Journey from Iran to India with Atoosha
Hello!

My name is Atoosha. I am a Parsi girl. It is an Avestan name and I am named after the daughter of the first king of Iran. I live in the vibrant town of Sanjan in Gujarat, India.

My grandmother tells me that Parsis have travelled all the way from Iran and arrived in India some 1300 years ago (8th Century)! She often tells me stories of my ancestors sailing on sea, fighting turbulent storms and finally landing in my beautiful town Sanjan.

Now, with the help of this exhibition at the National Museum, I am about to take a journey of discovery by traveling along the silk road, to revisit the mighty Persian Empire, which was founded by my ancestors, learn more about my religion Zoroastrianism and travel to various Parsi settlements in India.

By the way, Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest revealed religions in the world, and that makes me very, very proud!

Would you and your family like to join me on this journey of revelations?

While discovering amazing facts and learning something new about Zoroastrian culture on this voyage, you will also enjoy 10 activities. These will help you discover, spot and understand all the beautiful and unique objects displayed in this exhibition.

We will begin our journey from the Ancient world section near the entrance of this exhibition hall, and gradually advance on to other sections.

So, Let’s Begin!

Ushta te- may happiness be to you
Useful Vocabulary

Here, you will come across names and words that might sound new. I have, therefore, made a list of useful vocabulary.

Zoroastrianism
one of the world’s oldest religion.

Ahura Mazda
The sole creator God of Zoroastrianism.

Zoroastrians
Follower of Zoroaster.

Zarathustra or Zoroaster
Founder of Zoroastrianism.

Fravahar or Fravashi
The symbol of Zoroastrian’s which represent guardian angel.

Dakhma
A circular, raised structure used by Zoroastrians for exposure of the dead.

Achaemenid
First Persian Empire which was founded by Cyrus the Great.

Parthian
A major Iranian political and cultural power in ancient Iran.

Sasanian
The last pre-Islamic Persian empire.

Pahlavi or Middle Persian
The language of Sasanians.

Avesta
The sacred writings of Zoroastrianism, composed in ancient Iranian language of Avestan.

Mesopotamia
Ancient name of Iraq.

Agiary
Zoroastrian fire temple.

Magi
Three wise men who visited Jesus after his birth, with gold, myrrh and frankincense.
You might have noticed me using the word Parsi quite frequently. Wondering what that means? Well, it comes from the word Pars or Fars in Persian. Pars or fars is a province in Central Iran. Zoroastrians who migrated to India from Iran came to be known as Parsis.

This is a blank map of the ancient world. Did you see a similar map as you entered the gallery? I have numbered the places crossed by my ancestors to reach Sanjan in India from IRAN. Connect the numbers and create a trail to find out the names of places travelled by my ancestors.

You can find the names in two maps.
Hint #1: map one is in Ancient world section of the exhibition.

Hint #2: map two is in Journey and settlement section of this exhibition.
Activity 2: Sacred Texts

We are now entering into my world of sacred texts and hymns.

He is Zarathustra, the founder of Zoroastrianism.

His teachings were passed down by word of mouth for centuries. They were later written down in the Avestan alphabet, which was especially invented for the purpose of writing the teachings of Zarathustra.

Come, let me show you my favourite Avestan displayed here.
But, what is an Avesta?
Well, Avesta is the collection of Zoroastrian sacred texts, composed in the ancient Iranian language of Avestan.

Look, I have just written my name Atoosha using avestan alphabets

You can also try
In case 3 you will find this Zoroastrian Prayer book called the Khorde Avesta.

The first line of this page reads:
“Ashem Vohu Vahishtem asti
Ushtā asti, Ushtā ahmāi,
Hyat ashāi Vahishtāi ashem”.

It means:
truth is the best good
(and it) is happiness. Happiness (is) to him, who (is) righteous for the sake of the best righteousness.

Can you memorize this chant?
You will require it at the fire temple, in the exhibition which you will visit soon.
Activity 3: The silk road, Central Asia and China

In ancient times many Zoroastrians lived in Bactria, Sogdiana and Khwarezm. The Sogdian civilization, which flourished between the 5th and the 8th centuries CE was one of the important civilizations which covered most of the territories of present day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. These areas today form part of the Central Asian Grasslands. Central Asia was famous for its ancient network of trade routes also known as Silk Road.

Wonder why is it called “SILK ROAD” and not Cotton Road or Wool Road?

May be you can research about this at home.
This is a facsimile of Ambassadors’ painting which was created for King Varkhuman. He was a Sogdian King and ruled Samarkand in Central Asia. This was part of a court painting, which covered all four walls of an aristocratic house.
These are two other scenes from the same wall painting, which are not displayed at National Museum.

a. Painting on the western wall depicting envoys from various countries
b. Painting on the Northern wall depicting celebration of a Chinese festival with empress on a boat and the emperor hunting.
Activity 4: judaeo-christian world

You have thus far helped me discover the ancient world, write in Avestan language, and explore the interiors of an aristocratic house! I would now like you to know about Judaism and Christianity.
Did you know that Zoroastrianism was the main religion in Persia before the birth of Christ? Some Judaeo-Christian traditions and beliefs have their origin in Zoroastrianism.
This is a painting of three Magis or followers of Zoroaster who visited baby Jesus and Mary at Bethlehem. They are believed to have traveled from the Iranian province of Parthia to offer gifts to the newborn. You will meet them in the 4th section of this exhibition.
The attire worn by the Magis were a unique feature of the Parthian Empire of Persia.

The Magis followed the star in the east and found their way to Bethlehem. Can you spot the star in the painting and draw it here?

Look at their leggings. Do you think the print resembles the skin of any of these animals?
Activity 5: Persian Timeline

1. The Achaemenid Empire
   - Cyrus the great: He unified the Persian Empire and established the Achaemenid Empire.

2. The Parthian Empire
   - Arsaces I: He founded the Parthian Empire which lasted for 500 years.

3. The Sasanian Empire
   - Ardashir I: He was the founder of this last Iranian empire.

4. The Arabs
   - Several Arab commanders conquered Persia and Islam replaced Zoroastrianism as the state religion of Iran.
Take a look

Can you find this Achaemenid guardsman in this exhibition?
He is carved on a limestone relief?

Come a step closer and see if you can
find the following?

A pleated headdress

Hanging chords with tassels

Did you notice his expression?

Does he look happy or sad?
Look at the other guardsman
in the same showcase
and compare?
After your meeting with the guardsmen, walk towards the centre of the room and look for this cylinder

It is the replica of the Cyrus cylinder. The original was discovered in the ruins of Babylon, Iraq. The inscribed surface of the cylinder tells the proclamation by Cyrus the Great. The inscription describes the significance of communal harmony and tolerance. The cylinder also describes how the Persian King Cyrus increased the offerings made to the gods!
These are few offerings mentioned in the cylinder; do you recognize any of them?
Activity 6: Fire temple and Journey of settlement

This is my town Sanjan. I am very excited to reach here with you! After sailing for days and months, my ancestors arrived in the port of Sanjan in 8th Century CE. This is also the time when the Chola dynasty ruled South India.

It was the Kind King Jadav Rana, who permitted Zoroastrians to settle in Gujarat.
This is the entrance of a Zoroastrian fire temple or Agiary.

The centre of the temple or sanctum sanctorum has the sacred fire in a silver vase. The sanctum is visited only by the priest attached to the temple. The priest serves the sacred fire with logs of wood five times a day and ensures that the fire is never extinguished.

Let's have a look at the inside of this fire temple.
Do not forget to chant the prayer given on Page 7.

The objects below are what you would find inside.
This is a toran or a festoon. It is engraved with motifs of sun, moon, star, trees and water.

Can you fill this toran with motifs?
Take inspiration from the toran you see in the gallery.
Activity 7: Post Arab Conquest

King Yazdgerd Shehriar III was the last Sasanian emperor of Iran. He was defeated by Arab invaders. Soon Zoroastrianism was replaced by Islam as the state religion and many old rules were replaced by new ones. There were strict dress codes for Zoroastrian men.

Can you imagine yourself wearing garments made of certain colours for all your life!

In one of the sections of this exhibition you will find a wall with cloths of different colours and patterns.
Find this costume and look at it closely.
The answers are given at the bottom but first try answering them on your own.

Do you think it’s made of one fabric?

If not, how many can you count?

Why do you think the Zoroastrians wore such colorful costumes in 19th century Iran?

Do you think they loved wearing them or was it a compulsion?

1. No, 2 to 10 different stripes
2. Zoroastrians were not allowed to buy cloth by the yard.
3. This was one of the rules which governed the everyday lives of Zoroastrians in Iran.
4. Why do you think the Zoroastrians wore such colorful costumes in 19th century Iran?
**Activity 7: Parsi Salon**

This is the room I have been waiting to explore with **you**!

After the arrival at Sanjan, Parsis also began settling in different parts of India and the world. They were brilliant traders, builders, farmers, weavers and craftsmen.

So, what better place than this section in the exhibition, to get a glimpse of their lifestyle and craftsmanship!
Garas are embroidered silk textile introduced by Parsi traders who traded with China.

Originally, garas were short in length. One had to attach extra pieces of silk to create a Gara Sari.
Garas are known for their motifs.
Gara Saris are often named after their attractive designs.

What's in a name?
Let’s try finding few common Gara motifs here.

Cheena - Cheni no Garo
(Gara with Chinese men and women motifs)

Kanda - Papeta no garo
(Gara with Beige and brown Polka dots resembling Onions and potatoes)

Akho Garo
(Fully embroidered sari)
Gara (Rayomand maneckshaw)
Thank you for accompanying me on the journey of explorations and revelations.
The activity and trail book is around the temporary exhibition, “The Everlasting Flame Zoroastrianism: in History and Imagination.

It is designed to help you explore and understand the exhibition by finding objects and learning something new about Zoroastrianism.

You can attempt all the ten activities while you enjoy your journey from the shores of Iran to the coast of India!

Tell us how you found this activity book

It was Informative

I had Fun

I want to do more Activities?

I know a little more about Zoroastrianism now