

Meeting 28: The Devá-s & Ásura-s

Contradiction or subsumption?

Nikhil Surya Dwibhashyam

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Why a Vēda discussion group?

- What is Vedic literature?
 - Sāmhitā-s
 - Brāhmaṇa-s
 - Others?
- Vēda-s vs. Vedānta, Upaniṣād-s, Purāṇā-s
 - Later monism (ādvāita) vs. earlier dualism
 - Moral–political subtexts
- Modern (religious, scholarly) fixation upon later literature

What is there to discuss?

- History & linguistics
- Metaphysics of religion
- Exegesis (e.g. western vs. Eastern narratives)
- Moral principles
- Nuances of Śrāutá ritual
- How we can apply Vedic principles to our lives

Our plans

- Weekly “general audience” meetings on Sundays at 1200 EDT
 - Followed by in-depth literature meeting at 1330 EDT
- Different topic/aspect/angle discussed every week
- Format:
 - Præsentation
 - Free-form discussion
- Eventually something more
 - Children's books
 - Poëtry collective
 - Documentation
 - Actual rituals

WhatsApp group

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

Let's introduce ourselves!

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

Some questions to consider

- Who are the Devá-s?
- Who are the Ásura-s?
- What parallels do They have in other IE religions?
- Are *Devá* and *Ásura* synonyms? antonyms? neither?
- To what extent is the conflict between Devá-s & Ásura-s a later development?

Etymology

- *Devá* < \sqrt{div} “shine” or *div* “Heavens”
 - *divyá*
- *Ásura* < *ásu* “life force”
 - RV 10.15.1: Pitṛ-s attained ásu
 - Uṇādi: < \sqrt{as} “cast”
 - Many false etymologies
 - I recently heard < *súra*!
 - Obviously cognate with Av. *Ahura*
 - Æsir
 - *asuríá*, *asuryá*

Some western theories

- Parpola, Shendge: Devá-s for Ārya-s, Ásura-s for Dásyus
- Delhi: PII God named Ásura > Váruṇa
- Ásuras representing older Gods like Dív Pitṛ
 - Agní “leaving” Father for Devá-s: RV 10.124.2–3
- Consensus: Initially (quasi-)synonymous, then conflict developed
- I argue: all of these are wrong.

Apposition

- *Yákṣvā mahé • sāumanasāya Rudrám. / Námobhir Devám • Ásuram duvasya* (RV 5.42.11).
 - “Worship Rudrá for His great goodwill. With salutations honor the God, Ásura.”
- *Mahántā Mitrá–Váruṇā / samrājā Devāv–Ásurā* (RV 8.25.4).
 - “Great Mitrá–Váruṇa, sovereign God–Ásura-s.”
- *Tá hí Devánām • Ásurā táv aryá* (RV 7.65.2).
 - “For they [Mitrá–Váruṇa] are Ásura-s of the Gods, those kind ones.”
- *Mahád Devánām • Asuratvám ékam* (RV 3.55.1).
 - “Great is the sole Ásura-hood of the Gods.”

All Gods given label Ásura

- Previously: Rudrá, Mitrá, Váruṇa
- *Tuám rājā · Indra yé ca Devāḥ. / Rákṣā nṛṇ. Pāhí · Asura Tvám asmān* (RV 1.174.1).
 - “Thou art king, O Índra, of all the Gods. Protect the men. Guard us, O thou Ásura.”
- Others: Savitr̥, Dív Pitṛ, Agní, Pūṣán, Aryamán, Ādityá-s

Evil Ásura-s in the Ṛg-vedá!

- Not a “later interpolation”
 - Spread throughout both old and new hymns!
- ṚV 2.30.4, 7.99.5: heroes of the Ásura
- ṚV 8.96.9, 10.53.4, 10.157.4: Ásura-s Themselves

Subsumption theory

- Not difficult to synthesize views
- $D \in A$
 - $A = \arg \max_D \text{Asuratvá}$
 - Separately: $A = x : x \in A \wedge x \notin D$

Actual later developments

- Some synonymous use with Rákṣas in Classical period
- (Incomplete) loss of original meaning synonymous with Devá-s

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