

# Meeting 1: Vratá-s, Satyá, & Mitrá–Váruṇa

## The Vedic conception of oath-keeping

Nikhil Surya Dwibhashyam, Rohan Pandey

20 February 2022

# Meeting agenda

- Introduction to discussion group
- Today's meeting topic
- Free discussion

# Why a Vedā discussion group?

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

# Why a Vedā discussion group?

- What is Vedic literature?
  - Sāmhitā-s
  - Brāhmaṇa-s
  - Others?
- Vedā-s vs. Vedānta & Upaniṣād-s
  - Later monism (ādvāita) vs. earlier dualism (dvāitā)
- Modern fixation upon later literature

# Why a Vedá discussion group?

- What is Vedic literature?
  - Sámhitā-s
  - Bráhmaṇa-s
  - Others?
- Vedá-s vs. Vedānta & Upaniṣád-s
  - Later monism (ádväita) vs. earlier dualism (dvāitá)
- Modern fixation upon later literature
- What is there to discuss?
  - History & linguistics
  - Metaphysics of religion
  - Moral principles
  - Nuances of Śrāutá ritual

# Our plans

- Weekly meetings
- Different topic/aspect/angle discussed in depth every meeting
- Presentations
- Free-form discussions
- Eventually something more?

# Today's topic: Vratá-s, Satyá, & Mitrá–Váruṇa

vratá n. (MW on ṚV)

- will, command, law, ordinance, rule
- sphere of action, function, mode or manner of life, conduct, manner, usage, custom
- a religious vow or practice, any pious observance, meritorious act of devotion or austerity, solemn vow, rule, holy practice

# Today's topic: Vratá-s, Satyá, & Mitrá–Váruṇa

## vratá n. (MW on ṚV)

- will, command, law, ordinance, rule
- sphere of action, function, mode or manner of life, conduct, manner, usage, custom
- a religious vow or practice, any pious observance, meritorious act of devotion or austerity, solemn vow, rule, holy practice

## satyá n. (MW)

- truth, reality (ṚV &c)
- a solemn asseveration, vow, promise, oath (AV &c)



# Some questions to consider

- What is uniquely Vedic about the vratá?
- What are the religious & social consequences of breaking an oath?
- Why is the oath so fundamentally important to the Árya?
- What oaths must an Árya make?
- What are the implications of strict oath-keeping on our personal lives?
  - on social organization?

# The best place to start

- Usually a concordance!
- e.g. searching `. *vrat . *` in Graßmann's dictionary
  - *ánu-vrata*, *anyá-vrata*, *avratá*, ..., *su-vratá*
- What do we notice from the words' contexts?

# Are oaths fundamental to the *Árya* identity?

- *Árya*: a *vṛddhi*-ed form of *aryá* (Graßmann: *treu, ergeben, fromm*)?

# Are oaths fundamental to the Árya identity?

- *Árya*: a vǫdd<sup>hi</sup>-ed form of *aryá* (Graßmann: treu, ergeben, fromm)?
- *Aryá* probably from *arí* (MW: faithul, devoted, pious), not to be confused with *ári* (enemy!)

# Are oaths fundamental to the Árya identity?

- *Árya*: a vǫdd<sup>hi</sup>-ed form of *aryá* (Graßmann: treu, ergeben, fromm)?
- *Aryá* probably from *arí* (MW: faithul, devoted, pious), not to be confused with *ári* (enemy!)
- Loyalty/faithfulness (quā oath-keeping) as a distinguishing trait of ethnoreligious Árya identity?

# Are oaths fundamental to the Árya identity?

Ánu-vratāya · rand<sup>h</sup>áyann ápa-vratān  
āb<sup>h</sup>úb<sup>h</sup>ir Índraḥ · śnat<sup>h</sup>áyann ánāb<sup>h</sup>uvaḥ.

*Subduing the oath-breaking for the oath-following,  
Índra destroys the strengthless by the strong.*

—RV 1.51.9ab

- 1.51.8 makes clear: former are Dásyu-s, latter are Árya-s
- Herrenmoral? but also! piousness, loyalty

# Vedic duality: avratá & asatyá

# Vedic duality: Mitrá-Váruṇa



What happens to the avratá-s?

# Vrátya-s, Brāhmaṇá-s & the vratá