

Islam and Iran: A Historical Study of Mutual Services

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Al-Islam.org

Al-Tawhid Vol.6, N.2, 1989

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Publisher(s):

[Al-Tawhid Islamic Journal](#) [2]

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A discussion of the mutual services of Islam and Iran, the revival of the Persian language, and the Iranian choice of Shi'i Islam.

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Islam and Iran: A Historical Study of Mutual Services Part 2

Martyr Ayatullah Murtada Mutahhari

Translated from the Persian by Dr. Wahid Akhtar

Two currents in the history of Iran have caused a misunderstanding among some people who, knowingly or unknowingly, project them as the expressions of the Iranians' resistance and reaction to Islam, or at least to Arabs. These are: the revival of Persian language and the Shi'i faith. It is, therefore, necessary for us to deal at some length with these two phenomena – one of which is concerned with our official language and the other is related to our State religion bringing out the points which are relevant to the issue under investigation.

The Persian Language

One of the issues used as a pretext to claim that Islam was imposed on the Iranians, is raised in the following manner: It is said that the Iranians preserved their indigenous language throughout their long history and did not allow it to be eliminated and replaced by the Arabic language.

What a strange argument! Does the acceptance of Islam make it obligatory upon a people to give up their own language and adopt Arabic as their sole means of expression? Where is such a condition laid down in the Qur'an or *hadith* or Islamic law?

As a principle, Islam, which is a universal creed, does not raise the issue of language. It never occurred to the Iranians even in their wildest flights of imagination that the reviving and speaking of the Persian language amounts to opposition to Islam – nor they should have imagined such a thing.

If the revival of Persian was aimed at combating Islam, what was the reason for the Iranians' interest and sincere efforts in compiling and reviving the study of Arabic etymology, grammar, syntax, morphology, figures of speech, rules of eloquence and rhetoric? The Iranians' contribution to the development of Arabic studies is far greater than that of Arabs themselves.

Had the revival of the Persian language been directed towards fighting Islam, Arabs or the Arabic language, the people of Iran would have diverted all their efforts to compile and develop the lexicography, grammar, rhetoric and etymology of Persian instead of devoting their energies to the study and development of the lexicography, grammar, etymology, rhetoric and eloquence of the Arabic language, or they, at least, could have abstained from propagating and supporting Arabic.

The Iranians did not pay attention to Persian with a view to opposing Islam or Arab influence, nor did they consider Arabic an alien language. They regarded Arabic as the language of Islam and not as the language of the Arabs. As they accepted Islam as a universal faith, they accepted Arabic also as their own language as well as that of all Muslims.

In reality, if each of the other languages of the world, such as Persian, Turkish, English, French or German, is the tongue of a nation and people, Arabic alone is the language of a scripture. For instance, Persian is the language of a nation and people and innumerable individuals have a share in its survival and continuity. Its existence does not depend on the existence of any of its individual speakers, for it is not specially related to any person or book.

Neither it is the language of Firdawsi or Rudaki alone, nor it is the language of Nizami or Sa'di or Mawlawi or Hafiz, or any other particular individual. It is the language of all of them. But Arabic alone is the language of a scripture, the Qur'an. The Qur'an itself preserves and safeguards it, and has been the only factor responsible for its life and continuity.

All the works written in this language reflect the impact of the Qur'an and were produced on account of

the Qur'an. Even the grammar of this language came into existence on account of the Qur'an. All those persons who contributed to Arabic and wrote books in Arabic had been concerned with the Qur'an. It was for the sake of the Qur'an that books of philosophy, mysticism, history, medicine, mathematics and law had been written or translated into this language.

As a matter of fact, the Arabic language is the language of a Book and not the language of a nation or a people. If outstanding personalities have paid greater respect to this language than their own mother tongue, they did so due to their belief that it was not confined to any particular nation but was as the language of their creed. For the same reason, they never considered such an attitude to be a sign of disregard for their own language.

The people of non-Arab countries believe Arabic to be the language of their faith, while their own mother tongue was regarded as the language of their people. Mawlawi, following some of his famous Arabic verses in the Mathnawi, that is:

أَقْتُلُونِي أَقْتُلُونِي يَا ثِقَاتٍ إِنَّ فِي قَتْلِي حَيَاةً فِي حَيَاةٍ

بارسی گوگرجه نازی خوشتر است عشق را خود صد زبان دیگر است

*Speak Persian, though Arabic is sweeter;
Love itself speaks in a hundred other tongues.*

In this couplet Mawlawi expresses his preference for Arabic in comparison to Persian, his own mother tongue, because of its being the language of his faith.

Sa'di, in the fifth chapter of the *Gulistan*, narrates the fable of a youth of Kashghar who was studying al-Zamakhshari's introduction to Arabic syntax. In this story, he describes Persian as the language of the common man and Arabic as the language of scholars and learned men.

Hafiz, in one of his popular *ghazals*, says:

اگرچه عض هنرپیش باری ادبی است زبان خموش و لکن دهان پر از عربی است

*Though boasting of one's culture in the presence of the beloved is disrespect,
My tongue is tied, yet my mind is full of Arabic expressions.*

According to the late Qazwini in the *Best maqaleh* ("Twenty Essays"), one of the spiders caught in the web of its own folly – of whom there are not a few these days, with the blessings of the imperialists – always held a grudge against Hafiz for his speaking of Arabic in this couplet as a mark of culture!

Islam, as said above, does not address itself specially to any particular people or group, so that it should grant official status to their tongue and set aside other languages. Zayd ibn Thabit, according to al Mas'udi's report in *al-Tanbih wa, al-'ishraf*, had, at the Prophet's behest, learnt the Persian, Roman, Coptic and Ethiopian languages from such people in al-Madtnah as knew any one of them; he held the office of the interpreter to the Prophet (S). The books of history have recorded that Amir al-Mu'minin `Ali (A) occasionally spoke Persian.

On the whole, it may be said that a faith and creed that is meant for all human beings cannot depend solely on any particular language.

Every nation with its language and script, which are inevitable expressions of its culture and taste, is able to follow such a creed without encountering any restriction or hindrance.

In accordance with this, it should not be surprising that the Iranians continued to speak the Persian language after embracing Islam; for language and religion are not inseparably related to one another. Therefore, the biased critics of Iran are not justified in raising the issue of language as an evidence of the Iranians' resistance to Islam .

As a matter of principle, not only plurality of languages is not an impediment in the way of accepting Islam, it is considered a means of the progress of the faith, because each of the various languages with its special beauty and niceties can render an additional service to Islam. One of the achievements of Islam has been that different nations with varied languages and cultures embraced it and each contributed to enrich it with its specific aesthetic taste, culture and language.

Had Persian been eliminated, we would not have today been in possession of such valuable Islamic masterpieces as the *Mathnawi* of Mawlana, the *Gulistan* of Sa'di, the poetical works of Hafiz, Nizami and hundreds of other beautiful literary works which are filled to the brim with Islamic and Qur'anic ideas and have made Persian an immortal and inseparable part of the Islamic heritage. How good it would have been had there been other languages of Muslims which could also have served Islam with their specific genius and beauty! This was our first point.

Secondly, what people and factors have been responsible for keeping Persian alive? Was it the Iranians themselves who revived Persian or were the non-Iranian elements more responsible in this matter? Was the sentiment of Iranian nationalism the active factor in this process, or were many other political factors with no relation to Iranian nationhood instrumental in reviving Persian?

Historical evidence reveals that the `Abbasids, themselves Arab and of Arab stock, were more active in promoting Persian than Iranians. The reason was that they in their fight against the Umayyads, who pursued a policy that favoured Arabs to non-Arabs, adopted an antiArab political line. Because of this policy, the Arab nationalists of today laud the rule of the Umayyads and are more or less critical of the `Abbasids.

The `Abbasids, for the sake of struggle against the Umayyads, whose policy was based on Arab nationalism and Arab racism, opposed all elements that supported the Arab domination over non-Arabs and promoted the non-Arab elements with a view to weaken the hold of Arabs on other nationalities. With this aim in view, they promoted Persian and even opposed the Arabic language. Imam Ibrahim, the founder of the `Abbasid dynasty, wrote to Abu Muslim Khurasani: "See that not a single person in Iran speaks Arabic, and whosoever is found speaking Arabic kill him". [1](#)

Frye, in his book, writes:

In my opinion the Arab themselves contributed to the spread of Persian in the east at the expense of local languages such as Sogdian or other dialects. [2](#)

The author of *Rayhanat al-`adab* states:

Al-Ma'mun went to Khurasan in 170/786, and everyone from among the local scholars and elite sought his favour by means of some kind of service or through composing a eulogy. Abu al-`Abbas Maruzi, who possessed a mastery of both Arabic and Dari, recited a eulogy composed in a mixed language, having both Arabic and Persian words. Al-Ma'mun was pleased, and ordered that one thousand dinars (gold coins of eighteen grains each) be given to him regularly. Thereafter, Persian-speaking persons were attracted to write in that style and Persian poetry, which had been given up as a result of Arab domination, became popular again. [3](#)

Following are some lines from Maruzi's eulogy written for al-Ma'mun:

ای رسانیده به دولت فرق خود برفرفدین گسترانیده به فضل وجود بر عالم بدین

مر خلافت راتوشایسته، چومردم دیده را دین یزدان راتوبایسته، چورخ راهرد و غین

کس بدین منوال پیش ازمن چنین شعری نگفت مرزبان فارسی راهت با این نوع بّین

لیک از آن گفتم من این مدحت نورانا این لغت گیرد از مدح و ثنای حضرت توزیب و زین

You, who have raised your lofty head above the two bright stars of Ursa Minor! Your graceful and magnanimous hands extend over the world.

You are as worthy of the Caliphate as the pupil of the eyes.

You are as necessary for the faith of God as the eyes for a face. Nobody composed poetry in the style that I recite,

*Though the Persian language is accustomed to this kind of poetry. I composed your eulogy in this tongue,
That it may acquire elegance from your excellency's praise.*

On the other hand, we see many Muslim rulers of Iranian origin who did not show much interest in Persian. For instance the Tahirids, the Daylamites and the Samanids, who were all of pure Iranian stock, did not do anything to advance the cause of Persian. Contrarily, the Ghaznawids, who were of non-Iranian origin, became instrumental in the revival of Persian. Frye, in *The Heritage of Persia*, writes:

We know that the Tahirids favoured the use of Arabic at their court at Nishapur, and the last member of the dynasty was noted for his fine Arabic style. [4](#)

Earlier we have quoted the same orientalist in connection with the Daylamites' interest in Arabic. The Samanids, as said above, were from the lineage of Bahram Chubin, the renowned military commander of the Sasanid era. The rulers of this dynasty are considered as having been the most committed and just Muslim rulers in the history of Iran. They showed utmost sincerity and devotion in their attachment to Islam and Islamic institutions.

Quoting from al-Sam'ani's *al-'Ansab* in the scholarly introduction to his book *Ahadith al-Mathnawi*, the author (Faruzanfar), while describing the gradual impact of the traditions of the Prophet (S) on the development of literature and sciences in the Islamic world, writes:

Many of the nobles and ministers who encouraged poets and patronized writers and secretaries were themselves considered narrators (*ruwat*) of *hadith*.

For instance, among Samanid rulers and nobles, Amir Ahmad ibn Asad ibn Samin (d. 250/864) and his sons, Abu Ibrahim Isma'il ibn Ahmad (d. in Safar 295/907), Abu al-Hasan Nasr ibn Ahmad (d. Jamidi al-Thani 279/893) and Abu Ya'qub Ishaq ibn Ahmad (d. 21 Safar 301/913), have been mentioned in the *tabaqat* of *ruwat*. Abu al-Fadl Muhammad ibn 'Ubayd Allah al-Bal'ami (d. 10 Safar 319/931), the famous vizier of the Samanids, used to narrate *hadith*. Amir Ibrahim ibn Abi 'Imran Simjur and his son, Abu al-Hasan Nisir al-Dawlah Muhammad ibn Ibrihim, among the most eminent nobles and commanders of Khurasan, were among the narrators of *hadith*.

Similarly, Abu 'Ali Muzaffar (or Muhammad) ibn Abi al-Hasan (killed in Rajab 388/998), who was amir of Khurasan, and declared himself to be independent, was a narrator and used to hold meetings for dictating tradition, and was heard by Abu 'Abd Allah Hakim ibn al-Ba' (author of the well-known book, *al-Mustadrak*; d. 405/1014). [5](#)

At the court of the Samanids, despite their pure Iranian origin, Persian was not encouraged or promoted, and their Iranian viziers also showed no interest in Persian. The Shi'i Daylamites, too, adopted a similar attitude in this regard. On the contrary, the Sunni, Turkish Ghaznawids patronized and developed Persian in their regime.

All these facts indicate that factors and causes other than national and racial prejudices were responsible for saving and reviving Persian. The Saffirids, who paid attention to Persian, were they motivated by a pro-Iranian and anti-Arab sentiment, or was there some other motive at work? Frye says:

Perhaps the Saffarid dynasty in Seistan, which rose from humble origins, called forth New Persian since its founder Ya'qub knew no Arabic, and according to tradition he wanted poetry recited in a language he understood, not Arabic. [6](#)

According to this view, it may be said that the Saffarids took interest in Persian due to being commoners and illiterates.

Frye, after referring to a trend involving the intermingling of Persian and Arabic words during the reign of the Samanids, writes:

There was no revolt against either Islam or Arabic in the New Persian literary renaissance which might better be termed a naissance, since a new Islamic Persian culture was being created. The Zoroastrian elements in the poetry represented the mode of the time and should not be considered as expressions of true Zoroastrian belief. Nostalgia for the past existed, especially among poets where one is likely to find such sentiments, but there was no turning back.

New Persian was now a language of Islam side by side with Arabic, and Islam had definitely outgrown its Arab background. It had become a multi-national, multi-lingual universal culture and faith and Iran played the leading role in this transformation. [7](#)

Concerning the influx of words of Arabic into Persian and its effects, Frye, under the title "Beginning of New Life in Iran," writes:

For some cultures language is more important than religion or society in the continuity or preservation of that culture. This, I believe, is true of Persia, for the linguistic continuity from Middle to New Persian is undeniable, yet the two are not the same. The most striking difference between Pahlavi and New Persian is the introduction of an immense Arabic vocabulary into the latter, which made New Persian a world language with a famous literature which its predecessor had not been.

It was really Arabic which gave New Persian the richness which engendered the flowering of literature, primarily poetry, in the late Middle Ages. New Persian represented a new tradition formed by Muslim Persians well versed in Arabic, but with a love for their own spoken language. The New Persian language written in the Arabic alphabet was formed in the ninth century in eastern Iran and came to flower in Bukhara, the capital of the Samanid dynasty. [8](#)

Concerning the issue as to how Persian poetry was benefited from Arabic prosody, Frye says:

In the formation of New Persian poetry the old system was harmonized with the quantitative prosody of

Arabic, and the result was a wonderful expansion of forms, perhaps the earliest and best example of which is Firdowsi's *Shah namah*, written in *mutaqarib* metre. [9](#)

The Shi'i Creed

Iranians, since the early days of embracing Islam, showed a stronger emotional attachment to the Family of the Prophet (S) as compared to other peoples and nations. Some orientalist have tried to colour this emotional attachment with ulterior motives, interpreting it rather as a calculated reaction vis-à-vis Islam, or at least against Arabs, with a view to reviving old Iranian customs and traditions. The views of these persons provided a good excuse for two groups of people.

The first were the fanatical Sunnis who used it to malign the Shi'ah as a political sect insincere to Islam – as Ahmad Amin, the Egyptian writer, did in his book *Fajr al-Islam*, to which a rejoinder, *Asl al-Shi'ah wa usu'luha*, was written by the late 'Allamah, al-Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Kashif alGhita'. The second were the so-called Iranian nationalists, who, as opposed to the first group, lauded the Iranians for reviving and preserving ancient Iranian traditions under the veil of Shi'ism.

In *Qanun wa shakhsiyyat* ("Law and Personality"), one of the publications of Tehran University, Dr. Parwiz Sani'i, the author, while stating that the teaching of history in our schools is dry, superficial and vapid and that it should be lively, profound and analytical, says:

For instance, the problem of Shi'i and Sunni differences with regard to Islam was taught as a historical issue. It was said that the Iranians, who were inclined towards 'Ali' (A), followed him, and that the basic difference between Shi'is and Sunnis is that we consider 'Ali' (A) to be the first caliph, while the Sunnis regard him as the fourth caliph. This method of defining and describing the issue presents the Shi'i-Sunni difference as totally formal and unimportant, so that the difference itself is made to look unreasonable. Many years after leaving school, in the course of my studies, I came across the statement that the birth of the Shi'i sect owes its origin to the innovativeness of the Iranian mind which wished to preserve its national independence and its ancient heritage.

As Imam Husayn (A) was married to the daughter of the last Persian king, his son and his subsequent descendants were regarded as princes and successors of the great Iranian dynasties. In this fashion they succeeded in ensuring the continuity of Iranian rule with all its past traditions and distinctions. Thereafter, the title "Sayyid", which is specified for the descendants of the Imams, is a substitute for the title 'prince' (*shahzadeh*). [10](#)

The nature and importance of this innovation of the Iranian mind and ethos which was for the sake of retaining their "nationhood", are better brought to light by a further study of the ancient religion of Iran – that is, the Zoroastrian creed and its customs, rituals and traditions – which entered the Shi'i branch of Islam and reveals the affinity of the Shi'ah sect with the ancient history of Iran as well as our present life. That is, we come to observe how some of the beliefs and traditions of ancient Iran have been preserved

in the form of the Shi'i faith. [11](#)

Comte de Gobineau, in his book, *Les religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie centrale*, published about a hundred years ago, has traced the roots of Shi'i belief in the infallibility and sanctity of the Imams to the old Iranian dogma regarding the Divine origin of the Sasanid kings. He has considered the marriage of al-'Imam al-Husayn with Shahr Bana as the factor responsible for the transference of this belief to Shi'i thought. Edward G. Browne also subscribes to the view of Gobineau and says:

For myself, I believe that Gobineau is right in asserting that this doctrine of the Divine right of the House of Sasan has had an immense influence on all subsequent Persian history, more especially on the tenacity with which the Persians have clung to the doctrine of the Shi'a or sect of 'Ali. To them the idea of electing a Caliph, or spiritual successor to the Prophet, natural enough to the democratic Arabs, could not appear otherwise than revolting and unnatural, and in the case of 'Umar, the second orthodox Caliph, there was also an element of personal hatred against the destroyer of the Persian Empire, which, though disguised under a religious garb, is nevertheless unmistakable.

Husayn, on the other hand, the younger son of the the Prophet's daughter, Fatima, and of his cousin 'Ali, was believed by them to have married Shahr Banu, the daughter of Yazdgerd III, the last Sasanian king; and hence the remaining Imams of both the great Shi'ite factions (the "Sect of the Twelve" now prevalent in Persia, and the "Sect of the Seven," or Isma'ilis) represent not only the Prophetic but the kingly right and virtue, being at the same time descended from the Prophet Muhammad and from the House of Sasan. [12](#)

This is how some orientalist and Iranians – under the influence of the former – interpret and explain the nature of the Shi'i faith and the causes of its birth. Obviously, a detailed discussion of this issue requires a separate treatise, yet, in our view, it is unavoidable to explain a few relevant issues here.

The issue of al-'Imam al-Husayn's marriage to Shahr Banu, daughter of Yazdgerd, and the birth of al-'Imam al-Sajjad ('Ali ibn al-Husayn) (A) to an Iranian princess and the attribution of the Imams of his lineage to the Sasanid dynasty provided a convenient excuse to some fanciful persons with a motive to interpret the Iranians' inclination towards the Household of the Prophet (S) as a result of its relation with the Sasanid dynasty, and to interpret the Shi'i belief in the Divine right of the Imams of the Prophet's Family as a remnant of the ancient Iranian belief in the Divine origin of the sovereignty of the Sasanid emperors, for it is an acknowledged fact that the Sasanid kings believed themselves to belong to a heavenly race having a superhuman status or that of demigods, and this belief of theirs was supported by the Zoroastrian creed.

Historians refer to a Pahlavi inscription belonging to the period of Shahpur, son of Ardashir, the Sasanid king, discovered at Hajiyabad, which says:

This is the edict of me, the Mazda worshipper, Shahpur, placed amongst the gods, King of kings of Persia and non-Persia, of celestial descent from God, son of the Mazda-worshipper Artakhshatr,

placed amongst the gods, King of kings of Persia, of celestial descent from God, grandson of Papak, placed amongst the gods, the King. [13](#)

Hence, they say, as on the one hand the Sasanid kings believed themselves to be of Divine origin and on the other the lineage of the Infallible Imams (A) went back to them, and since all the Shi'i followers of them were Iranians, who accorded to them a heavenly status, on the basis of these premises the logical conclusion follows that the Shi'i faith in the Imamate of the Infallible Imams is an offshoot of the ancient Iranian belief.

In order to prove the absurdity of this argument we should say, as a prelude to our rejoinder, that the above-mentioned view is based on two premises that need to be separated from one another. Firstly, it is but natural that when a nation with a series of beliefs and notions, religious and non-religious, is converted to a new faith, it inevitably retains some of her old beliefs in the concealed depths of her psyche and unconsciously incorporate them in her new faith. It is just possible that such a people should accept the new faith sincerely without any intention to preserve their old beliefs in a new form, but as their hearts are not totally purified of their old beliefs, they, in one way or the other, bring with themselves their old beliefs into the new faith.

There is no doubt that some nations which embraced Islam were idolaters and polytheists, while others were Christian or Jewish or Zoroastrian, and most possibly their old beliefs exercised some influence on their Islamic thought and creed. It is obvious that the Iranians also retained some of their old beliefs in an Islamic dress. Unfortunately a part of the old superstitions are still current among certain people of Iran, such as jumping over fire on the last Wednesday of the year and swearing by the light of the lamp, which are remnants of their pre-Islamic past. It is an Islamic duty to keep the authentic Islamic beliefs always free from the taint of the beliefs of the days of the *Jahiliyyah* (pre-Islamic ignorance).

If we wish to study the issue of the Imamate and *Wilayah*, we have to refer to the Qur'an and the definitely authentic traditions of the Prophet (S) so that we may be able to know whether such a belief existed in Islam before the different nations of the world were converted to Islam.

The study of the Qur'an and the definite Prophetic Sunnah reveals that, in the first place, the heavenly and saintly status of some pious persons is verifiable from the Qur'an itself. Secondly, the Qur'an, explicitly and implicitly, has affirmed the notion of *Imamah* and *Wilayah*. Besides, the Holy Prophet (S) also introduced his Household (*'Itrah*) as enjoying such a status.

Before the Arab Muslims came in contact with other nations and were influenced by their beliefs, such a notion did exist in Islam. For instance, a verse of the Holy Qur'an says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَىٰ آدَمَ وَنُوحًا وَآلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَآلَ عِمْرَانَ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ ذُرِّيَّةً بَعْضُهَا مِن بَعْضٍ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

Surely God chose Adam and Noah and the House of Abraham and the House of Imran above all

beings, the seed of one another; and God hears, and knows. (3:33–34)

This verse obviously proclaims the special status of some human beings as signified by the notion of *Wilayah*. The Shi'i faith is definitely rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah, and there can be no doubt about it. We do not intend to embark upon this issue – though it offers a wide field for discussion – for it is not relevant to our present study. What we are concerned with here is the Iranians' relationship with the Shi'i faith and that, too, with reference to the assertion of some orientalists and their followers who say that the Shi'i faith was invented by Iranians as a device to resist Islam in order to preserve and protect in the garb of Shi'ism the old beliefs to which they were firmly attached.

Another point is that when a nation is militarily and politically subjugated by another nation, it consciously sticks to its old beliefs by preserving them under a garb, which in itself is a form of resistance against its conqueror. Some orientalists, as well as Iranians inspired by the former, usually assert that the Iranians chose Shi'ism for the purpose of disguising their old beliefs under its garb. We now propose to undertake an analytic examination of this view.

This view is related to the one already discussed, that is, whether the Iranians' Islam was a result of voluntary acceptance or if it was imposed on them by force? If Iranians were forced to give up their old faith and submit to the new one, one may presume that they might have made a pretense of discarding their age-old beliefs on accepting Islam under duress. But it is an established fact that the Muslims never compelled the Iranians to give up their religion and creed; rather, they permitted them to retain their fire-temples. After entering into *dhimma* pacts with the People of the Scripture (Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians), the Muslims even considered themselves obliged to protect their temples and to save them from destruction.

Moreover, it seems impossible that a small number of the Arabs – whose number never exceeded a few thousands – could have forced a nation of several million people to disown its faith and creed, especially when both, the sides were equipped with the same kind of weapons and arms or, rather, when the Iranians were better equipped in this regard. Hence the Arabs were not in a position to exert any pressure on the Iranians in forcing them to give up their religion.

Considering these facts, it may be asked, had the Iranians wanted to safeguard their old customs and tenets of faith, what was the need for them to hypocritically submit to Islam and to save their religion under the cover of Shi'ism? Apart from this, we have proved earlier that the acceptance of Islam by the Iranians took place gradually, and that the Islamic influence over the Iranian society and its domination over

Zoroastrianism was greater and profounder during the period when Iranians had recaptured their political independence. In the light of these facts there is no basis at all for such absurd allegations. Edward Browne has himself confessed in many places in his book that the Iranians embraced Islam willingly, of their own free choice. In *The Literary History of Persia* he writes:

More difficult to trace than the territorial conquest of the Sasanian dominions is the gradual victory of the religion of Muhammad over that of Zoroaster. It is often supposed that the choice offered by the warriors of Islam was between the Qur'an and the sword. This, however, is not the fact, for Magians, as well as Christians and Jews, were permitted to retain their religion, being merely compelled to pay a *jizya* or poll-tax; a perfectly just arrangement inasmuch as non-Muslim subjects of the caliphs were necessarily exempt both from military service and from the alms (*sadaqat*) obligatory on the Prophet's followers. [14](#)

Regarding the decline of Zoroastrianism, he adds (with reference to T.W. Arnold, , op. cit.) that:

The number of Persians who embraced Islam in the early days of the Arab rule was probably very large from the various reasons given above, but the late survival of their ancient faith and the occasional record of conversions in the course of successive centuries, render it probable that the acceptance of Islam was both peaceful and voluntary. [15](#)

Quoting Dozy (*L Islamisme*, p. 156), E. G. Browne writes: The nation most significant to be converted to Islam was the Iranian nation, because they rendered strength and stability to Islam. It were not Arabs. And it was from amongst them that the most vital sects emerged. [16](#)

The Iranians' response to Islam was so passionate and zealous that nobody can charge them with veiling their national and traditional religious sentiments by disguising them in the form of Shi'ism, so that they should have preserved and propagated their ancient faith in a new garb.

Earlier, we have explained that one of the main reasons of the defeat of the Iranians despite all their power and grandeur was the people's discontent with their government and creed. The people were disgusted with them and were ready to find a refuge. They were prepared to attend to a call of justice and truth and to rush to embrace it.

The Iranians' extraordinary eagerness in accepting the creed of Mazdak was also motivated by a similar discontent. It has been pointed out earlier that Zoroastrianism had become so degenerate that had Islam not come to Iran, Christianity would have triumphed here. Browne, quoting Dozy, the Dutch orientalist, writes further:

"During the first half of the seventh century," says Dozy in his excellent work on Islam, "everything followed its accustomed course in the Byzantine as in the Persian Empire. These two states continued always to dispute the possession of Western Asia; they were, to all outward appearance, flourishing; the taxes which poured into the treasuries of their kings reached considerable sums, and the magnificence, as well as the luxury of their capitals, had become proverbial.

But all this was in appearance, for a secret disease consumed both empires; they were burdened by a crushing despotism; on either hand the history of the dynasties formed a concatenation of horrors, that of the state of a series of persecutions born of dissensions in religious matters.

At this juncture it was that, all of a sudden, there emerged from deserts hardly known and appeared on the scene of the world a new people, hitherto divided into innumerable nomad tribes, who, for the most part, had been at war with one another, now for the first time united. It was this people, passionately attached to liberty, simple in their food and dress, noble and hospitable, gay and witty, but at the same time proud, irascible, and once their passions were aroused, vindictive, irreconcilable and cruel, who overthrew in an instant the venerable but rotten Empire of the Persians, snatched from the successors of Constantine their fairest provinces, trampled under their feet a Germanic kingdom but lately founded, and menaced'. the rest of Europe, while at the same time, at the other end of the world, its victorious armies penetrated to the Himalayas.

Yet it was not like so many other conquering peoples, for it preached at the same time a new religion. In opposition to the dualism of the Persians and a degenerate Christianity, it announced a pure monotheism which was accepted by millions of men, and which even in our time, constitutes the religion of a tenth part of the human race. [17](#)

In the same book, Browne, discussing the question whether the real Avesta is the extant one or has become extinct, says:

Intensely interesting though it (the Avesta) be as an ancient document embodying the doctrines of so celebrated a person as Zoroaster, and the tenets of an old-world faith which once played an important part in the world's history, and which, though numbering at the present day not ten thousand adherents in Persia, and not more than ninety thousand in India, has profoundly influenced other religions of intrinsically greater importance, the Avesta cannot be described as either pleasant or interesting reading.

It is true that the interpretation of many passages is doubtful, and that better understanding might lead to higher appreciation of these; but, speaking for myself, I can only say that while my appreciation of the Qur'an grows the more I study it and endeavour to grasp its spirit, the study of the Avesta, save for philological, mythological, or other comparative purposes, leads only to a growing weariness and satiety. [18](#)

What Edward Browne said in this connection could have been said on behalf of all the Iranians who gradually dropped the Avesta in great numbers in the course of centuries and accepted the Qur'an as their holy scripture. The Iranians' shift from the Avesta to the Qur'an was quite a simple and natural matter. They had no reason to stick to the teachings they had learnt from the Avesta, or were habituated to believe regarding their kings, and to hide them under the veil of Shi'ism with a view to translating them into action.

Secondly, when Yazdgerd failed to defend his capital, he had to flee seeking refuge from one city to another and from one province to another along with his huge retinue of courtiers, ladies of haram, a thousand musicians, a thousand hunting dogs, a thousand actors and clowns, and also a large number of other servants, all whom he still regarded as few.' [19](#)

Definitely, had the people of Iran wanted to support him by resisting the advance of the assaulting armies, they surely were able to do so. But they did not give him refuge, until he reached Khurasan, where, again, not seeing any support coming from any quarter, he had to hide himself in the quarters of a miller, and was ultimately murdered by the miller himself or by an Iranian frontier guard. How can one explain the view that the Iranians that did not provide any refuge to Yazdgerd himself, afterwards attached themselves to the members of the Household of the Prophet (S) just for the sake of their link (by marriage) to him, paying them so great a respect and keeping them so near and dear to their hearts?

Thirdly, if we accept the hypothesis that the Iranians were compelled to hide their sentiments under the veil of Shi'ism in the first century, why didn't they tear away this veil even two centuries after attaining independence, making their true sentiments known to all? Why, on the contrary, with the passage of time did they devote and commit themselves to the cause of Islam with greater fervour, cutting themselves from their old creed?

Fourthly, while every Iranian Muslim knows that Shahr Banu is not held in greater respect than the mother of the other Infallible Imams (A) – some of whom were Arab and some African – what Iranian or non-Iranian Shi'i respects and honours the mother of al-'Imam al-Sajjad more than the mothers of other Imams? Narjis Khatun, the mother of al-Hujjat ibn al-Hasan – may God hasten his appearance – was a Roman slave girl, but she is definitely respected much more than Shahr Banu by the Iranians.

Fifthly, if we examine the story of Shahr Banu's marriage with al-'Imam al-Husayn (A) on the basis of historical evidence, this marriage and al-'Imam al-Sajjad's birth to an Iranian princess is of doubtful authenticity.

The story of the Iranian's attachment to the Infallible Imams (A) for the reason of their relation with the Sasanid dynasty through Shahr Banu is similar to the story of Joseph retold by the person who said: "An Imam's son, Jacob, was torn to pieces by a wolf at the top of a minaret." He had to be told: "He was son of a prophet not son of an Imam. It was Joseph not Jacob. He was not on the top of a minaret but at the bottom of a well. Furthermore, the story is totally false, for Joseph was never torn to pieces by a wolf."

In this case also the entire story of the marriage of a daughter of Yazdgerd called 'Shahr Banu' or something else with al-Husayn ibn 'Ali (A) and her being the mother of al-'Imam al-Sajjad (A) is doubtful from the viewpoint of historical evidence. Contemporary historians have usually doubted the authenticity of this story and regard it as baseless.

They say that among all historians only Ibn al-Wadih al-Ya'qubi has written a sentence stating that the mother of 'Ali ibn al-Husayn (A) was Harrar, a daughter of Yazdgerd, and that al-'Imam al-Husayn (A) named her 'Ghazalah'. Edward Browne himself considers this story a fabrication. Christensen also considers the story dubious. Said Nafisi, in *Ta'rikh-e ijtimā'īye Iran* ("Social History of Iran"), dubs it as fictitious.

If we suppose that Iranians have invented and fabricated this story for justifying their love for the *Ahl al-*

Bayt (A), it is definite that it was done about two centuries after the event – that is, simultaneously with Iran's political independence. By the time the Shi'i creed had also become two hundred years old. Now, is it justifiable to say that the Iranians' inclination to Shi'ism was the product of a rumour about the princely status of the Imams of the *Ahl al-Bayt*?

That the story of al-'Imam al-Husayn's marriage with a daughter of Yazdgerd is doubtful, is a view based on historical research. But this story is confirmed by a number of *ahadith*, one of which is recorded by al-Kulayni in al-Kafi. It reports that the daughters of Yazdgerd were brought as captives to Madinah during the caliphate of `Umar, and the girls of al-Madinah gathered to watch them.

On the advice of Amir al Mu'minin `Ali (A), `Umar set them free to choose any person they wished to marry, and one of them chose al-Husayn ibn `Ali (A). But apart from this tradition's incompatibility with historical evidence, among the narrators of this tradition are two persons whose presence in the chain of narrators renders it unreliable.

One of them is Ibrahim ibn Ishaq al-'Ahmari al-Nahawandi, whom the experts of rijal consider dubious from a religious viewpoint and regard his narrations as unreliable. The other one is `Amr ibn Shimr, who is also considered a liar and fabricator of traditions. I am not in a position to pass any judgement on other traditions concerning this matter. On the whole all the traditions concerning this issue need to be studied and examined carefully.

Sixthly, if Iranians held the Imams of the *Ahl al-Bayt* in respect due to their relationship with the Sasanid dynasty, they should have, for the same reason, paid respect to the Umayyad family also, because, even those who deny the existence of a daughter of Yazdgerd by the name of Shahr Banu, admit that one of the granddaughters of Yazdgerd, named Shah Afrid, fell captive in one of the battles of Qutaybah ibn Muslim during the age of Walid ibn `Abd al-Malik, who married her, and by this marriage was born Yazid ibn Walid ibn `Abd al-Malik, known as `Yazid al-Naqis'.

Thus Yazid al-Naqis, one of the Umayyad caliphs, was related to the Sasanid kings and was an Iranian prince from his mother's side. Why didn't the Iranians express their esteem and love for Walid ibn `Abd al-Malik as the son-in-law of Yazdgerd and for Yazid ibn al-Walid for his being an Iranian prince? And why, for example, did they show all that great affection for al-'Imam al-Rida (`Ali ibn Musa) (A), whose relationship to Yazdgerd went six generations back?

If the Iranians were motivated by such national sentiments, they should have been extraordinarily respectful to `Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad, for, definitely, he was half-Iranian. Ziyad, `Ubayd Allah's father, was a man of unknown parentage, but `Ubayd Allah's mother, Marjanah, was an Iranian woman of Shiraz, whom Ziyad married during his governorship of the Fars province.

For what reason should the Iranians, whom the above-mentioned gentlemen depict as having very strong national and racial sentiments, glorify the Imams of the *Ahl al-Bayt* due to their kinship with the Iranian dynasty on the one hand, and, on the other, despite the same kinship, hate and look down upon

the half-Iranian `Ubayd Allah and his purely Iranian mother, Marjanah?

Seventhly, this view could be accepted as correct in case the Shi'i faith was confined only to Iranians or, at least, in case the Iranians had been the first group of people to be Shi'ah, or if the majority of Iranians to convert to Islam had accepted the Shi'i creed. But the fact is that neither the first Shi's were Iranians – with the exception of Salman – nor was the majority of Iranians converted to the Shi'i creed.

On the contrary, in the early era of Islam most of the Muslim scholars of Iranian origin in the fields of tafsir, *hadith*, kalam and literature were Sunni, and some of them had a strong bias against the Shi'ah – a tendency that continued till the Safawid rise to power (907/1501). Most of Iran's provinces had a Sunni majority till the time of the Safawids.

During the reign of the Umayyads when cursing 'Ali (A) from the pulpits was a common practice, the people of Iran, influenced by the malicious propaganda of the Umayyads, were also misled into following this evil practice. It is said that when `Umar ibn `Abd al-`Aziz prohibited this practice, some Iranian cities resisted his order.

The majority of outstanding Sunni scholars used to be Iranians up to the time of the Safawids – exegetes, traditionists (*muhaddithun*), theologians (*mutakallimun*), philosophers, men of letters, lexicographers and philologists. Abu Hanifah, the greatest of all Sunni jurists, popularly known as al-'Imam al-'A`zam (the greatest imam) was an Iranian.

Mubammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, the greatest *muhaddith* of the Sunnis, whose compendium is considered the greatest Sunni book of *hadith*, was also an Iranian. Similarly, Sibawayh among men of letters, al-Jawhari and al-Firuzabadi among lexicographers, al-Zamakhshari among exegetes, and Abu `Ubaydah and Wail ibn `Ata' among theologians, were all Sunnis. The majority of Iranian scholars and masses remained Sunni till the time of the Safawids.

Islam's Victory Over Prejudices

It is a surprising thing that Muslim nations have mostly been followers of the legal verdicts of scholars who belonged to nations other than their own. For instance, the people of Egypt followed the *fatawa* of Layth ibn Sad, an Iranian, while the people of Iran were mostly the followers of al-Shafi'i, who was of Arab origin. Some eminent Iranian scholars, such as Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni and al-Ghazzali al-Tusi, had a very strong bias in favour of al-Shafi'i and against Abu Hanifah, their compatriot. In later eras, the people of Iran embraced the Shi'i creed and submitted themselves to the Imamate of the Infallible Imams (A), who were of Qarashi and Hashimi stock.

While studying *fatawa* of legists of various schools, one comes across something which is surprising from the viewpoint of national bias, and indicates the extent of Islam's success in triumphing over such prejudices.

In *fiqh* the problem of *kuf'* (equality of status) arises in the context of marriage. The question that arises is whether all the races are equal in the matter of equality in marriage? In this regard, the judgement of the Iranian Abu Hanifah is highly noteworthy. He, like a staunch champion of Arab superiority, issues the decree that an `Ajam (non-Arab) is no match for an Arab, and an `Ajami man cannot marry an Arab woman. But all other fuqaha', such as Malik ibn Anas, despite being Arab, say that there is no distinction between Arab and `Ajam in this matter.

Sufyan al-Thawri, also an Arab, is of the same view. Al-`Allamah al Hilli, a leading Shi'i jurist and racially an Arab, in his book *Tadhkirat al fuqaha'*, quoting Abu Hanifah's *fatwa*, says: "What Abu Hanifah says is wrong, because in Islam an `Alawi Sayyid (*Shari f*) is an equal of an Abyssinian slave girl." He further says: "The proof of this view is provided by the fact that the Prophet (S) gave in marriage his cousin Diba'ah to Miqdad ibn al-`Aswad al-Kindi, a black man. When people objected to this match, he said **لَتُنْضِجَ الْمَنَاجِحَ** that is, I have done so in order to establish one level of equality.

The *fatwa* of Abu Hanifah is strange, and its reason, as Sunnis themselves accept, was Abu Hanifah's meagre knowledge about the Sunnah and practice of the Prophet (S). But here what is relevant is to note that in those eras the Muslim scholars had no national prejudices.

Here we may quote a memorable anecdote from the books of *fiqh*, which on the one hand shows the strength of the Arab's chauvinism, and on the other presents an example of Islam's surprising victory over such prejudices. It is said that Salman al-Farsi sought the hand of `Umar's daughter in marriage. `Umar, despite his not being altogether free from certain prejudices, expressed his consent, for he knew that Islam had negated all prejudices.

`Abd Allah, his son, due to this feeling of Arab chauvinism, was enraged, but could not do anything against his father's will. He sought the help of `Amr ibn al-`As, who promised to take care of the matter. One day `Amr ibn al-`As met Salman and said to him, "Congratulations, for I have come to know that you are going to be honoured by marriage with the Caliph's daughter." Salman replied, "If this act is supposed to bring honour to me, I shall not do it." And Salman declared his withdrawal of the marriage proposal.

Iranians' Shi'ism

The majority of Iranians turned to Shi'ism from the Safawid period onwards. Of course, it cannot be denied that Iran's environment was more favourable to the flourishing of the Shi'ism as compared to all other parts of the Muslim world. Shi'ism did not penetrate any land to the extent that it gradually could in Iran. With the passage of time, Iranians' readiness to practise Shi'ism grew day by day. Had Shi'ism not been deeply rooted in the Iranian spirit, the Safawids (907 – 1145/ 1501 – 1732) would not have succeeded in converting Iranians to the Shi'i creed and making them follow the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt* sheerly by capturing political power.

As a matter of fact, the cause of Iranians' conversion to Islam and that of their embracing of Shi'ism is only one. The Iranian saw that Islam was in harmony with his spirit and he found what he loved and craved for in Islam. The people of Iran, who were an intelligent people by nature and had, moreover, a rich cultural tradition, were attracted to Islam more than any other nation and served it devotedly. They also understood better than others the spirit of Islam, and for the same reason they gravitated towards the Household of the Prophet (S) and *tashayyu`* came to be deeply rooted among them. In other words, the Iranians discovered the true spirit and meaning of Islam in the Family of the Prophet (S). It was the Family which could alone answer and meet their spiritual and intellectual needs.

What attracted the Iranian's thirsting spirit to Islam more than any other thing was the Islamic message of justice and equality. He had been deprived of these for centuries, and awaited such a message. The Iranians observed that the only group of Muslims that was free of prejudice and very keen to establish justice and equality in society and showed an unlimited sensitivity in regard to these values was the Household of the Prophet (S). This honourable Family was seen as the sanctuary of Islamic justice, especially by non-Arab Muslims.

If we pay a little attention to the prejudice and discrimination practised by some of the caliphs with regard to their attitude towards their Arab and non-Arab subjects and to 'Ali ibn Abi Talib's defence of the criteria of Islamic equality and impartiality concerning Arabs and non-Arabs, the truth of the matter will become completely clear.

In *Bihar al-'anwar* (vol.9, bab 124), a tradition quoted from *al Kafi* records the following incident:

One day a group of the *Mawali* (Iranian clients of Arab tribes) came to Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali (A) and complained about the conduct of the Arabs. They said to him that the Messenger of God (S) did not make any distinction between Arabs and non-Arabs in the disbursement of public funds (*bayt al mal*) or in the matter of marriage. They added that the Prophet (S) distributed public funds equally among Muslims and let Salman, Bilal and Suhayb marry Arab women, but today Arabs discriminated between themselves and us. 'Ali (A) went to the Arabs and discussed the matter with them, but it was to no avail.

The Arabs shouted, "It is quite impossible! Impossible! "All, annoyed and angered by this turn of affairs, returned to the *Mawali* and told them with utmost regret, "They are not prepared to treat you equally and as Muslims enjoying equal rights. I advise you to go into trade and God will make you prosper. [20](#)

Mu'awiyah, in his well-known letter addressed to Ziyad ibn Abih, the governor of Iraq, wrote:

Be watchful of Iranian Muslims and never treat them as equals of Arabs. Arabs have a right to take in marriage their women, but they have no right to marry Arab women. Arabs are entitled to inherit their legacy, but they cannot inherit from an Arab. As far as possible they are to be given lesser pensions and lowly jobs. In the presence of an Arab a non-Arab shall not lead the congregation prayer, nor they are to be allowed to stand in the first row of prayer, nor to be entrusted with the job of guarding the frontiers or the post of a *qadi*.

On the other hand, once when a dispute arose between an Arab and an Iranian woman and they referred the case to `Ali(A), he did not allow any discrimination between the two. His judgement invited the protest of the Arab woman. Thereupon, 'Ali(A) stretched his hands and gathered two fistfuls of soil. Then looking at the dust in his hands he declared, 'So far as I can see, I cannot make any distinction between these two handfuls of dust.'

This allegorical act of `Ali (A) reminds one of the famous utterance of the Prophet (S), who said:

كُلُّكُمْ لَأَدَمَ وَآدَمُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ، لَيْسَ لِعَرَبِيٍّ عَلَى أَعْجَمِيٍّ فَضْلٌ إِلَّا بِالتَّقْوَى

All men are from Adam and Adam was from dust. The Arab has no merit over a non-Arab except on the basis of piety (taqwa).

That is, race, nationality and lineage are immaterial in Islam. All lineage goes back to Adam, who was made of dust. What ground can that be for any claim of racial superiority?

In *Safinat at-Bihar*, the following incident is mentioned under `wali':

One Friday 'Ali (A) was delivering his sermon on a pulpit made of bricks Al-'Ash'ath ibn Qays al-Kindi, one of the eminent Arab chieftains, came up and said: "These red-faced people (Iranians) have come to dominate us in your presence and you don't stop them." Then he angrily declared, "Today I will show what Arabs are!"

'Ali (A) said: "These big-bellied ones drowse in soft beds while they (the Mawali and Iranians) work hard during hot days for the sake of God. Even then they demand that I should drive them away like a tyrant. By God, Who split the seed and created man, I have heard from the Prophet (S) of God, saying : 'By God, even as you in the beginning will fight Iranians with your swords for the sake of Islam Iranians will afterwards fight you with their swords in the way of Islam. [21](#)

The following traditions are also recorded in *Safinat al-Bihar*:

Mughirah, comparing 'Ali with 'Umar, always used to say, " 'Ali showed greater consideration and kindness to the Mawali, while 'Umar, on the contrary, did not like them."

A man came to al-'Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (A) and said, "People say that one who is neither a pure Arab nor a pure mawla is of base origin." The Imam (A) asked him, "What do you mean by 'pure mawla'?" The man replied, "It is a person whose parents were slaves earlier." The Imam asked again, "What is the merit in being a pure mawla?"

The man answered, "That is because the Prophet (S) said that a people's mawla is from themselves. Therefore, a pure mawla of Arabs is like Arabs. Hence the man of merit is one who is either a pure Arab or a pure mawla associated with Arabs." The Imam (A) replied, "Haven't you heard that the Prophet (S)

declared that he (S) was the wali (guardian) of those who have no wali? Didn't he also say, 'I am the wali of every Muslim, whether he be Arab or non-Arab'? Doesn't a person whose wali is the Prophet (S) belong to the Prophet (S)?" After this, he added: "Of these two which is superior: the one who is related to the Prophet (S) and is from him (S) or the one related to a boorish Arab who urinates over his feet?" Then he said: "One who embraces Islam out of his free choice, willingly, is far more superior to him who has embraced Islam due to fear. These hypocritical Arabs were converted to Islam because of fear, while the Iranians came to the fold of Islam willingly and with pleasure. [22](#)

These kind of incidents, which indicate the prevalence of a policy of discrimination and partiality between Arabs and non-Arabs in the Muslim world, are found in a large number in the history of Islam. The Imams (A) of the Prophet's family were opposed to it. This reason alone is sufficient to understand why the Iranians, who on the one hand appreciated more than others the spirit of Islamic teachings and on the other suffered more than any other people from the consequences of this discrimination, had come to be partisans of the Family of the Prophet (S).

Insult in the Guise of Support

The most surprising thing is the attitude of some persons who inflict the gravest of insults on the Iranian people in the name of defence of Iranian race and nationality.

Sometimes they say that the people of Iran wanted to defend their old regime and creed with utmost seriousness, but despite all their grandeur, power, vastness of their land and a large population of a hundred and forty million, they were defeated by a small Arab army of fifty to sixty thousands. If this is true, isn't it a matter of great shame for the Iranians?

Sometimes they say that the Iranians changed their creed and faith because of fear. If what they say be true, the Iranians are the most degenerate people of the world, for a people which fails to preserve its cherished faith against a victor does not deserve the name of humanity.

Sometimes they say that the Iranians remained under the Arab yoke for the last fourteen hundred years. It means that although the military supremacy of Arabs did not last longer than a hundred years, Iranians could never recover from a blow struck fourteen hundred years ago. What a weakness, incapacity and worthlessness it reveals!

Even some backward peoples of Africa, after centuries of European colonialism, could, one after another, break their chains and liberate themselves; but a civilized nation with a rich past was defeated by a nomadic people who lost their power within a short time, but that nation could not overcome the shock of her defeat for fourteen hundred years and was compelled to continue living with the creed, ideas, customs, norms, and language of the victor against its own inner inclination!

Sometimes they say that Iranians adopted the Shi'i faith with a view to preserving their old beliefs and

customs under its guise. That is, during this entire long period they have been hypocritical in their profession of Islam, and all their claims of being Muslims, with which their history is replete, have been false and deceptive. For the past fourteen centuries Iranians have been telling lies, writing lies and living a life of lies. What greater dishonour and unmanliness is imaginable for a people?!

Sometimes they say that the root cause of all their love and sacrifices for Islam is not to be sought in the affinity of the Iranian spirit with Islam and Shi'ism and the Iranians' grasp and perception of a series of higher truths and teachings; rather, it is to be traced in a single marital union. These people changed the entire course of their lives and culture just for the sake of a kinship born of a marriage. What an absurdly rootless people!

Sometimes they say that the Iranians were eager to defend the creed and government of those days, but they withdrew from the battlefield and preferred to be silent spectators of events. Again what meanness and cowardice!

According to the views of these feeble-minded persons, the Iranian people are the meanest and the most degenerate people of the world, for in fear of their conquerors they abandoned their old script and adopted the Arabic script, paid greater attention to Arabic as compared to Persian and took pains to compile Arabic grammar and dictionaries, wrote their books in Arabic under duress, taught Arabic to their children under fear, incorporated Islamic teachings into the heart and soul of their literature in a state of dread, forgot their ancient creed on account of fear, did not rise to defend their favourite regime, and failed to defend their beloved faith and creed due to fear!

To summarize the views of these persons, the history of the fourteen centuries of the Iranian people reflects nothing but incompetence, hypocrisy, two-facedness, fear, cowardice, rootlessness, meanness and unmanliness, and what they have been lacking all the time was discretion, choice, conviction, faith and love of truth. In this way the greatest of all insults are piled over the heads of the noble people of Iran by these senseless individuals.

But the respected reader of this book will see for himself that these are false allegations against Iran and Iranians. Whatever the Iranian did was with his own discretion and choice. The Iranian has been competent, not hypocritical and double-tongued; brave and courageous, not timid and cowardly; a seeker of truth, not shortsighted and attentive to passing events; with deep roots, not rootless and baseless. In the future also the Iranian will retain his roots and integrity and strengthen further his ties with Islam with every passing day.

[1.](#) See al-Khutab by al-Maqrizi.

[2.](#) Richard Frye, *The Heritage of Persia*, p. 243.

[3.](#) Rayhanat al-adab, (3rd ed.), vol. 1, p. 181.

[4.](#) Richard Frye, op. cit., p. 254.

[5.](#) Faruzinfar, op. cit., pp. ba'-jim.

[6.](#) Richard Frye, op. cit., p, 254.

[7.](#) Ibid., pp. 254 – 255,

- [8.](#) Ibid., p. 252.
- [9.](#) Ibid., p. 253.
- [10.](#) Parwiz Sini'i, Qanun wa shakhsiyyat (Danishgih-a Tehrin), p. 157.
- [11.](#) Ibid., pp. 157 – 158.
- [12.](#) Edward Browne, op. cit., p. 130.
- [13.](#) Ibid., p. 153.
- [14.](#) Ibid., pp. 200 – 201.
- [15.](#) Ibid., p. 207.
- [16.](#) Ibid., p. 204.
- [17.](#) Ibid., pp. 185 – 186.
- [18.](#) Ibid., p. 102.
- [19.](#) Christensen, A., L'Iran Lesus les Sassanides (Copenhagen: 1936), Persian, tr., p.528. .
- [20.](#) Al' Allamah Baqir al-Majlisi, Bihar al-'anwar, vol. 9, chap. 124.
- [21.](#) Shaykh 'Abbas al-Qummi, Safinat al-Bihar, (under wall), c.f. al-Kay.
- [22.](#) Ibid.

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