

Weekly Zoroastrian Scripture Extract # 374: Manekji Limji Hateria – “Savior of Iranian Zarathushtris”

Hello all Tele Class friends:

Our Forefathers in Gujarat, India

Let us travel back in time to the arrival of our forefathers from Khorasan, Iran to avoid persecution by Arabs sometime between 721 – 936 CE. They settled in Sanjan, Gujarat, thanks to the local King Jadi Rana who not only gave them asylum but also the place to establish our Iranshah Atash Behram. After many centuries of peaceful living, the Muslims attacked Sanjan, Parsis fought side by side with the local Maharaja army but finally defeated by them. Iranshah was carried to the Bahrot Hills and after some years in those caves, Iranshah was moved to Vansda Hills and from there to Navsari at the invitation of Navsari Anjuman led by the famous Humdin Changa Asha, where Iranshah stayed for over two centuries.

The Persian Revayats

During this time, Parsis were quite ignorant about many Religious practices and so knowing that their Humdins in Iran were quite knowledgeable about those practices, the Parsis sent their emissaries with questions to Iran and got answers from the knowledgeable Dasturs of Iran. These series of exchanges on worship, customs, rituals and observance are called Revayats. Over three centuries, twenty-two Revayats were sent from India to Persia. The first Revayat was brought in 1478 CE by Nariman Hoshang of Broach, supported by the same Changa Asha mentioned above.

With these Revayats, our Iranian Humdins educated Parsis in our Religion for which we are very grateful.

Conditions of Parsis in Bombay and our Iranian Humdins in 1800's

Now, let us travel forward in time to mid 1800s.

Zoroastrians, in large part, lived in two countries - Iran and India.
Conditions of Zoroastrians in these countries were very different.

In India, under the British Raj, Parsis became prosperous, influential and powerful, and helped the British in developing the city of Bombay.

In Iran, Qajar dynasty was in power.

Persecution of Zarathushtris resumed under them:

- wall of their house had to be lower than that of Muslims

- forbidden from erecting new houses or repairing old ones
- Zarathushtri converting to Islam was entitled to all inheritance,
- have to follow dress regulations
 - are forbidden to educate their children
- Zoroastrian murders were unpunished
- Kidnapped and forced conversion were rampant
- they were not allowed to ride horses just donkeys and must dismount their donkeys if passing a Muslim
 - cruel Jizya (poll) tax levied on them for 1200+ years

The Society for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Zoroastrians in Persia (Amelioration Society)

A number of Iranians escaped and made their arduous journey to India usually by land and brought the terrible news to the Parsis of Bombay.

A beautiful girl “Gulestan” escaped forced marriage to a Muslim and arrived in Mumbai with her father. She married a prosperous Parsi Humdin, Framji Bhaajis Panday and they had 5 boys and 4 girls. She helped Irani Zarathushtris escaping to Bombay.

Their third son, Mehrwan Panday started a fund to help Iranian Zarathushtris and founded “The Society for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Zoroastrians in Persia” (Amelioration Society) in 1853 with the help of some rich Parsi Sethias like Sir Dinshaw Maneckji Petit, 1st Baronet. Its first priority was to send an emissary to Iran to find the conditions of our Humdins, and report back to them.

Manekji Limji Hataria (1813 – 1890)

Manekji Limji Hataria (1813 – 1890) was born in Surat. He earned his own bread from fifteen, traveling widely as a commercial agent in India. As a businessman he had travelled to various destinations including Sindh and spoke several languages. By the time of his appointment, he was already experienced, self-reliant and resourceful, and his choice by the Society proved a wholly admirable one.

He was appointed by the Amelioration Society as their representative. He was asked to travel to Iran, study the conditions of the Zoroastrians and report back. On March 31, 1854, he set sail from Mumbai with his 16-year-old son, Hormozji, and finally reached Yazd in July 1854.

Buildings and Renovations

He started to learn the language and begin to take an inventory of our Humdins in Yazd, Kerman, Tehran, and Shiraz. He was appalled by the paltry total of 7,200.

With the help of British and Russians, he achieved a success in lifting the restrictions on renovating our Atashkadehs, Dakhmas as well as building new structures.

England was the world power during these times. “The sun never sets on British Empire” was the familiar saying during these times. British were very influential in Iran. Maneckji was

helped by the British Ambassador in Iran, Sir Henry Rawlinson, through whom he met with the Qajar king in 1857 and put forward his case but nothing came out of this meeting. With the help of Sir Dinshaw Petit, Dadabhai Naoroji and others, Hataria persisted in advocating for the Zoroastrians in Iran.

Education

Then, much to the dismay of the jealous local authorities, Hataria motivated local Zoroastrian leaders to build schools based on the model used by the Parsees in India. The first school built was in Tehran in 1860. By 1882 he had eleven other schools constructed and functioning in Kerman and Yazd cities and villages.

Of all the changes he introduced, this farsighted and simple act laid the foundation of a Zoroastrian renaissance for the world was entering an information age. As a result of this Zoroastrian emphasis on a good education, Zoroastrians today make up one of the most educated communities in the world.

“Wherever he went, Hataria started to light fires - in temples, in schools, in minds and in hearts.”

His Return to Bombay to Report his work

He returned to Bombay in 1863 to report his findings.

The Bombay Parsis were horrified to hear his findings.

His report was published in 1865 in Bombay as a book in old Gujarati with lots of Persian/Arabic words: “Reeshaleh ej-haareh sheeaateh Iran yaaneh Iran deshnee safarnaa saarno report” (the report of the travels in Iran).

Its English translation: “A Parsi Mission to Iran” was published in Bombay in 1865.

He reported:

“I found the Zoroastrians to be exhausted and trampled, so much that even no one in this world can be more miserable than them.”

“Zoroastrians had no legal protection, lived in considerable poverty, living in huts, subsisting on a diet of bread, rice and vegetables.”

Manekji reported that immediate need was money, but long-term need was education and removal of the obnoxious Jaziya (poll) tax.

His Return to Iran and his efforts to abolish the Jaziya Tax

He returned to Iran in 1865 and started on his major projects.

Significant sum of monies was raised and sent to Hataria. He started a school in Yazd and Kerman, gave scholarship, money to parents of kids to send them to school.

There were several threats and attempts on his life during this mission.

Hataria also led an arduous campaign to abolish the oppressive Jaziya (poll) tax.

In addition to Maneckji's campaign in Iran, influential Parsis in India like Sir Dinshaw Petit via Indian Viceroy, Lord Northbrook, and Dadabhoy Naoroji in London pressured the British to influence the Qajar King to remove the Jaziya Tax.

The result of these activities—Hataria's in Tehran and those of prominent Parsis in India and Great Britain, plus the political pressure of the British Raj—was the abolition of the poll tax by a Qajar farmān “royal decree” dated Ramazān 1299/August 1882, after 1200+ long years.

It was the crowning achievement of this tireless worker for Irani Zoroastrians.

Manekji built boarding schools, girls' schools, Atashkadehs, Dokhmas, dispensaries in Yazd, Kerman, Sharifabad, and in other small villages near Yazd.

After Maneckji Hataria

During his last years, Maneckji stayed in Tehran until his death in 1890. In 1906, Mozaffar al-Din Shah Qajar was forced to sign a new constitution which allowed 5 seats in Majlis (2 Armanian, 1 Assarian, 1 Jewish, 1 Zoroastrian).

Reza Shah Pahlavi came to power in 1925 and conditions improved quite a bit.

Lesson Taught by Maneckji Limji Hataria

Manekji taught us a lesson: We as Zarathushtris must work together and help each other in need..

So, let us remember this special person, Manekji Limji Hataria, who devoted his life for the betterment of our Humdins in Iran. For this recognition, Zoroastrians of Iran have named their schools and other institutions after him, and his statues are found in Zoroastrian places.

Let us all thank him for his dedication. Each year on his death anniversary on 15th February, a Baj and Jashan are performed in his name at the Wadiaji Atash Behram in Bombay.

Let us pray in his memory:

Anusheh Rawaan Rawaani, Behdin Manekji Behdin Limji aedar yaad baad.

We remember here the immortal soul of Behdin Manekji Behdin Limji.

One Iranian Humdin leader stated:

“He was the Savior of our Irani Humdins in Iran!”

SPD Comments:

1. Renowned Zoroastrian scholar and English Professor Late Mary Boyce in her article: *Maneckji Limji Hataria in Iran - K. R. Cama Oriental Institute Golden Jubilee Volume - Bombay, 1969* – gives a wonderful account of Maneckji in Iran. It is available at:

<http://www.zoroastrian.org.uk/vohuman/Library/Maneckji%20Limji%20Hatari%20in%20Iran.htm>

2. In this article, she mentions the following about Maneckji's book mentioned above:

“I am much Indebted to Ervad Dr. P. K. Anklesaria for his kindness in giving me a copy of an English translation he has had made of this book (which is Maneckji's report on his first decade's work in Iran); and further for supplying for references in the present article the page-numbers of the Gujarati text.”

This was none other than late Dr. Peshotan Kawasji Anklesaria, the student, teacher and Principal of our beloved MF Cama Athornan Institute, whom I knew very well and he gifted me his personal Yazashne in our Din-e-Dabireh Avesta script which I will cherish forever.

I am trying to see if I can get a copy of this English translation by Dr. Anklesaria.

3. Encyclopaedia Iranica also has a good article on Maneckji at:

<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hataria-maneckji-limji>

which states that an abridged English translation of Maneckji's book was serialized in *Parsiana* 13/2, 1990, pp. 60-64; 13/3, 1990, pp. 34-35; 13/4, 1990, pp. 39-42; 13/5, 1990, pp. 25-26; 13/6, 1990, pp. 29-32; 13/7, 1991, pp. 14-18.

I am trying to see if I can get these archived articles from *Parsiana*.

4. Our very good friend and ZTFE London President, Malcolm Deboo, has a very detailed article at:

<http://www.zoroastrian.org.uk/vohuman/Article/Seth%20Maneckji%20Limji%20Hataria.htm>

with the title:

Seth Maneckji Limji Hataria - The Martin Luther King of Zoroastrianism & The Struggle for Zoroastrian Civil Rights in Iran.

He gives a detailed account of the efforts by Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE) during 19th and 20th centuries by ZTFE Presidents Dadabhoy Naoroji and Sir Mancherjee Merwanjee Bhowanagjee for the amelioration of our Humdins in Iran and for the abolishment of the Jaziya Tax. It is a quite amazing reading.

5. And finally our very good friend and now FEZANA youngest President Arzan Wadia in his February 14, 2020 *Parsi Khabar* issue presented a very good article on Maneckji by our another very good friend and Parsi Historian Marzban J. Giara at:

<https://parsikhabar.net/history/manekji-limji-hataria/22093/>

May the Flame of Fellowship, Love, Charity and Respect for all burn ever eternal in our hearts so we can do HIS work with humility, diligence and eternal enthusiasm!

In HIS SERVICE 24/7!

Atha Jamyat, Yatha Aafrinaamahi! (May it be so as we wish!)

Love and Tandoorasti, Soli