

Jamshid the Persian and Waraka the Arabian in the Indian Court of Harshavardhana

by A. Human Being (July 2016)



January 11, 630 AD: Kanauj, The Harsha Empire, Central Bharata (India)

Once upon a time in the far off land of Bharata, east of Arabia, lived a great king named Harshavardhana, who was known far and wide for not only having united north India and being crowned Maharaja at the young age of sixteen, but for ruling the citizens of this vast land with great justice and wisdom.

In the Maharaja's court, a banquet was being held to commemorate the completion of a vast network of rest houses to provide medicine and care for the poor. The court was filled with noblemen and advisors, visiting dignitaries, civil engineers, city planners, artists, and learned men of both high rank and low. Of food, there was an abundance: wild boars, stags, goats, ducks, and peacocks roasting slowly over fragrant wood; vegetables of every shape, color, and variety; and enough fruit and wine to make a man giddy. All of this, following an elaborate Bramanical puja and a more regional ritualized dance to seal the ceremony and guarantee the humanitarian network's benefit within the community.

Jamshid, an ambassador from the Persian Sasanian Empire, felt the sting of envy on seeing how the Maharaja's court outdid the court of his Shahanshah in Persia. And from this subtle pain, *of which he himself was unaware*, he addressed the Great King Harshavardhana, "Maharaja, many have compared you to Alexander in your youthful conquest of northern Bharata's feuding kingdoms after your father had repelled the Huns. You were still smooth cheeked when you, through arms and alliances, unified the land into this vast and prosperous empire. In these twenty-four years that you reigned as the Great King, all have benefitted. You have maintained a strong army with fortified borders; revived trade and

strengthened agriculture; built an infrastructure serving high and low alike; and made your capital, Kanauj, a center for high learning and the arts. And beyond all these feats, as genuinely miraculous as they are, you've provided extensive care for the poor, of which these rest houses are only one example. Forgive my imprudence, but I am compelled to ask you, Maharaja, 'What is your secret of good governance?'"

"Fear not to ask good questions, as this is a free court," the Great King Harsha responded. "You inquire into my secret." He rubbed his chin. "You are a new ambassador, Jamshid. If you had been here as long as your predecessor (and I am saddened by his accident in travel; my condolences and blessings upon his family), I imagine you would have figured it out on your own. It's an open secret, free for all to benefit from."

He pointed across the room to a fine painting of his father in chariot. "My father, Prabhakara, would have said the secret lies in strength of arms and wisdom from the classics, for he had repelled the Huns in the battlefield of war, in the battlefield of mind, and the battlefield of heart. Oh, how I grew up hearing the classics, '*Sanjaya, sing to me of what my sons and the sons of King Pandu did on the battlefield of Kuru, that field of sacred duty.*' King Prabhakara was a man of spiritual discipline, knowledge, and action. There was nothing he could not achieve.

"But what is *my* secret, Jamshid? Permit me a digressive answer. You are a Sasanian Zoroastrian, what your friend Waraka, the Christian, had called (with slight theological error) a 'sun worshiper'. We have much in common, you and I, because when I was a child, I was given by my guru, *Surya*, the Sun, as my *ishtadeva*, a personalized symbol of my inner essence, which outwardly can be recognized as a divinity. So, my inner nature, as shown me by my great teacher, is the Sun. And since you are a Zoroastrian, I ask you, 'What is the Sun?'"

"The Sun is a symbol of eternity," the Persian ambassador answered. "We are all rays from that singular Sun; and paradoxically that same Sun exists within each as a center."

"Elegantly said. Though I am not a Zoroastrian, per se, your religion seems to me to be precisely the religion of my youth. And look about you at your table, for you sit at a circular table around which you can see every shining and

reflective face. And through conversation, you must have already discovered that you are amongst ambassadors and scholars from within the realm and without. At your table are men proficient in the contemplative attainment and eloquent expression of reflecting the respective truths of their traditions. To your right and left are Shaivite, Vaishnavite, Jain, Theravada, and Mahayana practitioners, yogis, and contemplatives; and with the exception of three, they are all householders and professionals, like yourself, men of the world. The merchant husband and wife on your left side, with whom you were previously discussing the symbol of lightning, are Bon and Dzogchen practitioners from Tibet. Their friend sitting next to them is from the Zhangzhung Empire, and his spirituality, though familiar to them, utterly baffles my understanding. And Xuanzang, across the table, as I'm sure you've discovered, is our ambassador from the Tang Dynasty court at Luoyang who can elaborate on Confucius' rectification of names, Taoism's Zuowang practice, and the Heart Sutra of Mahayana. And finally, Waraka is our Christian friend whom you rescued from death in Arabia, and who has kindly expanded our admiration for Jewish, Christian, and even Greek mysteries from the West."

Jamshid nodded to all in the cosmopolitan circle of which he was but one singular ray. He reflected on past discourses in the Persian Sasanian court where Zoroastrians sat next to Vedic Hindus, Nestorian and Jacobite Christians, Manichees, Jews, and Buddhists. His heart was an old friend to cosmopolitanism with its inclusive morality, mutual respect, and shared economic and national relationships. It was from these basic human sentiments that his caravan had picked up the Ebonite Christian, Waraka, cared after his wounds, and brought him east with them, to contribute to a destiny larger than that of solitary death in the Arabian Desert.

At the time, the caravan driver had spotted him in al-Harrah, a stone littered valley northeast of Medina. Having heard men from many a caravan describe the city's deterioration into a militarized enclave, Jamshid bid the caravan driver to purposefully avoid it. The driver carefully gauged the topography of the land and angle of the sun while keeping the city as but a pin's point on the southern and then western horizon. Jamshid and the caravan driver both had shared the careless hope of gathering information on the political development in the region, especially as the rumor was that assassins were . . . well, killing rumor outright. Thus, in the valley of stones northeast of the beleaguered city,

they came upon a fettered man exposed in the waterless expanse. And thus, they had found and rescued Waraka.

Indeed, Jamshid recalled with a smile how his conversations with Waraka en route to India were more than an escape from travelers' tedium though the imaginal geography of narrative, but more expansively, a moral exercise in expanding upon shared spheres of knowledge and breaking the iron bands of prejudice that, without vigilance, may injure the traveler's heart. And at times, he had felt the arrogance of pride in his rescue of poor and dreadfully infirm Waraka. But what a surprise it was to discover in him a literate scholar of the traditions of the Mediterranean and Arabian Levant. And thus, though indeed, he had personally untied the old Arab from the stake where he had been abandoned, given the old man food and drink, and had his servants and physicians look after his needs, it was *he* who now felt indebted to Waraka, for the Ebonite had helped him loosen those iron bands that may transform a man into a fettered animal when tightened. *Rather, he had thought, one must live in imitation of the most-charitable Sun, who's very Self is revealed in the heart.*

And now he listened intently in the great court at Kanauj, as the Maharaja continued his wayward discourse on his success, "Ah, but if the sun is a symbol, what then is a symbol?" he asked, standing up from his table and circling (like a moon in its parabola) the round table of the dignitaries and scholars. He pointed at a Hindu architect and city planner.

The man responded, "A symbol is a truth that reflects a greater truth, like a seed in which we see reflected the entirety of the tree." He pointed toward his chest. "A symbol is a process that affects the pulsation of the heart in reflecting the seemingly outwardly projected sphere of appearances."

"Indeed! That is the secret of what a man might call his . . . *strength*," The Maharaja said. "It is the lion roar of the Buddha, it is the sun, the lightning, the diamond, the mustard seed. This is the Maharaja's center. It must be. And in this pulsation into relational appearances – the world of politics, economics, family, society, culture, aesthetics, religion, what-have-you – this same center is recognized as everywhere. It is in each and every one of you. And thus we greet each other, 'Namaste.' Good governance, dear Jamshid, exists in vigilance to the ubiquitousness of that center." The Maharaja's hands were folded in prayer. "From the perspective of aesthetics, therefore . . . for indeed, I am a

playwright as well . . . an art connoisseur may measure my success in this empire's fidelity to that truth. And this is a truth respecting the subjectivity and fallibility of every truth."

The Maharaja pointed to the far end of the table and swept his hands out and inward toward his chest. "Imagine that this circular table is the whole world, and each of you are the representatives of your respective religious and cultural traditions. Close your eyes now and raise your hands outward and upward. *You* – religious scholars that you are – are all blind men now . . . each of you . . . and your hands grope over the body of an elephant!" He pointed from one blind man to the next, "*You* feel the elephant's tail and say of the elephant, 'My friends, I have discovered the elephant and the elephant is like a rope.' *While you* . . . wrap your arms around the elephant's leg, 'No, you are wrong,' you say! 'An elephant is like a pillar or tree.' *While you* . . . feel the elephants side. 'An elephant is like a wall.' And you touch its ear, 'It is like a fan.' *While you* and your wife hold its nose. 'It is like a snake.'" And you touch the end of its tail. 'An elephant is more like a broom.' And finally, you touch the elephant's belly. 'An elephant is a low ceiling,' you say. 'I am afraid to anger it, for fear that it might crush me.' *Foolishness!*" he shouted. "Open your eyes. Know the elephant as your highest contemplation, whether you symbolize it as Ahura Mazda, God, Tao, Dzogchen, or Brahman. Look at your hands stretched outward; you are beggars after knowledge. And each of you has experience and subjectivity to share! You have the light of your own center to share – your own heart." The Maharaja pointed to the center of the table. "*And this is only one world!* The court astrologer here has constructed the tile floor, table arrangements, and verily, this entire hall, according to an image of the cosmos, and so each of these seven circular tables represents a world unto itself. (It's good *vastu*, sacred aesthetics.) So as a shared experiment in this court, we have participated in a sacred puja, dance, and feast as representative powers of the seven celestial bodies. We have participated and *are* – even now – participating in an experiment of the sacred. Both together and individually, we are the pulsation of this dance in a cosmos that is, most of all, curious about itself."

The Maharaja turned back to the ambassador from the Sasanian Empire. "Jamshid of Persia, pearl that you are in a string of pearls, have you now the answer to your question?"

“You have made of my heart the wedding feast of wisdom and good governance,” Jamshid replied. He swept the whole banquet hall with his arm. “With gratitude, I celebrate my cognizant inclusion in this cosmos of your answer. Blessings upon you for the enlightenment of my prideful negligence. I feel it snap like the final band of iron from around a pilgrim’s heart. I am free.”

The above short story is a chapter from the novel *War Verses: A Jihadist Fairytale* by A. Human Being. [here](#).

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