

The History of Zoroastrians after Arab Invasion

Alien in Their Homeland



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Abstract: This is only a fraction of what actually happened to the Zoroastrians after the Arab invasion. The purpose of the presentation is not to generate hard feeling toward any people. Because no generation is responsible for the actions of past generations, although almost always they are unfairly blamed for. However, denial of historical facts is not an option either. The real goal in addition to presentation of an untold history is to make our community aware of their past history and the suffering and indignities that their ancestors received to preserve their religion, culture and identity. Once it is realized that nothing that we have inherited is to be taken as granted, our responsibility toward the young generation, the generation of the 21st century is better realized.

Due to continuous persecution, discrimination and massacre the population of Zoroastrians of Iran from an estimated five million at the turn of the fifteenth century dwindled to only seven thousand at the middle of the nineteenth century. At this time the French ambassador to Iran wrote “only a miracle can save them from total extinction”. By the support of their Parsi brethren and their own faith, the Zoroastrian community in Iran revived and their fate turned around. Today they are well educated and enjoy the respect and trust of the general population for their reputation of “scrupulous honesty”.

The history of Zoroastrians of Iran after the Arab conquest can be summarized in three words: oppression, misery and massacre.

The Arabs invaded Persia not only for its reputed wealth, but to bring into the faith new converts and to impose Islam as the new state religion. They were religious zealots who believed that "in a religious war if one kills or is killed, one's place in heaven is secure". To impose the new religion, the old culture and creed had to be destroyed. Therefore first they targeted the libraries, universities and schools. Only few examples reflect the enormity of the calamity that befell upon Persia at 630 A.D. Although some events and figures appear legendary, nevertheless are considered to be true, as they have been recorded by many historians of the Islamic era.

When the Arab commander (Saad ibn-e Abi Vaghas) faced the huge library of Cteciphon, he wrote to Omar: what should be done about the books. Omar wrote back "If the books contradict the Koran, they are blasphemous and on the other hand if they are in agreement with the text of Koran, then they are not needed, as for us only Koran is sufficient". Thus, the huge library was destroyed and the books or the product of the generations of Persian scientists and scholars were burned in fire or thrown into the Euphrates.[1] By the order of another Arab ruler (Ghotaibeh ibn-e Moslem) in Khwarezmia, those who were literate with all the historians, writers and Mobeds were massacred and their books burned so that after one generation

the people were illiterate.[2] Other libraries in Ray and Khorassan received the same treatment and the famous international University of Gondishapour declined and eventually abandoned, and its library and books vanished. Ibn-e Khaldoun, the famous Islamic historian summarizes the whole annihilation and conflagration: "where is the Persian science that Omar ordered to be destroyed?" Only few books survived, because the Persian scholars translated them into Arabic.

To conquer Persia and force Islam, the Arab invaders resorted to many inhumane actions including massacre, mass enslavement of men, women and children, and imposition of heavy taxes (Jezyeh=Jizya) on those who did not convert. By the order of "Yazid ibn-e Mohalleb" in Gorgan so many Persians were beheaded that their blood mixed with water would energize the millstone to produce as much as one day meal for him, as he had vowed.[3] The event of blood mill has been quoted by the generations of Iranian Zoroastrian families to this day, yet our books of history have been silent about it. In recent years however, disenchanted Iranian scholars have been writing about the blood mills and in fact this event has been reported by our historians of the Islamic era. On the way to Mazandaran the same commander ordered 12,000 captives to be hanged at the two sides of the road so that the victorious Arab army pass through. Upon arrival, many more were massacred in that province and heavy tax (Jizya) was imposed on the survivors who did not convert. Some historians have estimated that a total of 400,000 civilians were

massacred.[4] Even though the figure appears inflated, nevertheless it reflects the extent of atrocities committed by the Arab conquerors. After the battle of Alis, the Arab commander (Khalid ibn-e Valid) ordered all the prisoners of war be decapitated so that a creek of blood flows. When the city of Estakhr in the south put up stiff resistance against the Arab invaders, 40,000 residents were slaughtered or hanged.[5] One of the battles by the Arabs has been named, Jelovla (covered), because an estimated 100,000 bodies of the slain Iranian soldiers covered the desert.[6] It is reported that 130,000 Iranian women and children were enslaved and sold in the Mecca and Medina markets and large amount of gold and silver plundered. One respected Iranian scholar recently wrote, "Why so many had to die or suffer? Because one side was determined to impose his religion upon the other who could not understand".[7] The Arabs colonized, exploited and despised the population. In this context they called the Persians "Ajam" or mute. They even named the Iranian converts "Mavali" or "liberated slaves". According to the Arab classification, this caste could not receive wages or booties of the war; they were to be protected and at times rewarded by their protectors. Mavalis were not allowed to ride horses and sometimes they were given away as gifts. One of the Umayyad Caliphs was quoted "milk the Persians and once their milk dries, suck their blood".[8] With so much atrocities committed in the name of religion, how much truly the Arab invaders knew about Islam? By the order of Omar 1000 warriors who knew one Ayah of the Koran were to be

selected to receive the booties of the war. But the problem was that among the Arab army there were not even 1,000 soldiers who could read one Ayah.[9]

The First Voice of Protest

The first voice of protest against the Arab oppression came from Firooz who assassinated Omar. He was a Persian artisan and prisoner of war who had been enslaved by an Arab. While observing the Iranian children taken to be sold as slaves, he was overcome by grief and wept for the sorry plight of his nation.[10] Thereafter other uprisings against the Arab occupation were all suppressed. They are recognized as Abu Moslem of Khrassan, the white clad, red clad (lead by Babak), Mazyar, Afshin and others. All together, during the two centuries of Arab occupation, a total of 130 Iranian uprisings have been recorded. All were brutally put down and each time lands were confiscated and the local people were forced to provide the Arabs with gold, silver and certain number of young slaves annually for reparation.

Finally the Arabs were driven out of Iran by an ordinary man from the south (Sistan) named Yaghoub (Jacob) Leisse Saffari, who forced the occupiers to the Tigris river where the stream was turned toward his army, many of whom died and he developed pneumonia. At his deathbed he received the Caliph's emissary who presented him

jewels and offered him the governorship of several provinces. Yaghoub responded with anger "tell your ruler, I have lived all my life on bread and onion, if I survive, only sword will rule between the two of us".

The two centuries Arab rule of Iran has been compared to a nightmare associated with the moans of widows and orphans, "a dark night of silence that was interrupted only by the hoot of owls and the harsh sound of thunder".[11]

By the independence of Iran however, the suffering of Zoroastrians was not over. Many Iranians at this era had been Arabized and picked up Arabic names. The new Moslems were no less hostile toward their old religion than the Arabs. Now the Arabic was considered a scientific language, the knowledge of which would place one in higher class among the scholars. That is why many scientific books at this era were written in Arabic and mistakenly those scholars and scientists have been assumed to be Arabs. The loss of identity had caused some Iranians to become alien to their own nationality. An Iranian premier (Sahib ibn-e Obbad) did not look in the mirror lest would see a Persian. Another ruler of Khorassan (Abdollah ibn-e Tahir) would not acknowledge any language but the Arabic. He banned publications in Persian and by his order all the Zoroastrians were forced to bring their religious books to be thrown in the fire. Those who refused were slain.

During the Islamic period many Iranian poets and scholars attempted to revive the Persian culture and history and reintroduce the national identity to the despised nation. Zoroastrian poets, Daghighi and Zardosht Bahram Pazhdoh and the Persian poets as Ferdowsi, Hafiz and Khayyam among many are to be mentioned here.

As the Arabs destroyed and burned all the non-Arabic and Pahlavi writings, Iranian scholars found a solution to save the books that was to translate them into Arabic. One of the rare books that survived the carnage was "Khodai-namak", a Pahlavi writing of the Sassanian era. It was translated into Arabic by Dadbeh "Ebn-e-Moghaffaa" under the title of "The Manner of the Kings." Ferdowsi versified and named it "Shah-Nameh." In 1991 Unesco recognized this book as the masterpiece of epics and Ferdowsi in Iran was glorified by the International Community.

Ferdowsi by versifying the "Khodai-namak" as his book of "Shah-Nameh," a new Persian poetry almost devoid of Arabic words truly revived the Persian language, and by renewing the legend of Iranian victory under the leadership of Kauveh, the blacksmith and Fereidoun over the blood thirsty Zahhak the Arab, gave a new sense of pride and identity to the Iranians. He certainly does not exaggerate when recites"

"I labored hard in these years of thirty

I revived the Ajam (mute) by this Parsi.

Hafiz a beloved mystical poet always refreshes the love of Zoroastrian faith in his poetry by calling himself a follower of the old Magi. In a poem he reminds the readers “ In a garden renew your Zoroastrian faith” and:

“In the monastery of the Magi, why they honor us
The fire that never dies, burns in our hearts”[12]

Khayyam who was a poet, scientist, astronomist, mathematician and a true intellectual, abhorred the Moslem clergy and their blind adherents. There were however, intellectuals whose views were resented by the clergy and because of that they even received a dreadful death. Among them Dadbeh who was burned alive, and Sohravardi, the founder of school of illumination whose views were based on the teachings of Zarathushtra, and Mansour Hallaj are to be mentioned. Flame of the past glory could rekindle in the hearts of Iranians by a spark. Khaghani Sherwani on his return from Hajj Pilgrimage spent a night at the city of Baghdad. There, the ruins of palace of Anoushiravan, known as Kassra Hall inspired him to recite one of the masterpieces of Persian poetry reflecting the glory of the past and the history of Sassanian era.

Despite all the intellectuals’ efforts, the suffering of Zoroastrians continued. Any local incident could flare up a major riot and become

a calamity for the Zoroastrian population and cause their massacre. The famous incident was when a group of fanatic Moslems in the City of Harat (Greater Khorassan, today Afghanistan), destroyed the wall of a mosque and blamed the action on the Zoroastrians, by the order of Sultan Sanjar (Saljuqi) many Zoroastrians of the greater Khorassan were massacred. The Parsis are known to originate from Khorassan and migrated to India during this era. Later another group from the city of Sari, Mazandaran joined them and founded the city of Nov-Sari. Parsis later became an example of successful community who founded industries, universities and charitable institutions and established themselves as a major force in the development of India. As the prime minister of Mharashtra once put it, "They were a shining diamond in the ocean of Indian population".[13]

In 1934 Mr. Foroughi, the Iranian minister of education and culture, himself a scholar and later prime minister, in response to Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian Philosopher and Nobel laureate, who had thanked the government of Iran for founding a chair of Iranian studies, wrote: "Dear Sir: You should not thank us and I will explain to you why! " For one thousand years your nation has hosted our sons and daughters know as Parsis. They left Iran under a distressful condition; but we never thanked you for it. Please accept this chair of Iranian studies only as a small token of appreciation."

Despite repeated mass slaughters, by the advent of Safavite Dynasty at the turn of the 15th century (600 years ago), between 3 to 5 million Iranian remained Zoroastrians.[14] The Caspian province of Mazandaran, at this time not only had preserved the old religion but was ruled by a Zoroastrian dynasty known as Paduspanian who remained in power until 1006 Hijri. The Safavites by enticement and use of violence both, converted the majority of Iranian into Shiism. This was a political act to encourage Iranians to fight against the Ottomans who were Sunni Moslems. By the order of Shah Ismail, the founder of the dynasty many Sunni Moslems were slaughtered but in the turmoil many Zoroastrians were included as well. During the rule of Shah Abbas the Great (1587-1628 A.D.) a strong unified Iranian army was in war against the Ottomans. Meanwhile, he dispatched troops to Mazandran with the task to Islamize the province, and by the use of force and violence the mission was accomplished. By his order many Zoroastrians were deported to a ghetto town near Isfahan named Gabrabad, where they lived in abject poverty. Many of deportees during deportation lost their lives. To these people who were forcefully detached from their farms and businesses, no job was given. They were brought there just to do the menial works that nobody else would accept. It was said that the poorest Iranians in comparison to them appeared quite rich. Due to the extent of indigence, the Zoroastrian community was the only one who could not present a gift for the coronation of King Soleiman the third.[15] A Roman tourist, Pietro Della Valle, who has visited the town

writes:[16] I had heard of the outcast sector of Iranian society named Gabrs who are faithless. I was determined to visit them. The streets of Gabrabad are straight and clean but the houses are one floor, reflecting the poverty of people. As I was walking I met a husband and wife. I asked the man do you love God? At this time the woman jumped in the conversation and said: "How one may know God but would not love Him." I realized that these people have their own religion but they are the victims of bigotry."

The Safavite era is the darkest period for the Zoroastrians. The writings of the high Islamic clerics would instigate hatred toward them. Even in public opinion they were responsible for the natural disasters as flood and earthquake, this kind of sentiment would make them vulnerable to persecution and massacre.

A letter from a French priest to his boss at this era (17th Century A.D.) reflects the state of suffering and misery of the Zoroastrians of Iran. He wrote, "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) that mean 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, develop orchards, and avoid polluting the water and putting down the fire. Their holiest man is called Zartosht and their most important festival is Nov Rooz..."[17]

Despite all the adversities, population of the Zoroastrians of Iran at the turn of the 18th century was estimated to be one million.[18] But the most horrendous massacre of the Zoroastrian population took place by the order of the last Safavite King, Shah Sultan Hussein (1694-1722.) Soon after ascension to the Persian throne, he issued a decree that all Zoroastrians should convert to Islam or face the consequences. By one estimate, one hundred thousand Zoroastrian families lived in the Central Iran. Nearly all were slaughtered or coercively converted. In this blood bath, the entire population of Gabrabad was wiped out. In other parts many men, women and children lost their lives. The bodies' of Zoroastrians thrown in the central river (Zayandeh Rood) have been witnessed by the French missionary and reported. The reports of the French priests residing in Isfahan reflect the enormity of the genocide that took place three hundred years ago in the central Iran. By the French estimate a total of 80,000 Zoroastrians lost their lives and many fled the massacre in misery to preserve their religion. The Zoroastrian sources estimate the number of victims at hundreds of thousand. The towns of Naiin

and Anar (between Isfahan and Yazd) converted to Islam. The local language of the people there remains Dari, exactly the same dialect that is exclusively spoken by the Zoroastrians of Iran. The customs and traditions of Abiyaneh (a town near Kashan) remains Zoroastrian. It is believed that the Zoroastrians of Khoramshah, a suburb of Yazd are the descendants of the survivors of that infamous blood bath. Again, the Zoroastrian families have quoted this event to this day, but our books of history have kept a policy of total silence toward it.

The Safavites were overthrown by the Afghan rebellion under the leadership of Mahmoud Mir Oveis. Then, Afghanistan was a province of Iran and Afghan insurgency was an internal affair. During the passing through the central desert due to harsh condition Mahmoud lost too many men, therefore he was unable to capture the city of Kerman; but before returning to Afghanistan he massacred the Zoroastrian population of the suburban Gavashir (1719 A.D.). The reason why he only massacred the Zoroastrians was due to the fact that this sector of the community as a result of in-city persecution had moved to the outskirts of Kerman and taken residence there. This area was not protected by high walls and towers; consequently they were easily accessible to the Afghans. For the next two years Mahmoud retrained and reorganized his army and this time he conquered the city of Kerman (1721 A.D.). Despite the Gavashir calamity, because of the carnage done by the Safavites and the

extent of suffering under that dynasty, the Zoroastrians formed a brigade and supported the Afghans. Majority of Afghans were Sunni Moslems and their rebellion was due to religious persecution under the Shiite rule, thus the Zoroastrians sympathized with their cause. Zoroastrian commander of the brigade was a man, titled Nassrollah. This title was granted my Mahmoud, however, his real name is not known. He addressed his troop, reminded them of the glory of the past and the duty to their country. Nassrollah became the most popular commander in the Afghan army and soon Mahmoud commanded him to conquer Fars in the south. He succeeded, but in the last battle for the city of Shiraz was fatally wounded. Mahmoud truly mourned the loss of his favorite general and at his funeral wept. He ordered a mausoleum was built for him near Isfahan and a Mobed was designated to perform the rituals. Twenty-two years later this mausoleum has been witnessed and reported by an English tourist.[19]

The victorious Afghans were eventually defeated by a strong military leader named Nader Shah Afshar (1736-1747 A.D.) who also defeated the Ottomans. He later invaded and conquered India and brought with him the famous peacock throne. In the army of Nader 12000 Zoroastrians men served. But even the victories of Nader and resurgence of a strong Iran did not change the fate of the Zoroastrian population and their agony went on. Nader upon return from India had become insane and after a failing assassination

attempt that wounded his arm, became suspicious at his own son who was blinded at his order. When Nader became aware that his suspicion was unfounded and his son was totally innocent, he resorted to mass murder. By one estimate during the bloodbath none of the remaining Zoroastrian soldiers survived and many of the Zoroastrian population of Khorassan and Sistan were massacred. Few survivors could cross the desert on foot and take refuge in Kerman or Yazd. The public census of the Zoroastrians of Kerman belonging to this era shows that 8000 were called Khorassani and 2000 Sistani. Today few families in Yazd can trace their lineage to Khorassan.

The Afshar dynasty founded by Nader Shah was short lasting, after whom the Zands took over. The founder of the dynasty was a kind-hearted man named Karim Khan who established the city of Shiraz as his capital. For a short time Iranians enjoyed peace and tranquility. After him the Zands were challenged by Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar. The Zands under the commandship of a brave man named LotfAli Khan Zand retreated to the city of Kerman. The city for several month remained under siege by the army of Qajar. A Zoroastrian astrologer named Mulla Gushtasp son of Bahman through the astrological signs predicted that on Friday, 29th day of the first Rabie, 1209 Hijri, the city would fall to the Qajar army. The Zand ordered Gushtasp to be jailed and if his prediction did not come true be killed. As he had forecasted, on the exact day due to the treason of one of the Zand commanders, the gates were opened and the city

fell to the Qajar. Agha Mohammad who was incensed by the stiff resistance put up by the people of Kerman, ordered 20,000 of the residents to be blinded but because of the Gushtasp's forecast the Zoroastrians were spared. Mulla Gushtasp is the great grand father of the late Keikhosrow Shahrokh. He was brought out of jail and was presented gifts and thereafter accompanied the new king in his trips.

The Qajar Era (1796-1925 A.D.)

The census of early Qajar era indicates that the total population of Zoroastrians was 50,000 and they had taken refuge mainly in the two central cities of Yazd and Kerman. One census includes a pocket of Zoroastrians living in the city of Qazvin.[20] There is no information about the fate of the Qazvin community. It is not known whether they were massacred, forcefully converted or scattered. But what about the Zoroastrians living in Yazd and Kerman? Did they live there in peace?

Despite the aforementioned favorable incident, the Zoroastrians during the Qajar dynasty remained in agony and their population continued to decline. Even during the rule of Agha Mohammad Khan, the founder of the dynasty many Zoroastrians were killed and some were taken as captives to Azarbaijan.[21] The community was regarded as outcast, impure and untouchable. Various methods were used to convert them to Islam. According to a law, if any member of

family converted to Islam, he/she was entitled to all inheritance. This was a materialistic incentive to proselytize the minorities. According to Edward Browne, the wall of Zoroastrian houses had to be lower than that of the Moslems. If they were riding a donkey, upon facing a Moslem had to dismount and during the rainy days they were not allowed to appear in public, because the water that had run down through their bodies and cloths could pollute the Moslems. The Zoroastrian food was considered impure and many public places refused to serve them. Harassments and persecution were the norms of daily life. At times, Zoroastrian girls were kidnapped and forcefully converted and married to Moslems and brought to town in fanfare. On top of all the misery the Zoroastrians had to pay a heavy religious tax known as Jizya. Due to corruption of the tax officials, at times twice and even three times the official figure would be collected, because every intermediary had to receive his share. If the families could not afford paying the Jizya, their children were beaten and even tortured and their religious books were thrown in fire. That is how the term "the bookless" came about. Under the woeful conditions, some had to convert and there were those who declared themselves Moslems, picked up Islamic names, but in secret continued Zoroastrian practices. Today the latter group among the Zoroastrians is known as Jaddid (new).

Count de Gobineau, the French Ambassador to Iran (1850's A.D.) expressed a pessimistic view of the Zoroastrians that reflects the

plight of community during the Qajar ear. He writes "Only 7000 of them remain and just a miracle may save them from extinction." He adds, "These are the descendants of the people who one day ruled the world." Zoroastrian massacre did not cease during the Qajar rule. The last two are recorded at the villages surrounding the city of Boarzjan and Turkabad near Yazd. Today, the village of Maul Seyyed Aul near Borazjan, among the local people is know as "killing site" (Ghatl-Gauh)[22] and Zoroastrian surnames of Turk, Turki, Turkian and Turkabadi reflect lineage to the survivors of Turkabad.

To present the true picture of Zoroastrian life in that era, I will quote several writers (Napier Malcom: 1905, Dr. Rostam Sarfeh: Parsiana, March 1990, Page 43, Khosrow Bastanifar: at last I return to Yazd, 1996, P 192 in Persian). The Zoroastrians even were not allowed to wear shoes but only slippers. They had to put on a dirty torn cap and sew a yellow old patch on their back, so that would be distinguished in public places. Their pants had to be short, so that when stones were thrown at them hit their exposed legs. They were not allowed to wear a new suit, the dirtier the cloth, and the less punishment. A prominent Zoroastrian merchant had put on a new pant. In the market place he was surrounded by mob and was forced to remove his pant, hold it on his head and walk back home. Zoroastrians entering a Moslem house had to carry a shawl upon which they had to sit, so that the place will not be polluted.

Zoroastrian farmers subsisted on the sale of their products. Once an authority announced their products are impure, people refused buying from them. After receiving payment, he declared that if those products are kept high in the air, are purified. A Zoroastrian girl carrying products to the city was raped. The attackers claimed she was drunk and was responsible for the crime. The girl could not tolerate the stigma and committed suicide by setting herself ablaze.

The misery of Zoroastrians is beyond description. Some even converted to Islam to be able to protect their old co-religionists.

Due to the extent of oppression, agony and destitution, many Zoroastrians ventured the hazardous journey to India. They had to risk their lives by crossing the hostile desert on donkeys or even on foot. Those who could afford voyaged aboard the ships. In India, they were recognized for Sadra and Kushti and were sheltered by their Parsi brethren. In the new environment, they proved their talents in business and science and prospered.

The woeful plight of the Zoroastrians caused the Parsis to dispatch emissaries to Iran. The notable one, Maneckji Limji Hataria arrived for the first time on March 31, 1854 A.D. at the age of 41. For one year he studied the general condition of the persecuted community. He found the Zoroastrians to be uneducated and suffered from endemic diseases and malnutrition. Worse than all, centuries of

oppression and persecution had taken a heavy toll on their spirit. The community had no confidence in herself and no hope for the future. Maneckji upon return to India reported his findings to the Parsi Panchayet. This is truly a historical document, part of which is quoted hereunder:

Dear Sir; This noble group has suffered in the hands of cruel and evil people so much that they are totally 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 receive no payment. As some evil and immoral men have been looking after their women and daughters, this sector of Zoroastrians community even during daytime stays indoor. Despite all the poverty, heavy taxes under the pretexts of land, space, pasture land; 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, community is disunited. Their only hope is the advent of future savior (Shah Bahram Varjavand). 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 this one sentence of Maneckji epitomizes the sorry plight of the community. "I found the Zoroastrians to be exhausted

and trampled, so much that even no one in this world can be more miserable than them.'

Amelioration fund was set up and from its interest income part of the Jizya was paid off. Once again Maneckji returned to Iran. This time he devoted his life toward saving his co-religionists from the brink of extinction. He followed three goals: To educate the community, to organize them and to abolish the burden of Jizya. He was a charming man who rallied the support of Dadabhoy Naorjoi and some of the European ambassadors to eliminate the injustice suffered by so many Zoroastrian generations in Iran. Several times he intervened in the unfair court rulings and forced them to reverse the unjust decisions. At that time if a Moslem murdered a Zoroastrian, the culprit would automatically be freed. If a Moslem borrowed money from a Zoroastrian and denied it, court would side with the Moslem. On the other hand, if a Zoroastrian borrowed from a Moslem and could not afford paying back, court would force his relatives, neighbors and friends to raise fund and defray the loan.

In his pursuit of educating the community, Maneckji faced unexpected difficulties for the following reasons:

1. The Zoroastrians for centuries had been prohibited from receiving education, just to be content with subsisting on menial jobs. The change of direction was difficult and even some believed that education will cause them not to be able to work and earn money:

2. The children worked and their dismal income nevertheless, subsidized the family. The families could not afford the loss of income.
3. Parents missed their children and they were not ready to send them away.
4. Some Zoroastrian leaders became envious of Maneckji, even saying that education will deprive the community of future workers who can make a living; some were even envious of children who will receive better education than they did.

Despite all the obstacles Maneckji prevailed and eventually picked up boys from Kerman and Yazd, took them to Tehran and founded a boarding school for them. He even subsidized the families for the loss of their children's income. To teach them, Maneckji published books and employed the best scholars, some of whom were educated in Europe. From these children future teachers evolved, who were scattered in the cities of Yazd and Kerman and Zoroastrian villages and educated the community. The result is that today illiteracy rate among the Zoroastrian population is near zero. With the Maneckji's encouragement and support, marriages took place and jobs were provided for the newly wed couples.

His historical achievement was the abolition of the religious tax (Jizya). Maneckji, through the direct negotiations with the Qajar King, Nassereddin Shah persuaded him to abolish the burden of Jizya and

that took place in August of 1882 A.D. Through the enticement and direct involvement of Maneckji and his successor, Zoroastrians later formed local associations named after the then king, Nasser Anjumans. I would like to quote the late Dr. Adharbad Irani, the famous Bombay ophthalmologist: "Words fall short of expression, we must devote our love and warm tears to our Parsi brothers who at the most critical time came to our rescue." [23] The loving memory of Maneckji among the Zoroastrians or Iran is perpetual. We name our sons Majecki, Limji and many families have chosen his name as surname as " Maneckji, Maneckjian, and Maneckjipour." If it was not for his dedication and selfless efforts, perhaps the Zoroastrian religion had vanished in its country of origin. If we believe in the word "saoshyant" as benefactor, isn't he the one who saved the Zoroastrians of Iran from extinction? [24]

Now, after centuries of suffering, the Zoroastrians began to enjoy the breeze of relative freedom and even under the unequal opportunities they proved their talents and abilities. One businessman, Jamshid Jamshidian known as Arbab Jamshid founded a trade center in the capital city of Tehran. He was well respected for his honesty and success even by the Qajar Kings. The notes of Jamshidian center generally were regarded and accepted as bank notes. Another Zoroastrian family, Jahanian, established a business center in Yazd. They expanded their business and even opened a branch office in New York. The public also accepted the notes of the Jahanian Center

as bank note. The five brothers were planning to found the first Iranian National Bank. But the assassination of one of the brothers, Parviz, forced them to abandon the plan. Iranian public, generally held the British responsible for the assassination, believing that they did not want the Iranians to establish and own banks. Due to the unstable national economy, the two business centers at the end went bankrupt.

The revolution for the establishment of constitutional monarchy took place in 1909 A.D.

And the Qajar King (Mohammad Ali Shah) was ousted and his young son, Ahmad Mirza was installed King by the revolutionaries. The Zoroastrians were active in this revolution and one of them, Fereidoun Fereidounian was martyred. The new constitution officially recognized the Zoroastrians as a minority entitle to one Parliamentary deputy. The first elected deputy was Jamshidian, who after one term, voluntarily withdrew and the next deputy, a young energetic politician named Keikhosrow Shahrokh was elected who was trusted and respected by the Moslems as well as Zoroastrians. Shahrokh many times reminded the people "Although I have been elected by the Zoroastrians, but in the Parliament I am a representative of the whole nation." Once a deputy name Modarres, who was a powerful clergy said, " If I can name one true Moslem, that will be Arbab Keikhosrow," Because of his honesty, during the famine he was

appointed as the director of the central silo. In this capacity he encouraged all the landowners to sell their crops at a reasonable price to the silo. When Ahmad shah asked for an unreasonably high price, Shahrokh reminded the king: "His majesty, do you recall what you said when you took the oath of office at the inauguration of Parliament? That you always think and act for the welfare and prosperity of the nation?"

Pahlavi Era

Shahrokh was an active member of the Majlis during the events that led to the accession of Reza Shah to the Persian throne. Reza Shah a true nationalist picked up "Pahlavi" as the dynasty's surname and emphasized the Persian nationalism. The pre-Islamic history, Keyanian, Pishdadian, Achaemenian, Parthian, and Sassanian were taught in the schools and Iranians were given a new sense of identity and a fresh direction. The Persian vocabulary was refined from many Arabic words and replaced by pure Persian vocables. Schools, roads, national railroad, factories and universities were built. The first chair of the Avestan studies was established in the University of Tehran, school of literature, under the directorship of the late Professor Pour Davoud who reintroduced the Avesta to the Iranians and after him one of his students the late Dr. Bahram Fravashi chaired the section. When Professor Pour Davoud passed away, a Tehran newspaper

wrote: "the service of the professor to the nation is not less than that of Yaghoub Leisse who defeated and forced the Arabs out of Iran."

Shahrokh remained a trusted confidant of Reza Shah. When the building of Iranian Parliament was consumed by fire, Reza Shah looking for an honest and trusted man to carry out the enormous project of reconstruction, appointed Shahrokh for this task. On the inauguration of the new building, Reza Shah was so much impressed that he told, "Arab Keikhosrow" although Arbab is redundant (He did not like titles), but Keikhosrow let me tell you, that destruction was well worth this construction." After Shahrokh, Mr. Rustam Guiv was elected to the parliament and later to the Iranian Senate, whose generosity has enlightened many Zoroastrian communities around the world. Next deputy was Dr. Esfandiyar Yeganegi an economist and founder of an irrigation company who was respected by the whole nation for his generosity and charitable works.

In 1932 a Parsi delegation met with Reza Shah and expressed their appreciation for all the achievements, he replied "all that you have said is correct, whatever I have done is for my country, but you tell me what can you do for your original homeland." The Shah invited Parsis to come and settle in the country of your ancestors. We will welcome you with open arms. Parsis at this time founded two high schools (Anoushiravan Dadgar for girls and Firooz-Bahram for boys.) These schools have graduated many Iranian scholars, professionals,

leaders and statesmen who always have cherished their memories of studying there. Parsis also contributed to founding schools in the Zoroastrian Villages of Yazd. They also established clinics and dispatched Parsi physicians. The reason was not only to treat the patients who suffered from endemic diseases and malnutrition, but because the Zoroastrian patients even in medical fields were regarded as impure and untouchable and were mistreated by the crew. Actually some medical facilities did not accept Zoroastrian patients, consequently in their own homeland they were alien and ailing, and died young because of bigotry. The Parsi-founded clinics, however, delivered service equally to all patients at need regardless of religion. They remained in operation until Goodarz Hospital was founded by the Goodarz (Jahanian-Varza) brothers in Yazd and employed European and Iranian physicians. Later Laal Maternity Hospital and a nursing school were annexed to it. During the Iran-Iraq war, Goodarz Hospital delivered a great service by treating the wounded Iranian soldiers. Once the hospital became operational, the Parsi clinics were transferred to the Red Lion and Sun organization. The late Peshotan Marker is to be mentioned who founded Marker (known as Markar) Foundation that includes boarding schools. These schools were managed and directed by the late Soroush Lohrasp who recently passed away. The number of other students in the Zoroastrian schools surpass far beyond the Zoroastrians. Meanwhile, the community under the unequal opportunities resorted to education so much that the illiteracy rate among the Zoroastrians is almost zero

while the national illiteracy rate approaches forty percent. The proportion of Zoroastrians with a university degree is the highest among the nation. They have founded schools, hospitals, industries, business centers and charitable organizations. Zoroastrians founded the first modern city in Iran at the Tehran Suburb. The community has produced physicians, engineers, professors, teachers, professionals, industrialists, and army generals. They have held important governmental positions up to the acting finance minister and deputy prime minister. Two Mobeds educated from Cama Athornan Madressa, exercised an effective role in the religious leadership and education of the community.

The Zoroastrians are well recognized as the genuine Iranians and respected for the reputation of scrupulous honesty. In 1972 I met an Iranian who complained of governmental corruption in Iran. But he admitted that when Dr. Farhang Mehr was the acting finance minister, no one talked about bribe. In response to my inquiry he added, "When people at the top are honest, the subordinates will watch." These words were particularly rewarding because by his own admission he was at odds with Dr. Mehr. In 1971 a young Parsi in Iran told me that he had applied for several jobs. The Presidents of the companies had informed him that they had other applicants but because he was a Zoroastrian, they were giving him priority. In 1953 Tehran was under curfew. Dr. Sarfeh in an editorial wrote: on his way to visiting a patient, he was stopped by a soldier and as he did

not carry his I.D. card, was taken to a military station. The officer in charge asked his name and then allowed him to go free and be escorted. When Dr.Sarfeh asked, don't you want me bring my I.D? He responded it is not necessary, because your name indicates that you are a Zoroastrian and we trust and respect you. In 1963, Iran was facing a meat shortage. The Iranian government looking for a trusted and honest man to handle the crisis, appointed general doctor (Mobed) Jahanguir Oshidari as the director of "The National Meat Company." In a matter of two months the crisis was over. Later General Oshidari "currently the president of council of Mobeds in Tehran" confided to his friends "people were offering me personal favors, but I rejected with anger. That is why the crisis was over soon.

At the turn of the recent revolution many scholars of the Zoroastrian studies suffered physical, psychological and financial punishments. Some were arrested, jailed and beaten. Others lost their jobs and even suffered the loss of a dear one, yet they pursued. These men have long foregone material interests and for the love of Zarathushtra put their families in distress. Their service to Zoroastrianism is beyond description.

Dr. Ali Jafarey, Dr. Bahram Fravashi, Dr. Hussein Vahidi, Hashim Razi and Dr. Ahmad Tafazzoli are to be named as examples. We must dedicate our love and heartfelt thanks and gratitude to these men

whose devotion has brought us closer to the message of Zarathushtra than ever before. Today many Iranians in search of their national identity and original roots are looking into Zoroastrianism. Although currently in Iran many discriminatory laws are practiced and Zoroastrians as other minorities are not employed by the government, nevertheless they enjoy the public trust and respect as the people regard them as genuine Iranians who morally and historically represent their ancestors. The Zoroastrians in spite of all the hardships and indignities suffered by their ancestors will always remain patriotic to Iran. It is interesting that the Parsis of India even after a thousand years living in India look toward Iran as their true homeland. Iran is the birthplace and homeland of Zarathushtra, our beloved prophet and we are connected to our motherland by profound religious, cultural and historical roots.

By reviewing the history of Zoroastrians after the Arab invasion, one may conclude that it was a miracle that Zoroastrianism survived the harsh treatment of history. As once Dastoor Bode said, " so many religions and nations have become part of ancient history. There must be a reason why Zoroastrianism survived." [25]

NOTES:

[1] Gergie Zeidan, History of Islamic Civilization, 3rd volume p 42-47; Persian translation of Kashf el Zonoun- Eben-e Khaldoun, by Haj Khalifeh, preface.

- [2] Abu Rayhan Birouni, Athar el Baghieh
- [3] Ebn-e Esfandiar, Tārikh-e Tabarestān, 1320 Sh. (1941) p 120.
- [4] Abdollah Mehdi el Khatib, Dolat-e Bani Omayeh dar Khorrāsān (The Umayyad Government in Khorassan), p40.
- [5] Ebn-e Balkhi, Forsnāmeḥ 1313 SH. (1934), p116-135.
- [6] Abu Hanifeh Dinouri, Akhbār el Tavāl, 1960 (Cairo) p141.
- [7] Shojaeddin Shaffa, Tavalodī Dīgar, p443, third edition.
- [8] Mohammad ibn-e Jarrir Tabari, History of the nations and the kings, p171, 1831, quoting Soleiman ibn-e Abdolmaleck
- [9] Agha Khan-e Kermani, Nāmeḥā.
- [10] Mohammad ibn-e Jarrir Tabari, History of prophets and the kings, 1358 AH, (Cairo) p414, (8,9,10) Quoted from Jenāyat va Mohāfat by: Shojaeddin Shaffa
- [11] Abdul Hussein Zarrinkoub, Do Qarn Sokūt, p85, third edition.
- [12] Translation by Seyyed Hussein Nasr
- [13] Inauguration of the Zoroastrian congress in Bombay, 1963
- [14] Estimated by Zabih Behrooz- Jean Chardin, a French tourist who visited Iran writes: %40 of the Iranians (or estimated four million) remains Zoroastrian.
- [15] Rashid Shahmardan, Tārikh-e Zartoshtoān, p176-177, quoting Jean Chardin
- [16] His letter dated: December 8, 1617
- [17] Bahram Fravashi, The marvelous letters (Persian translation from French) p108-109
- [18] -- Tārikh-e Zartoshtoān, P 177

[19] Jonas Hunway, Journal of the travels of revolution of Persia, Volume 11, p 153, 195, 208

[20] -- Tārikh-e Zartoshtoān, p125

[21] Ibid. p126

[22] Ibid

[23] Dr. Adharbad Irani, in his informal visit with the Iranian delegation to the second Zoroastrian congress, Bombay 1963

[24] Khosrow Bastanifar, At last I return to Yazd, in Persian

[25] Framroze Ardeshir Bode, Informal conversation in Tehran, Iran 1963