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Published by Anonymous on May. 02, 1994

The Celts

Common Ground of European Celts & Indian Vedic Hindus

Towering oak trees silhouetted a full moon scudding through charcoal clouds over the midnight forests of northern Europe. A broad lake rippled the moon's image. Two crackling fires fed on sacred oakwood and offerings jetted skyward from square and round pits set in a spacious rectangle clearing-defined by a water-filled moat. Surrounding the fires in a designated order were lean men called druids, sitting erect, eyes closed or mystically fixed, their long hair-white, blonde, auburn, brunette-stirred by stiff breezes. They wore white and dark blue cowled robes. A hundred yards away-mixed with owl hoots and forest murmurs-their chanting could be heard, a flowing acoustic river: sonorous, metered, slightly musical with alliterated phrases. Out on the lake were boats stacked with huge, gleaming heaps of cauldrons, swords, vases, mirrors, trumpets, lyres, furniture, jewelry-all wrought of gold, silver and copper. At the auspicious apogee astronomically calculated by a druid, the treasure was pushed overboard, sinking like metallic fish to the bottom. It was a forever gift to Lugus, the Celt God of Light, perhaps to use as a conduit of supernatural energy for blessings.

This was a Celt high ceremony, and such treasure offerings-sometimes representing 25% of a Celt tribe's economy-have been found by archeologists in lakes, ravines and votive wells all over Europe. It is one of dozens of mysteries of a people that are now ghosts of European history, but who were kindred spirits of the Vedic Hindus in India 3,000 to 1,500 years ago. Like giant mirrors set in the Alps and Himalayas, the two societies reflected images ranging from cosmology to civic law.

The Celts were a complex, spiritual, vivacious, artistic, business-smart people speaking an Indo-European language much like Sanskrit, German or Greek, grouped into socially sophisticated tribes that fanned across Europe 3-4 millennia ago and leapt to Britain and Ireland-from eire, a Celtic Goddess overlighting land. Eventually, they even made Turkey their home, and came very close to turning Rome into a Celtic eire. The Celts were a handsome people, tall and muscular-no fat allowed by law. The men sported burly mustaches and elaborate gold torcs

banded their necks. The women wore colorful chequered skirts, blouses and cloaks. The druids were a mystical order, trained for 20 years in memory, oration, law, metaphysics, ritual, magic, meditation, science, medicine. They roamed like free spiritual stallions among all the Celt tribes, and annually a grand council of all the druids was held on a broad hill or deep glen.

The Celts weren't the only Indo-Europeans settling the European idyll. Balts, Slavs, Germans and Nordics nestled in-all the way north to the frozen scraggs of Iceland. They each radiated a language, spiritual mindset and culture that tracks that of the early Vedic. At dawn, Germans daily slipped into cold, sacred rivers for ablution, chanting and wearing loose-flowing robes and a topknot in their long hair "so emblematic of the brahmins." So recorded Tacitus, the adventurer Greek historian. The Slavs took seven steps around a holy fire in marriage. The Icelander saga-the Edda-contains creation passages that are Upanishadic in tone.

Imagine a wide swath from Iceland, Ireland, the European west coast across southern Russia, the Caucus mountains, through Afghanistan and into India; that is the common ground for this unnamed mutual spiritual/cultural system. But there is more. The early Persians, the Hittites in ancient Turkey, and Greeks and Romans also spoke Indo-European language branches, and practiced parallel religions. The European, Asia Minor and Indian geography was blanketed by peoples speaking shared languages and following a single, multi-faceted mosaic of religions. Only Hinduism survived in India, though it mutated, and was nearly eclipsed by Buddhism. The Celtic religion survived most apparently in the ancient Irish faith and culture. Like the Vedas, the extant Old Irish literatures-memorized and transmitted through a 12-year training by an Irish bard/priest class who were the inheritors of the druids-are a window into Celtic thought and lifestyle. Again, like the early Vedas, the Old Irish sagas and hymns are at times locked in metaphor that we don't hold the keys to. There are also vast gulfs of knowledge missing from the Old Irish literature, for the only existing material is that put into writing-for the first time-by Irish Christian monks in the 7th century ce. By that time, 700 years of Roman warfare and punitive politics (all the way to Britain) followed by Holy Roman Church hegemony (including Ireland) virtually extinguished the flames of the European pagan religions. What remained was a Europe brightly misted in folk wisdom and sagas and inlaid with thousands of temple sites, holy groves and springs, stoneworks, fortresses, towns, cremation and burial grounds, sacred rivers, mountain eeries, seaside grottoes and treasure lakes all bearing names, artifacts and wisdom of the Celtic Gods, druids and culture, and other Indo-European pantheons. Most of what is considered Christian Europe is actually pagan Europe. Christmas day (December 25th) was usurped and inaccurately fixed by Christians from the Roman festival of Mithra. It came in turn from the Celt festival of the winter solstice, an astronomical event the druids observed to set the exact

beginning of the new solar year-the same calculation brahmins made in India.

The connections between Celtism and Vedism are dazzlingly profuse, but they aren't entirely dead branchings. They arch right into a hotel in County Kerry, Ireland, where historian Bryan McMahon plays a telling game with every Indian guest he meets. He hums some Irish folk music and asks them to complete the tune however they like. He says almost every time they will sing it like they already knew the song. "For me that is an indication that Indians and Irishmen have a common past." A Celt/ druid renaissance is brewing in Europe and the US.

Part II next month.

Parallels

Like two rivers cascading from the same mist-shrouded mountain, Celtic and early Vedic culture share astonishing similarities. Assembled here, for the first time, is a side-by-side comparison between the two kindred societies that were congruent in time and 3,000 miles apart in space. Our knowledge of the Celt society is rather sparse, and these listed parallels are probably a small percentage of the full extent of common ground.

Celtic/Vedic

1) Celtic cosmology cognizes four interrelating worlds of existence: netherworld, earth realm; heavenly realm of dead and demi-gods; white realm of supreme

Deities and energy source of stars.

Vedic cosmology perceives three interrelating worlds-physical; astral world of dead and demi-gods; causal universe of Deities, Supreme Being and primal energy; plus a fourth netherworld.

2) These worlds further divided into lands and cities occupied by spirits and disincarnate people of similar character. Time is slower in these realms.

The three worlds divide into loka habitats of existence, occupied by spirits and like-minded disincarnate people. Time is dilated in the lokas.

3) Celtic earth realm is called bitus. Celtic Gods are called deuos, meaning "shining one."

Vedic earth world is called bhu. Gods of Vedas are invoked as deva, meaning "shining one."

4) Departed souls dwelled in refined or hellish lands until their next reincarnation as a human or animal.

At death, souls continue existence in subtle or hellish realms until entry into the next human or animal body.

5) Celtic priests taught that human souls were indestructible, but the universe ends and rebuilds through fire and water in a repeating cycle.

The universe existence span-called kalpa-ends in a repeating creation/destruction

cycle through fire and water, symbolic of primal light and sound.

6) Celtic deities included Gods who actualized nature forces, promulgated ethics, justice, knowledge, speech, arts, crafts, medicine, harvests, gave war courage and battled forces of darkness, and Goddesses of land, rivers and motherhood. Gods often did multiple functions.

The early Vedic pantheon included deities of fire, solar, atmospheric and nature forces, ritual stimulants, speech, crafts, arts, harvests, medicine, justice, ethical/ecological order, war, battlers of malevolent beings, river Goddesses. Gods often had overlapping functions.

7) Celtic God of thunder was Taranus who carried thunderbolts. God of fire is Aedh (pronounced uh-ee), meaning fire. The sun Deity is Sulios. The Celtic word for invocation is gutuater.

Vedic God of rain and thunder was Indra who carried thunderbolts. Vedic God of fire is Agni, meaning fire. The solar Being is Surya. The Sanskrit term for invocation is hotar.

8) Celtic cosmology conceived of cosmic creation as a primal Person sacrifice. The Celt term for breath is anal. For soul, the Celt word is anam.

Vedic cosmology describes cosmic creation as the sacrifice of Primal Being. The Vedic word for breath is prana. The soul in the Vedas is atman.

9) The central Celtic ritual was the fire sacrifice, conducted in geometric pits with offerings of herbs, mead and flour cakes, conducted by chanting druids, the Celtic priests.

The central Vedic ritual was the fire sacrifice, performed in geometric pits with offerings of ghee, spices, rice-conducted by hymn-and-mantra-chanting brahmins

10) Celtic priests were called druids, meaning "knowers of the tree, or truth." They memorized the entire knowledge of the Celts and passed it on orally, forbidding written transmission. They were divided into several classes: seers, judges, royal advisors, hymn chanters, poet bards, sacrificers. They were also astronomers, healers and magicians.

The Vedic priesthood-the brahmins-memorized the scriptural and societal law knowledge of the Hindus, passing it on orally, forbidding writing. Brahmins formed several divisions associated with the fire ritual duties. Enlightened brahmins became rishi seers. Others advised kings and some specialized in medicine and astronomy/astrology.

11) Druids studied for 20 years in strict discipleship to master their oral, ritual, law, science and psychic arts.

Brahmins studied for 12 years in a gurukulam to master oral, ritual, mathematical, astronomical knowledge.

12) Druids memorized extremely lengthy poetic sagas that communicated spiritual metaphysics and civic laws. The poetic metre was a fixed syllable line, free form, with 3-part cadence at end.

Bards of the Vedic literature memorized lengthy poetic sagas conveying spiritual knowledge and dharmic duty. The poetic metre was a fixed syllable line, free form, with 3-part cadence at end.

13) Druids practiced breathing, posture and meditation techniques that gave degrees of ecstasy, often accompanied by intense heat in the body.

Vedic ascetics practiced breathing, posture and meditation skills in a spiritual unfoldment process called tapas (heat), generating high body heat.

14) Celtic society was divided into three hierarchical strata of life: priests, warriors and producers (inclusive of merchants). Druids advised warrior-kings known as rix. Upward progression through classes was possible.

Vedic society divided into four hierarchical castes: priests, warriors, merchants, workers. Brahmins counseled warrior-kings (rajās). Upward mobility was sanctioned in Vedas, but later frozen in societal law books.

15) Celts prized the magical power of telling truth, honor/piety among men and eloquence in conversation and oration.

Vedic society prized the supernatural power of truth-saying, piety and honor, and eloquence in gatherings.

16) Celts honored women, guarded their virtue, and allowed by law daughters of sonless fathers to inherit property or to marry kinsmen to bear male heirs to the father. Seeresses were sanctioned, and priestesses for Goddesses favored.

Vedic Hindus prized womanly virtues, and by law sonless fathers could bequeath property to daughters or arrange her marriage to relatives for male heirs. Female seers were countenanced, and female ascetics tended Goddess rites.

17) Celts recognized 8 forms of marriage from arranged to love to abduction. A bride gift was given by the groom.

Vedic Hindus followed 8 forms of marriage from arranged to love to abduction. The groom paid a bride price.

18) Celts defined life stages, columns of age: infancy (0-1), boyhood (2-11), adolescence (12-18), young adult (19-45), old age (46-65), decrepitude (65+) in which enlightening inspiration is sought.

Vedic society taught four ashrama stages of life: studentship (12-24); family life (25-48); elder advisor (49-72); religious solitaire (72+), in which the individual seeks enlightenment.

19) The Celtic ideal measure of life was to live 100 years.

The Vedic ideal of a fulfilled life was to live 100 autumns.

20) Celt family unit was a group of four generations from a great-grandfather.

The ancient Hindu family unit is four generations from a great-grandfather.

21) One Celt calendar was based on 62 lunar months (5 years +) intercalated to a 3-year solar cycle for solstice correction. Druids studied stellar motion, navigation and contemplated such abstracts as the size and nature of the universe.

Vedic astronomy is based on lunar months daily aligned to star positions and related to 3-year and 5-year solar cycles. Vedic astronomy was applied to astrology, and the rishi seers contemplated the universe's nature and genesis.

22) By Celt law a man owed money could fast at the door of the debtor-who must join the fast-forcing the debtor to pay or enter an arbitration.

By Hindu law, a creditor could fast at the door of the past due debtor, who then

was obligated to protect the health of the creditor and pay the debt.

To be continued in Part II