

The History of Zoroastrians Through Political Analysis and Historical Letters

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Introduction:

This presentation is complementary of my first talk, delivered in 1996 and 2001, on “The History of Zoroastrians after the Arab Invasion.... It is not intended to generate hard feelings toward any particular people, because no generation is responsible for the actions of past generations although almost always they are unfairly blamed for them. Also as humans we are emotionally vulnerable to excitement, which can be a cause for manipulation, false indoctrination and wrongdoing.

The real goal is to learn from the past history to build a better future world devoid of prejudice, hatred, rancor and revenge. There is also another important objective, which is to make the Zoroastrian community as well as others aware of the untold history so that their responsibility toward the generation of 21st century is better understood and all realize that the cultural treasure that we have inherited from our ancestors should not be taken for granted. Whatever we have received is the result of suffering and sacrifices of past generations and is to be cherished.

The Arab invasion of Iran in 630 A.D. and its consequences have never been researched impartially, because they always carry religious sentiments. It is taught and popularized that the Arabs brought Islam to Iran, and the Iranians, frustrated by their government, the strict religious codes interfering with their daily life and the established Sassanian caste system, embraced Islam’s message of equality and brotherhood. This view, however, not only is unsupported by historical evidence but also contradicts basic human intuition.

The fact is that people altogether do not give up their original tenets and traditions easily to adhere to new ones. Even the primitive Arabs did not abandon their old religion that simply, as there were several religious wars (Ghazvah) in which many nonbelievers were massacred. Not only did the Arab conquest not eliminate the caste system, but soon Iranians found themselves part of two new castes, slaves and Mavali. The mass of Iranian women, children and captured men were sold in the Arabian markets and even those who converted to Islam did not obtain freedom. They were called Mavali or the liberated slaves, who were mostly deprived of basic rights, could not ride horses or carry weapons, did not receive wages or booties of the war and at times were given away as gifts. The mass enslavement of Iranians was so rampant that in a story that Shiites made to relate the family of Imam Ali to the Sassanians, even the daughter of King Yazdgard, Shahrbanoo, was sold as a slave in Medina market to Imam Ali who gave her to his son, Imam Hussein, to marry.¹

The cultural calamity was disastrous. Books were burned, scholars slain and schools and libraries destroyed because the invaders regarded the Quran as the last book that nullified all existing ones. Iran in a short period of time fell from a global power and world’s center of science to an illiterate and backward country that could never stand on her own

¹ By this narrative the Shiites believe that Imam Hussein’s descendants are blood-related to the Sassanians.

feet. For centuries afterwards, until the time of Safavid dynasty at the turn of the fifteenth century it was not even a country under one flag.

Resistance to Islam:

At the beginning of the 19th century, a hide with a handwritten poem composed in Pahlavi and Kurdish was discovered in Northern **Iraqi Kurdistan** in a village named “Hezar Mard” near Suleimania. The experts confirmed that it belonged to the early Arab Invasion era and as the poetry begins with the word “Hurmuzgan” it has been called the “**Hurmuzgan Poem.**” (1) The unknown poet laments:

Worship Centers were destroyed
Fires were extinguished
Cities and villages were leveled by ruthless and cruel Arabs
They captured women and young girls
And free men were slain in blood
Behi-Kish (the Zoroastrian religion) was left helpless
To no one Ahura Mazda extended kindness

A Pahlavi poem belonging to early Islamic decades published by **Jamaspasa (2)** in India reflects the hidden pain and suffering of the Iranian population:

When a messenger may arrive from India?
And heralds the arrival of Shah Bahram of Keyanian 1
With a thousand elephants and Flag of Kavian
Led by a large troop and commanders in his group
We must dispatch a man with a translator to India
To let them know what we have seen from the Arabs
Who brought their religion and took our glory
To tell them how these devils take and eat from us like dogs
How they took away from us the kingship and our kings
With cruelty but no shame took our wives
They took our orchards and gardens, and instead gave us Jyzya 2
Look what these progeny of the lies did to us
Nothing worse can be done in this world

Reports of the historians of the Islamic era illustrate that there has been firm resistance from the Zoroastrian population toward forced conversion to Islam. According to them, at the end of the 4th century Hijri the vast majority of Iranians in the **Fars, Kerman, Khuzestan, Khorasan, and Caspian provinces and central Iran were Zoroastrians** with fire temples in operation. The **Mobedan Mobed** was recognized as the leader of all Zoroastrians (3). In fact, in **Fars and Kerman** Zoroastrians comprised such an overwhelming majority that they did not need to put on a yellow patch on their clothes, a decree that had been imposed by the Arab rulers. According to **Adam Metz**, in the city of **Gharinein in eastern Fars** no one had accepted Islam. (4).

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1-name of the legendry hero to be the savior

2- Jyzya, religious tax imposed by Muslims on non-Muslims and the owners of the book.

People hid their books in depositories and hung pictures of ancient kings and national heroes on the walls.

At the beginning of the tenth century A.D. (or during the 4th century Hijri), there was a large Zoroastrian population in **Isfahan** and its vicinity. Ebn e Zayla, the famous devoted pupil of Avicenna (980-1037 A.D.) was a Zoroastrian from Isfahan. In the second half of the 10th century, however, Isfahan's Muslim population outnumbered the Zoroastrian population. At the end of the century, the great temple of Isfahan fell into disrepair and like other main temples was converted to a mosque. But other temples continued to serve the community, especially in the outlying villages that were still entirely Zoroastrian.

According to **Estakhri**, in the 10th century A.D., Zoroastrians (mistakenly he calls them fire worshippers) lived not far from Baku, Azerbaijan (5). This was confirmed by **Aboulfeda** (6).

In 1840 A.D. **Avraham Firkowicz** met a local Zoroastrian in **Darband, Daghistan**, and they conversed in Turkish. Firkowicz asked him, "Why do you worship fire?" He replied that they do not worship fire at all, but rather the Creator, (Q'rt) ¹ which is not a person, but an abstract matter symbolized by fire.² (7)

The Zoroastrian community of Baku existed until 1915. My research has revealed no information about them after that time. Traces of religion are still visible in various parts of Azerbaijan (Ramana, Surakhany, Khynalyg and Yanar Dag) and by an unofficial estimate about 2000 Zoroastrians still live in that country.

Ateshgah of Baku: In the 18th century A.D., the Ateshgah (fire temple) of Baku was visited by Zoroastrian pilgrims. This is confirmed by the Persian handwriting Nakhsh inscription over the entrance aperture of one of the cells, which speaks about the visit of Zoroastrians from Isfahan:

Atashi saf Keshideh hamchon dak
Jey Bavani ressideh ta Badak
Saal-e-Nav-e nozi mabarak bad goft
Khaneh shod ru Sombole saneh-ye 1158

| Fires stand in line

Isfahani came from Bavan³ to Badak⁴

Blessed is the lavish New Year, he said

The house was built in the month of Ear in 1158 year⁵

There have been many western travelers who visited the Ateshgah and reported that there were Hindus as well as Indian and Persian Guebre (Zoroastrian) pilgrims who stayed there for several months and revered the shrine. **Chardin** writes that in two-day journeys fire was brought from Shemalkha (on Absheron). Several travelers report that the Parsi

¹⁻² The term Q'rt ("Kartir, Kirdar") in Pahlavi and Zoroastrian Persian means "one who does" or "Creator" kardegar, Q'rt can be reconstructed as "Karda," which means "mighty" or "sacred".

³ Bavan is a settlement near Isfahan and the name of the region where was inhabited by Zoroastrians between Yazd and Kerman.

⁴ The word Badak is a diminutive of Bad e Kubeh or Baku

⁵ The year 1158 corresponds to 1745 A.D. Sombole refers to the constellation Virgo (August-September) According to the Zoroastrian calendar, the Qadmi New Year in 1745 A.D occurred in August.

Punchayat of Bombay provided priests (8). In 1925, the Parsi scholar **J.J. Modi** visited the Ateshgah and believed that it was exclusively a Hindu temple. Modi however was unable to read the Persian inscription there (9).

Zoroastrian scholars in the early Islamic era also demonstrated cultural resistance through the translation of Pahlavi books into Persian and Arabic and the publication of new books such as *Pand-Nameh* (Advice) of Zartosht, *Jamasp-Nameh*, *Bondahishn*, *Dinkart*, *Minok-Kherad* and many others. One publication was a geographic book of the Sassanian era in Pahlavi discussing the history, date of construction and geographic location of major Iranian cities. Its later annexation reveals that the city of Baghdad was built by the Persian **Novbakht** at the order of **Mansour Davanik**, the second Abbasid Caliph. Iranian poets like Ferdowsi, Daghghi, Khayyam and later Hafiz, Saadi, Molavi and others exerted very influential roles in preserving and saving the Persian culture, language and Iranian national identity.

Safavid dynasty

The Safavids gained power at the turn of the 15th century A.D.

The ancestor of the Safavids, Sheikh Saffi Ardbili, was a Sunni Muslim. The founder of the dynasty, Shah Ismail, embraced Shiism to unify the nation and encourage them to fight against the Ottoman Turks, who were Sunnis. This policy was favored by the major European powers that faced the threat of Turks from the east. Turks were invading Europe and Islamizing the eastern parts; the goal was to keep them engaged in the south. The conversion of Iranians however was not an easy task. At the time 55% of the nation's population was Sunni, and 5% were Shiite. Forty percent of the population or four million remained Zoroastrian and worked to preserve the old religion. The large Zoroastrian sector raised concern for reversion to the old religion. Another problem was the absence of Shiite clergy to educate the public.

The shortage of clergy was resolved by bringing them from other areas such as Lebanon and Bahrain. Conversion of the Sunni majority to Shiism was carried out by force and bloodshed. In the turmoil, many Zoroastrians lost their lives, and many inhumane acts were implemented to eliminate the threat of reversion to Zoroastrianism. Jews and Christians were spared because they were regarded as the owners of the book –Moses and Jesus are named in the Quran, but there is no mention of Zarathushtra. Although in this era non-Muslims generally were not treated with dignity, no community and religion suffered as much as the Zoroastrian.

A law was enacted that if a member of a non-Muslim family converted to Islam, he or she was entitled to all the inheritance. Those who did not convert had to pay *Jyzya*, the religious tax; if they could not afford the tax they were subjected to torture, confiscation of property and even threats to their life. Zoroastrians even had to wear a yellow patch to be distinguished in public, which exposed them to insults and persecution. They were despised as *Gabre* or *Gavre*, which in the public mind was equal to the *Kafir* or faithless, and the Zoroastrian ghettos were called “*Gavrestan*,” which in Persian is reminiscent of “*Goorestan*” or cemetery. In this hostile environment Zoroastrians were even blamed for natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods. The Muslim clergy was particularly

active in instigating hatred against the Zoroastrian population, which led to more persecution and even massacres.

Zoroastrians during Shah Abbas:

During the rule of Shah Abbas the Great (1587-1628 A.D.), the capital city of Iran was moved from Qazvin to Isfahan, in central Iran. At this time a large Zoroastrian population was well established in central Iran.

Zoroastrians' suffering intensified during the rule of Shah Abbas in particular. This increased persecution was precipitated by the revival and gain in momentum of the eastern and Pahlavi philosophies. There was also the Ajamiyoun (Persian) movement, which claimed that the Arab era was over and a new Persian period was to begin. Shah Abbas was determined to crush the movement at its root. The followers of **Darvish Mahmood Passikhani Guilani**, who believed in reincarnation and were known as Noghtavioun (10), were massacred along with others. Shah Abbas personally executed several of their leaders. His serious concern about the reemergence of the Pahlavi philosophy caused him to carry a harsh anti-Zoroastrian policy.

In the 15th century A.D., in one of the early letters between the Iranian Zoroastrians and their co-religionists in India, the Mobeds of Yazd lamented that “no period (in human history), not even that of Alexander, had been more grievous or troublesome for the faithful than this millennium of the Demon of Wrath.”

In a letter dated Bahman Rooz, Ardibehesht Mah, 1005 Yazdgardi (1045 Hijri), the **Zarthushtis of Sharifabad**, Yazd wrote to the Parsis of India: “In the year 977 Yazdgardi (1017 Hijri) the agents of Shah Abbas came to Yazd to confiscate our religious books. They murdered two Mobeds who refused to surrender them. In Turkabad many Mobeds who refused to surrender the books were killed. The agents plundered and destroyed many scriptures here.” **Professor Zabih Behrooz** writes, “Shah Abbas executed many intellectuals and Zoroastrians under the pretext of atheism.” By his order the Zoroastrian quarter of **Sanatabad** in Isfahan was converted into a pleasure garden with peacocks, for the king. Entire Zoroastrian villages like **Abianeh, Barz, and Saravar near Kashan** were ordered to convert to Islam.

This policy of forced conversion did not affect the Zoroastrians of Fars, Isfahan and Kerman significantly. When the Frenchman **Jean Chardin** and other European travelers like **Firby, Tavernier** and **Texeira** traveled to Iran in the 17th century A.D., they noticed that in spite of poverty and rejection from public life, there were still a good number of Zoroastrians left throughout Persia. Chardin in particular praised the Zoroastrians because they were known for their hardworking nature, honesty and morality. Chardin mentioned a large Zoroastrian community living in Isfahan and its villages. In particular, he noted that one large market town known as Najafabad to the southwest of Isfahan was entirely populated by Zoroastrians producing the best wines.

In 1006 Hijri Shah Abbas dispatched troops to the Caspian province of Mazandaran and forcefully converted its inhabitants to Islam. By this time the province had not only remained mostly Zoroastrian but was also ruled by a Zoroastrian dynasty named **Padouspanian**. At Shah Abbas's order many Zoroastrians were forcefully expelled and deported mostly from Sanatabad, Yazd and Kerman to the city of Qazvin and a ghetto

town near Isfahan named Gabrabad. Many died during the deportation. These people, who had been detached from their farms and businesses, were given no jobs. They had been brought there to do the menial work that no one else would accept. **Pietro Della Valle**, a Roman tourist, in a letter dated December 8, 1617 writes that the streets of Gabrabad were wide and well-designed but the houses were one floor and small, reflecting the poverty of the tenants (11). He adds that the Zoroastrians could not own businesses and were mostly laborers and farmers. Their clothes were thick with the color of mud brick. It is worth mentioning that Shah Abbas transferred Armenians from the Julfa of Tabriz and settled them in Julfa near Isfahan. **Della Valle** writes that most Armenians in Julfa were merchants and wealthy and treated favorably. **Jean Chardin** (1643-1713) writes: quite a few Gabres (Guebres) and Parsis remain. These are the original Iranians who adhere to their old traditions and religion. Many of their houses and villages in the south of Isfahan were destroyed by Muslims during the civil war, and a few could take refuge in Yazd and Kerman. These people are so miserable that they could not afford to provide a gift on the occasion of the coronation of King Soleiman the third, and they were excused. (12)

In such a hostile environment, the Zoroastrians suffered spiritually and materially, and had to subsist to preserve their faith. In a letter from the 17th century A.D., a **French priest** writes to his boss (13):

“Islam is not the only religion of the Iranians. There are many Iranians who have preserved their old religion. But they have none of their ancestral knowledge and science. They live in a state of slavery and absolute misery. Most difficult and harshest public works are assigned to them. They are mostly porters or work in the farms. The state of slavery has caused them to be shy, naïve and rough mannered. They speak in a different dialect and use their old alphabets. Iranians call them (Gavre), which means idol worshippers, and they are treated much worse than the Jews. They are accused of being fire worshippers...but they respect the fire. They believe that in order to receive salvation, one should till the land and develop orchards, avoid polluting the water and putting down the fire. Their holiest man is named Zardosht and their most important festival is Nov Rooz....”

The role of clergy:

The Shiite clergy exerted a strong role in preventing any resurgence of Zoroastrianism. Their writings instigated hatred against the Zoroastrians. To make them more credible, these fabrications were mostly attributed to the Holy Imams. For example, **Sheikh Bahai**, the high cleric and scholar of Shah Abbas'era, wrote: “Majussis (Magians or Zoroastrians) had a book named Jand and Pajand that were burned in fire. They had a prophet named Zardosht who was killed. He had a book written on 12,000 hides. Jihad against them is a religious duty until they convert to Islam or promise that will not commit adultery with Muslim women (marrying them).”

These writings have continued even to our time, as **Rayshahri**, a contemporary clergyman and scholar, writes: “A man named Zardosht brought a book for the Majussis and claimed prophethood. Some believed him and others did not and turned him away. He was killed and consumed by the wild animals in desert. The primitive Arabs were

closer to God than the followers of Zardosht...and their king Keikhosrow had killed three hundred prophets.”

Years before rising to power, **Ayatollah Khomeini**, who was concerned about the resurgence, wrote: “Zardosht the magus and fire-worshipper by some dishonorable knaves has been called the holy and God-worshipper. If this fire of dirt that has risen from the temples of Fars is not extinguished, soon the trash will spread and they invite all to join the Gabre’s (Zoroastrian) creed.”

The worst blow:

Despite all the adversities, the population of the Zoroastrians at the turn of the 18th century A.D. was nearly one million. (14) But the worst blow was delivered by the last Safavid king, **Shah Sultan Hussein** (1694-1722), a fanatic and superstitious man. Soon after his accession to the throne to popularize himself, with approval and encouragement of the main clergyman **Mohammad Baqir Majlessi**, in 1696 A.D. Shah Sultan Hussein issued a decree that all Zoroastrians should convert to Islam or face the consequences. Nearly all were slaughtered or coercively converted, while a few fled the bloodbath and took refuge in Yazd and Kerman. In this massacre the entire population of Gabrabad was wiped out, and many men, women and children fell victim to bigotry in Najafabad and other towns and villages. A Christian missionary residing in Isfahan reported that the central river, Zayandeh Rood, turned red from the blood of the unfortunate Zoroastrians who would not convert and were butchered by mobs of thugs armed with swords, clubs and other weapons. The survivors fled to Mobarakeh, Khoramshah, Yazd and some to Kerman. Estimates of the number of victims vary, from more than 8,500 by the French, to as high as hundreds of thousands. Fire temples were razed to the ground or converted to mosques. Today the people of Naiin and Anar near Isfahan and Yazd speak Dari (the Zoroastrian dialect), but they are Muslims. The customs and traditions of Abianeh remain Zoroastrian, but the religion there is Islam. This infamous Zoroastrian massacre that occurred three centuries ago in central Iran has been quoted by the generations of Zoroastrian families to this day, but the history books have been silent.

By 1707 A.D., when **Le Bruyn** visited Isfahan, the Zoroastrians were no longer able to practice their religion freely. He noted that most Zoroastrians had been forced to Islam three years earlier (15).

In 1821 **Ker Porter** when visiting Isfahan noted that there were hardly any Zoroastrians left in Isfahan and Gabrabad was in ruins.

A demographic picture of the communities of central Iran can help demonstrate the extent of the Zoroastrian persecution and massacre just during the Safavid era. Today the two central cities of Isfahan and Kashan have strong Jewish communities, and Julfa of Isfahan remains exclusively an Armenian town with churches and schools. But there is no native Zoroastrian community in either of these cities. The fledgling community of Isfahan indeed is a transplant, a transient one of people who have in recent years for job opportunities settled and formed association.

Fear of resurgence in the later era:

The hostile sentiment toward Zoroastrians by Shiite rulers and clergy did not cease after the Safavids, and the misery and massacres continued. Still concerned with a resurgence

of the old religion, Shiite clergy continued to fuel hatred through depictions of Zoroastrians as fire-worshippers, impure and outcasts. In his letter dated March 20, 1818, **Ker Porter** wrote (16): “Many Zoroastrians are miserable and hopeless but they adhere to their religion. As they cannot afford to travel and take refuge in other countries, in their homeland they suffer and endure the hardship. Their spirit is high toward the sky and their eyes look down to the ground in tears for the daily misery they face. They have used the cities of Yazd and Kerman for shelter and those who were able fled to the mountains and India. There are 4,000 to 5,000 of them in Yazd where they can more or less practice their tradition. They are mostly good farmers, gardeners or artisans.” **General Houtum Schindler (17)** summarized the Zoroastrian’s plight as forceful conversion to Islam, confiscation of their assets and inheritance, extortion of one fifth of the value of property or business for the Muslim clergy, prohibition of construction of new buildings or repair of the old ones, prohibition from putting on new dress or riding horses, forceful payment of extra tax (Jizya), automatic exoneration of the murderers or culprits if they are Muslims and their victim is a Zoroastrian, or if they have attacked or burglarized the Zoroastrian houses or their shelters. **Count de Gobineau**, the French ambassador to Iran in 1850s, presented a pessimistic view of the Zoroastrian community: “Only 7,000 of them remain and only a miracle may save them from extinction. They teach a lesson to the world that glory is not everlasting, because these are descendants of the people that one day ruled the world.”

Edward Granville Browne, a renowned British orientalist and author of Iranian studies who traveled several times to Iran and stayed there over different periods, published several well documented books based on his observations. In his *A Year Amongst the Persians* (1887-1888) and other books he summarizes the restrictive codes imposed on the Parsis (Zoroastrians) as follows:

1. **Up to 1860**, they could not engage in trade. They hid things in their cellars and sold them secretly. After 1860 they could trade in Caravanserais but not in bazaars.
2. **Up to 1870**, they could not have schools and educate their children.
3. **Up to 1880**, there was a prohibition against white staking.
4. **Up to 1885**, they had to wear a torn cap and could not wear rings, and their girdles had to be made of rough canvas. But after 1885 any white material was permitted.
5. **Up to 1891**, all Zoroastrians were prohibited from riding horses. In town they had to be on foot. When they were riding donkeys in the desert, they had to dismount upon meeting Muslims. They were not allowed to wear new suits. Brown writes about an incident in 1860 where a 70-year-old Zoroastrian man wearing white trousers, was surrounded by a mob, hit and forced to remove his pants and hold them up while walking home.
6. **Up to 1895**, no Parsi (Zoroastrian) was allowed to carry an umbrella and there was a strong prohibition against sunglasses and spectacles.
7. **Up to 1895**, Parsis were obligated to twist their turbans instead of folding them.
8. **Up to 1898**, only brown, gray and yellow were allowed for body garments; after 1898, all colors were permitted except blue, black and bright red or green.

Also, the walls of the Parsi houses had to be lower than in Muslim houses. On rainy days Parsis were not allowed to appear in public because the water that had run through their bodies and clothes would pollute the Muslims.

The historical letter of Maneckji:

The plight of the Iranian Zoroastrian community is perhaps best depicted through their communications with the Indian Parsi community, which can be traced back several centuries. In the mid 1400s A.D., **Hoshing Nariman** visited Iranian Zoroastrians to obtain answers to religious questions that he later assembled as the Rivayat. The Iranian **Mobed, Shapour Jamasp Shahriar Bakhtafarin**, on the Khorshid day of Aban mah, the year 847 Yazdgerdi (887 Hijri) responded to those questions and mentioned that he and other Iranian Zoroastrians had been totally unaware of the existence of their co-religionists in other parts of the world (18). Bakhtafarin in his letter to Hoshing Nariman writes, “The grievous time that we suffer is the hardest since Kayomarth to this day, not even comparable to the era of Zahhak the Arab and Afrasiab the Turani or to the time of Alexander the Greek.” Nariman had to stay one year in Iran to learn Persian and returned to India in 1478. During the next three hundred years until 1773, twenty-five additional messengers made the journey to Iran. During the rule of **Karim Khan Zand** (1750-1779 A.D.), a Zoroastrian emissary from India, **Mulla Kavus**, visited the Zoroastrians in Iran. He noticed that despite the population decline, the total Jizya had remained the same. He took the opportunity to petition Karim Khan on behalf of the Zoroastrians of Iran from debilitating Jizya tax, a request that Karim Khan accepted by granting relief to the Jizya for the Zoroastrians. Soon after that in 1779 Karim Khan passed away, and the relieved religious tax stayed on until 1882. Mulla Kavus stayed in Iran until after the death of Karim Khan. As travel to Iran became more hazardous, he was the last Parsi to come to Iran to collect answers.

In 1854 the Parsis of India dispatched **Maneckji Limji Hoshang Hataria** to Iran to rehabilitate the Iranian Zoroastrians and save them from the brink of extinction. He first arrived in Iran on March 31, 1854 at the age of 41. For one year he studied the woeful plight of the Zoroastrians and upon return to India reported his findings to the Parsi Panchayat.

Without the famous letter of **Maneckji**, the list of the historical letters is incomplete. He wrote:

Dear Sir: This noble group has suffered in the hands of cruel and evil people, so much that they are alien to knowledge and science. For them even black and white, and good and evil are equal. Their men have been forcefully doing menial works in the construction and as slaves received no payments. As some evil and immoral men have been looking after their women and daughters, this sector of the community stays in-door during the daytime. Despite all the poverty, heavy taxes under the pretext of land, space, pastureland, inheritance and religious tax (Jizya) are imposed on them. The local rulers have been cruel to them and have plundered their possessions. They have forced the men to do the menial construction work for them. Vagrants have kidnapped their women and

daughters, worse than all the community is disunited. Their only hope is for the future savior (Shah Bahram Varjavand) to come. Because of extreme misery, belief in the savior is so strong that 35 years earlier when an astrologer forecasted the birth of the savior, many men in his search left the town and were lost in the desert and never returned.....”

Perhaps the following sentence from Maneckji best epitomizes the sorry plight of the community: “I found the Zoroastrians to be exhausted and trampled so much that I dare to say no one in this world can be even more miserable than them.”

Maneckji returned to Iran and devoted his life toward rehabilitating his co-religionists. With financial aid from the Parsi amelioration fund he paid part of the Jizya tax, set up boarding schools and clinics, provided jobs and organized local Zoroastrian associations. But his most significant achievement was the ultimate abolition of the religious tax, Jizya, which he accomplished through direct negotiations with the Qajar king, Nassereddin Shah. This important event took place by a decree in August 1882.

Dr. Pollak, the German physician of Nassereddin Shah (1882-1885) confirms the findings of Maneckji and reports that founding a school for the Zoroastrians was first rejected by the Iranian government because they were regarded as idolaters. He adds that to reduce the daily suffering, Zoroastrians claim having a letter from Imam Ali who has decreed that Muslims should not persecute the Zoroastrians.

Conclusion:

Iranians demonstrated a strong resistance against the Arab invaders and conversion to Islam. The city of Bukhara fell four times to the Arab invaders, each time people were forced to convert to Islam but once the Arabs left, they reverted to the Zoroastrian religion. With the fourth occupation an Arab warrior stayed in each house to ensure the residents continued Islamic practices, otherwise they received severe punishment (19).

Massacres, mass enslavement, land confiscation, plunder of wealth, destruction of schools and libraries and imposition of the Jizya tax on the nation with advanced civilization and cultural superiority by the primitive conquerors had such a shocking effect that its pain is still felt today. Worst of all, the entire cultural calamity did not stop at that point as campaign against the Persian culture and identity has been continuous and extended throughout the fourteen centuries of religious occupation; it is a process that is still ongoing today. That is why the fallen nation has not been able to rise once again. Conflict between the dominant religion and the Persian culture and nationalism, and the inability to reconcile the two have confused the conscience of the nation to the point that Iranians have not been able to determine a clear national identity and final direction for themselves.

Although the Safavids unified Iran, Iranians have paid a very heavy price for their policies. Coercive conversion of Iranians to Shiism and concern about resurgence of the Zoroastrian religion resulted in many bloodbaths. Worst of all, they used the power of clergy and religion to give legitimacy to their actions and continue despotic rule. The

damage caused by the Safavids is well discerned in our time. In the course of events, however, no community or religion suffered as much as Zoroastrian. Nonetheless, our history books have maintained total silence toward the dreadful massacre of Zoroastrians in central Iran and the coercive and violent conversion of Mazandaran natives. With regard to the latter, historians typically present a distorted picture of peaceful self-conversion. The sentiment over the issue of reversion although has improved but still prevails, as there is generally more sensitivity toward reversion than conversion to other religions.

I would like to conclude with the words of Dastoor Bode: “So many nations and religions have become part of ancient history, but there must be a reason why the Zoroastrian religion survived the harsh treatment of history.” By observing all the facts today, I dare to interpret his words as meaning: the Fire of Zarathushtra will finally rise from under the ashes, as it is happening today.

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- 5- **Al-Estakhri**:Kitab Masalik al-Mamalik, BGA, 1. ed. M. J. De Goeje., 1927
- 6- **Aboulfeda**: Geographie d’Aboulfeda traduite de Parabe en Francais et accmpagnee de notes et d’eclaircissements par M. Reinaud, t 1-11, Paris, 1848-1883
- 7-**Dan Shapira**-A Karaites from Wolhynia (Ukraine) meets a Zoroastrian from Baku and the Caucus, vol 5, no. 1, 2001, pp. 105-106. The Zoroastrian explained that God like fire has two potentials: constructive energy or destructive and burning one. By praying before the fire and service to God, we entreat His positive energy and reward.
- 8-The following are westerners who have reported about Ateshgah:
Chardin in the 17th century reported about the Persian Guebres who brought fire in a two-day journey from Shemalkha (on Absheron).(Chardin J. Voyages en Perse et autres lieux de l’Orient. Vol.11. Amsterdam. 1735. P. 311.
Engelbert Kaempfer, who visited Surakhany in 1683, wrote that among people who worshipped fire, two men were descendants of ancient Persians who migrated to India. (Engelberto Kaempfero. Lemgoviae: Typis& Impensis Henrici Wilhelmi Meyeri. Aulae Lippiacae Typographi- 1712 p 253-262
French Jesuit Villotte, who lived in Azerbaijan starting in 1689, reported that Ateshgah was revered by Hindus and Guebres, the descendants of the ancient Persians. (J. Villotte. Voyage d’un missionnaire de la Compagnie de Jesus en Turquie, en Perse. En Armenie en Arabie et en Barbarie Paris. 1730.

J. Hanway visited Baku in 1747 and left few records of Ateshgah. He calls people who worshipped there were Indians, Persians and Guebres (Jonas Hanway: An Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea. 1753)

Gmelin, who visited Ateshgah in 1770, wrote that in the present Ateshgah lived Indians and descendants of the Persian Guebres (Samuel Gottlieb Gmelin. Reise durch Russland zur Untersuchung d. drei Naturreiche. P45)

In 1820 the **French consul Gamba** visited the temple. According to him here lived Hindus and Persian Guebres, the followers of Zoroaster. (Jean Francoise Gamba, Voyage dans la Russie meridionale. 11. Paris. 1826. p 299)

The Englishman **Ussher** visited Ateshgah on September 19, 1863. He called it Ateshjeh and said that there are pilgrims from India and Persia. (Ussher. A journey from London to Persepolis. pp. 208-207, London. 1865)

German Baron Max Thielmann visited the temple in October 1872 and in his memoirs he wrote that the Parsi community of Bombay sent a priest who after a few years would be replaced. His presence was necessary to serve pilgrims who came from the outskirts of Persia (Yazd, Kerman) and India and remained in this sacred place for several months or years (Thielmann, Journey in the Caucasus, Persia and Turkey in Asia, Eng. Tr. By Heneage, 2. 9-12, London, 1876)

In 1876 the English traveler **James Bruce** visited Ateshgah. He noted that the Bombay Parsi Panchayat provided a permanent presence in the temple of their priest. (James Bruce. Transcaucasia and Ararat: Being Notes of a vacation Tour in the Autumn Of 1876).

E. Orsolle, who visited the temple after Bruce, said that after the Parsi priest died in 1864, the Parsi Panchayat of Bombay a few years later sent another priest here, but the pilgrims who came here from India and Iran had already forgotten the sanctuary, and in 1880 no one remained. (E. Orsolle. Le Caucase et la Perse. Ouvrage accompagne d'une plan. Paris. E. Plon. Nourrit et cie. 1885, pp 130-142)

O'Donovan visited the temple in 1879 and referred to the religious worship of the Guebres. (O'Donovan E. Merv Oasis: Travels and adventures East of the Caspian during the years 1879-80-81. 2 vols. New York, 1883)

In 1898 the "Men and Women of India" magazine published an article titled "The ancient Zoroastrian temple in Baku." The author calls Ateshgah a "Parsi Temple" and notes that the last Zoroastrian priest had been sent there about 30 years previously. (Men and Women of India. Vol. 1, no. 12, p. 696, Bombay, Dec. 1898).

J. Henry in 1905, in his book also noted that 25 years previous the last Parsi priest died in Surakhani. (J. D. Henry, Baku. An Eventful History. 1906)

9- J.J. Modi, the famous Parsi scholar, visited the Ateshgah in 1925 at the invitation of the society for the survey and study of Azerbaijan. He concluded that the structure was exclusively a Hindu temple. Modi however was unable to read the Persian inscription and did not see in its architecture of Chahar-tags, a specific feature of a fire temple of the Sassanian period.

10-Mahmoud Passikhani Guilani in 800 Hijri founded this creed. His followers believed in re-incarnation and therefore did not fear death. They believed that everything has been created from the soil and never disappears because it returns in another form to the soil. They called the soil, The Point, or Noghteh, and thus they were known as Noghtaviyoun.

- | 11- Pietro Della Valle visited Gabrabad; his letter was dated December 8, 1617.
- 12-Rashid Shahmardan: History of Zoroastrians (In Persian), P176-177 quoting Jean Chardin
- 13-Bahram Fravashi: The marvelous letters (In Persian), P108-109
- 14-Ibid, R.Shahmardan: P177
- 15-Ibid, R.Shahmardan: P125
- 16-Jamshid Sorooshian: Education and writing in Zarthushti religion, (In Persian) 1988, P173
- 17-J. Sorooshian:Ibid, P174
- 18- Pour Davood; Iranshah - quoted by Sh. Shaffa, after 1400 years, P404
- 19- History of Bukhara, Persian translation, P66

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