

## The *kalivarjya* concerning the prohibition of initiation during the celebration of the Vedic *sattra* rituals

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The subject of *kalivarjyas*, their origin, and their place within Brahmanical ideology has attracted keen interest from various scholars. Indeed, the *kalivarjyas* constitute ‘exceptions’ to the dharmic norm that seem to invalidate the authority of the *dharmā* itself. However, they allow us to verify how the *dharmā* has been constantly adapted to the new requirements that have emerged with the transformations that have taken place in India over time in the religious and socio-political spheres. Among the *kalivarjyas*, some refer to the field of *śrauta* rituals, and the one concerning the prohibition of the *sattradīkṣā*, i.e., the initiation on the celebration of Vedic rituals of the *sattra* type, appears particularly interesting. Through the analysis of some ancient and medieval texts and based on the interpretations provided in the past by numerous scholars, in this study I attempt to offer some possible explanations to clarify the meaning and the origin of this *kalivarjya*. The explorations conducted will allow shedding new light on the way of interpreting the changes that took place in the centuries following the decline of Vedic religiosity from the ritual, juridical, and historical-political point of view. This will lead to clarifying what the bans are for, whether they are intended to preserve something from the changes themselves, and whether they are intended to preserve, or sanction established roles in society.

**Key Words:** *Kalivarjya*, *Dharma*, Hindu law, Vedic rituals, *Sattra* rituals

### 1. Foreword

In the field of Indological studies concerning the analysis of the *kalivarjyas*, or “forbidden uses in the age (*yuga*) of *kali*,” some relevant contributions have been made by Italian scholars, beginning with Della Casa (1997).<sup>1</sup> Carlo Della Casa important contribution took on the value of a seminal study that bore fruit in three articles by Pellegrini (1997, 1998b, 2001).

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<sup>1</sup> Carlo Della Casa had already reflected on the *kalivarjya* topic in Della Casa (1991), entitled *Conservazione e innovazione nella cultura indiana antica*.

Following in the footsteps of these eminent scholars, this article is devoted to an interpretative analysis of the *kalivarjya* on the prohibition of initiation during the celebration of Vedic rituals of the *sattra* type.

## 2. The *kalivarjya* that interdicts the *sattradikṣā*

Starting with a few hints in the literature of the epic-purāṇic age (particularly in the *Nāradapurāṇa* and the *Ādityapurāṇa*), in the legal sources of later centuries, and then in the commentaries and digests (*nibandha*) of the medieval age, the Brahmanical tradition formulated the notion of *kalivarjya*, “that which is to be avoided in the Kali age,” i.e., the usages interdicted in the *kaliyuga*. According to a well-known conception of time established in the Purāṇic age, the progressive decay of *dharma* (meaning cosmic, religious, and moral law, but also legal norms)<sup>2</sup> determines the alternation of the four ages (*yugas*) of the cosmos.<sup>3</sup> Of these, the last, the *kaliyuga*, constitutes the phase in which only a quarter of the *dharma* remained in force, an age of imbalance, iconically represented by a cow resting on a single leg (cf. Parpola 1975-1976). The most comprehensive sources mention up to fifty-five *kalivarjyas*<sup>4</sup> and among them the eleventh prohibits *sattradikṣā*, that is, the initiation (*dikṣā*)<sup>5</sup> of rituals of the *sattra* type (ritual sessions lasting twelve days or more). Such *kalivarjya* is first mentioned in works dating back to the 12th century. At that time, in the *Aparārkacandrikā* or *Aparārkayājñavalkīyadharmasāstranibandha*, Aparārka’s<sup>6</sup> commentary on the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*,<sup>7</sup> the author, citing an anonymous exegetical source on *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* I, 156, merely states the prohibition of *sattra*-type rituals generically:

*sattrayāgaṃ [...] na kurvīta kalau yuge*

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<sup>2</sup> On the conception of *dharma* with reference to legal aspects cf. Rocher (2014: 39-58).

<sup>3</sup> On the notion of *dharma* see Halbfass (1990 [1981, 1988]: 310 ff.). On the theory of *yugas* and the conception of time see Pellegrini (1998a); Glücklich (1994: 39 ff.). For the relations between the theory of *yugas* and that of *kalivarjyas* see Wilhelm (1982).

<sup>4</sup> The first source to present a complete list of the 55 *kalivarjyas* formulated over the centuries is actually very late and dates to the 17th century, when Dāmodara wrote his *Kalivarjyanirṇaya* (cf. Banerji 1999: 286). For an overview of the passages in which *kalivarjyas* are listed see Bhattacharya (1943), for a historical examination of the development of *dharma* literature see Derrett (1973).

<sup>5</sup> On the unfolding of the *dikṣā* during the *sattras* see Gonda (1965: 316, n. 4).

<sup>6</sup> The author seems to be identifiable with a ruler of the Śilāhāra dynasty who lived in the first half of the 12th century (cf. Olivelle 2017: 145).

<sup>7</sup> On the importance of this text among *dharma* texts, see Olivelle (2019a: VII ff.).

In the *kaliyuga* the ritual of the *sattra* type is not celebrated<sup>8</sup>.

In the same period, Śrīdhara's *Smṛtyarthasāra*, which takes up some verses of the *Nāradapurāṇa*, in a more explicit manner, forbids the:

*sattradīkṣā* | (23a)

*kalau yuge tv imān dharmān varjyān āhur manīṣiṇaḥ* || (25cd)

The initiation [of the participants] into a sacrificial session [...].

The sages say that these are the prohibitions relating to the norm in *kaliyuga*<sup>9</sup>.

Around the 13th century, the prohibition of *sattra* initiation is found in the list of *kalivarjyas* within the *Smṛticandrikā* (XXXIa) of Devaṇṇa or Devānanda Bhaṭṭa.<sup>10</sup> This work, one of the most authoritative digests compiled in South India (cf. Bhattacharya 1943: 6), states that it is now a forbidden practice to consecrate all participants to a *sattra*.<sup>11</sup>

However, even earlier, by the time of Medhātithi's *Manubhāṣya* (9th - 10th centuries ca.), the *Commentary on Manu* - author of the *Mānavadharmasāstra* - the long ritual sessions of *sattras* were no longer celebrated.<sup>12</sup> Medhātithi's explanation for the gradual decline of these ritual practices calls into question a variety of reasons. According to the *Manubhāṣya*, the phenomenon whereby *sattras* are no longer performed could be explained by the fact that no one possesses the necessary means to perform them anymore and there is no longer any confidence in their efficacy; hence, in their ability to fulfill

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<sup>8</sup> For the text see *Yajñavalkyasmṛti* (1903-1904, vol. I: 233). Translations, unless otherwise specified, are by the author. Furthermore, where Western language translations of the quoted texts are available, these have been indicated to enable appropriate comparisons to be made.

<sup>9</sup> For the text see Śrīdharācārya 1912. See also Arp (2000: 24).

<sup>10</sup> For some information on the author and his works see Davis, Brick (2018: 42ff.).

<sup>11</sup> For a translation of this passage see Olivelle (2017: 177): "consecrating all people for a sacrificial session." The passage concludes with Devaṇṇa Bhaṭṭa's observation that: "In the beginning of the Kali Age great and wise men, in order to protect the people, have put a stop to these activities, after first establishing a norm. The agreement of good people is authoritative just like the Veda" (Olivelle, *ib.*). The conclusion of the reasoning derives directly from the laws established by Manu: *Mānavadharmasāstra* (MDhŚ) II, 18 states in fact that a certain usage in the legal field transmitted from generation to generation within a certain region assumes the value of good practice as it can be assumed as usage of virtuous people, i.e., respectful of the *dharma*.

<sup>12</sup> So much so that the first partial lists of forbidden usages were probably drawn up right around the 10th-11th centuries and, specifically regarding the *sattradīkṣā*, it was recognised as *kalivarjya* certainly not before the 8th century CE. (cf. Kāṇḍe 1946: 968; Id. 1962: 1268).

the wishes for which they were celebrated (cf. Kāṇḍa 1946: 938). However, these empirical explanations do not appear to be sufficient justifications to explain the emanation of *kalivarjya*: even if a religious practice has fallen into disuse, this does not mean that it should be set aside as no longer valid from the dharmic point of view, even in *kaliyuga*.<sup>13</sup> On the contrary, *sattras* have no less validity in Medhātithi's time than they did in that of Vedic texts, such as the *Śrautasūtras* (cf. Lingat 1973: 191).<sup>14</sup>

Certainly, the time-consuming organisation of solemn Vedic rituals and the long time required for their celebration, especially for rituals of the *sattra* type, constitute fundamental elements of understanding for the formulation of this *kalivarjya*. However, the cultural situation in which the conception of the *kalivarjyas* doctrine matures requires further consideration. In fact, the era in which the lists of forbidden usages are compiled represents a period far removed from the time texts were composed: India has seen the succession of important reforms on the level of religious practices and the advent, on the political level, of new protagonists, who have taken power away from those noble groups that had been the sponsors of the Brahmans themselves in ancient times.

The latter, in turn, to guarantee themselves and the continuity of their hegemony over Indian society had been forced to sanction the dharmicity<sup>15</sup> of new forms of worship, neglecting and letting the complex Vedic rituals progressively disappear. The Brahmans had thus already partly lost their former hegemony: they often devoted themselves to previously forbidden professions or performed rituals for women or members of social groups outside the first three classes or *trivarna* (cf. Sharma 1982 and Yadava 1979). The introduction of the *kalivarjyas* suggests that the Brahmans were perfectly clear about the idea that *dharma* is by no means immutable or eternal, that it changes, just as all human institutions do and have changed.<sup>16</sup>

However, in the attempt to explain the introduction of *kalivarjyas*, the adoption of a model of explanation based on the idea of moral relativism and conventionality of norms (cf. Bhatthacarya 1943: 177-195) applied to the Indian legal tradition seems inadequate (cf. Lingat 1973: 188; Doniger 1976: 70).

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<sup>13</sup> On Medhātithi's relationship with the authority represented by the *MDhŚ*, see among the most recent Yoshimizu (2012).

<sup>14</sup> On the real authority held by the *kalivarjyas* during India's subsequent legal and cultural history, see Bhattacharya (1943: 195-203).

<sup>15</sup> On the normative criterion established by the Brahmans to define what is *dharmic* and what is not (and thus to approve or disapprove something new), cf. Squarcini (2011a: 113-134).

<sup>16</sup> On this topic see Dumont (1970 [1966]: 195-196); Squarcini (2011b: 27 ff.). According to Olivelle (2006: 171), the very origin of the notion of *dharma*, understood specifically as a legal norm, is linked to the customs prevailing at the time when the first *dharma* texts (*Dharmaśāstras*) were written.

The sources from which to derive the norms, that is, the cognitive means of *dharma* (*dharmaprāmānya*),<sup>17</sup> are primarily the texts of the *śruti* and the *smṛti*. However, conflicts between the moral rules, and thus between the sources themselves, may also emerge from the comparison between them. Such conflicts call into question both the authority itself and the traditions built upon it, but they may also call into question a third component, namely society and its transformations (cf. Baxi 1983: 108).

In order to fully understand the origin of the *kalivarjyas* it is useful to reflect on the contrast between what is maintained in the texts of the legal tradition and what the commentators state referring to the world, i.e., to the customs established in the course of time, which is expressed in the concepts of *lokavidviṣṭa* (“odious to the world”) and *lokavikruṣṭa* (“despised or disapproved by the world,” cf. Lingat 1973: 190-191). This means that the Brahmins, realising the social changes that had taken place, felt at the same time that the *dharma* could no longer be based solely and exclusively on the authority represented by the texts and that the texts had to be transcended, without being denied, in the interests of preserving their own authority. Indeed, the cultural hegemony of the Brahmins could have been undermined if they had not taken on board the changes in the social context.<sup>18</sup>

As the well-known Indian jurist and politician of Dalit social extraction Bhimrao Ambedkar (2014 [1987]: 235) had already noted, the position taken by the Brahmins had been to enjoin certain prohibitions, but without ever expressing any condemnation of the ancient texts or of the hermeneutic tradition that emerged later. Therefore, because of the harmonisation of the Vedic cultural tradition with the new requirements that emerged in the following centuries, the aim of the Brahmanical class was never to point out possible errors, which would have meant opening up the possibility of a weakening of their authority and thus the risk of undermining the maintenance of their control over Hindu society. Rather, the solution was the one that emerges, for example, in the reworking of the concept of negation concerning the relationship with texts and ritual practices formulated by the *mīmāṃsākas*.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> On the concept of *dharmaprāmānya* see Lubin (2010).

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the different historiographical positions on the function and origin of the *kalivarjyas* see Menski (2003: 137-139).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Derrett (1964: 102). On the connections between the reflections of the authors of the *Mīmāṃsā* school and the *dharma* texts cf. McCrea (2010).

Indeed, according to the *mīmāṃsākas* one can distinguish two types of negation: relative and absolute. This distinction is also made by Buddhist models of reasoning. For example, in a Buddhist work such as the *Tattvasaṃgraha* of Śāntarakṣita<sup>20</sup> (8th century) we find the following distinction:

*tathāhi dvidivho'pohaḥ paryudāsaniṣedhataḥ* (XVI, 1004ab).

Therefore, the negation is of two kinds: *paryūdasā* and *niṣedha*.

This verse finds clarification in Kamalaśīla's *Pañjikā* (Analytical Commentary), where it is explained that the two terms are to be understood as relative negation and absolute negation respectively (cf. Jha 1937: 533). Thus, the *mīmāṃsākas* forego discussing prohibitions in the absolute sense (*niṣedha*), which would have questioned the continuity and therefore the authority of the texts, thereby exposing them to conflicts and contradictions. Rather, they intend to speak of exception or exclusion (*paryudāsā*)<sup>21</sup> to refer to a negation that specifically concerns the rules to be followed by those who perform a sacrifice. The concept of *paryudāsā* expresses a relative negation, i.e., a prohibition that is such as an exception.

In this regard, a philologically faithful translation of the term *varjya* allows us to reconstruct some conceptual passages useful for understanding the meaning to be attributed to these prohibitions. The term *varjya*, in fact, derives from the verbal root *vṛj-* which in the active form takes on the meanings of “to bend, turn, curve, turn,” but also “to deviate” and in the middle form those of “to choose for oneself, to select.” The adjective derived from the gerundive of *vṛj-* thus denotes what “must be excluded or avoided or abandoned” and specifically in the compounds takes on the meaning “with the exception of.” The term “exception” also resonates in other terms derived from *vṛj-*, as in the noun *varja* “that which makes an exception” and in the adverb *varjam* “except, with the exception of.” Exceptions, summarising the meanings of the root *vṛj-*, allow one to “bend” something, to turn it or go around it, to turn it in a different direction, deviating it from the established direction or the original norm (*dharma*). It is therefore not surprising that the literature on *dharma* has promoted, through the concept of *āpaddharma* (cf. Della Casa 1991; Bowles 2007), the idea that there are practices permitted only in times of crisis or change. The exception allows for selection, adaptation, or adjustment to changed circumstances. Exceptions, therefore, are permissible because they do not invalidate the norms handed down, and so do not invalidate the *dharma*, on the interpretation of which the Brahmans founded the

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<sup>20</sup> For the text see Krishnamacharya (1926). For the relations between Kamalaśīla's *Pañjikā* and Śāntarakṣita's *Tattvasaṃgraha* see Saccone (2018).

<sup>21</sup> On the subject see Staal (1962: 58 ff.), but also Brough (1947).

continuity of Indian society and the perpetuation of their power over it. They are also necessary because circumstances may not only be manifold but above all may change. Devaṅṅa Bhaṅṅa indeed repeats, quoting in his commentary a statement of Vyāsa, that: “*Dharma* that contradicts *dharma* is no *dharma* at all” (Olivelle 2017: 174; see also Arp 2000: 36).

The theory of the alternation of *yugas* becomes functional to all of this at the very moment in which, in addition to providing a model for explaining the passage of time, it also provides a model within which to frame the social, political, and religious changes that legal norms must face; in short, the theory of *yugas* comes to the aid of *dharma* maintenance precisely by affirming that *dharma* changes, evolves, or rather involves itself progressively, decaying:

*anye kṛtayuge dharmāstretāyāṃ dvāpare 'pare | anye kaliyuge nṛṅāṃ yugahrāsānurūpataḥ ||*

In *kṛtayuga* the norms of men are other than in the *tretā(yuga)* and different in the *dvāpara(yuga)*, in the *kaliyuga* they are other [again] in correspondence with the decay of *yugas* (MDhŚ I, 85).<sup>22</sup>

If in the *kaliyuga* only one-fourth of the original *dharma* is left, then only one-fourth of the religious rites will be practiced as well, compared to those originally elaborated in the Vedic age.

To sum up, it seems possible to affirm that the progressive elaboration and then the compilation of longer and longer lists, up to the famous systematisation in the 17th century, had a meaning that on the one hand specifically concerns not only the dimension that is the object of the ‘prohibitions,’ i.e., the *dharma*, but on the other hand also constitutes a solution concerning the maintenance of cultural hegemony by the Brahmans: to maintain the *dharma* by admitting that the Brahmans have never provided erroneous interpretations of it, but if anything since circumstances have changed, that it is now necessary to admit some exceptions, which will end up being interpreted as prohibitions or interdictions.

However, what has been said so far leaves open a not-insignificant question: what are the reasons that lead to the necessity of specifying that the prohibition of the *dikṣā* concerns the *sattras* in particular?

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<sup>22</sup> For the text see Mandlik (1992 [1886]), but I also considered Olivelle (2005). For the translation see also Doniger, Smith (1991) and Squarcini, Cuneo (2010).

### 3. The *sattras*, the *gavāmayana* and the *dikṣā*

The ways of performing solemn rituals, in the centuries following the composition of the *Samhitās* and then of the *Brāhmaṇas*, underwent progressive modifications until they were defined in the *Śrautasūtras*. Within this textbookish literature for the execution of the most complex sacrifices, the oldest text is probably the *Baudhāyanaśrautasūtra*, composed around the sixth century BCE, though the latest ones are as recent as the fourth century CE.<sup>23</sup> The changes introduced aimed firstly to provide orthodox alternatives within the different schools, and secondly to simplify some passages. Concerning the *sattra* rituals in particular, even if the modalities of their execution were presumably fixed in the later phase of the Vedic period, as early as the 4th or 5th century CE (cf. Kāṇe 1936: 8; Kashikar 1998: 55, but on the dating cf. Bhattacharya 1943: 176-177), the organisation of *śrauta* rituals had become increasingly rare due to the complexity of their preparation, and most probably the celebration of long ritual sessions (*sattras*) had fallen into disuse. The oldest epigraphic evidence of the celebration of *śrauta* sacrifices, in general, belongs to the Śuṅga period. An inscription on a stone found in the mountain pass of Naneghat (Nāṅāghaṭ) and datable between 70 and 60 BCE appears significant. The inscription, engraved on the walls to the right and left of the entrance to a man-made cave, had an obvious political and propaganda significance for the Sātavāhana dynasty, which ruled the Deccan between the 3rd century BCE and the 2nd century CE. The pass was undoubtedly an important commercial junction, meaning the inscription had the effect of informing all those making the passage of their entry into a powerful and wealthy kingdom, whose ruler was able to finance various solemn sacrifices. The inscription, attributed to the will of Queen Nāyanikā, wife of Sātakarnī I, the third ruler of the Sātavāhana dynasty, recalls the execution of numerous *śrautayajñas* and on lines 4 and 5 of the right wall the same statement is repeated:

*Gavāmayanaṃ yaṃño yiṭho[dakhinā dinā]gāvo 1101*

a Gavāmayana sacrifice was offered, a sacrificial fee was given (consisting of) 1,101 cows.<sup>24</sup>

The *sattras* (cf. Keith 1925: 349ff.; Kāṇe 1941: 1239ff.) were classified by the texts into two types: those that lasted less than a year (*rātrisattras*) and lasted from thirty nights to a hundred nights (*śatarātra*), and those that lasted a year (*sāmvatsarikasattras*) or more. If the *gavāmayana* represents the model of

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<sup>23</sup> On the dating of these texts see Gonda (1977) and Klaus (2000).

<sup>24</sup> The text and translation given are those published by Bühler (1883: 61 and 63). See also Pathak (1959: 218).



the *sāṃvatsarikasattras*, however, the texts, as *Śāṅkhāyanaśrautasūtra* (ŚŚS) XIII, 28, 7-8, give evidence of ritual sessions lasting three years, twelve years, one hundred years (*śatasāṃvatsara*) and even one thousand years (*sahasrasāṃvatsara*). While it is possible that the latter cases should be understood as theoretical speculations of Brahmanical circles on the borderline cases related to the very conception of sacrifice, however, it is also possible that such rituals were actually celebrated by some circles of “extreme ritualists who were prepared to explore the more radical implications of Vedic sacrificial thinking on their own persons” (Reich 2001: 147; see also Malamoud 1991: 126).

Within the *gavāmayana*, the celebrations held on the day of the *mahāvratā* at the end of the year were of exceptional solemnity. However, already at the time of the composition of the *Śrautasūtras*, this rite was perceived, regarding some performances, as characterized by a certain archaism. Indeed, some ritual sequences of the *mahāvratā*, such as the fight between an *ārya* and a *sūdra* for the possession of an animal hide, the mating between a man and a woman, and the verbal dispute between two individuals, one crippled and the other bald, were already considered obsolete by the *Śāṅkhāyanaśrautasūtra*:

*tad etat purāṇam utsannam na kāryam*

this ancient and disused [rite] should not be performed (ŚŚS XVII, 6, 2).<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps this judgement might be a first clue to be considered in explaining the origin of the *kalivarjya* relating to *sattradikṣā*.

However, other factors characterise the performance of the ritual sessions. Only Brahmans can take part in the *sattras*, and each of them (the texts provide for a variable number of officiants) must undergo the *dikṣā*,<sup>26</sup> so its preliminary bestowal constituted a peculiar moment in the execution of the *sattra* rituals. Brahmanical literature, depending on the schools of reference, presents different indications as to the time in which to perform the *dikṣā*,<sup>27</sup> but it always constitutes an imperative rite: for example, before performing the *gavāmayana* 17 (or 12) days were devoted to this phase (cf. ŚŚS XIII, 19, 1). As for the mode of conferral, the texts, depending on the schools, give very different instructions even for the same *sattra*, but they agree on the fact that each of the officiants imparts the *dikṣā* to

<sup>25</sup> For the text see Hillebrandt (1885-1889); for the translation see also Caland (1953).

<sup>26</sup> On the *dikṣā* and its continuity with the *upanayana* see Gonda (1965: 315ff.).

<sup>27</sup> For example, the *Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa* II, 371, 1 states that the *dikṣā* must take place on a single night, the eighth (*aṣṭakā*) of the month of Māgha (see the passage in Murakawa 2000).

another according to a very precise order. This begins with the *adhvaryu* who imparts it to the officiant who performs the function of *gr̥hapati*, i.e., the married man, “lord of the house” or “head of the family,” who, endowed with a certain wealth, overlaps in the organisation of the great rituals with the figure of the *yajamāna*, the patron or client of the sacrificial rite, who finances its preparation and reaps its benefits. Following Kāṇḍe 1941: 1243,<sup>28</sup> in fact:

The *adhvaryu* first gives *dīkṣā* to the *gr̥hapati* and to *brahmā*, *hotṛ* and *udagāṭṛ*; the *pratiprasthāṭṛ* gives *dīkṣā* to the *adhvaryu*, then to *maitrāvaruṇa*, *brāhamaṇācchaṃsin* and *prastotṛ*; the *neṣṭṛ* gives *dīkṣā* to the *pratiprasthāṭṛ* and the *acchāvāka*, *āgnīdhra* and *pratiharṭṛ*; the *unnetṛ* gives *dīkṣā* to *neṣṭṛ*, the *grāvastut*, and *subrahmaṇya* and lastly the *pratiprasthāṭṛ* or another *brāhmaṇa* (who is himself a *dīkṣita*) or a Veda student or *snātaka* gives *dīkṣā* to *unnetṛ*.

Certainly, the distinction between the role of the officiant (performed by the Brahmans) and that of the *yajamāna* appears to be annulled: the *sattrins* are all Brahmans, but since they receive the *dīkṣā* and enjoy the fruits of the celebration of the rite, it is possible to consider them all, at the same time, as also being *yajamānas*. Indeed, it is the *yajamāna* who, before being able to take part in a rite, must first undergo the *dīkṣā*, but the *sattrins* do not perform the *sattra* rituals on behalf of the *yajamāna*, but for themselves and the community. Although the texts provide that one of the officiants performs the function of *gr̥hapati*, i.e., symbolically takes upon himself the role of *yajamāna*<sup>29</sup>, the distinction between the officiant and the patron of the ritual seems to have disappeared. This makes *sattras* anomalous rites because each officiant is at the same time an officiant for the other. Thus, one of the fundamental binary structures underpinning the logic governing the performance of Vedic rituals has disappeared, namely the ritual division of tasks between the class of specialists of the sacred and the noble class, a distinction that in turn reflects the alliances and the tensions in social and political relations between the two groups. Now, if in *sattras* like the *gavāmayana* the *yajamāna* is the *brāhmaṇa*, i.e., the one who performs the sacrifice is also, at the same time, the one who commissions the performance of the ritual for himself to obtain its fruits, then the *sattra* can’t be celebrated by an individual who at the same time is not also a *dīkṣita*.<sup>30</sup> The conferring of the *dīkṣā*, therefore, constitutes a necessary preliminary, without which the very possibility of undertaking a *sattra* would be lost. So, coming back to the subject that interests us here: to consider a *kalivarjya* the *dīkṣā* in *sattra* rituals means in fact to interdict the

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<sup>28</sup> On the manner and sequence in which to carry out the *dīkṣā* all texts substantially agree, albeit with slight variations, see e.g., *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* XII, 1, 1, 1ff.

<sup>29</sup> On the figures of the *gr̥hapati* and the *yajamāna*, see Biardeau (1976: 37ff.); Ferrara (2018); Olivelle (2019b).

<sup>30</sup> On the identity between the *sattrin* and the *dīkṣita*, see Heesterman (1993: 175ff.).

celebration of the *sattras* themselves. This interdiction, then, was perhaps fed also by the perception of the archaic nature of the *mahāvratā*, which expresses, in some ritual scenes, practices contrary to the *dharma* defined in the following centuries.

#### 4. The role of the officiants' wives: new reasons for interdiction

A further clarification must be added to what has just been said, which makes the moment of conferring the *dikṣā* in the *sattras* an even more complex and problematic ritual frame. If all the officiants, in turn, receive initiation at the same time one from the other, this must also happen for their wives. To take part in the different rites in which they are protagonists on the sacrificial scene, they too must receive the *dikṣā*: *anupati patnīr uttarauttaraḥ* (“Together with her husband, one wife follows the other,” *Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra* XII, 2, 16).<sup>31</sup> The wives of the officiants mainly participate in the liturgical moments planned during the performance of the *mahāvratā*, attending especially to the aspects related to musical accompaniment. Indeed, during the *mahāvratā*, a central role was played by the melodies performed by the wives on a wide variety of musical instruments (cf. Jamison 1996: 98). According to the *Pañcaviṃśabrāhmaṇa* (PB):<sup>32</sup>

*taṃ patnyo 'paghāṭilābhir upagāyanty ārtvijyam eva tat patnyaḥ kurvanti saha svargam lokam  
ayāmeti*

The wives accompany it [= the chanting] with *apaghāṭilā*<sup>33</sup>. So, the wives accomplish the officiant's proper task, [saying], “May we go together [with them] to the heavenly world!” (PB V, 6, 8).

Thus, starting from the indispensable role played by the wives of the sacrificers/officiants during the performance of the rite, the conferring of the *sattradikṣā* implied that the husband and the wife were placed on an equal footing, just as the officiants who joined their fires together to celebrate the *gavāmayana* were equal (cf. Heesterman 2000: 143). This equalisation of roles could also lead to the claim that, just as the *sattrins* joined a sort of travelling band (similar to the *vrātya* brotherhoods)<sup>34</sup> during a

<sup>31</sup> For the text see Weber (1972 [1852]), for the translation see also Ranade (1978) and Thite (2006).

<sup>32</sup> For the text see Kümmel *et al.* (2005), for the translation see also Caland (1931).

<sup>33</sup> Perhaps stringed musical instruments, similar to the *vīṇā*.

<sup>34</sup> On the similarities between the celebration of the *gavāmayana* and the *vrātyastomas* cf. Heesterman (1962). See also Pontillo (2007), which extends the analysis by also considering passages from epic literature.

year, in the same way, the women, the *sattrinīs* we might say, formed a sisterhood committed, like their officiating husbands, to earning heaven (cf. Jamison 1996: 98). In the *gavāmayana*, therefore, the exaltation of the feminine element is reinforced by the conferring of the *dikṣā* to the wives (*patnīs*): they are thus legitimated to assume a central role during the execution, going so far as to equate them with their officiating spouses/*yajamānas/sattrins*. It is conceivable then that another reason that led the compilers of the *kalivarjyas* to formulate the one concerning the *sattradikṣā* may have been also the result of an irreconcilable contradiction between the equal meaning that the *dikṣā* assumes for wives and the decay suffered over the centuries of the social and religious role of women within the conception of *dharma*. The position of women in the Middle Ages, i.e., at the time of the formulation of the *kalivarjyas*, was now equated to that of the *sūdras* (see Pellegrini 2009). They had been deprived of the right to take the active part they had once played in the rituals (cf. Jamison 2006: 200ff.), as the general decay of the element of ancient religiosity expressed in the celebration of sacrifices consolidated. The role of women within society was limited in their rights and duties by the formulation of a set of rules reserved for them, the *strīdharmā* (cf. Jamison 2018), and now mostly relegated to the family sphere. As a result, the possibility of their obtaining a role equal to that of their spouses had to be interdicted (*varjya*).

##### 5. The multiple meanings of the term *sattra*

One must also take into account the semantic evolution of the term *sattra*. If the term, in the literature dedicated to the *śrautayajñas*, is connoted as a technical term of the ritual vocabulary that denotes precisely that type of somic sacrifices that were characterized as long ritual sessions, the meanings that the term assumes subsequently are no longer strictly related to the ritualistic sphere but have a wider meaning. For sure, in the *Mānavadharmasāstra*, the term *sattra* is often found in genitive compounds such as *brahmansattra*, indicating by now the fact that the *sattra* ritual is equated, if not identified, with the knowledge of *brahman*, that is, the dedication to the study and teaching of the *Veda*, as these lead to the realisation of the supreme principle. This identification is confirmed by Manu while discussing the different forms of impurity when he maintains that the contamination resulting from impurity (*aghadoṣa*) does not concern the *sattrins*, that is, those who are engaged in participating in the performance of a ritual session (Medhātithi's gloss makes it clear that specifically, one must mean those who are engaged in the celebration of the *gavāmayana*). The *sattrins*, therefore, are immune from contamination because they, like the rulers and those who keep a vow, are *brahmabhūtas*, that is, they have become the *brahman* (cf. *MDhŚ* V, 92). Again: Manu, dealing with the different means of livelihood,

explains that among the *dvijas* (twice-born),<sup>35</sup> as far as the Brahmins are concerned, i.e., the fourth category of men, they live exclusively on *brahmasattra*:

*caturthastu brahmasattreṇa jīvati*

but the fourth [type of householder belonging to the *dvija* group] lives on *brahmasattra* (MDhŚ IV, 9b).

Following Medhātithi's commentary, since *brahmasattra* ('the session of the *brahman*,' i.e., study and teaching) takes place without interruption over a long period, it is now even compared to a sacrificial session (*sattra*):

*naityake nāstyanadhyāyo brahmasattraṃ hi tatsmṛtam*

During the daily recitation, there is no interruption, indeed the *smṛti* [considers it] a sacrificial session of the *brahman* (MDhŚ II, 106).

Study and teaching are the activities proper to Brahmins, who need no further consecration, having acquired their status through birth and the *saṃskāra* of the *upanayana*. However, just as the daily recitation should not be interrupted – so much so that it is compared to the performance of a *sattra* – similarly, from a strictly ritual point of view, the performance of a *sattra*, such as the *gavāmayana*, cannot be interrupted by the celebration of other sacrifices, whether *śrauta* or *smārta*. The execution of the *gavāmayana* provided that, starting from the day on which the oblation for the *dikṣā* (*dikṣānīya iṣṭi*) was made, and for as long as the *sattra* was being performed, the bloody sacrifices involving the immolation of animal victims (*paśubandhas*) should be suspended, and therefore also somic sacrifices; similarly, both *iṣṭi* sacrifices (involving offerings exclusively of a vegetable nature) and *smārta* rituals were to be suspended – the latter comprising domestic rites such as daily offerings made to ancestors (*piṇḍapitṛyajña*) and deities, such as *agnihotra*, i.e., daily oblation to the fire (cf. Hillebrandt 1897: 154; Keith 1925: 349; Kāṇḍe 1941: 1243). *Smārta* rites, in particular, had acquired a special status within Vedic rituality as early as the time of the writing of the *Brāhmaṇas*. This was so much the case that they were

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<sup>35</sup> Male members belonging to the first three social groups (*brāhmaṇas*, *kṣatriyas*, *vaiśyas*), to whom, in addition to the biological birth, a second birth is reserved. When they have completed the period of study to which they dedicated themselves in their youth, thanks to the ritual of *upanayana* they are born a second time, becoming full members of society, as they acquire rights and duties.

compared, as we have seen (cf. ŚB XI, 5, 6, 1), to the *sattra* rituals themselves and provided the model for the development of the later forms of ritual worship (*pūjā*) proper to Hinduism (cf. Lubin 2016). Thus reads the *Jaiminiyabrāhmaṇa* (JB)<sup>36</sup>:

*tāni vā etāni dikṣamāṇād utkrāmanty agnihotraṃ darśapūrṇamāsau cāturmāsyaṇi paśubandhaḥ  
pitṛyajño gṛhamedho brahmaudano mithunam*

Indeed, the one who receives the *dikṣā* omits [to perform] these [rites]: the daily oblation to the fire, the new moon and full moon sacrifices, the four-month sacrifice, the animal sacrifice, the offering to the ancestors, the household ritual, the ritual offering of boiled rice to the officiants, and the sexual union (JB II, 38).

However, immediately afterwards the *brāhmaṇakāra* explains how all the ritual actions listed are not really suspended but rather assimilated into the various ritual moments of the *gavāmayana*. Thus, for example:

*tad yad dikṣopasatsu svāheti vratayati tenāsya dikṣopasatsv anantaritam agnihotraṃ bhavati*

He who drinks the *vrata* milk offering during the days of *dikṣā* and *upasad*, uttering the *svāhā* formula,<sup>37</sup> on the days of *dikṣā* and *upasad* he does not interrupt the *agnihotra* (JB II, 38).

If this were not so, over the year, during the celebration of the *gavāmayana* there would be a doubling of the rites, and the text seems to implicitly suggest that this excess could come to nullify the rites themselves. Among the passages that the *Taittirīyasaṃhitā* (TS)<sup>38</sup> dedicates to the *sattras*, we read, in support of this interpretative hypothesis, that it is necessary to avoid repetition during the celebration of the rites. For example:

*rathaṃtarāṃ dívā bhāvati rathaṃtarāṃ náktam ity āhur brahmavādīnaḥ kéna tād ajāmīti  
saubharāṃ tṛtīyasavané brahmasāmām bṛhát tán madhyató dadhati vídhr̥tyai ténājāmi ||*

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<sup>36</sup> For the text see Chandra, Vira (1954); for the translation see also Caland (1919).

<sup>37</sup> Milk *vrata* refers to the vow to feed exclusively on milk. The days of *upasad* or 'worship' constitute the days of celebration before proceeding to the pressing of the *soma* and, together with those dedicated to the *dikṣā*, thus precede the actual performance of the rite. The *svāhā* formula is the auspicious exclamation uttered when burning the offerings to the gods.

<sup>38</sup> For the text see Weber (1871-1872), for the translation see also Keith (1914).

Those who teach the *Veda* say, “The [chanting] *rathaṃtara* is for the day, the *rathaṃtara* for the night.” “With what is there no repetition?” He, to separate [them,] arranges in the middle as a *brahmasāman*,<sup>39</sup> during the third squeeze, the great [chant] of Sobhari.<sup>40</sup> Through this, there is no repetition (*TS VII, 4, 10, 2*).

The compound with a privative *ájāmi* derives from the noun *jāmi*, which commonly denotes ‘relationship,’ such as that between brother and sister (cf. MacDonell, Keith 1967 [1912], s.v.), but in ritualistic vocabulary, it assumes the technical meaning of ‘uniformity, repetition, tautology.’ So, it seems that the uniform, tautological repetition worried the Vedic ritualists, because, going back to the *JB* passage, a form of hyperritualism could be configured during the execution of the *sattras*, when the rites performed inside the *sattra* were added to those performed outside the *sattra*. The solution had been to incorporate the *śrauta* and *smārta* rites within the succession of rites performed during the *sattra*. As the centuries passed, the celebration of the *sattras* together with the other great Vedic rituals, came into crisis; probably the most pragmatic solution, which also enabled the *dharma* to adapt to contemporary customs, appeared to be that of interdicting the celebration of *sattra* through the interdiction of *sattradikṣā*, identifying it as *kalivarjya*.

However, the term *sattra* acquires a further meaning when it denotes the “five great sacrifices” (*pañcamahāyajñas*),<sup>41</sup> that is, the *ṛṣiyajña*, *devayajña*, *bhūtayajña*, *nṛyajña*, and *pitṛyajña*, which all men, and particularly Brahmins, must perform throughout their lives, to redeem their debt, respectively to the *ṛṣis* (seers of the stanzas of the *Veda*), the gods, the beings, the men, and the ancestors (cf. *MDhŚ IV, 21*).<sup>42</sup> Precisely because these rites are to be performed throughout one’s life, the author of the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (*ŚB*)<sup>43</sup> had already defined them as *sattras*, and just like *sattras*, they should never be interrupted:

*pañcaivā mahāyajñāḥ tānyevā mahāsattrāṇi*

The five great sacrifices are precisely great sacrificial sessions (*ŚB XI, 5, 6, 1*).

<sup>39</sup> The *brahmasāman*, however, assumes peculiar importance during the celebration of the *gavāmayana*. Cf. Eggeling 1885: 435, footnote 1).

<sup>40</sup> A Vedic poet, to whom tradition attributes the composition of some hymns of the 8th *maṇḍala* of the *Rgveda*.

<sup>41</sup> The definition of this doctrine, together with the different rules of ritual purity and the recitation of the *Veda*, developed in parallel with that of the *āśrama* (stages of life), around the 3rd century BCE or shortly before (cf. Olivelle 2018: 17).

<sup>42</sup> On this theme, see Śāstri (1971: 84-85); Malamoud (1989: 115-136).

<sup>43</sup> For the text see Weber (1964 [1849]), for the translation see also Eggeling (1963 [1882-1900]).

This identification could be seen as a further reason for the elaboration of the *kalivarjya* relating to *sattradikṣā*, because at the time when Vedic rituality had substantially been replaced by *smārta* rituality<sup>44</sup>, and the five great sacrifices had been equated with *sattras*, the *dharma* scholars considered it superfluous to continue to keep up the institution of *sattras*, which were thus banned, since the banning of the *dikṣā* was equivalent, as we have seen, to the banning of the celebration of the *sattras* themselves.

Another element that might have influenced medieval jurists to ban *dikṣā* can be found in the fact that the term *sattra* can also generically denote any sacrificial rite. Indeed, the compound *sattradikṣā* is also found in an inscription (4th century CE) on the pillar of Allahabad glorifying the great ruler Samudragupta (cf. Chhabra, Gai 1981: 203ff.). In a context where the king is extolled for his efforts in alleviating the sufferings of the humbler strata of the population, the poor, and those burdened by lack of livelihood and afflictions, the compound *sattradikṣā* appears in line 26. Here, as suggested by Bhattacharya (1961; but see also Mirashi 1960: 144, n. 2),<sup>45</sup> the term *sattra* should not necessarily be understood as referring to rituals of the *sattra* type, but simply as a generic term to denote Vedic rites, so the Indian scholar proposes to interpret the compound *sattradikṣā* as a metaphorical expression indicating the ardour of sacrifice, i.e., Samudragupta's lifelong commitment<sup>46</sup> to alleviating the suffering of his subjects in distress.<sup>47</sup> Here is Lorenzen's translation (2006: 177) where, with no more connection to the long ritual Vedic sessions, *sattradikṣā* is rendered as 'good deeds:'

His mind is dedicated to the consecration of good actions [*sattra-dikṣā*] for rescuing the miserable, the poor, the unprotected, the weak.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The expression of this new religiosity is also based on ascetic practices (*vratas*) that allow one to acquire merits that replace the rewards obtained through the celebration of sacrifices. For example, in the thirteenth book of the *Mahābhārata* (*Mbh*), the *Anuśāsanaparvan* ("The Book of Instructions"), it is stated that he who for one year observes fasting for seven consecutive days, eating only on the eighth, earns the merits that are acquired with the celebration of *gavāmayana* (cf. *MBh* XIII, 106).

<sup>45</sup> Mirashi's article had already been published in *Epigraphia Indica* 26 (1941): 297-304, but it is not quoted by Bhattacharya.

<sup>46</sup> In this sense the meaning of the term *sattra* seems to converge with that of *brahmasattra* encountered in the *Mānavadharmasāstra*.

<sup>47</sup> The expression *sattradikṣā* occurs, in a similar form and with a similar generic meaning to the term *sattra*, in the II *āṅka* of Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśakuntalā: sattreṣu dikṣitāḥ* (II, 16.).

<sup>48</sup> Lorenzen (2006: 177-178) also notes how in this inscription the exaltation of the sovereign's merits takes up motifs from Brahmanical ideology, but the ritualistic lexicon is used to promote the moral ideas of Buddhists and Jains.



It would seem that if the expression *sattradīkṣā* can also be understood in a generic sense as referring to the Vedic sacrificial rites, then the eleventh *kalivarjya*, the subject of this study, might not refer specifically to the *dīkṣā* of the *sattra* rituals, but to the *dīkṣā* in general, understood as the preliminary rites of the *śrauta* rituals. Indeed, several *kalivarjyas* specify the obsolete nature of Vedic rituals: in the list of 55 *kalivarjyas* of Dāmodara, No. 48 prohibits *agnihotra*,<sup>49</sup> No. 49 human sacrifice (*puruṣamedha*), No. 50 the celebration of *aśvamedha*, No. 51 of *rājasūya*, and finally, No. 54 prohibits animal sacrifices (*paśubandhas*), to which No. 29 is connected, prohibiting a Brahman from assuming the role of *śamitṛ*, ‘peacemaker,’ i.e., the officiant whose task it was to suffocate the animal victim during the celebration of *śrauta* rituals (cf. Kāṇḍe 1946: 930ff.; Heesterman 1984: 151).

#### 6. New expressions of religiosity: from *sattras* to *tīrthayātrās*

The decline of Vedic rituals was accompanied and at the same time determined by the emergence of new forms and new expressions of Indian religiosity. Following the spread of Buddhism, the construction of the first temples, the sculptural representation of the deities, and the emergence of more personal forms of devotion (*bhakti*)<sup>50</sup> also changed the expressions of worship, as Vedic rituality was overlapped by the worship of deities (*pūjā*) and the practice of pilgrimages (*tīrthayātrās*).<sup>51</sup> Pilgrimage likely took the name *tīrthayātrā*, “crossing the ford” because the oldest places of pilgrimage were traditionally the seven sacred rivers (*saptanadīs*: Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Godāvarī, Sarasvatī, Narmadā, Sindhu and Kāverī). Thus, already in the *Brāhmaṇas* mention is made of the *agniyāgas*, sacrificial rites dedicated to Agni, the Fire, to be performed at the rivers, as well as of a *sattra* which consisted of a pilgrimage proceeding upstream along the right bank of the Sarasvatī. In the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Pañcaviṃśabrāhmaṇa* we read that the preparation for the *sārasvatasattra*<sup>52</sup> consists in the *dīkṣā* of the participants and the preliminary rites that they must perform, in establishing the sacred fires that will receive the offerings and in performing the sacrifice at the full moon. Thus, *PB XXV*, 10, 11 tells us that the gods entrusted Sarasvatī with the task of supporting the sun, but the goddess lacked strength

<sup>49</sup> About the *varjya* related to *agnihotra* cf. Kashikar (1998: 54).

<sup>50</sup> See Spanò (2016) and the bibliography cited there.

<sup>51</sup> On this topic see Bhardwaj (1983); Bakker (1990) and more recently Jacobsen (2013).

<sup>52</sup> On this *sattra* cf. Austin (2008: 289-293). On the *sārasvatasattra* as the antecedent of the *tīrthayātrās* see Jacobsen (2013: 45-46) and Hildebeitel (2001: 140 ff.).

and sank: this is why the Sarasvatī river is full of bends.<sup>53</sup> At this point the text goes on to describe the central rite of the *sattra*, which is to ascend the river against the current (*pratīpam*) from west to east, to reach the source of the river:<sup>54</sup>

*pratīpam yanti na hy anvīpam aṣṭa*

They [the participants] proceed against the current, for by not following the current [the source] is reached (PB XXV, 10, 12).

Forty-days' journey on horseback, from the point where the river is lost in the desert sands, is situated the source of the river (*plakṣa prāsravaṇa*). At the same distance from the earth is situated the world of heaven (*svargam lokam*), and those who participate in the *sattra* reach this goal (XXV, 10, 16). Later, in the *Tīrthayātrāparvan* of the 3rd *parvan* of the *Mahābhārata*,<sup>55</sup> about a hundred sacred places for pilgrimage are listed, and the sage Pulastya, addressing Bhīṣma, clearly states the equivalence of pilgrimage and sacrifice:

*ṛṣiṅām paramaṃ guhyam idaṃ bhāratasattama | tīrthābhigamaṃ puṇyaṃ yajñair api viśiṣyate*  
||

This is the supreme secret of the Vedic seers, oh best among the Bharatas: the sacred visitation of *tīrthas* is better even than the sacrifices (MBh III, 80, 38).

Indeed, within the same *parvan*, we learn that going on pilgrimage to the forest of Naimiṣa, staying there for a month (cf. MBh III, 82, 55ab: *tatra māsaṃ vased dhīro naimiṣe tīrthatatparaḥ*), replaces the celebration of the *gavāmayana* because it enables one to obtain the same fruits as with the Vedic *sattra*.<sup>56</sup>

*gavāmayasya yajñasya phalaṃ prāpnoti bhārata*

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<sup>53</sup> The Sarasvatī river, mentioned in the *Ṛgveda* (cf. Ludvik 2007: 11 ff.), is variously identified with several Indian rivers. See Reusch (1995: 104) for the pilgrimage against the stream, but also Hiltelbeitel (2001: 140 ff.).

<sup>54</sup> On pilgrimage as a liminal activity and as a 'kinetic ritual,' for the understanding of which the category of movement is central, see Coleman, Eade (2004: 1-26).

<sup>55</sup> For the text see Sukthankar, Belvalkar *et al.* (1933-1971), for the translation see also Ganguli (2000 [1884-1896]) and van Buitenen (1975).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Hiltelbeitel (2001: 159). The narration of the celebration of a *sattra* that brought together several sages in the Naimiṣa forest is the framework that introduces the episode.

Oh, descendant of Bharata, he obtains the fruit of the *gavāmayana* sacrifice (MBh III, 82, 56 cd).

A ritualistic exception concerning the *sārasvatasattra* appears significant. All *sattras* provide for the installation of sacred fires on the *vedi* (the sacred delimited space where the rite takes place), while the *sārasvatasattra*, according to the *Yajñaparibhāṣāsūtra* (CXLVI *sūtra*) of Āpastamba, does not provide for the installation of fire on the *uttaravedi*. The explanation for this anomaly according to Oldenberg, in his commentary on this *sūtra*, is to be found precisely in the fact that the *sattra* of the Sarasvatī provides for the officiants to move during its celebration (cf. Oldenberg 1892: 355). In this way, the *sārasvatasattra* would seem to represent an embryonic form of *yātrā*. The progressive affirmation of pilgrimages, of which some *sattras* represent the premises and concerning which the pilgrimages themselves are configured as ritual practices capable of obtaining the same fruits, meant that over time *sattras* were progressively replaced by *tīrthayātrā*. This evolution in religious practices was probably legally sanctioned precisely with the prohibition in the Kali age of the *dīkṣā* referring to *sattra* rites, while the complex *śrauta* rituals were by then set aside.

Further confirmation of what has been discussed so far comes from a passage of the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*<sup>57</sup> in which the *dīkṣā* is identified with the *sattra* (lit. ‘the way of sitting, the session’), while the course of the session or the path to be taken during the session is denoted by the term *ayana* (*sattrāyana*).

*yā vai dīkṣā śā niṣāt | tātsattraṃ tasmādenānāsata ityāhurātha yattāto yajñāṃ tanvāte tādyanti  
tānnayati yó netā bhāvati sa tasmādenānyantītyāhuḥ ||*  
*yā ha dīkṣā śā niṣāt | tātsattraṃ tadāyanaṃ tātsattrāyanaṃ*

Indeed, the *dīkṣā* is ‘a sitting by’ (*niṣat*), that is the *sattra*. For this reason, they say of them, ‘they sit by;’ subsequently, when they perform the rite, they proceed; the one who has [been designated as] the guide guides him. For this reason, they say of them, ‘they go.’ Therefore, the *dīkṣā* is a sitting by, that is the *sattra*; that going (*ayana*), that is the ‘(per)course of the ritual session’ (*sattrāyana*) (ŚB IV, 6, 8, 1-2).

The passage, as often happens in the exegetical literature of the Brahmans, bases its argumentation on the recourse to the etymology that traces the term *sattra* back to the verbal root *sad-* ‘to sit.’ This leads

<sup>57</sup> The passage in question is also analysed by Heesterman (1993: 179).

the reader to distinguish the moment of the *dikṣā*, which coincides with the actual *sattra*, understood as sitting (*sat-tra*), from that of the celebration of the *sattrāyaṇa*.<sup>58</sup> One could assume, then, that the eleventh *kalivarjya* concerns the *sattra* identified with the moment of the celebration of the *dikṣā* (strongly connoted by Vedic religiosity), but not with that of the celebration of the ritual course (*sattrāyaṇa*), because this phase had by then evolved, in the historical developments of cultic practices, into the celebration of the *tīrthāyātrās*, the pilgrimages.

This, however, makes even more explicit the harmonising work of the Brahmans who guarantee continuity in change. Gonda (1965: 459) shows how the notion of the *dikṣā* evolved in Indian religiosity, reaching as far as modern Hindu cultic practices. Both the *pūjā* ('worship of the deity') and the decision to undertake a *tīrthāyātrā* ('pilgrimage') are preceded by some preliminary rites, which reproduce or take up, while refunctionalizing, the ancient practices that characterized the *dikṣā*: sexual continence, fasting, abstinence from meat products or salty or spicy foods, ritual ablutions, shaving the beard or cutting the hair. The contrast between the *dharma* and the changes in religious practice results in the need for Brahmans to manufacture and maintain consensus within post-classical Indian society (cf. Lingat 1973: 195).

Just the prohibition of the *dikṣā*, and therefore *lato sensu* of the *sattra* rituals, in parallel with that of other Vedic rituals, would confirm the legitimacy of expressing the religious feeling in the participation in the *yātrās*, the pilgrimages, open to all social groups, and whose origin seems likely to be traced back to a *sattra*, the *sārasvatasattra*.

## 7. Conclusions

In the history of Indological studies, little attention has been devoted to the *kalivarjya* related to the *sattradikṣā*, recording it in connection with other *kalivarjyas* related to other Vedic sacrifices and inserting its interpretation, although widely shared, in a historical framework related to the progressive loss of cultural and religious centrality that in the Vedic past had covered the great solemn sacrifices. In the course of this study, however, we have attempted to further deepen these analyses

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<sup>58</sup> A further clue can be found in a passage from the *Chāndogyaopaniṣad* (VIII, 5, 1-2), which identifies the institution of *brahmacarya* with various aspects of Vedic religiosity. In the passage, a definite difference emerges between the Vedic rites, on the one hand, collected under the common designation of *yajñas*, and the *sattrāyaṇas* (the courses of the ritual sessions): *atha yad yajña ity ācakṣate brahmacaryam eva tat* ("Therefore, they declare: 'that which is the *yajña*, verily is the *brahmacarya*,'" 1) and *atha yat sattrāyaṇam ity ācakṣate brahmacaryam eva tat* ("Therefore they declare: 'that which is the *sattrāyaṇa*, verily is the *brahmacarya*,'" 2). For the text see Radhakrishnan (1953).

along two lines: the investigation of the evolution and semantic complexity of the term *sattra* and that of the historical-religious context in which the practices and concepts explored are placed.

From the historical data examined and the sources in the textual and historical-religious contexts analysed, the term *sattra* implies a multiplicity of meanings, so that it can denote

- a) long sacrificial sessions;
- b) by extension, any religious practice that extends over a long period, such as the recitation and teaching of the *Vedas* or the *pañcamahāyajñas*;
- c) Vedic rites in a generic sense.

This points to a progressive replacement in the religious practice of the ancient *sattra* rituals by new forms of worship, which probably contributed to the *kalivarjya*'s enunciation of the *sattradikṣā*.

Other reasons that might have led to the formulation of the eleventh *kalivarjya* can be inferred from an analysis of the historical evolution that led to the demise of the Vedic ritual and the emergence of new forms of expression of religiosity.

These reasons, summarizing, could be identified, first, in a general and progressive loss of authority of the Vedic sacrifices (witnessed by the formulation of various other *kalivarjyas* related to different Vedic sacrifices), which invested, in particular, the *sattras*, such as the *gavāmayana*. To be sure, the performance of these sacrifices involved a great expenditure of energy that had to be lavished in their organization and execution; moreover, as we have seen, already at the time of the writing of the *Śrautasūtra* literature some ritual segments, particularly within the performance of the *mahāvratā*, were considered obsolete. That said, it is likely that in the changed historical-religious context, the practice of pilgrimage evolved from the celebration of some *sattras*: the same *dikṣā* seems to be at the origin of some aspects of the *pūjā* and of the preliminary practices that pilgrims undergo before embarking on the journey to the sacred place. Secondly, the *kalivarjya* that we have analysed aims to specifically interdict the *dikṣā* of the *sattras*. As a preliminary rite, the *dikṣā* was imparted to the *yajamāna* (the patron of the sacrifice) and was fundamental in the performance of *śrauta* rituals, but it assumed a specific status in the *sattras*: according to a complex sequence, it was imparted to all the officiants, since they were also patrons of the sacrifice. Thus, to interdict the *dikṣā* was in fact to interdict the celebration of the *sattra* itself. Moreover, just as in other solemn rituals the *dikṣā* was also imparted to the wife of the *yajamāna*, so in the *sattras* it was imparted to the wives of all the officiants. This implied, particularly in some *sattras* like the *gavāmayana*, the assignment of important ritual roles to women as well. Another of the reasons for the formulation of the *varjya* concerning the *sattradikṣā*, therefore, could be traced back to the need to adapt the Vedic ritual to the norms developed over time concerning

women and summarized in the so-called *strīdharmā*. Finally, as a last piece of evidence, there emerges in some passages of the *Jaiminiyabrāhmaṇa* a concern about hyperritualism during the celebration of a *sattra*, which may have found a solution precisely in the formulation of the eleventh *kalivarjya*.

In this way, the *kalivarjya* in question is offered as a further example of inclusivism,<sup>59</sup> i.e., the Brahmins' ability to integrate changes within the tradition. Aware of the need to legitimise new religious practices, such as pilgrimage (and in general the new forms of devotion spread in India since the centuries between the turn of the classical age and the rise of the vulgar era), without delegitimising the previous religious tradition, the Brahmins found the solution through the promotion of the *kalivarjya* theory: the difficulty was thus avoided (*varjita* one might say!) and the continuity of their control over all expressions of *dharma* once again guaranteed. Therefore, at the dawn of the Indian Middle Ages, the prohibition of the *dīkṣā* of *sattra* rituals, i.e., the prohibition of the celebration of *sattra* rituals themselves, may have appeared as the simplest solution to adapt the norms handed down by the *dharma* texts to the evolution of contemporary customs.

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<sup>59</sup> On the notion of inclusivism see Hacker (1983); Della Casa (1991) and the cited bibliography; for a critical review of the concept see Halbfass (1990 [1981, 1988]: 403 ff.).

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