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On Indian metrics.

By

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In his review[1] of OLDENBERG's work, *Die Hymnen des Rigveda,* Mr. GRIERSON has adverted to a development of Hindu metrics in support of a metrical theory advocated by OLDENBERG and others, viz. that the *ictus* or emphasis with which certain syllables of a line were originally pronounced, resulted in fixing the quantity of these syllables, and that even if in exceptional cases the quantity of a certain syllable was other than required by the rule, the *ictus* which was on that syllable, sufficed to preserve the rhythm. Thus the Gâyatrî has usually a double iambic ending, e. g.

agnim île pŭrōhĭtāṃ.

According to this theory it was metrically accented: —

agnim île puróhitám.

As the metrical accent according to this theory constituted the rhythm, such irregular lines as

babhrave nu svătăvăsē
kratvâ dakshasyă răthĭām
martasya devĭ ăvăsā̆ḥ

having the same metrical accent as the usual form viz. *svatávasé,* etc., still preserved the rhythm of the Gâyatrî.

This rhythmical theory suits and explains pretty well the facts of Greek metrics, and as the *ictus* or rather the difference between

[1] *Ind. Ant.* 1890, p. 286 ff.

arsis and thesis, is actually a fundamental point in Greek music, we are no doubt entitled to base an inquiry into the origin of Greek metres on the rhythmical accent as WESTPHAL and ROSSBACH have done with much success. It is no more than may be expected that European scholars, trained in the school of classical philology, should apply the same theory to Indian metrics, and that this has been done by nearly all who have written on the subject, is a well known matter of fact.[1]

Now I have repeatedly objected to this method of dealing with Indian metrics for the simple reason that we have no direct proof of, or testimony as to, the existence of the distinction of arsis and thesis based on the ictus or emphasis either in Indian metrics or in Indian music. As the original link between musical accentuation and metrics had been forgotten even in Greece, the silence of Indian metricians on this point has no great weight in deciding the question at issue. But we should expect to find Hindu music proving the correctness of the rhythmical theory. The nearest analogon to what is *time*[2] in European music, is the *tâla* of the Hindus. But this *tâla* is defined as the measuring of time. It is not indicated by, and based on, emphasizing certain notes as in European music, but is indicated or rather measured by the beating of the tom-tom which accompanies the musical performance and merely serves to keep the proper time. This is a radical difference and all to the point. Its effect will have been felt by all who have heard European melodies sung by Hindus. Although they may produce the correct notes in the correct time, still their delivery sounds strangely weak, and almost insipid, because the Hindus, unaccustomed to our musical system, do not *emphasize* the tones which have the musical accent or *ictus*. There-

[1] The most elaborate treatise of this kind is by Dr. RICHARD KÜHNAU: *Die Trishṭubh-Jagatî-Familie. Ihre rhythmische Beschaffenheit und Entwickelung.* Göttingen 1886.

[2] The reader must be warned not to understand the term *time* in its literal meaning, but in the technical meaning, viz. as that which in music regulates not only the time, but also the rhythm.

fore, be cause the distinction of arsis and thesis, as far as has been made out as yet, does not exist in Hindu music where it should have continued to exist, though it might have fallen into oblivion in metrics, I maintain that it is against all principles of science to explain Indian metres by a rhythmical theory which is based on the distinction between arsis and thesis.

Let us now examine the facts which Mr. Grierson adduces in support of the rhythmical theory, and see whether he interprets them aright. Since the time of Kêsab Dâs, i. e. in all classical Hindî dating from 1580 A. D., the Chaupâî metre contains four lines each of which consists of 16 instants (or *morae*) devided as follows: 6+4+4+2. But practically such a line may be differently divided, viz. 6+6+4, the last four instants almost invariably forming a spondee. But, for instance in Mâlik Maḥammad's writings, who flourished in 1540 A. D., "we meet continually, instead of the final spondee, a final iambus, so that there are 15, not 16, instants in a line. The scheme then becomes 6+6+3 (iambus)

$$\underbrace{6(1+1+1+2+1)}_{dadhi\ samunda}\ \underbrace{6(2+1+1+1+1)}_{dekhata\ tasa}\ \underbrace{3(1+2)}_{dahâ}$$

$$\underbrace{6(1+1+2+2)}_{kahi\ sande-}\quad \underbrace{6(1+1+2+1+1)}_{sa\ bihangama}\ \underbrace{3(1+2)}_{chalâ}$$

and so in many others. Now no ingenuity of scansion will make the first syllable of *dahâ* and *chalâ* long: and yet, unless they are pronounced as long, the verse will lose the essential characteristic of a *Chaupâî*. The answer to this riddle is that which Prof. Oldenberg gives for the Vedic *pâdas* quoted above. We must use accent, *ictus*, as a substitute for quantity."

Is this then the only possible solution of the problem? I shall attempt to give the question a totally different turn and then weigh the respective claims of either party as to the force and correctness of their views.

In almost all poetry, we meet with 'metrically' produced or shortened syllables. It can be imagined that, in an early phase of the development of poetical art, poets were more inclined to make use of

this licence in order to make a word suitable for the requirements of the metre. The question then is what unknown power, if it be not accent, could make the reader pronounce a syllable with the required quantity, though the author of the verse had given it a wrong one. In most cases our answer would be that the scheme of the metre having become fixed, and being, in this form, present in the mind of every reader, would naturally make him pronounce any verse in accordance with its established form, and to produce a short syllable where required, and vice versâ. In the case under consideration we could rest satisfied with this explanation. For first, the standard form of the Chaupâî ending with a spondee, though canonised by Kêsab Dâs, had already been used by Chand Bardâî, some centuries before Maḥammad Mâlik and Kêsab Dâs; and secondly, as Maḥammad Mâlik has not been, according to Mr. GRIERSON's statement,[1] a man of great learning, but became famous for the fact that he wrote for the people in the people's tongue, he may for that reason have freely indulged in such licenses as did not grate on the ears of his uncultured hearers. But it may be objected that this explanation is scarcely more than a detailed description of the facts to be explained. It is, therefore, necessary to start from another point of view. All Hindû verses are to be sung; consequently the metre of a poem is bound up with the melody or melodies in which it is customarily recited. Thus, the prosody of a metre has its counterpart in the prosody of the melody, the latter supporting the former and correcting it where it is faulty. As the lines of the Chaupâî generally end with a spondee, the four parts of the melody to which the Chaupâî are sung, must accordingly have ended with two long notes; and as a melody, in a way, exists by itself, it is capable of propping up a hobbling verse. Hence by the influence of the melody the iambic ending of many of Maḥammad Mâlik's Chaupâîs, could have been, and I don't doubt, was changed into the required spondaic ending.

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[1] *The modern vernacular Literature of Hindustan*, p. 15.

This explanation of the facts under consideration is, I think, preferable to that of Mr. Grierson, because it is founded on generally admitted facts, while Mr. Grierson bases his theory on an unproved, and I believe, unprovable hypothesis. Now the interest of the subject in hand does not so much consist in finding an explanation, but as Mr. Grierson states, in its analogy with some peculiarities of Vedic metrics. If my theory accounts for irregularities in Hindî metrics, it may also serve for explaining similar irregularities in Vedic metrics. The assumption we have to make, is that in ancient times as now-a-days there existed certain melodies to which the verses were sung, and that in these melodies not only the pitch, but also the time (or quantity) of some notes was fixed by the musical taste of the time. In making this assumption we bring into play only such factors as can historically be proved to have been in existence in India, while calling to our help the *ictus*, we introduce into our explanation an altogether hypothetical factor.

Nevertheless, the adherents of the rhythmical theory based on accent or *ictus* will be reluctant to give it up, because it seems to explain satisfactorily the development of the Vedic metres from the still more ancient forms in which nothing beyond the number of syllables was fixed. The advocates of the rhythmical theory will say that it is impossible for the hearers of such primitive verses to be sure of their having the required number of syllables, if the ear was not aided by the rhythm i. e. the alternation of accented and unaccented syllables. But, from our point of view, we can just as well remove the difficulty — if there be any — of the hearer being always aware that a verse had the required number of syllables. For as we believe that every metre went together with a certain melody or certain melodies, and as a melody could only be felt to be correct, if it had the fixed number of notes (i. e. all its notes, distinguished from each other by different pitch, and not alike as the syllables of a verse), it is evident that by the melody however rude it may have been in primitive times, the number of syllables in the corresponding metre was naturally and strictly regulated.

Again the supporters of the rhythmical theory find it easy to explain by its help the introduction of a fixed prosody in a verse in which originally only the number, but not the quantity of the syllables was fixed. For they say that the syllables which had the *ictus* were naturally made long, while the quantity of the unaccented syllables remained unfixed. In this way, it is believed, the metres gradually assumed their final forms, the σχήματα. But it will be seen that our theory explains the assumed development of the metres just as well. For, a melody being given in which besides the pitch of the notes the quantity of some had become fixed in the course of time, we readily understand that the notes of the melody communicated their prosody to the syllables of the verse; for only such verses would well or agreeably fit a certain melody, the syllables of which had the same quantity as the corresponding notes of the tune.

Finally, it may be said that the rhythmical theory satisfactorily explains Greek metrics, and that for Teutonic metrics it is not a theory but a fact, and that therefore it is plausible that the same theory should be adopted for explaining Indian metrics. This argument has probably a greater influence on the mind of the student, trained in the school of classical philology, than he would be ready to admit. Nevertheless, if stated in plain words, every one will see its logical inconclusiveness.

For, granted that some European metrics have passed out of a primitive stage in which the number of syllables was the only metrical law recognised, into the more developed forms in which prosody became a very conspicuous feature, through the agency of rhythm based on the distinction of arsis and thesis, still it will be hazardous to maintain that this was the only way imaginable. From the fact that rhythm regulated Greek music, we argue that it did also regulate Greek metrics. But in India music has developed to great perfection without rhythm i. e. the difference between arsis and thesis, and if I am rightly informed, the same holds with regard to Chinese music. As to the ideas in which we are brought up, rhythm might appear indispensable in music, and as nevertheless the music of great

nations actually does dispense with it, there is no cogent reason to believe in the indispensability of rhythm for metrics.

Nor can the similarity of the cause of the development of Greek and Indian metrics be inferred from the similarity of the effect. For, though a few Greek metres have a faint similitude to some classical Sanskrit metres, still I defy every master of the rhythmical theory to deduce from his principles the very popular metres Âryâ and Dohâ, especially the latter. The difficulty is indeed so great that it first induced me to give up the rhythmical theory as far as India is concerned, and to assume that the development of metrics in India followed a totally different line.

In conclusion I shall state my theory in a few paragraphs: —

(1) Metrical compositions were originally destined to be sung, and not to be recited in any way. This we observe to be the fact with savage and barbarous tribes.

(2) As metrical compositions are inseparable from their melodies, at least till literature has reached a high degree of refinement, the development of metres must be considered to go side by side with the development of music.

(3) If with some nations music became rhythmical (in the technical meaning of the word), it is plausible that rhythm also directed the development of metrics; but if with other nations music remained unrhythmical, rhythm can have been no factor in the development of their metrics.

(4) Indian music is not rhythmical, accordingly in explaining Indian metres we are not allowed to call in such a factor as the *ictus*.

Before we get a more accurate knowledge of Indian music than we can command at present, it would be a waste of time to hazard a more detailed theory of the development of Indian metrics.