

Zoroastrian Religion and Democracy

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This is how “democracy” is defined by the Webster’s Dictionary: [MF *democratie*, fr. LL *democratia*, fr. Gk *dēmokratia*, fr. *dēmos* (people) + *-kratia* -cracy (rule)] (1576) a: government by the people; *esp* : rule of the majority b: a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation *usu.* involving periodically held free elections.

History of democracy, as presented by Western scholars, only goes back to the people of Greek cities of the pre-Christian era. This is just a part of the story. The full fact is that regional elected councils are well documented in the Indo-European, particularly the Indo-Iranian, societies and among other peoples of the world of a greater antiquity. The point to note about the Greek and the later Roman city democracies is that “ancient democracies did not presuppose equality of all individuals; the majority of the populace, notably slaves and women, had no political rights. Athens, the greatest of the city democracies, limited the franchise to native-born citizens.” (Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia, Vol.8, “Democracy”) Nothing surprising! Women have been granted the right to vote and hold government office in most of the democracies only in the first half of the 20th century.

What do the Guiding Gathas of Zarathushtra say? The very first song begins with “Yatha Ahu”, the Principle of Choice. In order to bring peace, prosperity, stability, progress, and happiness to the living world, people are to select only competent persons who are able to free the world from mental and physical wrongs, and lead it to truth, precision, progress, wholeness, and immortality.

Song 16, the last but one, is particularly dedicated to *Vohû Khshathra Vairya*, literally ‘Good Domain Worthy-of-Choice’. It elaborates that a good government must be an elected one. It is then the best gain one can have. To serve a chosen government means to serve it best with devotion based on righteous deeds. It is for such a dominion, a world order that Zarathushtra rose to work for us, mankind. He founded the foremost democracy—mental and physical, spiritual and material.

Contrary to the pyramidal structure of the society into professions/casts of a single superior top to the massive inferior bottom of serfs and slaves seen in human history of many doctrines, the Gathas profoundly present a doctrine of individual freedom of will and choice equally for all men and women. The Gathic division of human society is unique. It begins with the family living in a house that multiplies consequentially into settlements, districts, lands, and finally the earth—all based on good thinking and precise procedure. This makes one realize the true democracy Zarathushtra expounded. The guiding leaders of all these units must be elected only on account of their competence, and, that too, by persons with ‘good mind—*Vohu Manah*’ and in the ‘right—*Asha*’ procedure.

In today's definition, it would mean that each and every person elected to the office must be fully qualified for the office he/she is elected to. It would, in a simpler term, mean competent people leading the house, settlement, district, land, and the globe. On the governmental level, it would mean that all the candidates for presidency, home affairs, foreign relations, commerce, council, cabinet, and all other offices will prove their competence of quality and experience to be elected for their particular posts. Every post will be filled by a person elected for his/her competence. And on the global level, we will have a "United Nations" organization that would lead free, friendly, peaceful, prosperous, healthy, happy, and lovingly united peoples of the globe to glory.

A close look at all the democracies in the world would show that mankind has still to work wisely and hard to reach the Gathic principle of "Vohu Khshathra Vairya".

Zarathushtra prayed for it in the concluding stanza of his Sublime Songs:

May the desired Fellowship come
for the support of the men and women of Zarathushtra,
for the support of good mind,
so that the conscience of every person earns
the choice reward, the reward of righteousness,
a wish regarded by the Wise God.

Let us join him in the prayer and work to achieve his ideal *Vohu Khshathra Vairya*:

"Both the lord and the leader are to be chosen
because of their righteousness.
These two appointments are made with good mind
so that acts of life are done for the Wise One,
and the dominion of God is well established,
in which the chosen person becomes the rehabilitator of the rightful who are oppressed."