

ZARATHUSHTRA'S HOMELAND AND THE APPEARANCE OF THE PROPHET

Emomali Rahmonov
(President of Tajikistan)

[**Editors Note:** This is an extract from the Book "*The Tajiks In The Mirror of History*"¹ by his Excellency Emomali Rahmonov, President of Tajikistan. It shows the views of the leader of the Tajik people and the aspiration and belief of the people of Tajikistan.

Tajikistan has proposed to UNESCO to celebrate 2002-2003 as the 3rd millennium of Zarathushtrianism and UNESCO has accepted it. Please see Editorial]

I remember now how ten years ago right after the harvest was finished I happened to get hold of a copy of "Sadoi Shark" (The voice of the East) a literary magazine which had the Gathas by Zarathushtra published in it. In those days periodicals used to be delivered directly to the collective farm office. Every morning I leafed through a new pile of newspapers and magazines, which stilled smelt of fresh printing ink. In spite of the lack of time I would underline the most interesting articles and read them in the course of the day whenever I had a spare moment.

From history books and from old Tajik-Persian literature I had already obtained certain knowledge about Zarathushtra. Not infrequently in those hard times I recited in my mind his call for 'goodness in thoughts, words, and deeds'. During the authoritarian regime when it became common practice that all the works in a collective farm - be it livestock breeding, sowing, harvesting or renovation of the premises - were ordered by the commanding voice of the chairman, the wisdom of Zarathushtra's precept quite often saved me from acting in a manner which otherwise I would have afterwards deeply regretted. At other moments when I was about to lose my temper and let some rude word escape my lips, the precepts of Zarathushtra and of some other famous sons of the nation would always help me to regain my composure. More than anything in the Zoroastrian religion, I remember the deep reverence for the earth

¹ "The Tajiks in the Mirror of History" (London River Edition Ltd. INSB 0-9540425-0-6) By Emomali Rahmonov.

and water and a great respect for farming and cultivation of the land. Latter on, when studying the Tajiks by B. Gafurov, especially the chapters of the book devoted to ancient historical events, I was repeatedly impressed by the humanistic essence and wisdom of Zarathushtra's teaching.

I come from a peasant family and since early childhood was closely connected to the land and farming. This can probably explain why, in spring and specially on the eve of Navruz, I often recall the words pronounced by Zarathushtra more than a thousand years ago: "A man who ploughs the field then sows the seeds alternatively with his left hand and right hand is serving the land well. He can be likened to a loving husband who comes to his wife who is lying in a soft bed bringing her a baby or a gift ... The earth is saying to him: 'Oh man who is ploughing me and sowing me with seeds with his left and his right hand ... I am giving birth incessantly, providing ample crops and food. He who sows the wheat is sowing seeds of goodness.'

Time and again I would go through the pages of this old magazine with faded cover rereading the Gathas and admiring their poetry and wisdom. The Gathas smell of the earth, ploughed fields, wheat and freshly baked bread. It is possible that the author, a person of such good thoughts and deeds, had once been a ploughman before he started to spread the divine words of the Gathas. Otherwise how else could it be explained that they contain some verses which sound like a song of a ploughman whose heart is overwhelmed with his feelings and love for the land:

My thoughts go back to Zarathushtra who created the immortal Avesta, the first prophet of the Tajiks whose trace on earth has not been erased by the dust of millennia and the ashes left by countless bloody wars.

There is still today no clear evidence when Zarathushtra was born or when he died. Many philosophers, scientists, historians and chroniclers have struggled to establish the date but this has only resulted in yet more contradictory versions and theories.

For example, some Phalavi sources, such as the Bundahish, Dinkard, Ardavirofnomeh and the Tansar message provide dates of Zarathushtra's birth and death, which differ by a quarter to half a century.

In the works of Biruni and Masudi it is said that the prophet was born in 600 BCE. Notwithstanding some minor discrepancies, the majority of modern historians and experts, after having investigated various sources, have established that the prophet was born at the beginning of the first millennium BCE (before 660BCE) and that he lived for 77 years.

We have to add that all these existing theories are mainly based on research on the Avesta. Is it true that the sacred book of the Zoroastrians can be defined as the greatest encyclopedia to have ever encompassed so many fields and activities of human life through so many epochs, The oldest book of the Avesta are the Gathas which are linguistically similar to the Rig-Veda, the oldest of the sacred books of the Vedas created by the Indo-Iranians. The Gathas consist of psalms and prayers dating back to the twelfth to tenth centuries BCE.

When trying to establish the epoch when Zarathushtra lived many scientists have been confused by the enormous length of the historical period covered by the books of the Avesta and by the vastness of the lands through which the Avesta spread. In the books of the Avesta, the myths and legends bring up such a wide diversity of subjects and they involve such inexhaustible source of wisdom and philosophy that they cannot fit into the scale or limits of the span of a single human life. This is why the teachings of Zarathushtra, which embraced such huge geographical space and period of time, without doubt surpassed all previous achievements of human thoughts. It was the immense scope of Zarathushtra's creativity, which made some scholars believe that the prophet was born either earlier or much later and resulted in the diversity of their opinions and their incapability to come to the same conclusions.

The majority of both old and new sources say nothing about whether or not Zarathushtra had been a farmer before he started to preach. But some scientists take the view that he was originally a livestock breeder and that this can be ascertained from his name which means "the owner of yellow camel". They believe that Zarathushtra owned some horses and camels.

The most reliable source from which to extract information on Zarathushtra is the Gathas. Most experts are of the opinion that the Gathas were composed by Zarathushtra and that the hymns and songs of the Gathas are actual words of the prophet. Some passages give a clear idea of how Zarathushtra lived and the wealth he possessed. They

describe some turbulent events, which took place during the prophet's lifetime.

For example, the following passage from the Gathas gives an idea of Zarathushtra's involvement with the breeding and livestock:

"Oh Ahura,
I ask you to give me the answer: the reward, which was promised to me of ten mares, ten stallions and a camel. Will they be delivered to me with the help of Urdibihisht?" (Yasna, 44 -18)

Now that we have talked about horses and camels, it is of interest to mention that the Bactrians were the first people in Central Asia to tame wild camels. This is why the two-humped camel native to Central Asia is called the "Bactrian Camel". The name itself testifies to the high level of livestock breeding which the predecessors of the Tajik had reached even so long ago. Unlike the one-humped camels of the Arabian Steppes and North Africa, the two humped Bactrian Camels are well adapted for carrying loads and long distance travel.

It is quite possible that it is due to these hardy camels that Bactria became a junction on the ancient caravan trade routes which linked together countries as Ancient Egypt, Babylon, Assyria and contributed so much to the intensive exchange between these different cultures and civilizations. Jawaharlal Nehru was quite right when he called nomads 'the hardy inhabitants of the step' and the camel 'the boat of the step'. He emphasized that swift-footed horses and strong camels have always accompanied the life and work of the peoples who inhabit the steppes. This can also explain why the two-humped camel and the Bactrian fleet-footed horses have stayed in such high demand all across Asia Minor and the Near East, At certain periods in the past a Bactrian horse was worth as much as a dozen young strong slaves.

The fact that the Assyrian people liked the two humped camels and used them in their daily work can be confirmed by an engraving, dating back to the time of King Shalmaneser (ninth century BCE), depicting a two-humped camel being sacrificed to the king. Before this time two humped camels were not known in Assyria. The royal annals dating back to the conquests by Ashurnasirpal tell us that in different regions of Bactria, Niso and especially Merv, taxes were levied not only in gold and silver but also in horse and camels.

Judging by the meaning of the name of the prophet Zarathushtra 'the owner of a yellow camel' we can make a suggestion that he may have lived either in Bactria or in one of the adjoining regions.

The name, the lifetime, the homeland of Zarathushtra and the period when he began receiving revelations and speaking as a prophet have been a subject of permanent scientific debate. The majority of the researches into Avesta and the ancient documentary sources indicate that Zarathushtra was born to a father call Purushasp and the name of his family was Spitama. They also say that Zarathushtra resided in Bactria. Some scholars think that he was born in Chorasmia, others take the view that he was born either in Azerbaijan or in a place which is called Rey situated in present day Iran.

The dispute and debate has also involved related subjects such as to where did the holy books of Avesta originate from, and to where did they spread afterwards. The place where Zarathushtra was born and where he started to profess his faith can be considered the original home of the Avesta and the source from where Zarathushtrian teaching spread.

Biruni supports the idea in the *Osor-ul-Bokia* that Zarathushtra was born in Azarbaijan and tells us: 'Then Zarathushtra appeared, the white son of Toomon. He belonged to the Azerbaijan people and descended from Manuchehr. He was born into the noble family of priests. He began to preach during the thirtieth year of the rule of King Gushtosp'.

It is true that a scientist may make any hypothesis he likes based on his research on a particular subject, but in this case the historical facts and written sources do not agree with the above-mentioned theory. According to Ctesius, a Greek philosopher who lived in 416 to 399 BCE served as court physician in the palace of the Iranian King Ardeshir II, and who had access to the king's huge library, Zarathushtra came from Bactria. It is hard to imagine that Ctesius, a servant of the Iranian King and the author of the *History of Fars*, could have said that Zarathushtra was born in Bactria instead of Iran if he had not enough proof. The academician B. Gafurov also referred to this Greek philosopher and wrote that according to an ancient legend Zarathushtra presumably resided in Bactria. This legend was related by the Greek philosopher Ctesius (the end of the fifth to the beginning of the fourth century BCE).

There are other proofs that confirm that Zarathushtra came from Bactria, which are the names of his father, his friends, his enemies and other people associated with him, which are mentioned in the Yasna and other books of the Avesta. The Avesta tells us the name of his father was Purushasp and that he was 'the forth man to have extracted the juice of the Hoama and thus obtained divine portion'.

The '*Dabistoni Mazohib*' (the Manual of Discipline) says the following about the prophet's lineage: ' In those days there lived a man called Pourushasp who was the son of Tapirosp from the Faridun family. His companion in life was called Dugduya and this godly women also came from the Faridun family. God blessed them both and she gave birth to Zarathushtra'.

The Yasna and the Gatha also tell us about some remote ancestors of Zarathushtra such as Khayachatosp (Yasna 46:15), Sitamon (Yasna 13:114), and other facts about him such as the name of his tribe is Spitama (Yasna 46:15) and the name of his followers are Gushtosp, Dzhanosp, Farashshtra and Friyon from Turan. In another part of the Avesta it is revealed that Zarathushtra was married to a girl called Khuva, who was either the sister or the daughter of Farashushtra, a vizier of king Gushtosp. Zarathushtra had three sons Istvastr, Urvatatnar and Khvarechitr and three daughters Freni, tryti and Poruchista. One of his daughters married Dzhamosp, and a cousin of Zarathushtra called Madyumankh was a fervent follower of his teachings.

People's name with 'OSP' at the end were widely spread in Bactria. We can find many of them among the people of Zarathushtra's tribe, (the name of Tamirosp was not mentioned before the seventeenth century, but one of Zarathushtra's remote forebears, Khayedazhotosp is mentioned in the Avesta.).

Even kings of the Kayonid dynasty had similar endings to their names such as Lukhrosp, Gushtosp, etc. The ending of 'Osp' in the names of Zarathushtra's forbears as well as the ending 'ushtra' in his name lead us to the conclusion that either the prophet's ancestors or he himself resided in Bactria.

Further proof showing that not only the prophet Zarathushtra but also the holy scriptures of the Avesta are connected with Bactria, is based on the geographical names mentioned in the Avesta. For example, the first

chapter of the Videvdad (or Vendidad) gives us the names of sixteen provinces, which were created by Ahura Mazda and where Aryans lived:

- 1- Airyana Vaejah with its rolling fields and meadows,
- 2- Gava Sugda with its abundant grassy pasture where God created an Ox from which all animals are descended.
- 3- Maru (Merv) with its invincible warriors struggling against the force of evil.
- 4- Bakhadi (Bactria) with its flying banners.
- 5- Hirava (Herat) with its life giving waters.
- 6- Vaykarit with its central city of Duzak.
- 7- Urva with its prosperous towns and green pastures.
- 8- Kanepta with the capital in Verkana.
- 9- Kharakayti Zeboro.
- 10- Khaytumant with its treasures
- 11- Raga with its towns and sages
- 12- Chakhra with its towns and famous warriors.
- 13- Rectangular Varna, the home of Faridoon who killed the three-headed monster.
- 14- Khaptind with its excellent lands (Punjab, Kashmir).
- 15- Ranha with its flowing waters.
- 16- Irvad Kanda with its land and towns (Vendidad chapter 1).

Other parts of Avesta mention such geographical names as Khorezm, Tus and rivers such as Doytiyo, Khorob (Pyandzh), Charob (Nukcha), Andakhum (Andikhoy), Danu (Sry Darya), Zarnushaty (Zeravshan). They tell about Barushon (a province of Badakshan), the Padhshvargar (Vahshvor) mountains and about Kumins in Chorasmia and Hissar in Tajikistan. Almost all the places named in Avesta are located in present-day Central Asia and North Afghanistan.

Although more than two thousand years have elapsed since the first mentioning of these geographical names, the majority of them, after undergoing some minor phonetic changes, are still being used by the Tajiks: Sogdiana, Merv, Bactria, Herat, Rog (Raga), Khimand. This makes it evident that the formation of the geographical picture of this area was being established at the same time as the spread of the Zoroastrian Religion. Since Zoroastrian rituals and customs originated and became influential in Balkh, the capital city of the ancient Bactria, and the doctrines preached by Zarathushtra first gained support at the court of Gushtasp, the academician Gafurov has all the reason to maintain that 'Bactria with its flying banners' became one of the first

countries where Zoroastrianism was established as a prevailing and influential teaching.

Thus, all the Pahlavi sources, historical manuscripts and chronicles attribute both the appearance of Zarathushtra's teaching and the composition of the Avesta to Balkh during the reign of King Gushtosp.

The Shahnameh by Firdawsi also relates about the wide spread of Zoroastrianism and the great impact it produced on the minds of the people. All of these documentary sources without exception give an account of Zarathushtra's arrival in Balkh, of how he occupied a high position at the court and gained recognition as a prophet and religious teacher. There are absolutely no grounds for connecting the origins of the prophet with Rey in Azerbaijan. The prophet belonged to the same ethnic and tribal group as the inhabitants of Bactria, he spoke the same language, which was spoken in Bactria where the doctrines of this religion were formed into a sacred book. In Kunduz, a province in Afghanistan, a settlement named Rog has existed since the earliest times and some European orientalists have mistaken this settlement for Rey located in Iran.

Yet further evidence that helps to show that both the prophet Zarathushtra and the Avesta had their origins in Bactria can be obtained from the works by Herodotus. The Greek historian relates that the kingdom of Media (which embraced both Fars and Azerbaijan) appeared as the result of the consolidation of separate tribes. According to Herodotus, the population of Media consisted of people belonging to six different tribes. Scholars think that only one of these tribes, the Arizonts, had some common roots with the Aryans.

Prominent experts in the history of Media, I. Dyakonov and I. Aliev, wrote that the Aryans "in their pointed caps, and swift horses" came to media from Central Asia and that thereafter they inhabited Parsua (Fars) and the neighbouring lands. It is possible that the Arizonts, whose name is a derivative from Arna (divine truth) spoke a language similar to the Aryan group of languages.

According to I. Dyakonov, the Aryan people from Central Asia had nothing in common and their language differed widely from the local tribes who lived in Media and Parsua. In the history of Media he wrote: that in Akkadian language 'Pansya' is related to 'Pansana' which means 'outlying' or 'outskirt'. The location of Parsua corresponds with the southern part of the country called Zamua which was mentioned in the text created at the time of Ashurbanipal ...It has to be stressed that quite

contrary to the prevailing view, the two names - Parsua and Persia - have nothing in common except their general meaning 'outlying district'. Thus, there are no reasons to think that Parsua used to be the home of the Persians who allegedly left this region between the end of the eighth and middle of the seventh century BCE.

The final evidence confirming that Ancient Bactria was the cradle of Zarathushtrianism can be seen by the language and style of Avesta. According to B. Gafurov, 'some linguistic characteristics of Avesta, including the dialects in which the Gathas were composed, correspond to East Iranian languages.

Many centuries have elapsed since the Avesta language was used and then became a dead language. Although it is difficult to establish the boundaries of the territory where it was once spoken, some scholars take the view that this territory included both Bactria and Merv. Samples of a written text called 'Puli Duaurunt' (The Bridge of Durunt'), which were found near Kabul made a prominent expert on the Avesta language, F Altheim believe that this language was spoken in Bactria.

Some time later, in support of this view a prominent orientalist E. Bertels wrote that the language in which the Avesta was composed had once been used in Khamun, situated in East Balkh and northwest Merv. This is why some scholars call Avesta language the Old Bactrian language. Latter on, at the time of the rise of the Graeco-Bactrian state (fourth or second century BCE) and specially during the reign of the Kushans with their great empire, the Bactrian language lost many archaic elements typical of the language of Avesta, but there is no denying the fact that this language was once used all across the territories of Bactria. In other words the cradle of Zoroastrianism is Bactria where the text of the Avesta were converted into a sacred book.

In conclusion we would like to say that many principles of the Zarathushtrian religion have left a deep imprint on the people's mind. The habit has been preserved prohibiting the killing of animals when they are pregnant and the cutting of trees in blossom. Water, earth and fire have to be protected from any impurity. The fumes of some fragrant herbs are still used to keep away sickness and the force of evil.

These and many other examples give evidence that in every Tajik house we may find trace of Zarathushtra's teachings.

Let us hope in the new millennium, the Tajik people will continue to live under the spiritual guidance of Zarathushtra, the prophet of truth and light.