MAZDAKISM AND ITS HISTORICAL PRINCIPALS

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Resumen. La revista QUID, es una publicación científica orientada a presentar aportes teóricos científicos y/o de desarrollo tecnológico aplicados en las áreas de ingeniería, artes, administración y ciencias sociales y humanas; está dirigida a la comunidad académica, investigativa y en general a toda la sociedad que se interese en estos temas de conocimiento. QUID es arbitrada y tiene una periodicidad declarada por semestre. Para lo cual publica constantemente convocatorias invitando a los autores interesados a remitir sus contribuciones representadas en artículos de investigación, reflexión y revisión.


Abstract: When Kavadh I seized power as King of Sassanid dynasty in the late 5th century Persia was entangled with drought; as some Sassanid nobles were oppressing low class people and influence of Zoroastrian clergies was an indirect threat to royal court and King. Kavadh was desperate to undertake a painstaking reform within political and social framework of his monarchy. Therefore, he decided to embrace new faith in Persia, declared by Mazdak. Mazdak encouraged some social changes in Persia like reducing the importance of religious formality, criticism of mainstream Zoroastrian clergy and he opposed to harams of some royal rulers and nobles. The clergy and nobles plotted against Kavadh and removed him from his throne. Kavadh could later manage to gain power again with the help of Hephthalite king and since he took power again, his policy toward Mazdak followers changed and allowed Anushiravan to launch a campaign against the Mazdakites. A few Mazdakis survived, and settled in remote areas. They kept their doctrines after Islamic conquest of Persia and later some movements such as Khurramites stood against Abbasid Caliphate. Mazdakites emphasised good conduct, which involved a moral and ascetic life, no killing and not eating flesh (which contained substances solely from Darkness), being kind and friendly and living in peace with other people. The Batiniyya, Qarmatians and other later revolutionary currents of Islam may also be connected to Mazdakism and were often equated with it by contemporary authors. According to Mazdak, God had originally placed the means of subsistence on earth so that people should divide them among themselves equally, but the strong had coerced the weak, seeking domination and causing the contemporary inequality. This in turn empowered the "Five Demons" that turned men from Righteousness – these were Envy, Wrath, Vengeance, Need and Greed.

1. INTRODUCCIÓN

1.1. Prologue

It is not clear that when Mazdak decided to invite others to his new faith. We only know that his faith was very popular at the early years of Kavadh I reign. Anastasius I who gained power 2 years after Kavadh I, heard rumours that Kavadh I had endorsed heresy within Persia. Therefore, it could be said that Mazdak began his preaching early fifth century, probably from 494 until 524 and experienced 30 golden years and its influence drove Kavadh I to give support to it. What was behind fast expanding of such news faith could be seen on the especial social circumstance. Mazdak himself was a fluent, bright and talented preacher who could influence masses of people in hard time of drought and lead them into a new faith which affected Persian society in a notable extent. (Ghirshman, et al., 1995) It could be said that Mazdakites believed on communism which was crucial to them and also a sort of dualism could be traced in their faith. They share a mutual view with followers of Manichaeism on some aspects as well. It is attributed to Mazdak that good deeds are based on our will although evil ones are due to predestination. In additions, it is attributed to him that he considered women and possessions as two roots of grudge and hatred, so he expressed controversial views on them, especially on the latter which could be considered as promiscuity. It is said that Mazdakites distinguished three elements (Fire, Water, Earth), and four Powers (Discernment, Understanding, Preservation and Joy, corresponding to the four chief officials of the Sassanid state - the Mobad, Mobad, the Chief Herbad, the Commander of the Army and the Entertainment Master). They led some uprising against Caliphate after Islamic conquest of Persia such as Sunpadh, Al Muqanna and Khurramites uprising under leadership of BābakKhorramdin.

1.2. An Introduction To Mazdakism

Mazdakis have their own distinctive tenets which made them different from other denominations such as Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism and Christianity. The most notable beliefs of Mazdakism are communism, piety, concept of God and their specific view on women. They have also expressed noteworthy ideas on economy and society. Here, we want to have a deep and thorough look on this sect as one of the most influential ones in ancient Persia.

2. MAZDAK AND MAZDAKISM

It is reported by A. Christensen that Mazdakism is 'the pure faith' which was spread by Zaradust-e Khuragen who said to have been in Byzantine and later came to Persia. Because his name was reported as 'Zaradust' (Zarathustra), his followers were called 'Zardushtigan' (Zaradustis) as well. (Christensen, Iran)

Some reports say that Zaradust-e Khuragen was follower of Manichaeism and his indoctrination was only considered as theoretical preaches; however, after Mazdak son of Bamdad developed such indoctrination, name of 'Zaradust-e Khuragen' was forgotten overtime and follower of this sect were called 'Mazdakis'. (Ravandi et al., 2003) As a result, it could be stated that such sect was one of denominations of Manichaeism and its origins backs to Byzantine territory round 2 centuries before time of Mazdak son of Bamdad. Al-Tabari says: 'as monarchy of Shahanshah was consolidated, he eradicated sect of hypocrite Mazdak son of Bamdad who caused heresy in faith of Zoroastrianism and led some people astray.' (Al-Tabari, 1996) It could be said, based on historical sources, that Zaradust-e Khuragen was only a simple preacher, nevertheless Mazdak was a man who asked people to his new faith, far beyond preaches, enriched by some social and theological reforms. So he overshadowed Zaradust-e Khuragen over the course of time and his teaching was named Mazdakism, which was derived from his own name, 'Mazdak'.

3. MAZDAK STANCE ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STATE

Persian society at time of Sassanid Empire was based on blood and possession and certain rules were drawn between ordinary people and nobles. There was a notable gap between nobles and ordinary people who comprised round 80 % of Persian society. No one were not allowed to change his social position and cast, people were supposed
to stick at their career in the way that they do not adopt a higher one belonging to a higher class. Villagers were suffering from poverty and it could be said they were the worst and the most miserable social class. As said above, people were not allowed to seek higher social rank; therefore, there was a predestination which firmly stated they will remain a villager, slave or farmer forever. We can state here that there were presumably no notable difference between social class of a slave and a villager.

Considering such social situation, Mazdak’s teaching can be understood as a call for social revolution. Many people who were critics of Zoroastrian clergies and wanted to see a painstaking reform within Persian society, followed Mazdak’s indoctrination and demanded a sort of communist society. Al-Tabari said: ‘Mazdak was preaching that men and women should be equal, their income should be the same. He said this is what God likes and gives us bounty and even if it was not a religious matter, it would be a good deed… he was motivating poor people against rich and corrupt nobles… when those rich people gained what they could not reach in a normal situation and they were oppressing poor, low-class people.’(Al-Tabari., 1997) It could be said that Mazdak’s indoctrination had 2 parts: First part was a call for social change in favour of poor and low-class people. Second part included a reformed religious teaching which was based on dualism and Manichaeism ethics. Mazdak said that soil and water belongs to God and all people are allowed to use it equally and likewise possessions and women should be shared. In his view, no one should not have many wives as slaves in harems and deprive others from having a wife. Persian society had for a long time been dealing with many issues and now it was Mazdak’s time to seize the opportunity, leading poor and low-class people on the basis of a new Manichaeism gnostic belief. His movement was a kind of poor people uprising in Middle East on the brink of Middle Ages which led to some other similar and popular uprising in other lands. (Qadiyani., 1987)

Perhaps Mazdakism was the first sect that mixed economic affairs with ethics. It, on the one hand, deals with natural instinct of curbing corruption when no one dares to speak about it; on the other hand, tries to fulfill dream of a fair and equal society. (Daryayi et al., 1987)

It could be seen through analyzing historical documents that feudalism in Persia had begun by mid-5th century and made farmers dependent on noble families. Such trend was accompanied by drought, high taxes and poverty and provoked a popular uprising in Persia under Mazdak’s banner.

4. THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES OF MAZDAKISM

Like both Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism, Mazdakism had a dualistic cosmology and worldview. However, his sect was more humane in comparison with Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism. Unlike Mani, Mazdak wanted to exploit his religious preach to reform his society and in his view people could not eradicate unjust cast without a clear plan to fight against corruption and oppressors. (A. Christensen., 1995) As told above, such belief was promoted roughly 2 centuries before Mazdak by followers of Zaradust-e Khuragen and was under influence of Manichaeism as well. Both share a mutual view on dualism in which two original principles of the universe are Light, the good one and Darkness, the evil one. Light is characterized by knowledge and feeling, whereas Darkness is ignorant and blind, and acts at random. Therefore, to weaken the Darkness, world should be cleaned from symbols of ignorance, oppression and corruption by a revolution against forces of evil and to establish a social order on the base of justice instead. (Granotovski et al., 1980) His difference with Mani is on the view of Darkness and Light: Light acts by design and free will, whereas Darkness acts at random. As a result, mixture of Light and Darkness, unlike Mani’s view, happened randomly and was not planned. As we see, Light has a notable superiority on Darkness in Mazdak’s opinion. Zaradust-e Khuragen had said Light dominated Darkness, but it is not the end and such mixture must be purified and Light must be totally be freed from filth of Darkness. Mazdak believed in three distinguished elements (Fire, Water, Earth). Unlike Mani who believed in five (Ether, Wind, Light, Water and Fire). Mazdakis believed that semi- eternal evil power (Satan) is formed by evil elements as good power (God), who in Manichaeism was being called king of Light, is production of three blessed elements. (Christensen., 1975)

‘Such sect was based on communism in which all people are equal and they should be able to access to wealth and women equally. In addition, we see that Mazdakis should be very pious and try to purify their souls from any evil and to refrain from meat by respecting animal’s right to live.’(Sykes et al., 2001)
The axis of Mazdak revolutionary principle was communism and he wanted to see everybody’s role in his ideal government and perhaps, due to such stance, Eqbal Lahouri called Mazdak the people’s prophet of Persia. (Arnold et al., 1979).

Mazdak believed that five evil characters stop human being from righteousness: prejudice, anger, reprisal, need and the most important of all, possession. Everyone who refrains from these evil characters will be united with Light. He expressed that inequality in wealth and wives cause need and such need is root of anger and reprisal. Although Mazdakism was very popular between poor people and its revolutionary principle united them for a social change, as a faith, it had its own followers between nobles as well. They could spread their faith and organize it in the way that they categorized ranks of their clergies. (Qadiyani, 1996)

The mutual facet between Mazdak and Plato could be seen in their view on reasons of inequality in the society. Both say that grudge, indulgence and jealousy are behind any evil. People not contented to what they have, they are jealous of others and finally, they begin to grab each other’s land, try to confiscate their assets as much as possible. These lead them to have skirmishes and wars. Mazdak and Plato argue from the same shared value on women and marriage. It should be noted that many criticism against Mazdakism stance on free love is not fair, as Hazards everything regarding love and marriage under control to have better families and children (Noldeke, 1987).

Mazdak’s social reform was under influence of Likorg, a Greek lawyer who lived in 9 century BC. Likorg founded a kind of constitutions in his homeland which could be seen as the first communist constitution. By implementing such constitution, a sort of revolution in which common ownership of the means of production, took place.

To sum up, teachings of Likorg and Plato had a crucial role on Mazdak and his communist like belief. It is attributed to Gaumata that even he had adopted such communist ideology before Zaradust-e Khuragen. His name was derived from ‘cow’ or ‘expert of cow’s race’, had undertaken same measures in his short, seven months long reign. Gaumata took many lands and facilities from rich people and nationalized them. It is reported that he stopped paganism and idolatry in Persian and mixed his communist belief with essence of Zoroastrianism. Both Gaumata and Mazdak were religious people and their revolutionary reform was affected by their religious belief. Darius I stood against Gaumata with the help of some Persian nobles and ousted him from the power. Next step was to punish and kill supports of Gaumata which we see is reported in Greek sources. (Qadiyani, 1996)

It has written by some scholars that: ‘Mazdakis believe God gives His bounties to all mankind and we should share divine bounties equally. Mazdakis wanted to confiscate assets of rich people and share them with poor people, as they believed that rich people took their wealth by ignoring other people’s right. What rich people has, is against justice and God the almighty disagrees with such oppression against poor people. They supported free love to encounter those people who had harems and enjoyed from polygamy. There is no reason behind such life in which some people have many wives as slaves in harem while poor class people live in poverty and remain single. Mazdakis wanted to reestablish a free society which people enjoy a sort of social equality. Some critics in their sources called Mazdakis as devilish, silly, poor and illiterate; however, Mazdakis wanted to support poor people in Persia.’ (Granotovski, 1985)

Christensen says: ‘Due to following Manichaeism, Mazdakis demanded less dependence on carnal life. Therefore, they embraced whatever could lead human to such path and strengthen its determination to not rely on carnal desires. It is the reason why they encouraging people to avoid having meat. Mazdak ordered his followers to kill their self, and he meant to kill your ambitions which keep you away from salvation.’ (Christensen, 1975)

Edward Brown mentions that Mazdak asserted that root of evil are anger and jealousy and these evil feature had damaged equality which is a divine gift and bounty. Mazdak wanted to revive this virtue in Persia again. (Browne et al., 2001) Mazdak urged people to avoid those evils which cause to quarrels, wars, hatred and death. People should unite to lead their society towards equality to have a better life and to preserve other virtues and diminish evil characters.

We can mention here again that there could be seen a similarity between Mazdakism and Manichaeism. ‘Righteous people’ should remain single and, not have more fashionable clothes on and they are expected to not be indulgent at all. Mazdakis have similar rules within their sect: ‘many beliefs of Mazdakis are alike what we see in Manichaeism. They share the same view towards life, the Light and Darkness and they both tend to a sort of
Mazdak is found their belief on the base of 'equality', as it is the cure of any evil in our lives. What we see as disagreements, quarrels, oppression, grudge, etc. they have one evil root in which people are not content with what they have. They want to have more wealth, more wives and such tendency deprives others from the same right. The result is an unjust society which is filled with hatred and jealousy. The solution is to take wealth from rich-class people and distribute whatever we have within all social classes equally.(Christensen, 1975)

There are contradictory reports on Mazdak and his indoctrination. His rivals in Persia called Mazdakism a heretic sect which is hypocritical one: one the one hand admires equality and blames unjust society, on the other hand mazdakis believe in 'free love' and such evil belief perishes families and virtues of Persian people.

We can observe some parallel teaching which can be mutual between Zarathustra and Mazdak. Both expressed that human being is obliged to good deed. We should not try to harm others, we should not greet people coldly when they come to our house as guests, should even behave well with our enemies as they are humans. Christensen believes that Mazdak personal morality was behind such teachings. In addition, we should bear in mind that unjust cast within Persia was another compelling element on Mazdakism and its popular indoctrination which was being spread so fast within Persian society.(Christensenn1976) Al-Shahrestani also reports that Mazdakism was based on dualism in which Light is characterized by knowledge and feeling, but Darkness is ignorant and blind and acts at random. They believed in a theory that water, earth and fire were mixed; whatever is auspicious,is remnant of their purified mixture and evils are from their waste.( Al-Shahrestani et al., 1956) Mazdak described his God as a King who has four powers in front of himself:Discernment, Understanding, Preservation and Joy, corresponding to the four chief officials of the Sassanid state - the MobadanMobad, the Chief Herbad, the Commander of the Army and the Entertainment Master. These four rule the world with help of seven inferior figures who has the help of twelve others. The Seven and the Twelve were united in a humanbeing, he was no longer subject to religious duties. In addition, God was believed to rule the world through letters, which held the key to the Great Secret that should be learned. He also mentions some Mazdaki denominations: Koudakian who lived in west of Persia and round cities such as Ahvaz, and Mahanians who live in eastern Iran and could be found in great Khorasan.(Al-Shahrestani, 1967)

Mazdak behavior was alike a mystic leader. He wore rough clothes. He was urging people to believe in equality and not be so dependent of their possession. His communist-like teaching could jeopardise Zoroastrian clergies position in Persian society, so they accused him of vulgar belief and free love.(Qadiyani, 1996)

Mazdak teaching to have equal life with others, could drain pockets of clergies and noble people of Persia. It is clear why they were so cautious and wanted to press Mazdak and his followers. Mazdak could gain ability to end their life and supremacy over Persian society. It is wise for Zoroastrian clergies to try counterbalancing Mazdakism and show him as a vulgar person who endangers Persian virtues.(Imanpor et el., 1990)

5. CONCEPT OF GOD IN MAZDAKISM

Teaching of Mazdak has two major pillars and points: First equality and second is being pious and abstemious.

Mazdak expresses that world and all its bounties belong to God. God the Almighty has created all bounties for all people, so they should distribute them equally then they are able to enjoy from a normal, peaceful life. God sends clouds to every place to pour down for all people, regardless of their race, language and social class. If some people have deprived others from divine bounties, righteous people must stop those oppressors and spread justice within their society. Such actions against oppressors benefit both the society and people. This principle could be seen in Zoroastrianism as well and it seems that Mazdak has been influenced by Zoroastrianism regarding this pillar.

The only path towards a good, eternal life in salvation is path of piety and devoutness. Mazdakis, like Manichaems, stressed to not be dependent on carnal life and desires. They didn't have meat at all to not be dependent on their carnal
desire and to train their spiritual side. They had another reason to refrain from meat: it caused slaughtering of animals and its blood deprives pious people from salvation. (Christensen, 1991) In a rare report, we see that Al-Shahrestani reported that Mazdak ordered his followers to kill each other to save them from Darkness. It could be a false report when we have other reports which assert that Mazdak demanded his followers to avoid murder. He probably meant to kill and dominate the self and his opponent falsified such view to mar his image.

6. CONCLUSION

About Mazdak and his followers, we face many contradicting reports in which we could not easily verify the details. Historians assert that Mazdak narrated many times from Avesta and was under influence of Mani on the Light and Darkness.

What is obvious when we study through books on Mazdakismis the belief on justice, equality and a kind of communism. Mazdak fiery sermons were so popular and gained ground among low-class people. In his view an unjust society is root of any evil such as anger and grudge which may end to skirmishes and wars. To conclude, Mazdak asserts that if discrimination is targeted and people could eradicate it, there would be no reason for disagreements, quarrels and skirmishes. In addition, he expressed that his followers should not harm other humans and be kind and embrace people, even their enemies.

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