CHAPTER -1

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i) Background of Iran and its origin.

Iran, one of the oldest civilizations, has played a significant role to spread human civilization in the world. Its language Persian, not only influenced the human race of its territory, but also the surrounding nations of the region to a great extent.

Iran and Persia: The two names have been used to designate the same country, but are not truly synonyms, when the Aryan peoples migrated from their original territory south of the Aral Sea to the upland plateau below the Caspian Sea, they called the new region Iran, which means 'Land of Aryan ('Airavejo', 'Aryavarta') 1.

The great royal palace site of the Achemenid dynasty, which originally ruled over the region north east of the head of the Persian Gulf, was called Parsa, taken into the Greek language at the time of Alexander, the Great as Persepolis. The powerful Achaemenid Empire was called Iran, but the regional and palace name became transferred to the province within the empire as Pars or Fars, and hence the people of many other lands came to be called the country Persia. In Sassanian times, the official name of the empire of Iran was Iranshahr. Since 1935 when the Iranian government, for the sake of consistency, requested all foreign countries to use the official name of Iran, the correct designation has gained general usage.

1. Firoze Cowasji Davar, Iran and its Culture, P-viii
On the otherhand the language of country is Persian. Farsi to the inhabitants, since it is the language of ancient Parsa, and it is written in Arabic characters. 2

As stated above Iran is one of the world's oldest countries. Its history dates back almost 5,000 years. It is situated at a strategic juncture in the Middle East region of South west Area. Evidence of man's presence as far back as the lower Paleolithic period on the Iranian has been found in the Kerman Shah valley.

The first civilization of Iranian was that of the Elamites, who might have settled in South western Iran as early as 3000 B.C. In 1000 B.C. Aryan tribes began migrating to Iran from the Volga River North of the Caspian Sea and from Central Asia. Eventually two major tribes of Aryans, the Persians and Medes settled in Iran, one group settled in the North west and founded the kingdom of Media. The other group lived in South Iran in an area that the Greeks later called Persians from which the name Persia is derived. However, both the Medes and Persians called their new homeland Iran, meaning 'the land of Aryans'. 3

Our knowledge of the earliest inhabitants of Iran is very fragmentary. Excavations in the cave at Behistun and in the caves called Beltand Hotu near Bohshahr on the Caspian coast represent a splendid beginning. The initial finds indicate an active flint industry in the Middle Paleolithic period as well as Skeletons and skulls of the Mesolithic period: this latter material has been dated to about 10,000 B.C. by the carbon -14 method of analyzing pieces of charcoal from various levels of digging. The excavators themselves believe that these people were Nordic of the same race as the Inner Paleolthic hunters of Europe.

2. Encyclopedia of Muslim World, Vol-10. P-68
3. Donald N. Wilber, Iran Past and Present, P-1
About 6,000 B.C the inhabitants of the area of Iran discovered agriculture, practical animal husbandry, and made printed pottery and polished stone implements. The physical characteristics of these people are not known, although at a later date precise material comes from a rock-cut relief at Kurangun in South western Iran. Dated about 2,500 B.C., the scene contains the sharply cut profiles of some forty of the local people. Farming gave a more dependable food supply and it seems certain that the population expanded greatly and spread out over valleys and plains. 4

The migration of Aryans from their original abode in Central Asia to the various points of Europe and Asia and particularly Iran and India, must be reckoned as the greatest event in human history, suddenly it opened a flood of intellectual activities, and the future course of human evolution was now largely determined by the tides of this flood.

The various groups of the migrating Aryans settled at different points in Asia and Europe bringing with them the language or languages through which they had been communicating. Thus came into being the Family of Indo-European languages which can be truly regarded as the greatest repository of human wisdom and knowledge. No doubt, the advancement of civilization and culture owes its greatest debt to the speakers of the Indo-European languages 5

**Important Political Periods of the History of Iran.**

Iranian history which is more or less documented with a written record and the details of which may from the subject matter of authentic study and discussion, extend over a period of 2,500 years. Roughly, it began in the year B.C 550 and continues to the present day. It may be classified into three periods as follows:

4. Donald N. Wilber, Iran past and present, P 155

1. Pre-Islamic Era: (Pre Aryan & Post Aryan) It may be said to have started with the rise of the Achaemenian dynasty, founded by Cyrus, the Great in B.C. 546 and lasted until the defeat of the Sassanian dynasty by the Arab (Muslim) invaders in A.D. 636 extending over eleven centuries.

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Even before the rise of the Achaemenan dynasty the Geographical boundaries of Iran were marked by the Oxus and the Persian Gulf on the one hand, and by the Indus and the Euphrates on the other. This vast region was inhabited in the North by a people of Aryan stock whom the Greeks called the Medes. The Shahnamah refers to them as the Pishdadiyan. Though the Iranian culture and civilization as well as the purest Aryan tradition existed during that period, the district culture of Iran and her actual written history began under the Achamenian. 6

6. Dr. Ali Asghar Hikmat: Glimpses of Persian Literature, pp-1, 2
PRE-ISLAMIC ERA

It was during this era that the purely national culture of Iran, whose remnants are still found both within and outside the country, had reached the zenith of its growth and development. This part of Iranian history may be subdivided into three distinct periods.

A. The Achaemenian period, (or in the words of the Shahnamah, the age of the Kayans). This period began with the accession of Cyrus, the Great (B.C. 546) whom some of the scholars identified with Kaikhusraw of the Shahnamah. It ended with the invasion of Alexander, the Great, who routed the Achamenans and brought the end of the dynasty. The last Achaemenan king was put to death in B.C 330.

The chief characteristics of this period are the evolution of the Ancient Persian language and the spreading language and the spreading abroad of the culture and political influence of Iran over an area extending from India to Greece.

B. The second period is the Parthian period which, in the Shahnamah, has been referred to as the age of Ashkaniyan. It represents an age of the rule of the “Kings of the Tribes” and included the rule of the Greek Selucids as well as of later Chieftains, mainly the descendants of Ashk. The later ruled small principalities in different parts of the country. The period began with the assassination of Darius Codomannus in B.C 330 and ended with the defeat of Ardawn, the Arsacid, by Ardeshir in A.D. 226. During this period, Iran was somewhat under the political and culture influence of Greece. Written records and detailed information belonging to the period are lacking and it may be described “The Dark Age” of Iranian history.

C. The Pahlavi period or the Shahnamah epoch, began with the fall of Ardawan and the founding of the Sassanian dynasty by Ardeshir Babkan in A.D. 226.
and continued until the Arab invasion of Iran and the break up of the Iranian empire at the death of Yazdgird III in 651.

Persian Empire was one of the biggest and mightiest empires of the world. During the time of Darius, one of the great kings of Achaemenid, the states included even Punjab of undivided India. Even pomp and glory of the Persian Empire had been acknowledged by our beloved prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). It is reported to have said that ‘I am very fortunate to be born in a period when the just ruler like Anushirwan was ruling over Iran’.

The documents and writings that have come to us in the Iranian languages as they developed in the course of their long history, are very valuable from the point of Historical Linguistics’ because their comparative study can very well reveal the evolution and development of an important branch of the Indo-European family of languages through its various stages.

It is on the basis of the study of these documents that the history of the development of the Iranian languages has been divided into three significant periods.


1. **Ancient Period**: Median, Scythian, Old Persian, and Avestan languages. Of these the last two languages hold great significance. Old Persian was the official language of the Achaemenian Empire which came into power in about 610 B.C. and a number of stone inscriptions are available in this language.

2. **Medieval Period**: Among the Middle Iranian languages, which flourished after the fall of Achaemenian Empire and the interval of the Selucid rule, Pahlavi is the most important.

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7. Ibid, P-2
It served as the official language of the two great Iranian dynasties, the Parthian and the Sassanian. Thus its span spreads from the middle of the 3rd Century B.C. to the middle of the 7th century A.D. a period of nine hundred years. It is also the sacred language of the two Iranian faiths, Zoroastrianism and Manicheanism. Pahlavi is now clearly divided into different dialects or languages, The South western Pahlavi or (Parsik) and the North eastern Pahlavi or Pahlavanik.

3. Modern Period: The term new Iranian is applied to the language and dialects which have been prevalent in the vast land of Iran from the beginning of the Islamic period till now and have been in use in conversation or writing among the various Iranian communities. Most important all of them is Dari Persian which has been and still is the official, administrative literary and academic language during this long period and has served and is still serving as the means of mental and spiritual communication for all the Iranians.

8. Dr. N.H. Ansari; A History of the Persian Language Vol.- 1, PP- 149, 150
ii) Map of present Iran
ii) What is Indo-European :-

The term Indo-European is used to denote a hypothetically reconstructed language whose existence has only been hypothetically established without any factual findings of this language in any form in this world; but whose existence can only be hypothetically equated after a careful comparison of some languages, such as Sanskrit, Avestan, Old Persian, Albanian, Armenian, Lithuanian, Latvian, Old Prussian, Old Church, Slavonic, Russian, Greek, Latin, Germanic, (Gothic), Celtic and Tokharian. All these languages were in flexional and synthetic at the beginning and their descendants gradually became analytic. These languages are akin to each other in linguistic structure, and therefore their phonological, morphological, syntactical and semantic equations are possible. Their similarities are so strong indeed that scholars have become unanimous in grouping them into one common family which perhaps no longer exists. The common name of the family as suggested by scholars is Indo-European. It is true that these languages have undergone a change and have developed in their own way, but still they have followed some definite laws in the course of their developments and changes. 9

9. Prof. Satya Ranjan Banerjee, A Handbook of Sanskrit Philosophy, P- (Vi)
iv) Diagram of world languages :-

[Image of a diagram showing the relationships between different world languages.]
One of the important groups of the Indo-European family of languages is Ayran or Indo-Iranian. From the oldest times, the word Arya was applied by the ancestors of both the Indians and Iranians to their race. But, in Iran, the groups of the people which had settled here in the beginning of the first millennium B.C. and spoke an Indo-European language called themselves Arya. Later on, their country was also called Eran or Iran in accordance with their own name. 10

Regarding the Medians who founded the first Iranian Empire, the Greek historian Herodotus writes that they are called Arioi (Aryan or Iranian) throughout the world. The relation of the Persian people to the Aryan race is also recorded in the stone inscriptions of the Darius, the Great who calls himself Iranian and of the Iranian race. As regards the race of the people who spoke the Avestan, the name of their original settlement Aryana Vaejah meaning 'the abode of the Iranians' is a good indicator. 11

The Scythians, Saramatians, Alanis and some other nomadic tribes of the Central Asia should be regarded among the people of the Iranian race because their descendants in Khotan and Tumshuq or the Cencasus (Ossetic) spoke and are still speaking the Iranian language. The names of the Scythians and many of the Saramatians are undoubtedly Iranian. Similarly, the word Alani, which is the name of the ancestors of the present Ossetic, is related to the word Aryan. There have been other groups of people belonging to the Iranian race which had at least oral literature. Among them may be mentioned the Sogdians and Parthians who produced considerable literary works in the later period.

10. Lexicon Universal Encyclopaedia (vol - 2), P - 145
11. Dr. Mzahar Asif, (tr) Tarikh - e - Assam (preface)
Similarly, the Bactrian’s and some other peoples were probably Iranians as the rock inscription of Ashoka discovered at Qandahar is addressed to them. But no specimen of their language, as it existed in the ancient period, seems to be extant.

The most ancient language of Iran as well as the Zarathushtrian scriptures, written in that language are the both known to us ‘Avesta’, it is erroneous, though common, to name the Zarathushtrian scriptures as ‘Zend Avesta’ or commentary upon it. Its another very common mistake is to consider Zend as a language. Zend is not a language at all, but the word, derived from the Pahlavi ‘Azinti’ means commentary or exposition. Hence Zend Avesta means the Avestan scriptures together with the commentary.

The languages of Iran during the Achaemenian rule has been named by scholars ‘Old Persian’ from which Pahlavi arose in later times. Old Persian is a corrupt from the Avestan language. Unfortunately no literature written in Old Persian has been come down to us; only the rock records of Achaemenian kings, written in cuneiform, have survived. 12

An analysis of the documents and writings in the Old Persian languages that have come down to us will throw light on the topic in proper perspective.

12. Firoze Cowasji Davar, Iran and its Culture, P - 282
1. The Median Language:

In the beginning of the first millennium B.C., the entire region lying between the valley of the Oxus and Syr River had been abode of the Aryans. To the north of this land, near the Aral Sea, was the country of Khawarrizm which was probably the first centre of Zoroastrian religion and, at any rate, it was regarded as an important religious and political centre. On the South eastern side laid Sogdiana in the vicinity of Samarqand. On this side of the Oxus river were Merv, Ayra( Herat) and Bactria.

It was probably from this North eastern religion that the Aryans descended to the Western Iran. In the beginning in the first millennium, the Medians and Persians had taken position on the borders of Assyria. Their power was constantly rising. It was in 610 B.C. that the Median king Huvaxshatra (Cyaxares) colluded with the rulers of Babylonia and overthrew the Assyrian government.

The Median empire is the first Iranian government about which some information is provided by the annals of the Mesopotamians government and the writing of Herodotus, the Greek historian. However, no writing in the Median language has come down to us and we do not know exactly whether the Medians had a written languages or not. The Achamaenan empires preserved the government and administrative records in Higamatana (Hamadan) also, the former capital of Media in addition to Pasargadae, Shush and Babylon.

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13. Encyclopaedia of Muslim World, Vol. -10, P- 74
In all probability, the Median government also, had a treasury for the government and official records but it can not said definitely that this records written by the Median kings who ruled in the beginning of the 7th century A.D. had set the custom that a summary of petition and claims was written down and sent in to the palace before the king who after issuing his orders returned them.

However, there are indications to presume that the alien secretaries translated the subject of the claims and counter claims for the king into Median which are originally written in their own current language. Some scholars believe that the Medians used the Cuneiform Script of the Old Persian also. They rather think that the style of writing Old Persian is the continuation of the style originated under the Median Empire. But it appears from the Bistun inscription of Darius that he was the first person to record something in the Iranian language, and this point goes contrary to the view of the above scholars. 15

Now, our entire knowledge of the Median language is limited to a few words which have come down to us indirectly. Most of these words are the proper name recorded in the Greek or Persian writings.

2. The Scythian Language: -

The Scythian were the Iranian people, some of whom had settled in the east of the Caspian Sea and the north of the abode of the Parthians and Sogdians. Others groups of Scythian lived in the West of Caspian Sea and the palace situated to the north of the Black Sea. The Western Scythian had overpowered the Median dynasty and taken the reigns of the government in their hand but after wards the Medians regained the control of the country and put an end to their domination. 16

15. Dr. N.H. Ansary, A History of the Persian Language (Vol. - 1), P - 151
16. Ibid, P - 152
The stone inscription of the Darius mentioned two groups of the Scythians. One of them is called the ‘Sharp-helmeted Scythians’ and other, the ‘Scythian beyond the Sea’. Each of them had settled in a particular region of the Achaemenan empire of that time. The Old Scythian language was not exactly similar to the Medians and Old Persian languages but it was not much different, too. Herodotus writes that the Median king Huvaxshatara treated respectfully a group of the Scythian warriors who had taken refuge with him and entrusted the Median children to them so that they may teach their language to them.

The some historian narrates some national stories and traditions of the Scythains regarding their origin, race and ancient history.

Strabo, the Greek geographer of the first century A.D. refers to the exceeding similarity existing among the Scythian, Median and Old Persian languages. 17

3. Avesta:-

The origin and meaning of the Avesta are obscure. The term Avesta(or in its older from Avistak, modern persian, Apastak) is a cognate with Sanskrit. But in meaning it is applied to a collection of writings which was popularly known as Zend or Old Bactrian. The word was used for, 'Scriptures' in the Pahlavi version of the Sassanian time. Later on the word came to signify ‘wisdom’, ‘knowledge’ or the book of knowledge. From the Pahlavi Avistak Va Zend, the term Zend Avesta was wrongly coined by Antequetil du Perron in 1771. Zend literary means ‘explanation’, and so Zend Avesta would mean ‘the scripture and commentary’. 18

17. Prof. Satya Ranjan Banerjee, A Handbook of Sanskrit Philology, P - Lvi
18. Dr. Rezazade Safaq, Tarikh - e- Adabiyate Iran (Persian), P - 7
The most ancient language of Iran contemporary to Sanskrit in India is known as Avesta. The Avesta is also the sacred book on Zoroastrians which is written in Avestan language. There are controversies about the word Avesta, some important historians are of the opinion that the word Avesta is Awestak meaning the Quranic verses. Some other like the author of Tarikh-e-Tabari has written as Avistak, but it has been recorded as Awesta or Ust in Dari language.

This language was spoken during the Peshdadian period in the Northern part of Iran. It was written from left to right in Avestan or Din Dabireh script. This language has I’rab like Arabic and changes according to its sound unlike the Modern Persian. It has both masculine and feminine gender. This language had 44 consonant and vowel in the alphabet, which was invented by Azar Padma Raspond during the reign of Sapur-1, the Avesta written in this script is called Zend later on when Avesta was transformed into Dari, it was named as Pazand and is considered to be one of the most perfect and scientific alphabets of the world.

This language has two dialects (1) The first dialect is called Gahani dialect or ancient dialect. (2) and the second dialect is modern dialect.

19. Dr. Muhammad Bahar Taqi, Sabak Shenasi (Persian), Vol-1, P-6
20. Ibid, P-7
21. Ibid, (Vol-1), P-15
4. Old Persian:-

This language is also known as *Farsi Qadim*. This language was spoken by the people of Paras who lived in the South-west part of Iran. This language written from left to right in a *Cuneiform script (Khatta Mekhi)*. This script was one of the toughest scripts of the world, which was invented by the Samarians who lived in Southern Iraq before 3000 B.C later on this script was adopted by the Ashorians and the Elamids. Around 18000 B.C. when this script was passing through its second and third developmental phases then it was adopted by the Mades. They brought so many changes in the script.22 Mean while when Cyrus the great king of Achaemenian dynasty, captured Babul in 1538 B.C. *Cuneiform script* was very much used by the Ashorians and the Elamids in the graphic style.

Old Persian like Avestan language has both masculine and feminine genders and it changes according to its *Trab*. It has 42 alphabetical as well as pictographical letters. This language is corrupt form of Avesta, unfortunately no literature written in this language has been come down to us except the rock records of the Achaemenian kings which have survived so that all may read and understand the Achaemenian records. They were curved in three languages namely Old Persian, Babylonian and Elamids. 23

22. Firoze Cowasji Davar, Iran and its Culture, P – 282

23. Ibid, P-283