

**REGIONALE UND ÜBERREGIONALE FAKTOREN IM DER  
ENTWICKLUNG VEDISCHER BRAHMANENGRUPPEN IM  
MITTELALTER**

(Materialien zu den vedischen Schulen, 5)

In: *Regionale Tradition in Südasien*, ed. H. Kulke and D. Rothermund.  
*Beiträge zur Südasienforschung 104*, Heidelberg 1986, 37-76

*Summary* (p.75-76)

The early development of the various groups and communities of Vedic Brahmins and their respective Vedic schools (śākhā) is still largely unknown\*. However, beginning with the 3rd century A.D. land grants to Brahmins are well documented on copper plates. A careful analysis of the grants permits a reconstruction of the history of the śākhās in the Middle Ages. In addition there are other sources for such a reconstruction: medieval commentaries on grammatical, philosophical, and Vedic texts; colophons of Vedic, and, occasionally, other manuscripts; the few systematic descriptions of Vedic Śākhās and their habitats (Vedavṛkṣa, Prapañcahṛdaya, Mahārṇava on Car. Vy.); accounts of early Euro-pean travellers, the Census of India, and recent reports on the survival and spread of the Vedas in India. A detailed survey of Vedic śākhās has unfortunately never been attempted although Bhandarkar emphasized the need for such a survey more than a century ago.

A few general, pan-Indian factors in the spread and distribution of Vaidik Brahmin communities also have to be taken into consideration:

1. The four Vedas are generally not represented equally well in each region. Due to its importance in ritual, the Yajurveda is usually the most frequently represented one among them, followed by Ṛgveda and Sāmaveda, - the Arthaveda trailing far behind, if it is represented at all.

2. The tendencies of certain dynasties to 'import' Brahmins from a particular area (mostly situated in North India) has to be seen in the

context of their respective religious and dynastic interest as well as their conflicts with neighbouring states;

3. the dimensions of the influx of Brahmins from another area have to be gauged, - not an easy task in the case of slow migration (e.g. the Nepalese Kumai).

4. sporadic restauration of certain schools by interested local Brahmins, effected through invitation of śākhā representatives from (often) geographically distant areas has been in evidence during the last few centuries.

What emerges is, first of all, the well-known division of India into two large areas, those of North and South India, represented by the Northern White Yajurveda (Mādhy.) and the Southern Black Yajurveda (Taitt.). In addition, however, a large number of more or less secluded regions forming the wide belt of territories between N. and S. India, and ranging from Gujarat via Vidarbha to Orissa, are clearly separate entities and so are some 'marginal' areas like Kashmir, Nepal, Kerala. All of them (and sometimes sub-regions like Benares, Coḷa-Maṇḍala as

\* cf. now my paper-'Tracing Vedic Dialects', lecture at the 6th World Sanskrit Conference, Philadelphia, Oct. 1984.

<p. 76> well) have got their individual peculiarities, often having functioned as areas of retreat for rare schools: Kāṭha in Kashmir, Maitr. in Gujarat, Vādhūla and Jaim. in Kerala, Paipp. in Orissa.

The dynamics of movement and immigration of Vaidik Brahmins communities and śākhās have so far not been studied in detail. Frequently the policies of a particular dynasty have played the major role in the settlement of a Śākhā in a particular territory. This dates back, perhaps, even to the times of the post-Maurya Kāṇva dynasty of Magadha and their Sātavāhana rivals in the South. The religious outlook of a particular śākhā may also have played a role: Tantric learning (Āṅgirasakalpa) of the Paippaladins in Bengal and Orissa, older Vedic traits of the Maitr., a certain openness for pūjā rituals with the Baudh., Hir., and other Taitt. schools, etc.

In studying a particular region like Kashmir, Nepal, Orissa, Kerala or Gujarat, one has to proceed with great care. Similar conditions (e.g. seclusion behind mountain barriers) do not result in a similar structure of the Brahmanical population of a region: One should not expect to find similar patterns of the spread of certain Śākhās or of the rituals they perform, etc. in such regions. Thus whereas Kashmir, Orissa and Kerala prove to be relatively homogeneous in having only one community of Brahmins each, Nepal and Gujarat show a great variety of Brahmin communities (Kashmir: 'Pandits' mainly of the Kāṭha school; Kerala: Nambudiris of the Vādhūla and Baudhāyana Taitt., Jaiminīya and Kauṣītaki schools; Orissa: Utkala Brahmins of the Kāṇva, Paippalāda, Śākala and Kauthuma schools, - but Nepal: Brahmins (all Mādhyandina) of the Doteli, Kumai, Purbe, Rājopadhyāya (Newar) groups, next to a few Sāmavedins and immigrant Taittirīyas; - and more than 100 groups in Gujarat, though the original schools there seem to be Maitr., Kauth., Śaunaka and Śākala.

Generally, it can be stated that a dynasty usually tries to attain or sustain all 3 (or 4) Vedas in a particular region, that the kings try to use locally represented schools for their political ends (e.g. legitimation of their rule), though they often enough invite completely new groups and schools, especially when trying to enforce their grip on a particular territory. Usually the influence of the 'great tradition' of the two large

subdivisions of India, the North and the South, is felt even in the more secluded areas, yet a reflux of local traditions into these major subdivisions can be observed as well, especially when a certain school is re-imported in case a śākhā is threatened by extinction, e.g, the Atharvaveda in Kashmir in 1419; Sāmaveda from Gujarat to Tamil Nadu; Maitrāyaṇīya from Nasik at the beginning of this century to replace the dwindling Caraka tradition of Nagpur. - Details of the distribution of communities and Śākhās may be gleaned from the maps, where a selection of the more important schools and data is presented.