

Meeting 6: The Vedic pitch accent

Nikhil Surya Dwibhashyam, Rohan Pandey

3 April 2022

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?
 - Sāmhitā-s
 - Brāhmaṇa-s
 - Others?

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- Vedá-s vs. Vedánta & Upaniṣád-s
 - Later monism (ádvāita) vs. earlier dualism (dvāitá)
- Modern (religious, scholarly) fixation upon later literature

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 - Later monism (ádväita) 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
- 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, and why was it lost?
- How was the Vedic accent originally pronounced in speech?
- Is the saṁhitā-páṭha 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*
 - *pát, padá*
 - *kártavāí, ráthas-páti*
- Sometimes determined by rules (e.g. when derived from verbal root); sometimes not!
 - For basic lemmata: must be memorized
- “Independent svaritá”?

- Vedic accent and (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 and non-Vedic eras.
- Others?

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