



INDIA I. INTRODUCTION

By the close of the second millennium B.C.E. the speakers of related but already well-differentiated and internally diversified language groups, proto-Iranian and proto-Indo-Aryan (along with proto-Nuristani), were settling in the new homelands of Iran and India where their historical future lay. Existing cultural, as well as linguistic, differences between the two larger groups would only be heightened by geographic dispersal and, consequently, different experiences of adaptation and interaction with the indigenous populations and different contacts with neighboring societies. However, through political expansion, commercial relations, religious and other cultural exchange, Iranians and Indians were destined to experience repeated, if not continuous, rediscoveries of each other, both in ancient times and, with increasing intensity, after the extension eastward of Islam and the Persian language.

The population of the subcontinent had extended west of the Indus river valley into the highlands of Baluchistan and along the coast of the Arabian Sea from the time of the Indus Civilization of the 3rd-2nd millennia B.C.E. Possibly we should even think of some continuity of ethnicity, language, and culture from Elam in the west across Iran to the Dravidian peoples of India. With the arrival of the two peoples, both calling themselves “Arya” but with distinct identities, the great river could be viewed as a geographical boundary of at least symbolic value, a divide between the Iranian-speakers of the plateau and Central Asia and the Indo-Aryan-speaking peoples of present-day northern Pakistan, the Punjab, and the Gangetic plain. The name of the Indus river



(OInd. *Síndhu*- “river, ocean” hence the name of the river *par excellence* to the west of the subcontinent) has been explained, traditionally, as purely Indic (a derivative from *syandati* “flow”; see Burrow, p. 197, and discussion in Mayrhofer, p. 468). However, an Iir. etymology that accounts for Iranian evidence (see below) relates the word to Skt. *sidh-2* “ward off,” giving a sense of “barrier” or “natural boundary” and contrasting with the OInd. terms for manmade boundaries (Thieme, p. 448; Mayrhofer, p. 466). Such a term almost seems to anticipate Strabo’s remarks on rivers as population boundaries (15.1.26; see 15.1.10 ff. on the Indus specifically). The word could well have been applied by the arriving Indo-Aryans to the entire drainage system of the Punjab (the Indus and its tributaries plus the Sarasvati), which is effectively summed up in OInd. *saptá síndhavaḥ* “(land of) the seven rivers,” i.e., the Punjab.

The Iir. term explains Avestan *hindu-/həndu-*, a word with context and parallels suggesting “boundary, limit” and with the sense of “river, ocean” already from Iir. usage; there is no reference to India: thus in *Yašt* 57.29 “whether at the eastern extreme ... or at the western extreme” (i.e., everywhere in the central *karšvar* “clime” of *X^vaniraθa*; similarly, *Yt.* 10.104); compare *ushəndava-* in *Yašt* 8.32 “the clouds arise from the mountain Beyond Bounds, which stands at the center of the Vourukaša Sea” (see Thieme, p. 449; Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* I, p. 136 on the mythical ocean). By the time that the geographical sketch of *Vīdēvdād* 1 was formulated, which is approximately centered on northern Afghanistan, the name *saptá síndhavaḥ* could be cited as *hapta hindu* (1.19). Here the context does indicate India (as opposed to the seven climes of the world, as an ancient commentator on this passage suggested; Anklesaria, pp. 12-13). Iranians must then have been familiar with the use of “Sindhu” as the river name. Achaemenid political control was extended, at least to its west bank, during the reign of Darius I; and the *dahyu* “land” which is listed (following *Gandāra*) as “Hindu,” presumably so called after the river, may also have seemed well named as the eastern “boundary” of the kingdom. Darius I, looking to the cardinal directions, says: “This is the kingdom that I hold, from the Sakas beyond Sugda over to Kush [Ethiopia], from Hindu over to Sardis” (DPh 4-8; cf. Cyrus the Younger before the battle of Cunaxa [401 B.C.E], looking only north and south, in Xenophon, *Anabasis* 1.7.6).

With the Achaemenid presence in *Gandāra* and the river region, and possibly increased commercial use of the river, reviving more ancient trade relations



between east and west—especially after the pioneering voyage of Scylax of Caryanda down the river and on to Egypt (Herodotus, 4.44)—these areas began their long history as bases for cultural contact, transition, and flux. (See below, ii.-iv.) Thereafter, political control of the regions might change frequently, beginning with the decline of Achaemenid power, the passing of Alexander, the rise of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom and then of the Maurya state (Strabo, 15.1.10), counterbalanced by the influx of new groups of Iranian-speakers. Yet India's economic wealth and cultural vigor, finding outlets to the west and expedited by Iranian entrepreneurship, would give it an influence on the art, thought, and religion of Iran and of Central Asia. In turn, the eastward political and cultural expansion of Islam would create a vast new field of interaction between Iranians and Indians across the subcontinent.

The present entry cannot provide even a cursory political history or cultural outline of the subcontinent, of which the size, population, and complexity already astonished Greek writers from Ctesias and Herodotus onward. Rather, this entry presents a series of survey articles on selected areas of interaction and mutual influence between the two culture areas; these range from consideration of the fragmentary information available for the pre-Islamic period to an overview of the enormous body of history, poetry, and other literature produced in India in the Persian language. From these surveys the reader can turn to the numerous biographical entries and detailed accounts of places, rulers, dynastic lines, writers, artists, saints, scholars, and other creators or expressions of Indian culture which invoke the art or thought of Persia and the Persian language. A few examples are: [AGRA](#), [BABOR](#), [BAHMANID DYNASTY](#), [DELHI SULTANATE](#), and [HYDERABAD](#). A special category of coverage relating to India is made up of the entries on the personalities and institutions of the Parsi community, descendants of Iranian émigrés who, taking refuge in Gujerat at least by the 10th century, have maintained there the religion of ancient Iran in living form.

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