Chapter XIII

THE PRE-VEDIC ĀŚVINS

Though Āśvins hold a distinct position among the gods of light and their appellation is Indian, their connection with any definite phenomenon of light is very obscure, and their original nature has been a puzzle to Vedic interpreters from the very beginning. And this obscurity makes it probable that the origin of these gods is to be sought in a pre-Vedic period and this can be done on having a look on the philological, historical and mythological grounds.

In the so-called Mittani list, an Anatolian text\(^1\) of the fourteenth century B.C. mentions a treaty between a Hittite

---

\(^1\) In the Boghaz-Köi inscription (1400 B.C.), found in Asia Minor in 1907, the name Nasatya occurs together with Mitra, Varuna and Indra. This shows that these Aryan gods were worshipped in Asia Minor till 1400 B.C.
king and a prince of Mittani. The text includes a series of divine names of Vedic type that are suggestive of the gods Mitra, Varuṇa, Indra and Nasatya. As they are found in the Mittani list, the names read Mithara, Uruvna, Indara and Na-as-at-ti-ia-an-na respectively. The original form of the word Nasatya shows that the consonantal shift from 's' to 'h' (which is found everywhere in the Iranian language) had not yet taken place. This very clearly indicates that the name Nasatya must be Indo-Iranian or pre-Iranian.

In the Avestā we find some Vedic gods in their degraded forms. Apparently, this shows that the nomadic Aryans, originally belonging to the Indo-European clan, travelled towards Iran with a desire of some adventure or in search of new pastures but because of certain religious conflicts they split up. For this reason, we come across with a demon Nachaithya, which is certainly the degraded representative of the Vedic Nasatya (because of similarity in name). So also Indra and Varuṇa are regarded as demons, in the Vended X 9 and XIX 43. Thus, again, definitely Aşvins, then, belong

1 JOI, Vol.XXV, Sept. 75, p.3.
3 P.C.Davar, Iran and India through the Ages, p.14.
to the early Indo-Iranian or proto-Iranian period.

They may be traced back still further to the Indo-European period because in the Indo-European mythology there are distinct points of contact between the Indian Aśvins, on the one hand, and the Greek sons of Zues and the Lettic god-sons, on the other. They are all horse-men, each pair of these deities has either a sister or a common bride, the daughter of the Sun, and all of them are said to be the rescuers. As there is a lack of common name, it is quite possible that the Aśvin-myth existed only in germ before the separation of the Indo-European clans.

Thus the concept of Aśvins may be traced back to a very ancient period i.e. to the Indo-European period.