Borayin Larios

Embodying the Vedas

Traditional Vedic Schools of Contemporary Maharashtra

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Foreword

When Louis Renou spoke of "the destiny of the Veda" in India, he was referring to the various ways in which the notion of the Veda lived on in particular contexts, in changed forms, and often reinterpreted. The Veda (at least the category— Brāhmaṇical knowledge in the form of Sanskrit *mantra*s, precepts, and exegeses—but not necessarily the original content) would continue to provide a framework for coordinating many forms of religious knowledge that were promulgated in the Subcontinent across three millennia. Renou emphasized the extent to which later Hindu references to "Veda" became no more than "a simple 'tip of the hat' to an idol with which one does not intend to be further encumbered."[1] But one strand of modern Hindu practice seeks to fashion a destiny that is truer to Veda in the strictest sense of the word: the texts of the four Vedic collections of *mantra*s, early exegesis, and canonical rituals. Renou himself had called attention to this aspect of the Vedic heritage. This sort of traditionalist study and ritual practice had long been sustained in small communities of the orthodox *vaidika brāhmaṇa*s, many of them founded centuries ago on lands (*agrahāra*) endowed by kings and other patrons. During the last couple of centuries, however, such communities have contracted, and their role as the repositories of the "original" Veda has increasingly been taken over by revivalists of various sorts. In the nineteenth century, Dayananda Saraswati's Ārya Samāj offered one vision of a way for Hindus to "return" to the Veda, focusing on knowledge of the Vedic texts and practice of at least the domestic rites. In the twentieth century, new sorts of institutions for Vedic education appeared. In the last part of the century, there was also a revival of *śrauta* Vedic ritual practice, especially in the Deccan.

There has been a fair amount of scholarly attention (beginning with Frits Staal) to the contemporary practice of Vedic ritual, including ethnographic studies of *agrahāra vaidika*s in the Godavari delta by David Knipe. But the literature on modern Vedic education is puny by comparison. The present volume fills that gap admirably, giving a comprehensive view of the state of Vedic education, focusing on Maharasthtra, where revivalist efforts have been most vigorous.

Thanks to his training in "ethno-Indology" under Prof. Dr. Axel Michaels in Heidelberg, Borayin Larios combines a solid grounding in the textual sources of the Veda with a nuanced ethnographic account of the context and social dynamics of contemporary Vedic education based on fieldwork. He is thus able to offer a typology of contemporary forms of Vedic training viewed against the backdrop of the institutional patterns of the past, based on textual and historical evidence, but also in light of the environment of competing educational and professional paths open to would-be *vaidika* professionals in India today.

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1 Renou, Louis. 1960. *Le destin du Veda dans l'Inde*. Études Védiques et Pāṇinéennes, 6. Paris: Éditions de Boccard.

Larios's ethnography further calls attention to the ways in which Maharashtrian *bhakti*-oriented Hindus interact with the *vaidika*s in their midst, and how the *vaidika*s in turn consciously work to integrate these disparate religious spheres — something that I have noted in my own work on Maharashtrian Vedic revivalism. For example, in Chapter 2, he gives an account of village farmers approaching a Vedic teacher during the Mahāśivarātri season for guidance on how to "properly perform the rituals." On the face of it, the Śivarātri festival is a post-Vedic development in Hinduism, but the Vedic "*guru-jī*" is happy to bridge the gap: he prescribes the inclusion of the Śatarudriya litany from the Yajurveda, but also has his students lead the chanting of Purāṇic liturgy and hymn-singing in the *kīrtan* mode. As Larios observes, this is one more instance of the "Brāhmaṇization" of devotional Hinduism. Yet the interaction is not wholly one-sided, with the *vaidika brāhmaṇa* endowing folk devotion with the imprimatur of expert sacred authority: the *vaidika* teacher also invites the villagers to sing and dance on the grounds of the Vedic school, implying a certain complementarity between the two types of performance. Reading such an account, one realizes that this situation of "negotiated complementarity" is just the latest version of a synthesizing approach that has been embraced by Veda-trained *brāhmaṇa*s since before the Common Era. The "late Vedic" ritual codes, especially the appendices to them (the *gṛhya-pariśiṣṭa*s), find ways to integrate Vedic *mantra*s (and other ritual elements) into Hindu image worship, and it is clear that works like the Śvetāśvatara-Upaniṣad, the Atharvaśiras, and the Mahānārāyaṇa-Upaniṣad were composed with the aim of assembling canonical Vedic material for the emerging Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava liturgies.

Vedic training as it is prescribed in the ancient rulebooks, represented in literature, and practiced by a dwindling few even today constitutes a textbook example of 'habitus' (in the sociological sense developed by Bourdieu), so it makes good sense that Larios analyses the subject in those terms in Chapter 5. The cultivation of such a 'habitus' likely provided the original basis for *brāhmaṇa* (and, by extension, Ārya) identity, and according to the logic of *pars pro toto* a reduced version of such training (the observance of purity rules, dining ceremonies, and the learning of the Sāvitrī *mantra* as a token of the Veda) could be enough to sustain a notional sense of Vedic piety that in practice was sufficient to validate social status.

Chapter 6 gets directly at the inescapable tension between preserving and reinventing the tradition in modern Vedic educational settings. The teachers and students to whom Larios introduces us seem to be swimming against the stream, adapting Vedic institutions pragmatically in order avoid losing them altogether, and rearticulating their aims in modern terms ('science', 'society', 'nation'). In this regard, the book provides important data for a comparative discussion of modern efforts to reaffirm and revitalize traditional modes of religious practice. Even as such movements are animated by a desire for authenticity, and the possibility of emulating the ancients, their projects cannot avoid being other than they intend. Every reconstruction remains a construction, given the changed circumstances.

Despite the most rigorous adherence to "the old ways," they are refracted by the prism of history. To adapt an adage: *tradizione tradimento*.

Timothy Lubin
Washington and Lee University

Preface

In my early teens, I was sitting in an *āśram* in upstate New York listening to Vedic *mantra*s being recited by a group of *brāhmaṇa*s who had travelled from India to perform several rituals, among them the installation of Hindu deities in the *āśram*'s main temple. I recall listening to the sound of these *mantra*s with great awe and wondering how these priests had learned to recite such long pieces of text by heart, and with such precision and unity. This mesmerizing event triggered a long-lasting fascination in me that led to the work you are about to read. I became interested not only in the Vedic texts but, particularly, in the traditional education of *brāhmaṇa* priests and their lifestyles in the twenty-first century. In 2005, I made it to India for the first time and took the opportunity to visit the Vedic school of Vedamūrti Śrī Vivekśāstrī Goḍboḷe. I was so impressed by the young students' recitation of the Veda and their way of life that I decided to take up the topic for my Master's thesis. After its completion, I had more questions than answers regarding the tradition and the apparent contradictions it seemed to have with the extravagant modernity I encountered in big Indian cities. I felt that the topic had potential for further research. When I came in contact with the work of Prof. Dr. Axel Michaels and the South Asian Institute in Heidelberg, I decided that this was the ideal place for me to continue my investigation into the subject. Luckily, Prof. Michaels was kind enough to accept me as his doctoral student and, after five long years of dedicated work, I managed to produce my doctoral dissertation, which I completed in 2013. This book is the revised version of that dissertation.

The following work deals with the body of texts collectively known as the Vedas, which are considered by many people to be the philosophical cornerstone of the Brahmanical traditions and, thus, of Hinduism at large. But this work more than being an exposition about the Vedas, is a book about those who carry the Vedas *in* them, namely the *brāhmaṇa*s themselves. This volume is unique in that it combines insights from ethnographic and textual analysis to unravel how the recitation of the Vedic texts and the Vedic traditions, as well as the identity of the traditional *brāhmaṇa* in general, are transmitted from one generation to the next in traditional Vedic schools of contemporary India. The questions that guide this work, besides the central issue of the transmission of the Vedic texts, are: (1) How does the distant Vedic past relate to the modern present for these custodians, and (2) How is this relationship framed within contemporary Hinduism?

The book is divided into two main sections: the first (Chapters 1 and 2) deals with the traditional system called *gurukula* and the Vedic tradition in general, and the second (Chapters 3 through 6) deals with the contemporary schools of Maharashtra. Chapter 7, the Conclusion, discusses the question of the Veda in relation to contemporary Hinduism. In the first section of the book, I briefly present the traditional view on studentship (*brahmacarya*) and the centrality of orality, as well as its relation to literacy in instruction of the Veda according to scriptural sources.

I accomplish this by crystallizing two main elements presented by the Dharmaśāstric literature: namely, the "ideal setting" (the *gurukula*) and the "ideal relationship" (the *guruśiṣyasaṃbandha*), in which this transmission of knowledge is supposed to take place. I use these normative (although non-homogenic) discourses, as established in the textual Brāhmaṇical imagination (mainly in "legal" literature), that portray the *raison d'être* and lifestyle of the *brāhmaṇa* to contrast them, in the second section of the book, with what I was able to observe in the contemporary Vedic schools of Maharashtra.

In Chapter 2, I offer a brief history of the Vedic schools in Maharashtra and the transformations of the education system from premodern times to their current state under the policy of the Indian government regarding religious education. Chapter 3 deals with the general characteristics of the schools, the forms of organization and infrastructure, and the sponsoring systems. Additionally, I offer three different models of *vedapāṭhaśālā*s deduced from my observations in Maharashtra to propose a typology of contemporary Vedic schools. This typology serves as an analytical tool to highlight distinct discursive features of the Vedic schools. This chapter also deals with the educational objectives, including curricula, modes of study, and examinations conducted in these schools. In Chapter 4, we learn about daily life in the *vedapāṭhaśālā* and the manner of socialization within the *gurukula*.

In Chapter 5, I analyze the mechanisms and institutions necessary to create the 'habitus' of the Veda reciter and become an "embodiment of the Veda" (*vedamūrti*). Here, the main topics are the central relationship between master and disciple (*guruśiṣyasaṃbandha*), and the transmission of knowledge as a mimetic process.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the preservation (or reinventions) of traditional elements, and the innovations and transformations within the transmission of the Vedas, as well as in the education system in these schools. Here I present a few specific examples drawn from my fieldwork in order to illustrate how changes in the political environment, the economic system, the social stratification, the education system, religious reforms, and changes in gender attitudes have influenced the way the Vedic traditions have reinvented themselves in a globalized world. In order to show how Vedic schools reinterpret the Vedas in contemporary India, I have developed the notion of an "identitarian kaleidoscope." With this concept, I show how a multiplicity of actors is involved in the production of discourses surrounding what it means to be an ideal custodian and embodiment of the Veda (*vedamūrti*). What are the challenges that modernity brings to these schools, and what are the compromises and adaptations they have to undergo in the twenty-first century? Who are the sponsors and how much influence do they have on the Vedic schools? And finally, what is the foreseeable future of Vedic chanting, and what trends can be predicted for the coming generations?

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My fellow colleagues and friends from the South Asia Institute of the University of Heidelberg provided me with a unique interdisciplinary environment that expanded my horizon and set the bar high through their excellent scholarship. In particular, I owe thanks to everyone in our department for their generous support and disposition to help whenever I needed them. I would like to express my appreciation here for Prof. Axel Michaels, who was my *Doktorvater* and whose guidance made this work possible, and also to Prof. Jörg Gengnagel, who kindly agreed to be the second reader of my doctoral dissertation. Pandit P. Aithal was very helpful and patiently enlightened me in many aspects of traditional Sanskritic learning. Another special mention goes to Prof. William Sax and his doctoral students from the Anthropology Department — with whom I spent a good deal of time in their weekly doctoral colloquium — where I found not only amazing academic input, but also wonderful friends who I value beyond academia. Jürgen Schaflechner, Max Kramer, Sarah Ewald, and Swarali Paranjpe deserve a special mention here for their unconditional support in academic and non-academic matters, and for their wonderful friendship.

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My greatest admiration and gratitude goes, however, to all the learned *vedamūrti*s and their students of Maharashtra who allowed me into their lives and taught me about their world. In particular, I thank Śrī Vivekśāstrī Goḍboḷe, his family, and all the students of his school for their hospitality, wisdom, and inner beauty. Nānājī Kāḷe and his learned sons and grandsons in Barshi embodied for me not only Vedic wisdom, but also kindness and magnamity. My *praṇām*s go to all of them.

Many other people who have gone unmentioned have helped me profoundly in preparing this work, and I am deeply indebted to all of them in many ways; however, as the usual academic warning goes: any errors or shortcomings in this work are completely my own.

Finally, I dedicate this work to our son Kabīr, who has already brought so much light into my world.

Note on Sanskrit and Marathi Words

One of the challenges that a reader encounters with a book dealing with a tradition embedded in a highly refined language such as this one — the name of the "Sanskrit" language itself means "refined" — is the large number of technical terms. I strongly believe that a basic understanding of these words is crucial for the reader to understand the tradition. Honouring the centrality that the *brāhmaṇa*s give to sound and proper pronunciation, I have given all Sanskrit terms with diacritics. Since my goal is not to make the reading tedious for those unfamiliar with the Sanskritic jargon (which would make my work inaccessible to the non-specialist) but rather to ease the experience of the reader, in addition to introducing the terms in the text itself I have added a glossary of the most common Sanskrit and Marathi terms appearing in this book.

Non-English words are marked in italics, except for names, primary sources, and places. I have used the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST) system for Sanskrit words, but have employed the transliteration of names, places, and other Marathi terms derived from Sanskrit using the Marathi pronunciation, rather than adhering to the Sanskrit convention. For example: Rāmdās instead of Rāmdāsa. In the absence of a standard convention for the transliteration of Marathi into English, I have retained diacritical marks on most Marathi and Hindi words in italics throughout the book. Although Indic languages and dialects make no distinction between uppercase and lowercase letters, I use capitals to indicate proper names (Śiva, Kṛṣṇa) and titles (Ṛgvedasaṃhitā, Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa). Terms that have been anglicized in form or have come into English usage (*paṇḍit*, *avatāra*) are given in their standard transliterated forms, with diacritics and italics; only the adjectives that are not themselves Sanskrit terms appear without italics (such as Purāṇic or Brāhmaṇical), and language names have been transliterated without diacritics (Marāṭhī = Marathi). In addition, the plural form of non-English words is used as in English, however the plural ending is not italicized (such as in *avatāra*s). The anglicized term 'Brahmin' that would appear with a high frequency in the text has been replaced by '*brāhmaṇa*' instead for the sake of consistency in the text. Indic words that occur in English quotations are given without diacritics, unless used by the author. In case of a Sanskrit or Marathi word being difficult to recognize in an English quotation, its standard transliterated version will be given in square brackets — for example: "shrout [*śrauta*]." Modern place names such as Maharashtra or names of cities that are commonly known by their English spelling (for example Alandi instead of Aḷaṃdī) have been used in their anglicised form. Modern proper names of Indian origin are given in their transliterated forms, except for authors and other public figures who are well known in their anglicised form (for example, Madhav Deshpande instead of Mādhav Deśpāṇḍe).

List of Abbreviations

Sanskrit Terms and Works

Aār	Aitareyāraṇyaka
AB	Aitareyabrāhmaṇa
ĀpDhS	Āpastambadharmasūtra
ĀśvGS	Āśvalāyanagṛhyasūtra
AV	Atharvaveda (Śaunaka)
AV(P)	Atharvaveda (Paippalāda)
BaudhDhS	Baudhāyanadharmasūtra
BaudhGS	Baudhāyanagṛhyasūtra
BhG	Bhagavadgītā
DG	Daśagrantha
GautDhS	Gautamadharmasūtra
HY	Haṭhayoga
Jyot	Jyotiṣa
Kār	Kauṣītakyāraṇyaka
KauśGS	Kauśikagṛhyasūtra
KK	Karmakāṇḍa
KūrP	Kūrmapurāṇa
MānDhŚ	Mānavadharmaśāstra
PārGS	Pāraskaragṛhyasūtra
ṚV	Ṛgvedasaṃhitā
ŚāṅkhGS	Śāṅkhāyanagṛhyasūtra
ŚB	Śatapathabrāhmaṇa
SV(R)	Sāmaveda (Rāṇāyanīya)
Tār	Taittirīyāraṇyaka
TarkŚ	Tarkaśāstra
TB	Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa
Tsaṃ	Taittirīyasaṃhitā
VāsDhŚ	Vāsiṣṭhadharmaśāstra
VSaṃ(K)	Vājasaneyisaṃhitā (Kāṇva)
VSaṃ(M)	Vājasaneyisaṃhitā (Mādhyandina)

Other Abbreviations

HJS	Hindū Janjāgṛti Samiti
HRD	Human Resource Development Ministry
IGNCA	Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts

Mar	Marathi
MSRVVP	Maharṣi Sāṃdīpani Rāṣṭrīya Veda Vidyā Pratiṣṭhān
MVVP	Maharṣi Veda Vyās Pratiṣṭhān
Skt	Sanskrit
RTE	Right to Education Act
RSS	Rāṣṭrīya Svayamsevak Saṅgh
VHP	Viśva Hindū Pariṣad
VŚS	Vedaśāstrottejak Sabhā

1 Introduction

> *... it seems more appropriate for Vedic studies to note that the Veda is not a fossilized book and that it still inspires a religious faith, whose evolution and application in the course of history offer to Vedic studies an immense field that is yet to be explored.*
> *–Jean Filliozat*[2]

Popularly, Hinduism is believed to be the world's oldest living religion. This claim is based on a continuous reverence for the oldest strata of religious authority within the Hindu traditions, the Vedic corpus, which began to be composed more than three thousand years ago, around 1750–1200 BCE, and which according to the tradition is eternal (*anādi*) and from non-human authorship (*apauruṣeya*). The Vedas have been considered by many to be the philosophical cornerstone of the Brāhmaṇical traditions (*āstika*), even previous to the colonial construction of the concept of "Hinduism" around the turn of the nineteenth century (Pennington 2005). B. K. Smith went so far as proclaiming the Vedas themselves as the iconic authority on which all of Hinduism is based — even if only symbolically —proposing the following definition:

> Having reviewed the analytically separable (but in actuality usually conflated) types of definitions Indologists have constructed for the construct called Hinduism—the inchoate, the thematic, and the social and/or canonical—I now wish to offer my own working definition, locating myself firmly within the camp of the canonical authority as constitutive of the religion: *Hinduism is the religion of those humans who create, perpetuate, and transform traditions with legitimizing reference to the authority of the Veda*. (B. K. Smith 1989: 13-14, emphasis mine)

This definition has been justly criticized, and scholars have shown that — in order to understand Hinduism — it is best to historicize the term and avoid anachronistic definitions which would be invalid for all periods and regions of India. Sanderson, for instance, in his recent work *The Śaiva Age* (2009) has convincingly argued that Śaivism during the early medieval period — roughly from the fifth to the thirteenth century — was a distinct religion different from Brāhmaṇism. According to Sanderson's argument, at the time, Śaivism was highly sceptical of the authority and validity of the Vedas, and of the traditional knowledge systems of Brāhmaṇism as a whole. Sanderson claims that Śaivism — today generally thought of as an integral part of Hinduism — was the dominant religion of the Indian subcontinent rather than Brāhmaṇism.

2 "... il parait plus opportune pour les études védiques de constater que le Veda n'est pas un livre fossilisé, qu'il inspire toujours une fois religieuse et que l'évolution de cette fois et des ses applications dans l'histoire offrent maintenant aux études védiques un champ immense qu'elles n'ont pas encore assez cultivé." Filliozat 1980: 526-7. Translation by the author.

Despite the evidence brought forth by contemporary scholarship, and the intense debates in recent decades around the term "Hinduism" and the construction of "Hindu" identity, in popular parlance, the Vedas are still generally believed to be "the oldest *scriptures* of Hinduism" and are arguably the most authoritative texts for most Hindus today. Even among Indologists and other scholars of the subcontinent, it is not uncommon to encounter the description of the Vedas as being "sacred books", a "body of scriptures" and "literature" in the conventional sense of the word. Nonetheless, the Vedas, despite having been written down in relatively recent times (in comparison to the date of their composition), have traditionally been preserved and ritually used, almost exclusively, orally. Oral texts, of course, are intrinsically bound to their custodians — in this case *brāhmaṇa* males, whose foremost duties, according to the tradition, are to study, thoroughly imbibe, and teach them. For the traditional *brāhmaṇa*, the Veda — which literally means 'knowledge' — is the symbolic system which orders and perpetuates reality, and thus, according to their own accounts, these custodians have a very intimate relationship to it. The verbatim transmission of this knowledge from teacher to disciple — in its current cultural setting as observed in traditional Vedic schools in Maharashtra, India — is the topic of this book.

The present work aims at studying the Veda and the Vedic tradition, not as a bygone culture that was lived thousands of years ago, but rather as it is presented to us by its custodians today in a rapidly changing India. It is the story of the keepers of a living tradition in a world of shifting cultural norms, and of the challenges of preserving and reinventing their Vedic tradition. On a macrolevel, it is also the story of the complex relationship between the Vedic religion and Hinduism.

My approach is built of a combination of Classical Indology and Cultural Anthropology, and it aims to shed light on both Indological themes and current socio-cultural dynamics. In the following pages, I present the results of my study of the traditional education and training of *brāhmaṇa*s through the system of *gurukula*, as observed in twenty-five contemporary Vedic schools. The *gurukula* system of education aims to teach *brāhmaṇa* males how to properly recite and memorize the Veda, as well as to train them for ritual performance. Ultimately, the goal of this system of knowledge transmission is to mold individuals to completely embody this knowledge. This system of education is alive today in many parts of India, and it is particularly strong in the southern states of the country and in a few other traditional enclaves, such as Benares. In this study, I deal particularly with Vedic schools or *vedapāṭhaśālā*s in the state of Maharashtra — a deliberate regional choice, the reason for which will soon become evident.

In the last forty years, scholarship on the Veda has moved from the philological and historical study of texts towards a rich multifaceted and multidisciplinary approach, notably in regard to studies of how Vedic ritual is performed today and the anthropological study of *brāhmaṇa* communities in different parts of India. Scholars have dealt with the history of its canonization, the development of the

Vedic schools, and its transmission, as well as its reception and influence in modern times. One of the pioneers to study the Veda and the Vedic ritual as practiced in modern times was Staal who, with a number of brilliant scholars, dealt — in his double volume *opera magna* entitled "*Agni, the Vedic ritual of the fire altar*" (Staal and Somayajipad 2010 [1983]) and in many other publications — with several aspects that go beyond the purely philological interpretation of the Vedic sources. Many more parties have followed that generation of scholars, and have taken similar paths by studying the living Vedic traditions.[3] The study of the Veda and its custodians is, therefore, no longer only the philological study of a culture buried in a distant past, but the examination of a rich tradition that is alive in the twenty-first century and embedded in very particular social and cultural contexts. In recent years, scholars have studied the history and transformations of these traditions, and have noted a revival of Vedic ritual and an increased visibility of the Vedas and of Vedic ritual in the religious public sphere, both within and outside of India. Particularly through the contributions of critical post-colonial theories, Indologists have become more aware of the dangers of presenting a mono-discursive view of Hinduism and have started to consider the contexts in which these traditions have been embedded. In an effort to move away from graphocentric approaches, some scholarship on the subject has moved to the study of related practices and the broader contexts in which these texts are embedded.

Two fundamentally different types of traditional education have been consciously distinguished in Brāhmaṇical circles: the *śāstrika* (scholastic) and the *vaidika* (recitational) (Wujastyk 1981). Although the distinction between *vaidika*s and *śāstrika*s has not always been clear-cut, experts in both traditions — exegetic and liturgical — have been the exception rather than the rule. As will become clear later, one can hardly accomplish mastery over both spheres of knowledge in a single lifetime.[4] The curriculum and the aims of each system are different. While the *śāstrika* aims at understanding the texts and mastering its language (Sanskrit) to interpret and apply them to different realms of study, the *vaidika* aims at mastering the sound form of these texts and their ritual application with the utmost exactitude. The *vaidika* must learn these hymns by heart, or as it is commonly termed in Sanskrit, "fix them in their throats (*kaṇṭhastha*)". One could also say that there is a third tradition not

3 To mention just a few: Howard 1977, 1986; Patton 1994, 2002, 2004; F. Smith 2000, 2001, 2010; Mahadevan 2003; Fuller 1984, 2001, 2003; Lubin 2001a, 2001b; Hüsken 2005, 2009; Witzel 1976, 1993; Knipe 1997, 2009, 2015.

4 We must remember that the 'exegetical' tradition was/is also an oral one in which large quantities of text are memorized as part of their training, but these texts were not aims in themselves; rather, they were tools for the command of Sanskrit and the interpretation of texts. For the curriculum of this system, see: Wujastyk 1981.

addressed by Wujastyk, and one that is acutely dying out[5] — namely, the ritualistic *śrauta* tradition based on the setting (*ādhāna*) and maintaining of the three sacred fires (*tretāgni*), and on a strictly regulated life centered around fire-sacrifices. This book's main focus is the second type of education, i.e. the tradition of the Veda reciter or the "embodiment of the Veda" (*vedamūrti*), although the other two are also addressed in passing throughout the book since they are an essential part of the broader Vedic tradition.

The old tradition of the preservation of Vedic lore in family clans (*śākhā* or *caraṇa*) who have handed down these texts from one generation to the next for millennia has proved to be very reliable despite the losses it has suffered along the way. Of course, this has not been a linear process, and there have been perhaps as many revitalization efforts in the past as there are occurring now in present day India — not to mention that this process has always been dependent on sectarian, political, and economic factors.

In the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa (11.5.6.6-7) and the Taittirīyāraṇyaka (2.10.1), one first encounters the recitation of the Veda as part of the theology of the "great sacrifices" (*mahāyajña*s) (Olivelle 1993: 53-55) that dictate the religious duties of a twice-born man. These "great sacrifices"[6] elevate the importance of daily recitation and the preservation of the Veda in such a way that large portions of Vedic texts and their recitation styles have survived uninterrupted since their composition, on up to the present day. The heated rivalry over the centuries, between the orthodox ritualists on the one hand and their critics on the other,[7] might have strongly contributed to the fact that the recitation of the Veda became more than limited to its role as a necessity

5 Although, as shown with the example given in Chapter 6, there are also modern revival efforts of the *śrauta* sacrifices in Maharashtra that are attracting a lot of attention among *brāhmaṇa* communities, and even among foreigners who now help to sponsor these laborious and complex sacrifices. Yet, as Knipe has aptly summarized, the observations of many other scholars are relevant here: "A commitment to set the fires for a career as agni-hotrin and co-sacrificing wife is [...] perhaps the single most important decision in the lives of a Veda pandit and his spouse. It must be undertaken jointly and with deep consideration. [...] Small wonder that few pandits and wives project the hope of performing adhana, and still fewer actually go through with the ritual" (Knipe 2015: 190).

6 The five great sacrifices are: *ṛṣiyajña* (also known as *brahmayajña*) — honouring sages by the study and recitation of the Veda; *devayajña* — daily worship of the gods (devas) by pouring oblations into the sacred fire; *pitṛyajña* — offering libations to the ancestors; *manuṣyayajña* — sacrifice to the humans, usually in the form of offerings of food; and *bhūtayajña* — feeding animals, especially cows and birds. (See for example: *athāvalokayed arkam haṃsaḥ śuciṣad ityṛcā / kuryāt pañca mahāyajñān gṛhaṃ gatvā samāhitaḥ // devayajñaṃ pitṛyajñaṃ bhūtayajñaṃ tathaiva ca / mānuṣyaṃ brahmayajñaṃ ca pañca yajñān pracakṣate* // KūrP, 2, 18, 101-102; other mentions of the 'five great sacrifices' can also be found in the Dharmaśāstra literature, for example in the MānDhŚ III 69-70.)

7 These critics were Buddhists, Jainas, and even groups within the Brāhmaṇical tradition (for example, expressed in Vedāntic thought), but also those who came later with the Muslim and Christian communities that took root in India.

for the ritual act. It was this development that led to a new understanding of the place which the language of Vedic revelation has within the daily practice of the *brāhmaṇa*, this move signifying the development of the "self-study of the Veda" (*svādhyāya*)[8] from a merely functional process of memorization to an important religious practice in and of itself — one that in fact came to be considered equal to, and perhaps in some cases even superior to, the actual performance of the Vedic sacrifices. *Svādhyāya* came to be considered as *brahmayajña*, the "sacrifice of and to Brahman" (cf. Malamoud 1977).

There is no such thing as an overarching Vedic pedagogy for the transmission of the Veda. It is worth recalling here that the Vedas were handed down in different familial clans, which preserved not only different texts, but also different recitation styles, ritual applications, and their own particular interpretations of these texts and rituals. Therefore, even while there were efforts to consolidate a "transregional Ārya culture" (cf. Lubin 2005), the variety of Vedic texts that have been preserved in distinct branches (*śākhā*s) of knowledge, as linked to specific ancestral lineages up until the premodern era, clearly reflect these particular differences even today. The recitation styles that have been preserved reflect the richness of modulation, intonation, and hand-gestures of each of these schools, as well as their ritual practices.

Although these schools mainly handed down the Vedic lore orally and according to their own *śākhā* (lit. branch), the tradition has left us with a large amount of ancillary texts belonging to these Vedic branches. These texts have survived, mainly unprinted and unedited, in diverse manuscripts, and give us a rich account of the technicalities of recitation of each school. The most detailed information on the study and recitation of the Veda comes from texts called *śikṣā*s and *prātiśākhya*s, and the respective commentaries belonging to each school.[9] The *śikṣā*s and *prātiśākhya*s concentrate mainly on how the texts and their permutations are to be pronounced and intoned correctly, i.e. their aural form. According to Aithal, they give only "scarce information" on how teachers should teach their students and how the study of these sacred texts should be structured.[10] Notably, none of the *brāhmaṇa*s I came in contact with had memorized a *śikṣā* or *prātiśākhya* text at the time of our meeting. Many of those I interviewed during my fieldwork did not possess a copy of such a text, and many others had never seen a *śikṣā* or *prātiśākhya* text in their lives. Yet, as will be shown below, the rules concerning the Vedic recitation are mainly learned through the system of oral transmission, and this includes the pronunciation rules stipulated in the *śikṣā* or *prātiśākhya* texts of each Vedic branch. Another source of information on the pedagogy of the Veda transmission is found in normative medieval texts (Dharmasūtras and Dharmaśāstras) in which one finds rules and regulations that concern the study period of the Veda, this called

8 *svādhyāya*, lit. "self-study". The term denotes the study (*adhyāya*) of one's own (*sva*) Vedic *śākhā*.
9 *śikṣā* meaning lit. "instruction or training" referring to the science, which teaches proper articulation and pronunciation of Vedic texts and *prātiśākhya*s "one for each branch (*śākhā*)".
10 Aithal, Parameshwar private correspondence 6.7.2011.

brahmacarya. This period is considered a crucial life-stage of a *brāhmaṇa*, during which the state of Brāhmaṇahood (*brāhmaṇya*)[11] is cultivated and established through the study of the Veda.

The early Dharmasūtras, which have been studied in detail by many scholars,[12] were composed around a time when the concept of *dharma* came to be understood in Brāhmaṇism as *varṇāśramadharma* ("the order of classes and life-stages") as a response to, or through, the influence of other traditions such as Buddhism and Jainism, but more importantly due to the changing social context.[13] The new role of the *brāhmaṇa*s within the late Vedic society shifted from their being mainly specialists of ritual to their gradual involvement in secular affairs such as state administration, law, arts, and sciences. The rapidly changing socio-religious atmosphere and the new political organization with new kingdoms required a fundamental redefinition of the *brāhmaṇa*s' social and religious positions. I will not go into the details of the argument brought forth by Olivelle and others here, but the important point is that the question of *dharma* became so central in the intellectual discourse of that time that the Brāhmaṇical circles developed their own sources of *dharma*. It was during this period of transition that the training in the verbal command of the Veda became crucial for the Brāhmaṇical ideology. *Brahmacarya*, the period of studentship, was a central topic for the texts dealing with *dharma*. It is important to note that it is the daily life of a *brahmacārin* and of his teacher that are regulated in great detail in these texts. But these rules deal only marginally with the instruction procedure of the Veda *per se*. In these texts, the emphasis is put on the ideal behavior (*ācāra*) of those involved in teaching and learning the Veda, and on how to become the embodiment of authority in the Vedic tradition.[14]

The Dharmasūtras point to three different sources of *dharma*: the Vedic texts themselves (*śruti*); *smṛti*, or "tradition", which can here be taken to refer to the Śrautasūtras and Gṛhyasūtras, as well as to earlier Dharmasūtras; and finally to the *śiṣṭācāra*, the "practice of the learned" (cf. Davis 2004, 2010). In this context, the practice of the learned clearly goes well beyond the mere performance of sacrifices as enjoined by the Vedic texts. In seeking an authoritative source for teachings relevant

11 The term *brāhmaṇya* is attested to in both Sanskrit literature as well as in vernacular languages as referencing the "state or rank of a *brāhmaṇa*" (Monier-Williams). In Marathi, the term is often spelled as *brahmaṇya* and is defined as "behaviour characteristic of a *brāhmaṇa*." (Tulpule) There is, of course, no simple answer to the question of Brāhmaṇahood, since who was and was not considered a *brāhmaṇa* has been a contested matter for millennia — involving factors such as birth, conduct and ritual. See for example: Sharma 2000: 132-180.

12 The most prominent studies are those by Kane (1930-1962) and Olivelle (1999, 2000, 2004, 2005b). Other relevant studies on the subject are well summarized in Hiltebeitel 2011.

13 For a discussion on this hypothesis about the concept of *dharma*, see: Olivelle 2005c, and also Hiltebeitel 2011.

14 More on this subject will be addressed in Chapter 5.

to the changing environment, one looked not to the Veda in the material sense of a specific literary corpus, but to those who transmitted the Veda orally — those most fully instructed in the Vedic lore: the *śiṣṭa*s. As living embodiments of the Veda, their conduct (*śiṣṭācāra*) and their judgement could be considered "Vedic", even when they went beyond the known Vedic teachings. For the *śiṣṭa*s, those entrusted with the oral transmission of the Vedic tradition, the Veda becomes internalized and embodied through the process of study and through memorization as a principle of action and judgement. They "become" the Veda, and thus what they do and say can be considered Vedic. Or, since the Veda is the source of *dharma*, what they do is "Dharmic".

*Vedapāṭhaśālā*s (or *gurukula*s) are the hubs through which the Vedic knowledge and authority is passed from one generation to another.[15] They are also the places where the younger and older generations meet to reconstruct and reaffirm their religious and social identity, and to become *brāhmaṇa*s in the literal sense of the word (i.e. those who carry *brahman*, in the sense of "sacred utterance or rite",[16] a well documented term for the Veda itself). Vedic schools with their *gurukula* model of education are, thus, a very tangible place to observe how the Veda is passed on to the next generations, and the ways in which the Vedic tradition and identity are preserved and reconstructed by the *brāhmaṇa*s today.

The study of *vedapāṭhaśālā*s and the transmission of traditional knowledge in modern Maharashtra has been neglected by Indologists and anthropologists alike,[17] even though the region has been an important center for Vedic learning for many centuries.[18] This work aims to present a systematic study of these traditional Vedic schools in the state of Maharashtra, as observed through ethnographic fieldwork.

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15 Traditionally, both the *śāstrika* and the *vaidika* education took place, either at home or in traditional schools, on the eve of colonialism and the modern state; however, the *śāstrika* tradition has mainly migrated to colleges and universities run on Western models, often even with English as the medium of instruction (cf. Michaels 2001). More recently, however, it has become quite rare to find traditional schools for the *śāstrika* type of education that still follow the *gurukula* model of instruction, in which the students live in the house of the *guru*. While "revivals" of this type of education are beginning to appear — as is the case with the school of Paṇḍit Devadatta Patil in Pune, which claims to be "the only one of its kind left in India" — the scarcity of such residential Sanskrit *pāṭhaśālā*s has become a reality.

16 For the connections between *bráhman* (n) and *brahmán* (m), see: Brereton 2002. See: also Renou 1949b: 16-21; Gonda 1950: 50-57; Thieme 1952: 122-125. For *brahmán* (m) in the ṚV, see: Geldner 1897: 143-155; Oldenberg 1917: 394-396; Bodewitz 1983: 34-37; Minkowski 1991: 111-128. For the connections of the *bráhman* with the *purohita* priest in the AV, see: Geldner 1897: 143-155; Oldenberg 1917: 375-383; Bloomfield 1897: lvii-lxxi; 1899: 28-34; Caland 1990.

17 Although, some scholars such as Laurie Patton (2004); Frederick M Smith (2001); and Jan Houben (2000) have drawn some of their material from the study undertaken in Vedic schools in Maharashtra.

18 The cities of Pune and Paithan, as well as other enclaves in Maharashtra, were important centres of Sanskrit learning along Kanchipuram and Benares. See: Deshpande 2011: 218.

For the analysis of these schools, I have considered social, religious, and political discourses and practices as the heuristic tool through which to analyze the ways they perceive and present themselves in a rapidly changing society. Necessarily, I also examine how different dominant discourses that have shaped modern India influence the Hindu traditions of Maharashtra. Here, a study of how the apparent ideological clash between the commonly held *bhakti* values of inclusivity and spiritual egalitarianism, versus the persistent Brāhmaṇical expectations of ritual and caste purity, evolved within the discourses particular to this region. I also consider the tension between discourses of "modernity" and "tradition" to which the contemporary custodians of the Vedas are exposed.[19]

The *vedapāṭhaśālā*s found throughout India, and those studied in this work, are heterogeneous and can range in size and complexity from being a small school run within the family tradition to being a large institution funded by wealthy religious organizations. Therefore, this book also aims to present different models under which the Vedic schools are organized in contemporary Maharashtra, and analyze: their religious and political affiliations; their types of funding resources and the relationship they have with their sponsors and the Indian government through the Human Resource Development Ministry (HRD); their interactions with other popular and local religious discourses and traditions; their adopted teaching methods; and their curricular and extra-curricular activities. These factors have too rarely been given careful consideration in the analysis of Vedic schools and, as will be shown in the following pages, they have a crucial impact on how the Vedas are transmitted from one generation to the next. This work, therefore, aims to be a contribution to the understanding of the dynamics of the transmission of knowledge in the Vedic milieu, as well as the way tradition is perpetuated and reinvented in a specific regional and historical context.

One of the main goals of the present work is to show some of the dynamics in the identitarian construction of the Maharashtrian Vedic *brāhmaṇa*, and the changes in the *brāhmaṇa* ideal as portrayed in traditional discourses found in Sanskritic textual sources, as well as those reproduced in the vernacular ones (Marathi and Hindi). These dynamics are, on the one hand, based on the selective rearticulation of Vedic ideals presented in the Brāhmaṇical literature, and on the other, the way in which *brāhmaṇa*s today adapt to discourses and circumstances of modernity — including proceses of urban migration and regional, national, and transnational movement; economic changes; the challenging of their traditional *status quo* by reform movements; and the changing position of women in modern India, among others. I will present examples from my fieldwork to illustrate how these changes and innovations, as well as continuities within the tradition, are rearticulated depending on the context used to reinforce a particular identity. These examples will illustrate how the articulation of

19 For a discussion on these debatable terms, see: Chapter 6.

discourses through practices, rituals, and symbols are constantly re-negotiating what it means to be a *vaidika brāhmaṇa* in contemporary Maharashtra.

The following parts of the Introduction will first situate the Vedic schools visited for this study in Maharashtra, and also introduce the author and his challenges in taking up such a research project. The last part of the Introduction will revisit the concept of orality (or rather, "sonality", following Wilke and Moebus 2011) and its relationship to literacy in the Vedic tradition. Hinduism has recently been called a "culture of sound" (Wilke and Moebus 2011: 12-13),[20] and while claiming the centrality of sound for Hinduism may seem to be an essentialist statement, it points to a rather understudied element in the Hindu traditions. And if this is true, then the element of sonality — not only as the spoken word, but as the sounding word — is even more important for Vedic tradition, which survived largely without script, even after that script was in use for many centuries.[21] Discussing the central issue of orality and literacy in the Vedic tradition will also help to address related questions relevant for the Vedic transmission of knowledge in modern Maharashtra, such as: What are the current attitudes towards the Vedas, both as orally transmitted and as printed texts? What practices and religious discourses are dominant in the representation of the Vedas? What is the role of manuscripts and printed texts in the transmission of the Vedas in these schools? How is illiteracy in the form of orality, as well as other traditional Brāhmaṇical values, being perpetuated now? And, how did printing technology, mass distribution, and Indological scholarship affect the self-perception of the tradition, as well as the Vedas themselves?

1.1 Locating the *Vedapāṭhaśālā*s

When I started my fieldwork, I was unaware of how many Vedic schools existed in Maharashtra. The first step in my research was to locate the schools and obtain permission to visit them. To this end, I consulted different people from whom I obtained three different lists. I collected the first list from Dr. B. Pataskar, the current director of the Vaidika Saṃśodhana Maṇḍala in Pune. The second list was from an internal record kept by the Maharṣi Veda Vyās Pratiṣṭhān and given to me by Dr. Kāḷe, a retired engineer who is a full-time volunteer and a key player in the organization located in Pune. The ex-director of the Vaidika Saṃśodhana Maṇḍala and well-respected scholar T. N. Dharmadhikari gave me the third list, as compiled from the research he had conducted many years ago for the government of India. From the three lists, I was able to visit the twenty-five schools presented in this work. The current number

20 See also: Beck 2008.

21 Important contributions to the discussion have been made by: Staal 1986a, 1986b; Falk 1993, 2010: 207-220; Witzel 1997, 2010; Bronkhorst 1982, 2002, 2011; Scharfe 2002, 2009: 80-83.

of *vedapāṭhaśālā*s in Maharashtra is estimated to be around 50, but this is a number that is difficult to prove since not all such schools are officially registered as such, and there are no thoroughly kept records in any institution. This estimation on the number of schools is usually drawn from the *pāṭhaśālā*s that take their examinations with the organizations based in Pune and other locations in Maharashtra. Sporadic efforts to gather such data are being made by individuals, and even by governmental organizations such as the Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts (IGNCA) and the Maharṣi Sāṃdīpani Rāṣṭrīya Veda Vidyā Pratiṣṭhān (MSRVVP).

Problems with obtaining such information are, for example, that smaller family schools comprised of only a teacher and his sons are not always known to the general public and, therefore, difficult to find. Teachers of such home-schools (*gṛhapāṭhaśālā*s) do not necessarily send their sons or students to the examinations organized in Pune or elsewhere, but prefer to test their students themselves or in the local community of *vaidika*s. Moreover, some teachers have other occupations in addition to teaching the Veda, to the point that some do not consider the transmission of the Veda as their profession, but rather as a religious duty. Many Vedic schools are also located in rural areas which are difficult to access, so that even organizations such as MSRVVP do not have the manpower to verify whether such schools are still functioning. Several school records listed on the relatively recent documents I consulted for my research, as provided by different scholars and organizations, had out of date addresses and contact information, or simply listed schools that did not exist anymore. Teachers pass away, financial resources dry out, new schools emerge, and limited access to communication and changes of address are some of the factors that make keeping records of these schools a difficult task.[22]

After my first and longest fieldwork visit to India, the Vaidika Saṃśodhana Maṇḍala published "The Directory of the Indological Research Institutes and Vedapāthaśāḷā-s" (Pataskar 2010b), which lists hundreds of Vedic schools across India, many founded in the last decade. Still, my intention was not to visit all the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s of the state, but to visit a significant number in order to see the diversity of schools. I make no claims of statistical precision, nor do I approach my study from a quantitative perspective. The schools presented here are not necessarily the oldest and most famous ones, nor the ones with the most students, but rather a sample of schools which illustrates the heterogeneity of Vedic schools one can encounter in Maharashtra.

The following is a list of the visited schools. For a brief description with the particularities of each school, please see Appendix 1.[23]

22 In fact, in 2010, a new Vedic school opened in Pune under the sponsorship of the Śaṅkarācārya of Sringeri. This is just one example of the new schools that have been opening in recent years.

23 For a detailed map with the locations of the schools: https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=zuemjINjUA9A.kLiAJ7n0xkHM accesed December 1, 2015.

Table 1. List of Vedic schools

	Name of school[24]	Location
1	Ved Bhavan	Pune
2	Vedaśāstra Vidyālay (Patwardhan Pāṭhaśālā)	Pune
3	Pune Vedapāṭhaśālā	Pune
4	Śrī Kṛṣṇayajurveda Pāṭhaśālā	Satara
5	Śrī Umāśaṅkar Advaitavedānta Vidyāpīṭh	Satara
6	Śrī Umāmaheśvar Vedapāṭhaśālā	Satara
7	Śrī Borikar Vedapāṭhaśālā	Satara
8	Śrī Vedaśāstra Vidyā Saṃvardhan Maṇḍaḷ (Śrī Vedapāṭhaśālā)	Karad
9	Vedaśālā Ratnagiri	Ratnagiri
10	Śrī Gaṇeśa Vedapāṭhaśālā	Devrukh
11	Vedaśāstra Saṃskṛt Pāṭhaśālā	Sawantwadi
12	Śrī Samārth Sant Mahātmajī Vedavidyālay	Dhalegao
13	Vaidik Jñān Vijñān Saṃskṛt Mahāvidyālay	Nashik
14	Kailās Maṭh Akhaṇḍānand	Nashik
15	Śrī Guru Gaṅgeśvar Mahārāj Pāṭhaśālā	Nashik
16	Śrutismṛti Vidyāpīṭham	Trimbak
17	Śrī Narasiṃha Sarasvatī Vedapāṭhaśālā	Alandi
18	Śrī Sadguru Nijānand Mahārāj Vedavidyālay	Alandi
19	Adhyātmik Pratiṣṭhān	Alandi
20	Śrī Jagadguru Śaṅkarācārya Maṭh	Kohlapur
21	Vedānta Vidyāpiṭh (Śrī Dattā Devasthāna)	Ahmednagar
22	Śrutigandhā Vedapāṭhaśālā	Beed
23	Bhosale Vedaśāstra Mahāvidyālay	Nagpur
24	Ārṣa Vijñāna Gurukulam	Nagpur
25	Śrī Yogīrāj Veda Vijñān Āśram	Barshi

24 The name in parenthesis indicates the popular name of the school, where one exists.

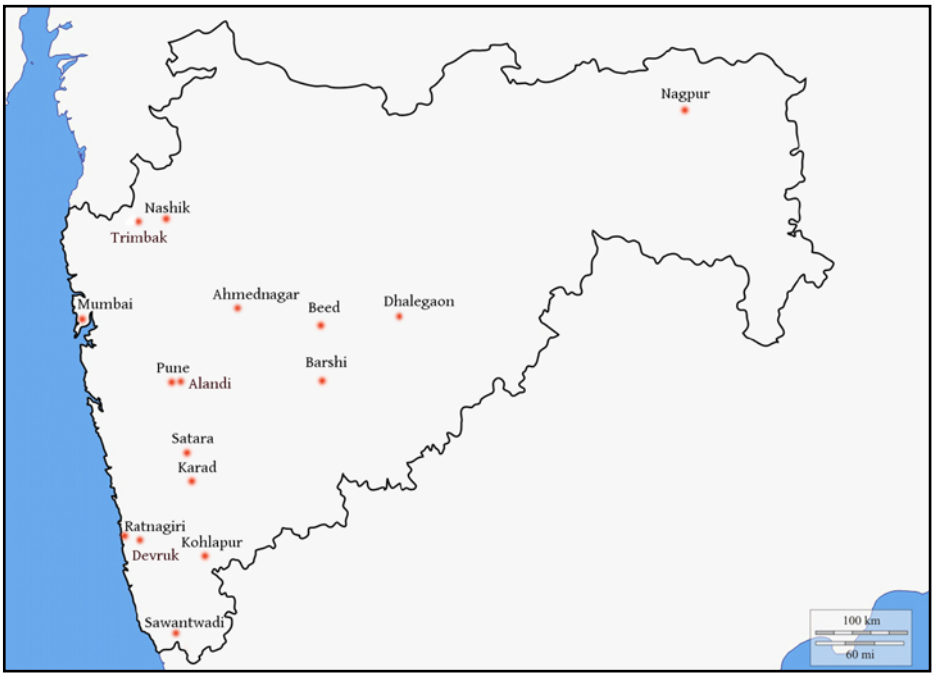

Plate 1: Map of Maharashtra with the localities of the schools.

1.2 The Indian in a Foreign Body: Ethnography and Participant Observation

An ethnography or systematic study of the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s of Maharashtra has not yet been completed, and filling this gap is one of the primary aims of the present work. The material that makes up this book comes from the twenty-five schools I first visited between February and October 2009, and then visited for a second time in October and November of 2011. The time spent at each school varied from consisting of day trips to entailing several weeks at a single locality. This is important for the reader to understand since the analysis I present here is based on diverse data collected in these schools. The least common denominator is a few hours spent in each school and the responses obtained from a questionnaire in Marathi that was intended to collect basic information from each school. It was designed to answer both factual as well as subjective questions.

The material collected focuses mainly upon:

1. The organization of the schools
2. The pedagogical methods employed
3. The frame and context of the social 'network'

The first aspect listed addresses the factual sort of information collected about the schools. It includes observations on the organization, funding, and financial situation of each school, the facilities, the number of teachers and students, the Vedic branches (*śākhā*s) taught there, the management of the school, the religious affiliation of the school, and the problems and challenges they face in running their school.

The second aspect deals with the transmission of knowledge and teaching procedures. It comprises the formal teaching methods used to instruct the students on the recitation of the Vedas (what one would call a 'class'), the *svādhyāya*[25] or self-study techniques, and the evaluation process for the students. Here, I also focused on the students' curricula, the teaching materials, the academic calendar, and the daily schedule of each school. I also directed my attention towards the crucial relationship between teacher and student (*guruśiṣyasaṃbandha*).

The last focus point of my fieldwork was designed to study the social network and context of the schools. Here, I considered the immediate relations the schools have with their neighbours, their fellow *brāhmaṇa*s, politicians, sponsors, clients and devotees, the families of the students, etc.; therefore, issues of caste, class, and political power often became important in related conversations. I enquired about subjects' exposures to other religious forms, their relations with regional and national politics, and other forms of local power. I was particularly interested in the assumed tension between "tradition" and "modernity" and, therefore, I paid attention to how these two terms were articulated by my interlocutors. I made a conscious effort to note how the members of the schools spoke about "modernity", and the perceived advantages and disadvantages of their exposure to markers of such a modernity — such as new technologies (TV, internet, etc.) and elements of what is perceived as "Western culture" in their lives.[26]

These three areas of observation are key themes in the present book, and while they may seem to be different topics altogether, they are often entangled and in correlation with each other. I do not claim to have thoroughly covered the study of all these areas in the lives of the contemporary traditional *brāhmaṇa*s of Maharashtra, which, if even possible, would require many more years of intense study and a close relationship with each *brāhmaṇa*. I understand, therefore, my work to be a sort of snapshot which captures a moment in time from a particular angle, but out of which, nonetheless, one can learn and understand many things, as well as point to directions for further study. Furthermore, it is clear that my observations are coloured by my experiences as a Swiss-Mexican male scholar with an inclination toward Indian spirituality. This is important because, as it will become clearer, my status was confusing for both my

25 Here, I refer to the term *svādhyāya* as one of the modalities of memorization in the pedagogical system of memorizing the Veda. For more on the three modalities, see subchapter 3.7.

26 As already mentioned in a previous footnote, I am aware of these controversial terms and I discuss them in more detail in Chapter 6.

interlocutors and myself. At times, I was considered almost to be one of them, and at others a complete intruder and stranger. However, in schools where I was able to spend more time, some outsiders even considered me as a student of these schools (and thus a *brāhmaṇa* of sorts). In one particular school where I spent more time and where I ultimately married my wife in a Vedic wedding ceremony (*vivāha*), I was considered to be an elder brother (*dādā*) and a close friend among both students and teachers. My participation in their daily schedule, rituals, and special events was both a subject of admiration and, at times, also a puzzle for my new friends. I was often asked why someone like me, a Westerner, would invest time and money in the study of the ancient Indian traditions and languages, while most of the young *brāhmaṇa*s they knew (not to mention non-*brāhmaṇa*s) had lost interest in the preservation of their knowledge and lifestyle, and were "running after material gain (*sāmagrī lābh*) and pleasure (*bhog*)". For a few Indians I talked to, I was an example from among several Westerners who, having lost his values, finally found his or her way back to India in search of God, to the place where "all spiritual wisdom is to be found". My presence was then, for some, a matter of pride and a proof of India's greatness. A Citpāvan *brāhmaṇa* from Pune and a volunteer at the Vedaśāstrottejak Sabhā once told everyone gathered for lunch during the annual examinations that I was probably "an Indian Brahmin in a previous life and was born in the wrong continent in this lifetime." There was, for him, no other explanation as to why I was "naturally inclined to Indian culture (*saṃskṛti*), religion (*dharma*), and lifestyle (*vyavahāra*)."[27]

In terms of ritual purity, my status was ambiguous in ways similar to those described by M. Parpola in her work among the Nampūtiris of Kerala (Parpola 2000: 62) and those described by Knipe (2015) in his recent book on the *vaidika brāhmaṇa*s of the Godavari Delta in Andhra Pradesh. I was also at times considered a *brāhmaṇa* and at times a *śūdra* or a *mleccha* (although I never heard someone call me that directly, and instead I overheard conversations about the "impurity" of the *aṅgrezī* or *videśī*). Sometimes, my interlocutors were not really sure where to place me within the class (*varṇa*) system, and at times this ambiguity created tensions. For example, while in most of the schools I was invited to eat lunch among the students and/or teachers (something which would have been unthinkable in the past, or in more orthodox circles), on a few occasions the students, teachers, or managers were not sure where to serve me food, or were hesitant to invite me at all. The main *guru* or someone of authority in the school usually resolved this matter by instructing what was to be done. While most of the time I was served food along with the students of the school, and ate next to them in the traditional way, at other times it was considered

27 Note that this explanation is also a common trope in traditional hagiographies of low-caste *sant*s and *bhakta*s. For example, the famous poet Kabīr of the fifteenth century who, being a low-caste Muslim weaver, is imagined in some hagiographic accounts as being of *brāhmaṇa* origin, from an unmarried *brāhmaṇa* virgin, then to be recued by a childless Muslim couple.

more appropriate to serve me in the same room, but at a distance from the rest of the students or teachers. When there were special events or rituals, the *brāhmaṇa* guests were always served first before the students. I was usually served with the students, but on a couple of occasions, I was served in a different room altogether, where I ate alone or with other non-*brāhmaṇa* guests. Eating on the floor with my right hand and a bare chest was also appreciated and encouraged. In a few schools, particularly those where I was not able to build up closer relationships, I was simply not offered food and had to arrange for my own food outside of the schools.

On some occasions, I was offered bottled water and silverware, which is both a marker of class and foreignness in modern India. If I refused and drank the water they drank, it seemed to me that I was more easily accepted. Eating like everyone else in the schools, and not refusing any food or drink offered, also helped me in creating bonds both with the teachers and the students, but in a few cases also with other members of the school, such as cooks and servants.

Rarely using Western clothes while in the schools, my attire usually consisted of Indian clothes (*kūrta-pajama*, or *dhoṭī*). Urban and non-traditionally educated Indians usually wear Western clothes, so it was both a matter of strange fascination and pride for the students of the Śrī Kṛṣṇayajurveda Pāṭhaśālā when they taught me how to tie the *dhoṭī* in the Maharashtrian way. I started using more Western clothes at the second stage of my fieldwork, as well as on my second fieldtrip, partly to see if there was any change in attitude related to my appearance. In some schools where they had known me to wear Indian clothes, I was asked why I had switched, but they did not specifically encourage me to return to the traditional garb. In schools where they first saw me in Western clothing, there was no difference in attitude, but I could sense some additional fascination at the presence of a foreigner. I quickly discovered that wearing Bermuda shorts (even with a *kūrta* on top) was not appreciated by the members of the school and that it highlighted my foreignness, which made them and myself feel uncomfortable.

Because of my Mexican complexion and my Indian attire, it was difficult at first for Indians to recognize me as a foreigner. I was often thought of as a Kashmiri *brāhmaṇa*, a Citpāvan or a Hindu of an unknown region. At other times, I was believed to be a NRI, especially when I mentioned living in Europe. This confusion of identity had both advantages and disadvantages for my fieldwork. For instance, advantegeously, I was able to access temples reserved for Hindus or enter sacrificial arenas without restrictions. An example of the disadvantages is that often people assumed I had an innate knowledge of the local language and the behavioral codes, and little patience was spared for me when I asked them to speak slowly or when I was inquisitive regarding certain concepts or practices. Nonetheless, overall this ambiguity helped me to gain access and trust from other *brāhmaṇa*s.

I have been asked, several times, "How can one get access to these schools?" While it is true that it is not always easy to be welcomed in and to conduct research in these schools, I must say that, in my case, I was lucky to win the trust of my

interlocutors, and only on isolated occasions was I confronted with difficult situations and/or apathy.

Networking was crucial for my study and, as a researcher, I opted to adapt and blend in as much as I could with the local customs and manners. Of course, I remained a foreigner to them, but by behaving in accordance with their expectations, I was able to gradually gain their trust. My personal background as a practitioner of a yogic tradition whose main *āśram* is based in Maharashtra, and also as a student of an Indian *guru*, helped me to behave in a way that was not completely alien to them. Having attended Vedic ceremonies before, being a young male, and being a vegetarian helped me be relatively well accepted and integrated, especially in schools were I was able to spend longer periods of time. If I had been an unmarried woman, a carnivore, and/or a complete atheist (issues that often came up), I believe that I would have certainly had more trouble in finding acceptance. Participant observation included, in some cases, my waking up at 4.30 a.m. or earlier to attend the students' prayers, and often taking part in worship sessions at sunrise. It also included my attending classes and doing my personal chores with them, and sometimes helping in the school's housekeeping, going on short pilgrimages, taking meals with the school community, playing cricket, having informal conversations, and so on.

One of my main problems during fieldwork was communication. Few of my interlocutors were able to speak English, and I would have liked to have been able to speak freely with them, but usually our communication was mediated between my rather rudimentary Hindi-Marathi mix or spoken Sanskrit and their very basic or (in most cases) non-existent English. One of the first biases in my fieldwork was that I created stronger bonds and was able to understand and make myself clearer with the interlocutors who spoke English than with those who did not. This is also why, whenever it was possible, I took an assistant to the field to translate for me when I was not sure I would otherwise be able to understand what was being said.

1.3 The Indologist without a Text

When I started working on this book — then, as my doctoral dissertation— one of the main concerns of my advisors was that I obtain "primary sources". For a classical Indologist, "primary sources" means preferably obtaining a Sanskrit text or another text in a classical language, whether it is a written document or an oral composition that one can work on philologically. The primary sources I was hoping to obtain from my field work in India were, on the one hand, Sanskrit texts used by the Vedic experts in the schools which would inform me about the pedagogy used in the transmission of knowledge and their way of life, and on the other hand, empirical data obtained through ethnographical methods (interviews and observant participation).

That the teachers in the schools I visited do not employ any kind of pedagogical manuals for the instruction of the Vedas quickly became a methodological challenge,

but, at the same time, it also provided a window of opportunity for developing further understanding of the transmission of knowledge in the Vedic tradition. The fact that the teachers I talked to had but a vague idea of the existence of the so-called Vedalakṣaṇa literature — i.e. the ancillary literature of the Vedas that deals with topics such as phonetics, phonology, and some elements of Vedic grammar — hinted at either a drastic degeneration of knowledge, a strong oral tradition of learning and memorizing the Vedas, or both, as I came to understand later.

Therefore, orality and the transmission of the Vedas in relation to literacy in Maharashtra quickly became a central theme of this study. Which Sanskrit texts could I study to better understand this relationship? How was this 'non-literate' ideal of an oral transmission of knowledge being perpetuated in my case studies?[28] I chose to study two main sources of texts in order to elucidate these questions. First, I sought to better understand the role of the *brāhmaṇa* as ideally presented in the Brāhmaṇical literature. Particularly, I wanted to examine the rules and regulations prescribed for the ideal student and teacher during *brahmacarya*, the first life stage according to the traditional *varṇāśramadharma*. As I delved into the historical material that has been recently fleshed out by historians of *brāhmaṇa*s in India, and specifically of this region, it became obvious that things were not as simple as I thought. The normative texts of the Śāstric literature in which the *brāhmaṇa* ideal is developed, and in which the life and social roles of the *brāhmaṇa* as custodians of the Veda are defined, had not necessarily been valid for all *brāhmaṇa*s in all regions across time. Shifts in attitudes and practices regarding what it has meant to be a *brāhmaṇa* in the last few centuries have been contested and adapted once and again, demonstrating that *brāhmaṇa* groups and their ideals are far from homogeneous. Although, in my fieldwork, I noticed that today's *brāhmaṇa*s rather look for unity as a Pan-Indian group, and more readily overlook differences in ritual and custom in favour of a homogeneous self-representation — this as a response to the challenges presented by drastic social changes. In order to create a more unified self-representation, common ground was found in the *śāstra*s that are not specific to a single *śākhā*, and also by making references to their own practice as the only way in which it was done, or as it was supposed to be done everywhere else. Here, it could be argued that a discussion on an orientalist overemphasis of the written text might be pertinent. Are the Śāstric texts and the rules described in them really that important to the *brāhmaṇa*s of today? Were they ever relevant to specific *brāhmaṇa*s as a social group? And if the sources were relevant, were these texts also based on the consensus of an oral tradition? What were, or are, the other sources of authority that determine who the ideal *brāhmaṇa* is and how he is to lead his life? While the main textual sources I worked with for

28 Note the use of the term *non-literate* instead of illiterate, since the absence of writing here does not denote ignorance but is, in this case, a conscious rejection of a particular medium (writing) in which knowledge cannot and should not to be transmitted.

this book are the well-known Dharmasūtras and Dharmaśāstras in which the "ideal relationship" and "ideal setting" are portrayed, I consciously tried to consider these as idealized reminiscences of the past, which are reused and reinvented partly as a *response* to contemporary social developments in which the discourses of what it means to be a traditional *brāhmaṇa* in modern India are articulated. That these texts do not necessarily reflect the practice of the past is clear from a historical point of view, but on the other hand, they have managed to selectively resurface as contemporary sources of authority — to mobilize and reinstall practices and ideals — surrounding the formal transmission of the Vedas. It would be interesting to continue an in depth study of the history, and the shifts of practices and ideals, around the *brāhmaṇa*s of Maharashtra and other regions of India over the last few centuries, as scholars have only begun to do in recent years.[29] In the present work, I have nonetheless limited myself to attempting to provide the reader with a snapshot of my observations on the contemporary transmission of the Vedas, and to present the perception of the *brāhmaṇa*s of these schools *vis-à-vis* the social changes they perceive in the last generation. By comparing these perceptions and by observing the current practices, with the idealized ones presented in the Śāstric sources, I hope to take a step towards a better understanding of the collective memories of the *brāhmaṇa*s of Maharashtra, as well as the related processes of cultural transformation.[30]

Therefore, besides using a questionnaire as an ethnographic tool, I intensely engaged in participant observation. This meant that I spent most of my time talking to the teachers, caretakers, and managers of the schools. I recorded many of these unstructured interviews. I also sat down with the students and talked to them. Whenever possible, I spent time observing and audio- and video-recording the Veda classes and other study sessions, as well as many moments of daily life.

I took thousands of photographs and several hours of video footage, and I was able to witness and participate in many of the rituals performed both in and out of the schools. On many occasions, I was able to share meals with the school's teachers and students or play an inning or two of cricket in their free time, as earlier discussed. But, not only was I not always invited to stay for lunch or to play cricket — there were times when certain information was deliberately not disclosed to me. The character of the Veda remains, at times, too sacred to be revealed, especially to a non-*brāhmaṇa* foreigner. In some schools I visited, the questionnaires I distributed were only reluctantly and partially filled out, and in other locations I was not able to record or take photographs. Some schools were very difficult to reach or to find, and sometimes the people in charge of the schools or the main teachers were not there, or had only a very limited amount of time available for me. It becomes clear, therefore, that the data

29 Cf. Knipe 2015; M. Deshpande 2012; P. Deshpande 2007; Minkowski and O'Hanlon 2008; Novetzke 2011; Washbrook 2010; etc.

30 I am using the term "collective memory" in the sense described in Assmann 2007.

obtained from these schools is not consubstantial; nonetheless, the material helped me to identify and illustrate certain aspects of the Vedic tradition of Maharashtra, as viewed from my own perspective and that of my interlocutors.

In conclusion, the results and insights obtained from my observations in the field are crucial to gaining a better understanding of the *gurukula* tradition in Maharashtra and the cultural processes that have been shaping the contemporary Vedic tradition. The ethnographic work done at these schools disclosed not only the way in which the Veda is meticulously transmitted orally today, but also the complex social field where the *brāhmaṇa*s of Maharashtra reconstruct and renegotiate their identity — and carry forward their tradition as "living texts". The insights drawn from this fieldwork were possible precisely because I have used a different methodological approach — one which makes a paradigmatic shift in understanding the Veda not merely as textual documents, but begins to include not only institutions that support and contest these traditions, but also the actual lives and practices of the custodians of these texts.

1.4 The Oral Transmission of the Veda

If there is one thing the Vedas are not, it is books ...
–Frits Staal[31]

As I will demonstrate in the chapter devoted to the teaching methods in the Vedic schools, written texts are used by the *brāhmaṇa* teachers and students in order to show the marginality of literacy and the weight of orality in the transmission of the Vedas. This focus on the transmission of knowledge through an oral system, which is devoid of explicit (written) instructions, has been repeatedly drawn to our attention by previous scholarship. The oral method of teaching sacred texts, and particularly the Vedic texts in India, is crucial to the identity of the Veda reciters, or the *śrotriya*s, as they are also called.[32]

As one learns from the Paspaśāhnika of the Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali, it was already difficult to convince Veda reciters to study grammar or *vyākaraṇa* (inclusive of the *śikṣā/prātiśākhya* literature) in the days of Patañjali around 250–100 BCE.

> In olden days it was like this: Brahmins studied grammar after their (initiation) ceremony. After they had learnt the different places of articulation, the articulatory organs and the extra-buccal process of articulation, they were taught the Vedic words. Nowadays, it is not like this. Having

31 Staal 2008: 4.

32 Lit. "one who has heard." Other meanings listed by Monier-Williams are: "learned in the Veda, conversant with sacred knowledge; docile, modest, well-behaved; m. a Brahman versed in the Veda, theologian, divine."

> learnt the Veda [the students] are quick to say: 'the Vedic words are known [to us] from the Veda, and the ordinary words from common speech. [So] grammar is useless.' To those students entertaining false notions the teacher teaches this science [of grammar] saying: 'these are the uses, [therefore] grammar must be studied'. (Mahābhāṣya I p.5 1.6-11 (tr. Joshi and Roodbergen, 1986: 68; modified) as quoted in Bronkhorst 2002: 109)

Patañjali's claim about the "olden days" may be wishful thinking, but his observation about "nowadays" is significant. It would seem that, contrary to the claims and protestations of the grammarians and the phoneticians, a noticeable number of Vedic reciters and ritualists were not terribly interested in learning grammar or phonetics— at least since the time of Patañjali.

Many Western scholars, including myself, have remarked with astonishment at the large quantities of text memorized by Indians, whether Vedic texts or otherwise. As Staal has observed:

> A prerequisite for the traditional study of ritual is that the student knows his own Veda by heart. He must know it thoroughly, from beginning to end. When given any couple of words, he must be able to continue the recitation from there. If he is good and takes pleasure in games, he can recite it backward, recite every other word, do with the words anything that a computer can be programmed to do [...] in brief, perform precisely the kinds of exercises of which *vikṛti* 'modifications' are simple examples. On this foundation he can learn to change the traditional order that he has committed to memory; and here we witness the beginning of those extraordinary exercises that are bread and butter – or rice and ghee – of Vedic ritual. (Staal 1989: 376)

Bronkhorst has proposed that the ideal of illiteracy in the Brāhmaṇical tradition has become an "ideological trap", not only in the past *vis-à-vis* the non-*brāhmaṇa*s, but also through to today for many Indologists, as well. This trap — in which any innovations, including the technology of writing, were systematically denied in order to perpetuate a particular self-representation of Brāhmaṇism — was reproduced not only by the *brāhmaṇa*s themselves, but even by their opponents. Innovations, particularly those from within the tradition, were presented as old concepts or ideas, which "were always there". Constant attempts to legitimize innovation by referring to these ideas back to a "golden age" is not an exclusively Indian or Brāhmaṇical strategy. Other cultures tend to mythify and idealize their past in order to justify certain attitudes or ideologies (cf. Bronkhorst 2011: 43). In the Brāhmaṇical context, I agree with Bronkhorst that "illiteracy" became and continues to be an ideal to be pursued for those who adhere to the Vedic tradition in one way or another. As mentioned above, "illiteracy" here would perhaps be better termed *non-literacy*, since it is not meant as a pejorative term, where a lack of knowledge of reading or writing is seen as a disadvantage that needs to be remediated by education, but rather as a paradigm of knowledge that thrives in the absence of the technology of writing. Whether this ideal of orality in Brāhmaṇism has been historically accurate or, as Bronkhorst believes, rather been an "ideological trap" that was perpetuated, among others, through the denial or condoning of writing (Bronkhorst 2011: 46), the fact remains that any articulated

ideology has agency, and as the popular saying goes: "a lie repeated long enough becomes the truth."[33] Orality became, and has remained, an ideal of the orthodox *brāhmaṇa* up to the present age, despite the introduction of writing, print, and mass distribution of texts. This conclusion is evident from the many conversations I have had with traditional Veda reciters over the years, and those which other scholars such as Knipe (2015: 136) have observed. The development of this ideology goes hand-in-hand with the centrality of speech (*vāc*)[34] since the early Vedic period, and with the development of the philosophy (or perhaps more accurately the *theology* of language [Beck 2008]) as early as the Vedic period, and has been reinforced and expanded upon in later developments that permeate Hindu schools of thought and practice, such as Sāṃkhya-Yoga, Vedānta, and particularly Tantra, on to today.

> The special association of speech and sound with eternal reality or truth is reflected in other usages that became standard in many sectors of classical and later Hindu culture. Noteworthy here is the use of *śabda* (lit. "sound") by the classical grammarians after Patañjali (d. ca. 150 C.E.) and by the thinkers of the Mīmāṃsā school to designate the eternal Word or Speech that underlies or is embodied in all language and discourse. Also significant is the further development of the notion of the eternal meaning or essence of word or speech (*śabda*) known as *sphoṭa*, which was also identified with the Absolute by the grammarians. These later thinkers, foremost among them Bhartṛhari (d. 651 C.E.), saw the true nature of ultimate reality, or Brahman, as the eternal Word and expressed this notion with terms like *śabda-brahman*, "sound-Brahman" or *parā vāk*, the "supreme Word", the self-revelation of which is the Veda. (Graham 1987: 71)

Most of the *brāhmaṇa*s I met in the Vedic schools were not particularly interested in the content of the texts they recited. In fact, some were even irritated by the question of "meaning". This attitude can be illustrated with an anecdote told to me by Prof. Madhav Deshpande. One of the Veda reciters he met in Pune, Vedamūrti Dinkar Phaḍke, told him a story of his encounter with his Veda teacher at Benares. The teacher found him reading the commentary of Sāyaṇa on the Ṛgveda, and slapped him and reprimanded him for this endeavor. The teacher's argument was that, if one got involved in understanding the meaning of the Vedas, one could never have enough time left to become an excellent reciter.[35]

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33 The ideal of vegetarianism is such an example. Whether it was originally an ideal in early Brāhmaṇism (and, indeed, there is enough evidence that this was clearly not the case) is not the issue here, but rather that it did become an ideal, and the consequences it has for the practice of Brāhmaṇism today.

34 The authors of the *brahman* developed different models to explain how *vāc* was effective as the source and blueprint of the creation initiated by Prajāpati (Holdrege 1994: 35-66). However, the creative power of speech was also thought to be potentially disruptive, and thus needed to be 'controlled' by being 'metered' and kept under the control of sacrifice, which was personified by Prajāpati (Carpenter 1994: 19-34).

35 Personal communication with M. Deshpande, 7.12.2009.

One can observe a general resistance from the reciters to spending their precious time on learning other things like *vyākaraṇa* or on reading Sāyaṇa's commentary on the Veda (at least during their memorization periods), even if these engagements are meant to clarify the often obscure meaning of the Veda (*vedārtha*). I found many manuscripts on different subjects in the private collections of the schools and homes of the *brāhmaṇa*s I met. Some had a vague idea of their content, but for many others, most of these scriptures were simply valuable objects to be preserved. Prof. Deshpande also found a manuscript of the Śaunakīyacaturādhyāyikā at the home of an Atharvaveda reciter, Śrī Narāyāṇa Śāstrī Ratate, in Benares, but he had never studied this text.[36] This does not mean, however, that the selective and specialized knowledge of these *brāhmaṇa*s reflected ignorance of the subject matter, but rather illustrates the deliberate rejection of a particular medium for soteriological reasons.

When I asked Paṇḍit Parameshwara Aithal about the nature of his own education, he responded with the following account (that I take the liberty of paraphrasing here) on how he learned Sanskrit in the early 1950s. He received traditional training in the Ṛgveda from his teacher after receiving the *upanayana* initiation when he was 8 years old. The instruction of the Veda was purely oral, and he does not recall his *guru* using any kind of printed text for the instruction of the Ṛgveda. But what is most remarkable is the story of how he eventually learned Sanskrit grammar. After a couple of years of memorization of Vedic *mantra*s and priestly training, he became interested in the meaning of the *ṛk*s, and so he decided to study the ancient language from his *guru*, who was a very learned *paṇḍita*. Since the mornings and afternoons were already occupied with the study of the Veda and the regular priestly training, the only time left for learning Sanskrit was at night. However, there was no electricity in his hometown at that time, and the instruction took place in complete darkness, except for when the moon was visible and he could see his *guru*'s face. The instruction consisted basically of his learning the entire Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini by heart. After years of memorization of the text, his *guru* continued the instruction of Sanskrit by discussing with him oral examples, and commenting in Sanskrit on popular texts such as the Bhagavadgītā. Paṇḍit Aithal also mentioned that writing materials such as paper where not widely available, and were expensive for the average man. Thus, training in writing was often undertaken with a stick in the sand or on a dusty floor, or with water on a hot stone. It was not until years later, when he decided to continue with his formal education at the Maharaja's Sanskrit College of Mysore in 1952, and later at the University of Dharwar where he obtained his PhD in 1970, that he came in contact with books and Sanskrit literature in their material forms.

It seems that Paṇḍit Aithal's story was not an isolated case and that, not so long ago in India, it was not uncommon to receive a primarily oral education, rather than one based on writing and literacy — particularly if one came from a priestly family in

36 *Idem.*

which the Vedas were preserved.[37] Indologists, such as Renou, Filliozat, and many others, have wondered how it was possible that the Vedic tradition, and in particular the recitation of the Veda, has survived up to this day, given that very few individuals actually know the "meaning" of the Vedas, and that "even in the most orthodox domains, reverence to the Vedas has come to be a simple 'tip of the hat' made in passing to an idol with which one intends no longer to be encumbered" (Renou, as quoted in Carpenter, 1992: 57). For Filliozat, the act of recitation and memorization was simply an aid to the exegesis, and was in his day: "preserved mechanically and without faith and wit".[38] He thought that:

> This method consists in developing and enriching one's memory by filling it with an enourmous mass of textual material. But this method is only preparatory and is necessarily followed by the study of grammar and logic which will eventually explain and enlighten the memorized texts. (Filliozat 1980: 517)[39]

This emphasis on the "content" and "meaning" of the texts, or the command of Sanskrit as language itself, has indeed misled many scholars in their understanding of the traditional *literati* in India. Yes, there have been, and still are, experts in the interpretation of the sacred texts and of the Vedic rituals; there are, and have been throughout history, countless famous *paṇḍita*s in India (cf. Michaels 2001). Even in the present day, Sanskrit schools and programs both in India and abroad are being propagated and promoted as traditional Sanskrit schools. Nonetheless, there seems to be confusion between traditional *vedapāṭhaśālā*s and Sanskrit schools (also called *pāṭhaśālā*s, *mahāpāṭhaśālā*s or *mahāvidyālaya*s). The contemporary *vedapāṭhaśālā*s are concerned almost exclusively with the memorization of the Vedas through the traditional oral method of education. This, as I intend to demonstrate, is not "merely preparatory" as Filliozat thought. But it has a right and justification of its own within the tradition. Carpenter has noted that:

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37 Schools in which writing was taught, along with other subjects such as arithmetic, existed in premodern India, but generally these institutions were not exclusively attended by the orthodox *brāhmaṇa*s, but in certain areas rather by scribal (*kayastha*s) and merchant communities (Scharfe 2002: 78). Knipe (2015), in his recent monograph on the *vaidika*s of the Godavari Delta in Andhra Pradesh, also presents a Vedic tradition that is heavily oral, and in which the Veda is foremost an oral affair, where one still finds Veda reciters who are proudly illiterate (2015: 73). In the descriptions of the biographies of the learned *paṇḍita*s of Benares given by Upādhyāya, we also learn, for example, that oral instruction and examination was favoured even in the Benares Sanskrit College, where only after a few years were writing examinations introduced (Upādhyāya 1985: 408).

38 "mécaniquement préserve sans esprit et sans foi."

39 "Cette méthode consiste à développer la mémoire et à l'enrichir d'une masse énorme de matériaux. Mais elle n'est que préparatoire. Elle doit nécessairement être suivie d'enseignements de grammaire et logique, et à la lumière de ceux-ci, d'une reprise explicative des textes appris par cœur."

> To approach the question of the 'destiny of the Veda' in India from the perspective of its 'meaning' to later generations thus overlooks the fact that 'the Veda' as a text, as a 'scripture' existing in independence of a concrete social and ritual order, was, (...) largely a fiction, and that in concrete, practical terms it was much more a paradigmatic *form of action*, the authority of which was inseparable from the authority of those who engaged in it. (Carpenter 1992: 58-59, my italics)

One must not forget that access to the Vedic corpus was the exclusive privilege of an elite group within the Hindu society — the learned *brāhmaṇa*s, whose exclusive control over the Vedic corpus was, and to some extent still is, facilitated by the oral and highly ritualized form of its transmission. One should therefore not overlook the fact that the oral transmission of the Vedas plays a key role in the preservation of the Vedic tradition. From this point of view, the "meaning" of these sacred texts becomes secondary. As a result, one should not wonder why, even in the most "learned" circles of reciters, the ignorance of the "meaning" of the Vedas has become the rule rather than the exception. Most of the teachers I interviewed on the question of the importance of meaning pointed to the fact that, while meaning is significant in general, "memorization must precede understanding."[40]

The social, linguistic, and religious context in which the Vedas are still alive in the daily lives of the *brāhmaṇa* community needs special consideration in order for us to better understand this phenomenon. "Precisely for this reason", says Carpenter, "questions of the meaningful content of the Veda as a text are less important than practical questions of its proper use within Brahmanical society."[41]

The riddle of the Veda, at least for a Western audience, is that the 'informative efficiency' of its transmission can often be reduced to nil, without this transmission losing its authority or justification. If one views the Veda as a literary text with a meaning that requires interpretation, then the Vedic tradition as it has continued to exist throughout most of the post-Vedic period in India proves truly mysterious: even today, hundreds of young *brāhmaṇa* boys devote years of their lives to memorizing the Veda verbatim with very little knowledge of — or apparently, interest in — what these words mean. But if one considers the form of this transmission, as I have suggested, the riddle begins to unravel. The transmission of the Veda from generation to generation is an integral part of the transmission of the legitimate Brāhmaṇical cosmology and religious practice that solidifies a particular social order (*dharma*), and its importance in this regard is unaffected by the question of whether or not the texts being transmitted are "meaningful".

It is the principal duty of the *brāhmaṇa* to preserve and reproduce the tradition. The central acts of this task of preservation and reproduction are the daily recitation and the study of the Veda and the Vedic auxiliary "sciences" (*vedāṅga*s).

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40 Interview with Vedamūrti D. Phaḍke 3.3.2009, Alandi.

41 *Idem.*

The recitation and study of the Veda is an end in itself, and together these acts are a sufficient source of merit, whether the individual knowledge stored in the *brāhmaṇa* is actually employed in the performance of the ancient sacrifices or not. The formally correct use of sacred speech — in private recitation or, again, in teaching — is itself enough to sustain *dharma*. "In fact, it may not be an exaggeration to say that no other premodern culture studied and valued sound the way India did", as Aklujkar (2008: 191) has remarked. In light of this valorization of the sonic form of texts, Analayo (2009) provides evidence from modern psycho-pedagogical studies that strongly suggests that the oral transmission of texts, which focuses on the *form* rather on the *content*, has important consequences for its memorization. Analayo concludes:

> The reason this worked so well was not in spite of their lack of comprehension, but, as the above-mentioned psychological research suggests, very much because they did not understand what they were learning. That is, the fact that they were not taught comprehension of the text they were memorizing appears to be an integral aspect of their training and can be understood to be an important factor of their success at verbatim recall. Had they understood what they were learning by heart, the inference-drawing level of textual comprehension would have been activated and would have influenced the way in which the text was stored in their memory. (Analayo 2009: 10)

This may explain why the training of rote memorization precedes that of exegesis and ritual application, even up to today. Nonetheless, this still leaves open the question of what exact is the interaction between orality, as the exclusive transmission of form, and the transmission of content. One cannot infer that the absence of writing and the near incomprehension of the text also automatically meant a lack of transmission of content, for we know that even those concerned with the semantic message of the texts also used orality as their main medium of knowledge transmission — for a long time, in parallel with the use of script.

The role of writing and manuscript production for the memorization and recitation of the Vedas remains an obscure story, and while some scholars (see below) believe that writing had an important role to play in the transmission of Vedic systems of knowledge, the consensus is that orality has had a predominant role in the preservation of tradition. Presented in the following pages are a few considerations, which at least partially elucidate the interaction between literacy, print culture, and the oral transmission of texts in the Brāhmaṇical context.

The vast amount of scholarship on Indian manuscripts and the discipline of codicology have been of paramount importance within Indology.[42] Manuscripts and

42 Noteworthy monographs are Falk 1993 and Hinüber 1990. For a short summary of the controversial debate about the origin and early history of writing in India, see the review article by Salomon 1995. A bibliography of the most important studies up to 1955 has been collected by Janert 1955. For a study on inscriptions, see: Salomon 1998.

inscriptions have been found, catalogued, translated, and used for critical editions of many texts in the last few centuries. Despite the many efforts for the preservation, classification, and digitization of manuscripts, though, the majority of the manuscripts in India remain untouched by scholars worldwide.

As much or as little as it is now known about Indian manuscripts, the question of the relationship between the writer/copyist of a manuscript, their sponsor, and the final user often remains obscure. Not only do the manuscripts themselves give us little information about this, but it has also been a peripheral question for the scholars who work with them. In recent years, more and more scholars have developed interest in the various ways of producing knowledge, and the circulation of mansucripts and printed texts in India, to better understand the intellectual history of the region. New approaches in the study of texts — which consider them not only in regard to their content, but give equal consideration to their materiality, their agency, their contexts and circulation, and which study their reception as well as the practices surrounding them — have just begun in the study of Vedic manuscript culture (cf. Witzel 1997; Pollock 2009; the contributions in Rath 2012). With these considerations, written texts can be studied as *actants* (in the Latourian sense) who have a vital role to play in the social network of their writers, users, producers, etc., creating an approach that has been called "text anthropology" in other philological disciplines.[43] The discipline is not to be confused with the field of "literary anthropology", which studies the role that literature plays in social life and individual experience, and in particular social, cultural, and historical settings, but rather focuses on the "social life of things", as Appadurai would have it (Appadurai 1988). "Text anthropology" focuses on texts as artifacts that *do* things (Barber 2007: 3).

The relationship between sonality, orality, and literacy (or, more precisely, the use of Vedic manuscripts) has been an ambiguous one. The Vedic tradition, which has been holding orality as an ideal, and which has rejected the medium of writing for this particular knowledge so long, at some point in time ended up (at least partly) adopting the new technology of writing for their canonical texts. Why and how this happened is a question that cannot be answered in the present work, in part because it is too broad a question to deal with here, but more importantly because we are still at an early stage in the study of the large number of Vedic manuscripts and the early printed editions as artifacts in its socio-historical and cultural functions. Nonetheless, a few remarks regarding the traditional mode of transmission of the Vedas in relation to their written form are useful here.

Bronkhorst cautions against clearly distinguishing between the memorization of Vedic texts and the memorization and oral use of non-Vedic texts:

43 For more on this approache see, for example: Hilgert 2010.

> Beside ordinary memorization Indians know an altogether different kind of memorization, viz. Vedic memorization. This kind of memorization appears to be unique in the world, and must be strictly distinguished from other forms of memorization. Vedic memorization, which a youngster acquires in his teens or even earlier, uses special techniques to make sure that no syllable of the text committed to memory be lost. Understanding the content of what is learnt by heart is not part of his training, and is sometimes claimed to be a hindrance rather than a help. (Bronkhorst 2002: 798)

Bronkhorst makes the distinction between Vedic and non-Vedic texts to establish what is transmitted through "Vedic memorization" versus that which is memorized with the aid of scripture. Yet, one problem is that the boundaries of what does and does not constitute these "Vedic" texts are not so easy to locate. The classical dichotomy between *śruti* and *smṛti*, as Pollock (2005) has shown, is not always straightforward, but is context dependent. I will demonstrate, when I examine the curricula of the Vedic schools of Maharashtra, how each Vedic *śākhā* has different ways of ordering their Vedic canon, and what constitutes the essential minimum of a contemporary Vedic reciter may not be the same for each school. One can argue that the minimum is the *saṃhitā* text of each *śākhā*, but the transmission of the canonical texts of a Vedic branch can vary from school to school.[44]

Manuscripts of the older *śruti* texts are not scarce,[45] but compared to the literature written as auxiliary texts to the Vedic literature (usually considered *smṛti*), and the rules and regulations meant mainly for its users (i.e. the *brāhmaṇa*s), the number is meager. The quantity of *vedāṅga* and *upaveda* manuscripts is at least ten times larger than all the *saṃhitā* and *padapāṭha* manuscripts taken together, not to mention the vast numbers of *dharmaśāstra* manuscripts.[46] The very prolific *vedalakṣaṇa* literature, which in its majority deals with the proper recitation and ritual use of Vedic *mantra*s, is much more significant in number than the Veda manuscripts we have available so far. The numerical disparity of manuscripts *per se* does not tell us much about the how Veda manuscripts were employed, but it does suggest that probably the rote knowledge of the Veda was presupposed for the readers of genres such as *vedalakṣaṇa* or *śrauta* literature. These highly technical

44 As in the case of the Taittirīya Kṛṣṇayajurveda schools visited for this work, which typically start their studies by memorizing the easier Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa texts, followed by the Taittirīyāraṇyaka, it is only once these are mastered that the students memorize Taittirīyasaṃhitā. Additionally, the example of the education of Paṇḍit Aithal may also shed light on the fact that, despite the widespread use of writing in modern India, the instruction he received was predominantly oral, even for non-Vedic texts (like the Aṣṭādhyāyī). This, in itself, does not in any way prove the absence of the use of writing in the process of modern Vedic memorization; however, as we will see in subchapter 3.7, written texts are still being used as *aide-mémoirs* rather than as an aim in themselves.

45 According to the Pune edition of the Ṛgvedasaṃhitā (1972), there are at least 80 manuscripts of this text alone, most of them dating from the seventeenth century CE onwards. This number increases significantly if we add other texts, considered *śruti*, to the list.

46 Aithal 1991: 15.

texts were meant for the experts of these traditions, not for the layman. The whole *śikṣā* literature is meant to preserve the proper recitation of the text, but it assumes to a certain extent the very knowledge of the texts it discusses. The fact that there are currently many styles of Vedic recitation (and many more are attested to have died out), speaks of a strong commitment to memorize the texts that were employed piecemeal in the Vedic ritual.

Müller, in his introduction of the Ṛgveda in 1850, contrasted the commentary of Sāyaṇa with the Ṛgvedasaṃhitā text, lamenting that the transmission of the former was full of errors in comparison to the later:

> The former [i.e. the Saṃhitā text] was by far the easier task. The MSS. of the Rig-veda have generally been written and corrected by the Brahmans with so much care that there are no various readings in the proper sense of the word, except those few which are found noticed as such in the commentaries or in the Prātiśākhyas. Even these are generally of small importance, and seldom affect the meaning of a sentence. [...] It was not necessary for an editor of the Rig-veda to collate a greater number of MSS., or to classify them according to their age and origin. I have seen nearly all the MSS. of the Rig-veda, which exist in Europe and I am convinced that no use can be derived from them as manuscripts because all of them are but transcripts, more or less carefully executed, of one and the same text. If there were as in other Sanskrit works, corrupt passages on which doubts might exist, a comparison of the Saṃthitā-text (original) with the Pada-text (a text in which the compounds are dissolved and the words divided) or a reference to the commentary, would have been sufficient to remove such doubts. [...] I have now to state the principle, which I have followed in editing the commentary of Sāyaṇa. If the MSS. of the Rig-veda are generally the best, the MSS. of the commentaries are nearly the worst to be met with in Sanskrit libraries: they have generally been copied by men who did not understand what they were writing, and the number of mistakes is at first sight quite discouraging. No class of writings would have needed more to be copied by men who were masters of their subject than commentaries such as these [...] This may be accounted for by the fact that Indian authors trust so much to their memory as to quote generally by heart. (Müller as quoted in Janert 1995: XI)

One could argue the plausibility that the reality was exactly the opposite of what Müller wrote in his introduction to his edition, namely in that the main scribes actually knew very little of the meaning of the Ṛgvedic hymns, but knew exactly how to reproduce every single syllable and accent of the text which they knew by memory.

With a few earlier exceptions, most Vedic texts were written down for the first time during the early second millennium CE. However, it is ironic that almost all printed editions of the Vedas available today "depend on the late manuscripts that are hardly older than 500 years, not on the still extant and superior oral tradition." (Jamison and Witzel 2003: 69)

As Galewicz (2011) has remarked, there were different actors involved in the production of manuscripts — through their copyists, correctors, owners, reciters, readers, and commentators. Similarly, one finds evidence for different kinds of scribes who had different tasks: the copyists of the text without accentuation and the

scribes of accented texts (*svarakāra*s) who occasionally added the missing accents at a later stage. On the other hand, the scribes who copied the commentary of Sāyaṇa (or any other commentary, for that matter) probably did not posses the same oral command over the text as they did with the Saṃhitā — the amount of variations found in the manuscripts being proof of this — and, in addition, understood perhaps more of the meaning of Sāyaṇa's text, enabling them to 'correct' unintelligible passages, thus interpolating mistakes.

> The later efforts, from Nirukta to Sāyaṇa, to engage once again with the content of the Vedic songs reveal to the unbiased observer that, far from preserving the original tradition, a new one is begun — one that seldom goes beyond guessing. (Janert, 1995: 6)[47]

As Falk has pointed out in his *Schrift im alten Indien*, the surface and the writing systems are of relevance since the reproduction of Vedic sounds was not suitable in the same degree for each script and writing material (Falk 1993: 284). Moreover, even in the manuscripts, which use scripts suitable for reproducing the phonetic particularities of Sanskrit, at least half of them are not accented. A Vedic manuscript without accents is exceedingly hard for a reader to comprehend unless he is very familiar with the content because, as is well known, accents in Vedic are essential to semantic meaning.[48] It is important to note here that the Vedas were not originally intended to be read in silence, but to be recited out loud. If the manuscripts do not have accents, it is virtually impossible for someone to properly recite even one sentence of the Veda. One may recall here that silent reading was not a common practice anywhere in the world until well into the Middle Ages, and writers assumed that their readers would hear rather than simply see a given text. "Religious reading" with its emphasis on repeated rereading and memorization, and upon the establishment of a moral relation between reader and work, contrasts even more drastically against the "consumerist reading" one is accostumed to in modern contexts (Griffiths 1999: 52). Additionally, as Doniger has remarked: "It made no more sense to 'read' the Veda than it would simply to read the score of a Brahms symphony and never hear it" (Doniger 2009: 106). Even accented manuscripts are nothing but a more detailed *aide-mémoire* for the reciter, who will know the finesses of the proper recitation only because of oral instruction.

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47 "Die späteren Versuche vom Nirukta bis Sāyaṇa, sich wieder—mit dem Inhalt der Lieder zu beschäftigen, lassen beim unvoreingenommenen Hinschauen bald erkennen, dass man, statt in der originalen Tradition der Auslegung zu stehen, eine neue beginnt und dabei selten über das Raten hinauskommt." Translation by the author.

48 The very often cited example of the *indraśatru* legend (Tsaṃ 2.4.12.1, ŚB 1.6.3.). in which Tvaṣṭṛ loses his head for mispronouncing (or misplacing the accent) clearly illustrates the point. For more details, see for example: Jamison 1991.

Already, Bühler believed that manuscripts might have been used for pedagogical reasons:

> There is no reason to assume that, even in Vedic times (as is the case today), manuscripts were used in India as auxiliary tools in teaching, as well as in other circumstances. The undeniable fact that brāhmī lipi (Brahmā's script) was developed by phoneticians and grammarians is an argument in favor of such an assumption. (Bühler 1896: 4)[49]

Thieme (1935: 120-30) was also convinced of an early written fixation (at least since the time of Yāska, i.e. the sixth or seventh century BCE) of the text. According to him, it was precisely this early written fixation that gave the Vedic Saṃhitās the necessary closure needed for a fixed oral transmission in the different Vedic schools. Bronkhorst (1982) also believes that writing had an important role in the consolidation of the Padapāṭha, and has argued that, in the versions which are available today, the word-by-word recitation is in fact older than the Saṃhitā.

Other observations also speak for the preference of orality over writing in Indian knowledge transmission. The peculiar style found in the ritual Sūtras, and later used as a literary device, simplifies the memorization of the texts.[50] Furthermore, the use of deictic pronouns and the exclusion of much of the ritual *minutiae* indicate that the Sūtras were also part of the oral instruction of a preceptor to his pupil. As was the case with the *śruti* texts, the ritual Sūtras were transmitted in the different *śākhā*s with their own unique collections of *mantra*s, as well as their own distinct knowledge of ritual application.

Therefore, it would be meaningful to ask, at this point, why were the Saṃhitās and other Vedic texts written down in a culture so centered on orality? What was their purpose, and how were these manuscripts used? Who was the target audience, and who commissioned these texts? Can one reduce manuscripts to *aide-memoire*s for forgetful *vaidika*s? The manuscripts themselves tell us otherwise. But, before entering into details, I will make a short excursion into the manuscript culture of India and into the various uses of manuscripts. Only then will we be better able to understand the interrelations between the written word and the Brāhmaṇical transmission of knowledge by oral means.

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49 "Es liegt aber natürlich kein Grund vor anzunehmen, dass nicht trotzdem, selbst in der ‚vedischen' Zeit, Manuskripte wie jetzt (noch) nebensächliche Hilfsmittel (In Indien) beim Unterricht und sonst gebraucht wurden. Man kann auch die unleugbare Tatsache, dass die brāhmī lipi („die zu Brahma gehörige Schrift"?) von Phonetikern oder Grammatikern ausgebildet ist, als ein Argument für solche Vermutung anführen." Translation by the author.

50 For the peculiarities of the *sūtra* style, see: Gonda 1977.

1.5 Manuscript Culture and the Use of a Text

Using the authors of ritual books as the only witnesses [of rituals] *is like using traffic laws to describe traffic.*
–Axel Michaels[51]

The question of why it is relevant to understand manuscripts in the Indian context in order to comprehend the transmission of the Vedas in contemporary India is one whose answer may sound too obvious. However, it is often forgotten in our script-centred worldview: manuscripts and books are not only texts; they are artifacts and, as such, they can play different roles in a given context. Following the terminology employed by Veidlinger (2007: 5-7), manuscripts can have at least two roles: 'cultic' and 'discursive'.[52] The main difference between the discursive and cultic roles is that, in the discursive, the words of the text are actually read, whereas in the cultic, the manuscript as a whole is treated iconically, generally as a physical embodiment of a particular knowledge. In other words, texts can also be seen as artifacts that have a social-life of their own — beyond their textuality.

As Pollock has pointed out, until recently, there were but a "few sustained analyses of the core dimensions of manuscript culture in the subcontinent, aside from old-style text criticism" (Pollock 2007: 77). By this, he means that few scholars have looked at the broader question of what it meant for the cultures of the subcontinent when the Indian writing system began to be used more frequently, or how writing and the production and circulation of texts has shaped the relationship between orality and literacy — and, in turn, shaped the socio-political order of this region.

Starting in the second millennium CE, literary writing began to be used in local languages and referred to as the "vernacular revolution" (Pollock 2007: 83). In contrast to other cultures in different parts of the world, instead of threatening or

51 Michaels 2004a: 99.

52 According to Veidlinger, the 'cultic' usage of a manuscript may be divided into two modalities, 'seen' and 'unseen'. 'Seen' refers to the actual worship of a physical manuscript visible to at least one person — for example, by ritually offering flowers, vermillion, and/or incense to the manuscript or by displaying it in a temple, or in a festive procession. The 'unseen' would refer to the worship of a text that cannot be visually accessed, such as when the texts might be hidden inside '*stupa*s', '*grantha samādhi*s', or other symbolic visual representations such as statues (*mūrti*s) of the texts or manuscripts. In a similar argument, Robertson (2004) distinguishes between direct and indirect representation. Indirect representation occurs when an icon that looks like the object represented is used to reference the text or word. The representation is thus indirect because it proceeds from iconic sign to object to words. In contrast, direct representation is when the textual signs correspond to actual words, i.e. syllables or phonemes — the link between the sign and the spoken sound is direct. In subchapter 6.3, I will present an example from a temple in Nashik whose main deity is a marble representation of the Vedas as a book, and in which the text is worshiped as Bhagavān Ved. Cf. also Myrvold 2010.

eradicating oral practices, up to the late twentieth century in the subcontinent, they remained both an ideal and a fact among most of the cultural elites. In fact, even today the Indian public education system emphasizes rote learning as a pedagogical tool, regardless of the topic.

In Vedic communities, the resistance towards the use of writing and the insistence on memory was recurrent and vastly shared by both Theravada Buddhists and Jains, up to the early centuries of this millennium. (Pollock 2006: 56-59) Specialized monks, known as *bhāṇaka*s, were charged with the task of memorizing the early texts, and this tradition continued for many centuries after the texts were committed to writing. In most Buddhist traditions, the memorization of sacred texts remains an important practice among monks, long after the advent of Mahāyāna Buddhism's reverence for the written word.[53] Jains, too, initially transmitted their texts orally during the centuries before they were committed to writing, but "Jain textual history focuses on the loss of certain Jain texts by lack of memory and calamity. The philosophical debates about Jain 'canon' are based on whether the texts have been remembered. It is a small wonder that Jains would turn to manuscript collections to protect their religious knowledge, as they have been taught that the oldest texts were nearly (or completley, as Digambars believe) lost through the years." (Kelting 2001: 67)

According to Pollock, it was with the advent of the Indian literary tradition called *kāvya* that manuscript culture began to gain importance in the subcontinent:

> From the beginning of the Common Era *kāvya* was always committed to writing and always circulated in manuscript form. Again, this is not to deny a continuing role for the oral performance of these written texts, or for the memorizing of such tests, let alone to deny a continuing vitality of primary oral poetry, which remains strong to this day in many communities in South Asia. But from the moment writing was invented the literary culture that resulted, the culture of *kāvya*, became indissolubly connected with manuscript culture, so much that the history of the one becomes unintelligible without taking into account the history of the other. (Pollock 2007: 81)

The fact that *kāvya* literature and other genres of Indian literature were committed to writing does not explain the reason why the Vedas, which were mainly preserved orally, came to be written down. Was the influence of *kāvya* and the massive manuscript production that started in the first centuries of the last millennium so strong as to incite the production of Vedic manuscripts? Could it be that Pollock has cause and effect reversed, and that *kāvya* developed because of the increased use of writing, rather than *vice versa*?

Even if this hypothesis might be part of the answer, one would need to still examine the extent to which this might have been possible, since it remains improbable

53 An excellent collection on the subject is Berkwitz, Schober, and Brown 2009.

that the Veda was ever publicly read in the way that *kāvya* was.[54] Moreover, even when a relatively prolific production of Vedic manuscripts is attested, this does not necessarily imply that these texts were actually used for individual reading in the literary sense, and nor does this tell us what relationship the manuscripts had to the oral transmission of knowledge — not even that the Veda was actually transmitted through written means.

Nonetheless, coming back to the discursive role of manuscripts, the classification of Griffiths (1999) used by Veidlinger, this role is threefold: composition, display, and storage.

The first refers to the process by which the text is written down on a particular surface — usually, though not always, prior to its display. The 'display' refers to two main modalities: "the work may be read silently or read out loud." It is important to further differentiate, in the case of reading out loud, "whether they are read in a bounded ritual/liturgical context, or whether they are studied, discussed, and commented upon in a scholastic environment" (Veidlinger 2007: 6).

After the canonization of the central texts of the Veda, the *saṃhitā*s have only rarely been the direct focus of exegetic study,[55] albeit that they have been regarded as the main source of authority by philosophic and scholastic traditions.[56] The Upaniṣads, on the other hand, an on which the Vedāntic philosophy relies, have been widely cited and quoted by the philosophical traditions of India, including in public and courtly debates.

After the advent of these two discursive modalities of displaying texts (ritual/liturgical and scholastic) comes the third, namely 'storage'. This final role gives a "work that has been composed and displayed the ability to be redisplayed and thus transmitted over time" (Veidlinger 2007: 6). It is pertinent to note that this mode mainly references the physical storage of the written text. In India, this can take the form of palm-leaf manuscripts or the *vedamūrti*, who has the ability to reproduce a text orally.

The above differentiation of roles might seem obvious, but the fact that the multifaceted dimensions of a text have often been neglected by our script-centred

54 Although, acording to authoritative Brāhmaṇical texts the Veda restricted to the three upper classes (*varṇa*) and usually only accesible to a *brāhmaṇa* audience, in contemporary India, the Veda is often publicly recited in temples (*pārāyaṇa*), particularly in South India. Public performances of Vedic recitation are also found during religious programs, and even at the beginning of rallies with a Hindu Nationalist political agenda. These practices that open the Veda for a larger audience are rather performative and could be considered in a sense as "speech acts" (Searle 1969), albeit, in this case, that the actual meaning of the text is unknown to the audience, and more often than not to the reciter, as well. On the question of *mantra*s as "speech acts", see: Taber 1989.

55 The most famous examples being the Vedārthaprakāśa and the Ṛgvedabhāṣya of Sāyaṇa.

56 Particularly for the Mīmāmsā school of thought.

scholarship highlights the importance of these aspects for a manuscript culture which is embedded in a context that highly values orality.

Another crucial factor in manuscript culture is the economy of the text. The manuscript as a form of material culture was laden with a symbolic value, and could therefore be bought, sold, or gifted. A hand-written manuscript was costly, and it was often produced as a result of royal or private patronage. Scribes were paid to produce a certain number of copies of a text that were often used as diplomatic tools. These copies were sent to libraries of neighbouring or distant kingdoms, or offered as royal gifts, and were meant to signify ritual and magical significance at least as much as they were meant to be read. Galewicz (2010), in his study of the imperial project of the Vijayanagara dynasty's sponsorship of Vedic commentaries, has shed light on the production and distribution of manuscripts. In addition, Galewicz (2011) has explored the concept of the "gift of knowledge" (*vidyādāna*) and the "gift of *brahman*" (*brahmadāna*) in relation to the gifting of manuscripts to *brāhmaṇa*s. While this "gift of knowledge" more often refers to types of knowledge other than the Veda proper, in some cases, the Vedic manuscripts have been counted as part of the ceremonial gift of knowledge. According to the opinion of Nīlakaṇṭha in his Dānamāyukha: "Threefold may be the gift of knowledge: gift of book, gift of image, and teaching."[57]

The experience of memorizing the Vedas as a *brahmacārin* in fourteenth century Karnataka was of course quite different from the experience today in modern industrialized India. The same can be said of teaching the Vedas, employing its different texts within various ritual contexts, and studying or writing commentaries on them while utilizing a very different scholastic perspective. Galewicz writes: "Each situation entailed a contact with a different Veda of sorts. Thus written copies potentially addressing these different situations should not necessarily look the same and be the outcome of one and the same process" (Galewicz 2011: 123). By possessing, acquiring, gifting, or selling a manuscript, tangible and intangible cultural capital is circulated in different forms. The circulation of cultural capital in the form of manuscripts also occurred in different contexts involving different networks formed by many human and non-human actants (to use Latour's terminology). These include patrons, political institutions, scribes, readers, reciters, priests, *svarakāra*s, and even deities.

One find, even within the law digests called Dharmanibandhas, a sub-category called Dānanibandhas, or digests specializing in the rules for gifting (*dāna*). In the Dānakāṇḍa ("Book on Gifting"), the fifth section of the Kṛtyakalpataru of Lakṣmīdhara, one finds the intricate rules for gift giving and receiving. As an example of the gifiting of knowledge in the form of manuscripts, Lakṣmīdhara cites the Devīpurāṇa (91.12-16): "I will now explain the gift of knowledge which pleases the Divine Mothers. Hear

57 *evaṃ trividham vidyādānam pustakadānaṃ pratimādānaṃ adhyāpanaṃ ceti*. As quoted in Galewicz 2011: 123.

from me the rules in accordance with which knowledge should be written down and given! Giving the Siddhānta scriptures on liberation and the Vedas brings about such things as heaven. The Vedāṅgas and epics should be given in order to promote the Law (dharma)"; and further, "a man should have a text comprising twelve thousand verses written down on a well-consolidated, uniform, palm-leaf copybook that is equipped with a colourful string to bind it and covered with red or black, soft or embossed leather that is firmly bound with thread and thus properly made. If a person does this and gives the book to a suitable person, he goes to the ultimate state" (as cited in Brick 2009: 143-44). From these and other non-Vedic examples on the ritual gift of manuscripts, it can concluded that it is plausible that manuscripts of all sorts, including Veda manuscripts, were at least partly produced in order that they be ritually gifted.[58] (Bisschop 2014; De Simini 2013; 2014).

Generally, the postcolonial critique of Orientalism suffers from the same disease its proponents have diagnosed: it presents the Brāhmaṇical ideology and the textual material used by the colonial Orientalists as a cohesive and homogeneous unit from which a monolithic upper caste-dominated ideology (i.e. Hinduism) was constructed. The critique has presented *brāhmaṇa*s in the same light which they have been imagined and idealized in in the Mānavadharmaśāstra[59] and other Brāhmaṇical texts: as orthopraxic, puritanical, and caste-obsessed. This unfortunate trend has also permeated large parts of previous Indological scholarship, which gave us the impression that there existed a pan-Indian "Brāhmaṇism", a homogenous community of *brāhmaṇa*s with an equally homogenous attitude towards writing and orality. In this sense, it would be productive to apply the same postcolonial critique to "Brāhmaṇism" in order to establish that it is as much of an over-inclusive concept as "the Arabs" or "Christendom", and that a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach breaks the ideological and cultural homogeneity that is inherent in the cultural and religious assumptions of colonialist logic. It is clear from the examples mentioned above, and from evidence presented elsewhere[60], that there was never such a thing as a cohesive group of *brāhmaṇa*s who shared the same practices and attitudes towards the Veda. "[...] (D)istinct *brāhmaṇa* communities developed their own distinct ways of handling their proper parts of Vedic heritage in manners marking their distinct identities." (Galewicz 2011: 119-120)

Even *brāhmaṇa*s belonging to the same group within the same kingdom could have completely different worldviews and be exposed to completely different social and ideological environments. For example, *brāhmaṇa*s employed in the court of a local king would likely have a slightly different worldview from *brāhmaṇa*s living in even the same kingdom, but in an isolated *agrahāra* in the jungle. Therefore, "We may

58 For details on *vidyādāna* see: Bricks 2009 and De Simini 2013.

59 For example: MānDhŚ I.93-100 (Olivelle 2005a: 91-92).

60 Cf. Deshpande 2012; Witzel 1993; Lubin 2005; O'Hanlon 2010 and 2011.

probably expect motifs for copying the Veda to be functionally different in matching different cultural contexts" (Galewicz 2011: 125).

Today, these different attitudes and approaches towards the Brāhmaṇical tradition and the Veda can also be clearly observed among the *brāhmaṇa* reciters of Maharashtra. Not only regional variations, but the degree of exposure to modern discourses, socio-political influences, and even personal experiences and education influence the ways in which they represent themselves and construct a specific identity in relation to the Veda.

It has been pointed out in this brief analysis of Sanskritic manuscript culture that other ways of using and conceiving manuscripts came to acquire important roles which partly explain why manuscripts of the Vedic corpus were produced for reasons other than reading them in the conventional sense of the word. This evidence, summarized above, favors the theory that the oral transmission and the aural form of the Veda has remained the privileged medium of transmission and use within the *brāhmaṇa* communities, on up to the present day.

2 Framing the Veda: General Contexts

What does it imply, to study the transmission of the Veda in contemporary Maharashtra? Who are the *brāhmaṇa* reciters of the Veda today? Under what circumstances have these schools emerged, and how have decisive socio-political changes in the last two to three centuries shaped the cultural memory of the custodians of Veda and their social networks? Understanding the contemporary transmission of the Vedas and determining those relations which still allow us to speak of a "Vedic tradition" is possible only on a subordinated level, circumscribed regionally and contextually.

In the following subchapters, I present four main contextual elements that frame my understanding of the *vedapāṭhaśāla*s of Maharashtra. I begin by mapping the *brāhmaṇa*s in Maharashtra and considering precolonial patronage systems in the region. Secondly, I address sociocultural changes introduced with modernity and globalization, and their direct implications for the Vedic schools. Thirdly, I consider the particular relationship between the predominant *bhakti* religiosity and Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy in the state. Finally, in subchapter 2.4, I consider the homogenizing forces of Reform Hinduism and the drastic impact these forces have had on perceptions about Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy at large.

2.1 *Brāhmaṇa*s in Maharashtra

The concepts of space and place have increasingly become the interest of scholars in social and cultural sciences. Feldhaus (2003), one of the most influential scholars on Maharashtra, has studied the region as a 'place' in which emotional and cognitive experiences, meanings, and identities are weaved into a geographical awareness. Language, culture, and religious practices are often deeply connected to a specific place.

> A person *cares* about places, likes them or dislikes them, longs to go to them, to return to them, to leave them, or not to leave them. In some cases, the sense of region as place includes a sense of the place as one's *own* place, one's home, a place that one belongs to and that belongs to one in some important way. Even further, awareness of *where* one is (or where one comes from) can become an important element in understanding who one is: it can become a vital aspect of a person's identity. (Feldhaus 2003: 7)

Bearing this in mind, I approach the Vedic schools as places in which the identity of the *vaidika* is often constructed in relation to place(s) and its cultural memory — not only in connection to the region of Maharashtra, but also with regard to how *brāhmaṇa*s have understood the land they call Bhārata and how that relates to the reality of a secular nation state. Of course, when talking about Maharashtra, one needs to remember that its modern political bounderies are no older than a few decades, as it was officially constituted in 1960. But the name "Maharashtra" had

been in use for this region for over a millennium and a half (Feldhaus 2003 :8), and it developed unique cultural traits over the course of its long history.

A common division of *brāhmaṇa* groups in India is between the five northern *brāhmaṇa* groups (*pañcagauḍa*) and the five southern *brāhmaṇa* groups (*pañcadrāviḍa*), these being divided across the Vindhya.[61] The northern *brāhmaṇa*s are the Sārasvata (from Panjab), the Gauḍa (from the area around Delhi), the Kānyakubja (from the Kanauj area), the Maithila (from Mithila), and the Utkala (from Orissa); the southern groups are the Mahārāṣṭrakas (from Maharashtra), the Tailaṅga (from Andhra Pradesh), the Drāviḍa (from Tamil Nadu and Kerala), the Karṇāṭa (from Karnataka), and the Gurjāra (from Gujarat). All of the ten groups have subgroups within this overarching regional classification. While some evidence suggests that this division is not very old — and that this classification was prone to conflict at the point in history when *brāhmaṇa*s migrated south — and these group divisions overlapped in certain regions such as Maharashtra,[62] it has now become the most widespread taxonomy among contemporary *brāhmaṇa*s.

Roughly, Maharashtra has two major geographical subdivisions: the Desh and the Konkan. The Desh is centered on the upper Godāvarī Valley, in the northwestern Deccan Plateau, and is the homeland of the Deśastha *brāhmaṇas*. The Konkan is the coastal lowland between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea, and comprises the six districts of Mumbai, Mumbai Suburban, Raigad, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg, and Thane. The Koṅkaṇ of Maharashtra stretches from well north of Mumbai to Goa on the south, and covers 30,746 km^2. This is the ancestral home of the Koṅkaṇastha *brāhmaṇa*s and their subdivisions, as their name indicates.

The Maharashtra *brāhmaṇa*s are again popularly divided into five groups: Citpāvan Koṅkaṇastha *brāhmaṇa*s, Gauḍa Sarasvat *brāhmaṇa*s, Deśastha *brāhmaṇa*s, Karḥāḍe *brāhmaṇa*s and Devrukhe *brāhmaṇa*s. Although other classifications exist, O'Hanlon (following Gunjikar) mentions the following groups:

> [...] the Desasthas of the Deccan uplands, and the multiple small communities of the Konkan littoral: Chitpavans or Chiplunas, Karhades, Senavis or Saraswats, Devarukhes, Kiravants, Padyas and Palshes. As might be expected, the histories of these names are difficult to identify with certainty. Some seem to derive from towns where there were large settlements of those subgroups, such as Chiplun, Karhad, Devarukhe and Palshe. Some appear to be titles derived from a particular mode of livelihood. Kiravants, for example, were said to be Saraswat Brahmans fallen from their high status by taking on the ritual work of many Sudra menials, hence their

61 This popular division is found in the Sahyādrikhaṇḍa of the Skandapurāṇa, a chapter of the text which tells the story of Maharashtra (Levitt 1977: 8-40; Levitt 1982: 128-145). In addition to this reference, a popular verse found in the Rājataraṅgiṇī of Kalhaṇa that is often cited by *brāhmaṇa* associations, gives the following description: *karṇātakāś ca tailaṃgā drāviḍā mahārāṣṭrakā gurjarāś ceti pañcaiva drāviḍā vindhyadakṣiṇe// sārasvatāḥ kānyakubjā gauḍā utkalamaithilāḥ pañcagauḍā iti khyātā vindhyottaravāsi*.

62 Deshpande 2002: 73-75.

> name *kriyāvanta* or 'possessed of many rituals'. Saraswat community histories explain the title 'Senavi', applied to Saraswat Brahmans who had moved up from Goa into the Konkan, as a derivation from the Sanskrit term *śahāna*, meaning clever or learned, referring to their clerical and scholarly pursuits. (O'Hanlon 2010: 206)

Due to the current state of research, it is difficult to trace how these groups came to be constituted and the nature of their relationships in premodern times. The political dynamics of the settlements in villages gifted as land to *brāhmaṇa*s and otherwise motivated migrations — as well as changes of livelihood and ritual rivalry, not to mention shifting patterns of commensality and marriage relations — are some of the elements that still need to be studied in depth if one wants to gain more clarity on the settlement of *brāhmaṇa*s and on their interactions with the rest of society in the territory today known as Maharashtra.

Maharashtra has been a land in which the Vedic tradition has both flourished and decayed, and where *brāhmaṇa*s have had an important socio-political role to play over time. Recent studies in the historical dynamics of *brāhmaṇa*s have pointed to the vast diversity of the *brāhmaṇa* communities of this land, and to the not always smooth shifts of power in this region (for example: Deshpande 2012 and O'Hanlon 2010, quoted above). Such studies have also shown how these power relations are entangled in larger socio-political processes that have affected not only this region, but also the rest of the subcontinent. Who was entitled to be called a *brāhmaṇa*, and what it meant to be one, has been a matter of heated debate and been tied to ritual, political, and economic privileges, as well as a matter of survival since premodern times. Who had the right to use Vedic *mantra*s in ritual and who could study the Veda did not always go uncontested. Tensions and accusations with legal consequences were not uncommon in Maharashtra during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

While scripturally the ideal of the *brāhmaṇa* has been linked to ritual activity and the recitation of the Veda, there is enough textual, epigraphic, and ethnographic evidence to suggest that *brāhmaṇa*s from an early period onwards engaged in occupations that did not require expertise in the Veda, and thus were concerned with the world (*laukika*), as opposed to those who were concerned mainly with the transmission of the Veda and the Vedic ritual (*vaidika*) (Fischer-Tiné and Mann 2004). For example, as documented in the family records (*kulavṛttānta*s) studied by Patterson, the percentage of Citpāvan *brāhmaṇa*s who were exclusively engaged in religious activities was only 5.5% (Patterson 1970: 393). While this percentage was certainly not the same among all the *brāhmaṇa* groups, it hints to the fact that *brāhmaṇa*s have long been engaged in other occupations besides priesthood and traditional religious activity[63] (cf. Talbot 1988 and 1991). This small example also hints to a rather dislocated imagination around the ideal *brāhmaṇa* and the actual

63 For more on the topic and for an example of the history of *brāhmaṇas* in the military, see: Chuyen 2004: 61-93.

modes of the livelihoods of *brāhmaṇa*s. It is clear from various Sanskrit sources, particularly the Dharmasūtras and Gṛhyasūtras, that the prescription of what it meant to be a *brāhmaṇa* varied a great deal during the constitutive period of this literature, and sometimes even within the same prescriptive text (Lubin 2005). Also, historical and ethnographic research has shown that *brāhmaṇa*s often constructed their identities primarily in terms of patrilinear kinship, alliance, and lineage (Michaels 2004a: 121-124), on which the Brāhmaṇical ideals of purity and hierachy (as exposed in the Śāstric literature) were constructed, but not necessarily rigidly followed. Therefore, one cannot take the category of the *brāhmaṇa* for granted since historical and regional variations of what it meant to be one had to be constantly renegotiated in their given contexts. Nonetheless, a histographic reconstruction of what it meant to be a *brāhmaṇa* in the context of Maharashtra is a task that lies beyond the scope of this work. This being the case, in the following section, I have to limit myself to some general observations regarding the local history of *brāhmaṇa*s that I consider particularly important in the representation of the modern identity of the orthodox *brāhmaṇa* in this particular region of India.

The presence of *brāhmaṇa* groups in Maharashtra goes back as early as the Gupta period, where evidence in the form of inscriptions of land donations to *brāhmaṇa*s from the Vākāṭaka dynasty has been collected. An example of these grants is the so-called Chammak Charter published by John Faithfull Fleet in 1888 in his *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*. The Chammak Charter consists of a series of copper plates written in Sanskrit, documenting a land donation to *brāhmaṇa*s undern the reigning king, Pravarasena II, in the fifth century CE. The grant consisted of 8,000 *bhūmi*s to a "thousand *brāhmaṇa*s of various *gotra*s and *caraṇa*s" (some mentioned by name) in the district which is today known as Amravati. The copper plates read that among the community of predominantly *yajurvedin*s and *atharvavedin*s also *caturvedin*s received royal favors, and that the Vākāṭaka ruler Pravarasena I had performed various *śrauta* rituals, including the well-known *atirātra*, *vājapeya*, and four *aśvamedha*s (Mirashi 1963: 22-28).

Different dynasties ruled substantial parts of the area now known as Maharashtra: the Sātavāhanas (first century BCE to 250 CE), the Ābhīras (third century CE), the Vākāṭakas (25–510 CE), the Kalacuris (fifth to sixth centuries CE), the Western Cālukyas (560–750 CE), the Rāṣṭrakūṭas (750–950 CE), the Śilāhāras (tenth to twelfth centuries CE), and then the Yādavas, who were the first dynasty to rule a Marathi-speaking kingdom in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. (Feldaus 2003: 8). During these centuries, despite a strong Buddhist and Jaina presence that won the favors of many rulers in the region, patronage towards *brāhmaṇa*s continued under these dynasties and empires, some giving more generous land grants and gifts to them than others. The gifting of land to *brāhmaṇa*s and the construction and expansion of royal temples served the purpose of creating an important network of ritual, political, and economic relations — not only in Maharashtra, but in other regions of India, primarily in the south (Kulke and Rothemund 2004: 138-40).

In 1296, the Muslim power of ʻAlā-ud-dīn Khiljī conquered the Yādavas, and parts of the territory of today's Maharashtra came under a series of Muslim sultanates and empires, including the Bāhmanīs (1347–late 1400s),the Sultanate of Bijapur (founded in 1489/90), and the Ahmadnagar Sultanate (1489/90–1633) (Feldaus 2003: 8). It was not until Islamic rule in the fourteenth century that significant changes in patronage for the *brāhmaṇa*s took place when the Khiljīs and their successors not only stopped state patronage, but also enforced taxes on non-Muslim subjects, which later (under the last important Sultan of Delhi, Firuz Shah Tughlaq) was extended to *brāhmaṇa*s who had previously been exempted (Kulke and Rothemund 2004: 178). Additionally, the violent expansion of the Mughal Empire became feared in central-west India as they looted and destroyed Hindu temples and institutions. These socio-political changes in many ways disturbed the economic privileges enjoyed by *brāhmaṇa*s, and thus traditional knowledge systems and Vedic learning in particular were partly abandoned in order that they could find profitable occupations among the new rulers.

The Mughal Empire rapidly expanded throughout most of the Sub-continent (except for the very southern areas), partly due to the use of firearms and artillery that had been previously unknown in this part of the world. The political, administrative, and military structures which extended through seven generations maintained a record of unusual administrative organization. Akbar, through incessant warfare, was able to annex all of northern and part of central India. Despite this fact, he is also known for having adopted a tolerant position toward his Hindu subjects, and he sought to enlist them in his armies and government service. The tolerance of Akbar and his son Jahāngīr stood in marked contrast to the Muslim religious bigotry displayed by his successor, Aurangzeb, who reigned from 1658 to 1707. During the period of Aurangzeb's reign, the Mughal Empire expanded so much that it could hardly be ruled any longer (Kulke and Rothemund 2004: 206). The first half of the seventeenth century was a very tumultuous period in central-west India, as Mughal forces, having eliminated the Nizām Shāh sultanate, attempted to expand southward into the Ādil Shāh sultanate, whose capital was at Bijapur. Local Hindu chiefs and hired troops in the region (who were increasingly identified by the term 'Marāṭhā') shifted alliances among various sultanates and minor factions. From among these military leaders, Śivājī began slowly and successfully raiding, hiding, fighting, and forging greater alliances with local petty rulers. Śivājī's tactics allowed him to claim greater sovereignty and taxation rights, as well as to demand greater fealty from the petty rulers below him. Finally, in 1674, when he managed to consolidate significant power, he had himself crowned the universal emperor with 11,000 *brāhmaṇa*s reciting the Veda at his consecration ceremony (Wolpert 1993: 165). By the time of his death in 1680, Śivājī had amassed a substantial treasury, and the command of over one hundred forts in western Maharashtra. With this reach, he established the foundation of an empire that would expand greatly over the next century. The Marāṭhā Empire and the subsequent historical developments were crucial to the manners in which

Maharashtrians experienced social change, and now continue to refer to the past in order to construct their collective memory.

Śivājī's son met with rather less success, although this was in part due to adjustments by Aurangzeb and his generals to the Marāṭhās' guerilla tactics. Śivājī's grandson, Śāhū, was more fortunate, in one sense, because he appointed a particularly skillful *brāhmaṇa* from the Konkan coast, Bālājī Viśvanāth, as his minister (*peśva*) in 1713. Although Śāhū was technically the king of the Marāṭhās, it was through Bālājī's diplomacy and military decisions that the empire began to stabilize. Bālājī was also responsible for appointing fellow members of his sub-caste (Citpāvan *brāhmaṇa*s) to influential and lucrative positions, creating animosity among other *brāhmaṇa* groups (mainly Deśasthas and Sārasvats, who claimed a higher position over the newly appointed Peśvas) and forcing many of them to migrate to the smaller independent states of the Scindias, Gaikwads, and others at the periphery of the Peśva kingdom. Bayly has argued that, in fact, the concept of a caste, as we know it today, was primarily constructed during this period.

> In both north and south India, such rulers were happy to vest these hitherto rather marginal people with rights and honours which were equally beneficial on both sides. In so doing, they contributed very powerfully to the shaping of more formally Brahmanical caste conventions in the wider society. (Bayly 1999: 67-68)

At Bālājī's death in 1720, his son Bājīrāo I was appointed minister in his place. Bājīrāo I assumed control of the Marāṭhā kingdom, with its capital at Pune, and he commanded that Śivājī's descendants should live protected from eminent danger, in Kolhapur and Satara. With this move, Bājīrāo I managed to obtain the *de facto* power of the empire and continued his father's policy of appointing Citpāvan *brāhmaṇa*s at key administrative positions. It was during this time (1720–1740) that the city of Pune took on its distinctly *brāhmaṇa* (i.e. Citpāvan) character.

> Thus, whether he [i.e. the Brahmin] acts as ritualist, as celibate preceptor-*guru*, or as *lokika* servant of the king, his presence is auspicious and desirable, indeed a defining condition of '*brahman raj*', a realm of worth and legitimacy. Hence, without wholly overriding the openness and comparative castelessness which had characterised their predecessors' political strategies, many eighteenth-century rulers took steps to Brahmanise their office-holding networks, in some cases recruiting only men of Brahman birth to occupy important posts and offices [...] It also helped to reinforce the claim that served them all so well, this being that the greatness of the Maratha realm was derived in large part from the greatness and piety of its associated Brahman client groups. (Bayly 1999: 69-70)

During this time, new *brāhmaṇa* networks became prominent. State pilgrimages and benefactions directed massive flows of wealth into the hands of the priestly and preceptoral *brāhmaṇa*s who served them both at home and in the distant all-India sites (cf. Bayly 1999: 70.) These grants, and the founding and patronage of schools of Brāhmaṇical learning, started to flourish and attract *brāhmaṇa*s from afar. Under

the Peśva reign, generous annual donations to Vedic scholars and institutions — from the region and from afar — were established. In addition to the mass distribution of the annual *dakṣiṇā* in Pune, other imperial expenditures were made to support Vedic scholars and other religious institutions.[64] The Peśvas built, renovated, and donated land and cash to temples, organizing sponsored religious festivals at several localities, especially those dedicated to Gaṇeśa. Particulary important were the two Gaṇapati temples at the nearby towns of Morgaon and Theur, belonging to the famous cluster of eight temples dedicated to Gaṇeśa called the *aṣṭavināyak*s (Feldhaus 2003: 140-148).

> [...] by the later eighteenth century, both the Chitpavan Peshwas and the great lines of Maratha warrior-rulers, who built dominions in central and western India from the 1760s onwards, had made their mark all over India as patrons of supra-local Brahmanical worship and learning. (Bayly 1999: 68)

Under Bājīrāo I, the empire took advantage of infighting among the Mughal princes and greatly expanded its territory northward. Bājīrāo I died in 1740 and his son assumed power, later expanding the Marāṭhā Empire into Orissa and parts of Bengal. In 1752, the Mughal throne in Delhi became a protectorate of the Marāṭhās. The empire was finally weakened only by a decisive defeat in 1761 at Panipat (80 km. north of Delhi), after which the various Marāṭhā generals began to assert greater independence, and the unified empire was transformed into more of a patchwork confederacy. The Marāṭhās' defeat at Panipat did not dismantle the empire, but it did trigger a significant change in their administration, as regional Marāṭhā generals became the leaders of noble houses (now Marāṭhā by *jāti*, which had become recognized as *kṣatriya*). Starting in the 1770s, some of the Marāṭhā houses began to be attacked by the British, who were consolidating their own centres of power. British fortunes continued to increase, and the Marāṭhā noble houses were too fractured to resist. In 1803, the British forced all of the Marāṭhā houses to sign disastrous treaties, and in 1818, the Peśva-led empire was formally dismantled as the British subjugated the remaining major Marāṭhā kingdoms, making them dependent princely states. Nonetheless, the prestige of Maharashtra — with Pune at its centre as a bastion of *brāhmaṇa* scholarship and religious authority — remained well into the twenty-first century.

However, according to Tucker, under the last Peśvas, the grants became rather haphazard, so that hundreds of ignorant *brāhmaṇa*s came to Pune for the annual distributions of *dakṣiṇā* without having to prove their erudition.

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64 Parulekar, who compiled several letters from the Bombay Secretariat Records for his Survey of Indigenous Education in the Province of Bombay (1820–1830), reports that the *dakṣinā* fund of the Peśvas "amounted to several lakhs" and had been "much reduced by the new Rulers, keeping it to about 35,000 rupees for annual distribution." (Parulekar 1951: 23.)

> Elphinstone, therefore, followed his subordinates' suggestions to reorganize Sanskrit learning by establishing a Sanskrit college similar to the colleges in Calcutta and Benares, using parts of the Dakshina fund to finance it. The rest, administered by a committee of five eminent shastris, was to go as grants to the most learned Brahmins. (Tucker 1976: 234)

Even so, soon the British enunciated a new policy in 1836, under which only 'useful' learning was to be taught in the newly founded colleges (cf. Tucker 1976: 335; M. Deshpande 2007: 1206.) The spread of British education and the general dissemination of Western ideas about history, science, religion, and society all had a tremendous impact on Maharasthrian society. In the middle of the nineteenth century, a number of *brāhmaṇa*s in Pune and Bombay began to publish, advocate, and organize for social and religious change. These *brāhmaṇa* social reformers consistently denounced the practices of child marriage, dowry, the ban on widow remarriage, and polygamy; some *brāhmaṇa* reformers also advocated for the dissolution of caste. Moreover, social and political changes in relation to caste were demanded much more vocally by a number of prominent low-caste and untouchable movements in the region, particularly those led by Jotibā Phule between 1873 and 1890, and by B. R. Ambedkar from 1927 to 1956. Additionally, there have been and continue to be strong nationalist movements in Maharashtra, and this has deeply influenced the views of Maharashtrians' on their past.

As mentioned above, *brāhmaṇa* groups have not always been sympathetic to each other, and important rivalries among them have led to some resentment that continues even today (cf. M. Deshpande 2012; O'Hanlon and Minkowski 2008; O'Hanlon 2010 and Washbrook 2010). M. Deshpande, for example, has pointed out ritual rivalries among different *śākhā*s in Maharashtra, noting that:

> With such strictures, the various Śākhās of the Vedas gradually evolved into *jāti*s, sub-caste communities with distinct social identities, and the relations between them became ever so complex. (M. Deshpande 2012: 346)

These centuries of significant social change, and modernity in particular, have also affected the way *brāhmaṇa*s perceive and represent themselves today. The question of caste and representation is too complex to deal with thoroughly here, but as will become clear in the presentation of my material and in the concrete case studies I present in Chapter 6, its modern articulation is crucial to the way *brāhmaṇa* reciters of Maharashtra socially position themselves in present-day India. The point of sketching some of the history of *brāhmaṇa*s in Maharashtra is to problematize and historicize the issue of self-representation — the more so because the construction of the *brāhmaṇa* self has often revolved around the dominant, but often contending, discourses of caste in terms of birth (*jātibrāhmaṇa*) on one hand, and virtue and morality (*karmabrāhmaṇa*) on the other. Another key aspect in the construction of the ideal *brāhmaṇa* is ritual purity and the different types of identifications with the Transcendental — i.e. with the sacrifice and the Veda (see Michaels' concept of "identificatory habitus" 2004: 332-340).

2.2 The *Brāhmaṇa* in Modern and Globalized India

The colonial experience and recent historical developments, most notably in terms of India's independence and the rapidly emerging economy in global markets, have drastically changed the social context of the *brāhmaṇa*. Particularly through the urbanization of the two megacities of Maharashtra — Pune and Mumbai — increased mobility, new job opportunities, and education, as well as the rapid development of communication technologies, have diversified the social landscape of the region. Communities from other states have migrated to these places and brought with them their own customs and rituals. While the majority of *brāhmaṇa*s in Maharashtra continue to affiliate with the five Maharashtrian groups, an important number of *brāhmaṇa*s from other parts of India are found in the larger cities of the state, some of which are organized in particular associations.[65] While these *brāhmaṇa* associations highlight the unique aspects of each subcaste, it must be noted here that, recently, there have also been several efforts to level out differences with various *brāhmaṇa* organizations through a pleading for an overarching "Brahmin front" or a fostering of an "all-Indian Brahmin pride", this often tied to nationalist discourses and political agendas.[66] Migration of Vedic traditions into Maharashtra has in many cases been a deliberate effort to import Vedic reciters in order to enrich the Vedic landscape of the region. Maharashtra has therefore now become one of the melting pots of Vedic traditions, and, as we will see in Chapter 3, most of the existing Vedic *śākhā*s of the four Vedas that survive today are found in the state.[67]

The increased secularization of the modern *brāhmaṇa* has had a decisive impact on the way *vaidika*s position themselves in modern India. To justify their actitvities and their tradition, they have to construct their identities while taking into consideration critique both as an internal articulation (for example, by social *brāhmaṇa* reformers and secularized *brāhmaṇa*s) and as an external reality (through the critique of other castes, non-Hindus, anti-*brāhmaṇa* movements etc.) The "sense of siege" of the *brāhmaṇa* as a (casted) community, that Bairy (2010) emphasizes, has certainly found expression in the anxiety of the *brāhmaṇa* to find their place in modern India.

> The Brahmins, however, had an additional and very unique demand placed on themselves. The discourse of the 'modern' prefigures caste as a system of hierarchy and inequality that is the very antithesis of modern ways of ordering social life. As a constitutive part of this unequal system, but also its very embodiment (Bairy 2010: 117).

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65 These associations have different names such as *sabhā, pariṣad, samiti* or *saṃgha* which can also be translated loosely be translated into English as: assembly, council, community and association.

66 More on these associations in Bairy 2009; Arnold et al. 1976.

67 Although, I should mention that — due to the Pan-Indian veneration of the Vedas — this is also true for other places in India, such as Vedic schools in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and of course Varanasi.

It is useful to recall here that the paradox of the *brāhmaṇa* self is twofold: on the one hand, it was mainly the *brāhmaṇa* who carried modernity forward in India, and on the other, he represented all that was unmodern. The hegemonic discourse of the modern ethos is built around individuality, emancipation, and democracy. The *brāhmaṇa*, then, have been confronted with the dilemma of ideologically representing a threat to modernity and at the same time striving to maintain their intellectual aura.

Washbrook has argued that the developments among *brāhmaṇa* communities in Maharashtra from the fifthteenth century were crucial, and that these laid the foundation for "an acceptable model of secular Brahmin behaviour, which, if not without difficulty, eventually came to establish itself as normative across the South" (Washbrook 2010: 597). The relationship between the 'religious' and 'secular' identity of the *brāhmaṇa*, and the natural tension between these different spheres of knowledge, as well as the discrepancies between ideology and practice, have existed for far longer than the colonial intervention.

This situation forced *brāhmaṇa*s to articulate their identity in new ways in order to justify not only their contemporary relevance, but to present themselves as custodians of all knowledge worth keeping, including technological and scientific developments. For example, one such strategy consists of ascribing the Vedic scriptures with the power to contain all knowledge, including modern physics, aeronautics, and other sciences.[68]

As mentioned in the Introduction, only a very small percentage of *brāhmaṇa*s are engaged in learning the Vedas today, and while many upper-caste Hindus support the idea of the necessity to preserve the Veda in the traditional way, very few would actually send their children to these traditional schools. This is often left to the most orthodox *brāhmaṇa* families, and often to those with the lowest resources who have no other option but to educate their children in boarding schools that are free of cost — namely, the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s.[69] Despite the fact that one of the conditions to being a custodian of the Veda (*vedamūrti*) who strives to fully embody the Brāhmaṇical values is both gendered (male) and determined by birth (*jātibrāhmaṇa*), in recent years, a few attempts have been made to dismiss this traditional access to the Vedas — that is, to undercut the charge of casteism or *jātivāda* by accepting non-*brāhmaṇa*s and women as students of the Veda in some schools, thereby professing a modern

68 It would therefore be of little surprise that one now finds the Indian Institute of Scientific Heritage, whose aim "[…] is to inform the world about the glorious scientific, rational and logical heritage of India and also inform the world to practice and adopt these messages in their life to lead a happy life in the 21st century." Their publications include titles such as: "Ancient Indian Aircraft" and "Ancient Indian Advice For Modern Management." http://iish.org/index.php?option=com_ipricecalc&view=price&Itemid=115 accessed on January 8, 2013.

69 I will come back to this economic aspect in subchapter 3.1.1.

(i.e. universal and egalitarian) *brāhmaṇa* self.[70] Despite these trends in urban India, in only one school visited during the fieldwork for this book were non-*brāhmaṇa*s and women theoretically being admitted, but in practice, it was only *brāhmaṇa* males who attended even this school. These innovations have generally been rejected in the most orthodox circles, for whom the access to the recitation of the Veda for women and non-*brāhmaṇa*s is simply unthinkable. Notwithstanding this rejection, one wonders if the changes described are a sign of a slow accommodation into the modern Hindu discourse in which universalism and egalitarian ideals weigh more on the imagination of what Hinduism ought to be, rather than overt exclusivism coming in the form of the caste and gender exclusion found in certain orthodox Brāhmaṇical circles. One teacher told me: "It is already very difficult to get apt Brahmin students who will study the Vedas today. We get only those students who cannot go to regular schools. If Brahmins are not interested in the Veda today, why should non-Brahmins be?"[71]

Since the 1950s — with the work of Srinivas, followed by Singer and their succesors — much has been written on the subject of social change in India. The proliferation of ethnographic monographs indeed complicated the picture of an essentialized view of the *brāhmaṇa*s and of caste, as produced by previous scholarship, particularly that from classical Indologists. Srinivas, who contrived concepts such as 'Sanskritisation'/ 'Westernisation' has been instrumental in enriching the discussion not only of 'caste', but also of the processes of cultural appropriation.[72]

Singer (1972) was one of the first to study the changes of the so-called "Great Tradition" of Sanskritic Hinduism in the context of a modern city (then Madras, now Chennai). In his observations in his seminal work, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes: an anthropological approach to Indian civilization*, he argues that there is no essential separation between tradition and modernity, and that the individual custodians of this tradition learned to cope with modernity through various "adaptive strategies". According to him, the process of the modernization of the religious sphere occurs simultaneously with that of the "Sanskritization" of the more secular spheres. He described how:

> Embodied in 'sacred books' or 'classics,' sanctified by a cult, expressed in monuments, sculpture, painting, and architecture, served by the arts and sciences, the Great Tradition becomes the core of culture of an indigenous civilization and a source, consciously examined, for defining its

70 The case of a young non-*brāhmaṇa* woman named Suvarna Satardekar, who successfully learned to recite the Śuklayajurveda Saṁhitā in the *mādhyandina* style a few years ago in the Guru Gaṅgeśvar Mahārāj Vedapāṭhaśālā in Nashik in the traditional way, remains a rare case. The trust that runs the school and the Veda Mandir (Chapter 5) takes pride in presenting her as an example of their progressive and modern views on both caste and gender.

71 Interview with Caitanya Kāḷe 4.11.2011, Barshi.

72 For a contestation of the usefulness of these 'concepts', see: Carroll (1977).

> moral, legal, esthetic and other cultural norms. A Great Tradition describes a way of life and as such is a vehicle and standard for those who share it to identify with one another as members of a common civilization. (Redfield and Singer 1956: 63)

The studies of contemporary *brāhmaṇa* priests — like the scholarship by K. Subramaniam 1974; Fuller 1984, 2000, 2003; Parry 1994; Parpola 2002; Knipe 2015 — as well as the broader studies on the *brāhmaṇas* as a social group (read 'caste') in different regions of India — see: Madan 1965; Khare 1970; Chuyen 2004; Fuller and Narasimhan 2014; and Bairy 2010 — are arguably the most prominent studies that deal with the *brāhmaṇa* not as a theoretical construct, but as communities within diverse social contexts.

Not only for *brāhmaṇa*s as a socio-religious class, but also for the traditional *vaidika*s of the schools I deal with here, modernity (urbanization, westernization, technological development, etc.) has marked their daily lives, as will become clear in subsequent chapters. For instance, the use of modern technology in the schools (one of the clearest markers of modernity for them) is perceived differently depending on the context of the conversation and who is asking. From my observations and from what I heard from the teachers and students, modern technology is a great attraction. For example, I was constantly asked about cars, computers, cameras, iPods, and all kinds of technological gadgets. In the eyes of some of the teachers and other *brāhmaṇa*s, the use of such devises was neither condemned nor rejected as long as their use was limited and used in a "*sāttvika*" (i.e. pure, chaste) way to create "more awareness about the value of the Vedas among the people."[73] The use of MP3-devices to record recitations of the Veda, cell-phones to better communicate with one another, TV and DVD players to watch religious films like the Rāmāyaṇa or the Mahābhārata, and loudspeakers for special occasions to transmit Vedic recitations to surrounding areas of the school have all become part of their everyday life. Facebook accounts and other social media, as well as the access to "modernity" through the Internet and mass media (notably TV and Bollywood), are slowly becoming the norm, rather than the exception, among students and teachers of Vedic schools. Computer technology is not only permitted, but even encouraged in some of the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s.[74] Some students have learned to copy Sanskrit texts on the computer in Devanāgarī script or to create PowerPoint presentations. Some children seemed very keen to create 'slideshows' with their new idols: global sports champions like football players Ronaldinho and Roberto Carlos, famous cricket players, or movie stars like Leonardo DiCaprio or some of the Bollywood stars.

In some schools, clothing has also been influenced (little by little) by 'Western style' fashion: occasionally the students wear T-shirts, shirts, and sometimes even

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73 Interview with Mr. Limaye 1.10.2009, Satara.

74 For an insightful collection of studies that have investigated the impact of these innovations on religious practices in South Asia see: Babb and Wadley 1997.

shorts.[75] In one of the schools, I met a student that was such a big fan of the football player Lionel Messi that he wore his new FC Barcelona jersey which he had received on his birthday practically every day.

Elements of Western food are also entering their diet, at least on special occasions when they are out of school or, for example, when they got to eat Swiss chocolate that the author brought for them. In one school, I heard that all students get to eat ice cream when they celebrate the birthday of one of the students. At the same time, I did observe an ambiguous relationship with modernity. The first and more formal reaction from many of my interlocutors, particularly from the older generations, was mostly one of rejection and suspicion towards these developments. Modernity at large was considered a threat to their world order, and a threat to their 'Vedic way of life'. The 'materialism' and the 'competition spirit', the 'money-oriented mentality', the 'corrupt Western way of life' with their 'loose morals' and the 'abandonment of religion' cause both fear and awe for them — it is a tension that is never quite resolved. For instance, some of the graduated students of a Vedic school, who I became friends with, liked to take me out to nearby temples or other places. Sometimes, they used to take me out to have an ice cream in one of the newly opened 'ice cream parlors' of the city. This was done rather secretly, and almost incognito. The students would wear Western clothes (shorts and a polo shirt) and a baseball cap to cover their tufts (*śikhā*) of hair, which would immediately identify them as *brāhmaṇa*s.[76] One of my friends explained to me that the change of clothes was a strategy to protect them from "evil talk". He said that they preferred not to be recognized as *brāhmaṇa*s by the people in the town because, in his words, "if people recognize us as Brahmins, they may talk bad about us. They could say 'look these *baṭuk*s [Vedic students] eat food outside the school and we are not leading a pure life'. Actually, they do not know us, but they would talk bad like this. We are not supposed to eat outside [the school] and we never do! This is just for fun. This is only ice cream!"

The ice cream example shows the ambiguity that many *brāhmaṇa*, both secular and *vaidika*, seem to have towards modernity and 'the West'. Furthermore, on the one hand it brings to the fore a fascination and appropriation of selected modern elements, and on the other, the revalorization of these elements within traditional frameworks that value community over individuality. Nandy argues that "the absolute rejection of the West is also the rejection of the basic configuration of Indian traditions; though, paradoxically, the acceptance of that configuration may involve a qualified rejection of the West." (Nandy 1983: 75) This paradoxical negotiation of identity and cultural

75 For more on the dress code, see subchapter 4.5.

76 While the *śikhā* (Marathi *śeṃḍī*) is occasionally used by other males in different communities that consider themselves "twice-born" (*dvija*s), it is nonetheless a very clear marker of pious *brāhmaṇa* identity. According to Michaels: "many Hindus consider this *śikhā* the sign of the paternal line." He describes it as a sort of "patrilinear 'umbilical cord'" (Michaels 2004a: 86).

values in relation to Western influence is constantly being contextually redefined. A visible shift in the socio-economic structures based on individualism, consumerism, and greater mobility seems to have strongly polarized attitudes of what constitutes 'tradition.' Religious institutions, such as the Vedic schools presented here, exemplify the efforts to renew, expand, and sustain a particular worldview through processes of socialization, i.e. legitimacy and control.[77]

2.3 Bhakti and Orthodox Brāhmaṇism

In Maharashtra, *bhakti* religiosity is inescapable. Perhaps the most prominent *bhakti* tradition in Maharashtra is represented by the *vārkarī-sampradāya*[78], who has coloured Maharashtrians' cultural identity. One can encounter *vārkarī* temples in every city and town, and see several groups of pilgrims constantly going to the shrines of the many saints while hearing multiple generations of families singing famous Marathi devotional songs (*abhaṅga*s, *bhajan*s). In the homes of orthodox *brāhmaṇa*s and in the Vedic schools are no exceptions. Every year, one can see great numbers of *vārkarī* pilgrims from all castes and classes go by foot, from the whole state of Maharashtra and beyond, to have the *darśana* of Lord Viṭṭhala (also known as Viṭhobā) in the town of Pandharpur. The pilgrims group in so-called *diṇḍī*s, and carry the image (*mūrti*) or, more often, the wooden/silver sandals (*pādukā*s) of their patron saint in procession on colourful decorated palanquins (*pālkhī*s).[79]

There are other important *vārkarī* centres also, such as: Alandi, where the *samādhi* shrine of Jñāneśvar Mahārāj is visited by hundreds of thousands each year; Dehu, the birthplace of the famous Tukārām; Paithan, the hometown of Eknāth that was once a bastion of Vedic learning; and many places more. Other devotional traditions, such as the more distinctly Brāhmaṇical one created around Samārth Rāmdās[80], which one could arguably group under the umbrella of '*sant* traditions', have also had a very strong influence on the religiosity of Maharashtrians.

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77 For more on the processes of socialization and the creation of a particular 'habitus', see Chapter 5.

78 The word *sampradāya* is commonly translated as "tradition", referring to ritual traditions and philosophical-theological doctrines organized in different religious communities (Malinar 2012).

79 For more on the *vārkarī* pilgrimage, see: Mokāśī 1987; and Karve 1962.

80 As it has been noted by Keune: "[...] much research remains to be done on the Rāmdās *sampradāy* and its religious and political influence in pre-colonial Maharashtra. An introduction to these matters can be found in J.W. Laine, *Shivaji: Hindu King in Islamic India*, esp. 52-62. A longer but quite dated work on the *sampradāy* by W.S. Deming, *Rāmdās and the Rāmdāsīs*. For a fascinating description of the heated historiographical conversations over Rāmdās' political significance in the 20th century, see P. Deshpande, Creative Pasts, 183-191" (Keune 2011 FN 44 p. 156). Rāmdās was also unique in that he proposed a *mahārāṣṭra-dharma* with clear nationalistic overtones, and which has been influential in modern nationalistic circles and political groups, in particular the Shiv Sena party.

It has been argued that *bhakti* of the *sant*s has been one of the leading forces in reforming Hinduism by emphasizing a more egalitarian access to the divine and by particularly attacking Brāhmaṇical pride as based on descent and ritualism.[81] These traditions moved away from the elitarian access of a minority (the *brāhmaṇa* male) to divine knowledge by conveying their message to the masses through their poetry and songs, these being composed in the spoken vernaculars rather than in Sanskrit.[82] The possibility of an individual relationship with God through a series of simple practices — particularly as centered on the repetition of the name that became available through the *bhakti* traditions — is one of the markers of the popular religiosity of Maharashtra.

The untouchable *sant* Cokhāmeḷā and other *śūdra* poet-saints — such as the gardener Sāvatā Māḷī, the potter Gorā Kumbhār, or Nāmdev the tailor have been recognized as important members of the *vārkarī* tradition. The most popular *sant* in this tradition, Tukārām, was also a *śūdra*. Additionally, the two main *brāhmaṇa sant*s (Jñāneśvar and Eknāth) in the tradition are both remembered as having met with strong rejection and punishment from the *brāhmaṇa* authorities because of their interactions with lower castes and their transgressions of the Brāhmaṇical rules of purity.

Keune (2011) has shown in his dissertation how understandings of devotional religion and caste changed in Maharashtrian society between 1700 and the present, as exemplified in the hagiographies of Eknāth Mahārāj, whose boundary-transgressing actions challenged societal expectations about ritual purity and Brāhmaṇness. At the same time, he also cautions that:

> Critical Marathi scholars point out that social reform and social equality are modern notions that are only anachronistically and problematically read into a 16th-century context. Many dalits dismiss out of hand the idea that Eknāth or any of the Marathi sants was truly concerned about social change, since equality for them was confined only to the realm of spirituality. (Keune, 2011: 6)

Other scholars such as Burchett (2009) and Lorenzen (2004: 185-186) have warned against an essentialist view of the inclusivity and egalitarian values of the *bhakti* traditions, and showed that these traditions in practice "point out that *bhakti* theory has rarely if ever been translated into actual social reform or sustained egalitarian *bhakti* practice" (Burchett 2009: 116). While these observations may well be true, there are, nonetheless, countless stories, songs, and hagiographies that today circulate among Maharashtrians and that present the *vārkarī*s (and other devotional

81 See for example: Schomer 1987; Zelliot 1976; Gordon 1993: 18-19.

82 Here, I must caution that there is an important gradation between these ideas among the *sant*s of Maharashtra. Rāmdās, for example, developed a very militant discourse attractive to mostly an upper-caste audience, while the songs of the *śūdra sant*s of the *vārkarī* tradition appealed rather to the lower social strata. See below within this chapter.

saints) as expounders of a more open and egalitarian religiosity than the one professed by the Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy. I argue that these discourses influence the way *brāhmaṇa*s are perceived by other social groups, and also the way in which they represent themselves today.

Here is one such story known by most Maharashtrians which illustrates the case in point, and that I take the liberty of summarizing below:[83]

> Jñāneśvar and his siblings had been excommunicated by the *brāhmaṇa*s of Alandi because his father, after being married, left to become a *saṃnyāsin* and, by command of his *guru*, returned to his wife, which caused the fall of all of his family from the caste. Jñāneśvar and his siblings nonetheless decided, after their parents' death, to do anything possible to regain the status of their caste. The local *brāhmaṇa*s of Alandi told the children that, if they could get a certificate of purity from the *brāhmaṇa*s of Paithan — a bastion of learned *brāhmaṇa*s at the time — they would accept them back into the community. Hence, Jñāneśvar and his three siblings went to Paithan to obtain the certificate from the learned *brāhmaṇa*s. The *brāhmaṇa*s of Paithan looked down on the children and did not agree to issue such a certificate But Jñāneśvar insisted on their being innocent of any wrongdoing, and gave a speech to the *brāhmaṇa*s in which he proclaimed that God was present in all living beings alike. He was mocked by the *brāhmaṇa*s and was challenged to prove it. There was a buffalo nearby and Jñāneśvar coherced into making him recite Vedas to prove his point. He placed his hand on the animal's head, and then the buffalo immediately started reciting the mantras from the Ṛgveda. The animal continued to recite Vedas for hours, and many *brāhmaṇa*s came to see the miracle at the bank of Godāvarī River. With the performance of the miracle, the *brāhmaṇa*s had no choice but to accept the greatness and supernatural powers of the young boy. They give up their arrogance and prostrated themselves at the feet of the children. The *brāhmaṇa*s of Paithan then issued the certificate of purity to the children.

The story continues with the children going back to Alandi and having to prove once more, this time to the *brāhmaṇa*s of their hometown, that the certificate was authentic and that they were 'true *brāhmaṇa*s'. The story illustrates a point that seems to be paradigmatic and is often encountered in stories similar to this one: the orthodox *brāhmaṇa*s are 'forced', through the evident miracles, to recognize the spiritual power of the *sant*s, and therefore temporally forgive their transgressive actions within the traditional social order. But, by recognizing the spiritual power of these saints, nonetheless, these stories at the same time "also reinforce the social hierarchy and confirm *brāhmaṇa*s as possessing a social identity of higher purity and value than any other" (Burchett 2009: 116). The fact that the godly siblings wish to return to their caste and become '*brāhmaṇa*s' once again shows that the problem is not the social hierarchy of Brāhmaṇism, but that the *brāhmaṇa*s in the story are morally weak

83 This story has been included in many hagiographies of Jñāneśvar, including in popular cinema. This story is one of the central narratives of the famous Marathi film of the 1940s, *Sant Dnyaneshwar* directed by Vishnupant Govind Damle and Sheikh Fattelal. This story is also part of the analysis presented by Novetzke (2011: 232-252.)

and corrupted, and therefore incapable of recognizing the spiritual greatness of the children.

This process has been described by Novetzke as "the Brahmin double", in which the *brāhmaṇa* himself turns to rhetorical and performative self-criticism in order to reinvent his own identity and tradition, and reclaim his religious and moral authority.

> Alternatively, this 'double' may display publically a self-conscious critical evaluation emerging from within Brahmin contexts, the presentation of two kinds of Brahmins, good and bad, as it were. It may also serve, more insidiously perhaps, as a comic foil that lures the sympathies of a non-Brahmin audience, acting, in a sense, as a 'double agent'. It is in any case the Brahmin double that provides one important way to separate Brahminism and Brahmins discursively in public culture. (Novetzke 2011: 236)

The *brāhmaṇa* groups of Maharashtra, stigmatized for their ritual rigidity and social intolerance, have therefore tried to adapt and integrate these discourses, and turn them to their favor. While the 'bad *brāhmaṇa*' and his intolerant orthodox outlook has existed well up into our days, there have also been efforts from the *brāhmaṇa*s themselves to counter this discourse,[84] not only through adopting the above mentioned rhetoric, but by appropriating, participating themselves, and ultimately partly mediating devotional practice. But the acceptance of the critique of the *brāhmaṇa*, nonetheless, is one of accommodation, selection, and reinterpretation of discourses and practices that generally favor the Brāhmaṇical ethos. Often, the more directly sharp criticism of Tukārām and others on the validity of Vedic learning expressed in their songs is either nuanced or simply ignored by the *brāhmaṇa*s.[85]

Nonetheless, it must also be acknowledged that the social reforms of the nineteenth century[86] — from figures such as Bal Shastri Jambhekar, Gopal Hari Deshmukh, Jotibā Phule, and later from Mahadev Govind Ranade, Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, Pandita Ramabai, Dhondo Keshav Karve, and many more, up to Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and his contemporary followers — orthodox *brāhmaṇa* practices and opinions, have been repeatedly challenged in different degrees by both *brāhmaṇa*s and non-*brāhmaṇa*s. This has had an impact not only on the way *brāhmaṇa*s are perceived in the Maharashtrian imagination, and in the way *brāhmaṇa*s position

84 We must not forget that the stories which criticize *brāhmaṇa*s in the hagiographies of the *sant*s were largely written by *brāhmaṇa* authors.

85 In his recent study of the Maraṭhā *kīrtan* traditions of South India (mainly in Tamil Nadu), Soneji (2013) has found that only *brāhmaṇa*s are found among the performers, and mostly an upper-caste audience attends these events. He also remarked that all *abhaṅga*s and *bhajan*s critical of the ritualistic Vedic tradition are filtered out of their repertoire, and only those addressing spiritual and mythical topics are used in their performances. For a reinterpretation of the sants poetry for nationalistic purposes, see: Schultz 2002 and 2013.

86 See also the next section.

themselves in their local socio-religious contexts, but also in their daily lives and ritual practices.

While one could think that the *vārkarī*s and orthodox *brāhmaṇa*s are incompatible, in many schools I visited I was able to witness the opposite. The *sant* religiosity and the Vedic traditions seem not only to coexist, but also to actively support each other. For example, one of the learned *brāhmaṇa*s I came in contact with, Vivekśāstrī Goḍboḷe from the Śrī Kṛṣṇayajurveda Pāṭhaśālā, who is himself very fond of devotional music and is an accomplished singer, often organizes recitals of devotional songs in combination with a 'Vedic' *yajña* performed on the same day. He also had traditional music classes organized for the students of the *vedapāṭhaśālā*, where they learn the traditional devotional songs of the saints. In this school, I also witnessed a group of *vārkarī*s from a neighbouring town who came from time to time to the school to perform their *kīrtan*s and sing *abhaṅga*s and other devotional songs. The students and teachers would not only observe, but also participate in these events and would even participate in the *diṇḍī* dances. The main teacher of this school also taught little children from the town (they being 5-10 years old) how to recite verses from the Bhagavadgītā and the popular Marathi text Manāce Ślok of Rāmdās. The teacher claimed having no regard for caste while teaching these lessons that lasted one hour in the early afternoon. These lessons were undertaken while the Vedic students of the school had some free time before their Veda class.[87] These two examples, from Vivekśāstrī Goḍboḷe, are not isolated cases. He and many other *vaidika*s who consider themselves "orthodox Brahmins" (as he denominated himself) show the influence of the acceptance and, to some extent the integration, of popular devotional traditions of the region into their daily lives.

The relatively close contact they have with people who follow very particular forms of popular Hinduism, like the *vārkarī*s, certainly plays a role in the construction of their worldview. For example, almost every year the school members assist the pilgrims on their annual pilgrimage to Pandharpur. On this occasion, the *brāhmaṇa*s from this school set up a resting point to provide pilgrim groups with food, water, and other basic needs for their journey. Vivekśāstrī Goḍboḷe told me in an interview that this involvement was important for him. He said:

> There are two types of importance; (1) first, they are chanting God's name, so when you feed them your food is going to God directly, and (2) also, they are walking on the road, and physically they need something. It is very hard. You cannot provide them with everything, that is true, but whatever your capacity is, you should give that. God is providing for all. Whatever your capacity is you should open your door. And God will open doors through other persons. God will give to you through other persons. (From interview, 22.02.06)

87 As of 2010, I am told that these community classes are given irregularly by the younger daughter of the main teacher or by one of the advanced students.

Once, I was also able to witness a curious exchange: a group of farmers wanted to honor Śiva on the night of Mahāśivarātri in the temple of their small village near Satara, so they came to one of the Vedic schools in the city. They came asking for advice from the *gurujī* there on how to 'properly perform the rituals'. The main teacher and principal of the school agreed to help, and sent some students with precise instructions on how to conduct the rituals there. He had them recite Vedic *mantra*s, such as the Śatarudrīya[88] (TSaṃ 4.5, 4.7), and perform the rituals in the village temple, but he also instructed that a session of *kīrtan* of the names of Śiva and the famous '*oṁ namaḥ śivāya' mantra* be led by the students of the school, and in which the villagers could also participate. In exchange for this aid, the teacher of the school asked the villagers to come once a month to sing and dance devotional songs in their repertoire on the premises of the school, to which the villagers happily agreed.

Whether, historically speaking, these values have truly been put into practice by the *bhakti* traditions or not, the above examples and many of my interactions with the *brāhmaṇa* teachers and students in Vedic schools of Maharashtra show that the modern values of social equality, self-determination, and service to the saints of Maharashtra (regardless of their social background) have been largely ascribed to *bhakti* religiosity, and accepted as something desirable and worth attaining.

However, it must also be noted here that not all of these *bhakti* traditions necessarily transcend Brāhmaṇical ideals of *varṇāśramadharma* and the conservative attitudes concerning the rights and duties of women; in fact, some scholars have argued that it was these devotional traditions which reinforced Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy.

> These Brahmans who Brahmanised others, including people of comparatively lowly or uncertain status, played a crucial role in spreading and stabilising the values of 'traditional' caste in this period. In both north and south India this task was regularly performed by the *sampradaya* devotional sects. (Bayly 1999: 75)

An example of this in Maharashtra is the so-called *datta-sampradāya* in the line of Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī and his successor Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī (aka Ṭembhe Svāmī), as well as the *rāmdāsī-sampradāya* of Samārth Rāmdās. As Morse has aptly summarized:

> Neither class nor genre was used to exclude members from the Vārkarī Pantha, and indeed many of the saints in the tradition were from the lower classes [...] this 'spiritual democracy' had permeated the socio-religious fabric of Maharashtra by Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī's time (fifteenth century CE) thus challenging the Brahmin establishment, whose power and authority was dependent on the very distinctions that the Vārkarī's 'spiritual democracy' swept away. Although Brahmins did participate in the tradition (some of the great poet-saints, such as Ekanātha, were Brahmins), the Vārkarī's bhakti was at odds with the śāstric ethos. (Morse 2012: 236)

88 For more on this popular hymn, see: Kramrisch 1981: 71-74.

While the *vārkarī*s and other devotional groups in which lower-classes are predominant in number may have very different stories about their interactions with *brāhmaṇa*s, and their collective memory may evoke very different associations about 'the *brāhmaṇa*', it is clear that for the *brāhmaṇa*s of these schools to follow the teachings and practices of the saints and *guru*s of Maharashtra is as important as the maintenance of their Vedic *dharma*. In fact, by honoring and practising the traditions of the *sant*s, as one of the teachers who I interviewed told me, "one becomes a better father, a better son, a better *brāhmaṇa* and especially a better human being."[89]

While this statement may come across as a romanticized version of Orientalism,[90] there are other ways in which *brāhmaṇa*s think of themselves in relation to the more critical *bhakti* traditions. There is a constant negotiation that is mediated by the *brāhmaṇa* regarding what belongs to the Vedic tradition (*sanātana-vaidika-dharma*) and what does not. The same elements — for example, devotion to a particularly iconoclastic saint such as Akkalkoṭ Svāmī (?-1878) — may or may not be considered 'Vedic' depending on which context they are framed within and who their interlocutors are. In Chapter 6, I will present how some of these apparent contradictions are negotiated within specific frameworks.

2.4 Modern Hinduism and the Religious Market in India

I want to conclude this section by drawing attention to another important context of the Vedic schools of Maharashtra — namely, 'modern Hinduism'. Of course, as with the previous three contexts, I can only highlight in a cursory way here some aspects that are crucial for the understanding of how these schools constitute themselves, and how they position themselves *vis-à-vis* the "newer" forms of Hinduism. By 'modern Hinduism', I am explicitly referring to the developments that were shaped in the nineteenth century[91] through the so-called Hindu reform movements[92], and which continue to develop and influence contemporary forms of Neo-vedānta, esoteric Guruism, popular *bhakti* religiosity, and political (i.e. nationalistic) Hinduism.

While these movements may reflect very different opinions and interpretations of Hinduism, a crucial common denominator is that they evolved in the context of the colonial experience. Halbfass has referred to this self-representation as one "which grew out of its encounter with the West" (Halbfass 1988: 344; 1991: 378). This self-

89 Interview with Śantarām Bhanose 4.05.2009, Nashik.

90 For a proposition of six types of Orientalism (1. Patronized/patronizing, 2. Romantic 3. Nationalist, 4. Critical, 5. Reductive 6. Reactionary), see: Heehs 2003: 169-195.

91 From ca. 1850 Cf. Michaels 2004a: 45.

92 These are exemplified in the organizations such as the Brahmo Samāj (est 1828), the Theosophical Society (est 1875), and the Ārya Samāj (est 1875).

representation was one that sought to present itself as a unified force which was worthy of competing with the religion of the colonial powers. It was in the hands of these movements that the notion of a unified eternal religion (*sanātana-dharma*) emerged, a trope that continues to circulate among the Vedic schools of Maharashtra. Zavos argues that *sanātana-dharma* "as orthodoxy in fact emerged as an influential feature of the modernization process, most particularly in the development of a doctrinally nonconfrontational, pan-Hindu identity" (Zavos 2001: 109).

The ideas of a unified Hinduism in the form of *sanātana-dharma*, which have the Veda symbolically at its center, also provided the "spiritual" rationale for political and social action, and have been linked with various forms of political rhetoric. Examples of this linkage are found with Vivekānanda (1863–1902), Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950), Radhakrishan (1888–1975), and their successors. In Maharashtra, too, similar efforts were on the way, for example, through the Prarthana Samāj ('Prayer Society') established by Ranade (1842–1901) and G. K. Gokhale (1866–1915) in 1869, from which debates over widow remarriage, child marriage, and female education were soon to enter the public sphere.

Many other examples could be noted here, such as the later movement led by Pandurang Shastri Athavale, the founder of the Svādhyāy Movement in the 1940s, which promotes the study of the Bhagavadgītā and the "recognition of God in all human beings."[93] In addition to these movements which are oriented towards social change, other *guru* movements in Maharashtra, such as those headed by Meher Bābā, Muktānanda or Rajneesh (a.k.a Osho) became very popular around this time, not only among Maharashtrians, but also among Indians from afar, and particularly Westeners.

Of special mention here is Sāī Bābā of Shirdi, a famous eclectic saint who lived from the 1830s to 1918 in the small town of Shirdi in the Aurangabad District. The saint, who lived in an abandoned mosque, spread his teachings and acted in accordance with the lifestyles of contemporary Sufi divines, but had a heterogeneous following that included many Hindus (Warren 1999). The once small village town of Shirdi has now become a large temple-town centered around Sāī Bābā's tomb (*samādhi*), and its temple complex is arguably one of the richest and most visited in India. Sāī Bābā's popularity exploded in the 1970s with the growth of mass media technologies and particularly Bollywood cinema in Mumbai (Elison 2014). The saint now has a ubiquitous presence in Maharashtra, and indeed his popularity has reached even beyond India among the Hindu diaspora. He has become an icon of religious tolerance

93 "The primary goal of Swadhyay is to develop an awareness of the indwelling God — the divine presence within every human being. Another basic idea of Swadhyay is that bhakti (devotion) is not strictly an introverted activity; rather, it is also a social force. Bhakti is at the foundation of Swadhyay'." Quoted from the official website of the movement: http://www.swadhyay.org/ accessed on February 1, 2013.

and coexistence for his followers, who often quote his most famous saying as it is inscribed on top of his *samādhi* shrine, this as an example of the inclusive character of his teachings: "*sab kā mālik ek*" or "the Lord of all is one". Despite his Muslim background and universal character as someone worshipped by diverse religious groups, Sāī Bābā now has a predominatly Hindu aura (some scholars would see in him a typical case of "Sanskritization" or "Hinduization"). Priests from local *brāhmaṇa* families preside over daily worship of Sāī Bābā's image in the traditional Hindu mode, this including the offering of *āratis* during different parts of the day. In 2014, Sāī Bābā and his followers became the object of a controversy initiated by Svarūpānanda Sarasvatī, the Śaṅkarācārya of Dwarka who criticized Sāī Bābā on the basis that he was not a Hindu, but a Muslim "*faqīr*", and thus not worthy of the worship of Hindus.[94] The issue was widely circulated in the news both nationally and internationally, and brought about heated public debates, both among secular devotees as well as among various Hindu leaders. Svarūpānanda Sarasvatī apparently said, among other things, that someone "who used to eat meat and worship Allah, a man like that can never be a Hindu god."[95] The Śaṅkarācārya received support from some of his followers — including orthodox Hindus such as the members of the Kāśi Vidvat Pariṣad and the belligrant *nāga-bābā*s — who were sympathetic to his cause. On the other hand, Sāī Bābā's devotees accused the Śaṅkarācārya of religious bigotry and he was summoned by the courts in various places like Varanasi, Indore, Jaipur, and Bihar on the basis of the complaints filed against him under section 298 of the Indian Penal Code (uttering a statement with an intention of hurting religious feelings).

Despite the controversy and the tension between various religious authorities on the subject, Sāī Bābā remains a popular religious force even among many Maharashtrian *brāhmaṇa*s, particularly for those who see in him an example of spiritual unity in diversity and view him as "a needed corrective to rigid sectarian ideologies" (McLaine 2011) that brings forth the "true spirit of *sanātana-dharma*", as I was told by a young Veda teacher in Nasik. It is interesting to note here that the most famous disciple of Sāī Bābā, a *brāhmaṇa* known as Upāsanī Mahārāj, was probably the first person in Maharashtra in modern times to impart Vedic chanting to girls at his *āśram* in Sakori, a town near Shirdi. His influence has been significant in Maharashtra, where women priestesses (*strī-purohitā*s) are now found in the cities of Pune, Nasik, and Mumbai.[96]

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94 "There is no mention of Sai Baba in the Shastras and the Vedas" so he "should not be worshiped with Hindu gods… He was not God, he was just a Muslim Fakir" http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Sai-vs-Shankaracharya-Conflict-may-turn-ugly/articleshow/37670625.cms accessed on July 6, 2014.

95 http://www.ibnlive.com/videos/india/talking-point-shankaracharya-swaroopanand-699412.html accessed on July 6, 2014.

96 For more on the teaching of the Veda to women, see: subchapter 3.8 and L. Patton 2005, 2007. Ute Hüsken is also currently leading a research project entitled "Changing Patterns of Women's Ritual Agency" which studies the phenomenon of the *strī-purohitās* of Pune.

Scholars such as MacKean (1996) and Nanda (2009) have discussed the role of modern *guru*s and their organizations in politics, particularly in Hindu Nationalism. They have noted that the prosperous emerging middle classes have embraced popular forms of Hinduism centered on temples, pilgrimages, popular saints, or male and female *gurus*. These new expressions of Hinduism have necessarily been fostered by India's liberalizing and globalizing market economy, and are becoming increasingly public and political.

> Aided by the new political economy, a new Hindu religiosity is getting ever more deeply embedded in the everyday life, both in the public and the private spheres. Use of explicitly Hindu rituals and symbols in the routine affairs of the state and electoral politics has become so commonplace that Hinduism has become the de facto religion of the 'secular' Indian state which is constitutionally bound to have no official religion. (Nanda 2009: 3)

But the current socio-economic policies are bringing the state, the religious organizations, and the business corporations into a much closer relationship than ever before. All these recent developments have propelled hegemonic discourses on caste and *brāhmaṇa* orthodoxy that in turn have deeply tainted the construction of Hindu identity and the role of the *vaidika*s today. Additionally, these processes have also become visible in official textbooks and the curricula of public education, as the research of scholars such as Bénéï (2008) has shown.

The first and clearest link of the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s to modern Hinduism is the patronage. As I discuss in subchapter 3.2, most of the schools have close ties to modern *guru*s, often attached to a larger organization that provides them with the necessary funds to run the schools. Some have multiple associations with different organizations, and others may not have direct economic links to modern religious movements, but they certainly have explicit relations with them. The non-economic ties to diverse religious traditions and discourses are equally important, for they often influence the way the members of these schools position themselves ideologically. These links are more difficult to map, for they are multifaceted and operate on different layers: the family traditions and lineages, the local temple(s), the caste association(s), political affiliation, and the religious affiliation of the clientele, of the teachers, and of the students, etc.

For instance, consider this hypothetical case: A traditional *brāhmaṇa* teacher may come from a traditional Deśastha family of ritualists whose traditional *kuladevī* is Reṇukā Mātā of Mahur. He may have been influenced politically by the Rāṣṭrīya Svayamsevak Saṅgh (RSS) and be active in his local caste association (Deśastha Ṛgvedi Brāhmaṇ Saṅgh). He may also count among his favorite books the works of Vivekānanda, be invited to perform at a *somayāga* organized and financed by followers of Akkalkoṭ Mahārāj of the *datta-sampradāya*, and be a devotee of the current Śaṅkarācārya of Sringeri — all at the same time.

It is interesting to note that many of these organizations are closely linked to spiritual/religious lineages that are or have been initially openly critical of

Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy, such as, in Maharahstra, the *datta-sampradāya* or the *vārkarī panth*.[97] Some examples of these institutions are the MVVP[98] as founded by Svāmī Govind Dev Giri (prior to 2006, known as Śrī Kiśor Vyās), who claims affiliation to the *vārkarī panth*, and in particular to the famous saint of the thirteenth century, Jñāneśvar Mahārāj at Alandi.[99] This institution sponsors a total of 12 Vedic schools in India, five of which operate in Maharashtra. Śrī Ramakṛṣṇa Sarasvatī, considered by his followers to be an incarnation of Dattātreya, inaugurated in Ahmednagar one of the largest Vedic schools in the state — visited during the fieldwork for this book — which teaches all four Vedas.[100] Śrī Gajānan Mahārāj of Shivapuri (also known as 'Śrī'), who is considered a reincarnation of Akkalkoṭ Svāmī and therefore also belonging to the *datta-sampradāya*, could be considered as one of the main revivalists of the *śrauta* traditions in the area. The *śaktipāta*[101] master Guḷavāṇi Mahārāj (1886-1974), the spiritual father of Nānājī Kāḷe and sons, is the inspiration for the revival of hundreds of the most complex Vedic Soma rituals (*somayāga*s) and the protection of endangered *śākhā*s of Vedic recitation through the Śrī Yogīrāj Veda Vijñān Āśram, as well as its branches. The late Guru Gaṅgeśvarānand is another example of a man who is considered to be a great saint by his followers and who continues to inspire them in support of the Vedic tradition.[102]

To briefly illustrate this point (plates 2), I will describe the following event: When I first visited the Alandi branch of the MVVP, there was occurring a festive programme to award students from a local girls' school. The patron of the organization, Śrī Govinddev Giri Mahārāj, and some dignatary guests were present at the ceremony.

97 The case of the *datta-sampradāya*(s) is a complex one because different groups (both *brāhmaṇa* and non-*brāhmaṇa*) in the region have appropriated the figure of Dattātreya as their main deity, though he himself is a figure who has an ambiguous and rather transgressive relationship with orthodoxy. The dominant branches of this *sampradāya* in the lineage of Śrīpād Śrīvallabha (around 1320-1350) were 'Sanskritized' since the beginning, and have a largely *brāhmaṇa* following. See: Rigopoulus 1998, and Pain and Zelliot 1988. Also noteworthy is the support that has come from the successors of Śaṅkara, whose non-dual philosophy (*advaita-vedānta*) was critical of the ritual aspect of tradition to obtain the ultimate knowledge. This has clearly been shown by: F. Smith 1994.

98 http://dharmashree.org/VedicSchools.html accessed on February 21, 2011.

99 He also proclaims himself to be a disciple of Jayendra Saraswati, the current Śaṅkarācārya of Kanchipuram. Also, Svāmī Govind Dev Giri (then known as Kiśor Vyās) received the Sri Chandrasekarendra Saraswati National Eminence Award in 2003. How important his influence on the *vārkarī*s of Alandi or the region is a question that needs to be studied elsewhere, but as has been pointed out to me by Jon Keune, there is a strong non-*brāhmaṇa* stream in the contemporary *vārkarī* tradition, especially as coalesced around the commemoration of Tukarām in Dehu.

100 See Appendix 1. http://www.dattadevasthan.org/VedantVidyapeetham.asp accessed on February 22, 2011.

101 *Śaktipāta* ('the descent of power') is a yogic/tantric experience that is often associated with the initiation (*dīkṣa*) in which the *kuṇḍalinī* energy of a disciple is 'awakened' by the *guru*. For more on this process see, e.g., Wallis 2008.

102 For these two examples, see subchapter 6.3 and Appendix 1.

Prior to the arrival of the *guru*, well-known *vārkarī* devotional songs (*abhaṅga*s and *kīrtan*s) were sung by the assembled crowd, *vārkarī* in its grand majority. The group was divided into a large majority of white-clad males with their distinctive *ṭopī* caps, and a few women who were seated separately, as well as the honoured students. The other group consisted of the *brāhmaṇa* students of the Śrī Sadguru Nijānand Mahārāj Vedavidyālay. The *brāhmaṇa* students sat in front of the assembly near the stage. Once the *vārkarī*s finished their chanting, a man in his 40s-50s gave a short speech and introduced the Vedic chanting by the students of the school. They intoned a few Vedic *mantra*s in the *mādhyandina* style (the branch taught in this Vedic school) while the public listened patiently. After the *mantra*s, Śrī Govinddev Giri Mahārāj, an elder *vedamūrti* from Alandi, and other dignataries were honoured by the staff members of the school, assisted by young *brāhmaṇa* students. As a symbolic gesture, Śrī Govinddev Giri Mahārāj with the other dignitaries on stage, together, kindled the large *ghee* lamp, each of them lighting a different wick. Following this event, the dignitaries received garlands, a shawl wrapped around their shoulders, a small gift, and a cardboard photograph of Śrī Govinddev Giri (who received the garland and a shawl). Once honoured, the guests of Śrī Govinddev Giri bowed to the *saṃnyāsin* in respect. The elder *brāhmaṇa* tried to bow to the *guru*, but instead Śrī Govinddev Giri honoured him by touching his feet. After honouring the saints on the altar on the stage, and after a few speeches from the organizers, the ceremony of handing over prizes/recognitions to people in (the *vārkarī*) community, and particularly the girl students, took place. Each of the dignitaries seated on stage had an item to distribute to the students (these items being a book by Govinddev Giri, a shawl, and an envelope with money). The students, in turn, either prostrated themselves before each of the dignitaries on stage or touched their feet in respect. The elder *brāhmaṇa* and Śrī Govinddev Giri received always the highest form of respect — a full prostration with the hands stretched out towards the feet (*daṇḍavat-praṇāma*). After the students had received their awards, other personalities in the crowd received honours. Speeches, mostly on nationalistic themes such as the protection of cows and the restoration of *sanātana-dharma* by protecting the Vedas and the *brāhmaṇa*s, were also given by one of the *brāhmaṇa* students and by Govinddev Giri himself. After the speeches, the *guru* requested that the audience recite the famous prayer by Jñāneśvar Mahārāj called Pasāyadān.[103] After the prayer, the gathering dispersed, and after a few minutes, the crowd was gone.

103 This is the closing prayer of Jñāneśvar Mahārāj's *opus magnum*, his commentary on the Bhagavadgītā in Marathi called Jñāneśvarī. The Pasāyadān is often referred to as the "universal prayer" (Kripananda 1989) and is regularly used in Maharashtra as an invocation prayer (*āvāhana* or *maṅgalastuti*). On many occasions, in ceremonies and other religious events such as this one, it is also used as a closing prayer.

Plate 2: Festival honoring school girls at a Vedic school from the MVVP. Govinddev Giri (upper image) in the center surrounded by *brāhmaṇa* and *vārkarī* personalities. *Vārkarī*s singing (lower image) devotional songs before the program was officially inagurated. Alandi 2009.

Part of the legacy of these reform movements are found in discourses that have affected areas of Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy — for example, that women should be college educated before marriage, widows should be respected and take active roles in families and communities, and that caste barriers should be dissolved or at least become more permeable. As Saunders has remarked:

> Clearly, the ideas of the Arya Samaj and other reform movements with respect to these and a variety of other social issues have been largely accepted by an influential segment of the Hindu population in India. (Saunders 2011: 55)

The influence of these discourses has had an important impact not only on ideological elements of Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy, but in relation to actual innovations in ritual performance, such as the access of women to the Vedas.

> One partial by-product of the paradigm seems to have been unintended. This was the expansion of women's access to Sanskrit education and the assignment to women of leadership roles in the Vedic system that had once been entirely performed by males. Arya Samaj schools launched this trend early in the twentieth century, training women to read Sanskrit, to recite Vedic *mantrams*, and to perform the fire offerings known as *havans*. During the late 1930's Guru Upansani Baba spread women's priestly roles to Maharashtra, when he began training women of his *ashram* to conduct Vedic sacrifices. Women of the Ramakrishna Mission finally realized Vivekananda's dream of a *math* for women *sannyasinis* devoted to service in 1957, founding the Sarada Math and Mission. [...] The Sri Sri Anandmayi Ma organization has likewise consecrated *sannyasinis*, as well as *brahmacarinis* vowed to perpetual discipleship. In fact, even the Shankaracaryas who serve as a living final authority for the orthodox Hindu community seem increasingly willing to accept women *sannyasinis*, while at least two women leaders of the so-called 'Hindu Party', the B.J.P. (Bharatiya Janata Party), have likewise taken up *sannyasini* robes. (N. Falk 2011: 314)

The consequences of this appropriation and reinterpretation of fundamental values of Brāhmaṇism, which have their roots in these movements, will be illustrated in the examples in Chapter 6. My aim here is to point to the interdependence of the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s with the developments brought about by efforts initiated in the Hindu reforms of the nineteenth century.

Another reason for the malleability of Brāhmaṇism's core values is that the different discourses around what it means to be a Hindu are widely and quickly circulated in today's communication era, through print and electronic media (film, television, video, and more recently the Internet), and therefore can also quickly change and influence opinions within *brāhmaṇa* networks.

The influence of these movements on contemporary Hinduism may be larger than scholars have heretofore recognized. Here, I have merely scratched the surface of the topic, and a more thorough study of how these ideas have spread in popular Hinduism, whether disseminated through *guru* movements, caste associations, or family members, would help us better understand the entangled lives of modern *vaidika*s, but I hope that some of these entanglements will become clearer in the examples I present in the following pages.

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 / katamásyāmṝtānām / katamásyāmṝtānām* (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 dṝśéyam / 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 prathamásyāmṝtānām…*).

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

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

Note that, when recited as an independent phrase, the final [tā̍] in *cānu̍ditā̍* 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:

yāmiṣuṁ̍ giriśaṁta̱ haste̍ / bibha̱rṣyasta̍ve |

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:

yāmiṣuṁ̍ giriśaṁta̱ haste̱ bibha̱rṣyasta̍ve |

The next breaks are at *“ye ce̱mām̐̍ ru̱drā a̱bhito̍ di̱kśu / śri̱tāḥ sa̍hasra̱śo’vai̍ṣā̱ṃ̱...*”, then “*hasta̱ iṣa̍va̱ḥ / parā̱ tā bha̍gavo vapa”, and “u̱bhābhyā̍m/u̱ta te̱ namo̍...”*. At the end of the 1st *anuvāka*, the student will repeat all the break points, reciting: “*haste̍ di̱kśiṣa̍va̱ u̱bhābhyā̍m dvāvi(gum̐̍)’śatiśca*”, thus summarizing all the word groups. *“dvāvi(gum̐̍)’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 nama̍ste rudra ma̱nyava̍ u̱tota̱ iṣa̍ve̱ nama̍ḥ...*”

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).

4 Life in the Vedapāṭhaśālā

This chapter aims at presenting the daily life at the Vedic schools and also at presenting some of the rules spoken and unspoken that regulate the lives of the teachers and students. I present here the yearly calendar and general usage of when to study the Veda, the daily schedule, the extracurricular activities, the dress code, and insignia used by students and teachers in these schools.

4.1 Yearly Calendar and Preparations Before Class

The *dharmaśāstra* literature gives us different information on the annual course of study. According to Āpastamba, the start of the course should be on the full moon of July-August (which is also the full moon dedicated to the teacher called *gurupūrṇimā*), and the course of study should conclude on the full moon or the lunar mansion *rohiṇī* of December-January.[250] Gautama, Baudhāyana, and Vasiṣṭha also suggest the same dates for the beginning of the annual course, and add that the course could alternatively start on the full moon of the next month. According to these sources, the course should last for four-and-a-half months or five-and-a-half months. Vasiṣṭha adds that, "outside of that period [one] should study the Veda during the fortnights of the waxing moon. If he wants to, he may study the Vedic Supplements [i.e. Vedāṅga]."[251]

According to the *dharmaśāstra*, therefore, the period of Vedic studies lasted usually no more six and a half months per year.[252] The *dharmaśāstra* literature is silent on the activities to be performed by both students and teachers during the rest of the year. According to Scharfe, probably the curriculum at that time was not as large as when the Vedic canon had been established and, once the curriculum expanded, the study periods naturally also became longer. He writes:[253] "The tendency to extend the period of study is obvious, a result perhaps of the ever-increasing volume of texts that had to be mastered" (Scharfe 2002:215).

Nonetheless, besides the actual period of the year in which the Vedas were studied, there are "non-instruction" days on which Vedic recitation and study was to

250 ĀpDhS 1.9. 1-3 cf. Olivelle 2000.

251 GautDhS.16.1-4 / BaudhDhs.1.12.16 /VāsDhŚ 13.1-7 cf. Olivelle 2000.

252 KauśGS 139 and 141: four months minus three days; ĀpDhS I 3,9,2: four and a half or five months; PārGS II 11,10: five and a half months; ŚāṅkGS IV 6,7f.: five and a half or six and a half months; ĀśvGS III 5,14: six months cf. Altekar 1934: 102.

253 "What did the Veda students do after *utsarjana*, in the time of our *sūtra*s (and the time preceding them), before this (perhaps optional) expansion of the study time was introduced, or those students who opted not to study after utsarjana? The old texts are silent on this point." (Scharfe 2002: 216), cf. also: Altekar 1934: 106.

be avoided.[254] But the fact that only six months or two months were dedicated to the study of the Vedic texts is rather improbable. The fact that, already, the *padapāṭha* and several *vikṛti*s of the four Vedas were preserved — through the oral tradition — by the time the *dharmaśāstra* literature was composed implies that intensive study to memorize these texts was needed.[255] Either the students then took much longer to memorize the Vedic texts than they do now or, as Scharfe suggests, the study period was extended more and more until it reached a continuous full-year calendar, as we find it to be today.[256] One would need to ask if the same students and teachers who preserved the Vedic recitation and chanting with their permutations were the same for/by whom these *śāstra*s were written. Whoever created these texts had the time and the financial support to do it. A *vaidika* who had to dedicate most of his life to memorizing and reciting the Veda, and to performing rituals, was not necessarily (pre-)occupied with the transmission and creation of other legitimating texts, such as the *dharmaśāstra* literature.

The school calendars of the Vedic schools of contemporary Maharashtra, although varying slightly from school to school and having their own rules and schedules for formal teaching, have a full yearly calendar that differs from the one given in the Śāstric literature, in which in which the rituals of renewal of the sacred-thread called *upākarman* and *utsarjana* accordingly, marked still longer periods which were free of study.[257] The structural and functional heterogeneity of the contemporary *vedapāṭhaśālā*s observed for this study influence the way the Veda instruction takes place and how it differs from the manner in which it is ideally supposed to be done, according to the textual sources. If one looks at the preparation stage of the Veda class according to the Śāstric literature, the first evident difference one encounters is concerning time and place.

The instruction of the Veda and its recitation is, according to the tradition, supposed to happen only on 'study' or *adhyāya*-days, and be avoided on 'not-study' or *anadhyāya*-days (cf. Scharfe 2002: 219-20; Olivelle 2006). The detailed instructions on when the Veda study is supposed to happen and when it is to be interrupted, according to the Śāstric rules, are by and large not followed in all the schools, and most probably they never were. Currently, these Śāstric rules are often not being

254 See below in this chapter.

255 It is generally accepted that the consolidation of the oral tradition happened in its majority during the Brāhmaṇa period (900–700 BCE), in which the Saṃhitās and their respective *padapāṭha*s were prepared. For a more detailed discussion on the subject, see: e.g. Deshpande 2002: i-xiii. The earliest Dharmasūtras, on the other hand, are generally dated as follows: Gautama 600 to 400, Āpastamba 450 to 350, Baudhāyana 500 to 200, and Vasiṣṭha 300 to100, all BCE, and the Dharmaśāstras even later. (Olivelle 2000: 9)

256 Including relatively short vacation periods. See below in this chapter.

257 For more on these rituals, see: Mookerji 1998: 191. On the topic of the sacred-thread, see below in subchapter 4.5.

respected *à-la-lettre* for practical reasons, but also sometimes out of ignorance. One must remember that these rules and restrictions were not necessarily authoritative to all the Vedic branches (particularly those articulated within the *śikṣā* and *prātiśākhya* literature), and that even when the rules were intended for a specific *śākhā*, more often local and even personal preferences on the part of the teachers have determined the practices followed in these schools, both in the present as well as in the past.

The study days are dictated by the teacher and follow the school's calendar as determined by either the main teacher or the director of the school. The *anadhyāya* days are traditionally stipulated in the Śāstric literature, but there are different interpretations concerning the prohibition against studying Vedic texts. Long lists of days on which the recitation of the Veda is to be avoided are found in the Dharmasūtras and elsewhere. For an example of such a list, I take the passage from the Gautamadharmasūtra, as quoted by Olivelle in his article on the subject:

> He should suspend vedic recitation during daytime when the wind whirls up the dust; at night when he can hear the wind blow; when the sound of a lute, drum, side drum, chariot, or wailing is heard; when dogs are barking, jackals are howling, and donkeys are braying; when the sky turns crimson; when a rainbow appears; when there is frost on the ground; when clouds appear out of season; when he has the urge to void urine or excrement; in the middle of the night, at the time of twilight, and while standing in water; when it is raining —but, according to some, only when the water is running down the eaves; when Venus and Jupiter are surrounded by halos, as also the sun and the moon; when he is frightened, travelling in a vehicle, lying down, or has lifted his feet; when he is in a cremation ground, at the village boundary, on a highway, or in an impure state; when there is a foul smell; when there is a corpse or a Cāṇḍāla in the village; when a Sūdra is near by; and when he experiences an acrid belching. The recitation of the Ṛgveda and the Yajurveda, moreover, is suspended as long as the recitation of the Sāmaveda is heard. When there is a lightning strike, an earthquake, an eclipse, or the fall of a meteor, vedic recitation is suspended until the same time the next day; as also when there is thunder, rain, or lightning during twilight when the fires are visible. When these happen during the rainy season, however, the suspension lasts only that day. When there is lightning during the night, moreover, the suspension lasts until the last watch of the night; but if it occurs during or after the third part of the day, the suspension lasts the whole night. According to some, a meteor has the same effect as lightning with respect to the suspension of vedic recitation, as does thunder when it occurs in the afternoon or even at dusk. If there is thunder before midnight, the suspension lasts for the whole night; if it happens during the day, the suspension lasts throughout the daylight hours, as also when the king of that realm dies, and when one student goes on a journey and another stays behind with the teacher. The suspension lasts for a day and a night when there has been a social disturbance or a fire; when he has finished reciting one Veda; when he has vomited; when he has eaten at an ancestral offering or at a sacrifice to humans; on the new-moon day-alternatively, the suspension here may last for two days; and on the full-moon days of the lunar months October-November, February-March, and June-July. At the three eighth-day offerings during the three fortnights of the waning moon following the full moon of November-December, the suspension lasts for three days; according to some, the suspension takes place only at the last of these eighth day offerings. When the annual course of study is commenced and concluded, the suspension is in effect on that day, as well as on the preceding and following days. In the opinion of all authorities, when rain, lightning, and thunder occur together, the suspension lasts for three days, as also when there is heavy rain. On a festive day vedic recitation is suspended after the

> meal. Immediately after commencing the annual course of study, recitation is suspended during the first four "hours" of the night. According to some, vedic recitation is always suspended in a town. Even mental recitation is suspended when a person is impure. After making an ancestral offering, the suspension lasts until the same time the next day, as also when uncooked food is distributed at an ancestral offering. Vedic recitation is also suspended for reasons given in each vedic branch. (GautDhS 16.5-49, transl. Olivelle 2006: 306-7)

According to the above passage from the GautDhS, the recitation of the Veda is to be interrupted on several "extraordinary" occasions. Olivelle concludes that a common factor to these restrictions of study is the anxiety arising from the 'liminality' of these situations:

> Concern with regard to the order of this regulated and classified universe is of paramount importance to the guardians of that order and especially with regard to the process whereby members of the group, especially the younger members, are socialized into accepting the inherited order (Berger 1967). Concern or scrupulosity — what we would call śaṅkhā[258] [*sic*] in Sanskrit — during times when this order is threatened is a central feature of the ritualized behavior intended to guard the order. [...] It is the śaṅkhā [*sic*] with regard to the boundaries of the order and to events that disturb that order that appears to be at the concealed heart of the rules governing suspension of Vedic recitation. (Olivelle 2006: 320)

As mentioned in the passage above, and according to many other similar texts,[259] the instruction of the Veda is not supposed to take place if one has previously engaged in 'polluting' activities, places, or circumstances. But most of these rules became obsolete in the course of time, and those mentioned in the passage above were not observed during my fieldwork, particularly those concerning meteorological circumstances. I was able to observe on several occasions how, for example, classes took place while it was raining out of season, or while dogs were barking near the school. Other rules prohibiting the study of the Vedas under other circumstances not mentioned in the passage above are considered in the compilation given by Olivelle (2006). For example, I was able to observe students and teachers engaged in writing, reading the newspaper, or other "forbidden" activities as according to the Dharmasūtras and Dharmaśāstras. In fact, most of the *anadhyāya* rules were ignored, except the traditional fortnightly holidays, which are followed in all of the schools and are determined by the lunar calendar on full moon and new moon, during occasions relating to death and birth, and in cases of a solar or lunar eclipse. Other interruptions in study may be the observance of Hindu holidays on which particular rites are followed. On these days, classes and study may fall off completely or be shortened.

258 The word Olivelle is referring to is not *śaṅkhā* (a kind of flute or a derivative from a conch or shell), but *śaṅkā* (care, fear, apprehension).

259 Most of the Dharmaśāstric texts have a section dealing with the study of the Veda in which the non-study days are addressed. For a comparative list of recurring topics in which several textual sources are used see for example: Olivelle 2006.

Additional suspension of study is observed during the vacation period which, strictly speaking, is not part of the *adhyāya* days. However, since the yearly calendar is not strictly marked by the *upākarman* rituals anymore, the calendar is quite varied among the schools I visited. Generally, ten days or two weeks are always given as holidays during the *dīpāvali* celebrations (October/November). The other vacation period lasts the whole month of Vaiśākha (around May) during the hot season when it is really difficult to do any kind of work. Over these two longer periods of holidays, the students go home to spend time with their families.

On the *anadhyāya* days that fall on the new and full moon, a few schools perform the traditional Vedic rituals of *pārvaṇa caru*[260](or rather adaptations of it), others spend their time performing alternative domestic (*smārta*) rituals (different types of *yajña*s and *homa*s), and other schools with less time, knowledge, and resources perform *smārta* rituals only occasionally, and very rarely attend *śrauta* rituals, but this, too, only as minor assistants or observers rather than as officiating priests, for whom a specific training is necessary. On such non-study days, the teachers and students also take their days off, on which they rest or attend to their personal chores. Study of non-Vedic texts, such as the *vedāṅga*s or philosophy, is permitted (and in rare cases encouraged), and in some schools where regulations are less rigid, entertaining activities such as the viewing of certain movies or cricket matches (both playing them and watching them on TV) are allowed for the students.

On the other hand, I happened to observe, more than once, the interruption of formal instruction for practical reasons other than those stipulated in the *śāstra*s, particularly if one of the teachers had a certain business to attend to, such as officiating a wedding, a commissioned *pūjā* or *yajña*, or a speech at a religious gathering. On such occasions, the students are usually asked to revise their previous lessons either in groups or by themselves, usually supervised by one of the elder students or by one of the auxiliary teachers if the school has them.

The instruction of the Veda is supposed to start in the first hours of the dawn on the *ādhyāya* days, right after the student and teacher have taken their baths and performed their *saṃdhyāvandana*. Nonetheless, only in the schools where the teacher and students live (and sleep) in the same enclosure does this actually happen. This is not possible, or at least not on a daily basis, where some of the teachers do not live on campus. In many of the schools I visited, the teacher does live with the students, but certainly not in all of them. In such cases where the teacher does not live in the school, the class usually happens in the course of the morning, but not as early as it is supposed to take place according to the Dharmaśāstric rules.

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260 The full and new moon oblations are traditionally called *darśapūrṇamāsa*, but now the *śrauta* rites are very rare. On the traditional *darśapūrṇamāsa* rites, see, e.g.: Hillebrandt 1889; Dumont 1957: 216-243. On the domestic or 'non-solemn' rites alternatively performed during this time, see: Gonda 1980.

The teachers who do not live in their schools usually have the classes scheduled after breakfast, roughly around 9.00 a.m. The teachers generally take at least some of their meals at home, and come only to the school to teach and, occasionally, to perform rituals. For students, sharing meals with their mentors is not unusual, however, it is more common for them to eat among themselves.

In most cases, the teachers also have other responsibilities that require their attention. Some even have other jobs and activities. In these cases, not only is the amount of time spent in formal teaching reduced, but also, as we will see later in Chapter 5, the quantity of time spent with the *guru* outside the formal study of the Veda is also reduced.

4.2 Daily Schedule

The *vedapāṭhaśālā*s of Maharashtra share a similar daily schedule marked by the natural rhythms of the day, albeit with some minor variations. Usually, this consists of three periods of formal instruction of the Veda: in the morning before noon, in the afternoon, and in the evening.[261] There is usually no fixed scheme, and all schools (including those founded by the MSRVVP) create their own schedule. Some of the schools that I was able to observe over longer periods of time kept adjusting their schedules to accommodate changes in the curricula (such as new English or Sanskrit classes), and in general, schools of the 'Gurukula' and 'Vedapāṭhaśālā' types, where more intimate relations are common, have more flexible and mutable timetables. This depends on the household, the extra-curricular activities of the *guru*, and larger community-focused projects in which the students might also be involved. In general, the larger the school, the more fixed the daily routine is, but also the less responsibilities within the school the students have.

For students, their day starts generally before dawn with a bath and personal chores. Usually between 5.00 a.m. and 6.30 a.m., *saṃdhyāvandana* (personal worship) takes place. The *saṃdhyāvandana* or in short *saṃdhyā* (lit. junction) consists of a cluster[262] of obligatory ritual acts that mark the divisions of the day (sunrise, midday, and sunset), and is therefore also known as the "triple junction" (*trisaṃdhyā*). In all the schools visited, the morning *saṃdhyā* was considered an indispensable activity. In theory, the morning *saṃdhyā* should be performed as soon as the sun has risen (see Gonda, 1980: 460). This would imply that all the students would do their *saṃdhyā*

261 Including the different types of instruction, see subchapter 3.6.

262 The main constituents being: sipping of water (*ācamana*), breath exercises (*prāṇāyāma*), sprinkling one's self with water (*mārjana*), the 'driving out of sin' breathing out from the nose on water taken in the right hand and then throwing the water away (*aghamarṣaṇa*), offering water to the sun (*arghya*), and recitation (*japa*) of the *gāyatrī-mantra*. Cf. Gonda 1980: 460.

at the same time, but in practice, in most of the schools, the ritual is performed in the morning hours before breakfast. Only two of the schools visited are located very near of a river where students can go and take their morning and/or evening ritual bath. In this case, students can bathe in larger groups and, therefore, also perform the *saṃdhyā* at the same time. This is nonetheless very rare, for most of the schools are located far away from a large body of water. This results in an inability of all of the students to practice their *saṃdhyā* together at the same time, and in practice, therefore, the students perform their *saṃdhyā* any time before breakfast or before their first revision session.

In addition to the morning *saṃdhyā*, in many of the schools, there is also a varied period of *pūjā* worship. In some of the schools for which there is a temple in the school or very close to the campus, students are encouraged to participate in the morning *pūjā* of the deity. In schools where there is no affiliated temple nearby, students remain in the school and either only perform their *saṃdhyā* or do additional worship in their free time. In the Śrī Kṛṣṇayajurveda Pāṭhaśālā in Satara, I could observe that while some students did only their morning *saṃdhyā*, two (or sometimes three) students had a longer morning routine in which they worshipped Śiva by performing a ritual bath (*abhiṣekha*) to the *śivaliṅgam* in the *pūjā*-room of the school, and integrated parts of the *saṃdhyopāsana* as their worship of Śiva. Another student chose to worship the Hanumān in the small shrine at the entrance to the school, in addition to his *saṃdhyā*, while the rest of the students performed only the *saṃdhyā*, according to their family tradition. This often has to do with the different tasks and responsibilities which students have in addition to their studies (we will come to these later). In other schools, the shrines are dedicated to different deities and, naturally, the worship varies greatly in form and scope — depending not only on the form of worship to each deity, but also on the personal inclinations of the teachers and students. In general, I could observe that in most schools a small group of students rotates on a regular basis in the worship of these deities, and that usually they are partly overseen by the teachers in some schools, such as the Śrī Kṛṣṇayajurveda Pāṭhaśālā. In some schools the teachers do not live on campus, but nearby in the neighbourhood, at a walking distance from the school. For this reason, the teachers rarely perform their *saṃdhyāvandana* in the school, but they rather come to school after performing the ritual at home, and after having their breakfast with their families. I also observed the case of a young unmarried teacher who comes to the school after performing his *saṃdhyā*, but often takes his breakfast with the students in the school.

During *saṃdhyā*, the students apply different kinds of *tilaka*s. Most of the schools I visited are from a Smārta background, so that they mainly follow a Smārta practice and calendar. The *tilaka*s the *brāhmaṇa*s generally use in Maharashtra are mainly of Śaiva expression. The horizontal marks of sacred ash (*bhasman*) gained more of a sectarian connotation with the popularization of Śaṅkara and his association with the

ten monastic orders (the *daśanāmī-sampradāya*). Although, this does not necessarily indicate a Śaiva preference.[263]

After *saṃdhyā* and personal worship, the students review the portions learned over the past few days. In many schools, it is not until around 7.00 a.m. that the formal supervision of the students begins. By this time, the teachers and the students come together to take their tea. During this time, in many schools, exercise is supposed to take place, often programmed as '*yoga*' which mainly consists of the famous sequence of yoga postures, *āsana*s called *sūryanamaskāra* (sun salutations).[264] This form of physical exercise, nonetheless, was very often left out of the daily schedule. In one school I visited, a teacher had been hired to teach only '*yoga*' to the students in the mornings. However, he stopped giving that class after a few months due "to the lack of interest from the students." In two of the schools where I could observe the performance of the *sūryanamaskāra* sequence, and where it was considered an "important part of the schedule", the session never lasted more than 15-20 minutes, and it took place without the supervision of a teacher, guided by one of the older students.

After their morning worship is completed, individuals have time for their personal responsibilities (such as washing clothes) and personal study or revision in groups until they gather to eat breakfast around 8 a.m. Together, they recite *mantra*s to the goddess Annapūrṇā and to other deities, as well as to the *guru*. In some schools, students help in serving food, usually taking turns every week on a rotating system. Breakfast is usually a spicy dish called *pohe* that is made of rice flakes, or *śīrā*, a sweet dish made of semolina. Buttermilk for breakfast is not uncommon, and milk with sugar is also served in some schools, particularly to the younger students. Tea is usually only served to the teachers or senior students, but on some rare occasions I have seen students drinking tea.

Soon after breakfast, the first lesson (*santhā*) of the day begins for all the students. The classes continue until 11.30 a.m. or 12.00 p.m. in the way described in previous chapters. After class, a short ritual dedicated to Agni in the form of the digestive fire (the *agni-vaiśvāraṇa*) occurs, in which a different student offers cooked rice to the deity. Additionally, in one of the schools I was able to observe, another ritual in which a small plate with the food cooked that day is first offered to the cows or other animals of the school. Also, the leftovers of rice and *capātī*s of the previous day are left in the open for

263 Many have indeed a strong Vaiṣṇava influence in their practice, and it is also not uncommon to find Śākta deities as the tutelary family deity (*kuladevatā*) of many *brāhmaṇas* in the region. For more on the complexity of the appellation 'Smārta' and its regional connotation of practice and group identity, see: Clementin-Ojha 2000.

264 It is unclear how old this sequence of *āsana*s is, but it finds no mention in classical Haṭhayoga texts such as the Haṭhayogapradīpikā, the Śivasaṁhitā, or the Gheraṇḍasaṁhitā. Some scholars believe that it was created by Pratinidhi Pant, the Rāja of Aundh, as a regimen for body-building rather than as a part of yogic *sādhanā*. (Singleton 2010: 124)

crows, ants, and other creatures to eat. This is considered as *bhūtayajña* or the 'sacrifice for the living beings', and is regarded as part of the five *mahāyajña*s that should be observed daily. The rest of the students and teachers do not participate in this offering; in the meantime, the appointed students for a given day arrange the seats by placing the mats and the big steel plates (*thālī*) on the floor. When the student has concluded the ritual, they come to sit for lunch. In the schools with a tendency towards the 'Vedavidyālaya' type, I was not able to observe the above-mentioned ritual performed and, instead, students went straight to wash their hands and take their seats on the floor to have lunch. In all the schools, before eating anything or touching the food, all of them recite some *mantra*s to Agni and to Annapūrṇā, usually the Annasūkta and/or Triśuparṇa. After reciting these *mantra*s, some of the students offer small balls of rice (*piṇḍadāna*) next to their plates to their ancestors (if a male family member has passed away within the last year), and they sprinkle water, forming a circle around it from left to right in order to bless it (*tarpaṇa*). The diet is strictly vegetarian, and the food is cooked and handled strictly by *brāhmaṇa*s. The food is based on a rice diet accompanied by curries of vegetables, *āmati* (a lentil based soup), and curd. There are particular holy days on which certain foods are prohibited according to religious rules of fasting (*upavāsa*) particularly rice, and thus are replaced by other kinds of foods that grow underground, such as potatoes, tapioca or peanuts. On fasting days there are certain food restrictions, and students are typically served a dish called *sabudana khicaṛī* made of tapioca pearls and potatoes, and other allowed products. Students are rarely encouraged to fast completely by drinking only water, since food is considered vital for concentration. As a general rule, they are also encouraged not to eat outside of the school, but if they have to, they should eat in "pure" (*sāttvika*) places — that is, eat food cooked by *brāhmaṇa*s which is strictly vegetarian.[265]

After lunch, there is usually a short period for personal chores and resting until the next Veda class takes place. This period varies considerably in each school. As mentioned above, depending on the school type, students will have varying activities to perform outside of the formal periods of instruction, whether less or more.[266] Between lunch and the afternoon Veda class is the time where many schools fit in their 'complementary' classes that might include: English, Marathi, Sanskrit, or computer sciences.[267] In some schools, these classes are given in smaller groups, depending on the needs of the students. In a school in Satara, the youngest students are sent to a class at the home of the main teacher, where they receive instruction in Marathi and basic Mathematics which are taught by the daughter in-law, as well as an extra

265 For conflicts on the aspect of eating out and consuming non-*brāhmaṇa* food, see subchapter 4.4.
266 See also the next section on the extracurricular activities of students and of teachers in the different schools.
267 For more on these classes see subchapters 3.5. and 4.3. In the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa 3.2.1.24, it is said that: "A Brahmin should not speak the language of the mlecchas", as quoted in Killingley 2007: 125.

revision class for Sanskrit, also given by her. In another school, the English class was given by a female teacher who came three times a week for one hour, but the class had to be temporarily discontinued when the teacher found another full-time job and no replacement for her could immediately be found.

In many schools, before the afternoon class students also take care of their assigned tasks that help with the running or maintenance of the school. This work is known as *gurusevā*, or service to the teacher. It is not merely believed to be menial work for the school or a sort of self-sufficient strategy. Instead, it is conceived as 'the yoga of action' (*karmayoga*) and 'selfless spiritual practice', and one through which one obtains merit (*puṇya*). Service to the master equals service to God and the fulfillment of one's *dharma*. This service to the master is also a crucial socialization strategy that serves to embody discipline, and automate control over the body and the senses.

After their English class, they attend to their second Veda class of the day with their respective teachers until 4.30 p.m. After their class, most of the students and the two younger teachers usually play cricket. They play a couple innings in the field next to the school, the courtyard, or in any space available to be roughly adapted into a cricket playground. The 'Vedavidyālaya type' will tend to have a courtyard in the school grounds which is designed specifically for large social events or for the practice of sports. In the Śrī Guru Gaṅgeśvar Mahārāj Pāṭhaśālā, there was no cricket ground, however, it was the only school which had a proper playground with recreational equipment for the students.

After playing cricket, they still have around 20 minutes of free time which they use for washing themselves and doing their evening *saṃdhyā*. They recite their prayers in small groups, or alone in different places within the school. After *saṃdhyā*, the students have dinner in the dinning hall and, after washing themselves, they have either some revision of the previously learned texts, self-study, or classes with the teachers. Sometimes the elder students and the senior teachers come together to recite at this time of the day. Around 9 or 10 p.m. the children prepare themselves to go to bed. The teachers go to their homes. A few students also go home if their families live nearby. The students who go home are mostly from the advanced batches, while most young students are all residents. The students prepare their "beds", which are only made of a couple of blankets spread on the bare floor and some of them even have a small pillow. During the warmer months of summer, they will only have a sheet (usually simply an extra *dhoṭī*) to cover their bodies with. It is customary that students sleep on the floor (*sthaṇḍilaśāyin*), and the Mānavadharmaśāstra and other scriptures state that it is mandatory for Veda students to sleep on the ground.[268] At 10 p.m. the lights are turned off and everyone goes to sleep.

268 In MānDhŚ II.108, it is said: "Kindling the sacred fire, begging almsfood, sleeping on the floor and doing what is beneficial to his teacher - a twice-born should do these until he has performed the rite of returning home" (Olivelle 2005a: 100).

This daily cycle repeats itself without interruption except for the official holidays, when students enjoy their free time in different ways, but usually they tend to appreciate playing cricket and doing other things not related to their studies. I was told by some of the students that they "review what they have learned and do their *saṃdhyā* on holidays", but mainly this is a time for them to relax and spend time with their families. There is no new text to be learned; however, they have to remember where they left off before taking their vacations. It often implies that they have to revise during some minimum of time everyday. Other students told me that they are often asked to perform rituals at home or recite what they have learned in school in order to please particular family members.

The schedule presented here in plate 5 is an actual example posted on a wall from the school in Nashik. This schedule varies from the prototype presented in the English version in Table 6. It includes a morning session of recitation of several non-Vedic texts, such as the Bhagavadgītā, the Viṣṇusahāsranāma, and other *stotra*s in the morning, as well as the midday *saṃdhyā* which is absent in the prototype. Such variations are found in all schools. While most schools aim for regularity, certain items in the schedule are actually performed every day at the given time (such as the morning and evening *saṃdhyā*). Other schools have more activities and are not so rigid. This depends on the teacher and the needs of the moment. The students may skip one activity or perform another for a longer period of time.

Table 6. Sample of a daily schedule

Time	Activity
4:00 a.m.	Wake up
4:15 – 5:00 a.m.	Personal chores, revision, and exercise
5:00 – 6:30 a.m.	Veda revision
6:30 – 8:00 a.m.	Morning *saṃdhyā* and morning *pūjā*
8:00 – 8:30 a.m.	Breakfast
8:30 a.m. – 12 p.m.	Veda study (*santhā* or *guṇḍikā*)
12:00 – 1:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:00 – 2:00 p.m.	English class/Veda study
2:00 – 2:30 p.m.	Rest
2.30 – 5:00 p.m.	Veda study (*santhā* or *guṇḍikā*)
5:00 – 6:30 p.m.	Play/Computer training for senior students (alternate days)
6:00 – 7:00 p.m.	Self-study (Music class / Computer training)
6.30 – 7:00 p.m.	Evening *saṃdhyā*
7:30 – 8:00 p.m.	Dinner
8:00 – 9:00 p.m.	Sanskrit class or revision (alternate days)
9:30 p.m.	Lights-off / Bed

(Jyotiṣa class on Sundays)

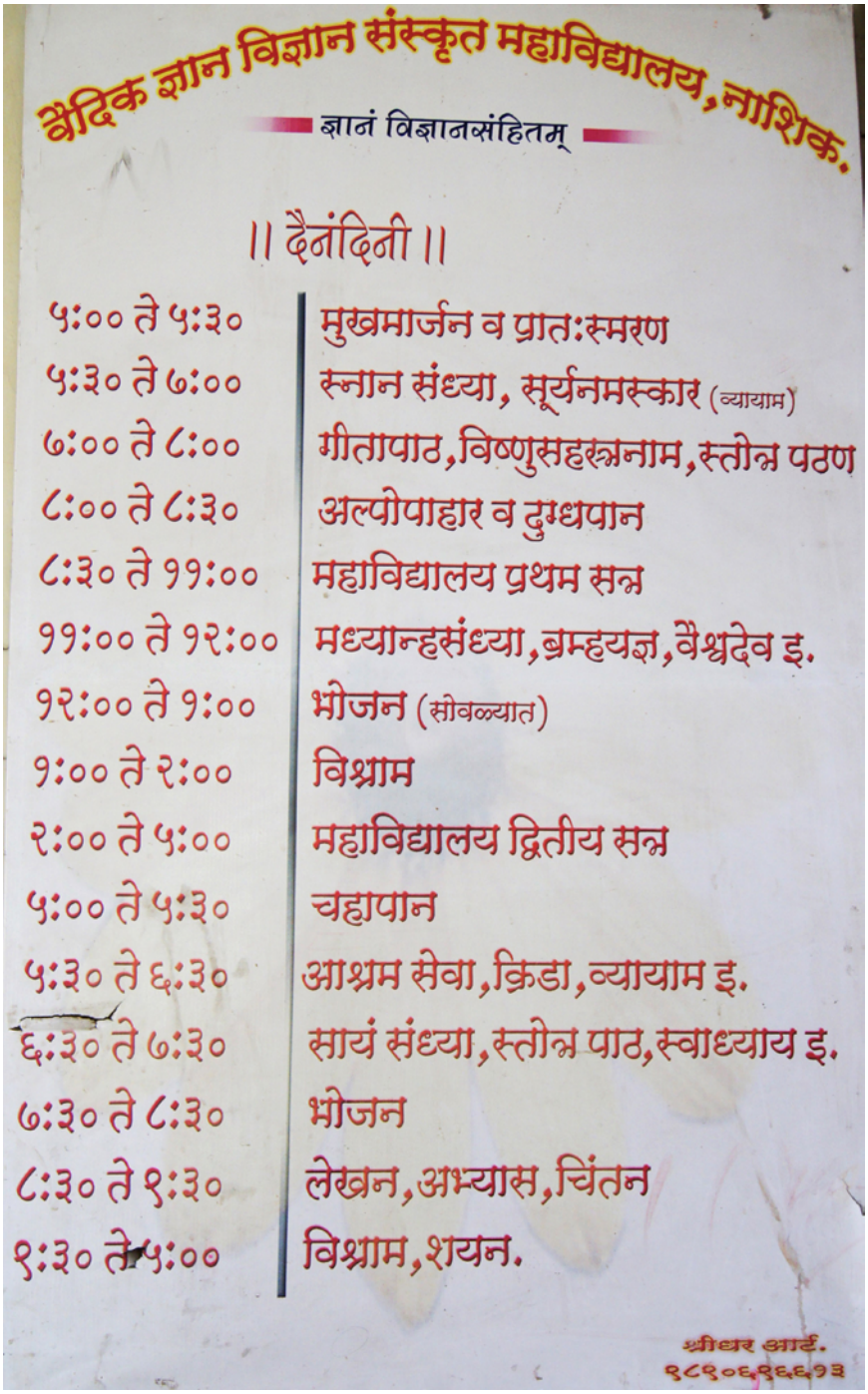

Plate 5: Daily schedule posted in the Vaidik Jñān Vijñān Saṃskṛt Mahāvidyālay. Nashik 2009.

4.3 Extracurricular Activities

I call 'extracurricular activities' those activities that are not dedicated to the teaching or study of the Veda. In extracurricular activities, I have included the instruction of non-traditional subjects such as English and the use of computers in order to separate them from the study of the Veda and because they often occur in a different setting and with less regularity. The teachers of the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s also do not consider these subjects as central as the instruction of the Vedas, and so they are often neglected. Other extracurricular activities are those that involve the maintenance of the school and service to the teacher. In the Vedic schools visited for this study, these activities are rich and varied. Depending on the school, the daily schedule is either more flexible or more rigid, permitting therefore more or less of these activities, depending on the outlook and needs of the school and the pedagogical approach of the teachers. In certain schools (usually those of the 'Gurukula' type and in the more independent 'Vedapāṭhaśālā' type) it is expected that students participate in extracurricular activities both in the school as well as outside of the school. Usually, these activities are framed as *gurusevā* ('service to the teacher'), and they are often considered part of students' training.[269] Other activities outside of the school, such as assisting the teacher in the performance of rituals for clients at their homes or in 'function halls' (*kāryālaya*s), going to the market to buy ritual materials and other groceries, and even taking classes outside of the school or going on pilgrimage are not rare in certain schools.

These extracurricular activities usually vary according to the degree of trust and responsibility conferred upon the students. Naturally, younger students do not engage in many extracurricular activities, particularly those that involve greater independence and responsibility. Younger students usually stay under the supervision of teachers and elder students, and rarely leave the premises of their school. Their extracurricular activities usually consist of simpler tasks, such as cleaning the premises and other household chores within the school. The focus for the younger students in their first years is usually placed on their studies and learning the proper behavior in the school. Occasionally, they accompany their teachers to a particular ritual. For example, in a *somayāga* I observed in Pune, I encountered some of the younger students from a *vedapāṭhaśālā* in Satara who had come to observe the ritual with two of their teachers. The rest of the elder students had stayed in Satara, as they had to prepare for an upcoming ritual in the school, and some of the elder students had left with the senior teacher to perform a wedding. For these younger students, this was both an opportunity to learn about a 'rare *śrauta* ritual', and at the same time it was an opportunity to break from their daily routine and enjoy a 'picnic day.'

269 For more on the importance of the extracurricular type of instruction as part of the *gurukula* system of education, see Chapter 5.

Once the students are a few years into their studies, their extracurricular activities start to diversify. Usually, their teacher — depending on the character and disposition of the student —confers these activities upon the students. For example, two of the students of a school in Satara became very interested in Indian classical music and desired to study *tablā* with one of the local teachers in town. They asked permission of their *guru* to see if they could take *tablā* lessons in the evenings during their free time. The teacher then consented with the condition that they "do well in their Vedic studies." Two other students of the same school wanted to study "more about computers", and also asked for permission to take a course on the computer program 'Office', to which the teacher also consented with the same condition, but a third student who wanted to take the same course was denied participation because he was "not doing good progress in his Veda class." The school mentioned here covers the costs of these extra classes, but this arrangement is rather an exception, and most of the schools do not provide such facilities or resources for students to study other subjects outside of their school. Sometimes, teachers of non-Vedic subjects, particularly of the English language, are hired by the schools to teach all of the students the given subject. These teachers are not necessarily traditional *brāhmaṇa*s, and come to school as a side-job to their regular income. In two cases I observed, female teachers imparting English classes, in two *vedapāṭhaśālā*s in Satara and Pune, came daily in one case and thrice a week in the other. When I asked the director of the school if the fact of them being female was any problem for them, he replied to me: "There is no problem at all. She is in fact very good with the children, but she does not come to the school when she has her period. No woman can enter the school when they have their period. According to the *śāstra*s this is not permitted."[270]

The extracurricular activities of students and teachers also include what they can do in their free time. These activities can vary from playing recreational sport games (cricket being the preferred sport), and reading newspapers and more rarely books, on to visiting friends and nearby temples. In a few schools, the watching of movies or selected TV programs is allowed on the *anadhyāya* days. Occasionally, students are allowed to watch cricket matches on TV or watch a movie. In a school in Satara, students had a TV set in the school and, on their free day, they were allowed to watch a few episodes from the popular Rāmāyaṇa or Mahābhārata serials under the supervision of a teacher. In all the schools, visits to the cinema were prohibited and non-religious content was discouraged. Despite this, most of the students I spoke to were familiar with the current Bollywood and even the Hollywood hits, which they watched during the vacation period in their family homes. Although still rather uncommon, some students now have increasing access to Internet in their schools, Internet cafes, and even on mobile phones on which they spend considerable parts of their free time, particularly on social media sites such as Facebook. Teachers and

270 For more on ritual purity, see the next subchapter, 4.4.

schools have also started to discover social media as a way to communicate and network, as well as a platform to present themselves and their services to the wider Hindu community.[271]

4.4 Ritual Purity

Besides these activities that break with the daily routine of teachers and students, their life remains very regulated and disciplined within the pedagogical and ritual framework, and within the aims of the school. Vedic schools are presumably the place where one encounters more resistance towards change, and where orthodoxy most openly orients itself towards the ancient rules of purity. Rules limiting sexual contact, food transactions, touch, company, the right to ritual activities, and etc. are known to be particularly stringent among orthodox *brāhmaṇa*s. The discourse on the purity of being and leading an "ideal Vedic life" is largely at the center of the self-representation of the *brāhmaṇa*s of most of these schools. Ritual purity (*śuci* or *śauca* in Skt and *soṃvaḷā* or *sovaḷā* in Marathi), i.e. rules of "permanent"[272] and "temporal"[273] impurity, continue to be an important aspect in the daily life of the Vedic schools, despite the fact that important changes of practices and attitudes can be noted in the lives of these *brāhmaṇa*s. It is important to remind ourselves here that these rules of ritual purity have been not only a matter of ideological fallacy for the Brāhmaṇical elite, but that ritual purification was actualy conferred by institutions and judicial processes in premodern India[274], as O'Hanlon has remarked:

> [...] at the important junction between an individual's interior life, his or her networks of social relationships, and the authoritative institutions of local community and the state responsible for overseeing the maintenance of ritual purification. (O'Hanlon 2009: 51)

She has demonstrated in her article on purification in pre-colonial Maharashtra (O'Hanlon 2009: 65-69) that *brāhmaṇa* councils (*dharmasabhā*s) continued to hold legal and ritual authority well into the eighteenth century, when it was institutionalized into the legal system of the Marāṭhā Peśva governments in Pune.

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271 Several teachers and at least three of the visited *vedapāṭhaśālā*s have active Facebook profiles, with a rapid increase of Facebook users among the students over the last three years.

272 Mainly the association with things or animals that are considered 'permanently' impure.

273 Such as those produced by the contact with death, childbirth, and blood (particularly menstrual blood).

274 For instance, the *dharmasabhā*s of "Nasik, Karad, Kolhapur, Mahabaleshwar, Rajapur, Wai, Pandharpur, and Paithan enjoyed particular reputations for experience, fairness, and consequently for the authority of their judgements" (O'Hanlon 2009). These in turn often consulted pan-Indian *brāhmaṇa* authorities, such as the ones established in Benares. (Bronkhorst 2005: 19-23; O'Hanlon and Minkowski 2008: 384-7)

I agree with the conclusions drawn by Olivelle in his article on the language for purity in the classical *dharma* literature (Olivelle 1998: 189-216), in which he regards these rules as *procedural* rather than static, in that they aim at 'becoming pure' not at 'being' pure. For him, these rules inscribe an anxiety (*śaṅkā*) of impurity or an attitude of constant purification that is a crucial element for the construction of the Brāhmaṇical 'habitus'.

> We can consider impurity rules as a system of socialisation. Individuals within the society must be made to acknowledge and support the social boundaries imposed on them, and this is effected primarily through social rituals. This may be one reason why many of the Dharmaśāstric rules on impurity are found in the sections dealing with the vedic student. (Olivelle 1998: 214)

If one would compare the ritualized daily routine of the *brāhmaṇa* from normative Sanskrit sources and the memory of elder *brāhmaṇa*s, as well as the historical and ethnographic sources available, one would note important changes in the daily life of *brāhmaṇa*s with regard to these rules. As we have seen in previous chapters, deviations from almost every purity rule can be found if compared to the normative texts, but to simply deduce from this fact an erosion of 'tradition' and a deviation from 'authentic' Vedic practice would be to miss the point. As I will argue in Chapter 6, the dichotomy between 'tradition' and 'modernity' is partly a misleading one, and both are interdependent.

A very tangible change that has drastically altered the rules of purity for both *brāhmaṇa*s and non-*brāhmaṇa*s is that, officially in India, untouchability has been prohibited under articles 15 and 17 of the Indian Constitution since 1955, and the practices of discrimination on the basis of untouchability are punishable up to a maximum of 6 months imprisonment or a fine amount of up to ₹ 5'000 — or with both.[275] While in practice, rarely are such cases reported, and the practice of discrimination and violence against 'untouchables' continues to be a reality in India; the long history of social critique, particularly strong during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the recurrent discourse against these practices in today's public sphere have affected the self-perception of *brāhmaṇa*s *vis-à-vis* these practices. The fact that many secular *brāhmaṇa*s have abandoned and criticized these practices has left the orthodox *brāhmaṇa*s with a certain anxiety on how and which practices concerning ritual purity are to be maintained. There is, of course, no homogeneous answer as to how the *brāhmaṇa*s of these schools deal with the rules of ritual purity in their daily life. Questions concerning these practices are a sensible topic and are usually dealt with with a certain sense of secrecy towards the outsiders, particularly if the one asking the question is, in theory, an 'untouchable' himself. Furthermore, the illegality of some of these practices and the hegemony of humanistic values of egalitarianism in the public discourse tend to be a potentially problematic 'grey area' where rules are interpreted and followed rather freely.

275 Act No. 22 of 1955 1 [8th May, 1955] http://indiankanoon.org/doc/1627294/ accessed on November 22, 2012.

Despite the above cautionary observations, one can say that, broadly speaking, most of the schools follow the Dharmaśāstric norms and ideals found in Sanskritic texts, albeit rather loosely. The ideal of the '*brāhmaṇa* student' (*brahmacārin*) is constructed with traditional values of discipline, obeisance to the *guru*, celibacy, a strict vegetarian diet, austerity, and control of the senses. The *brahmacārin* is then both a reconstruction from normative Śāstric sources, as well as a 'habitus' transmitted from one generation to the next, that is embedded in a particular cultural and historical context.[276]

As already mentioned in subchapter 3.4, the ideal of seclusion in a rural area continues to be, to a certain extent, a popular trope in the imagination of the orthodox *brāhmaṇa*. The city represents an uncontrolled environment in which polluting elements and distractions for the pious *brāhmaṇa* are abundant, and thus maintaining the rules of purity is a bigger challenge than for those living in more isolated areas who can afford to have minimal contact with non- *brāhmaṇa*s and with the "disgusting degeneration of the big cities", as one of my informants put it. There are naturally less tempting distractions for students, and thus the tranquillity of the village or the forest continues to be mentioned, now and again, as an ideal place for a "Vedic life".

With regard to commensality rules, all schools serve so-called *sāttvika* food which is cooked by *brāhmaṇa*s, and which students and teachers eat exclusively in the company of other *brāhmaṇa* males within the premises of the school. According to traditional norms, *sāttvika* food is vegetarian, nourishing, easily digestable, not too spicy, and not oily. This type of food enhances and maintains the intrinsic *sāttvika* nature of the *brāhmaṇa* that, according to the tradition, allows him to perform his duties as a "man of learning" by giving him "clarity of mind" and a "pure body". The term *sāttvika* is an adjective derived from the term *sattva*, one of the three qualities (*guṇa*s) of nature into which everything manifest (*prakṛti*) is classified according to Brāhmaṇical thought.[277] *Sattva* — the quality of clarity, lightness, happiness, and the like, along with *rajas* (agitation, vigor, pain) and *tamas* (darkness, confusion, lethargy, heaviness) — constitutes the three primordial qualities of nature. While one of three *guṇa*s dominates an individual, the other two are always present and active, as well. It is believed that, while the relationship among the three *guṇa*s is a dynamic one, most of the time one of the three *guṇa*s dominates the other two. This imbalance in the qualities of one's nature is directly affected by one's lifestyle, including the food and other substances one ingests, but also one's thoughts. At the same time, the intrinsic nature of the individual is often pre-determined by birth. Thus, *brāhmaṇa*s are intrinsically more *sāttvika* than, for example, individuals born in a caste traditionally classified under the "warrior

276 More on the construction of this 'habitus' and on learning to embody the Veda appers in Chapter 5.
277 The notion of the three qualities has been commonly attributed to the philosophical school of Sāṃkhya, where it plays a central role, but, according to Gonda (1976), this system of triple classification (*triguṇa*) is attested to within the larger context of "triadic groupings" that is found in Vedic literature.

class" (*kṣatriyavarṇa*) who are born with *rājasa* qualities. These qualities, too, are to be maintained by eating *rājasa* (nonvegetarian and stimulating) food, smoking tobacco or opium, and drinking alcohol — activities that are completely taboo for the orthodox *brāhmaṇa*. Sex is also considered to be highly *rājasa* in nature, and therefore, it is said that the ancient kings should keep a large number of women as their companions to strengthen this quality. *Brāhmaṇa*s, on the other hand, should avoid sexual activity during their study and limit their sexual appetite to reproduction purposes only; finally, the ascetic eliminates sex altogether. Contact with *tāmasa* substances — such as feces, dead bodies of humans and animals, or even saliva[278] or hair — introduces "impurity", and thus one avoids contact with such substances and with those who deal with these substances for a living.

Using the same logic presented above, in the Vedic schools, *brāhmaṇa* women never eat with the males — and they are usually absent from the schools in any case — except for the rather rare cases when cleaning ladies, female cooks, or the wives and daughters of the teachers are present on the premises. A *brāhmaṇa* student should be clean before eating and should eat on the floor[279] after having offered his food to god.[280] In only one of the schools I visited is the prescribed tradition of begging food (*bhikṣācaraṇa*) followed.[281] They follow the method called *mādhukārī* (honey-bee method), which consists of begging from different *brāhmaṇa* families in the vicinity. The collection of alms is done by a small group of students who take their begging bowls and make their rounds among the *brāhmaṇa* households, picking different families every day. This is considered a pious act that brings religious merit upon both the beggar as well as the donor, and as Knipe aptly notes, this practice also serves "as a means of bonding with the larger community" (2015: 30).[282] For the *brāhmaṇa* solicitor, it is a way of embodying austerity, and an opportunity to exercise his duty as a recipient of gifts, and for the donor it is an opportunity to increase his or her positive karmic capital.[283]

278 The contact with saliva is called *ucchiṣṭa*, and while generally thought to be polluting, the remains of food and water from god or the *guru* are thought to be purifying. Eating another's *ucchiṣṭa* deliberatly is, therefore, considered a way of showing one's close personal relationship to another person or acknowledging one's inferior rank. A student may eat the leftovers of his teacher, or a wife those of her husband, without becoming "impure" (see: Olivelle 1998).

279 In one of the schools (see Appendix 1: Śrī Guru Gaṅgeśvara Mahārāj Pāṭhaśālā), meals are served on tables and students sit on chairs, which is clearly an innovation from the traditional eating practices.

280 See section on the daily schedule, subchapter 4.3, for a reference to the *bhūtayajña* and *pitṛyajña*.

281 See: Śrutisṃriti Vidyāpīṭham, Appendix 1.

282 An important difference is that the two practices of begging food that Knipe describes in his book take place within a *brāhmaṇa* village (*agrahāra*) where there are only *brāhmaṇa* households, whereas in Maharashtra there are no *agrahāras* left.

283 Cf. Heestermann 1964.

In the rest of the schools, donations for feeding the students as a pious act are received in cash, the sum (an auspicious number such as 1008 Rs., 1001 Rs. or the like) usually advertised by the school either through their website, pamphlets, or even on a notice board in the school. These donations may sponsor one meal for all of the students on a specific auspicious day for the sponsor (birthday, anniversary etc.), or one of the many holy days of the Hindu calendar. There is also the possibility of donating a meal for one or more students for a specific duration (a month, six months, or a year), or the sponsor may also cover the expenses for a specific ritual, festival, or religious event organized in the school. The feeding of *brāhmaṇa*s in specific moments, such as during the yearly funerary rites (*śrāddha* or *pitṛpākṣa*), is considered particularly meritorious, and many schools receive donations during this time.[284]

Students are usually prohibited from eating outside of the school, but in some cases — during the extracurricular activities or while traveling — it can happen that students do eat or handle food outside of their school. For shorter trips, they either take food with them or make arrangements so that their dietary requirements are met, even if purity rules are not always easy to maintain. Among orthodox *brāhmaṇa*s, it is still considered a virtue to maintain commensality rules. During a Sanskrit Conference in Pune, I was introduced to a well-respected *brāhmaṇa* scholar who claimed to only eat food cooked by himself (*svayampākin*), and only ate in the company of other relatives or *brāhmaṇa*s from his own kin. His strict observance of this vow inspired the awe of a young *brāhmaṇa* who told me: "You see, he is such a great person; he is a *śuddh* [pure] Brahmin."[285]

The centrality of food in Brāhmaṇical Hindu thought has been widely studied in previous scholarship (e.g. Dumont 1988, Marriott 1968, Khare 1976, 1992; Olivelle 1995). By these studies, we are repeatedly informed that food and feeding are socially and philosophically determinant in India. Within the Brāhmaṇical context, food is closely associated with the socio-cosmic reality:

> To the Hindu, food also does not "represent" Brahman, but it is actually a part of this ultimate reality, Brahman. In this world and beyond, the cosmic moral order (dharma) regulates the availability of food to all creatures. Hindus regard such a truth as selfevident, requiring no further proof and admitting no doubts. When body and self are concerned, food is considered as one of the five "sheaths" (annamayakosa) which "clothes'" the soul (jiva; the other four sheaths being those of lifebreath, mind, understanding, and bliss). Thus, food directly matters to the formation of a Hindu's inner being and its becoming from one birth to the next. (Khare 1992: 5)

284 The "fortnight of the ancestors" is a religious observance that, in Maharashtra, falls during the lunar month of Bhādrapada (September–October) in which the ancestors are honored through a series of rituals, and particularly through the offering of food. For a bibliography on the subject of death in Hinduism, see: Sayers 2004.

285 Anonymous interview, 7.2.2009.

While the above quote may be regarded as too essentialist, particularly in consideration of the heterodox Hindu traditions, it does point to a Brāhmaṇical ideal that continues to colour the worldview of the *brāhmaṇa*s of the Vedic schools of Maharashtra.

During my fieldwork visit to the southern Koṅkaṇ region, one of the senior students from a *vedapāṭhaśālā* in Satara had agreed to accompany me on my trip, and we had much difficulty in finding a 'pure vegetarian' restaurant on the road. Our driver, a strict vegetarian *brāhmaṇa* himself, drove for hours in the evening hours in the Ratnagiri region —looking for a suitable place for us to have our dinner, but without success. We ended up eating at a hotel on the highway that offered vegetarian food, but alcohol and meat were also served in the same place. While this situation was initially problematic, and in normal circumstances completely unacceptable for both the driver and my assistant, we agreed to finally eat there, and ended up discussing how the best food is that which is cooked at home.

This short anecdote is intended to illustrate how, in general, the members of the schools largely follow Brāhmaṇical food regulations that express intricate socio-ritual distinctions of how food, body, and self are handled. At the same time, the example above shows how exceptions in food exchanges and commensality are negotiable, depending upon the circumstances.

It must also be noted here that more stringent rules of commensality observed in the past, between different *brāhmaṇa* groups, are generally ignored and, in my observations, most *brāhmaṇa*s — whether Deśasthas, Sārasvats, or Citpāvans — eat with each other if the occasion presents itself. Westerners, such as myself, who could traditionally be classified as untouchables (*mleccha*), are usually readily welcomed to dine along with them, particularly in Vedic schools that have relations to Western sponsors or scholars. Nonetheless, most *brāhmaṇa*s expressed an enthusiastic approval when I revealed my life-long vegetarian diet, which clearly shows that a general preference for the purity ideal is still prevalent among the traditional *brāhmaṇa*s I encountered.

Many other deviations from Śāstric ideals of ritual purity could be observed during my fieldwork.[286] Not only are the prescribed rules followed more loosely, but also expiations and penances for committed offences are not frequently followed. In two schools, for example, I observed that puppy dogs had been adopted by the students with the reluctant consent of their teachers. This struck me as particularly strange, since dogs are usually considered impure animals in Śāstric sources.[287] In both the cases, the animals were kept within the school's premises (courtyard and

286 The case studies in Chapter 6 will present further changes and innovations that concern not only ritual purity rules, but also other aspects of tradition.

287 See, for example, MānDhŚ III. 239: "A Cāṇḍāla, a pig, a cock, a dog, a menstruating woman or a eunuch must not look at the Brahmins while they are eating." (Olivelle 2005a: 120) Vedic recitation is also to be interrupted if dogs and other impure animals are nearby (MānDhŚ IV. 126 Olivelle 2005a: 130). Additionally, one of the names for members of the lowest class in the Brāhmaṇical hierarchy is *śvapaca*s or *śvapakas* ('Dog-Cookers'); for a discussion on this subject, see: White 1992.

garden), but were not allowed to enter the buildings of the school. Another curious incident was a *pūjā* in honor of a deceased dog for a Western client in the U.S.A. that was performed in one of the schools. The client had asked the *brāhmaṇa* to perform the ritual because the "dog had become like a member of her family", and they were hoping for a "good transition of his soul."

These non-traditional attitudes show how orthodoxy can be permeable and accommodating, depending on the contexts and circumstances. These changes, I will argue in Chapter 6, are part of the dynamic reconstitution and self-representation of what it means to be a *brāhmaṇa* in modern India.

These purity ideals surrounding the traditional *brāhmaṇa* self are not only inculcated in the socialization process, as will be argued in the concluding chapter, but are also prevalent in discourses that circulate among traditional *brāhmaṇa*s all over India. These discourses are not only often spread through close *brāhmaṇa* networks — such as the schools, *brāhmaṇa* associations, and religious gatherings of different kinds — but also often reach the public sphere in printed press, television, chatrooms, and Internet forums. The imagination of who is a *brāhmaṇa* and how he should behave is not only voiced within the *brāhmaṇa* community, but also through multiple dissonant voices. The *brāhmaṇa*s of the schools, therefore, position themselves in reaction to these discourses. Particularly influential seem to be the opinions of religious figures of authority within the *brāhmaṇa* communities. The religious, and to a lesser extent the political affiliations, of different *brāhmaṇa* groups to particular organizations and their charismatic figures often inform us of the opinions they have on issues of ritual purity and doctrinal interpretation. For example, the concept of Brāhmaṇical purification (*śuddhi*), which in the nineteenth century had an important comeback through Hindu revivalists such as Dāyanānda Sarasvatī and his Ārya Samāj, continues to influence the concept of purification, even up to our time. The concept became central to the mass 'purification rituals' of the so-called '*śuddhi* campaigns', which sought to 'recover' the once-converted Hindus back into Hinduism, as well as those who were considered Hindu, but were marginalized.[288] Many of these militant and often violent campaigns continue to fuel communal conflicts throughout all India, particularly among the tribal and Dālit communities.

In a similar vein, many of the *brāhmaṇa*s I encountered during my fieldwork (although certainly not all) see themselves as 'social workers' who help people (particularly '*bhakta*s') in various ways.[289] School teachers, or sometimes advanced students with the permission of their teacher, give advice to individuals or families, recommending certain ritual and non-ritual procedures to help people with their

288 Cf. Ghai 1990; Jaffrelot 1994a; Clementin-Ojha 1994; Zavos 2000: 87-92; Kanungo 2008.

289 An interesting trend are the so-called massive blood donation camps (*raktadāna*) that are often organised as part of the *brāhmaṇa* conventions. For more on the contemporary forms of *dāna* as philanthropy, see: Copeman 2011 and 2009.

personal problems. In exchange for this advice, people offer money or other goods. Many people come to the teachers of the schools seeking for advice for their personal problems, and particularly from those teachers who are also astrologers. Teachers, according to the needs of their clients, recommend a certain *mantra* or a certain simple ritual, depending on the nature of the problem itself.

Here is another example of the social imagination presented to me by one of the teachers I interviewed on the topic of *varṇa*. He told me that the classical division of society in India in four classes (*varṇa*s) is "found not only in India, but everywhere in the world", and then continued to explain why he considered it important to have good relations with the non-*brāhmaṇa* classes:

> [...] every class has certain importance. Because, although you are worshiping in the temple, who made the *mūrti* and the walls? *Śūdra*. They did the temple. So always, when you think class-wise *śūdra*s are many, because they are the foundation. For example, when you built something, then the foundation is big and wide, and the top floor is small, and middle floor is connecting with [the] foundation and with the top. Same thing is everywhere in the world, but the one who is on top should not forget the foundation. Otherwise, it can break anytime. Trees and flowers on top should not forget the roots, otherwise: no food. So, it is like that. Although they are not knowing many things, they have good devotion and good *bhāv*, and even though they are not knowing what is truth and untruth, and what is pious *karma* and what is bad *karma*, they do not know. Many of them, they do not know how to behave. So when they come to you, you have to teach them and they become happy. Then they are very grateful about this. They offer their gratitude, so their *bhāv* is like that. If you hurt them, you are finished.[290]

The categories of *varṇa* and ritual purity are often framed as "divine service" for humanity, in which "everyone has its role in society." Śrī Candraśekharendra Sarasvatī (1907-1994), 68th head of the Kanchipuram *maṭha*, also known in English as "the Seer of Kanchi", became very popular in Tamil Nadu, and beyond. Because of his life-long dedication to protect the Vedas from dying out some of the *brāhmaṇa*s I talked to even credit him for the survival of the contemporary Vedic traditions. His writings and speeches continue to widely circulate among *brāhmaṇa*s in south India and beyond. Since a few years ago now, some of his work is available also on the Internet, through the official website of the Kanchi *maṭha*, where a considerable amount of his work has been translated into Tamil, Telugu, and English. His successor and current head of the *maṭha*, Śrī Jayendra Sarasvatī, along with his disciple Śrī Vijayendra Sarasvatī and a whole array of other modern *guru*s, continue to propagate his teacher's views. In one of his writings, he says:

> The Brahmin's body is to be cared for like a temple since it is meant to preserve the Vedic mantras and no impure material is to be taken in. It is the duty of the Brahmin to protect the power of the mantras, the mantras that create universal well-being. That is why there are more restrictions in his life than in that of others. The Brahmin must refrain from all such acts and practices as make him unclean [...] The Brahmin's body is not meant to experience sensual enjoyment but to

290 Anonymous interview, 22.02.2009.

> preserve the Vedas for the good of mankind. […] He has to care for his body only with the object of preserving the Vedic mantras and through them of protecting all creatures. Others may have comfortable occupations that bring in much money but that should be no cause for the Brahmin to feel tempted.[291]

It can be observed from the passage above how the 'ideal *brāhmaṇa*', as the container of the Vedic *mantra*s, is discursively reiterated by an authoritative figure within contemporary Smārta Hinduism. The Veda is engrained in the body of the *brāhmaṇa*, which has to be maintained as ritually pure and morally regulated as possible.

4.5 Dress Code and Insignia

Regarding the instructions concerning the dress code, most of the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s have their students wear regular plain white *dhoṭī*s, but in practice, quite often the rule is relaxed and students also wear t-shirts of different colours and motifs, both inside and outside of class. In some schools, such as the Kailās Maṭh Akhaṇḍānand in Nashik or the Śrī Yogīrāj Veda Vijñān Āśram in Barshi, the dress code is stricter and the students are only allowed to wear the uniform of the school that consists of the traditional *dhoṭī* and *aṅgavastra* (plate 7). This rule concerns only their time spent within the school's precinct, as the rule is relaxed when students go out or travel and they are then allowed to wear Western clothes (plate 8), or at least a *dhoṭī* with *kurtā* and the traditional Maharashtrian cap (*ṭopī*). Among the *vaidika*s of Maharashtra, as with other *brāhmaṇa*s in India, a relatively strict dress code rule is to remove the upper garment (especially if it is a t-shirt) during the ingestion of food, and particularly at lunch and dinner. In some schools, such as the Śrutismṛti Vidyāpīṭham and the schools attached to the Maharṣi Veda Vyās Pratiṣṭhān in Dhalegaon and Alandi, the students are even asked to wear a different set of upper and lower garments, these being made out of silk and dyed in either bright red, orange, or ochre colours. In some schools, this change of clothes to colourful silk is only observed during festivities or special observances, but not during regular school days. The explanation given to me by a *guru* about the change of garments was that: "food is a holy act and, because of [the] pure qualities of silk, the student is made worthy to carry and eat food. Red colour is for renunciation. One should eat and serve food with [a] pure mind."[292] On special occasions, such as festivities or rituals of different kinds, *brāhmaṇa*s will also use their "Sunday clothes"; the *dhoṭī* and *aṅgavastra* will be made of silk (or at least be a new one with a particulary intricate colourful border), also called *sovaḷā*, and they will wear their jewelry (see

291 Candraśekharendra Sarasvatī, Hindu Dharma, Chapter: "Brahmacaryasrama", online version accessed on October 31, 2012. http://www.kamakoti.org/hindudharma/part17/chap11.htm.
292 Interview with G. Jośī 06.06.2009, Trimbak.

subchapter 4.5). On these occassions, some of the *brāhmaṇa*s use the *puṇerī pagaḍī*, a type of ceremonial turban-hat from the Peśva era and popularized by nationalist intellectuals of the nineteenth century, such as M.G. Ranade and L. Tilak as a symbol of honor and respect, and also as a marker of *brāhmaṇa*'s pride. If women are present in the celebration, they will also wear their finest *nauvārī saṛī*s[293] in the Maharashtrian style, as well as their finest jewelry.

In all the schools I visited, hair is kept in the traditional North Indian *brāhmaṇa* way,[294] i.e. with all of the head shaved (or hair is kept quite short) except for a tuft of hair called a *śikhā*. The *śikhā* can be found in different styles and to be of different density. Some *brāhmaṇa*s carry it as very small and discrete, almost invisible among the rest of the hair, while others allow their tuft to grow very thick and long, and then tie it in a particular way. In most of the schools, the grooming of the hair is a personal matter, but the teacher can decide when it is time for a haircut.[295] On special occasions such as an important ritual or a bigger social event, students can be told to get a haircut and shave beforehand on the permitted days sanctioned by the tradition. Teachers also shave and groom their hair and mustaches if the occasion requires it. Usually, a particular barber does the haircut and shaving for both students and teachers.[296]

Since all the schools presented here belong to the Smārta communities, the use of corporal insignia follow the rather broad Smārta tradition.[297] These insignias include the application of the triple Śaiva marks of sacred ash on their arms, chest, neck, torso, and forehead, called *tripuṇḍra* during *saṃdhyā*, as well as the different *tilaka*s, mainly of Śaiva expression — such as a dot mark (*bindī*) of vermillon, turmeric, white, or red sandalwood paste, or a combination of these (plates 6 and 9).[298] Also, after larger fire rituals such as the *atirudra-yāga*, some *brāhmaṇa*s take the soot from the main offering-laddle and apply with it a *bindī* on their forehead. Among the Vedic schools I visited, I rarely came across the Vaiṣṇava sectarian marks (vertical U or V lines), even among those Smārta *brāhmaṇa*s who had a clear tendency towards Vaiṣṇava devotional practice, which has a particularly strong holding in Maharashtra.

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293 These *saṛī*s are typical for the region of Maharashtra and are longer than the ones worn in the rest of India, measuring nine yards.

294 On the importance of the hairstyle in South India in relation to the different *brāhmaṇa* groups, see: Mahadevan 2003, 2008 and 2016.

295 For more on the subject see: Olivelle 2005d.

296 All Tuesdays, Saturdays, no-moon day (*amāvāsyā*) and other festive days in month of the ritual calendar are prohibited for cutting one's hair.

297 These body marks are not as heavily distinguished among *brāhmaṇa*s in Maharashtra as in the south or among ascetic groups. cf. Rao (2002) includes in his book a pictorial representation of the body markers worn by the different categories of Madhvas in Udupi.

298 It is not uncommon to see two *bindī* marks on the forehead, either with different materials or the same.

In addition to the dress and sectarian marks, the *brāhmaṇa*s of these schools also wear prayer beads (*mālā*s), other neck charms, and necklaces. The beads are usually either made of the sacred basil wood (*tulasī*) or *rudrākṣa* seeds (plate 8), and occasionally they are also made of sandalwood.[299] The *mālā*s are used daily, mainly for the practice of the *japa* of the *gāyatrī* to count the 108 repetitions of the *mantra* during the practice of *sandhyāvandana*. Earrings are also common among *brāhmaṇa* teachers, and occasionally among older students. The pierced ears indicate that the *brāhmaṇa* has gone through one of the sixteen main life-rituals indicated for the twice-born, the *saṃskāra* of *karṇavedha* "piercing of the ear lobes."[300] Currently, the ritual is rarely performed on males in this region and, therefore, earrings on men are usually a clear index for Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy. The earrings are mainly made of pure gold, or consist of *rudrākṣa*s or pearl mounted on gold. Some teachers also wear rings with precious stones, and this is particularly true of those who are also astrologers. Astrologers commonly prescribe the use of certain stones and minerals to balance the evil effects of particular planets.

But, the most indispensable and externally visible demarcation of Brāhmaṇahood[301] that is to be worn at all times is the 'sacred thread' called *jānaveṃ* or *muñja*[302] in Marathi (plate 6). The *brāhmaṇa* is invested with this thread at the *upanayana* initiation, and it is the most crucial prerequisite to one studying the Vedas. This ritual is ideally performed before puberty — usually between the age of six and nine years old — although, in many places across India, one finds cases where the ritual is delayed until right before a *brāhmaṇa*'s wedding (Fuller and Narasimhan 2014: 191). Now, in Maharashtra (and most of India), the material

299 The plant *tulasī* (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*), often called the "holy basil", is venerated in households throughout India. Special flowerpots or smaller temple-like structures called *tulsī-vṛndāvan* are frequently found in courtyards of houses, temples, and other compounds. The plant is associated with Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa, in particular. Tulasī is considered the consort of Viṣṇu, and therefore particularly sacred to a Vaiṣṇava. The wood of this plant is made into beads that are strung to a rosary/necklace. The *rudrākṣa* or "eye or tear of Rudra" (Eliocarpus ganitrus) is a seed from a tree found in Nepal and in northern India. They are identified with Śiva and are widely believed to possess healing power and the ability to confer spiritual power. These materials are commonly used in the manufacturing of prayer/chanting beads called *japamālā*.

300 More on this *saṃskāra* is described in KauśGS. 1,20,10 and BaudhGS. 1,12 cf. Gonda 1980: 377.

301 Although other, particularly upper castes, may also wear the 'sacred thread', no orthodox *brāhmaṇa* would refuse to use it. In Maharashtra, the Molesworth's Marathi-English Dictionary states that "at present several classes of people, Sutars, Sonars, Lohars and common Marathas, arrogating descent from the Kshatriya, or actuated by whim, adopt this thread" (p.314). To wear the 'sacred thread' has also been explained as an attempt for upward mobility through the process of 'Sanskritization': see: Srinivas 1995; Mandelbaum 1968; Deliège 2002.

302 Also, *yajñopavīt* from the Sanskrit: *yajñopavīta*.

of the 'sacred thread' consists of white cotton thread[303] with three strands, and is usually worn over the left shoulder and under the right, going around the torso.[304] The three threads are strung ceremonially into a triple or five-folded knot called a *brahmagraṇṭhi*. I received different interpretations from *brāhmaṇa* experts and scholars on the meaning of the three strings; some say they refer to the three Vedas (excluding, thereby, the Atharvaveda), the three inborn debts of the *brāhmaṇa* (*ṛṇa*s),[305] the three *guṇa*s, the three goddesses (Gāyatrī, Sarasvatī, and Sāvitrī), the *trimūrti*, and/or other popular Hindu triads.

The thread is renewed whenever it is necessary, but usually this is done in a ceremonial way at an auspicious time (usually during a full moon) and following particular ritual procedure that includes the repetition of special *mantra*s. Once a year, usually during the month of Śrāvaṇa, all *brāhmaṇa*s discard the old thread and invest in a new one in a ceremony called *upākarman*.[306] This procedure varies according to the Vedic *śākhā* that one belongs to, since the method of tying and wearing the sacred thread is connected, at least in theory, to one's own ritual ancestry, i.e. one's *gotra* and *pravara*.[307] In a few cases, I found that the ritual for renewing the *jānaveṃ* (as well as other daily rituals) was not bound to the actual Vedic branch determined by the birth (*svaśākhā*) of the student, but rather to the one of the Veda he was studying and which he had learned from his teacher. This was generally the case for students whose fathers were not familiar with the 'proper' procedure of their birth's *śākhā* or who were orphans who did not have a male figure in their family to teach them.

303 The word *muñja* indicates that, in the past, the thread was made from the fibres of the sacred grass (*saccharum muñja*). Occasionally, it is still used during the *upanayana* ceremony, but thereafter replaced by the cotton string. Already in the MānDhŚ II.44 (2005a: 96), it is indicated that cotton is the material indicated for the sacred thread of *brāhmaṇa*s.

304 On ritual occasions, such as during water offerings to certain deities or saints, the *upavīta* is worn suspended around the neck (then called *nivītin*) and, during ancestor rites, over the right shoulder (technically called *prācīnāvīta*).

305 The debt to the gods (*deva*s), to the seers (*ṛṣi*s), and to the ancestors (*pitṛ*s). Cf. Malamoud 1983.

306 Traditionally, the *upākarman* ritual marked the start of the academic calendar each year. See subchapter 4.1. On a curious note, the sacred thread often also includes the peculiaruse of a 'key chain'. Many students and even teachers attach the key of their locker or chest, where they keep their personal belongings, to their *jānaveṃ*.

307 It follows that the *pravara* is a line of ancestors, usually a group of three or five seers (*ṛṣi*s), in one's lineage (*gotra*) and is also decisive in some communities for marriage relations. Cf. Michaels 2004a: 122.

Plate 6: Young *kṛṣṇayajurvedin* wearing a combination of red sandalwood *tripuṇḍra* and a vermillion *bindī*. He is also wearing the 'sacred thread' called *jānaveṃ* or *muñja*. Satara 2009.

Plate 7: Students of the Kailās Maṭh Akhaṇḍānand wearing traditional *dhoṭī* and *aṅgavastra*. Nashik 2009.

Plate 8: Young student wearing praying beads (*mālā*) of *rudrākṣa* seeds and gold earrings and a Western t-shirt. Satara 2011.

Plate 9: A young Veda student wearing the *tripuṇḍra* of sacred ash (*bhasman*) and a vermillion *bindī*. Dhalegaon 2009.

5 Mimesis, Habitus, and Embodiment: Becoming a *Vedamūrti*

... it is not that the ācārya "knows" tradition but that he is tradition.
–Guy Richard Welbon[308]

Entire volumes[309] have been written about the relationship of teacher and student in the Indian context. It has been considered one of the backbones of Indian culture[310] and it is evidently the base of the system of knowledge transmission in the context of Vedic education.

> The guru must have gained importance initially from the fact that the knowledge — philosophical, religious, speculative, mystic, and cosmological — that was available had not been written down, it had to be acquired personally from someone. (Raina 2002: 173)

The paradigmatic role of the master is embedded in the terms used for the teacher. One of the most common Sanskrit terms is *guru*,[311] literally the "weighty one".[312] A widespread traditional etymological interpretation of the word "*guru*", as given to me by one of the teachers, is "someone who destroys your darkness; this is [the] syllabe *gu*; and brings light to your life... [the] *ru* syllable is light. Light is *jñāna* [knowledge]."[313] This depiction matches the following definition by Mlecko:

> Gu means 'ignorance' and ru, 'dispeller.' The guru is a dispeller of ignorance [...] The term "guru" also means "heavy" or "weighty" and might well illustrate the belief that accomplished or holy persons are characterized by an uncommon weight. (Mlecko 1982: 34)

The primarily role of the teacher is therefore to impart the knowledge (*veda*) to the student, thereby removing his ignorance. This knowledge in the context of the Brāhmaṇical tradition refers primarily to the knowledge of *bráhman* in the sense of

308 Welbon 1986: 376.
309 Some of the notable works have been summarized by: Rigopoulos 2007: 173.
310 "[...] insofern das Guru-Institut die religionsosziologische und religionspädagogische Hauptstruktur der traditionellen Gesellschaftsordnung darstellt und in dieser Funktion als älteste und möglicherweise bestbezugte Institutionsform religiöser Erziehung anzusehen ist." (Steinmann 1986: 8) And also: "[...] far from being an independent mode of transmission which transcends the social structure and the culture, the guru-disciple relationship operates as the very lifeline of the culture and the social structure." (Milton 1963: 207)
311 Other common terms are: *ācārya*, *upādhyāya*, *paṇḍita*, *śāstrī*. For more on the etymology of these terms, see: Steinmann 1986: 73-6.
312 White 1984.
313 Interview, Goḍboḷe, 03.03.2006, Satara.

the "sacred utterance or rite" that is the knowledge of the "revelation" (*śruti*). The Veda is regarded by the tradition of *pūrva-mīmāṃsā* and other orthodox (*āstika*) traditions as *apauruṣeya* (not created by human agency), and is primarily known in this world through the mouth of a *brāhmaṇa* as it has "come down in a chain of tradition" (*pāramparyagato vedaḥ*, VāsDhŚ VI 43).[314]

The Veda is to be learned through oral instruction, by which the student obtains his second birth and becomes a twice-born man (*dvija*). This second birth is enacted by the initiatory rite (*saṃskāra*) called *upanayana*,[315] in which the student hears the Vedic *mantra* from the mouth of his teacher or father for the first time and officially becomes a *brāhmaṇa*.[316] This initiation, in which the student obtains the Veda in the condensed form of the *gāyatrī-mantra*, is a crucial prerequisite for the formal instruction of the Veda. It is noteworthy that, without the first symbolic oral instruction that takes place during the *upanayana* ceremony, any attempts to handle the Veda with authority are futile. Therefore, the *guru* as the spiritual father is, in a ritual and social sense, more important than the biological father.[317] It is the *guru* who enables the student to obtain his social and ritual status within the Brāhmaṇical society. Without the *guru*, the student is excluded from the sacred knowledge he is entitled to by birth. Traditionally, he would also be rejected by Brāhmaṇical society for not attending to his scholarly obligation and would become "like a *śūdra*."[318] It is no surprise, then, that the figure of the *guru* took such a central role in the oral transmission of knowledge. Even if one could (theoretically speaking) learn all the Veda from a manuscript or a book, it would be invalid by the very fact that it was not received in the "proper way" (i.e. through the mouth of an accomplished teacher).[319]

It has been argued that the group more than the individual, and in particular the family, is relevant for the construction of identity in India.[320] This process of enculturation is heightened during childhood, when a person learns to position himself in the different configurations of his social environment. "[…] (C)hildhood

314 As cited by: Scharfe 2002: 13f30.

315 Cf. Zotter 2010; Swain 2009; Prasad 1997.

316 According to the authoritative scriptures, also members of the kṣatriya and the vaiśya class were worthy of undergoing the upanayana ceremony considered 'twice-born' and entitled, therefore, also to study the Veda. In practice, nonetheless, it was generally *brāhmaṇa*s who studied the Veda, so that in the later literature the term *dvija* (twice-born) became a synonym for *brāhmaṇa*. Cf. Lubin 2005.

317 Cf. Michaels 2004a: 108-110.

318 MānDhŚ II.168: "When a Brahmin expends great effort in other matters without studying the Veda, while still alive he is quickly reduced to the status of a Śūdra, together with his children."

319 "Sāyaṇa wrote in the introduction to his Ṛgveda commentary that 'the text of the Veda is to be learned by the method of learning it from the lips of the teacher and not from a manuscript.'" (Scharfe 2002: 8) On the topic, see also: Rocher 1994: 8-10.

320 "How a man lives and what he does are rarely seen as a product of individual effort, aspiration or conflict, but are interpreted in the light of his family's circumstances and reputation in the wider society. Individual initiative and decisions make sense only in a family context." (Kakar 1978: 121)

in India is an extensive deindividualization and therefore a complete and "perfect" (*saṃskṛta*) socialization." (Michaels 2004a: 108) From a theoretical perspective, and as we have seen in subchapter 3.4, the model of Vedic education is clearly more than just a "school" where information and knowledge are transmitted formally in the class and where one has a "private" life outside of school. The *gurukula* is, in fact, the very family (*kula*) of the *guru*, and the roles of both *guru* and *śiṣya* are much more than just "teacher" and "student". The *guru* plays the role of father, teacher, role model, and spiritual guide to his students. This works the other way around, as well; the students become the sons of the *guru* and are treated alike. Moreover, they not only become family members of one sort, but they also enter into a complicated and integral relationship, where every aspect of life is guided by the *guru* and followed by the *śiṣya*. Through this close familiar contact, the conditions for the mimetic process of knowledge transmission in the broad sense are established. Vedic education is then not "just" about the reproduction of the Veda from the *guru*'s mouth, like a "tape-recorder" (Witzel 2003: 24) or the ability to accurately perform rituals (although these two elements are certainly indispensable components of a student's education); during his study, the student learns to speak in a particular register,[321] interact with people, to dress, to discipline the body and, in sum, as one of the students in a Vedic school in Satara told me, "to lead a Vedic life." The goal of a student is to "become like his *guru*" in all respects.

The very nature of the system in which the training of the Vedic recitation takes place (*gurukula*) implies that the student strongly mimics the figure of the *guru* and thus shapes his identity and his social network. The *guru* aims to demonstrate to his students the ontological and epistemological benefits of subscribing to and applying the knowledge he embodies, represents, and transmits. The success of this transmission of knowledge, of course, depends on factors that are beyond the *guru*, and rather depend upon the willingness and the ability of the disciple to become like his teacher.

As described by Bourdieu (2010: 72-87), *habitus* is an internalized, embodied disposition toward the world. It comes into being through inculcation in early childhood, which is not a process of deliberate, formal teaching and learning but, rather, one associated with immersion in a particular socio-cultural milieu — the family and household. In societies with formal education and class stratification, the primary habitus inculcated through the family (which will differ according to the social position of the family) comes into contact with a system outside of the family: the school. This institution inculcates a secondary habitus, the "cultivated habitus," which privileges the cultural capital (this including world views, linguistic codes,

321 According to some of my intelocutors, Maharashtrian *brāhmaṇa*s "should speak 'pure' Marathi, and not the slang that they speak nowadays in Pune." Language codes as markers of social identities such as caste and class are well-studied in Sociolinguistics; see, for example: Pandharipande 2003. For more on the socio-politics of language, cf. Brass 1974.

certain types of knowledge, and material objects) of a particular social class. In the case of the traditional *brāhmaṇa*, the school is either embedded in the family structure or it replaces the same during the period of study. While many *brāhmaṇa* children up to the age of 8-12 receive a first socialization from their biological families, after they leave their home to study in the *vedapāṭhaśālā*, the members of the *guru*'s school become their new family. In a Bourdieuan language, one could say that these *fields* (family vs. school) merge into one another. Since the students live with their teachers, and the relationship with the teacher is more than just that built with someone who transmits formal knowledge, the *guru* and the older members of the school also play a central role in what Bourdieu calls 'primary habitus'. The *guru* becomes the father, and the other students his brothers. Notable is also the very limited role of women in the socialization of the *brāhmaṇa* in the contemporary *vedapāṭhaśālā*s. Sometimes, if the school is a homeschool (*gurukula*), the wife of the *guru* takes the role of the mother, but often the only female contact they have during their studies is with the women in charge of cleaning or cooking in the schools. Celibacy (*brahmacarya*) is considered essential for the study period and, therefore, contact with women is avoided as much as possible in order to ward off any temptations. Additionally, women are considered a potential danger to the state of ritual purity, since any contact with a menstruating woman would cause a state of impurity. The study period is, therefore, ideally restricted to the company of *brāhmaṇa* males. This particular form of socialization contributes to strengthening the group's self-awareness of the *brāhmaṇa* male as someone privileged with the specific duty of preserving the Vedas in their aural form.

But even if what has been sketched above refers mainly to the figure of the immediate *guru* as the teacher and the main authority for a Vedic student, there are other *guru*s who function on a different social level as figures of authority, particularly as religious or spiritual guides. Patron *guru*s and other holy men, family *guru*s as well as ancestors and elder *vaidika*s, are also figures of authority and inspiration to both students and teachers in the Vedic schools. The student will then get instructions directly or indirectly from his *guru* for practically anything he does during the day. The students themselves, also, are role models and teachers for the younger ones in the *gurukula* when the *guru* is not present. In this way, the students also get to practice how to be a teacher and exercise authority, whether they will become teachers one day or not.

Explaining Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus', Alam gives us a hint of how the institution of the *guru* is ultimately embodied by the Vedic student:

> Pierre Bourdieu, talking of pedagogy, argues that the success of any pedagogical action depends on the degree to which pedagogical authority has become part of the common sense of the individual receiver even in the absence of any pedagogical transmission. Relevant to our discussion here, Bourdieu also talks of the habitus which lies at the interface between the individual self and the larger social organism. It is the means by which structures of the social order are inscribed, encoded or written onto the individual body in the most corporeal forms of gestures, accents, patterns of dress, etc. Through the habitus, political mythology of the social order is 'made flesh'. (Alam 2011: 175)

Most of the 25 schools I visited have a link to one or several sects (*paramparā*) of modern Hinduism with a charismatic *guru* at its head.[322] As mentioned in the previous section, most of the schools have a link to the Śaṅkarācāryas of the southern *maṭha*s and are considered not only authorities in Vedic *dharma*, but 'universal teachers' (*jagadguru*s) worthy of the highest respect. Devotional attitudes towards them, and other living or deceased religious figures — often ascetics who carry an array of titles such as *jagadguru*s (universal teachers), *sadguru*s (true teachers), *sant*s (saints), and *svāmī*s (lords) — have, as we have seen in subchapter 2.3, a strong influence on the way the religious and moral identity of the *vaidika*s of Maharashtra are constructed. Nonetheless, the configurations between these authority figures and the ways in which the hierarchies are temporarily or permanently established for the students are mediated through the *guru* who the student spends the most amount of time with. While the immediate *guru* may himself acknowledge the authority, wisdom, and spiritual power of another individual or lineage, he will still dictate to his disciples to what degree the students establish relationships with these other *guru*s, whether they are ascetics or learned *vaidika*s. The *guru*, in his role as a spiritual father, will even mediate the relationship of the student with his biological family (at least during the period of studentship). He will regulate his visits to his original home and also make most of the decisions regarding the student's welfare and life. Notwithstanding this, the teacher, while being a *guru* in his own right, remains a student of his own *guru* and is imbedded in his own network of authority, in which he continually repositions himself. The dynamics of these and other power relations are not linear or fixed (as the critics of Dumont have clearly shown),[323] but are in constant negotiation with each other.

In any case, during the study period (and very often after, as well) the *guru*, from whom a student gets his socialization, is the main point of reference for the student.

> He [the *guru*] is an entity, which in Western culture has no exact counterpart. For the *guru* is a teacher, a counselor, father-image, mature ideal, hero, source of strength, even divinity integrated into one personality. (Mlecko 1982: 34)

Within the Brāhmaṇical ethos, to be an ideal *brāhmaṇa* is to be a teacher for others and to carry the moral and spiritual authority of the Veda in one's very being. By having completely internalized the sounds of the Veda, and constantly enacting them through recitation, he becomes learned (*śiṣṭa*), and his words and behavior become

322 As is noted in subchapter 2.3 and the examples of Chapter 6, the *bhakti* traditions, and particularly the *sant*s of Maharashtra, continue to have a strong influence on the construction of a Maharashtrian identity, including the *vaidika*s of these schools.

323 For a summary of three of Dumont's critics (Daniel, Khare, Nandy), see: Appadurai 1986 and also the contributions in Khare 2006.

authoritative. By becoming knowledge (*veda*), he makes space for innovation on a social and metaphysical level, for his behavior (*ācāra*) is a source of *dharma*.[324]

As mentioned above, one of the titles widely used in Maharashtra for someone who has memorized his Veda recession (*svaśākhā*) is *vedamūrti*. The Sanskrit word *mūrti* (f.) translates as any solid body or material form — an embodiment, manifestation, incarnation, personification; anything which has definite shape or limits; a person, form, figure, or appearance; an image, idol, or statue. The manifestation of knowledge is, therefore, embodied by the *brāhmaṇa* who has, at least in theory, completely memorized the Veda of his *śākhā* (i.e. primarily the Saṃhitā text, but also in some cases the Brāhmaṇa, Āraṇyaka, and Upaniṣads, as described in subchapter 3.5). This 'graduation title' is significant because, as Bourdieu (1991: 121) advises us, the imposition of a name, particularly a title, is one of the central "acts of institution" which inaugurates the actor's identity and informs the individual "in an authoritative manner of what he is and what he must be." Within the Brāhmaṇical tradition, the word *mūrti* also has strong ritual connotations. *Mūrti* is the generic name given to statues or icons installed in temples and other sacred places that are meant to be worshipped. The knowledge, then, is not only present in the persona of the *brāhmaṇa*, but it also sanctifies him, elevating the individual to the status of a deity who is to be venerated. Of course, the fact that *brāhmaṇa*s have insisted that they are and were worthy of deific reverence does not necessarily mean that others accept this claim, but, at least from the perspective of the authoritative texts of the tradition, the *brāhmaṇa* was elevated to the highest status possible for his identification with the Veda. One reads, for example, in the Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra:

> We are with those who do the following: (study of) the three Vedas, vedic studentship, procreation, faith, austerity, sacrifice, and giving gifts. He who praises anything else becomes dust and perishes. (BaudhDhS 2.11.34 as cited in Olivelle 1993: 90)

In the process of becoming such an "embodiment of the Veda", the pupil internalizes a large amount of knowledge — which is not formally imparted to the student in a classroom or during formal instruction — by spending the majority of his time in the company of his master and fellow students. The knowledge the student receives during his formal education will enable him to lead a life that mirrors the life of his own *guru* once he has finished his studies. The study period, then, has also the practical effect of sharpening the social and symbolic boundaries between the *brāhmaṇa* and those around him, and strengthening their ties with one another. This occurs by osmosis or intentional mimesis. The student learns to perform his role and to know his place in the power structure as a carrier of the Veda by being subservient

324 Cf. "This knowledge was the Veda. The priests identified themselves with the knowledge. They not only had the knowledge, they were the knowledge, they embodied it." (Michaels 2004a: 109)

to his teacher. Ideally, the *brāhmaṇa* ought to behave according to the *dharma*, and in the same way as the great elders did in the past. This static interpretation means there is not much room for changes and innovations, due to the theoretical vision created by the ideological lens of the orthodox traditions. Nonetheless, even the normative concept of *dharma* has been quite flexible. It has been reinterpreted and reconstructed again and again, and across generations. Yet, innovation and change has clearly existed in India. This has been the case in the Brāhmaṇical tradition for millennia, but it was successfully masqueraded under the ideology of continuity and the eternal principles of the Vedas. The concept of *dharma*, as Olivelle (2005c) has shown, was not originally intrinsic to the Vedic tradition; it was rather incorporated as a reaction to social and cultural changes between the third and fifth centuries CE. It is the ideology of a static perfection developed in the Vedāntic traditions that covered innovations of any sort, as coming from the only valid and unchanging source: the Vedas.[325] What is remarkable is that all of these innovations have happened within the framework of the Brāhmaṇical communities who carried the knowledge from generation to generation precisely because the Vedic tradition is not just about reproducing the Veda, but rather embodying the Veda and enacting it inside and outside of the Vedic ritual.

To be an ideal *brāhmaṇa* is to become a *vedamūrti* who has the moral and spiritual authority to *be* the Veda. By having completely internalized the sounds of the Veda, he becomes learned (*śiṣṭa*), and his words and behavior become authoritative — leaving more room for innovation, for he is the Veda himself and his behavior *is dharma*.

> Since Plato we have known that it is not just ideas, attitudes, and values, but also social forms of living and acting which are learned by way of mimetic processes. Because of the different preconditions young people start out with, however, what emerges is not simply a copy of a model; the mimetic process leads to a difference, which ensures the autonomy and creativity of its results. The model appropriated in the mimetic act is, therefore, not simply a reproduction of external similarities; it is a construction on the part of the person who behaves mimetically – a construction which leaves room for difference, particularity and creativity. (Wulf 2011: 90)

The student, from a very young age onwards, is encouraged to mimic the behavior of his elders, and in particular of his *guru* until he has himself become a graduate. Even once a student has completed his studies and left the *gurukula* to become a householder himself, he will remain loyal to his *guru*. In the same permanent relationship as exists with his biological parents, who will remain his parents worthy of respect for all of his life, the teacher of the Veda — by providing him with his "second birth" — will remain his source of soteriological authority for the rest of his life. In turn, as with his biological parents, the student may also become a *guru* one day and transmit to his own sons/students the Veda and, in this way, ensure his

325 Cf. Pollock 1985: 499-519.

own immortality. In the following quote, Michaels refers to the Brāhmaṇical role of father not only in the role of progenitor, but more imporantly as the transmitter of knowledge:

> Thus, when the father died, he did not pass on the knowledge to his son, but rather put him in his place, and thus, deindividualized, he lived on in him. [...] What is crucial is that the knowledge of deliverance is passed on from generation to generation, from father to son, by replacing the biological father-son sequence with a ritual father-son identification. (Michaels 2004a: 109)

While the transcendental symbolism may be clear ideologically speaking, in the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s I visited in Maharashtra, students and teachers have different degrees of intimacy, and the bond of their relationship varies strongly. This bond depends on how much time they spend together, how many students are under the teacher's tutelage, how many teachers share the responsibility of teaching the students, whether the teacher favors some students above others, etc. According to one of the *guru*'s of a smaller *vedapāṭhaśālā*, Vedamūrti Amol Jośī spends time: "with the students and the attention they get from their *guru* is crucial for the character building and the quality of the student. The larger the schools and the classrooms, the less is the quality of the students". According to Jośī and other teachers I visited during my fieldwork, the "true *gurukula*" system "is dying out" now. In larger schools, students and teachers spend less time together and are not living under the same roof. They consider the teaching of only the formal curriculum (the recitation of Vedic texts) as the main cause for the downfall of the "authentic" *gurukula* system.

Some teachers deliberately choose to take only a few students into their care in order to maintain what they perceive as the "*gurukula* tradition". Śrī Vivekśāstrī Goḍboḷe from Satara, for example, has decided to accept students every other year, depending on the amount of pupils that leave his school. He says it is crucial that the classrooms "do not get too big." He says that more qualified teachers would need to be hired (besides the two teachers who already teach, besides himself, in his school), and that the facilities of the school would also need to be adapted. "The bigger the school the harder it is to keep students under control," he told me in a conversation. There is also the economic burden that teachers carry with having more mouths to feed and more expenses to maintain an increasing number of students.[326]

The intensity of this bond, as mentioned above, can be correlated to different factors which can affect it. The most obvious factor is the amount of time spent in the company of each other and in the quality of this time. The intimacy of these moments depends on the 'philosophy' and disposition of the *guru*, as well as on the financial capabilities of the school.

326 Sponsorship as discussed in 3.1.1 is a crucial element of the life and durability of these *vedapāṭhaśālā*s.

In subchapter 3.4, I proposed a typology of three models as a tool for analysis of these schools. While all three models refer to the *gurukula* system as their ideological orientation, I have argued that the first model fosters a stronger intimate relation precisely because the limited space in the house of the master, the interdependency on an economical level, and the longer periods of time spent together between teacher and student are determinants for the mimetic process of knowledge transmission.

In conclusion, it must be acknowledged that a topic which is so readily dismissed as an Orientalist construction of the "Hindu elite" can — with the help of ethnography and historiography — illumine several processes of the identity construction and knowledge transmission of these texts. This work has tried to show that the traditional *brāhmaṇa*, as an idealized trope, has found its way into concrete practices and worldviews that are not only in the Orientalist imagination of the Indologist. I have proposed that the preservation of the Veda, as embodied sound (and not as scripture), continues to be at the center of (pre)occupations of the *brāhmaṇa* reciters I present here.

The transmission of the Veda and the "Vedic way of life" are dependent on an intimate education system in which face-to-face interaction within and beyond the classroom is essential. In this book, I have emphasized the mimetic processes in which the student ideally "becomes like the *guru*", and not only by memorizing the Veda and mastering some of the rituals, but also by learning to embody a specific 'habitus' in which he becomes the personification of this knowledge.

6 Preservation or Innovation? Changes in the Transmission of Vedic Identity and Tradition

This chapter puts forward observations on how the Vedic tradition has undergone changes and (re)constructed its identity in recent times through the interaction with different discourses around what it means to lead a "Vedic life". I seek to illustrate the self-perception of orthodox *brāhmaṇa* communities on their Vedic tradition as it has been passed down through a socialization that has its roots in formal education, but goes beyond it. In the following pages, I present elements of the discourses[327] that shape what I call the "kaleidoscopic Vedic identity" of the modern *brāhmaṇa* by weaving them into specific examples drawn from my fieldwork.[328] I by no means intend to be exhaustive with the material that I present in this chapter, but rather to point to a few paradigmatic examples which portray changes in the social environment and in the organization of the *vaidika*s of today, and show how the custodians of the Vedic tradition position themselves, *vis-à-vis* these changes, thereby constructing their identity and dealing with internal and external contestation and contradiction. These case studies illustrate how changes in the political environment, the economic system, the social stratification, the education system, religious reforms, and changes in gender attitudes have influenced the way the Vedic tradition reinvents itself in a globalized world. As I intend to show, these examples illustrate the transformations on more than one aspect simultaneously (and probably more aspects could be observed if we were to zoom into each of these cases). Instead, I will use them to highlight some dominant themes and their asymmetrical interactions, demonstrating how the Vedic identity is constructed in modern Maharashtra.

In order to explore change and innovation within the tradition, a short theoretical excursion to discuss the difficult terms 'identity', 'tradition' and 'modernity' is necessary before presenting the three case studies.

6.1 Identity as a Kaleidoscope

Identity is one of those hotly debated terms in social sciences that has been prominant for several years. Recently, the concept of identity as individual awareness has been vividly questioned altogether. As Sax has aptly summarized:

327 I use the term 'discourse' here in the sense of Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse, i.e. "the idea that all objects and actions are meaningful and that their meaning is conferred by particular systems of significant differences." Cf. Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 105-114.

328 See subchapter 6.1 for a discussion on identity and the use of the term 'kaleidoscopic'.

> Within the human sciences generally, the "self" has recently been declared dead. A battalion of poststructuralists, postmodernists, social constructionists, deconstructionists, feminists, and others have killed it, claiming that the notion of a permanent, bounded, autonomous self residing at the human core — a notion that is said to be central to the "Western tradition" — cannot withstand critical scrutiny. (Sax 2002: 6)

As Van Meijl notes, in the earlier view of the early structuralists-functionalists,[329]

> [...] identity came to be understood as the historically and culturally rooted self-image of a group of people that was predominantly sketched and sharpened in contact vis-à-vis other groups of peoples. This meaning of identity was related to other anthropological concepts, such as worldview, value, ethos, and, last but not least, culture, all of which suggested a certain kind of homogeneity among members of a community. (van Meijl 2008: 170)

In the 70s, there was generally the view in social sciences that the identity of individuals reflected the identity of their cultural group, and the identity of individuals was supposed to be identical to the identity of the group to which they belonged, which was consistent with anthropological theories about the relationship between person and group or community. Another important aspect of this view of identity concerned the presupposition of stability and permanence. In recent years, however, the anthropological focus on homogeneity and permanence has gradually faded away. With the term 'identity', I mean a *cultural* identity. The word "culture" is, of course, also a very polemical one and has been even longer and more vividly alive in the academic debate than the term 'identity.' Regardless, as obvious as it might seem, it is important for me to emphasize that the identity I am referring to is a *cultural* one; i.e. one that is made evident through the use of dynamic markers or identifiers such as language, dress, place, behavior, or less visible things such as religion, ethnicity, and kinship. The effect depends on their recognition by *other* individuals or groups. These identifiers help to create the fictitious boundaries that define similarities or differences between the identifier-wearer and the identifier-perceivers. Their effectiveness depends on a shared understanding of meaning. Equally, an individual can use markers of identity to exert influence on other people without necessarily fulfilling all the criteria that an external observer might typically associate with such an abstract identity. While identity is a problematic term, its manifestations and the concrete ways in which it is embodied/articulated are what make individuals come together as a social group.

The intrinsic fluctuation of culture that is currently associated with its multivocal contestation implies that culture is being used in a variety of different meanings that are contextually dependent. I call the Vedic identity "kaleidoscopic"[330] to emphasize

329 Such as Radcliffe-Brown and Parsons, among others.

330 The term is not originally mine. It has been used before by at least one anthropologist. Khal proposes the concept in relation to his concept of 'coolitude', which he describes as a 'kaleidoscopic identity' that embraces 'creolisation and a cultural métissage of experiences'. Cf. Carter and Khal 2002.

its multivocal nature — although, I use a visual rather than a sonic metaphor. And while adhering to the concept of identity as "dialogical self", as Van Meijl has called it, I have decided to use the visual image for the reasons that will become evident below. The multiplicity of voices constantly re-accommodate themselves into the self-perception of the modern *brāhmaṇa*. These voices are often dissonant or antagonistic, but still make up part of the whole (self) in the same way that colourful pieces of glass make a single image in a kaleidoscope. One reason I find the idea of the kaleidoscope useful is because of the relative fragility of the image. Depending on who is looking through the kaleidoscope, the image — or identity presented — changes, giving more strength to certain pieces and covering others. "Identity, in other words, is a kind of nexus at which different constructions of self coincide, and sometimes also collide" (van Meijl 2008: 174). The metaphor also includes the agency of the observer, and therefore implies a certain reflexivity, which renders all images relative and fragile. The kaleidoscope also works with mirrors, which add an additional dimension to the metaphor: the images (or discourses) are created through reflections/projections that are actually 'void' or 'immaterial', but still meaningful. While the kaleidoscope metaphor implies that the configuration of the projected image with the different colourful pieces is a matter of chance, the forces at play that highlight some pieces and leave others out are no other than the laws of physics (gravity, etc.). I am aware that an important element in the configuration of these "pieces" is not just a matter of how the kaleidoscope is shaken, but much more than that, the asymmetrical power relations between the glass-pieces.

In the last twenty years, anthropologists have realized cultural identity cannot be defined purely in terms of discursive or language-centered approaches, but must also give a great deal of attention to practices. To put the matter simply, the idea is that one does not primarily learn about a culture by memorizing rules, but through processes of mimesis.[331]

And here is where schools and education facilities are particularly significant, especially in the case of Vedic education where, ideally, the student spends 24 hours a day with his *guru*. It is here that the primary transmission of a 'habitus' takes place. The student learns to embody his tradition, through practices and through systems of meaning that teach him mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. When we talk about identity or identification, we always imply boundaries. It is learning to properly embody and perform these boundaries and their dynamics that makes up the "socialization" and shapes the kaleidoscopic identity of a group or individual.

These boundaries are not always clear-cut. This is particularly prominent within the context of Hinduism, with its endless voices and cultural diversity which, at the same time, do not necessarily abandon its unity at a meta-level. As Michaels writes,

331 For more on the process of mimesis within the Vedic transmission of knowledge, see subchapter 3.4 and Chapter 5 on the guru-disciple relationship (*gurušišyasambhandha*).

"Since Hindu religions presuppose such an identificatory principle of equality, they are 'disturbed' by fewer oppositions and dichotomies. They do not need exclusions, as it were, because the Other is always one's own" (Michaels 2004: 8). To explain this characteristic of Hindu religions, Michaels has developed the concept which he calls the "identificatory habitus", which he believes is the "cohesive force"[332] of Hinduism — and while I agree with him on this observation, I believe that the negotiation of boundaries can co-exist at different ontological levels. The mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion always depend on the identifications conditioned by context and scale. Contrasting with the first three examples Michaels gives to demonstrate the "identificatory habitus" at work (Michaels 2004: 6-7), countless others can be given where the boundaries and dichotomies are not only important, but also crucial to building the identity or 'habitus' of the Hindu — or, the 'traditional' *brāhmaṇa*, in this case. This does, of course, not underscore the importance of Michaels' proposition, for he himself has explained and exemplified in his work that he is much aware of the importance of the context. What I want to point out here is that, in as much as the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion may appear blurry for anyone trying to grasp the cultural identity of the Hindus as a whole, they are still very much present depending upon how one turns the kaleidoscope.

One would want to think that the Vedic identity is clearer and more homogeneous. Indological scholarship has repeatedly spoken and written about a "Brāhmaṇical ideology" that gives coherence to a specific system of practices followed by a more or less homogeneous group of people (the *brāhmaṇa*s) with specific cultural traits. But, in this small window into the Vedic world of contemporary Maharashtra, I have tried to show that problems arise when one essentializes these traits. When we de-historicize them, we lose the richness of diversity — even within a so-called "Brāhmaṇical culture." If one looks closely enough, it can be seen that even the authoritative texts which present the "Vedic ideals" do not always represent a cohesive, homogenic picture of how a *brāhmaṇa* ought to lead his life, much less portray the historical reality of how these ideals were/are actually translated into practices and socio-political institutions. While observing the lives of the *brāhmaṇa*s today, one may often encounter fundamental discrepancies between the ideal behavior proposed in these texts and the actual practices, even among those who try the hardest to be the most "excellent of *brāhmaṇa*s". The danger, as I see it, would be to try to essentialize a tradition whose identity is polyphonic, or as I like to call it, kaleidoscopic.

The concept of the *dialogical self*, as it has been developed by Hermans and Kemper (1993), is also useful for the analysis of the multiple identifications of

332 "I refer to the cohesive force that holds the Hindu religions together and makes them resistant to foreign influences as 'the Identificatory Habitus', and I ascribe an outstanding value to it because it is linked in special way to the descent, the origin of the individual, which is crucial to salvation in India." (Michaels 2004a: 5)

individuals and communities. It complements the dynamic conception of culture that has emerged in anthropology in recent decades.

> Hermans argues that the main aim of the dialogical interaction among a large variety of internal and external I-positions is to establish 'unity' in the self, but at the same time he points out that this process is never-ending. Unity seems to be achieved only in a meta-position, when individuals reflect on their interactions and invariably highlight the consistency among their different positions. (VAN MEIJL 2008: 180)

Elaborating on this, Van Meijl explains that the rise of differing cultural positions within the self of individuals is a consequence of an increasing interculturality, and an intensified dialogue within the self.

> And these voices are involved in complicated conversations that reflect the differentiation of culture in the global world. Negotiations, tensions, conflicts, agreements and disagreements not only take place between different cultural groupings at the social level, but also within the dialogical self of multicultural individuals. And since the world is becoming more heterogeneous and multiple, the self also becomes more heterogeneous and multiple with due consequences for the internal organization of the self. (VAN MEIJL 2008: 182)

My argument is that even within a relatively closed group, with what has been, until now, believed to be a more or less homogeneous tradition with a distinct "culture", the self and the tradition are also very much polymorphic and kaleidoscopic. What I find most interesting from Michaels' "identificatory habitus" is that it focuses on various mechanisms of identification for an individual or group and, at the same time, manages to get "away both from voluntaristic notions that claim that the individual in a culture exercises free thought and free will, or that thought and action can be considered isolated from the social context, on the one hand; and from a social-science determinism or materialism that maintain that the collective (or economic) reality determines the individual, on the other" (MICHAELS 2004: 8). But what I argue is that this type of 'habitus' is not necessarily specific to Hinduism, nor does it homogeneously produce a "distinct social" or "cultural sense" which gets transmitted through the process of socialization and acts as the social glue of cultural Hindu identity, but rather that this process creates a polymorphic maze of barriers of identification which are rich in cultural asymmetries and enacted within often unstable social and historical contexts.

6.2 Tradition, Modernity, and Innovation

When using words such as "change", "innovation", and "reinvention", we are assuming that there is a deviation from an "original". The question of authenticity and tradition, as with identity and culture, is not an unproblematic one. Post-modern scholars have argued that there is no such thing as "authenticity" and have also

questioned the concept of "tradition". The seminal work, *The Invention of Tradition* by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) proposed the concept of tradition as a fiction created in response to novel situations, and which often serves as a political strategy to culturally legitimate certain practices.[333] These authors distinguished between three types of invented traditions which each have a distinct function: a) those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion and collective identities, b) those establishing or legitimatizing institutions and social hierarchies, and c) those socializing people into particular social contexts. The first type has been most commonly referred to and often taken to imply the two other functions, as well (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 9). Authors in many branches within the social sciences have contributed to the discussion on whether the concept of tradition is useful or not, and with which considerations. Other scholars have proposed an "invention of innovation" as a counter theory to Hobsbawm and Ranger's work. Here, authors show how many of the so-called innovations are continuations of latent cultural elements (cf. the essays collected in: Dücker and Schwedler 2008).

Assmann's (2007) concept of cultural memory also argues that cultural elements are transmitted through socialization, and are engrained in our collective memories, which favors the idea of traditions as repositories of these memories. Moreover, since memory is a phenomenon that is directly related to the present — our perception of the past always being influenced by the present — this means that it is a dynamic and ever-changing process.

Acknowledging the work of my predecessors, I still think that the term "tradition" is useful for describing a collective identity with a set of practices that have both elements of continuity as well as of innovation. The word "tradition" derives from the Latin *tradere* or *traderer*, literally meaning "to transmit" or "to hand over". In our case, in which the *handing over* of knowledge is done primarily through oral techniques and, in which the main content of the transmission remains almost intact (i.e. the Vedic texts), the term still makes a lot of sense to me. But, in the larger picture, one has to be aware that it is precisely not only Vedic texts that are handed over to the new generation, but a whole set of cultural elements that are worked into the cultural identity of the *vaidika*. Tradition is, therefore, an abstraction of a collective identity that is constantly being reconstructed by the network of actors who are part of it, and particularly by their custodians — whether consciously or unconsciously. Tradition,

333 "'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. [...] However, insofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of 'invented' traditions is that the continuity with it is largely factitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition." (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 1-14.)

as I understand it, is therefore not just articulated, but also *embodied* and *enacted* by the custodians, supporters, and sympathizers of the tradition. As it was aptly noted by Welbon over 20 years ago:

> Tradition is smṛti, what is "remembered"; but it is not simply a frozen, formal code from which is drawn a remembered element to meet the specifics of a given, current situation. Rather, it is a process, a style of transmitting and revealing an awareness of the transcendent structure and the discoverability anew of that structure's significance in the distinctive features of new situations, not today finding itself in yesterday, but today finding its sense — and the sense of its tomorrows — with yesterday's help. (Welbon 1986: 374)

Now, the term 'tradition' here is not meant necessarily as the counterpole of modernity. We have encountered both these problematic terms several times in this work by now, and while they have been uncritically presented, mostly in the voices of the contemporary *brāhmaṇa*s themselves, I believe that they still hold some value. I am well aware of the dangers of uncritically using these terms. Many scholars, particularly those influenced by the linguistic turn and postmodern studies, have questioned the notion of the modern and modernity as imprecise categories. Dube has noted that even these terms "[...] have been themselves revealed as contradictory and contingent processes of culture and control, as checkered, contested histories of meaning and mastery [...]" (Dube 2002: 197). While critical scholarship has been warning us about the use of binaries — such as tradition and modernity, ritual and rationality, and so on — the predicament of the anthropologist is that the entanglement of such essentialized representations has a forceful impact on the everyday discourses of any social group being studied today. No matter what we as scholars think modernity is or is not, aspirations toward becoming modern, and the claims of being modern, are crucial for all kinds of people in the subcontinent and elsewhere. It is the everyday articulations of modernity in South Asia, as densely woven into the intimate lives of the subjects of modernity (in our case, the *brāhmaṇa*s), that interest me. Thus, while contested and contingent, these processes are not subject-less procedures. In this sense, modernity may well be a ghost of no graspable substance, yet it triggers not only the imagination, but specific attitudes and practices of the people who are daunted by it. I agree with Dube, therefore, that, by carefully "[...] exploring modernity as involving processes of the past and the present, shaped not only by the modern Western subject but by diverse subjects of modernity including, especially, the terms of the self-making of different classes and communities in India", we can raise "[...] critical questions concerning the plural manifestations and key contentions of the modern in South Asia." (Dube 2014: 96) One can also observe, in the examples presented in this book, how the discourses on modernity and the tradition of the *brāhmaṇa*s of today are often in themselves contradictory, contingent, and contested. It can further be argued that while the social actors involved have been *subjected* to these processes, they are also the *agents* that shape and articulate them. Thus, in this sense, both modernity

and tradition can coexist in time and space as binaries of contradiction that shape the social reality of India.

Having briefly discussed the way I understand the terms *identity, tradition*, and *modernity* in light of some of the current theoretical discussions in social sciences, I now turn to concrete examples through which I observe elements of both innovation and continuity within the contemporary Vedic tradition of Maharashtra. With these examples, my aim is, on the one hand, to clarify what I mean by kaleidoscopic identity, and, on the other hand, to illustrate the contexts of the changes and continuities of the contemporary Vedic tradition.

6.3 The Lives of the Vedas Today

6.3.1 The *Rājasūya* of Barshi 2011-2012

The *rājasūya*, as observed in 2011 during my fieldwork in the Śrī Yogīrāj Veda Vijñān Āśram, in one of the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s located in Barshi, Maharashtra and serves as an excellent example to illustrate significant changes in the discourses and attitudes towards the Vedic tradition and, in particular, towards the Vedic ritual in modern India. It also serves as an example of the extracurricular activities that are crucial to the education of the young Vedic students.

The *rājasūya* is an ancient Vedic consecration ritual in which a king's sovereignty is proclaimed, invoking the fealty of his subjects. This ritual made sense, at least symbolically, even as late as the eighth to tenth centuries, as is demonstrated by the claims made by South Indian kings to have performed dozens of these ceremonies and other Vedic rituals related to royal power, such as the *aśvamedha*. According to the Brāhmaṇical lore, the king had to be "consecrated" in fertility rites in order to be a proper king, and his special powers had to be replenished by repeated experiences catalogued in the *dharmaśāstra*.

The *rājasūya* is probably one of the most elaborate Vedic rituals. It contains several types of *somayāga*s, including a *pavitraḥ somayāga*, several *cāturmāsya*s, and 500 *iṣṭi*s (alternating between *pūrṇamāsa* and *amāvāsya*), as well as a number of rare *śrauta* rituals not commonly performed otherwise — like the *daśapeya*, *abhiṣecanīyaḥ*, *keśavapanīyaḥ*, *anumatyādayaḥ*, etc. This ritual is not only very elaborate, but also overly demanding in terms of time and resources. According to the organizers, the performance of the *rājasūya* in 2011-12 took 16 months to complete and ₹ 15'000'000 to cover all the expenses. (Shree Yogiraj Vedvijnan Ashram 2011: 6)

According to the organizers of this ritual, a *rājasūya* was last performed "800 years ago", and while there have been other attempts to claim that this particular Vedic ritual of consecration has been performed in the past, it is not exactly clear what is meant by the term *rājasūya* in those ritual performances. Some scholars like Thite claim that it is plausible that complex rituals such as this one, or the *aśvamedha*

described in the Vedic texts, were never actually performed in such detail in real life. By studying the references to these rituals in source material outside the Veda, as well as in inscriptions on copper plates, he shows that the poets and writers of the epics and the other literary texts he studied had no knowledge of the complexities of Vedic *śrauta* ritual. He finally concludes that these sacrifices, if ever performed, were never performed literally as described in the Śrautasūtras and other Vedic texts, but only symbolically and with many compromises. He further emphasises that the sacrifices like the *aśvamedha*, *puruṣamedha*, *sarvamedha*, and others must have been fictions, and rather theoretical rituals constructed on the basis of pure speculation and mental activity (Thite 1997: 255). While there is a considerable number of records that describe the performance of other Hindu consecration rituals (for example, the so-called *rājābhiṣeka*, which is technically a rather short but crucial part of the *rājasūya*), as far as I am aware, there are no academic studies of the historical performance of a complete *rājasūya*.[334]

It is not the aim in this section to thoroughly describe the ritual procedure, or to explain the symbolism of the ritual action, and not even to describe thoroughly the socio-religious subtleties that such a ritual may encompass. For that aim, one would need at least two volumes similar to those compiled by Staal (1983) when he studied with a group of scholars the *atirātra-agnicayana* ritual, as performed by Nambudiri *brāhmaṇa*s in Kerala in 1975, to do it justice. Nor do I want to repeat here the excellent work of Weber (1983) and Heesterman (1957) on this consecration ritual. The reason why I chose this ritual as one of my examples is because it is in rituals that one can clearly observe both 'internal' and 'external' changes in the discourses of its performance, which reflect the way the performers position themselves in relation to their tradition and, specifically, how they articulate the concept of dharma and their 'Vedic self' in a modern context.

For the last 30 years, the Śrī Yogīrāj Veda Vijñān Āśram (see: Appendix 1) has been making efforts to protect, preserve, and promote the eleven branches of the four Vedas and *somayāga* rituals of all Śrautasūtras available today. Hundreds of *somayāga*s of all types — including *ekāha* ('one day'), *ahīna* ('lasting several days'), *cayana sahita* ('pilling up' [of bricks]), *kāṭhaka-cayana* ('pilling up' [of bricks] according to the Kāṭhaka branch), *dvādaśāha* ('lasting 12 days'), *pauṇḍarīka* ('made of lotus flowers') and even *gavāmayana-samvatsāra-sattra* ('annual bringing of the cows') — of 13 months' duration have been presumambly performed by Śrī Yogīrāj Veda Vijñān Āśram, and all over India.[335] Nānājī Kāḷe and his sons and students are well known all over India for their efforts to revive the Vedic ritual tradition, as well as for the preservation and revival of the oral tradition of the Vedas.

334 See, for the example, the discussion of the coronation of King Bijendra in Nepal: Witzel 1987. For the discussion of other cases in Southeast Asia, see: Heine-Geldern 1968.

335 For more information on these types of *somayāga*s, see: Ranade 2006.

The *rājasūya* was on the list of rituals to be performed by Nānājī Kāḷe and his team. For years, they had been hoping to perform it, but it was not until 2011 that the opportunity finally materialized. The main problem was finding a suitable candidate to be the *yajamāna*. The difficulty lay in the fact that the candidate had to be someone from the *kṣatriya* class, and ideally from a famous royal family; moreover, he had to be a keeper of the three fires and had to have performed at least one *agniṣṭoma* in order to be eligible for the role of *yajamāna*. This made the task of finding a suitable candidate virtually impossible, for it is already very rare to find *brāhmaṇa*s who have performed an *agniṣṭoma* in India, not to mention their being *kṣatriya*s, who have probably only been Vedic ritualists in theory. Besides this major obstacle, which could have been resolved by giving the candidate a 'crash-course' in *agnihotra* and making him undergo all the requisite *saṃskāra*s and initiations in order to perform the ritual, the problem was also a practical one. Where could they find a candidate with royal blood who was willing to spend 16 months living in a remote area and performing an obscure ritual full of restrictions on their daily life? In the words of the organizers: "We tried our best to have such type of *yajamāna* for *rājasūya*. But in this *kaliyuga* no one was ready to undergo the penance of strictly observing rules and regulations of *somayāga* as *yajamāna* for 16 months." (Shree Yogiraj Vedvijnan Ashram 2011: 6) After some time, they finally were able to find a suitable candidate who would become the "king of kings": Thakur Siṃharāj Maṅgal Tanvār, a simple farmer from a small town in Madhya Pradesh, and who had "royal blood" (plate 10). According to the pamphlet of the *rājasūya*:

> Somayaji Thakur Mangal Sinharaj Tanwar originally belongs to 'Pandav Vamsha'. They declare their Gotra namely [as] Veda Vyasa. His wife Soubhagyavati Rukmini Devi belongs to [the] kul of last Hindu King of Delhi throne namely Pruthviraj Chauhan. King Anangpal Sinhaji Tanwar was the ruler of Delhi throne [...] The Tanwar Kula is adorned with Saint Baba Ramdevaji Tanwar, who was highly advanced spiritual soul. Rajasuya Yajaman Thakur Managal Sinharaj resides in Bawai, Tahasil Sonakaccha District Dewas, Madhya Pradesh. Yajamana Mangalraj Sinha and Patni Soubhgyawati Rukminidevi undergone the vedic Samskara system from 1) Jat Karma, 2) Chaul [Cūḍākaraṇa], 3) Upanyan 4) Vivaha, 5) Gruhyagni (Ekagni) Aadhan, 6) Kushmand Homa 7) Shrout [*śrauta*] Agnydhan (setting the three holy Fires) and 8) his first somayag agnishtoma was performed from 28 February to 4th March 2011, to make him eligible to become Yajaman of Rajasuya Maha Somayag. (Shree Yogiraj Vedvijnan Ashram 2011: 5)

Now, one may ask, why would someone want to perform such a costly, time-consuming, and arduous ritual? According to Nānājī Kāḷe and many who share his views, India was once the "land of wisdom and spirituality", and has now become the "land of corruption and hedonism." According to the organizers:

> [...] to change this broad canvas of evil situation we have to accelerate the cosmic subtle energies through collective 'prayers'. To change radically this evil trend of human mind, Holy Vedas propose the uncommon remedy of 'Somayag' to accelerate subtle 'Satvik' energies of Nature i.e. Pruthvi [earth], Aapa [water], Tej [fire], Vayu [wind] and Aakash [space] to create healthy atmosphere for [the] survival and growth of life on earth. Somayag is performed for the rejuvenation of nature and mankind. (Shree Yogiraj Vedvijnan Ashram 2011: 3)

Plate 10: Somayāji Thakur Maṅgal Tanvār and his wife Saubhagyāvatī Rukmiṇī Devī with R. Kāḷe during the performance of an *iṣṭi* of the *rājasūya*. Barshi 2011.

The first justification for such a ritual, therefore, has a clearly universalistic tone in which "nature and mankind" are to be "healed" through the positive energies produced through the "prayers" of the *somayāga*.

Traditionally, the Vedic *śrauta* rituals, which can be traced back to at least three thousand years, focused on individual (rather than universal) needs, such as good health, prosperity, and the removal of one's obstacles, but in this case, the discourse of a 'religious environmentalism' becomes evident in the articulation of a collective health and the "survival and growth of life on earth". One could read this discourse as a revival of the Vedic cosmogony in which *ṛta*, the cosmic order, needs to be restored for the benefit of all. In this way, through the performance of the ritual, not only the particular fulfillment of the *brāhmaṇa*'s *dharma* is accomplished, but also the balance of the universe and the "victory of good over bad" are obtained — thus aligning its discourse with the notion that denies Hindu *dharma* as a religion, and instead elevates it to the status of natural law: a "law" which is right for all people, everywhere, at all times (Nanda 2003: 77).

In the description of the purpose of the *rājasūya* given in the official pamphlet for the ritual, one reads that:

> Particularly [the] Rajasuya Maha Somayaga is proposed to create strong, powerful government which respects and observes ethical values for the welfare of all people irrespective of caste, creed, religion, sex, language etc; which is alert in protecting borders of the nation from enemy attacks and which try its level best to give justice to common man of the nation. (Shree Yogiraj Vedvijnan Ashram 2011: 4)

The passage above shifts from the universal discourse of the first quote — which could be interpreted as being close to the Vedic concept of *ṛta*[336] — to a clearly nationalistic one. Here, the aim of the ritual is articulated in terms of protection of the borders of the nation-state and in terms of "justice for the common man." Paradoxically, while worrying about external enemies and protecting the motherland, one finds a parallel discourse which simultaneously proposes to reinforce universal ethical values, which is understood here as *dharma*. The decline of these ethical values is seen as the primordial cause for the nation's problems.

Here, the mechanics of what I meant by the kaleidoscopic identity can be observed. One single ritual is performed and articulated with multiple identificatory barriers of inclusion and exclusion, and it is an example of what Michaels would call an "identificatory habitus".

On another level, one can see how — even in terms of the ritual itself — there is a "patch-work" of uncommon combinations. The *rājasūya* ritual can be performed according to different Śrautasūtras; however, in this case it is performed according to a combination of *sūtra*s, namely the Āpastambaśrautasūtra for the role of the *adhvaryu* and assistant priests, Āśvalāyanaśrautasūtra for *hotṛ* and *brahman*, and Drāhyāyanaśrautasūtra for the *udgātṛ* priests. This unorthodox combination of *sūtra*s is justified by practical reasons. Not only has the sheer length of the ritual been shortened (for, according to the Āpastambaśrautasūtra, its duration should come to 26 months), but many of its rituals have had to be adapted, modified, and simplified to suit the feasibility of the ritual. The justification here is in reference to a mythological conception of time:

> Total Period of Rajasuya followed by Apastamba Shrauta Sutra comes to 26 months. But in this point we have followed Katyayana Shrauta Sutra and Asvalayana Shrauta Sutra, so the total period of Rajasuya comes to 16 months. In this Kali Yuga we find this opinion, feasible in practice. (Shree Yogiraj Vedvijnan Ashram 2011: 8)

Here one can observe again the "identificatory habitus" at play, for one could argue that "anything goes" as long as it suits the purpose of the ritual. But caution is advised here, for even if this particular example speaks to a preference for the principle of substitution and a great flexibility, there are many other rules that are often not so readily negotiable, and are actually rigid, which again depends on the context in which they are applied.

Furthermore, the politics involved in the promotion of this *rājasūya* show the strategic appropriation of the ritual for political purposes. The inherent hierarchical symbology of the ritual is highlighted and reinterpreted in the political framework of nationalism. Here, a two-fold appropriation might be suggested: the deliberate use of

336 For an overview on the term see: Rupwate 1982.

existing political power (leaders and political parties to finance the ritual) to legitimize the ritual, and the reverse, the instrumentalization of the ritual to promote political agendas. It is not always clear who "uses" whom, but certainly they symbiotically benefit each other.

Officially, neither Śrī Yogīrāj Veda Vijñān Āśram, nor the political organizations involved (in this case the RSS), have specifically addressed the role of the government (or other political parties or organizations) in the *rājasūya* ritual. Nonetheless, the presence of the highest ex-leader of the RSS, as spokesperson of the ritual decision (i.e. *saṃkalpa*) in the name of the people of India on the inauguration of the *rājasūya*, sends a clear vision of how India is conceived by the organizers and main sponsors of the ritual:[337] a Hindu India, in which Hinduness or Hindutva is defined by an ideology based on the notion of a nation-state.[338]

Moreover, this nationalist agenda is enacted ritually, as for example:

> [...] Adhvaryu declares loudly that such and such named Yajamana has become the *ruler for the welfare of the whole nation*. The procession of Yajamana and Patni is perfomed sitting both in decorated chariot of two horses, with elephants, camels. (Shree Yogiraj Vedvijnan Ashram 2011: 10, my italics)

While I was in Barshi for the first time in 2009, Nānājī Kāḷe told me specifically that "he was not interested in politics" and that he didn't believe the efforts of the government were sincere or sufficient to "help preserve the Vedic tradition." In November 2011, during the *rājasūya*, he insisted that the ritual was meant for the "good of India and the whole world" and that it was not associated with any political party or force. Nonetheless, it is well known, as he himself has written in his publications, that he was imprisoned for three months for his participation in the RSS Satyagraha in 1949, and that he was an active supporter of the RSS for many years (Shree Yogiraj Vedvijnan Ashram 2005: 74). While he claimed not to be "politically motivated", or that any political organization had any role to play in the ritual, he also suggested that

337 "On 4th March 2011, Ex-Sarsanghchalak of the RSS Mananeeya K. Sudarshanji performed saṃkalpa of rājasūya as representative of India [...] and appointed Shri Thakur Mangalsinha Tanwar of Bawai Gram (M.P) as yajaman of Rajasuya." *Ibid* p. 6. In 2006, the ex-RSS leader also "inspired the Shree Yogiraj Ved Vijnan Ashram to undertake the 'Saumik Suvrushti' Project." This project aims to produce strong monsoons and sufficient rain through the performance of *somayāga*s, which they call "rain-induction technology". Sudarshan acted as the announcer of the *saṃkalpa* of the 16 large *somayāga*s performed for this project under the guidance of Nānājī Kāḷe and sons, but without taking the active role of the *yajamāna*. 31 more such *somayāga*s have been performed under the sponsorship and participation of the government of Madhya Pradesh in 2007, 2008-2009, and 2010 to propitiate rain. This is another telling example of the discourse on "Vedic science". For more on the subject, see the next example on the "Ved Mandir" of Nashik and: Nanda (2003, 2005) and Bechler (2013: 123-33).

338 "The ideologue does this by defining Hinduness in terms of a nation, a land, a polity: the Hindurastra." (Ram-Prasad 1993: 25)

the anti-corruption movement initiated by Anna Hazare at that time, and the death of Osama Bin Laden, were aided by "the good energies produced by the *rājasūya*."[339] I have not been able to talk with the performers since 2011, but judging from their postings on Facebook, one could imagine that the success of Narendra Modi is seen as a possible outcome of the 'positive energies' generated by this and other similar rituals.

Another element closely related to politics is how caste (in the sense of *varṇāśramadharma*, but with very tangible repercussions) is being reworked and articulated in this ritual. There is a general call from the organizers to all castes and sections of the society to participate in different ways:

> [...] we appeal to all our Bhartiya brothers to assist Rajasuya Somayaag financially, psychologically, intellectually and physical. By this kind of support to aims and objects of Rajasūya, it shall be fruitful. To get the support from all classes of society to proposed new Government, some specific rituals are performed in Rajasuya. Prominent persons named as Ratni are selected from different classes of society and ritual of 3 hours namely lshti is performed in the homes of 12 Ratnis. These Ratnis are Senapati, Treasury in charge, milkman, Gambling-house head, Gopal, farmer, widow woman, village head etc. (Shree Yogiraj Vedvijnan Ashram 2011: 10)

In this passage, we can observe the highlighting of the sub-ritual to the *ratnis*[340] as an attempt to promote a universalistic/inclusive discourse in which "everyone has its place in society." This sub-ritual is an important element of the *rājasūya*, but here it has been put in the limelight in order to endorse a vision of a society in which the participation of all classes in the ritual is essential to creating a new government. While, according to the Vedic texts (and in particular the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa), this section of the *rājasūya* calls for the participation of several dignitaries and members of the royal household and its primary role has been described as "one of the few parts of the *rājasūya* that are directly and exclusively related to kingship" (Heesterman 1957: 49), here we see it reinterpreted to involve the society at large and make them essential participants of the ritual.

The ritual decision (*saṃkalpa*)[341] in which the purpose of the ritual is declared by the ritual patron (*yajamāna*) was traditionally an individual affair and only spoken out by the *yajamāna* alone or with the aid of the priest. In this case, nonetheless, not only is the acting *yajamāna* an individual who is representing a collective (here, the

339 Personal communication (18.11.2012).

340 On the word *ratnin* in the context of this ritual Heesterman offers the following comment: "The name *ratnin* seems not to refer to jewels or regalia; the *ratna*s are the functions held by the royal dignitaries and the members of the royal household; they are the constituent parts of the government. For the translation 'receiving gifts' (Macdonell Keith, V.I., 2, p. 199), though possible, evidence is lacking." (Heesterman 1957: 49)

341 For more on the concept of *saṃkalpa*, see Michaels 2005; for *saṃkalpa* as transfer of agency, see: Hüsken 2009: 228-231.

"representative of the Indian people") and acting in the name of an abstract political power, but at the moment he is ritually performing the ritual decision (*saṃkalpa*) he is replaced by a different person who has greater political power and prestige than the acting *yajamāna* himself. Temporarily appointing with real political power to the role of *yajamāna* (such as the highest ex-leader of the RSS) who, however, will not actively participate in that role during the 16 months of the ritual and whose sole role is to "legitimate" its performance and act as a representative of the Hindu nation, suggests a transference of political/ritual power. The result of this strategy for the organizers is a potential increase in the number of supporters.[342] Moreover, the ritual decision is here interpreted as a "strong will power" which can bring about the desired change through the participation of "all people together":

> Subtle process of Sankalp:
>
> Such strong government can be created only through accumulated determined strong will power i.e, sankalp of all people together. And Rajasūya Maha Somayag is uncommon, vedic process which projects such 'Sankalp' of common man in mesosphere, in cosmos and accelerates all subtle cosmic energies which materialize the 'Sankalp' and brings the desired mutation in establishing new Government, which is honest and highly respects ethical values, only by obtaining divine blessings through "Rajasuya performance". Sankalp i.e. hundred percent determined will of unselfish key person plays a vital important role in success of any mission undertaken. Sankalp serves as the nucleus of Vedic Somayags. If this nucleus of Sankalp is feed by collective same hearty desire of crores of people, nurtured by collective mind-power through prayers of innumerable individuals, it is sure to materialize the Sankalp earliest. This strong subtle cosmic flow of Prana Shakti vibrates, accelerates cosmic energy to shape the Sankalp in reality. Desire, Knowledge and Action are the inherent qualities of Prana Shakti. Through Rajasuya Somayaga subtle process, this nucleus of Sankalp is properly channelized and is developed to harvest desired fruits. (Shree Yogiraj Vedvijnan Ashram 2011: 4)

According to the passage above, the *saṃkalpa*, as a hub of willpower, needs to be fed by the mind-power and prayers of as many people as possible to achieve the necessary results. Here, the *saṃkalpa* passes from being an individual ritual declaration of intentionality to a "subtle energy" that needs to be fed collectively and channeled through an "unselfish key person".[343] Whereas, in former times, the Vedic ritual was restricted to specific groups demarcated by class, sex, etc., it is here reversed and now performed to promote an ideology of inclusion. The predicament that it is not the acting *yajamāna* (in this case, the "king" — i.e. Thakur Maṅgal Tanvār) or even the 'de

342 The RSS is said to have 5 to 6 million members (Bhatt 2001: 113).

343 In this case, the "unselfish key person" is ex RSS leader Sudarshan, who is a Sarsaṅghchalak (paramount leader of the RSS hierarchy) and who represents the ideal of a servant of the nation. Indeed, for many years the leaders of the RSS were expected to remain celibate and unmarried, and to devote all their energies to the cause. For more on cohesion, leadership, and control in the RSS, see: Hansen 1999: 107-115.

facto' *yajamānas* (Nānājī Kāḷe and sons),[344] but a third individual who is invited to be the spokesperson of the *saṃkalpa,* exemplifies a new discursive formation in favor of a Manichean worldview.

6.3.1.1 Modern Hinduism

Besides the above-mentioned relationship with political Hinduism within this ritual frame, one also has to consider the presence of another complementary discourse, namely that of the spiritual affiliation of the Nānājī Kāḷe and the Śrī Yogīrāj Veda Vijñān Āśram. The pamphlet of the *rājasūya* reads: "[...] will be successfully completed due to grace of Sadguru Shri Gulavani Maharāj" (Shree Yogiraj Vedvijnan Ashram 2011: 1).

Guḷavāṇi Mahārāj is the spiritual *guru* of Nānājī Kāḷe, who inspired him to revive the ancient Vedic rituals.[345] It is commonly accepted that the saint lived between 1886 -1974 and spent 12 years in Barshi. This is Kāḷe's birth place. Guḷavāṇi Mahārāj was known as a *śaktipātācārya* who "awakened" the *kuṇḍalinī* energy in his disciples through an initiation called *śaktipātadīkṣā*. This tradition is closely associated with various *haṭhayoga* traditions, and in particular the *datta-sampradāya* of Maharashtra. For many years, Guḷavāṇi Mahārāj was a disciple of the famous Vasudevānand Sarasvatī, who was also known as Ṭembe Mahārāj from Guḷavāṇi, and he received initiation in 1909.[346] A few years later, in 1922, he took *śaktipātadīkṣā* from Śrī Loknāth Tīrth Svāmī Mahārāj in Hoshangabad (MP) and was then entitled to give *śaktipātadīkṣā* himself.[347]

Nānājī Kāḷe became a close disciple of Guḷavāṇi Mahārāj in his youth. He decided to learn the Ṛgveda in the traditional oral way and — after attending to a *somayāga* in which also Guḷavāṇi Mahārāj was present, and in which he felt that his *guru* was giving him a "command to revive the Vedic tradition" — in 1981, Kāḷe decided to set the three sacred fires in Nanded at the banks of the Godāvarī River in honor of his *guru*. After that, he went back to Barshi and, after a few years, in 1985 he established the Śrī Yogīrāj Veda Vijñān Āśram in the agricultural land of his forefathers. His ancestral house in the town of Barshi was donated in 2004 to the devotees of Guḷavāṇi Mahārāj, and remodelled into a temple with facilities for cooking and other amenities. He and his family moved permanently to the *āśram* that was a short distance from the city in order that he be able to carry out his self-appointed mission of reviving the

344 They being the ones with the original intention to perform the ritual and the actual organizers of the *rājasūya*.

345 See: Appendix 1.

346 http://www.shrivasudevanandsaraswati.org/english/itinerary.htm accessed on 3.3.2012.

347 Śrī Loknāth Tīrth Svāmī Mahārāj was born in Dhaka (now Bangladesh) in the year 1892 in a family of priests devoted to the goddess Kālī. According to hagiographic accounts, he came to western and south India, bringing the *śaktipāta-sādhanā* to these regions.

Vedic tradition. The building now functions as a temple that is visited daily by local devotees — mainly women who come to chant devotional songs.

It is noteworthy that the *datta-sampradāya* has been crucial to the development of the Vedic tradition in Maharashtra, particularly in recent years through the influence and sponsorship of *guru*s associated with this tradition. It is difficult to speak of a "marriage" between orthodox traditions and the esoteric/Purāṇic developments in Maharashtra (and lays beyond the scope of this work). However, from what we know, it is certain that this dynamic dialog is central to the formation of various identities associated with the Vedic transmission of knowledge in modern Maharashtra.

While I have argued that elements of popular Hinduism play an important role in the new forms of Vedic ritual, these elements can also be conspicuous by their absence in contemporary *yāga*s. In this case, during the formal performance of the ritual, one does not find any references to popular Hindu gods or local deities to which people can relate to — i.e., no Viṭṭhala, no Rāma, no form of the Devī etc. — as is usually the case in other modern "Vedic" rituals.[348] The only non-Vedic figure to appear in the ritual is Yogīrāj Guḷavāṇi Mahārāj. He, too, remains rather marginal during the ritual procedure, appearing only at the initial segment in which also Gaṇeśa is invoked.[349] The *śrauta* rituals appear to be foreign, lengthy, and complex procedures in which no common names of the divine, and no common ritual practices or symbols are invoked with which the devout Hindu could identify. While the Vedic *mantra*s are generally perceived as holy and potent by the average Hindu, the context in which these are usually encountered is clearly within a Hindu framework (and not a Vedic one). This can also occur within the ritual framework of the Brāhmaṇical *rites-de-passage* or *saṃskāra*s, in which mainly Vedic *mantra*s are used.

The soft emphasis on familiar Hindu discourses within the *rājasūya* and its framing is perhaps one of the reasons why this ritual has not drawn the popularity and interest as successfully as other contemporary so-called "Vedic" rituals in which more popular Hindu themes are highlighted.[350]

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348 See the case of the Śrī Rāmayajña of Satara, given below in subchapter 6.3.3.

349 Based on my experience and from what I have discussed with the *brāhmaṇa*s of Maharashtra, I observe that it has become common practice in large Vedic rituals to start such an event by invoking both the 'remover of obstacles' (*gaṇeśa*) and the worship of the charismatic spiritual master (usually also involved, either personally or through his/her organization in the sponsorship and organization of the ritual). This invocation is done by performing some form of *gaṇeśa-pūjā* and a *guru-pūjā* (which often involves a ritual washing of the guru's sandals or *pādābhṣeka/pādukābhiṣeka*). Additionally, in this particular case, a small shrine of Guḷavāṇi Mahārāj was installed in the southwest corner of the *yāgyaśālā*, in which a simple ghee lamp burns in front of his picture and some electric twinkling lights decorate the altar. While it is a significant innovation that merits being mentioned, the shrine does not receive much attention and remains at the periphery of the ritual activity of the *rājasūya*.

350 The invented ritual of the All World Gayatri Pariwar (AWGP) in north India, called "Ashwamedha Yagna" and in which the *gāyatrī-mantra* is recited by thousands of people, is becoming very popular in north India. (Cf. Bechler 2013: 116-121)

6.3.1.2 Media, Mobility, and Global Participation

While internal aspects of the ritual may perhaps not be as appealing to a wider Hindu audience, the media plays a crucial role in promoting the visibility of such an event. New media and technologies (Internet, TV, etc.), as well as greater access provided by physical mobility, allow for the wider promotion of the ritual. This makes it more accessible to everyone, including those living beyond the local region. Previously, promotional material distributed to promote a performance of similar rituals used to flow relatively slowly. Also, its reach was generally restricted to a local and communal audience rather than a pan-Indian one.[351]

A participant does not even have to be physically present to participate in the ritual anymore and to obtain the merit and fruits produced by it. It is sufficient that one joins the cause with his/her will power through prayers, good wishes, and preferably through monetary support. At the same time, the ritual is relatively private, especially compared to other grand rituals performed all over India, which attract large numbers of people and have extensive media coverage.[352] In fact, this ritual is relatively unknown even among the *brāhmaṇa*s I met during the examinations of the VŚS in Pune 2011. This is especially interesting, as most of them were from Maharashtra.

Usually these larger rituals are advertised extensively in print, digital, and social media. However, the *rājāsūya* ritual was only promoted by pamphlet and the website produced for this occasion.[353] There were hardly any references in local or national newspapers. Furthermore, word of the event did not spread through online social networks. Neither was it covered by television. I asked Nānājī and Caitanya Kāḷe if they had done any promotion by inviting the media to cover the ritual. They explained that they preferred to keep the number of visits to a minimum and that the presence of many people would "disturb the atmosphere of the ritual". Although they claim that "anyone is welcomed to the *rājasūya*", the fact is that it would be impractical to have a large number of visitors. Additionally, the fact that the *āśram* is located in an isolated

351 The best example is perhaps the Nambudiris who, until a few decades ago, allowed only members of their own community to participate or even observe their rituals, and who still prefer members of their community as the officiating priests for any ritual, this over external priests no matter how learned they may be. In recent years, however, the increased media presence and the academic interest in these rituals have resulted in an upsurge of their performace in Kerala and elsewhere in India.

352 Examples of such grand rituals involving a large number of *brāhmaṇa* priests are often performed by wealthy temples in south India and by transnational spiritual groups, but these are usually of the *smārta* variety and often involve the participation of auxiliary priests who have not undergone any priestly training. Additionally, these rituals are framed as "civic spectacles" (Lubin 2001b), many of which are connected to charitable projects that further provide the opportunity to support people or organizations in need.

353 http://yogirajsomyagvedas.com accessed on November 20, 2011.

rural area means that it does not attract the interests of too many middle class Hindus who might otherwise be interested in attending such rituals.[354]

The participation in large-scale rituals, such as this one, has generally increased in the last few years through extensive networking. In some cases, this has expanded to a global scale. Increased mobility and better communication have allowed communities to come together through a shared identity. It has also allowed for a seemingly more welcoming attitude towards those considered to exist outside of the group. In the example of the *rājasūya* performance, these changes have allowed for the collection of necessary funds and participation beyond the local sphere. While most of the priests involved with ritual came from the Śrī Yogīrāj Veda Vijñān Āśram, there were several who also came from other parts of Maharashtra.

As it has been pointed out above, even the central figure of the ritual, the *mahārāja* and his wife, came from a tiny village in Madhya Pradesh, hundreds of kilometers from Barshi. The money for the sponsorship also flowed from supporters of Nānājī Kāḷe beyond Barshi, usually from wealthy families living in mega-cities such as Mumbai and Pune. Additionally, scholars, both Indian and foreign (e.g. myself), visited Barshi in order to observe the *rājasūya* and other rituals performed in the *āśram*. This was only possible through a certain openness and hospitality on the organizers' part. This is important, as it demonstrates the non-static nature of the *brāhmaṇa* identity because this openness required a reinterpretation/reinvention of certain Brāhmaṇical values, such as *svadharma*, or *varṇa*. This opportunity has been supported and perhaps even catalyzed through processes of globalization, which have resulted in an increase in mobility and communication through technology and better infrastructure. These changes have not only permitted the creation of more effective networks beyond the local sphere, but they have also facilitated larger economic transactions, physical movement, and participation within these networks. These changes have altered not only the ritual environment and the ritual itself, but also the identity of their performers. As Michaels notes, "new ritual-complexes emerge in marginal or marginalized groupings and are often part of their identity building. As symbols of a new identity these ritual-complexes are modified or created anew."[355]

Of course, I am not suggesting that *brāhmaṇa*s are a marginal or marginalized group (although some of them do feel threatened by the modern society),[356] and they are not necessarily creating a "new" identity *per se* (though, as I have observed above,

354 Some scholars, such as Nanda, have argued that it is mainly the Indian middle class that has an increasing interest in such large-scale rituals and religious events. (Nanda 2009)

355 "Neue Ritualkomplexe entstehen meist in zunächst marginalen oder marginalisierten Gruppierungen, und sind oft Teil ihrer Identitätsbildung. Als Zeichen ihrer neuen Identität werden bestehende Ritualkomplexe modifiziert oder neue geradezu kreiert." (Michaels, 2004b: 8) translation mine.

356 Bairy has called this Brāhmaṇical angst the "sense of a community under siege." (Bairy 2010: 171-72)

I consider identity to be always "new"), but rather that they are creatively adapting and reusing discursive resources to the changing circumstances of contemporary India among others through ritual. But I agree with Michaels in that these changes in ritual can also reflect an identitarian change, or the adaptation of one's identity in a changing society.

6.3.1.3 Economics: the "Miracle" of Funding

The economic aspect of the ritual has also been at the focus of ritual theorists in the last few decades.[357] It is again not my aim to provide an in depth analysis of the economics of the *rājasūya* or to make a significant contribution to the economic theory of rituals as such, but rather to point towards possible answers to the changes one can perceive in the Vedic tradition.

Michaels has pointed out that humans only need as much ritual as they can afford by replacing other guarantors of social or personal stability, including new rituals.[358] He writes that reformulating or replacing ritual is successful when the following conditions are met:

> That there is enough power to act: (a) and the cultural and political situation is ready in such a way that the cultural "costs" of alternative beliefs are reduced, (b) that enough coordination, information, and diffusion are guaranteed, and (c) that the social or soteriological benefit supersedes the material costs. (Michaels 2004b, translation mine)[359]

According to this theoretical approach, these three elements would need to be fulfilled in the *rājasūya* in order to be economically profitable in the broad sense of the word. From the perspective of the rational choice theory, one would also need to assume that the performance of such a ritual would need to 'pay off' for the performers, the indirect participants, and the sponsors, or otherwise it would not be performed. The soteriological, social, and political benefits of the ritual are perceived to have a higher value than the ₹ 15'000'000 allegedly spent during the 16-month ritual.

The participation in the ritual through the donation of money for the performance of the *rājasūya*, and its articulation as a pious act yielding religious merit (*puṇya*)

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357 Cf. for example: Widlock 2005, 2010; McAnany and Wells 2008: 1-16; Hüsken and Venkatachari 2010.

358 "Der Mensch braucht soviel Ritual, wie er es sich leisten kann, es durch andere Garanten der sozialen und persönlichen Stabilität (darunter neue Rituale) zu ersetzen." (Michaels 2004b: 10)

359 "Eine durchgreifende Ritualreform (oder Ritualersatz) ist dann erfolgreich, wenn (a) ausreichend Handlungsvollmacht vorliegt, der Boden kulturell oder politisch so vorbereitet ist, daß dadurch die kulturökonomischen „Kosten" der Äußerungen von alternativen Überzeugungen verringert sind, (b) hinreichend Koordination, Information und Diffusion gewährleistet ist, und (c) der soziale oder soteriologische Nutzen die sozialen und materiellen Kosten überwiegt." (Michaels 2004b: 9-10)

for the donor, opens the traditionally exclusive role of the *yajamāna* to a wider public. This empowers a mere sympathizer to harvest the fruits of the ritual even without having to be physically present. This empowerment is also reflected in the reinterpretation of *saṃkalpa*, as we saw above. In a way, the monetary support gives this 'subtle *saṃkalpa*' concrete expression and gives pragmatic support to the ritual. The economy of the ritual is also framed within the *varṇāśrama* ideology, in that it seeks support through appealing to a broader base built upon the four traditional classes of Brāhmaṇism:

> Expert Vaidik Brahmins will perform Rajasuya, strictly following shrout [*śrauta*] sutras. Rich people of Vaishya class will give their full financial support to Rajasuya. And ordinary man can contribute through his physical seva in Rajasuya. Thus the participation in Rajasuya of all people, from all quarters is necessary. (Shree Yogiraj Vedvijnan Ashram 2011: 8)

Thus, the "participation of all people" is not framed exclusively as a monetary transaction; participation may include donations in kind, service in the form of labor (as free *sevā* or payed), and even 'just' through will-power (*saṃkalpa*).

From a more pragmatic and economic view, an important missing element of public Hindu rituals, which usually attract several devotees, is the distribution of free food. While this might seem particularly appealing to the financially disadvantaged, it seems to me, from the rituals I have observed, that it attracts people of all social strata. 'Blessed food' or *prasāda* is not only an opportunity to get a 'free lunch', but also, and more importantly, an opportunity to receive the blessings of the ritual performance through accumulating purifiying religious merit (*puṇya*) in a very tangible form.[360] A ritual feast, or *bhaṇḍārā*, is usually widely advertised as part of the ritual program, and the richer and more abundant the food plate is, the more people it attracts, and also the more merit and prestige the patron of the ritual obtains.

As one can see from this example, the economics of the ritual are interwoven into the religious ideology of the performers and their social network. This ritual economy is reflected in the dynamic social interactions between sponsors, participants, and performers, and is internalized and also embodied as their cultural capital through the enactment of the ritual event.

6.3.1.4 Socialization through Ritual

It is noteworthy that the main performers of this big event are children or teenagers who are students of the Śrī Yogīrāj Veda Vijñān Āśram. The majority of the other priests involved in officiating in the ritual were also former students of this school. Rituals, such as the *rājasūya*, are the arenas where the students can apply the knowledge

360 For more on the concept of *prasāda*, see: Pinkney 2008.

they have learned from their education while consolidating their ritual expertise in a formal public setting. Rituals enable students to perform their identity and, at the same time, further interiorize the discourses attached to its execution. All the discursive elements discussed above are performed by the students in different rituals and on several occasions during their studies. They learn to reproduce and reinvent these discourses mainly through mimesis, and not necessarily through rationalization. This forces the custodians of this tradition to be in a constant negotiation with the larger social processes, not only in their role as "culture brokers",[361] as Singer called them, but also in their constant identitarian construction of their self. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the image created by the identitarian kaleidoscope is, first of all, not a stable one, but even more importantly, the asymmetrical forces that trigger the fragile configuration of the pieces at work are not random, but dominated by the complex relations of power. These asymmetries are negotiated anew every time the actors perform their identity. As soon as one element changes, the relations of power and authority are re-negotiated, re-articulated, and re-enacted — creating a new image of itself, in the same way that a small change in the configuration of the glass-pieces in the kaleidoscope creates a new image every time one sees through it.

6.3.2 The Veda Mandir in Nashik, Maharashtra

In this section[362] I intend to present an additional example in which the traditional emphasis on the sound form of the Veda is challenged. In a temple situated in Maharashtra, the Veda is represented as a book bound in a contemporary style and allegedly crafted in white Italian marble. It is worshipped by anyone, irrespective of caste, gender, or nationality. This Veda temple, called 'Śrī Gurugaṅgeśvar Ved Mandir' (henceforth 'Ved Mandir'), will help to elucidate a shift in perception from the Veda as the spoken word to the Veda as "Holy Scripture", and to present some of the discourses that have catalyzed these changes.

The same trust that maintains the Ved Mandir in Nashik also runs one of the 25 schools I visited during my fieldwork. Every year since 1987, the organization also grants the "Guru Gangeshwar Ved-Vedang National Award" to three Vedic *paṇḍita*s "who recite the Vedas in the true form and imparts knowledge of the Vedas to

361 "Internal differentiation under these conditions leads to the autonomous development of separate social institutions and spheres of culture held together only by consensus on the technical order, whose accelerated rate of change tends to outrun the moral order. In metropolitan and colonial cities and in other 'secondary' urban centres, the intelligentsia and reformers serve both as agents of cultural innovation and as the 'cultural brokers' who try to reconcile and rationalize these innovations with the Great and Little Traditions of their primary civilizations." (Singer, 1972: 7)

362 Parts of this subchapter have been taken from an article entitled "Sacred sound becomes sacred scripture: the Veda Mandir in Naśik Mahārāṣṭra" published by the author in 2011.

maximum students".[363] The award includes a monetary prize of ₹ 21'000 in a public ceremony. The other two prizes are given to scholars who have contributed to the preservation and research of the Vedas.[364]

The Ved Mandir is found on the outskirts of Nashik City, in the present state of Maharashtra, India. This temple was built by the Sarda (also spelled Sāraḍā in the IAST system) family in the early seventies of the last century, and through the inspiration of Guru Gaṅgeśvarānand Mahārāj, a popular saint who became widely known across India and beyond.

According to hagiographic accounts, Guru Gaṅgeśvarānand Mahārāj was born in a *brāhmaṇa* family in Punjab in 1881. When he was five years old, he became blind as a result of chicken-pox and was left by his family under the care of a saint, Svāmī Rāmānand. According to the website maintained by one of the trusts founded by him, after many years under Svāmī Ramānand's tutelage, he succeeded his *guru* as the 17th head of the *udāsin* sect, which claims that the "lineage [was handed down] from Sant Kumar, son of Lord Brahma, the creator."[365]

Guru Gaṅgeśvarānand Mahārāj lived presumably for 111 years and passed away in 1992. He commissioned and supervised the production of a book called "Bhagavān Ved", which compiles the *mantra*s from all the four Vedic Saṃhitās, and supposedly "for the first time in a single book."[366] His book was widely distributed in India and abroad, partially, as will be shown below, to be used as an object of worship.

The rich businessman Śrīman Seth Kisanlāljī Sāraḍā and his wife Akhaṇḍ Saubhāgyāvatī Kiraṇ Sāraḍā, in memory of Kisanlāl's father, Śrīman Bastīrāmjī Sāraḍā, sponsored the temple. They established a trust in the name of his mother that maintains the temple and provides a number of charitable works and religious services. The trust is called: 'Matośrī Rāmpyārībaī Sāraḍā Dharmik Pratiṣṭhan'. The Sarda Group, a family enterprise established in 1922, is one of the largest *bīḍī*[367] companies in western India and has now expanded its business into real estate and hospitality service industries. The family does not have any traditional *brāhmaṇa* background and, as Kisanlāljī explained to me in an interview, his family were followers of the *vārkarī sampradāya* and of Jñāneśvar Mahārāj, in particular. Later in his youth, he became interested in Vipassanā meditation and used to visit the famous Vipassanā International Academy (also known as Dhamma Giri) at Igatpuri twice a week. At the time, he was completely ignorant of the Vedic tradition, except for the names of the four Vedas which he had learned during his school years. On April 1st, 1981, he and his family encountered Guru Gaṅgeśvarānand Mahārāj and, from then onwards, became

363 http://www.vedpradip.com/vedvidyalaya.php accessed on July 6, 2010.
364 *Idem*.
365 Taken from http://gurugangeshwaranandjimaharaj.com/experiences2.htm accessed on July 3, 2010.
366 See http://gurugangeshwaranandjimaharaj.com/accessed on July 3, 2010.
367 Indian cigarettes.

his dedicated devotees until his death eleven years later. They accompanied him in his travels and stayed with him whenever they could. Since Guru Gaṅgeśvarānand Mahārāj was so interested in the Vedas, Kisanlāljī, too, became interested. During the last years of Gaṅgeśvarānand's life, he travelled India and the world, teaching about the Vedas and installing temples dedicated to the Vedas.

Initially, Kisanlāljī wanted to build a simple temple dedicated to Kṛṣṇa and to his *guru* as an expression of his devotion. According to him, he had a limited budget and a simple plan, but through the suggestion and blessings of his *guru*, the project grew and was transformed into the construction of the large Ved Mandir that it is today. It was through the "grace of his *guru*" that the necessary funds became available to him and that the project was finished on time.

The Ved Mandir in Nashik was inaugurated on the 25th of January in 1988. The construction has three spacious vaults. The left chamber enshrines lord Rāma, accompanied by Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa. Hanumān guards them. The right chamber is dedicated to Tryambakeśvara, which is one of the twelve famous *jyotirliṅga*s of India.[368] Gaṇeśa and a black Nandi guard the *śivaliṅga*. The shrine also includes a smaller image of Pārvatī, Śiva's consort.

In the main vault at the centre of the building, one finds the *sanctum sanctorum* which enshrines the idol of what it is called "Bhagavān Ved", a two meter-tall representation of the Vedas bound in contemporary style and crafted in what is presumably white Italian marble. Opened in the middle, one can see in big golden Devanāgarī characters the words *bhagavān vedaḥ* engraved on the book. Under this title, one can see in a slightly smaller font the *gāyatrī-mantra,*[369] carved also in golden characters into its pages:

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः ।
तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो
देवस्य धीमहि ।
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

OM. May we receive this excellent splendor of the God Savitā, which should inspire our thoughts.[370]

On the right page of the book idol it reads verse I.1.9 from the Ṛgveda:

स नः पितेव सूनवे
ऽग्ने सूपायनो भव ।
सचस्वा नः स्वस्तये ॥

Be easy for us to reach, like father to his son. Abide with us, Agni, for our happiness.[371]

368 The original Tryambakeśvara temple is located only around 30 km. from the Ved Mandir.
369 Ṛgveda III.62.10.
370 Staal 2008: 220.
371 Doniger 1981.

Enshrined in front of the monumental marble book is a two-meters tall bronze statue of Guru Gaṅgeśvarānand Mahārāj holding a staff (plate 11).

Plate 11: Bhagavān Ved at the Ved Mandir of Nashik 2009.

As in any other Hindu temple, the idols are worshipped daily in the temple with traditional Hindu *pūjā* elements. Bhagavān Ved is daily decorated with fresh flower garlands. For festivities, such as *gurupūrṇimā*, Gaṅgeśvarānand's birthday, *mahāśivarātri*, and etc., the idols are worshipped accordingly with more pomp, and temple attendance substantially increases.

From the official website of the above mentioned trust, one can read:

> [...] Vedmandir is a unique gift to humanity.
>
> [...] Vedmandir is a modern presentation of the eternal truths of Indian Culture.
>
> [...] Above all, visit to Vedmandir is a pilgrimage.
>
> [...] Vedmandir is a cultural nucleus dedicated to Guru Gangeshwaranandji Maharaj, the torchbearer of Ved in modern times.[372]

As the passage above demonstrates, the temple presents elements that differ from the traditional view on the sonic nature and the oral transmission of the Vedas that we have encountered in the Vedic schools described in earlier chapters. Here, one can observe a shift in emphasis and perception of what the Vedas are and how they are to be "used", from the primarily oral form of the Vedas to be used in the Vedic ritual, to the worship of the Vedas as a scripture containing soteriological teachings for the individual and

372 http://www.vedpradip.com/vedtemple.php?linkid=15 accessed on March 3, 2010.

society — this being a "scripture" that not only contains meaning, but where the contents are considered meaningful for the modern man. The idea of installing a book as the main idol, instead of the *mūrti* of one of the gods of the Hindu pantheon, was thus, as Kisanlāljī explained, also "educational". Claims that the Vedas contain all eternal truths, including all the discoveries of modern science, are constantly made by many Hindus, Nationalists or not.[373] Here the Vedas are not just meant to be in praise of the ancient Vedic gods and an inseparable element of Vedic ritual, but they have evolved to a sort of mystical codex containing truths to be used as a guide in one's daily life, once they have been correctly explained to us by the knowledgeable *guru*.

In this example, Guru Gaṅgeśvarānand Mahārāj is perceived by his devotees as "[someone who] dedicated all his life to Bhagavan Ved. The very objective of his life is to propagate Vedic knowledge in the various countries all over the world and make human life meaningful."[374]

It is also worth noting that the carving of the *gāyatrī-mantra* on the marble idol in representation of the whole Veda is a powerful statement in itself. To have this *mantra* on display to any visitor who comes to the temple cannot be ignored. The *gāyatrī-mantra* traditionally has been used in the initiation ceremony (*upanayana*) of the highest class of the Brāhmaṇical society. During the ceremony, a boy's father or *guru*, while veiled from the public view under a blanket or shawl, secretly whispers the *mantra* into the young male's ear.[375] The *gāyatrī-mantra* has been praised in many authoritative texts as the condensation of the Vedas[376] and, as Michaels argued, it is often used by laymen as the "symbolic identification with the Veda... [that] is sufficient as a substitute for the whole." (Michaels 2004a: 97). Here it is made widely available, following the nineteenth century Hindu reform movement's plan to extend the chanting of the *gāyatrī-mantra* beyond caste and gender limitations. In 1898, Svāmī Vivekānanda began initiating non-*brāhmaṇa*s with the sacred thread ceremony and the *gāyatrī-mantra* (cf. Vivekananda 1969: 108-110), this on the basis that the Vedas and the Bhagavadgītā proclaim that *brāhmaṇa* status is earned and not inherited (Mittra 2001: 71). The Ārya Samāj notably spread the teaching that recitation of the *mantra* was not limited to males, but that women could rightfully be taught both the Vedas and the *gāyatrī-mantra*. (Bakhle 2005: 293)

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373 On the construction of the Vedas as books of science, see below in this chapter.

374 Translated from a brochure in Hindi published by "Matośrī Rāmpyārībaī Sāraḍā Dharmik Pratiṣṭhan". [...गुरुदेव सम्पूर्ण जीवन वेद भगवान को समर्पित है। उनके जीवन का उद्देश्य हि वैदिक ज्ञान का देश-विदेश मैं प्रसार कर मानव मात्र को सार्थक बनाना है।]

375 See: Michaels 2004a: 89 Illustration (b).

376 The MānDhŚ II, 83 states that: "[...] nothing is higher than the Sāvitrī [*gāyatrī-mantra*]." (Olivelle 2005a: 99) In many post-vedic texts, this mantra is designated as "mother of the Vedas" and is also equated with *brahman* (cf. BK Smith 1992). In the Bhagavadgītā X, 35, Kṛṣṇa says: "Of chants I am the Brihatsaman; Of meters I am the Gayatri" (Sargeant 2009: 445).

The most orthodox *brāhmaṇa*s left in India — or orthoprax, as Staal (1979b: 4) would call them — would most likely not adhere to this universalistic and open religiosity because it threatens the dilution of their own identity. I suggest, as mentioned above, that this is an example of the discourse which developed out of the nineteenth century Neo-Hindu nationalist movement that presented us with a "scientific" and "rational" religion found in *advaita-vedānta*.[377] Rām Mohan Roy, Vivekānanda, Dayānanda Sarasvatī, Aurobindo, and many other gurus who followed, like Gaṅgeśvarānand Mahārāj, found a friendly echo from their Western counterparts, and particularly amongst Western educated Indians, by presenting their spirituality through the lens of "science" and "rationality".

In Guru Gaṅgeśvarānand's writings and "Vedic speeches" (*veda-pravacana*s), one can perceive a very particular interpretation of the Vedic hymns coloured with ideas from a Neo-Hindu discourse drawing from various sources.[378] In his book from 1982, *Vedas a Way of Life from Yadnya (Sacrifice) to Yoga (Union)*, one repeatedly encounters the terms "scientific", "motherland", "modern age", etc. A few titles of the chapters of this book read: *Family Planning in Vedas*, *Sages Who Opened New Vistas in Science*, *Devotion for Motherland*, *Great Men Live for Others*, and *Make your Motherland Rich*, to mention a few. Many of Gaṅgeśvarānand's works exemplify the ideological discourse proposed by him and many other Hindu Nationalists, such as Vivekānanda and Sri Aurobindo, of the pressumed epistemological equality between "science" and modern Hinduism. This discourse stems from the need to prove that modern science verifies the metaphysical assumptions found in the Vedic episteme, and insists that the Vedas presage all important discoveries of science, including quantum and nuclear physics, thus, asserting that the Vedas are simply "science by another name." Nanda, who has written extensively about this claim, asserts that "[...] my inquiry has led me to conclude that what is going on in India today can best be described as 'reactionary modernism'" (Nanda 2003: xiv), this being a term she borrowed from Herf, who defined it as: "[... the] embrace of modern technology by those who reject Enlightenment reason." (as cited in Nanda 2003: 8). This discourse of science and the Vedas further reaffirms the perception that the Vedas are primarily 'books of knowledge'.

The first missionary efforts and the later colonial powers in south Asia introduced print technology and their own culture. These included the Western ideas of modernization, which evolved into the processes of industrialization and globalization. Therefore, the construction of the Orientalist worldview also created a monolithic, romantic and static picture of South Asian society. This has brought

377 Vivekānanda claimed, in the World Parlament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, that only the spiritual monism taught by the *advaita-vedānta* could fulfill the ultimate goal of natural science, and that it was Hinduism, the fulfillment of all other religions. Cf. Nanda 2005: 226.

378 Although he mainly quoted from Vedic literature, the Bhagavadgītā, the poet saints from Maharashtra, and the Purāṇas were also part of his repertoire.

about a confrontation between people from all social and cultural backgrounds. The confrontation included, of course, the Brāhmaṇical class that had been for many centuries the intelligentsia *par excellence* and the main religious elite in South Asia. With the colonialization, a "strategic mimetism", as Jaffrelot has called it,[379] was crucial in shaping a bibliolatry centered on a single "holy book".

The Western conception that knowledge is directly linked to literacy moved the Neo-Hindu nationalists of the nineteenth century and those who followed them to mimic not only the missionary zeal of their conquerors, but also to copy their institutions and practices — such as in conversion rituals, attempts to standardize and canonize religious knowledge and practices, and systematic unification of the heterogeneous sects and religious traditions of India, as well as attempts to dogmatize their beliefs and centralize religious power.[380] Not that these phenomena were completely absent from pre-colonial India, but instead I assert that they were clearly not present in the modality I am addressing here.

Guru Gaṅgeśvarānand Mahārāj draws considerable inspiration from this tradition of Neo-Hindu reformers. He was also one of the most influential figures connected to Vedic revivalism. On the official web page of Vedpradip, the journal "for preservation and research of Vedas" published by the Sarda group, he is described by one of his close disciples, Arjan Advani, in the following way: "He had in him the philosphical vision of Shree Aurobindo, the intense introspection of Shree Ramkrishna Paramahansa, the missionary zeal of Swami Vivekananda and the complete surrender of Shree Chaitanya Deva."[381]

One can also observe the objectification and personification that Vedic sound, by becoming a sacred book and a deity, could be venerated. The new god is addressed as "Bhagavān Ved", or "venerable Lord Veda".[382] As a result, this new god has entered the realm of *deva*s (gods) along with Śiva, Rāma, and their consorts. Moreover, Bhagavān Ved is introduced as the focal point of worship, having been enshrined in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the temple, where prayers and offerings such as flowers, fruits, and incense are offered to him.

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379 "Strategic mimetism" is a mechanism model in which the Hindu nationalists mimic the new religious and political forces (the British and the Muslims), and reinterpret their own traditions in light of the "other" to better articulate and justify their existence. (Jaffrelot 1994a: 184-217)

380 One is reminded here of the many examples which illustrate this mimetism — i.e. in the so-called "Catholic Hindu Mandir" proposed by Śraddhānanda in 1926, in which the Hindu devotees would worship the three mother spirits: Gaumātā, Sarasvatī, and Bhūmimātā. More examples of these mimetic strategies and the process of formation are well described in several of Jaffrelot's works, for example in: 1993: 517-524.

381 http://www.vedpradip.com/guru.php accessed on August 4, 2010.

382 My translation of the term "Bhagavān Ved".

With his missionary zeal and the help of the Viśva Hindū Pariṣad[383] (VHP), Guru Gaṅgeśvarānand Mahārāj founded over 500 temples in India and abroad. In each temple, he installed Bhagavān Ved as the main idol. Bhagavān Ved was not only represented by a book, as in this case from the Ved Mandir located in Nashik, but also as an anthropomorphic divinity standing on a blooming lotus flower and holding four manuscripts of the Vedas, one on each arm. The iconography reminds us of the marble idols of Purāṇic gods found across India, and in many Hindu temples across the globe.

The materialization of the Vedas into a written text, and even their deification *per se*, is not a new development of Guru Gaṅgeśvarānand alone. Examples of this personification in descriptions of the Vedic goddess Vāc, and later in Sarasvatī, as the 'goddess of speech' and the 'mother of the Vedas', or in Brahmā himself are evidence of this. These deities are often represented as holding one or several manuscripts in their hands. Later examples of the Vedas as scripture are found in the Purāṇas in which Hayagrīva or Matsya — i.e., two *avatāra*s of Viṣṇu — save the stolen manuscripts of the Vedas from the bottom of the ocean after killing the demon brothers Madhu and Kaiṭabha[384]. Other Purāṇic examples in which the Vedas themselves become personified as anthropomorphic creatures are found in several Purāṇas.[385]

Nonetheless, a large-scale sculpture representing the Vedas as a printed book (rather than a manuscript) is, to my knowledge, unique to Guru Gaṅgeśvarānand. The new anthropomorphic deity presented by him in the *mūrti*s he installed in India and abroad is also unique.

As mentioned at the beginning, Guru Gaṅgeśvarānand Mahārāj is the heir of the *udāsin* sect. Historically, the ascetic *udāsin* sect is said to point back either to Guru Śrī Cand or Bābā Gurditta (Oberoi 1994: 78). The former was the eldest son of Guru Nānak, the founder of the Sikh religion, and the latter was the eldest son of the sixth Sikh *guru*, Hargobind. The *udāsin* sect and their followers are sometimes referred to as *nānak-putra*s or the "sons of Nānak". According to Oberoi, the early Sikh history records ten *udāsin* orders, some of which have survived up to the present day.[386] The *udāsin* tradition was nonetheless excluded from the Sikh community when the *khālsā* order took over the religious power of the previously heterogeneous and non-exclusive Sikh groups in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This process took a decisive turn, particularly under the Singh Sabhā's project of "purging Sikhism from all its diversity" (Oberoi 1994: 25), which included ascetic branches such as the *udāsin*s.

383 For more on the VHP and its role in Hindutva ideology, cf. Jaffrelot 1994b and Hansen 1999: 90-133.

384 In some versions of the story, the demon stealing the Vedas is called Hayagrīva. See, for example, Bhāgavatapurāṇa (8.24).

385 For a detailed account on these *mūrti*s, see: Piano 1997 and also Shulman 1984.

386 Almast, Balu Hasne, Phūl Goinde, Suthure, Śāhī Bhagat Bhagvānīe, Sangat Sāhibīe, Mīhān Śāhīe, Bakht Malīe, and Jīt Malīe. (Oberoi 1994: 78-80)

The *udāsin* sect is still active today. Their members can be seen at each *kumbha melā* and, although many of its members still adhere to their Sikh heritage, they currently function as independent organizations (cf. Clark 2006: 55-56). Guru Gaṅgeśvarānand Mahārāj is seen as the successor of Svāmī Ramānand and the 17th head of the *udāsin*s of the southern *dhūnī*[387] that goes back to Balu Hasne, one of the four main disciples of Śrī Cand.

In this particular case, in the figure of this *guru*, one finds predominantly Hindu[388] rather than Sikh traits. In fact, references to their Sikh heritage are rarely mentioned in their congregations, and the emphasis is clearly put on the Vedas and on other Hindu scriptures and practices.

The name "Bhagavān Ved", I would argue, also mirrors (or at least timidly alludes to) the "Guru Granth Sāhib" which is enthroned in every Sikh *gurdwārā*. Both carry the epithets "*sāhib*" and "*bhagavān*", which are usually employed to address respectable humans, gods, demi-gods, and particularly *guru*s, and therefore addressing the texts with these terms reinforces their personification and their role as the ultimate teachers (*guru*). In fact, in a rather bold statement, Kisanlāljī suggested in an interview that: "[...] all temples should be demolished and only Veda temples should be there. Because we should teach children that knowledge is in the books, knowledge is in the Vedas [...] not in those [other] statues."[389]

Here, one can witness a fairly accomplished process of "Hinduization" in which the Vedas[390] are reinterpreted and mixed with elements, such as idol worship, which historically speaking are not "Vedic" and which have caused internal dispute amongst the Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy for many centuries (see, e.g.: Stietencron 2005: 52-54). The analysis of this process is certainly an enormous task and is beyond

387 The *dhūnī* or *dhūān* is a sacred fire, and sometimes it also refers to the place in which this fire is kept. These fires are an important aspect of various ascetic groups, including the Sikh-related orders: *udāsin* and *nirmala*. (For details on the udāsin Sikhs, see: Oberoi 1994.) Guru Gaṅgeśvarānand presumably belongs to the southern *dhūnī*; "[...] saints of the respective dhoonas were ordained to go in their directions to spread the Vedic teachings. Our Guruji are from the Dakshin Dhoona." http://gurugangeshwaranandjimaharaj.com/newsdetail.aspx?id=84 accessed on August 3, 2010.

388 The *udāsin-sampradāya* traditionally follows the worship of five main deities (*pañcadevopāsana*): Gaṇeśa, Śiva, Viṣṇu, Devī, and Sūrya. But references to both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava religiosity and practices are predominant in the publications and activities run by the trust. The spiritual initiation and blindness of the Gaṅgeśvarānand Mahārāj are linked to a vision of Lord Kṛṣṇa he had when he was five years old, and the founder of the *sampradāya*, Śrī Candra, the son of Guru Nānak, is regarded as an incarnation of Śaṅkara. (http://gurugangeshwaranandjimaharaj.com/shrichandra-bhagwan.htm accessed on August 3, 8.2010.)

389 Interview with Kisanlāljī Sāraḍā on 22.11.2011, Nashik.

390 Certainly not an unproblematic term, as has been shown by some scholars like Stietencron (2005), Viswanathan (1998) and others, but I use it in the absence of a better one. Here, "Hinduization" occurs in the sense of indexing Hinduism as a world religion with a particular book at its centre.

the scope of this book.[391] Nonetheless, I would like to point to an important element in this particular case. The Sikh worship of the Ādi-Granth and the Sikh heritage of the *udāsin* sect may have had a strong influence on the perception of the Vedas as a "holy book" for Guru Gaṅgeśvarānand. I suggest that it was the later Sikh bibliolatry and missionary endeavour within the *udāsin* tradition that inspired him to establish hundreds of "Veda-temples" in India and abroad, and to compile the Vedas in a single book to encourage the worship of Bhagavān Ved. He drew direct inspiration —as it is portrayed in the trust's website — from the practice of worshipping the Veda that presumably came from the founder of the *udāsin* sect, Śrī Cand.

> The book Chandra Baashya (written in the 16th century) describes the practice of worshipping Bhagwan Ved with dhoop, aarti and pooja. It says mantras are Guru and hence we should pray to them (Ved Mantras) in the same way we pray to the Guru with flowers, dhoop etc. Even if Bharat (India) wanted to follow this tradition there was no book form like the Granth Sahib to pray to. Keeping this in mind Swamiji decided to print and publish 'Bhagwan Ved'.[392]

Unfortunately, I was unable to find the Candra Bhāṣya mentioned in this passage, but it is plausible that the practice of worshipping Veda manuscripts predates Guru Gaṅgeśvarānand and, perhaps, it was a common practice among the *udāsin*s and even amongst other groups.

Sikh, and modern attitudes towards scripture, were appropriated by Guru Gaṅgeśvarānand Mahārāj and his followers to develop a new "Vedic tradition" discourse that employs an "immemorial" trope. With these new elements, the emphasis has changed from the sonic form of the Vedas to their scriptural interpretation, even shifting to a religious bibliolatry (cf. Michaels 1996). The shift of the Vedas from sound to scripture, and the relationship between the orality and literacy in this context, remains a rather understudied subject. Additional investigations on the role of manuscript culture in India, the later printing technologies introduced into India, and the Muslim and Buddhist attitudes towards the written text are crucial elements which ought to be considered.

While this may be a telling example for "Hinduization" and a shift of perception from sound to scripture, one can also observe that the perpetuation of the oral method of knowledge transmission and the honouring of traditional Vedic reciters is a way to actively perpetuate orthodox values that were not completely transformed or replaced by the Neo-Hindu reforms. Instead, they co-exist alongside new perceptions about the Vedas and their role within the spiritual religiosity of the followers of Gaṅgeśvarānand Mahārāj.

My point with this particular example is to argue that the identitarian kaleidoscope can turn mirroring images of itself in different ways, depending on who is observing or

391 Dutta (2007) among others has exemplified this dynamic process of interaction between the Vedic (Sanskritic) and the non-Vedic (vernacular i.e. Tamil) traditions in the history of Śrivaiṣṇavism in south India.

392 http://gurugangeshwaranandjimaharaj.com/newsdetail.aspx?id=92 accessed on August 7, 2010.

whether it is observing itself. I agree with Sax, who describes in his book *Dancing the Self* that the problem of identity is a "hall of mirrors". He uses this allegory to illustrate the complexity of the identitarian relationships in the communities of the Garwahl. He writes:

> The Other is also a reflection of the self, at times resented, at other times emulated. (Sax, 2002: 204)

This reflection is more often than not an unconscious effort to cope with the recent social changes that have emerged. The important question is how the people represent themselves to each other and to the rest of the world, and how they in turn are represented by the Others (including scholars). This dynamic exchange of symbolic capital at different levels between the custodians of a tradition and the Others is precisely what constitutes this ever-changing kaleidoscope.

6.3.3 The *Śrī Rāmayajña* of Satara

In this last case study, I will present the annual nine-day-long ritual performed in honor of the birth of hero-god Rāma (*rāmanavamī*) in Satara, Maharashtra as an example of the interdependent relationship between Vedic traditions and more popular forms of Hinduism. Here, it will become apparent how the identitarian kaleidoscope constantly produces new images of itself.

The *rāmanavamī* festival is very popular in Maharashtra, particularly around this area where the *rāmdāsī-sampradāya* has a strong holding due to the proximity of Satara to the Sajjengar fort,[393] where the remains of Samārth Rāmdās are buried. Many temples and religious/cultural organizations of the city participate in the celebrations with their own programs. As part of the festivities, a large ritual in honor of the god Rāma is organized by the Śrī Kṛṣṇayajurveda Pāṭhaśālā[394] under the blessings of the Sringeri *maṭha*.

The main ritual takes place on the premises of the school, and all the students and teachers of this, and other neighbouring Vedic schools, participate in the ritual. The "Śrī Rāma Mahāyajña", as the ritual is called, is divided into morning and afternoon sessions, and it involves the daily repetition of the *mantra: "śrī rām jay rām jay jay rām (svāhā)"*[395] while making offerings and oblations into the fire-pit. Between 16

393 Lit. "Fort of Good People."

394 See: Appendix 1.

395 This *mantra* is very popular in Maharashtra. It is said that it was composed by Samārth Rāmdās (1608–1681), whose *samādhi* tomb is located at the Sajjangaḍ fort near the city of Satara. The *mantra* was further used by other saints of the region, notably Srī Brahmacaitanya of Gondavale (1845 - 1913), who based many of his teachings on the interpretation and practice of this particular *mantra*. Śrī Brahmacaitanya was also one of the key figures in the revival of Vedic ritualism in Maharashtra. See: Rajopadhye (forthcoming).

and 20 *brāhmaṇa*s of all ages take turns making the offerings to the fire, while the rest of the students sit in the ritual enclosure repeating the *mantra*s. A few students or guests also take turns repeating the *mantra* with microphones, and the sound is delivered through loudspeakers placed around the school, while the audience repeats the *mantra*.

The elaborate ritual enclosure where the sacred fire is burning, and where the altar to Rāma and his holy family (as well as a whole array of other deities and *guru*s, including the patron of the event, the Śaṅkaracārya of Sringeri) is placed, is delimited by a canopy which only *brāhmaṇa*s are allowed to step within. The guests and local public can come and go as they please, sitting around the ritual enclosure or in a hall next to it, as they watch, listen, and repeat Rāma's name. In the adjacent hall, another altar is erected for the devotees. Here, they can pay their respects to the idols of Lord Rāma and other deities at a short distance, and make monetary offerings or in kind.

Parallel to the main *yajña*, in a small pavilion located in the backyard of the school, the teachers and some senior *brāhmaṇa*s invited especially for the occasion recite the whole Taittiriyasaṃhitā of the Kṛṣṇayajurveda. The recitation of the Veda here is also accompanied by the same ritual offerings (black sesame and ghee), but the sound of the *mantra*s is not broadcast via microphone, and thus remains only within the reach of *brāhmaṇa* ears. Outsiders and regular visitors are not allowed into this area, and even the younger students only go there when they are requested to bring wood, water, or to fulfill any other request the senior *brāhmaṇa*s may have. The morning session, which lasts a few hours, is then interrupted for lunch, during which speeches in Marāṭhī on different religious subjects are given by the main *brāhmaṇa* teacher or by an elderly *saṃnyāsin* associated with the school. Besides these speeches, a group of mostly elderly women sit in the adjacent hall and sing devotional songs that celebrate Viṣṇu's main incarnations: Kṛṣṇa and Rāma.

For a few hours in the afternoon, the ritual offerings along with the repetition of the *mantra* continue in the same way as in the morning session. Finally, in the evening, a 'cultural' program is organized in a public hall in the city center. Indian classical dance, *kīrtan* sessions, religious discourses, debates, and theatre plays are staged, alternating, on each of the nights. All the *brāhmaṇa*s of the school come to participate and are involved in the organization of the event. Not only do they actively help with the logistics of the events, but they also perform in a drama on one of the nights. The play is either a story from the Purāṇas or from the lives of the saints of Maharashtra. Prior to the event, they are rehearsed for a few months in the school. Each night, the main teacher of the school, Vedamūrti Vivekśāstrī Goḍboḷe, welcomes the gathered audience and presents the program of the night, introducing the performer(s). After the event, he publicly honors the artists or special guests by handing them a shawl, flowers, and a coconut. After the performance, everyone is invited to go back to the school to finalize the day by performing *ārati* in the hall next to the *yajña* pit. The *brāhmaṇa*s of the school sit together, singing on microphones

and playing the instruments that accompany the *ārati*. The crowd gathered for this closing ritual of the day stand.

Instead of *brāhmaṇa* priests who usually perform the evening ritual, people from the local community wave the flames on trays in front of the altar. They are people who are celebrating their birthday, or who requested they participate in honor of a personal special occasion, such as an anniversary or in the name of a deceased family member. On the last day (the actual ninth day of the month of Caitra according to the Hindu calendar), the final offering, called *pūrṇāhutī* (full-oblation), is performed in the morning. Around noon, when Lord Rāma is said to have been born, *brāhmaṇa* women ritually cradle a coconut on a decorated swinging crib, representing him as a baby.

The main *brāhmaṇa* teacher reads (or rather re-tells) the story of Rāma's birth to the gathered public. Once the reading (*kathā*) is over, all the devotees come one by one or in small groups and prostrate themselves in front of the *brāhmaṇa*, offering him a few Rupees (plate 12). They also pay their respects to the 'baby' Rāma and bow in front of the Vedic fire and altar. After all devotees present have had a personal glimpse of the divine (*darśana*), a procession (*śobhā yātrā*) with a palanquin containing the idols of Rāma, Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa, and Hanumat sets forth around the city where it joins other processions and groups. The *brāhmaṇa*s lead the procession, chanting the names of Rāma while other devotees, including *vārkarī*s, follow with festive enthusiasm. Men and women dance to the rhythm of the drums and the cymbals.

The palanquin stops at strategic points, temples, businesses, and homes to receive the offerings of devotees. Coconuts are smashed on the ground and milk is poured on the feet of the carriers of the palanquin. This continues for some hours, following a particular route that comes to an end in the Vedic school, where a special last communal *ārati* to Lord Rāma is performed. Immediately after the *ārati* performance, the audience sits down and listens to an offering of *mantra*s from the four Vedas (*aṣṭāvadhānasevā*)[396] as recited by the *brāhmaṇa*s of the different schools. The main *brāhmaṇa* of the school briefly explains the different types of recitations to the audience, reminding everyone that "the Vedas are the root of Hindu *dharma*." Then the *brāhmaṇa*s recite significant *mantra*s and particular types of recitation from their repertoire. After the Vedic *mantra*s are performed, and a last devotional song is sung with harmonium and tablas, the celebration ends with the words: "Victory to

396 The term originally designates an "eightfold-attention service" and is usually associated with a kind of literary memory contest. In the contemporary Vedic recitation offered at the end of a ritual or in honor of a special occasion, there are no poetry compositions or questions to be answered by the reciters, as is the case with the *avadhāna* performances in the Telugu tradition, but it is still a sort of 'show' of the reciters' abilities of memory and attention (*avadhāna*). For more on the *avadhāna*, see: Datta 1987: 292. The term "eightfold-attention service" may also refer to the performance of the eight traditional forms of the recitational permutations of the Veda (*aṣṭavikṛtis*), although in Maharashtra only the *jaṭāpāṭha, kramapāṭha,* and *ghanapāṭha* permutations survive, and this too only in the Ṛgveda and in the Yajurveda recensions.

Dharma! Destruction of Non-Dharma! May there be good conduct towards all living beings! Blessed be the whole universe! Glory to the husband of Pārvatī, the great god Śiva!"[397]

Plate 12: Vedamūrti Vivekśāstri Goḍbole giving blessings after retelling the story of Rāma's birth. Satara, 2009.

In this very brief description, I would like to make some observations. The *brāhmaṇa* reconstructs his own identity by participating in the *looping*[398] of a particular traditional 'habitus'. This is done by staging and performing his authority within the discursive frames of the Śrī Rāma Mahāyajña, exemplified, for instance, through the delimitation of the ritual arena, which only *brāhmaṇa* males can access and make the ritual oblations within. Further, the recitation of the Vedas, which takes place

397 The Hindī slogans may change slightly, but this is the standard sequence used in Maharashtra: "*dharmā ka jay ho! adharma kā naś ho! prāṇiyon mẽ sadbhāvana ho! viśva kā kalyāṇ ho! pārvatī pātaye hara hara hara mahādev!*" to which often the slogan *jay jay raghuvīr Samārth!* (Glory to the hero of Raghu['s clan], the powerful one [Rāma]!) is also added.

398 For more on the concept of the looping effect, see Chapter 6. The concept was developed by Ian Hacking (2001). His basic premise is that classification affects the thing being classified and that, unlike objects, people are conscious of the way they are classified, and therefore they alter their behavior and self-conceptions in response to their classification.

parallel to the main *yajña*, remains the exclusive duty of the *brāhmaṇa*. The audience, nonetheless, is aware that the recitation of the Vedas is a *brāhmaṇa* affair and that their prestige (at least ideally) comes from the oral command over these *mantra*s. This becomes particularly clear at the end of the ritual, when the *brāhmaṇa*s' ability to recite complex Vedic *mantra*s is exhibited in front of the audience. This act is significant because it is framed as a particular 'service' (*sevā*) to the God and the community. At the same time, the devotees also actively participate in the ritual by listening and observing the procedures, as well as by repeating a simple, yet allegedly powerful and prestigious (non-Vedic) *mantra*. Here the non-*brāhmaṇa* reiterates the ritual hierarchy of the *brāhmaṇa* over him, while at the same time appropriating his own merit as a *bhakta*. The 'cultural program' also serves as a stage on which the authority of the *brāhmaṇa* is performed, both directly and indirectly. It is the *brāhmaṇa* who honors the different performers, thereby visibly asserting his authority; when the *brāhmaṇa*s perform their theatrical play, the Brāhmaṇical self is reenacted and the audience learns about the ideal behavior of both the *brāhmaṇa* and the devotee. The non-*brāhmaṇa* audience is at the same time fully integrated into the ritual and given a key role in the evening, when not the learned *brāhmaṇa*s, but members from the community, perform the *ārati* to Lord Rāma. Finally, it is the *brāhmaṇa* who re-tells the story of the birth of Lord Rāma, and it is *brāhmaṇa* women who first cradle the deity.

It is noteworthy that, in modern *yajña*s such as the one described above, post-Vedic gods like Rāma are being incorporated into "Vedic" practices, and at the same time the Vedas, as authoritative texts, are being incorporated into post-Vedic Hinduism. While the textual basis for such ritual practices is, at best, thin, the very existence of such rituals indicates not only their functional importance to preserve the Veda in its oral form, but also modern Hinduism's innovative use of the Veda for the legitimation of its own practices.

Finally, the celebration of *rāmanavamī* in Satara is embedded in the meta discourse of Smārta Hindusism through the endorsement of the Sringeri Śaṅkarācārya, who is translocally perceived as the *jagadguru* (universal *guru*) among Smārta Hindus. The *looping* of discourses on the ideal *brāhmaṇa* at different scales is not only a textual one, but also necessarily an embodied one. The hegemony of the discourse on the ideal *brāhmaṇa* is dynamically negotiated anew through ritual activity and socialization. From the example above, one can observe that these two fields collide: the ritual is part of the socialization process and the socialization is also highly ritualized. The students not only learn to memorize and correctly reproduce the sound of the Vedas, but they also learn to be the Vedas and, by performing this identity, they continue to define what it means to be a *brāhmaṇa* in contemporary India. Using Bourdieuian language, we can regard the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s, in this sense, as both 'structured' and 'structuring' — 'structured' through the organisational, political, ideological, and economic frames, and 'structuring' through the impact that they have on the students, and on local and translocal communities through ritual activities such as this one.

7 Conclusion

The specific context of modern Maharashtra, where a long Brāhmaṇical tradition has been associated with power and prestige, but also with its abuse, arrogance, and pride, has met with strong contestation both from its own camp, as well as from the non-*brāhmaṇa* antagonists. On the other hand, a "Brahmin double" (Novetzke 2011) has been created through the reimagination of a "true *brāhmaṇa*", which has been reappraised by *brāhmaṇa* communities through their association with *bhakti* saints. The modern *brāhmaṇa* has shown that he is quite aware of the stigma often attached to him as the embodiment of "oppressive regimes of caste as a social system." (Bairy 2010: 233)

Modernity, urbanization, and nation-building processes, as well as the rise of egalitarian and democratic principles, have also challenged the Brāhmaṇical ideals which have forced *brāhmaṇa*s to find new ways to balance their profoundly ambivalent positions *vis-à-vis* the "anti-modernity" and the "modernity" discourses. Previous research has shown that the *brāhmaṇa* ideal has not been free of ambivalence since the Vedic and post-Vedic period. Repeated attempts to fix the ideal of the *brāhmaṇa* on certain characteristics by Brāhmaṇical authors show that Brāhmaṇahood was an unstable category that needed to be constantly redefined and reinterpreted according to the social changes and local contexts in which it was articulated. This web of tangled engagements reminds us of the complicated worlds that *brāhmaṇa*s both create and inhabit, as well as of the contexts within which these worlds emerge. It seems that the ambivalence of what constitutes the *brāhmaṇa* ideal has become even more ambiguous in modern times, in which many discourses around caste, gender, nation, religion, and globalization very openly challenge the very *raison d'être* of the male *brāhmaṇa*.

With the Veda at the center of the *vaidika*'s identity and activity, an additional ambivalence has become evident, namely that of the relationship between orality and literacy, between scripture and sound, and between form and meaning. This work has shown that the complex relationship between these elements has found its way into contemporary discourses and practices of what the Vedas are imagined to be, and how they are to be employed. These discourses often clash with each other and are not always free of contradictions. Some of the examples presented here, such as the Veda Mandir in Nashik, are vivid instances of the shift of perception from sound to scripture and from form to meaning, in which modern values of egalitarism, democracy, and nationalism are brought to the forefront. These shifts of perception and accentuation of modern values can be traced back to social changes and spiritual reform movements which became prominent at the end of the eighteenth century. They gained momentum with modern charismatic leaders whose seeds can be traced back to precolonial times, and perhaps even earlier. The forces of the so-called "syndicated Hinduism" have clearly shown that a general "Hinduization" of the Veda and of the *śrauta* rituals through several religious institutions with their various agendas

and ideologies is at work. I also noted how homogenizing forces in synergy with processes of globalization and secularization tend to breed a Hinduism that is more standardized, populist, radical, political, and missionary, but at the same time, that some of the individuals in these schools subvert these tendencies by appropriating more embracing, egalitarian, and universalistic discourses.

The examples presented in this work show how the Veda has been reappropiated, instrumentalized, and embodied in different ways by different actors with their own religious and political agendas. The aim of this book has been to present the heterogeneity behind the sponsorship and support of the "traditional" transmission of the Veda in the *vedapāṭhaśālā*s of Maharashtra, and how their views have a strong influence on the students and teachers of these schools. By explicitly pointing to the economic aspects, it becomes apparent that they have been crucial to the way that the Veda is transmitted today, and that the socio-economic background of students and teachers also plays an important role in its traditional preservation. We can observe, one the one hand, an increase of Vedic schools and resources through "new" sponsoring systems coming mainly from cash flows from the Hindu middle class, who are often upper-caste members and followers of Neo-Hindu charismatic leaders, and on the other hand, that the custodians of the Veda come from a rather impoverished social-strata. As Alam (2011) has shown, a similar situation seems to be reflected in other traditionalist projects in the subcontinent, such as the Indian *madrasa*s, where mainly Dālits and lower-caste children attend these religious schools.

Some of the dynamic negotiations between the *brāhmaṇa* ideal as a *vaidika* (also extensively constructed through Indological scholarship), and the local and translocal discourses and practices around the *brāhmaṇa* self, have emerged from the material discussed here. I have argued that the multivocality in which this constructed self is "looped", and the difficult and uncertain conditions of subsistence, have created a general apathy among *brāhmaṇa* families that has found expression in a crisis of identity among professional reciters of the Veda. The reason for the general apathy and lack of interest for traditional learning from the younger generations has often been explained to me, by these *brāhmaṇa*s, as a lack of professional security and a low-income expectation for Vedic experts. In the changing social environment of modern India, and with new economic possibilities, only the most orthodox or economically disadvantaged *brāhmaṇa* families have maintained the traditional role of custodians of the Vedas. It is here that new dynamics in the patronage system have emerged, and the impact that new sponsors have on traditional Vedic schools has been crucial. In particular, the Indian government (through the MSRVVP) has participated in the standardization and institutionalization of curricula by creating aid programs that bind schools to a certain syllabus over a particular time-span. Other sponsors and institutions, such as the VŚS, and in the name of protecting the tradition, have introduced evaluation methods and learning environments based on Western models, thereby contributing to a more rigid and standardized pedagogy. Additionally, the new avatars of traditional training that have introduced non-traditional subjects to

the curriculum may perhaps inadvertently foster a slow but steady decline of the richness of these traditions. While on the one hand one sees a general increase of institutions and new forms of economic support for the Vedic tradition, this does not necessarily correlate into an increased quality of preservation for the oral traditions. In fact, many of the teachers lament a decrease of interest among *brāhmaṇa* families wanting to send their children to traditional Vedic schools, thereby leaving them with only a few sincerely self-motivated students. From the study of the schools, one could perhaps predict a general increase in basic *paurohitya* training, but a decrease in traditional higher studies and the advanced recitation of texts beyond Saṃhitā, such as *krama*, *jaṭā* and *ghanapāṭha*, or the recitation of selected Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads.

Also, the loss of prestige for the traditional *brāhmaṇa* among the urban youth and an increasing view of the orthodox *brāhmaṇa* as "backward", "narrow-minded", and "provincial" has pushed conservatively-oriented *brāhmaṇa*s to find new venues through which to justify and "market" their activities among a variety of "clients". Besides the above-mentioned funds, new sources of income have emerged among the wealthy Hindu diaspora, and increasingly among Western yoga-enthusiasts seeking the "authentic spiritual heritage of India". This evolution has not, of course, been without internal frictions among *brāhmaṇa*s who need to constantly renegotiate the borders of their orthodoxy and the power relations among one another.

The traditional Vedic schools demand a harder sense of identification with the category of being and becoming a *brāhmaṇa* than other spaces in which Brāhmaṇaness is articulated, such as caste associations or schools that strive to produce a "secular" *brāhmaṇa* self, such as the Dayānand Anglo-Vedic Schools System (DAVs) or other so-called "*gurukula*s". A traditional identity constantly woven into ontological categories of "eternal knowledge" and "universal welfare" could be read as an effort to accord themselves a state of permanency and transcendence. In doing so, *brāhmaṇa*s strive to demonstrate their immutability *vis-à-vis* contextual and historical pressures.

Nonetheless, while the identity of the traditional *brāhmaṇa* has been more strongly solidified in Sanskritic sources which have been looped extensively, both by themselves and by external forces, it is important to highlight that self-representation is always contextual. The examples presented here show the relationship that the *brāhmaṇa*s share with their "Brāhmaṇaness" is fundamentally ambivalent, and even contradictory. Any attempt to define their identity is always established through active enunciations, as well as repudiations of what constitutes the "ideal *brāhmaṇa*." In the process, different actors in the network of the *vaidika* participate in what Hacking has called the *looping effect*. Discourses that portray "Brāhmaṇaness" are looped in the public sphere and mass media (written press, theater plays, TV, radio, and the Internet), as well as in a whole array of religious paraphernalia, grey literature, and CDs and VCDs that are all integrated into the religious economy of sacred places, iterating and thereby perpetuating certain discourses and practices. The iteration of these

discourses happens both in favor of, and against, the imagination of the *brāhmaṇa*-self, thereby forcing *brāhmaṇa*s to constantly position themselves according to these discourses, not only in ideological ways, but also in embodied and performative ways.

On the one hand, by striving to represent an ideal that is constantly retrived from Sanskritic sources, traditional *brāhmaṇa*s seek to act on behalf of the larger *brāhmaṇa* community, and even as representatives and guardians of the "authentic" Hindu heritage at large. On the other hand, they seek to recover and sacralize the modern public space by reclaiming their roles as "teachers" and "advisors" in secular arenas (Vāstuśāstra, science, medicine, management and governance). The use of modern technology, such as digital media and social networks (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc.), to project a particular self-image — one that is often presented in English and not in the vernacular, and that seeks to reach a public beyond the local level — allows entrance into the global media space.

This work has sought to engage with the discourses on the Vedas and "Brāhmaṇaness" in differenciated rather than essentializing ways. It has been argued that the construction of the *brāhmaṇa* identity is a matter of degree in which different layers of the identitarian "kaleidoscope" reaccommodate themselves constantly, according to processes that are dynamic, asymmetrical, and context-dependent. By giving voice to the custodians of the Vedas and showing the different ways in which the Vedas are being appropriated by the driving forces of modern Hinduism, we seek to move away from simply considering the Vedas as the "foundational texts of Hinduism", and to look at *how* the Vedas are transmitted within very concrete socio-cultural frameworks. This approach seeks to do away with the notion that the Vedas are forgotten fossils which are only vaguely and symbolically authoritative to the Hindus at large, and carefully zoom into the processes in which these traditions are reinvented in contradictory, contingent, and contested ways. There are good reasons to believe that is true also for other traditions in the contemporary world that approach their scriptures as more than just books on a shelf. I suspect that these traditions will continue to transmit their knowledge systems to the next generations, and that these will survive, adapt, and reform themselves in various creative modes, along with the coming generations that will embody them. Hopefully, this book will encourage others to further study the oral transmission of texts among living traditions across the globe.

Appendix 1: The Vedic Schools

Brief descriptions and particularities of each of the Vedic schools visited.

Name: Ved Bhavan
Location: Kothrud, the outskirts of Pune
Website: http://www.vedbhavanpune.com/
Number of Students: 10
Relevant Information:

This school is one of the most prestigious *vedapāṭhaśālā*s in Pune. The Ghaisas family founded it in 1945. The school presumably runs at least another small school in Kelshi in the Konkan area of Maharashtra, but unfortunately I was not able to visit it during my fieldwork trip in 2009.

Originally, Ved Bhavan stood on a different location from where it stands today, but they moved to the actual location many years back, and the current building was formally inaugurated by Paṇḍit Shankar Dayal Sharma, then vice-president of India, in February of 1989.

It was Vedamūrti Moreśvar Bhat Ghaisas's father, Vedamūrti Vinayak Ghaisas, who founded the school, but when he passed away in 1998, he left the school under the tutelage of his son and pupil, Moreśvar. According to Ghaisas *gurujī*, when the school was built on the outskirts of the neighbourhood of Kothrud, the school was "completely isolated from the city. There were no houses or buildings near here. We were completely surrounded by nature."[399] In 1998, the school incorporated a relatively large temple dedicated to *siddhivināyaka*, a form of Gaṇeśa, and to the other famous *aṣṭavināyaka*s[400] into its premises, and has developed facilities to accommodate up to twenty-five students.

The funding of the school comes from the MSRVVP in Ujjain, of which Vedamūrti Ghaisas is an advisor. In addition, important, although on his website one reads: "[t]his mission is not supported by any government grants, but is maintained only with the active cooperation."[401] Most of the funding is derived from private donations are offered to the school and some revenue is also made from the temple on the premises of the school. He is known for his conservative and nationalistic viewpoints, and the school's association with right-wing associations such as the RSS and HJS are well-known. On the temple inauguration of the school in 1998, RSS former chief Rajendra Singh was a special guest and, in his speech, he "called on the countrymen to make concerted efforts to keep the rich Indian tradition alive by supporting Vedic

399 Interview with M. Ghaisas 8.08.2009, Pune.
400 These are the eight most famous temples in Maharashtra that are strung in a pilgrimage circuit around the city of Pune, in a radius of 20-110 kms.
401 http://www.vedbhavanpune.com/english/index.php, accessed on June 5, 2014.

schools."[402] The presence of the RSS leader on this day, and the participation of Mr. Ghaisas in pro-Hindu events organized by the Hindu-right, hint to an ambiguous empathy between them. In any case, during my interview, any connection to either the RSS or VHP was denied.

Name: Vedaśāstra Vidyālay (Patwardhan Pāṭhaśālā)
Location: Udhwarpeth, the old city centre of Pune
Website: N/A
Number of Students: 20
Relevant Information:

This institution was created more than 60 years ago. The Vedaśāstra Vidyālay is popularly known as the Patwardhan Pāṭhaśālā, since it goes back to the founder, S. Patwardhan.

The school was founded in 1949 and, although it was originally a *ṛgvedīya* school, the Kṛṣṇayajurveda has also been taught in this institution.

Out of the 20 students, seven are learning the Ṛgveda under the guidance of Śrī Vedamūrti Śrīpād Śivrām Dhayaguḍe. The rest of the students are learning the Atharvaveda under the tutelage of Vedamūrti Durgadās Śivājī Ambulśekar, a young man from the State of Orissa. Some years ago, the school used to represent mainly the Ṛgveda, which is still being taught there, but since Durgadās *gurujī* was hired, the Atharvaveda has gained prominence in the school. Even if students are still learning the Ṛgveda here, currently, it is arguably the only institution in Maharashtra whose main focus is the teaching of the Atharvaveda.

In the same building used to live one of the famous *agnihotrin*s of Pune: Rājarām Kulkarṇī, who was also one of the main tutors in the school, but passed away a few years ago. The school still has a couple of cows in the building, as they are a necessary requirement for the daily *agnihotra* rites, but now they also serve to cover some of the milk supply for the students.

The school is financed through donations and a fund created long ago by the founder of this institution. Teachers receive a basic salary, but have to earn more money through *paurohitya* to cover all the expenses of their families.

Name: Pune Vedapāṭhaśālā
Location: Shaniwar Peth, in the center of Pune
Website: N/A
Number of Students: 17

402 Indian Express Newspapers, "RSS chief rues waning interest in Vedas", Thursday, April 23, 1998

Relevant Information:

This *vedapāṭhaśālā* is a 130 year old institution which currently imparts training in two *śākhā*s: Kṛṣṇayajurveda and Ṛgveda. It follows the syllabus laid down by the VŚS and conducts two courses: Saṃhitā and *karmakāṇḍa* (also called *yajñika*). In 2009, they were planning to move from the current location to a new three-story building, which was still under construction when I first visited the school. The first stone had been laid in a ceremony called *bhūmipūjana*, and was planned for completion in March of 2009. The residential building was planned to include a cowshed, a *yajñaśālā* with five fire-piths, a temple dedicated to Hanumān, a library, and a congregation hall, however, due to delays not all the expected amenities have been completed at the time of writing.

The old school was inaugurated on October 12th of 1881 and registered under the Societies Registration Act in 1942. It was located near the Tāṃbaḍī Jogeśvarī temple and the famous Ānanda-Āśram Saṃsthan that has a large collection of manuscripts.

The school has four teachers (two for each *śākhā*). Although, not all of them were present when I was there. In fact, there was only one teacher (the main teacher, Vedamūrti Śrī Prakaś Nageśrao Daṇḍge *gurujī*) who was called on my request by the "manager" to talk with me that day. The students when I arrived were studying by themselves, in smaller groups, portions from the Ṛgveda and Kṛṣṇayajurveda Saṃhitās.

Despite the very old and modest facilities (previous to the relocation to the new building), the school is very well known in Maharashtra among the *brāhmaṇa* community. Śrī Prakaś Nageśrao Daṇḍge is a well-respected priest, and so is Vedamūrti Śrī Vilās Dīkṣit, another of the main teachers of the school. They have, on several occasions, both served as branch experts during the VŚS Sabhā annual examinations.

The old school is now fully residential, and most of the students stay in the school. A few students who are doing the *yajñika* syllabus and whose parents live in the city of Pune go home once they finish their classes.

The expenses of the school are administered through the trust of the *vedapāṭhaśālā*.

Name: Śrī Kṛṣṇayajurveda Pāṭhaśālā
Location: Chinmanpura Peth, in the periphery of Satara
Website: http://vedavijnan.webs.com/
Number of Students: 22
Relevant Information:

This is the school I have had the opportunity to spend the largest amount of time in over the past ten years. I have therefore gained a closer and more intimate relation to both teachers and students of this school. Already, for my MA thesis, I had chosen this school as a case study on the living Vedic tradition of Maharashtra.

Vedamūrti Śrī Vivekśāstrī Goḍboḷe and the other members of the school have been crucial for my research, providing me with contacts and by making personal recommendations to other schools and *vaidika*s of the state.

Vedamūrti Śrī Vivekśāstrī Goḍboḷe 's father, Vedamūrti Śrī Lakṣmaṇśāstrī Goḍboḷe, originally founded the school. He taught his first son and a second student, Vedamūrti Śrī Cintāmaṇi Nātū, the whole of the Kṛṣṇayajurveda in the *hiraṇyakeśī* style at his own home. He also had other students who learned with him, including a younger brother, but none finished the complete curricula with him, except for these two students.

The school was revived and reestablished in 1998 by Śrī Vivek Goḍboḷe, with the support of a global organization called Muktabodha Indological Reseach Insititute (MIRI). It was Gurumayī Cidvilāsānanda, succesor of Svāmī Muktānanda of Ganeshpuri, a female *guru* with a vast following in the West, who expressed her wish and encouragement, which ultimately lead to the re-founding of this school in a newly acquired building by Muktabodha.[403] The school was subsequently sponsored completely for ten full years by MIRI.

In the year 2008, MIRI announced that, "the Vedashala Project reaching this point of maturity, the reseach institute's vision for creating the *vedapāṭhaśālā* to preserve this living oral tradition for future generations has been fulfilled. To this end, responsibility for the *vedapāṭhaśālā* was recently passed to Sri Vivek Godboḷe and the Krisna Yajur Veda Trust and it is now functioning as an independent organization."[404]

The *vedapāṭhaśālā* is now completely independent, and it is Vedamūrti Śrī Vivekśāstrī Goḍboḷe who provides it with the necessary financial resources. The school receives donations from the local community, as well as from a few donors from abroad. The *vedapāṭhaśālā* and, in particular, Vivek Goḍboḷe, has received recognition as well as financial support from the Śaṅkarācārya of Sringeri, for whom he is a representative of the 'Sharada Peetham' for the state of Maharashtra. The school is fully residential, although the three teachers live in a different building only a couple of minutes' walking distance from the school. The school has a large *yajñaśālā* in which regular sacrifices are conducted, a hall for public events, a small garden, and a *gośālā*. The students here are divided in three batches; they learn first Brāhmaṇa, then Āraṇyaka, and finally Saṃhitā of the Taittirīya branch of the Yajurveda. After this, students learn *padapāṭha*, *jaṭāpāṭha*, and *kramapāṭha*. Students from the first batch, in which also the son of Vedamūrti Śrī Vivekśāstrī Goḍboḷe has studied, have just completed their studies in *kramapāṭha*.

403 For detailed information on this school the reader is referred to my MA thesis "The Svāmī Muktānanda Vedaśālā. Reconstruction and preservation of Vedic tradition and identity in modern India. A case study."

404 http://muktabodha.org/vedashala.htm accessed on March 5, 2010.

Vedamūrti Śrī Vivekśāstrī Goḍboḷe after finishing his studies of the Kṛṣṇayajurveda with his father, went to Benares to learn the Sāmaveda in the rare *govardhanī* style, with Vedamūrti Śrī Somnāthśāstrī Bāpaṭ. The students have therefore also received some training in the recitation of certain Sāmavedic songs in this style, which is one of the most endangered branches of the Vedas.

Name: Śrī Umaśaṅkara Advaitavedānta Vidyāpīṭh
Location: in Gururvar Peth, in Satara
Website: N/A
Number of Students: 35
Relevant Information:

The main teacher, Vedamūrti Govindśāstrī Someśvar Jośī, is also a renowned Ṛgveda scholar. He has been awarded several times by different institutions, including by the Śaṅkarācārya of Sringeri. According to Govindśāstrī S. Jośī, he teaches them the *daśagrantha*s of the Ṛgveda.[405] He is one of the rare traditional *brāhmaṇa*s who, besides being an expert in Veda recitation, is also a traditional Sanskrit scholar, his specialization being Indian logic (*nyāya*).

Govindśāstrī S. Jośī also holds weekly public readings (*kathā*s) of the Rāmāyaṇa or the Mahābhārata in the courtyard of the school, which are attended mainly by a group of older women from the neighbourhood. There is also a small temple in the school dedicated to Rāma and his entourage.

Name: Śrī Umamaheśvar Vedapāṭhaśālā
Location: Satara
Website: N/A
Number of Students: 11
Relevant Information:

This school is also situated adjacent to a temple dedicated to Rāma in the town of Satara. The temple is called "Śrī Rāma Dhyān Mandir" and its walls are decorated with intricate paintings of gods and famous saints of India.

This school teaches 11 students the Kṛṣṇayajurveda under the tutelage of Vedamūrti D. Rāmakant Jośī in his own home. Vedamūrti D. Rāmakant Jośī is also the main priest of the temple, and his house is located next to it.

The modest school, relatively new, and the premises of the temple were under renovation when I visited the school in April of 2009. The school is fully residential and the students there are also taken care of by Vedamūrti D. Rāmakant Jośī's wife.

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405 On the daśagranthas, see subchapter 3.5.

The funds come from the *paurohitya* work of the teacher, along with some donations from the temple trust.

Name: Śrī Borikar Vedapāṭhaśālā
Location: Center of Satara
Website: N/A
Number of Students: 7
Relevant Information:

This *ṛgvedīya vedaśālā* is the last one I visited in Satara. This school is directly attached to a temple dedicated to Rāma: Jorarām Mandir in the center of the city of Satara.

The students learn the Ṛgveda under the tutelage of Vedamūrti Hanamant Śāstrī Borikar, who lives in the premises attached to the temple. The expenses are mainly carried by Borikar and his family, and by occasional donations received by supporters in the area. They are in good terms with other Vedic schools in the city and often participate in common activities and rituals, such as the *rāmanavāmī* festival organized each year by the Śrī Kṛṣṇayajurveda Pāṭhaśālā.

Name: Śrī Vedaśāstra Vidyā Saṃvardhana Maṇḍaḷ (Śrī Vedapāṭhaśālā)
Location: Karad, south of Satara
Website: http://vedshastravidya.com/
Number of Students: 14
Relevant Information:

This *ṛgvedīya vedaśālā* operates under the tutelage of Vedamūrti Guruprasād Vināyak Pujārī, a young *kramapāṭhin*. The school was inaugurated in 2001 and the building in which Pujārī teaches is also his home, where he lives with his wife and daughter and some of the students.

In 2009, six students were learning the Ṛgvedasaṃhitā, seven were learning *nityavidhi*, and one student was learning the Aitareyabrāhmaṇa. The curriculum in this school is set only up to Saṃhitā. After this, the students are encouraged to go to a different school or take up a job as a priest.

Besides the *vedapāṭhaśālā*, the trust of the school has other projects, of which the most important is a library, in which it claims: "Sanskrit books and around 7'000 hand-written manuscripts from different places and subjects are kept."

The *vedapāṭhaśālā* is located in a quiet neighbourhood which is only a short walking distance from the town. The library is located in a different building, next to a Hanumān temple and near the bathing ghats of the locality not far away from the school.

The school receives private donations from individuals through the trust, as well as financial help from institutions such as the Ponkshe Trust, located in Pune.

Name: Vedaśālā Ratnagiri
Location: Ratnagiri, in the district of the same name
Website: N/A
Number of Students: 15
Relevant Information:

This is one of the larger *vedapāṭhaśālā*s I visited in the Konkan area. My first contact with the members of this school was in Pune, during the *somayajña* of Harapsar in February of 2009. The *brāhmaṇa* priest of that *yajña* was Vedamūrti Śrī Dinkar Bālkṛṣṇa Joglekar. During that *yajña* also, his son Vedamūrti Śrī Prabhākar Diṅkar Joglekar was officiating as *hotṛ* priest, and one of the students, Śiṇḍe Gāḍgīḷ, from the school was his assistant. Out of its fifteen students, nine were studying Ṛgveda with Prabhākar Diṅkar Joglekar and six were studying Kṛṣṇayajurveda under the guidance of Vedamūrti Dattātraya Vināyak Leḷe.

According to a pamphlet, the school was founded in 1869 by Vedamūrti Viṣṇū Bhikājī Phaḍke. If the information is accurate, it would be the oldest Vedic school still running in Maharashtra, even before the Bhosale Vedapāṭhaśālā of Nagpur.

The school is also administered by a trust. Currently, M. V. Desai is the secretary (*kāryavāha*) and Mr. Śrī N. Phaḍke is the chairman (*adhyakṣa*) of the trust. It is the wife of Prabhākar Diṅkar Joglekar who is in charge of the meals and the household of the school.

The trust of the school collects donations mainly from the private sector, as well as from some religious institutions. The *Śaṅkarācārya*s of Kanchipuram and Sringeri have honored the teachers and students of this school on several occasions.

Name: Śrī Gaṇeśa Vedapāṭhaśālā
Location: Devrukh in the district of Ratnagiri
Website: http://vedshaladeorukh.org/
Number of Students: 22
Relevant Information:

The school was inaugurated in 1997 and, according to a pamphlet published in honor of the 11th anniversary of the school, five students have already successfully graduated from the school.

Vedamūrti V. Dattātreya Ācārya, the main teacher, has twenty-two students under his tutelage who are learning the Ṛgveda. Some students are learning *yajñika* and others are learning the Saṃhitā text. The main teacher and founder of the school was for many years Vedamūrti Vināyak Sītarām Athalye, an eminent *ghanapāṭhin* honored on several occasions by both religious institutions and the government of the State of Maharashtra, as well as by the Indian government through the HRD.

The *vedapāṭhaśālā* was constructed on a plot of land of 80'000 sq. ft. which was donated by Śrī Śamrao Desai and his family. Since its creation on December 16th, 1997, the school has had a strong donation base. The trustees of the school are effective fundraisers and get donations from the region and beyond. In a pamphlet from the school are listed all the donors for the period of 2007-2008. Many wealthy individuals from Mumbai and Pune are listed with their respective donations. The amounts vary from 1'000 to 60'000 Rs. Other donations come from organizations such as the Brāhmaṇa Sevā Saṅgh, Thane.

The school is named after the temple they have in the school, which is dedicated to Gaṇeśa. The temple also has a "meditation cave" (*dhyān gupha*) right under the Gaṇeśa, which is accessible through some stairs on both sides of the sanctum sanctorum. In this space, perhaps seven people can sit comfortably for meditation. There is an idol (*mūrti*) of Gajānan Mahārāj, who is the spiritual inspiration of the school.

The *vedapāṭhaśālā* is fully residential and rather isolated from the rest of the world and is surrounded by jungle. The town is not far away, but due to its location, there are virtually no external distractions for the resident students.

The school is organized in a trust, which has a clear and hierarchical structure. The president, manager, treasurer, and the trustees constitute the organizational body of the organization.

The trust sometimes organizes religious programs in the school, which the local and surrounding Hindu community attends. Celebrations such as *gurupūrṇimā*, *gaṇeśa caturthī*, and etc. are also open to the public. In honor of the 11th anniversary of the school, a large program which lasted several days was organized. Speeches, classical music, and dance took place, and a large crowd gathered for the occasion.

The school has plans for the future, for it wants to "expand its curriculum to include the teaching of all four Vedas [for which] [...] four class rooms each measuring about 500 sq. ft. will have to be constructed."[406] The dining hall and kitchen area will need to be expanded accordingly and there are also plans for a new library, the expansion and modernization of the cow-shed (*gośālā*), a room with more computers, and even the use of solar energy is to be introduced.

Name: Vedaśāstra Saṃskṛt Pāṭhaśālā
Location: Sawantwari
Website: http://www.vedpathshala.org/
Number of Students: 19

406 http://vedshaladeorukh.org/html/About%20Us%20-%20Future%20Plans.html accessed on November 10, 2009.

Relevant Information:

This *vedapāṭhaśālā* has two *ṛgvedin* teachers: Vedamūrti Śrī Gaṇeśvar Sāmba Dīkṣit and Vedamūrti Śrī Harihār Ātmarām Athlekar. The nineteen students are divided in three batches: four students are learning the Ṛgveda Saṃhitā, two are learning the *nityakarma*s, and thirteen are learning the *yajñika* couse. The *vedapāṭhaśālā* has also a *yajñaśālā* to perform fire rituals. I was informed that the school does perform *yajña*s regularly, but rather on special occasions and not forthrightly or monthly.

The school offers free lodging and boarding to all students who live there. Students must in return, as with most of the smaller *vedapāṭhaśālā*s, wash their own clothes and do much menial work in service to the guru (*gurusevā*).

Most of the schools visited attended the examinations of the VŚS, in Sringeri or Kanchipuram *maṭha*s, but the students of this school get examined through their patron, the Sahasrabuddhe Maṭh in Pune, who is also one of the main sponsors of the school. Further support comes from the Brāhmaṇa Sabhā of Mumbai and from private local donors.

Name: Śrī Samārth Sant Mahātmajī Vedavidyālay
Location: Dhalegaon, at the banks of the Godāvarī River
Website: http://www.dharmashree.com/
Number of Students: 47
Relevant Information:

This school is one of the largest Vedic schools I visited in Maharashtra. It has a very large campus with wings of three floors each and has a capacity to host hundreds of students.

It is the main school of the Maharṣi Veda Vyās Pratiṣṭhān of Śrī Govinddev Giri Mahārāj (previously known as Śrī Kishorjī Vyās).

The revival trend of Vedic learning in Maharashtra is partly due to institutions such as the Maharṣi Veda Vyās Pratiṣṭhān, which have important financial resources to support students and teachers who engage in this kind of endeavor. The trust not only sponsors schools and teachers, but also honors Vedic *paṇḍita*s through the Maharṣi Veda Vyās Award. It has also given pensions to twenty-five senior Vedic scholars, as well as given grants to *agnihotrin*s in different parts of India.

The organization has also organized Vedic workshops in different parts of the country. According to the website, more than Rs 5 crore[407] (around 111'000 USD) have been invested in this project.

The *pratiṣṭhān*, in order to ensure the quality and the motivation of the teachers and students be high, designed for the school that "proves to be the best learning

407 http://dharmashree.org/otheractivities.html accessed on April 4, 2009.

center" the 'Ideal Vedic School Award'. During Vedic workshops, depth of every student in Vedic studies is gauged and professionally examined by renowned Vedic scholars in the country. Only after their nod do the deserving students receive 'Ideal Vedic Student' award, as well as the scholarship."[408]

The school in Dhalegaon is one of the few Vedic schools in Maharashtra that teach all the four Vedas.

Name: Vaidik Jñān Vijñān Saṃskṛt Mahāvidyālay
Location: Tapovan, Nashik
Website: N/A
Number of Students: 27
Relevant Information:

The area in which the school is located seems to be rapidly becoming an upmarket residential zone, but currently the school is still rather isolated and surrounded by greenery.

In 2009, the school had recently built a temple in the same complex in which the building of the school was located. It is a modestly-sized building. The temple, which used to be a bigger living room of the house, serves now as the classroom in which the Vedic recitation takes place. The school has no library or any luxurious amenities.

The *vedapāṭhaśālā*, as with the majority of the Vedic schools in this area, is a *śuklayajurvedin* school of the *mādhyandina* branch. The main teacher, Vedamūrti Śantaram Bhanose, is a learned *ghanapāṭhin* who hails from a long tradition of Vedic experts. His father, Paṇḍit Narāyāṇsāstrī Bhanose, was an eminent Vedic expert who passed away in early 2011. He was not only learned in most of the *vikṛti*s upto *ghanapāṭha*, but also the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa and other texts. He was also a *śrauta* expert and had participated in many *śrauta* sacrifices. Several religious institutions, including the Śaṅkarācāryas of Sringeri and Kanchipuram, have honored both Śāntarām and his father for their expertise in the Veda. Śāntarām Bhanose is the main teacher, and there are at least two other teachers in the school. The *vedapāṭhaśālā* is not fully residential, as there is not sufficient space for all the students. The students who do not live in the school and have their families in Nashik come early in the morning and stay until the evening.

Financially, the school obtains its resources from diverse private donors and institutions, and from the personal earnings of Vedamūrti Śāntarām Bhanose and the other teachers through priestly services.

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408 *Idem.*

Name: Kailās Maṭh Akhaṇḍānand
Location: Nashik
Website: N/A
Number of Students: 50
Relevant Information:

This school is an old religious institution, established in 1920 by Svāmī Hṛdayānanda Mahārāj. It is a monastic center in which several *saṃnyāsin*s from the Sarasvatī order have taken residence. The school has a very good infrastructure and is probably one of the wealthiest ones in the region.

The *vedapāṭhaśālā* is named after Svāmī Akhaṇḍānand Sarasvatī, a famous president of the *maṭha* who introduced the Vedic school during his tenure. In 1974, the Mahāmandaleshvar Svāmī Vidyānandjī Sarasvatī Mahārāj took over the presidency of the institution and transformed the *maṭha* into a temple complex that came to be popularly known as as "Bhakti Dham" ("abode of devotion"). The institution also gained a social orientation under his presidency, and various activities such as medical aid, food distribution, religious speeches, and even Sanskrit classes were offered to the general public. These activities positioned the *maṭha* in a nationally notorious position.

Since 1995, the *maṭha* has been under the reign of Mahāmaṅdaleśvar Svāmī Sanvidānand. This institution is one of the few schools in Maharashtra which is financially supported by the Maharṣi Sāṃdīpani Rāṣṭrīya Veda Vidyā Pratiṣṭhān of Ujjain. In this year, too, Sampūrṇanand Saṃskṛt Viśvavidyālay of Benares recognized the curriculum of the school.

In 2009, there were four young *guru*s teaching the fifty students, who were divided in two batches. The school teaches the Śuklayajurveda of the *mādhyandina śākhā*. Students learn here the Saṃhitā and the *padapāṭha*. After the completition of *padapāṭha*, they learn Sanskrit grammar. Śrī Kṛṣṇa Godse and Śāntarām Bhanose, from another *pāṭhaśālā* in Nashik, used to regularly teach here and now are advisory members to the *maṭha*.

The trust of the *maṭha* also gives out the prize of "Sarasvatī Puraskar" to accomplished individuals who have made "significant improvement in the fields of arts, social work and particularly Vedic studies." The award consists of 25'000 Rs in cash, a silver *mūrti* of the goddess Lakṣmī, a shawl, and a coconut. The award aims at "popularizing the Vedas and preserve Indian culture."

Name: Śrī Guru Gaṅgeśvar Mahārāj Pāṭhaśālā
Location: on the highway Nashik-Tryambakeshwar
Website: http://www.vedpradip.com/ and http://www.sarda.co.in/religious.html
Number of Students: 17
Relevant Information:

The school is surrounded by nature. As with most of the Vedic schools in Nashik, it is a Śuklayajurveda school. Presumably, all the four Vedas have been taught here. I was given a list with the names of the previous eleven teachers since 1985, which is when the school first opened in Nashik.

The trust that manages the school also runs the Ved Mandir of Nashik, which is presented as a case study in subchapter 6.3. Before moving to the current location in the year 2000, the school used to be in the grounds of the Ved Mandir. The school was then shifted to the new location in order to provide the students with a better and larger infrastructure, and particularly a "more natural environment with less distractions from the city life."

When I visited, the students were under the tutelage of a young teacher from north India, Vedamūrti Praśant Patil.

The school has relatively modern amenities. The school manager who takes care of the logistics of the school showed me around the premises of the institution. The facilities of the *vedapāṭhaśālā* include a library, a large dining hall, a few classrooms, small apartments for the teachers, a playground, and a small shrine dedicated to Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Name: Śrutismṛti Vidyāpīṭham
Location: Trimbak near the Ballaleshwar Mandir
Website: N/A
Number of Students: 40
Relevant Information:

This school is located in the famous town home to the *jyotirliṅga* of Tryambakeśvara. Vedamūrti Madhur Gopalrao Jośī, a *ghanapāṭhin* of the Śuklayajurveda *mādhyandina śākhā*, runs the school. He is a well-known scholar in the area and has participated on several occasions in large-scale rituals in Maharashtra. The school is fully residential and all the students participate in the chores of the school, including providing the necessary food. This was the only school I visited where students still beg their food from the neighbourhood, according to the old custom of begging for their food (*bhikṣā*). Three or four students would go out in their red or ochre *dhoṭī*s equipped with large metal recipients wrapped in colourful cloth. They go from door to door of neighbouring *brāhmaṇa* households and beg for food.

The school is supported by the *brāhmaṇa* community of Trimbak, as well as from the monthly stipends they receive from the MSRVVP. Five students receive Rs 500 and the teacher receives 5'000 Rs. Still, the school's infrastructure is very modest and the money they receive is, according to Jośī, barely enough to carry on with their work.

Name: Śrī Narasiṃha Sarasvatī Vedapāṭhaśālā

Location: Alandi
Website: N/A
Number of Students: 32
Relevant Information:

This school is located in the famous town of Alandi, an important pilgrimage site in Maharashtra located a few kilometers from Pune.

The school's building is annexed to the Śrī Narasiṃha Sarasvatī Mandir and very close to the Adhyātmik Pratiṣṭhān. This school is a *ṛgvedīya* school and Vedamūrti Phaḍke *gurujī* runs the school, his brother, Gajānan Phaḍke taking care of the administration of the school.

Phaḍke *gurujī* is very well known among the *brāhmaṇa* community of Maharashtra, as he has trained many *vaidika*s over the years, including Vedamūrti Amol Jośī from the Beed. The students here have the opportunity to learn up to *ghanapāṭha*, passing through the Aitareyabrāhmaṇa, although as in the rest in the schools, only a handful of students may attain that level.

The school has partnered up with the Śāstrīc school of Paṇḍit Devadatta Patil, a young Sanskrit scholar running a private school in Pune which claims to be "the only one left in India in which the authentic *gurukula* model of traditional Sanskrit education takes place."

Phaḍke *gurujī* has also been, on several occasions, an examiner in the yearly exams carried out by the VŚS.

Name: Śrī Sadguru Nijānand Mahārāj Vedavidyālay
Location: Alandi
Website: http://dharmashree.org/
Number of Students: 70
Relevant Information:

In this school, the *śākhā* taught is Śuklayajurveda Mādhyandina. This school was the first school founded, on the 17th of October in 199,1 by the Maharṣi Veda Vyās Pratiṣṭhān on *vijayādaśamī*. The school is one of the twelve schools across India run by the organization.

It has very spacious precincts; the school claims that "about 200 students have completed Vedic studies in this school." Some of the ex-students of this school are working as teachers in other Vedic schools.

When I first visited the school, there was a festive program with the patron of the organization, Śrī Govinddev Giri Mahārāj, who honored *vārkarī* students as well as *brāhmaṇa* scholars and other local personalities.

The yearly examinations of this school happen through the Maharṣi Veda Vyās Pratiṣṭhān, usually in the larger school in Dhalegaon, where all the Maharashtrian schools of this organization come together.

Name: Adhyātmik Pratiṣṭhān
Location: Alandi
Website: N/A
Number of Students: 40
Relevant Information:

In this school, the Śuklayajurveda is taught. The main teacher here is Vedamūrti Viśvanāth Keśav Jośī, although other famous *vaidika*s teach or have taught here, such as Vedamūrti Maheś Candrakāṇṭ Rekhe. Some, whose parents live in the town, come and go, but most of them live in the school.

The *vedapāṭhaśālā* offers the possibility to learn up to *jaṭāpāṭha* and *ghanapāṭha*, and then learn the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa and other auxiliary texts.

The trust also draws it funds mostly from private donors, but some of the teachers and advanced students have received grants from the MSVVP, the Śaṅkarācāryas of Kanchipuram and Sringeri, and other smaller religious institutions.

Name: Śrī Jagadguru Śaṅkarācārya Maṭh
Location: Kohlapur
Website: N/A
Number of Students: 9
Relevant Information:

In Kohlapur, there is a branch of the Śaṅkarācārya Maṭh of Sringeri presided over by Śrī Narasiṃha Bhāratī Tīrth, the actual Śaṅkarācārya of this *maṭha*, also called Karvīr Pīṭh. He has been serving as the head of Karavīr Pīṭh since the year 2003. It is a two-story structure without any embellishments or architectural points. It is, however, very old. It was established during the 1670s by the former head of the great math at Sringeri in southwest Karnataka. He established both the Sankeśvar Maṭh, in northern Karnataka and at Karvīr in the southern Marāṭhā country.

The *maṭh* has a *vedapāṭhaśālā* in which, currently, nine students learn the Ṛgveda. Although, out of these students, only three are learning Saṃhitā, while the rest are learning the *yajñika* curriculum.

Only a few students here are residents of the *maṭha*; most of them come to learn the Veda from nearby. There are no sufficiently qualified teachers here. In fact, one of the students of the Śrī Kṛṣṇayajurveda Pāṭhaśālā, who is originally from Kolhapur, has been invited several times by the Śaṅkarācārya to come and teach in the *maṭha* even though he has only finished his basic education. Since the student wants to continue his studies in Satara, he has declined the offer of starting working for the *maṭha*. The Śaṅkarācārya, Śrī Narasiṃha Bhāratī Tīrth, is a very active religious leader with a great political influence, as well. He not only travels widely across the country, visiting

temples, *āśram*s and devotees, but he also delivers speeches in diverse gatherings such as those of the Hindū Janjāgṛti Samiti, a right-wing organization promoting the Hindutva ideology.

Name: Vedānta Vidyāpīṭham (Śrī Dattadevasthān)
Location: Ahmedabad
Website: http://www.dattadevasthan.org/
Number of Students: 70
Relevant Information:

This large *vedapāṭhaśālā* was inaugurated under the name Vedānta Vidyāpīṭham in 1988 and is attached to the larger religious trust founded by Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Sarasvatī Kṣīrsāgar in 1974 with the aim to propagate his teachings and "to protect and preserve the Vedas." Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Sarasvatī Kṣīrsāgar was a saint very well known in the area, and with a large following in Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Karnataka, even among the Hindu diaspora. Due to the large following of the saint, even after his death in 1999, the trust has a strong financial base to maintain not only the Vedic school, but also a huge temple dedicated to Dattātreya, and also where his *sāmadhi* tomb is found.

The school has a very large building in which four branches of the Vedas are taught, and currently has the capacity to accommodate up to 100 students. On my last visit to the school in 2009, there were around 70 students in the school. They are divided into the following groups: Ṛgveda, 30 students; Yajurveda (*taittirīya śākhā*), 14 students; Śuklayajurveda (*mādhyandina śākhā*), 10 students; and Sāmaveda (*rāṇāyanīya śākhā*), 16 students. Each group has its own room in in the building, in which students learn under the guidance of their *guru*.

The school also has a library where religious books and manuscripts are kept. The students and teachers of the schools are free to consult the books in their free time. The manager of Śrī Dattā Devasthān told me that "the trust is putting lots of efforts to preserve old scriptures and rare books."

The trust also maintains a farm where they have cows at a different location on the Ahmednagar-Aurangabad highway. They call it Śrī Narasiṃha Sarasvatī Tapovan. In Tapovan, the trust also keeps a small farm where fruits and vegetables are cultivated and supplied to the Vedānta Vidyāpīṭham. There is a close relationship between the trust and the Sringeri Śāradā Pīṭh. According to Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Sarasvatī Kṣīrsāgar, the 'the relationship between Sringeri and Śrī Dattā Devasthān is like that of the Sun with the Lotus. The sun's rays fall all over the earth everyday, but they affect the lotus most. The same is the case with Śrī Dattā Devasthān and Sringeri'. It was, in fact, the idea of Bhāratī Tīrtha, the actual *Śaṅkarācārya* of Sringeri, that a Vedic school should be brought to life. According to a newsletter released in 2007, on the occasion of the *prāṇapratiṣṭha* and *kalaśa pūjā* of the finished temple:

In one of His visits He [Bhāratī Tīrtha] remarked that the Devasthān should construct an independent building to start a Vedānta Vidyapeetham that could provide facility for at least a 100 students. He took a keen interest in the activities of the Devasthān and also suggested that it should have a fully equipped library containing scriptures, texts and books related to Vedānta.

It was Bhāratī Tīrtha, who in absence of the diseased Kṣīrsāgar, inaugurated the temple and performed the *prāṇapratiṣṭha* of the *mūrti* of Dattātreya, as well as the installation of the *kalaśa* in the roof of the temple from the 7th to the 14th of July in 2007. The organization reported that this event attracted "6-7 thousand devotees". It is interesting to note that the celebrations of *śaṅkarācārya jayantī* were introduced in Ahmednagar through the relationship between Bhāratī Tīrtha and Kṣīrsāgar.

Some of the teachers are also known for their knowledge in *śrauta* procedures and are often invited to larger Vedic sacrifices. Especially the Sāmaveda reciters, who are rare in Maharashtra, are often called to recite the necessary *mantra*s in Soma sacrifices. I first met the main Sāmaveda teacher in the *somayajña* which I attended in February of 2009 in Harapsar, Pune.

The Vedānta Vidyapeetham has also on its premises a large gathering space called "the Mahālakṣmī Maṅdap", in which conferences, speeches, and other public events are organized by the trust. Other celebrations and festivals — such as the anniversary of Kṣīrsāgar's passing away (*mahāsāmadhi*) and *dīpāvali* or Dattātreya's *jayantī* — are celebrated in the temple with great pomp. In 2010, a larger *śrauta yajña* was organized by the trust.

The financial stability of the trust comes from regular donations from the devotees of Rāmakṛṣṇa Kṣīrsāgar, in addition to a scheme in which the volunteers carry out missionary activities and also collect funds for the cause.

Name: Śrutigandhā Vedapāṭhaśālā
Location: Beed
Website: N/A
Number of Students: 12
Relevant Information:

This is a small family *vedapāṭhaśālā* which is run by Śrī Vedamūrti Rājarām Amol Jośī. The school teaches the Ṛgveda.

Recently, he constructed a new room to extend his own home to accommodate all the students. He also has a small cowshed with a few cows. The wife of Amol Jośī is in charge of the household and feeding everyone in the school.

The finances of the school are taken care of by Amol Jośī and his father, who is himself not a learned *vaidika*, but an enthusiast of the Vedas and a *brāhmaṇa* by birth. He is now a retired bank manager and, with his pension and other income that comes from *pūjā*s and other services to the community, the school can survive. The

school's infrastructure is modest but it has attracted the recognition of several Vedic authorities for the quality of the teacher and students. The school is also very well connected to other schools and *brāhmaṇa* institutions in Maharashtra, as well as other places of India. Amol Jośī studied in several places, and particularly in Pune/Alandi, with Phaḍke *gurujī*, and for shorter periods also in Benares. Amol Jośī and his school have received recognition from the Śaṅkarācāryas of Sringeri, Kanchipuram, and Kohlapur. In a pamphlet from the school, on the inner cover, there are photographs of the three current Śaṅkarācāryas *guru*s of these *maṭha*s. During an interview with him, he also showed me some of the awards he has received from the Śaṅkarācāryas in recognition for his "contribution to the preservation of the Vedic tradition." The same pamphlet shows photographs of the school with several *vaidika paṇḍita*s and religious personalities of Maharashtra.

When I visited the school, his only son had just turned five years old, but could already recite several verses from the Bhagavadgītā and knew the whole Viṣṇusahasranāma by heart. His father is looking forward to performing his *upanayana* ceremony in a few years, and to starting to teach him the Veda.

The school was inaugurated on the 11th of November in 2003, when Amol Jośī had returned to his hometown after many years of study, and having become himself a *daśagranthin* and a *kramapāṭhin*.

Name: Bhosale Vedaśāstra Mahāvidyālay
Location: Nagpur city
Website: N/A
Number of Students: 20
Relevant Information:

This *vedapāṭhaśālā* is one of the oldest Vedic institutions of the state. It is said that this school was founded in the nineteenth century through *brāhmaṇa*s from Bhosale family when scholars from Benares used to go to Nagpur periodically for the four-monthly seasonal *cāturmāsya* sacrifices. It claims to be the "oldest institution for Vedic studies in India." Even if it is clear that this is not the case, it is certainly one of the oldest *vedapāṭhaśālā*s that has maintained its activities, uninterrupted, during these 130 years.

When I visited the school in 2009, it had 20 students studying five *śākhā*s of the Vedas: Ṛgveda, Kṛṣṇayajurveda, Śuklayajurveda (*mādhyandina*), Śuklayajurveda (*kāṇva*), and Sāmaveda.

The school's building is very old and, although some renovations have been made, the ancient structure and the temple, and a small cowshed with three to four cows to cover the milk needs of the students, remains. The school was originally founded in the Rukmiṇī Mandir of the Bhosale Royal Palace on the 9th of December of 1879, but it was not until 1912 that the school was registered under the Societies Registration Act

and, in 1930, it became officially known as the Saṃskṛt Vedaśāstra Mahāvidyālay in a festive ceremony headed by Lakṣmaṇśāstrī Rao of Benares.

According to a newspaper article from October of 2008, the school has started a "Sanskrit Balak Mandir for the day scholars. Students from all walks of life, from all castes and from all religions come to this Balak Mandir and even some of them are Muslim students, who learn Sanskrit." (The Hitavada, 12th October 2008)

Name: Ārṣa Vijñāna Gurukulam
Location: Vicinity of Nagpur City
Website: http://www.arshavidya-nagpur.org/
Number of Students: 6
Relevant Information:

This *vedapāṭhaśālā* is situated in a 400-acre property in the middle of the jungle. The land on which the *gurukula* is situated is said to be holy because it is believed that Lord Kṛṣṇa camped on this land during his sojourn to captivate Rukmiṇī. The project was initiated by Dr. Śrīkant Jichkar, who is said to have been "a highly educated person from India with 20 post-graduate University Degrees to his credit." Not only is he supposed to be one of the most learned personalities of India, but he was also elected to the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly, becoming the youngest MLA in the country at twenty-five. After years in the Maharashtra Legislature, he was elected to the Indian Parliament in 1992, where he was MP till 1998. He has also represented the Indian delegation in the UNO and the UNESCO. He was claimed to be "one of the great ritualistic in India being an ahitagni who has established and maintains the three sacred Vedic fires and has himself performed the very rare Agnishtom and Vajapeya Somayajnas which have got him the title of 'Dixit' and 'Somayaji.'"[409] Interestingly enough, he would not have been entitled to perform these sacrifices, as he is not a *brāhmaṇa* by birth. Nānājī Kāḷe listed him "as the only Kshatriya Somayaji" (Shree Yogiraj Vedvijnan Ashram, 2005: 135) in his book on the *āhitāgni*s of India. He is probably one of the first non-*brāhmaṇa*s in India to have performed these Vedic rituals.

Nonetheless, the Ārṣa Vijñānam Gurukulam was founded by late Svāmī Dayānand Sarasvatī, and only inspired and partly sponsored by Dr. Śrīkant Jichkar, who was also the president of the institution until his sudden death in 2004 in a car accident.

The *gurukula* has "full time teachers [who] impart elaborate instructions in both Purvamimamsa (Vedas and Vedic rituals) and Uttarmimamsa (Vedanta)."[410] The place, besides being a residential *āśram* for *saṃnyāsi*s led by Svāminī Brahmaprakāśānanda

409 http://www.arshavidya-nagpur.org/ accessed on February 1, 2010.
410 *Idem*.

Sarasvatī, mainly attracts students from India and from all over the world for short and long-term courses in Sanskrit and Vedānta.

The Veda part of the curriculum of this institution is rather secondary when compared to the efforts and funds being dedicated to the Vedāntic part. The Veda school is located in a separate building next to the auditorium, in which the classes in Sanskrit and Vedānta take place. The Veda students and the teacher with his wife sleep in this building, apart from the residential section of the *āśram* where they also learn the Vedas and have their own kitchen.

According to the website, the *śākala śākhā* of the Ṛgveda and the *kāṇva śākhā* of the Śuklayajurveda are the Vedic branches preserved here. Although, I was told that there were plans to "have all the 11 existing *śākhā*s of the Vedas" taught there. How realistic and concrete these plans are will be seen in the future.

Even though two branches are said to be taught in this school, when I visited the *gurukula*. I only saw the six students of the Ṛgveda, and I was told that only the *śākala śākhā* of the Ṛgveda was taught there by Śrī Yaśvant, one of the graduates of Nānā Kāḷe's *vedapāṭhaśālā*s in Barshi, himself an *āhitāgni*. He is an expert in the performance of *vaidika* rituals like *somayāga*. He has performed as *adhvaryu* in *somayāga*, including *saptasomasamsthā* of *sarvatomukha yajña*. He has been teaching at the school since 2001.

According to the website, nonetheless, in the same school, also, *ghanapāṭhin* Śrī Rājeś Jahāgīrdār teaches the Śuklayajurveda of the rare *kāṇva śākhā*. According to the organization, it was Nānā Kāḷe who sent him to Chennai to study and to learn from Śrī Paraśurāma Ghanapāṭhī, an eminent scholar of the *kāṇva śākhā*. The official information from 2008 says that eight students have been under his tutelage since 2004.[411]

The Ārṣa Vijñāna Gurukulam also hosts a temple dedicated to Siddhivināyaka (a form of Gaṇeśa), Vedavedānteśvara (a form of Śiva), and Kṛṣṇa as the Gitācārya. The main deity in the temple is Dakṣināmūrti (also a form of Śiva).

I was told that anyone wishing to perform a Vedic ritual — such as a *somayāga*, *iṣṭi*, or any other *yajña* in the school — could be the *yajamāna*, and the all facilities (including the highly trained priests) would be provided. To my knowledge so far, no *śrauta yāga*s have been performed in this place.

Name: Śrī Yogīrāj Veda Vijñān Āśram
Location: Kasarwadi
Website: N/A
Number of Students: 21

411 *Idem.*

Relevant Information:

This is probably one of the most famous Vedic schools in Maharashtra and in India.

Nārayāṇ Govind Kāḷe, also known as Nānājī Kāḷe, is one of the most famous personalities in India concerning the revival of the Vedic tradition, and particularly the *śrauta* rituals. He did not go as a child through the traditional education, and in a very unique way he learned the Vedas very late. Nānājī Kāḷe was the All-India wrestling champion, had earned a B.A., and had a regular job as a clerk before becoming an *āhitāgni*. In an interview, he told me that it was his spiritual *guru*, Śrī Yogīrāj Guḷavāṇi Mahārāj, who inspired him to abandon his worldly life in order to dedicate himself fully to the learning of the Vedas and to become an *agnihotrin*. F. Smith, on the other hand, writes that: "Though neither Śrī Selukar nor Śrī Kāḷe was ever more than a casual, though respectful, devotees of Śrī [Gajānan Mahārāj of Akkalkoṭ], they established the vedic fires to a great extent as a result of his urging." (F. Smith, 2001:450) Kāḷe was clearly a devotee of Guḷavāṇi Mahārāj, from whom he received *śaktipāt* initiation. In all his publications, pamphlets, and in the altars of his *āśram*, a photograph of the saint is displayed. It was, nonetheless, Viśvanāth Śrautī, a learned *śrautin* from Nellore and a close devotee of 'Śrī', who helped both Selukar and Kāḷe to tend the three fires.[412] Kāḷe performed his *agnyādhyana* in March of 1981 on the banks of the Godāvarī River at Nanded, Maharashtra.

He told me in an interview that nobody wanted to take him as a student because he was already married and was supposedly too old to learn the Vedas. But Nānājī was so convinced of his mission that he did not give up until he found someone to teach him the Ṛgveda. He finally managed to convince a learned *paṇḍita*, who taught him the *mantra*s. He dedicated all his efforts towards this endeavor and learned very quickly.

After this, he established his *āśram* in 1985 on a large piece of inherited agricultural land in his hometown. The Śrī Yogīrāj Veda Vijñān Āśram is very isolated from the rest of the world and is not easily accessible. It is located in Kasarvadi, near the town of Barshi, in the Solapur District. He started to revive, one by one, all the available *śākhā*s of the Vedas, and "eventually draw on his own stable of students to officiate in both his own sacrifices and those of other agnihotrins, from ādhāna to sattra." (F. Smith, 2001)

He started by having his own three sons learn the Vedas. All of them studied the Ṛgveda and then they were sent away to learn a different *śākhā* each. Vedamūrti Raghunāth Kāḷe, his first son, studied the endangered *śaunaka* branch of the Atharvaveda. His second son, Vedamūrti Yogeś Kāḷe, learned the *maitrayānīya* branch

412 Selukar has been hosting them every year since 1980. In recent years, Selukar and his followers have held similar *yajña*s in Pune, Delhi, and Haridwar, as well. Selukar hosted a year-long yagna from April of 1999 to May of 2000. Nanda writes that: "Even though these yagnas are themselves not explicitly communal, Selukar belongs to the Anand Sampraday of the Dattatreya sect which, for historical reasons, has had adversarial relations with Muslims" (Nanda 2009: 83).

of Kṛṣṇayajurveda, and his third son, Vedamūrti Caitanya Kāḷe, learned the *rāṇāyanīya* branch of the Sāmaveda. Nānājī Kāḷe has three grandsons who are currently learning the Ṛgveda.

Since the establishment of his *āśram* in Barshi, he has established another thirteen *vedapāṭhaśālā*s in different places in India. His aim is to revive, protect, and promote the twelve branches of the Vedas available today.

Through his efforts and encouragement, nearly five hundred students have learned the Vedas and rituals. Students from the Śrī Yogīrāj Veda Vijñān Āśram have conducted many *śrautayajña*s. He and the students and teachers of his schools have performed many of the most complex *somayajña*s. Nānājī Kāḷe performed, with the six *somayāji*s, the exceptional *gavāmayana saṃvatsara sattra* with *trisahastra mahāgnicayana* that lasted fourteen months. On 15th July 2014, he and his team of *śrauta* priests completed the performance of an *aśvamedha* that lasted sixteen months.

The funding for all these projects comes from very different private sponsors and religious institutions. Nānājī Kāḷe is an excellent promoter and has been honored by the Śaṅkarācāryas from Kanchipuram and Sringeri. This is also one of the few schools recognized by the Maharṣi Sāṃdīpani Rāṣṭrīya Veda Vidyā Pratiṣṭhān of Ujjain, from whom he also receives donations for the school.

Nānājī Kāḷe has also been a consultant to the IGNCA for the proposal to UNESCO for the inclusion of the oral tradition of the Vedas as "Intangible Heritage of Humanity", which was unanimously adopted in 2003.

One of the most significant and perhaps polemical characteristics of Śrī Yogīrāj Veda Vijñān Āśram's projects is the so-called "rain induction and rain forecasting experiments" undertaken in many places in India. Hundreds of *somayāgas* have been performed to produce "abundant rain", and the results have been measured through "scientific methods". The *āśram* is equipped with an "Auto Weather Station" which measures meteorological activity, later correlated to the *yajña*s performed in the school.

In 2011 the "Saumic Suvrushti Project" will be undertaken in which 20 *somayāga*s will be performed at the twelve *jyotirliṅga*s and eight other places of India and scientific measurements will be done to determine the success of this rain-induction method.

F. Smith, in his "Recent History of Vedic Ritual in Maharashtra", warns:

> I must caution, however, that a revival instigated by the efforts of one or two people is inherently fragile. While it is clear that the surviving śrauta traditions elsewhere in India are seriously endangered, and therefore fragile in their own ways, the fragility of revival is quite different from the fragility of old and established family and community traditions. The communitarian aspect of revival abides on waves of energy that are often subject to sudden collapse, usually because of a lack of depth or deep history. This is not to criticize Nana Kale's efforts, but simply to highlight the natural fragility of his efforts. (F. Smith, 2001: 452)

Appendix 2: The *Vikṛti* Permutations of the Saṃhitā

The following traditional permutations (*vikṛti*) of the Saṃhitā texts are based on the *padapāṭha* and serve as mnemotecnic aids which produce specific changes of both spelling and accent, through the grammatical process of *saṃdhi*. Traditionally, there are eight such *vikṛti*s, but the important *kramapāṭha* is often not counted as part of the (eight) *vikṛti*s, but rather with the natural (*prakṛti*) recitation of the Veda. The "natural" recitation of the Veda according to some sources is the base text (*mūla*) — i.e. the *saṃhitā* recitation, the *padapāṭha*, and the *kramapāṭha*. The following popular verse[413], given to me by one of the *vaidika*s of Maharashtra, lists eight *vikṛti*s:

> *jaṭā mālā śikhā rekhā dhvajo daṇḍo ratho ghanaḥ*
> *ityaṣṭo vikṛti proktaḥ kramapūrva maharṣibhiḥ.*

Of these permutations, only three are preserved in Maharashtra: *jaṭāpāṭha*, *kramapāṭha*, and *ghanapāṭha*, and that too only in the Ṛgveda and in the Yajurveda recensions. Someone who has mastered these three *vikṛti*s is entitled to carry the name *ghanapāṭhin*.

For the sake of simplification, a visual representation of the eight traditional patterns is given below. Lower-case letters (a, b, c, and so on) symbolize each word of a verse; a slash (/) separates clusters of words, a double slash (//) indicates endings of verses. The Sanskrit marker "iti" marks the final word of a verse or half-verse (*pada*).

jaṭāpāṭha or "braid" recitation
abbaab / bccbbc / cddccd / deedde / fggffg / ...
mālāpāṭha or "garland" recitation, which has two variations:
1) *kramamālā*[414] (ordered garland)
ab / h *iti* h / bc / hg / cd / gf / fg / dc / gh / cb / h *iti* h / ba //[415]
2) *puṣpamālā* (flower garland)
ab / ba / ab / bc / cb / bc / cd / dc / cd / df / fd / df ...
3) *śikhāpāṭha* or "topknot" recitation
abbaabc / bccbbcd / cddccde / effeefg / ...

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413 The verse appears in a number of works, some of them compiled in: Abbhyankar and Devasthali 1978. The editors of this volume point to a certain Vyāḍi as the possible author of this verse. I thank Dominik Wujastik for this reference. The verse is also cited in Maheśvara's commentary on Amarakośa, first *kāṇḍa*, *śabdādivarga*, verse nr. 4. Unfortunately, the commentator does not give a source for this quotation. (Amarasiṃha 1907: 35)

414 Not to be confused with the more common *kramapāṭha*, see the recitation pattern number 9.

415 Forward movement from the beginning of each half-verse in two-word clusters which alternate from the end of a half-verse, with each two-word cluster in a reverse order.

4) *rekhāpāṭha* or "row" recitation
ab / ba / ab / bcd / dcb / bc / cd / defg / gfed / ...
5) *dhvajapāṭha* or "flag" recitation
ab / p *iti* p / bc / op / cd / no / ... / op / bc / p *iti* p / ab //[416]
6) *daṇḍapāṭha* or "staff" recitation
ab / ba / ab / bc / cba / ab / bc / cd / dcba / ... / ab / bc / cd / de / ef / fg / gh / hi / ihgfedcba[417]
7) *rathapāṭha* or "chariot" recitation
ab / ef / ij / mn / ba / fe / ji / nm / ... / dcba / hgfe / lkji / ponm /[418]
8) *ghanapāṭha* or "dense" or "bell" recitation
abbaabccbaabc / bccbbcddcbbcd / cddccdeedccde / ...
(9) *kramapāṭha* or "step by step" or "progressing" recitation
ab / bc / cd / df / fg / gh / ...

For a more detailed account on the *vikṛti*s with the modification in the accentuation of the text, see: Howard 1986; Bhandarkar, 1874: 133.

416 This recitation is very similar to *kramamālā* except that the two-word clusters are not reversed in the backward movement and the pattern consists of movement from the beginning and end of the verse, not the half-verse.
417 This recitation pattern is formed little by little, until all the words of the verse in reverse order is presented.
418 Here, a quarter of a verse, in more or less equal divisions of a complete verse, is ordered in such a way that they together represent the wheels of the "chariot". The quarter verses "used as wheels" follow the gradual *daṇḍa* formation.

Appendix 3: Images and Short Film of the Vedic Schools

For further images of the Vedic schools by the author visit http://www.flickr.com/photos/shrimaitreya/sets/72157617420581644/

For a short film by the author, entitled: “Embodying the Vedas - A day at the Śrī Kṛṣṇayajurveda Pāṭhaśālā” visit https://youtu.be/ALEHkgOx8EE

Glossary of Commonly Used Terms

abhaṅga: devotional song in Marathi language composed in the *ovī* metre.

ādhāna: ritual setting of the three Vedic household fires.

adhvaryu: officiating Vedic priest belonging to the Kṛṣṇayajurveda.

adhyayana or *adhyāya*: study of the Veda.

advaita-vedānta: one of the major theological/philosophical schools of the *āstika* tradition, now closely associated with the teachings of Śaṅkara (Śaṅkarācārya). The philosophy is monistic, i.e. it considers reality as non-dual (*advaita*) in nature.

agnihotra: twice daily offering of milk or ghee to Agni; name of the three domestic fires.

agnihotrin: one who has set the Vedic fires and performs *agnihotra*, the necessary rituals to maintain them.

agrahāra: a *brāhmaṇa* village.

āhitāgni: a *brāhmaṇa* who has set one or more domestic fires for *agnihotra*.

amāvasyā: new moon day; the ritual complex performed on this day.

anadhyāya: non-study day.

anādi: without beginning or origin, eternal (i.e. the Veda).

aṅgavastra: long, unstitched men's clothing made of cotton and sometimes silk that is worn over the left shoulder and under the right, around the torso.

anudātta: one of the Vedic accents. See: svara.

aparauṣeya: of non-human authorship (i.e. the Veda).

āraṇyaka: part of the Vedic corpus called "forest-book".

ārati: Honouring the deity with light (*dīpa*). *Āratī* is one of the major among the sixteen offerings made during worship (*pūjā*).

aśauca / aśuddha: impurity, pollution.

āśrama: a hermitage, monastery; one of the four stages in the life of a *brāhmaṇa*: *brahmacarya* (studentship), *gṛhastha* (householder), *vānaprastha* (forest dweller), *saṃnyāsa* (renouncer).

aṣṭāvadhānasevā: "eightfold-attention service" refers to the performance of Vedic recitations in service of God. It is said the eight traditional forms of recitational permutations of the Veda (*aṣṭavikṛtis*) were offered to the deity, although in

Maharashtra only the *jaṭāpāṭha*, *kramapāṭha*, and *ghanapāṭha* permutations survive, and this too only in the Ṛgveda and in the Yajurveda recensions.

āstika: term used to designate those who acknowledge the absolute authority of the Veda as revelation; name for the six philosophical systems (*darśana*) which adhere to and acknowledge the authority of the Vedas. The opposite are the *nāstika* systems.

avatāra: a term applied principally to the 'descent-forms' or 'incarnations' of Viṣṇu.

bhagavān: 1st person, masc. nom. sing.of *bhagavat*: 'fortunate', 'having shares', 'adorable', 'Lord', 'God'.

bhajan: A devotional song, or collection of hymns, usually sung collectively (in *satsaṅg*). Singing *bhajan*s is the principal mode of worship among *bhakti* sects in many regions of India.

bhakti:. From verbal root √*bhaj*, 'to share, be loyal', or √*bhañj*, 'to separate'; devotional love, surrender and adoration, especially to one's chosen deity.

bhasman: sacred ash, widely used as a purifying substance applied for marking the body with sectarian insignia, particularly amongst Śaivas.

bhāṣya: commentary, explanation.

bindī: forehead mark of a round dot (*bindu*); the colloquial umbrella term *bindī* can also refers to all forehead marks. See: *tilaka*.

brahmacārin: celibate Vedic student.

brahmacarya: first life stage in the life of a *brāhmaṇa* which is the period of study of the Veda.

brahman: (neuter) verbal power, the Veda, the absolute and transcendent reality.

brāhmaṇa: member of the first *varṇa*, priest, teacher; also a portion of the Vedic corpus containing expository material relating to Vedic sacrificial ritual (Brāhmaṇa).

brahmasthāna: dwelling-place of *brāhmaṇa*s.

brahmatva: Brāhmaṇahood, being a *brāhmaṇa*.

caraṇa / *cāraṇa*: belonging to the same branch of the Veda called *śākhā*.

cāturmāsya: four-monthly seasonal ritual performed during spring, rainy season and autumn.

chandas: the study of metre and prosody. One of the six *vedāṅga*s, or subsidiary fields of study of the Veda.

cūḍa: top-knot, tuft of hair remaing after the ritual tonsure.

dakṣinā: ritual payment offered to the priest or *guru* in exchange for the performance of a ritual or religious instruction.

dāna: gift, donation, ritual offering.

darśana: ('looking at', 'viewing') derived from the Sanskrit root '*dṛś*' ('to see', 'to look at') 1. auspicious viewing of a deity, 2. philosophical school (world-view).

darśapūrṇamāsa: new and full moon rituals.

deva: term used generically to designate the supernatural and celestial beings, or gods.

dharma: law, duty, custom; universal law.

dharmaśāstra: the "science of law". Name given to a voluminous category of verse literature dealing with Brāhmaṇical *dharma*.

dhoṭī: long, unstitched men's clothing made of cotton and sometimes silk that is wrapped around the waist.

dhūnī: sacred fire of an ascetic.

dīkṣā: consecration, initiation.

dvija: "twice-born", an individual who has been through the *upanayana* ritual and thus has become apt to study the Veda.

gāyatrī: a famous *mantra* from the RV 3.62.10 also called *Sāvitrī* and said to be "the mother of the Vedas"; a famous Vedic meter.

ghanapāṭha: the most difficult of the permutations (*vikṛti*) to recite the Veda.

ghanapāṭhin: a reciter of *ghanapāṭha*.

gotra: clan, lineage in descent from a Vedic sage.

gṛhastha: second life stage in the life of a *brāhmaṇa* which is the householder stage.

gṛhya: domestic, as opposed to *śrauta*.

guṇḍikā: "revision" class of the Veda. Also spelled *guṇṇikā* in Marathi: reperusing and reciting in order to commit to memory. From *guṇa* > *guṇita* to be multiplied, or repeated over and over.

gurukula: "residence of the guru". Also pedagogical system based on the oral transmission of knowledge and the proximity between student and teacher.

gurupūrṇimā: the day of full moon, *pūrṇimā*, in the month of Āsāḍha (July-August) of the Hindu calendar is traditionally celebrated as the festival in honor of the *guru*.

guruśiṣyasaṃbandha: the guru-disciple relationship.

homa: any oblation of cooked food or *ghī*; more generally still, any oblation or sacrifice.

iṣṭi: fortnightly offering on new- and full moon days.

jagadguru: "universal guru" a title often conferred to the Śaṅkarācāryas and other *guru*s of renown.

japa: muttering, a repetitive prayer or praise.

jaṭāpāṭha: one of the permutations (*vikṛti*) to recite the Veda.

jaṭāpāṭhin: a reciter of *jaṭāpāṭha*.

jāti: caste, also translated as sub-caste.

jyotirliṅga: Śiva is said to have manifested itself in the form of a column (*liṅga*) of light at twelve different sites across India: Somanātha, Nāgeśvara, Bhīmaśaṅkara, Ghṛṇeśvara, Tryambakeśvara, Mahākāleśvara, Oṃkareśvara, Rāmeśvaram, Śrīśailam (Mallikārjuna), Kedārnātha, Viśvanātha (in Vārāṇasī), and Vaidyanātha.

jyotiṣa: science of astronomy and astrology. One of the six *vedāṅga*s, or subsidiary fields of study of the Veda.

karma: act, work, ritual. Also the fruits resulting from these actions.

karmakāṇḍa: the traditional designation of that part of the Veda that deals with ritual (*yajña*), as opposed to the *jñānakāṇḍa* which deals with the liberating knowledge (*jñāna*); popularly also the study of domestic ritual.

karmakāṇḍin: priest who specializes in rituals, usually meaning domestic ones.

karṇavedha: "the piercing of the earlobes" one of the 16 *saṃskāra*s performed for a male child.

kathā: a type of religious storytelling, whose performances are a ritual event usually performed from oral epic narratives found in the Hindu scriptures.

kāvya: post-Vedic classical Sanskrit poetry.

khānda: chapter or portion.

kīrtan: devotional song; the musical setting of a text that glorifies a deity.

koṅkaṇastha: habitant of the coastal area called the Konkan.

kramapāṭha: one of the permutations (*vikṛti*) to recite the Veda.

kramapāṭhin: a reciter of *kramapāṭha*.

kṣatriya: member of the second *varṇa*, the warrior class.

laukika: secular, wordly; a *brāhmaṇa* who is not a learned in the Veda.

liṅga: phallic aniconic symbol of Śiva.

madhukāra: the "bee"method of collecting alms. The students goes from house to house like a bee from flower to flower, collecting food.

mālā: praying beads made of different auspicious materials.

mantra: literally 'instrument of thought'. Vedic verse or formula.

maṭha: hermitage, monastery, religious center.

mīmāṃsā: philosophical school based on the analysis of the Vedic corpus and of Vedic ritual.

mleccha: a barbarian, someone outside the *varṇa* system.

mokṣa: ultimate liberation from suffering and the cycle of births.

mūla: root or original text without commentary or any alteration.

mūrti: image, body, or statue of a deity.

padapāṭha: word-by-word recitation of the Veda without *sandhi*.

paṇḍita: a learned *brāhmaṇa*.

paramparā: a lineage of teachers collectively composing a channel for the transmission of religious knowledge from master to student.

pārāyaṇa: the "going over", recitation of the Veda, usually in a public venue.

parīkṣa: examination.

pariṣad: committee, organization, assembly.

paśubandha: animal sacrifice according to the *śrauta* sacrificial tradition.

pāṭha: recitation, study; a particular recitation style according to the permutations (*vikṛti*).

pāṭhasālā: Vedic school.

patnī: wife.

pīṭha: seat, throne, religious center.

pīṭhadhipati: authority who occupies the *pīṭha*.

prakṛti: paragdigm, model, template, natural form as opposed to (*vikṛti*).

prasāda: grace; remnant of an offering to a deity returned to the devotee.

praśna: question, topic, lesson.

prātiśākhya: a class of phonetic treatise (classified as *vedāṅga*), analysing and detailing the pronunciation of the Veda within each *śākhā* to ensure the correct performance of ritual.

pravara: line of ancestors, usually a group of three or five seers (*ṛṣi*s) in one's lineage (*gotra*) and are also decisive in some communities for marriage relations.

prāyaścitta: expiation rite.

pūjā: worship, making of offerings.

pūjāri: priest in a temple or shrine.

puṇya: merit, virtue, auspiciousness.

pūrṇāhutī: "complete oblation", an offering made with a full ladle at the end of the Vedic sacrifice.

pūrṇimā: full moon; day of the full moon.

purohita: priest, domestic or family priest.

rāja: from Skt. *rājan*, king.

rājasūya: an ancient and laborious *śrauta* sacrifice to consecrate a king.

rāma: the seventh *avatāra* of Viṣṇu and one of the major gods of modern Hinduism. His story is told in the famous epic the Rāmāyaṇa.

rāmanavamī: Rāma's birth is celebrated on *rāmanavamī* (the ninth day of the bright half of the month Caitra [Mar–Apr]). The festival is famous all across India and celebrations at places associated with Rāma, like Ayodhya and Rameshwaram, attract thousands of devotees.

rāṇī: queen.

ṛṇa: anything due, obligation, duty, debt. The triple debt to the gods (*deva*s), to the seers (*ṛṣi*s), and to the ancestors (*pitṛ*s).

ṛṣi: Vedic sage or seer. The tradition counts seven original seers.

rudrākṣa: a berry (from a shrub of the same name) favoured by Śaivas in the making of prayer beads. Literally the name means "the tears (or eyes) of Rudra".

śabda: sound, noise, word.

śabdabrahman: The Veda considered as a revealed sound or word and identified with the Supreme.

sabhā: assembly of a learned *brāhmaṇa*s.

śākhā: branch or school of the Vedic tradition.

samādhi: (1) burial site, tomb; (2) concentration, state of transcendence.

sāman: verse put into song and chanted in the Sāmaveda.

samāvartana: the return home of a Vedic student after completing his studies.

saṃdhyāvandana: compulsory rituals for a *brāhmaṇa* performed at the "joints" of the day (sunrise and sunset).

saṃhitā: collections containing the original, continuously recited text — the *mantra* portions — of the four Vedas.

saṃnyāsin: a Hindu religious mendicant, especially, a *brāhmaṇa* in the fourth stage of his life.

saṃskāra: domestic sacraments, rites of passage prescribed in the Gṛhyasūtras and Dharmaśāstra.

saṃthā: (M) initial lesson of the Veda.

sarasvatī: goddess of the arts, languages, and learning.

śauca: ritual purity.

sāvitrī: see: *gāyatrī*.

śeṃḍī: (M) top-knot, tuft of hair of a *brāhmaṇa*.

sevā: selfless service and is associated with *karmayoga*, disciplined action, and *bhaktiyoga*, disciplined devotion.

śikṣā: one of the six *vedāṅga*s, consisting of texts dealing with phonetic analysis. Their aim is to provide instruction in the proper pronunciation of the Veda, an essential prerequisite for the effective performance of the Vedic ritual.

śiṣṭa: a learned *brāhmaṇa*.

śiṣṭācāra: the conduct of a learned *brāhmaṇa*.

śiṣya: a Vedic student or disciple of a *guru*.

śiva: one of the main gods of medieval and subsequent Hinduism. The Śatarudrīya hymn of the Yajurveda is very popular and is prescribed for ritual worship in a wide variety of postvedic sources.

smārta: relating to *smṛti* as opposed to *śruti;* also an adjective applied to orthoprax *brāhmaṇa*s many of whom, since about the ninth or tenth century CE, aligned themselves with Śaṅkara's *advaita-vedānta* theology. However, the term '*smārta*' is also applied to *brāhmaṇa*s from a variety of regions in India. Thus, there are Telugu-speaking Smārta *brāhmaṇa*s, Maharashtran and Gujarati Smārta *brāhmaṇa*s, and Tamil Smārta Brahmans.

smṛti: "that which is remembered"; usually post-Vedic texts including the *sutras*, the *vedāṅga* literature, the epics, Purāṇas etc.

soma: sacred plant and its juice, possibly identified as ephedra; personified as the god, Soma.

śrauta: extended, complex; as opposed to domestic (*gṛhya*).

śruti: "that which is heard" i.e. another name for the Veda.

sūtra: a rule or aphorism in Sanskrit literature, or a set of these. Lit. thread, handbook of rules, manual.

svāmin (*svāmī*): "Lord" an honorific title, commonly addressed to a *guru* or a deity.

svara: tone in recitation corresponding to the three kinds of Vedic accents *udātta*, *anudātta* and *svarita*. A vowel having a low tone is called *anudātta* (non raised). *Anudātta* is the low tone of the syllables preceding an *udātta*. *Svarita* (sounded) is the falling accent, which usually follows the acute *udātta*.

svarita: "sounded, accentuated", the falling accent, which usually follows the acute *udātta*, in Vedic Sanskrit. See: *svara*.

svaśākhā: "one's own (family) *śākhā*." See: *śākhā*.

tretāgni: the three-fire complex of an *agnihotrin*, comprising the *gārhapatya*, *dakṣiṇāgni*, and *āhavanīya*.

tripuṇḍra: "three marks". Three horizontal lines or crescent marks on the forehead worn by all Śaiva adepts.

tulasī: the sweet basil plant, known also as sacred basil (*ocymum sanctum*) regarded by Vaiṣṇavas as sacred to Viṣṇu (especially as Rāma).

ucchiṣṭa: saliva pollution, food, drink touched by the mouth of another; the remaining food left from gods or holy people.

udāsin: ascetic sect founded by either Guru Śrī Cand (son of Guru Nānak) or Bābā Gurditta. The *udāsin*s were originally associated with the Sikh tradition and are still called *nānak-putra*s or the "sons of Nānak".

udātta: "lifted, upraised, lofty, elevated, high" one of the three Vedic accents customarily marked with acute accent. See: *svara*.

upanayana: ritual initiation of a Vedic student in which he receives the *sāvitrī* and is invested with the sacred thread. After this initiation a student is known as *dvija* "twice-born". One of the 16 *saṃskāra*s.

vaidika: adjective that means "Vedic"; a *brāhmaṇa* who studies the Veda as opposed to a *laukika* (secular).

vārkarī: the Vārkarīs are distinguished by their devotion to Viṭṭhala. The pilgrimage (*vārī*) takes twice a year to Viṭṭhal's chief temple in the town of Pandharpur. According to tradition, the saint-poets Jñāndev and Nāmdev (13th cent.) initiated the annual pilgrimage to Pandharpur and thereby founded the *vārkarī-sampradāya*.

varṇa: Brāhmaṇical model of four classes: Brāhmaṇa (priestly), Kṣatriya (warriors, nobles, aristocrats), Vaiśya (commoners, mostly farmers and merchants), and Śūdra (servant class).

varṇāśramadharma: laws governing the four classes and stages of life.

Veda: the entire corpus of Vedic texts including Saṃhitā, Brāhmaṇa, Āraṇyaka and Upaniṣads.

vedabhaṣya: commentary on the Vedas.

vedabhūṣaṇa and *vedavibhūṣaṇa*: titles conferred to learned *brāhmaṇa*s "he, whose ornament is the veda" or "that by which the veda is adorned", the second title implying a higher rank.

vedacūḍāmaṇi: title conferred to a learned *brāhmaṇa*, literally meaning "crest-jewel of the Veda."

vedādhāya: lesson in learning the Veda.

vedalakṣaṇa: texts of ancillary nature to the Veda and generally classified under *vedāṅga*, though only a few of them belong to the *śikṣā* category. They include *prātiśākhya*s, *anukramaṇi*s, works on accentuation (*svara*), and on different forms of modified recitation (*vikṛti*), and various kinds of indexes.

vedamūrti: "embodiment of the Veda", title given to learned a *brāhmaṇa* who has completed his Vedic education.

vedārtha: the meaning or sense of the Veda.

vikṛti: change, alteration, modification, variation; the alterations of the *mūla* text for various recitation styles.

viṭṭhala: the main deity of the *vārkarī-sampradāya*. Commonly thought as a form of Viṣṇu, there is also a considerable Vaiṣṇava-Śaiva overlap in the tradition. The Viṭṭhala temple is located at Pandharpur, Maharashtra.

vrata: religiously motivated vow, e.g. fasting, chastity, the performance of a particular ritual over a period of time.

vyākaraṇa: the science of grammar; analysis. Classified as one of the six *vedāṅga*s, but also regarded as an independent philosophical system.

yāga: the Vedic sacrifice, specifically the Soma pressing according to the *śrauta* tradition.

yajamāna: the patron or sponsor of the *śrauta* sacrifice; the performer of *yajña* who receives the fruit of the ritual.

yajña: the Vedic sacrifice.

yājñika: performer of Vedic rituals.

yajñopavīta: the sacred thread of a *brāhmaṇa*.

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