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NOTIZ – NOTICE

A Note On Ṛg Veda III.54.21(c)

ALAKA HEJIB / ARVIND SHARMA

I

Ṛg Veda III.54.21 runs as follows:

Sādā sugāḥ pitumāñ astu pánthā
Mádhvā devā ósadhīḥ sám pipṛkta /
Bhāgo me agne sakhyé ná mṛdhyā
Úd rāyó asyām sádanam purukṣóḥ //¹

The word *mṛdhyā-* in *pāda* (c) of this verse raises a syntactical problem; namely, whether it is to be properly connected with *bhāgo*² or with *agne*. This problem regarding the concordance of the verb and the noun is caused by the nature of the verbal ending. The form *mṛdhyāḥ* is second person singular of the optative aorist from the root *mṛdh* (to neglect)³. If the verb is taken to be in syntactic agreement with the vocative form *agne*, then the noun *bhāgo* is left unconstrued. If, however, one tries to construe *mṛdhyāḥ* with *bhāgo*, as Geldner⁴ and Renou⁵ seem to, then the verb does not agree with the noun and is *made* to agree with the noun through various devices⁶.

¹ F. Max Müller, *The Hymns of the Rig-Veda in the Samhita and Pada Texts*, Vol. I, Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1965, p. 253.

² Hermann Grassmann reads *bhāyas* for *bhāgo* in *Wörterbuch zum Rig-Veda*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1964, p. 1060, but this seems to be a printing error as in his translation of the verse under discussion he obviously reads the text as cited above (see Hermann Grassmann, *Rig Veda*, Erster Theil, Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1876, p. 97). This is further confirmed by the fact that the verse under discussion is cited by him under the entry *bhāgas* in his *Wörterbuch zum Rig Veda*, p. 922.

³ See Arthur Anthony Macdonell, *A Vedic Grammar for Students*, Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 407; Hermann Grassman, *Wörterbuch zum Rig-Veda*, p. 1060. Louis Renou, however, takes *mṛdhyāḥ* as “pseudo-précatif”, to be juxtaposed with *asyām* in *pāda* (d), which is a “pure optative form” (see *Etudes Védiques et Pāninéennes*, Tome IV, Paris: E. de Boccard, 1957, p. 50).

⁴ Karl Friedrich Geldner, *Der Rig-Veda*, Erster Teil, Harvard University Press, 1951, p. 399.

⁵ Louis Renou, *op.cit.*, Tome V, p. 14.

⁶ Geldner seems to read *mṛdhyāt* for *mṛdhyāḥ* (Bhaga [das Glück] möge in meiner Freundschaft nicht fehlen, O Agni) and Renou takes *mṛdhyāḥ* as third person singular pseudo-precative (O Agni, puisse Bhaga ne pas me faire défaut en alliance!).

The purpose of this paper is to examine whether syntactic agreement can be achieved within the *pāda* consistently with the form *mṛdhyāḥ* taken as a second person singular of the optative mood.

II

The three key words involved in the syntactic situation in *pāda* (c) are (1) Agne, (2) *bhágaḥ*, and (3) *mṛdhyāḥ*. Out of these three, there is little difference of opinion regarding Agne, which is accepted on all hands as the vocative form for Agni. The syntactical difficulties arise in the case of the other two.

The word *bhágaḥ*, being nominative (singular), cannot agree with *mṛdhyāḥ* (which is second person singular of the optative mood). If, however, one takes the word *bhágaḥ* as relating not to the verb directly, but indirectly through the word Agni, then it seems to pose less of a problem. There are three ways of connecting *bhágaḥ* with *agne*: (1) to take *bhágaḥ* as a vocative rather than a nominative⁷; (2) to take it as a predicative adjective of Agni⁸; and (3) to take it as an adjectival clause forming a parenthetical unity by itself, with the verb ‘to be’ understood (*bhágaḥ san*). The first two options involve emendation of the text, as do the suggestions by Renou and Geldner; hence the third option seems preferable. Indeed, it is precisely this option which seems to have been used by Hermann Grassmann, who translates the clause as follows:

... Vertheilend, Agni, denk an meine Freundschaft ...⁹

Thus Grassmann takes the word *bhágas* as applying to Agni¹⁰ in the sense of the distributor of gifts or riches.

⁷ This procedure is tempting, as the Rg Veda does contain double vocatives with the verb in the singular, e.g. Rg Veda VII.6.1. This would mean that we take Bhágas to be a separate deity, and not take it as in the nominative, which it clearly is. Hence, though tempting, the option does not seem to be desirable.

⁸ In this case *bhágas* is no longer taken as a separate deity but is only understood as an epithet of Agni. This, however, also involves disregarding its nominative inflexion and hence this option too does not seem to be desirable.

⁹ Hermann Grassmann, *Rig Veda*, Erster Theil, p. 97.

¹⁰ Hermann Grassmann, *Wörterbuch zum Rig-Veda*, p. 922, meaning (1) “der Zuteiler”, etc., and “so auch in Vergleichen (mit na, iva) ... von Agni”.

III

Grassmann's translation, however, although it seems to resolve the problem regarding the syntactic status of *bhāgas* in connection with *mṛdhyāḥ*, creates other difficulties. He uses the verb "andenken" (to remember)¹¹ to translate *(ná) mṛdhyāḥ*. Such a meaning can only be obtained if "ná mṛdhyāḥ" is read together as a unit, for the verb *mṛdh* means to neglect¹², and to remember means not to neglect. It must be borne in mind, however, that Grassmann, in translating *bhāgas* with Agni, has already taken the particle *ná* into account as a particle of comparison¹³. Now he is again using the same *ná* as a particle of negation, which is implied in his translation of *(ná) mṛdhyāḥ* as "denk an". It is true that the particle *ná* can be a particle of comparison and/or negation¹⁴, but whether it can be both simultaneously, or whether an extra *ná* can be supplied analogically¹⁵, in two different senses, remains to be established¹⁶.

IV

On the basis of the foregoing discussion it now seems possible to offer a translation of Rg Veda III.54.21(c) without doing violence to the text as follows:

O Agni, (being) the distributor (of gifts), do not neglect my friendship.

¹¹ Dr. Otto Springer, ed., *Langenscheidt's Encyclopaedic Dictionary of English and German Languages*, Part II, Berlin: Langenscheidt, 1974, p. 79.

¹² Arthur Anthony Macdonell, *op.cit.*, p. 407. Hermann Grassmann himself assigns the meaning "nachlassen, lässig werden" to this particular occurrence of *mṛdh* (*Wörterbuch zum Rig-Veda*, p. 1060).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 922.

¹⁴ William Dwight Whitney, *Sanskrit Grammar*, Harvard University Press, 1971, p. 413, para. 1122 c and h.

¹⁵ Geldner, for instance, supplies a comparative *na* after *somāḥ* in his translation of X.46.7(d): *vanarsado vāyavo na somāḥ*, vide *op.cit.*, Dritter Teil, p. 204. Also see his translation of Rg Veda IV.2.17.

¹⁶ It may be argued that the examples from classical Sanskrit do create room for suggesting that such a simultaneous use of *ná* may be a possibility. Thus the use of the *kākāṣigolakanyāya* (P. K. Gode and C. G. Karve, eds., *V. S. Apte's The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Vol. III, Poona: Prasad Prakashan, 1959, Appendix E, p. 58) and the existence of *śleṣa* as a figure of speech in later Sanskrit (vide Viśvanatha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa* X. 643) could be cited as examples. However, it must be borne in mind that the former is largely current in colloquial usage and the *śleṣa* as a figure of speech does not in general seem to apply to indeclinables.