

EDITORIAL

Nou Rouz is round the corner and I take this opportunity to wish you, on behalf of all the members of Iran Zamin and the Ancient Iranian Cultural & Religious Research & Development Center, **A Happy Nou Rouz.**

The Theme Topic of this issue is Mithraism the powerful religion of ancient times. Mithraism is said to have been revived in Western Iran and was taken by the Roman soldiers to Rome where it was Romanized and became a very powerful religion. Prophets of God could not do away with it and it lives with us today in some form or the other.

Zarathushtrianism was an established religion in Iran when Alexander invaded and destroyed the infrastructure of the Persian Empire. The fact that he started rebuilding old temples of Babylonia, which were in ruins due to disuse, means many things.

- 1- That the people had stopped using their ancient temples.
- 2- That no other system of temples had replaced the old ones during the two hundred and twenty years of Hakhmaneshenian rule.
- 3- That, reintroduction of temples and gods was seen as a triumph over the Persians by the Romans.
- 4- That, their aim was not the introduction of their own gods but destruction of Zarathushtrianism, for they did not introduce Roman gods, which they knew would be resisted as alien gods by the people, but they reintroduced the ancient beliefs of the people, which would be more easily accepted and thereby Alexander would achieve his goal of destruction of Zarathushtrianism. For his teacher Aristotle had told him; " If you destroy them you will destroy one of the pillars of excellence in the world."

The fact that Mithraism was revived in Western Iran closer to Rome supports this theory. Mithra or Mehr was one of the ancient gods of the Aryan people and revival of it should have been comparatively easy. Mithra represented the Sun, which is an important factor of our existence in the solar system. The direct influence of the sun on our day-to-day living produced a convincing argument in favour of the Sun God -Mithra who is believed was born to virgin Anahita (god of Water) as a saviour of mankind.

Rulers and not the Prophets established all the major religions. Prophets founded the religions but rulers established it. Religion was and is used to achieve political goals and no doubt was a weapon in the hands of the ancient super powers too.

Rome's order to its troops was to support the spread of the new belief among the Iranians. Thus the Roman soldiers were automatically exposed to this new god Mithra, whom they learned to view respectfully. Very soon the Roman soldiers became ardent followers of Mithraism and were instrumental in spreading it over a vast region from Western Iran to Europe. In Europe it was known as the religion of the soldier and traders, because it was they who were the initial believers in the new religion.

During the same period Christianity was born but it was not a threat and did not find favour and support among the rulers. Mithraism was a strong contender to Christianity in Europe and to Zarathushtism in Iran. This lasted till 224 ACE when the Sassanians overthrew the Western Iranian rulers, who professed Mithraism, and Zarathushtrianism was reintroduced, this time as a protected state religion.

Similarly in 312 ACE Constantine the Roman Emperor converted to Christianity and introduced Christianity as a state religion and so Mithraism was suppressed.

Now with the support of the two super powers Mithraism was systematically eradicated as a religion and we have very little information in hand today. In fact the history of the Parthian rulers who professed Mithraism were also wiped out along with Mithraism and we know very little about them. But in its last 300 years Mithraism had captured the mind and heart of its followers and the customs and rituals of Mithraism were part of their daily life. Christianity and Zarathushtism had no choice but to adopt many of those customs and rituals in order to eradicate Mithraism.

We still see among the people of these lands many ancient practices related to Mithraism. To name a few - Iran as a nation stills celebrate YALDA as the longest night; but it means "The Birth" and is supposed to be the birth of the Sun. The winter solstice, which according to present calendar falls on the 21st of December is the longest night and from the next morning the sun is out in the skies for a longer period each day and so it is said to be growing. The night before this phase commences people would get together and party till early morning awaiting the birth of Mithra to virgin Anahita. The birth of Christ to a virgin mother is similarly celebrated on December 25th to replace the birth of Mithra.

Among the Zarathushties Mehr was given the title of an Izad and a day and a month is named after it. Temples were built and called Dar e Mehr

and Fire was housed it in. If the sudden appearance of the fire and altar on the back of the coins of the Askanians replacing the queen; in the first century ACE, which coincides with the revival of Mithraism; can be taken as proof of the rise to importance by Fire and its connection to Mehr.

"Father Christmas", "Papa Noël" (Santa) the icon of Christmas is symbolic of the birth of the Sun for he comes out of the cold riding his sledge pulled by reindeers across the sky and brings festivity, and warmth through the chimney. The very word 'Father' represents the highest grade in Mithraism.

The handshake as a way of greeting is said to be the reminiscent of Mithraism. Who, was also the god of contracts. The Indo Aryans join their palms to greet, while ancient Iranians would greet by raising their palm towards their forehead. Which can be seen in the bas-reliefs at Takth e Jamshid (Persepolis).

Zarathushtra teachings were summarized into seven Amesha Sepantas to replace the seven grades of Mithraism. In the Gathas and in the Bible where the teachings of Zarathushtra are to be found, it is not classified as the seven Amesha Sepantas. The seven days of the week in the Gregorian calendar and their names are also said to be reminiscent of Mithraism. These are just a few which can be named within the confines of an editorial. Let us read in the following pages the research and views of our eminent friends about Mithraism.

The world would have been a Mithraistic world had it not been for the Sassanians in Iran and Constantine in Rome. Today the World unknowingly believes in many of the myths and follows many of the customs and rituals of Mithraism.

Mithraism is an interesting and important subject; Iran Zamin will have another issue on Mithraism in the near future for we are in search of TRUTH. So please send us your papers.

The Theme topic for our next issue will be "Fravahar" which was and is the icon of ancient Iran and has been wrongly described by western scholars as the statue of Ahura Mazda. Please contribute your papers on the subject or any other subject of your choice. **Iran Zamin is an outlet for presenting your findings to the world.**

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