

Importance of Zoroastrian Diaspora

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The Zoroastrian Diaspora of the recent time is the most important diffusion of a tiny minority from their home lands i.e. India and Iran. Recently Hinnell has involved himself with two editions on the same subject describing individual personalities and lots of other irrelevant issues

This Diaspora is playing a vital part in the revivification of their home religions. The diffusions of Parsi and Iranian Zoroastrians in some numbers, in places as U.K., USA., AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND and other cities of the Far East etc. are creating opportunities and problems in their new settlements.

In the Zoroastrian Diaspora, there is an element of exile. In some cases particularly Iranian Zoroastrians, it is the consequence of return of theocratic Islamic regime which has called all non-Muslims "animals" (see Ahmedinijad speech on record) and reducing all minorities to second class citizens. On the other hand Parsis in India migrated for economic batterment with no political persecution as they had experienced in their first diaporra to India from Iran after the fall of the Zoroastrian Empire. Now it is a more casual matter without any pressure, and particularly USA has been found more attractive to go for reason of economic opportunity as we have just said.

The Zoroastrian Diaspora is important for us to study for several reasons. The first is that it can provide a clue to patterns of religious transformation. Such changes may also pinpoint problems in the religion which makes its adaption to a new environment difficult. So the first reason has to do with adaption. Second, the Diaspora may itself affect the home based religion. The extreme reformist tendency in USA and UK helps to stoke the fires of passion to reformation in Mumbai and Tehran. Zoroastrian migrants often become wealthier than those left behind, and they may also be more exposed to education and foreign influences, and can export such influences back home. Third, the phenomenon of the Diaspora is important because of its great incidence in the modern world. In many big cities like New York, Los Angeles, in USA, in Sydney, Australia, etc multiethnicity is now commonplace and may be problematic to preserve ethnicity of Parsi / Iranian Zoroastrians. This may become a major problem of establishing their religious schools, "madressas" and more so for consecrated fire-temples in real sense, open only to the community members or to change century old tradition, and do as the Iranian Zoroastrians have done in their home land, by throwing open their temples to all high and sundry.

Establishing Zoroastrian academic chairs in the Diaspora, in some universities is not the answer as the existing chairs are struggling for getting students and many have closed besides, very few, if at all, have Zoroastrians enroll because of lack of opportunities available for jobs after graduation, beside ancient dead languages are difficult to learn and more difficult to teach – (details are discussed elsewhere). Students when encounter difficult ancient Iranian languages drop out and go to learn ancient Iranian/Parsi History in the Dept of History but ancient history is ancient and almost dead for getting jobs in the fast moving modern world.

The need for Parsis and Irani Zoroastrian Cultures to cope with Judeo-Christian culture in the west meant that sometimes new religious movements from the homeland could flourish in the Diaspora. The religious fundamentalism "back to the Gathas" gave attraction which served overseas community in a way the results of which will be seen in the years to come.

Diaspora Zoroastrians have begun building Fire-Temples but with a big switch that is not yet comprehended.

The Parsi/Irani Zoroastrians religious system is not of much formal training. Customs and rituals are handed down from one generation to another by a kind of social osmosis. The rupture of this osmosis has proved to be a problem in Zoroastrian religious education.

It might be an interesting research project to see how far the various themes of Parsi/Irani Zoroastrian traditions are present in non-Zoroastrian environments. – themes such as marriage within the community, rituals, instruction in the scriptural traditions, strong sense of purity and pollution, importance of praying regularly etc. These themes which are woven into complicated fabrics of Zoroastrianism do not all travel equally easily to new environments.

The Diaspora religion like Zoroastrianism must exist, by its very nature, typically as a minority group. Those that are “minority at home” have no special difficulties, but must face severe assimilation within Judeo-Christian majority.

Parsis stands in a position betwixt and between the more or less non-missionary religions, and that they have to face it in the near future. Zoroastrians in the Diaspora have seen some newly published translations and editions of their scriptures and these have made their teachings accessible to the host Western style community, especially in the United States.

Attitudes to religion will in general remain individualistic and privatized.

Another factor in the life of Zoroastrian Diaspora is that members of traditional beliefs, will find new ways to work together for mutual protection, and will cooperate in various ways. This is the field which heralds important changes not only for Zoroastrianism but also for other world religions.

These are some thoughts about the study of the Zoroastrian Diaspora. As noted above, some editions on Diaspora have been published, but they describe individuals and their achievements and omit the wide horizon. The research of Zoroastrian religion in the Diaspora has been somewhat neglected. Some of the phenomena to which I have drawn attention need to be further look at. Zoroastrians should realize that they are entering in the Global Period, a new era of religious life. It is fair to say that Zoroastrians in the Diaspora have yet come to terms with these changes.