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Ṛta and Aša: The Metaphysical Foundation of Happiness in Classical Hindu-Iranian Texts (Rigveda and Gatha)

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Abstract

The belief in good and evil, and the consequences of each, is almost universally shared or innately held by all humans, a belief that may be as old as humanity itself. However, what has been subject to debate since antiquity is the criterion or measure of good and evil. This article explores one of the earliest responses to this question: that which is consonant with the cosmic order is good, and that which is not is evil. This response presupposes a belief in a cosmic order or system, known by various terms across different cultures. In ancient Hindu and Iranian texts such as the Vedas and the Gathas of the Avesta, this principle is referred to with terms such as ṛta, arta, and aša. In these traditions, this principle not only organizes all cosmic events, both large and small, but also serves as the criterion for determining the rightness and wrongness of individual behaviors, social and political systems, and devotional practices. It even provides the framework for divine acts and commands. While the Hindu ṛta shares common roots with the Iranian arta or aša, they did not undergo the same semantic developments over history. This article examines the semantic scope and various instances of these terms, as well as their transformations from impersonality to personification and sanctification, their connection to divinity and holy texts, and the differences they experienced throughout their historical development.

Keywords: ṛta, aša, cosmic order, dharma, good and evil.

Ṛta and Aša

While the concepts of good and evil—also described as right and wrong or decent and indecent—are referred to differently in various cultures and religions, they

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are among the oldest and most pervasive ideas considered and used by humans throughout history and across all civilizations. There is a clear connection between these contrasting concepts and another pair of opposing notions: happiness and unhappiness, or felicity and wretchedness. The latter pair can be seen as consequences of the former. It is typically believed that those who do good will attain well-being and happiness, while those who tend toward evil will face a dark fate and wretchedness.

Meanwhile, an early question that has persisted to this day is the criterion or measure by which a behavior or idea is characterized as good or evil. Various answers have been given based on a wide spectrum of religious, philosophical, and other principles. Interestingly, humans in antiquity, across diverse civilizational centers, offered a more or less similar answer to this question: consonance or inconsonance with the cosmic order.

This mysterious reality, to which various yet largely similar characteristics have been attributed, has been given different names across various cultures: *ṛta* and *dharma* in India, *dao* in China, *arta* and *aša* (*asha*) in ancient Iran, *maat* in ancient Egypt, dike in ancient Greece, *ratus* in Latin, and *ḥaqq* (truth), *ʿadl* (justice), *sunnat Allāh* (Allah's tradition), and *fiṭra* (innate nature) in the Quran and Islamic texts. The widespread and ancient use of these concepts across different cultures and nations indicates their pervasive nature in human belief, reflecting a connection between human conduct and the behavior of the cosmic order.

This article aims to provide an explanation and comparison of the conceptual dimensions and functions of ṛta and aša within ancient Indian and Iranian traditions, based on their respective ancient texts: the Vedas in Hinduism and the Zoroastrian Avesta. Various aspects of our discussion include the antiquity, conceptual dimensions, and characteristics of these concepts, as well as how they are discovered and unveiled. We will also explore their connection to creation, morality, ritual practices, and social order, their ties to divinity, and finally, the consequences of ignoring them and being inconsonant with them.

The term ṛta is one of the most frequently used words in the Rigveda and all Vedic texts in general, with its earliest uses found in these scriptures. Most researchers date the Vedas to around 1200 BC, though some have proposed dates as far back as 2400 BC or even 4000 BC (Dasgupta 1922, 1:10-12).

According to Mircea Eliade, the term ṛta is used approximately 300 times in the Rigveda (Eliade 1978, 1:201). While its earliest occurrences seem to be in these texts, some researchers point to tablets found in Amarna Hill, where the term arta, an Iranian term with the same etymology as ṛta, is repeated. This evidence suggests that the concept predates 1500 BC, indicating that it had already developed before the Aryans entered India (Keith 1918, 10:805).

The term ṛta comes from the root ṛ, meaning "to move" or "to go," which is connected to the Indo-European root ar (properly matching each other or being coordinated). Through ar, it is related to the Greek word harmos, from which the English word "harmony" is derived, and to the Latin ars, which is the origin of the English word "art" (Mahony 1998, 3). Some researchers assert that the root ṛ means "emergence," "arising," and "tending upwards," and that ṛta means "truth," "law," "order," and "the course of things" (Grimes 1996, 256).

Ṛta in the Vedas

In the Vedas, the word ṛta refers to truth and rightness, similar to the term aša (asha) in the Avestan language. Aša primarily refers to the cosmic order and extends to moral laws on one hand and ritual practices, particularly sacrifices, on the other (Keith 1918, 10:805).

Ṛta, as the arranger and manager of the cosmic order, guides the motions of the sun, moon, stars, and the rhythms of seasons and cycles of days and nights. It is the natural law that governs the rains, the flows of rivers, and the light of the sun. Thus, ṛta is an impersonal yet powerful force that permeates the universe, leading to its unity, coherence, and consolidation, serving as the foundation of both the material and ethical world. Ṛta is the dynamic law or order in which everything and every part contributes in its peculiar way to the smooth and orderly process of the world as a whole. If all things align with ṛta, then they will be true to their own nature and play their roles in the cosmic order in a proper and appropriate manner. The order and survival of the universe, as well as the organization of cities, countries, and human happiness and felicity in this world and the hereafter, depend on ṛta. The three main tenets of human conduct and morality—good thoughts, good words, and good deeds—are those that are harmonious with ṛta. A person who maintains this harmony in all conditions and in all of their external and internal actions will become eternal and imperishable, just like this eternal order, becoming artāvan and ashvan (Holdrege 2004; Mahony 1998, 85; Mojtabaee 1402 Sh).

Radhakrishnan (1948, 1:78-79) identifies ṛta with Platonic universals. According to his view, the world we experience is a reflection and shadow of ṛta, which is permanent unlike the transient transformations we experience in the world. Thus, Vedic scholars believed that ṛta precedes the emergence of all phenomena, as the entire world is found within ṛta, growing therein: "By truth (ṛta) the nourishments urge themselves along the long way, and by truth (ṛta) the cows approached truth" (RV, IV.23.9).

Accordingly, not only humans but also gods are obliged to act in accordance with this cosmic order, without the ability to change it. If they act contrary to the structures of ṛta, they will be described as anṛta, meaning crooked or false (vrjina)

or untrue (asatya) (Mahony 1998, 235). Here, one can observe the continuity between the cosmic order and the moral order: what is a law in the material world becomes a virtue in the moral world. In other words, the opposition between virtue and vice mirrors the eternal opposition between ṛta and anṛta, or between truth and falsehood. It represents a conflict with devilish forces or humans who, in the Vedic period, sought to contradict the cosmic order through magical acts and tools. Of course, those who act contrary to ṛta will be punished by deities who protect ṛta, and thus, there are many supplications to gods in the Rigveda where perseverance and preservation of the right path are requested: "We, seeking you, seize hold of your companionship, Indra. Lead us along the path of truth (ṛta), across all difficult passages" (RV, X.133.6).

Thus, among the frequent issues occurring in the Vedas, likely influenced by the concept of ṛta, is the inevitable system of reward and punishment. It is derived from the idea that those who commit indecent or improper acts will suffer in the next world, while those who perform good acts will enjoy the highest material pleasures (Dasgupta 1922, 1:72). Similarly, this theme can be observed in the Gathas, the oldest part of the Avesta, regarding arta or aša (asha). It states that the best character belongs to the followers of aša, while the worst belongs to the advocates of druj (draoga or drauga: lie or falsehood). It also mentions two commands from Mazda: permanent pain and suffering will befall those who are deceived by druj, while followers of the path of aša will attain salvation (Yasna, 30.4 and 10 in Max Müller 1887). It is noteworthy that such rewards and punishments are not confined to the hereafter. Many Vedic verses refer to rewards and punishments that occur in this world, such as wealth and material endowments or immunity to illness, catastrophes, troubles, and the like (Dasgupta 1922, 1:4).

During the Vedic period, it is noteworthy that ṛta was conceived as impersonal and was never personified as a god. However, within the developments of Hindu thought, it evolved into a god-hero, often manifesting in the sun. In this context, the sun's motion was deemed to occur through ṛta. Throughout these developments, ṛta was sanctified and personified as an object of worship and even as the child of dharma (Stutley and Stutley 1977; Mahony 1998, 85). In the Gathas, there is a permanent and simultaneous manifestation of arta/aša, which at times appears as an abstract, impersonal reality, and at other times as an objective, concrete, and even anthropomorphic entity. It is sometimes stated that the path is one, represented by aša, with all other paths being deviations (Yasna, 72.11). Aša is described as the ultimate good and well-being (Yasna, 72.1), with well-being belonging to the righteous who seek the best aša (Yasna, 72.1). Additionally, natural beauties such as the sun's rise and dawn are considered symbols of aša and representations of Ahura Mazda (Yasna, 50.10). At times, aša is described as a truth inherent in all those with

good natures, while in other instances, it is depicted as the interlocutor of Ahura Mazda at the onset of creation (Yasna, 29.6).

Despite the potential for the concept of ṛta to evolve into a pivotal concept of moral reflection within Hindu thought, a role it played during the ancient Samhitas of the Rigveda, as pointed out by Keith, India did not witness progress in this regard during the later periods of the Samhitas and the Brahmanas. In contrast to what happened in Iran, where reflection on the notion of aša led to the profound moral significance and force of this concept and the evolution of Zoroastrianism, India experienced a regressive course. Instead of further developing the moral aspect of ṛta, there was an insistence on systematizing the act of sacrifice as the central role of ṛta (Keith 1918, 10:805).

In fact, a theory was developed, with primitive origins in the ancient Vedas, suggesting that proper ritual practices, particularly the sacrifice ritual, manifested the structure of cosmic law. Improper execution of these rituals was seen as a manifestation of the collapse of the cosmic order. Thus, an organized performance of sacrifice rituals was believed to be essential for manifesting the cosmic order and ensuring the survival and persistence of the universe. However, it is noteworthy that as a practical result of this correspondence between ṛta (cosmic order) and the intricate act of sacrifice, certain clergies in the Rigveda beseeched gods to fulfill their requests. With their knowledge of the nuanced details of the sacrificial rituals, they gained the power to compel the gods to bring about what they needed (see Keith 1918, 10:805; Dasgupta 1922, 1:6).

Ṛta/aša and Divinity: While other great religions, including the Iranian counterpart of ṛta, namely aša, maintain that everything falls under divine dominion, this cannot conclusively be said regarding the Vedic texts, particularly in the relationship between ṛta and the divine, where contrary evidence can be presented. Various passages in the Vedas speak of a relationship between ṛta and various gods, but none depict the gods as the origins or creators of ṛta. Instead, in some cases, the gods are said to be born of ṛta and praised for having ṛta (Mahony 1998, 85). The gods are praised for aligning with the movement of ṛta without deviating from its path, and their rule over the world is said to be in virtue of ṛta and its laws and structures.

One of the most important and ancient Vedic gods is Varuna, who rules over the world of humans and gods. Varuna is depicted as the creator of the world, possessing knowledge of everything, being infallible, and seeing all sins and mistakes (Eliade 1978, 1:200-201). Despite having attributes often attributed to great gods, it is said that he was nurtured in *ṛta*'s house (Eliade 1978, 1:200-201) and rules the entire world by virtue of the eternal *ṛta* (*Hymns of the Rigveda* V.63.7 in Griffith 1920). In numerous instances, Varuna and its associated god Mitra are described as the main protectors of *ṛta* and the cosmic order, punishing those who contradict this order

(*Hymns of the Rigveda* V.63.7). Other gods, such as Indra and Visvadeva, are also mentioned as protectors of ṛta (IV.13.10; VI.50.15).

Other gods are also said to follow ṛta. For example, the Goddess Dawn is described as traveling perfectly along the path of ṛta (V.80.4; I.74.3).

Even in the case of Brahman, who later gained special importance in Upanishadic literature, it is said that Brahman originated from ṛta (Dasgupta 1922, 1:36). The Maruts are described as coming from the seat of ṛta (Hymns of the Rigveda IV.21.3), and Vishnu is said to stem from ṛta (I.156.3).

Nothing definitive can be said about the impersonal eternal entity that existed before the emergence of the sky, Earth, and the phenomenal world, and even served as the origin of gods who must act within its frameworks. Perhaps Radhakrishnan (1948, 1:79) is right in suggesting that the first indications of a tendency towards an unchanging mystical truth should be sought here. The nature of this law is unchangeable, and everything that exists is a transient manifestation and an imperfect duplication. The truth is one, without any parts or alterations, while plurality is fluid and transient. However, can we conceive of ṛta, as described in the ancient Vedas, as a primitive allusion to the one indescribable entity that mystics have spoken of, with the phenomenal world being a manifestation thereof?

It is difficult to provide a decisive answer to this question, particularly given the diversity of Vedic theological themes. These themes are presented not as systematic technical propositions but more often as psalms in praise of gods. Moreover, the various interpretations of Vedic perspectives on theism, polytheism, the worship of multiple deities, and even pantheism complicate matters further. All these perspectives find various pieces of evidence in the Vedas.

In any case, as Radhakrishnan notes, the notion of ṛta in the ancient Vedas, whatever it initially represented, soon evolved into the concept of God's providence and the law of moral rightness and conduct (1948, 1:79). This became the criterion and measure of the rightness of any moral and devotional acts by humans, particularly the ritual of sacrifice mentioned earlier. Recognizing this notion transformed the conception of the nature of gods. Henceforth, the universe was seen not as a chaotic construct of random blind elements, but as the result of coordinated, purposeful action. This faith provided security to humans. In these circumstances, it appears that there is a law of rightness and truth in the moral world that mirrors the beautiful order of nature (Radhakrishnan 1948, 1:80).

While many researchers maintain that the time interval between the composition of the Vedas and that of the Gathas, believed to be Zarathustra's own composition, was short, it appears that the connection between arta/aša and Mazda's divinity is considerably distinct from ṛta's relation to the Vedic gods. In this case, such a relationship should be seen as Zarathustra's achievement. Another difference is that, unlike ṛta, aša in the Gathas is explicitly said to be Ahura Mazda's creation:

> He is through His understanding the creator of the righteous order. Therefore, as the first did I conceive of Thee, O Ahura Mazda! (Yasna, 31.7)
>
> As the One to be adored with the mind in the creation, as the Father of the good mind within us, when I beheld thee with my (enlightened) eyes as the veritable maker our righteousness. (Yasna, 31.8)

That said, while Ahura Mazda is the creator of aša, just like the Vedic gods, he acts in harmony with aša, serving as an ashvan,[2] similar to how Vedic gods were ṛtavan. Not only is he the creator of and in harmony with aša, but he also consults with it about building the universe (Yasna, 29.2). He chose it for his followers, urging them to strive towards aša (53.5) in order to reap rewards both in this world and the next (35.8).

Zarathustra and the worshipers of Mazda beseech him to assist them in following aša and in living by its light (Gatha, 30.9). Furthermore, the good words and deeds of ashvans will also safeguard aša (31.22).

The extensive usage of this word in the Gatha and its varied meanings and functions, especially concerning Ahura Mazda, stem partly from the antiquity of the text and the evolutionary processes it underwent, and partly from the lack of a consensus among researchers on a definitive translation. This complexity makes it particularly challenging, if not impossible, to arrive at a conclusive understanding of the relationship between aša and Ahura Mazda.

Ṛta and dharma: In Hindu tradition, alongside the concept of ṛta we have discussed thus far, there is another concept firmly intertwined with ṛta: dharma.

The scope of usage of this term within Indian religions, particularly after the Vedas, is much broader than the former term. It is a pivotal concept not only in Hinduism but also, and perhaps even more prominently, in Buddhism and Jainism. Its significance in Buddhism is so pronounced that Edward Conze, a renowned scholar of Buddhism, delineates numerous meanings of the term in Buddhist texts, ultimately characterizing Buddhism as a religion centered on understanding, action, and the fulfillment of dharma (Conze 2012, 13-25). Suzuki, another prominent scholar of Buddhism, elucidates the literal meaning and conceptual evolution of dharma as follows: the term originates from the root "dhr," signifying to hold, to carry, and to bear. Initially, dharma denoted that which carries, bears, or supports. Over time, its connotation expanded to denote that which serves as the criterion and rule or moderates the course of things, evolving into law, organization, rule, doctrine. In subsequent stages, it encompassed meanings such as duty, justice,

2. This phrase appears in many cases in the Avesta. For instance, in Hadokht Nask, Zarathustra describes Ahura Mazda as "ashvan."

virtue, moral excellence, character, attribute, inherent quality, essence, existence, reality, being, and beyond (Suzuki 1907 220).

In this article, our emphasis lies on the conceptual correlation between this term and ṛta. This connection is significant, given that both words are employed in the Vedas. However, in later periods and in other Hindu and Buddhist texts, dharma began to acquire a broader semantic scope, gradually replacing ṛta. Consequently, some researchers propose that ṛta may be regarded as the Vedic precursor of dharma (Mahony 1998, 85).

However, despite the simultaneous usage of the two terms in the Rigveda, some semantic distinctions between them are noted. As mentioned earlier, ṛta typically pertains to the cosmic order, whereas dharma signifies the protection of ṛta. In translations of the Rigveda, dharma is often interpreted as law or holy law (Hymns of the Rigveda V.15.2, V.51.2, V.63.1), but it particularly denotes sacrificial rituals that safeguard the cosmic order (Holdrege 2004, 216). In these texts, ṛta is frequently translated as "order," referring to the cosmic order. In the Rigveda, Agni is invoked: "By holy Law they kept supporting Order, by help of sacrifice," and Mitra-Varuna is addressed: "Guardians of Order, ye whose Laws are ever true... ye by eternal Order govern all World" (V.63.1,7).

Dharma encompasses the preservation of cosmic and social order. It serves as a criterion achieved by Aryans through the implementation of Vedic rituals and adherence to traditional duties. In its function as the protector of cosmic order, dharma shares a close association with satya (truth or rightness), often used as an attribute of the gods to extoll them (Holdrege 2004, 216).

The statements above regarding the relationship between ṛta and dharma in the Vedas imply that ṛta or cosmic order, as stated in the Vedas, is an eternal entity preceding the gods. Moreover, the gods, as protectors of this sacred cosmic order, enact laws and rulings to preserve ṛta. These laws often concern ritual practices, particularly the nuances of the act of sacrifice. As many Vedic verses explicitly suggest, including those mentioned above, these laws are always deemed right and true, enabling them to fulfill their purpose. Thus, in Vedic passages, dharma or satya dharma are attributed to the gods. However, ṛta is considered a means by which the gods exercise their power to manage the world. They enact dharma but in adherence to ṛta. This power-giving adherence is only possible if they can comprehend the secrets and structure of this mysterious cosmic order. The greater their knowledge, the greater their power.

Interestingly, the thirst for attaining countless supernatural powers through knowledge of the secrets of the structure and order of the universe does not only intensify among the gods but also among later Vedic and Brahmana leaders.

How was this power-bestowing knowledge to be acquired? There existed a belief in the divine or uncreated nature of a scripture, namely the Vedas, which, in

their perspective, contained the secret laws of the universe (Dasgupta 1922, 1:8). These texts were seen as the sole repositories of transcendent truths, invulnerable to challenge by reason alone. Reason's role was merely to strive to reconcile these truths with our sensory experiences and observations (Dasgupta 1922, 1:5, 15-16).

The level of belief in and credibility assigned to scriptures is similarly profound among followers of other religions, including Jews, Christians, Muslims, and even Buddhists. However, what distinguishes and prompts reflection here are the two points highlighted by Dasgupta in his concise yet insightful work. Firstly, while the Vedas are regarded as repositories of the secret laws of the world, they never disclose these secrets to anyone. They contain no assertions about the truths and realities of the world; instead, they remain sealed, imparting only a collection of injunctions. To put it differently, the Vedas constitute not a system of affirmations and negations, but a system of prescriptions and proscriptions, the secrets of which remain unopened and unknown. According to this perspective, the Vedic system of prescriptions and proscriptions held such authority and credibility that it demanded unwavering compliance without the need for rational or logical justifications, as it was believed to guide in a realm beyond the capacities of reason and experience.

The only useful way to employ reason was to accept the Vedas' intimacy and then act in a manner that might make their mysterious nature plausible to us (Dasgupta 1922, 1:14-15). Note: plausible, not knowable. These commands were not intended to engage with people's daily lives, teach social lifestyle, or instruct on how to treat others or beings—matters that could be grasped through reason and experience. Instead, they aimed to guide us in achieving desires beyond ordinary human experiences. These desires, although impossible to achieve through ordinary means, should not be seen as spiritual and inner directives for spiritual nurturing. Rather, they were objective, unchangeable laws considered in realistic ways, referring to material wellbeing and comfort in this life and in Paradise (Dasgupta 1922, 1:10).

Another point suggested by Dasgupta, a prominent Hindu philosopher, is the manner of interpreting Vedic revelation, which is unfamiliar to followers of other religions. The Vedas, and Vedic literature in general, belong to the first of the two main categories of Hindu scriptures: śruti (heard or revealed) texts and smrti (memorized, approximately equivalent to "tradition" or sunna in Islam). What is unusual, unlike in Abrahamic religions, is that this revelation does not involve the existence of a God or any superior being who revealed instructions to humans. Instead, these rulings or commands are considered eternal truths in themselves, having no beginning or end. They have revealed or disclosed themselves to humans, or more precisely, to certain sages. Naturally, compliance with Vedic rulings is not intended to please a god, nor do they imply the acceptance of worldly blessings as divine endowments. On the contrary, they entail the existence of a great impersonal force that harmonizes us and our fate with the events of the natural world (Dasgupta 1922, 1:10).

In the Gathas, however, there are distinct perspectives on both issues. Contrary to the ritual and sacrificial approach of the Vedas, the prescriptions and proscriptions here are largely directed at the moral conduct of Mazda-worshipers and how they align themselves either with truth or aša, or with druj or falsehood. The former is prescribed and the latter is proscribed, with warnings against its harmful repercussions. The Gathas explicitly speak of the freedom to choose either path, assigning a role to reason in this choice: "That at first thou, O Mazdah (mindful) with thy mind and understanding, Thou didst shape substance and spirits, and didst establish body and life, and deeds and doctrines whereby men who exercised their faculties of choice might develop convictions" (Gatha, 11.31). Moreover, it states, "Tell me, O Ahura Mazdah (lord mindful) what is not to occur, and what is to occur, in order that I may distinguish that, what (ever success therein) You may have given me, through Asha (justice) was the better thing" (Gatha, 5.31).

Thus, the Gathas are not only repositories of prescriptions and proscriptions but also accounts of what is and what is not. These elements constitute the Gathas' ontology and deontology. In his supplications to Ahura Mazda, Zarathustra disclosed this ontological secret.

This implies the second distinction. In the Gatha, Ahura Mazda is the creator of the universe and founder of its governing system, aša. He selected Zarathustra and by addressing him, he discloses the secret. By emphasizing the role of reason in human free will, it recounts how humans can attain happiness. In various cases in the Gatha, the prophet underscores his mission: "Therefore, as (heaven) appointed arbiter and judge over both parties, will I go to you, that we may live in accordance with Asha (justice)" (Gatha, 31.2).

Conclusion

Harmony with cosmic order, known by different terms across various cultures, has long been a key criterion for assessing good and bad human behavior, as well as human wellbeing and wretchedness. This indicates that, since antiquity, humans have believed in a firm connection between themselves and nature, or more broadly, with the entire world of existence. As an organic part of the universe, they viewed their actions and thoughts as both influencing and being influenced by the entirety of beings. The belief in the influence of stars, planets, and celestial spheres on human life, traces of which still survive in the works of ancient people and even among some contemporary humans, is a small indication of this widespread ancient belief. This belief is likely a precursor to the theory of microcosm and macrocosm, or the concept of small and big humans, which later gained significance, particularly in certain philosophical and mystical schools.

The Hindu and Iranian traditions share many beliefs tracing back to their common ancient origins. One such belief is the doctrine of cosmic order, referred to in their ancient works and texts with terms that share etymological roots: ṛta,

arta, aša. Despite their shared semantic origins, these concepts have evolved over time, encompassing a broad spectrum of meanings. While they exhibit remarkable semantic affinities in both cultures, they sometimes diverge in the notions they emphasize: Vedic texts highlight the ritual function of this concept, whereas Gathic texts underscore its moral function.

The difference in how ṛta and aša relate to divinity is also significant. In both traditions, God or gods are required to act in harmony with cosmic order. However, Vedic texts depict ṛta as an eternal entity independent of the will of the gods, while in the Gathas, aša is created by Ahura Mazda and represents an order that he has established. Despite being its creator, Ahura Mazda acts within the framework of aša and advises his followers to adhere to it.

In both traditions, ṛta and aša are sometimes fully impersonal and abstract, and other times personified and sanctified, particularly in the tradition of the Gatha. Occasionally, they become so anthropomorphic that providing a precise definition becomes challenging. In Vedic texts, unlike in the Gatha where aša never acquires a status higher than Ahura Mazda, ṛta is sometimes depicted in a way that, as Radhakrishnan suggests, it has the essence of a mystical, unchangeable truth.

In Indian tradition, ṛta gradually gave way to the significant concept of dharma, which is largely related to laws and rituals. However, aša or arta in the Iranian tradition never lost their pivotal, primarily moral significance.

Despite the supreme status of reason and free choice in the Gathas, both Indian and Iranian traditions maintain that revelation or scripture discloses the secret of cosmic order and serves as the criterion of good and evil. However, there are stark contrasts between the two traditions in how they construe the concept of revelation and how it discloses these secrets.

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