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Nambudiri Veda Recitation: after half a century

by Frits Staal

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Preface

During the last few years of Frits Staal's life (November 3, 1930 - February 19, 2012), we were in frequent email exchange and we also met, at several occasions, in the USA and last in Kerala in 2011.

Several such exchanges were related to an article about his book *Nambudiri Veda Recitation* (NVR) that he proposed for EJVS, as well as about his planned book¹ "*May these Bricks be Cows for me. Infinity, the History of Science and Truth.*" He offered it to Harvard University Press as he thought that the Harvard Oriental Series has a somewhat different aim.

As for the current paper he wrote to me on 6/18/10: "I would like to put my essay on NVR and the Gonda series on my website" [www.fritsstaalberkeley.com, 2010]² This has not occurred then as far as I know. -- In 2010 he was also seriously thinking of a reprint or new edition of this NVR book of which he had obtained a pristine copy.

He sent me an early version of the current article on 6/28/2010, including the highly important section on the high *udātta* pitch, in "a new draft," and on 7/25/2010 "the latest incarnation," for EJVS.

We delayed the publication then as he was occupied with his forthcoming book, and the upcoming Agnicayana at Paññal in 2011; he passed away less than a year later. However, as none of his posthumous works have been published so far I fulfill his wish here.

¹ His proposed outline is attached here:

Part I: Infinity

1. Pinning Down Infinity, 2 – *Place Value Notation and Recursiveness*, 3 – *The Piling of Agni, Trigonometry and π* , 6 – *Vedic India*, 9
2. Greek Philosophers, 11 – *Venus and Aphrodite*, 15
3. Looking Beyond Europe, 17 – *The Noble Savage*, 20

Part II: History Of Science

4. Babylonians Gaze at the Sky, 23 – *From Plato to Copernicus*, 28
5. Languages and Religions, 32 – *The Infinity of a Script: Chinese*, 40
6. How Not To Do It, 44

Part III: Truth

7. Names Only? Sanskrit and Chinese, 48
 8. Physics, Greed and Superstition, 54
 9. Truth and Theories, 59 – *Object-language and Meta-language*, 62 – *Alan Turing Sharpens the Definitions*, 64.
- Conclusion, 68

Source Notes, 72 – Bibliography, 82 – Indices, Chronological Table. ---

About this he wrote to HUP, along with a draft of the book, on 11/22/2010. On 6/19/10 he even proposed to me: "Let us think together about putting "the whole book" (which you haven't yet seen!) in EJVS. There are features of it that some people who do not see EJVS are interested in."—Unfortunately he did not follow up on this proposal.

² www.fritsstaalberkeley.com. The bare home page is still visible, but not any further contents, at:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20120111175216/http://www.fritsstaalberkeley.com/>. His website at Berkeley

<http://philosophy.berkeley.edu/staal> too has disappeared. See:

<https://www.google.com/a/UniversalLogin?service=jotspot&passive=1209600&continue=http://sites.google.com/site/fritsstaal/&followup=http://sites.google.com/site/fritsstaal/>

These works, notably his “Cows” book and a short autobiography,³ are available in computer files with his son Nanoo Frederic. We hope that they will appear in due course.

M. Witzel, Dec. 27, 2015

³ That was planned to be brought out by his publisher Laurens van Krevelen.

Nambudiri Veda Recitation

After Half a Century

by

Frits Staal

C o n t e n t s

1. NVR and the Gonda Series

2. The High *udātta*

3. Review of NVR by Armand Minard in the *Indo-Iranian Journal* 6, 1962, 302-303, with English translation,

4. Review of NVR by Louis Renou in the *Journal asiatique* of 1962, 294-296, with English translation

Acknowledgements and Bibliography.

1. NVR and the Gonda Series

“Nambudiri Veda Recitation” (“NVR” from now) was packaged and tucked away in 1961 in a wonderfully efficient fashion in a series created by Jan Gonda, the formidable Sanskritist of the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands, author of literally hundreds of volumes on Vedic topics, many of them published in the beginning by Mouton & Company, a reputable publisher in The Hague, but also elsewhere in the Netherlands, e.g., by Oosthoek in Utrecht, North-Holland Publishing Company in Amsterdam, to which in due course Oxford and New York were added, and last but not least E. J. Brill at Leiden.

The Hague is what the Dutch used to call “ ‘s-Gravenhage ” which means something like “Court of the Counts” and looks at a classical past that was destined to disappear or almost disappear not long thereafter. I shall begin with a description and translation of the front matter, immediately following upon the title page of NVR, because it illustrates why I wrote that the book was “packaged and tucked away” in such a manner that it contributed to its oblivion.

Facing the title, there is a page which looks as follows:

**DISPUTATIONES
RHENO-TRAJECTINAE**

**DISPUTATIONES INSTITUTI AD LINGUAS
ORIENTALES
DOCENDAS ATQUE INVESTIGENDAS
IN UNIVERSITATE RHENO-TRAJECTINA
CONDITI**

**EDIDIT
J. GONDA**

V

(with at the bottom:)

MOUTON & CO. 1961. 'S-GRAVENHAGE

I can more or less translate the Latin which includes several expressions that will not be found in any Latin-English dictionary. *Disputationes* is straightforward; it corresponds to what we might call “investigations”. *Rheno Trajectina* refers to Utrecht or to an adjectival form which, if it were English, could be *Utrechtian*. The next five lines may be somewhat freely rendered as: “Investigations of the Institute Founded for Teaching and Conducting Research in Oriental Languages at the University of Utrecht”. The rest is obvious: though the Latin suffix “it” is not the same as the English pronoun “it”, J. Gonda edited volume 5.

The preceding four volumes that were published in the series were books on the Veda by Gonda himself or one of his students. The fourth was J. C. Heesterman’s dissertation *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration* (Heesterman 1957). It became more widely known because it was separately published by Mouton. Why was NVR added to this respectable series? There might have been several reasons.

NVR was probably included because it was recommended by two professors at Leiden and by J. A. B. van Buitenen, Gonda’s student at Utrecht, who later became widely known in the USA where he was Professor of Sanskrit at Chicago. The Netherlands Organization for Pure Research (Z. W. O.) assisted in the expenses. These facts are mentioned in the Preface of NVR.

I believe that Mouton was eager to publish many of Gonda’s works; but not all. No good publisher would. The reasons are obvious: how and where could they be sold? It seems however that there was an understanding between Gonda and Mouton. Mouton would publish as much of Gonda as he could absorb, but it should include the volumes of the Utrechtian series on condition that the books would come in twosomes, undivorceable but not equals: the first of each couple was advertised and the second was not. It was destined to oblivion unless special reasons intervened. No wonder that NVR was put in the second

category. In order to understand this fully we have to take a brief look at the national, i.e., Dutch, and the European situation.

Gonda's *Collected Works* have been published as they should be but I have no access to them and shall continue with some remarks on Gonda and his works as I know them. Before doing so, I must mention that these works do not include a book called "Sanskrit in India" that is mentioned by Google & Wikipedia. It does not exist; but Gonda's "Sanskrit in Indonesia" was a significant contribution of 465 pages dense with information on the topic (Gonda 1952) .

Jan Gonda (1905-1991) was not born in Gonda in Uttar Pradesh, as some Indian readers assumed, but in Gouda in the Netherlands: a small town, almost equidistant from the Hague, Amsterdam, Utrecht and Rotterdam. He studied at Utrecht Latin and Greek (= Classical Greek), later Arabic. His doctoral dissertation was on the Greek verb ΔΕΙΚΝΥΜΙ. Soon thereafter he was appointed at Utrecht as a professor. In his *Inaugural Lecture*, he explained that the languages of Indonesia had not only borrowed from Sanskrit, but *vice versa*: Indonesian influences were absorbed by India and reached India and the Arab countries in pre-colonial times. By 1932, Gonda held two professorships at Utrecht: Sanskrit and "Malay" (= later Indonesian) & Javanese (= Old-Javanese: because of its scientific interest).

Gonda had been a pupil of Willem Caland (1859-1932) and though he published more volumes than Caland, the latter was without doubt the nestor of Vedic ritual studies in the Netherlands (see, e.g., Caland and Henry 1906-1907). Other Dutch universities contributed to the study of Sanskrit but that was partly due to its combination with Indonesian, then Dutch Indian studies. Gonda looked down upon Leiden as an upstart, perhaps not in all Sanskrit studies - Kern (1833-1917) had been there before Gonda - but certainly in Vedic. Amsterdam had nothing to do with Sanskrit and was an altogether different place from Utrecht and Leiden: it was, especially when I studied there, the most progressive university in the Netherlands. That implied that many social sciences were taught in addition to the so-called "humanities" which included anything whatsoever.

The European situation was more transparent, perhaps. In Paris there were two people whom Gonda must have respected. The first was Armand Minard, especially famous for his two volumes on the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, called *Trois énigmes sur les cent chemins* ("Three Enigmas on the Hundred Paths": 1949 and 1956). Highly respected by specialists and hardly intelligible to others, its path had been paved by the widely available English translation in five volumes of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (Eggeling 1882-1900). The second was certainly Louis Renou whom V. Raghavan called "not only the leading and seniormost Indologist of France now, but the most complete Sanskritist" (Raghavan 1956, page 20). These words might be used with reference to Raghavan himself provided we replace France by India. But Raghavan was not a Vedic scholar if we exclude the Sāmaveda which happened to be his own Veda (see Staal forthcoming). It is likely, therefore, that Minard and Renou were the only two people to whom Gonda sent offprints on a regular basis. Given the size of his output, he could not possibly have done more without ruining himself, his publisher or both. Did he also send them NVR or had they already discovered the

hidden series? All I know is that NVR received brief but substantial reviews by Minard in 1962 and by Renou in the same year. These two reviews are included in sections 3 and 4.

Professor Gonda was thanked in the *Preface* of NVR and for good reasons, but he might not have published that work with great enthusiasm. He would have noted that it contained information that was not available anywhere else but Gonda was a man not only of his word, but a man of words, not of nebulous matters like Oral Traditions. Nor was he enamored of illustrations. The tucking away of NVR was perhaps not due to Gonda only. Mr. de Ridder of Mouton could not have been aware of the importance of oral traditions in India. But he had a good nose. In 1957 he had already published a booklet that was to change the course of linguistics: *Syntactic Structures* (Chomsky 1957). It counted only 116 pages and I don't know how many copies it sold or how often it was reprinted, but it certainly was the bestseller in linguistics for many decades.

Gonda had a good idea of my academic background. He certainly knew that I had not been a student at Leiden but at Amsterdam, a place from which Asian (then: "Oriental") studies had long been eliminated. Second, Gonda would not have failed to note that I might have picked up a little, including some Pāṇini from a Chennai pandit, but had not studied *Sanskrit* at any *proper* place. NVR must have benefited from last minute corrections that Gonda himself inserted in my manuscript.

Just as de Ridder was an experienced publisher, there is no doubt that Gonda was a seasoned academician. There were others at Utrecht, including the equally formidable Cornelia de Vogel, expert on Greek and medieval (that is: European) philosophy. I had collided with her earlier because of my book *Advaita and Neoplatonism. A Critical Study in Comparative Philosophy* which was also published in 1961 but at the University of Madras. That equally rare product of my portable typewriter was the result of a suggestion by Professor T.P. Mahadevan who had an extremely sweet disposition. He was an expert on Advaita as well as an Advaitin and knew that Śāṅkara was said to be similar to Plotinus. That book became the topic of my thesis for the Ph. D. at the University of Madras.

Mahadevan read my draft, made suggestions and corrected my English but the question arose who would be an equally experienced judge on Plotinus. In my innocence I suggested Cornelia de Vogel at Utrecht. My draft was mailed to her and she soon found out that I had studied Greek and Latin at my Amsterdam Gymnasium for five and six years, respectively. That study had been thorough but did not include Plato or Aristotle, let alone Plotinus. What de Vogel failed to see is that not having studied Plato, Aristotle or Plotinus would be a bereavement to students of Greek, but would deprive students of European philosophy from all possibility to acquire a proper foundation. To her it meant that I had not studied *Greek* at any *proper* place.

We should recall that during the early twentieth century, the study of Indian philosophy outside India was in its absolute infancy. Sitting in her study somewhere in Germany, Betty Heimann (1930, *page* 146ff.) wrote that Indians perceived the external world as "a continuum". She explains this constancy ("Konstanz") by the richness of tropical vegetation. *Advaita and Neoplatonism* comments on *page* 40: "In the light of the fact that

the first achievements of the ancient Indians took place in the plain of the Ganges or still further to the North West, where there was no exuberance of tropical vegetation, it seems preferable to accept this simply as a human tendency which is general and which seems to have especially developed in India for reasons that are unknown to us”.

NVR had been typed on a portable typewriter during the weeks I travelled as the only passenger on a cargo boat from Mumbai to Genova. With the waves of the Indian Ocean in the background, passing through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, I played in my cabin my South Indian records on a tape recorder. Gonda did not hear the Vedas that were ringing in my ears but must have contributed substantially to NVR. I am sincerely grateful for what he did and without which that booklet might have been published in an inferior format and shape or not at all.

The end of my sojourn in India was marked by my return to Amsterdam where I went immediately to my first academic teacher, Professor Evert W. Beth, who taught logic, including the history of logic and of the sciences. I was ready to spend a few years on logic and mathematics but Beth, not being a philologist but a logician without prejudices and with a truly universal outlook, raised a rhetorical question: “Did you not learn anything in India?” Results followed each other in rapid succession: a visiting Professor of Sanskrit from Belgium was consulted, I was examined, Beth recommended that I continue writing and after a few months I earned a Ph. D. at the University of Amsterdam. Beth was my real *guru*.

Returning to Gonda, I mentioned already that he was a seasoned academician. It is said that during faculty meetings at Utrecht, he would sit silently until everyone else had had his say. Then he got up and thundered: “I have heard these arguments used with respect to each of you before you were appointed. So let us not waste time and admit (or not admit, as the case may be) this person”.

The reader might wonder what kind of man Gonda was. He was a farmer’s son and strong as a bull. He did not merely publish hundreds of volumes. He taught classes not only on Sanskrit and Vedic, but on Indo-European comparative grammar, Indian history, Indian philosophy and Indonesian languages. He had many students and was always working. When I visited him for the first time at his home in Utrecht, the door was opened by a lady in an apron. She let me in and asked me to wait downstairs: “The Professor is in his Study.” I was asked to go upstairs and there he was, sitting behind his desk. A moment later, the same lady, who was his wife, appeared with a tray which she put carefully on the one spot on the desk where there was enough room to put it. I am sure he had breakfast and lunch in the same manner.

Many years later, I had myself become a professor at the University of Amsterdam. My wife and I gave a large reception. Gonda and the Ambassador of India were present, and the latter immediately went to make his *namaskārams* to the great scholar and asked him: “When, respected Professor, will you accept the standing invitation of the Government of India and visit our country?” Blushing perhaps, since he was always red, Gonda invoked his poor health, the long journey and the many inconveniences that his poor body was not

used to. Gonda never attended meetings or congresses outside Utrecht. He simply did not waste his time.

2. The High *udātta*

It is one thing to claim that a publication received brief but substantial reviews, which remained hidden, and quite another to show that something of value was lost by hiding them. One reason that they remained hidden was that the two reviewers wrote in very scholarly French. I must now try to state in succinct English what it is that was hidden and lost and why.

The “why” is easier than the “what” so let us begin with the “why”. Apart from its reviews, NVR was mentioned by only a few authors, including Michael Witzel (e.g., in 1997 on several pages, especially *page 334, note 406*), Fujii 1997, *page 98, note* and Galewicz 2004, 361-384, which published relevant photographs taken in 2000

What remained hidden was a cluster of problems concerning the pitch of the accents of Vedic recitation. The discussion has centered on the concept and history of “the high *udātta*”. These problems may have been missed by Gonda but they were emphasized by Minard and Renou in their reviews. What is at issue is the claim of NVR that Nambudiri brahmans preserved the high *udātta* which is also found in early Vedic and other ancient Indo-European languages.

NVR stated the problem thus: “It seems here is the survival of a system of accentuation which looks very much like the system that Pāṇini described, later to be replaced by the system with the high *svārīta*” (*page 43*).

Let me begin to briefly review the relevant facts.

Pāṇini’s Sanskrit grammar, which was probably composed in the fifth century BCE, taught that the *udātta* is high (Pāṇini 1.2.29). The same description occurs in the *Prātiśākhya*s, “one for each of the Vedic schools or *śākhā*’s”, which belong to the Vedic period, presumably before Pāṇini. Pāṇini mentioned two other accents: 1.2.30 teaches the *anudātta* which is recited at a low pitch; and 1.2.31 teaches the *svārīta* which means “sounded” or “pitched” and is a combination of high and low.

Subsequently, Rigvedins have gone beyond Pāṇini: they presently recite the *udātta* at the middle pitch and the *svārīta* at a higher pitch.

Throughout India, the *svārīta* is presently recited at a higher pitch, just as the *udātta* is recited at the middle pitch. The high pitch *udātta* is only preserved in two special recitations of the Nambudiri brahmans

NVR mentioned that the same applies to many Nambudiri Brahmans; but added that there are exceptions where we find: “the survival of a system of accentuation which looks very much like the system that Pāṇini described, later to be replaced by the system with the high *svārīta*” (*page 43*).

NVR was mentioned by relatively few authors, none of them referring to the reviews by Minard and Renou. The first who paid serious attention to it was Michael Witzel in his encyclopedic study of accentuation covering India and Nepal, starting with earlier

publications and including all the Vedic *śākhā*'s (Witzel 1974). Witzel referred there to NVR on several occasions, starting with the second of his 78 footnotes, and paid attention not only to the marking of the accents, but to their actual recitations as they had been recorded or described. His section 3.3.4 described the chief results of NVR in this area. He refers specifically to “the modern Nambudiri RV recitation which, in some conservative groups, still retains this feature in *padapāṭha* and *kramapāṭha* recitation”. Witzel’s encyclopaedia demonstrated that the Nambudiri situation is not confined to the Nambudiris.

In 1997, Witzel returned to NVR on several pages (especially *page 334, note 406*). So did Fujii (1997, *page 98, note*) and Galewicz (2004, 361-384), which published relevant photographs taken in 2000.

NVR may, of course, have been known to and mentioned by others, including teachers teaching their students. There is no written evidence. It is remarkable that the book was not mentioned in Dandekar’s *Vedic Bibliography* of 1961 or 1962, in leading journals such as JAOS (*Journal of the American Oriental Society*), BSOAS (*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*), excluding the indirect references in the articles by J. E. B. Gray), or, as far as I have been able to find out, in the IJ (*Indo-Iranian-Journal*), the WZKSA (*Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd-Asiens und Archiv für indische Philosophie*) or the ZDMG (*Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*).

One problem lurking behind this issue is the relative chronology of Pāṇini and the *Prātiśākhya*s. Since the latter pertain to Vedic, which is almost in its entirety earlier than Pāṇini, one might be inclined to assume that, e.g., the *Rkprātiśākhya* is earlier than Pāṇini. That might be true of it in its original form but in its present form, the only one that is known, it has certainly been influenced by Pāṇini whose grammar had started a revolution. He had predecessors whose work is lost and the *Prātiśākhya*s dealt with similar problems. Pāṇini however did not only describe the Sanskrit that was spoken in his area and time but introduced new linguistic techniques and devices. His contribution to Indian science was like that of Plato and Aristotle to the European sciences. There had been the Presocratics in Greece, just as there had been *Prātiśākhya*s in India as well as earlier grammarians (of which we only know the names). Historians can find out more about such connections: Plotinus was influenced by Plato and Aristotle and the later *Prātiśākhya*s were influenced by Pāṇini. On the Indic side and as far as I know, these problems have not been sorted out let alone solved.

Having referred already to the “Pāṇinianization” of the *Prātiśākhya*s (*page 77*), Madhav Deshpande has emphasized an important truth that many scholars seem to have forgotten. The *Prātiśākhya*s “are, first and foremost, description of recitational practice, rather than that of some abstract theory”. He illustrates it by some abnormal cases of *kampa* where the tone descends to an extremely low level (Deshpande 1997, 438-9). NVR described similar features beyond the realm of the accent: “a certain swinging or trembling pronunciation of many final vowels, nasals, *visarga* and occasionally ‘l’ as a kind of *kampa*” (*page 37*; further discussion in Staal *forthcoming*).

3. Review of NVR by Armand Minard

Indo-Iranian Journal 6, 1962, 302-303

Judaism,⁴ Christianity and Islam are the religions of the Book. The superhuman words that lie at the foundation of Vedism are based upon pure hearing (*śruti*) and their

⁴ Here is the original French text: Judaïsme, christianisme, Islam sont des religions du Livre. Le verbe surhumain qui fonde le védisme est pure audition (*śruti*), et la transmission n'en peut être qu'orale. Elle l'était nécessairement à l'origine, le Véda ayant précédé de plusieurs siècles l'apparition de l'écriture dans l'Inde. Elle l'est demeurée depuis:

l'écriture la souillerait. Les récitants ont joué ici le rôle ailleurs dévolu aux copistes. La récitation n'est donc pas seulement un fait de rhétorique et de liturgie: elle est une pièce maîtresse de la philology.

Comment le connaissons-nous? D'une part, par les traités indigènes. D'autre part, par les récitants et desservants. L'observation de leur pratique, amorcées par Haug il y a un siècle (1836), poursuivi par Burnell, Felber, ... Bake, Apte, Gray, n'avait donné lieu, jusqu'ici, qu'à des études fragmentaire. M. Staal a poussé ses recherches plus loin qu'aucun de ces prédécesseurs. Au terme d'un séjour de trois années dans l'Inde, il a procédé à de nombreux enregistrements (été 1957), exploité le fonds antérieur, mis à profit les amicales communications de plusieurs collègues. Pour le Rg-Veda, les résultats obtenus confirment le plus souvent ou complètement ceux de Gray (BSOAS 22 1959 35). Pour le Yajur-Veda et le Sāmaveda, ils sont entièrement neufs.

Seuls les brahmanes ont droit de réciter le Véda (les non-brahmanes ne sont pas même admis à l'entendre). Chaque famille appartient à une *śākhā*, plus précisément à un *sūtra* dans une *śākhā*. Les textes des différentes *śākhā* se récitent parfois selon un même mode. Mais l'inverse est plus fréquent, c'est à dire qu'un même texte se récite différemment suivant les lieux. Or, on a des raisons de penser que c'est dans l'Inde du Sud que la tradition c'est le mieux conservée (p.18).

L'auteur a, comme Gray, pris pour sujets d'enquête les Nambudiri du Kerala, en pays Malayalam. Cette communauté de 60.000 brahmanes (p. 35) offre des archaïsmes singuliers. C'est ainsi que, jusqu'à 1933, elle est restée strictement patrilinéaire: seul le fils aîné pouvait épouser une fille de sa tribu; les autres fils épousaient des filles Nayar, et leur fils entraient dans le système matrilineaire des Nayar (p. 31). Mais surtout c'est, tout ensemble, le privilège et le devoir des Nambudiri de maintenir la tradition védique (p. 33). Pour apprécier la valeur de ce témoignage, il emporte de trouver un point de comparaison. La recitation Aiyar le fournit: c'est le style le plus usual en pays tamoul et, de surcroît, le plus clair (p.20).

On connaît le problème soulevé par Haug, et qui reste entière (p. 22). Selon Pāṇini, l'*udātta* est l'aigu par excellence. Or, en style Aiyar (comme, aussi bien, dans tous les modes de récitation modernes), la voix culmine, non sur l'*udātta*, (qui reste au niveau médian de la chaîne mélodique), mais sur la syllabe suivante (*svarita* enclitique): fait déconcertant, mais qui a chance d'être ancien, puisqu'il répond aux descriptions des *Prātiśākhya*. Si l'on admet que Pāṇini leur est antérieur, c'est entre ces deux époques que ce serait produit ce renversement. Par quelles voies? Gray postulait, contre toute vraisemblance, un accent d'intensité. L'explication qu'avance à son tour M. Staal (p.62) est trop compliquée pour être convaincante. Mais l'essentiel de son analyse est ailleurs. Chez les Nambudiri, le *samhitāpāṭha* (récitation continue) garde à l'*udātta* le niveau médian que lui assigne l'usage général. Mais le *padapāṭha* (récitation par mots séparés) et le *rathapāṭha* (*vikṛti* qui semble inconnu du reste de l'Inde: p.47) le placent (du moins en syllabe légère) au sommet du registre (p. 61), en accord avec l'enseignement de Pāṇini et les exigences de la linguistique. Ce témoignage extraordinaire est malheureusement isolé. Faut-il le suspecter? y voir un artifice pour se rattacher à la tradition pāṇinéenne? Il ne le semble pas. Par l'ensemble de ses traits, la récitation Nambudiri s'affirme comme archaïque. Les rares altérations qu'elles ont subies sont purement superficielles: ainsi les intrusions du phonétisme Malayalam (p. 38-39). Il est donc probable que cette *udātta* culminale reflète un usage très ancien.

transmission must have been oral. It was necessary for their origins to be oral, for the Vedas preceded the appearance of writing in India. They have remained so ever since: writing would pollute them. The role of the reciters is the same as what is elsewhere done by copyists. Recitation therefore is not only a fact of rhetoric and liturgy: it is an essential part of philology.

How do we know this much? Partly because of indigenous treatises. The other part is due to the reciters and the priests. Their practices were witnessed more than a century ago by Haug who was followed by Burnell, Felber, ... Bake, Apte, Gray, but all these investigations have so far only led to fragmentary studies. M. Staal has taken his investigations further than any of his predecessors. After staying in India for three years, he made numerous recordings (during the summer of 1957), studied their context and profited from findings that several colleagues generously provided. In the realm of the Rigveda, his findings often confirm or complete those of Gray (*BSOAS* 22-1959-35). In the case of the Yajur- and the Sāmavedas, they are entirely new.

Only brahmans are entitled to recite the Vedas (non-brahmans are not even allowed to hear them). Each family belongs to one *śākhā*, more precisely to one *sūtra* of one *śākhā*. Sometimes the texts of different *śākhās* are recited in the same manner. The opposite is however more common: that is, the same text is recited differently in different places. In general, there are good reasons to maintain that the tradition is best preserved in the South (p. 18). Like Gray, the author has focused his studies on the Nambudiris of Kerala, the Malayalam country. Their community of 60,000 brahmans (p. 35) presents remarkable archaisms. Until 1933, it remained strictly patrilineal: only the eldest son could marry within his community; the other sons married the daughters of Nayars and their children belonged to the matrilineal system of the Nayars (p. 31). All in all, it is the privilege and the duty of the Nambudiris to maintain the Vedic tradition (p. 33). In order to evaluate what that implies, we need to find a comparison elsewhere. It is provided by the Aiyar recitation: their style is most common in the Tamil country and is, in addition, the most perspicuous (p. 20).

We are familiar with the question raised by Haug which has remained unresolved (p. 22). According to Pāṇini, the *udātta* is the highest tone. However, in the Aiyar style (like in all other modern recitations), the highest voice is not the *udātta* (which stays at the middle pitch), but the enclitic *svarita* which follows it. It is a disturbing fact, but perhaps an ancient one, because it corresponds to the descriptions of the *Prātiśākhya*s. If we admit that Pāṇini is earlier, there must have been a reversal between the two periods. How did it come about? Gray suggested, against all likelihood, a stress accent. The explanation that Staal proposes (p. 62) is too complex to be convincing. But the essential part of his analysis rests

L'ouvrage de M. Staal contient bien d'autres données précieuses: sur la répartition des *śākhā*, sur les *vikṛti* des trois Védas, sur le dessin de la chaîne mélodique, sur l'enseignement gestuel des accents (p. 40-41). On ne peut ici que faire entrevoir ces richesses. Dans un secteur important (et trop négligé) du védisme, elles constituent un apport solide et neuf.

elsewhere. Among the Nambudiris, the *saṃhitāpaṭha* (continuous recitation) assigns to the *udātta* the medium level to which it is generally assigned. However, the *padapāṭha* (recitation of separate words) and the *rathapāṭha* (a *vikṛti* that seems to be unknown elsewhere in India: p. 47) place it (at least when the syllable is light) at the top of the register (p. 61), in accordance with the teaching of Pāṇini and the requirements of linguistics. This extraordinary testimony is unfortunately isolated. Must we suspect it? Is it an artificial attempt to conform to the Pāṇinian tradition? That does not seem to be the case. The totality of characteristics of the Nambudiri recitation confirms that it is archaic. The few changes it has undergone are entirely superficial: like the intrusions of the sound system of Malayalam (p. 38-9). It is therefore probable that this high *udātta* reflects a practice that is very ancient.

The work of M. Staal contains many other valuable observations: regarding the distribution of the *śākhās*, about the *vikṛtis* of the three Vedas, on the patterns of melodic chant, on the representation of accents by hand gestures (p. 40-41). One can only catch a glimpse of its abundance. In an important (and much neglected) area of Vedic studies, they make a contribution that is solid and new.

4. Review of NVR by Louis Renou

Journal asiatique of 1962, 294-296

This⁵ small book shows how, within a limited but significant domain, remarkable results may be obtained with the help of a meticulous description combined with a gift of interpretation that organizes the facts within a coherent whole.

⁵ Here the original French text: Ce petit livre montre comment, dans un domaine limité, et d'ailleurs fort important, on obtient des résultats remarquables grâce à une description minutieuse combinée avec un don d'interprétation qui organise les faits décrits dans un ensemble cohérent.

On sait assez quelle a été le rôle de la récitation orale dans l'établissement et le maintien des traditions védiques. Il n'est pas exagéré d'affirmer que la récitation et ses lois font partie intégrante de la philologie védique: elle commande même plus d'un aspect.

Notre connaissance repose sur quelques traités de date védique, ou portions de traités, et, à l'autre bout, sur les résultats auxquels conduit l'observation des récitants et officiants actuels. Ici toutefois, malgré le vaste champ dont on dispose à travers l'Inde, les remarques qu'on a pu faire depuis un siècle ont été décousues et généralement superficielles. M. Staal a choisi l'Inde méridionale – c'est là en effet que la tradition semble être le mieux conservée – et plus particulièrement les Nambudiris, groupe de brâhmanes de Kerala (donc, en pays malayalam) où l'on sait par ailleurs, comme M. S. le rappelle opportunément, que des pratiques sociales singulières sont attestées, et où l'on se doutait depuis longtemps que, dans le domaine védique, il y avait pour nous quelque chose à apprendre (il n'y a rien à ce sujet dans l'ouvrage récent de Kunjunn RAJA, *The Contribution of Kerala to Sanskrit Literature* (1958), ouvrage instructif par ailleurs). Déjà M. J. A. B. Gray, dans un fort pénétrant article de 1959 (*BSOAS*, 22, p. 35), avait examiné de près la récitation du *Rg-Veda* chez les Nambudiris: l'étude plus large que donne aujourd'hui M. S. est un complément de ce premier travail en ce qui touche le *Rg-Veda*; pour le *Yajur-Veda* et le *Sāmaveda* (l'*Atharva-Veda* est hors de cause), c'est un développement entièrement neuf.

The role that oral recitation has played in establishing and maintaining Vedic traditions is well known. It is no exaggeration to say that recitation and its rules are an integral part of Vedic philology. They determine a good part of it.

Our knowledge is based on treatises that belong to the Vedic period, or portions thereof, as well as on the results of observation of the reciters and officiating priests. Even so, and despite the vast amount of data that India has to offer, comments that have been made throughout a century have been desultory and often superficial. M. Staal has chosen southern India – where the tradition has in fact been best preserved – and in particular the Nambudiris, the brahmans of Kerala (the Malayalam country), where it is known, as M.

En bonne méthode, l’auteur a pris pour point de comparaison la récitation “Aiyar”, que est le style dominant, en tous cas le plus clair, le plus commodément utilisable, en pays tamoul. La récitation “Aiyar”, comme la récitation indienne en général, se caractérise par le fait que la voix s’élève, non sur la syllabe notée par le ton aigu (*udātta*), mais sur la syllabe qui suit, celle qui porte le ton *svārīta*. Ceci a déconcerté depuis longtemps les linguistes; il y a là pourtant une particularité ancienne, puisque les *Prātiśākhya* la confirment pour l’époque védique (tardive). Il est vrai, d’autre part, que Pāṇini enseigne, comme on l’attend, que l’*udātta* est prononcé “haut” (*uccais*). S’ensuit-il qu’un déplacement du ton se serait produit entre l’époque de Pāṇini et celle des *Prātiśākhya*? Conclusion téméraire, d’autant plus qu’on ignore la chronologie relative entre les grammairiens et les phonéticiens. On pourrait dire plutôt que les *Prātiśākhya* ont strictement en vue la récitation védique, alors que Pāṇini vise l’usage Sanskrit indifférencié (car les règles sur l’accent ne peuvent être considérées comme des règles “védiques” [*chandasi*], puisque aussi bien il existe des règles “védiques” à l’intérieur des chapitres accentuels). Dans l’article déjà cité, M. Gray croit pouvoir expliquer l’anomalie en reprenant l’idée, jadis en honneur, que l’accent védique (et indo-européen) serait un accent d’intensité, non un ton musical. M. S. ne tranche pas la question, mais il incline à croire que la situation ancienne – celle qui comportait un *udātta* “haut” suivi d’un *svārīta* descendant – aurait été simplifiée par les *Prātiśākhya* qui, enseignant un *svārīta* ascendant, ont, en contre-coup, transféré l’*udātta* en valeur médiane. Quoi qu’il en soit de cette question irritante, M. S. a sans doute raison de penser que ce transfert s’est accrédité en milieu yajurvédique, d’où il se sera étendu au *Rg-Veda*.

Or, il y a ceci remarquable chez les Nambudiris que, si le *samhitāpāṭha* (c’est à dire la récitation continue) maintient la valeur médiane de l’*udātta*, en revanche, le *padapāṭha* (ou lecture mot à mot), ainsi qu’une des réceptions spéciales (ou *vikṛti*’s) propre à ce groupe de brāhmanes et qu’on appelle le *rathapāṭha*, attestent un *udātta* prononcé plus haut que les autres syllabes (du moins pour l’*udātta* en syllabe brève; en syllabe longue, l’élévation de la voix concerne une portion seulement de la syllabe). C’est la première fois, dans la prononciation vivante d’un texte védique, on entend vibrer un ton aigu à la place même où on l’attend, en conformité avec les postulations de la linguistique!

Qu’il y ait là un archaïsme authentique, non une reviviscence artificielle, l’ensemble des traits de la récitation Nambudiri le laisse présumer, et d’abord la tendance rythmique qui marque cette récitation, en contraste avec la tendance musicale de la récitation tamoule. Le fait que des mots védiques soient prononcés avec une influence Malayalam ne prévaut pas là-contre. Des détails précis sont conservés, tant dans les *vikṛti* rgvédiques que dans le *Yajurveda* ou le *Sāmaveda*, qui est effroyablement ardu (seul W. Caland avait pu pénétrer assez profondément ses arcanes), M. S. reconnaît lui-même qu’il n’a pu aboutir à des conclusions décisives. Les spécimens qu’il cite de *sāman*’s Jaiminīya (c’est en effet l’école Jaiminīya qui est en jeu dans le milieu Nambudiri), arrange par *gāna*, seront fort utiles: l’interprétation finale devra toutefois attendre un relevé plus complet de la situation.

L’auteur c’est penché également sur la récitation sacrificielle, moins étudiée encore et qu’on croit à tort régie par la “monotonie”: il donne des renseignements très précis, conformés par les traités anciens, sur la manière dont t sont dit les *sāmidhenī*, ces stances accompagnant le dépôt des bûchettes sur le foyer, au début de la de la cérémonie des Pleine et Nouvelle Lunes. Ces menus détails éclairent d’un jour nouveau la compréhension du Veda en sa fonction éminente qui est savoir oral et parole.

Staal points out, that remarkable social practices are attested, and where it has long been felt that something could perhaps be learned in the Vedic domain. (Kunjunni Raja's recent work *The Contribution of Kerala to Sanskrit Literature*, 1958, has nothing to offer though it is instructive in other respects.) In a penetrating article of 1959 (*BSOAS* 22, p. 35), M. J.E.B. Gray has closely examined the recitation of the Rigveda among the Nambudiris. The larger study that M. Staal now offers complements this work insofar as it is concerned with the Rigveda. With regard to the Yajurveda and the Sāmaveda (the Atharvaveda is not pertinent in this context) it is entirely new.

Following good practice, the author's has chosen for comparison the recitations of the Aiyars which display the dominant style in the Tamil country. It is also the clearest and the most accessible. Like other Indic recitations, the Aiyar style is characterized by the fact that the tone rises, not on the syllable that is marked by the raised tone (*udātta*), but on the following syllable which is marked by the *svarita*. This has puzzled linguists for a long time, even though it is an ancient feature, confirmed by the *Prātisākhya*s during the later Vedic period. It is true that Pāṇini teaches that the *udātta* should be recited at a high pitch as one would expect. Does it follow that the tone changed between the period of Pāṇini and that of the *Prātisākhya*s? It would be a rash conclusion, especially since we do not know the relative chronology between grammarians and phoneticians. It would be better to say that the *Prātisākhya*s have Vedic recitations in view whereas Pāṇini is concerned with the general form of Sanskrit. His rules that pertain to accent should not be looked upon as "Vedic" (*chandasi*) rules (though some rules within the sections on accent are "Vedic" rules). The article of M. Gray that has been quoted already expresses the belief that the anomaly can be explained by an idea that was formerly held: the Vedic (and Indo-European) accent was a stress accent, not a tonal accent. M. S. does not deal with that problem but he is inclined to believe that the original situation – that of a high *udātta* followed by a descending *svarita* – was simplified by the *Prātisākhya*s which taught an ascending *svarita* that left a medium value for the *udātta*. Whatever we may say about this baffling problem, M. S. is undoubtedly right that the change came about among the Yajurvedins from where it spread to the Rigveda.

One particular feature of Nambudiri recitation is especially remarkable: the *saṃhitāpāṭha* (or continuous recitation) preserves the medium value of the *udātta*, but the *padapāṭha* (or word-for-word recitation) and special recitations (or *vikṛtis*) such as the *rathapāṭha* display an *udātta* that is higher than the other syllables (at least in the case of the *udātta* on a short syllable; when the syllable is long, the high voice tone includes only a part of the syllable). This is the first time that one hears, in the living tradition of a Vedic text, a high tone at exactly the place where it is expected according to the principles of linguistics!

That this is an authentic survival and not a revivalist development, is in accordance with all the characteristics of the Nambudiri recitation as contrasted with the musical development of the Tamil recitation. The fact that the pronunciation of some Vedic has

been influenced by the pronunciation of Malayalam does not invalidate that conclusion. Valuable details are made available, both among the *vikṛtis* of the Rigveda and in the Yajurveda and the Sāmaveda. In the realm of the Sāmaveda (only W. Caland has been able to penetrate its mysteries sufficiently), M. S. recognizes himself that he has not been able to reach definite conclusions. The specimens he quotes of *sampans* of the Jaiminīya (which is the school to which the Nambudiri Sāmavedins belong), arranged in accordance with the *gāna*, will be very useful. Their final interpretation depends on a more complete analysis of the situation.

The author has also examined ritual recitations. They have been studied rarely and it has been believed that they are characterized by being recited in monotone. He provides precise information, supported by the ancient treatises, on the manner of recitation of the *sāmidhenī* verses which accompany the putting down of the sticks on the altar at the beginning of the Full and New Moon ceremonies. Such small details may one day throw new light on the understanding of the Vedas in their eminent function as oral knowledge and language.

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