CHAPTER IV

PREHISTORIC AND PROTO-HISTORIC PERIOD
I - DEFINING PREHISTORY AND PROTONISTORY

According to Dr. H. D. Sankalia, "Prehistory means the history of a region, a country or nation; people or race, before it took to or knew writing." But the case of India is peculiar in that though no regular written accounts were available here till the middle of the 3rd century B.C., India possesses a well-developed literature - the Vedic and the Sūtra - the earliest of which easily goes back to 1500 B.C. It remained unwritten for a long time. So the Proto-history of India starts from the Indus Valley culture (which had a pictographic script) and includes the Vedic and Post-Vedic periods ending about the 6th century B.C., during which certain early Chalcolithic or late Neolithic cultures flourished in Bundelkhand. For the sake of convenience, in this chapter we will study all evidence of religion in the region belonging to the Pre-Mauryan period.

II - SOURCES

In the rock-paintings of our area we have a rich source of information for the period under review. Religious beliefs and practices of the prehistoric people of Bundelkhand have found illustration in their contents.

No less important is the Chalcolithic pottery found at Bāran during excavation. On it some symbols have found depiction that may be attributed religious character.

In ancient Sanskrit literature of India we possess another source. Particularly Pāṇinī's grammar supplies us some valuable information regarding cults that existed during his time.

III - ON DEFINING RELIGION

The word 'Religion' is sometimes wrongly equated with its corresponding Sanskrit term 'Dharma', richer in meaning and deeper in significance than its English counterpart. The former stands for "certain characteristic types of beliefs, practices, feelings, moods, and attitudes etc."\(^1\), the latter signifies a mode of life or a code of conduct which regulates a man’s work and activities as a member of society enabling him not only to attend to his mundane obligations but to strive for Final liberation through it.

In ordinary usage, however, the word Religion has often been taken in the sense of a cult, communicating "a system of religious belief and worship"\(^2\) the practical expression of the religious experience. Dr. J. S. Jaw also takes the word as "essentially a system of faith and worship, implying, as it does, human recognition of a personal god entitled to obedience and its effect on conduct."\(^3\)

The difference between religion and philosophy should be made clear here. Drawing a distinction between religion and philosophy, Dr. R. K. Tripathi remarks,"There is no harm if religion believes in God as a person, in His incarnation or in creation out of His fiat or will. But this is not admissible in philosophy which is critical and rational."\(^4\) The consciousness of a mighty power is so overpowering that one immediately begins to feel one's littleness, one's impotence, one's nothingness. This experience does not make one feel any humiliation rather one is led to prayer and worship.

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5. Ibid. P. 22.
The lower and less civilized sections of the society worship a host of gods and godesses, whereas the higher or highbrow elite visualises Him as One and Supreme suffering no equal. Thus belief in a super-human being is always present. So acceptable, indeed, is the simple and short definition of religion, as "the belief in spiritual beings" given by A.B. Taylor.  

IV - THE ORIGIN OF RELIGION

The origins of religion are shrouded behind a thick iron wall of Time, as impenetrable even now as ever inspite of the vast resources of science and archaeology that are available to us. None can say, and with certainty, on the basis of unimpeachable evidence as when did the consciousness regarding God dawned on human mind. Nevertheless, some conjectures have been made to solve the riddle.

Meriting mention among such attempts is that of Dr. (Mrs) Margaret Murray who opines that in distant past, small societies consisting only of women and children came into existence as a natural corollary to the difference of sexes - the woman requiring safety and quiet during pregnancy period and the infants requiring protection and nourishment until strong enough to protect themselves. Belief in a female deity long precedes that of a male one, because woman was regarded as the sole origin of the child which she produced from her own body without any apparent cause, and when the child was born, she produced, also without apparent cause, the food to nourish it. To conclude this Creation or Transmission of Life by women appeared mysterious to the early man and to this

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phenomenon the origins of religion may be traced. According to Dr. R.K. Tripathi, "It is almost universally admitted that religion begins with the consciousness of some mysterious power or 'Mysterium Tremendum' as Otto happily calls it."

Mention may be made of another attempt in which origins of Religion have been traced to the elements of Magic present in human society prior to the birth of Religion. It is supposed that "fertility, fruitfulness and fear of the mysterious Nature, the shock of death or rejoicing over the success of killing an animal gradually sowed the seeds of magic and rituals which are the predecessors of human religion."2

V - THE MOTHER-GODDESS CULT

It is not a little surprising that the earliest manifestation of Religion in the area of our study contains those very elements to which the origins of religion have been traced in above attempts.

Of foremost importance in this connection, is the cult of the mother-goddess or a female deity to whom Dr. Margaret Murray accords the place before male god. Marshall says "In no country in the world has the worship of the Divine Mother been from time immemorial so deep-rooted and ubiquitous as in India."3 A passage in Matsya and Pādmapurāṇas speaks of Vindhyavāsini as a mother goddess of the Vindhyas and of Sita as that of Čitrakūṭa.4 Significant again, is the find of terracotta female figurines from excavations at Eran (Dist. Sagar) representing a female deity.

Dr. R. C. Bhandarkar\(^1\) has noted that Durga resided permanently on the Vindhya mountain and was the goddess of Sabaras Fulindas and other tribes, who worship many other goddesses also. We have already showed that these were the pre-Aryan dwellers of Bundelkhand. The facts noted above, collectively prove that Mother-Goddess cult in Bundelkhand is of prehistoric origin and was prevalent among the primitive settlers here. She held a pre-eminent position among the natural deities of the non-Aryan population. Indeed, as Marshall remarks,\(^2\) some of the pre-Aryan tribes have never really come within the fold of Hinduism and among these tribes the worship of the Mother or Earth-Goddess is specially strong.\(^2\)

Pāṇini has mentioned Pārvatī with several names such as Bhavānī, Sarvānī, Aurāṇī.\(^3\) We should remember that the Mother-Goddess of pre-Aryan times, when adopted by the Aryans became Umā and her various forms.

VI - Magic :-

Certain primitive tribes still inhabit the region of Bundelkhand and these modern back-waters of human race are an important source for the study of Prehistoric Man as he lived here. There is the case of 'arrested civilization' if we are to use a phrase of Toynbee. In them the element of magic predominates religion.

The idea of magic in the primitive man originated in material needs - particularly animals. Animals were both the staff of life and the chief adversary of man. So an idea arose

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3. Agrawala, V.S. : India as known to Panini, P.359.
that the hunters and the hunted belonged, as it were, together, resulting in mimesis and dances in which the hunter thought he was assuming the nature and life of the animal. As he was often able to kill his prey by imitating it, so he thought he could turn himself into an animal and thus have power over other animals. Power over the images or imprints gives power over the person is a conception observed to be common to the primitive mind.¹

In illustration of the above we can see in rock-paintings of the area of our study that the earliest group of them contain certain figures which are putting on animal masks.² A painting in Narayaoli rock-shelter shows a horse-rider wearing an animal mask resembling that of a horse. At Abchand we have human figures wearing animal masks bearing sword and shield.

VII - TOTEMS:-

The wearing of animal masks had another object also. Primitive man had firm faith in certain totems and he wore animal mask with a view to personifying them. A totem has been defined as "a class of material objects which a tribe regards with superstitious respect believing that there exists between it and every member of the class an intimate and altogether special relation." The most common features of behaviour towards the totem are a prohibition of the species as food and a certain respect for the animal in its natural state. Testifying to totemism among the early settlers of our area are certain rock-paintings of high

² Pande, S.K. "Painted Rock-Shelters in Madhya Pradesh (thesis) University of Saugor P. 283-87."
antiquity, studied by Dr. S.K. Pande in which human figures wearing animal masks perform ceremonial dances which either stand for sympathetic magic or are dramatization of clan legends.\(^1\) "Totemism is specially remarkable for its striking contrast to all anthropomorphism or anthropopathism where the spirits or gods who are venerated, respected or feared are thought of or described as partly or wholly human and with human traits."\(^2\)

Dr. S.K. Chatterji\(^3\) believes that certain magico-religious rituals are of Chauceric origin and we know that Proto-Australoids who settled in our area were called Nišādas, Pulindas and Šabarās by the Aryans. Elements of magic and totem must have existed in their religion. Origins of zoo-morphic deities in Brahmanism can be traced to the contact of Aryans and primitive dwellers of the region.

VIII - Taboo

Taboo is definitely religious in its essence. A tabooed object may not be killed, eaten, or spoken to as it tends to eradicate, its holy but dangerous essence to surrounding objects which, in consequence, become a taboo. Dr. S.K. Chatterji\(^4\) believes that the idea of taboo was born at a time when Proto-Australoids or Nišādas and Aryans first came into contact with each other.

IX - Organization of Bundelkhand

Gradual must have been the penetration of the Aryans in this region. Long before the birth of Buddhism and Jainism, numerous hermitages of Aryan Raṣis sprang into existence

3. The Vedic Age, p. 150.
4. Ibid.
along the banks of the rivers and up the mountainous fastnesses as the time rolled by. Alluring and inviting were the sylvan surroundings in Viniyana range for those in search of the Divine. In one of the Jātaka tales, we come across the name of Sarbhanga, a commander-in-chief of Benares, who built his hermitage somewhere in the Viniyana region on the Godāvari. 1 Bavari a chaplain of the king Prasenjita of Kosala also retired from the world and built a hermitage on the Godāvari in the Viniyana region. 2 We have noted above that the Godāvari of the Kāmāyaṇa has been identified by Cunningham with a stream near Citrarakūṭa in Banda district of Bundelkhand. 3 A road is known from early Jain literature which connected Rājgrha with Pātālilāṇa and must have passed through the region of our study. 4 Shri Gorelal Tiwari places hermitages of Atri, Sūtikṣaṇa and Sarbhanga, south of Yamuna of which that of Atri was certainly in the region of Bundelkhand. 5

According to Dr. C. C. Pandit, "the ascetics were divided into many classes. The most marked cleavage was between the orthodox and the heterodox, or as the Kalpaśūtra expresses it, between the "Bhrāmāṇnayēṣu" and the "Pariṣāyēṣu nayēṣu"." 6 The ancient Rais were not aggressive propagators of their faith. As distinguished from them the Pariṣāyakas (Pṛivaikal) and Śamāṇas (ṣramāṇa) exerted themselves actively to propagate the same amongst all classes of the people, with the result that before Aśoka ascended the throne, the whole of India was Aryamīd for he says in one of his edicts, "and there is no country except that of the Yavanas where there are not these order, namely, the Brāhmaṇa and the Śramāṇa ascetics.

2. Ibid. P.218.
Particularly regarding Bundelkhand we should note that the time of its Aryanisation has been taken as the end of Kṛṣṇa age, "when we find the aryans in occupation of the whole of North India including the regions beyond the Vindhyas and the Narmadā down to the Tapti and the Satparas. 1 According to A. D. Pixalkar," the area of Bundelkhand was colonized by the aryans during the time of Paraśurāma (2550-2350 B.C.) and Kauśika became king of Āodi who was one of the sons of the great Viṣṇava king Visharman. 2 The austic dwellers of the forests were called Nīgadhās by the aryans who were associated with the hills of central India and the Vindhyān tracts. 3

A - ZOOGORPHIC CULTS

A natural course of give-and-take followed after aryans came into contact with the primitive dwellers and in this the 'conquerors were conquered'. The fact is reflected in the Atharva Veda of which Dr. A. L. Basham says, "It possesses, however, an atmosphere of simple animism and sympathetic magic and seems to reflect a lower cultural level than that of the Rgveda deriving from the plebeian religion of the aryans and containing many non-aryan elements. 4 Identical are the opinions and observations of Dr. B. C. Law who says, "It was, indeed, through Atharvanic process that an alliance between secular Brahmanism and all primitive cults was possible. 5

Generally the totem of the prehistoric people was a bull or bison and we possess representation of bull in rock-paintings of our area. This bull, then becomes the mount of Viṣṇu.

1. V.A., P.311-12.
2. Ibid., P.284.
3. Ibid., P.314.
4. Basham, A.L., The Wonder that was India, P.233.
Dr. Bascham also speaks of the existence of theriomorphic cults among the early settlers of India, prominent among which he found the cult of the Boar in parts of Malwa. Later on this boar becomes an important incarnation of Vishnu but we get references to it even in early Vedic literature. It should be noted here that a large painting of Boar is available to us from Barkheda not very remote from the area of our study.

Influence of the Pre-Aryan dwellers can be noticed on the Aryans in other respect also. According to Dr. V.S. Agrawala, "Early Indian art invented a number of fanciful figures such as Siṃha-Vyāla, Gaja-vyāla, Áva-vyāla .... in which a particular head was joined to a different body. Indian view is that they are so many ganas of Rudra. Of interest for us here is the fact that a Gupta temple at Bhumra near the boundary of Bundelkhand has yielded from its ruins numerous representations of zoomorphic ganas. So the possibility can not be ruled out that many zoomorphic deities were worshipped in the area of Bundelkhand during the period under review. At Abcand we come across a painting of an animal which has the face of an elephant and legs like those of a horse.

Writing about religious conditions in the age of Buddha, Dr. G.C. Pande says, "Besides the celestial gods and wood-land deities, the people worshipped various kinds of lowly beings like the shades of the departed, evil spirits, and various animals such as elephants, horses, cows, dogs and crows. An oft-quoted passage from Middesa (placed in 4th century B.C.) needs to be quoted here," the deity of those who are devoted to an elephant, a horse, a cow, a dog, 

2. Ṛgveda 1/61/71.
3. Indian Art, P.72.
a crow, Vāsudeva, Baladeva, Punnabhadda, Manibhadda, Aggi, Nāgas, Supannas, Yakshas, Asuras, Gandabhás, Mahārājas, Ganda, Sūriya, Inda, Brahma, Deva, Dīsa is the elephant, the horse, the cow, the dog, the crow....respectively.\(^1\) Needless to say that many of the totems of prehistoric dwellers of Bundelkhand underwent a metamorphosis into cult deities after the Aryanization of Bundelkhand being worshipped now as Zoomorphic deities.

XI- **SIVA**

Pāṇini has mentioned some Vedic as well as post-Vedic deities. Among these we find names like Sarva, Bhava, Rudra which are associated with Śiva.\(^2\) No positive evidence we possess for proving the existence of Śaiva cult in Bundelkhand during the period under review. But Dr. R.G. Bhandarkar is of the view that Śiva had a close connection with stragglers in the forests, with Vrātyas or those who were not included in the Aryan community and with the wild tribe of the Nisādas.\(^3\) He further says," the gods of these last were amalgamated with Rudra." Adoption of zoomorphic deities by the Aryans and their affiliation to Śiva has already been mentioned above. But if we accept the opinion of Dr. R.G. Bhandarkar, existence of Śaiva cult in the area of our study is not beyond realms of possibility. It may be noted here that trident, a special weapon of Śiva, has found depiction in the prehistoric rock-paintings of our area which also points to the existence of Śaivism.

XII- **JAINISM**

Dr. Jyoti Prasad Jain has tried to establish that Jainism existed even during the time of Ṛgveda. His findings and observations have direct bearings upon the area of our study and subject. So a mention of his theory would not be out of place here.

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2. Agrawala, V.S. : India as known to Pāṇini, P.358.
Saying his argument on literary data, he says, the name of Rṣabha-deva is mentioned even in the Ṛgveda. The Vedic literature indirectly mentions him as Arhan, Keśi, Vrātya and Vataraṇa muni. The principles which he taught can be gleaned from the Vedic literature, which calls his followers as śramaṇa, muni and yati.

Further, the Vedic king Vena, supposed to have been born ninth in line of Manu according to Viṣṇu-Purāṇa, embraced the Āhimsā-Dharma of his maternal grandfather Yama and objected to the caste system. Origins of aboriginal tribes like Śābara, Pundra, and Vāhlika are traced to his time and he propagated Jainism among these Ānāryas who were variously called by the Aryans vis., asuras, daityas, rakṣasas and nāgas. ¹

The name of Hājā Vena is mentioned in the Hāthigumpha inscription of Kharavela² who was a Jain king and who calls him a great conqueror. Earlier in the line stands king Vasu³ also mentioned in the same inscription. We have accepted king Vasu as the first Aryan king of the Cedi kingdom. Significantly, this king was also a believer in Āhimsā-Dharma for he did not allow the killing of animals at the sacrifice he instituted. His story is narrated by Bhīṣma in the Mahābhārata.⁴ According to Dr. G.C. Pande, "The Mganathas or the Jainas were an already established sect in the age of Buddha. They claim a hoary antiquity for themselves which seems quite plausible. They appear to have belonged to the non-Vedic Munis and śramaṇas who may have been ultimately connected with pre-Vedic civilisation."⁵

¹ Jaina, Jyāoti Prasad: "Rājya Vane'r Oṛā Pramanra Kī Prāchīnātā" (Karl)
² चुल्लक चित्रनन्द शृंगी ग्रंथ, पृ. १३५-३६.
³ राजसिद्ध सूक्ष्मविनिरोध.
Vasu and Vena both belonged to the Čedi dynasty in which was born kuṇāravela later on. We have already seen in one of the preceding chapters that the earliest name available for the area of Bundelkhand from early literature is Čedi. Further, Čabarās have also been identified to be the primitive settlers of this area. A tradition in the Jain Bhāraṭa-Sūtra 1 associated with Ajīvikas locates Kūndra country at the foot of the Vindhyā mountain. Thus taking into consideration all the evidence cited above, it is not altogether impossible that Jainism existed in Bundelkhand in as early times as those of king Vasu.

XIII - RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS

We have noted that rock-paintings contain religious symbols. So does pottery recovered from the Banavasi excavations. But whereas symbols of the former are datable only to the Mauryan and post-Mauryan period, the latter source has been assigned to the Chalcolithic period on scientific basis. Dr. U.V. Singh who has thoroughly studied the pottery from Banavasi found that painted designs on it included among other things crosses, 3 stars, 4 Sigmas, 5 Sun, 6 Plants and animals 7 also. But he treats them purely as decorative motifs and attributes no religious significance to them whatever.

3. Ibid., Plate XLVII Nos. 94, 95, 96, 110.
4. Ibid., P. 151.
5. Ibid., Plate XLVII Nos. 101, 102, 103.
6. Ibid., Plate XLVII Nos. 97, 98, 99, 100.
7. Ibid., Plate XL, No. 40.
8. Ibid., Plate XLVIII, from No. 123 to 148.
There may be some truth in his opinion regarding symbols like crosses and stars but he has not been able to appreciate properly the deep symbolism underlying figures of Sun and Sigma. The former, in one case, is available with rays radiating from it. And Sigma bears close resemblance to Vajra, which had intimate association with Indra. And it needs little evidence to prove that Sūrya and Indra were worshipped even during the Vedic age. Admitting though the fact that pottery may not be a proper medium for religious symbolism, we attribute religious significance to these symbols because high and mighty deities like Sun and Indra could not be represented merely for decorative purposes. Noteworthy, are the opinions of Dr. U.P. Sahab here. He says, "Forms which are regarded as purely decorative or artistic might have once had some religious or another meaning attached to them at some stage of their development."

XIV - Indra

We have accepted Vasu Uraśidara to be the first Aryan king of Bāndelkhand. An interesting myth is associated with this king. Varānaśīvara relates that once the gods were unable to defeat the Asuras in war. Headed by Indra they went to Viśnu on Brahmā's advice. Viśnu gave Indra a flag which enabled him to overpower his foes. Indra in his turn gave a bamboo flag-staff to the Čedi King Vasu Uraśidara who worshipped it duly and thus started the festival known as Indramahā. The myth attests to the fact that Indra was an important deity in Bāndelkhand during the period.

2. S.J., XII, 13.