

## SPOTTING PARSİ NAMES

*I have created the following guide to help historians and others with an interest in the past identify Parsi names in their sources. -Mitra Sharafi ([sharafi@wisc.edu](mailto:sharafi@wisc.edu)) [version updated on 4 June 2014]*

### (1) On Parsi naming conventions:

Until the mid-colonial period, Parsis followed patronymic naming practices. For instance, the name *Bomanjee Cowasjee* indicated that a man's (first) name was *Bomanjee* and that his father's (first) name was *Cowasjee*. From the nineteenth century onward, Parsis began taking European-style surnames that remained constant down the generations. They combined these surnames with preexisting patronymic practices. In the name *Bomanjee Cowasjee Captain*, therefore, *Bomanjee* was the man's first name; *Cowasjee* was his father's first name; and *Captain* was the family name. Women were sometimes referred to only by their first names in many colonial records. After the acquisition of European-style surnames, though, naming conventions for a woman's full name would be as follows. Her first name would be her own. Her second name would be her father's first name until marriage, after which point it would change to her husband's first name. Her family name would also change from her father's surname to her husband's upon marriage. For example, *Manekbai Rustom Kapadia* (whose father's name was *Rustom Behram Kapadia*) would become *Manekbai Nadirshaw Vachha* upon marriage to a man named *Nadirshaw Jamshed Vachha*. Her father's father's first name was *Behram*. Her husband's father's first name was *Jamshed*. See Dosabhai Framji Karaka, *History of the Parsis including their Manners, Customs, Religion and Present Position* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1884), vol.1, pp.162-3 at note 1. A scan of the Karaka excerpt is posted on my website. It is also available on Google Books:

<http://books.google.com/books?id=itoHAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=karaka+history+parsi&hl=en&sa=X&ei=3omPU5jRAYSpyATByIHwDw&ved=0CCcQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=karaka%20history%20parsi&f=false>

### (2) On Parsi first names:

- See Karaka's extensive list of Parsi male and female first names: Dosabhai Framji Karaka, *History of the Parsis including their Manners, Customs, Religion and Present Position* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1884), vol.1, pp.163. A scan of the Karaka excerpt is posted on my website. It is also available on Google Books:  
<http://books.google.com/books?id=itoHAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=karaka+history+parsi&hl=en&sa=X&ei=3omPU5jRAYSpyATByIHwDw&ved=0CCcQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=karaka%20history%20parsi&f=false>

- See *The Parsiana Book of Iranian Names* (Mumbai: Parsiana, 1997). This guide, published by Parsiana and Giara Publishers, is available for purchase here: <http://www.parsiana.com/bookclub/book-club.aspx>

(3) On Parsi family names:

- See the names included in Darukhanawala's biographical dictionary: H. D. Darukhanawala, *Parsi Lustre on Indian Soil* (Bombay: G. Claridge and Co., 1939). A scan of Darukhanawala's Table of Contents is posted on my website.
- Common Parsi family names include: Banaji, Cama, Davar, Dhondy, Dubash, Godrej, Guzder or Gazdar, Jamaspasana, Jijibhoy (also Jeejeebhoy or Jijibhai), Kotwal, Madon, Mistri or Mistry, Mody or Modi, Petit, Readymoney, Sethna or Shethna, Tata, Umrigar, Vachha (also Wachha or Wacha), Vimadalal, Wadia
- Some Parsi family names derived from places in South Asia: Bharucha (from Bharuch or "Broach" in colonial usage), Udhwadia (from Udwada), Ankleshwaria (from Ankleshwar), Poneger or Punegar (from Pune), Rangoonwalla (from Rangoon)
- Names shared by Parsi and Gujarati Hindu families: Dalal, Gandhi (also Gandhi or Ghandy), Mehta, Parekh, Patel
- Names shared by Parsi and Gujarati Muslim families: Dalal; also names with the suffix *-wala*, *-walla*, *-vala*, *-valla* (literally: one who keeps, controls, manages or has a particular thing; usually corresponding to a trade). Parsi examples of such names include: Hodiwala<sup>1</sup>, Ginwala<sup>2</sup>, Commissariatwala, Polishwala, Sodawatervalva, Batliwala<sup>3</sup>
- Parsi names describing a trade (often in English): Captain, Contractor, Dalal, Doctor, Engineer, Lawyer, Master, Printer, Vakil
- Family names that could be Parsi or British: Boyce, Cooper, Dick, Marker, Romer

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<sup>1</sup> *Hodi* (in Gujarati)= boat

<sup>2</sup> This name derives from the cotton gin, not the drink. Note that explicitly alcoholic drink-making names were Parsi, not Muslim, as in the Parsi names Toddywala (*toddy*= a popular, "country"-made liquor in South Asia) or Mahudavala (from a flower from which an alcoholic drink could be made).

<sup>3</sup> *Batli* (Guj.) = bottle (from the English)