IN ANCIENT TIMES, THE SYSTEM OF COMMUNICATION WITH THE PEOPLE WAS THE FIRST DEMOCRATIC ELEMENT

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Abstract: This article analyzes the communication system established among the peoples of ancient Turan and evaluates it as an early manifestation of democratic principles. The research draws on historical sources, archaeological findings, legendary narratives, and ancient written monuments to explore mechanisms that facilitated public address, the expression of popular opinion, and broad participation in decision-making processes. The study examines forms of socio-political dialogue—such as tribal assemblies, people's councils, and the council of elders—that functioned in ancient times, revealing their democratic foundations. Furthermore, the article investigates the historical roots and connections of these systems with contemporary civil society institutions. The traditions of dialogue within Turan's cultural heritage are interpreted as early forms of popular governance.

Keywords: Turan region, ancient communication system, public dialogue, democracy, popular assemblies, council of elders, civil society, historical heritage, socio-political systems, popular governance.

Introduction. The peoples of the Turan region are considered among the most ancient civilizations to have introduced a socio-political and spiritual-cultural order, along with a system of values, into their way of life. Historical sources indicate that as early as three thousand years ago, our ancestors developed specific norms and standards governing their relationship with nature, one another, and society at large. The renowned German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, in his work Thus Spoke Zarathustra, acknowledges that the lifestyle of the ancient Zoroastrian peoples exemplified a distinctive and elevated form of democracy. In this section, we examine the formation and manifestation of traditions of public dialogue in the governance practices of our ancient ancestors. We also analyze the mechanisms through which communication with the people was conducted, exploring the methods and forms it took, while offering a philosophical interpretation of these practices.

The Avesta is the sacred text of Zoroastrianism, one of the oldest religions that emerged in the regions of Central Asia and Turan.

It contains the primordial and ancient divine conceptions of various early peoples, cosmological ideas about the universe and the Earth, myths and legends related to the creation of the world, as well as philosophical and ethical views. One can observe the early forms of public dialogue—an essential element of democracy—within the social structure of the Zoroastrians. According to Abu Rayhan al-Biruni and several other historians, the peoples of Central Asia, even in ancient times, had special halls where communities gathered for public

discussions and councils. These halls, where a sacred fire was kept constantly burning, were known as Atashkadeh. Village men would gather there for rest, and travelers could stay overnight. Most importantly, these spaces hosted assemblies devoted to both major and minor communal matters. In these gatherings, traditional religious, philosophical, and moral views intertwined with the spirit of the time.

A holistic analysis of the Avesta reveals that, prior to the era of Zarathustra, the early ancestors adhered to various tribal religious beliefs. By the first millennium BCE, primitive social relations began to be replaced by the earliest forms of class-based society.

The earliest known form of community governance among our ancestors is referred to as "military democracy."

Over time, it became evident that a strong ideological foundation was needed to sustain and develop this system. Local tribal religions, which had once served to unify communities, began to act as a barrier to societal progress and the transition to a more advanced stage of development. During this complex period, the need arose to unite various tribes of the region and to organize them around the initial idea of statehood. Responding to this historical necessity, Zarathustra emerged as one of the progressive thinkers of his time. His teachings laid the groundwork for a new ideological and spiritual system, and the Avesta—a written source that provides invaluable information about the ancient social life and economic structure of our ancestors—came into existence.

From the Avesta, we learn that ancient society had a hierarchical structure composed of four social units:

the extended patriarchal family (nmana),

the clan (vis),

the tribe (zantu),

and the country or region (dahyu).

The highest spiritual and social authority was the Zarathushtrōtema, a leader who acted as an intermediary between the god of goodness, Ahura Mazda, and the people. Zarathustra, whose name derives from the Old Iranian roots ushtra (camel) and zarat (old or golden), meaning "elder camel driver" or "descendant of camel herders," was seen as a divine messenger. He conveyed the wishes and demands of the people to Ahura Mazda and relayed divine guidance back to the people, embodying the early principles of moral and spiritual leadership in society.

In this context, Zarathustra is seen as a mediator between Ahura Mazda and humanity.

For example, in one dialogue, Zarathustra asks:

"O Creator of the Universe! O Truth!

Which is the second most blissful place on Earth after the most blessed one?"

To this, Ahura Mazda replies:

"Such a place is where an Ashavan has established a home.

In that household, a priest maintains the family order,

there are herds of cattle, a wife, children, and livestock living in harmony.

The animals are well-nourished and cared for,

the mistress of the house is content, and the children are joyful.

A sacred fire burns eternally, and every beautiful event of life is joined with goodness."

The term Ashavan (also known as Arta) refers to the universal law of righteousness and harmony established by Ahura Mazda. It signifies moral integrity, and every action of a virtuous person is expected to align with this principle.

This passage illustrates a mediated form of communication between the divine and humankind, where Ahura Mazda provides practical guidance on how to properly organize household and social life. Zarathustra, in this role, serves as the messenger—conveying divine instructions to the people. Such mediated communication reflects an early form of social guidance and order rooted in spiritual authority.

Zarathustra was an exceptionally gifted poet, theologian, and philosopher.

He promoted the idea that belief in a single God was essential for society to advance to a new stage of development. According to legend, on one Nowruz (New Year) morning, Zarathustra, along with a group of priests, began preparing the sacred drink haoma. At dawn, while taking part in the preparation ritual, he descended to the riverbank to draw water. As he performed his ablution with the pure flowing river water, a radiant being—Vohu Manah—appeared before him. Drawn by its divine light, Zarathustra followed it and ultimately arrived in the presence of the great and benevolent deity, Ahura Mazda.

Surrounded by seven luminous and eternal spiritual entities like Vohu Manah, Ahura Mazda revealed that He was the creator of all existence and had chosen Zarathustra from among humankind to deliver this message. At that time, Zarathustra was forty years old. From that moment forward, he became the prophet of the religion of Ahura Mazda—the term prophet meaning "messenger of goodness."

Zarathustra began preaching the teachings of Ahura Mazda among his people. To convey his message, he composed poetic hymns known as Gathas, intended to be chanted in song. Seventeen of these Gathas were later included in the Yasna—one of the central parts of the Avesta—and have survived to this day.

The Avesta presents the world as a realm defined by fundamental oppositions—light and darkness, life and death, good and evil, justice and lawlessness.

Zarathustra's religious teachings describe the eternal struggle between the spirit of good (Ahura Mazda) and the spirit of evil (Angra Mainyu, or Ahriman). Ahura Mazda calls upon humanity to live righteously and uphold goodness, while Ahriman attempts to lead people astray through falsehood and wrongdoing.

One of the core moral principles of Zoroastrianism is expressed in the Avesta as follows:

"If you wish for Ahura Mazda—the creator of all that is good—to triumph over Ahriman—the source of evil and corruption—and for humanity to achieve eternal happiness, then think good thoughts, speak good words, and perform good deeds."

A person who adheres to these three principles in life will not fall into evil or corruption. This path, though seemingly simple, is in fact the ultimate goal of a truthful life—to remain steadfast on the path of righteousness.

In Zoroastrianism, human beings are granted the freedom of choice, and each person must consciously decide whether to align with good or evil. The individual's moral choice plays a crucial role in the cosmic struggle between truth and falsehood, good and evil.

The path of goodness is the path of truth, and it is this path that Zarathustra, as the messenger of Ahura Mazda, seeks to guide humanity toward.

Historical written sources indicate that before the Achaemenid period, the region was home to the Ancient Bactrian Kingdom. The king ruling under the dakhyu was not an absolute sovereign; his powers were limited by the dakhyupatis. He served only as the head of a council composed of dakhyupatis, and his authority was further constrained by the political assembly called the xanchamana (or anjuman).

At the apex of this political organization was a religious leader and chief judge known as the zaratushtraema. This high priest held a status comparable to the prophet Zarathustra himself. Without his approval, neither the dakhyupatis nor the dakhyu sastis could assume positions of power. This system clearly reflects early democratic principles, particularly the separation and limitation of political power.

In the lands created by the god of goodness, Ahura Mazda, the council of elders was called the varzana or xanchamana, while the general public assembly was known as v'yakha. These gatherings represented authentic forms of communication with the people, where every member of the community—whether family, clan, or tribe—had the opportunity to express opinions and propose solutions regarding matters that concerned their collective fate.

Decisions made by the council of elders were strictly based on the majority's voice, aiming to adopt resolutions beneficial to the majority. In addition to these, there were important political and military meetings called Dakhyunam Fratemato. These assemblies functioned as allied gatherings, bringing together representatives from neighboring allied tribes to participate collectively.

In Zoroastrianism, faith is founded upon three main pillars: purity of thought, steadfastness of word, and humanity of actions. The Avesta states that "fulfilling one's promises, remaining loyal to one's word, strictly observing trade and contractual obligations, repaying debts on time, and being free from deceit and betrayal are signs of true faith."

Ahriman, having separated from Ahura Mazda's essence, engages in creating evil. The only way to return the world to its original state of goodness is through a pure life, honest labor,

creativity, banishing evil from the heart, maintaining sincere faith, helping the poor, and committing to good intentions, good words, and good deeds.

Thus, the Avesta not only presents the moral philosophy of Zoroastrianism—the world's oldest religion—but also serves as a valuable source that is religious, historical, and literary in nature. It stands as a comprehensive compendium of our ancestors' long past and intellectual development.

Conclusions. The ancient societies of the Turan region demonstrate an early and sophisticated system of governance rooted in dialogue between rulers and the people, embodying foundational democratic principles such as power sharing and collective decision-making. The Zoroastrian religion, as reflected in the Avesta, not only offers a profound moral philosophy centered on the eternal struggle between good and evil but also emphasizes the importance of ethical conduct through purity of thought, truthfulness of speech, and righteousness of action. The integration of religious authority and social councils in these early communities highlights a complex socio-political structure where spiritual and temporal powers were balanced. This historical legacy underscores the deep cultural and philosophical roots of civic engagement and moral responsibility, which continue to resonate in modern concepts of democracy and civil society. Thus, the traditions of Turan and Zoroastrianism provide invaluable insights into the evolution of human social and political thought, emphasizing the enduring significance of dialogue, faith, and ethical leadership in shaping just and prosperous communities.

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