

Vedic *govyacchá* ‘herdsman’

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Abstract

The Old Indo-Aryan word *govyacchá* first occurs in the Middle Vedic literature.¹ Its most significant occurrence is in the important *Rājasūya* ritual, with another significant appearance in the *Puruṣamedha* ‘human sacrifice’ ritual. This reconsideration of its meaning follows Hoffman’s literal interpretation (Hoffmann 1966), but departs from his conclusion, which fails to recognize the actual nature of the position as an occupational term that means ‘herdsman’. The *govyacchá* ‘herdsman’ is then paired with another personage in the *Rājasūya*, the *akṣāvāpa*, another term first occurring in the Middle Vedic literature, and usually translated as ‘dice-keeper’, ‘dice-thrower’, or some such term associated with the game of dice. As the partner to the ‘herdsman’, this term also requires a reconsideration of its meaning, and that the *akṣāvāpa* is also a technical ritual term for the corresponding occupational activity to that of the ‘herdsman’ and means ‘agriculturalist’ or ‘farmer’. Thus these two individuals in the *Rājasūya* represent the economic foundation of society that is required to sustain life by means of their involvement with the growth and nourishment of animals and plants.

1. *govyacchá* and *govikartā*

The word *govyacchá* occurs first in the middle Vedic literature.² The word occurs in two places: the *rājasūya* and the *puruṣamedha*. In the list of the *ratnins* ‘the jeweled ones’, in the *Rājasūya*, the companion to the *akṣāvāpa* is either the *govyaccha* or the *govikarta*. Rau considers the *govyaccha* to be the butcher (Fleischer) and, perhaps, the king’s cook.³

In an illuminating article on this word, Hoffmann provides a more convincing explanation as to his identity: he derives the second member of the compound from *vi+chā* ‘die Haut auseinandersspalten, verletzen, verwunden’.⁴ He cites a denominative form *vichāyāti* ‘sich als brutaler Schläger betätigen, brutal schlagen’⁵ and a derived verb *vich:vyach* ‘mit brutalen schlagen, treiben’.⁶ He provides several examples of the verb:

¹ This literature includes the post-*ṛgvedic* *saṃhitās*, the *brāhmaṇas*, and several *śrauta sūtras*, in particular, the *Baudhāyana* and the *Vādhula śrauta sūtras*.

² *govyacchá*: KS 15.4:1.212.2; VS 30.18; TB 3.4.16; BŚS 12.15.

³ Rau (1957:111). Hillebrandt also referred to him as the King’s cook (Küchenmeister). Rau (1957:111).

⁴ Hoffmann (1966:71)

⁵ Hoffmann (1966:71)

⁶ Hoffmann (1966:71)

ŚBK 4.2.4.12 *údīcīm āti vichāyatēti* ‘treibt sie die (*Somakrayaṇī* (Kuh)) vorbei noch Norden’⁷

TB 1.9.9 *yāt’hā ṛṣab’hāya vāśitā nyāvīcc’hāyāti* / ‘Das ist genau so, wie wenn man eine rindernde Kuh einem Stier (unten hin) zu treibt’.⁸

AVP 6.3.1 *ko vaḥ paścāt prāvichāyat kaḥ purah* ‘Wer trieb euch hinten an, wer vorn?’⁹

He translates the word *govyacchá* accordingly as ‘Kuhstreiber’¹⁰ (‘Cow-driver’). Hoffmann also points out that the word *govycchanī* refers to the whip which drives on the cow(s) (‘zum Kuhstreiben dienden’).¹¹

In BŚS 6.12; 21.11 we find the unique form *vits + ati*, which should also be derived from *vi + chā*:

athaitaṃ somakrayaṇīm agreṇa śālām udīcīm ativitsayanti (6.12) ‘The Soma-purchasing cow is driven in front of the shed to the north.’¹²

somakrayaṇyā ativitsana iti / sadasaḥ kāle ativitsayed iti b / uparavakāla iti śā** (21.11) ‘As for the driving away of the soma-purchasing cow: One should drive away at a spot fixed for the *sadas*, says Baudhāyana. At the spot fixed for the *uparava* holes, says Śālīki.’¹³

This form was not noticed by Hoffmann and its appearance with a dental affricate is significant.¹⁴

Hoffmann compares the word with *govikarta*¹⁵ and observes how the two terms are used interchangeably in the same place in the *Rājasūya*. Interestingly, and significantly, *govyacchá* occurs in the KS and also the early BŚS, but *govikarta* is used in the MS and ŚB. Neither term occurs in the TS, but both terms occur in the *puruṣamedha* section of the TB. The etymology of *govikarta* must be: ‘Cow-cutter’ from *vi + kṛt* ‘to cut up’. The term *govikartā* is understood to be the ‘butcher’. Compare the following from the TB 3.4.16 *yó gām vikṛntantaṃ māṃsām bhikṣamāṇa upatiṣṭhate* ‘who approaches with reverence [i.e. worships] the cow, requesting its cut-up (*vikṛntantaṃ*) meat’

Hoffmann's literal etymology for the term *govyacchá* clearly indicates a task other than ‘butchery’ and, in fact, more clearly reveals the identity of the *govyacchá/govikarta*. Hoffmann makes a distinction between the two and suggests it is the *govyaccha* who drives the cow to the place of slaughter at the hands of the *govikarta*. But this is simply too narrow a task for one who is involved in a solemn ritual such as the *rājasūya*. Rather, we can look for a more comprehensive occupational category and identify the *govyaccha* as the ‘Herdsman’, the one ‘who drives on forcibly [the cattle]’. As a herdsman, one of his tasks would be that of butchery involving both the slaughter and the cutting up of the animal. With the loss of understanding that the *govyacchá* was a herdsman, his function also as a ‘butcher’ found then a

⁷ Hoffmann (1966:63)

⁸ Hoffmann (1966:63)

⁹ Hoffmann (1966:68)

¹⁰ Hoffmann (1966). Mayrhofer in EWA 558 transcribes the two terms with *govyachā* **and** *govyachani*

¹¹ EWA 558.

¹² Kashikar (2003) 2:299.

¹³ Kashikar (2003) 4:1417.

¹⁴ See the article on affricates in the MS by Mehendale (1970).

¹⁵ Hoffmann (1966:68). See also Scharfe (1989:129) and fn. 24.

replacement term with the word *govikarta* ‘one who cuts up the cow’, that is, a ‘butcher’. These actions would have been, most likely, simply aspects of the earlier herdsman’s duty. This would indicate an important change in the social system in which butchers emerge as a distinct occupational group within the context of greater sedentary lifestyle over that of a pastoral one, with the herdsman correspondingly receding into the background.

In the *Puruṣamedha* TB 3.4.16 the three words, all associated with the cow in a significant way, *govyacchá*,¹⁶ *goghātā* and *govikartā* occur together.

pipāsāyāi govyacc^hām / nīṛtyai goghātām / kṣud^hé govikartām /

‘(He sacrifices) the Herdsman to thirst; the slaughterer to Death (*nīṛti*); [and] the butcher (the one who cuts up the cow) to hunger’.

It is possible, and the TB *puruṣamedha* passage suggests this possibility, that the two distinct tasks of first killing the animal (*goghāta*), and then cutting up the animal (*govikarta*) could very well fall to two different individuals. One is directly responsible for taking the life, while the other individual will then butcher the animal into various portions. It would seem that there are three occupations involved here. The term *govikarta* is the one ‘who cuts up the cow/cattle’. We also encounter the term *goghāta* ‘he who slaughters the cow’. But what is significant is that we can see how these latter two terms can equally apply to the activities of a herdsman who would be involved in herding, slaughtering, skinning and butchering. Each of these actions are then related to a corresponding quality: the one who ‘drives on the cattle’, he causes thirst, the slayer of cattle, he brings about their death, and the one who cuts up the meat allays hunger (*govikarta*¹⁷).

Rau was aware of this situation involving separate activities as probably the domain of one person:

Sicher bezeichnen beide Ausdrücke (Fleischer und Koch, dn) den selben Mann, und seine Stellung beweist, dass das Amt in der alten Zeit nicht anrühig war. Rindfleisch galt zur *Brāhmaṇa*-Zeit noch als geschätztes Nahrungsmittel. Wie ändern sollte man sich die Zahlreichen Namen für Fleischer, Köche, Tranchierer, Würzer, usw. erklären.¹⁸

We can reconcile the three distinct activities in the person of a ‘herdsman’ or the one ‘who drives on the cattle’ with slaughtering and cutting up. I suggest we can discern a chronological layering within the text, where we have both a term for the herdsman and the subsequent changes in the socio-economic system of the Middle Vedic period, with the emergence of new and distinct occupational categories that have split off from that of the herdsman.

Importantly, the commentary on the *BŚS* glosses the word *govyaccha-* with *goadhyakṣa-* (xii 15) ‘overseer of the cows’, i.e. a herdsman. Importantly, Sāyana states that the *govikarta-* is the king’s companion on the hunt (*mṛgayāsahāyaka*) and calls him a hunter (*vyādha*) and ‘injurer of cows’

¹⁶ Dumont emends incorrectly to ‘*govyad^hām?*’

¹⁷ Kuhschlächter, Krick (1982:427), fn 1148.

¹⁸ Rau (1957:111).

(*gohimsaka*-) as well.¹⁹ As the ‘companion’, this aspect underscores his association with mobility rather than the sedentary task of butchery. These associations further confirm the conclusion that the *govyaccha* is a ‘herdsman’ and that this was the original meaning of the word.

It was mentioned at the outset that these two terms, *govyaccha* and *govikarta* only occur in the *rājasūya* and the brief reference to them in the *puruṣamedha* in the TB discussed immediately above. These terms occur in two different lists of individuals that are enumerated in the *rājasūya*. The one list covers the daily visit of the *rājā/rājanya* to the *ratnins* ‘jeweled ones’²⁰ and the other list enumerates individuals who receive the *sphya* ‘wooden spade’ passed down to various individuals beginning with the *rājā/rājanya*. The term *ratnin* is difficult for obtaining an exact meaning. The term *ratna* ‘jewel’ also occurs in the ŚB which Rau considers a variant of the term *ratnin*.²¹ Scharfe considers these individuals to be ‘bestowers of gifts’.²² He also refers to them as ‘officers’ and ‘dignitaries’,²³ words that imply a somewhat developed state, which I think is doubtful. The two lists of individuals found in the *rājasūya*, viz. the *ratnin* list and the *sphya* list, only partially correlate.

2. The passing of the *sphya* and the digging out of the *adhidevana*

For the *rājasūya* rite involving the *sphya*, the wooden sword, the activity of the passing of the *sphya*, concludes with the digging out of the *adhidevana* by several variously named individuals. The *sphya* ‘wooden sword’ requires a few words.²⁴ It is an important implement in the *śrautic* ritual. It is symbolically connected with Indra’s *vajra* ‘cudgel’. What is particularly interesting about the word is that it originally meant ‘scapula’. It is significant that in the AV hymn to the rice-porridge (*odana*), the two *sphyas* are equated with two shoulders signaling the connection with the earlier meaning of the word.²⁵ The word still has this primary meaning ‘shoulder’ blade’ in the various Iranian languages.²⁶ We will return to the importance of this earlier meaning of the word with ‘scapula’ within the context of the *rājasūya*.

The *sphya* is used to dig out the *adhidevana*. The *adhidevana* is usually translated as ‘dicing ground’ or ‘dicing pit’.²⁷ But the Middle Vedic texts make it clear that the (*Madhya*)-*adhidevana* is a fire-pit and it appears that it is a specialized term for a particular fire. Furthermore, it is another name for the *sabhya* fire, the Assembly Hall fire.²⁸ The equation *sābhya* = *madhyādhidevana* is explicitly made. I would also suggest that a more likely translation for the *adhidevana* is the ‘divying up fire’, that is, the Assembly Hall

¹⁹ Sāyana on ŚBM 5.3.1.10.

²⁰ These are individuals associated closely with the *rājā/rājanya*. They can be either members of his household or special types of functionaries. Earlier researchers tend to overstate their role within a ‘king’s court’ (Prasad 2015:61, fn 66) and place them within a more developed monarchical society than we encounter in these texts. A longer discussion on these points is outside of the scope of this paper. Eggeling considers them ‘officers’ (SBE 41:53).

²¹ Rau (1957:106).

²² Scharfe (1989:128).

²³ Scharfe (1989:128).

²⁴ On the *sphya* see Sahoo (1991-1992) and especially Janert (1964). For a list of IA correspondences, see entry for *sphya* <http://bharatkalyan97.blogspot.com/2017/02/itihasa-of-yajnyayudhani-weapons-for.html> (accessed 18 March 2020). For images of the *sphya* see Raghu Vira (1934:292) and also Ranade (2006:324).

²⁵ AV 11.3.9 *k’ālah pātram sphyān āmsāv iṣé anūkyē*.

²⁶ See esp. Steblin-Kamensky (1999:173-174)

²⁷ M-W translates with ‘table or board for gambling.’ Lüders 1907:11 also translates *adhidevana* with ‘Würfelbrett. The PW renders the term ‘Spielbrett’.

²⁸ Researchers do not recognize this connection which the ritual texts make absolutely clear. Unfortunately, the heavy weight of tradition in this matter has unduly influenced researchers.

fire, where the division of sacrificial substances occurs.

MS 1.6.11

trīr vā idāṁ virāḍ vyākramata gārhapatya āhavanīyaṁ sábhyaṁ ॥

The *virāḍ* advanced to the three (fires): the *gārhapatya*, the *āhavanīya* and the *sábhya*.

KS 8.7 [=KapS 7.4]

trīr vai virāḍ vyākramata gārhapatya āhavanīyaṁ madhyādhidevanam ॥

The *virāḍ* advanced to the three (fires): the *gārhapatya*, the *āhavanīya* and the *madhyādhidevana*.

Compares also the list of fires in the KS:

KS 6.8=KapS 4.6.7²⁹

*odanapacano gārhapatya āhavanīyo madhyādhidevanam āmantraṇam eṣa vai virāḍ
pañcapada*

The five-footed *Virāḍ*, in truth, constitutes the [five fires]:

Southern Fire (‘the rice-porridge cooking [fire]’) —the Householders Fire— the Guest Fire
– *Madhyādhidevana* – The Announcing Fire

The (*madhya*)-*adhidevana* is very clearly a fire pit and not a dicing area in the *VādhS*.³⁰

dakṣiṇēnāgnim adhidevanam uddhanti

They dig out [*ud+han*] the *adhidevana* fire (*agni*) in the southern area (of the sacrificial complex).

There can be no question that *adhidevana* qualifies *agni* ‘fire’. The *adhidevana* is located in the *Sabhā* and it can be identified with the *sabhya* fire. By understanding this word as referring to a fire and the fire that is located in the *Sabhā* ‘Assembly Hall’, its intimate relationship to the *śrautic* ritual itself can be asserted. It is incorrect to consider the ‘dicing ground’ or ‘dicing pit’ as occupying the same space as the *sabhya* fire. Rather, when the *sabhya* fire is used *in this particular ritual context*, it is called the *adhidevana* or *madhyādhidevana* and not the *sabhya*, just as the ‘southern fire’ or the *dakṣiṇāgni* is also called the *odanapacana*. The *āmantraṇa* fire is also called the *āvasathya* fire.³¹

In an important article on the verbs formed with *-ñ-*, Lubotsky (2011) notes that the verb *dīv* does not enjoy any cognates outside of Sanskrit. He also accepts the usual meaning of ‘to play dice’. Yet, he makes the suggestion that the likely etymological source can be made with IE **deh₂* ‘divide, distribute, cut’. This is precisely the situation we are dealing with in the ritual and with the cow. We can offer the suggestion that the word *adhidevana* is where there is the ‘divying up’ or ‘dividing up’ of the meat shares from a sacrificial animal. The association with the fire indicates the sacrificial shares were cooked there. The verb *dīv* with

²⁹ This sentence is not found in the MS.

³⁰ Ikari (1999).

³¹ See Ranade (2006:112).

the preverb *vi* does not mean ‘to play dice’, but ‘to divvy up [the cut-up shares of the sacrificial animal, here the cow]’. Likewise, the verb *dīv* without the preverb *vi* means ‘to distribute, allot’ and refers to the distribution or allotment of a live animal. In this ritual, it is not made clear exactly who are to be recipients of the ‘cow’ when it is “distributed”. The idea of dicing and playing dice during this and the *Rājasūya* is a mistaken notion that was the result of a misunderstanding of the Middle Vedic rituals. By the time of Classical Sanskrit, the semantic development was ‘to distribute, allot’ → ‘to wager’ ‘to play (dice)’. This later meaning was then erroneously read into the actions of an already archaic and long fallen into disuse ritual. Just as there is the significant cultural shift between the Early Vedic period and the Middle Vedic period, so to there is a considerable gulf between the Middle Vedic period and that of the classical Sanskrit milieu.

3. *Sphya* handed down to the *akṣāvāpa* and the *govyaccha*

Establishing that the *adhidevana* is the same as the Assembly Hall fire (*sabhya*) forces a reexamination of its role in the *rājasūya* and the individuals associated with it. Interestingly, it is to be noted that the lists record different individuals digging out the *adhidevana*. This particular situation provides for an interesting insight into aspects of the development of the *śrautic* ritual during the middle Vedic period.

In the BSS 12.15 the *akṣāvāpa* and the *govyaccha* dig out the *adhidevana* after receiving the *sphya* that has been passed down through certain individuals.

*taṁ samprayacc'atī sūtāya sūtagrāmaṇine sajātāya sajātagrāmaṇine samgrahitre
'kṣāvāpagovyac'āb'hyām antatas tena tau mad'hyato 'd'idevanam udd'atya tisraḥ pañcāśataḥ
sauvarṇān akṣān nivapatas* ॥

He hands it [sc. the *sphya*] sequentially to the annual rules enforcer, [who hands it] to an annual rules enforcer who is a village-leader, [who hands it] to a *sajāta*, [who hands it] to a *sajāta* who is a village leader, [who hands it] to one who collects goods, and finally [he hands it] to a farmer (*akṣāvāpa*) and a herdsman (*govyaccha*). Having dug out the [fire pit for the] divvyng up fire from the middle, they toss down one hundred and fifty tokens of gold (onto the fire pit).³²

4. The Role of the *govyaccha* and the *akṣāvāpa* in the *Videvana* ritual

The text clearly links the *govyaccha* and the *akṣāvāpa* together. Yet, if the *govyaccha* is the herdsman, how is it that the *akṣāvāpa* is really a ‘dice thrower’ or the one in charge of the gambling hall as various commentators, both native and modern take the term? There are good reasons for not accepting this conclusion. Furthermore, we need to completely reevaluate our understanding of the *videvana* ritual. The *videvana* ritual is **not** a ‘dicing’ event and had absolutely nothing to do with dice but rather, it was a ritual, the centrality of which was the cow that symbolized prosperity, fecundity, regeneration, and life itself and was the object of the sacrifice. She was to be sacrificed and distributed to select individuals in their capacity as the guarantors of her sacrificial role for the benefit of society. This was a solemn ritual occasion and there simply was not any ‘gambling’ or ‘dicing’. This faulty interpretation was the result of the

³² Cf. the translation by Kashikar (2003), v.2, 12.15:775. The identification of the functionaries mentioned will be discussed in a separate paper.

complete loss of the ritual within its proper social context and milieu and which then underwent a drastic reinterpretation through the ensuing centuries. We can thus place the *adhidevana* ‘divvying up’ fire and this action within the ritual event, rather than seeking to find ways to accommodate ‘dicing’ and ‘dice-boards’ that seem completely out of character with the ritual activities and substances that belong to the *rājasūya*.

Who then is the *akṣāvāpa*? If the *govyaccha* is the ‘herdsman’ and the *akṣāvāpa* is his counterpart, I suggest that he is an agriculturalist or farmer.³³ This pairing makes perfect sense: the *govyaccha* and the *akṣāvāpa* are the herdsman and the farmer who then represent the *viś*. They represent respectively the two different members of the primary food producing groups. The passing of the *sphya* begins first with the brahmin, then passing the *sphya* to the *rājan/rājanya* and ending with the two food producing groups represented by a herdsman and a farmer. The passing of the *sphya* is a ritual of fecundity, originally probably beginning first with the leader, but then as the brahmins achieve social ascendancy, they emerge as the first mediators of the divine powers that channel the regeneration and procreative powers of plants and animals. The *rāja/rājanya* are the mediators for the temporal powers of control, *kṣatra*. In the passing of the *sphya* during the *videvana* ritual, the *govyaccha* ‘herdsman’ and the *akṣāvāpa* ‘agriculturalist’ are the last to receive it, and it is they who then dig out the fire pit receiving in this symbolic act the regenerative powers over which they are directly involved.

The identification of the two as the farmer and the herdsman provides the logical connection between their simultaneous appearance at this point in the *videvana* ritual and their simultaneous appearance in the *ratnahaviṃsi* on the 12th day. The common denominator that exists between the ‘farmer’ and the ‘herdsman’ is that they together constitute the economic functioning of the *viś*, i.e. agriculture and animal husbandry, and who together receive the *vajra* of Indra. These two represent the *viś* who “forms the basis of the state on which the *brahman* and *kṣatra* rest”³⁴ and “the *brahman* and *kṣatra* are superior to the *viś*.”³⁵

Yet, the herdsman then disappears from this ritual, and only the *akṣāvāpa*, the farmer, remains. In the TS there is no reference to either the *govikarta* or the *govyaccha*. Several reasons can be suggested for his disappearance from the ritual. First of all, he is a cow-killer, and in the society in which *ahiṃsā*- ‘non-injury’³⁶ is emerging as a dominant valued principle in the society, his particular activities now render him impure and unfit for the ritual. Thus they have stopped killing the cow in the ritual and there was no reason for the herdsman to be present since he no longer had any ritual function to perform. We note the various changes in the ritual where different authorities hold very different opinions with regard to sacrificial animals. In the *Videvana* ritual in the BŚS, Baudhāyana states that the cow which is to be divided up is to be killed, while Śālīki states that the cow is to be released. A ritual expert by name of Kātya says many cows are to be sacrificed and for this the *yajamāna* will receive praise!³⁷ This is the wide range of options that

³³ The *akṣāvāpa* is translated as ‘dice-keeper’ and various other permutations on this notion. Just as the *adhidevana* is not a ‘dicing-pit’ or ‘gaming board’, and the *akṣas* are symbolic of shares that in an earlier manifestation of the ritual would have been actual shares, the *akṣāvāpa* has nothing to do with dicing or gambling. A more complete treatment of this entire matter will be presented elsewhere. Only the relevant conclusions are presented here.

³⁴ VI 254; ŚB 11.2.7.16; KB 16.4

³⁵ VI 254; PB 2.8.2; 11.11.9; AB 2.33.1; KS 29.10; TS 2.5.10.1; ŚB 6.4.4.13, etc.

³⁶ Alsdorf (2010), Schmidt (1968), Tull (1996), Heesterman (1984).

³⁷ BŚS 20.16 to BŚS 2.15. See also Kashikar (2003) vol. 4:1355.

are found in this one text alone, but importantly, the non-killing of the cow eventually emerges as the standard.

We see the ambivalence of the killing of the cow in the *saṃhitas* themselves: In the KS 8.7 (=KapS 7.4) (Fire-establishing) it is said that the cow is killed

gām ghnanti tām vidīvyante. tām sabhāsadbhya upaharanti

They slay the cow. **They** divvy up [her shares] (*vi + dīv*); **they** gift (*upa+hr*) her to those sitting in the Assembly hall [which is where the *adhidevana* fire is located.]

In the MS 1.6.11 (Fire-establishing) states (apparently) that the cow is to be set free.

gām asya tad aha sabhāyām dīvyeyuh tasyāḥ parūṃsi na hiṃsyus tām sabhāsadbhya upaharet

They shall distribute his (sc. the sacrificer’s) cow on that day in the Assembly Hall. **They** should not injure her limbs. **He** gifts her to those sitting in the Assembly Hall.

The KS uses the verb *vi+dīv* and the MS uses only *dīv* and, as noted above, when the cow is killed there is the verb +preverb *vi+dīv* and when it is not killed, only *dīv*.

5. *Sphya* handed down to the *sajāta* and the *sajāta* and *pratiprasthātṛ* prepare the *adhidevana* fire-pit

In the ŚB both the *akṣāvāpa* and the *govyaccha/govikarta* disappear and they are replaced by the *sajāta* and the *pratiprasthātṛ*. What is also notable is that the *pratiprasthātṛ* suddenly appears, whereas the *sajāta* is a participant in the handing down of the *sphya*.

ŚBM 5.4.4.19-20

tām grāmañīḥ saajātāya prayac^hati indrasya vajro 'si téna me rad^hyéti téna grāmañīḥ saajātām ātmanó 'balīyāṃsam kurute tad yád evāṃ samprayác^hante nét pāpavasyasam ásad yat^hāpūrvám asad iti tásmād evāṃ samprayac^hante

The village leader gives it [sc. The wooden shovel] to the *sajāta*. [Reciting the verse] “You are the cudgel of Indra, by means of it, submit to me.” The village leader renders the *sajāta* less powerful to himself. They pass it on in this manner to avoid a confusion among the ‘classes’ so that there remains the proper order [among them].³⁸

át^ha saajātásca pratiprasthātṛ ca eténa sphyéna pūrvāgnau śukrásya purorúcād^hidévanam kuruto 'tā vai śukrò 'tāram evaitát kurutaḥ

Thereupon the *sajāta* and the *pratiprasthātṛ* (executive priest’s primary assistant), with that wooden sword, prepare the *adhidevanam* [fire pit], in the original fire, with the *puroruc* verse of the *śukra*.

³⁸ See Eggeling v. 3:111-112.

The *pratiprasthātṛ* is introduced here along with the *sajāta*. The *sajāta* replaces the *aksāvāpa* and the *pratiprasthātṛ* replaces the *govyaccha*. Notably, the ritual is closing in on itself with fewer types of individuals allowed to be participants. The ritual has become the almost exclusive domain of the brahmins with only the *yajamāna* allowed to also participate with his wife.

6. The development of specialized ritual offices: the *pratiprasthātṛ*

The ŚB differs from the other texts in that the *aksāvāpa* and the herdsman do not dig out the (*madhya*-)*adhidevana*- or place the *akṣas* on it. Instead the *sajāta*- and the *pratiprasthātṛ* are given this task (however only the *sajāta*- places the *akṣas*). This unique situation presents the question: Why do these two perform this task instead of the agriculturalist and the herdsman? The fact that the two are involved does strongly suggest an analogical relationship between the *aksāvāpa* : *govyaccha* :: *sajāta* : *pratiprasthātṛ* and that the *aksāvāpa* corresponds to the *sajāta*- and the *govyaccha* corresponds to the *pratiprasthātṛ*.

Why should the *pratiprasthātṛ* replace the herdsman? With the increasing complexity of the ritual by an emerging group of ritual specialists, and, we assume, the society as well, we see further interesting developments. The herdsman belongs to an earlier strata of Vedic society. As he starts to fall out of the ritual, we can expect to find his replacement as well as his absence altogether. Interestingly, we find the replacement for the herdsman in the *pratiprasthātṛ*, the primary assistant of the *adhvaryu*.³⁹ The activities of the *pratiprasthātṛ* in the animal sacrifice (*paśubandhu*) convincingly link him with the *govyaccha*.

The *pratiprasthātṛ* is the primary assistant of the *adhvaryu* who is the chief technical priest.⁴⁰ The term does not occur in either the RV or the AV. The reference to the two *adhvaryus* in the RV does not make clear whether one of them is indeed the *pratiprasthātṛ*.⁴¹ By the time of the *Samhitās*, his is a well-established office. The word itself is derived from *prati-pra-sthā*- 'to set out towards (somewhere or someone)'. Thus his name establishes his association with movement. Significant are his functions and tasks in the ritual. 1. he leads the sacrificer's wife about during the course of the ritual; 2. he asks the sacrificer's wife the names of her lovers' in the *Varuṇapraghāsa*; 3. he is responsible for cutting up the entrails of the immolated animal into 11 parts during the animal sacrifice (*paśubandhu*).

His first task underscores his primary responsibility and is most likely accounts for his name: the one who set out towards (the wife). With regard to his second task, that of asking the wife to name her lovers, this requires some comment. I do not believe that this is to be taken at face value; rather, I see here a connection with the belief that a woman is 'given' (for consummation) four times: to God Soma, to God Agni ('Fire'), and then to the fairy Gandharvas. Finally she is given to a man.⁴²

The *pratiprasthātṛ* is also responsible for cutting up the sacrificial animal which would link him with the *govikarta*.⁴³ The *pratiprasthātṛ* is involved with the immolated animal. He is in charge of the spit for the cooking of the heart in the animal sacrifice rite (*paśubandhu*) and the *pratiprasthātṛ* converses with the

³⁹ See BŚS in ŚK 1.2:833-34.

⁴⁰ See Ranade (2006:236), Voegli (2001).

⁴¹ RV 2.16.5. Ranade (2008:236); VI 2:31. Oldenberg doubts if it is the *pratiprasthātṛ* and instead thinks the second officiant is the *agnīdh*. See RV 10.41.3.

⁴² RV 10.85.40-41 and AV 14.2.

⁴³ See BŚS chapter 4, passim.

śamitr in connection with the cooking of the organs of the animal.⁴⁴

There are thus very strong similarities between the *govyaccha*-/govikarta- and the *pratiprasthātṛ* with regard to the nature of their respective tasks: the similarities are movement, i.e. the *govyaccha* drives on the sacrificial cow that represents *Śrī* while the *pratiprasthātṛ* leads, or rather, ‘drives on’ the sacrificer’s wife, his *Śrī*, the physical embodiment of prosperity and fecundity.

In the BŚS the *pratiprasthātṛ* has a discussion (*sam+vad*) about the animal (*paśu*). The *pratiprasthātṛ* then stirs the *pr̥ṣadājya* ‘brown butter’⁴⁵ and scoops out a portion of it into the ladle (*juhū*) and leaves the sacrificial compound towards the north between the *cātvāla* ‘rubbish heap’; the sacrificial animal remains whole and asks the immolating priest (*śamitr*): “Has the oblation been cooked, O *śamitar*.” (*śṛtaṃ havīḥ śamitaḥ*). The *śamitr* stands towards the north with the heart spit in his hand and replies “it is cooked.” (BŚS 4.8)

Śālīki and Baudhāyana disagree on the words of the *pratiprasthātṛ*. According to Śālīki, the *pratiprasthātṛ* recites three times *śṛtaṃ havīḥ śamitaḥ* “Is the oblation cooked, O *śamitr*,” each time stepping forward a step; each time the *śamitr* replies *śṛtam*. (BŚS 4.8).⁴⁶ Baudhāyana on the other hand, while agreeing that after each statement that the *pratiprasthātṛ* steps forward, states that he asks not only the question, but that he adds after each step the mantra:

1. *pūṣā mā paśupāḥ pātu* ‘May Pūshan, the protector of the herds, protect me’
2. *pūṣā mā prapathe pāte* ‘May Pūshan protect me on the path’
3. *pūṣā mā ’dhipatiḥ pātu* ‘May Pūshan, the Lord, protect me.’ (BŚS 20.29)⁴⁷

Thus, significantly, the *pratiprasthātṛ* invokes Pūṣān, the deity of the pasture, a deity who would be of particular importance to the herdsman.⁴⁸

7. Transition from a predominantly pastoral society to a predominantly agricultural society

That the *pratiprasthātṛ* functions as a replacement for the herdsman provides a valuable insight regarding the pre-history of the early Aryan priesthood which remains obscure. Thus, we see here how the priesthood

⁴⁴ BŚS 24.36-37. Kashikar (2003), I.2:833.

⁴⁵ The French *beurre noisette* is probably more descriptive. For description see Ranade (2006:231).

⁴⁶ Kashikar (2003), v.1 215, 217.

⁴⁷ Kashikar (2003), v. 4,1387

⁴⁸ We can point out the interesting connection of the ‘herdsman’ with the epic character Duḥśāsana. It was mentioned above that the *pratiprasthātṛ* leads the sacrificer’s wife about during the ritual, and it was the herdsman who ‘drives forcibly on’ (that cow) whom they slay in the Assembly Hall, Rudra hankers after her. ŚB 5.3.1.10 *yām vā imām sabhāyām ghnanti rudro haitām abhimanyate* (Fire Establishing ritual). Duryodhana is considered to be Manyu/Rudra incarnate. Well known is Duḥśāsana’s deed in the epic when after Yūdhiṣṭhira stakes Draupadī: Śrī, she who was the *aparājita-glahā*- ‘the undefeated stake’ and over Śakuni’s objections, Duḥśāsana sets off to fetch Draupadī and he drags her into the Assembly Hall. Duḥśāsana’s name itself reflects his connection with the *govyaccha*-/govikarta: we should not derive it from ‘one of bad instruction’ but from *śas*- ‘to cut’ and to see a meaning such as ‘one who is a violent cutter’ with his name itself as if a gloss on the word *govyaccha*-/govikarta-.

as a class continually seeks to expand its role and presence in the society and is one that has been able to take over from other social groups their ritual functions and incorporate them into the developing *śrautic* priestly framework.

The conclusion we can draw is that here we have a case of the transposition of the tasks of the herdsman from the earlier Vedic society to that of a priest in the Middle Vedic period. This reflects both the growth of the sacrificial cult at the expense of the earlier non-priestly officiants, along with the steady encroachment of a class of priests who become the sole performers of the ritual tasks. One of the difficulties with the Middle Vedic texts is the problem with their internal chronology. We see in examples above how two different individuals are involved in the exact same rite. The text which mentions the *govyaccha/govikarta* most likely reflects the earlier state of affairs and was preserved in the transmission of oral tradition. Then, with the growing importance of the brahmins as the sole ritual officiants, along with only the sponsor, the *yajamāna*, non-brahmins who were part of the earlier ritual activities are dropped and replaced by ‘priestly’ substitutes. From this it seems clear that in the pre-*śrautic* ritual, there were individuals other than brahmins involved and participating, thus fleshing out Heesterman’s ‘pre-classical’ ritual and its participants.

The other critical point is the transition from a predominantly pastoral society (albeit with agricultural activities) to a predominantly sedentary agricultural society where pastoralism is no longer the major economic activity which it clearly is in the hymns of the Rig Veda. There is also the transition to a rice-based society from the earlier emphasis on, and importance of, grain/meat. What can we conclude from these interesting ritual substitutions of several individuals? One of the significant changes that we see is the increasing importance of rice in the society over that of grain. There is also the growing importance of rice at the expense of domesticated animals, which will result ultimately in the removal of animal sacrifice from the ritual. This is seen in the steady equation of rice with cows/cattle. The AV 11.3.5 states that *gāvas tāṇḍulāḥ*⁴⁹ ‘rice grains [are the equivalent] of cattle’. It is also possible that the growing sentiment towards *āhiṃsa* ‘non-violence’ i.e. ‘non-killing’ and the more sedentary agricultural life also promulgated the identification between the two foods, the meat and the rice.

This ritual participant substitution is an important indication of the very real and deep differences between the Early Vedic period of the hymns of the RV and that of the Middle Vedic Period, with its highly developed sacerdotal system in which there has been an essential ‘takeover’ of the mediating roles of worship and sacrifice by a class of ritual specialists.

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(Accessed 01 August 2019)

⁴⁹ Cf. ‘die wiessen Keiskorner sind (in mystischen Sinn) Kühe (d.h. weisse Kochmilch?)’, Janert (1964:194).

AVŚ = *Atharva-Veda Saṃhitā. Śaunaka Recension.*

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Abbreviations:

AVP = Atharvaveda Saṃhitā Paippalāda; AVŚ = Atharvaveda Saṃhitā Śaunaka ; BŚS = Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra; EWA = *Etymologische Wörterbuch des Altindoirischen*; JB = Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa; KS = Kāṭha Saṃhitā; MS = Maitrāyaṇi Saṃhitā; MW = Monier Williams. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*; PW = Böhtlingk, O. *Sanskrit Wörterbuch*; RV = Ṛgveda; SBE = *Sacred Books of the East*; ŚBM = Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa Mādhyandina; ŚK = *Śrautakośa*; ŚŚS = Śāṅkhāyana Śrautasūtra; TB = Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa; VI = *Vedic Index*; VS = Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā.

ヴェーダ語 *govyacchá* ‘herdsman’

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キーワード：サンスクリット語 ヴェーダ祭式 牧畜 *govyacchá* *akṣāvāpa*

要旨

中期ヴェーダ文献に初出するサンスクリット語 *govyacchá* は、王の即位儀礼である *Rājasūya* 祭と、人身供犠である *Puruṣamedha* 祭の記述中に出現することで知られている。Hoffmann (1966) はこの語を字義通りに解釈したが、この語が「牧夫」という職業名を指すとは考えなかった。本論では Hoffmann の解釈を一步進め、*govyacchá* が「牧夫」を意味し、*Rājasūya* 祭のもう一人の登場人物である *akṣāvāpa* と対をなしていることを主張する。*akṣāvāpa* は通常「賭場の胴元」「壺振り」、または他の骰子賭博の関係者として解釈される。*govyacchá* と *akṣāvāpa* はともに語義の再検討が必要であり、後者は「牧夫」に対応する職業である「農夫」を指す祭式用語であると考えられる。それによって、*Rājasūya* 祭の両登場人物が動植物の成長に関わって生命を維持するという、社会の経済基盤を代表する立場となり、祭式の意義ともよりよく合致する。

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