

FIRE IN THE VEDIC AND ANCIENT IRANIAN LITERATURE

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Abstract

Fire has a great significance in Ancient Iranian and Indian literature, Fire had been the centre of Hindu and Zoroastrian rituals from the ancient time till now; however its root is in the Indo-European periods.

Fire is praised in the Vedas as Agni. He is the son of sky (Dyauh) and Earth (Prthivi) and he is messenger between Gods and human beings, and he is messenger of God and one who carries the oblation to the Gods. Agni is a God who receives the oblations in the form of fire, and offers them to the Gods. The fire element has three manifestations in the universe. In the sky in the form of Sun, in the atmosphere in the form of lightning, and on earth in form of ordinary fire.

Fire was very holy in the opinion of ancient Iranian people. It had been praised too, and whoever disrespected the fire, he was treated with God's anger. Iranians always used sweet-smelling sticks in the fire-temples and braziers to please the Gods. Fire in the Avesta book is Atarsh or Atash and in the ancient Persian language, Atar or Athar, and in Phlavei, Atur or Ataxsh or Atash' and in the Persian is Azar. In the Avesta book the Fire Agni is called Azar izad and he is the son of Ahuramazada due to his significance of the occasion. Fire is sign of purity and truth and Ordibehesht Anshaspand is his guardian and Azar Izad is considered as his assistant. The whole Yasna No.62 from Avesta book belongs to Azar Izad and Atash Niyayesh (Fire praise) is one of the five most important Zoroastrian Praise, which is read by priests in the fire-temple in every five time of the day. There were very important fire-temples in the ancient Iran which each of them belonged to the particular caste.

It can be said that the holiness at the fire has been existed among all ancient people and it is always praised as a common thing by them. Because fire is considered as a friend and helpful mate.

The fire in the Fire place of home recompenses the lack of sunshine and sunheat. It keeps away bad dream and harmful beings. Fire in the temple is the mediator of the spiritual world and carries up the prayers of the man to the sky by its flames which are like wings.

The study of ancient people's belief indicates the relationship between people of the world by paying respect to the fire and praise it.

In the ancient Greece the Fire Deity is called 'Hestia', in the ancient Rome, Vesta. The ancient Chinese people praised the deity of fire as 'Tasavang' and in Mexico as 'Aztec' and their fire temples were the greatest temples.¹ From the ancient time paying respect to this useful element has been

also existed among Arian people. They believe that the fire is the base of the life and it is the essence of the creation.²

Fire in the Indo-Iranian religion was praised as the oldest and holiest element. And it has three manifestation, namely in the sky as sun in the atmosphere as lighting and in the earth as the ordinary fire. In this period the praise of the fire was in the centre and the religion and was done by the clergy cast who was called Atharvan. The fire in the Iran was considered as powerful, pure and wise God and who grants food and child and likes home and families and destroyer of the enemies.³ He grants the worshipper, the blessing which is increasing from day to day. He is source of fame and who increase the man and takes the offering to the gods.

The worshipper of Agni approaches him with the utmost courtesy every morning and every night.⁴ He is eternal being who is setting in the place of

mortal being and receives their offering. He knows the holy people and when he is fed by pure ghee; his volume is increased and shines. He is great and it is attended everywhere and he is old in spite of looks young and beautiful. He grants his worshipper, son and increase their offerings.⁵

Agni is one who knows creation; he is the lord of the reign. He is the God of the power and wealth. He is self-existent and is younger than all Gods. He grants whoever praises him.⁶ One of specialty of *Agni* is the fight with demons. His most famous battle is the fighting with *Kraved* and *Raksasas*. One of his other specialties is purified power.⁷ Fire was very holy in the opinion of ancient Iranians. It had been praised too and whoever disrespected the fire he was treated with God's anger. Iranian always used sweet-smelling sticks in the Fire-temples and Braziers to please the Gods.⁸

In the ancient Iran, the discovery of fire is attributed to *Hushang*.⁹ After the discovery of the fire he praised the fire and hold a celebration and called it Sade Festival.¹⁰ The Greek historians have written something about Iranian Gods like Sun, Moon, Earth, Water and Fire.

Strabon says :

"The Persian people offer the offering to the water and fire. They put the selected pieces of meat on the sticks and kindle the fire and always keep it bright. They kill one who disrespected to the fire."¹¹

Other Greek histories namely *Herodotos*¹², *Xenophon*, *Diogenes Laertius* and *Dion*¹³ have referred to the fire and water as Iranian Gods. *Maximus tyrus* also has mentioned the fire as the God of Iranians.

Curtius also writes :

"Iranians take an oath in front of fire and such oath has been very important. In the *Arebl*; *Dariush*¹⁴ has supplicated in front of *Sun*, *Mitra* and *Azar* which enable his army to defeat *Alexander*.¹⁵

There have been three important Fire-temples in the

ancient Iranian period in which every one of them has belonged to the special caste.

The first was *Azar Borzinmher* which has belonged to the farmers caste and the second one was *Azar Feran Baq* belonged to the clergies and third one was *Azar Goshasp* belonged to the army.¹⁶

Fire in the Avesta book is *Atarsh* or *Atar* and in the Ancient Persian language *Atar* or *Athar* and in the Pahlavi *Atur* or *Ataxsh* or *Atash* and in the Persian is *Azar*.

In the Avesta book the fire angel is called *Azar Izad* and he is the son of *Ahuramazda* due to his significance of the occasion. Fire is a sign of purity and truth and *Ordibehesht Anshaspand* is his guardian and *Azar Izad* is considered as his assistant.¹⁷

In the *Yasna* 25, Part 7, has written :

"We worship you, the Fire, *Ahuramazda*'s son! The holy lord of the ritual order and we worship all kinds of the fire".

There are five kinds of Fire according to *Yasna* 17, Part 11:

1. The Fire *Berezi-Savangha* (of the lofty use). This fire is that before *Ahuramazda* and the kings¹⁸.

2. The Fire *Vahu-Fryana* (the good and friendly). This fire dwells in the bodies and beasts (animals heat).

3. The Fire *Urvazishta* (the most beneficial and most helpful). This is in trees and plants.

4. The Fire *Vazishta* (the most supporting). This is in clouds (lightening).¹⁹

5. The Fire *Spenishta* (the most bountiful). This is the fire which is applied in the world.

In the *Zamyad Yasht* Parts 46-50,²⁰ *Azar* the rival of the demon "*Azi Dahaka* which he prevents him for obtaining of the awful Glory (sacerdotal Glory).²¹ In the *Yasna* 36, Part 1; *Azar* is mediator between Gods and the human beings.²² In the *Farvardin Yasht* Parts 87,88, when *Ahriman* (demon)

revolts against *Asha* (good creation, Holiness); *Azar* helps him and defeats *Ahriman* as can't harm the world.²³

The whole Yasna No. 62 from Avesta book²⁴ belongs to *Azar Izad* and *Atash Nyayish*²⁵ (Fire Praise) is one of the five most important Zoroastrian prayers which is read by Priest in the Fire -temple in every five time of the day.

These five times for play are:

1. *Havani* (From Sun rise to noon)
2. *Rapithwina* (From noon to after noon)
3. *Uzayeirina* (From afternoon to Sunset)
4. *Aiwistrthrima* (From Sunset to mid night)
5. *Ushahina* (From midnight to sunrise)

In *Firdawsi's Shahname* which is one of the most important Iranian epics; There are many kings and heroes who have been going to the fire-temples before the war or important works and have been worshipping in front of the Fire and offered the oblations to the fire and they had some desires which were granted by the God; and they also after granting their desires went to the fire-temple and again worshipped the fire and then they helped the fire-worshipper and poor people. Sometime they grant a big part of their treasure to the fire-temple.

Conclusion :

There are some similarity between fire in the Vedic literature; ancient Iranian literature, the Zoroastrian religion and *Firdawsi's Shahname*:

1. In the *Vedas* the most important role of the *Agni* is mediator between people and the Gods and who carries up the prayer of the man to the sky. There is the role of fire in ancient Iran as third *Dariush* has suplicated in front of the Sun, *Mitra* and *Azar* which enable his army to defeat *Alexander* and in the Zoroastrian religion; also in whole Yasna 62. The fire (*Azar Izad*) is worshipped, and *Atash, Niyayesh* is one of five most important Zoroastrian which is done on five time in the day is *Atash, Niyayesh*.

In *Yasna 36, Part 1 Azar* is the mediator of the man and Gods. In *Firdawsi's Shahname*; also, many king and heroes have been going to the fire temples and worshipped in front of fire.

2. Fire is one which received the oblation for the Gods; in all the cases which mentioned above. In the *Vedas* in the form of pure ghee; in the Ancient Iran in the form of dry and sweet smelling sticks and in *Firdawsi's shahname* in the form offering valuable jewels.

3. *Agni* in the *Vedas* has three, manifestations in the form of sun in the sky, in the form of lightening in atmosphere and in the earth in the form of ordinary fire. Similarly in the Avesta, there are five kinds of fire of which two kinds of them are the fires, namely, the Fire *Vazioshta* (The Fire in cloud and lightening) and *Spanishta* (which is applied in the world).

But in the Avesta sun is also praised, Separately as *Khorshed Nyayish*.

4. In the *Vedas*, the worshipper of *Agni*, worships him every morning and evening. Similarly in Avesta there is *Atash Nyayish* which is done every five times of the day.

In *Firdawsi's shahname* also most of times the kings wash their bodies and then they used to go to the fire-temples.

5. In the *Vedas Agni* grants to their worshipper son and increases their offsprings. Similarly in the Yasna 62, the worshipper desire, the fire which "he grants him, pious children who increased the country."

6. In the *Vedas* and *Avesta*, *Agni* has a great rank. In the *Vedas Agni* is the son of sky (*dyaus*) and Earth (*Prithivi*) and in whole of *Avesta* Fire is mentioned as *Ahura Mazda's* son.

7. *Agni* in the *Vedas* is one who knows the creation and in *Avesta* fire is considered as protector of the good creation.

8. One of the most important *Agni* role in *Vedas* is one who fights with *Ahriman* (demon) and

his most famous battle is the fighting with Kravyad and Raksasas. In *Avesta (Zamlyad Yasht Part 46-50)* Azar fights with **Azi Dahaka**.

Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a close similarity between Agni in the *Vedas* and Fire in the ancient Iranian literature, *Avesta* book and *Firdowsi's Shahname*.

Such study may help understand to both Iranian and Indian cultures in relation with each other.

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