

Notes on the Evolution of an Initiation Ritual: The *Vratabandha* of the Bāhun and Chetri*

For the Bāhun and Chetri, a group of Nepalese high-caste Hindus,¹ the initiation—the “leading near (to preceptor and sacred knowledge)” (*upanayana*),² or as it is more often called, the “binding to an observance” (*vratabandha*(*na*), Nep. *bartaman*)³—is the important life-cycle ritual (*samskāra*) by which a boy becomes a twice-born member of his caste and lineage.⁴ Its modern performers characterize the ritual as *vaidika*. Indeed the rich material on this initiation which the Indian textual traditions provide bears witness to continuity from ancient Vedic times on. But it also attests to constant change regarding both the form and meaning of the initiation.

The ritual in question has customarily been studied from one of two perspectives: either anthropologically, based on ethnographic data drawn from modern contexts, and usually without considering historical material; or indologically, focusing on the origin of the ritual and the early period of its development, as captured in a few references in the Vedic hymn collections (*Samhitās*) and in the treatment accorded to it in the treatises on domestic ritual (*Grhyasūtras*) and in the legal codes (*Dharmasūtras* and -śāstras),⁵ with references to later (including modern) times being made only sporadically, usually in order to demonstrate a decline from some original meaning or form.⁶ Although attempts have been made to bridge the gap between the textual tradition and modern-day practice,⁷ the role of post-Vedic texts in shaping the ritual has yet to receive due at-

* I would like to thank Philip Pierce for correcting the English of this paper and Timothy Lubin for his valuable comments.

1 The Bāhuns (Brahmins) and Chetris (Kshatriyas), whose mother tongue is Nepali, are also known as Indo-Parbatiyā or Parbate, and constitute one of the largest ethnic groups of Nepal.

2 On this term, see Gonda (1979, with further references); Kajihara (2002: 8f); Lubin (1994: 171–4).

3 On the term *vratabandha* see Michaels (1986: 195–6). The word was apparently first used in Puranic texts for the *upanayana samskāra*: e.g. *Agnipurāṇa* 24.31 and 34.

4 For different aspects of the complex meaning of the modern *vratabandha*, see Bennett (2005: 59–61); Gray (1995: 42–6); Bouillier (1986: 9–11); Michaels (1998: 91–114). As I have argued elsewhere (Zotter 2009), the new status of the boy is primarily acquired through his being activated as a ritual agent.

5 See Altekar 1965: 298–305; Barua 1994: 37–59; Bhattacharyya 1980: 60–9; Bronkhorst 1992; Gopal 1969: 296–301; Kajihara 2002 and 2004; Kane 1968ff.: II, 256–346; Lubin 1994; Oguibé-nine 1990; Pandey 1998: 112–5; Scharfe 2002: 87–114.

6 Pandey, for example, refers to some late features and modifications of the initiation ritual as “a tragedy of the educational ideal of the Upanayana Samskāra” (1998: 139) and even “a mockery of fate” (*ibid.*: 148).

7 Bouillier (1986) and Michaels (1986 and 1998: 91–114) combine analyses of textual and ethnographic material.

tention. The present paper will deal with some of the developments which have occurred up to the present day within one Vedic tradition of particular relevance to Nepalese ritual culture, the Vājasaneyi school of the White *Yajurveda*.⁸ The analysis will be based on this school's treatise on domestic rituals, the *Pāraskaragrhyasūtra* (PG),⁹ commentaries on it written by Harihara (before AD 1250) and Gadādhara (ca. AD 1500),¹⁰ Rāmadatta's handbook on *samskāras*, (written in the first decades of the 14th century),¹¹ selected modern ritual manuals together with commentaries,¹² and observa-

8 On the predominance of this school in Nepal since the Newar renaissance in the 11th century, see Witzel (1976: 19, 20, 22–4 and 2001: 260, 262, *passim*).

9 I have based myself throughout on Gopālaśāstrī Nene's edition (Mālavīya 2000). In some chapters, the verse count differs from the one in Stenzler's edition (1876) and from the translations by Stenzler (1878) and Oldenberg (1989), which will be given in parentheses.

10 Gonda 1977: 602. On Harihara, see also Kane (1968ff.: I, 736–7).

11 Rāmadatta was a member of the famous Thakkūra family. Like his father Gaṇeśvāra and his cousin Caṇḍeśvara, he was not only a scholar but also a minister at the court of Harasimhadeva, the last king of the Kārnāṭa lineage of Mithilā (on Rāmadatta and his family, see Ganguly 1972: 86–9; Miśra 1973; Thakur 1956: 347–8; for further references, see Zotter 2009). Rāmadatta composed a handbook for the whole set of life-cycle rituals (excluding death rituals), which was copied and published under such titles as *Vājasaneyinām Vivāhādipaddhati* or *Daśakarmapaddhati*. In the following I will refer to two manuscripts copied in the middle of the 17th century in the Kathmandu Valley and filmed by the *Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project* under NGMPP E 915/6 (partial retake E 1549/15) and H 391/27; a modern edition of the text published as *Daśakarmapaddhati* (DP) by Khemarāja Kṛṣṇadāsa in Bombay; and the *Vājasaneyinām Upanayanapaddhati* (VUP), a description of the *cūḍākaraṇa*, *upanayana*, *vedārambha* and *śamāvartana*, edited and commented upon by Rāmacandra Jhā and published by the Caukhambā Vidyābhavana, Benares. As investigations into the interdependence among the ritual handbooks have shown, Rāmadatta's text was used by Dadhirāma Marāsini in compiling his *Karmakāṇḍabhbhāskara* (KBh), an exhaustive ritual compendium, written in the 1930s and first published in 1997 by the Mahendra Sanskrit University in Dang (West Nepal). See also the following note.

12 At present one of the most popular initiation handbooks in the Kathmandu Valley is a text of uncertain origin. I refer to this manual as the *Cūḍopanayana* text, since most of its editions contain the term *cūḍopanayana* in their title. The text is available in two versions, which have been regularly reprinted by different Nepalese publishers in Benares. The present paper has made use of a recent reprint of the *Cūḍopanayanavidhi* (CV) together with a Nepali commentary probably published for the first time in 1991. Relevant handbooks have also been published in Nepal itself, including by the Nepalese government. The only Nepalese initiation handbook noted so far in Western academic literature (e.g. Bouillier 1986: 12–5; Michaels 1986: 195; cp. Witzel 1976: 24) is the *Vratabandhapaddhati* by Dhanaśamśera J.B. Rāṇā und Kṛṣṇaprasāda Bhāttarāī, published in 1973 (V.S. 2030) by the Royal Nepalese Academy. This Nepali text has strongly influenced later handbooks (see below) but has been out of print for many years, and therefore rarely used in rituals. Since the 1980s the School Book Department of the Ministry of Education and Sport has been publishing a set of textbooks on ritual called either *Karmakāndam* or *Asmākam Karmakāndam* (KK). The text has been re-edited several times by a changing editorial board mainly consisting of pandits who teach at Vedic schools in the Kathmandu Valley. At least one of these re-editions of the book, for class nine, contains a description of the *vratabandha*. Recently ritual texts were also published by the Mahendra Sanskrit University in Dang. The KBh has already been mentioned (see the previous note). These days the *Vratabandhapaddhati* of Rājāma Ghimire (VPGh), published by the same institution, is the most readily available. The Sanskrit text of the VPGh is mainly based on the KBh, but the Nepali commentary also adopts many details from the VP. Finally, a booklet

tions of actual performances of the ritual.¹³

Although I will focus on only one Vedic school, it is far beyond the limits of this paper to treat all deviations within its corpus.¹⁴ It is not my aim to provide a complete picture of the initiation and its development, but to examine selected components from a historical perspective in order to demonstrate some general principles at work in the evolution of this ritual and in its structure.

The Vedic and modern *upanayana*

By performing the *upanayana*, a candidate becomes a religious student (*brahmacārin*)¹⁵ bound to a special observance (*brahmacarya*). Early traces of the notion of *brahmacārin* can be found already in the Vedic *Samhitās*. The word is attested for the first time in *Rgveda* (RV) 10.109.5,¹⁶ but only in the *Atharvaveda* (AV) do more substantial lineaments appear, including some features still important in the modern initiation ritual.¹⁷ Kajihara, who has extensively investigated the early material on the institution of *brahmacarya*, has concluded that the ritual actions attested in the oldest stratum of the AV “may have constituted a prototype of the *upanayana*” (2002: 38), a base later gradually elaborated (ibid.: 398, *passim*).

Within the textual tradition of the White *Yajurveda*, a first account of the ritual is found in the *Śatapathabrahmaṇa* (ŚB) 11.5.4: According to this text, the candidate declares that he has come in order to enter upon *brahmacarya*. The preceptor (*ācārya*) asks the candidate’s name, takes him by the hand, accepts him as a religious student (*brahmacārin*), entrusts him to the care of various deities, instructs him in the rules of *brahmacarya* and finally teaches him the *sāvitrī* (RV 3.62.10). All these ritual elements mentioned in the *Brāhmaṇa* are inherent parts of the *upanayana* as prescribed later in

by Madhusūdana Suvedī has been consulted: the *Saralīkṛtagrahaśāntyagnisthāpanacūḍopanayana-vedārambhasamāvartanavidhi* (SV). This text combines the *Cūḍopanayana* text with the VP. For further details on the Nepalese handbook tradition, see Zotter 2009.

13 In the years 2006 and 2007 I observed about ten *vratabandhas* in different localities in Kathmandu, Deopatan and Thankot (for further details, see Zotter 2009).

14 For a more detailed analysis, see Zotter 2009.

15 The *brahmacārin* is “someone who is engaged in / devoted to *brahman*”. For the etymology of the term, see Gonda (1965: 284). Cf. also Kajihara (2002: 6–7); Scharfe (2002: 91).

16 In RV 10.109.5 (= Atharvaveda [AV] 5.17.5), the only occurrence of the word *brahmacārin* in the *Rgveda*, the candidate is characterized as rendering service and becoming a limb (*anīga*) of the gods. See Gonda 1965: 284–5; Kajihara 2002: 35–6, 40–1; Kane 1968ff.: II, 265; Scharfe 2002: 92.

17 For instance, AV 11.5.4 mentions a girdle (*mekhalā*) and kindling (*samidh*) in connection with the *brahmacārin*, while AV 11.5.6 states that he wears the skin of a black antelope (*kārṣṇa*); cf. Gonda 1965: 285–6; Kajihara 2002: 107–50 (with further references); Kane 1968ff.: II, 270; Oguibénine 1990: 3–6.

the Gr̥hyasūtras.¹⁸ The PG adopts even minor details of the account in the ŚB, ones uncommon in Gr̥hyasūtras belonging to other Vedic schools.¹⁹

The Sūtras treat the *upanayana* as an important link in the chain of *samskāras*, the gradual series of rituals that form milestones in human life from conception to death.²⁰ These texts describe a form of ritual procedure for the initiation which is much more detailed than in older kinds of texts. The insignia of a *brahmacārin* (the girdle, antelope skin etc.) are ritually handed over or put on as certain mantras are being uttered. Service to the sacrificial fire and the begging of alms—both daily duties of the *brahmacārin*—are integrated in a ritualized form. But the *sūtrakāras* not only incorporated features of the *brahmacārin* mentioned in earlier texts. In the period in which the *upanayana* was being formed into a *samskāra*, it did so not in a vacuum but in correlation with other rituals, especially with another kind of initiation, the consecration for the Soma sacrifice (*dīksā*). Several features of the consecrated Soma sacrificer (*dīksita*) developed on the model of the *brahmacārin*. But, as Kajihara (2002: 390) has argued, there are also features that passed from the *dīksita* to the *brahmacārin*. For instance, the staff (*danda*) that had been associated with the *dīksita* since the Brāhmaṇas became an important insignia of the *brahmacārin* in the Gr̥hyasūtras.

The *upanayana* developed also in correlation with the marriage ritual (*vivāha*), another important *samskāra*. In the PG, the *upanayana* and *vivāha* share a complete sequence of ritual elements. The preceptor/bridegroom makes the student/bride look at the sun and touches his/her heart. So too the student's cupped hands are filled, and the bride's head sprinkled, with water, both performed while the so-called *āpohiṣṭīya* verses (RV 10.9.1–3) are being recited. All three gestures are adapted to their respective contexts, but the parallel is quite obvious.²¹

The levelling process continued. Ritual elements were transferred from other rituals or even newly created. Some of the late additions to the *upanayana* relate to the sacrificial cord (*yajñopavīta*, Nep. *janai*), a ritual object which advanced to become the most prominent outward sign of an initiated, or twice-born (*dvija*), Hindu.²² Harihara's com-

18 On the descriptions of the *upanayana* in the different Gr̥hyasūtras, see Altekar (1965: 298–305); Gopal (1959: 296–301); Kane (1968ff.: II, 281–7); Lubin (1994: 174–99); Pandey (1998: 135–40).

19 One instance is the recurrence of the rule “consume water” (*āpo'sāna*) among the instructions (*anuśāsana*) to the student (cf. ŚB 11.5.4.5 and PG 2.3.2). For a comparison of the passages from the two texts, see Kajihara (2002: 255–60).

20 On the term *samskāra*, see Gonda (1980: 364); Gopal (1959: 255); Kane (1968ff.: II, 190–1); Pandey (1998: 15–7); Scharfe (2002: 103); Smith (1986: 66).

21 Cf. PG 1.8.3–6 (*vivāha*) and 2.2.16–18 (14–16, *upanayana*). See also Oldenberg (1894: 467). For the mutual influence of the initiation and marriage rituals in the tradition of the Atharvaveda, see Kajihara (2004).

22 Cf. Michaels 1998: 100; Pandey 1998: 98; Scharfe 1999: 89 and 2002: 105; Stevenson 1971: 22–3. The sacrificial cord probably first appeared in the late *smṛti* period, on the analogy of the deerskin (*ajina*) or upper garment (*uttarīya*), worn (like the cord) on different occasions in different positions (Gopal 1959: 317–20, n. 21; Kane 1968ff.: II, 287–91; Scharfe 1999: 90–5, 97–9 and 2002: 104–8; cf. Michaels 1998: 105). According to Scharfe (1999: 99 and 2002: 104) the deerskin was replaced by the cord (cf. Altekar 1965: 318). At least for Nepal this statement does not appear to be valid. In script as well as in performance both, deerskin and cord, are given to the candidate.

ment on PG 2.2.10–13 states that the *sūtrakāra* failed to mention the investment with the sacrificial cord (*yajñopavītadhāraṇa*).²³ He himself offers a short instruction since, as he argues, the cord should be given in the *upanayana*.²⁴ Later initiation handbooks expand on this ritual element.²⁵ Whereas Rāmadatta and his editors add only minor details,²⁶ in the more recent manuals the *yajñopavītadhāraṇa* is often described elaborately. For instance, according to the VP (p. 92) the *gāyatrīmantra* (RV 3.62.10) is recited ten times over the thread beforehand. Other initiation handbooks adopt detailed instructions for the worship of strands and knots of the thread from manuals on daily ritual obligations (*nityakarman*).²⁷ There is another ritual element mentioned neither in the PG nor by its commentators but commonly found in Nepalese handbooks. Rāmadatta says that according to custom ([*lok*]ācāra)²⁸ eight sacrificial cords are to be given to Brahmins (*yajñopavītāṣṭakadāna*) before the boy receives his *yajñopavīta*.²⁹ As further preparation, some modern texts also include a ritualized binding of the tuft of hair (*śikhābandhana*) resulting from the first haircut (see below p. 24). This successive elaboration clearly reflects the growing importance attached to the sacrificial cord.

The development of the *upanayana* in the textual tradition of the White *Yajurveda* is summarised in table 1. It is obvious from it that changes and modifications of the ritual procedure have occurred at every historical stage. But the table also clearly demonstrates the conservative attitude ritualists take toward their texts. An element once introduced to the ritual by some authority may undergo radical change in form or mean-

23 The *yajñopavītadhāraṇa* is not mentioned in most of the *Grhyasūtras* (Gopal 1959: 296; Kane 1968ff.: II, 284, 291; Pandey 1998: 131–2; Scharfe 1999: 96 and 2002: 107; Smith 1989: 96). An instruction relating to it found in some manuscripts of the PG is a late interpolation (Kane 1968ff.: II, 284, n. 662; Mālavīya 2000: 35; Speijer 1872: 22; Stenzler 1876: 53 and 1878: 42 [note on PG 2.2.10]).

24 To support his view Harihara quotes, among other verses, *Yajñavalkyasmṛti* 2.29 (*danḍājinopavītāni mekhalā caiva dhārayet*). His view regarding the *yajñopavītadhāraṇa* in the commentary is merely that the mantra “*om yajñopavītam paramam pavitram* etc.” should be recited by the boy while putting on the cord in its *upavīta* position (i.e. hanging over the left shoulder) and sipping water (Mālavīya 2000: 35). Harihara adds some further details in his *prayoga* at the end of the commentary on PG 2.5.44 (Mālavīya 2000: 79).

25 See NGMPP E 1549/15: 1v; H 391/27: 6r; CV: p. 37; DP: p. 60; KBh: p. 250; KK: p. 80; SV: p. 223; VP: pp. 62–3; VPGh: pp. 108–9.

26 Some manuscripts call for the cord to have three strands (NGMPP E 1549/15: 1v; H 391/27: 6r. Cf. Harihara’s *prayoga* [Mālavīya 2000: 79]). The VUP (p. 34) mentions knots whose number coincides with the segments (*pravara*) of the clan (*gotra*) of the boy. The Maithili commentary specifies the number as three or five (VUP: p. 34). The KBh (p. 250) adds a detail also found in the *prayoga* of Harihara (Mālavīya 2000: 79) and in other texts (e.g. CV: p. 38; VP: p. 92): the boy should raise his right arm while the cord is being put on. The DP (p. 60) gives no further details.

27 E.g. *Upanayanapaddhati* pp. 68–72 and *Samskāradīpaka* pp. 291–2. For one description of this preparatory act in the *nityakarman*, see *Nityakarmapūjāprakāśa* pp. 37–9.

28 This statement is found at least in some versions of the text (see NGMPP E 1549/15: 1v; DP: p. 59).

29 NGMPP E 1549/15: 1v; H 391/27: 6r; CV: p. 37; DP: pp. 59–60; KK: p. 79; KBh: p. 250; SV: p. 223; VP: pp. 90–91; VPGh: p. 108; VUP: p. 34.

| Ritual element | ŚB ³⁰ | PG ³¹ | Hari-hara ³² | Hand-books ³³ |
|---|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Fire ritual I (first part of preparations) | | | X | X |
| Instruction I (<i>anuśāsana</i>) or student's entering upon <i>brahmacya</i> | X | X | X | X |
| Putting on the lower garment (<i>vāsahparidhāpana</i>) | | X | X | X |
| Binding the girdle (<i>mekhalābandhana</i>) | | X | X | X |
| Binding the tuft of hair (<i>sikhābandhana</i>) | | | | (x) |
| Gift of eight sacrificial cords (<i>yajñopavītāṣṭakadāna</i>) | | | | X |
| Investment with the sacrificial cord (<i>yajñopavītadhārana</i>) | | | X | X |
| Putting on the deerskin (<i>ajinadhārana</i>) | | X | X | X |
| Taking the staff (<i>dandagrahana</i>) | | X | X | X |
| Filling of cupped hands (<i>añjalipūrana</i>) | | X | X | X |
| Looking at the sun (<i>sūryodikṣana</i>) | | X | X | X |
| Touching the heart (<i>hṛdayālambhana</i>) | | X | X | X |
| Dialogue (<i>praśnottara</i>) or asking the student's name | X | X | X | X |
| Entrusting to deities or act of protecting (<i>rakṣana</i>) | X | X | X | X |
| Circumambulation of the fire (<i>pradakṣīna</i>) | | X | X | X |
| Fire ritual II (further preparations, oblations of ghee and some concluding elements) | | (x) ³⁴ | X | X |
| Instruction II (<i>anuśāsana</i>) or teaching of rules | X | X | X | X |
| Gift of a cow (<i>godāna</i>) | | | | (x) ³⁵ |
| Teaching of the <i>sāvitrī</i> (<i>sāvitryupadeśa</i> or <i>mantradāna</i>) | X | X | X | X |
| Laying kindling (<i>samidādhāna</i>) | | X | X | X |
| Warming the hands (<i>pāṇipratapana</i>) and washing the face (<i>mukhamārjana</i>) | | X | X | X |
| Touching all parts of the body (<i>sarvagātrasparśa</i>) | | | X | X |
| Marking the body with ashes (<i>tryāyusakarana</i>) | | | X | X |
| Formal salutation (<i>abhivādana</i>) | | | X | X |
| Bestowing blessings (<i>āśīrvādapradāna</i>) | | | X | X |
| Begging for alms (<i>bhiksācarana</i>) | | X | X | X |
| Fire ritual III (further concluding elements) | | | | (x) ³⁶ |

Table 1: Ritual elements of the *upanayana* according to the Vājasaneyi school of the White *Yajurveda*.

30 See ŚB 11.5.4.1–15.

31 See the chapters PG 2.2 to 2.5.

32 According to Harihara's *prayoga* (Mālavīya 2000: 78–84).

33 NGMPP E 1549/15: 1r–6r; H 391/27: 5r–10r; CV: pp. 34–61; DP: pp. 57–77; KBh: pp. 248–60; SV: pp. 222–43; VP: pp. 84–150; VPGh: pp. 106–30; VUP: pp. 31–63.

34 PG 2.3.2 mentions only the *ājyāhutis* and the eating (of the remains). See below p. 28.

35 The “gift of a cow” (*godāna*) is a very common ritual element, usually performed by worshipping some money and giving it to the priest. Some of the handbooks prescribe it as preparation for the *sāvitryupadeśa* (e.g. CV: p. 53; KK: p. 86; KBh: p. 257, n. 11; SV: pp. 235–7; VP: pp. 125–8; VPGh: pp. 120–1).

36 See below p. 30.

ing, but usually it does not simply disappear in the later textual tradition. The history of a ritual of enduring importance like the *upanayana* is a constant process of accumulation or accretion. Although the performers may stress the antiquity of the acts they are performing, the modern *upanayana samkāra* is not a faithful imitation of the ancient original (or ur-ritual). The ritual is and always has been open to change within the surrounding culture and its whole stock of rituals. Before further examples are given of such adaptations, one of the most striking differences between the ancient *upanayana* and the modern performances of the initiation needs to be addressed.

The combining of *samskāras* in the *vratabandha*

Like the *upanayana*, the cycle of *samskāras* as a whole has been subject to modifications. After the cycle's formation in the Sūtra period several new *samskāras* arose,³⁷ while others went out of vogue.³⁸ As a necessary precondition for marriage, the *upanayana* remained securely in place, but changes in the conducting of the *samskāras* affected it. It has been noted that in order to reduce expenses the *upanayana* can be delayed and performed in an abbreviated form directly before the marriage (*vivāha*).³⁹ Among the Bāhun and Chetri of modern Nepal, their life-cycle initiation, usually called *vratabandha*, is still observed as a ritual separate from marriage, but here too the classical concept of the *samskāras* can undergo noticeable alteration. Whether performed for a single person or a group of boys,⁴⁰ the modern *vratabandha* is usually a very complex event which takes weeks of preparations. It consists of different preparatory rituals (*pūrvāṅgakarman*)⁴¹ performed on the first day and a four-to-eight-hour procedure on the second (the main) day. Although the term *upanayana* is used synonymously for

37 One example of a *samskāra* of relatively late origin is the *karnavedha* or piercing of the ears (Kane 1968ff.: II, 196, 254–5; Pandey 1998: 102–5). Rāmadatta prescribes it—as usual in texts of the Vājasaneyi school (cf. Hillebrandt 1981: 50; Speijer 1872: 21)—for the third or fifth year (H 391/27: 4v–5r; DP: pp. 55–6; KBh: pp. 236–7), i.e. between the *cūḍākaraṇa* and *upanayana*. On the creation of the *vedāramba samskāra*, see below pp. 33–5.

38 Several Grhyasūtras describe the first shaving of the beard (*keśānta* or *godāna*), a ritual modelled on the first haircut (*cūḍākaraṇa*), as part of the *samskāra* cycle in the sixteenth year, counted either from birth or conception (Gopal 1959: 28–9; Hillebrandt 1981: 50; Pandey 1998: 143–5), but most of the medieval digests contain hardly any information about it (Kane 1968ff.: II, 405).

39 See Bennett 2005: 60; Michaels 1986: 194; Pandey 1998: 148; and (with further references) Keßler in this volume.

40 Like many Newars in their neighbourhood, some Indo-Parbatiyā families prefer more economical group initiations (*saṁhika vratabandha*), even if according to tradition the initiation is prescribed for a single boy (see Bouillier 1986: 11, 17). A rare textual instance of a collective initiation, *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* 2.101.14, tells of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma being jointly initiated by Vasudeva (see Dange 1987: 912–3).

41 Harihara was already prescribing a worship of the Mother Goddesses (*mātr(kā)pūjā*) and an auspicious form of the ancestral rite (*ābhuyadayika-* or *nāndī(mukha)śrāddha*) as preparation (see, for example, his *Upanayanaprayoga* [Mālavīya 2000: 78]). In modern-day practice, the *pūrvāṅgakarman* of the *vratabandha* likewise usually includes the “binding of the tuft” (*jūṭikābandhana*), which is performed at dusk on the first day in preparation for the cutting of the boy's hair the next day.

vratabandha, to denote the whole ritual, the initiation of the Bāhūn and Chetri in its present form is a combination of the *upanayana* with three other *samskāras*. On the main day of the *vratabandha* the candidate passes through:

- The “first haircut”, literally the “making of a tuft of hair (at the back of the head by cutting away all the rest)” (*cūḍākarāṇa*), which according to PG 2.1.1–4 is performed when the boy is one year old, in the third year or when otherwise considered auspicious.
- The *upanayana*, according to PG 2.2.1–4 performed for a Brahmin in the eighth year after birth or conception, for a Kṣatriya in the eleventh and for a Vaiśya in the twelfth year,⁴² or for all whenever considered auspicious (by family custom).
- A ritualized “beginning of the Veda (study)” (*vedārambha*), not described by the PG as a *samskāra* (cf. below p. 33).
- And finally, the “return (home)” (*samāvartana*), prescribed at the end of the Veda study (cf. PG 2.6.1).

The details concerning the age of the boy and the time of the ritual given in the list clearly show that the *sūtrakāra* is referring to separate *samskāras*. The commentaries on the Sūtra and Rāmadatta’s handbook also describe separate rituals. But in some of the modern editions Rāmadatta’s text has been modified to accord with the present ritual practice. For instance, in the *Vājasaneyinām Upanayanapaddhati* (VUP), a version of the text containing only descriptions of the four *samskāras* mentioned above, all statements about the proper time have been removed from Rāmadatta’s text. Instead, the editor supplies the relevant information in a foreword—quoting, for example, the popular verses *Mānavadharmaśāstra* 2.36–37—but only for the *upanayana* (VUP: pp. 5–6).⁴³ A similar meshing of *samskāras*, unknown to older textual authorities, can be found in other recent ritual texts. While some modern handbooks—such as the *Vratabandhapaddhati* (VP) and later compilations based in part on it—still contain traces of the old form and mention the joint performance of the *samskāras* as the (usual) alternative,⁴⁴ other initiation manuals (the *Cūḍopanayana* text being one example) use the

42 The numbers correspond to the number of syllables in a *pāda* of the mantra to be learnt, respectively the *gāyatrī*, *trīstubh* and *jagatī* (Altekar 1965: 296, n. 1; Glaser 1912: 5; Kajihara 2002: 379, n. 7; Lubin 1994: 175; Oldenberg 1894: 466–7; Pandey 1998: 117–8; Scharfe 2002: 88, n. 7; cf. the *Samskāraprakāśa* of the *Vīramitrodaya* pp. 344–5). In the VPGh (p. 7) these numbers are also associated with different sets of deities, namely the Eight Vasus, the Eleven Rudras and the Twelve Ādityas (cf. *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* 3.9.3 [= SB 14.6.9.3]).

43 Another modification can be found in the *Karmakāṇḍabhbhāskara* (KBh). The “piercing of the ear” (*karnavedha*), as in Rāmadatta’s text, is performed between the *cūḍākarāṇa* and *upanayana* (see n. 37), but the order of *samskāras* has been changed. There the instructions for the *karnavedha* are given before the ones for the *cūḍākarāṇa* (without modifying the details about the age), the heading “*Cūḍopanayanavedārambhasamāvartanakarmanāṁ sahaprayogah*” being added (KBh: pp. 236–8). In the VUP (p. 30, n. 2) the *karnavedha* is merely mentioned in a footnote at the end of the *cūḍākarāṇa*.

44 According to the VP (p. 4), the *cūḍākarāṇa* should be performed at the age of one or three years, or else together with the *upanayana* (cf. SV: pp. kha–ga, 169; VPGh: p. 12).

same technique as the VUP: they describe four *samskāras* but quote the proper time only for the *upanayana* (e.g. CV: pp. 25–8).

Reflecting actual ritual practice, the modern textual tradition depicts the initiation as a bundle of rituals centred on the *upanayana*. Different conceptual links exist between the central (sub-)ritual and the other *samskāras* attached to it in the modern Nepalese tradition. Since early times the *upanayana* has determined eligibility (*adhikāra*) to study the Veda. The teaching of the *sāvitrī*, or *gāyatrī* (RV 3.62.10), grants access to the holy text.⁴⁵ In the modern *vratabandha*, the *upanayana samskāra* is immediately followed by two so-called educational *samskāras*: the ritualized beginning and end of the Vedic study (respectively the *vedārambha* and the *samāvartana*). Thus in the modern initiation wholly different stages of the classical educational system are amalgamated and passed ritually. In contrast to the classical conception, ritual and education have nothing to do with each other anymore. This does not necessarily mean that the ritual replaces actual Vedic learning. Ritual has a reality of its own. The study of the Veda is still prestigious, and although it is not very common in modern Nepal, I know personally of several Brahmin boys who joined a Vedic school after their *vratabandhas*. Thus they started to learn the Veda by heart after the end of their Vedic studies was ritually sealed!

Unlike the other *samskāras* of the *vratabandha*, the *cūdākarana* is not reckoned among the educational ones.⁴⁶ This first of the bundle of *vratabandha samskāras* replaces an ordinary act of shaving the head at the beginning of the *upanayana*, which is prescribed as purificatory preparation, for example, in PG 2.2.7 (5). While the *vedārambha* and *samāvartana* were simply attached to the *upanayana*, the *cūdākarana* was integrated into the pre-existing structure of that ritual.

Modern practice suggests that the conception of the *cūdākarana*, too, has undergone change. According to the textual tradition, it is the child's first haircut, performed to remove the impurity of the initial hairs.⁴⁷ Since this *samskāra* is nowadays combined with the *upanayana*, the age of the candidate at his *cūdākarana* is higher than prescribed in

45 This mantra is said to be the essence of the Veda (see Altekar 1965: 302–3, n. 1; Michaels 1986: 204). Stevenson states “so sacred is the *gāyatrī* that the right ear of the child, once he has heard it [in the *upanayana*], becomes holy for life and can save the sacred thread itself from contamination if that be wound over it” (1971: 36).

46 Altekar (1965: 290–1) has suggested that the *vidyārambha*, the commencement of one's primary education, is recommended only by very late authorities, given that it was long combined with the *cūdākarana*. But since most *Gṛhyasūtras* prescribe the *cūdākarana* for the third or even earlier year (for references, see Gonda 1980: 90; Gopal 1959: 280; Hillebrandt 1981: 49; Kane 1968ff.: II, 260; Pandey 1998: 96–7), this seems quite implausible.

47 According to some *Sūtras* (e.g. *Āśvalāyanagrhyasūtra* 1.17.18), the *cūdākarana* is also performed for girls, but without (Vedic) mantras (Bhattacharyya 1980: 48; Gopal 1959: 283; Hillebrandt 1981: 50; Schmidt 1987: 24–5). In the early 20th century, Stevenson (1971: 20, 23) reported that a ritualized first haircut for girls is no longer common (see also Campbell 1976: 62). Kane (1968ff.: II, 265), too, states that the *cūdākarana* for female children is practised only among a few castes.

the Sūtras,⁴⁸ so that in the initiation ritual the hair of the boy or young man is usually not being cut for the first time in his life. But even though a ritualized first haircut may have been done in early childhood, the performers insist that the shaving of the head within the *vratabandha* is not just a preparation for the *upanayana* but the *cūdākarana* *samskāra*. It seems that a change in ritual practice brought about a split of this *samskāra* into a purificatory “first haircut” (*mundana*) and the “making of the tuft of hair” (*cūdākarana*), the investment with the most prominent outward sign of a twice-born (*dvija*) alongside the sacrificial cord.⁴⁹

The combination or temporal fusion of different *samskāras* is the most striking modification of the modern-day initiation, but not the only one. The four *samskāras* constitute merely the central part of the ritual *vratabandha* complex. They form, one could say, the skeleton of the ritual structure but not its complete body. In the course of time these nuclei merged with other rituals, above all the fire offering (*homa*) and common forms of worship (*pūjā*).

*Samskāras and the fire ritual (*homa*)*

Fire offerings, the central feature of Vedic ritual culture, remained of great importance into post-Vedic times and beyond. Even in modern ritual the fire sacrifice (*homa*) often serves as a frame for a ritual event.⁵⁰ As Einoo (2005: 5) has argued, although there are great differences between Vedic and post-Vedic rituals, the later borrow many elements from the former in order to give the new procedures a Vedic appearance. The material on the initiation ritual confirms this opinion.

The *homa* is combined with *samskāras* already in the Grhyasūtras—at least with the most important ones. Like other Sūtras, the PG provides a model *homa* which can be

48 According to the Sūtras, the *cūdākarana* is usually performed in the third year of a child. Only a few passages, such as PG 2.1.1 and 4, mention an alternative performance at the end of the first year or at some commonly recognized auspicious time (cf. Gonda 1980: 90; Gopal 1959: 280; Hillebrandt 1981: 49; Kane 1968ff.: II, 260; Pandey 1998: 96–7). The proper age for the *upanayana* differs to a much greater extent in the Sūtras (Lubin 2005: 85–6). While many Indian scholars have tried to explain the divergence by referring to changes in the ancient educational system, and have assumed a low age as original (e.g. Altekar 1965: 295–8; Pandey 1998: 117–20), another group of scholars is of the opinion that the *upanayana* was primarily performed at a higher age as a puberty rite (Bhattacharyya 1980: 59–60, 67; Oldenberg 1894: 469; Scharfe 2002: 87–8; cf. Kajihara 2002: 143, 375; Kane 1968ff.: II, 270). In modern Nepal the *vratabandha* is related neither to the boy’s education nor to his physiological state, and is therefore quite flexible in terms of his age. In the initiations I observed myself, the age of the candidates ranged from five up to twenty-two years (cf. Bennett 2005: 120, n. 7; Michaels 1998: 94).

49 For the significance of the tuft of hair (*sikhā*), see Michaels (1998: 100–1); Pandey (1998: 98–9); Stevenson (1971: 22–3).

50 According to a modern Nepalese school book on ritual, the *Karmakāṇḍam* class 8 (p. 1, n. 1), a *homa* is performed not only in *samskāras*, but also in pacification rituals (*śāntikas*, such as the *graha-*, *vināyaka-*, *śrī-*, *ṛtu-* or *mūlaśānti*) or in order to promote growth and welfare (*pauṣṭikas*, such as the *tulasī homa*, the *viṣṇu-* or *rudrayāga*, and the *vrata-* or *devapratīṣṭhā*). Compare Gadādhāra’s commentary on PG 1.1.5 (Mālavīya 2000: 9).

applied *mutatis mutandis* within different ritual contexts.⁵¹ The text prescribes a set of ritual actions for the preparation of the fire ritual at its very beginning, when dealing with the domestic sacrifice of cooked food (PG 1.1.2–4).⁵² This is, as explicitly stated, the general procedure for any *homa* (PG 1.1.5). In the first description of a *samskāra*, namely the marriage ritual (*vivāha*), PG 1.5.3 specifies a standard set of fourteen oblations of ghee (*ājyāhuti*),⁵³ while PG 1.5.6 explains where the oblations unique to the *vivāha* should be inserted.⁵⁴ The Sūtra goes quickly down the list of actions and oblations, leaving it to the commentaries to provide further details (Mālavīya 2000: 4–9, 74–78).⁵⁵

Once having introduced the model of the *homa*, the *sūtrakāra* contents himself with presenting select features of it. In its description of the *cūḍākarāna*, PG 2.1.6 merely states that the mixing of hot and cold water, the first specific act of the *samskāra*, should be done after (the father) is touched (by a priest), offers oblations of ghee and eats (the remains).⁵⁶ Based on this short remark, the commentators of the Sūtra outline the usual preparations: the set of fourteen *ājyāhutis* and two concluding elements, namely the “eating of the remains” (*samśravaprāśana*) and the “gift of a filled vessel (to the priest)” (*pūrṇapātradāna*).⁵⁷ Thus they sketch out a standard *homa* including preceding and succeeding elements.⁵⁸ The handbooks, meant for guidance in the performance of the ritual, give full-fledged instructions for the *homa*, describing the proce-

51 For the model *homa* in the various Grhyasūtras, see Kane (1968ff.: II, 207–10); Gonda (1980: 346–62); Gopal (1959: 381–7); Harting (1922: xxx–xxxii).

52 This includes the five preparations of the ground (the so-called *pañcabhūsamskāras*), the preparing and placing of the utensils and so forth.

53 The fourteen oblations (*āhuti*) of ghee (*ājya*) consist of two *āghāra* oblations (for Prajāpati and Indra), two *ājya* portions (for Agni and Soma), three oblations for the *mahāvyāhṛtis*, five *sarvaprāyaścitta* oblations (to different deities), another ghee offering for Prajāpati, and finally an oblation to Agni *Sviṣṭakṛt*.

54 For modification of ritual procedures in the form of insertions (*āvāpa*), see Staal (1996: 91–9). Cf. Hillebrandt 1981: 98–9; Lubin 1994: 149; Oldenberg 1997: 28–9 (n. on *Śāṅkhāyanagrhyasūtra* 1.9.12).

55 To give just one example: About the placing of the *brahman*, an important priest who monitors the performance (cf. Kane 1968ff.: II, 1021), the Sūtra only states: “...having spread the seat of the *brahman* to the south...” (*dakṣiṇato brahmāsanam āstīrya* PG 1.1.2). Harihara (Mālavīya 2000: 4–5) additionally prescribes a standardized dialogue by which the *brahman* priest is selected and appointed for the ritual, and mentions different materials for worship. He also notes another feature that is standard in modern-day *homas* (see e.g. ASA: p. 42; ASP: p. 18; CV: p. 43; KBh: p. 253): if a *brahman* priest is not available, he can be replaced by a (bundle) of fifty blades of *kuśa* grass (cf. Gadādhara’s commentary [Mālavīya 2000: 6]).

56 *anvārabdha ājyāhutī hutva prāśanante* PG 2.1.6a. Oldenberg translates *anvārabdha* as “the father taking hold (of his wife)” (1997: 301). Stenzler translates: “Nachdem (der Vater, von der Frau) berührt...” (1876: 38). But according to the commentaries of Harihara (*brahmaṇā upasprṣṭa*) and Gadādhara (*brahmaṇānvārabdha*) the sacrificer is touched by the *brahman* priest (Mālavīya 2000: 7). Compare the commentaries of Harihara and Gadādhara on PG 2.5.3 (Mālavīya 2000: 75, 76).

57 See Harihara’s and Gadādhara’s commentaries on PG 2.1.6 and the *prayogas* for the *cūḍākarāna* after their commentaries on PG 2.1.24 (Mālavīya 2000: 7, 18–9, 21–2).

58 Likewise, the central set of *ājya* oblations can be divided into preparatory (the *āghāras*, the two *ājya* portions etc.), central (in case of the *cūḍākarānahoma*, the five *sarvaprāyaścitta* oblations) and finalizing parts (such as the offering to Agni *Sviṣṭakṛt*).

dure step by step. Its composers adopt most of the details added by the commentators to the concise description of PG 1.1.2–4 and 1.5.3⁵⁹ and make additions of their own.⁶⁰ One especially significant restructuring of the ritual is a modification at the end of the *homa*. According to Harihara and Gadādhara, the *homa* ends before the *samskāra* starts, and can therefore be regarded as a preparatory ritual (*pūrvāṅgakarman*) of the *samskāra*. In the handbooks, by contrast, additional concluding elements related to the *homa*—usually a “full (ladle) oblation” (*pūrnāhuti*)⁶¹ and the marking of the body with ashes (*tryāyuṣakaraṇa*)—follow the *samskāra*.⁶² Here the *homa* serves not so much as a preparation but rather as an enclosure that frames the main or core ritual. The handbooks thereby come closer to acknowledging the compositional principle that the main act (*pradhānakarman*), here the *cūḍākaraṇa samskāra* as a whole, is embedded in preparatory and concluding acts, the *pūrvāṅga*- and *uttarāṅgakarmans* respectively.

As with the *cūḍākaraṇa*, the commentaries on the PG and the ritual handbooks prescribe the *homa*, whether as a preparation or an enclosure, for each of the four *samskāras* constituting the modern *vratabandha*, although the Sūtra itself does not mention an oblation of ghee (*ājyāhuti*) for the *samāvartana* and says nothing about a *vedārambha samskāra*.⁶³ But there are modifications of the combination model outlined above, namely the sequence of (the first part of) the *homa*, the specific elements of the respective *samskāra* and, at least according to the handbooks, the final part of the *homa*. PG 2.3.2 has the oblations of ghee (*ājyāhuti*) for the *upanayana* occurring only after the conferral of the diverse insignia, the first part of the ritualized dialogue between preceptor and student and the entrusting of the boy to different deities (see table 1). In later texts, the usual series of preparations for the *homa* is split up. The five preparations of the ground (*pañcabhūsamskāra*) and the laying of the fire (*agnisthāpana*) are interwoven with other preparations and placed at the very beginning of the *upanayana*,⁶⁴ whereas the bigger part of the *homa* (the remaining preparations, the *ājya* oblations and the first part of the concluding elements) is performed at the position called for in the Sūtra.⁶⁵ Referring to *Mānavadharmaśāstra* 2.169, where the second birth of an Āryan is linked to the *mauñjibandhana*, Scharfe has stated that “the central act of initiation was originally not the investment with the sacrificial cord, but the ‘tying of

59 NGMPP H 391/27: 1v–3v; CV: pp. 4–18; DP: pp. 41–9; KBh: pp. 239–44; SV: pp. 171–81; VP: pp. 32–51; VPGh: pp. 86–96; VUP: pp. 5–17.

60 Some modern *vratabandha* handbooks, for instance, insert a fairly elaborate *agnipratiṣṭhā* (KBh: p. 241, n. 2; SV: p. 172; VP: pp. 33–4; VPGh: p. 90).

61 Einoo terms the *pūrnāhuti* an example of “the revival of quasi Vedic elements” (2005: 4).

62 NGMPP H 391/27: 4v; DP: pp. 54–5; KBh: p. 247; SV: p. 211; VP: pp. 67–8; VPGh: p. 102; VUP: pp. 28–9. Some handbooks mention other standard concluding elements, such as the payment to the priest (*dakṣinādāna*).

63 That the fire ritual played an important role when it came to constructing a new *samskāra* for the beginning of Vedic studies will be shown below (see p. 34).

64 NGMPP H 391/27: 5; DP: pp. 57–8; KBh: pp. 248–9; SV: p. 222; VP: pp. 84–5; VPGh: pp. 104, 106; VUP: p. 31.

65 Cf. Mālavīya 2000: 45–6, 80, 86. NGMPP H 391/27: 7r–8v; DP: pp. 63–70; KBh: pp. 252–6; SV: pp. 227–34; VP: pp. 103–23; VPGh: pp. 113–9; VUP: pp. 39–49.

the *muñja*-girdle”” (1999: 99).⁶⁶ But judging from the structure of the ritual in the PG, and assuming that the central acts of a *samskāra* are prepared for by the oblations of ghee, neither the binding of the girdle nor the investment with the sacred thread occupies a central position. From the structural point of view, both elements appear to be mere preparations, albeit fundamental ones.

During the central acts of initiation (which are prepared for—and in later texts enclosed by—the *homa*), the candidate is bonded to the crucial constituents of Vedic ritual (cf. Lubin 1994: 192–3). Once introduced to the language of the ritual by being taught the *sāvitrī*, the *brahmacārin* is brought into contact with the sacrificial fire. Under the guidance of his preceptor, he performs a series of ritual actions common to the preparation of a *homa*. According to PG 2.4.2–7, he is to wipe the ground around the fire with his hand, sprinkle water, stand up and put three pieces of kindling (*samidh*) into the fire, and then to repeat the whole procedure. These gestures, in PG 2.4.1 collectively termed “placing of the kindling” (*samidādhāna*), are an integral part of the daily duties of a student. By performing them at his initiation, the boy is acting for the first time as a *brahmacārin*. With regard to the structural principles of the ritual composition, it is noteworthy that the *samidādhāna* is also performed in the *samāvartana* (see PG 2.6.9), the *samskāra* that brings the observance of *brahmacarya* to an end. While the *samskāras*, or the central elements of them, are embedded in corresponding parts of the *homa*, the period of studies is framed by the repetition of one specific element of the *homa*.⁶⁷

The *samidādhāna* was not only subject to procedural modifications,⁶⁸ but its meaning also changed. In Śrauta rituals the *samidhs* are meant as kindling for the sacrificial fire, never as an oblation themselves, whereas in post-Vedic ritual, as Einoo (2005a: 41–9) has pointed out, they appear as offering material (cf. Gonda 1980: 166–7). At least some of the material examined here clearly documents this shift of meaning. Harihara (Mālavīya 2000: 52–3) and some of the handbooks (e.g. CV: p. 56) use the verbs *ā-dhā-* or *pra-kṣip-*: the student “lays” or “throws” the wood. According to Rāmadatta and others, the *samidhs* should be “offered”.⁶⁹ Some manuscripts even add a variant of the *tyāgavākyā*, a short formula common in the *homa* by which the sacrificer renounces the offered material.⁷⁰

66 See also Scharfe (2002: 108).

67 Depending on the text, one or more elements of the *upanayana*, such as the formal salute (*abhi-vādana*) and the bestowing of blessings (by the preceptor) (*āśīrvādapradāna*), may be repeated in the *samāvartana* as well.

68 In the initiation handbooks, the wiping of the ground (*parisamūhana*) prescribed in PG 2.4.2 is replaced by a fivefold placing of fuel (*indhana*) (NGMPP E 1549/15: 4v; H 391/27: 9r; CV: p. 55; DP: p. 72; KBh: p. 258; SV: p. 239; VP: pp. 134–136; VPGh: p. 125; VUP: pp. 52–3). Cf. Harihara’s commentary on the Sūtra (Mālavīya 2000: 52–3).

69 *juhuyāt* NGMPP E 1549/15: 5r and H 391/27: 9r; DP: p. 73; KBh: p. 258. Cf. VP: p. 136 (*cadāuna lāune*); VPGh: p. 125 (*homa garnū*).

70 *idam agnaye* E 1549/15: 5r; H 391/27: 9r. Contrariwise, the VUP (p. 54, n. 2) remarks that this action is not an offering (*havana*) and therefore no *tyāgavākyā* is spoken. See the discussion in Gadādhara’s commentary on PG 2.4.3 (Mālavīya 2000: 55).

This post-Vedic reinterpretation coincides with another modification of the *upanayana* ritual. After the laying of the *samidhs*, PG 2.4.8 mentions two more elements related to the fire, namely warming one's hands (*pāṇipratapana*) and washing one's face (*mukhamārjana*). Later texts insert the touching of the bodily parts (*sarvagātrasparśa*) and the marking of the body with ashes (*tryāyuṣakarana*).⁷¹ In the handbooks, the *tryāyuṣakarana* is a regular element of the *uttarāṅgakarman* of the *homa* (see above p. 28). Rāmadatta consequently describes two *tryāyuṣakarana*s for the *upanayana*, one after the *sarvagātrasparśa* (to conclude the “fire offering” within the core ritual of the *samskāra*) and a second after the begging for alms (*bhiksācarana*) (to finalize the framing *homa*).⁷² In modern ritual manuals, the historically accreted redundancy is moderated. The *pūrṇāhuti*, another standard concluding element of the *homa* (see above p. 28), is inserted before the *tryāyuṣakarana* within the *samskara*, and the final part of the *homa* after the *bhiksācarana* is elided.⁷³ In this way the core ritual is conflated with its enclosure, or to be more precise, the outer frame of the *samskāra* is merged into an inner frame.⁷⁴

The *samskāras* and *pūjā*

It was not only in the formative period of the ritual life-cycle that the different *samskāras* developed in correlation with the surrounding ritual culture. When dealing with the post-Vedic dynamics of ritual, special attention must be paid to *pūjā*, the most common and important form of ritual in contemporary Hinduism.⁷⁵ The central or core act of *pūjā* is the worship of a venerated object with varying acts of service (*upacāra*).⁷⁶ But depending on text and performer, the *pūjā* may contain several other features, many of them serving as frames: a ritualized invocation (*āvāhana*) and dismissal (*visarjana*) of the deity or the worship of the standard set: lamp (*dīpa*), jar (*kalaśa*) and Ganeśa.⁷⁷ By incorporating diverse Vedic, Puranic and Tantric elements, *pūjā* evolved into an elaborate ceremony, and eventually began to be employed as a construction kit for adapting other rituals, including the *samskāras*, to popular ritual practice.

71 These elements are already found in the commentaries of Harihara and Gadādhara on PG 2.4.8 (Mālavīya 2000: 57, 59) and are part of the sequence quoted in the *samāvartana* (ibid.: 103, 115, 127).

72 NGMPP E 1549/15: 5v, 6r; H 391/27: 9v, 10r; DP: pp. 74–5, 76–7; VUP: pp. 59, 63.

73 CV: pp. 59–60; SV: pp. 241–2; VP: pp. 143–5; VPGh: pp. 127–8. In the KBh (pp. 259–60) Rāmadatta's text is modified accordingly.

74 For examples of reduction of redundancy by merging inner frames into an outer frame, see below p. 38.

75 On the incorporation of the *pūjā* into the ritual practices of other religions, see Bühnemann (1988: 7–8).

76 On the historic origins of these acts of service see Thieme (1939) and Einoō (1996). In current ritual practice, a sequence of five or sixteen acts is the most common (see Bühnemann 1988: 10, 29, 64), but the number can be increased up to 108 or more, or, conversely, the different materials can be replaced by some unbroken rice (*akṣata*) or a flower.

77 For the standards governing *pūjā*, see Bühnemann (1988); Tripathi (2004).

That the investment with the sacrificial cord (*yajñopavītadhārana*), an element of relatively late origin, can be elaborated and highlighted by introducing worship of the strands and knots of the thread has already been mentioned (see p. 21). But old core elements of the *samskāras*, too, have been influenced by *pūjā*. To give another example from the *upanayana*: in some North Indian handbooks, which also (like the Nepalese manuals) belong to the Vājasaneyi school of the White *Yajurveda*, the teaching of the *sāvitrī* (*sāvitryupadeśa* or *mantradāna*) is supplemented by borrowings from *pūjā*. For instance, the *Upanayanapaddhati* (p. 87) describes how, in preparation for that ritual element, the mantra is written with a golden pen on a plate of rice and then worshipped together with Sarasvatī and the preceptor. In the *Yajñopavītapaddhati* (pp. 38–9) this sequence—extended by the worship of Gaṇeśa and the clan deity (*kuladevatā*)—is interpolated in Rāmadatta’s text. But to my knowledge only one of the handbooks used in Nepal has taken notice of this *pūjā*: referring to the *Samskāraganapati* of Rāmakṛṣṇa (cf. *Samskāraganapati* p. 712), Nityānanda Panta Parvatīya (1867–1931) in his *Samskāradīpaka* (p. 298)⁷⁸ offers a parenthetical description but remarks that this *pūjā* is neither mentioned by Gadādhara, Nr̥siṁha and others nor common in “our regions”.⁷⁹ Thus while the manuals describe the time-honoured core actions of the *samskāras* and the *homa* with great unanimity, they do display regional variations concerning details added to the ritual later, even though they all belong to the same Vedic school and thus follow the same *Grhyasūtra*.

Pūjā has also influenced the other *samskāras* that constitute the modern *vrata-bandha*. It is common in modern Nepalese handbooks and practice to prepare the *cūḍā-karana* by fastening to the hair of the boy three bundles of cloth in which Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva have been worshipped with customary *pūjā*.⁸⁰ An example from the *saṁvartana* can serve to demonstrate how features of *pūjā* have been incorporated into the *samskāra*: According to the school of the White *Yajurveda*, one central act of the *saṁvartana* is a bath (*snāna* or *abhiṣeka*) with the water of eight jars (*aṣṭakalaśa*).⁸¹ PG 2.6.9–14 specifies the position of the vessels⁸² and the mantras for taking and sprinkling the water. In his commentary and manual, Harihara adds a few details to these frag-

78 This influential handbook (frequently quoted by the KBh and the VPGh) was written in AD 1917. Its author lived and died in Allahabad (see Upadhyāya 1994: 408), and it is widely employed in Nepal by Kumāī Brahmins (oral communication, Mahes Raj Pant).

79 *gadādharaṇr̥siṁhādibhir noktam | na cāsmaddeśeu pracalati*.

80 The descriptions of the *jūṭikābandhana* or *-adhivāsana* differ in details (cf. CV: pp. 2–3; KBh: p. 239; SD: pp. 278–9; SV: pp. 47–53; VP: pp. 134–6; VPGh: pp. 77–83; VUP: pp. 1–3). Rāmadatta only hints at this preparatory ritual (*pūrvāṅgakarman*) when, in his description of the *cūḍākarana*, he says that, of the three tufts tied the night before, the right-hand one should be moistened first (NGMPP H 391/27: 3v; DP: p. 50; KBh: p. 244; VUP: p. 17).

81 Other *Grhyasūtras*, while not mentioning the eight vessels, do offer details not found in the PG: for example, that the student is to sit on a cow’s hide during the bath. For these differences, see Gopal (1959: 311–4); Hillebrandt (1981: 61–3); Kane (1968ff.: II, 408–11); Pandey (1998: 150–1).

82 According to PG 2.6.9, the water vessels are placed north of the fire on *kuṣa* grass that has been laid out east to west, pointing east. Some of the handbooks mention an alternative position: the VP (p. 240), for example, says that the vessels are placed either north or east of the fire. In modern practice, the vessels occupy space on the eastern side of the ritual arena.

mentary instructions: the water should be taken with the right hand, the procedure starts with the vessel in the south and works its way north, and so forth (cf. Mālavīya 2000: 103–4, 127). These points are standard. In Hindu ritual, the right hand is generally favoured over the left, and many acts are directed toward the north, the direction of the gods. Rāmadatta's handbook is very close to Harihara's,⁸³ but some more recent texts devote particular attention to the *kalaśas*, the jars from which the water for the bath is taken. The *kalaśa* is an important implement in *pūjā*. As they do for other utensils used in *pūjā*, the manuals in question elaborate on its installation: First the ground is prepared and a seat (*āsana*) erected. Then the *kalaśa* is filled with several auspicious materials and a series of gods is invoked onto the vessel, especially its “shoulder region” (*skandhapradeśa*), and worshipped.⁸⁴ Different parts of this standard set of preparations have been transferred to the *samskāra* ritual. The VP (p. 241) describes how eight seats (*āsana*) are prepared by tracing out eight-petalled lotus blossoms (*aṣṭadalakamala*) and placing leaf-plates of rice on them. The text also mentions the filling of the vessels with, among other things, water, sandal paste, barley, sesame, flower, “all herbs” (*sarvauṣadhi*),⁸⁵ “five jewels” (*pañcaratna*) and “five leaves” (*pañcapallava*) (cf. VPGh: p. 159). Other handbooks adapt certain details of the invocation (*āvāhana*) and worship.⁸⁶ For instance, in the CV (pp. 73–5) the Eight Mothers (Aṣṭamātrikā) and the Guardians of the Eight Directions (Dik- or Lokapāla), two popular groups of deities collectively invoked onto the *kalaśa* of the *pūjā*, are assigned to the eight vessels. Together with other Vedic and Puranic gods, they are worshipped vessel by vessel, each with five acts of service (*pañcopacārapūjā*) and various mantras (cf. KK: pp. 105–6):

| <i>Kalaśa</i> | Mantras | Deities |
|-----------------|--|--|
| 1 st | <i>om tattvā yāmi brahmaṇā</i> etc. (VS 18.49, 21.2) | Varuṇa, Brāhmī, Indra |
| 2 nd | <i>om namo 'stu sarpebho ye</i> etc. (VS 13.6) | The Nāgas, Maheśvarī, Agni |
| 3 rd | <i>om ṛtāśādṛtadhāmāgnih</i> etc. (VS 18.38) | The Apsarases, Kaumārī, Yama |
| 4 th | <i>om brahma jajñānam prathamam</i> etc. (VS 13.3) | Brahmā, Vaiśnavī, Nirṛti |
| 5 th | <i>om viṣṇo rarāṭamasi</i> etc. (VS 5.21) | Vāmana, Vārāhī, Varuṇa |
| 6 th | <i>om mā nastoke tanaye</i> etc. (VS 16.16) | Rudra ⁸⁷ , Aindrī, Vāyu |
| 7 th | <i>om sahasraśīrṣā puruṣah</i> etc. (VS 31.1) | The Cirañjīvins, ⁸⁸ Cāmuṇḍā, Soma |
| 8 th | <i>om śrīś ca te lakṣmīś ca</i> etc. (VS 31.22) | Lakṣmī, Mahālakṣmī, Iśāna |

Table 2: Deities worshipped in the eight vessels (*aṣṭakalaśa*) as part of the *samāvartana*

83 Only a few additions are made in order to provide more precise instructions for the ritual acts indicated in the PG (E 1549/15: 11v–12r; H 391/27: 16rv; DP: pp. 101–3; KBh: pp. 277–8; VUP: pp. 97–100).

84 For the standard procedure for the *kalaśasthāpana* in the *pūjā*, see KBh: pp. 6–11, 54–7, 60; SV: pp. 8–13, 15–6; VPGh: pp. 41–4, 49–52. Cf. Bühnemann 1988: 45–6.

85 *Sarvauṣadhi* is a mixture of (often ten) different plants, see e.g. *Agnipurāṇa* 177.17.

86 The VP (p. 241) notes parenthetically that, according to some, the Eight Mothers (Aṣṭamātrikā) are worshipped in the vessels.

87 According to the SV (p. 278) the Eleven Rudras beginning with Vīrabhadra etc. are worshipped.

88 This group of eight long-living or immortal beings (Mārkaṇḍeya, Vyāsa, Paraśurāma, Aśvatthāmā [also known as Drauna], Kṛpa [also known as Kṛpācārya], Bali, Hanumān and Vibhīṣana) is also worshipped in a *pūjā* on the occasion of one's birthday (see KBh: p. 232; KK9: pp. 119–21).

In the SV (pp. 271–82), a handbook just recently compiled, the information given in the VP and CV is combined, with the *asṭakalaśapūjā* being further elaborated. The vessels are filled with additional materials, and the text enumerates for each of the deities given in table 2 a separate *āvāhana* formula (*om N.N. ihāgaccha iha tisṭha* etc.) and a specific mantra.⁸⁹ Even Purānic deities are invoked by means of Vedic mantras. In *pūjā* in general, and not only in *pūjā*-ized modern ritual, components of ritual (actions, deities, mantras, materials) of different historical origin are readily combined.

The construction of a new *samskāra*

In the post-Vedic period, the principles of accretion introduced so far—the transfer or creation of new core elements, the framing by a fire ritual, and the adoption of *pūjā*-based standards—were used not only to modify existing rituals but also to construct a completely new *samskāra*.

In the series of *samskāras*, the PG does not mention a separate ritual for the beginning of study. PG 2.5 having ended with the description of the *upanayana*, the next section starts with the instruction that one should take a bath (i.e. perform *samāvartana*) when the study of the Veda is complete (PG 2.6.1). This does not mean that Pāraskara made no provisions for ritual at the beginning of Vedic study. A later chapter of the PG is concerned with the inauguration of the annual course of study (*adhyāyopākarmā*) in the month of Śrāvaṇa. For that occasion the text outlines a special *homa* (PG 2.10.3–9), which is more generally performed whenever observances (*vrata*) are begun or ended (PG 2.10.10).⁹⁰ It prescribes a number of other ritual actions, too, including the laying of *samidhs*, the eating of grains and yoghurt, and the recitation of the *sāvitrī* (PG 2.10.11–18).⁹¹ Thus the PG contains a cyclic but no life-cycle ritual for the beginning of the study of the Veda.

At the end of his *upanayana* manual, Harihara quotes PG 2.6.1 (see above) and argues that the completion of Vedic study presupposes having begun it.⁹² Consequently he includes instructions for the “beginning of the Veda” (*vedārambha*) before proceeding on to the *samāvartana*.⁹³ Like other *samskāras*, this “new” ritual is to be preceded

89 The first deity or group of deities of each vessel (Varuṇa, the Nāgas, Apsarases etc.) is worshipped while reciting the mantra given in table 2. For the worship of the Eight Mothers (Brāhmī, Maheśvarī, Kaumārī etc.) the text employs the mantra VS 28.13, with three exceptions: Vaiṣṇavī (like Vāmana) is worshipped to the text of VS 5.21; Aindrī or Indrāṇī, to that of VS 38.3; and Mahālakṣmī (like Lakṣmī), to that of VS 31.22. The mantras given for the eight *dikpālas* (Indra, Agni, Yama etc.) are VS 20.50, 22.17, 37.11, 12.62, 21.1., 27.12, 34.12 and 25.18 respectively.

90 For the different *vratas* which had to be observed in order to make a student eligible to study (a certain portion of) the Veda, see Gopal (1959: 306–10); Kane (1968ff.: II, 370–5); Pandey (1998: 141).

91 For the conclusion (*utsarga*) of the annual course of study in the month of Pauṣa, see PG 2.12.1–3.

92 *tatra vedasya ārambhaṁ binā samāptih karttum aśakyeti* (Mālavīya 2000: 84).

93 This ritual is also called *vratādeśa* by Harihara (Mālavīya 2000: 84). On this term, cf. Kane (1968ff.: II, 197); Pandey (1998: 142).

by the worship of the Mothers (*mātrpūjā*) and an auspicious form of the ancestral rite (*ābhuyudayikaśrāddha*). Then, before starting to teach the Veda to the *brahmacārin*, the preceptor (*guru*) conducts a *homa* (Mālavīya 2000: 84). While the *samskārahomas* for the *cūḍākaraṇa* and *upanayana* feature the standard fourteen oblations (see above n. 53), the *vedārambhahoma* is modified by the insertion (*āvāpa*) of the *vedāhutis*, a set of oblations mentioned in PG 2.10.4–9 for the *adhyāyopākarman*. Harihara applies the same modification to the *samāvartanahoma* (Mālavīya 2000: 103), thus employing an element from the ritual frame of the annual course of study to close out the life-cycle period of studenthood.

In Harihara's manual, the *vedāhutis* can be viewed structurally as the centrepiece of the *vedārambha* ritual, but the handbooks add further elements, with the effect that this set of oblations forms part of the frame of a new core ritual.⁹⁴ Rāmadatta's text contains four new elements: 1) the recitation of the *gāyatrī*, 2) a formal salutation, 3) the teaching of the mantras VS 3.1 and 3.2a, and 4) the recitation of the *svastivācana*.⁹⁵ Except for the teaching of the Vedic mantras, these elements are standard for the ritual, being performed, for example, in the *upanayana*. Later texts make further additions. Gadādhara mentions *pūjās* for Vighneśa (Ganeśa), Sarasvatī, Hari (Viṣṇu), Lakṣmī and one's own tradition or school for the *vedārambha* (Mālavīya 2000: 96). More recent handbooks often include the worship of the preceptor or other persons who have kept up knowledge of one's Vedic tradition,⁹⁶ along with a *pūjā* for the Veda itself.⁹⁷

Since the handbooks are not bound to an ancient model in a scripture as authoritative as the PG, it is no surprise that they vary to a much greater extent concerning the *vedārambha* than in their descriptions of other life-cycle rituals. Considerable differences are even attested for the very central element of the *samskāra*. According to Rāmadatta, the student is taught the beginning of the third book of the VS.⁹⁸ This book contains the mantras for the daily fire oblations (*agnihotra*) (cf. *Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra* 4.12–15). The reason for this choice may have been its great importance for the ritual practice of a householder. However, more recent handbooks follow a different principle in selecting the text to be taught. The *Cūḍopanayana* text has settled upon (embedded in a repeated recitation of the *gāyatrī*) VS 1.1a and 40.17c along with ŚB 1.1.1.1 and

94 Like Harihara's, all other handbooks begin the *vedārambha* with the *homa* that centres on the *vedāhutis* (E 1549/15: 6r–8r; H 391/27: 10v–12v; CV: pp. 62–4; DP: pp. 78–86; KBh: pp. 262–7; KK: pp. 91–6; SV: pp. 247–54; VP: pp. 159–84; VPGh: pp. 132–9; VUP: pp. 64–75), but (as is usual in the other *samskāras*) most of them attach the *pūrṇāhuti* and *tryāyusakarana* as concluding elements to the new main or core part of the *samskāra* (see E 1549/15: 8v; H 391/27: 12v–13r; CV: pp. 64–5; DP: pp. 87–8; KBh: p. 269; SV: p. 257; VP: pp. 194–6; VPGh: pp. 145–6; VUP: pp. 76–7).

95 NGMPP E 1549/15: 8r; H 391/27: 12v; DP: pp. 86–7; KBh: p. 268; VUP: pp. 75–6.

96 Depending on the handbook, this *pūjā* may honour one's preceptor (*guru*), the *sūtrakāras* and sometimes the *Rṣis* (cf. CV: p. 64; KBh: p. 237, n. 2; VP: p. 184; VPGh: p. 140). According to the KK (p. 96), Kātyāyana is worshipped as the *sūtrakāra*.

97 According to the *Cūḍopanayana* text, the book of the Veda is itself worshipped (CV: p. 64). The VP (p. 184) prescribes the worship of Vedapuruṣa through offerings on the book (cf. SV: p. 254; VPGh: pp. 139–40).

98 NGMPP E 1549/15: 8r; H 391/27: 12v; DP: p. 87; KBh: p. 268; VUP: p. 76.

14.9.4.33 (CV: p. 64). Thus, independently of their content or ritual significance, the very first and last words of the *Samhitā* and the *Brāhmaṇa* of the White *Yajurveda* are to be recited *pars pro toto*. The two dissimilar models can be found in extended versions, and also in different (and sometimes conflicting) combinations with each other.⁹⁹

Most of these variations clearly impose a drastic change of meaning upon the *vedārambha*. Introduced to mark a beginning, it was transformed into a ritual representation of the study as a whole. In the contemporary initiation, the learning of the *Veda* is not only initiated but also passed and finalized within one complex ritual.

The *vratabandha* in modern-day Kathmandu

So far the *vratabandha* has been described as a bundle of four *samskāras* of different historical origin, each framed by a fire ritual (*homa*). The ritual was enriched by adding details and elements from other rituals (such as *dīksā*, *vivāha*, and *pūjā*), and with that the outlines of the complex form of the *vratabandha* began to take shape. But this sketch, based on the descriptions in the handbooks and their textual predecessors, does not yet reflect the whole complexity of the ritual as it is performed in modern-day Nepal.

Among the Bāhūn and Chetri of Kathmandu there is a tendency to engage for the *vratabandha* professional priests who have passed the course of study of Vedic schools and so can claim that they perform the ritual according to the rules of the textual tradition (Nep. *vidhile*). These priests not only consult an initiation handbook to guide them through the ritual; they also make use of a manual on how to lay a sacrificial fire (*agni-*

99 According to the VP (pp. 186–95), the teaching begins (as in the text of Rāmadatta) with VS 3.1 and 2, but the handbook subsequently also cites the beginnings of the other *Samhitās* (RV 1.1.1 etc.), while specifying alternative verses or text passages in case the student is a Kṣatriya or Vaiśya. The *Samskāradīpaka* (pp. 311–4), on the other hand, extends the structure found in the *Cūḍapanayana* text. The mantras given are: VS 1.1 and 1.2 entirely, the beginnings of the following chapters (VS 2.1, 3.1 and so forth up to 40.1) as *pratīkas* and VS 40.17 completely. Then follows ŚB 1.1.1.1 and 14.9.4.33, the beginnings of the other *Samhitās*, and finally PG 3.16, the last section of the *Grhyasūtra*, which is said to prevent what is learnt from falling into oblivion (see also VP: pp. 187–8). Modern compilers often combine different information of older authorities. The KBh (pp. 268 and 267–9, n. 2), for instance, follows Rāmadatta in the main text and quotes (with slight variations) the corresponding passage of the *Samskāradīpaka* in a note. The main text of the KK (pp. 96–8) adopts the order of the *Samskāradīpaka*, while noting that, as an alternative to VS 1.1, VS 3.1 can be taught as the first mantra of the so-called “short beginning of the *Veda*” (*svalpavedārambha*). The SV (pp. 254–6), by contrast, adds the mantras VS 1.1 and 2 to an abbreviated version of the VP. The VPGh (pp. 139–42), finally, represents a combination of the passages in the KBh and VP.

sthāpana or *-sthāpanā*).¹⁰⁰ Before observing how the *agnisthāpanā* is combined with the initiation ritual, it is worth considering the composite character of this fire ritual.

As noted above, the *samskāras* have been *homa*- and *pūjā*-ized in a process of accretion. In the contemporary ritual practice, there are still other correlations between these rituals. A *pūjā* can be framed and upgraded by a *homa*.¹⁰¹ The *agnisthāpanā*, at least according to the specialized modern Nepalese handbooks, combines all three forms of ritual. This ritual adapts the human *samskāras* to the “new-born” fire¹⁰² and also provides several examples of the *pūjā*-ization of the fire ritual.¹⁰³ The preparatory part includes the general components of *pūjā*: the purification and placement of the different vessels;¹⁰⁴ the worship of a lamp (*dīpa*), jar (*kalaśa*) and Ganeśa; and so forth.¹⁰⁵ Some of the *pūjā* elements, including those mentioned, have been transferred to the *homa* without any modification. In other cases, standards applicable to *pūjā* have been adapted to components specific to the *homa*, as in the worship of the fire altar (*vedi*) or the “girdle” (*mekhalā*) around the fire (namely a pattern formed by powder on the ground).¹⁰⁶ Another way of combining features of a *pūjā* and *homa* is illustrated in the centremost part of the *agnisthāpanā*. As noted previously (see p. 34), the standard set of fourteen oblations of ghee (*caturdaśājyāhuti*) can be modified by insertions (*āvāpa*). In the *agni-*

100 There are several such publications available in the Nepalese market: for example, the booklet of Buddhisāgara Parājuli titled *Agnisthāpanā* (ASP), which has been reprinted since the 1960s by different publishers, or the newly compiled *Agnisthāpanāvidhi* (or ^o*paddhati*) of Om Prakāśa Adhikārī (ASA). The procedure for laying a fire is also included in some comprehensive works on ritual. In the latest edition of the official Nepalese school book series on ritual, the general *homa* ordinance (*sāmānyahomavidhi*) is the first lesson of class eight (KK8: pp. 1–51). Dadhirāma Marāsini deals with the *agnisthāpanā* in the general part of his ritual compendium, just after the *mātrikāpūjā* and the *ābhyudayikaśrāddha* (KBh: pp. 37–86); Madhusūdana Suvedī, too, has integrated the relevant instructions into his initiation manual (SV: pp. 54–114, 296–324).

101 In the contemporary ritual practice, several elaborate forms of *pūjā*, such as the popular *śiva*- or *satyanārāyaṇapūjā*, usually include a *homa* conducted so as to conform to an *agnisthāpanā*.

102 In order for the fire to be laid properly, it has to pass through the different *samskāras* from *garbhādhāna* up to *vivāha*. These *agnisamskāras* are usually performed in a very concise way by reciting mantras (cf. ASA: pp. 54–6; ASP: pp. 13–17; KBh: pp. 40–2; KK8: pp. 7–9; SV: pp. 67–70). For Puranic references, see Einoo (2005: 4, n. 3); Hikita (2005: 149).

103 In general, the *agnisthāpanā* can be seen as an extended version of the standard *homa* (cf. p. 28–9). Only a few of the basic elements have been subjected to serious modification. To give an example: whereas in the initiation handbooks (in accordance with older normative texts) a seat (*āsana*) is offered to the *brahman* priest (see n. 55), in the modern *agnisthāpanā* a figure made of 50 stalks of *kuśa* grass is placed on the *āsana* and worshipped together with Viṣṇu and Prajāpati as the god Brahmā (cf. ASA: pp. 42–3; ASP: pp. 18–20, 32–4; KBh: pp. 42, 47–8; KK8: pp. 9–10, 14–5; SV: pp. 79–80). In the ASA (pp. 42–3), Śiva is worshipped instead of Prajāpati, the handbook having introduced into the textual tradition a variant quite common in modern ritual practice.

104 According to most of the handbooks, the so-called “ritual vessel” (*karmapātra*: see ASA: pp. 7–8; ASP: pp. 2–3; KK8: p. 2; SV: pp. 55–7) and the vessel with water for receiving a respected guest (*argh[y]apātra*: see ASA: pp. 13–5; ASP: p. 32; KK8: p. 14; SV: p. 79) are installed during the *agnisthāpanā*.

105 ASA: pp. 29–40; ASP: pp. 45–56; KBh: pp. 54–8; SV: pp. 88–97.

106 For these *pūjās* specific to a *homa*, see ASA: pp. 22–28; ASP: pp. 9–11; KBh: pp. 39–40; KK8: pp. 4–6; SV: pp. 65–6.

sthāpanā, one addition to the basic scheme of oblations is a *pradhānadevatāhoma*, a set of oblations for the 58 “main deities” summoned—in the *pūjā* as well as in the preparation of the *pūjā*-ized *homa*—onto the shoulder of the *kalaśas*.¹⁰⁷ Finally, extensive refinements are also made to the concluding part, to allow for blessings to be bestowed upon the participants of the ritual. Many of the elements added here correspond to elements of the extended beginning.¹⁰⁸ Like the basic *homa* described in initiation handbooks, the procedure for the *agnisthāpanā* can be divided into three parts: the preparations (*pūrvāṅgakarman*), the main act or *homa* proper, and a final part (*uttarāṅgakarman*). A central set of oblations is enclosed in both forms of a *homa*, but in the *agnisthāpanā* further layers are added to this framework.¹⁰⁹

The principle that something ritually important needs a frame (provided by preparations and corresponding parts at the end, reduplication of ritual elements etc.) can be applied to all levels of ritual. The different parts of the basic *homa* are arranged to frame the main acts of each *samskāra* (see p. 28–9) and in a slightly modified form to frame the ritual stage of studenthood (see p. 34). In the modern *vratabandha*, the *agnisthāpanā* manual is used to instal an additional fire amidst the four fires for the *samskārahomas*.¹¹⁰ This *pūjā*-ized form of a *homa* encloses the bundle of four *samskāras* as a whole. In this way the *vratabandha* is marked as a ritual unit and the general framework of a *pūjā* is integrated into the initiation ritual.

This complex construction built up around the four *samskāras* and their different frames can be altered further by either supplementation or reduction. Most of the modern initiation handbooks at least mention the “pacification of the (nine) seizers” (*grahaśānti*) as a necessary preparatory ritual before the first *samskārahoma*.¹¹¹ In actual prac-

107 The *pradhānadevatāhoma* consists of oblations for the Pañcāyanadevatās, the Five Lokapālas, the Navagrahas, the Adhidevatās, the Pratyādhidevatās, the Dik- or Ten Lokapālas, the Eight Vasus, the Twelve Ādityas, Eleven Rudras, the Sixteen Mātrikās, the Seven Maruts and the six gods Vināyaka, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Arka and Vanaspati (ASA: pp. 63–76; ASP: pp. 77–86; KBh: pp. 63–70; SV: pp. 104–14; KK8: pp. 27–34; for the invocation of these deities onto the *kalaśa*, see ASA: p. 56; ASP: p. 40; KBh: pp. 9–11, 45–9; KK8: p. 25; SV: pp. 15–6, 98–9; VPGh: pp. 49–51). A second insertion, often called the (subsequent or concluding) sacrifice for the four *Svastis* etc. (*catuhsvastyādi[uttarāṅga]homa*), consists of oblations for further (groups of) Vedic and Puranic deities, and even epic heroes like the five Pāṇḍavas (for the variants, cf. ASA: pp. 70–6; ASP: pp. 87–94; KBh: pp. 70–6; KK8: pp. 34–40; SV: pp. 296–307).

108 E.g. the ritual dismissal (*visarjana*) of Agni, Brahmā and other gods invoked for the ritual (ASA: pp. 106–7; ASP: pp. 112–3; KBh: p. 82; KK8: p. 45; SV: pp. 319–20), the *mangalābhiṣeka* with water from the *kalaśa* (ASA: pp. 107–11; ASP: pp. 114–5; KBh: pp. 82–4; KK8: pp. 46–8; SV: pp. 320–3) or the binding of a protective thread (*rakṣā*) around the wrist of the sponsor and other participants (ASA: p. 112; ASP: p. 117; KBh: p. 85; KK8: p. 48; SV: pp. 223–4), after having been prepared and worshipped at the beginning of the ritual (ASA: pp. 43–5; ASP: pp. 53–6; KBh: pp. 58–60; KK8: pp. 24–5; SV: pp. 97–8).

109 On the framing of the fire ritual with elements from other rituals, see Witzel (1986: 176–7 and 1992: 780–2).

110 Usually all five fires are situated in a line on the central north-south axis.

111 Cf. CV: pp. 3–4; KBh: p. 239; KK: p. 71; VP: pp. 9–11; VPGh: p. 78. A more detailed account is given in the SV (pp. 114–68). Compare the *grahaśānti* manuals in the appendix of the VPGh (pp. 177–236) and the general part of the KBh (pp. 87–152).

tice it is not uncommon to combine the *vratabandha* with still other popular rituals, such as the worship of Śiva (*śivapūjā*) or the donation of a lakh of lamp wicks (*lakṣavartikādīpadāna*, Nep. *lākhabatti*). Quite often additional priests are employed to recite auspicious texts.¹¹² It all depends on the sponsors' resources to what extent the ritual is expanded. A lack of resources or interest in the ritual conduces to a minimalized form. Instead of separate fires, all necessary oblations can be offered to one fire, and the procedures for the different *samskāras* can also be reduced to a few basic elements. As long as there are certain significant features, the ritual performed remains valid.¹¹³

But even when the ritual is well equipped, the ideal scheme spelled out above cannot always be strictly followed. Not only the day of the ritual needs to be auspicious, but certain important moments within the ritual, too, are fixed astrologically.¹¹⁴ It is therefore rather the rule than the exception that the priests are forced to rearrange the sequence of acts in order to harmonize ritual and cosmic events. Some elements, such as the *pradhānadevatāhoma* or parts of the *grahasānti*, may be postponed or, if the personal resources are available, held parallel to core elements of the *samskāras*. Less important ritual elements can be skipped. How the procedure is accommodated to the time frame has to be decided upon on an individual basis.

Beyond that, some more general modifications of the ritual structure can be observed. It has already been seen that an outer frame can merge into an inner frame (see p. 30). But in ritual practice the reverse form of reduction is much more common. Initiation handbooks redundantly describe for every *samskārahoma* the standard *pūrvāṅgakarman*. In modern performances, the procedure is abbreviated by amalgamating parts of those frames with the *agnisthāpanā*. After the central fire has been elaborately laid on the basis of the *agnisamskāras* and what follows, the *samskāra* fires are kindled by transferring embers of the central one without repeating the time-consuming preparations from *pañcabhūsamskāra* to *samidādhāna*. A similar shortcut can be applied to certain other ritual elements repeatedly prescribed by the manuals, including the "gift of a cow" (*godāna*) and such standard concluding elements of *pūjā* as the "prayer for forbearance (towards ritual mistakes)" (*kṣamāprārthanā*) and the "presenting the ritual (to the god)" (*karmasamarpana*). In some cases this is done not only to save time and effort. Even as the light (*dīpa*) kindled at the beginning is kept burning throughout the whole procedure, so too all the different gods, once invoked, should remain present for the ritual as long as possible. Their dismissal (*visarjana*), although in the handbooks often prescribed for immediately after their *pūjā*, is usually postponed and collectively performed as part of the *uttarāṅgakarman* of the *agnisthāpanā*, that is, just before the ritual ends and blessings are distributed.

112 Chapters of the Veda, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, the *Durgāsaptasatī* (*Caṇḍī*), the *Viṣṇusahasranāma* or the *gāyatrīmantra* are favoured for recitation.

113 For example, the *upanayana* should include at least the investment with the sacrificial cord and ascetic-like dress, the teaching of the *gāyatrī* and the begging for alms.

114 Besides the beginning of the ritual (*śubhāramba*), an auspicious moment (Nep. *sāit*) needs to be assured for the cutting of the boy's hair, the teaching of the *gāyatrī* and the begging for alms.

Textual normative models of the ritual offer several possibilities when it comes to substituting components and to elaborating or shortening the procedure. In practice the idealized form of a ritual is accommodated to the limits of personal, temporal and material resources. Therefore, significant variations can occur. The attempt has been made, though, to show that most of the modifications during the historical evolution of the ritual, and during modern performances as well, are not random, but follow clear conventions or rules. Some of the principles underlying the composition and dynamics of the ritual have, I hope, been demonstrated in this paper.

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