

A Gatha - Tamasha at London

News from London. "A Gatha Colloquim" will be held at London by the World Zoroastrian Organization (WZO) on 5th, 6th and 7th November 1993, where papers will be presented on "New approaches to the Interpretation of the Gathas". The lecturers, according to WZO, London, circular "will include", (1) Prof. Helmut Hambach, (2) Palla Ichaporia, (3) Prof. Sternly Insler, (4) K. Irani, (5) A. Jafarey, (6) Yasmine Jhabvala, (7) Dina McIntyre, (8) Prof. Martin Schwartz, (9) Prof. Shaul Shaked, (10) Farrokh Vajfdar. "You will be feasted", the circular says, "on upto date researches and latest viewpoints by these eminent speakers on our most sacred Zoroastrian texts, which are the very heart and foundation of the Zoroastrian Religion."

I was wondering how P. Ichaporia, the most modern 2 years-old addition to the fraternity of "scholars" and the Computer Translator is sandwiched between two life-long Professors Humbach, the German and Insler, the English. But being acquainted with the often published lists of Indian film-stars, I found that nos. (1) to (10) above are alphabetically listed, surnamewise. Even then Irani & Jafri have very properly found their places together as the birds of the same feather, contentwise. (I mean their antiquated "scholarly" content).

It is apparent that this is going to be the usual Western Oriented Circus of conjectures, guess works, speculations, surmises and ultimately a cloudy confusion on the Gatha. One of the participants of this proposed feast, Insler has very fairly called the Gatha as "a book of riddles", and "a text bound with seven seals". In the Introduction to his Gathas, Insler has, right from the first sentence, enlisted the tremendous difficulties in deciphering the message of the Gatha. "Much of our knowledge of these poems is highly doubtful". **"There can be no assurance that the translation of a given passage approaches the intentions originally formulated by the prophet."** And that is the view of several other Western Savants, like Geldner, Boyce, and Schmidt.

And it is not, that the riddles are unfolding as the time passes by. They are most confusingly aggravating. Every translation, may it be profoundly laboured like those of the chain of European and Parsi scholars or of the computer laboured like no. 2 in the above list, has gone on adding to the confusion and the London colloquim should be the last straw on the camel's back.

The very title of the colloquim "New approaches to the Interpretation of the Gathas" indicates that some alleged "new" interpretations will come forth. This is a huge contradiction. Prof. Insler himself has said on page 3 of his Gathas, **"There can be only one correct interpretation of each line** for us as there was for the man who first formulated them." And this is the almost universal view of all the Western Scholars. If, thus, the message was only one, the path of the alleged "new interpretations" itself declares that any old interpretation along the line is not the original message of the prophet. That means it is incorrect, wrong! And a most recent interpretation will have the same fate. Another new will come, making all the previous ones old and wrong. That means all these expositions are not at all in contact with the real genuine message of the prophet. Then why do you say, you Jafrey Irani Circus Ltd., that the Gatha alone is the genuine Zoroastrianism? Which Gatha? Which of the ever changing "new interpretations"?

And are you sure on the strength of your studies, that the Gatha is the genuine Zoroastrianism? Or that it really contains Zarathushtra's message? Or for that matter, Zoroaster ever existed?

Don't get angry, my scholastic friends! I am referring to the Western Savant of the Eastern Sacred Books, Max Muller. He has said in his "Collected Works - Chips from a German Workshop, Vol. 1 page 474 :

"But among critical scholars Zarathushtra has long been recognized as a purely mythical figure..... We have no longer any right to call

Zoroaster the author, still less the writer of Avesta, **not even of its most ancient parts, the so called Gathas**, which, if Prof. Darmesteter is right, would in their present form **not be older than the first century of our era.**"

So what do you think, you the members of the N.A. Parsi Circus (with one Muslim), alphabetically headed by Pestonji Icholkaranjkarwala?

Even if Gatha is assumed to be Zoroaster's message, which one of the dozens of highly conflicting translations is the genuine original one existing in His mind when He supposedly wrote them? No assurance on this, says Insler, Bartholomae was once the chief authoritative translator. His foundations were then declared to be "unsound in many respects" by Humbach Insler (nos. 1 & 3 in the London list) and others. Those who purported to work on one and the same foundation say Vedic Sanskrit alone-are found to be in extreme variance with each other. Compare, for instance, Taraporewalla and Insler on Ha 44-18, 51-12. The former's free translation is called 'subjective' by Boyce. Insler's 'readable' translation can also be similarly branded. The chain of the "new" translations and "new" interpretations will go on, each link trying to snap all the previous links, making the chain as illusory and painful as a night mare. Which "heart" and which "foundation" of our Religion?

Ye Western Scholars and their Parsi satellites! This is the result of your treating holy Scriptures as ordinary literature, and not the Manthric compositions. As the modern saint Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, without grasping the mystical element and without the capacity to probe into the "veiled truth" in the Scriptures, they will remain "for ever a sealed book". Prof. Insler has already referred to "the seven seals" on the Gatha. To grasp the truths imbedded in a sacred scripture, you are not required to be a "Critical Scholar", which is the other name for inflated ego, but a mystical humble man. And, sirs, your apathy for mysticism is founded on the 19th century materialism, which, in this last decade the 20th century, is shattered to pieces. Physics, the leader of athiesm is knocking the door of mysticism. If you are interested, just have a probe into the books after books on modern

science showing this amazing phenomenon. Read Capra, Bohm, Sheldrake, Peats, Paul Davis, Casti and a host of others. With your ignorance and your high brow scholarship, you have sapped away the faith of the Parsis in their noble, lofty Religion and its divine Institutions. This has led the ignoramus of the type of K. Irani to say that Parsis do not treat Fire as Sacred and a self interested Muslim to blaspheme each and every spiritual exercise, which is the secret of our survival. It is time, we the faithful Parsis revolt against this onslaught, which Swami Vivekananda had described as the other name of atheism. For us, it is not just "the critical scholarship," but a question of life and death.

K. N. Dastoor

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By the way, the Dastoorji referred by Adi Davar earlier was Dastoor Kaikhushru Jamaspa-asha, who left the hall just before Jafrey revolved his chakkar. (No comments).

At another session Jafrey was the speaker. He said he wanted to stay out of "controversy" and "diversity". Here also Pervin stood up (hats off-, Lady!) and said, "you say you don't want to call people names but by calling someone "orthodox" or "reformist", you are branding them names. If any organization is parallel with the main body or any organization separates from the mainstream, then isn't that causing diversity or controversy? And aren't YOU the cause of all that?" Jafrey gave a faded smile and said that **he was on his own and had nothing to do with Parsi or Irani Zarthoshti's.**

So here is hypocracy at its full height! The man, a muslim purports to convert non-Parsis to Parsis, enjoying the hospitality of a class of ignorant Parsis or Iranis, and says he has nothing to do with Parsis or Iranis. See ye! The hosts of Alibhai!

This is what happens amongst the Parsis of the great country of North America. Racial suicide is in the offing....

It is high time, Oh "Saoshyant", for your arrival!.....

K. N. Dastoor

A report on the Gatha Tamasha at London

**A Huge Exercise in Futility and A Great Demonstration of Confounding Uncertainties.
No Sense in the Vibratory Effect of our Manthra Prayers, thus spake prof. Irani.**

A curious thing has happened to me. In the last issue of Dini Avaz (Vol. 18-5, Sep Oct. 1993) I wrote about "A Gatha Tamasha at London" to be held on 5th, 6th, and 7th November 1993. And lo! I found myself sitting as a participant in that so termed "Gatha Colloquium" on all those three days at the "four star" hall of the Croydon Park Hotel, 7 Altyre Road, East Croydon, Surrey !! I was made to reach there through the affectionate feelings of a few friends and the generosity of a good well wisher from America. And to give you one more surprise, I sat there as the special correspondent of Jame Jamshed, Din Parast and Dini Avaz!

There was a change in the list of the speakers. Two out of the ten named in the last Dini Avaz were not there - Yasmin Jhabvala and Prof Shaul Shaheed. Three new names had appeared : Prof Paul Thime, Dr. Ilya Gersheviteh and Dasturji Dr. Hormazdiyar Mirza. I have reported the proceedings in some details in Jame Jamshed Weekly, on and from 14-11-1993. Here I will present a few points which will be of particular interest to the readers of Dini Avaz.

As the humble faithful, you may ask, was there any talk about the spiritual institutions and traditions which form the basic structure of our Daena and our life, like Sudreh Kushti, Manthra-Vaani, Yasna-Kriya Kaam, Atash Padshah, Dokhm-e-nashini, Meher-Patet-the Science and art of religious morality, Boonak-Pasbaani - the preservation of the racial gene ? The answer, a flat No.- unfortunately and sorrowfully. But the situation was not completely devoid of humour. Dr. Singhvi India's High Commissioner to U.K. and an eminent Counsel of Supreme Court, who inaugurated the Colloquium (shortly "Coqm"), was the only speaker who referred to "the great and noble traditions. His whole speech was devoted to

traditions. Almost every third sentence had the word 'traditions' in it. His was mainly an appeal to try to unlock the mysteries of our traditions, to internalise them, to "underpin them intellectually" in their "mystical Voyages" and "ethical perspectives." But his was the first and the last reference to traditions. He perhaps thought that the Coqm was to unravel the inner meanings of the Parsi traditions. Little was he aware that the Coqm was conceived and executed by or through the tradition breakers, and not tradition lovers, and was the child of the Gatha-Alone-Cult which understands (i.e. misunderstands) our spiritual disciplines and the Truths behind them, as "mythical mumb Jumbo". Prof Irani, admitted that he was not a scholar of the Gatha or the Gathic language and relied on the translations and commentaries of Humbach, Insler, Jafrey and Ichhaporia (Hifi). He did not show any hesitation in saying that the theory of vibratory and mystical effect of reciting Avesta had no sense - same Prof Irani who said at the World Parliament at Chicago that unlike Hindus Fire is not sacred to Parsis. And here lies the humour of the situation : Dr Singhvi is an ardent admirer of the Parsi tradition of the sacred fire; while passing near Udwada, he once came in to pay homage to Iranshah from outside the holy building; he once explained to the judges of the supreme court the Parsi procedure of consecrating the Holy fire; he was sincerely pleased to see Dastoorji Mirza of Iranshsh in the Coqm. And in the presence of Dastoorji himself Prof Irani blasphemed the sacred Manthra-Vanni, in which Dasturji is nurtured from his infancy and which the faithful Parsis love to recite—some for hours together-without caring for its philological meanings and Jimmicks. Amongst the participants of the Coqm there were lovers of Manthra prayers. Annoyance was seen on the faces of some of them at Prof. Irani's said tall-talk. One

of them was seen asking questions in private about a Manthra-Nirang from Baheram Yashta ! So here was the circuit of humour : Irani - Sanghvi-Dasturji Mirza- Iranshah-Manthra lovers:.....

The next question our faithful readers may ask : Was there any talk about the grand and glorious uncertainties glittering in the translations of the Gatha? The answer is again tinged with a streak of humour : YES. A very big YES. Almost every speaker had to say something on the extreme uncertainties of the Gathic translations. It seemed as if the coqm was a huge essay on the doubts, perplexities, obscurities, ambiguities and dilemma of the numerous hugely varying translations and interpretations of the Gatha. The already existing smoke of confusion became denser and blacker by this coqm. And it was the international scholars who were more eloquent about this! They not only talked about the uncertainties in so many profound words but had no hesitation in expressing their differences with each other on several points relating to the meanings, inferences, guesses and conjectures of the Gathic exertions. A very versatile 88 years old venerable professor Thime from Germany, whose versatility extends from veda, Sanskrit, Avesta and philology to painting, humanitarian studies and virgin marriage, said that he would never dare to translate a single Gatha; that he was not very convinced about the progress in the interpretation of the Gatha; that there were much "dissent and strife" and radical difference and contributions. Another elderly Prof. Ilya Gershevitch referred to the massive Gathological dolldrums of Chaos," and floundering in the Gathic ocean." Another 72 years old Prof. Hambach said that the access to the Gatha was much more difficult; some translations were based upon some "supposed content" or "anticipated interpretation"; there were "abnormal grammatical forms"; Gatha seemed to be an address to particular liturgy, who were Zarathushtra's participants of the rituals and not to ordinary people; there were deliberate ambiguities in almost all the stanzas; Gatha seemed to be arising from an archaic mysticism

of Zarathushtra's times. (I'll take you in Prof. Humbach's ritualistic background and archaic mysticism, later.)

Now here is a further surprise for you. The most eloquent to set out the grand confusion generated and enhanced by the Western oriented studies, was none other than Ali A. Jafarey ! As is the tradition with us the lawyers (particularly in India), I met and chatted with him, calling him "big brother" instead of "my learned friend", he being 6 years elder to me (72: 66), and some one having mistaken me as Jafarey! Of course, he did not kiss me like he did to Noshir Dadrevala at Chicago, but did present to me a copy of the paper he read at the coqm (Ses. I on 7-11-93).

The title of his paper was "The Gatha, and Translation, Explanation, Interpretation, Imagination". He said that the Gathas were composed by one person, Zarathushtra, but they had been translated by so many diverse persons of so many diverse backgrounds and motives and in so many diverse ways that the resulting translating led one "to imagine as many Zarathushtras as there are translators. He said, "The hair splitting methods used by some surgeons of translations simply mar the very beauty and sublimity of the Gatha, and some of them "look more like postmortem mutilated bodies than pieces of priceless art". (Look, who is talking ? It is this GAC who are trying to reduce our spiritually vibrating Religion to a dead body!) Having set out the "confounding confusions, Jafarey suggested" a standard version by a collective effort of outstanding scholars." Earlier Adi Davar had made the same suggestion. At the end of the coqm, he said, WZO would first examine the feasibility of the standard translation project, (should I shorten it as "G-strap"?) and proceed towards its execution later.

So the big question is the feasibility of G-strap . Will or can, it be practicable, achievable, possible? Mr. Jafarey himself said that he had suggested it as early as in 1964 but got nothing more than "nodding approvals", Is the reason far to seek ?

The coqm itself was the biggest argument to the feasibility of G-strap.

The dilemma of the West oriented studies is not confined to the guess factory of the Gathic translations alone. It covers everything else - the date, the authorship and even the existence of its purported author Zarathushtra. Max Muller said that according to the "critical scholars", He was a purely mythical fugure (Collected works: Chips from a German Workshop - V Vol 1-p. 74). He also said that Zarathushtra was not the author of the Gatha and the Gatha was written in the first century A.D. as revealed by Darmesteter, (ibid).

According to other expositors, the date of Zarathushtra and His purported Poetry (or songs as some say), the Gatha, vary from anything between 5000 B. C. of Aristotle and Tilak to K. R. Cama's : between 2300 to 1200 B.C.(Guj. Zar. Nameh, p.95), Boyce's 1700 to 1500B.C. (Zoroastrians - p-18), Bartholomae's 1000 to 900 B.C., West and Jackson's 660 - 583 B.C., Duperron's 589 to 512 B.C. , that is, in all, somewhere between 512 B.C. to 5000

B.C. - a period of 4500 years !! A gorgeous Himalayan " Scientific " uncertainty! Prof. Gershevitch at the coqm criticised scholars for arguing in favour of a date older than 600 B.C. and said that from the point of view of comparative linguistics, the Gatha " would have been" composed at a date later -than 600 B.C. Apart from the missing ring of conviction in his "would have been," his statement is a clearly implied indictment on the inexactness of the philological science and comparative linguistics. The conjectures about the Gathic date are based mainly on philological intricacies. The material question, then, is: What is this science of yours which is so inexact as to assign the hugely varying dates spread over thousands of years? Can you call it a Science, the fundamental ingredient of which is to try to stick to exactness at all costs ? And if the translations and meanings of this small composition of 17 poems (as they call it) are based upon such a science vibrating with such inexactitude, would it be wise for us, the Parsis, to be lured away by, or even to rely and depend on, them ?

(To be Continued)

K. N. D.