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INTRODUCTION BY

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## ZOROASTRIANISM

(sacred girdle), and the *sikhā* (tuft of hair on the top of the head), and among the Parsis in the *sudreh* (sacred shirt), the *kustī* (girdle), and the cap which always covers the head.

### RELIGIOUS CRISIS IN IRAN BEFORE THE ADVENT OF ZARATHUSHTRA

This great race, following the same ideals and observing the same ancient faith (Sanātana Dharma), lived as one people for many centuries. Then there came a division. Very probably, it arose in some dispute over religious matters, for certain ancient words relating to worship came now to mean the exact opposite with one or the other of the two factions. The Hindus inverted the meaning of *asura* (*ahura*), and, in their turn, the Iranians took the word '*deva*' (*daeva*) in the sense of a 'power of evil', a demon. So also among the Iranians the ancient deities, like Indra,<sup>5</sup> the Nāsatyas, Vidhātṛ, and others, became 'demons'. Yet Haoma (Soma), Hvar (Svar, Sūrya), Māoṅgha (Mās, Candramas), Mithra (Mitra), Yima (Yama), and many others continued to be the 'adorable ones' for both the divisions. Both branches also retained most of their ancient ceremonies and sacraments, as well as their social divisions and customs.

In the course of ages, the worship of the one supreme Father and life-giver (*asurah pitā nah*) was gradually forgotten, and the supreme position of Ahura came to be occupied by certain minor deities. Side by side with this, the noble Aryan path of *asha* (*ashahe pantāo = ṛtasya panthāḥ*) was also lost sight of. Old ways were given up; tyrants obtained supreme power over Iran, and the good and the pious were oppressed. At such a crisis in the history of the Iranian race, the great teacher Zarathushtra was sent down upon our earth to teach again to the people the worship of Ahura-Mazdā and to point out anew the path of *asha*.

### LITERATURE OF ZOROASTRIANISM

The teachings of Zarathushtra have been, fortunately, still preserved for us almost in his own words. In the course of the ages which followed, Iran had to suffer at least two catastrophic defeats, which have been recorded in history. The first was in 331 B.C. at the hands of Alexander of Macedon. The second was at the hands of the Arabs in A.D. 651. On both these occasions the scriptures were scattered and destroyed,<sup>6</sup> but

<sup>5</sup> Strangely enough, Indra as Vṛtrahan (Avesta: Verethraghna) is worshipped by the Iranians. In later days he is the 'angel' Behrām (Varharan), the giver of victory. He is the special *ištadeva* of the Sassanians.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander himself destroyed the Zoroastrian scriptures, when he wantonly burnt down the palace at Persepolis. At the Arab conquest the scriptures were not destroyed immediately, but some centuries later. We find a Zoroastrian priest giving a detailed table of contents of all the twenty-one sacred volumes (the *nashs*) of Zoroastrian faith in the reign of the Khalif