

CULTURAL INTERACTION BETWEEN ANCIENT INDIA AND IRAN

Many obscure aspects of the growth of civilization in its early phase are illuminated when the traditional Iranian lore contained in the Zend-Avesta and the Pahlavi texts is analysed side by side with the Vedas and Brahmanical literature. Simultaneous study of the tradition of the two branches of the Aryans fills many gaps that would inevitably remain if we were to confine ourselves only to the Indian tradition.

This is understandable, for the people who composed the Vedas and the Zend-Avesta belonged originally to the same stock and shared a common primeval heritage. The reminiscences of the migration of the Aryan hordes somewhere from the bitterly cold region close to the Arctic are found both in the Rgveda and the Zend-Avesta. We find, however, that the memory of this land is quite hazy in the Vedas, while the ancient Iranian texts show not only a more vivid recollection of the original land but also a fairly clear idea of the path of migration. In fact there are clear references in the Zend-Avesta which indicate that the ancient Iranians knew that people belonging to the Aryan stock had gone to many lands.

They were aware that a branch of Aryans had reached as far as the basin of the river Ganga. But what is even more remark-

able is that the Zend-Avesta records that a brother of their own first ancestor established the kingdom of Rum (Rome), thereby showing that they were conscious that the people who lived in Europe also belonged to the same stock. While the people who had migrated to the Sapta-Sindhu (the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent) were referred to contemptuously because of the racial and cultural admixture that they had undergone, even the later Pahlavi texts continued to regard the people who lived in what are now known as Afghanistan and Kashmir as their kith and kin.

As we shall see later, the relations between the ancient Indian and Iranian branches of the Aryans were similar to those that often exist between cousins or neighbours. Though they shared a lot with each other, there was perpetual jealousy and animosity between them. So much so that the Devas, or Gods, of the Indians were "Daevas," or demons, for the Iranians; and Ahura or Asura, the supreme god of Iranians became Asura, or evil being, in India in the course of time. This rivalry and mutual hatred has found expression in various myths in the two cultures. The Zend-Avesta tells how when Yima reached the land of seven rivers, Haft-Hindu (Sapta-Sindhu in Sanskrit), the region now covering the northwestern portion of the Indian subcontinent, he married a demoness who gave birth to bears and monkeys. This obviously has a reference to the offspring born of the union between Aryan migrant males and the women of the dark-complexioned and snub-nosed people who were living here from earlier times. There are also references in the Zend-Avesta to Aryans becoming "deformed" as a consequence of their migration to the Indian subcontinent. Among the ancient texts the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa bears ample evidence to this hatred. Here, too, we find the consciousness of kinship between the Indians and the Iranians and also the existence of mutual hatred. According to the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, the Asuras (Iranians) and Devas were the two sons of Prajāpati but the Asuras became degraded as a result of the influence of magic and poison.

Some striking characteristics like the worship of fire, the drinking of Soma or Haoma, wearing the sacred thread, and considering the cow a holy animal, are found in common in both the traditions. Such similarities between cultures which

had branched off from a common stock are not unexpected.

But more remarkable are the similarities that we find in the pattern of growth of the two traditions. The response of both of these traditions to the rise of Buddhism is comparable in several respects. For a time Buddhism held sway, but later both the traditions threw up strong revivalist movements to combat it. These movements sought to restore the ancient Aryan religion, but in this attempt they were not fully successful. In their fight against Buddhism, both these movements had to seek the support of people who were bearers of non-Aryan traditions. Thus in Iran the Assyrian elements of culture extensively penetrated the revivalist movement and in India the movement of revival had to accept much from the culture of the proto-Austroloid, proto-Mongol, and proto-Mediterranean people who were settled here before the Aryans came.

We find some interesting differences also. In India there was a rigorous oral tradition of ancient Aryan lore. The Vedas are called *Sruti* of "the listened." In Iran the sacred lore was committed to writing. This had its disadvantages as well as advantages. During foreign invasions, which were frequent, libraries were burnt up. Alexander's invasion of Iran is an outstanding example of such destruction. In the existent Iranian texts the loss of substantial portions of ancient sacred texts due to this destruction is lamented again and again. After the invaders had withdrawn, priests had to meet together to reconstruct the texts as much as they could. The ancient Iranian texts are a kind of patchwork rather than smooth wholes as they might have existed originally. As a contrast, in India the ancient Aryan lore was meticulously preserved through rigorous oral tradition which disapproved the alteration even of a single syllable. It may be mentioned, however, that while the original form of the Vedas seems to have been largely preserved, later works which were not considered perfect revelation continued to be reworked in the processes of oral tradition.

A basic difference between the cultures of India and Iran stems from the fact that while the Aryan hordes which invaded India encountered earlier settlers who were racially very different from them, the non-Aryan people in ancient Iran did not present such a racial contrast. In India it is this vast racial difference

that seems to lie at the root of the Varṇa and caste system. In Ṛgveda there are only two Varṇas primarily, the Aryan and the Kṛṣṇa Varṇa. The latter obviously refers to the pre-Aryan dark complexioned, snub-nosed people, who are disparagingly referred to in the Vedas. This great racial difference seems to have brought to the fore the importance of birth. The caste hierarchy is determined strictly by birth. On the other hand in ancient Iranian society there were no exclusive ranks based on birth. What is even more remarkable, the Iranian society did not develop any servile class comparable to the Sudras of India who are believed to be born only to serve the people of higher castes.

There is ample evidence that the Aryans of Sapta-Sindhu as mentioned in the Ṛgveda and the Aryans of Iran as mentioned in Zend-Avesta, had a common ethnic origin. While the Aryans of Iran remembered the original land and their migration from that land, Ṛgvedic Aryans do not seem to have a clear memory of these. The original land of Iranians is referred to as "Airyana Vaejo" in Zend-Avesta.

In Airyana Vaejo, there are ten months of winter and two months of summer. The winter was dire there. "It was cold for waters, cold for earth and cold for the trees."¹ There the sun rises and sets only once in a year.² The land was covered with snow. Similar passages are found in Vedic literature also. The Aitareya Brāhmaṇa speaks of a land where the sun never sets.³ We come across a similar description in the Ṛgveda: "Snow or Hima has stolen the leaves of the forests."⁴ This obviously does not refer to conditions in the plains of India. This description fits in well with the climate in the polar region. The bitterness of winter and the never-setting sun are clearly related to that region. We do not find such a place near Iran. Since the migration from the original land had taken place centuries ago, it was natural for them to forget the proper location of the ancient land.

The first leader of migration, Yima or Yama, had to move

¹ The Zend-Avesta, I. Vendīdād I. 1.4.

² The Zend-Avesta, I. Vendīdād II. 40.

³ Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, III. 4.6.

⁴ Ṛgveda, X. 68.10.

towards the south to “meet the sun;” this also shows that the original land was situated in the north where the earth is covered with the “thick falling of snow-flakes.” In that land of ice, the dog is certainly the greatest friend of man. In Avesta a whole chapter (Fargard XIII) is devoted to the dog. In R̥gveda too, the first mortal, Yama, and god, Indra, have dogs. Later on, however, the dog became a despised animal in India. Perhaps the animosity that developed between India and Iran contributed to this reversal of attitude.

According to Zend-Avesta in the original land of Aryans a couple produced only two children in forty years, a son and a daughter.⁵ The ideal that a couple should have only two children, indicates scarcity of food which must have been a great problem. In later Pahlavi texts the original land is also endowed with the quality that “one loaf sufficed to satisfy the hunger of ten persons.” This also suggests that the ancient Aryans faced some sort of a population problem. The Avesta vividly brings it out as the cause of migrations.

Among Indo-Aryan languages, the Lithuanian language is considered to be the most archaic. The polar region is not very far off from Lithuania. In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa and Āpastambīya Mantrapāṭha we find the word *Salva*, denoting a particular people who are considered to possess expert knowledge of performing various sacrifices.⁶ The word *Salva* is strikingly similar to the word *Slav*; only the sounds have changed places, which is not uncommon in the evolution of languages.

It appears that hard winter in the original land of Aryans was also a cause of migration. The worship of the sun and fire also indicates this. But the later migrations were certainly due to over-population as is described in the Zend-Avesta: “the earth has become full of flocks and herds, of men and dogs and birds and of red blazing fires, and there is no more room for flocks, herds, and men.” Yima, the leader of the migrating Aryans, took a golden ring and a poniard inlaid with gold as the symbol and the instrument of sovereignty from Ahura Mazda. And the

⁵ Zend-Avesta, I. Vendidad II. 41.

⁶ Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, X, 4.1.10, Āpastambīya Mantra Pāṭha, II. 10.12.

great king, fair Yima, the son of Vīvanghat, migrated “towards the luminous space southward to meet the sun.”⁷

In Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa we have “Yama hath given the settlement on earth.”⁸ The Zend-Avesta mentions sixteen settlements. These are situated in central Asia, Iran and the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent. The names of the settlements are not always in proper order. In the Indian subcontinent the first settlement is Cakhra. Cakhra seems to be the land situated at the foot of Hindu-Kush, the site of modern Charikar in Afghanistan. The adjectives “strong” and “holy” are used for this land in Avesta. At this site an old constructed city was excavated during British rule. According to Avesta, the evil custom of burning the dead was introduced by Angra Mainyu or the Satan in this land.⁹ It is possible that this custom was prevalent at this place. Even now it is practised by Hindus in India.

The fourteenth settlement is mentioned as the four-cornered Varena. The adjective “four-cornered” suggests that it was a four-cornered hill fort. Probably it is the fort “Aornus,” mentioned in the accounts of the campaign of Alexander as a strong hill fort. It corresponds to Sanskrit “Varaṇa” mentioned by Pāṇini (c. fifth century B.C.) who also described it as a four-cornered hill fort. It was situated near the junction of the Kabul and Sindhu rivers. Sir Aurel Stein thinks that this mountain citadel was washed away by the Sindhu river later on.¹⁰ At this spot Thraetaona in Avesta or Traitana in Ṛgveda fought with Aziś Dahaka or Ahiḥ Dāsaka. In the Ṛgveda we find the mention of a warrior named Traitana. Traitana is mentioned as a Dāsa who subjected the composer Dīrghatamas to the ordeals of fire, water, and single combat and the latter was protected in all the three ordeals by the Aśvins.¹¹ It is interesting to note that in both the traditions the adjective “*Dahāka*” or *Dāsa* is used for the adversary in a derogatory sense.

In the Avesta we find an interesting reference which shows

⁷ Zend-Avesta, I. Vendīdād II. 79.

⁸ Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, VII. I.1.3.

⁹ Zend-Avesta, I. Vendīdād I. 17-18.

¹⁰ Smith, Vincent A., *Early History of India*, 3rd edition, pp. 56-58.

¹¹ Zend-Avesta, II. Abān Yašt IX. 34.

their consciousness that the Roman culture had the same roots as their own. There is a myth in Avesta that two daughters of Yima who were earlier abducted by Azi (the dragon) were set free and married by Thraetaona and bore him three sons. One of these became the king of Rum (Rome) while the other two ruled Iran and Turan.¹²

The Aśvins or Nastyau of Ṛgveda (Naunghaithya in Zend-Avesta) became fiends in the Iranian tradition while Traitān, who is a hero in the Iranian tradition, is portrayed as a villain in Ṛgveda.

In Zend-Avesta we find that in Varena (northwest of India), “the Angra Mainyu, who is all death, counter-created by his witchcraft abnormal issues in women and the oppression of foreign rulers.”¹³ It appears that “deformity” in children refers to the offspring born of a union between Aryan and non-Aryan people. In Zend-Avesta it is said that first Yima “took from Daevas both riches and welfare, both fatness and flocks, both wealth and glory,” but later on he began to find delight in words of falsehood and untruth, the glory was seen to “flee away from him in the shape of a bird.”¹⁴ In the Pahlavi texts we find that “when reason departed from Yima, for the fear of Daevas (the demons), he took a demoness as wife and gave Yimak, his sister, to a demon as wife; and from them have originated the tailed ape and bear.”¹⁵ In the Ṛgveda the Dāsas are described as *Kṛṣṇa Varna*¹⁶ or dark coloured, *Anāśab*¹⁷ or without nose, and *Amanuṣya*¹⁸ or non-human. In the epic of Ramāyana, the indigenous tribes are simply called apes and bears though they are faithful friends of the god-hero, Rāma, of this popular epic, who himself is a dark-coloured prince.

These descriptions present an interesting spectacle of similarity and contrast which brings out the cultural processes resulting from racial admixture. The Iranian texts look upon the offspring of inter-racial unions as beasts—apes and bears. The

¹² Ṛgveda, I. CLVIII. 4-6.

¹⁴ Zend-Avesta, I. Vendidad I. 17.

¹⁴ Zend-Avesta, II. Zamyād Yašt VII. 31-34.

¹⁵ Pahlavi Texts, I. Bundahis, XXIII.

¹⁶ Ṛgveda, II. 20.7.

¹⁷ Ṛgveda, V. 29.10.

¹⁸ Ṛgveda, X. 22.8.

Ṛgveda, the earliest account of Aryans in India, also regards the non-Aryan people who were subjugated as less than human. It refers despisingly to their snub-nose and dark complexion. But the great epic Ramāyana, which must have been composed when the Aryans had developed a stable relationship with the earlier non-Aryan inhabitants, pictures apes and bears (referring perhaps to non-Aryan tribes) as the best and respected friends of the god-hero Rāma. The god-hero Rāma is considered an incarnation of lord Visnu. According to Avesta, another evil created by Angra Mainyu for the land of Varena is oppression by foreign rulers. It is a historical fact that the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent has been the victim of foreign invasions since time immemorial. Oppression is of course involved in any invasion.

It is interesting that in this very text of Zend-Avesta, a class of fiends is called “Varenya Daevas” or those Daevas who live in Varena. The ancient Aryan migrants who had settled in Varena gradually mingled with the local population and lost their racial purity. Their religious practices were also influenced by indigenous culture. Being close neighbours, they developed a kind of rivalry with the Iranians and were turned into fiends in Avesta.¹⁹

The next settlement is described as the land of seven rivers of Haft-Hindu (Sapta-Sindhu in Sanskrit). According to Avesta, in this land too, women gave birth to abnormal issues. This obviously refers to offsprings of inter-racial unions and indicates the disapproval of racial admixture. The land of seven rivers is mentioned as a place having excessive heat.²⁰ Some names of the fiends are strikingly similar to the names of Aryan tribes which lived in the land of seven rivers. These are Kurugha (Kuruḥ in Sanskrit), Sārastya (Sārasvata in Sanskrit), Duruka²¹ (Druhyu in Sanskrit). The theme of the famous epic of Mahābhārta is the family feud of Kuru princes. The Sārasvatas are the Brahāmaṇas of Northwestern India. The Druhyus are one of the militant Aryan people mentioned in the Ṛgveda.

¹⁹ Zend-Avesta, I. Vendidād X. 14.

²⁰ Zend-Avesta, I. Vendidād I. 19.

²¹ Zend-Avesta, I. Vendidād XXII. 21.

The sixteenth and the last settlement of Aryans is the land made by the floods of the Rangha. This seems to have an obvious reference to the recurring floods of the river Gaṅgā.²² The basin of the Gaṅgā has always fascinated those who viewed it for the first time. In the R̥gveda the large-heartedness of a chief of the Panis is compared to the vastness of the basin of the Gaṅgā. Even in modern times the Europeans were struck by the vast expanse of the plains of the Gaṅgā. In Avesta, the Rangha is the river “whose shores lie afar,” and which flows in distant lands.²³ Zarathustra blesses king Vistasp that he might have strength enough to reach the shores of Rangha. This suggests that the river was difficult to reach, which further confirms its identification with the river Gaṅgā.

The Zend-Avesta says that in this plain “headless” people reside. This is an expression of antagonism towards these people. It reflects a low estimate of their intelligence. It is also possible that this may have reference to the republics which had no monarchs. It is a historical fact that Ganas, or republican states, existed in Northern India in ancient times, even before the birth of Buddha.²⁴

The early Aryans were cattle-breeders. Their illustrious mythical leader, Yima or Yama, bears the title of the Great Shepherd. He was the first man and the first king to receive the law from the supreme God Ahura Mazda,²⁵ or Asura Medha in Sanskrit. The adoption of the name Ahura Mazda seems to be the result of the profound influence of the powerful Assyrians on the Aryan tradition. King Assurbanipal (700 B.C.) established Asura Mazāś as the supreme god along with seven good angels and seven bad spirits. This god became popular among the masses of Iran, and became Ahura Mazda of Avesta, the sacred book of Iranian Aryans.

In the Indian tradition too, the word “Asura” seems to have its origin in the Assyrian influence. According to Arrian the Indians living between the rivers Sindhu and Kabul (Cophen) “were in ancient times subjected to the Assyrians, the Medes, and

²² Zend-Avesta, I. Vendidad I. 20.

²³ Zend-Avesta, II. XXIII. 4; XXIV. 2.

²⁴ Maha-Parinibvān-Sutta, VI. 62.

²⁵ Zend-Avesta, I. Vendidad II. 2.

finally, to the Persians under Cyrus to whom they pay the tribute he imposed upon them.”²⁶

In the R̥gveda, “Asura” is used as an epithet for many gods. But this word does not denote any particular god. Obviously the term was borrowed from the Assyrians. Often the word Asura has been used as an epithet of Varuna. The ancient Aryan god Varuna is the supreme guardian of the cosmic order, or R̥ta. Varuna is the R̥gvedic transformation of the old Slav god “Peruna.” We find in R̥gveda:

“With bending down, oblations, sacrifices,
O Varuna, we deprecate their anger:
Wise Asura, thou king of wide dominion,
Loosen the bonds of sins committed by us.”²⁷

In the course of time, however, the meaning of “Asura” underwent a change in India and a study of the transformation in its denotation and connotation is extremely interesting. From an epithet for the highest gods like Varuna, Agni, Soma etc., it came to be employed in a derogatory sense in some parts of the R̥gveda itself. This change may have been brought about because of the animosity that developed between the Aryans in India and those in Iran. The transition is singularly remarkable. One hymn of the R̥gveda uses “Asura” both in good and bad senses.²⁸

By the time of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, the word Asura came to be used only for demons. What is even more interesting, in the Upaniṣads an antonym of this word was coined to designate gods. This was done simply by interpreting the opening letter “A” of the word Asura as the negative prefix. By dropping this letter “A” the word “Sura” was derived which became the most common word for “god.”

In the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa we find a myth in which it is said that “Indra has slain Aururmaghas.” The word Arurmaghas seems to be the corrupt form of Ahura Mazda. In the Kauṣikati Upaniṣad the word acquired another form, “Arunmukhas.”²⁹ In

²⁶ Indica, I. 1-3.

²⁷ R̥gveda, I. XXIV. 14.

²⁸ R̥gveda, X. 124.5.

²⁹ Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, VII. 27; Kauṣikati Upaniṣad, III. 1.

a myth, Indrā boasts that he delivered the Arunmukhas to the wolves. The commentator, Śamkarānanda, adds a curious remark to the effect that the skulls of the Arunmukhas were turned into a thorny tree named Karira.

In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, the Devas (gods) and the Asuras (demons) seem to come from the same stock but they are depicted continually fighting with each other. However, in the myths of Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, these fights are carried on through contending sacrifices. There is bitter rivalry, and abuse is freely exchanged. The Devas and Asuras, armed with various elaborate sacrifices, rites and rituals, seek to vanquish each other. In one myth it is said that between these two people stood the Gāyatrī. It is asserted that “Gāyatrī was the same as this earth, and this earth indeed lay between them... Agni acted as messenger for the gods and an Asura-Rākṣas named Saharākṣas, for the Asuras.”³⁰

In the passage of Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa the words “Gāyatrī stood between them” indicate that both the peoples belonged to the same cultural tradition. Both the Devas and Asuras are described to be the progeny of Prajāpati, the progenitor. This is a strong indicator that both the people had a common ancestry.

The name of the messenger of Asuras, Saharākṣas, reminds us of Cyrus, the famous Persian ruler. Cyrus conquered the borderland between Iran and India. Greek records support this identification. “According to Ctesias (Fragment 37, 2d. Gilmore), Cyrus died of a wound inflicted by an Indian, in a battle which the Indians were fighting on the side of Derbikes whom they supplied with elephants.” Radha Kumud Mookerji thinks that these Derbikes might have been a frontier tribe³¹ The word “Derbikes” may, however, be the Greek version of the Sanskrit word “Devāh.”

This mythical battle between Devas and Asuras seems to be an expression of the continuously strained relationship between the two branches of Aryans. We find, in the Taittirīya Saṁhitā,

³⁰ Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, I. 4.1.34.

³¹ Radha Kumud Mookerji “Foreign Invasions” in *The History and Culture of Indian People* ed. By R.C. Majumdar and others, Bombay, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1968 (4th ed.), vol. II; p. 39.

³² Taittirīya Saṁhitā, II. 37.1.

that “the defeated gods were reduced to the position of Viś or common people of Asuras.” The word Viś stands for commoners in the Iranian tradition also. The Sapta-Sindhu or Haft-Hindu is mentioned as a province of Iran in the inscriptions of the illustrious Persian king Darius,³³ or Darayavauša (Dhāraya-vasu in Sanskrit).

In Zend-Avesta Yima is depicted as the guardian and protector of mankind. In the original land of Aryans, Ahura Mazda warned Yima that fatal winters were going to occur; therefore, to save mankind from those winters he must make a *Var*, or enclosure, about two *Hatbra*, or two miles, long on every side.³⁴

The law of Mazda was brought by a bird called Karshipta (one having stretched wings) in the *Vara* of Yima. This mythical bird lives in heaven. It recited the Avesta in the language of birds. James Darmester thinks that this bird is an incarnation of lightning. The swiftness of lightning is similar to the swiftness of the bird. Thunder was considered the voice of God speaking from heaven, a revelation. In the Talavakara Upaniṣad we find a similar expression, which supports the explanation given by James Darmester. It says: “The knowledge flashes forth in the lightning and now vanishes again.”³⁵ A striking parallel is found in the Ṛgveda too. In the Ṛgveda a bird of golden wings, the envoy of Varuna, hastens to the home of Yama.³⁶ Varuna is the supreme lord who is the upholder of law; the Ṛgvedic counterpart of Ahura Mazda.

There are many similarities between Zend-Avesta and Ṛgveda. Yima, the son of Vīvanghavant, was the first mortal who prepared the Haoma or Soma for the incarnate world. In the Ṛgveda, Vivasvān is the morning sun personified. He is the father of Yama. With him lives Soma.³⁷

The *Var* of Yima is pictured as the ideal place to live. Zend-

³³ There are two inscriptions of Darius which mentioned Haft-Hindu as a part of king Darius's domain. These are at Persepolis (c. 518-515 B.C.) and at Naksha-i-Rustam (c. 515 B.C.).

³⁴ This enclosure was thus a square. It is not impossible that the planning of neighbourhoods in “squarem,” as found in many European cities and Indian towns like Jaipur, has its roots in the distant past when the Aryans had not yet branched off.

³⁵ Zend-Avesta, I. Vendīdād II. 31-41; Talavakāra Upaniṣad, IV. 4.

³⁶ Ṛgveda, X. CXXIII. 6.

³⁷ Ṛgveda, XI. XXVI. 4.

Avesta affirms: “In the reign of Yima swift motion was there, neither cold nor heat, there was neither age nor death, nor envy made by Daevas or demons.”³⁸ Similarly the Ṛgvedic poet aspires to live in the realm of Yama:

“Make me immortal in that realm where dwells the king
Vivasvān’s son (Yama).
Where there is the secret shrine of heaven, where those
waters are young and fresh.”

Like Yima of Zend-Avesta, Yama is also described as the leader of the Aryans, who migrated from the original land.

“Honour the king with thine oblations, Yama, Vivasvān’s
son, who gathers men together,
Who travelled to the lofty heights above us,
Who searches out and shows the path to many.
Yama first found for us a place to dwell in;
This pasture never can be taken from us.
Men born on earth tread their own paths,
That lead them whither our ancient Fathers have
departed.”³⁹

Both in Zend Avesta and Ṛgveda,⁴⁰ Yima or Yama is described as the leader of the Aryan migration from the original land, and the lord of the dead. In both the traditions he is described as the first mortal who shows the souls the path to heaven, the abode of the blessed.

In Ṛgveda, Yama keeps two dogs who show the path to the departed souls. These dogs are of dark colour and have four eyes. The mother of these dogs is the she-dog of Indra named Saramā. The Ṛgvedic poet describes them vividly:

Run and outsped the two dogs,
Saramā’s offspring, brindle, four-eyed, upon thy happy
pathway.
Draw night then to the gracious-minded fathers where
they rejoice in company with Yama.

³⁸ Zend-Avesta, III. Yasna IX. 4-5.

³⁹ Ṛgveda, IX. CXIII. 89.

⁴⁰ Ṛgveda, XXIV. 1-2.

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And those two dogs of thine, Yama, the watchers, four-eyed
who look on men and guard the pathway
Entrust this man, O King, to their protection, and
with prosperity and health endow him.
Dark-hued, insatiate, with distended nostrils, Yama's
two envoys roam among the people.
May they restore to us a fair existence here and today,
that we may see the sunlight.⁴¹

Among the Parsis (descendants of Iranians who migrated to India) there is a custom that a four-eyed dog (having two spots above the eyes) is shown the dead body before its disposal.

We find much glorification of the dog in Zend-Avesta. In the original land, which was perhaps in the polar region, the dog must have been essential for the survival of man. This glorification seems to be a vestige of that ancient tradition. In Ṛgveda, though the dog is not praised to any comparable extent, we do find that the gods Indra and Yama keep a dog.

In Zend-Avesta a whole Fargard is devoted to the dog. It is declared that the dog possesses the character of eight persons. Among the characters enumerated are those of the priest, the warrior and the husbandman. These are the three ranks of ancient Iranians. The ancient Iranians' veneration for dogs was so pervasive that even beaver, fox, hedge-hog and tortoise are conceived as dogs. But in post-Vedic India the dog was reduced to a despised position. In the Pāraskara Gṛhya Sūtra diseases of the new-born male child are personified in the dog. In the ritual for warding off these diseases they are addressed as the dog.⁴² Looking at a dog is considered an evil omen. A student who has taken a bath after studentship should avoid seeing dogs for three nights. Anyone who touches a dog should take a bath with his clothes on. The food seen by a dog is unfit for eating.⁴³ This may well be a result of persistent antagonism that the ancient Indians had against the Iranians who considered the dog holy.

In Zend-Avesta the priest is called Āthravan. Yima is described

⁴¹ Ṛgveda, X. IXV. 10-12.

⁴² Pāraskara Gṛhya Sūtra, I. 16.24.

⁴³ Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, I.I. 31; Pāraskara, Gṛhya Sūtra, II. 8.3, Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra, I. 5.15.16., I. 5.16.30.

as the first priest. In the Ṛgveda, too, Atharavan is the first fire-priest. The mention of Yama is also significant.⁴⁴ There are other parallels too in Ṛgveda and Avesta. Rta, the universal, eternal, physical and moral order of Ṛgveda is found in Avesta as Rata, the good, or the order made by Mazda to regulate the worlds.⁴⁵

Mitra of Ṛgveda has the same attributes as the Mithra of Avesta. The largest Yast (chapter) of Avesta is dedicated to Mithra who is the god of light or sun. Light symbolized the truth. Mithra is the god of truth. Mithra is ever vigilant, watching every deviance of mankind. Similarly in the Ṛgveda it is declared:

Mitra, when speaking, stirreth men to work:
Mitra sustaineth both the earth and heaven.
Mitra beholdeth men with eyes that never close.
To Mitra bring oblation with clarified butter.⁴⁶

In Avesta, Mithra is also the lord of pastures and the chief of assemblies. The attribute of being the “chief of assemblies” is obviously related to the conception of the upholder of law. “We sacrifice unto Mithra, the lord of wide pastures, who speaks the truth, the chief in assemblies, with a thousand ears, well-shapen, with ten thousand eyes, high, with full knowledge, strong, sleepless and ever awake.”⁴⁷ Mithra also punishes those who deviate from the right path. Due to ardent antagonism against those Aryans who had settled in India, the Iranian Mithra is described as “one who breaks the skulls of the Daevas.”⁴⁸

In Ṛgveda, Juhū is mentioned as the deserted wife of Bṛhaspati, who was restored to him by gods.⁴⁹ Perhaps this Juhu is Jahi of Avesta. Jahi is originally a god’s bride who gave herself to the demon and became the demoness of unlawful love and unchastity. The courtesan is her incarnation.⁵⁰ In a similar way,

⁴⁴ Ṛgveda, I. LXXXIII. 5.

⁴⁵ Zend-Avesta, I. Vendidad XI.X. 19.

⁴⁶ Ṛgveda, III. LIX. 1.

⁴⁷ Zend-Avesta, II. Mithra Yašt. 7.

⁴⁸ Zend-Avesta, II. Mithra Yašt. 25.

⁴⁹ Ṛgveda, X. CIX. 2-7.

⁵⁰ Zend-Avesta, I. Vendidad XVIII. 62.

Angirases, in Ṛgveda, are described as a race of higher beings, between gods and men. They are the first sacrificers whose ritual is considered as ideal. But their Iranian version, Angra Mainyu, is the Satan of Avesta who always creates evil things.

In Avesta the genius of earth is named Spenta Armaiti. In Ṛgveda, also, we find a similar name “Armati” for the genius of the earth.⁵¹

Predictably the worship of fire is a common feature found in the sacred books of both the traditions. There are a number of similar words related to fire sacrifice. These similar words indicate that common ritual practices were prevalent in the two branches of Aryans. For instance the sacrificer is *Zaotar* in Avesta and *Hotarah* in Sanskrit; the sacrifice is *Yasna* in Avesta and *Yajna* in Sanskrit; the hymn is *Manthra* in Avesta and *Mantra* in Sanskrit; the oblation is *Azwti* in Avesta and *Abuti* in Sanskrit. The Fire-priest is called *Āthrvan* in Avesta and *Atharvan* in Sanskrit. In Avesta the name of the Fire-god is derived from it. *Athrvan* is one who has the fire. The fire became *Athra* and later on the word was corrupted to *Ātar*. The *Dṛstarah* of *Mantras* (or the perceivers of hymns) of Ṛgveda are *Dastūrs* (priests) in Avesta. In both the traditions a great deal of stress is laid on the maintenance of the sacred fire. The Zend-Avesta and Pahlavi texts maintain that failure to do so results in drought, the diminishing of milk in cows, barrenness and abortions in women and acute scarcity of male offsprings.⁵² These Iranian texts prescribe maintenance of fire for protection of the pregnant woman from demons. It has also to be kept up for three days after the birth of a son.⁵³ Fire is a must in India, too, in confinement and childbirth. Taking oaths in the presence of fire and water seems to be an ancient Indo-Iranian custom. The Zend-Avesta prescribes that an oath should be taken before water and blazing fire. Even today marriage among Hindus must be solemnized in the presence of a water-filled jar and blazing fire. Oath-taking is an essential feature of marriage. The bride and bridegroom take an oath to live as husband and wife in the presence of fire and water.

⁵¹ Ṛgveda, X. XCII. 5.

⁵² Pahlavi Texts, III. Sad Dar. XI. 6.

⁵³ Pahlavi Texts, IV. Dīnkard. VIII. XXXVIII. 6-7.

The H(a)oma or Soma was the sacred drink of both the branches of Indo-Iranian Aryans. According to Avesta the H(a)oma grows on high mountains whose “snow peaks” remain ever white. It has tremendous healing power. It gives vigour. When people take it mixed with milk, it makes them prosperous. It is described in Avesta as being of many varieties.⁵⁴ It appears that H(a)oma was a kind of shrub which could grow on lofty mountains as well as in the valleys.⁵⁵

In Ṛgveda, also, the Soma is described as the “king of the forest”⁵⁶ who is the “dweller of the hills.”⁵⁷ The Soma-juice is also taken together with milk.⁵⁸

The H(a)oma or Soma has been variously identified by different scholars. But it seems that at least by the time the Aryans had reached Iran and India it was the plant now known as *Bhang* in India (Indian hemp) that was used as H(a)oma or Soma. It grows as a shrub which when ground and taken, preferably with milk, produces euphoria and fantasies. Pathans, a people who live in the land lying between Iran and India even today use the words “Oma Rāzā” (or King Eoma) for this shrub. In Avesta, Trita is described as the third person who prepared H(a)oma for the corporeal world.⁵⁹ In Ṛgveda, also, it is said that Trita refined Soma.⁶⁰ In Zend-Avesta there are “thirty-three lords of ritual order”. In the Ṛgveda, also, thirty-three gods are mentioned.⁶¹

It appears that ancient Aryans who had settled in Iran used to take beef and later on this practice was disapproved. In Zend-Avesta it is declared that if a householder fattens a cow for beef, he receives the curses of the cow. The cow curses: “Childless be thou, shorn of offspring, illfamed, and slander-followed, who gives me fodder but does not use me (for milk), but fattenest me for wife or children, and for thy niggard selfish meal.”⁶²

⁵⁴ Zend-Avesta I. Vendīdād IV. 46.

⁵⁵ Zend-Avesta, III. Yasna X. II-17.

⁵⁶ Ṛgveda, IX. V. 10.

⁵⁷ Ṛgveda, IX. LXII. 15.

⁵⁸ Ṛgveda IX. IX. 2.

⁵⁹ Zend-Avesta, III. Yasna IX. 9.

⁶⁰ Ṛgveda, IX. XXXIV. 4.

⁶¹ Zend-Avesta, III. Yasna I. 10.

⁶² Zend-Avesta, III. Yasna XI. 1.

In India too the early Aryans relished beef, but later on it was entirely forbidden. The *Gr̥hya Sūtras* mark the stage of transition. Here in the ritual of *Madhuparka* the householder offers a cow to the guest and gives him a butcher's knife to sacrifice it, but at the same time implores him to let the cow live if he so decides.⁶³

The cow is considered to be sacred by the Hindus even to this day. The urine of the cow is believed to have medicinal properties. Besides this, it is an important ingredient for purificatory rites. The *Smṛtis* prescribe drinking of *Gomūtra* (urine of the cow) for expiation of grave sins. Similarly, the *Zend-Avesta*, and also the *Pahlavi* texts, extol the medicinal and purificatory properties of *Gomez* (bovine urine). According to *Zend-Avesta* three cups of bovine urine have to be administered for three days to a woman who bears a still-born child to get rid of the pollution.⁶⁴ Such a woman is believed to be polluted because she had become a living grave. The urine is given "to wash over the grave within her womb." The *Pahlavi* texts also allude to the use of cow-dung as fuel. It is used as fuel in India to the present day. The value of the cow depends also on its dung in both the cultures.

Giving a sacred cord to the boy at the initiation ceremony is a common sacrament of Iranian and Indian Aryans. In this ceremony the boy or the teenager is given the sacred girdle and initiated into the elite community. While initiating the student according to *Gobhila Gr̥hya-Sūtras*, the teacher touches his navel with the word "Ahura."⁶⁵ This seems to be a clear Iranian influence. "Ahura" is the actual word which the Iranians use for the supreme God.

Despite these numerous similarities, in the course of time relations of animosity seem to have developed between the Indian and Iranian branches of Aryans. The *Ṛgvedic* gods came to be considered as evil spirits by the Iranians. This is true of *Indra*, who is mentioned by the same name both in the *Ṛgveda* and *Avesta*; *Sūrya* of *Ṛgveda* who is *Sauru* in *Avesta*; and

⁶³ Cf. *Shrirama Indradeva*, "Genesis of Indian Civilization: The Evidence of *Gr̥hya Sūtras*" *Diogenes*, no. 84, pp. 25-40.

⁶⁴ *Zend-Avesta*, I. *Vendidad* V. 51.

⁶⁵ *Gr̥hya-Sūtra* of *Gobhila*, II. 10.29.

Nasatyau of Ṛgveda who is Naunghaithya in Avesta. It is declared in Avesta that all these fiends are to be driven away from the house with the words: "I drive away Indra, I drive away Sauru, I drive away the daeva Naunghaithya from this house, from this borough, from this town, from this land."⁶⁶

The Avesta does not recognise the Indian Aryans as full human beings. It is recommended in Avesta that a surgeon should first perform surgery on three Daevas (Indians); only if he treats them successfully should he operate on Iranians.⁶⁷

Unlike other ancient civilizations, the ancient Iranian society as portrayed in the Zend-Avesta did not have a distinct servile class, though the word *Sūdra*, the generic name of the Indian servile class, seems to be of Iranian origin. Probably it is derived from the Persian word *Khurda* which means "small." The Khurdas are the people who have been fighting with the Iranians since ancient times.

We find the mention of three classes in Avesta. The first one is of Āthravans or priests; the second one is that of warriors, and the third one is that of agriculturalists. Zarathustra blesses king Viśtāsp thus: "May ten sons be born of you. In three of them mayest thou be an Āthraivan. In three of them mayest thou be warrior. In three of them mayest thou be tiller of the land. And may one be like thyself, Viśtāsp."⁶⁸

In the Pahlavi texts, we find mention of four classes. These are those of priests, warriors, husbandsmen and artizans.⁶⁹ The first rank consists of judges and those learned in religion. The second rank is that of warriors. They keep watch over the cities and destroy the enemy, thus performing both police and military functions. The third rank consists of writers and, secondarily, cultivators and the other urban people. The traders, artisans and shop-keepers form the fourth rank.⁷⁰ Priesthood is the most important profession in ancient Iran. According to James Darmester only the son of a priest could be a priest; anybody whose father was not a priest could not be a priest. But the blessings

⁶⁶ Zend-Avest, I. Vendīdād. Fargard X. 9.

⁶⁷ Zend-Avesta, I. Vendīdād. VI. 37-39.

⁶⁸ Zend-Avesta, II. XXIII. 5.

⁶⁹ Pahlavi Texts, IV. Dīnkard IX. XL. VII. 21 p. 308.

⁷⁰ Pahlavi Texts, IV. II. The Rivāyat of Kāmāh Bahrah. 12. p.425.

of Zarathustra to the king Vištāsp do not seem to confirm the hypothesis of James Darmester.⁷¹ In these blessings Zarathustra says that the king should beget ten sons of body and three of them may be Āthravans or priests. From these blessings it becomes quite clear that a son of a king may follow the profession of a priest if he so chooses. It is possible that during ancient times the profession of priest was not hereditary, but later on it became hereditary, as in India. However, while the priestly castes in India became perfectly endogamous, in Iran the priests continued to take brides from other ranks. This, in a way, can be considered the continuance of hypergamy, which was also permitted in India for a long time.

The Pahlavi texts enumerate certain vices of priests. These are heresy, covetousness, negligence, usuriousness, attention to trifles and unbelief in religion.⁷² The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa also describes Asuras as usurers who declare Vedas to be magic. In a myth it is also asserted that the Asuras lack sacrificial knowledge.

Gods and Asuras are the progeny of Prajāpati. Both came in a sacrifice and aspired for the *Vāk* or Speech. But “being a woman she went to gods, who had well-trimmed houses. The gods cut her off from the Asuras and enveloped her completely in the sacrificial fire. The Asuras, therefore, lack the sacrificial knowledge.”⁷³

It is not certain that these ranks were hereditary. It seems that people of higher ranks could take the professions of lower ranks, but naturally it would be difficult for the people of lower ranks to climb. However, these ranks were not exclusive. There is a provision that if a son is born of a maidservant he should be given the status of the son of the master. However, female children born of a maidservant were not recognized as his daughters.⁷⁴ Comparable provisions are found in the traditional law books, such as the Nārada Smṛti, of India.

In ancient Iran, the people whom the Aryans subjugated were not racially very different from the victorious Aryans.

⁷¹ Zend-Avesta, I. Introduction 47.

⁷² Pahlavi Texts, III. LIX. 7.

⁷³ Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, XIII. 4.3 11; III. 2.1.19.

⁷⁴ Pahlavi Texts, I. Shāyast Lā-Shāyast. XII. 14.

Therefore the ranks did not get crystallized as castes, as happened in India. In India the castes became hereditary as well as endogamous units. In Avesta, when the Aryans entered the Indian subcontinent and took a “demoness” as wife, the issues born of the union became “deformed.” The proto-Australoid people who lived in the Indian subcontinent were racially very different from the invading Aryans.

In Ṛgveda, we find the story of Yama and his sister Yami, a counterpart of the ancient Iranian myth of Yima in a different form. In this story, Yami, the sister of Yama, offers herself as wife to her brother Yama. It appears that in the beginning the Aryans married indigenous proto-Australoid women, but when they found that the children born of these unions had a dark complexion and were snub-nosed they avoided such marriages. This avoidance seems to have found expression in the myth of Yama and Yami in the Ṛgveda. Perhaps such scruples crystallized into the codes of endogamy which characterize the Indian caste system. In Ṛgveda the word *Varṇa* means colour. The two *Varṇas* are *Arya Varṇa* and *Kṛṣṇa Varṇa*. These indicate two different racial groups. According to Hindu mythology and sacred law books, all the numerous castes have emerged as a result of hypergamous and hypogamous unions among persons of different *Varṇas*. This is not entirely true. Many invading hordes and indigenous tribes turned into distinct castes and became integral parts of the caste hierarchy. However, the study of anthropologists like D.N. Majumdar indicates⁷⁵ that even today the order of castes in the basin of the rivers Gaṅgā and Yamuna, which is regarded as the cradle of Hindu civilization, shows a remarkable correlation with the amount of Nordic traits in its members.

The people of Iran were exposed to various influences. The Assyrians were their closest neighbours. The traces of Assyrian religion can be seen clearly in Avesta. The Assyrian religion seems to have been superimposed on the ancient Aryan religion. Zarathustra, the reformer of Iran, wanted to revive and revitalize the ancient fire-worship. But as the Assyrian religion was popular

⁷⁵ D.N. Majumdar, *Races and Cultures of India*, Lucknow, Universal Publishers, n.d. pp. 36-37, 52, 59.

among the masses, the revival of the ancient Aryan religion in its pure form was not possible. It is the Assura Mazās of Assyrians which came into the Avestan religion along with seven good angels and seven bad spirits. Zarthustra had to accommodate it. But he succeeded in overthrowing the influences of Buddhism and the transformed, Indianized, Aryan religion, at least in its manifest form. Buddhism was established by Aśoka in the north-west of the Indian subcontinent also. In the Zend-Avesta, Zarthustra is described as the “first priest” who took the turning of the wheel from the hands of the Daevas.⁷⁶ As is well known, the wheel (Dhama Cakka) is the central symbol of Buddhism. The words “Buddha” and “Deva” both came to be employed for fiends in the Iranian tradition. In the Avesta “Buiti, the Daeva” occurs as a fiend. It is called “unseen death” and “hell born.”⁷⁷ Even the name of Gautama (the Buddha) occurs in Zend-Avesta. The ideal son, who is born by the grace of glorious gods Mithra and others, defeats Gaotema or Gautama (presumably the Buddhists) in disputation. “Through their brightness and glory a man is born who is a chief in assemblies and meetings, who listens well to the (holy) words, whom wisdom holds dear, and who returns a victor from discussions with Gaotema, the heretic.”⁷⁸ In a Pahlavi text the “Daeva Bud” is called “secret-moving pestilence, the deceiver.”⁷⁹ It is also said in the same Pahlavi text that these Buddhists preached the “nature of sacred beings to mankind but mankind fully understood that they are not sacred beings but Daevas”⁸⁰ or demons. At another place in Pahlavi texts it is declared, “The demon ‘But’ is he whom they worship among the Hindus, and who lives in idols, as one worships the horse as an idol.”⁸¹ This is a clear reference to Buddhists of India. The worship of the horse probably refers to the horse-sacrifice or Aśvamedha-Yajña, which a mighty king in ancient India aspired to perform as a token of his supremacy over other rulers. In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa we find a myth

⁷⁶ Zend-Avesta, II. XIII. XXIV. 89.

⁷⁷ Zend-Avesta, I. XIX. I. 1.

⁷⁸ Zend-Avesta, II. Yaśts and Sīrōzahs. 16.

⁷⁹ Pahlavi Texts, V. Dinkard VII. 37.

⁸⁰ Pahlavi Texts, V. Dinkard VII. 46.

⁸¹ Pahlavi Texts, I. Buddhahiś XXVIII. 34.

in which Asuras, the wicked enemy of gods, held the horse of the gods in the horse-sacrifice. But the horse, who is a “thunderbolt,” killed the four-eyed dog under his feet.⁸² This is obviously a symbolic representation of the trouncing of Iranians by the Indian warriors.

From time to time Iranians sought to revive their ancient religion, demolished the idol-temples and established the sacred fire on the river Veh or Sindhu and restored the empire of Iran. Zarathustra is described as the priest of Kabul who, during the reign of king Vištāsp, “established the fire at the shining mountain in Kabul.”⁸³

The movements for the revitalization of the original Aryan faith in ancient Iran and India bear remarkable similarities. In India as well as in Iran these revivalist movements were aimed at undoing the pervasive influence of Buddhism. The Manusmṛti, the most sacred law book of Hinduism, owes its predominance to the fact that it laid the normative foundations of the traditional Hindu society of Brahmanical revival against Buddhism. However, no revivalist movement ever succeeds in reviving a bygone age. The Iranian religion and norms of the revivalist era borrowed heavily from the Assyrian tradition; and in India the Brahmanical revivalist movement had to take over many prevailing non-Aryan religious and institutional elements in order to enlist the support of the wider masses in its fight against Buddhism.

It appears that the people of Kashmir, Iran, and Kangdez (Kundez valley is situated in Afghanistan) shared the same religion and culture. In the Pahlavi texts it is laid down that the people living in these places are mutually connected and equally meritorious.⁸⁴ It is interesting to note that the land of Sapta-Sindhu is not mentioned as one where people of the same religion are living. Perhaps the people of Sapta-Sindhu were following the transformed Indo-Aryan religion, and were therefore ignored by the Iranians.

Like all ancient Aryan civilizations, in Iran also the family

⁸² Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, XIII. II.

⁸³ Pahlavi Texts, I. Bundahiś XVII. 6.

⁸⁴ Pahlavi Texts, III. Sad Dar X. 7.

was predominantly patriarchal. The head of the family, usually the father or the eldest male, wielded considerable authority. The position of the wife was subordinate to her husband. A woman needed guardianship of a man in discharging her duties. He could be her husband or son, or, failing these, her father.

According to the ancient Iranian tradition, in cases where the husband died prematurely, and the son was too young to head the family, the father of the wife would assume the family guardianship. From this provision it is clear that in Iran, at least during the revivalist era, the patriarchal values were not as strong as in traditional India. Unlike India, where the eldest male member of the late husband's family assumes the guardianship of the family, in Iran it was to the relatives of the wife that this responsibility was assigned. After the father of the wife, her eldest brother is declared to be the guardian of the sister's family.⁸⁵ This custom of appointing a guardian from the widow's family seems to be of non-Aryan, probably of Assyrian, origin.

It is also provided that the family guardian—that is the father or brother of the widow—should be given ample remuneration for food, clothing, medicine and shelter.⁸⁶ Unlike India, where taking money from daughter or younger sister is taboo, in Iran this was not considered improper. It must have been an established usage of the country and was therefore included in the law books.

There are remarkable similarities between the ancient civilizations of Iran and India as regards the status of the woman. In both civilizations there is no salvation for the woman who is not married. According to the Pahlavi texts the man could have lineage in the future existence by reciting Avesta but the woman could have no such lineage without offspring.⁸⁷ According to the Hindu sacred law books, the unmarried woman cannot attain salvation because without marriage she remains un sanctified; marriage is the only full sacrament for her though for a man there are other sacraments also. A woman was not recognized

⁸⁵ Pahlavi Texts, II. Dādistan-i-Dinik LVI. 7.

⁸⁶ Pahlavi Texts, II. Dādistan-i-Dinik LVI. 8.

⁸⁷ Pahlavi Texts, I. Shāyast Lā-Shāyast. X. 19.

as a witness in either civilization; though litigation between husband and wife is permitted in Iran⁸⁸ it is not in India.

Both in ancient India and Iran the son has been given great importance in the family. The daughter has been assigned a lower position than the son. In the later Pahlavi texts, the father is called the fire and his son is the lamp-light.⁸⁹ A person who has a son is considered more privileged than one who has none. It is believed that a sonless person cannot attain heaven.⁹⁰ A sonless person cannot cross the "bridge of the heaven." The word *pur* or son means *pul* or bridge through which the father goes to heaven. A person who has no son is called "one having severed bridge." He cannot attain heaven though he has performed many meritorious deeds. At the gate of the Cinvad bridge, while taking account of his deeds, every archangel would question him as to whether or not he has left any substitute for himself in the world. Where the reply is in the negative, his soul would have to remain in that place full of anguish and grief.⁹¹ In the Chandogya Upaniṣad, self or the Ultimate Reality is called *Setu* or bridge, from which all evil-doers are turned back.⁹²

In the Indian tradition, also, the importance of a son is emphasized. A son is necessary for the spiritual welfare of man. A man is saved from the hell, named "*put*," from the very sight of his son's face, according to Bṛhaspati.⁹³ In fact the Sanskrit word for son, *Putra*, is etymologically interpreted as "one who saves his father from the hell, named *put*." A sonless person is considered miserable. He can never gain heaven or salvation.⁹⁴

Both the traditions prescribe a low age of marriage for girls. The Pahlavi texts ordain that a daughter must be given in marriage before she is fifteen, lest she is exposed to paramours and the father incurs sin.⁹⁵ In the traditional Indian law books the maximum age of marriage is even lower. It is twelve years.

⁸⁸ Pahlavi Texts, IV. XX. 87.

⁸⁹ Pahlavi Texts, IV. Dīnkard VIII-XXXI. 21.

⁹⁰ Zend-Avesta, I. Vendīdād IV. 47.

⁹¹ Pahlavi Texts, III. Sad Dar XVII. 4-7.

⁹² Chandogya Upaniṣad, VIII. 4.1.

⁹³ Bṛhaspati Smṛti, XXVI. 81.

⁹⁴ Bṛhaspati Smṛti, Sanskāra Kānda. I. 58.

⁹⁵ Pahlavi Texts, IV. Dīnkard VIII. XX. 95.

A father who does not give away his daughter in marriage before this age incurs sin. Both the traditions bear witness to the prevalence of bride price. Marriage between cross-cousins is preferred both in the Iranian tradition and R̥gveda. But in later times it was looked upon with disfavour in India.

However, in matters of inheritance and ownership of property, the woman of ancient India was in a position of disadvantage as compared to the woman in ancient Iran. In ancient Iran the property of a sonless person could go to his wife and daughters. But the Mitakṣarā system of law which prevailed over most of India did not permit the wife or the daughter to inherit property. It had to go to the paternal kin, unless a person adopted his daughter's son as his own son. The difference between the position of women in ancient Iran and India may have something to do with the influence of the Assyrian civilization on the former. This influence is also visible in the conception of life after death in ancient Iran. Besides the idea that the dead proceed to live with the departed ancestors, which is found in common in the Zend-Avesta and R̥gveda, we also find in later Iranian works the conception of a "Day of Judgement" on which the souls of the dead rise up.⁹⁶

The interaction between the ancient Iranian and Indian cultures presents an interesting spectacle. Though in both the traditions there is distinct consciousness of a common descent and close kinship with each other, the animosity and jealousy between them leads to the transformation of the gods of one into the demons of the other. And this attitude is mutual and reciprocal. Because of significant differences of race and culture in the people that they encountered, the two branches of Aryans developed different kinds of social stratification and structure. Even so, both the traditions of culture responded to a challenge in a remarkably similar manner. Both of them threw up strong revivalist movements to combat Buddhism which had almost entirely swamped them. These revivalist movements in both the traditions took over non-Aryan cultural elements on a large scale in order to win the support of the larger masses in the fight against Buddhism. Such processes throw interesting light

⁹⁶ Pahlavi Texts, IV. Dīnkard IX. XXXXVII. 10.

on certain common modes of response which cultural traditions tend to make when faced with a challenge to their existence. The side-by-side analysis of the source material of the two cultural traditions makes intelligible many points that would have remained obscure and appeared meaningless when studied in isolation.

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