



Invocation of the Sun in the *Gāyatrī* *Mantra* and in Latvian Folksongs [Saules piesaukšana *Gāyatrī* mantrā un latviešu tautasdziesmās]

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Abstract. The close affinity between Sanskrit and European languages has been proven a long time ago, and many researches about Central European languages and Lithuanian language have been published in this regard. However, there are just a few comparative works about Sanskrit and Latvian language, mainly dictionaries or studies on morphology, phonetics, and transcription. This research deals with lexicogrammatical and semantic aspects of Sanskrit and Latvian that have not yet been properly analyzed by other scholars. In this regard, the research provides a unique contribution to the comparative literature and linguistic studies. Besides, the author has chosen a new perspective to view the Sun in the religious folk culture, correlating it with linguistic semantics in a close-to-text analysis of three poetic texts – the *Gāyatrī* mantra and two Latvian folksongs.

The main goal of this research is to discover and to describe similarities and differences in literary means of expression, grammar and lexica of Sanskrit and Latvian in order to display the spiritual attitude toward the Sun in both cultures. Syntactic parts in both languages are compared, starting from the level of words, phrases, and sentences to the level of the writing as a whole. Although phonetics, intonation, and meter also constitute an essential part of mantras and folksongs, however, they will not be discussed in this article. It would rather be an object of a field research about oral traditions of the folk culture.

[Sanskrita un Eiropas valodu ciešā radniecība ir pierādīta jau sen, un ir publicēti daudzi pētījumi par Centrāleiropas un lietuviešu valodām. Taču ir tikai daži salīdzinoša aspekta darbi par sanskritu un latviešu valodu, galvenokārt, vārdnīcas vai raksti par morfoloģiju, fonētiku un transkripciju. Šajā pētījumā aplūkotās sanskrita un latviešu valodas leksikogrammatiskās un semantiskās iezīmes, kuras citi valodnieki vēl nav pienācīgi analizējuši. Līdz ar to raksts sniedz unikālu ieguldījumu salīdzinošās literatūrzinātnes un lingvistikas jomā. Turklāt autore piedāvā jaunu skatījumu uz saules tēlu reliģiskajā tautas kultūrā, sasaistot to ar lingvistisko semantiku, tekstam tuvā analizē salīdzinot trīs poētiskus darbus – *Gāyatrī* mantru un latviešu tautasdziesmas *Lec*, *Saulīte* un *Spīguļo, Saulīte*.

Šī pētījuma galvenais mērķis ir atklāt un aprakstīt līdzības un atšķirības sanskrita un latviešu valodas literārajos izteiksmes līdzekļos, gramatikā un leksikā, tai par laika parādot garīgo attieksmi pret sauli latviešu un indiešu kultūrās. Sintaktiskā aspektā tiek vispirms salīdzināti vārdi, frāzes un teikumi, bet pēc tam apskatīti arī visi panti to veselumā. Fonētika, intonācija un metrika arī ir būtiska mantru un tautasdziesmu sastāvdaļa, tomēr šajā rakstā tās netiks detalizētas. Šādam izpētes objektam būtu vairāk atbilstošs lauka pētījums par tautas kultūras mutvārdu tradīcijām.]

Keywords. Keywords: Vedic mantras (Vēdu mantras), Rigveda (Rigvēda), Latvian folksongs (latviešu tautasdziesmas), Saules dainas (Saules dainas), comparative literature studies (salīdzinošā literatūrzinātne), lexicogrammar (leksikogrammatika), semantics (semantika)

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Research background

Since ancient times the Sun has been the most visible and therefore the most important natural phenomena in the human life. Many cultures have adored it as the source of energy and as a supernatural power. Not only common people have paid a close attention to this phenomenon, but also scientists have done different kind of research about it, both in religious context, in natural sciences, as well as in literary and art studies [1]. In India the Sun is adored in different ways, and in the ancient Latvian folk culture it also takes a very important place. Due to the tight ethnic and linguistic relationship, Latvian and Indian folk culture, Vedic hymns and Latvian folksongs have been an object of comparison in many researches [2]. But there are very few works regarding comparative linguistics.

Vedic hymns represent one of the most ancient religious and literary traditions in the world, but Latvia is famous for the great number of folksongs that can actually be considered as Sacred Scriptures of the Latvian nation (Kusiņa-Šulce 2021) [3]. According to the state statistics the total number of Latvians amounts to 1 175 902 persons (Centrālā statistikas pārvalde 2023) [4]. Some sources state that there are more than one million Latvian folksongs (Latvijas Universitāte 2021) [5], but other scholars assert that there are as much as three million songs (Ķestere, Kaļķe 2020: 43) [6]. In any case one can surely say that each Latvian “has” at least one folksong.

Indian religious tradition starts with four Vedas: the *Rigveda* (10 chapters and 10 589 mantras), the *Yajurveda* (40 chapters and 1976 mantras), the *Sāmaveda* (29 chapters and 1875 mantras) and the *Atharvanaveda* (20 chapters and 5977 mantras). The *Rigveda* is concerned with various hymns praising the deities, and it is said to be the oldest of the four texts (Naicker 2019: 2) [7]. Most western Sanskritists think that the date for the codification of the *Rigveda* is between 1200 and 1000 BC (Possehl, Witzel 2002: 389-390) [8]. Indians believe that Vedas were revealed to ancient sages or so called “seers” (Sanskrit. *ṛṣi*), and the *Gāyatrī mantra* belongs to the section composed by Vishvāmitra (Samarth 2018: 46) [9].

The verse 3.62.10 from the *Rigveda*, widely known as *Sāvitrī*, *Gāyatrī*, or *Gāyatrī mantra*, ranks among the best-known mantras in the world. Since the mid-first millennium BC, it has been used in the so-called Upanayana ritual as the primary initiation mantra of Hinduism (Haas 2023: 48) [10]. One can affirm that nowadays it is one of the most wide-spread or even the most popular invocation among Hindus. It can be recited at sunrise or at sunset, during Raksha Bandhan Festival or at any period of the day (as a prayer for clear and peaceful mind and for good health).

Latvian folksongs or so called *Latvju dainas* have been arranged and edited by the Latvian folklorist, social activist, writer, and poet Krisjanis Barons in the beginning of the 20th. century. First ones were written down during the 17th. century, however, many of them belong to an archaic poetic tradition and date back to a much earlier times (Bula 2011; Muktu-pāvels 1998: 67) [11, 12]. Although the time of origin in both cases differs greatly, Vedic mantras and Latvian folksongs show a surprising similarity in many aspects: spiritual significance, ritual functions, magic nature, brevity of the form, and mythological figures.

Latvian traditional celebrations show a cyclic character that has developed in close connection with the course of the Sun and the dependence of humans on it. The vast cycle of summer and winter solstice songs is a part of this system (Kokare, 2001) [13]. There are ca. 4000 songs about the Sun, in Latvian called *Saules dainas*, and maybe 1000 more where the Sun is mentioned indirectly with other epithets (Kursīte 2018: 444) [14]. Among them, the most often heard one is *Spīguļo, Saulīte*. It can be recited in the cold and rainy weather (as a prayer for sunshine), during the Summer Solstice Festival (*Līgo svētki, Jāņi*) or at Easter (when the spring begins, everything starts to bloom and people await more light and warmth). Latvian geodesist, astronomer and researcher of the history of science Jānis Klētnieks maintains that in the very beginning it was a prayer for the sunshine during a solar eclipse (Klētnieks 1985: 6) [15]. The second Latvian folksong that was chosen for the analyses also

bears the title from its first line *Lec, Saulīte*. It is not so wide-spread in oral form or during traditional festivals, yet, after comparing it with the *Gāyatrī mantra* the author of this article discovered a very close lexical and syntactical resemblance of both texts.

Original texts and translations

In order to facilitate and to clarify the analyses of texts, all three chosen verses will be first listed here in their original form, as well as in English and in Latvian translations. Below is the *Gāyatrī mantra* in Devanāgarī script and in the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration. Other transliterated Sanskrit words in the text also will be given in this system.

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

OM bhūr bhuvah svaḥ

(Shrīrāma Sharmā 2005) [16]

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं

tat savitur vareṇyam

भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

bhargo devasya dhīmahi

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt

(Vishvāmitra 2023) [17]

Below is the English translation by the American linguist Stephanie Jamison and Vedic scholar Joel Brereton who have translated the whole *Rigveda*. There are hundreds of translations of the *Gāyatrī mantra*, but the author has chosen this one, because it represents a very precise word-by-word translation that better fits the intended linguistic analyses.

OM earth, air and heaven

(translation by the author)

Might we make our own

that desirable effulgence of god Savitar,
who will rouse forth our insights

(Jamison, Brereton 2015: 554) [18].

The first line of the verse does not appear in the *Rigveda*. However, it is traditionally added when the mantra is recited in rituals or written as a separate prayer. The line starts with the sacred primeval syllable OM and ends with three mystical words or *vyāhriti* which represent three realms (all influenced by the Sun God): the terrestrial, the intermediate and the celestial. This line will not be included in the analyses as it does not constitute a part of the original text structure.

The translation of the *Gāyatrī mantra* in the Latvian language done by the author of this article is also given below. It represents the first direct translation of this significant text from Sanskrit into Latvian, and therefore has a unique value.

OM zemē, gaisā un debesīs

Lai iemantojam mēs to vispārāko –

Saules dievišķo mirdzumu,

Kas iedvesmos mūsu domas!

The following part of this chapter will deal with the two selected folksongs. Latvian folksongs were published in 12 volumes in the middle of the 20th. century and digitalized by the professor of languages and literature Maruta Lietiņa Ray from the University of Virginia. Both verses come from volume XI, chapter of *Mythical Songs* of this compilation (Švābe u.c. 1952-1956) [19]. All folksongs are marked with unique numbers by which they can be easily identified everywhere. The folksong that is syntactically and lexically closer to the *Gāyatrī mantra*, is given below as the first one. The English translation of this verse was not available; therefore the author offers her own translation version.

Lec, Saulīte, lec, Saulīte,

Spīd' ar mūsu sētiņā!

Ir mums tava gaišumiņa

Vajadzēt vajadzēja (33838).

Rise, dear Sun, rise,

Shine in our courtyard!

Your precious light

We indeed need so much.

The second folksong that has been selected for the comparison is translated by the linguist and researcher of Latvian folklore Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga (who also served as the president of Latvia from 1999 to 2007).

Spīguļo, Saulīte,
Spīguļo, spīguļo!
Met melnu (kreklu) zemē,
Velc baltu mugurā (34028v1).

Shimmer, dear Sun,
Shimmer, shimmer!
Throw the black (shirt) down,
Put a white one on
(Vīķe-Freiberga 2022: 295) [20].

Main object of invocation – the Sun and its attributes

In Sanskrit the Sun has a great many names and epithets. But, when comparing it with Indo-European languages, usually the word *sūrya* is mentioned, due to its strong analogy with words in European languages (*the sun* in English, *die Sonne* in German, *le soleil* in French, and *saule* in Latvian). However, in the *Gāyatrī mantra* two other names appear. The core text mentions the masculine solar deity Savitar in genitive case (*savituh*), indicating that he is the owner of the divine light.¹

The German indologist Dominik Haas who wrote a dissertation on the *Gāyatrī mantra*, explains that in the Vedic language the word Savitar is derived from the verbal root *sū* (to impel) and therefore it literally means “impeller”, “arouser”, or “stimulator”. He is the god who impels all beings to rise, to move, and to procreate. Furthermore, Dominik Haas asserts that in the *Rigveda* Savitar is associated with the intermediate space or atmosphere, as opposed to the Sun itself. “In particular, he appears to have been associated with evening, primarily after sunset, and sometimes with morning, primarily before sunrise” (Haas 2020: 155) [21].

As already mentioned, Savitar is a masculine god; however, this name can also be associated with a female deity – Sāvitrī who appears in some early Vedic texts as a daughter of Savitar (Ludvik 2007: 8) [22]. In some English translations, even by Indians themselves, one can find a capitalized pronoun “She” which clearly shows an association with a goddess (Vivekānanda 1915: 211) [23]. However, in ancient times Sāvitrī did not have a direct relation to the Gāyatrī mantra. Only later, in the Mahābhārata she was invoked by this mantra. From about the 4th. century onwards, in late Epic and Purānic literature she emerged as a princess who rescued her husband from the hell (Ludvik 2007: 123-126) [22]. Besides, Sāvitrī is often called the “Mother of the Vedas” (*vedamātṛ*), and this epithet leads us to the correlation with the name of Gāyatrī.

The mantra is commonly known as *Gāyatrī*, because it is set in the *gāyatrī* meter (3 lines, 8 syllables in each line, together 24 syllables) (Haas 2023: 50) [10]. These 24 syllables can symbolize different groups of deities, sages, cosmic principles, parts and senses of the human body, etc. (Naicker 2019: 3, 6-9) [7]. Besides, Gāyatrī herself is a female deity, also known as the “Mother of the Vedas” (Ankrava 2019: 80) [24]. She is associated with the light of wisdom and with the creation force, and is identified as the supreme pure consciousness (Das 1990: 51) [25]. Her consort is Brahma, and it is even said that “Gayatri is Brahma, Gayatri is Vishnu, Gayatri is Shiva, Gayatri is Vedas” (Ankrava 2019: 81) [24].

In the Latvian language and folk culture the sun is always a female figure called *saule*. According to Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga it is possible to distinguish three aspects of the sun: cosmological, meteorological and mythological (Vīķe-Freiberga 2016: 11) [26]. In the ancient Latvian cosmology, the sun represents the core of the universe and cosmic energy (Kursīte 2018: 444) [14]. It has also become a metaphor for good weather, because in Latvia one can observe frequent climate changes: rainy clouds and clear sky with

¹In the Devanāgarī script (used for Sanskrit nowadays) capital and small letters are not distinguished. Therefore, when personal names are used as components of the sentence in English, they are capitalized according to the English language rules. But in the transliteration Sanskrit words are not capitalized.

bright sun replace each other very often. Besides, in many folksongs the sun appears as a deified figure that can imply and bring health, beauty and goodness.

The Latvian literary scholar, linguist and professor Janīna Kursīte-Pakule suggests that Latvian folksongs may refer to the ancient matriarchal society where the sun is worshiped as the great primeval mother and celestial queen who gives birth to all living beings. In folksongs one can often come across the phrase “the mother sun”, in Latvian – *saules māte* (Kursīte 2018: 444) [14]. In some folksongs from the Volume XI, Chapter of Mythical Songs one can also find the phrase “daughters of the sun”, in Latvian – *saules meitas* who are often mentioned as brides of the “sons of the god” – *dieva deli* (Švābe u.c. 1952-1956) [19]. They may symbolize such phenomena as dawn, sunset or rays of the sun (Kursīte 2018: 448) [14].

Regarding the word “sun”, one should point out two specific linguistic aspects of the Latvian language that come to appearance also in the selected folksongs: diminutive forms and capitalization of common nouns. In both texts the diminutive form for the sun is used, and the word is capitalized – *Saulīte*. Usually, when talking about the physical sun one writes it with a small letter, but in this case a capital letter is used to emphasize the personification and deification. Diminutive forms are very common and often used in Latvian everyday speech, but in poetic writings they deliver a special feeling. They may indicate that something is very dear, precious, and pleasant; may imply a wish to make something close and intimate; may show a polite, kind, and caring attitude. In the case of the sun people try to bring it close to themselves, as if it were their own mother who could take care of them (Kursīte 2018: 445) [14].

One should also pay attention to the attributes of the sun that are mentioned in the *Gāyatrī Mantra* and in Latvian folksongs. The first folksong mentions the “precious light”, it is an approximate equivalent of the Latvian

diminutive form – *gaišumiņš*.² The sunlight often symbolizes goodness and kindness, and in Latvian spoken language a good person is often called *gaišs cilvēks* where the adjective *gaišs* means “bright” or “light”. White color in appearance points also to a pure soul or mind (Raudupe 2019: 118) [27].

The second verse narrates about the “black” (*melns*) and the “white” (*balts*) of the sun. Some text versions do not say exactly what is black or white, but other ones talk about the “shirt” (*kreklis*). By the way, this word represents the only metaphor used in the chosen verses. In folksongs the typical color of the sun is white, and this first of all it points at the physical sunshine. The black color may refer to the time period when the sun cannot be seen (night, solar eclipse, winter etc.), but is still exists in people’s thoughts (Kursīte 2018: 444) [14].

Vaira Viķe-Freiberga draws parallels between changes in weather with the periodical human laundering cycle when dirty clothes are put away and clean ones are put on (Viķe-Freiberga 2022: 274) [20]. She also asserts that in early times Latvians believed they could influence weather conditions with magic spells, and a specific ritual with this kind of songs was done to chase away black clouds (Viķe-Freiberga 2016: 133-134) [26]. But the theologian, religious historian, and folklore researcher Haralds Biezais is the opinion that the white color of the sun refers here to moral and ethical qualities that are derived from the figurative meaning of dirty and clean clothes (Viķe-Freiberga 2016: 132) [26].

In the *Gāyatrī mantra* the attribute of the God Savitar is the “desirable effulgence”, in Sanskrit – *vareṇyam bhargas* (adjective and noun in neutral, singular, accusative case), and it is associated with the transcendental divine light. Dominik Haas explains the first word *vareṇya* as an adjectivized participle optative passive derived from the verb root *vṛ* with meaning “to choose” or “to desire” (Haas 2023: 54) [10]. There are many different translations of the word *vareṇya* in the case of the *Gāyatrī mantra* offered by dif-

²A literal translation in English is not possible, therefore the word “precious” is added to reveal the connotation of the diminutive form in Latvian.

ferent scholars: worth to be chosen, fit to be worshipped, desirable, adorable, best, excellent, effulgent, supreme etc.

The noun *bhargas*, the subject of the verse, can have three-layered meaning: the general, the specific and the figurative. Basically, it means “splendor, effulgence, light” and may denote a kind of “an unsteady flicker as in the case of flames [...] often equated with metallic objects” (Haas 2023: 54) [10]. This meaning coincides with the image created by the verb “shimmer” (*spīguļo*) in the second Latvian folksong. Specifically, in view of Savitar’s association with the early morning and evening, the noun may denote a “gentle gleam of the sky before sunrise or after sunset” (Haas 2023: 54) [10]. Figuratively this light could be related to the last word of the stanza – *pracodayāt* (will rouse, inspire or illuminate). As already mentioned above, in times of the *Rigveda*, wise men who composed sacred hymns were called “seers”, so the light, intuition, inspiration, and the act of composing hymns were integrally related. “Sight requires light, and the gods were consequently often asked to bestow this visionary light, which was also generally associated with the sacral world and the states of beatitude and bliss” (Haas 2023: 55) [10]. It is still an object of discussion who actually inspires people’s minds here – Savitar himself or his light.

Narrator and verbal expressions

In this and next chapter the *Gāyatrī mantra* will mainly be paralleled with the first folksong *Lec*, *Saulīte*, because it contains more analogue lexemes and structures. Only at times the second folksong *Spīguļo*, *Saulīte* will be attracted for the comparison.

Both Sanskrit and Latvian texts clearly show that the main narrator is the first person in plural which may point out a wish to benefit not only oneself, but also others. In both cases the narrator appears twice. In the *Gāyatrī mantra*

the verbal form *dhīmahi* in the second line implies the action by the first person and can be translated as “might we meditate”.³ In English one must always add a separate personal pronoun to indicate a precise action, but in Latvian and in Sanskrit verbs can be conjugated and already imply a definite person, singular or plural forms, so that it is not obligatory to add a separate lexeme. The second place where the narrator appears is the phrase *dhīyoḥ naḥ* (our insights), it contains a direct reference to the personal pronoun (noun is in accusative case, but pronoun in genitive).

In Latvian text the personal pronoun itself is mentioned twice: in phrases *mūsu sētīnā* (in our courtyard) and *mums vajadzēja* (we needed), in genitive and in dative case (the latter shows necessity in Latvian). From expressions related to the first person, one can induce that the actual place where the intended activity should take place in both compared texts is different. In the *Gāyatrī mantra* it is the human mind, inner thoughts, insights, but in Latvian verse it is the courtyard of the house – the center of home where the light (i.e. warmth) of the Sun is expected. In the first case it reveals an individual spiritual practice, but in the second – a social function of the Sun who is asked to bring light (i.e. kindness and love) in the family. Now let us analyze main activities described in these verses. In Sanskrit one can mark out two of three verbal forms. The first one *vareṇya* (optative passive verbal adjective) was already mentioned in the previous chapter and in many translations it is translated as an adjective “effulgent, desirable, adorable, supreme”, etc. However, it shows a hint to the main narrator. A more precise meaning of the word could be “worth to be chosen” or “to be wished for”, and it indicates that there is someone who considers it (here: the light) as a valuable thing and chooses it as the best one. Some scholars translate it also as a verb, e.g. Indian philosopher, yogi, and poet Sri Aurobindo:

³In the translation given above this verb was rendered as “might we make our own”, but here the shorter translation version “might we meditate” is chosen to facilitate the equation with Sanskrit original where there is a single verb.

⁴Full translation of the stanza: “We meditate on the glory of that Being who has produced this universe; may She enlighten our minds.”

”We choose the Supreme Light of the divine Sun”⁴ (Purani 1982: 57) [28]. Besides, it is important to know that the archaic form of the word is *vareṇīya*, and it is necessary to add the letter “i” in order to get 24 syllables in total.

The predicate of the verse *dhīmahi* can be rendered as “might we make our own” or “let us acquire” (first person plural). Dominik Haas explains that in Vedic language it was actually derived from the root *dhā* with the meaning “to put” which, used in the middle voice, means “to obtain” and in the aorist optative form expresses a wish (Haas 2023: 62) [10]. However, in Post-Vedic times most scholars derive it from the root *dhī* with the meaning “to think, to contemplate” and in the given context translate it as the verb “to meditate”, e.g. Swami Vivekānanda⁵, Monier Monier-Williams,⁶ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan⁷. Nowadays it is explained in relation to the next word – noun *dhīyoḥ* (feminine, plural, accusative case) which is also derived from the root *dhī* and means “thoughts” or “insights”. The same word *dhī* can represent the root of a noun and a verb.

The last verb to be analyzed in Sanskrit text is *pracodayāt* which stems from the root *cuḍ* (to hasten) and literally means “might cause to move forward”. This is an ancient subjunctive causative form (here: third person singular) which expresses that something is expected in the future (Haas 2023: 64) [10]. In this context it is the divine light that “is expected to inspire” human minds.

Latvian text has four verbs: *lec*, *spīdi*, *vajadzēt*, *vajadzēja*. The first two are in the imperative mood, second person singular, and they express a direct request to the Sun “to rise” and “to shine” in the courtyard. Unlike Sanskrit where verbs are mostly used in a form of a wish, benediction or possibility, Latvians engage in a direct dialogue with (super) natural powers and talk to them like ones of their own kin. In this place it

is interesting to juxtapose Sanskrit and Latvian abbreviated words: *vareṇ(i)ya* and *spīd(i)*. In Sanskrit the full form is necessary for a correct meter, but in Latvian, on the contrary, the abbreviated one is used for a correct rhyme. In India the full form is a characteristic of ancient times, but in Latvian the full form is used nowadays in everyday speech. One can observe that the full form of *vareṇīya* and the short form of *spīd* both are used in poetic writings and sacred scriptures, not in everyday speech.

Two other words *vajadzēt vajadzēja* come from the same root *vajadzēt* (to need) and form a multiplication with two modal verbs, indicating that something “is extremely indispensable”, in this case – the light of the sun. The first verb is in the infinitive form, the second – in the simple past tense. However, it does not mean that something was needed earlier, and now is not needed anymore. On the contrary, it is emphasized that the light was necessary already long ago and therefore now it is even more important. Different kinds of multiplications are very common in Latvian folksongs. In first lines of both Latvian verses we see a repetition: *lec, Saulīte, lec, Saulīte* (rise, dear Sun, rise, dear Sun) and *Spīguļo, Saulīte, / Spīguļo, spīguļo!* (shimmer, dear Sun, shimmer, shimmer). This feature shows a figurative culmination, an intensification of the invocation, and emphasizes the need for the fulfillment of the request.

Syntactic analyses

First of all a short introduction about the sentence structure and punctuation in Sanskrit and in Latvian is necessary. Both languages are highly inflected: each word has a distinct form that precisely defines its role in the sentence and clearly shows relations with other words. The Latvian language has a rather strict SVO word order, but the SOV system of Sanskrit is more a common practice than a strict rule. Indian writ-

⁵”We meditate on the glory of that Being who has produced this universe; may She enlighten our minds.” (Vivekānanda 1915: 211) [23].

⁶”Let us meditate on that excellent glory of the divine vivifying Sun, May he enlighten our understandings” (Monier-Williams 1882: 164) [29].

⁷”We meditate on the adorable glory of the radiant sun; may he inspire our intelligence” (Radhakrishnan 1953: 299) [30].

ers and poets often arrange words and sentence parts in Sanskrit very arbitrary, according to the specifics of the chosen genre and meter. Besides, the use of punctuation marks (such as full stop, comma, colon, quotation, exclamation and question marks) is obligatory in Latvian; and there are many complicated rules. In each of the selected folksongs one can find four commas, one exclamation mark and the full stop. In Classical and Vedic Sanskrit texts only two punctuation marks are used: single or double vertical strokes (called *danḍa*) that roughly correspond to the full stop or indicate the end of the text respectively. In the Latvian language each word is written separately, but in Sanskrit words often are often combined in compounds or merged together according to conjunction rules – *sandhi*. That is why the division of sentence parts and words in Sanskrit is often problematic, making it difficult to find analogue structures in European languages.

Regarding the syntax, translations and interpretations of the *Gāyatrī mantra* show substantial differences. According to the Sanskrit grammar, there is only one main predicate *dhīmahi* (might we meditate), consequently the whole verse contains only one sentence. In the English translation by Jamison and Brereton (given in the beginning of the article), there is an analogue sentence structure. However, for the most part scholars prefer a more figurative translation; therefore one usually finds a division in two sentences – e.g., “We meditate on the adorable glory of the radiant sun; May he inspire our intelligence” (Radhakrishnan 1953: 299) [30]. In such case the last word *pracodayāt* that actually represents the predicate of the subordinate clause, is treated like the predicate of an independent clause. More interpretative translations may even be split in three independent statements – e.g., “[.] turn thy attention to the All-Absorbing Sun within. Accepting its influence be thou absorbed in the Sun, And it shall in its own likeness make thee All-Luminous” (Singh 2012: 275) [31].

Each one of the chosen Latvian folksongs con-

⁸An approximate meaning in English could be “[it] is”.

tains two sentences that stretch over two lines respectively. This sentence division appears also in other folksongs and can be considered a standard. In the first two lines there are three verbs which function as predicates and represent equal parts of the sentence. The second folksong has two equal predicate clauses also in the third and fourth line. Comparing Sanskrit text with Latvian verses one can conclude that the sentence in Sanskrit is longer and its structure is more complicated, but clauses in Latvian are rather short and relatively simple. Though poetic and archaic expressions can be found in the latter, as well, e.g., in the second part of the first folksong: “Ir mums tava gaišumiņa vajadzēt vajadzēja.” In Latvian there is actually one more verb – *ir* (third person singular from the root *būt*),⁸ and the needed object is expressed with the genitive case, not with accusative (like nowadays). It is impossible to render these connotations directly in the English translation of the verse; the meaning can only be explained separately. But these details are not essential for the comparison, and therefore will not be further analyzed here. Looking at the whole text of folksongs one can notice that it is bristling with physical motion and activity created by numerous verbs (the first one has 6, the second one – 5). In meantime, one should pay attention to the fact that the length of the *Gāyatrī mantra* and folksongs is nearly the same. If one compares the mantra with the second folksong, omitting the letter “i” in the word *vareṇ(i)yam* and taking away the word *kreklis* (shirt) in Latvian, both verses result in the same length of 10 words and 23 syllables.

The main intended action and the main goal of the invocations in the Indian mantra and in Latvian folksongs are on one hand different, but on the other – rather similar. One can treat *dhīmahi* (might we acquire) and *spīdi/spīguļo* (shine/shimmer) as main actions that are described and intended. From this point of view, Indians aspire to obtain the divine light in order to make perfect their own mind, but Latvians ask the Sun to perform the action – to give them light and warmth, not participating in the

process themselves. From another perspective, one could also take two modal verbs *vajadzēt vajadzēja* (indeed needed) for a human activity, and interpret it as an attempt to enact the light, i.e., goodness and harmony in one's own life. In this case the main goal of the folksong would be an approximation to the word *dhīmahi* in Sanskrit.

Looking at the compositional semantics, in both languages it is possible to perceive a three-level narrative. As already mentioned earlier, there are three main verbal expressions both in the *Gāyatrī mantra* (*vareṇya, dhīmahi, pracodayāt*)⁹ and in the first folksong (*lec, spīdi, vajadzēja*).¹⁰ If one regards each of them as the core of a clause, they can reveal the following layers of activities. The *Gāyatrī mantra*:

- Adoration of the Sun God and his effulgence (line 1);
- Focusing the mind, meditation (line 2);
- Prayer to the Sun to enlighten the mind (line 3).

The Latvian folksong [*Lec, Saulīte*]:

- Process in the nature – sunrise (line 1);
- Its influence on humans – light in the courtyard (line 2);
- Human necessity for the light (lines 3 and 4).

In this example we can see that the *Rigveda* as a highly religious work reveal supernatural and psychological contents, but folksongs show that Latvian traditional customs and beliefs are more akin to the social life and natural phenomena. The Latvian writer, author of religious and philosophical literature Rudīte Raudupe in her comparative research on vedas and dainas expresses a similar opinion that Vedic hymns are very rich in spiritual concepts, but Latvian folksongs pay more attention to domestic events, work habits and human relationships. (Raudupe 2019: 29) [27].

⁹In English – desirable, might we make our own, will rouse forth.

¹⁰In English – rise, shine, needed.

Conclusions

The conclusive chapter will be divided into three imputed parts: historical and practical grammar issues, similarities and differences in the perception of the sun, main motivation and goals of the invocation.

Indian Vedic mantras came to existence as early as 1200 BC, but the exact time of the origin of Latvian folksongs is not known. It is only known that the first ones were fixed in written form in the 17th. century. Due to the large time and space gap between both cultures and countries, it is hardly possible to find any direct relations or mutual influences in poetic and religious texts. Still, many researchers mark out close resemblance between two languages and spiritual ideas, e.g., Suniti Kumar Chatterji in his monograph *Balts and Aryans in Their Indo-European Background* (1968) [32]. Consequently, in the chosen examples of verses one can find both similar and different aspects regarding the grammar and means of expression.

Sanskrit and Latvian both are highly inflected languages, therefore most lexemes have distinct endings which precisely indicate the function of each word in the sentence and define mutual relations among words. Suffixes and prefixes are possible for nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, and in both languages they even may show an approximate similarity in meaning and application. However, this aspect was not further discussed in this research.

Judging by the given examples, sentences in mantras of the *Rigveda* tend to be longer and more complicate. Archaic expressions and structures can be found in both cases, and their original meaning and grammatical explanation may be an issue even for native speakers and scholars who therefore offer different modern interpretations.

Furthermore, it was discovered that the length of the compared verses, i.e., the number of words and syllables can be nearly or exactly the same. However, this number in Latvian folksongs does not imply any further symbolic, but it

is highly elaborated and much discussed in the case of the *Gāyatrī mantra*. Abbreviations of words and omitting of the letter “i” can be found both in Sanskrit and in Latvian text, but the usage of abbreviations regarding the chronology of time and ritual practice differs.

Diminutive suffixes are very popular in Latvian, used both in everyday speech, as well as in poetic texts; they are not so wide-spread in Sanskrit (though also possible). In former case they may deliver a special feeling of intimacy, politeness and caring attitude. Furthermore, many kinds of multiplications are common in Latvian folksongs; they express culmination, intensification or urgent need. No such characteristics can be observed in the given Sanskrit text.

Hopes and wishes of Vedic narrators are expressed in optative, benedictive or future possibility forms; unlike Latvians who engage in a direct dialogue with (super)natural powers. This aspect is touched upon also by Rudīte Raudupe in her book *Perception of God in Vedas and Dainas* (Raudupe 2019: 134) [27]. In opposition to Vedic gods, Latvians treat their gods of nature like close friends, and they may talk directly to gods or ask for their help without special polite forms of address.

Sanskrit has three genders, Latvian language – two, and nowadays, they are used quite automatically, so that in most cases it is impossible to trace back why definite words are associated with a definite gender. However, in the given case the gender of mythological figures reveal interesting connotations and associations, e.g., Savitar is a male god, but his name can be related with the goddess Sāvitrī who may appear as his daughter. Some researchers of vedas even associate the light with the feminine energy which gives light and birth to all beings like a mother.

In the general sense one can attribute the three aspects of the sun listed by Vaira Viķe-Freiberga (cosmological, meteorological and mythological) not only to Latvian folksongs, but also to the sun in Vedic culture, perhaps even adding the fourth one – social role as a mother who endows the family with warmth and love. But in the specific case of the *Gāyatrī mantra*, the God Savitar plays a cosmological, religious and psy-

chological role, while the importance of Saulīte in the chosen Latvian folksongs lies more in her meteorological, social and moral role. However, one must be aware of the fact that ancient Latvians were pantheists who saw the power of God in the nature all around them. In Vedic times Indians also worshiped nature deities, such as the sun or the thunder, only later they turned more to Puranic gods - Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva (Raudupe 2019: 30-31) [27]. Therefore the sun in Latvian folksongs may also emerge as a deified figure who implies and brings health, beauty and blessing to people. However, in distinction to Gāyatrī, she is usually not associated with the light of wisdom or pure consciousness.

The Latvian text mentions the white color, and this first of all points at the physical sunshine, but can also be associated with moral qualities, such as goodness and kindness. In the Sanskrit text the color of the sun or sunlight is not elaborated, it is only said that this splendor is worth to be worshiped which means the supreme quality. Interestingly, some Sanskritists interpret it as an unsteady flicker like a metallic object (Haas 2023: 54) [10], and this description reveals a very similar image with that of the shimmering sun in the folksong *Spīguļo, Saulīte*.

This folksong also implies a dichotomy of white and black, i.e., light and darkness which may refer to the day and night, rainy and sunny weather, or in figurative meaning – to the clean and dirty things, good and bad qualities. In the Sanskrit stanza one does not find such a duality, however, it is worth to recall the association of the God Savitar with the early morning and late evening, with time before sunset and after sunset, as well as the Indian ritual practice of reciting the *Gāyatrī mantra* at dawn and sunset when the light alternates with darkness. However, these are only minor aspects that could be considered alongside. The major tendency of the enlightenment described in the *Gāyatrī mantra* is a development along a spiral – a conversion from ignorance to intelligence, and not a cyclic process like in the folksong. On the other hand, one could expect this kind of an irreversible change also in the situation described in the folksong

where the sunlight motivates people to develop good moral qualities.

The background for this kind of rituals, spiritual and moral self-cultivation could be found in weather conditions of both regions. In India the sun brings an unbearable heat, and people believe that exposing oneself to the torment of this heat they can get rid of the terrestrial suffering and attain spiritual enlightenment. On the contrary, the sun in Latvia is always associated with a pleasant feeling, because in autumn, in winter and at night weather is often cold, dark or rainy. Contrasts are sharp in the nature and as such they also appear in folksongs in figurative sense.

The actual place where the intended activity should take place in both compared texts is quite different. The *Gāyatrī mantra* pertains to the human mind, but in Latvian verse the courtyard of a real house is mentioned. In the first case it is more an individual spiritual practice, but in the second – the Sun plays the function of a socializer who is asked to bestow the light and implied warmth to the family.

The main intended action and the main goal of the invocation in the Indian mantra and in Latvian folksongs can be interpreted from different angles. Both Sanskrit and Latvian texts clearly show that the main narrator is the first person in plural, and this fact may imply a wish to benefit others. However, it seems that Indians aspire to perform the action themselves – to focus on the divine light in order to perfect their minds, but Latvians ask the Sun to perform the action, not participating in the process themselves. From another perspective, one could also reinterpret the doubled modal verb “need” and imply an attempt to actively use the light, in order to establish goodness and harmony in the human life.

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