

43

AVESTAN MUSIC: ITS TEXTS AND ITS TUNES

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LOST AVESTAN RÂGS, HOW CAN THEY BE RESTORED?

Iran, the motherland of Avestan lore, today lives by the sweet memory of the lost and forgotten jewels of its sciences and its arts. One of such is the missing music of its marvellous and almost omnipotent "mânthras". We have records of the texts; we have records of the saintly singers; we have records of the occasions which necessitated the singing of those songs; and we have records of the powerful and all-controlling effects and influences those songs had then exercised. But, the saddest phase of it all is that there is no trace left with us of the type and the class of the "Râgs", or tunes, in which they were sung. It is the "Râg" that works the wonder. It is the rhythmic cadence that beats against the atmosphere; it is the rhythmic cadence that "occasioning certain vibrations of the nerves" either stirs and stimulates or benumbs and dulls the energies of man. And, as the peculiarity of a Râg may require, it is also the combination of certain fixed notes of the "Saptak" (the Octave) to the exclusion of others, that creates a power which is all-controlling. Universal Mazdaznan in its all-embracing outlook has the pleasurable patience to realise that in truth nothing has been lost, nor has anything been really forgotten. The fact is that in Nature the disappearance of a science or an art from one country is always balanced by its differently garbed reappearance in another. The decay of ancient music in Iran is fully compensated for by its reincarnated rise and development in Arabia and India retaining and exhibiting unmistakable traces of the motherhood of Iran. That Iran had her science and art of music in a highly developed condition is proved by the fact that the Avestan word

1. *Curiosities of Literature*, page 161.

for the science of music is "Frasrûiti". We find this word in the Hom Yasht, para 14, and we are indebted for its interpretation to our present Ustâd-Saheb of Ilm-e-Khshnoom, Dr. Framroz Sorabji Chiniwalla.¹ The whole Avesta is a song. Iran has its texts, and India has its tunes, and religious liberality and religious tolerance, which is of the essence of Mazdaznan, shall prompt a way out in a co-ordinated struggle to locate the Iranian texts into Indian Râgs. We know what a "Râg" can accomplish; and we also know what the recitation of Iranian texts, in the days of yore, has already accomplished. Choose then the Iranian text and the Indian "Râg" of cognate capacities; bring them together, and arrange the words of the former to the tune of the latter. Avestan music shall thus have been restored and regained. It shall then be an *Indo-Iranian Entente*.

MUSIC'S MYSTERIOUS MIGHT

The pious suggestion for today's subject came to me entirely and absolutely from that excellent book, the "Sangit of India" by Atiya Begum. The talented authoress most charmingly enumerates the many virtues of a song, and says, it can bring down rain, ignite fire, tame the wildest beast, control the elements of Nature, cure human ailments, etc., etc. There is also an excellent collection of the numerous possibilities of music in the essay "Medical Music," in that wonderful book, "Curiosities of Literature," by Isaac D'Israeli at pages 101-103. Of the many possibilities of music, the one that relates to the cure of human ailments has the strongest affinity with Avestan music. Ardi-behesht Yasht, paragraph 6, is an authoritatively written record that of all the five kinds of healers of human ailments enumerated there: (१. अशैषथी-सानुं-करनार, २. धनसाधथी-सानुं-करनार, ३. शस्त्रवेध अष्टले

1. See Khshnoom Neekese Vehedin, Volume II, page 122.

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वाह्यःकाथी-साञ्जु-करनार, ४. छावापावाथी-साञ्जु-करनार, अते प. मांथ्रवानी-लश्मीते-साञ्जु करनार), the one who would cure by the recitation (singing) of holy spells was considered the best, the most thorough, and the most efficacious. The modern Mazdaznan also confesses, "I shall conduct my life in a way that the knife shall never need to be resorted to, and herbal medicines shall never need to pass my lips, but in their stead holy spells through the formulas of invocations and prayers, exemplify the perfect life in God on Earth".¹ The oldest Avestan record of curing human ailments by the reciting of a song of prayer is preserved for us in the idea of "Mānthrō Baēshazo," of the Ardibehest Yasht. The pious man would sing the "Mān্থra" and the malady would disappear. But what was the text of the Mān্থra and what was its tune (Rāg) is yet an unsolved mystery. David cured Saul of his mental derangement by a song on the harp.² But what the text of the song was, and what the tune to which it was sung remain unknown. Pythagoras preached to his large number of students that music cured ailments.³ The priests were taught music and medicine at one and the same time: how to cure the ailing body with the healing of music.⁴ The Avestan idea of "Mān্থrō Baēshazō" can very well be compared with the Indian idea of a "Naik". This "was the highest degree conferred on one who was a past master in the science". And a Naik was one who was "able to cure ailments through the power of his music".⁵ We have Avestan texts, even today, which are reputed to cure human ailments when sung by a pious priest. A short list of these texts will be found interesting:— 1. Pichchi-ni-Ardibehest Yasht; 2. The prayer known as "Afsoonē Shāh Faridoon"; 3. The cotton thread on which the text of the Vendidad has been recited; 4. The water from the "Hom" ceremony; 5. The "Gomez" from the "Nirangdin" ceremony, either to bathe with or taste in a small quantity; 6. Certain mental and bodily ailments can be cured by

1. Mandanan Confession: Avesta in Song, page 387.

2. Curiosities of Literature, page 102.

3. Sangit of India, page 46.

4. Ibid. page 49.

5. Ibid. page 54.

the singing of (a) Haptan Yasht, (b) Tir Yasht, (c) Ashishvagh Yasht, (d) Behram Yasht, (e) Aban Yasht, and (f) Hormazd Yasht; 7. The proper singing of the Ushtavaiti, Spentomad, and the Vahishtoishiti Gāthās is very helpful to restore peace of mind; 8. For the curing of human ailments the singing of the Hom, Vanant, Khordād, and the Shiroza Yashts, is also recommended.¹ It is indeed regrettable that when we possess all these valuable texts, we are ignorant of the type of the tune (Rāg) in which they should be sung. If, for this defect we turn to India and Indian music, we find in the "Sangit of India" that the "Rāg", known as "Jejevanti", could cure paralysis. The Begum Saheba also tells us, "Suraj Khan, sang Jejevanti, and cured paralysis" (page 60). Iranian texts and Indian Rāgas will make such a masterful combination that the worst problems of the world, shall all yield before it. Co-operate and Conquer.

1. For this list, I am thankful to my friend Mr. Behram Hormasji Dady-Suntook, B.A.

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WHAT IS MYSTIC MUSIC ?

For the songs of man to do more than merely please the physical sense of hearing, besides its text and its tune, a rarer element is absolutely necessary and indispensable, and that is a pair of pious lips to pronounce the words, and a pure and sinless heart to provide the inspiration. There are authoritative records of the marvels a mystic singer can perform by his mystic music. He can accomplish the most unbelievable miracles in all directions of human activities: he can bring down rain, and make dry wood blaze forth into a brilliant flame. He can control and command the forces of Nature, and can tame down to absolute docility the wildest of beasts and birds. He can cure the most heinous of human ailments, and can even turn a sinner into a saint. If music can perform such miracles, it must become extremely interesting to know the essentials which enable it to exhibit its powers. The first of such essentials, of course is the text of the Māntra. The second is its tune. The third is, for some Rāgas at least, the time of the day and the season of the year: but even the simultaneous existence of all these three essentials would leave the performance quite ineffectual and resultless, if there is not the presence of the fourth essential in the person of the singer who needs must be a man of ideal piety and sinlessness. A memorable anecdote of a great Muslim saint well reveals and proves the truth of this great rule:—

The story runs, that, once upon a time in the household of a great Muslim Moulvi Saint, there was a very faithful domestic by name Gaffoor. He had served long and served honestly. His master, the Moulvi Saheb, was quite pleased with him and his work, and in a happy moment decided to make Gaffoor a free man, and reward him for what he had done. One morning when Gaffoor was, as ever, alert on his duty, he received a very strange order from his Master. The order was that Gaffoor should go to the fields far away, and bring home a stone boulder, the heaviest he could lift. Every member of the household naturally became curious to know the reason why such an unusual order had been

given and waited for the result. A few moments later, Gaffoor returned panting under the weight of the stone, he had brought. The whole congregation of the house was astir to see what would happen next. The man of God soon prepared himself by his usual ablutions, and came and sat in front of the big boulder. What he then did was very short and very simple. He only sang the Sura Fatihâ¹ and lo! the stone became gold. The Moulvi Saheb then called Gaffoor, and giving him good blessings for his long and faithful services, gave him his freedom, and the lump of gold as his well-earned reward. Gaffoor thanked his master, his eyes made humid with tears of gratitude, kissed his master's hand and departed. It now so happened that in the service of the pious Moulvi, there also was another domestic, by name "Mamdu," who was not quite so good and sincere as Gaffoor. When he saw, the marvel of the stone changing into gold, said to himself, "Why? I know the Sura Fatihâ, and I can sing it just as well as the Moulvi Saheb can. I also shall turn a big stone into gold and thus end this life of drudgery. I shall try the experiment tomorrow morning." The morning came, and all was well. The Moulvi Saheb needed a jug of warm water. He called for Mamdu, but he was calling in vain. Mamdu was missing. The good old man becoming very anxious started a search, and after a while discovered Mamdu in the fields far away, very seriously and solemnly squatting before a huge stone, and singing away the Sura Fatihâ in fine measures. The old man approached him from behind and waited: but a sudden fit of laughter disturbed Mamdu, and the latter turned round and sprang to his feet for the respect of his master. The pious man quietly and sympathetically said, "My

1. The first Sura of the Koran, which Sura very closely corresponds to our sacred prayer: 'Pa Nâmi Izat-i Bakshâyandeh-i Bakshâyashgar-i Meherbân Ahura Mazda Khvatâe'.

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son, you do know the Sura Fatihâ, and you can sing it well enough too, but you have not as yet developed the perfect piety of your heart and lips to make the sacred text and its tune, work and perform."

A HISTORIC MIRACLE : AN IRANIAN TEXT IN AN INDIAN RÂG
(A PIOUS CONJECTURE)

"Iran-Shah", the Fire-Temple at Udwada, is the Mazdaznan Holy of Holies in India. We believe and we know that the sacred Fire which is there burning as brightly as ever for the last thirteen centuries was first set ablaze by the great Âbed (Mobed) Neryosangh Dhaval of blessed memory. The congregation of the believers had well assembled. A big piece of dry fragrant wood, sawed out in a solid round from a tree trunk, lay on a bed of ashes on the Urn; and the Âbed priest stood in front of it at a respectable distance. He had prepared himself for the momentous occasion by the "Tareekats" (ceremonials) of his religion. And he was also prepared by the discipline of his head and heart. The preliminary prayers over, he sang

"Uç mõi arrshvâ Ahurâ
Aramaiti tevishîm dasvâ
Spēništa mainyu Mazdâ
Vañhuyâ zavô-âdâ
Ashâ hazô emavaṭ
Vohû Manañbâ j'ſeratûm".¹

And the wood in the Urn burst forth into a Flaming Fire. The pious priest knew the text, he knew the tune (Râg Deepak) and he had his piety of conscience, to work up a harmonious attunement to glorify the will of God.

Here we have the authoritative record of the text used: we know that the singing of the text caused the spontaneous ignition of the wood in the Urn: the next step then for us would be to know what was the type or class of "Râg" in which the text was sung. For this search of the "Râg" therefore, the science of Indian music very successfully comes to our aid. This Indian

1 Gâthâ Ahunavaiti, Yasna Hâ XXXIII, stanza 12.

science tells us that the singing of a song set in the notations of "Râg Deepak" would ignite fire at once. From this a pious conjecture can safely be made that the pious priest had sung the sacred verse of the Gâthâ in the Râg Deepak. Here we had the text, the tune (Râg) and the pious singer, and history has it that the miracle was performed.

THE YATHĀ AHU VAIRYŌ AND THE ASHEM-VOHU

As we have said before, the whole Avesta is a song, and every Mazdaznan has either consciously or unconsciously always sung it. The Gâthâ is a song, and so also is the Gitâ. Thus it is that the two great masterpieces of the world's most ancient and sacred literature are songs. Of even greater importance are the mystic formulas of the Sanskrit "Gâyatri" on the one hand and the Avestan "Yathâ Ahû Vairyô" and "Ashem-Vohû" on the other. These two are songs as well. The original tunes of all these holy scripts are hopelessly lost: but so far as the Mazdaznan prayers of the "Yathâ Ahû Vairyô" and "Ashem Vohû" are concerned, the Rev. Dr. Otoman Zar-Adusht Ha'nish (1844-1936) has, by his divine intuition, formulated or arranged in the musical notation of the West (Europe) the sublime tunes (Râgs) of both these formulas.¹ Whether the tunes so arranged are identically the same as the original ones or not, it will never be possible to say with certainty: but we (Mazdaznans) who revere the name of Dr. Ha'nish, and we who, of a conviction, believe in his saintliness

1 See Avesta in Song, pages 279, 280.

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and prophethood, we rejoice to make it known to the world at large that these tunes, certainly are the nearest approach to, and the best substitutes for the lost or forgotten originals. Nay, let not an assertion even bolder still seem exaggerated if a sincere devotee of Mazdaznan confidently accepts that these our Master-made tunes (Rāgas) ARE very originally revived and rearranged for the use of our modern world. We sing the songs almost every day, and if for want of our own perfection we cannot move the mountains, yet we do most certainly gain our proportionate share of their glories and greatness.

CONCLUSION

Avestan music is like an unrecognised talisman. Its powers and its possibilities are an unexplored mystery. This is my reasoned conclusion, and I have reached it through a logical study of Begam Saheba Atiya Begam's book "Sangit of India." Music has a charm and a power of its own, which will subdue all. We know Avesta is always to be sung, and this direction was not formulated in vain. Avesta was made to be active, and to work, and to be helpful to the good creations of God. This it can only do if and when it is recited with a pious mind, and in its correct intonations. The correctness of the intonations (Rāga) is a great factor in the success of the whole. It has an almost all-pervading influence which must be recognised and appreciated. Iran has its texts and India has its tunes, and when I thought of and wrote this essay, the good wish that was uppermost in my mind and heart, was to see tolerance prevail over fanaticism, and love dominate over jealousy, by a well-meant co-ordinated effort to unite and make one the Iranian text with the Indian tune, so that there may result therefrom the greatest good for the greatest number. Such a sincere co-ordination will surely help to advance man in his eternal evolution; it will help the bird and the beast to live a life of greater usefulness and lesser hindrance, and finally, will also be able to raise an impregnable bulwark for the king and country. It is my prayer on this auspicious day that such a task be attempted and achieved. Amen!
