3. Fire in the Vedas and the Ancient Iranian literature

A. Fire in the Vedas

It can be said that the holiness of 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 light of Sunshine and Sun heat. It keeps away bad dreams 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 the fiery wings.

The studies of ancient people’s belief indicate the relationship between people of the world in paying respect to the Fire and praise of it.

In the Ancient Greece the Fire Deity is called ‘Hastiā’, in the Ancient Rome, Vestā. The ancient Chinese people praised the deity of Fire as ‘Tasaovang’ and in Mexico as ‘Āztek’ and their Fire temples were the biggest temples\(^1\). From the ancient time paying respect to this useful element has been also existed among Aryan 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

\(^1\) Afifi R.; Mythology and Culture of Iran. P.408
\(^2\) Ibid. P.406
atmosphere as lighting and on the earth as the ordinary Fire. In this period the praise of the Fire was in the centre and the religious ritual was done by the clergy’s cast who is called Āthrarvan. The Fire in India and Iran was considered as powerful, pure, and wise god and who grants food and children who likes home and families but is destroyer of the enemies. He grants the worshipper, the blessing which is increased from day to day. He is source of fame and who increases the man and takes the offering to the gods.

The Fire is called Agni god in the Vedas. He is the chief terrestrial deity. Next to Indra he is the most prominent among the Vedic gods. He has golden form. He shines like the sun. His luster is like the rays of the dawn and the sun and like lightings of the rain-cloud. He shines even at the night. Like the sun dispels the darkness with his rays. He is destroyer of darkness and sees through the gloom of the night. Kindled he opens the gates of darkness. The earth enveloped in darkness and the sky becomes visible when Agni is born.

According to the Vedas Agni is the first divinity of the immortals (RV I. 24. 2). Agni is the lord of men, the invoker and messenger of the gods, the brilliant-rayed and one who hears the hymns of devoted (RV I. 27.12). He is the bearer of offering, the beloved of many (RV I. 12.2), the wise, the observer

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4 MacDonell. A. History of Vedic Mythology, p 130.
5 Wilson .H.H. R gveda Samhitā Vol 1, p 56.
6 Ibid, p 66.
7 Ibid, p 27.
of truth, the radiant, the remover of disease\(^8\) (R\(\text{\textnumero}\) V. I. 12.7). He is the possessor of all riches and the perfecter of rite\(^9\) (R\(\text{\textnumero}\) V. I. 12.1) and one who bestows riches and food and the source of progeny\(^{10}\) (R\(\text{\textnumero}\) V. I. 12.11). Agni is verily as a loving father to a son, as a king man to a kinsman, as friend to a friend\(^{11}\) (R\(\text{\textnumero}\) V. I. 26. 3).

Agni is immortal who has taken up his abode with mortals as their guest. He is the domestic priest who rises before the dawn, and who concentrates in his own person and exercises in higher sense all the various sacrificial offices which the Indian ritual assigns to a number of different human functionaries. He is the sage, the divinest among the sages, immediately acquainted with all forms of worship, the wise the director, the successful accomplisher, and the protector of all ceremonies, who enable men to serve the gods in a correct and acceptable manner in cases where they could not do this with their own unaided skill\(^{12}\).

Agni is the preeminent one over the wind, becomes manifest to the worshippers, in approbation of his worship and Heaven and Earth tremble at his power\(^{13}\) (R\(\text{\textnumero}\) V. I. 31.3). He as the excellently wise directs the man who follows improper paths to acts that are fitted to reclaim him. One who the strife of heroes and as widely – scattered wealth, destroys in combat the mighty by the feeble\(^{14}\) (R\(\text{\textnumero}\) V. I. 31.6). He confers upon to the worshipper vigor, progeny and life\(^{15}\)

\(^{8}\) Ibid, p 28.
\(^{9}\) Ibid, p 26.
\(^{10}\) Ibid, p 28.
\(^{11}\) Ibid, p 63.
\(^{12}\) Wilkins. W.J, Hindu Mythology, p 23.
\(^{13}\) Wilson. H.H. R\(\text{\textnumero}\)gveda Sam\(\text{\textnumero}\)hitā, Vol 1, p 75.
\(^{14}\) Ibid, p 76.
\(^{15}\) Ibid, p 55.
Agni is the bright shining, the immortal, the cleaner with clarified butter, the fitly invoked, and the bearer of the oblation in the sacrifice\(^{16}\) (R\(\text{V. I.} 23.24\)). He as son of strength moves every where fleetly\(^{17}\) (R\(\text{V. I.} 27.2\)) and one who goes every where, ever protect the worshippers whether near or far \(^{18}\) (R\(\text{V. I.} 27.3\)).

He is the lord, protector, king of men. He is the lord of the house, dwelling in every abode. He is the guest in every home, he despises no man, and he lives in every family. He is therefore considered as the mediator between gods and men, and as witness of their action\(^{19}\). Agni is the lord of Sustenance\(^{20}\) (R\(\text{V. I.} 26.1\)) and procures the food that is in the heaven and mid air and grants the wealth that is on earth\(^{21}\) (R\(\text{V. I.} 27.5\)). He is the vast, the illimitable, smoke-bannered, resplendent and one who grant food\(^{22}\) (R\(\text{V. I.} 27.11\)) and one who gives to his worshippers a food acquiring steed, a valiant son, renowned, assiduous in pious works. Agni travel beautifying heaven and earth, Agni makes as woman the bearer of male offspring and intelligent\(^{23}\). He is the messenger and invoker of the gods who is endowed with all knowledge. The flames of Agni are mighty and eternal,

\(^{16}\) Wilson .H.H. R\(\text{gvedaSam\(\text{hit}\}}\), Vol 2, p 157.
\(^{17}\) Ibid , Vol 1, p 65.
\(^{18}\) Ibid.
\(^{19}\) Wilkins. W.J, Hindu Mythology, p 23.
\(^{20}\) Wilson .H.H. R\(\text{gvedaSam\(\text{hit}\}}\), Vol 1, p 63.
\(^{21}\) Ibid , p 65.
\(^{22}\) Ibid . p 66.
\(^{23}\) Ibid , Vol 4 , p 387.
spread around the rays, and touch the heaven\textsuperscript{24} (R\textsuperscript{\textcopyright} V. I. 36.3). Agni is the giver of delight, the domestic guardian of mankind\textsuperscript{25} (R\textsuperscript{\textcopyright} V. I. 36.5).

Agni is the vigilant god amongst the gods\textsuperscript{26} (R\textsuperscript{\textcopyright} V. I. 31.9) who is the protector, the giver of the life. He has hundreds and thousands of treasure. He is the defender of pious acts and attended by good men\textsuperscript{27} (R\textsuperscript{\textcopyright} V. I. 31.10). Agni is worthy to be praised and one who is opulent with his bounties. He is defender of cattle for the sons of the worshipper’s sons\textsuperscript{28} (R\textsuperscript{\textcopyright} V. I. 31.12). The four – eyed Agni blazes as the protector of the worshipper\textsuperscript{29} (R\textsuperscript{\textcopyright} V. I. 31.13). The youthful and most resplendent Agni protect the worshipper against evil sprite and from the malevolent man, noxious animals, and those who seek to kill the worshipper\textsuperscript{30} (R\textsuperscript{\textcopyright} V. I. 36.15). He with the burning eyes destroys entirely our foes\textsuperscript{31} (R\textsuperscript{\textcopyright} V. I. 36.16).

Agni is also as great god magnified by being declared to be above all the gods. Varun\textsuperscript{\textcopyright} a, Mitra, the Maruts, and all the gods worship him. He delivers the god in battle, he defeats Dasyus for the Āryan\textsuperscript{32} Agni like other gods sits on the sacred grass and he is mighty, adorable, excellent and devoted to the gods\textsuperscript{33} (R\textsuperscript{\textcopyright} V.
I. 36.9). He is solicited for power – conferring\(^{34}\) (R\(\text{V}\). I. 36.17). He is the augmenter of vigor, the liberal giver of the food\(^{35}\) (R\(\text{V}\). I. 36.2) who protects in the battle and incites the warriors to combat\(^{36}\) (R\(\text{V}\). I. 27.7). Agni has penetrated in the vast heaven and earth; he animates the worshipper alone in battles; and destroys numerous enemies\(^{37}\) (R\(\text{V}\). 10. 80.2). He is praised by worshippers for the sake of wealth. He is the performer of the rite. One who preserves the worshippers, heaven and earth along with the gods\(^{38}\) (R\(\text{V}\). I. 31.8). Agni as the youngest of the gods protects the worshipper and bestows abundant wealth\(^{39}\) (R\(\text{V}\). 10. 80.7). R\(\text{\#}\) is variously invoke\(\text{Agni}\) with hymns; man when severely pressed in battle invokes Agni; the bird flying in the mid heaven invokes Agni who circumambulates thousand of cattle\(^{40}\) (R\(\text{V}\).10. 80.5). One who is worshipped by all men and convey the worshippers with horses through the battle, and the bestower of bounties\(^{41}\) (R\(\text{V}\). I. 27.9).

Agni is a divine (\textit{asura}) monarch (\textit{samrāj}), strong as Indra. His greatness surpasses that of mighty heaven. He is greater than heaven and earth, than all the worlds, which he filled when born. He is superior to all the other gods in greatness\(^{42}\). Agni is the sovereign lord of sacrifice with praises\(^{43}\) (R\(\text{V}\). I. 27.1).

\(^{34}\) Ibid, p 97.
\(^{35}\) Ibid, p 94.
\(^{36}\) Ibid, p 65.
\(^{38}\) Ibid, Vol 1, p 76.
\(^{39}\) Ibid, Vol 4, p 388.
\(^{40}\) Ibid.
\(^{41}\) Ibid, Vol 1 p 66.
\(^{42}\) MacDonell. A. History of Vedic Mythology, p 141.
\(^{43}\) Wilson. H.H. R\(\text{\#}\) gveda Sam\(\text{\#}\) hitā, Vol 1, p 64.
He is the high priest of sacrifice, the divine, the ministrant who presents the oblation to the gods and the possessor of great wealth\(^{44}\) (R\(\text{\textvisiblespace}V\) I. 1.1). Agni is son of strength who accepts the sacrifice and the praise with all his Fires and grant abundant food\(^{45}\) (R\(\text{\textvisiblespace}V\) I. 26.10). One who announces to the gods the offering and the newest hymns\(^{46}\) (R\(\text{\textvisiblespace}V\) I. 27.4). Agni spreads the oblation through the heaven. The forms of Agni are manifested in many places\(^{47}\) (R\(\text{\textvisiblespace}V\) V. 10. 80.4).

Agni is the presenter of oblation, the attainer of knowledge and one who is true, renowned, and divine\(^{48}\) (R\(\text{\textvisiblespace}V\) V. 1. 1. 5). He is the radiant, the protector of sacrifice, the constant, illuminator of truth\(^{49}\) (R\(\text{\textvisiblespace}V\) V. 1. 1.8). Agni is the bright, the purifier who bring hither the gods to sacrifice and oblations\(^{50}\) (R\(\text{\textvisiblespace}V\) V. 1. 12.10). He is the ever young and wise the guardian of dwelling of the sacrifice, the bearer of offering\(^{51}\) (R\(\text{\textvisiblespace}V\) V. 1. 12.6). Worshipper should approach him reverential homage in thought, daily, both morning and evening\(^{52}\) (R\(\text{\textvisiblespace}V\) V. 1. 1.7). Agni is the accomplisher of sacrifice, the possessor of happiness, the repository of wealth\(^{53}\) (R\(\text{\textvisiblespace}V\) V. 3. 27.2). One who brings kindled at the sacrifice, the purifier, and the adorable, whose hair is flame\(^{54}\) (R\(\text{\textvisiblespace}V\) V. 3. 27.4).

\(^{44}\) Ibid, p 1.  
\(^{45}\) Ibid, p 54.  
\(^{47}\) Ibid, Vol. 4, p 388.  
\(^{50}\) Ibid, Vol. 1, p 28.  
\(^{51}\) Ibid, Vol. 1, p 27.  
\(^{52}\) Ibid, Vol. 1, p 4.  
\(^{54}\) Ibid.
Agni, one who is to be celebrated by both ancient and modern sages\textsuperscript{55} (R\textsuperscript{V}. I. 1.1.2). He is the lord of the men, the sacrificing priest, the gracious, the chosen and the kindly one\textsuperscript{56}. (R\textsuperscript{V}. I. 26.8). Agni is the showerer of desires, the augmenter of the prosperity of his worshippers\textsuperscript{57} (R\textsuperscript{V}. I. 31.5). He is the first Angiras R\textsuperscript{V}s\textsuperscript{R}s is, a divinity and is the auspicious friend of deities\textsuperscript{58}. (R\textsuperscript{V}. I. 31.1). Agni is the first and chief Angiras; grace the worship of the gods, sapient, manifold for the benefit of the entire world, intelligent, the offspring of two mothers and responding in various ways for the use of the man\textsuperscript{59} (R\textsuperscript{V}. I. 31.2).

According to the scholar’s opinion though Agni is an Indo-European word, but the worship of Fire under this name is purely Indian. In the Indo-Iranian period the sacrifice of the Fire is already found as the center of a developed ritual, tended by a priestly class probably called Atharvan; personified and worshipped as a strong, pure, wise god, giver of food, offspring, intellectual power, fame, friendly to the house, but destroyer of foes; probably even thought of as having different forms like lightning or the Fire from wood. The sacrificial Fire seems to have been an Indo-European institution also, since the Italian and Greeks, as well as the Iranian and Indians had the custom of offering gifts to the gods in Fire\textsuperscript{60}.

B. Fire in the Ancient Iranian literature and Avesta

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, Vol. 1, p 2.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, Vol. 1, p 54.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid, Vol 1, p 57.
\textsuperscript{58} Wilson. H.H. R\textsuperscript{V} gveda Sam\textsuperscript{R}hit\textsuperscript{R}, Vol .1, p 74.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} MacDonell. A. History of Vedic Mythology, p 142.
The Fire is 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.

In the Ancient Iran, the discovery of Fire is attributed to Hushang. After the discovery of the Fire he praised the Fire and holds a celebration and called it Jashn-e- Sade “Sade Festival”. The Greek historians have written some words about Iranian Gods like Sun, Moon, Earth, Water and Fire.

Strabon says as follows:

“The Persia people offer the sacrifice 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”.

Other Greek historians namely; Herodotus, Xenophon, Diogenes Laertius and Dinon have referred to the Fire and water as Iranian Gods. Maximus tyrus also has mentioned the Fire as the God of Iranians.

Curtuis also writes: “the Ancient Iranians swear in front of Fire and such oath is very important. In the Arebl; Dariush has supplicated in front of Sun, Mitra and Āzar which his armies able to defeat Alexander.”

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61 Afifi R.; Mythology and Culture of Iran p.405
62 One of the Iranian Kings in the Ancient Period.
63 Ancient Persian Festival held 50 days before the Nowruz Festival (New Year Festival).
64 Afifi R.; Mythology and Culture of Iran p.404
65 Pour, Davoud; E. Yashts, Vol I. P.508.
66 The name of Place
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 “Āzar Borzinmehr”\textsuperscript{69} which belonged to the farmer’s caste and the second one was “Āzar Faren Baq”\textsuperscript{70} that belonged to the clergies and third one was “Āzar Goshasp”\textsuperscript{71} that belonged to the army.

Fire in the Avesta book is “Ātarsh” or “Ātar” and in the Ancient Persian language “Ātar” or “Āthar” and in the Pahlavi “Ātūr” or “Ātaxsh” or “Ātash” and in the Persian is “Āzar”. In the Persian language the Fire angel is called “Āzar Izad” and he is the son of Ahura Mazda due to his significance of the occasion. Fire is a sign of purity and truth and Urdibehisht Amesha-Spend is his guardian and “Āzar Izad” is considered as assistant of Urdibehisht.\textsuperscript{72}

In the Yasna (No. 25, Part 7) it has been written in the following:

“We worship you, the Fire, Ahura Mazda’s son! The holy lord of the ritual order and we worship all kinds of the Fire”\textsuperscript{73}.

There are five kinds of Fire according to Yasna (No. 17, Part 11) as follows: \textsuperscript{74}

1. The Fire “Berezi-savangha” (of the lofty use). This Fire is that before Ahura Mazda and the kings.

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\textsuperscript{67} One of Iranian Kings in the ancient era.
\textsuperscript{68} Pour, Davoud; E. Yashts, Vol. I. P.508.
\textsuperscript{69} Afifi R.; Mythology and Culture of Iran p 415.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid, p 416.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, p 417.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, p.404.
\textsuperscript{73} The Zend Avesta Part III. p.277
\textsuperscript{74} The Zend Avesta Part III. p.277
2. The Fire “Vohu-fryān”, (the good and friendly). This Fire dwells in the bodies of beasts (animals’ heat).

3. The Fire “Urvāzishta”, (the most beneficial and most helpful). This is in trees and plants.

4. The Fire “Vāzishta”, (the most supporting). This is in clouds (lightning).

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

In the Zamiyād Yasht (Parts 46-50)\textsuperscript{75}, Āzar the rival of the demon “Azi-Dahāka” which he prevents him for obtaining of the awful Glory (sacerdotal Glory).

The Yasna (No.36, Part 1) describes as ; Āzar is mediator between Gods and the human beings\textsuperscript{76}. In the Farvardin Yasht (Parts 87, 88), when Ahriman (demon) revolts against Asha (good creation, Holiness); Āzar helps him and defeats Ahriman as can’t harm the world\textsuperscript{77}.

The whole Yasna No.62 from Avesta book\textsuperscript{78} belongs to Āzar Izad and “Ātash Nyāyish”\textsuperscript{79} (Fire Praise) is one of the five most important Zoroastrian prayers which is chanted by priests in the Fire-temple every five times of the day.

These five times for prayer are as follows\textsuperscript{80}:

1. Hāvani (From Sun rise to noon)

2. Rapithwina (From noon to after noon)

\textsuperscript{75} The Zend Avesta Part II. p.298.
\textsuperscript{76} Pour, Davoud; E, Yasna, part II, p 32 .
\textsuperscript{77} The Zend Avesta, Part II, pp 198- 201.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, Part III. P.313-316.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid, Part II. p.357.
\textsuperscript{80} Pour Davoud. E, Khorde Avesta; p.148.
3. Uzayēirina (From afternoon to Sunset)

4. Aiwistuthrima (From Sunset to mid night)

5. Ushahina (From midnight to sunrise)

In the Firdausi’s Shāhnāme, 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. Sometimes they granted a big part of their treasure to the Fire-temple.

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As we discussed above there are some similarities between Fire in the Vedic literature, Ancient Iranian literature, the Zoroastrian religion and Firdausi’s Shah Nāme as follows:

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 according to Ancient Iranian literature as the third Dariush has supplicated in front of the Sun, Mithra, and Āzar who enable his army to defeat Alexander, and in the Zoroastrian religion the Genius of Fire (Āzar Izad) is worshipped also in whole Yasna (No. 62), and Ātash-Nyāyish (Fire prayer) is also one of the most important Zoroastrian prayers which is done five times in a day.
In Yasna (No.36, Part 1) Āzar is the mediator of the man and Gods. In Firdausi’s Shāhnāme; also, many kings and heroes have gone to the Fire temples and worshipped in front of Fire.

2. Fire god is one who received the oblation for the gods; in all the cases which are 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 some times, selected pieces of meat and according to Firdausi’s Shāhnāme in the form of valuable jewels.

3. Agni in the Vedas has three manifestations; in the form of sun in the sky, in the form of lightning in atmosphere, and in the form of ordinary fire on the earth, similarly the Avesta mentions five kinds of fire of which two kinds of them are the fires, namely; the fire “Vāzishta” (The fire in Cloud and lightening) and “Spenishta” (which is applied in the world as ordinary fire).

4. In the Vedas, the worshipper of Agni worships him every morning and evening, similarly in Avesta there is Ātash Nyāyish which is done every five times of the day. In the Firdowsi’s Shāhnāme also most of times the kings take bath and then they used to go to the Fire-temples.

5. In the Vedas Agni grants to their worshipper; son and increases their offspring similarly in the Yasna 62, the worshipper desires, 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 (Prithivī) 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 similarly in Avesta Fire is considered as protector of the good creation.

8. One of the most important roles of Agni in Vedas is “one who fights with the demons” and his most famous battle is the fighting with Kravyād (a demon) and Rāksasas similarly in Avesta (Zamiyād Yasht Part 46-50) Āzar fights with Azi-Dahāka.