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Some Observations about Warrior-gods and Distinctive Weapons in the Imagery of Vrātyas*

ABSTRACT: Heesterman (1962), moving away from the hypothesis of a non-Aryan background for the Vrātyas, went far beyond the brahmanical-grounded heterodox interpretation of their culture (see also Candotti and Pontillo 2015, Pontillo and Dore 2016, Vassilkov 2016). The Vrātyas are usually associated with the cult of Rudra (see, e.g., Charpentier 1911, Hauer 1927, Falk 1986) who is regarded as an outsider god. Dore (2015: 55; 2016) remarks that there is no reason to “consider the relationship between the Vrātya and Rudra as being more important or more revelatory compared to the relationship with Indra.” Taking for granted the influence of both gods on the culture and on the literary representation of the culture of this group, the present paper focuses on the analysis of Vedic textual traditions dealing with the bow associated with the leader of the Vrātyas, in order to understand to what extent such a weapon represents evidence of their aggressiveness.

KEYWORDS: Vrātyas, Indo-Āryan weapons, Vedic literature

* All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

In a recent article, af Edholm (2017: 4) summarized the most relevant traits of Vrātya culture in the following points:

1. Rudra, the Rudras (including the Maruts), and Indra as central deities.
2. Rituals performed by a group (*vrātyastoma*, *sattra*) with a leader (*gr̥hapati*, *sthapati*), who is *primus inter pares*.
3. References to activities typical of a warrior-society and sodality, such as seasonal expeditions or raids and time spent in the men's house (*sabhā*).
4. Use of specific gear: bows and arrows, black garments or animal-skins, et cetera.
5. A “sort of heroic asceticism aimed at god-like status” (Pontillo 2016: 210).

In the present paper I am going to briefly deal with point 1 and then focus on point 4 by studying the primary sources and the textual traditions of the element of the bow carried by the Vrātya leader, in order to understand to what extent it represents an evidence of the violent traits often associated with this group and if different descriptions of such a weapon may have had cultural and religious implications. In doing so, I will analyse and compare Vedic textual evidence dealing with the description of the Vrātyas, to obtain a clear overview of the general perception of this group, over centuries and in different traditions.

1. Rudra / Indra

On the one hand, Falk (1986) underlined the parallelism between the Vrātya leader and both Rudra and Indra while, on the other, he identified the group of the Vrātyas with the Rudras and the Maruts,¹ respec-

¹ The Maruts, described as Vrātyas, are called *daiva* in PB 22.1.1 and PB 24.18.1: Caland's translation as “the adherents of the God” underlines the importance of Rudra, who is usually referred to as *deva* in many Vedic passages, such as, for example, in the Brahmanical literature (i.e., PB). Heesterman (1962: 18) envisages *daiva* as those “who aim to Heaven.” See also Candotti and Pontillo (2015: 155–161) and Witzel (2004).

tively conceived as companions of Rudra and Indra themselves. Selva (2019: 331) studied the “myths and functions of IE deities specifically connected with warriors,” while acknowledging the previous research by McCone (1987) and Kershaw (2000); in particular he recalls the results reached by the former, who

(...) has highlighted the role of the two deities corresponding to the two main age sections of male societies that were allowed to bear arms: the **korios*, the youth warband who formed the frontline of the army, fought on foot, naked, wearing only their belt or a light armour and weapons, especially a bow; and the **teuteh2*, the army of the adults, equipped with full armour, a spear and shield, and who fought on chariots or, later, on horseback. To these two groups correspond a **korios* god, armed with a bow, who embodies the furious rage of the Männerbund and its connection with liminality, the wilderness, and death; and a **teuteh2* god, armed with a spear or club, who represents the adult warrior. This duality is represented by couples like Óðinn / Týr, Quirinus / Mars, Rudra / Indra, Lug / Núadu and Enyalios / Ares.²

The comparability between (a) Rudra / Indra and their groups on one hand, and (b) the Vrātya leader and his group, on the other, could be conceived as being dependent on the distinctions between the **korios* god (Rudra) and the **teuteh2* god (Indra).

The prominence of the god Rudra in Vrātya culture has been pointed out by scholars such as Charpentier (1911), Hauer (1927), Choudhary (1964: 88), Falk (1986), af Edholm (2021). Parpola (1973: 37ff), apart from underlining “the connection of the *vrātyas* and of Rudra with the death cult,” focuses on the “close parallelism” between the appearance of the Vrātyas and that of Rudra, which is analysed and compared in detail on the basis of primary Vedic sources (we will focus on this point below): both the Vrātya leader and Rudra enjoy

² See Bollée (1981: 173), where we find an explanation of the parallel between Indra and the Late Avestan god Miθra, who is described as endowed with dark attributes and who is worshipped by violent Iranian groups organized into brotherhoods.

a parallel status in the AV, and likewise, a more general comparison could be made regarding their hair, the turban and garments they wear, the ornaments and even their chariots and weapons.³

There are many traits that can be interpreted as evidence of the parallelism between Rudra and the Vrātyas: violence, rowdiness and aggressiveness are often associated with this group and with Rudra himself; Rudra is also the god excluded from the divine sacrifice (ŚB 1.7.3.1; 3), an exclusion which is mirrored by the Vrātya's condition of outsiderhood, which can be overcome by performing the ritual called *vrātyastoma*.⁴ But, with respect to Rudra, Keith (1913: 159) points out that “we cannot believe that to the composers of the *Brāhmanas* he was a god not wholly received into the circle of the gods” and uses the so-called *śatarudriya* in the Yajurvedic texts as an argument.

As regards Indra's role in the Vrātya culture, Dore (2015; 2016) already shed light on the importance of this god for access to heaven in the most ancient Vedic *saṃhitās*. Dore (2015: 180ff) focuses on

³ Note that Keith's (1913: 157) interpretation on this topic, expressed in response to the theory advanced by Charpentier about the possibility of seeing the Vrātyas as the founders of the Rudra-Śiva cult, is essentially very different.

⁴ PB 24.18. Heesterman (1962: 6–7) concludes that the *vrātyastoma* in fact celebrates the covenant between the Vrātyas when they were engaged in an expedition. He gives an overview of the content of the primary sources stating,

(...) apart from the idea of purification (Baudh, Kāṭhaka, Mānava), the purpose of the *vrātyastomas* is given by some texts as reaching heaven (JB, PB, Śāṅkh.). Other texts, without mentioning a specific wish to be attained, state the occasion at which they serve: the uniting of a number of *vrātyas* is a group (Lāṭy., Kāty.), their setting out on a *vrātya* expedition (Āp., Hir.), the end (Mān.) and the beginning of their expedition (Kāṭh).

See also Candotti and Pontillo 2015: 158:

(...) the function and the aim of the Vrātyastoma might have considerably changed overtime in parallel with the shift of the notion of vrātyahood. There is always a tension also in “orthodox” texts relating to Vrātyastoma rites between the individual and ethic, and the communitary and cultural, that denounces, so to say, the effort made by their authors to absorb and dilute cultural differences in an ecumenical ideology.

the possibility of seeing “the mythological figure of the *vr̥tya* as a consecrated warrior” in Indra’s relationship with *Br̥haspati*. Moreover, the author underlines that the *sattra* context, where the *r̥sis* come together to honour Indra, recalls the “descriptions—on a mythological level—of an assembly of *vr̥tyas* (the consecrated warriors) with their *Ekavr̥tya* as the leader.”

The *Ekavr̥tya* is mentioned in ŚS 15.1.6-8⁵ (≅ PS 18.27.4–7):

*sá ekavr̥tyó bhavat sá dhánur ádatta tád evéndradhanúḥ || n̥lám asyo-
dáram lóhitam̐ pr̥sthám n̥lenaivápriyam̐ bhr̥át̥ryam̐ prór̥noti lóhitena
dviśántam̐ vidhyat̥ti brahmavādino vadanti*

He became the sole *Vr̥tya*. He took the bow, that was Indra’s bow: blue its belly, red the back. With the blue he keeps away the unfriendly cousin, with the red he wounds the enemy. So say the *brahmavādins*.⁶

According to Dore (2015: 35), this passage hints at a “transfiguration” rather than a mere identification: this process is accomplished by a man who “seems to replace Indra in his role as lord of the gods.” Pontillo (2019: 256–257) explains that there are textual elements in the Vedic literature that may be interpreted as traces of an alternative conception of the accessway to heaven; these are the epithet *dyútāna* and, as well, “other images of fire” referred to a “potential deity,” which can be compared to the “so-called warrior / ascetic *ekavr̥tya*” mentioned above in ŚS 15.1.6–8. Indeed, he is “a man who achieves a divine status, and who is praised as a God, a Chieftain, and a Lord.”

In the passage quoted above, a pivotal act of such an apotheosis process is the taking possession of Indra’s bow.

⁵ Withney 1905.

⁶ See also Whitney 1905.

2. The tradition of the bow

This weapon, referred to as *indrādhānuḥ*, “Indra’s bow” is described in the AV as *nīlam asyodāraṃ lohitaṃ pṛṣṭhām*, “blue its belly, red the back.” Neri and Pontillo (2023: fn 9) explain:

The genitive pronoun *asya* had been interpreted by Whitney and Lanman (...) as a neuter form, referred to the neuter *dhānus* ‘bow’ (...) and intended as the rainbow, commonly called Indra’s bow.

However, they also point out that “its (*asya*),” which might equally well be “his (*asya*)” thus precisely agreeing with *udāra* ‘belly’ and *pṛṣṭhā* ‘back’ respectively, might refer to the masculine *sā ekavrātyā*.” Neri and Pontillo opt for the latter option in their translation.

Thus, the very first description of the Vrātya’s bow in the Vedic literature is related to the god Indra; in fact, it is precisely Indra’s bow. For the sake of the present research, this is the conclusion that must be drawn from the AV, even though the meaning and interpretation of the whole stanza is always open to debate.

As already recalled above, the Vrātyas are traditionally described as being armed with bows and arrows: the Vedic sources present a clear distinction between the leader’s equipment and that of the group, also in terms of garments. According to PB 17.1.14–15, and here resumed according to Caland’s translation (1931), the Vrātyas wear “upper garments with red borders and corded fringes,⁷ with strings at each side; each of them has a pair of shoes and doubly-joined goat’s hides.”⁸

⁷ But note that this interpretation is uncertain.

⁸ The so-called Vrātyas can be associated with the Vrātyas: they share a connection which, according to Candotti and Pontillo (2015: fn 28), “is not founded on a mere phonetic similarity but rather on some shared details of their respective equipment.” They are also

(...) characterized by specific warlike equipment (22.3.17: *ujjyadhānvānaḥ* “[And] with bows with loosened strings”; 22.3.18: *kalāpinaḥ* “[And] with quivers (of arrows).”) All these features largely coincide with those depicted in LŚS 8.5.8: *lohitōṣṇīṣā lohītavāsaso nivīṭā ṛvijāḥ pracareyur upotaparūṣā*

The Vrātya leader on the other hand, referred to as *gr̥hapati*, wears a turban, a garment with black fringes and two goat skins and he carries a goad;⁹ he also possesses a silver ornament which, according to Caland (1931), is worn around the neck. He carries a weapon called *jyāhṇoḍa* (*jyāhroḍa* in the subsequent sources). The tradition in line with this description is the following:

uṣṇīṣaṃ ca pratodaś ca jyāhṇoḍaś ca vipathaś ca phalakāstīrṇaḥ kṛṣṇaśaṃ vāsaḥ kṛṣṇaḥvalakṣe ajine rajato niṣkaś tad gr̥hapateḥ (PB 17.1.14)¹⁰

A turban and a goad and a *jyāhṇoḍa* and a (chariot)—for bad roads—covered by a wooden board; and a black garment, two black and white skins, a silver ornament: this is (the equipment of) the *gr̥hapati*.

uṣṇīṣaṃ pratodo jyāhroḍo ratho vipathaḥ phalakāstīrṇo 'śvo 'śvataraśca yugyau kṛṣṇaśaṃ vāsaḥ kṛṣṇaḥvalakṣe ajine rajato niṣkaḥ tadgr̥hapateḥ (ĀpŚS 22.5.5)¹¹

A turban, a goad, a *jyāhroḍa*, a chariot—for bad roads—covered by a wooden plank, a horse and a mule fit to be yoked, a blackish garment, two black and white skins, a silver ornament: this is (the equipment of) the *gr̥hapati*.

uṣṇīṣaṃ pratodo jyāhroḍo ratho vipathaḥ phalakāstīrṇo 'śvo 'śvataraś ca yugyau kṛṣṇaṃ vāsaḥ kṛṣṇaḥvalakṣe ajine rājato niṣkaḥ || tad gr̥hapateḥ || (HŚS 17.2.33)¹²

A turban, a goad, a *jyāhroḍa*, a chariot—for bad roads—covered by a wooden board, a horse and a mule fit to be yoked, a black garment, two

ujyadhanvānaḥ (The officiants should perform [the sacrifice] wearing red turbans and red garments and having a thread round the neck, with wrapped arrows and bows with loosened strings).

⁹ A comparative perspective underlines the continuity of these characteristics in the Indo-European culture (see table 12 in Selva 2019).

¹⁰ All the quotations from PB are based on Śāstrī and Śāstrī 1935–1936.

¹¹ All the quotations from ĀpŚS are based on Thite 2004.

¹² Āgāṣe and Śaṃkara (1907–1932).

black and white skins, a silver ornament: this is (the equipment of) the *grhapati*.

teṣāṃ vyañjanāny uṣṇīṣaṃ pratodo jyāhroḍa ratho vipathaḥ phalakāstīrṇaḥ kṛṣṇadaśaṃ vāso nīlabalakṣe ajine rājato rukmas tad grhapateḥ | (MānŚS 9.3.3)¹³

Their characteristics are a turban, a goad, a *jyāhroḍa*, a chariot—for bad roads—covered by a wooden board, garment with black fringes, two black and white skins, a silver circular ornament: this is (the equipment of) the *grhapati*.

The almost synoptic similarity of the content of the primary sources dealing with the description of the Vrātya's equipment may signify that they essentially continue the tradition of the PB, which is chronologically the first source on the topic.

Now, we must add the BŚS to these sources, a text which also deals with the description of the Vrātyas:

atha yatkrṣṇaṃ vāsaḥ kṛṣṇatūṣaṃ paridhatte dīkṣitavasanasya tad rūpaṃ | atha yat kṛṣṇabalakṣyāvajine dhārayati kṛṣṇājīnayoḥ tad rūpaṃ | atha yat suvarṇarajatau rukmau bibharti pariḥarmyayoḥ tad rūpaṃ | atha yat kṛṣṇaṃ uṣṇīṣaṃ dhārayati dīkṣitoṣṇīṣasya tad rūpaṃ | atha yac carma-mayair bāṇavadbhis tisṛdhanvaṃ dhārayati dīkṣitadaṇḍasya tad rūpaṃ || (BŚS 18.24)¹⁴

He is dressed in a black garment with black border: this is the sign of the garment of the *dīkṣita*.¹⁵ He wears two black and white skins: this is the sign of the two skins of black antelope. He brings two gold and silver circular ornaments: this is the sign of the two ritual vessels used to prepare

¹³ Gelder 1961.

¹⁴ All the quotations from BŚS are based on Kashikar 2003.

¹⁵ The syntax of this exegetic passage stresses the importance of the content of the correlative clause in this sense: despite the structure of the proposed translation, the aim of the author of the text is to specify the nature of, e.g., the “sign of the garment of the *dīkṣita*” and not the opposite.

hot beverages. He wears a black turban: this is the sign of the turban of the *dīkṣita*. He holds a bow with three arrows with leather quivers:¹⁶ this is the sign of the *daṇḍa* of the *dīkṣita*.

While the general aesthetic representation is very similar to the already considered Vedic sources, the text of the BŚS features a major variation which regards the weapon carried by the Vrātya leader: in this description the *jyāhṇoḍa* becomes a *tisṛdhanva*.

Hence, according to the primary sources, the tradition regarding the bow belonging to the Vrātya leader subsequent to the AV can be summarized as follows:

	YV	SV	AV
<i>saṃhitās</i>			
			ŚS = <i>indrathanus</i>
			PS = <i>indrathanus</i>
<i>brāhmaṇas</i>			
		PB = <i>jyāhṇoḍa</i>	
<i>śrautasūtras</i>			
	BŚS = <i>tisṛdhanva</i>		
	ĀpŚS = <i>jyāhroḍa</i>		
	HŚS = <i>jyāhroḍa</i>		
	MānŚS = <i>jyāhroḍa</i>		

¹⁶ The interpretation of *carmamayair bāṇavadbhis* as “with leather quivers” is still tentative: given that the possibility of having leather arrows seems unsuitable, is the author referring to more than one quiver associated with a single bow, or would it be possible to hypothesize the existence of one case for each single arrow?

3. The *jyāhṇoda* / *jyāhṛoda* in Vedic sources

The exact meaning of the term *jyāhṇoda* was not clear to the exegetes. Lāṭyāyana glosses it as *dhanuṣka aniṣu*¹⁷, a “small bow having no arrows” (LŚS 8.6.8). Caland, indeed, translates it as “a bow without arrow.” This choice is not perfectly grounded on etymological reasons, since *jyā-* literally means “string” in the sense of “bowstring” also in the RV, where it occurs several times; the same meaning can be observed elsewhere.¹⁸ Kāṭyāyana’s interpretation does not give us any more clues: he notes *ayogyam dhanuḥ*, “useless bow” (KŚS 22.4.11); the commentary¹⁹ adds *jyarahitaḥ kevalo dhanurdaṇḍah*, “the simple stick of the bow deprived of the (bow)string.”

The essential obscurity and uncertainty of these explanations forces us to infer that this weapon was, as Banerjea also concluded (1963: 157), “a kind of bow, or at least was thought to be so by the Sūtrakāras.” Hauer (1927: 48) hypothesizes the equivalence between the *jyāhṇoda* and the *daṇḍa*. Parpola (1973: 41) maintains, analogously, that it “apparently corresponds with the *daṇḍa* ‘stick’ with which the *vrātyas* are said to beat those who should not be beaten in PB 17.1, 9 and the *daṇḍa* of the Vedic *diksita*.”²⁰

The *topos* of the unstrung bow can be found in the PS where, echoing ŚS 15.1, Rudra is described as *nīlagrīvaṃ vilohitam*, “the blue-necked, the red one.”²¹ He is the one to whom the poet addresses this invocation and the god’s weapon is mentioned in PS 14.3.7:

*yā ta iṣuḥ śivatamā śivaṃ babhūva te dhanuḥ | śivā śaravyā yā tava tayā
no mṛḍa jīvase ||*

¹⁷ All the quotations from LŚS are based on Ranade 1998.

¹⁸ See Macdonell and Keith 1912: 291.

¹⁹ See Weber 1972.

²⁰ Note that even the weapon taken by the Ekavrātya was allegedly not intended to be used for shooting arrows (see above ŚS 15.1.6–8).

²¹ See also TS 4.5.1.

That arrow of yours is most benign; your bow has become benign. Benign is that shot of yours. Show us kindness with it, for the sake of life.²²

The prayer to the “benign,” “not frightful,” “not evil-looking” form of the god is taken up in PS 14.4.2:

*namāmsi ta āyudhāyānātātāya dhr̥ṣṇave | ubhābhyām akaram namo
bāhubhyām tava dhanvane ||*

Homages to your bold weapon, which is unstrung! I have done homage to both (your) arms, to your bow.

The (absence of) string in Rudra’s bow seems to be considered an element which characterizes his peaceful state judging from PS 14.4.3:²³

*pra muñca dhanvanas pary ubhayor ātñyor jyām | yās ca te hasta iṣavaḥ
parā tā bhagavo vapa ||*

Unfasten the string from both ends of (your) bow, and lay aside, O Lord, the arrows that are in your hand.

The truthfulness of this assumption emerges from PS 14.4.5:

*vijyam dhanuḥ śikhaṇḍino viśalyo bāṇavām uta | aneśann asyeṣavaḥ śivo
asya niṣaṅgatih ||*

²² The translations of PS 14, to which some passages of the *Nīlarudra Upaniṣad* correspond, are by Lubin (2007) who published critical edition of this text and its commentary.

²³ The interpretation of the *jyāḥṇoḍa* as a symbol of peacefulness was also the position adopted by Falk (1986). Note, moreover, that according to Walker (1968: 56), the bowstring of Śiva’s bow, which was known as *ājagava*, was called *jyā* and “and the term *jyāhroṣa* signified the unstrung bow not ready for use.” Note that as a parallel of a non-active status on the part of the god, “in sex-mysticism the *jyāhroṣa* symbolized the passive or flaccid state of Śiva.”

Stringless (is) the bow of the Crested One, and tipless (his) shaft; his arrows have disappeared; his quiver (is) benign.

Such a picture of Rudra's attitude is clearly in contrast with those sources where he is described as a violent, well-armed god: consider, e.g., RV 5.42.11 *sviṣúḥ sudhánvā* "the one of good arrow, of good bow."²⁴ However, the god's "peaceful" state when he is invited by the poet to accept the oblation can also be observed in TS 1.8.6:

eṣā te rudra bhāgās tām juṣasva ténāvaséna paró mūjavató 'tīhi | ávatat-adhanvā pínākahastāḥ kṛttivāsāḥ ||

This is thy portion, O Rudra; rejoice in it; with it for food, do thou go away beyond the Mujavants with unstrung bow, thy club in thy hand, clad in skins.²⁵

The perspective of a bow with a loosened string, and which is associated in Vedic literature with Rudra in a calm or even in a defeated condition (consider the *pravargya*'s paradigm-myth referenced in af Edholm 2021), is completely different from the description of the Vrātyas summarized by Choudhary (1964: 114). According to that description, the Vrātyas "carried a whip in their hands and a small bow without arrow by which they made depredations and troubled the people." Status of such a weapon, described *ibid.* as "not meant for shooting" should suggest, instead, a not imminent violent attitude on the part of the one who carries it, since a non-stringed bow is not a weapon ready for use.

However, the possibility of seeing it as a different kind of armament, as noted above, still subsists, even if the symbolical value of this weapon should not be undervalued.

²⁴ Aufrecht 1968. See also ŚS 11.2.12.

²⁵ Tr. Keith 1914.

4. The *tisṛdhanva* in Vedic sources

The sole explicit reference to a working weapon carried by the Vrātya leader comes from BŚS 18.24, a yajurvedic text which mentions the so-called *tisṛdhanva*, compound translated by Kashikar (2003) as “a bow with three arrows” and interpreted by Hauer (1927) as denoting a special bow consisting of three pieces of wood. From a grammatical point of view, the word *tisṛdhanva* consists of a compound having *tisṛ-* (the feminine form of the numeral three)²⁶ as the first constituent and the neuter word *dhanvan*, “bow,” as the second one. The numeral *tisṛ* also co-occurs with *dhanvan*²⁷ in MS 4.5.9 although not in compound (see below); now, it is logical that this numeral quantifies feminine items, whose linguistic expression is obviously understood both in the compound and in the syntactic string. The fact that *iṣu-* m.f., “arrow,” is in fact employed in the MS in its feminine declension (see, e.g., MS 2.13.12.7) makes this word a plausible candidate to virtually supply the above-mentioned lacuna.

Given that the *ḡyāhṇoda*, which was probably a stringless bow, could be interpreted as the symbolic attribute of a god, probably Rudra, in a “peaceful” state, the same reading cannot be applied at first glance in the case of the *tisṛdhanva*, seeing that a bow with three arrows suggests instead the possibility that it is about to be used.

Before it is denoted as the weapon of the Vrātya leader in the BŚS, there is another mention of a bow equipped with three arrows in the same text, i.e., in BŚS 10.48.49:

*yo rudro agnau yo apsu ya oṣadhīṣu yo rudro viśvā bhuvanāviveśa tasmai
rudrāya namo astu> iti athaitat tisṛdhanvaṃ yācati tenottare śronyante
tiṣṭhann upatiṣṭhate api vānuparīkrāmaṃ <yat te rudra puro dhanus tad
vāto anu vātu te tasmai te rudra saṃvatsareṇa namaskaromi> <yat te
rudra dakṣiṇā dhanus> <yat te rudra paścād dhanus> <yat te rudrot-
tarād dhanus> <yat te rudropari dhanus> iti athainad ayācītaṃ brā-
hmaṇāya dadāti*

²⁶ This is a substitute for *tri-* according to A 7.2.99.

²⁷ All the quotations from MS are based on Schroeder 1881–1886.

Obeisance to Rudra, who resides in fire, in water, in plants and in all beings.” He asks for the bow with three arrows. Standing in the northern [*śroni* (of the altar)] or (suitably) moving around, he prays with the verses, “May the wind blow after thy bow which is towards the east. O Rudra, I pay obeisance to thee for a Saṃvatsara; ... which is towards the south... for a Parivatsara...; ... which is toward the west... for a Idāvatsara...; which is towards the north... for a Iduvatsara...; which is upwards... for a Vatsara...” He gives away that bow (together with the arrows) to a *brāhmaṇa* without being asked.²⁸

Judging from this passage, the role of Rudra once again seems crucial: since he has the *tisṛdhanva* at his disposal the sacrificer invokes Rudra attributing the ownership of the bow to him.

Textual research shows that the *tisṛdhanva* also appears during the ritual in BŚS 12. 19.115:

*anvāhāryam āsādya tisṛdhanvaṃ śuṣkadṛtiṃ dadāti taṃ pratirājabhyaḥ
prahiṇīti sa yaḥ pratigrhṇāti mitro ma iti taṃ veda atha yo na pratigrhṇā-
ty amitro ma iti taṃ veda.*

Having placed the *Anvāhārya* cooked rice (within the altar), he gives away a bow with three arrows and a dried leather bag. The Adhvaryu sends these to rival kings. One who receives these, him he takes as his friend; one who does not, him he considers as his foe.

Notwithstanding the warlike significance of sending weapons to rival men, this passage instead suggests the symbolic value of such a practice where the bow is one of the most important ritual elements.

A role in the sacrificial act for the *tisṛdhanva* can also be inferred from BŚS 18.9.351.17, which describes a ritual procedure apparently devoted to the worship of Indra:

²⁸ Tr. Kashikar (2003), slightly modified.

pātraṃ dadāti tisṛdhanvaṃ ca

He (the sacrificer) gives the pot and the bow with three arrows.

Now, since the only source mentioning this same *tisṛdhanva* as the weapon belonging to the Vṛātya leader is the yajurvedic BSS, while the most common occurrences of the *ḥyāhṇoḍa* start from the samavedic PB, one may wonder whether there are specific traditions and precise implications related to the *tisṛdhanva* within the yajurvedic imagery.

The *sattra* myth occurring in MS 4.5.9, quoted here according to Amano (2016: 45), clearly mentions a bow with three (arrows) even if the word *tisṛdhanva* is yet to be used:

devā vai sattrām āsata kurukṣetre: 'gnīr makhó vayúr indras. tē 'bruvan: 'yatamó naḥ prathamá ṛdhnávat, tán naḥ sahá=' 'iti. tēṣāṃ vai makhá ārdhnot. tán nyākāmayata. tán ná sámasṛjata. tát asya prāsáhādītsanta. sá itá evá tisró 'janayateto dhánus. (...) sá pratidháyāpākrāmat. tám nábhyaḍhṛṣṇuvant. sá dhanvārtim̐ pratiṣkábhyaṭiṣṭhat. sá índro vamrīr abravīd: "etām̐ ḥyām̐ +ápyatta=" 'iti.

The gods sat at a *sattra* sitting in Kurukṣetra, [namely] Agni, Makha, Vāyu, and Indra. They said: “When one of us will first get success, that [will be] common to us [all].” Then Makha got success among them. [But] Makha wished that [success] only for himself, so he didn’t share it. Then they (the other gods) tried to get it by force, so he brought forth three [arrows] from here and a bow from here. (...) He stepped back, setting [bow and arrow], so they didn’t have the courage to go toward him. He bent the bow and didn’t move. Then Indra said to the termites: “Bite at this bow string!”

In this passage the weapon belongs to the god Makha, whose connection with Rudra has already been illustrated by af Edholm (2021). Variants in the pattern of this well-known myth include Rudra himself as the god whose head was severed by the bowstring. Note that the plural feminine form of the numeral “three,” *tisraḥ* echoes the grammatical characteristics of the first constituent of the compound *tisṛdhanva*.

The *tisṛdhanva* again appears in a ritual context in TS 1.8.19²⁹ (see also TB 1.8.3.4), where it is explicitly mentioned as a part of the *dakṣiṇā* for a sacrifice devoted to Savitr̥:

savitre satyaprasavāya puroḍāsam dvādaśakapālam ||
tisṛdhanvaṃ śuṣkadṛtir dakṣiṇā ||

To Savitr̥ of true instigation a cake on twelve potsherds; the sacrificial fee is a dry skin bag and a bow with three arrows.³⁰

Note that the condition of being a *dakṣiṇā* is the explanation Macdonell and Keith (1912: 312) give for the term *tisṛdhanva* in their Vedic Index.

The *tisṛdhanva* is also mentioned twice in the white yajurvedic ŚB. In the first case (ŚB 11.1.5.10) it once again represents the *dakṣiṇā* for a sacrifice to honour Agni as Indra's main helper when he defeated Vṛtra:

tisṛdhanvaṃ dākṣiṇāṃ dadāti dhānvanā vai śvānam bādhante tādetāme-
vaitādbādhate yāttisṛdhanvaṃ dākṣiṇāṃ dadāti.

A bow with three arrows he gives as *dakṣiṇā*; for with the bow a dog is driven away: he thus drives away that (dog, the moon) when he gives a bow with three arrows as *dakṣiṇā*.³¹

The other occurrence is in ŚB 14.1.1.7, this time with reference to the myth already told in MS 4.5.9:

sá tisṛdhanvám ādāyāpacakrāma

Having taken the *tisṛdhanva*, he stepped back.³²

²⁹ Weber 1871.

³⁰ Tr. Keith 1914.

³¹ Tr. Eggeling 1882.

³² Cf. Eggeling 1882.

In the present version the god who possesses the bow is Viṣṇu.

The special weapon is mentioned again in the context of a sacrifice, with an overt reference to Rudra, in the chronologically later ĀpŚs 17.12.3 (which echoes BŚS 10.48.49):

*tisṛdhanvam ayācitaṃ yajamāno brāhmaṇāya dattvā yat te rudra puro
dhanur ity etair yathāliṅgam upatiṣṭhate*

After offering an unsolicited *tisṛdhanva* to the *brahmin*, the *yajamāna* approaches [the altar] with these characteristic words: ‘which is your bow, Rudra, placed in the east.’

Interestingly, the *tisṛdhanva* is described as the *dakṣiṇā* of a sacrifice also in *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* 4.2.15, a ṛgvedic text:

tisṛdhanvam dakṣiṇā | tat svastyayanasya rūpam

The bow with three arrows is the *dakṣiṇā*; this is a sign of good fortune.

Keith’s translation (1920) reads “of a safe journey.” To summarize the different occurrences of the *tisṛdhanva*:

	ṚV	YV	
		Black	White
<i>saṃhitās</i>			
		(MS = Makha’s bow) ³³	
		TS = Ritual (<i>dakṣiṇā</i>)	

³³ Even if there is no occurrence of the compound *tisṛdhanva* in the MS, this information has however been considered in the present chart since the same denotatum (a bow with three arrows) seems to be clearly expressed in the text.

<i>brāhmaṇas</i>			
	KB = Ritual (<i>dakṣiṇā</i>)	TB = Ritual (<i>dakṣiṇā</i>)	ŚB1 = Ritual (<i>dakṣiṇā</i>)
			ŚB2 = Viṣṇu's bow
<i>śrautasūtras</i>			
		BŚS1 = Ritual (Rudra's)	
		BŚS2 = Ritual	
		BŚS3 = Ritual	
		BŚS = <i>Vrātya</i> 's bow	
		ĀpŚS = Ritual	

Thus, in the branch of the tradition dealing with the weapon carried by the *Vrātya* leader represented by the BŚS, one of his attributes is the possession of a bow with three arrows. The Vedic corpus shows the ritual use of this element, whose nature and metaphorical significance is certainly worthy of investigation. A positive value for this symbol in the sense of a good omen can be observed in both the KB and the BŚS. As the chart above shows, the largest number of representations of the bow with three arrows is found in the *yajurvedic* tradition starting with the MS (even if the quotation is in an embryonic linguistic form), where the weapon belongs to the god Makha; it is then echoed by the *samavedic* ŚB, in which the owner of the bow is Viṣṇu. In both cases the myth is the same; in both cases Indra is the god who prevails (see ŚB 14.1.1.12).

In this narrow variety of patterns and contexts, the BŚS tells us that the *tisṛdhanva* was the weapon of the *Vrātya* leader: could the general imagery have changed in that passage, and the bow with three arrows suddenly have become a symbol of violence?

An attempt at drawing some conclusions

To conclude, and without claiming to have reached any definitive inference from the textual analysis and the reflections discussed in the present paper, it indeed seemed interesting to take another look at a much studied passage from the BŚS. In this text, where the link between Rudra and Vrātyas is quite strong and probably emphasised in accordance with its internal contents, a statement such as *aandro vai vrātyo māruto grāmas*, “the Vrātya is for Indra; the village is for the Maruts”³⁴ may represent a momentary settlement of the group after the expedition, and the Vrātya leader, who should still carry Rudra’s bow, is in fact associated with Indra; see BŚS 18.25:

asamjñātam iva vā ete caranti ye vrātyaṃ caranti | sam evainān jñāpayanti | mādhyamadinīyān anuvartata aindrāmāruta ekādaśakapālas | aandro vai vrātyo māruto grāmas | grāmeṇaivainān samīco dadhāti |

Indeed, those who live a Vrātya-life live quite discordantly. [This rite] leads them to an agreement. The cake on eleven potsherds to Indra and Maruts follows the libations of Soma at the midday pressing. The Vrātya is for Indra; the village is for the Maruts. In this way he brings those into harmony with the village.

Such a parallelism recalls the relationship between Rudra and Indra and its significance in analysing the Vrātyas from the Männerbund perspective. Even though Indra embodies the warrior god par excellence, and even considering the many similarities that he shares with Rudra, he nonetheless does not possess the same savage traits of this god, at least within the development of his cult in the Vedic tradition.

Consider finally TĀ 1.5.4–5³⁵ which deals with the same myth narrated in the MS and offers an interesting suggestion as far as the “joined” ownership of the bow is concerned:

³⁴ See below.

³⁵ Mitra 1872.

*tád indradhánur ity ajyám | abhrávarṇeṣu cákṣate | étád évá sám̐yór
bārhaspaṭyasyá | étád rudrasya dhánúḥ | rudrásya tveva dhánurārtniḥ
| síra útpipeṣa |*

This is the *indradhanu*, without bowstring; they look at it in the colors of the clouds. It belongs to Śamyu, son of Brhaspati, and it also belongs to Rudra: the end of the bow, indeed, (has) cut (his) head away.

The presence of a strong Rudraic element is beyond question with respect to the bow attributed to the Vrātya leader, an association that contributes to the cultural identification of the Vrātya leader himself. But, according to this passage, the unstrung bow belongs to both Indra and Rudra and such a weapon could refer to the one mentioned in the AV.

Now, within the imagery of an outsider god who carries a bow and is then defeated by Indra, the absence of the bowstring in the tradition started by the PB, but also the ritual value of the bow with three arrows, may be a symbol that perhaps not only emphasises Rudra in his most peaceful manifestation, but also the “failure” of this wild, subversive god before the power of a greater one.

Thus, on the strict basis of the analysis of the Vedic sources, it appears that the specific argument referencing weapon attributed to their leader should not be used to strengthen the idea of the violent nature of the Vrātyas.

Abbreviations

ĀpŚS	<i>Āpastamba Śrautasūtra</i>
BŚS	<i>Baudhāyana Śrautasrutra</i>
HŚS	<i>Hiranyakeṣi Śrautasūtra</i>
KŚS	<i>Śrautasūtra of Kātyāyana</i>
LŚS	<i>Lātyāyana Śrautasūtra</i>
MānŚS	<i>Mānava Śrautasūtra</i>
MS	<i>Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā</i>
PB	<i>Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa</i>

PS	<i>Paippalāda Saṃhitā</i>
RV	<i>R̥gveda</i>
ŚB	<i>Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i>
ŚS	<i>Śaunakīya Saṃhitā</i>
TĀ	<i>Taittirīya Āraṇyaka</i>
TB	<i>Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa</i>
TS	<i>Taittirīya Saṃhitā</i>

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