

A CRITICAL AND PROCESS DOCUMENTATION THESIS PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DESIGN  
EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY OF ART + DESIGN

# REIMAGINING RITUALS

Design's role in amplifying cultural Identity

Leea Contractor | BDes (Communication), Indus Valley School of Art & Architecture, 2017.



# **Reimagining Rituals**

Design's role in amplifying cultural Rituals

Leea Contractor

BDes (Communication), Indus Valley School of Art &  
Architecture, 2017.

A CRITICAL AND PROCESS DOCUMENTATION  
THESIS PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE

OF

MASTER OF DESIGN

EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY OF ART + DESIGN  
2023



© Leea Nadeer Contractor, 2023

# | Abstract

My research focuses on the *Parsi*<sup>1</sup> diaspora, its disengagement with tradition, its lack of access to and its desire to conduct and participate in their cultural rituals. Employing the methods of autoethnography, participatory research, and cultural design, my research explores the cultural practices of the *Parsi* community to understand the current role that rituals play in their lives and the barriers to performing these rituals. I discovered evidence of the community's desire to make the steps behind *Parsi* rituals and their significance more accessible. I focused on developing a digital application (app) to express and explore responses to my research findings. This app serves as a repository and almanack that will allow community members to access rituals and traditions by disseminating information about how the rituals are conducted, the materials used, and the events and beliefs upon which they are based.

<sup>1</sup> The Parsis are an ethnoreligious community that were exiled from their homeland Iran, due to the Arab invaders, and settled in the subcontinent of India and Pakistan.



# **| Table of Contents**

<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Land Acknowledgements</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Dedication</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Key Words</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>Note To The Reader</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Who are the Parsis?	<b>1</b>
Diasporic Migration	<b>1</b>
Why are Rituals Important	<b>2</b>
<b>Cultural Identity</b>	<b>4</b>
Diaspora	<b>5</b>
<b>Rituals</b>	<b>9</b>
Rituals and their importance	<b>9</b>
Zoroastrian and Parsi Rituals	<b>11</b>
<b>Role of the designer in society</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>My Practice</b>	<b>18</b>
Outcomes: Knowledge gained from my research	<b>18</b>
Outputs: Design results and experiments	<b>19</b>
My Community of Practice	<b>20</b>
<b>The Investigation</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Design Iteration &amp; Exploration</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Development of the project</b>	<b>41</b>
Questionnaire	<b>41</b>
Ritual Talk	<b>42</b>
<b>Reimagining Rituals - the app</b>	<b>45</b>
The Personas	<b>45</b>
The Structure of the App	<b>49</b>

# I Table of Contents

Features of the App	54
The Calendar	54
The Repository	56
Community Building	58
Your Account	59
<b>Full Circle: Conclusions</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Future Directions</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>72</b>
Research Ethics Certification	72
Questionnaire	73
Focus Group Questions	82
Focus Group Sessions	83
Existing calendars	85
Visual Research	86
Visual Ethnography	87

# List of Figures

Fig. 1.	<i>The World Zoroastrian Congress, 2022.</i> <i><a href="https://wzc2022.nyc/photo/">https://wzc2022.nyc/photo/</a></i>	7
Fig. 2.	<i>K.E. Eduljee, Zoroastrian Heritage, 2005. <a href="https://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/navjote/index.htm">https://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/navjote/index.htm</a></i>	12
Fig. 3.	<i>Left: Lemon tree planted for the Madavsaro ceremony.</i> <i>Right: Printout of instructions found at a wedding from Zoroastrians.net, 2022.</i>	13
Fig. 4.	<i>My use of Dorst's 9-step process of contextualising the problem, 2023.</i>	17
Fig. 5.	<i>An example of my pocket calendar, marked up by my mother with important dates, 2023.</i>	18
Fig. 6.	<i>Navjote Sticker, 2022.</i>	19
Fig. 7.	<i>A Ses, 2022.</i>	23
Fig. 8.	<i>Stills from the prompt Transportation, 2022</i>	24
Fig. 9.	<i>Methods of Culture-Centred Design, 2023.</i>	25
Fig. 10.	<i>The Parsi Pack, 2021.</i>	27
Fig. 11.	<i>Chalk stamps from Pakistan, 2021.</i>	28
Fig. 12.	<i>The use of The Parsi Pack kit, 2021.</i>	29
Fig. 13.	<i>Crazy 8 Brainstorming results, 2022.</i>	30
Fig. 14.	<i>The Lifetime - Repository list, 2021</i>	31
Fig. 15.	<i>The Lifetime, 2022.</i>	32
Fig. 16.	<i>The Sticker Pack, 2022.</i>	33
Fig. 17.	<i>The Iterative process of the Chitti Lakhvanu part of The Sticker Pack, 2022</i>	34
Fig. 18.	<i>The Pop-up - The Ceremony, 2022.</i>	35
Fig. 19.	<i>The Pop-up, 2022.</i>	36
Fig. 20.	<i>The Open Source, 2022.</i>	37
Fig. 21.	<i>Left: Comments to the post on a Facebook page: World Wide Zoroastrians, 2022.</i> <i>Right: Comments on The Open Source link, 2022.</i>	38
Fig. 22.	<i>The Calendar, 2023.</i>	39

# List of Figures

<i>Fig. 23. The Calendar, 2023.</i>	40
<i>Fig. 24. Questionnaire: Ages of the responders, 2022.</i>	41
<i>Fig. 25. Questionnaire: results to the question, What do you know about Parsi rituals? 2022.</i>	42
<i>Fig. 26. Focus Group Sessions, 2022.</i>	44
<i>Fig. 27. Personas, 2022.</i>	45
<i>Fig. 28. User Journey Map, 2022.</i>	46
<i>Fig. 29. User Journey Map, 2022.</i>	47
<i>Fig. 30. Wireframe, 2023.</i>	48
<i>Fig. 31. Reimagining Rituals: Start-up questions, 2023.</i>	49
<i>Fig. 32. Reimagining Rituals: Start-up questions, 2023.</i>	50
<i>Fig. 33. Reimagining Rituals: Start-up questions, 2023.</i>	51
<i>Fig. 34. Reimagining Rituals: Start-up questions, 2023.</i>	52
<i>Fig. 35. Reimagining Rituals: Start-up questions, 2023.</i>	53
<i>Fig. 36. Shenshai Calendar, 2022.</i>	54
<i>Fig. 37. Reimagining Rituals: Calendar section, 2023.</i>	55
<i>Fig. 38. Reimagining Rituals: Rituals section, 2023.</i>	56
<i>Fig. 39. Reimagining Rituals: Ritual section - Navroze, 2023.</i>	57
<i>Fig. 40. Reimagining Rituals: Community Section, 2023.</i>	58
<i>Fig. 41. Reimagining Rituals: Community Section, 2023.</i>	60
<i>Fig. 42. Representation of the shift in the Parsi community through the Reimagining Rituals app, 2023.</i>	62



# | Acknowledgements

To my parents, Anita and Nadeer Contractor, without whom none of this would have been possible.

To my sisters Zara and Cyra Contractor, who laughed and cried with me throughout this process, and for their constant support and inspiration.

A special thank you to my sister Zara, who opened her home to me during a pivotal point in my life. I am incredibly grateful for her valuable and constructive critiques, advice and encouragement.

Thank you to my supervisor Dr Bonne Zabolotney who raised the bar higher each day, challenging me to get through and believing in my work. I am incredibly grateful to have your wise and kind words that have supported, guided and challenged me during this process.

Thanks to Dr Sophie Gaur for your guidance, motivation and advice that offered fresh perspectives.

Thank you to my external reviewer, Jennifer Rittner, for your feedback, questions and encouragement.

To Cameron Neat, Celeste Martin, Craig Badke, Chris Jones, Dimeji Onafuwa, Katherine Gillieson, Keith Doyle, Laura Kozak, Louise St. Pierre, Manuhua Barcham, Reyhan Yazdani, and Robin Mitchell-Cranfield, whose instruction and support was invaluable.

To Ava Master and Jaime Wright, for wading through a sea of text, looking for stray commas and misspelt words.

To Alex Sturman, for your help and constant kind and motivating words

Thank you to my cohort, especially Giulia Borba and Aamir Rangwala, For the constant inspiration and incredible moments we shared in school and online.

To all my participants for their time, input and feedback.

# | Land Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge that this research has been conducted on the stolen and uncaded traditional territories of the Coast Salish people, the xʷməθkʷə́yəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlílʷətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. Uncaded means that this land was never surrendered, relinquished or handed over in any way.

I am grateful for being on these lands and for being able to conduct my practice and research here.

## **I Dedication**

In loving memory of my Grandparents:  
(Late) Dinaz & Minoo Bamjee

## **I Key Words**

Zoroastrian rituals, Parsi rituals, Identity, Cultural Preservation, Zoroastrian Diaspora, Culture, Rituals, Design for Belonging, Cultural amplification, Communication Design, UI/UX Design,



# Glossary

**Belonging:** This is fundamental to how humankind organises itself and is integral to our physical and mental health. A sense of belonging allows us to “manage stress and other behavioural issues” and, in turn, makes us more resilient and strengthens our coping mechanisms during times of hardship (Theisen, 2019).

**Community:** A sense of community is a feeling that members (of a community) have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to being together. (McMillan & Chavis, 1986)

**Cultural Identity:** A critical element in understanding ourselves and fostering a sense of belonging with others who share our heritage, traditions and values within an ever-changing context that is rooted in the past but continues to evolve.

**Diaspora:** A network of actual or hypothetical connections between dispersed people whose feeling of community is maintained through various interactions and associations, such as kinship, trade, travel, a common culture, language, ritual, scripture, print, and electronic media (Peters, 1999).

**Irani Zoroastrian:** The Zoroastrians that remained in Iran during the Arab invasion in the 7<sup>th</sup> CE.

**Parsi:** The Parsis are an ethno-religious community exiled from their homeland Iran due to the Arab invaders, and settled in the subcontinent of India and Pakistan.

**Ritual:** This is an act done in a particular situation and in the same way every time that it has imbued with symbolism and meaning (Ozenc, 2016).

**Wicked Problems:** A complex problem that, aside from being vague and unclear, often deals with incomplete or contradictory information and requirements that are regularly changing. Moreover, wicked problems do not have one clear-cut way of tackling substantial societal problems; in fact, there are a variety of ways to do so, depending on the point of view one takes when approaching them (Buchanan, 2009).

**Zoroastrian:** The Zoroastrians are the followers of the Persian Prophet, Spitman Zarathustra, who lived in Ancient Iran in 1200 BCE.

# I Note To The Reader

Dear Readers,

Before you begin, I would like to express that I am by no means, an authority on *Parsi* culture or rituals; nor am I taking any kind of a religious standpoint or commenting in any way that I am.

What I am doing is simply creating a way for existing rituals to be easily carried out by the youth of the *Parsi* diaspora.

Thank you.

# Introduction

## Who are the Parsis?

The *Zoroastrians* are the followers of the Persian Prophet, Zarathustra, who lived in 1200 BCE. From 550 BCE, for the next thousand years, *Zoroastrianism* "flourished as the imperial religion of three great Iranian empires: the Achaemenians, Parthians and Sassanians" (Godrej & Mistree, front flap, 2002). *Zoroastrianism* rose to such prominence that it later influenced several major world religions, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Bekhrad, 2017).

It was not until the 7th CE that the dominance of *Zoroastrianism* came to an end when the Arabs invaded Persia, forcing the community to flee to the mountains of Khorasan (Godrej & Mistree, 2002, p. 155), where they continued to survive for the next two centuries. Finally, in the 10th century CE, a handful of *Zoroastrians* set sail to Sanjan, the western coast of mainland India, where they came to be known as *Parsis* (Mistree, 2002, p.413).

<sup>2</sup> A document that was compiled in verse form, in 1599 CE, by Mobed Bahman Kaikobad Sanjana. It was regarded as the most important historic narrative in Parsi Zoroastrian literature, as it meticulously describes the legendary migration of the Zoroastrians from Iran to India.

It is interesting to note that aside from the *Qissa-I Sanjan*<sup>2</sup>, there is no other documented history of the *Parsis* following their arrival in Sanjan. The "paucity of material available for the early period of Zoroastrianism" (Mistree, 2002, p.414) makes this period a mystery. It is also why the *Zoroastrians* depended entirely on the oral transmission of their religion and culture.

In the 17th century, some of the *Parsi* community settled in Bombay due to the job prospects afforded by the British East India Company. Over the next two centuries, their prominence grew in the subcontinent as the diaspora spread as far as Karachi in modern-day Pakistan.

## Diasporic Migration

John R. Hinnells identifies two main migration phases constituting the 'modern *Zoroastrian* diaspora'. The first was in the mid-nineteenth century, and the second occurred in the second half of the twentieth century. While the first *Zoroastrian* diaspora came from India around 1850 CE and settled in China, Sindh, Britain and East Africa due to trade in the British Empire, those of the second phase came from Pakistan, East Africa, Iran, as well as India and settled in Britain, Canada, USA and Australia, typically for education, career development and for leaving hostile regimes (Hinnells, 2005).

Throughout these waves of migration, the *Parsis* have preserved the crux of the *Zoroastrian* religion through storytelling and oral communication to pass down knowledge from generation to generation (Shahzadi & Mistree, 1998). However, as the diaspora expands in North America, many rituals that were once frequently practised by the *Parsi* community in India and

# Introduction

Pakistan are being forgotten or abandoned. Often this is because of a lack of accessibility to the specific materials needed to perform certain rituals, or, more often, because information about these rituals is scattered and often lies only with the older generation of *Parsis*, who remain the gatekeepers of this knowledge.

I felt this extreme sense of disconnection from my community on the 21st of March 2022, which was my first *Navroze* (Persian New Year) away from home. While living in Karachi, I did not think that the rituals we performed were of great significance. My mother or aunts typically conducted them, and I would mainly participate passively. Being so far away from home, I began to miss participating in *Navroze* and felt increasingly disconnected from my culture.

I understood that if I wanted to continue celebrating *Navroze*, I would have to learn the steps to a ritual I have been a part of all my life. Several calls to my mother to remind me of the steps prompted me to delve deeper into my problem.

My research has revealed that several young adults in the *Parsi* community know our rituals but do not perform them, as they do not know the steps required. In other cases, the rituals performed appear complicated, and many feel daunted by the idea of performing them independently. For those who know the steps, their significance is unknown, causing them to feel disconnected from the actions taken when conducting the rituals.

## ■ Why are Rituals Important

<sup>3</sup> A Zoroastrian cleric of a particular rank. Unlike an *Ervad*, a *mobed* is qualified to serve as celebrant priest at the *Yasna* ceremony and other higher liturgical ceremonies.

*Mobed*<sup>3</sup> Fariborz Sohrab Shahzadi (1998) says, 'Rituals are a set of practices, which when experienced and accomplished in a given order, become the vehicle through which a person can relate to the unseen spiritual world. The enactment of a ritual enables one to maintain a religious link with the divine and physical worlds'. While Shahzadi expresses the importance of rituals through a spiritual and religious lens, Dr Susie Wise (2022) takes a more secular view of rituals. She talks about how to design for belonging, so that community members feel a sense of inclusion. She points out that we can shape a person's sense of belonging to a community by borrowing from design tools and thinking. This includes rituals, which, at their core, offer to solidify one's sense of identity and to belong in a community (Ozenc, 2016).

While subsequent chapters take a deeper look at the importance of ritual, to contextualise my research, let us first look at the idea of rituals and a sense of belonging.



# I Introduction

According to Angela Theisen (2019) of the Mayo Clinic, a "sense of belonging is fundamental to the way humankind organises itself" and is integral to our physical and mental health. A sense of belonging allows us to "manage stress and other behavioural issues" and, in turn, makes us more resilient and strengthens our coping mechanisms during times of hardship (Theisen, 2019).

A community forms the basis of this type of inclusion and belonging. I use the term a 'sense of community' as proposed by psychologists McMillan and Chavis:

A sense of community is a feeling that members (of a community) have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to being together. (Chavis, McMillan, 1986)

Enabling access to rituals is one of many ways to foster a greater sense of community amongst the youth of the Parsi diaspora and make them feel more connected to their roots and culture and, in turn, to one another.

The importance of cultural amplification through ritual design has been a topic of discussion for sociologists, anthropologists, and ethnographers for some time now.

Ritual design encompasses designing ways to support our existing or lost rituals and make them more livable and doable (Ozenc, 2016). Design's role in cultural amplification is relatively new, but with the expanding role of the designer in society, and the growing field of ritual design, there is a strong case for the cross-over of these disciplines. I situate my thesis research within this discourse and am excited by the prospect of contributing to this emerging field.

# | Cultural Identity

In his influential essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Stuart Hall (2021) shares two very distinct definitions of cultural identity. The first expresses how we can be seen as 'one-people' through our shared history, ancestry and culture. Through this lens, cultural identity provides a "stable, unchanging and continuous frame of reference and meaning" (Hall, 2021, p. 223) through the ebb and flow of historical change. Hall proposes a second definition, which he views as superior. This interpretation recognises both the similarities we share with other individuals, as well as the differences. In this view, cultural identity is not fixed and rooted in the past, but instead, it undergoes constant transformation. "It belongs to the future as much as the past" (Hall, 2021, p. 226).

JS Phinney (1996) cites 'Cultural Identity' as a complex cluster of factors, "including self-labelling, a sense of belonging, positive evaluation, preference for the group, ethnic interest and knowledge, and involvement in activities associated with the group." (Phinney, 1996, p.144).

If we overlay these definitions atop one another, cultural identity (for the purpose of this research) becomes a critical element in understanding ourselves and fostering a sense of belonging with others who share our heritage, traditions and values within an ever-changing context that is rooted in the past but continues to evolve.

The notion of a 'sense of community' was introduced by Seymour Bernard Sarason (1977), who stated that a sense of community is central to an individual's well-being and it reflects "the sense that one belongs in and is meaningfully part of a larger collectivity ..." (Sarason, 1977, p. 41). He argued that it should be the defining principle of community research and action.

Before diving deeper into a sense of community, it is important to define community. Whereas the root of the word comes from the Latin word 'communis', which translates into what is "public, general, shared by all or many". Community or 'communitas' refers to fellowship or to the concept of belonging (Esposito, 2010, p. 9).

So a feeling of belonging to a community ultimately speaks to a sense of connection and sharing, which was then condensed to the phrase 'a sense of community'.

Psychologists McMillan and Chavis proposed that the four elements to identify a sense of community are:

- Reinforcement: integration and fulfilment of needs,

# Cultural Identity

- Membership: the feeling of belonging or sharing a sense of personal relatedness,
- Influence: mattering, making a difference to a group and of the group mattering to its members,
- Shared emotional connection.  
(McMillan & Chavis, 1986, Pg. 12)

Their definition illustrates that the very idea of community has more to do with cultivating a sense of belonging and connection than with spatiality and supports the origins of the word 'common'.

In *The Psychology of Belonging*, researcher and psychologist Kelly-Ann Allen states, "As a human species, we share one thing in common: our need to belong. When that need is not met, we can see a devastating impact on the human psyche." She continues, "we find much of our meaning, identity, relevance and satisfaction in life through our sense of belonging to groups." This can be at family, community and societal levels.

In his paper *Sense of Identity and Community: A Case Study of Kashmiri Diaspora Abroad*, Zahid Hussain says, "when an individual or a group of individuals migrate from their region to another, the identity is not lost, but the sense of identity and community prevails and is consciously kept intact to remain socially anchored with their parent community. The feeling of oneness with their community is necessary to ensure their social and psychological stability." (Hussain, 2019, p. 35).

It is this prevailing sense of identity, community and belonging that I want to explore within my context as part of the *Parsi* community and, more specifically, as part of the *Parsi* diaspora that has grown beyond the Indian subcontinent.

## Diaspora

The term 'diaspora' has its roots in the Greek language and stands for migration and colonisation in ancient Greece. However, it only entered the social sciences vernacular after the 1980s. According to Judith Shuval, this was because "before the 1960s, immigrant groups were generally expected to shed their ethnic identity and assimilate to local norms" (Shuval, 2000, p. 44). It was only in the 1970s that the concept of diaspora began to gain popularity after it was noted that social models based on assimilation did not work and "policy changes in some societies permitted or even encouraged immigrants to maintain various aspects of their ethnic tradition" (Shuval, 2000, p. 44).

# | Cultural Identity

The term diaspora has now come to suggest “a network of actual or hypothetical connections between dispersed people whose feeling of community is maintained through a variety of interactions and connections, such as kinship, trade, travel, a common culture, language, ritual, scripture, print and electronic media” (Peters, 1999).

James Clifford, an interdisciplinary scholar, says, “A diaspora connects multiple communities of a dispersed population....Minority and migrant populations share forms of longing, memory, and identification.” (Clifford, 1994, p. 304).

In *Diaspora and Cultural Memory*, Anh Hua proposes that theorising the notion of diaspora leads to the discussion of identification and affiliation, the reinvention of cultural traditions in the new world order, and the construction of hybrid identities, as well as cultural and linguistic practices, and the building of communities (amongst other concepts) (Hua, 2005).

She stresses that “it is crucial to remember that diasporic identities and communities are not fixed, rigid, or homogeneous, but are instead fluid, always changing, and heterogeneous.”(Hua, 2005, p.193).

While diasporic identities are constantly evolving, “diasporic peoples find themselves in closer relations with their old countries in ways now made possible by modern transportation, communication, and labour-migration technologies” (Clifford, 1994, p. 304). A viewpoint shared by anthropologist Paul Basu (2007), who says that “in the era of cyber-space, the diasporic communities have more tools and resources to keep the memories of the homeland alive.” (Castillo Muñoz, 2021, p. 344).

These views of diaspora, community and communication prompted me to consider the potential of various forms of media and contemporary tools that could facilitate the *Parsi* diaspora to connect not only to each other but to their culture.

Since the second half of the twentieth century, Zoroastrians have spread across the globe and have settled in multiple countries such as North America, Australia, Germany, India, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Russia and Singapore. Each of the countries mentioned above has formed their own local Zoroastrian associations. To connect the Zoroastrian diaspora worldwide, two major associations/organisations have also formed (amongst several smaller, local organisations), namely ‘The World Zoroastrian Organisation’ and ‘The Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America, a charitable organisation, formed to coordinate amongst twenty-seven Zoroastrian associations in the United States and Canada.



# Cultural Identity

Last year, in an attempt to connect, teach and impart knowledge about our religion, tradition, culture and rituals, the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York (ZAGNY) and FEZANA hosted the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress, which was attended by nearly 1200 participants from 16 countries.



Fig. 1. The World Zoroastrian Congress, 2022. <https://wzc2022.nyc/photo/>

# | Cultural Identity

During the congress, the President of FEZANA and Congress Co-Chair, Arzan Sam Wadia, shared that today more than two third of the Zoroastrian youth are born in the diaspora. Scattered far and wide, it has become increasingly difficult for them to meet others who follow their faith and traditions, leaving them with a feeling of a loss of identity.

This loss of identity is being combated by Youth Congress' which are held every four years, with the first taking place over 25 years ago. Over the years, these congresses have brought together hundreds of Zoroastrian youth, allowing them to network with people they may not have otherwise met and to work together and overcome the challenges we face as a community (WZYC, 2020).

While these organisations continue to provide educational resources and platforms or events for Zoroastrians (and thereby, Parsis) to connect, there still seems to be a desire, particularly amongst the youth, to connect to Parsi culture and traditions on a day-to-day basis.

Particularly when taking educator and researcher Georgiou's perspective, diasporic identities depend on shared myths and memories, as well as upon a sense of belonging in an imagined community which has some continuity and relevance across time and space (Georgiou, 2006).

These shared 'myths and memories' can be explored through many avenues, such as language, food or storytelling; however, after considering several different aspects, I have chosen to explore rituals. The following chapter elaborates on the importance of rituals and forms the basis of my exploration.

# Rituals

## Rituals and their importance

- 4 A red paste, made from Vermilion powder mixed in water, is used to make a mark on the forehead. This has been adopted from the Indian tradition rather than the Iranian tradition (Munshi & Stewart, 2002).
- 5 A handmade bead garland, typically strung on the main entrance of a home. This is another example of a custom adopted from Indian traditions.
- 6 When you cleanse the body with a mixture of milk, rose petals and uncooked rice grains.
- 7 A desert made from semolina.
- 8 Lentils and rice.
- 9 A traditional candle is used when praying. typically it is a short glass partly filled with water topped with oil, with a long wick held by a metallic clip or a floating 'kakrow' on a cork float.
- 10 The birth anniversary of Zarathushtra.

I moved to Vancouver in the summer of 2021. The excitement of moving to a new place was underscored by feeling disconnected from my community. While my family was never overly religious, many *Parsi* rituals were seamlessly woven into our lives: We stamped chalk outside our doors and put *Til*<sup>4</sup> on our foreheads on special occasions. There were *torans*<sup>5</sup> strung up in doorways and *doodh phool*<sup>6</sup> baths on birthdays. We ate *ravo*<sup>7</sup> and *daal chawal*<sup>8</sup>, lit *divo*<sup>9</sup> and came together to celebrate.

I never thought about these practices. They just seemed to 'happen'. It was only after moving away from home that I felt a loss of these rituals, particularly around my birthday, *Navroze* and *Khordad Saal*<sup>10</sup>. I struggled to maintain a connection to my roots: a theme that kept surfacing in the early days of my Masters' program.

As I delved further into the concept of rituals, I found growing importance placed on them in today's society, specifically about discussions around the fragmentation of social cohesion, the loss of values, and the search for cultural identity (Wulf et al., 2010). They are increasingly seen as a vessel through which the gap between an individual and their communities and cultures can be bridged as they offer a sense of security and belonging at times of uncertainty.

I realised this was something I was subconsciously clinging to, and I tried to unpack why rituals were suddenly so important to me. They provided comfort and familiarity, yes, but it went further than just a set of practice that I would perform.

Kursat Ozenc, a design scholar and practitioner who co-created the *Ritual Design Lab* (a design + research initiative), defines a ritual as an act done in a particular context and in the same way each time that it is then imbued with symbolism and significance. The meaning might not be obvious or even seem irrational to others, as I am sure many of the ones I performed did, but as Ozenc pointed out, they did provide the ritual performer, me, with a spark of meaning (Ozenc, 2016).

While for me, some of this meaning could be said to be spiritual or even religious—Shahzadi & Mistree's definition of rituals is “a set of practices, which when experienced and accomplished in a given set order, become the vehicle through which a person can relate to the unseen spiritual world.” (Shahzadi & Mistree, 1998) – I felt more inclined towards the idea that rituals at their core offer to solidify one's sense of identity and to belong in a community (Ozenc, 2016).



# I Rituals

It is interesting to note that Rashna Writer, author of *Contemporary Zoroastrians*, expresses how a major difference between the *Irani* and *Parsi Zoroastrians* is that the former places emphasis on the 'philosophy' of *Zarathustra* (prophet), while the latter show a great propensity for rituals of *Zoroastrianism*, through which 'their sense of cohesiveness and community was in turn enhanced' (Writer, 1994, pg 68).

This is a sentiment that I strongly relate to. It was this disconnected feeling that I was hoping to counter with my research on rituals, but it was not just unpacking the role of rituals but the role they play in a diasporic setting.

According to immigration policy specialist Marc R Rosenblum and Daniel J. Tichenor, professor of Political Science, "Anthropological analysis has predominantly been about ritual in its "natural setting. In the natural setting, the beliefs and concerns underlying the ritual, indeed the very substances and paraphernalia of a performance, are all rooted in the context in which the ritual takes place."

However, they go on to say that rituals are pivotal in the context of cultural reconstruction and revitalisation, particularly where a former cultural order has to be renewed or reconstructed in response to the impact of disruptive change (Rosenblum & Tichenor, 2018).

This can be taken in the context of migration. Rosenblum and Tichenor (2018, p. 221) continue to say, "it is necessary...to examine the ways in which a ritual becomes "naturalised" in a new setting."

They warn us against "transferred rituals solely as a vehicle for boundary marking", an idea shared by Mark Johnson and Pnina Werbner, who say, "Ritual translocation into the diaspora is not simply about ethnic boundary making processes. Rather, ritual as embodied practice ritual effects cultural renewal and innovation ... reconciles past with present and reconstitutes a sense of home and personal integrity in the face of rupture and disintegration." (Johnson & Werbner, 2010).

Therefore when not just replicated but embodied, a ritual is distinguished from habit and routine because it involves awareness, consciousness and intentionality. I noticed that in practising *Parsi* rituals in a new context, I became more aware of my actions and more intentional and conscious about the meaning and symbolism of the actions performed. This was increasingly apparent when I looked for alternatives or substitutes for the materials typically used in rituals back home. In the event that a specific object was unavailable, I found myself researching the symbolism of the object so that I could use a suitable substitute. I felt this understanding

# Rituals

gave the ritual more meaning. While in a cultural context where these rituals were natural, I never questioned the symbolism and meaning. It was just a set of things that were ‘done’. Recreating these rituals for myself in Vancouver, far away from the original context, I was compelled to understand more about each ritual, which in turn strengthened my sense of connection to my community.

Shahzadi & Mistree explain that a successful ritual, when understood and correctly performed, gives the participant an experience of happiness and harmony in both the physical and spiritual world. (Shahzadi & Mistree, 1998)

As I noticed how much I craved this cultural connection, I wondered if others had also felt the same urge. I began to ask other youth of the *Parsi* diaspora how they felt, and this need to feel connected through rituals seemed to be a common theme.

This was further proven through a questionnaire I conducted at the 12<sup>th</sup> World Zoroastrian Congress in July 2022. The overall results reveal that the youth of the *Parsi* diaspora continue to struggle with connecting with their community and roots, mainly due to the disconnect they feel with conducting our rituals: 4.3% of respondents expressed that they do not know anything about *Parsi* rituals at all; 38.3% said they know of the rituals, but rely on the knowledge of someone else to tell them how to carry out the specific steps.

I then conducted several focus group sessions with those participants that answered my questionnaire. From the focus groups, my participants expressed the immense importance rituals have on connecting them to the community and their connections to our rituals. Even though each participant expressed their eagerness to conduct these rituals, a major factor as to why they were unable to do so was not only the lack of knowledge about the steps to take but what each of them represents and means.

## Zoroastrian and Parsi Rituals

In his chapter *The Bāj-dharnā (Drōn Yašt) and its Place in Zoroastrian Rituals*, *Ervade*<sup>11</sup> Dr Ramiyar P. Karanjia defines *Zoroastrian* rituals in an inherently religious light and as ones that can only be performed by *Zoroastrian* priests.

<sup>11</sup> A Zoroastrian cleric of a particular rank (lower than a Mobed).

In contrast, Shehnaz N. Munshi and Sarah Stewart, the authors of *Observances of the Faithful*, divide the *Parsi* rituals into three categories:

- Celebratory,
- Apotropaic (i.e. having the power to avert evil influences or bad luck)
- Rites of passage.

# Rituals

Tanaz Karai, a youth member of ZAGNY, explains in her article *Parsi Ceremonies & Rituals* that *Parsis* have rituals that range over an individual's lifetime. They start from when a person is in their mother's womb and continue throughout their life till they eventually depart from the earth (Karai, 2013).

These different categories beg the question: which of these are more culturally rooted verses those which have an amalgamation of both religious and cultural? Here is where there is a bit of a distinction between *Zoroastrian Irani* rituals and *Zoroastrian Parsi* rituals. The religious rituals amongst the two remain the same, but as a result of the *Parsis* fleeing Iran in the 10th century, they adopted many customs and rituals from the subcontinent while maintaining many of their existing rituals (Karai, 2013).

The *Navjote* ceremony (when a *Zarathushti* child is initiated into the faith) is an example of the former. Here the child is invested with the sacred *Sudreh* and *Kusti* (religious shirt and sacred girdle) with the appropriate recitation of prayers by a qualified *Zoroastrian* priest. In contrast, a birthday ritual that is conducted is more culturally rooted.

Here, the birthday child bathes with milk, rose petals, rose water and rice. After this, the *sagan* is performed for the child who is standing on a *patlo*, which has unique chalk designs stamped on them. A red *Tili* is put on his/her forehead, and rice is stuck on it. The child is made to wear a flower garland as a symbol of purity, beauty, peace, and love (this was adopted by

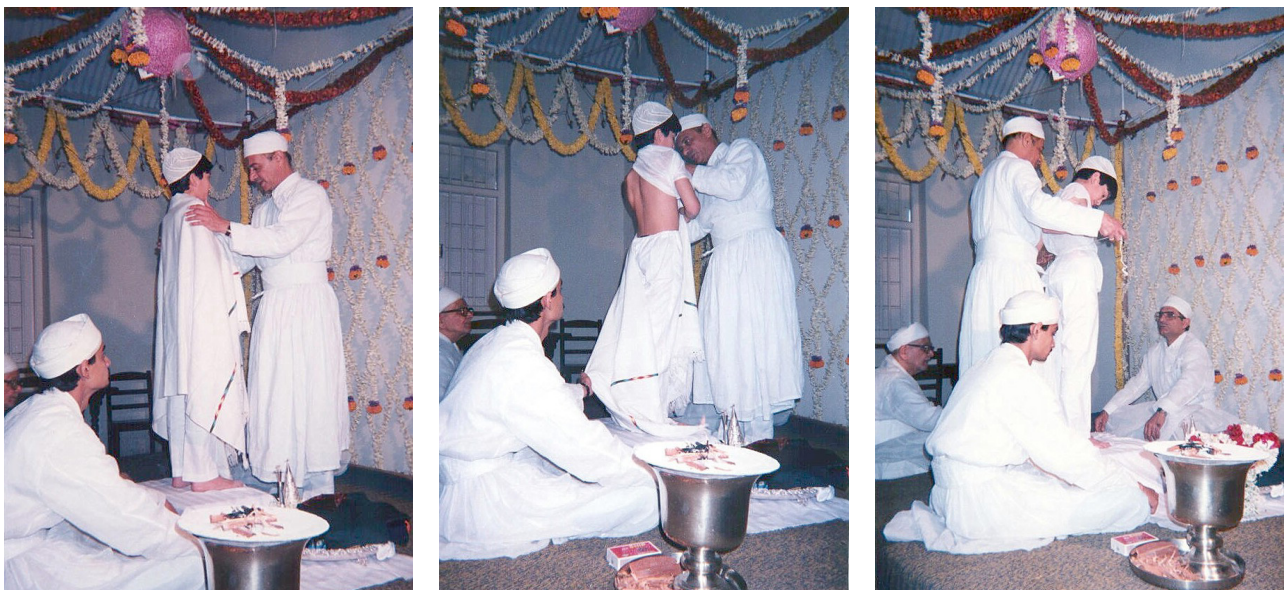


Fig. 2. K.E. Eduljee, *Zoroastrian Heritage*, 2005. <https://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/navjote/index.htm>

# Rituals

the *Parsis* from Indian culture). Furthermore, the child is presented with gifts from his/her family.

In *A Zoroastrian Tapestry: Art, Religion & Culture*, editors Godrej & Punthakey Mistree state that the crux of the *Zoroastrian* religion and culture has been preserved through oral communication and passed down from generation to generation. Therefore, there is a lack of access to formally recorded information about many *Parsi* rituals and customs; or at least, the information is not readily accessible.

In August of 2022, I attended a several-day-long *Parsi* wedding in Richmond, BC, where I observed how the wedding rituals were conducted. I noted how some customs were adapted and adjusted to the comfort of the family. As there are many pre-wedding rituals, each of which has specific steps to follow, the bride printed out the instructions for her *Madavsaro* ceremony (wherein a mango sapling is planted outside the door of the bride and groom's house- a ritual that symbolises fertility), which she found online, in the hopes that it would help her mother, who was conducting the ritual. I observed that in the middle of a flurry of activity, the printed page was not easy to read or navigate. The content was too dense and not presented in an organised, step-by-step manner. It read more like a story than a set of instructions and provided little help to those conducting the ritual.

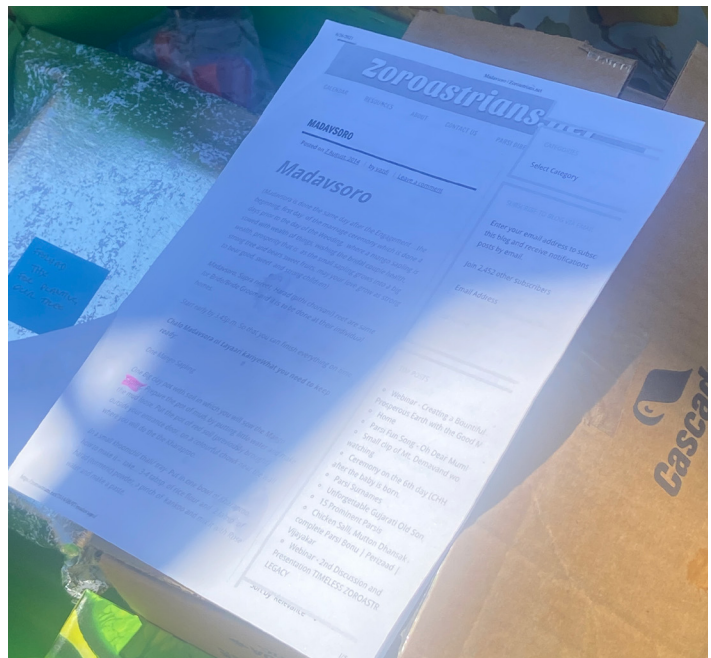


Fig. 3. Left: Lemon tree planted for the *Madavsaro* ceremony. Right: Printout of instructions found at a wedding from *Zoroastrians.net*, 2022.



# I Rituals

A similar experience occurred when I spoke to another member of my focus group: For her destination wedding, she travelled with a book that served as a guide for all the rituals that were to be performed. She mentioned having to refer to it multiple times to conduct the rituals and understand their significance. However, while she was grateful to have this resource available to her, it was not easy to navigate.

Her biggest takeaway from this experience was that with the information, one should not be “reliant only on our priests or even the ladies in our community to carry out a ritual. It is extremely beneficial to have resources that are widely available so that other *Zoroastrians* from around the world can continue to preserve our customs and traditions”.

The intent of my thesis was becoming increasingly apparent: I needed to design a way in which information about rituals was not only available but intuitive and easy to use and which, on some level, allowed the sharing of ideas and resources.

But what makes me uniquely equipped to address this issue? And how could I use my skills as a designer to help address this problem?

# | Role of the designer in society

Traditionally the idea of a loss of cultural identity would not necessarily fall within a designer's realm of expertise. Sociologists, anthropologists and cultural theorists would be considered the obvious choice to tackle such problems. In fact, prior to the 1950s and 1960s, definitions of design were primarily dictated by the discipline practised, such as architecture, industrial design or engineering.

In the 1970s, Victor Papanek took a radical view of design with his essay *Design for the Real World*, declaring that "All men [read human beings] are designers...for design is basic to all human activity." (Papanek, 1985 p.3). This democratisation of design not only meant that anyone could be a designer but that the design could be (and, according to Papanek, was) applied to various everyday activities.

By relinquishing the idea of the designer as an 'expert' and seeing them instead as facilitators (Sanders & Stappers, 2012, p.24), the scope of the design itself expands and allows designers to add value in previously unexplored spaces.

In fact, current definitions of design uniquely situate it to address complex cultural problems and offer solutions that can transform and revitalise aspects of traditional culture while disseminating knowledge and promoting discourse.

Sustainable design educator, writer and activist Alastair Fuad-Luke (2009) believes that design is linked to contemporary cultural perceptions and yet very personal. It is this view of design that resonates with me the most.

Being part of a microscopic global community (the *Parsis*) has left an indelible impact on my work. Culture, identity, and community building are recurring themes in my portfolio, which have only deepened since moving away from my home country. Over the past few years, it has sparked a curiosity about design's role in preserving and amplifying cultural identity, particularly my own.

It was clear that this sense of a loss of cultural identity I was feeling since moving to North America was a 'wicked problem'. According to Buchanan, a professor of design, management, and information systems, a wicked problem is a complex problem that, aside from being vague and unclear, often deals with incomplete or contradictory information and requirements that are regularly changing. Moreover, wicked problems do not have one clear-cut way of tackling substantial societal problems; in fact, there are a variety of ways to do so, depending on the point of view one takes when approaching them (Buchanan, 2009).

# I Role of the designer in society

Designers, with our inherently interdisciplinary and iterative approach to problems, can continuously adapt and respond to sociocultural issues. We do this by synthesising the information at hand and by presenting an extensive range of possible solutions (Cross, 2010, p. 223). We also do this by recognising patterns and reconfiguring them (Cross, 2010, p. 224).

Inspired by Kees Dorst's idea of 'Frame creation' (Dorst, 2015), I realised that part of the existing problem of preserving traditional rituals is focusing on the traditional methods of keeping these rituals alive. For example, oral history and storytelling might be part of the *Parsi* legacy (Mistree, 2002, p. 413); however, alone, it may not be as effective or efficient in passing down knowledge to the youth of the *Parsi* diaspora, particularly when it comes to making the steps of a ritual feel 'doable'.

As an interdisciplinary designer and part of the youth of the *Parsi* diaspora in North America, I was able to use my lived experience and layer it over my knowledge of contemporary design tools and practices to generate a possible design solution that is culturally sensitive and relevant, as well as intuitive and user-friendly.

I began to apply Dorst's 9-step process of contextualising the problem Fig. 4. What emerged were several themes through which I could frame my problem space and solidify my research, positioning it within the growing discourse of a designer's role in society, and as Fuad-Luke pointed out, designing in a space that is culturally relevant and deeply personal.

# Role of the designer in society



Fig. 4. My use of Dorst's 9-step process of contextualising the problem, 2023.

# My Practice

Being a part of the *Parsi* community as well as a part of the youth of the *Parsi* diaspora, I share similar experiences as my target audience, and I am able to use them to inform my design.

An example of a lived experience informing my design is the complexity of calculating one's *Roj*<sup>12</sup> birthday. Several youth who I spoke to, some over 40 years of age, said they would frequently ask their mothers what day their *Roj* fell on. Other families have created excel spreadsheets that need to be updated annually to figure out the corresponding day of the Gregorian calendar to celebrate their *Roj* birthday.

12 All Zoroastrians have two birthdays - one following the religious calendar, and one according to the Gregorian calendar. Each leap year, our Persian/Roj birthday goes one day ahead of our normal birthday.

To calculate this, one must know the names of the 12 months and 30 individual days of the *Shenshai* calendar, plus an additional five days that fall at the end of the year. In order to tackle this problem, I began researching the *Shenshai* calendar and learnt about what each day and month represents and symbolises. This led me to begin designing 'The Calendar' Fig 21, as a physical calendar, which was later translated into a digital version, used in my outcome, *Reimagining Rituals* the app Fig 27.

Amardad - 1391 YZ			December 2021 - January 2022		
SUN		Notasah Dt KHORDAD 19	TIR 26	Cyra Cyroo Roj BEHRAM 2	ASMAN 9
MON		Grammy Grandpa Dt AMARDAD 20 Kenisi Soti Dt Amini	GOSH 27	RAM 3	ZAMYAD 10
TUE	HORMAZD Dec.14	DAEPADAR 21	DAEPMERHER 28 Roj Amini	Cyra Cyroo Dt Amini GOVAD 4 Notasah Adil Dt Amini	MARESPAND 11
WED	BAHMAN 15 Zara Zara Roj	Leela Dt Biday ADAR 22 Rushy A Kavarshi Dt	MEHER 29 Phi Kaezad Dt Amini	DAEPDIN 5	ANERAN 12
THU	ARDIBEHESHT 16	AVA 23 Phi Kaezad Roj	SROSH 30	DIN 6	
FRI	SHEHREVAR 17	KHORSHED 24 Nadees = Zara Dt	RASHNA 31 Lyla Roj Amini	ASHISHVANGH 7 Lyla Roj Amini	
SAT	ASFANDARMAD 18 Quita Nadees Dt Havosi Zarsi Dt	MOHOR 25	FRAVARDIN Jan. 1, 2022 Grandpa Deak Amini 2016	ASHTAD 8	

Fig. 5. An example of my pocket calendar, marked up by my mother with important dates, 2023.

## Outcomes: Knowledge gained from my research

Throughout my research, I have explored various facets of design while keeping my culture as the central focus. I have developed multiple outputs such as a Do it yourself (DIY) kit, digital stickers, the development of visuals

# My Practice

and so on (these are explained in depth on page 27). Having gone through an iterative process of knowledge-sharing about our rituals, I began weaving the insights of each outcome into my research.

## Outputs: Design results and experiments

I started to identify recurring themes that have played a major role in the development of *Reimagining Rituals*. Some of these include the following:

- **My response is not based on replicating culture and bringing back tradition; it is about keeping elements of culture alive within an evolving context.**



This has allowed me to not be confined by specific visuals or images to represent my culture.

However, where there are specific aspects of my culture, I have honoured that. This can be seen in projects such as *The Lifetime* and *The sticker pack*. For both of these projects, I have made sure to keep my designs culturally relevant with a modern twist. For example, in the sticker below Fig. 6, the aesthetics of the characters are seen as playful and cartoon-like, while every detail has been meticulously designed, such as the chalk stamps on the *Patla*<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Small flat step stool to stand on.

Fig. 6. Navjote Sticker, 2022.

- **The resistance to sharing**

Many elders in the community repeatedly have expressed their concerns with the dwindling knowledge about our religion, culture and traditions, specifically with the youth. However, when allowed to share their knowledge, many opt not to, acting as if it is a closely guarded secret. They tend to share their knowledge only with members of their family.

This can be seen in a project I designed titled *The Open Source*, where I created a webpage on which anyone in the community could share their knowledge about particular rituals. When shared with the community, there was an overwhelming number of responses, with praises that this initiative was taken; however, only two people shared their knowledge on the webpage.

# My Practice

- **There is no replacement**

An essential aspect that I am aware of is that, no matter how effective my projects are, they will not replace the materiality of the actual rituals. For example, *The Parsi Pack* was designed as an alternative to our chalk stamps, as many Parsis from around the world may need their own or be unable to purchase one from India or Pakistan. This was not designed as a replacement but a substitute to help learn the ritual. The return of materiality will follow once the ritual has been understood.

It is through these outcomes and outputs that I have transformed and grown from being a communication designer with a strong visual vocabulary to an interdisciplinary designer with a practice that requires interaction design knowledge. As I have also turned to 'Making' as part of my research process, my work lies within the realm of Practice-Based Design and Action Based Design.

## My Community of Practice

My community of practice includes scholars, design practitioners, and anthropologists who have significantly impacted my design work. As my field of practice is situated around understanding design's role in amplifying rituals and making them more accessible to the youth of an endangered diaspora, my practice benefits from the involvement of experts in *Parsi* culture, interdisciplinary designers, and diverse thinkers.

While I haven't found any designers working along the theme of *Parsi* rituals, I have been inspired by Pakistani filmmakers, artists and designers such as Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy, Anushka Rustomji and Leena Naqvi, who use themes of culture, identity and memory within their work.

Chinoy is a Pakistani-Canadian journalist, filmmaker and activist who has worked on several world-renowned projects. One that stood out to me was a beautiful, immersive exhibition titled *HOME 1947*. It was about the largest mass migration as a result of the creation of two newly independent countries, India and Pakistan, and what it means to find and feel at home.

I have always been fascinated by the idea of memories and stories being used as a cultural blueprint. For this reason, I was captivated by how Chinoy shared the stories of migration and diaspora through unique mediums of design.

# I My Practice

Rustomji is a visual artist and educator who seeks to explore themes of erasure and loss in reference to diasporic communities. Her work has had a significant influence on my practice; specifically, her installation *Ready-Made Ruin* was exhibited as part of a show titled *Transition of Tradition*, held in 2018. The aim of her installation was to question colonial narratives of land and materiality. The installation comprised of a representation of an Iranian carpet, designed with recreations of ancient *Zoroastrian* and Mesopotamian motifs, on the floor of the gallery. Throughout the exhibition, visitors walked over the 'carpet', progressively erasing it and rendering its patterns and form incomprehensible.

The installation aimed to question colonial narratives of land and materiality through representations of the modes of production and reception around traditional cultural practices.

Similarly, Naqvi shares stories of cultural identity, migration, diaspora and oral history through food and design. She brings people of different nationalities, languages and cultures together to conduct a food-based public participatory project.

My community of practice also extends to ritual designers such as Kursat Ozenc and Margaret Hagan, lecturers at the Stanford D. School, Jeltje Gordon-Lennox, author of *Crafting Secular Ritual*, and The Interaction Foundry. All of whom have helped gather and build research into the significance and importance rituals play.

What stood out to me was the work done by *The Ritual Design Lab*, a design and research initiative created by Ozenc and Hagan. It inspired me to learn about the principles around which the lab was created and their belief in the power of rituals to provide meaning and importance to how we live and what we do.

They use their lab to incorporate ritual concepts and history into design work and generate new rituals for use in modern life. They conduct workshops based on ritual design practices with university students and different organisations. After that, they share their process and findings on Medium, an open platform for anyone to read. Doing so increases others' awareness of this subject matter and allows for open discussion.

These workshops aim to help the participants create and generate rituals to help with specific tasks, such as creating community in the workplace, building trust, increasing engagement, and sparking creativity. For the same reasons, Gordon-Lennox has created checklists for specific life



# I My Practice

events, and The Interaction Foundry has created *The Ritual Design Toolkit* to help comprehend harness and design rituals.

Even though many ritual designers and scholars, including Ozenc and Hagan, are predominantly working around secular rituals, their reasoning to do so aligns with the rationale behind my work and, in turn, validates my area of research.

# | The Investigation

The approach I took for this thesis can be divided into two main phases. In both phases, I have worked with multiple research methods and have used an experiential framework which reflects on my lived experiences and those within my community. In the first phase, I am being influenced by the methods and skills of auto-ethnography and self-reflection, while the second situates my work within the practices of the Human-Centred Design approach through the lens of Culture-Centred Design.

In '*The Auto-Ethnographic Turn In Design*,' Schouwenberg and Kaethler explain how this is a unique field of study as it places the designer on the 'inside' of the project, compared to being on the 'outside' (Schouwenberg and Kaethler, 2021). It requires the researcher or designer to start questioning themselves and their place in the world. Being a part of the youth of the Parsi diaspora, this approach was an obvious starting point for me. Similarly, Adams, Linn, and Ellis emphasise meticulous self-reflection as a means to identify and explore relationships between oneself and society, balancing rigour, creativity, and emotions (Adams et al., 2015).

These characteristics are reflected in my research projects described on page 27. My explorations included videos, digital representations, iconography, tool kits and guides. A specific example was when I worked on my transportation project, as seen in *Fig. 7*.



*Fig. 7. A Ses, 2022.*

# The Investigation

14 A tray of traditional Zoroastrian items having symbolic importance and used during various ceremonies and occasions.

During this research phase, I questioned my connection to my community, specifically through our rituals. Through my own experience, I know that the Ses<sup>14</sup> is used in every ritual and is a prominent and auspicious symbol for Parsis. The items placed on the Ses depend on the ritual being performed, and before being used, it is typically wiped down and cleaned in preparation.

15 The full video of my process can be seen here: <https://youtu.be/-9K2hDPyXhM>

As my first auto-ethnographic exploration, I immersed myself in the experience of cleaning my Ses, which I brought with me to Vancouver from Karachi, while listening to a recording of our prayers. Throughout this process, I took my time to clean each item, truly understanding their shapes and forms while remembering what they each symbolise and represent. Throughout this experience, I recorded my thoughts and feelings in a journal<sup>15</sup>.



Fig. 8. Stills from the prompt *Transportation*, 2022

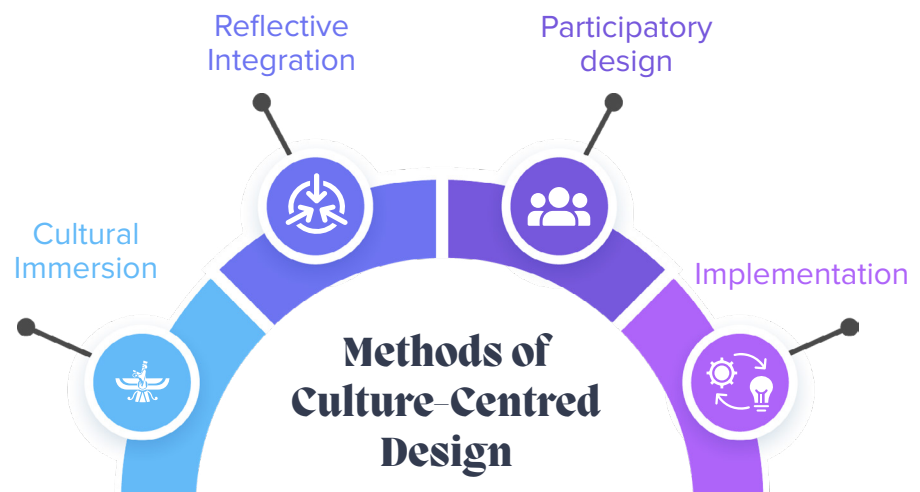
# I The Investigation

Memories and feelings around the rituals I have practised surfaced, and I began questioning whether other youth of the Parsi diaspora were feeling similarly disconnected from their roots. I wondered if the act of performing our rituals would mitigate this feeling. Using autoethnographic methods, I was able to socialise my personal memories and experiences as a basis for further research and discovery and to situate the work into a space of culture-centred design practices.

An essential part of practising community building and cultural amplification is observing the individuals within a community to gain a deeper understanding of their culture.

In doing this, my practice is heavily influenced by the principles and ideas behind the methods of Human-Centred Design (HCD) and Culture-Centred Design (CCD). Some of these include working with a bottom-up approach, allowing the people and communities to be empowered with the field's knowledge and to determine which cultural elements should be fostered in the design process. That design begins with the community or people that the designer is creating for and ends with new solutions built to suit their needs.

For this reason, my design process was inspired by those used in the CCD method: Cultural Immersion, Reflective Integration, Participatory design, and Implementation. All of these phases work best when done in parallel to each other.



*Fig. 9. Methods of Culture-Centred Design, 2023.*

To engage with my community in multiple ways, I volunteered my time with the World Zoroastrian Organization and became their head of social media and first youth representative; I became a member of my local association,

# I The Investigation

<sup>16</sup> A youth-initiated programme is designed to strengthen community identity amongst Zoroastrian youth across the world.

The Zoroastrian Society of British Columbia. I was appointed committee chair member for the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress (WZC), volunteered my time to design their brochure & social media, and gave a talk at the Congress to promote the *Zoroastrian Return to Roots program*<sup>16</sup>.

To deepen my design practice, I created and designed projects which can be seen in the following chapter on page 27.

I conducted a questionnaire and focus group sessions with 282 Zoroastrians worldwide for the Reflective Integration phase. More information can be read in the chapter: Development of the meaningful project.

Lastly, for the implementation phase of my research, I designed the *Reimagining Rituals* mobile application, which has been explained on page 58.



# | Design Iteration & Exploration

Drawing parallels to my research, I explored multiple ways of dispensing knowledge and information about Parsi rituals to the youth of the Parsi diaspora. Some of my works include:

## **Dispensing information through a tactile experience**

This DIY chalk stamp box was designed in response to a reading, *"Print Culture and Decolonizing the University: Indigenizing the Page: Part 1"* by Marie Battiste. The article largely dealt with the symbols Indigenous peoples have used for communicating across generations. Inspired by this, I began to explore symbols in my own culture, narrowing it down to using them as markers of special occasions.



Fig. 10. The Parsi Pack, 2021.



# Design Iteration & Exploration

As mentioned before, when the Parsis moved to the subcontinent, they adopted some of the cultural traditions from their new homeland. Using chalk stamps for celebratory rituals was one of them. The stamps are designed using perforated lightweight metal chalk boxes into which white chalk powder is put and stamped on a damp floor. Traditionally the designs are either floral, have a fish or a horseshoe. Along with this, many include words in English or Gujarati, such as “Good Luck”.

## Key Insights & Impact on Reimagining Rituals:

- Designing through making- this process helped me prototype and iterate possible solutions.
- Learning through doing - this featured heavily in my app since the premise is learning about rituals through conducting them.
- Using the materials and resources available in a given time and space
- Providing clear instructions and directions.



Fig. 11. Chalk stamps from Pakistan, 2021.



# Design Iteration & Exploration

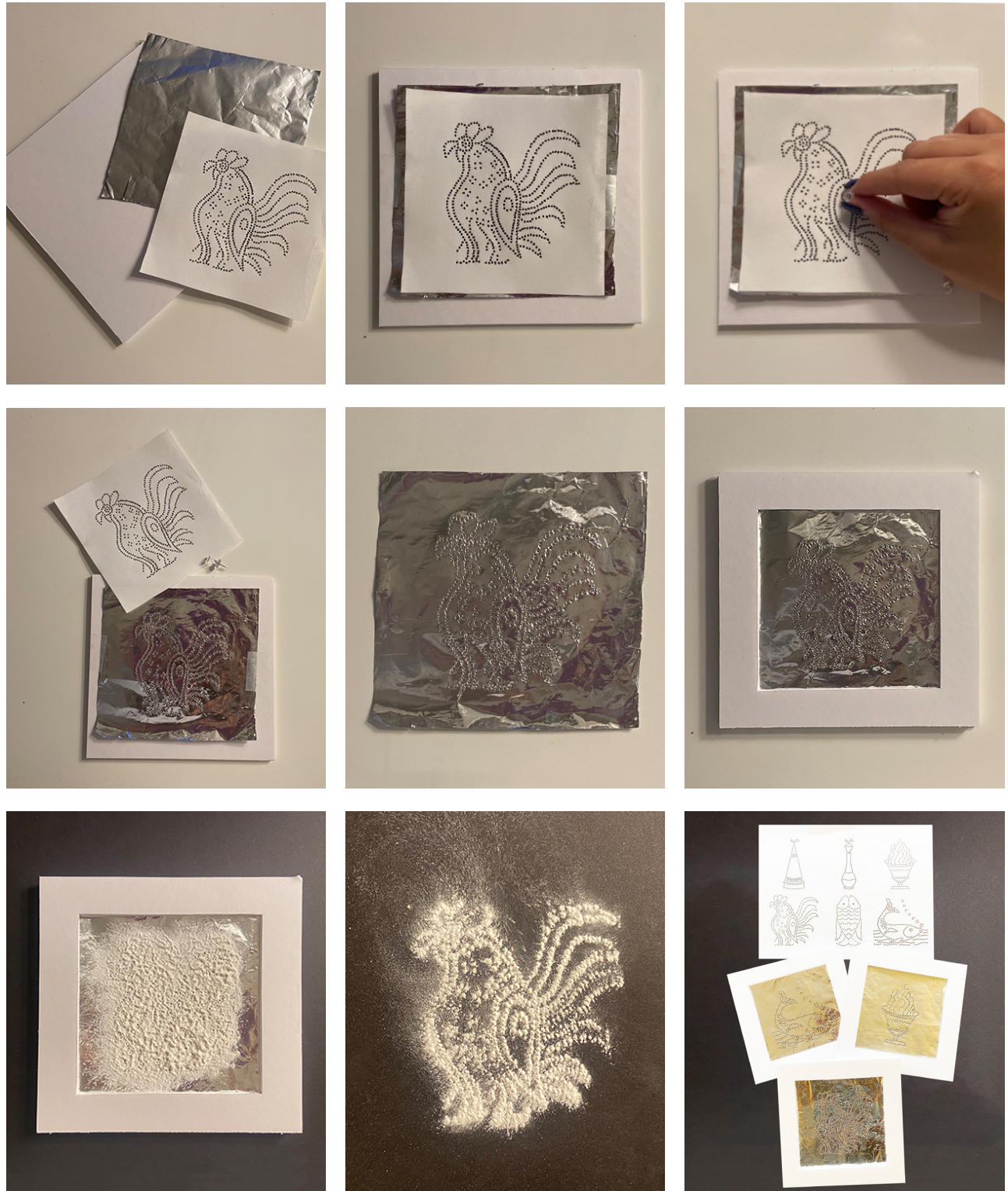


Fig. 12. The use of The Parsi Pack kit, 2021.



## Dispensing information through visuals

As part of my research, I conducted an interactive brainstorming technique, titled the *Crazy 8's*, with members of my cohort. This technique is a quick sketching exercise that challenges the participants to sketch eight distinct ideas in 8 minutes.

I handed them a paper divided into eight sections and asked them what culture meant to them.

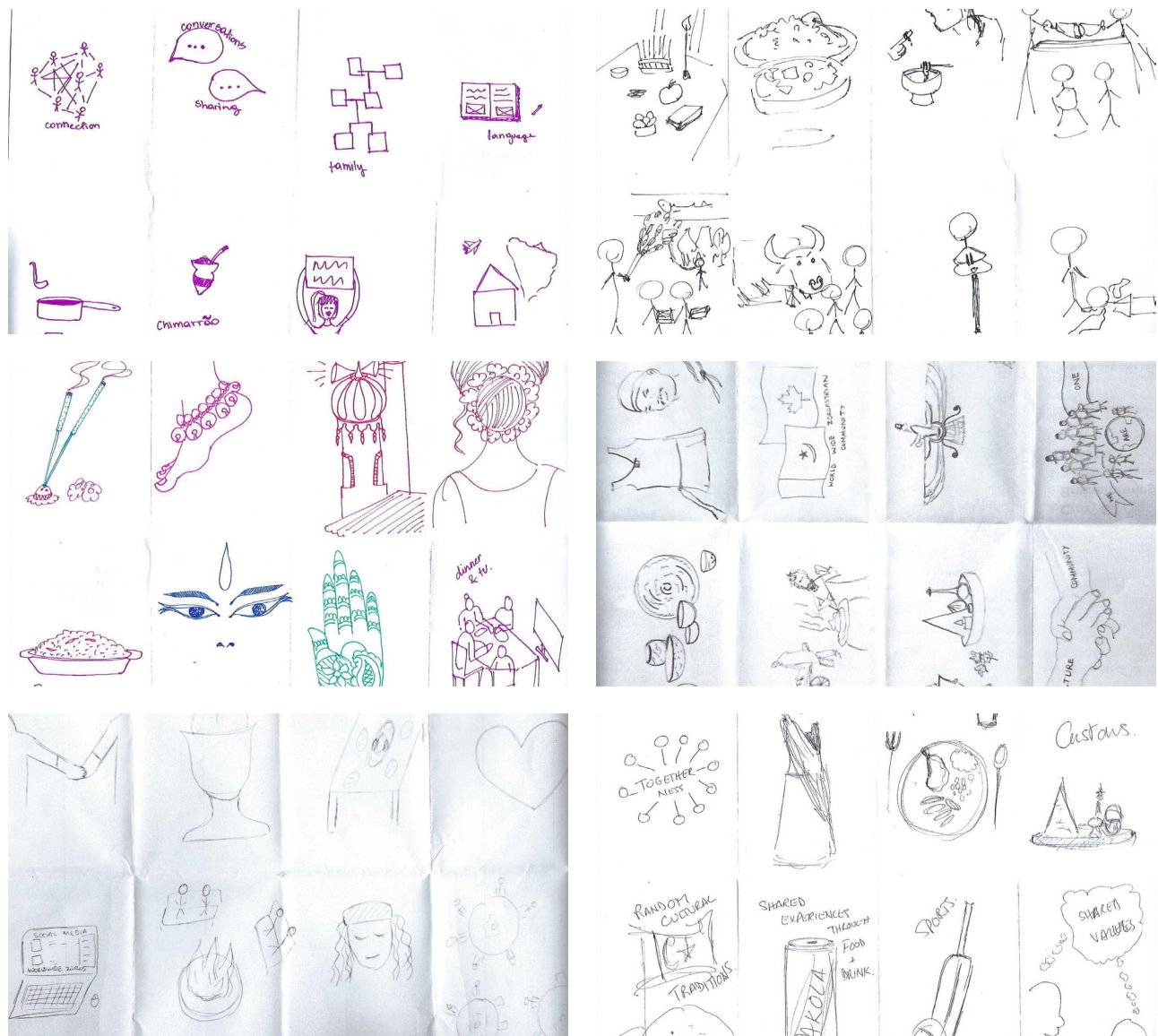
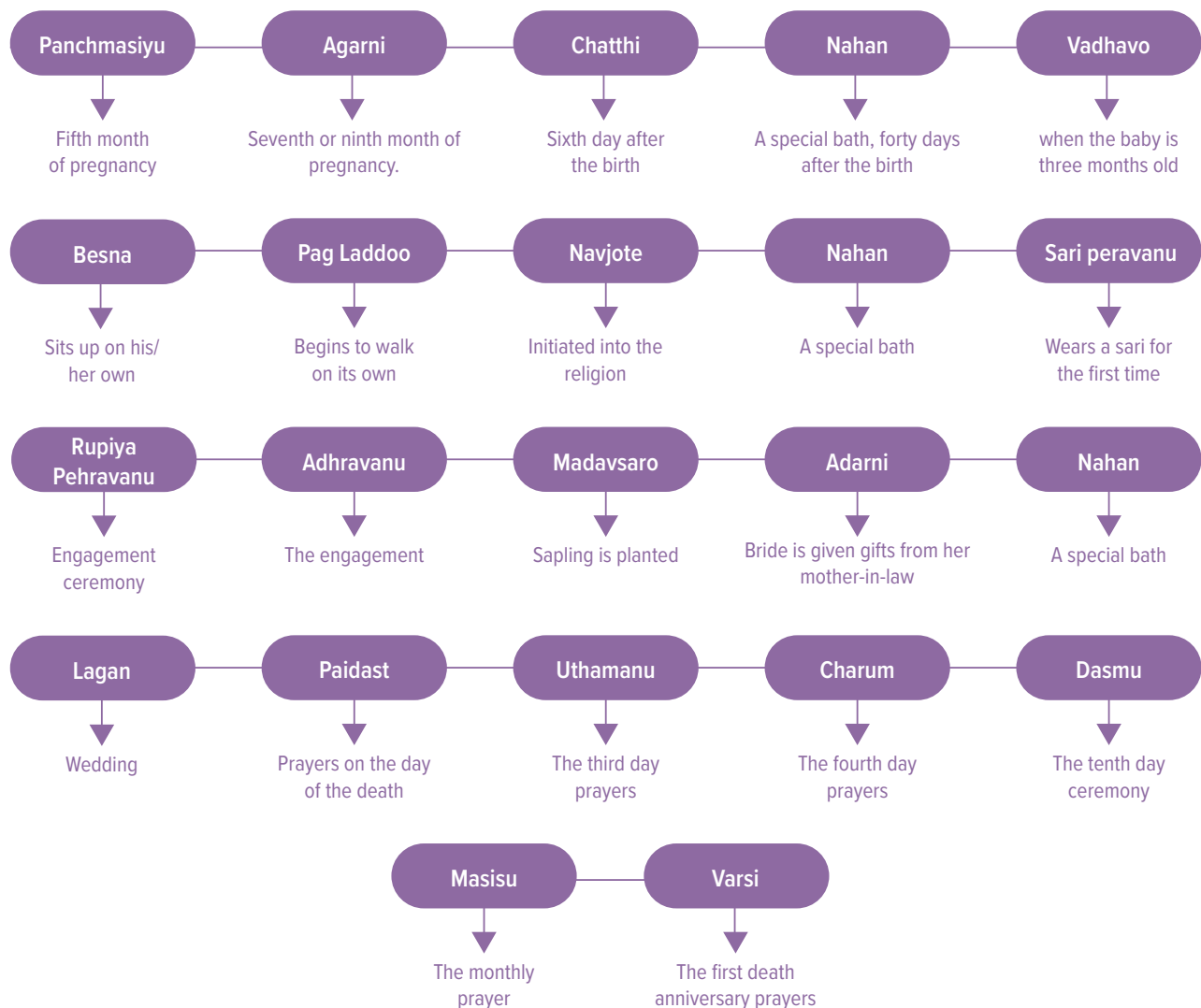


Fig. 13. Crazy 8 Brainstorming results, 2022.

# Design Iteration & Exploration

After analysing the results, I learnt that most of the responses contained drawings of rituals from their culture *Fig. 13* This led to discussions about these rituals and why my participants found them important.

Through research, I found Tanaz Karai's article describing that *Parsis* have rituals that range over an individual's lifetime, so I began by creating a list of these rituals *Fig. 14*.



*Fig. 14. The Lifetime - Repository list, 2021*

This led me to design and create *The Lifetime*, where I explored five rituals by playing with visuals that were designed to dispense information about them and their symbolism *Fig. 15*.

# Design Iteration & Exploration

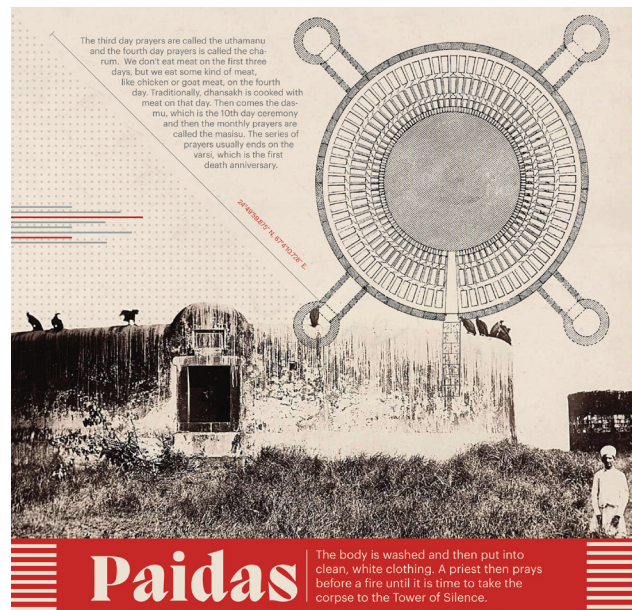
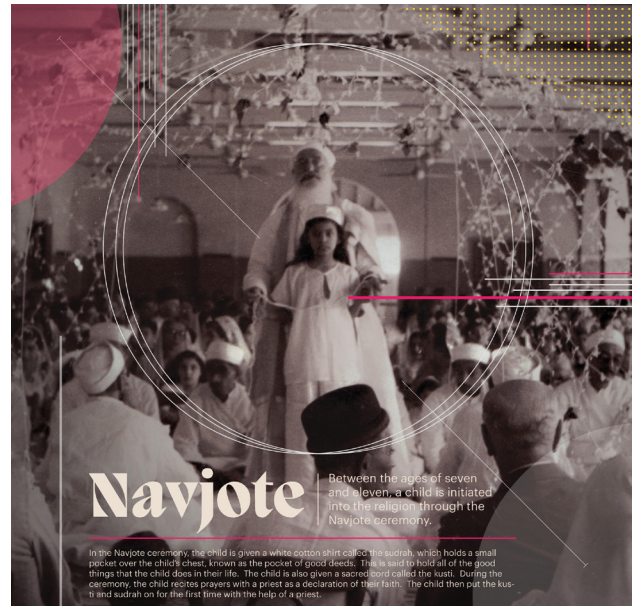


Fig. 15. The Lifetime, 2022.

## Key Insights & Impact on Reimagining Rituals:

- Understanding the close association that participants had between culture and rituals
- A deeper insight and understanding into 5 Parsi rituals
- Creating a repository of Parsi rituals that has been used in my app



# Design Iteration & Exploration

## Dispensing information Social Media

I started to look at the idea of decolonising design and visual representations of different cultures in mainstream social media and messaging apps. Finding a lack of Parsi representation, I designed these stickers to illustrate our rituals, such as the *Navjote*, *Besna*, *Chitti Lakvanu* and *Dhai Machi*.

The stickers were shared on a Facebook group, 'Worldwide Zoroastrians', where I received roughly 900 reactions and 490 comments. Many shared their feedback and support, expressing how they too saw a need for Parsi representation.

Through the iterative process of designing each sticker, I understood how to customise imagery to be culturally specific. One such example was the *Chitti Lakhvanu*<sup>17</sup> sticker.

<sup>17</sup> The Chitti Lakhvanu is one of the rituals that take place before the wedding ceremony, in which the Bride/Grooms family come together to handwrite their guests' names on their wedding invitations.



Fig. 16. The Sticker Pack, 2022.

# Design Iteration & Exploration

I chose to create a visual that can represent the ritual in a minimalist way, keeping in mind the tradition of writing in a red pen. I then added a human figure to it; however, it did not look quite right.

When I critically analysed it, I realised the person I had drawn seemed too generic, so I adapted the clothes and hairstyle to look more quintessentially, Parsi.

## Key Insights & Impact on Reimagining Rituals:

- Interest and need to represent the Parsi community
- Cultural insight is integral to design; such as the use of red which is an auspicious colour. This colour choice has continued in my app.



Fig. 17. The Iterative process of the Chitti Lakhvanu part of The Sticker Pack, 2022

# Design Iteration & Exploration

## Dispensing information through intergenerational communication

Before starting this project, I explored the method of autoethnography, after which I chose to return to a more graphic exploration leading me to work on The Pop-up.

For this project, I took a deep dive into one particular ceremonial ritual, the *Navjote*, and tried a new way of dispensing the information needed for it to be performed. From my personal experience, as well as that of other Parsi youth, the child is typically told what to do for this ritual on the day of the ceremony itself by a priest.



Fig. 18. The Pop-up - The Ceremony, 2022.

# Design Iteration & Exploration

For this reason, I designed *The Pop-up* to not only help the child understand what they will be doing but to create an intergenerational conversation between the child and their elders.

Each page has been illustrated to represent prominent scenes from the ceremony and briefly explain them. Some pages have additional features, such as in *Fig 17*, I created a pull-out card with information and a checklist for the items needed to perform this part of the ritual.

This ceremony marks a rite of passage for every Parsi. The Pop-up not only serves as a guide but a tool through which parents can teach their children about the ceremony they will eventually be a part of.

## Key Insights & Impact on Reimagining Rituals:

- Explaining rituals allows one to connect with it on a deeper level
- Breaking information down into digestible chunks is important
- Checklists are extremely helpful in performing a ritual



Fig. 19. *The Pop-up*, 2022.

# Design Iteration & Exploration

## Dispensing information through sharing

In all my previous projects, I was sharing information with my community through different media, so for this, I chose to have my community share their knowledge with me. I created an Open Source webpage on which anyone can comment to share information about two specific rituals: The *Pag Ladoo* and The Navjote. The decision to only have two options was to test how the community would engage and share. One is a ritual known by all Parsis, and the other is slightly lesser known but not unknown.

Once the webpage was ready, I shared the link on a well-known Facebook group, 'Worldwide Zoroastrians', where many were happy to see a member of the youth taking an initiative *Fig. 21*.

Unfortunately, aside from two comments made for the *Pag Ladoo*, there were no other comments shared. This made me wonder whether the barrier to engagement was too high and if users might need more encouragement to share knowledge.



*Fig. 20. The Open Source, 2022.*



# Design Iteration & Exploration

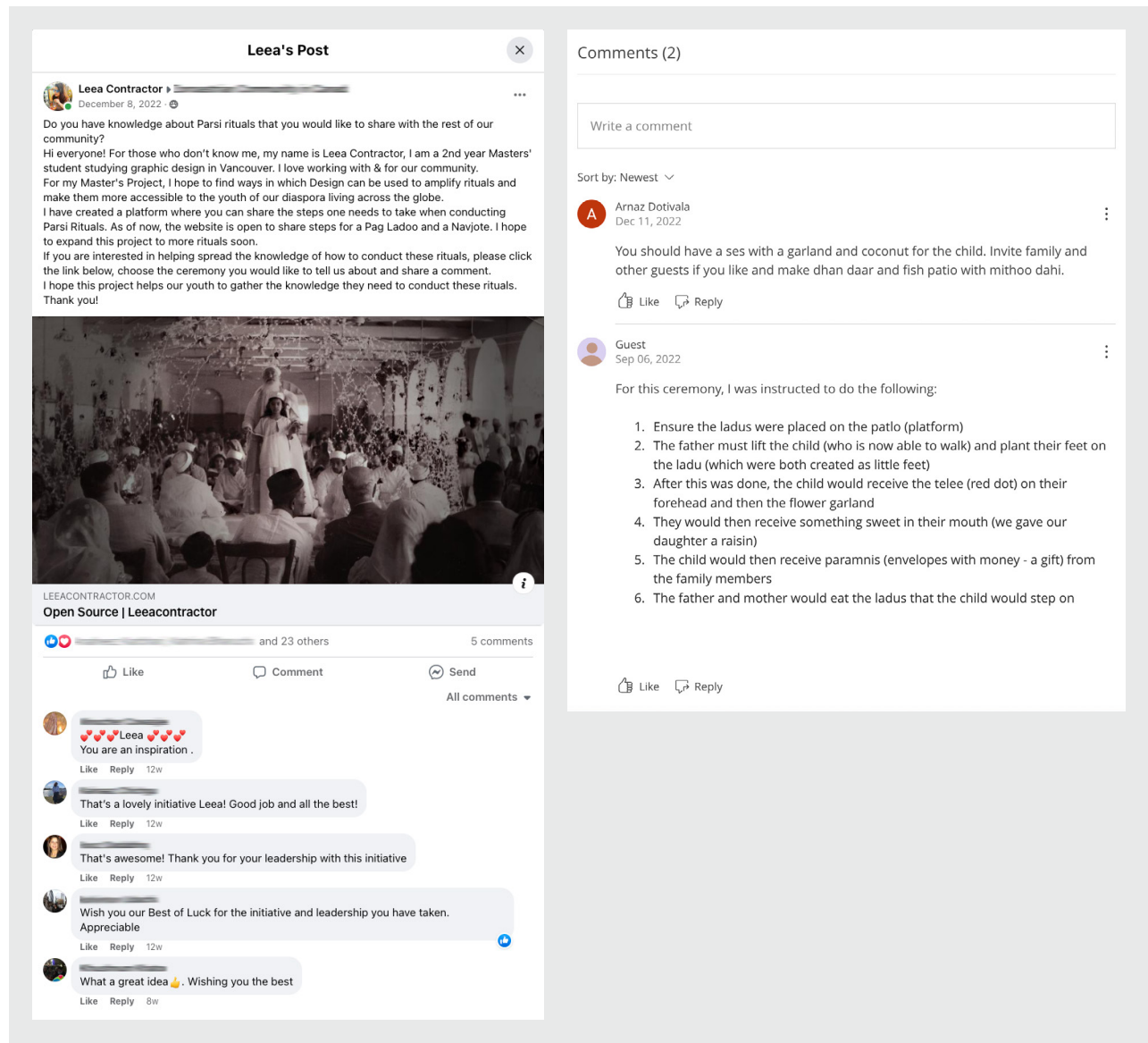


Fig. 21. Left: Comments to the post on a Facebook page: World Wide Zoroastrians, 2022. Right: Comments on The Open Source link, 2022.

## Key Insights & Impact on Reimagining Rituals:

- Multiple ways of information access are important: In my app, there are two ways to do this, through a repository of information that I have created and a community space where anyone can leave a comment, picture or information about any ritual similar to the Open Source project.
- It is important to encourage people to share through easy prompts.

# Design Iteration & Exploration

## Dispensing information through a calendar

This project began after I started my initial brainstorming for *Reimagining Rituals*. Knowing that one of the significant components of the application is the *Shenshai* calendar, I started researching it and then began designing, *The Calendar*.

The outcome was to create a desk calendar that incorporates both the Gregorian and *Shenshai* calendars in an attempt to make them more accessible and understandable. This project was designed as an analogue version of the calendar that is available on the app, including one main function, the reminder<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> I designed this function in my app so that the user can be reminded to prepare items needed for a ritual in advance.

Through this project, I learnt about the importance and hierarchy of information needed when merging two calendars. For each day, The Calendar provides the user with the name or date according to the *Shenshai* and Gregorian calendars.

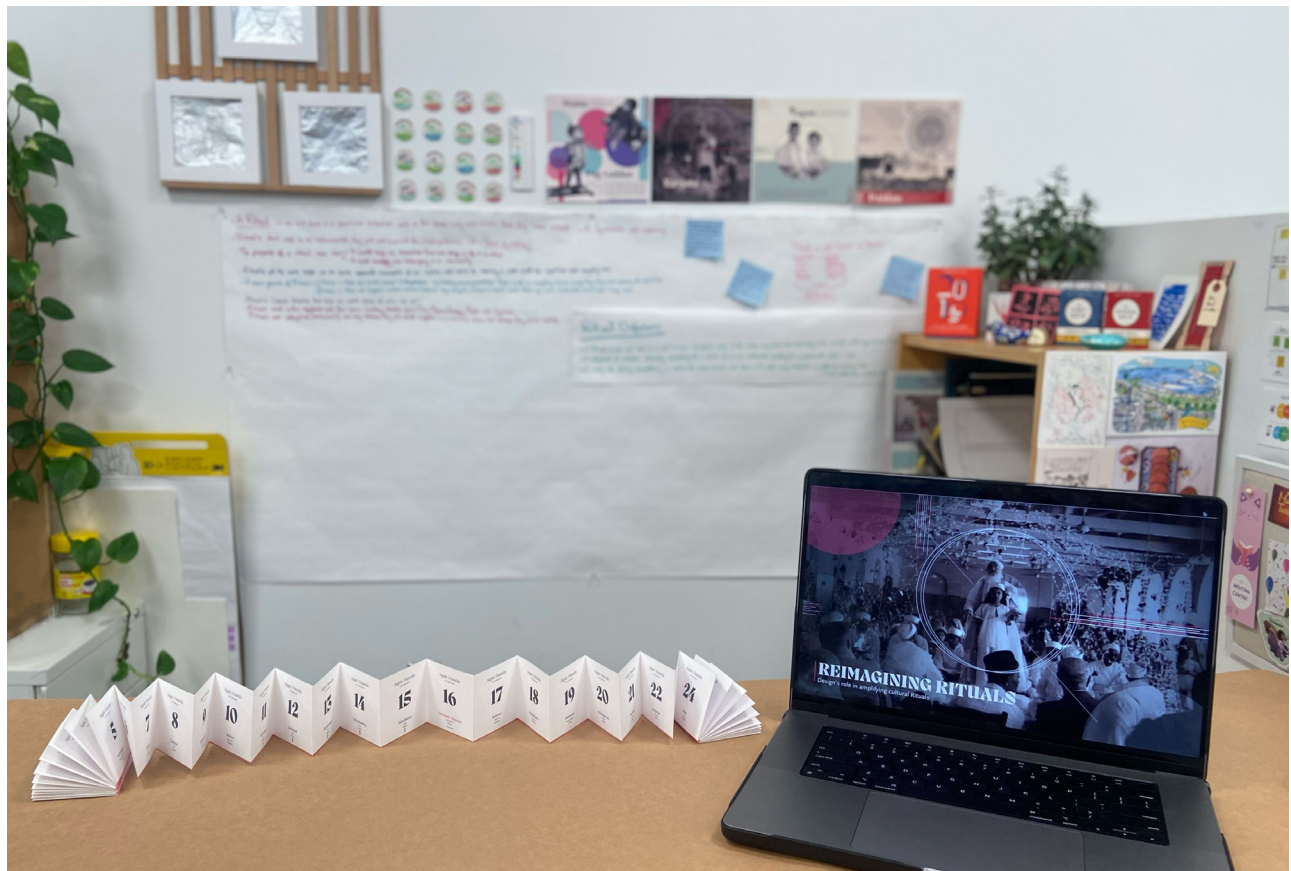


Fig. 22. *The Calendar*, 2023.

# | Design Iteration & Exploration

Even though most of my users typically refer to the Gregorian calendar, the idea is to have the information regarding the Shenshai calendar be the more prominent of the two. The best way to do so was by using icons and symbols for each ritual, allowing the calendar to be more visually appealing and not be filled with just text and information.

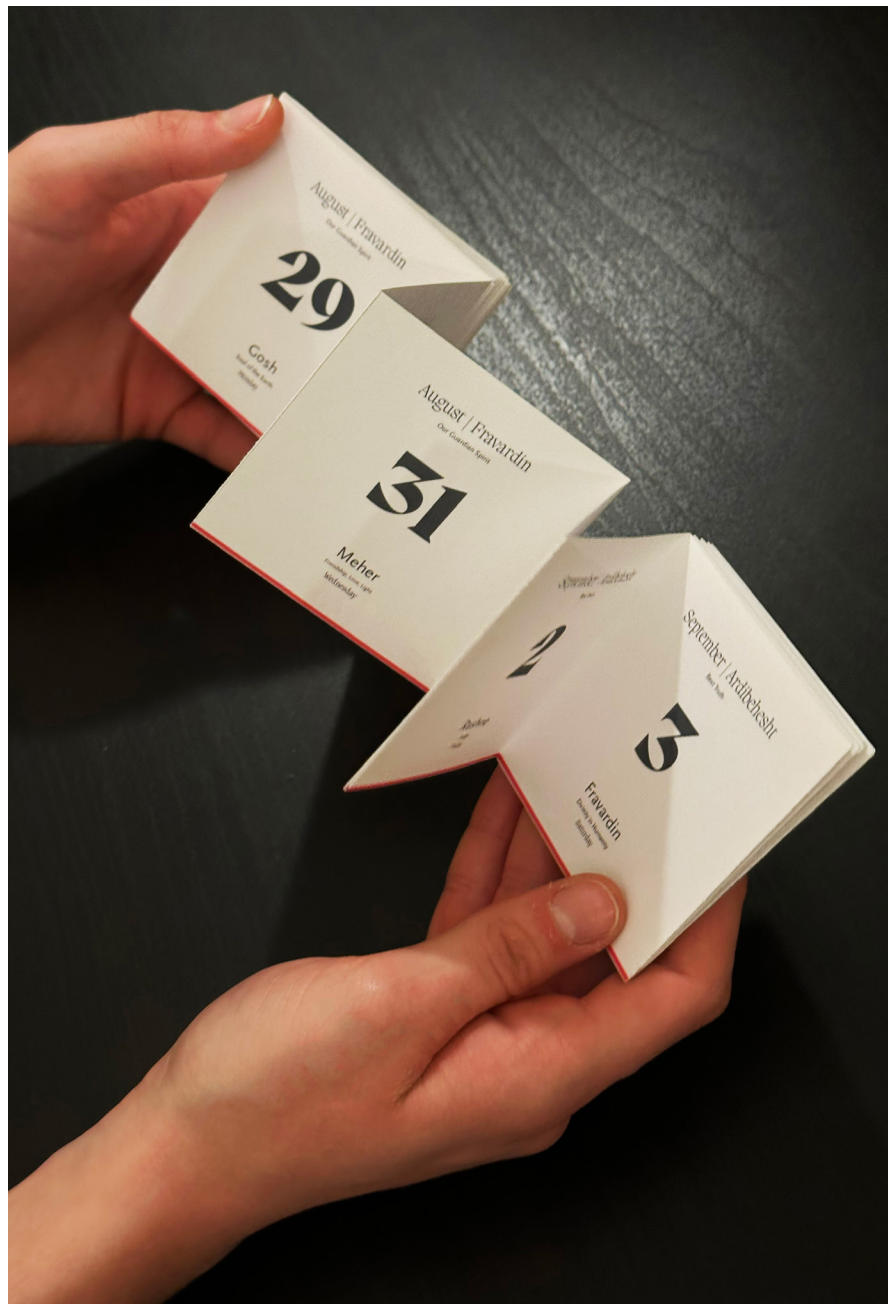


Fig. 23. The Calendar, 2023.

# Development of the project

The iterative process towards developing my outcome began with framing my researchable question: How can design be used to amplify rituals and make them more accessible to the youth of the *Parsi* diaspora?

In addition to autoethnographic research, I decided to conduct a questionnaire to gauge my audience's connections to *Parsi* rituals.

## Questionnaire

I designed a digital questionnaire to distribute amongst all the youth attending the World Zoroastrian Congress. I received responses from two hundred and eighty-two Zoroastrians worldwide. Fig. 24 represents the age brackets of my respondents, with the majority being young adults between the ages of 20-40.

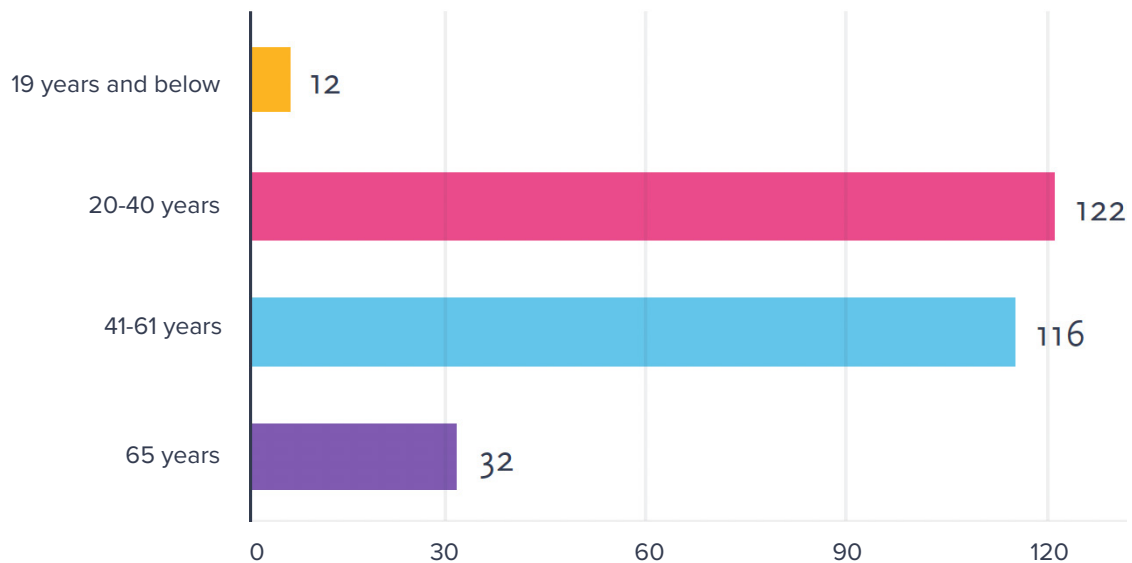


Fig. 24. Questionnaire: Ages of the responders, 2022.

A question asked was what they think the future of the *Parsi* rituals looks like to them. One hundred thirty-seven of the responses were negative, with answers such as 'bleak' and 'non-existent'. In contrast, a few others saw a bright and rising future as they saw more youth taking an 'initiative to keep our rituals alive'. An interesting comment that surfaced in a few of the responses was how our rituals are adapting and adjusting to the places we live in. One respondent explains that 'future generations of Parsis are likely to adapt and tweak these rituals to reflect the world they live in. Rituals have always evolved along with belief and societal changes and will likely continue to do so'.

Another interesting insight taken from the questionnaire was Fig. 25 that, when asked how much they know about *Parsi* rituals, 38.3% of the

# Development of the project

respondents selected the choice that they know of Parsi rituals but rely on the knowledge of someone else to tell them how to carry out the specific steps. From this, 44.4% of those that selected this option are young adults between the ages of 20-40.

From the 108 responses, 56 selected 'lack of knowledge' as the reason for not conducting Parsi rituals, while 18 chose a lack of resources and time, and twelve chose a lack of interest.

The data gathered through this method shows that the Parsi youth recognises that the future of our rituals is dwindling as they lack the knowledge to conduct them; however, they have a deep desire to do so.

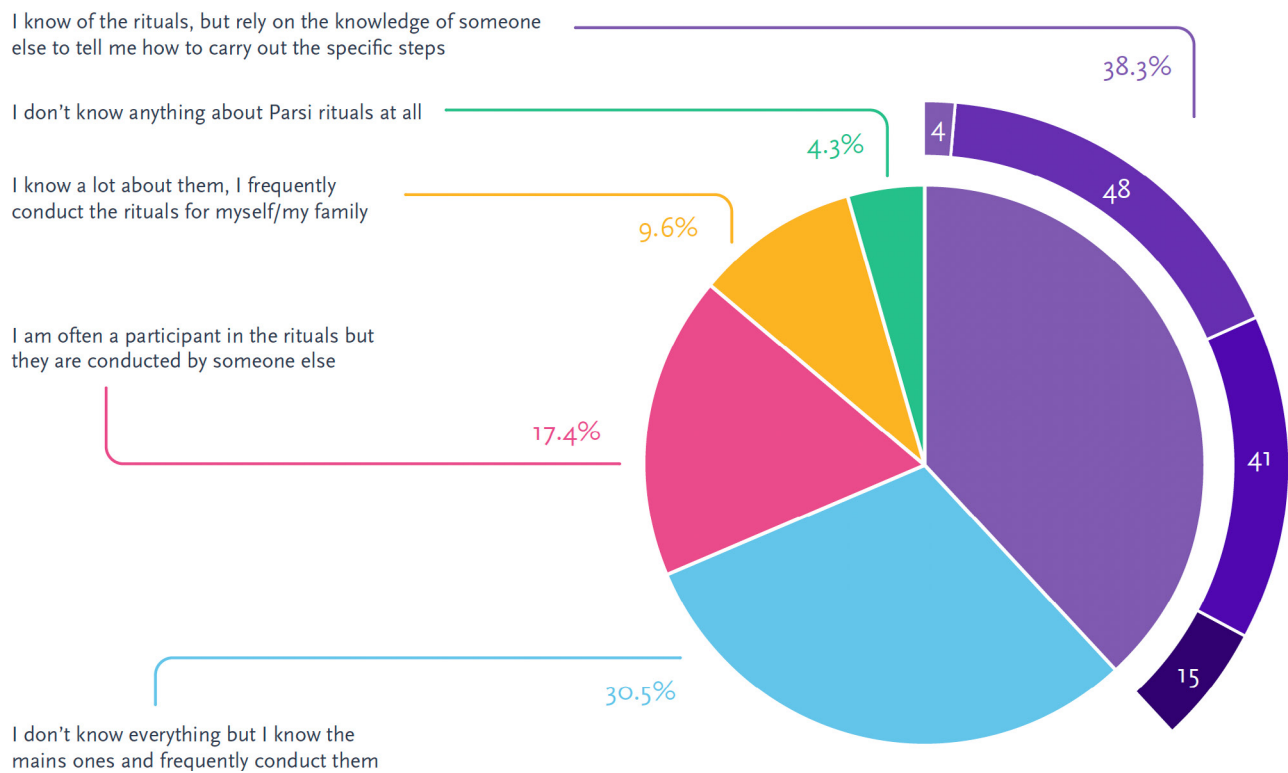


Fig. 25. Questionnaire: results to the question, What do you know about Parsi rituals? 2022.

## Ritual Talk

From the questionnaire, 183 participants shared their contact information to help further my research. The focus group was structured in a way to have the participants elaborate on their answers to the questionnaire and discuss their opinions.



# I Development of the project

There were three very prominent concerns and discussion points brought up by my participants in the focus group sessions.

The first was the mutual feeling of a lack of connection towards our rituals. This feeling was brought up multiple times in the course of the conversation; however, they explained the reason for it being so is that “You see them being conducted and have a perception of them, but you do not understand the background and significance of them” (Participant 2).

Another participant said, “It gets confusing because some rituals are religious, that is taught to you as a *Zoroastrian*, while there are also cultural rituals that come with our *Parsi* heritage. It is what we have inherited, and that blend is confusing. Within this, then, each ritual differs amongst people in our community as well. Some conduct them one way, while others do it slightly differently”. They continued to explain how there is no official ‘guide’ or ‘textbook’ to follow, and the few that may exist are very instructional, so they do not explain the significance behind the actions one has to take. Referring back to the definition I am using for rituals by Ozenc, a ritual is ‘endowed with symbolism and meaning’; if a participant does not know this, the connection they have to rituals will not be complete.

Another major takeaway from the session was the idea behind adapting and adjusting. My participants expressed how it is difficult for young adults sometimes to conduct rituals when they are told of very specific rules to follow that they might not be able to do. One participant explained how “my mother told me when I was younger that I should remove the items [that include plants, fruit, honey, sugar, vinegar etc.] from the table on the 13th day and then toss them in flowing water”. This participant expressed how they found this daunting and against the norms of the country they now live in.

The conversation continued amongst the other participants, who expressed how they were unaware of this rule and that this yet again shows the need for a single source of the steps to take. “Sometimes it is not the difference between the *Parsi* and *Irani* traditions. Sometimes these steps vary amongst even families because all our knowledge and information was passed down orally”.

Another participant explained that the significance of throwing the items into flowing water was to return them to nature and that her way of doing that was to compost them. Here they have shown how they are adapting and adjusting themselves to their surroundings and still staying connected to the spirit of their ritual.

During the focus group, another example was brought up: A participant said they were explicitly told that the *Madavsaro* could only be done with

# I Development of the project

a mango sapling; however, as her wedding was taking place in Italy, and there were no mango saplings available, so they chose a lemon sapling instead. “The ritual was followed to the ‘T’. The only difference was the type of tree. I do think we are learning to adapt and adjust. At this point, we must”.

Lastly, my participants began discussing the best way to receive this knowledge. They all agreed that it had to be through a digital platform. They explained that if they can access it through their mobile phones, they will have access whenever and wherever they need it. Logging into a website seemed too cumbersome. They wanted something intuitive and easy to navigate.

A participant expressed that they would like the information “but not in an authoritative way. Tell us what we have to do and where there is wiggle room. The beauty of Zoroastrianism and being *Parsi* is the ability to adapt our customs, rituals and traditions to our lives”.



Fig. 26. Focus Group Sessions, 2022.



# Reimagining Rituals – the app

The outcome of my research takes the shape of a mobile application based on the findings from both my focus group sessions and the insights gathered from the projects I designed and created throughout my research. As accessibility to this knowledge was a significant concern for my participants, having it available on their mobile phones mitigates the problem and uses a format geared towards them. The application has been designed so that the material available to the users can be personalised, accessed online and offline, is also convenient, and an easy, self-directed learning experience.

## The Personas

Before diving into designing the app, I created three user personas: Jeroo, Zal and Anita Fig. 26 based on my findings from my questionnaire and focus group sessions. These are users whose goals, aims, and characteristics represent the needs of the larger group of Parsi diaspora users.

These personas help create a deeper understanding of my target users, which is fundamental in creating a good user experience for my application. It is through understanding the expectations, concerns, and motivations of my target users that I am able to design an app that will satisfy my users' needs. After building these personas, I created a user journey map for each of them, which can be seen in Fig. 27 & Fig. 28.



Fig. 27. Personas, 2022.

# Reimagining Rituals – the app

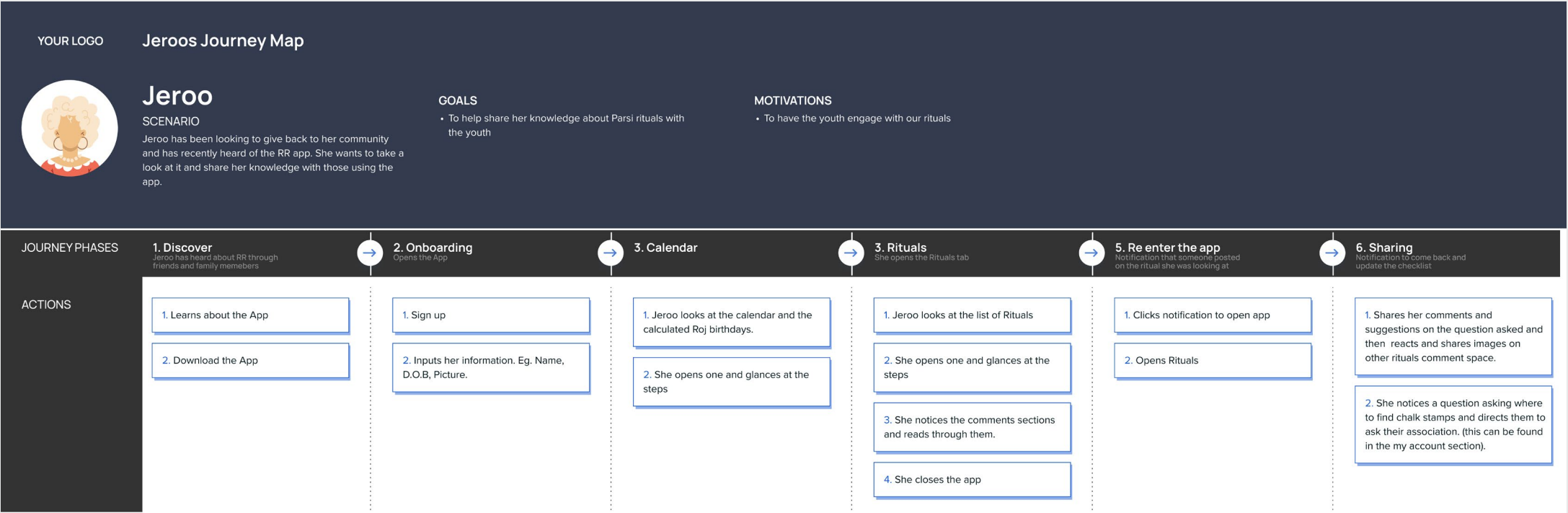
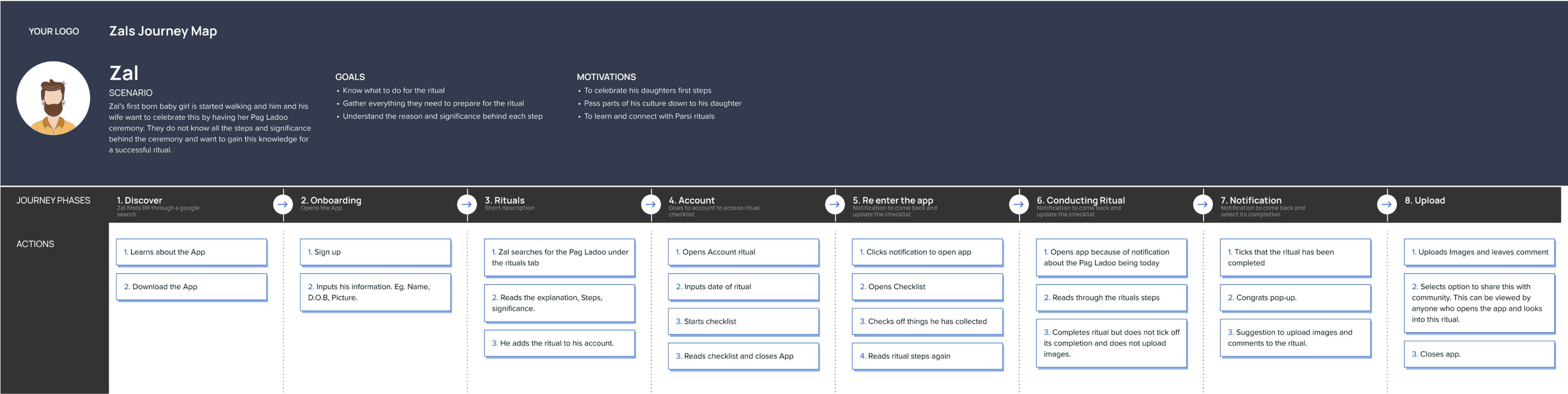


Fig. 27. User Journey Maps, 2023.

# Reimagining Rituals – the app

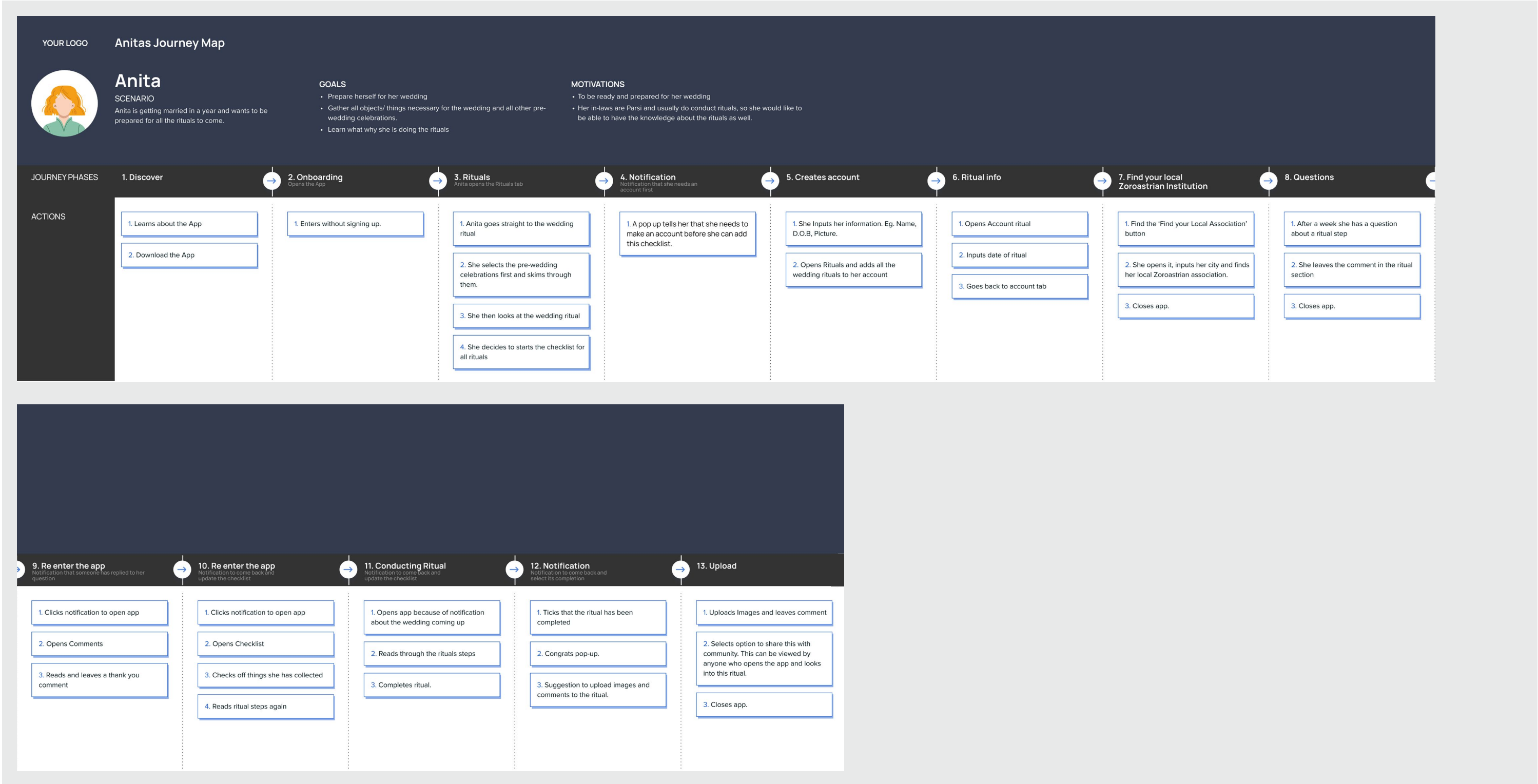


Fig. 28. User Journey Maps, 2023.

# Reimagining Rituals – the app

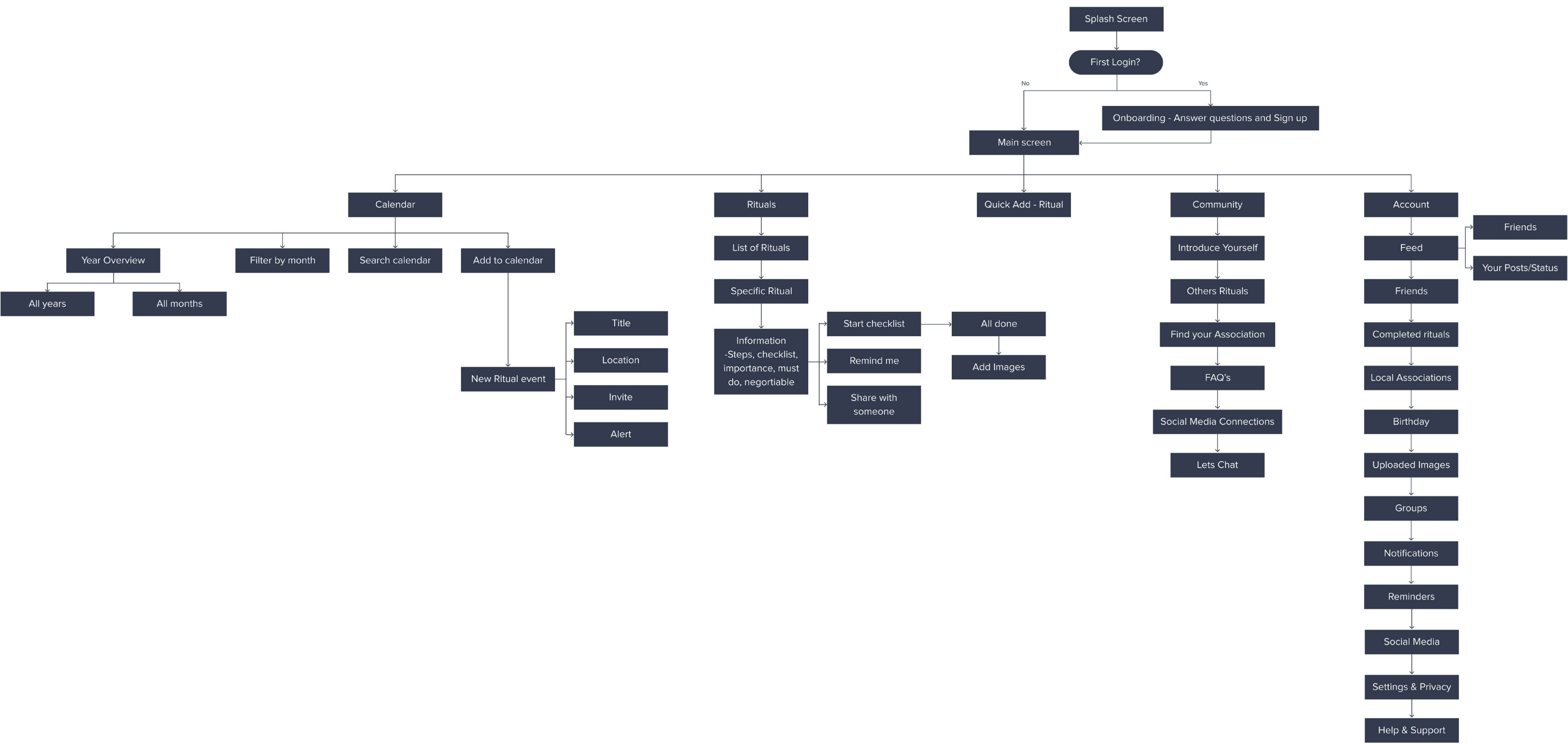


Fig. 29. Wireframe, 2023.

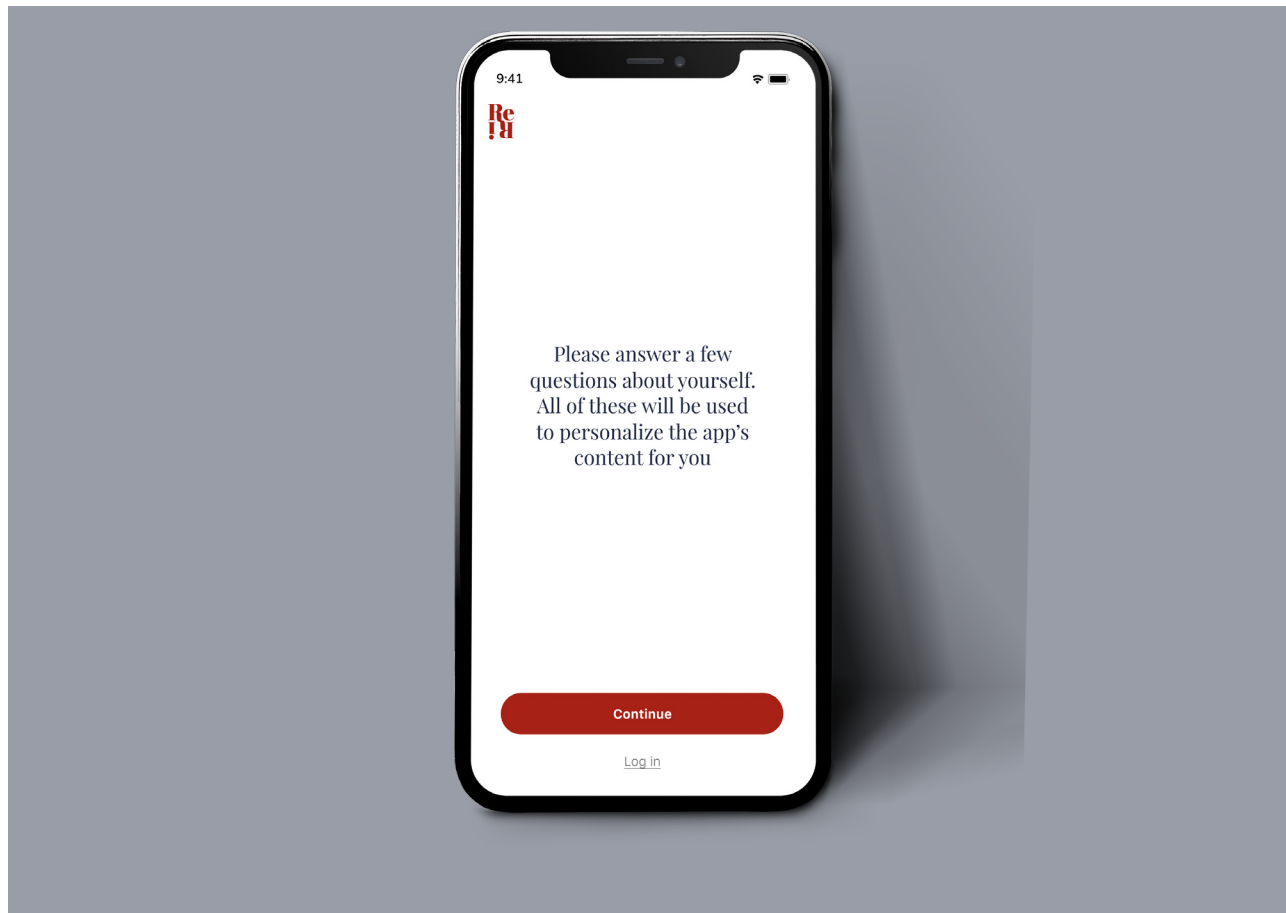
# Reimagining Rituals – the app

## ■ *The Structure of the App*

To create the structure of the app, I began by building the wireframe *Fig. 29*, keeping the user journeys in mind.

Upon opening the app for the first time, the user is prompted to answer a few questions or log in to an existing account.

When signing up, the user inputs their personal information, such as their name, email address and date of birth. The date of birth is important and handy, as the app will calculate the user's Roj birthday for them, along with anyone else's birthdays they choose to add to their list. Through first-hand experiences, I have found that it can be quite challenging to calculate ones Roj birthday, and so, typically, the youth turn to their elders to do it for them. With this function, they can have their Roj birthdays calculated for them and also have the option to download and share a pdf containing a list which includes their Roj birthday as well as all of those whom they have added to their list.



*Fig. 31. Reimagining Rituals: Start-up questions, 2023.*



# Reimagining Rituals – the app

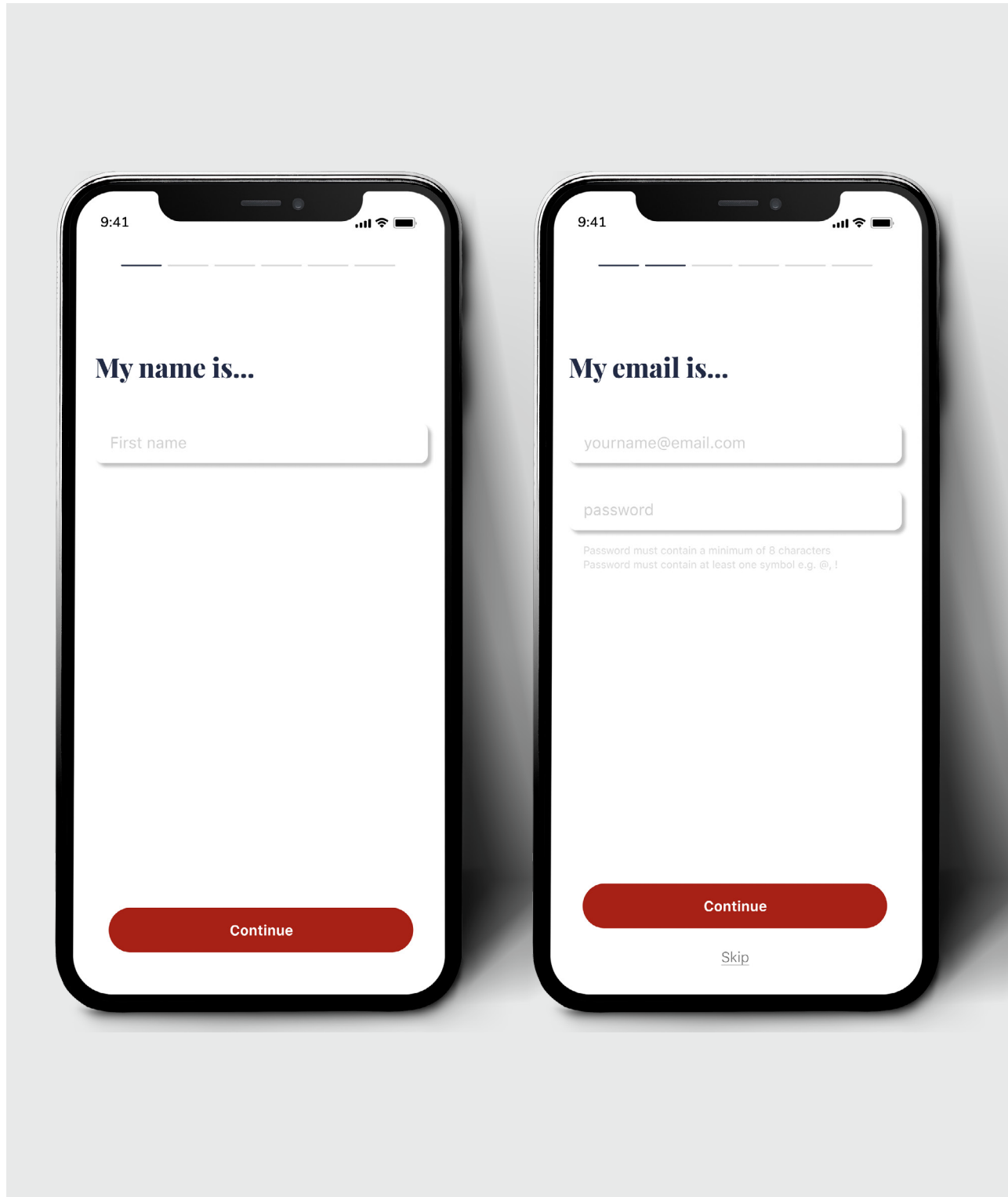


Fig. 32. Reimagining Rituals: Start-up questions, 2023.

# Reimagining Rituals – the app

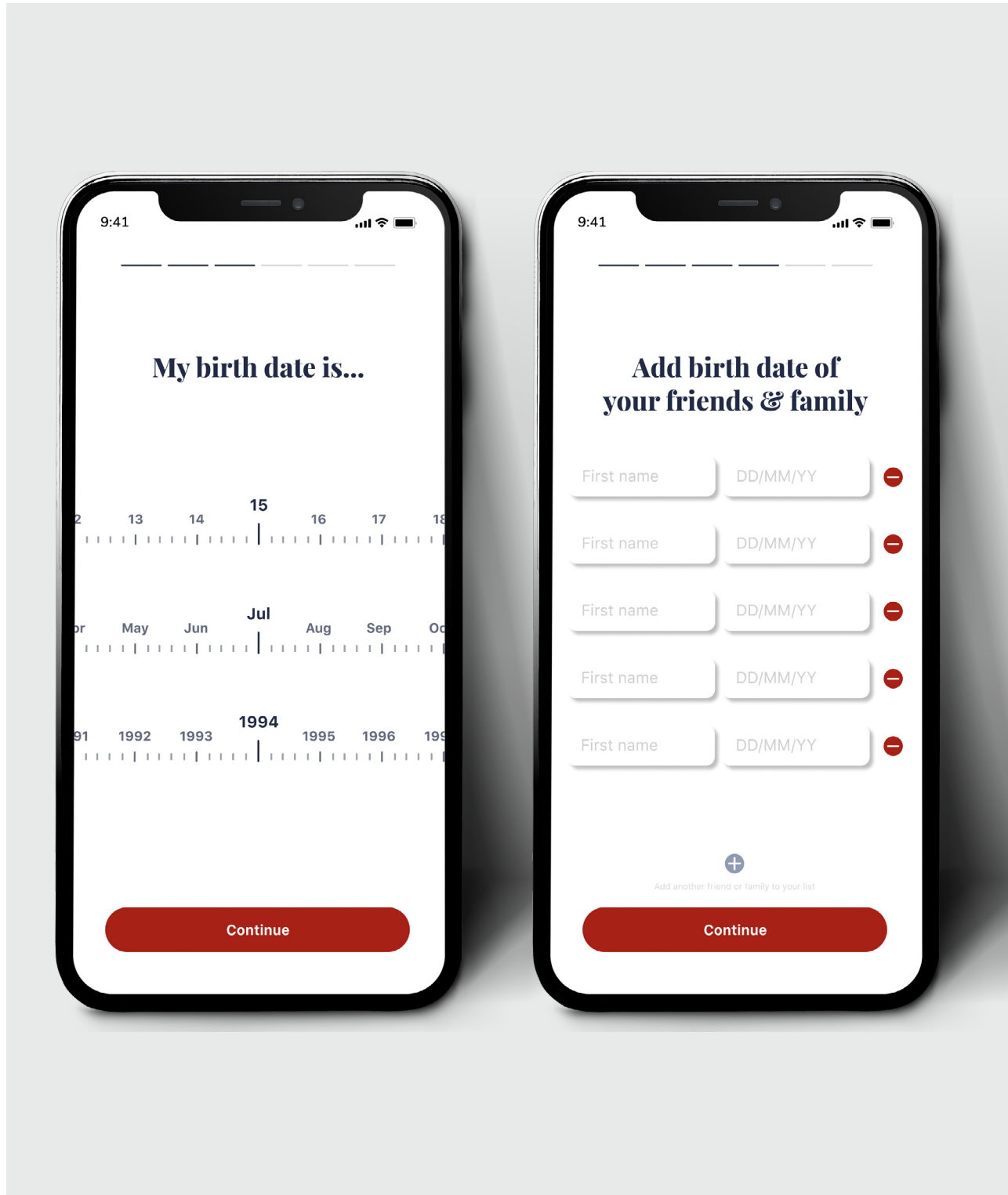


Fig. 33. Reimagining Rituals: Start-up questions, 2023.

# Reimagining Rituals – the app

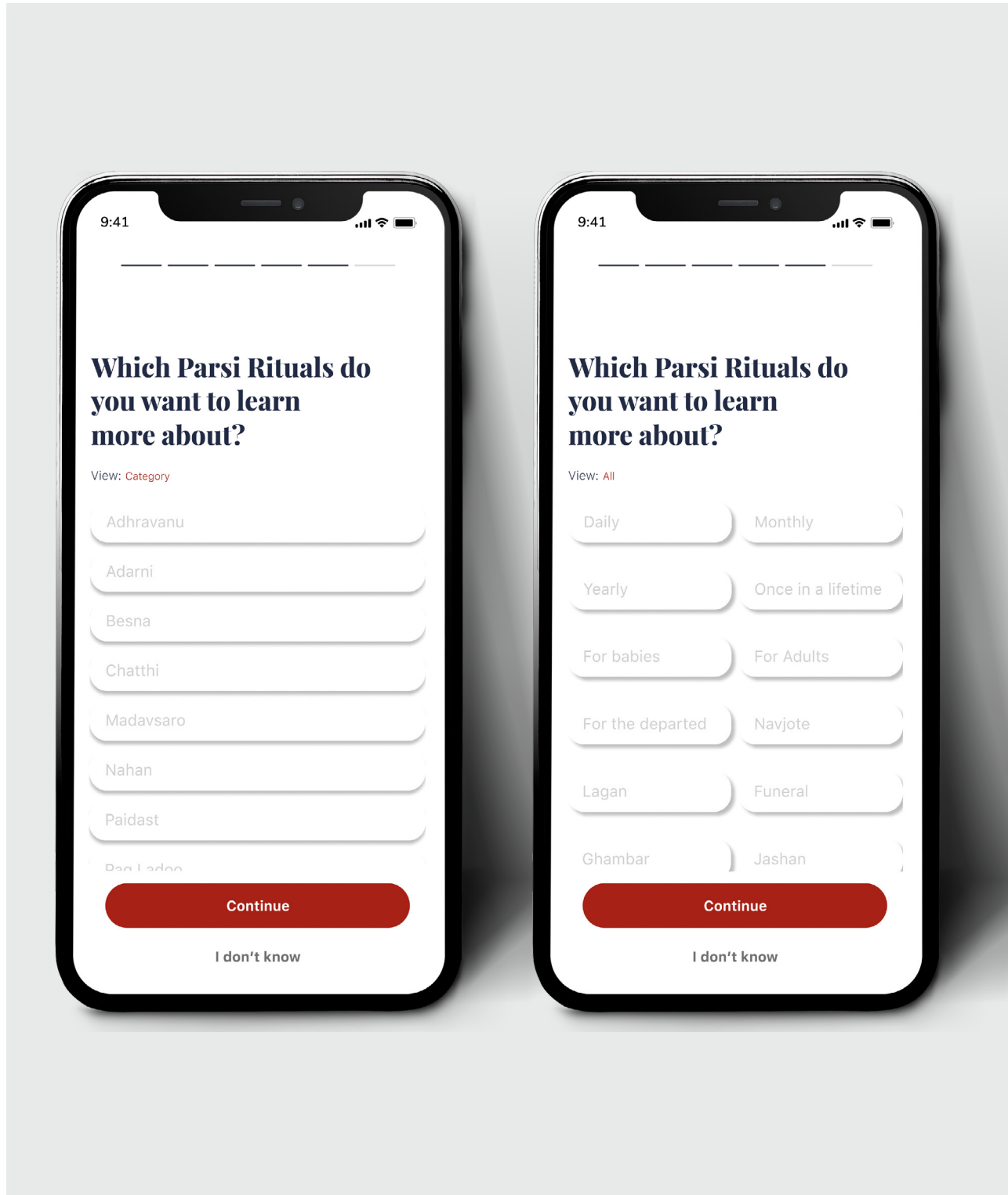


Fig. 34. Reimagining Rituals: Start-up questions, 2023.

# Reimagining Rituals – the app

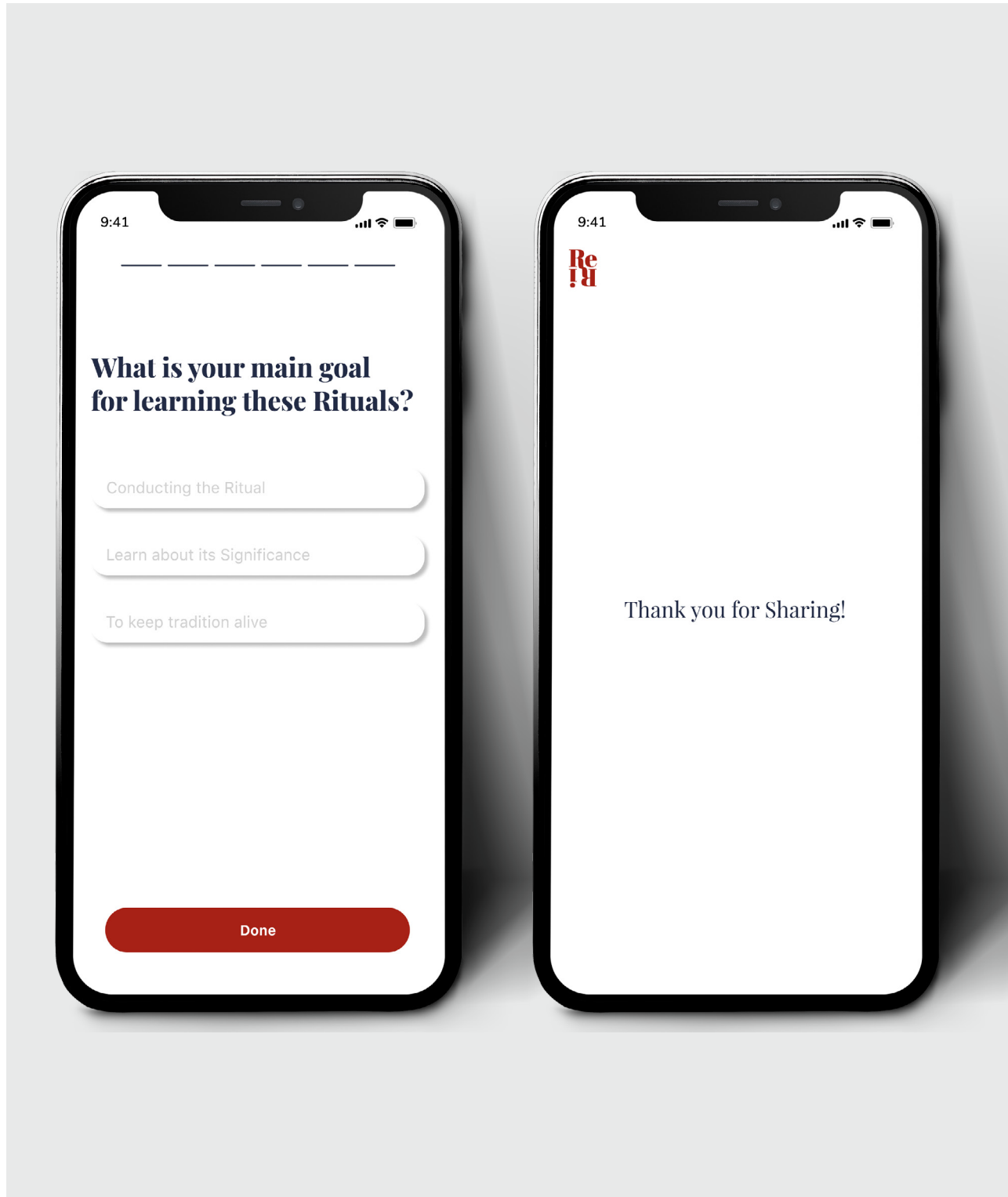


Fig. 35. Reimagining Rituals: Start-up questions, 2023.

# Reimagining Rituals – the app

Once this has been completed, the user is asked to select the rituals they are most interested in doing or learning about. They can choose to select individual rituals from an extensive list, or they can choose from several pre-grouped/filtered rituals such as those that happen once in a lifetime, those that are for children or even those that are for a demise. After this, the user is guided through the main features and functions of the app, which they can skip if needed.

## Features of the App

My research has led me to create four main features for the application: The calendar, as most of our rituals, are based on a specific month and what it represents. The calendar is crucial in understanding and directing the steps to the rituals; The repository, an extensive list of all our rituals, both religious & cultural; community building, this feature has been prioritised to connect and build community amongst the Parsi diaspora; and lastly, the account section, which is host to all the users' information.

### The Calendar

The Zoroastrians follow three religious calendars. I am choosing to focus on the *Shenshai*, or Imperial<sup>19</sup> calendar, which is followed by the majority of Parsi (Shahzadi & Mistree, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> In Sasanian times, the Zarathushtis adhered to a single religious calendar with 365 days total and 12 months of 30 days each plus five extra Gatha days. To align it with the solar calendar of 365 - 1/4 days, a new month was traditionally introduced once every 120 years.

Ancient calendars were kept in sync with the changing of the seasons by the intercalation of an additional month every 120 years, which traditionally caused the New Year to fall in the third week of March. The last time the Parsis included an extra 13th month was 1129 CE. As the Parsis stopped intercalating an additional month once every 120 years, the New Year has moved back in time until it presently occurs in August.

Every month in the Zarathushti calendar is named after Amesha Spenta, Izad or the Essence of Mazda, each dedicated to or representing an element or creation, as shown in Fig 22. The Fasli (seasonal) calendar starts in March, while the Shenshai and Kadmi calendars start in August and July, respectively (Boyce, 2009).

Shenshai Calendar Farvardin Month 1392 Y.Z. (Aug – Sept 2022)		 <b>PalV's Kasti</b> Buy Parsi Kasti Online		<b>Reasonable Rates.</b> <b>Free Delivery.</b> <a href="http://www.palvkasti.com">www.palvkasti.com</a>	
સોમ (Mon)		22 અમરદાદ (Amardad)	29 ગોશ (Gosh)	5 રાંમ (Ram)	12 જમીઆદ (Zamyad)
મંગળ (Tue)	16 હોરમઝદ (Hormazd)	23 દેપઆદર (Daepadar)	30 દએપમેહેર (Daepmeher)	6 ગોવાદ (Govad)	13 મારેસપંદ (Marespand)
બુધ (Wed)	17 બેહમન (Bahman)	24 આદર (Adar)	31 મેહેર (Meher)	7 દએપદીન (Daepdin)	14 અનેરાંન (Aneran)
ગુરુ (Thu)	18 અદીબેહેશ્ત (Ardibehesht)	25 આવાં (Ava)	1 સરોશ (Sarosh)	8 દીન (Din)	16) Sh. New Year 1392 Y.Z. 18) Consecration of Ragithwan 21) Khordad Sal 22) Kadmi Maidhyozahem Gahambar 1) Ann. Mumbai Doongerwadi Sagdi, J.J. Adaran Surat Rustompura 3) Fravardigan Jashan 4) Ann. Lonavala Adaran, Death Ann. Dasturji Kukadaru
શુક્ર (Fri)	19 શહેરેવર (Shehrevar)	26 ખોરશેદ (Khorshed)	2 રશને (Rashne)	9 અશીશવંધ (Ashishvagh)	
શનિ (Sat)	20 અસપંદામેદ (Aspandarmad)	27 મોહોર (Mohor)	3 ફરવદીન (Fravardin)	10 આશતાદ (Ashtad)	
રવિ (Sun)	21 ખોરદોદ (Khordard)	28 તીર (Tir)	4 બેહરાંમ (Behram)	11 આસમાન (Asman)	

Fig. 35. Shenshai Calendar, 2022.



# Reimagining Rituals – the app

Most of the rituals performed by the Parsis community heavily rely on our calendar, as important days and festivals are calculated according to it. An example of such a ritual would be the *Muktad*, observed on the 26th day of the 12th month till the 5th *Gatha* day.

A key feature of my app is the *Shenshai* Calendar, which overlaid with the Gregorian calendar. Its functions include:

- The ability to calculate an individual's *Roj* birthday
- The app will notify the user of special occasions and festivals they should be aware of based on the calendar and when each task should be carried out.
- Users can learn more about what the 12 *Mahs* (months) and their 30 *Rajs* (days) represent.



Fig. 37. Reimagining Rituals: Calendar section, 2023.

# Reimagining Rituals – the app

## *The Repository*

The key feature of the app is its repository of Parsi rituals. They are presented on the app in the form of a list which can be filtered through categories. These include rituals that happen once in a lifetime, such as a *Besna* or a *Navjote*, those that happen once every year, such as *Khordad Saal*, and those that happen every day, such as *Kasti* prayers. The repository includes rituals that are religious, cultural and religio-cultural.



Fig. 38. Reimagining Rituals: Rituals section, 2023.

# | Reimagining Rituals – the app

Each ritual, when opened, will have information about its significance, the steps to take when conducting it, a checklist for the user to keep, indications where alternatives can be used and lastly, a comments section where users can ask questions, leave comment or tips and tricks as well as photos of their rituals being performed to aid others in conducting the ritual.



Fig. 39. Reimagining Rituals: Ritual section - Navroze, 2023.

# Reimagining Rituals – the app

## Community Building

*Reimagining Rituals* places great importance on the community building section of the application. Within this function, there are seven main features:

- **Stories:** Here, the user can view their friends' daily stories,
- **Introduce yourself:** In this feature, the user can introduce themselves through a post to the entire *Reimagining Rituals* community. This has been made so that new users can find and make friends with those with a common interest or even live in the same city.

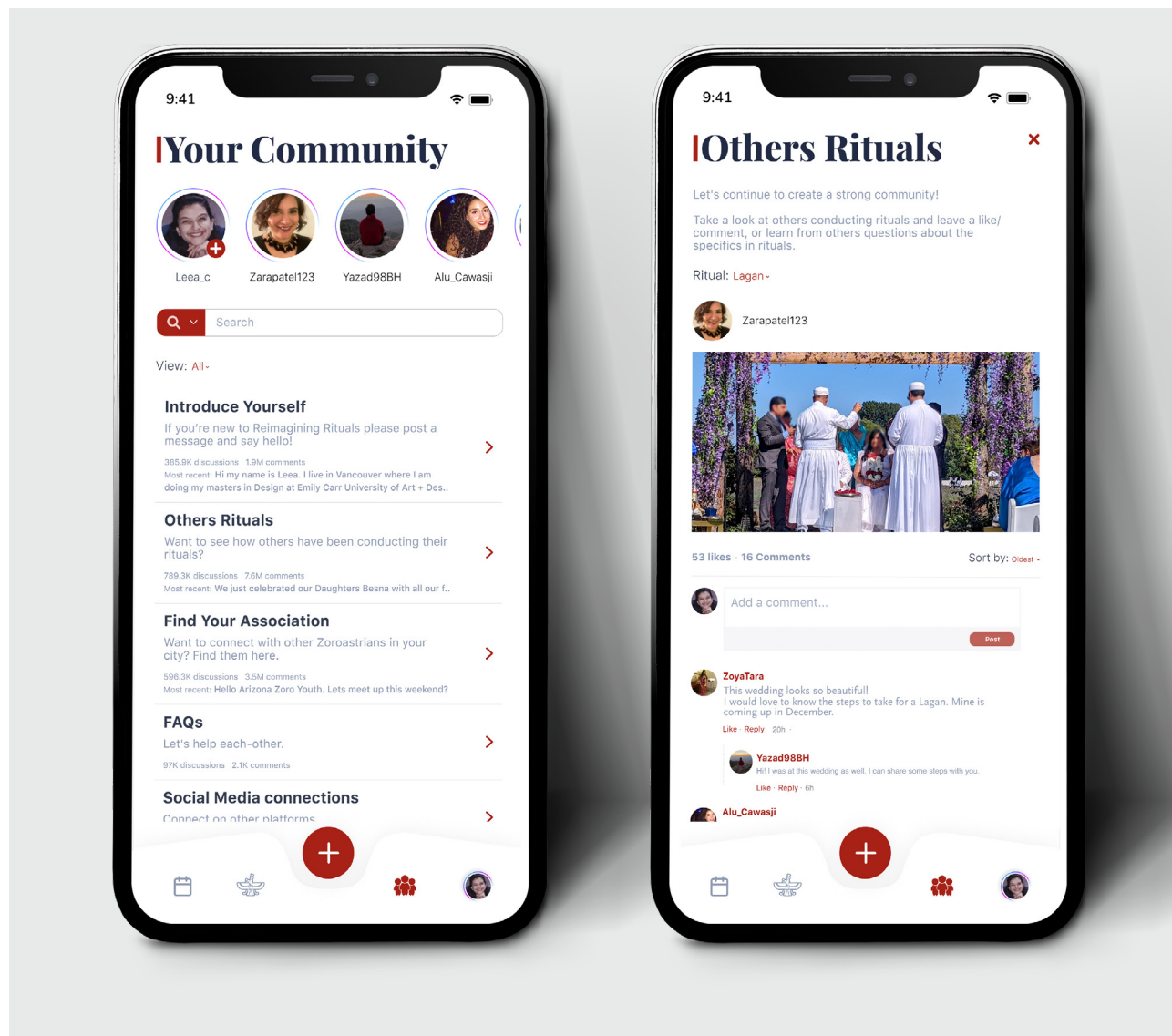


Fig. 40. Reimagining Rituals: Community Section, 2023.

# | Reimagining Rituals – the app

- **Others Rituals:** Here, the users can view the top rituals that others are conducting for that month. This will be in the form of posts/videos/pictures other *Reimagining Rituals* community members have chosen to share with everyone.
- **Find Your Association:** As mentioned before, Zoroastrian Associations have been formed across the globe. *Reimagining Rituals* has created this feature to help users locate their local Zoroastrian Associations.
- **FAQs:** This section has two main features; the first is where the app answers general FAQs, and the second is where the user can select a specific ritual from the drop-down menu, which leads them to a comments and questions section. Here the user is able to view comments and questions others have asked (and have been answered by the community itself) or can leave some of their own. The users are also able to upload images/videos to help answer or guide others to solve their problems/questions.
- **Social Media Connections:** This feature includes links to other Zoroastrian community building websites and social media pages, such as the Facebook group Worldwide Zoroastrians and the Zoroastrian Youth of North America (ZYNA) webpage.
- **Let's Chat:** Users can chat privately with other community members.

## *Your Account*

The accounts section opens to a list of shortcuts for the user. These include:

- **Your Feed:** Here, the user can access their feed, where they can create a post, add to their story, view their friend list, update their profile and display pictures and also view their previous posts.
- **Friends:** This directs them to a list of friends from which they can view their profiles.
- **Your Completed & Ongoing Rituals:** This comprises the users' completed rituals as well as those that are ongoing.
- **Local Association:** The user can find information about their specific Zoroastrian Association here.
- **Your Uploaded Images:** Here, the user can view all the images/videos they have uploaded of the rituals they have conducted.
- **Groups:** Created by or followed by the user



# Reimagining Rituals – the app

- **Notifications:** A list of notifications.
- **Reminders:** A list of reminders.
- **Social Media:** If they choose to, this connects the users' social media platforms to the app.
- **Settings & Privacy:** This function is to allow the user to adjust their settings and privacy options.
- **Help & Support:** The user can report any problems (technical or ethical) and view the terms and policies of the app.

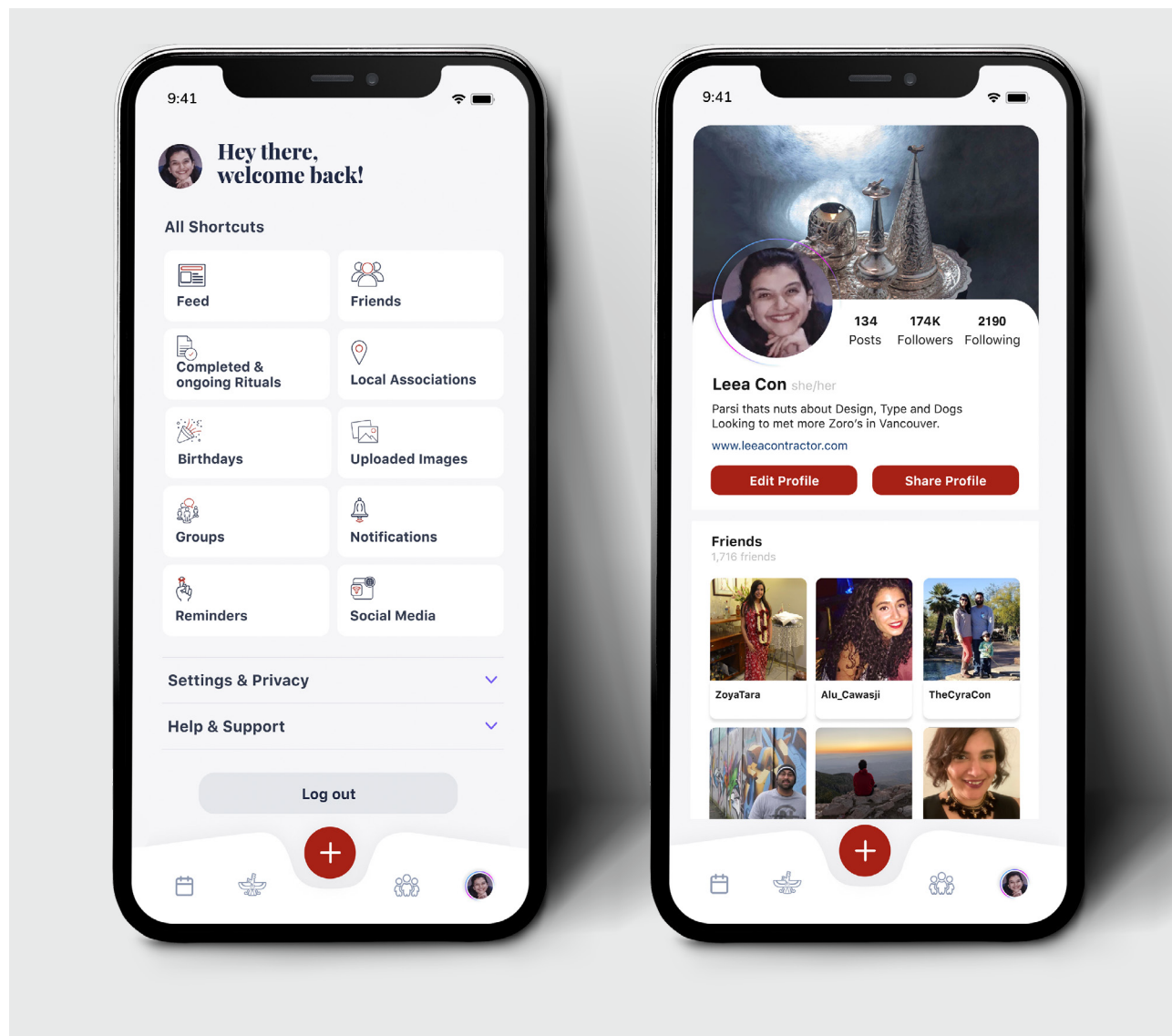


Fig. 41. Reimagining Rituals: Community Section, 2023.

# | Full Circle: Conclusions

In March 2022, I felt more homesick than I had since moving to Vancouver. *Navroze* was coming up, and I knew it would not be the same as it was back home: The family coming together, the smell of roses from the garlands we wore, the chalk stamped outside each door, the food served, or the *Haft Seen* table laid.

I was right. We tried to recreate it as best we could, but there were several frantic phone calls to my mum asking what we needed, what we could substitute, and brainstorming where we could find specific items. It took three tries to find a turnip, which we needed, and a last-minute run to Jugo Juice in an attempt to buy sprouted wheatgrass (*Sabzeh*) on *Navroze* morning.

It still was not the same. This time I was not a passive participant but the person carrying out the ritual, and despite everything, I felt disconnected...

Fast forward to March 2023: *Navroze* is a few days away. Through the past year of research, I have developed a deeper understanding of the ritual and history of *Navroze*. I know the significance of each of the seven items on the haft-seen table.

By using the mechanisms of the app, such as the calendar and checklist, I was able to prepare myself better this year and reminded myself to grow the *Sabzeh* two weeks in advance.

I have connected with a small community of friends and my sister, who lives in Arizona, where we report on our progress and send each other photographs.

Through this lo-fi, analogue testing, I have already seen a shift in my experience, and through this process, I have a greater appreciation for the potential impact the *Reimagining Rituals* app can have on my community.

Fig. 41 represents my community and how in the past, the nodes of knowledge sharing formed a centralised network with a few primary keepers and disseminators of knowledge. I hope to shift the knowledge sharing to a distributed network through the tools I have created as part of the *Reimagining Rituals* app. In this way, the *Parsi* diaspora can connect to their roots and culture, as well as each other, fostering a deeper connection and sense of belonging to a global community.

What started as an introspection on my relationship to *Parsi* rituals and their effects on my connection to culture and community turned into a journey of cultural preservation and amplification, knowledge sharing and community building.

# Full Circle: Conclusions

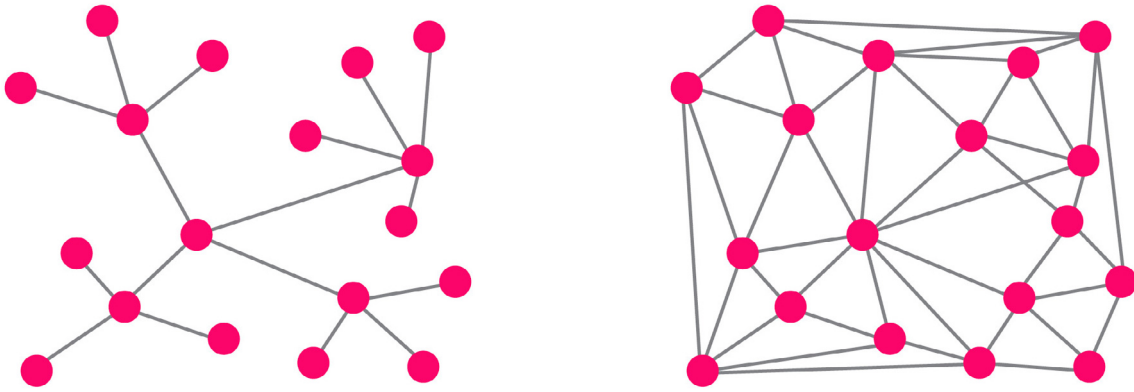


Fig. 41. Representation of the shift in the Parsi community through the *Reimagining Rituals* app, 2023.

*Reimagining Rituals* is the outcome of this journey. It serves as both a guide and an invitation for the *Parsi* community: to connect more profoundly to one another through the practice of our cultural rituals and to share their knowledge with other *Parsis* across the world.

Above all, it shows us how traditional problems often benefit from non-traditional solutions and that we can use the contemporary tools available to us to deepen our culture and traditions.

As a cultural project, *Reimagining Rituals* acknowledges the desire the youth of the *Parsi* diaspora have to connect to their community and does so by making the act of performing rituals easy to understand and carry out. It celebrates adapting and adjusting to where you live to allow our culture to survive and thrive through these waves of migration. It attempts to unpack the role rituals play in a diasporic setting. It recognises the notion that diasporic identities and communities are not rigid or homogeneous, but instead, they are constantly evolving (Hua, 2005, p.193).

*Reimagining Rituals* supports an understanding of *Parsi* rituals and facilitates conducting them using a familiar platform (apps) that increases availability and access while remaining sensitive to tradition.

As a design project, it reinforces autoethnography as a launching-off point for designers to use their lived experiences to create in a meaningful way. It speaks to design that is culturally aware and, as Fuad-Luke put it, “deeply personal”. It speaks of how ‘designerly ways of knowing’ can lead to a cross-pollination of ideas when the designer relinquishes the role of ‘expert’ and functions more like a facilitator. Above all, it speaks to a designer’s role in a society that is constantly evolving.

# | Future Directions

The *Reimagining Rituals* app was developed as a part of my Graduate research project in Design thesis. While it sows the seeds for the project, given adequate time and resources, I hope to see it develop into a functional mobile app in the future.

Its benefits could be far-reaching for the community, helping the youth of the *Parsi* diaspora preserve and amplify their culture, and there is potential to find funding for it amongst *Parsi* philanthropists or even the larger *Zoroastrian* organisations.

Creating a usable app would require harnessing the knowledge of *Parsi* and *Zoroastrian* scholars to develop content about the rituals, their significance and what is needed to perform them.

It would require an editor to distil the information so that it is suitable for mobile apps. It would also benefit from a professional photographer capturing the essence of the rituals.

On the development side, it would require front and back-end developers to make the app functional, as well as several rounds of user testing.

Launching the app would take a concerted marketing campaign that speaks to *Parsi* youth using relevant touchpoints like social media.

*Parsi* culture is a rich mix of influences, distinct in its practicum and with strong ties to a diasporic community, but it is by no means the only such culture. I hope that the methodology behind *Reimagining Rituals* can be applied to different cultures globally in an effort to preserve and amplify them as they continue to evolve.

# References

- Adams, T. E., Linn, S., & Ellis, C. (2015). Introduction to Autoethnography. In Autoethnography. Oxford; New York Oxford University Press.
- Allen, K.-A. (2020). Psychology Of Belonging. Routledge.
- Basu, P. (2007). Highland Homecomings. Routledge.
- Bekhrad, J. (2017, April 6). The obscure religion that shaped the West. [Www.bbc.com. https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20170406-this-obscure-religion-shaped-the-west?ocid=](https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20170406-this-obscure-religion-shaped-the-west?ocid=)
- Boyce, M. (2009). Textual sources for the study of Zoroastrianism. W. Ross Macdonald School Resource Services Library.
- Buchanan, R. (2009). Wicked Problems in Design Thinking. In Design Studies: A Reader (pp. 96–102). Berg Pub Limited.
- Castillo Muñoz, Y. (2021). “Staying Diasporic: Centering migrant and diasporic ways of being in design.” Pluriversal Design Special Interest Group, 341–348. <https://doi.org/10.21606/pluriversal.2021.0033>
- Chinoy, S. O. (2017). HOME 1947 [Immersive Exhibition].
- Clifford, J. (1994). Diasporas. Cultural Anthropology, 9(3), 302–338. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/656365>
- Cross, N. (2010). Designerly ways of knowing. (4th ed., Vol. 3, pp. 221–227). Springer London Ltd.
- Dorst, K. (2015). Frame Creation and Design in the Expanded Field. She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation, 1(1), 22–33. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sheji.2015.07.003>
- Eduljee, K. E. (2005). Navjote, Sudreh Pooshi, Zoroastrian Initiation Ceremony. [Www.heritageinstitute.com. https://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/navjote/index.htm](http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/navjote/index.htm)
- Esposito, R. (2010). Communitas. Stanford University Press.
- Fuad-Luke, A. (2009). Design activism: beautiful strangeness for a sustainable world. Earthscan.
- Georgiou, M. (2010). Identity, Space and the Media: Thinking through Diaspora. Revue Européenne Des Migrations Internationales Les



# References

- Médias Des Minorités Ethniques, 26(1), 17–35. <https://doi.org/10.4000/remi.5028>
- Godrej, P., & Mistree, F. P. (2002). *A Zoroastrian Tapestry: Art, Religion & Culture*. Mapin Pub. ; Wappingers' Falls, Ny.
- Gordon-Lennox, J. (2016). *Crafting Secular Ritual*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Hall, S. (2021). *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*. In *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory*. Routledge.
- Hanington, B., & Martin, B. (2019). *Universal Methods Of Design*. Rockport Publishers.
- Hinnells, J. R. (2005). *The Zoroastrian Diaspora: Religion and Migration: the Ratanbai Katrak lectures, the Oriental Faculty, Oxford 1985*. Oxford University Press.
- Hua, A. (2005). *Diaspora and Cultural Memory*. In *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home* (pp. 191–208). University of Toronto Press.
- Hussain, Z. (2019). *Sense of Identity and Community: A Case Study of Kashmiri Diaspora Abroad*. *Indian Journal of Social Research*, 60(1), 35–47.
- Johnson, M., & Werbner, P. (2010). *Diasporic Encounters, Sacred Journeys: Ritual, Normativity and the Religious Imagination Among International Asian Migrant Women*. *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, 11(3-4), 205–218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2010.517510>
- Karai, T. (2013, October 26). *Parsi Ceremonies & Rituals* | ZAGNY. ZAGNY. <https://zagny.org/parsi-ceremonies-rituals/>
- Karanjia, R. P. (2004). *The Bāj-dharnā (Drōn Yašt) and its Place in Zoroastrian Rituals*. In *Zoroastrian Rituals in Context*. Brill.
- McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). *Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory* (Vol. 14). *Journal of Community Psychology*.
- Mistree, K. (2002). *Parsi Arrival and Early Settlement in India*. In *A Zoroastrian Tapestry* (p. 413). Mapin.

# References

Munshi, S. N., & Stewart, S. (2002). Observances of the Faithful. In A Zoroastrian Tapestry : Art, Religion and Culture (pp. 385–397). Mapin.

Naqvi, L. (n.d.). The EAT Project. Theeatproject. Retrieved March 15, 2023, from <https://www.theeatproject.com/copy-of-about>

Ozenc, K. (2016, April 6). Introducing Ritual Design: meaning, purpose, and behavior change. Medium. <https://medium.com/ritual-design/introducing-ritual-design-meaning-purpose-and-behavior-change-44d26d484edf>

Papanek, V. (1985). Design for the real world. Thames & Hudson.

Peters, J. D. (1999). Exile, Nomadism, and Diaspora. In Home, Exile, Homeland Film, Media, and the Politics of Place. Routledge.

Phinney, J. S. (1996). Understanding Ethnic Diversity: The Role of Ethnic Identity. American Behavioral Scientist, Volume 40(Issue 2).

Rosenblum, M. R., & Tichenor, D. J. (2018). Oxford Handbook of the Politics of International Migration. Oxford University Press.

Rustomji, A. (2018). Ready-Made Ruin (Lahore). Taseer Art Gallery Lahore.

Sanders, E. B., & Stappers, P. J. (2012). Convivial design toolbox: generative research for the front end of design. Bis.

Sarason, S. B. (1977). The Psychological Sense of Community. San Francisco : Jossey-Bass.

Schouwenberg, L., & Kaethler, M. (2022). The Auto-Ethnographic Turn in Design. Design and Culture, 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17547075.2022.2061138>

Shahzadi, M. F. S., & Mistree, K. (1998). The Zarathustri Religion - A basic text (1st ed.). FEZANA: Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America.

Shuval, J. T. (2000). Diaspora Migration: Definitional Ambiguities and a Theoretical Paradigm. International Migration, 38(5), 41–56. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2435.00127>

# References

- Theisen, A. (2019, March 8). Is a sense of belonging important? [Www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org. https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/is-having-a-sense-of-belonging-important](https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/is-having-a-sense-of-belonging-important)
- Wise, S. (2022). Design for belonging: how to build inclusion and collaboration in your communities (pp. 1–26, 83–137). Ten Speed Press.
- Writer, R. (1994). Contemporary Zoroastrians. University Press of Amer.
- Wulf, C., Althans, B., Audehm, K., Bausch, C., Göhlich, M., Sting, S., Tervooren, A., Wagner-Willi, M., Zirfas, J., Lagaay, A., & Hamilton, E. (2010). Ritual and Identity; The staging and performing of rituals in the lives of young people.
- WZYC. (2020). 8th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress. 8WZYC. <https://www.8wzyc.com/>

# Bibliography

Anteby-Yemini, L., & Berthomière, W. (2005). *Diaspora: A Look Back on a Concept*.

Basu, P. (2005). Macpherson Country: genealogical identities, spatial histories and the Scottish diasporic landscape. In *Cultural Geographies* (Vol. 12, Issue 2, pp. 123–150). Sage Publications. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1474474005eu324oa>

Berk, Gozde Goncu. *A Framework for Designing in Cross-Cultural Contexts: Culture-Centered Design Process*. June 2013, pp. 121–126.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture* (pp. 40–65, 171–197). Routledge.

Bhesania, M. (2018). *Zarathustra and the origins of Zoroastrianism - Exploring the Historical, Social, Cultural and Economic Legacy*. Meher Bhesania.

Bremner, C., & Rodgers, P. (2013). *Design Without Discipline*. *Design Issues*, 29(3), 4–13.

Brewer, Joe. “Cultural Design: The Scientific Field Needed for the 21st Century.” *Medium*, 10 Jan. 2018, [medium.com/@joe\\_brewer/cultural-design-the-scientific-field-needed-for-the-21st-century-b1e2ff546245](https://medium.com/@joe_brewer/cultural-design-the-scientific-field-needed-for-the-21st-century-b1e2ff546245)

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture* (pp. 40–65, 171–197). Routledge.

Bhesania, M. (2018). *Zarathustra and the origins of Zoroastrianism - Exploring the Historical, Social, Cultural and Economic Legacy*. Meher Bhesania.

Bremner, C., & Rodgers, P. (2013). *Design Without Discipline*. *Design Issues*, 29(3), 4–13.

Buchanan, R. (1995). *Wicked Problems in Design Thinking*. In V. Margolin & R. Buchanan (Eds.), *The idea of design* (p. 14). MIT Press.

Burns, C., Cottam, H., Vanstone, C., & Winhall, J. (2006). *RED Paper 02: Transformation Design*. [www.designcouncil.org.uk](http://www.designcouncil.org.uk); Design Council, UK. <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-work/skills-learning/resources/red-paper-02-transformation-design/>

Chick, A., & Micklethwaite, P. (2017). *Part 2: Sustainability*. In *Design for*

# Bibliography

Sustainable Change (pp. 76–101). Bloomsbury Publishing.

Churchman, C. W. (1967). Guest Editorial: Wicked Problems. *Management Science*, 14(4), B141–B142. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2628678>

Clark, H., & Brody, D. E. (2009). *Design studies: A Reader*. Berg.

Cross, N. (2010). *Designerly ways of knowing*. (4th ed., Vol. 3, pp. 221–227). Springer London Ltd.

Chiang, C.-Y. (2010). Diasporic Theorizing Paradigm on Cultural Identity. In *Intercultural Communication Studies XIX*.

Dissanayake, E. (2000). *Art and intimacy: how the arts began*. University of Washington Press.

Dittenberger, S. (2018). PUTTING THEORY TO PRACTICE: REFLECTIONS ON THE INTEGRATION OF PRODUCT DESIGN ASPECTS IN AAL PROJECTS. *Proceedings of the DESIGN 2018 15th International Design Conference*. <https://doi.org/10.21278/idc.2018.0187>

Escobar, A. (2018). *Designs for the pluriverse: radical interdependence, autonomy, and the making of worlds*. Duke University Press.

Frascara, J. (2002). *Design and the Social Sciences*.

Ghandeharion, A., & Farshi, S. S. (2017). Homi Bhabha and Iranian-American literature of Diaspora: Is Firoozeh Dumas's funny in Farsi Postcolonially funny?

Lahiri, H., & Hibbard, A. (2019). *Diaspora theory and transnationalism*. Orient Blackswan.

Hall, S. (2017). *The Fateful Triangle* (pp. 125–174). Harvard University Press.

Hanington, B., & Martin, B. (2019). *Universal Methods Of Design*. Rockport Publishers.

IDEO. (2015). *The Field Guide to Human-centered Design*. (1st ed.). IDEO.

Lewis, A. (1980). The Ritual Process and Community Development. *Community Development Journal*, 15(3), 190–199. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03616958008988481>



# Bibliography

org/10.1093/cdj/15.3.190

Manzini, E. (2015). Design for Social Innovation. In *When Everybody Designs: An Introduction to Design for Social Innovation*. MIT Press.

Munasinghe, Aroshine. A Culture-Centered Design Approach to Improve a User Interface for Migrants. 2017.

Niedderer, K. (n.d.). A DISCOURSE ON THE MEANING OF KNOWLEDGE IN ART AND DESIGN RESEARCH.

Niedderer, K. (2007). Table of Contents: Articles: 1 Mapping the Meaning of Knowledge in Design Research. *Design Research Quarterly*, 2.

Paleczny, T., & Zieliński, B. (2008). CULTURAL IDENTITY: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PHENOMENON. *Politeja*, 10(1), 353–372. <https://doi.org/10.2307/24919310>

Pooley, J. A., Cohen, L., & Pike, L. T. (2005). Can sense of community inform social capital? *The Social Science Journal*, 42(1), 71–79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2004.11.006>

Poulos, C. N. (2021). Conceptual Foundations of Autoethnography. In *Essentials of Autoethnography* (pp. 3–18). American Psychological Association.

Putnam, R. D. (2007). E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 30(2), 137–174. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2007.00176.x>

Sanders, E. B.-N. . (2002). Scaffolds for Experiencing in the New Design Space. *Information Design*, 1–6.

Serrat, O. (2008). Knowledge Solutions Culture Theory.

Sanders, Elizabeth. B., & Stappers, P. J. (2008). Co-creation and the new landscapes of Design. *CoDesign*, 4(1), 5–18.

Shen, Siu-Tsen, et al. “Towards Culture-Centred Design.” *Interacting with Computers*, vol. 18, no. 4, July 2006, pp. 820–852, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intcom.2005.11.014>. Accessed 9 Mar. 2023.

# Bibliography

- Sonn, C. C., Bishop, B. J., & Drew, N. M. (1999). Sense of community: Issues and considerations from a cross-cultural perspective. *Community, Work & Family*, 2(2), 205–218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668809908413941>
- Stolz, J., Schneuwly, M., Krüggeler, M., Englberger, T., & Könemann, J. (2016). (Un)Believing in Modern Society. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.
- Thackara, J. (2006). In *The Bubble: Designing in a Complex World*. Mit.
- The World Cafe. (2015, July 4). Design Principles. The World Cafe. <https://www.theworldcafe.com/principles.html>
- The World Zoroastrian Organisation. (2023). The World Zoroastrian Organisation – Globally supporting Zoroastrianism, its people and traditions. [www.w-z-o.org](http://www.w-z-o.org). <https://www.w-z-o.org/>
- Van Der Veer, Gerrit. “Culture Centered Design.” *Proceedings of the 9th ACM SIGCHI Italian Chapter International Conference on Computer-Human Interaction: Facing Complexity*, Association for Computing Machinery, 2011.
- Vaughan, L. (2017). *Practice-based design research*. Bloomsbury Visual Arts.
- Venkataramani, A., & Menter, A. (2020). *Integrating Self and Systems Through Ritual Towards Deeper Systems Practice*.
- Zenner, W. P. (1987). Middleman Minorities in the Syrian Mosaic. *Sociological Perspectives*, 30(4), 400–421. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1389211>
- ZYNA. (2023). Zoroastrian Youth of North America | FEZANA. Zoroastrian Youth of North America. <https://fezana.org/zyna/>

# Appendices

## Research Ethics Certification



# Appendices

## Questionnaire

### Hi! I am so glad you agreed to fill up this questionnaire.

My name is Leea Contractor, I am a 1st year Masters' student studying design at Emily Carr University in Vancouver. I was born and raised in Karachi, Pakistan, which has had a major impact on all my designs so far. For my Master's Project, I hope to find ways in which Design can be used to amplify rituals and make them more accessible to the youth of the Parsi diaspora living in North America, and across the globe.

Now that you know a little about me, I would love to hear what you think below!

\* Required

1. How old are you? \*

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Where do you live? (city, country) \*

\_\_\_\_\_

3. As part of the Parsi diaspora, which rituals are you more interested in learning about? \*

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Daily  
☐ Monthly  
☐ Yearly  
☐ Ceremonial

7. How do you know/remember what steps to perform for each ritual?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Is there anything that would help you conduct these rituals more efficiently?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. If your household includes younger generations, do they have a thorough understanding of these rituals?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ I am not sure

10. What are the ways that you will share this knowledge with friends or family members?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Skip to question 38

4. What does the future of these rituals look like to you?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. What do you know about Parsi rituals? \*

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ I know a lot about them, I frequently conduct the rituals for myself/my family  
Skip to question 6  
☐ I don't know everything but I know the mains ones and frequently conduct them  
Skip to question 11  
☐ I know of the rituals, but rely on the knowledge of someone else to tell me how to carry out the specific steps Skip to question 17  
☐ I am often a participant in the rituals but they are conducted by someone else  
Skip to question 24  
☐ I don't know anything about Parsi rituals at all Skip to question 31

I know a lot about them, I frequently conduct the rituals for myself/my family

6. Which types of Parsi rituals do you frequently conduct?

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Daily  
☐ Monthly  
☐ Yearly  
☐ Ceremonial

I don't know everything but I know the mains ones and frequently conduct them

11. Which types of Parsi rituals do you frequently conduct?

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Daily  
☐ Monthly  
☐ Yearly  
☐ Ceremonial

12. What is preventing you from conducting the other Parsi Rituals?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

13. For the Rituals that you frequently perform, how do you know/remember what steps to perform?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

14. Is there anything that would help you conduct these rituals more efficiently?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Appendices

15. If your household includes younger generations, do they have a thorough understanding of these rituals?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ I'm not sure

16. What are the ways that you will share this knowledge with friends or family members?

---

---

---

---

Skip to question 38

I know of the rituals, but rely on the knowledge of someone else to tell me how to carry out the specific steps

17. What is preventing you from conducting the Parsi rituals?
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Lack of knowledge  
☐ Lack of interest  
☐ Lack of resources and time  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

22. Do you think it is important for the knowledge of Parsi Rituals to be passed down from generation to generation?

Mark only one oval.

Not really

1 ☐

2 ☐

3 ☐

4 ☐

5 ☐

6 ☐

7 ☐

8 ☐

9 ☐

10 ☐

Absolutely

18. Who in your family knows the most about the specific steps of the Parsi rituals particularly monthly, yearly and ceremonial rituals?

---

---

---

---

19. Are you interested in leading and conducting these rituals yourself?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ I'm not sure

20. What would make you interested in leading/conducting these rituals yourself?

---

---

---

---

21. Is there anything that would help you conduct these rituals yourself?

---

---

---

---

23. What are the ways that you will share this knowledge with friends or family members?

---

---

---

---

Skip to question 38

I am often a participant in the rituals but they are conducted by someone else

24. What is preventing you from conducting the Parsi rituals?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Lack of knowledge  
☐ Lack of interest  
☐ Lack of resources and time  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

25. Who in your family performs most of the Parsi rituals particularly monthly, yearly and ceremonial rituals?

---

---

---

---



# Appendices

26. Are you interested in leading and conducting these rituals yourself?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ I'm not sure

27. What would make you interested in leading/conducting these rituals yourself?

---

---

---

---

28. Is there anything that would help you conduct these rituals yourself?

---

---

---

---

30. What are the ways that you will share this knowledge with friends or family members?

---

---

---

---

Skip to question 38

I don't know anything about Parsi rituals at all

31. What prevents you from knowing about Parsi Rituals?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Lack of awareness  
☐ Lack of interest  
☐ Lack of resources and time  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

32. Is there anyone in your family who performs/used to perform Parsi rituals particularly monthly, yearly and ceremonial rituals?

---

---

---

---

29. Do you think it is important for the knowledge of Parsi Rituals to be passed down from generation to generation?

Mark only one oval.

Not really

- 1 ☐  
2 ☐  
3 ☐  
4 ☐  
5 ☐  
6 ☐  
7 ☐  
8 ☐  
9 ☐  
10 ☐

Absolutely

33. Are you interested in knowing more about Parsi Rituals?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ I'm not sure

34. What would make you interested in leading/conducting these rituals yourself?

---

---

---

---

35. Is there anything that would help you conduct these rituals yourself?

---

---

---

---

# Appendices

36. Do you think it is important for the knowledge of Parsi Rituals to be passed down from generation to generation?

Mark only one oval.

Not really

1 ☐

2 ☐

3 ☐

4 ☐

5 ☐

6 ☐

7 ☐

8 ☐

9 ☐

10 ☐

Absolutely

37. What are the ways that you will share this knowledge with friends or family members?

---

---

---

---

Skip to question 38

Future Project

Would you like to help me advance my project by being a part of future workshops/focus groups? If so please share your email address below. I hope to connect with you soon!

38. Your email

---

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms

# Appendices



Hi! I am so glad you agreed to fill up this questionnaire.

282 responses

[Publish analytics](#)

How old are you?

282 responses

28

24

29

35

30

27

31

46

44

Where do you live? (city, country)

282 responses

Karachi, Pakistan

Toronto, Canada

Mumbai, India

Mumbai

Karachi Pakistan

Toronto

Karachi, Pakistan

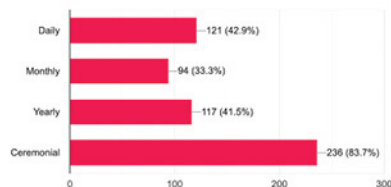
India

Mumbai, India

As part of the Parsi diaspora, which rituals are you more interested in learning about?

[Copy](#)

282 responses



What does the future of these rituals look like to you?

233 responses

Bleak

Good

Fading away

Dwindling

Diminishing

They will probably cease to exist

Bleak

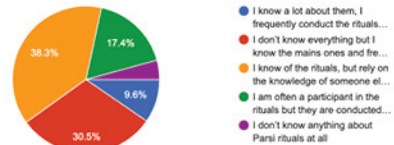
They're fading out currently

I don't know

What do you know about Parsi rituals?

282 responses

[Copy](#)

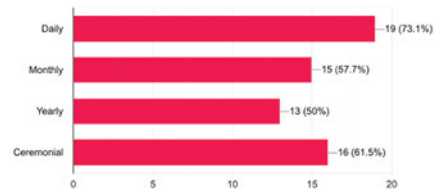


I know a lot about them, I frequently conduct the rituals for myself/my family

Which types of Parsi rituals do you frequently conduct?

26 responses

[Copy](#)



How do you know/remember what steps to perform for each ritual?

23 responses

When you practice it daily, you never forget.  
Special days like Behram Roj, Hormazd Roj, the Shehshahi calendar, Mushkil Aasaan prayers, kusti prayers, tandarosti and all.

It's been taught to us since childhood, n we've passed it on to our kids

They are imbedded in the memory through the socialization process at a young age. It's like riding a bike or memorizing steps to a dance. Once you begin it starts happening.

I guess I kinda learned them by heart when I was younger and carried them as habit?

Thru orset

From childhood, I follownot

Following a friend, family member

By heart

# Appendices

Is there anything that would help you conduct these rituals more efficiently?  
22 responses

No

I am quite content the way I do them. Life is a fast moving pace and you have to really work hard to make it balance efficiently.

Participation of youth

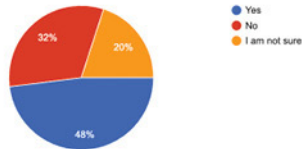
Like saving time? Why is the society so eager to save time. These rituals are a form of spiritual connection and meditation. Relax and take your time.

Well, I'm part of a lot of traditional groups on Facebook that remind me! Maybe access to materials needed? Like sandalwood. But I'm pleasantly surprised at the ready ability to access them thru places like the Zoroastrian Culture Shop run by Jehan Ganjia

Not particular

Reference page/ site

If your household includes younger generations, do they have a thorough understanding of these rituals?  
25 responses



What are the ways that you will share this knowledge with friends or family members?  
23 responses

I'd let them watch me do them and participate along.

Through practice

Leading by example. Just do it. Let people watch and follow.

I keep trying to forward rituals etc to my son, but I think he ignores them! My mother did teach him the navjote prayers and he did have a navjote in Chicago!

By example

By talking to them

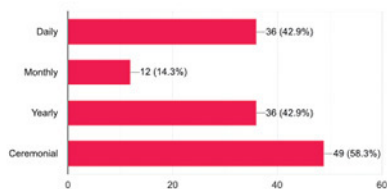
By doing and participating in as many rituals as we can with friends and family

Regular communication

Thru written n Oral communication

I don't know everything but I know the mains ones and frequently conduct them

Which types of Parsi rituals do you frequently conduct?  
84 responses



What is preventing you from conducting the other Parsi Rituals?  
75 responses

Lack of knowledge

Lack of knowledge and purpose?

Nothing is really preventing me, unfortunately I've fallen out of the habit.

Comittment

Not much knowledge on them and I also am not too keen on them either due to it being so specific.

Time and money

No fire temple in area No dasturs

Inconvenient to pray daily. No one in community here wants to hold gahambars.

No fire temoles

For the Rituals that you frequently perform, how do you know/remember what steps to perform?  
78 responses

"Mom said so" - that's the only way

It's become muscle memory but sometimes I do forget small parts.

Book

I don't but if I have to then repetition

Just habit from previous traditions

By practice

I look online.

Memory

Learnt from elders

Is there anything that would help you conduct these rituals more efficiently?  
66 responses

Nope

No

If there was more of a relation made to it

I think if someone / thing was reenforcing the importance of them.

More interest I suppose

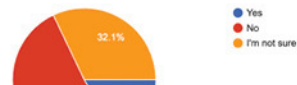
Honestly just doing them more I think would benefit anyone that wants to learn more about them.

Book or website

If I was in a city where more zoroastrian lived xlt a fire temple existed

More online content

If your household includes younger generations, do they have a thorough understanding of these rituals?  
81 responses

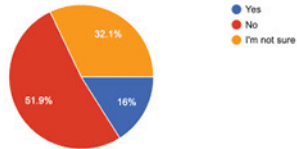


# Appendices

If your household includes younger generations, do they have a thorough understanding of these rituals?

[Copy](#)

81 responses



What are the ways that you will share this knowledge with friends or family members?

68 responses

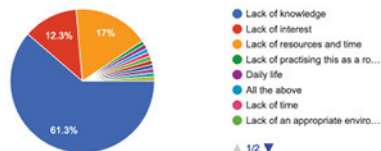
Social media
Not sure
Via phone / social media
Doing them together
Post on social media
By doing them
We try to write things down for the kids. My dad made them a prayer book.
Share
Word of mouth

I know of the rituals, but rely on the knowledge of someone else to tell me how to carry out the specific steps

What is preventing you from conducting the Parsi rituals?

[Copy](#)

106 responses



Who in your family knows the most about the specific steps of the Parsi rituals particularly monthly, yearly and ceremonial rituals?

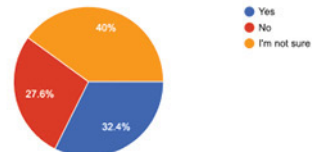
103 responses

Mother
My mom
Parents
Mom
My mother
Parents
No one
My grandmother
None

Are you interested in leading and conducting these rituals yourself?

[Copy](#)

105 responses



What would make you interested in leading/conducting these rituals yourself?

84 responses

Knowledge
Knowledge
Nothing
More knowledge
Understanding the full breadth of the significance
Proper knowledge to go off of
Preserving what I grew up with
If I knew enough and felt confident enough to conduct these rituals, and if I felt I could devote enough time to do them justice.
Just knowing more about my religion because everything seems so lovely I just don't

Is there anything that would help you conduct these rituals yourself?

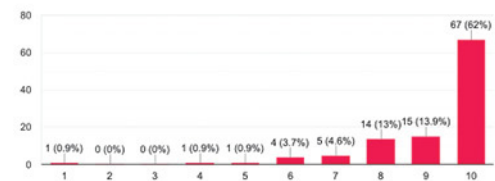
88 responses

No
Knowledge
Not really
Maybe when I have time as I'm a working professional
Knowledge and practice
Like how to do them/ when to do them/ significance
Proper instruction
Knowledge and experience
Lifelong mentors who could guide me 1:1 or in small group settings, and who could help me direct my learning — I can learn a lot through the internet but it's difficult to structure

Do you think it is important for the knowledge of Parsi Rituals to be passed down from generation to generation?

[Copy](#)

108 responses





# Appendices

What are the ways that you will share this knowledge with friends or family members?  
86 responses

Word of mouth

Use technology, informal meetings, Sunday school for kids etc

By talking about it

Videos

By actually doing the rituals

Through documentation, physical and digital

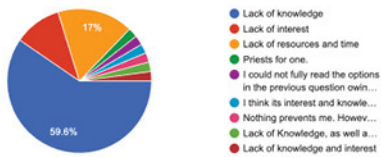
Bringing family to Zoroastrian community events, and making sure we spend a lot of time together at all festivals/ceremonies – these are a great opportunity to learn something new and reinforce traditions. I would also share resources such as books/videos/articles.

Making detailed instructions on paper

I am often a participant in the rituals but they are conducted by someone else

What is preventing you from conducting the Parsi rituals?  
47 responses

Copy



Who in your family performs most of the Parsi rituals particularly monthly, yearly and ceremonial rituals?  
44 responses

Mother

Mother

Me

Dad

My mother

Me, parents

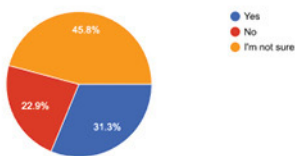
My mother in law

My late granny used to

Priests

Are you interested in leading and conducting these rituals yourself?  
48 responses

Copy



What would make you interested in leading/conducting these rituals yourself?  
39 responses

Unsure

Knowing more about the reasoning behind them.

Knowledge of our prayer. Our word

The simple rituals

Family support

the immersion in one's culture

NA

Having more time

To know about the rituals

Is there anything that would help you conduct these rituals yourself?  
36 responses

No

More understanding and knowledge.

N/a

No

A tell all book in simple terms

Yes- plenty of resources, but none too user friendly

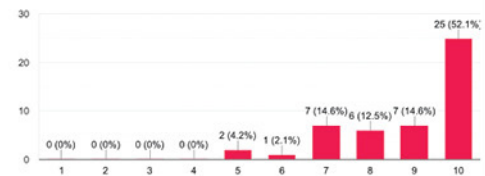
Yes - tanslations of meanings and easy to read English texts

Yes

Nothing

Do you think it is important for the knowledge of Parsi Rituals to be passed down from generation to generation?  
48 responses

Copy



What are the ways that you will share this knowledge with friends or family members?  
41 responses

Social media

Learning from relatives

Through importance

By passing down the books written by our elders

Making them participate so they can actually learn hands on

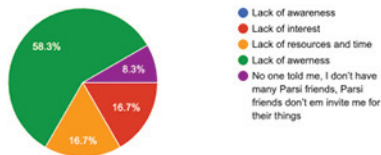
# Appendices

## I don't know anything about Parsi rituals at all

What prevents you from knowing about Parsi Rituals?

Copy

12 responses



Is there anyone in your family who performs/used to perform Parsi rituals particularly monthly, yearly and ceremonial rituals?

11 responses

No

My maternal aunts do rituals but I do not know if it's Parsi as we are Irani Zoroastrians (from Bombay)

My late maternal grandfather Nadirshah Sidhwa was an Ervad but not a practicing one. He apparently did conduct some prayers at his home during Mukhtad but that was way before my parents got married.

my grand parents sadly they passed when i was very young

My mother performs the death anniversary ceremonies

Mom does her prayers daily.

Grandmother

Are you interested in knowing more about Parsi Rituals?

Copy

12 responses



What would make you interested in leading/conducting these rituals yourself?

10 responses

If they had relevance to our daily lives and were Zoroastrian rituals rooted in our faith versus parsi rituals adapted from Hinduism

Not leading but learning and having enough knowledge of them. To understand their roots and why we do what we do.

maybe

I don't have any interest in conducting rituals, however I would be intrigued in knowing more should there be an easy, accessible and comprehensive method to access such knowledge

I don't know

Having someone else to perform them with

Just learning more about the culture.

Is there anything that would help you conduct these rituals yourself?

10 responses

Information on what they are and their purpose

None

someone to guide

No

I don't know

Resources on the significance of the rituals, how/why they started, and how to perform them

Probably wouldn't.

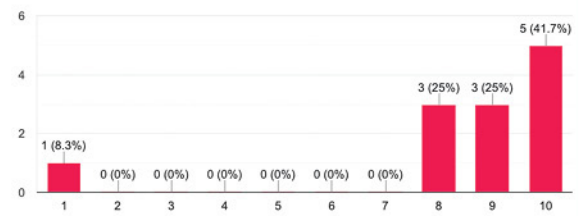
Simplified and fast way to do them

Knowledge

Do you think it is important for the knowledge of Parsi Rituals to be passed down from generation to generation?

Copy

12 responses



What are the ways that you will share this knowledge with friends or family members?

9 responses

By having them participate with me

If the knowledge I have is 'authentic' I can talk about them within my circle

by encouraging others to participate in them

Spoken word - I am often asked about Parsi rituals (and beliefs) and for the sake of spreading more knowledge I would like to be able to tell friends (or any others) who inquire

Internet

Performing the rituals once I am married and have a family

Encourage them to participate

By conducting the rituals and having them view them.

# Appendices

## Focus Group Questions



### Reimagining Rituals Focus Group

Hi everyone!

Thank you all for volunteering your time and being here. I am very excited to have this discussion with you today. As most of you may know I am a 2nd year Masters' student studying graphic design in Vancouver. I love working with & for our community!

For my Master's Project, I hope to find ways in which Design can be used to amplify our rituals and make them more accessible to the youth of our diaspora living across the globe.

 leea.contractor@gmail.com (not shared) [Switch account](#) 

Before we get started I wanted to just run a few things by you, which you have already read in the consent form:

As this is completely voluntary, you can choose to withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the Principal Investigator and the Co-Investigator or with Emily Carr University of Art + Design either now or in the future. You can withdraw your consent no later than January 15, 2023. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed. All information documented during the research will be held in confidence. This session will be recorded but will only remain with me and not shared with anyone else. If you are uncomfortable with your face being in the video, you are welcome to turn your camera off at any point.

As you all also read, today's focus group is a casual discussion about Parsi rituals and your involvement in them.

I know a lot of these questions were already asked in the questionnaire, but since it was anonymous I will be asking most of them again. Also this is a great way for us to have a dialogue together.

Your answer

To start off with I want to know What you know about Parsi rituals? For example, do you know a lot about them, do you frequently conduct them? Or do you not know anything about them at all?

Your answer

Which Parsi rituals are you interested in learning about? – ceremonial, monthly yearly, the ones that happen once in a lifetime.

Your answer

I would love to hear about the role that rituals play in your life? Are you happy with the that role or do you wish you did more or knew more about them?

Your answer

Can you share with us a time that you conducted or were a participant in a Parsi ritual?

Your answer

Is there anything that is preventing you from conducting these Parsi Rituals?

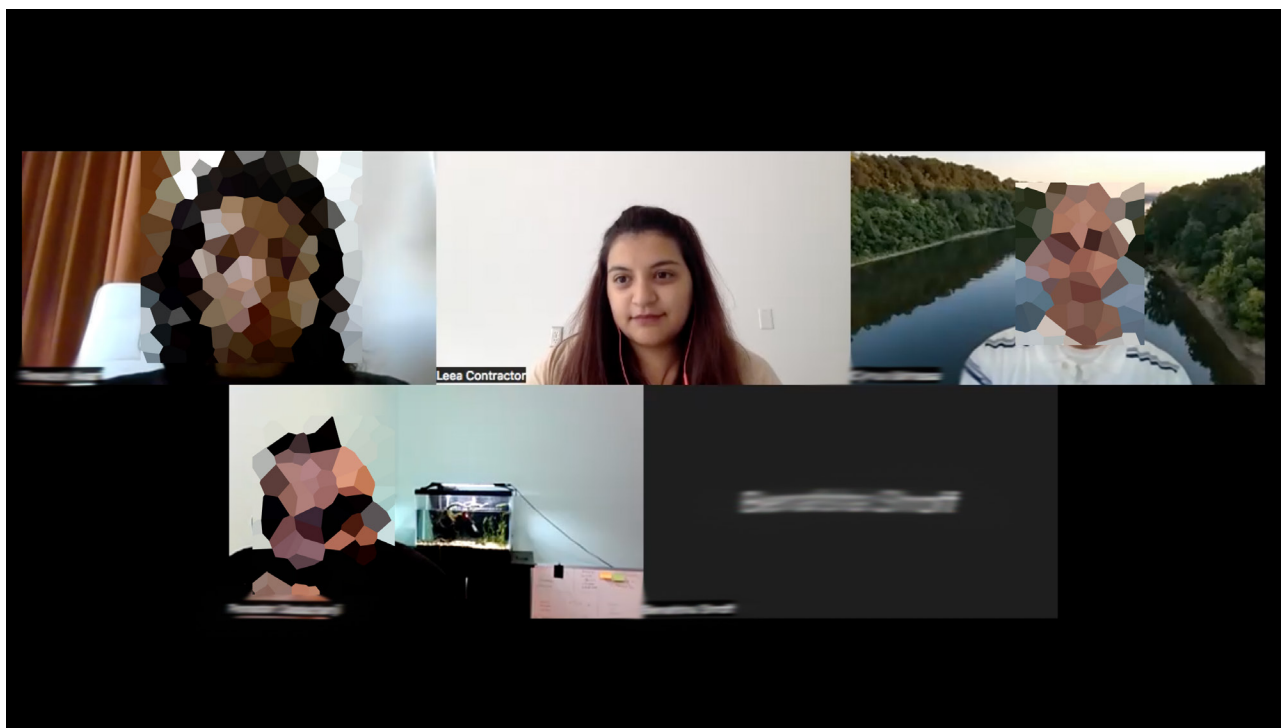
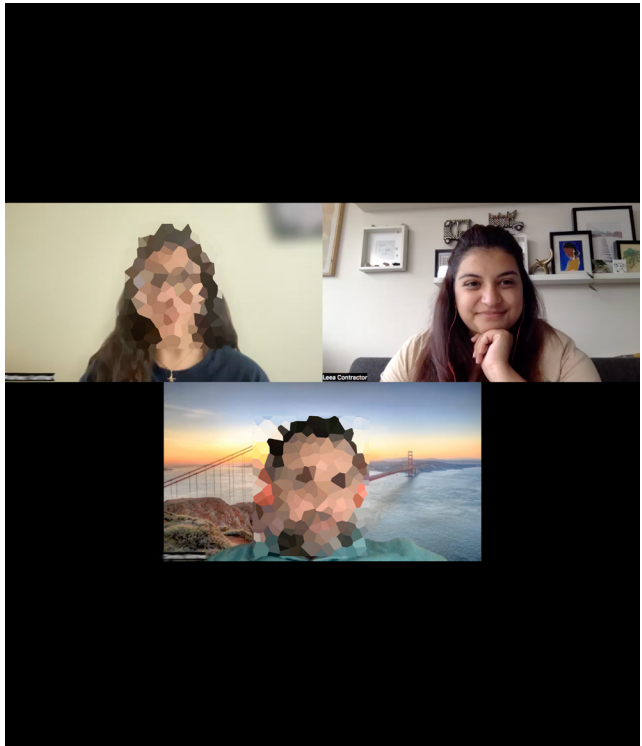
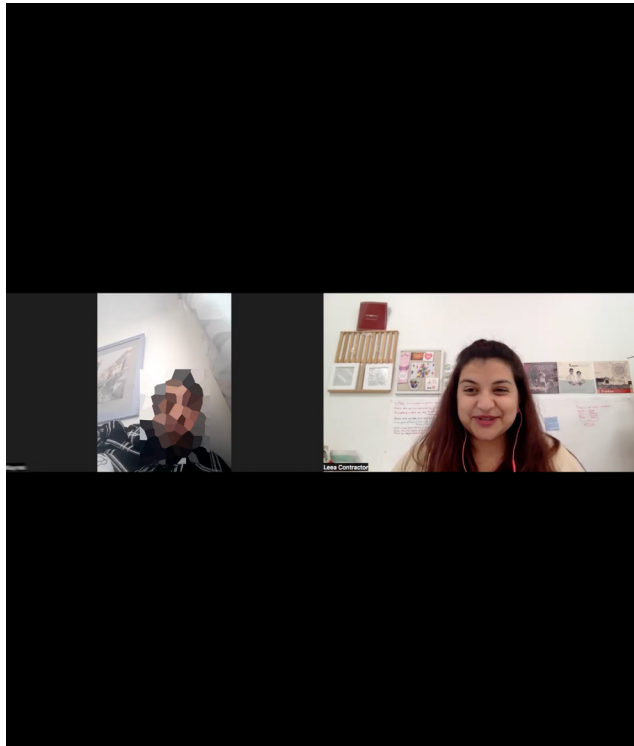
Your answer

Finally, what would make you interested in conducting or participating in more Parsi rituals?

Your answer

# Appendices

## Focus Group Sessions





# Appendices

## Focus Group 1:-

1. How much <sup>do</sup> you know about Parsi Rituals?

P1: limited knowledge → I have attended but do not know the details & the meaning of why its being done.  
: Mom is Parsi. Dad is Irani. Didn't interact with grand parents. Parents immigrated to USA.  
: Singular source of info is from the mom.

P2: Born & raised in Colorado.

: Singular source - aunts. No idea what they mean → You see them being conducted, but you have a perspective of them, but don't understand the background of them.  
: lived & worked in India after college → learnt a lot then  
: Problems with daily rituals. → they got lost bc of not knowing & not having the knowledge.

P3: Grown up in Khia and so has grown up with alot of rituals & exposure to them. Through family & community.

: Confusion between Religious & Cultural Rituals. → Cultural has more reasons. → they blend & mix a lot.  
: Reasons for Rituals differ amongst Parsis - Some follow certain rituals - while others don't. - P1: Didn't know of a Roj birthday. Some things do I don't get passed down in book.

P4: Born & brought up in India. Dad's not but doesn't know much about Rituals. Follows what others tell us. Mom tells us what to do.

: Everyone has their own way of doing things. Its not between Parsis & Iranis - but amongst the same families as well. → There is no textbook or guide to it. Each family does it their own way. Then when it comes to a wedding or Navroz each family adds their own thing in and gets it done.  
: Huge lack of knowledge and of anyone to explain how & why we do it. → Over time we'll loose these Rituals completely.

P2: Its interesting how in this diasporic way Rituals that we do are evolving & being preserved. - Incorporating from each family.

: Didn't know how to make a Haor for Sari wearing. Aunty taught them.

2. What Rituals are you interested in learning about? Yearly, Monthly, Daily, Once in a lifetime.

P2: For daily rituals some forms have a Divo everyday. - Koot: Prayer but a gap with it at a certain time of day.

: Get Yogurt & sugar on auspicious day - for a test or interview.

: Great for young children to see these rituals - Good to maintain & keep up for their religious identity.

P4: lose Rituals over time when you move and are by yourself. Its hard.

P2: Undefined rules around certain Rituals. This stops us from doing them. - wiggle room?

P4: Is doing it better than not doing it? - give us a reason - we question things.

P1: Rituals change over time its hard to accept. Adopting or ceasing. You can be influenced by your context.

P2: Adopting & adjusting but also **PRESERVING**

3. What roles do Rituals play in your life? Are you happy with it?

P3: Even though I know them, I don't know the details. Its to my detriment that someone else does it. There's so much meaning behind them that I don't know. Being abroad makes it harder.

P1: Rituals are a small part of my daily life. But once I have my own place & fam, I would like to do some things. Divo, Navroz table.

P4: The smaller rituals are the most significant to me. To connect your children to the community I want to do aliar maino, aliar Roj and keep a fire in my home, with my future family.  
[There's so much that we have adapted/adapted over time. When you talk to the older they don't want to adapt to today's times but their ancestors adapted when they moved from Iran, because they were forced to. To]

P2: Its a way to celebrate your identity

: There is a greater importance of knowing the Rituals now. You can pass them on.

: I don't think our parents & their generation before also didn't know the Rituals very well.

4. A Ritual you took part in.

P2: Mahavara. We adapted to it happening in a different city. - Italy. My families blessings to build my family.

5. What's Preventing you?

P1: lack of knowledge no lack of accessibility. - not easy to do it when you haven't been able exposed to it.

P3: Conducting rituals in situations where you can't. lighting Divo in apartment.

P4: lack of knowledge. Being alone so don't want to do it by myself. Divo vs Candle?? not the same.

P2: Time Commitment. Thats why its hard to participate in community stuff.

: I feel bad not fully being able to commit to it. → easy to say "I don't know it" but the truth is even if I did, I wouldn't do it cos of time.

6. Best way to receive this knowledge? website, App, DIY kit.

P3: Having someone with the knowledge write it down. With reasoning as to why its being done a certain way.

P4: A website where you can comment. No time to participate. v eg Facebook groups.

P1: An authoritative source. Fecano, Avesta. org. → lots of different mediums. But online first. This is imp for ppl around the world.  
: maybe an aunts who does videos.

P2: Get info, but in a standardized but not authoritative way. Tell us what we have to do, and what we can not do/adjust etc. wiggle room.

: A resource - digital. has mythical & comprehensive. how its done, detailed photos. Explain the ceremony. The steps. what is stage it happens in. The broader outline & personal interpretation of how to conduct the Rituals. THE BEAUTY OF ZOROASTRIANISM IS THE ABILITY TO ADAPT THE RELIGION TO OUR LIVES.

: standardized Guideline.

# Appendices

## Existing calendars

Amardad - 1391 YZ			December 2021 - January 2022		
SUN		Notasheh Dt KHORDAD 19	TIR 26	Cyra Cyro Roj BEHRAM 2	ASMAN 9
MON		Garmy Grandpa Dt AMARDAD 20 Kerim Soti Dt Amini	GOSH 27	RAM 3	ZAMYAD 10
TUE	HORMAZD Dec.14	DAEPADAR 21	DAEPMEHER 28 Kaj Amini Notasheh Amini	Cyra Cyro Dt Amini GOVAD 4 Notasheh Amini Dt Amini	MARESPAND 11
WED	BAHMAN 15 Zara Zara Roj	Leza Dt Bibay ADAR 22 Rushy A 22 Zangeneh Dt	MEHER 29 Phi Kargad Dt Amini	DAEPDIN 5	ANERAN 12
THU	ARDIBEHESHT 16	AVA 23 Phi Kargad Roj	SROSH 30	DIN 6	
FRI	SHEHREVAR 17	KHORSHED 24 Nadees = Zara Dt	RASHNA 31 Amini Lyfa Raygine Roj	ASHISHVANGH 7 Lyfa Raygine Dt	
SAT	ASFANDARMAD 18 Quita Nadees Dt Havos, Zoro Dt	MOHOR 25	FRAVARDIN Jan. 1, 2022 Phandran Death Amini 2016	ASHTAD 8	

Shenshai Calendar Farvardin Month 1392 Y.Z. (Aug – Sept 2022)		 <b>PalV's Kasti</b> Buy Parsi Kasti Online		<b>Reasonable Rates.</b> <b>Free Delivery.</b> <a href="http://www.palvkasti.com">www.palvkasti.com</a>	
સોમ (Mon)		22 અમરદાદ (Amardad)	29 ગોશ (Gosh)	5 રામ (Ram)	12 જમીઆદ (Zamyad)
મંગળ (Tue)	16 હોરમઝદ (Hormazd)	23 દેપઆદર (Daepadar)	30 દેપમેહેર (Daepmeher)	6 ગોવાદ (Govad)	13 મારેસપંદ (Marespand)
બુધ (Wed)	17 બેહમન (Bahman)	24 આદર (Adar)	31 મેહેર (Meher)	7 દેપદીન (Daepdin)	14 અનેરાન (Aneran)
ગુરુ (Thu)	18 અદીબેહેસ્ટ (Ardibehesht)	25 આવાં (Ava)	1 સરોશ (Sarosh)	8 દીન (Din)	16) Sh. New Year 1392 Y.Z. 18) Consecration of Rapithwan 21) Khordad Sal 22) Kadmi Maidhyozahem Gahambar
શુક્ર (Fri)	19 શહેરેવર (Shehrevan)	26 ખોરશેદ (Khorshed)	2 રશને (Rashne)	9 અશીશવંધ (Ashishvangh)	1) Ann. Mumbai Doongerwadi Sagdi, J.J. Adaran Surat Rustompura
શનિ (Sat)	20 અસપંદામેદ (Aspandarmad)	27 મોહોર (Mohor)	3 ફરવદીન (Fravardin)	10 આશતાદ (Ashtad)	3) Fravardigan Jashan 4) Ann. Lonavala Adaran, Death Ann. Dasturji Kukadaru
રવિ (Sun)	21 ખોરદોદ (Khordard)	28 તીર (Tir)	4 બેહેરામ (Behram)	11 આસમાન (Asman)	



# Appendices

## Visual Research

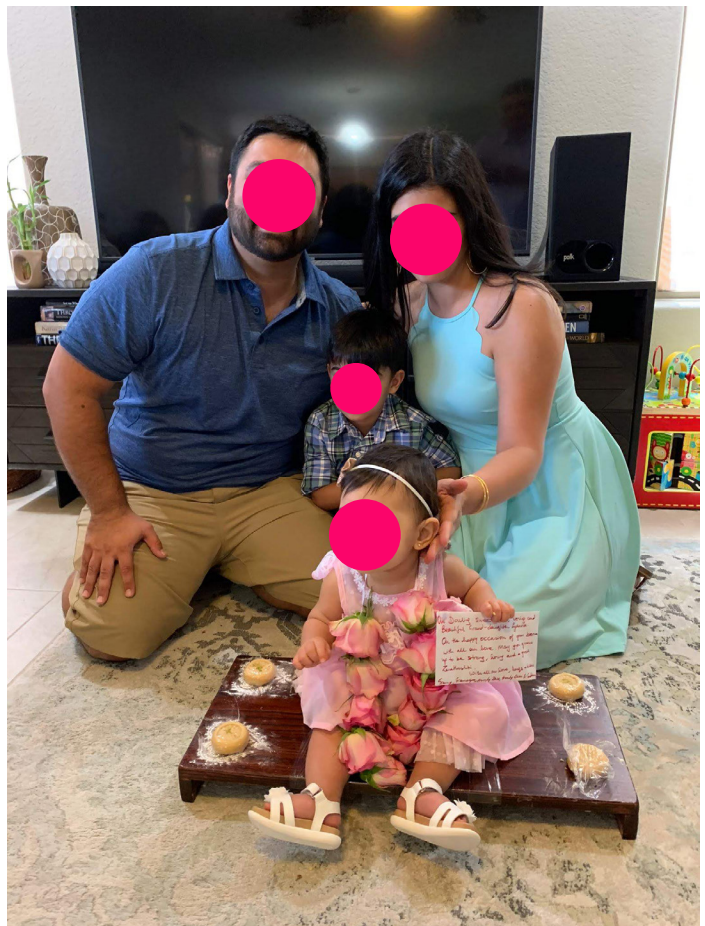
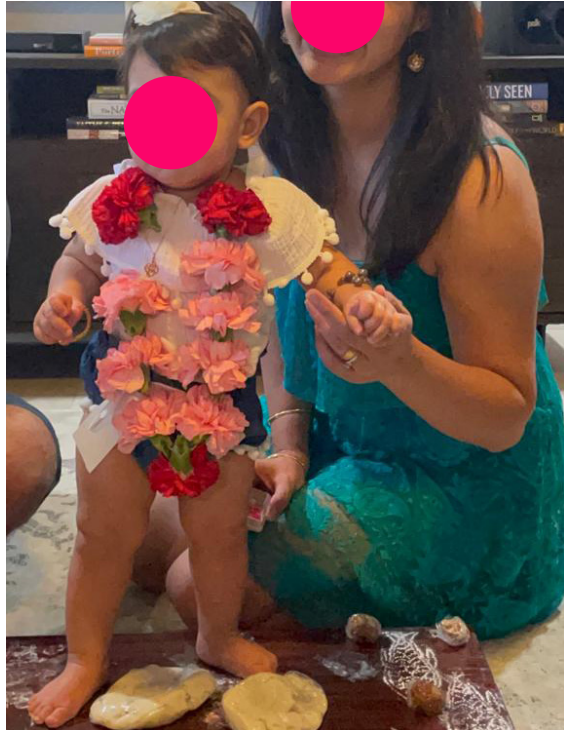


IMAGES FROM MY FAMILY ARCHIVES



# Appendices

## Visual Ethnography



IMAGES FROM A BESNA & PAGLADOO CEREMONY HELD IN PHOENIX, ARIZONA HELD IN 2021



# Appendices

## Visual Ethnography



IMAGES FROM A JASHAN CEREMONY HELD IN KARACHI, PAKISTAN, IN 2022



# Appendices

## Visual Ethnography



IMAGES FROM A MADAVSARO HELD IN RICHMOND, BC HELD IN 2022



# Appendices

## *Visual Ethnography*



IMAGES FROM A WEDDING HELD IN RICHMOND, BC HELD IN 2022



# Appendices

## Visual Ethnography



IMAGES OF THE NAVROZE TABLE SETUP BY MY MOTHER IN MY HOME IN KARACHI, VS THE NAVROZE TABLE I SET UP IN MY HOME IN VANCOUVER, 2022



## **Reimagining Rituals**

Design's role in amplifying cultural Rituals

EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY OF ART + DESIGN

© Leea Nadeer Contractor, 2023