

Respected Members of the Audience and Dear Hamdins:

I thank Wadia Agiary Trust for arranging this very interesting conference and for giving me the privilege to speak on “How Zarathustra’s teachings helped to maintain earth’s environment”. No claim is made for any scholarly knowledge for presentation of this small paper. I now place before the audience (consisting of all faiths) and pray that with the blessings of Ahura Mazda and our dear prophet Zarathustra, our endeavour to keep the mother earth in its pristine form becomes successful.

Today with march of science and technology, with vast deposit of sewage and garbage with nuclear tests waste, the nature has been ravaged. The aesthetic quality of life has taken a back stage in Man’s life. Man’s cruelty towards the nature has resulted in ecological imbalance. Environment has been harmed with impunity. What was preserved and protected by our ancestors 5000 years has been polluted in the last five decades.

At the outset we must remember that as far as Zoroastrianism is concerned, rites and ceremonies are a natural corollary to contemplation of nature. It is known to all Zoroastrians that Zarathustra himself for 15 years retired from the activity of worldly life and contemplated on nature for revelations. One English writer talks of contemplation¹ which will appeal all of you.

“ Do we want to contemplate God’s Power?
We see it in the immensity of His Creation.
Do we want to contemplate His Munificence?
We see it in abundance with which He fills the earth
Do we want to know what God is, search His Scriptures called
“CREATION”

Contemplation of nature is supported by Scientist. Wonderful as it may seem there is a great Design behind Nature. The same is orderly, beautiful and idealistic. Zarathustra’s revelation was the same. According to Him the whole world is based on Divine Beauty and human being is justified in seeing God’s life, i.e. love and light in this world. Zarathustra’s hymns pour out his sincere praises and asks who created the Creation and who supported the earth and heaven; Except God².

Before the advent of Zarathustra, the mother earth was ravaged by strife, torment, torture caused on account of imbalance in nature. So she cried out to Lord Ahura Mazda to send a saviour, a pastoral who would take care of her Pastures³.

¹ D. A. Anklesaria – Pg 54

² Gatha Ha 44

³ Gatha Ha 29.1

As a sequel to Spenta Armaiti's complain, Ahura Mazda after consulting his cabinet of Amesaspandas appointed Zarathustra as a Deliverer. Anticipating the Divine messenger, the entire Nature rejoiced at his birth and exclaimed!

Ushtāno zato athrava yo spitmao zarthustro. Yehe zathaecha vakshaecha uksin apo urvaraoscha; yehe zathaecha vakhsaecha usta ta tem nimravanta vispo spento datao daman. "In whose birth and growth the waters, plants rejoiced; in whose birth and growth waters and plants increased; in whose birth and growth all the creations created by Spenta Armaiti cried out "Hail" with joy". Born for us is one priest Spitaman Zarathustra". The entire creation became joyful and welcomed Him⁴

He brought the message of Asha which is a Spectrum of seven, consisting of the truth about the nature, reality, piety, purity, righteousness comprising of observance of commandments of Din, Dharma, selflessness, service, love, kindness, repentance and tarikat.

Before we dwell and explore the dimension of Zoroastrian perception of ecology as outlined in scriptures, we have to understand the relationship between Ahura Mazda and his Creation. Ahura Mazda is the architect of the celestial and terrestrial worlds. Zarathustra's heart flows out in reverence to Him. He puts rhetorical questions to Him in Gatha Ushtavaiti Ha 44⁵. "Who laid down the path for the sun and the stars? Who made the moon to wax and wane betimes? Whose might hold the earth sky apart? Who has brought forth the water and the plants and who guides the winds in their uncharted course. **The answer is none but the Creator Ahura Mazda**, the protector and the sustainer. He reigns over his creation at will and joyfully. Therefore Zoroastrians regard the elements of nature with profound reverence. According to Zoroastrianism "Man is a Trustee of Nature. He should not violate that trust. The ecological issue is connected with ethical or moral interdependence. The interdependence is in the form of Amesha

Spenta. These Holy Immortals preside over the material creations. They represent six attributes of Ahura Mazda and Ahura Mazda is sometimes acknowledged as 7th. When these attributes are personified they are taken as the guardians of the seven material creations in later Zoroastrian literature. Some scholars refer them as Archangels.

Hence all creations are divine being. Viz, Vohumana over animal kingdom, Asha Vahista fire, Khashathra Vairya Metals, Spenta Armaiti earth, Hauvatat Water and Ameretat Plant. So Ahura Mazda and Amesha Spentas along with Yazatas take the task of preserving, protecting the entire creation. It is a matter of great pride for Zoroastrians that 5000 years ago Zarathustra realized the importance of natural environment. Modern scholars of repute recognize Zarathustra as greatest Ecologist. Our present day

⁴ Fravardin Yast para 94

⁵ Gatha Ushtavaiti Ha 44

concept of preservation of earth's environment commenced when Zarathustra propagated his teachings revealed by Ahura Mazda. Indeed a prophet⁶ divinely inspired and the Messenger of religion, who interpreted Ahura Mazda's commandments and brought spiritual insight, wisdom, power to the concept of seven Archangels in charge of material and spiritual worlds. Avesta word for prophet is Ratu. Another word is Manthran or a Manthra reciter revealer of "Holy word". So through Manthran – Holy words we can protect and preserve God's creations i.e. nurture and care for natural elements as part of the doctrine of this ancient religion. Polluting a creation means a direct affront to the divine being.

A true Zoroastrian with the help of this powerful Manthra will be able to protect the environment namely sky, water, air, plant and animals. Before we embark on preservation of nature, let us examine what pollutes the nature.

The answer is through the extent avesta scripture Videvodat and Pahalvi literature Minoi Khrat.

Venidad explains in detail the term Pollution - Nasu and rules regarding infection and contaminated things. According to Videvodat all bodily discharge of hair cutting and nail cutting result in breeding of noxious creature which are harmful to the nature. Zoroastrian individual is enjoined to dispose of these wastes without polluting the nature. Cleanliness and purity are the main principles of Zoroastrian religion.⁷

Among 21 Nasks, Videvodat (laws against daeva) is the only voluminous scriptural book available with us. It deals with laws of sanitation, hygiene and purification against contact with dead matter and contagion/infection emanating therefrom. The text reveals that the ancients acknowledge earth as providing basic resources for the sustenance of life and extolled agriculture as a noble profession. Ahura who has created joy producing earth is venerated by Zoroastrians. Videvodat clearly details the things that bring joy to the earth. As an individual it would be duty of a Zoroastrian to follow these rules.

When does the earth become happy? The earth becomes happy when individual tills the dry land and makes it productive, and those who piously give in charity the produce of the land. He who sows the corn sows righteousness. By following the principle of Khvashet Nigesh i.e. exposure of dead body to the sun, whereby earth is not polluted.

We all know that the water which consists all energies for sustaining human life is not to be polluted. Zoroastrians revere water and as an individual never spits or washes hands in the running water of the rivulets, oceans or wells. It is sacrosanct to the Zoroastrian. Individual should esteem it as indispensable

⁶ Ancient & Middle Iranian Studies by Dastuji Dr. Homayr K. Mirza – Article 10, Pg 61

⁷ Scientific illusions in the Videvodat & critical study by Ed. R.Karanjia-1992

to life and increase its intrinsic purity. Videaodat abomination to defile water by placing corps in it. This text details purification of the moving as well as still water. So much respect is shown that if a person who himself is contaminated by carrying the dead body should remain 30 paces away from water. Individual should not defile water by immersing chemical deposits, sewage industrial wastes in the water which is harmful to the marine life. Water as a cleansing aspect is well remembered and respected. Unfortunately, human beings have broken all laws of piety, purity and preservation of water.

Zoroastrian or individual adore Fire. Fire is an element of nature. Fire has an inherent merit as a symbol of the Divine Life. Ahura Mazda in Haptan Yasht Karda 2. affirms that through agency of Holy Fire individual would first reach Him "Ahya thawa Athro verezena pauruyea pairi-jasmaiday Mazda Ahura). Smoking, burning of dead body or any object which emanates foul smell pollutes the fire.

Purity of air/ wind is a constant reminder to a devout Zoroastrian. In Kshnuman of Siroza Yasht, we pay homage to wind which is superior to all other creations. This is taught right from inception to children viz., in the prayer Jasme Avanghe Mazda where he affirms his faith in wind. He prays "Vaanaityaoscha upratato ramno khvastrahe vayaosh uparo kairyehe tardhato anyais daman aetat te vayo yat spenta mainyaom.

The yazata presiding over victorious ascendancy of Mino Ram of Vayu yazad i.e. air and wind is superior to other creations and which is considered to be beneficent to keep the air purified.

Care for maintenance and preservation of Gospand, innocent and useful domestic animals such as cows, goats, sheep and dogs is a virtue specially inculcated by Zarathrushttra. Animals of all kind are under Bahman Ameshaspand care and protection. According to Dinkart,⁸ "He who well maintains cattle in his protection, his fame subsists in the world and the splendor of Ahura Mazda becomes his own in the Best Existence.

The process of assisting and protecting nature can be divided into two. Firstly, it can be achieved individually and secondly collectively. Let us examine both these aspects separately.

When individual ravages the environment he sets nature in turbulence. The Hom Yasht intones "I am for those who preserve order, not for those who create disorder". Among 21 Nasks which were destroyed by Alexandra, we had Staot Nask a science of phonetic prayer. Our entire scripture is based on recitation or chanting of these Manthras which generate spiritual vibrations within the devotee and out in the nature. The entire prayers are based on vibratory effect which creates a halo around the person and keeps his Keharp (semi spiritual bonds) clean. In praise of this we have in Avesta Manthra line "Stoat Yasna

⁸ Pahalavi Translation of Dinkat Gatha 28.1

yazmaide. Ya data Angheush paouruyeya” We attune ourselves to Stoa Yasna which is the first primeval law. Prophet Zarathustra based his Manthra on Stoa Yasna which when recited can help the Mother earth in her progress. The individual through recitation of Manthavni becomes attuned to the forces of nature around him. The word Yazmaide frequently occurring in our prayers means we express our adoration for the beauty of nature and get in tune with sun, moon, star, water, air and express our gratitude to the Creator. Individual is required to pray five faraijiat prayers daily. These prayers are nothing but litany to God’s most bountiful creations which energizes individuals who in turn is in hamazor with nature. They are:

1. Khorshed Niyash – litany to Sun. It is mentioned in the prayer that it not only purifies the earth but also the flowing water.
2. Meher Niyash - in praise of light, origin of light, harbinger of the Sun, twilight, Cosmic atmosphere including cosmic rays. The seven dakhuis mentioned are layers of atmosphere.
3. Mahbakhtar Niyash – in praise of Moon having seed of the earth (māongha gaochithra)
4. Avan Ardivisur Niyash – in praise of water possessing vibrating energies
5. Atash Niyash in praise of Fire not an element but a divine being.

Many of us are very busy and who have no time to pray can at least express gratitude by praying Namaskar which is a shorter version. There are different namaskars like Homage unto lamps, mountains, waters and plants. Homage unto Four Directions where one reveres and salutes the pastures, lands, dwellings, fountains, waters of rivers, streams, trees, this earth, yonder sky, holy winds, the stars, the moon, sun and to the boundless natural light and unto all creations of Spenta Mainyu. This is to be recited each time turning to each direction. In praying this, the individual develops a seminal bond with the environment which is the temple of Nature. Individual is thus connected with the Nature into his daily life. The same holds good for the larger Yashts connected with nature.

Besides this in the scriptures there are larger Yashts which are devoted specifically for Nature. Ardibehest Yasht is for fire energies. Khorshed Yasht for sun. Mahbakhtar Yasht for Moon. Avan for Water. Tir for stars which protect the earth in four corners and also bringing rain. Gosh Yasht for welfare of animals. Ram Yasht for Vayu and Zamyad Yast for the Mountains. If recitation of these yashts are not possible than Setayash for that particular roj and month should be prayed.

We now proceed to the second point - how collectively Zoroastrian religion assists in maintaining ecological balance.

The answer is through rites and rituals. Rituals are set of actions performed mainly for their symbolic value. They are performed according to the rules laid down in scripture or by traditions. They are

performed by an individual or by a group in places especially reserved for it. They are performed on a special occasion invoking blessings of Ahura Mazda, Amesha Spentas, Yazatas. The rituals enacted by the priests with plants, water, milk, fire, earth, are man's contribution towards advancement of the world in its regular course. By daily rites they consciously purify, bless and strengthen every one of six creations.

Zoroastrians express gratitude through Ghambar. It is a seasonal festival for congregational Thanks Giving for Nature's gift which we enjoy. Universe was brought into manifestation through the Divine will of Ahura Mazda. So Zoroastrian's perform ghambar - collecting together at a place to share nature's produce harmoniously whereby hamazor is maintained with the nature seasonally.

**The stages of creations are

First Stage He created Luminaries - Sky. The Ghambar known as Maediozarem associated with Mid Spring. Begins with Roz Khorshed and ends with Roz Dae Pa Meher.

Second stage which is after 101 days He created Water Maediosahem Mid Summer. Begins with Roz Khorshed of the month Tir and ends with Roz Dae Pa Meher.

Third Stage after 176th to 180th days he created the earth Paeteshahem – Sowing season Begins with Roz Astad of the month Sherevar and ends with Roz Aneran.

Fourth stage - 206-to 210th He created Vegetation Ayathrem Begins with the Roz Astad of Meher month and ends with Roz Aneran.

Fifth Stage - 286 to 290 He created animal kingdom– Maediaarem - Mid Winter. Begins with Meher of the month Dae and ends with Roz Bahram.

Sixth stage - 361 to 365 He created man Hamaspathmaedaem . Nameaes of 5 days of Gatha im,ediately on completion of the month Asfandarmad **

The four words used in Afrin of Ghambar ⁹– Yazad, sazaad, khurad dehad i e. pray perform eat or give. – seem to suggest the different ways in which one can participate in the seasonal festival by gathering sharing and giving charity whereby we give joy to different creations of Ahura Mazda. Unfortunately today we lay more importance to food which is being served in the Ghambar and have forgotten the very essence of Ghambar. Many of us do not know the names of Gahmbar and the purpose of celebration. The ecological imbalance created by waste of food, during Ghambar by throwing food in dustbins and the

⁹ Religious Ceremonies & Customs by J J Modi, pgs 230-260

sewage, is against the principle of moderation. We pray that we refrain from harming mother earth and have value for the produce which she lovingly nurtures for us.

Another collective way we pay tribute to earth is by performing Jashan - for all important events whether joyful or melancholy, The word Jashan is derived from the Avesta word Yasna "veneration" We invoke the blessings of Ahura Mazda, Ameshaspentas and Yazad. For the particular function all persons assembled partake of the Darun - the consecrated bread known as myazda, chasni and fruits. There are different Jashans for different occasions invoking and obtaining blessings from the yazads. Identifying ourselves with nature on different occasions energises mother earth.

Apart from public ceremonies which become hamzors with nature, there are inner ceremonies performed in the fire temple. They are Nirangdin, vanidad, visperad, Ijashni Baj darun, which purifies the outer atmosphere through vibrations and recitations of these prayers keep the nature in balance,

Our Zoroastrian Corporates (-10) have taken task of environmental protection. Tatanagar have beautifully designed parks, luscious green lawns, tall trees as an excellent example to other Corporates. They believe that ethos of caring has to be extended from to his environment. They have preservation plants afforestation breeding program for masher fish, butterflies, recycling plants to save water s well as sewage treatment plants. They have started study of ecology in schools to bring awareness to the children. Envisaging rapid and tremendous growth in infrastructure and construction sector, Sohrabji Godrej Green Business Centre has established Indian Green Building Council (IGBC), IGBC encourages developers and builders to build green to enhance environmental preference buildings. This is the greatest contribution to the teachings of Zarathustra and to Geush Urvan – The Soul of the Earth.(10) (The Zoroastrian view of Ecology – Dr Dhalla)

In conclusion let us pray to Ahura Mazda to give us wisdom and knowledge, to preserve and protect every atom in nature which is the embodiment of Fravashi. To guide our souls to righteous path, to strengthen our faith in Motheistic religion of Lord Zarathustra which is simple, pure and practical. Lastly to preserve and protect nature from Druje nasu (pollution) with perseverance. Every generation enjoys the use of vast hoard bequeathed to it by religion and transmits that hoard augmented by fresh acquisitions to future age. The future age, is shrouded with Nuclear explosion for warfares, which will be harmful to the ecological balance in the nature. The after effects of radiation are more deadly to the entire creation. Zarathustra's religion is not for destruction, but for preservation of mother earth Armaity Spenta Mainyu the daughter of Ahura Mazda. He has left us hoard of tenets and His religion shall remain eternal till the day of Frashogard.

I end in His words from Gatha Ha 28.4 and 29.4

“ Yavat isai tavacha avat kshai aese ashahya”

- As long as I have strength and as long as I am able to, I shall teach the cause of Asha, i.e. Truth about creation

Havo vichiro Ahuro, athane anghat yatha hvo vasat.

So shall it be just as He desires. “Atha Jamyat yatha afrinami”

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