

# Understanding The Zoroastrian Religion

Are the sacred writings other than 'Gathas' non-Zoroastrian?

Is there any rational and reasonable basis *for* the belief that only 'Gathas' were written in Zarathushtra's time?

(2)

"Inherent in you are the faults of the flesh. They tempt you towards sins, and lead you away from the path of God. Fight them, aspire to conquer them, and for that, learn to control the mind". This is the great lesson all prophets and sages and saints have taught to us.

We know that mind is the source of all our thoughts, words and deeds, good or evil. But what is mind? How does it function? Where is it in us.

We are given an impression that it is in our heads. A most complicated organ-brain is there and it is the mind's functionary or emissary.

But brain is another mystery. It is said to be "the darkest continent of the 20th century"; and that for two reasons: the first is that it works day and night in a dark chamber within 'your head; and second, that much about it is wrapped in an unknown unexplored darkness.

A GHOST?

We have thus two mysterious things mind and brain. There is a third and still

deeper mystery; what is the relation between the two? How does the mind 'direct' the brain to act? Brain is a system composed of "ten thousand million neurons" says Sir John Eccles, a great Australian neurophysiologist, (Neurons mean nerve-cells). He adds that they are "momentarily poised close to a Just-threshold level of excitability". They are ever ready to be excited but something is required to excite them. There is such 'something' in us, but what is it we do not know. It may be that mysterious monster 'mind'. The brain, says Eccles, "Is the kind of machine that a ghost could operate, If by 'ghost' we mean in the first place an 'agent' whose action has escaped detection even by the most delicate Instruments" (I). He means, 'mind' Is that ghost.

A ghost operating some machine in ever darkest chamber-really a ghostly affair! And we all live and do everything by that! No doubt our attempt to understand the ghost and its agent fails, because all our understandings come from that very ghost and he mar be chary In allowing us to under

stand its real self

Whatever may be our 'scientific' attempts to understand mind, all great Religions have taught us certain basic Truths about how this ghost of a mind functions, and what we have to do about it. Mind, they teach, is an apparent reflection of certain forces and energies deep within us. These forces are two-fold, or in other words, these energies flow in two different directions. One tends the minds towards God, humanity and the Path leading towards God and humanity. The other directs the mind towards evil and away from the Path of God. In an ordinary human, the latter force is more powerful. It is for him to go against this force, by trying to direct his thoughts towards God and Religion. Because mind is a controllable thing. If you earnestly try to bend it towards God and the Good, the good forces within will help.

normal human mind is stronger towards evil, and it is a strenuous exertion not to allow it to be d rifted away in the strong currents of evil. That is why all Religions have given certain spiritual disciplines, 'Yogas'. exercises and institutions. They are meant, devised and prescribed to keep the mind inclined towards the Good and God.

For Zarathushtrians, Sudreh-Kushti and Manthra-prayers are two of several such spiritual exercises and disciplines. They are to be performed in a certain prescribed way and with certain thoughts passing in the mind. They are the great purifying agents for the mind, (Every Kushti done properly in its actions and thoughts, is a "Barashnoom", a spiritual bath to our whole being).

"The tongue should speak only the truth and the Manthra" is another such spiritual exercise (2). Manashni, Gavashni, Kunashni is another.

#### WHY RELIGIOUS DISCIPLINES AND EXERCISES?

But that is not easy      The tendency 'of a

#### THE UNSTEADY Intelligence

When the mind of a person encourages any of the wandering carnal senses, that sense drags away his intelligence like the wind dragging away a boat in water. Therefore Oh Mahabaaho (Arjun)! that person's intelligence becomes steady whose senses have become free of passions and are in his complete control.

- Lord Krishna Gita  
Ch. 2-67, 68

#### THE MIND THAT DECEIVES

The ghost - mind - has some deceiving characteristics. When it desires to lead its human keeper towards the wrong way. It induces in him all sorts of arguments and excuses. A killer is made to think he is killing for "the good" of the society. A liar is consoled by the thought that after all he is doing it for some 'good'. The sexual sinner is made to argue; what is wrong In it? Why should" I not enjoy the physical pleasures when I am gifted with them" by nature herself? A man who wants to flout the Orders of his own Prophet, would say 'Oh! that is quite old and orthodox and outdated!" A Parsi who is too inert and lazy to appreciate the spiritual value of the Zoroastrian disciplines, Yogas, exercises and institutions and to act on them would

take refuge in: "Oh! that is all external! Zarathustra did not teach all this. Some priests have fooled us in doing them".

### **STUDY MODERN SCIENCE**

This is actually happening in our Community since the beginning of this century. Time to time somebody pompously turns up and shouts: "Do away with these nonsenses: Follow the pure Religion". They are the victims of that great treacherous ghost-mind. That ghost. In Its usual way. sweeps them away from the right path and they then close their eyes towards the truth as shining as the mid-day sun. They would talk of modern scienc<!, but never care to see that the most modern discoveries of science have started showing us in a very faint way the great spiritual truths and wisdom behind all our religious practices. traditions, discip-

lines, and Yogas. To-day, If you desire to appreciate the Zoroastrian Religion with all its existing institutions, go to most modern sciences like nuclear physics astrophysics, biology, and ESP. (This humble Dini Avaz will from time to time give you some idea about the truth of this proposition.)

### **THE GRAND EXCUSE**

To ignore modern science while trying to dabble in Zoroastrian Religion is the sin of omission induced by a tricky mind. But there is a sin of commission also prevalent amongst us, which tries to find excuses for ignoring and discarding our religious disciplines. One of such grand excuses is that: Only some portion of the Gathas are the writings of Zarathushtra; all other Avesta writtings -like Vendidad, Yasna, Visparad. Y.,shts. Niyash etc -learn-

edly termed 'later Avesta'-were written much after Zarathushtra. And the Gathas do not teach any "external thing" like Sudreh - Kushti or Manthra - prayers, or Yasna-ceremonies or Fire-temples or Dokhmas. Gathas teach "pure religion". All the other writings are impure and defiled and all external rituals and ceremonies have no significance; they were devised by "later priests" for professional interests.

The late Dr. Dhalla was the champion of this theory, and he called himself 'a reformist'. His satellites are still there with us and go on singing the same off tune song.

What reasons and arguments are advanced for this escapist theory?

### POETRY AND PROSE

The first argument is that Gathas are in verse. while non-gathic writings are in prose. This means, Zarathushtra was a poet; so He was incapable of writing prose; or He perhaps thought it below His dignity to do so! If you are a poet. please take care not to write any prose, because after a few thousand years. the then learned savants will say. you were not and could not be the author of that prose! Macaulay wrote some good poetry and some better prose In a flowery style and drafted some laws in very stony legal language, In 3020 A. D. the pundits will perhaps declare In a very pompous heavy technical language that poet Macaulay was different from that dry lawyer who drafted Indian Senile Code. (This is on a conjecture that the word 'Penal' will by then be transformed to 'Senile' by substitution of 's' by 'p' and other linguistic fluctuations by then invented). As a poet, you cannot write even a letter in prose. If you wrote some good letters in poetry to your girl-friend when

she was a beautiful spinster, then it is neither capable of nor permissible for you you to write a letter in prose to the same lady, now your wife, with some of her previous poetry-inspiring beauty damaged.

### ARGUMENTS IN A CIRCLE

But there are some real beauty points In these poetry-verse argument about the the Zoroastrian writings. For instance. Dr. Dhalla, the great champion of that theory, used the term 'poet' for the writers of Ram Yashta, Zamyad Yashta. and Homa Yashta in his 'Zoroastrian Theology' (3). He did not say that these yashts were poetries and therefore must have been written by Zarathushtra Himself. He said. they were not written by Him, because they were Yashts and not Gathas! But that is just a merry-go-round. There must be something different in the Gathic and non-Gathic poetries, indicating their alleged different times. But no such poetic differences are shown. Are we to conjecture that the two poetries have different meters and therefore they belong to different ages?

But that way, as the late Ervad Phiroze Masani pointed out, the Gathas, as poetry, have no uniform meter (4). There are different lengths of lines, different number of words in one line, different number of lines in one stanza and different rhyme and rhythm in different stanzas. Should we then say: as poet Zarathushtra could not write prose, so He could not write poetry in different meters; therefore only one particular meter should be considered as that of Zarathushtra and all others of those poor creatures: "later priests"!

In fact, this theory and its other ingredients have led these "Doctors of Theology"

to say that only some portion of Gathas are written by Zarathushtra!! So, discard disciplines, throwaway non-Gathic Avesta, eliminate some portion of Gathas and what remains is this Great Religion of Zarathushtra! ! Why not eliminate that remainder also on the ground that it; was written In primitive times, and is out of date and out of tune with our 'progressive' and 'scientific' times? It is very easy

to find flimsy arguments and excuses to eliminate and cut down a thing. It is difficult to be able to see the common thread or current running in it. That requires not an escapist tendency but painstaking effort, and truth cannot be reached without pain.

Although 'writers' of Yashta and non-Gathic Avesta are very often referred to

#### THE WHIM!

One such pet theory (of the self-styled) reformers is this: The Gathas constitute the earliest and most reliable Scriptures, all other Avesta is later and younger. Anything in the latter that is not found in the Gathas may thus be challenged-if it does not suit the whims of the heterodox. It is very conveniently forgotten that the Gathas are a small portion of the Avesta literature containing hymns and cannot therefore be expected to embody either a complete philosophy Or an exhaustive ritual; nay being mere hymns cannot legitimately be expected to deal with these subjects at all.

JEHANGIR J. VIMADALAL In Introduction to Phlroze Masani's 'Zoroastrianism, Ancient and Modern' (p. vi-vii.)

by the theorists, nobody has found out who were they and what were their names and when did they write. Only vague and arbitrary statements are made that they were "later" priests and wrote their Avesta 'later' than Zarathushtra. (I do not know why on this theory, they can be only 'priests' and not non-priestly Zoroastrians or even non-Zoroastrians).

#### 'LINGUISTIC' DIFFERENCES?

The second argument for the belief that non-Gathic writing were written much latter than Gathas, is that the Avesta of the two is different. This is what is known as the linguistic basis of that theory.

No doubt Gathas have long accents and syllables, while non-Gathic writings sound different. But can we be so sure about the two being separated In point of time? Could they not be languages of the same times but spoken or written in different places? There is a very significant proverb In Gujarati: "The dialect changes every twelve miles" (5). This can be a complete answer to the argument of time-separation. To-day Gujarati of Kathiawar is very much different from Gujarati of Surat. The words having the same meaning are, though slightly comparable. differ in many ways. It can be space separation. We cannot be dogmatic about time-separation merely because of comparable linguistic differences.

That of course is an argument of a layman like me, who has no good fortune to have a deep study of science and art of languages. But a renowned scholar and author of the Western studies of Zoroastrianism, Dr. Wilhelm Geiger, advance the same argument. In his "Civilisation of The Ancient Iranians" (translated by Dastur Darab Peshotan Santana) Dr. Geiger says:

"Although (the Gathas) bear (s) many marks of great antiquity, still it is not quite free from later and more polished forms of expression. Again the language of the Gathas is essentially a distinct dialect, the difference of which from that of the rest of the Avesta may be easily explained by its having belonged to a different country" (6).

In an objective impassioned manner Dr. Geiger says that space-separation can account for the difference in the languages of Gathic and non-Gathic writings.

Again, the difference may be due to the subject matters of the writings. Wordsworth's poems and Stephen's Law of Evidence were written in the same period of time, but the languages are entirely different. One is anxious to use literary and figurative language; other is anxious to avoid any poetic expression to make the meaning as clear and unambiguous as possible. If Gatha's theme is philosophical and devotional and Vendidad's theme is the laws of practical day-to-day living, the languages would be very much divergent. To convey the same meaning, entirely different expressions and words would be used.

### THE CONTENTS THEORY

I must state, in all fairness, that Geiger does believe that Gathas are older in point of time, but he does not found this belief on the linguistic differences; these according to him, can be space-separated. His belief about the antiquity of Gathas is based on their own contents.

And that takes us to the third argument that: a comparison of the contents of Gathas and those of non-Gathic writings indicate that the latter were written much after Gathas.

Here again we are on very soft and even treacherous ground. There is no uniformity about the contents of Gathas in the modern linguistic studies of Zoroastrianism. There are as many translations as there are savants and pundits and each is so much divergent from another that the contents are not even reasonably ascertainable! What can be the message of one particular stanza is an body's guess. And those translations, which are stated, to be authentic do not contain much of a divine message or much of a religious philosophy even! The whole difficulty is that in order to decipher the sublime message of the Gathas, or of any Avesta writing, certain words are to taken in their technical sense. Nobody need scratch his nose for this. Avesta is the Science of all sciences; and any science, whether worldly or spiritual, must have, and always has, its own technical terms, which have meanings quite different from the dictionary. "Equity of Redemption" is a special technical term of the law of property. „ Work" has a special meaning in Physics. "Relativity" of Einstein is a big monster compared to its ordinary meaning. 'Horse-power' has a very remote indication of a real horse; in Physics, It is a measure of 'work done. So, 'Geush-urva' in Gathas has very remote connection with cattle; its principal meaning is entirely different. It is a technical term used for certain living conscious Force or Energy in Nature, which has a special relation with our mother-earth (7). But if you read it merely as cattle, Gathas would be said to be belonging to "the cattle age" and that would take the bottom out of its real esoteric technical meaning!