

Talks by Prof.Vevaina and Daryaee at Daremeher in S. California

Friends,

There are two lectures on Sunday morning, June 28, 2009 at the Zoroastrian Center in Westminster, California, from 10 am to 12 pm.

Dr. Yuhan Vevaina will talk on the subject of "Charity and Benevolence in Zoroastrianism, from Gathas to Today"

and,

Dr. Touraj Daryaee will talk on the subject of "To protect the poor and the needy in the Sassanian period"

**Regards,
Maneck Bhujwala**

Dr. Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina

Charity and Benevolence in Zoroastrianism from Gathas to Today

Speaker's Biography:

Yooohan S.D. Vevaina, Born in Bombay, India to a Parsi family. Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina received his Ph.D. from the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University in 2007. After completing his dissertation, Studies in Zoroastrian Exegesis and Hermeneutics with a Critical Edition of the Sudgar Nask of Denkard Book 9, Dr. Vevaina served as a Core Fellow in the Core Curriculum in Harvard College and as a Lecturer at Harvard from 2007-2008. He has taught a number of courses related to Zoroastrianism including, Old Persian and Middle Language and Literature, an Introduction to Zoroastrianism and a seminar course on Contemporary Zoroastrianism. His research interests include: critical approaches to the study of Zoroastrianism; the history and development of Zoroastrian interpretation; the interplay between text and liturgy in ritual practice; colonial and post-colonial constructions of religion; and religion in Diaspora. He is currently working on a number of articles and a book project. He is also a guest speaker for CZC Mobedyaar classes.

Dr. Touraj Daryaee

To protect the poor and the needy in the Sassanian Period

Follow by Short questions and answers session.

***Free and open to the public.

Speaker's Biography:

Touraj Daryaee was born in Tehran, Iran. Daryaee took his Ph.D. in History at the University of California, Los Angeles in 1999. Dr. Daryaee's research has focused on ancient and early medieval history of Iran, specifically the Sasanian Empire. He has worked on Middle Persian

literature, editing and translating several texts with commentary on geography, dinner speech, chess and backgammon. He is also interested in the history of Zoroastrianism in Late Antiquity and its encounter with Islam. He is the editor of the *Name-ye Iran-e Bastan: The International Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies* as well as the electronic journal, *Bulletin of Ancient Iranian History* and the director of *Sasanika: Late Antique Near East Project*. Dr. Daryaee is Howard C. Baskerville Professor in the history of Iran and the Persianate World and the Associate Director of the Dr. Samuel M. Jordan Center for Persian Studies and Culture at the University of California, Irvine.

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Friends,

Following is a summary of two informative lectures I attended on Sunday, June 28, 2009, at the California Zoroastrian Center(CZC), in Westminster, California, USA. It is based on my recollection, so I apologize for any omissions and errors. Some of the detail information such as about Iranian communist authors was obtained from a Google online search, specific wording of part of Gatha verse and translation from Ervad Kavasji Edulji Kanga's book, etc.

**Regards,
Maneck Bhujwala**

Dr. Khushro Mehrfar opened the session, thanking the CZC board members, Mobed Rostam Vahidi, facility manager, Mr. Ardeshir Baghanian and his assistant who operated the audio system, the Samuel Jordan Persian Studies department at U.C. Irvine, California, the speakers, and all attendees. He recognized Dr. Jennifer Rose (who teaches Zoroastrian Studies at college level) who attended and who had brought pictures from her recent trip to Iran which she will show at her talk to be scheduled at the CZC in near future. He also commended Dr. Vevaina's parents (who were also present) for having raised such a worthy son, as well as the parents of Dr. Daryaee (who were not present).

Dr. Mehrfar apologized to the speakers for a somewhat smaller audience with the possible explanation that many Iranians had gone to attend a mass protest rally in Los Angeles (in support of the brave Iranians who sacrificed their safety and well-being and some with their lives, from the beatings and bullets of regular police and plainclothes Basij moral police and revolutionary guard).

Dr. Mehrfar then introduced Prof. Dr. Daryaee, who was born in Iran and now is an associate director of the Persian Studies program and who teaches at University of California, Irvine, and organizes lectures and seminars by many scholars on ancient Iran at U.C.Irvine.

Prof. Touraj Daryaee's lecture

titled, "To protect the poor and the needy in the Sassanian period", demolished some false reasons about the sudden fall of the Sassanian empire at the hands of the Arab armies, that have been assumed as facts by many people.

Dr. Daryaee said that in order to do a scientific research on historical matters, one needs to study primary sources of information. He pointed out that the current false understanding about the fall of the Sassanian empire was mainly due to the study of secondary sources of information and neglecting the primary sources.

False assumptions are as follows:

- * Class distinctions (upper class, lower class, etc.) and ill-treatment of lower classes, which was the reason that the Arab invaders were welcomed by the lower class Iranians and their religion was readily accepted by them.
- * Pressure from the Priests, who were interested in taking money (and focused on rituals), which was another reason that the lower classes accepted the new religion
- * Rulers of Iran had become corrupt, collecting taxes from the people and enjoying a life of luxury, (which was the reason the people accepted the new rulers from Arabia).

Dr. Daryaee mentioned that Iranians like Ali Shariati (an Islamist, sociologist, revolutionary who was influenced by Marxism while in France, and believed in class war to bring about a classless society), Karim Keshavarz (a communist who translated the Russian authored history of Persia from Russian to Persian), and Jalal-Ahmed (who had joined the communist Tudeh party and later the Socialist party), were responsible for spreading the above concepts based on secondary sources such as the Persian history written by Communist Russian authors. Edward G. Browne (Professor of Arabic at Cambridge University, U.K.) who authored "A Literary History of Persia", also made the wrong assumption that the Arab invasion was a blessing for Iran.

Dr. Daryaee presented evidence from the following primary sources to disprove the above-mentioned false assumptions:

- * Archaeological finds of clay seals in many parts of Iran with Pahlavi inscriptions indicating the Priests administering "Office of Protector of the Poor" in specific cities. A few pictures of these clay seals were shown for the Office of Protector of the Poor for the cities of Shiraz and Daylam (in northern Iran). This shows that the rulers had a high degree of concern for the welfare of the poor sections of the population, and the priests were actively involved in ensuring the well-being of the poor.

- * Passages in the Gathas, Yashts, and Pahlavi texts specifically teach about taking care of the poor. Neglecting the poor was considered as a sin.

- * World history describes the rise and fall of all empires. Arab armies caused the fall of empires of Byzantine Romans, Turks, Chinese, etc. also. Why is it that the same false assumptions are not given for their fall also ?

Dr. Daryaei concluded by advising that we should not make judgments based on secondary sources of information, that may have some political or other agenda. Instead scientific research should be done using primary sources of information.

When asked about his opinion on what caused the fall of the Sassanian empire, Dr. Daryaei said that it was probably due to a combination of several reasons, such as a military weakened by wars with Romans, internal divisions within the military (some military units did not come to the aid of King Yazdegerd during the Arab attacks), uniting of Arab tribes, and environmental disasters (earthquake and floods in the bread basket area of Iran).

After Dr. Daryaei's lecture, Dr. Mehrfar introduced the President of CZC who also thanked the speakers and attendees for participating in the lecture event. Then Dr. Mehrfar introduced Professor Dr. Yuhana Vevaina, who was born in Mumbai, India, and was now teaching at Harvard University in the United States.

Prof. Yuhana Vevaina's lecture

titled "Charity and Benevolence in Zoroastrianism, from Gathas to Today" cited evidence from various sources indicating the religious requirement for charity to the needy, and a continuity of the practice of charity by Zarathushtra in Iran and India throughout the centuries.

* Dr. Vevaina mentioned the higher importance of certain concepts depending on the position of the verses in the scriptures, and the location of the concept of providing for the poor. For example, the Yatha Ahu Vairyō prayer which is recited at the beginning of the Gatha passages and has the teaching to help the poor ".....Khshathremcha Ahurai aa yim drigubyo dadat vastaarem" or "...that person who constitutes himself to the protector (or the nourisher) of the poor, (accepts) the sovereign rule (of the entire world) (as it were) of Ahuramazda", and the location of the reference to the poor in the last verse of the last Gatha passage Yasna 53.9 "... tat Mazda tavaa khshathrem yaa erejejoyee daahee drigaove vahyo." or "....O Mazda ! Your kingship (is such) that the poor person who leads a righteous life will receive your highest blessing".

* Dr. Vevaina pointed out that the teaching requiring Zarathushtra to provide for the welfare of poor people was present in passages in several other religious texts such as Dadastane Dinig and Arda Viraz Namag.

* About the practice of charity, Dr. Vevaina said that Zarathushtra in Iran and India lived a life of charitable giving to the needy, continuously over the many centuries since the founding of the religion. Not only did they help needy fellow Zarathushtras but also the poor and needy of other communities in Iran, India, Pakistan, Hong Kong, and other countries wherever they migrated.

* Commenting on the relationship of close cooperation and mutual help that existed between the Zarathushtras of Iran and India (after the fall of the Sassanian empire), Dr. Vevaina said that Zarathushtra of India used to correspond with their co-religionists in Iran on matters of religion, and there were scholar-priests who traveled from Iran to India to instruct on religious issues.

* Dr. Vevaina also talked about the time when Iranian Zarathushtis were in a very distressed condition with their population reduced (about 8000) during the mid-nineteenth century during the rule of the Qajar dynasty, and when the Zarathushtis of India sent their emissary, Maneckji Limji Hataria to travel to Iran and report on the condition of the Iranian Zarathushtis and their needs, and the subsequent fund raising in India for the benefit of their co-religionists in Iran, repairing of homes, schools, and fire temples in Iran, petitioning by Maneckji Hataria to Shah Naseeruddin of Iran to remove the hated Jizya tax burden on Zarathushtis which he did. There is a Ratan Tata Hall built in Yazd, and funding of a school by Mrs. Desai.

The Jizya tax was responsible for keeping the Zarathushtis of Iran in an economically suppressed condition. When this tax was removed by the Shah, the Zarathushtis of Iran gradually became successful in business, trade, and other fields, and they produced many philanthropic persons like Meherban Zarthoshti, Arbab Rostam Guiv and others who did charities for the poor.

* Dr. Vevaina mentioned the relatively unknown philanthropist Zarathushti who lived in Surat, India, by the name Rustam Maneck, who used to pay the Jizya tax on behalf of the poor people during the rule of Mongol emperor Aurangzeb, and who also paid a princely sum of Rs.10,000 as ransom to Maratha king Shivaji (who sacked the city of Surat) for release of Zarathushti hostages.

* Referring to the false assumptions made by some scholars that the Zarathushtis had forgotten about the proper understanding of their religion after the fall of the Sassanian empire, Dr. Vevaina said that many books written by Zarathushtis in Persian and Gujarati have not been read and studied by scholars otherwise they would not make such false judgment. He said that these books need to be studied and researched properly.

* Commenting on the large number of Zarathushti charities in India, he referred to a report by Professor John Hinnels that indicated the number of Parsi charities as being about 20 percent of the total number of charitable organizations in the whole of India.