

Prophet Zarathustra, the Avesta and the Vedas

With special reference to Professor Kshetresachandra Chattopadhyaya's views*

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Introduction: The Discovery of the Avesta:

Inquiries into the religion of ancient Persia began long ago by the Greeks who first studied it. Aristotle, Hermippus, Dinon, Theopompus, Hermodorus, Heraclides Cumanus wrote about it, but little of it is extant. Xanthus the Lydian (who lived before Herodotus) had mentioned Zoroastrian (Nicolaus Damascenus, Didot, *Fragm. Hist III*, 409).¹ In the first centuries of Christianity, "the religion of Persia was more studied and less understood than it had ever been before. The real object aimed at in studying the old religions; was to form a new one."² Real inquiry into Mazdeism was not resumed until the Renaissance.³ Barnabe Brisson completed the task of compiling the information from the Greek and Roman writers and published it as *De regio Persarum principatu libritres*, in 1590. In 1700, the renowned orientalist at Oxford, Thomas Hyde, published the *Veterum Persarum et Parthorum et Medorum. religionis historie*, which was the first systematic attempt to restore the history of old Persian religion with due consultation with Islamic writings. However, as later scholars

* The article (*A Golden Chain of Civilizations: Indic, Semitic and Hellenic (from c. 600 BC to c. AD 600)*) Vol. I. Pt. 5, Section 1: *Cultural Contacts and Movements*, Edited by G.C. Pande (PHISPC, Centre for Studies in Civilizations, New Delhi & MRML) 2012) has quoted extensively from "*Studies in Vedic Indian and Iranian Literature by Prof. K.C. Chattopadhyaya*" edited by V. N. Mishra (Agra, 1978) and *Zoroastrian Religion by Kshetresachandra Chattopadhyaya* edited by R.S. Mishra and K.N. Mishra (BHU, Varanasi, 1979), which are valuable compilations of the various lectures by Professor Chattopadhyaya. The titles of the two books have been respectively abbreviated here as '*Studies.....*' and '*Zoroastrian Religion.....*' in the reference underneath. Exhaustive use of James Darmesteter's, *The Zend-Avesta*, [*The Sacred Books of the East (SBE)*] has also been made.

¹ In later times several oracles like *Λογια του Ζωροαστρου* or *Oracula Chaldaea sive Magica* (by Neo-Platonists) became popular. "As his name had become the very emblem of wisdom, they would cover with it the latest inventions of their ever deepening theosophy" (p. xiii) Zoroaster and Plato were treated as if they had been philosophers of the same school and Hierocles expounded their doctrines in the same book. Proclus wrote commentaries on 70 Tetrads of Zoroaster, which were "nothing more or less than Proclus commented on by Proclus". Prodicus the Gnostic possessed secret books of Zoroaster.

² Darmesteter James, *The Zend-Avesta, Part-I, The Sacred Books of the East (SBE)*, Vol. IV, (OUP 1887/MLBD, Delhi, 1980 reprint), Introduction p. xiii.

³ Travellers like Pietro della Valle, Henry Lord, Mandelslo, Ovington, Chardin, Gabriel du Chinon, Tavernier had come across followers of Zoroastrianism in the East (India and Persia).

discovered, the work was full of wrong conclusions because it was based upon the recent compilations referring to the last stage of Parsi religion.

Another serious attempt was undertaken by a scholar from Paris named Anquetil Du Perron, who was greatly inspired by the sight of the facsimiles of some pages of the Vendidad that he had seen with Etienne Fourmont, a French orientalist.⁴ Du Perron published the first European translation of Avesta in 1771. It was entitled, *Zend-Avesta, ouvrage de Zoroastre, contenant les Idees Theologiques, Physiques et Morales de ce Legislateur ... Tradnit en Francois sur l'original Zend* (par M. Anquetil Du Perron, 3 vols). The Oxford scholars, among whom William Jones was the foremost, immediately questioned the authenticity of the Avesta published by Anquetil Du Perron.⁵ Soon the scholarly world was divided into two debating groups, while a third opinion developed by Meiners that Parsiism is a medley of Brahmanical and Muslim ideas and traditions did not find immediate supporters.

Among the scholars who championed Anquetil Du Perron's translation of Avesta and one who vindicated the authenticity of his Zend books and researches, was the philologist Kleuker. He published the German translation of Avesta, and showed that neither Avestan (Zend) nor Pahlavi had any Arabic elements. In 1791, numismatist Tychsen opined that the antiquity of the Avesta stands established because there was marvellous accordance between the Zend Avesta and the accounts of the ancient Greeks (particularly Plutarch) with regard to the doctrines of Zoroaster. In 1793, Sylvestre de Sacy deciphered the Pahlavi inscriptions of the Sassanids basing upon the lexicon prepared by Anquetil Du Perron. Sacy's contribution became the key to cuneiform inscriptions of the Achaemenids of Persia, which could finally remove all doubts about the genuineness of the Avestan language. Tychsen had felt that since Avestan language was growing obsolete, the Zend books were translated into Pahlavi in the time of the Sassanids of Persia.⁶

After 1784, William Jones modified his opinion towards Anquetil Du Perron's works. While browsing the Zend (=Avestan) glossary prepared by Anquetil Du Perron, he commented that there seemed a near relationship between the Zend and Sanskrit languages. The observation made Jones the creator of comparative grammar of Sanskrit and Avestan.⁷

⁴ (In fact, this was the copy of the Vendidad, which George Boucher had received in 1723 from one Richard Cobbe who brought it from Surat. Boucher had exhibited it in the Bodleian Library. It inspired one scholar Frazer, who went to Surat for Parsi books but returned without success.) Du Perron set-off to India in 1755 in the service of the French East Indian Company, and returned to Paris in March 1764 with several books obtained from the Parsis of Surat.

⁵ William Jones was possibly annoyed with Du Perron's criticism of Thomas Hyde. Jones' pamphlet (*Lettre a M. A*** du P***, dans laquelle est compris l'examen de sa traduction des livres attributes a Zoroastre*) attacked not only the literary style, but also the contents of it under the pretext that "silly tales, absurd laws, grotesque gods and demons could not be the work of a sage like Zoroaster."

⁶ Upon Sacy's discovery, Tychsen wrote that "Pahlavi was used during the reign of the Sassanids...and it was...by Ardeshir Babagan that the doctrine of Zoroaster was revived. One can now understand why the Zend books were translated into Pahlavi."

⁷ "I was inexpressibly surprised to find that six or seven words in ten are pure Sanscrit, and even some of their inflexions formed by the rules of the Vyacaran.... it follows that the language of the Zend was at least a dialect of the Sanscrit..." (*Asiatic Researches*, II §3) The latter part was incorrect but the near relationship of the two languages was important. (Darmesteter, *op.cit.* p. xx)

Inspired with Jones' comment, studies in comparative grammar of Sanskrit and Avestan commenced. In 1798, Father Paulo de St. Barthelemy concluded that Sanskrit was spoken in Persia and Media that brought forth the Zend language. John Leyden, in 1808 published a paper that Zend was a Prakrit dialect like Pali and compared Zend with Sauraseni. Erskine thought that Zend was a Sanskrit dialect imported from India by the founder of Mazdaenism, but it was not spoken in Persia.⁸ Reacting to such opinions, particularly to Erskine, the famous philologist Emmanuel Rask wrote the first essay on Avestan grammar in 1826.⁹

Eugene Burnouf was a scholar of ancient languages, who after having identified the shortcomings of Anquetil Du Perron, and had also having consulted the Sanskrit translation of the Yasna by Parsi Neriosengh (c. 15th century AD), propounded the appropriate method of interpreting the Avestan, in his work "*Commentaire sur le Yasna*". He also gave the first notions of a comparative mythology of the Avesta and the Vedas, "never sacrificing either tradition to comparison or comparison to tradition". The successes of Burnouf, Lassen and Rawlinson in deciphering the inscriptions at Persepolis and Behistun, revealed the existence of the language closely connected with the Avesta in the times of the Achaemenids. The authenticity of the Zend books was thus vindicated.

The Interpretation of the Avesta : Two schools of thought:

Once the authenticity of the Avesta was vindicated and the idea of close relationship between the Avestan and Sanskrit was propounded, the task of interpreting the Avesta and its religious material was addressed by scholars. But after Burnouf, dispute arose on the methods of interpreting the Avesta. Some scholars preferred the traditional approach, while another group of scholars preferred to study the Avesta in comparison with the Vedas. By this time the Vedic studies had made much progress and the affinities with Avestan words and thoughts had become clearer. Many gods and heroes found in the Avesta also had presence/parallels in the Vedas. Vedic scholars like Roth, Benfey and Martin Haug did not see it worthwhile to refer to Pahlavi tradition/literature; rather advocated to refer to the Vedas.

Scholars like Spiegel and Justi, who were the exponents of the traditional school reacted that the "translating Zend by means of Sanskrit and Avesta by means of the Vedas, because Zend and the Avesta are closely related to Sanskrit and the Vedas, is forgetting that relationship is not identity."¹⁰ "The traditional method as it starts from matters of facts moves always in the field of reality; the comparative method starts from an hypothesis, moves in a vacuum, and builds up a fanciful religion and a fanciful language."¹¹ Spiegel's efforts brought forth the first Pahlavi grammar and acquainted the world with the Old Iranian religion. But

⁸ Peter von Bohlen, in 1831, was one of the last to confuse and say that Zend was Prakrit dialect.

⁹ *Transactions of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, III, 524. He explained that modern Persian was not derived from Zend but from a dialect closely connected with it. Zend was not derived from Sanskrit, and their systems of sound are quite different.

¹⁰ A scholar seeks the Avesta in the Avesta, and not Veda. Meanings of the Avestan words change in Sanskrit as well. [Avestan *meregha* (bird) = Sanskrit *mrga* (gazelle)]

¹¹ Darmestester, *op.cit.*,p. xxvii.

the traditional studies were too apt to stop at tradition, instead of going beyond to comparative studies, which would have been desirable.

The comparative school developed the Indo-Iranian mythology. In the steps of Burnouf, it was Roth who showed that how the epical history of Iran was derived from the same source as the myths of Vedic India, and pointed out the primitive identity of Ahura Mazda with the Vedic deity Varuna. But the dangers of the method of the comparative school came to sight in the studies of the great Pahlavi scholar, Martin Haug “who giving a definite form to a system still fluctuating, converted Mazdaeism into a religious revolution against Vedic polytheism, found historical allusions to that schism both in the Avesta and in the Veda, pointed out curses against Zoroaster in the Vedas, and, in short, transformed, as it were, the two books into historical pamphlets.”¹²

To put it briefly, the debate generated upon the authenticity of the Avesta published by Du Perron had sparked off a fire that subsided for a while but did not extinguish; it caught the scholarly minds regarding the interpretation of the Avesta by way of two different approaches; and finally made the burning issue of the so-believed schism in the Indo-Iranian religion. The antiquity of the Avesta and the Vedas were equated, and the date of Prophet Zarathustra was also taken into question.

James Darmesteter, in 1879, while reviewing the approaches of both schools pointed to the fact that the translations of one and the same passage from the Avesta differed vastly under the divergent approaches of the scholars of the two schools. Both the approaches are important but it is necessary to strike the right balance to derive information. “In fact tradition gives the materials, and comparison puts them in order.”¹³ “The Veda is not the past of the Avesta, as the Avesta is the past of tradition. The Avesta and the Veda are not derived from one another, but from one and the same original, diversely altered in each. ...The Veda ... cannot help in discovery matters of fact in the Avesta, but only in explaining them when discovered by tradition...”¹⁴

The existence of an Indo-Iranian Religion:

The historiography of early Indo-Iranian relationship was guided by the above-referred two theories of the two schools. The theory of the common Indo-European origin of the Aryans proposed by William Jones was based upon linguistic similarities in the Indo-European languages; and so did the theory of Indo-Iranian religious schism by Martin Haug derived support from linguistic arguments. After the discovery of the Boghazkoi inscription, both of these theories held greater sway. The suggestion that the Aryans had a meeting point in Eurasia from where they had spread out, gained strengthened. The Aryans were supposed to have first migrated to Iranian lands and there from had entered into India. In this way, they had a common source for their religious ideas embodied in their religious texts.¹⁵ Further, it

¹² Darmesteter, *op.cit.*, p. xxix.

¹³ “Tradition, as a rule, is wont to enforce the ideas of its own ages into the books of past ages..... Tradition is always either new sense or nonsense The key to the Avesta is not the Pahlavi, but the Veda. The Avesta and the Veda are two echoes of one and the same voice, the reflex of one and the same thought: the Vedas, therefore, are both the best lexicon and the best commentary to the Avesta.” [Darmesteter, *op.cit.*, p. xxvi]

¹⁴ Darmesteter, *op.cit.*, p. xxviii.

¹⁵ Chattopadhyaya wrote, “The similarities I have referred to between two religions are not only due to *common heritage* but also caused by the *contiguity of the two countries*, India and Iran, and a *free movement of the*

was supposed that the *Avesta* was a text dating if not prior, at least of the same date as the *Rg Veda*. It was also said that the Aryans who moved into India and those left behind in Iran had some points of dispute in their religious outlook.

According to James Darmesteter, there was one same source for the Vedas and the *Avesta*, and it was named as the Indo-Iranian religion. The Indo Iranian religion had two general ideas at its base: that (a) there is a law in nature, and that (b) there is a war in nature. There was a “latent monotheism and an unconscious dualism” in the Indo Iranian religion, which faded away in the development of Indian thought “but Mazdeism lost neither of these two notions nor did it add a new one, and its original action was to cling strongly and equally to both ideas and push them to an extreme. Mazdeism ...struggled on towards unity. The Lord slowly brought everything under his unquestioned supremacy, and the other gods became not only his subjects, but his creatures.”¹⁶

“The single elements of Mazdeism do not essentially differ from those of the Vedic and Indo European mythologies generally” but “a series of myths” like the myths about the heavenly life of Yama did much “towards obscuring the close connection between *Avesta* and the Vedic mythologies.”¹⁷ There were certain gods in the Indo Iranian religion which found place in both the ancient faiths of *Avesta* and the Vedas, for example, the Heaven god Varuna (in Vedas) and Ahura Mazda (in *Avesta*); and there are similar myths, like, the fight of Atar and Azi Dahaka for possession of hvareno (in *Avesta*) and the myth of Traitana or Trita Aptya (in the Vedas).¹⁸

The antiquity of the *Avesta*:

‘*Avesta*’ means “the law”.¹⁹ As the Magi of the time of Herodotus sang songs of their gods during sacrifice, “it is very likely that there was already a sacred literature in existence.”²⁰ All the tenets of the *Avesta* were well established in the time of King Philip of Macedon and Aristotle. According to Darmesteter, “The original texts of the *Avesta* were not written by Persians, as they are in a language which was not used in Persia, as they are in a

peoples of the two countries, a point which is often overlooked in these studies.” [italics ours] *Zoroastrian Religion*..... pp. 2—3.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, lvii — lix. See also, J.Darmesteter, ‘The Supreme God in the Indo European Mythology’ in *Contemporary Review*, Oct. 1879, p. 283.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp. lxx; lxxv.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, pp. lxii—lxvii.

¹⁹ As shown by Oppert (*JA*, 1872) the word ‘*Avesta*’ is derived from Old Persian *abasta*. The *Avesta* is a “liturgical collection” which is “more a Prayer Book than a Bible” (*JD*. xxxi). The primitive *Avesta*, as revealed by Ormazd to Zoroaster and by Zoroaster to King Vistasp of Bactria, was supposed to have been comprised of 21 Nosks (Books) that were destroyed by Alexander, and except one book, viz., the Vendidad exists in its entirety.[Darmesteter, *op.cit.*,p. xxxii]. Of the extant *Avesta*, the first part consists of the Vendidad (religious laws and mythical tales), the Visperad (litanies for sacrifices) and the Yasna (comprising of litanies and 5 Gathas or hymns). Part two, that is, the *Khorda Avesta* (small *Avesta*) comprises of prayers in 5 Gah, 30 Shirozah formulae, 3 Afrigan and 6 Nyayi. There are also Yast (18 extant hymns in praise of Izads), and Noske (fragments). For a discussion on contents, see also, Chattopadhyaya, K., *Zoroastrian Religion*..... pp. 16—18.

²⁰ Darmesteter, *op.cit.*,p. liii. “The very fact that no sacrifice could be performed without the assistance of the Magi makes it highly probable that they were in possession of rites, prayers, and hymns very well composed and arranged, and not unlike those of the Brahmanas....”.

language which was not used in Persia, they prescribe certain customs which were unknown to Persia, and proscribe others which were current in Persia. They were written in Media, by priests of Raghā and Atropatene, in a language of Media, and they exhibit the ideas of the sacerdotal class under the Achaemenian dynasty.”

“All the Avesta ideas are already fully developed in the time, or, at least, at the end of the Achaemenian dynasty. There is perfect accordance of the account of Mazdeism in Theopompos (in Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, § 46) with the data in Zend books.”²¹ It has been assumed that the present Avesta is “the remnant of the sacred literature of Persia under the last Achaemenid kings”,²² because the earliest date of the Avesta is the last century of the Sassanian dynasty. “Avesta took its definitive form from the hands of Adarbad Mahraspand, under King Shapur II, in consequence of the dangers with which Mani’s heresy had threatened the national religion..... Therefore instead of saying that there are parts of the Avesta that may belong to so late a period as the fourth century, it is more correct to say that no part of it can belong to a later date.”²³ Further, “the present texts are derived from texts already existing under the Achaemenian kings.”²⁴ Therefore, the bulk of the Avesta is pre-Sassanian, some parts of Avesta must be Sassanian and not all in Avesta is pre-Sassanian.

Antiquity of the *Rgveda-samhita* and the *Avesta*

Researches on the issues pertaining to the antiquity of the holy *Avesta* and the date of Prophet Zarathustra, had been directed and dominated by linguistic arguments. The major derivations were as follows: (i) *Avesta* is older or at least of the same antiquity as the *Rgveda-samhita*; (ii) the Aryans split into two sects upon their differences about religious rituals and the one branch that migrated to India became known as the Indo-Aryans; and (iii) the religious reformer and Prophet Zarathustra lived earlier than supposed.

Among the Indian scholars, the bold veteran and well-versed authority in ancient languages, Kshetresachandra Chattopadhyaya took up the task of correcting the conclusions of the western scholars, by pointing out the shortcomings in the approaches. He revealed the “hollowness of linguistic arguments” about the antiquity of the *Gathas* and their author Zarathustra, besides adducing strengthening with new arguments to existing views that he favoured. According to him the Western Orientalists “have not always been able to get at the true significance of our culture for lack of understanding of the actual psychological reactions

²¹ *ibid.* Zend refers to the Commentaries of the Avesta in Pahlavi language (*Zoroastrian Religion.....* pp. 17-18.)

²² “The slow triumph of Magism can be dimly traced through the Achaemenian period. Introduced by Cyrus, it reigned supreme for a time with Pseudo-Smerdis, and was checked by Darius.” (*ibid.*, p. lv.) Darius rebuilt some temples destroyed by Magian Gaumata. It seems to have resumed its progress under Xerxes, who destroyed Greek temples, and his Magian companion to Greece named Osthanes wrote on Zoroastrian lore. “New progress marked the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus. In his time the legends of Media became national in Persia and his reign was an epoch in political history of Magism. But the real victory was not won till six centuries later, when national interest required a national religion..... the Magi ascended the throne with Ardeshir one of their pupils (Agathias, II, 26), and the Magian observances became the law of all Iran.” (Darmesteter, *op.cit.*, p. lv)

²³ Darmesteter, *op.cit.*, pp. xxxviii – xxxix.

²⁴ *ibid.* pp. lii - liii. However, Chattopadhyaya noted that the Parthian King Vologoses-I (AD 51—75) made the first attempts to collect the texts and the final redaction was prepared by King Ardeshir-I (AD 226—240), the founder of the Sassanian dynasty. *Zoroastrian Religion.....* p. 15

to religious situations.”²⁵ Throughout his objections, presented in form of lectures (from 1964 to as late as 1973), Chattopadhyaya adhered to historical objectivity.²⁶ Certain conclusions for example, his assertion that “linguistic arguments are of value only when comparisons are made between different languages belonging to the same geographical area;”²⁷ should be valued as rules for historical research, It is necessary to breathe again with appreciation, his views on the *Avesta* and Zarathustra, for the sake of refreshing our minds of unfounded (western) prejudices and misguided approaches.

The perplexity in the historical debate about the issues of the date of *Avesta* and the prophet Zarathustra lies at the root of the date of the *Rgveda-samhita*. “The linguistic agreements between the *Rgveda-samhita*, *Gathas* of Zarathustra and the other texts in the Gatha dialect in the *Avesta* have been used as arguments for a late date of the Vedas and an early date of the *Avesta*, in utter disregard of the *anyonyasrya* (argument in a cycle) involved in this.”²⁸

One wrong assumption in Vedic studies strengthened by Max Muller was “positing a date like the fifteenth century before Christ for the dispersal of different tribes from the original home of the Indo-Europeans. The beginning of the Vedic texts could not, therefore, be placed earlier than 1,000 or at the utmost 1,200 years before Christ.”²⁹ The dates for the Vedic literature tend to be between ± 2500 B.C. to ± 500 B.C., and between this period the Vedic religious thought and practise developed. The earliest Vedic texts are those in which we find “real devotion to the gods, with very simple rituals accompanying the spontaneous prayers addressed to them.”³⁰

²⁵ *Studies in Vedic Indian and Iranian Literature* by Prof. K.C. Chattopadhyaya p. 83. (abbreviated onwards as *Studies.....*)

²⁶ He quotes Sir James George Frazer from *The Golden Bough*, “The slow, the never-ending approach to truth...consists in perpetually framing and testing hypotheses, accepting those which at the time seem to fit the facts and rejecting the others.” *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 159.

²⁷ Chattopadhyaya, *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 85. argued, “We find the present day Lithuanian language showing strong points of agreement with ancient Sanskrit. It also preserves the old pitch accent of the Vedas. But no body can place Lithuanian and Sanskrit in the same period of time.....History has shown that certain languages have had a rapid development, while others have been static or practically static for a long time.” Another of his opinion, worth quoting is: “A hypothesis of diffusion of ideas can be seriously entertained only if two conditions are fulfilled, (1) the supposed creditor and debtor nations must be known to have been in contact, directly or indirectly and (2) the institution or the idea about which the hypothesis is going to be formed cannot be explained through ordinary human psychology or through the known history of the supposed debtors. Both these conditions must be fulfilled.” (*ibid.* p. 91).

²⁸ *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 85. “Connected with the question of Vedic chronology is the problem of the relation between the Vedas and the *Avesta*. The linguistic agreements in religious ideas have made western scholars place them in the same period of time. This has affected the proper understanding of a number of Vedic ideas.” *ibid.* p. 83. Elsewhere, he had also commented, “It is quite likely that this exaggerated antiquity for Zarathustra has inspired philological arguments for the *Avesta* based on the agreement between its language with that of the Vedas.” See, *Zoroastrian Religion.....* p.7.

²⁹ *ibid.* p. 84. It was opposed quite early (in 1905) by Winternitz.

³⁰ *ibid.* p. 84. “In course of time, the ritual grew in complexity and in rigidity and the gods in whose honour the rites were originally performed got dethroned and were made subservient t the sacrifices which they also have been described as performing.”

The geographical references in the *Rgveda-samhita* show that the text was formed in India, and not in Iranian land and is wrongly believed by Haug and Hillebrandt, that its earlier portions were composed in the Iranian territory.³¹

In the opinion of Chattopadhyaya, the *Rgveda-samhita* is not older than the remaining Vedic literature. It contains “very ancient and very late materials”. E.V. Arnold had rightly commented that the *Rgveda-samhita* is “not a book, but a library and a literature.” Chattopadhyaya furnishes support to the view saying that after Sakalya compiled the *padapatha*, six verses surely did find way into the canon of the *Rgveda-samhita*; and there are many more verses and hymns which appear to belong to late date.³² The “nucleus of the *Rgveda-samhita*” is formed of the “family books”. In the Devatawise sub-sections the “longer hymns come first and the shorter ones afterwards...But this scheme has been disturbed at a number of places in a manner which shows that additions have been made from time to time but without disturbing the original collection.”³³ Hence, “the *Rgveda-samhita* as a whole is not to be separated from the *mantra* position of the Yajurveda and the Samaveda, though many of its hymns are much earlier than the *mantras* of the other Vedas, in fact earlier than any other Indo-European texts.”³⁴ Chattopadhyaya believes that the composition of the Vedas “spread over a long period, from about 2000 B.C. at about 1000 B.C. or even later.”³⁵

The *Avesta* belongs to a later date than the *Rgveda-samhita*, asserted Chattopadhyaya. The view about the resemblance to the language of the *Gathas* and the *Rgveda-samhita* was discarded, declaring that “linguistic argument has no probative values as (1) the language of the *Gathas* also shows many post-Vedic forms, (2) it bears a more marked resemblance with the language of the Achaemenian Persians from the sixth century B.C. downwards.”³⁶

Geldner found great agreement between the Vedic and Avestic languages. However, Chattopadhyaya disagreed and criticised the view.³⁷ In his opinion, the *Gathas* can not be

³¹ *ibid.* p. 107. “The discovery and the study of the prehistoric non Aryan civilization of the Indus basin have given a different bent altogether to our studies. We now understand that some of the pre-Aryan peoples of India were more highly civilized, from both material and spiritual points of view, than the Aryan invaders....and the Aryans learnt from the dwellers of this holy soil lessons in austerities (*tapas*) and the practice of *yoga*...” *Studies... op.cit.*, pp. 84 -5.

³² *ibid.* p. 86. The *Apri-Suktas* and the Prauga-sastra which present the rigid order of the fully developed ritual are later additions.

³³ *Studies..... op.cit.*, pp. 86 – 87. Family collections were “originally arranged in the order of the number of hymns comprised in them, the shorter collections coming first and the longer coming afterwards.” Sometime later, “necessity was felt for collecting the old hymnal lore for utilisation in different sacrifices.” The *rsi* families must have been contacted for securing the previous family heirlooms. “In such a process of collection ... old and late materials ... jostle together.” “That is why the family books of the *Rgvedasamhita* begin with the Agni hymns and not with those in praise of the more popular deity, Indra.”

³⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 87-8.

³⁵ *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 156. “There are hymns in the *Rgveda Samhita* which can on various grounds be placed in a very late period but even they show old forms” for example VII.33.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 127. There are still greater agreement between the language of the *Avesta* and the Ancient Persian of the Achaemenian inscriptions of the sixth and fifth centuries before Christ. Further, to the above two arguments he added the third argument that “different dialects in different areas do not have the same rate development.”

³⁷ *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 155. “Such agreement that really does exist between the Vedas and the *Gathas* proves nothing about the latter’s age.” Chattopadhyaya declares that Geldner “gives away his whole case when he says about the language of the latest inscriptions in Ancient Persian that ‘on the whole it is almost as antique as Zend (i.e. Avestan), with which it has many points in common.’” He adds, “Ancient Persian, as available to us, is factually not earlier than ± 510 B.C. We cannot take it to a much earlier period on a-priori grounds, as is sought to be done in the case of the *Gatha* of Zarathustra.” (*ibid.*, p. 171).

placed earlier than the seventh century B.C. despite the traces of the “early forms” in their texts. While evaluating their antiquity, he notes that “verses preserve more antique language than contemporary prose. the so-called early forms in the Gathas as well as the *Rgveda-samhita*. exigencies of metre make the authors take liberties with the language, chiefly in the direction of analogical formations.....”³⁸ Hence, “the antique character of the Gathic verse does not warrant us to give to it the same antiquity as the earlier portion of the *Rgveda Samhita*.”³⁹

Changing Estimation of Vedic Gods :

James Darmesteter had written, “The single elements of Mazdeism do not essentially differ from those of the Vedic and Indo European mythologies generally. Yet Mazdeism, as a whole, took an aspect of its own by grouping these elements in a new order, since by referring everything either to Ahura Mazda or Angra Mainyu as its source, it came to divide the world into to symmetrical halves, in both of which a strong unity prevailed.”⁴⁰

According to Chattopadhyaya, “Religion is recognition of higher existence with striving for its realisation.” Further “the idea of a great god, a god higher than other gods, has always been before the human mind.....though the Highest Goddoes not seem to have come in for much of a worship in the earlier period. It is other gods, who were believed to serve human purpose, that received worship at the hands of the ancient Aryans.”⁴¹

Among these gods, the most important was Indra. “He seems to have been originally not a god of rains and thunder”⁴² but upon the description as Rgvedic Vrtrahan Indra and Avestan Varathragna, Indra seems to be “originally a god of strength and war”; and as such “he naturally became the demon-killer or dragon-slayer *par excellence*. The imageries that grow up round the phenomena of rain and thunder took the form of war on a vast scale”.⁴³ Indra was a “departmental god, with special appeal to fighter.”⁴⁴ Later, he declined in stature and he was a “king of the gods more in name, than in reality, except perhaps in Buddhist references.”

With a settled population and “lesser need for war” people were drawn towards “deeper things of life”; and then the importance of the Adityas—the solar deities presiding over the different aspects of sun increased. Oldenburg, by equating the Adityas with the

³⁸ “Vedic *devebhih* is an analogical formation and is not necessarily earlier than classical *devaih*. When the Prakrits show *devehi* etc., they are not going back to old forms but are using the same simplifying process of analogy.” In classical Sanskrit verse and in poetry the language is fixed and the rules of grammar are strict and do not allow deviation. “But in the *Puranas* and in similar *arsa* literature and in the *gatha* of Mahayana Sanskrit literature we have plenty of liberty taken with the language and few would agree to take them as pre-Paninian.” (*Studies...op.cit.*, p. 155)

³⁹ *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 156.

⁴⁰ Darmesteter, *op.cit.*, pp. lxx—lxxi.

⁴¹ *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 88.

⁴² There are other gods like Rudra, the Maruts, Apam Napat, Trita Apatya etc., for the phenomena of rain and thunder. *ibid.* p. 88.

⁴³ “Poseidon was originally the god of thunder in Greece. But the sky god, Zeus became the thunderer and pushed Poseidon to the character of a god of the sea.” *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 89.

⁴⁴ “It is for this reason that most of the *danastuti* verses occur at the end of Indra hymns.” *ibid.* p. 89.

planets, believed Varuna to be the moon.⁴⁵ Chattopadhyaya saw it as a wrong association⁴⁶ and declared that “Varuna was the setting Sun or the night Sun as his associate Mitra, was the rising Sun or the day Sun. These are the two different aspects of the self same Sun. Mitra and Varuna must have been the presiding deities (*abhimanins* in the language of the Brahmasutra) of bright and dark”⁴⁷ sides of the solar orb. Both Mitra and Varuna look at our actions with unwinking eyes, evidently one by the day and the other by the night.” Varuna declined in importance in the later period, just like Mitra, Pusan and several other solar deities, while Visnu emerged as the “great representative of all these gods and received the devotion of large section of the people.”

The change in estimation of the Vedic gods was treated as a normal development, but in Indian context. However, the similar examples of changed esteem of gods in Indo-Iranian context created diverse opinions. It was again an important issue for Chattopadhyaya to argue and explain.

Asura and Daeva : The Demons and Gods Riddle

In 1862, Martin Haug published the theory of Indo-Iranian religious schism in the Rgvedic period, arguing that the religions of the Veda and the Avesta show certain marked differences. ‘Asura’ the Indian cognate of Iranian ‘ahura’, bears the sense of “demon” from the time of the later Vedic texts and, as if to match this, ‘daeva’, the Iranian correspondent of ‘deva’, has a bad sense in the Avesta.

Haug had laid great importance to the reversal of meanings of the two words in the Avesta and the Vedas. The word Asura [=Lord (in Avesta) and =Demon (in Brahmanical literature)], was “in the older religion of the Vedas it is quite as august as in the Avesta, and is applied to the highest deities, and particularly to Varuna, the Indian brother of Ahura.....The change took place, not in Iran, but in India. The descent of the word daeva from ‘a god’ to ‘a demon’ is a mere accident of language” wrote Darmesteter. He further argued that “etymology was unable to preserve the Daevas from this degradation, as the root div, ‘to shine’, was lost in Zend, and thus the primitive meaning been forgotten, the

⁴⁵ Also connecting Varuna’s activities with night. Oldenburg’s and Geiger’s supposition of the Babylonian influence in the ten Adityas seemed wrong to Chattopadhyaya. “Their association with righteousness may make them good parallels of Sams, the Babylonian Sun-god but that does not warrant the hypothesis of either Babylonian influence on the conception of the Adityas or of Indian influence on that of Sams.” He gave a scientific paradigm on borrowings and influence. “A hypothesis of diffusion of ideas can be seriously entertained only if two conditions are fulfilled, (1) the supposed creditor and debtor nations must be known to have been in contact, directly or indirectly and (2) the institution or the idea about which the hypothesis is going to be formed cannot be explained through ordinary human psychology or through the known history of the supposed debtors. Both these conditions must be fulfilled.” He concluded that there was nothing to show the existence of “any effective contact between the Aryans of India of the early Vedic period and the Babylonians.” *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 91.

⁴⁶ “The unfortunate equation of the name *Varuna* with Greek *ouranos*, meaning ‘sky’ gave European scholars a wrong lead. They supposed that he was the god of sky, though it was admitted that there was no Vedic textual warrant for such a view and though there is very little evidence in Greek literature to show that Ouranos was used as the name of the sky god.” *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 89. Cf. “Varuna appears to be a purely Indo-Aryan word, formed in the same way as *Karuna*, *taruna*, *dharuna* etc.” *ibid.*, p. 90

⁴⁷ “The Aitareya Brahmana tells us that there are two sides of the solar orb, one bright and the other dark. In the day time Aditya keeps the bright side turned towards us. At the sun-set he changes his side retraces his steps keeping the dark side turned towards us and the bright one on the side of the gods.” *ibid.* p. 90

word was ready to take any new meaning which chance or necessity should give to it. But only the word descended into hell, not the beings it denoted....”⁴⁸

Two problems came to the fore-front. Firstly, in the *Rgvedasamhita*, the word “asura” meant “a divine spirit” in not less than 94 occurrences of the word. But in 14 other passages of the *Rgvedasamhita*, and almost all other Vedic texts and all later literature, the word “asura” stood for “demon”. An explanation was required for the “inversion of meaning” of the word. Secondly, the word “daeva” which had earlier borne a good sense changed its import to a bad sense and meant “demon” in Zoroastrian texts. Connected to it was the third problem that three Vedic gods, viz, Indra, Sauru and Nanhathya were mentioned among the demons in the Vandidad. Why was it so?

Chattopadhyaya addressed the first problem and his arguments can be enumerated as follows:

- (i) The word ‘asura’ occurs one hundred and eight times in the *Rgveda-samhita* and except in fourteen passages it means a “divine spirit” i.e., *deva*.⁴⁹ It suggests that originally ‘asura’ meant a divine being.
- (ii) In *Rgveda-samhita* (x.151.3) “asura” means “lesser gods” (*deva-yonyah*) as does ‘*daimonia*’ (opposed to *theoi*). Lesser gods were “beings connected with ‘devas’ or ‘asuras’ but not exactly ‘devas’ or ‘asuras’ themselves.”⁵⁰
- (iii) In the transition of the word ‘asura’ > ‘spirit’ > ‘evil spirit’, the process of deterioration is comparable with that as in the meaning of the Greek word *daimonia* (deity) > English *demon* or in English ‘ghost’ > goblin.⁵¹ It was a natural semantic development and that “no individual seems to have influenced the semantic degradation of ‘asura’”.⁵²
- (iv) “The ‘Asuras’ of the Brahmanas were not ethnics, but were ‘demons’ as the ‘Devas’ were ‘gods’.” They were neither the Iranian people, nor the Assyrians and neither the non-Aryan natives of India as has been wrongly supposed by scholars.⁵³
- (v) It is the “pejorative tendency” of the human being under which repulsive words are substituted with pleasant ones to keep a maleficent power in good humour. In this way the degradation of the meaning of ‘asura’ may have happened when this polite and esteemed word was used to refer to the ‘demonic’ to keep them in good humour.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Darmesteter, *op.cit.*, p. lxxx. and \$ 41

⁴⁹ *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 109. In rest of the literature ‘asura’ means ‘demon’. Belief in demons was a universal phenomenon known as bacillophobia.

⁵⁰ *ibid.* p.111.

⁵¹ *ibid.* p. 110. In the Rudradhyaya of the *Yajurveda*, Rudra degenerates as demon. Yazata in Younger Avesta also degenerates into a demon.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 113.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 115. “To suppose that the writers of the ‘Brahmanas’ meant by ‘Asuras’, whom they described as constantly fighting with the ‘Devas’, the Iranian people, as K.N. Sitaram does, is just as wrong as to believe with R.G. Bhandarkar that they were the Assyrians, or that they were non-Aryan natives of India as assumed by A.P. Banerji-Shastri”.

⁵⁴ *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 111-12. Breal had said, “The so-called pejorative tendency is the result of a very human disposition which prompts us to veil, to attenuate, to disguise ideas which are disagreeable, wounding or repulsive.” Chattopadhyaya notes that “the maleficent Rudra is called in the Vedas ‘Siva’ (i.e.,”beneficent’) to keep him in good humour” and similarly a ‘ghost’ is referred to as ‘deity’ among commoners. In his opinion, the pejorative tendency is “the simplest and, perhaps, the best” explanation as to how the word ‘asura’ deteriorated in meaning.

Western scholars were convinced to a large extent, for instance, R.L. Turner accepted Chattopadhyaya's view about semantic change regarding the deterioration of the meaning of the word 'asura'.⁵⁵

To the second problem, Chattopadhyaya pointed out the following facts:

(i) The word 'daeva' earlier had a good meaning. The theophoric name of the Median prince 'Daiukku' (c. 715 B.C.) and of Diokes (c. 709 B.C.), the founder of the Median Empire well attest this fact. "Coming to the time of Zarathustra we find sufficient indications about the same exalted meaning of the term 'daeva'..."⁵⁶ Even in the long inscription of Xerxes-I (486-465 B.C.), more than a century after Zarathustra lived, the word 'daeva' still bore the meaning of 'god'.⁵⁷

(ii) The transition to a bad meaning was not due to the process of any natural semantic degradation. It was purposely influenced. Relating that the violence to cattle was often perpetrated in the worship of the 'daevas', Zarathustra "set his face against them and put them in the category as wicked mortals."⁵⁸ "In a number of passages of the Younger Avesta, the word seems to mean 'gods of other people' and finally it comes to mean 'demon'... Thus Zarathustra's attitude towards the 'daevas' has in course of time affected the meaning of the term 'daeva'."

(iii) "Zarathustra has not himself altered the meaning of the word 'deva'—'daeva', though the change is ultimately due to the circumstances for which he is responsible. That change, it should be noted, was due to the course of the religious history in Iran, which has nothing to do with the religion of the Vedic Indo-Aryans."⁵⁹

For the related third problem about the mention of Indra, Sauru and Nanhaithya among the demons (*vispanam daevanam*), Chattopadhyaya explained that "Sauru, Indra and Nanhaithya are Indian deities, believed to be connected with evil—first as causing destruction, the second standing either unrighteousness or death in war, and the last leading to falsehood—and hence were mentioned as demons."⁶⁰ He also observed as follows:

(i) Several lists of demons are given in the Avesta (Y. XXVII.1, Yt. I.31, IV.2,4, X.97,134, XVIII.2) but there is no mention of Indra or other Indian deities in those lists, which is significant.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 109.

⁵⁶ "...for we find him lamenting in Y. XXXII.4 that persons doing wicked things (violence to cattle—see verses 8,10,12,14 and 16) were called 'beloved of the daevas' ('daevo-zusta')!" *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 113.

⁵⁷ p. 115.

⁵⁸ See Y. XXIX.4; XXX.6; XXXII.3,5, (XLIV.20); XLVIII.1, (XLIX.4). Zarathustra was a "thorough-going theist and worshipped only Ahura Mazda. So he ignored the 'daevas', not with passive indifference but with active hatred." *ibid.*, p. 114.

⁵⁹ *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 113 n. 53: The violence to cattle (e.g., *taurobolium*) was in Iran particularly in the worship of Mithra, very likely referred to in Y. XXXII.14 and XLVIII.10. Mithra was given the name of 'yazata' by the Zoroastrians. *ibid.*, p. 114.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 120. Chattopadhyaya points out in n. 84 : "For the Persian attitude towards lying see, Herodotus I, 138."

(ii) The demonhood of Indra etc., is not a Zarathustrian doctrine but the declaration of an individual author of the Vandidad (Vd.X.9) and the later writer of Vd. XIX.43 simply took over the matter from the Vd. X.9.⁶¹ The probable date of the Vandidad is ‘first or second century before or after Christ’.⁶²

(iii) Only in the Pargard (Vd.X.9) does the Indian deities are mentioned. Sauru = Sarva = Rudra, either in the Vedic form or as in the Puranic trinity is a god connected with destruction. Nanhaitya was Nasatya and his demonhood “seems to be based on a wrong etymology of the name.” for Indra, “the reason may lie in the immortal traits that Indra had by now developed in Indian mythology. Pahlavi writes described Indra as an opponent of ‘Artavahist’, the archangel of righteousness. Consequently he may have been taken as the personification of unrighteousness.” Further, “those who fell in battle went to Indra’s heaven and might have been taken as having lost their lives through Indra.” Indra thus may have been associated with death-causing demons like Aeshma, Varanya, Mazaienya, Tauru and Zairi, in the Vandidad.⁶³

The Supposed Religious Schism between the Aryans of Ancient Iran and India

Haug had believed that the ‘asuras’ whom the Brahmanical gods are known in the religious literature as fighting, were the deities of the Iranians. In turn, the Iranians declared the Indian deities, Indra, Sarva and Nasatya, as demons in Vandidad (X.9). According to Haug, the quarrel was social because the cattle-tending Vedic Aryans plundered the pre-Zarathustrian settled agriculturists of Iran. Zarathustra brought the final break-up of the Irano-Aryans and Indo-Aryans. Eduard Meyer, A. Hillebrandt, Christian Bartholomae and many others supported the theory, and new arguments were also adduced by the adherents.⁶⁴

As early as in 1887, James Darmesteter had refuted the proposals of Haug. “The only evidence in favour of the old hypothesis of a religious schism is reduced to the evidence of a few words which might a priori be challenged..... the history of the world is not a chapter of grammar.”⁶⁵ He declared that “so far as the Vedic religion and the Avesta are concerned, there is not the abyss of a schism between them.....Nowhere in the Avesta is the effort of any man felt who, standing against the belief of his people, enforces upon them a

⁶¹ *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 116. “In fact, the turning of Indra, etc., to demons belongs to the Vandidad Sadeh and is wanting in the Pahlavi commentary the textual value is certainly higher than that of manuscripts of the Vandidad Sadeh, which are later in date. In fact # 11-43 of the Pargard appear to be later additions, breaking the connexion between # 1-10 and 44-47, and # 42 and 43 seem to have been added by the redactors of the Vandidad sadeh to bridge the gulf between #41 and 44 and thus help in making the entire Pargard read as one whole.”

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 118-9. With support from Moulton (*Early Zoroastrianism*) Chattopadhyaya noted, “Vandidad.....is a very late text, removed from Zarathustra’s time by centuries, and breathing a spirit that is very different from that of the Gathas.” (*ibid.* p. 103)

⁶³ *Studies..... op.cit.*, pp. 118-19. But Chattopadhyaya expresses his own doubts about the surety of the suggestion. *ibid.* p. 120. Interestingly, in Vd. X.9 only Nanhaitya has been called a ‘daeva’ and not Indra and Sauru, and neither the other so-called demons, but in the interpolated Vd. XIX, 43, each one of the beings is called a ‘daeva’.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 102-3. Arguments like the northern direction for the demons with the Iranians and southern direction for the Indians.

⁶⁵ Darmesteter, *op.cit.*, p. lxxix.

new creed, by the ascendancy of his genius, and turns the stream of their thoughts from the bed wherein it had flowed for centuries. There was no religious revolution: there was only a long and slow movement which led, by insensible degrees, the vague and unconscious dualism of the Indo-Iranian religion onwards to the sharply defined dualism of the Magi.”⁶⁶

He further explained that “as the moral and abstract spirit which pervades Mazdeism is different from the Vedic spirit, and as the word *deva*, which means a god in Sanskrit, means a demon in the Avesta, it was thought that Zoroaster’s work had been a work of reaction against Indian polytheism, in fact, a religious schism. That he raised a new religion against the Vedic religion, and cast down into hell the gods of older days can no longer be maintained, since the gods, the ideas, and the worship of Mazdeism are shown to emanate directly from the old religion, and have nothing more of a reaction against it than *Zend* has against Sanskrit.”⁶⁷

Yet Haug’s theory stood for a long time drawing support from several points. The total rejection of the Haug’s theory came from Chattopadhyaya who questioned, “Where has such a religious change due to quarrel been ever seen? Scholars should abandon this theory unsupported by the slightest parallel.”⁶⁸ Upon his wide study and deep insight, Chattopadhyaya could venture to proclaim “In fact, Indians and Iranians were always friendly neighbours in antiquity, ever ready to learn from each other. Consequently an Indo-Iranian religious clash should be considered a pure myth.”⁶⁹

The arguments presented by Chattopadhyaya dealt the problem in its totality. He emphasised the vital difference in the antiquity of the *Rgveda-samhita* and the *Vandidad* and discussed the possible reasons causing the misperception regarding three Vedic Indo-Aryan deities and inclusion of their names in the list of demons in the *Vandidad*. He had explained the course through which the meanings of terms ‘*asura*’ and ‘*daeua*’ were inverted. Further, he rejected the alleged reversal in the localisation of the demons in India and Iran; and highlighted that the reforms of Zarathustra were not in antipathy to the Indian behaviour, but in context of the religious practises in Iran. He proclaimed, “Vedic texts have preserved ample evidence of a perfectly natural semantic development” of the term ‘*asura*’, “without a trace of violent religious clash.”⁷⁰

While explaining the transition in the meaning of ‘*asura*’, he asserted that the “alleged agreement between Avestan and ‘*asuri*’ metres is absolutely non-existent”, denying further

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. lxxxi. \$42

⁶⁷ Darmesteter, *op.cit.*, pp. lxxvi- lxxix. \$40.

⁶⁸ *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 101-2. “...people do not change their religions so light-heartedly as Haug assumed.....a spiteful deliberate inversion of gods and demons could never have taken place among the Indo-Aryans and the Inano-Aryans when Zarathustra preached his message. How could either community chastise the other by making changes in its own religious notions?... All this could not be realized in 1862, when Haug propounded his theory. But since then we have made great strides in the history of religion and in the analytical study of the Veda and the Avesta. Should we be still satisfied with the antiquated assumptions of Haug? Is it not high time that we should discard them altogether and take a more objective view of things?” (*ibid.*, pp. 125-26).

⁶⁹ *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 108. He cites in the foot note: “The ‘*Bhavishya Purana* (Brahma Parvan, Samba Akhyana) speaks of Maga priests as brought from Iran (*Svetadvipa*) to help in the worship at the sun temple erected in Multan by Samba. Cf. also ‘*Vishnu Purana*’ II.4. 69-70, ‘*Agni Purana*’ 109.21 and ‘*Padma Purana*’, I. 8.34-37.”

⁷⁰ *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 112.

that ‘asuri’ cannot mean ‘of the asura worshipping Iranians’.⁷¹ Denying the reversal of the localisation of the demons in India and Iran, Chattopadhyaya explained that “it was probably on meteorological grounds that the Iranians placed their demons in the north, from which direction blew the bleak continental winds, which were not impeded by the mountains. Yt. III.9, 16 and XXII.25 read with Yt. XXII.42 associate the north wind with the demons.”⁷² He also disputed the allegation that in India the localisation of demons was in south; rather it was the quarters of the *pitrs* or “departed ancestors”, who were “divine beings watching over the welfare of their descendants.”⁷³

Demonification of Indo-Aryan deities was explained away by Chattopadhyaya saying that “only such deities were selected for ‘demonification’ as were understood or misunderstood as ‘harmful’ and none of the noble and popular Indian gods of the period figure here.”⁷⁴ He questioned, “...if there were spite and consequent desire to turn the gods of the opponents into demons, why should this be confined only to three deities, and the others, forming a large number, still receive fervent devotion?”⁷⁵

It was a contention of Haug that “Zarathustra’s hits against the ‘kavi’, the ‘krapan’ and the ‘usixs’, ‘priests and prophets of the ‘usij’” were references to his rival Vedic Aryan priests. To this view, Chattopadhyaya objected that “*Kavi* seems to have meant only ‘chief’ as in the case of *Kavi Vistaspa*⁷⁶ and also it is not certain that Zarathustra was a “renegade

⁷¹ Haug had cited the naming of three metres used in the ‘Sukla Yajurveda Samhita’, which, he thought corresponded exactly to the metres of the Gatha groups of the Yasna as ‘asuri’.(see, p. 102) According to Chattopadhyaya, those metres do not resemble Avestan metres. “It is hardly right to talk of ‘metres’ of prose formulas of the Yajurveda.” (n.48). The nomenclature of ‘Asuri’ for certain Indian metres is very late. “The ‘asuri’ Gayatri has in all 15 syllables in the verse, the ‘asuri’ Ushnih 14 and the ‘asuri’ Pankti 11. This is the total number of syllables in the verse and not in each line, in the same way as these metres have in the ‘arsī’ form 24, 28 and 40 syllables respectively in the verse. But the ‘Gatha Ahunavaiti’, which Haug believes to be corresponding to the ‘asuri’ Gayatri, has three lines of 16 or 15 syllables each, generally making a total of 14 syllables, the ‘Vohu-Kshathra Gatha’, supposed by him to correspond to the ‘asuri’ Oshnih, three lines of 14 syllables each, with a total of 42, and the Gathas ‘Ustavaiti’ and ‘Spenta Mainyu’, which he takes as corresponding to the ‘asuri’ Pankti, have respectively five lines of 11 and four lines of 11 syllables each, which totals of 55 and 40 ! Hence the alleged agreement between Avestan and ‘asuri’ metres is absolutely non-existent. Consequently ‘asuri’ cannot mean ‘of the asura-worshipping Iranians’.The name ‘asuri’ is purely fictitious like the other names ‘daivi’, ‘prajapatya’, ‘brahmi’ etc.” (ibid. p.112-3).

⁷² *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 122. “This clearly shows that the north was a region causing physical discomfort, fit to be associated with the demons.”

⁷³ *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 121. Chattopadhyaya further noted that in the Vedic texts also, the north is the region of demons, e.g., in Satapatha Brahmana, I.2.4.10, the gods exclaimed that the demons escaped from them running northwards. In the Vedic rituals, the ‘utkara’ or dustbin is constructed to the north of the ‘vedi’ or altar and the demons are ceremonially carried there during the rituals of Darsapurnamasa yajna. The ‘sphyā’ or the wooden sword is hurled as a substitute of the ‘vajra’ to the north to hit the demons and the rivals of the sacrificer. Regarding the later texts where the south-west became the direction of Nirrti, the demoness of destruction, Chattopadhyaya says that “this idea may have developed in an area where the south-western wind was harmful”. p.122.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.120. Also, “Haug’s theory also cannot explain why Indra-Vrtrahan was split up into two entities, one figuring in the list of demons and the other of gods.” (p. 116)

⁷⁵ *ibid.* p. 116.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, , p. 105 n. 15. Later it was understood as meaning anti-Zarathustrian princes, except scions of the *Kavi* or Kayanian dynasty.

priest”⁷⁷, rather a priest at all. Zarathustra was against the priests “of his own country, the ‘karpan’,⁷⁸ etc., referred to by him, and not of India.”

Haug had propounded that the ultimate cause of the supposed quarrel was social, because the cattle-tending nomadic Vedic Indians used to plunder the settled agriculturists pre-Zarathustrian Iranians. Chattopadhyaya has replied that “there is nothing to show that the Indo-Aryans of the Vedas were nomads and the Irano-Aryans of the Avesta settled agriculturists.Settled agriculture can no longer be taken as always a later development from nomadism.....There is no proof, further, that the Indo-Aryans used to attack the territories of the Irano-Aryans and carry away their possessions.”⁷⁹

Chattopadhyaya declared that on the other side, “.... we have no grounds for believing that the reform of Zarathustra had any special antipathy towards the religion of the Vedas. The Avesta does not show it....”⁸⁰

The Date of Prophet Zarathustra

Graeco-Roman authors, except Herodotus, mentioned about Zarathustra and placed him five thousand years before the Trojan War or six thousand years before Xerxes or Plato or Alexander; several centuries prior to the Greek contacts with the Persians. The original work of the Lydian historian, Xanthus (middle 5th century B.C.), who seemed to have referred to Zarathustra, was lost but some excerpts were quoted by later writers viz., Nikolaus of Damascus (circa 1st century B.C.) and Diogenes Laertius (2nd and 3rd century A.D.). It was Diogenes who quoted Xanthus in context of the date of Zarathustra, saying that “Xanthus the Lydian reckons 6000 years from Zoroaster to the expedition of Xerxes”⁸¹ Editors (Loeb Classics) and scholars (like Moulton) rectified the mistake by reading *hexakosia* (600 years) in the place of *hexakiskhilia* (6000 years), and brings the dates of the prophet to the seventh century B.C. The scholar, Jackson explained that the high antiquity assigned to Zarathustra by later Graeco-Roman writers like Pliny and Plutarch was “due to the misunderstanding of the Iranian theory of millennial cycles, according to which Zarathustra’s *fravasi* was formed 6000 years before he had his revelation.”⁸²

⁷⁷ *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 105. “*Zaotar* in Y. XXXIII.6, used by Zarathustra for himself, does not mean ‘priest’; the context seems to require the etymological sense of ‘invoker’...same as ... ‘hymnist’.”

⁷⁸ “The word *karpan* has no exact Indian equivalent and taking it to mean ‘Iranian priests’ is certainly more natural than ‘Indian priests’ through a hypothetical form.” (*Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 105. n.15)

⁷⁹ See, *Studies..... op.cit.*, pp. 103-4. “...Rgveda-samhita distinctly shows that they were no mere cattle-tending nomads but also practiced agriculture. Though the Younger Avesta always praises agriculture, the Gathas of Zarathustra only show solicitation for cattle.....The Vedic Aryans did engage in forays on other peoples’ cattle, but these appear to have belonged to their brethren or to the non-Aryans (e.g. the Kikatas named in Rgveda-samhita III.53.14) in India. The settled Iranians of antiquity were certainly exposed to the attacks of some nomadic tribes. But we know from Herodotus that they were the Sakas. The traditional enemies of Zarathustrians are the Tura = Turanians, most probably those Sakas.”

⁸⁰ “...beyond the casual mention as demons of Indra, Sauru and Nanhaithya in Vd. X.9 and its later copy in Vd. XIX:43, and the uncertainty about the characters of these three personalities which the writers of the Bundahish and Dinkart betray disproves it even for the Pahlavi period.” *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 121

⁸¹ *Studies..... op.cit.*, pp. 141-2. Also, “Diogenes makes Xanthus refer to the conquest of Persia by Alexander when the historian must have been dead for about one hundred years. This shows what a careless write Diogenes was and what value we should attach generally to these quotations from Xanthus the Lydian.” (p. 143)

⁸² *Studies..... op.cit.*, *ibid.*, p.144. Only pre-Christian classical writer to mention Zarathustra was Xanthus. Neither Plato, nor Aristotle nor Herodotus named Zarathustra. Darmesteter explains the *Fravashi*: “From the

Iranian tradition places the birth of Zarathustra⁸³ in the seventh century B.C. However, the dates vary from 660 to 627 or 625 B.C., according to the different interpretations of the tradition and other supportive evidence. Consequently, E.W. West assigned 660—583 B.C. to Zarathustra, while Hertel (unsuccessfully) tried to prove the period of activity as 558—522 B.C. Chattopadhyaya, pursuing a scientific approach, attempted to explore into “the nature of the tradition” as also examine “the unusual grounds for rejecting” the arguments for an early date.⁸⁴ In a series of lectures delivered over a period of time, every time adding new arguments, he concluded in favour of the traditional dates of 627/625 B.C. for the birth of Zarathustra. He believed that the prophet was born anywhere between 629 to 625 BC.⁸⁵

The historical and linguistic arguments, both, were addressed by Chattopadhyaya. Among the former were the Pahlavi tradition, the *Bundahish* (XXXIV, 7-8)⁸⁶ that mentions of the chronology of the Iranian kings from the mythological period. “It gives an interval of 272 years between ‘the coming of religion’ and the end of Alexander’s reign (323 B.C.), i.e., it places ‘the coming of the religion’ in 595 B.C.”⁸⁷ However, E.W. West brought forward the accounts from the *Selections of Zat Sparam* (XXIII.11-12) and the *Arta-Viraf Namak* (I. 1-2) which “appear to place an interval of exactly 300 years between ‘the coming of the religion’ and the conquest of Persia by Alexander (331 B.C.)”⁸⁸ Placing greater reliance on the latter two texts, and deducing 300 years from the so-said ‘coming of the religion’, West deduced that Zarathustra was born in the year 660 B.C.⁸⁹

Chattopadhyaya referred to Haug’s translation of the passage from *Arta-Viraf Namak* and compared it with West’s rendering of excerpt from the *Selections of Zat Sparam* and concluded⁹⁰ that “the reference to 100 years is to be interpreted as reference to centuries in

worship of the Pitris was developed in Iran the worship of the Fravashis, who being at first identical with the Pitris, with souls of the departed, became by and by a distinct principle. The Fravashi was independent of the circumstances of life or death, an immortal part of the individual which existed before man and outlived him. Not only man was endowed with a Fravashi, but gods too, and the sky, fire, waters and plants (Orm. Ahr. §§ 112—113).” Darmesteter, *op.cit.*, p. lxxiv. n. 1. According to Jackson, “The Fravasi designates one of the spiritual elements in the constitution of man and the word denotes a sort of guardian angel.” This ‘angel’ for Chattopadhyaya meant “a sort of adhidevata (presiding deity). See, *Zoroastrian Religion*..... pp. 16. He felt that the misunderstood concept of fravasi by the Greeks caused them to ascribe an early date to Zoroaster. (*Zoroastrian Religion*..... p. 59)

⁸³ Zarathustra was born in the family of Spitamas in Urmi in Airyana Vaejo (Urmiah in Azarbaijan) or in Raga (Rai in proper Media). His father was Poursaspa and mother was Dughdhova. Zoroaster married his youngest daughter, Pourucista to his disciple Jamaspa (Gatha, Yasna 53). When the prophet was 42 years of age, he converted the King of Bactria into his religion. He died at the age of 77 years.

⁸⁴ *Studies*..... *op.cit.*, pp. 132-3. A.V.W. Jackson accepted the alteration of the date as proposed by E.W. West for reasons to which Chattopadhyaya replied. (See, *Proceedings of the Xth All India Oriental Conference, Tirupati*, pp. 64-7.) Other scholars Geldner, Bartholomae, Meyer and Moulton had “pleaded for much earlier dates on grounds of general probability.”

⁸⁵ *Zoroastrian Religion*..... pp. 11. For a discussion on the dates see pp. 6—12.

⁸⁶ *Studies*..... *op.cit.*, pp. 128; 133-4; 167.

⁸⁷ *ibid.* p. 128.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 128-9; 136; 167. “It is quite likely that the *Arta Viraf Namak* is later than and based on the selections from *Zat-Sparam*.” (*ibid.*, p. 129).

⁸⁹ *Studies*..... *op.cit.*, p. 135. Cf. *SBE*, xlvi, p. xxviii ff. West supposed that *Bundahish* made a mistake of 35 years in the reckoning.

⁹⁰ *Studies*..... *op.cit.*, pp. 135-6.

round numbers”⁹¹ and so, “300 is only a round figure, which may stand for any figure in the third century.”⁹² In this light, the dates suggested by *Bundahish* do not vary so much with that of the *Zat Sparam* and the *Arta-Viraf Namak* so as to invite correction.⁹³

It was also debated as to what is meant by the phrase “coming of the religion” in the above passages. It could not mean the birth of Zarathushtra. It either meant ⁹⁴ (i) Zarathushtra’s going into first conference with the Holy Immortals, when he was 30 years of age; or (ii) Zarathushtra’s first preaching of his religion at the age of 32; or (iii) Zarathushtra’s conversion of Vistashpa, when the prophet was 42 years of age.

E.W. West accepted on the basis of *Dinkart* (VII.8.51) that the above phrase referred to Zarathustra’s conference with the Immortals.⁹⁵ Chattopadhyaya’s analysis of the relevant passage of *Dinkart* reveals discrepancy of six regnal years and so there should have been “266 years intervening between the ‘coming of the religion’ and the death of Alexander (323 B.C.) and not 272 years as West and Jackson suppose.”⁹⁶ Chattopadhyaya suggested “taking clue from the importance given by the Indian Buddhist tradition to the first Revolution of the Wheel of Law by Buddha at Sarnath” that the second alternative of taking the phrase ‘coming of the religion’ to mean as Zarathushtra’s first preaching of his religion could be correct.⁹⁷ Also to be noted in this regard is the evidence of Al-Biruni (973-1048), who said that “from Zarathustra’s ‘appearance till the beginning of the Aera Alexandri’ the Perisians ‘count 258 years’”.⁹⁸ The expression “appearance” could not refer suitably to the birth, but “the natural meaning of ‘appearance’ will be appearance before the public as a preacher.”⁹⁹ If Al-Beruni meant either of the incidents, viz., the conversion of minister Jamaspa (when Zarathustra was 40 years) or that of King Vitaspa (when Zarathustra was 42 years), the prophet’s date of birth works out as 628 B.C. or 630 B.C.¹⁰⁰

⁹¹ *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 129.

⁹² *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 136. “We have no right to assume that the three sets of events mentioned in the *Zat-Sparam* occurred at the lapse of just 100, 200 and 300 years since the ‘coming of the religion’. Things do not happen in life in such mathematical order. The natural explanation should be that they are to be ascribed to the first, second and third centuries since the religion. We have similar references by centuries in Buddhist annals in India.”

⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 130.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 130; 133.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 133. In light of West’s insistence for 300 years gap referred above, to him the date of birth of Zarathustra should be 660 B.C. Cf. p. 130.

⁹⁶ *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 134. “Consequently the ‘coming of the religion’ may be placed about 589 B.C. and if Zarathustra was 30 years old at that time, he was born in the year 619 B.C.” Chattopadhyaya further cited several mistakes in the *Bundahish* about the rule of Arsacids, Sassanians which “shows how unsatisfactory is the author’s knowledge of the chronology of his country’s history” (*ibid.*, p. 135).

⁹⁷ *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 130. If 595 B.C. was the date of the event, and Zarathushtra was 32 years of age, his birth could be placed in the year 627 B.C.

⁹⁸ *Studies..... op.cit.*, pp. 168; 137. The era of Alexander in Al-Beruni’s belief was 330 B.C. Masudi, who died 16 years before Al-Biruni’s birth, recorded the same tradition. (*ibid.*, p. 137)

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 168. If it meant birth, the date of Zarathustra’s birth will be 588 B.C. If it refers to his first conference with the Immortals, he was born in 618 B.C. , and if to the conversion of Vistashpa, then the birth was in 630 B.C. (*ibid.*, p. 137)

¹⁰⁰ *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 168. “J. Hertel identified Vitaspa, the patron of Zarathustra, with Vitaspa, the father of the Achaemenian King Darayavaush (Darius-I), who reigned from 521 to 485 B.C. and on the basis of this identification placed the period of the prophet’s activity between 559 and 522 B.C. The identification of the two

Further, it is learnt from a Syrian scholiast named Theodore bar Khoni, who lived about the end of sixth century A.D., that, “From Zardusht to the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ are six hundred and twenty-eight years and seven months.”¹⁰¹ If the words ‘the revelation’ refers to the birth of Jesus Christ, so should the words ‘from Zarathusht’ mean from Zarathustra’s birth. In that case, the date should be 628 B.C.

Another tradition, cited by Jackson as well-known in Persia, proclaimed that one “cypress tree planted by Zarathushtra or Vishtaspa at Kashmir to commemorate Vishtaspa’s acceptance of the Religion.....was felled by orders of the Caliph Mutawakkil in the year 861 A.D.”¹⁰² after it had lived for 1450 years. Treating the years as solar years as Persians count, the date for plantation of tree comes as 589 B.C. and accordingly one arrives at Zarathustra’s birth in 631 B.C.

“Lastly, Anqueti du Perron stated, ‘That a certain religious sect that immigrated into China about A.D. 600 is evidently of Zoroastrian origin and that these believers have an era which dates approximately from B.C. 559.’” On its strength, Hertel believes that it refers to the ‘coming of the religion’ in 559 B.C.¹⁰³; or it refers to the conversion of Vishtaspa.¹⁰⁴ However, according to Chattopadhyaya, if “it starts from the death of the Prophet, as we have our Buddhist era from Buddha’s death, then the date of Zarathushtra’s birth would be 559+77=636 B.C.”¹⁰⁵

Considering the above mentioned various sources and upon their analysis, Chattopadhyaya concluded that “rightly or wrongly, they point towards a date like 630 B.C., as the year when the Prophet first saw the light of the day, or, to give a more round figure, they represent him as living about 600 B.C.”¹⁰⁶ The date 631 B.C. for the birth of Zarathustra corresponds most with the dates given by *Bundahish* and Theodore bar Khoni.¹⁰⁷

Epilogue

Chattopadhyaya admitted of being “deeply obliged to western orientalist for teaching us how to study our own texts historically”; but qualified it by adding that “they have not always been able to get at the true significance of our culture for lack of understanding of the actual psychological reactions to religious situations.”¹⁰⁸ He explained that further by saying that “Vedic studies have been hampered by several wrong assumptions which have not given us correct perspective in a number of points.” He cleared misconceived views pertaining to the ancient Indo-Iranian contacts of the Vedic days.

Vitaspas has been rejected by a number of scholars; including A. Meillet, and cannot be seriously entertained.” (ibid. p. 169)

¹⁰¹ *Studies..... op.cit.*, pp. 130; 137.

¹⁰² *Studies..... op.cit.*, pp. 131; 138;168.

¹⁰³ ibid., p. 138. So the birth of Zarathustra should be placed in 589 B.C.

¹⁰⁴ ibid., p. 138.; then the Prophet was born in 601 B.C.

¹⁰⁵ *Studies..... op.cit.*, p. 138. “There are left two more possibilities about the origin of the era, (1) that it commemorates the departure of the original community from Iran or its arrival or (2) it signalises some other event. It is thus impossible to utilise this alleged Chinese evidence.”

¹⁰⁶ ibid., p. 139.

¹⁰⁷ However, in a lecture delivered in the year 1973, Chattopadhyaya said that 628/629 is as near to 625 BC vouched for by the Bundashishn tradition as we can expect in a non-Zoroastrian writer. *Zoroastrian Religion.....* p. 13.

¹⁰⁸ ibid., p. 83.

One is reminded of the suggestions of Darmesteter who had opined that “no language, no religion, that has lived long and changed much, can be understood at any moment of its development, unless we know that it became afterwards, and what it was before. The language and religion of the Avesta record but a moment in the long life of the Iranian language and thought so that we are unable to understand them, unless we know what they became and whence they came. What they became we learn directly from tradition, since the tradition arose from the very ideas which the Avesta expresses; whence they came we learn indirectly from the Vedas, because the Vedas come from the same source as the Avesta. Therefore it cannot happen that the tradition and the Veda will really contradict one another, if we take care to ask from each only what it knows, take care to ask from each only what it knows, from one the present, and the past from the other.”¹⁰⁹

Chattopadhyaya also mentioned about the number of “deep-seated agreements in the religious outlook” of the two communities.¹¹⁰ “The differences that are discernible in the religions of the two communities can be easily explained through natural development, which was necessarily different in the two cases.”¹¹¹ Finally, he proclaimed, “In fact, Indians and Iranians were always friendly neighbours in antiquity, ever ready to learn from each other. Consequently an Indo-Iranian religious clash should be considered a pure myth.”¹¹²

Darmesteter had observed, “Zoroaster is not described as one who brings new truth and drives away error, but one who overthrows the demons: he is the smiter of fiends, like Verethraghna, Apam Napat, Tistrya, Vayu, or Keresaspa..... he smites them chiefly with a spiritual one, the word or prayer....he repels the assaults of Ahriman with stones....But the great weapon of Zarathustra is neither the thunder-stones he hurls, nor the glory with which he is surrounded, it is the Word.”¹¹³ Similarly, but with additional arguments, Chattopadhyaya found no animosity in the attitude of Zarathustra and complimented the Prophet by bestowing the title of “Goswamin” upon him.¹¹⁴

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¹⁰⁹ Darmesteter, *op.cit.*, p. xxvii.

¹¹⁰ *Studies*..... *op.cit.*, p. 124. For example, the monotheistic similarities between the Gathas and the Upanisadas; resemblance of the Prajapati with Ahura Mazda; the theme of the conflict between the Good and the Evil in the scriptures on both sides; the concern for the protection for cattle in both religions. etc.

¹¹¹ *Studies*..... *op.cit.*, p. 125.

¹¹² *Studies*..... *op.cit.*, p. 108. He cited the example from Brahma Parvan, Samba Akhyana of *Bhavishya Purana* about bringing of Maga priests from Svetadvipa (Iran) to help in the worship at the sun temple in Multan, by Samba.

¹¹³ See, Orm. Ahr. § 162 seq. Darmesteter, *op.cit.*, pp. lxxvii—lxxviii.

¹¹⁴ “This Indian Brahmin pays homage to the Great Master Zarathushtra who can be fitly called a ‘Gosvamin’ (literally, ‘Lord of the Cattle’)”. *Studies*..... *op.cit.*, p. 159.

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