

# Meeting 16: The blue-necked stork

Rudrá in Vedic & post-Vedic literature

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# Meeting agenda

- (Re)introduction to discussion group
- Today's topic præsentation
- Free discussion

# Why a Vedá discussion group?

- What is Vedic literature?
  - Sámhitā-s
  - Bráhmaṇa-s
  - Others?
- Vedá-s vs. Vedánta & Upaniṣád-s
  - Later monism (ádvāita) vs. earlier dualism (dvāitá)
- Modern (religious, scholarly) fixation upon later literature

# What is there to discuss?

- History & linguistics
- Metaphysics of religion
- Exegesis (e.g. countering western narratives)
- Moral principles
- Nuances of Śrāutá ritual

# Our plans

- Weekly meetings on Sundays at 1200 EDT
  - Followed by more in-depth literature meeting at 1330 EDT
- Different topic/aspect/angle discussed in depth every week
- Format:
  - Præsentation
  - Free-form discussion
- Eventually something more

# WhatsApp group

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/IXCQEkhfrcwHI7CNY8Fgat>

# Let's introduce ourselves!

- Name
- School (if student)
- How you found this group
- Briefly: background/interest in Hinduism & Vedic literature

## Some questions to consider

- What was Rudrá's role in the original Vedic religion?
- What were some epithets of His that were reinterpreted in post-Vedic times?
- What aspects of post-Purāṇá Śivá can be seen in Vedic Rudrá?
- When did the synthesis of Rudrá with Śivá occur historically, & during what stage of literature is the shift evident?
- To what extent were Rudrá and Śivá still distinguished in later times?
- Who are the Rudrá-s really?



# Who is Rudrá?

## ■ External view

- Etymology probably  $\sqrt{rud}$ 
  - Some say  $\sqrt{vr}d^h$ ,  $\sqrt{ru}$ , perhaps  $\sqrt{rud}^h$  (cf. *rud<sup>h</sup>irá*)
- Name very often trisyllabic: *Rudará* or perhaps *Rudrá*
- IE: very little connection
  - But father of the Marút-s: parellel to IE
  - Also: kóryos/Vrā́ta!

# Who is Rudrá?

## ■ Internal view

- An important though not esp. mentioned God in ṚV: 75 times
- War-God, storm-God, wind-God, thunder-God, beast-God
- Hymns in ṚV:
  - 1.114, 2.33, 7.46
- Most frequently paired with Sóma
  - 1.43, 6.74
- Plenty outside ṚV: famously TS 4.5
- Later paired with Agní (AV+); acc. Doniger, inherited features from Índra

# Vedic descriptions of Rudrá

- Is brown/dark-red (ṚV 2.33.5, VS 16.7) & shines like gold (ṚV 1.43.5)
  - Is blue-necked, *níla-grīva*! (VS 16.7)
  - Has black belly & red back (AV 2.27.6)
- Has braided hair (ṚV 1.114.5) & is clothed in a skin (VS 3.61)
- Has firm limbs (ṚV 2.33.9)
- Is “thousand-eyed”, prob. metaphorical (AV 11.2.2)
- Takes many forms, *puru-rūpa* (ṚV 2.33.9)
- Inhabits the mountains (VS 16.2)
- Has 3 mothers, *tri-ámbaka* (ṚV 7.59.12); later reinterpreted as 3 eyes

# Vedic mythemes about Rudrá

- Carries thunderbolt *didyút* as weapon, like Índra
  - But much more often: the bow *d<sup>h</sup>ánvan* and arrows
- Beasts at the whim of weather: thus, *paśu-páti* (AV+)
  - Also Himself bestial (RV 2.33.11), bull-like (2.33.7)
- Rules over the Heavens & Earth (RV 7.46.2)
  - Father of existence (RV 6.49.10)
- Malevolent: man-slaying, *nṛhán* (RV 4.3.6)
  - Must pray to Him to avoid harm (RV 1.114.7); rather unique
    - Harm is from His lightning or sicknesses (AV 11.2)
- Remained behind when Gods ascended (ŚB 1.7.3.1)
- Receives remainder of sacrificial offerings (AD 2.4.2)
- Robber (VS 16.20)
- Best of all physicians, *b<sup>h</sup>iṣáktama* (RV 2.33.4)
  - (Usually physicians of the Gods are the Aśvín-s)

# And who are the Rudrá-s?

- Class of Gods alongside Ādityá-s & Vásu-s
- In my & most western scholars' opinion: straightforwardly synonymous with Marút-s
  - who are also called Rudríya-s
  - But later indigenous sources disagree
    - cf. general “God as title” phænomenon
    - or Puranic interpretation: Śivá splits into 11
- Mentioned from ṚV onwards
- Sons & soldiers of *the* Rúdra by the cow Pṛśni
  - Interesting parellel to natural phænomena: storm-clouds
  - Literalist interpretation of Vedá
- Associated with Índra in war rather than with Rudrá

# Who is Śivá?

- Not a person!
  - Not controversial to anyone who has read the Vedá
- Adjective: „heilsam, heilbringend, hold, günstig“
- Noun: „Heil, Glück“
- Used in RV to describe Agní, Índra, Tváṣṭṛ, Vāyú, i.a.
  - Rúdra only once! (10.92.9)
- Later association with Rúdra most likely euphemistic (cf. Macdonell)

# Rudrá in the Vedá: an overview

- Terrible, fearsome, bestial, but divine & not dæmonic
- Descriptions are consistent throughout Sáṁhitā-s (& Bráhmaṇa-s?)
- More emphasis is placed on Him towards later Sáṁhitā-s (esp. VS)
  - VS description most conspicuously similar to later Śivá
- Morally neutral nature præsent from very beginning
  - But honored & placated by men just as other Gods are

# Rudrá after the Vedá

- Almost always quā Śivá: little distinction
- TA & KU have some of earliest consolidation
  - Umā & Pārvatī
  - TA 10.22.1: definition of Rudrá as Śivá
- “God of destruction”: not seen in Vedá (nor is trinity, of course)
- Some similarities with Índra’s downfall
  - Purāṇá-s portray Him as foolish
  - Constantly seeks Víṣṇu’s help
  - Suffers personal/familial issues from His misdeeds



# Rudrá outside Hinduism

- Śivá as a synthesis of Vedism with “Dravidian” beliefs
- “Paśu-pāti” seal in IVC
- Lots of hogwash in my opinion
- Liṅga worship condemned in ṚV 7.21.5, *śiśná-deva*
- Buddhism: dæmon condemned to Hell, destroyed and converted to d<sup>h</sup>amma
- Jainism: 11 Rudra-s
- Sikhism: mostly unrelated; name for divine order *hukam*

# The significance of Rudrá to Vedic revivalism

- Rudrá is the basis for the most important, supreme God of around a third of Hindus.
- Mythology & aspects significantly different in Vedism vs. Shaivism
- But much less of a dichotomy than Índra: Śivá continues to be worshiped & honored under the name Rudrá with recognizably continuous traits
- Perhaps an opportunity for synthesis

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## Some references

- Kazanas, N. D. "Indo-European deities & the Ṛg-vedā."  
*J. Indoeur. Stud.*, 2001.
- MacDonell, A. A. "Vedic Mythology."  
*Grundr. Indoar. Philol. Altertumskd.*, 1897.