



## The Role of Religion in Dominance of Iranian Culture and Customs in Arabic and Islamic Culture at the First Two Centuries of Hejira

Najmeh Dorri

Hormozgan University, Bandar Abbas, Iran

\* Corresponding author's Email: drdorri\_3415@yahoo.com

**ABSTRACT:** One part of every nation's culture, mores and manners derives from its beliefs and thoughts. The culture of different nations and their promotion in various subjects has a direct relation with their religion. Iranian culture was a phenomenon of the power of humanistic religions like Zoroastrianism but as a fault of clergymen at the end of Sasanian dynasty had lost its positive influence. Islam, as the most perfect divine religion did not reject the morals of previous religions. Moreover, thoughtful Iranians had a great role in various branches of science, translation and compilation and even in forming many religious sects and the growth and developing of Islamic mysticism. It leads to the great dominance of Persian language in to Arabic, especially in subjects that were related to religion like worships and prays. Arabs were influenced by Iranians by means of religion specially the cult of Shia. It is obvious that Iranians were interested in saints of Shia because it had a close relation with their historical thoughts and principle beliefs.

**Keywords:** Religion, Earliest phase of Islam, Iran, Arabs, Islamic science

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

### INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, the religion is extremely influenced by government policy and prevailing power of each region. Before the advent of Islam, in Arabian country especially in its southern, Arabs religion was subordinated by superpower Policies of Persian and Roman. Thus the cult of the Jew of Romans was developed in Saudi Arabia by Jewish immigrants and then the Christianity.

Conquering of Yemen was during the reign of Khosrow Anushirawan, when Iranian Christianity or Nestorian religion penetrated in Saudi Arabia through Hira by Persian conquerors.

Except for the above two religions, the Sabian religion was widespread in some parts of Hijaz, particularly in Mecca. Edwin Arnold writes about it: "Islam was born in a desert, from a Sabian mother and Jewish father, with a Nazarene nursemaid ". Of course other religions associated with Ignorant culture such as idolatry, or the worship of the heavenly bodies were common in different the corners of Arabia. The subject of present paper is the influence of Persian religion and rituals such as Zoroaster, Mani and Mazdak on Arabs, which reasons were the relations of two lands, conquering of Yemen by Iranian army and constructing Persian building for a long time or the position of the kings of Hira and the compliance of Monazars from Sasanian kings. For example it is said that the word Zamzam which has been attributed to a well in Mecca, was derived from a kind of Zoroastrians worship was performed around that well (Mahalati, Unknown), or at the time of the Sassanian dynasty,

Qobad, the Sassanian king, had promoted Mazdak religion and had quitted the king of Hira for not cooperating in promoting that religion and replaced Harith ibn Amr Eccles Almrar in Hira as the king of Hira to follow Mazdak religion in Hira, Najd and Tahameh. (Ibn E Athir, 1987; Taghi Zadeh, 1970).

Ibn Qatibeh in his book, pointed to the influence of Christianity among the tribes of Rabiye and Ghassan and Qazaeh, and the influence of Zoroaster religion among the tribes of Bani Tamim and the influence of Mani religion among Quraish. And he Reminisces Amr ibn Adi as the first Lakhmy king, who supported Manichaeism after the crucifixion of Mani (Yaghoubi, 1968; Yarshater, 2002).

What is important is that the Iranian religions and beliefs were still common in Saudi Arabia after the advent of Islam and was accepted by the Muslims. The influence of the Iranian religious beliefs within a religion which was the best and the most complete one, represented the grandeur of Iranian civilization, which strong roots were found in idealistic religion of Islam. Of course not only it does not reduce the credibility and the value of Islam, but also represents the Islam supports of all human values and beliefs that are connected to the divine revelation.

#### 1 - Islam and the relation with non-Muslims

Like Jews and Christians and Muslims, Zoroastrians were also the companions of a holy book. The tolerance policy of Muslims toward them, attract their attention to various dimensions of heavenly religion. Zoroastrian thoughts came to Islam

through direct and indirect ways. The direct way was through Iranian Zoroastrians who lived in Bahrain and Yemen and had commercial relations with other areas of Saudi Arabia. Indirect way was through Jewish and Christian people who had already adopted Zoroastrianism elements. Later, these adopted beliefs got into Islam by means of them (Petrushevsky, 1975).

## **2- Parallels of religious elements of Iranian religions and Islam**

Before Islam, the Iranian's official religion was Zoroastrianism which accessible and reliable monuments has remained. Therefore, it can be compared with Islam in some ways. The comparison of Zoroastrianism and the religion of Islam is an expanded discussion and require extensive study of religious texts, but here just some of the common elements between Zoroastrianism and Islam are pointed out. It is noted in History of Civilisation that:

"Some religious elements such as angels, demons, Satan, Heaven, Hell, Resurrection and the Day of Reckoning, which are the common heritage of the Semitic people, have been taken from Iran and Babylon by the followers of Judaism and some other elements were also taken from Iranian by Muslims. In accordance with the principles of Islamic and Zoroastrianism eschatology, dead shall pass a bridge which is located over the abyss and terrible hell..... [We See that] Muhammad (PBUH) had applied the theology, ethics and rituals of Judaism and Iranian eschatology and had mixed them with all of his teachings about devil and ceremonial rites of Hajj and Kaaba, and then Islam emerged (Durant, 1988).

The Ascension of the Prophet noted in Najm Sura and Asra Sura in Quran has w great similarity with the spiritual journey of a Zoroastrian priest, "Arda Viraf". The outcome of Arda Viraf seen had been collected in a book called "Arda Viraf nameh" and is similar to the mentioned narratives of the Prophet at night of Ascension.

### **2-1 - parallels of the religious commands**

Putting aside the principles of the religion and relating issues, Some Islamic commands have some similarities with the commands of Iranian Religions. This represents that Islam has adopted all commands, laws and ordinances which are consistent with human nature and the spiritual, moral and social values derived from ancient Iranian religion and has rejected those were contrary to Islamic values and principles. (Malayeri Mohammadi, 1968).

For example, the Zoroastrian Sassanian believed that girls can marry at the age of nine and boys can marry at the age of fifteen, as well as Islam which identified the age 9 and 15 as the maturity age for girls and boys respectively (Daryai, 2004). Also some

principles like purity of ablution, uncleanness of corpse, being unclean, uncleanness of menstruating women, reading Qur'an for pleasing the spirit of dead one to ask for forgiveness of his sins, are in accordance with Zoroastrianism instructions (Yarshater, 2002).

About the women wearing in Sasanian era, there are some instructions in Zoroastrian texts which are similar to those of Islam and indicate that of women's wearing and dress should be simple and completely covers the head and feet as well as makeup and the use of wigs were prohibited for them (Yarshater, 2002).

Sometimes there are some cases in historical narratives which are very similar to Islamic commands. It is noted in the book "Albaqyeh "that at the triumphant era of pirouz, Anushiravan's Ancestor, people were affected by a drought. Then, pirouz didn't receive any taxes those years and kindly opened his Treasury to the public, and then he went to holy fire "Azarkhovara" and prayed for rain.

In the case of marriage, there are many similarities between the rituals of Islam and Zoroastrianism. In the book "History of Iran In the early centuries of Islamic " it is stated that: "the types of marriage in the form of Sassanian era and even before it were an old legacy and in Islamic era there was no hindrance to it (Nafisi, 1952).

Polygamy in Islam is so similar to official and temporary marriage of Zoroastrianism, in Quran, Nesa Sura, God allowed polygamy with some conditions.

The phenomenon of temporary marriage was also one of the customs of Sasanian, while it was not permissible in Christian religion. Spuler writes:

"A kind of marriage that was formed by Shia was being performed, temporary marriage, spread to Iran Soon as possible, because it was extremely similar to this phenomenon at Sasanian era (Nafisi, 1952).

## **3 - Iranian and establishing Islamic studies and religious sects**

What represents the advanced civilization of Iran at the time of Islam arrival to this land is their wisdom and resistance to imposed ideas. In the book "History of the rational sciences in Islamic civilization" it is stated that "Because the Iranians have been interested in debating and in the prevalence of Sassanian, by the interval of different religions and religious debate, they became familiar to research on religious issues, they rapidly began to have different discussions and religious conflicts after the arrival of Islam.

Thus the foundation of most Islamic sects and Islamic sciences were made by Iranians and their influences of their didactics and ideas. The first Persian scholar in the context was Abu Hanifa Parsi,

who was, According to Homai, the absolute chairman of the companions of verdict an analogy.

Also, some religious cults were aroused under the influence of Iranian beliefs and principles, for example "Mu'tazeleh" who were the followers of Ibn Ata (131-80 AD) who was Iranian. Another cult was "Dahriye" which Follower's beliefs were so close to those of Zoroastrianism. (8) Except those mentioned, many other Islamic sects, particularly the sects which were branched of Shia sect and Khawarij, specially theological schools, are indebted to Iranian ideas and their leaders were often Iranians. Expansion of the beliefs based on Zoroastrian, Manichaeism, and even Mazdakian beliefs was so high at the beginning of the Abbasid dynasty, to the extent that in some cases led to doubt and insecurity in Muslims beliefs.

### **3-1 - Iranian and Islamic Mysticism**

Iranian mysticism rooted in Iran's vicissitudinous history. In the book "pre-Islamic Iranian culture", it is stated about the origin of Sufism: " the emergence of Sufism's soul East for the first time, was the born of the fusion of Greek Philosophy and Persian mentality that has taken place in Iran Zoroastrianism which was in a simple and messy form at the beginning, but it gradually became mature and complete in the Islamic era. For sure, Iranians had a significant role in the development and expansion of Sufism thoughts during Islamic era and the majority of great Sufis in early centuries of Islam were Iranians such as:

Hallaj, Habib Ajami, Ibrahim Adham, Fazyil Ayaz, Shqiq Balkhi, Hatim Asam, Ibn Khafif Shirazi, Shebli Baqdadi, Najm aldin Kharazmi, whose descriptions and biographies are mentioned in Sufism books, and Islamic mysticism owe to their existence.

### **4- Islam and Persian language**

According to their ancient tribal customs, Arabs had highly emphasized on strenuous and eloquent Arabic accent especially in the early advent of Islam. And anyone who was not professional in speaking by Arabic accent, were called Ajm and alkan and they believed that having torn clothes and various faces is much better than having wrong speech. (Zeidan, 1954)

Although Arabs had great efforts to strengthen Arabic language and weakening and humiliating in other languages including Persian, there are some narratives that reveal the use of Persian language by the great Islamic personalities. As an instance, Ibn Abbas was asked whether the Prophet had ever spoken to Persian. He answered yes, some days Salman came to him and the Prophet said: "be well and happy". Mohammad Ibn Emil said that sentence is equivalent to saying welcome. (Qalaqshandy, 1909). Other cases such as Prophet's conversation with the companions of Khandaq (The Ditch), the story arresting Ubaidullah Ibn Ziyad in Basra, scandal of

Ubaidullah and spreading of a Persian poem among people of Basra, are some examples for this issue (Tabari, Unknown)

### **4-1 - Quran and praying in Persian**

Because of their innate talent, Iranians soon took over the Arabic language and wrote the most valuable books in that field. However, common people did not know Arabic well and in spite of embracing the Islam, many of them could not pray or read the Quran in Arabic. For this reason, Islamic scholars began trying to fix the problem and permitted the Quran to be translated in Persian for Iranians to be better understood. In the preface to the translation of Tabari History it is issued that: "Mansour gathered scholars of Transoxiana and asked about their verdict for the translation of Quran to Persian language. They said it is allowed to read and write Arabic Quran in Persian for anyone who can't understand Arabic. As God said that: I have not sent any prophet except in accordance to the familiar language of his people. Another point is that Persian language was of ancient languages and was spoken by different prophets from the time of Adam to the time of Ismail (PBUH). Every kings and prophets had spoken in Persian and the First prophets who spoke to Arabic were the Prophet Ismail. And our Prophet (PBUH) came out from the Arabs and the Quran in Arabic, was sent to him (Tabari, Unknown).

### **5 - Iranians' opinion about the Relations of monarchy and religion**

Such a link between religion and the state/ As if they are under a same cover/ No throne, religion standing would not be possible/ No religion, throne standing would not be possible (Ferdowsi, 1996).

Kingdom and religion are intimately linked to the Iranian people and the Iranian kings always have considered them as correlatives. It is mentioned in Dinkart that: religion is kingdom and kingdom is religion. For them, the foundation of kingdom rests on religion and the foundation of religion rests on kingdom (Daryai, 2004), or Ardeshir says to his son Shapur in his will that: know that kingdom and religion are two brothers that one can't remain without another, because religion is the base of kingdom and it is always supported by the kingdom (Daryai, 2004).

Thus Iranian believed that the kingdom has great sanctity and the kings were as holy as religious leaders. It is stated in the book "Heritage of ancient Iran" that:

"Accompany of the state and religion is of basic elements in Islam and is taken from Sasanian dynasty and Iranian Thought that the king is a manifestation of the God, and any opposition to him is as ingratitude to God (Frye, 1989).

Iranian assumed monarchy as a divine right or divine blessing and knew the king as the son of God.

The king was surrounded by a glowing and bright halo as his divine honour and was always with him. So we can say that beliefs based on the brightness, sanctity and purity of the Prophets and Imams in Islamic thought were in the same direction with the ideas of ancient Persian kings.

### **5-1- Kingdom among the Arabs**

In the tribal system governing Arabic lands, there was no place for absolute authority of a powerful king. Although the Arab's chief and Sheikh had a great degree among them, he was not the manifestation of God. Arabs did not used to call their rulers as king and they just called foreign rulers by the word king (Hata, 1987).

But gradually Arabs had close relationship with their powerful neighbours and could conquer them in a short time. Symbols of power and pomp of powerful kings, take them away from the simplicity of the Prophet and the Caliphs and to get closer to the pomp of Sasanian kings. Especially during the authority of Abbasid Caliphate who always tried to emulate the policies of Sasanian kings and tried to introduce themselves as holy and inviolable as the Persian kings. Under the influence of Iranian thoughts, they took advantage of the Iranian theory that Monarchy is a gift from God and tried to prove their legitimacy according to that.

### **5-2 - The interest of Iranian to Shia sect and Shia Imams**

By the use of these ideas, Abbasid kings could make it reasonable to dismiss Umayyad Caliphate. Because the Democratic Arabs believed that it is a natural fact that a caliph or his successors to be selected by the people's opinion, While the Iranians Knew the kingdom as a divine and holy position and king's orders was undeniable and followed. Accordingly, Iranians were more interested in Shia because it was based on the selection of successors according to God's order, not by means of Conciliation of related councils which was valid among Arabs and had no place among Iranians.

Iranians by having a great cultural support and national pride, had been satisfied to accept the religion of Islam, by seeing the discriminable policies of Umayyad caliphs, were failed to reach their goals which were based on evolution, freedom, brotherhood and equality. Toward the degrading policy of Umayyad caliphs who were based on superiority of Arabs Iranians sympathized to Shia whose sentiment was more compatible with Iranian passion.

#### **5-2-1 - love of Imam Ali (AS)**

At the time of the Prophet, the policy of equality and justice and love were applied among all the Muslims, But within a few years after his death, the attitude to equality vanished gradually. Lords, who

had accepted Islam with great enthusiasm, surprisingly saw that Umayyad did not equally share the public treasury among lords and other Arab Muslims and they also deserve lords to have underlying jobs (Ibn Abdarieh, 1962).

While at the same time, the Iranians believed that Imam Ali was a hero who opposed to this inequality and tried to overthrow the oppression and injustice.

It is narrated that Imam Ali (AS) used to share public treasury equally among lords and other Arabs, and stated that if any treasury is under my control, the shares of black and white is the same. (Yaghoubi, Unknown). Also Imam Ali used to kindly accept the gifts of non-Muslims people. In response to all those decency, Iranians supported him as an imam and also his caliphate and his children, and asked him to regain their lost power.

### **DISCUSSION**

Before accepting Islam, during the Sasanian era and even earlier, Iranians were a noble nation with a specific cultural and had a great influence on Arabs after being conquered by them. Ignorant Arabs, in the shadow of the Prophet's teachings and the blessing of the brotherhood and equality came to a place that managed to defeat powerful Sasanian Empire and inherited their great civilisation. But Iranians, who had accepted the message of Islam with its all desired features, applied some the measures and policies that Arabs didn't have, and in a short time took the control of the dominant ethnic. Although during Umayyad caliphate they were overthrown and were behaved in a humiliating way, with the rise of the Abbasid caliphate and the dismissal of Umayyad caliphate, Iranians were able to capture almost all key positions again.

Iranian religions such as the religions of Zoroaster, Mani and even Mazdak, were completely transcendental before being extremely destroyed by clergymen. The greatness of Islam is that it never violates all previous rituals of beliefs and each of the ideas and beliefs that were consistent with human values and holy ideals get some similarities with Islam and this means that all divine religions are afflatus. The subject of them is human conduct and there are lots of similarities between religions.

Iranians by different ways including writing religious books, classifying Islamic Studies, creating religious sects, translation of the Quran and Islamic books and the development of Islamic mysticism, and so on, helped the influence of Iranian religion, beliefs and customs among Islam and Arab Muslims. With the

establishment of Abbasid caliphate and especially during the first stage of Abbasid caliphate, the golden age of Iranian influence on the Islamic world emerged and it was also the brilliant era of Islam and Arabs in all political, social, scientific, cultural, military aspects. Iranian religious influence on Muslims' beliefs and their widespread development is manifest.

#### REFERENCES

- Daryai, T. (2004). *Sasanian Empire*, translated by Morteza. Saqibfar, Tehran: Ghighnus.
- Durant, W. (1988), *History of Civilization (Age of Faith)*, translated by Abulghasem Taheri, second edition, Tehran: Islamic Revolution Education.
- Ferdowsi, A. (1996). *Shahnameh*, by the efforts of Sa'id Hamidian, Tehran: Ghatreh
- Frye, R.N. (1989). *The legacy of ancient Persia*, translated by Mohammad rajbnia, Third edition, Tehran: Scientific and Cultural Publication.
- Hata, Ph. (1987), *Arab history*, translated by Abulghasem payandeh, second edition, Tehran: Agah.
- Ibn Abdarieh A.I. M. (1962). *Aghd Al Friede*, Egypt.
- Ibn E Athir, I. (1987). *Al kamel Fi Al tarykh*, Beirut: Elmiyeh Daralkotob.
- Mahalati, S. (Unknown). *Introduction to the history of Arab's literature*, Shiraz: Pahlavi University.
- Malayeri Mohammadi, M. (1968). *The pre-Islamic Iranian culture*, Tehran: Tus.
- Nafisi, S. (1952). *History of Civilized Sasanian in Iran*, Tehran: Tehran University.
- Petroushevsky. I.P. (1975). *Islam in Iran* translated by Karim Keshavarz, Tehran: Payam.
- Qalaqshandy, Abualabas Ahmad (1909). *Sobh Alasha*, Cairo: Daralkotob Alkhadiveh.
- Tabari, M.I.J. (Unknown). *Tarikh Alrosol va Almoluk*, Tehran: Asatir
- Taghi Zadeh, H. (1970). *Articles*, vol 9, Section 7, observed by Iraj Afshar, Tehran.
- Yaghoubi, A.I.Y. (1968). *Yaghoubi History*, translated by Mohammad Ibrahim Abeti, Tehran, Enterprise of translation and publication.
- Yarshater, E. (2002). *The Iranian presence in the Muslim world*, translated by Fereydon Majlesi, Tehran: Morvarid.
- Zeidan, G. (1954). *History of Islamic Civilization*, translated by Ali Javaher Kalam, Tehran: Amir Kabir.