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HAOMA AS A PLANT IN THE AVESTAN TEXT*

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As in the Vedic in the Avestan too Haoma (Vedic Soma) has been completely deified. He is a god, who being praised by men, offers long life, prosperity and happiness to the latter. In spite of his divine character Haoma stands also as a herb. In the R̥gveda¹ this plant-like feature of the god Soma has been repeatedly emphasized. It presents a nice drink, which is extremely intoxicating. Indra while encountering his enemies in the battle-field drinks the juice of the plant and becomes intoxicated. He gets courage and vanquishes his enemies. There are very graphic descriptions of the preparation of the juice from the plant and hymns are chanted during the performance of the processes connected with its preparation, namely the pounding of the shoots, passing of the juice through the strainer, putting of it into the vats and its mixing with the milk etc. It is extremely health-giving. It not only infuses strength and courage into one's mind but also imparts immortality to the gods. The gods become victorious over the enemies in the battle, as they are invigorated with the drink of the heavenly beverage.

As in the Vedas in the Avestan too² the god Soma (Haoma) is deified. Haoma is belauded with the chanting of the hymns. If pleased the god Haoma grants very heroic sons, who rule the earth. He gives prosperity and riches; one secures beauty, knowledge, wisdom and all kinds of material comforts by his grace. By his favour one can not only repel the enemies but also get relief from the evil influences of the harmful spirits. The devilish Druj cannot overwhelm a man, who performs the worship of the Haoma and chants the gāthās in his praise. Yet in spite of this divine character of the god, his original feature as a plant has not been totally lost sight of. Occasionally we get glimpses of his trait as a plant. The popularity of the latter as a herb and of a delicious drink that is prepared from it flashes here and there and points to the impersonation of deity from the natural object, a phenomenon which is to be abundantly found in the Vedas. In the present paper an attempt is being made to present Haoma as a plant, of which traces can be obtained from the verses that are dedicated to the divine Haoma.

Haoma has a bright yellow colour and very tender sprouts: *verdorajā zairi-gaonō namyasūš* Yest 9.16, "you are victorious, gold-coloured and have tender sprouts". *nī tē zāire madom mruyē* 9.17. "Oh goldcoloured Haoma ! I

always speak of your intoxication." *haoma zāire vadard Jaidi 9.30.* "oh gold-coloured Haoma, hurl the weapon" *haomō gaoma zairi-gaonō 10.12* Haoma is sweet and gold-coloured. Reference is found to the roots, the branches and the spouts of Haoma. *Varddayaṇuha mana vaca vīspdsca paiti varšajis vīspāšca paiti fraspavryd vīspāšca paiti fravāxsō 10.5.* "May you thrive with your mind and word with the growth of all stems, with the growth of all branches and with the growth of all sprouts."

In the first pressing the sprouts of Haoma are held together with the chanting of the hymns and in the second (pressing) when these are pounded with a great force such chanting of the verses takes place.

fratardmēit te havandm vača upastaomi huxratvōyō ācsus hangdurvayeiti upardmēit tē havandm vača upa staomi huxratvō yahmi niymd marš aojangha 10.2. "In the first pressing I promise thee with the word, oh intelligent one, when I am holding together they sprouts. In the second pressing of the Haoma I praise thee with the word, oh intelligent one, when I am pounding thee down with manly strength."

Haoma grows on the top of the mountains, particularly on that of the Harburja mountain and from there it spreads to the whole of the Pārsika range. *āat aiṇhe ahiaiwyāstō baršnus pāiti gairinam 9.26.* "you are spread in plenty on the top of the mountains." *haraidyo paiti vardzayā 10.11.* "you grew on the high Haraburja." Therefrom the birds scattered you to other directions on the mountain, *ā at Owā aOra fradašta mdrdya vīzvanca viyardm avi iškata upārisaena. 10.11.* "Thereupon the birds brought you to the other solitary places on the mountain beyond the range of the hawks."

Besides the mountains the river-valleys (i. e. river-beds) too are the places, where the Haoma-plant grows. This seems to have been indicated by the Yest 10. 17. *vīspe haoma upastaomi yatveit baršnušva gairinam yetvēit jafnušva raonam yatēit azahu dardtānhō jaininam upadardzāhu 10. 17.* "I praise all the Haomas, which are on the tops of the mountains, those, which are in the river-valleys (beds) and also those, which as fetters are in the possession of women."

Haoma grows by the rains, which help the development of the body of the plant and make it blossom. The mountains, upon which the plant thrives with all its splendour, must be very high, *staomi maeyam ča vārdm ča yā te kdhrpdm vaxšayato baršnus paiti gairinam. staomi garayō bordzanto yaOra haoma urūruduša. 10 3.* "I praise the cloud and rain, which make thy body blossom upon the tops of the mountains. I praise the very high mountain, where you grow up." The land, where Haoma grows, is laudable.

A sweet smell comes from the herb that remains spread over a wide tract. The top of the mountain is the place, where the divine plant of Mazda grows. *staumi zdmō yaOra raodahe hubaoidis aurvō carāndm uta Mazdā huruOma haoma raose gara paiti* 10.4

“I praise the earth, where you grow with sweet fragrance on a wide tract. Oh Haoma like a great treasure of Mazda you grow on the mountain.”

The juice of haoma is mixed with milk and the beverage is prepared. It is distributed then to the people, who assemble to get a share of the excellent drink. *yasd tē bāda haoma zāira gava iristahe boxsaiti*. 10.13. “Who distributes you, oh Haoma, constantly (among the assembled persons) mixed with milk.”

The drinking of the juice is highly efficacious for the body. It surely gives health. The intoxication caused by its drinking cheers the heart. *ranjaiti haomahe madō, yō yada puOrdM taurumdm haomdm vandactā mašyo frā āloyo tanubyaō haomō vīsaite boēšazai* 10.8. “The intoxication, caused by Haoma, cheers. He, who adores Haoma like a young son, is favoured by Haoma, who attributes health to his body.” As Haoma gives health, there occurs an appeal from the worshipper for the granting of health. *haoma dazdi me bāēšazanam yābyo ahi baēšazadā*. 10. 9. “Oh Haoma! give me health since you are the giver of health. The phenomenon of the distribution of health by Haoma leads to a great delight and remains associated with it. This indicates obviously the magnanimous heart of Haoma. *ā te baēšaja irīradard vanghēus mananḥō mayāloyo* 10.12. “your health-giving is for delight and is an outcome of an excellent heart. So Haoma remains ever associated with health. *Vanghusdāto baēšajo*. 9.16. “Haoma is created by excellence and is the health-giver.”

The praise of the Haoma helps the growth of the plant. One becomes more victorious if one praises Haoma. The regular pressing of the plant, its worship and its systematic drinking help one to assault the Devilish spirits: *haoma uxšyeiti stavanō, aoa nā yō dim staoiti vdrdOtjastarō vavāiti nitdmčit haomahūitis nitdmcit haoma stūitis nitdmcit haoma xarditiš hazanray-nāyāi asti daevanam*. 10.6 “Haoma grows when belauded. The man, who praises Haoma, becomes more victorious. The regular pressing of Haoma, the regular worship of Haoma and its regular drinking make one strong enough to inflict assaults on thousand Daevas.”

The above discussion clearly shows that the image of Haoma as a plant was quite clear to the propagators of the Zoroastrian faith and the

composers of the Avestan hymns. While the divine attributes are assigned to the plant its character as a herb nevertheless remains sparkling within the vision of the poet. As a result of this the efficacies of the herb, its medicinal value and its intoxicating nature are repeatedly emphasized. The poets do not forget to mention the original place of its occurrence that is at the top of the mountains and its later march to different places as a result of the activities of the worshippers of the plant. In the later period Haoma gradually becomes changed into a god by the attribution of divine characters. It not only gives intoxication and health, but provides a man with all sorts of material prosperity and comforts. One gets wisdom, knowledge and other spiritual powers too as a result of the most sincere and devoted worship of the Haoma plant. Haoma becomes transformed ultimately into a perfectly divine figure as a consequence of the attribution of the heavenly features. The deification becomes complete in the later period.

Here one thing should be borne in the mind. As in the Vedic in the Avestan too the object of nature the floras and faunas become transformed into gods. The Vedic Soma and Haoma in the Avestan bear clear testimony to the fact. But inspite of this deification the original features of the natural phenomena find an important place in the description of the poets. In the case of Soma and Haoma this has been clearly seen. If one minutely observes one can very easily perceive, the gradual processes of transformation and its different shapes in the different ages. The conception of Soma, it may be rightly surmised, is a legacy from the Indo-Iranian people. But after the emergence of Iranian and Vedic the transformation of the conception took place absolutely in the identical manner in two different lands.

Notes

- Read at the Dharwar session of the All India Oriental Conference in 1976
- 1 Vide History of Sanskrit Literature by Macdonald; p-97.
- 2 Vide Yasts 9-11.