

*India in the Avesta of the Parsis.*

(Read at Calcutta, before the Asiatic Society of Bengal on 2nd July 1913.)

Anquetil Du Perron, the great French scholar, having seen a few stray pages of the Avesta writings in his country, had come to this country as a soldier-adventurer to study that language, and after passing through this city, had gone and settled at Surat, the then head-quarters of the Parsis. Having studied the Zend Avesta there for some years, he returned to France and published, in 1771, his *Zend Avesta*, containing the French translation of the Scriptures of the Parsis. Sir W. Jones was the first to run him down, as one duped by the Parsis of Surat. He said that the Avesta books, which he had brought to the notice of scholars in Europe, were not genuine and were a fabrication of the priests. The late Prof. James Darmesteter, a talented country-man of Anquetil Du Perron, who, for the first time, translated into English a large part of the Avesta from the original itself, thus speaks of the dispute: "A violent dispute broke out at once, as half the learned world denied the authenticity of the Avesta, which it pronounced a forgery. It was the future founder of the Royal Asiatic Society, William Jones, a young Oxonian then, who opened the war. He had been wounded to the quick by the scornful tone adopted by Anquetil towards Hyde and a few other English scholars: the *Zend Avesta* suffered for the fault of its introducer, Zoroaster for Anquetil.... It is true that Anquetil had given full scope to satire by the style he had adopted: he cared very little for literary elegance, and did not mind writing Zend and Persian in French; so the new and strange ideas he had to express looked stranger still in the outlandish garb he gave them."<sup>1</sup> Summing up the result of the long dispute on the subject, Darmesteter says: "Modern scholarship.....came to that twofold conclusion, that, on the one hand, Parsiism was one of the elements out of which Mohammed formed his religion, and, on the other hand, that the old religions of India and Persia flowed from a common source."<sup>2</sup> Kleuker and other distinguished scholars had, one after another, upheld the work of Anquetil and showed that the Avesta books he had discovered were genuine. Some of them in showing this, took the help of the Sanskrit language, of the scientific study of which Sir W. Jones had laid the foundation. Had Sir William Jones himself lived long, he would have soon corrected his somewhat

<sup>1</sup> S. B. E., Vol. IV. (1880), pp. XV-XVI.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. XVII.

hasty conclusions, for which, one must say, the translations of Anquetil themselves were, to a certain extent, responsible, because, though they did all credit to him as a great scholar, they were after all crude. Sir W. Jones had no opportunity to see the Avesta books here in Calcutta, where there were very few Parsis at the time, though he had studied the later Persian Literature that bears some connection with the Avesta books.

Prof. Darmesteter thus speaks of the Avesta: "The Zend-Avesta is the sacred book of the Parsis, that is to say, of the few remaining followers of that religion which reigned over Persia at the time when the second successor of Mohammed overthrew the Sassanian dynasty..... In less than a century after their defeat, nearly all the conquered people were brought over to the faith of their new rulers, either by force, or policy, or the attractive power of a simpler form of creed. But many of those who clung to the faith of their fathers, went and sought abroad for a new home, where they might freely worship their old gods, say their old prayers, and perform their old rites. That home they found at last among the tolerant Hindus, on the western coast of India and in the peninsula of Guzerat.....As the Parsis are the ruins of a people, so are the sacred books the ruins of a religion. There has been no other great belief in the world that ever left such poor and meagre monuments of its past splendour. Yet great is the value which that small book, the Avesta, and the belief of that scanty people, the Parsis, have in the eyes of the historian and theologian."<sup>1</sup>

In this short paper, I want to collect those passages in "that small book, the Avesta," which refer to the land of "the tolerant Hindus," who kindly gave to the Parsis the hospitality of a "home."

The Indians and the Irānians, forming the two most important branches of the Aryan or the Indo-Iranian stock of The Pahlavas and the Gandhara Brahmanas, people, knew something of each other's country from very remote times. References to the Iranians of the Parthian dynasty of Persia are found in Manu<sup>2</sup> (X, 43-44) and in Natryashastra (XXV, 89). They are spoken of as Pahravas. These Pahravas, Pallavas or Pahlavs are the Arsacidian Parthians. A dynasty of that name had long ruled in India even up to the country of Mysore in the South. The Chalukyias are the opponents of these Pahlavs. They are supposed by some to be the same

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., XI-XII.

<sup>2</sup> "Institutes of Hindu Law or the Ordinances of Menu," by W. Jones (1794), p. 294.

as Salukians or the followers of Selucus, the general of Alexander the Great. If so, we see in this opposition another instance of the constant struggle of the Greeks and the Persians for the supremacy in the East. The coins of the Pahlavas have been found in the dominions of Kanishka, a Buddhist king, because they lived in his extensive dominions. These coins had the name of Avesta deities on them.<sup>1</sup>

Râdjatarangini, the History of Cashmir,<sup>2</sup> refers to some Gandhara Brahmans ( गान्धारा ब्रह्मण ) of the Mlechha dynasty ( मलेच्छवंश ) in the reign of a king Mihira Cula, the Mirkhul of the Âin-i-Akbari. This Mihira Cula is depicted by the author of the Râdjatarangini as a wicked king in whose reign the Mlechhas had an ascendancy. He had founded the temple of Mihireswara and the City of Mihirapur in which the Gandhâr Brahmans, a low race, and therefore the more highly esteemed by this iniquitous monarch, were permitted to seize upon the endowments of the more respectable orders of the priesthood.<sup>3</sup>

While travelling in Cashmere some years ago, a learned Pandit of Sharinagar told me, that the Gandhara Brahmans referred to in the Râdjatarangini were Zoroastrian Mobads or priests. Some other statements in the Râdjatarangini<sup>4</sup> about them seem to confirm this identification. These references to the Zoroastrians of Persia show that India knew Irân from very old times. Similarly, we learn from the Avesta, that Irân knew India from very remote times.

According to the Irânians of the times of the Avesta, the then known world consisted of five countries. These are mentioned in the Farvardin Yasht which is, as it were, the canon of the ancient Zoroastrians. It contains the names of the ancient Irânian saints whose Farohars or good spirits are invoked in prayers. In it,<sup>5</sup> the saints of the following five countries are invoked :—

1. Airyanâm dakhyunâm, *i.e.*, the country of the Airyas.
2. Tuiryanâm dakhyunâm, *i.e.*, the country of the Turânians.
3. Sairimanâm dakhyunâm, *i.e.*, the country given to Selam by king Faridun—the country of Rum, or Asia Minor and Eastern Europe.

<sup>1</sup> Vide "Zoroastrian Deities on Indo-Scythian Coins. (Indian Antiquary, Vol. XVII, Part CCVII). Vide Mon. E. Druin's Paper, entitled "Le Nimbe et les Signes de l'Apothéose sur les Monnaies des rois Indo-Scythes" (Revue Numismatique. Quatrieme Serie, Tome V, deuxieme trimestre 1901).

<sup>2</sup> Vide my paper on "Cashmere and the Ancient Persians," B.B.R.A.S. XIX, pp. 237-248.

<sup>3</sup> Asiatic Researches, XV, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Bk. I, Slokas 306-309.

<sup>5</sup> Farvardin Yasht (Yasht XIII, 144).

4. Sâininâm dakhyunâm, *i.e.*, the country of China.
5. Dâhinâm dakhyunam, *i.e.*, the country of the Dahæ, a people of Central Asia.

Of these five, India was included in the first, the country of the Airyas or Aryas. As to this first country, the country of the Airyas, sixteen countries or cities are included in its catalogue, the first being Airyana-Vaêja, or the Irân Vej, the Irân proper of the early Irânians, or, what can be called the Aryavrut of the Irânians, as India is the Aryavrut of the Hindus. India forms a part of the country of the Airyas named in the Farvardin Yasht.

References to India, in the Avesta. Coming to the question of the direct references to India itself in the Avesta, we find, in all, four references. They are the following:—

- I. The Vendidad, Chap. I, 19.
- II. Yaçna (Sarosh Yasht) LVII, 29.
- III. Meher Yasht, 104.
- IV. Tir Yasht, 32.

1. The Vendidad: The four facts mentioned by it. Of these four, the first, *viz.*, the reference in the Vendidad, seems to be the oldest and the most important. The passage runs thus:—

“Panchadasem asanghâmcha shoithranâmcha vahisitem frâthweresem, azem yô Ahurô Mazdâo yô Hapta-Hindu, hacha ushastara Hindva avi daoshatarem Hindûm. Âat ahê paityârem frâkerentat Angrô Mainyush pouru-mahrkô arathwyâcha dakshta arathwîmcha garemâum.”

*Translation.*—I, who am Ahura Mazda, created, as the fifteenth best place and country, (the country of) Hapta Hindu, (which extends) from the East of the Hindu (river, *i.e.*, the Indus) up to the West of the Hindu. Then, the evil spirit created therein, as a counter-act (against its excellence), excessive menstruation and excessive heat.

We learn from this passage of the Vendidad the following facts about India—

- (A) That India was the fifteenth of the 16 Aryan countries, known to the early Iranians as created or blessed by God.
- (B) It was known as Hapta Hindu.

(C) The country watered by the Indus formed India, and its boundary latterly extended further both ways, towards the East and the West.

(D) It had, as it were, two curses or miseries associated with it. Let us now examine these facts.

Firstly, let us consider, why is India spoken of in the Vendidad as the 15th country? The answer to this question

A. India, the 15th country. is connected with the question, as to what the first chapter of the Vendidad is a record of. Baron Bunsen, Rhode, Lassen, Haug and others thought, that the 16 places, mentioned in the Vendidad, were those to which the ancient Aryan or the Indo-Irânian race migrated one after another. Others, like Spiegel, thought, that this chapter only contained a list of the countries known to the ancient Irânians. Prof. Darmesteter took it merely as "a geographical description of Irân." I think, that the chapter contains an enumeration of the countries which were occupied, one after another, by the ancient Irânians, and in which the ancient Mazdaçnân religion prevailed to a more or less extent. The very beginning of the chapter helps us to say so. It runs thus:—

"Mraot Ahurô Mazdâo Spitamâi Zarathushtrâi azem dadhâm Spitama Zarathushtra asô râmô-dâitîm nôit kudat-shâittim. Yedhi zî azem nôit daidhyâm Spitama Zarathushtra asô râmô-dâitîm nôit kudat-shâittîm vîspo anghush astvâo Airyanem Vaejô frâshnvât."

*Translation.*—Ahura Mazda said to Spitama Zarathushtra: O Spitama Zarathushtra ! I have created (all) countries as pleasure-giving countries (*i.e.*, as countries giving pleasure to its inhabitants), and not as pleasure-destroying (countries). O Spitama Zarathushtra ! Had I not created countries which gave pleasure and which did not destroy pleasure, then the whole of the living world would have crowded in the country of Airyana Vaeja (Irânvej).

The gist of the chapter seems to be this : God has created all countries for the pleasant abode of men. He had no idea of adding any discomfort. But circumstances have connected some kind of discomfort or evil with all countries. For example, even Irân, which is mentioned as the first chosen land of God, though beautiful and enjoyable in all matters, has the disadvantage of being excessively cold and of being infested with large snakes. After creating Irân, as the first of the inhabitable countries, God went on creating other countries one after another. Had not God thus made inhabitable other countries, all human population would have thronged at, and crowded, Irân. Thus

one after another, as one city or country got overcrowded, another was created and made habitable. All such countries had with their advantages, one or another disadvantage or complaint attached to them. India was the fifteenth country in the list, and the disadvantages attached to it were, (*a*) that it was excessively hot, and (*b*) that there, women had to pass through the state of menstruation at a very early age of life.

The sixteen countries named in the Vendidâd are the following :—

<i>Names in the Avesta.</i>	<i>Modern names.</i>
1. Airyana Vaêja ... ..	Irân.
2. Sugdha (Sogdiana of the Greeks) ...	Samarkand.
3. Môuru ... ..	Merv.
4. Bâkhdhi ... ..	Balkh.
5. Nisâya ... ..	Nishâpur.
6. Harôyû ... ..	Herat, or the country of the Heri-rud (river).
7. Vaêkêréta ... ..	Nimrouz or Seistan.
8. Urva ... ..	Kabul.
9. Veharkâna ... ..	Gourgân.
10. Harahaiti ... ..	Sarasvati.
11. Haêtumant ... ..	Helmand.
12. Ragha ... ..	Rae.
13. Chakhra ... ..	... ..
14. Varêna .. ..	Gilân.
15. Hapt-Hindu ... ..	India.
16. The country near Rangha ... ..	.....

Scholars differ on the question of the identification of some of these countries. However, the order of the countries shows, that all the 14 countries, preceding the mention of India, are on the West of India. India, being in the further East, is mentioned well-nigh last. The identification of the 16th country is very doubtful. Anyhow, we see that India is one of the countries known to the ancient Irânians. Later books which, if not truly historical, are semi-historical, speak of India being at times under the sway of the pre-Achæmenian Irânians. So, we may take, that India is named in the list of the countries as one under the territorial sway or under some influence of the ancient Irânians.

The second fact which we learn about India from the above passage of the Vendidâd, is that it was known as Hapta-Hindu. This fact is very striking. The Hapta-Hindu of the Vendidâd is the Sapt-Sindhu of the Vedas. The word shows that India was known to the Persians from old times, when the Indus had seven branches and

not five, which have given the country through which it flows, its later Persian name of Panjâb. The seven branches were the following :—

Vedic names.	Greek names.	Mahabharata names.	Modern names.
Sindhu	Indus	.....	Sindhu
Vitastâ	Hydaspes	Vitastâ	Jhelum
Asikani	Akesinis	Tchandrabhaga.	Chenaub
Parushani	Hydraortes	Airavati	Râvi
Vipas	Hyphasis	Vipasa	Biyâ
Satadhru	Hesydrus	Satadru	Sutlej
Kubha	Kophen	.....	.....

It looks strange, but it is a fact, that the country of India and its people were known to the ancient Greeks, and are, even now, known to the moderns, including the Hindus themselves, by their Irânian names. The indigenous Vedic name of the country, through which the Indus (which has given its name, India, to the country) flows, is Sapt Sindhu. So, the country ought to have been known by the name Sindhustân and not Hindustân which is a form of the old Irânian name. The river has preserved its old Indian name, *viz.*, Sindhu, but the country has taken its Irânian name Hindu (Hindustan). The ancient Greeks and all the other Westerners, who began to know India through Persia, knew this country and know it even now, by its Irânian name.

The Greek name of one of the branches of the Indus, *viz.*, the modern Jhelum (Vedic Vitastâ), is Hydaspes. This name is Irânian. The word "aspes" which forms the second part of the name, is Avesta "aspa," corresponding to the Sanskrit अश्व (Ashva), Latin 'equus,' horse. We find the word in the Avesta and Greek names of another Persian river also. It is the Hvaspa of the Avesta,<sup>1</sup> the Choaspes of the Greeks, the modern Cherkheh. Unfortunately, we have not in the extant Avesta the names of the seven branches of the Indus. But this Greek name of one of the branches shows that the branch was named by the Greeks after its Irânian name. Similarly, the main river and the country itself were named after their Irânian names.

In the Sassanian times of the later Pahlavi commentators of the Avesta, the Indus having only five branches, the commentators were at a loss to know why the country was called Hapt-Hindu. So, they

<sup>1</sup> Zamyad Yasht, 67. *Vide* my paper on the river Karun (Asiatic Papers, pp. 1-22).

seem to have ingeniously discovered another reason for the name. They said: "Avash hapt-Hindukânih hanâ âigh sar-khudâ haft ait,"<sup>1</sup> *i.e.*, it is called Hapt-Hindu, because there are seven rulers over it. Possibly there were seven rulers ruling over the land of the Indus at the time.

As stated by Dr. Haug, at least two facts lead to show that the Vendidâd, in which the name of India occurs as Hapt-Hindu, was written many centuries before Christ.

Probably age of the Vendidâd.

Firstly, we learn from Herodotus,<sup>2</sup> that Deioeces of Media had founded the famous city of Ecbatana (Agabatana, Hamdan). That was in B.C. 708. This great city of ancient Persia is not mentioned in the above list of the cities of the Vendidâd. This fact, therefore shows that the Vendidâd, or at least this chapter of the Vendidâd, was written long before B.C. 708.

Secondly, the city of Balkh, which is named as Bâkhdhi in the Vendidâd, is spoken of there as the city of "Eredhvôdrafsâm," *i.e.*, the city of the exalted banners (darafsh, Fr. drapeau). This statement shows that it was still at that time the capital city of Bactria, carrying the royal banner. Now, we know, that Bactria fell into the hands of the Assyrians at about B.C. 1200. So then, this particular chapter (Chap. I) of the Vendidâd must have been written long before B.C. 1200, when its exalted banner fell at the hands of the Assyrians. These facts then show, that India was known to the ancient Irânians as Hapt-Hindu, *i.e.*, as "the country of the seven rivers of the Indus," a long time before 1200 B.C.

Coming to the third fact, we find that the country of India, as first known to the Irânians, before about 1200 B.C., was only the country of the Indus. Latterly, the boundary seems to have extended both ways. This fact appears from a sentence in the above chapter of the Vendidâd, which as it were, gives the eastern and the western boundaries of the Hapt-Hindus. It says, "Hacha ushastara Hindva avi daoshatarem Hindum," *i.e.*, the country of Hindustan, extends from the East of the Indus to the West of the Indus. This sentence is not found in some of the old manuscripts of the Vendidâd.<sup>3</sup> So, it seems, that it is a later addition by way of a comment. The later Pahlavi rendering of

<sup>1</sup> Spiegel's Text of the Pahlavi Vendidâd, p. 7, l. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Bk. I, 98.

<sup>3</sup> *Vide* Westergaard's Text, p. 346, note 5 to para. 19, where he says "K<sub>2</sub>, K<sub>9</sub>, R omit these six words, hacha.....Hindum."



the Vendidâd gives the comment thus: "Hacha ushastara Hendva avi daoshastarem Hendum."<sup>1</sup> The above Avesta passage and this Pahlavi rendering have well nigh the same phraseology. So, it appears that the Avesta sentence is a later addition by a commentator. Anyhow, what we find from this passage is this: At first, it was only the country watered by the Hindu (Indus) that was known as the country of Hindustan (India), but latterly, gradually the country both on the west and the east of the country so watered by the Indus was included in the name Hindu or India.

4. Lastly, we come to the question of the curse on the country. The Vendidâd associated some evil, misfortune or curse with all the sixteen regions mentioned in its list of the Aryan cities. Ahura Mazda or the good spirit created them as pleasure-giving abodes for men, but the evil spirit produced some kind of evil to mar their pleasures. In the case of India, the evil was twofold. Its people had to bear too excessive heat and its women had to pass through a period of menstruation at a very early period of their life. We know that this is true of India even now.

Having examined the four inferences that can be drawn from the passage of the Vendidâd which is the first and the principal reference to India in the Avesta, we will now look into the other references.

II. The reference to India in the Yaçna (LVII, 29) runs thus:—

"Yatchit ushastairê Hendvô âgeurvayêitê yatchit daoshairê Nignê."

*Translation*—Who goes from Hindustan in the East to Nineveh in the West.

Here Sraosha, the Yazata or Angel presiding over Obedience, is represented as marching in his chariot of swift horses, from the East to the West. India (Hindva) is here represented as the Eastern boundary and Nineveh as the Western boundary of the then known Irânian country. Scholars differ as to the meaning of the last word *nignê*. Some do not take it to be a proper noun. Darmesteter takes the eastern boundary to be the river Indus, and the Western the river Tigris. But we need not enter into the question of settling the meaning of the last word. Suffice it to say for our purpose, that the Yaçna speaks of India as the eastern boundary of the territories of the country of Iran.

III. The reference to India in the Meher Yasht (104) runs thus:—

Mithrem vouru-gaoyaitîm yazamaidê .. ... yenghê daregâchit bâzava fragerewenti mithrô-aojanghō, yatchit ushas tairê Hindvô âgeurvayeiti yatchit daoshatairê Nignê.

<sup>1</sup> Spiegel's Text, p. 7, 1, 3.

*Translation*—We invoke Mithra of wide pastures.....whose extended arms help that person who adheres to his promise (mithra), whether that person be in Hindustan in the East or Nineveh in the West.

The Meher Yasht treats of Mithra, the Yazata or Angel of Light, who is believed to preside over "truthfulness." He helps those who truthfully adhere to their promises, whether they happen to be in India in the East or Nineveh in the West. The phraseology being the same as that in the Yaçna, the inference also is the same.

From the above two references of the Yaçna and the Meher Yasht, we find the following two facts :—

1. Firstly, they have dropped the word Hapta or seven from the name of the country and no longer speak of it as Hapta-Hindu, but speak of it only as Hindu. This shows, that latterly, the name Hindu or India was not confined to the country watered by the Indus but was extended to regions other than this.

2. Secondly, the rule of Persia extended at the time from Nineveh in the West to India in the East.

IV. The last reference to India in the Avesta is that in the Ti Yasht (32). It speaks not of India itself but of one of its mountains—the Hindukush. The passage runs thus :—

"Âat tat dunmân hãm-hishtenti us Hindvat paiti garôit."

*Translation*—Then vapour arises from the mount Hindu.

Tistrya is the Yazata or angel presiding over rain. So, in the Yasht which treats of an account of this Yazata, the watery vapour which forms rain, is referred to as arising from Mount Hindu, which is identified with the Hindukush.