an intercalation ceremony like the Vidēvdād after a break of a few months, they go over all the important points which are marked in their textbook.[200]

6.2.4 Revision of memorised texts

Among the bhantar teachers at the Athornan Institutes, there is a popular Gujarati saying which sums up the teaching philosophy followed there: *āgal dōr, pāčhal čōr* 'run ahead, pile up behind', where ahead refers to new material being memorised, and the pile behind refers to the previously memorised material which needs to be revised constantly so that it is not forgotten. [201] In essence, the student is expected to gallop ahead in memorizing the next stanzas, while preventing the piling up of revision of the old material.

As seen in the previous section, one of the methods integrated into the memorisation process to ensure that the older material is not forgotten, is to make the student recite all the stanzas of the current chapter and not just the newly memorised stanza. Another important mechanism to facilitate this is having some days dedicated to revision of previously learnt texts, after every few days of memorising new material.

The split of the total bhantar study time between memorizing new stanzas and revising learnt material depends on the time of the year and the text being studied. Generally, for each student, more time in the initial years is focused towards learning the new material in order to progress faster; however, as the corpus of memorized chapters swells, increasing time is dedicated for revision.

During the regular term, revision of old material is assigned after about four to five turns of new material, as seen in Figure 21 above. Though not always the case, it is observed in many instances that a student tends to take more days to give back a revision than he needs for memorising new material. Typically, a student returns a revision lesson every second day, while a new stanza is given back on average once per day. In a typical month, if every fifth lesson is a revision, the student will spend on average twenty days on learning new material, and ten days on revision. Thus, the student roughly spends about a third of his bhantar time on revision. This percentage is smaller in the initial years,

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[200] At least three priests – Er. Rooyintan Peer (interview #37), Er. Nozer Mehenty (#30) and Er. Kaizad M. Kotwal (#23) mentioned that they revise from their own prayer books in which the important text is marked.
[201] Mentioned in interviews by Er. Kersi Karanjia (#42), Er. Sarosh Behramkamdin (#43) and Dastur Keki Ravji (#3).

while once the student nears completion of the curriculum, almost the entire time is then dedicated to the revision of already memorised material.

Revision for annual bhantar examination

A complete revision cycle of all the studied material is conducted every February, in preparation for the annual bhantar examination. During this time, very limited or no new material is given for memorisation, and all the bhantar sessions are dedicated to revision. In the lesson book, the dates for the revision days are written within parenthesis or occasionally written in red ink, to distinguish them from the days of regular study. The figure below shows the continuous days of revision leading up to the bhantar competition (on 18-2-18) and bhantar exam (on 24-2-18) in the lesson book of a student VHD.
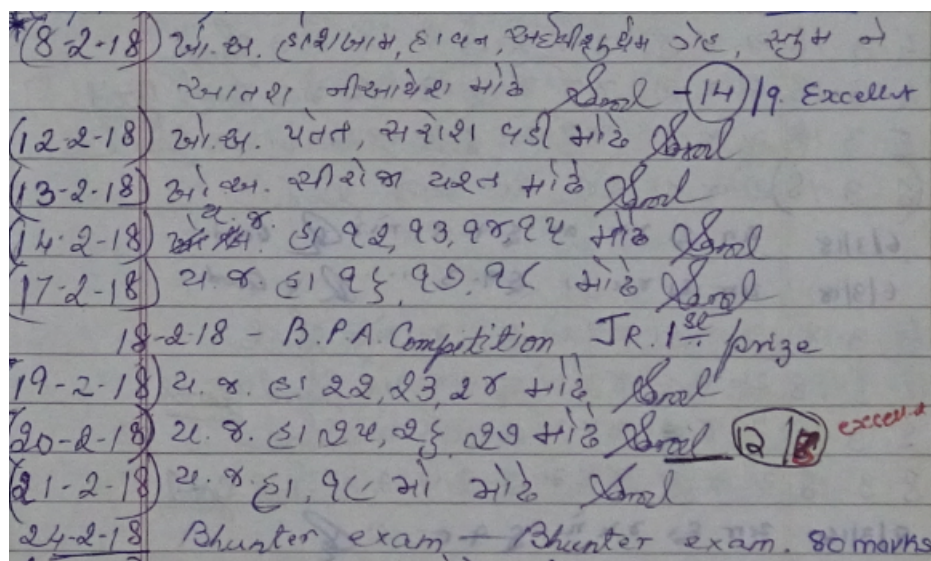
(8-2-18)	Khorde Avesta – Hošbām,
(12-2-18)	Khorde Avesta – Patet, Sroš Yašt Vadi
(13-2-18)	Khorde Avesta – Sirozā Yašt
(14-2-18)	Yasna 12, 13, 14, 15
(17-2-18)	Yasna 16, 17, 18
18-2-18	BPA Bhantar Competition – 1st Prize for Junior category
(19-2-18)	Yasna 22, 23, 24
(20-2-18)	Yasna 25, 26, 27
(21-2-18)	Yasna 19
24-2-18	Bhantar examination – 80 marks / 100

Figure 25: VHD lesson book with all revision days before the annual bhantar exam

In the past, the bhantar sessions on weekends were typically reserved for revision, while the rest of the week was mainly for learning new material, however this system is no longer followed, and revision is prescribed at the discretion of the bhantar teacher. Thus, in a regular bhantar class, some students will be studying new stanzas, while the other will simultaneously be revising previous lessons. Some bhantar teachers prefer to list all the revision lessons in a separate section of the book for easy

visibility on the progress of the student. Shown below is the revision section from the lesson book of SAD.
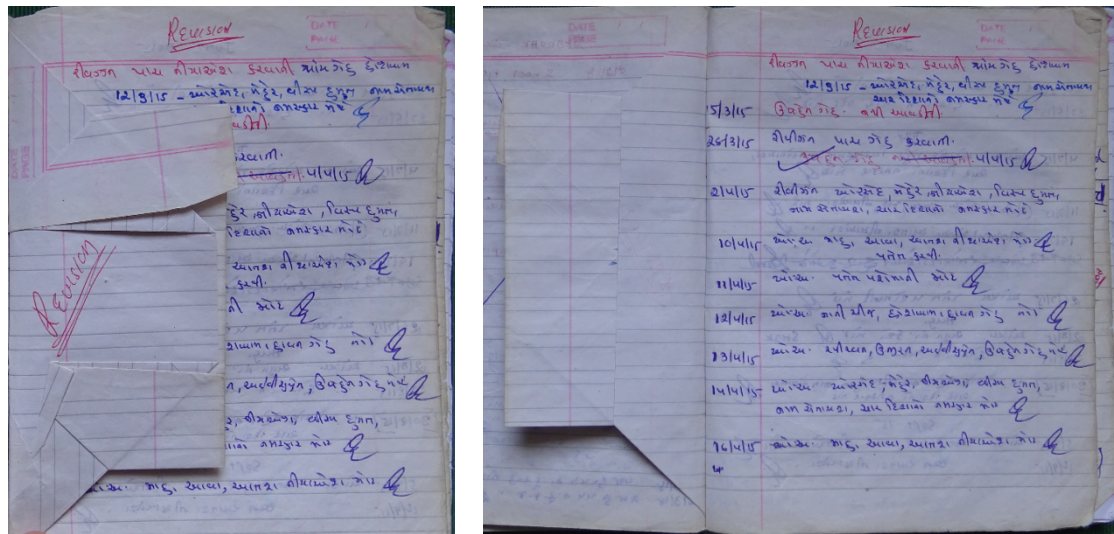
Figure 26: SAD lesson book with a separate section for the revised lessons

The bhantar teacher conducts the revision for a student in the same way as the 'take-up' of new stanzas. Once the student is ready with the revision, he submits the lesson book on the teacher's desk and gets called by him subsequently. If the assigned revision is one or two chapters, the student is typically asked to recite them completely. At the time of the annual examination, often many chapters are assigned to be revised together. During this time, the teacher asks the student to recite only certain important and error-prone sections, instead of the complete chapters.

Cyclical rounds of revision

The revision sessions are conducted in a cyclical fashion. For the Yasna, the first cycle of revision begins with the introduction (Y 0) and Y 1 and proceeds all the way up to the last memorised chapter, after which the second revision cycle starts again from Y 0. The cycles thus keep repeating with newer chapters added at the end. This is elucidated with an example below.

Depicted in Figure 27 is the revision cycle for student FMG, who started the Yasna study in September 2014, and completed memorisation in September 2017. As FMG progressed through the Yasna chapters, he also underwent continuous rounds of revision of the learnt chapters in parallel. The first round of revision started in January 2015 with Y 0 and stopped at Y 8 in February 2015, since FMG was still studying Y 9 at that time. Then a second round of revision started in April 2015 again with Y 0 and this time it continued up to Y 18, which was the last memorised chapter. In the interim period between the two revision cycles of the Yasna chapters, the revision of the Khorde Avesta material was being conducted. This cycle of revision kept on continuing with new chapters added at the end, until the completion of all the chapters. The revision-4, revision-7 and revision-8 rounds were conducted in the February–March period in preparation for the bhantar exam.

Yasna ha	Completed	Revision-1	Revision-2	Revision-3	Revision-4	Revision-5	Revision-6	Revision-7	Revision-8
0	Sep-14	Jan-15	Apr-15	Jul-15	Feb-16	Apr-16	Sep-16	Feb-17	Feb-18
1	Oct-14								
…	…								
8	Dec-14	Feb-15							
9	Feb-15								
10	Apr-15								
…	…								
18	Jul-15		Jul-15						
19	Jul-15								
20	Jul-15								
…	…								
31	Nov-15			Dec-15					
32	Jan-16								
33	Mar-16				Mar-16				
34	Apr-16								
…	…								
43	Aug-16					Sep-16			
44	Sep-16								
45	Oct-16								
…	…								
53	Apr-17						Jan-17		
54	Apr-17								
55	Apr-17								
…	…								
68	Aug-17							Jan-18	
69	Aug-17								
…	…								
72	Sep-17								Mar-18

Figure 27: Revision cycles of increasing length based on FMG lesson book

Finally, before the student is scheduled to go for his Nāvar initiation ceremony, depending on the time available, he is made to undergo one more round of revision, encompassing at least of the most important chapters. In the case of FMG, whose Nāvar ceremony was performed in May 2018, the bhantar teacher, Er. Kersi Karanjia, squeezed an additional round of revision in April (after the completion of the revision-8 cycle). As seen in FMG's lesson book, the Yasna chapters 0–34 and 54–60 were revised. These chapters covered most of the ritually intensive sections of the Yasna to be performed during the Nāvar ceremony.

April 2018	
1/4/18	(revision) Y 31, 32, 33, 34
2/4/18	(revision) Y 30
4/4/18	(revision) Y 29–34
5/4/18	(revision) Y 28–34
6/4/18	(revision) Y 21–27
8/4/18	(revision) Y 11, 13–18
9/4/18	(revision) Y 12, 19–20
10/4/18	(revision) Y 0, 1–10
11/4/18	(revision) Y 54–58
12/4/18	(revision) Y 54–60
Summer vacation from 13/4/18–12/6/18	
Became Nāvar on 4/5/2018 roj Ram, māh Adar, 1387 YZ	

Figure 28: Intensive revision on ritually important chapters before FMG's Nāvar

This process of continually refreshing the learnt material through a systematic revision schedule is an integral part of the memorisation process. The time and effort dedicated to revision increases significantly before the annual bhantar examinations and prior to the Nāvar-Marātab readiness exam, which form the topic of discussion of the next section.

6.2.5   Prayer examinations

Prayer or bhantar examinations are an essential part of the training process at the Athornan Institutes. Bhantar examinations are of two types, viz. the routine bhantar examination to test the student's progress during the year typically held at the end of the academic year, and the special Nāvar and Marātab examination, which tests the student's readiness to undergo the initiation ceremony. Both these examinations are analysed in detail in this section.

Annual bhantar examination

While a student's progress is continuously monitored by his performance in the bhantar class, a formal examination is conducted at the end of each academic year to determine whether the student is on track to finish the curriculum or whether any course correction is required. In the past when schooling was in-house, the bhantar examination held even higher significance since students who did not clear the bhantar exam were detained in the same standard and were not allowed to advance until their progress was satisfactory. This is no longer the policy at the Athornan Institutes, where the marks obtained on the bhantar exam do not have any bearing on the academic progress at school.

Since the time of the inception of the Athornan Institutes, annual examinations have also been a means to showcase the training of the students. External examiners, who were either eminent priests

or distinguished religious scholars, were invited to test the students. Often bhantar teachers of one institute were called upon as external examiners to the other institute.[202]

At the MFCAI, in addition to the annual examination, there was a fixed timetable of bimonthly exams which was used to constantly monitor the progress of the students. There were three tests on religious subjects viz. an oral bhantar test, a written religious knowledge test, and a written test on Iranian history. The exams were conducted every two months as follows:[203]

Term	Month	Exam schedule	Marks out of
1 (Jun–Oct)	July	1st bi-monthly test	25
	September	2nd bi-monthly test	25
	October	1st Terminal exam	50
2 (Nov–Apr)	December	3rd bi-monthly test	25
	February	4th bi-monthly test	25
	April	Annual examination	100

Table 20: Exam schedule at MFCAI

The criterion for grading the bhantar exams was a combination of the fluency of recitation, the correct pronunciation of the words, and the number of mistakes and omissions. Based on these, the teacher would gauge the performance and accordingly assign total marks on the exam. The student was promoted to the next standard based on the marks obtained in the final exam. Higher relative importance was accorded to the religious subjects which had a passing mark of 45/100, while the academic subjects had a lower passing mark of 35/100. The students were thus detained if they did not meet the minimum level of proficiency in bhantar, even if they passed all the academic subjects.

Dastur Keki Ravji, who was the bhantar examiner at the DAI for three years during the 1995–2000 period, described the systematic criteria employed to mark the candidates during the annual bhantar exam. The marking system was devised by Er. Keki Panthaki, then bhantar teacher at the DAI, who gives a sheet to mark the students on five different items:

Name	1. Voice quality	2. Mistakes & omissions	3. Pronunciation	4. Rhythmic praying	5. Any prayer of choice	Total
	__ / 20	__ / 20	__ / 20	__ / 20	__ / 20	__ / 100
Student-1						
Student-2						
…						

Table 21: Examination criteria at the DAI

The student was marked out of twenty on each of the five criteria, and then the marks were summed for a total out of hundred. The marks were assigned on the following basis:

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[202] Karanjia (2019b, pp. 25–26) mentions the staff of MFCAI who conducted the bhantar exams at the DAI.
[203] Details based on interview with Er. Rooyintan Peer (#37).

1. Voice quality was adjudged as good if the student's recitation was loud and clear, and as poor if he mumbled and was incoherent.

2. A mistake was counted if the text was forgotten or recited incorrectly; and an omission was when a word was skipped in error.

3. Pronunciation was of paramount importance. Having *śuddha uččār* ('pure pronunciations') was the hallmark of a well-trained student of the Athornan Institute, versus the *aśuddha* ('impure') pronunciations of those trained elsewhere. A track was kept of the number of mispronunciations and the student was marked accordingly.

4. Rhythmic praying (Guj. *ladhan mā bhanvuṃ*) was tested primarily for the metrical texts of the Gāthas, which were to be recited in a poetic rhythm observing the correct pauses, and not as a prose.

5. Prayer of choice was an optional criterion used to differentiate among the best performers. The students were asked to recite any prayer of their choice, which was marked on the difficulty of the chosen text and its execution. If the student chose a relatively simple text, he would be marked lower even if he executed it perfectly.

A similar criterion as the above was often used during the bhantar competitions. When two students were very evenly matched, usually the tie-breaking criteria was based on which student had better *uččār* (pronunciations). When asked for examples of incorrect pronunciations, Dastur Ravji cited the following instances where students often faltered[204]:

Y 28.1 *ahiiā yāsā nəmaŋhā   ustānazastō rafəδrahiiā …*

Often *ustānazastō* 'with hands outstretched' was mispronounced as *ustānozastō*

Sroš Bāj, Gāhs, Y 0.4 etc.   *dušmata dužūxta dužuuaršta …*

The ž in *dužūxta dužuuaršta* 'bad words, bad deeds' is often pronounced as z or even as a j, which is considered as an example of inferior articulation.

The annual bhantar examination is also used to determine if a student's progress is very slow and he needs to be put on a step-down curriculum. Occasionally, a student is unable to cope with the required memorisation pace of about one stanza per day. If he is falling behind significantly, a decision is made by the bhantar teacher to make him only fluently read certain chapters of the text, instead of learning them by heart.[205] The criteria for judging these students on the annual exam are suitably modified.

Nāvar and Marātab examination

The students from the Athornan Institutes, who have completed their training and are ready to undergo either the Nāvar or Marātab initiation, must first appear for an oral examination testing their bhantar knowledge. Here the student is certified on his ability to fluently recite the requisite prayers from memory, failing which the initiation ceremony would likely have to be postponed until he achieves the required readiness. At the DAI, only after the student has passed the exam, does he receive the permission from the Principal and Managing Committee for undergoing the initiation. As

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[204] Interview #3.
[205] For an example, see case study in section 7.4.2.

per the regulation at the DAI, if a student undergoes the initiation without the explicit written permission from the principal, the student is liable to be immediately dismissed from the institute.[206]

A case study of the examination conducted before the initiation ceremonies of three candidates in 2017, is presented below. The observations on this examination are recorded after the case study.

Case Study of a Nāvar and Marātab Oral Examination

Date: 17th September 2017, Sunday
Time: 9.30–11.00 AM
Location: Mevawala Agiary, Byculla, Mumbai

Background

Two students SRS and ZMT, are ready to undergo the Nāvar initiation, while one student ARP is ready for the Marātab initiation. SRS and ZMT are both 12 years old and studying in the 7th standard. They are from Surat and will have their Nāvar ceremony at the Surat Ātaš Bahrām. ARP, who is 14 years old and studying in the 9th standard, is a resident of Mumbai and will have his Marātab ceremony at the Banaji Limji Agiary[207] at Fort, Mumbai.

The bhantar certification test is conducted by Er. Darayus Parvez Bajan, a former student of the DAI (1981–1990). Er. Darayus is the son of Er. Parvez M. Bajan, the Panthaki of the Mevawala Agiary at Byculla, Mumbai, where this oral examination was conducted. Er. Darayus has been conducting both the annual bhantar examination as well as the Nāvar-Marātab certification exam for the DAI students since the year 2003.[208]

Curriculum

In order to qualify for the Nāvar, the candidate needs to have memorized all the Khorde Avesta texts (5 Gāhs and 5 Nyāišes, Satūm Karda, Patet), selected Yašts (Sroš Yašt Vadi, Sroš Yašt Hādoxt, Hom Yašt, Vanant Yašt, Sirozā Yašt, Ardibehešt Yašt), the Yasna chapters 1–72 and Visperad Karde 1–23.

The Marātab candidate, in addition to the above, requires memorizing the Āfrīnagans, Āfrīns and Bāj Dharnā, and should be able to fluently read the complete Vidēvdād fragards 1–22 from the book.

Oral Examination

The oral exam commenced at 9.30 AM with all the three candidates standing facing Er. Bajan, who instructed them to recite certain sections of the text from the above curriculum. Er. Bajan followed a standard pattern of asking one candidate to start a particular prayer, then asking the second candidate to continue midway, and then asking the third candidate to conclude it.

The following sequence of prayers were asked to be recited by the three candidates:

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[206] Karanjia (2019b, pp. 25–27) cites multiple cases where this rule was applied, and resultantly the student was either dismissed outright, or reinstated only after a stiff penalty.
[207] Consecrated in 1709 CE, the Banaji Limji Agiary is the oldest extant fire-temple in the city of Mumbai.
[208] Karanjia (2019b, p. 27).

1. Khorde Avesta: Rapithwin gāh, Uzirin gāh, Xvaršēd Nyāiš, Ava Aredvi Sur Nyāiš (*ā hātāmcā* stanza from Y 65)
2. Yašts: Sroš Yašt Hādoxt (Karde 1–5), Sirozā Yašt (small *xšnuman* for all 33 Yazatas)
3. Yasna initial chapters – Y 3, 4, 9–11, 23–25
4. *Yasna middle portion – Y 28–54 were largely skipped as the students were not adequately prepared for the Gāthās and Yasna Haptanghāiti.*
5. Yasna concluding chapters – Y 55, 58, 60, 64, 68, 71–72
6. Recitation of Y 72 while pouring water back into the well after the completion of the Yasna ritual.
7. Visperad Karde 16; since none of the candidates were able to recite it confidently, they were asked to recite any Karde of their choice.
8. Selected portions of the Bāj and Āfrīnagān (only to Marātab candidate ARP)
9. Vidēvdād – Testing of the fluent reading of the Vidēvdād by ARP was skipped as all Marātab candidates are assumed to have attained proficiency in reading the Avestan script.

The recitation exam lasted for an hour and fifteen minutes, and concluded at 10.45 AM.

Er. Darayus, when asked about his assessment of the exam, mentioned that he would rate all the three candidates in the range of 70–75% for their performance. In his letter to the Principal of the DAI, Er. Ramiyar Karanjia, he recommended all the three candidates to be qualified to appear for their respective Nāvar and Marātab initiations.

Observations on the oral examination

The candidates were found to be very well prepared in the Khorde Avesta and Yašt recitations. For the first section (*hās* 1–27) and third section (*hās* 54–72) of the Yasna, the candidates were satisfactorily prepared, but required a bit of prompting at certain points, usually at the beginning of a new stanza. However, for the Yasna middle section (*hās* 28–53) which includes the Gāthās, and also for most of the Visperad, the candidates were found to be unprepared.

The Khorde Avesta material undergoes the maximum rounds of revision since it is learnt first, and parts of it are refreshed daily during the morning and evening prayer sessions, hence it is fixed very well in the mind. The first and third sections of the Yasna are ritually intensive, and hence these parts are emphasised by the bhantar teacher while teaching, which explains why these parts were reasonably well prepared for the exam. The middle section of the Yasna (which is in Old Avestan) and the Visperad, however, typically undergo only one or two rounds of revision by the time of the Nāvar exam. Also, since these recitations are usually not accompanied by any ritual actions, the student can potentially read the text from a book, and hence some amount of laxity is accorded for this part. This is also the reason why students who are well behind on their curriculum, are made to only fluently read the Gāthā chapters instead of having to completely memorise them.[209]

While analysing the bhantar lesson books of the above three students, it was observed that all of them had completed the memorisation of the entire Yasna and Visperad, hence technically they should have been able to recite all the chapters from the mid-section of the Yasna (*hās* 28–53). However, on closer

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[209] See case studies in sections 7.4.2 and 7.4.3.

analysis, it was observed that during the revision just preceding the Nāvar, some of the supposedly difficult chapters had been read from the book, as the student would have been unable to recite it from memory.

Below is an entry from the lesson book of one of the Nāvar candidate, which shows that Y 43 and Y 44 had been memorised in April and June 2016, but during the Nāvar revision in October 2017, these chapters were not recited from memory (Guj. *moḍhe* 'by mouth'), but only read (Guj. *vāčtā* from verb *vāčvūṃ* 'to read').
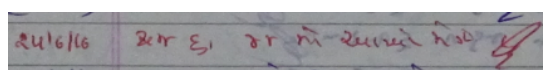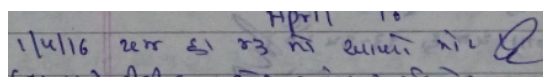
1/4/16	Y 43 completely memorised
…	
24/6/16	Y 44 completely memorised
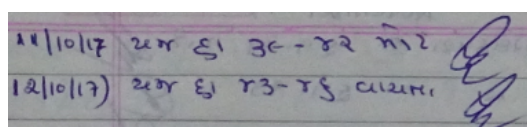
(11/10/17)	Y *hās* 39–42 *moḍhe* (memorised)
(12/10/17)	Y *hās* 43–46 *vāčtā* (reading)

Figure 29: Bhantar book entry showing memorised lesson (above) and revision (below)

In the above examination, the fact that all the candidates were cleared for the initiation with a good score despite not being completely prepared, shows that some amount of leniency is now accorded if a satisfactory level of competence is attained. This is contrary to the earlier prevalent practice at both the Athornan Institutes, when the examinations were very stringent, and students were only allowed to appear for the exam if their memorisation was extremely thorough. Er. Nozer Mehenty (at MFCAI from 1975–1986) described the preparation that the bhantar teacher would make the student undergo before the Nāvar-Marātab exam using the phrase *dābi dābi ne rus kādhe* 'squeeze squeeze and extract the juice'. The external examiners during his time would regularly be high priests like Dastur K. M. JamaspAsa, Dastur F. M. Kotwal[210] and Dastur Minocherhomji, who would first make the students undergo a gruelling oral exam, followed by the practical ritual performance exam, and only then issue the permission if they were absolutely satisfied. For the oral exam, besides the Khorde Avesta, Yasna and Visperad, the student was also expected to have the Āfrīnagāns, Āfrīns and the Bāj Dharnā well memorised. Thus, a marked change in the stringency is observed to have taken place in

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[210] Dastur Kotwal was the Principal at MFCAI up to the year 1977, after which he relinquished his position and was appointed as the high priest (Dastur) of the H. B. Wadia Ātaš Bahrām.

the period of the last three to four decades. This relaxation is also observed in the ritual training imparted to the students, which is the topic of the next section.

6.2.6 Ritual training

Ritual training or kriyākām (Guj. *kriyā* 'ritual', *kām* 'work') is an integral part of the priestly training at the Athornan Institutes. The very goal of the Athornan Institutes' curriculum is to create a priest who can perform the rituals proficiently. An enormous amount of time at the institutes is spent on memorising the texts, so that the student is able to recite it fluently and impeccably while performing the ritual. Hence, much attention was traditionally devoted to teaching the finer details of ritual actions, as well as the adhering to the religious *tarikat* ('observances').

During the 1920s and 1930s, the kriyākām training was conducted everyday morning for three hours. The students were divided into batches and had turns according to a training timetable. The setup of the training was made to be as close to the actual ritual as possible. The students had to wear the priestly headgear (*pāghḍī*) and use the sacred bread (*darun*) in the ritual practice. The Paragna had to be done from 5.30 AM to 6.15 AM and thereafter the Yasna was to be performed fully and completed by 8.30 AM. Practice for the Bāj Dharnā and the Āfrīnagān was also conducted regularly. Further for the senior students, the practice of the entire Vidēvdād ceremony was to be done at night at least six times a year. The student had to adhere to the ritual observances (*amal*) while maintaining the ritual power (*khub*) obtained by performing the Yasna in the morning.[211]

Er. Rooyintan Peer provided the following detailed description of ritual training imparted at the MFCAI during the 1960s to 1970s:[212]

> The preparatory Paragnā ritual, which is relatively difficult, was not part of the curriculum and only the Yasna ritual actions were taught. The Yasna ritual training was taken up in three sections, viz. chapters 1–27, the Gāthic section of chapters 28–53, and finally chapters 54–72. The first section was difficult as students were just learning to cope with the new text. Once the memorization up to chapter 27 was completed, the student joined the *kriyākām* training. He would move ahead to memorise the next section in his bhantar studies, and the ritual training was continued on the side. There were multiple batches of students undergoing ritual practice and each batch had their turn on different days of the week for ritual training. There were three to four students per batch and the student joined a batch once he had finished memorising the first section of the Yasna.
>
> The ritual precinct at the MFCAI had a total of three pāvīs, which are rectangular areas enclosed by furrows within which the ritual is performed.[213] Out of these, two pāvīs were functional with the *idhorā* (the stone tables used as the ritual table and as the seat for the chief priest). The training instructor at MFCAI, Er. Nadirsha Aibara, would come and conduct the ritual training early in the morning at 6.30 AM so that it did not interfere with the regular school hours. Er. Aibara made two students sit at the two *idhorās* and supervised both, while the other students sat on a bench outside the pāvīs and observed. The new students would be introduced to the ritual starting from the basics of how to enter the pāvī. After the morning training, the senior students were assigned

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[211] Karanjia (2019b, pp. 28, 56–57).
[212] Interview #37 (13-1-2017).
[213] Figure 30 shows the pāvī at the DAI.

the duty to follow-up and make the juniors practise the ritual again during the free time later in the day, so that they were prepared for their next turn. Once the student had joined the *kriyākām* training, it would continue every week throughout his remaining years at the MFCAI. It was important to keep refreshing the ritual performance as it was very easy to forget with a gap of only a few months. And even if the student revised the ritual, there was a tendency to forget the finer points unless he kept practising it hands-on.

Er. Peer stressed the fact that no errors were tolerated in the actual ritual, and the fluency and finesse which were expected from the students, only came from continuous practice. To achieve the desired level of expertise, Er. Aibara would keep a stick ready, and the students were constantly struck on the hands for every mistake in the ritual action. Er. Peer, who went on to become the principal at the MFCAI, firmly believed in the effectiveness of this method, stating that acute proficiency in ritual training could be gained only with this level of strictness.

Over the years, this rigor has reduced, nonetheless ritual training remains an important part of the curriculum at the Athornan Institutes. The ritual training presently imparted at the DAI follows the same hands-on approach, however the intensity and repetition is observed to be significantly reduced compared to the description given by Er. Peer.

Ritual training at the DAI

Prior to 1965, when the students attended the in-house school at the DAI, ritual training was integrated into the everyday timetable. Each senior student was allocated a turn on a particular day of the week, when the Paragnā and Yasna were to be performed from 5.30–8.30 AM. In addition, the Bāj Dharnā and Āfrīnagān rituals were also to be performed regularly.

After 1966, when students started attending the external DPYA school, the daily schedule had to be modified to fit around the school timetable. In addition to the school hours, school study periods had to be accommodated so that students were able to complete the assigned homework. This left little time on weekdays for ritual training, especially for the senior students who had a higher academic workload. As a result, ritual training was shifted to be performed only on the weekends, and it was started once the student had completed the entire Yasna study.

In recent years, the training is usually started a few months prior to the Nāvar ceremony. Students normally undergo the Nāvar initiation during the vacation in May, for which the ritual training is started in the December–January period. Training is held for about 1.5 hours (7 AM–8.30 AM) on one or both the weekend mornings. There is no practice session held mid-week, hence the ritual actions need to be refreshed during the weekend session only. For the Nāvar initiation, ritual training is given only for the Yasna ceremony; the training on the Visperad is not given since at many fire-temples where the Nāvar initiations are performed, only a Yasna with a dedication to Ahura Mazdā is performed on the fourth and final day instead of a Visperad ceremony.[214]

Students who are ready for the Marātab initiation, are also called for training once or twice a month. Since the Visperad is part of the Vidēvdād ceremony of the Marātab, the candidates are shown the ritual differences in the Yasna with the intercalated Visperad and the important ritual actions in the

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[214] Based on the description by Er. Kersi Karanjia (interview #42).

Visperad, mainly in Karde 3 pertaining to the installation of the priests. There are no ritual actions to be performed during the recitation of the Vidēvdād, and hence it does not involve any ritual training. Presented below is a case study on the ritual training imparted to two DAI students before their Nāvar ceremony by the instructor Er. Kersi Karanjia.

Case Study of a Ritual Training session at the DAI

Date: 10th September 2017, Sunday
Time: 7–8.30 AM
Location: Dadar Athornan Institute (DAI), Mumbai

Background

Two students SRS and ZMT, both twelve years old and studying in the 7th standard, were slated to undergo the Nāvar initiation during the school break for the Diwali festival in October 2017. Both students had completed the memorisation of the complete Yasna and Visperad and were revising the texts for the Nāvar ceremony at the time of this training session. Both SRS and ZMT hail from Surat and their Nāvar ceremonies were scheduled to be performed together at the Modi Ātaš Bahrām in Surat on 4th November 2017.

The training session on 10th September was conducted by Er. Kersi Karanjia who is the bhantar and kriyākām teacher at the DAI. This was the first ritual training session conducted by Er. Karanjia for the two potential initiates. It would be similarly conducted on all Sunday mornings up to the Diwali break starting on 13th October 2017; hence, five training sessions were possible before both students returned to Surat. Er. Karanjia had made the following rough timetable for the five training sessions:

Session #	Date	Chapters covered	Activity
1	10-9-2017	Prelim, Y 0–27	Ritual demo with SRS as Zot, ZMT as Rāspi
2	17-9-2017	Prelim, Y 0–27	Revision with ZMT as Zot, SRS as Rāspi
3	24-9-2017	Y 28–34, Y 59–72	Ritual demo with ZMT as Zot, SRS as Rāspi
4	1-10-2017	Y 28–34, Y 59–72	Revision with SRS as Zot, ZMT as Rāspi
5	8-10-2017	Entire Yasna	Overview of complete ceremony

Table 22: Kersi Karanjia's timetable for initiates

Thus, the Yasna was divided into two parts and only the ritually intensive chapters were covered; the first section consisted of Y 0–27, and the second included the first Gāthā (Y 28–34) and the concluding chapters (Y 59–72). The remaining chapters, including Gāthās 2–5 do not have any significant ritual actions, and hence were skipped from the training. The training for each section spanned two weeks: a demonstration was given in the first session, and then it was revised in the subsequent week. For one complete session, each student was designated as either the chief priest (Zot) or the assistant priest (Rāspi), and this was reversed in the next session.

Progression of the kriyākām session

At 7 AM, Er. Karanjia and the two students first assembled in the hall at the DAI which houses the demarcated ritual area (pāvī) shown in Figure 30 below. Both students were dressed in white priestly

attire with the pāghḍī (turban) and padān (mouth-sheet), and they had folded the long sleeve of their shirt to mimic the priestly vest (badiyān) worn while performing the inner rituals.

Figure 30: The pāvī at the DAI where the ritual training is imparted

All the required implements including the various utensils were removed from the cupboard and kept within the pāvī. Then both the students were led to the water well, which is situated within the DAI compound, adjacent to the main building. At the well, Er. Karanjia instructed the students on the correct method of drawing water after cleansing the pail by filling it partially and emptying it three times. After filling the water pots, the students returned to the pāvī, where the ritual training commenced with SRS designated as the Zot and ZMT as the Rāthvī.

Figure 31: Ritual training on drawing water from well for ceremonial usage

The preparatory Paragnā is not taught, since it is not performed by the student during the Nāvar ceremony, but by the priest who will initiate the candidate. However, the Rāspi (ZMT) was made to sit and arrange all the implements on the ritual table, which is normally done as part of the Paragnā.

Figure 32: Practice on the arrangement of implements on the ritual table

After the arrangement on the table was completed, SRS stepped on the chief priest's seat (Guj. *idhorā*, Pahl. *zōd gāh*) and ZMT took on the role of the assistant priest for the practice of the Yasna ceremony. Starting with the Dibāčo (Y 0), Er. Karanjia made the student recite the stanzas containing ritual actions, and made the students perform the appropriate ritual activity. The assistant priest was mainly an observer for much of the time, except on occasions when he had to perform a specific ritual action.

Figure 33: The chief and assistant priests during ritual training

The entire demonstration spanning the preliminaries and chapters 1 to 27 of the Yasna was completed by 8.30 AM. Er. Karanjia once again quickly recapped all the ritual actions to be performed in this

section. This concluded the training session for that day; the next session was scheduled for the following Sunday when the position of the Zot and Rāspi would be interchanged.

Observations on the ritual training

In the early decades of the Athornan Institutes, ritual training was held to be as important as the memorisation. Once a student had completed memorising the first section of the Yasna (chapters 1–27), his ritual training was started and continued perpetually until he left the institute. On average a student would take between two to three years to go from Y 27 to the completion of his Nāvar curriculum. During this time, he would typically spend at least one turn a week for three hours on ritual practice. Thus, by the time of his Nāvar, he would have practised the kriyākām for nearly three hundred hours (calculated as 3 hours per week x 40 study weeks per year x 2.5 years).

This is in sheer contrast to the 7–10 hours (1.5 hours x 5 weeks) of total ritual training imparted to the students before the Nāvar as seen in the above case study. This watering down of the ritual training is a conscious decision prompted by a range of factors. The primary factor responsible for the reduced kriyākām is the increased academic workload, which precludes any ritual practice during the weekdays. On the weekends, there are other activities such as increased bhantar and school study time, dharmagnān classes, and Parents' Day once a month, all of which compete with the time allotted to kriyākām. Due to these factors, kriyākām practice is taken up only closer to the initiation date.

The DAI bhantar teacher, Er. Kersi Karanjia, explained another important reason for this change. He said that since fewer and fewer initiates came prepared with ritual training, the practice has evolved whereby all the ritual actions are performed by the senior priest on behalf of the candidate. According to him, even if ritual actions were taught in detail and practised often like in the past, these would invariably be forgotten once the student passed out of the institute and pursued higher education. Only when the student enrols as a practising priest at a fire-temple, does he need the ritual know-how, which is acquired afresh at that time.

This completes the various aspects of the actual training imparted at the Athornan Institutes for memorising the texts and learning the rituals. In the next section, associated factors which aid in the learning of the texts are explained.

6.3   Associated Factors

In this section, two aspects of the training which while not directly linked to the teaching of the texts and rituals, but aid in the learning process are described. The first factor is the participation in the daily prayer sessions which helps to continually refresh the Khorde Avesta prayers, and the second is the use of rewards and punishments to effectively extract the best performance from the students.

6.3.1   Morning and evening prayer sessions

As seen in section 5.5.3 on the daily timetable at the Athornan Institutes, there is a fixed time slot for the daily prayers in the mornings and evenings at both the institutes. These two prayer slots bookend the productive period of the day, i.e., the morning prayers precede bhantar study and school hours and the evening prayers are held after the study time and just precede dinner. At the MFCAI, the

morning prayer time was 6.30 AM to 7 AM, and the evening time was 7.30 PM to 8 PM; while at the DAI, the two time slots are 6.20 AM to 6.50 AM and 7.30 PM to 7.55 PM.

While the prayer session serves the primary purpose of completing the obligatory prayers expected to the recited daily, it is also an integral part of the memorisation process. The daily recitation serves as a constant revision for all the Khorde Avesta prayers and Yašts memorised by the student before starting the Yasna study. As detailed in 5.2, the pre-Yasna curriculum is as follows:

Year	Khorde Avesta
1	- Kusti prayers, Sroš Bāj, Hošbam, 5 Gāhs, 5 Nyāišes, Satūm, Patet Pašemāni
Year	Yašts
2	- Sroš Yašt Vadi, Sroš Yašt Hādoxt, Hom Yašt, Vanant Yašt, Sirozā Yašt, Ardibehešt Yašt,
	- optional Hormazd Yašt

Table 23: Pre-Yasna curriculum at the Athornan Institutes

Each of the above prayers is selected for recitation as part of the daily prayer sessions on different days of the Zoroastrian calendar month. Thus, in each month, all the above prayers are recited at least 3–4 times, and thereby are constantly refreshed in the mind.

<u>Timetable of prayers for the morning and evening session</u>

Each of the thirty days (*roj*) of the Zoroastrian calendar month is dedicated to a particular Ameša Spenta or Yazata. As an example, the month of December 2017 is shown from the Parsi calendar.[215] In this example, the fifth Zoroastrian month Amardad starts on 15th December 2017 with the day Hormazd, and ends in 30 days on 13th January 2018. The first fourteen days of December 2017 are the latter half of the previous Zoroastrian month Tir.

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[215] This shows the mainstream Shenshahi calendar which is followed by a majority of the Parsi Zoroastrians. A smaller subsection of the community follows the Kadimi calendar which runs one month ahead of the Shenshahi calendar.

Figure 34: Zoroastrian calendar month with the *roj* names

The first seven days of the month are dedicated to the seven Ameša Spentas, and the remaining twenty-three are designated as *hamkars* ('co-workers') of one of the seven Ameša Spentas. Each such group is dedicated to an entity such as fire (*Ardibehešt*), water (*Asfandarmard*), etc., which determines the Nyāiš, Yašt or other prayer to be recited on that *roj*.

#	Ameša Spenta	*Hamkars* 'co-workers' days	Group dedicated to:	Important Prayers
1	Hormazd (1)	Dae-pa-Adar (8), Dae-pa-Meher (15), Dae-pa-Din (23)	Ahura Mazda	Hormazd Yašt Sirozā Yašt
2	Bahman (2)	Mohor (12), Goš (14), Rām (21)	Animals	Hošbam, Māh Nyāiš
3	Ardibehešt (3)	Adar (9), Sroš (17), Behrām (20)	Fire	Ataš Nyāiš, Ardibehešt Yašt
4	Shehrevar (4)	Xvaršēd (11), Meher (16), Asman (27), Aneran (30)	Earth	Xvaršēd Nyāiš, Meher Nyāiš
5	Asfandarmard (5)	Ava (10), Din (24), Ašišvangh (25), Marespand (29)	Water	Ava Aredvi Sur Nyāiš, Sroš Yašt Vadi
6	Khordad (6)	Tir (13), Fravardin (19), Govad (22)	Departed souls	Satūm no Kardo, Patet Pašemāni
7	Amardad (7)	Rašne (18), Aštad (26), Zamyad (28)	Plants	Hom Yašt, Vanant Yašt

Table 24: Grouping of the 30 days of the month with the 7 Ameša Spentas

The fixed monthly prayer timetable is stuck on the wall in the prayer room of the DAI. It lists the main prayer(s) to be recited in the morning and evening prayer session for every day of the month. This prayer schedule remains fixed and is repeated every month.

Figure 35: Timetable of daily prayers pinned on wall at the DAI

The title on the top of the page in Gujarati is *rojīṇḍī baṇdagīnī noṇdh* 'list of daily prayers'. The above list is translated in the table below:

#	Roj	Morning Prayer	Evening Prayer
1	Hormazd	Ataš Nyāiš	Hormazd Yašt
2	Bahman	Hošbam	Māh Nyāiš
3	Ardibehešt	Ataš Nyāiš	Ardibehešt Yašt
4	Shehrevar	Xvaršēd Nyāiš, Meher Nyāiš	Moti Haptan Yašt
5	Asfandarmard	Ava Aredvi Sur Nyāiš	Sroš Yašt Vadi
6	Khordad	Satūm no Kardo	Patet Pašemāni
7	Amardad	Hom Yašt, Vanant Yašt	Moti Hom Yašt

#	Roj	Morning Prayer	Evening Prayer
8	Dae-pa-Adar	Hormazd Yašt	Sirozā Yašt
9	Adar	Ataš Nyāiš	Ardibehešt Yašt
10	Ava	Ava Aredvi Sur Nyāiš	Sroš Yašt Vadi
11	Xvaršēd	Xvaršēd Nyāiš, Meher Nyāiš	Sirozā Yašt
12	Mohor	Hošbam	Māh Nyāiš
13	Tir	Satūm no Kardo	Patet Pašemāni
14	Goš	Sroš Yašt Hādoxt	Māh Nyāiš
15	Dae-pa-Meher	Hormazd Yašt	Sirozā Yašt
16	Meher	Xvaršēd Nyāiš, Meher Nyāiš	Moti Hom Yašt
17	Sroš	Ataš Nyāiš	Sroš Yašt Vadi
18	Rašne	Hom Yašt, Vanant Yašt	Moti Haptan Yašt
19	Fravardin	Satūm no Kardo	Patet Pašemāni
20	Behrām	Ataš Nyāiš	Ardibehešt Yašt
21	Rām	Hošbam	Māh Nyāiš
22	Govad	Satūm no Kardo	Patet Pašemāni
23	Dae-pa-Din	Hormazd Yašt	Sirozā Yašt
24	Din	Ava Aredvi Sur Nyāiš	Sroš Yašt Vadi
25	Ašišvangh	Sroš Yašt Hādoxt	Sroš Yašt Vadi
26	Aštad	Hom Yašt, Vanant Yašt	Moti Hom Yašt
27	Asman	Xvaršēd Nyāiš, Meher Nyāiš	Sirozā Yašt
28	Zamyad	Sroš Yašt Hādoxt	Sroš Yašt Vadi
29	Marespand	Ava Aredvi Sur Nyāiš	Sroš Yašt Vadi
30	Aneran	Xvaršēd Nyāiš, Meher Nyāiš	Patet Pašemāni

Table 25: Daily timetable of the main morning and evening prayers at the DAI

From the above table, it can be seen that all the prayers are repeated multiple times in a single month. Among these, a few prayers are constituted of chapters from the Yasna, viz. Ataš Nyāiš (Yasna 62), Ava Nyāiš (Y 65), Satūm no Kardo (Y 26), Moti ('big') Haptan Yašt (Y 35–42), Sroš Yašt Vadi (Y 57) and Moti Hom Yašt (Y 9–10). Thus a total 14 chapters or about a fifth of the total Yasna is continually revised during the recital of the daily prayers.

#	Khorde Avesta	Repetition		#	Yašts	Repetition
1	Hošbam	3		1	Hormazd Yašt	4
2	Xvaršēd Nyāiš	5		2	Moti Haptan Yašt (Y 35–42)	2
3	Meher Nyāiš	5		3	Ardibehešt Yašt	3
4	Māh Nyāiš	4		4	Sroš Yašt Hādoxt	3
5	Ava Aredvi Sur Nyāiš (Y 65)	4		5	Sroš Yašt Vadi (Y 57)	7
6	Ataš Nyāiš (Y 62)	5		6	Moti Hom Yašt (Y 9–10)	3
7	Patet Pašemāni	5		7	Vanant Yašt	3
8	Satūm no Kardo (Y 26)	4		8	Sirozā Yašt	5

Table 26: Number of recitations of the Khorde Avesta and Yašt prayers every month

Every prayer session follows a pre-defined pattern and is composed of a set of prayers, which are either fixed or variable, as shown in the table below. The central item of variable part (#6) is the most important portion of the prayer session and takes the maximum time. The choice of this recitation is dependent on the day of the month as described in the preceding section.

Prerequisite	1. Ritual cleansing with water (*pādyāb*)
	2. Kusti ritual (untying and retying)
Fixed	3. Recitation of 101 names of Dadar Ahura Mazda
	4. Sroš Bāj
Variable	5. Gāh (Hāvan in morning session, Aiwisruthrem in evening session)
	6. Nyāiš or Yašt or other prayer relevant to the day (*roj*) of the month
	7. Dedication (*xšnuman*) from the Sirozā Yašt for that day (*roj*) and month (*māh*)
Fixed	8. Doa Nām Setayešne
	9. Doa Tandorosti
Optional	10. Din no Kalmo (Zoroastrian Creed)
	11. Monājat (devotional song in Gujarati)

Table 27: Fixed and variable parts of the prayer session at the DAI

An entire morning prayer session was filmed at the DAI in December 2017. The description of this session is given in Appendix 7: Case Study of a Prayer Session at the DAI. Some observations on the prayer session are noted below.

Observations on the prayer session

Only students from Standard 4th and above are part of the morning prayer session since the junior students (Standards 1st to 3rd) are allowed a later waking up time; however, all students participate in the evening prayer session. Since the junior students are still in the process of memorising the prayers which are part of the above prayer sessions, they are made to sit separately for the evening session and only the basic prayers are conducted for them by one of the senior students.

The students generally carry their Khorde Avesta book from which they can read the longer prayers, however they are expected to know by heart the prayers which they have already memorised. When a student is called out, it is expected that he should be able to recite the prayer without referring to the prayer book. In case he fails to do so, he can potentially be given some punishment by the senior student conducting the session. In the above recorded session, one student RPD was asked to come out and recite Karde 4 of the Sroš Yašt Hādoxt from memory. When he was unable to do so, the senior conducting the session SPP assigned him the punishment of standing outside the class during the subsequent bhantar study session.

A total of 10 students were called out to stand and recite during the session. Thus, two-thirds of the total 15 students were tested for their memorisation for the selected prayer in a single session. This factor acts as a strong motivation for students to take the prayer sessions seriously and keep refreshing the prayers which are part of the upcoming sessions. This is an important revision mechanism built into the daily timetable.

One significant difference between the prayer session and the bhantar study session is that during the prayer session all the students recite the prayer aloud in unison and keeping a steady pace with uniform pauses after every three or four words, whereas during the bhantar study period, each student is learning a different prayer and recites at his own pace. In this way, the prayer session helps the student to adjust to the slow but steady pace and curb the natural tendency to recite fast leading to pronunciation lapses.

6.3.2   Reward and Punishment

There is a reward and punishment mechanism based on the performance in the bhantar class in order to motivate the good performers and dissuade the laggards. The reward is mainly in the form of recognition of the top performers by having their names listed on the notice board or blackboard. While corporal punishment was the norm in the past, it is no longer allowed at the Athornan Institutes.

During the early decades of the DAI, if a student was found to be very weak in his bhantar studies, a time period of six to seven months was given for him to cope with the studies, failing which he was asked to leave the institute and the vacated place was given to another deserving student.[216] Such dismissal of weak students was carried out during the 1920s to 1940s period when there were limited seats available at the institute and the demand was very high. Since then, this practice has been discontinued and other methods are used to push the poor performers to perform better.

Er. Rooyintan Peer describes the elaborate points system in place at the MFCAI during his time as a student there in the 1960s. A weekly register was maintained for each student in which the material to be learnt for each of the next seven days was written down. Then every day the student was graded out of 20 marks on his progress vis-à-vis the assigned text. There was also a practice to recognize any outstanding performance by giving the full 20 marks and then some additional marks in recognition of the special effort. The marks obtained in all the classes were added up at the end of the day to maintain a daily total, which was cumulated every week and the results were declared on a leaderboard. This points system spurred a spirit of competition among all the students and motivated them to push beyond the assigned quota of text to be memorised.

Er. Peer recalls a personal incident when he was studying the Uštauuaiti Gāthā (Y 43–46), which is one of the difficult portions of the Yasna with each stanza having five lines. On average students were able to memorise one to two stanzas daily, but on one occasion, Er. Peer managed to memorise five complete stanzas on one day. That day the teacher recognised his outstanding performance by marking a 20/20 in the register and then adding another 25 bonus marks, which pushed him to the top of the students' leaderboard of top performers. On the flip side, punishment for non-performance was very stringent. Er. Peer mentions that the stick was used to the full extent, and that he too had been on the receiving end of the punishment on numerous occasions despite being among the top performers in the class.[217]

In the past, equal importance was given to performing the ritual and students were expected to strictly adhere to the training regimen. Any lapse in performance of a ritual action during training was

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[216] Karanjia (2019b, p. 31).
[217] Interview #37.

immediately corrected by a beating with the scale. Dastur Keki Ravji who studied at the DAI in the 1950s recalls his experience as a student. The training instructor, Er. Erachsha Karkaria would make the students sit on the *idhorā* (stone seat) for the ritual practice. For almost the entire duration of the Yasna ritual which takes more than two hours, the chief priest must set two fingers of his left hand on the *barsam* bundle which rests on the two moon-shaped stands, as shown in Figure 36. This is quite a strenuous position to maintain for this long duration and requires much practice. In order to test the students' resilience during practice, Er. Karkaria would be seated next to the student with a scale in one hand, and with the other hand pour some cold water on the student's back. If he shivered and lifted his hand from the bundle, he was beaten with the scale. Such tests by the instructor were continually done up to the time the student had mastered all the ritual actions. Dastur Ravji, who went on to become a prolific ritual priest, credited this stringent training by Er. Karkaria to be the key to his success.[218]

Figure 36: Student undergoing ritual training at the DAI with his left hand on the *barsam* bundle

The cumulative performance during the year is also recognised at the annual prize distribution which takes place on the *Melavda* ('Gathering') day of the DAI, typically held in December every year. Two bhantar trophies are handed over to the students with the best performance on the annual bhantar exam, one each in the senior and junior categories. Bhantar prizes are given to the top 3–4 students in both the senior and junior categories. Prizes are also awarded for *dharmagnān* 'religious knowledge' and for 'Praying loud and clear'. Achievements of the students who have won laurels for the institute at external bhantar and religious competitions, such as the ones held by the Bombay Parsee Association (BPA) and the Iran League, are highlighted. All the prizes are distributed on stage in front of a large gathering, which serves as a motivating factor for the students.

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[218] Interview #3.

<u>Contemporary points system at the DAI</u>

Presently, the progress of the students is aggregated every ten days and then declared before the entire class. Each line entry in the notebook for memorisation of new material is counted as one point, and each entry for revision is counted as two points. Every month, the points total is computed in the lesson book for periods 1st to 10th, 11th to 20th, and 21st to 30th/31st and all the students must report their total to the bhantar teacher. Further the total for the month is also computed and written in the lesson book. The performance is graded into the following categories:

Points total	10+	10	9	8	7–6	<6
Grade	A+	A	B	C	D	F
Result	Outstanding – Name on board	Average				Poor Assigned Task class

Table 28: Grading performance on 10-day basis at the DAI

At the time of visiting the DAI on 22nd September 2017, the principal Er. Ramiyar Karanjia asked the students to compute the total number of memorized passages assigned over the period 11th–20th September, and individually report it. The highest count of 14 points for the period was achieved by FMG while studying the Visperad Kardes 1–2. As shown in the figure below, he scored 10 points for memorising new material (1 point each) and 4 points for revision on two instances (2 points each, usually marked in red in the book). He was followed by VHD with a score of 13 points for memorizing the Y 30–31.
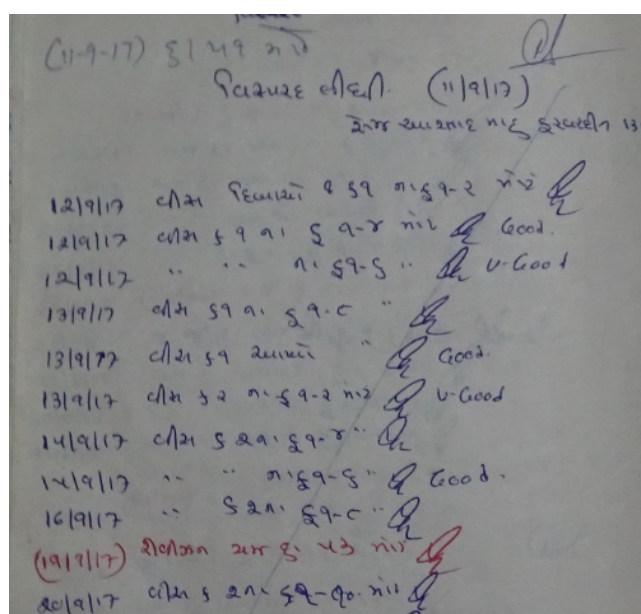
(11-9-17) Revision *hā* 51 memorised
        Visperad taken (11/9/17)
        roj āśtād, māh farvardīn 1387

12-9-17 Vis. Dibāčo & k.1 – st.1-2 memorised
12-9-17 Vis. k.1 – st.1-4 memorised   Good
12-9-17 "   st.1-6 memorised   v. Good
13-9-17 Vis. k.1 – st.1-8 memorised
13-9-17 Vis. k.1 full memorised   Good
13-9-17 Vis. k.2 – st.1-2 memorised   v. Good
14-9-17 Vis. k.2 – st.1-4 memorised
14-9-17 "   st.1-6 memorised   Good
16-9-17 "   st.1-8 memorised
(19-9-17) Revision Yas *hā* 53 memorised
20-9-17   Vis. k.2 – st.1-10 memorised

Figure 37: Page from FMG lesson book for 11th–20th Sep 2017

Both the students' names were written on the blackboard with a grade of A+ and the class was made to applaud their achievement. Most of the other students scored in the range of 6–10 points. There were three students who scored 5 points or less, which meant that they had not managed to finish

even one lesson on every two days. This was graded as an F and the students were assigned to Task Class for the next ten days, or up to the time that they covered up the deficit of memorisation lessons.
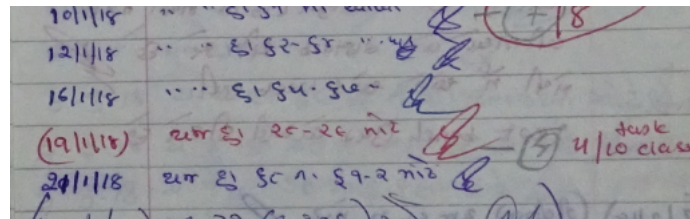
Figure 38: Page from lesson book of student assigned to Task Class

When the student is assigned to the Task Class, he must forego his play time which is roughly thirty minutes in the morning for indoor games and forty-five minutes in the evening for outdoor games and watching television. During this time, he is expected to sit in the classroom and catch up on his memorisation lesson. If he completes his assigned quota of memorisation for the day, he can go and play for the rest of the games time for that day. However, he must report to Task Class again next morning for the duration of the punishment. Also, a student who is serving his Task Class punishment must either stand behind or sit on the last bench for the duration of the bhantar class, so as to be easily identified. The bhantar teacher ensures that these students are regularly checked for their progress.

Besides assigning Task Class, other forms of punishment include reprimanding the student, making him kneel on the floor or making him stand outside the classroom. However, as conceded by the teachers themselves, this is not as effective as in the past when the students would be beaten profusely for misbehaviour or for not completing their study. The following note written in a student's lesson book describes the limited recourse a teacher has when the student fails to complete his assigned study despite repeated warnings.
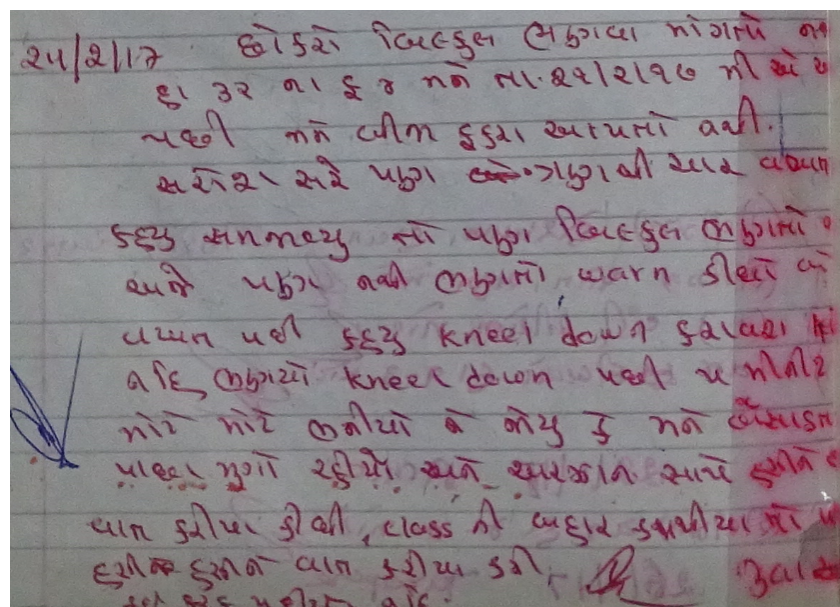
Figure 39: Punishment note in student lesson book

24/2/17

chokro bilkul bhaṇvā māṃgto nathī. hā 32 nā f.4 mane tā. 21/2/17 mī e āpyā pachī mane bījā fakrā āpto nathī. Saroś sare paṇ traṇ thī chār vakhatkahyu samjāvyu to paṇ bilkul bhaṇto nathī.

āje paṇ nathī bhaṇto, warn *kidho be vakhat, pachī kahyu* kneel down *karāvaś, to paṇ nahi bhanyo.*

kneel down *pachī 5 mīnīṭ moṭe moṭe bhanīyo ne joyu ke mane besāḍtā pāchā mugo rahīyo ane arzān sāthe hasīne vāt karīyā kīdhī,* class *nī bahār kāḍhīyā to paṇ hasī hasīne vāt karīyā karī, kai farak paḍīyo nahi.*

'The boy absolutely does not want to study; after giving me stanza 4 of chapter 32 on date 21/2/17, he has not given me any further stanza. Sarosh Sir also explained to him three to four times, still he does not study at all.

He is not studying today either; he has been warned twice, then he was told that he will be made to kneel down, still he has not studied.

After being made to kneel, he recited loudly for 5 minutes; then seeing that he was not being asked to sit down, he stopped reciting and starting chitchatting with another student; when they both were removed from the class, they still continued talking; there has been no effect on him at all.'

In multiple interviews with the staff of the Athornan Institutes and with parents of current students who are former students of the institutes, it emerged that the biggest difference in the training during their time and now was the reduction in strictness and punishments. Most of these interviewees also admitted that without that kind of corporal punishment, they likely would not have achieved their present proficiency. Principal Er. Karanjia acknowledged that while it was difficult to attain the kind of finesse in prayer recitation that was achieved in the past due to the more relaxed environment, it is nonetheless a change that was inevitable in keeping with the changing times.[219]

6.4 Post-learning Factors

In the preceding sections, the main constituents of the training process and associated factors are evaluated in detail. As the student goes through the Nāvar and Marātab curriculum, there is a need to constantly refresh the learnt texts so that they are not forgotten, which is mainly achieved by the constant revision conducted in the bhantar class. There are also other activities which help students to stay in touch with the texts after he has finished the complete curriculum. Three such activities, which are described here, are participation in prayer competitions, serving as an apprentice priest during the school holidays, and training junior students as a trainee teacher. The first two are ongoing activities while the student is still studying, while the last one is usually taken up in the final years of schooling or as a college student.

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[219] Interview #35.

6.4.1 Participation in prayer competitions

Students at the Athornan Institutes regularly participate in the annual prayer competition conducted by the Bombay Parsee Association (BPA), held in either January or February. The competition is open to all Parsi participants, but there is a special category only for students of the Athornan Institutes. Within that category, there is a separate grouping for the junior and senior students, and the prayers selected for the competition closely mirror the curriculum that the student would have completed by that time.

The below figure shows the requirements for the categories of Athornan Institute students and other Nāvars/Marātabs, taken from the call for the competition published in the Parsi community newspaper[220]. It shows the vast difference in both the curriculum for the competition and the prize money awarded. It is worthwhile to note that for the other Nāvars/Marātabs category, the only prayers to be tested upon are the first and last chapter of the Yasna and the Ātaš Nyāiš, reflecting the minimal level of training and proficiency attained by these candidates in general.

(B) STUDENTS / EX-STUDENTS FROM ATHORNAN INSTITUTE (Only School / College students):

Junior Group
Hoshbam, Havan and Aiwisruthrem Geh, Atash Nyaish, Patet Pashemani, Stum, Sarosh Yasht Vadi, Siroza Yasht and Yasna 1 -11, 19 -21, 28-34, 44, 46.
1st prize Rs.3000/-, 2nd prize Rs.2000/-, 3rd prize Rs.1000/-. All other Participants Rs.500/-each.

Senior Group
Hoshbam, Havan and Aiwisruthrem Geh, Atash Nyaish, Patet Pashemani, Stum, Sarosh Yasht Vadi, Siroza Yasht and Yasna Ha 1 -11, 19 -21, 28-34, 44, 46, 48, 51, 53, 54, 58, 61, 62, 65, 68. Visperad 1, 2, 9, 15, 18 & 19. All Afringans and Afrins, Reading from book - Farokhshi, Dhoop Sarna, Pazand Ashirwad.
1st prize Rs.5000/-, 2nd prize Rs.3000/-, 3rd prize Rs.2000/-. All other Participants Rs.750/-each.

(C) NAVAR/S / MARTAB/S (not from Athornan Institute & Only School / College students)
Yasna Ha 1 and 72 + Atash Nyaish
1st Prize Rs.1000/-, 2nd Prize Rs.750/-, 3rd Prize Rs.600/-, 4th Prize Rs.350/-Consolation Prize/s Rs.200/- .

Figure 40: BPA Prayer Competition categories

In the past, the competition was a face-off between the two Athornan Institutes. Ex-students of both the institutes[221] mentioned that since the winners of the competition could stake a claim about their school being better than the other, they were put through a gruelling routine of preparation for the competition by their respective bhantar teachers. In the last few years, there have been no students at the MFCAI, hence the competition has become more of a showdown among the students of DAI themselves.

All the Athornan students who have completed the minimum required curriculum are sent for the competition. The competition coordinators ensure that the assigned curriculum is shuffled every year and covers all the important texts in rotation. Er. Darayus Bajan, the external bhantar examiner at the DAI, who is also one of the judges at the competition, said that a similar judging criterion is used. The students are judged on a combination of good pronunciation, number of mistakes and ability to recall the text without requiring any prompting. Preparation for this competition is done in conjunction with the annual bhantar exam which is scheduled just after the prayer competition. The recognition and

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[220] Jam-e Jamshed dated 12-12-2010.
[221] Interviews with Dastur Keki Ravji of DAI (#3) and Er. Nozer Mehenty of MFCAI (#30).

lucrative prize money are good inducements to participate for the senior students who have already completed their Marātab initiation and are otherwise focused on their academic studies. This incentivises them to revise all the memorised material and showcase it at the competition.

Besides the BPA prayer competition, the students also participate in competitions organised by other bodies such as the Dadar Jashan Trust, the Rathesthar Mandal and the Iran League.[222] The latter holds competitions on the Shahnameh recital[223], religious quiz, Parsi songs, elocution and drawing contests, in which the Athornan Institute students participate regularly. While these competitions do not help in recalling the prayers, they test the student on other aspects of the curriculum such as religious knowledge and Iranian history.

6.4.2   Working as an apprentice priest

The students at the Athornan Institutes who have completed their Nāvar have a chance to put their study into practical use during the vacations from school. One of the opportunities to work is during the annual *Fravardegān* or *Muktād* days just preceding the Parsi New Year, which are a period of intensive ceremonies at fire-temples with a huge demand for priests. The Athornan Institutes typically have a week to ten days of Muktād holidays, and most senior students opt to work as trainee priests during this time. They enrol at a fire-temple, typically the one where their Nāvar ceremony was performed, and are required to perform the Āfrīnagān, Faroxši and Satūm ceremonies.

Similarly, there is also an opportunity during the annual summer vacation in May and the Diwali break, when the students travel back home. Very often when the student's father is a practising priest at a fire-temple, he tends to take his son along to give him practice on the daily rituals. This is a good opportunity for the student to stay in constant touch with the prayers, which tend to start being forgotten if not revised during the one month plus break.

In the past, when the Yasna ceremony was performed daily at most fire-temples, the students would have had the opportunity to revise the entire Yasna in performance during the break as an apprentice priest. However, at the present time, since the Yasna is performed only at a few select fire-temples, the opportunities to practice the entire Yasna are extremely rare, unless the father is an inner ritual performing priest.[224]

Even during the regular term, there are a few opportunities for the students to perform certain ceremonies. Since the 1970s, the students who had completed the Nāvar were sent to perform a Jašan ceremony whenever requested at a residence in the Dadar Parsi Colony, within which the DAI is located. When there was a request from outside the colony, a staff member could take a student with him to perform the Jašan. Along with gaining practical experience, the student would improve his communication skills when interacting with the community members.

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[222] Karanjia (2019b, p. 54).

[223] During the month of November 2017, the DAI students were being trained by Ms. Havovi Karanjia, wife of Principal Er. Ramiyar Karanjia, for the Shahnameh competition held by the Iran league. The students had to recite certain couplets in Persian, followed by its interpretation in Gujarati. Since the students do not have any knowledge of Persian, they learnt the entire part by rote, as they would normally do with the Avestan prayers.

[224] See case of Rooyintan Mehenty (section 8.2.1) who was given regular training on the Yasna by his father, Er. Nozer Mehenty, a Bōywālā at the H.B. Wadia Ātaš Bahrām.

There is a meal sponsor scheme run at the Athornan Institutes almost since the time of their founding, in which a person can sponsor a meal for all the students usually in memory of a departed relative. Prior to the meal, one student or a group of students pray the Satūm dedicated to the departed soul. For the junior students, this is usually the first opportunity to perform a complete ritual. At the DAI up to 1995, the practice was to recite the longer Bāj before meals in which the Yasna *hā* 8 was recited followed by the Pazand Dibāčo (introduction) wherein all the names of the deceased were recited. However, this practice of taking the long Bāj was discontinued after 1995.[225]

All the above opportunities not only gave a chance to the student to refresh his memorised prayers, but also the confidence to perform the ceremonies in front of those commissioning it.

6.4.3   Becoming a trainee teacher

Once a student completes his Nāvar and Marātab curriculum at the DAI, usually by the time he is in the eighth or ninth standard at school, he is assigned the task of training one or two of the juniormost students. He is given full responsibility of the student including taking his study and making the entry in the lesson book. The senior student stops conducting the training once he reaches the final year of school to focus on his academic studies. Some students choose to stay back at the DAI after starting college and resume their role of a trainee teacher for the junior students. In some cases, the training by the senior student continues beyond the initial Khorde Avesta curriculum to the Yasna.

Shown below is page from a current college student FKD's lesson book from the year 2008 (FKD's second year at the DAI), where the lessons are taken up by a combination of different people, viz. the bhantar teacher Er. Kersi Karanjia, two college students who stayed back as trainee teachers, Kaiwan and Kurush Dastur, and by a senior student, Sheherezad Pavri.
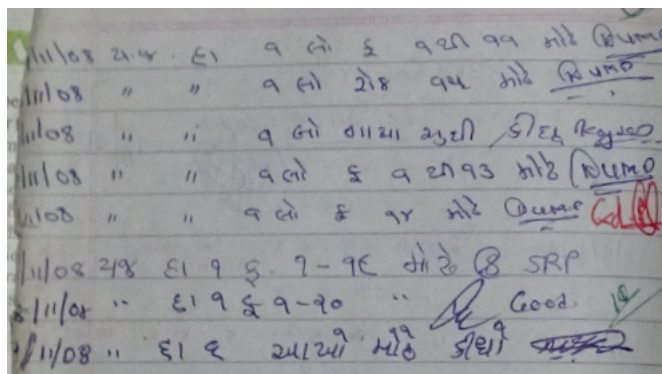
Line entry signed by:
KUMD (Kurush Meher Dastur)
KUMD
Kayvan (Kayvan Meher Dastur)
KUMD
KUMD
SRP (Sheherezad Rohinton Pavri)
KK (Er. Kersi Karanjia)
Unidentified

Figure 41: Student trainee teachers at the DAI during 2008–09

In addition to training the junior students, the seniormost students also were given the responsibility to conduct the morning prayer session at the DAI, as seen in section 6.3.1. The senior student could punish the students who were unable to recite the prayer from memory. In order to do that he himself would need to have the prayer refreshed in his mind. Thus, serving as a trainee teacher and conducting the prayer session were effective methods for the seniors to constantly revise the texts.

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[225] Karanjia (2019b, pp. 73–75).

In this section, a description is provided of three important mechanisms which help the students to stay in touch with the studied texts after the memorisation is completed. Participation in competitions and training junior students requires the senior student to revisit and refresh the memorised texts. Further performing rituals while at the Athornan Institute or during the school vacations, gives valuable ritual practice and exposure to these students.

6.5 Summary

This chapter delved into the details of the training process at the Athornan Institutes. The training imparted is a combination of various factors, some directly linked to memorising the texts and learning the rituals, while others act as enabling factors for the process. There are some factors which give the student a headstart in his priestly training such as a good foundation of basic prayers learnt at home, ability to read the Gujarati script and the aptitude to pick-up prayers by listening to the seniors.

It is observed that the actual memorisation happens only within the bhantar sessions, since the student is always actively engaged with other activities throughout the rest of the day. If a student is unable to consistently complete his part during the bhantar session, he is made to compensate by studying during the designated play and leisure time. The bhantar teacher marks the important parts in the student's prayer book and highlights the specific areas where there is a potential for mistakes, which aids in the memorisation process. Once a prayer is memorised, it undergoes constant revision at regular intervals. This is achieved by a systematic schedule of conducting back-to-back rounds of revision, each starting with the basic prayers and going all the way to the last memorised text. The annual examinations are an important checkpoint to see whether the student is on-track to complete the curriculum in the allocated time.

There are other enabling factors which facilitate the learning process. Maintaining a bhantar lesson book for each student which records his daily progress, is the single most important tool to evaluate the student's ongoing performance. The reward and recognition for good performance, and punishment for lapses, are used by the bhantar teacher to keep the students motivated to push ahead with the curriculum. The daily prayer sessions which follow a set timetable depending on the day of the month, serve to refresh all the Khorde Avesta prayers memorised by the student. Finally, there are activities after the completion of the memorisation process which help the student to remain in touch with the texts and rituals, such as participation in bhantar competitions, performance of rituals as a trainee priest and serving as a student teacher to the junior students.

In the next chapter, a deep-dive into the memorisation of the Yasna is conducted, based on the case study of eleven students at the DAI, who completed their curriculum during the 2012–2018 period.

7 Quantitative study of the memorisation of the Yasna

The previous chapter has presented a qualitative study of the priestly training process at the Athornan Institutes. In this chapter, an attempt is made to look at the information available from the students' lesson books and make some observations based on the quantitative study of the data. Some of the questions that will be answered based on the data are: What is the average time taken to complete the Khorde Avesta, Yasna, Visperad and Vidēvdād? Which are the most difficult chapters of the Yasna for memorisation? What is the typical age of entry and how is the curriculum modified for the late entrants?

The chapter is divided into five parts: the first part presents the data available from the lesson books, the second part discusses the methodology followed to create a database of the available information, the third part presents the analysis and findings from this data, the penultimate part exhibits the case studies of selected students, and the final part brings together the conclusion drawn from this exercise.

7.1 The Data

The principal and the teaching staff at the DAI kindly made available the students' lesson books for analysis. A choice was made to select those students who had completed their Nāvar curriculum so that the lesson books would have information about their complete Khorde Avesta and Yasna study. Since the lesson books are in daily use by the students, it was not feasible to borrow them physically for an extended duration. Permission was sought and kindly granted for photographing the books, so that they could be analysed at length. In order to avoid any disruption, the books were borrowed to be photographed in the Diwali vacation in October 2018 for eight current students who had finished the Yasna study. One more lesson book was made available by a college student still resident at the DAI. A second round of photographing was done during the Christmas break in December 2019, when two more books were added to the collection, and the additional pages for the previous eight students were also photographed. Thus, in total, complete data up to the Yasna study was available for eleven students. The basic profile of the eleven students is provided in the table below:

Student	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Enrolled in year	2007	2008	2009	2011	2012	2013	2012	2012	2016	2014	2017[226]
Enrolled at age	6.4	6.0	6.4	5.5	7.4	6.7	5.6	6.7	9.5	8.6	11.4
Enrolled standard	1st	1st	1st	1st	2nd	2nd	1st	2nd	4th	4th	7th
ID[227]	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11

Table 29: Profile of eleven DAI students selected for analysis

The eleven students had enrolled at the DAI between the years 2007 and 2016. The typical enrolment age of the students was 5.5 to 7.5 years, and in the first or second standard at school. However, there were three students in this group who were admitted at a later age and in a higher standard (S9, S10, S11). These students who have enrolled in a higher standard have fewer years to complete the bhantar curriculum, since the target date for completion is by the eighth or ninth standard of school. If the student is a quick learner, then he is made to complete memorisation of the entire programme, else some of the curriculum is fast-tracked. One of these students (S10) whose progress was slower than required, was made to only fluently read certain difficult chapters of the Yasna so that the curriculum could be completed on time. Another student (S11) who was admitted in the seventh standard and hence had only two years to finish the study, was put on a fast-track curriculum which included skipping certain portions and fluently reading other parts of the Yasna instead of memorising. These two cases (S10 and S11) were decided to be excluded from the main study since they were not comparable to the other nine cases, and instead were analysed separately.

The nine selected students had completed their entire Nāvar curriculum which included the Khorde Avesta, the Yasna and the Visperad, and had undergone the Nāvar initiation.[228] In addition, they had completed the study of the Vidēvdād by December 2019, when the lesson books were photographed. Seven students had also completed their Marātab initiation, while two students were yet to complete it.

Student ID	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9
Start of study	Jun-07	Jun-08	Jun-09	Jun-11	Jun-12	Jun-13	Jun-12	Jun-12	Jun-16
Khorde Avesta completed	Nov-08	Sep-10	Jun-11	Aug-13	Jan-14	Sep-14	Nov-14	Dec-14	Jan-17
Yasna completed	Jul-11	Nov-14	Oct-15	Mar-17	Mar-17	Sep-17	Jan-18	Apr-18	Jul-18

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[226] S11 had first enrolled at the DAI in the year 2012, but discontinued his study there after a few months. He was re-enrolled in the year 2017.

[227] For the purpose of this study, the names of the students have been anonymised. They are referred to by identification (ID) codes S1 to S11.

[228] See section 5.2 for details on curriculum.

Visperad completed	Dec-11	Mar-15	Mar-16	Aug-17	Aug-17	Feb-18	Aug-18	Dec-18	Sep-18
Nāvar initiation	May-12	May-15	May-16	Nov-17	Nov-17	May-18	May-19	May-19	May-19
Vidēvdād completed	Oct-12	Jan-16	Jul-17	Sep-18	Sep-18	Dec-18	Oct-19	Oct-19	Sep-19
Marātab initiation	May-13	May-16	Oct-17	May-19	May-19	May-19	–	–	Nov-19

Table 30: Milestones for the nine shortlisted DAI students[229]

7.2   Methodology

Complete data up to the end of the Vidēvdād was available in all the nine lesson books. Figure 42 below shows an example of a page from the lesson book of one of the students (SPP). Each line entry mentions the date and the text, chapter and stanza number which was completed on that day. The contents of the lesson book are discussed in detail in section 6.2.1.

Figure 42: Sample page from student lesson book

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[229] Updated up to December 2019.

Based on the start and end dates, it is possible to calculate the total time taken by a student to complete the study of each text. Shown below is the time elapsed in years between the start and completion of each of the texts. This duration, however, includes the vacation months during which no study is undertaken, and hence it is somewhat inflated. In order to adjust for the vacation time, more granular data needed to be considered.

Student ID	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9
Khorde Avesta	1.4	2.2	2.0	2.2	1.6	1.3	2.4	2.5	0.6
Yasna	2.7	4.2	4.4	3.6	3.2	3.0	3.2	3.3	1.5
Visperad	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.6	0.7	0.2
Vidēvdād	0.3	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.2
Total	4.8	7.1	7.4	6.8	5.7	5.1	6.3	6.6	2.5
% of time for Yasna study	56%	59%	59%	53%	56%	58%	50%	50%	61%

Table 31: Duration in years for study of texts by the nine students

It is observed from Table 31 that students take about six years on average to complete the curriculum up to the Vidēvdād. Out of this a majority of the time is dedicated to the study of the Yasna, which takes more time to complete than all the other texts combined. This is consistent with the importance attached to the study of the Yasna, and the commensurate effort dedicated to its memorisation.[230]

7.2.1   Selection of the Yasna as the text for analysis

The Yasna is more suitable for an in-depth analysis compared to the other texts because of a number of factors. Among the texts being memorised, the Yasna is, by a significant margin, the longest and most difficult. The Visperad is much shorter and easier to memorise because its text is quite repetitive and uniform in nature. The Vidēvdād, though much longer than the Yasna, is not committed to memory but only made to be read fluently, which is achieved within a few months. Next to the Yasna, the Khorde Avesta has the most material to be memorised, however it does not lend itself for better comparison. Unlike the Yasna, all students do not start the Khorde Avesta at the same level of competence. Some students finish memorising the basic prayers at home before coming to the institute, while others start from the very beginning. The extent of the Khorde Avesta material for memorisation is also somewhat variable and hence difficult for uniform comparison; for instance, when a student has started late or his progress is slower, some Yašts are completely skipped or made to be fluently read.

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[230] In conversation with many priests, it emerges that the memorisation of the *boterī* (from *boter* 'seventy-two' in Guj. referring to the seventy-two chapters of the Yasna) is considered to be the differentiating factor between a fully-trained priest, i.e., *Pākko* (lit. 'ripe') mobed, and an *Adhuro* ('incomplete') or *Kāččo* ('raw') priest. Also see section 4.3.3.

There were also physical factors which made the analysis of the Khorde Avesta material difficult. In a few cases the data was non-existent; in one lesson book, the complete Khorde Avesta listing was lost, while for a couple of others, there was only a summary of their first year without any details. Even for cases where the pages were present in the book, they were usually in poor condition since being the oldest material in the book, it had undergone the most wear and tear over the years. Due to these factors, the Khorde Avesta was excluded from the analysis, and only the Yasna was considered.

7.2.2   Structure of the Yasna text

The Yasna is a text composed of seventy-two chapters or *hās*, preceded by an introductory chapter known as the Dibāčo (Guj. 'preface'), which is designated as Y 0. Each chapter is further sub-divided into stanzas, which are variable in length but typically between three and five lines long. The number of stanzas per chapters is also variable, ranging from a low of two stanzas in Y 54 to a high of thirty-four stanzas in Y 24, Y 57 and Y 59.

The stanza is the unit of memorisation assigned to the students. Depending on the text, usually one or two stanzas are expected to be memorised daily in the bhantar class. However, this division into stanzas is a relatively late addition, first introduced by N. L. Westergaard in his 1854 edition of the Yasna[231]. The manuscripts of the Yasna do not exhibit this division into stanzas, nor do the early Indian print editions. For example, Dādābhāī Kāvasjī's Yasna[232] in Gujarati script published in 1871 does not have the stanza division. Below is a snapshot from the start of the Yasna in Kāvasjī (1871, p. 30) written as a running text without marking the stanza numbers.

[Gujarati/Avestan script text]	(Y 1.1) *niuuaēδaiiemi haṇkāraiiemi daθušō*
	…
	…
	…
	… *yō mainiiuš spəṇtōtəmō* (Y 1.2) *niuuaē-δaiiemi haṇkāraiiemi vaŋhauue.* …
	…
	…
	… *aməšąnqm. spəṇtanqm* (Y 1.3) *niuuaē…*

T. D. Anklesaria's *Yasna bā Nirang*[233] was one of the first Indian editions to introduce the subdivision into stanzas based on Westergaard's edition.[234] From the time of its publication, Anklesaria's edition was considered to be authoritative since its Avestan recitation text was based on a western edition. In addition to Westergaard's text, it included the variant readings from K. F. Geldner's edition[235] in the footnotes. The second and third editions of Anklesaria's Yasna bā Nirang were published in 1926 and

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[231] See the introduction in Westergaard (1852-1854, pp. 25–26).
[232] Kāvasjī (1871).
[233] Anklesaria (1888).
[234] As per the preface in Anklesaria (p. 19), the lithograph edition of the Yasna bā Nirang in Avestan characters published by Ervad Framarz Jamshed Rustam Kuka in 1880 CE was the first Indian edition with the Avestan recitation text based on Westergaard's edition. However, it was out of print at the time of Anklesaria's publication in 1888 CE.
[235] Geldner (1886-1896).

1957 respectively. The third edition has been subsequently reprinted and is currently used as the standard textbook for teaching at the Athornan Institutes.[236]

The number of stanzas in the entire Yasna text in Anklesaria's edition totals to 1001. However, there is a significant amount of repetition across the Yasna chapters, hence the number of unique stanzas is much lower. In two instances the entire chapter is repeated, viz. Y 5 is the same as Y 37, and Y 18 is identical to Y 47. Beyond that, many individual stanzas are repeated either identically or with minor modifications. A chapter-wise analysis yields that 304 stanzas out of the 1001, i.e., 30% are repeated. It is useful to view this with an example – Y 22 comprises of twenty-seven stanzas as show here:

Y 22 stanza	1	2	3	4	5	6-19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Unique	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Repeated in Y stanza	–	–	–	–	3.5	3.6-19	22.1	22.2	22.3	0.8	0.9	0.10	0.11	0.12

Table 32: Repeated stanzas in Y 22

The first four stanzas are unique. The next fifteen stanzas are identical to the corresponding stanzas from Y 3, i.e., Y 22.5–19 = Y 3.5–19. The next stanza is taken from the first stanza of the same chapter, and the next two are identically repeated, i.e., Y 22.20–22 ~ Y 22.1–3. And the last five stanzas are taken from the introductory chapter (Y 0), i.e., Y 22.23–27 = Y 0.8–12. Thus, out of the twenty-seven stanzas, only the first four are unique, which is essentially the memorisation task before a student, since he would have memorised the remaining stanzas in the chapters where they were first encountered.

After adjusting for the repeated stanzas, the number of unique stanzas is 697. This is the target before the students aiming to memorise the entire Yasna text. Prior to starting the Yasna, the students have memorised most of the Khorde Avesta prayers and a few of the important Yašts, as detailed in the section 5.2. Many parts of the Khorde Avesta and Yašts are sourced from the Yasna, and hence by memorising these texts, the student already learns part of the Yasna. The important sections of the Yasna which the student memorises as part of the Khorde Avesta and Yašts study are detailed below:

#	Khorde Avesta text / Yašt	Yasna chapter and stanza	Number of repeated stanzas
1	Satūm Kardo	Y 26.1–11, Y 6.19, Y 17.18	13
2	Hošbam	Y 52.1–7, Y 8.5–7, Y 11.12–14, Y 27.1–2, Y 60.8–12, Y 71.26–28	23
3	Sroš Yašt Vadi	Y 57.1–34	34
4	Ātaš Nyāiš (Ny 5)	Y 62.1–10, Y 27.9–11, Y 33.12–14, Y 34.4	17
5	Āvā Aredvisur Nyāiš (Ny 4)	Y 65.1–14	14
	Total		101

Table 33: Yasna sections learnt as part of Khorde Avesta

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[236] Redard & Daruwalla (2021, pp. 1-2).

In addition to the 101 stanzas shown in the table above, there are many individual stanzas from the Yasna which are learnt as part of various Khorde Avesta texts. This totals to 157 stanzas which are already memorised by the student before he reaches the Yasna study. Thus, out of the 697 unique stanzas of the Yasna, the student has 540 stanzas left to memorise. This is essentially the task in front of the student when he starts the Yasna study.

Figure 43 shows the chapter-wise distribution of unique and repeated stanzas. The repeated stanzas from the Khorde Avesta are colour-coded in green and the stanzas which are repeated from within the Yasna are colour-coded in blue.

Figure 43: Yasna chapter-wise unique and repeated stanzas table.

Hā	Total	Unique	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34
0	15	6	KA	KA	KA	KA	KA	KA	7	8	9	10	11	12	KA	KA	KA																				
1	23	16	1	2	KA	KA	KA	KA	KA	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	KA	17	18	19	20	21	22	Y0.7												
2	18	9	1	2	~Y 1.3-15													16	17	18																	
3	25	7	1	2	3	4	~Y 1.3-15											KA	~Y1.1			20	21	~Y 1.18-19				KA									
4	26	8	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	~Y 1.3-15														KA	~Y1.1	23	~Y 1.18-19		KA								
5	6	4	KA	2	3	4	5	KA																													
6	21	2	~Y 2.2-17																17	18	KA	~Y2.1	KA														
7	28	9	1	2	3	4	~Y 1.3-17															20	21	~Y 1.18-19		24	24	24	KA	KA							
8	8	5	1	2	3	4	Hoshbam			Y8.8																											
9	32	28	1	2	3	4	5	~Y9.3	7	8	~Y9.3	10	11	~Y9.3	13	14	15	16	KA	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32		
10	21	20	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	KA														
11	18	10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	AVo	Hoshbam			Y8.8	KA	KA	KA																	
12	9	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	KA	KA																										
13	8	8	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8																											
14	5	1	1	~13.4	~Y2.18	KA	bāj-2																														
15	4	3	1	2	3	bāj-1a																															
16	10	10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10																									
17	19	2	~Y6.1	Y 6.2-10									Y17.?	Y6.1	Y 6.12-16			Satu	Y6.20																		
18	9	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Y18.2	KA																										
19	21	21	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21														
20	5	5	1	2	3	4	5																														
21	5	5	1	2	3	4	5																														
22	27	4	1	2	3	4	Y 3.5-19														Y 22.1-3				Y 0.8-12												
23	5	4	1	2	3	4	KA																														
24	34	2	Y24.?	~Y 22.2-3	Y4.2	Y24.?	Y 24.1-3	Y 4.1-22																	Y 0.8-12												
25	8	1	~Y 22.1-3			~Y 22.23-26			~Y16.1-2																												
26	11	0	Satum Kardo																																		
27	15	5	Hoshbam	YVa	3	4	5	6	7	Ny 5	Ny 5	Ny 5	KA	YVa	AVo	KA																					
28	12	12	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11																							
29	12	11	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Y28.1																							
30	12	11	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Y28.1																							
31	23	22	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	Y28.1												
32	17	16	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Y28.1																		
33	15	10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Y27.8	Ny 5	Ny 5	Ny 5	Y28.1																				
34	16	13	1	2	3	Ny 5	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Y27.4	Y28.1																			
35	10	8	1	KA	3	4	KA	6	7	8	9	10																									
36	6	6	1	2	3	4	5	6																													
37	5	0	KA	~Y5.2-5																																	
38	5	5	1	2	3	4	5																														
39	5	3	1	2	3	Y 13.5-6																															
40	4	4	1	2	3	4																															
41	7	4	1	2	3	4	Y 7.24-25	Y35.2																													
42	6	6	1	2	3	4	5	6																													
43	17	16	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Y43.1																		
44	21	19	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	KA	17	18	19	20	Y43.1														
45	12	11	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Y43.1																							
46	20	18	1	2	3	4	5	6	KA	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	Y43.1															
47	7	0	Y 18.2-7						~Y18.2																													
48	13	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Y47.1																						
49	13	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Y47.1																						
50	12	11	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Y47.1																							
51	23	20	1	2	3	4	5	6	Y18.?	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	~Y15	Y51.1												
52	8	0	Hoshbam							Y8.8																												
53	10	9	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Y53.1																									
54	2	1	Y27.?	2																																	
55	7	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7																												
56	5	1	Y15.?	~Y56	3	~Y56	YVa/AVo																														
57	34	0	Sroš Yašt Vadi																																		
58	9	9	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9																										
59	34	4	Y 17.1-17																	Y 26.1-10										28	Y17.?	30	31	YVa/	33	bāj-2
60	13	6	Y43.3	2	3	4	5	6	7	Hoshbam				KA																							
61	5	5	1	2	3	4	5																														
62	13	1	Ātaš Niāyeš										11	Y27.?	bāj-2																						
63	3	1	Y15.?	Y56.?	3																																
64	7	0	Y46.?	Y 50.6-11																																	
65	19	0	Āvā Aredvisur Niāyeš															Y51.?	Y15.?	Y 56.3-4	bāj-1																
66	19	1	1	Y 7.5-19															Y66.?	Y22.?	Y22.27																
67	8	0	~Y 23.1-4				~Y7.?	Y 38.3-5																													
68	24	13	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	~Y16	9	Ny 1	Ny 1	12	13	14	15	Y 52.5-8					21	Ny 1	Ny 1	Y 47											
69	3	0	~Y15.2																																		
70	7	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	Y57.4																												
71	31	15	1	KA	KA	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	KA	13	14	15	16	17	18	Y 6.14-16			Y17.?	KA	KA	~Y35.?	Hoshbam	Y 60.11-12	KA							
72	11	2	Y 61.1-5						~Y22	Y22.?	8	Ny 1	Ny 1	11																							
	1001	540																																			

Legend:
- Unique stanza in Yasna
- Repeated from Khorde Avesta (KA)
- Internal repetition from Yasna

Figure 43: Yasna chapter-wise unique and repeated stanzas

7.2.3   Creating a Database

Starting from the student lesson books, the first step was to create a spreadsheet for each student and populate the data into it. For every line entry in the lesson book, one line item was created in the spreadsheet to reflect the data. An example of a line from the lesson book and the data captured into the spreadsheet for one day is shown below:
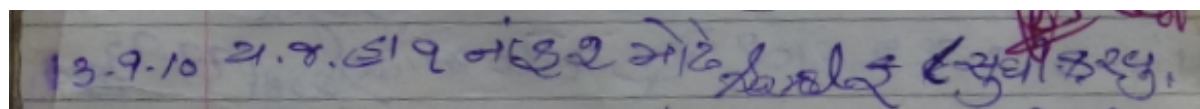
Date	Text	Chapter	Sub-entry	Sign and comments
13-Sep-10	Yasna	*hā* 1	Stanza 2 memorised	Study up to stanza 8

Each line mentions the text, the chapter, and the stanzas memorised on that day. Further in the comments section, the teacher optionally writes down the assigned part to be memorised for the next class (in this case, stanzas 1–8 of chapter 1). In this way, the complete information for all students was captured into a spreadsheet, with data from each book entered into a separate tab. For example, the page shown in Figure 42 above, which has the entries for the dates 9-Sep-2010 to 25-Sep-2010 for the student SPP, is populated in the below spreadsheet under 'Page 1 front'.

	Year	Month	Page	Date	Day	Text	Entry	Sub-entry	Comments
1	Year	Month	Page	Date	Day	Text	Entry	Sub-entry	Comments
2	2010						Joined Madressa in June 2008		
3		September-2010	Page 1 Front	09-Sep-10	Thu	Yasna taken for memorization			Roj 22, Mah 1
4				10-Sep-10	Fri	Yasna	Dibacho	Stanza 1-4 memorized	
5				10-Sep-10	Fri	Yasna	"	Till *Razishtayao Xshnuman*	
6				11-Sep-10	Sat	Yasna	Dibacho complete memorized		
7				12-Sep-10	Sun	Yasna	Chapter 1	Stanza 1	
8				13-Sep-10	Mon	Yasna	"	Stanza 2	Study till stanza 8
9				15-Sep-10	Wed	Yasna	"	Stanza 1-8	Study stanza 9-10
10				16-Sep-10	Thu	Yasna	"	Stanza 1-10	Revise Siroza Yasht
11				18-Sep-10	Sat	Khorde Avesta	Siroza Yasht memorized	*(revision)*	
12				21-Sep-10	Tue	Yasna	Chapter 1	Stanza 1-11	Study stanza 12-13
13				22-Sep-10	Wed	Yasna	"	Stanza 1-13	Study stanza 14-15
14				23-Sep-10	Thu	Yasna	"	Stanza 1-15	Study stanza 16
15				24-Sep-10	Fri	Yasna	"	Stanza 1-16	Study stanza 17-18
16				25-Sep-10	Sat	Yasna	"	Stanza 1-18	Study stanza 19-21
17			Page 1 Back	27-Sep-10	Mon	Yasna	"	Stanza 1-21	Study complete chapt
18				28-Sep-10	Tue	Yasna	Chapter 1 complete memorized		Revise 5 Niayeshes
19		October-2010		09-Oct-10	Sat	Khorde Avesta	Khorshed, Meher Niayeshes ar	*(revision)*	
20				10-Oct-10	Sun	Yasna	Chapters 2	Stanza 1	Study St 2-3
21				11-Oct-10	Mon	Yasna	"	Stanza 2-3	Study St 4-8
22				13-Oct-10	Wed	Yasna	"	Stanza 1-8	Study St 9-10
23				14-Oct-10	Thu	Yasna	"	Stanza 1-10	Study St 11-13
24				15-Oct-10	Fri	Yasna	"	Stanza 1-13	
25				19-Oct-10	Tue	Yasna	"	Stanza 1-15	
26				21-Oct-10	Thu	Yasna	Chapter 2 complete memorized		Revise Dibacho, Ch 1-
27				29-Oct-10	Fri	Yasna	Dibacho, Chapters 1-2	*(revision)*	
28				30-Oct-10	Sat	Yasna	Chapter 3	Stanza 1-2	Studt St 3
29		November-2010		01-Nov-10	Mon	Yasna	"	Stanza 3	
30							Diwali Vacation from 2-11-10 to 21-11-10		
31			Page 2 Front	25-Nov-10	Thu	Yasna	Chapter 3	Stanza 1-13	
32				26-Nov-10	Fri	Yasna	Chapter 3 complete memorized		

Curriculum | Database | FD | **SP** | AP | ZT | SS | KS | PT | FG | VD | SG | Summary | Chart-1 | Chart-

Figure 44: Information from each student's lesson book on separate tabs

Next, from the spreadsheet created for each student, the number of days taken to memorise each stanza was extracted and populated into a separate table. Shown below is an example from the lesson

book of a student (PYT) listing the study of the start of the Yasna. The table on the left captures the date-wise entry from the lesson book page as described above. That data is converted into the number of days of study by stanza, as shown in the table on the right.
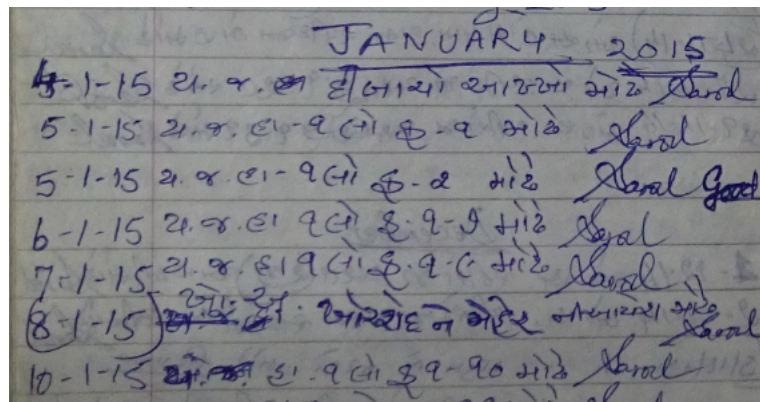
Date	Text	Entry	Sub-entry		Chapter	Stanza	Study days	Revision
…					Y 0	–	8	
04-Jan-15	Yasna	Dibāčo (Y 0)	Complete memorized		Y 1	Y1.1	0.5	
05-Jan-15	Yasna	Chapter 1	Stanza 1			Y1.2	0.5	
05-Jan-15	Yasna	"	Stanza 2			Y1.3	–	
06-Jan-15	Yasna	"	Stanza 1–7			Y1.4	–	
07-Jan-15	Yasna	"	Stanza 1–9			Y1.5	–	
(08-Jan-15)	Khorde Avesta	Khoršed, Meher Nyāiš	(revision)			Y1.6	–	
						Y1.7	1	
10-Jan-15	Yasna	Chapter 1	Stanza 1–10			Y1.8	–	
…						Y1.9	1	
						Y1.10	2	1
						…		

Figure 45: Student's lesson book page with corresponding database entries for Y1.1–10

On 4-Jan-15, the student has completed Y 0 which was started eight days prior and accordingly the study days for Y 0 are marked as 8. On the next day (5-Jan-15), the student completed stanzas 1 and 2, hence each stanza took the student half a day to study, which is marked by 0.5 for Y 1.1 and Y 1.2. If the student completes more than two stanzas, that day is proportionately divided between all these stanzas (for example, if four stanzas are completed in a day, all four are assigned 0.25 days).

Further down on 8-Jan-15, the student completed revision of the Khorde Avesta material which was studied earlier. This one day of revision is marked in a separate column, since it does not pertain to the study of the Yasna chapter and it is counted separately. The last entry on 10-Jan-15 is for Y 1.10 for which the student has taken two days (8th to 10th), hence the study days for Y 1.10 are marked as 2. The number of days for all stanzas of a chapter is then aggregated to get the chapter level data. This chapter level total excludes the days which the student has spent on revision of other previously learnt material.

The data thus collected for each student was populated into a database which lists the numbers of days taken by every student to complete each stanza of the all the Yasna chapters. The figure below shows the students on the horizontal axis, and the Yasna chapters on the vertical axis. Each chapter can be further drilled down to show the stanza level details for each of the nine students, as shown for Y 12 below:

Figure 46: Database of students with chapter-wise details of Yasna study

7.3 Analysis

The granular stanza-wise data on memorisation thus obtained was then used for analysis. The findings and conclusions drawn from this analysis are discussed in this section.

7.3.1 Duration of Yasna study and revision

The total number of days taken by each of the nine students to complete the entire Yasna memorisation is tabulated below. After every few days of memorising new stanzas, the teacher assigns revision of studied chapters. The number of days of revision assigned to a student during the course of the Yasna study is also aggregated and shown in the table.

Student ID	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	Average
Yasna study days	417	549	718	534	533	464	495	588	300	511
Interim revision days	290	513	444	405	308	294	335	277	102	330
Total	707	1062	1162	939	841	758	830	865	402	841
Revision days percent	41%	48%	38%	43%	37%	39%	40%	32%	25%	39%

Table 34: Days taken for Yasna study and revision by the nine students

The days taken by the students for memorising the Yasna fall in a large range from as low as 300 days to a high of 718 days. However, most students are clustered around the median of 533 days. There is greater variance among the revision days from a low of 102 days to a high as 513 days, with the median being 308 days. It is generally observed, that the longer it took for a student to complete the Yasna study, the larger was the proportion of days that were dedicated to revision. This can be explained by the fact that the students who took longer, underwent more cycles of the annual revision period which spans over fifty days. For example, S2, who started the Yasna study in September 2010 and completed it in November 2014, had four revision periods of over fifty days during the months of February–March for the years 2011–2014. Conversely S9, who took less than two years to complete the Yasna, underwent only one annual revision cycle.

On average, revision days comprise close to 40% of the total period, i.e., two days of revision for every five days of study. However, the time taken for revision was generally dependent on the propensity of the student. Some students were proficient in giving back their revision study on time, whereas a couple of students took much longer to revise. It can be seen that S8 who took the second longest time to complete the Yasna study (588 days) was very efficient at giving back his revision (277 days), whereas S2 who completed the Yasna in fewer days compared to S8, took almost twice the number of days to revise. This was corroborated from the lesson book of S2, where comments, such as the one below, are encountered a few times.

16/7/14

(It has been three weeks, yet he has not given *hā* 32–33 in revision; even *hā* 32 has not been revised)

There are around 270 study days available to a student in an academic year.[237] The average number of days elapsed between the start and end of the Yasna study was 841 days, which is also the median for the nine students under study. This translates to roughly three years and one month of study,

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[237] Cf. section 5.4.

which is in line with the curriculum plan where the Yasna study is allocated three years, commencing during the second year and finishing in the fifth year of study.[238]

7.3.2   Progression of the Yasna study

In section 6.2.2 on study within the bhantar class, it was shown that though the class is common, teaching is on an individual basis and each student learns his own assigned part. This can be viewed graphically on a chart with time on the horizontal axis, and the Yasna chapter studied on the vertical axis, as shown in the figure below.
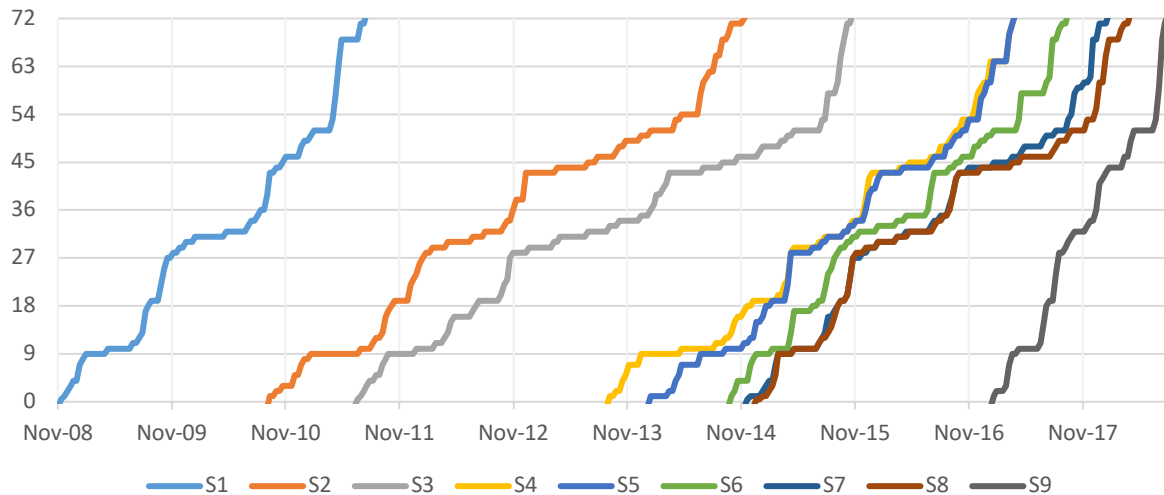
Figure 47: Yasna memorization time-line

It can be seen that each student starts the Yasna study with the introductory chapter (Y 0) at a different point in time, and makes his way to the last chapter (Y 72) at his own pace. Thus, at any point of time, the students in the same class are either studying different chapters of the Yasna, or have already completed it, or may have yet to begin. From example, in the month of November 2014, S1 had finished the Yasna and the remaining curriculum, S2 had reached the last chapter, S3 was on Y 46, S4 on Y 17, S5 on Y 11, S6 on Y 4, S7 and S8 were just about to begin the Yasna, and S9 had not yet enrolled at the DAI.

The different slopes for each student indicate the length of time taken for the study. A steep slope indicates that the student completed the study in a relatively short time (S1, S9), whereas a gradual slope shows that the student took a larger amount of time (S2, S3). The individual slope for each student is also not uniform, but has some steep rises and some flat plateaus. The areas of a steep climb indicate that the chapters are simpler to memorise and are completed in a short time (*hā* 54–63). Conversely, the flat areas indicate that the chapters are difficult and take long to memorise (*hā* 9–10).

Since the above chart is plotted on the time axis, it includes the vacation time and other off days at the institute when there is no study. Due to this, the data for some of the chapters on the chart gets skewed when it overlaps with a long vacation period. Another downside of the above chart is that it

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[238] Cf section 5.2.

does not allow for uniform comparison across students since all have a different starting point. In order to overcome these shortcomings, a normalised chart was created in which the time on the horizontal axis was replaced by the cumulative period of Yasna study, i.e., the number of days taken by a student from the starting day was plotted against the Yasna chapter.
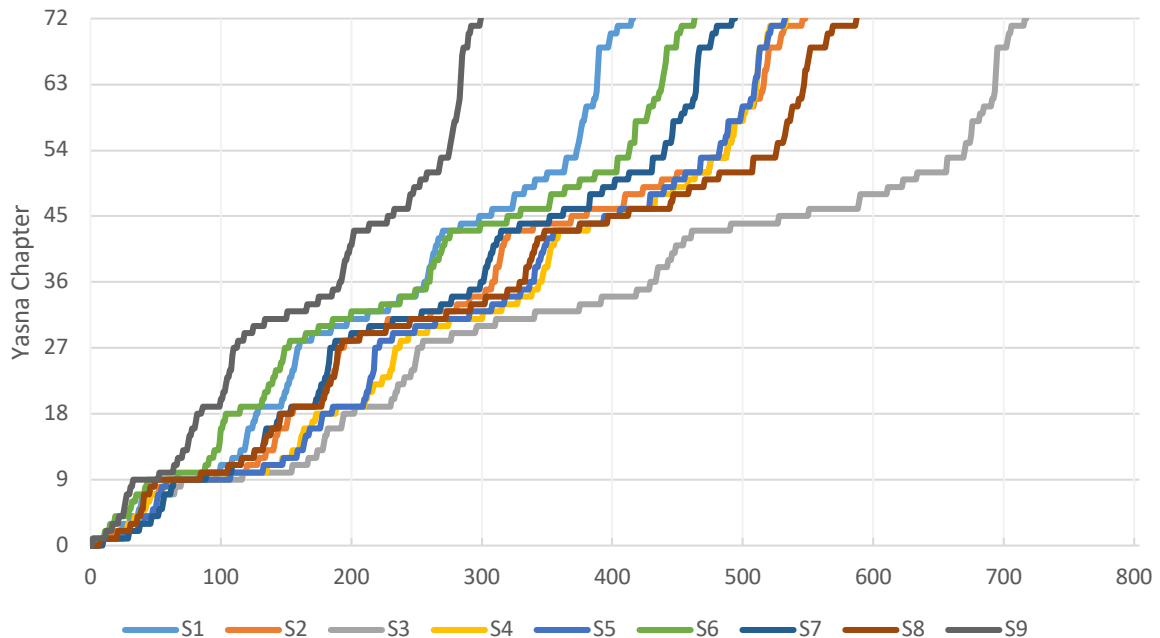
Figure 48: Yasna chapter-wise days taken for memorization

In the above figure, the progress of each student through the Yasna chapters can be seen in comparison with the other students. The total number of days for most students falls in the range between 400 and 600 hundred days, with one outlier on each side. This implies a normal distribution of the data around the average of 500 days. While some students are uniformly faster (S9) or slower (S3) than the rest, the remaining exhibit mixed characteristics. While comparing S1 and S6, it is observed that S6 (green) progressed faster than S1 (blue) during the initial stages (up to Y 27), then both were level during the middle section (*hās* 28–44), and finally S1 was much faster in the final section (*hās* 45–72) and finished almost fifty days ahead of S6.

There are some examples of a pair of students progressing almost simultaneously through the chapters, which is observed in the case of S4 and S5. As seen in Table 30, both these students have crossed the important milestones at the same time. Figure 47 above shows that S4 started the Yasna a few months before S5, however their lines merge after the initial chapters and progress together all the way to the finish. From Table 34, we note that S4 had taken almost a hundred additional days for revision compared to S5, whereas the number of Yasna study days are identical. These additional revision days compensate for the earlier starting point of S4, and hence we observe an almost overlapping progress for both students in Figure 48 above.

Figure 48 also gives a good view of the difficult sections of the Yasna. The flat portions on the curve indicate chapters which take a longer time to complete. The initial chapters (*hās* 0–8) are relatively simple with all the lines clustered together, followed by two difficult chapters (*hās* 9–10), where the

chart flattens and the individual lines diverge. The next chapters (*hās* 11–27) are simpler indicated by the steep climb on the chart, except for a short plateau at Y 19. The next seven chapters belong to the first Gāthā (*hās* 28–34) which are again difficult to memorise, as observed by the flat curve. This is followed by the steep slope for the eight chapters of the Yasna Haptanghāiti (*hās* 35–42), and then the remaining Gāthic chapters (*hās* 43–53), which are again longer and difficult to memorise. The final section (*hās* 54–72) is rapidly completed with only a short notch observed for Y 68 and Y 71 nearing the end of the Yasna. A closer analysis of these individual sections is presented in the next section.

7.3.3   Chapter-level analysis

It is observed from the previous discussion that there is a wide variance in the amount of time taken to memorise different parts of the Yasna. As seen in Table 34, the students take 511 days on average to complete the entire Yasna, which is seventy-three chapters including the introduction (Y 0). This translates to seven days per chapter on average. However, there are some chapters which take much longer to complete. The table below lists the top chapters in terms of memorisation time, in descending order. The top thirteen chapters take up more time than the remaining sixty chapters, with each taking up more than fourteen days to memorise.

#	Yasna *Hā*	Study Days	% of total days
1	9	35	6.9%
2	46	24	4.6%
3	31	24	4.6%
4	10	23	4.5%
5	44	21	4.2%
6	19	20	4.0%
7	43	20	3.9%
8	32	19	3.8%
9	51	17	3.4%
10	1	15	2.8%
11	29	14	2.8%
12	34	14	2.8%
13	30	14	2.8%
Top 13 chapters		261	51.0%
Rest 60 chapters		250	49.0%
Overall		511	100.0%

Table 35: Top chapters of the Yasna by memorisation duration

The above list comprises of nine chapters from the Gāthās, two chapters (Y 9–10) which are recited as part of the long Hom Yašt, the first chapter (Y 1) and Y 19, which is a commentary on the Ahuna Vairiia prayer. If the chapters belonging to a larger unit such as the Gāthās are considered together, then the following units emerge as the most time-consuming constituents of the Yasna to memorise.

Yasna section	Chapters	Count of chapters	Total study days	% of total days	Days of study per chapter
Hom Yašt chapters	9–10	2	58	11%	29
Ahuna Vairiia commentary	19	1	20	4%	20
Gāthā 1	28-34	7	108	21%	15
Gāthā 2	43-46	4	78	15%	19
Gāthā 3	47-50	4	32	6%	8
Gāthā 4	51	1	17	3%	17
Gāthā 5	53	1	11	2%	11
Total		20	324	63%	16
Rest of Yasna		53	187	37%	4

Table 36: Top sections of the Yasna by memorisation duration

The first Gāthā (Y 28–34) takes 108 days and is the most time intensive unit of the entire Yasna study, followed by the second Gāthā (Y 43–46) at 78 days. The two chapters (Y 9–10) recited within the Hom Yašt are next at 58 days, followed by the third Gāthā (Y 47–50) taking 32 days. The list is completed by Y 19 and the last two Gāthās (Y 51 and Y 53). These twenty chapters together take on average 324 days to memorise, which is nearly two-thirds of the time for the entire Yasna study.

However, if the above sections are viewed on a per chapter basis, then the order is significantly altered. The most time per chapter is expended on the Hom Yašt (29 days), followed by Y 19 (20 days), and then the second Gāthā (19 days). These three sections have chapters with the largest number of unique stanzas, and hence require the most time to memorise. A stanza-level analysis can be used to determine the most difficult parts of the Yasna, after adjusting for the length of the chapter.

7.3.4 Stanza-level analysis

The unit of memorisation assigned within the classroom is a stanza. In interviews with priests who had memorised the complete Yasna, the question was asked on which was the most difficult part to memorise. Quite a few priests identified the second Gāthā[239] as the most difficult text to memorise, while some cited Y 9–10 and Y 19.[240] In order to determine the stanzas of which chapters were the most difficult and hence time-consuming to memorise, the chapter-level data was normalised by the number of stanzas in the chapter.

As discussed in section 7.2.2, there are 540 unique stanzas to be memorised in the Yasna. On average, these are memorised in 511 days, which translates to roughly to 0.95 days taken per stanza, or seen in another way, students memorise a little more than one stanza every day. However, if this data for time taken per stanza is sorted in order, it is observed that the stanzas for certain chapters take much longer the average. The table below lists the chapters which take the longest time per stanza to be memorised.

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[239] Er. Rooyintan Pir, Er. Cyrus Darbari, Er. Kersi Karanjia.
[240] Er. Tehmton Sidhva.

Yasna chapter	Total stanzas	Repeated stanzas	Unique stanzas	Days taken to memorise	Days taken per unique stanza
Y 46	20	2	18	23.7	1.32
Y 29	12	1	11	14.3	1.30
Y 30	12	1	11	14.1	1.28
Y 43	17	1	16	20.2	1.26
Y 53	10	1	9	11.3	1.26
Y 9	32	4	28	35.2	1.26
Y 32	17	1	16	19.3	1.21
Y 18	9	2	7	8.0	1.14
Y 10	21	1	20	22.8	1.14
Y 45	12	1	11	12.5	1.14
Y 44	21	2	19	21.4	1.13
Y 33	15	5	10	11.1	1.11

Table 37: Yasna chapters with longest duration to memorise per stanza

All the chapters listed in Table 37 take more than 1.1 days per unique stanza for memorisation. Among these are all the four chapters of the second Gāthā, four out of the seven chapters of the first Gāthā, both chapters of the Hom Yašt, and the fifth Gāthā. The only remaining chapter in the above list, which is somewhat unanticipated, is Y 18. However, it becomes apparent that Y 18 belongs to this list, as the entire chapter, barring the first stanza, is taken from the Y 47, the first chapter of the third Gāthā. The student memorises Y 18 when he first encounters it, and then when he reaches Y 47, he just gives a revision, which is supported by the fact that it takes the students only one day on average to complete Y 47. A consolidated view of the Hom Yašt and Gāthā chapters is presented in the table below.

Yasna Section	Yasna chapters	Days for memorisation	Count of unique stanzas	Days taken per stanza
Hōm Yašt	Y 9–10	58	48	1.21
Gāthā 1	Y 28–34	108	95	1.13
Gāthā 2	Y 43–46	78	64	1.22
Gāthā 3[241]	Y 47–50	40	43	0.93
Gāthā 4	Y 51	17	20	0.86
Gāthā 5	Y 53	11	9	1.26

Table 38: Yasna sections with the longest memorisation duration per stanza

From Table 38, it is observed that the fifth Gāthā takes the highest time per stanza, followed by the second Gāthā and the Hom Yašt chapters. This is followed by the first Gāthā and then the third and fourth Gāthā respectively. The Gāthās are metrical texts with a fixed syllable counting meter repeated in each stanza for all the chapters of that Gāthā. The total syllable count determines the length of stanza, and when this total syllables per stanza is compared with the memorisation time taken for that

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[241] The number of unique stanzas and the average days of memorisation for Y 18 are added to Y 47.

stanza, it is almost perfectly in order, as seen in the table below. Gāthā 5 has the most syllables per stanza and takes the longest to memorise, followed in sequence by Gāthā 2, Gāthā 1, Gāthā 3 and finally Gāthā 4.

Gāthās	Verse lines per stanza	Meter of each verse line	Count of syllables per stanza	Study days taken per stanza
Gāthā 1	3	7 , 9	16 x 3 = 48	1.13
Gāthā 2	5	4 , 7	11 x 5 = 55	1.22
Gāthā 3	4	4 , 7	11 x 4 = 44	0.93
Gāthā 4	3	7 , 7	14 x 3 = 42	0.86
Gāthā 5	2 (minor) + 2 (major)	7 , 5 7 , 7 , 5	12 x 2 + 19 x 2 = 62	1.26

Table 39: Comparison of length of Gāthic stanza with memorisation time

7.3.5 Duration of Khorde Avesta study

From Table 40, we can determine the time taken by the nine students to complete their Khorde Avesta study, which is tabulated below.

Student ID	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9
Start month	Jun-07	Jun-08	Jun-09	Jun-11	Jun-12	Jun-13	Jun-12	Jun-12	Jun-16
Completion month	Nov-08	Sep-10	Jun-11	Aug-13	Jan-14	Sep-14	Nov-14	Dec-14	Jan-17
Study duration (in months)	17	27	24	26	19	15	29	30	7

Table 40: Khorde Avesta study duration for the nine students

The average duration of the Khorde Avesta study based on the above data is 22 months, which is somewhat on the higher side when compared to the one and a half years allocated in the typical year-wise curriculum of DAI.[242] As many as five out of the nine students have taken two years or more to complete the Khorde Avesta study. Some of the time variation among the students can be explained by the different levels at which the student starts, including whether he has learnt the Gujarati script before arriving at the DAI. The extremely short period of study for student S9 is because he had completed memorising most of the basic prayers at home before coming to DAI, and also since he was admitted in a higher standard (4th), he was made to skip the memorisation of one of the Yašts to save time.

As explained earlier in the section on methodology, the data from the student lesson books from the Khorde Avesta was fragmentary. Complete detailed information was available only for three students (S6, S7, S8), partial information or summary was available for five students (S1, S2, S4, S5, S9), while for one student (S3), the pages with the Khorde Avesta study were completely missing. Based on the

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[242] Cf. section 5.2.

available information from the lesson books, a typical schedule of study was prepared for all the constituents of the Khorde Avesta, as detailed in Table 41.

The total of 330 study days shown in the table, excludes the days assigned for revision and the vacation days, and hence these 330 days are spread over around twenty months. Prior to beginning the Khorde Avesta, the student undergoes a period of learning the Gujarati script if he has not already studied it before, which typically takes between fifteen days to one month. Again, after the Khorde Avesta is completed and before the Yasna study commences, the student is trained to read the Avestan script, commonly referred to at the DAI as *zand*, which typically takes one to two weeks to learn.

The last column in the table shows the number of stanzas from the Yasna which appear in that particular Khorde Avesta text. These 133 stanzas are studied as part of the Khorde Avesta and then skipped when encountered during the Yasna study. Previously in section 7.2.2, it was mentioned that 157 stanzas from the Yasna have already been studied as part of the Khorde Avesta material. This difference of twenty-four (i.e., 157–133) is mainly due to the stanzas containing only either the three short prayers, viz., the Ahuna Vairiia, Aṣ̌əm Vohū and Yeṅ́he Hātąm, or the exchange of Bāj[243] between the chief priest and the assistant priest. Both these instances are not attributed to any particular text of the Khorde Avesta in Table 41 and hence excluded from the count of stanzas.

Khorde Avesta curriculum	Constituent texts	Average study time (days)	Yasna chapter where the text appears	Stanza count
Kusti Prayers	Kem Nā Mazdā	7	Y 46.7, 44.16, 49.10c	2
	Ahura Mazda Khodāe	5	–	
	Māzdayasno ahmi	3	Y 12.8–9	2
Small prayers	Nirang Gaomez	1	–	
	Jamvānī Bāj	1	Y 37.1 = Y5.1	2
	Cherag no Namaskar	2	–	
	Din no Kalmo	1	–	
	Doā Tandorosti	5	–	
Enumeration of days, etc.	30 roj names	2	–	
	12 māh names	1	–	
	5 Gāthā, 6 Gāhambār, 7 Hamkāra names	2	–	
	101 names	5	–	
Sroš Bāj + allied prayers	Sroš Bāj	4	Y 0.1, 11.16, 14.4, 23.5, 27.12	5
	Ahmai Raesča	2	Y 68.11	1
	Hazangrem	1	Y 68.15c	1
	Jasa Me Avanghe Mazda	2	Y 72.10	1
	Kerfeh Mozd	1	–	
Hošbām		15	Y 27.1–2, 52.1–7, 45.6b, 8.5–7, 11.12–14, 60.8–12, 71.26–28	23
5 Gāhs	Hāvan Geh	7	Y 71.2–3, 71.23–24	4
	Rapithwin Geh	3	"	
	Uzirin Geh	3	"	

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[243] On the variations in the Bāj exchange, see Cantera (2016).

Khorde Avesta curriculum	Constituent texts	Average study time (days)	Yasna chapter where the text appears	Stanza count
	Aiwisruthrem Geh	4	"	
	Ušahen Geh	3	"	
5 Nyāiš + small prayers	Khoršed Nyāiš	25	Y 11.17–19 = 0.4–6, 68.10, 68.22–23	9
	Meher Nyāiš	6		
	Vispa Humata	1	–	
	Dua Nām Setayeš	6	–	
	Čar Dishā no Namaskār	1	Y 1.16 = 3.18 = 4.21	3
	Māh Bokhtar Nyāiš	6	–	
	Ava Aredvisur Nyāiš	25	Y 65.1–14	14
	Ātaš Nyāiš	20	Y 62.1–10, 27.9–11, 33.12–14, 34.4	17
Patet / Satūm	Patet Pašemāni	32	–	
	Satūm no Kardo	18	Y 26.1–11, 6.19, 17.18	13
Yašts	Sroš Yašt Hādoxt	18	–	
	Sroš Yašt Vadi	30	Y 57.1–34	34
	Ardibehešt Yašt	15	–	
	Small Hom Yašt	4	Y 9.17–18	2
	Vanant Yašt	6	–	
	Sirozā Yašt	30	–	
	Hormazd Yašt (reading)	7	–	
Total days		330	Total count	133

Table 41: Khorde Avesta average study duration for the constituent parts

The Yasna study, which excludes these 157 stanzas from the Khorde Avesta, taken on average 511 days to complete (section 7.3.1). Using Table 41, it is possible to calculate the approximate duration which the student takes to memorise these 157 stanzas during the Khorde Avesta study. Shown below is an approximation for the texts listed in Table 41 .

#	Khorde Avesta text / Yašt	Number of Yasna stanzas	Time to memorise (days)
1	Satūm Kardo	13	18
2	Hošbam	23	15
3	Sroš Yašt Vadi	34	30
4	Ātaš Nyāiš (Ny 5)	17	20
5	Āvā Aredvisur Nyāiš (Ny 4)	14	25
	Sub-total	101	108
6	Other miscellaneous stanzas	32	22
7	Short prayers + Bāj	24	-
	Overall Khorde Avesta	157	130

Table 42: Memorisation time for Khorde Avesta stanzas from the Yasna

It takes 108 days to memorise the 101 stanzas which feature in the five main Khorde Avesta texts which are taken from the Yasna. In addition, there are twenty-two unique stanzas from the Khorde Avesta which appear as thirty-two stanzas of the Yasna with some repetitions. These are assumed to have taken one day each to memorise, hence the total is counted as twenty-two days. For the twenty-four stanzas which contain only the short prayers or the Bāj, no time for memorisation is assigned. Thus, the total time for memorisation of the 157 stanzas is 130 days. By adding this number to the 511 days, we get a total of 641 days for the entire Yasna including stanzas repeated in the Khorde Avesta.

These 641 days do not include the days for revision and vacation time. On average, if there are two days of revision for every three days of new material study as seen in Table 34, then the 641 days of study would be interspersed by approximately another 428 days of revision, which gives us a total duration of Yasna study as 1069 days. In section 5.4 on the details of an academic year at the DAI, the number of working days in an average academic is calculated to be 270 days. Thus, the 1069 days would require exactly four academic years, implying that out of the total tenure of a student at the DAI, four years of study can be completely attributed to the study of the chapters of the Yasna.

This completes the analysis of the Yasna study based on the lesson books of the nine students. In the next section of this chapter, a case study is presented on the students who have enrolled in a higher standard at the DAI. Since they have fewer years to complete the curriculum, a different approach is adopted by the teachers to ensure that these students reach the target that is specifically set for them.

7.4 Case study of students enrolling in advance standard

Out of the eleven students profiled in section 7.1, three were enrolled at the DAI beyond the typical age of seven years. Two of these students (S9, S10) were admitted to the fourth standard at school at the age of around nine years, and one student (S11) was re-admitted after a break of a few years in the seventh standard at the age of nearly twelve years. The goal of the DAI curriculum is for a student to ideally complete his Nāvar studies by the seventh standard at school and the Marātab studies by the eighth standard. If a student is progressing slowly, an additional year is allowed whereby he completes the Nāvar by the eighth standard and the Marātab latest by the ninth standard. Thus, a student admitted in the fourth standard, has a maximum of five years to complete his entire Nāvar and Marātab curriculum. If a teacher feels that a student may not reach this goal, then the curriculum is slightly curtailed to allow him to finish by the target year. In this section, the progress of the above three students from their admission up to the completion of their Nāvar curriculum, is presented.

7.4.1 Case 1: Swift progress through the curriculum

Student S9 was enrolled at the DAI in 2016 in the fourth standard. Shown below are the first few entries in his lesson book, which indicate that he had already completed the initial Khorde Avesta prayers at home before coming to DAI.

	June 2016
14-6-16	Kho. A. (Khorde Avesta) All the small items of bhantar which he has studied at home and come, those have been taken up orally (i.e., asked to recite from memory)
15-6-16	Kho. A. Nirang gaomez memorised
16-6-16	Kho. A. Hošbām stanza 1 memorised

Figure 49: Initial entries in lesson book of S9

Thus, the student S9 started memorising the Hošbām text from his third day at the DAI. From table Table 34, it can be seen that S9 already had covered about forty days' worth of study which precede the Hošbām prayer and a further two to three weeks of learning the Gujarati script. Thus, S9 saved close to two months of the initial curriculum, by having come prepared from home.

S9 progressed swiftly through the entire Khorde Avesta curriculum and reached the end of the Hormazd Yašt study, which is the last item in the list, by January 2017, i.e., within six months from starting. The only text from the curriculum that he was made to skip was the Ardibehešt Yašt, which typically takes around two weeks to memorise. By virtue of reaching the start of the Yasna by the middle of the fourth standard, S9 had put himself in a good position to complete the Nāvar curriculum by the end of the seventh standard, i.e., a period of three and a half years.

S9 proceeded through the Yasna chapters at a phenomenal pace. As seen in Table 34, he had completed the entire Yasna memorisation by July 2018, within only one year and a half. This was less than half the average time of three plus years taken by students to complete the Yasna study. S9 progressed through the remaining curriculum and completed the Vidēvdād by September 2019, after which he underwent the Marātab initiation in November 2019, while studying in the seventh standard.

7.4.2   Case 2: Slow progress through the curriculum

Like S9, student S10 was also enrolled in the fourth standard at the DAI, but in the year 2014. S10 progressed through the Khorde Avesta curriculum at a relatively slower pace. He completed the Khorde Avesta study in January 2016 taking about a year and a half. All the Khorde Avesta texts were memorised, except for the Ardibehešt Yašt, which was only made to be fluently read, and the Hormazd Yašt, which was skipped entirely. Consequently, S10 had a little more than three years to complete the Yasna, Visperad and other short texts to be in time for the Nāvar ceremony, which had to be completed latest by the end of the eighth standard.

The progress of S10 through the Yasna curriculum is summarised in Table 43 below. It shows the number of days taken by S10 to complete each section of the Yasna, and for reference it also shows the average time taken by the nine students (S1–S9) by complete the same part. The right side of the table gives the cumulative days since the start of the Yasna study.

Yasna section	S10 days taken	Whether memorised or fluently read?	S1–S9 days average	Cumulative days for S10	Cumulative days for S1–S9	Surplus / Deficit
Y 0–8	86	Memorised	54	86	54	-32
Y 9–10	39	Reading	58	125	112	-13
Y 11–18	76	Memorised	40	201	153	-49
Y 19–27	69	Memorised	38	270	191	-79
Y 28–34	57	Reading	108	327	299	-28
Y 35–42	22	Reading	25	349	323	-26
Y 43–53	0	Skipped	139	349	462	113
Y 54–72	61	Y 58, 64, 68, 70, 71 read, rest memorised	50	410	511	101
	410		511			

Table 43: Comparison of days taken for Yasna study by S10 and an average student

It is seen that S10 started slowly and took 32 additional days to complete the first eight chapters of the Yasna (Y 0–8). In order to reduce the deficit, the teacher decided to make S10 only fluently read the next two chapters (Y 9–10) which are very long, instead of making him memorise these. This specific point can be found in the lesson book of S10, which is shown in Figure 50 below. S10 started by memorising the first stanza of Y 9 on 4-8-2016, however from the next day he was only made to read the stanzas instead of memorising.
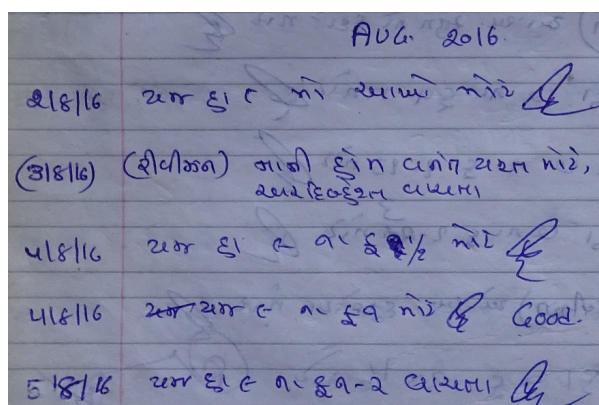
Aug 2016
Yasna *hā* 8 complete memorised
(Revision) Hom, Vanant Yašt …
Yasna *hā* 9 stanza ½ memorised
Yasna *hā* 9 stanza 1 memorised
Yasna *hā* 9 stanzas 1–2 reading

Figure 50: Shift from memorisation to reading in lesson book of S10

Again, from Y 11–27, S10 was made to memorise all the chapters since the text in these chapters is accompanied by a lot of ritual actions within the Yasna and parts of these are also recited in the Bāj Dharnā (or Sroš Drōn) ritual. S10 took 145 days to complete memorising this part, which was almost twice the time taken by a typical student, due to which he fell behind in the targeted curriculum by almost eighty days. After this, S10 was put on an accelerated path, in which most of the chapters were

made to be fluently read or skipped altogether. The chapters of the first Gāthā (Y 28–34) and the Yasna Haptaŋhāiti (Y 35–42) were read, while the rest of the Gāthās (Y 43–53) were completely bypassed. In the last section (Y 54–72), the difficult chapters (Y 58, 64, 68, 70, 71) were read, while the remaining easier ones were memorised completely. Thus, S10 was able to complete this expedited Yasna study by August 2018 in a total of 410 days, which is a hundred days lesser than taken by an average student to memorise the complete Yasna. S10 was then made to complete the remaining Nāvar curriculum consisting of the Visperad, the Āfrīnagān and Āfrīns, and underwent the Nāvar initiation in May 2019.

7.4.3   Case 3: Abridged curriculum

The final study in this section is of student S11 who was first admitted to the DAI in June 2012 in the second standard. However, after a brief period of study, his parents discontinued his training at the DAI. After attaining some basic training at home, S11 underwent his Nāvar initiation without memorising most of the Yasna chapters. He applied for re-admission to the DAI in June 2017 at the age of eleven years. In normal circumstances, a student beyond the age of nine years is not consider for admission at the DAI since he will not have adequate time to complete the curriculum. However, special consideration was given in this case since S11 had been a prior student there, and he was admitted to the seventh standard.

Since S11 had already completed the Nāvar, the goal was to get him adequately prepared for the Marātab initiation, starting from his current level of proficiency. The chief milestones of his study at the DAI are listed in the table below.

#	Milestone	Date	Duration (months)
1	Start of study	June 2017	–
2	Khorde Avesta completed	November 2017	5
3	Yasna completed	April 2018	5
4	Visperad completed	June 2018	2
5	Vidēvdād completed	December 2018	6

Table 44: Study milestones for student S11

During the first five months, he was made to memorise selected prayers from the Khorde Avesta. For example, the Hāvan and Aiwisruthrem Gāh, which are commonly recited were memorised, while the remaining three Gāhs were made to be read only. Similarly, only the Ātaš Nyāiš, Patet Pašemāni, Satūm Kardo and the Sirozā Yašt were memorised, while the remaining parts of the Khorde Avesta were skipped. The Yasna study followed an even sharper trajectory than seen previously in the case of student S10. Most of the time intensive chapters were either made to be read or skipped altogether. This abridged Yasna study was completed within an extremely short duration of only five month. This was possible because S11 had previously memorised a significant part of the first twenty-seven chapters at home in preparation for his Nāvar ceremony, and hence was able to progress through these at a very good pace. The next six to eight months were dedicated to gaining proficiency in reading the Visperad and Vidēvdād text, in preparation for the Marātab ceremony, which S11 completed in May 2019 after the eighth standard.

It is interesting to note that in the academic year after his Marātab, S11 resumed the memorisation of the Yasna chapters which had earlier been only read. For example, the snapshot from September 2019 in the lesson book of S11 shows the completion of Y 28 and the start of the memorisation of Y 29, both chapters which had been read from the book during the Yasna study.

	September 2019
	Yasna *hā* 14–17 memorised
	Yasna *hā* 28 memorised completely
	Yasna *hā* 29 stanza 1 memorised
	Yasna *hā* 29 stanza 1–2 memorised
	Yasna *hā* 29 stanza 1–3 memorised

Figure 51: Memorisation of skipped chapters in lesson book of S11

7.4.4 Summary of case studies of students enrolling late

As seen in the three cases discussed above, a late entrant to the DAI has fewer years to complete the curriculum. Initially he starts his Khorde Avesta study at the same level as any regular student, but is expected to go faster in order to make up for the lost time. If he is fast, he is made to complete the entire Khorde Avesta corpus, else a few Yašts are skipped. In extreme cases, such as for S11, only the absolute requisite texts are studied, and the rest are glanced over or skipped completely. Once at the Yasna study, the progress in initial few chapters generally determines the course that will be followed for the rest of the Yasna. If the student demonstrates the ability to memorise at a fast pace, he will be put on the regular path of memorising all the chapters. However, if the student starts to lag, a few chapters are made to be read fluently, and check if he can get back on track. If the progress is still slow, larger chunks of text are read instead of being memorised. In extreme cases, a bunch of chapters, which are difficult to memorise and also do not have any accompanying ritual actions, such as in the case of the second to fifth Gāthās (Y 43–51, 53), are entirely omitted.

In summary, the progress of the three late entrants to the DAI is mapped against that of a typical student who enrols by the age of seven in the first or second standard at school. For the comparison, S5 has been considered as a typical student as his time of study is very close to the average of the nine students considered for the study. The table below shows the days taken by each student for the study of different sections of the Yasna on the left side, and number of chapters memorised in that section.

Yasna section	Days taken for study				Count of chapters memorised			
	S5	S9	S10	S11	S5	S9	S10	S11
Y 0–8	59	33	86	35	9	9	9	9
Y 9–10	74	31	39	15	2	2		
Y 11–27	99	55	145	35	17	17	17	12
Y 28–34	105	73	57	9	7	7		
Y 35–42	38	23	22	3	8	8		
Y 43–53	108	62	0	0	11	11		

Y 54–72	51	25	61	10		19	19	14	10
Overall	533	300	410	107		73	73	40	31

Table 45: Progress of late entrants versus a typical student at the DAI

S5, who enrolled in the second standard at the DAI, took 533 days to completely memorise all the chapters of the Yasna, which is slightly higher than the average of 511 days. S9, who enrolled in the fourth standard, was able to make up for the late entry by taking only 300 days to complete the entire Yasna study, well below the average time. S10, who also enrolled in the fourth standard, was unable to make up for the lost time, and hence was put on an accelerated course of study which included the memorisation of only forty out of the seventy-three chapters. Finally, S11, whose enrolment was very late in the seventh standard, was put on a special abridged curriculum which included the study of only the essential texts of the Khorde Avesta and memorisation of only thirty-one chapters of the Yasna.

It is useful to view the above data graphically as shown in Figure 52 below. The horizontal axis shows the academic years starting in June, and the vertical axis shows the text being studied. The chart plots the progress of the four students discussed above, viz. a typical student S5, and the three late entrants S9, S10 and S11. The table below the chart shows the standard of the student at school during that academic year for the duration of the study.
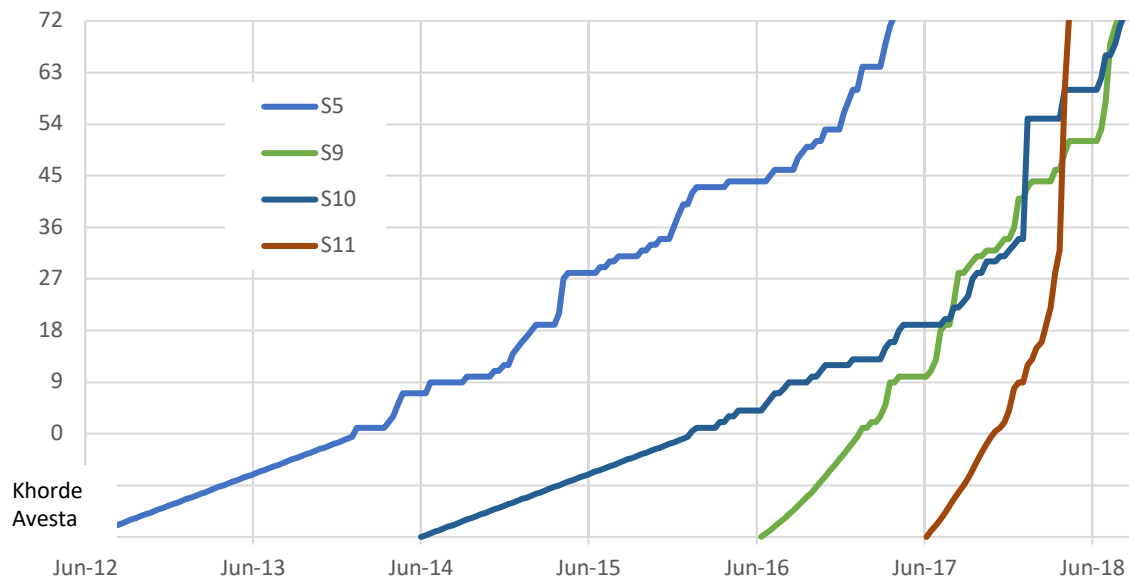
S5	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th		
S9					4th	5th	6th
S10			4th	5th	6th	7th	8th
S11						7th	8th

Figure 52: Progress in Yasna study and corresponding standard at school

The leftmost line in the above chart shows the progress of S5, who takes five years to progress through the Khorde Avesta and Yasna curriculum, and finishes it during the sixth standard. Thus, he is well prepared to undergo the Nāvar initiation by the seventh standard of school.

The second line from the left traces the path of S10, who starts in the fourth standard. Since S10 is in the same standard as S5, ideally his path should be steep and catch up with S5 near the top. However, it is observed that his initial path, during the Khorde Avesta and starting chapters of the Yasna, follows an even flatter trajectory compared to S5, which implies that the gap is widened instead or narrowing. This causes an intervention by the bhantar teacher, who puts S10 on the fast-track which includes reading of the difficult chapters in favour of memorisation. Thus, we see a much steeper climb by S10 after Y 27 as compared to S5, leading him to finish by the eighth standard and go through the Nāvar initiation in that year.

The third line from the left is the path taken by S9, who also starts in the fourth standard, however two years after S10. The steep slope indicates the swift progress made by S9 through both the Khorde Avesta and Yasna curriculum. Despite starting two years after S10, we see that S9 manages to catch up with him, and creditably without skipping the memorisation of any text or chapter of the Yasna. This puts him in a strong position to finish the Nāvar curriculum by the sixth standard and even be slightly ahead of schedule for the initiation.

The rightmost line shows the trajectory of S11 who arrives at the DAI in the seventh standard. He is in the same batch as S5 and S9, but starts much after them. As a result, from the very beginning he is put on a shortened curriculum, which is visible in the almost vertical ascent followed on the chart. He completes the abbreviated Khorde Avesta and Yasna curriculum during the same academic year, and proceeds to be on course for his Marātab initiation after the eighth standard.

7.5   Conclusion

The student lesson books are a treasure trove of information on the minutiae of the priestly training process at the Athornan Institute. They give very detailed information on the day-to-day study of the students which can then be extrapolated to derive knowledge on various aspects of the training. The lesson book is started on the first day of the student at the institute and records the daily progress all the way up to the completion of the entire curriculum, many years later.

The students take six to eight years on average from the time of admission to the completion of the complete training leading to the Marātab initiation. A major portion of this time is dedicated to the memorisation of the Yasna, which takes around three to four years to finish. A period of revision is constantly interspersed with the study of new material, which on average takes up almost forty percent of the total study time.

The Yasna is not a homogeneous text but comprises of chapters of varying length and difficulty, each of which is further subdivided into stanzas. Almost thirty percent of the stanzas of the Yasna are internally repeated, which implies that the memorisation effort is expended only on the unique stanzas of the text. The Khorde Avesta study which precedes the Yasna, contains significant material borrowed from the Yasna text, and a student has usually memorised these parts by the time he reaches the Yasna study. After adjusting for the internal repetition and that from the Khorde Avesta,

there are 540 unique stanzas of the Yasna which a student will be required to memorise. On analysis of the lesson books of the nine students included in the study, this requires on average a little over 500 study days. This roughly translates to one stanza being memorised every day. However, it is observed that some texts require a higher level of memorisation effort compared to other parts of the Yasna. On closer inspection, the chapters of the Hom Yašt and the first, second and fifth Gāthās appear to be the most difficult to memorise.

Each student progresses through the curriculum at his own pace of study. A student who is proficient at memorisation may have started later than another student, but may finish well before him. The bhantar teachers ensure that each student is on course to finish the curriculum at least by the time he finishes the eighth standard at school. For the students who have enrolled in a higher standard, an expedited curriculum is sometimes followed if that student is not likely to reach completion by the target year. This fast-tracked curriculum entails only the reading of certain chapters in lieu of memorisation, and in extreme cases the complete omission of these from the study.

8 Contemporary Priestly Training outside of the Athornan Institutes

While the training methods used at the Athornan Institutes are uniform in nature and designed to create a fully-trained priest, the training outside of the Athornan Institutes represents a diverse set of methods and practices. It encompasses the entire gamut ranging from the very basic coaching imparted just before the candidate's Nāvar ceremony, to, in very rare cases, matching the complexity and totality of that of the Athornan Institutes.

In a typical year, close to twenty Nāvar initiations in total are performed across India, with the majority of them in Mumbai.[244] Out of these, there are only one or two candidates who have received the complete training spanning 5–7 years, and these candidates usually have trained at the Athornan Institutes. The remaining majority of the initiation candidates have either been trained at home by their father or at the home of a priest or at the fire-temple. They would typically have undergone either some level of advanced training for one to two years, or only spent a few months on the basic requirements for the initiation.

Since a unified framework is difficult to apply to the training practices outside the Athornan Institutes, in what follows, the main identifying characteristics of such a training are defined, and then relevant case studies are presented illustrating the different types of training.

8.1 Determinants of training imparted

The main characteristics and determining factors of the levels of priestly training imparted to the candidate are discussed below.

Parents' motivation

The parents of the child preparing for initiation have the biggest influence on the kind of training imparted to him. As shall be seen in the case studies in the next section, some parents want their son to be initiated into the priesthood as a family tradition, but are not keen on burdening him with additional workload besides the regular school studies. In such cases, the candidate is made to undergo the Nāvar with minimal training (Case studies 6–7). In a majority of cases however, the parents want their son to gain at least an acceptable level of proficiency and either train him at home or enrol him under a priestly instructor (Cases 3–5). In some rare cases, the father is very determined to make his son complete the entire curriculum before initiation and imparts the entire training himself (Cases 1–2).

Duration of training

The length of the training period usually gives a very good idea about the level of proficiency of the candidate. The duration can vary from a few months for candidates receiving minimal training, to as

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[244] Nāvar initiations in Mumbai are performed at the Vatcha Gandhy Agiary (4–5 initiations per year), H. B. Wadia Ātaš Bahrām (∼2), Rustomfram Agiary (∼2) Cama Baug Agiary (∼2), Banaji Limji Agiary (∼1), and M. J. Wadia Agiary (∼1). Other occasional venues include Banaji Ātaš Bahrām, Sethna Agiary, and Sodawaterwala Agiary.

high as four to five years for the fully trained candidates. The complete Nāvar initiation takes about one month and comprises three main parts, viz. two complete purificatory rites (*Barašnum*) each lasting nine days, followed by the six days of *Gewrā* [245] and finally the proper 4-day Nāvar ceremony. During the *Barašnum*, the candidate is in self-isolation and has to desist from coming in contact with anyone and anything. Throughout the approximately twenty-five days of the *Barašnum* and the *Gewrā*, he is expected to spend most of the time in prayers and maintaining ritual observances. This period is utilised by the priests to train the candidates and make them ready for the Nāvar ceremony.

In case the candidate has received no prior training, this period is used to teach him the most important aspects of the ritual (Cases 6–7). This includes the start of the Yasna wherein the introductory chapter (Y 0 or *Dibāčo*) is recited by the candidate with the appropriate dedications (*Xšnumans*), further the partaking of the sacred bread (in Y 8) and the *hōm* juice (in Y 11), and the terminal portion of the ceremony recited at the well. Besides these parts, the remaining text can be recited by the candidate from the book during the ritual.

Most of the Nāvar candidates however do have some prior training before the initiation starts (Cases 3–5). Most priests start training their sons for the Navjote initiation which is the investiture ceremony of a child typically around the age of seven to nine years, and then continue further training for a few years leading up to the Nāvar initiation around the age of eleven to thirteen years. This includes roughly a year spent on the basic Khorde Avesta prayers, and a couple of years on memorising a few important chapters of the Yasna and gaining reading proficiency for the other chapters.

In some rare cases, the candidates are trained as *sampūrna* Nāvar where they have completed the entire curriculum and the accompanying ritual know-how (Cases 1–2). This training typically spans four to six years of regular full-time study.

Location of training

The initial training of a student usually begins at home with the basic *kusti* prayers in preparation for the Navjote ceremony. After this, depending on the parents' situation, the training is continued for the Nāvar, either at home or the son is sent to a local priest, who belongs to the same Panthak.[246] The final part of the training on the ritual actions is undertaken after the text is learnt, and is usually taught to the candidate at the fire-temple during the time of the initiation.

Training Instructor

In a majority of cases, the candidate receives some basic training from his father at home. Usually if the father is a practising priest, then he tends to continue training his son at home or at the fire-temple where he works (Case 1). However, if the father is engaged in some other profession, the training is continued under another priest either at home, or at the priest's house or fire-temple (Cases 2–5).

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[245] The Gewrā ceremony consists of the performance of a Yasna ritual daily for six days by two priests, which gives them the qualification to initiate the Nāvar candidate. See Modi (1937, pp. 161–162) for details.
[246] For a note on Panthaks, see section 3.2.3.

<u>Further Training</u>

The Nāvar is the first stage of priestly initiation where the candidate gets qualified to perform the common outer ceremonies. However, he is required to undergo the second stage of initiation, Marātab, to qualify for performing the solemn inner rituals. In the past, the Nāvar was usually completed by fifteen years of age, and then the Marātab was undertaken whenever the candidate was completely trained to perform all the ceremonies, sometimes well into adulthood.[247] However in present times, almost all Marātab candidates complete the initiation within a couple of years after the Nāvar, irrespective of whether they have gained the relevant expertise.[248]

The Marātab initiation is not mandatory for the priestly lineage to be maintained in the family, and hence it is undertaken only if the family desires the son to practice as a priest in the future. If the candidate has undergone the Nāvar without having completely learnt the Yasna and Visperad, he is required to gain familiarity with at least those parts of the ceremony which contain important ritual actions. Further, he needs to gain at least some fluency in reading the Vidēvdād text, which is performed as part of the Marātab ceremony. While there are some exceptions, in most cases, at least one to two years are dedicated towards preparing for the Marātab (Cases 4–5). In some cases, the sons were comprehensively trained by their fathers to achieve competence in the all night Vidēvdād ritual before making them undergo the Marātab initiation (Cases 1–2).

The table below summarises the different characteristics of three levels of training imparted outside the Athornan Institutes.

Characteristic features of Training	Level of Training		
	Basic	**Advanced**	**Comprehensive**
Parents' motivation for training son	Complete the Nāvar initiation formality	Become a well-trained priest capable of performing the routine priestly ceremonies	Become a full-fledged priest capable of performing all solemn rituals
Duration	Short – few months before initiation	Intermediate – about one to two years	Long – four to six years
Location	At the place of the Nāvar initiation	Either own or priest's home, or at fire-temple	Either at home or fire-temple where the father is a priest
Training instructor	Generally, the priest who initiates the candidate	Either the father if he is qualified, or another priest	Usually, the father who is a fully-trained practising priest
Further training	Typically, none after the Nāvar initiation	The candidate may undergo the Marātab initiation at a future date	The training for the Marātab is ongoing after the Nāvar initiation

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[247] Cf. section 3.4.2. Case of Mobed Darabsha Sidhwa, who underwent the Nāvar at 15 years in 1921 and Marātab at 18 years of age in 1924.

[248] A recent exception was the Marātab initiation of Er. Zerick Dastur on 18th January 2021 undertaken as an adult, decades after his Nāvar completed as a schoolboy. Source: Jam-e Jamshed Weekly (24-1-2021, p.4).

Characteristic features of Training	Level of Training		
	Basic	Advanced	Comprehensive
Training selection criteria	Parents interested in getting their son initiated to keep the priestly lineage in the family[249]	Parents wanting to train their son but unwilling to send them to the Athornan Institutes	Father believes he can provide training himself which is equivalent to or better than the Athornan Institutes

Table 46: Different levels of training of candidates educated outside the Athornan Institutes

8.2 Case Studies of training outside the Athornan Institutes

In what follows, the different levels of training imparted at home or in the fire-temple are explored in detail with the help of case studies. In the first section, two case studies of candidates who have undergone complete training and memorised the entire curriculum are presented. The second section presents three case studies of candidates who have received some level of intermediate training for three different scenarios viz. training at home, at the house of a priest and at the fire-temple. The final section presents the perspective of the priests at two fire-temples in Mumbai on the Nāvar initiation of the candidates who have undergone very basic training.

8.2.1 Comprehensive Training

It is extremely rare to find candidates who have been trained comprehensively outside of the Athornan Institutes. The two detailed case studies presented below are the only known contemporary candidates to complete the entire curriculum for the Nāvar initiation at home.

Case Study 1: Rooyintan Nozer Mehenty trained at home by his father[250]

Background

Among the priesthood, Rooyintan (b. August 2003) is a prodigy of sorts. He was the youngest priest to perform the exalted Nīrangdīn ceremony at the age of ten years, and then he became the youngest priest to perform the Bōy ceremony at an Ātaš Bahrām. Rooyintan's father Er. Nozer was a Bōywālā priest at the H. B. Wadia Ātaš Bahrām and belongs to the Surti Bhagariā Panthak. Rooyintan is the only known contemporary case who has received his entire priestly training exclusively though oral transmission. Rooyintan memorised the entire Yasna and Visperad text for his Nāvar at the age of eight years, before he was able to read the Gujarati or Avestan script in the prayer books.

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[249] Modi (1937, p. 159) states that the priestly lineage can be revived by a descendant up to the fifth generation. In present Parsi practice, up to the third generation is usually acceptable, i.e., if the great-grandfather was initiated into priesthood, but the grandfather and father were not, the son can still be initiated. Beyond this, a candidate is eligible for initiation only if his priestly lineage can be traced indisputably.

[250] Based on multiple in-person and telephone interviews with Er. Nozer Mehenty and son Rooyintan during the 2016–2020 period (interviews #30 and #36).

Training

Er. Nozer Burjorji Mehenty had received his priestly training at the MFCAI where he was a student from 1975 to 1986. His son Rooyintan was born in August 2003. Er. Nozer started Rooyintan's training before he was five years old in preparation for his Navjote. Every day he conducted two teaching sessions of about an hour and a half, first in the morning and then again in the evening after school. The mode of teaching was purely oral.

The milestones in the training were as follows:

Year	Rooyintan's age	Progress / Milestone
2008	4.5 years	Bhantar training started
2009	6 years	Completed Khorde Avesta curriculum including 4 Yašts (Sirozā Yašt, Sroš Yašt Vadi (Y 57), Hom Yašt (Y 9–10) and Haptan Yašt (Y 35–42)
2010	7 years	Completed Yasna chapters 1–27 Navjote ceremony performed at H. B. Wadia Ātaš Bahrām
2011	8 years	Completed entire Yasna, Visperad and Āfrīnagāns Nāvar initiation at the Modi Ātaš Bahrām, Surat
2012	9 years	Complete Vidēvdād reading fluency Marātab initiation at the Modi Ātaš Bahrām, Surat
2013	10 years	- Performed two Getīkharīd ceremonies at the H. B. Wadia Ātaš Bahrām - Performed his first Nīrangdīn ceremony at the Modi Ātaš Bahrām, becoming the youngest priest in recorded history to do so - Performed the Bōy ceremony at the Modi Ātaš Bahrām, and subsequently at the H. B. Wadia Ātaš Bahrām
2013 onwards	–	- Resident student at the MFCAI (2013–2017) - Completed schooling; family relocated to Deolali in May 2017 – Rooyintan takes up role of assistant Panthaki at Deolali Agiary. - Completed a total of eight Nīrangdīn ceremonies, all at the Modi Ātaš Bahrām, up to 2019

Table 47: Milestones in Rooyintan Nozer Mehenty's training

Bhantar training regimen

During the years of training under his father, Rooyintan's daily routine on a typical school day was as follows:

Time	Activity
5.45 AM	Wake-up time
6.15–7.30 AM	Bhantar study
9.00–3.00 PM	Academic education at the Jamshetji Jejeebhoy School for Boys
3.45–5.15 PM	Bhantar revision
5.30–7.00 PM	School homework and tuitions

7.15–8.45 PM	Exercise and Karate[251] practice
9.00–9.30 PM	Dinner
10.15 PM	Sleep time

Table 48: Rooyintan's daily routine

Thus, on a regular weekday, Rooyintan spent at least 3 hours on bhantar study and revision. On Saturdays and Sundays, when school was off, he and his father spent 3–4 hours in the morning and a further 1–2 hours in the evening, mainly on revising texts memorised earlier. This added up to a total of about 25 hours per week of bhantar memorisation, which is almost twice the number of hours spent by an equivalent student at the DAI.[252]

The result of this sheer quantum of time dedicated to bhantar is seen in the remarkable speed at which the prayers were memorised. Within one year after his basic kusti prayers were learnt, Rooyintan finished the entire Khorde Avesta curriculum by the age of six. This included the regular prayers – five Gāhs, five Nyāišes, Patet, Sirozā Yašt and Sroš Yašt Vadi, and in addition the entire Hom Yašt (Y 9–10) and Haptan Yašt (Y 35–42). By memorising these prayers, Rooyintan had in essence completed thirteen chapters of the Yasna (9–10, 35–42, 57, 62 and 65). In less than six months after that and before his Navjote ceremony, Rooyintan had completed memorising Yasna chapters 1–27. In one year after his Navjote, Rooyintan completed all chapters of the Yasna, Visperad and Āfrīnagāns, and underwent the Nāvar initiation. Within the next year, Rooyintan had obtained fluency in reading the Vidēvdād and the associated Bāj Dharnā and underwent his Marātab initiation.

The entire priestly curriculum from the basics up to the Marātab was completed in a little over three years, nearly twice as fast as the average time taken by a student at the Athornan Institutes. Some of the key factors responsible for this speed of the learning process are explored in detail in this section.

Mode of bhantar training

The morning bhantar session was conducted shortly after waking up and lasted for an hour and a half on school days, and much longer on the weekends. New material was taught in the morning session. It consisted of at least a couple of stanzas but sometimes as many as seven or eight stanzas. This was the time when Rooyintan was still between the age of five and eight years, and before he had learnt the Gujarati script and was able to recite from the prayer book.

Er. Nozer would start teaching the new stanza by breaking it down into smaller recitation units of a few words, and then down to individual words. Er. Nozer adduced the example of the Ahuna Vairiia prayer to explain the process of how Rooyintan was taught, which is detailed below.

1. First starting with the individual words, which were repeated multiple times:

Er. Nozer (N): *yaϑā*
Rooyintan (R): *yaϑā yaϑā yaϑā … yaϑā* (repeating 10–15 times)

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[251] Rooyintan was also accomplished in karate, and represented India at an international competition in Bangkok in May 2011 at the age of seven, where he won the second prize in his category. This martial art training was also imparted by his father, Er. Nozer who is himself a certified black belt.
[252] The total time of bhantar study in a typical week at the DAI is 14 hours. See section 5.5.3 for details.

N: *ahū*
R: *ahū ahū ahū …* (10–15 times)
N: *vairiiō*
R: *vairiiō vairiiō vairiiō …* (10–15 times)

2. Then combining the individual words in the half verse-line:

N: *yaϑā ahū vairiiō*
R: *yaϑā ahū vairiiō yaϑā ahū vairiiō …* (8–10 times)

3. Once the words were fixed in the mind, the next set of words were taken:

Er. Nozer (N): *aϑā*
Rooyintan (R): *aϑā aϑā aϑā …* (10–15 times)
Er. Nozer (N): *ratuš*
Rooyintan (R): *ratuš ratuš ratuš …* (10–15 times)
N: *aϑā ratuš*
R: *aϑā ratuš aϑā ratuš …* (8–10 times)
Er. Nozer (N): *ašāt̰.cīt̰*
Rooyintan (R): *ašāt̰.cīt̰ ašāt̰.cīt̰ ašāt̰.cīt̰…* (10–15 times)
Er. Nozer (N): *hacā*
Rooyintan (R): *hacā hacā hacā …* (10–15 times)
N: *ašāt̰.cīt̰ hacā*
R: *ašāt̰.cīt̰ hacā ašāt̰.cīt̰ hacā …* (8–10 times)
N: *aϑā ratuš ašāt̰.cīt̰ hacā*
R: *aϑā ratuš ašāt̰.cīt̰ hacā aϑā ratuš ašāt̰.cīt̰ hacā …* (8–10 times)

4. Then combining the two half verse-lines for the full verse-line:

N: *yaϑā ahū vairiiō : aϑā ratuš ašāt̰.cīt̰ hacā*
R: *yaϑā ahū vairiiō : aϑā ratuš ašāt̰.cīt̰ hacā …* (5–7 times)

5. Once the first verse-line was reasonably well remembered, the same process was followed to teach the second verse-line:

N: *vaŋhə̄uš dazdā manaŋhō : šiiaoϑananąm aŋhə̄uš mazdāi*
R: *vaŋhə̄uš dazdā manaŋhō : šiiaoϑananąm aŋhə̄uš mazdāi …* (5–7 times)

6. Then the first two verse-lines were to be recited together from memory:

R: *yaϑā ahū vairiiō : aϑā ratuš ašāt̰.cīt̰ hacā*
   vaŋhə̄uš dazdā manaŋhō : šiiaoϑananąm aŋhə̄uš mazdāi … (3–5 times)

7. If there was a mistake in the pronunciation of a certain word, then it was taken up again for repetition. Once the two lines were fairly well memorised, only then the last verse-line was taken up for study word-by-word:

N: *xšaϑrəmcā ahurāi.ā : yim drigubiiō dadat̰ vāstārəm*
R: *xšaϑrəmcā ahurāi.ā : yim drigubiiō dadat̰ vāstārəm …* (5–7 times)

8. Once the last line was memorised, it was to be recited from memory along with the first two lines memorised earlier:

> R: *yaϑā ahū vairiiō : aϑā ratuš aṣ̌āṯ.cīṯ hacā*
> *vaŋhə̄uš dazdā manaŋhō : š̌iiaoθananąm aŋhə̄uš mazdāi*
> *xšaθrəmcā ahurāi.ā : yim drigubiiō dadaṯ vāstārəm* (3–4 times).

This would complete the process of teaching a new stanza. This process was then repeated for teaching a second stanza for the day. Depending on the time taken and the complexity of the text, on average two to three stanzas were covered in a day. Since Rooyintan had no recourse to reading from a book, he needed to keep the text in his mind up to the evening prayer session. This he said he would do by recalling it during the day, while traveling to and back from school and during the lunch break.

The evening bhantar session was conducted right after returning from school for about an hour and a half. This session was mainly for 'take-up', a term used to refer to Er. Nozer taking-up, i.e., making Rooyintan recite the previously learnt text from memory. He was expected to recall the stanzas memorised in the morning, without mistakes. Further he needed to be able to recite all the stanzas from the beginning of that text or chapter of the text. For example, if he had memorised stanzas 11–12 of Yasna 1 in the morning, he needed to recite all the learnt stanzas, i.e., 1–12 of chapter 1 in the evening session. If there were many lapses, beatings were used as a common form of punishment. Attesting to the effectiveness of the punishments, Rooyintan himself asserted: "*mār vagar sikhāi nai*" 'one cannot learn without a beating'.

On the days when Er. Nozer was on duty as a Bōywālā̄ at the Ātaš Bahrām and hence unavailable to conduct the teaching session, he would teach Rooyintan a larger amount of text ahead of his priestly service, and Rooyintan was expected to memorise the text on his own.

One of the days of the weekend was dedicated to revising all the previously learnt texts. For example, if Rooyintan was memorising Yasna chapter 12 during the week, on either the Saturday or Sunday of that week, he would be required to recite Yasna chapters 1–11 and spend time to iron out any mistakes that had crept in. Thus, a continuous cycle of revision was built into the learning process.

Progress tracking and marking in the book

Er. Nozer kept track of the Rooyintan's progress in his own prayer books of the Khorde Avesta and the Yasna, where he would note the areas of weakness and mark the text which needed to be revisited. The *Yazaśne bā Niraṅg* in Gujarati by the Kutar brothers[253] was used as the reference book by Er. Nozer, and it is also used by Rooyintan to refer the text whenever required.

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[253] Kuṭār & Kuṭār (1917). A detailed description of the book appears in Redard and Daruwalla (2021, p. 7). Er. Nozer mentioned that this was a part of a set of prayer books gifted to each student by the trustees of the M. F. Cama Athornan Institute, when they passed out after successfully completing the entire curriculum.
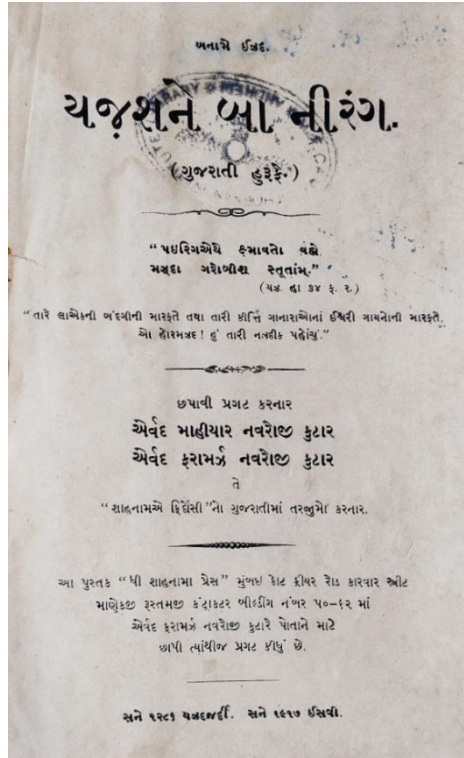
Figure 53: Er. Nozer's copy of the Yazaśne bā Niraṅg bearing the stamp of the MFCAI library

Some of the important markings in the book included the following:

▪ Marking variations in the text for different ceremonies, e.g. Yasna vs. Visperad
Certain stanzas of the Yasna are modified when recited within the Visperad ritual. These variations are clearly marked in the textbook wherever they appear.

For example, Y 63.2 within a Yasna ritual is as follows:

Y 63.2 *sraošō iδā astū apąm vaŋuhīnąm yasnāi ašāunąmca frauuašibiiō yā̊ nō ištå uruuōibiiō hiiaṯ paouruuīm taṯ ustəməmcīṯ …*

The equivalent stanza when recited within the Visperad ritual in slighly modified with some additional words which are underlined below:

VrS 63.2 *sraošō iδā astū apąm vaŋuhīnąm yasnāi <u>aməšạ̄ngmca spəṇtạngm</u> ašāunąmca frauuašibiiō yå̊nō ištå <u>zaoiiō</u> uruuōibiiō <u>ašāunąmca</u> yasnāi <u>sraošō astū yaṯ</u> paouruuīm taṯ ustəməmcīṯ …*

The additional words shown in the above example are clearly marked by Er. Nozer in the textbook by underlining them and writing 'Imp.' in the margin, as shown in the figure below. These specific words would be stressed upon while teaching this stanza. Further the equivalent Yasna chapter (*hā* 63) is also marked by Er. Nozer.
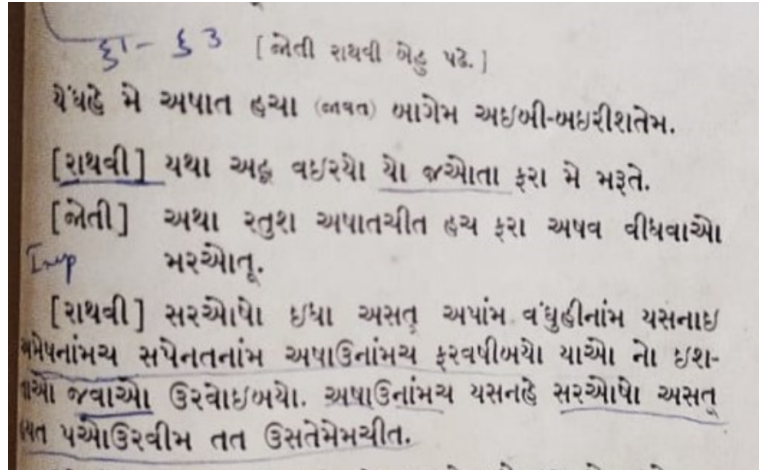
Figure 54: Underlining of variant words between different ceremonies

▪ At certain places, Er. Nozer explicitly notes down the differences in the textbook. For example, in Y 60.13, four *ahuna vairiia* and three *aṣ̌əm vohū* are recited, whereas in the equivalent passage in the Visperad ceremony, ten *ahuna vairiia* and ten *aṣ̌əm vohū* are recited.

As shown in the figure below, Er. Nozer has underlined the numeral 10 on both occasions and also made the following entry in Gujarati to highlight this difference: *yād rākhvuṃ ijaśne hā 60 – yathā-4 aṣem-3 āve* 'to remember in Yasna hā 60 – it is yaϑā (ahū vairiiō)-4 aṣ̌əm (vohū)-3'.
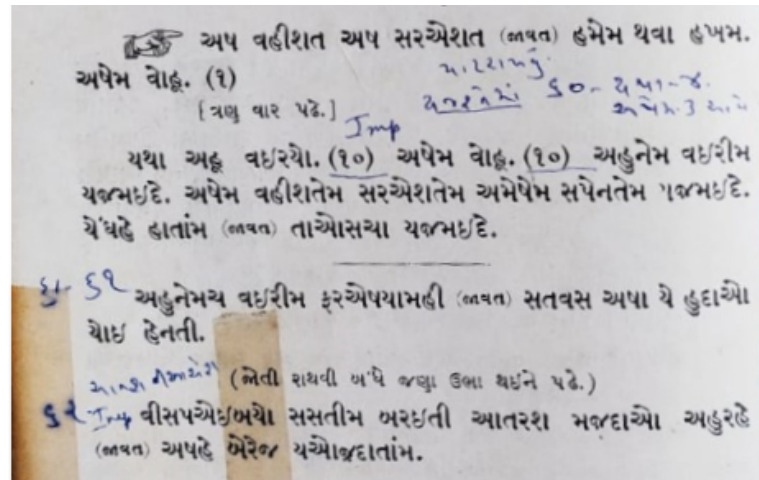
Table 49: Written note on the differences between ceremonies

▪ Marking of pivot words in difficult passages

The Yasna chapters 9 and 10, which form the Hom Yašt are generally considered difficult to memorise. There are certain stanzas, which have a set of repeated words which act as a pivot and only the variable words need to be memorised.

For example, in Y 9.19–21, the words *iməm. ϑβąm.* (Avestan number). *yānəm. haoma. jaiδiiemi. dūraoṣa …* are repeated six times in sequence. The student would need to remember the next

variable words which follows this line. These words have been underlined in red by Er. Nozer to emphasise their importance while memorising.
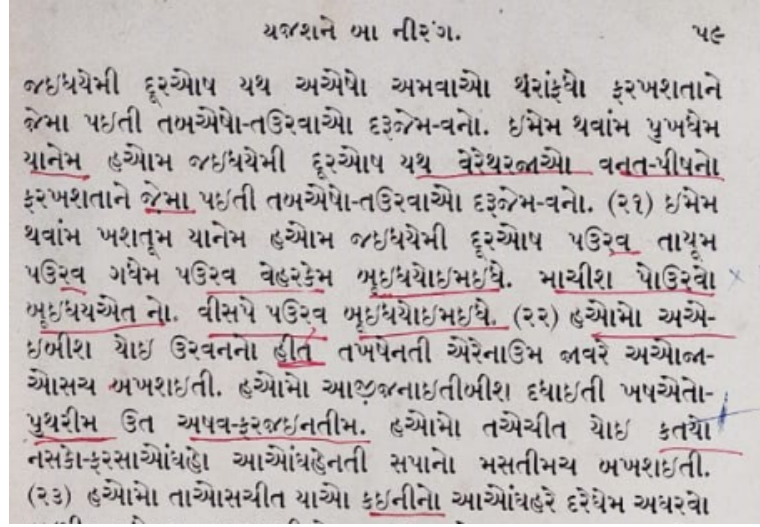
Figure 55: Highlighting of pivotal words in a key passage Y 9.19–22

- Marking of mistake prone passages

Some passages which were repeatedly forgotten or prone to errors were underlined and marked by Er. Nozer with the acronym R.M. standing for 'Repeated Mistake'. Rooyintan was made revise these sections over and over again until he was able to recite it fluently without errors.
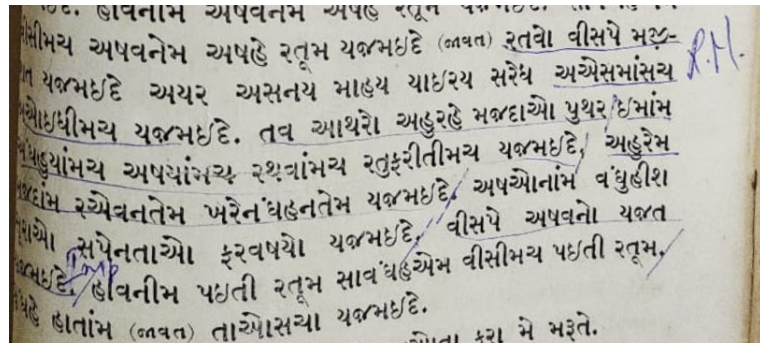
Figure 56: Marking of repeatedly erred passage with R.M. (VrS 35.27)

- Use of counting as a memory aid

Certain passages are suited to be broken logically into parts which can be numbered and memorised sequentially. In the below example belonging to the Visperad (VrS 43.1–2), the alternate lines to be recited by the assistant priest and the chief priest were numbered from 1 to 6 by Er. Nozer and taught to Rooyintan. While testing this, Er. Nozer would say the number and Rooyintan was expected to recite the appropriate line.
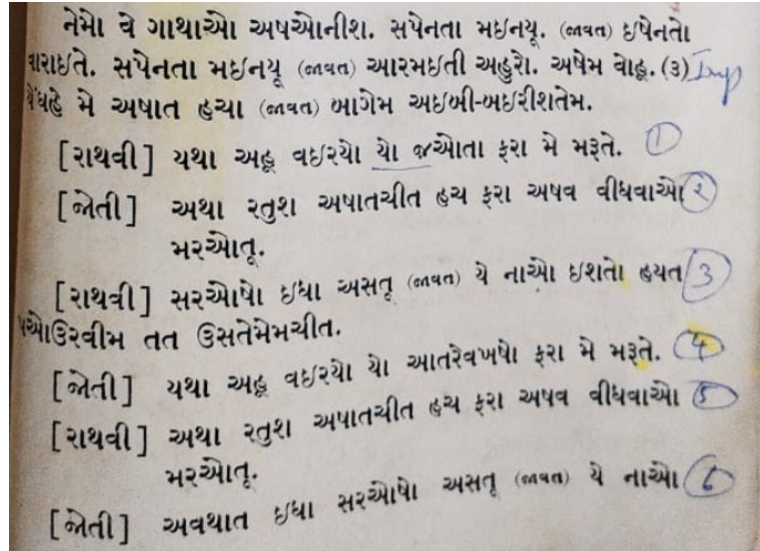
Figure 57: Numbering of lines as an aid for memorisation (VrS 43.1–2)

Thus, while Rooyintan did not access the book himself to learn the text since he was taught orally, the markings served Er. Nozer as memory markers while imparting the training in an efficient manner.

Ritual training

Er. Nozer described the ritual training imparted by him to Rooyintan, which was commenced once Rooyintan had finished certain chunks of the Yasna text. After memorisation of Yasna chapters 1–8 was completed, he was taken to the Dar-i Mihr of the H. B. Wadia Ātaš Bahrām on weekend mornings and taught the accompanying ritual actions within an unused pāvī. Rooyintan would be made to sit on the *idhorā*, i.e., the stone seat and had to perform the ritual actions along with the recitation of the text. Once he had completed memorising the entire Yasna, the ritual practice would be split over 2–3 sessions, the first covering chapters 1–27, then the central portion from chapters 28–54, and then finally for chapters 55–72. Similarly, he was made to practise the rituals actions within the Visperad. For the Vidēvdād, Rooyintan was made to practice reciting the text for long durations while remaining seated on the *idhorā*, and over time develop control over bodily requirements of thirst and relieving oneself, which is essential during the all-night performance of the Vidēvdād ceremony.

Revision and Practice

Rooyintan was enrolled as a resident student at the MFCAI after the completion of his Marātab in 2012. Since he had already completed the entire priestly curriculum, he only focused his attention during his stay there on academic studies. In order to keep refreshing the memorised texts, Rooyintan would return home every weekend and revise with his father. Er. Nozer who was a full-time priest at the H. B. Wadia Ātaš Bahrām up to 2017, would arrange for a Yasna and occasionally a Vidēvdād ceremony for his clients to be performed there on Saturday. Prior to the Yasna, both priests needed to complete the *pānč tāy bāj* (the Bāj with five wires) in order to obtain the ritual power (*nāni* 'small' *khub*) to perform the Yasna. Then the entire Yasna was performed by Rooyintan officiating as the chief priest with Er. Nozer overseeing and guiding him as the assistant priest. Thus, the entire Yasna text and the accompanying ritual was refreshed during the performance. On weekends when there was

no ritual commissioned, Er. Nozer would make Rooyintan recite all the *Karde* of the Visperad, and make him read the *fragards* of the Vidēvdād, thus keeping the text current in the mind.

In 2017, the Mehenty family relocated from Mumbai to Deolali, a small town in Maharashtra, and Er. Nozer took up the role of a Panthaki at the Chinoy Agiary there. Deolali and the adjoining Nasik city has a small Parsi population of about 300. Since there are hardly any inner rituals commissioned by the local community, Er. Nozer accepts requests for a Yasna ceremony from his contacts in Mumbai, which are performed roughly once a month by Rooyintan and him there in Deolali. In addition, there is an occasional request for a Vendidād Sāde, a ceremony in which the entire Vidēvdād is recited without the accompanying ritual. Similar to Mumbai, on weekends when there are no rituals commissioned, the father-son duo revises the entire texts of the Visperad and the Vidēvdād by going over the important parts.

In October 2020, Rooyintan informed that he was studying in the 12th standard in junior college at Deolali and assisted his father in the day-to-day activities at the fire-temple as the assistant Panthaki. He utilises the summer vacation in May and the Diwali break during October–November to travel to Surat and perform Nīrangdīn ceremonies at the Modi Ātaš Bahrām. Rooyintan mentioned that he has also started pursuing the certificate course in Avesta-Pahlavi which is conducted under the auspices of the Sir J J Zarthosti and Mulla Feroza Madressas, under the guidance of the Principal Er. Parvez Bajan.[254]

Case Study 2: Er. Tehmton Sidhwa and son Zal[255]

Background

Er. Tehmton is a priest of the Sanjāna *tolā* and belonging to one of the nine priestly families who serve the Iranshah Ataš Behrām at Udvada. Er. Tehmton completed his priestly training under a senior priest during the 1980s, and he trained his son for the Nāvar and Marātab initiations at home. Er. Tehmton is a fully trained priest capable of performing the inner rituals like the Yasna and Vidēvdād, and has trained his son as a *sampūrna* Mobed too.

Training of Er. Tehmton Sidhwa under Er. Panthaki

Er. Tehmton's Navjote was performed in 1980, and he had his Nāvar initiation in 1982, followed by the Marātab initiation in 1984. He did his initial bhantar training for the Navjote at home in Dadar, and then the Nāvar-Marātab training under Er. Burjore Panthaki, who was a long-term bhantar teacher at the DAI during the 1976–1997 period.[256]

Er. Tehmton used to go to Er. Burjore's house on all weekdays from 6 PM to 7 PM for bhantar study. For the Nāvar initiation, Er. Tehmton had left out the long and difficult chapters for memorisation,

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[254] The Mulla Firoze Madressa (established in 1854) and the J. J. Zarthosti Madressa (established in 1863) has been subsequently merged into a single entity (see section 3.1.4). Classes are conducted on weekends at the J. J. School at Fort in Mumbai. However due to the Covid-19 lockdown, all classes were being offered online from June 2020 onward.
[255] Based on multiple interviews with Er. Tehmton Sidhwa (#39).
[256] Karanjia (2019b, p. 140).

including all the Gāthās, however he completed memorising the entire Yasna and Visperad text for his Marātab initiation.

Initiation	Year	Memorised texts	Training location
Navjote	1980	Kusti prayers, Sroš Bāj, Hošbām, 5 Gāhs, 5 Nyāišes, Patet Pašemāni, Sroš Yašt Vadi (Y 57)	At home with father and mother
Nāvar	1982	Yasna excluding chapters 9–10, 19, 28–53, 68, 71; Few sections of the Visperad	At Er. Burjore Panthaki's home
Marātab	1984	All chapters of the Yasna and all sections of the Visperad; reading of the Vidēvdād in Gujarati script.	At Er. Burjore Panthaki's home
Sāmel[257]	1986	Ritual performance in the Sanjānā tradition	In Udvada under senior priests Er. Firoze Makujina and Er. Kekobad Mogal

Table 50: Er. Tehmton's training stages

Er. Tehmton was also taught the ritual intricacies by Er. Minoo Bhadha who made him note down the details of the ritual actions in the Sanjānā tradition, especially when it was at variance with the mainstream practice of the Bhagariā Panthak. Also, unlike the Bhagariā ritual, which is well-documented in several publications, there is no book on the ritual actions of the Yasna as per the Sanjānā tradition.[258]

Training of Zal under father Er. Tehmton Sidhwa

Zal received his entire bhantar training at home from his father Er. Tehmton, starting from the Navjote readiness all the way up to the completion of the Marātab. Given below is a detailed description of various aspects of this training at home, and a comparison is drawn with the training at the Athornan Institutes.

Training time

The training session was typically conducted in the evenings on weekdays after Zal's school and after Er. Tehmton returned from work, and for additional hours on the weekends. Unlike at the Athornan Institutes where the bhantar schedule is more rigid, here the training time was flexible and was adjusted as per the workload from school, but the target was to complete at least one stanza on average every day. For example, memorisation was skipped during school exam days, but during the school break, an additional portion was covered to catch up. Further Er. Tehmton made Zal revise the prayers whenever there was a small window of time available during the day; for example, on the

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[257] Sāmel (Guj. 'induction') is an advanced qualification beyond the Marātab unique to the Sanjānā Panthak, in which traditionally the candidate was tested by an assembly of senior priests on various aspects of the recitation and ritual required to be performed for the Nāvar and Marātab initiations, and to gauge his readiness to perform as a Mobed at the Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām in Udvada.
[258] The book *Pāv mahelni kriyāo teni khūbīo sāthe* [Ceremonies of the Pāv Mahel with their Merits] (Unwala, 1922) provides the details of the performance of the various Bāj and the Paragnā in the Sanjānā tradition, however it does not provide the ritual directions of the Yasna and Visperad ceremonies.

scooter ride when Er. Tehmton dropped Zal to school in the morning, he would make Zal recite the stanza learnt the previous evening. According to Er. Tehmton, this short bursts of revision during the day were very effective as they aided a better recall of the text, and saved considerable revision time during the actual bhantar study session thereby expediting the memorisation process.

Initiation	Year	Age	Memorised texts	Training location
Navjote	2013	7	Kusti prayers, Sroš Bāj, Hošbām, 5 Gāhs, 5 Nyāišes, Patet Pašemāni, Sroš Yašt Vadi (Y 57); Started Yasna study	At home with father
Nāvar	2015	9	Complete Yasna, Visperad, Bāj Dharnā	At home
Marātab	2016	10	Fluent reading of the Vidēvdād	At home
Sāmel	2017	11	All above texts & Sanjānā ritual practice	At home / Udvada

Table 51: Zal's training stages

There are some important aspects of the training at home which emerged from the study. One of the key differences between Er. Tehmton's and Zal's bhantar study was the parents' motivation. While Er. Tehmton's parents were happy to just have him complete the Nāvar, in the case of Zal, Er. Tehmton was focused on having him initiated as a fully-trained priest. Zal's training was started at an early age since they had determined upfront that the entire curriculum needed to be completed before Zal reached a higher standard at school (5th –6th) when the academic workload would be heavier.

According to Er. Tehmton, memorisation capability is less dependent on the inherent grasping power of the student, and more on applying the mind to the process. This was substantiated by stating that often students are not able to memorise the assigned text initially, but after being reprimanded, they are able to commit it to memory. He says Zal has less trouble recalling the memorised text, but typically needs to be prompted at the end of a section or chapter which has a common concluding passage, such as *aṣəm vohū*-3. Another identified problem area was the changeover between the Visperad *Karde* and Yasna *hā*, where he would sometimes need a cue. In terms of the most difficult parts of the Yasna memorisation, Er. Tehmton said that Zal found the second Gāthā (Y 43–46) and the penultimate chapter Y 71 as the hardest to recall and prone to mistakes.

Er. Tehmton stated that the lack of a peer group worked to Zal's advantage as he did not get negatively influenced by others perception on the difficulty of certain chapters, and approached each part with a fresh mind without having any preconceived notions about the text. This was especially true while memorising the Gāthās which are perceived to be more difficult, but Zal was made to treat these as equivalent to any other chapter of the Yasna. When asked what was the main difference between the training he had received as a child, and that imparted by him to his son, Er. Tehmton said that he proactively identified and highlighted all the potential problem areas while teaching Zal, something that he was not taught explicitly and had learnt the hard way after expending much time and effort.

The expression *āaṱ aoxta zaraθuštrō nəmō haomāi* appears four times in Y 9–11, each time followed by a different set of words. This is a potential trap and often students, if not careful, end up in a different stanza without realising their mistake.

Y 9.3   *āaṱ. aoxta. zaraθuštrō. nəmō. haomāi.*
            <u>*kasə. θβąm.*</u> *paoiriiō. haoma. mašiiō. …*

Y 9.16   *āaṱ. aoxta. zaraθuštrō. nəmō. haomāi.*
            <u>*vaŋhuš. haomō.*</u> <u>*huδātō.*</u> *haomō. …*

Y 10.17 *āaṱ. aoxta. zaraθuštrō. nəmō. haomāi.* <u>*mazdaδātāi.*</u>
            vaŋhuš. haomō. <u>*mazdaδātō.*</u> *nəmō. haomāi.   *<u>*vīspe. haoma.*</u> *upastaomi.*

Y 11.8   *āaṱ. aoxta. zaraθuštrō. nəmō. haomāi.* <u>*mazdaδātāi.*</u>
            vaŋhuš. haomō. <u>*mazdaδātō*</u>*. nəmō. haomāi.*

In the above example, the important words for Y 9.3 are *kasə θβąm* to differentiate it from the other three occurrences. For Y 9.16, it is *vaŋhuš haomō*, and then also *huδātō* to avoid confusion with Y 10.17 and Y 11.8, which have *mazdaδātō* instead. Further in Y 10.17, *vīspe haoma* continues the stanza, whereas Y 11.8 terminates with *nəmō. haomāi*. When teaching the above stanzas, these specific instances were highlighted and Zal was made to take cognizance of the potential to go off track.

The term used among a section of the priesthood for such areas of possible confusion is *khāngā visā*, which is derived from the Middle Gujarati terms *khāṇguṃ* 'crooked, lateral, indirect, oblique' and *viśā* 'part, section', together meaning a 'lateral or oblique part' of the text.[259]

Use of actions for Khorde Avesta training

Zal was around five years old when Er. Tehmton started his training on the Khorde Avesta. At that age, Er. Tehmton would use gestures and actions to aid Zal in memorising certain passages. An example given by Er. Tehmton of such usage of actions is the stanza from the Aiwisrūϑrim Gāh which mentions the three Avestan professional classes of *āθrauuan-* 'priest', *raθaēštār-* 'warrior' and *vāstriia- fšuiiaṇt-* 'agriculturalist'.

G 4.7   <u>*āθrauuanəm*</u> *ašauuanəm ašahe ratūm yazamaide*
         <u>*raθaēštārəm*</u> *ašauuanəm ašahe ratūm yazamaide*
         <u>*vāstrīm.fšuiiaṇtəm*</u> *ašauuanəm ašahe ratūm yazamaide …*

To serve as a mnemonic, the two hands were joined together in a praying gesture at *āθrauuanəm*, the right hand was swung in a striking action at *raθaēštārəm*, and both hands were raised in a ploughing

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[259] Kothari (1995, pp. 134, 472).

gesture at *vāstrīm. fṣuiiaṇtəm*. These token actions were proven to be effective in easily recalling the accompanying text, as well as breaking the monotony of the recitation.

Figure 58: Er. Tehmton demonstrating the use of gestures to aid in memorisation[260]

Use of counting on fingers to aid recall

Er. Tehmton highlighted the tried and tested technique among the traditional priests of using their fingers to keep a count of the verses and verse-lines. This is especially useful for the metrical texts of the Gāthās which have a known number of verses or stanzas per chapter and a fixed number of verse-lines per stanza.

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[260] Demonstrated by Er. Tehmton during interview with this author conducted at the DAI in December 2017.

Gāthā	Yasna *hā*	Verses/stanzas per *hā*	Number of verse-lines per stanza
1	28	11	3
	29	11	
	30	11	
	31	22	
	32	16	
	33	14	
	34	15	
2	43	16	5
	44	20	
	45	11	
	46	19	
3	47	6	4
	48	12	
	49	12	
	50	11	
4	51	22	3
5	53	9	4

Table 52: Number of stanzas per chapter and verse-lines per stanza for the Gāthās

The usual practice was to keep a count of the stanzas within a chapter using the left hand, and a count of the verse-lines within that stanza on the right hand while reciting the text of the Gāthās. For a left-handed person this would be the reverse. This technique, according to Er. Tehmton, was very useful to know whether one's recitation was on track, since if a line or stanza was inadvertently skipped, the reciter would become aware of it immediately.[261]
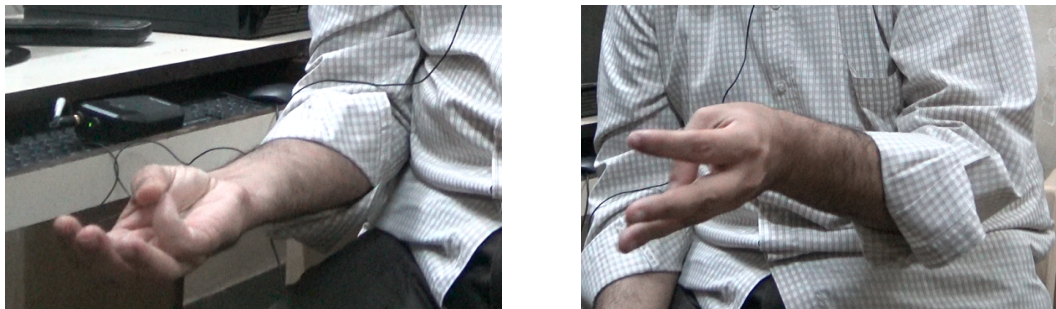
Figure 59: Er. Tehmton counting verses on the left hand and lines on the right hand

In order to count, the phalanges of each finger are utilised. The counting on either hand starts with the little finger, and proceeds towards the thumb via the ring finger, middle finger and index finger. Each finger has two joints dividing it into three segments which, starting from the base of the finger

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[261] Counting on fingers of both hands while memorising a text is also observed in the Vedic tradition. Scharfe (2002, p. 241) mentions that the students memorising the Ṛgveda in Thichur, Kerala count the *varga*s (sub-division of a lesson into groups of around five stanzas) with the fingers of the left hand and the half-stanzas (*ardharca*) with the fingers of the right hand.

and going towards the tip, are the proximal phalanx, middle or intermediate phalanx, and the distal phalanx. These three segments are used to count upto three and then the tip of the finger is the fourth count; then the counting continues at the base of the next finger, and so on. Thus a total count upto twenty is possible utilising all five fingers on one hand. While counting on the fingers, the tip of the thumb is used as a pointer, and while counting on the thumb, the tip of the index finger is utilised.
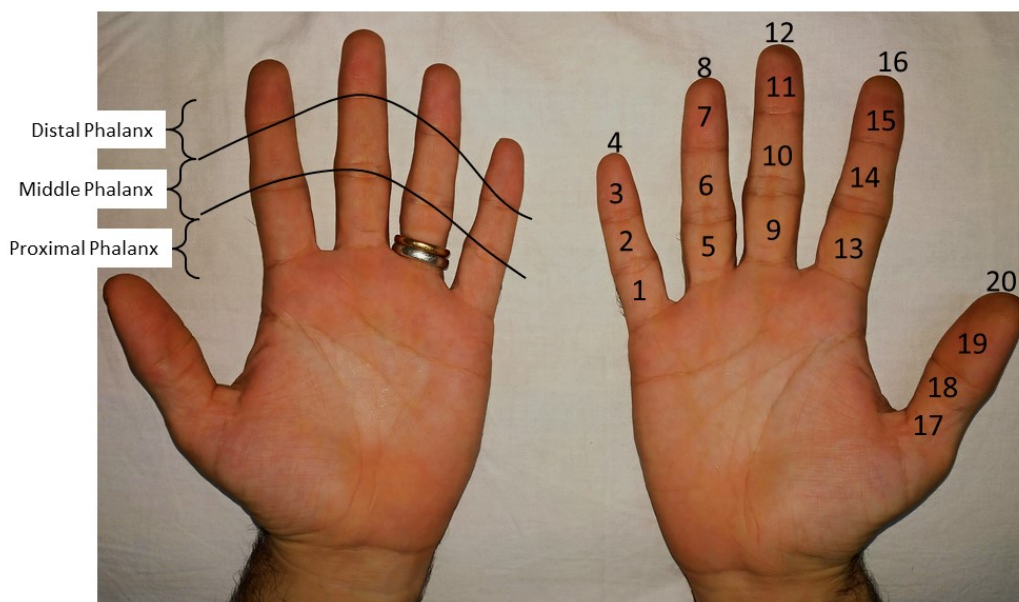
Figure 60: Use of the phalanges of the fingers to keep count during recitation

Example of counting position at the start and end of Yasna 28, which has a total of eleven stanzas, and each stanza has three verse-lines:

Verseline	Avestan text recited	Left thumb tip position	Right thumb tip position
Y 28.1a	*ahiiā yāsā nəmaŋhā ustānazastō rafəδrahiiā*	1	1
Y 28.1b	*maniiāuš mazdā pouruuīm spəṇtahiiā aṣā vīspāṇg šiiaoθanā*	1	2
Y 28.1c	*vaŋhāuš xratūm manaŋhō yā xšnəuuīšā gāušcā uruuānəm*	1	3
Y 28.2a	*yā vå mazdā ahurā pairī.jasāi vohū manaŋhā*	2	1
…	…	…	…
Y 28.11b	*tuuәm mazdā ahurā frō.mā sīšā θβahmāṯ vaocaŋhē*	11	2
Y 28.11c	*maniiāuš hacā. θβā. әәåŋhā yāiš ā aŋhuš pouruiiō bauuaṯ*	11	3

Table 53: Use of counting positions during Y 28

This counting technique, using both hands, is utilised more at the time of learning and then at the time of revising the Gāthā chapters, but seldomly used within a ritual since the fingers of the left hand are almost always resting on the *barsam* bundle, and hence unavailable for counting. This act of counting has become so synonymous with practising the recitation, that the Gujarati term *ganvuṃ* 'to count' is

used to describe the process of revising the text. So, for instance, a young priest would be told *ganiyā kar* 'keep counting' implying that he should keep revising the text.

While this two-handed counting technique is unique to the metrical texts of the Gāthās, counting on a single hand is a very frequent action even within the actual ritual performance. Most notably, it is used to count multiple recitations of the *ahuna vairiia* and *ašǝm vohū* prayers. Counting is also performed where the text contains lists of numbered or unnumbered items , as shown in the examples below:

Example 1: Yt 1.7 containing a numbered list of names of Ahura Mazdā:[262]

āaṯ mraoṯ ahurō mazdå	Thus said Ahura Mazdā: 'O pious Zaraϑuštra
fraxštiia nąma ahmi ašāum zaraθuštra	I am by name 'He who is to be implored',
bitiiō vąθβiiō	second, 'Shepherd',
θritiiō auua.tanuiiō	third, 'Able',
tūiriia aša vahišta	fourth, '(O) Best Truth'
puxδa vīspa vohu mazdaδāta ašaciθra	fifth, '(O you who are) Every good thing created by Mazdā having its seed in Truth',
…	…
vīsąstǝmō ahmi yaṯ ahmi mazdå nąma	twentieth I am, I am that (who is) 'Mazdā' by name.

Example 2: Ny 2.11 containing an unnumbered list of seven places where Mithra is worshipped:

> …
> *miθrǝm aiβi.dax́iiūm   yazamaide*
> *miθrǝm aṇtarǝ.dax́iiūm yazamaide*
> *miθrǝm ādax́iiūm   yazamaide*
> *miθrǝm upairi.dax́iiūm yazamaide*
> *miθrǝm aδairi.dax́iiūm yazamaide*
> *miθrǝm pairi.dax́iiūm   yazamaide*
> *miθrǝm aipi.dax́iiūm   yazamaide*

Vidēvdād Training

Er. Tehmton trained Zal to fluently read the Vidēvdād text in his Marātab initiation. The *Vaṃdīdād bā Nīraṃg*[263] by Ervad N. K. Bhesania which has the Avestan text written in Gujarati script was employed for the training of the Vidēvdād. Zal was made to read one stanza at a time until he was able to recite it fluently, and then proceed to the next stanza. Every day he was made to read from the beginning of the chapter (*fragard*) up to the studied stanza. Once the chapter was completed, a time benchmark was given within which the chapter needed to be read. For instance, a threshold recitation time of three minutes maximum was set for the first chapter of the Vidēvdād, and Zal needed to practise reading it repeatedly until he could recite it within the threshold time. This reading speed when

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[262] Translation from Panaino (2002, pp. 25-26).
[263] Bhesania (1943). A description of the book appears in Redard & Daruwalla (2021, S. 7).

maintained for the other chapters would ensure that the entire text could be completed within the time allocated for the Vidēvdād ceremony, which starts typically at 1 AM. and has to finish before dawn by 5.30–6 AM. This is especially important when the Vidēvdād is being performed as part of the Nīrangdīn ceremony. Due to the additional ritual actions related to the consecration of the Nīrang, the ceremony is completed by around 8 AM if the Vidēvdād is read at a good pace. However, as sometimes seen in the case of novice priests, when the pace is off, the ceremony goes well beyond the stipulated time and ends after 9 AM.

At the Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām in Udvada, where Zal's Marātab initiation was performed, no electricity is used on the premises and all the lighting is provided by oil lamps. Thus, during the performance of the Vidēvdād ritual on the last day of the Marātab, the text is required to be read only in the light of an oil lamp. In order to prepare for this, Er. Tehmton made Zal to practise reading the Vidēvdād in the dim light of the oil lamp on a few nights during Zal's Barašnum preceding the main Marātab ceremony. In this way he became accustomed to reading the text in the dark.

The above case study of Zal's training at home highlights substantial difference with the typical training imparted to a student at the Athornan Institute. The key observations are tabulated below.

Criteria	Zal's training	Athornan Institute student
Age at start of training	5 years	7-8 years
Marātab completion age	10 years	13–14 years
Daily bhantar timetable	Flexible based on school workload	Fixed daily times dedicated to bhantar study
Training during vacation	Increased time dedicated to bhantar study	Limited training at home, dependent on parents' motivation
Peer group influence	No peer group hence little outside influence on the learning process	Senior students have major influence, plus there exists a competitive spirit among the batchmates
Individual attention	100% of the time since it was a one-to-one training	Teacher has roughly 8–10 students mapped; hence individual attention is for ca. 10% of the bhantar class

Table 54: Structure of training at the DAI

In this sub-section, two case studies of comprehensively trained candidates have been presented. In both these cases, which are rare exceptions to the typical training imparted outside the Athornan Institutes, the students not only completed their entire curriculum with a high level of proficiency but also did it at a very fast pace. The most important success factor was the focused and strictly regimented approach adopted by their fathers to fulfil their goal of creating a fully-trained priest.

In the subsequent part of this section, case studies of priests who have undergone the initiation with partial training are presented. A differentiation is drawn between the students who have spent at least a full year on training (Advanced) and those who have undergone only very rudimentary training (Basic).

8.2.2 Advanced Training

Most priests who choose not to send their sons to the Athornan Institutes, generally impart some training to them at home. The initial training is memorising the *kusti* prayers from the Khorde Avesta for the Navjote ceremony. Usually, the training continues beyond the Navjote and the important prayers for daily recitation like the Sroš Bāj, Hošbam, five Gāhs and five Nyāišes are learnt. Beyond that some parents continue the training up to the Nāvar initiation either themselves or by another priest, wherein a few chapters of the Yasna are taught either to be memorised or read fluently.

In this section, the following three case studies are presented to illustrate the variations in this type of training:

> Case Study 3. Training by visiting priest at the home of the candidate in Mumbai
> Case Study 4. Training imparted by a priest at an Agiary in Mumbai
> Case Study 5. Training by a priest at his own home to a candidate in Canada

Case Study 3: Training by visiting priest Er. Gustasp Vimadalal at the home of candidate Jehan Dastoor in Mumbai (2019-2020)

Background

Jehan (Age 9.5 years, studying in the 4th Standard) is the son of Dinshaw Hoshang Dastoor, who has completed the Nāvar initiation but has never practised as a priest. Dinshaw wants his son Jehan to undergo the Nāvar initiation journey as a spiritually uplifting experience, and not necessarily for becoming a practising priest.

Jehan was initially trained in the basic Khorde Avesta prayers at home by his father, Er. Dinshaw. He was then being trained by Er. Gustasp Vimadalal, who is a former student of the DAI and is presently the Panthaki at the Narielwala Agiary in Dadar, Mumbai. Er. Gustasp's son is a current student at the DAI.

The Nāvar training commenced in June 2019, and it is conducted at Jehan's home at the Five Gardens area in Dadar, where Er. Gustasp visits. For the first five months (June–October 2019), the classes were conducted biweekly, and roughly once a week from November 2019 onwards.[264] Each teaching session is for a one-hour duration.

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[264] The classes were ongoing up to March 2020, when they were suspended due to the lockdown imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 61: Jehan Dastoor practising under the guidance of father, Er. Dinshaw

Training goals

The target according to Er. Gustasp is to make Jehan memorize the initial part of the Yasna, starting from the Dibāčo (Y 0) up to Y 2.1. This is the portion of the Yasna text which is required to be recited while standing on the seat during the Nāvar ceremony. After Y 2.1, the candidate sits down and can start reading from a book. Similarly, the final portion of the last chapter (Y 72), which is recited at the well, is also to be memorised. The remaining chapters of the Yasna are recited by the initiate together with the priest ordaining him, and who acts as a secondary Zot (chief priest) during the ceremony.

The textbook used for imparting the training is the book *Concise Yasna* by Rustomji Panthaki, which contains the Avestan recitation text and ritual directions in the Roman script.[265] The book does not include the complete Yasna, but only the chapters containing key ritual actions. These include the introduction (Y 0) and Yasna chapters 1–8, 11, 15, 16, 22–27, 62, 65, 66, 71 and 72. The scope of the Nāvar training is to be able to fluently read all chapters from the book; the remaining chapters of the Yasna absent from the book are not covered. Prior to starting the Yasna training, reading fluency is also required for the essential prayers from the Khorde Avesta. The standard book used for the study of the Khorde Avesta is printed by the Union Press with the recitation text in Roman script.[266] Er. Gustasp had expected the above curriculum to be completed by May 2020, i.e., within one complete year, since it would take much lesser time for achieving reading fluency than for memorization. However, due to the ensuing Covid-19 lockdown, the classes had been suspended from March 2020.[267]

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[265] Panthaki (1991). A detailed description of the book is provided in Redard & Daruwalla (2021, p. 8).
[266] Khordeh Avesta in Roman Script (2007).
[267] In January 2021, Er. Gustasp mentioned that they had resumed the class and Jehan's Nāvar was scheduled for May 2021.

An observation was made for one complete training session conducted on 23rd January 2020, and its description and findings are noted below. Starting in June 2019, the aggregate teaching time up to this session had been 45–50 hours.

<u>Description of training session held on 23-1-2020 (5.15 PM to 6.20 PM)</u>

Er. Gustasp arrived at the Dastoors' residence and sat at one end of the dining table and Jehan sat to his right. Er. Gustasp was dressed in non-priestly attire with white priestly cap, while Jehan was in regular house wear (shorts, t-shirt) with red prayer cap.

The curriculum that had been completed up to that session was the fluent reading of the Sroš Bāj, five Gāhs, Xvaršed and Meher Nyāišes plus the short prayers, and memorization was completed for the Dibāčo (Y 0 comprising 14 stanzas) and Y 1.1–15

The first five lines (a–e) of stanza Y 1.16 were memorised in the last class and were revised in this class, and the remaining five lines (f–j) were taken up for memorisation in that class:

Y 1.16   a: *niuuaēδaiiemi haṇkāraiiemi*
          b: *å̇ŋhąm asaŋhąmca šōiθranąmca gaoiiaoitinąmca maēθananąmca auuō.xvarǝnanąmca*
          c: *apąmca zǝmąmca uruuaranąmca*
          d: *aiṇ́hå̇sca zǝmō*
          e: *auuaiṇ́heca ašnō*
          f: *vātaheca ašaonō*
          g: *strąm må̇ŋhō hūrō anaɣranąm raocaŋhąm xvaδātanąm*
          h: *vīspanąmca spąṇtahe mainiiə̄uš dāmanąm*
          i: *ašaonąm ašaoninąmca*
          j: *ašahe raθβąm*

The approximately one-hour long class proceeded as follows:

Minutes	Activity
00–15	Fast, fluent reading of previously memorised part (Y 0 to Y 1.1–15)
15–35	Y 1.16a–e revision and re-memorization (studied in last session)
35–45	Y 1.16f–g committed to memory
45–55	Y 1.16h–j committed to memory, and then verses f–j together
55–65	Y 1.16 complete (verses a–j) recitation

Table 55: Structure of a training session at the DAI

<u>Observations</u>

There are similarities between the training methodology at the Athornan Institutes and the training at home. The core teaching method is the same; first reading a new stanza carefully and repeating it loudly after the teacher for about 10–15 times, initially at a slower pace and following the printed text with the finger, then reciting it from the textbook for another 15–20 times, and finally reciting it without the aid of the textbook. The text is first broken into small sections (half-lines, quarter-lines) and committed to memory, and then linked together to memorise the larger portions. The focus was on reciting loudly and maintaining a steady pace.

The text which is frequently erred or forgotten is underlined in the textbook. One line which was often forgotten by Jehan and required a lot of class time, was given for the first time as a written assignment at home – however this writing task is novel and has not been observed at the Athornan Institutes.

However, there are also some significant differences at home compared to the Athornan Institute training. The teaching setup at home is less formal with both teacher and student seated at a table, as opposed to the classroom setup at the Athornan Institutes. The primary difference is in the time dedicated to bhantar study at home (1–2 hours/week), which is only about one-tenth of that at the institutes (15–20 hours/week). Other differences include the forms of punishment and the impact of having a peer group. These differences are summarised in the table below.

#	Criteria	Training at home	Training at the Athornan Institutes
1	Setup	Both the teacher and the student were seated at the table	The student stands when he approaches the teacher's desk.
2	Individual attention by teacher	The entire one hour, i.e., 100% of the class time is dedicated to one student.	Roughly 10% of the time, or 5 minutes on average per student is dedicated in each bhantar session.
3	Total learning time per week	1–2 hours	15–20 hours
4	Learning expectation	There is little or no expectation of learning and revising outside of teaching session.	The student is expected to complete memorising his assigned text either within or outside class.
5	Forms of punishment	It is fairly limited, viz. reprimanding in a loud voice, made to stand and recite for some time, slap on the arm when mistake made while reading from book, etc.	Punishment was more stringent in the past, but even today the student is made to stand for the entire class, or assigned to 'task class' where he forfeits his play/leisure time for bhantar study.
6	Learning from peers	It is absent since there is only one student.	Learning from seniors/peers, and the sense of competition are important factors motivating the students.

Table 56: Differences between training at home and at the Athornan Institutes

Though the direct face-to-face contact time between teacher and student in both cases is similar (1–2 hours per week), the total class time spent on memorization is about 7–10 times higher at the Athornan Institutes (15–20 hours per week).

One further limitation at home is the lack of continuity due to the relatively large gap between classes (4–7 days). Due to this, nearly half the class time is consumed in recalling memorized text from the last class. There is much better continuity at the Athornan Institutes where the text learnt in the morning session is revised in the afternoon class.

Teaching philosophy of Er. Gustasp

Er. Gustasp stressed on certain aspects of the recitation which can be gauged by the instructions given by him to Jehan. Below is a sample of his statements during the training session:

- 'Pray loudly and in rhythm'
- 'Pray smoothly like the flow of water' (i.e., without pausing to recall text)
- 'Bring out the energy and maintain that level (of loudness)'
- 'Pray as loudly as possible so that it can be heard by your mother in the kitchen'

According to Er. Gustasp, if a student is enthusiastic and interested in learning, the job is much easier; however, in most cases there is a resistance to learning, and it becomes very difficult.[268] Further he also stated that if a student is ready, he should undergo the Nāvar initiation then instead of waiting another year, as the learnt text is forgotten quickly unless one is in continuous touch with it.

Case Study 4: Training imparted to Arish Pundole by a priest Dastur Keki Ravji at the Cama Baug Agiary in Mumbai[269]

Background

Arish Yazdi Pundole (b. June 2000) hails from a priestly background but both his father and paternal grandfather had not undergone the priestly initiation. Hence his father was keen on his completing the Nāvar initiation in order to retain the priestly lineage in the family. Arish underwent the Nāvar initiation in May 2008 and the Marātab initiation in May 2009 at the Cama Baug Agiary in Mumbai.

Training for Nāvar and Marātab

Arish learnt the basic prayers at home and had the Navjote ceremony in January 2007 before the age of seven. Then he started going to Cama Baug Agiary in preparation for his Nāvar, where he was trained by Dastur Keki Ravji, the Panthaki of the Agiary and his wife, Roshan, who taught him the basic Khorde Avesta prayers. Arish would visit the Agiary for training on all weekday evenings from 4 PM to 5 PM.

Out of the sixteen months between the Navjote and the Nāvar, roughly half were dedicated to the prayers from the Khorde Avesta and the other half to the Yasna. The important prayers in the Khorde Avesta which were memorised included the five Gāhs, all the Nyāišes except the Āvan Nyāiš, Hošbām, Patet, Satūm Kardo and Sirozā Yašt. Then the Yasna training was commenced from the Concise Yasna book by Rustomji Panthaki.[270] In the nine months leading up to the Nāvar, the first eight chapters along with the introduction (Dibāčo) were memorised and fluency was attained in reading all the other chapters in the book. Arish's Nāvar ceremony was performed at the Cama Baug Agiary by Dastur Ravji in May 2008.

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[268] This factor also emerged in interviews with many priests. Priests like Rooyintan Peer, Keki Ravji, Ramiyar Karanjia, Cyrus Darbari, Varzavand Dadachanji who exceled in memorization as students were all self-driven and motivated to complete the curriculum.
[269] Based on multiple interviews and conversations with Dasturji Keki Ravji and Arish Pundole.
[270] Referred to in Case Study 3 above.

After completion of the Nāvar, the same training routine was continued for one more year in preparation for the Marātab. Around half the year was spent to improve proficiency in the Yasna ritual, and the remaining half year was spent in gaining some familiarity with the Vidēvdād text. After the completion of the Marātab initiation at the Cama Baug Agiary under Dastur Ravji in May 2009, Arish focused on his academic studies and lost touch with the prayers.

<u>Re-training as an apprentice priest</u>

After completing his high school in 2017, Arish joined again at the Cama Baug Agiary to serve as a part-time priest. In the ensuing break of close to eight years, he had almost completely lost touch with the prayers learnt during his initiation. Initially he was called for work only on a few days every month when he would mainly be required to perform the Satūm and the Āfrīnagān ritual. Over time, Arish has taken over more responsibility at the Agiary. He now works at the Agiary almost daily from 8 AM to 10 AM, and during the break from his Engineering College in 2020 due to Covid-19, he works full-time on certain days of the month and performs all the Bōy ceremonies. He is currently being trained by Dastur Ravji and his sons Hormaz and Farzad to perform the Bāj ritual.

Since Arish is not proficient with the Gujarati script, he refers to the Zoroastrian Ceremonial Prayers in Roman script[271] which includes the text for the various Āfrīnagāns and Āfrīns.
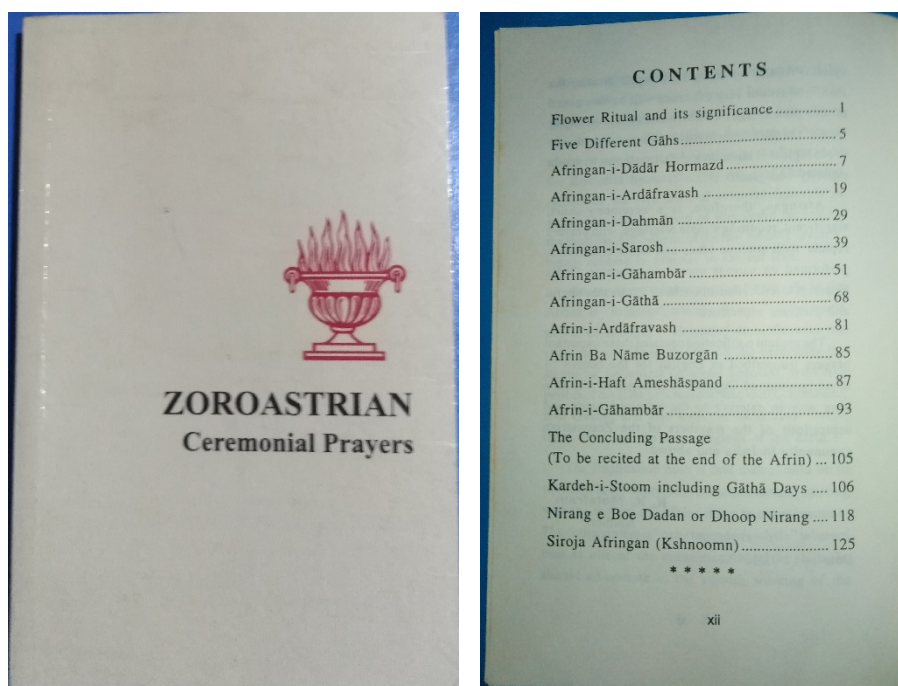
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Figure 62: Zoroastrian Ceremonial Prayers by E. R. Panthaki (1990) and the table of contents

The other commonly referred books by priests who do not read Gujarati include the Farokshi in Roman Script, and the Four-day Death Ceremonies of a Zoroastrian (including Geh Sarna), both published by the Athornan Mandal, and are available for sale at the DAI.

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[271] Panthaki (1990).

Figure 63: The prayer books in Roman script for the Faroxši and the Geh Sārnā ceremonies

Observations

Arish was trained for a relatively short period and underwent his Nāvar and Marātab initiations before his eighth and ninth birthdays, respectively. This initiation at a very young age is typical of an *adhuro* 'incomplete' Nāvar[272], compared to the *sampūrna* 'complete' Nāvar initiation typically between the ages of twelve to fourteen years. The goal of the *adhuro* Nāvar is to make the child undergo the initiation while he is still at a lower standard in school and the academic workload is still relatively light. Most priestly families see the act of initiating their son as fulfilling their priestly duties and giving an option to the child to serve as a priest in the future if he so desires.

Arish, like a majority of the part-time priests attached to any fire-temple, is mainly involved with the performance of outer rituals, and will likely never perform any of the more solemn inner rituals. This fact is borne in mind while training most of the priestly candidates outside of the Athornan Institutes. Hence a majority of the training time before the Nāvar is usually dedicated to the Khorde Avesta prayers which will be required for the outer rituals like the Ātaš Nyāiš for the Bōy ceremony, the Sroš Yašts (Hādoxt and Vadi) for the death ceremonies and the Āfrīnagān, Satūm and Patet for the daily commemorative ceremonies. In addition, the Yasna chapters 1–8 are taught as they incorporate the text required for the performance of the daily Bāj ceremony.

Case Study 5: Training imparted by Er. Jal Panthaky at his own home to Nekzad Illava in Canada[273]

Background

Er. Jal Panthaky, based in Mississauga, Canada, is the younger brother of the former long-term principal of the DAI, Er. Rustomji Panthaki. Er. Panthaky imparts prayer training at his home to candidates like Nekzad Aspi Illava who are preparing for the Navjote ceremony and the priestly

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[272] Discussed in section 4.3.3.
[273] Based on multiple email exchanges with Er. Jal Panthaky during 2019.

initiations of Nāvar and Marātab. Er. Panthaky started training Nekzad for his Navjote ceremony in 2011 and continued the training though his Nāvar initiation in 2015 and Marātab initiation in 2017. All the three ceremonies were performed at the Motlibai J. Wadia Agiary at Jogeshwari in Mumbai by Er. Keki Dosabhai Panthaki, a former bhantar teacher at the DAI during the 1997–2003 period.

Figure 64: Nekzad Illava during Nāvar with Er. Keki Panthaki and Er. Jal Panthaky[274]

Figure 65: Nekzad Illava during Marātab with training teacher Er. Jal Panthaky

Bhantar Training

Er. Panthaky trained Nekzad for two hours on every weekend at his own home. The Navjote training was during the years 2010–2011, the Nāvar training for about three years (2012–2015) and the Marātab training for a further two years (2015–2017). Thus, about six years of training was imparted, aggregating to about 500–600 hours of study time. The mode of teaching was by Er. Panthaky reciting the word first, and then Nekzad repeating it three times while looking at the word in the book in order

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[274] Photos shared by Er. Jal Panthaky.

to pronounce it correctly. Nekzad was expected to memorise the text during the session and then again revise it at home during the week. During the training sessions, Er. Panthaky conducted surprise tests on the previously memorized prayers. If some area was weak, Nekzad needed to memorize it again at home and was expected to recite it fluently without mistakes in the next session.

The bhantar curriculum covered during the training is tabulated below.

Curriculum	Khorde Avesta	Yasna
Memorised	Kusti prayers and 101 names Sroš Bāj Hāvan gāh Ātaš Nyāiš Other short prayers Bāj before meal and toilet Names of Roj, Māh, Gāthā, Gāhānbār	Y 0 (Dibāčo) Y 1 Y 2.1–3 Y 26 (Satūm) Y 62 (Ātaš Nyāiš) Y 72
Read fluently	Uzirin and Aiwisruthrem Gāhs, Khoršed and Meher Nyāišes, Patet Pašemāni and Patet Ravān ni Sroš Yašt Vadi Sroš Yašt Hādoxt Āfrīnagān and Āfrīn	Rest of the chapters in the Concise Yasna book: Y 2–8, 11, 15, 16, 22–27, 65, 66, 71

Table 57: Nekzad's bhantar training

Ritual Training

The training was being imparted at home and there was no access to a traditional ritual precinct with the ritual implements. However, Er. Panthaky made some improvisations to give Nekzad a flavour of the ritual setup. He used the available kitchen utensils including the mortar and pestle and created the setup on a small coffee table to mimic the ritual table (*ālāt khuān*). Er. Panthaky would demonstrate the ritual actions first and then make Nekzad perform it himself along with the recitation.

Outlook

According to Er. Panthaky, the Zoroastrian community in Greater Toronto numbers around 7000, which is the largest concentration of the Zoroastrian population outside of Mumbai. There are about twenty-five fully ordained priests, plus twelve young trainee priests like Nekzad. There are also four more candidates for Nāvar, whose initiation is planned at the new place of worship being built and expected to be completed in 2020. At the present time, there is no plan to perform any Marātab initiations there. If the Nāvar initiations proceed in Toronto, as Er. Panthaky mentions, this will be the first instance of a complete Nāvar ceremony as it is still performed in India to take place in any of the new diaspora Zoroastrian settlements.

8.2.3 Basic Training

In some cases, priestly families want their sons to complete the Nāvar initiation as a formality and as a means to continue the priestly lineage in the family. Generally these candidates undergo a short period of training to complete the minimum requirements before being sent for their Nāvar initiation.

Case Study 6: Nāvar at Vatcha Gandhy Agiary by Er. Asphandiar & Er. Hormuz Dadachanji[275]

There are about five Nāvar initiations performed in a year at the Vatcha Gandhy Agiary in Mumbai. This is, at present, among the highest number of initiations for any single location in India. The Panthaki of the Agiary, Er. Asphandiar Rustomji Dadachanji and his sons Hormuz and Marespand have a streamlined method to carry out the initiations. Out of the total candidates for initiation, roughly half are local, whereas another half are candidates who live abroad and come to India for their initiation. The Nāvar initiation takes about four weeks, and the candidate is expected to arrive about a week early to familiarise himself with the process and the surroundings. Since this five-week period is possible only during the annual school holidays, the local candidates undergo the initiation in the vacation month of May, whereas the overseas candidates are ordained during the Christmas break in December.

Er. Hormuz stresses the importance of the having the candidate mentally ready to undergo the initiation. Hence the one week prior to starting the four-week long initiation process is used to make the candidate comfortable with the setup and to familiarise him with the isolation rules to be followed during the period of the Barašnum. The candidate and his family meet the Dadachanjis along with Dhunmai, the wife of Er. Asphandiar, who manages the kitchen with other domestic helpers. During the entire duration of the Nāvar, the candidate will reside within the hall enclosing the ritual precinct, and will sleep on a mat just adjacent to the pāvīs (furrows enclosing the ritual area).

When the family first contacts the Dadachanjis for their son's Nāvar, they are informed about the minimum readiness that is required. The candidate needs to have memorised the following prayers before arriving for the Nāvar:

- Kusti prayers
- *Jamvāni Bāj* (before meals) and *Bāj hājate javāni* (before toilet)
- Y 0, Y 1, Y 2.1–3 (recited standing on stone seat)
- Y 62, i.e., Ātaš Nyāiš (again recited standing)
- Y 72 (concluding part to be recited at the well)

Besides the above texts, the candidate can have access to a prayer book, and hence these to do not need memorisation. However fluent reading of at least a few of the starting chapters of the Yasna is recommended, but not mandated. The Concise Yasna book by Rustomji Panthaki[276] was commonly used to study the Yasna chapters above. In 2019, a digital platform was launched which has audio recordings of all the extant Avestan prayers recited by an accomplished ritual priest, Dastur Keki

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[275] Based on an interview Er. Asphandiar Dadachanji conducted in Dec. 2017 (interview #6) and a conversation with Er. Hormuz Dadachanji in October 2020. Er. Asphandiar and both his sons underwent their priestly training at the DAI, and Er. Hormuz's son, Varzavand, is a current student at the DAI.
[276] Panthaki (1991).

Ravji.[277] Candidates are now encouraged to listen to these recordings while memorising to ensure that they get the correct pronunciation of the Avestan words.

The period just prior to and during the Nāvar initiation is not utilised for learning any new material, but only to revise the texts already memorised. It is also used to demonstrate the basics of the ritual to the candidates who are not familiar with it. Er. Asphandiar explains to them the setup of the implements on the ritual table and the procedure of consecrating the implements by washing three times with the recitation of the *xšnaoθra ahurahe mazdå ašəm vohū* (1) formula, while simultaneously explaining to them the significance of these ritual actions.

Case Study 7: Nāvar at the H. B. Wadia Ātaš Bahrām by Er. Adil Bhesania[278]

In a typical year, there are one or two Nāvar initiations and occasionally a Maratab initiation at the H. B. Wadia Ātaš Bahrām. The candidate usually comes with limited prior training and will be initiated as an *adhuro* Nāvar. Er. Adil Bhesania, who is a Bōywālā at the Ātaš Bahrām, imparts some basic training for a few weeks before the start of the Nāvar if the candidate is present. If the candidate comes from abroad, some basic training is provided during the Barašnum period of the Nāvar itself.

Depending on the duration of the training, the candidate is made to learn the following:

- Memorise the start of the Yasna to be recited standing, i.e., Y 0 (Dibāčo) with the dedications (*xšnūmans*) and Y 1, and the text recited during key ritual actions like partaking of the *dron* (Y 8.4) and the hom preparation (Y 11.10)
- Achieve reading fluency (Guj. *vāčto kare*) for Y 2–8

During the Nāvar ceremony, the preparatory Paragnā ritual is not performed by the candidate but by the senior priest who will be assisting him, hence the student strictly does not need to learn the details of the Paragnā, at least not for the Nāvar ceremony.

In the Yasna ritual performed during the Nāvar, the candidate officiates as the Zot, i.e., chief priest, and the senior priest as the Rāspi, i.e., assistant priest for the duration of the ceremony. However, since the candidate usually requires help, the senior priest also doubles up as the secondary Zot, and recites along with the candidate, while simultaneously instructing him on the ritual actions to be performed. In the Bhagariā Panthak tradition, prevalent at H. B. Wadia Ātaš Bahrām, an additional assistant priest is present only during the initial portion of the Yasna, after which the senior priest alone is present as the Rāspi.

8.3   Reflections on the training outside of Athornan Institutes

A majority of the candidates who have received training outside of the Athornan Institutes belong to the second or third category described above, i.e., they have received either some level of advanced training or have very basic training. The priests belonging to the first category, i.e., those who have been comprehensively trained, only rarely receive their formation outside the Athornan Institutes

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[277] Available at https://drive.google.com/open?id=1aqse8-oXUaiBabKxNfmWRStA549ayItA. The launch of the digital platform in May 2019 was covered at https://www.facebook.com/jamejamshed/posts/jame-mondaymorning-inspirationervad-sarosh-aibara-has-created-a-digital-platform/2950421124968102/

[278] Based on the description given by Er. Adil Bhesania in an interview.

because of the sheer amount of time and effort required to be expended, both by the student who in addition has a heavy academic workload to manage and by the teacher (usually the father) who typically has a full-time day job. This is reflected in the relatively low number of priests able to perform a full Yasna ceremony and the other solemn ceremonies – in 2020 there are altogether about fifty priests across India, mainly in Mumbai and Surat, who perform these inner rituals. Among them, an overwhelming majority have studied at either the DAI or the MFCAI for at least a few years if not for the entire duration of their priestly training. By contrast, there are only five priests who have been fully trained at home to perform unabridged inner ceremonies. They include the three priests discussed in detail in case studies 1 and 2 above.

Many priests who have received only basic or some level of advanced training and who wish to pursue the priestly profession, usually join as apprentices at a fire-temple and are trained on the job. Most of these priests have undergone their Nāvar initiation before the age of fifteen, and start working as priests only after they have completed their college education. In the ensuing break of three to five years during the time at college, many priests lose touch with the texts studied during their initiation, and need a training period to come up to speed. At the fire-temple, most priests are expected to perform the outer ceremonies of Āfrīnagān, Faroxši and Satūm, and in some cases also the Bōy ceremony for the consecrated fire. During the initial apprenticeship period, these priests take assistance of a prayer book and over time develop proficiency to recite the texts from memory.[279] However, almost none of these priests ever go on to perform the longer, solemn rituals like the Yasna, which is only performed by priests who have been comprehensively trained and who have memorised the text during their childhood.

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[279] The Faroxši ritual which consists of the recitation of the Fravardin Yašt is almost always recited from the book even by veteran priests.

Section IV: Emerging themes and Future Outlook

9 Changing Patterns and Evolving Trends

The dynamics in the early twentieth century which led to a thriving number of students at the Athornan Institutes, are no longer in play or have significantly evolved since the middle of the 20th century. Consequently, both the Athornan Institutes have found it increasingly difficult, albeit in different degrees, to find new students to replace the graduating ones. The institutions have adapted to this new normal in different ways. The Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 has further forced new technologies to be adopted to cope with the induced restrictions. Further, in the diaspora countries with a burgeoning Zoroastrian community without access to the Athornan Institutes and any other traditional training centres, new structures and mechanisms have evolved to create the priests needed to fulfil the religious requirements. These are some of the topics addressed in this chapter.

9.1 Factors leading to a decline in students

In section 3.3.4, the trend of student enrolment at the two Athornan Institutes was analysed in detail. The average number of admissions per year has dropped to a tenth of its value during the early decades of the institutes. In the 1940s, there were twenty students being admitted each year across both institutes; presently, this number has dropped to about two. While the DAI has seen a drop in student numbers to half of its earlier levels, the situation at MFCAI has been even more dire. Compared to nearly eighty enrolled students in the early decades, there have been none at all in the past few years.

Historically, the MFCAI was better geared for the future than the DAI. From the beginning, the MFCAI was well endowed and thus not beset by financial troubles, like the DAI was for many decades. From the time of its inception, the MFCAI laid an equal emphasis on religious as well as secular studies, focussing on the idea of creating enlightened priests. The DAI, on the other hand, was mainly dedicated to producing well-trained priests, and offered limited academic training. For a certain period, these factors worked in favour of MFCAI, where more students enrolled and passed out each year. However, over time, both institutes went in opposite directions; while MFCAI discontinued its secular education and focused purely on priestly training, DAI started an arrangement with a nearby day school and adjusted its schedule around the school timetable. This led to a reversal of fortunes of the two institutes. The DAI gradually gained popularity among the parents, whereas fewer parents sent their sons to the MFCAI leading to the present scenario.

At the same time, there has been an overall reduction in student numbers, which is the result of several factors. The most important reasons for this decline are explored below.

9.1.1 Changing demographics of the community

The Parsi population of India has been declining since the 1950s, and the rate of decline has accelerated in the past few decades.[280] The decline among the younger members is more acute, due

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[280] Visaria (1974) for the period 1881-1971, and Unisa et al. (2008) for data up to the 2001 census, track the demographic slide among the Parsis in India. See also (Raju & Singh, 2017) and Shroff and Castro (2011) for reasons of the demographic decline.

to the migration to other countries in search of better economic opportunities. However, the biggest factor responsible for the demographic decline are late or no marriages and few or no children among most members of the community.[281] Quite simply put, the community produces fewer and fewer children with every passing generation. This demographic trend is as applicable to the priestly families as to the community in general. The priestly families have fewer sons available to train as priests than there were in earlier generations. Consequently, the pool of eligible candidates for the Athornan Institutes has shrunk considerably over the past decades, but especially markedly in the last twenty to thirty years.

This trend can be observed among the students at the Athornan Institutes, where previously multiple sets of brothers were enrolled together, whereas now there are barely one or two examples. One of the research participants, Er. Kaizad J. Kotwal, who enrolled at the MFCAI in 1988, mentioned that his batch comprised of about 20 students in the early 1990s.[282] Among these were four brothers of the Tarachand family, three of the Karanjia family, and two each from the Sanjānā and Jijina families. Thus, more than half the cohort group was constituted of multiple sets of brothers. If this is compared to the present scenario at the DAI, where the student count is over twenty, there is only one set of two brothers, from the Turel family. Thus, a marked difference is seen in the student constituency in less than thirty years, which is reflective of the overall demographic change affecting the community.

9.1.2   Proliferation of good schools outside Mumbai

One of the primary reasons for parents to send their sons to the Athornan Institutes is to obtain a good secular education which is offered together with the priestly training. Up to a few decades ago, there were very few good English-medium schools outside the major cities. In most towns and smaller villages of Gujarat, the parents either did not have access to an English-medium school or found it unaffordable to send their sons there. Thus, many parents from Gujarat and other states across India preferred to send their sons to Mumbai, where they would not only obtain a good secular education, but also avail it at no cost since the entire education at the Athornan Institutes, including its secular components, was provided completely free of cost. However, in the past few decades, good English-medium schools have proliferated in the tier-2 and tier-3 towns in Gujarat and other places. Thus, one of the driving factors for parents to send their sons away to Mumbai has ceased to exist.

Similarly, good work opportunities, which earlier were mostly concentrated in a city like Mumbai, are now available in most smaller towns. Hence, the parents who earlier sent their sons to Mumbai to secure their future, no longer have to make that choice.

9.1.3   Parents unwilling to separate sons from family

The present bhantar teacher and former student of the DAI, Er. Sarosh Behramkamdin, said in an interview that during his time as a student in the 1970s, parents used to entrust their sons to Rustomji (Panthaki), the former principal of the DAI, and forget about them. These parents from outside Mumbai, hardly ever made the trip to Mumbai to meet their sons on the designated Parents' Day of the month, and only saw them when they returned home for vacations.

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[281] Patel (2010) is a well-researched paper on the subject.
[282] Er. Kaizad J. Kotwal interview in Navsari (#21, Feb. 2019).

One fallout of having fewer children is that parents are increasingly unwilling to send their only son to the Athornan Institutes and have him grow up away from the family. This was cited as an important factor behind their decision-making by many research participants who had young sons.[283] One of the fathers, when asked why he did not send his two sons to the DAI where he studied himself, put it in an interesting way saying that 'his brain said yes, but his heart said no'.[284]

Another factor playing on the parents' mind is that the son will find it difficult to juggle both the academic and the bhantar curriculum together, which in turn might adversely affect his career prospects. This factor has caused the teachers at the DAI to adopt a more lenient approach towards the bhantar studies and allow more time for school study, in order to assuage these kinds of parental concerns.

9.1.4 Priests from Athornan Institutes treated at par with others

It is well established among the Parsi community that the priests trained at one of the two Athornan Institutes are much more proficient in ritual performance and have superior recitation skills compared to other priests. However, with the decline in the demand for the complex inner ceremonies which only a fully trained priest could perform, there is limited differentiation between priests who graduated from the Athornan Institutes and those who have undergone little or no training at all. The routine outer rituals, which form the bulk of the daily requests from the community, can be performed by either category of priests without a conspicuous difference in the quality of the performance. Consequently, there is barely any premium offered to a student who has spent six to eight years of his prime schooling time to memorise the ritual texts. This is the single biggest factor leading to the demotivation and frustration among the priests who have graduated from Athornan Institutes, as a result of which they have overwhelmingly refrained from sending their sons to train at these institutes.

A combination of the above factors has led to the shrinking pool of candidates available for selection at the Athornan Institutes. Both institutes appeal to parents to avail of their facilities and regularly publish advertisements in the Parsi newspapers and magazines to call for admissions. There have been outreach programs by both institutes especially to smaller towns and villages to tap into smaller settlements for potential students.[285] However, these have yielded limited results.

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[283] Er. Kaizad J. Kotwal (#21), Er. Khushravi Palia (#26) among others.
[284] Er. Cyrus Darbari interview in Jan. 2017 (#11).
[285] During a visit to the MFCAI in 2016, the trustee Mr. Camaji Cama, mentioned that committee members had asked a few priests who were former students, to visit the villages and mofussil areas of Gujarat to seek new students for admission, but none of the parents were willing to send their children to the Athornan Institute.

Figure 66: Call for admissions to the DAI appearing in the Parsi Times on 12-1-2019

9.2 MFCAI – Abridged curriculum and emergence of Behdin Pāsbān

In 2009, when the number of students at MFCAI had dropped to five, a programme was launched whereby priestly training could be imparted beyond the conventional target group of sons of priests between the ages of six to fifteen years. Ervad Ratanshah Motafram, the former bhantar and religious teacher at MFCAI, formulated a scheme which was targeted at three categories of students.[286]

- Category 1 was the usual category of boys from priestly families who enrolled by the age of 8–9 years and received complete priestly training leading to the Nāvar and Marātab along with a secular academic education up to Secondary School Certificate (10th standard).
- Category 2 was for the boys from priestly families who had already undergone the *kāččā* Nāvar initiation, i.e., without complete training and outside of an institutional context.[287] They would be trained to become full-fledged (*sampūrna*) priests, conversant with all Zoroastrian rites and rituals.
- Category 3 was aimed at the lay community members with a religious inclination who could become *behdin pāsbāns* ('lay caretakers/protectors'). They would be trained to perform common outer liturgical ceremonies like the Satūm, Āfrīnagān, Faroxši and Jašan as well as the *Bōy* ceremony for a Dādgāh fire. They were mandated to perform these ceremonies only in places where there was a shortage or absence of qualified priests.

Category 1, which followed the traditional curriculum, would be a full-time residential course. However, Categories 2 and 3, which were newly introduced, could be availed either by full-time boarders or part-timers for whom classes were held on weekends. Category 2 provided an avenue for

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[286] Information provided by the current MFCAI principal, Er. Khushru Panthaky in an interview (#41, Dec. 2016).
[287] See section 4.3.3.

priests, even at a mature age, to obtain complete training which they had not done at the time of their priestly initiation. It was Category 3, however, which was pathbreaking. For the first time, it provided a formalised curriculum for a lay community member to get trained in the commonly performed outer rituals and enlist as a caretaker priest at a place where a traditionally ordained priest was unavailable.[288]

Since the above scheme was launched in 2009, there has been a mixed response; while there have been no takers for the full-time resident category, the part-time programme has received a reasonably good response, especially for Category 3. After its launch, the part-time programme metamorphosised into a different form. It is managed by Er. Cyrus Dastoor of the MFCAI Ex-Students' Association and now conducted as a two-week intensive resident training programme during the summer break. It mainly comprises of religious lectures and practical ritual training sessions. Then, throughout the year, the group meets on alternate Sundays to continue their recitation practice. The focus is on gaining familiarity with the recitation text and ritual actions by repeated practice, rather than on the memorisation of the text.

The programme has received criticism from a subsection of priests who claim that it infringes on their rights and cuts into the already limited body of work. There was also a fallout between the organisers and the trustees of the MFCAI, due to which the summer programme was moved out of the MFCAI premises in 2012, and it is now conducted at the Cama baug Agiary in Grant Road, Mumbai.[289]

The curriculum of the Behdin Pāsbān program includes the following essential categories of rituals:

- Tending to fire-temple: Bōy ceremony
- Commemorative rituals: Āfrīnagān, Faroxši, Satūm and Jašan
- Death rituals: Geh Sārnā, Uthamnā and Sroš kardō ceremonies

The trained Behdin Pāsbāns currently serve at a few fire-temples which are not serviced by regular priests, mostly in places with a sparse Parsi population. These include the fire-temples in Kalyan, a satellite town of Mumbai, and in Kanpur, a city in in the state of Uttar Pradesh. This is becoming increasingly important as many small towns in Gujarat, where much of the young population has migrated out, do not have regular priests available to serve the local fire-temples. While the fires from some of these locations have been relocated to cities, a few are being tended to by lay community members without employing any formal rituals. The presence of a well-trained Behdin Pāsbān at these places helps in the sustenance of the consecrated fire and in fulfilling the ritual requirements of the local Parsi community. The resident training program (Category 3) is also attended by interested female community members, and the term Bānu Pāsbān ('lady caretaker') was proposed for a female candidate who successfully completed the programme.

What initially started off as an initiative by the MFCAI to arrest the decline in its student numbers, has now taken a life of its own. The MFCAI has little or no connection at all with the program in its current

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[288] The concept of a Para Mobed (partial priest) where lay community members were trained to fill-in for the absence of priests was first introduced in the 1970s. The term *Para Mobed* was discontinued as the word Mobed implied a completely trained priest performing inner rituals, and substituted by the term *Behdin Pāsbān*. For details, see https://ramiyarkaranjia.com/15-qa-about-priests/.

[289] Article titled 'Honing priestly skills' in Parsiana magazine dated 21-8-2012.

form, and the participants of the programme do not associate with the MFCAI. Thus, though this initiative by the MFCAI to enable lay community members to serve the religious needs was successful, it failed to achieve its goal of having a sustainable base of students at the institution for the future.

9.3 DAI – Adoption of technology

Over the course of the hundred years since the founding of DAI in 1919, the teaching method there has remained reasonably constant. There has been no impact of the technological advances during this time as the training does not utilise any electronic medium. The students are taught face-to-face and then use a manual to memorise, almost exactly in the same way that the first batch of students would have done one century ago.

The only instance of the use of an electronic gadget was for a brief period in the early 2000s. At the time, one priest, Er. Sarosh Aibara, had taken the initiative of audio recording the entire Yasna and had enlisted the help of Dastur Keki Ravji, an ex-student of the DAI, for providing the recitation. According to Er. Aibara, the primary aim of this exercise was to help priestly students learn the correct pronunciation in the absence of a teacher, and to continually revise and refresh the text. The Athornan Mandal which manages the DAI arranged for a few Sony Walkman headsets for the use of the students. The Yasna recording was given in a headset to the students by turns as an aid to memorisation. According to Er. Ramiyar Karanjia, who was the DAI Principal at the time, since memorisation of a text required focus and repetition, and was not possible to achieve it by just listening to the audio recording. He found that, when listening to the audio recording, the students' minds used to waver, and they were not focused on the audio. Hence, this experiment of using technology to complement the in-class training was unsuccessful, and the old method of memorising exclusively by means of reading and repetition was continued.[290] Barring this one episode, there was no attempt to leverage technology for training the students.

9.3.1 Online training during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic in the year 2020 forced a change and ushered the adoption of new technologies and mediums to cope with the imposed restrictions. Just prior to the lockdown being enforced, the DAI sent all the students to their homes and was temporarily shut down in March 2020. In June 2020, when the new academic year began, the lockdown was still in force, hence the DAI had to resort to online classes for the bhantar study to compensate for the loss time. As of March 2021, due to the persistence of the pandemic enforced lockdown, the entire academic year had continued to be conducted online. The annual bhantar exam for the year 2020-21 was cancelled, and the study would be resumed in the new academic year starting in June 2021.[291]

For the academic year 2020–21, there are twenty-three school students enrolled at the DAI. Among them, five are in the final year of school (Standard 10th) and have completed their priestly curriculum; hence they are excused from the daily bhantar study. The remaining eighteen students, who are in standards 1st to 9th, are divided into three groups each comprising of six students. Each group is

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[290] Interview with Er. Ramiyar Karanjia in Dec. 2016 (#35).
[291] Communication with Er. Ramiyar Karanjia in March 2021.

managed by one of three teachers, viz., Principal Er. Ramiyar Karanjia, and bhantar teachers Er. Kersi Karanjia and Er. Sarosh Behramkamdin. The online bhantar session is conducted on all weekdays from 5 PM to 6 PM using the online video conferencing tool, Zoom.[292] There are no classes held over the weekend, during which the student is expected to revise previously learnt material. The revision study is assigned by the teacher on Friday, and it is expected to be given during the Monday session.

9.3.2   Description of an online training session held in October 2020

An online training class witnessed by the author of this thesis was conducted by one of the the bhantar teachers, Er. Kersi Karanjia, on Wednesday, 28th October 2020, from 5 PM to 6 PM via the Zoom video conferencing application.[293] The six students training under Er. Kersi are all at different stages in their priestly training, as indicated below.

- FMG (9th standard) – completed the Nāvar and Marātab
- YJB (9th) and FSD (6th) – ready for Nāvar in 2020, but Nāvar postponed (see below)
- HKF (8th) – Nāvar planned in 2021
- ZMT (5th) – Nāvar planned in 2021
- SHB (5th) – No visibility on Nāvar

The online session was started on time at 5 PM with Er. Kersi and three students (YJB, HKF, SHB). The sequence of events during the online session was as follows:[294]

- Er. Kersi started by asking SHB to read Karde 5 of the Sroš Yašt Hādōxt text from the Khorde Avesta, which the student was unable to recite fluently.
- Two more students (FMG, FSD) logged in late at 5.07 PM, while one student (ZMT) was absent for the session.
- Next, Er. Kersi asked HKF to recite Visperad (Vr) Karde 22, but he was not able to recite fluently.
- At 5.15 PM, Er. Kersi asked YJB and FSD to read aloud the Faroxši Karde 1 together since both were studying the same text.
- At 5.20 PM, FMG recited stanzas 5–6 of the Āfrīn of Gāhānbār successfully from memory. He was assigned stanza 7 for the next class.
- Then, Er. Kersi turned to SHB again, reading out Karde 5 himself and making SHB repeat the text after him.
- At 5:30 PM, HKF was again asked to read out Vr 22, but he was still unable to read fluently.
- At 5:35 PM, FSD was made to read Faroxši Karde 1.
- At 5:40, the first 40-minutes Zoom session ended. FMG and YJB were allowed to exit; HKF, SHB and FSD were asked to re-login.
- At 5.43 PM, FSD successfully finished Faroxši Karde 1; after being assigned Karde 2 for next class, he exited the online session.

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[292] https://zoom.us/.
[293] I thank Er. Kersi Karanjia for giving me an opportunity to attend the online classroom sessions as a non-participating observer.
[294] For a comparison with the equivalent in-class training during normal times, see section 6.2.2 (Memorisation within the bhantar class).

- The, Er. Kersi read out the final Karde of the Visperad to HKF, who was asked to prepare it for the next class.
- At 5.50 PM, everyone exited, and the online session terminated.

As seen from the above sequence of events, the general pattern governing these online sessions is as follows. The teacher gives each student a chance to recite his assigned part by turn. The students who can recite successfully (either from memory or fluently read from the book, depending on the text), are taught the next stanza, and asked to prepare it for the next class (FMG, YJB). However, if the student is unable to do so, he is asked to keep working on it as the session goes on and given a chance again after some time (HKF). Once the student finishes his part for the day, he is asked to exit the online session, so that the teacher can focus on the remaining students.

9.3.3   Observations on the online training session

The progression of the online session closely mirrors the physical classroom session and follows a fixed sequence. The teacher first checks the assigned study for each student. Then, he starts calling each student by turn to recite the assigned stanza – if it is recited satisfactorily, he is made to read the next part, else he is asked to prepare the assigned again. Priority is given to students who have not given their lesson in the past few turns; conversely, a student who regularly finishes his assigned task can exit the online session after his turn is completed. Before ending the session, the teacher makes sure that all the students have been assigned a lesson for the next class, and a corresponding entry is made by him in the bhantar diaries which have been retained at the DAI.

The attendance for the online sessions was observed to be irregular. During the week under observation,[295] the attendance was roughly around 75%, i.e., one or two students were absent for most of the sessions.

Maintaining discipline and punctuality for the online training sessions was also difficult. At the DAI, the students are expected to come to class on time and remain at their seat during the entire class. In the online session, a few students invariably logged in late, and the students were away from their seats on multiple occasions. It was difficult for the teacher to gauge if the student was reciting the assigned text from memory as expected or consulting the prayer book, as the visibility was limited.

The ability to enforce punishment for lapses is limited. At the DAI, a punished student is made to stand at the back of the classroom and must remain there until he manages to complete his given study. If he fails to do it after multiple attempts, he is assigned to the task class, wherein the time for games and TV is forfeited until he completes the assigned study. In an online classroom environment, when the students are at their home, it becomes extremely difficult to enforce any form of punishment.

One of the major difference observed was the drastic reduction in classroom time. The total online classroom time of five hours per week is only a third of the weekly classroom time at the DAI. The implication of this reduced contact time is the slow progress in the *bhantar* study, which was attested by Er. Kersi. He further stated that the online medium was inefficient since students frequently got disconnected due to poor connectivity, and the clarity of transmission was far from ideal.

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[295] 26th–30th October 2020.

There were other limitations introduced by the online medium. One important aspect of teaching a new stanza is the marking in a student's textbook of important words and phrases, which are prone to mistakes. This is possible only to a limited extent in an online session. Other aspects such as the combined prayer sessions which are an important part of the learning process are also not conducted online. Also, practical teaching aspects such as the ritual training wherein the candidate is given hands-on experience have not been hitherto attempted using the online medium.

Thus, the online medium is found to be far from ideal for priestly training. The progress for most students, especially the slower learners, is significantly hampered. However, Er. Ramiyar Karanjia conceded that in the present situation, this was the best possible option to keep the students in touch with their prayer curriculum, failing which most of the previously learnt texts would be quickly forgotten. He added that, since the students already attend online classes for their secular schooling for many hours in the morning, it was not practical to increase the time for the online *bhantar* sessions.

The Nāvar initiation for two DAI students which was originally planned during the summer in 2020 was postponed to 2021. The DAI premises remained closed for the entire academic year 2020–21, and throughout the year, the classes were conducted online. In March 2021, Er. Ramiyar Karanjia confirmed that the bhantar exam for that year were not being conducted, and he was hopeful that in-class sessions would resume when the school reopened in June 2021.

9.4 NAMC – Training of priests in the Diaspora

The Zoroastrian population of North America has been increasing for the past many decades, primarily due to the emigration from the traditional Zoroastrian bases of Iran, India and Pakistan. Though precise numbers are difficult to gather due to the dispersion of the community members, the most reliable estimate was compiled by Roshan Rivetna of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA). She estimated the Zoroastrian population in Canada and USA to have been 16,769 in 2004 and 20,847 in 2012, an increase of 24% in eight years.[296] This growth trend in the North American Zoroastrian population would, in high likelihood, have persisted in the ensuing period up to the present.

The religious needs of this burgeoning Zoroastrian population were initially met by first-generation priests who had immigrated from India, or their sons who had travelled to India to undergo the Nāvar and Marātab initiations. The North American Mobeds Council (NAMC) was created in 1992 to guide the Zoroastrian Communities in North America in the perpetuation of the Zoroastrian religion in the USA & Canada.[297] The NAMC recognised the need for properly trained and initiated Mobeds to serve the Zoroastrian community in North America, and developed the Mobeds training programme to meet that requirement.[298] The primary goal of the programme is to prepare and train Zoroastrians for their initiation as Mobeds to provide religious services and disseminate better knowledge and understanding of the Zoroastrian faith among community members in North America. Though young candidates from the age of nine or ten years are preferred, any interested adult candidates can also

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[296] Rivetna (2013).
[297] https://namcmobeds.org/about-us/.
[298] I thank Er. Jal Panthaky of the NAMC, who kindly shared the draft of the NAMC Mobed Training Manual dated October 2020.

undergo the training. The training programme is divided into two parts, viz., pre-Nāvar and post-Nāvar training. The goal of the first part is to prepare the candidate to successfully undergo the Nāvar, while the second part focuses on the performance of the most frequently requested ceremonies.

The curriculum for the pre-Nāvar training is elaborated in section 8.2.2 (Table 57) on the training provided by Er. Jal Panthaky to a candidate Nekzad Illava in Ontario, Canada. The memorisation is limited to the most commonly recited texts from the Khorde Avesta (Kusti prayers, Sroš Bāj, Hāvan Gāh, Ātaš Nyāiš and other small prayers) and selected chapters of the Yasna (Y 0–2.3, 26, 62, 72). Some other essential texts of the Khorde Avesta and the Yasna chapters with important ritual actions (Y 2.4–8, 11, 15–16, 22–27, 65–66, 71) are made to be read fluently. The post-Nāvar curriculum is tabulated below:

#	Category	Ceremonies
1	Purification ceremonies	- Pādyāb kusti
		- Nāhn, Barašnum
2	Outer liturgical ceremonies	- Jašan, Satūm, Āfrīnagāns, Āfrīns, Faroxši
		- Funeral ceremonies including Geh Sārnā, Sroš kardo, Uthamnā and Cāhrum (4th day) ceremonies
		- Navjote ceremony
		- Wedding ceremony
3	Inner liturgical ceremonies	- Abbreviated (concise) Yasna ceremony
		- Bāj Ceremony
		- Nāvar Ceremony

Table 58: Post-Nāvar curriculum applied by the NAMC

The abbreviated or concise Yasna ceremony consists of the recitation and ritual performance of only those chapters of the Yasna which involve a significant ritual action, meaning that most of the other parts including the Gāthic chapters (Y 28–53) are omitted.[299] In order to facilitate the learning process, the NAMC has taken the initiative to transliterate most prayer books into the Latin script.[300]

The priestly training is typically imparted either at the local Ātaškadeh[301] or at the home of the instructor or the candidate. If that is infeasible, then it is imparted over an electronic medium, preferably via video conferencing. The practical aspects of the ritual are taught by demonstrating these to the candidate. The NAMC estimates the entire post-Nāvar training to amount to a three-year course, with each week comprising of one hour of live training and four hours of learning/practice, i.e., total five hours per week. The aggregate over three years comes of 150 hours of training time and 600 hours of additional learning time at home.

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[299] The recited chapters are as per Panthaki (1991) which is described in section 8.2.2.
[300] Bagli (2006, p. 83). The first book in these series is on the understanding and practice of the concise Nāvar ceremony (Bagli & Unwalla, 2014).
[301] The term Ātaškadeh ('room/house of the fire') is normally used for a fire-temple housing a consecrated fire (Choksy J. K., 2006, p. 327). In the North American context, it may refer to either a fire-temple or a community prayer hall.

After the completion of the training, the candidate is tested by an Examiner Mobed, who assesses the candidate on the following categories:

- Recitation of memorised Khorde Avesta and Yasna (amounting to 35% of the overall assessment each)
- Fluent reading of the other selected texts (10%)
- Practical aspects of the Inner and Outer Liturgical ceremonies (10% each)

If the Examiner Mobed considers the assessment criteria to be fulfilled, the candidate is recommended to the NAMC for certification.

A closer analysis of the NAMC training reveals that the curriculum is identical to the training undergone by most Nāvar candidates in India who are trained outside of the Athornan Institutes (section 8.2.2). However, this curriculum is extremely curtailed when compared to that of the Athornan Institutes. The aggregate 750 hours of training and learning time that is estimated by NAMC is equivalent to about one and a half years of learning undergone by a student at the DAI (averaging 500 hours per year). Considering the average seven to eight years of study at the Athornan Institutes, each student there expends about five times the effort compared to that outlined in the NAMC manual.

At the present time, the Nāvar ceremony of the candidates is performed only in India, because the facility to administer the Barašnum and the performance of the requisite Yasna and Visperad ceremonies which are part of the Nāvar initiation, are only possible in India. The NAMC, however, plans to develop the facility to initiate the candidate within North America in the future. According to Er. Jal Panthaky, former secretary of the NAMC, the plan to build a place of worship with all the facilities was already underway in the 7000-member strong Zoroastrian community of Toronto, Canada, at the time he was writing.[302] The place will include a Yazišn Gāh , Barašnum Gāh, and rooms to stay in isolation after the Barašnum ceremony for the candidates becoming Nāvar. The building would be consecrated first, followed by the consecration of the Dādgāh fire and the Kebla[303], and finally the fire would be enthroned with the proper ceremonies and procedures. Once these facilities are operational, the initiation of the candidates could be performed locally without them having to travel all the way to India. This would be the first instance of a complete Nāvar ceremony being performed outside of Iran and the Indian subcontinent.

In this chapter, a few patterns of socio-economic change emerging in the 21st century which have transformed certain aspects of priestly training have been explored. The reduction of the pool of students available to enrol at the Athornan Institute is caused by several factors, and the institutes have responded in different ways to counter this decline. The disruption caused by the COVID-19 lockdown forced the DAI to adapt to the online mode of teaching, which, though beset by many issues, remains the best option to continue the training. In North America, where the Zoroastrian population and with it the demand for religious ceremonies is growing, the council of priests, NAMC, has put in place a mechanism to train priests on the required rituals, and to ordain them locally in the future.

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[302] Email communication by Er. Jal Panthaky dated 29-9-2019.
[303] The inner sanctum of the fire-temple where the consecrated fire is installed.

10 Conclusion

In the concluding chapter of the study, an attempt has been made to outline the major themes emerging from the study of the Zoroastrian priestly tradition and the training of the priests. In the final section, the avenues for further research emerging from this study are highlighted.

10.1 Loss of the Oral Transmission

Since the time of its composition, the Avestan corpus is known to have been transmitted orally from one generation to the next, from father to son, from teacher to pupil. This corpus was written down for the first time in a script that was specially invented for this purpose, sometime during the late Sasanian or early post-Sasanian period. The oldest extant manuscripts date from the thirteenth century CE, however the colophons within these manuscripts trace back at least a few centuries before that. Hence, it can be reasonably assumed that a parallel written transmission has been in existence along with the oral tradition for at least over one millennium. It is known that both the oral and written traditions influenced each other over the course of their transmission history. One of the initial research questions was whether this independent oral tradition was still in existence.

From the research, it emerged that at least some of the private classes run by a single priest during the nineteenth and early twentieth had elements of oral transmission. Dastur Hormazdyar Mirza (1957, p. xxii) informs us that printed books or manuscripts were not commonly used by students memorising the ritual texts. Instead, they used a small wooden tablet (*pāti*) to note down what was orally transmitted to them by the teacher. It is unclear whether the teacher himself had access to a book or manuscript for teaching or not. But there were a few teachers at least as late as in the mid-twentieth century who relied purely on oral transmission. At the Kāngā ni Sār at Navsari, operational until the 1940s, the blind teacher, Er. Nallabhai Kanga and his father, Er. Sohrab who preceded him, taught his students from memory without access to any written material. The students at the Kāngā ni Sār, however, did use Anklesaria's *Yasna bā Nirang* as reference book for the recitation study, and hence the medium of learning was a hybrid of both oral and written traditions.

However, after the mid-twentieth century, no trace of an oral transmission can be detected in the priestly training method. There have been two principal factors which were instrumental in the loss of the oral tradition. The first factor was the publication of western editions of the Avestan texts, after the mid-nineteenth century, mainly by Westergaard (1852-1854) and Geldner (1886-1896). The Avestan recitation text from these editions was adopted into the printed Indian editions, which were then considered to be more authoritative than the other Indian publications. This standard version of the text was deemed to have *śuddha uččār* ('pure pronunciations') as opposed to variants having *aśuddha uččār* ('impure pronunciations'). Most local priestly training classes in existence which had relied on oral transmission, did not meet this standard, and hence priests who had trained there were considered to have inferior pronunciations. Dastur Keki Ravji received his priestly training in Navsari in the 1950s under one such priest Er. Dorabji Kotwal, who taught the students orally. When Dastur Ravji was subsequently enrolled at the Dadar Athornan Institute, his prior training was considered to be replete with faulty pronunciations and he was made to memorise the texts afresh.

The second factor was the emergence of formal priestly training schools with a standardised curriculum from the late nineteenth century period onwards. These organised schools had adopted a standard textbook for imparting recitation training such as Anklesaria's *Yasna bā Nirang* at the two Athornan Institutes in Mumbai. This led to the creation of one archetype, and the relegation of all other variant versions. J. J. Modi (1932, p. 72) mentions that Tata Madressa in Navsari was considered superior because the pronunciations of the other private teachers, who conducted classes for memorising the Avestan texts, were faulty. The rise of these formal training schools effectively led to the closing down of most of these private classes where some form of oral transmission may have survived.

Thus, the oral tradition, which may have survived until the nineteenth century, either independently or influenced by the written tradition, has effectively been completely lost by the end of the twentieth century.

10.2 Segmentation and consolidation of the priesthood

One of the research questions at the start of the study was whether there were significant differences in ritual practice between the different priestly factions and whether these were reflected in the priestly training curriculum.

The Zoroastrian priestly class has undergone multiple rounds of segmentation in the course of its history in India. The first major splitting was on geographical lines into the five priestly Panthaks (section 3.2.3). Even within a single Panthak, there were further sub-division such as the five genealogical Pols (Guj. 'street, stock')[304] of the Bhagariā priests of Navsari, or the nine families of the Sanjānā priests of Udvada, among which the religious duties were divided. In the seventeenth century, there was a breakaway faction from the Bhagariā priests, known as the *cahāro sāth* ('four together') as it comprised of four priestly families. In the eighteenth century, the divide along calendrical lines, split the community into the Shenshahis and the Kadimis. The Kadimi priests adopted the ritual practice influenced by the Iranian Zoroastrian tradition. Thus, the priesthood in the nineteenth century was very fragmented, with each faction having their own set of unique ritual practices. The priestly training classes run by local priests would thus specifically cater to one group of priests, leading to a diversity among the various training schools.

In the twentieth century, an increasing trend of consolidation among the different priestly groups is observed. Certain factions such as the Bharuchā and Khambātā Panthaks have ceased to exist as the Zoroastrian population at these centres diminished, whereas others such as the Godāvarā priests adopted the practice of the dominant Bhagariā tradition. In Mumbai, where a majority of the Parsi community is based, the boundaries between the different priestly factions faded away. For example, the Bhagariā, Sanjānā, and Kadimi priests interchangeably work at the fire-temples affiliated to a particular denomination. Thus, there is an increasing homogenising trend among the priesthood. This pattern is observed at the two Athornan Institutes, which impart uniform ritual training as per the predominant Bhagariā practice. The students belonging to the other groups, mainly the Sanjānā and the Kadimi factions, would learn the ritual differences when they started working as a trainee priest.

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[304] Nakabeppu (2000, p. 73).

However, a brief study on the comparison of the actual ritual practice of the Kadimi priests with the standard Kadimi ritual handbook[305], showed that the Kadimi priests who trained at the Athornan Institutes had largely adopted the Bhagariā technique, and were not familiar with the minor ritual differences as per the Kadimi tradition.

Thus, it is observed that the priestly training curriculum at the principal schools does not account for ritual differences in the priestly groups, and consequently, over time, most of the minor differences in ritual performance of the smaller priestly factions have largely been lost.

10.3 Training at the Athornan Institutes and Outside

During the period under study spanning two hundred years, the priestly training schools grew in size and organisation. The unorganised private class run by a single priest at home, gave way to the semi-formal schools, and then to the formal Athornan Madressa (section 3.1). In the twentieth century, the two highly structured priestly training schools, the Athornan Institutes were founded, where a majority of the priest received their education. However, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, this situation has been reversed. It is observed that only about one in ten priestly candidates is being trained at the Athornan Institutes, while the remaining 90% are trained outside of these institutes. These candidates are either trained at their own home or that of the priest, or at a local fire-temple. The training, which varies depending on the amount of memorisation the candidate is made to undertake, can be either comprehensive (full curriculum), advanced (selected parts) or basic (limited or none). A majority of the candidates trained outside the Athornan Institutes fall in the latter two categories (section 8.2).

The primary difference observed between training at the Athornan Institutes and outside is the amount of aggregate time expended on the training. A typical student at the Athornan Institute spends about 500 hours per year for six to eight years to complete the curriculum, aggregating around 3000–4000 hours over the duration of the study. In contrast, a candidate pursuing the advanced curriculum at home or with a priest, typically spends around 5–7 hours per week for about one or two years, which is roughly 400–600 hours of total study. This staggering difference in hours of study is on account of the full Yasna memorisation and the constant revision cycles, both of which roughly take up 1000 hours of study time each. The remaining difference in time is due to the study of the Khorde Avesta, Visperad, Vidēvdād and other allied texts, which is only given a cursory glance while training at home (sections 6.2.4 and 7.3).

The other differences between the two methods stem from the setup (classroom vs. home), teaching methodology (group vs. individual), peer learning (vital vs. absent) and the use of rewards and punishments (important vs. negligible). One key point of differentiation observed was that the environment of an Athornan Institute with a regimented routine brought the goal of priestly training into constant focus, whereas the training at home was perceived as an extra-curricular activity, which was often subordinated by the pressures of academic schooling.

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[305] Garda (1916).

10.4 Memorisation as the core of Priestly Training

Memorisation of ritual texts is the focal point of the training of a full-fledged priest. The goal of this training is to enable a priest to participate in the higher liturgies which require ritual actions to be performed along with the accompanying recitation, which is not possible unless the entire text is memorised. A student at the Athornan Institute spends at least five to six years on actively memorising the ritual texts. The memorisation process, followed at the Athornan Institutes, is a combination of several parts, which have been described in chapter 6.

The fundamental element of memorisation is the feeding of small new portions to memory, while constantly refreshing the previously learnt parts so that they are not dissipated. Thus, memorisation can be viewed as a two-step process of committing to the short-term memory (new material) and then to the long-term memory (previously learnt material). It was observed that recalling a text from the short-term memory required the student to consciously remember the sequence of words, whereas the recall from long-term memory was done at a more subconscious level without expending much effort. The various individual components of memorisation at the Athornan Institutes fulfil this two-step process. For both steps, there is a primary technique and then there are other secondary factors which aid the process.

The first step when a student is tasked with learning a new stanza is to break it down into manageable portions (lines, half-lines), then carefully focus on each part and recite it loudly multiple times. This is the primary technique used to commit the text to the short-term memory. The student uses other methods such as using gestures and counting on the fingers to achieve this memorisation. This process of learning a new stanza is aided by the markings done in the textbook by the teacher and the daily monitoring of the progress noted in the student lesson book.

Once the new material is learnt, it has to be committed to the long-term memory, else it is quickly forgotten. One built-in mechanism to achieve this is the recitation of all the previously learnt stanzas of the chapter, while giving the study of a new stanza. This process enables the previous stanzas to be refreshed in the mind. It was observed that after a few days of constantly reciting a stanza, the students were able to recall it without much conscious effort. The repetitive revision cycles (section 6.2.4) serve to refresh all the learnt material at regular intervals of time. There are other secondary factors which help in this long-term memorisation process such as the annual examinations and competitions, and also the performance of the text within a ritual.

	Commit to Short-term Memory	Commit to Long-term Memory
Primary Technique	Focus on text with multiple rounds of loud repetition	Repeating complete chapter, Continuous revision cycles
Secondary Factors	1. Usage of Gestures / Counting 2. Marking the textbook 3. Daily / Monthly tracking	1. Annual examinations 2. Bhantar Competitions 3. Performance in the Ritual

Figure 67: 2-step process of committing to short-term and long-term memory

10.5 Endangered inner rituals

Cantera (2015, p. 377) summarises the importance of the long liturgies (which refers to the inner ritual of the Yasna and its variant forms) within the Zoroastrian religion as follows:

> "The Zoroastrian 'long liturgy' in reverence of the god Ahura Mazdā has been celebrated in the form in which it appears in the manuscripts (or in a similar form) since Achaemenid times (*c.* 550–330 BCE) and continues to be celebrated today among the Parsis, the Zoroastrians in India. Throughout the centuries this liturgy has been one of the most characteristic features of the Zoroastrian community."

As noted in section 4.2, until the 1950s, the Yasna was performed multiple times daily at the large Ātaš Bahrāms and usually once daily at other smaller fire-temples in India. Most ordained priests were able to perform it proficiently as it was part of their ritual routine. The availability of a large number of priests proficient in inner rituals enabled the performance of the longer more complex combination ceremonies. The high competition meant that only the most eligible priests were selected for these exalted ceremonies, which were executed by exacting standards of performance.

However, over the past decades, the performance of the Yasna ceremony has declined drastically, wherein it has completely ceased to be performed in most fire-temples. Presently, it is only performed occasionally at the Ātaš Bahrāms and a handful of other fire-temples. Most of the daily rituals are now limited to the Āfrīnagān, Faroxši, Satūm and Bāj ceremonies. Thus, a majority of the priests today, have never performed a Yasna ceremony since the time of their initiation, and do not envisage having to perform it. Since, most fire-temples do not have access to a pair of inner ritual performing priests, the Panthaki or head priest in charge of those fire-temple does not accept any request for a Yasna or its variants from his clientele. Over time, this has led to a change in the pattern of rituals requested by the community members, who no longer commission the inner rituals. This is a vicious cycle in which fewer priests lead to lesser ritual requests, which in turn reduces the demand for qualified priests. This shrinking pool of priests performing inner rituals has also meant that the longer complex ceremonies are extremely difficult to organise, and the priests performing them often do not meet the stringent prerequisites of earlier decades.[306]

The fact that fewer new candidates are being added to the pool of priests qualified to perform the inner rituals than the number of retiring priests, brings into question the long-term survival of these ceremonies which have been at the core of Zoroastrian tradition for well over two millennia.

10.6 Relevance of the Athornan Institutes

The Athornan Institutes were established in the early twentieth century for the amelioration of the priestly class by creating well-trained knowledgeable priests, who were proficient in ritual performance and who could become the future religious guides of the community (sections 3.2 and 3.3). The institutes met this requirement by having a streamlined programme centred around

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[306] For example, it was observed that presently some priests use the aid of a book while performing the Yasna during the Nīrangdīn ceremony. Not having the entire Yasna memorised thoroughly would have rendered them ineligible to perform this ceremony, only a few decades ago.

memorising the Yasna and other texts to thoroughly prepare a candidate for the Nāvar and Marātab initiations. This training would enable the candidate to perform the three Yasna and one Visperad ceremonies, which were part of the Nāvar initiation, and the Vidēvdād ceremony of the Marātab initiation. This would lay a strong foundation for a career as a Yaozdāthregar Mobed, i.e., a priest capable of performing all inner rituals.

The present shift in focus from the longer Yasna related inner ceremonies, to shorter outer ceremonies, has impacted the Nāvar ceremony itself. In many cases, the initiation is performed, not with the intention of leading to a priestly career, but rather just to keep the priestly lineage active in the family (section 8.2.2). Consequently, most Nāvar candidates barely memorise a few chapters of the Yasna, and they are shepherded through the ceremony by the initiating priest. For a majority of the candidates, the need to memorize the Yasna is not felt, as it will likely never be put to use in the future. This is one of the primary reasons for the fall in enrolments at the Athornan Institutes. Even among the students passing out of the Athornan Institutes, a small proportion pursue a priestly career which involves the performance of inner rituals. Since the very purpose for which the Athornan Institute programme was constituted, which is to create an inner ritual performing priest, is losing relevance, then the sustenance of the institutes becomes difficult. This is already observed in the case of one of the institutions, the MFCAI, where there are no enrolments from the past few years (section 3.3.4).

For the longer-term survival of these institutions, either the ritual landscape may need to change making inner rituals relevant again, or the institutes may have to start catering to a different need. As seen in the case of MFCAI introducing an abridged curriculum (section 9.2), the latter option may not be adequate.

10.7   Avenues for further research

The aim of this thesis was foremost to open up a heretofore unexplored dimension of the Zoroastrians in India, the training of their priests. Considering the historical importance of the priesthood within the Zoroastrian tradition and of the prolific use of the press by the Parsis in the nineteenth century, the absence of a comprehensive document of priestly training methods is glaring. This thesis has attempted to shed light on the pre-modern priestly schools and the training methods applied therein. The aim of the study was not to provide an exhaustive listing of the schools operational in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but to provide a flavour of the different types of schools and their pedagogy. The priestly training in the period prior to the nineteenth century remains unexplored and further research into the Gujarati archival material as well as the Revāyat exchange between the Indian and Iranian priests, may throw some light on it.

The next area of significance highlighted by the study was the variation between the different priestly factions. The differences between the Bhagariā, Sanjānā and the Kadimi priestly groups have survived whereas that of the other smaller groups are not traceable. While a detailed analysis on this subject was outside the scope of this study, some preliminary findings yielded significant differences between the three surviving traditions. This is an area of urgent research since there is a strong tendency for homogenising the variations, especially for the less dominant traditions. An attempt to open this area

for future research has been made by the availability of the standard handbook of the Yasna ritual[307], which could enable a methodological comparison with the manuscripts and also with the ritual manuals of other priestly groups.

The study of the training at the Athornan Institutes was timely, as one of the institutions, the MFCAI, did not have any enrolled students after 2017. At the DAI, though the student strength has remained steady for the past decade, shows a declining trend over the long-term. A systematic comparison would have been possible to draw between the DAI and the MFCAI, if detailed observations as performed at DAI were possible at the latter. The study threw up several interesting themes deserving a more detailed investigation than was possible in this study. For example, which students choose priesthood as a career after graduating and what are the motivations, what is the role of the teacher in driving these choices, how do the staff and students perceive the role of the institute in the future, etc. would enable a richer understanding of the subject.

The study of the training outside of the Athornan Institutes constitutes a diverse set of practices, which were captured in the form of case studies. This is an area of emerging importance as a majority of the candidates for priesthood are trained at home or with a local priest. This is especially true for all places within India outside of Mumbai, and in the diaspora communities.

The scope of this project was limited to the recitation and ritual training imparted to priestly candidates. The training in other aspects of the priesthood such as religious scholarship, counselling to community members, scriptural study, interpretation of rituals and other devotional forms of worship remain to be systematically documented.

The focus of this study was on the Indian Zoroastrian tradition. A similar study undertaken for the training of priest in Iran would yield interesting insights. Such a study in the near future would complement the present one and enable a comparison between the training in the Indian and the Iranian traditions. Likewise, a comparative study of the training of priests in the Zoroastrian and the Vedic tradition of India, which share a commom heritage, is valuable and remains an unexplored area. In the final chapter, an epilogue to the study, some important aspects of Vedic education are explored and contrasted with the training of Zoroastrian priests.

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[307] Redard & Daruwalla (2021) provide a translation of the Gujarati ritual directions of the Paragṇā, Yasna and Visperad from T. D. Anklesaria's Yasna bā Nirang (1888).

Section V: Epilogue

11 A Vedic perspective

The traditions of the Vedas in India and of Zoroastrianism in Iran are similar in antiquity, and trace their origins to the common Indo-Iranian pre-historic period of the third millennium BCE. Both traditions rely heavily on the oral transmission of their religio-cultic texts over this long history. While the Vedic tradition retained its colossal corpus with high fidelity, the texts of the Zoroastrians were fragmented and its language was influenced by the changing geography of its followers. Zoroastrian priestly training in India is likely to have evolved over the course of the past millennium since the arrival of the Parsis from Iran. While much is not known about the early period in India, the data from the last few centuries reveal many similarities with the Vedic priestly training. In this epilogue, some of these aspects are explored to understand how the process of becoming an Athravan compares with that of a Vedic *Brāhmaṇa* (priest).

The breadth of the Vedic corpus is vast compared to the surviving texts of the Zoroastrian tradition. The various branches of Vedic studies have had stronghold pockets in different parts of India, where they have been preserved and passed down to succeeding generations. The practices and the training process of Vedic priests exhibits great diversity and regional variations, and there is no single template that is applicable across the country. Numerous scholars have studied and documented the practices prevalent among specific Vedic communities or regions. Notable studies over the past fifty years include the works by Frits Staal (1961) on the Nambudiri Brāhmaṇas of Kerala, Wayne Howard (1986) on the Vedic recitation in Varanasi, Hartmut Scharfe (2002) on the evolution of Vedic education from ancient to modern times, David Knipe (2015) on the *Vaidika*s in the Godavari delta of Andhra Pradesh, and Borayin Larios (2017) on the Vedic schools in Maharashtra. The last of these studies is of particular interest as it depicts the contemporary training at Vedic schools which are similar in organisation and functioning to the two Zoroastrian Athornan Institutes which form the focus of the present work, and are also located in the same geographical area, i.e. the Western Indian state of Maharashtra.

The aim of this chapter is not to present a systematic comparison of the various elements of priestly training of the two traditions, but to explore a few key areas which have a bearing on the training process and its evolution. The chapter is divided into three broad themes, viz. historical factors, contemporary training aspects, and modern trends.

11.1 Historical factors

11.1.1 Continuity of the Vedic Oral Tradition

Orality has remained central to the transmission of the Vedas. At the traditional Vedic schools (Skt. *gurukula*), the transmission of knowledge from teacher to pupil continues to be purely oral with limited use of printed texts or manuscripts. The recent monographs by Knipe (2015) and Larios (2017) present detailed ethnographic studies of the *vaidika*s of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra respectively, where the Vedic transmission is seen to be mostly an oral affair, and where one still finds Veda reciters who are proudly illiterate with regard to the tradition of the Vedic texts.[308] Orality has remained an ideal up to the present age, despite the introduction of writing, print, and mass distribution of texts. The fact that Veda reciters are addressed by the term *śrotriya* (literally 'the one

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[308] Knipe (2015, p. 73).

who has heard'), highlights the strong emphasis on the oral method of learning the Vedic texts.[309] Even though textbooks are nowadays utilised by students within the classroom and for self-study, they serve only as a medium to recall the text, not as a source for learning a new text. As it will be seen in section 11.2.3, the teacher's recitation remains the primary source of the text along with the correct pronunciations and pitch variations, elements which cannot be obtained from a printed book.

Orality was also, historically, a key feature of the transmission of Zoroastrian texts from one generation to the next. Even after the introduction of a script and the copying of manuscripts, a strong oral tradition existed alongside the written transmission. However, as discussed in section 10.1, this tradition of orality within Zoroastrianism has been decimated over the past two-century period. Printed editions have completely replaced the spoken word in so far as they have become the primary source of the Avestan texts in contemporary priestly training. These publications reproduce the Avestan text from the editions by European scholars, namely Niels L. Westergaard and Karl F. Geldner, of the nineteenth century, which have been compiled exclusively from manuscripts.[310] Thus, contrary to the Vedic tradition, absolutely no trace of the purely oral transmission of texts has survived among the Zoroastrian priesthood.

One of the key differences between the two traditions was the great emphasis laid on the rules of tone and accentuation in Vedic recitation, in contrast to the absence of a defined accent system in Zoroastrianism. In Vedic training, the proper pitch accent is indicated by the teacher using hand gestures, and students follow with appropriate head movements.[311] The printed texts only reproduced these accents in limited measure[312], and hence the teacher was indispensable in the correct transmission of the text. In the Avestan recitation, however, the accent is not explicitly indicated, and the pronunciation generally follows the teacher's own style. This is also observed in the written transmission of the Avestan texts, where no accent markings are found in any manuscript. Since the accent training was not required to be taught by the teacher, the written medium may have substituted the oral transmission more easily.

11.1.2 Extent of the textual corpus

The Vedic canon is colossal, especially in comparison with the extant Avestan corpus. There are four main Vedic *śākhā*s (branches): the Ŗg Veda, the Yajur Veda (bifurcated further into the Kŗṣṇa 'black' and Śukla 'white' branches), the Sāma Veda and the Atharva Veda. Each branch of the Veda comprises of the primary recitative (*saṃhitā*) and associated texts (Brāhmaṇa, Āraṇyaka, and Upaniṣad). In addition to these, there are manuals (*sūtra*) for solemn (*śrauta*) as well as domestic (*gŗhya*) rituals.[313]

A second dimension of the study of Vedic literature is the recitation pattern (*vikŗti*) for each text. The student first learns the *saṃhitā* or continuous text of his own branch, followed by the *pada-pāṭha* (word-by-word) text in which compounds are broken into individual words and recited without the phonetic adjustments made in a spoken sentence. For a third review, the same text is learnt in the

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[309] Larios (2017, pp. 19-21).
[310] See Yasna in Avestan script in section 5.3.
[311] Scharfe (2002, p. 241).
[312] Witzel (1974, pp. 472-473) mentions about the prevalence of many non-standard systems for marking the accentuation in Vedic manuscripts, which were either normalised or simplified in the later printed editions. Franceschini (2017, pp. 78-79) notes that the Vedic accent is marked only in a tiny percentage of the total manuscripts (11 out of the 121 manuscripts surveyed by the author).
[313] Knipe (2015, p. 37) tabulates the texts for each of the Vedic *śākhā*s.

krama-pāṭha technique, a step by step recitation where the successive words are coupled together. These three recitation techniques are known as *prakṛti* ('natural') *pāṭha*s as they preserve the original word order. This review of the same text using different recitation techniques, solidifies the text in the mind of the Veda student.

There are furthermore complex and difficult recitation techniques, which involve backward chaining in addition to the forward chaining. Since these modifications change the natural word order, they are known as *vikṛti* ('modification') *pāṭha*.[314] The most complex recitations techniques like the *ratha-pāṭha* and *ghana-pāṭha* are attempted by many, but mastered only by a few of the brightest students.[315]

Thus, there are the two main dimensions of the study of the Vedic corpus, first, the 'quantity' or extent of texts to be memorized, and second, the 'quality' aspect of mastery over the recitation patterns in different *vikṛti*. The vastness of this curriculum precludes any one person from mastering the entire corpus (as one lifetime is inadequate).[316] Most students choose to specialise after mastering the *saṃhitā* text of their chosen *śākhā*. Some pursue the *pada-pāṭha* recitation of the memorised *saṃhitā* text, and build up to the other *vikṛti* of the same text, while others may choose another *śākhā* or a different area of Vedic study such as ritual theory (*karmakāṇḍa*) or astrology (*jyotiṣa*). Hence, graduating students are specialists in different areas, having mastered either a particular branch (*ṛgvedin*, etc.) or a particular recitation style (*ghanapāṭhin*, etc.).[317]

This great diversity in the 'schools' of Vedic learning, is in sharp contrast to the standard curriculum of the Zoroastrian priestly schools.[318] As seen in the sections on historical priestly training (3.1, 3.4) and on the contemporary training (5.2), the same standard curriculum has been employed over, at least, the past two-hundred-year period, at all places, ranging from the home school to the large Athornan Institutes. Thus, unlike the variety of expertise among the Vedic graduates, all trained Zoroastrian priests are experts in the same domain. The limited size of the surviving Avestan ritual repertoire can be taught completely within a six to eight year timeframe, thus precluding the need to specialise in a particular branch. It is, however, possible, indeed likely, that the Zoroastrian priestly curriculum was more diverse in the past. We find some ritual texts which are attested in manuscripts such as the Hādoxt Nask and the Vištasp Yašt ceremony, which have fallen into disuse.[319] These and other such texts may have been part of the curriculum in the past, which could have required some degree of specialisation within the priestly schools.

The other aspect of Vedic training using different recitation techniques (*vikṛti*) is not attested within the Zoroastrian priestly tradition. No modification is performed on the recitation text in contemporary priestly training and there does not appear to be any historical reference for using different varieties of word order as memorisation tools.[320] However, an interesting anecdote was related by Er. Adil

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[314] Eight standard *vikṛti pāṭha*s are identified, viz. *jatā* (braid), *mālā* (garland), *sikhā* (top knot), *rekhā* (row), *dhwaja* (flag), *danda* (staff), *ratha* (chariot) and *ghana* (dense) *pāṭha*. Howard (1986, pp. 121-149) gives a detailed description with examples for each *pāṭha*.

[315] Knipe (2015, p. 149), Larios (2017, pp. 94-95).

[316] Knipe (2015, p. 141).

[317] Larios (2017, p. 87).

[318] The sole exception is the curriculum for the Kadimi priestly faction which has minor recitation differences with the mainstream Shenshāhi faction. Also see section 10.2.

[319] These texts are also listed in some of the early printed editions of the Yasna and allied ceremonies such as the one by Mančerjī Posṭvālā in 1900 (Redard & Daruwalla, 2021, p. 6).

[320] One reference to the *pada-pāṭha* in a Zoroastrian text is given by Witzel (1989, p. 323), where he conjectures the Avestan *Gāϑā*s to be a *pada-pāṭha* form of the recitation text.

Bhesania[321] which was reminiscent of the backward recitation in a Vedic *vikṛti*. At an annual bhantar examination conducted at DAI in the 1970s, a visiting examiner, Er. Bamanshah Anklesharia, asked one of the brightest students of the batch, Zarir Dastoor, to recite a difficult *gāϑā* chapter in the reverse order. Zarir was asked to recite Yasna *hā* 44 starting from the final (20th) stanza and then recite each preceding stanza up to the first. While this assigned task was different from the reverse word order of the Vedic *vikṛti*, the underlying premise was the same: to consolidate the memorised text in the brain. The examiner was thus checking whether the student had thoroughly imbibed the recitation text.

11.1.3 Exegetical versus Liturgical education

In the Vedic tradition, a distinction is made between two fundamentally different types of education: the *śāstrika* (scholastic) and the *vaidika* (recitational).[322] The end goal of the two types are contrasting: the former embodies an intellectual tradition to develop a *pandit* ('scholar') capable of interpreting the scriptures, whereas the latter aims to create a *vaidika* or *vedamūrti* ('embodiment of the Veda') who has mastered the sound form of the text and can reproduce it with extreme exactitude in a recitation. The *śāstrika* student aims to interpret the texts and master its language (Sanskrit) to apply them in different contexts and realms of study. In contrast, the *vaidika* learns the hymns by heart, or as it is referred in the tradition 'fixes them in his throat' (*kaṇṭhastha*). The student of either branch begins his formal study at the age of around eight years, and continues well past his teens to master the *śāstra*[323] or emerge as a proficient *Vedamūrti*. While the *vaidika* education continues to take place either at home or in traditional schools, the *śāstrika* teaching has mainly migrated to colleges and universities run on Western models, often even with English as the medium of instruction.[324]

Such a structured division between the exegetical and liturgical training is not observed among the contemporary Zoroastrian priesthood. The primary focus of the present curriculum is on the liturgical requirements of memorising the texts and mastering the ritual performance. Limited aspects of the exegetical tradition such as the synopsis of texts and the interpretation of ritual actions, are imparted to the students, though this activity is peripheral to the core objective of memorising the ritual texts. Since the late nineteenth century, a student interested in pursuing a formal study of the Avestan texts and its grammar, had the option to enrol at one of the Madressas imparting scholarly training.[325] This line of study was undertaken by priests after they had completed their standard liturgical training.

However, it is likely that in the past, a strong exegetical tradition existed in parallel to the liturgical tradition within Zoroastrianism, which has now been almost wiped out. The Pahlavi text Dādestān-ī-Dēnīg describes the condition of the Zoroastrian priesthood in Iran during the early centuries after the fall of the Sasanian Empire. The text differentiates between two categories of priests, the *Hērbed*, a scholar-priest, and the *Hāwišt*, a ritual expert.[326] The *Hērbed* would likely have had expertise over

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[321] Interview #4, min 55-56.
[322] Wujastyk (1981, p. 30), Larios (2017, p. 3).
[323] The complete study of a śāstra takes about twelve years (Wujastyk, 1981, p. 32).
[324] Michaels (2001, pp. 3-10).
[325] The Mulla Feroze and the Sir JJZ Madressas in Mumbai and the Sir CJZ Madressa in Navsari (section 3.1.4); however, such institutions were an innovation of the nineteenth century created to fulfil the need for religious scholars who could guide the community, and did not trace their history to any exegetical schools of the past. In recent times, learned high priests of the community such as Dastur Kotwal and the late Dastur JamaspAsa have trained under western scholars in addition to the study at the above institutions.
[326] Dādestān-ī-Dēnīg 65.1 in Kreyenbroek (1987, pp. 195-197).

meta-ritual Avestan texts like the Vidēvdād and Nērangestān along with its Pahlavi gloss (Zand) and on technical matters concerning ritual allowances and restrictions (*šāyest-nē-šāyest*). The *Hāwišt*, on the other hand, would have memorised a considerable number of Avestan liturgical texts and could recite these within a ritual, but had no knowledge on the interpretation of these texts. It is unclear whether *Hērbeds* pursued their scholarly study after completing their liturgical training or directly as in the case of the Vedic *śāstrika* students. The latter case seems plausible as most *Hērbeds* are described as being incapable of taking part in the ritual as celebrants.

A trace of this dual education is found in the two categories of the extant Zoroastrian manuscripts, viz. liturgical (Sāde) and exegetical (Pahlavi).[327] The liturgical manuscripts in India, which provide the recitative text in Avestan language and the ritual directions in either Middle Persian or Gujarati, were primarily used as a training tool for the ritual performing priests. The exegetical manuscripts, conversely, have the Avestan text with a translation and commentary in the Pahlavi or Sanskrit language to aid its interpretation. It is likely that the scribes who copied the liturgical manuscripts were practising priests with good proficiency in the ritual sphere, while the scribes of the exegetical manuscripts belonged to theological schools and aspired to gain a deeper knowledge of the text.[328]

11.2 Contemporary Training aspects

11.2.1 Typology of the schools

The Vedic schools in India range in size and complexity from being a small school run within the family tradition to being a large institution funded by wealthy religious organizations. In his survey of the typology of the Vedic schools in Maharashtra, Larios (2017, p. 77) presents a heuristic classification of the schools into three categories based on their physical setup and pedagogical method. The three idealised and somewhat overlapping categories with their defining features are described here.

a. Gurukula Type:

The term *gurukula* is used for the 'house or extended family of a guru' and refers to schools maintained by the efforts of an individual (the *guru*) and his close family members. The students usually reside at the *guru*'s house and are considered a part of the same family. The *guru* imparts the recitation training to his resident students within the household, and is solely responsible for supervising the progress and development of his students. The *guru* treats his teaching as a fulfilment of his religious duty and usually does not seek any financial remuneration. In exchange the students help in the menial chores of the household and take care of their own belongings. This gurukula model served as the template for the private training classes run by Zoroastrian priests in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[329] These classes were run by individual priests at their home, and in most cases remained functional during the lifetime of their master only.

Due to its informal setup and lack of a stable financial backing, the gurukula model is severely endangered in modern India, with only a few schools of this type operational in the twenty-first century. Within the Zoroastrian tradition, such schools did not survive beyond the initial decades of

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[327] Cantera (2015, p. 41). For details, see Cantera (2011, pp. 201-210).
[328] An example of the exegetical school was that of Dastur Jāmāsp Īrānī in Surat in the eighteenth century which was dedicated to the study, exposition and editing of Avestan texts like the Vidēvdād (Cantera & Andrés-Toledo, 2008, pp. 82-83).
[329] See section 3.1.1.

the twentieth century and presently there is no trace of these private 'gurukula' type Zoroastrian priestly training schools.

b. Vedapāṭhaśālā ('Veda School') Type:

This category refers to a communal school in which one or more teachers live with their students, and which is usually dependent on external funding from a wealthy patron or trust. This category is similar to the Nišāls described in section 3.1.2, which were sponsored by affluent Parsi benefactors. Like the Vedapāṭhaśālās, the Nišāls were operated at a designated location where the teachers were only responsible for teaching the curriculum, while the operational aspects of the school were administered by the school management. However, unlike the former, where training was restricted to a particular branch of the Veda, the Nišāls also included secular subjects in the curriculum and could be attended by students from non-priestly backgrounds also.

Another distinctive feature of the Vedapāṭhaśālās was that they were isolated from nearly settlements in order to minimize contact with the rest of society and allow for a more ritually pure life away from the various polluting elements. This was usually not a feature of most Zoroastrian Nišāls, and was only observed at a few priestly schools which were part of a fire-temple complex[330]. The only known Zoroastrian seminary coming close to the Vedapāṭhaśālā model is the M. F. Cama Athornan Institute which was established on an isolated hill in a suburb of Mumbai and surrounded by several acres of forested lands. Both the teaching staff and the students were resident at the self-contained campus with limited outside interaction, and enjoyed a high-degree of separation from the bustling city life.[331]

c. Vedavidyālaya ('Veda College') Type:

This final category refers to larger communitarian type of school created through the sponsorship of an external body. This type of school is based on the 'western' educational institution model, where there is a defined governing structure headed by a principal and the teaching staff is usually hired for their specialised expertise in a subject. These institutions usually offer many branches of Vedic study and may include subjects like English language and computer lessons to prepare the student for a larger role in the society.

This category mirrors the organisation of the new Athornan Institutes established in Mumbai and Navsari after the mid-nineteenth century.[332] These institutes were founded either by an association of priests or by a large endowments from wealthy donors. These Athornan Institutes, like the Vedavidyālayas, aim to create educated priests, who along with their ritual expertise are also trained to prepare for leadership roles in the religious domain.

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[330] For instance, the Nišāl of Dadibhai Nosherwanji (section 3.1.2) which was operational within the Dadiseth Ātaš Bahrām premises in Mumbai.
[331] See section 3.3.3.2. With the rapid growth of the population in the suburb of Andheri in recent decades, the institute campus is no longer isolated from the city. The surrounding forested area has subsequently been cleared and a residential colony has been constructed on that land.
[332] See sections 3.1.3 and 3.3.

11.2.2 Study of the texts

The diversity in the size and curriculum of the Vedic schools implies that there is no single standard daily routine followed at all schools. Most schools define their own timetable of study and other activities to be performed daily. At the traditional schools modeled on the *Gurukula* system, the training usually commenced very early in the morning, sometimes as early as 4 AM[333], whereas many present-day schools begin their formal classroom session only at around 9 AM.[334] Larios (2017) in his survey of the Vedic schools in Maharashtra state, presents a prototypical schedule[335] based on the routine followed at most schools.

A comparison of this schedule with the daily routine followed at the Athornan Institutes[336], yields interesting insights. The daily Vedic routine is strikingly similar to the timetable that was followed at the Dadar Athornan Institute prior to the 1960s (cf. Table 16), when schooling was conducted in-house. In both cases, the day began very early at around 5 AM, followed by a bath, morning prayers and a 1.5 hour Veda/bhantar study session, before breakfast at 8 AM. On either side of lunch at noon, classes were conducted for recitation studies as well as for other subjects (mainly English and Sanskrit languages at the Vedic schools; languages, Mathematics and Social Sciences at the DAI). There were no study sessions in the evenings, and the time was reserved for prayers, games and pursuing other activities such as music and computers, before winding up early at around 9 PM.

While the typical Vedic school routine builds in around six hours of classroom study and an additional couple of hours of self-study, less than five hours were dedicated for recitation study at the DAI. This gap between the times for scriptural studies has further widened in recent decades when the DAI students started attending an external day-school. As per the present timetable followed at DAI (cf. Table 18), only two hours are reserved for bhantar studies on weekdays, which is barely a fourth of the total time dedicated for the same activity at the Vedic schools.

It is observed that while the Vedic schools have incorporated the study of some modern subjects (English, Computers, etc.) in the curriculum, it has been limited to less than two hours daily.[337] In contrast, a current DAI students spend close to six hours at the external school, and an additional four hours on school studies at the institute. This huge disparity indicates that the traditional Vedic schools have retained the primacy of memorising the Veda, whereas at the Athornan Institutes, the bhantar study has been largely supplanted by the academic studies.[338]

11.2.3 Types of study sessions

The Vedic study sessions can be classified into three primary types based on the material covered and the mode of study, viz., the teaching of new material in class (*vedādhyāya*), revision of learnt material in class (*guṇaṇikā*) and self-study outside of the class (*svādhyāya*).[339] These three modes are described in detail below.

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[333] Knipe (2015, p. 251); Scharfe (2002, p. 240) gives a start time of 5 AM.
[334] Larios (2017, p. 137).
[335] Larios (2017, p. 140). Also p.230 provides a link to a short film about the typical day at a Vedic school in Satara, Maharashtra. It is available at https://youtu.be/ALEHkgOx8EE.
[336] Cf. section 5.5.
[337] Larios (2017, pp. 94, 138).
[338] On the increasing importance of academics at the Athornan Institutes, see sections 4.4.1 and 5.6.
[339] As described by Larios (2017, p. 102).

a. *Vedādhyāya* (Veda lesson): This session is always conducted by the teacher (*guru*) wherein new study material is introduced. The teacher breaks the verse or stanza to be taught into smaller units and starts by reciting the first unit aloud. All the students then repeat the same unit aloud multiple times. The teacher then introduces the next unit, which follows the same procedure. Then the combination of the two units, which is usually a verseline (*pāda*), is recited by the teacher, and followed by the students. This method of fragmenting and then combining is employed until the entire verse or stanza is completed, after which the next unit is taken up.

The students in many cases refer to their textbook during this study in order to locate and familiarise the text for subsequent self-study. The textbooks, though, only serve as a supporting medium; the teacher remains the primary source of the text, along with the proper pronunciations and pitch variations. During recitation, the teacher corrects any mistakes by only repeating the word in the proper intonation and pronunciation, without any additional instructions. Sometimes the corrections are accompanied by movements of his right hand to indicate the proper accent.

The amount of new material introduced in *vedādhyāya* session depends on the school. One method followed was to start with the first ten stanzas or units on the first day, then cover stanzas 2–11 on the second day, stanzas 3–12 on the third day, and so on.[340] Thus, limited new material was introduced each day, while much of the previous material was repeated. Traditionally, the *vedādhyāya* sessions were conducted for a period of ten consecutive days, after which the revision classes were conducted.[341]

b. *Guṇaṇikā* (revision): After the new material has been introduced and repeated a few times in the *vedādhyāya* sessions, the *guṇaṇikā* (from *guṇita* 'multiplied, repeated') is used to solidify the text in the student's memory. In a *guṇaṇikā* session, the learnt text is taken up for revision by being recited multiple times over. Here, instead of a group recitation, the students take turn to individually recite a portion of the text. Also unlike the *vedādhyāya*, the revision session may be conducted by a senior student in the absence of the teacher, and either of them only intervene if there is a mistake in the recitation. The recitation in a *guṇaṇikā* session is deliberately conducted at a faster pace to shift the focus away from the printed text, which may be used only as a mapping tool or not at all.

c. *Svādhyāya* (self-study): In addition to the above two classroom sessions, the student is expected to recite to himself, the learned portions over and over again, either individually or in a small group. This self-study is identified as one of the most important aspects of the learning process, and usually around two hours are dedicated to it on a daily basis.[342] While this amount of time is adequate for the bright students to complete their task, the weaker students are sometimes required to forgo their playtime and other activities in order to complete their memorisation backlog.

Comparison with the training at the Athornan Institutes

While the primary goal of the training of both, the Vaidika and the Athornan, is the same, which is the thorough memorisation of their respective texts, there are some significant differences in the study sessions of both traditions. The most significant difference is the one-on-one teaching in the Athornan Institute classroom versus the batch learning in the Vedic class. At the former, the bhantar teacher

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[340] Scharfe (2002, p. 241).
[341] Larios (2017, p. 106).
[342] Larios (2017, p. 115).

instructs each student individually and all students may be studying a different section, whereas at the latter, the entire class is taught the same text simultaneously.[343]

Elements of all the three types of Vedic teaching sessions (viz., *vedādhyāya*, *guṇaṇikā* and *svādhyāya*) are observed in the training at the Athornan Institutes. The bhantar teacher teaches a new stanza by breaking it down into smaller units and makes the student repeat the unit multiple times after him, which is the methodology followed in the *vedādhyāya* session. After a few sessions of teaching new material, the teacher makes the student recite the entire chapter in a revision class, which is similar to the *guṇaṇikā* session. While the teacher engages with one student at a time, all the other students pursue the study of their individual parts at their own desk, which is akin to the *svādhyāya* of Vedic training. Thus, presently all the three types of Vedic study sessions are incorporated into the same classroom session at DAI.[344]

This difference in pedagogy has an implication on the progress of the students through the curriculum. It is observed at the Athornan Institutes that each student progresses at an individual pace based on his ability to memorise, and thus, a wide variation is seen in the amount of time taken to complete the curriculum.[345] A student at the typical Vedapāṭhaśālā is usually not accorded this laxity; a weak student is required to dedicate much additional time to the *svādhyāya* in order to catch up with the rest of his classmates, so that he is at par during the next *vedādhyāya* or *guṇaṇikā* session. This additional study time to reduce the backlog is also observed at the Athornan Institutes; however, it is demanded only from students who have fallen behind significantly.[346]

It is likely that this concession to an Athornan student is an outcome of the increased workload from his secular school studies. As observed in the present daily routine of a DAI student, more than nine hours during the weekdays are expended at the external day school and its associated studies[347], which leaves negligible free time to squeeze in additional time for bhantar studies. This has meant that the slower students take eight to nine years to complete the curriculum, instead of the customary six to seven years. Prior to its temporary closure in 1965, the DAI study programme was capped at six years, and all students had to exit the institute after this time. Since secular subjects were taught in-house at that time and the bhantar study was accorded a higher priority, the teacher could choose to make the student skip the school study and focus only on the bhantar curriculum. Due to this factor, most students at that time graduated from the institute after completing the entire course within the six year timeframe, which is very difficult to achieve under the present circumstances.[348]

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[343] The progression of the Athornan Institute class is described in section 6.2.2.

[344] In the past decades, there was a greater distinction between the classes for teaching new material and for revision. At the MFCAI up to the 1960s, the morning session at 7 AM and school periods for bhantar were conducted by the bhantar teacher wherein new material was taught, whereas the evening bhantar study at 7 PM was reserved for self-study and was overseen by a caretaker or senior student (section 5.5.2). Also at the DAI until a few decades ago, the bhantar classes during the weekends were reserved for revision sessions, whereas new material was taught only during the weekday sessions (cf. section 6.2.4).

[345] See section 7.3.2 for a visual representation of the varied progress of the students at DAI.

[346] See 'task class' under Reward and Punishment (section 6.3.2).

[347] The junior students (standards I – VII) have 5.5 hours of school and 3.25 hours of school study at the DAI, whereas the senior students (standards VIII – X) have 6 hours of school and 4.25 hours of school study. See Table 18 in section 5.5.3.

[348] The curriculum is fast-tracked in different degrees for a majority of the present students. While the weaker students are made to skip the memorisation of large chunks of the texts (case study in section 7.4.2), it was observed that even reasonably bright students were cleared in bhantar exams despite being unable to recite any of the Gāthic chapters from memory (see case study on Nāvar-Marātab exam in section 6.2.5).

11.3 Modern Trends and Innovations

11.3.1 Drop in number and quality of enrolments

Knipe in his monumental study on the *Taittiriya Yajurvedins* of the Godavari Delta in Andhra Pradesh, traces the career path chosen by three generations of *vaidikas*. The oldest generation labelled as 'traditionalists' all followed in their fathers' footsteps to become sacrificial priests; the next generation termed as 'Selectors' followed a mixed path with a few maintaining their father's legacy while the remaining chose non-priestly careers; and the youngest generation, called 'Opportunists' mostly pursued careers of their liking, far-removed from that of their fathers and grandfathers.[349] This sums up the trend at most Vedic schools across the country. Larios reports that many teachers lamented the drop in interest among *brāhmaṇa* families wanting to send their children to traditional Vedic schools, leaving them with only a handful of sincere and self-driven students. Increasingly, most of the students come from a rather impoverished social stratum. This trend is also observed in other traditionalist projects, such as the Indian *madrasa*s, which are attended mostly by children belonging to the lower caste and socio-economic background.[350]

A similar tendency of falling number of enrolments at the Athornan Institutes has been observed since the 1950s.[351] Most parents, especially from well-to-do priestly families, are increasingly unwilling to send their sons to become full-time priests due to a number of reasons, as discussed in section 9.1. Similar to the trend in Vedic schools, a number of students at the Athornan Institutes come from less privileged families, who consider the priestly training to be a fall-back option in case other career paths are not available.

11.3.2 Curtailed curriculum

Larios (2017, p. 88) reports that while the core aim of the traditional Vedic schools is to train the students to memorise the complete *saṃhitā* text of a particular *śākhā*, some schools only pursued this for the bright and motivated students. For the students who were either unable or unwilling to finish the entire *saṃhitā* memorization, an alternative two-to-three-year *paurohitya* (family priest) training is imparted, which enables them to perform basic lifecycle rites and simple domestic rituals to earn their livelihood. This curtailed curriculum is offered to weaker students, or to those who start their *veda-pāṭha* training very late and hence are unable to memorize large quantities of texts in time. The *paurohitya* training, nonetheless, has less prestige within the community than the curriculum encompassing the entire Veda. Larios observes a general increase in the basic *paurohitya* training, but a decrease in traditional higher studies beyond the *saṃhitā* (i.e. Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads) and the advanced recitation techniques (*krama*, *jaṭā* and *ghana-pāṭha*).[352]

A similar approach is followed at the Athornan Institutes, where the weaker students and those who start late follow an abridged curriculum.[353] Like the *paurohitya* training, the shortened curriculum at

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[349] Knipe (2015, p. 247).
[350] Larios (2017, pp. 204-205).
[351] See section 3.3.4.
[352] Larios (2017, p. 205).
[353] Discussed in the case studies in sections 7.4.2 and 7.4.3. Also see section 9.2 for the introduction of a shortened study programme at the MFCAI.

the Athornan Institute at least enables students to earn a livelihood by the performance of the common outer rituals. This is also reflected in the reduction of time dedicated to teaching the ritual actions of the complex inner rituals.[354] Due to the drop in demand for the longer inner ceremonies, it is likely that most students who do not memorise the complete curriculum, will never go on to perform these intricate ceremonies in the future. Hence, these students are made to memorise only those specific parts of the text which are recited within the shorter outer ceremonies.[355]

11.3.3 Traditional versus newer custodians of knowledge

Traditionally, each Vedic student was directed to study the Veda *śākhā* cultivated in his family, and cross-overs were encouraged only after the completion of one's own branch.[356] This safeguarded the rights of recitation and ritual performance within the family or group of families affiliated to a particular school. In modern times, this restriction was relaxed and most students were free to choose their branch of study; however, only the fully-trained *vaidika brāhmaṇa* was still considered to be the primary custodian of authentic Vedic knowledge. This has changed in recent years with the proliferation of half-trained ritual priests (*paurohitya*s), the recent phenomenon of women priestesses (*stri-purohitās*) and in rare cases even persons belonging to the lower caste who can replace the *brāhmaṇa* by learning the necessary rituals without having undergone the complete traditional curriculum. [357] This has caused turmoil among the fully-trained *vaidika*s, who perceive this as transgressing on their traditional rights.

A similar trend is observed within the Zoroastrian priesthood, where traditionally priests belonging to different geographical (Sanjānā, Bhagariā, etc.) and calendrical (Kadimi and Shenshāhi) factions served only within their own jurisdiction. Over the course of the past century, these stringent boundaries were removed to allow priests to work interchangeably; however, only a fully ordained priest from an Athornan family was considered eligible to fill in any priestly role. In recent decades, there is an increasing trend of priests being initiated with very limited training [358], which has caused discontentment among the fully-trained priests. The emergence of the Behdin Pāsbān programme[359] wherein a person belonging to the laity is trained to serve in a limited priestly role, has also been a source of conflict among the priesthood. In order to defend the rights of traditional priests, trained Behdin Pāsbāns are allowed to function only at places where a regular priest is unavailable. Thus, we observe a very similar evolution in the emergence of 'new' custodians of religious know-how, and a similar response mechanism by the traditional custodians in both the Vedic and Zoroastrian traditions.

11.4 Summary

Due to its shared heritage and close proximity, Zoroastrian priestly training in India displays many commonalities with the Vedic tradition. Orality was strongly entrenched in both cultures, but it has

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[354] For details, see section 4.4.2 and 'Observations on the ritual training' under section 6.2.6.
[355] A majority of Zoroastrian priests today only perform the outer ceremonies (section 4.3.2). Even the fully-trained priests usually only perform the shortened version of the longer inner ceremonies, which leave out the recitation of many chapters of the text (See description of concise Yasna in section 4.2.4).
[356] Scharfe (2002, p. 225).
[357] Larios (2017, p. 127).
[358] See section 4.3.3.
[359] See section 9.2.

survived only in the Vedic practice. The oral transmission of Zoroastrian texts may have lacked the exacting fidelity of the Vedic texts, ensured by the various *vikṛti* techniques. In time, this would have led to various regional variations in recitation, and the lack of a single authoritative version of the text. This was remedied in the critical editions of the texts by European scholars in the nineteenth century, which came to be recognised as being more authentic. Over the course of the twentieth century, printed books based on these editions completely replaced all the regional versions and, in effect, eliminated any remaining traces of the oral transmission.

The vast corpus of Vedic texts has survived more or less intact despite the long passage of time, which has not been the case with the Avestan canon. Texts like the Hādoxt Nask and Vištasp Yašt which are attested in manuscripts, have perished in the present priestly practice. One reason for the robust survival of the Vedic text, may have been the numerous *brāhmaṇa* families and traditional schools in various parts of the country which preserved their own recension of the Veda. It is possible that a wider variety of Avestan texts was preserved in the traditional priestly stronghold towns of Navsari, Ankleshwar, Bharuch and other areas. Some of these texts may have been vulnerable when the Zoroastrian population migrated to other places and the towns lost their priestly dominance.

While the liturgical (recitational) training of priests has continued at the traditional schools in both the Zoroastrian and Vedic practice, the exegetical education has undergone significant changes. The Vedic exegetical education has shifted to modern universities, whereas there is a break in exegetical tradition within Zoroastrianism. This break may have occurred due to the shift of focus of the Zoroastrian priests away from the interpretation of the texts towards the correct performance of the liturgies from the fifteenth century onwards.[360] It was only during the eighteenth century, that a revival in the exegetical type of education was observed, however, it was limited to a few schools.

It is in the contemporary training of priests, that we find significant similarities between the Zoroastrian and Vedic traditions. The three categories of Vedic schools share features common to the Zoroastrian priestly schools. The private training class run by a Zoroastrian *ustād* at his home seemed to be heavily influenced by the Gurukula system. The Zoroastrian Nišāls, like the Vedapāṭhaśālās, were usually sponsored by a single patron, but featured a broader curriculum with more secular subjects. And the new Athornan Institutes and Vedavidyālayas are both innovations of the twentieth century which have been modelled on the western education system. A key difference between the two traditions is observed in the introduction of secular subjects to the curriculum. While, priestly training at the Athornan Institutes has been subordinated to the requirements of the academic school, at the Vedic schools, it has largely remained marginal so far.

Finally, the forces of modernity and social change have affected both traditions, especially during the course of the past century. Socio-economic changes among the priesthood have led to fewer and fewer candidates enrolling at the priestly schools, which have responded by easing the curriculum to cater to the evolving ritual requirements. Other innovations such as the induction of female priests and those from non-priestly backgrounds, which have caused some ripples among traditional priests, are still largely peripheral to the mainstream priesthood. It is still the fully-trained male from the priestly family, who would have begun his study before the age of seven years with the three verses of the most important prayer of his tradition[361] and gone on to master the complete curriculum, that remains at the pinnacle of the priesthood.

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[360] Redard and Daruwalla (2021, p. 225).
[361] The Gāyatrī prayer (Ṛg Veda 3.62.10) and the Ašǝm Vohū (Yasna 27.14).

12 Appendices

12.1 Appendix 1: List of Mobeds performing inner rituals

The table below provides a list of places where inner rituals like the Yasna have been routinely performed during the 2015—2020 period. At each location, the number of priests[362] engaging with these rituals are listed along with their age (on 1-1-2020), their priestly faction and their place of priestly training. The following points can be noted from the table:

1. A majority of the fire-temples where inner rituals are actively performed are in Mumbai (11), while Navsari, Surat and Udvada have one such fire-temple.
2. Out of total 50 active priests, 33 are based in Mumbai followed by Surat (11), Udvada (4) and Navsari (2).
3. The D. N. Mody Ātaš Bahrām in Surat has the highest number of inner ritual priests (11) affiliated to it.
4. A majority of the priests (42 out of the 50) received their complete training at one of the two Athornan Institutes.
5. Among the priestly factions, the Bhagariā Panthak has maximum representation (24) followed by the Sanjānās (17) and the Godāvarās (6). There are only three Kadimis priests, all attached to the Banaji Ātaš Bahrām, the only Kadimi fire-temple in the list.
6. The average age of the priests is 46 years and the median is 43 years. There are seven priests under the age of 30 years, fifteen between 30–40 years, eleven between 40–50 years, seven between 50–60 years, and ten over 60 years of age.

City/town	Base location	#	Age	Priestly faction	Training Institute
Mumbai	Anjuman Ātaš Bahrām	1	46	Bhagariā	DAI
		2	45	Bhagariā	DAI
		3	38	Bhagariā	MFCAI
		4	38	Godāvarā	MFCAI
		5	21	Bhagariā	DAI
	Banaji Ātaš Bahrām	6	67	Kadimi	MFCAI
		7	53	Kadimi	MFCAI
		8	18	Kadimi	DAI
	Banaji Limji Agiary	9	42	Bhagariā	DAI
		10	42	Sanjānā	DAI
		11	38	Sanjānā	DAI
		12	34	Sanjānā	DAI
		13	26	Bhagariā	DAI
	Cama Baug Agiary	14	75	Bhagariā	DAI
		15	35	Bhagariā	MFCAI / home
	H. B. Wadia Ātaš Bahrām	16	71	Bhagariā	DAI
		17	59	Godāvarā	DAI

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[362] The names of the priests are excluded from the table to maintain anonymity.

City/town	Base location	#	Age	Priestly faction	Training Institute
		18	50	Bhagariā	MFCAI
		19	50	Sanjānā	Home
		20	46	Bhagariā	DAI
	Lalbaug Agiary	21	51	Sanjānā	DAI
		22	33	Sanjānā	DAI
	Motlibai Wadia Agiary	23	83	Sanjānā	DAI
		24	34	Sanjānā	DAI
	Rustomfaramna Agiary	25	71	Sanjānā	DAI
		26	60	Sanjānā	MFCAI
		27	57	Sanjānā	DAI
		28	44	Bhagariā	DAI / home
		29	27	Godāvarā	DAI
	Sethna Agiary	30	71	Godāvarā	DAI
		31	38	Bhagariā	DAI
	Thoothi Agiary	32	52	Bhagariā	DAI
	Vatcha Gandhi Agiary	33	80	Bhagariā	DAI
Navsari	Bhagarsath Ātaš Bahrām	34	56	Godāvarā	DAI
		35	37	Bhagariā	MFCAI
Surat	D. N. Mody Ātaš Bahrām	36	75	Bhagariā	DAI
		37	70	Bhagariā	DAI
		38	44	Bhagariā	DAI
		39	43	Bhagariā	DAI
		40	39	Bhagariā	DAI
		41	39	Sanjānā	MFCAI
		42	37	Sanjānā	DAI
		43	36	Bhagariā	DAI
		44	32	Sanjānā	MFCAI
		45	29	Bhagariā	MFCAI
		46	16	Bhagariā	Home
Udvada	Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām	47	45	Sanjānā	Home
		48	43	Sanjānā	DAI / home
		49	39	Sanjānā	DAI / home
		50	25	Sanjānā	Home

12.2 Appendix 2: Sample interview questionnaire with responses from Er. Sheherazad Pavri

Interview #38: Participant – Er. Sheherazad R. Pavri

Part 1: General information (*Collected at in-person meeting at Wadia Agiary, Mumbai in Feb 2018*)

Date of birth / age: 5-5-1994 / 24 years

Place of birth: Mumbai

Residence: Godrej Baug, Mumbai

Father name and priestly background: Er. Rohinton Faramroz Pavri (Bhagariā Panthak) Worked full-time in the corporate sector and practiced priesthood on part-time basis. After retirement took up full-time priestly duties at the Doongerwadi as priest in charge of funerary prayers.

Nāvar date / place: May 2005 at Vadi Daremeher, Navsari

Marātab date / place: October 2006 at Vadi Daremeher, Navsari

Priestly training at: Dadar Athornan Institute (DAI)

Part 2: (*Answers received via email on 13-5-2018*)

Information related to DAI:

1. Year/standard of entry and exit:

    SRP: Entry: 2001 (2nd standard)
         Exit: 2010 (10th standard)

2. Bhantar teacher(s) at the DAI:

    SRP:
    Er Cawas Dastur, Er Sam Sidhwa, Er Kersi Bhadha, Er Sarosh Behramkamdin, Er Kersi Karanjia

3. Progression at the DAI – Texts memorized at the end of Year 1, Year 2, …
    (*If you still have your student diary noting the daily progress at DAI, I would like to look at it and take some photos*).

    SRP: Year 2: Visparad kardo 6
            Year 3 : Ready for Navar
            Year 5: Ready for Maratab
            (sorry, some of my reports are missing. Also, I do not have my Bhantar diaries where daily reports were mentioned of memorising and revising)

4. Peer-group from DAI: Among the students in your batch, how many or what proportion practice priesthood on a full-time or part-time basis?

    SRP

    a. Full-time priests: 7
    b. Part-time priests: 17
    c. Pray only in Muktād / do not practise: 19
    d. Perform any inner rituals like the Yasna, Vendidād: 0 (The last lot of peers have either moved out of country or taken up a job)

Priesthood career related:

1. Do you have any records of the standalone Yasna, Visperad and Vendidād ceremonies you have performed? Any information on the aggregate count, when, where, etc. would be quite useful.
SRP: I only have a record of 62 Vendidāds performed till date.

2. Information of Nīrangdīn ceremonies performed:

    SRP

#	Finish date	Location	Partner priest	As Zot/Rāspi?
1	18 April, 2011	Banaji Limjee Agiary	Khushroo Kanga	Zot
2	18 April, 2012	Banaji Limjee Agiary	Hoshedar Panthaki	Zot
3	14 November, 2012	Banaji Limjee Agiary	Hoshedar Panthaki	Rāspi
4	12 May, 2013	Banaji Limjee Agiary	Hoshedar Panthaki	Rāspi
5	29 May, 2013	Banaji Limjee Agiary	Hoshedar Panthaki	
6	17 November, 2013	Banaji Limjee Agiary	Hoshedar Panthaki	
7	9 April, 2014	Banaji Limjee Agiary	Hoshedar Panthaki	
8	30 April, 2014	Banaji Limjee Agiary	Hoshedar Panthaki	
9	10 May, 2015	Banaji Limjee Agiary	Hoshedar Panthaki	
10	19 November, 2015	Banaji Limjee Agiary	Hoshedar Panthaki	Rāspi
11	20 November, 2016	Banaji Limjee Agiary	Hoshedar Panthaki	
12	24 February, 2018	Motlibai Wadia Agiary	Khushroo Kanga	Zot

3. Priestly duties in a typical month (when you are not traveling out / performing the Nīrangdīn):

    SRP: (Here everything would be in approximation since I do not have a fixed work month. This is mainly because I started Mobedi along with my college studies. Currently with handling business and travelling, the schedule is more dynamic)

- Days of service per month: 15-18
- Hours dedicated on average day and rituals performed:
  3–4 hours on a normal day (Āfrīnagān / Faroxši / Bāj ceremonies)

2 hours when Yasna performed

24 hours for Vendidād (Since that involves stay in Agiary after morning Yasna and then main ceremony at night)

- Number of Yasna and Vendidād ceremonies performed:

2–3 Vendidād performed in a month

3–4 Yasna performed in a month

Part 3: (*Answers received via email on 18-5-2018*)

Ritual Performance

1. Based on my interaction with many current students at the DAI, my perception is that there is a vast difference in the recitation ability of students passing out of the Athornan versus the higher-ritual (Yasna, Visperad, Vendidād) performing Mobeds. Is this difference chiefly due to experience, or is there a qualitative difference between the two groups?

    SRP:
    The vast difference is understandably due to the extra pressure of school studies these days. The current crop of priests who priests perform these ceremonies are fluent, only through practise and experience ; and so many of them weren't at all that smart when it came to school studies. It came as a responsibility to them, which became a calling and with experience became very refined.

2. While performing a longer ritual, what is your thought process, i.e., are you consciously thinking about which part you are reciting and what is the next stanza/chapter/ritual action? OR are you just in the moment, so to say on cruise-control mode, where it keeps flowing automatically? If it is both, roughly what proportion is each during the ritual? (To an observer, most of the time it seems to be the latter).

    SRP:
    It is 90% cruise-control mode, rightly observed by you. The 10% attention is being mindful of the surroundings. Being Pav Mahal ceremonies, it is pertinent that no one else enters the pāvīs, hence. Also, devotees who aren't aware of the same tend to unknowingly walk in to pay their respects to the Dādgāh saheb.

3. How do you mentally perceive the text of the Yasna intercalated with the Visperad/Vendidād? Is every chapter one unit, like praying a series of individual Nyāišes and Yašts in sequence? OR is it a monolithic text, akin to say the Fravardin Yašt during the Faroxši? To paraphrase, what are the fundamental building blocks in recalling the text?

    SRP:
    Since there is intercalation, we usually follow the flow of the Karde of the Visperad. After every gatha there are 2 Vendidād pargarads so that gives us the flow. only there is one exception, but

being the first to happen it doesn't cause confusion per se. Moreover, as soon as the Vendidād Pargarad reading commences after Ha 27, we read from the book. Hence, I don't see any confusion regarding the flow especially during the Pargarads being recited.

4. Do you use any gestures (apart from the ritual actions) like counting on your fingertips? Do any gestures aid in better recalling of the text?

   SRP:
   Counting on fingers while praying large number of Yathas and Ashems, say 10 and over. Also, a hand chopping action mid-air sometimes tends to be done while recalling something or someplace where I make a mistake and get corrected.

5. How often and what parts of the longer texts (Yasna-Visperad) need to be revised to be retained, i.e., whether certain portions of the texts are forgotten after a long break? Or is no revision necessary, and the memorized text remains intact? If not revised, does the fluency reduce whereby some conscious effort to recall is required?

   SRP:
   Being away even for 2–3 months is enough to start making mistakes or at least faltering. The text breaks up, will not remain intact and some prompting like the ending of the previous word needs to be done. Yes, the fluency goes down, even if it involves reading Pargarads. Actively performing, let us say 2–3 Vendidāds a month is enough for me to stay well versed.

Priesthood related:

1. Why are there only ca. 20 Mobeds who have performed the Nīrangdīn ceremony in recent years? Is the subset of priests with the ability to perform the Yasna and the Vendidād, significantly larger? Can you enumerate the factors responsible for this?

   SRP:
   ▪ In my experience with priesthood in the last 10 years, there were priests available with the calibre of performing Nīrangdīns. (I would say 4–5 here which significantly ups the number and makes the situation better, at least in Bombay.) They were lacking the drive and motivation. The right mentoring and guidance are lacking.
   ▪ Further, majority of them moved out to lucrative jobs or even newer pastures (abroad) where they get better facilities and opportunities. It is not that the money is not good for higher ceremonies. But if you compare it to other professions, it can be bettered.
   ▪ Where you do not take money into consideration, life is difficult. Better facilities and benefits are absent which draws away young Mobeds into other professions. History has shown the flow of income from various monetary schemes for Mobeds running dry.

2. What would incentivize the other Mobeds, for the above number to significantly increase?

SRP:

A well-defined competitive pay structure will definitely draw people to the profession. This needs to be coupled with benefits at the workplace, say medical insurance, provident fund etc. Also tying down someone to a fire-temple will not be helpful in the wrong run. According to me, the solution would be to have enough mobeds where a rotation on a regular basis will keep everyone productive and occupied, not fatigued by pressure or compulsion.

3. What are your motivations in choosing the path you have taken?

SRP:

My motivation was to primarily showcase my skill. I was well versed and wanted to make use of something for which I have put in so much time and effort. This was for my 1st Nīrangdīn. As it went on, I take it up today to continue the performance of a high ceremony which very few can – understanding it is a dying art, so to keep the show going. I also enjoy the peace I am at while being away from the outside world. So, I try doing it at least once a year as a spiritual retreat, away from chaos.

4. If you were to assign % values to the factors for performing a Nīrangdīn ceremony, how would you rate the follows:

SRP:
   ▪ Monetary – 30%
   ▪ Spiritually uplifting – 30%
   ▪ Sense of duty (priestly lineage / history) – 20%
   ▪ Pride (of being among the very few at the pinnacle or ritual performance) – 19%
   ▪ Excitement (thrill of performing to an audience) – 1%

5. Is becoming a higher liturgy performing priest (*yaozdāthrahar mobed*) not meant for average students, but only for the best and brightest ones? If yes, why… if not, why not?

SRP:
History has shown that the best Yaozdāthregar mobeds were not the smartest, dropouts and even uneducated. The process of being streamlined into the profession was different back then, which worked. Once the streamlining is complete, practise makes one better and eventually a pro at it.

6. Can you share your personal experience with managing a full-time profession (job or business) while being very proficient in ritual performance? Do you do anything differently from others? What advice do you have for those who have trouble managing one at the cost of the other? Have you personally sacrificed a more lucrative career to choose this path?

SRP:

- The only thing that allows me to be at the top of my game is not using money as the motivation, but the peace and happiness gained at the end out of it. It gets really hectic for me at times, late nights, early mornings – but I am not willing to quit something through which I have come up so much and earned a lot of accolades, love and respect.
- I do not take up work where I know I will not be able to do it. Understanding and balancing out stuff based on priorities makes me more productive.
- I have not sacrificed a lucrative career. Thankfully, I am blessed to be able to run my business while pursuing priesthood.

7. Finally, why do you think the sustenance of inner rituals, continuity of the traditional priesthood, etc. is important? And do the best ritual priests have the onus of being religious scholars, or is that not important?

SRP:

- It is important for this to continue with relevance to modern times. Only understanding their relevance will allow for their sustenance and continuity of the religion.
- The best priests have the responsibility of making the laity understand the importance of these ceremonies.
- Having religious scholars is very important. The priests would find it extremely difficult to pursue such study while actively practising. So at least, working in synergy with religious scholars is a good solution.

12.3   Appendix 3: Sample observation schedule filled in DAI classroom in December 2017

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Directions: Observe the progression of the class, attendence, teaching methodology, individual attention to student
Name of observer: Kerman D. Daruwalla
Type of observation: Non-participant
Method of recording: Event / time sampling

Date: 7th December 2017 — Part 1
Time: 8 AM – 9 AM
Class: DAI Prayer Class – Morning session
Teacher(s): Er. Kersi Karanjia
Total students: 12
Students present: SRS, ZMT, SGV, PYT, HKF, FSD, YJB, SAD, ZLT, SHB, ARR
Students absent: FMG

Event #	Student	Time from	Time to	Duration	Text	Stanza(s)	New/Revision	Notes
1	FSD	8.00	8.05	5 min	Y10	15	New	Made to stand at desk & learn
2	ZMT	05	8	3	Farin Tul	last	"	Made to read & said back
3	FSD	8	10	2	Y10	15	"	Re-do
4	SGV	10	12	2	Y7	1–4	"	Made to read – "same as Y3" Fr. Kersi
5	ARR	12	16	4	Snes' Paij start		"	" " " from book
6	PYT	16	21	5	Y53	1–8	Rev + New	Few stanzas are not prepared well – re-do
7	YJB	21	36	15	Y9	1–32	Rev	Complete Y9 – read fluently from book – not memorise
8	SGV	36	50	14	Y7	1–4	New	Taken up, made to read Y7.5–24
9	FSD	50	57	7	Y10	15	New	Memorised
10	✗	✗	Session finished		✗		✗	

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Directions: Observe the progression of the class, attendence, teaching methodology, individual attention to student
Name of observer: Kerman D. Daruwalla
Type of observation: Non-participant
Method of recording: Event / time sampling

Date: 7-12-2017 — Part 2
Time: 8.05 – 9 AM
Class:
Teacher(s): Er. Sarosh Behramkamdin
Total students: 8
Students present: VHD, SKK, KZS, AND, FJB, BKB, SKB, RPD
Students absent: —

Event #	Student	Time from	Time to	Duration	Text	Stanza(s)	New/Revision	Notes
1	BKB	8.05	8.15	10 min				—
2	KZS	15	20	5	Y68	1–6	Rev + New	Taken 1–6 stanzas, given 7–8 to memorise.
3	FJB	22	30	8	Nām Stayin 1–3		Rev	Made to read and repeat
4	VHD	30	36	6	Y35	1–2	New	Completed 1–2, given 3–4.
5	FJB	36	45	9		4	New	Read together 5–6 times
6	AND	45	54	9	Kvariseddy	1–15	Rev.	last few stanzas are raw – re-do
7	SKB	54	9.00	6	Aivisantinan Geh	5–12	Rev.	Completed
8								
9								
10								

12.4 Appendix 4: Sample observation schedule filled in the online DAI class in October 2020

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Directions: Observe the progression of the class, attendance, teaching methodology, individual attention to student

Name of observer: Kerman D. Daruwalla

Type of observation: Non-participant

Method of recording: Event / time sampling

	Students	Minutes
1.	YJB	8
2.	FMG	6
3.	FSD	13
4.	SHB	11
5.	HKF	17
		55 mins

Date: 28-10-2020

Time: 5 PM – 5.50 PM

Class: DAI Prayer Class – Online on Zoom

Teacher(s): Er. Kersi Karanjia

Total students: 6

Students present: 5 (YJB, FMG, HKF, FSD, SHB)

Students absent: 1 (ZMT)

Event #	Student	Time from	Time to	Duration	Text	Stanza(s)	New/Revision	Notes
1	SHB	5.00	5.07	7 min	Hadoxt	Kn. 5	Rev	Unable to read fluently
2	YJB	7	10	3	Satum	last	Rev	completed
3	HKF	10	15	5	Visp.	Kn 22	New	Re-do
4	YJB & FSD	15	20	5	Farokhi	Kn. 1	New	Reading
5	FMG	20	26	6	Afrin	5-6	New	Recited from memory – assigned stanza 7
6	SHB	26	30	4	Hadoxt	Kn. 5	Rev	Teacher reads & SHB repeats
7	HKF	30	35	5	visp	22	New	Still unable to read fluently
8	FSD	35	40	5	Farokhi	1	New	Read from book → End of 1st session → Re-login
9	"	40	43	3	"	"	"	Completes successfully
10	HKF	43	50	7	Visp	last kn	"	Teacher reads & assigns for next class

✗ ———— End of online session ———— ✗

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Directions: Observe the progression of the class, attendance, teaching methodology, individual attention to student

Name of observer: Kerman D. Daruwalla

Type of observation: Non-participant

Method of recording: Event / time sampling

	Students	Minutes
1.	YJB	21
2.	FMG	9
3.	FSD	16
4.	SHB	30
		76 mins

Date: 30-10-2020

Time: 5 PM – 6.10 PM

Class: DAI Prayer class (Online on Zoom)

Teacher(s): Er. Kersi Karanjia

Total students: 6

Students present: 4 (YJB, FMG, FSD, SHB)

Students absent: 2 (HKF, ZMT)

Event #	Student	Time from	Time to	Duration	Text	Stanza(s)	New/Revision	Notes
1	YJB	5.00	5.07	7 mins	Farokhi	Kn. 2	New	reading from book
2	FMG	7	12	5	Afrin	7	Rev + New	Kn 7 recited from memory Kn 8 given
3	YJB	12	20	8	Yasna	56-57	Rev	fluent reading; prepare Y 58
4	FSD & YJB	20	26	6	Farokhi		New	read page 375
5	FMG	26	30	4	Afrin	Kn. 8	New	completed; assigned Kn 9-10
6	SHB	30	40	10	Hadoxt	5	"	lacks fluency
7	FSD	40	50	10	Yasna	ki 44	Rev	assigned for next class
8	SHB	5.50	6.10	20	Hadoxt	Kn. 5	New	Revision → Ardvi Sur Nyais + Sros Yast Hadoxt
9	✗ —— Session end —— ✗							
10								

12.5 Appendix 5: DAI timetable as shared by the Principal Er. Ramiyar Karanjia

The daily activity schedule is different for weekdays and weekends. On weekdays, the junior (classes I–VII) and seniors (classes VIII–X) follow a slightly different routine to accommodate the high school timings.

DAILY TIME TABLE OF DADAR ATHORNAN INSTITUTE– JUNE 2017

WEEK-DAYS			SATURDAYS & HOLIDAYS	
TIME	**ACTIVITIES**		**TIME**	**ACTIVITIES**
5:30 - 6:20	WAKE-UP, KASTI, BRUSH, BATH, TEA		5:30 - 12:00	SAME AS WEEKDAYS
6:30 -	WAKE-UP (For Juniors Std. I-III)		12:00-2;30	LUNCH, GRAMMAR CLASS, TV
6:20 - 6:50	MORNING PRAYERS		2:30 – 3:30	REST
	For Std. I - VII		3:30 – 4:15	DHARMAGNAN/TAVARIKH (Bhantar on holidays)
7:00 - 8:00	BHANTAR STUDY		4:15 – 5:40	TEA, BISC.UITS, GAMES
8:00 - 8:20	BREAKFAST		5:45 - 7:15	SCHOOL. STUDY
8:20 - 8:55	BATH (JR), GAMES (INDOOR)		7:20 - 10:00	SAME AS WEEK DAYS
9:00 - 10:30	SCHOOL STUDY			
10:30 - 10:40	BREAK			
10:45 - 11:45	BHANTAR STUDY			
11:45 - 12:30	KASTI, LUNCH, CHANGE, PACK SNACKS & BOOKS			
12:30 – 6:00	TO D.P.Y.A. HIGH SCHOOL			
6:00 - 6:15	SNACKS			
6:15 - 7:30	SCHOOL STUDY			
	For Std. VIII – X			**SUNDAYS**
6:40:6:55	BREAKFAST		5:45–6:35	WAKE-UP, KASTI, BRUSH, BATH, TEA
7:00 - 1:00	D.P.Y.A.HIGH SCHOOL		6:35 - 7:00	MORNING PRAYERS
1:00 - 1:30	KASHTI, LUNCH, BREAK		7:10-8:00	BHANTAR
1:30 - 3:00	BHANTAR STUDY		8:00-9:00	FREE TIME
3:00 – 3:30	BREAK		9:00 -10:30	SCHOOL STUDIES
3:30 – 5:00	SCHOOL STUDY		10:30-11:00	INDOOR GAMES, TV
5:00 – 5:40	TEA, BISCUITS, GAMES		11:00 - 12:00	BHANTAR
5:45 – 7:30	SCHOOL STUDY		12:00 - 1:30	LUNCH & POST CARD
	COMMON		1:30 – 3:30	TV
7:30 - 7:55	EVENING PRAYERS		3:30-4:00	WASH, KASTI, TEA & BISCUITS
7:55 - 8:45	DINNER, CHANGE, INDOOR GAMES, T.V.		4:00 - 6:45	OUTDOOR GAMES
8:45 - 9:00	KASTI, BRUSH TEETH.		6:45 - 10:00	SAME AS SATURDAY
9:00 - 10:00	SCHOOL STUDY			

Prior to / during Tests & Exams the Time-table will be suitably altered.

12.6 Appendix 6: Translation of Gujarati letter by Mobed Darabsha Bomanji Sidhva in Karanjia (2018)

May Pak Dadar Hormazd bestow help

I am writing a few experiences of my life – I would like to give you the trouble of reading these when you have the spare time to do so. While living in Udvada at my father Bomanji's house, I had learnt the Yašts, Nyāišes, Yasna and the Vendidād and memorised everything. I was 15 years old at the time and I was made a Navar in 1921. At that time, I was attending the vernacular school in which I learnt Gujarati for 7 years and English up to the 3rd standard. I was nine years old and my Navjote was to be performed, when my dear mother passed away five days before the Navjote, because she had severe asthma and had a heart failure. My Navjote was then performed on the monthly anniversary day of my mother by my paternal uncle. From the age of 7 years to 15 years, after returning from school at 4 PM and washing my face and hands, I used to go to the kitchen and drink the tea that had been made. From 4.30 PM to 8 PM, I used to learn the prayers, and then in the evening when the lamp was lit, after performing the kusti, my father used to make me pray the *farajyād* (obligatory) prayers; and then after 8 PM, I ate whatever food my aunt (father's sister), Cooverbai Burjorji Jarda and my aunt (father's brother's wife) used to give me, and then at 9 PM I used to sit on the table in the hall and do my lessons, and I used to go and sleep at 10 PM.

In the morning after waking up at 5 AM, first doing the *taro* kusti (kusti performance after application of unconsecrated bull urine), then answering nature's call and doing the kusti, then at 6 AM I used to do the morning *farajyād* prayers. In that the 101 names of Pak Dadar Hormazd, Sroš Bāj, Hošbām, Hāvan Geh, Khoršed Yazad and Meher Yazad's Nyāišes, Nām Setāyasni, Čār Dišā no Namaskar and Tandorosti – all these prayers I used to recite from memory. After that, I would brush and have tea and then go to the *otlā* (porch) to memorise the *bhantar* prayer that was assigned; then at 9 AM, I would get ready and have tea with roti and salt, and then go off to school. We would come home at 12 noon and have whatever food was kept in the kitchen, then wash our hands and face and go back to school; and at 4 PM we would return home from school and have tea and then from 4.30 PM again sit for studying. Then when the lamp was lit, I would do the evening *farajyād* prayers, and then after having dinner, I would do my lessons and then retire to bed at 10 PM.

At that time, we did not have electric lights in Udvada. That is why I used to study using the kerosene lamp. If my father was home then, I had to study for two hours in the morning too and then I went to school. In my class at school, we also had sons of other Mobeds of Udvada – there were 12 students in my class. In 1921, I had studied Gujarati for 7 years and English till the 3rd standard. I had also given the exam and was promoted to the 4th standard, but my father discontinued my schooling. I requested my father a lot to let me study till the 5th standard, but he refused flatly saying that now I need to memorise the *bhantar* prayers and become a Maratab. When my father used to go to perform the Yazašne in the mornings, at that time I did not study and used to create a ruckus in the house. When my father used to return home at 11 AM, seeing him from afar I used to sit down for studying.

My father used to maintain the complete *barašnum*. Anything from outside could not be eaten. The women gave him a *karasyo* (water mug) of clean water, then he would take the *jamvāni bāj* (grace before meals) and then partake his food. That too, only in a bronze *xumčā* (large tray-like plate) and

then no mouth-freshener like almond, raisin, date, etc. could be eaten as any outside item cannot be partaken while conforming to the *barašnum*. After cleaning the mouth, releasing the *jamvāni bāj* and performing the kusti was required. At that time, dry fruits were fairly cheap. Almonds were 10 *anna* (16 *anna* = 1 Rupee) per *ratl* (1 *ratl* = 0.5 kgs), raisins 4 *anna/ratl*, dates 2 *anna/ratl* and *charoli* (small seeds like pine nuts) 4 *anna/ratl*.

If I was very naughty at home, my old paternal grandmother Avabai complained to my father when he returned home, that his son Doli (at home everybody used to call be Doli) has been very mischievous. Hearing this, he would call and scold me or at times I was beaten with a cane. That is the reason that my father decided to send me to the Zai-Bordi (Gholwad station) Agiary, where the Mobeds from Udvada, Kersaspji Katila and Pestonji Katila were practising, to learn the prayers correctly there.

There for a few days, due to the discipline, I used to feel like crying. But within one month, I had become nice and jovial. There the work schedule was to wake up at 5 AM, sweep the Agiary premises and water the plants, and then after taking a bath, put water to heat for the Mobeds. They, by turn, would take a bath and perform the *boi* ceremony of the Pak Adaran. Then I would put the water to heat for the tea in the kitchen; when the Mobed would arrive, he would add the tea leaves and milk to the boiling water in the kettle to make the tea ready, which we would all drink. It was to be drunk from a bowl and saucer made of German silver only. In the mornings, I would wash the bowls and saucers after tea. Then they both (the two Mobeds) would sit down to perform the Yazašne, and at 7 AM I would sit on the porch to study the *bhantar* lessons from the book. Then at 9 AM, I would get up and prepare 3-4 sweet *rotis* (flat bread) of wheat with some *ghee* (clarified butter) and sugar. After finishing the Yazašne, they came to the kitchen and after taking the *bāj*, partook of the tea and breakfast of *rotis*; I would also sit beside at a table and have the tea and *rotis*. Then I would perform the kusti and recite the *farajyād* prayers, and at 9.30 AM again sit on the porch and memorize. Then at 11.30 am, whatever food was prepared, would have to be eaten in a *xumčā* (large plate) only. This was the year of 1922 and they did not keep plates, cups and saucers.

At noon local time (i.e., 12.40 PM Indian Standard Time), according to turn, the Mobeds would perform the *boi* ceremony of the *Padshah* ('king' with reference to the installed fire) and then everyone would sleep till 2.30 PM; they both would sleep inside the room and I would spread my bedding on the cot and sleep outside on the porch. At 2.30 PM I would get up and put the water to boil for tea, then they would get up and prepare tea; and then after tea at Mumbai local time of 3 PM (IST 3.40 PM), whoever has the turn would do the kusti and *farajyād* prayers, and give the *boi* for the Uzirin geh. I would sit on the porch to study. After giving the *boi*, they would write anything that was required and every 2-4 days I would get whatever was required from the shop and the bazaar. They would sign and give the letter with the list of goods, and accordingly I would get it from the shop, which was 0.5 miles from the Agiary.

Then based on the daily schedule, the Mobed who had his turn would do the kusti and *farajyād* and give the *boi* for the Aiwisruthrem geh. Then after dinner, they used to teach me how to make the *roti* of rice flour. These fresh *rotis* I would make in the night and after eating everyone sat on the porch for some time and asked me what I had memorised during the day. I would memorise it well enough to be able to recite it freely in front of them. To properly learn the Vendidād, they would wake me up at 3 AM in the morning and I would sit on the *idhorā* (stone seat), light an oil lamp in a bowl and study

in its light till 5 am. In this way, they made me extremely proficient in the Yazašne, Vendidād and also taught me the accompanying *kriya* (ritual actions), and in addition to that I also learnt a few Yašts and the Afringān, Faroxši, Aširwād, etc.

In 1923 within one year, I had memorised all the *bhantar* very well, and I returned back to Udvada at my father's insistence. At the Agiary I used to do all the chores, cleaning and washing vessels. For that I received a monthly wage of 8 Rupees; they paid me the accumulated sum of Rs. 101, out of which I spend some amount. There in the orchards owned by the Behdins (laity), grew many chickoo and guava trees, from there I got some chickoos and guavas. Paying Rs. 11 for the fruits, I was sent back to Udvada one fine day. At Gholwad station I bought the ticket and sat in the train and at 11 am got off at Udvada station, from where I took a horse-cart ride back home. I paid the horse-cart driver 4 *annas* and the train ticket cost 12 *annas*. I met everyone there, and after a few days for my Maratab ceremony, I was given the *barašnum*. There in the Ātaš Bahrām compound, there was a separate house constructed, where the people undergoing the *barašnum* stayed for nine days and returned back home on the tenth day. During the *nahn* (ritual bath), the daily schedule was to wake up at 4 AM and wash the face with *taro* (bovine urine) only and then perform the Ušahen geh *farajyād* prayers. In the morning, tea and whatever snacks were sent from home would only be carried by a Mobed's son and served in a *kathli* (metal glass) and *kansya* (metal bowl). For lunch there was a separate set of clothes, which were worn and a kusti was performed. One had to sit on a leather mat on the floor, then the boy would fetch water from the well after purifying the *karasyo* (metal water mug) and after the *jamvāni bāj* (grace) was taken, would pour some water in a separate bowl. For those days, one is not allowed to brush and one has to wear hand gloves for holding the cup into which the boy pours the tea, and eat with a spoon only. Water can be taken only for drinking, and it cannot be taken for any other purpose. After eating, the water left in the bowl was to be used for gargling and for cleaning the mouth only from the outside. Fingers also could not be used for cleaning the teeth. Then the *jamvāni bāj* was released and a kusti was done; then the clothes were changed and kept in a separate niche in the wall and then returning back to the mattress change to the original clothes after applying little *taro* to the body and then perform two kusti rituals. Then after resting for a while, if one needed to attend nature's call, then a separate pair of socks and gloves were to be worn and then after taking the appropriate *bāj*, going to the big compound and sitting on the stone slabs that are kept for this purpose. Water was absolutely not to be used and for cleaning one had to carry a *dhefa no tukdo* (piece of soft stone). Then after completion the *bāj* was to be released and then after going inside the face was to be washed with *taro* and then a kusti was to be performed. The gloves and socks for attending to nature's call were to be kept separately and the eating gloves were kept along with the clothes for that purpose. After resting for a while, at 9 AM perform the kusti and sit on the stone steps in the compound outside by spreading a leather mat, perform the Hāvan geh *farajyād* and also pray the *ruwan ni patet* (Patet for the soul of the deceased) for the person in whose memory the *barašnum* is being taken. Then after sitting for some time, return to the mattress to read the newspaper if it is available, holding it by wearing gloves and avoiding any direct contact. Then after resting for some time, at 11 AM whatever lunch has been carried by the boy from home, to eat that after changing to the designated set of clothes, wearing the eating gloves and eating with the spoon only. After finishing lunch, using only the water poured by the boy into the bowl to gargle and clean the mouth, then release the *bāj* and return to the mattress to change the clothes and perform two kusti rituals.

Then for some time the Rapithwin geh *farajyād* was to be performed. At 3 PM Mumbai local time (3.40 PM IST), have the tea which the boy carries from home after changing clothes. And if these changed clothes were to be used again then they should not come in contact with the sleeping mattress. Then after spreading a leather mat on the steps outside, the Uzirin geh *farajyād* was performed. Again, in the evening at 5 PM the boy would carry dinner from home. Before that since the clothes have been changed, sit on the leather mat at a distance and pray the *jamvāni bāj* and then have dinner broken into small morsels in a *langri* (flat pan) – even the *roti* is broken into small pieces so that it can be eaten with the spoon without touching it with the hand. The water leftover from drinking was to be used for gargling and cleaning the mouth. Then the *bāj* was released, a kusti was performed and eating clothes were changed and the clothes on the mattress were worn again and two kusti rituals were done. After that no food or water could be had until the next morning. After that in the evening one sat in the porch on long leather mat over which a bedsheet was spread out. Other Mobeds who were taking the *nahn* also spread a sheet and sat outside, and made some conversation. After the lamp was lit, we would get up and perform the Aiwisruthrem geh *farajyād*. After that we would be awake for some more time. For that many days, nothing can be touched. The person from the Agiary would make a proper lamp from coconut oil in the room and then we would close the door. Only wooden items could be touched; besides that, we could only sleep by making contact with the bedding and the leather mat only. If one needed to go to the toilet, he had to conform to the *tarikāt* (purity rules). Again, we got up early morning at 5 AM and performed the prayers for the Ušahen geh. In this way for nine days, every day we strictly followed this schedule. After the initial *nahn*, one could take a bath after 72 hours, i.e., on the morning of the fourth day. For that the boys would carry hot water from home in a big copper *kāhrnu* (pot), and also a Mobed who has performed the Yazašne gets clean Nīrangdīn (consecrated urine of bull) and holy water, which in priestly parlance is known as *āv*. Then on the seventh day which is after another 72 hours, another bath is taken in the above manner. And finally on the tenth day morning after taking a bath, we went home and took another bath and then recited the *bāj* and brushed teeth, thereby using water after a 10-day period. After drinking tea, we proceeded to the Ātaš Bahrām where along with another Mobed a Yazašne was performed. After that we could go home.

Kindly read the above-described steps on the *nahn* which I have written. Mobeds maintained the power of the *barašnum*, however there in the village of Udvada, one could not get much work. In the olden days, the Mobeds performed the *kriya* (ritual) daily; at that time one Yazašne would cost Rs. 2 for both the Mobeds. Since I was new, I would only get to perform one Yazašne every 4-5 days. Hence in a month, I would earn only Rs. 7-8, and therefore my father decided that this is not feasible and I travel with a few Mobeds to the Agiaries of the outside villages keeping my barašnum intact. It was not possible to travel by train, hence my arrangement was made at Div Agiary where I had to set sail on the sea in a small steamer. The salary at the Agiary was Rs. 60 per month. After staying there for one year, I returned back to the village. The cumulative salary of Rs. 720 and the *ašo-dād* (gratuity) given by the Behdins came to a total of approximately Rs. 900. From that I purchased the reputed *halwa* (sweetmeat) of Div made of pure *ghee* – I bought 1 *man* which is equal to present day 15 kgs of this *halwa* and also bought 12 nice white bedsheets with prints costing Rs. 1 each, and on a good day left by steamer to Mumbai, where I stayed at my cousin uncle-aunt's house in Nulbazar area for around eight days. In Mumbai too I incurred some expenses, hence I had a balance of Rs. 600 left with

which I left for Udvada and after meeting everyone, the next morning I went to give the Rs. 600 to my father, but he got very angry that I should have got Rs. 900 and instead I got back only Rs. 600, asking what I spent it on. I explained in detail but he was still furious, and only after 2-3 days after the anger had cooled down, he accepted the amount.

Again, in the village there was no source of income hence he sent me to the Agiary of Tarapore village. There I stayed for 6 months before returning back to my village. There the salary was Rs. 40 but every day Rs. 2-3 could be received for performing the Yazašne, meaning in 6 months up to Rs. 600 was earned and the 6 months' salary came to Rs. 3000, hence in aggregate around Rs. 3600 was received, out of which some money I spent on buying goods in the market and around Rs. 500 on other things. Both of us there took turns, one would cook whatever food items the vendor brought at the door; we would eat mutton in our meal for 15 days and fish for the other 15 days. We bought mutton for 4 *annas* or fish which was also cheap for 1 rupee, with which the two of us would eat very well at both the meals; and at 9 AM at breakfast we would have sweet *roti* with *ghee* and sugar along with tea. For all expenses both of us Mobeds used to share equally, hence the share of expenses for 6 months was around Rs. 400. In this way I explained to my father that in fact I had spent only Rs. 200 on other things. Hearing this he softened up and then took the remaining money from me. At that time, I was 20 years old and had started earning, hence I informed my father that I am deciding to get married. And that I wanted to marry my cousin sister staying at the Nulbazar area house in Mumbai who was 18 years old. Hearing this my father became extremely angry, saying that we are not on very good talking terms with that family; hence I refuse your proposal with that girl, and I have selected another girl as your bride. But I insisted that I had decided to marry that girl only, and due to this we father-son got into an argument. Because of this my father became upset with me and completely stopped talking with me, due to which I did not like to stay at home anymore and decided to take up a paying job at any Mumbai Agiary. At that time, my own paternal uncle was running his service at the Wadiaji Atašbehram; I wrote a letter to him saying that I wanted to come to Mumbai and work in residence at any Agiary there. For that if he had any acquaintance at any Agiary, to kindly make an arrangement for me to stay over there; else I would come to Mumbai and arrange for something myself. I was very well-versed in the Yazašne, Vendidād and all other *bhantar*. The Mithaiwala Agiary was at Grant Road; there the Panthaki (manager) was Manekji. Afterwards he became the *Dasturji* (head-priest) for the Godāvarā Panthak and whenever he went out, he would have a shawl on his shoulders. He took my test and seeing that I was proficient in all the *bhantar*, employed me at a salary of Rs. 50 per month. At that time, I used to also perform the Yazašne, Vendidād with my paternal uncle. In this way I stayed at the Agiary from 1924 up to 1927. In the afternoon I would rest for a while after getting free from work, and would step out in the evening. At that time, there were around 12 Mobeds at the Agiary and everyone ate their meals at the Agiary itself. After three years like this, I made a firm decision to get married. At that time, I was 22 years old. During the *Muktād* (Frawardegān), my father would come to Mumbai to perform the prayers at someone's bungalow for an eighteen-day period. The charges for the *Muktād* service at that time was Rs. 150. After getting relieved from there, my father would stay at the Wadiaji Atašbehram. Then he would buy any required items from the *Muktād* money, and then go back to our Udvada home after 8 days. Such is my story. There is a lot more to write, but in order to not trouble you Sirs to read, I am closing this writing in brief.

Kindly forgive for this trouble caused; once again I thank you both,

Writer: I am Mobed Darabsha Bomanji Sidhva – kindly accept my wish and prayer.

athā jamīyād, yathā āfrīnāmī

12.7 Appendix 7: Case Study of a Prayer Session at the DAI

One complete morning prayer session was filmed at the DAI in December 2017.[363] A description of the session and observations are detailed below.

Date: Saturday, 9th December 2017
Time: 6.15 AM to 6.50 AM (morning session)
Zoroastrian month: Tir māh, and day: Ašišvangh roj (see Figure 34 above)
Location: Prayer Hall of the DAI

Figure 68 shows the DAI students at the morning prayer session. They are seated three to a bench in a row on the northern side of the prayer room, facing the east. A total of 15 students were part of this morning prayer session. This session excludes the six juniormost students (Standards 1st–3rd), who have a waking time of 6.30 AM and are excused from the morning prayers.

On the notice board to the left is the daily timetable of prayers, which was referred to above, for determining the variable prayer designated to that day. The student standing in front of the lockers is SPP, the seniormost student of the batch, who conducts the entire prayer session. He calls on each student sequentially to come out and stand and then recite a certain portion of the text facing the class. The rest of students remain seated and recite in their places.

Figure 68: Students at the morning prayer session at the DAI

The students starting from the front row and closest to SPP are as follows:

Row-1: RPD, SRS, PYT
Row-2: FJB, ZMT (standing out), SGV

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[363] The session was filmed by Remi and Anna Sowa of Chouette Films. The recordings were done in two parts and provided in files A062_1209147_C004.mpeg and A062_12090152_C004.mpeg.

Row-3: VHD, YJB, HKF

Row-4: KZS, AND, SKK

Row-5: SAD (partially visible), ARP (not visible)

Prior to entering the prayer hall, each student performs an ablution by washing all the exposed parts of the body including the hands, face and feet. After entering the room, they first settle in their seats before standing up again to perform the Kusti ritual. The sequence of events is tabulated below:

mm:ss (file-1)	Recitation text	Activity
00:21–02:24	Kusti prayers & 101 names	Untying and retying the Kusti by all students
02:25–04:54	Sroš Bāj	SPP calls ZMT out to stand and recite
03:47	–	SPP sends SAD to wake up junior students
04:55–06:33	Hāvan Gāh	ZMT standing
06:34 – end	Sroš Yašt Hādoxt start	ZMT standing

mm:ss (file-2)	Recitation text	Activity
00:01–01:14	Sroš Yašt Hādoxt, Karde 1, Stanza 5–6	ZMT standing
01:15–03:21	Karde 1, Stanza 7 – Karde 2 end	SPP calls PYT out to stand and recite
03:22–05:32	Karde 3 – Karde 4, Stanza 16	SPP calls RPD
04:35	Karde 4, Stanza 16	RPD falters and assigned punishment to stand outside class during study period
05:33–07:16	Karde 4 complete	SPP calls ARP
07:17–09:11	Karde 5 complete	SPP calls VHD
09:12–10:43	Short prayers (*ahmai raescha*, etc.)	all seated
10:44–12:37	Sroš Yašt Hādoxt end and Nirang	SPP calls YJB
12:38–13:25	Doa Nām Setayešne, Stanza 1	YJB standing
13:26–14:23	Stanzas 2–3	SPP calls SGV
14:24–15:14	Stanza 4	SPP calls HKF
15:15–16:00	Stanzas 5–6	SPP calls SKK
16:01–17:25	Stanza 7 – end	SPP calls KZS
17:26–18:38	Doa Tandorosti	KZS standing
18:39–22:05	Gujarati song – *neki ni kharidi* ('buying of virtue')	KZS standing
22:06–23:07	Mino Ašišvangh xšnuman	Reciting dedication of the day (*roj*)
23:08–23:50	Teštar Tir xšnuman	Reciting dedication of the month (*māh*)
23:51	*Yazdan panāh bād*	End of session

Table 59: Progression of the morning prayer session at the DAI on 9-12-17

13 Glossary

Ādarān: The middle grade of consecrated fire of the three grades, which can be tended to only by an ordained priest.

Adhuro Nāvar: 'Incomplete' Nāvar; a candidate who has undergone the initiation ceremony of Nāvar without being completely trained in the recitation and performance of the Yasna. Also referred to as Kāčço 'raw' Nāvar.

Āfrīn: 'Benediction', is a Pāzand text recited within the Āfrīnagān ceremony. The commonly recited ones are the Āfrīn-i Ardāfravaš, Āfrīn-i Dahmān and the Buzorg Āfrīn.

Āfrīnagān: 'Benediction, blessing', refers to both the outer ceremony, and the Avestan text recited therein. The commonly recited Āfrīnagāns are dedicated to Ahura Mazdā (Dādār Hormazd), Ardāfravaš, Dahmān, Srōš and Sirozā.

Agiary: The Parsi term for the fire-temple, usually containing the Ādarān or Dādgāh fire.

Ahura Mazdā: The supreme God of the Zoroastrian tradition.

Ahura Mazdā Khodae: Pāzand prayer recited during the kusti ritual while tying the sacred girdle around the waist.

Ahuna Vairiia: One of the most important and commonly recited short prayer, composed in Old Avestan.

Ahunauuaitī Gāϑā: The first of the five Gāϑās or hymns attributed to Zaraϑuštra.

Aiwisruthrem (Aiwisrūϑrim) Gāh: The fourth division of the Zoroastrian day, lasting from sunset to midnight.

Amal: Maintaining the ritual power by conforming to religious observances.

Aməṣa Spəṇtā (Aməšaspands): 'Bountiful Immortals', refers to the seven entities to whom the first seven days of Zoroastrian calendar month are dedicated.

Anoshe-ravān: 'immortal soul'; prayers recited in honour of a deceased person.

Āp: The consecrated water prepared during the Nirangdin ceremony and used for ritual cleansing.

Ardāfravaš (Fravardin): 'Righteous Frauuaši'; the collective term for the dedication to the departed within the ritual. The nineteenth day of the Zoroastrian calendar is dedicated to the Frauuaši.

Āśirvād: 'Benediction'; Pāzand (and also in Sanskrit) benediction recited by a pair of priests before the couple during the wedding ceremony.

Ātaš: 'fire'; usually used in reference to a consecrated fire at a fire-temple.

Ātaš Bahrām: The consecrated fire of highest grade. There are eight Ātaš Bahrāms in India, viz., four in Mumbai, two in Surat, and one each in Udwada and Navsari.

Athornan (Athornān): Used either for a person belonging to the priestly class, or the entire priestly class itself.

Athornan Mandal: 'Priestly Guild/Association'; a body of priests created for the welfare of priests, which oversees the Dadar Athornan Institute.

Bāj: The ceremony performed by a single priest within a ritual precinct, which includes the recitation of certain chapters of the Yasna along with the ceremonial tasting of the consecrated bread (drōn).

Barašnum: The nine-day long purification ceremony, which is a prerequisite for priests performing the higher liturgical ceremonies.

Barsam: A bundle of metallic wires (formerly plant twigs) which is ceremonial tied and used within the inner rituals.

Bhagariā: The most dominant of the five priestly groups (Panths), whose seat is in Navsari; also referred to as the Bhagarsath Panth.

Bhantar: Recitation of Avestan prayers and its memorisation.

Bōy: Ceremony of tending to the consecrated fire at regular intervals accompanied by the recitation of Avestan texts. It is performed at the start of each of the five divisions of the Zoroastrian day for the Ātaš Bahrāṃs and the Ātaš Ādarāns.

Bōywālā: The priest who performs the Bōy ceremony.

Čāhrom: The fourth day after death, on which the soul of the deceased is believed to pass from the physical to the spiritual realm.

Dādgāh: The most basic grade of consecrated fire, which can be tended to by any qualified member of the community.

Daham Yazad: The entity to which an Āfrīnagān ceremony is dedicated on the fourth morning after death.

Dahom: The tenth day after death, which is an important day for ceremonies to be recited in honour of the deceased person.

Dakhma: A high walled structure within which the corpse is laid for excarnation by birds of prey and drying by the sun.

Daremeher (Dar-i Mihr): 'Court of Mithra'; the place usually within the fire-temple premises which houses the ritual precincts.

Dastur: Title of high priest, usually affiliated to an Ātaš Bahrām.

Dhārā pramāne: 'as per custom'; refers to the performance of the concise Yasna ceremony with the recital of only those chapters which contain important ritual actions, and discretionary recital of the remaining portions.

Dhūp Nirang: Pāzand recitation which is part of the Uthamnā ritual performed on third day after death

Doā Nām Setāyišn: Pāzand prayer usually recited after the completion of the Niyāyišn and Yašt recitations.

Doā Tandorosti: Pāzand prayer from the Khorde Avesta recited for health and well-being.

Dibāčo (Dibāče): 'Preface'; the introductory chapter of the Yasna (Y 0); also refers to the Pāzand section of Āfrīnagān and other texts.

Fakro (pl. Fakrā): Stanza

Farestā (Firešte): Outer ritual comprising thirty-three Āfrīnagān and Bāj performances, one each dedicated to the thirty divinities of the Zoroastrian calendar month and an additional three divinities.

Faroxši: An outer ritual performed in honour of the deceased, consisting of the recitation of the Fravardin Yašt.

Fire-temple: The generic term for a Parsi Zoroastrian place of worship, which houses either the Ātaš Bahrām, Ādarān or Dādgāh fire.

Fragard (Pargarad): 'Portion, section'; each of the twenty-two divisions of the Vidēvdād text.

Fravardegān: Also, Muktād; the last ten days of the Zoroastrian calendar year dedicated to the Frauuaṣ̌i of the deceased persons.

Fravardiān: Ceremony performed in memory of the deceased during the Fravardegān period comprising of multiple Yasna and Vidēvdād performances.

Fravardin: See Ardāfravaš; the first month and the nineteenth day of each month of the Zoroastrian calendar.

Gāh: The five divisions of the Zoroastrian day; also, the Avestan prayer dedicated to each of the five periods of the day.

Gāhānbār (also Gāhāmbār): The six seasonal festivals of the Zoroastrian calendar year.

Gāthā (Gāϑā): The five hymns composed in Old Avestan attributed directly to Zaraϑuštra; the last five days of the Zoroastrian calendar year.

Geh Sārnā: The funeral ceremony performed by a pair of priests who recite the first Gāϑā (Y 28–34) standing in front of the corpse.

Getīkharīd: 'Purchase of the world'; ceremony for the salvation from sins committed in this world. It is performed by two priests who perform the Gewrā ceremony, followed by one Yasna dedicated to Sroš, followed by a Yasna to the Sirozā, and then a Visperad on the final day.

Gewrā: The performance of one Yasna ceremony each for six days by a pair of priests, with the chief priest and assistant priest alternating each day.

Hā (Hāiti): 'Chapter'; used to denote the seventy-two chapters of the Yasna.

Hādoxt: Name of a Nask (volume of Zoroastrian scriptures) after which the shorter of the two

Hamāyašt: A combination ceremony comprising multiple performances of the Yasna, Vidēvdād and Āfrīnagān. The *nāni* (small) Hamāyašt has 144 Yasna and 12 Vidēvdād ceremonies, whereas the *moti* (large) Hamāyašt has 144 Yasna and 144 Vidēvdād ceremonies.

Ham-kalām: 'United in word'; the higher ritual power obtained by a pair of priests after performing the Gewrā ceremony, enabling them to perform the most solemn ceremonies.

Hāvan Gāh: The first division of the Zoroastrian day, lasting from sunrise to mid-day.

Idhorā: The stone table within the ritual precinct used as the ritual table and as the seat for the chief priest.

Iranshah (Irānšāh): 'King of Iran'; the oldest and most important Ātaš Bahrām of the Parsi Zoroastrians, situated in Udvada.

Jasa me auuaŋhe Mazda Mazdaiiasno ahmi: Avestan prayer recited as part of the kusti ritual; it is taken from Y 12 and is referred to as the Zoroastrian confession of the faith.

Jašan: An outer ceremony comprising of the Āfrīnagān and Bāj rituals, performed on either cheerful occasions as a thanksgiving ceremony, or solemn occasions such as death anniversaries.

Kadimi: 'Ancients'; the sect of Parsi Zoroastrians who aligned their calendar to the old Iranian Zoroastrian calendar, and whose ritual practice is influenced by the Iranian Zoroastrian tradition. They are a minority group among the Parsis.

Karde (Guj. Kardo): 'Section'; each of the twenty-four divisions of the Visperad text; also used to refer to a section of other texts.

Kem nā Mazdā: The Avestan prayer recited prior to untying the girdle in the kusti ritual.

Khorde Avesta: 'Little' Avesta; a collection of devotional texts used by both the priesthood and the laity; it includes among other texts, the Gāhs, Nyāišes, Sīrōza, Āfrīnagān, and some Yašts.

Khoršed (Xvaršēd) Nyāiš: The first of the five Nyāišes, dedicated to the sun.

Khub: Ritual power required to be obtained by a priest to perform the higher liturgies. The *moti* (big) Khub, obtained by performing the Yasna, remains valid for three days, whereas the *nāni* (small) Khub, obtained by performing the Bāj ceremony, is valid for that day only.

Kriyā: 'Ritual'

Kriyākām: 'Ritual performance'

Kusti: The sacred girdle ritually tied around the waist; also refers to the ritual of tying the girdle.

Māh: Month of the Zoroastrian calendar; also, the Nyāiš dedicated to the moon.

Makān: 'Building'

Marātab: The second and more advanced level of priestly initiation, which qualifies the candidate to perform the higher liturgical ceremonies like the Yasna and Vidēvdād.

Meher (Mithra, Mihr) Nyāiš: The second Nyāiš dedicated to Mithra.

Meherjirānā: The hereditary title of chief priest (Dastur) of the Bhagariā Panth, based in Navsari.

Melāvdo: 'gathering', refers to the annual gathering of the Dadar Athornan Institute

Mīno Nāvar: Spiritual entity presiding over the priestly initiation

Mobed: Zoroastrian priest; presently used as the title of a priest who is engaged with the performance of higher liturgical ceremonies.

Muktād: Also, Fravardegān; the last ten days of the Zoroastrian calendar year dedicated to the Frauuaši of the deceased persons.

Nāvar: The first level of priestly initiation which qualifies the candidate to perform the outer rituals.

Navjote: The initiation ceremony of a child into the Zoroastrian faith, typically performed between the age of seven to nine years.

Nirang: Urine from a white consecrated bull (Varasyā) which has been consecrated in the Nīrangdīn ceremony.

Nirang-i kusti: The formula recited during the kusti ritual i.e., the ritual of untying and retying the sacred girdle around the waist.

Nīrangdīn: The eighteen-day long ceremony in which the Nirang is consecrated.

Nyāiš (Niyāyišn): 'Invocations of praise'; the five litanies in Avestan language dedicated to the sun, Mithra, moon, waters and fire.

Padān: The white mouth-sheet worn by priests during ritual performance in order to prevent the saliva from inadvertently falling on the fire and other ritual implements.

Pādyāb: Ritual cleansing of the face, hands, feet and any other exposed parts of the body, performed prior to the kusti ritual.

Pāghḍī: White priestly turban.

Paivand: 'Connection'; the physical connection established between two priests while performing the funeral (Geh Sārnā) ceremony.

Paivand-nāmeh: 'Connection formula'; the Pāzand recitation during the wedding ceremony, also known as the Āśirvād.

Panth, Panthak: The five geographical priestly divisions; historically priests from a particular Panth were limited to work within this jurisdiction, however these restrictions are no longer in force.

Panthaki: The head priest of a fire-temple, who is in charge of commissioning rituals to be performed for the families affiliated to him.

Paragnā: The preparatory ceremony before the performance of higher liturgies like the Yasna and Vidēvdād, in which the various required constituents are procured, prepared and arranged on the ritual table.

Patet: Pāzand prayer for repentance; the Patet Pašemāni prayer is recited to atone for one's own sins, whereas the Patet Ravān-ni is recited on behalf of a deceased member of the community.

Pāvī: The furrows enclosing the ritual precinct; the term is alternately used to denote the ritual precinct itself.

Pāzand: Pahlavi (Middle Persian) language prayers which have been transcribed in Avestan script.

Rāthvī (Rāspi): Assistant Priest supporting the chief priest during higher liturgical ceremonies.

Roj (Roz): Day of the Zoroastrian calendar month.

Sampūrna Nāvar : 'Complete' Nāvar; a candidate who has undergone the initiation ceremony of Nāvar after being completely trained in the recitation and performance of the Yasna. A completely trained priest is also addressed as a Pākko ('ripe') Mobed, as opposed to a Kāččo ('raw') Mobed who is not comprehensively trained.

Sanjānā: The Southern-most geographical division of priests (Panth), historically based in Sanjān; the seat of the Sanjānā priests is the Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām in Udvada.

Sāmel: 'Induction'; the advanced qualification beyond the Marātab for priests belonging to the Sanjānā Panthak, which qualifies the priest to serve at the Iranshah Ātaš Bahrām in Udvada.

Satūm (Stom): 'Praise'; an outer ritual performed by a single priest with food offerings and the recitation of Y 26.

Shenshahi: 'Royalists'; the dominant sect of Parsi Zoroastrians who retained their original calendar after the calendrical split in the eighteenth century.

Sirozā (Sīrōze): 'Thirty days'; Avestan text with a shorter and longer dedication to the thirty entities of the Zoroastrian calendar; the dedication

Sroš (Av. Sraoša): One of the important divinities of the Zoroastrian tradition, to whom the first four-day ceremonies after death are dedicated. It is the seventeenth day of the Zoroastrian calendar month.

Surti Bhagariā: Priests belonging to the Bhagariā Panth of Navsari, who have historical settled in and around the city of Surat.

Tarikat: Religious observances, especially to be conformed to by priests in order to maintain their ritual power.

Tolā: 'Group, faction'; a term used to denote the various priestly groups.

Uthamnā: After-death ceremony performed in the afternoon on the third day and repeated just prior to dawn on the fourth morning, when the soul of the deceased is supposed to transition from the material existence to the spiritual realm.

Yaozdāthregar Mobed: 'Purifier Priest' capable of performing all the higher liturgical ceremonies.

Yasna (Yazišn, Ijasni): 'Worship'; text of 72 chapters with the Gāϑās at its centre; also, the name of the fundamental inner ritual in which the text is recited.

Yasna-ī Rapithwin: Yasna ceremony dedicated to second Gāh of the day, Rapithwin; which can be performed in that Gāh during the first seven months of the Zoroastrian calendar.

Yazišn Gāh: Ritual precinct enclosed by furrows within which the inner liturgical ceremonies are performed.

Varasyā: The consecrated white bull, whose hair and urine are used as implements within the higher liturgical ceremonies.

Visperad (Av. Vīspe Ratauuō): 'All the Ratus', divided into 24 sections (*karde*)

Vidēvdād (Vendidād, Av. Vīdaēuua- Dāta-): 'Law of those who reject the demons'; Avestan text divided into 22 sections (*fragard*); name of the solemn all-night ceremony within which the text is recited.

Yašt: 'Worship'; hymn to various Zoroastrian divinities.

Zinde-ravān: 'Living soul'; ceremony performed for a living person.

Zod gāh: 'Place of Chief priest'; the stone seat within the ritual precinct on which the chief priest is seated while performing inner rituals.

Zot (Zotī, Jotī, Av. Zaōtar): 'Pourer of libation'; Chief priest officiating in a higher liturgical ceremony.

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