

The Power and Realm of the Demons (Asuras) versus Gods (Daevas) in Ancient Iranian and Hindu Religions and Mythologies

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Abstract

One of the basic issues in Hinduism and ancient Iranian religions concerns the territory, power, and function of evil forces such as demons and *asuras*. They are often depicted in Iran and India as against the divine forces (gods) and their followers. But what are the differences and similarities between Indian *asuras* and Iranian demons against forces of *daevas* and *ahura* in terms of their power, territory, and function? By examining the major Indian and Iranian sources, it becomes clear that evil forces in Iran are always portrayed as destructive and in conflict with the function and interest of the *Ahura* forces. Consequently, due to the superior nature of gods over the demonic forces, victory ultimately belongs to the good (*Ahura*) forces. In India, however, despite the pervasive evil associated with *asuras*, which in some cases makes them resemble Iranian demons, they sometimes align with the forces of the good, and in many cases, *asuras* possess features and privileges similar to those of the gods. As a result, in Indian mythology, there is a more balanced power dynamic, with the gods and demons holding relatively equal power.

Keywords: India, Iran, demon, *asuras*, *daevas*, Ahuramazda.

Introduction

In ancient times, the Aryan tribes had close ties with each other. Evidence suggests that even in the second millennium BC, the Indian Aryans were related to the Hittites who lived in Asia Minor (Kuz'mina 2007, 456). The important Iranian Hindu tribes, too, had strong cultural and ideological connections with each other, sharing a common territorial origin. However, over time, factors such as migrations between the Hindu-Iranian tribes, differences in the territories they settled in, and the influence of the native inhabitants led to changes in their shared beliefs.

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However, Indians and Iranians left a common religious heritage that is reflected in the oldest sacred literature such as *Rigveda*, *Brahmana*, *Smriti*, *Upanishads*, *Purāna*, and *Avesta* (which served as the sacred literature for the ancient Persians). These texts provide valuable insight into the religious beliefs held by the Indo-Iranian tribes (both before and after their divergence) can be obtained.

The similarities between the religious beliefs of Iranians and Indians can be attributed to the common origin of these two civilizations. However, a review of Vedas demonstrates that, with the passage of time and emergence of different texts such as the Upanishad, Purana, and Avesta, some differences appeared in their religious beliefs and attitudes towards gods and demons. Consequently, the Indian gods that were called “devas” (*Sanskrit*) in the attitude of Iranians played the role of evil forces, and the so-called demons and some Iranian *ahuras* and gods, which were called “asuras” in India, took on a demonic form. Thus, the ambiguities and issues raised in this study pertain to the attitude of Iranians and Indians as two major Aryan peoples towards the demons and *asuras*. Moreover, it is important to consider how power, realm, and the abilities of demons and *asuras* as forces representing evil against the forces of good and gods (Indian *daevas* and the *ahuras*: Iranian gods) are portrayed in the holy books of Iranians and Indians, and what functions are intended for them. Furthermore, it is crucial to compare the differences and similarities between the power, realm, ability, and function of Indian and Iranian demons in relation to the gods and *Ahura* forces (the group of gods and *Amšaspand*).

1. Asuras and Daevas in Ancient Indian and Iranian Thinking

What is certain is that, before the fourteenth century BC, the Aryan tribes of India and Iran worshiped various gods, including *Mitra*, *Verona vârunâ*, *Indra*, and *Nasâtya*, whose names are mentioned *RigVeda* and *Avesta* as well, indicating that they were worshiped in Iran and India before the advent of Zoroaster (*RigVeda* 1897, 2:3; Upanishads 1884, 15:45; Bailey 1971, 2). Until about the fourteenth century BC, the two Indo-Iranian Aryan tribes worshiped common gods. Moreover, the difference between the daiva-worshipping and Ahuramazda-worshipping tribes (Hindi dialect: *Asura*-worshipping) was not significant, as it dates back to the time of Zarathuštra (about a millennium BC) (MacKenzie 1913, 30, 61-62). The affinity of the oldest form of the Avestan language with the dialect of the Vedas is so great in syntax, vocabulary, diction, meter, and general poetic style, that by mere application of phonetic laws, whole Avestan stanzas may be translated word for word into Vedic, so as to produce verses that are correct not only in form but in poetic spirit. The affinity in the domain of mythology is by no means so considerable. For the religious reform of Zarathustra brought about a remarkable displacement and transformation of mythological conceptions (Macdonell 1897, 18). In fact, Indians and Persians worshiped two groups of gods: *asuras* and *daevas* (*Deva* derived from the root *div*, meaning shine). They were the gods of nature and lords of all

kinds, who were accepted in India (Sang and Hewamanage 2015, 19). Nevertheless, in the reforms of Zoroaster, *asuras* were agreed upon, *Asura* = *Ahura*, with the adjective *Mazda* meaning wise or great (Zaehner 1975, 82, 100; Bailey 1971, 9). Thus, in the first millennium BC, the Aryan population of Iran worshiped Ahura (Asura) and most Aryans of India worshiped Daevas. Crucially, the Iranian gods (ahuras) played the role of asura (Ahriman) for the Hindus, and vice versa. Indian Daevas played the role of Ahriman in Iranian thinking. However, the etymological meaning of both *Deva* and *Asura* is almost the same (Umamaheshwar, n.d., 1-6).

However, When Iranians and Hindus separated, the former referred to the evil force as Ahriman (Ahriman, Angra-Mainyu / Who was at the top) and to his assistants as demons (*Dēv*; *Daeva* in Avesta) (and some *PAIRIKĀ*) (Nyberg 2003, 2:11; Bartholomae 2004, 105). In the religious literature of ancient Indians, Asuras are also considered as demonic forces that, of course, had assistants and evil forces that were variously called *Dāsyu*(*Dasa*) and *Rakṣasa* (MacKenzie 1913, 67, 70; Gray 1916, 68).

2. Capabilities of Asuras / Ahriman versus Gods: Differences and Similarities

2.1. Features of Demons and their Position and Realm versus Gods

After the separation of Iranian and Indian Aryans, *asuras* took on the role of gods for Iranian Aryans as good and positive forces, while they were viewed as Ahriman in Indian mythology. That said, in India, the power of *asuras* did not diminish significantly, but *daevas* played their role, and the sacrifices and vows of human beings were monopolized by these gods, and in contrast, many *asuras* (devils) also achieved blessings, while gods/*daevas* often tried to deprive *asuras* of their blessings through deception, austerity, and various tactics (MacKenzie 1913, 37-39, 63).

According to Vedic literature, all beings, both earthly and heavenly, are believed to have originated from the body of Purusha. This means that even gods (*daevas*) and Ahriman (*asuras*) share the same origin (Dhalla 1938, 65). Another narration suggests that Brahma (Prajapati) created *asuras* from his hip joint (MacKenzie 1913, 101). *Asuras* are of interest to Brahma, as he left to them the rule of the three castles of heaven, which are extremely strong and can be conquered only by a mighty god (Shendge 1977, 79, 102). In fact, some *asuras* are invincible and cannot be harmed. Therefore, they are sometimes considered by great gods such as Brahma and Shiva as being able to determine the limits of their power, realm, and even destiny, and elicit feelings of love or hate. Despite their misfortune and evil deeds, the *asuras* still hold authority and enjoy privileges bestowed upon them by the gods (*daevas*). The character of Ravana in *Ramayana* is portrayed as the Kingdom of Satan, who was banished from heaven after insulting Brahma. Yet he is given the right to choose and enjoy the privileges (Greco 2015, 3). It is also mentioned in the oldest Hindu epic literature that Meghanada, the child of Ravana, was the oldest among their thousand sons, who is unmatched in strength, courage, science, and magic (*Ramayana* 1891, 1665).

Some demons (*asuras*) are supported directly by and come from Brahma and therefore have immunity. Consequently, they cannot and should not be harmed. Due to their credibility and are still considered and favored by the greatest gods. Among them, Vritra was a witch, but because of the Brahman nature, when he was killed by Indra, the incident was concealed for a while for fear of Brahma to clear the sin (*RigVeda* 1897, 2:21; Sinha 1950, 216; MacKenzie 1913, 4). Raven, another demon leader, descended from Brahman, the father, and he knew Sanskrit well and performed Vedas rituals. After Raven's death, the body was cremated in Vedas rituals (*Ramayana* 1891, 215; Nair 2017, 762).

Interestingly, in Hindu mythology and religions, demons (*asuras*) often shared features with gods (*daevas*). However, while there may be some similarities in terms of their respective realms and power, ultimately it is the gods or demons who have the power in hand and overcome the demons (*asuras*), and if necessary, can eliminate them from the scene. Moreover, according to some sects from Hinduism, like Vishnu thinking, they are immortal and the main inhabitants of their realm (MacKenzie 1913, 147).

In the worldview of ancient Iranians, there are major differences in Hindu religious beliefs about demons and their power and even origin. In this worldview, demons are not associated with Ahura Mazda, and unlike Brahma who created *asuras* from his hip joint, Ahura Mazda had no relation to demons and was indeed opposed to them. In fact, Zarathuštra believes in only one Almighty God, but because he controls human beings in choosing between good and evil, he places Angra Mainyu as one who has determined his own path by his own choice. Therefore, in Zoroastrianism or Mazdayasn belief, the existence of evil is deemed the result of a free choice (Duchesne-Guillemin 2014a, 670).

However, gradually, within Iranian belief (at the level of folktale), Angra Mainyu was positioned as an adversary of Ahura Mazda and was bestowed with power, realm, and assistants like Ahura Mazda as Ahriman. In fact,

Zarathustra's religion is marked by a very decided dualism between two sharply opposed Principles. The Principle of Good is represented by Ahuramazda, that of Evil by Ahriman. In the Gathas, which are the oldest texts in the Avesta, we still find traces of the Supremacy of Ahuramazda in relation to Ahriman, while in the later texts the two Antagonistic Principles are placed on a footing of complete equality. It is between these two Principles that man must choose, and when he has chosen, he finds himself involved in the never-ending conflict between Good and Evil, a conflict Which lasts throughout the ages of the world until at last Evil is annihilated. (Pattazzoni 1954, 7)

According to Iranian belief, Ahriman (the chief of all the *daēvas* and the *daēvanqm daēvō*; i.e., the *daēva* of *daēvas*) inhabits the realm of darkness, beyond which Ahura

Mazda is situated in territory of light (Pattazzoni 1954, 671-73). Therefore, the highest and brightest place belongs to Ahura Mazda, and the lowest and darkest part belongs to Ahriman (Zaehner 1975, 248). In fact, in the Avestan literature, Ahriman and his forces have a specific realm or territory and selected the lower world (darkness) as their territory to be in front of the territory of Ahura Mazda (up and in the light) (Huyse 2002, 210).

As noted before, according to mythological belief, demons belong to a realm that is not ruled by gods (Pouredavoud 1927, 81, 17; Zaehner 1975, 248). There is therefore no common relation or shared interest between them. For every good creation that Ahuramazda has created, there is a demonic creation by Ahriman. Ahriman, or deadly demon, lives in the inferior world, and whatever is impure, terrifying, and harmful is his helper and follower. However, in the conflict between these two forces, the higher in power and position are Ahura Mazda and Amšaspand (a class of seven divine entities emanating from Ahuramazda), who finally destroy Ahriman, demons, and demonic creatures (*Bundahišn* 2005, 70, 386).

In addition, although some believe that Zarathuštra considered Ahriman to be very powerful and never considered Mazda to dominate him completely, both in the past and in the present, (Boyce 1979, 213), in Iranian belief, Ahriman, unlike Ahura Mazda, is mentioned as depressed, in the dark, full of aggression and ignorance, and it is the knowledge of Ahura Mazda that enables time and place to become real, because only this can destroy Ahriman (Stefon, n.d., 4). Also, in the world of good, which is the place of Ahura Mazda, God is aware of everything and knows that there is Ahriman and a bad world, but Ahriman, who is the manifestation of absolute ignorance, is unaware of the existence of Ahura Mazda. Ahura Mazda, on the one hand, is *vispo.vidhvo* (the omniscient); that is, a conscious being aware of courses of events, as well as the future and the result of actions, but Ahriman, due to his lack of knowledge, understands events after they have taken place (Pettazzoni, 1978: 133-34). Thus, in the first encounter between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, Ahura Mazda sets a period for the dispute and a specific time for the last battle, and Ahriman ignorantly accepts it and makes his overthrow certain (*Bundahišn* 2005, 4-14; Duchesne-Guillemin 2014a, 670-73).

2.2. Power and Capability of Demons (Asuras) against Gods (Daevas)

Before delving into this issue, let us note that in Hindu teachings and mythology, there are different groups of evil forces that play different roles under different names, including *rakṣasas*, who like *asuras*, are demonic forces, but unlike *asuras* who fight with gods, use their power against humans. Among the evil and demonic forces, there are creatures called *dānava*, who oppose sacrifice (MacKenzie 1913, 64). *Daityas* are giants belonging to the family and tribe of *asuras* and *danavas* (Mahalakshmi Prasad 2011, 360). PostVedic mythology depicts *daityas* as enemies of gods (see Macdonell 1897, 134) who intend to deceive man, and like Danavas, are opposed to human sacrifice and vows to gods.

As pointed out, Indian *asuras* sometimes possess formidable power due to their shared origin with *daevas*. Their strength is so great that even gods are unable to eliminate them, acknowledging their power and capability. Amongst them, Bali, the king of *asuras*, is believed to have gained the kingdom of heavens and be able to drive gods out of their territory. Additionally, Durga is a demon who has conquered three worlds and driven Indra and other minor gods out of heaven and his territory to the forests (MacKenzie 1913, 411). Even if we exclude some of the greatest Hindu gods, demons sometimes have superiority over gods. For instance, according to legends, Raven forced the gods to perform tasks within his house: Agni (God of Fire) cooked, and Varuna (Client of Water and Rain) extracted water, and Kubera (God of Wealth) made money (*Ramayana* 1891, 1641, 1668).

According to the doctrines and myths of Zoroastrianism or Mazdaism, the manifestation, power, and capability of Ahriman and demons are shown in different ways. In Avestan literature, the first manifestation of Ahriman in the Ahura world is when he recovers from anesthesia and rushes to the material creatures of Ahura Mazda along with his demons (Zaehner 1975, 263-64; West 1880, 162-63). This demonstrates that Ahriman possess the ability to resist material creatures and can be successful in destroying them. In fact, Ahriman creates assistants from the group of demons in order to disrupt Ahuraian creations in front of Ahuraian assistants, spreading lies, deceit, destruction, and war against the group of gods tasked with preserving the creation of Ahura (Avesta 1889, 2:75; Avesta 1896, 3:4-5; *Bundahišn* 2005, 207-209). On the other hand, by creating six assistants (*akōman*), he will stand against Amšaspand and fight against natural phenomena.

Mazdeism is characterized by dualism, namely the belief in two creators and two creations. Ahura Mazda (Ormazd), along with his host of Amšaspand and Yazatas, presides over the good creation and wages an incessant war against his counterpart Angra Mainyu (Ahriman) and the latter's army of noxious spirits. The principle of evil has spawned darkness, suffering, and sins of all kinds. He is anxious to hurt the creatures of the good creation, longing to enslave the believers in Ahura Mazda by bringing them into falsehood or into some impure contact with an evil being. He is often called *Druj* (deception). An array of *daevas* (i.e., demons) is marshaled under him, with six of these forming a group that is explicitly antithetical to *Amšaspand*. Among the Demons are *Aeshma* (wrath or violence), *Akamanah* (evil mind), *Bushyasta* (sloth), *Apaosha* (drought), and *nasu* (corpse), who takes hold of corpses and makes them impure, to say nothing of the Yatus (sorcerers) and the *pairikas* (in modern Persian, *pari*, i.e., fairy), who are spirits of seduction (Gray 1916, 405).

In Zoroastrianism, there is a belief that Ahriman and his group of demons oppose Ahura Mazda and his followers (gods and Amšaspand). Despite all the good deeds of gods, we encounter the destructive action of the devil group, resulting in a balance of power between Ahuraian and demonic forces (see Dumézil 1988, 54). It is

important to note that in Iranian religious and mythological beliefs, Iranian demons (unlike Hindu *asuras*) never dominate the gods, and even in most cases it is Iranian forces who are introduced as conquerors and dominators of the world of demons. Nevertheless, according to the common prediction and belief among ancient Iranians, Ahura Mazda and his forces will ultimately emerge victorious, and Ahriman and his assistants will be removed from the earth and the habitat of people. This illustrates the obvious difference between Iranian and Hindu thinking about the power of demons (*asuras*) versus *ahuras* (*Daevas*).

2.3. Immortality of Demons/Asuras

In Indian mythology, some *asuras* and demons have intricate histories and have lived long and dynamic lives (Greco 2015, 3). In other words, certain *asuras* (demons) are immortal and are shielded from both earthly and celestial threats, which is of course a gift provided by *daevas* (gods) (*Ramayana* 1891, 1665; Sinha 1950, 238-40). In fact, *daevas* had immortalized some *asuras* due to some austerity practices or drinking amrita, including Svarb-Hanu who immortalized himself by drinking amrita (water of life) (Bailey 2015, 34, 36, 47, 60) as well as Hiranya-kaṣipu, a witch who had earned the favor of Brahma despite the oppression she had inflicted on the world. Like his brother, Hiranyāksha seduced Brahma to obtain invulnerability against humans, animals, and gods. His spell was such that he could not be killed during the day, night, within his palace, outside it, by men or animals, gods (Sinha 1950, 238-40).

Not all *asuras* and demons shared the same fate, however. Most of them were like humans in terms of physical strength and composition and were thus vulnerable to injury. As a result, blood flowed from them and they fell on their feet and were wounded (*Ramayana* 1978, 20, 41, 126; Mahabharata 1968, 63). Thus, immortality cannot be attributed to all demons since only a few of them managed to survive as their interests clashed with those of the gods. *RigVeda* refers directly to giants and demons who have been destroyed by gods, including the drought demon Vala (Brother of Vritra; in Sanskrit: Vṛtra), whose place was underground in a dark prison overrun by Indra (*RigVeda* 1897, 2:138, 479, 481). Interestingly, some demons and giants are destroyed by humans (Sinha 1950, 382).

It should be noted that some Hindu demons are characterized by giving rise to other demons upon being killed. For instance, the demon Svarbhanu, who is said to have eclipsed the sun with darkness and attained immortality by drinking amrita, could not be killed by even a great god like Vishnu, despite being beheaded. Rahu emerged from his head and Ketu from his body, both of which became celestial stars (Bailey 2015, 34, 36, 47, 60; MacKenzie 1913, 64-65, 144; Macdonell 1897, 171). Thus, although immortality cannot be attributed to all Hindu demons, some Hindu *asuras* and demons can thus be deemed immortal since the killing of some of these demons causes the emergence of other demons.

In Iranian mythology and Mazdaism (Zoroastrianism), the gods are sometimes depicted as slaying demons. For example, Mehr is portrayed in “Mehr Yasht” (Yasht. 10.6) as a god who kills demons (Christensen 1977, 10). However, Ahriman and demonic forces are mostly immortal until the last millennium. Even though human beings prevent the exercise of demonic power through good deeds, even the gods, particularly Ahura Mazda, were not able to destroy Ahriman and the demonic forces till the appointed time arrives during the final millennia (Hushidar/Avesta: Uxshyatereta, Hushidarmah and Saošyant Millennium), where the demonic forces of death and nothingness will be defeated (*Bundahišn* 2005, 386).

As for the shared Iranian and Indian myths about the mortality and immortality of demons, it is necessary to point out that Iranian mythology (in exceptional cases, of course) involves the idea that if certain demons are killed, other demons arise. For this reason, Iranians were satisfied that Aži Dahak would not be killed and would be chained until the promised time arrives when it would finally to be killed in the eleventh millennium (Hushidar) by Garshasp (*Bundahišn* 2005, 342). Thus, contrary to the Hindu belief, Iranian mythology sets a specific time for the life of demons, and every event takes place at a specific time. However, the destruction of all of Ahriman’s assistants will take until the end of time.

Additionally, a main characteristic of Iranian mythological thinking is that even at the end of the twelfth millennium (Saošyant), the destruction of Ahriman is never mentioned. Instead, it is said that after the destruction of his assistants (demons), he returns to the place where he first invaded the heavens and the creatures of Ahura (Avesta 1886, 1:43:199; *Bundahišn* 2005, 65). However, after this time, there will be no trace of Ahriman and his assistants. In one of the Iranian traditions, there is a mention of the end of Ahriman: the omniscient said to Bahram Yazad (Yazata): “You whom I have created victorious from the very beginning, give evidence of victory; go with the six amšaspands and bring Ahriman to me bound.” Bahram Yazad set out with the six amšaspand and brought the impure Ahriman, bound, before Ormizd. Ormizd said to him: “this impure one, spiritually bound, shut him away, head downwards, in hell” (Dumézil 1988, 119).

2.4. Avatar of Asuras and Deūonic Forces

A crucial belief held by ancient Hindus concerning a special feature of demons (*asuras*) is that Indian *asuras* transform themselves (as a material incarnation or avatar) into various forms. In fact, *asuras* appear to various desired delegations to play an effective role in battles and even seducing creatures. As *asuras* transformed in battle with Krishna (Sinha 1950, 388-89), Surpa-nakha turn the sister into a beautiful woman (*Ramayana* 1978, 127-28; MacKenzie 1913, 400) and Raven transformed herself into a half-demon on her first meeting with Sita (*Ramayana* 1935, 211; Dhar 2019, 138, 150). Putana was a child-killing female giant who turned into a beautiful girl (Sinha 1950, 380-81). Mārīcha,

a demon who took the form of a deer and deceived Sita and Ram, causing Raven to steal Sita alone (*Ramayana* 1935, 205; MacKenzie 1913, 404; Dhar 2019, 138). Of course, *daevas*, like *asuras*, had the power of deformation and incarnation. An example is Rama who was the seventh manifestation of Vishnu. Hence, avatars are also common among gods (*daevas*) based on the fact that *daevas* (Indian gods) formed an association to avoid the persecution of demons. One god had to become a human being, and Vishnu accepted this mission. He appeared in the form of a Children king (*Ramayana* 1935, 13, 17, 28).

According to ancient Iranian beliefs, despite the dominance of Ahriman in the affairs of creation and confrontation with Ahuramazda forces, there is no notion of material creation attributed to demons, which is in contrast to Hindu mythology. These beliefs are reflected without any distortion in the early Avesta, which dates back to Zoroaster's teachings. However, in the Young Avestan and mythological narrations that are overshadowed by post-Zoroastrian beliefs and/or Hindu-Iranian thinking, there are rare cases of transformations of demons into a human or animal form, particularly when it comes to fairies who deceive and trap humans. Ancient Iranians believed that there was a pair of demons called Pairikā that should be fought because they were opposed to fire, water, land, cattle, and plants (Adhami 2010). In the fourth out of the seven labors of Rustam, when Rustam, hungry and thirsty, steps into the headquarters of a fairy who dresses up like a young woman and sits next to Rustam who unaware of this woman's diocese, starts enjoying her, but then, by mentioning the name of God, the fairy returns to its original form and is killed by Rustam (Ferdowsi 2006, 156; Firdausi 1989, 102-103). A similar story takes place in the "Seven Labors of Sandier," where a fairy appears in the form of a beautiful woman (Firdausi 1989, 278). Moreover, in mythological narratives, Ahriman appears in the form of a wise man and cook in front of Aži Dahak, thus deceiving him and causing the murder of his father and the growth of a snake on the shoulders of this man (Firdausi 1989, 10-11). In general, as for the feature of demons in taking material form (avatar), it should be noted that in Veda and Hindu texts, *puranas*, *asuras*, and *rakṣasas* are similar to gods (*daevas*) in having rich prominent personalities and avatar forms (Greco 2015, 3). In Iranian religious literature, however, this feature is not common in Ahriman and demons. Except a few cases in the narrative (mythological) literature of the material form of some demons, this feature (again rarely) belongs to some Iranian gods such as Verethraghna, which is also pre-Zoroastrian dating back to the Indo-European period (Thieme 1960, 80:312-14). Therefore, the transformation of devils (*asuras*) can be traced back to the period of the first Iranian Hindu teachings, which is neglected by the religious belief of Iranians (Avesta), but can only be found in Iranian narrative and national literature (Such as *Shāhnāma*) in which Ahriman and his Assistants (Pairikā) are sometimes depicted as having avatars.

3. Nature and Destiny of Demons (*Asuras*) in Hindu and Iranian Beliefs

Demons (*asuras*) and forces of evil in Iranian and Hindu thinking have different natures and features because it does not fit in the minds of Iranians that Ahriman could be even slightly like *Ahura Mazda* or the good could be compatible with the bad. In fact, in the Gathas, which are considered pure poems of Zoroaster, Ahriman is not mentioned as an evil being who has an independent territory and power, but it is Angra Mainyu, who along with Spənta Mainyu, counts as one of the twin spirits who turns into evil by choosing evil (evil thinking). Consequently, in the beginning, there is no relation between Ahura Mazda and the evil forces, and when Ahura Mazda appears as the father and creator of the twins (Angra Mainyu and Spənta Mainyu), neither of them was evil, and the evil is not chosen by Angra Mainyu (Duchesne-Guillemin 2014a, 670-71). However, gradually in national myths and narratives (folklore), Angra Mainyu gained more power and instead of standing against Spənta Mainyu, he came into conflict with Ahura Mazda, while Ahriman never has the same interests and the same origin as Ahura Mazda, and contrary to the Hindu thinking that sometimes Brahma (the Almighty God) is the protector and mourner of *asuras* and helps them even against *daevas* (Indian gods), no consistency was observed between *Ahura Mazda* and Ahriman.

Of course, in Hindu beliefs, the separation and contradiction (in origin and function) between *asuras* and *daevas* is not observed completely. This is because in Hindu thinking, even Brahma and other gods (*daevas*) sometimes share common interests and functions with *asuras*. This is based on the fact that even in the Veda belief, giants and demons are not always bad (Upanishads 1985, 342) and sometimes they even critique each other and are on the side of the human and the gods. The younger brother of Ravan, Bibishana or Vibishan, is a demon who had a dispute with his brother over Sita, joined the Ram army, and reached the kingdom of Lankapura after Ravan was killed. According to *Ramayana*, although he was a demon or a ghost, he lived a good and pious life (MacKenzie 1913, 416-17). So, Supā-sernama the demon stands against Ravan and prevents him from killing Sita (MacKenzie 1913, 423). Interestingly, the term *Maya* signifies occult power, applicable in a good sense to gods or in a bad sense to demons, and the epithet *Mayin* (crafty) is chiefly applied to Varuna among the gods (Macdonell 1897, 24).

Therefore, *asuras* are not always evil and do not do evil, and even according to the ancient Indian references, such as *Rigveda*, benevolent and wise *asuras* are in the rank of gods and helpful (*RigVeda* 1897, 2:184; Sinha 1950, 224-26). Therefore, conflicts between *asuras* and *daevas* (as forces of good and evil) are not obvious enough. Such differences fade away as we trace back to the earlier Hindu literature. According to the books of Veda, there is not much conflict between *daevas* (gods of light) and *asuras* (demons), while in *Brahmana*, the difference between the two is clear, and *asuras* are the undisputed enemies of *devas* and synonymous with evil (Upanishad 1884,

15:343). In *Ramayana*, too, we find that angels and demons are brothers of the same father, who are hostile to each other over the reign (MacKenzie 1913, 14).

A story is worth mentioning at this point, in which the close relationship between *asuras* and *devahs* is more clearly defined, demonstrating that despite the differences and enmities between these two groups (good and evil), their enmity is not fundamental when compared to what is seen in the Avesta and between the forces of Ahriman and Ahuramazda. The story goes as follows: One day Indra approached Krišna, telling him of the vile deeds of Naraka of Pragjyotiṣa, and a terrible struggle then ensued between Krišna, Balarama, and Pradyumna on the one side, and Bāṇa, Śiva, and Skanda on the other. Finally, Krišna prevailed, and was about to slay the asura king when Śiva intervened and asked for his life, which Krišna graciously granted, as Śiva had acknowledged his supreme position (Gray 1916, 405). Contrary to Hindu thinking, however, ancient Iranians gradually witnessed differences and boundaries between the interests and powers of *daevas* and *asuras*. Ahriman is always evil and destructive from the outset, and demons never (even temporarily) engage in benevolence and righteous deeds for gods and human beings. Rather, it is Ahriman as an evil spirit who seeks to destroy people's happiness and spiritual hopes with violence and cruelty (Jackson 1977, 11:81).

However, crucially in Hindu and Iranian thinking, we always see the struggle between the worlds of good and evil to dominate each other. However, in Iranian thinking, Ahriman and his assistants try hard to dominate creatures. And except for the first encounter between Ahriman and Ahura Mazda, which occurred as a result of Ahriman's invasion of the world of light and finally led to Ahriman's loss of consciousness, we no longer see a confrontation between Ahuraian and demonic forces. In Hindu thinking, however, there is sometimes a conflict between *daevas* and *asuras*, and all this is because in the Iranian worldview, Ahriman is inferior to the realm and power of Ahura Mazda. In contrast, the Hindu thinking changes the role of *asuras* (and in the opposite direction to *daevas*/gods), their power is not diminished and one of the amazing manifestations of Indian mythology is equality between the powers of gods and demons and their constant struggle over the domination of the three worlds (Zaehner 1975, 65)

Furthermore, in the worldview of ancient Iranians, despite all the powers and capabilities of demons against gods and humans, the ultimate victory is with gods. With the defeat of demons, the world will become safe for human beings and Ahuraian creatures, and evil and demons will never have a permanent territory and power. Therefore, the struggle between good and evil beings, in which man takes part by siding, according to his conduct, with Ahura Mazda or with his foe, would end with the victory of the former at the great renovation of the world, when a flood of molten metal will, as an ordeal, purify all men and bring about the complete exclusion of evil (Gray 1916, 405). Of course, it would be more accurate to say that even though

Ahriman is removed from the earth and the habitat of people, there is no mention of the complete destruction of Ahriman in Iranian traditions; rather, he would become ineffective and would no longer have an impact on people's lives. According to later Indian myths and legends (in the Vishnu sect, which is one of the three sects derived from the Hindu religion), in the end times with the advent of Kalki, the last avatar of Vishnu appears in the form of a white horse and kills demons and the enemies (MacKenzie 1913, 41:137).

Conclusion

The power and realm of demons were not equal in the beliefs of ancient Iranians and Indians. In India, *asuras* and giants (demons) could take various forms, and directly and indirectly endanger the life of gods (*devas*) and cause evil. Thus, Indian demons were so powerful that they subjugated some gods to their authority. In Iran, however, although the Young Avestan and national traditions (folklore) were akin to the Indian *asuras*, the demons were deemed eternal, but Ahriman and his assistants were more seductive and disruptive than anything else. They did not have the power to dominate gods and Ahura's territory, but in some cases in Iranian myths and narrations, demons (Ahriman, demons, and *pairikā*) displayed behaviors that reveal a similarity in capability and function with Indian *asuras*. These similarities can be attributed to the common origin shared by Iranian and Indian myths. Other similarities can also be attributed to interactions between Iranians and Indians and their mutual influence. Accordingly, we see that contrary to the explicit statement of Zarathuštra in the Gathas (and the early Avestan), *Ahriman* had no material creation. In the Young Avestan and Pahlavi literature, Ahriman exhibits material devils such as snakes, wolves and devils (*pairikā*). Sometimes it takes on human and animal forms (avatars). Thus, it should be noted that Indian *asuras* did not initially oppose *daevas* (gods), but gradually came to play the opposite and destructive role. This idea is somewhat reminiscent of a doctrine in Semitic religions (Christianity and Islam), where Ahriman was first associated with God and then rose against him. However, in Iran, there is always a definite border between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, without them having any common interests, as the fate of demons is nothing but destruction, and Ahura Mazda and his followers will be the final possessors of immortality and peace.

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