

## **“WE CANNOT HAVE TWO MAZDAYASNI ZARATHUSHTI DEENS...”**

**- PERVIN J. MISTRY**

Dr. Kreyenbroek is quoted as saying “If you believe Zoroastrianism is chiefly a set of philosophical truths, there is no harm in anyone believing them. I think what traditional Parsis fear is the threat to their ethnic identity.”

1: It is this last sentence about “ethnic identity” which raises some valid concerns. I beg to point out that there is no question of traditional Parsis fearing “the threat to their ethnic identity”. Traditional Parsis have never considered their identity to be just “ethnic”. In Greek, “ethos” means “nation” and “ethnic” means pertaining to a group of people having a common national or cultural tradition. The Zarathushtis are a distinct Religious group and we care to preserve our distinct Religious identity. Our ancestors did not give up their lives and their native homeland of Iran in order to preserve only their “ethnic” or socio-cultural identity. The traditional Parsis fear for the loss of Religious identity if we assimilate with other ethnic groups through intermarriage and if we cease to practise our rituals.

Is it only the practice and preservation of “chok-toran”, “ses-sopara” and “kor-ni-sari” which distinguishes a Zarathushti? These are merely acquired socio-cultural customs as is the practice of “sukhad-loban”. Sandalwood does not grow in Iran. Hence, even the practice of “sukhad-loban” is not a religious mandate but offering incense (khushboo) to fire is a religious/ scriptural tradition among the Zarathushtis.

What distinguishes our religion from other religions is the fundamental spiritual discipline

of wearing sudreh-kusti; practising dokhmenashini; kriya-kaam which includes not just kusti- padyab but also the rituals of baaj, jashan, Vendidad, yasna, obsequies, etc.; uttering and preserving the unique mantras called “staot yasna”. perpetually preserving the worship and sacredness of fire. Above all, as a religious group, we practise the most important spiritual discipline which is “boonak pasbani” and it is to practise this religious mandate that we are religiously enjoined to abstain from proselytism and interfaith marriages. The injunction in the Vendidad, Husernam Nask, Dinkard, Gathas, Chithrem Buyat and Patet against proselytism and interfaith marriages is mandatory for a Zarathushti to obey.

It is important for the heterodox Zarathushtis and for the whole world to comprehend that our religion is based on the LAWS OF ASHA meaning the immutable and eternal Laws of Truth which govern Nature. Nature itself prohibits the mixing of “seeds” or genes in all its kingdoms. As Zarathushtis, as the followers of Asha, we emphasize the importance of preserving “toknam” or “boonak pasbani”, and to safeguard our religion and our religious identity, we sealed our fate in blood and became homeless refugees thirteen centuries ago.

**It was a preserve to the RELIGION and not the “ethnic identity” that we arrived at the shores of India and established our atashkadehs and dokhmas; preserved our rituals; practised “boonak-pasbani” and**

**continued wearing the sudreh-kusti. Because we preserved our Religious identity, we have survived for millennia through massacres and intense persecution.**

It is a fact that children of intermarried couples do not have strong commitments or bonds to any one particular religion. They drift through life without a religious identity. History also PROVES that Zarathushti groups who left Iran to escape religious persecution perished through intermarriages and proselytism except for the group which came to India and practised "boonak-pasbani". The other groups assimilated into the host communities. We, too, could have accepted assimilation with the Hindus in India or with the Muslims in Iran if it was only the "ethnic identity" we wanted to preserve.

Therefore, to the orthodox, traditional Zarathushtis, what is more important than life itself is their Religion and RELIGIOUS IDENTITY, and please make no mistake about this religious zeal. As traditionalists or fundamental orthodox, we have a clarity of vision and complete security in our scriptural teachings as well as identity.

2. "There's room for pluralism in every community". Perhaps. But what are the consequences? Till today, we are the only religion which is not divided. We cannot follow different rites and traditions where we Zarathushtis live in different parts of the world or within India itself. One group cannot follow different doctrines from the teachings of Zarathushtrianism and yet claim to be "Zarathushti". Asho Zarathushtra did not preach different doctrines to different groups of his followers. His message is pure, straight and simple. His teachings are found in the 21 Nasks (the Vendidad being the only Nask

which has survived in its entirety) and in the Pahlavi commentaries such as the Dinkard.

A Zarathushti, a follower of Asho Zarathushtra, will naturally obey and follow Asho Zarathushtra's teachings with faith and devotion. No follower ever accepts a teaching through negation, disobedience or disregard of the teacher's authority. One cannot arbitrarily change the teachings which are Divine and Revealed and corrupt them to suit the degrading moral standards of society. If individuals wish to follow a different set of rules and teachings, that is not "pluralism". This is acceptance of what is WRONG, justifying and accepting this wrong and then rationalising it with words such as "pluralism".

We cannot have two Mazdayasni Zarathushti Deens! If the heterodox wish to act against the religious teachings and proselytize intermarry, do away with some or all rituals, change the prayers and the language of the prayers, they are free to convert themselves to any other "progressive" religion of their choice. They are free to even set up a so-called "religion" (a cult) of their own. But! they cannot disobey the religious and traditional teachings and practices of the Mazdayasni Zarathushti religion and yet be called "Mazdayasni Zarathushtis!".

A Zarathushti NEVER accepts wrong as "right" and presents the wrong with misleading descriptive words such as "pluralism" or as Dr. Ali Akbar Jafarey suggests: "unity in diversity". Wrong is wrong whichever way one looks at it, and Zarathushtis do not accept wrong nor twist and turn wrong to make it look better or politically correct. A zarathushti religiously fights and speaks out against wrong/evil whenever and in whatever form it confronts him/her.

When Christianity splintered, has it become more spiritual? It is divided into different Churches and is not today's Churchianity a hindrance to real unity within Christianity? Every different group of Christians interpret the teachings of their Saviour differently and this has distorted the true message of Lord Jesus Christ. Ireland is devastated by bloodshed between the Protestants and the Catholics. The Muslims also divided into various sects and there has been bloodshed within their own community.

The Jews separated into orthodox and liberal groups and helplessly, the world witnesses the explosive tension of unsurmountable hatred being built up due to each group professing opposite ideas in the very name of Judaism. Rather than copy the wrong tolerated and promoted in other religious communities, as Zarathushtis we must, in fact; teach others how NOT to divide and part ways and accept wrong as "pluralism".

Religion is not merely an exercise in grammar, literature, philosophy, geography or history. It is a Divine Message from God brought by His Divine Messengers. Religion is, above all else, a matter of FAITH. Being Divine and Divinely Revealed, religion is not a socio-cultural fad to be changed and twisted to suit societal trends or be subjected to democratic "rights". The orthodox will never accept, rationalise and justify spiritually wrong practices as being "pluralism". We cannot, as a microscopic community, accept changes and practices which are detrimental to our survival.

Besides, if we accept divisions as a sort of "truce" labelled as "pluralism", how many divisions will there be? To begin with, there will be three groups (i) the heterodox will do away with rituals, promote intermarriages and proselytism with their trumpeted

missionary zeal; (ii) the liberals will perhaps preserve the rituals, but do away with the scriptural and religious injunction of "boonak-pasbani" by accepting converts, their married spouses and their children, and (iii) the orthodox will remain the only true Zarathushtis who will preserve all the rituals, traditions and "boonak-pasbani".

If "boonak -pasbani" is a scriptural, religious injunction, then, should any group who disobeys this religious mandate have the right to be called "Zarathushtis"? It is easy to find temporary peace by opting out of dialogues, but to many individuals this is the beginning of a religious renaissance. Through the dialogues (often heated and unfortunately, personal) between the heterodox and the orthodox, the community is actually learning. This is a good sign of revival. Instead of justifying wrong as "pluralistic", let us propagate Faith through correct knowledge.

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