

Borayin Larios

Embodying the Vedas

Traditional Vedic Schools of Contemporary Maharashtra

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Managing Editor: Katarzyna Tempczyk

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Foreword

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Timothy Lubin
Washington and Lee University

Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Note on Sanskrit and Marathi Words

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

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

List of Abbreviations

Sanskrit Terms and Works

Aār	Aitareyāraṇyaka
AB	Aitareyabrāhmaṇa
ĀpDhS	Āpastambadharmasūtra
ĀśvGS	Āśvalāyanagr̥hyasūtra
AV	Atharvaveda (Śaunaka)
AV(P)	Atharvaveda (Paippalāda)
BaudhDhS	Baudhāyanadharmasūtra
BaudhGS	Baudhāyanagr̥hyasūtra
BhG	Bhagavadgītā
DG	Daśagrantha
GautDhS	Gautamadharmasūtra
HY	Haṭhayoga
Jyot	Jyotiṣa
Kār	Kauṣītakyaṛaṇyaka
KauśGS	Kauśikagr̥hyasūtra
KK	Karmakāṇḍa
KūrP	Kūrmapurāṇa
MānDhŚ	Mānavadharmasāstra
PārGS	Pāraskaragr̥hyasūtra
ṚV	Ṛgvedasaṃhitā
ŚānGS	Śāṅkhāyanagr̥hyasūtra
ŚB	Śatapathabrāhmaṇa
SV(R)	Sāmaveda (Rāṇāyanīya)
Tār	Taittirīyāraṇyaka
TarkŚ	Tarkaśāstra
TB	Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa
Tsaṃ	Taittirīyasaṃhitā
VāsDhŚ	Vāsiṣṭhadharmasāstra
VSaṃ(K)	Vājasaneyisaṃhitā (Kāṇva)
VSaṃ(M)	Vājasaneyisaṃhitā (Mādhyaṇḍina)

Other Abbreviations

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

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

1 Introduction

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

–Jean Filliozat²

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 To mention just a few: HOWARD 1977, 1986; PATTON 1994, 2002, 2004; F. SMITH 2000, 2001, 2010; MAHADEVAN 2003; FULLER 1984, 2001, 2003; LUBIN 2001a, 2001b; HÜSKEN 2005, 2009; WITZEL 1976, 1993; KNIPE 1997, 2009, 2015.

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

addressed by Wujastyk, and one that is acutely dying out⁵ — namely, the ritualistic *śrauta* tradition based on the setting (*ādhāna*) and maintaining of the three sacred fires (*tretāgni*), and on a strictly regulated life centered around fire-sacrifices. This book's main focus is the second type of education, i.e. the tradition of the Veda reciter or the “embodiment of the Veda” (*vedamūrti*), although the other two are also addressed in passing throughout the book since they are an essential part of the broader Vedic tradition.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸ *svādhyāya*, lit. “self-study”. The term denotes the study (*adhyāya*) of one’s own (*sva*) Vedic *śākhā*.

⁹ *śikṣā* meaning lit. “instruction or training” referring to the science, which teaches proper articulation and pronunciation of Vedic texts and *prātiśākhya*s “one for each branch (*śākhā*)”.

¹⁰ AITHAL, Parameshwar private correspondence 6.7.2011.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

16 For the connections between *brāhmaṇ* (n) and *brahmán* (m), see: BRERETON 2002. See: also RENOU 1949b: 16-21; GONDA 1950: 50-57; THIEME 1952: 122-125. For *brahmán* (m) in the RV, see: GELDNER 1897: 143-155; OLDENBERG 1917: 394-396; BODEWITZ 1983: 34-37; MINKOWSKI 1991: 111-128. For the connections of the *brāhmaṇ* with the *purohita* priest in the AV, see: GELDNER 1897: 143-155; OLDENBERG 1917: 375-383; BLOOMFIELD 1897: lvii-lxxi; 1899: 28-34; CALAND 1990.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.1 Locating the Vedapāṭhaśālās

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

²⁰ See also: BECK 2008.

²¹ Important contributions to the discussion have been made by: STAAL 1986a, 1986b; FALK 1993, 2010: 207-220; WITZEL 1997, 2010; BRONKHORST 1982, 2002, 2011; SCHARFE 2002, 2009: 80-83.

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

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

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

The following is a list of the visited schools. For a brief description with the particularities of each school, please see Appendix 1.²³

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

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

Table 1. List of Vedic schools

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

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

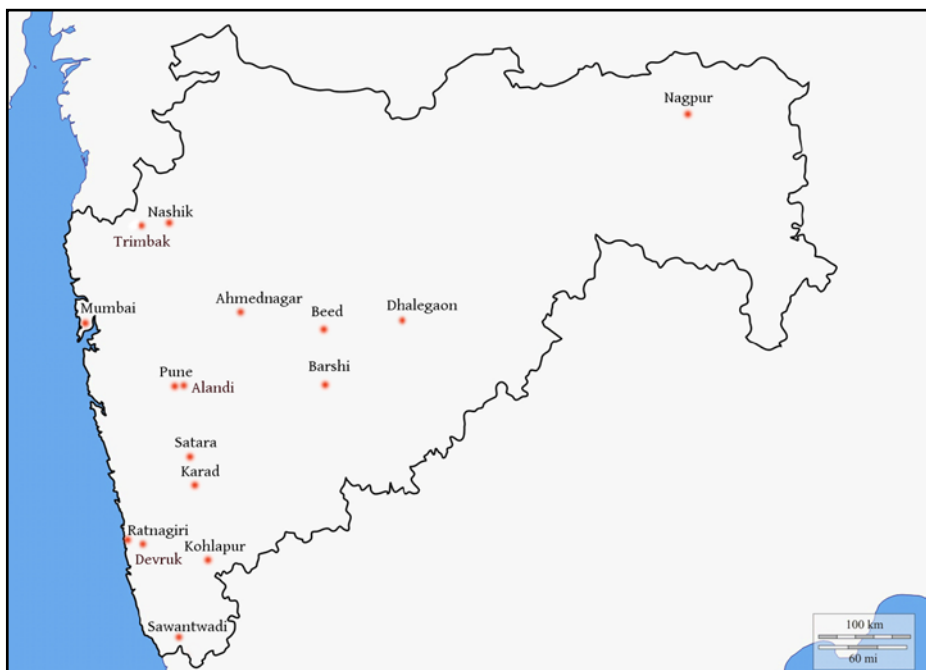


Plate 1: Map of Maharashtra with the localities of the schools.

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

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

The material collected focuses mainly upon:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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