

"Parsis, be true Mazdayasni - Zarthoshtis"

by

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[We reproduce the article of Late Ervad Dr. Minocher Karkhanavala written by him on the birth centenary of Mr. Jehangir Vimadalal, which is still quite relevant to-day as it was two decades earlier]

The name Jehangir Vimadalal immediately brings to our mind the Vision of a man thoroughly devoted to his religion, a man extremely proud of his noble and glorious Mazdayasni Zoroastrian origin as well as of his Parsi Community, a man zealously dedicated to the preservation and perpetuation of the noble heritage, tradition and customs of his forebears, a man valiantly and resolutely fighting all inroads against the citadel of "Parsipanu" and with great eloquence and exquisite logic exhorting his brethren to defend and preserve the same. It is therefore in the fitness of things, that as we celebrate his birth centenary, pay our homage to and refresh our memory of this noble soul, we examine a few of the accusations and vile attacks made against our noble religion, its rituals, customs and traditions by a handful of misguided individuals, expose their hollowness and lack of religious understanding and at the same time make firm our faith in our supreme religion, thereby vindicating the trust that has been reposed in us by our forefathers and fulfilling our obligation to preserve and pass on to the future generation the great religion unchanged and in all its glory.

(A) The early Zoroastrians - were they barbarians?

The extreme antiquity and the fact that the Zoroastrian religion has survived all vicissitudes, and upheavals in its life span of nearly 8,500 years, instead of being a matter of intense pride is made a matter of ridicule and shame by (these self-proclaimed "intellectual" reformers. They therefore, want to "modernize" the religion). They argue that what was good and correct for people more than 8,000 years cannot be good and correct today; they announce with arrogance that the religious teachings, customs and ceremonies were meant for those days of "barbaric" people and not for the modern educated man.

The "intellectuals" at the same time are aware that the true religion is only the philosophic teaching of the Gathas which represents the epitome of Zoroastrian philosophy.

There cannot be two opinions regarding the deep and intense philosophy contained in the Gathas, which are unquestionably the orations of Spitaman Zarathushtra himself, and as the Rev. Dr. Mills has said every syllable of which is loaded with thoughts the acceptance of this very fact exposes the illogic of the assertion that the early Zoroastrians were barbarians.

Any good and intelligent teacher, or orator knows that however vast may be his own knowledge, he has to teach and speak at the intellectual level of his class or audience, if he is to make any impact and carry any convictions. Surely these conceited "intellectuals" of the present day would grant that Spitaman Zarathushtra whom we venerate as the most intellectual of all intellectuals, and as the most knowledgeable of all knowledgeable, would not make this elementary mistake and preach the highest philosophy to a barbaric audience, and persuade them successfully to give up the wrong path. No! Never!

It is only our false ego and pride that prevents us from admitting that the audience whom Holy Zarathushtra addressed had high intelligence and was extremely knowledgeable. They were no barbarians.

In teaching or lecturing parables have to be resorted to when the intellectual level and learning of the audience is low and hence moral and philosophical concepts have to be clothed in incidents of everyday humdrum living. The very absence of parables and at the same time the extremely philosophic contents of the Gathas show the intellectual level of his audience since

Zarathushtra could communicate his philosophies directly and there was no need for him to resort to teaching at a low intellectual level.

Let us therefore, not derogate our great and glorious forebears as barbarians and thereby expose our own intellectual bankruptcy. Let us revere these giants of the past and seek knowledge and understanding with sincerity and humility, and with unflinching faith in the excellence of our religion - its principles and its practices.

(B) Does the Zoroastrian religion need to be modernized?

Because of the false concept of the "intellectuals" that the people in the time of Zarathushtra were barbarians, they extend their inferiority complex and decry the religious principles and practices as outmoded. They wrongly believe that the religion should be modernized i.e. westernized; by which is really meant wholesale mimicking of the worst in western culture and in the prevalent western customs and habits. This quixotic approach of "modernizing" our noble religion and its most scientific practices, is a direct consequence of the ignorance of these self-styled "intellectuals" about modern science. The irony is that often they plead for the "modernizing" in the name of science of "the seventies". The trouble is that the science they talk about is the antiquated science of the 19th century and not of the 20th century. They haven't caught up yet! Today there is growing concern in the Western countries for prevention of pollution of air, water and land. This has led to tremendous development in the field of "Ecology" - the science pertaining to the relation of living organisms (this includes mankind) and their natural environment; a science concerned with studying and preserving the balance established by Nature in-between the various types of organisms and between them and their environment; a science dedicated to prevent the annihilation of life on this planet, by man's unimaginative and ignorant trespass against the laws of Nature which require that the environment be kept clean and unpolluted.

The proponents of ecology have a lot to learn from our supremely scientific religion. No ecologist has preached with the same fervour and insisted

upon following procedures with the same degree of rigidity and strictness as is done in our religion in maintaining the environment pure and clean. In fact all the "tarikats" (rituals and practices) enjoined in the religion are for this purpose of keeping one's environment pure and are therefore, based on the strictest adherence to the principles of "Ashoi". No ecologist has as yet bothered to go beyond the pollution of the physical environment, but the "tarikats" in our religion are meant to prevent pollution of not only the physical environment, but of the total environment, which includes the mental and the spiritual also. How much more "modern" can we get?

While the ecologist may just be beginning to concern himself with only the physical standard of purity and cleanliness which though are as yet highly primitive by the standards prescribed in our religion, modern medicine in the last few decades has become increasingly conscious of the existence and effects of the mental environment such as "depressing" or "Cheerful" on a person's life. It is also recent that psychosomatic medicine - including therein psychopathology and psychophysiology have come into their own. This was after medicine recognized the profound effect of thoughts on the physical well-being and health of an individual - a fact common place in the Zoroastrian religion for over 8,500 years (Yasna 30:7). However, it is still more recent that psycho-physics and effects like psychokinesis, telepathy etc. which were lumped under the title of extra-sensory perception (E.S.P.) began to be taken seriously and given the attention it deserved. And it is only a few days ago that E.S.P. gained respectability after its recognition by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Yet all these and other effects of both good and bad thoughts, the mental environment, as well as the benefits that accrue to the individual and those around him by a clean and unpolluted mental environment sustained by good thoughts, are proverbial and well established in our religion. In fact, ours is the first and still the only religion that has so categorically and emphatically expounded the virtues of good thoughts. How much "modern" can we get?

These "intellectuals" will have yet to wait, (if

they so wish to wait for the inevitable to happen) for western science to recognize the existence and effects of a Spiritual environment. Nevertheless, it is ironic and a little strange that some of these "modernizer" Don Quizotes, who when they are in this country denounce our religion and deprecate its rituals meant for spiritual uplift, and castigate these practices and beliefs as primitive for emphasising the spiritual aspects, should give lectures on the spiritual aspects of other faiths when these persons are in western countries (- may be the jingle of dollars makes one more spiritually minded!) How "modern" can we get?

These self-proclaimed "modernizers" shudder that a dead body should be isolated as early as possible and dressed in simple but clean old white clothes, (they have not as yet known about modern hygiene); that if anybody touched it after a certain interval of time then the person should undergo a purificatory bath lest he contaminate the society (they have not heard of quarantine procedures): that the corpse be disposed off by the method of Dokhmenashini (who cares if it is the most quick and efficient method, causing no pollution of either air, water or land:). They want the change simply because they must mimick the west on emotional and snobbish considerations. They want the body to bedecked up in a suit everybody to touch the body as long as they want (and spread contamination to all) and have the body cremated in an electric crematorium.

What a pity, that these persons are so far behind the best in really modern science. Realizing that electric crematoriums spread very considerable pollution (both chemical and biological) in the environment, large cities in the western countries, had put, their crematoriums way out in the Country side We, in this Country, being so modern ! have located it right in middle of a heavily populated area, only to have entire neighbourhood complain of the acrid smoke everytime someone went up in smoke, and demand that it be shifted out. How much "modern" can we get?

It is best to remember, the admonition of the Rev. Dr. L. H. Mills which can be dedicated to such misguided and misinformation individuals of our community: "Some of the later passages in the

Zend-Avesta regarding putrefication and which might seem to some of us most grotesque were hardly superfluities, for they showed a sanitation which it would be better for us to follow rather than condemn. They anticipated much modern theory on the subject and led the way in the most practical of all science-disinfection."

How much more "modern" can we get?

(C) The Question of Conversion.

Another fantasy which these "intellectuals" want us to swallow is that Zarathushtra must have converted i.e. proselytized, or else how could he have spread the religion, and therefore, we should do the same. This native argument betrays a complete disregard for history and a total lack of appreciation for the facts.

Recapitulating the facts therefore we find that Gayomard was the first in the line of great early Iranians who "Heard" the precepts of Ahura Mazda (Fravardin Yast, para. 87) and preached the same. Thus Mazdayasnism - the Mazda - worshipping religion - began several thousands of year before Zarathushtra. Subsequently, there were other great teachers amongst whom was King Jamshed. According to one source it was from his time onwards the Mazdayasni people began to wear the Kusti. This too was about three thousand years before Zarathushtra. Then followed a long line of saintly Mazdayasni kings amongst whom were Faredoon, Kaikhushroo and Kai Loharasp.

However by the time of the birth of Holy Zarathushtra (actual 8,500 years ago) the ancient Mazdayasni religion had been so much defiled and "Deva yasni" had made such inroads, that so to speak the soul of mother Earth (geush urvan) cried out to Ahura Mazda for a saviour (Yasna 29:1). Thus, the mission of Zarathushtra was to rid the Mazdayasni religion of the evil of devayasni and restore it to its pristine purity, as well as to enlighten the minds of the Mazdayasni with the most sublime and philosophical concepts of the Deity that the world has ever known.

For this purpose, even today in our 'Jashme-avanghe bandagi' (and in other bandagis too) we proclaim ourselves as "Mazdayasnoahmi,

mazdayasno zarathushthis" - I am a Mazdayasni, - a Mazdayasni Zarathoshti. Likewise our sudreh is the visible outward manifestation of the Zarathoshti part and the Kusti that of the Mazdayasni part of the Mazdayasni Zarathoshti religion.

Zoroastrianism can never therefore, be regarded as a separate religion from the old Mazdayasni, in the sense that Christianity is a separate religion from Judaism even though Jesus Christ was born to Mary who was a Jew. In fact, in the Mazdayasni Zoroastrian religion, all the forebears are rated as the "Paoryotakeshan" (of the Older laws) and even Zarathushtra himself is referred to as a 'Paorimch takeshem' (Fravardin Yast, para 152).

It is obvious therefore, that Zarathushtra never converted i.e. proselytized since Zoroastrianism is simply the process of evolution within the Mazdayasni religion. What he did was to make good Mazdayasni - Zoroastrians out of the wayward Mazdayasnis. If the word "conversion" is to be applied to this process, then I would very much like to see a good number of present day so-called Parsee "converted" to good, devout and dedicated Mazdayasni-Zarathoshti.

Because Zarathushtra did not convert, conversion of non-Mazdayasnan is forbidden in the religion. That is why marriage of a Mazdayasni with a non-Mazdayasni is tabooed and is considered a grave sin (Venidad 18-62). Had conversion been enjoined in the religion, marriage to non-Mazdayasnis would have been encouraged with a provision that they be taken into the religion.

Further, we find historical proofs that the Mazdayasni-Zarathoshtis of the past did not convert. Cyrus the great and his descendents like Xerxes are venerated in the Torat and in the Old Testament, simply because these great Persian kings not only liberated the Jews from captivity and rehabilitated them in their own homeland but also provided funds from the Royal treasury so that they - the Jews, could build their own temples and venerate God in their own way. Wars have been fought to convert; but history records this exception when the victor instead of converting i.e. proselytizing the vanquished of another faith, going out of the way and furnishing funds for rebuilding the temples of the vanquished. The reason is obvious, the religion of the victors forbade

proselytization.

In the span of these few pages, I have tried to show how, misguided and without any validity are some of the allegations and proposal of those who wish to "reform" and "modernize" the religion. (Space does not permit discussion of all their allegations, but all are equally invalid). Zoroastrianism has been and still is the most modern and most scientific religion, and in fact modern scientific thought is fast approximating it.

To those who wish to reform the religion and to modify its rituals and practices I would urge that first prove your worthiness and spiritual prowess just as the great Dasturan Dastur Aderbad Marespand had done and then come to preach us to forsake the religious beliefs and practices handed down by our noble forefathers.

To all my co-religionists I request that let us preserve and perpetuate the teachings and practices of the religion with all the powers at our command; let us in our dress, customs and tradition preserve the "Parsipanu" so dear to the late Jehangirji Vimadalal, so that we can pay our real tribute of this great and true Mazdayasni-Zarathoshti.

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