

CONVERSION IN ZOROASTRIANISM

Difficulties with the Bombay Zoroastrian community and the communities abroad
Despite exposure of the feeble canard on non-conversion falsely implicating Jaydev Rana, we notice that this untruth is still being peddled by unscrupulous anti-conversion lobbyists. Bombay indeed does have its particular difficulties with regard to acceptance of outsiders into the Zoroastrian faith, but pleads especial SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC reasons for RELIGIOUS non-compliance! Emphasis is placed on the Parsi socio-religious funds set up with the provisos that they benefit only the Parsis and that strange class of the so-called "born Zoroastrian". The priests have, apparently, left a loophole to conveniently allow the return of some backsliders on the curious pretext that their conversion out was both "illegal and invalid".

This is untenable, for were it really so then we should not have had any obstacles denying exogamous Zoroastrian women their INALIENABLE BIRTHRIGHT of fire-temple visits and dakhma exposure: on such occasions we were assured that by outmarrying they had voluntarily and knowingly (!) renounced their Zarathushtrian Mazdayasnian faith! It is distressingly evident that religious adherence is being determined quite arbitrarily from ad hoc misogynistic premisses.

No less unpleasant is the sad tendency of our Bombay prelates -- to whom we once used to entrust our religious and spiritual guidance -- to manipulate texts to suit their predilections for a tribal religion despite the clearest injunctions to the contrary.

One such piece of misinformation was noticed in a false statement that just one lone Parsi scholar had translated the root VAR-, thrice located in the Gathas, as "convert". That this was palpably untrue was quickly brought to light with references to the sound scholarship of Kavasji KANGA, Khodabax PUNEGAR, and Irach TARAPOREWALA -- all respected Gatha translators.

Much is being made of the fact that our Parsi translators had also utilized "to choose", "ward off/turn from (evil)", "to convince", "to cause to believe". Permutations formed about the root VAR- can only convey expressions unambiguously suggestive of the drive for PROSELYTISM. A selective adherence to peripheral meanings, with the careful exclusion of the embarrassing "CONVERT", is exactly like saying of someone that "he strides, paces, strolls, saunters, promenades, causes one foot to move ahead of the other, BUT he is not walking!" What would be the point of Zarathushtra's energetically repeated "convincing", "causing to believe", "turning away from (evil)" of seekers after Ahura Mazda's Wisdom, if his purpose and intent was not their CONVERSION? We shall not further labour the point, having done so at length precisely for reasons of countering so much manipulation of our religious texts and undermining of the real importance of the conversion issue.

We ourselves having no personal or vested interest, and certainly NO HIDDEN AGENDA, we seek only a restitution of the Truth of our religious and commentarial texts.

Mr Cyrus P. Mehta of Harlow, Essex, recalls for us that the several learned articles and factual religious statements made in Western India early in the twentieth century by the pious Parsi Zoroastrians Darab SANJANA, Jivanji MODI, Shehryarji BHARUCHA, Khurshedji Rustamji CAMA and Tehmurasp Dinshahji ANKLESARIA, all of whom had opined that IF

A PERSON SERIOUSLY WISHES TO BECOME A ZOROASTRIAN, THEN THERE IS NO BAR IN OUR RELIGION. Their conclusions were not based on blind beliefs but ON THE STUDY AND AUTHORITY OF ZOROASTRIAN SCRIPTURES.

Few in Bombay now care to remember these judicious pronouncements of our enlightened ancestors. Enlightenment is not some new fad brought about since the Parsi and Irani emigrations world-wide: it has always illumined the Zoroastrian psyche. Western scholars too, pioneer and modern-day, applying common-sense to their disciplined scientific training, have arrived at the same conclusion: that ZOROASTRIANISM ENJOINS CONVERSION. No' sensible Zoroastrian would advocate indiscriminate or mass conversion.

However, he does maintain that in cases of intermarriage, non-Zoroastrian spouses and the children from increasing intermarriages be encouraged to embrace Zoroastrianism and integrate within the communities. Family harmony would thrive, apostasy disappear, and community stability benefit naturally from RELIGIOUSLY inculcated social moves towards acceptance.

Had the Bombay priests come straight out with the RELIGIOUS TRUTH ABOUT CONVERSION and then explained that owing perhaps to personal distaste or disinclination, or economic and socio-political pressures, now, augmented by alien fundamentalist busybodies and wily opportunists, it was not possible to put our religiously inculcated precepts into practice, and called a moratorium on this vexing issue. The self-respect of the Bombay community and its religious and populist leaders would thereby have remained unassailed throughout the decades of needless obfuscation. However, what is seemingly appropriate for Bombay cannot be rigidly imposed as RELIGIOUS dogma upon the rest of the Zoroastrian world where, evidentially, circumstances and needs are very different.

Solutions similarly remain to be boldly tackled over the thorny questions of Calendars, Initiation, Intermarriage, Funerary procedures (especially regarding Burial, Cremation, Secondary Burials, non-Zoroastrian pallbearers, post-mortem Prayers) and all other matters which our communities continue to irresponsibly and hurriedly shelve as "controversial". Such pressing matters of real concern to every Zoroastrian will not resolve themselves through studied indifference.

Adding to the difficulties confronting our priesthood and the laity is the infiltration by those Parsis who rejected Zoroastrianism for a moribund THEOSOPHY: an insidious mix of doctrines incorporating ideas alien to Zarathushtra's theology are passed on to a gullible public as a modern extension of the Prophet's teachings. Then there are among the Parsis groups of followers of the latter-day receivers of secretly communicated pseudo-religious teachings, the more revered as they become less comprehensible!

Such non-Zoroastrian views are being espoused by small vocal minorities. And though they certainly, under the principle of 'freedom of conscience', have the right to believe and declare the same, they must be seen for what they really are -- PERVERTERS OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE PROPHET ZARATHUSHTRA. Not only do they publish and preach in India; they appear as itinerant preachers in parts of the world where Zoroastrians have recently settled to promote their peculiar theosophies, attempting to gain the support of the uninformed by insinuating a tribal religion based upon blood. The illuminating message of the Prophet is craftily avoided, or even displaced. The life of moral striving and the goal of establishing the Rule of Righteousness is utterly ignored. For whatever unpleasant reasons, our authentically Zoroastrian priesthood seems paralyzed to denounce or counteract such unprincipled

infiltrations, preferring to divert attention to imagined threats from phantasms. These difficulties indeed lie with the Bombay priesthood.

We do not wish to engage in pointless disputation. Ours is a plea for enlightenment, which is already embedded in the words of the Prophet. We urge our enlightened dasturs to articulate this Wisdom and not fail the Teacher whose teachings they profess. We jointly feel that a cultured, enlightened, educated and teaching priesthood represents our best hope for the propagation of the faith and the continuance of its glory well into the next millennium of our PROPHET ZARATHUSHTRA WHO WAS SENT TO US TO PERFECT THIS WORLD THROUGH OUR OWN PERFECTION.

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