

The Role of Natural Contradictions in Creation of Good and Evil Beliefs

Abolghasem Dadvar¹ & Roya Rouzbahani¹

¹ Faculty of Arts, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran

Correspondence: Roya Rouzbahani, Faculty of Arts, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: rrouzbahani@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Natural elements play significant role in Iranian legends. Water, mountain, earth, sky, sun, moon, stars, wind, plants, animals, rain, and fire are among natural effective and mythopoeic forces. Generally, structure of Iranian myths is a kind of believe to dichotomy in nature, in human and in contradictory forces available in the world. One of the most important aspects of this contradiction is continuous battle between good and evil. Since Iran with diverse natural geography is the land of great conflicts, main issue in this research is determining the role of natural conflicts in creating good and evil beliefs in Iranian myths. In this study, data are gathered using documentary sources and research method is comparative, descriptive, and qualitative analyses. There is natural contradiction in every land in nature and natural geography. Results indicate that among different causes that lead to formation of myths, nature and its available conflicts have great role in creation of such beliefs.

Keywords: myths, nature, natural contradictions, duality

1. Introduction

In brief investigation on Iranian mythological stories in which we face a dominant aspect that is traditional opposition of good and evil. Mythological stories that were narrated about end of the world for primitive man contain continuous battle between the forces of good and bad. Iranians have traditionally created double ontology. However, this phenomenon is not just specified to Iranians and it can be said that there is a kind of belief in duality of nature, human, and opposite forces in myths of every nation. But such belief in Iran is different and has a special form that continues to influence the social insight of Iranians, an insight on which negative forces have active role along with positive forces. An important issue that can be observed in Persian myths is dualism. Iranians' belief in good and evil in the past and present can form a part of myths, culture, and art of this people. This issue raises a question: how this belief was introduced and developed? Bahar, a great Iranian professor and mythologist knows existence of Conflict between different elements in gods' world or humans' world as basis of humans and gods' myths. He believes that conflict is main point of all mythological stories, both gods and champions stories and expresses that "I think as long as there is contradiction in the human society, heroes, and champions will be created". Thus, stories of heroes and champions will disappear just when contradictions of human, nature, and social conflicts are eliminated (Bahar, 1998, p. 381). Basically, Iran is the land of big contradictions, deserts, jungles, snowy mountains, and green valleys with climate diversity. In Iran's nature, there are dry salty deserts in the middle part, high mountains such as Damavand and mountain ranges such as Alborz and Zagros, green plains such as Mazandaran plain and very green banks of Caspian Sea that depicts a contradictory image. To understand duality and good and evil in Iranian myths it is better to start with original sources and myths literature in order to see the way of emergence of such idea and its change in its original context. Hence, our goal is to investigate the role of natural conflicts in creating the good and bad beliefs in Iranian myths.

1.1 *Effective Elements of Nature in Myth-Making*

Water elements are among most important natural forces that affect Iranian myths. This element in a land such as Iran that is a dry area with little rain (except the southern areas of Caspian Sea) due to natural geography is of great importance considering its crucial role in nature and human life. Iran is located in the center of global dry belt and has wide deserts. Water as a natural phenomenon has affected human life due to its crucial role in provision of drinking water, production of food and products, prosperity, and development of green nature.

Therefore, divinity and sanctity of water are complicated and important issues in Iran because of their main role in fertility of nature also a great part of myths has been dedicated to this element (water). There are many gods in Iranian myths related to water and the importance of these gods becomes clearer given the shortage of water in this land (Gershman, 1961). Rain is another important element in Iranian myths. It is a divine phenomenon in these myths. In general, the philosophy of rain creation is explained by need for freshness in ancient mythological literature, a freshness that removes pains and helps plants to grow (Afifi, 1995). Mountains had prominent role in former culture as an important source for people who were living in these regions due to special location of mountains in Iran (Qurashi, 2011). Land has been considered as holy by Ancient Iranians as one of the useful sources for all phenomena. Everything has originated from land. It gives life to everything and every living creature again returns to the earth (Armstrong, 2011, p. 30). Sky is among most important manifestations of sanctity. It is full of religious and mythological values. Integrated sky is the sign of superiority and power and is the place of gods. It symbolizes the majesty of God. It also contains other useful elements including sun, moon, and stars (Sadaqah, 1999, p. 112). In addition, some animals such as cow have had significant role in human life throughout history and so have been reflected in myths. In ancient Iran, cow was considered as the most useful livestock. Cows due to influence on agriculture, cultivation, and human nutrition have special position in Iranians' life and a significant presence in their myths.

1.2 Role of Natural Contradictions in Emerging the Good and Evil Beliefs in Iranian Myths

According to the studies on myths related to people who believe in duality in good and evil, positive and negative forces, brightness and darkness, and conflict of devils and ghouls against Gods, there are significant contradiction in nature and natural geography of every land. Therefore, role of nature and natural-geographical contrasts in creation of dual belief and barrel of good and evil in Iranian myths can be investigated.

1.3 Good and Evil Belief in Parsiism

Traditional Iranian cosmology is deeply dualist. Iranian myths are reflective of "good and evil" and "light and dark" contrasts. Two contralateral gods are "Ahura Mazda" as the sky lord and "demon" that lives in dark. Although world of gods is divided into two groups with different tasks in Indo-Iranian myths, such classification is not related to good and evil gods. Aryans are classified into good gods and bad gods also the name of gods in bad group which means anti God and evil. In Iran, such treatment in western Asia develops and being Iranian and devil comprehends all over creation and super creation and becomes center of Iranian religious ideology. Such a case can't be seen in any Asian nation. In Iran, evil finds a clear symbol as demon, something that is not seen in Achaemenid inscriptions but is defined in Gahan (Gatha). Based on available documents, presence of devil in Gatha of Zoroaster as symbol of evil forces is a new Iranian belief (Bahar, 1998: 39). Concurrent with the emergence of Zoroaster's religion, he invited the people to the Zoroastrianism religion, i.e. the monotheism religion which prevented people from polytheism and idolatry and knew only one God worthy of worshipping, Ahura Mazda who has no peer and is unique. In the meantime, the God of good is called Amesha Spenta and Yazata, i.e. the God. In general, it can be stated about the belief in opposition and contrast of the gods of good and evil in the Zoroastrian religion and its influence on the next coming religions that in the initial Zoroastrian religion also based on what has remained in Gathas, the manifestation of good is Sepanta minoo and the evil referred to as demon. These two are themselves Ahura Mazda's creatures. Amesha Spenta and the angels who are closest to Ahura Mazda (God) are also in a lower rank compared to Ahura Mazda. The Influence of this belief may be observed in the religions after Zoroaster (Figure 1).



Figure 1. A relief painting representing Ahura Mazda who has been in permanent quarrel with the devil, the god of darkness and evil (Doty, 2013, p. 38)

From Zoroastrians' perspective, Ahura Mazda is superior to the summum bonum (the highest good) and he has no relation with the evil. He is the source of all goodness, lightness, life, beauty, happiness, and good health. Ahura Mazda is on the top of his 7 deathless manifestations which are then called Amesha Spentas. "Amesha Spentas are gods, without being god. They are created, without being creature and they have supervision and directorship on the main qualities of the nature, without being the same with them. These subjects which are called Yazata (honorable people), are six individuals: Vohu Manah, Xsathra-vairya, Haurvatāt, Armaiti, and Amərətāt (Grimal, 1989). After creating the Amesha Spenta, Ahura Mazda created the gods whom opposite negative powers are the demons. The devil and the demons are against Ahura Mazda and superior gods. The creation of the demons and demonic creatures is not described in Avesta and Pahlavi books as obvious as the heaven creation of Ahura Mazda and Ahuraic creatures. Angra Mainyu is the leader of demons' group. His aim is to annihilate and destroy the world. As the Ohrmazd creates the life, Angra Mainyu creates the death. He creates the illness against the good health, and the ugliness against the beauty. All illnesses of people are completely resulted from Angra Mainyu. Angra Mainyu created the demons including "Aka manah" which means bad thought and the demonic creation is from him. "Aešma" means hastily which wicked people turn to it and the followers of piety fight with. This is the enemy of the herds. Later, six greater demons are also added to the Aka Manah in the new Avesta and the term "Kamaleh Divan" is used in opposition to "Amesha Spenta" for this collection of seven demons (Bahar, 2010, p. 42).

1.4 Good and Evil Belief in the Myth of the Creation

The main feature of the Iranian myths is duality. This subject is well manifested in 12000-years of mythological history in Iran. The creation in regular 12000-years history is a tradition belongs to Sassanid era and writings related to this era. In the beginning, there were Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu (the Avestan-language name of Zoroastrianism's hypostasis of the "destructive spirit; the Middle Persian equivalent is Angra Mainyu); one in the boundless light, and another in the endless darkness. Invasion of Angra Mainyu was resumed 3000 years passed from Ahura Mazda's heaven creation. Angra Mainyu became aware of Ahura Mazda's brilliant and clean dominion so he became curious and jealous and attempted to invade the dominion of good. Ahura Mazda who was aware of everything suggests peace to Angra Mainyu, provided that Angra Mainyu commends his creation, but Angra Mainyu did not accept this suggestion because of his post-knowledge. In this way, a contract is concluded between Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu provided that the last battle between the good and evil forces occurs 9000 years after this attack. In that 3000 years in which Angra Mainyu fell into unconsciousness, Ahura Mazda gave his heaven creation material and universal form. The pearl of the first Ahura Mazda creation is infinite clear which created fire, wind, water, and earth respectively one after another out of that and he created a material existence out of the earth (Bahar, 2010, p. 43). At the end of the second 3000 years, Angra Mainyu's friends and collaborators who suffered from the unconsciousness of their commander, proceed to encourage him to make him get out of this ignorance. Their effort aimed when Jahi, a female demon went forward and encouraged the Angra Mainyu to fight. With Angra Mainyu's coming out of anesthesia, his actual attack to the current world began. Angra Mainyu with all his demons attacked Ahura Mazda's beautiful and excellent creation (ibid, 85).

1.5 Good and Evil Belief in Manichaeism

Manichaeism is among other rituals formed in Iran in which duality is clearly observable. The fundamental facts which were proposed by Mani in the 3rd century AD were: introspection based on the distinction between two principles, one is the principle of good and heaven, and another is the principle of evil and material, and division of time into three periods: previous period in which the world has emerged yet; middle period in which the light is invaded, a war occurs and the world (who is created for defense) becomes full of light, although it is bad; and finally the last period which is the period of separation from the mixture and the light releases completely and finds its real place (Jean de Menasce, 2008: 272). Duality in Manichaeism is in this way that he declared "two worlds of spirit and material are against each other. One of them is good (= soul) and the other is evil (= material). These two worlds are opposite in their pearl and nature and they are against each other. These two worlds and forces are mixed with each other because of the action of evil principle (material or darkness), rescue of the lightness and good from the constraint of the full-evil material and darkness is only in the renewed separation and releasing from the constraint of the material (Bahar, 2010: 84). According to the subjects which were explained, in investigation on the evolution and change of Iranian mythological systems, the interface or important divergence which exists is the same belief into both bases of good and evil. Of course the quarrel between these two and this principle dominates on all myths of Iran.

1.6 Battle of Good and Evil in Tishtrya Myth

The Aposha and Tishtrya battle myths are among ancient Iranian myths which well express the battle of good and evil forces. This myth which is completely inspired by the nature is indeed the battle between the angel of rain and the demon of drought. Indeed, paying attention to the attractive and allegorical myth of Tishtrya in Avesta, clarifies the problem of contrast and quarrel between good and evil, lightness and darkness, and good and evil in the most appropriate manner. Here, the scene of fighting is in the sky. Here, we quote the summary of the description of this battle from the Tishtarish, Avesta book: Tishtrya flies thirty days and nights in the light. For example, in the first ten nights, Tishtrya shouts that who prays for me and commends me with ritual and custom until I give him/her blessing or in the third ten nights, he asks who commends me until I give him well-figured horses and affluence of peace. Then he comes down into the Vourukasha and on the other hand, Apausha demon, appears in darkness and they grapple with quarrel. For three days and nights in this war, Apausha wins with glory and he defeats him (Razi, 1985, pp. 267-270).

1.7 Good and Evil in Championship and Epic Stories

In Iran, there are a lot of divine heroes and the stories which are quoted about them are sometimes closer to legend than myth. But if we remove these characters, we would have a void space in the image of ancient Iranian mythology. For this reason, we present a short introduction of them. Yama (Indian), Yima (Iranian): In Iran, Yima is so venerated because of the narration of his 1000-thousands years of governance and the feature of this domination is abundance of blessing and peace and there is no sign of devils and their indecent behaviors. Yima is praised because of constructing Vara or an underground fortress. The creator warns him that the people would be involved in a frightening winter, and because of that, all people and animals on the earth would be annihilated and it induces the Yima to build a fortress. So that, the demonic calamity may not surmount the generation of these phenomena and when the frightening winter became dominant on the world with the attack of Malkus demon in the final centuries of the world and it brought annihilation with itself, the origin and race of all phenomena were kept and particularly, the human's generation was continued.

Houshang: His name is as the one who provides good houses. In Avesta, he is referred to as Paradata, i.e. the first person who is determined (for government) and becomes as Pishdad in Pahlavi and Persian (the first person who brings law). The beginning of Pishdadian dynasty starts from here (Haririan et al., 2011: 141). About the relation with Houshang and the demons, it is stated that "Houshang commands the ancient days of the ruler of the seven climates and the people and the demons and all magicians escape from him into the darkness. Mazana or Mazandaran in the north of the mountain of Damavand is the home of many magicians and demons who two-third of them are killed by Houshang, the hero (Hinnells, 2003).

Tahmuras: His name correlates with power. His period of domination is stated to be 30 years. Like Houshang and other good people, Tahmuras fights with the demons and defeats them.

Fredon (Tharitouneh): He is a champion in the Avesta who has a semi-divine personality and his appellation is dragon killer. Fereydu is the one who overcomes Zahhak, but does not kill him because Ohrmazd warns him that if he kills Zahhak, the earth would become full of snakes, frogs and ants. Fredon's victory against Zahhak brings him to the position of the most victorious people (Hinnells, 2003).

Keresaspa (Garshasp): This ancient champion belongs to the Indo-Iranian era. Garshasp's prowess begins with killing the horned dragons. In a narration, Garshasp kills Gandarevah, the golden heel dragon and he states that fighting with this frightening monster continues 9 days and nights in the cosmic sea. Many monsters, brigands and criminals peter by Garshasp's hands, and one of these monsters is Kamak or the avian monster who covers all the earth during flying and the rain cannot fall (ibid, 114).

1.8 Battle of Good and Evil in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh

Dual contrast or battle of good and evil is the main theme of Shahnameh. The frequency of the stories directly encompassing the practical struggle between good and evil in Shahnameh is at least two times greater than the stories which are related to another theme. The theme of Shahnameh has three parts: the mythical part in which devilish forces still recourse to battle without mediator and they interfere in the humans' fate; the athletic part in which the role of the creatures of badness and uncleanness is assigned to the enemies of Iran, and a historical part in which the poet at the time of its creation has remained loyal to the history and he selects the thoughts and narrations with many note-takings. In this way, all over the Shahnameh, we observe a type of contrast and battle between good and evil which is manifested with clashes of heroes and kings with devils that are always ended with the victory of good over evil (Safa, 1955, pp. 205-208).

1.9 The Role of Natural Contrasts in Creating the Belief of Good and Evil in the Myths of the World

Mesopotamia: It is a mountainous land that encompasses all of the Firat river patches. Hot and wet weather of the southern Mesopotamia and access to abundant water in that region is one of the very considerable conditions for growing the palm tree which is cured along the rivers and channels. In the other end of Iraq, there are large marshes encompassing the southern part of the Tigris and Firat delta and it constitutes a special zone which has many differences with other regions of Mesopotamia. The contrast in the Mesopotamia land is obvious because of presence of mountainous regions (cold weather) in the north, dessert (very hot and dry weather) in the center, and fertile region (hot and wet) in the south also the existence of large marshes in the South of the Tigris and Firat delta. The number of most important demons or evil gods in Mesopotamia was considered seven, but their actual number was more. In the beliefs of the ancient Mesopotamians, the good and evil spirits had emerged from a unit source which was giant- God, giant- father or the father and mother of the first demons and gods. In Mesopotamian myths (Babylonian, Assyrian, Akkadian), Tiamat and Apsu were two giants of the first God, and sometimes these evil gods were called Anu's children who had house in western mountains. One of the ancient Mesopotamian stories is the story of Apus and his two children, good and evil. This story is observed as the story of Baa'l and evil, Baa'l and death, Baa'l and Yam in Hiti myths (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Baa'l, God of storm, (Doty, 2013, p. 31)

The battle between good and evil is observed in the myths of creation of these people. Based on Babylonian myth, this order which is continuing in the modern universe was created from the battle and the dispute which occurred between the dragon of the dark sea and the figures of the stormy and agitated seas with the gods of light and goddesses of order and peace in the first day. At the top of those terrible monsters, a strange and full-august creature was master who had a bird figure called Zu, or in other words, a dragon called Tiamat and the head of the gods of lightness was a god called Ninurta (Babylonian priests and druids wrote this Sumerian legend in another form when this Sumerian legend was authorized by them, and they replaced the god of their city, i.e. Marduk instead of Ninurta and introduced him the creator of the universe and the humans and creator of order and peace). Apsu, the god of sweet and fresh waters and Tiamat, the dragon of the salty and unpleasant sea fought with each other (Boss & Grangaard, 2011). As it was observed, there is contrast both in the nature and in the Mesopotamian myths.

Egypt: Egypt is a land which a great sea separated it from other pieces of the world from the north side and the large deserts started from the east, southern mountains encompassed it in the Ethiopia, and from the west, the wide endless sandy regions portended and thousands of parasangs "dessert" in Bakhtaran encompassed it and the very high equatorial mountains were located in its south like an elevated wall which in its openings, seven consecutive waterfalls were created (Boss & Grangaard, 2011). In this land, in addition to its state of being dessert, dry, and barren which constitutes a great part of the Egyptian nature, because of the existence of Nile River, its coasts are fertile. This severe contrast has created this land (Rosenberg, 2008: 315). Based on one of the Egyptian myths, "Ra" got old and the humans rebelled against him. Ra sent his eye as the goddess Sekhmet to punish them. This goddess was very annihilator such that the sun god became inevitable to intoxicate her to stop killing, otherwise the human beings were overthrown. Another type of this myth is related to a rapacious

goddess called Tefnut. She was living in the shape of a female lion in the Nubia desert. Ra requested her to come back to him, so he sent Shu and Thoth to make him satisfied to come back to home. On the way back, he figured himself out as a beautiful goddess in the city of Philae. It is given in the third myth that the goddess Isis gained her magical power through this way that she created a snake and forced it to bite Ra. No god could endure Ra's anger and cure him; so Isis appeared and said she rescues him if he reveals his mysterious name. The sun god was annoyed and he obeyed inevitably. So, Isis gained a huge power with obtaining his divine knowledge (Warner, 1975). One of the very important myths of Egyptians is related to Osiris. In this myth, the battle between good and evil is observed which was between two brother gods, i.e. Osiris who was the helper and generous god and representative of good forces, and Seth who was the symbol of uncleanness and devil.

Ireland: in Irish myths, the racial quarrel and war called "Fomori" representing darkness. Celts who were accounted as the representatives of light and constituted a type of contrast in these myths, "all explain the northern rough, rude environment, and political instability obtained from individuals' and native residents' stability against the aggressive people" (ibid, 416). In Irish myths, gods and giants are always immortal. "In these myths, when the gods of light, Toatad and Danan were dismissed and went into the underground, they were converted to the shape of a living mass and they spent their lives in peace in the tumulus. But the defeated Fomorians were inevitable to bear the miserable conditions of dark rooms and the depth under the lakes and the lakes" (Doty, 2013: 126). In general, in Irish myths, the forces of brightness, fertility and life should be always prepared to deal with the force of blackness and darkness. These two forces are often in quarrel with each other in order to overcome the Ireland.

China: the Chinese myths are related to the antiquity of its culture, with thousands of years of history and based on the variety of the people which have been participants in developing the Chinese society. So this is natural that this large country has very various weathers. Desserts, deltas and hills are concentrated in the east. So the element of contrast is well manifested in this country. The most obvious characteristic of contrast in Chinese myths is their belief on two elements of Yin and Yan (Yang) (Figure 3). In the opinion of the Chinese people, "basically there was a unit cosmic cell which included Ch'I (ether). This Ch'i (ether) material was created to be pounded by a creator force called Dao. The stress emerging from this action finally divided the cell into two opposite and complementary halves. These two ethereal elements which encompassed the cosmos are known as Yin and Yan. The ethereal material of Yin is made of the essence of the earth. It is dark, feminine and heavy, while the heavenly Yan is brilliant, male and light-weighted" (Warner, 1975).

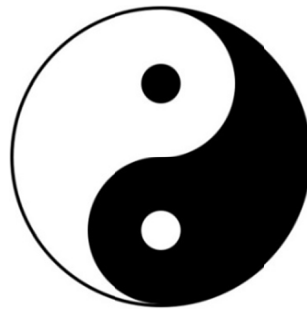


Figure 3. Taijitu, traditional symbol representing the forces of Yin and Yang (www.indexiran.ir)

Tibet: The Tibetan Plateau has particular climate. Its weather is cold, but it has sufficient sun. In some of its mountainous regions, the weather is completely different from its deep and narrow straits. The Tibet is the dessert of the mountain, a dry and cold land known as the roof of the world. The myths of Tibet are adopted from the ancient beliefs before the Buddhist age, Indo-Tibetan Buddhism and ceremony of Bon. In the myths of creation, belief in the element of contrast is observed well. The myths of genesis of the world (myths of creation) are of three main types: "cosmic seed, prevenient creature and contrast of forces. In various narrations, the cosmic seed constitutes the mediator factor in the process of creation of the world which starts with vacancy or light; then the cosmic seed of the owner of the cosmos, creates the world or a devilish creature. Regarding opposed fundamentals, a Tibetan myth states that the human came into the existence from non-existence as the owner of the existence. Then, among the absence of the seasons, or day and night, a black and white point of light born a black man called "black adversity" which supervises on the non-existence and distributes the natural disasters and the white man called "shine" which supervises on the seasons and learns good things" (Doty, 2013: 66). With the development of the Buddhist religion, their power was reduced, but until today, their performance has still remained in the vulgar beliefs or in the shape of guard god and it looked like the Buddhist gods and Ban

Po. According to the mentioned subjects and investigation on the myths of the world, it can be explained that there are significant contrasts in the myths of the races in which there are kinds of belief in the duality and good and evil, positive and negative forces, darkness and lightness and dispute between the demons and the giants against the gods, in the nature and natural geography of every land.

2. Conclusion

Since the human life in the bosom of the nature, being under its influence is something natural. This paper knows the duality of all rituals available in Iran from Zoroaster's message until the Islamic era resulted from the nature and its opposed geography. This belief can be inspired by the nature in this way that in the ancient days people always faced with these contrasts in their environment. There is dark night after light day, drought against rain, fatal storm wind against the pluvial and useful wind, fatal flood against life-giving water, illness against health and death against birth. The existence of such contrasts in nature and human's real world has caused the belief that the principle of contrast in Iranian thought has a natural basis. The love of nature was the reason for peace, wideness, and affluence, and the wrath of nature was a root for suffering, hunger, and famine. Forces of the nature are also imagined including both forces of verdure and drought. Hence, it is thought that the duality in the beliefs of the Iranian people may be affected by the nature and the geography of this area. According to the results of the current study, it can be stated that there is a significant contrast in the nature and natural geography of every land in the myths of Mesopotamia including Egypt, Ireland, China, and Tibet which have belief in good and evil forces, the existence of giants and demons, battle between the forces of darkness and light, and positive and negative forces. In the nature and natural geography of each one of these lands, there is a significant contrast. Generally, it can be concluded that among various reasons resulting in the formation of the myths, the nature and its available contradictions play significant role in shaping such beliefs and opinions.

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