



Manifestation of Evil in Persian Mythology from the Perspective of the Zoroastrian Religion

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Abstract: Zoroastrian religion, which was first founded in ancient Iran before Islam, introduces the constant conflict between Ahura Mazda, known as the benevolent, omniscient and endless light, and Ahriman which is the endless and absolute darkness and aims to demolish Ahura Mazda. For this purpose, Ahriman creates six demons of evil thought including *Akoman* (equivalent to Avestan *Akem Manah*), *Indar*, *Naonhaithya*, *Saurva*, *Taurvi* and finally *Zauri* which are incarnated as villains to counter Ahura Mazda's creation and good thoughts. In a mythological legend like *Shahnameh*, Ferdowsi distinctly depicts the battle between evil and human being which ultimately leads to the victory of benevolence. This paper aims to investigate the mythological villainy of *Akoman* and its defeat by Rostam in Ferdowsi's great epic *Shahnameh*.

[S.R. Ebrahimi, E. Valaei Bakhshayesh. **Manifestation of Evil in Persian Mythology from the Perspective of the Zoroastrian Religion.** *Am Sci* 2021;17(5):60-65]. ISSN 1545-1003 (print); ISSN 2375-7264 (online). <http://www.jofamericanscience.org> 7. doi:[10.7537/marsjas170521.07](https://doi.org/10.7537/marsjas170521.07).

Key words: Zoroastrianism, Villain, Daeva, Ahriman, Ahura Mazda, Aka Manah, myth.

1. Introduction

Hinnells begins his book *Persian mythology* by describing the function of myth. He believes that myth is a part of the history because myth describes human being's attitude about himself and his surrounding world. This idea is very true about Persian mythology because its myths dealing with creation and recreation of the universe are interpretations of the world's process of being or ideas concerning them (Hinnells, 1994).

Ancient Iranian believed that world is round like plate while the sky wasn't endless space but hard and compact essence like diamond encompasses the world in its shell. The earth was intact originally; there were neither mountains nor valleys. Sun and stars were in their orbit in the sky. Everything was quiet and orderly, but this order and peace was broke down by entering the devil. Devil broke the sky and penetrated the earth, fell into the water and entered the core of the universe and shook it when mountains came out (Hinnells, 1994).

Zoroastrianism had its source in a branch of the great Iranian race. It rose to power as the religion of the Medo-Persian Empire, and while it spread widely among the people, mostly in Asia Minor, its strongholds were always the Iranian lands. People who lived in India and in Iran were called Indo-European. Their gods were incarnated figures of

ideals like Honesty or natural events such as storm or they were adventurous heroes like Indra and Keresaspa (Rouse, 1907). They were commonly heroes fighting against threatening monsters.

The religion of the early Iranians was closely akin to that of the Vedic Indians. One of the greatest of the Iranian gods is Mithra, the Vedic Mitra; other Indo-Iranian gods are Zoroastrian devils, like Indra and Nasatya (Naonhaithya) (Moore, 1912).

Proto-Indo-Iranian religion is an ancient development of Indo-European religion. The religion whose supporters call themselves "Worshippers of Mazda," the Wise God, and which we commonly name after its founder Zoroastrianism, is in many ways of peculiar interest. Zoroastrianism is, further, extremely an ethical religion, both in its idea of God and of what God requires of men. It presents itself as a revelation of God's will through his prophet. His will is that men, rejecting the false gods, should serve the Wise Lord alone, obey his word, and contend on his side for the defeat of evil and the triumph of all good in nature and society and in the character of the individual (Lincoln, 1997).

2. Cosmology of Creation

In the Zoroastrian, which has universally been represented as the classic example of a fundamental dualism, creation myth represents us with two gods-

Ahura Mazda, who is good, and *Angra Mainyu*, the evil one. *Ahura Mazda* dwells in the lights on high, and *Ahriman* dwells in the eternal darkness in the depths (Fox, 1967). In the Zoroastrian scriptures the primitive challenge between *Ahura Mazda* and *Ahriman* is expressed most entirely and appealingly in the *Bundahishn* (MacKenzie, 1990). Here in this paper the relation of the rules of light and darkness is declared in the precise and formal manner. According to Zoroastrian tradition, world history is twelve thousands years divided into four three thousands. The first three thousands is original creation period. The second three thousands year is spent based on *Ahura Mazda's* will and the next period is combination of good and evil. The final three thousands is the time to defeat *Ahriman*. *Ahura Mazda* was on high in omniscience and goodness; for boundless time he was ever in the light. The light is the space and place of *Ahura Mazda* that is the Endless Light and omniscience and goodness are the entirety of *Ahura Mazda*. *Ahriman*, slow in knowledge, whose will is to smite, was deep down in the endless darkness. He was not even aware of the existence of *Ahura Mazda* until he arose from the chasm and came to the light. *Ahriman*, of course, being eternal in time past, believes himself also to be everlasting in time future. As Zoroastrian myth goes on, *Ahura Mazda* in his omniscience knew that *Ahriman* existed, that he would strike and, since his will is envy, would mingle with him; and from the beginning to the end he knew with what and how many instruments he would carry out his purpose (Ahmadi, 2004). In ideal form he fashioned forth such creation as was needful. Then *Ahriman* rose up from the lowest point and went to the border from where the lights are seen. When he saw the light of *Ahura Mazda* subtle, he rushed forward. Because his will is to smite and his substance is envy, he made rush to demolish it. Seeing courage and domination superior to his own, he fled back to the darkness and fashioned many demons, a creation destructive and meet for combat. *Ahriman*, then, once he comes to know of *Ahura Mazda's* existence, sets out to destroy him, but before doing so he makes a preliminary reconnaissance at the borders of *Ahura Mazda's* heavenly kingdom which, it should be noted, is intangible (Bahar, 2001)

According to one sect of the Zoroastrians, the *Zurvanites* (Boyce, 1957), *Ahriman* did in fact "master the world" and that for a time *Ahura Mazda* had no force against him. *Ahriman* rules the world for nine thousand years, while *Ahura Mazda* rules higher than him, apparently in heaven: the one is king in time, the other in eternity (Dadegi, 1989). In the Pahlavi sources a measure of earthly power is settled to *Ahriman*, though he never really has a

chance of winning. According to the *Bundahishn*: *Ohrmazd* knew in his omniscience that within these nine thousand years three thousand would pass entirely according to the will of *Ahura Mazda*, three thousand would pass according to the will of both *Ahura Mazda* and *Ahriman*, and that in the last battle the Destructive Spirit would be made powerless and that he himself would save creation from hostility (Dadegi, 1989). *Ahura Mazda*, knowing in what manner the end would be, offered peace to *Ahriman*, saying:

"O *Ahriman*, bring aid to my creation and give it praise that in reward therefor thou mayest be deathless and unageing, uncorrupting and undecaying. And the reason is this that if thou dost not provoke a battle, thou shalt not thyself be powerless, and to both of us there shall be benefit abounding" (Zaehner, 1965).

But *Ahriman* cried out:

"I will not bring aid to thy creation nor will I give it praise, but I shall destroy thee and thy creation forever and ever: yea, I shall incline all thy creatures to hatred of thee and love of me." (Zaehner, 1965).

And the interpretation thereof is that *Ahriman* thought *Ahura Mazda* was helpless against him, and that therefore did he offer peace. He accepted not but offered threats.

In Zoroastrian myth, the conflict between *Ahura Mazda* and *Ahriman*, probably dates back at least to the fourth century B.C. In the *Bundahishn* *Ahura Mazda* and *Ahriman* have now agreed to limit the battle to nine thousand years. *Ahriman* now attacks again, and is again repulsed: "Then *Ohrmazd* chanted the *Ahunavar*- Zoroastrians sacred pray that *Ahura Mazda* recited to defeat *Ahriman*- and he showed to *Ahriman* his own final victory, the powerlessness of *Ahriman*, the destruction of the demons, the resurrection, the Final Body, and the independence of all creation from all aggression forever and ever. When *Ahriman* beheld his own powerlessness and the destruction of the demons, he was rested low, collapsed, and fell back into the darkness. Unable to do hurt the creatures of *Ahura Mazda* for three thousand years *Ahriman* lay crushed (Hinnells, 1997).

Unmistakably, we have here a dualism. All that comprises the world is the creation of one or the other of these two primal spirits, the good or positive elements ("Life") coming from one, and the evil or negative elements ("Not-Life") from the other. These

spirits are *Spenta Mainyu* and *Angra Mainyu* (Boyce, 1979). *Ahura Mazda* or *Ormazd* means wise god and almighty, *Spenta Mainyu* holy is the symbol of creation *Ahura Mazda*. *Ahriman* and *Spenta Mainyu* are twins and *Ahriman* is the symbol of destruction. *Spenta Mainyu* is the symbol of *Asha* (honesty and rightness) and *Ahura Mazda* is supporter of *Asha*. *Ahriman* is the symbol of lie while *spenta mainyu* is considered as mere good, *Ahriman* is assumed as villain. The story of *Kaveh the Blacksmith* and *Azi dahaka* in *Shahnameh* proves the villainy of *Ahriman* whose aim is to annihilate human being.

Ahriman's ultimate goal is to get rid of mankind so he created *Azi dahaka*, a tyrannical ruler, to obliterate piety and generate ignorance and darkness (Hinnells, 1997). *Azi dahaka* is a tyranny ruler who is known as a man with two serpents. Once *Ahriman* appeared to him as a faithful young man and asked permission to kiss *Azi dahaka's* shoulders on which two serpents grew then *Ahriman* said they must be fed with two young men's brains every day. This is the story of battle between right and wrong, human being and evil, justice and tyranny, love and hatred and finally between *Ahriman* and *Ahura* (Hosseinzadeh, 2005). *Ahura Mazda* besides *Spenta Mainyu* that is the head of seven immortals has other six accompanies, together they are called *Amesha Spenta* (Boyce, 1983). In non-specific usage, the term *Amesha Spenta* denotes all the divinities that furthered or braced creation and all that are bounteous and holy. The "divine sparks" that appear in the Gathic *Yasna* 47.1 are: *Vohu Manah* roughly means good purpose, *Asha Vashishta* means truth and righteousness, *Khasathra* means desirable, *Spenta Armaiti* means holy and devotion, *Haurvata* means wholeness, and finally *Ameretat* which means immortality (Bahar, 2001).

On the other hand evil spirit *Ahriman* creates his hordes of *dews* to counter the creation of *Ormuzd*. *Ahriman* is seen to create six *dews* that in Zoroastrian tradition are the antitheses of the Avestan *Amesha Spentas*. Mirroring the task of the *Amesha Spentas* through which *Ahura Mazda* realized creation, the six antitheses are the instrument through which *Angra Mainyu* creates all the fears in the world (Bahar, 2001).

The six arch-demons are respectively: *Akoman* of evil thought and equivalent to Avestan *Akem Manah*, *Indar* that freezes the minds of the creatures from practicing righteousness, *Naonhaithya* of discontent, *Saurva* of oppression and desire, *Taurvi* the destroyer and at last *Zauri* who poisons plant creation (*Yasna* 32.3).

3. Akem Manah, the Deave

Akem Manah (*Akəm Manah*) is the Avestan language name of Zoroastrianism's demon of the "evil mind" or "evil purpose" or "evil thinking". *Manah* denotes a state of mind, and *akem manah* may thus be more precisely described as the state of mind or being that stops an individual from accomplishing his moral sense of duties. The hypostasis of this malign influence is the demon (*daeva*) *Akem Manah*, who appears in the Gathas. Gathic *akem manah* may also be compared with *acishtem manah* "worst thinking," which reflects the later Zoroastrian opposition between *akem manah* and *vohu manah*, "good purpose." In the Zoroastrian texts of the 9th-12th centuries, *Akoman* is the second of *Ahriman's* devised to counter *Ormuzd's* creation of the world. This rank reflects *Akem Manah's* opposition to *Vohu Manah* who is the second of the *Amesha Spentas* (Ahmadi, 2004). In the Gathas, the oldest texts of the Zoroastrian canon are believed to have been composed by Zoroaster himself, the *daevas* are 'wrong gods' or 'false gods' or 'gods that are rejected'. In the *Younger Avesta*, the *daevas* are noxious creatures that encourage chaos and disorder. In later tradition and folklore, the *dēws* are personifications of every conceivable evil. In these pre-historic texts, where the term occurs 19 times, the *daevas* are a distinct category of "quite legitimate gods, who had, however, been rejected." In *Yasna* 32.3 and 46.1, the *daevas* are still worshipped by the Iranian peoples. *Yasna* 32.8 notes that some of the followers of Zoroaster had previously been followers of the *daevas*.

In the Gathas, the poet censures the *daevas* as being incapable of discerning truth (*asha*) from falsehood (*druj*). They are accordingly in "error" (*aēnah-*), which led them to have accepted the bad religion. Simultaneously, the Indo-Iranian legacy of the *daevas* as beneficent gods is still evident in numerous expressions that appear in both Avestan and Vedic Sanskrit. Furthermore, although the *daevas* are described as being incapable of proper discernment, they are never identified with the *druj* itself. The *daevas* are never themselves *druj* "false" or *dregvant* "of the lie."

Although the *daevas* are clearly identified with evil (e.g., *Yasna* 32.5), they are not identified as evil. They deceive mankind and themselves, but they are not *aka mainyu*. *Angra Mainyu* or *Ahriman* in Persian, once the Zoroastrian epitome of evil, lost its original Zoroastrian/Mazdaist identity in later Persian literature, and was eventually depicted as a *div*. Religious depictions of *Ahriman* made in the era following the Islamic invasion show *Ahriman* as a giant of a man with spotted body and two horns (Omidisalar, 2001).

Found in abundance in Persian mythology are the *Dives*, meaning 'celestial' or 'bright'. These divinities were worshipped in pre-Zoroastrian Mazdaism, and as in Vedic religions, the adherents of the pre-Zoroastrian form of Mazdaism considered the *daēva* holy and sacred beings. It is only after the religious reforms of Zarathustra that the term *daēva* became associated with demons and villain. Even then the Persians living south of the Caspian Sea continued to worship the *daeava* and resisted pressure to accept Zoroastrianism, and legends that involve *daēva* live on to this day. Dive is one of the most important members of the legends and myths in the history of early Iranians. In ancient times this word was applied to a group of Arian's gods which were worshiped among Iranians and Indians. *Dive* meant "God" too. Before the immigration of Indo-Iranian Arian tribes from their common country, these tribes worshipped the natural elements as their "god", but after the appearance of Zoroaster some modifications took place in the field of Iranian religion (Zaehner, 1961). Zoroaster believed that only it is "*Ahura Mazda*" who deserved to be worshiped and he rejected worshipping other gods.

4. Dive as Villain in Persian Mythology

The characters of Persian mythology almost always fall into one of two camps. They are either good, or they are villain. The resultant conflict mirrors the ancient conflict, which in Persian mythology is based on the Zoroastrian concept of the dual emanation of *Ahura Mazda*. *Spenta Mainyu* is the source of constructive energy, while *Angra Mainyu* is the source of darkness, destruction, sterility, and death. Persian myths are traditional tales and stories of ancient origin, some involving extraordinary or supernatural beings. Drawn from the legendary past of Iran, they reflect the attitudes of the society to which they first belonged - attitudes towards the confrontation of good and evil, the actions of the gods, *yazats* (lesser gods), and the exploits of heroes and fabulous creatures (Ilona and Takeshita, 2001). Myths play a crucial part in Iranian culture and our understanding of them is increasing when we consider them within the context of Iranian history.

In Persian literature "Dive", incarnated as a villain, is introduced as a mythical creature with a body like a mankind, but giant, two horns and a tail, ugly and frightening. Based on common narrations they were homely deceived creatures who enjoyed eating the flesh of mankind. They were powerful, cruel and stone-hearted with big teeth like boar (Safa, 1991). They had ability to transform themselves. They were skilled in conjuring and their clothes were made of pelt. Through Persian legendary epics like

Shahnameh, the well known masterpiece of Ferdowsi (Yarshater, 2007), many dives blocked the way of the heroes. These dives are problematic villains. They are usually forces of enemy to help them in the wars between Iranians and the people of other countries but they are killed by Iranian heroes. The Dives are very powerful and they are able to do extraordinary tasks.

5. Mythological villainy of *Akvan Dive*

In Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, the story of *Akvan Dive* is a short account concerning villainy of a demon. *Akvan* is described as having long hair, blue eyes and a head like an elephant with a mouthful of tusks instead of teeth transformed himself into a zebra. Safa believes that:

"In my book, since the *dives* were used to wear animal fur -as *Akvan* wears zebra's- they are described as having horn and tail in old Iranian tales and myths, as well as *Shahnameh*"(Safa, 1990).

Because the story of *Akvan* and his villainy is rooted in old beliefs of Iranian, there is a philosophical enlightenment at the beginning of the story to remind readers of power of great god and his conquer over all villainies and the role of good thought in Iranian beliefs.

Story begins when a shepherd of Iranian king *Kikavoos* (Yarshater 2007) notifying the attack of a strange animal like zebra to the cattle. Be made aware by consultants about a dive, *Kikavoos* knows that the animal is not a zebra but *Akvan dive* (Ferdowsi, 1966). Accordingly, he asks the brave men of the army to beat *Akvan*. Unable to find anybody, *Kikavoos* asked *Rostam* (Davis 1999) to help him to get rid of that dive. *Rostam* proceeds to the pasture of the shepherd. He searches the meadow for three days but he finds the dive in the fourth. When *Rostam* attempted to kill him, *Akvan* disappeared as the result of his own magic and made *Rostam* follow him on and on even as *Rostam* finds out that he is not an animal but a *dive*. Feeling tired *Rostam* fell into asleep beside a spring (Davis, 1999). *Rostam* got up after a long sleep and found himself defeated by the dive. *Akvan* detached the piece of land on which *Rostam* was sleeping. Disappointed, *Rostam* knows that if he dies the dive can overcome all the Persian land. So when dive asked him to choose whether he prefers to be thrown into the sea or mountain, *Rostam* knew *Akvan* is spiteful and inverts his alternative he responded. *Rostam* told dive to throw him to the mountain and Dive threw him in to the sea. As swimming, *Rostam* struggled with sea

animals and reached the shore and searched for his adored horse, *Rakhsh*. Finding his horse in the cattle of Afrasyab (Yarshater, 2007), he fights with his men to take back his horse and goes back to the place where he has been taken by Dive. He finds Dive in the same place and takes him and bangs him in the head with his strong weapon, *gorz*. Then he cuts off the head of *Akvan* and prays god. Ferdowsi calls Dive wicked and villain who has diverted from the way of humanity and honesty.

6. Conclusion

In a general conclusion we can say that Dive has a metaphorical meaning in Persian literature. The purpose of the usage of Dive is the wicked and villains as they are the depictions of Satan. They annihilate the holy creatures. Their ugly and frightening faces are the symbol of their bad and evil deeds. In mystic and moral literature Dive means concupiscence and internal Satan. They should be killed by pious and mature representatives of God. In fact God and *Dives* are hostile to each other and in the legends villains in tales, story and mind of Iranian people are the incarnated figures of *Dives*.

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