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Family Values and Social Cohesion: Insights from Zoroastrian Scriptures

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the role of family values and social cohesion as depicted in Zoroastrian scriptures, particularly focusing on the Avesta, the sacred text of Zoroastrianism, and its teachings on morality and spirituality within the family setting. The research involves an extensive analysis of the Avesta, examining its guidance on marriage, family relationships, and the upbringing of future generations. The study emphasizes the cultural, moral, and ethical principles outlined in the scriptures, highlighting their significance in fostering a virtuous and cohesive community. The Avesta underscores the importance of the family as the primary environment for moral and spiritual development, emphasizing three core principles: Good Thought (Humata), Good Word (Hukhta), and Good Deed (Hvarshta). The text details the roles and responsibilities within the family, advocating for the preservation of purity, moral integrity, and the promotion of a healthy and prosperous generation. The research finds that the Avesta provides a comprehensive framework for family dynamics, including marriage rituals, ethical standards, and the upbringing of children. The principles outlined in the Avesta are shown to be relevant even in

contemporary discussions about family well-being and marital ethics. The study concludes that the teachings of the Avesta offer valuable insights into the foundational role of family in cultivating moral and spiritual growth. The principles of Good Thought, Good Word, and Good Deed remain central to fostering a virtuous and cohesive society. The Avesta's guidance on family values continues to hold significant relevance in modern times, providing a timeless framework for understanding and enhancing family dynamics and social cohesion.

Keywords: Spirituality, Society, Civilization, Tradition, Faith, Religion, Education, Morality, Moral Rights, Marriage, Ceremony, Patriotism, Generosity.

Introduction

Family values and social cohesion are essential components of any society, and understanding their historical and cultural contexts can provide valuable insights into their modern relevance. One of the oldest religions in the world, Zoroastrianism, underscores the critical role of the family in fostering spirituality and moral growth (Botalov, 2022; Sheffield, 2022). At the heart of this tradition is the Avesta, its sacred text, which outlines the foundational teachings and principles of Zoroastrianism (Piras, 2022; Rodziewicz, 2022). The Avesta emphasizes that the family is the primary setting for developing human morality and spirituality. It teaches that a person's moral and spiritual character is built on three fundamental principles: Humata (good thought), Hukhta (good word), and Hvarshta (good deed). These principles reflect the core of Zoroastrian ethics, emphasizing the link between thought, speech, and actions in cultivating a virtuous and spiritual life (Grenet, 2021; Sahner, 2021).

A good idea involves showing kindness, being prepared to assist loved ones during difficult or dangerous times, consistently striving to promote the well-being of others, and living harmoniously with everyone (Grenet, 2021; Sahner, 2021). Good words refer to honoring promises, being truthful in dealings, fulfilling commitments promptly, avoiding theft and dishonesty, and refraining from corrupt behavior (Cantera, 2021; Maksymiuk, 2021). The Avesta offers comprehensive guidance on many facets of life, such as moral, spiritual, and social behavior. This study seeks to examine how the Avesta deals with topics like marriage, family relationships, and fostering a healthy generation, highlighting the significance of these elements for sustaining a virtuous and prosperous community.

The moral and ethical guidance provided by the Avesta extends beyond individual behavior to encompass family and community dynamics. It addresses the responsibilities of parents and children, outlining the roles each family member plays in fostering a healthy and virtuous home. By emphasizing the importance of good thoughts, words, and deeds, the Avesta not only provides a framework for personal development but also promotes social harmony and cohesion (Agostini, 2020; Dafni, 2020).

Cultural and religious insights from the Avesta offer a thorough exploration of Zoroastrian views and practices concerning marriage and family. These insights are invaluable in understanding how ancient civilizations approached family dynamics and generational well-being. The principles outlined in the Avesta remain relevant today, providing a foundation for discussions about family well-being and marital ethics in the modern world (Guo, 2020).

In addition to its historical context, the Avesta's teachings on marriage and family life have contemporary relevance. The emphasis on nurturing a healthy generation, both physically and spiritually, aligns with current discussions on child development and family health. The Avesta's principles advocate for the proper upbringing of children, stressing the importance of a clean, virtuous environment that fosters growth and well-being.

Moreover, the Avesta outlines specific rules governing family and marital relationships, underscoring the importance of mutual respect and responsibility. It promotes the idea of fidelity and encourages couples to show care and compassion towards one another. The legal framework set by the Avesta notably advances the protection of

women's rights, ensuring their equal status in legal, economic, social, and moral terms within the family structure.

The ongoing relevance of Zoroastrian teachings is evident in the way they address contemporary issues such as marriage, family unity, and the upbringing of children. By providing a comprehensive ethical and moral framework, the Avesta continues to offer valuable insights that can contribute to the betterment of modern society. This study will delve into these teachings, exploring how the principles of good thought, good word, and good deed are imparted and practiced within the family setting, and how they contribute to the overall health and cohesion of the community.

Methodology

The Avesta, a collection of texts, offers comprehensive guidance on many facets of life, such as moral, spiritual, and social behavior. This study seeks to examine how the Avesta deals with topics like marriage, family relationships, and fostering a healthy generation, highlighting the significance of these elements for sustaining a virtuous and prosperous community.

Cultural and Religious Insights: The study offers a thorough exploration of Zoroastrian views and practices concerning marriage and family, providing valuable perspectives on one of the world's earliest monotheistic religions.

Moral and Ethical Guidance: The research delves into the teachings of the Avesta, emphasizing the moral and ethical principles that Zoroastrians are advised to adhere to, especially in relation to marriage and family life.

Historical Context: Analyzing the Avesta's viewpoints on these matters offers insight into how ancient civilizations dealt with family dynamics and generational well-being.

Contemporary Relevance: The study examines how the teachings of the Avesta apply to today's world, providing insights that can contribute to modern conversations about family well-being and marital ethics.

Marriage in the Avesta: The Avesta describes the principles for a harmonious and virtuous marriage, detailing the roles and responsibilities of both husbands and wives. This research will investigate the rituals, obligations, and ethical standards related to Zoroastrian marriage.

Family Dynamics: The Avesta highlights the crucial role of the family as the foundation for moral and spiritual development. It addresses the relationships between parents and children and outlines the responsibilities of each family member in fostering a healthy and virtuous home.

Healthy Generation: A key element of the Avesta's teachings is the emphasis on nurturing a healthy generation, encompassing both physical and spiritual well-being. The research will explore the practices and principles advised for promoting the health and moral integrity of children.

Good Thought, Good Word, Good Deed: Central to Zoroastrian ethics, the principles of Good Thought (Humata), Good Word (Hukhta), and Good Deed (Hvarshta) are fundamental to family life and upbringing. This study will investigate how these principles are imparted and practiced within the family setting.

Result and Discussion

During the Zoroastrian era, different reasons for marriage were common:

1. Marriages arranged according to the wishes of the father or guardian.
2. Marriages based on romantic affection.
3. Marriages driven by social neglect or pressures regarding women.
4. Marriages primarily aimed at procreation and raising children.

Overall, Zoroastrianism has long emphasized the importance of women and family matters, establishing a foundational framework to enhance their roles and status in society since ancient times.

The Avesta considers education to be fundamental to life, advocating that every young person should learn to read and write. It also promotes early training in skills such as planting trees, making household items, farming, and caring for livestock. These teachings are designed to instill the idea that labor provides intrinsic satisfaction. Zoroastrianism stresses that participating in productive and virtuous activities is crucial for a fulfilling life, suggesting that true appreciation and enjoyment of life come from creating tangible goods with one's own efforts.

In the Avesta, family and marital relationships are governed by specific rules: Zoroastrian tradition regards fifteen-year-olds as adults. It was customary for adolescents to wear a woolen silk belt around their waists, symbolizing their commitment to the Zoroastrian faith and their involvement in religious ceremonies at the fire temple.

Children begin their religious education at the age of seven within the fire temple setting. This early instruction concentrates on three main areas: 1) imparting religious and moral teachings, 2) providing physical education, and 3) teaching basic reading and writing skills. Zoroastrianism underscores the importance of a well-rounded education for children, which includes moral development, intellectual advancement, physical fitness, understanding of sexual norms, cultivation of honesty, fostering patriotism, and encouraging generosity.

In the society being studied, boys were required to acquire a wide range of skills. These included mastering combat techniques, properly caring for and handling horses, cattle, and camels, and proficiently using over 50 military weapons for defense against wild animals. Their training also involved extensive horsemanship and expertise in 32 different military disciplines.

Similarly, the education and upbringing of girls received special attention. Girls were expected to develop both physical and military skills, such as spinning, sewing, participating in wrestling matches with boys, horseback riding, fencing, swimming, and archery. At the ages of 15 for girls and 16 for boys, they underwent a rigorous assessment conducted by a group of elders.

In societal roles, girls were given the opportunity to attain the title of "katbonu", which signified the role of "housewife", whereas boys were encouraged to aim for the position of "kat godu", representing the respected role of "head of the family".

Good deeds involve following all positive principles and ethical standards through one's actions and words, demonstrating a dedication to virtuous behavior and moral integrity.

In the Avesta, an ancient Zoroastrian scripture, there is a strong focus on preserving the purity of offspring. The text strictly controls this aspect, explicitly forbidding marriages between close relatives and siblings, highlighting the significance of familial purity within the community's ethical framework.

Modern medical science has definitively shown that consanguineous relationships between siblings and close relatives negatively affect the health of future generations, a fact that was long understood by our ancestors and remains relevant today. Beyond the physical consequences, marriages between close relatives also carry significant spiritual implications that should be considered by the human conscience. Ancient Zoroastrianism, which was prevalent in Central Asia, placed great importance on family and marital issues, viewing them as crucial to human well-being. Central to Zoroastrian ethics is the ongoing requirement for both physical and spiritual purity, a principle that has persisted for thousands of years.

Disrupting a family or marriage is strictly prohibited as it aligns with divine principles. If a husband or wife engages in immoral behavior within the family, they are subject to punishment with a stick, a measure designed to maintain family stability.

Zoroastrian teachings highlight the sacredness of the family in Eastern traditions, stressing the importance of its preservation and preventing its dissolution. The Avesta also addresses issues related to population growth, imposing severe penalties for certain offenses: a woman who intentionally causes a miscarriage faces being put in a sack and receiving 50 lashes, while an unmarried man who commits the same offense faces the same punishment and must additionally wear a chain around his waist.

The Avesta holds hard work and diligence in high esteem, viewing these virtues as primarily cultivated within the family. It sees labor not only as a means of material gain but also as a channel for goodness. The text underscores that true generosity arises from the results of one's own work and skill. According to the Avesta, "He who plants the seed plants the seed of piety, fosters devotion to Mazda, and strengthens the faith..." This act is considered as spiritually significant as praying ten thousand times and making numerous sacrifices. Furthermore, labor is portrayed as a way to drive evil from the earth. The Avesta asserts, "When the grain sprouts from the soil, the giants shudder; they groan when the grain is harvested, and when the grain is ground into flour, they are defeated".

In the Avesta, it is affirmed that personal perfection essentially starts within the family. The "Nigarbot" ("God forbid") section quotes Zoroaster as stating, "My only goal is truth and integrity".

The Avesta emphasizes that achieving spiritual growth within the family requires prioritizing the following:

firstly, maintaining physical cleanliness and spiritual purity.

secondly, concentrating on the proper upbringing of infants and young children.

thirdly, avoiding idleness, laziness, and sloth. The “Minuhirat” section of the Avesta cautions, “Be wary of laziness, lest you fall behind in this world”.

The Avesta offers a thorough exploration of family and marital relationships. It provides insights into attitudes towards women, outlining their roles, responsibilities, and setting standards for the appropriate age for marriage. The text emphasizes the importance of the marriage contract, ensuring that women have equal legal, economic, social, and moral rights as their husbands. Women are welcomed into their husbands’ families as equals, honored for their roles as loving and respectful partners. The Avesta also permits interfaith marriages, but the marriage contract prohibits either spouse from remarrying or taking another partner without mutual consent, aiming to preserve family unity and avoid issues like jealousy or disrespect. While divorce is generally discouraged, the Avesta ensures legal protections for both parties’ interests if separation occurs.

The Avesta designates the father as the leader of the family, and it expects adherence to the familial roles and relationships specified in the text. It promotes fidelity and encourages couples to show care and compassion towards one another. Importantly, the Avesta sets up a legal framework that notably advances the protection of women’s rights for its era.

Conclusion

The Avesta, an ancient Zoroastrian scripture, specifies that individuals reach the age of marriageability at 15-16 years old. Zoroastrianism places a significant emphasis on maintaining good health through proper nutrition and strongly encourages childbirth. In response to Zoroaster’s question to Ahura Mazda, “What will you provide for the families with children?” Ahura Mazda replied with a promise of protection, prosperity, and plentiful sustenance for such families.

In Zoroastrian society, women who had many children were highly esteemed and rewarded with camels. In contrast, women found guilty of infanticide faced severe penalties, including the death sentence. Both men and women who engaged in adultery within their families were subject to severe punishments, ranging from physical punishment to execution. Additionally, the societal structure valued motherhood by granting substantial rewards to women who gave birth to 2-3 children at once. These rewards included a pair of dairy cows, a yellow camel, and financial support from the state treasury.

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