

Gender Equality

We do not have a great deal of direct evidence, from Iranian sources, of what life was like in ancient Iran, in large part because of destructive major invasions that occurred around 331 BCE (Alexander) and approximately 647 CE (the Arabs). Most of the information we now have was written by those who were enemies of Iran, and therefore was transmitted through the perceptions of their own cultural and political biases. But the Gathas and a few other ancient Avestan texts do remain (and have been roughly 80 + % decoded, based on verbal advice from Professor Insler), that now have been supplemented by archeological evidence, from which we can glean bits and pieces of what life was like for ancient Iranian women before the destruction of the Achaemenian Empire ~ a time period which was the least distant from Zarathushtra for which we have historical evidence.¹ For those who are interested in linguistic information as it relates to gender equality, I have footnoted some evidence here.²

Gender Equality in the Gathas.

The Gathas contain direct evidence that in Zarathushtra's thought, men and women were treated as equals. The last Gatha is a poem he composed for his daughter's wedding day, in which he advises her,

"Do thou persevere, Pouruchista ... To thee shall He grant the firm foundation of good thinking and the alliance of truth and of wisdom..." Y53:3, Insler 1975.

To Zarathushtra, 'good thinking', 'truth', and 'wisdom' are attributes of the Divine, which he thought a woman capable of attaining (or acquiring lordship over).

On this same occasion Zarathushtra gives some advice to all the brides and grooms who were then getting married. He does not tell the brides to be obedient to their husbands (although some later texts do).³ Nor does he tell the husbands to assume authority over their brides. He says instead: "Let each of you try to win the other with truth [aša-]..." Y53:5, (Insler 1975), expressing the notion that the marriage relationship is not one of domination and subservience, but of partnership, with each spouse having to make the same effort to win the love and respect of the other, with all the values that comprise the true order of existence (aša-) ~ factual truths, as well as the truths of mind/heart/spirit ~ values such as honesty, generosity, friendship, lovingkindness, compassion, being fair, as detailed in another chapter.⁴

In Y46:10, he specifically mentions both men and women in speaking of the transition to the good spiritual state of being (crossing the metaphoric bridge), "Wise Lord, whoever ~ be it man or woman ~ would grant to me those things which Thou dost know to be the best [vahišta- 'most good'] for existence, namely, truth for the truth and the rule of good thinking (with that person) ... I shall cross over the Bridge ..." Y46:10, Insler 1975.

He says, "These things are exactly true, men; exactly women..." Y53:6 (Insler 1975) ~ addressing both men and women equally, in expressing his teachings.

In light of all this evidence, it would be reasonable to conclude that where he uses 'man' in his system of thought, he does so generically, to include all human beings (and the same applies to the masc. pronouns he uses for the Divine).

Gender equality in other Old Avestan texts.

The *A Airyema Ishyo* (Y54:1),⁵ is in Old Avestan (the same form of Avestan as the Gathas), and therefore closer to Zarathushtra's time than Younger Avestan texts. Like the Gathas, it mentions men and women together,

"May the dear community come to the support of the men and women of Zarathushtra,...", Y54:1, my translation.⁶

The *Yasna Haptanghaiti*, (YHapt. 35:2 ~ 41:6) also is in Old Avestan, but was likely composed long after Zarathushtra's time and closer to YAv. times.⁷ This text takes for granted that both men and women could be rulers. The composer prays,

"... May a good ruler, man or woman, thus assume rule over us ..." YHapt.41:2, Humbach 1991 translation.⁸

For the composer of this text to have uttered such a prayer, the history of his times must have included women who ruled in their own right, and were good, respected rulers. The fact that men and women could be rulers, also corroborates that the masculine gender of *ahura*- 'lord' is grammatical, and has no intrinsic gender significance.

And other verses of the *Yasna Haptanghaiti* also specifically mention men and women together. Examples are footnoted here.⁹

Later Younger Avestan (YAv.) Yasnas also are full of instances in which men and women are mentioned together, mostly with no indication that one sex is less equal than the other. Some examples are footnoted here.¹⁰

A YAv. Fragment mentions that both men and women were disciples of Zarathushtra.

"As thou keepest company with the Good Mind ... speak to the male and female disciples of Zarathushtra Spitama..." *Miscellaneous Fragment 1* § 1, Mills translation.¹¹

In those ancient times (though sadly not today), this equality of men and women in the Zoroastrian religion, extended even to rituals and priestly functions. A YAv. text speaks of "... the saints of the ritual, male and female". *Visperad* 1:3, Mills translation.¹²

A much later text¹³ speaks of women priests. It states that whenever it is necessary for a priest to travel, such priestly duties should be allocated between men priests and women priests in a way that harmonizes with family responsibilities, so that neither priestly duties nor family responsibilities should suffer. This text states that as between two priests who are married to each other, if both have control over property and can manage wealth, then either one may travel to perform priestly duties. If only the man has control over property and can manage wealth, then the woman priest should travel to perform priestly duties. And if only the woman has control over property and can manage wealth, then the man priest should travel to perform priestly duties,¹⁴ indicating not only that women were priests, but that they had independent control over property, even after marriage, which I found quite surprising.

This text (written by Zoroastrian priests) also insists on a non-Zoroastrian woman's right to practice her own religion without legal or physical persecution. It states that if a man converts to the religion of goodness (*din-i-behi*),¹⁵ he should not force his wife to convert.¹⁶

The gender equality demonstrated in the Gathas and later Avestan texts has since been corroborated by archeological evidence.

In the early 1900s, an archeological dig in Persepolis, the palace of the Achaemenian King Darius I (also called the Great who reigned from (approx.) 522 to 486 BCE),¹⁷ and succeeding Achaemenian kings, discovered hundreds of clay tablets now known as the Persepolis Fortification & Treasury Tablets. These tablets included payroll records which show that the numbers of male and female workers employed were "well balanced".¹⁸ Women were employed as both workers and supervisors, received the same rate of pay in wine, beer, grain or silver, as their male colleagues¹⁹, and received additional pay as mothers ~ unfortunately with preferential treatment by at least one such employer for the mothers of boys.²⁰ These tablets also show that women owned, and had full control over, their own estates throughout the empire,²¹ were involved in the management and administration of these estates, disposed of their rents and income, engaged in their own grain and wine businesses, employed work forces, paid taxes, and enjoyed economic independence. They had their own personal seals, and issued orders in the form of letters under seal, to their own stewards or administrators.²² They had the legal right to act independently from their husbands,²³ and participated in public feasts and in the social life of the Court ~ a fact that the Greeks (who disapproved of such barbaric practices) thought quite strange.²⁴

Even after the fall of the Achaemenian Empire, the ancient traditions of gender equality did not entirely disappear in outlying areas. Moulton writes of a foreign diplomat, one Tchang K'ien, who in 128 BCE found two classes of population in Khorassan and Bactria, the nomads and the "unwarlike". Moulton paraphrases this diplomat's description of the unwarlike population as follows: "... there is no supreme ruler, each city and town electing its own chief. They pay great deference to their women, the husbands being guided by them in their decisions", and Moulton concludes that this description "reflects the features of the Gathas sufficiently well."²⁵

The freedom which women enjoyed in ancient Iran, is also depicted in the Shahnamah,²⁶ where for example, Gordafried, the daughter of a garrison commander was described as well versed and unrivalled in the arts of warfare.²⁷ When Sohrab, the warrior champion of an invading army, laid siege to her father's castle, she challenged him to single combat, during which the tip of his lance caught her helmet, and her long hair streamed out as she rode, causing Sohrab to wonder in astonishment: if the women of Iran are so valiant, what must their men be like (clearly not a believer in gender equality! but at least giving credit where due).

Similarly, the eldest daughter of the quintessential Persian hero, Rustam, was also a warrior. She was described (by her husband, the warrior Geev) as a knight in her own right.²⁸

It is interesting that these legendary stories of women warriors in the Shahnamah are echoed factually in the Cambridge History of Iran (CHI) which mentions that the women warriors of a Persian satrap, were introduced to Alexander at a banquet in Ecbatana.²⁹ To Alexander and his followers such women warriors were an anomaly. Not so to the ancient Iranians.

In conclusion, it would be simplistic (and probably inaccurate) to state that there were no differences at all in the treatment of men and women in ancient Iran. Unbiased evidence of life in ancient Iran is scarce. But what little remains to us, establishes that women were regarded as capable and respected equals ~ an equality that was rare in the ancient world (and indeed, even today).

The freedom to choose, which is a fundament of Zarathushtra's thought, is reflected in the freedoms enjoyed by these ancient women in making their life choices ~ in the spiritual path, in entering the priesthood, in marriage, in owning and managing property, in engaging in business, in earning livelihoods in the workplace, in ruling kingdoms, and even in warfare.

Unfortunately, in the centuries that followed the destruction of the Achaemenian Empire by Alexander, when most of the provinces of Iran were ruled by Alexander's Greek successors (the Seleucids) gender equality in Iran declined. After the Arab invasion of Iran, and the subsequent migrations of Zoroastrians to India, gender equality took a hard blow. It did not survive to anywhere near the same extent as it existed in ancient times, although such surviving Zoroastrian communities practiced gender equality to a greater extent than did the social environments in which they lived in Iran and India.

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¹ The Pahlavi texts (composed more than 200 years after the Arab invasion and occupation of Iran) did not subscribe to the same notions of gender equality that we see in the Avestan texts and in the archeological evidence of the Achaemenian Empire.

² We need to dispel some myths (based on linguistics) which are dear to many of us. I do so reluctantly, not wishing to sadden anyone. But truth is an imperative.

First, let us recall that Zarathushtra's idea of the Divine was radically different from that of the religions of his culture, in which their deities had human-like forms. Some were male gods and some were female goddesses. In Zarathushtra's thought, the Divine has no human-like form ~ a fact that is mentioned even by ancient Greek writers and more recently by Professors Moulton and Thieme (detailed in *Part One: The Nature Of The Divine*). I ask that you keep in mind Zarathushtra's new understanding of the Divine when considering the following linguistic information.

In the Gathic Avestan language, nouns are classified as masculine, feminine and neuter. But except for nouns which are intrinsically male or female (such as 'man' 'woman' 'son' 'daughter' et cetera) the genders of Avestan nouns are only grammatical. To illustrate with a modern language (which, like Avestan is also in the Indo-European family of languages), in French *la plume* 'the pen' is a feminine noun. In ancient times, pens were probably feather quills. But such feathers were produced by male and female birds. So there was nothing intrinsically feminine about either a feather or a pen. On the other hand, *le crayon* 'the pencil' is a masculine noun although there is nothing intrinsically masculine about a pencil when compared with a pen. Surely we could not argue (could we? ...) that the allocation of genders here signifies the fallibility of men and the infallibility of women, in that writings in pencil are erasable, whereas those in pen are not? No, no, of course not.

Exploring the genders of various nouns in Indo-European languages could generate a lot of fun (and irritation) for both men and women ~ depending on the nouns chosen. But the significance of most such genders is purely grammatical. A truth that often is forgotten by translators.

For example, everyone agrees that *spənta- ārmaiti-* ('beneficial-sacred embodied truth') is a fem. noun yet all humans regardless of gender have this divine quality (although imperfectly). The same is true of *haurvatāt-* 'completeness' and *amərətāt-* 'non-deathness', both fem. nouns, yet in Zarathushtra's thought everyone, regardless of gender, is capable of attaining these two divine qualities. The noun *mašya-* 'mortal', is masc., yet living beings of all genders in the material existence are 'mortal'.

Many ancient Indo-European languages, like Avestan, Vedic, and Latin, are languages of inflection and the genders of nouns, adjectives and some pronouns, together (with their case and number), affect the endings of words. Why the ancient Indo-Europeans devised such a complicated form of language, I haven't the foggiest idea. To a lesser degree, we see the same idea of grammatical genders that are unrelated to actual genders in some modern languages that are not languages of inflection, but are in the Indo-European family of languages (like French and Spanish).

How does all this linguistic information affect the dispelling of a favorite myth?

Well, there are those who contend that Zarathushtra's notion of 'God' is not that of a masculine patriarch (which is true), but instead is a mix of the masculine and the feminine (which, with respect, is the myth).

In support of their conclusion, they point to the fact that three of the attributes of the Divine (later called amesha spenta) ~ truth (*aša-*), good thinking (*vohu- manah-*) and good rule (*vohu- xšaθra-*), are masculine nouns (which is not accurate). And that three other attributes of the Divine ~ beneficial embodied truth (*spənta- ārmaiti-*), completeness (*haurvatāt-*), and non-deathness (*amərətāt-*), are all feminine nouns (which is accurate).

In Avestan, the first three are not masculine nouns. They are neuter nouns (Beekes 1988 pp. 131, 115, 117; Skjaervo's Old Avestan Index; Hintze 1994 in the Glossary of her translation of the YAv. *Zamyad Yasht*, pp. 42, 44, 49).

Those who subscribe to the notion that to Zarathushtra, 'God' is a mix of masculine and feminine also point to His name ~ that *mazdā-* 'wisdom' is a feminine noun (about which there is disagreement amongst linguists), and *ahura-* 'lord' is a masculine noun. While it pleases me to think that 'wisdom' is feminine, I have to admit that a few wise men do exist ~ a fact that could not have escaped Zarathushtra's attention, since he was a man, and a very wise one indeed. So even if *mazdā-* is a (grammatically) feminine noun, this could not have had any intrinsic gender significance in Zarathushtra's selection of a name for his notion of the Divine.

In the same way, *ahura-* (the way in which Zarathushtra uses this word in the Gathas) is a lordship over (completely possessing) the values that comprise divinity (detailed in *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*). If the masculine gender of this noun *ahura-* had any intrinsic significance, it would mean that only men could acquire lordship over these divine attributes. But the evidence of the Gathas is to the contrary (witness the way in which Zarathushtra speaks to his daughter's capabilities ~ quoted in the main part of this chapter).

In the same way, *mainyu-* is a masc. noun. But the term *spənta mainyu-* '(the) beneficial-sacred way of being', is a divine quality that all mortals have (imperfectly) regardless of genders have, indicating that the masculine gender of this noun *mainyu-* is purely grammatical, not intrinsic.

In short, the neuter, feminine and masculine genders of the attributes of the Divine (later called amesha spenta) and Zarathushtra's names for the Divine (*mazdā-* and *ahura-*) are purely grammatical. They have no gender significance that is philosophical or theological, which is surely reasonable. Gender is a function of our physical shells, and as such have no relevance to Zarathushtra's new envisionment of the Divine as a being without physical form. To ascribe one or more genders to the Divine would be to limit the Divine to the physical, which is mortal ~ hardly consistent with the fact that one of the attributes of the Divine is non-deathness (*amərətāt-*) ~ a state of being not bound by mortality, and therefore not bound by any material shell(s), even though immanent in all things (detailed in *Part One: The Identity Of The Divine*, and in *Part Two: A Question Of Immanence*).

Zarathushtra had to use the Avestan language as it then existed. It would not have been possible for him to change the existing (grammatical) genders of nouns to reflect his ideas.

But in Gathic Avestan, as in English, the masc. gender can be, and is, used generically. For example, in English we have *mankind* which includes all genders. In GAv. (as in English) masc. pronouns are used generically as well. And GAv. masc. pronouns in their various case forms are used generically for the Divine.

Finally, it is true that Zarathushtra refers to Wisdom (*mazdā-*), as the 'father' of truth (*aša-* Y47:2), good thinking (*vohu- manah-* Y31.8, Y45.4), and embodied truth (*ārmaiti-* Y45:4). Based on the contexts in which he uses 'father' (describing the act of creation as 'birthing') his use of 'father' can only be allegorical because fathers do not give birth. He uses an allegory 'father' to express the idea that Wisdom generates (fathers) truth, its comprehension, its embodiment or personification in thought word and action (see *Part Two: The Puzzle of Creation*).

³ For example, the very late YAv. *Yasht Fragment 22* describes a good woman who has departed this life as,

"... rich in good thoughts, good words, and good deeds, well-principled and obedient to her husband, ..." YAv. Fragment Yt. 22:18, Darmesteter translation, SBE 23, p. 318. Geldner does not include this *Yasht Fragment* in

his compendium of Avestan texts, so I do not know which Avestan words Darmesteter translated as 'well-principled and obedient'.

⁴ *Part One: Truth, Asha*, details Zarathushtra's perception of the qualities inherent in the true (correct) order in the existences of matter (factual truths) and mind/heart/spirit (abstract truths).

⁵ According to Taraporewala, the *A Airyema Ishyo* is in the same meter as the last Gatha (Y53), and he thinks it was composed by Zarathushtra himself, although other scholars disagree. I am not an expert on the meters of the Gathas, but for other reasons, I happen to agree with Taraporewala on this point. In any event, the thoughts expressed in the *A Airyema Ishyo* are very close to Zarathushtra's and it specifically mentions both men and women (as do other verses in Y53 itself).

⁶ My translation. Discussed in detail in *Part Six: Y54:1, The A Airyema Ishyo*.

⁷ Skjaervo in his Old Avestan primer on the Old Avestan language, estimates the dates of the Avestan texts as follows:

1,700 to 1,200 BCE composition of the Old Avestan texts;

1,200 to 900 BCE transition period;

900 to 400 BCE composition of the Young Avestan texts.

Skjaervo, *Introduction To Old Avestan*, (updated to Feb. 24, 2022), p. xii.

So the Gathas would have been composed (according to Skjaervo) around 1,700 BCE.

In the Gathas (which are composed in Old Avestan), Zarathushtra's most frequently used name for the Divine is 'Wisdom (*mazdā-*), then 'Lord' (*ahura-*), and least frequently 'Lord Wisdom' (*ahura- mazdā-*).

In the Younger Avestan texts (composed in YAv.), 'Lord Wisdom' (*ahura- mazdā-*) became the standard name for the Divine; and 'Wisdom' (*mazdā-*) is least frequently used. And this is also true of the *Yasna Haptanghaiti* (composed in Old Avestan) in which the Divine is named 'Wisdom (*mazdā-*) only once (as a compound word), but is most frequently named 'Lord Wisdom' (*mazdā- ahura-* and *ahura- mazdā-*) detailed in *Part Three: Evolution Of The Names Ahura, Mazda*. So it would be reasonable to conclude that the *Yasna Haptanghaiti* was composed around 1,200 BCE (towards the end of the Old Avestan period) ~ 500 years or so, after the Gathas were composed.

⁸ Humbach 1991 Vol. 1, p. 150.

⁹ Here are a few examples of men and women being treated equally in the *Yasna Haptanghaiti*.

YHapt.35:6 in GAv. "Just as now, a man or a woman knows what is real, so (do they know) what is really good ...". Hintze 2007, p. 31, *A Zoroastrian Liturgy, The Worship in Seven Chapters*.

YHapt.39:2 in GAv. "... Now we worship the souls of the truthful ones, men and women wherever they may have been born ..." Hintze 2007, p. 40.

YHapt.37:3 in GAv. "... We worship Him in the form of the choices of the truthful ones, both men and women." Hintze 2007, p. 36.

¹⁰ Here are some examples from the YAv. Yasnas in Mills' translation (the English of which sometimes is a bit Victorian) in SBE 31. He routinely translates *aša-* and *ašavan-* words as 'holy', or 'sanctity', or 'saint', instead of 'truth', 'truthful', 'truth-possessing' or 'truthful-one'. All words in round parentheses are his interpretive aids. Words in square brackets are my explanations. The page numbers are to SBE 31.

Yy13:1 in archaic YAv., "... And I invoke the chief of the province-lord. And the chief of women I invoke..." p. 251.

Yy8:3 in YAv. "O ye Bountiful Immortals [Mills' translation of 'amesha spenta'] and ... ye just men and just women ..." p. 229.

Yy16:9 in YAv. "And we worship ... all good men and all good women..." p. 257. The Avestan notion of 'worship' as a celebration is detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle of Worship*, and a ft. therein.

Yy26:4 in YAv. "... we worship the spirit and conscience, the intelligence and soul and Fravashi of those holy men and women who early heard the lore and commands (of God) and loved and strove after Righteousness, the ritual truth [*ašāi*]..." p. 278. Mills' word 'ritual' describing 'truth' is his own interpretive addition. It is not in the Avestan text. Geldner 1P p. 93.

Yy26:6 in YAv. "... we worship the life, conscience, intelligence, soul and Fravashi ... of the saints male [*ašaonqm*] and female [*ašaoninqm*] ... which are those of the dead and living saints, and which are those also of men as yet unborn, of the future prophets who will help on the renovation, and complete the human progress with them all." p. 279. The Avestan words in square brackets have been transliterated from Geldner 1P, p. 94; *ašaonqm* means 'of truth possessing (ones)' (masc.) and *ašaoninqm* means 'of truth-possessing (ones)' (fem.). It is worth mentioning that in the phrase 'men as yet unborn' the masc. gender is used generically to include men and women (as previously stated).

Yy26: 7 - 8 in YAv. Here, both men and women are mentioned as teachers and disciples. And 'worship' is the notion of celebration ~ 'we celebrate'.

"7. ... we worship the souls of the dead ... of the Aethrapaitis (the teachers) and of the disciples; ... of all holy men and women; (8) and we worship the Fravashis of all the holy teachers and disciples; and of all the saints both male [*narqm ašaonqm* 'of truth-possessing men'] and female [*nāiringm ašaoninqm* 'of truth-possessing women']." Mills translation, SBE 31, page 279. The YAv. words are from Geldner 1P, p. 94, their more literal translations in square brackets are mine.

Yy26:9 - 10 in YAv.

"... 10. We worship all the good, heroic, bountiful Fravashis of (those) holy men and holy women..." Mills translation, SBE 31, page 279. The word 'bountiful' is Mills' translation of *spənta*- 'beneficial'.

Yy57:9 (in YAv., also called the Srosh Yasht) "...who for the poor among ... men and women built a mighty house ..." SBE 31, p. 300.

Even 'enemies' are meticulously referred to as 'male and female' Yy61:2 - 3, SBE 31, pp. 312 - 313.

We also see equal and specific references to men and women in other YAv. texts. For example, (as translated by Darmesteter) the *Vishtasp Yasht*, § 30, "... of the good Mazdean law and of all those who walk her ways, men and women." SBE 23, pp. 335.

But (with less than perfect equality) YAv. *Visperad* 1:5 praises "...women who bring forth many sons of many talents...", Mills translation SBE 31, p. 336.

¹¹ Mills' translation, SBE 31, p. 389.

It is only fair to note, however, that in the *Farvardin Yasht*, (also a YAv. text), the fravashis of Zarathushtra's male and female disciples are segregated into separate parts of the Yasht ~ the male disciples being in § 95 (last sentence) and sections that follow; and the female ones being in § 139 and sections that follow. Whether this segregation in the *Farvardin Yasht* was in the original Avestan, or was the result of the way in which the Sasanian collators arranged the sections of the *Farvardin Yasht*, we do not know. However, the mentioned males far outnumber the mentioned females.

¹² SBE 31, p. 336.

¹³ S. J. Bulsara translation 1915, *Aerpatastan and Nirangistan*, (published by the Bombay Parsee Panchayat Funds and Properties Trust). The text has some YAv. passages interspersed with Pahlavi commentaries (which sometimes quote from other Avestan texts now lost to us).

Professional linguists today think that the Avestan of this text is grammatically faulty, indicating it was composed after Avestan times, when our priests were no longer fluent in Avestan (perhaps after the destruction of the Achaemenian Empire (331 BCE) but before the formation of the Sasanian Empire (200 CE). Bulsara indicates (through the supplemental title he gives this text), that in his opinion this text was "...Portions of the Great Husparam Nask...". This text, *Aerpatastan and Nirangistan*, was (in large part) a code of instruction for Zoroastrian priests, and therefore was probably written by Zoroastrian priests. However the text itself, in various chapters, shows disagreement among religious authorities. For example,

In Chapter 3, the author states that "women are deemed fit for the guardianship of fires, even where the Varharan Fire [later called atash behram] is enthroned. But notes that other authority would limit this to service of the novitiate. (Bulsara, p. 18).

Ch. 16, § 7 notes one religious authority who is of the opinion that a woman is not fit for religious functions unless "Holy Wisdom" approves her as fit (one wonders how "Holy Wisdom" made its opinion known); whereas § 8 cites another religious authority who states that a woman is fit for religious functions except when she is specifically declared unfit. (Bulsara, p. 137).

Even with these differences of opinion, it is clear that women were involved in the rituals of those ancient times, whereas in India historically, they have had no role at all in the performance of rituals. In Iran, the Chief High Priest of the Zoroastrians, Mobed - i - Mobedan Mehraban Firouzgary, started a program of initiating women to become Mobedyar ~ performing many (but not all) rituals. And the same is happening in some Zoroastrian communities in the United States, in which both men and women can become mobedyar. I grieve that Mobed - i - Mobedan Firouzgary departed this life (in early 2025) a courageous man of vision with a good mind/heart ~ a great loss to the worldwide Zoroastrian community.

¹⁴ S. J. Bulsara 1915 *Aerpatastan and Nirangistan*, pp. 17 ~ 18. This text also states that a woman may, with her husband's approval, travel with another man who is not her husband, to assist in performing priestly functions (pp. 19 - 20), and that if such a man behaves dishonorably towards her, he is culpable (pp. 22 - 23) i.e. the woman was not automatically blamed.

¹⁵ The translation "Good Religion" *din-i behi* (more accurately translated as the 'religion of goodness') was one of the names by which Zoroastrians called the religion during Pahlavi times because of its emphasis on goodness. The genesis of this term is the more ancient Avestan term *vañuhī daēnā* ~ 'good envisionment' which we find in the Gathas and YAv. texts ~ an envisionment of existence that has goodness (*vohu-/vahišta-*) at its core, detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle Of The Most Good, Vahishta*. The original Avestan name for the religion was *mazdayasna* 'the worship/celebration of w/Wisdom' (there are no capital letters in Av. script).

¹⁶ S. J. Bulsara 1915 *Aerpatastan and Nirangistan*, p. 40.

¹⁷ CHI 1985 Vol. 2, Appendix II, p. 874.

¹⁸ Brosius 1996, *The Women of Ancient Persia, 559 ~ 331 B.C.*, p. 182.

¹⁹ Brosius 1996, pp. 182, 153 ~ 160.

²⁰ Brosius 1996, pp. 172, 178, 182.

²¹ Accord: CHI 1985 Vol. 1, p. 577, ft. 4 which mentions that queen Amestris (wife of King Xerxes) had many holdings around Nippur, a rich agricultural area in Babylon; and also mentions the holdings of queen Damaspia, wife of Artaxerxes I, who was queen from 464 BCE to 424 BCE.

²² Brosius 1996, pp. 130 - 141, 180.

²³ Brosius 1996, p. 197.

²⁴ Brosius 1996, pp. 91, 94 - 9. Brosius comments that in Greek understanding, it was not appropriate for wives and respectable women to appear at public feasts (as the Persian women did), "that such behaviour befitted only barbarians" (citing Plato and Theopompos) and demonstrated "their lack of order and their inferiority." p. 96.

Wiesehofer, in his book *Ancient Persia*, shows a photograph of an Achaemenian cylinder seal of a woman, seated, in what appears to be a position of authority. He explains "Achaemenid seals such as this often depict women at court, suggesting an active social and political role for them in society." Plate XIIIb.

It has been suggested that the absence of carvings of women at Persepolis are proof that women led sheltered lives and did not participate in the life of the Court (similar to the role of women after the Arab invasion of Iran). Those who so contend are apparently not familiar with a large body of archeological and textual evidence ~ including the Persepolis Fortification & Treasury Tablets, cylinder seals, ancient Avestan and Greek texts, as well as the ancient sources from which the *Shahnamah* was derived ~ in which the evidence is all to the contrary.

Those who so contend also seem to be unaware that the carvings at Persepolis had one objective ~ to project the authority of a specific Achaemenian king and his prince and heir, and their divine right to rule. But other art forms did indeed depict women. To give just one example, Brosius states (citing Herodotus) that King Darius I (the Great) ordered a statue to be made of gold, depicting his wife Artystone (pp. 84 - 85).

²⁵ Moulton 1912 pp. 85 ~ 86.

²⁶ The *Shahnamah* is a saga composed in poetry by a Persian poet, Firdousi. It was composed (in its present form) some time after the Arab invasion of Iran, but large portions of the work purport to record the legends and ancient history Iran, so these pre-Islamic sagas would have had to exist ~ even if only in song ~ as the source for Firdousi's information.

²⁷ Surti 1987, *Shah Namah of Firdaosi*, Vol. 1, Ch. 158, p. 135.

²⁸ Surti 1987 Vol. 2, p.264.

²⁹ CHI 1985, Vol. 2, p. 484. The archeological sites of the Sauromatians (also known as Sarmatians) who were nomads of Iranian stock, show a large number of graves of armed women. And we are told that Sauromatian women were not only warriors, but also priestesses. CHI 1985 Vol. 2, pp. 189, 190, 195. We do not know if these nomads were followers of Zarathushtra. We do know (from the textual and archeological evidence available) that there was a culture of gender equality in ancient Iran, and that this cultural tradition is reflected in Zarathushtra's teachings, and in the early history of the religion ~ a cultural tradition that took a hit after the conquest of Alexander when Grecian ideas held sway in the seats of power. And these traditions of gender equality took an even greater hit after the Arab invasion of Iran. In the surviving Pahlavi texts we see a severe decline in notions of gender equality.