

THE RECENT HISTORY OF VEDIC RITUAL IN MAHARASHTRA

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Vedic *śrauta* ritual continues to be performed in Maharashtra, Goa, and all four states of South India.¹ Information on the identity of those initiated (*dīkṣita*) into the practice of *śrauta* ritual, *āhitāgnis* ('whose fires have been established') or *agnihotrins* ('who perform the *agnihotrin* ritual') who have subsequently performed soma sacrifices in the first three-quarters of the 20th century, was brought together by C. G. Kashikar and Asko Parpola (KP) in an article entitled "Śrauta Traditions in Recent Times", published in 1983 in Volume II of Frits Staal's massive *Agni*.² What I intend to do here is update that article by providing details on the current state of *śrauta* ritual in Maharashtra and Goa. It is impossible to do this, however, without referring to the contemporary arrangement of vedic *śākhās* in Maharashtra and the state of the art of *śrauta* practice in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, the neighbouring states whose ritual traditions are closely linked with those of Maharashtra.

Since the late 1960s there has been a marked shift in the character of *śrauta* ritual in Maharashtra. Prior to that time the practice of *śrauta* ritual had been a hereditary avocation of a number of brahman families, lineages, and communities who had, for the most part, maintained the vedic ritual traditions for generations, in some cases for hundreds of years.³ The tradition of performing soma sacrifices was well

¹ I am indebted to C. G. Kashikar, T. N. Dharmadhikari, and Shrikant Rajimwale, as well as to Āhitāgni Nana Kale for a considerable amount of the information accumulated here.

² Also relevant are Kashikar 1958 and 1964, which describe some of the differences between present practice and ritual prescriptions presented in the *sūtra* texts. Much information of a similar nature may also be found in Smith 1987, which examines the history of *śrauta* ritual from the perspective of the performative tradition of the Āpastamba ŚS.

³ I am informed by Agnihotram Ramanuja Tatachariar of Chennai that the *śrauta* fires have been burning continuously in his family home in Kumbakonam since the 11th century. In the 16th century, he says, a fire destroyed the house, but it was quickly rebuilt and the vedic fires rekindled.

maintained because highly trained representatives of all three Vedas necessary for its performance – the Ṛgveda, Yajurveda, and Sāmaveda – were relatively accessible, even in the outlying districts, which is to say away from the primary centers of learning in Nasik, Pune, Satara, Kolhapur, Pandharpur, Nagpur and along the Konkan coast. Perhaps the most important aspect in the preservation and maintenance of *śrauta* traditions is the manner in which officiants of these three Vedas have learned to work together to create an idiosyncratic, but seamless, ritual choreography. Different regional traditions have developed unique styles and mannerisms, body language and interactional assumptions, which are as important to the flow of the performance as knowledge of the vedic mantras and the textually prescribed choreography.⁴ Thus, it may be said that the character of all *śrauta* ritual is local rather than pan-Indian, and when *śrauta* ritualists are forced to reach outside their highly nuanced and intuitively recognized local performative culture for technical support, problems arise. And this is part of the present story.

In spite of the fact that the performance of a soma sacrifice requires officiants trained in the ritual duties (*ārtvijya*) of these three Vedas – the *ādhvaryava* by specialists in the Yajurveda, the *hautra* by specialists in the Ṛgveda, and the *audgātra* by specialists in the Sāmaveda – each region of India has historically possessed a preponderance of specialists in one or more of these Vedas, but rarely in all of them.⁵ Thus, the ideal system begins to break down quickly. In order to successfully perform a soma sacrifice, then, ritualists have generally been forced to resort to one of two strategies: either they could import qualified *vaidikas* from other communities, preferably nearby, to perform the ritual duties of the Vedas that were not represented in their own community, or representatives of the local vedic specialization could learn the ritual roles and mantras of the remaining Vedas.

The situation was complex and challenging from the outset, as the staging of a soma sacrifice required seventeen officiants: four each for the *ādhvaryava*, the *hautra*, and the *audgātra*, four handling auxiliary roles (the *brahmagāṇa*), and one honorary supervisor (*sadasya*).⁶ In most communities which lacked full representation of the three necessary Vedas, local ritualists took recourse to the first alternative: specialists from the missing or underrepresented Veda were brought in from neighbouring villages, or even from farther afield. For example, in recent decades it has been commonplace in Maharashtra for *āhitāgnis* with a scarcity of technical support to import the *ādhvaryava* from Nellore (Andhra Pradesh), Gokarn (Karnataka), Bidar (Karnataka), or elsewhere, the *hautra* from Gokarn, and the *audgātra* from Tirupati, Chennai, or Honnavar (Karnataka). This has often resulted in problems of basic language communication (though sometimes these officiants

⁴ On the important topic of ritual style, see Smith 2000: 255 and n. 23.

⁵ The Nambudiri tradition of Kerala is an exception.

⁶ See Staal 1983, I: 49ff.

speak with each other in Sanskrit, often their only common language), disagreements over performance style, and perhaps most importantly disputes over the prescribed animal sacrifice.

In some regions, particularly in Tamilnadu or Andhra Pradesh, which have always had a vast preponderance of Yajurvedins belonging to the Āpastamba sub-school,⁷ very few Sāmavedins, and practically no Ṛgvedins, the ritual roles for the officiants of both of the latter were learned by the Yajurveda specialists from *prayogas* and *paddhatis* prepared specifically for this purpose.⁸ These texts were extensions of the *yājuṣahautra*, the mantras and prescriptions for the *hautra* provided in the primary literature of the Yajurveda. This *yājuṣahautra*, intended for *iṣtis* such as the new and full moon sacrifices (*darśapūrṇamāsau*), is attested as early as the mid-first millennium BCE in the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa (3.5),⁹ and a few centuries later in the Āpastamba Śrautasūtra (24.11–14) and Satyāśāḍha-Hiraṇyakeśi Śrautasūtra (21.1–2).¹⁰ In Maharashtra, the utilization of the *yājuṣahautra* was common for *agnihottrins* belonging to both the Satyāśāḍha school of the Taittirīya *śākhā* of the Kṛṣṇayajurveda¹¹ and the Kātyāyana school of the Mādhyandina *śākhā* of the Śuklayajurveda. In the former case the *yājuṣahautra* is based on the *hautra* mantras and prescriptions of the Āśvalāyana *sūtra* texts, while the latter employs the mantras and prescriptions of the Śāṅkhāyana texts. It is noteworthy that the Śāṅkhāyana school of ritual recitation and practice is extinct in Maharashtra; thus its sole locus in that state of preservation is in the *hautra* of the new and full moon sacrifices of the few remaining Kātyāyana *śrautins* of Maharashtra.¹² Thus, ritualists have continued to recognize the importance of the *yājuṣahautra* in the preservation of their *śrauta* traditions. In many parts of India where the (usually dominant) Yajurvedins have failed to learn the ritual roles of the underrepresented Vedas, the *śrauta* traditions have disappeared.

The classical working arrangements between the vedic sub-*śākhās* in Maharashtra are mentioned briefly by Kashikar and Parpola (1983: 249), and addressed more fully by Kashikar (1977: 149 ff., in Marathi). In order to understand these arrangements it will first be necessary to describe the distribution of vedic *śākhās* and sub-*śākhās* within Maharashtra. Historically, Maharashtra is divided into

⁷ This *sūtra* belongs to the Taittirīya *śākhā*. A few Yajurvedins in these states follow the Kāṇva *śākhā* of the Śuklayajurveda.

⁸ See Jeeyar Swamigal 1976–78 for demographic data on South Indian *vaidikas*. These volumes are an invaluable source of data for anyone studying the recent history of vedic education and knowledge in South India.

⁹ See Dumont 1960. This section of TB more fully explicates TS 1.6.11, 2.6.1–2.

¹⁰ See Smith 1987: 25, n. 95.

¹¹ See Kashikar 1958: 61ff.; Kashikar & Parpola 1983: 227.

¹² For the textuality of this, see Kashikar 1984. The Śāṅkhāyana *hautra* also survives in Kerala among the Nambudiris; see Sreekrishna Sarma 1983.

five areas, some of which include Goa and parts of present-day Karnataka: (1) Khandesh, comprising the northwestern districts; (2) Konkan, which includes the coast along the Arabian Sea south of Mumbai, all of Goa, as well as coastal Karnataka; (3) the Deśa or Ghāt area, which comprises the present districts of Pune, Satara, Kolhapur, Solapur, Sangli, Ahmadnagar, and, in Karnataka, Belgaum district; (4) Marathwada, which contains the five districts of Aurangabad, Parbhani, Beed, Nanded, and Osmanabad; and (5) Vidarbha, which includes the north and northeast districts. In Khandesh, Konkan, Marathwada, and Vidarbha it is still possible to find a few good vedic paṇḍits, especially in the villages in Konkan and along the Godavari river. Some have preserved knowledge of vedic ritual, though practically none have established the vedic fires. In the Ghāt districts, the brahmins have migrated *en masse* from the countryside to the cities. Most of them have moved to the district headquarters bearing the same names as the districts, but some have moved to other smaller cities such as Wai, Pandharpur, and Barshi. At one time brahmins learned in vedic recitation and *śrauta* ritual could be found in dozens of villages in these districts, but now it is entirely likely that not a single learned brahmin resides in any small village in these districts. In any case, most of the remaining learned paṇḍits are over sixty years of age, and their descendants have moved not to the smaller district headquarters towns but to the larger urban centers in search of educational and employment opportunities.

The dominant sub-*śākhā* in Maharashtra is the Āśvalāyana school of the Ṛgveda (*Śākala śākhā*), which is well represented throughout the state. The only region where it is not clearly dominant is Khandesh, in which the preponderance of *vaidikas* follow the Kātyāyana school of the Śuklayajurveda. Followers of this school are also found in large numbers in Vidarbha. This school is particularly concentrated around Nasik, where it is followed by practically the entire brahmin population, as it is in almost the entirety of north India. Nasik has been a bastion of the Śuklayajurveda for hundreds of years and has often supplied Varanasi with learned *vaidikas*. A large number of families belonging to the Kāṇva recension of the Śuklayajurveda reside in Pandharpur (Solapur district) and a few towns in northern Karnataka and western Andhra Pradesh.

Various schools of the Taittirīya *śākhā* of the Kṛṣṇayajurveda are also found in most parts of Maharashtra. These include the Hiranyakeśi school in Konkan and south Maharashtra, extending northward into Pune and Mumbai and eastward sporadically across the state. A few families who follow the Baudhāyana *sūtra* may be found in Konkan, Solapur district, and perhaps elsewhere, while a few of the Āpastamba school remain in the districts bordering northern Karnataka. They represent the fringe of the heavy concentration of Āpastambins who have resided in northern and eastern Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamilnadu for perhaps two thousand years. A few families who observe at least some remnants of the domestic

ritual of the Mānava *sūtra* of the Maitrāyaṇi *śākhā* of the Kṛṣṇayajurveda may still be found in Nandurbar (Dhule district) and Nasik in Khandesh. Unfortunately, their knowledge of both the Mānava *sūtra* and its ritual is virtually nonexistent. The Ṛgvedins follow the ritual of the Āśvalāyana *sūtra* texts while the Taittirīyins have usually followed the ritual of the Satyāśāḍha-Hiranyakeśi *sūtra* texts. Until the last few decades of the 20th century, “Ṛgvedins have generally followed the Baudhāyana and less frequently the Āpastamba school for the ādhvaryava” (Kashikar & Parpola 1983: 227). The *agnihotrins* of the Āśvalāyana school have historically employed the *ādhvaryava* of either the Baudhāyana or Āpastamba schools, while the Yajurvedins have generally employed the *hautra* of the Āśvalāyana school. However, as the Baudhāyana *ādhvaryava* has gradually faded from prominence (very few representatives of this *sūtra* tradition remain in northern and coastal Karnataka and southern Maharashtra¹³), the Āpastamba *ādhvaryava* is now employed almost exclusively. While a few remaining *śrautins* of the Satyāśāḍha-Hiranyakeśi tradition survive in southern Maharashtra, this *sūtra* tradition is also fast becoming a casualty of the new alignment of Maharashtrian *dīkṣita* Ṛgvedins with Yajurvedins from Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu. It is important to mention that the performance of the new and full moon sacrifices has been regularized through much of Maharashtra and South India as a result of the widespread use of the *prayoga* or ritual manual published by Vāman Śāstrī Kimjvaḍekar in 1924, as part of his judiciously compiled *Darśapūrṇamāsaprakāśaḥ*. With the exception of the *śrautins* of the Śuklayajurveda, all the *agnihotrins* of Maharashtra (and many elsewhere) follow this excellent *prayoga*, which is as explicit and complete as the most carefully wrought libretto for an opera or play.

The Sāmaveda is extinct in Maharashtra, except in one or two places where it is being revived (see below). However, as recently as the late 19th century a few Maharashtrian Sāmavedins remained in the major cities of the state. For all soma sacrifices in Maharashtra, the *audgātra* must be brought in from outside. Kauthuma Sāmavedins from Varanasi were previously invited to officiate for the soma sacrifices performed by *yājñikas* of the Kātyāyana *sūtra*, while Kauthuma and Rāṇyānīya Sāmavedins from Honnavar or Gokarn officiate for the others. In addition, Gokarn has always been a major center of both Ṛgveda and the comparatively rare Baudhāyana school.¹⁴ Many of the *śrautins* of Gokarn are Maharashtrians, and this

¹³ The Baudhāyana tradition survives in Kerala, but that tradition is very distant culturally, performatively and linguistically from the Maharashtrian tradition.

¹⁴ I might mention the name of Rāmacandra Bhaṭṭa Kodlekere of Gokarn, now about eighty years of age, who is usually regarded as the last great *vidvān* of the Baudhāyana school of ritual praxis. For the last forty years he has officiated as *adhvaryu* in most of the *somayāgas* in which the Baudhāyana *ādhvaryava* has been employed. He has also learned the Taittirīya Saṃhitā in all eight recitational modifications (*vikṛtis*), and, I am told by other ritualists from Gokarn, may be the last person to accomplish this.

also served to forge a strong link between the vedic traditions of North Kanara Dist., Karnataka, and Maharashtra.¹⁵

Under the increasing pressures of modernity, particularly the attractiveness of non-vedic professions and the migration of large numbers of educated brahmins from the towns and villages to the urban centers (in part due to political pressure, in part due to job opportunities), the vedic ritual traditions in the small towns quickly and substantially thinned out in the first half of the 20th century. The attendance at vedic memory schools (*pāṭhaśālās*) correspondingly decreased, hence it became difficult to locate younger men trained in officiating duties. Consistent with this trend is the fact that by the time of Indian independence in 1947 very few people retained any interest in the decades long or even lifetime commitment that was incumbent on those who established the vedic fires, which is to say in becoming *nityāgnihotriṅs* ('whose vedic fires are maintained permanently'). Historically, this was a commitment to vedic study and to the performance of the daily morning and evening *agnihotra* and the fortnightly *darśapūrṇamāsau*. This required an unflinching dedication to a sedentary and regulated lifestyle in the proximity of one's three vedic fires (*trētāgni*), and in general eschewing the public eye.

With the decline of the "traditional" *śrautin*, a new breed came forth in the late 1960s, at least in Maharashtra. These were men who were usually not from families of *śrautins*, and often they were almost completely untrained in vedic recitation and ritual practice. Instead, they were influenced by newly formulated religious and spiritual agendas or by certain spiritual teachers whose mission was to help re-establish the Vedas as a major force in modern Indian culture. Because of the decline of the old patronage systems consisting of either gifts from local rulers or a dependable and regular source of community support, such as brahman neighbourhood organizations called *agrahārams*, most of the recent *āhitāgnis* became much more public figures than were their predecessors, if for no other reason in order to attract patronage. Thus, vedic ritual performance assumed a much more public, messianic, revivalist character than had hitherto been the case. Despite the scholarly depiction of *śrauta* ritual as "public", in fact for most of its long history it has been public only to the degree that its participation has extended into a highly selective community. For the most part the *āhitāgnis* lived in villages and towns, in simplicity and relative obscurity, and, as *nityāgnihotriṅs*, generally performed only the *agnihotra* and *darśapūrṇamāsau* for the sake of maintaining their family traditions. Occasionally they would perform soma sacrifices, but these were shielded from the general public. These *āhitāgnis* are increasingly being replaced by more cosmopolitan and well-connected ritualists who have developed interpretations, even theolo-

¹⁵ See Kashikar & Parpola 1983: 220–223. Not only are *āhitāgnis* with Maharashtrian names found in N. Kanara, but also in the other districts in northern Karnataka bordering Maharashtra, including Belgaum, Bijapur, and Dharwar.

gies, of vedic ritual that are often substantially different from previous understandings.¹⁶ In other words, many, but by no means all, *dīkṣita agnihotrins* of the last thirty-five years in Maharashtra have been vedic activists in one form or another.

This raises the delicate issue of authenticity. This topic, very much on the minds of scholars and ritualists alike, is fraught with opinion. Mine is that it is an unnecessary, even an empty, concept when applied to most cultural forms. I beg the reader to forgive me a brief anecdote. At the World Sanskrit Conference in Philadelphia in 1983, I was placed in charge of showing the recently released video *Altar of Fire*, filmed by Robert Gardner during the performance of the 1975 *agnicayana* in Kerala documented by Frits Staal.¹⁷ A well-known and respected scholar of *śrauta* ritual in the audience (who had, however, never seen a *śrauta* ritual) was visibly upset by what he saw: “This is not real vedic sacrifice, this is totally inauthentic,” he ranted. I asked him why, expecting him to reply that it was because of the role of non-Indians and non-*vaidikas* in the organizing and fund-raising. Rather, he explained in tiresome detail, it was because it did not follow the Śrauta-sūtras to the letter. This, I replied, was not proof of its inauthenticity, but quite the opposite, and let the matter drop. This is also the view of Kashikar and Parpola, who state that

the deviations of the modern performances from the injunctions of the ancient ritual texts can to some extent be considered as proofs of their authenticity. Taking into consideration that the Śrauta Sūtras themselves often allow for optional procedures, various substitutions, and relaxation of older ritual restrictions, it would indeed be suspicious if modern practices agreed in every detail with that described by the Śrauta Sūtras some two thousand years earlier. (Kashikar & Parpola 1983: 246.)

The central problem with the idea of authenticity is that it is grounded in moral judgment based on expectations which are wholly impressionistic and usually devoid of historical perspective. This problem was recently discussed by the novelist Vikram Chandra (2000) in an article defending the authenticity of Indians writing novels in English, which had been attacked in print (ironically perhaps, by an Indian scholar writing in English).¹⁸ After a good deal of convincing argument and, yes, ranting of his own, Chandra concludes: “don’t fear the God of Authenticity, for he is a weak god, a fraud, a fake, and – for all his posturing – completely irrelevant” (Chandra 2000: 49). Bravo! The notion of authenticity has raised its spectral head all too often in contemporary India, most often motivated by cultural chauvinism, nationalist politics, Hindutva, and so on. But it is not without precedent in India. The ideology of authenticity goes something like this: whatever is older is better,

¹⁶ See Smith 2000 for an example of this.

¹⁷ Produced and edited by Robert Gardner, available through the Extension Media Center of the University of California, Berkeley.

¹⁸ The offending article is Mukherjee 1993.

what is older is more genuinely Indian and authentically vedic. This ideology harks back to purāṇic notions of *yugas* and early second millennium CE notions of Rām Rājyā, in which an idealized history is contrasted with a present age of foundering dharma.¹⁹ In its current incarnation, however, the ideology of authenticity is a shadow of 19th century Western (and even Indian) orientalism, and betrays incomplete understanding of vedic tradition, the nature of ritual,²⁰ and the mechanics of religiosity in India. This is not the place to critique the notion of authenticity in greater detail. It must suffice to state that while I accept the arguments regarding the authenticity of modern vedic ritual provided by Kashikar and Parpola, a better course would be to deconstruct the notion fully. There can be no doubt that from the point of view of the dynamics of religious tradition in India it is authentic for followers of the Mādhva or Vallabha Vaiṣṇava traditions to perform vedic animal sacrifices with a papier-mâché or dough animal (*piṣṭapaśu*). Nor can there be any doubt that for certain other ritualists it is equally authentic to slaughter an animal and offer its organs (*pratyakṣapaśu*). But the moral, political, and religious ideologies behind the issue of authenticity must not be overlooked.

Without a doubt, the individual who most influenced the course of *śrauta* practice in Maharashtra in the last several decades was Gajānan Mahārāj (1915–1987), otherwise known simply as “Shree”, an important spiritual teacher and widely regarded saint from the town of Akkalkot, near Solapur in southern Maharashtra.²¹ He popularized a modified *agnihotra* that could be practiced by one and all, regardless of caste, gender, ethnicity, or nationality. One of his close disciples was a learned *śrautin* from Nellore named A. S. Visvanath Srouthy (d. 1997). Under the inspiration of “Shree” and the direction of Visvanath Srouthy, S. H. Apte (#17 below), a hereditary temple priest from Mhapsa, Goa, and H. M. Atre, a retired school principal and teacher from Solapur (see discussion on #6 below), established the *śrauta* fires, in 1969 and 1970 respectively. One of Shree’s and Visvanath Srouthy’s teachings was that animal sacrifice was a later addition to the *śrauta* ritual, hence a late interpolation into the vedic canon; in other words, it was not there “in the beginning”.²² Thus, they advocated the performance of soma sacrifices with a ‘ghee animal’ (*ājyapaśu*, *ghṛtapaśu*). The mantras for the animal sacrifice are recited, but the animals themselves are represented by small ghee-filled clay pots,

¹⁹ On the early history of the idea of Rām Rājya, see Pollock 1993.

²⁰ Cf. Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994: 157: “Revisions always take the form of new theories about what the ‘real’ (original, ordained, authentic, divinely decreed, or ‘reborn’) nature of the act is.”

²¹ Many biographies of Shree exist, all written by disciples, and all lacking the details given here.

²² See Gune 1994 and Houben 1999, both excellent articles on the textuality and ethics of vedic animal sacrifice.

which are bound to the *yūpa* with braided *darbha* grass “ropes”.²³ This ghee is subsequently offered incrementally in place of the omentum (*vapāyāga*) and the parts of the animal (*aṅgayāga*).

Beginning in 1980, Śrī Atre began the regular performance of soma sacrifices, often very exotic and unusual ones, which is to say largely beyond the *saptasoma-saṁsthā*, the seven one-day (*ekāha*) sacrifices in the series beginning with the *agniṣṭoma* and ending with the *aptoryāma*.²⁴ Knowledge of these performances was quickly disseminated within the vedic communities in Maharashtra, and shortly thereafter two other men established the *śrauta* fires with the assistance of Visvanath Srouthy. One, Ranganath Krishna Selukar from Gangakhed in central Maharashtra, who established the *śrauta* fires in 1972, also performed an impressive number of exotic soma sacrifices under the direction of Visvanath Srouthy, and since the latter’s death in 1997 has continued to do so under the guidance of his grandson Srinivas Srouthy. Śrī Selukar has taken on the persona of a “saint” in his own right, and now is known as Selukar Maharaj. The other *āhitāgni* is Narayan Govind (Nana) Kale from Barshi (Dist: Solapur), who established the *śrauta* fires in 1981. Though neither Śrī Selukar nor Śrī Kale was ever more than a casual, though respectful, devotee of Shree, they established the vedic fires to a great extent as a result of his urging. Though Śrī Selukar gained moderate fame and a fair share of notoriety for his ritual activity (see below), Śrī Kale founded a highly successful vedic *pāṭhaśālā*.

Not only does Nana Kale now perform exotic soma sacrifices with officiants trained at his own school, but in 1993 he decided to perform them with actual animals (*pratyakṣapaśu*) rather than ghee substitutes. Most importantly, however, he has initiated an increasing number of individuals, particularly young men in his *pāṭhaśālā*, into the practice of *śrauta* ritual. At the beginning of the 21st century, it appears that the mild renaissance in *śrauta* ritual begun under Gajanan Maharaj is being extended under Nana Kale, though to some extent reconfigured, especially over the contentious issue of animal sacrifice. If Nana Kale’s ambition to instruct a

²³ For more details on permitted substitutions, including ghee, for the sacrificial animal in the Āpastamba tradition, see Smith 1987: 74, 260–263.

²⁴ These seven one-day soma sacrifices are characterized by a fixed number of alternating *stotras* and *śāstras*, lengthy recitations by, respectively, the *udgātṛ* and two of his three assistants based on verses from the Sāmaveda and by the *hotṛ* and his three assistants based on verses from the Ṛgveda. The seven *saṁsthās* are the following, with the number of *stotras* and *śāstras* in parentheses: *agniṣṭoma* (12), *atyagniṣṭoma* (13), *ukthya* (15), *ṣoḍaśi* (16), *vājapeya* (17), *atirātra* (29), and *aptoryāma* (33). In all seven, five series of *stotras* and *śāstras* are recited in both the morning and midday soma pressing sessions, and the remainder are recited in the third, or evening, session. What I here label “exotic” sacrifices are the *agnicayana* (which is usually embedded within an *atirātra* or *aptoryāma*), the *pauṇḍarika* (cf. BaudhŚS 16.32:278.4, ĀpŚS 22.24.8–12), the *vājapeya*, the *mahāvratā* and any soma sacrifice with more than one soma pressing (*sūtya*) day. For a list of “rarer soma sacrifices” performed in recent times (up to 1975), see Kashikar & Parpola 1983: 244–245.

significant number of his students in the practice of *śrauta* ritual is eventually actualized – and there is a very good chance of that – then in the not too distant future the majority of *śrauta* ritualists in Maharashtra will have established their vedic fires under his guidance. This represents a major change in direction for the *śrauta* traditions of Maharashtra. Indeed, until about ten years ago it was safe to say that most of the dozen or so *āhitāgnis* of Maharashtra were quite elderly, that most of them had no descendants interested in establishing the vedic fires for themselves, and that the *śrauta* tradition in Maharashtra was heading inexorably towards extinction. Now the number of *agnihotrin*s in Maharashtra is nineteen, and it appears that this list will grow rather than shrink, bucking both the temporal trend of the last several centuries and the geographical trend in which the number has diminished everywhere in India. 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.

Only three *āhitāgnis* remain from the once prominent Kātyāyana *sūtra* tradition of northern Maharashtra. They are Balkrishna Ambekar from Nasik, Selukar Maharaj from Gangakhed, and a gentleman surnamed Pathak, from the town of Deolgaon Raja in Buldhana district in northern Maharashtra, about whom I have little further information. Śrī Ambekar, the custodian of an old lineage of *śrauta* ritualists, has not so far performed a *soma* sacrifice, though for decades he has regularly performed his *agnihotra* and *darśapūrṇamāsau*. Occasionally he performs the *cāturmāsya*s, a series of seasonal sacrifices,²⁵ and a long series of *iṣṭis* (rites modeled on the new and full moon sacrifices) called *nakṣatra-sattra*, offerings of rice-dough balls (*puroḍāśa*) to various deities said to rule the lunar asterisms (*nakṣatra*).

Śrī Selukar, perhaps the most active performer of *soma* sacrifices in contemporary India, unlike Śrī Ambekar, does not hail from a family of *śrautins*. As expected, he performs his *agnihotra* and *darśapūrṇamāsau* according to the ritual procedures of the Kātyāyana ŚS. However, he performs his frequent and usually exotic *soma* sacrifices with the *ādhvaryava* of Visvanath Srouthy, which is to say with the assistance of South Indian Kṛṣṇayajurvedins who follow the ritual of the Āpastamba *sūtra*. This situation initially created a good deal of confusion and compromise, primarily because the Kātyāyana ritual tradition of the Śuklayajurveda

²⁵ In modern times the norm has been to perform the *cāturmāsya*s consecutively over a period of five days (*samasta, yathāprayogapakṣa*); cf. Bhide 1979: 178–179.

maintains five fires, while that of the Kṛṣṇayajurveda maintains three.²⁶ Perhaps more of a problem is that the *yājamāna* (the role of the sacrificer) in the soma sacrifice is a good deal simpler in the Kātyāyana tradition, as the *sūtras* of the Kṛṣṇayajurveda enjoin considerably more mantras for the *yājamāna*. The solution arrived at by Śrī Selukar and Visvanath Srouthy, unique so far as I am aware in the history of *śrauta* ritual, is to employ the five fires required by the Kātyāyana *śākhā*, but to follow most of the ritual procedures for the soma sacrifice according to the injunctions of the Kṛṣṇayajurveda. The only exception to this, as far as I am aware, is the *yājamāna*, which follows the Śuklayajurveda practice of prescribing minimal mantras. Śrī Selukar still follows the Śāṅkhāyana *hautra* in his new and full moon sacrifices, as prescribed in the Kātyāyana *Hautrapariśiṣṭa* (cf. Kashikar 1984), in spite of employing ritualists who follow the Āśvalāyana *hautra* and Āpastamba *ādhvaryava* in his soma sacrifices. This is now all but unavoidable because, as noted above, the Śāṅkhāyana *hautra* in Maharashtra appears to be extinct.²⁷ This mixing and matching of *śākhā* affiliation according to convenience, availability, and ideology may be cited as a good example of the authenticity of Selukar Maharaj's performances, at least if authenticity is distinguished by deviations which occur due to changing circumstances within a vigorous tradition. Naturally enough, however, certain *yājñikas* would contest this assertion and claim that the adoption of ritual procedures from a *śākhā* other than one's own is a compromise of serious enough proportion to render Śrī Selukar's performances inauthentic and invalid. This brings us back to the elusiveness, and, I would suggest, the emptiness, of the notion of authenticity.

The following table has three columns. The first lists the names of the *agnihotrin*s. The second identifies their vedic *śākhā* along with that of the accompanying *ādhvaryava śākhā* for Ṛgvedins and *hautra śākhā* for Yajurvedins. For example, if the *agnihotrin* is a Ṛgvedin and employs the *ādhvaryava* of the Āpastamba *sūtra*, this will be indicated by "Āśv/Āp." If the *agnihotri* is a Yajurvedin who follows the Satyāṣāḍha-Hiraṇyakeśi *sūtra* of the Taittirīya *śākhā* of the Kṛṣṇayajurveda and employs ritualists of the Āśvalāyana *sūtra* of the Ṛgveda for his *hautra*, this will be indicated by "Hir/Āśv." The Sāmaveda *śākhā* will not be indicated, as all the soma sacrificers in Maharashtra and Goa employ Sāmavedins belonging either to the Kauthuma *śākhā* (from Tirupati or Chennai) or the Rāṇāyanīya *śākhā* (from N. Kanara Dist.). Though members of the Kauthuma *śākhā* follow the Lāṭyāyana Śrautasūtra while members of the Rāṇāyanīya *śākhā* follow

²⁶ The additional fires are the *sabhya* and *āvasathya*; see Smith 1982.

²⁷ It is possible to argue that in antiquity there was a closer affinity between the *śrauta* traditions of Kerala and Maharashtra, through coastal Karnataka, as both the Nambudiri *śrautins* of Kerala and the Ṛgvedins of Maharashtra employed both the Śāṅkhāyana *hautra* and the Baudhāyana *ādhvaryava*.

the Drāhyāyana Śrautasūtra, there are practically no performative differences between them, and no differences at all that impact on their choreographed interaction with the *ādhvaryava* and *hautra*. The third column lists the village of residence and in some cases the addresses of the *agnihotris*. I have arranged the list according to *svaśākhā*, that is by the vedic sub-school which the *agnihotrin* follows through family descent. Ten follow the Āśvalāyana school of the ṚV, five the Satyāśāḍha-Hiraṇyakeśi school of the KYV, and four the Kātyāyana school of the ŚYV. Notes on the *agnihotrin*s follow the list. In a few instances I was able to gather no information beyond what appears in the table.

TABLE: List of Agnihotrin in Maharashtra²⁸

No.	Name	śākhā	Residence
1.	Śrī Nārāyaṇa Govinda (Nānā) Kāle	Āśv/Āp	Śrī Yogirāj Ved-Vijñān Āśram, Kasarwadi, Barshi, Dist. Solapur.
2.	Śrī Raghunāth (Ketan) Kāle	Āśv/Āp	Ved-Vijñān Āśram, Kasarwadi, Barshi
3.	Śrī Yogeś Kāle	Āśv/Āp	Ved-Vijñān Āśram, Kasarwadi, Barshi
4.	Śrī Vijay Mānerikar	Āśv/Āp	Ved-Vijñān Āśram, Kasarwadi, Barshi
5.	Śrī Aniruddha Ṭhākur	Āśv/Baudh-Āp	Tal. Rajpur, Dist. Ratnagiri
6.	Śrī Prasād Atre	Āśv/Āp	Solapur
7.	Śrī Vināyaka Keśava Kālī	Āśv/Āp	Nagpur
8.	Śrī Bhīmasenācārya Varkheḍkar	Āśv/Āp	Dattaghat, Pandharpur
9.	Śrī Narasiṃhācārya	Āśv/Āp	Nilanga, Dist: Latur
10.	Śrī Rājārām A. Kuḷkarnī	Āśv/Baudh	Narsobawadi, Dist. Kolhapur
11.	Śrī Kṛṣṇa Śāstrī Bāpat	Hir/Āśv	Nagpur
12.	Śrī Mahadev Hari Āpte	Hir/Āśv	Mhapsa, Goa (1969)
13.	Śrī Hari Āpte	Hir/Āśv	Mhapsa, Goa (1980)
14.	Śrī Dīpak Āpte	Hir/Āśv	Mhapsa, Goa
15.	Śrī Rāmacandra Vāsudev Nātū	Hir/Āśv	Vishrambag, Dist. Sangli
16.	Śrī Raṅganāth Kṛṣṇa Selūkar	Kāty in <i>iṣṭi</i> Āp/Āśv in <i>soma</i>	Gangakhed, Parbhani Dist.
17.	Śrī Bālkrṣṇa Ambekar	Kāty/Śāṅkh	Nasik
18.	Śrī Śrīkānt Jicakar	Kāty in <i>iṣṭi</i> Āp/Āśv in <i>soma</i>	Nagpur
19.	Śrī Pāthak	Kāty	Deolgaon Raja, Buldana Dist.

²⁸ Though in the list I am providing the names with full romanized diacritics, I have decided not to do that elsewhere in this essay.

I. Nana Kale commenced the practice of *śrauta* ritual in 1981, inspired by Ranganath Selukar and the disciples of Gajanan Maharaj of Akkalkot. To date Śrī Kale has performed four *nakṣatrasattras*, four *agniṣṭomas*, three *agnicayanas*, one *sarvatomukha*, one *pauṇḍarīka*, and a *gavāmayana*, an impressive dossier for any age. In 1983 Nana Kale founded the Sri Yogiraj Ved-Vijnan Ashram, a vedic *pāṭhaśālā*, a few kilometres outside the town of Barshi, in Solapur District of Maharashtra, on his own farmland. Though Śrī Kale is a Ṛgvedin, he sent his three sons to vedic *pāṭhaśālās* in South India to learn the *svādhyāya* (memorization and recitation) of three different Vedas, the Ṛgveda, the Taittirīya Saṃhitā, and the Sāmaveda (Rāṇāyanīya *śākhā*).²⁹ The *pāṭhaśālā* became very successful, with a steady number of thirty-five to forty students attending since the end of the 1980s. It is now the most successful Veda *pāṭhaśālā* in Maharashtra.³⁰ The students in the *pāṭhaśālā* are trained in *svādhyāya* of the vedic texts taught by Nana Kale's three sons. In addition, representatives of other *śākhās* were brought in to teach, including young but thoroughly educated students of the Mādhyandina and Kāṇva *śākhās* of the Śuklayajurveda. Eventually, Śrī Kale was able to draw on his own stable of students to officiate in both his own sacrifices and those of other *agnihotrins*, from *ādhāna* to *sattra*.³¹

This has enabled him to address one of the primary problems in the present-day performance of *śrauta* ritual, namely a scarcity of trained officiants (*ṛtvik*). He has alleviated this situation by training a sufficient number of officiants of all the necessary *śākhās* at his *pāṭhaśālā*. Not only have these students memorized vedic texts, but they have learned the *ārtvijya* or performative aspects of *śrauta* practice from specialists Nana Kale brought in from Karnataka (Bidar and Gokarn) and Andhra Pradesh (East Godavari and Guntur Districts).³² Thus, Nana Kale's students are trained in carpentry for the purpose of manufacturing sacrificial utensils

²⁹ Nana Kale's younger (unmarried) son Caitanya has completed study in Rāṇāyanīya *śākhā* of SV in Honnavar. In 1993, Nana Kale sent six students from Maharashtra to Thogur, near Srirangam (T.N.) to learn the Jaiminīya SV. After they complete their studies in 2002 they will teach this *śākhā* in the *pāṭhaśālā* in Barshi. Presently he has eight students learning the Kauthuma SV in Madipadu (Dist: Guntur, A.P.). These students will also complete their studies in 2002 and rejoin the *pāṭhaśālā* near Barshi in order to teach this *śākhā*. Teaching of the Kāṇva *śākhā*, taught sporadically, will begin regularly in 2001.

³⁰ In addition to his *pāṭhaśālā* near Barshi, Nānā Kāle is operating a branch office in Akola called the Dongare Mahārāj Ved-Vijñān Āśram. This *pāṭhaśālā* has 20 students for ṚV, taught by Caitanya Kale, who is also training students in the Rāṇāyanīya SV. Also Śrī Kale is running a *pāṭhaśālā* in Trivandrum called Sītārām Āñjaneya Veda Kendra. This *pāṭhaśālā* has four teachers of four vedic recensions, and forty students (Jan. 2000). He intends to open branches in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh in the next year or two.

³¹ Thus far, Nana Kale has trained twelve students the *ādhvaryava* for soma sacrifices, twenty for officiating in *iṣṭis*, twenty for *audgātra*, and a large number for *hautra*.

³² David Knipe has studied these *śrauta* traditions intensively over the last twenty years; see Knipe 1997.

(*yajñapātrāṇi*, *yajñāyudhāni*).³³ In addition, they are able to manufacture bricks (*iṣṭakā*) for the *agnicayana* and have studied all aspects of the geometry of vedic ritual, from measuring the size of bricks to measuring the ritual enclosures (*vihāra*).³⁴ Since 1994, officiants from Nana Kale's *pāṭhaśālā* have performed *agniṣṭomas* and other more difficult soma sacrifices in many places in India, including Mumbai, where they performed a *sarvatomukha* of Gosvami Vallabharayji, an *āhitāgni* from Surat, Gujarat; several *agniṣṭomas* of Gosvami Gokulotsava Maharaj of Indore,³⁵ and a *sarvatomukha* of Dendukuri Somayaji near Vijayawada.³⁶ Most recently Śrī Kale's students officiated in the first ever vedic soma sacrifice held in the United States, a *vājapeya* with *ājyapaśu*, performed in July 2000 in New York City by Gokulotsavaji Maharaj, who, like Vallabharayji, is a *gosvāmin* of the Vallabha *sampradāya*.³⁷

Nana Kale's *śrauta* performances beyond *agnihotra* and *darśapūrṇamāsa* are the following:

- *agnyādhāna*: Nanded, April 4, 1981.
- *nakṣatrasattra* (cf. TB 3.1, BaudhŚS 28.3–4): 1981, 1990, 1991, 1992, Barshi. The three most recent of these were performed in order to train students in *ādhvaryava* and *hautra*.

³³ See Dharmadhikari 1989.

³⁴ Nana Kale is also teaching his students and teachers at the *pāṭhaśālā* "the internal sacrifice", what he regards as the essence of the *śrautayajña*, through *śaktipāt dikṣā*, emphasis on regular twice a day practice of *śaktipāt sādhanā*, as well as *yogāsanas*, *prāṇāyāma*, and meditation on the deities in the *śrauta* rituals. This holistic view of vedic ritual practice is described in his 41 pp. pamphlet in Marathi: *Śraut Yajñāṅgī Devatādhyān Vicār* ('Explanation of deity meditation in *Śrauta* Ritual'); see Kāḷe, n.d.

³⁵ On Gokulotsavaji Maharaj and his recent performance of an *agniṣṭoma* in London, see Smith 2000.

³⁶ The name Dendukuri occurs frequently in KP, cf. #59–62, 76, 87, 131, 144, 147, 203, 204. The present Dendukuri is probably #147 or one of his descendants.

³⁷ The officiating crew was entirely replaced from the crew employed in Gokulotsavaji's 1996 *agniṣṭoma* in London. It is highly unusual for an *āhitāgni* to employ a different crew of officiants for different soma sacrifices. See Smith 2000 for details of the 1996 London *agniṣṭoma*. The New York *vājapeya* was unusual in several respects. First, it was held indoors, in the Gujarati Samaj Hall in Queens. Second, the ritualized race of seventeen chariots (*ājīdhāvana*), which is one of the defining features of a *vājapeya*, was represented by a single chariot. The chariot consisted of a small wooden carousel horse on wheels, similar to those found in playgrounds or supermarkets for the amusement of young children, hitched to a mid-sized portable *maṇḍir* with four corner-posts, a roof, and a small *vimāna*, commonly used in India as a household temple. The *maṇḍir* was, in turn, mounted on a wagon. Led by the *yajamāna* and his wife, this ersatz chariot made one *pradakṣinā* around the *yāgaśālā* beginning on the north side. The portable *maṇḍir* had within it an elaborate wooden box (*jhāṅpī*, Hindi) on which was mounted a Ṭhākūrjī or image of Kṛṣṇa. The list of unique features of this *vājapeya* could be continued at some length. I intend to write a more complete account at a later date.

- *agniṣṭoma*: Yavatmal, 1983 (*ājyapaśu*). In accordance with the new breed of *śrautins* in Maharashtra, Śrī Kale offered ghee as a substitute for the sacrificial animal.
- *agniṣṭoma*: 1994, Barshi (*ājyapaśu*).
- *nirūdhapaśubandha*: August 1994 (*pratyakṣapaśu*). In 1994 Śrī Kale decided that he had no “spiritual experience” with the ghee animal, so turned to the actual (*pratyakṣa*) animal. He reported a much improved experience as a result of following the vedic injunctions to the letter.³⁸
- *maitrāvaruṇa paśubandha*: Sept. 1994 (*pratyakṣapaśu*). This *kāmya* sacrifice is for the purpose of generating rain. Nana Kale reported that following this *yajña*, it rained heavily throughout that night. This convinced him that the *pratyakṣapaśu* was rightly enjoined by the *ṛṣis*.
- *agniṣṭoma*: 27 March – 1 April 1995, Barshi (*pratyakṣapaśu*).
- *sāgnicit-sarvatomukha* (ĀpŚS 22.11.12–13) with *ekasāhasracayana*: 18–28 Feb. 1996, Barshi.
- *dvisāhasracayana paunḍarikakratu*: 22 May – 21 June, 1997, Barshi.³⁹
- *trisāhasracayana dvādaśāha*: 12 March – 17 April 1998, Barshi.
- *gavāmayana saṃvatsarasattra* with six *dikṣita agnihotrins*, Nana Kale as *gṛhapati*: 27 March 1999 – 15 April 2000.⁴⁰ After the conclusion of this yearlong series of soma sacrifices, each of the six *āhitāgnis* will perform an *agniṣṭoma* separately.

2. Raghunath (Ketan) Kale, the eldest of three sons of Nana Kale, is the principal *ācārya* in ṚV in the Ved-Vijñan Ashram near Barshi. He established the fires with a *somapūrvādhāna* (with *pratyakṣapaśu*) 8–13 May 1997 in Barshi. The *ṛtviks*

³⁸ Personal communication.

³⁹ The *paunḍarika* is part of the “exotic” repertoire of *somayājins* of Andhra Pradesh, along with the *vājapeya*. They are performed because of their mention in a verse of the Rāmāyaṇa (6.116.81, crit. ed.): *paunḍarikāśvamedhābhyāṃ vājapeyena cāsakṛt | anyaiś ca vividhair yajñair ayajat pārthivarṣabhaḥ*. Even under the best of conditions, however, the performance of an *āśvamedha* is impossible today. However, see #8 below. The point, though, is that the Rāmāyaṇa wields influence even on the composition of certain *śrauta* traditions.

⁴⁰ In order to prepare for this performance, Śrī Kale, in collaboration with certain other ritualists from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, composed a complete *prayoga*. This libretto, which took two years of painstaking labor to prepare, included the mantras and choreographic instructions for the *ādhvaryava*, *hautra*, and *audgātra*. This was undertaken because of such a *prayoga* was unavailable. It is possible that a *sattra* of this nature has not been performed for centuries. In order to obtain the officiating manpower for this *sattra*, Śrī Kale performed six *somapūrvādhānas* on new *agnihotrins*. Because these new *agnihotris* are still *brahmacārins*, which is to say unmarried students in the *pāṭhaśālā*, many *śrauta* experts objected. Śrī Kale attempted to answer these objections, and has vowed to perform an *aṅgirasasattra* with seventeen *agnihotrins* in three years, after these *brahmacārī agnihotrins* are married. The unmarried *agnihotrins* thus fall into a special category and are not counted on the list given above.

were other students at the Ashram. He performed an *atyagniṣṭoma* with *agnicayana* in 1998 in Barshi. He has served as *hotṛ* in many soma sacrifices, including the year long *gavāmayana sattra* performed by his father and the *vājapeya* in New York in July 2000.

3. Yogesh Kale, the second son of Nana Kale, is the primary *ācārya* for the Taittirīya *pāṭha* at the Ved-Vijnan Ashram. He established his fires with a *soma-pūrvādhāna* (with *pratyakṣapaśu*) from 15–20 May 1997 in Barshi. Again, the *ṛtviks* were other students at the Ashram.

4. Vijay Manerikar has learned the ṚV through the *kramapāṭha* and has taught ṚV in the Ved-Vijnan Ashram since 1992. He established the fires with a *prākṛta agnyādhāna* in May 1999 in Barshi, and performed an *agniṣṭoma* (with *pratyakṣapaśu*) as a separate procedure immediately following his *ādhāna* in May 1999. He officiated as the *maitrāvaruṇa* in the *gavāmayana* performed by Nana Kale in 1999–2000 and in the *vājapeya* in New York in 2000.

5. Aniruddha Thakur, who resides in a village in Ratnagiri district in southern coastal Maharashtra, is a follower of the Āśvalāyana *sūtra* tradition of the ṚV. He adopted the Baudhāyana *ādhvaryava* from Gokarn in his *agnyādhana*, but follows the Āpastamba *prayoga* for the *darśapūrṇamāsau* published in the *Darśapūrṇamāsaprakāśaḥ*. I have no other information on him.

6. Prasad Mahadev Atre of Solapur performed *agnyādhāna* along with the *vrātyastoma* soma sacrifice in Barshi from 1 to 6 May 1997, under the guidance of Nana Kale, with students from his *pāṭhaśālā* serving as *ṛtviks*. Śrī Atre's father, Āhitāgni Mahadev Vishnu (Nana) Atre, was a close disciple of Gajanan Maharaj of Akkalkot, and was a very active *somayājin*. Prasad Atre's wife is a non-brahman (Maratha); therefore his marriage is termed *anuloma*. For this reason, Visvanath Srothly, who planned and directed the soma and other major *śrauta yajñas* performed by Nana Atre, was reluctant to grant him initiation into *śrauta* practice (despite there being no injunction prohibiting this in the ritual *sūtras*). After intense negotiations with Gajanan Maharaj's son, Dr. Shrikant Rajimwale, also well-versed in vedic ritual, it was decided that if he performed the *vrātyastoma* (with *ājyapaśu*) as *prāyaścitta*, he could then perform the regular *agnyādhāna*.⁴¹ However,

⁴¹ On the *vrātyastoma* see ĀpŚS 22.5.4–14, KātyŚS 22.4. Pañcaviṃśa Br. 17.1–4 describes four kinds of *vrātyastoma*. The purpose is to draw back into the vedic fold one who is *patitasāvītrika*, viz., one who has fallen (*patita*) from brahmanical status because he never received the *gāyatrī* mantra (*sāvītrika*), which is to say one who has never undergone the *upanayana saṃskāra*; cf. Kane 1974: 376ff., 385–386. KātyŚS 22.4.30 states that the *vrātyastoma* renders one socially appropriate (*vyavahāryā bhavanti*).

Visvanath Srouthy passed away before this could be undertaken. Thus, it fell to Nana Kale to organize these performances.

It is not inappropriate here to list the major *śrauta yajñas* performed by Śrī M. V. Atre, from his *ādhāna* in 1970 up to his passing away in 1994. All of these performances were organized by Visvanath Srouthy, whose greatest pleasure was organizing exotic *śrauta yajñas* and composing *prayogas* for them. Śrī Atre performed twelve soma sacrifices (numbers 1, 2, 6, and 10 in the following list of sixteen are not soma sacrifices):⁴² (1) *agnyādhāna* – Solapur, 1970; (2) *cāturmāsya* – Solapur, 1972; (3) *agniṣṭoma* – Solapur, 1978; (4) *ātreyā catūrātra* with *agnicayana* – Solapur, 1980; (5) *vājapeya* – Solapur, 1982; (6) *nakṣatra sattra* – Nellore, 1983; (7) *agniṣṭoma* – Chiplun, 1984; (8) *mahāvra* – Bhopal, 1985; (9) *dvisāhasracayana* – Una (Saurashtra), 1986; (10) *divaḥśyeni apadhā svarga-sattra* – Solapur, 1988; (11) *goṣṭomokthya*⁴³ – Solapur, 1989; (12) *aptoryāma* – Zadoli (Raj.), 1990; (13) *agniṣṭoma* – Hardwar, 1991; (14) *vṛṣabha mahā-somayāga* – Hardwar, 1992; (15) *indrastut indrastoma atirātra* – Hardwar, 1993; (16) *atirātra* – Akkalkot, 1994.

7. Vinayak Keshav Kali of Nagpur is a learned *śrautin* who follows the *Āśvalāyana sūtra* of the ṚV. He is a *nityāgnihotrin* who adopted the *Āpastamba ādhvarya* performed by Mānika Dīkṣit of Bidar and the Gokarna *hautra* in his lone *agniṣṭoma*, performed in 1979 in Karnataka.

8. Bhimasenacarya Varkhedkar is the son of Balacarya Varkhedkar (KP #341) from Pandharpur who died Jan. 1990. Balacarya Varkhedkar's performances included an *agnicayana* performed in 1975, a *vājapeya* performed in 1984, and an *aśvamedha*, performed in Hyderabad in 1985. This highly modified *aśvamedha* was performed under the supervision of Agnihotram Ramanuja Tatachiar of Chennai. The Varkhedkars are Mādhva Ṛgvedins who employ the *piṣṭapaśu* in their soma sacrifices. In the *aśvamedha*, Balacarya Varkhedkar used a silver replica for the royal steed (whose wandering was of course not possible under the circumstances), and a *piṣṭa* horse for offering. Bhimasenacarya was the *adhvaryu*. I have no information on the latter's soma sacrifices.

9. Śrī Narasimhacharya from Nilanga in Latur district is also a Ṛgvedin of the Madhva *sampradāya*. He established the fires in 1998 and has once performed the *cāturmāsya*s, according to the *Āpastamba sūtra*. He has not so far performed a

⁴² Cf. Kashikar & Parpola 1983, #150, Rentachintala Venkatachala Yajulu of Vijayawada, who performed twenty *somayāgas* up to 1975.

⁴³ This was probably a modified *gosava*, cf. *ĀpŚS* 22.12.17, 13.1–3, rather than a *goṣṭoma*, mentioned in 22.13.22. The former is an *ekāha*, following the model of an *ukthya*; cf. TB 2.7.6, PB 19.13.

soma sacrifice, though he has made it clear that if he did he would offer a *piṣṭapaśu*, as is the tradition among Mādhyas.

10. Rajaram Kulkarni is a Ṛgvedin who established the fires in 1985 in Pune, thus becoming the first *śrauta agnihotrin* in Pune in several decades. However, he is from Narsobawadi in Kolhapur district, and moved back there a few years ago. He performed an *agniṣṭoma* (with *pratyakṣapaśu*) in 1999, in Sagar (Karnataka), in which he adopted the *ādhvaryava* of the Baudhāyana *sūtra*. He has also performed the *cāturmāsya*s many times. It is noteworthy that he is the only remaining Ṛgvedin *agnihotrin* who has fully retained the once prevalent Baudhāyana *ādhvaryava*. The remaining Ṛgvedins now utilize the convenient *prayoga* in Kimjavadekar's *Darśapūrṇamāsaprakāśaḥ*, which is based on the ĀpŚS.

11. Krishna Shastri Bapat from Nagpur follows the Hiraṇyakeśi *sūtra*. He established the *tretāgni* in 1980 with a *somapūrvādhāna* (with *ājyapaśu*). He performs his regular *darśapūrṇamāsa* according to his own *sūtra*, utilizing the *yājusaḥautra*. However, for his *somapūrvādhāna* he adopted the Baudhāyana *ādhvaryava*. Both the *ādhvaryava* and the *hautra* came from Gokarn.

12. Mahādev Hari Apte (KP #308) was the first disciple of Gajanan Maharaj to establish the vedic *tretāgni*. His *agnyādhāna* was performed along with an *agniṣṭoma* (*somapūrvādhāna*) in Akkalkot in 1969. He follows the Satyāśāḍha *sūtra* for his new and full moon sacrifices, but selected the Āśvalāyana *ādhvaryava* for his *agniṣṭoma* rather than the Baudhāyana *sūtra*, as was traditional for *āhitāgnis* of the Satyāśāḍha-Hiraṇyakeśi school. Though he continues to perform his *agnihotra* and *darśapūrṇamāsa*, he has not performed any further soma sacrifices. As is usually the case in Maharashtra, he employs Kimjavadekar's *Darśapūrṇamāsaprakāśaḥ* for his *iṣṭis*. Though it follows the procedures of the ĀpŚS, in fact there are very few differences between that and the procedures of the Sat-HirŚS. He keeps his *tretāgni* in a large room with an earthen floor adjoining his home in Mhapsa, Goa. The room is large enough for the *tretāgnis* of his two sons as well.

13. Hari Mahadev Apte is the eldest son of Śrī Mahadev Hari Apte. He established his fires in a *somapūrvādhāna* in Solapur in 1980. He performed *agniṣṭomas* (with *ājyapaśu*) in Mumbai in 1996 and 1997, employing the students of Nana Kale for the Āpastamba *ādhvaryava* and the remaining *ārtvijya*.

14. Dipak Mahadev Apte is the younger son of Mahadev Hari Apte. He established the fires in a *somapūrvādhāna* in Barshi in 1997, under the supervision of Nana Apte and his students.

15. Ramacandra Vasudev Natu, the younger brother of Śaṅkar Vāsudev Nātū (d. 1985; KP #324) follows the Hiranyakeśi *sūtra*. He performed his *agnyādhāna* in 1955 and periodically performs the *cāturmāsya*s. In his *darśapūrṇamāsau* he employs the *yājuṣahautra*. He has not performed any soma sacrifices.

16. Ranganath Krishna Selukar took *smārtādhāna* in 1966 and *śrautādhāna* in 1972. He performs *agnihotra*, *darśapūrṇamāsa*, and *cāturmāsya*s in accordance with the KātyāṢṢ and the Kātyāyanahautrapariśiṣṭa, engaging members of his own *śākhā* as *ṛtviks*, but has adopted the Āpastamba *ādhvaryava* (Visvanath Srouthy of Nellore) and Āśvalāyana *hautra* (Gokarna Ṛgvedins) for soma sacrifices. He insists on offering *ājyapaśu*, which qualified officiants of his own *śākhā* refuse to do. He has performed soma sacrifices nearly every year since 1980. I do not have a complete list of his soma and other sacrifices, but they include the following:

- *cāturmāsya*: every year 1974–80, most recently in Barsi, 13–17 Nov. 1980.
- *agniṣṭoma*: 1980 in Nanded.
- *sāgnicit-viśvajit-sarvaprṣṭha-atirātra* (with *dvisāhasracayana*): 1981 in Nanded.
- *svarga sattra*: 26–31 July 1981, in Kurukshetra .
- *vājapeya*: 30 April – 16 May, 1982, in Latur.
- *aptoryāma* with *dvisāhasracayana*: 4–15 April 1983, in Beed.
- *abhijit atirātra* with *trisāhasracayana*: 30 April – 11 May 1986, in Beed.
- *jāmadagnyacatūrātra*: 18 May – 15 June 1986, in Jalna.
- *gavāmayana saṃvatsarasattra*: May 1999 – May 2000, in Gangakhed.

17. Balkrishna Hari Ambekar of Nasik (son of KP #318) is the only remaining *āhitāgni* in Nasik. His father, Hari Śaṅkar Jośi Ambekar (d. 1972), performed an *agnicayana* (1958) and *vājapeya* (1959). Śrī Ambekar has not so far performed a soma sacrifice, but has declared that if so, he would use *pratyakṣapaśu*. This has proven to be an inhibiting factor in the current climate in Maharashtra, especially in the pilgrimage city of Nasik. Though a few *vaidikas* in Nasik are capable of performing an *agniṣṭoma* according to both the Kātyāyana and Śāṅkhāyana *sūtra* and *prayoga* traditions, it is unlikely that this will occur. Śrī Ambekar follows the Kātyāyana *hautra* in his *iṣṭis*.

18. Dr. Shrikant Jichkar of Nagpur, holds sixteen advanced academic degrees including M.D., M.B.A., and D.Litt. (Sanskrit). In addition, he was formerly an I.A.S. officer, Member of Parliament, and Chancellor of Kalidas Sanskrit University. Though he belongs to the Śuklayajurveda, Mādhyandina *śākhā* (Kātyāyana *sūtra*), he followed the Āpastamba *sūtra* in his soma sacrifices. Nana Kale's students have always served as officiants. He is not a *nityāgnihotrin*, but performs a *punarādhāna* (see Smith 1987: 77–86, 367–441) prior to each major *śrauta* per-

formance. This abandonment of the *agnihotra* and *darśapūrṇamāsau* is frowned on by nearly all *agnihotrin*s. Śrī Jichkar established his vedic fires with a *soma-pūrvādhāna* (with *ājyapaśu*) in 1996. He subsequently performed an *agniṣṭoma* (with *pratyakṣapaśu*) in 1997, a *nirudhapaśubandha* in 1998, and *cāturmāsya* and *āgrayaṇa iṣṭi* in 1998.

19. Śrī Pathak from Deulgaon Raja, Buldana district, established the fires in 1995. He follows the Kātyāyana *sūtra* tradition. Another recent *agnihotrin* from the same town, Śrī Surangalikar, performed his *agnyādhāna* in 1979. He also follows the Kātyāyana school, and never performed a soma sacrifice. I have no further information on these *agnihotrin*s. Because I am uncertain whether Śrī Surangalikar is still alive, I cannot include him as another living *agnihotrin* of Maharashtra.

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