

In the name of the Just and Benevolent

The Role Parsis of India Played for the Survival and Endurance of the Zartoshtis of Iran

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More than a thousand years have passed since the first group of Zartoshti refugees stepped on the shores of Sanjan. In the course of history Parsis of India put their hearts and souls to preserve and flourish the essence of the Mazdi Yasni faith. Historic researches give evidence that at least upto the 12th century ad the Parsis' religious leaders had not abandoned the religious doctrines and the contents of the religious scripts. The writings of Dastur Neryusang Dehaval tells about the knowledge of the mobeds of those times with respects to the Avesta scripts, Pahlavi and Sanskrit languages and interpretation of Zand. But, the ups and downs of the following centuries, like the ruinous invasions of Mahmud Qaznavi on India and the tyrannies of his commander, Alef Khan, done to the Parsis, the pressure put by the Moslems by collecting high 'jaziya' (tax) in order to encourage them to convert to Islam, on the other hand, the pressure brought onto the Parsis by the Portuguese missionaries, and last but not least, constant pressure brought by the prejudiced Hindus, caused the Parsis to forget their religious knowledge, to the extent that they even forgot the Pahlavi script.

As understood from the book, "The Stories of Dastur Darab Hormozyar", in the first letter of the Parsis of India to the Iranian Zartoshtis, in the year 847 Yazdgerdi (Parsi calendar), Nariman Hushang had requested the Iranian mobeds not to write their response in Pahlavi language because in India none of the Parsis knew this language any more. Therefore, the Iranian Dasturs replied in the Persian language but with Din Dabira script. In part of this letter, which is recorded in "The Stories of Dastur Darab Hormozyar", we read, "The reason that I did not write in the Pahlavi language was because Nariman Hushang had requested that the Hirbods and the Mazdi Yasni community in Navsari, Behruj, Surat and Anklesar do not know Pahlavi. He wrote that there are Behdin's in these towns and also Hirbods but none know the Pahlavi language. The reply that Shapur Jamasp gave to the Indian Hirbods and Behdins is as follows: "In the name of God – For the reason already mentioned I have written in the Avesta script".

The visit of Nariman Hushang to Iran, in the year 857 (Iranian calendar) undoubtedly opened a new chapter in the relationship between the Iranian Zartoshtis and the Indian Parsis. The Iranian behdins had no knowledge of the existence of their coreligionists in India. The news that Nariman Hushang brought about the Parsis was a source of great joy for the Iranian Dasturs and behdins. Nariman Hushang stayed in Yazd for one year, to learn the Persian language. After learning the language he submitted his message to the Iranian Dasturs and took the answers (to his religious questions) with him to India. Four years after the visit of Nariman Hushang, in the year 861 (Iranian calendar) two Iranian Zartoshtis by the names of Nushirvan Pourkhorram and Marzban Pouresfandiari, traveled to Bombay. 29 years after them, four other Zartoshtis traveled to India for business, and brought back with them a letter from the Parsis. Their names were Nushirvan Pourmehraban, Saad-ol-amr Pour Marzbanshah, Nowruz Pourfariborz and Farrokh Pourbarbakhsh. It was at that time that the learned and sagacious man, Dastur Azarkeyvan, traveled from Shiraz to Surat.

In the year 972 (Iranian calendar = 1593 ad), Mobed Ardeshir Kermani traveled to India and wrote a book called Farhang Jahangiri, in which he translated the Zand, Pazand and Pahlavi vocabulary into Persian. In the year 1029 (Iranian calendar = 1650 ad) Shahriyar Pourrostan traveled to Gujrat. On his return he carried a letter from the Parsis of India addressed to the Iranian Behdin's...

The Indian Parsis, particularly those from Navsari, very carefully collected the letters they received from Iranian Dasturs, because these were answers to their religious questions, and this collection turned into a very valuable book for them. These questions and answers, that brought to light many facts of the Zartoshtis' history, took Dastur Darab Hormozyar 14 years to compile. He called it "The Stories of Dastur Darab Hormozyar". The last letter, written in the year 1142 Yazdgerdi by Molla Kavuos Pourrotam was received in India, and from then onwards the religious correspondence between the Indian Parsis and the Iranian Dasturs stopped.

All this while, the Iranian Dasturs were sending volumes of Avesta and Zand to the Indian Parsis. Sending these books from Iran to India had two advantages: first, it helped the Parsis to strengthen their link with their religion and culture, and secondly, it preserved the books from burning in the fires of ignorance and enmity. This system continued until the 19th century ad, as mentioned by easternologists, namely, Edward Brown and Jackson, in their travel accounts.

Edward Brown: "Zartoshtis sent most of their ancient and very important books which had survived the plunders and burning in the past centuries, from Yazd and Kerman to India, to keep them safe in the hands of the Parsis of India, because they feared to lose them when each time the rulers would change."

Abraham Jackson, the American easternologist and scholar in the Avesta language, also mentions in his travel account about his meeting with Dastur Tirandaz and Master Khodabakhsh. In this meeting, they showed him some of their religious books that they possessed. Jackson writes about this meeting: "Participants in the meeting (Master Khodabakhsh and Dastur Tirandaz) stated that they have sent all their valuable books to India in order to save them and also for the use of the Parsis, and for reprint.

One of the most valuable volumes (Nask) that they sent to India during this period, was the volumes of Dinkerd. This big book consisting of 9 volumes was carried to India in 1262 (Iranian calendar = 1850 ad) by Molla Bahman Monajam, son of Molla Bahram, the then magistrate of Khorramshah.

The Parsis of India had repeatedly written to the Iranian Dasturs to send mobeds and Hirbods to India to teach and train them. But the Iranian Dasturs did not find it practical, because traveling by sea had religious restrictions and traveling by land was not safe in those days. But, finally, this step was taken and about 300 years ago (1099 Iranian calendar) one of the most learned Dasturs of the time, by the name of Jamasp Velayati, accepted the hardships of such a trip, and traveled to surat. This visit opened an important chapter in the religious lives of the Parsis of India and also in the researches made by easternologists from the West.

Dastur Jamasp Velayati helped as much as he could to solve the religious questions for the Parsis, and also taught the Pahlavi and Avesta scripts. But after some time he noted deep differences of opinion among the Parsi Dasturs and this made him discouraged. He found the solution in training a few of the younger Mobed generation, with the hope that they would be able to solve the old disputes and bring new life to the religious community. One of the three

whom Dastur Velayati selected to teach the religious science and the Avesta and Pahlavi languages was Dastur Darab Kumana from Surat. Years disposal of the famous easternologist, Anekti De Perone, and taught him the Pahlavi language. The decision that Dastur Kumana made to teach Pahlavi to De Perone caused a great stir in the western research centers. The efforts of De Perone were a great step in the history of research in the Zartoshti religion and culture, and many easternologists from the West became interested in doing research on the Avesta and Pahlavi books.

Besides training the three young Dasturs and giving advices to other Hirbods and Behdins, Dastur Velayati started writing books on Avesta for the Indian Parsis. When returning to Iran he left all the books that he had taken with him to India, for the Parsis to use. One of the books was “Hirbodestan and Nirangestan”, which for the first time came into the hands of Parsis of India. Seven years after Jamasp Velayati left India, Jamasp Asana transcribed these books with great care and precision.

After the transfer of our religious science together with the valuable books from Iran to India and after the Avesta and Pahlavi languages were taught to the Parsis, a huge turmoil and stormy events in Iran nearly extinguished the radiant light of the Zartoshti culture in Iran. Wasn't it God's will that the divine message of Zarathushtra should not be forgotten, and instead be preserved by the Parsis of India? At a time when the Iranian Zartoshtis, in the following centuries, were severely harmed and suppressed by the rulers of the Safavid and Qajar dynasties, with God's grace, and as a result of the efforts of Jamasp Velayati and the books that were kept with the Parsis, this most humanitarian religion and culture was restored and become known to the whole world. These same books were later studied by easternologists and scholars in the Avesta. During the rule of the Qajar's this time the Parsis of India came to the rescue of Iranian Zartoshtis and the knowledge that was once transferred to India came once again to Iran, to generously water the starving tree of the Zartoshti community in Iran and give it new life.