

Meeting 20: From the Kṛttikā-s to the B^hāraṇī-s

Exploring Vedic asterisms and astrolomy

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Meeting agenda

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

Why a Vēda discussion group?

- What is Vedic literature?
 - Sāmhita-s
 - Brāhmaṇa-s
 - Others?
- Vēda-s vs. Vedānta & Upaniṣād-s
 - Later monism (ādvāita) vs. earlier dualism (dvāitā)
- 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 is the significance of the náḁṣatra-s to the Vedic religion?
 - in later Hinduism?
- What sectarian trends might have existed in the relevance of the náḁṣatra-s?
- What *are* the náḁṣatra-s metaphysically? How were they formed?
- To what extent are Vedic astronomy & astrology compatible with modern science?
 - Literally? metaphorically?
- What elements of the Vedic astrological tradition can be found in modern Hindu astrology?

Vedic astronomy & cosmology

- *Pari-maṇḍalá u vā́ ayám lokáḥ* (ŚB 7.1.1.37): “This world indeed is round.”
- *Sa vā eṣa na kadā can’ āstam eti n’ od eti. Taṁ yad astam etī ’ti manyante, ’hna eva tad antam itvā ’tḥ’ ātmānam vi pary asyate. Rātrīm ev’ āvastāt kurute ’haḥ parastāt* (AB 3.44.6–7): “Never indeed does He set nor rise. When it is thought that He sets, having arrived at the day’s end, then He turns Himself over. He makes night below & day above.”
- Possible heliocentrism (prob. not): *Tád Ādityá imām lokán sūtre sám ā́ vayate* (ŚB 8.7.3.10): “Then the Sun strings himself to these worlds on a thread.”
 - Geocentrism as a metaphysical–moral position
- The Earth has 7 regions (RV 1.22.16).

Vedic astronomy & cosmology (contd.)

- *Ádhi tvíṣīr · adhita Súrīasya* (RV 9.71.9): “He (Sóma) hath assumed Súra’s brilliance.”
- Sacrifice necessary for Sun-rise (SB 2.3.1.5)? Other interpretations are possible.
- The Sun is frequently called a star (*nákṣatra viṣvā-deva*).
- “Eclipse-causing dæmon” Súarbhānu (RV 5.40) doesn’t refer to eclipse
- No notion of cyclical time or later Hindu ideas like the Manv-ántara-s
- One view: creation “as-is” by Gods (Young Earth Creationism)
 - Alternatively, more metaphorical views (Old Earth)

Vedic astrology vs. “Vedic astrology”

- Modern Indian astrology is a Greek import (cf. Yavaneśvara) integrated with local (incl. Vedic) traditions.
- Horoscopes, personality traits, Zodiac, week-days, Mangalik, &c. totally absent from Vedic period & in some cases even præ-mediæval period
- Vedic astrology used to appoint times for sacrificial (& later other) ritual
- That is: fundamentally **not prædictive**
- Náḁṣatra-s were limit of Vedic astronomy/astrology
 - Little if any discussion of planets, for example

What is a náḁṣatra?

- Prob. $\sqrt{nakṣ}$ “attain” + *-tra* “means”
 - Aufrecht: *nákta* “night” + *-tra* “protection”
 - ŚB 2.1.2.19 (“kabbalistic” etymology genre): *ná* + *kṣatrá* “power”
- “Asterism”: constellation but unofficial
- Also used synonymously with *stṛ́*
- “Lunar mansions”: division of 27–28 days, segments of the Moon’s ecliptic

Stṛ in the Ṛg-vedā

- *Pipéṣa nākam̐ · stṛb^hir dāmūnāḥ* (1.68.10): “The householder (Agní) adorned the sky with stars.”
- *Aruṣásya · duhitārā ví-rūpe: / stṛb^hir anyā́ · pipiṣé Súrav anyā́* (6.49.3): “The Red’s daughters are unlike: one adorned with stars, the other the Sun’s.”
 - i.e. Day & Night

Nákṣatra(-s) in the Ṛg-vedá

- *Ápa tyé táyávo yathā / náḁṣatrā yanti aktúb^hiḥ / Súráya viṣvá-caḁṣase.* (1.50.2): “Like thieves the constellations go away with their light before the all-seeing Sun.”
- *Śṛṇótu naḁ · Pṛ^hiví Dyāúr ut’ ápaḁ / Súryo náḁṣatrāir · urú antárikṣam* (3.54.19): “May they hear us: the Earth, the Heavens, the waters, the Sun, the stars, the wide space.”
- *Dṛḁhó náḁṣatra · utá viṣvá-devaḁ / B^húmim á atān · Díām d^hāsín’ āyóḁ* (6.67.6): “Fixed, the star of all gods (Súrya) / filled the Earth & the Heavens with the food of life.”
- *Náḁṣatreb^hiḥ · Pitáro Dyām apimṣan* (10.68.11): “The Fathers decorated the Heavens with stars.”
- *Á^ho náḁṣatrāṇām eṣām / upást^he Sóma áhitaḁ* (10.85.2): “Thus among the stars in this place Sóma (the Moon) is set.”
- *Náḁṣatram pratnām · áminac cariṣṇú* (10.88.13): “The ancient star (Agní) eternally wandering”

Nákṣatra-s in the At^harva-vedá (19.7.1)

Citrāṅi sākām · Diví rocanāni
sarīsrpāṅi · b^húvane javāni
aṣṭā-vimśām · su-matīm ichámānaḥ
áhāni gīrb^hiḥ · saparyāmi nākam.

*Shining bright together in the Heavens,
gliding through the world in haste:
I, seeking the favor of those twenty-eight,
worship the days & the sky with songs.*

Nákṣatra-s in the Atharva-vedá (19.7.2)

Su-hávam me • Kṛttikā Róhiṇī ca
ástu bʰadrám • Mṛgáśiraḥ śám Ādrá
Púnarvasū • sūnṛtā cáru Púṣyaḥ
bʰānúr āṣleṣā • áyanam Magʰā me.

*May the Kṛttikā-s (1) & Róhiṇī (2) be well-invoked for me,
be Mṛgáśiras (3) blessed, Ādrá (4) healthy,
be the Púnarvasu-s (5) pleasant, Púṣya (6) agreeable,
be the Āṣleṣā-s (7) bright, the Magʰā-s (8) progress for me.*

Nákṣatra-s in the Atharva-vedá (19.7.3)

Púṇyam Púrvā · Phálgunyāu c' átra Hástaḥ
Citrá śivá · Svātí sukhó may astu
Rádho Viśákhe · su-háv' Ānurādhá
Jyēṣṭhā su-nákṣatram · áriṣṭa Mūlam.

*May the Former Phálgunī-s (9) [& the Latter (10)] & Hásta (11) be virtue,
be Citrá (12) holy & Svātí (13) easy for me,
be the Viśákhe-s (14) bounty & Ānurādhá (15) well-invoked,
be Jyēṣṭhā (16) well-starred & Mūla (17) uninjured.*

Nákṣatra-s in the Atharva-vedá (19.7.4)

Ānnam Púrva · rāsatām may Aṣād^{hā}ḥ
úrjaṁ Devī · Úttarā á vahātu
Ab^{hij}ín me · rāsatām púṇyam evá
Śróṇaḥ Śráviṣṭ^{hā}ḥ · kurvatām su-puṣṭím.

*May the **Former Aṣād^{hā}-s** (18) grant me food,
the **Latter** (19) Goddesses bring me strength,
Ab^{hij}ít (20) grant me virtue indeed,
Śróṇa (21) & the Śráviṣṭ^{hā}-s (22) make good prosperity.*

Nákṣatra-s in the Atharva-vedá (19.7.5)

Ā me mahác · Chatáb^{hi}ṣag várīyaḥ
ā me dvayā · Próṣṭ^hapadā su-ṣárma
ā Revátī · c' Āṣvayújāu b^hágam me
ā me rayím · Bháraṇya ā vahantu.

*May Śatáb^{hi}ṣaj (23) bring me great freedom,
the two [Former and Latter] Próṣṭ^hapadā-s (24, 25) good refuge to me,
Revátī (26) and the Aṣvayúj-s (27) fortune to me,
the Bháraṇī-s (28) treasure to me.*

Nákṣatra-s in the Tāittirīya-sámhitā

- Some differences in enumeration (4.4.10): Tiṣyà for Púṣya, Svātí for Svā́tí, Róhiṇī (repeated) for Jyéṣṭhā, Vicṛt-s for Mūla, Apab^hāraṇī-s for B^hāraṇī-s
- Each náḁṣatra assigned to a God, e.g. Kṛttikā-s to Agní, Róhiṇī to Prajāpati
- Náḁṣatra-s appointed for certain rites: e.g. consecration on Citrá (TS 7.4.8), Púnarvasu-s for rekindling (TS 1.5.1)
- Náḁṣatra-s themselves hailed in many rituals; also náḁṣatra-bricks and -offerings
- *Sukṛtām vā etāni jyótiṣi yán náḁṣatrāṇi* (TS 5.4.1.3): “The lights of the well-doers, these are the stars.”
- Enumeration in Tāittirīya-brāhmaṇa aligns with TS
 - Much more detailed descriptions, esp. TB 3.1.1–2
 - See also TB 1.1.2, 1.5.1.

Nákṣatra-s in the Śata-pat^ha-bráhmaṇa

- Similar situation to KYV in ritual hailing
- No enumeration of náḁṣatra-s like in KYV, nor assignment to Gods
- Fewer ritual præscriptions, but still some:
 - Funerals should be performed in a “singular” náḁṣatra (ŚB 8.8.1.3).
- The Sun took away (*ā* √ *dā*) the power of the stars, and can serve as a náḁṣatra (ŚB 2.1.2.18–19).
- *Nákṣatrāṇi vāi jánayo, yé hí jánāḥ puṇya-kṛtaḥ Svargám lokám yánti* (ŚB 6.5.4.8): “The stars are people, who acting virtuously go to Svargá.”
- *Nákṣatrāṇi vāi sárveṣāṃ Devānām āyátanam* (ŚB 14.3.2.12): “The stars are the home of all the Gods.”

Vedic vestiges today

- Original Vedic náḁṣatra-s still used today by astrologers
- Certain rituals must be performed at ordained, auspicious times.
- How divergent from Vedic præscriptions?

Interesting blog posts

- mAnasa-taraMgiNI. “nakShatra homa as per the kAThaka yajurvedins.” 2007.
- mAnasa-taraMgiNI. “A note on the asterisms forming the nakṣatra-s.” 2017.

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