

**THE ARIAN WITNESS: OR THE TESTIMONY OF
ARIAN SCRIPTURES IN CORROBORATION OF
BIBLICAL HISTORY AND THE RUDIMENTS OF
CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE INCLUDING
DISSERTATIONS ON THE ORIGINAL HOME
AND EARLY ADVENTURES OF INDO-ARIANS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649062119

The Arian Witness: Or the Testimony of Arian Scriptures in Corroboration of Biblical History and the Rudiments of Christian Doctrine Including Dissertations on the Original Home and Early Adventures of Indo-Arians by K. M. Banerjā

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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INDO-ARIANS,

BY THE

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CALCUTTA:

THACKER, SPINK & CO.

LONDON:—TRÜBNER AND CO., 57 AND 59, LUDGATE HILL,

1873.



PRINTED BY C. F. LEWIS, BAPTIST MISSION PRESS.

PREFACE.



The following pages may be viewed under two aspects: first, as an inquiry after the original settlement of the Asiatic Arians, and the early adventures of the Indo-Arians; secondly, as an investigation of their ancient legends, traditions, and institutions in the light of corroborative evidences of Sacred history and of some of the fundamental principles of Christian Doctrine. The first view presents a historical aspect, the second theological; and they are the two main divisions of the essay now submitted to the public.

The author will not be surprised if both divisions of his work be charged with *novelty* in an invidious sense. His plea rests on the evidence adduced, and it is only just to add that in whatever he has said he speaks under correction. Candid criticism will be most welcome to him from whatever quarter it may come. He has no other object in an enterprize which has cost time and labour than the investigation of Truth. Since this work was committed to the press, he has heard of the discovery at Cashmere of a valu-

able manuscript of the Rig Veda by a distinguished German Professor. The author looks forward with fresh interest to its publication.

Most of the points, now submitted, had occupied the author's attention for years. They had been tentatively discussed in lectures, addresses, and articles in magazines and periodicals, and now, in the afternoon of life, he feels it a duty imposed by his very profession to present them in an embodied form. This is his only apology for appearing in print on this occasion.

It will be seen that in the first part of the work an attempt has been made to point out coincidences and relations between the Rig Veda and the Assyrian Inscriptions, the two great repositories of ancient Asiatic ideas and traditions, opened almost simultaneously by European industry and ingenuity within the last forty years. The author owes it to his readers to explain the grounds on which this novel attempt has been ventured on.

No term in the Rig Veda seems to have puzzled students, translators, and commentators more than the word "asura." The modern idea denoted by the term is that of an ogre and a demon. The idea is annually embodied in the person of the *Mahishasura* among the figures worshipped at the Durga Puja.

He appears there as the fiercest of the goddess's enemies, receiving his death wounds at her hands. In the Rig Veda, however, the gods themselves are, all of them, termed and accosted as *asuras*, and one of them, introduced at the moment as the Creator of the Universe, is called the *all-knowing and wise Asura*. And yet the same Veda elsewhere gives an opposite picture of the character indicated by the term, corresponding to the modern ideal of a demon and an ogre, and the very same individuals are sometimes represented as *asuras*, and again lauded as *destroyers of asuras*.

. The commentator Sáyanácharia felt no difficulty in interpreting the term, where it occurred in the demoniacal sense. In truth, it required no elaborate interpretation *there*. In that sense the word would be familiar even to a child. But the commentator's ingenuity was severely taxed when he had to interpret "asura" as a term applicable to the gods. He had to fabricate novel derivations and etymologies, too often revolting to common sense. In one case "Agni" was found burdened with the title "Asura," (आसुर, a patronymic from Asura) and the commentator, deriving it from *Asura*, interpreted it as a *destroyer of asuras*, the relation, he said, was in that place that of a *destroyer and his victim* ! The grammatical logic,

here propounded, might have justified the application of the surname "Bonapartist" to the hero of Waterloo, by whom Napoleon was ruined.

Elsewhere, again, the commentator adopted a derivation of the term (as applicable to *gods*) which the cautious Professor Wilson himself called, "an unusual sense of the word," adding, however, "but it would scarcely be decorous to call *Varuna an Asura*."¹ An unusual derivation might be excused in the case of an extraordinary term, *hapax legomenon*. But "asura" is a term constantly to be found in the Rig Veda, and oftener in a divine than a diabolical sense. Here then was the difficulty. Unless we allowed the interpretation of the Rig Veda to receive light from sources outside the limits of India, we must accept an unpleasant position between the two horns of a dilemma. We must either submit to unnatural derivations and unusual interpretations *as a rule*, or confound the Indo-Arian gods with the Indo-Arian demons.

For himself, the author fails to understand why scholars who had themselves broached or admitted the foreign origin of Indo-Arians, on the other side of the Indus, should be shy of allowing Indo-Arian documents or legends to be interpreted with trans-Indus

¹ Wilson's translation of the Rig Veda, vol. i. p. 64.

light. Would it have been fair criticism in England to restrict the interpretation of an old Anglo-Saxon document to ideals purely Druidical and insular, to the jealous exclusion of all light from the continent of Europe? In the case of the word *Asura*, we find that *Varuna*, held for the moment as the framer of the heavens and earth, is called "the all-knowing *Asura*." Is it fair criticism to fall back on "the unusual sense of the word" suggested by *Sáyana* to the exclusion of the obvious inference that the title appears as a translation of the Iranian term "*Ahura-Mazda*," applied to the Supreme Being, with which Indo-Arians must have been familiar before they crossed the Indus? The interpretation of the Iranian title is, according to Parsee doctors, "the wise Lord."² This itself supplies a clue to the meaning of *Asura* as generally applied to the gods in the *Rig Veda*. And in the case of *Agni*, the patronymic "*Asura*" was obviously owing to his being so called (*Ahurine*) in the *Zend Avesta*, as the son of *Ahura Mazda*. The *Rig Veda* itself seems to recognize this filiation by representing *Agni* as *the son of Power*.

But this is only a solution of a part of the problem. The same term is again used in an opposite sense.

² See p. 116 *infra*.