
HAVE NOT THE WESTERN ZOROASTRIAN STUDIES KILLED THE PARSI FAITH?

PARADIGMS OF THE 19TH CENTURY - RISE OF MATTER AND FALL OF SPIRIT.

A Paradigm Means Truth for the Timebeing, But Bound to Break.

Religion! No sooner the word is uttered, than the idea strikes, "an excuse to quarrel, fight, even declare a 'holy' war."

But the original meaning of Religion is 'in duty bound'; to God. While arriving on earth, we have given a promise to Him. "I promise to be in duty bound to follow Thy Word, spoken for me, through Thy Prophet, whom Thou hast assigned to me."

The life on earth is a religious journey to God. The road map is bestowed on us by our Prophet. We have to tread on it every single moment of our breath. Religion is not just an intellectual exercise to be debated on a dinner table. It is a spiritual exercise and discipline in love and devotion to Him and His Prophets.

Most of us Parsis of the 20th and 21st centuries do not take it that way. Our religion is very simple, they say, Manashni Gavashni Kunashni, Good thoughts, words, deeds (MGK). Some, pretending to be wiser, would say it is a monotheistic religion believing in one God. Some would declare with great pride that it teaches freedom of will or choice, and allows us to arrive at God's Truth by intellectual reasoning. There is a dualistic monotheism or monotheistic dualism, and a non-omnipotentism too. There is a Gatha-alone-Cult (GAC) and also an orthodoxism and libertinism. All this, no duty-bound-business; but just hot debates with steaming Dhanshak odor in the air.

Did our ancestors arrive at Sanjan to preserve and protect just MGK and this maze of "isms"? The sixteen Sanskrit 'Shloka's versifying the Parsi Din and way of life sing

an entirely different song. They narrate the spiritual Institutions and devotional disciplines of the Zarthoshti Dharma. For more than a thousand years we adopted them in this holy Land of Bharata.

Even today several of us go to Agiari and Atash-Beheram for Prayers and ceremonies; but not all of us pray from Khordeh Avesta and even observe the rules of presenting themselves before the Atash Padshah. Even the mobeds in charge of the Agiaris and ceremonies do not observe the traditional tenets (excepting a few). The so called 'head' priests keep their eyes closed to this huge fraud. We have stopped teaching Religion to our children. The parents are just baffled by the children's questions on the customs, canons and culture of Zarthoshti Din. Somewhere in the 19th and 20th centuries our community entered into a dark cloud of ignorance in the matters of our great Din. We quarrel and argue and throw personal mud against each other through paid advertisements in newspapers!

The cloud of ignorance goes on becoming darker and darker. Most of us, the Parsis are unaware of the spiritual, mystical and devotional aspects of the Zarthoshti Din. These are the most essential ingredients of any Religion.

From where did this cloud of ignorance invade the Parsi Community?

There were two main factors : (i) the advent of modern science, and (ii) the arrival of the Western Studies on the "Zoroastrian" Religion (as they called it).

The first invasion, as the Nobel laureate Illya Prygogine (1977) pointed out, began on 28th April 1686, when Newton presented "Principia", a paper on the laws of motion and gravitation. The second invasion was in 1771 when Anquetil Du Perro published his Volumes on Zoroastrianism and Parsis.

RISE OF MATTER AND FALL OF SPIRIT

Newton's Principia planted the seed of Godlessness in the Western psyche. Although Newton himself was a firm believer in God, his idea that nature operated on set natural laws, led the Western thought to discard the existence of God. Christian priests argued that Newton's laws applied only to matter, but what about life on earth? Did not the innumerable varieties of life indicate a Creator God? Bang arrived Darwin (in 1859) with his "evolution", natural selection and survival of the fittest. Newton's **natural** laws shook hands with Darwin's **natural** selection. By the end of the 19th century, Godlessness was firmly established and the intellectuals took pride in being atheists. The West was immersed in the egoistic notion that the human intellect as possessed by west was capable of understanding every thing in the universe.

RELIGION, A SUPERSTITION

The second factor, namely, the Western Studies of "Zoroastrianism" (as they called it) starting from Anquetil Du Perro was naturally affected by the first, the then "modern science". All religions became the subject matters of "critical" intellectual studies. The concept of religion was stated to arise out of the superstitions of primitive mankind, the immediate children of monkey-kind. The mystical and spiritual side of Nature was driven away in the strong current of Godlessness. The world is what we see and observe. There is nothing mysterious beyond the observable universe. That became the burthen of the song inherently sung by all such studies of various Religions, including the "Parsi Zoroastrian"

Religion (as they called it.)

As the eminent Parsi savant Dr. Irach Taraporewalla pointed out, there was also a historical bias pervading those studies. A prophet of remote times, "Zoroaster", who lived much before Jesus Christ could not have preached the same or similar doctrines and concepts as the latter did.

Science and the historical bias both ran through this newly born Zoroastrian Studies of Europe, and several paradigms were generated

What is a paradigm? The word paradigm means a theory that sticks and is declared to be "true" in nature for some period of time. Thomas Kuhn, a historian of modern science, applied the word to the theories of physical sciences. He pointed out in his thesis, "**The Structure of Scientific Revolutions**", that the theories of all sciences are paradigms. They stick to the psyche of modern science for a time. Each such theory is taken as the truth. The students are taught the theory with great scientific rigor. It is worked upon and developed with great zeal. For a time it is The Truth. Then arrives some solitary young scientist. He points out certain facts which are not consistent with the theory; furore is generated in the science community. Who is this young puppy to challenge our long-standing theory? Were we all wrong, all along? But slowly and certainly the old theory is shaken and the new is accepted. This is called the breaking of the paradigm and arrival of a new one. **Kuhn pointed out that this new paradigm meets the same fate as the old one.** All science is thus a chain of paradigms which break, one after the other. While treading this path of the paradigm breaks, some theories do invent new technologies, assuming the theories to be true in nature. The paradigm breaks, but the technological invention continues its existence. This does not mean that the theory was "the truth" in Nature. Kuhn writes : "**Just because modern physics has spawned computers,**

nuclear power and CD players does not mean it is truer, in an absolute sense, than Aristotle's physics."

All it means is that science is not in contact with Reality in Nature! Here is a glaring example: the theories of Relativity, which deal with big bodies like the stars in the sky, is not compatible with Quantum theory, which deals with the smallest particles of matter. If one is true, the other is not! Scientists are at the end of their wits in trying to evolve a theory which can make the Relativity and Quantum theories shake hands. They call it TOE, "Theory of Everything.

THEY ARE BROKEN BUT WE DONT.

The 19th century paradigms started breaking from the very first decade of the 20th century, and by its end they were all broken. The paradigm that the human intellect was capable of understanding God's truth was also shattered. Science was coming to an end and knocking the door of mysticism. (See the last two issues of this humble Parsi Pukar).

But the Western Studies of the Zoroastrian Religion has not broken its paradigms. They continue their university researches founded on their 'critical' and orthodox notions of history, geography, philology, etymology and grammar. Their theories founded on the paradigms of the 19th century science go on merrily. The mystical, spiritual and devotional constituents of the Zarthoshti Din are still far far away from the Western Studies. They are tacitly not allowed an entry. The Western Zoroastrian Studies (WZS) is therefore unscientific, orthodox and old fashioned.

THE GOOD POINTS OF THE WESTERN ZOROASTRIAN STUDIES

Some of us the Parsis are better at misunderstanding, than understanding. Presently, when there is a wave of hominum arguments (i.e. personal mud slinging), I must clarify that I have great awe and admiration for

the Western Studies of Zoroastrianism. They have put our holy Scriptures in good scholarly organisation. They have led us to the correct reading of Avesta. Treating Avesta as an ancient language, they applied scientific methods to decipher and understand it, particularly through comparative study of ancient languages like Sanskrit and others. They tried to evolve theological doctrines with the help of other major Religions. Their exertions were strenuous. Their scholars are known to work 16 to 18 hours a day. Their scholastic rigor and thoroughness were amazing. My uncle Rustom Dastoor Meherjirana (Bapaji) was a post graduate professor of Avesta Pahalvi in the Bombay University. He was my teacher-at-home on the subject and used to tell me astonishing stories about the Western Scholars like Westergard, Geldner, Geiger, Spiegel, Haug, Bartholomae and quite a crop of them.

BUT THE KILLING DRAWBACKS

BUT alas! the drawbacks of these studies, were several. **Firstly**, their nurture was in the then prevailing Newton-Darwin-paradigms. The seeds of Godlessness were fast growing.

Secondly, there was the progress paradigm. When monkees evolved into humans, the latter were primitive in their thinking and their tools. They then progressed and had now at the end of 19th century were at the pick of progress. That made the ancient prophet Zoroaster belonging to pastoral and agricultural period. How can he know Newton's laws? Look at some of the primitive questions he asks in Gatha Ha 44, like who supports the sky, how does the moon wax and wane, when would you, Ahura, give me the gift of ten pregnant mares and one camel?

Thirdly, WZS were treating their subject-matter on University levels. Ph.D's are awarded on original researches. Some new and original idea must be presented in the Ph.D. thesis. The Avesta - Pahalvi studies, therefore became a fertile ground of historical, geographical,

philological, etymological and grammatical conjectures, guess-works and surmises. A bunch of the so called theological doctrines of Zoroastrianism burst out. (They are enumerated on and from page 10) This was a good game for university scholars, but highly dangerous for Parsi faith. Any Religion is a matter of spiritual upliftment through disciplines, 'Yoga's, traditions. God is not just a 'concept' to be played with on paper. He is divine Entity to be reached through spiritual exertions in day-to-day life on earth.

THE PARSIS SCHOLARS

The Western scholasticism was brought to India particularly by the initiative of the late savant Khurshedji Cama. A band of Parsi scholars took up the Avesta-Pahalvi studies born in Europe. Khurshedji Cama himself, Shaheriarji Bharucha, Baheramgor Anklesaria, Sohrab Bulsara, Bomanji Dhabar, Khodabux Poonegar, Rustom Dastur Meherjirana, Homi Chacha, Manek Kanga, Jamshed Katrak, Manekji Dhalla, Phiroze Masani are some of the outstanding names. They did adopt the rigorous style of the Western scholars.

There was no doubt that all the Parsi scholars were awed and lured by the European School. Yet there were two distinct classes : one was carried away completely by the western paradigms and took them to be gospel truths. The other was inclined to justify the age-long traditions and tenets of the Din in the light of the Western studies. The task of the former was easy. They had just to quote big European names like Darmesteter, Bartholomae, etc to prove their point. The other class had more strenuous task, as they had to go against the European mainstream. An objective assessment about the caliber of the two classes reveals that the second, the tradition oriented class, had more astute and painstaking scholars. That is why **Khurshedji Cama had no hesitation to declare that the west oriented translations of Avesta are dry and void of the mystical**

meanings, as presented by Baheramshah Shroff of Ilm-e-Khshnoom, and that it is necessary to decipher such mystical meanings. Rustom Dastoor Meherjirana was a pet disciple of Baheramshah Shroff and close friend of Framroze Chiniwalla. Phiroze Masani had openly adopted Ilm-e-Khshnoom in his studies and propagation.

EXCUSES TO ESCAPE

The first class of the carried a way scholars became popular amongst the so called reformist Parsis, who wanted excuses to escape from the spiritual and traditional disciplines and exercises of the Zarthoshti Din. For instance, these scholars obliged the escapists, with passages from scriptures in the alleged support of conversion, wherein **the followers of other Religions were called Dregvant, Darvand the untruthful, fraudulent, impure!** As the academic standards fell and Parsis stopped giving Religious education to their children, the number of such escapists multiplied. Today the community has entered the dark zone of ignorance about the great and glorious Zarthoshti Din, its canons and culture. And here we are, ourselves ringing the bells of extinction through genetic mix-ups and by means, inter-alia, of the raw childish, immature and mud-slinging paid advertisements and articles in newspapers, which, in turn, are bankrupt in thinking, if not in finance.

And we the faithful crave for our Saoshyant, Saviour

Western Zoroastrian Studies are like judging a once - living man by dissecting his corpse.

Framroze Chiniwalla

In British days, the Parsis were madly attracted by foreign white skins of Scholars and Madams.

Keko.