

Asha Vahishta Seminar #5: Synopsis

During the fifth colloquium of the series, the participants interrogated the role of the priesthood. Who is a priest, what the role of priest should be, and how priests fit into the concept of faith and fellowship, were some of the themes. The role of prayer, rituals and traditions, were also critiqued.

Participant discussion revolved around how and for what reason, the institution of the priesthood must be reformed. It was pointed out, that in focusing on the issue of priest, the role of an officiant for religious life, ceremony, and community leadership, were in essence being discussed.

Consensus seemed to indicate that the figure of priest must be that of a scripturally informed, but also emotionally involved individual. With regard to the latter, many participants expressed the desire to witness a priest who could act as both, a ceremonial figurehead, but also a pastoral counsellor.

Community leadership via priesthood was conceived broadly as fostering fellowship. This might be through the promotion of an education directive to better inform the community of the tenants and articles of faith. It might also involve a sermonizing of sorts, or brief addressing of the laity before and after rituals.

The historic role of priests, and their contemporary plight, was also discussed. It was mentioned that for the continued development and existence of Zoroastrianism, a reformed priesthood with a contemporary outlook, was necessary.

This does not necessarily mean a removal or reform of rituals, prayers, and tradition. But it does mean that a reformed priesthood approaches all these aspects from the position of a contemporary adherent of the diasporic community. In this way, priests remain rooted within, and to, their location, their era, and their community.