

Preface to the First English Edition
of
The Yasht - Bā - Maāni

The oldest Zoroastrian religious scripture, as preserved at present, is known as the Avesta - a term which is also applied to the language in which the scripture has been preserved.

Having experienced at least three major periods of holocaust in its history, the scripture in Avesta that has survived at present is only a miniscale amount of the original.

Out of the 21 Nasks (Books) of Avesta even in the Sassanian times viz. in the third century A.C., only one Nask, i.e. the Vendidad, has survived almost in full at present. Out of the other 20 Nasks, a total of only about another half a volume of Nask in fragments has survived. This gives an idea of the colossal amount of destruction that Zoroastrian literature has suffered through the ages.

The extant Avesta literature is divisible into five groups, viz:- 1) The Yasna, 2) The Visparad, 3) The Vendidad, 4) The Yasht Literature and, 5) The Khordeh Avesta.

The fourth of the above groups, the Yasht Literature, is not a single running text like that of the first three groups, namely, The Yasna, The Visparad and The Vendidad. Instead, it is a compilation of a number of independent texts called Yashts. Each such Yasht is a prayer in the form of a hymn,

and assigned to each of the major Yazatas in his/her praise. 'Yazata' is the Avesta term for a spiritual divinity or an angel. Its later form is 'Yazad'.

It is important to understand the idea, concept and significance of the term Yazata. In the Zoroastrian religion, Ahura Mazda is considered the Supreme Creator of the Universe. As such, all natural creations, and all types of natural phenomena through the function of heavenly bodies and material creations are considered to be the actions of Ahura Mazda. But it is very difficult for us the human creatures, to understand all these functions uniformly and within one time. These are therefore made possible in the Zoroastrian Religion to be understood through the concept of Amesha Spentas and different Yazatas. All these Amesha Spentas and Yazatas are therefore different attributes of Ahura Mazda Himself, and through them, each of these Universal aspects is understood clearly and separately, e.g. Fire through Asha Vahishta, Vegetation through Ameretat and so on. The difference between the Amesha Spentas and the Yazatas is very relevant, in that the former are the immortal type of standard creations, whereas the latter are presiding over the world-wide changing phenomena; for instance, Haurvatat is the Amesha Spenta presiding over the Water itself, whereas the Yazata Tishtrya is presiding over a certain phenomenon of rain-making, which in turn is a part of the Creation of Water. That is what the basic meaning of Amesha Spentas as the 'Bountiful Immortals' stands for. But in general, the term Yazata applies to all Divine beings including Ahura Mazda and Amesha Spentas. These Yazatas are also classified into masculine and feminine forms.

At the outset, a Yasht is generally composed in a ballad form of poetry, in which that particular 'Yazata' is personified,

and is a sort of a hero in the central character, and his characteristics and functions are brought out in a majestic heroic language. This personification is so done in order to make it understood at the level of lay people. But the real study and understanding of these Yashts only lie in their deeper meanings, with each one of them representing the different aspects of Universal creations as has been noted; problems only arise when these Yashts are tried to be explained only at the outer superficial story level. The Yasht literature is therefore a real treasure trove of the ancient Iranian civilisation. These Yashts could be compared to some extent with the different Puranas among the Indian literature like Agni Purana, Vayu Purana, Garud Purana and so on.

The Pahlavi word 'Yasht', Avesta 'Yazati', is derived from root 'yaz' : 'to worship,' the same stem from which the word 'Yasna' is derived. The Yashts evidently form a part of the ancient Baghan Nask. They are composed in honour and worship of Ahura Mazda, Amesha Spentas and Yazatas.

The Yashts are a treasure-trove of Iranian epic poetry and of the Mazdayasni Zoroastrian Iranian religious and moral literature. They are an ample mine of knowledge of ancient Iranian poetry and mythology, and constitute comparatively a very substantial portion of the Avestan literature. They provide us ample ground for ethical, literary, historical and philological dissertations. They contain valuable records of legends of Iran and of ancient mythology. Important historical materials of the kings and heroes of the Pishdadian and Kyanian times and epic narrations and heroic descriptions of those times have been preserved in the Yashts. Moreover, the Yashts have incorporated ancient Avestan tradition and history and contain much of the ancient laws. They sing glory and greatness, piety and benevolence, effort and exertions,

truthfulness and valour, and love and patriotism of the great Iranian ancestors.

The epic character and the poetic form are the distinguishing features of the Yashts. Other than the Gathas (which are absolute metrical compositions), the poetic pieces in the Avesta are noticeable particularly in the Yasht literature. Although there is no uniform meter running through them, different types of rhythmic metrical compositions are to be found in the Ardivisur Yasht, Tir Yasht, Meher Yasht, Hom Yasht and so on. A favourite form in the glorification of various Yazatas is the piling up of qualitative epithets for some lines together. Such strings of adjectives may produce a striking literary effect. There is latent in the Yashts, an abundance of mythical lore, folk legend, and epic material in embryo which find full expression centuries later in the Shah Nameh.

In the Sassanian times, there were Yashts dedicated individually to all the major divinities, in particular to those whose names are assigned to the thirty days of a month of the Parsi calender. But in course of time, some of these Yashts have been lost to us, and at present there are 22 Yashts, and fragments of some more. The first 20 Yashts have been numbered uniformly in the following order :

1. Hormazd Yasht
2. Haftan Yasht (Av. Yasna Haptanghaiti)
3. Ardibehesht Yasht
4. Khordad Yasht
5. Āvān Ardivisur Yasht
6. Khorshed Yasht
7. Mohor (Māh) Yasht
8. Tir (Tishtrya) Yasht

9. Gosh (Drvāsp) Yasht
10. Meher (Mithra) Yasht
11. Srosh Yasht (Hādokht)
- 11a. Srosh Yasht Longer ('Vadi')
12. Rashne Yasht
13. Fravardin Yasht
14. Bahram Yasht
15. Rām Yasht
16. Din Yasht
17. Ashishvangh Yasht
18. Āshtād Yasht
19. Zamyād Yasht
20. Hōm Yasht

The Vanant Yasht and the Sirozah Yasht are generally considered to be the other two remaining Yashts.

The Sirozah, which is in two parts, having the same 33 paragraphs each (but in different grammatical formations), is considered as a Yasht, because in it the divinities of each day of the Zoroastrian month are collectively invoked in turn, and it is generally used in prayers and rituals.

There is a Yasht for Bahman Ameshaspand also, but since it is in Pāzand (known as Zand-i-Vohuman Yasna or Zand-e-Bahman Yasht), and also because of its contents, it is not considered as a part of the Avesta Yasht Literature.

The Avesta Texts of some of the Yashts are identical (with adaptations) with the texts of some of the chapters of the Yasna; for instance, Yasna 9-10 form the Hōm Yasht; Yasna 35 to 42, the Haftan Yasht; and Yasna 57, the Srosh Yasht (longer).

The celebrated Avesta scholar, the late Ervad Kavasji Edalji Kanga of revered memory, had during his lifetime accomplished the work of translating the entire extant Avesta literature in Gujarati in different volumes.

One such volume then is known as the YASHT-BĀ-MAĀNI i.e. 'Yasht with meanings'. In external form, all the Yashts are characterised by their identical introduction and conclusion, but they differ greatly in length and character. A few among all the Yashts, known as the smaller Yashts, and also those which are considered to be necessary or popular by the devotees for frequent use at various occasions and in various circumstances, are generally included in the Book of the 'Khordeh Āvesta', the book for the daily prayers. In the same manner, Ervad Kavasji Kanga has also included such Yashts in the volume of the KHORDEH-AVESTA-BĀ-MAĀNI. They are Hormazd Yasht, Haftan Yasht, Ardibehesht Yasht, Khordad Yasht, Khorshed Yasht, Māh (Mohor) Yasht, Gosh Yasht, Srosh Yasht Hādokht, Srosh Yasht (longer) Vadi, Bahram Yasht, Hom Yasht (large), Hom Yasht (small), Vanant Yasht and Sirozah Yasht.

The remaining larger Yashts, therefore, comprise the subject of this volume YASHT-BĀ-MAĀNI. These are Āvān Yasht, Meher Yasht, Rashne Yasht, Fravardin Yasht, Rām Yasht, Din Yasht, Ashishvanh Yasht, Ashtad Yasht and Zamyad Yasht. Also included in this volume are what is known as the Yashts 21 and 22 in some quarters, and which are also known as the "three Fragards (chapters) of the Hadokht Nask". Prof. Westergaard has termed the same as the "Yasht Fragments". (For details, see Introduction to Yasht No. 21). Moreover, the two 'Monajats' in Persian are also added at the end of the volume. This volume was first published in Gujarati in 1901 by Ervad Kavasji Kanga. This

was done in a scholarly and systematic manner, the text being transliterated and translated each paragraph simultaneously, and given a number to each word for the benefit of the readers following the translation with accuracy. He also gave footnotes, wherever necessary in the light of modern research based on philology. This volume has subsequently been brought out in three editions.

As has been described above, the original translation of the Yasht-Bā-Maāni was in the Gujarati language. Even though there is much demand for work of this kind and utility, readership in the Gujarati language is gradually diminishing in the Parsi community, particularly among the younger generation as well as among a very large number of those who have migrated to Western countries in recent years.

The Trustees of the Parsi Panchayat of Bombay have therefore undertaken the task of getting such classic works in Gujarati translated into English. The Trustees therefore entrusted this work to another celebrated scholar of Avesta-Pahlavi of international repute, the late Professor Ervad Maneck Furdoonji Kanga.

Prof. M. F. Kanga then completed three of late Ervad Kavasji Kanga's works, viz. Khordeh-Āvesta-Bā-Maāni, Gāthā-Bā-Maāni and Yasht-Bā-Maāni before his sad demise in October 1988 at the age of 80 years.

The terms of reference for these works entrusted to Prof. M. F. Kanga were to carry out a faithful word-by-word translation into English language from the original Gujarati of Ervad K. E. Kanga, and also to include the text in the Roman script without any alteration. Prof. M. F. Kanga completed these works with meticulous care, and brought to bearing on it his vast knowledge and experience.

Subsequently, the first volume of the Khordeh-Avesta-Bā-Maāni in English was published by the Trustees of the Parsi Punchayat of Bombay in January 1993. The second such volume of the Gathā-Bā-Maāni in English was published in January 1997. Now the Trustees are making available for the benefit of the Zoroastrian World, the third and last of such volumes in the form of the present edition of the Yasht-Bā-Maāni in English.

There is one change in this English edition. In the original Gujarati edition, Ervad Kavasji Kanga has included Fravardin Yasht in the volume of Yasht-Bā-Maāni. But taking into account the significance of the Fravardin Yasht, it has already been included in the English edition of the 'Khordeh-Avesta-Bā-Maāni'. Therefore, that Yasht has been omitted from this volume so as to avoid the duplication of the same.

Ervad Dr. Rooyintan Peshotan Peer

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