

SKANDA: THE ALEXANDER ROMANCE IN INDIA

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The marvellous exploits of Alexander the Great startled and thrilled the world. East and West vied with each other in paying him divine honours during his life and after his death. Myths and legends woven around him, embroidered with all the glowing colours of imagination spread through the Continents. The lands he conquered and those beyond them told his tales in diverse tongues. Greek and Latin, Syriac and Arabic,¹ Ethiopic, Hebrew, Samaritan, Armenian, Persian, English and French, German and Italian, and even Scandinavian languages of Europe, Asia, and Africa enshrined in prose and verse the immortal romance of the Macedonian Prince. Those were the days when religion held sway over the minds of men. His tolerance of faiths other than his own, his cosmopolitan outlook in matters religious, inspired as it was by a deep vein of mysticism helped him² “wherever he went to treat with respect the local religion.” His attitude towards the religion of the Persians, his greatest adversaries, the destruction of their sacred books at Persepolis is one of the rare exceptions to the rule of his general tolerance. The Arabs worshipped him as Iskandar³ Dhu'lquarnein (two horned Alexander) and even Islam⁴ adopted Iskandar among her prophets, and carried his forgotten fame back into India. He was the first Aryan monarch to become a God.⁵

When these various nations with whom he came into contact have preserved various accounts of his life and conquests, have elevated him to the position of a Superman and God, it is strange, if it be a fact, that Ancient Indian Literature alone is oblivious of him. Great scholars and historians have noted this phenomenon of apparent silence.⁶ But they are not surprised. Indians are a peculiar race. India ignores and forgets.⁷ “It is a conspiracy of silence.” “India remained unchanged. The wounds of battle were quickly healed: the ravaged fields smile again.”⁸ “No Indian author, Hindu or Jain or Buddhist makes even the faintest allusion to Alexander or his deeds,” asserted V.A. Smith, and he quotes with approval the lines by Matthew Arnold:

*“The East bowed low before the blast
In patient, deep disdain,
She let the legions thunder past,
And plunged in thought again.”*

It is a peculiar theory which holds that man in the East is radically different from members of his species in the West. His skin may be dark or brown, but his normal reactions to external stimuli cannot be different from those of his fellow beings elsewhere. The sun might shine brighter on him and the hues of land and sky might be more beautiful around him; but the fundamentals of human psychology remain true everywhere. And the vaunted greatness of historians and scholars cannot repudiate the patent facts of the character of ‘Homo Sapiens’.

If the Indian mind does not materially differ in fundamental facts, the question naturally arises “Are there allusions or references in Indian Literature to the conquest of Alexander, and if so, what?”

¹ Hogarth's *Philip and Alexander of Macedon*, p. 281.

² Wheeler's *Alexander the Great*, p. 334.

³ Hogarth p. 270.

⁴ *Ib.* p. 281.

⁵ H. G. Well's *The Outline of History*, p. 224.

⁶ Max Mueller's "India what can it teach us" and V. A. Smith – *Early History of India*, and *Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. VI, p. 434.

⁷ V.A. Smith – *Early History of India*, p. 426.

⁸ *Ib.* p. 118.

This paper is an attempt to trace those references that lie scattered over the vast range of Indian Literature.

In Persian and Arabic and in Eastern languages generally, it is a well-known fact that Alexander is known under the name of Iskandar. And it is natural, if Indian languages have used his name, it might be a variant of its Asiatic form. What form could it normally assume in the ancient Sanskrit language? We are familiar, through Buddhist sources with the Indianization of the name of the Graeco-Bactrian King, Menander.⁹ It occurs as Melinda. On the same analogy, Iskander regularly becomes 'Iskanda.' It is next an easy step to treat the initial 'I' as a case of prosthesis¹⁰ as it obtains regularly in Prakrits, and arrive at the Sanskrit form 'Skanda'. But a suspicion might lurk whether it is not a case of philological legerdemain. The name of Skanda is familiar in Sanskrit, in Indian languages and literature in general. But has it anything to do with Alexander the Great? Is it not an isolated case of accidental coincidence? It behoves us to examine it further.

If there are historical facts of the life and deeds of Alexander analogous to those of Skanda as we gather from the Indian literature and if there is corroboration of material details in the lives of [people?], we have to pause before we reject the hypothesis as idle, far-fetched fantasy.

At the outset, it must be borne in mind that many long centuries have sped since the days of Alexander of Macedon. A tangled mass of myths have grown around his name and eclipsed his true history. The folk-lore of centuries embodying the exploits of local heroes lies entwined over the garbled tales of Alexander, often distorting them beyond recognition. The life of Alexander by a Pseudo-Callisthenes gained unmerited currency and the brilliant hues of lurid fiction threw facts into the shade. We have, then, to extricate historical matter from the cobwebs of age-old legends.

Alexander was a prince, and Kumāra, which means a prince in Sanskrit, is a synonym of 'Skanda.' He was a warlord and leader of an army, and Senānī which means the leader of an army is again a name of Skanda. The lance was Alexander's favourite weapon, and the weapon of Greek soldiers in general, and Skanda is called 'Śakti-dhara' (lance bearer). These are resemblances which may gain weight in the light of other evidences.

The fondest hope and proudest ambition of Philip of Macedon, Alexander's father was to lead a Crusade against Persia after achieving a Pan-Hellenic Confederation. The memories of the incursion of the barbarian hordes from Persia who devastated the smiling lands of Greece and subjugated her inhabitants, were still there in the minds of men. But Philip did not live long enough to see the fructification of his hopes. It was left to his son Alexander to fulfil the dreams of his father. The conquest of Persia and the establishment of a World Empire under Hellenic supremacy was his greatest ambition. The defeat of Darius was perhaps the greatest event of his life. And Skanda was born for the slaying of Tāraka, the asura, who menaced the peace of the world. Now Tāraka is but the sanskritization of Darius¹¹ 'Dāra' of Eastern legends (Dārayavus of the Persian Inscriptions).¹² Darius in Persian means preserver or protector, and Tāraka in Sanskrit also means preserver or protector. There is at once the similitude of sound and sense. Against the advice¹³ of Parmenion, Alexander fired Xerxes's palace at Persepolis as a sign to all Asia that Achaemenid rule had ended. And with the death of Darius and the complete conquest of Persia, Ahura Mazda, the God of Persia was naturally dethroned, and there appeared in his stead the new Aryan God from the West, Alexander. The sway of Ahura Mazda waned with the vanquishing of Achaemenid power. Alexander could legitimately be spoken of as having crushed Ahura Mazda, the guardian deity of the King of Persia. Skanda is referred to as *Mahiṣāsura*mardana. Now *Mahiṣāsura* appears to be the natural sanskritized form of Mazda-Ahura. In the oldest portions of the Avesta, this compound word does not occur in the form of

⁹ Milanda panha

¹⁰ Cf. Strī. (Skt.) Itthī (Pkt.)

¹¹ Cf. Gonis (Grk) kons (Skt.)

¹² Cf. any Dictionary.

¹³ Cambridge ancient history, Vol. VI, p. 383

Ahura Mazda.¹⁴ It is Mazda Ahura. But the Sanskrit form is a much-disputed point. Various scholars of repute have essayed at length to arrive at the Sanskrit equivalent of Ahura Mazda. That Asura is the Sanskrit equivalent of Ahura is admitted by all. But controversy crops up, when we come to the equivalent of Mazda.

Dr D.B. Spooner connects it with Maya (Zoroastrian period of Indian History, T.R.A.S. 1915, p. 63-89). The regular Indian equivalent according to the Indologist Dr. Thomas and philologists like Dr. Brugmann (T.R.A.S 1915, p. 78) is 'medha'. On the strength of a passage in the Rig Veda "*Mahas putrāso asurasya vīrāh*" (Rg. 10.10-12), it is pointed out that Mazda corresponds to Mahas – I venture to suggest that the *Mahiṣāsura* of the *Puranas* is but a Sanskrit rendering of the Mazda Ahura of the Persian, *Mahiṣa* being equivalent to Mazda.

But even in the Vedas, the word *Mahiṣa* is used in the sense of the great or the venerable. The Uṇādi sūtras derive it by affixing 'ṭṣac' to *mah*, (avimahyoṣ ṭṣac – Unl.48). Jñānendra Sarasvati explains *Mahiṣa* as *Mahān* and quotes '*turīyam dhāma mahiṣo vivakti*' '*uta mātā mahiṣam anvavenat*'¹⁵ in support of his view; and *Maz* is admittedly the Avestic equivalent of Sanskrit '*Mah*'. Compare also the feminine form *Mahiṣī* which means a queen. The word *Asura* which originally possessed a good signification came to acquire a bad import, probably after the rift between the Persians and the Indo-Aryans.

Alexander married the beautiful princess Roxana the daughter of the King of Bactria; and Skanda is said to have married *Senā* or *Deva Senā*, daughter of *Mṛtyu* according to *Skanda Purāna*¹⁶ and daughter of *Prajāpati* according to the *Mahā Bhārata*.¹⁷ Now it is a well-recognised symbol of language that proper names are contracted in actual usage, and the end often chosen to designate the whole. It was an accepted rule in Sanskrit¹⁸, *Kātyāyana* says¹⁹ "*vināpi pratyayam pūrvottarapadayor lopo vācyah*" and *Patanjali* adds "*lopah pūrvapadasya ca*". *Senā* is but the latter part of *Roxana* ill-disguised in Sanskrit garb. And the form *Devasenā* is but a Sanskrit rendering with a view to preserving its sense, as *Roxana* is derived from the root 'raz' to 'shine' just as *deva* is from 'div' to 'shine'.²⁰ Evidently the king of Bactria is denoted by the word *Mṛtyu*.

On his march into India, Alexander crossed the Hindu Kush mountain through the Koashan pass.²¹ The Macedonians who served with Alexander called the mountain *Kaukasos*,²² perhaps to flatter Alexander attributing to him the highest geographical adventure, the passage of the Caucasus. The name Hindu Kush is but a corrupted form of 'Indicus Caucasus'. '*Grancasus*' which means 'white with snow' is the original Scythic form of the word *Caucasus*.²³ *Skanda* is referred to as '*Krauñca dāraṇa*', and *Kraunca* is admitted on all hands to be the name of a mountain pierced through by *Skanda*. *Kalidasa* refers to this mountain pass as a passage through which swans make their seasonal flights.²⁴ He but echoes the idea of the *Mahābhārata* which says '*tena hamsās ca gṛdhras*' '*ca merum gacchanti parvatam*'.²⁵ Now *Krauncha* is a more proximate variant of the *Grancasus* than *Kush* is of *Caucasus*. And the identification of the *Kraunch* pass with the *Koashan* is natural and legitimate.

¹⁴ Proceedings and Transactions of the First Oriental Conference, p. 6 V.K. Bajwade.

¹⁵ Siddhanta Kaumudi with Tattvabodhini, p. 496

¹⁶ Skanda Purana, Vol. I. P. 57 and 58

¹⁷ Maha Bharata, Vana Parvan, Ch. 226, 1.

¹⁸ Athava purvapadalopotra drastavyah, *Mahabhasya* I Ahu.

¹⁹ Vartika on 5-3 88

²⁰ Rawlinson's Herodotus, Vol III, p. 453.

²¹ *The Cambridge Ancient History*. Vol. VI, p. 391 and 403.

²² M. Crindles *Ancient India*, p. 187

²³ Rawlinson's Herodotus Vol. III p. 161.

²⁴ Hamsadvaram....Krauncarandhram....Meghaduta.

²⁵ Mahabharata Vana Parvan Ch. 227, 33.

We next come to one of the most interesting facts of history. Chandra Gupta Maurya, the first Emperor of India, while yet a boy, had seen Alexander “the invincible splendid man from the West.” “Later on when he became a great King, Chandra Gupta worshipped Alexander among his Gods.”²⁶ It appears a curious fact that a Hindu King paid divine honours to a foreign prince whom he had himself beheld. But the whole world had recognised his divinity. Even the democratic cities of Greece deified and adored him. Egyptian priest had acclaimed him as the son of God and God, and set their seal of assent on the flagrant faith in his divinity. Alexander is said to have visited the temple of Ammon Ra in the oasis of Siwa. He advanced into the mysterious inner sanctuary, and the image declared²⁷ “Come son of my loins, who loves me so that I give thee royalty of Ra, and the royalty of Horus. I give thee the valiance, I give thee to hold all countries and all religions under thy feet, I give thee to strike all the peoples united together with thy arm”.

It was not a notion new to Egypt. “Innumerable empires consecrated to the Sun extended around the Nile. Millions obeyed the will of one. What the ruler dreamed was fashioned by his slaves with their myriad hands. Everything was possible to him. The King was the son of God...All obeyed him as the descendant of the original conqueror. Because that first conqueror named himself King and son of the Gods, all believed him. Here in the East, it is possible to say to human beings, “I am your God,” and all believe.”²⁸ That frame of mind is not the sole monopoly of the East. In the West also that has been the case, and is so perhaps still. Heroes princes and prophets have been deified in the East and the West from time immemorial. The pages of history are strewn with the broken images of God Kings of all times and climes. The elevation of a single man to power without adequate checks leads him to the dizzy heights of megalomania: and people under his power bow before him and pay divine homage; and others take up the thread where they leave it. From Neolithic days when the symbolic sacrifice of a god-king was performed for the fertility of the crop,²⁹ down to modern times the belief in the chosen man has persisted. The Pharaohs of Egypt, the divine monarchs of Peru,³⁰ Alexander and Caesar are but a few examples. Dr. Rosenburg, chief of the Department for the Ideological Training of the future German Nation is reported to have said “We need a son of God. Today, there stands among us one, who has been especially blessed by the creator. No one has the right to find fault with those of our people who have found their son of God and have thus regained their Eternal Father.”³¹ No wonder Herr Hitler, the leader of Germany is being deified.

And in the East, the Dalai Lamas of Tibet and the Emperors of Japan, not to speak of a host of other princes and priests, are living examples of accredited divinity.³²

The tendency to regard a great and strange foreigner as a god is no less marked.³³ “The Greeks were quite familiar with the idea that a passing stranger might be God. Homer says that the Gods in the likeness of foreigners roam up and down cities.”³⁴ And, Alexander was no ordinary foreigner. He had captivated the imagination of the world. He himself had a vague faith in his divinity. His followers confirmed it. And Chandragupta might have been influenced by the prevalent craze. His matrimonial alliance with Seleucus who succeeded to the throne of Persia might have made it tactically opportune, and politically expedient. For Indian corroboration, we have the much-disputed passage of Patanjali’s Mahābhāṣya commenting on Pāṇini’s Sūtra “*Jīvikārthe cā’paṇye*” (5-3-99) “*śivah Skando viśākha iti...maurair hiranyārthibhir arcāh prakalpitāh*”. No one questions the fact that the Mauryas had something to do with the images of Skanda. But who were the Mauryas referred to here? And what did they do? Images are made for worship or for sale or are carried from door to

²⁶ *The House of Seleucus* by E. R. Bevan, p. 295

²⁷ *New Light on Ancient Egypt* by G. Maspero p.252

²⁸ *Napoleon* by Emil Ludwig p. 121

²⁹ Fraser’s *The Golden Bough* – Spirits of the Corn and the Wild – Vol. I, Chap. VII.

³⁰ H. G. Wells – *The Outline of History*, p. 214.

³¹ Quoted in Sunday Times (Madras) dated March 28, 1937

³² H. G. Wells – *The Outline of History*, p. 408

³³ Fraser’s *The Golden Bough* – Spirits of the Corn and the Wild – Vol. I, p. 236

³⁴ *Odyssey* XVII and Plato’s *Sophist*.

door and alms collected by mendicants. And 'Mauryas' referred to here cannot mean a class of mendicants. The passage is "*Mauryair hiranyārthibhih*". The word '*hiranyārthibhih*' is significant. Beggars do not go about asking for gold. It refers to kings. There are more than half a dozen places in the Mahābhāṣya where occurs the sentence '*arthinaś ca rājāno hiraṇyena bhavanti*'³⁵ where it refers to a fine or punitive tax collected by kings. The passage might naturally refer to a kind of religious tax collected by the Mauryas and probably introduced by them on the model of the practice of Babylonia where the whole land belonged to God.³⁶ There might have been periodical religious processions carrying the image of God, when collection was made from house to house. It is a custom that obtains in India even at present. Now Mayūra Vāhana is a synonym of Skanda. He is pictured as riding a peacock. That the Mauryas derive their name from the word 'moriya' which meant peacock and that the peacock was the symbol of the Mauryan dynasty are now facts admitted by scholars of note. The Mahāvamśa Tīkā explains thus the origin of the term Mauryan:³⁷

"The appellation of 'Moriyan sovereigns' is derived from the auspicious circumstance under which their capital, which obtained the name of Moriya, was called into existence.

"While Buddha yet lived, driven by the misfortunes produced by the war of (prince) Vidhudhabo, certain members of the Sākya line retreating to Himavanto, discovered a delightful and beautiful location, well watered and situated in the midst of a forest of lofty bo and other trees. Influenced by the desire of settling there, they founded a town at a place where several great roads met, surrounded by durable ramparts, having gates of defence therein, and embellished with delightful edifices and pleasure gardens. Moreover, that (city) having a row of buildings covered with tiles, which were arranged in the pattern of the plumage of a peacock's neck, and as it resounded with the notes of flocks of 'Konohos' and 'Mayūros' (pea-fowls), was so called. From this circumstance these Sākya lords of this town, and their children and descendants were renowned throughout Jambu dīpa by the title of 'Moriya'. From this, the dynasty has been called the Moriyan dynasty."

J. Przyluski says³⁸ "Mayūra once admitted into the religious literature, had evolved like other Indo-Aryan words. The existence of the Prakrit form 'Mora' explains the nature of the Maurya dynasty. This word which the Chinese translators render by "the family of the Peacock" is to be classed with Mātanga amongst the names of tribes and royal clans related to animal or vegetable". Dr. Radhakumad Mookerji remarks³⁹ "The connection of the Moriyas or Mauryas with the peacock is attested by interesting monumental evidence. One of the pillars of Asoka shows at its foundation the figure of a peacock, while the sculptures on the great Sanchi Stūpa depict the peacock at three places. Both Faucher and Sir John Marshall agree with Grunwedel that this representation of the peacock was due to the fact that the peacock was the dynastic symbol of the Mauryas."

Weightier evidences cannot be cited to prove that Mayura or the peacock symbolizes the Mauryas. It is needless to say that the usual deviation based on the assumption that Mura was the name of Chandragupta's mother is ill-founded. As the Mauryas were responsible for the introduction of this worship, and as they might have led the processions carrying the image, Skanda must have come to acquire the appellation of Mayūra Vāhana. It tallies with the evidence of the Mahābhāṣya and corroborates western evidence of Chandragupta's Alexander-worship. The identity of the real animal which conveyed Alexander is still preserved in the ritual processions of the image of Skanda mounted on a prancing charger sculptured with realism. The practice obtains generally on occasion of religious processions and particularly when the ritual of a mimic fight between Skanda and the Asura is staged. The Mahabharata corroborates the evidence of the ritual. "Lohitāśvo mahābāhur hiraṇyakavacaḥ prabhuḥ."⁴⁰

³⁵ Maha Bhasya (1) 1-1-1. (2) 1-1-7. (3) 2-1-4. (4) 2-3-46 (5) 6-1-5. (6) 8-3-58. (7) 8-4-2

³⁶ H. G. Wells – *The Outline of History*, p. 228.

³⁷ Max Muller's *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*, p.146.

³⁸ *Pre-Aryan and Pre-Dravidian in India*, translated by Dr. P. C. Bagohi, p.133.

³⁹ *Dr. S. Krishnaswami Aiyanger Commemoration Volume*, p. 98-99

⁴⁰ M. Bh. Vana Parva, Ch. 232-69.

In Margelan of Ferghana, *his red silken banner* is shown even at present.⁴¹ The Mahabharata states, 'Patakā kārṭtikeyasya Viśākhasya ca lohitā'.⁴²

It is an undisputed fact that Alexander was regarded as the son of God. Even before the oracle of Ammon Ra proclaimed his divine parentage, there were circumstances which tended towards a growing credence in the divinity of his origin. Wheeler remarks⁴³ "the confidence in an ultimately divine origin was an essential part of every family tree among the noble families of the older Greece. All the great heroes were the sons of Gods. If Minos was the son of Zeus, Theseus must needs, as Bacchylides's paean, XVII shows it, prove himself Poseidon's son". Alexander's mother Olympias who was steeped in the religious mysteries of a semi-Greek land, in the dark cults and orgiastic practices, spells and incantations of primitive religion, made no secret of her conviction that he was the son of god. Even Philip suspected his legitimacy and the tale went around that the arch-sorcerer Nectanebo, the last Egyptian Pharaoh had visited Olympias in the guise of the ram-headed Ammon and that he was Alexander's real father. Olympias was elated when reports reached her of the oracular confirmation of her conviction. The miraculous success of his military expeditions augmented further the growing belief; and Skanda is referred to as Ísasūn, the son of God.

Zeus Ammon is often portrayed with the horned head of a ram. And Alexander, the son of Ammon, came to acquire the image of his father with horns springing up from his head. The coinage of Lysimachus has preserved for us the profile of the two-horned god, the Dhulqarnein of the Arabs and their Koran. Chāga mukha or Chāga vaktra, which means ram-faced, is again one of the synonyms of Skanda.⁴⁴

The Pancatantra asks,

"Viṣṇuḥ sūkararūpeṇa mṛgarūpo mahān ṛṣiḥ
Saṅmukhaḥ chāgarūpeṇa pūjyate kim na sādhubhiḥ"

I-45

"Viṣṇu in the form of a boar, the great seer in the form of a deer and Saṅmukha in the form of a ram – are these not worshipped by pious men?" It was evidently a popularly known fact expressed by the author of the Panca Tantra fables that Skanda was worshipped in the form of a ram. It might have been so during his days. But who in India knows now of such a worship as that? Who would not be surprised by the epithet chāga-mukha applied to Skanda as we find in the Mahabharata? These are facts that could not be ignored. These are strange corroborations that stare us in the face.

We pass on from the historical facts of his life to the domain of Mythology and Romance to which his name was transported on the wide-spread wings of popular fancy.

"Around him the whole dream-world of the East took shape and substance; of him every old story of a divine world conqueror was told afresh."⁴⁵ More than eighty versions of the Alexander-romance, in twenty-four languages have been collected, some of them the wildest of fairy tales; they range from Britain to Malaya; no other story in the world has spread like his. Long before Islam, the Byzantines knew that he had traversed the Silk Route and founded Chubhan, the great Han capital of Sianfu; while the Graeco-Egyptian Romance made him subdue both Rome and Carthage, and compensated him for his failure to reach the eastern Ocean by taking him through the gold and silver pillars of his ancestor Heracles to sail the western. In Jewish lore he becomes master of the Throne of Solomon and the High Priest announces him as ruler of the fourth World-Kingdom of Daniel's Prophecy; he shuts up Gog and Magog behind the Iron Gate of Derbend, and bears on his shoulders

⁴¹ *The Cambridge Ancient History* Vol. VI. P. 435.

⁴² M. Bh. Vanaparva, Ch. 220-231.

⁴³ *Alexander the Great* by Wheeler, p. 350.

⁴⁴ Sa bhutva bhagavau sankhye raksaus chagamukhas tada Maha Bharata III, Ch. 228, 51.

⁴⁵ *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. VI, p. 435

the hopes of the whole earth; one thing alone is forbidden to him, to enter the cloud-girdled earthly paradise. The national legend of Iran, in which the man who in fact brought the first knowledge of the Avesta to Europe persecutes the fire-worshippers and burns the sacred book, withers away before the romance of the world-ruler; in Persian story he conquers India, crosses Thibet, and subdues the Faghfur of China with all his dependencies; then he turns and goes northwards across Russia till he comes to the Land of Darkness. But Babylon, as was fitting, took him farthest: for the Babylon-inspired section of the Romance knows that he passed beyond the Darkness and reached the Well of Life at the world's end on the shores of the furthest ocean of them all.

In the hill-state called Nysa, overshadowed by the triple-peaked Mount Meros, probably the modern Koh-I-Mor,⁴⁶ Alexander came into contact with the tradition that the Greek god Dionysus was the founder of the city and was the first to conquer India. Arrian tells us that "he heard that the Arabs venerated only two gods, Uranus and Dionysus; the former because he is visible and contains in himself the heavenly luminaries, especially the sun, from which emanates the greatest and most evident benefit to all things human; and the latter on account of the fame he acquired by his expedition into India. Therefore he thought himself quite worthy to be considered by the Arabs as a third god, since he had performed deeds by no means inferior to those of Dionysus."⁴⁷ Was he not himself the accredited son of Zeus? Arrian refers to a current story of Alexander reeling through Carmania at the head of a drunken rout, dressed as Dionysus.⁴⁸ Dionysus too is a ram-headed god, the first to conquer India. And the identification is slowly effected. But Mr W.W. Tarn⁴⁹ is inclined to suspect the truth of this identification. He says "Thereon, Alexander was deified at Athens, though the story that he became a particular god Dionysus, seems unfounded". He concedes the existence of the story. Only he suspects its authenticity.

The truth of the story of this identification is borne out by the Indian account of Skanda. Most of the ideas current in Greek mythology concerning Dionysus are available in the Indian version. What are the salient features of the conception of Dionysus?

The origins of the cult of Dionysus can be traced to prehistoric times. Dionysus was originally a nature god of fruitfulness and reproduction of all trees and vegetation. Thus in Indian tradition, Skanda is equated with 'Viṣākha' or 'Bhadraśākha' (the God of the auspicious or Golden Bough) evidently referring to the deity of vegetal reproduction. These words are remnants reminiscent of the ancient cult of tree-worship, suggestive of Dionysus, Dendrites. Vidyaranya, the philosopher saint speaks of the prevalence of tree-worship which persists even to the present day, in India.

“Antaryāminam ārabhya sthāvarānteśavādinah santy aśvatthā'rka vaṃśāda
kuladaivatadarśinah”

Pancadasi VI, 121

In Europe and Asia, where trees and creepers were worshipped during spring and harvest festivals from the earliest times, a ritual, a symbolic wedding of the tree with some creeper was often celebrated.⁵⁰ And poetic imagination everywhere pictured trees and creepers in intimate sexual relation.

“Paryāpta puṣpa stabaka stanābhyah
Spurat pravalōṣṭha manoharābhyah
Latāvadhūbhyas tarvo'pyavāpur
Vinamra śākhā bhuja bandhanāni”

Kumārasambhava

⁴⁶ *The Early History of India* by V. A. Smith, p.56.

⁴⁷ Arrian's *Anabasis of Alexander*, translated by E. J. Chinnock, p. 408

⁴⁸ Arrian's *Anabasis of Alexander*, Ib. p. 362.

⁴⁹ *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. VI, p.451.

⁵⁰ Frazer's *The Golden Bough* Vol. I. p. 346.

And in South Indian tradition, Skanda, equated with Bhadrāsākha (He of the Golden Bough) is represented as marrying Valli, the creeper. The real origin character of this God and his spouse is preserved in tradition as well as in places worship, particularly in Ceylon, where adjoining the temple of Skanda there is a close preserve of cornfield.

Herodotus⁵¹ speaks of Dionysus as a late addition to the Hellenic gods. “Whence the gods severally sprang, whether or no they had existed from all eternity, what forms they bore – these are questions of which the Greeks knew nothing until the other day, so to speak. For Homer and Hesiod were the first to compose theogonies and give the gods their epithets, to allot them their several offices and occupations, and describe their forms”.

The worship of Dionysus is said to be of Thracian origin. But the fundamental conceptions underlying the rites and ceremonies of Dionysiac worship are the common heritage of various nations. Yet there is no reason to doubt the veracity of Herodotus’s statement that the worship was new to Greece. New forms of ritual and new ideas might naturally have been grafted on to the old existent ones. And that is always the case with religion even when the new one appears to radically differ from the old. The residuum of old faiths remains and through a gradual process of osmosis, diffuses into the new.

The cardinal notions of the cult of Dionysus are evident from The Bacchae of Euripides (Prof. Gilbert Murray’s translation),

“Achelous’ roaming daughter,
Holy Dirce, virgin water,
Bathed he not of old in thee
The Babe of God, the Mystery?
When from out the fire immortal
To himself his God did take him,
To his own flesh and bespake him”.

In The Bacchae, Dionysus is fire-born and attended by the light of torches. He is Dithyrambos⁵² the twice-born: born from fire and again from water. The water-rite or baptism is an ancient ritual. The baptism of fire and the baptism of water are meant for the magical acquisition of strength for the child. And it has survived in Christian ritual to the present day in one form or another.

“In fire is a great strength, and the child must be put in contact with this strength to catch its contagion and grow strong. The water-rite, baptism, has the same intent. Water too is full of sanctity, of force, of ‘mana’; through water comes the birth into a new life”.⁵³

Now we could trace this Bacchic idea in unaltered form even in the Upaniṣads. The Kaṭha Upaniṣad says,

“Ya imam madhvadam veda
Ātmānam Jīvam antikāt
Iśānam bhūtabhavyasya
Na tato vijugupsate – etad vai tat
Yaḥ pūrvam tapaso jātam
Adbhyaḥ pūrvam ajāyata
Guhām praviśya tiṣṭhantam
Yo bhūtebhir vyapaśyasta – etad vai tat”.

⁵¹ Rawlinson’s *Herodotus*, Vol. II, p. 82.

⁵² Themis by Dr. J. E. Harrison, p. 34

⁵³ Themis ib. p. 34

“He knows this mead-eater
as the living soul at hand,
Lord of what has been and what is to be,
He shrinks not from him. This verily is that.
He who first from the fire was born
From waters, of old, was born
Who in mystery entered stands,
Who was seen by creatures”.

Whatever be the metaphysical interpretation given, the fact remains that there is unmistakable parallelism between these passages from the Bacchae and the Kaṭha Upaniṣad. The fire-born, water-born mead-eater who stands in mystery cannot escape our notice.

Later Sanskrit literature, particularly Classical Sanskrit Dramas, abound in descriptions of Vasantotsava or Madanotsava. The Vasantotsava was a regular Bacchanalian festival conforming in all essential details to the authentic western type. Compare the description in the Ratnāvali of Śrī Harṣa.

“Prekṣasva tāvad asya madhu matta kāmīnījana
Svayamgrāha grhīta sṛṅgakajala prahāra nṛtyan
nāgara jana janita kautūhalasya samantatah
śabdāyamāna mardaloddāma carcarī śabda mukhara
rathyā mukha śobhinaḥ prakīrṇa paṭavāsa puñja
pinjarita daśa diśāmukhasya saśrīkatām madana
Mahotsavasya”.

Ratnāvali, Act. 1

Skanda is frequently spoken of as the son of fire (Agnibhū - the son of the Ganges (Gangāsuta) and Mystery (Guha).

Dionysus is also described as the son of Semele, the Earth Mother.⁵⁴ “He is not only son of Semele, of Earth, but son of Semele as Keraunia, Earth the thunder-smitten”.⁵⁵ It was appropriate in her case as bride of Zeus, the god of thunder. Euripides has rendered the conception into immortal verse in his Hyppolytus.

“O mouth of Dirce, O god-built wall
That Dirce’s well run under;
You know the Cyprian’s fleet foot-fall
Ye saw the heavens round her flare
When she lulled to her sleep that Mother fair
Of Twy-bron Bacchus and crowned her there.
The Bride of the bladed thunder:
For her breath is on all that hath life,
And she floats in the air,
Bee-like, death-like, a wonder”

In the prologue of the Bacchae, Dionysus himself is made to say

“Behold god’s son is come unto this land.

⁵⁴ *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* by Dr. J. E. Harrison, p. 404

⁵⁵ *Ib.* p. 407.

Of Thebes, even I, Dionysus, whom the brand
Of heavn's splendour lit to life, when she
Who bore me Cadmus' daughter Semele,
Died here. So, changed in shape from God to man,
I walk again by Dirce's stream, and scan

[text corrupted]

Now the word Keraunia regularly sanskritized becomes *saravaṇa*. Compare the analogy of Ionia which admittedly becomes *yavana*. Skanda is Śaravaṇabhava, born of Śaravaṇa. But the usual Sanskrit etymology of Śaravaṇa a "forest of reeds" seems quite natural, when this original signification was lost through the lapse of time. He is also referred to as *Mahīsuta*,⁵⁶ the son of the Earth.

According to Greek mythology, Dionysus, the son of Zeus, was nursed by the nymphs Hyades. They were originally twelve on number and five of them were placed among the stars as Hyades and seven of them under the name of Pleiades, out of gratitude for their services.⁵⁷

And according to the Indian myth, the six stars *Kṛttikās* or Pleiades were the nurses of Skanda, and thus he acquired the name of *Kārttikeya*. This particular corroboration is worth noting. The myths are identical. The same star groups figure both in the capacity of nursing nymphs. It is an interesting fact.⁵⁸ The constellation of the Pleiades looms large in the imagination of all primitive peoples. The coincidence of the rising or the setting of the constellation with the commencement of the rainy season might have made the primitive man associate these stars with agriculture. This belief was current in both hemispheres. The aborigines of Australia, the Indians of Paraguy and Brazil, Peru and Mexico and North America, the Polynesians and Melanesians, the natives of New Guinea, the Indian Archipelago, and of Africa hold this star-group in veneration. Greeks and Romans and ancient Indians had noted the heliacal rising. Naturally enough, stars which were associated with the rains and the fertility of the crops were regarded as the nurses of the god of vegetation and fertility.

"Dionysus is a god of many names; he is Bacchos, Baccheus, Iacchos, Bassareus, Bromios, Euios, Sabzios, Zagreus, Thyoneus, Lenaïos, Eleuthereus, and the list by no means exhausts his titles".⁵⁹ Many of them are descriptive titles. "Certain names seem to cling to certain places. Sebazios is Thracian and Phryian, Zagreus Cretan, Bromios largely Theban, Iacchos Athenian."

Zagreus or the Cretan Dionysus is the son of the Goddess Mountain Mother.⁶⁰ On the clay impression of a signet ring found at the palace of Cnossos, we come across the figure of the Mountain Mother. On the apex of the mountain, there she stands with two fierce mountain-ranging lions on either side, with an extended weapon, "imperious and dominant".⁶¹ Behind her is her shrine with columns, trident-shaped. The trisūla-shape is unmistakable. Now turn to India. Skanda is the son of Pārvatī Umā. I venture to suggest that Pārvatī Umā is an exact rendering of Mountain Mother. Of course, a curious etymology of Umā has been given by the Puranas, which we find is followed by the great poet, Kalidasa.

"Umeti mātṛā tapaso niṣiddhā
Pascād umākhyām sumukhī jagāma"

– Kumāra sambhava

⁵⁶ Gangasutastvam svamatena deva Svahamahikrtikanam tathaiva, M. Bh. Vanaparvan, Ch. 233-15.

⁵⁷ *Classical Dictionary* by Sir Wm. Smith and G. E. Marindiu under "Hyades" p. 431.

⁵⁸ Frazer's *The Golden Bough* – Spirits of the Corn and the Wild – Vol. I. p. 307-319.

⁵⁹ *Prolegomena to The Study of Greek Religion* by Dr. J. E. Harrison p. 413.

⁶⁰ *Prolegomena*, Ib. p. 497.

⁶¹ Ib. p.497.

“Forbidden by her mother from penance, with the words “U” “MĀ” (O don’t) the graceful girl later acquired the name of Umā.”

The ingenuity of the etymology is transparent. In fact, the word *Umā* seems to be related to the Semitic word ‘*Umma*’ which means mother; and *Ambā* and *Ambikā* are other names of Pārvatī.

The worship of a Mother Goddess was prevalent throughout Asia. It obtained in Egypt and from there it is said to have passed on to Greece.⁶² Herodotus asserts, “The Egyptians, they went on to affirm, first brought into use the names of twelve gods, which the Greeks adopted from them; and erected altars, images and temples to the gods; and also first engraved upon the stone the figures of animals. In most of these cases they proved to me that what they said was true.”⁶³ George Rawlinson remarks “there is also evidence of the Greeks having borrowed much from Egypt in their early Mythology as well as in later times, after their religion had long been formed.”⁶⁴ In Egypt we find a Goddess “standing on a lion, like ‘Mother Earth’ who is mentioned by Macrobius⁶⁵ (Saturn. I, 26). We find her again in Assyrian monuments.⁶⁶ The very name of the Egyptian Mother Goddess is ‘*Maut*’.⁶⁷ The comments of the great scholar G. Rawlinson on this point are again worth quoting. “Besides the evidence of common origin, from the analogies in the Egyptian, Indian, Greek and other systems we perceive that Mythology had advanced to a certain point before the early migration took place from central Asia. And is in after times each introduced local changes, they often borrowed so largely from their neighbours that a strong resemblance was maintained; and hence the religions resembled each other, partly from having a common origin, partly from direct imitation, and partly from adaptation; which continued to a late period”.⁶⁸ But whether the early migration took place from Central Asia or not is a question beyond the purview of this paper.

We have already referred to Dionysos being portrayed as ram-headed and Skanda being Chānga-mukha. It is interesting to note, in this connection, that he is referred to as ‘*Naigameya*’ in the Mahabharata. Would it not be possible that this word has its origin in misreading and mis-spelling the word *Nysian*, Dionysos being taken to mean the Nysian God. Such a suspicion is strengthened by the large variety of forms in which the word *Naigameya* occurs in various works. It occurs as *Nejameṣa* in the Gṛhya Sūtras of Āśvalāyana and Śāṅkhāyana, as *Naigameṣa* in Suśruta and as *Nemeṣa* in the Mathurā Inscription.⁶⁹ Prof. Pargiter gives various illustrations of flagrant misreadings of names.⁷⁰ *Naiṣeya* or *Naiṣayeya* meaning Nysian would have easily assumed all these various forms.

The Indian legend concerning the origin of Skanda is vague, vacillant and divergent. Different sources give different tales. The Mahabharata has two or three varying versions. The tone of dubious hesitancy is patent. The first version of the story goes that Vasistha and the other Ṛṣis were offering a sacrifice. Agni, being invoked, descended from the sun, entered into the fire and received the oblations. Issuing forth from the fire, he beheld the lovely spouses of the seven Ṛṣis, bathing pleasantly in their hermitages. They shone like golden altars, pure as the crescent moon, like the flames of fire, and all as wondrous as the stars. The mind of Agni was upset. He became the slave of his passion. Knowing no other means of quenching his lust, he entered into the domestic fire and beheld them and touched them with his flames. Thus he dwelt for long enamoured of these lovely women. But his heart’s desire was unfulfilled, and in distress and despair, he decided to abandon his corporeal form and retired into the forest. Now Svāhā, the daughter of Dakṣa has fallen in love with him. Her amour was unrequited and she now found an opportune moment and a clever ruse. She

⁶² Rawlinson’s *Herodotus* Vol. III, p. 55, n.p.

⁶³ Rawlinson’s *Herodotus* Vol. II. p. 4.

⁶⁴ *Ib.* Vol. II p. 249.

⁶⁵ *Ib.* Vol. II, p. 446.

⁶⁶ *Ib.* Vol. II, p. 446.

⁶⁷ *Ib.* Vol. II, p. 242. Compare the Dravidian form ‘*Mat*’ meaning mother, corresponding to Skt, ‘*Matr*’

⁶⁸ *Ib.* p. 250

⁶⁹ *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda* by A. B. Keith, p. 242.

⁷⁰ *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition*, p. 127-129.

assumed the form of the wives of the six ṛṣis, one after another, and enjoyed the bliss of union with Agni. But she was not able to impersonate Arundhati, the chaste wife of Vasiṣṭha. Thus,

“six times was the seed of Agni thrown into the reservoir on the first of the lunar fortnight. Discharged there and collected, that seed by its energy generated a son. That which was discharged (Skanna) being worshipped by the ṛṣis became Skanda.”

(Vanaparvan Ch. 227)

“Sāṅkṛtvatas tu nikṣiptam
Agne retaḥ kurūttama
tasmin kuṇḍe pratipadi
Kāminyā svāhyā tadā
tat skannam tejasā tatra
saṁvṛtam janayat sutam
ṛṣibhiḥ pūjitam skannam
Anayat skandatām tataḥ.”

Vanaparvan, Ch. 227 (17-18).

It is evident that Śiva or Rudra does not come in here, nor do the Kṛttikā stars. In the next stage, Agni is equated with Rudra and the Kṛttikās are slyly smuggled in. “*Brahmins call Agni Rudra; therefore, he (Skanda) is the son of Rudra. The seed which was discharged by Rudra became the white mountain. And the seed of Agni was placed by the Kṛttikās on the white mountain. All the devas having seen him honoured by Rudra, they call him who is the mysterious one, the best of the virtuous, the son of Rudra. This child was born when Rudra had entered the fire. Skanda, the greatest of the Devas was born with the energy of Rudra, of Agni, of Svāhā and of the six women. Therefore he became the son of Rudra*”.

Vanaparvan Ch.229 (35-38)

“Rudram agnim dvijāḥ prāhuḥ
rudrasūnus tatas tu saḥ
rudreṇa śukram utsṛṣtam
tat śvetaḥ parvato’ bhavat
pāvakasyendriyam śvete
kṛttikābhiḥ kṛtam nage
pūjyamānam tu rudreṇa
dṛṣtvā sarve divaukaśaḥ
Rudrasūnum tataḥ prāhur
guham guṇavatām varam
Anupraviśya rudreṇa
Vahnim jāto’ hy ayam śisuh
tatra jātas tatas skando
rudraunus tato’ bhavat
rudrasya vahneḥ svāhāyāḥ
Ṣaṇṇām strīṇām ca tejasā
jātas skandas suraśreṣṭho
rudrasūnus tato’ bhavat.”

Vanaparvan Ch. 229 (35-48)

The confusion arising out of the attempt at the fusion of different concepts is hardly disguised. We perceive the very process of fusion, the trembling fingers of the fabulist at work, mixing and mingling divergent legends. Rudra and Agni, Svāhā and Kṛttikās are all jostling against each other. The introduction of the Kṛttikās does not appear to serve a purpose here. The acquisition of the six faces through their intrusion is mentioned only later. And there, Śiva has slowly displaced Agni from his original fatherhood. Agni becomes the agonized bearer of Śiva’s caustic energy.

“The discharged energy of Śiva fell into Agni. The Lord Agni was not better able to bear all that imperishable stuff. The brilliant bearer of oblations was sinking under it. Being advised by Brahma, he deposited it in the Ganges. The Ganges herself incapable of bearing it threw it ashore on the venerable Himalayan range. There, the son of Agni grew encompassing the worlds. The Kṛttikās saw that lustrous foetal form in the thicket of Sara reeds, and each one cried out “he is mine”. The lord knowing their maternal affection drank the effluent milk of their breast with six mouths.”

Śalyaparvan, Ch. 45 (6-12)

“tejo māheśvaram skannam
Agnau prapatitam purā
tat sarvam bhagavān agniḥ
nā’ śakad dhartum akśayam
tena sīdati tejavi
dīptimān havyavāhanaḥ
na ca’inam dhārayāmāsa
brahmaṇe uktavān prabhuḥ
sa gangām upasangamya
niyogād brahmaṇaḥ
garbham āhitavān divyam
bhāskararopamatejasam
atha gangā’pi tam garbham
asahantī vidhāraṇe
utsasarji girau ramie
himavaty amarārcite
sa tatra vavrdhe lokān
āvṛtya jvalanākāram
dadṛśur jvalananākāram
tam garbham atha kṛttikāḥ
śarastambe mahātmānam
analātmajam īśvaram
mamā’yam iti tāḥ sarvāḥ
putrārthmyo’ bhicukruśuḥ
tāsām viditvā bhāvam tam
mātrṇam bhagavān prabhuḥ
prasnutānām payaḥ ṣaḍbhir
vadanair apibat tadā.”

(Salyaparvan, Ch.45 (6-12))

Finally we get a summary of results.

“Some regard him as the son of Brahman,
some as the eternal boy, the eldest born,
some as the son of Śiva, and some as the
son of Agni, of Umā, of Kṛttikās and of the Ganges”.

Salyaparvan, Ch.45 (98-99).

Kecid enam vyavasyanti
pitāmahasutam prabhum
sanatkumāram sarveśam
brahmayonim tam agrajam
kecid maheśvarasutam
Kecit putram vibhāvasoḥ
Umāyāḥ kṛttikānām ca
Gaṅgāyās ca vadanty uta

These varying accounts confirm our suspicion.

We are now going to tread on more controversial ground. Dionysus is said to be the son of Zeus and Skanda is the son of Siva. Could it be that the very word Siva itself is an Indianization of Zeus and imported from outside? The word Zeus has a long history behind it. Philologists are agreed that Zeus is the Greek form of the Sanskrit word “*dyaus*” which means sky, and we have the form “*divas pitṛ*” corresponding to the western form Zeus-pater or Jupiter. But the word Siva in the sense of a god, we do not come across in the Vedas. We are familiar with Rudra, the Vedic counterpart of the Puranic Siva. We meet Siva in some Upaniṣads, the chronology of which is questionable. Pāṇini is familiar with Siva, and Patanjali too. That is to say, earlier than the 4th Century B.C., the usually accepted date of Panini, there is no authentic mention of Siva. It is not proposed here to claim Siva to be a thorough-bred foreigner. The excavations at Mohenja Daro have brought to light a seal (Plate XII of Sir John Marshall’s work) representing a prototype of Siva Paśupati, and it reveals the hoary antiquity of such a conception. As so often happens in the history of religion, new names and new notions were overlaid on the old. But a question might naturally arise. If the word Siva has come from Greece, how could Pāṇini be aware of him in the 4th Century or thereabout? India had come into contact with the western world, long before the conquest of Alexander. From the days of Xerxes who invaded the North-West, India had frequent intercourse with the West. Contingents of Indian troops had served in the armies of Xerxes and Darius in their expeditions against Greece. Trade and commerce might have helped the process of the diffusion of religion and culture. But it is rather a hazardous venture to hang on the frail form of a verbal resemblance in matters like this. But the parallelism does not stop with the word.

Attributes of Siva with which we are familiar in Indian religious literature are discernable in the case of his Greek counter-part Zeus. We note Zeus as Jupiter triphthalmos the triple-eyed god.⁷¹ Siva as triambaka is worshipped throughout India; and triambaka is always explained as three-eyed. We become aware, for once, of the fact, that there is a word *amba* or *ambaka* in Sanskrit which means an eye. It is suspicious.

In Egypt we encounter the Solar god variously called Atin, Atys, or Attin,⁷² who was both male and female (Macrobius-Saturn I, 26). We meet the double-sexed god again in Europe. Says Rawlinson, “*Macrobius (Saturn III.7) speaks of a bearded Venus in Cyprus and She is called by Aristophanes ‘Aphroditos’, apparently according with the notion of Jupiter being of two sexes, as well as of many characters and with the Egyptian notion of a self-producing and self-engendering deity. This union of the two sexes is also found in Hindoo mythology, and similarly emblematic of the generative of productive principles.*”⁷³ Of course, the double-sexed Zeus of Hindu Mythology is Siva, Ardhanārīśvara. It is a striking similarity.

Herodotus speaks of a Jupiter Stratius worshipped by the Carians.⁷⁴ “*He was also called Jupiter Labrandeus, either from his temple at Labranda or from the fact that he bore in his right hand a double-headed battle-axe (‘Labra’ in the Lydian language). Such a representation of Jupiter is sometimes found upon Carian coins. And a similar axe appears frequently as an architectural ornament in the buildings of the country.*”⁷⁵ We are naturally reminded of Siva as Khaṇḍa paraśu figuring so frequently in Sanskrit literature.

⁷¹ *India in Greece* by E. Pecoche, p. 386.

⁷² Ramwlinosn’s *Herodotus* Vol. III, p. 130, n. 6.

⁷³ *Ib.* Vol. II, p. 452.

⁷⁴ *Herodotus* (Rawlinson) Vol. III, p. 262

⁷⁵ *Ib.* p.262, n.1

It is an admitted fact that the word 'Tues' of Tuesday is derived from the name of the old German God Zio, (Zeus) or Tius.⁷⁶ The Indian names of the days of the week are exactly corresponding to the western names. These names assuredly, had a common origin. Dion Cassius⁷⁷ expressly states that the seven days were first referred to the seven planets by the Egyptians. The 'tues' of Tuesday appears as *Cevva* in Dravidian languages. That is as much as to say that the Dravidian word *Cevva* corresponds to the western word Zeus. Now in Tamil, the alleged root of the word *Cevva* may be spelt either way as 'Civ' or 'Cev', and C is pronounced as Ś. If this process of reasoning is sound, it would follow that, while directly through Vedic and Sanskrit, various forms of the word '*dyaus*' became current in India, it reached India again through the Greek form Zeus, after circuitous migrations in diverse lands, passing through diverse tongues. This fact explains the absence of the God Siva in the Vedas, and probably South India hugged to her bosom this new-come god with fervid devotion. Of course, there were gods and goddesses too before the arrival of Siva. But again, they paled into insignificance before the impetuous new-comer. The conception of Siva as astamurti is a bold attempt at an all-embracing symposium of diverse allied cults of the worship of Zeus, as the sun, the moon, etc. Even the practice of the devotees of Siva daubing themselves with white ashes (*bhasman*) is analogous to the orphic rite of the worshippers of Zeus besmearing their bodies with dust or ashes or gypsum which the ancients called '*titanos*'. Archbishop Eustathius commenting on the word Titan says, "*we apply the word titanos in general to dust, in particular to what is called asbestos, which is the white fluffy substance in burnt stones*".⁷⁸

It is claimed by some that Skanda is purely a South Indian God and there are no Skanda temples in the north. It might be so or not now. But even during the days of Kalidasa, we come across great Skanda Shrines of note in the north. Cf. '*Tatra skandum niyatavasatim*' – Meghadūta. Sānkarācārya invokes him as the God of the Indus region.

Cf. Subrahmaṇya bhujanga:

*"Iti vyañjayan sindhutīre ya āste
tam īde pavitram parāśaktiputram."
"namas sindhave sindhu deśāya tasmai
punas skandamūrte namas te namo' stu".*

Before the introduction of the Skanda or Kārttikeya cult from the north, under the name of Subrahmaṇya, South India was paying for her divine homage to Muruka, amongst other local primitive deities. Amongst Dravidians it was a very ancient worship. But even here, palpable affinities could be traced to similar religious rites elsewhere. Muruka, like Skanda, is the God of War. He was also the God of Hunting. We are told of a Babylonian and Cushite God of Hunting and of War under a name variously spelt as Murik,⁷⁹ Mirukh⁸⁰ and Mirikh. Murik is really the original Cushite and it is still applied by the Arabs to the planet Mars which has always represented the God of War: and does even today represent Skanda in India. The word occurs still in this vernacular form in Ethiopian inscriptions. The worship of the same god with the same functions under the same name by apparently different races is a problem for ethnologists to tackle. But the fact remains. Either the Cushites and Dravidians might both belong to the same race, or one might have adopted the practice from the other. The former is the more probable hypothesis.

Theocrasia, or the fusing of one god with another has played a conspicuous part in the history of religion from prehistoric times. In the oldest Egyptian religion, Horus, the son of God Osiris (Serapis) was regarded as the intercessor with the Father for sinners. H.G. Wells says, "*many of the hymns to Horus are singularly like Christian hymns in their spirit and phraseology. That beautiful hymn "Sun of my soul, thou Saviour dear", was once sung in Egypt to Horus. In this worship of*

⁷⁶ Ib. Vol. II, p.81, n. 1.

⁷⁷ Ib. Vol. II p.283

⁷⁸ *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* by Dr. J. E. Harrison, p. 493

⁷⁹ *A History of Sumer and Akkad*, by L. W. King.

⁸⁰ Rawlinson's *Herodotus*, Vol. I, p.361, n. 1.

Serapis which spread very widely throughout the civilized world in the third and second centuries B.C., we see the most remarkable anticipations and usages and forms of expression that were destined to dominate the European world throughout the Christian era. The essential idea, the living spirit of Christianity was, as we shall presently show, a new thing in the history of the mind and will of man; but the garments of ritual and symbol and formula that Christianity has worn, and still in many countries wears to this day, were certainly woven in the cult and temples of Jupiter-Serapis and Isis".⁸¹

The cult of Skanda was super-imposed on the Muruka cult. But the ancient form of worship persisted. With slight modifications, it exists to the present day.

When Dionysos first came to Greece – from where exactly we do not know whether from Thrace or elsewhere – he came with a vast train of attendants; his revel rout of Satyrs and Centaurs and Maenads.⁸² "The Centaurs, it used to be said, are Vedic Gandharvas, cloud-demons. Mythology now-a-days has fallen from the clouds, and with it the Centaurs." Homer alludes to them as "*wild men, mountain haunting*".⁸³ On the metopes of the Parthenon, they appear as horses with the head and trunk of a man. "*By the middle of the 5th Century B.C., in knightly horse-loving Athens, the horse-form had got the upper hand. In Archaic representations, the reverse is the case. The centaurs are in art what they are in reality, men, with men's legs and feet, but they are shaggy mountain-men with some of the qualities and habits of beasts, so to indicate this in a horse-loving country, they have the hind quarters of a horse tacked on to their human bodies.*"⁸⁴ The Satyrs were essentially akin to the Centaurs.⁸⁵ But when the Centaurs evolved in mythology from wild men to become more and more horse-like, the Satyrs retained their characteristics of wild men with diverse beastly adjuncts. The Maenads are the women-attendants of Dionysos, his nursing nymphs, in mythology. Maenad means 'mad woman'.⁸⁶ In actual ceremonial, they were women worshippers⁸⁷ possessed, maddened or inspired by his spirit. They had various titles, "*Maenad, Thyiad, Phoibad, Lyssad*", meaning "Mad one, Rushing one, Inspired one, Raging one".⁸⁸ These Satyrs and Centaurs and Maenads correspond to the Sattvas (bhūtas) and Kinnaras and Mātṛganas of Indian Mythology. The Bhūtagaṇas retain, in India too, the same mischievous and frolicsome Puck-like traits of their Greek counter-parts. The Kinnaras appear with palpable corporal inversion. Their trunks are human, but the heads are horse-like, and they are frequently referred to as *aśva mukhas* ('having horse-face'). The Mātṛganas figure prominently in the Mahabharata and the Puranas. The women who were seized with divine frenzy when possessed by the God have left traces of their vanishing existence in ancient Tamil poetry, though they have faded out of the social life of modern times in India.

These Maenads or nursing nymphs were represented, as we know, by "*frenzied sanctified women*"⁸⁹ who worshipped Dionysus as a baby in his cradle. In this particular form, Dionysus came to be called 'Dionysus Liknites' – *Liknon* meaning a cradle. The Orphic ceremonial of the Liknophoria or the carrying of the Liknon was widely practiced in Greece. Votive offerings of various sorts, originally the first fruits of the earth and often the best of things dear to man were carried in the Liknon to the shrine of Dionysus.

The kāvāḍi in South India is almost the representation of an Indian cradle, carried topsy-turvy by the devotee on his shoulder with offerings hung from the horizontal pole. The word *kāvāḍi* means,

⁸¹ H. G. Wells *The Outline of History*, p.384 and 385.

⁸² *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, p. 379.

⁸³ *Ib* – p. 380

⁸⁴ *Ib*. – p. 381

⁸⁵ *Ib*. – p. 383

⁸⁶ *Ib*. – p. 388

⁸⁷ *Ib*. – p. 388

⁸⁸ *Ib*. – p. 389

⁸⁹ *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, p. 401.

in Tamil “a decorated pole of wood with an arch over it carried on shoulders with offerings, mostly for Muruka’s temple.”⁹⁰ In a vase-painting from a Krater in the Hermitage Museum at St. Petersburg, we get an exact representation of the modern Indian kāvaḍi – the outline of an arch covered with fillets, curving over the ends of a horizontal pole with foliar decorations, placed under the feet of Dionysus. Dr. J.E. Harrison, the talented of the author Prolegomena’ and ‘Themis’, regards this representation as the Omphalos of Gaia, the earth Goddess, the mother of Dionysus.⁹¹ But, the Earth Goddess does not appear in the picture, and the filleted arch is under Dionysus’s feet. Whatever that be, its resemblance to the kāvaḍi is striking and noteworthy.⁹²

How was Dionysus worshipped in Ancient Greece? Exact details of mystic rites cannot possibly be had. But we get interesting descriptions. “His worshippers, women especially, held nightly revels in his honour by torch-light on the mountain tops. Dancing in ecstasy to the sounds of cymbals and drums, they tore in pieces a sacrificial animal, whose blood they drank with wine.”⁹³

In Athens, the worship of Dionysus was later reformed by Epimenides and was purged of certain objectionable elements. Dr. J.E. Harrison quotes a dialogue between Pentheus and Dionysus.⁹⁴

P. How is this worship held, by night or day?

D. Most oft by night, ‘tis a majestic thing

The darkness.

P. Ha! With women worshipping. ‘Tis craft and rottenness”.

Herodotus speaks of the maddening influence of Dionysus. The band of raving revellers seized by the god go dancing in divine frenzy.⁹⁵ The scenes were similar in India. The veteran scholar Mr. P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar says,

“The god of the hilly region was the Red God (Seyon) also called Murugan, who was the patron of prenuptial love. He was offered by his worshippers balls of rice mixed with the red blood of goats killed in his behalf. He was a hunter and carried the Vel or Spear...This god created a love-frenzy in girls.”⁹⁶

He quotes again from the Paṭṭinapālai, 11. 134-158, and translates,

“In the market streets there were ceaseless festivals to Murugan, in which women, obsessed by him, danced, and the flute, and the Yāḷ [lute] were sounded and the drums beaten.”⁹⁷

We behold today with our own eyes, around us here, pious devotees of Skanda dancing in ecstasy to the rhythmic beat of resounding drums. We cannot afford to ignore the unchanging persistence of this very ancient cult. Men may come and men may go, but it seems, the cult goes on for ever.

I have attempted to show that the very name Skanda is a foreign importation, that many prominent features of the Skanda cult are immigrants. Different strata of beliefs could be distinguished in the conglomerate mass of myths and legends woven around Skanda. Various races and ages have left the impression of their diverse contributions. Egyptian, Babylonian, Cushite, Dravidian and Greek and Indo-Aryan conceptions of a particular form of divinity have all coalesced

⁹⁰ Tamil Lexicon, Madras University.

⁹¹ Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion, p. 390

⁹² Prolegomena, p. 400.

⁹³ Themis, p. 443.

⁹⁴ A History of the Ancient World by Rostovtzeff, p. 233 & 234.

⁹⁵ Rawlinson’s Herodotus Vol. III, p. 58 & 59

⁹⁶ History of the Tamils by P. T. S. Aiyanger, p. 76 and 77.

⁹⁷ Do. p. 335

into a complex faith. Each has impressed its indelible seal in its present form. Since the advent of Alexander, old faiths took a new turn, assumed a new cloak. That new trend is discernable. I have but advanced here a few evidences which go to prove my contention.

But there could be a serious objection. If the word *Skanda* has been introduced into India after Alexander's conquest, Indian literature before the days of Alexander could not possibly refer to him. Are there not references in the pre-Alexandrine literature of India? There is no mention of Skanda in the Vedas. But it occurs once in the Upaniṣadic literature. In the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, a seer of the name Skanda Sanatkumāra is mentioned. It must, first, be noted that it is not a god Skanda yet, that is referred to. Secondly, the chronology of the Upaniṣads and of Vedic literature in general first stated by the Max Muller and accepted by the majority of the scholars is open to grave doubts. Thirdly, the passage where it occurs has been alleged to be an interpolation by competent authorities.⁹⁸

The problem of Vedic Chronology is one of the most intricate problems of Sanskrit literature. Chronology is, in general, the weak point of the Indian Literary history. Whitney in the introduction to his Sanskrit grammar said "*all dates given in Indian literary history are pins set up to be bowled down again.*" Those words ring true even today.

Max Muller started from the few known facts of Indian history – the Invasion of Alexander, and the rise of Buddhism in his chronological theory. His arguments were as follows:

1. Buddhism is nothing but a reaction against Brahminism and it presupposes the existence of the entire Veda Saṃhitas, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads. Therefore, it must have arisen before 500 B.C.

2. Vedānga and Sūtra literature probably arose simultaneously with the origin and early spread of Buddhism. These works may be placed in the period from 600 to 200 B.C. But the Sūtra works presuppose the Brāhmaṇas. For these he set apart 200 years. Thus the Brāhmaṇas came to be dated from 800-600 B.C.

3. The Brāhmaṇas in their turn, presuppose the Saṃhitas. Let 200 years be allotted for the arrangement of the Saṃhitas. Thus the Saṃhitas were arranged from 1000-800 B.C.

4. But arrangements could not take place before composition. Another 200 years for composition. This Veda were composed during the period from 1200-1000 B.C.

The arguments, indeed, are simple. But from the starting point of the Sūtra period fixed during 600-200 B.C. through the generous and uniform intervals of 200 years, his hypothesis flounders on. And Max Muller himself had no absolute faith in his theory. He says, in his Gifford lectures on Physical Religion, "*Whether the Vedic hymns were composed 1000 or 1500 or 2000 or 3000 years B.C., no power on earth will ever determine.*" But those who followed him would not leave his theory forlorn. When he vacillated, his followers took it up in right earnest and said that he could not go back, they would support him. That is in short, the story of Vedic Chronology.

The premise that Buddhism presupposes the entire Veda from Saṃhitas to Upaniṣads can hardly be held. In fact the earliest Upaniṣads like the Bṛhadāraṇyaka and the Chāndogya show, let alone the later ones, traces of Buddhist influence. Dr R. E. Hume, the learned translator of the thirteen principal Upaniṣads says:

"Yet, evidence of Buddhist influence is not wanting in them. In Bṛhadāraṇyaka 3-2-13 it is stated that after death the different parts of a person return to the different parts of nature from whence they came, that even his soul (ātman) goes into space and that only his Karma, or effect of work remains over. This is out and out of the Buddhist doctrine. Connections in

⁹⁸ *The Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads* translated by D. R. E. Hume p.262

the point of dialect may also be shown. Sarvāvat is a word which as yet has not been discovered in the whole range of Sanskrit literature, except in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa and in Northern Buddhist writings. Its Pali equivalent is sabbava. In Bṛh 4-3-2-6 'r' is changed to 'l', i.e. palyayate from pary-ayate -- a change which is regularly made in the Pali dialect in which the books of Southern Buddhism are written...Somewhat surer evidence, however, is the use of the second person plural ending 'tha' for 'ta'. Muller pointed out in connection with the word acaratha (Muṇḍaka 1-2-1) that this irregularity looks suspiciously Buddhist. There are, however, four other similar instances."⁹⁹

In reference to the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, Prof. Keith says "By a division, which seems to have no precedent in Brahmanical texts, and which has certainly no merit, logical or psychological, the individual is divided into five aggregates or groups (khandha), the Sanskrit equivalent of which means 'body' in the phrase Dharma skandha in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad."¹⁰⁰ "Trayo dharmaskandhāh" (Chāndogya 2.23). Beck compares it with the Dīgha Nikāya passage, where the three imperfect conceptions of self as body, as mind and as ideas are referred to.

The Upaniṣads, it must be noted, mark a break from the tradition of Vedic sacerdotalism. It is not a normal and regular development of the speculation of the Saṃhitas, what little there is. New thoughts and new theories radically opposed to already existing forms, strike us at every turn. Ritual acts are condemned. Priests are ridiculed.¹⁰¹ The new and sublime doctrine of the soul and again the doctrine of transmigration appear here, for the first time. The Kṣatriya is elevated, often, above the Brahmin. It is a revolt. It is as much a revolt as Buddhism. Buddhism was the expression of the revolt of a master mind against the darker forces of the world, against the inequalities of life, against the thralldom of a rigid social hierarchy, against dirt and sin and slavery. Whenever in the history of human thought, we find an abrupt break, a swift swerve from the regular course of normal evolution, the impact of a master mind will be evident somewhere. That came from the Buddha. But it is possible that the Buddha himself represented the normal reaction of a different race against the incursion of new Aryan tendencies. And Upaniṣadic literature reflects the tendencies of that new spirit. The hypothesis usually held, that Buddhism presupposes the Upaniṣads seems ill-founded. The converse might be nearer the truth.

There are scholars like Hopkins¹⁰² and Jackson who place the bulk of the Rg Veda hymns between 800 and 600 B.C. on the evidence of the very close affinity of the contents and language of the Rg Veda and the Avesta.¹⁰³

But, whatever be the chronology of the Upaniṣads, it is admitted on all hands that the two Upaniṣads Bṛhadāraṇyaka and Chāndogya are of a composite character. Different books have been strung together – ill-strung though – to give us the present versions. And naturally enough, interpolations easily creep in.

If certain notions of the deification of a great foreign prince have been incorporated into legends concerning an Indian God it need not perturb us. The Bhagavad Gītā assures us –

*"Ye Yathā mām prapadyante
tāns tathaiva bhajāmy aham"*

and Gauḍapāda says

⁹⁹ *The Thirteen Principal Upanisads*, p.6.

¹⁰⁰ *Buddhist Philosophy* by A. B. Keith, p.85

¹⁰¹ Note for instance the Chandoyga passage of bitter sarcasm hurled against priests – I. 12 4/5. It describes a procession of dogs marching on like a procession of priests, each holding the tail of the other in front and saying, "Om! Let us eat. Om, let us drink etc."

¹⁰² *Religions of India*, p. 7.

¹⁰³ *The Origins and Development of Religion in Vedic Literature* by Dr. P. S. Deshmukh, p. 196.

“*Yam bhāvam darśayed yasya
tam bhāvam sa tu paśyati
tam cā’vati sa bhūtvā sau
tadgrahaḥ samupaiti tam.*”

Kārikā II, 29.

The fountain-head of all religions is the pure and devout heart of man, thrilled by the awe and mystery of the universe. The stream might course through diverse regions, carrying with it the various tributes of minor streams. But it cleanses and refreshes and strengthens all that seek it, and moves onwards to its final goal, the vast and mysterious ocean.

“*Bahudhā’ pyāgamair bhinnāḥ
panthānaḥ siddhihetavaḥ
tvayy eva nipatanty oghā
jāhnavīyā ivā ‘ ṛṇave*”

Kālidāsa’s Raghuvamśa.

The culture and civilisation of India have always been assimilative. India, at heart knows no distinction of East and west. Well and truly has the noble Marquess of Zetland said –

“The legacy of India, how rich a heritage, drawing contributions, as it does, from diverse races and from many epochs both preceding and following the great Aryan incursion from the lands lying beyond the snow-capped ranges of Hindu Kush”.

Introduction to *The Legacy of India*
edited by G.T. Garatt, 1937

SKANDA ŚATKAM

*Skandāḥ kumārah senānīḥ
Śaktibhṛd raktaketanaḥ
Aśvārūḍhas tārakārir
Mahiśāsurasamardanaḥ*

*Devasenāpatir devaḥ
Krauñcarandhravidāraṇaḥ
Mayūravaraśamsevyah
Sindhu deśa samādṛtaḥ*

*Naigameyaś chāgavaktro
Madhvadi vahninandanaḥ
Apām suto dvijo divyo
Guhaḥ śaravaṇodbhavaḥ*

*Mahyā umāyāḥ pārvatyās
Tanayaḥ kṛttikāsutaḥ
Vallīvrto bhadraśākho
Bhūtakinnarasevitaḥ*

*Nānāvāditra kuśalair
Nānā lāsya vilāsibhiḥ
Bhaktamātrganaiḥ sevyo*

Murukāś śivanandanah

Ābrahma stamba saṁvyaṅto
Yo brahmanyah sanātanaḥ
Sankalpa kalpavṛkṣāya
Ṭasmai sarvātmane namah

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