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Cannibalism in the *dīkṣā* Chapter of the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā*

ABSTRACT: This paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on human sacrifice and cannibalism in the *Vedas* by examining newly discovered descriptions in the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* III 6.6. This passage appears to contain fairly specific points that ancient practitioners were meant to consider when engaging in cannibalism, points that are not found elsewhere. *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* III 6 is a chapter about the purification (*dīkṣā*) of the sacrificer before the *soma* ritual, repeatedly emphasizing sacrificer's transformation into a suitable sacrificial victim. By compiling and examining such descriptions, the paper demonstrates how concerns related to human sacrifice were deeply embedded in the *dīkṣā* rite of the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā*.

KEYWORDS: cannibalism, *Veda*, *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā*, *dīkṣā*, *dīkṣita*

1. Human sacrifice and cannibalism in the *Vedas*

In numerous ancient civilizations, the practice of cannibalism and human sacrifice is well-documented. While the significance and underlying reasons for these practices may vary, they often involved a delicate interplay between cultural taboos and motivations. In the ancient Indian Vedic literature, there are references to human sacrifice, but

these appear to be more mythical or ideological rather than accounts of actual rituals. Assuming the practice of human sacrifice did occur, the presence of strong taboos likely hindered clear and explicit descriptions, making it a challenging aspect of study.

The topic of human sacrifice and cannibalism in the *Vedas* has been discussed by scholars since at least the nineteenth century, with figures such as Colebrooke (1805) and Weber (1868) offering their perspectives. Parpola (2007) has comprehensively reviewed and examined previous research. As these studies have pointed out, the *Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa* contains myths related to human sacrifice, namely in the story of Śunaḥśepa, while the *Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa* and *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*, although debated as to their symbolic nature, include chapters dealing with *puruṣamedha* (“human sacrifice”).¹ However, the older ritual literature, the *Black Yajurveda-Saṁhitās*, lacks corresponding myths or ritual descriptions. The only description of human sacrifice or consumption of human flesh in the *Black Yajurveda-Saṁhitās* is a short passage in the *sattra* chapter of the *Kāthaka-Saṁhitā* (KS), and the *Taittirīya-Saṁhitā* (TS) parallel references it for counterargument.² Consequently, it has been challenging to determine whether human sacrifice was an enduring part of the ancient Vedic tradition, and the lack of continuous historical records presents a persistent challenge in the study of human sacrifice.

To approach this challenging question even to a limited extent, it is necessary to find and accumulate descriptions that may suggest actual human sacrifice and cannibalism. The author has found a suggestive description of cannibalism in one of the *Black Yajurveda-Saṁhitās*, the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā* (MS). This is in MS III 6.6, in the chapter concerning *dīkṣā* (purification of the sacrificer) as part of the preparations for the *soma* ritual. The purification of the sacrificer is intended to prepare him ritualistically to perform the ritual, but also to turn him

¹ *Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa* 7.13–18; *Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa* 3.4.1–19; *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* 13.6.1–2. Cf. also Bakker 2007.

² KS 34.2; see 2.2 below.

into an offering. This description is believed to reflect concerns associated with human sacrifice, a point discussed by Oshima (2010–2011). The potentially suggestive description of cannibalism in MS III 6.6 is to be found in the passage where the sacrificer as *dīkṣita* (one who is purified by *dīkṣā*) becomes the offering himself. This is a particularly complex passage that requires careful interpretation. It will be examined in section 2.1 below.

This passage appears to contain fairly specific points for ancient Vedic practitioners to consider when engaging in cannibalism, points that are not found elsewhere. They are unique to the MS and entirely absent in the parallel of the KS and the TS. In this passage, the word *asuryā-* (“Asuric deed”) seems to denote human sacrifice. This term will be further explored alongside KS 34 in section 2.2. KS 34 is a scene from the *dvādaśāha* (“twelve-day” ritual), the concluding ritual of the one-year *sattra*, which Falk (1986, 38f.) has examined for descriptions of human sacrifice and cannibalism.

The term *puruṣamedhā-* occurs only once in the MS:

*āsānto vā eṣó 'prītaḥ. puruṣamedhāṃ vā eṣá prátīkṣate yájamānam evá havyám. (...) agnihotrahávanīm pratápya hásto 'vadhéyo, hásto vā pratápyāgnihotrahávanyām avadhéyas. ténaiváinaṃ śamayati. téna prīṇāti.*³

This (Agni = Rudra) is not appeased, not satisfied⁴. He longs for a human sacrifice, for the sacrificer as the oblation. (...) After heating the [spoon] for pouring the agnihotra [milk], one should either place his hand beneath it, or, after heating the hand, place it under the [spoon] for pouring the agnihotra [milk]; thereby, he (the sacrificer) appeases him (Agni = Rudra), thereby, he satisfies him.

In this passage, Rudra, appearing as Agni (the sacrificial fire), is said to seek human sacrifice because he has had no share in the *agnihotra*

³ MS I 8.5(5): 122.2–6, translated in Amano 2009: 299.

⁴ All the translations are made by the author of the article.

ritual. By heating the spoon and placing his hand underneath, or by heating his hand and then putting it under the spoon, the sacrificer is substituting for the *puruṣamedhá-* and thereby satisfying Rudra. Therefore, this passage is not understood as a description of an actual practice of human sacrifice. Apart from this instance, the term *puruṣamedhá-* is not used elsewhere in the MS or in the other *Black Yajurveda-Samhitās*.

However, the use of *puruṣa-* (“human”) and *médha-* (“sacrifice”) in the same sentence is found several times in MS III 6, the chapter on *dīkṣā*, and it can be interpreted as implying *puruṣamedhá-*. Although *puruṣa-* and *médha-* are not rare vocabulary words on their own, instances for the use of both together in the same sentence appear only in MS III 6 but nowhere else in the MS. Furthermore, the identification of *dīkṣitá-* (“the purified sacrificer”) with *havis-* (“the oblation”) in MS III 6 may also be indicative of the theme of human sacrifice. In section 3, I will introduce descriptions containing *puruṣa-* with *médha-* as well as *dīkṣitá-* with *havis-* and *médhya-* (“suitable for sacrifice”) to provide further insight.

2. The description of possible cannibalism

2.1 The description of possible cannibalism in MS III 6.6

āhitāgnir vā eṣā sán +nāgnihotrām⁵ juhóti, ná darśapūrṇamāsáu yajate.
^[66.13] *tád, yā āhutibhājo devátās, tá anudhyāyiniṅ karoti. karśáyata*
ātmānam^[66.14]. ténaivāśya tád dhutám bhavati. devā ásurān +hatváib-
bhyó⁶ lokébhyaḥ pránudanta^[66.15]. téṣām ásavo manuṣyān práviśāms.
tád idám riprám puruṣe 'ntár: átho, ^[66.16] kṛṣṇám iva cákṣuṣy antás. tán
nāśnīyād. asuryám evāpahate. yadā vái puruṣe ná kím ^[66.17] canāntár

⁵ So corrected; Schroeder and Sātavalekar *nāgnihotrām*; cf. Mittwede (1986: 120).

⁶ So corrected; Schroeder and Sātavalekar *hatváibhyo*.

bhāvati, yadāśya kṛṣṇām cākṣuṣor nāsyaty, átha médhyo. yádi kuryán, náktam ^[66.18] *kuryād. asuryò vái rátrir. +asúryám*⁷ *+evásuryám*⁸ *kriyate.*⁹

This one (the *dīkṣita*), although he is an *āhitāgni* (meaning one who has established his own sacrificial fire through the *agnyādhāna* ritual), does not perform *agnihotra* [and] does not hold new and full moon sacrifices. [Hence] he leaves the deities, who are the enjoyers of offerings, wanting. He makes himself lean; thereby, his [*agnihotra*] becomes something offered. The gods, having slain the Asuras, cast them out of these worlds. Their essences (after death) entered into humans. That is the impurity inside a human. And it is also a blackness, as it were, inside the eye. One should not eat it / him; one casts away the Asuric. As soon as there is nothing more inside a human, as soon as the black part of his eyes disappears, then he is suitable for sacrifice. In the case that he does that, he should do it at night. The night belongs to the Asuras; something Asuric is done in the absence of the sun.

This passage begins with the sacrificer's fasting. The sentence *karśáyata ātmānam* implies self-starvation through fasting, which is considered to be the *agnihotra* offering and a means to appease the gods. In other words, during *dīkṣā*, one offers oneself through self-starvation in lieu of performing the *agnihotra* and the new and full moon sacrifices. It is within this context that the consumption of human flesh is mentioned.

The interpretation of *tán náśnīyāt* holds pivotal significance in determining whether this passage alludes to cannibalism. Given the preceding assertion that the essence of the Asuras has entered into human beings, resulting in *riprá-* and the blackness within the eye, it appears reasonable to construe *náśnīyāt* “one should not eat” as cautioning against the consumption of such impurity present in humans. This practice of *náśnīyāt* serves as a preventative measure against anything Asuric.

⁷ So corrected; cf. Viśva Bandhu (1976), s. v. *asūrā-*; Schroeder *asūryām*. Cf. *asūryá-* in *Rgveda* 5.32.6.

⁸ So corrected; Schroeder and Sātavalekar *evásūryām*.

⁹ MS III 6.6(1): 66.12–18. Cf. Oshima 2010–2011: 67.

Now, I would like to delve more rigorously into the question of what the object of *asñīyāt* is. The issue is the interpretation of *tán* (before *nā*^o). If we interpret *tán* as *tád* n. sg. acc., it can be understood either as an adverb meaning “at that time” or “therefore,” or as an accusative pronoun referring to the blackness in the eye (*kr̥ṣṇám*) or to impurity (*riprám*). In the former case, it would signify “at that time/therefore, he should not eat,” which would indicate fasting on the part of the sacrificer. In the latter case, it would convey “one should not eat it (the impurity or the black part),” which would imply human consumption. And here I would like to add a third possibility. In the oral transmission, there were no distinctions between *-n n- < -t n-* and *-ṃ n- < -m n-*, both of which were actually pronounced as *-n n-*, and in the manuscripts of the MS they are written randomly as *-nn-*, *-ṃnn-*, or *-ṃn-*. Therefore, in this passage as well, *tán* could potentially be the masculine singular accusative *tám*, leading to the interpretation “one should not eat that [human],” which indicates a human in the state of bearing impurity and black color in his eye.

The human becomes suitable for sacrifice when *riprá-* is absent and the eyes are no longer black. The eyes not being black could probably indicate a situation where several hours have passed after death. The absence of *riprá-* might suggest a state where impurities within the body have been eliminated (by some means of treatment?). A human in such a state is considered *médhya-* (“suitable for sacrifice”).¹⁰

Oshima (2010–2011: 67) interprets the state without *riprá-* and with non-black eyes as arising from hunger during fasting. And he interprets the subject of *asñīyāt* as pertaining to the sacrificer. Following this interpretation, the sacrificer fasts and becomes hungry, which indicates an appropriate state in which to perform the sacrifice (so the passage does not necessarily indicate cannibalism).

There is, however, another basis for considering that this passage is related to cannibalism. This is linked to the meaning of the phrase *yádi kuryān, náktam kuryāt* and the meaning of the term *asuryā-*. Oshima

¹⁰ The description urging the removal of *riprá-* that is identified with *amedhya-* may also be observed in MS III 6.2 at 3.2 below.

translates *yādi kuryān, nāktam kuryāt* as “if he were to make [the black part], he would make night (*nākt-*).” However, in the MS, *yādi* often introduces choices in ritual contexts, in which case the main sentence serves as a prescription for ritual actions.¹¹ The word *nāktam* in the MS is used elsewhere exclusively as an adverb.¹² Therefore, *yādi kuryān, nāktam kuryāt* must mean “in the case of doing it, one should do it at night.” Since it indicates performing an action at night, interpreting the action as fasting does not make sense (because one does not eat during the night in any case). Moreover, that which takes place here is considered to be *asuryā-* (“an Asuric act”) in the following sentence. In this context, it is strongly suggested that this “Asuric act” implies something bloody, possibly a human sacrifice.

The term *asurya-* meaning “bloody” is also observed in KS 34.2 in relation to a sacrifice involving sacrificial animals (or humans).

2.2 Description of animal sacrifice and cannibalism at the *dvādaśāha* (the twelve-day ritual concluding the one-year *sattra*) in KS 34

In KS 34.2, *asurya-* signifies “Asuric color (*varṇa-*),” which alludes to blood and activities involving bloodshed, implying a sacrificial ritual. KS 34.2 describes a sacrificial animal for Tvaṣṭar used following

¹¹ See Amano (2009: 130–135), especially, “Die genannte Verwendungsweise mit dem präspriktiven Optativ im Hauptsatz ist die häufigste” (Amano 2009: 133). An example of the same sentence construction is found in MS III 8.10: 111.3f.: *yād adhvaryuḥ pratyān dhiṣṇyān atīyāt, prāñān sāmkaṛṣeta. pramāyukaḥ syād. yādy atīyād*^[11,4], *yajñaparūsy atīyāt*, “If the Adhvaryu priest were to go past the dhiṣṇya hearths to the west, he would bind [the part], thus preventing the breaths; he (the sacrificer) would become emaciated. In that case he (the Adhvaryu priest) should go past them, he should go past them in the interval between ritual acts.”

¹² In the MS, *nāktam* appears with adverb *dīvā*, “in the daytime,” and therefore means apparently “in the night.” Examples for *nāktam* and *dīvā* appearing together are: I 5.5(2): 73.12f.; I 9.3(1): 132.14; II 2.6(1): 20.1; II 3.6(2): 34.4; III 7.8: 88.1; III 11.2: 142.3,6; III 11.3: 144.3,5; III 11.10: 157.5; IV 3.4: 43.10; IV 5.1: 63.7f., 9, 14. Other examples for *nāktam* as adverb are: I 8.6(3): 124.8; II 1.11(1): 12.20f.; IV 2.10: 32.17f. The MS uses *rātri-/rātrī-* as a substantive denoting “night.”

the sacrifice of eleven animals (*ekādaśinī*) that is performed in the *dvādaśāha* concluding the one-year *sattra*. Hirose (2024: 971) has suggested the possibility that this sacrificial animal for Tvaṣṭar might serve as a substitute for human sacrifice.

*asuryam vā etasmād varnam krtvā teja indriyaṃ vīryaṃ prajā paśavo 'pakraṃanti, yasya yūpo virohati. sa īśvara ījānaḥ pāpīyān bhavitos. tvāṣṭraṃ bahurūpam ālabheta.*¹³

Once he (the sacrificer) produced the Asuric color (implying blood), the radiance, the life force, the man's force, offspring [and] cattle go away from this one (the sacrificer), whose sacrificial pole is raised up (i.e., who holds an animal/human sacrifice). He may fall into the misfortune of becoming worse after having sacrificed. He (the sacrificer) should capture [and sacrifice] a multicolored [sacrificial animal] dedicated to Tvaṣṭar.

In the same context of the *dvādaśāha*, there is a discussion regarding consuming flesh of human beings. This passage, as interpreted by Falk (1986: 38–39), is considered to be indicative of the practice of cannibalism (“Hier im Kāthakam wird eindeutig von kannibalistischen Praktiken gesprochen”).

*puruṣasaṃmito vā eṣa. yas sattriyaṃ pratigrhṇāti, puruṣam vai so 'tti. yaṃ khalu vai puruṣam atti, na tasyāsmiml loke nāmuṣmimn apibhavati.*¹⁴

This [ritual] (= the *dvādaśāha*) is equal to the human sacrifice. The one who receives something [to eat] in the *sattra* (human flesh?), he (is the one who) eats the human victim. To tell the truth, the human victim, whom he eats, does not have a share, neither in this world nor in yonder [world].

¹³ KS 34.2: 36.20f.

¹⁴ KS 34.8: 41.16–18. This passage is discussed in Pontillo (2023: 212–215) in relation to cannibalism and self-immolation in *sattra*.

It is clearly stated that he consumes a human being. The *sattriya-*, that is the edible object received by a *sattra* participant in the *sattra*, is probably human flesh, as pointed out by Falk (1986: 38) “den zum Sattra gehörenden [Opfermenschen als Dakṣiṇā].” This is also because in the parallel passage in *Taittirīya-Saṃhitā* (TS), the received object is explicitly mentioned as *puruṣakunapá-*, *aśvakunapá-*, “human corpse,” “horse corpse.”¹⁵ The statement that the person to be eaten belongs to neither this world nor the other (but is in a liminal space) may serve as a justification for eating him.

3. The sacrificer (*dīkṣita*) as oblation described in MS III 6 (the chapter on *dīkṣā*)

Here, I have compiled passages where *púruṣa-* and *médha-* are used together, and the sacrificer (*dīkṣitá-*) is described as *havis-* (“oblation”) or *médhya-* (“suitable for sacrifice”), or the purification of the sacrificer for being a sacrificial victim is mentioned. These passages collectively indicate that the sacrificer’s *dīkṣā* was conducted in a manner reminiscent of human sacrifice.

3.1. MS III 6.1:59.9–12

⁺*caríṃ*¹⁶ *kurvanti* (...). *púruṣo vá eṣá médhāyálabhyate; puruṣasyeva hy eṣá pratimā;* ^[59.12] *yatá iva hí rūpám. tásmāc carúr evá kāryàs.*

¹⁵ TS 7.2.10.2–3: *eṣá ha vái kunápam atti yáh sattré pratigrhnāti puruṣakunapám aśvakunapám* “This one who receives a human corpse [and] a horse corpse in the *sattra* eats corpse (dead flesh).” The TS views this act negatively. The TS is likely to have a negative perspective on the way the *dvādaśāha* is performed in the KS, possibly because the latter includes human sacrifice, which the TS rejects (preferring to use the name *dvādaśarātrá* instead): TS 7.2.10.4 *tásmād dvādaśāhēna ná yáḥyam* “Therefore the *dvādaśāha* should not be performed.” Cf. Hirose 2024: 970.

¹⁶ So corrected; Schroeder and Sātavalekar *carú;* (B) *caríḥ*.

They (the priests) make a gruel (...). This [gruel] is captured [and sacrificed] as human victim in the sacrifice, as it is the image of a human victim, for it is the form of one who is walking (i.e. a living human). Therefore, one should make a gruel.¹⁷

This passage describes a scene where rice gruel is offered as part of the introduction into *dīkṣā*, and it is suggested that the offering of gruel carries a symbolic meaning related to human sacrifice.

3.2. MS III 6.2:60.17–61.12

snāti. mṛtā vā ^[60.18] *eṣā tvāg. amedhyam̐ vā asyaitād ātmāni śāmalam. tād evāpahate. médhya evā* ^[61.1] *médham úpaity (...)*^[61.8]. [*ghṛténa mā ghṛtapvāḥ punantv*] *īti. devātābhir evātmānam pāvayate. [viśvam̐* ^[61.9] *hī riprām pravāhantu devīr*] *īti. yād evāsya riprām amedhyam̐ ātmāni śāmalam,* ^[61.10] *tād asmād ādhi pravāhanty. [úd id ābhyaḥ śúcir ā pūtā emi=]* *īti. śúcir evābhyo* ^[61.11] *yajñīyo médhyah pūtā údeti. havir vāi dīksitó. yadā vāi havir yájuṣā prokṣáty*^[61.12], *átha havir bhavati. yād yájuṣā snapáyati, havir evānam akar.*

He (the sacrificer) takes a purificatory bath. This skin is dead. This stain in his [body] is not suitable for the offering; he he divests himself of it. As one suitable for the sacrifice, he comes to the sacrifice (...). “They shall purify me with clarified butter, those who are purified with clarified butter,”¹⁸ [he says]; with the deities, he purifies himself. “For the goddesses remove all impurity,” [he says]; the impure [part] in his [body] which is unsuitable for sacrifice, which is the stain, they remove that from him. “From them (the waters), I emerge pure and clean,” [he says]; pure, worthy of sacrifice, suitable for sacrifice, he emerges pure and clean from them (the waters). The dīksita is the oblation. As soon as he (the priest) sprinkles [water] onto an oblation with a *yajus*, then it becomes a [proper]

¹⁷ Cf. Oshima 2010–2011: 62.

¹⁸ MS I 2.1: 10.1 = *R̥gveda* 10.17.10, *Atharvaveda* Śaunaka recension 6.51.2.

oblation. Because he (the priest) makes him (the sacrificer) take a purificatory bath with the *yajus*,¹⁹ he has made him into the oblation.²⁰

This is a scene from the purification of the sacrificer, where the sacrificer bathes to cleanse his body. In this passage, it is clearly stated that he washes away his stain (*śámala-*) from his body, purifies himself (*ātmānam pāvayate*) to become suitable as an offering (*médhya evá médham úpaiti; havír bhavati.*).

3.3. MS III 6.2:61.12–62.2

asñáti. prāñā vā ásanam^[61.13]. *prāñān evátmán dhitivā +dīkṣate.*²¹ *suṣiró vái púrusah. sá vái tárhy evá sárvo,*^[61.14] *yárhya áśito. yád áśito bhávati, médhya evá médham úpaiti (...). +āñkte.*²² *'bhyañkte. vásaḥ páridhatta. etá vái púrusasya*^[61.19] *tanvāh. sátanūr evá +médham*²³ *úpaiti. návanūtenābhyañkte (...). darbhapiñjúlābhyañ samāyauti.*^[62.2] *tát +svíd*²⁴ *abhyāñjanam akar. átho, abhy éváitád ghārayati. medhyatváya.*

He (the sacrificer) eats. The act of eating stands for the vital functions (life sustaining elements). After placing vital functions within himself, he undergoes *dīkṣā*. A human is hollow. At the moment of having eaten, he becomes complete. Because he achieves the state of having eaten, he being suitable for the sacrifice, comes to the sacrifice (...). He applies ointment [to the eyes], he anoints [the body], he wears clothes. These

¹⁹ In MS III 9.6: 123.10f., the act of sprinkling water is performed on the sacrificial animal, and it is believed to purify impurity not suitable for sacrifice: *paśúm śnapayanti. yád eváśyābhiniṣaṇṇam śamalam amedhyam*^[123.11], *tāñ śúndhanti.*

²⁰ Cf. Oshima 2010–2011: 64. The chapter on *agniciti* contains a passage where the sacrificer of the *agniciti* is said to have become the oblation: MS III 4.7: 53.18 *havírbhūto vā eśá, yò 'gnim cinuté.*

²¹ So corrected; Schroeder and Sātavalekar *dīkṣate*; Schroeder's manuscripts *dīkṣite*; see Mittwede 1986: 119.

²² So corrected; Schroeder and Sātavalekar *āñkte*. The underlying is *á-añj*. The same form with the correct accent is attested in MS III 6.3: 62.5–7 as well as TS 6.1.1.5f.

²³ So corrected; Schroeder and Sātavalekar *médhyam*.

²⁴ So corrected; Schroeder and Sātavalekar *svíd*; see Mittwede 1986: 120.

are the appearances of the human victim. He goes to the sacrifice with the [suitable] appearances. He anoints [himself] with fresh butter (...). He mixes it with two stalks of *darbha* grass. With this [action] he has completed his adornment. And also he (the priest) sprinkles [butter on the sacrificer].²⁵ It is for the sake of being suitable for the sacrifice.²⁶

This scene depicts the sacrificer consuming a small amount of food before adhering to eating constraints for *dīkṣā*. Here, the state of having consumed a small meal is considered suitable for the sacrifice. Furthermore, it is mentioned that by applying ointment to the eyes and the body and wearing specified clothes, the sacrificer is regarded as taking the form of a *pūruṣa-*. In this context, *pūruṣa-* does not refer to “human” in a general sense, but rather conveys the meaning of “human victim.” Term *pūruṣa-* is repeatedly used in conjunction with the words *médha-* / *médhya-* / *medhyatvá-*, effectively emphasizing concerns associated with the *puruṣamedhá-*.

3.4. MS III 6.3:62.13–63.12

ūrdhvam cāvāñcaṃ ca pāvayaty; (...). [vācāspātis tvā punātv] iti. ^[62.16]
vācāspātir evāinaṃ yajñāya pāvayati. [devās tvā savitā punātv] iti. ^[62.17]
savitṛprasūta evāitābhir devātābhir médhāyātmānam pāvayate (...).
yajñāya ^[63.2] *khālu vā eṣā kām ātmānam pāvayate* “// yajñāṃ śakeyam //”
īti= (...). ékaviṃśatyā ^[63.11] *pāvayati. dáśa hástyā angúlyo, dáśa pádyā,*
ātmāikaviṃśó ^[63.12] *yāvān evāsyātmá, tám pāvayati.*

He (the priest) purifies him (the sacrificer) upwards and downwards (...). “Vācaspati should purify you,” [he says].²⁷ Vācaspati purifies him for the sacrifice. “The god Savitar should purify you,” [he says]. Approved by

²⁵ *abhi-ghārayati* is used as a specialized term in rituals, signifying the act of sprinkling butter onto the oblation just before offering it, completing it as an oblation. Here, the intention is to signify that the sacrificer is being prepared as an oblation.

²⁶ Cf. Oshima 2010–2011: 64.

²⁷ These mantras are compiled in MS I 2.1: 10.6 and following.

Savitar, he purifies himself for the sacrifice with these deities (...). In fact, he purifies himself for the sacrifice, [saying], “May I have the aptitude [to be] the sacrifice” (...). [Reciting] the twenty-one verses, he (the priest) purifies him (the sacrificer). The fingers on the hand are ten, [the toes] on the feet are ten, the body itself is the twenty-first. All these parts of his body, he purifies.

This passage involves the purification of the sacrificer with *darbha* grass. Through this purification it is believed that the sacrificer becomes suitable for the sacrifice. In this context, not only the term *médhāya* is used, but also *yajñāya* is employed.

3.5. MS III 6.6:67.19–21

havír vái dīksitó. yád anyátra kṛṣṇājīnād +āsīta,²⁸ yáthā havíḥ^[67.20] skannám, evám syād; yáthā haviṣe skannāya prāyaścittim icháty, evám asmai prāyaścittim^[67.21] icheyur.

The *dīksita* is the oblation. If he were to sit anywhere other than on the black antelope’s hide, he would be a spilled oblation. Just as one seeks an expiatory rite for a spilled oblation, they (the priests) would seek, in the same way, an expiatory rite for him.²⁹

In this scene, the purified sacrificer (*dīksita*), representing an oblation, is seated on the hide rather than directly on the ground. Just as oblations must not spill, he too must be in a contained space.

3.6. MS III 6.7:69.7–11

yóktreṇa pátnī sámnahyate, mékhalayā dīksitó (...)^[69.8]. ūrdhvám vái púrusasya nábher médhyam. avācīnam amedhyám. yán mékhalām^[69.9]

²⁸ So corrected; Schroeder and Sātavalekar *āsīta*.

²⁹ Cf. Oshima 2010–2011: 67f.

paryásyate, médhyasya cāmedhyásya ca vídhr̥tyai. devátābhyo vá eṣá
^[69.10] *médhāyātmānam ālabhate, yó dīkṣate. badhn̥tá iva vá etád ātmānam,*
yán^[69.11] mékhalām paryásyate.

His wife is adorned with the *yoktra* sash, the *dīkṣita* is wrapped with the *mekhalā* sash (...). The [region] above the navel of a human is suitable for the sacrifice, the [region] below is unsuitable for the sacrifice. Wearing the *mekhalā* sash serves to keep the [region] suitable for the sacrifice and the [region] unsuitable for the sacrifice separate. This one who is purified through the *dīkṣā* captures himself for the deities, for the sacrifice. Through the act of wearing the *mekhalā* sash, he binds himself (like a sacrificial animal).³⁰

This scene discusses the act of wrapping the sacrificer with a sash, which relates to making the sacrificer fit for sacrifice. The words *puruṣa-* and *médhya-* are used together once more. Additionally, the act of binding the sash is likened to capturing a sacrificial animal using a rope. The term *ā-labh* is employed, which is a specialized term representing the act of capturing and offering a sacrificial animal. This indicates the identification of the sacrificer with the sacrificial animal.

3.7 Parallels in the KS and TS to the chapter on *dīkṣā*

In the *dīkṣā* chapter of the MS, there are expressions that include *puruṣa-* (meaning “human [victim]”) and *médha-* (meaning “sacrifice”) or *médhya-* (meaning “suitable for sacrifice”), implying human sacrifice, and some of these have parallels in the KS and the TS:

chidro vai puruṣo ’ntarād amedhyas (KS 22.13: 69.3f. ~ MS III 6.2: 61.13ff. → 3.3)

A human is cleft, is unsuitable for the sacrifice in his interior.

³⁰ Cf. Oshima 2010–2011: 73ff.

*mṛtam*³¹ *vā etat puruṣasyāmedhyam, amedhyam evāpahatya medham upaiti* (KS 22.13: 69.7f. ~ MS III 6.2: 60.17-61.1 → 3.2)

This [part] of a human is dead, unsuitable for the sacrifice. After divesting himself of it he (the sacrificer) comes to the sacrifice.

ūrdhvaṃ vai puruṣasya nābhyā medhyam avācīnam amedhyam (KS 23.4: 78.9 ~ TS 6.1.3.4 ~ III 6.7: 69.8 → 3.6)

The [region] above the navel of a human is suitable for the sacrifice, the [region] below is unsuitable for the sacrifice.

However, such instances that implicate *puruṣamedhā-* by the use of *puruṣa-*, along with *médha-* or *médhya-*, are fewer in number in the KS (with three instances) and the TS (with one instance) compared to the MS (with six instances).³²

Furthermore, the co-occurrence of the identifying sentence *havír vai dīkṣitás* was found in two instances in the MS (III 6.2: 61.11 and III 6.6: 67.19 → 3.2 and 3.5), whereas in the KS, there were three instances (23.1: 73.1, 23.3: 77.13, 23.6: 81.4), and in the TS, one instance (TS 6.1.4.5).

4. Conclusion

MS III 6.6: 66.12ff. likely portrays a scene where the *dīkṣitá* as a human victim is consumed (→ 2.1). This description seems to refer to specific practices regarding the human consumption, such as the timing as determined by the color of the eyes, the handling of bodily excretions, and the time of performance (at night). It serves as a significant description with no parallels in the KS or in the TS, highlighting

³¹ So corrected; ed. Schroeder *dhāvate 'mṛtam*.

³² The TS has the following example: 6.1.2.2 *medháyā hí mánasā puruṣo yajñám abhigáchatī* “A human approaches the sacrifice with intelligence, thinking.” It is not *medhā-* “sacrifice” but *medhā-* “intelligence” that is standing with *puruṣa-*.

differences in the treatment of cannibalism among different schools. The relationship between cannibalism and the rituals that precede and follow it remains an open question. The consumption of the sacrificer (*dīkṣitá*) seems to provide an inconsistency with the progression of the ritual (as consuming him would mean the sacrificer is no longer present). This is believed to be a result of discontinuity caused by the incorporation of an older ritual element into the new framework of the ritual.

The chapter on *dīkṣā*, MS III 6, reveals that the *dīkṣitá* is treated as a sacrifice, as the words *púruṣa-* (“human [victim]”), *médha-* (“sacrifice”), *havis-* (“the oblation”) and *médhya-* (“suitable for sacrifice”) imply (→ 3.1–3.6). This trend appeared more strongly in the MS as compared to the KS and the TS (→ 3.7).

In the *Black Yajurveda-Samhitās*, only the cannibalism described in the *dvādaśāha* of the *sattra* in KS 34 was known, therefore, the addition of the example from the *dīkṣā* chapter of the MS is significant. Cannibalism is mentioned in the *sattra* chapter of the KS, which is why it is often discussed in relation to the Vṛātya culture.³³ Heesterman and Falk have pointed out a close connection between *dīkṣā* and Vṛātya culture, but in the author’s previous research on Vṛātya culture in the MS, no descriptions indicating a close association between *dīkṣā* and Vṛātya culture have been found.³⁴ The *dīkṣā* in the MS seems to have been a part of the mainstream orthodox culture.³⁵ The connection between the *dīkṣā* chapter of the MS and cannibalism presented in this paper raises the question of whether it indicates an association

³³ See Pontillo 2023: 212–215.

³⁴ Heesterman (1962: 29): “there is, in principle, no difference between the vṛātya and the dīkṣita”; cf. also Heesterman 1982: 255–256, Falk 1986: 45–46 and 1986: 57, that state regarding PB 24.18 “die Begriffe Vṛātya, Sattrin und Dīkṣita untrennbar miteinander verbunden sind.” Cf. also af Edholm 2017: 9–11. However, Amano (2016: 63): “What we did not find in the *Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā* is a connection with the *dīkṣita-*, a connection that is widely argued for in studies on the *vṛātyas*, or with human sacrifice.”

³⁵ About orthodox and non-orthodox culture see Amano 2016: 35–37.

between Vrātya culture and *dīkṣā*,³⁶ or suggests that cannibalism was practiced outside the Vrātya culture as well (because it dates back to the era of commonality before the Vrātya culture separated from the orthodox culture). Further investigation of the *dīkṣā* in the untranslated MS and KS will undoubtedly widen this analysis.

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³⁶ Following the description of the cannibalism at the *sattra* described in KS 34.8 (→ 2.2), KS 34.9: 43.3–4 mentions the *dīkṣā* for twelve nights: *dvādaśa dīkṣeran saṃvatsarāyatanās* “For twelve [nights], they (the participants of the *sattra*) should consecrate themselves (perform the *dīkṣā*) when they think annual cycle as [primary] indicator.” The use of the verb *dīkṣeran* in this sentence implies the association of the *dīkṣā* with the *sattra* / Vrātya culture.

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