

Afshin Marashi. *Exile and the Nation. The Parsi Community of India and the Making of Modern Iran.* Austin: University of Texas Press. 2020. 328 pages. ISBN-13: 9781477320792.

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Previous studies of the intellectual and political history of Iranian nationalism have often acknowledged the widespread utilisation of Zoroastrian motifs and tropes without specifying the role played in the dissemination of pertinent knowledge by Zoroastrian communities themselves. Afshin Marashi's study *Exile and the Nation. The Parsi Community of India and the Making of Modern Iran* makes a fascinating and innovative contribution in this regard. After his 2008 monograph *Nationalizing Iran* and the 2014 volume *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity* which he co-edited with Kamran Scot Aghaie, it is the latest contribution to the study of Iranian nationalism by Marashi, who holds the Farzaneh Family Chair in Modern Iranian History at the University of Oklahoma. The book consists of five chapters, each dedicated to an outstanding personality who, in one way or another, had ties with the Parsi community of Bombay during the first half of the twentieth century and benefitted from their sponsoring of philanthropic and culture political activities directed at the Iranian Zoroastrian community and Iranian society more broadly.

Marashi situates his study in the field of Persianate Studies, thus subscribing to a scholarly trend moving away from the arbitrary borders dictated by conventional area studies in order to explore what it terms a wider, historical 'Persianate world' including, most relevant here, South Asia. By shifting one's focus this way, new perspectives emerge that earlier were missed out on by scholars of (Iranian) nationalism – especially by the 'modernists', who are castigated by Marashi for their penchant to 'overemphasize the discursive power of 'modernity' in rendering irrelevant all systems of culture and thought that preceded it', partially as a counter reaction to 'equally stubborn and still-entrenched ahistoric, perennialist, and primordialist arguments for the histories of the nation across the Indo-Iranian world' (p. 14). More specifically, Marashi highlights *the eclipse* of this Persianate world as the constitutive context of the conditions eventually bringing about the Parsi-Iranian exchange studied in the book. These conditions left the Parsis of Bombay in some uncertainty about their future in an independent India, being a minority formerly privileged by the British colonialists and blessed with considerable economic success. By the same token, the emerging ties between Iran and the Parsi community coincided with – or indeed were brought about by – the political exigencies of Iranian nationalism, be it as understood by Iranian exile journalists residing especially in Berlin, or of course as propagated by the early Pahlavi state as a part of its agenda of modernisation.

Chapter one deals with Kaykhosrow Shahrokh (1874–1940), an Iranian Zoroastrian from Kerman, most known for his 31 years of service as the Zoroastrian MP in the Iranian Majles (first elected in 1909). Shahrokh, in the 1890s, spent a year at a Parsi school in Bombay and established contacts with local philanthropists, who since the mid-nineteenth century had been working for the improvement of the social and educational circumstances of their then beleaguered Iranian coreligionists. After his return to Iran, Shahrokh joined this cause as a member of the ‘Society for the Amelioration of the Conditions of the Zoroastrians in Persia’ founded by the Parsi Sir Dinshaw Petit in 1854. In 1905, Shahrokh successfully rallied for the constitutional protection of Iran’s religious minorities. Besides his social and political activism, Marashi highlights Shahrokh’s authorship of books promoting a reformist understanding of Zoroastrianism both to the Iranian Zoroastrians themselves and the general Iranian public. Regarding the latter, Shahrokh both laboured to dispel prevalent prejudices against Zoroastrians and supported a reading of Zoroastrianism as an inherent part of authentic Iranian nationhood. Here Shahrokh, who as an MP advocated values of an inclusive liberalism, suggests a certain obsession with racial purity – an ideological pathway fully taken by his son Bahram who by the late 1930s served as the chief broadcaster of the Nazis’ Radio Berlin Persian Service.

The second chapter introduces the only Parsi of the five personalities chosen by Marashi: Dinshah Jijibahai Irani (1881–1938), who more precisely belonged to the subgroup of the ‘Iranis’ among the Parsis. The term ‘Irani’ denoted the descent from an Iranian Zoroastrian family that unlike the majority of the Indian Parsis emigrated from Iran only recently, especially during the nineteenth century. There are many similarities in the legacy of Irani with that of Kaykhosrow Shahrokh. Again, Marashi divides Irani’s achievements first into his philanthropic activities aiming to improve the Iranian Zoroastrians’ deplorable conditions, for instance as a founding member of the Iranian Zoroastrian *Anjoman* (in 1918) and the Iran League (in 1922). Secondly, Marashi points to Irani’s publishing of books serving the intellectual exchanges between Parsis and Iranians as well as the non-Zoroastrian Iranians, especially those nationalistically minded. These books, Marashi argues, were imported to Iran with a “quasi-missionary’ motive’ (p. 81), lest the Iranian Zoroastrians’ religious practice would move even further away from what the Parsi emissaries to Iran considered correct Zoroastrian religious practice. To make them more palatable to the Iranian readership, Irani fused reformist Zoroastrian ideas with Sufi motives.

Chapter three distinguishes itself from the book’s four other chapters in that it does not *biographically* approach an individual operating in the Parsi-Iranian encounter, but rather focuses on one particular event: The 1932 visit of Indian Nobel Prize laureate Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) to Pahlavi Iran. The visit’s relevance to the book’s objective is palpable: On the one hand, Tagore’s visit was organised by the aid of prominent Parsis in Bombay – in fact, Dinshah J. Irani was a friend of Tagore and accompanied him during the trip. More importantly however, Tagore’s visit and much of his own thought dovetailed with the trope of an ‘Indo-Iranian cultural ecumene’, central to the Pahlavi state’s making of the Iranian nation. The Iranian press introduced Tagore to the public as ‘a living personification of an Indo-Iranian civili-

zational ideal' (p. 105), Tagore met with leading intellectuals and ideologues of the era and eagerly presented himself as an heir to the Persian poetic tradition, culminating in his visit to the tombs of Sa'di and Hāfez. The visit and its styling remained not without a critical backlash: prominent voices, such as Muhammad Iqbal and Abolqasem Lahouti lambasted Tagore for lending support to an authoritarian regime and an ideology marginalising the 'Abrahamic-Islamic' heritage of Iran in proto-fascist terms.

Ebrahim Purdavud (1886–1968), the famed Iranologist and translator is subject of the following chapter. Purdavud, whose first personal encounter with a Parsi exile dates back to his early years as a student in Paris, is widely acknowledged as a prolific and in fact the first translator of key Zoroastrian texts into Modern Persian. It was only after Purdavud's translations, that Zoroastrian texts such as the Avesta and the Gathas came to be considered as 'artifacts of an Iranian *national* heritage' (p. 139). Marashi's presentation of Purdavud's work is to be credited with his pointing out that the praise levelled at Purdavud has usually overlooked the share of Parsi scholars in his achievements. In 1925, Purdavud was invited to Bombay by Parsi philanthropists where he composed his famous translations at remarkable productivity, benefitting from Parsi sponsoring as well as the intellectual exchange with Parsi scholars and clerics. Overall, Marashi's account of Purdavud's life and legacy may be highlighted as the most brilliant among five insightful chapters.

The last of these five chapters is dedicated to Abdulrahman Saif Azad (1884–1971) who is primarily known as the editor of *Irān-e Bāstān* ('Ancient Iran'). Azad is portrayed by Marashi as a proto-Third-Worldist whose struggle against imperialism was flexible in its ideological affiliation, using pan-Asian and leftist as well as pan-Islamic vocabulary. He retraces Azad's biography from his service to the German legation in Iran during the First World War and his stay in Berlin in the 1920s where Azad took up his journalistic activities, finally arriving at his journey to Bombay. Following news of the Parsis' willingness to financially support projects shaping ongoing debates in Iran in their interests, Azad successfully requested the sponsorship of his magazine *Irān-e Bāstān*, published between 1933–35. However, Azad and his donors soon fell out as Azad had the magazine develop into a mouthpiece of Nazism, occasionally publishing translated articles from the German Nazi Party's official magazines. The chapter also broaches Azad's promotion of Parsi remigration to Iran which he elaborated on by making references to the Zionist movement imbued with antisemitism.

The overarching and recurring topic of the five chapters is the ideological tension inherent to the discussed intellectuals' activities. While they seemingly subscribed to the Parsis' agenda of liberal democracy inspired by the community's centuries-long existence in a pluralist, cosmopolitan environment, the transfer of such ideals into the context of a young, fledgling Iranian nation-state dominated by an intelligentsia with proto-fascist sympathies did not occur smoothly. The result was an ambiguous thrust in the five authors' legacy, with illiberal propensities ranging from what Marashi calls 'liberal Aryanism' in Dinshah Irani's case to outright Nazism as promoted by Saif Azad. This tension is masterfully illustrated by Marashi. That being said, the author could have put more effort into actively interrelating the five chapters, as they

to some extent appear detached from each other. The reader may thus be enabled to read single chapters without having to know the preceding context, however, if read as a whole, the book at times comes across as repetitive. This, as well as minor errors in the editing of German language names and terms (among a few spelling errors, Marashi appears to confuse by name the orientalist Max von Oppenheim with his quasi-namesake Max Oppenheimer, the painter; p.164), can easily be pardoned as the author astutely opens a window to a previously little studied world. The book will be instructive and of great enjoyment to everyone interested in Persianate Studies, the history of Modern Iran, Zoroastrianism Studies and the study of (Iranian) nationalism more broadly.