

India's Vedic Grammarians

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The earliest more or less datable events in the cultural history of India, the death of the Buddha and the composition of Pāṇini's grammar, antedate with one to two centuries a slow and hesitant shift from orality to the written transmission of sacred and literary texts. These same events presuppose a long tradition of Vedic texts, and Pāṇini's grammar moreover presupposes a long tradition of grammatical and linguistic concerns with these texts.

We are therefore confronted with a tradition of Vedic texts stretching over two to three millennia, out of which only the last few centuries show a text transmission in written form, usually parallel with a gradually weakening oral and ritual tradition that to varying degrees takes occasional or even systematic support from by that time available written sources. An analysis of the relationship between Pāṇinian and other grammars and the Vedic texts is of utmost importance and has consequences both for the analysis of Vedic texts and for our understanding of Pāṇinian and other grammars. The remarkable contributions of Thieme (1935) and Bronkhorst (2007) are still only pioneering works that have explored only part of the problem area. The fact, for instance, that Pāṇini devotes a great number of rules specifically to Vedic forms and prescribes other rules apparently in order to cover both the current high standard language—*bhāṣā*—and Vedic usage undermines the position defended in recent decades that pure semantics or meaning conditions would be the starting point of Pāṇini's grammar: the Pāṇinian consultation cycle must evidently have started with a preliminary statement (cp. Houben 1999, 2009), whether from Vedic or current usage, which is next “polished” (*samskṛta*) by the application of rules to problematic aspects in it, in the case of Vedic forms especially its accentuation, the linguistic intuition for which was on the verge of extinction in Pāṇini's time.

It would be a matter of simple self-delusion if we would remain satisfied with trying to ask our questions only to the authors whom we know are the oldest in the tradition, Pāṇini, Kātyāyana, Patañjali and the authors of the *Kāśikā*. After all, our perception of the works of these early authors is naturally shaped by the forms in which they were perceived and transmitted to us in the period which, on the one hand, has the old traditions sufficiently available in oral or written form or in ritual and customary practice; and which is, on the other hand, sufficiently close in time so that manuscripts produced have a good chance to survive till at least the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the beginnings of our modern study and editing of these texts. The period to which these two conditions are, from our current standpoint, most applicable is around the 16th–17th century, a period in which Vedic grammar still received consistent and extensive attention in grammars and grammatical treatises. These represent different schools and several views on grammar and on Pāṇini, but in modern studies mainly one among these—a very important one, it is true—has been followed, viz., the one of Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita.

In addition to an overview of contributions of India's Vedic grammarians (i.e., grammarians who have systematically addressed Vedic matters as well), this paper proposes a comparative analysis of the twentieth or *chandas* chapter in the grammar of Bhaṭṭoji's early contemporary, Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa, and a determination on that basis of the state of knowledge

of Vedic texts and Vedic grammar in Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa's environment, an environment about which we know that it has preserved lively traditions of Vedic ritual to the middle of the last century.