Chapter I

Introduction

According to the scholars’ opinion the Indo-Iranian people lived in the Asia Minor or the areas of Ural Sea in Russia or North Pole areas. They migrated to earn their living and dispersed in the various countries accompanied by their language and civilization. These people in process of the time developed their language and expanded it. In the beginning of the period of migration some group of Indo-Iranian people migrated to Iran and some other people came to the middle Asia. This group after the crossing of the North-Western regions of Hidnukush Mountains arrived to “Sapta-Sindhu land” namely “Seven Rivers land” in Punjab. The people who dwelled in India were called “Āryan” and they who came to the Iranian Plateau were called “Ariyān” or “Aeryan”. Both of them mean “noble” as the name of Iran has been derived from this root.¹

It is evident which the inhabitants of Iran and India in spite of having one origin, were gradually transformed in the new environment and generated two different civilizations on the basis of ancient civilization of Asia. Both of them worshipped the nature elements, because of their primary civilization. They worshipped the manifestation of the nature with songs. Indian Mantras are retained in the form of Veda books which

¹ Indu Shekhar, Sanskrit Guide, P 2. And also see The Sanskrit language by T. Burrow, P 1.
consist of knowledge and Iranian Gāthās, the base of Avesta have been sung in description of ancient Iranian Gods².

As per testimony of researchers the oldest documentary history of religions in India begins with the entry of Āryan s to India through north west around mid-millennium B.C. Knowledgeable scholars unanimously believe that a holy religious complex called Vedas has accompanied by ancient Āryan s which constitute the basis of all formations and later transformations of Hinduism. That this holey complex has been written in old language of Sanskrit which has four parts including, Rṣīgveda, Sāmaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda.

Burrow about Iranian and Indian background remarks in the following words:

“In the greater part of India today languages are spoken which are derived from a single form of speech which was introduced in to India by invaders from the north – west more than three thousand years ago. The invading people were known in their own language as “Ārya” a word which is also commonly used as an adjective meaning “noble, honorable”. Behind them in the central Asia remained kindred people who eventually occupied the plateau of Iran, as well as large tracts of central Asia. These people used the same name of their counterparts, in Avestan “Airya”, and from the genitive plural of this word the modern name of Iran is ultimately derived. In conformance with this usage of term Āryan is now used as the

² Ibid.
common name of these people and their languages; alternatively the term Indo- Iranian is commonly used. To distinguish the Indian branch from the Iranian, the term Indo- Āryan has been coined, and as applied to language, it covers the totality of language and dialects derived from this source from the earliest times to the present day”.  

Since Iranian in view of its very close relationship with Indo- Āryan is of the first importance for the study of Indo- Āryan philology, a short account of its distribution and documentation is desirable. The migration of Indo- Āryan to India brought about, or perhaps was the final stage of the separation of primitive Āryan community into two distinct divisions which henceforth evolved separately in linguistic as in other respects. The Iranian left behind in the region of the Oxus Valley proceeded to expand rapidly in various directions occupying not only the Iranian plateau which remained their centre of gravity, but also large tracts of central Asia, extending on the one hand to the confines of China and on the other hand to the plain south of Russia. From an early period Iranian showed a much stronger tendency to differentiation into separate dialects which soon became independent language than was the case with Indo- Āryan, which for geographical and other reasons maintained a comparative unity over most of North India for a very long period. 

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3 T. Burrow, The Sanskrit Language, P 1
4 A recollection of Chorasmia as their original home is preserved in the tradition of the ancient Iranian.
5 T. Burrow, The Sanskrit Language, P 3
For the old period Iranian is represented by documents in Avestan and Old Persian, and it is these texts which are of prime importance for comparison with Vedic Sanskrit. Avesta is the name given to the ancient collection of sacred writing preserved by the adherents of the Zoroastrian religion, and it is after this that the language is named. It is an eastern Iranian dialect, the text location of which has not been precisely determined. The oldest sections of the Avesta, the Gāthās are attributed to Zoroaster himself. Concerning his date there has been much dispute, and it seems that the traditional date of the Zoroastrians themselves, which place him around 600 B.C., can hardly be correct. The language of Gāthās are no less ancient than that of Ṛgveda, and for this and other reasons the comparison of the two texts must belong roughly to the same period. Old Persian, a south western dialect, and one showing tendencies to modernization in comparison with the earliest Avestan, is preserved in inscriptions of the Achamenian kings in special cuneiform alphabet invented for this purpose. The relation between this ancient Iranian and the language of the Vedas are so close that it is not possible to study satisfactory one without the other. Grammatically the differences are very small; the chief differentiation in the earliest period lies in certain characteristic and well-defined phonetic changes which have affected Iranian on the one hand and Indo-Āryan on the other. It is quite possible to find verses in the oldest portion of Avesta, which simply by phonetic substitutions according to established laws can be turned into intelligible
Sanskrit. The greater part of the Vocabulary is held in common and a large list could be provided of word shared between the two which are absent from the rest of Indo-European.\(^6\)

Simultaneously with entry of Āryan s to the land of India, the land of Iran did not remain unaffected from their invasion either, since a branch of this clan invaded towards south of Iran and took deserts of plateau of Iran under hooves of their horses. The branch of Āryan which ultimately divided, one towards east (India) and another to west (Iran) again tended to south and scattered in deserts of those two countries. The passage of time and days brought much changes in their languages, traditions and their rituals and in connection with religion and belief caused two separate beliefs one “Hinduism” and another “Zoroastrian” between these two tribes of Āryan background in which still traces of the same basis and root of those groups of people are explicitly visible and evident in their languages, beliefs and methods.\(^7\)

Having cast a transient glance at religious and cultural texts of Iranians and Indians in ancient times we conclude that these two ancient clans have had religious and cultural commonalities, in matter of worship and adoration of Gods in particular. As it follows in this research a great number of these Gods are with the same name and in common which sometimes with similar methods and sometimes with quite different ones and along with peculiar rituals and traditions have been worshipped.

\(^6\) T. Burrow , The Sanskrit Language , P 4
\(^7\) Nas, J, B.Comprehensive History of Religions, Translated by Ali Asghar Hekmat, p 133.
1. The Vedas and Avesta

The affinity of the oldest form of the Avestan language with the dialect of Vedas is so great in syntax, vocabulary, diction, meter and general poetic style that by the mere application of phonetic laws whole Avestan stanzas may be translated word by word into Vedic, so as to produce verses correct, not only in form but in poetic spirit. The affinity in domain of mythology is by no means so great. For the religion reform of Zoroaster brought about a very considerable displacement and transformation of mythological conception. If therefore, we possessed Avestan literature as old as that Rigveda, the approximation would have been in this respect. Still, the agreement in detail, in mythology no less much greater than in cult, are surprisingly numerous.8

2. The Vedas

The Vedas are the starting point of the Hindu thought. The word “Veda” is derived from a root “Vid” meaning “to know” and implies divine knowledge or revealed knowledge. The Vedas are also called Śruti heard knowledge, as distinguished from the Smṛti or remembered knowledge. The one is direct knowledge, which is not of human origin and is acquired without meditation; the other is traditional knowledge, which is handed down from the ancient teachers.

The Vedas are considered by most Hindus God-inspired and eternal. Their teachings are all-comprehensive. They are the highest authority on

8 Mac Donell, History of Vedic Mythology, P 10
the doctrines of religion. They are applied to the whole course of an individual’s life and have prescribed his duties at all impotent occasions and for all phases of life – birth, adolescence and education, marriage and death. They authorize domestic and social rules and give validity to legal institutions. They prescribe religious rite and worships – the daily prayers and sacrifices. Lastly they are the source and standard of all orthodox schools of thought and philosophy.

The Vedas consist of four separate books and to them are appended certain treatises which are of an expository or philosophic nature. The entire canon consists of four parts, namely; the Samhitā, the Brāhmaṇa, the Āraṇyaka and the Upanishads.

The four Vedas are the Rāgveda, the Sāmaveda, the Yajurveda and the Atharvaveda.

The Rāgveda contains 1028 Sūktas that is laudatory hymns, lyric in praise of gods and prayers. The Rāgveda is accomplished with the poetry.

The Sāmaveda mostly is the repeated of the verses of Rāgveda But it has seventy five original stanzas also. The Sāmaveda re-arranges the verses of the Rāgveda for the purpose of chanting them on the occasion of sacrifices. The Sāmaveda is the Veda of chants.

The Yajurveda consists of verses and of original prose formulas. They apply to various sacrifices. It is known as the Veda of sacrifice prayer.
The Atharvaveda, which is latter in composition than the other Vedas, represents religious thought of the common people at a less refined stage of culture. While the Rigveda addresses prayer to the higher gods and seeks their benedictions, the Atharvaveda is largely concerned with the appeasement of demons and evil spirits.

The Vedas were not written down for a long time and were wholly preserved in memory. Extraordinary precautions were taken to prevent even the slightest deviation in the sacred text, and it must be said to the credit of the Brahmins, who imposed upon themselves this difficult task, that they achieve astonishing success in it. The canon has been handed down through the ages complete and unaltered.

The first step in the formation of the canon was the collection of the material. The songs and hymns were composed by different authors called seers or sages (rṣis) at different times and in different regions through which the Āryan tribe migrated to India.

The different parts of the Veda were composed, collected and handed down to the generations by different families. Different schools of tradition were formed and the four Vedas have come down in some cases in more than one recension.

In the case of Rigveda the extant collection or the Samhitā belongs to one school only, namely, that Śākala, although there was probably another collection also. The Samhitā is divided in ten cycles (manḍalas). Of this ten, six (2nd to 7th) are homogeneous and each is ascribed to a single
sage or his family. The hymns of mantras are the oldest. The ninth mantras consist of verses addressed to Soma only. The first and eight and tenth mantras have unity because of the similarity of the worship prescribed in each. These mantras apparently later in date.

Rgveda is indeed poetry. It includes invocations to gods and prayers for long life, prosperity, offspring and victory. The poems are the product of a developed style of language and many of them rise to great heights of skill and imagination. They were chanted at the sacrifice by the Hotā priest.

The Sāmaveda contains one thousand five hundred forty five stanzas divided into two books (Arcikas). These stanzas are arranged for the purpose of chanting at the Soma sacrifice by the Udgāta priests.

The Yajurveda consists of verse and prose-chants and formulas. The purpose of these hymns, prayers and prose pieces is to use them at various sacrifices by the Adhvaryu priests.

The Yajurveda Samhitā has two versions known as the Śukla (white) and the Kṛṣṇa (black) Yajurveda. In the poetic part of this Veda half the verses have been borrowed from the Rgveda, the other half are original. The prose part, which is nearly half of the whole Veda, is also original.

These three Vedas are closely related to each other and for a long time they alone were recognized as the sacred scriptures. The Atharvaveda which was compiled in latter period consists largely of spells incantations. Some of the magic formulas aim at curing diseases, others at destroying
enemies, overcoming wild beasts and driving away demons. The object of some spells is to secure family harmony, to conciliate foes, and to attain long life, health and good fortune. The priests who officiate at these rites are known as Brahmā. The Atharvaveda consists of twenty chapters (Kānḍa), divided into seven hundred thirty hymns and about six `thousand stanzas, of which one-fifth are taken from the Rgveda.

Some of the poems of the Rgveda must have been composed in their original home when the Āryan tribes which migrated to India were living together with those who went to Iran and settled there. The successful march through inhospitable countries, triumphs over enemies who obstructed their advance, and victories over the peoples threatening their settlements, must have endowed them with the peculiar prestige, increasing their faith in the gods and in the efficacy of hymn and prayer. Naturally the verses became a sacred trust, more so because through them relations were established between the human and the divine world and because they succeeded in lifting corner of the veil which covers the mystery of the universe.

3. The Vedic gods

There are many gods in the Vedas. According to the Vedas they can be divided into several kinds. The gods of the sky, of the atmosphere and of the earth, the greater gods and the lesser gods, abstract gods and gods in groups.
Yaska (probably the oldest commentator on the Vedas) give the following classification of the Vedic gods. “There are three deities, according to expounders of the Vedas: Agni, whose place is on the earth; Vāyu or Indra, whose place is in the air; and Sūrya, whose place is in the sky. These deities receive severally many appellations in consequence of their greatness or of the diversity of their function”\(^9\). In the Rigveda itself this number is increased to thirty three, of whom eleven are said to be in heaven, eleven on earth, and eleven in mid-air\(^10\).

If the number of times a god mentioned is taken as a criterion, Indra, Agni, and Soma would appear to be the most popular gods. On the other hand, on the basis of qualities Varuṇa and Indra were most important among the Vedic gods.

Varuṇa is the supreme god, the god of gods, the creator and sustainer of the universe. The sun, the moon and the stars obey him in their courses. The sky is his garment, the sun is his eyes, and the storm is his breath. His eternal law (Ṛta) supports the order of nature and the moral law. He punishes the evil-doer, yet his mercy and grace extend to those who turn from sin and repent. The Vedic conceptions of Varuṇa and Rātā correspond so closely with those of Iranian Ahura Mazda and Asha that a community of religion of Indians and of Iranian is indicated in the age before their separating.

\(^9\) W.J. Wilkins, Hindu Mythology, P 9
\(^10\) Ibid.
The names of Mitra and Varuna most frequently occur together in the many hymns. Varuna is often addressed alone, but Mitra very seldom. Mitra represented and ruled over the day, whilst Varuna was ruler of the night.11

Indra, who in the Vedas occupies a position no less prominent than that of Varuna, is described only a demon in the Avesta, although under his other appellation Vrātrahan (Verethraghna in the Avesta), he is the genius of Victory for both branches of the Āryan race. In India he was exalted above all other gods, while in Iran he dwindled into insignificance, leaving Ahura Mazda supreme. The mighty Indra, whose praises fill the Vedas, wields the thunderbolt, rides the fiery chariot of many horses, slays the demon (Vrātra) and releases the waters. He encompasses heaven and earth, he finds the sun to illumine the world and makes the Dawn (Usās) glow in the morning sky. Indra is the leader of the heavenly hosts, the giver of victory, fulfiller of wishes. He drinks Soma which he likes immeasurably.

Among other great gods are Visnu, Rudra and Prajāpati. They acquire increasing importance in later times. In the Rgveda, Visnu is the measurer of the universe by three steps; he strides across the world (sky, atmosphere and earth). He nourishes and protects gods and people. Rudra is the god of destruction, his wrath has to be appeased, even the gods are afraid of him, yet he has auspicious (Śiva) aspect. He is wise; he rules

\[\text{Ibid, P 37}\]
the world like a father. He averts evil and heals diseases. Prajāpati is the creator. He establishes the heaven and the earth and is the lord of all creation. He is the father of devas (gods) and Asuras (demons). He is the Hiranयगर्भha, the golden germ from whom creation proceeds. He is the Kāla (time), Stambha (supporter of the universe), the Prāṇā (breath).

Agni, the god of fire, is one of the most prominent of the deities of the Rgveda. With the single exception of Indra, more hymns are addressed to him than to any other deity12. Agni, the many-tongued fire, manifests himself in many forms in the sky, on the earth and in the middle regions. He mediates between man and gods and purveys sacrificial offering to gods. Around him center the household worship. Agni is as ancient as the Āryan race itself.

Sūrya (Sun) is another ancient deity whose worship spread in many lands and to whom the Hindus address every morning and evening their daily prayers. Sūrya is one of three chief deities in the Rgveda, as the great source of the light and warmth. Sometimes He is called as son of Dyaus, sometimes of Aditi13. Sūrya and Savitr are two names by which the sun is commonly addressed in the Vedic hymns. Sometimes one name is exclusively used, some times they are used interchangeably and sometimes they are used as though they represent quite distinct objects. It

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12 W.J.Wilkins, Hindu Mythology, P 21
13 T. Rengarajan, Dictionary of Indian Epics, P 484
is supposed that Savitr refers to the sun when invisible; whilst Sūrya refers to him when he is visible to the worshippers.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Pūsān} is the name of a Sun god to whom some hymns are exclusively addressed, and whose praise at other times is sung in connection with that of Indra and other gods. He is to behold the entire universe; is addressed as the guide of travelers, and the protector of cattle. He is called upon to protect his servants in the battle, and to defend them as of old. He is invoked in the marriage ceremonial, and asked to take the bride’s hand, to lead her away, and to bless her in conjugal relationships. He is said also to conduct the spirits of the departed from this world to the next. He is also called “the nourisher”, as Visnū in later times was called “the preserver”.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{Soma} the god of the drink, occupies a prominent position in the Vedic ritual. These were objects of reverence to both the ancestors of Indians and Iranian, for much of their cult revolved round Soma (in the Avesta Haoma).

According to the Vedic hymns is the god who “represents and animates the juice of Soma plant”\textsuperscript{16}. Soma is the juice of a milky climbing plant, extracted and fermented, forming a beverage offered in libations to the deities, and drunk by the Brāhmanas. Its exhilarating qualities were grateful to the priests and the gods were represented as being fond of it\textsuperscript{17}.

\textsuperscript{14} W.J.Wilkins, Hindu Mythology P 30
\textsuperscript{15} W.J.Wilkins, Hindu Mythology, P 36.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, P 69
\textsuperscript{17} T. Rengarajan, Dictionary of Indian Epics, P 468
Dyaus (Heaven) and Prithivī (Earth) are amongst the most ancient of Āryan deities; hence they are spoken of in the hymns of the Rgveda as the parents of the other gods. They are described as the “great wise and energetic”; those who “promote righteousness, and lavish gifts upon their worshippers. And in another place they are said to have “made all creatures”, and through their favor immortality is conferred upon their offspring. Not only are they the creators, but also the preservers of all creatures; and are beneficent and kind to all. ¹⁸

Aditi has the honor of being almost the only goddess mentioned by the name in the Rgveda, as the mother of any of the gods; but it is by no means an easy task to delineate her character, as the most contradictory statements are made concerning her. She was invoked as the bestower of blessing on children and cattle; and she is declared to be the mother of Varuna, and other deities, some time eight, sometime twelve in number. She is supposed to be impersonation of infinity, especially the boundlessness of heaven, in opposition to the finiteness of earth. Another supposition is that Aditi is the personification of universal, all-embracing Nature or Being. ¹⁹

Ādityas are the descendant of Aditi. In one passage in the Rgveda, the names of six Ādityas are given: Mitra, Aryaman, Bhaga, Varuna, Daksā and Amśa. In another passage they are said to be seven in number, though their names are not given. In a third, eight is the number mentioned;

¹⁸ T. Rengarajan, Dictionary of Indian Epics, P 13
¹⁹ Ibid, P17
but of the eight sons of Aditi, who were born from her body, it is told that she approached the god with seven, and cast out Märtnāda (the eight). As the name of these sons given in different parts of Vedas don’t agree with each other, it is difficult to know who were originally regarded as Ādityas. Judging from the number of hymns addressed to them, some of these deities occupied a conspicuous position in the Vedic Pantheon; whilst others are named once or twice only, and then in connection with their more illustrious brethren. 20

Vāyu is the god of wind and one of the Vedic trinity. He is associated with Indra and rides on the chariot with him, Indra being the charioteer. Vāyu is said to have sprung from the breath of Purusā, the Supreme Being 21. Some times he is regarded, equally with Indra, as representing or ruling over the atmosphere. He won the race for the first draught of the soma juice; and at Indra’s request allowed him to have a quarter of it. 22

Vāta is another name of Vāyu in the Vedas. He is generally known as Vāyu, but the name is sometimes combined in the Rgveda with that Parjanya, and Parjanya-Vāta and Vāyu are then mentioned distinctly. 23

Apām Napāt is described as brilliant and youthful and is said to shine, without fuel in the waters. He is golden in form, appearance, and

20 W.J.Wilkins , Hindu Mythology, P 18, 19
21 T. Rengarajan, Dictionary of Indian Epics ,P 200.
22 W J.Wilkins , Hindu Mythology, P65
23 T. Rengarajan, Dictionary of Indian Epics, P 524.
This deity has appeared in the Avesta by the same name. In the Avesta Apām napāt is a sprit of waters, who lives in their depth, is surrounded by females and is often invoked with them, drives with the swift steed, and is said to have seized the brightness in the depth of ocean.

4. Ancient Iranian literature and Avesta

Among the references which are available to research about ancient Iranian belief these three are the important sources as follows:

- Inscriptions and stone carvings of Achamenian kings (one of the most important ancient Iranian king dynasty)
- Reports of Greek Historians
- Avesta Book

1. Inscriptions and stone carvings of Achamenian kings

Many kings from the Achamenian kings like Darius, Xerxes, Ardshir and others, have written their deeds on the inscriptions. They have mentioned the names of the Gods like Ahura Mazda, Anāhita and Mithra who help them in their deeds. For instance Darius the great says:

“Ahura Mazda granted me this Kingdom; Ahura Mazda helped me to gain this kingdom; by order of Ahura Mazda, I have this kingdom”

25 MacDonell, History of Vedic Mythology, P 102.
26 Norman Sharp, Commandments of Achamenian Kings, P 34.
And in another place he has mentioned the name of Ahura Mazda and other gods as follows:

“Whatever I accomplished, I did it by order of Ahura Mazda. Ahura Mazda and other gods helped me.”  

“Ahura Mazda will bless the person who worships him”

And in another inscription he says as follows:

“Ahura Mazda is the great God who created this earth, that sky, this people, the happiness of the people and who appointed Darius as king, one king among all, one commander from many (people)”.

Xerxes the son of Darius says: “By order of Ahura Mazda I built this gate of all countries (Persepolis). I and my father (Darius) built many other beautiful things in this Persepolis whatever is beautiful I did by order of Ahura Mazda”.

Beside Ahura Mazd, Mithra and Anāhita are also worshiped by the Achamenian kings. Their names appeared in the inscriptions of Achamenian kings from the kingdom period of second Ardeshir (359-404 BC).

In his inscription he says as follows:

27 Ibid., P 70.
28 Ibid., P 76.
29 Norman Sharp, Commandments of Achamenian kings, P 85.
30 The capital of Achamenian kings in the ancient Iran.
“My grand father, Darius built this building (Persepolis). Fire destroyed it in the time of first Ardeshir (my father). I built it again by order (according to desire) of Ahura Mazda, Anahita and Mithra. May Ahura Mazda, Anāhita and Mithra keep me under their shelter and protect me from any enmity; and don’t destroy whatever I have built”\textsuperscript{32}.

2. **Greek Historians and geographers’ reports**

When Alexander the great attracted to Iran, Greek Historians and geographers have written important words about ancient Iranians.

Herodotus says as follows:

“Iranian worship sun, moon, earth, fire, water and wind and perform sacrifices for them.”\textsuperscript{33}

He also remarks: “Iranian don’t urinate and spit out in the water and don’t wash their hands in it and don’t contaminate it.”\textsuperscript{34}

Strābon, the Greek geographer quotes as follows:

“Iranian doesn’t take a bath in the flowing waters and don’t throw in that the dead corpse and whatever is impure.”\textsuperscript{35}

3. **Avesta; an Ancient Iranian Treatise**

Among all sources, Avesta Book is most important to study about ancient Iranian religion. No doubt Avesta book is the best and most valuable book in the ancient Iran which gives us useful information about

\textsuperscript{32} Pour Davoud, Yashhts, Vol 1, P 168.
\textsuperscript{33} Pour Davoud, Yashhts, Vol 1, P 160
\textsuperscript{34} ibid
\textsuperscript{35} ibid
religion, myths, thoughts and sciences of Ancient Iran. So this book is very important for comparative study in language, religion and culture.

The word of Avesta is the Persian form of the word abestāg or apestāk in the middle Persian (Pahlavi) language. This word probably means “command”. But this word is not mentioned in the Avesta texts\textsuperscript{36}.

There are various opinions about the original meaning and the root of the Avesta word. According to the opinion of scholars the word Avesta is a compound word from prefix (a)+vistā, participle from the root vid “to know” and in this sense it is cognate with the word “Veda”. Some scholars derived it from the root stā “to stand” and have translated it as “base”. And some persons have derived it with from the root stu “to praise” and translated as “specific praise and invocation”.\textsuperscript{37}

The texts of Avesta can be divided in two main parts:

- The Gāthā Avesta
- Younger Avesta

The texts of Gāthās are approximately one sixth of from the present Avesta. It is the only source about Zoroaster. In fact this book includes the pure religious instructions of Zoroaster.

The Younger Avesta includes five sixth portions from whole texts of the holy book of Zoroastrian. It has five main parts namely; Yasna, Visperad, Vendidād, Yashts and Khorde Avesta.

\textsuperscript{36} Zarshenas, Zohre, Language and literature of Ancient Iran, P 22.
\textsuperscript{37} Rashed Mohassel, Mohammad Taghi, Avesta, P 23.
i. **Yasna** includes the hymns and Zoroastrian religious prayers. It has seventy two Ha (= chapter). The word Yasna means “worship and invocation”.\(^{38}\)

ii. **Visperad** has twenty four parts. The Contents of this part of Avesta have been selected from Yasna. In fact it is supplementary of Yasna\(^{39}\).

iii. **Khorde Avesta** is also called as small Avesta. It has some short prayers for common people which have been selected from Avesta book.

iv. **Vandidād**: the old form of this word is Vīdaēuuadāta\(^{40}\) “the rules of separation and staying away from demons”. In fact this part of Avesta is the Practical book about religious laws. This book has been composed in the form of question and answering which Zoroaster asks some questions and Ahura Mazda replies to him. It has twenty two Fargard (= parts)\(^{41}\).

v. **Yashts**: in the Avesta language yašta is participle from the root yaz “to praise” and like Yasna it means “praise”. Yashts are the collection of praises and invocations for Zoroastrian Yazatas (Geniuses). The numbers of Yashts are twenty one. The Yashts are very important source of study about ancient Iranian culture and beliefs even before Zoroaster. Because in this collection

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\(^{38}\)Zarshenas, Zohre, Language and Literature of Ancient Iran, P 26.

\(^{39}\)Rashed Mohassel, Mohammad Taghi, Avesta, P 27.

\(^{40}\)Ibid, P 27.

\(^{41}\)Zarshenas, Zohre, Language and Literature of Ancient Iran, P 26.
there are some Yazatas which almost belong to Indo-Iranian period. In fact there are some Indo-Iranian gods who appeared in the Avesta as Yazatas. According to ancient Iranian calendar the name of twenty days of a solar month are dedicated to Yazatas.

Before introducing Yazatas; first it is necessary to explain some points about Zoroastrian religion, Ahura Mazda and Amesha Spentas.

According to Zoroastrian religion the world such as it is now, is twofold, being two hostile beings, Ahura Mazda, the good principle and Angra- Mainyu, the evil principle; all that is good in the world comes from the former, all that is bad comes from the latter. The history of the world is the history of their conflict, how Angra Mainyu invaded the world of Ahura Mazda and marred it, and how he shall be expelled from it at last. Man is active in the conflict, his duty in it being laid before him in the law revealed by Ahura Mazda to Zoroaster. When the appointed times comes, a son of law giver, still unborn, named Saoshyant will appear, Angara Mainyu and hell will be destroyed, men will rise from dead and everlasting happiness will reign over the world.⁴²

The Zoroastrian religion is therefore composed of two different strata, the one comprises all the gods, myth, and ideas which were already in existence during the Indo-Iranian period, whatever changes they may have undergone during the actual Iranian period, the other comprises the

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⁴² The Zend Avesta, Translated by J. Darmesteter, part I, Introduction P 46.
god, myth and ideas which where only developed after the separation of the two religions\textsuperscript{43}.

**Ahura Mazda**

Ahura Mazda is the name that Zoroaster gives to the god. He is placed at the top of Zoroastrian religion. Ahura Mazda means “The lord of wisdom” or “The wise Lord”. The first element of this compound Ahura “Lord “ is one of the Indo-Iranian generic forms of god head and Zoroaster confers upon it the Iranian epithet Mazda “wise”.

**Amesha Spentas**

Amesha Spentas are the various manifestations of Ahura Mazda who have been created by his will. Amesha Spenta means “The undying and well doing one”.

They are in the following\textsuperscript{44}:

- Sepand-MINU or Spenta Mainyu (Holy Spirit)
- Bahmān or Vohu-manô (good thought)
- Urdibehisht or Asha-vahishta (excellent holiness)
- Shahrivar or Khshathra-vairya (perfect sovereignty)
- Sepandārmad or Spenta Ārmaiti (divine piety)
- Khordād and Amordād or Haurvatāt and Ameretāt (health and immortality)

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, P 47.
\textsuperscript{44} The Zend Avesta, Translated by J. Darmesteter, part I, Introduction P 50.
All seven Amesha Spentas stay beside Ahura Mazda in their residency namely “Singing house” on the golden throne. Each of them supports a part of creation. Vohu-manô (good thought) supports the Animals; Asha-vahishta (excellent holiness), the fires; Khshathra-vairya (perfect sovereignty), the metals; Spenta Ārmaiti (divine piety), the earth; Haurvatāt (health), the waters and Ameretāt (immortality), the plants. The man is supported by Ahura Mazda himself.45

In the Avesta book Haptan Yasht (invocation of seven persons) is dedicated to this seven Amesha Spentas.46 Besides there are two separate Yashts which belong to two Amesha Spentas namely Urdibehisht Yasht47 and Khodād Yasht48.

Yazatas or Izads

There are many Yazatas who are mentioned in the Avesta. Some of them are related to the group of Indo-Iranian gods like Mithra, Anāhita, Vayu, Tishtryā, Bahrām (Verethraghna). Some of them related to religious ritual like Atar or Azar (Izad of Fire), and Haoma. And some of them are the natural phenomena like Khorshid (Sun), Āsmān (Sky) and Zamin (Earth). Every one of these Yazatas has a separate Yasht in the Avesta which has been composed for their invocation and praise. The text of the Yashts related to ancient Iranian gods and religious rituals before Zoroaster is very important and essential to study and research the ancient

46 The Zend Avesta, p II, P 35.
47 Ibid P 41.
48 Ibid P 48.
Iranian beliefs and religion even before Zoroaster. In fact these sources are the base of this research work to study the ancient Iranian beliefs and religion.

Here the researcher mentions some Yazatas of which some belong to the group of Ancient Iranians gods.

**Ardvi-Sura Anāhita** is the goddess of water in ancient Iran. The word “Ardvi-Sura” means “powerful” and “Anāhita” means “Pure” together means “The powerful and pure water”. She is the source of all waters on the earth. This name is used as Nāhid in the modern Persian. One of the longest and oldest “Yashts” from Avesta book namely; “Ābān Yasht” is dedicated to this Iranian goddess\(^{49}\).

**Moon** has been mentioned as “Maongha” in the Avesta book and it is said as “Māh” in the Pahlavi and Persian languages. One Yasht of the Avesta book namely; “Māh Yasht” and one of the most important prayers namely; “Māh Nyāyish” which is chanted three times in a month (beginning, middle and end of every month) are dedicated to the Moon. According to the ancient Iranian calendar a period of thirty days is said to be one month and one year consists of twelve months. The twelfth day of every month called “Māh-Ruz” (The day of the Moon) is dedicated to this divine personage.\(^{50}\) In the Avesta the holy moon has been praised as one who keeps the seed of the Bull\(^{51}\) and the lord of righteousness.

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\(^{49}\) Afifi, A, Mythology and Culture of Iran in the Pahlavi texts, P. 430. For more information refer to this same thesis, chapter IV, Anāhita in the Avesta.

\(^{50}\) Afifi, R, The Mythology and Culture of Iran in the Pahlavi texts, p.620.

\(^{51}\) The Zend Avesta, Part II, p.89.
**Tishtryā** is the name of Genius (Yazata) of rain and it is also the name of rains star. This name is in the form of “Tishtryā” in the Avesta, “Tishtar” in the Pahlavi texts and “Tashtar” or “Tir” in the Persian language.\(^5^2\) He appears in the Avesta as one who fights against the Apoasha, the very famous demon of drought in ancient Iran. Finally he overcomes this demon and the rain flows on the fields of seven country of Ahura Mazda.\(^5^3\)

**Mithra** is one of the most important Yazata in the Avesta Book. This name has been mentioned in the Avesta and ancient Persian as Mithra (Miθra), in Sanskrit as Mitra, in the Pahlavi text as Mitr or Miθra and in the Modern Persian as Mehr. The meaning of this word is the friendship contract and love. He is the god of light and brightness. One of the longest Yashts from Avesta namely; Mihr (Mehr) Yasht is dedicated to him. Originally Mithra is one of the Āryan’s gods who has appeared beside Varun in the Vedas.\(^5^4\)

**Sun** is the name of an ancient Iranian god and is the name of a “Yazata” in the Avesta book. The Avestan form of this world is “Hvarexšaeta” (Hvarekhshaeta) and it is said “Xvaršēt” in the Pahlavi texts, and “Xoršid” (Khorshid) in the Persian. The main quality which is mentioned for sun in the Avesta is the “swift horsed Sun”. The Sun from a

\(^5^2\) Mythology and Culture of Iran in the Pahlavi texts, p.463.  
\(^5^4\) Afifi . R, Mythology and Culture of Iran , P 624
long time ago was praised by Āryan people and ancient Iranian even before Zoroaster. 55

Drvāspā means one who has sturdy and healthy horse. Avestan form of this word is Drvāspā and this is another name of Gēuš Yazata who is the protector of cattle and herd. 56 Darmesteter applies this name as Gōs and says: Gōs “the Cow” is Personation of the animal kingdom which she maintains and protects 57. A Yasht of the Avesta book namely; Drvāspā Yasht or Gēuš (Gōs) Yasht belongs to this Yazata. 58

Fire was very holy in the opinion of ancient Iranians. It had been praised too and whoever disrespected the fire was treated with God’s anger. Iranian always used sweet-smelling sticks in the Fire-temples and braziers to please the Gods 59. Fire in the Avesta book is “Ātarsh” or “Ātar” and in the Ancient Persian language “Ātar” or “Āthar” and in the Pahlavi “Ātur” 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 60. “Ātash Nyāyish” 61 (Fire Praise) is one of the five most important Zoroastrians prayers which is read by priests in the Fire-temple in five times of the day.

55 Afifi, R; Mythology and Culture of Iran in the Pahlavi texts, p.503.
56 Ibid P. 510.
57 The Zend Avesta, Part II, p.110.
58 Ibid .
59 Afifi R.; Mythology and Culture of Iran p.405
60 Afifi R.; Mythology and Culture of Iran p.404
61 The Zend Avesta Part II. p.357.
Sorush is one the most important Zoroastrian Yazata. This name has been mentioned in the Avesta in form of Sraosha which means “Obedience”, especially obeying divine commands. Sorush in view of the rank is equal of Mithra. Some time he is considered as an Amesha Spentas. Among all creations of Ahura Mazda, Sorush was the first person who praised and invoked Ahura Mazda and Amesha Spentas. He was the first one who performed the rituals and chanted the Gāthā (Zoroaster’s hymns). A Yasht from the Avesta namely; ‘Srōš Yasht Hâdhôkht’ belongs to this Yazata.

Farvardin also is the name of a Zoroastrian Yazata. The Pahlavi form of this word is Farvartin which has been derived from Fravashi, the Avestan form of this word. Another Pahlavi form of this word is Farvahar. Farvahar is one of the inner faculties of the man which existed before birth. It ascends to the heaven after death and remains there eternally.

Darmesteter says: “The Fravashi was independent of the circumstance of life or death, an immortal part of the individual which existed before man and outlived him.”

Farvahar (Fravashi) is one of most important traits of the Zoroastrian religion. One of the longest Yasht of Avesta (thirteenth Yasht) namely; Farvardin Yasht belongs to this Yazata. The Farvardin festival or Nowruz festival (New Year festival in Iran and one of the ancient Iranian festival)

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62 Afifi R.; Mythology and Culture of Iran. PP 517,518.
63 The Zend Avesta, Part II, p.159.
64 Pour Davoud. E, Yashts , Vol I, P 582.
65 The Zend Avesta, Translated by J. Darmesteter , Part I, Introduction, P 74.
66 The Zend Avesta, Part II, p.179.
which is held in the First day of Farvardin (the first month of the year according to solar calendar) is the time of descending of Farvahars to visit the survivors. Verethraghna is one of powerful Geniuses (angel) in the Avesta and it means victory. The Avestan form of this word is Verethraghna and it is the form of Varharām or Varharān in the Pahlavi text, and it is said Bahrām in the Persian language. Verethraghna belongs to the Indo-Iranian divinities. He is one of the most popular divinities of the Iranian cult and is considered as Indra in the Vedas. He is Genius of victory and the best armed of the spiritual angles. The Bahrām Yasht in Avesta bearing his name celebrates his exploits.

Vayu in the Avesta Book is the god of wind. This name has been also applied as Veyu, Vāyu, Vāy and Andarvāy in the Pahlavi Books. Vaya in the Avesta is the name of wind element as well as Genius of wind. In fact Vayu is beside of water, fire and earth to complete the four elements. One Yasht of the Avesta Book namely; “Rām Yasht” is dedicated to Vayu.

Chistā is the genius of knowledge. In the Avesta Chisti or Chistā means science and knowledge. A Yasht from the Avesta Book namely “Dīn Yasht” is dedicated to Chistā.
**Art or Ard** is the Genius of wealth. This word has been mentioned as Ashi Vanguhi. The Ashi in the Avesta means wealth, blessing, riches, reward and it also is the name of the Yazata who guards the wealth and property. A Yasht from Avesta namely; Art Yasht or Ashi Yasht belongs to it. According to the Ancient Iranians calendar the twenty fifth day of every month is called Ard or Art day.

**Ashtād** is also the name of a Zoroastrian Yazata. This word is in the Avesta as Arshat, in the Pahlavi as Ashtād and in the Persian as Ashtād. According to Bundahish (one of the Pahlavi text) Ashtād is the guide of the people in the paradise and this world. One of the important attributes which has been mentioned in the Avesta for Ashtād is “One who increases the world” In Ancient Iranian calendar the twenty sixth day of every month is Ashtāt day. A Yasht from the book of Yashts (a part of Avesta) is called Ashtād Yasht but the details of this Yasht are not related to this Yazata. It is about Iranian Farr.

**Zamiyād** or Zama-Yazata is the name of genius of the earth. This name is in the Avesta book as Zama, in the Pahlavi text as Zamik and in the modern Persian as Zamin. One Yasht of Avesta book is called

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75 The Zend Avesta, Part II, p.270.
76 Afifi, R. Methodology and Culture of Iran in the Pahlavi texts, P 429.
77 Ibid P 437.
78 The Zend Avesta, Part II, P 283.
79 Farr or Xvarenah (hvarenô) in the Avesta is properly the light of sovereignty, the glory from above which makes the an earthy god. He who possesses it reigns, he who losses it fell down. (Darmesteter. J, The Zend Avesta, Part I, Introduction, P 62.) The Farr which is specifying to Iranian is called Iranian Farr.
80 Afifi, R. Methodology and culture of Iran in the Pahlavi texts, P 534.
“Zamiyād Yasht”\textsuperscript{81} but its content is about the Kiyān Dynasty\textsuperscript{82} and due to this reason it is also called “Kiyān Yasht”. According to ancient Iranian calendar, the twenty eight day of every month is after the name of the earth\textsuperscript{83}.

**Haoma** in the Avesta is the name of a Yazata as well as plant which its obtained extract is consumed in the religious ceremonies. It is said Homa in the Pahlavi and Persian languages. “Haoma” in the Avesta and Soma in the Vedas are quite similar together. All over Avesta book, the Haoma plant and Yazata of Haoma have been mentioned as one who “drives death afar”. One Yasht of Avesta book namely; “Haoma Yasht” belong to the Haoma, in this Yasht, Golden Haoma is praised as one who increases the world and one who drives death afar.\textsuperscript{84}

There are many gods in the Vedas and Yazatas (geniuses) in the Avesta. However the present thesis concentrates only a few aspects of similar gods in these two literatures. This research work has compared and analyzed some important Veda gods and Avesta Yazatas who have some similarities in their names or attributes and qualities. With a glance on the details of this research work one can understand the relationship of India and Iran mythology. Any one who desires to study any one of them, it is beneficial to study some information about the other one.

\textsuperscript{81}The Zend Avesta, Part II, P 286.
\textsuperscript{82}One of the Iranian King Dynasty in Ancient time.
\textsuperscript{83}Afifi, R. Methodology and culture of Iran in the Pahlavi texts, P 534.
\textsuperscript{84}Pour Davoud, Yashts (of Avesta). Vol.2, p.353
The researcher hopes this research work will be a guide book for all Indian and Iranian scholars who want to study the background antiquities in ancient religion, mythology, culture and comparative linguistics. It may be useful to strengthen relationship of Indian and Iranian countries by focusing the ancient common history of Vedic and Avestan culture.

**Importance of the study**

Thinkers all over the world are concerned with the self understanding of man. Man wants to know about his own history. In the light of this history he determined his own destiny.

There are many reasons for comparative study some of them may be in the following:

- One good reason for a comparative study is that the thought structure is reached which will stand against human conflict, religious wars and communal tension. Most probably this is a real fear in the mind of the modernists.

- A study of different faith may show us the common acceptable points found in them, which till now might have been only dimly noticed.

- A study of various religions may serve to enrich and deepen ones insight in to ones own religion.

- A study of religions may cross- fertilized religion, leading to an amalgam of religion in sight or may give rise to newer form of religion.
But the main reasons of the researcher for comparative study of the faith of these two great societies namely; Iranian and Indian in the ancient era are as follows:

- Clarifying background of some of cultural and religious commonalities of Indians and Iranians.
- Contribution to unification, and development of Indo-Iran nation’s relationship through identification of racial and religious common background in ancient era.
- Such study may help to understand both Iranian and Indian cultures, in relation with each other.

Method of research

The method of research is comparative and is by library method but the comparison of the faith of these two great ancient societies has been done in two main fields namely, first in the linguistic aspects and secondly to compare the character and qualities of deities. In the first field the researcher tries to mention the gods by same names or little bit changed and then to compare them in both aspects for example: Vāyu in Vedas and Vāyu in Avesta; Soma and Haoma; Āpah and Āpi or Āp; Mitra and Mithra; Apām Napāt in Vedas and Avesta.

In the second field beside the comparison of the name of the gods the researcher has tried to compare their characters to distinguish the similarities and dissimilarities of their qualities.
This field of the study is very important because there are many gods in Veda and Avesta in which don’t have same name but totally have different names, but their duties and some qualities are almost the same or very nearly similar together for example: Agni in the Vedas and Ātar or Āzar(fire) in the Avesta ; Varunā and Ahura Mazda ; Čandra and Maongha(moon); Indra and Verethraghna (genius of Victory), Sūrya and Hvarexšaeta or Khorshid (Sun) ; Dyaus and Asmana (sky)Prithvī and Zamiyād (the earth).