

Investigating Zoroastrians' Social Status in Isfahan during the Safavid Era

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Abstract

The relationship between the government and religious minorities as well as their social status in the Safavid era is one of the most significant issues in the period. It gained a critical status especially since the beginning of the reign of Shah Abbas I and the transfer of his capital to Isfahan. Although there is a lot of material about the welfare and special status of Armenians in Isfahan in the sources of this period, writings and resources about other minorities are available only sporadically. This is especially true for Zoroastrians in terms of their long presence in Iran. Although the number of Zoroastrians gradually decreased with the arrival of Islam in Iran, their transfer to Isfahan under Shah Abbas and the use of their power and skills for flourishing the economy of the Safavid period suggests the significance of this religious minority at that time. Using a descriptive-analytical research method and based on written sources, this study seeks to answer the question of the social status of Zoroastrians in Isfahan throughout the Safavid period. Earlier studies confirm that the social status of Zoroastrians had varied in different periods of the reign of the Safavid. Although this minority had a relatively favorable status during the reign of Shah Abbas I, after his death and the decline in religious toleration in the Safavid state, the Zoroastrians were once again oppressed and the majority of them were compelled to leave Isfahan.

Keywords: Zoroastrians, the Safavid dynasty, Abbas I of Persia, Isfahan.

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Introduction

After the collapse of the Sassanid government and the arrival of Islam in Iran, the status of Zoroastrians changed significantly. Independent books and written resources about the Iranian Zoroastrian society during the Islamic era have long remained, containing scattered information about them. Undeniably, the Islamic conquest induced the majority of Zoroastrians to abandon Iran; some of them chose China and some others India to seek asylum. The population of Zoroastrians residing in India set up their sacred Fire called Bahram Fire (Fire of Victory) in Navsari in Gujarat, and established the Parsis (Indian-Iranian Zoroastrian community). However, the groups of Zoroastrians stayed in Iran, being able to preserve and protect their ancient religion for quite some time. Parts of northern Iran, especially the regions adjacent to the Caspian Sea, and territories in the center of Iran from the edges of Fars and Isfahan to Yazd and Kerman were the main areas where the believers in Zoroastrianism survived in some numbers.

Seemingly, after the spread of Islam in Iran, since Islam attached the significance to religious minorities and religious tolerance, in the governments such as the Buyids, Zoroastrian fire temples continued to exist in some corners of Iran, and they would freely perform their religious ceremonies and protect their religion especially in the areas such as Fars. Since the 4th century AH, some various factors, including the emergence of fanatic dynasties such as Seljuks, which was followed by limiting the scope of Zoroastrian activities, led the population of Zoroastrians to be reduced in the central regions of Iran. The number of this minority, therefore, migrated to the eastern regions of the country and even other countries such as India and even China. This trend continued until the foundation of the Safavid dynasty. The present article attempts to study Zoroastrians' status in the Safavid era in order to explain the evolution of the government's view about this minority and its influences on their social life from the

period of Abbas I and the selection of Isfahan as capital to the fall of this city and the Safavid dynasty. The research hypothesis proposes that Zoroastrians' social status in the Safavid era was in fact based on the type of view and the level of religious toleration of the Safavid government. Although Zoroastrians in Isfahan were given a relatively favorable situation during Shah Abbas I, after his death, the social status of this minority changed and gradually religious toleration turned to oppression and violence on Zoroastrians.

The presence of Zoroastrians in Isfahan from the arrival of Islam to the Safavid dynasty

Isfahan was one of the largest and most important cities during the Sassanid era since it was ruled under the Sassanid princes (Kristiansen, 1988: 129). With the rise of Islam and the conquest of this city in the 23rd AH, residents of Isfahan continued to maintain their ancient religion by paying *Jizyah* (tax). However, over time, groups of them chose to convert to the new religion (Ibn Rustah, 1987: 185).

The reports presented by Ibn Rustah and Ibn Hawqal in the 3rd and 4th centuries indicate the active presence of Zoroastrians and their fire temples in Isfahan (Ibn Rustah, 1987: 185; Ibn Hawqal, 1967: 109). Perhaps later, encouraged by Zoroastrians' presence, Mardavaj of the Ziyarid dynasty paid attention to the ancient customs and rituals and established a great festival to revive ancient customs in the winter of 323 AH, by providing plenty of firewood on both sides of Zāyanderūd River and setting the fire (Ashtiani, 1991: 132). Later, with the rise of the Seljuk and making Isfahan as capital, the intense persecution and oppression on the Zoroastrian minority was increased. In the days when the Shi'ite and Sunni conflicts peaked, not only was Zoroastrianism considered as heretic, but also, Zoroastrians were defamed as infidels such as the Qarmatians (Tusi, 1994: 179). Thus, this ethnic minority in Isfahan were suffering from

prosecution and imprisonment during this period. In addition to religious fanaticism, various ethnic groups' invasion of Iran and their attacks to Isfahan were among other factors limiting the Zoroastrian presence in this city. The Siege of Isfahan by the army of Tinur can be seen as an example, in which seventy thousand people were killed in Isfahan solely on one day (Yazdi, 1957: 1/314). Therefore, these invasions are of significance in discussion and investigations about the Zoroastrians in Isfahan, as the sources related to this period have consistently referred to the Zoroastrians as heretics, idol worshipers, and disbelievers against whom Jihad was one of the imperative goals of the Tamerlane Army. due to the evidence available, throughout the period of Tamerlane's invasions of Isfahan, the Zoroastrians of Isfahan, along with other residents of the city, were easily attacked and killed, because in addition to facing the charge of disobedience and protest against the order of the Tamerlane Army, they were also considered as idolaters. Jihad against them was mandatory (ibid., 2/102-105), hence gradually reducing the number of Zoroastrians from Isfahan. Some of them moved to some suburban areas, and more survivors of this minority came to the other regions, such as Yazd and Kerman (Bois, 2002: 194-203). Those issues continued until the Safavid dynasty was established. As a result of an increase in migration to Yazd and Kerman, these cities became the cannon of the Zoroastrian gathering and presence in the advent of the Safavids.

The establishment of the Safavid dynasty and its effects on Zoroastrians of Isfahan

With the foundation of the Safavid dynasty, although the views of the sovereignty were changed over religion in terms of formalization of Shi'ism, no significant changes occurred in Zoroastrians' situation, therefore, the process of their migration and settlement to regions such as Yazd and Kerman has been continuing. Moreover, at the

beginning of the Safavid state, the special conditions seems to have inevitably affected the acceleration of these migrations since at the onset of the Safavid era and during Ismail I 'military campaigns, Isfahan was once the victim of the Safavid military strategies (Barbaro, 1349: 270-272). Some of the resources, therefore, have referred to the migration and settlement undertaken by the majority of Zoroastrians in Isfahan throughout this period in Kerman, and connected it with gentle behavior, of the governors and grandees of Kerman towards this minority (Mashizi, 1990: 43-45).

In a letter sent from Yazd to the Parsees, contemporary of Ismail I's era (880Yazdgari / 916 AH), has been written the number of Zoroastrians, along with the Zoroastrians of Isfahan had been about 1000 people in the area (Shahmardan, 1984: 265). It seems that the Zoroastrians' migration from other areas simultaneously with the Zoroastrians' migration of Isfahan to these areas continued to grow increasingly, whereas another letter, in the reign of Tahmasb I (966 AH), has indicated that the population of the community of Bihdīnān of Khorasan, residing in Yazd had been almost 3000 people (ibid, 270). Afoshteh Natanzi considered the Zoroastrian neighborhood of Yazd as the greatest one in terms of population and density (Afoshteh Natanzi, 1972: 531). Nevertheless, according to some references, at the beginning of the Safavid era, the majority of Zoroastrians had been still living in villages and had not have a decent social status. For instance, according to some sources, in Shah Tahmasb I's reign, some of the villages inhabited by Zoroastrians were demolished and Zoroastrian inhabitants were forced to abandon there. However, their fire temples have been survived destruction only by some mediation (Shahmardan, 1957: 53-55). Consequently, the Zoroastrian villages near Isfahan also have benefited from this. For instance, the active fire temple in Gaz Village, dating back to the pre-Islamic period (Mostofi, 2010: 50), escaped destruction and abandonment, and this village would remain

one of the Zoroastrian centers in the suburbs of Isfahan by the end of the Safavid era (Korsinsky, 1363: 75).

Reinforcement of the presence of Zoroastrians in Isfahan during Abbas I of Persia

With the rise of the Safavids, political evolution strategies took place in Iran. This development hit a peak during the time of Shah Abbas I by implementing his special economic and political measures. Thus, by compelling various ethnic minorities to emigrate, Shah Abbas I would settle them in Isfahan, where he took advantages of their might and capability at the time of trade policy with foreign governments in the way of the prosperity and development of Iran, especially the city Isfahan. Accordingly, Sharden explains that "Abbas I of Persia, who considered his country's development and prosperity to be dependent only to the commercial growth, was constantly thinking that he should promote trade with foreign countries. Hence, he would develop some reasonable approaches; for instance; he ordered to deliver cash and non-cash assistance to each of Armenians who would tend to expand trade with India and European countries. Other than these immigrants, Abbas I the great commanded another group of Zoroastrians and Armenians, who were craftsmen and artisans, to migrate to Iran and settle on outskirts of the capital beyond Zāyanderūd River. They were settled in New Julfa. According to his commands, thousands of Armenian inhabitants from the cities and villages of Caucasus, Iberia, and Armenia Minor as well as 1500 Zoroastrian families from Kerman and Yazd migrated to Isfahan" (Sharden, 1995: 4/1573).

At the time, Shah Abbas I accommodated Zoroastrians in a suburb in the southeast of Isfahan, where they founded Gabrābād or Gabrestān known as Sa'ādātābād (Della Valle, 1991: 78). Executing this strategy, Shah Abbas the great seems to have pursued further aspirations. By transferring this group of

Zoroastrians to the capital and accommodating them alongside other minorities such as Armenians and Jews, Shah Abbas I could show off a more balanced treatment towards them than his predecessors in the form of Safavids' religious policies. , he, therefore, could endow a special persona to his court Shardin's saying confirms this issue that Shah Abbas I was always thinking to receive attentions and trust of all nations, especially European ones, and since he was fascinated by their industry and commerce, was constantly struggling to -draw their attention so as to gain reputation and credibility for his country. Thus, Shah Abbas I granted them complete freedom of religion in order to perform their religious ceremonies (Shardin, 1995: 4/1431). Shah Abbas, however, considered the presence of the Zoroastrian minority group and its strong growth in regions such as Yazd and Kerman in a long-term, which can provoke crisis against the government, so that sometimes sectarian differences between Muslims and Zoroastrians in Kerman was so intensified that Shah had to interfere personally and resolve the crisis. For instance; during GanjAli Khan's rule in Kerman, one night Shah had a nightmare that half of Kerman has been burned, and the day after that, a complaint was submitted by the Zoroastrians of Yazd and Kerman. In order to address these complaints, Shah was planning to go to Kerman secretly, wearing simple dervish clothes to investigate and explore the case, and finally, he ordered the comfort and welfare of the Zoroastrians, and the governors followed the commands of shah Abbas I (Bastani Parizi, 1983: 301).

Apart from these issues, at the time, Zoroastrians of Yazd and Kerman also mastered professional skills, according to Tavernier, Zoroastrians of Kerman, who constituted more than 10,000 people had fire temples and regular religious organizations, and were active in the wool trade (Tavernier, 1957: 112), whereas Zoroastrians of Yazd were involved in the texture of silken fabrics (Green, 1985: 415-416). Some researchers

have attributed weaving Termeh fabric to Zoroastrians in Yazd for the first time. Originally, Zoroastrians seems to have used this kind of clothes to make for "Gabri" trousers they were wearing in their celebrations and weddings (Ashrafian, 2000: 29-30). The presence of this minority, therefore, had significant effects on the economic development of the capital and the economic prosperity of Iran in the Safavid era. Correspondingly, the sources about this period have referred to Zoroastrians as artisans along with Armenians, had been compelled to migrate to Isfahan in order to boost the flow of trade and industry improvements (Shardin, 1995: 4/1572). In fact, Zoroastrians of Isfahan were a productive minority group throughout this period, and had close relationships with Zoroastrians of Kerman and Yazd. The Zoroastrians of Isfahan, especially in the field of wool trade, had become intermediaries between Zoroastrian merchants of Kerman and the Isfahan market (Bastani Parizi, 1979: 127).

Despite the significant attendance of this minority in Isfahan and their involvement in the economic affairs of this city, the fact should not be overlooked that this minority had never been granted the privilege and status in comparison with their neighboring minority in Isfahan, Armenians residing in New Julfa (Turkaman, 1971:2/668). Don García de Silva Figueroa, who had visited Isfahan in 1026 AH points that "Most of [Zoroastrian] men work as daily labors or farmers. Besides, a few numbers of them are artisans and merchants, because they are not often wealthy and their investment is not required for trade, their women...are doing needlework and weaving wool, and spinning by hands, while sitting on the doorsteps of their houses". He continued to report about the settlement of this minority: "almost their settlements are composed of three thousand homes in long straight alleys, often with tunnel of trees, to lower warm temperature. Although it was not more than ten years under the command of the king, these people had been displaced from their hometown and settled in the area in a bid to

develop Isfahan. Nevertheless, it could create a great and fantastic neighborhood in the suburb and even a beautiful city" (Figueroa, 1362: 207). This writer depicted the Zoroastrian neighborhood more stunningly than Julfa since it was more properly constructed after Julfa neighborhood (Della Valle, 1991: 77-79). In this period, Isfahan had four neighborhoods; Abbāsābād, Julfa, Gabrābād and Isfahan, which were so close to one another that only ChāhārBāgh Avenue and Zāyanderūd River intersecting them. In fact, if consider the bridge as the center from northern part the main city Isfahan has begun, ie, from the eastern corner of the avenue, Abbāsābād from the west, Julfa on the other side of Zāyanderūd River in the south, and Gabrābād belonged to Zoroastrians (ibid, 48-49).

Regarding the religious views of Zoroastrians in Isfahan, investigating the sources confirms that throughout this period, there has been no deeper understanding of the beliefs of this minority among the general population of the capital (i.e. Isfahan). Therefore, people principally viewed them as a fire-worshipping minority, which was a contributor factor in increasing their social isolation. Petro Della Valle has written that "we have been told by one of Zoroastrians that they do religious practices three times a day, the first time when the sun rises, the other times are at noon and the sunset. They worship and believe in the only God and the Creator of the Universe who is unseen. When we said that we have heard something else about their religion, the man's wife who was taken aback laughed and said loudly in Persian: Oh God! I'd sacrifice my life for you! How is it conceivable for us not to know you?! Who you are? And where are you? Thereby, I have fathom that considering them as idol worshipers is nonsense. However, we had been told that the Sun and to a lower degree, the stars are sacred for them" (Della Valle, 1991: 80). At this time, Zoroastrians, as a part of the population in the capital of the Safavid, could freely perform religious practices, wear their special religious clothes and follow their

lifestyles (Figueroa, 1983: 207).

The decline of the Zoroastrian's social status in Isfahan after the death of Shah Abbas I

With the death of Shah Abbas I, the social status of Zoroastrians gradually changed in Isfahan. As in the first step in 1046 AH, Shah Safi issued a decree donating 200 houses in the neighborhoods of Gabrābād to the homeless Armenians, which would be done by Mirza Muhammad Taher, the Chancellor of Royal Court of Isfahan. Nevertheless, this decree resulted in local conflicts (Hashemi, 2015: 110). This event seems to have initiated into impairing the atmosphere of religious tolerance that Abbas I had first established in Isfahan in relation to religious minorities. Therefore, not only had this issue provoked hostility between Armenians and Zoroastrians, but also it had disrupted tranquility and calm and killed off their hopes for a better life in the Safavid capital, which had been formed for the Zoroastrian community throughout the time of Shah Abbas I. After the death of Shah Safi, when Shah Abbas II ascended the throne, the persecution of Zoroastrians in Isfahan steadily increased. At the time, under the command of Shah Abbas II (1060 AH), the Khajuor Hassan ābād Bridge (Qazvini, 1950: 259) or Shāhi Bridge (Shamloo, 1992: 1/518), or Gabrābād Bridge (Shahmardan, 1360: 174) was starting to be built across the Zāyanderūd River. Seemingly, the construction of the bridge could facilitate the transportation network for Zoroastrians to the northern areas of Isfahan. Some reports, however, indicate that it was a disruptive means to prevent the Zoroastrians' communication with the center of Isfahan, thus leading to their marginalization, since the bridge had refrained them from commuting between their neighborhood and the main part of Isfahan by crossing ChahārBāgh Avenue (du Cerceau, 1985: 203). Some sources also have reported that Zoroastrian workers have contributed to constructing this bridge. As a result, it has been attributed to Gabrābād Bridge (Shahmardan, 1981: 174).

Nevertheless, it seems that the proximity of this bridge to Gabrābād Neighborhood has been one of the determining factors in naming it as Gabrābād Bridge. According to Tavernier's saying about Abbas II's decree for the construction of the bridge writes that the river and its splendid scenery near Gabrābād fascinated everyone and the first row of the houses in this neighborhood have stood on the bank of the river" (Tavernier, 1957: 419).

Although some travelers visiting Isfahan during this period have classified the Zoroastrians of Isfahan ranked lower than Armenians in terms of their social status (ibid.: 410). According some reports, the intense pressures were brought to bear, especially on levying heavy Jizya tax, on Zoroastrians. As mentioned in sources, in 1068 AH, after their complaint against paying Jizya was not resolved five hundred of Zoroastrian community from Isfahan and Kerman blocked the way to Shah Abbas II to show their disapproval of imposing this tax on them (Mashizi, 1990: 251). Throughout this period, principally the responsibility for the population census and the process of collecting this tax from Zoroastrians were fallen on the number of them who had just converted to Islam. Perhaps, the reason behind it was that such people could usually know better all the Zoroastrians and were aware of their personal wealth and status. In most cases, tax authorities sent to regions like Kerman and Yazd would be elected from Zoroastrians of Isfahan who had just converted to Islam. Perhaps, it was because they were more committed to the Safavid capital, Isfahan. Sometimes, their treatment gave rise to Zoroastrians' dissatisfaction (ibid. 496).

In Safavite era, the rate of the yearly Jizya taxation was considered equally to an average of 4.6 grams gold per person. In addition, a kind of tax was determined for some professions whose rate was usually equal to Muslims' one. In commercial affairs, Zoroastrians would have to pay the tariffs on imports and exports of goods at 10%, while it was 5 % for Muslims. In reality, the purpose

of applying such pressures on the Zoroastrians was to abandon their religion to convert to the new religion, which was the strategy of the government (Qazvini, 1950: 218). The pressure on the Zoroastrians of Isfahan continued during Abbas II's era. Under his command (1070 AH) Zoroastrians were displaced from their own neighborhood, Gabrābād, to settle them in a neighborhood next to Armenians in Julfa. The writer of the book *Abbas Nameh (History of Shah Abbas)* writes that in this year, prosperity came towards Gabrābād and King in court of Isfahan commanded to set up an agency adjacent to Sa'adat Garden and Zāyanderūd River, besides the new bridge. Therefore, Zoroastrians should move from there and migrate to Julfa Neighborhood" (Qazvini, 1950: 270).

Furthermore, under the command of Shah Abbas II, a tower or "dakhma" of Zoroastrians located in Gabrābād was destroyed by military cannonballs. Zoroastrians laid the bodies of their dead on top of the tower. Kaempfer gave a justification for this command that "the king did not want to observe the performance of non-Islamic rituals adjacent to his garden" (Kaempfer, 1971: 218).

Another reason to issue this command seems to be the completion of the landscaping a new royal palace. After the destruction of Gabrābād and the settlement of Zoroastrians at the end of Julfa neighborhood, royal palaces, such as Haft Dast Palace, Mirror Hall Palace (Tālār-e-āyeneh), Namakdān Palace, Golestān Garden, Bāgh Daryācheh Mansion, and Sa'adatābād palace and garden were built in there (Rafiee Mehrabadi, 1973: 60).

Reviewing the resources of this period suggests that during Abbas II's reign, the strict policies towards religious minorities was intensified as his courtiers were provoking this issue (Qazvin, 1950: 218). Until that time even Armenians, who had achieved prosperity and the welfare state, seem to be humiliated by courtiers. According to Shardin, Shah Abbas II always told to his court official "if we tend to get Armenians frustrated, who are always struggling to boost the economic development

of the country to suffer from introducing tight and stringent laws it would be injustice against God's satisfaction. We must protect them and pave the path for their freedom and welfare" (Shardin, 1995: 4/1655).

When Shah Suleiman inherited the throne, the religious tolerance for the minorities began more or less to dwindle so that Zoroastrian groups in Isfahan were required to migrate and return to Kerman and Yazd. Consequently, at the time, the emigration of them to Kerman caused the gathering of a large number of Zoroastrians along with the Zoroastrians migrants from Isfahan there (Mashizi, 1990: 43). Zoroastrians' mandatory migration to Kerman and Yazd was not limited to this period; after Zoroastrians' exodus from Isfahan to Kerman by the order of Shah Suleiman in an attempt to disrupt their communication with people of Kerman, this minority were forced to flee their old neighborhoods in the city center to reside on outskirts of the city. Since the new Zoroastrian neighborhood was not surrounded by walls and fortifications, it would repeatedly be invaded and looted by other tribes. According to Shardin's sayings, a large number of Zoroastrian families gradually returned to Isfahan after the death of Shah Abbas II, therefore, there have been about 300 Zoroastrian families in Isfahan. Some of them were starting to work as farmers in fields, while the others were weaving homemade felt to make special hats and clothes for themselves (Shardin, 1995: 4/1573). Moreover, the other group of them took shelter in the villages around Isfahan pursuing agriculture activities, especially in the cultivation of grapes and production of wine (ibid, 4/1524). In the respond to persecution they were facing, Zoroastrians of Esfahan would put an effort to preserve the customs and traditions and especially their language, and would not accept any changes (Strauss, 2017: 213). Zoroastrian priests, subsequently, would write in Pahlavi to retain their religious texts (Mehrafrin, 2015: 115). According to some resources, the exchange of their

correspondence with the Indian Parsees had increased since 1082 AH, and the Parsees would offer financial assistance to the Zoroastrians in Iran to withstand such pressures and tensions (Bois, 2007: 115; Bahrami, 1990: 3). Besides, the demand of the Parsees for more religious education, keeping up their correspondences increasingly seems to have been an attempt to protect Zoroastrian religious texts. Although the Zoroastrians of Isfahan were totally different from the other inhabitants of the city, they had still a little bit resemblance with people of Isfahan in terms of their clothing style. Women would wear quite simple and unpretentious attire. Like Muslim women, they would cover their hair a larger fabric tossed over their head and hold it closed under their chin to completely cover their shoulder and neck (Carri, 1969: 96). Zoroastrian men would also wear long coats complemented with loose laces. They would often hold coat's collar closed but their sleeves were voluminous (Carri, 1969: 213). Investigating the resources of this period confirms that what had remained of Gabrābād was only a small deprived village about one mile long, with a simple temple where a light had been hung from the ceiling and a small chamber where the sacred fire was kept (Carri, 1969: 96).

With the rise of Sultan Husayn, Islam Ulama played a more active role in the society, and religious violence was escalating against the remaining Zoroastrian minority in Isfahan. After yielding the throne to him, Sultan Husayn issued a decree conversion of Zoroastrians to Islam. (Gilanentz, 1965:101). Following the command, the Zoroastrians quickly transferred their sacred fire from Isfahan to Kerman (Lockhart, 1965: 85) and strived to practice the beliefs and rituals (Mir Ahmadi, 1990: 101). Throughout this period, under the pressure put on them increasingly, the number of Zoroastrians in Isfahan was reducing, until few of them remained there. Rural areas in the southern part of Isfahan where the Zoroastrians were living were destroyed. Some Zoroastrians inhabited

around Yazd and Kerman (Shahmardan, 1981: 176-177). In addition, few Zoroastrians living in Isfahan were suffering from a poor financial situation. One of the Christian priests describes the situation of the Zoroastrians in Isfahan that "they were going through hard times, would often work as farmers, or gardeners, and they would be offered the hardest unenviable jobs" (French priests, 1991: 108). The priest has considered religious teachings as a contributor factor among this religious minority and explained the reason behind it that "they were born and brought up in the arms of poverty", and this is why our missionaries can more easily teach them the truths in the Bible, and call them to the religion of Jesus Christ" (ibid., 111).

Zoroastrians of Isfahan during the Afghan invasion and the collapse of the Safavid capital

Sultan Husayn's mistreatment with the minorities, especially the Zoroastrians, living in Isfahan created chaos and violence, which would be spreading until the late of the reign of Shah Suleiman. Sultan Husayn and his courtiers had not taken any of turbulence seriously until the Afghans surrounded the capital. At the time, the disgraceful situation of people in Isfahan, affected by famine, hunger, and Sultan's ignorance about people's affairs would be long and repeated like the story of Masnavihaftad Man. For instance, Krosinsky narrates the conditions that "the doors were all closed by the government, but people would repeatedly knock the doors by throwing stones at them. The court eunuchs came out of the palace to answer the people. They asked servants that if their king came out from the palace, they would sacrifice their lives for him and fight for his satisfaction, while people were shouting and crying. No one paid attention to what they said, and the king had ignored people, who were suffering from starvation, wrestling with disasters. The weapons were deployed by the courtiers, who were firing the poor people. Some people were killed in that event. People, who were feeling

desperately disappointed, fled their city in hordes” (Krosinsky, 1984: 62).

Some resources clarify that with the fall of the capital, Zoroastrians colluded with the Afghans, and confirm their claims by referring to the presence of Nasrullah Khan the Zoroastrian as one of Mahmoud’s commanders, and exploiting this minority in the conquest of the “Gaz” castle (Gilanentz, 1965: 98). Although the Zoroastrians were unsatisfied with the Safavid government, more evidence need to investigate this claim. As known, the attack of Afghans and their invasion to Isfahan seems to be a national rebellion, followed by the Safavid rulers and courtiers’ disqualification and their ignorance of resolving the growing problems. Moreover, the cooperation of Nasrullah Khan the Zoroastrian cannot be perceived as a sign to attribute it to all Zoroastrians. Even, some resources raise some questions about the originality of Nasrullah Khan the Zoroastrian and attribute him to Ka’b Tribe in India (Krosinsky, 1984: 72). Additionally, there is the other report claiming that after the conquest of Isfahan, Mahmoud executed all the Iranians who had betrayed their country during the siege since he felt that one could not trust those who have betrayed their king and country, and if they are given a good opportunity, they would be disloyal to him once again (ibid. 68). It is worth noting that following Afghans occupation of Isfahan, Mahmoud issued orders to honor the Afghans and categorized people into seven classes to deal with their affairs, which the Zoroastrian minority was in the fifth rank. “The Afghans must have upper level, the Second are Sunni Dargozini people, the third Armenians and Christians, the fourth Multanis who are Hindus, the fifth fire worshipers (Zoroastrians), the sixth Jews, and the seventh Rāfiḏī (refer to Shia Muslims) (ibid. 72).

After occupying Isfahan, Mahmoud had created a horrifying environment to suppress any opposition, so that by holding a magnificent celebration with the presence of 1500 of the best dignitaries and stewards he

slaughtered all of them. One of the Dutch company’s representatives who had been in Isfahan at the time described the event that “It was full of horror and fear with screaming and yelling. When I was accompanied with the Dutch in the company garden, I heard shouting and crying. We were scared to death and numbed with fear, not knowing what was happening. In the morning of the following day, dead bodies of 1500 dignitaries and slaves of the Safavids were laid on the ground in front of the royal palace to show how he [Mahmoud] has wreaked savage revenge against people of Isfahan. At the time, everyone in Isfahan was scared stiff (Floor, 1986: 238). Naturally, in such terrifying atmosphere created by the Afghans, along with Sultan Husayn’s disqualification and his policy of offering surrender drove religious minorities to support the dominant people.

In his last speech addressed to his court and people, Sultan Husayn declared that “In this case, I have any chance other than surrender and submission, I set up the foundation of my government in a bad way, and I had forgot the blessings of Allah. Enemies penetrated into our society via hypocrisy, and what we had was handed over them due to incompetency. Since Almighty God imposes his will on this issue, let us go to the new King and all obey him”. That night, Sultan Husayn was getting around the city, while crying until the morning. That night, Sultan Husayn, people, and the army did not come back home. Instead, they gathered in the court, agreeing to surrender the city. Then, Sultan went to Mahmoud, addressing him: “Destiny determines you as the king of Iran, give my congratulations!” After that, Sultan Husayn told his courtiers and Mahmoud’s companions that now, Mir Mahmoud was their king. Then, he advised his companion to follow Mahmoud and the principles of Sharia” (Krosinsky, 1985: 66). In fact, it seems that in such atmosphere, in an attempt to survive, not only the Zoroastrian minority, but also all the people of the capital, were compelled to accept the Afghan tribe. After this incident, there

were 2000 Qizilbash troops, serving in Mahmoud's Army (Gilanentz, 1965: 71).

Possibly, it can be said that claims raised about Zoroastrian minority have been exaggerated, since with the fall of the Safavids, although putting pressures on Zoroastrian minorities had reduced, in the comparison with other minorities in the capital, they obtained no special privileges and preferences. Consequently, the process of their migration from Isfahan to the central regions and eventually to foreign countries had still continued (Shahmardan, 1961: 140).

Conclusion

After the arrival of Islam to Iran, Iranian Zoroastrians migrated to some countries such as India and China to survive their political and social lives, while others moved to regions such as Yazd and Kerman to be far from government's oppressions. Gradually, these cities turned to the center for the gathering of Zoroastrians in Iran. Zoroastrians of Isfahan were not exceptional. Due to the increased persecution on Zoroastrians, they would immigrate to these regions over different periods.

However, with the rise of Shah Abbas I, and making Isfahan as the capital, some significant changes introduced about the status of religious minorities in Isfahan, which were undoubtedly associated with Abbas I's religious tolerance policies towards religious minorities. Following this orientation, once again some measures were provided by the Safavid state for the settlement of groups of Zoroastrians in Isfahan under the command of Shah Abbas I. According to Shah Abbas I, actions were carried out to promote the Zoroastrians' welfare status, and this minority, like Armenians, were resettled in a neighborhood called Gabrābād, and harnessed their skills in the production of textiles such as Termeh fabrics. Although the social status of Zoroastrian was relatively well regarded at the time, this minority did never attain high rank as Armenians. With the death of Abbas I and the increase of religious intolerance in the

Safavid court, the situation of the Zoroastrians in Isfahan was disrupted. These pressures were firstly formed by consecrating some dwellings of Zoroastrian to Armenians, throughout the period of Abbas II, simultaneously with the reduction of the religious tolerance of the court towards the minorities, and in particular, with the Zoroastrians, Shah issued a decree compulsory migration of them from Gabrābād neighborhood.

The oppression and persecution on Zoroastrians were eventually pursued in the reign of Shah Suleiman with their mandatory immigration from Isfahan to desert areas such as Yazd and Kerman. As a result, the population of this religious minority in the capital was progressively reduced. Eventually, the pressure on this minority hit its peak in the reign of Shah Sultan Husayn who issued a decree mandatory conversion from Zoroastrianism to Islam. The consequences of those pressures were formulating the policies on the concealment of religious beliefs and ceremonies by Zoroastrians, on the decrease in the number of followers of this minority in Isfahan, and the increase in their migration to the regions such as Kerman and Yazd and foreign countries such as India.

If the strategies had designed to Armenians over the period, those would have been also implemented on the Zoroastrians, and the religious bias had reduced, Zoroastrians, like Armenians, could have had inevitably more efficient economic impacts on the society as merchants trading with India.

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