I, Andrew P Adkins, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Anthropology.

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Tending the Sacred Fire: The Adaptation of Zoroastrianism to North America

Student's name: Andrew P Adkins

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee chair: Clement Jeffrey Jacobson, PhD

Committee member: Leiia Rodriguez, PhD
Tending the Sacred Fire: The Adaptation of Zoroastrianism to North America

A thesis submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Cincinnati in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Anthropology of the College of Arts and Sciences by Andrew Patrick Adkins

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Committee Chair: C. Jeff Jacobson, PhD
Abstract

This brief, focused ethnographic study investigated the unique problems and adaptations of Zoroastrianism in North America and how they made it distinct from the religion practiced in the mother communities of India and Iran. The field research took place in the Zoroastrian community in Chicago, Illinois and involved participant observation and a series of interviews administered at several important events. Each interview was built around a number of open-ended questions about the community’s current difficulties, differences with other Zoroastrian groups, and members' predictions of the future.

Most of the participants agreed that Zoroastrianism dealt with a different set of problems in North America than in India. Difficulties specific to North America included an unwillingness of younger members to participate in community life, difficulties meeting the needs of Zoroastrians outside of major cities, the part-time nature of the priestly occupation, and conflict between Zoroastrians of Indian and Iranian background. As a result the community has adopted a flexible attitude towards the practice of the religion that is unheard of in the mother country. This is important because some of the subjects maintained that the growing Zoroastrian community in this country might soon dominate the future of the world's oldest monotheistic religion.

Keywords: Zoroastrianism, religion, India, survival, change, adaptation, diaspora
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Introduction

Zoroastrianism is too often thought of as a relic of the past. Although only around 120,000 people still practice this ancient religion (Hinnells 2007: 273), its historical and cultural impact is far out of proportion to its numbers. The historical importance of Zoroastrianism is hard to ignore, as it was the state religion of the great Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sasanian empires that defined the pre-Islamic Middle East. Additionally, many of its teachings live on as the most important doctrines of Judaism, Christianity, Islam and even Buddhism (Boyce 1979: 1). Even though this religion was founded as early as 1400 BC (Boyce 1979: 2), sizable communities of Zoroastrians can still be found in India, Iran, Pakistan, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States (Boyce 1979: 226). In spite of their small numbers, Zoroastrians continue to be one of the wealthiest and most influential subcultures in India and the Indian Diaspora.

Despite this, the vast majority of scholarly literature in English about Zoroastrianism concentrates on the past to the exclusion of the present. Many books and articles, such as Zoroastrians: Their Beliefs and Practices by Mary Boyce, concentrate mainly on the history and holy texts of the religion. Although most sources mention that there are living practitioners of Zoroastrianism, they maintain their numbers are tiny and growing ever closer to extinction. Works that focus on the present tend to be limited to the largest living Zoroastrian community in India. Furthermore, The Good Parsi by T. M. Luhrmann and other case studies make it seem like no aspect of Zoroastrian community life remains untouched by debates over how to stop this way of life from disappearing.

However, there is comparatively little information written about Zoroastrians living in the Western world. Is the Zoroastrian community of North America shaped by the same issues that affect its counterpart in India? This research project highlights how the unique problems and adaptations of Zoroastrians in North America distinguish them from their better-studied coreligionists. Specifically, I sought to understand how North American Zoroastrians in the Greater Chicago area understand and respond to the challenges of the twenty-first century. In order to answer this question, I embarked on an
ethnographic field study of the Zoroastrian community in Chicago, Illinois.

Studying how Zoroastrians understand and are responding to the challenges of the twenty-first century can show us the power of optimism, ingenuity, and the willingness to adapt in the face of what some view as an intractable situation. The Zoroastrians of North America have refused to accept the conclusions others have made about their fate and through adaptation have partially reversed their numerical decline. But they have more to tell us than just that. By understanding how different communities deal with different problems, we can understand how similar groups become different over time. The Zoroastrians of North America can also show us how many different evaluations people can have of the same situation, which give rise to different solutions and, in the end, cultural variation.

The American Zoroastrian community, with its particular approach to the challenges unique to the present, may represent the future of Zoroastrianism worldwide. Even though many more Zoroastrians live in India, their numbers are shrinking, unlike in America. In a few decades there may be more Zoroastrians in North America than in India, and with the shift in numbers may come a shift in the degree of influence. The Zoroastrian community in Chicago today may resemble what the future has in store for this oldest of all monotheistic religions.
The Worldwide Zoroastrian Community

Zoroastrianism may be the world’s oldest prophetic religion, but it is also one of the smallest. Most sources estimate that there are only about 120,000 Zoroastrians in the world today; a number which many say is decreasing with every generation. Although Zoroastrians are a minority in every country they inhabit, they are subject to special discrimination in their country of origin, Iran, as well as neighboring Pakistan (Hinnells 2007: 273). Although the largest Zoroastrian community in India has fared better, it has still suffered a significant decline in status and influence since the end of the colonial period (Hinnells 2007: 255). Additionally, Zoroastrians who settle in the Western world face the risk of culture loss and assimilation. Despite all this, the religion is practiced in more countries around the world now than ever before in its history (Hinnells 2007: 273).

Zoroastrianism was the religion of the majority of Iranians before the coming of Islam in the seventh century. Zoroastrians began to migrate to India about a century later in order to seek religious freedom. In a few hundred years they became more numerous there than in their homeland (Hinnells and Williams 2007: 1). Since the eighteenth century they have migrated from India to Britain, China, East Africa, Sri Lanka, what is now Pakistan, and later the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and finally the Arab states around the Persian Gulf (Hinnells and Williams 2007: 2-3). Despite its demographic decline, Zoroastrianism remains dynamic and relevant in the lives of its adherents, who have included some of the most important personalities in the history of India and the Indian Diaspora. The work of industrialist Jamsetji Tata and Indian National Congress founder Dadabhai Naoroji helped define the character of modern India. Because the majority of Zoroastrians worldwide are of Indian descent, it is of prime importance to understand the state of the community in that country.

The Zoroastrian Community in India

India remains the home of the world's largest population of Zoroastrians, by far. The 2001 census showed a total of 69,901 Zoroastrians in India, which is down from a total of 114,490 in 1941
(Hinnells 2007: 272). Although the Indian Zoroastrians, also known as Parsis, originally settled as farmers in the northern region of Gujarat, most of them became merchants after the arrival of European traders in the seventeenth century. When the city of Bombay (which is now known as Mumbai) became the center of English trade, it also became the home of most of India’s Zoroastrians (Hinnells and Williams 2007: 1). Once the wealthiest and best educated indigenous population in India under British colonial rule, the Parsis have endured a massive decline in status and numbers since 1947 (Luhrmann 1996: 1-2). The Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America estimates that a total of 20,000-22,000 Parsis have migrated overseas (Hinnells 2007: 272). The problems of the Zoroastrian community in India might be the most heavily studied aspect of living Zoroastrianism.

In 1994 Iranian Studies professor Philip G. Kreyenbroek conducted a study of the beliefs and practices of the Zoroastrian community in Mumbai in order to write Living Zoroastrianism: Urban Parsis Speak about Their Religion. Some issues are mentioned repeatedly over the course of the thirty total interviews that make up the book. Most Parsis believe that their numbers are dwindling because they are not having enough children (Kreyenbroek 2001: 51). Additionally, the Zoroastrian priesthood, which is traditionally an inherited position, has endured an enormous loss of prestige due to the promulgation of anti-clerical ideas by Protestant missionaries. Therefore, very few youngsters want to pursue a priestly profession (Kreyenbroek 2001: 52-53). These same Christian ideas have also caused many traditional beliefs and practices to fall to the wayside, such as the strong dualism of good and evil and the rules of ritual purity (most notably the practice of excluding menstruating women) (Kreyenbroek 2001: 299-300).

Kreyenbroek and other authors stress conflict between Zoroastrians as one of the most important issues of the modern age. In addition to long-standing disagreements over the proper dates of holidays, the Zoroastrian community of India is also divided by debates over what must be done to preserve this ancient religion. The declining numbers of Zoroastrians make debates between different sub-groups more acrimonious, because each one believes their opponents will bring about the doom of
the faith (Kreyenbroek 2001: 55). These debates tend to pit those who see Zoroastrianism as faith in the power of a set of traditional observances against those who see it as a moral philosophy based around the teachings of Zoroaster (Kreyenbroek 2001: 293). Also central is the question of the validity of traditional sources of authority versus individual interpretation (Kreyenbroek 2001: 294). Although most Zoroastrians deplore the current divided state of the community, they keep fighting each other because they assume there can only be one true form of the religion.

On top of all of this, there seems to be a Parsi obsession with their own decline. In *The Good Parsi: the Fate of a Colonial Elite in a Postcolonial Society*, psychological anthropologist T. M. Luhrmann sets out to understand why so many older Parsis claimed that members of the younger generation were degenerate, backward, effeminate, and dependent (Luhrmann 1996: vii-viii). She was baffled by this degree of self-criticism because statistics show that the wealth and social status of the community had not fallen as much as such talk would suggest. This inspired her to interview a sampling of Parsis in Mumbai between 1987 and 1990 (Luhrmann 1996: 15). The reasons that Parsis give for their decline are various.

Many Zoroastrians in India maintain that their community is tearing itself apart with all this arguing (Luhrmann 1996: 130). One of the most often repeated claims is that wealth has made the Parsis complacent, costing them the motivation to succeed in business. The younger generations have become dependent on the charitable funds established by wealthy Zoroastrians and subsequently have lost the will to work. Some demand that money from these funds, which were established by wealthy ancestors, must be restricted the needy, while others are campaigning for them to be abolished altogether (Luhrmann 1996: 149-150). Many middle aged and older Parsis maintain that anyone with ambition migrates overseas; and only those without drive remain in India (Luhrmann 1996: 132). Others blame the younger generation's abandonment of the traditional honesty and work ethic as the cause of their downfall. However, there are those who point the finger at these very morals, saying that honest Parsis cannot compete in an environment dominated by corrupt, cheating Hindus (Luhrmann
Luhrmann believes that this trope of decay is at its heart an attempt to offer a psychologically comforting explanation of the reversal of fortunes of the Parsi community. By blaming themselves the Parsis assert that the cause of this decline is within their control and thus reversible. Although the extent of their self-loathing may not make sense to outsiders, it comes from the same psychological mechanisms that people around the world use to make sense of their suffering (Luhrmann 1996: 156-157).

For many community members, stopping this decline in numbers is by far the most important issue. Most Parsis believe that more babies are needed, but are at odds with each other on how to encourage births. At the center of this debate is the question of whether Zoroastrians should be allowed to marry non-Zoroastrians. Intermarriage can be either the main cause of Parsi decline or the main cure for it, depending on who is talking (Luhrmann 1996: 146-147). Many argue that this limitation on the number of potential mates is the main reason why Parsis have so few children. Some also say that the addition of new genes would do much to prevent the hereditary diseases that are so prevalent in their community (Luhrmann 1996: 148). Others, however, maintain that intermarriage would contribute to the decline rather than alleviate it, because the children from such marriages would have conflicting identities and be more likely to give up Zoroastrianism (Kreyenbroek 2001: 85). Indian Zoroastrians of Iranian extraction frequently state that intermarriage with Hindus is the main reason for the Parsi decline (Luhrmann 1996: 131).

Compounding the low birthrate is the fact that young Zoroastrians often delay or forgo marriage for multiple reasons. Many young women refuse to date other Zoroastrians because they are reputed to be effeminate and even impotent (Luhrmann 1996: 132). Parsi parents are said to pamper their boys and push their girls, meaning that the girls work harder and do much better in school than the boys. The only place women can find mates with an equal education or income is outside the community (Luhrmann 1996: 133-134). However, the most recent statistics do not support this
assertion. The *Survey of the Parsi Population in Greater Bombay*, conducted by Malini Karkal in 1982, concluded that Parsi men and women were equally likely to get a higher education and that men earned on average more than women (Luhrmann 1996: 135).

A more likely explanation is that many do not want to marry until they can find someone to satisfy both their Western and traditional expectations of a desirable spouse, which is very difficult given the limited pool of potential mates. Others are able to find mates but refuse to marry until they can find a residence away from their parents, which is often impossible in overcrowded Mumbai (Luhrmann 1996: 169-171). Although their adoption of British ideals and mores benefited them during the colonial period, they may actually be hampering their growth after independence. Are problems like these applicable to all Zoroastrians, or are they particular to the community in India? Next we will see how many of the same issues apply to the Zoroastrians of Iran.

**The Zoroastrian Community in Iran**

There is far less information available about the Zoroastrians of Iran, even though it was the birthplace of the religion. “The Survival of Zoroastrianism in Yazd” by Nile Green is a short exploration of the current condition of Zoroastrianism in the region with the largest Zoroastrian population. Yazd, located in the central highlands of Iran, began to be the center of Zoroastrianism at some point before the eleventh century AD. This was when the high priest, or *Dastur Dasturan*, fled persecution in Fars province to the south and settled with his two most sacred fires in the village of Sharifabad outside of Yazd. From this time until the nineteenth century the Zoroastrians of Yazd became an impoverished and almost forgotten minority (Green 2000: 115). The fall of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1979 caused a massive exodus of Zoroastrians abroad, probably in greater numbers than the original exodus to India after the first wave of persecutions (Green 2000: 116).

In 2000 there were probably between five and twelve thousand Zoroastrians living in separate neighborhoods and villages in Yazd province. Many of these have lost much of their population, due to the decline in births as well as urban migration (Green 2000: 116). Although observers in the time of
the Shah noticed that Zoroastrians would frequently move out of town when Muslim settlers started to 
arrive, this phenomenon has been declining since the 1970s. Recently opportunity has had more to do 
with the decline of the population of Zoroastrian villages than Islam does; the villages with the largest 
Zoroastrian populations also have large Muslim ones. Many of the deserted Zoroastrian homes in the 
countryside are re-occupied when city dwellers move back into them on special occasions; the low 
market values of these homes enable many to retain them for holiday use (Green 2000: 117).

There are now eighteen Zoroastrian temples in Yazd province (Green 2000: 117). Although one 
was destroyed to make way for a road, most of the other temples are well maintained and in good 
condition, even in sparsely populated areas. These include dar-i mehrg that house sacred eternal flames 
as well as talars, or community meeting halls (Green 2000: 118). The number of fully ordained priests 
(who are essential for all Zoroastrian rituals) is dwindling, but the practice of initiation of laymen into 
the priesthood, who are known as mobed-i yars, has enabled the sacred fires to survive. In addition to 
priests there are anjomans, or committees of lay members who organize Zoroastrian social functions 
(Green 2000: 119).

Some of the most important problems include the closing of Zoroastrian schools due to the lack 
of pupils, and the difficulty of finding marriage partners in a country where marriage to Muslims is 
forbidden. Although the Islamic Republic of Iran has claimed to uphold the rights and safety of the 
Zoroastrians (Green 2000: 119), harassment and especially discrimination by members of the Muslim 
population continues to be a major problem. Since the 1979 revolution the Zoroastrians became more 
determined than ever to preserve their heritage, and have embarked on efforts to educate the younger 
generations. However, by the 1990s declining numbers became the community's most serious problem. 
With no signs of an end to the restrictions on marriage and the migration overseas, this problem has not 
been effectively countered (Green 2000: 120). However, overseas Zoroastrians have had more luck in 
this regard.

Zoroastrians in Britain
Perhaps the oldest and largest community of overseas Zoroastrians is located in the United Kingdom. The majority of this community lives in London, which has the largest Zoroastrian population of any city outside of Iran or India. Great Britain is one of the only places where the number of Zoroastrians is growing due to immigration (Hinnells 1996: 6). The population is made up of immigrants from Mumbai and Gujarat in India, as well as Pakistan, Iran, and East Africa (Hinnells 1996: 1).

The first Zoroastrians to settle in Great Britain came from India in the mid nineteenth century. The first Zoroastrian organization in Britain was the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe, founded in 1861. However, the number of Zoroastrian settlers was not large until after World War II (Hinnells 1996: 266). In the 1960s the process of Africanization in Kenya and the revolution in Zanzibar drove many Zoroastrians from East Africa to settle in Britain. East African Zoroastrians tend to be more traditional, and their influence has made the community generally more conservative since the 1960s. At the beginning of the twenty-first century an increasing number of religious events are being held, and a surprisingly large number of women still follow the traditional restrictions during menstruation (Hinnells 1996: 267).

The Zoroastrian community in the United Kingdom was studied in-depth in *Zoroastrians in Britain*, by South Asian religious scholar John R. Hinnells. Hinnells' 1996 study concluded that despite widespread expectations that newer generations of Zoroastrians will have abandoned their religion, the practice of Zoroastrianism is, if anything, increasing among the younger generations. Zoroastrians are increasingly aware of the importance of maintaining their identity as well as the central position of religion as a part of that identity. 85% of the older interviewees and 75% of the young ones identified themselves as practicing Zoroastrians. Many older Zoroastrians believe they have become more religious after immigrating to Britain (Hinnells 1996: 233).

Despite complaints about racism and the decline of British morality, the Zoroastrians still think of Britain as a nice place to live (Hinnells 1996: 283). Even so, Zoroastrians see the survival of their
religion as dependent on several factors. These include the need for a new house of worship (Hinnells 1996: 284), the need to educate new generations about the intricacies of Zoroastrianism (Hinnells 1996: 285), upholding a positive public image of the religion (Hinnells 1996: 287), and being financially independent from the white majority through the establishment of charities (Hinnells 1996: 288). There have been no major disputes between Parsis and Iranis, partly because of the small number of Iranis and partly because of consciousness of the Iranian roots of the religion (Hinnells 1996: 291).

Since the 1990s Zoroastrians have been sponsoring many interfaith meetings and activities in order to inform outsiders about the true nature of their religion (Hinnells 1996: 287). The community has instituted religious education classes, community-wide festivals, and youth group activities in order to educate newer generations and bring them together. There is also an increasing emphasis on theology and belief over ritual, and pressure is forming to abbreviate liturgies, although not as strongly as in North America (Hinnells 1996: 292). The British Zoroastrian community is beginning to develop in a direction that is different from either India or North America, which will be discussed next.

The Zoroastrian Community in North America

The first Zoroastrians settled in North America around 1967 when Canada, and shortly afterward, the United States opened their borders to non-European immigrants. In North America there was a strong concern that Zoroastrians would spread out all over the country and, without contact with others of their kind, quickly assimilate into the dominant population. This resulted in the formation of many regional associations, first in Canada and then the United States. At least 23 Zoroastrian organizations exist in North America today (Hinnells 2007: 268).

In 1987, the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) was founded in order to pool the resources of these organizations together and to promote cultural and educational events. These include Zoroastrian Congresses that are held twice a year to plan strategies for survival and to promote social interaction between Zoroastrians. Additionally, FEZANA publishes a quarterly journal with community news as well as articles on various aspects of the religion (Hinnells 2007: 13).
As a result of these efforts, Zoroastrians of North America generally believe that although they may practice the faith less actively than their Indian counterparts, they are better educated in the teachings of the faith (Hinnells 2007: 269).

The most important issue for many North American Zoroastrians is intermarriage and the acceptance of children from intermarriages. Another question of prime importance is whether or not it is right to accept converts from other religions. Many people believe that continuity with the past is necessary to preserve a Zoroastrian identity, while others argue that change is inevitable. Attitudes towards these issues vary between areas and individuals. An issue that is more prevalent in North America than elsewhere in the world is conflict between Zoroastrians of Indian and Iranian origin. This is because most Zoroastrians who fled Iran after the 1979 revolution settled in the United States and Canada. The two communities clash over significant differences in theology and practice, such as the proper dates to hold holidays. Iranian Zoroastrians, or Iranis, are more likely to reject the ritualism of the Parsis, along with the multitude of doctrines they developed over their centuries in India. As a result many Iranis hold events separately from Parsis, and often associate with other Iranians rather than Zoroastrians (Hinnells 2007: 269-270).

In 1979 the World Zoroastrian Organization (WZO) was formed in order to support local associations and to advocate for the rights of Zoroastrians worldwide. From the time of its inception the WZO has been in conflict with the major Zoroastrian associations in India such as the Bombay Parsi Punchayet. The WZO has come to represent the interests of diaspora Zoroastrians, partly because its leaders tend to be in favor of allowing intermarriage (Hinnells 2007: 271). Despite associated controversies, the WZO is widely respected in India for its charitable donations and aid work for poor Parsis worldwide (Hinnells 2007: 272).

Luhrmann (1996) does not see the omnipresent Parsi trope of decline in Zoroastrians living outside of South Asia. Instead, the Parsis in North America, Europe and elsewhere seem to accept that the young generation must choose a new identity for themselves. They must learn to combine aspects
of the culture of their host country with that of traditional *Parsi-panu*, or Parsi-ness, in order to find something that works for them. Overseas Parsis see the change in values in their young as a cultural resource rather than evidence of a moral decline (Luhrmann 1996: 217). However, to make sure the young can find a place for Zoroastrianism in their lives, organizations like FEZANA sponsor many publications as well as meetings in order to ensure they are educated enough to obey the spirit, rather than the letter, of all the religion’s rules (Luhrmann 1996: 213-214).

According to the website of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) there are twenty-six regional Zoroastrian associations located in twelve US states, four Canadian provinces, and three multi-state areas. A newspaper article by Julia Lieblich, which can be found on the ZAC website, states that there are about 2,000 Zoroastrians in the United States, and about 700 of them are within driving distance of Chicago (Lieblich 2002). The newspaper article by Allison Hantschel mentions a figure of around 2,500 Zoroastrians in North America, and states there are around 300 families in the area of this city (Hantschel 2002). These are the only sources that mention the size of the Zoroastrian community in North America.

**The Zoroastrian Community of Chicago, IL**

The Zoroastrian Association of Chicago website describes the history of the community. It says that the first Zoroastrians to settle in this city came over from India to study engineering in the 1930s and have remained in the city ever since. Zoroastrians first began to settle as families in Chicago in the late 1940s, right after India gained its independence. Most of them came to study at universities in Illinois and decided to stay in the area when they found job opportunities. About four or five Zoroastrians a year settled in this area until the 1960s, when the number increased substantially. The 1970s was the height of Zoroastrian migration to the area, and the number has since then declined to a steady trickle. The community has expanded in size from around forty individuals in the 1960s to around six hundred in the 1990s (Rivetna 1996).

The earliest efforts to organize the community in 1965 resulted in the formation of the first
Zoroastrian Association, which only functioned for a few years. In 1974 several Zoroastrians called for the foundation of another association. This was driven by the need to promote Zoroastrian education and awareness in the American-born youth, who were growing up without any knowledge of their religion or heritage. On August 11, 1974 a general meeting of Zoroastrians in the area was held, at which they agreed to start holding monthly meetings. The Zoroastrian Association of Chicago (ZAC) was officially incorporated on December 31, 1975. At first the Association’s meetings were held at member’s homes, but later they moved to a local Unitarian Church (Rivetna 1996).

The current house of worship was financed and built by the ZAC in 1983. The Zoroastrian Association’s Constitution was written shortly after it was founded. It outlines an “Open Door Policy” where any willing volunteers are accepted into the Board of Directors by a majority vote from that body. The Executive Officers of the ZAC are also elected by the Board. Shortly after the foundation of the Association, several burial plots were bought in Elm Lawn cemetery, and the Association has ensured that there are places to bury Zoroastrian dead since that time (Rivetna 1996).

The Zoroastrian Association has sponsored many Zoroastrian and interfaith events throughout its history. It hosted the Second North American Zoroastrian Congress in 1977 as well as two Youth Congresses and community conferences, seminars, lectures, and summer camps. They continue to host social and fund-raising events, such as the No Rooz celebration on March 26. The constitution of FEZANA was written and approved in the library of the building in 1985 (Rivetna 1996).

The Zoroastrian Center

The house of worship, known as the Arbab Rustam Guiv Darbe Mehr, was constructed in 1983 and inaugurated with two days of ceremony on September 3 and 4th. It was the first building on the continent to be designed and built as a Zoroastrian center (http://www.zac-chicago.org/history/making_of_a_darbe_mehr.htm). The sacred fire was set in a brazier imported from Surat in India. The whole endeavor was made possible through the donations of one hundred families as well as the efforts of the President of the Association at that time, who served as the General
Contractor during the building’s construction. In addition to donations, the property was bought with a $150,000 trust from the individual whom the center was named for. The facility’s construction was delayed by many difficulties, including the collapse of the roof and problems with the zoning authorities, making its construction a huge victory for the Zoroastrian community (http://www.zac-chicago.org/history/making_of_a_darbe_mehr.htm).

The main entrance to the Darbe Mehr building is located on the northeastern wall. It opens into a small hallway that leads to the central hall of the building. On the right side of this hallway is a door into the Patel Library, which contains books as well as a conference table where all the Board of Directors meetings are held. Most of the functions I attended were held in the central hall. This is a large room with folding chairs and tables stacked up against the walls that are set up before functions are held. On the southwest wall there is a stage on which the priests sit with the fire vase in order to perform Jashan prayer ceremonies.

To the right of the entrance hallway, on the northwest wall of the building are the two entrances into the anteroom and prayer room. In the anteroom worshipers take off their shoes and put on a head covering before they enter the prayer room. Against the southeast wall of the prayer room is the silver fire vase, which houses the sacred fire which is tended by priests. When prayer ceremonies are held in this room, people stand around the fire vase and chant prayers. Against the southwest wall of the prayer room is a shelf on which flowers can be placed, and in the northeast corner there is a table on which lit candles are placed. On the northwest wall hands a large painting of the prophet Zoroaster flanked by two chairs.

On the southeast wall of the main hall, opposite of the prayer room, are entrances to the Fellowship Hall. The Fellowship Hall is where meals are served and children’s classes are taught. The cordoned off area around a television on the southwestern area of the building is where I held most of my interviews. From this area there is a door that leads into the FEZANA office. On the Northeastern side of the building, next to the Fellowship Hall, is a doorway and window leading into the kitchen,
where all the meals are cooked. These seven rooms were the setting for all the events I observed at the Zoroastrian Center.
Methodology

In order to gain a first-hand understanding of the situation of North American Zoroastrians, I conducted a brief ethnographic study at the Zoroastrian Center of Chicago, Illinois. I chose to study the Zoroastrian Association of Chicago because it was the closest Zoroastrian group large enough to have its own place of worship. I modeled my methodology off of Hinnells (1996). This was a two-part study that focused on the opinions and perceptions that Zoroastrians had about the state of their community.

The first step involved distributing a printed seven-question survey that anyone at the Zoroastrian Center could complete. I handed out thirty-three copies of the survey to volunteers over the course of four community meetings and managed to get a total of twenty responses. This preliminary questionnaire was intended to discover the opinions of as large of a sample of the population as possible. Primarily, I sought to determine if the Zoroastrians struggled with the same problems in North America that they did in India and Iran, and if they thought they were any more successful in dealing with them.

Each printed copy of the survey consisted of four pages. The first and second pages were taken up by the Institutional Review Board-mandated consent form, which explained the purpose and potential risks of the study. On the third and fourth pages were seven short answer, opinion-based questions with spaces provided for the participants' answers. Each participant was asked to write down whatever information they thought was applicable to the question. When the participants were done with the survey, they returned the completed forms to me. I stored them inside a hard plastic binder until it was time to read and analyze them. The survey generally should have taken between five and twenty minutes to complete. The entire survey has been printed out and attached in Appendix A of this document.

The survey phase of the study began when I arranged to travel to Chicago for the Board of Directors Meeting on May 8. On that day I arrived at the Zoroastrian Center and spoke to the Board of Directors about my survey and plans for further research. Someone completed a questionnaire for the
first time after the end of this meeting. On June 5, 2011 I returned to Chicago to attend the Homajee ni Baj event, which included prayers by priests, a talk about the significance of the holiday, and a lunch. When most attendees were finished with their meals, I distributed printed copies of my seven-question survey to all those who volunteered to take it. I made sure to ask for participants at every table. In the end sixteen people volunteered. Eight filled out their surveys and returned them to me that day, while two of them told me they would turn in their completed questionnaires when I attended the Annual General Meeting next Sunday. The other six surveys I did not receive. By this point I had a total of nine completed surveys.

On June 12, 2011 the Annual General Meeting was held, which I had arranged to attend in May. I went to this meeting expecting to finish the survey portion of my research, but ended up getting only two more completed surveys. I tried to conduct an in-depth interview, but my volunteer declined upon seeing the twelve questions I was planning to ask him. There were very few events in June and July. Therefore, I did not return to Chicago until the Gatha Days, held everyday from August 14 to August 18, and Shenshahi Navrose Function, which was on August 19. Each of these events involved a prayer ceremony followed by a dinner. It was during the dinners that I passed out questionnaires and asked people to participate in interviews. On August 14 I received nine completed surveys, meaning that I had twenty and could move on to the next portion of the study.

The survey allowed me to gain a glimpse of how the community understood the issues they were struggling with. After analyzing them, I formulated fourteen short questions to explore these issues in greater depth during a series of face-to-face interviews with several different members of the community. Each interview lasted no longer than forty minutes. All of the information shared consisted of personal observations, opinions and life experiences. My fourteen interview questions were as follows:

1. First of all, how long have you been a member of this community? Do you play any important role or place in this community?
2. What do you know about other Zoroastrian communities aside from this one, in the United States or elsewhere?

3. For now I'd like to focus on the community in this city. Can you tell me about the size of this community? Is it growing? What are the criteria that define who is and is not a member?

4. What aspects of life in America present special challenges to the practice of Zoroastrianism?

5. How has the Zoroastrian community changed or adapted in response to these challenges?

6. What do you think about these or other changes in the Zoroastrian community in this city today?

7. Are you satisfied with the Zoroastrian community at this time, or do you think it should change?

8. Do you know of others who think the same way you do about the state of the community?

9. Is there anything else you would like to say about Zoroastrianism in this city or in other parts of the United States?

10. In what ways is the Zoroastrian community in the United States different from the community in Iran or India (if at all)?

11. I have heard that the Zoroastrian community in North America is more accepting towards intermarriage and more open to outsiders. I have also heard that its members are generally better educated in Zoroastrian beliefs than in India or Iran. Has this been your experience?

12. What do you think about the future prospects of Zoroastrianism globally?

13. What do you think about the future of Zoroastrianism in the United States? What about in Iran and India?

14. Is there anything else you would like people to know about Zoroastrianism?

Before and after dinner on August 15, 17, 18, and 19 I was able to get six different interviews with eight people. I endeavored to conduct each of my interviews in private to ensure confidentiality, although this was not always possible. Before each interview I made sure the participant read and signed the IRB-mandated consent form, which is attached in Appendix B. For each interview I was equipped with my printed interview questions, a notebook, and a digital recorder. Although my
fourteen basic questions were the same for all participants, every interview contained a few spontaneous questions that allowed me to understand the subject’s responses in more detail or to explore new issues that may have been mentioned. These interviews enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of individuals’ perception of their community’s future, and allowed me to identify major differences between the communities in North America and India. Since all of my respondents were of Indian origin, unfortunately I could not get much information about the community in Iran.

My first interview was conducted in the side hall of the Darbe Mehr on the evening of August 15 at about 9:00 PM. My subject and I sat across from each other in a children’s area partitioned off from the hall where dinner had been served. I did not have a recorder present at this interview. For this interview, as well as all the others, I used pseudonyms to identify the participants.

My second interview was conducted before the service started on August 17. This interview occurred in the same place as the interview on August 15, in the cordoned off area next to the FEZANA office. I first got my subject to sign two copies of the consent form, and let him keep one. The interview started at 6:46 PM and lasted 19:56 minutes. I recorded the interview on a digital voice recorder located in my pocket. The chanting of a priest could be heard in the background, as well as other people talking in the main room. The second interview that took place on August 17 was also held in the same location as the two previous interviews. This one lasted 25 minutes and 35 seconds. It began at 8: 56 and was over by 9: 26. Because of his position on the Board of Directors, my subject provided an administrative perspective which was helpful clarifying many issues, including the official criteria that determine membership.

Only one interview took place in the Darbe Mehr on August 18. It happened after dinner and was split up by interruptions into several different recordings. The total time of the interview is 32 minutes and 42 seconds. The first three segments were completed in the library room of the building. When that was closed down, the last segment had to be finished in the area next to the FEZANA office. This interview was long and very informative because my subject was well educated about the state of
his community, and kept abreast of what was going on through periodicals such as *Parsiana* and the FEZANA journal.

The first interview on August 19 was conducted at a table in the main hall immediately before dinner. We were the only two people sitting at the table. The interview lasted twenty-five minutes and eleven seconds. The talking of people sitting at other tables could be heard in the background, which at times made it hard to hear. My subject signed one consent form, but did not want to sign another copy to keep for himself. Therefore, I used the last consent form during my interview with the priests. My subject was very open and informative in his answers and was more than willing to answer any additional questions that I had. At the end of the interview he also asked the two priests who were present if they wanted to participate in an interview, which was conducted after dinner.

Two priests present at the ceremonies on the August 19 Shehanshahi Navroze event, along with one wife decided to participate in an interview. The three sat down for an interview before dinner began, but when it was announced that dinner was being served, I told them that we should wait to conduct the interview. After dinner was finished, all four of us sat down in the same place and conducted the interview, which lasted 39 minutes and 48 seconds. Early in the interview my pencil lead ran out and I stopped taking written notes on what was being said. Throughout the interview, there was loud talking in the background and my subjects were often difficult to understand. This interview was full of insight regarding changes in Zoroastrian rituals and the problems facing the priesthood.

After the last two interviews on August 19 I was able to conclude the field part of my research. Using the completed copies of my questionnaire, I collated and compiled all the survey information and then identified the most frequent answers. I also observed trends that multiple survey responses had in common and noted them in my results section. For the six interviews, I transcribed the audio recordings, read them, and made note of apparent trends, such as common opinions and observations. In the results section, I will describe how each interview addressed my four research questions.
The Sample Population

My seven-question survey was done anonymously, so I do not have any specific information about individual respondents. Once a person had completed the survey, they simply handed it to me or placed it on the table next to where I was eating. Many people who asked for a survey did not complete one. I had no way to associate each survey with a name or even a face. However, there were some characteristics common to most of those present at each of these meetings.

Most of the people at the nine meetings I attended were middle-aged or older and either born in India or of Indian descent. There were about equal numbers of men and women, and some young children but few younger adults. My study was limited to those of eighteen years of age and older, so I could not include any children. In fact, all of the people who volunteered to take the survey looked to be older than thirty years old, and most were older than forty. With the exception of the Annual General Meeting, the events I attended in June and August were primarily Parsi holidays, so the people there were predominately of Indian rather than Iranian origin. Because most of the survey respondents seemed to be Indian-born and of an older generation, they were probably less likely to connect with the American-born youth and more likely to see their lack of participation as a problem. If I had attended more social or youth-related events rather than administrative and religious ones, I would have probably encountered a greater number of younger members of the community.

The eight people who participated in in-depth interviews represented a fairly wide section of the community. These included two priests, one member on the Board of Directors, one founding member of the community, one university professor, and one recent arrival from out of town, coming to a total of six men and two women. All of the interview subjects except for two originally lived in India. Some of my interview subjects were considerably younger than most of the survey respondents, while one identified himself as the oldest man in the community. One of the priests looked to be in his late teens or early twenties, and three others looked to be in their thirties. I have identified all of them by pseudonyms.
All of my subjects were volunteers and could not have represented the full spectrum of viewpoints in this community. One person I interviewed identified as a staunch liberal, but none of the others I spoke to were staunch conservatives. Most of them seemed to agree on many important issues and thought that the Zoroastrians in India were too conservative. Because I had to rely on only people who were present at certain events, I could not take a more representative sample of the community.

Research Findings

This study used open ended surveys and brief recorded interviews to explore how members of one of the largest Zoroastrian communities in North America compared to their co-religionists in more extensively studied mother communities in Iran and India in regard to the following specific questions:

1. What do North American Zoroastrians define as the most important issues affecting the survival of their religion?
2. What are North American Zoroastrians doing to ensure that their religion survives? Do most people think these measures are effective?
3. How do the problems affecting Zoroastrianism in Iran and India compare to the ones in North America?
4. Is Zoroastrianism developing in a different direction in North America than it is in the home countries of Iran and India?

Here I discuss my survey and interview answers and how they pertain to each of these four research questions. I consider the survey responses first and then discuss the interviews. While examining the results I was able to identify several important themes that will be elaborated on in the discussion section.

Threats to the Survival of Zoroastrianism

All of my subjects could mention one or more problems that threatened the survival of their faith. One of the most common observations on the survey was that the number of practicing
Zoroastrians was decreasing or even dwindling. As one respondent put it, “by far the most important issue is the dwindling Zoroastrian population maintaining future generations in our faith.” To some, the community was “rapidly dwindling” or even “vanishing,” “especially in India.” Other answers were not as strong, expressing simply that the community needed to “increase in size.” Another person revealed why this was so important: “rapidly declining numbers could make the community extinct.” The word “extinction” appeared alone in a few answers, while another person went as far as to write “survival” three times. As we will see, many of the other issues they brought up were closely related to this one.

Another issue that appeared especially frequently was the question of whether or not marriage with non-Zoroastrians was acceptable. Some described inter-marriage itself as a problem, stating that “the younger generations are marrying outside the community,” but others phrased this more as the question of accepting the children of such marriages. According to one, “In India” the issue was “different from male [to] female. The issues of male child are recognized but issues of female child are not recognized as Zoroastrians.” A different respondent specified that the problem was “people marrying out of the community and not raising children as Zoroastrians.”

The need to accept outsiders who wish to adopt the faith was also mentioned by a good number. All of these specified that the prohibition on conversion constituted the problem except for one, who wrote nothing more than just “conversion.” One respondent wrote about the attitude behind this restriction: “to traditionalists, Zoroastrianism is an ethnic religion. This stifles the efforts of others to spread the true message of Zarathushtra [sic].” A smaller number stated that the tendency of Zoroastrians to marry later in life was a problem. One person stated that both “late marriage” as well as “small families or in many cases no children” were problems. Most of the people who wrote about this also mentioned the shrinking number of believers.

A few others noted that the low level of participation by young people in community life was a serious problem. One wrote about a trend where a “large number of younger people” are “losing
interest in religion,” while another described this phenomenon as a “lack of commitment in the second generation.” There was also the difficulty of “keeping the Zoroastrian identity after dispersal to far-flung geographies.” Because believers live in areas all over the United States, many of them do not have contact with priests or other Zoroastrians, leading to a decline in religious knowledge and practice. Additionally, it was said that “Zoroastrianism is almost unknown to people of other faiths”. In other words, there is “very little awareness of the faith outside of the community”.

One person mentioned the community's “non-adaptiveness,” as well as the “loss of language/culture/traditions” and the difficulty “maintaining our 'roots' 'culture', [and] 'practices'.” Others said that traditional rituals and dogmas might be a source of difficulties. One person simply stated “ceremonies/rituals,” while another listed “dogmas” and a “false superiority complex” as sources of trouble. A single person believed that “disagreements over customs” between Zoroastrians was a major issue. However, another respondent remarked that Zoroastrians in India needed to accept the way the religion was developing in North America. Finally, a number of people brought up the lack of religious knowledge and education among the youth. “Younger generations” often grew up “not knowing rituals and customs,” often because “the priests” were “not really up to educating religion to the members.”

These answers give a good idea of how members of this community who attend meetings like this define threats to their religion's survival.

The decreasing population of Zoroastrians was said by a good fraction of the respondents to be the most serious threat to the religion’s survival. The lack of youth involvement in the religion was nominated by fewer but still a good number of respondents. After that was the possibility of the extinction of Zoroastrianism itself. All the other issues received only one response each: the loss of “traditions/ cultural practices,” the idea of Zoroastrianism as an ethnic religion, the need to “raise awareness” about the religion, late marriages, people who marry out and do not raise their children as Zoroastrians, accepting outsiders who wish to convert, and increasing interaction and acceptance between religions. One final respondent wrote only “Not sure.”
All of my interview subjects were asked if there were any aspects of life in America that made practicing Zoroastrianism difficult. Rose D., who was a recent arrival to the community, emphasized the isolation of many Zoroastrians all over North America. Outside of major cities Zoroastrians have no places of worship and no priests, meaning they are unable to perform many rituals. Also they have little or no contact with other Zoroastrians, meaning little cultural exchange takes place.

Middle-aged community member Bahman C. said that there was nothing about living in America that made practicing Zoroastrianism difficult. However, he did mention that here Zoroastrian priests are not full-time practitioners as in India, a fact which limits many of the services they can perform. He also elaborated that many communities are without priests or even a place to worship. The experienced priest Farhad B. and his wife Zarin B. came to similar conclusions. Board of Directors member Pherozeshah M. described the lack of youth involvement and the lack of institutions to train priests in North America as the most important issues.

University professor Neville R. believed all the above issues were important, but added the question of whether younger generations are able to assume control over the community. The most important issue to community elder Cyrus B. was the lack of participation from second generation Americans. Also, Cyrus B. saw the community's unwillingness to change and adapt as a major problem. Cyrus K., Farhad B., and Zarin B. agreed that both the geographic dispersal of Zoroastrians and the lack of places of worship for many were important. Zarin B. also mentioned the need to get the youth educated and involved.

Both Neville R. and Cyrus B. believed that conflict between Indian and Iranian Zoroastrians constituted a major problem in other communities, but was absent in this one because of sound planning and capable leadership. Farhad B. also maintained that Chicago was more close-knit and free of conflict than communities elsewhere around the country. Conflict between Parsis and Iranis was not mentioned in any of the surveys, and conflict in general was not discussed often in them. The difference may be because of the nature of the impromptu questions I asked in the last few interviews.
Community Responses and their Effectiveness

Almost all of the survey respondents could describe actions that their community was taking to counter the previously mentioned threats to Zoroastrianism, but only some were able to comment on their effectiveness. A few participants stated that one or more of these actions were working effectively. The first person to fill out one of my surveys assured me that “ZAC, by constitution, accept[s] and allow[s] to participate, all non-Zoroastrians who have married within our community. Everybody can participate in all prayer activities. Children of mixed marriage can be initiated within our religion.”

This person went on to say that this “works very well within Chicago.” Another respondent mentioned “Religion classes. But [these are] not cultural enough, only factual translating [of] text.” When asked whether or not these measures were effective, this person wrote “Yes!”

Another participant described a certain measure as effective, but not as effective as she or he hoped. This person wrote “Our community is trying to bring the young Zoroastrians together though different programs. The attempts to bring them together [are] working but sometimes the relationship from a distance is not as effective, as one would want it to work.” There was also a respondent who described how effectiveness varied based on geographic location: “Our community is good about including non-Zoroastrian spouses & their children (not all Zoro. Communities are as inclusive).” This was effective “to an extent.”

In contrast, there were just as many participants who implied that the actions they mentioned were not effective. One person stated that “Issue 1 has been addressed by interfaith participation. However, it has not been very effective. Participation by youth is minimal. Issue 2 is considered to be a personal issue and has not been addressed as a group.” A different respondent wrote that “Every 2 years we have N. American Zoroastrian Congresses which help a bit temporarily but not really overall very effective.” Finally, a more ambivalent answer was: “They have congresses all over the world. Not seen much results yet. Getting involved in inter-religion gatherings.”

The majority of survey participants could name one or more community responses to the
problems they mentioned earlier, but did not say anything about whether or not they were effective. Many of the answers like this had to do with initiatives to educate and involve the youth. One answer described these as “Several initiatives help bring young Z’s together—Youth Congresses, NextGenNow, youth camps, Z-Assn programs, FEZANA meetings....” Another, simpler response was: “-Organizing 'talks'. -Get togethers.” A third respondent included a rather lengthy answer: “Our small community takes care to teach our youngsters all aspects of the religion—prayers, ceremonies, rituals. Hoping against hope that most of it sticks.”

One answer mentioned actions specific to only one area: “In Mumbai, Mumbai Parsi community is promoting Youth Programmes.” Two more were rather similar, concentrating on the acceptance of “inter-faith couples and their children in the community.” Someone noted that “Communication between here and India” was being promoted, “but here we are more open-minded and progressive.” Because of the shrinking population, it was said that Zoroastrians were encouraging people “to have bigger families” and to “be open to interfaith marriages.” Similarly, someone else stated that the community was “encouraging more young people to marry and have children” and even “opening the community to conversions.”

A few respondents indicated that they did not know what was being done about the problems they mentioned. One answered with “don't know,” and while another wrote simply “no idea.” The longest answer of this type was “I am not really sure of what is being done to react or counter this issue.” A final answer was unclear; stating only that “the views of Zoroastrians are most liberal in USA.”

My survey responses also made several suggestions about what the community should do to ensure its survival. One of the most important was the necessity of educating the younger generations in traditional beliefs and practices. One respondent encouraged the community to “educate” the “younger generation” and “create more social events to encourage interest in the community,” while another told them to “teach real practices and customs and keep them alive.” Another was the need to
become more inclusive. One respondent suggested that people should “think about Zoroastrianism as a world religion and not a social club whose membership should be restricted only to a select few.”

A few people believed that Zoroastrians needed to promote their birthrate by marrying earlier. Someone suggested that people should “encourage early marriage” while another added that they had to “marry early, have a couple of children, and interact healthily and positively with others outside the community.” Another suggestion was that conservatives should adopt a more liberal stance. “The conservative Z’s should be more lenient in their ideas & thinking to bring the youngsters… in the religion.” A similar answer suggested that their problems could be countered “by being more liberal & inclusive.” One respondent expressed the need to “Encourage youth participation,” while another recommended that “elders in the community” should “encourage youth to follow and participate in all the religion workshops.” The older generations needed to “continue to teach our kids the principles of our religion and encourage them to continue to do the same with their kids in order to preserve our community.” The final respondent's wrote simply “get involved.”

One suggestion was that Zoroastrians needed to be “more open with traditional customs” and “change with the changing times.” Another wrote that they must “be open minded and look at the big picture.” In addition to marrying earlier, it was recommended that Zoroastrians should “interact healthily and positively with others outside the community.” To one respondent, Zoroastrians have a characteristic talent that “has to be channeled in a unified way and not against each other.” Interestingly, only one person mentioned the need to accept the “children of mixed marriage” in Question Six.

On one survey someone wrote that more social events needed to be held in order to “encourage interest in the community.” A single person even suggested that priests needed to try to “draw non-Zoroastrians to join the religion” and “Encourage conversion.” A final recommendation was that Zoroastrians needed to “have faith, hope” and “courage for the better survival of our religion.” Only one respondent believed that maintaining the status quo was best, and that person specified this was in
regards to India. This suggests that although Zoroastrians generally have many different ideas about what must be done to deal with today’s problems; most of them believe that changes should be made to the way things are done.

In each of the interviews I asked how the Zoroastrian community has changed or adapted in response to the problems it faces. All of my subjects had something to say about this except Zarin and Cyrus K. Rose believed that the community had done a good job of adapting to the United States and was “thriving” because of its openness to outsiders. Both she and Farhad mentioned that Zoroastrians dealt with the lack of Dakhma burial towers in the United States by cremating their dead. Bahman described how priests deal with the necessity of working part-time by only hosting ceremonies once in a day. Also, he told me how the community dealt with the lack of exposure to other Zoroastrians by stressing education in the meaning of Zoroastrian beliefs.

Pherozeshah mentioned that the community was doing “everything that’s possible” to deal with the problems it faced, and was very “flexible” and “practical” in its approach, “the way it should be.” He did not say how they were reacting to the lack of a seminary and consecrated fire temple, however. Neville R. told me that there were plans to build a consecrated Atash Adaran temple in Houston, and that the community had dealt with the possibility of conflict between Parsis and Iranis by ensuring equal participation in the management of the ZAC. The latter measure was also praised by Cyrus B.

Pherozeshah, Neville, and Cyrus B. all spoke about the problem of low youth involvement, but did not mention that anything was being done to remedy this. Farhad affirmed that the closeness of the community and the dedication of the priests enabled them to overcome their problems. The priests were willing to travel anywhere they were needed to perform their services, and were dedicated enough to do this in addition to their regular jobs.

Are the members of this community satisfied with its current state? Almost half of my survey respondents did not state that any changes should be made to community life. This may be because they were satisfied with the way things were, or because they did not notice the question, which was on
the reverse side of the paper. One person wrote “no comments,” while another put “[I] do not know, but there is always room for the change.” Another thought this issue was best left “to scholars.” An additional person wrote that she or he would prefer not to answer because “I would need a lot of time to just give this question some justice.” One respondent claimed that “It is the Zoroastrians in India that need to change, not us.” Therefore, only a minority of respondents had any suggestions for changes that should occur in this community.

There were two suggestions that were mentioned by more than one respondent. These include the idea that Zoroastrianism must be adapted to modern times and that the community must be more accepting of others. One respondent wrote that he or she had already mentioned what needed to be changed in previous questions. All these answers suggest that many Zoroastrians believe that the community either does not need to change, or cannot agree on how it should change.

Interview subjects Rose and Bahman said they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the community today, and liked to think that a lot of members of the community agreed with them. Pherozeshah was also satisfied with the community, but thought there was a lot of room for improvement. He believed that most of his generation agreed with him, but the younger ones did not. Neville said he was “satisfied” with the community and was “actually optimistic” about its future. He was especially glad that several youths were being ordained for the priesthood. Although Neville had not talked to many people, he had found that opinion articles written by ZAC leaders in Zoroastrian magazines consistently agreed with his own views. Cyrus B. believed that the community should be changing more than it was, and did not know if anyone else agreed with him or not. Farhad was “very satisfied” with the community, but Zarin wished that the youth would become more involved. Both Farhad and Zarin agreed that most of the people they knew thought the same way about this. Finally, Cyrus K. “did not know.”

Only Cyrus B., Zarin, and Cyrus K. did not say that they were satisfied with the community. Also, everyone but Cyrus B. and Cyrus K. believed that most of the community, or at least most of
their generation, agreed with their assessment. Therefore, it is possible that over half of my subjects are satisfied with the present state of things.

**Different Country, Different Problems**

Because of the nature of the seven questions, this topic was only hinted at in the survey responses. However, one respondent wrote that the main problem affecting Zoroastrianism worldwide was that the community in India did not accept the changes being implemented to the religion in North America. The others did not specify whether they were talking about the Zoroastrians in North America, Iran, India, or all over the world.

Fortunately, several of my interview subjects spoke directly about this subject. Rose, Farhad and Zarin, Cyrus K., and Bahman all spoke about Zoroastrians in the North American continent who had no access to temples, priests, or other Zoroastrians. Bahman said that believers in India took their religion for granted and did not do much investigation into its teachings. In America, however, believers tended to do more research and reading into such topics. Bahman and Farhad described how priests are not full-time professionals as in India. Additionally, Pherozeshah and Neville mentioned that the future in the United States would be influenced by the lack of a consecrated fire temple and especially the absence of institutions to train priests.

Rose, Pherozeshah, and Farhad also agreed that there is much less flexibility in how the religion is practiced in India. Cyrus B. asserted that the younger generations were much more willing to participate in community life in India than their American counterparts. Pherozeshah and Neville also mentioned the problem of youth involvement. Finally, Neville and Cyrus B. spoke about how conflict between Indian and Iranian Zoroastrians was endemic to many communities across North America. Therefore, everyone knew of issues that affected either India or North America, but not both of them.

Additionally, all eight of my interview subjects agreed with the statement that the North American community was more open to marrying and interacting with outsiders. However, only Cyrus B. disagreed with the statement that Indian Zoroastrians tended to know less about the religion than
their North American counterparts. Therefore, almost all of my interview subjects believed that a different set of problems faced Zoroastrians in North America and India.

The Future of the North American Community

All of the survey participants except for one could describe changes they have seen in this community during their lifetimes. Only one respondent said that “not much” had changed. A few people mentioned that the community was decreasing in numbers, with one going as far as to say they were “dwindling.” Someone claimed “the Zoroastrian Community is getting smaller and smaller in the 45 years I have been here.” An answer even provided an explanation for this trend: “marriage outside of the faith and the 'rigid mind set' of the community to not recognize the children produced by such unions.” Another answer stated the community's financial strength had decreased along with its numbers. Finally, one person maintained that Zoroastrianism was shrinking in India but growing in North America.

A majority of the respondents could describe how the community has changed in ways unrelated to size. One respondent wrote that the community had become “much more open and lenient to non-Parsis or those married outside.” Another answer was “more Zoroastrians are marrying outside the community and expanding, which is a good thing.” A different respondent remarked that the community is becoming more “cohesive” and interacting more with “other faiths and organizations.” Someone said they “are tending to become inclusive” and “heading towards liberalism in place of orthodoxy.” It was also observed that “In the USA, some Zoroastrians who were very traditional and orthodox (say 30 years ago) have become less traditional, and more accepting of liberal ideas.” A final respondent described how the community had been evolving since his or her childhood and was now at a “crossroads.” It could either “change with time-or perish.”

Some people believed that the primary change was in their perception of the community. My first survey respondent wrote that his or her views on Zoroastrianism have changed after moving from India due to contact with Irani Zoroastrians. Another claimed that she or he felt no concern for the state
of the community in India but started to become worried after relocating to America. Interestingly, differences were mentioned between the younger and older generations. One person answered that the “younger generation is less conservative than the older;” while another claimed “the young generation is getting away from religion.” Furthermore, mention was made of a “major migration of youth from India/Pakistan to the West.” One last respondent said that “large numbers” were coming here “from India.”

This suggests that over half of Zoroastrians in this community believe that there have been significant changes in the religion during their lives. This is significantly more than a minority of one or two who believe that there have been no serious changes over their lifetime. Therefore, over half of my respondents think the community is changing in a direction that may make it different than the community in India.

Rose told me that although Zoroastrianism is “a relatively small community that is dwindling in numbers worldwide,” “there is more of a promise for Zoroastrians to thrive outside India.” Conversely, Bahman thought that the Zoroastrian community was growing in both the United States and in India. According to him, this was evident because of the large number of centers opening up in the United States and the growing attendance at youth events in India.

Pherozeshah believed that the future of the community in the United States was “very bright,” and the reason for its decline in other places is partly due to emigration to the United States. The communities in India and Iran are “rapidly declining” because of a low birthrate as well as emigration. Neville was confident that the “center of gravity” of the global Zoroastrian community was shifting from India to North America. Within the next few decades he predicted the North American community will have greater numbers, wealth, and influence than any of the others. The Indian form of orthodoxy will not continue to be the dominant form of Zoroastrianism for long, he predicted.

Cyrus B. thought that the community in North America was not changing as much as it should, and that it was sure to go extinct if it did not adapt. However, he also stated that the North American
community was becoming more liberal at the same time that the community in India was growing more conservative. He went on to assert that the future of the religion in India and Iran was “at best, bleak,” while in the United States it had the opportunity of being “very bright.” That is, as long as it did not follow the advice of conservatives like “Khojeste Mistree.” Although he was not sure, Cyrus hinted there was a chance that North America could become the world center of Zoroastrianism, perhaps in his lifetime.

Farhad believed the religion was growing worldwide, but Zarin was not as sure. Farhad believed that the community here had a “bright future,” although everyone else had different opinions about it. Their future has to be better than India's, because so many Indians were migrating and settling here. Although he did not know much about Iran, Farhad predicted that Zoroastrianism would continue to survive there, as it has survived oppression for hundreds of years.

All but one of the interview subjects who answered Question Thirteen believed that Zoroastrianism had a brighter future in the United States than it did in India. The one outlier, Bahman thought the future was positive in both India and the United States. Although Rose believed that all the communities were dwindling worldwide, she did admit that she saw a more positive future for the American community. Therefore, out of the seven subjects, one predicted the community would grow in both North America and India, one thought it would decline in both places, and four believed that the community would grow in North America and shrink in India, so that soon North America will become the dominant community.
Discussion of Findings

Summary of Findings

In this study I set out to discover how the unique adaptations of North American Zoroastrians set them apart from their mother community in India. Almost everyone who participated in my survey or interviews agreed that Zoroastrianism faced a different set of problems in North America than it did in India. All of the interview subjects also agreed that conflict over the issues of conversion and inter-religious marriage was no longer as central an issue in the United States as it was in India because these practices had become widely accepted.

Instead, they described a number of other problems unique to North America. These included problems related to geography (such as the isolation of Zoroastrians who live outside of the largest cities), to the needs of the priesthood (including the lack of institutions to train a new generation of priests as well as the fact that they can only afford to function part-time) and to conflicts between Zoroastrians of Indian and Iranian background. Some problems common to Zoroastrians worldwide included the unwillingness of conservatives to adapt to new conditions, and perhaps most importantly, the fact that younger generations needed to become more involved in the religion.

Zoroastrians in this country have turned to unique solutions to deal with these specific problems. Since their priests must offer services while holding regular jobs, they have become more flexible as to when their services are available. Additionally, because so many communities do not have priests, the ones that do must be willing to allow theirs to travel all over the country to perform the required services and rituals. Additionally, community members have adopted a more liberal interpretation of the religion that enables them to keep up with changing times.

Zoroastrians of different backgrounds have arrived at compromises about how regional associations are led in order to prevent conflict. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, they have founded organizations such as FEZANA that promote the education and involvement of the youth. Publications such as the FEZANA journal and events such as the World Zoroastrian Youth Congress
ensure that new generations are informed about the faith and traditional culture. Events such as these bring together members who are far apart and would not normally see each other, building a sense of community. All of these solutions have led to a flexible attitude towards the practice of the religion that is unheard of in the mother country.

Most of the survey respondents agreed that the Zoroastrian communities in India and the United States were developing in different directions. More than half of them could name changes that occurred in the Chicago community during their lifetime. All but one of the interview subjects believed that Zoroastrianism had a brighter future in the United States than it did in India. In fact, many of them told me that the number of Zoroastrians was growing in North America as a result of the adaptations they had made.

Implications for the Community

Since most respondents agreed that Zoroastrianism was not dwindling in North America at least, there is a consensus that the community will exist in the future. This may be the most important implication of all. The fact that North American Zoroastrianism is developing in a different direction than the form practiced elsewhere has very important implications for the future of the religion. Many of my interview subjects believed that the number of practitioners was growing in North America because of the adaptations made to its practice. Many of them maintained that in the future, perhaps as early as a few decades, the world’s largest and wealthiest Zoroastrian community will be in North America, not India. In the words of interview subject Neville R., “the intellectual and economic center of gravity of the community will be moved to the US,” and that Iran and India “will become satellites, in some ways, to what is happening here.”

Neville believed that throughout history the branch of any religion with the most numbers and resources tends to become regarded as the mainstream form. Therefore, he predicted that the North American form of Zoroastrianism would become the global orthodoxy, perhaps even within his lifetime. Neville specified that “because the intellectual and economic center of gravity of the
community will be moved to the US… in subsequent generations, the Indian orthodoxy will be supplanting by whatever is considered as the norms of Zoroastrianism as promulgated in the US.” He was “not optimistic about the Indian Zoroastrian... orthodoxy continuing to exist.” What is happening in this community might set the stage for a general liberalizing trend in the world's oldest monotheistic religion. This statement, more than anything else, indicates how important this community's adaptations might become.

Implications for Future Research

Perhaps the most important achievement of this study is that it demonstrates why North American Zoroastrians are worthy of scholarly attention. By showing the uniqueness of this community's condition, I have indicated that observations about the community in India are not applicable to all Zoroastrians. Furthermore, the fact that many of its members estimate that this community may dominate the world of Zoroastrianism some day shows that its relevance is more than just local.

The main problem with my study is its limited scope and the biases associated with convenience samples. It focused on the Zoroastrian community in only one city, and depended on the participation of a small number of self-selected volunteers. Since I was not able to send out an internet-based survey, I could only give questionnaires to people who were present at the meetings that I attended. Therefore, my observations cannot be applied to the entire Zoroastrian community in Chicago, let alone North America. Those who are willing to explore this topic in further detail could try to administer a survey of Zoroastrians all over North America, like the one in Chapter Six of Zoroastrians in Britain. A random sampling of the opinions of a large number of community members would paint a much more representative picture of Zoroastrianism in the United States.

Field studies of different communities of Zoroastrians elsewhere in the country could also offset the biases of my study. A study of how a primarily Iranian community, such as the Persian Zoroastrian Association of San Jose, California, experiences the same issues would be very illuminating.
Additionally, most of my respondents were older in age. A study of a group of young Zoroastrians, such as members of the NextGenNow organization or the attendees of a World Zoroastrian Youth Congress, and their evaluations of the situation of the religion would also be worth a try.

Also, future studies could examine specific issues rather than general ones. Judging from the topics discussed at the Annual General Meeting in June, the actions that North American Zoroastrians are taking to educate their children and inspire them to participate in the community could be enough for another thesis project. It is clear that this study is only the beginning; the North American Zoroastrian community is important enough to merit a much better understanding by the public.
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Appendix A: Printed Zoroastrian Survey

1. Adult Consent form for Research

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Please read this page carefully.

The person in charge of this study is Andrew Adkins of the University of Cincinnati (UC) Department of Anthropology. He is being guided in this research by Dr. C. Jeff Jacobson of the Anthropology department.

Purpose:
The purpose of this research study is to analyze how the ancient Zoroastrian religion is attempting to adapt itself to the challenges of modern American society. Specifically, it will focus on how the members of that religion define the problems facing their community and what they are doing to address these problems.

Subjects:
Around 20 people are expected to take part in this survey. The people eligible for this study include those on the Zoroastrian Association of Chicago mailing list who have been informed of this survey as well as people present in the Arbab Rustom Guiv Darbe Mehr who wish to participate.

You will be asked to write out answers to seven questions in the spaces provided. They do not have to be deep, but please include any information that you think applies to the questions.

Possible risks:
The only risks that might come from this research are emotional. There is a small chance that some questions might inspire negative emotions in you or make you upset. Therefore you should not write anything if it makes you feel uncomfortable. There is also a chance that you might become estranged from members of your community for expressing certain opinions. In order to prevent this, many steps will be taken to keep this research as confidential as possible. Only the principal investigator, Andrew Adkins, will ever read your responses. No one's actual name will be recorded in any aspect of this survey: in the final paper pseudonyms will be used. A false name and location will be given to the Zoroastrian center in the final paper so that each person's anonymity can be protected.

Possible Benefits:
You will not receive any direct benefit for participating in this study. However, your participation may help the general public to gain a better understanding, as well as respect for, the religion of Zoroastrianism.

You are under no obligation to answer every question in the survey. Also, if you decide that you do not want to continue with the survey, you can simply return the sheet to the researcher and inform him that you no longer want to participate, and your answers will be discarded. You will suffer no negative consequences.
Confidentiality:
Your answers will be stored on the Survey Monkey website for as long as the survey is open. These notes will be used for analysis so that the principal investigator can arrive at conclusions, which will be used in the final paper. These records will be kept until the project is finished, which should be around May 2011. The final paper based on the findings of this research study may be published; but you will not be identified by name.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, you should contact Andrew Adkins at (304)-638-9957 or adkinsap@ucmail.edu. Or, you may contact thesis advisor C. Jeffrey Jacobson at 513-556-5780 or c.jeffrey.jacobson@uc.edu. No one has to be in this research study. Refusing to take part will NOT cause any penalty or loss of benefits that you would otherwise have. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You may stop this survey at any time.

Agreement:
By continuing to the next page, you indicate that you have read this information and have received answers to any questions I asked. By continuing to the next page, you give your consent to participate in this research study.
1. What changes have you experienced in the Zoroastrian community over your lifetime?

2. What do you think are some issues facing the Zoroastrian community today?

3. Which of these issues do you think are the most important?

4. How are Zoroastrians in your community attempting to react to these issues? Do you think these steps are effective?

5. What thoughts do you have about the future of Zoroastrianism?

6. What do you think Zoroastrians must do, if anything, to ensure the survival of their religion?
7. Are there any aspects of Zoroastrian community life that you think should be changed? Why or why not?
Appendix B: Interview Consent Document

Institutional Review Board

IRB # 11-03-30-04
APPROVED 4-11-11
EXPIRES 4-11-12

Adopted Consent Form for Research
University of Cincinnati
Department: Anthropology
Principal Investigator: Andrew Adkins
Faculty Adviser: Dr. C. Jeff Jacobson

Title of Study: Tending the Fire: The Crisis of Zoroastrianism in the Twenty-first Century

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Please read this paper carefully and ask questions about anything that you do not understand. This research is sponsored by the University of Cincinnati.

Who is doing this research study?
The person in charge of this research study is Andrew Adkins of the University of Cincinnati (UC) Department of Anthropology. He is being guided in this research by Dr. C. Jeff Jacobson of the Anthropology department, Dr. Martin Haug of the UC Department of History, and Dr. Stephanie Sadre-Orafai of the UC Department of Anthropology.

What is the purpose of this research study?
The purpose of this research study is to analyze how the ancient Zoroastrian religion is attempting to adapt itself to the challenges of modern American society. Its specific focus is on how the members of the religion define the problems facing their community and what they are doing to address these problems.

Who will be in this research study?
About ten participants should take part in this research study. All of them will be people on the Zoroastrian Association of Chicago mailing list or attendants of meetings at the Chicago Darbe Mehr who ask to participate in the interview by contacting the Principal Investigator by E-mail, on the phone, or in person.

What will you be asked to do in this research study, and how long will it take?
You will be asked to answer a few questions in as much depth as you can. It will take about one hour. The interview will take place inside the Darbe Mehr. You do not have to answer every question and can terminate the interview at any time.

Are there any risks to being in this research study?
The only risks that might come of this research are emotional. One or more questions might inspire negative emotions in you or make you upset. However, there is no need to say anything if it makes you feel uncomfortable. You can refuse to answer any questions that you don't want to answer. There is also a change that you might become estranged from members of your community for expressing certain opinions. In order to prevent this many steps are being taken to keep this research as confidential as possible. The only people who will read the interview notes other than the principal investigator will be his three thesis advisors. No one's actual name will be recorded in any field notes.
Are there any benefits from being in this research study?
You will probably not be getting any direct benefit for participating in this study. However, your participation will help the general public to gain a better understanding, as well as respect for, the religion of Zoroastrianism.

What will you get because of being in this research study?
You will not be paid or given anything to take part in this study. This interview is on a strictly voluntary basis.

Do you have choices about taking part in this research study?
The primary choice you will have to make is whether you want to hold it in person or over the telephone. Also, if at any time you decide that you do not want to continue with this interview, you can just say so and it will stop. All of the notes will be discarded and your information will not be used in the final paper. You will suffer no negative consequences: just go back to what you were doing.

How will your research information be kept confidential?
Several steps will be taken to make sure that your identity and your responses are kept secret. In the notes and final paper people will be referred to by pseudonyms. This center will be given a false name and location in the final paper so that each person's anonymity can be protected.

Your information will be kept in a field notebook for as long as it takes to finish this project. It will be stored in a locked cabinet at home in Cincinnati. These records will be kept around until this project is finished, which should be around May 2011. The final paper based on the findings of this research study may be published; but you will not be identified by name.

The only places where your name will be recorded will be on this consent form. The consent forms will be turned into the IRB committee, who will keep them secure in their archives for at least three years, as mandated by federal regulations. The University of Cincinnati recommends that the printed field notes be kept for two or more years after the end of the study. This is because agents of the University of Cincinnati may inspect study records for audit or quality assurance purposes. These will be kept in a locked cabinet in the Anthropology department office, as well as the final copy of the thesis document.

What are your legal rights in this research study?
Nothing in this consent form waives any legal rights you may have. This consent form also does not release the investigator, the University of Cincinnati, or its agents from liability for negligence.
What if you have questions about this research study?
If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, you should contact Andrew Adkins at (304)-638-9957 or adkinsap@ucmail.edu. Or, you may contact thesis advisor C. Jefferey Jacobson at 513-556-5780 or c.jeffrey.jacobson@uc.edu.
The UC Institutional Review Board reviews all research projects that involve human participants to be sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or complaints about the study, you may contact the UC IRB at (513) 558-5259. Or, you may call the UC Research Compliance Hotline at (800) 889-1547, or write to the IRB, 300 University Hall, ML 0567, 51 Goodman Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45221-0567, or email the IRB office at irb@ucmail.uc.edu.

Do you HAVE to take part in this research study?
No one has to be in this research study. Refusing to take part will NOT cause any penalty or loss of benefits that you would otherwise have. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer.

You may start and then change your mind and stop at any time. To stop being in the study, you should tell Andrew Adkins, who will be conducting the interviews.

Agreement:
I have read this information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I give my consent to participate in this research study. I will receive a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

Participant Name (please print) ____________________________________________

Participant Signature _____________________________________________ Date _______

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent _____________________________ Date _______
Appendix C: Interview Questions

I am a cultural anthropology student interested in religion and religious communities, particularly in the ways in which modern Zoroastrianism is adapting to meet the challenges of life in modern America. I have some very basic questions about this particular Zoroastrian community and how it compares to communities in India, Iran and elsewhere. As a member of this community you provide an important perspective.

1. First of all, how long have you been a member of this community? Do you play any important role or place in this community?

2. What do you know about other Zoroastrian communities aside from this one, in the United States or elsewhere?

3. For now I'd like to focus on the community in this city. Can you tell me about the size of this community? Is it growing? What are the criteria that define who is and is not a member?

4. What aspects of life in America present special challenges to the practice of Zoroastrianism?

5. How has the Zoroastrian community changed or adapted in response to these challenges?

6. What do you think about these or other changes in the Zoroastrian community in this city today?

7. Are you satisfied with the Zoroastrian community at this time, or do you think it should change?

8. Do you know of others who think the same way you do about the state of the community?

9. Is there anything else you would like to say about Zoroastrianism in this city or in other parts of the United States?

The following questions concern the Zoroastrian communities in India and Iran. I realize that you may not have direct knowledge of those communities, but I hope you will try your best to help me understand how they may be similar to or different from the Zoroastrian community in the United States.
10. In what ways is the Zoroastrian community in the United States different from the community in Iran or India (if at all)?

11. I have heard that the Zoroastrian community in North America is more accepting towards intermarriage and more open to outsiders. I have also heard that its members are generally better educated in Zoroastrian beliefs than in India or Iran. Has this been your experience?

12. What do you think about the future prospects of Zoroastrianism globally?

13. What do you think about the future of Zoroastrianism in the United States? What about in Iran and India?

14. Is there anything else you would like people to know about Zoroastrianism?

Thank you very much for your participation. Your data is invaluable for my study.
Appendix D: Survey Responses

1. What changes have you experienced in the Zoroastrian community over your lifetime?

1. “After coming to US, I met Iranian Zoroastrians for the first time and came to know about how they follow the religion. My views on Zoroastrianism has changed, and I now see the religion as universal and am open to accepting other[s] who wish to live the teachings of Zarathustra”
2. “Not much..”
3. “Much more lenient and open to non-Parsis, or those married outside”.
4. “Getting less and less in number”
5. “More Zoroastrians are marrying outside the community and expanding, which is a good thing”.
6. “The community has become more liberal”.
7. “The community as a whole is becoming more cohesive. There is more interaction with other faiths and organizations.”
8. “From my childhood to date, we have seen a lot of evolution. I believe that Zoroastrianism is at a crossroad[s]. Either evolve-change with time-or perish”.
9. “Dwindling Zoroastrian community”.
10. “Major change is the community becoming more open and liberal to accepting people who are not born Zoroastrians in the faith.”
11. “In the USA, some Zoroastrians who were very traditional and orthodox (say 30 years ago) have become less traditional, and more accepting of liberal ideas.
12. “Living and growing up in Mumbai I felt safe and had no concerns for the future of the Parsee Community. Now, having moved to N. America I have many concerns.”
13. “The community is shrinking in numbers-one of the reasons may be marriage outside of the faith and the 'rigid mind-set' of the community to not recognize the children produced out of such unions.”
14. “Major migration of youth from India/Pakistan to the West (UK, US, Australia).”
15. “Progressively, we as a community here in North America, are tending to become inclusive. Heading towards liberalism in place of orthodoxy.”
16. “The Zoroastrian Community is becoming smaller & smaller over the 45 years I have been here. The young generation is getting away from religion and also because of intermarriages.”
17. “Younger generation is less conservative than the older.”
18. “Increase in marriages outside the community. -Migration by Zoroastrians in large numbers from India.”
19. “Zoroastrian Community is increasing in USA. Zoroastrian Community is decreasing in India.”
20. “The community has reduced in number of Zoroastrians. The community has gone down in financial strength.”

2. What do you think are some issues facing the Zoroastrian community today?

2. “It is a vanishing community.”
4. “Extinction, disagreements over customs (some), e. g. interfaith marriage”.
5. “In regards to the US, I don’t think we have problems here as much as with the old system in India accepting what we are doing here.”
“The younger generations are marrying outside the community”.
“One of the main problems has always been a tendency to marry late or not at all. Dwindling numbers.”
“1. Late marriages amongst community 2. Inter-caste marriages”
“Housing, dwindling numbers, very little awareness of the faith outside the community.”
“1. Zoroastrianism is almost unknown to people of other faiths. 2. To traditionalists, Zoroastrianism is an ethnic religion. This stifles the efforts of others to spread the true message of Zarathushtra”.
“1. Dwindling numbers of Parsis, especially in India. 2. Dispersion of Z's across N. America, & lack of commitment in the 2nd generation.”
“-Shrinking numbers, -Dogmas, -false superiority complex, -late marriage, -small families or in many cases no children”
“-Keeping the Zoroastrian identity after dispersal to far-flung geographies -Rapidly declining numbers could make the community extinct.”
“By far the most important issue is the dwindling Zoroastrian population maintaining future generations in our faith.”
“In India where there are more Zoroastrians the intermarriages causes problems-Different from male or female. The issues of male child are recognized but the issues of female child are not recognized as Zoroastrians.”
“People marrying out of the community & not raising children as Zoroastrians. Younger generations not knowing rituals & customs.”
“Rapidly dwindling in numbers. -Large number of younger people losing interest in religion. -Priests not really up to educating religion to the members.”
“Issues are: not allowed conversion and intermarriage”
“1. To increase their size. 2. Be able to accept other community members in their religion.”

3. Which of these issues do you think are the most important?

1. “Survival of the religion”.
3. “Loss of traditions/ cultural practices”.
4. “Extinction”.
5. “Not sure”
6. “Preserving the community”.
7. “Without a sizeable population, all other infrastructure becomes irrelevant.”
9. “Dwindling Zoroastrian community; Late marriages”.
10. “Raising awareness”
11. “Number 2”.
12. “1. Keeping the 2nd generation in N. America connected, involved & committed to perpetuating the faith.”
13. “Community population”
14. “Decrease in numbers is a critical issue.”
15. “We have to make sure that future generations study and practice our religion so that it does not become irrelevant.”
16. “In the USA the #2 issue is less important as Zoroastrians in North America are not as orthodox and those in India.”
17. “People marrying out of the community & not raising children as Zoroastrians.”
18. “Reduced numbers of Zoroastrians globally.”
19. “-Same as above- both.”
20. “Inter-religion mix & acceptance.”

4. How are Zoroastrians in your community attempting to react to these issues? Do you think these steps are effective?

1. “1. ZAC, by constitution, accept and allow to participate, all non-Zoroastrians who have married within our community. 2. Everybody can participate in all prayer activities. 3. Children of mixed marriage can be initiated within our religion. Works very well within Chicago”.
2. “Do not know.”
3. “Religion classes. But not cultural enough, only factual translating text. Yes!”
4. “Encouraging to have bigger families. Be open to interfaith marriages”.
5. “Communication between here and India, but here we are more open-minded and progressive”.
6. “We are allowing kids of whose one parent is Zoroastrian to be part of our community”.
7. “I am not really aware of what is being done to react or counter this issue.”
8. “No idea”
9. “In Mumbai, Mumbai Parsi community is promoting Youth Programmes.”
10. “By accepting inter-faith couples and their children in the community.”
11. “Issue 1 has been addressed by interfaith participation. However, it has not been very effective. Participation by youth is minimal. Issue 2 is considered to be a personal issue and has not been addressed as a group”.
12. “Several initiatives help bring young Z’s together-Youth Congresses, NextGenNow, youth camps, Z-Assn programs, Fezana meetings....”
13. “-Organizing ‘talks’. -Get together”
14. “-Encouraging more young people to marry and have children. -Opening the community to conversions.”
15. “Our small community takes care to teach our youngsters all aspects of the religion- prayers, ceremonies, rituals. Hoping against hope that most of it sticks.”
16. “Our community is trying to bring the young Zoroastrians together though different programs. The attempts to bring them together is working but sometimes the relationship from a distance is not as effective, as one would want it to work.”
17. “Our community is good about including non-Zoroastrian spouses & their children (not all Zoro. Communities are as inclusive). Yes, to an extent.”
18. “Every 2 years we have N. American Zoroastrian Congresses which help a bit temporarily but not really overall very effective.”
19. “The views of Zoroastrians are most liberal in USA then the conservative in India.”
20. “They have congresses all over the world. Not seen much results yet. Getting involved in inter-religion gatherings.”

5. What thoughts do you have about the future of Zoroastrianism?

1. “If we do not change our thinking about accepting our children’s non-Zoroastrian spouses, we may not survive”.
2. “Do not think much about it.”
3. “Very washed out, sadly, due to everyone’s own interpretations and lack of any ‘rules’/‘norms’.”
4. “Bright, if people look with a different angle”.
5. “I think with enough efforts we are not going to be a dying religion at all, we will survive”.

6. “Zoroastrianism will survive in spite of all the problems and issues”.
7. “I hope and wish that they can get over the petty bickering and unnecessary problems because of it”.
8. “It is a faith that has seen a lot of devastations. We need to change”.
9. “Zoroastrianism would last forever.”
10. “Zoroastrianism has survived and it will continue to survive.”
11. “Zoroastrians have tremendous talent. The future is not clear.”
12. “The future of Parsis in India looks sadly rather alarming. In N. America, the religion is evolving and in a few decades may take on a new identity.”
13. “I believe the Zoroastrianism will face extinction in the next hundred years unless corrective measures are undertaken.”
14. “The community is doing well financially but declining numbers will make it extremely difficult to sustain it.”
15. “Very optimistic.”
16. “We hope the young generation is given a chance to thrive on their own and hopefully the community will go on increasing in number.”
17. “The diminishing number of Zoroastrians is very concerning.”
18. “Future not very promising.”
19. “Five fingers are not the same, everybody's views are different-today-tomorrow- past-present & future, it will continue forever.”
20. “Survival of the oldest religion.”

6. What do you think Zoroastrians must do, if anything, to ensure the survival of their religion?

1. “Think about Zoroastrianism as a world religion and not a social club whose membership should be restricted only to a select few. Zoroastrianism is the finest religion in the world”.
2. “Maintaining status quo is the best answer, especially in India”.
3. “Teach real practices and customs and keep them alive”.
4. “-Be more open with traditional customs. -Change with the changing times.”
5. “Be open minded and look at the big picture”.
6. “Continue to teach our kids the principles of our religion and encourage them to continue to do the same with their kids in order to preserve our community.”
7. “Marry early, have a couple of children, and interact healthily and positively with others outside the community.”
8. “Work together in harmony and come to terms with different thoughts and beliefs.”
9. “Should participate and contribute towards Zoroastrian religion. Elders in the community to encourage youth to follow and participate in all the religion workshops”.
10. “Encourage youth participation.”
11. “All the talent has to be channeled in a unified way and not against each other.”
12. “In order to preserve & perpetuate the faith, we must respect all views and come together-because there is strength in togetherness.”
13. “-Encourage early marriage -Accept children of mixed marriage”
14. “-Educate younger generation. -Create more Social events to encourage interest in the community.”
15. “We can do this by being more liberal & inclusive.”
16. “The conservative Z’s should be more lenient in their ideas & thinking to bring the youngsters remain in the religion.”
17. “Educate young people on religion, rituals, & customs, accept everyone.”
18. “-Priests need to be more proactive and evangelical and try to draw non-Zoroastrians to join the religion. -Encourage conversion.”
19. “Have faith, hope, courage for the better survival of our religion.”
20. “Get more involved.”

7. Are there any aspects of Zoroastrian community life that you think should be changed? Why or why not?

1. “All that I have mentioned above”.
2. “Do not know, but there is always room for the change”.
3. No answer.
4. No answer.
5. “Well they have changed in the US. If anything has to be changed it is in India. Here we accept anyone, there they are not willing to accept.”
6. No answer.
7. “This is one question which has innumerable pros and cons and will always be the one which causes the most and the strongest reactions within the community. It is fraught with (?) and controversy leading to (in some cases) a total polarization of a sub-group. Also, it would be easier having these thoughts collected [and] recorded, rather than putting them down on paper. A majority of the community in a particular demographic/geographic location may want it one way and it is really a big mess. I would need a lot of time to just give this question some justice”.
8. “It is a very difficult question. I would leave this issue to scholars”.
9. “No comments.”
10. “Youth involvement- Have more social/religious programs/ events geared towards the youth.”
11. “See number six.”
12. “We should preserve all the teachings of Zarathustra. We should also try our best to continue our customs, festivals, ceremonies & traditions as well as our dress, language, food, ethnicity as much as we can. We should learn from and enjoy each others' customs (Parsi & Iranian) & eventually evolve (gradually) into a new N. American persona.”
13. No answer.
14. No answer.
15. No answer.
16. “Hope that the 2nd generation of Z's will take more interest in the religion.”
17. No answer.
18. “Bring this ancient religion into the new age.”
19. “Zoroastrian community life will change if you want to change. Stay with the time & change with the time.”
20. “Be more accepting of others and open doors to their community.”