

Avestan Womanhood (- its high esteem) and Love

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Pronunciation symbols

I have adopted the following transcription (after Kanga and Taraporewala) as permitted by my software, while avoiding the encoding of the **ITRANS convention** hoping to make the reading (for non-academic purposes) generally easier: -

a as in **fun**; **ā** as in **far**; **ã** (nasal sound **ãn**) as in '**āvãn**'; **ə** as in **fed**, **ē** as in **fade**; **i** as in **fill**; **ī** as in **feel**; **o** as in **for**; **ō** as in **fore**; **u** as in **full**; **ū** as in **fool**. The nasal sounds are **ãn** as in **āvãn**; **ən** as in the French '**trés biən**', **īn** as in **Ahīnsā** (also pronounced '**īm**' as in Sanskrit **Ahīmsā** and as also in Avestan and Gathic languages) and **ūn** as in Humayūn. The pronunciation of some consonants (as permitted by my software) are '**ś**' for '**sh**', '**š**' for '**ss**', '**ř**' for '**ri**', **ñ** for '**ni**', '**ž**' for '**zh**'.

The pronunciation of the vowel sounds '**ə**' as in **fed** and '**ən**' as in the French '**trés biən**' is unique to the Gathic / Avestan languages. **These vowel sounds 'ə' and 'ən' are not found in the alphabets of Sanskrit and (Shuddha) Gujarāti** (and possibly also in other Indic group of Prakrit languages) where **all 'e' vowel sounds are pronounced as ē as in fade**. Also, it is interesting that Vedic texts appear to be conspicuous by the absence of a double negative although double negatives do occur later in 'Classical' Sanskrit.

Abbreviations

Gāthic: **Gāth**; Avestan: **Aves**; Sanskrit: **Skt**; Pāhlavi: **Pāh**; Fārsi: **Fārs**; Gujarāti: **Guj**; Khordēh Avestā: **Kh Av**; Yasna: **Ys**; Yasht: **Yt**; Vendidad: **Vən**; Visparad: **Visp**.

Avestan Womanhood (Nāirithwana) - its high esteem (Aibigairya)

The Zarathushtrian pattern of society, both in Iran and on the Subcontinent is governed 'outwardly' by an overt patrilineal tradition.

Yet, deep down 'inwardly', there seems to have remained a silent undercurrent of a covert matrilineal way of life. So covert, indeed, have been the ways that few 'outsiders', who have volunteered to study the way of life, have managed to detect them. Possibly, they have been unable to put their study of the covert ways in words effectively. The 'outsider', somehow, sees some attitudes and behaviours as "common practices". The onus of the burden seems to have been put on and borne by the woman, although admittedly, in a rather bravely subtle and subterranean manner.

Such ways have, in fact, remained so for millennia through the trials and tribulations of our wanderings, displacements, migrations and resettlements during which period the woman has borne, with silent fortitude, the tremendous burden of the transmission and continuity of our customs, our attitudes, our mannerisms and our ancient Indo-Iranian traditions enjoined in the Avestan Scriptures.

Even in the westernised modern way of life the Avestan woman has, under considerable pressures and 'taken-for-granted expectations', managed to keep the domestic traditions well and truly alive within the community with a vigour which, like the undercurrent of a flowing river, has continued to remain silent and unperceived to others.

During our frequent movements/displacements over the millennia some of the local practices of the host populations, have, to some extent understandably, been imbibed. This too has occurred not without persistent resistance and strict adherence to Zarathushtrian values from the domestic front, thus pointing towards the Zarathushtrian home as the main pivot for the hopeful continuity and progress of **lived** Zarathushtrian **experience** (Gāth/Aves: **Shyaōthnā** and **Hushyaōthnā** - **meaningful experience**).

The personal sacrifices (which have been left almost unquestioned and undiscussed) the Avestan woman, in her self-adjusted matrilineal way of domestic life, was expected to offer were enormous. But then, could it be possible that such demanding ways could well have been borne intuitively through the mere necessity of survival, during our many stages of resettlement and subsequent attempts at reliving new ways and languages to help incorporate the many social and domestic lifestyle re-adjustments for subsequent generations to come? This fact is borne out in a paragraph from the (Pahlavi) Book of Ardā Virāf (**Ardā Virāz Nāmag, Chapter 68**), where Ardā Virāf talks of the torments he saw during his deep sleep of seven days and seven nights after drinking consecrated wine. He was credited as having 'witnessed' the fate of a woman, who had remained impious during life by 'not following the tenets of the Faith', and also of a man who had 'not been able to encourage his wife to follow the tenets'.

On the Subcontinent, until the more recent arrival of gas and electric stoves, among the many pious domestic responsibilities of the woman the most obligatory one, to ensure the continuity of the domestic hearth fire, which was never extinguished, cannot be underestimated. The vision of the Wadias in building charitable low budget community homes for the Parsis and Iranis of the Subcontinent was initiated, naturally, by a previously little known woman - Jerbai Wadia. She had established a provision for the incorporation of a hearth fire (the **Chulā-vāti**) in the building each new home. The embers of the burning coal, at the end of the day, were not discarded or extinguished, but were buried carefully under the ashes held in the 'vāti' (a receptacle for the ashes expended by the burning coal during the day) and re-used the following day to re-ignite the fire for cooking.

It is of interest to note how this pious tradition too has been kept alive. **Vəndidād 3.2** refers to the many ways of making the Earth most happy - "**the second manner in which the Earth becomes most happy is for the righteous man to build a house where a fire is kept burning (unextinguished) and where cattle, wife and a retinue of off-springs live.**" It is worthy of note that he invaluable and beneficent cattle (during the times of a land based agricultural economy) were mentioned first. **Vəndidād 3.1** adds: "**the first manner of making the Earth most happy is for the man, who possesses a strong, able pair of hands to be industrious and capable enough to till the soil (with the help of cattle, that is) of Mother Earth.**"

The improper notion that 'all humans' be referred to as 'man or mankind' has not been considered acceptable in our Scriptures. Women, throughout the texts from the Gāthās down to the ultimate Rivāyats and also in the rock inscriptions of the Achaemenian and Sassānian era, have been denoted as equal to men. Each gender is mentioned specifically and in its proper context. For example, the above quote from **Vəndidād 3.2** which places '**cattle before wife and retinue of off-springs**' is balanced by subsequent phrases like '**cattle and horses and men**'. Throughout our Scriptures there is a repetitive allusion to beneficent animals gaining precedence over man as well as woman in the order of mention and praise.

Many non-Zarathushtrian writers, among them women, have been fascinated by such Gāthic/Avestan treatment of the genders, by the talk of women in noble terms and by the fact that the wife held a position equal to the husband, both in the house and in the community. She also took part in the religious ceremonies as equal in the congregation and in acts of worship. There are no separate sections for worship and offer of prayers to the fire.

Unlike the trend in other civilisations the birth of an Avestan girl heralded as much joy as the birth of a boy. During ancient times **the 5th day (Spandārmad Ruz) of the month of Spandārmad was a special feast day of honor for women - a Mother's Day.** The Yazata, Spentā Ārmaiti (Pāh: Spēndārmad) as the patron Yazata of Mother Earth, especially looked after the good, chaste and beneficent mother and wife, who cared for and loved her children and her husband. Liberal presents as thanksgiving were bestowed on the woman of the house by the men in the household. The custom still exists among Zarathusti communities in Iran and her former colonies of the former Greater Persia.

Mary Boyce in her 'Textual Sources' quotes from an English translation of dogmatic Pāhlavi passages from 'Chidāg Andārz i Pōryōtkēshan': ".....each man or woman who attains the age of fifteen should know these things: ***“Who am I? Whose am I? From where have I come? To where shall I return?.....My mother is Spēndārmad, my father is Ormazd. My humanity is from.....”*** We will come to the purpose of this insertion, later in the modern interpretation of this topic.

Unlike the heated and inconclusive theosophical debates occurring in the other Faiths of the world, whose Archangels and the subordinate pantheon of divinities are all masculine and the allusion to the gender of the Creator is denoted as 'He' / 'Him' (with a capital 'H') only, there is no such disputation in Avestan beliefs. The Creator's Divine attributes have a fairly equal distribution of the two genders and some are even described as neuter. Of the seven Divine attributes [the Avestan Archangels/ the Amēshā Spentā (Pāh: Amshāspand)/ the Divine Heptad which are the Holy Immortal attributes of the Creator] ***feminine genders are given to Spentā Ārmaiti (Pāh: Spēndārmad), Haurvatāt (Pāh: Khordād) and Amēretāt (Pāh: Amardād).*** Spentā Mainyu the Holy Spirit of Ahurā Mazdā (like all other Mainyus) is masculine. The remaining three Divine attributes Khshathra Vairya (Pāh: Shēhrēvar), Vōhu Manō (Pāh: Bahman), and Āshā Vahishta (Pāh: Ardibēhēst) have been kept neuter, but have been given either gender during the translations / interpretations by different scholars at different times.

Being the essence of Ahurā Mazdā's very nature they are so close to him that, in the Gāthās, Zarathushtra addresses the Creator as the singular 'thou' and sometimes when he apprehends the Creator together with more than one of these Divine attributes with the plural 'you (i.e. all of you)'. Yet, Zarathushtra has not used the word ***Amēshā Spentā*** (which appears later in the Younger Avesta) to denote these Divine attributes of the Creator. The inextricably woven total gender conglomerate is given the Spiritual (Minō) title of Lord (Ahurā) of

Wisdom (Mazdā) to **the Creator in our Faith** rather than of god (as in the other Faiths. Borrowed from their own Roman masters the words **God, Gods and Goddesses were imposed** by over zealous missionaries and entered common vocabulary after the (so-called) Third World colonial empires were established. The Indo-Iranian words have always been the '**Creator**' and the '**Divinities**'.

These Divine attributes, in the Earthly (Gəti) sense, when attained by an ordinary mortal makes the person a Superior man or woman - an Ashavan - who then becomes worthy of experiencing, in his body, mind and heart, the supreme feeling of ecstasy.

Several of the 33 subordinate Yazatas (Angels) are of the female gender, too.

The feminine Avestan Yazatas are **Āpō/ Apam Napāt** (Avest: Āvān/ Pāh, Fārs & Guj: Ābān), **Māh** (Pāh: Māh/ Guj: Mohor), **Gēush Urvān** (Pāh: Gōsh/ Guj: Gōsh), **Rashnu** (Pāh: Rashna/ Guj: Rashne), **Daēna** (Pāh: Din/ Guj: Din), **Ashi(sh)** (Pāh & Fārs: Ard/ Guj: Ashi(sh)-svang), **Ārshtād** (Pāh: Āshtād/ Guj: Āstād), **Zāmyād** (Pāh: Zāmyād/ Guj: Jamiād), **Dahma Vanghui Āfriti** (Pāh: Dahma/ Guj: Daham). Besides the Yazatas of calendar dedications, which remained the 'chief' among the subordinate Yazatas, there are other Yazatas many of whom again are female - **Arēdvi Sura Anāhita**, **Ushā**, **Tushnāmaiti**etc.

A chronological journey

The Avestan word for womanhood is **Nāirithwana**.

Let us, now, proceed to examine our voluminous Scriptures and look into the fascinating aspects of Avestan womanhood to investigate its legitimate merits in days of yore and, even try to trace, sketchily, the impact the preserved Avestan values have had on the private devotional life and the social standing of Zarathushtrian women and, therefore, on the Zarathushtrian family unit in modern times.

In our quest to identify the merits of the Avestan woman we will need to trace the life of a hypothetical newborn girl and follow her progress through life.

The newborn: According to the Book of **Rivāyats** the infant girl must be "**breast fed for 15 months and in case of the male infant for 17 months.**" This discrepancy in feeding between the genders clearly resulted from the fact that **infant mortality was higher among male infants, as it is still so** to the present day. If the mother were to wean the infant earlier and if the husband consented to it they were both regarded as committing a sinful offence.

Age 7: the Avestan child, a minor of tender age from infancy to early childhood (Aves: *apērē-nāyuka* / Skt and Guj: *Nājuka*) of either gender (Aves and Skt: *Strī* is feminine gender) was deemed immature and therefore unfit to be made responsible for her thought, word or action. The onus was on the mother (Aves: *Mātar*) and father (Aves: *Ptā*; Skt: *Pitā*) or the guardian (Aves: *Paiti-pāyu*), who would have replaced one of the parents. As such she is permitted to indulge in childhood liberties. The child, at age 7 years, is considered grown up to a 'major' age but is still not fully grown up, i.e. in physiological terms (Aves: *apērē-nayav*). She then becomes responsible for her own thought, word and action and therefore is deemed fit to be made ready for the initiation into the Good Faith by the investiture of the Sudrēh and Kushti. The ideal age, documented in the Book of Rivāyats, is "**7 years and 3 months**".

Age 9: The Pah text, *Sad-dār* (literally: 100 doors. Actual meaning: 100 openings/avenues of knowledge) in Chapter 34 advises: "**a daughter, until she is 9 years old, should not be affianced (i.e. engaged. Aves: *Paradata*) or betrothed to anyone.**"

Age 12: When the girl is 12 years old (i.e. the average Avestan age of puberty) she should be given in marriage. At this age of puberty the awkward little pre-pubertal girl becomes a young Avestan woman (Avest: *Charaiti*). Her mature female form develops and, with the gradual change in her figure, her composure becomes pleasing and her deportment more admirable, befitting a young and beautiful maiden.

Hādokht Nask, XXII.10 talks of an encounter at the Chinvat Bridge between a righteous man's soul and his own conscience (*Daēna*) appearing in the image of a *Charaiti* (a beautiful young maiden) to assist him cross over the Chinvat Bridge: "**the soul of the righteous man asks: "What maiden art thou - you, who possess such a delightful figure to behold?"**" The reply is in *Hādokht Nask XXII.11*: "**thou artgood, of lofty character, fair in dealings, sweet scented, of fearless strength and free from spite....such as I, thy own Conscience, appear to thee**", the maiden (his own conscience) says to the pious soul of the righteous man's own conscience -*Daēna*.

The unwedded maiden:

Vəndidād 3.24 equates, in a prosaic manner, "**the sin of keeping a Charaiti (a charming and dignified 12 year old girl) unwed to a virtuous man and thus barren is equal to the sin of tillable soil that is kept uncultivated. In both instances the Earth remains most unhappy.**"

Our Avestan text is full of praiseworthy and recommended advice for the unwedded woman, a virgin maiden (Aves: **Kaininā; Kainyāl Skt and Guj: Kanyā**). Such was the importance given to the institute of marriage that the merits of giving an unwedded maiden in hand of marriage was considered a highly meritorious act, for which many relatives vied, one with the other, to achieve this end. Parents (as they do even now) were all too eager to assist in the grooming of their daughters, so that they remained presentable in appearance, behaviour, deportment and character.

Yazata Āvān, Divinity of 'purity in the life-giving waters' is described in **Āvān Yasht, Verse 64** as ***"an attractive maiden, confidently courageous, carrying her well formed figure in a high-girded dress. She has an untainted, innocent but radiating outlook having been born of noble parentage. She thus walks tall in slippers with laces tied up to her ankles, wearing a shiny diadem of gold to hold her fair hair in a dignified fashion."***

It was not surprising that boons were asked of the Divinity of purity (**Arēdvi Sura Anāhita**) as in **Āvān Yasht, Verse 87** ***".....from you, unwedded maidens will ask for right royal residences and for highly respectable husbands of strong physique."***

In **Rām Yasht, Verse 39** unwedded maidens implore Ahurā Mazdā to help bestow a boon through Yazata Rām to ask him to help them secure such handsome young men ***"as are fit to become 'keepers of the house' who will, as long as they live, remain amicable and continue to give them off-springs, who will be lively of body, sharp of intellect and fluent of tongue."***

The Yazata of righteous thought, Ashi Vanghui (in **Ashi(sh)-svang Yasht, Verse 11**) beseeches parents to ***"adorn their unmarried daughters' legs with anklet chains bearing trinkets*** (which may have been believed to possess charm like qualities) ***to enhance the beauty of their figure, of a slim waist line and a well proportioned torso, for the eyes of their admirers to behold (in righteousness) and for their minds to wish for the lady of their choice."***

The Yazata Ashi(sh) in **Ashi(sh)-svang Yasht, Verse 54**, in addition, makes it known that she would clearly ***"decline offerings if they are from, among a list of other persons, those who have remained unwed for long."***

To such spinsters, who have long remained unmarried, **Ys: 9.23** advises that they ***"hasten to request Haōma Yazata, discreetly asking him to bestow on them truthful husbands, soon."***

Femininity (Aves: **Nāiri/** Pah: **Nāirik/** Skt and Guj: **Nāri**) Alternately, the word common for masculinity in all four languages -

Avest/Pāh/Skt and Guj is **Nara**. The word for a female united to a man by marriage is entitled **Nāirika** (akin to the title Mrs. in western society).

Traditional Gāth/Aves courtesy: When a couple is mentioned together, the phrase always commences with the lady being mentioned first before the man. Thus, in **Gāthā Vahishtoīsht 53.8:** it is **jē-nērām** Woman and man/ wife and husband and **jān-nāirīm** (Woman and man). Further, we would have heard of the stories of Lailā-Majnun and Shirin-Farhād, unlike the Romeo-Juliet and Mr. and Mrs. of the western tradition. In days of yore in Iran, through even to this day, many wives opt to retain their maiden family names after marriage or add it to the husband's family name, with a hyphen, to change to a double-barrelled surname. This was later, in the post-Sassanian period, adopted by western societies.

The outstanding Avestan woman:

Nāiri-ghēna (one who has given birth to and nurtured many offsprings) has been used to denote the highly celebrated lady, who has fulfilled all the attributes of Avestan womanhood to a level when she is worthy of honour and even of reverence.

For example in **Aiwisruthrām Gāh, Verse 4** the reverential '**ghēnāō**' are so '**highly praiseworthy ladies**' among the common people as to be considered the Spiritual leaders of women, a title otherwise reserved for the feminine Amēshā Spēntas and the female Yazatas.

In **Yasna Haptangaiti 41.2 and 35.6** there is a strong emotional plea (probably from Zarathushtra himself): "**Thy Kingdom come, O Ahurā Mazdā, shall last for ever and for ever since thou art a just sovereign on Earth as thou art in Heaven ruling over men and women, themselves worthy of reverence, outstanding and abounding in thy Spirit. In thy Kingdom, too, both such men and women shall remain in harmony with thy Spirit and in accord with thy desire.**"

In **Gāthā Ushtavaiti, 46.10** Zarathushtra talks of the promise of a reward he will offer to those who will adhere to his teachings. "**Whosoever, man or woman [na(rəm)-gh(ē)nā], O Mazdā Ahurā, giveth unto life that which thou hast deemed the best..... with them I will myself walk to cross over the path of the Chinvatō Perētu (The 'Bridge of the Separator' of the good from the evil).**"

Age 15: (Aves: **Panch-dasayāō - 15 year old**): The Avestan lady is deemed to have become '**a fully formed adult (Aves: pērē-nayav)**' possessing a beautiful healthy figure (Aves: **Srira** / Skt and

Guj: **Sharira**). Praises galore have been sung in the Avesta regarding the attractive female form, the body-beautiful in words like **Srāō-tanvō** (attentive make-up), **Sraēshta Kēhrpa** (choicest form), **Srirayāō** (body beautiful) with detailed descriptions of the elegant adornments and fancy apparel and jewellery the Avestan ladies were fond of bedecking themselves with:-

In **Āvān Yasht (verse after verse)** the feminine distinctions of the immaculate Lady, Arēdvi Sura Anāhita is described in quite glowing and, at times, candid and explicit terms (instead of separating each I have made a composite description, which also avoids repetition:-

“She stands there dignified, Arēdvi, the lady immaculate in the figure of a fair maiden, wearing a flowing garment, her girdle tightened high above her middle to hold her well-formed breasts under a richly embroidered cloak of finely woven gold, making her lovely to behold.

She, of noble lineage, carries a well built frame of tall stature, thus exhibiting a strong and courageous personality. Her fair and pretty arms, adorned with precious sorts of ornaments, are much more strong and capable of dutiful work than the legs of a horse.

With bārsom in hand, pendant ear-rings composed of four-cornered gemstones set in gold scintillating in her ears, a right royal necklace around her bare neck and with golden slippers luminous in different colours covering her feet up to her ankles, she has a composure that is most admirable.

Her fair hair is held in an attractive style by a rich diadem adorned with a hundred twinkling gemstones cut in an octagonal shape (like the spokes of a wheel) and mounted in gold; and, with well positioned decorating fillets streaming beyond her hair, her manner appears most pleasing.

During winter she wears garments of beaver skins, each obtained from three select beavers, whose rich furs are harvested at the appropriate time (i.e. only after they had borne young for four seasons. The mature skins of the beavers then exhibit a beautiful gloss, shiny like silver and gold).”

In **Ashi(sh)-svang Yasht** we noted, previously, the adornment of the feet of the unmarried daughters with anklets. They were considered good looking if ***“they possessed a slim waist, long pointed fingers and a figure so well-proportioned as to be a joy to behold by those who were chaste and righteous.”***

We have noted too, previously, that each one of us will meet (after judgement) Daēna, our own conscience, at the Chinvat Bridge.

The **Vendidād** further quotes that the more righteous from

amongst us will see their own conscience in a better light in the figure of a pleasant 12 year old Chairita, as attractive as the most beautiful in the land, to hold their hand and escort them across the Bridge of the Separator (of the good from the evil). ***“She, the beautiful, fair Daēnā of queenly stature possessing a skilful confident and distinguished composure, will appear respectfully before them wearing a crown on the head.”***

Hādokht Nask describes a 15 year old lady ***“of fair arm, tall stature and pleasant composure, of well developed breasts and attractive build, of noble birth and of glorious lineage. Her presence, as she steps forward and extends her arm to hold the hand, is felt in the breeze blowing across the mountain peak at the commencement of the Chinvat Bridge.”***

Avestan Love:

The Avestan word for love is ***Fritha*** (Skt and Guj: ***Prita***). There is no mention at all of or reference to pure unadulterated love between the genders before marriage in the Avesta. However, the pre-nuptial Avestan love of a person for another (i.e. a couple due to be wed) is clearly identified, each time, in the context of the particular quality or attribute, which is admired by the ‘lover’. This is emphasized in ***Ashi(sh)-svang Yasht, verse 59*** where the sin of wilfully keeping man and (future) potential wife apart (wilfully preventing them from meeting for whatever reason; hoping to block their marriage, as it were) is mentioned. ***“The worst deed that men and cruel persons can commit is to wilfully keep asunder woman and man in a state of prolonged separation and to prevent them from meeting.”***

In the Gāthās, Zarathushtra specifically talks of true unadulterated love for Ahurā Mazdā in the Gāthic words, ***Frinat*** and ***Frinai***.

In ***Gāthā Spēnta Mainyu, 49.12***, Zarathushtra uses the Gāthic equivalent ***Frinai*** to declare his own love: ***“I, verily, with hymns of praise would love thee, O Mazdā Ahurā.”***

In ***Gāthā Ahunavaiti, 29.5***, he uses the word ***Frinəmna*** to describe Ahurā Mazdā’s love for humanity: ***“With uplifted heart and outstretched hands, O Ahurā Mazdā, I invoke thy grace.”***

In ***Gāthā Ahunavaiti, 28.5***, he reassures his followers that ***“devout (vaintya - that which is close to the heart/ loving) prayers offered attentively (sravāyō) for righteous causes, will never go unfulfilled.”***

The non-Gāthic form of love (if we may use the word, 'platonic'), denoting (almost) revered respect for the subject, who possessed

certain admirable qualities, were reserved for the reverence shown to the Aməša Spəntās and Yazatas as in :-

In *Tir Yasht, verse 43*, it is “***the bright radiant light of Ahurā Mazdā as seen in the awe-inspiring brilliant glow of the star, Sirius [Tishtriya/Tēshtar/Tir - the brightest star in the night sky], which is loved and honoured.***”

In *Sraōsha Yasht Hādokht, verse 20*, the Yazata Sraōsha is “loved and respected in the house, where lives a pious man full of good thoughts, words and deeds.”

In *Fravardin Yasht, verse 29*, the word *hudaōithra* –“with eyes of love” is used to describe the eagerness gaze of those, who revere the beneficent Fravashis.

Similarly, in several verses - the Gāthic Hymns of praise, the Fravashis of the righteous, all houses of righteous persons, cattle, draught animals and rich pastures, good waters, trees, plants used as medicinal herbs, the qualities like courageous truth in face of adversities and timely assistance given - are all ‘loved’.

The Avestan Beloved:

True 'love' between two Avestan persons of the opposite gender after wedlock, it seems from the texts, was interpreted as the living of a virtuous life in a symbiotic relationship to fulfil the purpose of Creation, thus leading to expected results both, during Earthly existence and thereafter, as ordained by Ahurā Mazdā. Any other way that was likely to defeat that purpose was considered evil, such that it was fraught with negativism and it, ultimately, led to disastrous consequences. There is, as such, no word in the Avestan texts to describe the word ‘beloved’ i. e. a person of the opposite gender especially dear to one’s heart, in a one to one relationship outside the institute of marriage (i.e. not prenuptial, where the couple is due to wed). In real life such affairs of the heart would have been expected to occur. In the Sassānian era the epic tragedies of Shirin-Farhād and in a later period of Lailā-Majnun are examples.

It was, then, obviously a pious obligation on the part of the parents (or the guardian) to ensure that a proper life partner was made available to their sons and daughters. In the case of the daughters this obligation was apparently based on the Avestan premise that “a woman is in need of a ‘protector’ (Aves: *paīti-pāyu*) throughout life”. The lady was deemed to be ‘given’ (in marriage and adoption) rather than be ‘taken’ ”.

In the Avestan text, interpretation of the word ‘beloved’ is quite different from the modern one. It very much refers to a certain

closeness by 'relating to with respectful, favourable regard showing sentiments of warm affection while holding the person in high esteem, without any direct personal sense of an attachment'.

In Rām **Yasht, verse 36**, Kai Vishtāspa's wife, Queen Hutaōssa, who was convinced of the humanitarian goodness in Zarthustra's vision and preachings, beseeches Ahurā Mazdā hoping that he will bestow her the supreme favour that her dignity will be upheld with respect, so that she "**remains beloved (Aves: *paiti-zanta/ buyata/ manyentē*; Skt: *Lōkmānya*) of society and the courtiers and will be legitimately welcome in the Court of her husband.**" (This was during the most crucial moments in the life of the Zarathushtra, when he was incarcerated in a dungeon for 9 days and 9 nights by Vishtāspa's orders).

In **Fravardin Yasht, verse 147**, there is a fervent plea that the Āthravans (Fire priests) of the country remain, with respect, '**beloved of the populace**', too.

The Unwed Woman:

Aves & Skt: **Ghra** means a matrimonial home with a husband and housewife. **A-Ghra** means not with a husband; defacto; separated. Appropriately, Skt and Guj: **ghra** literally means a family household.

In **Ys: 9.2** "**the unwed women (Aves: *aghravō*) who have truly revered Yazata Haōma pray that they be soon blessed with honest husbands.**"

The Virginal Maiden: (Aves: ***an-upayata/ an-upaēta***)

In **Ashi(sh)-svang Yt: verse 54**, we have previously noted that **offerings given to the Yazata Ashi Vanghui were not acceptable if they remained unwed, but then in the next verse 55 there is a clear distinction emphasised between virginal maidens of tender age and mature women.**

Again in **Ashi(sh)-svang Yt: verse 59**, the sin of wilfully keeping man and (future) potential wife separate has been mentioned. "**The worst deed that men and cruel persons can commit is to wilfully keep asunder woman and man in a state of prolonged separation and to prevent them from meeting.**"

The Avestan Marriage (of Pāhlavi times):

The word for '**matrimony**' is **Nāirithwant**.

In the Book of **Rivāyats** an interesting account is given about the '**proper procedure of negotiating' a marriage contract through (a long suffering) match-maker or messenger.** The father sends a

message on behalf of his son to the father of the prospective bride asking for the daughter's hand in marriage to his son. The proper thing for the father of the prospective bride was to say: -

"Let me think it over." After a few days he recalls the messenger and says.

"If my daughter receives 2000 dirhams as marriage gift (*māhr*) I will give her to him." After some days the messenger returns to the father of the prospective bride and says.

"All is well. The father of the man agrees to give 2000 dirhams."

Later, the messenger returns to ask.

"But will you give your daughter's hand in marriage to this man (addressed as 'the son of '. The first names are still discreetly avoided). And the father of the prospective bride replies.

"I would not have asked for the gift had I not considered proper to give my daughter to this man." There is no mention about what gain the messenger received for all these tedious goings-on, but there is mention of the sin the father of the girl would have committed if he later retracted this verbal contract.

Just before the marriage ceremony three married men need to approach the girl to confirm her intentions to marry this particular man and to reconfirm whatever was said with her father.

The officiating priest (who has qualified as a *nāvar* and is himself married) then offers to put her right hand in the right hand of the bridegroom and asked the couple to nominate one of the Amēsha Spēntas for guidance during the ceremony. Only the priest is entitled to tie the marriage knot, literally a knot of cloth between the garments of the bride and groom. The marriage gift (*Māhr*) of 2000 silver dirhams is, sometimes, topped with 2 gold dinars, depending upon the financial state of the father of the groom.

According to '**A guide to the Zoroastrian Religion**' (which clears the traditionally held misconceptions in our mind in the form of easy to understand Questions and answers) Dastoor Firoze M Kotwal and James W Boyd explain the tying of 'marriage knot' in the present day ceremonies conducted on the Subcontinent. They say that the tying of the couple's hand with a thread is not tying the knot. Rather it is the asking of questions by the priest (in the Pāzand language, which is not understood in Gujarati) first to the father of the groom, regarding payment of silver and gold (coins) and then to the father of the bride whether he will accept the gift. When both fathers have answered in the affirmative he asks the father of the bride.

"Do you swear to welcome the bridegroom with truthful thought for

the increase of good action and progeny, so long as you live?”

“Yes, I do promise,” replies the father.

The priest then turns to the couple and asks each one separately whether they agree to abide by these promises with truthful intent through their lives.

“Yes, we do approve of it,” they both say individually.

Besides, the incorrect notion about the question - “**Passand kardiid?**” being “do you like your partner?” is also corrected. The couple is again asked whether they approve of the oath given by the two witnesses. Each replies, “**Passand kadam**” which means “I approve”.

Zarathushtra’s authoritative suggestions:

As seen by my mind, below are my humble interpretations of **Gāthā Vahishto Isht -Yasna 53.5 to 9** while comparing Irach J S Taraporewala’s interpretations of the Gāthic words with the meaning of some vital Sanskrit equivalents found in the Vēdic and later Sanskrit Texts.

Verse 5: “Listen attentively to these words (of instructions) as I speak to ye, Maidens and to ye, Youths prepared to engage in the bonds of holy matrimony. Understand them well and bear them in thy Good Minds. Let each one of ye do earnestly strive to surpass the other, both, in Righteousness and in Love, to such a degree as to deserve the more gainful of the reward.”

Verse 6: “Through thine entire life accept, O’ Men and Women, that the instructions of Truth shall prevail in the face of convenient Untruths of obvious advantage, trying to lead thee away from thine own true selves (remain true to thine own selves). Then, verily, such woeful deceit of the evil eye shall envelope and dim the glow of thy Inner Selves (like smoke around fire) enticing ye to perversions in life.”

Verse 7: “But, the reward of this pious bond of togetherness shall be there if ye, as wedded couple, continue to exercise zealous devotion to each other in all walks of life (high or low) where the evil spirit of those devoted to untruth is encountered. However, should ye decide to renounce this pious bond of togetherness ‘woe’ shall remain thy last word.”

Verse 8: “Needless, those intimidators will undoubtedly face the consequences of their guilt-ridden acts when they are countered by our just rulers in favour of our Maidens and Men, who will, then, become free of dissension and attain happiness for evermore”

Verse 9: "Such perpetrators of evil, who promote the disapproval of our worthy Maidens and Men, are themselves given to craving passions, to scorning Righteousness and to strife among themselves and with their own Inner Selves"

Then, follows Zarathushtra's **Airyemā Ishyō recitation, Yasna 54.1** which is traditionally recited during all Zarathushtrian wedding ceremonies as a Wedding benediction (blessings - Pah and Guj: **Āshirwād**) from the priest. The benediction confers a Desire for lasting friendship (for their togetherness during the entire life) of the couple. The Yazata of Friendship (and of Healing), Airyamān, is invoked;-

"May the much desired and lasting friendship come, in the pursuit of this noble purpose of the Good Mind, to the support of the men and women of Zarathushtra whose Inner Selves seek to earn this precious reward. I will pray to Āshā for the bestowing of this righteous blessing, you so desire, which Ahurā Mazdā has intended."

Marriage among close relatives:

Aves: **Khvaētvadatha** literally means 'giving of oneself'/ Pah: **Khvētōdas/Khvēdyōdath** (probably initially referred to a 'given adopted person' and not a 'close relative given in marriage').

Visparad 3.3 even sings the praise of the 'given person'.
"Reverence be to *Khvētōdas*."

The next-of-kin wedlock appears to have been, not only encouraged, but considered a highly meritorious act in later Avestan texts. Yet among the closely related Vedic people (who look upon their cousins as sisters and brothers; thus, automatically debarring them from getting married) inquiries are made into the previous seven generations to exclude a relative before the wedding is arranged. It is possible that when the conquering Aryans occupied Semitic lands (commencing with the Achaemenid Period) the common Semitic attitudes, regarding intermarriage between close relatives, became more frequently adopted by our ancestors. It was, at first, presumed to be 'safeguarding family virtues and qualities.' Although such presumptions may have been justifiable to some extent, it cannot be denied that the tradition had, later, become deeply rooted in some families to help "safeguard" the family fortunes. The terrible consequences of transmitting fickle genes through consanguineous union over a long period of time (in our case close to 1,400 years) in a small restricted community (in our case only 12,000 ladies of child bearing age recorded in 2001) is well documented in medicine. It is common knowledge that some characteristic inherent physical and

mental afflictions, resulting in lifelong suffering, have been unfortunately transmitted through the generations in a rapidly increasing number of Zarathushtrian families as genetic transmission become more and more saturated.

The righteous husband:

Vendidād 4.47 talks of the relative merits possessed by a **Nāirivant** (one who has a wife). **“Having a wife, O Spitamā Zarathushtra, is abundantly preferable to a righteous man, who is able to lead a more meaningful life than the one who does not have a family.”** Then follows in merit, “the man who **begets children** (Av: **puthravant**), who **acquires honest wealth** and who is in **pursuit of good knowledge.**”

The achievement of wedlock:

The marriage of a virtuous woman to a righteous man was an ideal yearned by many prospective partners, then, as it is now.

The book **Shāyast-Nāshāyast (Proper-Improper 19.10)** recommends that **“ten Ahunavars (the Book of Rivāyats recommends eleven) be recited before leaving home in the yearning quest (Aves: vadhrya) of a marriageable (eligible) lady (Aves: kaininā-vadhrē).”**

The ‘giving’ of a virtuous woman (according to the **Dinkard (Book VIII 17.3)** to a righteous man carries such high merits that the person acquires some immunity for his soul from entering hell (Aves: **Daōzangha/ Pah: Duzakh/ Guj: Dōjakh**). Further, the **Dinkard (Book VIII 20.126)** says **“it is a most grievous and deceitful sin to encourage a change of heart and allow a woman to marry another person once the decision to marry has been finalised.”**

The wedlock household:

This having been established, the couple live as wife and husband (Gāthic: **jə-narəm/ Aves: pathni-paithe**. Also **jan-nāirim/ Skt: patni-patī**. Also **jam-patī**).

The Avestan texts say the virtuous and loving wife, who holds an honourable position in society (Aves: **vantaōngha**) is one who:- is well taught in her feminine duties by parents of good lineage, is a diligent house-wife (Aves: **nmāna-pathni in Aiwisruthrəm Gāh, verse 8**), is the rightful lady of the house (**nāirivat-nmānəm - Vendidād 3.2**), is a progenitor, rich in off-springs (Aves: **frazaintivant**

of Hādokht Nask), of many off-springs (*hachāt-puthrāō*), is “**a strict follower of the laws of purity, is as much proficient in the home as with the domestic cattle in the barn and in the growing fields, does not indulge in the sin of slander, is well principled and not discourteous to her husband whom she assists in creating a life-style of mutual enjoyment. She then becomes qualified to be deemed a respected and loved wife (Aves: vantav - the all-conquering) and thus promotes a happy home life (Aves: hukhshina - well organised).**”

Avestan Motherhood:

The *Barēthri* (the fertile woman of child-bearing age) of many off-springs (*frazainti*) has been repeatedly praised as we have already noted.

Vendidād 2.10 pleads to “divine wisdom to go forth and pay homage to women, who bear off-springs.”

The credit is given to the “brilliant and glorious influence of the helpful Fravashis (*Fravardin Yasht, verse 15*) that the “**mothers bringing forth off-springs’ conceive (Aves: paiti-puthra), give birth (Av: zamava), have a safe delivery (Aves: hu-zamita) and become rich with off-springs (Av: haēchāt-puthrāō).**”

As in *Ys: 23.1*, which suggests “**Reverence to the Fravashis (is desirable), who assist the unborn (young of animal and) child in the womb, sheltering it as it continues to progress in its development.**”

It is interesting to note that our Fravashis were in existence in the Mino state before we were born. They remain as our guardian spirit near our right side during our life and they will also continue to exist forever in the Minō state (in the case of those among us who have remained more just and righteous during earthly life). This bears out well in *Fravardin Yasht, verse 17*.

In *Ys: 10.4*, there is a rather prosaic comparison of the Avestan mother, who has given birth to several off-springs, with the fertility of the open fields possessing productive soil, which bore and supported abundant life and to the righteous plant for the devoted Haōma worshipper.

There is a constant emphasis on and **a fervent desire to carry through a safe and healthy pregnancy with all attempts made to safeguard the unborn child (says Fravardin Yasht, verse 11) ‘against the assaults of the evil adversary, Vidhōtu’ to full term, followed by an uncomplicated, safe delivery.’**

In *Fravardin Yt: verse 15* the Fravashis of the departed are

praised and invoked - ***“It is through their radiant aura that women conceive (Aves: puthrē varənvainti), give birth through safe deliveries (Aves: huzamiyō), thus remaining blessed with many off-springs.”***

In ***Āvān Yt: verse 87*** women in labour pray to the lady immaculate, Arēdvi Sura Anāhita entreating her to ***“allow the delivery to occurs safely”***, since the Divinity exercises authority in such matters.

In ***Āvān Yt: verse 2*** the clean waters of the river, Arēdvi Sura Anāhita, were credited as possessing ‘purifying qualities’, offering good health and strength during the child-bearing phase, thus, ***“protecting the womb, aiding a trouble free delivery and ensuring an abundant and timely supply of milk for the newborn.”***

Vədidād 19.6 talks of the birth of Zarathushtra. ***“O thou righteous Zarathushtra thou art the son of Pourushāspa, born of your mother (who is Dughdōva) of the illustrious Zawishi family.”***

Then again in ***Vədidād 19.46***: ***“Born among us is the righteous Zarathushtra (in the house of Pourushāspa) in possession of such a potent weapon as to smite all evil.”***

And in ***Fravardin Yasht, verse 94*** ***“Good fortune has come unto us. Spitamā Zarathushtra, an Āthravan, has been born among us. Henceforth, the good religion of MazdāYasna shall spread forth and be accepted over all the seven regions of the Earth.”***

The worthy Gāthic and Avestan Daughter:

The Gāthic word was ***Dughēda*** and the Avestan word, ***Dukhtar/ Dughtar*** (Skt: ***Duhitar***).

Both mean ***“one, adept at milking cows”*** (Skt: Duh - ‘to milk/to extract’). During times of a soil-based economy it was the early morning duty of the daughters of the house to milk the cows.

In Gāthā Ushtāvaiti, Yasna 45.5 Zarathushtra uses symbolic language in describing the attributes of the Lord Father, Ahurā Mazdā's attributes - Spənta Ārmaiti and Vōhu Manō as his daughters

Again, in Ashi(sh)svang Yasht the divinity, Ashi Vanghui, is described, symbolically, as the daughter of Ahurā Mazdā and the sister of Āshā Vahishtā.

In Gāthā Vahishtō Ishti, Yasna 53.3 uses the epithet ***‘the last achievement’ for his youngest daughter, ‘Pouruchista’***

(presumably of an unwed lady), while singing the praise of his great-great-grandfather, Haēchāt-aspa of the family of Spitamā, as per the traditional norms of ancestor worship (Skt: **pitris**) of those days.

The devout (religious) Woman:

Zarathushtra, in his **Yenghē Hātām** prayer recitation, effectively sums up the concept of ‘spiritual holiness’ of humans: **“Reverence be to those men and women who, among all other living beings, having received Ahurā Mazdā’s gift of rational thought, themselves seek to excel in acts of worshipful reverence, in righteousness.”** This short prayer is held in such high regard that it is prayed at the end of each of the 17 Hāitis (chapters, also Hās for short) of the Gāthās, at the end of the main text of all the Yashts and the 5 Gāhs, as if to reinforce the rationality behind the holiness of humans (amongst all other living creatures).

In the Fravardin Yasht more than 250 holy persons have been named with reverence to their Fravashis. **Among the list are the names of 27 holy women** of the time. They appear to have been named in a chronological order. Commencing with the **Prophet’s wife, Hvaōgvā** (later Aves: Hvōvi), follow his three daughters - **Frēni, Thrīta and Pouruchista** and then **Kai Vishtāspa’s wife, Hutaōssa** and his daughter, **Humāyā** (Pāh:Humāyun/ Humāyin/Humāi. Guj: Homāi). The unwed Avestan ladies names always had the traditional prefix, ‘Kainyā’ (Skt & Guj: Kanyā/ the modern Miss) before their names.

The high esteem of the female gender (Aves: Strī/ Skt: Strī):

In the Avestan society and culture, as described in our Scriptures, the esteem was closely parallel to the described attributes of the feminine Yazatas. She was considered **worthy of honour who “giveth into life what Ahura Mazda deemest the best,” according to Zarathushtra (Yasna 46.10)** and who almost possessed the qualities of the feminine Yazatas, Spēnta Ārmaiti (Pah: Asfandārmad/Spēndārmad), the patron Aməša Spēntā of and protector of women, **was “full of grace, of beautiful features, high in intellect, well disciplined and of unblemished conduct.”**

The high esteem (aibi-gairya), in which they were held, was way ahead of such regard shown to women in other cultures of the time. Their dignified standing of a high degree as mother, wife and the lady of the house was envied and the virtues she prayed for and inculcated in her children were celebrated in verse and prose. What, then, were the qualities of these Avestan holy women?

Aiwisruthrēm Gāh, verse 9: “The Holy woman is more righteous, is of an amicable frame of mind and is better instructed in the many practices of good words and good deeds, is respectful of her husband and is of a truthful tongue. She is endowed with the most serene of dispositions and possesses almost Yazata-like attributes, like those of Spənta Ārmaiti. Such women are indeed worthy, O Ahurā Mazdā, of reverence.”

Further, in Haptan Yasht (in the section of ***Aiwisruthrēm Gāh***), it is recommended that the Fravashis of such holy women, who have borne many sons, be revered because of their impressive courage (child bearing was fraught with great calamities, then), their great physical endurance and their triumphant achievement, who, by the Grace of Ahurā, were themselves born of noble lineage.

Even Ahurā Mazdā showed reverence to Queen Hutaōssa (of many brothers), a descendent of the illustrious Naōtar family, says ***Rām Yasht, verse 35.***

Visparad 3. 4 adds a modified touch to the above. ***“Women rich in holy thoughts, words and deeds, are, well informed and, as devoted wives, are, in return, in tune with and pleasantly agreeable and courteous to their husbands.”***

Women as Priests:

The Book on Aerpatishtān and Nirangishtān describes how both, men as well as women, were asked to officiate as Priests and in doing so had to give up their important work of tending the growing fields (during times of a land-based economy) in order to fulfil this pious requirement, but only to a maximum of six days, probably in a rotating roster. Those willing to become priests had to go through the intensive training like their husbands did.

Visparad 4.4 talks of women being summoned to serve during the ‘obligatory’ Seasonal festivals of ‘Gahanbār’. Unlike on the Subcontinent the lay persons in Iran actually took (and still take) active part in the solemnity of some rituals of the ceremonies.

In the Gahanbār ceremony, while eight priests surround the glowing Fire, the representatives of the community in the village, district and the household, including a respected (and holy) housewife of many off-springs (***hushham sasta: ‘well-versed’ in the ritualistic procedures***), are all expected to be readily available to fulfil certain obligations during the ceremony conducted by the eight Priests.

Sad-Dār (100 doors/openings to knowledge) 5.5 talks of men and women being, both, equally proficient in performing the Navazud (Guj: Navjōte; literally new birth) Ceremony and the Gəti Kharid

(literally the entry to heaven obtained during worldly existence) by themselves for their own benefit.

Women as Judges:

In the Stud Yasna, *Dinkard XXI 7.8* ***“the proficiency of a woman, who was thoroughly acquainted with the Avestan Law was recommended for Judgship and presided over a court of law and often in preference to a man, less acquainted with the law.”***

Women as Rulers:

In *Gāthā Spənā Mainyu Ys: 48.5* Zarathushtra implores, “May a just sovereign (not an oppressive one), either man or woman, through experiences of good understanding rule over us (in both, our earthly, Geti, as well as in our spiritual, Mino, existences).”

The Queen: The *Khshathri* (consort of the King, the *Khshathra*), a renowned and dignified personality, was a highly respected person holding unquestioned public authority. She was known to make herself readily available to the masses, who often reached out to her for assistance during social disquiet and moments of crises in the realm.

Women of Royal birth:

Ladies born of noble lineage (not necessarily only those of regal / royal birth) were **hu-ptār** (Av: hu is good; ptā is father/seed meaning of an illustrious/ respected family). In a society divided into the privileged nobility, the Lord - the Ahurā and the land-based commoner, the 'Lady' (born of or wedded to the Lord) was the **Ahurāni** (the 'Lordly'Lady) incorrectly translated by some western scholars as 'wives of Ahurā Mazdā'. In several verses of Ys: 68 the Ahurāni is pictured as a highly respected lady, a favourite of the masses because, as a very influential public figure, she remained caring for the needy. She is **revered with “offerings of rich flocks of grazing animals (the Avestan source of love and warm regard), is of noble thoughts, words and deeds, of off-springs blessed with an inborn ability to acquire intellect thus rendering prosperity to the home, village, province, country and to the good religion.”**

The Lady-immaculate, **Arēdvi Sura Anāhita**, is also called an Ahurāni (in **several verses of Yasna 68**) because she is **“worthy of reverence with rich gifts. Her pure flowing streams of waters and gentle springs emanating from the rapid river create, in the**

surrounding atmosphere, water vapour, dewdrops and showers of rain to render the good Earth fertile and conducive to good health. She shows deep reverence to Fire and, overall, centres herself round a delightful home worthy of the joyful family to live in.”

Avestan social norms:

Widows:

According to the Book of ***Rivāyats*** (in keeping with the constant tenor of positivism and a rich abundance in the Avestan way of life), widowed ladies were capable of remarrying after only 4 months and 10 days, if they was not nursing a newborn. Otherwise, they had to wait for 18 months to marry again.

Lack of children:

In Avestan tradition a married couple that remains childless literally has a calamity at hand. In ***Vəndidād 3.24*** this stands out as a constant reminder: “***Certainly the Earth is most unhappy when her soil, which is fit for cultivation, remains uncultivated for a prolonged period. It is almost as if a virtuous and beautiful woman remains childless by her virtuous husband.***”

The husband is then entitled to remarry if his wife is unable to conceive. It is not clear how the conclusion was arrived at, that the wife was barren (Aves: ***a-frazainti***). There could well have been an equal possibility that it was, in fact, the husband who was sterile.

Separation or divorce:

This was indulged in, mainly, for reasons of inability to conceive by the wife. Childlessness and divorce equally, were both not looked upon favourably by the Avestan society. The Book of ***Rivāyats*** recommends that “when a couple is childless the husband may wed another wife, but the first wife should not be divorced.” Surprisingly, there is no mention of adoption being recommended as an alternative in such cases. Also, the possibility of the husband being sterile does not seem to have been mentioned and taken into account.

Adoption:

Av: ***Khvaētvadatha*** / Pah: ***Khvētodas/Khvēdyōdath*** - literally means giving of oneself. We have noted before the word probably refers to a ‘given adopted person’ and probably also to a ‘given in marriage’ to a close relative. There is no direct mention, at all, of adoption in the Avestan Text. Most of the importance given to it appears to date back only to the 9th century CE, when the writing of the Pāhlavi Texts flourished. There seems to be an emphasis on the

naming of an off-spring (adopted daughter or son, whether a child or a grown up - *Dādīstan i Dinik 57.3*) in the prayer rituals (Pah: *nāmaganih*) during life as well as in the funerary rites of the deceased “to assist in the safe crossing of Chinvat Bridge on the 4th dawn”. Also, “to obtain assistance from the Fravashi of the living adopted person for the propitiation of the soul of the departed, while continuing the lineage in this world so that religious ceremonies and other meritorious deeds may be performed in the name of the deceased” in later prayers on behalf of the departed. The acknowledgment of this tradition was so intense at the time that, according to the Book of *Rivāyats*, “**the same person could be adopted many times.**”

Grandmother and Old Age:

Aves: *nyākē* meaning ‘a lady bent down through age’ was a respected figure in the Avestan household even though old age, per se, during Avestan times was deemed to be a result of the evil workings of Angra Mainyu.

Even King Jāmshid (in *Rām Yasht, verse 16*) implores Yazata Rām to ‘**spare him from extremes of cold or heat, from old age and untimely death and also from the evil envies.**’

And, the Pēshdādian King, Haōshang (in *Ashi(sh)svang Yasht, verse 30*) asks favours from Ashi Vanghui to ‘**grant him such righteousness that it would succeed in restraining old age and untimely death from Ahurā Mazdā's creation.**’

The Avestan ideal for the relationship between the genders, as we have noted before, was that of a distinctly separate but **clearly equal and complementary symbiotic duo partnership** in a life-long bond of togetherness. This symbiosis was based on the acceptance of the obviously natural, innate difference (of opposites) between the genders. Such an inborn nature of each gender was valued equally and seen as essential to the total human enterprise. There was a division of labor, based on the natural bent of each gender, as preordained by Ahurā Mazdā. Women and men worked at different tasks in a complementary capacity, neither being more (or less) important than the other.

With **the advent of industrialization**, the cultural influences of materialism created an unfortunately narrow stereotype of what women (and men) are, or should be, really like. As modernization progressed those, whose talents and temperaments did not ‘fit the stereotype’, were even labeled as suppressing much in themselves that would seek expression ‘to become equal’. This stance, sadly, led to a social disquiet, improperly based on ‘unfair inequality’ totally

ignoring the vital propriety of 'individuality' into account. In a materialistic way of industrialized life, where speed and quick profits became more important, this surmise turned out to be somewhat true in the conduct of such aspects as the government of the arms race, environmental degradation and of many other present day ills. The urge for being heard to be and being seen to be 'doing something worthwhile' during life, with **a consequent need to seek approval (i.e. of external energies)** increased and, further, strained the 'individualistic' emotional values of togetherness.

In such different times, when **the requirement of two earnings**, oftentimes, becomes necessary to be able to meet costs, it would help to delve into the crucial elements pointed out by Zarathushtra of **intimacy and trust (internal energies)**: - *Gāthā Vahishtō Isht, verse 7*: "***But, the reward of this pious bond of togetherness shall be there if ye, as wedded couple, continue to exercise zealous devotion to each other in all walks of life (high or low) where the evil spirit of those devoted to untruth is encountered. However, should ye decide to renounce this pious bond of togetherness 'woe' shall remain thy last word.***"

It is really not important whether one works or stays at home or whether the other is always able to help out in housework or not. As such, all work is sacred without having to feel obsessed about the choice. A high degree of trust in the other's decision in the area of special competence is, obviously, vital as, also, the respect and acknowledgment of the other's viewpoints. Ultimately, it all comes down to the phrase, 'know thyself' enough to strengthen the bond of togetherness. *Gāthā Vahishtō Isht, verse 6*: "***Through thine entire life accept, O' Men and Women that the instructions of Truth shall prevail in the face of convenient Untruths of obvious advantage, leading thee away from thine own true selves (remain true to thine own selves). Then, verily, such woeful deceit of the evil eye shall envelope and dim the glow of thy Inner Selves (like smoke around fire) enticing ye to perversions in life.***" It is really an individual choice to be able to say 'yes' to a (mutually adjusted) symbiotic life and together and to be brave enough to even remain 'unconventional', if need be. This, as observed above could become counter to the expectations of the community, society and, even, friends. In modern terms, the worthy Gāthic expectations (of those times) obviously have become quite unthinkable to many in present times.

According to the Gāthās, the 'who-should-I-be?' person should really be asking 'who-am-I?' **The basis of Zarathushtra's teaching was reflection.** He emphasized on the concept of **individuality** (the personal quality of consciousness in each individual) in desisting from

becoming a mere unreflecting member of a herd. This does not imply, by any means, violation of the time honored traditions, which have preserved the vital elements of the faith. The awareness of and the nurturing of the physical world, well and truly welded into the Avestan woman's defined role from ancient times, is (a silent, but) the greatest strength of our faith. This relationship of the Avestan woman to the physical world (**hu-shyaōthnā - meaningful experience**) has become recognized as being more significant, in combating the workings of Angra Mainyu, than all the pious rituals enacted by the well-meaning priesthood can ever attain. The reflective nature of our faith has always remained meaningful in our response to a fundamental need, that of our physical striving during our constant movements out of the primal homeland. Prof. Kaikhosrov Irani calls this need a **Primary religious demand**. The **Secondary religious demand**, he says, arises when, encountering a particular religious tradition, the person (here, the Avestan woman) demands a religious vision (an intensely personal one) which she can dedicate herself (and her family) to.

The modern Avestan woman has, certainly, come a long way from her ancient domestic responsibilities of observing strict rules of sanitation, tending the domestic cattle, spinning and weaving the sacred Kushti, overseeing the chores in the fields and the early morning milking of the cows. Properly accomplished in the various levels of education, she has raised herself to a bright and responsible companion to her husband, capable of understanding his duties and sharing his joys and his sorrows. Through her daily activities, now of a different sort, says Khojeste Mistree, "she is able to create a concurrence of the physical and the spiritual and in this way she is able to achieve an ideal in the lives of those she cares for."

References:

The interpretations are mostly of my own humble making with the priceless help of and inquiry into: -

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