



How to cite this article:

Heshmati Manesh, N., Delbari, S., & Asadbeigi, A. (2027). A Comparative Study of the Economic and Financial Activities of the Zoroastrians of Yazd (From the Safavid Period to the End of the Qajar Period). *Journal of Historical Research, Law and Policy*, 5(6), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.61838/jhrp.472>



Article history:
Original Research

Dates:

Submission Date: 09 June 2026

Revision Date: 08 October 2026

Acceptance Date: 15 October 2026

First Publication Date: 18 October 2026

Final Publication Date: 01 June 2027

A Comparative Study of the Economic and Financial Activities of the Zoroastrians of Yazd (From the Safavid Period to the End of the Qajar Period)

1. Norasteh. Heshmati Manesh¹: Department of History, Ma.C., Islamic Azad University, Mashhad, Iran
2. Shahrbanoo. Delbari^{2*}: Department of History, Ma.C., Islamic Azad University, Mashhad, Iran
3. Ardeshir. Asadbeigi³: Department of History, Ma.C., Islamic Azad University, Mashhad, Iran

*corresponding author's email: shahrbanoo@iau.ac.ir

ABSTRACT

Zoroastrianism is one of the ancient and officially recognized religions of Iran. Owing to its location in central Iran, proximity to the desert, and accessibility to various regions, Yazd historically served as a refuge for Zoroastrians. From an economic and commercial perspective, its geographical position also facilitated their access to the Silk Road. As a community that has constituted an integral part of Iranian history from the pre-Islamic period to the present, Zoroastrians warrant a prominent place in historical scholarship. Nevertheless, the number of studies devoted to them remains limited in comparison with the long history of their presence in Iran. The present study aims to identify and historically analyze the economic conditions of the Zoroastrians of Yazd during four successive periods: the Safavid, Afsharid, Zand, and, finally, Qajar periods. Accordingly, the principal research question is as follows: What role did the Zoroastrians of Yazd play in the economic activities of the region from the Safavid period to the end of the Qajar period, and what effects did these activities have on the economic, social, and cultural structure of Yazd? The findings indicate that the Zoroastrians of Yazd encountered various economic and social challenges from the Safavid through the Qajar periods. During the Safavid era, religious restrictions and pressures persisted; nevertheless, their commercial and agricultural skills enabled them to preserve their economic livelihood. During the Qajar period, their economic circumstances improved, particularly in the textile industry. With the support of the Parsis of India and Manekji, the Zoroastrians of Yazd were able to enhance their economic standing and assume an important role in the regional economy. During the Safavid, Afsharid, and Zand periods, although the state's treatment of Zoroastrians gradually shifted from the Safavids' confrontational approach toward the more interactive approach characteristic of the Qajar era, Zoroastrians were generally unable to engage in extensive economic activities because of such factors as the jizya and heavy taxation. During the Qajar period, however, the arrival of the Parsis of India in Iran contributed to the expansion of Zoroastrian economic activities and commerce, while they also received reductions in the jizya and other taxes. This study employs a descriptive-analytical research method.

Keywords: Zoroastrians, Islam, economy, Safavid dynasty, Afsharid dynasty, Zand dynasty, Qajar dynasty.

Introduction

A review of Iranian history shows that, following the establishment of Islamic governments in Iran, a confrontational attitude toward Zoroastrians emerged. This attitude was fundamentally rooted in the perceived



opposition between the identity and nature of Islam and Zoroastrianism. The outcome of this confrontation was the predominance of Islam, which became increasingly evident under governments such as the Safavid dynasty. This approach imposed certain restrictions on Zoroastrians, a substantial number of whom lived in Yazd, preventing them from engaging in economic and commercial activities on the same scale as the Muslim population of Iran.

With the establishment of Shi'ism as the official religion by the Safavids, Zoroastrians came under severe religious pressure. They were required to pay the *jizya* and were deprived of many social and economic rights. Restrictive regulations were imposed on religious minorities, including Zoroastrians, excluding them from governmental and administrative positions. During this period, Zoroastrians made considerable efforts to preserve their religious and cultural identity, although the observance of their rituals and ceremonies was subject to restrictions. It can be argued that the economic conditions of the Zoroastrians of Yazd during the Safavid period were shaped by a combination of economic activities, social restrictions, and communal support systems. Despite facing legal and social challenges as a religious minority, the Zoroastrians of Yazd managed to preserve their cultural identity and contribute to the economic life of the city. Following the Safavid period and the ensuing internal conflicts, the Zoroastrians of Yazd faced considerable difficulties and discrimination. Nader Shah Afshar devoted greater attention to military conquests and comparatively less attention to religious minorities. Nevertheless, Zoroastrians continued to experience religious pressure. With the rise of the Zand dynasty under Karim Khan Zand, more tolerant and supportive policies toward religious minorities, including the Zoroastrians of Yazd, were adopted, producing significant positive effects on the Zoroastrian community in the region. Prior to Zand rule, the Zoroastrians of Yazd had been subjected to substantial economic and social pressure. During the Qajar period, the arrival of the Indian Parsis in Iran improved the economic circumstances of Zoroastrians. The objective of the present article is to examine the extent of Zoroastrian economic activity and its impact on Yazd from the Safavid period to the end of the Qajar era. Accordingly, the principal research question is as follows: What role did the Zoroastrians of Yazd play in the economic activities of the region from the Safavid period to the end of the Qajar era, and what effects did these activities have on the economic, social, and cultural structure of Yazd? It appears that, from the Safavid to the Qajar period, notwithstanding the relatively limited economic activities of Zoroastrians during the Afsharid and Zand periods, their greatest degree of economic activity occurred during the Qajar era, largely with the assistance of the Indian Parsis. This article therefore examines the economic conditions of the Zoroastrians of Yazd from the Safavid period to the end of the Qajar era. Regarding the background of the present study, it should be noted that, at the time of writing, the only closely related work was Ali Akbar Tashakkori Bafghi's book *The Social History of the Zoroastrians of Yazd: From the Establishment of the Naseri Association to the Fall of the Qajar Dynasty* (1). Although this is a noteworthy work, it does not specifically address the economic conditions of the Zoroastrians of Yazd, and its chronological scope is narrower than that of the present article, thereby demonstrating the novelty of the present study.

Financial Economics

Financial economics is a branch of economics in which financial concepts occupy a central position and which examines the allocation and management of financial resources in financial markets (2). This field examines financial decisions in areas such as investment, financing, and financial risk and generally focuses on how such decisions affect individuals, firms, and the macroeconomy (3). In essence, financial economics analyzes how scarce resources are used to achieve future financial objectives and is founded on the concepts of forecasting, risk, and

return. Although this concept may appear modern, its historical antecedents can be traced to earlier periods (4). Throughout history, financial economics, as a dimension of economic activity, has played a key role in the economic and commercial decisions of societies. In antiquity, various civilizations, including ancient Egypt and ancient Greece, employed concepts such as lending, interest rates, and financial exchange. In these societies, individuals capable of managing financial resources could acquire greater economic power. In subsequent periods, particularly during the Renaissance in Europe, financial activity expanded through the emergence of financial institutions and the early securities markets. During the Middle Ages, the emergence of banks in Italy and subsequently in other parts of Europe gave rise to a more complex financial system. During this period, banks operated as financial intermediaries among governments, merchants, and investors.

Financial economics also received considerable attention in Iran. During the Safavid period, Iran experienced extensive economic and financial transformations. One of the most important characteristics of this period was the growth of foreign trade and the development of commercial routes, particularly through the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. Shah Abbas I devoted considerable attention to the development and strengthening of the country's financial and commercial system. Moreover, through the establishment of a more regularized taxation system and the imposition of taxes such as the *jizya* on non-Muslims, the Safavid state was able to strengthen its financial resources. In later periods, including the Qajar era, institutions such as the Jamshidian Trading House and other financial enterprises were also active.

Economic Activities of the Zoroastrians of Yazd During the Safavid Period (1501–1722)

The Safavid era in Iran was a period of transformation and consolidation of power under the Safavid dynasty, which established Shi'ism as the state religion and centralized political authority. Yazd, a city with a substantial Zoroastrian population, was an important economic center during this period. As one of the religious minorities in Iran, the Zoroastrians of Yazd faced various restrictions and economic difficulties under Safavid rule. Compared with other groups and the majority population, this minority encountered challenges such as discrimination and economic restrictions. Nevertheless, Zoroastrian economic activities during this period had a notable impact on Yazd. Jean Chardin, the French traveler who visited Iran during the Safavid period, described the economic conditions of the Zoroastrians of Yazd as follows:

“Yazd is a city in which most inhabitants are engaged in commerce and trade, and among them the Zoroastrians, who have resided in this city since ancient times, are renowned for textile weaving, dyeing, and the silk trade. They maintain workshops in their homes where they weave fine textiles, which are then exported to India and other lands. Some of them are also engaged in financial transactions and money changing and, because of their honesty, enjoy the trust of the people” (5).

The Zoroastrians of Yazd engaged in various economic activities during the Safavid period. They were known for their expertise in handicrafts such as weaving, metalworking, and jewelry making. In addition, Zoroastrians participated in trade and commerce at both local and international levels. They were involved in the silk and textile trades and benefited from Yazd's strategic location along commercial routes linking Iran, India, and the Ottoman Empire. Despite their economic contributions, the Zoroastrians of Yazd faced legal and social restrictions as non-Muslims. The Safavid state imposed specific regulations on religious minorities classified as *dhimmis*, affecting both their social status and economic opportunities. Zoroastrians were required to pay a special tax known as the *jizya* and were subject to dress regulations and various social restrictions (6). Nevertheless, some Zoroastrians were

able to overcome these constraints and achieve economic success through craftsmanship and commerce. Moreover, Zoroastrian economic prosperity in Yazd was closely connected to communal systems of support. In the absence of adequate legal protection, Zoroastrians relied on their communal networks for social and economic security. The Zoroastrian community of Yazd established institutions such as fire temples and charitable organizations to support community members and preserve their religious traditions.

Although the Safavid period constituted an important and transformative era in Iranian history and had profound effects on the country's religious minorities, including Zoroastrians, the community nevertheless faced numerous challenges. The principal challenges encountered by Zoroastrians in Safavid Iran are discussed below.

Social and Legal Restrictions

From the perspective of financial economics, the establishment of Shi'ism as the official religion of Iran during the Safavid era subjected religious minorities, including Zoroastrians, to various restrictions. One of the most significant burdens was the heavy taxation that Zoroastrians were required to pay in the form of the *jizya*, or poll tax. These taxes adversely affected their economic activities and restricted their financial resources. Their social position was also such that they were segregated from Muslims in numerous spheres of social and economic life (7). Thus, during the Safavid period, Zoroastrians, as a religious minority, faced both social and legal restrictions. They were required to pay the *jizya* and were subjected to regulations concerning matters such as clothing and religious spaces. These conditions had a profound impact on their economic position. On the one hand, this religious minority experienced social exclusion, and such marginalization itself weakened their economy because they could not readily obtain highly remunerative occupations or engage in large-scale trade in the same manner as other members of society. On the other hand, the *jizya* constituted an additional source of economic hardship for Zoroastrians, most of whom lived in Yazd. Zoroastrians were required to pay higher taxes to the government than Muslims, which could adversely affect their economic capacity and constrain their development. Nevertheless, Zoroastrians continued their economic activities to the extent possible. Eskandar Beg Torkaman, the Safavid court historian, wrote in *The World-Adorning History of Abbas* about the economy of Yazd and the role of Zoroastrians:

"In the *Dar al- 'Ibada* of Yazd, the community of Gabrs [Zoroastrians] are among the people of craft and commerce and are skilled in trade and textile production. The Yazdi fabrics carried to the lands of India and Europe are often produced in the workshops of this community. Shah Abbas, the late sovereign of blessed memory, imposed the *jizya* upon them for the prosperity of trade and the development of that region, while at the same time leaving them free in their commercial transactions, from which considerable profit was obtained" (8).

Inequality in Legal Privileges

During the Safavid period, Zoroastrians generally experienced restrictions on legal rights and privileges, including rights relating to property ownership, citizenship, and personal rights, resulting in inequality before the law and in access to justice. Zoroastrians were also subject to specific regulations governing their clothing. Such regulations could visibly distinguish them from Muslims and reinforce social discrimination (9). This separation from the merchant class and even from ordinary members of society inevitably affected their economic position, particularly because economic weakness itself constituted one of the challenges facing Zoroastrians during the Safavid period. This minority was commonly regarded as having less access to wealth and economic resources, which contributed to further economic and social hardship. In cases involving crime or embezzlement, Zoroastrians could also face

discrimination in access to justice and adjudication, negatively affecting the protection of their rights. Consequently, social and economic discrimination against Zoroastrians during the Safavid period had profound effects not only on their daily lives but also on the social, economic, and cultural development of the community.

The Safavid period created numerous challenges for Zoroastrians as a religious minority in Iran, affecting their everyday lives as well as their economic, social, and cultural activities. These challenges placed pressure on Zoroastrians at both individual and collective levels and adversely affected the development and advancement of the community. During the Safavid period, Zoroastrians were subjected to discrimination as a religious minority, including discriminatory taxation in the form of the special tax known as the *jizya*. Zoroastrians were adherents of an ancient religion, yet, unlike Muslims and despite the recognition historically accorded to certain protected religious communities, they were not exempt from payment of the *jizya* (10). The *jizya* constituted a special tax imposed upon non-Muslims, including Zoroastrians, Christians, and Jews. It imposed a heavier fiscal burden than the ordinary taxes applicable to Muslims and was assessed according to the individual's financial circumstances. The payment of the *jizya* by Zoroastrians was not merely a fiscal burden but also represented a form of social and religious discrimination that distinguished Zoroastrians from other groups and, especially, from the Muslim majority. Such discriminatory measures constrained the economic and social development of Zoroastrians and had long-term effects on their lives. These forms of discrimination not only increased the tax burden imposed upon Zoroastrians but also reflected the Safavid state's neglect of their social and economic rights (11). The obligation to pay the *jizya* as an additional expense restricted Zoroastrian financial resources and prevented them from investing in new enterprises or expanding existing economic activities. These limitations reduced their competitiveness in local markets.

Commercial Exchange and Exports via the Silk Road

During the Safavid period, the Zoroastrians of Yazd, as one of Iran's religious minorities, played an important economic role. Given Yazd's geographical location and its commercial connections with the Silk Road, this community benefited from significant economic opportunities. Zoroastrians were primarily engaged in commerce, handicrafts, and agriculture, thereby contributing to the strengthening of the regional economy and its cultural diversity (12).

The Zoroastrians of Yazd participated in the export of various commodities, including wool, silk, and handicrafts. With their expertise in crafts such as carpet weaving and metalworking, members of this religious minority contributed to the vitality of the local economy and produced high-quality goods supplied to both domestic and foreign markets. Through their commercial and economic relations with other ethnic and national groups, Zoroastrians also contributed to cultural and social exchange. These interactions not only supported their economic development but also facilitated the transfer of new knowledge and techniques to the Zoroastrian community and improved their living conditions.

Moreover, despite the social challenges and religious restrictions periodically imposed upon the Zoroastrian community of Yazd, its members successfully resisted these obstacles and preserved their cultural and economic identity. Through active participation in markets and the establishment of productive workshops, they played an important role in the economy of Yazd and particularly in the development of commercial centers such as Yazd itself.

Accordingly, the Zoroastrians of the region, as an active and important economic group, not only contributed to the economic prosperity of the region but also strengthened social and economic ties through their commercial and cultural activities, thereby enriching the cultural and economic life of Iran during this period. More broadly, trade along the Silk Road played a highly significant role in the economy and culture of Safavid Iran and contributed to urban development, cultural and economic exchange, and the expansion of international relations among different countries.

Economic Conditions of the Zoroastrians of Yazd During the Afsharid Period (1736–1747)

During the Afsharid period, many Zoroastrians were engaged in rural life and agriculture, producing agricultural products, raising livestock, and practicing handicrafts. Because Zoroastrian religious teachings emphasized the importance of work and productive effort, they endeavored to improve their economic circumstances and achieved a degree of relative success. Domestic and foreign trade was also highly active during the Afsharid period, and many Zoroastrians participated in these markets as merchants. They were involved in trade with neighboring and European countries and improved their economic position through the exchange of goods and services (13). Nevertheless, some Zoroastrians also encountered economic difficulties during the Afsharid period, particularly those engaged in rural life and agriculture, who were affected by adverse economic conditions and fiscal exactions. Such individuals often lived under unstable and uncertain conditions and confronted problems such as poverty, unemployment, and economic inequality.

It should also be recognized that the Zoroastrians of Yazd faced various commercial and occupational challenges during the Afsharid period. Some of these challenges included the following:

During this period, competition between Muslim merchants and Zoroastrian traders intensified. Such competition could result in price reductions, competitive offers, and commercial misconduct detrimental to Zoroastrian merchants, particularly because Zoroastrians were effectively regarded as second-class citizens in comparison with Muslims engaged in commerce. In addition, high taxes and irregular fiscal impositions by the state and local authorities could adversely affect Zoroastrian commercial and industrial activities and reduce their income. The *jizya* likewise continued to be imposed during this period, and Zoroastrians frequently encountered serious financial difficulties.

Some Zoroastrians were comparatively poor and lived under unfavorable conditions, facing unemployment, poverty, and famine, all of which contributed to economic inequality among different social strata. During this period, the political authorities also maintained a hierarchical attitude toward Zoroastrians. Although this approach did not subject Zoroastrians to the same degree of persecution and inequality as during the Safavid period, it nevertheless created livelihood and identity-related difficulties. The Afsharid approach, and particularly that of Nader Shah, toward other religions and toward Zoroastrians was diverse and variable. This approach may have been shaped by a range of factors, including social, political, and cultural circumstances as well as Nader Shah's own personality and individual views (14). Several dimensions of the Afsharid approach toward other religions and Zoroastrians are discussed below.

In some instances, Nader Shah's government not only imposed heavy taxes on Zoroastrians but also subjected them to social and religious discrimination. Such measures placed economic and social pressure on Zoroastrians and weakened their position. Nader Shah's relations with Zoroastrians were also influenced by the political

dynamics of his era. In some circumstances, he made use of Zoroastrians as one of the country's religious minorities in efforts to consolidate his own power and influence.

At certain times, Nader Shah attempted to maintain a balance among different religious minorities, including Zoroastrians. He may have adopted measures intended simultaneously to improve Zoroastrian rights and strengthen the position of other minorities. During Nader Shah's reign, some Zoroastrians and members of other religious minorities also voiced criticism of the state because of taxation and social discrimination. In some instances, Nader Shah responded harshly to such criticism, while in others he attempted accommodation. Overall, Nader Shah's approach toward other religions and Zoroastrians was variable and multifaceted, and his policies in this field cannot be reduced to a single uniform approach (15). Nader Shah pursued relatively diverse religious policies and attempted to promote unity between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims. In certain circumstances, he also adopted specific measures intended to reduce sectarian tensions within his empire. Nevertheless, the social and religious pressures historically imposed upon Zoroastrians continued during his reign. Historical sources contain references to general punishments imposed on religious minorities, although they do not identify any specific collective punishment directed exclusively at Zoroastrians under Nader Shah. Such sanctions could include payment of the *jizya*, social restrictions, and, in certain circumstances, execution for particular acts of disobedience (16). However, no documented and specific report indicates that a defined number of Zoroastrians were punished during Nader Shah's reign. The Afsharid state generally showed little inclination to support or develop Zoroastrian industries and commerce, and some state officials sought to restrict their activities. The roots of this lack of support and obstruction can be regarded as historical, since similar practices by political authorities are observable both before and after the Afsharid period. Nevertheless, as noted above, because Nader Shah Afshar's approach to religion was not characterized by strong sectarian fanaticism, the political, economic, and cultural conditions of Zoroastrians during this period may be assessed as comparatively better than during the preceding era.

Economic Conditions of the Zoroastrians of Yazd During the Zand Period (1751–1794)

In the period following the collapse of the Safavid dynasty and before the rise of the Zands, Iran experienced considerable political instability and internal conflict. Religious minorities, including Zoroastrians, faced substantial pressure and discrimination during this period (17). With the rise of Karim Khan Zand, positive developments occurred in relation to minority rights, including an improvement in the position of Zoroastrians. Karim Khan Zand, after assuming power, demonstrated greater tolerance toward other religious groups than was common in his period. This tolerance may be attributed to two principal factors: first, the need to preserve the country's independence and unity, and second, his own religious and ethical outlook. Confronted with internal and external threats, Karim Khan Zand sought to promote and preserve national independence and unity (1). He recognized that achieving these objectives required the participation of all sectors of society in national activities and decision-making without religious discrimination. As a ruler, he attached considerable importance to justice and equality before the law and maintained that the state should protect all citizens and guarantee equal rights regardless of religion or ethnicity.

In examining the Zand approach toward other religions and Zoroastrians, it is important to recognize that this policy varied across different periods and historical circumstances. From the establishment of the dynasty, the Zands adopted different attitudes and policies toward other religious communities. Several dimensions of the Zand approach toward other religions and Zoroastrians are outlined below.

In some instances, the Zand government promoted tolerance and respect toward other religions and reflected these principles in its policies. Some Zand leaders and intellectuals regarded other religions as avenues for understanding spiritual realities and expanding human knowledge and comprehension. Certain accounts and ideas associated with the Zand period also acknowledged the plurality of religions and beliefs, and the dynasty generally demonstrated greater attention to religious diversity and respect for other faiths. It should also be noted that, as in preceding and subsequent periods, Zoroastrian priests in Yazd were responsible for collecting and managing Zoroastrian religious funds. These payments, known as “religious funds,” were used to maintain fire temples, pay the stipends of priests, and assist impoverished Zoroastrians. A portion of these funds was provided as interest-free loans to Zoroastrian merchants in order to sustain the commercial prosperity of the community. “Senior priests, in addition to performing religious duties, were responsible for regulating the financial affairs of the Zoroastrians. They collected funds from Zoroastrian merchants and craftsmen, part of which was used for the maintenance of fire temples, while another portion was returned to Zoroastrians in the form of commercial loans” (8).

The Zand approach toward other religions and Zoroastrians varied over time and across different circumstances. These changes may have resulted from political, social, and cultural conditions as well as the perspectives of Zand rulers and intellectuals. Overall, the Zand approach toward other religions and toward Zoroastrians was diverse and cannot be reduced to a uniform policy. It was shaped by various historical and cultural circumstances, social and political interactions, and the individual attitudes of Zand leaders (18). It can further be argued that Karim Khan Zand sought during his reign to promote religious and social tolerance and to avoid religious discrimination in social and political affairs. This approach gave religious minorities comparatively greater opportunities than in many other periods to live within society and continue their religious activities.

The Zand period played an important role in the economic and social history of Zoroastrians. As adherents of one of Iran's ancient religions, Zoroastrians continued to exert a significant influence on the economy and culture of the region (19). During this period, the Iranian economy was largely based on agriculture and mining. Zoroastrians, as a religious community, were involved in agriculture and animal husbandry. Both private and individually owned lands were cultivated, and agriculture depended on irrigation and relatively advanced techniques of water management. Trade and commerce were likewise highly significant, and important cities developed into major commercial and industrial centers.

Nevertheless, despite Karim Khan's comparatively tolerant policies, Zoroastrians at times continued to face social restrictions and were even subjected to exile. Despite these pressures, Karim Khan Zand sought to reduce the community's fiscal burden by lowering the heavy taxes imposed upon Zoroastrians. This tax reduction helped Zoroastrians improve their economic circumstances and assume a more active role in economic activities. During Karim Khan Zand's reign, Zoroastrians enjoyed greater opportunities for commercial activity. These economic policies contributed to improved livelihoods and greater economic prosperity within the Zoroastrian community.

Economic Conditions of the Zoroastrians of Yazd During the Qajar Period (1796–1925)

During the Qajar period in Iran, the economic conditions of Zoroastrians in Yazd and other regions continued to be influenced by various social, political, and economic factors. Before the Naseri era and the arrival of the Association of the Notables of India in Yazd, most Zoroastrians were farmers. Gradually, however, as their community became more open and with the assistance and capital of Iranian Zoroastrians, they also entered commerce and exchange. In 1857–1858, Khosrow Shah Jahan and his brothers Parviz, Godarz, Rostam, and

Bahram established a company for commerce and exchange in Yazd. Initially, their commercial activity centered on the export of cotton and developed out of their agricultural activities; as the company expanded, they also became involved in exchange transactions. During this period, numerous prominent Zoroastrians of Yazd were engaged in economic activities, including Arbab Keykhosrow, Manekji Limji Hatara, Arbab Jamshid Jamshidian, Rostam Giv, the father of Arbab Keykhosrow Shahrokh, and others.

Their most important money-changing activities included accepting deposits and cash from individuals in exchange for instruments known as *bijak-e sanduq* and demand receipts, transferring money within the country, and buying and selling foreign currencies and banknotes, services that were sometimes required even by the central government. During the First Majles, they sought to establish a national bank, but this initiative failed because of opposition and intrigue by foreign powers and domestic autocratic forces (14). Ultimately, in 1912–1913, following the killing of Parviz Shah Jahan and the exile of Khosrow Shah Jahan, the institution ceased its operations entirely. The establishment of the first meat company and a general telephone joint-stock company may also be counted among the notable achievements associated with this commercial enterprise.

The economic circumstances of the Zoroastrians of Yazd during the Qajar period were influenced by numerous factors, including social structures, religious restrictions, commercial transformations, and economic reforms. Despite existing challenges, Zoroastrians continued to engage in traditional occupations such as agriculture, craftsmanship, and commerce. Their skills in fields such as silk weaving, metalworking, and jewelry making were recognized not only locally but also in regional markets. Through participation in local markets and commercial networks, the community was able to preserve its position within the economic life of Yazd (20).

Despite the social and religious restrictions imposed upon the Zoroastrian community within the framework of *dhimmi* status, its members maintained connections with domestic and international commercial networks. They acted as intermediaries between local markets and distant trading routes and participated in the exchange of goods and the circulation of capital throughout the region. During this period, handicrafts remained one of the most important areas of Zoroastrian economic activity, and Zoroastrian craftsmen were known for producing high-quality textiles, carpets, and metalwork. These products, which attracted attention in domestic and regional markets, contributed to the economic sustainability of the Zoroastrian community of Yazd.

Nevertheless, political instability and economic challenges arising from wars, internal conflicts, and foreign intervention directly affected the economy of the country as a whole and, consequently, the economic conditions of Zoroastrians. Trade routes were disrupted during this period, and market demand for certain products declined. In addition, *dhimmi* status subjected Zoroastrians to discriminatory laws that restricted them in certain areas of employment and economic ownership. These restrictions included higher taxation and prohibitions on participation in particular occupations.

In the field of landholding, a number of Zoroastrians in Yazd owned agricultural land and were active in farming, although legal and social restrictions meant that land ownership among Zoroastrians was less extensive than among Muslims. Nevertheless, some Zoroastrians benefited from educational reforms and modernization initiatives during the late Qajar period and entered modern professions such as medicine, law, and commerce. This development contributed to the formation of a small Zoroastrian middle class and facilitated the community's socioeconomic mobility. Modernization during the Qajar period, while creating opportunities for the economic advancement of some groups, also generated new challenges. The introduction of modern industries transformed traditional economic structures and intensified competition in commercial markets for communities such as the

Zoroastrians. Overall, the Qajar period had a dual impact on Zoroastrians from a social and economic perspective: on the one hand, certain reforms facilitated economic advancement and expanded occupational opportunities; on the other hand, structural restrictions and competition from modern industries placed some traditional Zoroastrian occupations under pressure.

In summary, the economic circumstances of the Zoroastrians of Yazd during the Qajar period were shaped by traditional occupations, integration into commercial networks, and adaptation to changing economic and social dynamics under an Islamic government. Despite the challenges associated with their status as a minority community, the Zoroastrians of Yazd maintained their economic resilience and contributed to the diversification of the regional economy. Indeed, their economic circumstances during the Qajar period reflected a combination of tradition, resilience, and adaptability in the face of socioeconomic restrictions and changing conditions. Despite these challenges, Zoroastrians made a substantial contribution to the economic fabric of Yazd and preserved their cultural and economic identity within a predominantly Muslim society.

Zoroastrian Merchants' Relations With the Indian Parsis

Following the Arab conquest of Iran and the collapse of the Sasanian Empire, a group of Zoroastrians migrated to India, where they formed the Parsi community. This migration occurred primarily during the eighth and ninth centuries. In India, the Parsis became concentrated mainly in the states of Gujarat and Maharashtra, with Bombay emerging as one of their most important centers. The Parsi population of India has been estimated at approximately 60,000. The Parsis have remained strongly committed to preserving Zoroastrian rituals and traditions and have carefully observed their religious ceremonies. They worship in fire temples and celebrate major Zoroastrian festivals such as Nowruz, Mehregan, and Sadeh. Parsis have played an important role in the economic and social development of India (21). Many have become known as merchants, industrialists, and philanthropists. Prominent families such as the Tatas and Godrejs are among the best-known Parsi families in India and have had a major impact on the country's economy and industry. The Parsi community in India has also faced challenges such as declining birth rates and increasing rates of intermarriage, which have contributed to population decline. Nevertheless, efforts have been made to preserve Parsi cultural and religious identity through education and the promotion of Zoroastrian culture. The remaining Zoroastrians of Iran and the Parsis of India constitute two major communities of Zoroastrian adherents that, despite historical challenges and transformations, have continued to preserve and promote their culture and religious traditions. These communities have played an important role in safeguarding the Zoroastrian heritage and ensuring the continuity of Zoroaster's teachings and continue to be regarded as significant representatives of the history and culture of ancient Iran.

With the advent of Islam in Iran, some adherents of Zoroastrianism who preferred migration to remaining in their homeland moved to India and laid the foundations of the Parsi presence there. Although historical sources generally indicate that they enjoyed security and prosperity until the fifteenth century, by the late fifteenth century political crises apparently resulted in the deaths of many Parsis and the dispersal of others across different regions. Moreover, in relation to the preservation of religious rites and traditions, factors such as dispersion in a foreign land, payment of the *jizya*, and assimilation into the surrounding culture caused the Parsis to lose or forget many aspects of their religious heritage (21). These circumstances differed from the social conditions of the Zoroastrians of Iran. Iranian Zoroastrians, by remaining in their homeland, adapting to their surrounding environment, and undertaking cultural efforts to collect and preserve their religious texts, particularly during the early Islamic centuries, were able

to maintain a comparatively stronger position than the Parsis of India and, during the Safavid period, effectively became an authoritative source for responding to the latter's religious questions. In 1478–1479, an individual named Nariman Hoshang traveled from the Parsi community to Yazd in order to obtain answers concerning religious matters and requested that the Zoroastrian priests of Yazd prepare their responses in the Pahlavi language. This request indicates the extent to which the Parsis had become unfamiliar with the ancient script and language and, correspondingly, with aspects of the Zoroastrian religious tradition. Several reforms and forms of Parsi activism concerning the economic conditions of Iranian Zoroastrians are discussed below.

Reduction of the Jizya

Manekji Limji Hataria, one of the most prominent Parsi figures of the Qajar era, played an important role in reducing and ultimately abolishing the *jizya* imposed upon Iranian Zoroastrians. His activities in this area had far-reaching effects on the improvement of their economic and social conditions. As noted above, through persistent efforts and effective negotiations with Qajar officials, Manekji Limji Hataria played a significant role in securing reductions in, and ultimately the abolition of, the Zoroastrian *jizya* (22). These measures not only improved the economic and social circumstances of Zoroastrians in Iran but also demonstrated that international cooperation and support could contribute to positive and meaningful change in the conditions of religious minorities. Manekji's success in this regard inspired similar efforts elsewhere and illustrates the significance and effectiveness of diplomacy and negotiation in addressing social and economic problems. The economic strength of the Indian Parsis during this period enabled them to provide assistance to other communities, among which the Zoroastrians of Iran were significant beneficiaries. The establishment of major trading houses such as the Jamshidian, Jahanian, and Yeganegi houses during this period reflects the growing economic power of Zoroastrians (23).

It should be emphasized that Zoroastrians under Qajar rule faced numerous religious and social restrictions. One of the most significant was the obligation to pay the *jizya* as a special tax imposed on non-Muslims. The *jizya* constituted a considerable financial burden and drove many Zoroastrians into poverty. Accordingly, the Bombay Parsi Association dispatched Manekji Limji to Iran to investigate the circumstances of Iranian Zoroastrians and take appropriate measures to improve their condition. Manekji arrived in Iran in 1854 and began his activities by meeting local officials and prominent members of the Zoroastrian community. In terms of his objectives and activities, Manekji met senior Iranian officials, including the Shah and his ministers, and informed them of the problems faced by Zoroastrians. He argued that the *jizya* was an unjust tax and called for its reduction or abolition. Manekji emphasized that reducing the *jizya* would improve the economic condition of Zoroastrians and enable them to assume a more active role in society. He also invoked ethical and religious principles emphasizing justice and fairness in the treatment of minorities. At the same time, the Parsi community of India provided significant financial assistance to Iranian Zoroastrians so that they could pay the *jizya* while retaining sufficient resources to sustain their livelihoods. Through moral and political support for Manekji, the Indian Parsis also increased pressure on Iranian officials to reduce the *jizya*. Such support played an important role in the success of Manekji's efforts.

As a result of Manekji's negotiations and persistent efforts, the amount of the *jizya* imposed upon Zoroastrians was substantially reduced. This reduction alleviated their financial burden and enabled them to improve their economic circumstances. Ultimately, after years of effort and negotiation, the Zoroastrian *jizya* was completely abolished in 1882. This achievement had a major impact on the condition of the Zoroastrian community. The reduction and abolition of the *jizya* relieved Zoroastrians of a significant financial burden and enabled them to

strengthen their economic position. As discrimination and pressure diminished, Zoroastrians were able to assume a more active social role and participate to a greater extent in various social and economic fields. It may therefore be argued that Manekji's success in reducing and abolishing the Zoroastrian *jizya* served as an inspiring model for other religious minorities in Iran and elsewhere. This achievement also strengthened relations between the Indian Parsi community and the Zoroastrians of Iran and encouraged greater cooperation between the two communities.

The Tiyul of the Zoroastrians of Yazd

Tiyul referred to the allocation of a portion of government revenues or agricultural lands to a particular individual or group. Such revenues were granted as remuneration or a special privilege to individuals or communities. During the Qajar period, the *tiyul* system functioned both as a method of governmental financing and as a means of rewarding selected individuals or groups. It enabled prominent individuals and local authorities to benefit from specified sources of revenue.

During the Qajar period, the circumstances of the Zoroastrians of Yazd were shaped by governmental religious and social policies as well as by economic and social pressures. One of the principal challenges confronting Zoroastrians during this period was payment of the *jizya*, which was imposed as a heavy tax on non-Muslim minorities (24). In this context, the role of Manekji Limji Hataria, the prominent Parsi activist and representative of the Bombay Parsi Association, was particularly important. His efforts to improve the circumstances of the Zoroastrians of Yazd and to obtain the *tiyul* of Zoroastrian affairs in the region represented an important turning point in the modern history of Iranian Zoroastrians.

Manekji Limji Hataria's efforts to improve the circumstances of the Zoroastrians of Yazd through the administration of the *tiyul* of Zoroastrian affairs constituted one of his most significant initiatives for reducing discrimination and improving the community's economic and social conditions. These activities demonstrate the influence that social activists and international support could exert on improving the position of religious minorities. Manekji's success not only improved the condition of the Zoroastrians of Yazd but also provided a model for other minority communities in Iran and elsewhere. These developments strengthened relations and cooperation between the Indian Parsis and the Zoroastrians of Iran and contributed to increased cultural and economic interaction between the two communities.

Payment of the Jizya by the Association of Notables

The payment of the *jizya* by the Association of Zoroastrian Notables during the Qajar era constituted an important effort to reduce the fiscal burden imposed upon Iranian Zoroastrians and improve their economic and social conditions. By organizing the payment of the *jizya* and negotiating with government officials, the association played an important role in improving the circumstances of the Zoroastrian community.

The association was established by prominent Zoroastrians and community leaders to defend Zoroastrian rights and interests and contribute to improving their circumstances. One of its principal objectives was to administer and pay the community's *jizya* so as to reduce the financial burden on individual Zoroastrians. The Association of Notables collected and organized financial resources from within the Zoroastrian community to ensure regular payment of the *jizya* (25). The association sought to distribute the fiscal burden equitably among Zoroastrians so that economically vulnerable individuals would face less pressure. It also negotiated with government officials to reduce the amount of the *jizya*, and such negotiations occasionally resulted in reductions in the tax. Regular

payment by the association also increased government officials' satisfaction with the Zoroastrian community and contributed to reducing tensions.

The activities of the Association of Notables strengthened cooperation and mutual assistance among Zoroastrians. Through a heightened sense of collective responsibility, community members worked together to improve their circumstances. The association's success in reducing the fiscal burden and improving conditions also increased the confidence of Zoroastrians in confronting social and economic problems.

Overall, it may be argued that the Association of Zoroastrian Notables played a vital role during the Qajar period in administering and paying the *jizya*. Through the organization of financial resources and negotiation with government authorities, the association contributed to reducing the fiscal burden of the *jizya* and improving the economic and social conditions of Zoroastrians. Its activities demonstrate the potential influence of social organizations in improving the circumstances of minority groups and reducing discrimination. The association's achievements not only improved the position of Zoroastrians but also provided a model for other minority communities in Iran and elsewhere.

Expansion of Economic Relations With Foreign Merchants

The Qajar period constitutes an important era in Iranian history, and economic relations with foreign merchants, including Zoroastrian merchants, played a highly significant role during this time (26). Zoroastrian merchants, as an important commercial group within the region, played a key role in the expansion of trade and economic activity in Qajar Iran.

During the Qajar period, the Iranian Zoroastrian community constituted an influential group within the country's commercial and economic sphere. Through extensive commercial networks, investment in infrastructure, the provision of financial resources, and participation in industry and production, Zoroastrian merchants exerted a considerable influence on the Iranian economy. One of the most important dimensions of Zoroastrian economic activity during the Qajar period was their participation in domestic and foreign trade. These merchants, many of whom were based in major commercial cities such as Yazd, Kerman, and Tehran, established extensive networks that enabled them to play an important role in Iran's trade with Europe and Asia. Through these connections, modern technologies and foreign capital were introduced into Iran, contributing to the country's economic growth (27). Another important sphere of Zoroastrian economic influence was the provision of financial resources to the Qajar government. Through taxation and participation in commercial activity, these merchants contributed to state revenues. Some Zoroastrians also became directly involved in establishing banks and financial institutions. Among the most prominent was Arbab Jamshid Jamshidian, who in approximately 1887–1888 became associated with banking and financial activities supported by Russian capital. Such institutions contributed to financing economic and infrastructural projects and facilitated commerce and capital circulation within Iran. The active presence of Zoroastrians in this field contributed to their emergence as an important group within the Qajar economic system. Zoroastrians were involved not only in trade but also in the development of national infrastructure. They participated in projects involving ports, railways, and communications. One important Zoroastrian figure in this respect was Keykhosrow Shahrokh. As the Zoroastrian representative in the National Consultative Assembly, he undertook significant initiatives aimed at improving the economic and social condition of Zoroastrians as well as promoting national infrastructure. His efforts in developing commercial routes, establishing schools, expanding transportation, and improving Zoroastrian living conditions were among his most important contributions. The activities of

Zoroastrian merchants were not limited to commerce and banking; they also had a substantial impact on industrial and productive development. By providing raw materials and creating consumer markets, these merchants contributed to the expansion of various industries. The importation of diverse products and investment in productive enterprises increased employment and economic growth. Their extensive trading networks facilitated effective connections between domestic producers and international markets, thereby gradually strengthening Iranian industries. The role of Zoroastrians in the Qajar economy can therefore be considered one of the significant factors contributing to the country's economic development during this period. They played an important role not only in commerce and banking but also in economic infrastructure and industrial development (27). Their active economic presence strengthened their position within Iranian society and also contributed to the modernization of the country's financial and commercial structures. A closer examination of the economic role of Zoroastrians in Iran therefore demonstrates that they should be understood not merely as a religious minority but also as one of the important pillars of commerce and economic development during the Qajar era.

Influence of Zoroastrian Merchants Within the Government Apparatus

During the Qajar period, Zoroastrian merchants constituted a prominent and influential commercial group whose influence extended beyond economic affairs into politics and the governmental apparatus. This influence derived from their wealth and commercial experience, their involvement in economic infrastructure, and their international connections. Because Zoroastrian merchants possessed substantial financial resources, they were capable of providing funds required by the government. Such financial relationships could influence governmental decision-making (10). Through participation in different industries and commercial activities, Zoroastrian merchants also became involved in economic decision-making as advisers and administrators. Their experience and knowledge enabled them to influence government economic policies. Their commercial relations with foreign countries also gave them a role in Iranian foreign policy, as their influence on trade relations could indirectly affect the external policies of the Iranian state. Moreover, by providing financial resources, generating employment, and promoting industry and commerce, Zoroastrian merchants contributed significantly to domestic development and were consequently capable of influencing state affairs and governmental institutions. Overall, the influence of Zoroastrian merchants within the governmental apparatus during the Qajar period derived from their economic and political capacities and could have broad effects on state policies and decision-making. Manekji, for example, was one of the most prominent representatives of the Zoroastrian community during the Qajar era. As a well-known merchant and financial administrator, he exerted a substantial influence on Iranian society. His influence during the Qajar period and among Zoroastrians may be identified in several important respects.

He was recognized as a powerful and wealthy merchant. His wealth and authority enabled him to exert greater influence on political and economic matters. He was actively engaged in commerce with foreign countries, particularly European states, and these connections could have had significant implications for Iranian foreign policy. It should also be emphasized that, as one of the representatives of the Zoroastrian community, Manekji sought to protect and strengthen the interests and rights of this religious minority during the Qajar period. He also played an important role in promoting Zoroastrian education and culture. It was likewise during this period that the Zoroastrians of Yazd increasingly established trading houses and expanded their commercial transactions (28).

During the Qajar period, Zoroastrians, particularly with the assistance of the connections and investments of the Indian Parsis, played a much more prominent role in the Iranian economy. This role was especially striking in

comparison with their comparatively limited activities during the Afsharid and Zand periods. Through investments in Iranian economic and infrastructural projects, the Indian Parsis contributed to strengthening the country's economy. They were particularly active in the development of ports, railways, and communication networks. As a prominent merchant, Manekji contributed to the country's economic development. Through investment in various economic fields, including trade and industry, he contributed to employment creation and economic development. As one of the leaders of the Zoroastrian community, he also played an important role in its social and cultural organization. Overall, Manekji was one of the prominent figures of the Qajar era and played an important role both in Qajar politics and in the affairs of the Zoroastrian community, producing wide-ranging effects in these fields.

Conclusion

The Zoroastrians of Yazd, as one of the most prominent Zoroastrian communities in Iran, experienced substantial economic and commercial transformations from the Safavid period to the end of the Qajar era. Their economic circumstances during these periods were characterized by numerous challenges and opportunities. During the Safavid period, following the establishment of Shi'ism as the official religion of Iran, Zoroastrians encountered religious restrictions and pressures. These included the obligation to pay the *jizya*, a poll tax imposed on non-Muslims, as well as various social and cultural restrictions. Nevertheless, because of their skills in commerce, agriculture, and handicrafts, the Zoroastrians of Yazd were able to preserve their economic position to some extent. During the Afsharid and Zand periods, the Zoroastrians of Yazd continued to face religious pressure, although commerce and agriculture remained their principal sources of income. During the Qajar period, their circumstances gradually improved. Although religious pressures persisted, Zoroastrians were able to take advantage of new economic opportunities to strengthen their economic position. The Zoroastrians of Yazd expanded their commercial activities during the Qajar period and made notable progress particularly in the textile industry and textile production. These industries enabled them to increase their income and assume an important role in the regional economy. The Indian Parsis, and Manekji in particular, exerted a major influence on the advancement of Zoroastrian status during this period. Overall, the Qajar era, particularly with the assistance and investment of the Indian Parsis, witnessed the greatest degree of Zoroastrian economic agency. Through their commercial connections and investments, Zoroastrians played a key role in infrastructure development and in strengthening the country's economy. Compared with the Afsharid and Zand periods, which were accompanied by considerable economic and political difficulties, the Qajar era may be regarded, particularly for Zoroastrians, as a period of economic advancement and development.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who helped us carrying out this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

References

1. Tashakkori Bafghi AA. The Constitutional Revolution in Yazd. Yazd: Yazd Studies Center; 1998.
2. Hens T. Financial economics. Tehran: Donya-e Eqtesad Publishing; 2024.
3. Giglio S, Kelly B, Stroebe J. Climate finance. *Annual Review of Financial Economics*. 2021;13(1):15-36.
4. Challoumis C, Eriotis N. A historical analysis of the banking system and its impact on Greek economy. *Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology*. 2024;8(6):1598-617.
5. Chardin J. Chardin's travels. Tehran: Tous Publishing; 1993.
6. Zarrinkoub A. The history of Iran after Islam. Tehran: Amir Kabir; 2000.
7. Afshar I. Monuments of Yazd. Tehran: Society for the National Heritage of Iran; 1995.
8. Eskandar Beg T. The world-adorning history of Abbas. Afshar I, editor. Tehran: Amir Kabir; 2003.
9. Keshavarz A. Transformations of the Zoroastrian community during the Safavid period. *Journal of Iranian History and Culture*. 2013;5(1):78-95.
10. Khaefi, Gholizadeh, Gholizadeh T, Gohar. Divine glory, its transformations, and its continuity until the Safavid era. *Stylistics of Persian Poetry and Prose (Bahar-e Adab)*. 2015;30(8):236-56.
11. Savory R. Iran under the Safavids. Tehran: Markaz Publishing; 1993.
12. Nemiranian K. Zoroastrians of Iran from the advent of Islam to the present. Tehran: Kerman Studies Center; 2008.
13. Mehdipour R. Afsharid Zoroastrians: History and sociology. Tehran: Markaz Publishing; 2008.
14. Moshir al-Dowleh A. Indian Parsis during the Qajar period: A study of history and culture. Tehran: Navid Publishing; 2018.
15. Ghanei S. The Afsharid and Zand dynasties. Tehran: Sahel; Avaye Eshgh; 2008.
16. Soroushian JS. The history of the Zoroastrians of Kerman over the past few centuries. Tehran: Elmi va Farhangi; 1992.
17. Boyce M. A concise history of Zoroastrianism. Tehran: Safi Ali Shah Publishing; 1998.
18. Mohajerani, Shabahang, Amini, Mortazavian. Examining the role of Zoroastrians in the advancement and enrichment of Iranian culture: From the arrival of Islam in Iran to the contemporary period. *Intercultural Studies*. 2019;14(38):65-87.
19. Rahimi F. The economic conditions of Zoroastrians during the Zand period. *Social Research Quarterly*. 2019;3(2):45-60.
20. Amanat A. Pivot of the universe: Karnameh Publishing; 2022.
21. Shahmardan R. The history of Zoroastrians: Zoroastrian sages. Tehran: Faravahar; 1984.
22. Sheikholeslami MH, Amrollahi MT. Indian Parsis in interaction with Iranians. *History of Foreign Relations Quarterly*. 2022;23(90):81-104.
23. Haji Akbari M. Examining the role of Zoroastrians in the Qajar economy with an emphasis on Zoroastrian trading houses. *New History*. 2015(11).
24. Price M. Iran's diverse peoples: A reference sourcebook. Illustrated ed: ABC-CLIO; 2005.
25. Mehrabi Z. The cultural and social conditions of Indian Parsis during the Qajar period [Master's thesis]: University of Tehran; 2017.
26. Shini Gholampour R, Heidari Bani D. A study of the construction methods of dakhmas among Indian Parsis and Iranian Zoroastrians. *Armanshahr Architecture and Urban Development*. 2021;14(35):115-31.

27. Mehrabadi M. Iranian women as portrayed by European travel writers. Tehran: Afarinesh; 2000.
28. Dadbakhsh M, Raeisossadat T. The economic role of Zoroastrian merchants and trading houses during the Qajar period. Iranian Studies. 2021;6(19):7-24.