

NATIONAL SEMINAR ON ZARTHOSHTI DHARMA UNDER THE AUSPICES OF HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT MINISTRY

LET US "GET RID OF THE COBWEBS OF WESTERN INFLUENCES"
FROM THE STUDIES OF EASTERN CULTURES AND RELIGIONS
- PROF. CHATTOPADHYAYA

COSMOGENESIS AND TAAVIL OF VENDIDAD IN THE INHERENT LIGHT OF ILM-E-KHSHNOOM

Report by Ervad Marzban Hathiram

[Editorial Note :- A rare event has occurred in the field of Zarathushtrian Studies, on 25th April 2002 at New Delhi. The outlines of Cosmogogenesis (Srushti Rachna) as depicted in the Zarthoshti Dharma and elaborated by Ilm-e-Khshnoom, and a few esoteric elaborations of the holy Avesta Scripture: Vendidad, were presented before a National Seminar of erudite scholars and students; and were received with great zeal and sympathy and even amazement. Some of the participants had no hesitation to say that this was for the first time that the Zarthoshti Dharma was presented to them in this fashion!

The venue was 36, Taghlakabad Institutional Area, New Delhi 110062. The Ministry of Human Resources Development, Central Govt., (established by the late P.M., Rajiv Gandhi) has an agency: Studies in Civilisations. This agency works on a special project called "The Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture". The aforesaid National Seminar was sponsored by that Project and **was specifically on Zarathushtrian Dharma.**

We Parsis are well known for organising pseudo religions congresses and conferences all over the world, each of which, after a while turn from scholastic researches to romantic searches. But the New Delhi Seminar of 25th April 2002 was unique. Not all the participants were Parsis. Non-Parsis particularly heard the speakers earnestly with a thirst for truth.

The speakers were:

- (i) **Professor M.A. Mehendale**, a venerable authority on Sanskrit and Avesta. He was actively associated with Vedic Sanshodhan Mandai at Pune, (which had published the Avesta Texts of Yazashney, Vendidad and Khordeh Avesta in Hindi rendered by Prof. Manek Kanga.)
- (ii) **Ervad Dr. Rooyintan Peshotan Peer**, a Sar-taa-paa Mobed and an erudite research scholar of the holy Scriptures and Texts. (His Ph.D thesis was the translation of Daadastaaney Dini, a very difficult to decipher Pahalvi Text. He is jointly working on Bartholomae's Avesta Dictionary under the auspices of Vedic Sanshodhan Mandai, Pune.)
- (iii) **Ervad Parvez Bajan**, a mobed but of Westerly Scholastic outlook.
- (iv) **Prof. Adi Doctor**, ex-Vice Chancellor of Goa University, an authority on political science.
- (v) **Ervad Marzban Hathiram**, a student of Zarthoshti Scriptures and writings, well groomed in the Western-Style-Studies, and an ardent student of Ilm-e-Khshnoom.

Following is a short report on the speeches rendered by the five speakers. The report is penned by Marzban Hathiram.]

The Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture is a mammoth project undertaken by the Centre for Studies in Civilizations. The governing members of this august body include some of the sharpest and most illuminated and intellectual minds of our country, headed by the eminent philosopher Prof. D. P. Chattopadhyaya. These members felt that the present study of Indian History, Philosophy and Culture is

tainted with the sometimes imperialistic views of the Western Oriental scholars who first started this tradition a few hundred years ago. Hence it was felt that the complete history of the Indian civilization needed to be done without the Western prejudices and so this Centre was founded. It has done a lot of commendable work. It has a plan to bring out nearly 75 volumes on different facets of Indian history including the extent of science and philosophy present in India since remote times, and **has so far brought out about 17 volumes on diverse topics**. Under this project, a separate volume has been dedicated to the study of Systems of Indian Religion, of which an important part is dedicated to the study of Zoroastrianism. The seminar was, therefore, an introduction where scholars of the religion could present papers which would be then be submitted in written form for the publication of the volume.

The seminar started with an introduction by **Professor D. P. Chattopadhyaya**. In his inaugural address, the eminent philosopher pointed out that **the time had come to rid the study of Indian history, science and philosophy of the cobwebs of western influences. He said: "The concepts of dateability, placeability and provability are half-baked."** Expounding on this very important concept, he pointed out that **how does it matter whether Zarathushtra was born in 600 BC or 6000 BC? What matters is that we study his message to mankind and implement it in our lives.** He said that **even the word 'Zoroastrianism' was wrong, as it was Greek corruption of Zarathushtrianism.** He went on to debunk the attitude of western scholars to pin point events in history. History is not a dry listing of events that took place. Rather we must write history with an eye to the future, he said. Similarly, not everything can be proven and **it is not necessary that something that cannot be proven is wrong.**

This inspiring message was carried forward by eminent philosopher **Professor Kireet Joshi** who in his address recounted the different interactions he had with members of the Parsi community and laid out the traits of honesty, integrity and philanthropy present in all Parsis.

The morning session then started with Ervad Parvez Bajan presenting a paper on 'The brief Historical Outlines of Iranian Zoroastrian History which presented in a nutshell the 7 known dynasties that ruled Iran from prehistoric times to the fall of the Sassanian dynasty. The question-answer session that followed had an interesting debate on the term Aryan and whether it denoted a race or a set of personal traits that marked a people. There were also some views defending as well as attacking Tilak's theory of the Arctic home of the Indo-Iranians.

The next paper was presented by Ervad Dr. Rooyintan P. Peer who spoke on '**Zoroastrian Religious Scriptures and the Language of the Scriptures**' drawing the audience's attention to the antiquity of the Avesta language, the whole extent of the total Avesta scriptures encompassed in the 21 Nasks, the vast Pahlavi literature and the development of Old, Middle and Modern Persian and Pazend. **Dr. Peer strongly debunked the prevailing mentality of looking only at the Gathas as the be all and end all of Zoroastrian thought, and pointed out that the Gathas in fact were not an independent part of the scriptures but were part of the 72 chapters of the sacred Yasna that forms the core of the Zoroastrian ritual. The key to understanding the Gathas lay in understanding the rest of the scriptures and the Pahlavi literature.** Dr. Peer also pointed out various similarities between Avesta and Sanskrit and between certain terms occurring in both the languages as well as the names of certain personages such as Hom/Som, Yima/Vivasvat etc.

The morning session ended with an erudite paper by noted Avesta Scholar Professor M. A. Mehendale, who came to Delhi at the ripe age of 84 and presented a paper on the Amesha Spentas. Freely quoting from the Gathas as well as other Avesta sources, Dr. Mehendale pointed out that though there were several references to the Amesha Spentas in the Avesta, they were never identified as being 7 and being named so in the same passage. He also made an interesting comparison between the Amesha Spentas and the Adityas of Hindu theology. The Professor also refuted the theory of a German scholar that the Adityas and the Amesha Spentas were actually planet gods and that the concept was borrowed from other sources.

The afternoon session began with a paper by Ervad Marzban Hathiram on the '**Significance and Philosophy of the Vendidad.**' Ervad Hathiram began by reciting the Yatha Ahu Vairyo prayer and dedicating the paper to the memory of those ancient Zarathushtrian priests who handed down the scriptures from

generation to generation and hence helped in preserving a strong oral tradition that allowed us to have at least one complete Nask from the total 21 that were destroyed by Alexander and later by the Arabs. He reminded the audience that but for these brave Athrvans, we would not have the luxury to sit in this hall and talk about the scriptures today. Introducing the subject, Hathiram explained that the Avesta term for the Vendidad was 'Vi-Daevo-Data', meaning the law against the Daeva. So who was the Daeva and where did he come from, and why did we need a law against him? He then took the audience on a brief tour of Cosmogony and explained the concepts of **Ahu, Khao Afrazyaman, Staota Yasna, Fravashi, Baodangh, Urvan and finally the origin of evil through the ignorance and ego of the Urvan**. Explaining the process of 'dasesmestutam' or the decimal based division of the urvan to cleanse it of its evil, Ervad Hathiram explained the creation of Angra Mino and his appointed work, taking the audience through the creation of Minoi, Hasti, Nisti and finally Geti, and Angra Mino's revolt in Geti which resulted in Zarathushtra descending on the earth with the Vi-Daevo-Data. He then gave a concise summary of the 22 chapters of the Vendidad and showed the chain of continuity that exists in this scripture and pointed out how a mere literal translation of the Vendidad did not do justice to its unique message. Ervad Hathiram ended his paper with a plea to look at the hidden meanings that lay in the scriptures so as to arrive at a deeper and more meaningful understanding of them. In the question answer session that followed several speakers pointed out the similarities in the account of Cosmogony that Ervad Hathiram had explained and that which existed in the Vedas. **Some also pointed out that this was the first time that the Zoroastrian religion had been explained in this fashion to them.**

The next paper, presented by **Professor Adi Doctor, ex-Vice Chancellor of Goa University an authority on Political Science, was on 'Parsis and Indian Nationalism'**. In this paper, Professor Doctor traced the contribution of several Parsis to the freedom struggle - both through constitutional as well as extremist ways. Prominent Parsis included Dr. Dadabhai Naoroji, Dinshaw Wacha, Phirozeshah Mehta, Madam Cama, Shapurji Saklatwala and Veer Nariman. He also spoke on the Parsi approach to social reform, prominent individuals being Behramji Malbari, Furdonji Bengali and K. N. Cama. The question answer session following this talk also dealt at length with the Parsi approach to women's education and the abolishing of child marriages as well as the contribution of Parsis to the development of Mumbai.

The last paper in the seminar was presented by **Ervad Dr. Rooyintan P. Peer**, who **spoke on the Philosophy of the Gathas**, a continuation of his earlier paper. He expounded on the various philosophical concepts one comes across in the Gathas, especially those relating to the so-called freedom of choice. He also dealt with Asha, Vohu Manah, and the twin concepts of Haurvatat and Ameretat. He concluded his paper with an appeal to look to the spirit of the Gathas for inspiration rather than mere literal translations.

The valedictory session was chaired by Professor D. P. Chattopadhyaya. In his address, the learned Professor quoted from diverse sources **ranging from Ramakrishna, Nietzsche, Aurobindo to Niels Bohr**. In an inspiring speech, the eminent philosopher urged participants **to break free from the shackles of Western induced scholarly approaches, where there was only right and wrong. Nothing is completely right or completely wrong and there are various shades of truth**. He decried the approach of trying to fix dates in history or using the atlas to find out places as mentioned in the scriptures. He expounded at length on the desire of man to find the truth in nature and said that this massive project was lucky to have the participation of such a wide range of experts who had contributed freely to its cause. He thanked all the participants, specially the three Parsi priests from Mumbai who had given the seminar participants an opportunity to learn more about this little known religion. The key to understanding the Vedic religion lay in understanding Avesta, he said.

The session ended with a closing address by Dr. Murzban Jal who promised to bring more scholars of the Zoroastrian religion to this project so that more contributions could be given.

[Ervad Marzban's full speech will be published in this Magazine's next issue.]

[Editorial Note: The most notable features of the Seminar are (i) Prof. Chattopadhyay's Introductory and Valedictory addresses and (ii) reactions of the participants towards Marzban's presentation on Cosmogony and Vendidad, which was founded on Khshnoom.

Prof. Chattopadhyay referred to the cobwebs of Western influences on Religions Studies, which were based on the concepts of "dateability, placeability and provability". In other words these West Oriented Studies emphasised history, geography and dry philology much more than the spiritual and mystical contents of Religion in general and different Religions in particular. The date of Asho Zarathushtra may be a good subject for a University doctorate, but not one to bring Him in our heart and life. As to provability, Kurt Godel pointed out in his famous equation (1931) that there will always exist certain true statements that **cannot be proved to be true through mathematics and logic**. Take this a little further and you will plunge into the wide gulf of difference between non-saintly 3 dimensional intellect and the saintly n-dimensional **experience in Samadhi**.

Marzban reports that Prof. Chattopadhyaya quoted from Ramkrishna, Nietzsche, Aurobindo and even Neils Bohr, a famous physicist of the 20th century. Marzban does not report what the quotations were. It is likely that he might have referred to Aurobindo's Forward to his "Hymns to Mystic Fire", (Please see page 3 of this Issue). Since last nine decades the exponents of Khshnoom are at pains to point out that the doctrines revealed in the Zarathushtrian Mysticism can well be shown in the extant Avesta, if the dry etymology of the West is rinsed in the divine water of Khshnoom.]

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