

sand and gravel so neither ground moisture nor soil can touch the dead body. In such a place, the dead body should be left for two days to a month (Razi, 1997: 1875).

8. The Sindhū or Indus River, is a large river originating from the Tibet Plateau and after passing from the Jammu and Kashmir region, Gilgit and Baltistan, passes through the middle area of Pakistan and joins the Arabian Sea near Karachi port.

9. Dravidian refers to the native people of the Indian subcontinent. Today, the people of this race constitute about one fourth of the Indian population and mostly live in south India. Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal and Maldives are the other countries where Dravidians constitute a significant minority.

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Similarities between the Iranian and Indian sun

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| 1. In Iranian myths, the sun is interpreted as the eyes of Ahura Mazda, in Indian myths also, Surya (the sun god) was considered as the eyes of the gods. |
| 2. In Iranian and Indian myths, the sun cleans and destroys all evil. |
| 3. In Iranian myths, particularly in Avesta, the sun has frequently been described with a horse. Mihr, the sun god in Iran, was carried in a sphere with four horses. In Indian myths, Surya rides on a sphere with 7 horses carrying it. Or Surya, appears to his wife in the form of a mare and the children of this intercourse have a horse head. |
| 4. In Iranian and Indian myths, Eclipse is considered a sign of evil and devils' work. |
| 5. In ancient India and pre-Zoroastrian Iran, the sun has a very high position and was considered as one of the great common gods of the two religions of Iran and India. |
| 6. Several myths in Iran and India show that the sun deity was born in Iran and India. |

Differences between the Iranian and Indian sun

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| 1. After the advent of Zoroaster in Iran, the sun god, degraded into a lesser being and became a companion for Ahura Mazda and sometimes his creation. In India, Mitra stays with other gods and Surya maintains his great position as the sun god. |
| 2. In Indian myths, we see the three sun gods: "Mitra", Surya and "Savitri", but in Iran, we only have one sun god. |
| 3. The Indian sun gods marry other gods and bear children but the Iranian Mitra does not have a similar fate. |
| 4. In Indian myths, the description of the sun mostly focus on its appearance, but in Iranian myths, its speed is mostly mentioned. |
| 5. In Indian myths, Surya has a destructive characteristic in the end times but in Iranian myths, this role was not defined for the sun. |

Endnote

1. See: Yasht 10/27: A hero with 10000 eyes, the all-knowing undeceivable
2. See: Yasht 35 and 65
3. See Yasht: 10, 142
- 4 See Yasht: 10, 142
5. A hat attributed to the locals of Farije in Asia Minor. It is a fedora with a curved top that in the art of ancient Greece and Rome, is evidence that the person is eastern (Olansi, 2001: 57).
6. They attribute Mihr to a historical personality born in 272 AD from a mother named Anahita. Based on this belief, many Parthian kings of the Parthians, followed Mithraism and chose the name "Mehrdad" for themselves. Nal: Moghaddam, 2001; 59.
7. Kata or grave. It is recommended that these katas must be made in a place far from plants and water with little moisture, far from human and animal routes; several steps from holy elements such as water, fire and hoards of livestock and houses of righteous people. Only a kata with said conditions can be saved from bad atmospheric conditions and become a temporary crypt for the dead body. This place must be such that when a dead body is placed inside it, it should neither touch the ceiling nor the sides. Its floor should be covered with

rificed for Mitra were white or colorful), the left side belongs to Varuna and right side belongs to Mitra, Varuna keeps the celestial order and Mitra restores a lost order; to the point that is related to Vedas, Mitra's duty included preservation of _without any fury or vengeance_ good relations whose actual examples were proactive allegiance and compassion (Merkelbach, 1998: 28).

Over time, we see the creation of other gods in Indians' belief. First Varuna, then Mitra, next Arjaman show up one after another. In Vedic belief, these three deities were called Adityas meaning heavenly gods. With the combination of the role of the threefold gods with the collection of Aryan gods, they are replaced with the three new gods of Vayu (wind), Agni (fire) and Surya (sun). The role of these three heavenly gods later gets divided among nine gods and gradually, Adityas turn into minor deities (Ions, 1996: 17).

One of the three heavenly gods of Indians (Adityas) is Surya who replaced Mitra and is known as the sun god but beside Surya, there are two sun gods in India who are part of Surya's collection. Before focusing on Surya, we focus on these two deities.

Vivasvat: this powerful deity, who in the vedas, is the eighth son of Aditi (mother of gods), was the same as the sun in the sky who after birth, is unkindly treated by her mother (Zarvarani, 1997: 204). This god, marries Sarayna the goddess of clouds and daughter of Tushtari, but after the marriage celebration, the bride suddenly disappears, and Tushtari is left with no option but to create another bride for his son in law; the result of this twofold marriage are two Ashwin pairs of twins called Vime-Yemi (Ions, 1996: 30).

Savitri: Savitri is of Rigveda gods. In morpho-

nemics, su- means pulling forwards which is also a name of the sun. Savitri is a blonde god married with Prsni meaning light ray; he is a force that mobilizes humans and is an enemy to devils, removes evil dreams and banishes devils and demons (Bajlan, 1979: 109). Savitri, is the magical sound out of which the sun is born. Savitri is a name given to the sun before rising and also while setting, but Savitri commands people throughout the day so when night comes, he can lead them to their houses, send birds to their nest and herds to their fold and force them to rest. Savitri protects from diseases, solves problems, and gives long lifetime to humans and immortality to gods (Ghalekhani, 2003: 184). Savitri in narrations and Vedas is depicted as a god riding a golden sphere with two shiny horses carrying his sphere in the sky. In this path, Savitri protects from diseases, solves problems, and gives long lifetime to humans and immortality to gods (Ghalekhani, 2003: 184).

Surya: he is the greatest sun god who gradually dominates Vivasvat and Savitri and takes them in. In narrations, Surya is blonde and has golden hands and his sphere is carried by seven mares or 7-head mares in another narration. He is known as the eye of Varuna and Mitra (Danie'lau, 1964: 93). The Indian Surya (the sun god) sometimes matches the Iranian Hoorā that is the eyes of Ahura Mazda. Of course, the life giving sun is sometimes described as destructive, "in the end times when the sun will dry out the universe and destroy all life" (Zekrgoo, 1998: 64). In an ancient myth, Aswini are the sons of Surya that manifest in the form of mares and thus is called Aswini. Sume or Chandre, is another son of Surya. (Ions, 1996: 32).

Conclusion

The sun, the great Aryan god common among Indians and Iranians, had many similarities in the two cultures and the reason for it can be the same race and common mythical history of the two nations and the differences can be found in years when these two nations fell apart and were

influenced by different environments.

By investigating and comparing the myth of the sun in the two civilizations of India and Iran, their similarities and differences can be written as below :

its first day is Khorram day (sun day) and this day and month are both named after the great deity Jupiter” (Biruni, 1942: 256). All these mentions and names suggest that the night of Yalda and day of Deygan, have a firm relationship with the sun, with Mihr that conquers darkness since that day and is increased. This day is sun’s day, Mihr’s day, which was highly respected by Iranians and was considered the greatest celebration that was, the birthday celebration of Mihr or the sun that was considered the beginning of year (Razi, 1992: 541).

In Zoroastrianism, the sun is considered as one of the holy ones and cleaners; in the majority of fargards related to commandments, the sun is considered as a phenomenon of creation with the duty to clean up all dirt. In fargards 5 and 6 of Vendidad, it is evident how sun exposure is done. Sun exposure was used for dead bories. They carried the dead body out of Kata⁷ and carried it in an appropriate season for the crypt, and placed it at the top of a mountain or hill such that his/her eyes would be towards the sun which was a means for forgiveness. If Mazda-worshippers did not use sun exposure for their dead, it was considered as being equal to killing a righteous man (Razi, 1997). In the Pahlavi book *Shāyast ne-Shāyast* (meaning “Proper and Improper”), there are some commandments for avoiding sun pollution and preserving its sanctity: a menstruating woman should not look at the sun and other illuminators as well as the sheep and plants and should not talk to righteous men; the scary Druj (a demon’s name), is the menstruating Druj that gives to others with evil eye. (Mazdapoor, 1990:64).

The Indian sun (Sūrya)

The Indian civilization is one of the oldest in human history. Therefore, the scope of its myths range from prehistoric to historic times. Indian myths are a part of the live culture of the Indian people. The origin of Indian religions, is the the

worship of nature and its forces; these religions then evolved towards philosophical thoughts, and by passing from Upanishads, they turned into late Indian mythology (Rezazadeh Shafagh, 1988: 12). The current Indian religious beliefs are the products of these myths including the natural force of the sun (Shaygan, 1977: 82).

Since 1700 A.D. the Aryan conquerors, destroyed the “Indus⁸” civilization and brought the “Vedic religion” to India which dominated the land for nearly a thousand years; Aryans were brave horsemen and charioteers and agile swordsmen who quickly defeated Dravidians⁹; the skin color of the Aryans was bright and the Dravidians were dark skinned with a victory-oriented culture; the Aryans were immigrants who unlike Dravidians, would not settle down and for this reason, their deities were less linked to the soil they lived on. Our knowledge of Aryan deities is taken from a collection of poems called Vedas collected in nearly 800 BC; during the arrangement of the Vedas, the Aryan deities were influenced by the beliefs of the main inhabitants of the Indian plateau.

In Vedic tradition, the greatest god is named Varuna (the god of honesty and master of the sky) who enforces law, rules the world and has greater respect than other Aryan gods, but the rank of Varuna in Vedic poems is not consistent and overtime, the duties of this god is given to other gods. With the primary decrease in the power of Varuna, another god called “Mitra” is placed next to him who has a high spiritual ranking (Ions, 1996: 16). The characteristics and duties attributed to these two – although sometimes inseparable – often contradict each other and in fact form a complementary collection, such as the punishment of sinners by Varuna that contradicts the nice and affectionate treatment of Mitra, or the relation of Varuna with night and the black color (to the point that people sacrificed black animals for him) and Mitra’s relation with day and brightness (to the point that animals sac-

is mentioned; in Iranian myths, there are three narrations about the birth of Mihr:

1. In the heart of a long and cold night, Mihr was born inside a deep and low-rise cave among the Alborz Mountains from inside a stone. At birth, he only has one hat on his head, and a sword and bow in his hands. (Some consider the birth of Mihr inside the stone to be a metaphor for the sparkles of the collision of two rocks). At birth, Mithra has an orb in one hand and has placed his other hand on the zodiac.

2. Anahita, the Aryan fertility goddess, gives birth to Mihr inside a cave in absolute darkness. In this narration, sometimes there is talk of three (or two) shepherds who were present at the cave during his birth. After giving birth to him, Anahita places him on a lotus leaf.

3. Mihr is born inside a lotus flower on a pond that belonged to Anahita. The rising of Mihr from the lotus flower is demonstrated in some statues (Bahar, 1996: 117).

But the first story is emphasized in most sources; an inner and mysterious force, projected Mihr out from the stone; at this state, Mitra is completely nude and has a Fariji hat⁵, with his hand raised holding a burning dagger, he is the child of illumination and is born from inside a stone. A rock got pregnant and gave birth to Mitra (Razi, 2002: 296).

It should be reminded that so far, no statue or stone carving from the birth of Mitra with said characteristics has been discovered in Iran and the only stone carving found of Mihr is the one that is seen in Taq-e Bostan in Kermanshah in the scene where Ardeshir is being crowned by Ahura Mazda where Mihr is standing on a lotus flower while holding a Barsom and has a crown of light rays on his head. Some believe that Mithra's mother, Nahid, was fertilized in water by Zoroaster's seed. Zoroaster's seed or semen was kept in the water of Hamoon Lake therefore the foretold messiah must have come out of that seed⁶. Mihr's symbols, have a special link with water, such as the fertilization of

the goddess in water and the fertilization of oysters and developing pearls in water which made the followers of Mitra to image that Mitra was born like pearl from an oyster and or was kept in water like the seed or semen of Zoroaster. It seems that people thought he is kept in a lotus and therefore, lotus has a close relationship with Mithraism; Lotus and oyster are two outstanding symbols for Mithraism, but based on the existing statues and stone carvings in the shrines of Mihr, the best symbol suited to store and develop the seed was dolphin; dolphins feed their children with their own milk in water, therefore, it can keep Mitra in water; some also believed that Mitra was born in fire not water. This matches the concepts that Iranians mention of fire as a witness because Mitra is a deity of justice, therefore has a close relationship with fire (Rostampoor, 2003: 100). Apart from the way Mihr was born, the time of his birth was also important because the birth of Mihr is an astronomical event which happens in one night a year that is Yalda night which dates back to thousands of years ago in Iran. 30th of Azar month (a Persian month) or the 21st of December, has the shortest day and longest night in a year but right after the next month which is called Dey in Persian, days gradually become longer and nights shorter, therefore, this night was called Yalda which means the birth of the invincible sun that was Mihr. If you look at the meaning of Yalda, its relationship with the sun and Mihr becomes clearer; In Borhan-e Ghatte, under the term Yalda is written: "Yalda is a Syriac word meaning Arabic birth which is the first day of the winter and last day of autumn (first of Jedit and end of Ghos) which is the longest night in year and or near that night, the sun moves into the Jedit month and they say that it is extremely ominous and inauspicious and some say that Yalda night is the 11th of Jedit" (Mohammad Hossein Kolf Tabrizi known as Borhan, 2005: under the term "Yalda"). Biruni writes: "the Dey month also known as Khormah,

sunlight, gradually caused the sun to be considered the same as Mihr and swearing by the sun was considered the same as swearing by Mihr and God. In religious myths after Zoroastrianism, it is the sun that knows everything, sees everything¹ and witnesses agreements².

Mihr is derived from Mitra or Mithra of Indian and Iranian root. In Avesta, Mithra, Pahlavid (Mitr), Mitra is recognized as an ancient Iranian deity (Ya Hagi, 1990: under the word "Mihr" Vanak: Mosaheb, 1977: Encyclopedia: under the word "Mihr") and today in Persian, it is known as Mihr and Mitra. For the term "Mihr", Dehkhoda has included the following meanings in his book: affection, love, friendship, justice, covenant, pact (Dehkhoda, 1998: under the word Mihr) and in another place, the meanings of friendship, affection and the Aryan god of light were used for Mihr; In Farsi, the term right after Mihr is the latter version of the term Mitra which means the sun (Moein, 1974; under the word Mihr). One delicate point about the sun and Mihr is that for ancient Iranians, the sun had a great position but its deity, Hur, did not have an important position; therefore the worship of the sun was the same as the worship of Mihr or Mithra (ChristinSen 1999: 102). What gave the sun a great level of holiness among ancient Iranians was not only that it was the sun, rather it was the light of the sun and Mihr is the deity of light. The best interpretation for the relationship between the sun and Mitra can be this: Mitra is not the sun, but a light that destroys darkness and gives a happy life to the earth and fertilizes the nature with its warmth and lights, and banishes demons dwelling in the dark who spread sins, disobedience, impurity and famine and drought upon earth (Cumont, 2004: 25). In Iranian myths, the first deity to challenge Mitra was the sun, and because Mitra wins the challenge, the sun is forced to make a cooperation pact with Mitra and in return receives a sign of friendship. The winning Mitra, puts a shiny crown on the sun's

head because of the agreement and the sun always keeps the crown during its daily tour; after defeating the sun, Mitra stands up and puts his right hand out towards the sun and firmly presses his hand to seal the friendship deal; after that, they have remained two loyal friends and supporters for each other (Cumont, 2004: 134). In religious Iranian literature, the placement of the sun and Mitra is really clear. Ahura Mazda reigns all the area from the sun to the earth, the devil is in the absolute darkness real and Mitra is in the middle ground of these two (Cumont, 2004: 30) Is the anthem of Mitra, four white horses, carry his golden chariot³, and this means that until the deity illuminates his body at dawns, he creates many events⁴. As was mentioned, one of the characteristics of Mihr was being illuminated. The illuminated being of Mihr can be interpreted in two ways:

A: in Avesta, Mihr is usually described with this characteristic (being illuminated) such that it can be claimed that illumination and brightness is an inseparable part of him; based on hymn 50 of Mehr Yasht, his place is on the tall and shiny mountain of Alborz, where it is neither night nor darkness and no fog rises from its peak and based on hymn 112 of the same Yasht, the routes that Mihr passes from to visit the Mithraism land is illuminated.

B: from old times, Mihr and the sun are mixed and this mixture particularly in the characteristic of illumination has made the sun to be recognized as Mihr and therefore, the characteristic of being illuminated is mostly attributed to the sun than Mihr (Jafari Gharie A., 2009:24). Strabo the Greek geographer and many Greek and Romanian writers, have identified Mihr as the sun (Pourdavood, 2001: 123). However in the Sassanid period, Mihr become the pure sun god (Zenr, 1995: 163) and gradually, Mithraism became the same as sun worshipping.

In the belief of ancient Iranians, the birth of Mihr

Introduction

The sun has a very glorious position in ancient Iranian myths. In pre-Zoroastrian times, the sun was worshipped as a powerful deity, and in post-Zoroastrian times, it was praised as the creation of Ahura Mazda. The sun was also praised and respected as a deity in India. The star of the sun has always been worshipped by all nations due to its values for mankind. In ancient times, this star had a very glorious position and was seldom not worshipped as a god by people, hence some myths have been created about it. Sun worshipping can be seen in the majority of ancient civilizations; for example, various sun gods in ancient Egypt including Ra/Re “the mid-day god who in Egyptians’ belief, had emerged from the petals of a lotus” (Birilin, 2007: 55), Khepra, the dawn god and Atom the night god and also an eagle right-eyed deity with the body of a human called Hur. In Mesopotamia, the sun god was named “Shemsh”, who rode shadows and punished sinners and had a large net that trapped sinners just like the light of the sun making darkness disappear (Dorant, 2006: 154). In ancient Greece, the sun god was called “Helios”. Every day at dawn, he rode from the east on his fiery chariot carried by four horses and continued to ride the chariot in the sky until sunset. Since Helios rode in the sky all day and looked

down at the earth from above, people believed that he sees and hears everything on the earth, therefore both the deities and humans considered him as a witness to all events or oaths made (Grimal, 2009: 374), and in ancient Rome, the sun god “Sol Invictus” meaning the invincible sun was praised who was one of the first gods in the late Roman Empire. The term “invictus” means invincible” and of course it was one of the adjectives frequently attributed to various Roman deities including Sol (Pron, 2009: 230). The sun in Chinese myth is the son of Khan and is named Shùn whose chariot was carried by some dragons (Farokhi, 1979: 124). The sun god was firmly praised and worshipped by humans. The sun in primitive religions was worshipped as a god or one of the major gods, and in Monotheistic Religions, it has always been an important creation of God. In ancient times, the sun was worshipped as the most magnificent god, the god of illumination, the all-seeing god and the source of fertility and life. Also, due to its rising and setting, it was considered a symbol of death and resurrection. In this article, we focus on the position of the sun in the religious texts of ancient Iran and compare the Iranian sun with the Indian one and show their differences and similarities.

Hypothesis

Mitra, the great Aryan deity, was the symbol of light and sunlight for Iranians and Indians that after the advent of Zoroastrianism, became a companion for Ahura Mazda and with the migration of the Aryan to India, was placed among the Hindu deities. The differences and similarities of the Iranian and Indian sun deities were caused by different beliefs in the two lands.

Iranian sun (Mihir (Mithra-Mitra))

To ancient Iranians, the sun, was a glorious start praised by the people, and was considered as a god until the advent of Zoroastrianism after which, he was demoted to become a companion of Ahura Mazda but still kept a strong presence. Doubtlessly, the sun and its importance and the worship of this life giving element and its similarities with Mihir who was the deity of light and

Investigating the Myth of the Sun in India and Iran

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Abstract

The celestial element, the sun, whose extraordinary energy illuminates the moon and stars and the human life depends on, has been praised in many ancient beliefs by scholars and philosophers. The sun was praised because of its life giving benefits or because people were afraid that they would make it angry and lose it. In this paper, the position of the myth of the sun in Iranian and Indian beliefs as two Aryan nations will be investigated and the effects of it in the ancient texts of both nations will be compared to reveal their differences and similarities.

Keywords

the sun, Iran, India, Soria, Mihr, Avesta.