

Zeitschrift: Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft =
Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft

Band: 31 (1977)

Heft: 1

Rubrik: Notiz = Notice

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 03.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

NOTIZ – NOTICE

A Note On *Rg Veda* III.54.21(c)

ALAKA HEJIB / ARVIND SHARMA

I

Rg Veda III.54.21 runs as follows:

Sádā sugáḥ pitumāñ̄ astu pánthā
Mádhvā devā óṣadhiñ̄ sám pipr̄kta /
Bhágó me agne sakhyé ná mṛdhyā
Úd rāyó asyām sádanam̄ purukṣóḥ //¹

The word *mṛdhyā*- in *pāda* (c) of this verse raises a syntactical problem; namely, whether it is to be properly connected with *bhágó*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 *bhágó* is left unconstrained. If, however, one tries to construe *mṛdhyāḥ* with *bhágó*, 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 *bháyas* for *bhágó* 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 *bhágas* 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 Pāṇinéennes*, 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) *bhágah*, 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 *bhágah*, being nominative (singular), cannot agree with *mṛdhyāḥ* (which is second person singular of the optative mood). If, however, one takes the word *bhágah* 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 *bhágah* with *agne*: (1) to take *bhágah* 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 (*bhágah 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 Zutheiler”, 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 *bhágas* 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 *bhágas* 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 *kākāksigolakanyāya* (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 *slesa* as a figure of speech in later Sanskrit (vide Viśvanatha, *Sāhityadarpana* 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 *slesa* as a figure of speech does not in general seem to apply to indeclinables.