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Author(s): Marya Dara

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Zoroaster as the Epic Hero to Prove His Legitimacy

Maryam Dara¹ 

Abstract

Epic heroes are noble individual of prodigious martial strength but they too mostly pass through several trials to prove their legitimate position. These endeavors include battles with evils while the heroes rarely overcome mental evils. The trials are challenging for heroes' power to defeat the evil. The seven trials of Rostam and Isfandiyār as well as the twelve trials of Heracles fall in this category. Twelve thousand years of the Zoroastrian world includes an eternal battle between good and evil and the good will win this battle at last in the Armageddon. Zoroaster is the highest level of Ahura Mazda's forces against Angra Mainyu. He too passed the seven trials in his childhood and adulthood which is not though the pure history but mixed with the myths and epics. Therefore, he acts as a hero to prove his legitimacy and triumph over dēws, Karaps and evil thoughts was his utmost aim and established Zoroastrianism through converting Goštāsp and his court. All of the trials he passed proved his legitimacy for being the prophet.

Keywords: Epic; Hero; Seven Trials, Zoroaster.

¹ Assistant Professor of RICHT, Tehran, Iran.  maryam_dara@yahoo.com

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Introduction

The legitimacy of the great heroes of the epics could be proven by passing several trials and labours. Their victory over the evils, witches, monsters and dragons are well-known in the stories as Rostam, Isfandiyār and Heracles. But these are not the only heroes who proved themselves through the trials.

Myths and epics differ in the first characters as the gods and deities in the myths and heroes in the epics. The epics are more believable than the myths through their main characters, mostly human beings with physical powers. But mental powers also play a significant role if the heroes are wise or needed to be mentioned as mentally powerful characters through their stories. The great heroes are considered to extraordinarily gain the highest position among the epical heroes. While several trials are narrated in a story, the hero can prove himself through passing them with triumph and reaching an aim at the end. They need the physical power, courage and sometimes wisdom to cross the trials with success. Afterwards, those heroes are entitled as Great Heroes.

These trials are always seven in Iran and the most well-known are the trials of Rostam and Isfandiyār as *haft xāns*. But there is an exception with Zoroaster as he had to go through several trials in his life to be entitled as the Iranian prophet. The historical life of Zoroaster was a mystery but, there are references to his mythical-legendary life in different Zoroastrian manuscripts and books as *Vizīdagihā ī Zādisparam*, *Dēnkard*, *Sad Dar-ī Nasr*, *Bundahišn*, *Zrātušt Nnāmag*, *AlMilal va AlNihal*. He is not a hero but his triumphs over evil forces and thoughts are underlined in the aforementioned texts.

Although, Ahura Mazda and Amēša

Spands played key roles in the life of Zoroaster, the whole concept is believable. Human beings are the source of most of the evil forces as Karaps or witches and malevolent or even evil thoughts in father's and villagers' heads and not the dragons and monsters of epic stories.

Wining over evil forces is the ultimate aim of Zoroastrians throughout life as Zoroastrianism is a cult of dualism, in which, the final triumph of Ahura Mazda's forces over *Angra Mainyu's* are predicted and these forces are in an eternal battle for twelve thousand years. In Zoroastrianism, in other words, there is the belief of a twelve-thousand-year battle of two forces of good and evil from even prior to the creation till the Armageddon. In the epics, these evil forces are illustrated as Zahak, Turan troops, dragons and *dēws*. Additionally, gods as Bahrām has the function of winning both against mental evils and enemies on the battlefields (Pourdavood, 1998: 112). Zoroaster is the most significant warrior of Ahura Mazda in these battles with evils throughout his life and these battles could be divided in to two seven-trials from childhood to adult life. He is a representative of the good forces; therefore, he is to defeat evils on Ahura Mazda's behalf. His battle resembles a great hero passing the trials hence; it is the aim of the author to study the mythical-legendary life of Zoroaster and his fight with evil forces.

Zoroaster's Trials

The early life of several great historical or epic characters are covered with stories to prove they are going to be special adults and legitimate persons when grow up such as Cyrus, Rostam, Keykhosrow, Jesus etc. Among these narrations are

the childhood of Zoroaster according to *Vizīdagihā ī Zādisparam* (8, § 4-5).

Zoroaster was presented as a hero even before he was born. The trials he passed through and his triumph over evils were proofs of his legitimate position and a great Iranian prophet.

The birth of several great historical or epic characters as Cyrus, Jesus and Rostam were predicted. Zoroaster's birth was predicted by The First Cow- created along with Kayōmart as the first creations- as the one to revenge the Cow's death caused by *Angra Mainyu*. Additionally, kings as Jamšēd, Fereydūn and others foretold Zoroaster's birth. Even the famous Cow of Kaykāvōs did the same prediction (Amoozgar and Tafazzoli, 2001: 123-124). Also, the fortunetellers predicted his birth and this is an archetype for the birth of a child who is to be a great man of all times.

Now let us review the story of Zoroaster's birth and his childhood. *Dēws* put the evil thoughts in the minds of the people to believe Doydaw, Zoroaster's mother, was a witch (Amoozgar and Tafazzoli, 2001: 32). The young woman fled her village to Porošasb's, her future husband. Then, *Čišmag Dēw* caused the earthquake to destroy their house but the bowl of milk containing the essence of Zoroaster's body remained safe (Ibid: 33). According to *Vizīdagihā ī Zādisparam* (8, 4-5), *dēws* sent a fever to Doydaw but she could cure herself.

According to *Dēnkard* (9, 24, 3), Anāhid, the goddess of pure waters, was present in the birth of Zoroaster who held Doydaw's head and shoulders. Additionally, Ašī, the goddess of wealth and blessing, held her back and forth and Dēn held her sides and other good forces helped her to ease the birth (Amoozgar and Tafazzoli, 2001: 36, 115).

But the trials of Zoroaster started

basically after his birth and during his childhood as following: 1. According to *Dēnkard* (7, 3- 4), Dorasraw Karap, the most famous witch, decided to press the small head of baby Zoroaster but his hands lost the ability and became stiff. 2. Dorasraw Karap also put the idea of killing Zoroaster in his father's mind (5-6). Therefore, Porošasb put his son into fire (9-10). 3. Then he put Zoroaster in the path of the bulls and 4. then in the path of horses. His mother found the child each and every time and brought him back home (11-14). 5. The father also put the child in the wolf's lair. The wolf offspring were killed therefore being there for baby Zoroaster was far too dangerous. But suddenly wolf's snout became stiff and locked and the ewe fed the child with milk and finally child's mother saved him again (15-18). 6. According to *Dēnkard* (7, 32-33), Zoroaster at the age of seven met Dorasraw Karap and Bradaroriš Karap who decided to scare him but they failed. Bradaroriš Karap wanted to feed the child with his urine to make Zoroaster alike but Zoroaster threw the vessel, according to *Vizīdagihā ī Zādisparam* (11, 4 (Rashed Mohassel, 2006: 61). 7. According to *Dēnkard* (7, 3, 34) Zoroaster also threw the milk bowl Karaps wanted to curse him with but the Karap was killed instead of Zoroaster at the end (Amoozgar and Tafazzoli, 2001: 81-82).

These were the trials for Zoroaster to prove he is legitimate for being a prophet. He passed seven other trials as an adult as following:

He encountered Ahura Mazda and Amašāspands seven times from thirty to forty years of his age according to *Dēnkard* (Ibid: 40). As it is mentioned in *Vizīdagihā ī Zādisparam*, Zoroaster faced many Vars (religious tests) after becoming the prophet. These Vars-

mostly as the fire, the molten metal and ripping the stomach- were supposed to prove Zoroaster's faith and they were similar to miracles and they happened to observe his being honest and true. The trials of his adult life were as following. 1. He passed the fire with the help of his good thought, good speech and good deeds (22, 10), 2. The molten metal was poured on his chest but the metal became cold and he handed it to Amēšaspands (22, 12), 3. His stomach was ripped but he was cured immediately (22, 13). Each and every time he won and had the triumph passing the tests. These trials were to show the prophet's faith and honesty (22, 14) (Rashed Mohassel, 2006: 69). 4. Then Zoroaster went to King Goštāsp's court with 21 Nasks of *Avestā*, Azar Barzīnmīhr and cypress bough. And these miracles scared the king's courtiers who envied Zoroaster. There is a narration illustrating Zoroaster in a dialogue with them but he passed this test as well. 5. Then they put dead human and animal body parts in his bag and finally King Goštāsp imprisoned Zoroaster (Amoozgar and Tafazzoli, 2001: 42-43, 147-148). 6. After a short while, Zoroaster cured King Goštāsp's horse and was released according to *Dēnkard* (7, 4, 7), therefore he put conditions to the court that Goštāsp and Hotūs, his queen, had to convert into Zoroastrianism. Isfandyār was supposed to support Zoroastrianism and Zoroaster's enemies had to be punished (Ibid: 43, 80, 97, 106). This was the turning point and great triumph of Zoroastrianism as the kingdom became believers and was one of the most important steps in the history of Zoroastrianism. Zoroaster had to perform miracles such as showing Goštāsp his position in after-life therefore this is the reason why these events can be considered as a trial. 7. There is this other

trial of him as he could push away *dēws* by *Ahūnawar*, Zoroastrian prayer, according to *Dēnkard* (7, 4, 55-62), similar to Rostam in his fourth trial. *Angra Mainyu* sent a *dēw* in the figure of a woman to Zoroaster but Ahura Mazda had previously warned Zoroaster. He asked the *dēw* to turn her back on Zoroaster and when that *dēw* did Zoroaster discovered several *xrafstars* on her back. Therefore, he invoked *Ahūnawar* in order to disappear that *dēw* (Ibid: 91-92, 94-95).

Analysis

Passing the trials is a method of proving a hero of his legitimacy to be the greatest. He has to be considered as suitable as no one else is. Sometimes these tests are considered Vars or Pāgošāi (Doostkhah in Koyaji, 2004: 551) as the effort to go forward to the next step and becoming true or descent men, soldiers or even heroes. Vars and Pāgošāi are different than the trials. Vars happen to anybody to test him as a true person. Also, Pāgošāi can be performed for any man in a society to show he is ready for the difficulties of the adult life. Therefore, only trials are specifically narrated for a special person to show he is higher, stronger and more suitable than others for a position or mission. Trials are passed in order for a hero to achieve a great victory no one else could. Additionally, something must be saved or an achievement must be gained by passing these extraordinary trials. Rostam saving King Kaykāvōs after seven trials as the *Jahan Pahlavan* (highest rank of hero) and also Isfandyār saving his sisters by passing through seven trials are the best examples of such trials in Iranian epics. Zoroaster too proved his decency after several trials and saved *Dēn-i behi*. He is the great soldier of Ahura Mazda in the eternal

battle against evil forces therefore he had to pass the trials to prove his legitimacy as a hero and the prophet. His other achievement was to convert Goštāsp and his court to guarantee the expansion of *Dēn-i behi*.

The first seven trials Zoroaster went through were aimed at making him the prophet and the next seven trials were to prove his faith and ability and appropriateness for such position. His childhood trials included 1. Defeating Dorasraw Karap, 2. The fire, 3. The path of bulls, 4. The path of horses, 5. The wolf's lair, 6. Dorasraw Karap and Bradaroriš Karap, 7. The cursed milk bowl. Then he passed seven other trials in his adulthood as 1. The fire, 2. The molten metal, 3. His ripped stomach, 4-5. The envious court officials, 6. Converting the king and his court, 7. The female *dēw*. Some of his trials while he was an adult look like miracles and Vars suggesting that he was the prophet not an epic hero but the author suggests that although Zoroaster never did any epic heroism he had to pass the trials as a key force of Ahura Mazda.

His victory in the palace of King Goštāsp was the strongest point since a religion could become strong when the kings supported it. One of the main trials in the epics is dragons and *dēws* slaughtering by the heroes. As Zoroaster is not an epic hero but passing the trials, he destroyed evil thoughts, Karaps and *dēws* and the symbols of *Angra Mainyu*. Zoroaster lived all his life against evil thoughts and deeds. These are testimonies that Zoroastrianism aims to win the battle against evils after twelve-thousand years. Under this perspective, a prophet acts like an epic hero who is facing dragons appearing in different forms throughout his life. The main idea of the battles he participated in was the basis of Zoroastrianism, the religion

of dualism, and the prophet in such a religion had to be a winner and a hero to overcome all the steps to prove his suitability for such a holy mission.

Conclusion

The life of Zoroaster is a combination of history, myth, epic and religion. As is observed, defeating not only evil people but evil thoughts played a significant role in the life of Zoroaster. He is a prophet and simultaneously a religious-epic hero. The dualism of Zoroastrianism can be observed in the life history of Zoroaster. He was the main hero of twelve-thousand years of the battle between the good and the evil and he defeated the evil thoughts, Karaps and *dēws* while passing through trials as a hero. He was defeating evils even prior to his birth and continued his battle throughout his childhood and adulthood. The trials proved him proper and that he could be the Iranian prophet. His several adult trials sometimes resemble the miracles and some elements related to epic stories as the triumph over the fire and female *dēw* resembles other Iranian epic stories. He turned victorious after each trial similar to the eternal triumph of Zoroastrianism which ends with the victory of Ahura Mazda and the good powers over the evils. As his life story resembles an epic of the battle between the good and the evil, the prophet of this religion too should be an epic hero and should prove his legitimacy. The Iranians' preferences of winning over the evil transformed the life of Zoroaster into an epic story with trials in order for him to prove his legitimacy of being the prophet of Ahura Mazda- the ultimate winner of the eternal battle against the evils.

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