

woman's head, and excommunicating the deviants from the community and so on. The Panchayat continued to wield a strong influence over the religious-social life of the community till 1830. After this the sons of the old members took over and began considering their positions in the Panchayat as personal possessions. They behaved high handedly and in a biased manner. Henceforth, the Panchayat became an institution of class discrimination. Thus serious breaches like bigamy were now glossed over by the Panchayat, so far as the richer members of the community were concerned. This made some of the 'elderly' members resign their positions on the Panchayat. It had virtually become a powerless institution. The British Government also withdrew its recognition from the Panchayat.

In 1865, a Parsi Law Reform Association and later in 1961 a Government Commission worked on drafting a bill which gave the Parsi community, a written law of their own. It was entitled the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act of 1865 and Parsi Succession Act of 1865. These Acts have been amended in subsequent years to liberalise and facilitate legal proceedings relating to marriage and succession.

19.4.5 Festivals

So far we have discussed the emergence of Parsi community in India, their basic tenets, some of the important rites and customs of the Parsis and the role of the Parsi Panchayat. There is another area of Zoroastrian social organisation that reflects the collective entity of the Parsis. The area which rejuvenates the Zoroastrian way of life are the Parsi Festivals.

Feasting is a necessary component of Parsi worship. In other words it is not just a 'desirable' or an expected mode of behaviour but one that is religiously enjoined upon Parsis. It follows directly from their fountainhead, Zoroaster, who enjoins every Parsi to lead a happy and joyous life. The principal festivals in the Parsi year are the six seasonal festivals, *Gahnbars* and the days in the memory of the dead at the Parsi year's end. Also, each day of the month and each of the twelve months of the year is dedicated to the deity. The day named after that month is when the great feast day of that particular deity is held. The new year festival, Noruz or Navroz is the most joyous and beautiful of Zoroastrian feasts. It is a spring festival in the honour of *Rapithwin*, who is the personification (i.e. considered as person) of noonday and summer. The festival to *Mithra or Mehragan* (noble spirits) was traditionally an autumn festival. This festival was as honoured as the spring feast of *Norus*.

As you have observed in this unit, the Parsis provide an interesting variation from other communities. Though numerically small and localised in a few regions in the world, they are significant in terms of their economic and social strength in India.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Fill in the blanks in the statements given below.
 - a) The initiation site, which marks the admission of a Parsi boy or a girl into the Zoroastrian faith, is called
 - b) The place where the dead body of a Parsi is disposed is called

- c) The new year festival of the Parsis is called
- ii) State whether the following statements are true or false.
- a) Zoroastrianism prescribes strict monogamy.
- b) Low age at marriage is prevalent among the Parsis today.
- c) A daughter and a son acquire an equal share of the father's property when the father dies intestate.
- d) The Parsis Panchayat consists of both the priest and laymen.

19.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you were introduced to the social organisation of the Zoroastrian community in India. Zoroastrianism or Mazdaism (deriving its name from its supreme God, *Ahura Mazda*) was introduced in India around the 8th century A.D. We described how this community came to be localised in and around Gujarat and we mentioned their population strength at around 76,382 in India 1991. We pointed out that the Parsis (as they are referred to in India) have made a significant contribution to the economic, political, educational and social development of India. In order to have an understanding of their social organisation we looked at their basic tenets or belief systems. We noted that fire is worshipped as a symbol of their supreme God *Ahura Mazda*. We pointed out that Zoroastrians believe that a person has to make a choice between leading a good life or leading an evil life. We then moved on to describe their rites of initiation and death, their customs relating to marriage, family, and laws of inheritance and succession. We observed that in the Parsi society both men and women enjoy rights of succession and inheritance. We also described the Parsi Panchayat and the festivals of the Parsis. We have thus given an adequate overview of Parsi social organisation.

19.6 KEYWORDS

<i>Ahura Mazda</i>	Name given to the supreme God of the Zoroastrians, which means, "Wise lord"
<i>Avesta</i>	A collection of texts gathered in writing roughly between 4th and 6th century A.D. and attributed to Zoroaster or Zorathustra
<i>Dakhma or Dokhma</i>	Also known as 'Tower of Silence' where the Zoroastrians dispose the dead
<i>Mazdaism</i>	Another name for Zoroastrianism derived from the name " <i>Mazda</i> " meaning supreme Lord
<i>Navjot</i>	An initiation rite by which a boy or girl is admitted into the Zoroastrian faith

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19.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) The founder of the Zoroastrianism is Zarathustra or Zoroaster.
- ii) The other name for Zoroastrianism is Mazdaism.
- iii) Fire is worshipped as a symbol of the supreme God.
- iv) The Parsis are found mainly in Gujarat, Maharashtra especially in Bombay and Deccan.
- v) The two important sources of information about Zoroastrianism can be derived from its texts, the Avesta and the Gatha.

Check Your Progress 2

- i)
 - a) Navjot
 - b) Dakhma/dokma or Tower of Silence
 - c) Navroz/Noruz
- ii)
 - a) T
 - b) F
 - c) F
 - d) T

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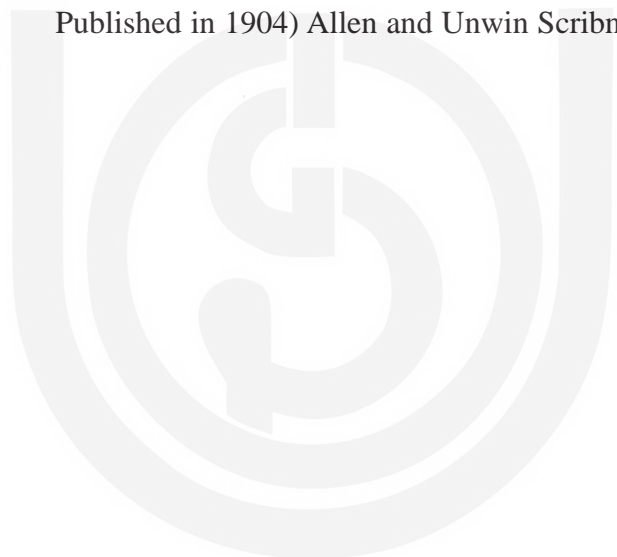
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