

Farohar The spirit of the matter

Talking about Farohars, here's a nice article on it which appeared in the Times of India last year. Regards
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The spirit of the matter

Adi F. Doctor on Farohar, the religious symbol of the Zoroastrians

FROM the astodan (receptacle for bones) of King Darius the Great at Naqsh-e-Rustam in Iran nearly 2,500 years ago and the door- post of palaces of other Achaemenian kings, to the portals and acades of present-day fire temples of the Parsis and the fair neck of a modern Parsi girl, not to mention stickers on cars, the one common symbol that adorns them is the winged human figure. Different interpretations of this figure have been given by historians and scholars, ranging from Ahura Mazda (supreme creator), Farohar and the Kyanian Glory. Even today, Parsis of India call it Farohar, the most sublime guardian spirit of every human soul.

But that is not correct; for if we cannot visualise the soul how can its guardian spirit be imagined? Besides, the original detailed version of this winged figure is to be found on the astodan of King Darius I, which shows the exalted king who was a 'Dahyupata' (righteous ruler-cf.sansk. 'dharmaraja'), praying before the fire altar. A winged human figure is seen in the air between the King and the fire.

The mystery of this figure was solved by the hermeneutist par excellence of Zoroastrian scriptures, the late Dr Framroze S. Chiniwala in the early thirties of this century. In the detailed 'ta'vil' or exegesis of this bas relief at Naqsh-e-Rustam, he has explained that the winged figure is the expanded astral or subtle form (Kherpa) of the King, embodying his exalted thoughts almost all the ancient Iranian monarchs and paladins were highly advanced souls.

While an ordinary individual's Kherpa remains by and large closed or at the most, slightly open, that of an 'Abed' or an 'Ashavan' (holy sage), is permanently spread out. This expanded Kherpa of a saint is what the symbol depicts.

At times even today, two types of winged human figures are portrayed - one has a wing-span with five rows of feathers, while the other has four rows. The opened-out wing indicates the journey of the saint or king through the earth. The five rows indicate the five major religions of the world (Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam), through which individuals have to pass before achieving salvation.

The four-rows wing belongs to a man with 'Khshathra' (righteous authority). It shows the exalted status of his personal magnetism and aura, which has four essences; Ushtan (life-force) , Mithra (thought-force) , Daena (conscience) and Anasar (four basic elements that constitute his atoms). The two ends of the fillet, emerging out of the central disc that surrounds the figure's waist, indicate the result of the King's actions on earth and whether he will have to reincarnate because of some outstanding Karmic debt or proceed further in the higher realms.

The bottom tail-like appendage, which is three rows of feathers, indicates Manshni (thoughts), Gavashni (words) and Kunashni (deeds), which should be harmonious.

The winged figure is depicted holding a small ring in his left hand, as well as a bigger ring/disc round its waist. The ring is the `Zarvan-e-Daregho Khadat', the 81,000-year- time cycle between two deluges on earth, in which the Dahyupat is living. In this part of the cycle, he has no control, for it represents his immutable destiny.

The smaller ring in the hand, however, indicates his Thwashe Khadat, the present life cycle over which he has control. He can alter his fate to some extent by his effort and industry. Once he succeeds in doing that, this central disc will snap and he will be free from the shackles of the long cycles of work and death.

The Achaemenians used their rock-hewn cuneiform inscriptions and bas reliefs as a method to record permanently their history and philosophy. The significant point is that wherever the King or the holy person is depicted in a posture of prayer, he is shown facing a fire altar and the winged human figure.

The later Parthian and Sassanian coins invariably show a fire altar on the obverse and the winged figure on the reverse of the coin. All of which clearly indicates the connection of the winged human figure with worship and meditation.

However, for the present day Parsis, the winged figure seems to act like a lucky mascot.

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