

“QUALITIES OF SHI’ISM ENTRANCE TO SISTAN”

(Recibido 05-06-2017. Aprobado el 07-09-2017)

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Abstract.Sistan was regarded as one of the most important states in the ancient Iran. The region was one of the widest and the most significant states in ancient Iran and it had always attracted the attention of the governors and rulers in political, economical and religious terms in the course of history to the extent that some heirs apparent were sent there to be reared and prepared for governorship.

With the advent of Islam and the dispersion of Arabs in Iran after Nahavand War, Sistan was also invaded by the Arabs and it was captured at the time of the second and the third caliphs and the Islam’s seeds were sown in the area and Islam rapidly infiltrated among the people of the region.

Since the Imamate of Imam Ali (Peace be upon him) and with the birth of various sects in the religion of Islam, Sistan drew the attentions of various sects’ followers who used it to promote their own sect and for living due to its being far from the caliphate capital. In the meantime, Sistan’s people more warmly welcomed Shi’ism and very soon they became the stubborn sponsors of this religious stream to the extent that they resisted the pressures of anti-Shiites rulers and governors in more than one occasion and they were the initiators of protests and rebellion in support of the Shiites

Keywords: Iran, Islam, Shi’ism, Sistan

1. INTRODUCTION

Sistan's people have long been the religious followers of monotheistic and ethical beliefs. With the Arabs' entrance to the region and their efforts for expanding the Islam's rites in the conquered territories, Sistan, like the other spots in Iran, was quickly absorbed to this novel religion due to its monotheistic religious background and the people therein accepted Islam during the very first months and years of Islam.

But, with the creation of various sects in Islam, especially after the Imamate period of Imam Ali (Peace be upon him), and with the creation of Shi'ism stream that highly emphasized on Imam Ali (Peace be upon him)'s conduct in serving social justice and parity, it attracted the attention of the Sistan's people for many reasons and the people there, even with the great deal of dissidence to its growth, rapidly became the supporters of Shi'ism and since that time up to the rise of Safavids who paved the way for the authentication of Shi'ism in Iran, Sistan has been one of the important Shi'ism centers in Iran.

The present article tries to mention a history of Sistan's status and the beliefs held by the people there in the ancient Iran era so as to deal with the way Islam entered the region and then it makes use of library research and investigates the documents to run a reasonable deduction and perform a historical comparison to reach to an appraisal of the quality of Shi'ism entry and expansion in Sistan.

2. SISTAN'S HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY

Sistan, which was called "Sajestan" by the old Arab authorities, is derived from the Persian word "Sagestan". Sagestan is the name of a plain at the periphery of Zareh Lake¹ and it encompassed the lake as well as the eastern section thereof which included Hirmand River and the other rivers that discharged into Zareh Lake. Zareh Lake was bigger than this in the medieval centuries and besides Hirmand there were three other large bodies of water that spilled to the lake, namely Khavas River,

¹ Zareh Lake is the very Hamoon Lake. The name Zareh Lake can also be seen in Shah-Nameh Poetry Book by Ferdowsi.

Farahroud River and another river that came from Esfazar and it is now called "Haroudroud". During the medieval centuries, the single chair of the district capital has always been belonged to the city "Zaranj" (Lestereng, 1958: 359-396). Quoting Estakhri, Sistan's cities were Zalagh, Karkouyeh, Zaranj, Rosht, Basurd and Ghaznayn, (Estakhri, no date, 39). Sistan has been given various names during the long course of history including Zabul, Zavel, DEranja and Zarneka (Shahraki, 2014: 15). And, quoting Lestereng, "this climate in this region is relatively warm, it constantly blows severely in there and the masses of sand are displaced from here to there and the buildings and the farms are occasionally destroyed in sandstorms" (Lestereng, 1958: 362). The author of the book "Ehya'a Al-Moluk" writes: "in the 11th Hegira Century, Sistan borders were stretched from Kashmir to the shorelines of Indian sea and its western border reached to Kerman and its northern section was bordered by Sabzevar and Harat and its southern part was enclosed by a line water border, the Sind River" (Sistani, 2010: 18); in addition, Tabari has also stated that Sistan has been larger and more important than Khurasan and it was encompassed by Sind River and Balkh River" (Tabari, 1973: 2015). Therefore, according to the various writings by the historians and geographers regarding Old Sistan, it has to be depicted as embracing a very large and prosperous area with abundant water sources and auspicious weather, all of which had turned it to the most important state of Iran's plateau.

3. PRE-ISLAM SISTAN

Sistan, the land of Iran's national mythology, has an ancient history and it is one of the most important regions in Iran. According to the text of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, mythological Sistan is the birth place of heroes like Nariman, Sam, Zal and Rustam who lived in this region at the time of Pishdadiyan Dynasty. Garshasb Pishdadi, one of the most famous Iranian heroes in the national myths, has risen from Sistan. After Garshasb, Kayghobad, an offspring of Manuchehr, became the king and founded the Kiyanian Dynasty. He wrote the Sistan's kingship charter for Rustam (Afshar, 2011: 15).

Based on writings bearing topics about the history of Sistan, Garshasp and his great grand children to

Faramarz, son of Rustam, have all been the followers of His Highness Adam (Peace be upon him)'s religion and prayed thrice a day and they did not marry their daughters and sisters and they enjoyed the benefits of an ethics-oriented society (Sistan's history, 2010: 33). Also, other religions like Zoroastrian, Demonism, Mithraism and Judaism were common in Sistan.

Some think it likely that Turanians who are portrayed in Shahnameh by Ferdowsi as the opposite party to the war against Iranians are the same Scythians who were majorly populated in centers like Zabul and Kabul. In such a manner that it is said "Scythians were the tribe who resided on both banks of Jeyhoun and Seyhoun but, before Christ, they were forced to abandon the region due to the raids by some clans and some set out on a journey towards the west and some others to the south, the eastern part of the country and passing by the city of Harat they reached Hamoun Lake and occupied Zarang State. Scythians proved their presence in the region before Achaemenid dynasty at the same time with the Medes (WWW.Wikifiqh.ir). Also, the historical sources mention that Kianiyans remained in their own territories after admitting the Medes' citizenship (Bayani, 2002: 38).

So, it can be concluded that Kiyanian government in Sistan has been a planted one in the Medes era. Sistan is conquered by Achaemenid dynasty at the time of Darius and it seems that their government was again a protégé to the Achaemenids the way it was at the Medes era in a way that it is written by Herodotus that "Cyrus was a cordial friend of the Scythians and called them benefactors for their great many of the services offered, so Sistan, at the time of Achaemenids, has been an obedient and very important and strategic state" (Afshar, 2011, 161). It is said that the Scythians, who were forced to desert their settlements at the time of Parthian dynasty, began attacking the Parthian borders during early kingship of Phraates II (Haghighat, 2005: 106). At the time of Parthian Mithridates I of Persia, the eastern states including Sistan were ruled by the Parthian Dynasty (Afshar, 2011: 63&64). With the collapse of Parthian dynasty, Ardashir I, the first Sassanid king, once again seized Sistan and made it his subordinate. The kings in this region had to authenticate the Sassanid kings and pay tributes to preserve their independent position as local governorships. After Pirouz was killed in 484 AD, a vast part of the territories in the region were

subjugated by the Hephthalites² but the region again became a subservient to Sassanid dynasty when Chosroes I dispatched his troops thereto. At the peak time of Sassanid Dynasty's power, the installations of the great and strategic commanders to the important territories like Sistan, the king of which were called Scythian kings, were predominantly carried out by the central government and the governorship of these lands was particularly vested in the hands of the king's sons who were likely to take the throne. Amongst these heirs apparent are Narseh, son of Shapur I, and Verethragna III, son of Verethragna II who appointed his son for the governorship of Sistan after it was recaptured and named him the Scythian King Verethragna. During late Sassanid era, due to the frailty of the kings and the internal conflicts in the administrative and military formations of the Sassanid dynasty, the local governorship of Sistan became more powerful and it almost declared independence in such a manner that their military and martial power in protecting the borders was more clearly revealing of the local governors' political significance (WWW.Wikifiqh.ir) and, finally, at the time of Yazdegerd III, the 400-year Sassanid kingship was overthrown as a result of conquering of Nahavand by the Muslims who called it the Great Victory and this paved the way for the Arabs' entrance to Iran's districts, including Sistan (Afshar, 2011: 16). Pre-Islam Sistan, at the time of ancient Iran, enjoyed a very rich civilization and culture which dated back to the millennia BC. The most known civilization of the region is termed the "burnt city" and it is famous among the archaeologists as the ancient paradise and there are discovered relics signifying the very rich civilization therein. Before these archaeological explorations and discoveries, it was thought that Nile river banks and the Mesopotamian plateau are the cradles of the ancient civilization but with the excavations in Sistan, it was made clear that the Burnt City was one of the oldest cities in the Middle East and the relics therein are found wonderfully and extraordinarily intact during thousands of years in a way that these relics are unprecedented and unique in the entire Asia (Shahraki, 2014: 22&23).

4. THE PROCESS OF ISLAM ENTRY TO SISTAN:

Since the ancient time, Sistan land has been very important in terms of political, economical and religious issues and the domination over this region was considered a grand privilege for any man of

² Hephthalites were a tribe who were originally from Gansu State in China and invaded Bactria.

power so it drew the attention of the Muslim Arabs very soon.

There is a discrepancy in the sources regarding the conquering of Sistan. Some sources like “the history of Sistan” (2010: 80), Bazurth (1991: 40), Gardizi (1984: 230) and Dinvari (1989: 141) have cited the conquering of Sistan as being coincident with the Osman’s caliphate and other sources like Ibn Athir, 1993: 1552), Ibn Khaldoun (1984: 537), Tabari (1973: 2015) and Kufi (2007: 284) have mentioned it as being coincident with the caliphate of Omar. The sources that mention its being simultaneous with Omar’s caliphate, describe the acceptance of Islam as stated in the following words: Sistan’s people were defeated by the Arabs and the Arabs captured Sistan. Then the people asked for peace on the condition that the conquerors could take possession of their cities and land and the pastures and the hunting grounds were left to the people and the people of Sistan agreed to pay tributes; moreover, the sources that attribute the conquering of Sistan to Osman’s caliphate period, describe it as mentioned in the following words: Arab army invaded Sistan at the time of Mithra Jubilation because the Sistan people did not keep their promise after the caliphate period of Omar and resisted him but they were defeated and had to reestablish peace by presenting a thousand slaves each holding a golden beaker in their hands.

The author of “Sistan’s history”, as well, expresses the following in regard of conquering of Sistan: “Rabi’e Ben Ziyad Haresi was sent to Sistan and a great many of the Muslims were killed in the war that took place therein. Muslim army attacked again and the Sistan’s king said that we have to make peace, everybody accepted and an individual was sent to Islam army to say that we are unable to fight but one cannot fight with the God and you are the army of the God, so Rabi’e accepted him and ordered the army to put their weapons down and annoy no one and asserted that everyone is free to submit to Islam” (Sistan’s history, 2010: 80-82). The majority of the first Muslims, who entered Sistan, were individuals who had been fostered and brought up by the great Apostle of Islam (may Allah bestow him and his sacred progeny with the best of His regards) and their objective of capturing the region, like the great apostle (may Allah bestow him and his sacred progeny with the best of His regards), was inviting the people therein to Islam and they used to tell the Sistan’s people that “Say there is no other god than Allah to be saved”. The Muslims’ behavior that, surely, has not been left uninfluenced by the Islamic teachings impressed Sistan’s citizens a lot

because as it was customary, Holy Quran readers and religious teachers were dispatched to whatever the territory which was captured by the Muslim army who then got involved in training new Muslims (Shahraki, 2014: 57&58).

It seems that there are other factors that have contributed to the submission of Sistan’s people to Islam:

- 1) The existence of common concepts between the Zoroastrianism and Islam including the belief in the other world, the Satan, the unity of Ahura Mazda and the God, the good conquest over the bad (rwgn.net);
- 2) Harsh treating of certain social classes by Zoroastrianism (Christiansen, 2007: 67&69);
- 3) The Sassanid era’s society division into several classes (Zarrinkoub, 2015: 82); and,
- 4) People’s discontents with the government and, more importantly, the general motto of everyone’s equality in the Muslim society (Zarrinkoub, 2015: 175).

5. THE PROCESS OF SHI’ISM ACCEPTANCE IN SISTAN AND ITS OUTCOMES:

At the beginning of Islam’s entry to Sistan, there were not yet various religious sects and demarcations formed. Due to the same reason, Islam was promoted in whole and away from sect-specific concepts. Although there was observed traces of the seminal Muslims’ attachment to Ahl Al-Bayt (peace be upon them) and such an emotional bond was well beyond their attachment to the great apostle of Islam (may Allah bestow him and his sacred progeny with the best of His regards), but the religious integrity of Sistan was gradually subjected to schisms and the formal religion in the large cities, including in Zarang and Bost, was Sunnat (Shahraki, 2014: 98&99).

But, on the other hand, there were factors that caused the people of the region to become more inclined towards Shi’ism. After Nahavand Battle and the Arabs’ entry to Iran, they took a great many of the people as captives the majority of whom very soon accepted Islam from their Arab masters and was freed (Ja’afari, 1995: 139). According to the narrations cited in most of the historical sources, the Arab masters did not properly treat the captivated slaves, called vassals, and continuously humiliated

them and there was much difference between them and the Arabs. When His Highness Ali (Peace be upon him) became the Imam, things were changed in such a manner that His Highness placed serving justice and following the right as the main pivot of his programs and decisions. In his first measure, His Highness opened the treasury house and divide it equally to all the people and as his second measure His Highness cleared the caliphate from corrupted individuals and agents and prevented the individuals who caused disparity, discrimination and discontent among the general public from interfering in the affairs and then His Highness implemented the most sensitive and the most complicated part of his practical policy which was installing his own agents to the tenures instead of making use of incompetent previous agents because His Highness considered government as a means to establish justice, truthfulness and rightfulness (Khezri, 1966: 73-75). Belazari knows the reason behind the Shi'ism tendencies as residing in the arrival of His Highness Ali (Peace be upon him)'s functionaries, including Abdulrahman Ben Jorta'ee, Khalid Ben Kas and Rabi'e Ben Kas Anbari, at Sistan (Belazari, 1958: 89); moreover, His Highness Ali (Peace be upon him) treated the followers of the other religions and the non-Muslim nationals of Muslim states equally and justly and supported the lower social classes and the vassals. Vassals were mostly Iranians and they constituted a vast part of His Highness Ali (Peace be upon him)'s army and the prevalent population of his imamate capital (Shahraki, 2014: 100). There was a considerable number of women among the war prisoners who legitimately got married to the Arab conquerors and gave birth to children for them and the result was that in less than 20 years, the time interval before His Highness Ali (Peace be upon him)'s arrival at Kufa, there was a new generation of Arabs in Kufa whose mothers were Iranians. The important point here is that Kufa's Persians, the ones with Iranian mothers, were not allowed to enjoy equal positions. They were called vassals or functionaries and were considered as freed slaves (Ja'afari, 1995: 39&40). But, because His Highness Ali (Peace be upon him) served justice and supported them, these vassals were inclined towards him. When these vassals returned to their families, they carried with them the message of His Highness's justice and equality and Sistan, as well, was not an exception to this situation. The seminal Holy Quran readers and religious scientists, who were dispatched to the various regions for promoting and spreading Islam, were the ones who had seen the Prophet (may Allah bestow him and his sacred progeny with the best of His regards) and Imam Ali (Peace be upon him) in person and they had heard

the prophet (may Allah bestow him and his sacred progeny with the best of His regards)'s Ahadith regarding His Highness Ali and his immaculate progeny (peace be upon them) and they could be preachers of His Highness Ali and his sacred progeny (Peace be upon him)'s rightfulness and divulge the tyrannical deeds of the rulers and enlighten the public thoughts thereby to exert influences on the then society of Sistan (Shahraki, 2014: 100). And, it seems that the same factors gave rise to the Sistan people's tendencies towards Shi'ism in such a manner that Yaghout Hamavi writes: "at the time that Imam Ali (Peace be upon him) was insulted from the top of the east and west pulpits, they never did the same and conditioned their treaty with the offspring of Omayyeh on the cessation of insults to His Highness Ali (Peace be upon him)" (Hamavi, no date: 90).

It can be understood from the historical evidences that His Highness Ali (Peace be upon him) had a special attention to Sistan and the people there. Abdulrahman, Amir Al-Mu'menin's functionary, constructed Sistan's Main Mosque and the Sistan's people were taught by Hassan Basri. Amir Al-Mu'menin Ali (Peace be upon him) dispatched Imam Hassan (Peace be upon him) accompanied by an army to the territories of Persians' Iraq and some lands submitted to Islam by war; some others submitted to Islam as a result of a letter sent by Imam Hassan (Peace be upon him) among which were the people of Bakhtiyar and Sistan. Sistan people's tendencies towards His Highness Ali and his sacred progeny (peace be upon them) were so high that a short while after Ashura Incident and before the rise of Mukhtar they were the first who rose to seek revenge for Imam Hussein (Peace be upon him)'s martyrdom as it is written by the author of "Sistan's history" regarding the people's rise in seek of revenge for Imam Hussein (Peace be upon him)'s martyrdom "when the news of Imam Hussein (Peace be upon him)'s martyrdom reached the people of Sistan they said that Yazid has not chosen a good way in treating this way with the prophet's progeny. At this time, a revolt was set up in Sistan in such a manner that the governor of Sistan escaped to Basra and took the people's treasury house contents and the tributes of Kabul and the other properties with him and Ubaidullah Ben Ziad dispatched his two of the brothers, named Yazid Ben Ziyad and Abu Ubaideh Ben Ziyad, to Sistan" (Sistan's history, 2010: 100).

Such a tendency of Sistan's people towards Shi'ism was continued at the time of Omavis and then during Abbasid caliphate in a way that some sources have

introduced Ya'aghoub Lays as being a Shiite (Razi, 2009: 170). But, it does not seem that Ya'aghoub has been a Shiite because if it was so he should have not gone to war with the Alavis in Tabaristan and, on the other hand, if he has been a Shiite he should have not let the heretics join his army. So, it appears that Ya'aghoub Lays exercised a sort of religious compromise. At the time of Nasr Ben Ahmad Samani (880-910), we witness an increase in Ismailis' activities in such a way that even Nasr Ben Ahmad, as well, joined Isma'eeli creed, late in his life. The most important individuals claiming Esma'eeli creed in the Samanid kingdom were Hussein marvroudi and Muhammad Ben Ahmad Nakhshabi who set the grounding for the Samanid's court conversion to Ismailism as a result of which they forced Nasr Ben Ahmad to resign from authority (Dehmoredeh, 2005: 34).

During the later periods, including during Al-e-Bouyeh governorship who were the followers of Shi'ism, Ghaznavids and Seleucids, such tendencies were kept up in such a manner that sources have stated the news of Naser Khosrow Ghobadiyani's arrival at Sistan during Seleucids Era for inviting the people to Ismailism (Khezri, 1966: 258). Tendencies and conversions to Shi'ism were transferred from one period to another. During Khwarazmian, Mongolian and Ilkhanate eras, tendencies towards Shi'ism were so deeply rooted that Ilkhanate kings including Tekodar, who later on called himself Ahmad and converted to Islam, and Sultan Muhammad Khodabandeh Oljeito and Ghazan khan preferred Shi'ism (Bayani, 1999: 484-597). Tendencies towards Shi'ism were carried on during Timurids and Turkmans' governorships. Although Timur has been cited to have been a Sunni but the sources have also confirmed his religious compromise and it is written in this regard that "Sunni Timur was somewhat careless to the religious tendencies; but he treated the Islam Elders with pure veneration and he particularly supported and protected the Prophet's progeny and descendants" (Zarrinkoub, 2001: 61). Surely, the Shi'ism tendencies of these kings have not been devoid of effect on the Sistan's people who were the early fans of His Highness Ali (Peace be upon him). Finally, with the appearance of Safavid Dynasty and the authentication of Shi'ism as the formal religion in Iran, Sistan entered its new epoch of political and religious life.

At the time of King Tahmasp Safavi, Sultan Muhammad Sistani migrated to India due to the interventions and presence of Qizilbash group and for his deprivation of independence. It is

documented in "Ehya'a Al-Moluk" that Sistan was handed over to Qizilbash group. With the governorship of Qizilbash in Iran, half of the Sistan's people joined them and selected Shi'ism and another half insisted on their Sunnism and this was the way the Sistan society bisected in terms of its religious thoughts to East Sistan, the people of whom were Sunnis and announced their isolation from Iran and West Sistan the people of whom were Shiites (Shahraki, 2014: 123).

6. CONCLUSION

Sistan, as one of the important satraps in the ancient Iran, has long been an ethics-oriented community and it relied on the monotheistic tendencies of ancient religions and there are even signs of divine religions like Christianity and Judaism observed on this land. Therefore, pre-Islam Sistan has been well acquainted with the monotheistic and ethics-oriented thoughts and this naturally paved the way for the expansion of new religion.

Islam entered Sistan at the time of Omar and Osman's caliphates and it was quickly and subject to the prior religious mentalities of the people in Sistan as well as under the influence of the Muslims' pleasant behaviors and habits was greatly welcomed and the Sistan population gradually went on towards conversion to Islam. With the passage of time and the creation of religious sects among the Muslims, many of the Islamic sects' proponents and followers migrated to Sistan for its being far away from the Islamic caliphate center. On the other hand, many of the people in Sistan moved to large cities and the Islamic caliphate centers for various reasons like marriage, finding a job, business and so forth; thus, the people of Sistan got familiar with the various Islamic sects' thoughts and Sistan's people were, in the meanwhile, deeply enchanted by the way of conduct and the manners and the kindness and justice of Imam Ali (Peace be upon him) and his highness's Shiite followers and it was the way Shi'ism seed was sown in this territory.

Therefore, Sistan's people were fanatic followers of His Highness Ali (Peace be upon him)'s progeny to the extent that they refrained from insulting the Imam at the time of Omavis and they were the first tribe who in the course of Karbala catastrophe expressed their objection and scorned Yazid.

Thus, Sistan was from the very beginning a supporter of Shi'ism and it always proved its protection of Alavi descendants and even though the majority of the dynasties governing Iran were Sunnis

and put pressures on Shiites but their trend of expansion and protection of Shiites was never overshadowed by such discontents and this stream survived in Iran until the appearance of Safavid Dynasty by which Shi'ism was authenticated.

The investigation of the political-religious roots and outcomes of Shi'ism in Sistan during various courses is a very extensive and multi-facet issue entailing further and more widespread research that is out of the present study's scope. It is hoped that the researchers perform further future research considering this political-religious stream so as to clarify the other latent angles thereof.

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