

# RELATIONS BETWEEN PARSIS AND THE BRITISH

Dr. Kersey Antia, Oct 11, 2019; updated Nov 10, 2019

The issue of retaining Zoroastrian religious identity during the British Raj concerned the Parsi minds from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onward. While there was no threat of Zoroastrianism disappearing in Gujarat where the Parsis faithfully adhered to their faith, Westernization posed the danger of Christianization. However, whenever Christian missionaries or firebrand evangelists overstepped and crossed the line by openly daring to criticize Zoroastrianism, the orthodox in the community responded with a furious backlash.” But due to the vast amount of knowledge of Indo-European Zoroastrian culture and history being unearthed at that time and with the learned dissemination of many Zoroastrian scriptures and texts and languages by eminent Western scholars, Parsi pride in Zoroastrianism was reaffirmed. The Parsi could feel at ease being both modern/Western and Zoroastrian, a salient fact which is unfortunately missed by Luhrman despite her sincere sympathy for them.

While a few Parsi nationalists such as Dadabhai Naoroji spoke out against specific abuses and transgressions of British India, the Parsi sentiment on the whole agreed with the following sentiments expressed by Nowrojee Furdoonji, the secretary of the Bombay Association when he said: “Let us for a while examine the character and policy of the British Government, under whose sway we have the good fortune to be placed. This liberal and enlightened government has conceded several important and valuable privileges...the first is civil and political liberty, which consists in the power of thinking and acting with perfect independence, just as we deem fit, without any restraint or control on the part of our rulers...The second is religious liberty or toleration, which is the free right of adopting and maintaining opinions on religious subjects ... without any interference or control on the part of government or any private individual. It cannot be denied that these privileges were either withheld *in toto*, or greatly abridged, and unjustly curtailed under the former dynasty of rulers...” This is so reminiscent of the very basis of Zoroastrianism per Yasna 30.2, 45.2, etc.