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«ارداویرافنامه»

Ardavirafnameh: A Zoroastrian's Visionary Journey Heavens to The

Ardaviraf or Ardavirajh has been a Zoroastrian religious reformer. According to the legend, the period of his life is estimated between 3rd to 7th century A.C. i. e. from the early to the last Sassanid monarchs' era.¹

With a view to enlighten his co-religionists about the outcome of good and bad actions effectively, Ardaviraf has narrated his visionary journey to the heavens. The account of his journey and his observations of a'araf (purgatory), paradise and hell are contained in a book in old pahlavi language in amdabira script. The original text, a number of its persian renderances both in prose and poetry partial as well as complete², and also its translations in English, French, Gujerati, Sanskrit and Pazand have been published.³ Behram Pajhdu's, a Zoroastrian poet of the 7th century A.D.⁴ versified persian translation⁵ is, however, the most famous, but the original text or any one of its renderances in the said languages apparently didn't get a wider echo among the researchers interested in such narrations. The book comes under the category of those works which pertain to human visionary ascension, and as it was evidently written in the

pre-Islamic era, its unique nature is well envisageable. As Spanish Professor Miguel Asín Y. Placius has rightly remarked,⁶ no account of spiritual journey to the heavens save that of Prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon him) is complete. It may be added that Prophet's miraaj was an actual and physical journey when he was awake, according to the Muslim's belief, and no ascensional traditions fully coincide with those of the Prophet. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the mystic or literary works developed under the impact of the holy Prophet's Isra (nocturnal journey from Macca to Palestine) and miraj (ascension to the heavens from Palestine and return to Macca) traditions are many,⁷ but the works pertaining to visionary journeys to the heavens in the pre-Islamic era are a few⁸, and Arda-virafnameh is quite significant and important among those. Prof. Asín in his valuable search has shown the impact of Isra' and miraj traditions, and also that of Abul Ala Ma'arri (d.449AH) and Ibn e-Arabi,s (d.638AH) works on divine comedy. However, other sources of Dante's influence may emerge later. The Spanish researcher had commented that it was too difficult to prove Dante's media of influence from the Muslim sources, but later researches by others have made these dimnesses vivid⁹. Similarly the day might come when someone is able to show that Dante was aware of the contents of Ardavirafnameh too, particularly of the hell scene which is so similar in both the works and comparative instances of both, will follow later.

A Short account of the book.

The journey begins from the fireplace of Farnebagh, and guided by two angels, Soroush Ahru and Azar Eizad, Ardaviraf reaches the celestial spheres. After witnessing

the affairs of paradise, purgatory and hell, he makes a visitation to to the Divine Presence and listens to a message for his fellowbeings. It said that the real success lay in leading an honest and pious life.

Ardaviraf being a religious man, has tried to reform his society on the basis of fundamental principles of the faith. His aim seems to make the people believe about the after life, and rewards as well as punishments of the good actions and evil doings respectively. The Zoroastrian traveller of the upper spheres shows little interest in paradise or purgatory whereas in others' accounts, e.g. in Dante's Divine Comedy, these parts are the most interesting. In Ardavirafnameh there are passing remarks about the pious people and faithful servants of the society dwelling peacefully in the paradise: the religious leaders, the scholars, military people, farmers, shepherds and teachers etc. Some of them who fell short in performing their duties, are shown waiting in the purgatory so that their turn for the great of mercy approaches and they also join the paradise-dwellers' to lead enviable lives'. The book contains vivid pictures of the sinful people. The narrator has put in his full energy in portraying the picture of various sinful people in a way that others may be fearful to the admonitory results of their deeds. Hereunder is the list of a few sinful people being tortured in the hells. murderers, hoarders, black marketeers, liars, wizards, and witches, backbiters, men and women indulging in adultery, usurpers of others' land, sodomites, polluters of fire, water and public places, women disrespectful to their husbands, non-payers of the labourers' wages, persons remaining dirty, avaricious for money, unbelievers in the life hereafter, loaders of heavier weights

on the beasts, false witnesses, accepters or givers of bribes, weighers with lesser weights in trade, adulterers of drinks or meals with opium and poison, maltreaters of travellers and caravaners, women not feeding their children from their breast, women attracting the men with coquetries, parents careless towards their children and rebels of The kings. The pattern of narration, to quote from Zaradosht Behram Pajhdus couplets, regarding the tortures of slanderers, is as follows:

زبانش از دهان بیرون فتاده	یکی مردی دهن دیدم گشاده
یکی دندان براومی زد، یکی دم	فرو آویخته زو مار و و کزدم
سروشم گفتم: کاین بودست غماز	گناه این چه بوده، بازگو راز

I saw a man with open mouth, his tongue had come out from mouth. Snakes and scorpions clang and sting him,

I asked the angel Soroush, 'Who is he, tell me the secret?'

He said 'He was a Slanderer.'

Ardavirafnameh and the Divine Comedy.

As pointed earlier, Ardavirafnameh has many common narrations with the Divine Comedy, particularly in Inferno (Hell) portion. Dr. Shoja'uddin Shafa, the renderer of the Divine Comedy into Persian, writes:

"Ardavirafnameh has got wonderful likeness with the Divine Comedy: so much so that it will be surprising if we consider Dante to be unaware of this Zoroastrian work, though any information regarding his awareness is inconsistent yet. As compared to all works produced in the East or the West which resemble Dante's work or seem to have influenced him, Ardavirafnameh is evidently the most near in likeness. The pattern of Journey in the next World, the types of punishments and tortures, description of

different stages of hell, the narrations of varied tortures of single people e.g. tortures with fire, fetid smell, storms, rods, stings by snakes and man-shaped serpents and certain sinful people's brains being granted, etc. fully coincide in both the works, whereas other works preceding the Divine Comedy are devoid of such detailed elaborations. Hence, it can safely be said that many centuries before Dante's work, generally acclaimed as the best example of the European's genius till those days, Iran had also a work so akin to Divine Comedy in some respects, but whereas the Divine Comedy has been esteemed so high from the very days of its creation, the Iranian work Ardavirafnameh, has remained less known or rather hidden¹⁰. It is not possible to present a detailed coincidence of both the works-however a few tortures of the sinful people in the hell of Ardavirafnameh common with the inferno of Divine Comedy are put forth as an impetus for further perusal by the interested scholars:

i) strong and fetid-smell winds were blowing on persons indulging in unlawful sexual lusts¹¹.

ii) A sodomite's soul was turned into the shape of a snake and fire was coming out from its mouth¹².

iii) The bad state of torture of unchaste and adultress women¹³.

iv) The torture of a person who used to make false promises; his body was being combed with iron bars¹⁴.

v) The avaricious and hoarders being beaten by the dreadful giants¹⁵.

vi) The punishment of one who tried to create rifts among the people; noxious insects were stinging his hanging tongue¹⁶.

vii) The pagans and unbelievers being stung by the

snakes and scorpions¹⁷ .

viii) The unformidable torture of a witch¹⁸ .

Ardavirafnameh is mostly concerned with Zoroastrians, but it is fully devoid of religious prejudices. Ardaviraf shows the persons in paradise, purgatory and hell, but unlike Alighieri Dante, he doesn't name them and also doesn't disclose their religious affinities. He is only concerned with good and bad actions-light and darkness; whosoever lacks light, he falls into 'darkness'.

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2. see Mcjalleh e - Danishkadeh - Adabiyat Tehran cf pp 175-194 and monthly Vaheed Tehran of December 1971 pp 1377-1378, for details.

3. Mentioned in the prelude of Ardavirafnameh edited Dr. Rahim A'fifi Mashhad, 1343 H. Shamsi.

4. Majalleh-e-Adbiyat Tehran page 179, Duzakh (Persian Tr. of Inferno). Tehran 1334 H. Shamsi pages 45-50.

5. Edited with original Pahlavi text by Dr. Rahim A'fifi. cf.

6. Islam and the Divine Comedy page 54.

7. See, the Muslim world U.S.A., April 1973; article by Nazear ol. Azma and also Vaheed Tehran October 1971 article by Dr. Husain Munis (Persian tr. by the writer).

8. See 'Panzdah Guftar' by Prof. Mujtaba Minavi pages 25-29 and Duzakh pages 20-24.

9. 'Panzdah Guftar', page 34.

10. Duzakh, cf. page 33.

11. See 7th stage Inferno (English tr. Longfellow) Canto 6 for comparison.

12. *ibid* canto 15 and 16.

13. *ibid* 8th stage Canto 18.

14. *ibid* Canto 26 and 27.

19. *ibid* 4th stage Canto 7.

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