CHAPTER V

COMPARISON BETWEEN ATHARVA-VEDIC AND FOREIGN OCCULTISM.

In spite of certain differences due to local variations, non-availability of all materials and pressure of territorial requirements, there is a general resemblance in the character of occult practices as traced in the Atharva-veda and those prevalent in many countries of the Middle-East e.g. Assyria, Babylonia, Iran, Arabia and the West e.g. Armenia, Albania, Lithuania, Greece, Germany, Celtic & Balto-Slavic countries.

The occultism in the AV, may be stated to be of Indo-European character in certain aspects. This may be illustrated by drawing instances from the occult practices of different countries and regions.

The rain-making rituals which had almost a universal popularity offers the best example. In the AV, the hymns iv.15 & vii.19 are used as rain-charms to bring showers when severe drought persists.
In these rites, reeds, weeds and grass which thrive in rains are dipped in a water bowl and water is sprinkled all over. (1)

In Greece, Southern Russia and Armenia also, we find similar ritual proceedings for bringing showers.

Thus, for example, in a village near Dorpat in Russia when rain was much wanted, three men used to climb up the fir-trees of a sacred grove. One of them drummed with hammer on a kettle or small cask to imitate thunder; the second knocked two fire-brands together and made the sparks fly to imitate lightning and the third who was called the rain-maker, had a bunch of twigs

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(1) Pra nabhasva ityācena vrṣṭikāmo marudbhya māntravarnikībhya vā devatābhyaḥ kṣīrāudanahomah ājyanomah kāśādividhuvakabeta-
sākhyā oṣadhiṃ kṛṣṇaṃ pātre kṛtvā sampātyābhimantraḥ jalamadhya
adhomukham ādiramah, tāsāmeva kāśādināṃ sampātīabhimantita-
nāmapṣu plāvamāṃ svaśirasō meṣa sīrāsaśca abhimantritasya apṣu
prakṣepeṣaṁ......... ityetiṇī abhīvaṃṣaṇakarmāṇi kuryāt.

Śāyaṇabhaṣya (AV. iv.15)

Samutpatantu pra nabhasveti varṣakāmo dvādāśaṣṭiṣṭrāmanu śrūṣyet.
Sarvavrata upaśrāmyati. Maruto yajate yathā varuṇam juhoti.
Oṣadhiḥ sampātavatih praveśābhīnyucjati. Viplāvayeta.
Svaśiraedhaka-sīrākṣaajaranḍuṇaḥo vamśāgre pravadhya
yodhayati ...... apṣu aīdatiḥ.

Kaus. 41. 1-7
with which he sprinkled from a vessel on all sides.

In New Britain, the rain-maker wraps some leaves of a red and green striped creeper in a banana leaf, moistens the bundle with water and buries it in the ground; then he imitates with his mouth, the splashing of rain. (2)

Among the Greeks of Thessaly and Macedonia, when a drought has lasted a long time, it is customary to send a procession of children round to all the wells and springs of the neighbourhood. As the procession walks, a girl whom her companions drench with water at every halting place while they sing an invocation of rains (3).

Bathing is practised as a rain-charm in some parts of Southern and Western Russia.

2) Frazer. Golden Bough (Abridged) p. 63

3) Ibid. p. 69

* In the District of Mynensingh (now in Bangladesh) a rain invocation rite, in which banana leaf was used, enjoyed great popularity. People gathered in one central place and wrote 'Ka' (the first letter of Bengali alphabet) on banana leaves with an indelible ink prepared from gourd-leaf juice. The letter 'Ka' was written in lacs. Then the writers carried the banana leaf rolls on winnowing pans and moved from door to door. The women used to pour water over the banana leaves which were afterwards thrown in ponds. (Gathered from people of actual experience who participated in the rite)
An Armenian rain-charm is to throw the wife of a priest into the water and drench her. In Arcadia, when the corns and trees were parched with drought, the priest of Zeus dipped an oak branch into a certain spring on Mount Lycaeus. Among the Celtic people, rain-making rites were also usually associated with a sacred well, where the people went in procession, probably with an image of a divinity, which was sprinkled with water; in some case, it was sufficient to beat the water with branches, sprinkle it on stones or throw it in the air.

In all these cases as in AV, there is association with water and mimery of rain-showers by sprinkling water from wetted twigs, a distinct characteristics of Sympathetic Occultism.

Secondly, in the AV it is found that fire occupies a prominent position for expulsion of evil spirits. The AV hymn 'satyaujāḥ pradahatvagnirvānaro vṛṣa etc (AV. iv.36) and also AV iv.37 & vi.32 invoke Agni to drive or to burn away the demons.

4) Frazer. Golden Bough (Abridged) p. 77
5) L.F.A. Matny, Croyances et legendes Ee Moyen Age, p.14
6) Bhūtagrahādyuccātanakarmasu viniyo Grahamṇāyaḥ. (AV. iv.36)
    Cātānāṁamapanodanena vyākhyātam.
The priests circumambulate the sacrificial fire and offer "home" into it.

In the middle-East Asia and East European countries also, fire is seen to play an important role to expel evil spirits.

An effigy of the witch, held to be responsible for misfortunes is prepared and thrown into bon-fire, lit up for the purpose. When the effigy is being burnt, performers sing and dance e.g. in Babylonian rites for driving away demons, after recital of correct formulae, objects collected by the magician for the purpose were destroyed in fire in synchronization with the destruction of evil influence under which the patient suffered.

In many parts of Germany, a fortnight before the "day of great fire", children go about from farm to farm, collecting fuel. When the day comes they cut down bushes, especially jumper and broom, and in the evening great bonfires blaze on all the heights. It is a common saying that seven bonfires should be seen if the village is to be safe from conflagrations.

At Grand Halleux they set up a pole, called makral or the witch, in the midst of the pile, and the fire is kindled by the man who was last married. In the neighbourhood of Morlanwelz, a strawman is burnt in the fire. In Brabant, on the same day, women and men disguised in female attire used to go with burning torches to the fields, where they danced and sang comic songs for the purpose.
In Switzerland also, it was customary to kindle bonfires. Boys went about from house to house begging for wood and straw; then piled the fuel on a conspicuous mountain round about a pole, which bore a straw effigy called the witch. At night fall, the pile was set on fire and the young folks danced wildly around it. This was called burning the witch. (8)

In Germany, at Voralberg, on the first Sunday, a slender young fir-tree is surrounded with a pile of straw and firewood. To the top of the tree is fastened a human figure called the Witch, made of old clothes and stuffed with gunpowder. At night, the whole is set on fire.

In Swabia, on the first Sunday, in Lent, a figure called the witch is made up of clothes and fastened to a pole. This is stuck in the middle of a pile of wood, to which fire is applied; while the Witch is burning, the young people throw blazing discs into the air. The charred embers of the burned witch and discs are taken home and planted in the field in the belief that they will keep vermin from the fields. (9)

7) Frazer. Golden Bough (Abridged) p. 610
8) ibid, 613
9) ibid, 612-13
In the Greco-Roman Occult rites as also in the AV\(^{(10)}\) many evil spirits are mentioned in female forms, e.g., witches of various descriptions: Erinyes, Nemesis\(^{(11)}\).

Among the Arabians and Pastoral people of the white Nile, animals are often used as scapegoats. In Arabia, at the time of the Plague epidemic, the people lead a camel through all the quarters of the town in order that the animal may take the pestilence on itself.\(^{(12)}\)

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10) Nirrti, Arati, Arayi, Arati, Jurri, Candci, Sadanvas, Mangudi.

11) Erinyes is the avenging deity; also called Eumenides. People dreaded to call these goddesses by their real names. It was said to have been first given them after the acquittal of Orestes by the Areopagus, when the anger of the Erinyes had been soothed. They are represented as winged maidens with serpents twined in their hair and with blood dripping from eyes. They punished men both in this world and after death. Nemesis is the goddess who measured out to mortals misery and happiness both; subsequently she was regarded as the goddess who punished crimes.

Smith's Smaller Classical Dictionary pp. 208, 344

Among the people of white Nile a cow is used as a scapegoat at the time of famine. The animal is driven by the women to the river banks and across it. The cow is considered to be the symbol of the evil and its expulsion means driving the evil out. (13)

In Greko Roman and Slavic countries instances of human scapegoats are frequently found. (14)

In the AV also we find an instance of expulsion of evils by using animal scape-goats, where a vasā (barren cow) is sacrificed to drive away misfortunes; (15) But in the AV, we do not find any instance of using human being as scapegoat, which proves that the Atharva-vedic people might have been more humane in consideration than those of Slavic and Greko-Roman countries.

Not only that the AV occult practices in many cases bear similarity with other I.E. occult rites, but also there are numerous verses in the Atharva-veda which differ little from other I.E. occult incantations, in spirit and character.

13) Frazer, Golden Bough (Abridged), p.565
14) ibid., "Human Scape-goats in Classical Antiquity", pp.577-583
15) AV ii. 14; (yaṣya gamā navārardhśya bhavat tadghnham daivahatam Chānati, teṭoṣa )
   nityāye tājāya vasāya yāgaḥ kāryaḥ, sāyanashasya
   Kaus 44.1-11

Indo-European (I-E)
The Merseburg magic incantations for curing the sprained leg:

Bone to bone,
Blood to blood,
Limb to limbs

As if they were glued (16)
is quite similar to the AV mantras iv. 12.3, 4 & 5 against the breaking of leg. (17)

16) Vide Winternitz, A History of Indian Literature, p. 112

17) Sam te majja majñā bhavatu samu te paruṣā paruḥ I
Sam te māṁsasya visrastam sāmaṣṭhāpya rohatu II
AV. iv.12.3

Majjā majñā sam dhiyaṣṭām carmaṇā carma rohatu. I
Aṣṭk te asthi rohatu māṁsam māṁsenā rohatu II
AV. iv.12.4

Loma lomāśamkalpya tvaca samkalpya tvacam I
Aṣṭk te asthi rohatu echinnam sam dhehoṣadhe II
AV. iv.12.5

Rohiniyāśīti sūktena asthyādibhanāvīttaye
lākṣodakamabhimantrya .... kṣtapradesāmavasincet.

Sāyanabhāṣya (AV. iv.12)
Kaśś. 28.5, 6
There is, again, a remarkable agreement between AV and
German occult incantation. About 99 diseases are mentioned in
the AV, so in German incantation too. (18)

Moreover, as in the AV, in German spells also we find the
conception that many diseases are caused by worms and there are
a series of occult spells, which are intended to serve the purpose
of driving away all kinds of worms.

In a spell against toothache:

Pear-tree, I complain to thee
Three worms are pricking me.
The one is grey,
the other is blue,
the third is red,
I wish they were all three dead.

Worms of various colours are mentioned (19). In the AV also
we find similar mention (20).

18) Winternitz, A History of Indian Literature, p. 115
19) Ibid, p. 118
20) Sarūpau dvau virūpau dvau kṛṣnau dvau rohitau dvau I
   Ye krimayaḥ śītikaksā ye kṛṣṇāḥ śītibhāvahā I
   Ye ke ca viśvaṁūpāstāṁ kṛmīṁ jambhayāmasi II

AV, v. 23, 4-5
In an extract from a papyrus of late period, quoted by Bernard Bromage, we find an incantation which is similar in spirit with a RV mantra.

Another notable feature is that the AV rites to kill an enemy is strikingly similar to some I.E. rites, performed for the same purpose: e.g. in Babylonian countries, to kill a hostile person, his image was to be fashioned in human form and its destruction by fire, to the recital of correct formula, was believed to synchronize with the destruction of the hostile person whose figure had been imitated. These images could be made of wax, honey, bitumen etc.

21) 'Establish a relation between yourself and god .... bring here all the powers of the God. Master of the whole world God of fire, put thyself in connection with thy supplicant and magician, Listen to me.'

Bernard Bromage, The Occult Arts of Ancient Egypt, p.96

22) Agniḥ ...... devāḥ eha vakṣati II
RV. i.1.2
Agniḥ ...... devo devebhīraḥgamati II
RV. i.1.5
Sa nah piteva sūnava'gne sūpāyanobhava I
RV. i. 1.9
Celtic method of killing a person is by throwing a spear into his shadow\(^{(23)}\) or of making an image of him and sticking pins into it or placing it in running water so that he (the enemy) might suffer or waste away.\(^{(24)}\)

AV rituals for destruction of enemy are also of same nature: e.g. in the performance of the māraṇa rite, to kill a man, an effigy of the enemy is made of earth and hit on the head\(^{(25)}\) or his shadow\(^{(26)}\), which signifies that the man will be likewise treated.

Few other points of similarity of ideas and methods are also observed, e.g. twins were believed to possess some occult powers in the AV. e.g. The hymn iii.26 prays to the mother of twins to bestow happiness, wealth and prosperity. In British Columbia twins were believed to possess magical power of bringing rains; birth of twin signified plentiful rains. In South Africa a little time after the birth of twins, a ceremony is performed, the object of which is to transmit the reproductive virtue of the parents to the plantains.\(^{(27)}\)

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24) ibid, p.258
26) Čayām va. upaninayate. Kauś. 47. 55-56
27) Frazer, Golden Bough, pp. 16 & 137
Close similarity in many respects between AV and Zoroastrian occult practices is also noteworthy.

As in AV hymns, we also find in gathas of Zend Avesta (the religious book of the Zoroastrians) concept of demons as fierce, blood thirsty evil spirits doing harmful activities and prayers to drive away them. Not only this, the names of the demons in some cases are identical e.g. cemons rakṣa and Yātu appear both in AV

(28) Pronounce then that word O Zarathustra! that word to be spoken, when thou fall upon the idolaters, the thieves and Daevas rushing together. Then the malice of the wicked worshippers of the Daevas, of the Yatus and their followers, of the Pairikas and their followers, will be off righted and rush away. Down are the Daevas! Down are the Dāeva-worshippers and they take back their mouths from biting. (Translated by James Darmesteter, S.B.E. xxiii. p.161 from Zend-Avesta XI, Srosh Yast Ḥadhḵōkht,6)
Vide also - Zend-Avesta Yasna, IX.30, 31, 32 (S.B.E. xxxii, p.239)
" " Yasna, XII.5 (S.B.E. xxxi, p.249)
" " Vendidad Fargard X.1 (the recitation of this is followed by exorcism, written in the ordinary language of Avesta, expressly composed for the occasion - James Darmesteter, S.B.E. iv. p.133)

Zend-Avesta Mihir Yast XI.48 (S.B.E. xxiii. p.131)
and Avesta (29) but there is, in oases opposiness of meaning in
worts, denoting demon e.g. in Zend Avesta Daeva means evil spirit
or evil planet whereas in AV it denotes benevolent gods. Again, in
AV, the word asura is used in the sense of demon, while in Avesta
it (Ahura) is the dominant deity of benevolence. Moreover, simi-
lar to numerous AV hymns, Zend Avesta also contains a number of
gathas praying to Ahura Mazda asking for all happy phases of
life (30). The relationship between Zorastrian and Atharva-vedic
occultism is also supported by mention of the word Atharvan in
Zend Avesta (31).

**AV Rites and Tibetan Occultism.**

In Tibet, the ancient land of mystery, a number of occult rites are practised which, as is well-known, attracted the atten-
tion from all over the World. Occultism has always been a way of
Tibetan life. The learned Lamas, the Bön, Gaṃchen, Gyudpas,
Ngagpas (32) are believed to be skillful occultist in demonology.

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(29) In Atharva-veda; Rakṣas (AV.ii.3.6), Yātu (AV.iv.9.9);
In Avesta: Rakśa (Zend-Avesta, Yasna XII.5, S.B.E.xxxi.p.249),
Yatu (Zend-Avesta, XI. Srosh Yast Hadhōkht. 6, S.B.E.xxiii,
p.161)

(30) Zend-Avesta, Yasna XXXIII - 10, 12 (S.B.E. xxxi. pp77-78)
    "    "    XVIII ( S.B.E. xxxi. p. 259)

(31) Zend-Avesta, Farvardīn Yast xxx 147; Dīn Yast vi.17;
Zamyad Yast viii.53 (S.B.E. xxiii. pp. 228,268,299)

(32) Alexandra David Neel, Magic and Mystery in Tibet, pp.37,74,12.
As in AV, majority of the Tibetans also believe in certain ritualistic methods of healing the sick, securing material prosperity and conquest of evil-beings. There are also certain striking similarities in the methodology. In Tibetan rituals, a great importance is given to the ritualistic cry 'Hik' followed by the shoud 'Phat'. (33) In the AV, particularly in the Tārtrāsa recital of words Hrīm and 'Phat' and is a common occurrence (34).

The concept of Mahākāla and Dākinī (mkah hgroma, pronounced Kandoma) is also found in Tibetan mysticism (35) whose origin may be sought in the light of Atharvan (36).

These similarities between Tibetan and AV rites indicate that however bizarre and isolated Tibet could have been, the cultural osmosis between two countries, India and Tibet, did take place.

33) Alexandra David Neel, Magic and Mystery in Tibet, p. 26

34) AV. iv. 18.3

35) Alexandra David Neel, Magic and Mystery in Tibet, ppi 15, 50

36) AV. xix. 53. 1-10 (Kālasūkta)
    " 51. 1-5 ( " )
Thus, we see that many of the AV mantras and AV rites have surprising similarities with those of the various peoples of various countries. Among the ancient Greeks and Romans, among the Slavic people, among the Arabians, among the peasants of Mediaeval Europe and Russia, we find the same strange thoughts in their occult rites and practices as in the AV.

These similarities, seem to indicate that the Atharva-vedic and other Indo-European occult practices might have sprouted from a common source. At one time, the Aryans lived together. In course of time, they separated and migrated to India and other places. The branch of Aryans, who migrated to India from their original home, carried with them the Aryan culture, of which the occult practices were a part. After coming to India and spreading out, they assimilated the local non-Aryan culture including their occult practices. Osmosis of Aryan and non-Aryan occult practices therefore appears to be the genesis of the Atharvavedic occultism.

In the process of evolution and on account of regional differences, changes in the way of life took place; but instances of many similarities in various aspects - cultural, social and linguistics - remained. A common source of origin and interconnection among the Aryan groups therefore appear to be a probable reason of similarities in occult practices of AV and other Indo-European countries.

Striking similarities also exist between AV and Tibetan occult rites, though Tibetans are of non-Indo-European origin. This is prima facie due to cultural osmosis that invariably happens between any two neighbouring countries.