3 The Vedic Schools in Contemporary Maharashtra

Having sketched the broad socio-historical and cultural contexts in which these schools have found their places in contemporary Maharashtra, I now turn to the specifics. In this chapter, I begin by presenting the official policy of the Indian government regarding religious schools, along with the impact these policies have on the transmission of the Veda. I then move to the sponsors and support organizations of these schools, thereby addressing the economic factors that dictate their operation. I will then present a typology of the schools I visited during my fieldwork, as a heuristic tool to analyze different discourses and practices around the ideal of the *brāhmaṇa*, as articulated and embodied by the members of these schools.

3.1 Governmental Regulations

Understanding the modern development of Vedic schools and their current patronage systems requires some observations on the Indian government's official policy on education.[104] Under Article 21-A of the Indian Constitution, there exists a provision of "free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of fourteen years."[105] The Right to Education Act (or RTE), which implements revised rules to both public and private schools, was signed on August 4, 2009, and came into effect on April 1, 2010. It was intended to be valid for all schools and for all children of India. The former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said, on the day the act was implemented: "We are committed to ensuring that all children, irrespective of gender and social category, have access to education; an education that enables them to acquire the skills, knowledge, values and attitudes necessary to become responsible and active citizens of India."[106] The act lays down norms relating to student-teacher ratios, management, buildings and infrastructure, school working days and working hours, and teacher qualifications. However, these norms do not take into account traditional calendars or traditional subjects and methods that are vital to schools such as the Vedic *pāṭhaśālā*s.[107] For these reasons, religious and minority groups, as well as supporters of their schools, criticized the act. Controversy was also raised by

104 Part of this and the following section are similar to those appearing in an article published in 2016 in the proceedings of the 5th International Vedic Workshop entitled: "Trends of Standardization and Institutionalization in the Transmission of the Vedas: Examples from Contemporary Maharashtra."

105 http://www.education.nic.in/natpol.asp#pol accessed on June 29, 2011.

106 http://www.pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=60001 accessed on February 8, 2012.

107 Additionally, it is important to mention that the Maharashtrian Hindu calendar follows the southern, *amānta* system with months ending in the no-moon day (*amāvāsyā*), rather than the northern, *pūrṇimānta* system, in which months end with the full-moon (*pūrṇimā*). Also, this system dates years according to the southern, Śaka era rather than the northern, Vikram era. (Feldhaus 2003: 183)

the fact that the act stipulates a compulsory reservation of 25% for disadvantaged children in private schools.[108] The implementation of the act created some anger and confusion with regards to its application across the country, particularly among the minority groups and NGOs who perceived themselves to be threatened by the new law.

A functionary of a prominent Vedic School in Kerala told the *Times of India*, upon the implementation of the RTE act: "Only children who are genuinely interested in learning through the Vedic system join our school. Many of the Vedic Schools are still loosely modeled on the gurukul system. Our pedagogy is different and also emphasizes an oral teaching. It will be difficult for us to give reservation the way RTE states [i.e. student-teacher ratios, etc.] or even have [a] school management committee. Most of our students are from poor background[s]. Moreover, since only a few hundred Vedic Schools are left in the country, exemption won't have an adverse impact on mainstream education."[109]

After negotiations with representatives of the Muslim minorities (such as from the Madrasa Board and the All India Muslim Personal Law Board), and pressure from a delegation from Congress leaders,[110] *madrasa*s were the first to be granted an exception from the act, and the Human Resource Development Ministry (HRD) issued a guideline in this regard, stating that such institutions are protected under Article 29 and 30 of the Constitution, which guarantee the rights of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions. Subsequently, representatives of the Vedic schools also submitted a petition to the HRD Minister, Kapil Sibal, requesting exemption from the RTE and rejecting the letter they had received from the Maharṣi Sāṃdīpani Rāṣṭrīya Veda Vidyā Pratiṣṭhān asking them to comply with the act.[111] Religious institutions such as the Kāñci Kāmakoṭi Pīṭham, the Ahobila Maṭh, the Andayan Āśram, and the Ārya Samāj supported the representatives of the petition with their signatures. A few days later, the exception for Vedic schools was granted and the official guideline was amended under Section 35(1) of the RTE.

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108 According to the RTE: a "[...] 'child belonging to disadvantaged group' means a child belonging to the Scheduled Caste, the Scheduled Tribe, the socially and educationally backward class or such other group having disadvantage owing to social, cultural, economical, geographical, linguistic, gender or such other factor, as may be specified by the appropriate Government, by notification". (The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009. Published in *The Gazette of India Extraordinary*. New Delhi, August 21, 2009 p.2.)

109 http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-08-31/india/28291237_1_rte-act-vedic-education-schools accessed on August 7, 2011. Square-braquets in the quote added by the author.

110 http://www.indianexpress.com/news/Keep-madrasas-out-of-RTE--Digvijaya-tells-PM/887071/ accessed on March 1, 2012.

111 The Maharṣi Sāṃdīpani Rāṣṭrīya Veda Vidyā Pratiṣṭhān is a branch from the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Education. For more on this institution, see subchapter 3.2.

> Applicability of RTE to Minority Institutions – Institutions, including Madrasa and Vedic Pathshalas especially serving religious and linguistic minorities are protected under Article 29 and 30 of the Constitution. The RTE Act does not come in the way of continuance of such institutions, or the rights of children in such institutions and schools of minority organizations covered within the meaning of section 2(n) of the Act, will be governed by the provisions of the RTE Act, 2009.[112]

Since the time of Indian Independence in 1947, the Indian government has been concerned with rescuing the cultural heritage of the country from extinction and, to this end, among other activities, it created the Sanskrit Commission in 1956 "to consider the question of the present state of Sanskrit Education in all its aspects".[113] The commission, although not focused on the oral transmission of the Veda, produced through its report a sketch of traditional schools of Sanskrit learning, including Vedic *pāṭhaśālā*s. The picture portrayed by the report was one of a dilapidated tradition on the verge of extinction.

> It is highly regrettable that, on the whole, there are, about many of these institutions, no signs of a living or growing organism but only symptoms of a decaying constitution. This unfortunate state of affairs has not escaped the attention of educationists, persons interested in Sanskrit, and the Governments.[114]

After portraying the situation of traditional and modern learning of Sanskrit and their allied subjects, the commission recommended a series of steps to be implemented by the Indian government in order to safeguard and revitalize Sanskrit learning. Among other specific points for the Sanskrit language, the commission recommended that:

> [...] special attention should be paid to the preservation of the Oral Tradition of the different Vedas and their recensions as current in different parts of India, this Oral Tradition being useful even from the point of view of linguistic and literary research; that provision should be made available in temples and religious institutions for the recitation of the Vedas, and that, where such provision already exists, it should be continued; that the surplus of temple funds which might be available, should be utilized for the maintenance of schools for the teaching of the Kantha-patha [oral[115]] of the Vedas; that, in those parts of India where the Oral Tradition of the Veda has died out, authorities of educational and religious Institutions should take steps to revive it; that the Research Institutes working in the field of the Veda should, wherever possible, utilize the services of the Pandits who have preserved the Oral Tradition of the Vedas; [and] should be helped by the Governments to rehabilitate themselves [...].[116]

Even after the recommendations of the 1956 report and the government of India's investment of considerable resources to create supervisory agencies, inaugurate new

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112 http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=68827 accessed on August 8, 2012.
113 http://www.education.nic.in/cd50years/u/45/3Z/453Z0101.htm accessed on June 29, 2011.
114 Ibid.
115 *kāṇṭhapāṭha* literally means "throat recitation/learning" Monier-Williams 2011.
116 http://www.education.nic.in/cd50years/u/45/3Z/453Z0C01.htm accessed on June 29, 2011.

centers of Sanskrit learning, revive old centers, and finance publications, cultural events, and radio (and more recently, television) broadcasts for nation-wide consumption (all centered around the promotion of the language), only minimal improvements on traditional Sanskrit education with a focus on oral instruction and the memorization of texts have taken place. Moreover, traditional Vedic recitation was practically ignored by these programs, which aimed at promoting the Sanskrit language in general, and not specifically the preservation of the Vedas in their oral form.

UNESCO's declaration in 2003 that Vedic recitation is an "intangible heritage of humanity" brought it to the spotlight of public attention. India's Department of Culture and the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, aided by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA) in New Delhi, took the initiative to submit Vedic chanting to the UNESCO as a candidate for global recognition. The Ministry of Culture claimed that it implemented IGNCA's five year action plan to safeguard, protect, promote, and disseminate the Vedic oral tradition, encouraging various scholars and practitioners to revitalize their own branches (*śākhā*).[117] Nonetheless, according to Nānājī Kāḷe and B. Pataskar, who were involved in the creation of the plan, [118] the aid did not reach all the recipients mentioned in the document — this including Kāḷe's schools, which are among the custodians of rare branches of the Veda.

Even after UNESCO's declaration and the efforts of the Indian government through the Department of Culture's plan, many schools across the country remained without financial aid or any other official recognition. As will be discussed below, important changes in the traditional transmission of knowledge have notably appeared, following India's independence. These changes were brought about not only through the government's direct intervention and regulation, but also through the lack of the same. Nanda (2009: 120-134) is one of the scholars who has convincingly shown the government's direct and indirect support of religious institutions, including schools and trusts for the training of priests. She concludes that, in contemporary India,

> [...] the actual practice of secularism in India seems to be replicating the pre-modern, pre-Mughal Hindu model of the state-temple relationship. Elected ministers and bureaucrats see themselves in the mould of Hindu kings of yesteryears who considered it their duty to protect dharma. The temple priests and gurus, in turn, think nothing of treating elected officials as VIPs, if not literally as gods. The seamless partnership of faith and politics continues under the thin veneer of secularism (Nanda 2009: 139).

She has, nonetheless, not distinguished between traditional *vedapāṭhaśālā*s and other types of schools with a religious curriculum and a different political agenda,

117 Report of the Working Group on Art and Culture for XI Five-Year Plan and Proposals for XI Five-Year Plan (2007-12) & Annual Plan (2007-08) Ministry of Culture, Government of India. New Dehli, 2007.
118 Personal communication, 6.9.2009.

such as the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic Schools (also known as DAVs)[119] and others, which may have different aims, but in particular different curriculums than the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s studied in this work.

3.2 "Money Matters": The Economy of Vedic Schools

In most of the studies on the current Vedic tradition, the crucial factors of politics and economy are left out. A few recent exceptions who consider these important factors are, e.g., Lubin (2001a, 2001b), F. Smith (2000), Fuller (1979, 2001), and Knipe (2015).

These two factors, and particularly the economic one, are of a decisive importance to the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s. Not only is the existence of these schools completely dependent on financial resources but, in my opinion, the economic factors have a larger influence on the Vedic traditions than scholars have so far considered.

Whether a school can operate or not depends on whether its sponsors can provide a minimum subsistence for its members. This includes food, clothing, accommodation, medical facilities, and books and materials for students and teachers, as well as the salaries for the employees. The sponsors dictate, to a certain extent, not only the size and population of the school, and the infrastructure and facilities, but also the curriculum, the religious affiliation, the social and religious events, and the way the members of the school present themselves in society. The sponsors of these schools and the teachers have to come to terms with the way the school is managed, and agree on the needs and expectations of each side. Compromise on both sides is the unspoken rule. The attachment to institutions is obviously always linked to other aspects beyond just the financial one; as we have seen in previous chapters, hereditary, regional, and religious motives may influence the ties to a particular group or organization.

It is not uncommon to see these traditional schools emerge and disappear in the course of only a couple of years. In fact, most of the schools I visited during my fieldwork are only 30 to 40 years old, although a very small number of others were founded a century or so ago, when the British promotion of secular education was weakening traditions of instruction that had previously been largely preserved within *brāhmaṇa* families. Of course, as we saw in subchapter 2.1, this does not mean that the formal transmission of Vedic knowledge is new in Maharashtra, but rather that the sponsoring system has undergone tremendous change, having moved away from family lines of transmission, these supported directly or indirectly by royal patronage, to mostly private institutional forms sponsored by India's economical elite and the Hindu diaspora.

119 For more on the DAVs and their role within the colonial project, see, for example: Kumar 1990 and Langohr 2001.

Now, official governmental support comes through the Maharṣi Sāṃdīpani Rāṣṭrīya Veda Vidyā Pratiṣṭhān (MSRVVP), a branch of the Ministry of Human Resource Development in the Department of Education that was established in January 1987 as an autonomous organization and as a follow-up to the 1956 report of the Sanskrit Commission. The headquarters of this organization are now in Ujjain,[120] Madhya Pradesh where they moved in 1993. The organization's official objectives are stated as follows on their website:[121]

> (i) To preserve, conserve and develop the oral tradition of Vedic studies, for which the Pratishthan will undertake various activities such as, support traditional Vedic institutions and scholars, provide fellowships/scholarship, undertake production of audio/video tapes, etc.;
>
> (ii) To foster the tradition of intonation and recitation through the human agency;
>
> (iii) To encourage and ensure involvement of dedicated students in higher research in the field;
>
> (iv) To provide for research facilities to students with the background of Vedic knowledge and to equip them with sufficient scientific and analytical outlook, so that modern scientific thought contained in the Vedas, particularly disciplines of mathematics, astronomy, meteorology, chemistry, hydraulics, etc. could be linked with modern science and technology and a rapport established between them and modern scholars;
>
> (v) To establish, take over, manage or supervise Vedic pathashalas/research centres all over the country. Maintain or run them for any of the objects of the society;
>
> (vi) To revive and administer such of the endowments and trusts as are defunct, or not properly run;
>
> (vii) To give special attention to Shakhas which are extinct and for which human repositories can be identified, and to prepare a detailed list of pandits related to these Shakhas;
>
> (viii) To ascertain the present status of oral traditions relating to the Vedas, particularly intonation and recitation peculiar to various regions, institutions and mathas in the country.[122]

The objectives and activities of the MSRVVP have been expanded in the past two or three years.[123] Noteworthy is point (iv), which illustrates the trend observed by Nanda of mixing pseudo-science with religion in favor of a nationalist agenda (Nanda, 2003).

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120 Hindus consider Ujjain one of the seven sacred cities (*saptapurī*) and it is also the place where Lord Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma got their education from the sage, Sāṃdīpani.

121 http://msrvvp.nic.in/about.htm accessed on August 8, 2010.

122 As downloaded from http://msrvvp.nic.in/AnnualReport.pdf on 20.1.2012.

123 The aims of the MSRVVP have been articulated in different ways through the official channels of the organization, mainly through their website and annual reports. As of March 2012, the website (http://msrvvp.nic.in/about.htm) still shows a shorter list of objectives than the annual report quoted above.

However, despite all of these objectives and the work of over 28 years, the MSRVVP has still not reached many *vaidika*s of Maharashtra. Although many *vaidika*s are aware of the MSRVVP, a good number of them are not willing to directly collaborate with it. In fact, this institution had so far given official financial support to only two out of the twenty-five schools that I visited during my fieldwork in 2009.[124] The great majority of those schools get financial support from sources other than the Indian government. Moreover, according to the interviews and questionnaires filled in by my interlocutors in the schools I visited, even within those schools that do get financial support from official channels, the provided funding is far from sufficient to cover all of the respective school's expenses.

One of the reasons for this, as provided by my aforementioned sources, is that the aid program for traditional Vedic schools is run according to a curricular supervision-scheme developed by the MSRVVP. The curriculum of the MSRVVP program focuses mainly on the memorization of the *saṃhitā* of any of the available *śākhā*s, and it consists of a program lasting six years. After four years, the student obtains the title of *vedabhūṣaṇa* and, after six, he is called *vedavibhūṣaṇa*.[125] This curricular supervision by the MSRVVP does not suit the taste of many of the teachers and principals of the Vedic schools I visited, and they prefer to keep their pedagogic and organizational freedom rather than to become financially dependent on and vulnerable to scrutiny from a governmental organization. Additionally, they generally place little trust in the government, particularly when it comes to money. Some are afraid that, if financial aid is made available to them, it will not be provided with the needed regularity. Therefore, some schools look for financial support from non-governmental sources, including some of the institutions regarded as "prestigious" or "trustworthy" — such as the organizations of the Śaṅkarācāryas, local *brāhmaṇa* organizations (*sabhā*s), private sponsors, other Hindu leaders, or a local temple trust. A minority of small (family) schools,[126] with only one *guru* and a handful of students, prefer to bear the

124 According to the report, 2009-2010 of the MSRVVP, the organization currently supports four schools in Maharashtra: "1. Ved Bhavan of M. Ghaisas (Pune), 2. Veda Vedang Sanskrit College, Kailas Math (Nashik) 3. Sachchidanand Veda Swadhayay Pratishthan (Takli) 4. Shri Sant Gyaneshwar Veda Vidya Pratishthan (Aurangabad)". Additionally, it grants aid to several teachers and students in Maharashtra on an individual basis under the "Preservation of Oral Tradition of Vedic Recitation" scheme. I visited the first two schools during my fieldwork in 2009 and 2011; see Appendix 1.

125 Both titles mean "he, whose ornament is the Veda" or "that by which the Veda is adorned", the second implying a higher rank. Both titles come from the verbal root '*bhūṣ*' which, according to Monier-Williams (2011) means "to strive after, use efforts for, be intent upon", as well as to "adorn, embellish, attire", and with the intensifying prefix vi, it acquires the meaning: "to be brilliant, appear". It implies that the person has orally mastered the Veda and is a brilliant reciter. Despite the few Sanskrit classes in their curriculum, the students who have obtained these titles are not expected to know the meaning of the texts they recite, but to reproduce the sounds in the accurate way (and neither are they required otherwise in the schools not sponsored by the MSRVVP. See subchapter 3.2.)

126 See more in subchapter 3.4.

main expenses themselves (through the money obtained by providing priestly services and through private donations), and thereby maintain their financial independence from any official ties.[127]

Despite all the efforts from the Indian government and the significant sums of money set aside for financial aid,[128] sponsorship of Vedic schools has largely remained non-governmental. I do not know the exact figures of revenues from private donations and other income sources, but according to the interviews conducted with teachers and the management of these schools, federal aid (if they receive such help at all) is but a fraction of the income needed to support these schools. The result is that most of the sponsorship for these Vedic schools does not come from the Indian government, but from private donations. In addition to regular donations, monetary prizes, awards, and recognitions are regularly distributed to learned *brāhmaṇa*s by diverse religious and educational organizations all over the country, which also contribute to the support of traditional Vedic schools.

The social environment has changed so much for the *brāhmaṇa* community in the last two centuries that, currently, very few *brāhmaṇa* families have among their family members an expert in Vedic recitation and rituals according to their hereditary *śākhā*. Very few parents can train their sons in Vedic recitation at home, even for the most basic of rituals (such as *saṃdhyāvandana*), having themselves lost the traditional knowledge which was expected of every *brāhmaṇa* some centuries ago. Even fewer are those who are willing to send their children to Vedic schools for priestly training. Even traditional *brāhmaṇa* families typically view secular schooling, completed up to at least tenth grade, as the minimum requirement for a successful life. The main reason for this is that Vedic students of today allegedly face very different opportunities for future employment than in the past — particularly since the creation of the Mandal commission in 1979 and the so-called reservation system that aims at diminishing discrimination on the basis of caste by securing seats in government and education

127 This may change with the BJP and Narendra Modi as Primer Minister, in power since 2014. Modi has had a great acceptance among the *brāhmaṇa* communities in Maharashtra, and is seen as an ally who will not only "push towards economic growth and development", but who will turn India into a "great Hindu nation", as one of the graduates from a Vedic school studied here recently posted on Facebook. Narendra Modi's announcement introducing a new Ministry of Yoga in 2014, being successful in passing a resolution in September 2014 (with a record number of 175 country co-sponsors) for the observance of an International Day of Yoga was also much welcomed by several members of the Vedic schools presented in this work. The impact of the new Indian government on the preservation of Vedic recitation cannot be taken into consideration here, but it is worth noting that there is the possibility that increased economic and institutional support from the Indian government will begin to flow into these schools.

128 According to the annual report, for the period 2009-2010, the MSRVVP granted 44,36,925 Rs to four Vedic schools of Maharashtra and 46,30,800 Rs to teacher-student(s) units under the scheme of "Preservation of Oral Tradition of Vedic Recitation". Source: http://msrvvp.nic.in/GrantReleased.pdf accessed on January 20, 2012.

for the the socially or educationally backward, i.e. Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The implementation of the Mandal commission received strong opposition from upper-castes, and particularly *brāhmaṇa*s, who estimated the allocation of quotas to be a form of racial discrimination, and contrary to the democratic principles of equality. In fact, *brāhmaṇa*s have turned the issue around and have recently demanded that reservations be made for them on economic grounds. Anil Gachke of the Akhil Bharatiya Brahmin Mahasangh said that: "[S]ince 2008, we have been seeking reservations on economic grounds and not on the basis of caste. Those who are not well-off financially must get quotas in education and jobs".[129]

While the development of the secular (*laukika*) *brāhmaṇa* is not new, as we have seen in previous chapters, most *brāhmaṇa* males today typically spend most of their time engaged in active careers unrelated to traditional occupations. If their rural home communities cannot provide them with stable income from either family wealth or temple patrons, they must train to enter one of the many secular career options. *Brāhmaṇa*s who wish to keep their traditional role as teachers of Sanskrit and allied subjects also have to undergo an official certification that will enable them to teach at government-sponsored institutions. The standardization of education in modern India that evolved from Western models of governance has clearly led to a severing of the traditional link between Vedic recitation, ritual, and Sanskrit study.

In addition to this factor, state governments now exert pressure on all their citizens in urbanized areas to meet standards of secular education, which largely conflict with those of *brāhmaṇa* tradition. States in the south, but also in Maharashtra, are highly contentious about promoting English as a prerequisite for government jobs, and also as the required language of instruction for university study. Many *brāhmaṇa* families who I met were not willing to send their children to *vedapāṭhaśālā*s, as they consider the associated opportunities for their children in a modern society to be of very little practical use in making a living. In fact, a website in favor of the revival of Vedic recitation states that some of the common "excuses" of *brāhmaṇa*s now are that the traditional Veda study "is suitable for those who are not bright and who cannot pursue normal career[s;] namely it is for those failed in secular schools, the poor and the destitute."[130] Other reasons not to send one's son to a Vedic school include the disparity of having a son educated traditionally and a daughter being 'highly' educated in the modern system. Some families lamented that a son educated traditionally would have trouble finding a bride, not to mention finding a way to financially sustain his family. One teacher confessed that his mother had been looking for "a suitable bride" for him to marry for several years. He said that it was very difficult for young men like

129 http://www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report-brahmins-too-demand-for-reservations-in-maharashtra-2004800 accessed on August 17, 2014.
130 http://samhita.in/resistance.html accessed on August 7, 2010.

him to find a girl who would be willing to "lead a traditional and austere life [...] girls nowadays want to lead modern lifestyles and have a rich husband, and have little interest for a *vaidik* life."[131]

It is indeed mainly *brāhmaṇa* boys from low-income families who are sent to the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s, in hopes of securing free education for them and thereby freeing the parents from the burden of having another mouth to feed. The pressure of securing a job as a priest as soon as they can perform the basic house rituals is generally significant, particularly among the most disadvantaged *brāhmaṇa* families.[132] Indeed, richer *brāhmaṇa* families usually seek an English education for their offspring, in order that they be able to secure a well-paid job in the government, the booming IT industry, or the field of business administration. They hope their children will become engineers, doctors, MBAs, or IT specialists, and if possible, they hope to send their children abroad.[133]

Brāhmaṇa women's roles have also shifted as men now mostly engage in pursuits unrelated to *brāhmaṇa* traditions. Currently, upper caste families expect that a girl should be college-educated, contrary to what had been generally expected of them prior to India's independence, when women were expected to stay at home. While attitudes towards women working outside the domestic environment have begun to change, orthodox families are still inclined towards having women remain at home after marriage. One argument in favor of this, I heard from a female friend in Pune, is that, since the father is working all day, "the education of the children depends on the mother and the other women in the house."[134] The mother's education, therefore, is crucial to guide the children, and will also ensure that children "get good marks in school."[135] Both the arguments are related, and it seems that one of the prime reasons for educating girls is not only to better their chances in the marriage market, but also to ensure that children in the family learn moral/religious values from them.

Elder mothers, grandmothers, and in some cases widows attend weekly sessions of recitation, devotional singing, and commentary by a learned *brāhmaṇa*. At these sessions, women typically outnumber the few and mostly retired men. Technically, such practices draw on Purāṇic rather than on Vedic sources, yet sons raised in such homes do note that the women's ritual enthusiasm has fuelled their own interests in Vedic study. While they are still barred from studying the Veda within traditional families, women are clearly welcomed and often even featured in the musical

131 Anonymous interview, 4.3.2009.

132 Other scholars report the same situation in other parts of India; for example, Fuller and Narasimhan found that, in Tamil Nadu, "[m]any domestic priests, like temple priests, are poor" (2014: 187-88).

133 Cf. Fuller and Narasimhan (2008; 2014) for an example from Tamil Nadu.

134 Anonymous interview, 12.3.2009.

135 *Idem*.

recitation and study of Sanskrit epic and poetic literature.[136] In the universities, many women pursue advanced degrees in Sanskrit literature and, amongst other things, traditional medicine. Several middle class *brāhmaṇa* families I met included women trained in such disciplines who had thus taken on the role of preserving Sanskrit culture, while their supposedly *brāhmaṇa* husbands had little time for anything but their profitable careers. While sons may be inspired by such maternal dedication to tradition, they are unlikely to find in their mothers and aunts any direct modelling of traditional male ritual roles.

A small number of students from rich families will be able to become teachers to their own and to their relatives' and neighbours' sons. These are the lucky few who need not worry about the secular influences of their work environments, since their family resources are explicitly dedicated to the preservation of the Vedic tradition. Other students whose families have connections with local temples, *āśram*s, or other religious organizations will become temple priests.

One ex-student I know, who completed his basic studies from one of the Vedic schools, and who currently works in Pune in a sub-branch of a marketing firm established in California, has adopted Western clothes, dark glasses, and has cut off his sacred tuft (*śikhā*), leaving little room to identify him as a *vaidika brāhmaṇa* at first sight, except for perhaps his gold earrings (which he still wears). He is proud to have a job in an international company and have exposure to the latest technological developments. He likes Hollywood movies, and his all-time favorite movie is James Cameron's *Titanic*. Due to the different time zones between the U.S.A. and India, and his highly-demanding job, he has to often work night shifts, leaving him little energy and time to do his daily worship (*saṃdhyāvandana*) and his daily recitation of the Veda (*svādhyāya*). Nevertheless, he is currently studying Sanskrit with a private tutor because he is planning to take an entry exam for the Benares Hindu University and continue his 'traditional' education. His long-term goal is to work as a religious teacher in the Indian Army, as a 'Junior Commissioned Officer' (JCO), or in one of the Hindu temples abroad. He often inquired about the demand for *brāhmaṇa* priests in Hindu temples in Germany, and whether I had contacts to whom I could introduce him for this kind of job.

But most students of the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s do not have the certainty of obtaining a secure job after they have completed their studies. Very few will try to get a university diploma in Sanskrit or allied studies from a prestigious university. The modern pressures exerted by the secular oversight of Sanskrit study is strong since the majority of Sanskrit teaching jobs are to be found at government-sponsored institutions, which include both large universities and small government centers. These students must adhere to the curricular standards of such secular institutions. To begin with, the completion of high school, and most particularly the study of English, is essential

136 They have even ventured into taboo arenas such as priesthood. See footnote 96 above.

if they wish to obtain employment teaching at the secondary or university level in government schools. Additionally, these universities often require that the aspirants cover a very different curriculum from what they have studied in their own Vedic school. Some students will even try to gain acceptance to an MBA program or a similar career track in order to make a living.

Daily study at traditional Vedic schools is accompanied by Veda recitation and is framed by worship of the sun (*sūryanamaskāra*) at dawn and dusk (*saṃdhyāvandana*) with ritual offerings before meals. There is no place for such practices at government-sponsored schools or at jobs outside of the Vedic epistemic community. Students in such settings are under no obligation to maintain the traditional Vedic rituals and ways of life. Indeed, the presence of women and lower-castes among traditional *brāhmaṇa*s in their classrooms or workplaces demands that such traditional ways must be observed privately (if they can be observed at all). These radical changes in their daily lives, from being a Veda student to a house-holder in a modern society, challenge their traditional lifestyles and identities as custodians of the Veda.

3.3 New Patrons of the Veda

The Śaṅkarācāryas and their organizations, mainly those of Sringeri and Kanchipuram *maṭha*s, have in the last few decades directed much of their efforts and resources to propagate, protect, and restore the Vedic tradition (including through the recitation of Vedic texts).[137] These religious leaders have been credited, perhaps in something of a hyperbolic fabrication: "as the most Brahmanical of all Brahmans, they are also vital figures in constructing, perpetuating and defending Brahmanical Sanskritic Hinduism in south India" (Fuller and Narasimhan 2014: 200). These include, among other activities, organizing Vedic meetings (*sammelana*s which are occasionally also called "assemblies" *sabhā*s), giving regular scholarships and pensions, and granting awards and recognition in public ceremonies to learned *brāhmaṇa*s from around India. The Śaṅkarācāryas, who have a large following in south India, and particularly among the orthodox (mainly *smārta*) *brāhmaṇa* communities, possess important financial resources (including those coming from the Hindu diaspora) that are put at the disposal of Vedic schools. Sringeri is located in the state of Karnataka, and Kanchipuram in the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu. Sringeri's claim to having religious authority over the whole south (as the legitimate representative of the

137 "Over the last couple of centuries, the activities of the Peetham towards the sustenance and propagation of Sanatana Dharma have intensified. The Jagadgurus of the Peetham began touring extensively establishing branches of Sri Sharada Peetham, Sringeri in holy towns and important locations, and setting up traditional learning schools or Pathashalas." http://www.sringeri.net/activities accessed on February 4, 2011.

"Southern tradition", *dakṣiṇāmnāya*) has been challenged by Kanchipuram's claim of being more authoritative than the other four monasteries because, unlike in their cases, it was not established by Śaṅkara's main disciples, but by Śaṅkara himself (Clémentin-Ojha 2006). Both institutions also compete in their efforts to preserve the Vedas and the Vedic tradition. As an example of this preservation effort, the heads of the Sringeri and Kanchipuram *maṭha*s have made a tradition of celebrating their birthdays and other special occasions, such as *ādiśaṅkarācārya jayantī* (birthday of Śaṅkara) or *gurupūrṇimā*, by holding ritual Veda recitals (*vedapārāyaṇa*), examinations, and competitions across India, and awarding the most outstanding scholars in their respective areas of expertise.

The Veda Pośakā Sabhā was established by the 35th Śaṅkarācārya of Sringeri (1954–1989) specifically to conduct examinations of Veda recitation.[138] According to their official website:

> The Peetham's Veda Poshaka Sabha established 3 decades ago by Jagadguru Sri Abhinava Vidyatirtha Mahaswamiji conducts exams in higher Vedic studies. A number of students appear for the examinations conducted during the Shankara Jayanti Celebrations. Every year about 20 highly qualified students in Krama and Ghana are certified by the Sabha and honoured in the presence of the Sringeri Jagadgurus.[139]

The Kāñci Kāmakoṭi Pīṭham, through the Veda Rakshana Nidhi Trust established in 1958, has been running its own *vedapāṭhaśālā*s throughout the country and conducting its own examinations twice every year.[140] The certificates are handed out in a ceremony in the presence of the Śaṅkarācāryas of the Pīṭham (either Jayendra, Vijayendra, or both), usually in *ādiśaṅkarācārya jayantī* (April/May) and on the final day of *navarātrī* on *daśaharā*, also called *vijayadaśamī* (the 'the victorious tenth' day) (September/October). In many events organized by the Pīṭham in Kanchipuram and other parts of the country, *brāhmaṇa*s are invited to recite portions from the four Vedas, or sometimes learned experts from a particular Veda are invited to perform a recital (*vedapārāyaṇa*) of the whole textual corpus of a particular *śākhā*.[141] These *brāhmaṇa*s in turn receive money and traditional tokens of appreciation as a ritual fee (*dakṣinā*), as well as public recognition from the heads of the Pīṭham.[142]

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138 See subchapter 3.7 for more on these examinations.

139 http://www.sringeri.net/activities/propogation-of-sanatana-dharma accessed on February 4, 2011.

140 http://vrnt.org/ accessed on February 1, 2011.

141 According to some the Sringeri, *maṭha* has been traditionally connected with the Yajurveda, whereas the Kanchi *maṭha* is associated with the Ṛgveda.

142 These tokens can vary from time to time, but can include silk shawls, sacred ash (*vibhūti* lit. 'great power, might, splendor'), *kuṃkum* (made from saffron or other flower petals) or *sindūr* (vermilion made from cinnabar), a coconut, flowers, betel leaves and nuts (*tāmbūla*), unbroken rice (*akṣata*), prayer beads (*japamālā*), gold, and/or sacred books or images.

The Veda Rakshana Nidhi Trust lists the following mission statement:

> To strive every nerve to protect and preserve our holy Vedic heritage and pass it on to posterity.
>
> To protect and preserve the age-old tradition of Vedic Adhyayanam (study).
>
> To bring out more and more traditional Vedic Pandits, particularly in those sakhas on the verge of extinction.
>
> To ensure that the society gets a steady stream of qualified Gurus to encourage, guide and enable Grahastas (house holders) in their Sroutha and Smartha Karma Anushtanam as prescribed.
>
> To inform and educate the general public about the Vedic heritage, tradition and way of life.[143]

Many of the schools in Maharashtra which I visited have received monetary aid, or at least public recognition, from the Śaṅkarācāryas of Sringeri and/or Kanchipuram in this way.[144] *Vedamūrti*s from several schools proudly showed me their awards, or they have pictures of themselves receiving the awards displayed on the walls of their schools and homes. This official support from the Śaṅkarācāryas gives the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s and their *guru*s some kind of legitimation and prestige *vis-à-vis* the local community, from whom the main support and sponsorship of these schools comes from, and, at the same time, potentially attracts donors from the whole country, and even from among the Hindu diaspora across the globe.

Of course, not only the Śaṅkarācāryas, but also many of the modern *guru*s discussed in subchapter 2.4 (and there are many more in Maharashtra, to say nothing of other states) have sponsoring schemes for Vedic schools. These charismatic leaders and the institutions they have fostered have unique ideological, philosophical, and spiritual traits, all of which need closer consideration. While the scope of this book does not permit me to deal with each of them in detail, I have pointed out here that the Vedic oral tradition of Maharashtra is now largely embedded in diverse Neo-Hindu networks, without which the sponsorship of traditional Vedic schools might be unimaginable.

3.4 Today's Vedic Schools in Maharashtra: a Typology

The Vedic schools in contemporary Maharashtra vary from being small family schools in which a father teaches his sons and a couple of students on to larger educational enterprises with up to a hundred students. They vary not only in size and infrastructure,

143 http://vrnt.org/mission.php accessed on February 1, 2011.

144 Although, in general, it seems that the majority of the Vedic schools of Maharashtra have a proclivity towards the Sringeri *maṭha*, and less so to the one in Kanchipuram.

but also in curricula. Some schools teach only one Veda, others all four. Some teach only up to a certain level, whereas others teach to the highest degree possible.[145] Some schools provide the students with practical sacrificial knowledge and others even teach some of the auxiliary sciences of the Vedas (*vedāṅga*), particularly *kalpa* or ritual actions (also known as *karmakāṇḍa*) and *jyotiṣa* (or, traditional astrology), which plays a crucial role in planning the proper time for a ritual.

In this section, I present a typology[146] of Vedic schools that crystalized during my observations of the Vedic schools. I have kept a brief general description of each of the schools in Appendix 1 as reference for the reader. I decided to propose a typology of the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s of Maharashtra in consideration of the material obtained on the schools. As with all typologies, it implies a simplification of the heterogeneity and complexity of the topic for the sake of analysis. Typologies represent systems of classification which are created through the grouping of information into categories based on some perceived similarity. The three school types presented here are meant as heuristic categories, not essential types.

I chose a triple template as a classification model, as based on the infrastructure of the schools. I correlated the infrastructure (size) of the respective schools with other aspects that directly or indirectly affect the "traditional" transmission of knowledge. I have called these: 1) 'Gurukula' Type, 2) 'Vedapāṭhaśālā'[147] Type, and 3) 'Vedavidyālaya' Type. These three Sanskrit terms often figure in the official names of Vedic schools, but this alone does not necessarily signify that the respective school would fit the same respective category of the school. Most of the founders, managers, teachers, and students of these schools consider themselves to be "authentic representatives of the *gurukula* system of education"; they would generally not see substantial differences among *vedapāṭhaśālā*s and would definitely not seek to differentiate between the categories proposed here. I have chosen to use these Sanskrit terms because of what they usually evoke: *gurukula* evokes the

145 The highest degree of recitation is given to those who are able to recite the *ghanapāṭha*, preceded by *kramapāṭha* and *jaṭāpāṭha*, which are the most complex permutations (*vikṛti*s) that are most commonly learned in the schools of Maharashtra. The titles received for this level of recitation are commonly *ghanapāṭhin*, *kramapāṭhin,* and *jaṭāpāṭhin*, respectively; nonetheless the title/degree granted by the VŚS to those having passed the final examinations is *vedacūḍāmaṇi*, literally meaning "crest-jewel of the Veda." Even with the trends of standardization, the traditional academic titles vary greatly across India (Michaels 2001: 3-16). The official titles used by the MSRVVP are *vedabhūṣana* and *vedavibhūṣaṇa*. For more on these titles and degrees, refer to subchapters 3.2, 3.7.6, and 3.8.

146 I use the terms "type" and "typology" in the weberian sense of the words as referencing an "ideal type".

147 A word of caution here: I use the term *vedapāṭhaśālā* to refer to Vedic schools in general accross this work, but in this typology, I refer to a particular form of institution and do not intend to imply here that all the Vedic schools presented here fit into the specific 'Vedapāṭhaśālā' type. See below the "Concluding Remarks on the Use of a Typology" p.104.

"household of the *guru*", the word *pāṭhaśālā*[148] evokes a larger organizational and usually more impersonal structure, and finally I have used *vidyālaya*, which is a term often employed in larger educational institutions such as colleges and universities in India. In practice, nonetheless, the use of these terms is rather interchangeable, and one can encounter large non-residential and secular institutions using the term 'Gurukul' or 'Rishikul' who do not explicitly offer an exclusive religious education based on the *gurukula* model or adhere to a strict Brāhmaṇical ideology.[149] Modern Sanskrit schools focused in the study of the language,[150] including those affiliated with the Rāṣṭrīya Saṁskṛta Sansthān, are also not to be confused with the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s, whose main focus is the training in the recitation of the Veda.

Moreover, the schools fit only very broadly into this template, and each school has very unique characteristics and a unique history. The three types presented here are meant to be gross categories whose boundaries are quite permeable. In other words, the characteristics of one school type may be found in a *vedapāṭhaśālā* that could predominantly be assigned under another of the remaining two classifications. In truth, most of the schools present elements of all three classifications. Nonetheless, by taking a step back and artificially creating 'ideal types', one can better observe certain trends in the current state of the Vedic tradition. With this typology, I demonstrate how the tradition is being revitalized (or reconstructed) by perpetuating elements considered part of the "ancient Vedic tradition", and also reconfiguring itself by consciously or unconsciously adding innovative elements that were originally alien to the tradition. I believe that by making this move and considering crucial factors that make up the network of these schools, one can predict certain trends in the transmission of the Vedas for the immediate future.

3.4.1 The 'Gurukula Type'

The first ideal type of school suggested here is the nuclear-family type. I have called this model the 'Gurukula type' since the Sanskrit term *gurukula* refers specifically to "the house or extended family of a *guru*."[151] How such a "house" of a *guru* looked in ancient India and how many members of the family or the clan lived in the same space is not relevant here, for I take the term to designate the contemporary Vedic

148 The term *gurukul* is usually used in the vernacular (Marathi and Hindi) to translate to "school".
149 All over India, from primary schools up to Engeneering colleges and institutes of Technology carry these names.
150 For an overview of traditional Sanskrit learning in contemporary India, see: Michaels 2001: 3-17.
151 Although, the word *kula* originally meant more than just the physical place: a herd, troop, flock, family, community, tribe etc. The composite later came to be understood as the place where instruction takes place, e.g. in the term *gurukulavāsin* or "resident of the house of the *guru*", which was used for a student. Monier-Williams 2011.

schools which are maintained mainly through the efforts of an individual (the *guru*) and his close family members (wife and children).

In this model, the *guru* also teaches his own sons the Veda in the father-son tradition (*pitāputraparamparā*). He might take up a few more students beyond his sons, as his own material resources permit. He has no "school" in the Western sense of the word. He teaches the Veda to fulfill his own *dharma* as a *brāhmaṇa* and he ideally does not request money or support from unknown donors or from people outside of his community.

The students live in the house of the teacher and are considered to be his sons, whether they are his own offspring or not. The pupils will also consider the wife of the *guru* as their own mother. The wife of the teacher in turn cares for the students as if they were her own progeny. The same goes for the daughters of the teacher if they live in the house. The students will help in the menial chores of the household and will take care of their own belongings. There is little sense of privacy and property since it all belongs to the family to some extent. In this model, there are no uniforms, no diplomas, and the *guru* is the only person to supervise the progress and development of the students.

Not only are these types of schools becoming rare, but they are also much more difficult to find. They are usually not listed as "schools", and sometimes they are found in very remote areas in which *brāhmaṇa*s are still landowners (in some cases in the form of *agrahāra*s), and they are able to live from whatever is produced in their land. Very few of these *vaidika*s are completely self-sufficient,[152] but Knipe (1997; 2015) and others have documented cases where one still finds such *vaidika*s in Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Karnataka. In Maharashtra, instruction occasionally takes place at the homes of learned men, and this setting is also known as a *gṛhapāṭhaśālā* (home-school). Usually, the students come to these teachers for the study of *vikṛti* permutations or for instruction in a particular subject, such as astrology (*jyotiṣa*). While occasionally a student may live with his teacher, these are often not residential schools, and students come only for a few hours every day.

In my own fieldwork, there were only a few schools that currently come close to the 'Gurukula type': Vedamūrti Amol Jośī and his school in Beed, Vedamūrti Gopālrao Jośī and his school in Trimbak, and Vedamūrti Govindśāstrī and his school in Satara.[153]

Even if today these schools are drastically diminishing, a significant number of the current teachers I met in my fieldwork studied under this model. Vivekśāstrī Goḍboḷe of Satara studied with his father in his own home and had only a single other *sahādhyāyin* (co-student). His own school used to function as a *gurukula* where he

152 By 'self-sufficient', I mean free of the sponsorship of a second agency. *Brāhmaṇa*s are, of course, dependent on the farmers that work on their lands and on the mercantile networks to sell their product (mainly paddy and in some cases coconut).

153 See: Appendix 1.

lived with his students until they obtained donations from Muktabodha Indological Research Institute in 1998 and could expand significantly.[154] Ghaisas *gurujī* in Pune also learnt the Veda from his father, and his Ved Bhavan has grown slowly into a larger institution with more complex relations to its sponsors. Other teachers studied the Saṃhitā with their own fathers and then went away for further studies with other teachers in different schools.

Nānājī Kāḷe, who has had his three sons learn the Veda in his *āśram*, from different teachers, would also fit this model since he established his school within his own land. The school grew slowly as he used his own resources and the assistance of his immediate family. However, due to other characteristics, his school fits better in the next template. Nonetheless, his youngest son, Caitanya Kāḷe, developed a very close relationship with his Sāmavedic *guru* and perfectly fits the 'Gurukula type' model. In his aim to revive all the branches of the Veda and become independent of outside experts in order to perform the Vedic rituals, Nānājī Kāḷe decided to have his own sons and students trained in all the *śākhā*s available in India today. Since, according to Nānājī Kāḷe, there was no one in Maharashtra to teach the Sāmaveda at that time, he had no choice but to take Caitanya (along with another student of his *āśram*) to the Karikan Parameśvarī Temple near Honnavar in order to learn the *rāṇāyanīya* branch of the Sāmaveda from Vedamūrti Viśveśvar Bhaṭṭa. After a long trip by train, bus, and foot, they reached the home of the teacher, this being located on a hilltop in the dense forest of Karnataka, where the above-mentioned temple is located. After being accepted as students, the two boys stayed with his *guru* for ten years, isolated from the rest of the world until they mastered the Sāmaveda according to the *rāṇāyanīya śākhā*.

The *gurukula* model as portrayed here is perhaps the most endangered one in modern India. The sources of income are limited to the personal earnings of the teacher, who needs to make extra efforts to both teach the Veda and earn money for his family. In previous times, many learned *brāhmaṇa*s were landowners and could live from the profits of their land. Now, many teachers have to work in *paurohitya* (ritual services), astrology, or in any other job which renders the task of teaching the Veda with dedication to be more difficult than it is for someone who is fully sponsored to be an *ācārya* (teacher). Besides that, the attractive monthly salaries, the comfort of modern facilities, and the public recognition offered by larger sponsors attract both young and senior teachers to the second and third types of schools, as discussed below.

154 The Muktabodha Indological Research Institute has several projects to "preserve endangered texts from the religious and philosophical traditions of classical India and make them accessible for study and scholarship worldwide." So far, this is the only Vedic school that was sponsored by the institute until the Vedic school became an independent organization. The Muktabodha Indological Research Institute has announced that there are plans to "turn its attention to preserving other highly endangered areas of the Vedic oral tradition." http://www.muktabodha.org/vedashala.htm accessed on August 2, 2012.

3.4.2 The 'Vedapāṭhaśālā Type'

The 'Vedapāṭhaśālā type' of Vedic school refers to a communal school in which one or more teachers live with their students. It seeks to emulate the mythical *āśrama*s described in the Purāṇic accounts, particularly those mentioned in the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa.

In this case, it is not an individual effort for personal gain or the fulfillment of *dharma*, but it is a communal enterprise. The main difference here is that these settlements largely depend on the sponsorship of a financially powerful patron. These schools seem to be a relatively recent development as based on the older hermitage (*āśrama*) model. In precolonial India, kings sponsored such settlements and institutions, and granted tax-free lands and entire villages to *brāhmaṇa* communities, as well as to monastic institutions (*maṭha*s).[155] The *brahmadeya*s, also known as *agrahāra*s, were lands given in donation to an assembly of *brāhmaṇa*s or to individual families. Not infrequently, the work force to cultivate these lands, as well as cattle, was also gifted to them. In exchange, the *brāhmaṇa* villages were supposed to uphold Vedic learning and to perform rituals for the welfare of the kingdom. Inscriptions and other records across India attest to the existence of this system in precolonial India, and despite the land reforms of post-independent India, a few examples of landowning *brāhmaṇa* villages are still found in modern India.[156]

While the 'Vedapāṭhaśālā type' is not to be equated to the *āśrama*s and schools of the medieval *agrahāra*s, they share a similar economic aspect which I would like to emphasize. Both the *agrahāra*s and the 'Vedapāṭhaśālā type' of schools are completely dependent on sponsorship, and while generally the individual teachers have a say in how to operate and manage the schools, it is the communal effort that maintains these schools. It is usually a public trust or a similar type of organization that pools needed resources together. Traditional and new methods of fundraising (such as through websites) are used to finance the regular activities of this type of schools.

Another main characteristic of this type of school is in their isolation from the rest of the world. These schools often imitate the *āśrama* model, which tries to minimize contact with the rest of society, while at the same time aiming to lead an exemplary life "according to the Vedas". This isolation allows for a more ritually pure[157] life by maintaining distance between themselves and various polluting elements.

155 For the development of this form of patronage, see: Lubin 2005.

156 For an example from coastal Andra Pradesh, see: Knipe 1997; for the Namputiris in Kerala, see: Parpola 2000.

157 On ritual purity, see subchapter 4.4.

Pedagogically speaking, it also has the advantage of minimizing distractions from the urban world and creating an "environment conducive for Vedic learning."[158]

Many of the schools I visited had originally aimed at some sort of seclusion from the outside world. They were originally either situated at the periphery of urban life (village or city), or more or less isolated from the rest of society. This isolation could be achieved either by locating the school at the outskirts of the village/city or in a sort of ghetto neighbourhood for *brāhmaṇa*s, such as the western *peṭh*s[159] in the old city of Pune. The rapid urbanization of the last few decades has often drastically changed the surrounding areas of these schools. As an example, according to Vedamūrti M. Ghaisas, when the Ved Bhavan[160] school was inaugurated in the mid 1940s, it was completely isolated from the city — in a "green lush area, completely quiet and perfect for Vedic studies." Now, large residential buildings, 'colonies', and business have enclosed it. Heavily loaded with traffic, the old Pune-Mumbai highway also passes in the vicinity of the school while the green and quiet surroundings of trees and grassy fields have been replaced by a fully urbanized neighbourhood.

Schools of the 'Vedapāṭhaśālā type' tend to teach only one Vedic *śākhā*, and usually have no more than two or three teachers, each with smaller batches of students. These schools usually do not have any ambitions to expand their curriculum to other Vedic *śākhā*s, or necessarily enlarge and improve the physical infrastructure of the school. They are also less proselytizing than the next type of school, and content themselves with the students who come to their schools and with the capacity of their current facilities.

These schools already present a less intense intimacy than the previous model because the teachers often do not live directly on the campus, but in a house in the neighbourhood. The separation of space between the private sphere of the teacher's house and the students' housing also has social consequences. While the teachers may still be, to a large extent, responsible for the students and their development, the fact that there is a third party that at least partly deals with the economic aspect of the school releases the pressure on the teachers, who are otherwise the only wardens responsible for the boys' welfare and education.

3.4.3 The 'Vedavidyālaya Type'

The 'Vedavidyālaya type' of school is also a larger communitarian type of school, similar to the 'Vedapāṭhaśālā type'. It depends entirely on the financial support of sponsors. The difference here is that the efforts and the initiative does not come *a*

158 Anonymous interview, 12.3.2009.
159 The *peṭh*s [Sk. *pīṭha*] are the old division of wards established mainly during the Peśva reign.
160 See: Appendix 1.

priori from the *vaidika*s — i.e. the teachers themselves — but from the sponsors. It is the sponsors, often Hindu organizations such as temple trusts or religious associations, who decide to have a *vedapāṭhaśālā* as part of their socio-cultural agenda. These organizations are the masterminds of the enterprise. Usually, teachers are called in as employees once the project has been conceived or is nearing completion. The agency of the teachers is in this model reduced to their pedagogical and ritual expertise, while the organizational and curricular decisions are largely made by the sponsors. The organizational and logistical structure of these schools is more complex, and many actors and interests are involved in the process of creating and maintaining such a school. The schools that fall under this template are either the main enterprise or just one of the many activities and projects run by the sponsors.

Another characteristic of this model is the scale of the schools. Usually, they are conceived to have an expansive character in which the number of students and the breadth of the curriculum is taken as the measure of success of the school. The motto of the sponsors and founders of these schools seems to be: "the more students and the more Vedic branches, the better."

Teachers who are not locally available are hired from far away places to teach in the schools. These teachers might not speak the local language and may have a different cultural background and, therefore, initially have more difficulty relating to the students. With the import of a *śākhā* originally not present in the region, the members and sponsors of these schools seek to revive the Veda as a whole and thereby enhance its prestige.

Schools of this type are, generally speaking, conceived as specialized schools where students are prepared to 'serve the society' at large. They are trained to be 'role models' for the Hindu society. These trusts are often financed by sponsors who have an interest in promoting a national identity that is specifically "Hindu" in character. The nationalistic nature of this project includes modern elements that better prepare the students for their future in a modern society. This is the main reason why topics such as English and computer lessons are added to the Vedic curriculum — to arm the students to better integrate themselves into today's society at a later date. The following quote is found on the website of the Maharṣi Veda Vyās Pratiṣṭhān, which runs a number of Vedic schools in India:

> In view of enabling the students to get acclimatized and conversant with modern technology education in computer science along with lessons in traditional knowledge is imparted in these schools. A student of our Vedic schools is expected to be a cultured, well-read, iron-willed leader of the society in future. His just being a Vedic scholar is not enough if he has to emerge winner in present circumstances. Hence, in our schools, conscious efforts are being taken to ensure all-round development of the students.[161]

161 http://dharmashree.org/VedicSchools.html accessed on February 2, 2012.

Schools under this template, even if most of their young members are unconscious of their political participation, become embodiments of an ideological project, and the role model citizens of an idealized Hindu nation. It is important to note that the other two types of schools presented above are not exempt from the political sphere and are also prone to be mobilized toward joining the nationalistic project, or are instrumentalized to act in events which serve their cause; but, the integral difference with the other two models is that they have more freedom to decide whether they want to join in or not. Due to the interdependent nature of the relationship with their sponsors and their limited agency in organizational matters, the school members of the 'Vedavidyālaya type' are often automatically expected to participate in events organized by the trusts.

It is in events such as the ones organized by the Hindū Janjāgṛti Samiti (HJS) that students and teachers get influenced by the Hindutvā ideology displayed in speeches and the manipulation of sacred symbols. Through images and narratives of heroic divinities such as Rāma, Hanumān, Paraśurāma, and Śivājī, as defenders of Hindu culture and the territory of India, nationalistic themes are easily introduced in the Vedic schools.

Some of the schools I visited that best fit this template are the Śrī Samarth Sant Mahātmajī Vedavidyālay of Dhalegao, the Śrī Sadguru Nijānand Mahārāj Vedavidyālay of Alandi (both belonging to the Veda Vyāsa Pratiṣṭhān), the Kailās Maṭh Akhaṇḍānand of Nashik, and the Śrī Datta Devasthān of Ahmednagar.[162] Again, the template intends to serve as an extreme example in order to show certain tendencies and not to reflect the one-to-one nature of the school's social reality.

3.4.4 Concluding Remarks on the Use of a Typology

The exercise of creating a typology of Vedic schools allows us to observe these schools as a sort of mental laboratory in which different ideals concerning the traditional education of the *brāhmaṇa* and that which is considered "Vedic" are being revived, reinvented, and reinterpreted in contemporary India. Some of the previous scholarship, especially as represented in textbooks on Indian religions, has assumed a linear historical development from Vedic Brāhmaṇism to Hinduism, in which the latter gets replaced or reintegrated by the former, where *gṛhya* replaces *śrauta* rituals, and where there is a tendency for the external ritualism to be replaced by the internalization of mystical experience. But here it not only becomes evident that we need to abandon this evolutionary view on Hinduism, but also that it might be fruitful to think of the term "Vedic" as a floating/empty signifier[163] to which large chains of

162 See: Appendix 1.

163 In the sense of: Laclau and Mouffe 1990: 28.

signifieds are being attached, and which may take on whatever meaning is ascribed to them. Diverse discourses around the transmission of the Veda and the pedagogical ideals of each individual school are entangled within a mesh of economic factors, geographic and ecological specifications, sectarian affiliations, family traditions and other social contexts. Approaching the Veda (or Vedas) through the notion of the empty signifier helps us to understand how this body of texts has been and continues to be able to gather contingent elements into a 'stable' field of meaning. In this way, the Veda, as a hegemonic apparatus and hence as an empty signifier, offers a certain stability to an otherwise heterogeneous field.

By using this typology as a heuristic device to analyse these schools, we obtain a better understanding of how the same empty signifier (the 'Vedas' and that which is 'Vedic') is being articulated into unique discourses and practices in the context of modern Hinduism. While, in this model, the 'Gurukula type' emphasizes the household and intimate relationships, the 'Vedapāṭhaśālā type' emphasizes a more conservative notion of community, in which isolation and idealized space play an important role. The 'Vedavidyālaya type', on the other hand, is more clearly embedded in larger discourses and networks; and while it is often an important symbol of religious prestige, such a school remains subservient to the overall ideology of the sponsors.

As this typology shows, interpretations made regarding the Veda's transmission and its contents are always dependent upon the outcome of struggles over various alternative representations and practices that compete over it and try to hegemonize their position. The following section will present how the oral transmission of the Veda takes place in these schools, and then Chapter 4 will elucidate the ways in which students and teachers become embodiments of their tradition, this by offering an overview of their daily lives.

3.5 Curricula of the *Vedapāṭhaśālā*s in Maharashtra

> *The sacrifice to the Brahman is one's own (daily) study (of the Veda). The juhū-spoon of this same sacrifice to the Brahman is speech, its upabhṛt the mind, its dhruvā the eye, its sruva mental power, its purificatory bath truth, its conclusion heaven. And, verily, however great the world he gains by giving away (to the priests) this earth replete with wealth, thrice that and more – an imperishable world does he gain, whosoever, knowing this, studies day by day his lesson (of the Veda): therefore let him study his daily lesson.*
> *–Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa XI.5.6.3*[164]

What do the students of the Veda (*brahmacārin*s) learn? Which texts are committed to memory and what other subjects are learned in traditional Vedic schools? How is the

164 Eggeling 1900: 96.

study structured, and what do the classes look like? How is today's practice different from ancient times? This chapter will address these questions.

The curriculum taught in the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s of Maharashtra is as varied as the schools themselves. Not only are most of the *śākhā*s of the four Vedas surviving today represented in the various schools of Maharashtra, but we also find schools preserving even texts with the most complex recitation patterns (*vikṛti*s).

The Vedic schools visited for this study vary in the amount of texts they memorize besides the Saṃhitā of their own *śākhā*[165] — that is, the Brāhmaṇa and Āraṇyaka texts, the learning of a second Saṃhitā (or passages of it), or even additional non-Vedic texts such as the Bhagavadgītā. The second curricular difference one finds among these schools is that some schools offer training in the various recitation patterns (*vikṛti*s), this based on the word-by-word (*padapāṭha*) text of the Saṃhitā of a particular *śākhā*. Therefore, the two main curricular axes are, first, the 'quantity' of texts to be memorized, and second, the mastery over the recitation patterns of the root text (*vikṛti*s).

The main pedagogical differences concerning the memorization of the Vedic texts seem to be primarily curricular and, to a lesser extent, methodological. For example, the learning procedure[166] of the Taittirīyasaṃhitā of the Kṛṣṇayajurveda seems to be virtually the same in all the schools I visited. The same applies for schools in which students learn the recitation of other Vedic texts belonging to the same *śākhā*. Larger variations in methodology occur when we compare one *śākhā* to another. The quasi-identical Saṃhitā text of the Śuklayajurveda in its two recentions,[167] for example, is learned and recited in a different way if it is undertaken in the *kāṇva* or in the *mādhyandina* style; and, of course, the differences grow when we compare different Vedas — i.e. the recitation of the same hymn, for example, in its Ṛgvedic tri-tonal version versus the musical rendering in Sāmavedic style. This is even more evident if we look at recitations outside of Maharashtra. A Namputiri *ṛgvedin* from Kerala will have a very different style of recitation, and also distinct pedagogical methods, compared to a *ṛgvedin* from the Koṅkaṇ area of Maharashtra, even if formally they belong to the same *śākhā*, i.e. *śākala* (cf. Staal 2001:3-16).

Apart from these differences, one needs to consider the other factors that affect the curricula and daily schedule of these schools. Adding other traditional subjects — varying from astrology (*jyotiṣa*), ritual sciences (*karmakāṇḍa*), and Sanskrit, to non-traditional subjects such as English and computer studies — has an impact in the amount of time and energy dedicated to a concentrated study of Vedic recitation

165 Traditionally, one would always first learn one's own recension (*svaśākhā*) and then proceed to learn another Veda. Nonetheless, at this time (at least in Maharashtra) the learning of a Veda is no longer necessarily linked to the Veda determined by birth. See below in this chapter.

166 For the description of the teaching and learning procedures, see subchapter 3.7.

167 The Vājasaneyisaṃhitā of these two recensions (*kāṇva* and *mādhyandina*) varies only in a few passages, as noted in Weber 1852.

(*vedapāṭha*). Another crucial factor in this regard is the extra curricular chores the students and teachers have to perform, in or outside of their school, either in service to the master/school or for their own livelihood (in the cases of the teachers).

In general, the core aim of the traditional Vedic schools visited during my fieldwork is to train their students to be able to recite from memory the complete Saṃhitā text of a particular *śākhā*. However, in a few schools, while the Saṃhitā text is generally taught to willing students, the minimum curriculum is not to master these texts, but instead a two-to-three-year *paurohitya* training is offered to students who are either unable or unwilling to finish the memorization of the whole Saṃhitā.[168] The *paurohitya* training enables a student to perform basic rituals such as the *rites de passage* (*saṃskāra*s)[169] and other simple domestic rituals with which they can earn their livelihood and/or officiate as family priests. This training is also optionally offered in some schools for students who opt to acquire only the priestly training. Nonetheless, the *paurohitya* training generally goes along or follows the *vedapāṭha* training. In some schools, this training is offered to weaker students, or students who started too late with their *vedapāṭha* training and are not able to memorize large quantities of texts. The *paurohitya* training, nevertheless, has less prestige among the learned community than a full curriculum in which a student memorizes the whole Veda. The general view is that the more the student has learned by heart and the more skillfully he can recite the Vedic *mantra*s the better. In general, the occupation as a temple priest who has to deal with *brāhmaṇa* and non-*brāhmaṇa* clientele, and who is thus subjected to the pollution of the exchange of gifts (*dāna* and *prasāda*), is traditionally considered less pure and thus inferior by other *brāhmaṇa*s.[170]

The possibility to expand the curriculum beyond the Saṃhitā and *paurohitya* training is open and encouraged in most of the schools. This depends both on the individual students' capacities and motivation, and on the teacher's knowledge of further Vedic texts (Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, etc.) and/or the permutations of the Saṃhitā — starting with the *padapāṭha* and continuing up to the complex permutations

168 Schools which exclusively offer *paurohitya* training were not considered in this study. The *paurohitya* training offered in the schools I visited is of secondary importance, and they generally present the training of vedapāṭha as their main curriculum.

169 Michaels notes: "saṃskāra, formed from the same verbal root as 'Sanskrit' (saṃskṛta, which literally means 'the totally and (correctly) formed [speech]'), is usually translated as 'transition rite', 'rite of passage', or 'sacrament', but these terms only partially convey its significance. What is crucial, as Brian K. Smith has emphasized, is that with the saṃskāras, someone or something is made either suitable, appropriate, or equivalent (yogya) for a holy purpose, for example, as a sacrificial offering." (Michaels 2004a: 74).

170 The subject of the gift and the gift in return in Brāhmaṇical culture has been discussed by many, as summarized by: Michaels 1997. On page 249 in this article, he concludes that: "The more ascetic the Brahmin, the worthier he is; the śrotriya ['knower of the Veda'] is held to be the best priest, since he receives no gifts (cf. ŚBr XIII.4.3.14)."

(*vikṛti*s), such as *ghana*.[171] Potentially, a *vaidika brāhmaṇa* can be embarking on a life-long commitment of learning. As Knipe has aptly remarked in relation to the career opportunities of a *brahmacārin*: "[...] 'the Veda' with hundreds of primary, acolyte and commentarial texts provides unbounded territory for exploration" (2015: 36).

In some cases, such as the Taittirīya schools I visited in Satara, the students are encouraged and somewhat forced to learn beyond the Saṃhitā from the beginning onwards. This is so, because the syllabus often starts with an easier Vedic text to memorize other than the Saṃhitā, for example, with the Brāhmaṇa or the Āraṇyaka of this particular *śākhā*. While teachers still decide, most of the time, in which order they start their course, the syllabus has become a little more homogeneous in Maharashtra as a result of the standardization and the "official" segmentation of the curriculum through institutions that conduct Veda examinations, such as the Vedaśāstrottejak Sabhā in Pune (see below in subchapter 3.7.6).

The curriculum of the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s is therefore not homogeneous and completely fixed, although it revolves around the ideal mastery of at least the Saṃhitā text of a given *śākhā*. Parting from this point, the curriculum can expand in different directions. Either the student continues his studies of the *padapāṭha* recitation of the Saṃhitā text, and from there builds up to other permutations of the same (usually *krama*, then *jaṭā*, and lastly *ghana*, depending on the *śākhā*), or else he moves into other areas of Vedic studies such as *karmakāṇḍa*, *jyotiṣa*, or in some rare cases the study of *vyākaraṇa, mīmāṃsā, nyāya*, and *vedānta*. I should mention here that, at present, *jaṭāpāṭhins* and *ghanapāṭhin*s can only be found in the Ṛgveda and in the Yajurveda (in both the white and black recensions). In the Sāmavedic traditions, we do not find these *vikṛti*s[172] and, in the Atharvavedic traditions, it has become so rare that it can hardly be counted as a survival.

The expansion of the curriculum into other areas of knowledge is rather rare in the schools I visited. The syllabus was fairly limited to the recitation of the Saṃhitās and its permutations (when available), as well as for the Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and in a few cases also some of the Upaniṣads. Students who wish to continue their Vedic studies usually leave their foster school for another institution offering the chosen subject. This is generally looked upon as a specialization, and usually happens after their mastery of basic recitation skills in regard to the above-mentioned texts.

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171 *Ghanapāṭha* is the most difficult recitation style and usually comes only after *krama* and *jaṭā*, which are the other two *vikṛti*s, most commonly learned in the schools of Maharashtra. Although, apart from these three other *vikṛti*s exist (such as *mālā*, *śikhā*, *rekha*, *dhvaja, daṇḍa*, *ratha*), they are almost extinct in Maharashtra. For more information on the *vikṛti*s, see: Appendix 2.

172 The Sāmaveda is based on the *padapāṭha* of the Ṛgveda, and therefore the natural (*prakṛti*) and the modified (*vikṛti*) recitations are ordered in a different way for their regular recitation and their application in ritual (cf. Staal 1995: 383-4; or Howard 1986: 201). Nonetheless, the Vedaśāstrottejak Sabhā in Pune offers examinations of the *padapāṭha* of the Pūrvārcika and Uttarārcika of the Sāmaveda for both the recensions.

The traditional *śāstra* schools,[173] of which I found only one in Pune, specialize in teaching Sanskrit grammar, logic (*nyāya*), *mīmāṃsā*, and other exegetical and philosophical disciplines, but these do not train their students to fully recite the Veda, and neither is this a requirement to enter this school. At this time, Sanskrit colleges and universities have largely supplanted these traditional Sanskrit schools in India.[174]

Training in the recitation of the Veda, as observed in my fieldwork, happened largely independent of the auxiliary Vedic disciplines, including the Sanskrit language. The learning of the meaning of the *mantra*s is not necessarily condemned, as long as it does not hinder the proper memorization of the sounds of the Veda, but it is also not particularly encouraged by the teachers (who themselves have very basic Sanskrit knowledge, and are practically completely ignorant of Vedic Sanskrit).[175] Regardless, in the few cases in which the exegesis of the *mantra* is encouraged, it is usually confined to the learning of Sanskrit according to Pāṇini, and in very rare cases according to Vedic etymology (*nirukta*). In general, the meaning of the Vedic texts seems to be of secondary interest, if any interest at all, to most of the *vaidika*s I was in contact with. They would rather learn the ritual application of *mantra*s (*kalpa*) and astrology (*jyotiṣa*), for which a minimum knowledge of Sanskrit is required or at least helpful, than pursue a deep study of Sanskrit and the philosophical systems in their original language.[176] In contrast to the four exegetical sciences[177] of the six auxiliary sciences to the Veda (*ṣaḍaṅga*), as well as the mastery in the six philosophical schools, the last two *aṅga*s (i.e. *kalpa* and *jyotiṣa*) allow the students to obtain knowledge of the ritual application of the Veda and to earn a living with the services they provide to the community.

It is probable that, in ancient India also, the curriculum was fragmented and that there was a lot of flexibility as far as the subjects of study and specialization in different areas of expertise were concerned within one's *śākhā/caraṇa*. As mentioned in the introduction, two fundamentally different types of education have been consciously distinguished in Brāhmaṇical circles: the *śāstrika* (scholastic) and the *vaidika* (recitational).[178] Although the distinction between *vaidika*s and *śāstrika*s has not been always clear-cut, experts in both traditions (exegetic and liturgical) have

173 See below in this chapter for the differentiation between the two types of traditional schools, i.e. *śāstrika* and *vaidika*.

174 See: Deshpande 2001: 119-153 and Michaels 2001: 3-16.

175 The situation in South India seems not to be different from Maharashtra, as described by: Fuller 1997: 14.

176 Many *brāhmaṇa*s read translations or monographs of philosophical works in Marathi or Hindi, from which they gain basic knowledge in the philosophical texts of their interest. I have also found that the works of Vivekānanda and other Neo-vedānta authors are the most commonly found books in the libraries of the schools.

177 Phonetics (*śikṣā*), grammar (*vyākaraṇa*), etymology (*nirukta*), and prosody (*chandas*).

178 See: Wujastyk 1981: 30; Aithal 1991: 6-12.

rather been the exception than the rule.[179] As will become clear below, one can hardly accomplish mastery over both tasks in a single lifetime. The curriculum and the aims of each system are different. While the *śāstrika* aims at understanding the texts and mastering the language (Sanskrit) to interpret them, the *vaidika* aims at mastering the sound forms of these texts and their ritual application with utmost exactitude.

The minimum requirement for any reciter is the ability to properly recite the Saṃhitā of his own recension, as determined by birth (*svaśākhā*). The learning of one's *svaśākhā* used to be a crucial requirement, as Scharfe has noted:

> [...] we find statements that one should study and practice the tradition (*śākhā*) of one's ancestors – even to the exclusion of all others. Cross-overs were allowed only when some religious rite was omitted in one's own school, but dealt with in another school; it must not, however, be opposed to the teachings of one's own school. Most authorities, though, allow or even praise the study of other Vedas, provided their own tradition was learned first: the *dvi-vedin*, *tri-vedin*, and *catur-vedin*, i.e., scholars who have learned two, three or even all four Vedas were held in high esteem and carried that designation with pride. The harshest critique falls on those who study something else, i.e., worldly learning without learning their Vedic tradition first, and the Maitrī-upaniṣad would not allow a brahmin to study anything but Vedic knowledge. (Scharfe 2002: 225-6)

While it is true that preference is given to one's own recension (*svaśākhā*), in actual practice many *brāhmaṇa*s have begun to study other Vedic *śākhā*s in Maharashtra, and also elsewhere (cf. Howard 1986: 109). This is particularly prominent in those schools considered in danger of extinction, such as the Atharvavedic recensions, or those not well represented in the region — such as the schools of the Sāmaveda. Moreover, in most of the schools visited for this research, many students who were studying in a school belonging to a particular Vedic branch hailed by birth from a different Veda community. For example, in the Śrī Kṛṣṇayajurveda Pāṭhaśālā located in Satara, one finds many students whose original *śākhā* is not the Hiraṇyakeśī[180] taught there, and not even another *śākhā* belonging to the Yajurveda, but who hail from Deśastha Ṛgveda families and even from *brāhmaṇa* families (Padhye)[181] from the neighbouring state of Goa. This is particularly interesting, as the old rivalry between Deśastha and Citpāvans (the later also called Koṅkaṇastha) has a long history. This relationship was particularly heated during the Peśva reign.[182]

179 Some examples of such recent prodigies who have mastered both disciplines are mentioned in: Howard 1986: 7-10; Knipe 1997: 310; and Deshpande 2001: 125ff.

180 The Hiraṇyakeśī *śākhā* came almost to extinction in Maharashtra. Originally, it was Citpāvan *brāhmaṇa*s who preserved this *śākhā* in the Konkan region.

181 The Padhye is a sub-branch of the Karhade *brāhmaṇa*s who are, in its majority, *ṛgvedin*s who follow the Āśvalāyana Śrautasūtra.

182 Cf. Pandit 1979.

In short, the curriculum is, at present, no longer bound to familiar denominations (*svaśākhā*), but one finds a broad mixture of familiar lineages within a single *vedapāṭhaśālā*.

Having all the above considerations in mind regarding the variability of the curricula of the Vedic schools of Maharashtra, I will now focus on describing the curricula of these schools in detail, as well as the current teaching and learning methods for the recitation of the Veda, as observed in my fieldwork. To give an overview of the subjects taught in the *pāṭhaśālā*s, I refer to Table 2:

Table 2. Curricula of subjects taught at the Vedic schools

	Name of School	Saṃhitā and *śākhā*[183]	Additional Vedic texts	Additional Auxiliary disciplines[184]	*vikṛtis*[185]	Non-Traditional Subjects
1	Ved Bhavān	ṚV	AB, Aār	DG	+ghana	-
2	Vedaśāstra Vidyālay (Patwardhan Pāṭhaśālā)	AV, ṚV	-	KK, Skt	-	English
3	Pune Vedapāṭhaśālā	ṚV, Tsaṃ	-	KK, śrauta*	-	-
4	Śrī Kṛṣṇayajurveda Pāṭhaśālā	Tsaṃ, [SV(R)]	TB, Tār,	Jyot, KK	+ghana	English, HY, Computing
5	Śrī Umāśaṅkar Advaitavedānta Vidyāpīṭh	ṚV	AB, Aār	DG, Skt, TarkŚ, KK	+ghana	-
6	Śrī Umāmaheśvar Vedapāṭhaśālā	Tsaṃ	TB, Tār,	KK	-	-
7	Śrī Borikar Vedapāṭhaśālā	ṚV	-	KK, Skt	-	-
8	Śrī Vedaśāstra Vidyā Saṃvardhan Maṇḍaḷ, "Śrī Vedapāṭhaśālā"	ṚV	AB	KK	+krama	-
9	Vedaśālā Ratnagiri	ṚV, Tsaṃ	AB, TB, Tār,	KK, śrauta	+krama	-

183 Please refer to the list of abbreviations given at the beginning of the book. Only the above mentioned recensions are currently available in Maharashtra, although attempts to revive the Atharvaveda Paippalada have been undertaken by Nānājī Kāḷe in his school, Śrī Yogīrāj Veda Vijñān Āśram. To my knowledge, there are no schools in the state learning the Jaiminīya branch of the Sāmaveda.

184 Some have indicated the teaching of *śrauta* rituals as part of. Nonetheless, it could not always be confirmed through observation. When not observed, it is marked with an asterisk (śrauta*).

185 The '+' sign implies the prerequisite of the presiding permutations and is to be interpreted as "up to". This does not mean that all the students learn up to this level, but that the teacher has obtained mastery in the given recitation and can potentially teach it to his students; additionally, the given teacher has indicated this mastery in the questionnaires filled in by all the schools.

	Name of School	Saṃhitā and *śākhā*	Additional Vedic texts	Additional Auxiliary disciplines	*vikṛtis*	Non-Traditional Subjects
10	Śrī Gaṇeśa Vedapāṭhaśālā	ṚV	-	KK	-	-
11	Vedaśāstra Saṃskṛt Pāṭhaśālā	ṚV	-	KK	+krama	-
12	Śrī Samārth Sant Mahātmajī Vedavidyālay	ṚV, VSaṃ(M), VSaṃ(K), SV(R), AV	AB, TB, Tār, ŚB	KK	+krama (not all śākhās)	English, HY, Computing
13	Vaidik Jñān Vijñān Saṃskṛt Mahāvidyālay	VSaṃ(M)	ŚB	DG, Skt, Jyot	+ghana	HY, English
14	Kailās Maṭh Akhaṇḍānand	VSaṃ(M)	-	Skt	+pada	-
15	Śrī Guru Gaṅgeśvar Mahārāj Pāṭhaśālā	VSaṃ(M)	-	Skt	-	English, Computing
16	Śrutismṛti Vidyāpīṭham	VSaṃ(M)	-	KK	+ghana	-
17	Śrī Narasiṃha Sarasvatī Vedapāṭhaśālā	ṚV	AB	KK	+ghana	-
18	Śrī Sadguru Nijānand Mahārāj Vedavidyālay	VSaṃ(M)	-	KK	-	-
19	Adhyātmik Pratiṣṭhān	VSaṃ(M)	ŚB	KK	+ghana	-
20	Śrī Jagadguru Śaṅkarācārya Maṭh	ṚV	-	KK	+krama	-
21	Vedānta Vidyāpīṭh (Śrī Dattavedasthān)	ṚV, VSaṃ(M), VSaṃ(K), Tsaṃ, SV(R),	AB, TB, Tār, ŚB	-	+krama (not all *śākhā*s)	English
22	Śrutigandhā Vedapāṭhaśālā	ṚV	Aār, AB	KK, DG,	+krama	-
23	Bhosle Vedaśāstra Mahāvidyālay	ṚV, Tsaṃ, VSaṃ(M), SV(R)	TB, Tār, ŚB	KK	+ghana	-
24	Ārṣa Vijñāna Gurukulam	ṚV	-	KK, śrauta*	+krama	-
25	Śrī Yogīrāj Veda Vijñān Āśram [186]	ṚV, SV(R), AV [VSaṃ(M),VSaṃ(K), Tsaṃ,]	[Aār, AB, TB, Tār, ŚB],	KK, śrauta	(+ghana)	'Traditional' agriculture

186 Site of the training of students in almost all Vedic branches available, as indicated in the square parentheses. After completing their studies, ex-students opened branches of this school in several parts of India. At the time I was visiting the school in Barshi, they were currently only teaching the ṚV, SV(R), and AV.

The table above does not provide any information on the amount of time spent on each subject, nor does it give us information about the batches of students that learn these subjects. Also, the fact that some of these schools offer several courses does not mean that all students learn the whole curriculum. As mentioned earlier, the curriculum of a student can move towards different directions depending on his aptitude, his inclination, and the encouragement and support he receives from his preceptors and family.

The following example illustrates this: in 2009, the 24 students of the Śrī Kṛṣṇayajurveda Pāṭhaśālā located in Satara were divided into three different batches according to their ages and the time they had already spent in the school. First, all students learn the main Vedic corpus of the Taittirīya school (i.e. Saṃhitā, Brāhmaṇa and Āraṇyaka). This takes them approximately seven or eight years.[187] After learning this, or sometimes in parallel to this learning, additional subjects are imparted to the students, such as a weekly hour of English for the youngest students (not for the older ones, who are supposed to have the basics and can thus concentrate on their advanced studies) and one hour of computer science on a fortnightly basis. After this, students can continue learning the permutations of the Veda, according to their aptitude and interest, starting with the study of the *padapāṭha,* and then *kramapāṭha*, *jaṭāpāṭha*, and finally *ghanapāṭha*. In this particular school, of the ten students who have finished their basic education, six of them have taken interest in *karmakāṇḍa* (three of whom have already completed the course on this subject), and two other students have taken an interest in deepening their recitation up to *kramapāṭha* and are currently learning *jyotiṣa*. In addition to these variations in curriculum, two advanced students are particularly interested in computing and are taking classes at night in an institute outside of the school, while one of the graduate students was particularly inclined to learning Sanskrit language at a more advanced level.

In sum, the above-mentioned school has the academic personnel to teach up to *ghanapāṭha*, the highest and most complex level of recitation, and the main teacher is also a renowned astrologer and Smārta ritualist, but not all students will become experts in all of these fields. Some will leave the school after the completion of the main curriculum or even before, and others will continue with one option or the other. Students who have a facility to memorize quickly, and have the stamina

187 Depending on the amount of time dedicated daily to the study of these texts and the facility of the student to memorize the material. Scharfe, while trying to determine what the exact curricula of Vedic schools was, has observed that there are variations in modern times regarding the time needed to learn a particular Veda. "Modern reports give a shorter time frame: a full Vedic course at a pāṭhaśālā near Tirucci in Tamilnad took eight years to complete according to V. Raghavan, P. Aithal found courses lasting more than eight years with ten to twelve hours of learning each day, F. Staal five to six years among the Nambūtiris of Central Kerala or the Ṛgveda including the Krama-pāṭha (but, it seems, without Brāhmaṇas, etc.)." (Scharfe 2002: 247).

and discipline to continue, will become *kramapāṭhin*s, or perhaps even *jaṭā* and *ghanapāṭhin*s. Others will leave to learn a further Veda from another teacher or will learn an auxiliary science (*vedāṅga*).[188]

The curriculum of the schools of Maharashtra is structured either internally (as in the cases of the schools of the Maharṣi Veda Vyās Pratiṣṭhān), or by the external bodies who conduct examinations. The main external institutions are the Vedaśāstrottejak Sabhā of Pune, the Maharṣi Sāṃdīpani Rāṣṭrīya Veda Vidyā Pratiṣṭhān of Ujjain, and the *maṭha*s of the Śaṅkarācāryas of Sringeri and Kanchipuram.[189] The yearly examinations conducted by these institutions segment the texts of each branch of the Vedas so that all schools now roughly follow the curriculum according to the order in which the exams are organized. The following list presents the curriculum for the Veda section as it is currently structured by the Vedaśāstrottejak Sabhā[190] for their yearly examinations.[191] This list can be considered the master template of the Vedic schools of Maharashtra, even if (as shown in the table above) not all the schools reach the second and third "standards" (*iyattā*).[192]

As can be noted, the third standard does not state a time frame for the study of this segment of the curriculum. According to some of the school teachers and examiners, this is due to the fact that only a few students reach this stage, and each student takes a "different amount of time to master these recitations depending on his capacity and mind-power."[193] Besides this, students who have completed the second standard usually take up other activities and responsibilities, such as teaching in their respective schools or even marrying after the completion of the second standard, therefore, leaving considerably less time for study.

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188 F. Smith described to me in a personal communication the case of the *pāṭhaśālā* in Kumbakonam, where the best students become *paṇḍita*s, the second best become teachers of recitation, and the worst ones take up *paurohitya*. Knipe (2015) additionally describes the living ritual tradition in Andhra Pradesh of taking up a *śrauta* career by setting the three fires (*tretāgni*). This arduous ritual option has almost disappeared in Maharashtra, with only very few candidates continuing the hereditary tradition. A telling example of the minority in this state are the Kāḷe family from Barshi, and the students Śrī Yogīrāj Veda Vijñān Āśram. According to a survey done by him and his associates in 2004, there were 18 *āhitāgni*s left in Maharashtra (Shree Yogiraj Vedvijnan Ashram 2005: xi).

189 For more on these institutions, see: subchapter 3.7.

190 The information comes from a brochure printed by the Sabhā in the year 1997. The brochures for the examinations are printed on a yearly basis, whereas a report on the activities of the organization, including details on the examinations, is distributed among the donors and members every two years.

191 For a detailed description of the role of the VŚS in the institutionalization process of the curriculum in Maharashtra, see below the subchapter 3.8.

192 *iyattā* f An allotted quantity. An allowance. A standard. Limits or bounds. (Vaze 1911: 55).

193 Interview with Kāḷe: 06.06.2009, Barshi.

Table 3. Curriculum for the Veda section for the examinations at the Vedaśāstrottejak Sabhā - First Standard

Ṛgveda Śākala Śākhā	
Year 1	Ṛgvedasaṃhitā *adhyāyas*: 1-16
Year 2	Ṛgvedasaṃhitā *adhyāyas*: 17-32
Year 3	Ṛgvedasaṃhitā *adhyāyas*: 33-48
Year 4	Ṛgvedasaṃhitā *adhyāyas*: 49-64
Year 5	Aitayeyabrāhmaṇa *pañcikās*: 1-6
Year 6	Aitayeyabrāhmaṇa *pañcikās*: 7-9 and the Aitayeyāraṇyaka
Kṛṣṇayajurveda Taittirīya Śākhā	
Year 1	Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa *khaṇḍas*: 1-2
Year 2	Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa 3rd *khaṇḍa* and Taittirīyāraṇyaka
Year 3	Taittirīyasaṃhitā *khaṇḍas*: 1-4
Year 4	Taittirīyasaṃhitā *khaṇḍas*: 4-7
Śuklayajurveda both Mādhyandina and Kāṇva recensions	
Year 1	Vājasaneyisaṃhitā *adhyāyas*: 1-18
Year 2	Vājasaneyisaṃhitā *adhyāyas*: 19-40
Year 3	*padapāṭha adhyāyas*: 1-26
Year 4	*padapāṭha adhyāyas*: 27-40 *kramapāṭha adhyāyas*: 1-12
Year 5	*kramapāṭha adhyāyas*: 13-40
Sāmaveda both Rāṇāyanīya and Kauthuma recensions	
Year 1	Pūrvārcika first *adhyāya*, complete *agneya* songs (*gāna*)
Year 2	Pūrvārcika *adhyāyas* 2 & 3, *bṛhatyanta bahusāmi* songs (*gāna*)
Year 3	Pūrvārcika complete, *indrapuccha* songs (*gāna*)
Year 4	Uttarārcika first half (10 *adhyāyas*), complete *pavamāna* songs (*gāna*)
Year 5	Uttarārcika second half and the forest song (*āraṇyaka gāna*)
Atharvaveda Śaunaka Śākhā	
Year 1	Atharvavedasaṃhitā *khaṇḍa*s: 1-10
Year 2	Atharvavedasaṃhitā *khaṇḍa*s: 11-20
Year 3	Gopathabrāhmaṇa complete

Table 4. Curriculum for the Veda section for the examinations at the Vedaśāstrottejak Sabhā - Second Standard

Ṛgveda Śākala Śākhā	
Year 1	Saṃhitā *padapāṭha aṣṭakas*: 1-4
Year 2	Saṃhitā *padapāṭha aṣṭakas*: 5-8
Year 3	Saṃhitā *kramapāṭha aṣṭakas*: 1-4
Year 4	Saṃhitā *kramapāṭha aṣṭakas*: 5-8
Kṛṣṇayajurveda Taittirīya Śākhā	
Year 1	Saṃhitā *padapāṭha khaṇḍas*: 1, 3, 4 and *khaṇḍa* 2 *praśnas* 1-4
Year 2	Saṃhitā *padapāṭha khaṇḍas*: 5, 6, 7 and *khaṇḍa* 2 *praśnas* 5-8
Year 3	Saṃhitā *kramapāṭha khaṇḍas*: 1, 3, 4 and *khaṇḍa* 2 *praśnas* 1-4
Year 4	Saṃhitā *kramapāṭha khaṇḍas*: 5, 6, 7 and *khaṇḍa* 2 Saṃhitā *ghanapāṭha*
Śuklayajurveda both Mādhyandina and Kāṇva recensions	
Year 1	Vājasaneyisaṃhitā *jaṭāpāṭha*
Year 2	Vājasaneyisaṃhitā *ghanapāṭha*
Sāmaveda both Rāṇāyanīya and Kauthuma recensions	
Year 1	Pūrvārcika *padapāṭha* complete; five *adhyāyas* of Uttarārcika; Ūhagāna *daśarātraṃ* and Ūhagāna *saṃvatsara*
Year 2	Uttarārcika *padapāṭha*: *adhyāyas* 6-10; *ekāhaprabhṛti prayaścitta* Ūhagāna.
Year 3	Uttarārcika *padapāṭha* second half, Ūhagāna *kṣudraparva-rahasya* and complete Mantrabrāhmaṇa
Atharvaveda Śaunaka Śākhā	
Year 1	Atharvaveda *padapāṭha khaṇḍas*: 1-10
Year 2	Atharvaveda *padapāṭha khaṇḍas*: 11-20
Year 3	Atharvaveda *kramapāṭha* Complete

Table 5. Curriculum for the Veda section for the examinations at the Vedaśāstrottejak Sabhā - Third Standard

Ṛgveda Śākala Śākhā	
No fixed time-frame	*jaṭāpāṭha* and *ghanapāṭha* of the Ṛgvedasaṃhitā
Kṛṣṇayajurveda Taittirīya Śākhā	
No fixed time-frame	*jaṭāpāṭha* and *ghanapāṭha* of the Taittirīyasaṃhitā
Śuklayajurveda both Mādhyandina and Kāṇva recensions	
No fixed time-frame	Śatapathabrāhmaṇa
Sāmaveda both Rāṇāyanīya and Kauthuma recensions	
No fixed time-frame	Tāṇḍya Brāḥmaṇa, Ṣaḍviṃśa Brāhmaṇa
Atharvaveda Śaunaka Śākhā	
No fixed time-frame	*jaṭāpāṭha* and *ghanapāṭha* of the Atharvaveda

The curriculum is on the one hand very structured for the first part of the Vedic study — i.e. the core texts (Saṃhitā, Brāhmaṇa and Āraṇyaka) — but on the other hand, there is more freedom of choice in how the students continue (or not) with their education. The structure of the examinations as practiced by institutions such as the Vedaśāstrottejak Sabhā are, in reality, only ideal schemes which are rarely followed *ad pedem litterae*. In practice, many of these schools do not send their students every year to the examinations, as students sometimes need longer (or shorter) amounts of time to learn the given curriculum. This particularly true for the schools of the 'Gurukula' and 'Vedapāṭhaśālā'type in which teachers can decide these matters more freely. Moreover, students who come from far away to Pune for the examinations might sit their examinations for two yearly units on the same occasion, instead of one for each, thus condensing the travel expenses into one year. Smaller schools will also make sure to send their students only once they are ready, which might not necessarily suit the calendar of the examinations, as it generally requires a week to ten days before the *dīpāvali*, one of the most popular Indian celebrations, that takes place in the month of Āśvayuja of the Hindu calendar (which usually falls in the month of October/November in the Gregorian calendar). Larger schools, which have a more-structured organization and a proper academic calendar, are less flexible with amendments to the curriculum.

From the accounts found in ancient literature, we cannot extract a clear curriculum valid for all the Vedic schools (not even for the schools of a single *śākhā*), even if the different systems of organizing the Vedic texts into segments points to a curricular structure in the oral transmission of the text (cf. Scharfe 2002: 249-50). One can assume, however, that each *śākhā*, and perhaps even individual schools belonging to the same *śākhā*, had their own system of organizing the curriculum. Scharfe, when

referring to the Vedic curriculum in ancient India, notes: "We must also consider the possibilities that there were variations in educational practice from region to region and over long time-spans, especially when the study period was extended to run the full length of the year" (Scharfe 2002: 249), while Altekar also writes, "In ancient India there were no successive classes, examinations and clear-cut courses, as they exist in modern systems of education" (Altekar 1934: 110).

It is important to note that among the *ṛgvedin*s of Maharashtra the claim of having the 'ten books' (*daśagrantha*s) as their curriculum is not uncommon. These ten 'books' are the Saṃhitā, Brāhmaṇa, Āraṇyaka, Śikṣā, Kalpa, Vyākaraṇa, Nighaṇṭu, Nirukta, Chandas, and Jyotiṣa with the initial and primary focus in these schools being heavily placed on mastering the Saṃhitā, and sometimes the Brāhmaṇa and Āraṇyaka,[194] but the actual requirement of knowledge of the other subjects, in particular the *śikṣā*, *vyākaraṇa*, and *nirukta*, is virtually non-existent. Galewicz (2011) also shows that a quasi-new canonization of the Ṛgveda into a single work containing the above-mentioned *daśagrantha*s is used in the Vedic schools of Maharashtra, and remarks that, even though the edition is common among the *ṛgvedin*s, many people carrying this title have not studied in depth the portions beyond the Saṃhitā, Brāhmaṇa, and Āraṇyaka, plus the *pada* and *krama* permutations.

Among the *kṛṣṇayajurvedin*s and *sāmavedin*s, I did not encounter the claim of a mastery of the *daśagrantha*s, but it is found among a few *atharvavedin*s[195] and occasionally among *mādhyandina yajurvedin*s.

The curriculum is therefore not as uniform and clear-cut as it would seem to be at first sight. The Vedic education system of ancient India was perhaps so focused on its exact sonic transmission of its texts, and the curriculum grew so large, that family clans — which became the later *śākhā*s — developed groups of specialists in the recitation of the Veda. These specialists became, as the auxiliary branches of knowledge grew, a small fraction within the *brāhmaṇa* intellectual occupations of each *brāhmaṇa* clan.

> Smritis are most disappointing as far as information about the curricula, method of teaching and examinations is concerned. They are content to observe that Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas should study the Vedas exclusively in the monsoon term, and the Vedas along with the Vedangas during the rest of the year. [...] a little reflection will show that even the Brahmana community could not have been following this stereotyped curriculum throughout the several centuries of Ancient Indian History. The rise of new branches of knowledge must have affected the curriculum [...] (Altekar 1983: 117).

194 An alternative list of the *daśagrantha*s includes *padapāṭha* and *kramapāṭha* instead of Nighaṇṭu and Āraṇyaka, but in a different order.

195 *Atharvavedin*s are in their majority *ṛgvedin*s by birth, and have taken up the learning and teaching of this Veda to prevent it from extinction (cf. Howard 1986: 109; and Bahulkar, 2016).

Scharfe points to the simplified versions of the Vedic corpus, or "shortcuts", in which the student learns but a selection of hymns, and the first and last hymn in a section (*anuvāka*), or whatever the teacher considered adequate.[196] Moreover, the daily recitation of the Veda (*svādhyāya*), considered the main duty of a *brāhmaṇa*, acquired a ritual structure and became a rite on its own called the *brahmayajña*. This daily ritual condenses the ideal and practice of giving and receiving instruction of the Veda into the recitation of a couple of Vedic *mantra*s, this accompanied with simple ritual actions. This practice is still followed by many *brāhmaṇa*s today, and is usually performed right after the daily practice of *saṃdhyā*. But the most extreme version of such a "short-cut" is perhaps the reduction of the whole Vedic corpus into a single *mantra*: the *gāyatrī-mantra* or, even more, into the Mantric monosyllable, *oṁ*.[197]

3.6 Styles of Vedic Recitation

As it was briefly pointed out above, according to tradition, there are two main modes for the recitation of the Veda; these are the natural modalities (*prakṛti*) and the permutations (*vikṛti*). In addition to these options, Vedic recitation can be done for its own sake as *brahmayajña* or in its ritual application (*viniyoga*), in which only portions of the *mūla* texts (i.e. *saṃhitā*) are used. In any case, whether the Veda is recited to oneself (*svādhyāya*) or for its ritual application, it has to be memorized, as has been shown above, according to the traditional methods through the mouth of a *guru*.

Although the words of these texts themselves remain virtually unchanged, there exist different styles of recitation across India. The different styles of recitation represented in different locations across the country have been divided by some scholars (and by the communities of *brāhmaṇa*s themselves) into South and North, which correspond largely to the geographic distribution of the ancient *śākhā*s.[198] Influenced by factors such as the local languages, the recitations have developed unique styles which can be clearly distinguished from each other. A clear example of this is the White Yajurveda which is currently recited in two different styles as correlated to two slightly different textual recensions preserved in the two groups: *kāṇva* and *mādhyandina*. These differences, of course, go back to the different clans who preserved these texts in different regions of India and to the mythical founders of these *śākhā*s according to the tradition.[199] While there are few substantial changes

196 Cf. Scharfe 2002: 249.

197 For a remarkable study on this syllable see: Moore Gerety 2015.

198 See: Gonda 1975: 44-45 and Witzel 1993.

199 These mythical figures are for the *kāṇva śākhā* and *mādhyandina śākhā* who were students of the famous sage Yājñavalkya according to the tradition. For more information on the language differences and regional distribution of these schools see: Witzel 1989.

in the Vājasaneyisaṃhitā itself within the two *śākhā*s, the recitation style is different. Without going into all the details of all the pecularities pertinent to the recitation styles[200] of the *kāṇva* and *mādhyandina śākhā*s, it will suffice to point out that the most notable differences between them is the use of handgestures (*mudrā*s) that indicate the tones in the recitation of the Vājasaneyisaṃhitā: while *kāṇva* signals the tri-tonal marks of the text (*udātta, anudātta and svarita*) with up and down hand movements of the outstretched right arm (indicating only the *anudātta* and the *svarita* tones), the *mādhyandina* style "reads" the tonal marks of the same text differently altogether. The most important characteristic that can easily differentiate the two schools is that the *mādhyandina* style indicates the *udātta* middle-tone with a horizontal hand gesture, whereas the *kāṇva* allows only up and down hand movements. In fact, some teachers told me that this is exactly the reason why they are called *mādhyandina śākhā*, the word *mādhya* meaning "middle, meridian, central, in between" in Sanskrit. Therefore, while the actual content of the Vājasaneyisaṃhitā of the White Yajurveda may look almost the same in print, the oral recitation and the ritual practice of these two *śākhā*s are evidently quite different from each other.

A trend that can be observed in the contemporary Vedic schools of Maharashtra is, on one hand, an increase in the amount of *śākhā*s and styles being revived in the state by importing traditions which were originally considered alien (or, for a long time, almost extinguished) in Maharashtra, and on the other hand a homogenization of recitational variations through standardization. The import/export of these recitation styles goes not without saying, particularly when it is an 'artificial' process, such as the reconstruction of a "tradition" from printed texts.[201]

The example of the Sāmaveda in Kerala, described by Staal (1961), might be an extreme one, but it is certainly not an isolated one, as Howard (1986) and others have shown. The Atharvaveda recitation has been revived in Benares through *ṛgvedin*s, thereby adopting a distinctive *ṛgvedīya* style. The institutionalization of the curriculum and an increase in mobility has become an evident element to support a pan-Indian revival of the Vedas.

As we saw above in the examinations conducted in several institutions, greater mobility has slowly begun to blur the regional variations. Experts of Vedic branches are called in from other states not only to evaluate students, but also to teach in new Vedic schools.

200 It is noteworthy that even within the *mādhyandina śākhā* North Indian *yajurvedin*s recite it in a different way from those of Maharashtra. For details on these two recitation styles and their differences see: Howard 1986.

201 For the case of the Sāmaveda in South India, see: Staal 1961: 66-67.

3.7 Modalities of Teaching and Studying the Veda

Besides the curricular variations discussed above, and the intrinsic differences in the recitation of each *śākhā*, one also finds methodological variations. These differences mainly refer to mnemotecnics, the intensity of the oral instruction, and the use of printed/handwritten manuscripts for the study of the Vedic texts. Other differences were found in schools regarding the "orthopraxy" of ritual behavior — i.e. the duties, rules, and regulations of daily life in regard to what is right and wrong while reciting or instructing the Veda (ritual purity, formality and restrictions) — as well as the protocols for relationships between teachers and students. These aspects will be dealt with in this section, which describes the procedures and modalities in which the Vedas are taught and studied, as observed during my fieldwork.

Each Vedic recension has developed particularities in the recitation and oral transmission of the Veda. These particularities and styles have been textually preserved in the *prātiśākhya*s and other phonetic treatises of each *śākhā*. The scope and purpose of this work does not aim to study and synthesize all these treatises and practices, as have been developed over the centuries, neither to describe the differences in style that apply to the Vedic recitation of each recension. Therefore, in the following section, I have concentrated on giving a general and relatively overarching description of the methodology followed in the Vedic schools of Maharashtra. For more detailed information on each of the *śākhā*s, or regional variations, the reader is referred to individual *śikṣā*s and *prātiśākhya*s[202], as well as to works such as the monographs of Staal and Howard on the recitation of the Nambudiris from Kerala and on the Vedic tradition in Benares, respectively.[203]

I will focus here on the three main ways in which the Veda is formally studied. The first method common to all the *śākhā*s is *vedādhyāya*, simply called *santhā* in Marathi,[204] and in this context it refers to the specific technique for memorizing the Vedic corpus. The word comes from the Sanskrit *saṃsthā* which, among other things, has the connotation of "to fix or place upon." In this case, it would refer to the placing or fixing of the Veda in the memory of the reciter. In such a session, the teacher (*guru*) is physically present to impart a given portion of the text to be learned on the given day. This technique introduces the new portions of the text to be learned by heart by the students in digestible segments. The specific content of the lessons and the technicalities — such as hand movements, intonation, and recitation style — of course vary from *śākhā* to *śākhā*, but the most widespread model in the schools I visited is

202 For example, those edited by: Pataskar 2010a; Deshpande 2002; and Howard 1986.
203 Staal 1961; Howard 1986. Additionally, Howard 1977, 1988a, 1988b on the Sāmavedic chant.
204 *saṃthā* 1) Reading and conning in order to commit to memory. 2) The portion to be read and conned, a lesson (Molesworth 1857).

based on this type of repetition.[205] The second type of lesson is the "revision" class, which is similar to the *vedādhyāya*. These sessions are generally called *abhyāsa,*[206] and consist of a technique called *guṇaṇikā* in Sanskrit, and *guṇḍikā* or *guṇṇikā*[207] in Marathi. The main difference is the purpose of each lesson. While *santhā* is meant to introduce new material at a slower pace, in which smaller units (words or half *pāda*s) are repeated twice (or trice) after the *guru*, the revision class or *guṇḍikā* method usually goes much faster and has the purpose of reviewing the material already introduced in the *santhā* sessions, and stringing the portions together. The third and last modality in which the Veda is learned is called *svādhyāya* and can also be translated as "recitation to one's self". Here, the student goes over the lessons by himself (or in small groups), making sure to completely memorize the text, usually aided by a printed edition of the text.

In the next section, I will describe in detail the procedures of these three modalities of Vedic study (*santhā*, *guṇḍikā*, and *svādhyāya*), which are an integral part of a Vedic student's daily schedule in the schools visited in Maharashtra.

3.7.1 Spaces and Seating Arrangements for the Veda Instruction

Before going to the three modalities of Vedic study, I will briefly address the physical space in which instruction takes place, and I will also briefly discuss seating arrangements. As we saw in the triple typology, the physical infrastructure of the 'school' can vary drastically from one type to the next. While some schools have specific 'classrooms' where hundreds of students can sit, with the space being used exclusively for teaching and study, such as in the 'Vedaviyālaya type', in the other two types the learning spaces are used for diverse purposes. The classroom is often also the sleeping room. Even the *pūjā* room is used for a variety of purposes extending beyond religious practice. This is particularly so for smaller schools where space is limited and the space is weaved into the social life of the people who inhabit it. In the 'Gurukula type' of school, where the model of joint-family is at the center of social interaction, there are no private spaces; or rather, they are demarcated by the norms of social interaction. For example, in relations of gender, the *guru*'s bedroom and the female quarters are taboo. In schools of the types 'Vedapāṭhaśālā' and 'Vedavidyālaya' the segregation of space is much more evident and there seems to be a clearer sense

205 For a detailed illustration of these methods, see below.

206 Some definitions given in Monier-Williams are: "reduplication; repetition; repetition of the last verse of a stanza or of the last word of a chapter; repeated or permanent exercise, discipline, use, habit, custom; repeated reading, study."

207 *guṇṇikā* 1) Reperusing and reciting in order to commit to memory, conning. The term evidently comes from *guṇa* > *guṇita* to be multiplied, or repeated over and over.

of privacy. Here, students do not enter the *guru*'s house or quarters unless invited or in need of a particular service, and a clear sense of the *guru*'s family property versus that of the students is made apparent.

In most of the schools visited, students sit with their teacher on the floor, either in the classroom or in the open (garden, porch, courtyard, etc.). Usually, students are facing the teacher in a semi-circle. Another very common way of sitting for this type of class involves half of the students facing one another in parallel rows, and the teacher sitting in the middle and at the head of the row, facing them in a sideways fashion (see plate 3).

Plate 3: Ved. M. Ghaisas and students of the Ved Bhavan sitting in the courtyard studying the Veda. Pune 2009.

The floor is often covered with a thin layer of cow dung and water solution, particularly if it is of a ritual enclosure (*yajñaśālā*). The students sit on square or rectangular mats made of different materials, the most common being white wool or cotton with a colourful border of silk (or similar fabrics), or more recently, colourful plastic stripes interwoven into different patterns. While students may have their own personal mat and never share their seat with other fellow students, in many schools, the sitting mats (particularly plastic ones) are interchangeable. They are also used to seat guests, and they serve as seats for other activities, such as eating lunch. Teachers in some schools have special seats. The most common is a wood stall that is raised a few centimeters from the ground on which the teacher puts his *āsana* (mat), which is usually of the

same material and form as those of the students. In a few cases, I observed that some teachers have special seats which are either considerably taller or have more layers of cloth, or even more rarely, the teacher will sit on a deerskin. The skin of a black deer is considered more auspicious than that of a spotted one, but both are considerably more prestigious than the use of a plastic mat.[208] This practice contrasts with most of the prescriptions found in the Dharmasūtras regarding seats and sitting arrangements. In most of the schools I visited, the cardinal direction (north or east) for seating and the arrangement of teacher and students was not rigid for the Veda class, or at least not as relevant as the Dharmaśāstric rules instruct.[209] For the personal *svādhyāya*, it seemed even less relevant. Also, the teaching enclosure is quite often not a fixed classroom (even if there might be one in the school for this purpose). Quite often, the instruction takes place alternatively in the courtyard, the garden under a tree, or some other spot within the school grounds. Sometimes, it is the students who suggest a particular spot and the teacher who agrees, but most of the time, it is the teacher who decides when and where to start a lesson.

3.7.2 Introductory Lesson (*Santhā*)

When a new section of the Veda is introduced to a student, the *guru* will initially break the verses or a long sentence into smaller units, which the students repeat after him, as will be shown below. Once the phrases have been memorized, the *guru* strings them into a whole sentence/paragraph, which is then repeated as a whole a couple of times in order to fix it mentally. Over time, longer and longer portions are strung together and committed to memory.

In the basic model for *santhā*, the teacher starts by reciting one-half of a *pāda*,[210] which the students repeat two or three times after him.[211] The following illustration uses verse 1.024.01 from the Ṛgveda as an example. The letters a, b, c, d represent the *pāda*s of the verse:

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208 A *brāhmaṇa* teacher once asked me if I could bring him a deerskin from Europe since they are so difficult and expensive to obtain in India. Since the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 regarding the hunting and dealing of endangered animal species, such animal skin can not be obtained legally.

209 Usually, the auspicious direction is facing the north or the east. For example, GautDhS 1.54: "When he is given permission, he should sit at the teacher's right facing the east or the north" (Olivelle 2000: 123).

210 The term *pāda* here is used broadly in both the sense of a "quarter of a verse", as well as a fragment of a sentence or line. The *santhā* procedure is applied for the memorization of both prose as well as verse texts (or portions of them). For an example of prose fragmentation, see below in this chapter.

211 It is usually *ṛgvedin*s who repeat three times after the *guru*, whereas the rest of the *śākhā*s usually only repeat twice.

a) *kásya nūnáṃ katamásyāmṛtānām*
b) *mánāmahe cāru devásya nāma*
c) *kó no mahyā́ áditaye púnar dāt*
d) *pitáraṃ ca dṛśéyam mātáraṃ ca*

teacher: *kásya nūnáṃ* (breath)
students: *kásya nūnáṃ / kásya nūnáṃ / kásya nūnáṃ* (breath)
teacher: *katamásyāmṛtānām* (breath)
students: *katamásyāmṛtānām / katamásyāmṛ̊tānām / katamásyāmṛ̊tānām* (breath)
teacher: *mánāmahe cāru* (breath)
students: *mánāmahe cāru / mánāmahe cāru / mánāmahe cāru* (breath)
teacher: *devásya nāma* (breath)
students: *devásya nāma / devásya nāma / devásya nāma* (breath)
teacher: *kó no mahyā́* (breath)
students: *kó no mahyā́ / kó no mahyā́ / kó no mahyā́* (breath)
teacher: *áditaye púnar dāt* (breath)
students: *áditaye púnar dāt / áditaye púnar dāt / áditaye púnar dāt* (breath)
teacher: *pitáraṃ ca dṛśéyam* (breath)
students: *pitáraṃ ca dṛśéyam / pitáraṃ ca dṛ̊śéyam / pitáraṃ ca dṛśéyam* (breath)
teacher: *mātáraṃ ca* (breath)
students: *mātáraṃ ca / mātáraṃ ca / mātáraṃ ca* (breath)

After this, via the same procedure, the instruction continues to the next verse, 1.024.02 (*agnér vayám prathamásyāmṛ̊tānām*…).

Traditionally, the *guru* teaches new chapters for a period of ten consecutive days, as illustrated in the above example. In one normal day of instruction, around 30 verses are repeated in this mode. Usually, it takes ten *santhā* sessions, plus ten revision sessions (*guṇḍikā*), as well as a varying number of *svādhyāya* sessions, for students to memorize a chapter.[212] It takes approximately one month to master a chapter, depending upon the duration and frequency of the classes, the difficulty of the passage being studied, and the capacity of a student. An estimate given to me by one of the *vaidika*s as an example is the Puruṣasūkta, which is committed to memory by young boys in approximately six days of intensive study. Students who did not start their training at an early age (8-10 years old) usually take longer, from 10 days to two weeks to memorize the same *sūkta*. Most of the *vaidika*s consulted agreed that, in general, younger boys are able to accomplish more in less time.[213]

212 There are several methods to divide the different Vedic texts; here, by "chapter" I mean one *anuvāka*, but this can vary depending on the Vedic text being studied and the division system used in a particular school. For more on these divisions of text, see: Renou 1957: 1-18 and Scharfe 2002: 250.
213 Interview with V. Goḍboḷe, 03.03.2009, Satara and interview with A. Jośī, 06.07.2009, Beed.

As shown in the example above, in the first (and occasionally also in the second) *santhā* sessions, the teacher recites half of a *pāda*, which students repeat twice in unison after him. During the second and third sessions, they repeat one or two full *pāda*s after the *guru*, this being equivalent to half of a verse of four *pāda*s.[214] In the fifth and sixth sessions, the pupils repeat two complete verses after the *guru*. Then, from the seventh to the tenth *santhā*, they repeat more verses or sentences (*vākya*s) in a row, twice after the *guru*.[215] One unit of ten repetitions, as mentioned above, is called *santhā* or, also, *upadeśa*. The *guṇḍikā* session, as will be shown below, serves to string the verses and portions together and to get the focus away from the printed text by increasing the speed of recitation.[216]

The above section described the *santhā* methodology, which is the most widely used in the schools I visited; however, there is a variation to the *santhā* technique which can also be observed in some schools of the region. The teacher starts by initially reciting the first *pāda* "a" of a verse once, with the students repeating. Each step then increases the number of pada repetitions in the following way:

1) Teacher: a
Students: a
2) Teacher: aa
Students: aa
...
7) Teacher: aaaaaaa
Students: aaaaaaa

The maximum number of *pāda* "a" repetitions is seven. By the end of the seven rounds, 28 repetitions of *pāda* "a" have been completed. After the seven rounds for the *pāda* "a", repetitions for *pāda* "b" begin, according to the same procedure used for *pāda* "a".

214 Verses can consist of four *pāda*s varying from 5 to 27 syllables, depending on the metres. There are also verses that have a different division, e.g. the famous *gāyatrī* metre that has three instead of four *pāda*s. For more on the division of the verses and Vedic prosody, see: Arnold 1905; Oldenberg 1982; Winternitz (1986: 5-35), and Macdonell 1966: 436-447.

215 In the case of the Yajurveda, a *pañcāśat* (i.e. fifthy words (*pada*s)) are counted as a unit independent of the verses or phrases.

216 According to M. Deshpande (1995: 131), "We are told [in the Kātyāyana's Vārtttikas on Pāṇini 1.1.70, and 1.4.109] that there are three speeds of pronouncing the mantras i.e. fast (*druta*), medium (*madhyama*), and slow (*vilambita*). Of these, the fast speed is supposed to be used when a student is reciting the mantras for his own study. In the ritual use of the mantras, one is supposed to use the medium speed. A teacher is supposed to use the slow speed to recite the mantras while teaching his students. Using an inappropriate speed at the wrong occasion creates unacceptable situations, and in this sense, the speed is a distinctive feature at this level."

After the four *pāda*s of the verse (or sentences, in the case of prose) have been completed, the next procedure is followed:

1) Teacher: ab
Students: ab
2) Teacher: abab
Students: abab
…
7) Teacher: ababababababab
Students: ababababababab

The same procedure is repeated to cluster *pādas* "c" and "d" together. After this section of the lesson, the same method is applied to the complete verse. Finally, the method is repeated for the whole chapter/section (*anuvāka*).

While the first *santhā* technique is the most widespread one, the second *santhā* technique can be observed among some *śuklayajurvedin*s, and occasionally among *ṛgvedin*s in Maharashtra. Mohanathas (2003: 58-61) also described the second technique as the one prevalent in the schools she visited in Alandi. While Dubois (2013: 51-74), Aithal (1991: 12), Scharfe (2002: 244-5), Staal (1961: 59-61), and Fuller (1997: 8-9) have described the first type (although partly with other regional names.)

The prose texts such as the Brāhmaṇa and Āraṇyaka, as well as some portions of the Taittirīyāsaṃhitā, have no metre and, therefore, the *pāda* division of it is not used; instead, the division into sentences (*vākya*) is preferred. The *santhā* lesson here is comprised of ten sentences. The *guru* initially breaks the sentences into shorter units, which are easy to recall. As the *guru* breaks the phrases into clusters of words, he adheres to the rules of tone and accentuation (*svara*). This means that the accent of the final syllables will change according to those rules. Let me illustrate this with the first line of the *śāntimantra* in the Taittirīyāraṇyaka [4.1.1], which has particularly long sentences:

namo̍ vā̱ce yā co̍ḍi̱tā yā cānu̍ditā̱ tasyai̍ vā̱ce namo̱ namo̍ vā̱ce namo̍ vā̱caspata̍ye̱ nama̱ ṛṣi̍bhyo mantra̱kṛdbhyo̱ mantra̍pratibhyo̱ mā māmṛṣa̍yo mantra̱kṛto̍ mantra̱pata̍ya̱ḥ parā̎du̱rmā'hamṛṣī̎nmantra̱kṛto̍ mantra̱patī̱nparā̎dāṁ vaiśvade̱vīṁ vāca̍mudyāsaṁ̊ śi̱vamada̍stāṁ̱ juṣṭāṁ̎ de̱vebhyāśśarma̍ me̱ dyauśśarma̍ pṛthi̱vī śarma̱ viśva̍mi̱daṁ jaga̍t|

Teacher: *namo̍ vā̱ce* (breath)
Students: *namo̍ vā̱ce / namo̍ vā̱ce* (breath)
Teacher: *yā co̍ḍi̱tā* (breath)
Students: *yā co̍ḍi̱tā / yā co̍ḍi̱tā* (breath)
Teacher: *yā cānu̍ditā̎*
Students: *yā cānu̍ditā̎ / yā cānu̍ditā̎*
… etc.

Note that, when recited as an independent phrase, the final [*tā̍*] in *cānúditā̍* is not *anudātta* [*tā̱*], as in the original text, but stays *svarita* through the rules of *svara*.[217]

The *santhā* classes that I was able to observe lasted anywhere between one-and-a-half to three hours, depending on the length of the chapter or the prose section to be learned.

During the class, the teacher sits quietly and corrects the students when they make a mistake in pronunciation or recite the incorrect note of the *mantra*. From the reactions I observed from different teachers, and in my conversations with them, it seems that a tonal (*svara*) mistake is as grave as a mistake in pronunciation (if not being more serious). The *svara* mistakes are often not tolerated, and teachers put particular emphasis on correct accentuation, whereas stress on clear diction and articulation seems to be secondary. During a class, the teacher only corrects the students by repeating the word in the proper intonation and pronunciation, but does not give any additional instructions in the class. His corrections are sometimes accompanied by up and down movements of his right hand, these indicating the correct *svara*s. Of course, in branches where the *mudrā*s or hand-movements accompanying the recitation are mandatory (Sāmaveda and both recentions of the White Yajurveda), the teacher will put special stress on their correct execution.

Comparing the contemporary classes with the ideal 'classes' set for students and teachers, as presented in the *dharmaśāstra* literature and the Prātiśākhyas, one can trace elements, methods, and values that have prevailed (or have been reconstructed) from these sources. But we can also observe new elements, deviations, innovations, and contradictions. It is perhaps on the level of formal instruction that we have the greatest variations to the Dharmaśāstric rules. In most of the schools I visited, there was no conscious effort to abide by these rules. In fact, the majority of the teachers and students were not aware of them. This means that they had not read the texts concerned, or at least not thoroughly, and instead simply reproduced the style of teaching they had learned from their respective teachers. For example, during the formal instruction, the seating configurations were almost never followed the rules indicated by the Śāstric texts (and if they ever were, it seemed that it was rather by an embodied disposition that was informed by a conviction of their ancestors, as opposed to the personal conviction of the current teacher).

The lessons I observed during my fieldwork never started in the same way as that described in the Dharmaśāstric rules. The lesson usually started and ended with a

217 The accentuation rules, as well as the pronunciation of particular words or syllables, are unique to each *śākhā*. These specific phonetic rules are only valid within the same recension, although variations in style are found even from region to region within the same Vedic branch. Notation systems for the accents also vary from *śākhā* to *śākhā*. Cf. Staal 1961: 27-30; and Scharfe 2012. For more examples of how the *svara*s change in the recitation of Ṛgveda, see: Dharmadhikari 2000.

simple "*hariḥ oṁ*",[218] and none of the other formulas to address the *guru* described in the ancient texts were used.[219] During class, I never saw any student ritually holding *kuśa* (or any other sacred grass) as it is prescribed in some Dharmasūtras.[220] Once the material of the class has been covered according to the above mentioned method, both teachers and students close the class, usually by saying the *mantra* "*hariḥ oṁ*" or "*oṁ*" all together (usually, quickly and without giving it much emphasis, and at a speed and intonation common to normal language). Therefore, besides the recitation of this short *mantra*, there are no traces left of the formulas prescribed by the Dharmaśāstric literature to finish the class (cf. Scharfe 2002: 223-4).[221] Once the class is over, the students bow to their teacher one by one and then disperse. Some of them complete a "full-*praṇāma*" (placing the whole body on the ground with the arms stretched in the *añjali* gesture); this expression of respect is also called *daṇḍavat-praṇāma* or the "stick-like prostration". Alternatively, students prostrate by kneeling down and putting their forehead on the ground, close to the *guru*'s feet with the hands facing down. This is done whether the teacher is standing or sitting.

3.7.3 Revision Class (*Guṇḍikā*)

As described above, the *santhā* method is designed to introduce new material to the pupils. In this case, the revision class, called *guṇḍikā*, is designed to train the memory of the pupils, and aims particularly at getting the focus off of the printed text. The *guṇḍikā* exercise is done in ten revision sessions for the beginner students, and six for the advanced ones — i.e. those students having memorized a whole "book" (for example, the TB.) In the *guṇḍikā* method, the students recite one *pañcāśat*, under the supervision of the *guru*,[222] for ten sessions. In this exercise, the dynamics of the recitation are different. While in the *santhā* sessions, the pupils repeat after the *guru*, in the *guṇḍikā* session, and the *guru* commonly only listens and corrects the recitation when necessary. It is also not the whole group simultaneously who recites the text back to the *guru*, but the pupils take turns in reciting the given material (either sentences or portions), as exemplified in the description above. Another very common method

218 Or a similar invocation, such as "*śrī gurubhyo namaḥ hariḥ oṁ*".
219 ŚāṅkGS IV 8,12. ŚāṅkGS IV 8,16 referred to by: Scharfe 2002: 224-5. See also: Mookerji 1998: 188.
220 ŚāṅkGS II 7,5. "grasping young *kuśa* shoots with both hands — the right hand being on top —, [holding the shoots] between them"; ĀśvGS III 4,7, with Haradatta's commentary; MānDhŚ II 71. Also cf. Kane 1962-75: 32.
221 According to the ŚGS IV 8,16, the class should end with the formula: "We have finished, sir!" (*viratāḥ sma bho3ḥ*) being recited by the students, the teacher responding with the words: *virsṛṣṭaṃ; virāmas tāvad*: "Dismissed! A rest, for the time being!" ŚGS IV 8,17 (*virsṛṣṭaṃ; virāmas tāvad iti' eke*).
222 Although, as will be shown below, a replacement — usually an advanced student — can also accompany the pupils in this exercise.

within the *guṇḍikā* session is to let the pupil recite as much as he can by memory and, once he makes a mistake, or is unsure of the next sentence, the teacher asks the next student to continue from where the previous one faltered. The second student then recites until he makes a mistake, and then gives his turn to the next student, and so on. The students signal a completed round of the *pañcāśat* with one clap for one repetition and two claps for two repetitions. The whole process also happens without much verbal intervention from the teacher (except for when mistakes are made). Other than the actual recitation of the *mantra*s, the class remains silent.

In subsequent *guṇḍikā* sessions, whole verses or several *pāda*s are taken together and without the aid of the printed text. The teacher starts by reciting the first sentence, with this modelling also the speed of the recitation, and this is then repeated by the students at the same pace. The teacher deliberately accelerates the tempo of the recitation to get the focus away from the printed text. The faster the recitation speed, the more difficult it becomes to read the whole words and sentences. The text becomes only a sort of *aide-mémoire* or map, which helps the student to roughly locate the passage in turn, which he has started to memorize. In fact, after a few of the *guṇḍikā* sessions, the student is not allowed to use the book and has to recite from memory. If a student makes a mistake while reciting, the teacher will emphasize the correction at a lower speed and by clearly articulating the correct pronunciation and intonation.

The revision session (*guṇḍikā*) sometimes precedes the *vedādhyāya* in the same study session, although they are generally separate sessions. For the revision classes, the *guru* does not always have to be present. The role can be filled by an advanced student who already knows the portion if the teacher cannot attend the class for some reason. For the *vedādhyāya* class, the *guru*'s presence is indispensable.

For the passage being studied, the *guṇḍikā* session is introduced to the students only once they have finished the *santhā* sessions for the same passage. But it also happens that, while in the mornings new material is being introduced, the afternoon sessions are used for the revision classes, so that, while the new material is being introduced, the older lessons are being revised on the same day.

The following is an example of a description of a *guṇḍikā* session, as observed in the Śrī Kṛṣṇayajurveda Pāṭhaśāla of Satara. At 8.30 a.m., the students are ready for their first class, after washing their hands and feet, and brushing their teeth. They gather in the courtyard on a colourful blanket with their *āsana*s, wooden bookstands, and books to begin their class. Three students have taken their places and set up the texts to recite in front of them. The three missing students are late for class. When they arrive, the *guru* has not yet arrived. After 15 minutes, the teacher comes by and the students become quiet. He tells them that this morning he has to go to Sajjengar for some business, and that one of the advanced students will be the guide for the revision session of the morning. An advanced student is called in by the *guru* and sits down with the students while the *guru* leaves for his business. Without much exchanging of words, the students swiftly start the class. The senior student takes the book of one of the students and familiarizes himself with the section they are

learning. He starts by reciting directly the first verse (without "*hariḥ oṁ*" or any other opening formula) while the rest of the students immediately join in. All together, they recite the first *mantra* of the third chapter of the Taittirīyāraṇyaka. After this, they start the *guṇḍikā* exercise. This is a circular repetition of a chapter or section in which each student repeats one or several textual units (*pāda*), 'chaining' or 'waving' the *mantra*. The last word of the *pāda* is then repeated by the next student, who starts with the next *pāda*. This continues until the whole chapter has been recited at least once, although two and sometimes three repetions are common in one session. In this case, the students only recite one round and move to the next chapter. The senior student corrects them in the exact same way the *guru* would do it by saying the word in an emphatic tone, with the right way of recitation or by queing the student with the first two or three words if the student has failed to remember. If the student is unable to remember the correct sequence or has a sudden "blank" and cannot continue the sentence or section, then the *guru* (or, in this case, the senior student) signals with his finger the next student who is supposed to pick up where the previous student stopped. There are no interruptions in the recitation, except when mistakes are made. However, even when this is the case, there are no explanations of any kind.

If a student needs to stand up to go to the bathroom or to get a drink, he does this with consent of the *guru*. The student does not speak while the recitation is going on, but signals his desire to go to the bathroom, sometimes by using the pan-Indian signal of raising the pinky finger. If there is a verbal intervention on the part of the student or the teacher (for example, if his mobile phone rings), the recitation simply continues. In some occasions, I observed teachers taking phone calls or receiving visitors in another room, and while speaking with the other person, he would simultaneously correct his students when mistakes occurred in the recitation. The teacher would be listening to both the conversation and the recitation of his students.

The class closes with the repetition of the last verse of the chapter, followed by a quick "*oṁ*". The senior student stands up and leaves the courtyard. The rest of the students also stand up quickly and disperse. Usually, students offer their respect to their instructors by bowing to their feet, but this time there is no prostration, as the senior student has not yet gained that level of respect.

At times, one or more students may have some problems with the memorization or correct pronunciation of the passage. Usually, this happens when a student does not learn as diligently as the others during his personal study time (*svādhyāya*), or when he is distracted for some reason. Also, some students naturally learn faster than others.

3.7.3.1 Grouping of Words

To aid the memorization, there are several mnemotechnic devices that help the reciter to retain and access the text at will. Each *śākhā* has its own tradition of such devices. Generally speaking, the inner logic and the mnemonic devices of each

Vedic branch can be divided into: metrical devices (i.e. the verse structure and its melodies or intonation), bodily gestures (*mudrā*s), counting techniques, numbered lists (for example, the indexes called *anukramaṇī*s), visualizations,[223] and the above description of chunking the verses into digestible units that can be more easily memorized. Then there are, of course, the famous permutation devices called *vikṛti*s.

In the Kṛṣṇayajurveda, the following mnemotechnic device is used: a break, ideally every 50 *pada*s (words), called a *pañcāśat*[224] is introduced, in which there is a pause in recitation, similar to the pause at the end of a sentence. At the end of the section concerned, the phrases at the breaks are repeated, and the phrase at the final break is then followed by the number of words that exist till the end of the section. Finally, at the end of a *kāṇḍa*, the first words of each *anuvāka* are repeated, as an aid to memorize the sequence of *anuvāka*s. The break, being independent of the length of the verses or phrases, does not always coincide with the start of a verse or sentence. To illustrate this, let us consider the following example: the 5th *praśna* of the 4th *kāṇḍa* of Taittirīyasaṃhitā, more commonly known as Śatarudrīya, which consists of 11 *anuvāka*s.[225]

In the first *anuvāka*, the first break for the purpose of memorization after approximately 50 words is:

yāmiṣuṁ giriśaṁtạ hasté / bibhạrṣyastáve |

The "/" indicates the break where the student will pause to breathe in the recitation. This is only for study purposes, as, in the normal *saṃhitā* recitation, there would be no pause, and we would have:

yāmiṣuṁ giriśaṁtạ hastẹ bibhạrṣyastáve |

The next breaks are at *"ye cẹmāṁ rụdrā ạbhitó dịkśu / śṛitāḥ sáhasrạśo'vaiṣāṃ…"*, then *"hastạ iṣávạḥ / parā tā bhágavo vapa", and "ụbhābhyắm/ụta tẹ namó…"*. At the end of the 1st *anuvāka*, the student will repeat all the break points, reciting: *"hasté dịkśiṣávạ ụbhābhyắm dvāvi(guṁ)'śatiśca"*, thus summarizing all the word groups. *"dvāvi(guṁ)'śatiśca"*, or *"dvāviṁśat ca"*, refers to the 21 words remaining from the last break to the end of the *anuvāka*. Note how, even in this final phrase, the rules of

223 Patton's (2004) observations on the visualization techniques at the Śrī Yogīrāj Veda Vijñān Āśram, in her book *Bringing the Gods to Mind: Mantra and ritual in early Indian sacrifice*, seem to be a rather unique trait of Nānājī Kāḷe's school and when I was there in 2009 and 2011 these techniques were not, or only minimally, employed during class.

224 It is not always the case that this break happens every 50 words; it can be anywhere between 40 to 60. These breaks have been marked traditionally, and none of the *vaidika*s were able to give me the explanation for the irregularity in the counts.

225 Starting with "*om namáste rudra mạnyavá ụtotạ iṣávẹ namáḥ…*"

saṃdhī and *svara* according to the Taittirīya style apply. At the end of the 11th *anuvāka*, which is the end of the 5th *praśna*, the first two words of each *anuvāka* are repeated following the same procedure, helping the student to memorize the sequence.

This system enables the reciter to build word-clusters in his mind that he can then string together. This helps to identify the different text sections, and serves as a sort of index within which the reciter can quickly find the text portion he needs.

Another mnemotechnic device is the use of *mantrapratīka*, where certain *mantra*s that have already appeared earlier in the *saṃhitā* are not recited again in full. Instead, only the first few words are uttered to "remind" the student of the whole verse or elided section. For example, there is the *mahāśāntimantra* at the start of the *pravargya brāhmaṇa* section (5th *praśna*), which is the final *anuvāka* of the *pravargya mantra*s. These *mantra*s form the 4th *praśna* of the Taittirīyāraṇyaka, which the student will already have learned by the time he learns this portion. The *mantra*s begin with *"śaṁ no vātāḥ pavatāṁ..."*. While reciting during his studies, the student will simply recite *"śannas tanno mā hāsīt"*. Here, the word *"śannas"* = *"śaṁ naḥ"*, refers to the first two words of the *anuvāka,* and *"mā hāsīt"* to the last two words of the *anuvāka*. All the intervening words (about eight minutes of recitation) of this portion are understood to "have been recited."

These devices help the student memorizing new portions by their remembering these 'shortcuts' that have occurred before. This is quite similar to the methodology also employed by Pāṇini, who uses short formulas to imply rules or groups of grammatical units with certain characteristics.[226]

3.7.3.2 Pattern Recognition

A student learning the Veda can identify certain patterns that help him memorize the text. Some *mantra*s appear to be deliberately composed in a way that helps with memorization. For example, the Bhṛguvallī in the Taittirīyaopaniṣad has similar phrases and structures, which repeat themselves and make memorizing these *mantra*s relatively easy. The patterns in the accentuation and metre are additional elements that aid memorization.[227]

Sometimes, the text has *mantra*s which contain numbers, like in the section known as the Camakam of Śatarudrīya mentioned above. Students may thus memorize the sequence of numbers as an aid to memorization. While reciting portions with numbers or, when a section of text needs to be repeated a number of times, the reciter usually counts with the help of his fingers. Using a complex system in which each

226 For example, the first *sūtra* of the Aṣṭādhyāyī "*vṛddhir ādaiC*" denotes, by the term "*aiC*", a group of phonemes {*ā, ai, au*}. Here, the capital "*C*" denotes a special meta-linguistic symbol. These symbols are called *it* or *anubandha*s in Pāṇinian grammar.

227 For more on the repetitions in the Veda, see, e.g.: Bloomfield 1916 and Gonda 1959.

finger is divided into 3 sections (the phalanges), while using the thumb as a pointer, each phalanx[228] can be counted to give a total of 12 counts on one hand. Furthermore, by using the other hand to mark five multiples of 12, one can extend the count up to 60.

Even if this is a great aid to memory, students still need to remember the right intonation (*svara*s) of the *mantra*s, which is as important, if not more so, as the words themselves. Although students report that learning the accents is difficult, once they have become accustomed to it, the structure given through intonation helps the memorization of a certain passage. Therefore, the prose sections and those parts of the Veda, which are recited in monotone (*ekaśruti*), have in general no easy structure, and learning them requires extra effort on the part of the student.

3.7.4 Self-study (*Svādhyāya* and *Brahmayajña*)

It is the soft recitation of the Veda that he should tirelessly perform every day at the proper time—
for this is his highest Law, they say; others are called secondary Laws.
–Mānavadharmaśāstra IV.147

In addition to the formal instruction of the Veda, as described above, the student will recite by himself each portion learned in class over and over again[229] as part of his self-study. The self-study (*svādhyāya*) is one of the most important parts of the day of a *brāhmaṇa* student. At least a couple of hours of the day are spent in reciting for himself the portions to be memorized. The practice of *brahmayajña*,[230] or *svādhyāya*, allows the student to revise sections he has learned over a period of days. This is sometimes done in pairs or in small groups where the participants need to revise the same portion or have the same difficulties with the text. Some students pair with their best friends to revise the lesson or portions of text they need to revise. Sometimes, however, after evaluating the performance of his students, the *guru* can order weaker students to study together during the regular free time until they have mastered the given portion, this while the students who have successfully memorized the portion

228 The distal phalanx, middle phalanx, and proximal phalanx of each finger.

229 According to the students and teachers who were asked in different schools, usually a student repeats between 5 and 10 times the lesson previously studied in class.

230 The term *brahmayajña* can either refer to the daily recitation of the Veda in general or it can refer to the later ritualized and condensed recitation in which only a few verses of the Vedas are recited, and which usually follow right after the *saṃdhyāvandana* ritual. If not noticed otherwise, I have opted for the term *svādhyāya* to refer to the daily recitation of the Veda and as a technical term for the individual recitation for study purposes, and *brahmayajña* for the ritual of the same name.

are able to go and play, or take care of other tasks in the school, such as watching after the cows or cleaning the stable (*gośāla*).

In some schools, *svādhyāya* is mostly encouraged when the *guru* is absent from the school, or is in the school but taking care of other business besides teaching his students. Sometimes, if the *guru* is absent for longer periods throughout the day, the students are asked to memorize the lessons learned so far with him through self-study. When the *guru* comes back, he may often evaluate the students one by one to see if they have properly memorized the text. Students who have not properly memorized the text are usually punished by their being depriving of their free time, and asked to double their self-study efforts. This internal evaluation process as well as the formal, institutionalized examination procedure will be described in the following section.

The students generally sit either alone or in duos in order to revise the lessons in which they are still weak. They sit with their books and choose a quiet corner of the school. Some of the children have a favorite corner of their own. When they recite alone, they do so by generally muttering with less amplitude, although some of them prefer to recite in a louder voice when they are not being watched or heard by anyone.

There is no single technique to memorizing these lessons. Some students read the sentence one time, and repeat it without looking at the text a second time before moving to the next sentence. Others do several recitations of the same portion over and over again until they feel comfortable with it. In order to catch up with the rest of the group, the slower students will have to study during their free time, or they are are occasionally exempted from certain household chores so that they may devote themselves fully to the memorization of a text.

3.7.5 The Written Text as a Mnemotic Map

Most schools use Indian printed editions or private manuscripts of the text used in class. Photocopies of either the manuscript or the printed edition are also not uncommon. They are often wrapped in a colourful silk cloth, particularly if they are hand-written manuscripts, although these are usually reserved for the teachers or kept in the school's libraries, or even in teacher's homes, as items of religious value worthy of being treasured. The printed books are usually covered in the way modern schoolbooks are protected: enveloped with plastic, paper, or both (the use of newspaper is not uncommon). Sometimes students decorate their printed books with stickers of all kinds, and particularly of Hindu gods, but also of other motifs like cartoons, as found in regular schools across India.

The book is quite often placed on a wooden stall in front of the student. In the case of a manuscript or photocopies of the text, the stall is rather inconvenient, and the text is then placed on the silk napkin or on the wooden cover that protects the manuscript. Sometimes, a heavy object is also placed on the page in case the

classroom or the teaching enclosure is windy. In several cases, I observed the use of a piece of glass to allow better visibility of the text.

In the Hindu traditions, sacred scriptures and books in general are considered to be holy objects in which the goddess of language, arts, and learning — Sarasvatī — abides, and thus in most *vedapāṭhaśālā*s, the books are handled with great care and respect; in particular, this applies to manuscripts. However, in some of the schools, the pupils seem to be more careless while handling them. In these places, books are often damaged and teachers do not seem to encourage the proper care of them or punish the students when books are mishandled. Some *vedapāṭhaśālā*s have private libraries in which Vedic books and manuscripts are kept. These are, nonetheless, rarely used for pedagogical purposes during the formal classes. They are there for private consultation of both students and teachers, and are usually well-kept.

The use of the printed texts is not even remotely close to that of the role textbooks have in regular secular schools. Writing, as has been noted by many scholars previously, is only able to reproduce the multifaceted Vedic sound in a very limited way. As the great variety of Vedic manuscripts show, the notation systems developed to indicate elements of Vedic recitation, such as iterations and loops, mean that the manuscripts themselves can not reproduce sound. The particular pronunciation of words, and the pitch variations as well as hand-movements (*mudrā*s), accompanying the recitation are missing in these notations. Therefore, human intervention is required which results in the the personal interpretation and style of the *vaidika*s in different regions.

Anyone who attempts to reproduce the sound directly from the manuscripts, without the aid of a master expert in the sound, will never to do so correctly in the eyes of the tradition. There are too many vital elements intrinsic to the recitation of the Veda that are missing from the manuscripts, and which can only obtained from direct instruction from the *guru*. Therefore, printed texts can be considered as a type of linguistic 'map' which is occasionally referred to when one is lost. But the reciter does not look at the map constantly, or else they may overlook the landscape. Another comparison that can be useful here is of the notations used in music. The notation serves the music student in learning the piece, but the goal is to internalize the musical piece by heart so that he can produce a unique interpretation. The notations then serve the musician to guide his execution of the piece, but this interpretation cannot be learned by learning to read the notes on the paper alone; a music teacher is needed to learn how to play the piece and infuse it with feeling.

3.7.6 Examinations

In the *gurukula* system, the evaluation process happens mainly internally, and as part of the teaching process. As shown above in the description of the methodology used in the schools to master the recitation of the Veda, the *guru* is making sure at each

repetition that the student performs properly and so reproduces the text. Therefore, a formal examination system is indispensable. Moreover, the ritual application of certain parts of the text and the ritualized group recitations[231] are further ways in which the proper recitation and application of *mantra*s can be put to the test. Nonetheless, as will be shown below, formal examinations have increasingly become a crucial element in the education of the *vaidika*s of Maharashtra in recent years.

The inherent and continuous evaluation, which happens in the schools themselves or within the *brāhmaṇa* community in a rather informal way, is what I call *internal* evaluation. In contrast, the *external* evaluation is presumably a relatively new mode of testing the recitation ability and memory of a student.[232] The external type of examination happens usually once a year, and it takes place outside the school, as organized by different independent organizations. For the past 150 years, in Maharashtra, it is mainly the Vedaśāstrottejak Sabhā located in Pune which has been gathering Vedic experts from all over the country to conduct the yearly examinations.[233] Through the influence of Western education and the emergence of a new Sanskrit scholarship during the nineteenth century, traditional *brāhmaṇa*s feared their education might not survive unless some special efforts were made. Therefore, in 1875, an ideologically heterogeneous group of *brāhmaṇa* enthusiasts founded the VŚS to protect against the extinction of the traditional Sanskrit education. The group had famous personalities from both sides: the reformists M. G. Ranade and M. M. Kunte on one hand, and the orthodox *brāhmaṇa*s, such as Ram Dikshit Apte, Narayan Shastri Godbole, and Janardan Bhataji Abhyankar on the other (Desphande 2001: 141).

231 *Sammelanas* and other ritual gatherings in which the whole Veda of one *śākhā* was recited are such an example. Galewicz (2005) has studied the ritualized recitation called *anyōnyam* (Mal.) among Nambudiri *brāhmaṇa*s, which is an example of this.

232 It is difficult to determine how old the formal examinations and their methods are, but formal examination requires a certain institutionalization level, which was only possible in larger centres of learning, so that it is plausible that these kinds of methods appeared with larger institutions, such as the University of Taxila. Scharfe mentions a *śalākā-parīkṣā* common in Mithila and Navadvipa, in which "the examiners took a manuscript that was part of the syllabus, pierced it with a needle, and the student had to explain the last page run through by the needle." (Scharfe 2002: 190). The question remains whether this method was used to examine Vedic recitation or for other subjects taught there. A similar practice, also well known in Maharashtra, but also difficult to assess historically, consists of the examiner taking a blade of grass and inserting it randomly into the Vedic manuscript or book. The student has then to recite the verses from that page onwards, as cued by the examiner giving the student the first two words.

233 Scholars such as Tucker (1976), Deshpande (2001, 2009, and 2010), and Rao (2010) have discussed other educational institutions and personalities in Pune during the educational reform of the nineteenth century. Additionally, the role of the Vaidika Saṃśodhana Maṇḍala in the preservation of the oral tradition of the Vedas should also be studied in the future.

Among the most important activities of the Sabhā continue to be the annual examinations conducted for the Vedic schools of the state, and even beyond. Every year, hundreds of students from the Vedic schools in Maharashtra go through examinations in Veda recitation of the *śākhā* they have studied in one of the examination centers established by the VŚS.[234] These exams have become quite popular in Maharashtra, and most of the Vedic schools send their students to these exams at some point during their studies. In these examinations, the students are tested by experts brought from all over India, as based on their abilities to properly recite a particular portion of the Veda from memory and without the aid of a printed text. Upon successful demonstration of his recitation skills, in a ceremony organized at the end of the examinations, the student is awarded a diploma that corresponds to the amount of text and style recited. The Vedaśāstrottejak Sabhā sees itself as an organization which promotes and certifies different experts in a wide spectrum of topics related to Vedic education. Officially, the examination cover the following sections: Veda; Auxiliary Sciences (*vedāṅga*); Veda Interpretation (*vedārtha*); Solemn Rituals (*śrauta*); Domestic Rituals (*smārta*); Sanskrit Grammar (*vyākaraṇa*); Logic (*nyāyaśāstra*); Philosophy in the following topics — *pūrva-mīmāṃsā*, *advaita-vedānta*, *viśiṣṭādvaita-vedānta*, *śuddhādvaita-vedānta*, *dvaita-vedānta*, *sāṃkhya-yoga*, *dharmaśāstra*; Astrology (*grahajyotiṣa*); *purāṇa*; Rhetorics (*sahityaśāstra*); Poetry (*kāvya*); and a combined examination (*saṃkīrṇa*). In practice, nonetheless, it is the Veda section which has the highest amount of students. The examinations in topics such as astrology or Hindu law are almost non-existent, and in the last couple of years, only a handfull of students have been granted a diploma in these subjects. It must also be noted that these additional subjects are, for the most part, not taught by the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s as part of their curriculum. Other institutions and independent *paṇḍita*s train students in the exegetical disciplines. State-recognized universities and numerous other organizations, such as the Maharashtra Jyotiṣ Maṇḍaḷ in Pune, also examine students in these subjects. Moreover, the examinations, which do not concern the Vedic recitation and the Vedic ritual directly, are attended not only by *brāhmaṇa* students of the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s, but also by students of other schools and people with various backgrounds, including women.

Besides the Vedaśāstrottejak Sabhā, there are also similar yearly examinations organized by trusts that sponsor their own schools. The two institutions known to me are the Maharṣi Veda Vyās Pratiṣṭhān and the Sahasrabuddhe Maṭh, both based in Pune, although the examinations of the former can be conducted elsewhere. In 2009, I had the opportunity to attend the examinations organized by the Maharṣi Veda Vyās Pratiṣṭhān (MVVP) in Dhalegaon on the premises of the largest school of the institution. The examinations lasted three days, in which the recitation of the

234 In 2011, 460 students were examined in the examination centres organized by the Vedaśāstrottejak Sabhā in Nashik, Sawantawadi, Satara, Beed, and Pune.

four Vedas, as well as other subjects taught in the schools of the Pratiṣṭhān, were tested. Students from the Maharashtrian schools belonging to this organization were examined by experts brought in from as far as Puri, Orissa for the occasion. According to the organizers, they also admit students from other schools or individuals who wish to take the examination organized by them, although the great majority of students come from schools under the same institutional umbrella. In fact, during the examinations organized in 2009, I saw only one external student who took the examination. The MVVP has examination centers in different parts of the country where many other pupils took the examinations in Vedic recitation in the same period of time. The external student came from a Vedic school in Tamil Nadu, who at the time had a 10-day vacation, which he spent with his family in Mumbai. It was his father who came to know about the exam and decided to enrol his 13-year-old son in the examination for the first four *kāṇḍa*s (chapters) of the Taittirīyasaṃhitā. It was the proximity from Mumbai and the diploma that his son was to receive which motivated him to bring him to Dhalegaon.

Some schools also send their students to be examined outside of Maharashtra. The official body of the government established in Ujjain, the Maharṣi Sāṃdīpani Rāṣṭrīya Veda Vidyā Pratiṣṭhān (MSRVVP) among others, conducts examinations for schools across India. Nonetheless, only three of the schools I visited said they sent their students to the exams organized by the government through the *pratiṣṭhān*.[235] Other important centers where the exams are being conducted on a yearly basis are the Sringeri and Kanchipuram *maṭha*s in South India.[236] In fact, both heads of these *maṭha*s have made it a tradition to celebrate their respective birthdays by holding examinations for *brāhmaṇa*s of all of India and awarding the most outstanding *vaidika*s with diplomas and prizes, not only in cash, but also in gold rings, shawls, garlands, or other tokens for keeping the oral tradition of Vedic recitation alive.[237]

As discussed above, in the section regarding the curriculum, the segmentation into yearly units is mainly marked by the examinations given at the different organizations. The external evaluation system through these yearly mass examinations has become

235 While the MSRVVP was founded by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Education, of the Government of India, it is an 'autonomous organization'. More information is available in subchapter 3.1.

236 There are other organizations spread across India, but another important organization outside of Maharashtra, which since 1994 has increasingly attracted *vaidika*s from all over India (including Maharashtrians) to their examinations, is the Veda Nidhi Trust which is attached to the Avadhoota Peetham in Mysore, Karnataka and was founded by Śrī Gaṇapati Saccidānanda. The trust also honors reciters from all the Vedic branches, giving them generous monetary awards and stipends. Another important source of support comes from the Sri Venkateswara Veda Parirakshana Trust, established by the famous Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD) in Andhra Pradesh, which not only conducts examinations, but has many schemes providing funding to many *vaidika*s in that region.

237 See subchapter 3.3 for more on the Śaṅkarācāryas of Kanchipuram and Sringeri.

prominent in Maharashtra. Most of the students of the schools I visited attended the exams of the VŚS in Pune, the exams in the Śaṅkarācāryas' *maṭha*s, or the ones organized through MVVP, and, in some cases they attended multiple examinations at different organizations.

Over last century, particularly in Maharashtra, formal examination procedures have become increasingly institutionalized. There were no formal examination procedures in Dharmaśāstric times (or previous to the colonial rule), nor diplomas and degrees.

> There was no final examination. Classes were small, and teacher and student were in daily contact and communication, affording the teacher a good appreciation of his students' progress (or the lack of it). (Scharfe 2002: 291)

There was, presumably in earlier times, much more practical application of the memorized texts in a ritual setting in which the actual knowledge of an individual was in evidence, for there were probably more and larger sacrifices in which the Vedic *mantra*s were used. This is but only a small portion of the corpus for, as we know, the use of Vedic *mantra*s in the ritual constitute just a fraction of the Saṃhitā text, not to mention the other texts, which are not recited during the Vedic ritual, such as the Brāhmaṇas and the Āraṇyakas. Therefore, one has to assume that there were other moments in which the knowledge of the *vaidika*s could have been tested. The *brāhmaṇa* gatherings (*sammelana*s) of today in which the whole Saṃhitā is ritually recited (*pārāyaṇa*) are also examples of this. What is certain is that an overarching standardization of curricula into learning segments of the Vedic corpus was certainly not seen until the appearance of institutions such as the VŚS a couple of centuries ago.

This new type of external examination and institutionalization of Vedic knowledge can be seen as a "mimetic strategy", as Jaffrelot calls it[238] (although, to what extent this is really "strategic" in this case still needs to be examined carefully). I would argue that, in many cases, the 'strategy' is not so much a conscious effort of the *vaidika*s themselves, but rather of their sponsors and the social pressures they are confronted with on a daily basis. Politicians who would like to see the *brāhmaṇa* community go back to an ideal "golden age" in which all scientific development and modern discoveries are all contained in the Vedas, and in Vedic culture, see this as an opportunity to show how "scientific and relevant the Vedic tradition is".

On the other hand, the examinations are events that allow the community of *brāhmaṇa*s to come together and strengthen their relations. A teacher from a school in central Maharashtra told me that one of the reasons why he made the effort to go

238 The term he uses in French is "*mimétisme stratégique*", and was coined in his writings on Hindu Nationalism; see, e.g., Jaffrelot 1994a, 1999.

with his students every year to the examinations was to "maintain good relations with other good Brahmins."[239]

In the schools I visited, *guru*s who often need to be away from the school have more difficulty in ensuring the proper memorization of the text of their students without recurring to more sessions of formal evaluation than *guru*s in schools where the teacher is always present in the school. This is due to the fact that, if the teacher is present, then he is able to better assist the students and correct potential mistakes on time. Wrongly learned material without assistance leads to more effort and time from the part of both, students and teachers.

3.7.6.1 The Veda Examinations in the VŚS

There are two modalities in which the exams can be given at the VŚS: partial and complete. The partial exams (*bhāgaśaḥ-parīkṣā*) are meant to segment the curriculum into a yearly syllabus for which students get a certification for their 'partial' qualifications; and the complete exams (*sampūrṇa-parīkṣā*), on the other hand, are a sort of final examination in which all the material of all the *bhāgaśaḥ* exams for a given *śākhā* is covered in a single session.[240] For the third-standard examinations (advanced exams), there are no partial exams and the student has to be able to recite the whole material given in that standard, whether it is advanced recitation of permutations (*vikṛti*s) or additional texts of that Vedic branch. A student who has completed the first standard (*iyattā*) obtains the honorary title of *abhijña* (lit. 'one who understands or is acquainted with'), a student having completed the second standard that of *kovida* (lit. 'experienced, learned, skilled, proficient'), and someone who has finished all three standards receives the title of *cūḍāmaṇi* (lit. 'crest-jewel').[241]

The examinations at the VŚS are scheduled once per year and last for approximately ten days, prior to the *dīpāvali* celebration around October. The exact dates are announced a few months before, and the schedule for each subject is distributed in advance to the participating schools. The VŚS hires the best expert *vaidika*s available in the region or from other parts of India for all of the subjects to be examined.[242] Some of these experts might be very young, although most of the *guru*s have ample experience in their area of expertise and often have impressive

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239 Interview, A. Jośī 16.04.2009, Beed.

240 For details on the curricular segmentation of the exams, please refer to the subchapter on the curricula of the Vedic schools: 3.2.

241 Taken from the pamphlet for the exams of 2009 of the VŚS. As mentioned previously and noted by Michaels (2001: 3-17), these titles and degrees are not necessarily pan-Indian, even if efforts of standardization are being made. See subchapter 3.8.

242 Usually, the VŚS pays for the examiners' transportation and other travel expenses. A symbolic renumeration is also offered to the experts who are generally honored with traditional tokens of respect at the closing ceremony.

curricula. While the majority of both experts and students comes from the State of Maharashtra, others come from remote places and even from other states such as Karnataka, Orissa, or Tamil Nadu for the examinations. In recent years, the VŚS has opened smaller examination centers in other parts of Maharashtra in order to facilitate the certification of students. In this way, a greater number of students can be examined without their having to travel such long distances. Nonetheless, the main examination center remains at the headquarters of the VŚS in Pune, where about 400 students took the examinations in 2009, and 460 in 2011.[243]

A nominal fee of 25 Rs per student is charged for the examination, which also includes a meal on the day of the examination and a diploma in the case of success. The exams run for several days, although only one day is needed for each examination. The exam sessions happen on the premises of the Sābhā. This includes several rooms, some of which are reserved for very simple accommodation, in which the examiners who come from afar can stay overnight or rest during the breaks. According to some of the directors of this organization, "due to lack of funds and manpower", the premises are quite neglected, but this does not hinder the Sābhā from continuing to be the most prestigious examination center of Maharashtra.

Many of the exams take place simultaneously in the different rooms of the building, including the library, the grand hall, and administrative offices. The examinations usually are done in groups, but sometimes, if there is only one student, the examination can also happen individually. This is particularly so for the advanced examinations such as *krama-* or *ghanapāṭha*. Usually, the students are not examined by their own teacher. That is, if the teacher of a student's school is the examiner, he will be sent to another examiner in order to avoid bias. Two experts in the same session often conduct the test.

In some cases, the examiners and the students know each other well from other occasions during which they have had the opportunity to interact. If the relations are on good terms, this may increase the confidence of the students, who can feel more at ease in a familiar context. For example, during the examinations of the VŚS in 2009, students from the Śrī Kṛṣṇayajurveda Pāṭhaśālā were examined by Vedamūrti A. Abhyankar, whom they knew quite well. They had spent time together on several occasions in the past. Some of the advanced students had spent some time with him in his school in a village in Karnataka, studying with him, while the younger students knew Vedamūrti A. Abhyankar from his regular visits to their home-school in Satara. Vedamūrti A. Abhyankar is a close friend of the main teacher and director of their school Vedamūrti Vivekśāstrī Goḍboḷe. This circumstance played to the advantage of

243 According to the numbers published in the annual reports of the VŚS, student numbers at the annual examinations are, overall, on the rise, thus suggesting that more *brāhmaṇa*s are opting for Vedic education. However, this contrasts with the statements of most of the *brāhmaṇa*s I talked to in the schools, who have an overall more pessimistic view on the state of the Vedic tradition.

the students, for it made the examination less stressful for them, as they were already quite nervous. On that occasion, Vedamūrti S. Bhatt, who served as a supervisor, accompanied Vedamūrti A. Abhyankar.

The general procedure for the examination is as follows: The exam starts by briefly invoking Gaṇeśa[244] or by reciting "*hari oṁ*". Then the examiner gives a word or a small sentence from a random portion of the section to be examined. He does this either by simply recalling a portion from memory and cuing the student with the first two words, or by opening a page of the printed edition randomly and selecting the portion the student has to recite. After this signal, he chooses one of the students by pointing with hand movements to continue the phrase until completing the *mantra* or the unit of that section. Then he chooses randomly from another section of the text and indicates to the next student to start reciting that *mantra*. The procedure continues like this until all of the students have recited a *mantra*, and then the cycle starts again with a new portion. Sometimes, he chooses two students to recite the same portion together, alternating the pairs.

The examiner evaluates the students by deducting five points when a given student makes a mistake in pronunciation or intonation. Memory failures are also penalized by deducting five points per memory blank. The total marks are 100 for the partial exam and 200 for the complete exam. When a student makes a small mistake, the examiner signals it with his hand or by shaking his head. The student then tries to recite the portion correctly and, if he manages to do so, he continues; otherwise, the examiner corrects him by reciting the word correctly. Usually, average students can easily identify the given portion and can immediately start the recitation. The challenge is to continue without making mistakes or forgetting large portions. When memory fails, a student quickly starts to mumble the text to himself from the last portion until he remembers or reaches the last sentence where he stopped, and then he makes a second attempt to continue the portion. If the student has been successful, then he carries on until he finishes the portion, or if he cannot remember, either the examiner gives him a second chance by reciting the next few words for him, or simply asks the next student in the semi-circle to continue where the last student left off; or he might also ask the next student to repeat the portion anew. Depending on the capacity of the students, the *guru* may ask for a different random portion of the text. Sometimes, you can see the eagerness of other students in an exam to recite the portion that one of their fellow students has forgotten. They will sit mumbling inaudibly and moving their hands or head as if wanting to hint at the correct lines. Sometimes, when the examiner sees this, he asks the mumbling student to continue the portion aloud.

244 Among the *kṛṣṇayajurvedin*s, some verses (or the whole) of the Atharvaśīrṣa (also known as Gaṇapatyatharvaśīrṣopaniṣad) is recited to open the examination.

The examiners, as in a regular Veda class, do not speak much during the examination and also do not give instructions — on the procedure or otherwise. Students are usually nervous and quiet during the exams — for their reputation, as well as that of their school, is at stake. Teachers, particularly those from smaller schools who consider their pupils not yet ready for the examination, do not send them until they have mastered the portion to be examined. This is one of the reasons why the ideal yearly curriculum as set by the VŚS does not always fit a school's calendar. Certain schools with institutional freedom or with a different yearly calendar may accept new students in the middle of the year, though they first need to catch up and adapt to the school's routine. While it is not unusual in the examinations to see students perform poorly, one rarely sees them fail completely. In 2009, an examiner passed some of the students whose performance was rather poor, but not before giving them a good scolding and telling their teacher that they needed to practice more for the next year.

Most examiners do not prepare for the examinations, and while some of them bring printed copies of the text along, they usually do not use it, except for in randomly picking the portions for the exam. The examiners get a 'marks-sheet' provided by the VŚS with the list of the students taking the examination, in order to grade them accordingly. During the exams, I observed that these sheets were seldom used, except perhaps at the beginning of the exam in order to identify the students present. At the completion of an exam, the grading occurs behind closed doors. Officially, the examiners are not allowed to reveal the results to the students until the closing ceremony; however, in reality, they are quite often informed after the deliberation. This is particularly the case if the student and examiner already know each other.

Each exam lasts about one or two hours, depending upon the amount of students taking an exam and the portion to be examined. The exams that cover the entire *śākhā* (*sampūrṇa*) last for at least three or four hours. There are no pauses, except during the longer *sampūrṇa* examinations, where after the *saṃhitā* portion, students and teachers take a brief bathroom pause and sometimes drink *chai*. The *chai* is brought by one of the employees or volunteers of the VŚS. After only a few minutes, they continue with the Brāhmaṇa and Āraṇyaka parts until they finish the examination. Evidently, not all the material is covered (this would take days), only a few randomly selected portions of the texts being examined.

3.8 Trends of Standardization and Institutionalization

There are several organizations attached to various charismatic leaders and other important organizations in Maharashtra that have been vital for the support of the oral traditions of the Veda in this region.

These exams have inspired other organizations, such as the Maharṣi Veda Vyās Pratiṣṭhān, to come up with their own evaluative system by organizing their own

examinations that also follow a similar curriculum. There are several examination sessions offered by different institutions across the country,[245] and students may take more than one exam for the same section of the Veda.[246]

These formal examination procedures, and their awards and diplomas (see plate 4), have become increasingly institutionalized in Maharashtra over the last century or so. One must also remember that the demand of the general public for a "better education" of priests has also encouraged the production of more credentials and validations, such as the ones distributed by the VŚS. An example of this is seen in how, increasingly, teachers and organizations encourage their students to obtain more diplomas in their field of expertise, and also in how "refresher-courses" for priests (and similar workshops that are specifically tailored to meet the ritual demands of the clientele) are in vogue across India. Interestingly enough, these demands hardly include the skill to recite complex patterns or the memorization of larger portions of text, but rather focus on the ability to explain the meaning of the *mantra*s and the ritual actions. The studies of Fuller (2003) and of Hüsken (2010) illustrate the effects of the pressure from the clientele as well as from the government.

As we know from Scharfe's study, there were no formal examination procedures in Dharmaśāstric times (or previous to the colonial rule), nor diplomas and degrees. "There was no final examination. Classes were small, and teacher and student were in daily contact and communication, affording the teacher a good appreciation of his students' progress (or the lack of it)." (Scharfe 2002: 291)

This new standardization is not without consequence for the tradition. These exams slowly managed to segment Vedic learning into a syllabus that is now generally followed by the schools of Maharashtra in order to accommodate an annual exam system. Teachers have begun to instruct the students specifically in preparation for these exams. This means that it becomes more difficult for them to teach in a different order than the one given by the exam organizers. This also hinders them from being attentive to their students' particular learning capacities and developments. Fixing the curriculum of any *śākhā* to learning the *saṃhitā* portion in a period of six years (as the MSRVVP has done), and giving the impression that higher studies[247] are not essential for a *brāhmaṇa*'s education, reflects not only a lack of knowledge regarding

245 The exams, as part of the birthday celebration of the Śaṅkarācārya of Sringeri mentioned above, are one example of this.

246 The spirit seems to be, the more diplomas and public recognition the better. This seems to be true particularly for advanced students reciting the permutations (*vikṛti*s) of the Vedas, who can sometimes be encountered in exams in Pune (VŚS), Sringeri (Śaṅkarācārya's *maṭha*), and one of the centres of the MSRVVP, for example in Ujjain.

247 Such as the study of the recitation of permutations (*vikṛti*s) or the ten-books (*daśagrāntha*), which are part of the traditional curriculum in certain Vedic branches.

traditional regulations stipulating authentic learning of the Vedic corpus,[248] but it also risks reducing or abrading the Vedic education.

This process, of course, is yet another clear example of a social change that has at least some of its roots in the experience of colonial rule. Tucker explains how:

> [...] new elites were arising to join or supplant the old. Under British rule the orthodox Brāhmaṇs of western Maharashtra faced a steady erosion of their position in society. For the maintenance of orthodoxy at least three groups were significant: teachers (pantojis), temple and household priests (bhats) and the shastris. The modern decline of these professions is still very imperfectly understood, but some indicators of their difficulties are available. Traditional Marathi education began with elementary studies of arithmetic, reading and writing. Several boys studied in the home of a Brāhmaṇ teacher who was in many instances also a household priest; their fees and donations gave him a very modest income. A majority of the students in the region around Poona were Brāhmaṇs, but only a few of these went on to further studies in the Sanskrit classics, the Vedas or the shastras. The indigenous teachers were thus highly vulnerable to competition from English-educated teachers in government or missionary schools from the 1840s onwards. (Tucker 1976: 333)

These trends of standardization through the bureaucratization of traditional education hint to a process of adaptation to global modernization developements that are often conditioned by socio-economic criteria such as the 'productivity' and 'marketability' of traditional knowledge. Now, it could be said that, at least at the level of the family priest, a thorough mantric knowledge is perceived as secondary. Only the actual *mantra*s used in the ritual are considered necessary. With this, the very life-purpose of the traditional *vaidika brāhmaṇa* is indirectly questioned in a ritual economy of replacement. This directly reflects the location of traditional learning and religious practice within a modern context, and what constitutes legitimate claims to an authentic reproduction of this knowledge system. Examples of this tension include half-trained *purohita*s, the recent phenomenon of women priestesses (*strī-purohitā*s), and in rare cases even Dālits who can replace the twice-born *dvija* men by learning the necessary rites without having to study in the traditional education system in order to learn the whole traditional curricula. This ritual market is influenced by the laws of supply and demand, in which the client who sponsors the ritual — knowingly or unknowingly — dictates what is authentic for the tradition and what is not.

In this view, it can be said that the orthodox custodians of the Vedic tradition and their supporters have also found strategies to better "sell" their practices and lifestyles. To put it in a Bourdieuian way, the students and teachers in the Vedic schools described in this work, consciously or unconsciously, adapt to their modern environment. This is obvious through the introduction of English and computing classes, the distribution of diplomas (plate 4), the new framing of the Vedic ritual,

248 The Saṃhitās vary considerably in length, form, and recitation style (accentuation, pitch, hand gestures or the lack of them, etc.), and therefore require different skills and time for mastery.

and their universalistic rhetoric. These are some examples of the construction of a new type of cultural capital that fits the demands of the contemporary market. These adaptations are driven just as much by the students as by their sponsors, who have embodied this discourse that promotes a traditional education which is suited for modern India.

Plate 4: (left) Diploma of the VŚS for the first examination in Vedic recitation (*praveśaparīkṣā*), Pune 2009. (right) Certificate for Sāmaveda recitation of the MVVP from the examinations in Dhalegaon, 2009.

Many of the schools I visited remain generally sceptical and threatened by discourses of "modernity". They consciously try to avoid contact with what is perceived as "modern". Others have expressed the need to join the project of modernity by appropriating values such as "democracy", "gender equality", "human rights", "universalism", and "religious freedom". While there is no clear pattern on which type of school is more conservative than another, I would argue that schools sponsored by larger trusts attached to less orthodox *gurus* tend toward a more liberal and universalistic practice of what they understand as "Vedic". These practices and discourses are garbed in popular Neo-Vedāntic terms, such as *sanātana-dharma*.

The case of the young Dālit woman who successfully learned to recite the Śuklayajurvedasaṁhitā in the *mādhyandina* style under the Guru Gaṅgeśvar Mahārāj Vedapāṭhaśālā in Nashik, in the traditional way mentioned in subchapter 2.2, is a

good example of this point.[249] While all women were categorically rejected by most of the schools I visited, the trust that runs the school and the Ved Mandir takes pride in presenting her as an example of their progressive and modern views on both caste and gender. This stance *vis-à-vis* caste and gender is coherent with the philosophical/religious worldview as exposed by Gaṅgeśvarānand and his followers who, in turn, could be labelled as distinctively Neo-Hindu and strongly aligned with the reform movements of the nineteenth century.

The circulation of cultural elements in dynamic ways has been characteristic of what we have come to call "modern Hinduism". Halbfass pointed to the "self-representation of Hinduism which grew out of its encounter with the West" (Halbfass 1990: 344), and Romila Thapar has called this new adaptation and homogenization of a variety of religions "syndicated Hinduism" (Thapar 2001: 54-81). One can observe how, even in apparently the most orthodox sections of traditional Hinduism, a shift has occurred from a soteriological knowledge anchored in traditional values to a more functional and simplified tradition in 'service of the nation' and the 'modern citizen'. This has contributed to a decline of the more advanced forms of erudition (the *paṇḍita* and the *śrauta* ritualist).

249 The *dharmaśāstra* literature and other classical texts influenced by Brāhmaṇical ideology point to the fact that at least two similar or mutually intelligible languages or variant registers of the same language were to be used: Sanskrit by male *brāhmaṇa*s and Prakrit by *śūdra*s (lower classes) and women. Punishments expressed in the GautDhS 12: 4-6 propose pouring molten tin and lac into the ears of non-twice born (lower class) people who listened intentionally to a Vedic recitation that includes Sanskrit *mantra*s. If he were to recite Vedic texts, his tongue should be cut out, and if he remembered or taught them, his body should be cut into pieces (Olivelle 2000: 147).