

# THE AGHUKHOH OF SEMA NAGAS OF THE ASSAM HILLS AND THE CHAH OF THE KABULIS.

(Read on 25th October 1922.)

## I

The weapons of warfare of the ancients and of various modern tribes, living far away from seats of civilization, and the methods of their warfare present several aspects worth studying from an Anthropological point of view. The present Paper treats, not of weapons, but of a particular method of fight, observed among a hill tribe of India, and of its comparison with a similar method of the people of Kabul in older times, described by Firdousi in his *Shâh-nâmeh*. The subject of the paper is suggested to me by an interesting monograph by Mr. J. H. Hutton on "The Sema Nagas,"<sup>1</sup> one of the several Naga tribes of the hills on the North-Eastern Frontiers of India between Assam and Burmah. The monograph is interesting from several points of view. One of these points is, that it shows, what important part is played by migration in the formation of tribes in various parts of the country, especially in the hills. This particular tribe was the result of three migrations from the North-East, the North-West and the South. What the author says in his preface, confirms what we find from some of the papers in our Journal, that many of our judicial courts are places, where occasionally many a tribal question comes for discussion, and judicial officers have opportunities to study many questions of anthropological interest. The author says: "There is hardly any part of tribal custom which is not sooner or later somehow drawn into one of the innumerable disputes, which the local officer in the Naga Hill is called upon to settle."

---

<sup>1</sup> "The Sema Nagas" by Mr. J. H. Hutton, I.C.S., with a Foreword by Mr. Henry Balfour.

The Foreword of Mr. Henry Balfour claims the attention of a society like ours. It urges early work in the matter of inquiry in the case of all tribes and castes. He says: "The rapid changes which the culture of the 'unrisen' races is undergoing renders urgent the work of the field anthropologist. It is of the utmost importance, not only to the Science of Man, but also to responsible officialdom, since a just and enlightened administration of native affairs cannot be established and pursued without an intimate knowledge of, and sympathetic interest in the natives themselves, their customs and their point of view. Lack of ethnographic knowledge has been responsible for many of the misunderstandings and fatal errors which have tarnished our well-meant endeavours to control wisely and equitably the affairs of those whose culture has been evolved under environments which differ widely from those of civilized peoples." The last great war has, as it were, affected many a nook and corner of the wide world. It may have affected—and one must wait for the results—the distant hilly tract of this tribe, because a large number of the people of this tribe had gone to Europe during the war as men of the labour-corps of the British Army. The French authorities, as reported by Mr. Balfour, described them as having "self-possession and absence of fear when they were landed in France after experiencing shipwreck in the Mediterranean—a truly novel experience for those primitive inland hill-dwellers."

## II

Coming to the subject proper of the paper, we find, that in the third part of his monograph, treating of the Laws and Customs of the tribe, Mr. Hutton speaks of their settlement of disputes and war—war in general, whether genuine war or mere head-hunting. Describing the methods or tactics of warfare and head-hunting, he speaks of their Aghukhohs or war-pits, and thus describes them: "This is contrived by choosing a place where the path goes along the side of a hill and excavating a deep and long pit

under the path perhaps as much as 6 feet long by 8 feet deep, without disturbing the surface which is left intact for a considerable thickness. The bottom of the pit is filled with double rows of *panjis*, say 4 feet and 2 feet in length respectively, and the excavation is concealed. The *aghukhoh* may then just be left for the enemy to walk into, or the enemy may be lured to rush into it by a warrior on the far side, who apparently risks his head to wait about and shout insulting challenges. In this way, with good luck, sometimes even three of one's foes at a fall may be caused to go down together well perforated into the pit. The *aghukhoh* or "leg-pit" is usually made by taking advantage of a depression in the ground, and this depression, or a shallow pit made for the purpose, is planted with short *panjis* in the ordinary way and filled up with bits of sticks, moss, grass, leaves, and earth, so that, it lames people before they realise that the ground is *panjied*. The stone-chute (*Zhūka*, "flattener") is known to the Semas, but apparently not put into practice by them in warfare. Stones and sticks and sharpened bamboos are also used."<sup>1</sup>

From what we read of the old Stone Age, it seems that the idea of these *Aghukhohs* or war-pits may have been taken by this and other similar tribes from the "pitfalls," whereby early primitive man caught tigers and such other ferocious animals. These pits were pits with pointed wooden spikes, etc.<sup>2</sup> One of the Asiatic methods still prevalent for capturing elephants is that of such pitfalls.

### III

Now, we find a parallel of this mode of warfare in the *Shâh-nâmeh* of Firdousi, whereby Rustam was killed by his half-brother Schogâd on the frontiers of Cabul. We read of this subject in the *Shâh-nâmeh* under the heading of

Parallels from the  
*Shâh-nâmeh*.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, page 171.

<sup>2</sup> *Vide* "Every day life in the Old Stone Age" by Marjorie and Quennels, page 29, Figure 16.

چاه کندن شاه قابل در شکارگاه و فغان رستم و زوره در آن  
*i.e.*, the Digging of a *châh* (a pit) by the Shâh of Kâbul in the  
 Hunting ground and the falling of Rustam and Zavâreh into it.<sup>1</sup>  
 The subject forms a part of the Episode, entitled داستان  
 رستم و شغاد *i.e.*, the Narrative of Rustam and Shoghâd. Firdousi  
 describes the story on the authority of an old book (*daftar*) in  
 the possession of one Âzâd Sarv,<sup>2</sup> who lived at Merv in the  
 house of Ahmed of Sahl. This Azad Sarv was descended  
 from the family of Sam Nariman, the ancestor of Rustam, and  
 knew much of the battles (*razm*) of Rustam. This Âzâd Sarv  
 had a book about (ancient) kings (*nâme*-i-Khusravân). Fir-  
 dousi's story, given on the authority of this book, runs thus :

Zâl, the father of Rustam, had, by a slave woman (*bandahi-*  
 kanizah), a son, named Shoghâd. On the  
 The story about the Death of Rustam by a Fall in a *châh*.  
 birth of the child, the astrologers of Kâbul  
 and Kashmir, on being consulted, predicted,  
 that the child would bring all infamy on the family and  
 would be the cause of ruining it. Zâl was much distressed  
 to learn that, and he prayed to God to avert that misfor-  
 tune. When the child grew up, Zâl sent him to the King  
 of Kâbul to be brought up by him. The Shâh of Kâbul  
 brought him up like a fresh apple (*tâzah seb*) and gave him  
 his daughter in marriage. Rustam was the Feudal Lord of  
 Kâbul and the Shâh of Kâbul was his feudal vassal.  
 Rustam received every year from the Shâh of Kâbul, as a  
 token of this vassalage, the tribute of a skin of a cow<sup>3</sup>  
 (*yak charm-i gav*). Now, the King of Kâbul thought that  
 Shoghâd, the step-brother of Rustam, having become his  
 son-in-law, out of regard for the new relationship, Rustam  
 would forego the usual tribute of the skin of a cow hardly worth

<sup>1</sup> Vuller's Text of the Shâh-nâme, Vol. III, page 1735. M. Mohl's  
 Le Livre des Rois, Vol. IV, small edition, p. 573. The Gujarati Shâh-  
 nâme of the Kutâr Brothers, Vol. VI, p. 250.

<sup>2</sup> Mohl's Text gives the name as Azadêh Sarv.

<sup>3</sup> چنان بدکه هر سال یک چرم گاو . . . ز کابل بهی خواستی بازو مساو

a *diram*. But when the proper time came, the officers of Rustam demanded the usual tribute. This enraged the King and his people of Kâbul. Shoghâd also was much distressed at his step-brother not entertaining any regard (*sharm*) for him. So, he thought of injuring him. He submitted the following stratagem to entrap his brother: He proposed, that the King of Kâbul may give a grand feast or entertainment (*sûr*) to all the grandees of the city. Therein, he may show coldness to him and speak cold words to him (*marâ sard gâi*) and call him a coward (*nâ javân mard*). Thus insulted, he would leave Kâbul and go to his brother Rustam to complain. Rustam would come to revenge the insult to his brother. Then, on the road towards Kâbul, he may get a hunting-ground (*nakhchir-gâh*) prepared. I will describe what follows, in the very words of Firdousi, to enable us to see what kind of pitfall was aimed at: "You prepare a hunting ground on the road (to Kâbul) and prepare several pits in that hunting ground. Prepare those pits (*chah*) of the size of Rustam and his horse (*rakhsh*), and fix in them long (pointed) swords (*tîghhâ-e darâz*) and also water-coloured (*âb-gun*, *i.e.*, clean or brilliant) spears and daggers, in such a way, that the pointed edges may point upwards and the handles may be downwards. Better prepare ten of such pits than five, if you wish to be free from any anxiety (of failure by a smaller number). Employ one hundred artificers (for the purpose) and prepare the pits, and do not let even the wind know the secret. Then shut up the openings of the pits and keep even your lips ignorant (*i.e.*, do not let even your lips know this secret)." Having suggested this stratagem, Shoghâd went to Seistan, the feudal seat of his brother, and complained bitterly to his father Zâl and brother Rustam about the insulting conduct of the King of Kâbul. Zâl and Rustam got angry. Rustam consoled his brother Shoghâd, and keeping him with him, treated him kindly. He prepared an army to march from Kâbul, and proceeding from the District of Zâbul in Seistân, encamped within the territories of the King of Kâbul.

Then Shoghâd went to Rustam and dissuaded him from marching with such a large army. He said: "If I would write your name on water<sup>1</sup> (and send it) to Kâbul, nobody would get rest and sleep. Who will dare to come before you to fight? And who will stand long, when you will move to fight? I think, that, by this time, he must be repenting and must be thinking to make amends for my departure (from his court). (Perhaps) there will come soon from Kâbul distinguished chiefs asking for forgiveness." Shoghâd thereby dissuaded Rustam to march upon Kâbul with a large army. So, Rustam resolved to go there with 100 horsemen and his brother Zahvâreh.

In the meantime, the King of Kâbul chose a certain place in the hunting ground and got several pits dug there. He got swords, spears, daggers and lances fixed in the ground with their points upward, and covered the openings in such a way that nobody could discover the fraud. When Rustam commenced to march, Shoghâd sent a messenger in advance to Kâbul to inform the King of his approach. The King came out of his city to meet Rustam and, on seeing him from a distance, got down from his horse, took off his Indian hat from his head, and went before him with bare head and folded hands. He took off his shoes, and prostrating himself on the ground, apologized for his conduct. Rustam pardoned him and asked him to cover his head and to ride on his horse. The King then entertained Rustam right royally in a beautiful tract of country near Kâbul. He then proposed a hunt which Rustam accepted with great pleasure. The hunting party departed in various directions and Rustam and his brother Zavâreh were induced to go over the place which was dug from underneath and concealed. The Rakhsh, the noble steed of Rustam, coming just near the place where the pits were dug, stopped at once, having

---

<sup>1</sup> Writing or marking something on water is the weakest way of writing. It is immediately effaced. So, what is meant is this: "Even the slightest possible intimation that you are marching upon Kâbul will make the King and people of Kâbul sleepless."

a strange odour from the newly dug ground. He, as it were, saw some danger and walked very slowly and cautiously, feeling his ground. Rustam did not like this, and so whipped him. Being much pressed to go on, he proceeded, not at the usual pace, but leaped over that portion of the ground where he suspected there was something wrong with the ground. In his jump, he leapt over the pit, but the pit being extensive in length, in spite of all his effort, his hind legs fell in the pit and he fell with his rider into the pit. Both, the rider and the horse, were mortally wounded by the pointed weapons, fixed point upwards in the pit. Notwithstanding being greatly wounded, Rustam made a noble effort and, extricating himself from the pointed weapons, looked over the pit, and from the look and demeanour of Shoghâd, who was watching all this from over the pit, soon found that all this was the result of a stratagem on the part of Shoghâd. He cursed Shoghâd, who returned the curse by abuse and taunt. Rustam thus caught in the death-trap, asked Shoghâd to help him in one way at the last dying moment. He asked him to untie his bow from his wounded side and to put in two arrows in it, so that, in case, at night, a lion came in and tried to harm him further, he may try to save himself from further injury by means of the bow. Shoghâd did so, little suspecting that the bow was asked to be drawn to kill him. Thereupon, Rustam aimed his bow at his treacherous brother and killed him, and thanked God for enabling him to revenge his death with his own hands. He and his brother Zahvâreh, who also had met a similar fate, both expired soon after.

We find, from an earlier part of the Shâh-nâmeh, that Zohak, the parricide, killed his pious father Mardâs in a similar way, by digging a pit in his garden over the way by which he went at night for his prayers. Zohâk got a deep pit (*zarf châh*) dug in the way and got its mouth covered over by leaves and grass (*kha-shâk*). Mardâs fell into it and died.

It seems that this method of killing or entrapping enemies in hidden pits was prevalent among many people, and from olden times, because we have proverbs among different people referring to this method. Some of these proverbs are the following<sup>1</sup> :—

1. ગુણે તો પડે (Gujarati), i.e., one who digs a pit falls into it.

2. Who so diggeth a pit shall fall therein (Old Testament, proverbs XXVI, 27).

3. Wer Andern eine Grube grabt, fallt selbst hinein (whoever digs a pit for others, falls himself therein).

4 (a) چاه کن همیشه در چاه است  
(The digger of a pit is always in a pit.)

(b) چاه کن را چاه در پیش  
For the digger of a pit, a pit is (always) before him.

## “THE KHUTBA-(خطبه) OF THE MAHOMEDANS AND THE DASTŪRI OF THE PARSEES.”

(Read on 29th November 1922.)

Our attention to the Khutba of our Mahomedan brethren has been drawn at present by the telegrams Introduction. we have received of the election of a new Khalifa. It is said, that now the Khutbas will be recited in the name of the new Khalifa. The object of this paper is to show, that there is, among the Parsees, as among the Mahomedans, a custom, whereby the name of the Dastur or the High Priest is recited in certain rituals. The recital is spoken of as Dasturi.

(1) Vide the કહેવત માળા, by Mr. J. N. Petit, edited by Mr. Jijibhoy P. Mistri, Vol. I, page 151.