

## THE BELIEF ABOUT THE DUBBÂ OR THE DROWNING SPIRIT IN INDIA. ITS PARALLEL IN ANCIENT IRÂN.\*

(Read on 15th June 1927.)

### I.

In the "Man in India" of September and December of 1923 (pp. 196-201), there is an interesting article, entitled "Water Spirits in North Behar" by Mr. Sarat Chandra Mitra, the prolific contributor on subjects of Cultural Anthropology in the Journals of our and other societies. The article describes a belief, that various tanks are believed to be inhabited by a *Dubbâ* or Drowning Spirit, which is also spoken of in some places as *Pân dubbâ* ( पान डुब्बा ) or "the Drowning spirit (*Dubbâ*) which lives in water (*Pân*)." The belief is that "The *Dubbâ* does not kill men for the purpose of feeding upon their corpses, but does so with the sole and express object that the ghosts or spirits of his victims may become his companions and keep company with him" (p. 197). It is also believed, that the "Drowning Spirit" haunts the neighbourhood of some wells and "accosts lone passers-by in the stilly hours of the midnight and to ask from them for *khaini* (powdered tobacco leaf mixed with quicklime) to eat saying with a nasal twang:—खोनि दे खोनि दे (*khaini dê, khaini dê*) or 'Please give me some powdered tobacco to eat.' Should the passer-by be foolish enough to pay heed to this ghostly request and to go near him for giving "him the asked-for tobacco, it is believed and said that the ghost will surely seize and kill him" (pp. 197-98).

What we find at the bottom of the belief is, that it is an evil spirit that inhabits the tanks and other collections of water that kills a man falling into them, and not the water itself.

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\* Journal Anthropological Society of Bombay, Vol. XIII, No 7, pp. 750-53.





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*Translation* :—O Creator! “Does Water kill man?” Ohrmazd replied to him that “Water does not kill man. Astovidât binds<sup>2</sup> him. The (bad)<sup>3</sup> atmosphere carries him away bound. The water carries<sup>4</sup> him up (*i.e.*, brings him up to the surface); water carries him down (*i.e.*, takes him down to the bottom); water pushes<sup>5</sup> him forward<sup>6</sup> (*i.e.*, carries him back into a hole)<sup>7</sup>; and then in the end birds eat him. When from there, in the end, Fate reaches him (*i.e.*, comes to him). It [Fate] over takes him in the end (*i.e.*, he is on the higher route when he proceeds further in this corporeal world by [means of his] Fate and in the spiritual world by soul.”

### III.

As to the Drowning Spirit, alluring the passers-by, by asking tobacco from them, some folk-stories, heard on this side of our country, say, that some of the ghosts of the dead are fond of flesh. If a passer-by has cooked-mutton with him he is harassed by the lurking ghosts. The harassment consists in causing him to miss his way, his returning to one and the same spot, his being called by some invisible being by a clapping of hands, &c. In such a case, the advice, commonly believed in, is, that the person so harassed

<sup>1</sup> Dastur Hoshang Jamasp's Vendidad pp. 150-51. *Vide* also Spiegel's Vendidad p. 50 ll. 7 et. seq. Dastur Darab's Vend. p. 71. Dastur Janiaspji's Pahlavi Gujarati Vendidad, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Pahl. asruntan to bind. Arab. أسير taking capture (Steingass).

<sup>3</sup> Two kinds of air or atmosphere or winds are spoken of. Vâe-i-veh, *i.e.*, the good or beneficent air and Vâe-i salitar, *i.e.*, the bad or maleficent air.

<sup>4</sup> Vajidan P. گزیدن to choose.

<sup>5</sup> Lit. mingles up. Gomekhtan, P. آمیختن to mix, mingle.

<sup>6</sup> Patireh, padireh Av. paiti.

<sup>7</sup> *i.e.*, hollow or crevice of a rock.

should throw away the flesh. The ghost, thus getting what it wanted, ceases to harass him further. Again, another advice, in the case of thus being harassed by a ghost at the dead of night on a road, is, to make water at once. The ghost is believed to dislike the smell of the urine and so leaves the pursuit of the man. Urine of cattle is, for this purpose, believed to have the efficacy of driving away evil spirits. It seems that at first, it was believed to have some efficacy to cure or prevent some physical diseases. Thence, the efficacy was believed to have extended to cases of mental diseases or evils.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Vide* Prof. Eugene Wilhelm's paper on Urine. *Vide* my "Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees." See the word Gaomez in the Index.