

Fire in Iranian Mythology

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ABSTRACT— The position of fire in the history of ancient Iran can be examined from two perspectives: mythological, and historical and scientific. In the first perspective, exploring the ancient Iranian mythology, including texts of Avesta, Pahlavi, etc., and especially pondering in mythologies survived from these resources, we can explain the position of fire in Pishdadian and Kayanid dynasties. Although, data derived from these resources with respect to today's criteria lacks historical value scientifically, it should be said that not only about "appearance of fire" but also about creation of the three important fires or the fire temples of world in ancient Persia, there is no significant documents except than referring to mythological resources. Especially that subject of "appearance of fire" can be seen only in mythological history.

Introduction

Myths resources, including texts of the Avesta, Pahlavi, etc., of ancient Iran indicate existence of two Iranian dynasties: Pishdadian and Kayanids. According to the resources, since their presence in Iran has been mostly in East, they are also called the east ancient dynasties of Iran. Investigation of various mythological resources indicates that although the identity of these dynasties is mostly semi-historical and mythological rather than scientific, it should be noted that they have had a very important position in ancient Iranian culture.

Fire and the creation of human

Since "appearance of human" in mythical history of Iran has been associated with the element of fire, it seems that after understating the way that fire created the most important issue in the mythical history of Iran has been finding out how the first human was created. It is because that resources of mythical history of Iran report that fire is the essence of all phenomena, especially people. Now, we present some of the most important ones of such resources including "Bundahisn" and "Zādspram excerpts". Examining and studying the text of Zādspram excerpts (Chapter I, Paragraph 25), we read "then Hormuzd created sky, water, ground, plant, sheep, people and then fire, which all of them were mixed in each other".¹ In this line, in Iranian Bundahisn text, we read, "the first creature was a droplet of tear, because everything was made of water except the seed of people and sheep, which are made from fire".

If as these texts suggest we accept that human essence is made of fire, thus, after the death of Keyoumars, the first human, and dropping his sperm on earth and growing up the plant rhubarb, the first human couple generations, i.e. Mashi and Mashiane, emerged, which were Keyoumars' children. In Paragraph 87 of Frawardin Yasht in this regard it is said that all Aryan families and race are generations that can be traced back to Keyoumars.

Types of fire

Pahlavi or middle Persian Manuscripts not only provide wide information in connection with the formation of three main types of fire among ancient Iranians but also associate each of these fires with an social classes in ancient Iran, in era of Sassanid. It should be mentioned that in this kind of resources, there are to some extent different opinion too. For example, in Chapter 3, paragraph 84 to the end of Zādspram excerpts, it is said that when the Kingdom of Hooshang Pishdādi, people used Serishook cow for going to other lands through sea. One day, when sea was stormy, the fire that was on back of cow dropped into the sea and as a result, the fire became three parts. One part, i.e. Barzin Mehr fire, which was associated to farmers' class, fell in Rivand Mountain in Khorasan and another part, i.e. Farnabagh fire, which was related to the clergy class, fell in Khorezm Mountains. The third part of fire, i.e. Gashnasb, which is related to Artashtaran, fell in Asvand Mountain in Azerbaijan. In this regard, in Zādspram excerpts we read, "Ohrmazd in the beginning of the creation of earth delivered it to Azar Farnabagh Varjavand, Azar Ghashnasb Takavar and Azar Barzin Mehr to protect it, which are associated to Aseroon (clergy) and Artashtar

¹ Rashed Mohasel, MT., Zādspram excerpts (Translation), Tehran, Institute for Cultural Research and Studies, 1988, p. 3.

and Vasteryoush (farmers). Azar Faranbagh placed in Khorezm Mountains in Khorezm. Azar Gashnasb placed in Asvand Mountain in Azerbaijan and Azar Barzin Mehr placed in Rivand.

Fire and the rescuing nature of Farah Jam

Although Jam in mythological history of ancient India is the God of the dead, in Iranian mythological history, i.e. texts of Avesta, he is a beautiful, capable, good pasture person who has gotten all the good qualities. During his governance, although he refuses to introduce and propose of Zoroastrianism religion instead improves and grows the world so that during his governance, ground extended three times. As well as, any creature and phenomenon, especially red fire blazes, were at their best status. Also, Jam by building a fort, Jamkord, saved creations of Ahura Mazda from cold and storms². In Pahlavi or middle Persian Manuscripts, although Jam is highly praised, because of his sin and pride, divine blessings left him three times. According to Section 16 of Paragraph 12-14 of Bundahisn, after Jam was killed, Zahhak, a dragon like man in Avesta, confiscated the blessings. However, Azar Farnabagh threatening Zahhak saved the blessings again. In Bundahisn, we read “Jam during his kingdom, progressed in everything with the help of the three fires, i.e. Farnabagh, Gashnasb, and Barzin Mehr ... when they killed Jam, Azar Farnabagh freed Jam's blessings from the paws of Zahhak³.”

Siavash and fire exam

One of the most beautiful stories of fire in mythological history of ancient Iran is using it to prove impeccability of Siavash, the son of Keykavos Kiani, who had been slandered by Soodabeh, the kings' wife. “Siavash from one hand, due to his innocence and on the other hand, being ensure that he would come out proud and honorable from the fire exam, without any fear, went into harvest of fire and got outside healthy”⁴. “He proved that fire as a “divine radiance”, not only does not harm the innocents but also cause their pride and victorious. However, due to libel that was attributed to him by the Father and his relatives, he left Iran. It is noteworthy that in connection with the fire exam (Var) in mythological history of Iran, not only Siavash but also other people such as Zoroaster, Āzarbād Marsbandan as well as Sina in ancient India were tested by fire exam that the result of the exam for all of them was pride and dignity.

Fire and fireplace

Historically, much debate is presented about founders of the major and important fireplaces in ancient Persia as well as the time of their construction, which no definitive and reassuring answer is found to them yet. In this regard, according to mythological history of ancient Iran, it seems that Keikhosro Kiani the child of Siavash destroyed the Pagoda next to the Lake Chichest, or Orumiyeh, lake, and instead of it built a large fireplace. This fireplace in the mythical history of Iran was known as Azar Ghasnasb and it was dedicated to Arteshtaran category. Pahlavi texts in line with the importance of this fireplace have some contexts. For example, in Section 16 of Paragraph 14 of Bundahisn, in this relation, it is said that “Azar Ghasnasb until the kingship of Keikhosro protected the religion and invited the world people to it. When Keikhosro destroyed the pagoda that was next to Lake Chichest, destroyed darkness and illuminated the world, built a fireplace on Asvand Mountain”⁵. Also in relation to reputation and greatness of this fireplace, it should be said that not only warriors and Arteshtaran category but also the Sassanid kings used to go there for worship and gave gifts to there.⁶

Fire, life and mission of Zoroaster

Undoubtedly, one of the most important roles of fire in the mythical history of Iran when Zoroaster's birth appears so that demons deceiving his malevolent including “Dorsarv” caused Zoroaster to be endangered by the fire. However, according to various resources, Zoroaster did not fired or according to another narration, fire never burnt him because he was innocent and more importantly, his fate was living to present pure Mzdysna religion to the

² For more information, refer to the story of Jam and Vandidad

³ Behzadi, R., *Hindi Bundahisn* (translation and report), p. 98.

⁴ For more information, refer to *Shahnameh*, Vol. 2, pp. 441-447.

⁵ Behzadi, R., *Hindi Bundahisn* (translation and report), p. 98.

⁶ For more information, refer to book of *Yadegar Zarin*, Translated by Y. Mahyar Navabi, Tehran, Asatir Publication, 1996.

people. After the thought, grace and piety of Zoroaster became complete and after his talks with Amshasbandan and Ahura Mazda and understanding mysteries of the religion, obeying Ahura Mazda declared his mission and consequently faced many problems. According to Gahan (Yasna 46, paragraph 7), which is composed by himself, we could become aware of these things. Zoroaster finally decided to go before Goshtasb Kiani. He entered the court of King Kayani with twenty-one of verse of Avesta, evergreen Cypress, and especially fire in fire texts of Barzin Mehr, which is the symbol of Ahura Mazda, and invited him to his religion. Although his malevolent called him mendacious and even prisoned him, but ultimately, by presenting his miracles, especially by the fire, and triumphing in debates caused Goshtasb to be a believer.

In traditions of different resources, especially middle Iranian ones, Izad Azar had a prominent role accepting the Mazdysna religion by Goshtasb, since the belief of Goshtasb King by seeing these miracles firmed. For example, when Zoroaster met Goshtasb and his courtiers, Goshtasb takes the fire and then gives it to Jamasb, his minister, and Jamasb gives the fire to Esfandiar Kiani, a hero, and the fire burn none of them. Then placed the fire at a special place and it was burning without any firewood and soil and water did not affect it. Then Izad Azar said to Goshtasb, if you accept Mazdysna religion and attempt in its expansion, he would reach long-term and kingship and much wealth and otherwise he would be damaged. Multiple resources and texts including Zādspram excerpts⁷ and Pahlavi traditions provide us with useful information about Izad Azar as well as the role of fire in firming belief of Goshtasb King to Mazdysna religion. For example, in the context of Pahlavi narrations, in this regard, it is said, “afterwards, Zoroaster two years kept persuading Goshtasb King to accept the religion. He said to Goshtasb, accept the religion because it is what requested by Hormuzd, Amshasbandan and others Gods ... but Goshtasb did not accept the religion. Then Hormuzd sent Barzin, Ordibehest and Azar Barzinmehr to Goshtasb’s home and they said to Goshtasb, accept the religion because if you accept it, we will wish for you long-term kingship, great ability and long life, much wealth, durability and grandeur. In addition, we will give you a boy named Peshotanu and if you reject the religion, we will command vultures in the air to eat your meat and drop your bones on the ground. Goshtasb again did not accept the religion. Then, Hormuzd sent the God Nirivsang towards Ordibehest that mix the herb Mang into wine and gave it to Goshtasb and Ordibehest did as such. When Goshtasb ate it immediately got comatose. They guided his soul towards brightness and gave him a venerability to make him able to accept the religion. When Goshtasb reawakened, called Hutus that where is Zoroaster? I want to accept the religion ... when people heard the words of Zoroaster that he had learnt the religion to Goshtasb became happy. Then he accepted Zoroaster as priest”⁸.

Fire and the purgatory world

According to middle Persian literature, ancient Iranians strongly believed on the prominent and important role of the God Azar, i.e. fire, not only in this world but also in the purgatory world, or Hamistgan, as well as for entrance into paradise. Book of Arda Viraf is one of the most important Middle Persian literature that states how God Azar and Soroush passed the Chinvat Bridge and visited different parts of Heaven and Hell and the fate of the goods and the bads were saw to them. It seems that in this spiritual journey, Ardaviraf based upon answers received from the God Azar became aware of situation of the bad and good people. After he became again aware, wrote what he had seen to aware people of the rightness of the religion as well as to notify people of situation of people in heaven and hell. The important thing in this context for us is discovering the ancient Iranian belief about the role and position of God Azar or fire not only in affairs of this world but also in affairs of the final world, which is well depicted in this context. It was probably for this reason that ancient Iranians on the fourth day after the death of the deceased used to scarify some tallow of the victims to fire, i.e. God of Azar, hoping he would help the deceased in passing the Chinvat Bridge and make the darkness of the way clear to him. In this regard, in Part V of the book of Arda Viraf we read “and then Chinvat Bridge widened equal to nine spears and then I along with Soroush Ahloo and God Azar easily, spaciouly and bravely crossed the Chinvat Bridge. Soroush Ahloo and God Azar took my hand and said to me come here to show you heaven and Hell, brightness, heaven’s happiness, rewards of paradise, as well as darkness, stenosis, and badness of the hell. Come here to show you position of liars and honest people.”⁹

⁷ Zādspram excerpts, p. 35.

⁸ Pahlavi Narration, Translated by M. Mirfakhraei, pp. 57-58.

⁹ Amozegar, Z., Book of Arda Viraf (Translation and Research), Tehran, Moein, 1993, pp. 50-51.

Conclusions

In ancient Iranian culture, there is a fire in Goroodman before Ahura Mazda and the second fire was Beh franaftār, which is a fire within the body of humans and animals and keep them alive. Vāzishta is the third fire that exists in clouds and sky and causes raining and flourishing of earth. The fourth fire is Urvāzishta, which in plants causes the growth and survival of them and will expand blessings. Finally, the fifth fire in ancient Iranian culture is Spanishta, which means the most sacred fires. It has a divine glory and its manifestation on Earth is the fire of Bahram and his main task in fighting against conflict, destruction, lie, witchcraft and so on.

Indeed, one of the most important positions of fire in ancient Iran and the ancient India has been testing people by fire, which seems to be derived from insight of ancient Iranians in Avesta's teachings. It is because in teachings of Avesta, fire is the best criterion of judgment and diagnosing between truth and lie. Fire judges also between practices of two groups of Ashavān and Druvandān and finally determines the reward and punishment for them.

Therefore, it seems that fire as one of the most sacred elements in indigenous cultures of the Iranian plateau, before the arrival of Aryans, has had great holiness. Also, after the arrival of the Aryans to the plateau, due to combination of Aryan culture and indigenous peoples of the Iranian plateau, especially after the advent of Zoroaster, fire find a fundamental position in ancient Iranian culture and it kept its strong and evolutionary presence in ancient Iranian culture and religion.

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