

Designing Identities through Faith and Enterprise: The Parsi Influence on the Cultural and Built Environment of South Gujarat

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Abstract: The Parsis of India represent one of the most unique narratives of cultural migration and integration in human history. Originating from Persia and finding refuge in Gujarat, this community not only preserved the spiritual essence of Zoroastrianism but also wove it into the social, architectural, and economic fabric of their adopted homeland. This paper explores the multifaceted impact of the Parsi community on the cultural, architectural, and industrial development of South Gujarat, with particular reference to Surat, Navsari, and Udwada. It examines how Zoroastrian faith shaped Gujarati culture and built environments, while simultaneously being influenced by local customs and aesthetics. The study also highlights the Parsis' contribution to India's modernization—in commerce, industry, education, and philanthropy—and the reasons behind their contemporary demographic and social decline. Finally, it proposes the establishment of a Zoroastrian Cultural and Architectural Institution at Udwada as a sustainable intervention to rejuvenate Parsi identity, heritage, and community life.

Keywords: Zoroastrianism, Parsi Architecture, Cultural Identity, Udwada, Heritage Regeneration

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