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Zoroastrians Influence on the Religious Ideology of Akbar

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Abstract

Akbar, a unique political and historical figure of Medieval Indian History, tried to incorporate the everlasting religious values in one religion Din I Ilahi but never forced his subordinates and subjects to join and follow his new experiment. Actually Akbar obtained the attributes of Din I Ilahi from different sources and whereas he was not politically motivated as Alauddin Khulji was earlier. History witnessed a tolerant and visionary emperor in Akbar who positively influenced the socio-political and religious conditions of India. In this paper I would try to emphasize the Zoroastrian influence on the Akbar religious policies which later came into light as Tauhid i Ilahi or Din i Ilahi..

Key Words: Zoroastrianism, Akbar, Parsian, Iran

Introduction

Zarthursta shaped the principal doctrine of the Zoroastrian religion in Iran before 3200 years.

Zarthursta classified the deities of spiritual forces in duality called Spenta Mainyu and Angra Mainyu where Spenta Mainyu positive force and Angra Mainyu is negative force¹ which works under the God Ahur Mazda. The Zoroastrian holy book Avesta gives the account of rituals needed to satisfy the anger of God.² Considered as a part of Aryans Zoroastrians founded Sassanid Dynasty and become royal faith of local Iranian people. Later Sasanid developed the rituals of the Zoroastrianism. India adopted their costumes and culture through Persian traders. With Indian connection Persian community accumulated enormous wealth.³ Today Zoroastrian are few in comparison to other community of the world and working hard to keep their values alive. Zoroastrians are spread worldwide and can be found in any developed country. Such a group of Zoroastrian community arrived and settled in South India.⁴

Arrival of Zoroastrian in India

Persian community was in influence of Prophet Muhammad's preaching when they migrated Khurasan to Diu Island. Further they settled in Sanjan (Gujrat) after getting permission from Jadi Rana, the local ruler of the territory⁵ with certain restrictions that they can not keep weapons and they necessarily have to adopt local customs and traditions in

¹Baig, Mirza Asif. *Zoroastrians in Mughal Court: A short study of Parsis and their Rise in Mughal Court*. 20th Dec. 2004, P. 42.

Retrieved from http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/szic/pdf_files/6-%20Altaf%20Langrial%20Artcle%20Zoroastrians%20edited_Dec%2014.pdf

²Hartz, Paula R., *Zoroastrianism*, Infobase Publishing, New York, 1999, P 8, 10.

³Sarah, Stewart, *The Everlasting Flame, Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination*, I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, New York, 2013, p 58.

⁴Hartz, Paula R., *Zoroastrianism*, Infobase Publishing, New York, 1999, P 8, 10.

⁵Palsetia, Jesse S, *The Parsis of India Preservation of Identity in Bombay City*, p 2, 3.

lieu of their own. Ceremonies and festivals are allowed up to limited extent but after sunset. With course of time Raja got familiar with Zoroastrian traditions and religion and bestowed some relaxation to them in their practices, rituals and trade as well. Zoroastrians also tried to promote fire worship in India.⁶ With the development in trade Zoroastrians got strengthen their political situation in India and by the end of 11th century they refused to pay tributary to Raja. Raja invaded Zoroastrian and defeated to re-establish his supremacy over them.⁷ Apart from few controversies between Indians and Parsis the real political mileage gained by Parsis when Dastur Mehar Ji Rana came in Akbar's palace and joined Royal service. In later period another Parsi family Dordi joined service of Jahangir. After advent of Europeans, Parsis contributed as middle men in trade.⁸ We found an account of Parsian practices in 1320 of a French missionary Jordon Us who noticed "*Parsian the race of pagans that worshipped the fire and exposed their dead in roofless towers,*" In 1615 Adverd Terry wrote "*For those Parsees, further, they believe that there is but one god, who made all things and hath a sovereign power over all.*" Terry was first European to have explained their traditions to him.⁹

Expansion of Zoroastrian Religious Values in India

Zoroastrians succeeded their religious valued primarily in Gujrat by constructing many fire temples.¹⁰ During twelfth century the Parsis had settled in *Vandanir* in Kathiawar, Broach, Variav, Anklesvar, Cambay and Navsari. The first *dakhma* or *Tower of Silence* was made in Broach and then in later periods two brick towers were built in the same town to satisfy the ritualistic demands of local Parsis¹¹ When the Parsis permanently settled in India in late thirteenth century the monks segregated the Parsis colony into five ecclesiastical sections. Accordingly five districts like Sanjan, Navsari, Anklesvar, Broach and Combay were become the principal towns of Parsism and had gotten popularity as Bhagaria (Navsari), Bharucha, Godavra (Surat), Khambatta and Sanjanas.¹² later in Sanjan a fire temple was built.¹³ In 1740 the fire established in Navsari is continued till the date.¹⁴ And in 1972 the Parsis celebrated anniversary of the installation of the sacred fire Atash Bakram (Iran Shah) in India¹⁵

⁶Spear, Percival, *A History of India*, Penguin Books India Pvt, Ltd, New Delhi, 1965, 2/49.

⁷Iyer, Meena, *Faith and Philosophy of Zoroastrianism*, Kalpaz Publications, Delhi, 2009, p 46,

⁸Tuck, Patrick, *The East India Company, 1600-1658*, Routledge, New York, 1999, P 17

⁹Palsetia, Jesse S. *The Parsis of India Preservation of Identity in Bombay City*, p 12.

¹⁰Kapstein, Matthew T, *The Presence of Light*, The University of Chicago Press, Ltd, London, 2004, p 162

¹¹Singh, K.S, *Gujarat*, Popular Prakashan, Pvt, Ltd, Mumbai, 2002, p 19, 20

¹²Iyer, Meena, *Faith and Philosophy of Zoroastrianism*, p 46, 48.

¹³Sven S. Hartman, *Parsism, The Religion of Zoroaster*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, The Netherlands, 1980, P 12

¹⁴Sven S. Hartman, *Parsism, The Religion of Zoroaster*, p 12, 13.

¹⁵Boyce, Mary, *Zoroastrians, Their religious beliefs and practices*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, London, 1979, p 175.

Parsis in Mughal India

Gujarat was occupied by Akbar in 1572 when he came into touch with Parsi community and treated them well and provided his patronage.¹⁶ The Parsi started gaining prosperity under Mughal patronage and during 19th Century Bombay became the principal city of Parsi Community.¹⁷

Akbar and Zoroastrians

Akbar with his religious vision was indulge into dialogues with different religious leader and established Ibadat Khna and a new religion to which Henry Blochmann termed Din i Ilahi but in original it was named as Tauhid i Ilahi means devine monotheism. This was social order rather than religion and accepted by only 18 people of Akbar's time. Many Hindus, Muslims and Zoroastrians refused to accept Akbar's new religious version.

Professor Vincent Smith says that Akbar invited fire-worshippers and sun-worshippers to his court and from Navsari the Parsi priest Dastur Maherji Rana arrived in the court with his followers. After getting instructions from the Parsis the Emperor started to wear the Zoroastrian Kusti and the sacred cord around his waist. According to Zoroastrian custom this cord must be tied and untied many times in a day and one should then always recite some specific prayers and must turn towards the sun or fire.¹⁸ According to Blockmann, the translator of Ain-i Akbari: "They called the fire worship the great worship and impressed the emperor so favourably that he learned from them the religious terms and rites of the old Parsis and to make arrangements that sacred fire should be kept burning at court by day and by night, according to the customs of the ancient Persian kings, in whom fire temples it had been continuously burning, for fire was one of the manifestation of God and a ray of his rays. His majesty from his youth had been accustomed to celebrate the Hom (a kind of fire worship) from the affection towards the Hindu princess of the Harem."¹⁹

By this occasion Akbar abolished Zizya and pilgrimage tax from Parsian community and declared equal citizenship for them.²⁰ Some historian acclaimed that Akbar converted to Zoroastrian but there were no direct evidence of this incident.²¹ The greatest development in Akbar's believe was "Respect of Sun" which he put as central element in his newly formed religion. According to Vincent Arthur "The Parsis propaganda was supported by the zeal of the Hindu Raja Birbal, an ardent sun worshiper from another point of view, and it also filled in well in the practices by the Hindu ladies in the zanana who had their burnt offering (hom), after the Brahmanical fashion. A few years later (1589) Akbar carried further his compliance with Parsis ritual by adopting the Persian names for the months and days, and celebrating the fourteen Persian festivals. But he stopped without ever reaching the point of definitely becoming a Zoroastrian. He acted in the same way with regard to Hinduism, Jainism, and christinity. He went so far in relation to each religion that different people had reasonable ground for affirming him to be Zoroastrian, a Hindu, a Jain, or a Christian."²²

¹⁶Stephen P. Blake, *Time In Early Modern Islam*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2013, P 33

¹⁷Palsetia, T Jesse S. *The Parsis of India*, p 26.

¹⁸Smith, Vincent Arthur, *Akbar The Great Mughal*, Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, London, 1917, p 164.

¹⁹Allami, Abul Fazl, *The Ain-Akbari*, translated by H. Blockmann and Colonel H. S. Jarrett, Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1873-1907, 1/166.

²⁰Boyce, Mary, *Zoroastrians, Their religious beliefs and practices*, p 175.

²¹Iyer, Meena *Faith and philosophy of Zoroastrianism* p 48.

²²Smith, Vincent Arthur, *Akbar The Great Mughal*, p 164.

To pay respect Dastur Mehar Ji Rana Akbar donated him 200 bighas land in 1579 and in 1591 after death of Dastur Mehar Ji Rana Akbar further donated 100 bighas land to his son.²³ From 1580 Akbar made paying respect to fire and sun mandatory for his court men.²⁴

Later Akbar invited Ardshir in his Lahaur court which was a renowned Persian Author of the time to help Mir Jamal-ud-din in compilation of Persian dictionary which later published in 1608-09 after Akbar's death under the title of *Farhang i Jahangiri*.²⁵

Meherji Vacha and Mehervaid is said to be companioned with Dastur Mehar ji Rana in religious debate of Akbar.²⁶ Akbar orderd his courtier and only priest of Tauhid i Ilahi Abul Fazl to establish the permanent light in Royal Palace. But once when Akbar visited his palace in afternoon found the lamp was sleeping Akbar enrage and the lamp was thrown then out from the top of the Palace.²⁷

The Mysticism was developed in Parsi religion in Akbar'e time as Sven S. Hartsman says "This tolerance of faith finds many different kinds of expression. One example of this is the well-known and highly esteemed Dastur Khurshed S. Dadu of Bombay. In his creed one can detect influences from many different quarters, perhaps especially from theosophy. He believes in metempsychosis and in the idea that several Zoroasters have existed through the ages. He also has points in common with Sufism and with Indian asceticism. As a matter of fact, he represents a continuation of a kind of Parsi mysticism that began during the times of Emperor Akbar with Dastur Azar Kaiwan (1533-1618) as a leader of a sect that called itself Yazdaniyan, the adherents of Yazdan (God). They possessed their own writings like the Dabistan-i-Mazahib".²⁸

We found great influence of Zoroastrianism in Jahangir's reign which in directly visible in the name of Mughal princes and Emperor's son i.e . Khusrau, Khurram, Jahandar, Shahrayar and Hoshand. Like his father Jahangir also bestowed land to the Parsi priests like Meherji Kamdina and Hoshang Ranji. In the reign of Aurangzeb a book "Dabistan-i Mazahid" was came into existaqnce by a Parsi writer named *Muhsin Fani*, in which the detail information had been given about the religions of Hindustan.²⁹

Conclusion

Zoroastrian influenced not only religious ideology but also the polity and culture of Mughal Empire. The Persian influence introduced by Akbar's endeavour of understanding the core religious ideas of all contemporarily existing religions through debate and following their believes in rigorous practical experiments which later shaped as *Tauhid i Ilahi*.

Zoroastrian values inserted later in primary practices and rituals of Mughal court and the most significant title *Far-i-Izadi* (light of God) which was adopted by Akbar himself is the major evidence of the Zoroastrian influence over the Emperor.

²³Edwards, Stephen Meredyth, *Mughal Rule in India*, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 1995, p 300.

²⁴Iyer, Meena *Faith and philosophy of Zoroastrianism*. p 27.

²⁵Smith, Vincent Arthur, *Akbar the Great Mughal*, p 165

²⁶Iyer, Meena *Faith and philosophy of Zoroastrianism*, p 48.

²⁷Boyce Mary, *Zoroastrians, Their religious Beliefs and Practices*, 187,

²⁸Sven S. Hartman, *Parsism, The Religion of Zoroaster*, p 15. AL-ADWA 42:29

²⁹P.M Holt, Ann K.S, Lambcon, Bernard Lewis, *The Cambridge History of Islam*, The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, UK, 1970, p 58

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