

CHAPTER 3

THE RELIGIOUS IMPACT OF ZARATHUSHTRA ON THE PEOPLE OF VEDIC TIMES

We are now in a position to understand the impact of the teachings of Zarathushtra on the people of Vedic times, both in Iran and India, and even beyond. For, as will become more and more evident, it was not only on Iran that he exerted a great impression; India also was strongly influenced; in fact, we shall here enunciate a stupendous thesis: namely, that his teachings had so great an effect, that it can be said Zarathushtra cast the die which ultimately determined for ever the history—religious at first, and through it political and cultural too—of the entire world, and the effects of which persist to this day. That this is no exaggeration will, I think, be clear to the reader by the time he or she finishes reading this book. We shall build up to this conclusion with a gradual accumulation of facts and inferences which will leave no reasonable doubt in the matter.¹

It was, as we saw, in Vedic times that the Great **Ratu** Zarathushtra was born in Iran. Let us leave to a later chapter the attempt to determine the exact date of his birth, for the present merely contenting ourselves with observing that, as the passages from the Gatha reproduced earlier clearly demonstrate, the language of his teaching differed so little from that of the Vedas that entire verses of the Gatha can be turned into the purest Vedic Sanskrit “by the mere application of phonetic law”, as Macdonnell, the author of *Vedic Mythology*, tells us, “so as to produce verses, correct not only in form but in poetic spirit as well.” As the *Cambridge History of India* notes, “the coincidence between the *Avesta* and the *Rigveda* is so striking that the two languages cannot have been long separated before they arrived at their present condition;” and Griswold goes so far as to point out that each can be said to be “a commentary on the other”. No scholar of the *Avesta* worth the designation can do without a thorough grounding in Vedic Sanskrit.²

Thus the age of the First Prophet of Humanity cannot be dragged down without at the same time dragging down the age of the Veda. He is contemporary, at the very latest, with the late portions of the *Rigveda*, if not the middle portions.

In his youth, in that case, he must as we saw have found around himself worshippers of both the **Devas** and the **Asuras**. The worshippers of **Asura Varuna** considered their deity—like all **Asuras**—to be formless, and they also tended to be more mono-

¹ The manner in which I am approaching this subject will, perhaps, not satisfy some readers, who have grown accustomed to demanding a “proof” for every statement. I say, quite frankly, that I cannot *prove* (in the mathematical sense, as incontrovertible) many of my statements; but I also say that to demand such “proof” is both fatuous and, in a study like ours, unnecessary. What I do aim at doing—and in this, I think, I have largely succeeded—is to find so many fingers pointing in the same direction that to doubt would be rather unreasonable, though not impossible. (In this I am following, more or less, the principles we all apply in our law courts, where it is only necessary to prove beyond *reasonable* doubt—not necessarily beyond *all* doubt). I shall also, for bolstering my statements, not rely principally upon the prestige of my references, but shall couch my arguments in such terms as may enable each reader to make up his or her own mind. Fair enough, ladies and gentlemen of the jury?

² This is merely a jibe at some Universities, in which professorships in Persian studies have been awarded to individuals who, however well-read they may be in Middle Eastern languages and cultures, know next to nothing of the Vedic language and tradition. I can understand the dilemma the University Board faces: for to do justice to Zoroastrianism the Prof. must know something not of Iran alone, but of India, Israel, Arabia, Greece, Rome, Chaldea, Babylon, Assyria, Gaul and—arguably—Mongolia, China and Japan as well; and just where do you find a guy so smart, who has yet been so dumb as to put himself formally through the inanities of what we euphemistically call an academic education?—I am not, mind you, running down *all* University studies: I have a degree myself (though in agriculture, not in linguistics or religion); and I must say that at times I quite enjoyed my University days, which were in Israel—and which is quite an exciting place to live in in any case. But as I think anyone who has gritted his teeth and gone through the mill must admit, the system hardly encourages one to think for oneself: since in order to pass exams and get good grades, one must satisfy the likes and dislikes of some other person who has been foolish enough (or, in many

theistic than otherwise:

अश्वत्थामसुरे विश्वेदेदाः अमिमीत वरिमाणं पृथिव्या ।
आसीदद् विश्वा भुवनानि सम्राट् विश्वेत्तानि वरुणस्य ब्रतानि ॥

All-Wise **Varuna** created heaven and earth and is the Sovereign of the Universe. That is his glory.

Rigveda 8.42.1

In addition, the worshippers of Father **Varuna**, especially the **Vashishthas**, laid considerable emphasis on moral character, “the Greatest Good”, viz, Righteousness:

Ashem vohu vahishtem asti

Righteousness is good; it is the Greatest Good of all.

The Ashem Vohu

Zarathushtra must also have found around himself worshippers of **Indra**, the most popular deity of the Rigveda. These **Angirasas** were not quite so punctilious about declarations of monotheism; if there were no other gods, **Indra**, being their Chief, would lose much of his glory. Moreover, he was Chief for a limited period only; after his term was up, someone else became the **Indra**; so he could not be said to have “created heaven and earth”, or even to be the “sovereign of the universe” (except temporarily). Then again, his followers—as for instance the followers of **Kripa**—preferred, as we saw, to conduct their worship through the medium of the icon or idol (**mūrti**): which meant that they ascribed a *form* to their deity. This practice was, of course, in opposition to the aniconic, sacrificial type of worship practised by the followers of the **Ahura-tkesha** or **Paouryatkasha**, the Older Teaching.

The **Daeva Yasnists**, moreover, looked more to their deity to “protect [them] from the external foe”; they did not lay as great a stress on moral rectitude as on their deity’s prowess in defending them from harm.³

Zarathushtra, then, grew up in such a cultural *milieu*. Being a spiritually inquisitive person—intensely so in fact: but then again, this doesn’t seem to have been too uncommon in that *milieu*!—he must have become aware of the religious, philosophical, and even social and political contradictions underlying these two trends. According to legend, he wanted to know the Right Path, the **erejush pantho**, for himself. He decided that he would learn from the Highest Source of sources Himself what the Truth was, and was determined to spare no effort in his spiritual quest.

Around the age of twenty,⁴ then, he left his parents’ home—

cases, intimidated enough) to do likewise himself—viz., the Professor whose course one is taking. The Academic *milieu* also plays down what I think is one of the most enjoyable and important faculties of the human mind, namely emotion: and though this is done in order to try and achieve a greater degree of objectivity—a laudable motive no doubt—its actual result is only to achieve a greater degree of dullness: one reason, perhaps, why University students traditionally turn for fun to frolic, their studies being so stultifying. This, surely, is *not* as it should be; and I am happy, in fact, to be able to conduct this study unencumbered by an overdose of erudition, and to poke fun every now and then at my less fortunate critics in Academia.

³ It is to be recalled that one only prays for protection if one is seeking something *from* the Deity, not when one is seeking to fulfil a responsibility *towards* the Deity. This was probably one of the main differences between the worshippers of Varuna and those of Indra, and subsequently between the followers of Zarathushtra and the **daeva-yasnists** he denounced: for, to paraphrase President Kennedy, Zarathushtra said, in effect, “Ask not what your God can do for you, ask what you can do for your God.”

⁴ Some people say “thirty”. Let’s not quibble: it hardly makes any difference!—Zarathushtra’s life-story seems, in fact, to have been considerably embellished over the ages; and we are—if we wish to be honest—faced with the conclusion, in view of all sorts of conflicting versions, that we really do not know much about him, from the biographical point of view anyway. All the same we do feel justified, because of the recurrence of certain themes in all the tales about him, in concluding that the main circumstances of his life as delineated here are fairly close to historical fact.—About his leaving home and going into the wilderness, though, this can hardly have been an uncommon practice in those days: among the Australian aboriginal people, for example, there is a custom that when a lad gets to the age of puberty—sixteen or thereabouts—he has to leave his clan and live off the land all by himself for a few years, hunting down his own food and finding his own water in the desert and kindling his own fire and all that sort of thing. Just as our best and brightest are proud these days to graduate with top honours from a prestigious university by the time they are twenty-five or so, I’m sure the best and brightest of Vedic times felt proud to graduate from such a “school of hard knocks”, which was probably a lot harder than Harvard: and Zarathushtra at all events may certainly be credited with having graduated *summa cum laude!*

so legend has it—and went up on a high mountain to undertake a life of hard *sâdhanâ* (spiritual discipline) and meditation, resolved to know the Truth, even if need be at the cost of his life. Tradition says that it was Mt **Damavand**, close to **Râji** (the city of his birth), more than 18,000 feet in altitude and hard enough to climb even with modern equipment, that was the site of his quest. Others think that he went further west, to Azarbaijan, or the Sabilian Hills, overlooking Lake Urumiya. My own personal fancy prefers to visualise him on Damavand, a majestic mountain of spectacular aspect, which looks as if it was created by Nature specially for a spiritual seeker.

Wherever it was, he spent, according to tradition, ten long years in his *sâdhanâ*. And the ardent zeal of **Asho** (“Righteous”) Zarathushtra did not fail to evoke a response from the Great Formless One. **Ahura Mazda** gave Zarathushtra His **darshan** (vision),⁵ and as the *Mundaka Upanishad* puts it, the First of the Gods taught **Atharvân**, “His eldest son”, His **Brahmavi-dyâ**, Divine Knowledge. It is this Knowledge and this Wisdom that is embodied in the *Gatha*.

As the *Rigveda* itself admits:

यज्ञैर्अथर्वा प्रथमः पथस्तते ततः सूर्यः वेन आजनि ।

Atharvân first chalked out the way of worship.

Rigveda 1.83.5

Let it not be protested by the casual student that to read into the *Mundaka Upanishad* and the *Rig Veda* references to the Prophet of Iran is too fanciful. As I shall try to point out, veiled (and even not-so-veiled) references to Zarathushtra and his teachings positively abound in the Indian scriptures. As we study further, we shall see how and also why this took place. But before we get to that point, let us first try and know something of the substance of **Ahura Mazda**’s Message to His Prophet, and through him to Humanity.

One of the main features that distinguishes the teaching of the *Gatha* is the enunciation of strict and uncompromising monotheism. Not that this was a new teaching; we have seen how the *Rigveda* had already announced that

एकं सदिप्राः बहुधा वदन्ति ।

Truth is one; the wise call It different names.

Rigveda 1.164.46

THAT had existed even before creation:

⁵ The word दर्शन **darshan** is a very common one in India, and only needs to be explained for the sake of non-Indians. Literally it means “sight” or “vision”, for it derives from the ancient root **drs** “[to] see”; and it is normally used only by Hindus, and that only for beatific visions, such as those of a great Spiritual Master or **Guru**. Parsis as a rule eschew this term, thinking it foreign to their faith, and forgetting (if they ever did know in the first place) that Zarathushtra himself has used it for the vision of **Ahura Mazda** (I have given details later). The idea of actually *seeing* God—even a formless God—is not peculiar to Aryan religions; for in the *Torah* too (*Exodus 33.18-23*) we find a passage describing how Moses saw the “back parts” of the **LORD** passing by, and was only spared the sight of His face in order that it might not kill him. Such passages—whether in eastern or western religions—cannot be held up as “proofs” of the anthropomorphic nature of the Deities of ancient peoples, any more than mention of “the right hand of God” in the New Testament (*Acts 7.55*) be taken likewise for the beliefs of the Apostles.—By the way, have you ever noticed that neither the Mosaic Commandments nor the Upanishads actually assert that God *is* formless, but only that *we*—His worshippers—*should* not (according to Moses) and indeed *cannot* (according to the Upanishads) *ascribe* a form to Him?

आनीदवातं स्वधया तदेकम्
तस्माद्धान्यन्नः परः किं चनास ॥

The ONE, Self-created, alone aspirated;⁶
Aside from It nothing had any existence.

Nāsadiya Sūkta of the Rigveda

In this day and age we are not impressed by monotheism all that much. In other times and climes too, men who have had the Vision of the Divine have testified to the Unity of God. Moses, in later ages, told the Jews: שמע ישראל יהוה אחד **Shema Israel YHVH Elohehu YHVH Ehad** “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is One.” The most basic tenet of Islam is **La ilahi il’Allah** “There is no god but God.” Even Lao Tzû, the most profound and mystical of Chinese Sages, declared (*Tao Teh Ching 39.1*) “In the beginning there was the One.”

Zarathushtra too, upon his attaining Realisation, announced the One-ness of **Mazda**:

Mazdao sakhare⁷ moirishto

(or, to put it in Vedic):

महद्दाः सस्वर स्मरिष्टम् ।

Mahad-dâh sa-svara smarishtam

Mazda alone is worthy of worship.

Gatha 29.4

Consider, however, the tremendous impact of this statement in historical perspective: *no other person before Zarathushtra* had made such a powerful declaration of monotheism! *All* the other Sages mentioned above lived *after* Zarathushtra. Zarathushtra was the first Prophet we know of, who spoke of monotheism in the most uncompromising of terms.

Moreover, **Asura Mahad-dâ**,⁸ in keeping with all the **Asuras** of those days, was also *formless*. (Well of course—as we have seen, *all Asuras* were formless!) His worship was not to be conducted *via* a **mûrti** or idol; in fact, the idol was to be smitten out of the Congregation of Zathushtrians:

Kada ajem murthim ahya maghahya urupayeinti

When shall I smite the idol out of this Congregation?

Gatha 48.10

⁶ The idea of *Truth*—which to us is an abstract Principle—actually *breathing* like a person, sounds to our ears incongruous; but we at times forget that our associations have been shaped (or perhaps I should say *mis-shaped*) by millennia of education and culture; and that what is virtually “self evident” to us is hardly so to the more unspoiled mind. Let me illustrate this phenomenon—upon which we shall expand later—with an anecdote. Once while working as a shepherd on a Kibbutz in Israel I got into some conversations with a fellow shepherd, a Beduin by the name of Muhammad. He was quite a taciturn fellow, and would at times come out with statements which I in my stupid sophistication would think of as non-sequiturs; and one day he asked me, right out of the blue, if I knew how and why rain fell. I, thinking to enlighten this simple individual, gave him the full scientific explanation: starting with the sun shining on the sea and water vapour going up in the atmosphere and forming clouds, which being carried over land by aeolian forces, and raised to a high enough altitude ... you know, the whole *spiel*. He listened to my long lecture in silence: and I was getting painfully aware as I went along that it was becoming a most reproachful silence. At the end of my talk he asked me: “Have you never heard of **Allah**?”

⁷ The Gathic word **sakhare** is सस्वर **sa-svarah** in Vedic: “One Who goes by Himself; Singular; Unique”. It comes from the root **svr** “[to] go”. The cognate in the Rig Veda is **sasvartâ**, as in this sentence: यत् सस्वर्ता जिहिलिरे यद् आविः (*Rigveda 7.54.5*) “What the Unique One conceals, or what is manifest”.—I give this derivation because scholars are not all agreed upon the meaning of the term **sakhare**, even though they certainly are on Zarathushtra’s monotheism. I give the rendering here on the right as one admitted to be possible, and one which certainly reflects the spirit of the Gatha; and is consonant, moreover, with the purport of the verse in which it occurs. (The only reason I mention this at all, in fact, is to silence Academics, who are so picky and critical that when reading their works or arguing with them, one is often reminded of Bernard Shaw’s aphorism that “those who can, do; while those who cannot, teach”).

⁸ The root **dâ** can be taken to signify “creator”, as in the *Hiranyagarbha Sūkta* of the Rigveda: स दाधार पृथिविं द्यामुतेमाम् “He created the earth and these heavens”. Thus Indian visitors to Iran, being well acquainted with the term **Mahad** (meaning “The Great One”, may well have taken **Mazda** to mean **Mahad-dâ**, *i.e.*, “The Great Creator”! We shall have more to say about this matter later.

Not just the idol; Zarathushtra was evidently not fond of an over-abundance of rites, rituals and ceremonies either; he declared that The Great One was to be realised through Love alone, and that too by people of all castes and creeds—even the **Deva Yānists** worshipped only Him, if they but knew, when Love was in their hearts:

**Ahya cha khaetush yasat
ahya verejenem mat airyamna
ahya daeva. Mahmi manoi
Ahurahya urvajema Mazdao**

Him the **khetu**⁹ worships; Him the **vrijana**⁹ and the **āryamna**⁹ worship; [even] the **Daeva[-yasnists?]** worship [only] Him. To my mind, it is [naught but] Love for **Ahura Mazda**.

Gatha 32.1

This was also the first time that **Bhakti**—devotion, intense love for the Divine—had been enunciated by a world teacher! Before Zarathushtra, not even the Vedas had mentioned the Love as the Way unto the Divine. But to Zarathushtra, Love, whether for or of God, was a very real and concrete thing, as real as the love of a friend, a brother, a father:¹⁰

Urvato varata pata va Mazda Ahura

Thou Art the Friend, the Brother, [and] the Father, O Great Spirit [of them all].

Gatha

In light of the above, let us try to visualise the impact that Zarathushtra's teaching had on those around him. On the one hand, there were the **Devayānists**, who worshipped through the medium of the idol, who laid stress on rites, rituals and ceremonies, who had a predilection for the caste system,¹¹ who flourished in the eastern part of the Aryan Land. On the other hand, there were those who stuck more closely to the original teaching, the **Paourya-tkessa**, who continued worshipping through the medium of the Fire as their forefathers had done, who had a predilection for Father **Varuna** the All-Wise **Asura**, who laid great stress on **अषम् asham** or **ऋतम् rtam**, “Righteousness”, who followed the “Way of the Fathers”. It is easy to see that Zarathushtra's Message, the **Mazda Yasna**, had a great affinity with the **Paourya-tkessa**, whereas between the followers of Zarathushtra and the worshippers of **Indra** there could be little meeting ground.

This “**Deva-Asura War**” was obviously a phenomenon re-

⁹ The terms **khaetu**, **verejenem** and **airyamna** apparently designated people belonging to three different groups. Some scholars think they signified the three upper castes among the Aryans of Iran—corresponding to the Indian **vaishya**, **kshatriya** and **brāhmin**; others think otherwise. We need not enter into the controversy here, since it is not relevant to the point we are trying to make. (Some further points regarding the caste system have been made in margin note No.11 on this page, where the reader may find some interesting facts).

¹⁰ Many Christians are of the firm belief that the concept of God as Father originated with Christ; and so they are often hurt and offended to have “pagans” prove to them that they are quite mistaken in this regard. In point even of Biblical fact the idea existed in Judaism well before Jesus's time (see for instance **Isaiah 63.16**); and Jesus himself, in employing such terms as “Our Father which art in heaven”, was simply enunciating a phrase—אֲבִינוּ שֶׁבַח שָׁמַיִם **avinu shebashamayim**—which happened to be currently on the lips of large numbers of Jews in his days, and which is found in many contemporary Jewish texts. And as for the East, it had carried the concept much farther, and brought in other family members into it too: the most important being, perhaps, God as Mother, as in the cult of **Durga** or **Kālī**, and as Spouse, as in **Vaishnavism** and **Sufism** (upon which I have expanded in subsequent pages). All these trends, however, find their earliest expression in Vedic and Gathic Hymns—as we shall see elsewhere in this study too.

¹¹ Many people believe that the division of a people into separate hereditary castes according to their function in society is a peculiarly Hindu custom, and are not aware that it has existed in several societies in history—and not all of them were Aryan. The mediæval Japanese, for instance, had developed a similar system around the cult of the **bushi** or warrior, for at one time a **samurai** could only call himself so if he was born in a **samurai** family (and for this reason Hideyoshi, the greatest military genius Japan ever produced, who happened to be born a peasant, was never allowed to assume the title **Shōgun** or “Supreme Military Dictator”—which was reserved for **samurai** only—and had to content himself with the inferior appellation **Taikō** or “Great Prince”). Among ancient Aryans a caste system of one sort or another was, in fact, common all the way from the Bay of Bengal to the Bay of Biscay; for the Celts, for instance, as Peter Berresford Ellis tells us in his book **The Druids**, “As the ancient Celts emerged into recorded history and became known to the Classical writers, it is clear that in their society four

sulting from the mutual incompatibility of these two cults. The multiple **Daevas** on the one hand, and the One Great **Asura** on the other, were clearly not going to get along too well with each other. The Indian scriptures have symbolised this clash of ideals in the poetic form of the well-known war between the **Devas** and the **Asuras**. The outcome of the war was, in a sense, predictable. The **Devas** gained the upper hand in India, while **Asura Mazda** emerged triumphant in Iran.

A **Devayânist** cries out in the *Rigveda*:

परं मृत्योः अनुपरेहि पंथाम् यस् ते स्व इतरो देवयानात् ।
चक्ष्मते श्रुणवते ते ब्रवीमि मा नः प्रजां रीरिषो मोत वीरान् ॥

May the other cult [*i.e.*, the **Pitr-yâna**, the cult that is *other* than the **Devayâna**] be utterly ruined. We will worship a god who has eyes and ears.

Rigveda 10.18.1

On the other side of the River, Zarathushtra denounces the **Devas**:

At yush daeva vispaongho
akat manangho sta chithrem;
yas cha va'o mash yazaita
drujashcha pairimatoish cha.
Shyomam a'ipi daibitana
ya'ish asrudum bumyao haptaithe

O ye **Daevas** all,
Ye are progeny of the Evil Mind;
Whoso fondly serves you
Serves but Lie and Error.
Your deceit spreads all round
For which ye are notorious
The seven worlds over.

Gatha 32.3

A clear declaration of war on each side!

Mind you, by and large it was not a war that was fought with arms; these people were too enlightened a folk to imagine that ideological, philosophical, religious and spiritual questions could be resolved with the help of the sword.¹² It was a war of *ideas*, and even while it was being waged, the **Bhrigus** and the **Angirasas** could, and did, live side by side. Thus we find that as far west as Asia Minor the **Devas** were worshipped by Hittites as late as the second millennium BCE, as evidenced from an inscription found at Bogasköy near Ankara in Turkey, bearing the

main classes had developed, as they had done initially in other Indo-European societies: the intelligentsia, the warriors, the producers of goods and the menials or manual workers. These classes paralleled the Hindu ones of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra". It was Zarathushtra's innovative teaching that first challenged this typical Aryan trend; and although today the concept of equality between man and his fellow-man is so common as to be taken for granted, it ought to be appreciated that it was not the framers of the Declaration of Independence, but the Persian Prophet, who first enunciated it in unambiguous terms.

¹² I have expanded upon this idea in much greater detail in a later chapter. The notion that religious beliefs were something to fight—physically—over is somewhat recent among Aryan peoples, and in pre-Christian times they would have found such ideas risible. We shall not expand upon it here, since—as Solomon says—there is a time and a season for everything; let us therefore wait for the right moment to discuss the implications of this extremely important Aryan trait, and the enormous effect it has exerted upon the world's history.

declaration of King Subbilibiama of Mittani,¹³, here given in transliterated form:

Mitrasya ilani Varunasya ilani Indra ilani Nasatya anya

The mention of **Indra**, along with other gods, gives us a hint that the cult was very likely that of the **Deva**-worshippers or **Angirasas**.

There were even attempts at peace-making. The **Rishi** Agastya, for instance, addresses **Indra** as follows:

किं नु इन्द्र जिघांससि भ्रातरः मबूतस एव
तेभिः कल्पस्व सअधुया मा नः समरणे वधी ।

How now, **Indra**, why art thou so inimical [to the invisible gods]? They are thy brothers! Be kind to them. Do not fight and slay us!

Rigveda 1.170.2

... but **Indra** would not be pacified:

किं नु भ्रातरगस्त्य सखा सन्न अतिमन्यसे
विद्या हि ते यथा मनो अस्मभ्यम् इन् न दित्ससि ।

How is it, brother **Agastya**, that though thou art a friend, thou dost disdain us? I know thy mind! It is not inclined toward us [*i.e.*, you have greater love for the **Asuras**].

Rigveda 1.170.3

This war of ideas was fought mainly on the battlefield of thought. Attempts were made to convert eminent teachers of the rival doctrine:

यः अक्रिरसः शौनहोत्रो मृत्या भार्गव शौनकः अभवत् ।

When the Angirasa **Shunahotra** died, the **Bhârgava Shaunaka** came into being.

Sâyana Bhâsya, 2nd Mandala

In plain language this verse can be taken to mean, that an **Angirasa** Sage, **Shunahotra** by name, was converted by the **Bhrigus**; and when he was converted, he changed his name to **Shaunaka**. This was evidently a remarkable success, for **Shunahotra** is identified with the Rishi **Gritsamada**, reputed to be the compiler of the second Book of the **Rigveda**, and therefore a most eminent Seer. (That an **Angirasa** could become a **Bhârgava** shows that strictly speaking these were two *cults*, not two

¹³ The **Mittani** were a people, Hittite by linguistic affiliation, of whom the best-known city-state was Troy. The Trojans, in the *Iliad*, are portrayed by Homer as being in religion and custom no different from the Greeks; but as the Bogasköy archeological discoveries indicate, there must have been differences between them to some extent, at least in the names of the gods worshipped. Nevertheless, the customs observed by the Aryans of India and Iran did not stop abruptly at the “Turkish” border, but gradually and almost imperceptibly blended into Greek customs. This is also understandable since the Greeks themselves—as pointed out by H.S. Robinson and K. Wilson in their *Encyclopaedia of Myths and Legends of All Nations*—“evidently descended from tribes who had come westwards from the early home of the Indo-Europeans in South-Central Asia”. The notion that Europe was either demographically or geographically a separate entity from Asia was not entertained by the ancients; and it was only more recent Europeans, intent on keeping Europe Christian, who promoted the concept we now take for granted: that Europe is a “continent”. In actual fact it is no more a continent than China is, or India for that matter; and it is only the European bias that education has acquired in recent centuries which perpetrates this out-and-out lie. All the same it is a lie that—in Goebbels’s words—has been repeated a thousand times, and thereby turned into a truth (of sorts); and so we need not obliterate all references to Europe in our study. It is, however, necessary to keep in mind that strictly speaking “Europe” is a myth, and that in ancient times even that myth was unknown. (The myth itself asserts, by the way, that **Europa**—the girl after whom Europe is named—was herself not even European, but was the daughter of the King of Tyre, which lies in Asia: telling testimony indeed!)

clans. It is understandable, though, that members of any particular clan would normally also adhere to the same cult.)

The **Deva Yânists** were also not asleep. They converted some Sages of Iran, as testified unto by the the following verse:

बहवि समाः अकरमन्तरस्मिन इन्द्र वृणानः पितरं जहामि ।
अग्निः सोमः वरुणस्ते च्यवन्ते पर्यावद् राष्ट्रं तदवामि आयन् ॥

Many a year have I lived with them; I shall now accept **Indra** and abjure the Father. **Varuna**, along with his fire and his **Soma**, has retreated. The old regime has changed. I shall accept the new order.

Rigveda 10.12.4

Some, less disposed to dispute ideological matters, and of a conciliatory bent, tried to assimilate both cults into one:

नू मत ब्रथानि अग्ने उच शशार्वि त्वं मघवद् सुषदः ।
रातो स्याम उभयाम आ ते यूयं पात स्वस्तिभि सदानः ॥

Agni,¹⁴ teach us our prayer. Bless the **Mâghavats** [*i.e.*, those who belonged to the **Magha** or Congregation of Zarathushtra] also. May both the communities be under thy protection. Help us always to weal.

Rigveda 7.1.20

It is obvious that the two communities, both having emerged out of the same stock of original beliefs, were living together in close proximity, and moreover had no intention of resorting to armed conflict for the resolution of theological differences—at least not through large scale war.

What to speak of Iran and India, the **Angirasas** and the **Bhri-gus** lived together even in Greece, where—as pointed out by Macdonnell—they seem to have been known respectively as the **Angigos** as the **Phlegyai**.¹⁵

That it was the Persians who were inimical to **Indra** can be seen by the following line, spoken by an **Indra**-worshipper:

सं मां तपन्ति अभितः सपत्निरिव पर्शवः ।

The Persians oppress me, as a co-wife does a co-wife.

Rigveda 1.105.8

And **Indra** swore vengeance on the Persian **Asuras**:

खले न पर्शान् प्रतिहन्मि भूरि
किं मां निन्दन्ति शात्रवो अनिन्द्राः ।

¹⁴ We already said something about **Agni** earlier, but it is a very fascinating term, and has many ramifications; and thus we shall much more to say about it in the course of our study. One interesting historical fact is that the Hittites, who lived in what is now Turkey, employed a similar term—**Agnis**—which not only meant “fire” but seems also, as in Sanskrit, to have been the name of a deity. Its is strange that the term established itself in India, but not in neighbouring Persia (where the word for “fire” was usually **atar**, and where no cognate of **agni** ever took root, even though some scholars think a word similar to it was in use in the most ancient days); and yet the same word finds itself firmly established among the Trojans but again not among the neighbouring Greeks; while the Romans, on the other side of the Greeks, knew all about it, as **IGNIS** ... while the transalpine Gauls did not; and that it survives to this day (as **ugnis**) among the Lithuanians but not among the Germans. For this linguistic peculiarity—perhaps it is only interesting to linguists, but to linguists it is very interesting indeed—I have not the remotest explanation, and would be grateful for any light thrown upon the matter.

¹⁵ Some people with whom I have spoken have expressed surprise at my statements about the ancient links between India and Greece; and I am in turn surprised at *them*, for it is—or should be—well known even among Europeans that one of the most celebrated of Greek philosophers, Pythagoras, had some contact with India (whether first- or second-hand), and as a result of which had picked up his ideas of *metempsychosis* or Transmigration of Souls, which many of his disciples preached on European soil, and to which even Shakespeare has alluded. The land of Greece was well known to Indians, and they had a (Sanskrit) name for it as well: **यवन** **Yavana**, a corruption of **Ionía** (an ancient Greek name for Greece). After Alexander’s conquests, as a matter of fact, there even grew up a Graeco-Buddhist cultural tradition in Afghanistan, called the **Gandhara** (after **Kandahar**, the principal city of that region at the time), which has left behind for our enjoyment Buddhist statuary sculpted in impeccable Greek style.

I shall crush them like leaves on a grinding stone: how dare
these incorporeal [अनिन्द्र] rogues vilify me?

Rigveda 10.48.7

But Zarathushtra was made of sterner stuff: he was not to be intimidated by **Indra**'s threats. He went on resolutely with the task of propagating the Good Religion. And **Indra** soon found to his grief that the whole of Iran had adopted **Mazda Yasna**!

Indra was so important that out of the thousand-odd Hymns of the *Rigveda*, two hundred and fifty are addressed to him, while for **Varuna** there are only twelve; **Vishnu** has a mere five, while **Rudra** is restricted to three, and by his far more common present name, **Shiva**, he is not mentioned even once.¹⁶ **Indra** is the most highly lauded of the Vedic deities; he is hailed and feared as the Great Warrior:

Through fear of thee upon the earth is shaken
E'en the immoveable—the ether, all things;
The earth, the heavens, mountains, forests tremble:
The firm foundation trembles at thy going.

Rigveda 6.31.2

“He is the mighty unrestricted lord and master, King of the worlds and people; not even the heavens can restrain the Mighty's might; the work he sets about he accomplishes, and no one is able to hinder him. In his two hands he holds the nations and their possessions; he animates the spirit of heroes in battle against their enemies, though unnoticed by the wise and by the hosts, numerous as the stars.” The opposition which a repudiation of **Indra** was likely to stir up, from a religious, philosophical, sociological and even political point of view, must have seemed simply appalling, but Zarathushtra's courage was equal to the occasion. **Mahârishi** Zarathushtra asserted simplified, aniconic monotheism, not by words alone, but by deeds; he established the **Magha**, the world's first Church or Spiritual Community,¹⁷ for the confirmation and propagation of his teachings. It was bold challenge thrown in the face of the religious establishment of his time.

However, it must be noted that the Message of **Mazda** was not altogether an unknown one to people of the time. Zarathushtra's protest seems directed against the innovations—and especially the elaborate and ritualistic iconolatry leaning toward polytheistic tendencies, and a disregard for moral principles—of the relatively more recent **Daeva-Yasnists**; but his doctrine had much in common with the pure ancestral **Paourya-tkaesha**.

Yet **Mazda Yasna** was also not quite the same old wine in a

¹⁶ This statement needs to be qualified somewhat, for the word **Shiva** is used at least once in the Veda to indicate a deity—or at least such an interpretation is possible. However, it is true that not a single one of the Vedic Hymns is specifically addressed to **Shiva** by name. **Rudra**, of course, is equated with **Shiva** by all Hindus; but it is by no means clear that the Vedic Aryans did likewise. In point of fact the worship of **Rudra** as **Shiva** owes its inception, as we shall show in a later Chapter, to the impact of **Mazda Yasna** on Hinduism. (It is also true—as we shall mention in passing later—that it is in addition a result of the interaction of between the Aryans and the **Vratyas** or non-Aryan aboriginal peoples of India; but as that interaction is somewhat outside the scope of this study, we shall ourselves not go too deeply into it).

¹⁷ The word “Church” used here is quite an accurate translation; for this English word is itself a translation (via the Greek **ἐκκλησία** *ekklesia*) of the Hebrew original **קהל** *kahal* which literally means “group of people”, or “community” (and it is implied in that phrase, of course, that they are devoted to some sort of Spiritual activity or goal). Many people believe that a religion cannot exist without a “church” or some sort, and it comes somewhat as a surprise to them to learn that neither Hinduism nor Islam (among other religions) possesses a Church (in the sense of an organised body of adherents). Zarathushtra, as far as we are aware, was the first religious leader to realise the potential of such a system (especially its political potential); and should thus be credited with having invented this concept too.

new bottle. Zarathushtra, for instance, did not see fit to retain the name **Varuna**; and this might have been because **Varuna** had been called the “Friend of **Indra**”:

अनु वृषु वरुण इन्द्रसखा ।

Varuna is the friend of **Indra** in the heavens.

Rigveda 7.34.24

... and often, when **Indra** or Varuna was worshipped, his friend (**मित्र Mitra** or **Mithra**)¹⁸ was worshipped along with him. This is the origin of the name **Mithra** who later developed into a deity in his own right, and whose cult the Romans adopted in large numbers, and carried as far west as the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. However, in Vedic times **Mitra** was not yet an independent god, for in the **shruti**, although we find **Indra** or **Varuna** (and many other gods too) often mentioned alone, we seldom find this to be the case with **Mitra**. The Vedic **Mitra** was only mentioned in the company of his “friend”:

शं नो मित्रं शं वरुणः ।

Peace be unto us, **Mitra**; peace be unto us, **Varuna**.

Rigveda; and also Taittiriya Upanishad 1.1.1

Zarathushtra gave a totally *different* name to the Supreme Being. Perhaps he did not want any loophole left through which **Indra** could re-enter, and thereby corrupt, his strictly monotheistic religion. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that he gave the Almighty one, and *only* one, name, albeit double-barrelled: *viz.*, **Ahura Mazda**. Never in his **Gathas** does he address, or refer to, God except by this name.¹⁹ In that sense, then, his monotheism is stricter than any the world has ever seen, whether before or after his time.

Compare, for example, this approach with that of Judaism and Islam—the strictest monotheistic faiths after Zarathushtra’s. In both of these faiths the Supreme Being is called by several names. The **Torah**, the most ancient (and also the most sacred) portion of the Jewish Bible, itself calls God by at least three names, יהוה YHVH, אלהים Elohim, and אֵל שַׁדַּי El Shaddai. Subsequently Judaism came to address the LORD using a great number of epithets: הקדוש ברוך הוא Ha Kadosh Baruch Hu “The Holy One, Blessed be He”, צור ישראל Tsor Yisra’el “The Rock of Israel”, המקום Ha-Makom “The Place”, and several others. The **Qur’an**, besides of course calling Him **Allah**, also calls Him, in its very first **sura** or Chapter, the **Fatiha**, by the term **Rab**.²⁰ The word **Al Rahman** “The Compassionate” also came to be

¹⁸ This term, and the deity it names, is one of the most interesting in the study of religions. In antiquity as old as the Vedas, it survives in our own days as, for instance, the name of the Buddha-to-be, **Maitreya**—in which form it has spread as far east as Japan; while the Romans, as we said, took it as far west as Wales. Literally the name **Mitra**—as in modern Hindi—simply means “friend”. The nature of the deity denoted by it, however, has varied over time and space so greatly that it rivals **Soma** in strangeness (see also page ..., margin). The Roman **Mithra** was usually linked with the bull-sacrifice or **Taurobolium** which had, possibly, its origins in the Cretan cult of the **Minotaur**, and of which traces survive, presumably, in the Spanish bull-fight; but **Mitra** or **Mithra** (the **-t-** sound, though written differently by different peoples, was probably pronounced the same by them) was more often connected with the Sun (as for instance in the Roman term **SOL INVICTUS**) or with light (as the later Persian form of his name, **Meher** “light”, indicates, and as the late Shah of Iran—the one deposed by the Ayatollah—used to grandiloquently describe himself: **Aryameher** “Light of the Aryans”). One commonly used Hindustani term for expressing gratitude, *i.e.*, saying “thank you”, is derived from the name **Mithra**: मेहरबानी meherbānī, which more-or-less means, “May [the Lord’s] light be upon you”. **Mithraism** (in its Persian form) was to be found in India too; and in Asia Minor a number of rulers at one time or another have called themselves **Mithridates** “Son of **Mithra**”—in fact *all* the rulers of one of the ancient Greek States at one time called themselves so.

¹⁹ This statement needs to be qualified, however, by pointing out that there is a word in the **Gathas**—**Vahma**—which seems to correspond to the Hindu concept of ब्रह्म **Brahma**, “The Absolute”. This term, in the sense in which it is used in Hinduism—it is, by the way, quite different from ब्रह्मा **Brahmā**, The Creator, whose name ends with a long **-ā-** sound, while the former is pronounced almost as **Brahm**—this “Absolute” of Vedism is very special in religious thought, and in western belief finds its closest parallels only in such relatively recent terms as the “Godhead” of mediæval Christian mystics (though in China, on the other hand, it is closely paralleled by the concept of the **Tao**, which has existed for at least than two and a half millennia). In Hinduism it is an even more ancient idea, for it is used in the **Yajurveda** itself (of which it is actually the closing word). The idea underlying **Brahma** can perhaps best be explained to westerners by saying that while God is a *personal* concept, **Brahma** is quite *im-personal*, and denotes, not a conscious Deity interfering in human affairs as and when it pleases Him, but a

used, among some Muslims, as an alternative name for **Allah**, as did **Al-Haqq** “The Reality” and **Al-Malik** “The King”. And it is a known historical fact that when people have started speaking in terms of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, they have been accused by others of tendencies towards polytheism. Perhaps Zarathushtra was aware of this danger. He insisted on one and only one name for the One and Only.

And he was obviously particular about the spiritual connotations of the name he chose: “The Great, Formless Spirit; Creator of the World and Wise Lord.”²¹ Zarathushtra did not choose a mundane name like **Agni** (“Fire”), **Vâyu** (“Wind”), or even **Savitur** (“Sun”)—all of these common Aryan names of gods, and the first and the last of them very important even to the **Paouryātkaesha**. No; he selected an appellation which carried the highest spiritual connotation he could think of.

Innovative as this tactic was, however, the term “**Ahura Mazda**” was all the same not one that sounded strange to the **Varuna**-worshipper of his day. The term **Ahura** or **Asura**, with its connotation “formless”, was already current at the time; and as for **Mazda**, why, there happened to be a common Vedic word sounding very much like it, which in the Indian style of pronunciation was articulated as **Vedhas**.

This word **Vedhas** was not new coinage. **Rudra** had been addressed as **Vedhas**:

अषाढाय महमानाय वेधसे ।

Ashâdhâya Mahamânâya Vedhase

Rigveda 7.46.1

...**Mitra** had been addressed as **Vedhas**:

राजा सुक्षत्रो अजानिष्ट वेधाः ।

Râjâ sukshatro ajânishta Vedhâ

Rigveda 3.59.4

...**Agni** had been addressed as **Vedhas**:

कीलालपे सोमपृष्टाय वेधसे ।

Kilâlape Somaprishtâya Vedhase

Rigveda 10.9.41

...and even **Soma** had been addressed as **Vedhas**:

प्र पूनानाय वेधसे सोमाय वच उद्धतम् ।

more abstract something, like an underlying substratum of reality.

²⁰ In Hebrew this same Semitic root has given rise to the word **Rabbi**. This, by the way, is a term by no means lightly employed even in Hebrew: for Moses, alone of all the Prophets, is called by Jews **Moshe Rabenu**, “Moses our **Rabbi**”—his eminence in Judaism being so much greater than that of the other Prophets of Israel that the term **Navi** “Prophet” is regarded as not quite exalted enough for him. In this respects, moreover, the term **Rabbi** (or **Rab**, of which **Rabbi** is a derivative) is to some extent paralleled by the Iranian term **Ratu**; for we shall see later, the word **Ratu** has been employed in Zoroastrianism both for Zarathushtra and for God.

²¹ As to the various meanings of the term, we shall say something later. At this stage it is perhaps sufficient to indicate that although scholars differ as to the meaning of the compound name **Ahura Mazda**, it is highly possible (see Chapter 7), that in fact *all* the differing meanings are correct, in one way or another!

Pra punânâya Vedhase Somâya vacha uddhatam

Rigveda 9.103.1

As a matter of fact, the term **Vedhas**, when used in association with the term **Asura**, referred to the Highest Lord:

पतङ्गमुक्तं असुरस्य मायया हृदा पश्यन्ति मनसा विपश्चितः ।
समुद्रे अन्तः कवयो विचक्षते मरीचीनाम् पदम् इच्छन्ति वेधसः ॥

Through the Grace of the **Asura** the Sages see clearly in their hearts the Soul flying up like a butterfly [**patangam**]. Their vision pierces the depths of the oceans. They desire from **Vedhas** the staus of “The Enlightened” [**marîchî**].

Rigveda 10.117.1

A Hymn composed, as its initial verse announces, in **Ilaspad** (Iran?), indicates that **Agni**, the Fire, is the special **hotar** or priest of **Vedhas**:

त्वामिदत्र वृणते त्वायवो होतारं अग्ने विदयेषु वेधसः ।

In this assembly, O **Agni**, the people elect thee alone to be the priest of **Vedhas**.

Rigveda 10.91.9

So it is evident that the name **Vedhas** was quite familiar in Iran—and not only there, but all over the known world of those days, if the *Rigveda* may be believed:

विदुष्टे विश्वा भुवनानि तस्य ता प्रब्रवीषि वरुणाय वेधस ।

All the worlds know Him; [it’s just that] some call **Varuna** by the name “**Vedhas**”.

Rigveda 4.42.7

Now it so happens that this term **Vedhas**, when phonetically transposed into the Iranian pronunciation, becomes **Mazda**, as illustrated in the steps indicated below:

(1) As the **Nirukta**—one of the oldest Vedic lexicons (and probably one of the oldest dictionaries in the world)²² tells us, the word **Vedhas** is interchangeable with **Medhas** (*Nirukta 3.15*);

(2) The **-e-** sound in the word **Medhas** then changes to **-az-** in the Zend style of pronunciation—as it does in words like **नेदिश्ट** **nedishta** “nearest” (Sanskrit) which becomes **nazdisht** in Iran)—and this turns **Medhas** into **Mazdhas**;

(3) The **-s-** ending of Sanskrit elides, according to the gram-

²² I know it is hard for people like us, in whose minds “education” is invariably equated with “literacy”, to grasp the idea of a *memorised* dictionary; and so we can’t believe our ears when told that in ancient times India possessed not just one but *several* such! In addition to the **Nighantu** mentioned here, there is the **Unâdi** (mentioned earlier) and the **Amara Kosha** (from which we quoted earlier too). Many such didactic works—included among them is **Pânîni**’s treatise on grammar which we spoke about in the *Introduction*—were set in verse for ease of memorisation; and although in this day and age written versions of all of them exist, the classic way of learning them even now is by rote, as schoolchildren learn multiplication tables. (In India, by the way, such mathematical tables include not just integers but fractions as well, and as a very young boy I had memorised some of them: which goes to show how important memorisation has always been in India, and still is). The importance of the spoken—as opposed to the written—word was always very great in all ancient Aryan cultures; and perhaps this is the reason why western orientologists do not credit India with as great an antiquity as, say, the Mesopotamian cultures (for they find no *written* evidence).—By the way, one question always on the minds of sceptics needs to be addressed: how textual reliability of oral material could be assured over many generations. I do not know how the Druids did it; but as far as the **shruti** was concerned, it was secured by a very ingenious method of memorisation, in which each passage was repeated aloud in three separate ways: first, in a straightforward manner; then secondly, with the syllables alternating (as, symbolically, **abc bcd cde def etc.**); and lastly in another similarly scrambled-up manner. Of course the second and the third memorisations made no sense; but they served as checks against the first, which did make sense. The extreme rigour of such a system against corruption cannot be matched by any method of writing short of computerisation; for errors are bound to creep in while copying by hand—errors which would have no chance whatsoever of slipping by the ear accustomed to hear the Vedas properly recited in the above-mentioned three ways. The Indian system is certainly much more reliable in the *very* long run; for the oldest Biblical texts we possess—and those only a few fragments—go back a mere two thousand years, all others having long ago crumbled to dust; and thus we have only inference to assure us that Daniel or David prayed from the same **Torah** which Moses brought down from Sinai—and which may not even be the one in use now. It is true, of course, that the method of Vedic recitation outlined above is more recent than the Vedas themselves, and thus as regards their *very* original words we cannot be certain that they have survived unchanged. But then, as I shall point out later too, those that have survived

metrical rule स्नोर अन्त्योर लोपः (from the *Katantra Chanda Sutra*) which says that Vedic nouns often drop the final **-s-** and **-n-** sounds optionally, thus rendering **Mazdhas** into **Mazdha**;

(4) And, since there is no **-dh-** sound in Iranian, the word in the ancient Persian tongue becomes **Mazda**.

Whether Zarathushtra *himself* derived the name **Mazda** from the term **Vedhas**, or not, is irrelevant—and in fact scholars are divided on the question. What *is* relevant for our argument—and here the scholars *do* agree—is that *once this name had been given out to the public*, it became *accepted* by them in preference to the earlier name **Varuna**, because the term **Vedhas**—or rather its Iranian equivalent—was obviously already well known in Iran, particularly as an epithet of **Varuna**. In other words, “**Mazda**” is the newer, Zarathushtrian name for the age-old proto-Aryan, Indo-European **Asura Varuna** or **Uranus**, the first of the **dityas** or sons of the Sun, the ancestor of **Dyaus** or **Zeus**,²³ the upholder of the moral order and All-Wise Lord of All He Surveys.

All serious scholars of Zend now accept this; indeed we have Prof. Max Müller²⁴ himself—than whom no more august authority can be named—telling us that “**Vedhas** came to be invoked as **Mazda** in the land of Iran”. Others say the same thing: Manicol writes that “the evidence that identifies **Varuna** with **Mazda** is too strong to be rejected”, while Bloomfield declares: “It seems to me an almost unimaginable feat of scepticism to doubt the original identity of **Varuna** and **Mazda**”. Worshipers of Father **Varuna**, then, were converted to **Mazda Yasna** in droves.

Not, mind you, that it was an easy task. When—as the Parsis like to think—Zarathushtra came down from the holy mountain with the Holy Book in his hands,²⁵ he could find nary a person to receive and accept his teaching. His first real disciple was his own cousin, **Maidhyomaha**, and in fact for many years he remained his *only* disciple. It was only after Zarathushtra managed to convert King **Vistasp** of Balkh, and his family and court as well, that his Message gained widespread acceptance, and that because the King’s subjects probably felt they should follow their sovereign’s example. Perhaps Zarathushtra knew that if his teaching was to have a chance of spreading among members of the public in a wide way, he would have to get it done through someone in a position of power; and maybe it was with this thought in mind that he approached the King, knowing, in all probability, that he was entering a veritable lions’ den, where influential people inimical to the purport of his Message had the ear of the monarch, and where they might well use this influence to get him falsely thrown into prison—as did actually happen—or maybe even killed—as, fortunately, did not; at least not

are the only ones that possessed a kind of internal quality of easy memorisation and accurate repetition (all others having long since been distorted beyond recognition, and as a result, in all likelihood, completely forgotten).

²³ In fact, an ancestor twice removed. According to Greek Mythology, **Ouranos** (Latin **URANUS**) gave birth to **Chronos** (called **SATURN** by the Romans), who in turn gave birth to **Zeus**. Of course the word **chronos** also means “Time”, and it could well have been this relationship which prompted Zoroastrian theologians of a later age to postulate the notion of **Zervane Akarne** or “Boundless Time”, as being something almost on a par with **Ahura Mazda** Himself.

²⁴ Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), the greatest Indologist the West has ever produced (and possibly the greatest it ever *will* produce, for his work far eclipses that of all subsequent western indologists). A German by birth, he did most of his study of eastern cultures at Oxford, England: and amazingly enough, never once in his entire life had the opportunity to set foot on Indian soil. He pioneered the linguistic analysis of religions, and I feel proud to be following, in this book, his footsteps; and though one need not agree with him in everything he says, his transparent love and glowing admiration for India so strongly attracts Indians that in India his name has overshadowed the prestige even of the greatest literary giant Germany has ever produced: for the **Goethe Institut**, the cultural organisation of the Republic of Germany, which has branches in every country on earth, is in India alone known instead as **Max Müller Bhavan**.

²⁵ The mental picture of Zarathushtra descending the mountain holding a Holy Book, much like Moses holding his Tablets, seems to be firmly entrenched in the Parsi mind; and many of them might thus be offended to read that this could not possibly have happened, and that Zarathushtra was almost certainly quite illiterate (reading and writing not having been invented yet!) The astounding thing, though—and something to make Parsis proud of the Persian Prophet—is that he could compose such potent poetry without so much as setting pen to paper, when modern authors can’t come close even with their micro-computers, word-processors and on-line thesauruses. The entire Vedic tradition is in this respect one of the wonders of the literary world; for the Vedas as we know them, vast as they are, must surely be only a tiny fragment of the entire store of Vedic material ever composed—the bulk of it lost over the ages because of the immense difficulties of memorising it all.

before he had managed to convert the Royal family and court.

Nevertheless, the enmity did not die down even after the King's conversion. Whether it was on ideological grounds or not we shall perhaps never know for certain, but when Zarathushtra was 77 years of age, an assassin is said to have thrust a dagger into the Holiest Prophet of the epoch while this Most Righteous Man was praying in his Fire Temple before the Sacred Fire.²⁶ However, by that time his Message had already been accepted in one of the principal kingdoms of his age, and after that there was no stopping it, certainly not west of the Hindu Kush; for in spite of the scant number of those who formally profess his Faith today, the extent of Zarathushtra's influence on the West was so great that—as we shall soon demonstrate, and astounding as such a statement may appear at first blush—his teaching may be said in a sense to be ruling over West Asia still...and not only over West Asia, but over the whole Western world too: for the impact of his reformation on subsequent religions was of tremendous consequence. *All* the major religions that have stood the test of time—and particularly those that originated in West Asia—have adopted the main tenets of his teaching *in toto*; while those that did not, whether they were Aryan (like the Greek, Roman, Nordic and Celtic religions), Semitic (like the Babylonian, Assyrian and Canaanite faiths), or other than these (like the Egyptian), have all died out; and even Hinduism—which as we shall show developed out of an elaboration of the rival cult, the **Devayâna**—assimilated the spirit of his teaching without openly renouncing **Indra** and his retinue of three-and-thirty gods, by re-interpreting these deities in a new manner, mostly in the light of his message. And as we shall show later in this book, a very strong case can be made out for the argument that Hinduism is indirectly indebted to **Mazda Yasna** for two of the three members of its **Trimurti** or Triad, namely **Vishnu** and **Shiva**; and if so, then as the remarkable Zend scholar of Bengal, the late Shri Jatindra Mohan Chatterji, succinctly puts it in his *magnum opus* *The Hymns of Atharvan Zarathushtra*, “India cannot be much too indebted to Iran”.

We shall examine these topics in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

²⁶ The mental picture Zoroastrians have created for themselves of this incident too—like that of the one on the previous page—is probably just as anachronistic; for as we already mentioned earlier, the original Zoroastrian worship did not take place in temples at all, but in the open air; and if the Prophet was indeed praying when struck down, it was in all likelihood upon a broad meadow, or in a sylvan glade. Legend has it that he was killed by a Turanian or Mongolian, and this is quite possible, for the Huns have had a murderous reputation since time immemorial; but if this legend is true, it was probably no more ideologically motivated than the plunder and pillage perpetrated by the troops of Genghis Khan. (On the other hand, the assassin could well have been an Aryan, hired by the high priests of the time for the purpose; and the deed could have been pinned on a Mongolian suspect simply to divert attention from the true perpetrators).