

Editorial –

DO THE "ZOROASTRIAN CONGRESSES" BRING ABOUT ANY GOOD?

COMPARE THEM WITH THE RELIGIOUS CAMPS HELD BY OUR HINDU BRETHERN

The Parsis who have settled in the Western countries are very fond of holding "religious" congresses, conferences and colloquiums. Two were held in July 1997 : one at London and the other at Chicago. Both were "Zoroastrian Youth" congresses. The London one was for world youths, Chicago for North American youths.

With great respect towards the exerting organisers and the youthful participants, I beg to ask : Have these grand assemblies done any good?

Parsis all over the world can be divided into three classes qua their attitudes towards religion:-

1. The orthodox, who can be tersely defined as those who are of the view that along with the moral code, the religious Institutions like Sudreh Kushti, Manthra Prayers, Atesh Beherams & Agiaris, Dokhma, Rituals, Boonak Pasbani (the preservation of the racial gene) are absolutely necessary for the spiritual upliftment of a Parsi and the survival of the community.

2. The liberals or radicals or non-conformists, or heterodox (originally baptised as 'reformists') are those who, prompted by their own avoidance of the aforesaid religious disciplines, contend that they are all outdated; that "freedom of choice" and good thoughts, words and deeds, are the only foundations of the "Zoroastrian" religion.

3. The lethargic, who are not much bothered about the controversy and yet would "like to know" or "are interested in" the matters of "our" religion and "our great Prophet," but themselves do not exert to know, being "too busy" with their worldly life.

The 'religious' congresses are convened by the first two classes - more by the liberals, and mostly attended by the third class.

Because of the controversy - which at times take bitter turns - between the liberals and the orthodox, such congresses have more of a political contour than religious.

The July 1997, London Congress was alleged to be orthodox oriented because of the presence of some so called orthodox priests from India and of Mrs. & Mr. Gordafriid and Temton Aresh of California. The Chicago congress was alleged to be liberal oriented because of a banner pamphlet with the heading "Freedom of Choice" and a paper setting out the "license" to be worldly happy alleged to be given in the Zor. religion and indirectly blaspheming other great Religions current amongst the humans on earth.

At Chicago, in answer to each of the questions: who would prefer to marry a Parsi only, and who are wearing Sudreh Kushti, hardly a dozen fingers were raised, out of a quite a few hundred youths. Almost half the youths present were born of mixed marriages - either way.

At London, there was a murmur amongst a group of youths that radical "priests" from America were not called at the congress. Mrs. Aresh had on more than one occasions thumped her hands on the table, including one on (the life and death?) question of "Mamma's boy". Some heat was generated on the question of conversion and mixed marriages. It was apparent that in spite of fan-like discussions on various topics - some trivial and some flimsy - the undercurrent - or rightly the overcurrent - was on that naughty or knotty question alone.

Were these then "religious" conferences? The parents of the lethargic class sent their children there, so that they may "learn something" about their religion and more importantly "come in contact" with other Parsis or "Zoroastrians". Have they learnt anything of their religion?

In Chicago, the organisers were at pains to sustain interest amongst the youthful participants. Many of them were least interested and had their eager eye on the coming coffee break. The interested youths were seemingly tired of that eternal talk of freedom of choice and manashni, gavashni, kunashni.

These congresses, conferences and colloquiums, whether youthful or elderly, are futile exercises, because "Religion" in the right sense - even dictionary sense - is absent; it has no existence there. **Religion is not just a matter of intellectual exercise; it is the way of life, nay life itself.** The word has the Latin root "religare", which means 'to bind'. That is, bounden duty of life; the duties as prescribed. (No 'license' to choose.) Religion is also connected with "relegere", meaning "to ponder over, to 'give heed to, observe, care for". **All Eastern Religions set out three components of Religion: Knowledge, Duty, Devotion. Knowledge is divine science beyond physical sciences; duty is the code of conduct to be carried out as spiritual exertions, with reverence towards one's Prophet; and devotion is profound love and attraction towards God and His Prophet.**

Tell me, my friends, is any one of these dictionary elements or the spiritual components ever present, even faintly, at these conferences? Does any highbrow professor or scholar say anything - even a word - on these practical application of Religion in life or on the spiritual and devotional aspect of the great Religion of Asho Zarathushtra? Does anybody try to enlighten the youth on the most beautiful and fascinating matters contained in our Religion? They just read some papers prepared after some exertion and the listeners listen often listlessly with their eyes on their watches. Some philological and grammatical or argumentative and controversial stuff is put forth, which goes in the ears, touches the brain, percolates down to the throat and throttles it. It is jammed there. All that it does is to increase the appetite down below in the stomach. The only organ which should throb in devotion viz. the heart, located between the throat and the stomach, is sent to a deep sleep, throughout the pompous proceedings.

That, my friends, is not a religious congress, not even a communal or social one. It is just a hazy assembly of a few talkative ladies and gentlemen talking to a slumbering audience who, at the end, has not learnt anything. **Look at the camps and seminars arranged by our Hindu brethren. They are intended to invoke love and devotion to Religion and its divine Entitles, Personalities, Saints and Sages, and to teach the way of life as ordained in Religion, through the channel of devotion.** We see a powerful wave of divine love vibrating in such a camp. The listeners listen in rapt attention and with fierce concentration. The throb of devotion often makes them stand up and dance in ecstasy. We see their eyes moistened. Some weep copiously. When they go back to their homes and work, they feel invigorated and exalted. Their spiritual battery is energised and charged. They feel the divine presence of God and His divine Forces and Entities ever with them. Their faith rises. They are ready to face the problems and obstacles in life with calm and serene confidence.

Can these highbrow "Zoroastrian" conferences ever dream of achieving this? What is the sense in satisfying the already inflated ego of the professors and scholars and then go home with one's wallet lightened and the heart empty? If anything, you will just say, without following anything of the highbrow rumblings, "Oh! Sure our Religion is great. I am proud of it" - and leave it at that. That pride has no meaning. Pride is no good. It goes before a fall..... And the fall of our community is not far, if the divine does not intervene, and we do nothing about our Daena, except to hold lustrous and boisterous conferences.

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