

# Meeting 6: The Vedic pitch accent

## Speaking, recitation, & interpretation

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# WhatsApp group

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

# Meeting agenda

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

# Why a Vedā discussion group?

- What is Vedic literature?
  - Sáṃhitā-s
  - Brāhmaṇa-s
  - Others?

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  - Later monism (ádvaita) vs. earlier dualism (dvaita)
- Modern (religious, scholarly) fixation upon later literature

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  - Later monism (ádvaita) vs. earlier dualism (dvaita)
- 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
- Different topic/aspect/angle discussed in depth every meeting
- Format:
  - Præsentations
  - Free-form discussions
- Eventually something more?

# Let's introduce ourselves!

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

## Some questions to consider

- Why is the Vedic accent important?
- When, how, & why was it lost?
- How was the Vedic accent originally pronounced in speech?
- Is the *samhitā-pāṭha* really the original pronunciation of the *Vedá-s*?  
(No.)
- Can the Vedic accent be applied to later Sanskrit?
- We'll return to these at the end!

# What is the Vedic accent?

- One syllable (or rarely two) takes an emphasis denoted by an acute accent
  - *devás, devéna*
  - *páť, padá*
  - *kártavái, ráthas-páti*
- Sometimes determined by rules (e.g. when derived from verbal root); sometimes not!
  - For basic lemmata: must be memorized
- “Independent svaritá”?

# Philology

- Vedic accent & (Indo-Iranian, Indo-European) reconstruction
  - Much better than Ancient Greek!
- Best source of accent assignment
  - Contributes to many sound changes in other families

# The tradition of different schools

- RV tradition considered “standard” even for many non-RV hymns
- Basic pattern: low preceding accented syllable, high following
- Blocked by another accented syllable nearby
- Totally breaks meter, particularly with svaritá-s
- Long svaritá: RV vs. KYV

# Restoring the accent in Classical

- Surprising number of words straightforward to reconstruct
- Otherwise: etymological reconstruction
  - Following standard rules from inference or Pāṇini
- Phonological reconstruction?
  - Not ideal: not entirely clear how syllable stress worked in Classical

# Why is the accent important?

- Interpretation of precise meanings
  - One example: *śiśná-deva*
  - Clearly bahú-vrīhi (exocentric)
  - Is it *déva* or *devá*? Scholars differ.
- Proper recitation technique
- Construction of Vedic identity
  - The accent is perhaps the clearest delineation between the Vedic & non-Vedic eras.
- Others?

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