

mothers how uncomfortable they feel. "As soon as they hear her name, they back off," she said.

Hooshang Nematzadeh, 56, is vice president of the central board of the United Mashadi Community of America. "Acceptance is the problem in the mainstream community of Great Neck or Kings Point," he said. "The problem is being stereotyped as Iranian Jewish or Persian. They don't know as much about the culture. We have always been a separate community to them."

In fact there are two distinct Persian communities in Great Neck. The 5,000 to 7,000 Tehranis take their name from the Iranian capital but include Jews from everywhere in Iran except the city of Meshed (also spelled Mashad), a trading outpost in northeastern Iran. The Mashadis were forced to practice their religion in secret after a pogrom in 1839 ended when all Jews in the city agreed to convert to Islam. The underground period lasted until 1925, when the prohibition was lifted. But the interlude of tolerance ended for the Mashadis, and for all Iranian Jews, after the Islamic revolution in 1979.

Virtually all the Mashadis who came to the United States settled in the Great Neck area, and now there are almost 4,000 of them. Even more than the Tehranis, whose biggest North American colony is in Los Angeles, they mingle, work, pray and marry primarily among themselves.

"We are very close to each other," Mansour Zar said of his fellow Mashadis, several of whom had joined him at the Classico Cafe, a local restaurant known as a Persian hangout, to help him celebrate his 58th birthday.

"We are trying to get Americanized but we try to keep the same way we were in Iran," the 20-year Great Neck resident said as the table conversation flicked back and forth between Farsi and English. "We are going to keep our culture. Most Mashadis try to stay together. We would like to get married together."

Fred Ohebshalom, 47, president of the local Sephardic Heritage Alliance, said the Tehrani community was trying to preserve its heritage but was not concerned with marrying only among themselves. "We have no problem as far as our children getting married in the American community because we are Jews ourselves. They have a choice, either way."

There's even a hint of tension between the two Persian groups. Whatever resentment still lingers, Mr. Ohebshalom said, should be directed at the Mashadis. He said they are the ones who congregate in large groups and speak loudly in Farsi.

THE NEWCOMERS

Two Distinct Groups Of Persian Jews

When Vida Aziz, 51, moved to Great Neck more than 20 years ago, only a few Iranian families lived in town. "Back then, they didn't know where Persia was," said Mrs. Aziz, who was born in Tehran and lived in West Virginia and Queens before coming to Great Neck. "Today there are some that are unhappy that all the homes are bought by Persians. They say the Persians took over the neighborhood."

Mrs. Aziz added that because her daughter, Jessica Hakimi, 33, doesn't look Persian, she is frequently told by other young