

Parsis, Identity or Extinction?

Synopsis of Ervad K. N. Dastoor's Speech at the "6th All India Zoroastrian Youth Seminar".

(**Editor's Note** : The above Seminar was held at Ahmedabad on 24, 25, 26th October, 1992 under the auspices of Parsee Youth League of Ahmedabad. The organizers rightly and commendably thought it fit to invite three speakers to speak on religious subjects. Ervad K. N. Dastoor spoke on "Identity Problem"; Mr. Noshirwan Khurshed Daboo on "Science and Religion" and Dr. Rooyuton Peer on the "Significance of the Zoroastrian Tenets". Following is a short written-out summary of some of the points from Ervad Dastoor's speech).

Various studies in social sciences have shown that a community determined to preserve its identity has to adopt a behaviour pattern consisting of the following :-

- It has to follow certain practical ways of life and living, which are different from the rest of the world.
 - The different ways of life and living are required to have their foundation on religious principles and doctrines.
 - Every member of the community is required to have a firm conviction that the religious principles and the ways of life and living founded on them are the only means of the preservation of the Community's identity and survival.
 - The ways of life and the religious principles are required to be imbibed in every child from a very young age.
- The Community is required to have a strong leader - organization to ensure and enforce the compliance of the above requirements.
 - One of the religious principles to be infused in the collective frame of mind of the Community is that the marriage, whether of a male or female member, with an outsider, generates a social and spiritual disorder and is a step towards extinction.
 - The interaction with the outsiders, whether individuals or communities, is required to be controlled in such a way that it does not create disharmony with them and at the same time does not disturb or obstruct the Community's way of life and living.

There are two communities on the globe, which very convincingly illustrate and verify these propositions. One is the Amish community in America and the other is the Parsi community of India. The former has firmly adopted this behaviour pattern and is surviving and thriving. The latter, after faithfully following the pattern for 12 centuries, started rejecting it since last about 5 decades, and has thereby initiated and accelerated its own extinction.

The Amish

Religious persecution by their own co-religionists induced the Amish to migrate from Europe to America, in different groups,

between 1683 and 1737. Their largest congregation is in the Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. They have their own distinctive dress and ways of life strictly based on Biblical teachings. Every action, word and thought is based on Religion. They do not use electricity and any electrical equipment in their houses! No electric light even! They do not use motor cars. They travel in horse-buggies. Electricity and oil induce inhumanity and unchristianity in the humans. They are at the root of all wars and all evils. They arouse ego and separation - mania. The Amish are mainly farmers. They do not send their children to American schools. They marry amongst themselves and do not have pre-marital sex and artificial birth control. Average number of children to a woman is 6.6. The number of youths is larger than the elders. They teach their ways of life and the religious principles to their children right from the age of two years. They faithfully follow and obey their priests and religious organizations. They stick to their ways firmly and offer Gandhian type of resistance if called upon to reject them. Over the years, they have marginally modified their ways, but not to the extent of radically altering them. "The Riddle of Amish culture" by Donald Kraybill (John Hopkins University Press - 1989) gives an excellent account of their amazingly singular ways of life, and the religious sanction behind them.

The Parsis.

In their self-introduction to Jadi-Rana, as poetically narrated in the 16 shloka's of Neryosang, the Parsis described their distinctive ways of life and Religion. We wear Sudreh-Kushti, a yogic equipment as purifying as the holy river Ganga. We worship the holy Fire, specially consecrated. We perform the rites and ceremonies for the dead as ordained by our 'Poorvachrya's. (the ancestral saints). The secret of our honesty,

charity and golden character is our Religion. Thus spake our ancestors in the 8th century before the Indian King.

The ways of Life which were different from the rest of the world were (1) Sudreh-Kushti, (2) Manthra Prayers, (3) Atash Kadeh, (4) Yasna ('Kriyakaam'), (5) Dokhma, and (6) Boonak-pasbaani (the preservation of the racial gene). These six ingredients of the Parsi Life were at the basis of the then proverbial Parsi honesty, integrity, charity and character. The strict moral code which the Parsis could practice emanated from the six religious disciplines. Right upto the middle of the 19th century, the Parsis had unshakable faith in the disciplines. They did not question any of their tenets and practices on intellectual grounds. Their hearts throbbed with absolute faith and did not care for the winds of the brain.

Arrive, the Western Studies

The Western Studies of the Parsi Religion arrived in the latter half of the 19th century and the solid ground of Faith started having tremors. Even then, upto the first four to five decades of the present century, the Parsis could preserve their faith in the ages long religious disciplines. Thereafter the fall accelerated and to-day we are presenting to the world a subject for a sociological thesis : "The Behaviour of a Community fast on its Way to Extinction".

The alleged "progressives" relying on the exploded paradigms.

Something extremely curious has happened. The Western Studies of our Religion were based on the material and scientific thought of the 19th century. It was an infidel century propounding that man's intellect was capable of understanding the

whole of nature and all its phenomena. The amazingly tragic situation is that all the scientific thinking of the 19th century is mercilessly shattered in the present century. All the physical sciences are now knocking the door of mysticism! All the arguments against Religion are violently turned upside down. Books after books on science are coming out since last 3 decades, which clearly show that science has arrived at an intellectual barrier. Here I have a list of 20 such books. (We'll publish the list in Dini Avaz later - Editor).

All religions are based on mysticism. They do point out that there is an intellectual barrier, which a non-saintly human mind cannot penetrate. Modern science has now arrived at it. Our Religion and all its six disciplines are based on mystical science, which is far beyond all physical sciences. All the present day arguments shot out by those who advocate rejection of the religious disciplines,

are antiquated and unscientific. They are founded on the illusory materials of 19th century, which the 20th century science has ruthlessly destroyed!! Each of our religious disciplines is aimed at spiritual upliftment. You just cannot explain them away by intellectual arguments, which only reflect ignorance and not knowledge.

Do it yourself.

If you as the young desire to have that knowledge, you should yourself investigate; read, study, examine, explore, experiment and inquire into, instead of just being carried away by whatever shallow thoughts that touch your brain or by somebody else's "studies". Why not be on your own and rely on your own labour? Ponder objectively and laboriously on the propositions I have advanced before you. The world is much wider than any carry-away thinking.