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# Agonistic Scenes of the *mahāvrata* Rite
## The Praiser-*abhigara* and the Reviler-*apagara**

ABSTRACT: The present paper focuses on one of the competitive scenes staged during the Vedic classical *mahāvrata* rite: a sort of "agonistic" play performed between someone defined as *abhigara*, basically translated as "praiser," and someone who is called *apagara*, interpreted as "reviler." They appear to take part only in a verbal and not a physical duel. In fact, scholars consider the scene an example of a verbal contest. However, given that *abhigara* and *apagara* are never mentioned in the Rigvedic and Atharvavedic collections and rarely occur in the Vedic *corpus*, appearing mostly in sections concerning the peculiar *mahāvrata* ceremony, this dichotomous pair certainly sparks interest since they are associable with the *Mahābhārata* context. The analysis of the Vedic textual sources concerning the *abhigara* / *apagara* contest on the *mahāvrata* day, a survey of the terminology correlated to these two terms and their etymological reconstruction may offer a peculiar perspective on the relationship between violence, ritualism and narration in the *Mahābhārata*.

KEYWORDS: *Mahābhārata*, *sattra*, Vrātya, poetry of praise, poetry of blame

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*   As far as the passages of Vedic texts are concerned, unless otherwise stated, the translation is mine.

## 1. Introduction: Preliminary notes on the *mahāvrata* rite

According to the scholarly literature,[1] the classical Vedic *mahāvrata* rite or "Great Observance" is an annual festival that marks the winter solstice and takes place on the last but one day of the *gavām-ayana* ritual, lit. "March of the Cows." It consists of a classical somic liturgy, that is the *agniṣṭoma* sacrifice, therefore the *mahāvrata* rite conventionally belongs to the *śrauta* ritual.[2] However, it also entails manifold non-standard ritual elements, such as musical instruments, dancing and singing women, explicit sexual references, etc., considered by scholars as tokens of a New Year festival, characterised as such by an "atmosphere of bacchanal" (i.e. Jamison 1996: 96–98). As a calendrical rite, the Vedic *mahāvrata* is a ceremony that marks the passage from the old to the new year, by means of which sunlight, life and prosperity must be renewed and re-founded.

Several antagonistic scenes, such as those performed by *ārya* vs. *śūdra*, *brahmacārin* vs. *puṃścalī* and chariot races, also feature among these peculiar ritual elements. More specifically, a verbal contest between *abhigara* and *apagara* takes place,[3] and a duel, to conquer the sun, between an *ārya* and a *śūdra* is staged.[4] Therefore, formally it is a *śrauta* rite, but the antagonistic trait is emphasised, that is to say, a sort of "ritualised" violence is performed. In this regard Heesterman[5] argued that such scenes may be remnants of primordial warrior violence, considered as an archetype of the sacrificial violence itself. The archetypical antithesis of life and death was gradually converted to a metaphorical level by means of the mediation of the priestly category and translated into the ritual dichotomy of purity and impurity, controlled by the sacerdotal authority. In this sense, the antagonistic

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[1]   Cf. e.g., Hillebrandt 1890; 1897: I. 157–158; Keith 1908; 1909; Hauer 1927: 246–267; Horsch 1966: 325–327; Rolland 1973; Parpola 2000; Witzel 1997b; 2005.

[2]   Thite 1975: 100–103.

[3]   Cf. Kuiper 1974, and the very stimulating paper by Reich (2010).

[4]   See Rossi 2022.

[5]   E.g., Heesterman 1985: 75 ff.; 1993: 54–55.

scenes, performed on the *mahāvrata* day, must stage the dichotomy between ritual purity and impurity: the winner of the contests is the champion of the Brahmanical orthopraxy, and the defeated rival, charged with ritual impurity, is categorically removed from the sacrificial area.[6] Although Heesterman's interpretation of such a "ritualised violence" has drawn criticism[7] since it postulates a theoretical model that is not easily verifiable, the "agonistic" trait does however clearly characterise the early Vedic culture.[8] The antagonistic social dynamics of a semi-nomadic clan-based society, like the proto-Indo-Aryan one, are aimed at the acquisition of social prestige (Kuiper 1962: 182), since its leadership is committed to securing wealth for all the community, especially by means of the ritual distribution (*vidátha*)[9] of conquered cattle and booty. A form of warrior sodality of Indo-European matrix must be entangled in this proto-Indo-Aryan society, a group that belongs to the Vrātya culture and which is correlated to a warrior brotherhood / *Männerbund*, characterised by specific initiation practices. Such practices were aimed at instructing the future Indraic *yóga*-chieftain, that is the clan-lord entrusted with leading his own clan in the mobility phase (*yóga*) of the semi-nomadic lifestyle[10] and who not only had to protect the clan-cattle but also conquer new livestock for the *vidátha*. According to some scholars the *mahāvrata* rite appears to refer to the Vrātya warrior culture,[11] and even to correspond to a sort of cosmic *vidátha* (Kuiper 1974: 131). More specifically, it celebrates the emergence of a new model of sovereignty, inaugurated by the Kuru clan-lordship (Witzel 1995: 7–8.) and, in fact, this rite is correlated to the emergence of the Kuru hegemony. The same was a sort of "dynastic chiefdom," that is a large confederation or "supra-tribal" realm, based on what Proferes (2007: 12) has defined as an "ecumenical" paradigm of sovereignty, identified with "solarship"

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[6]     For instance, as regards the challenge for the conquering of the sun, cf. Rossi 2022.
[7]     Cf. i.a. Whitaker 2011 *vs*. Collins 2014.
[8]     Cf. e.g., Whitaker 2011: 163–166.
[9]     Cf. Kuiper 1974: 129–132; Thapar 1984: 55–56; Crevatin 2016 [2017]: 22–23.
[10]    As for this interpretation, cf. Selva 2019: 405.
[11]    Falk 1986: 31; 44; Kershaw 1997: 230 ff.; Selva 2019: 329 ff.

in general, which also drew on the Vrātya model of leadership.[12] And the *mahāvrata* rite was a sort of "medium" by means of which the new paradigm of the Kuru sovereignty came to be established.

On the other hand, it may also be assumed that a Brahmanical revision of both the ritual and textual material concerning the *mahāvrata* ceremony was carried out by the sacerdotal authority, especially in an anti-Vrātya perspective (Hock 2016). In fact, a festival like the *mahāvrata* might have been more effective in establishing the ecumenical value of the self-same overlordship, if it had been ritually legitimised by the sacerdotal elite. In effect, the very Kuru sovereignty promoted the *śrauta* reform itself and the institution of the sacerdotal category that was definitively entrusted with performing the sacred ceremonies.[13] The classical *mahāvrata*, as a rite depicted in the Vedic sources and included in the *śrauta* reform, is thus framed in a ritualised cosmos, which is hierarchically oriented according to micro--macro cosmic correspondences and pivoted on the fundamental homology between the sovereign and the rising-sun.[14]

## 2. *Abhigara* and *apagara* in *sattra* rituals

Furthermore, the *mahāvrata* ritual belongs to the *sattra* typology[15] which is a sacrificial session of twelve days or more, in which all the participants or *sattrin*s are simultaneously officiant priests and sacrificers (*yajamāna*s).[16] They are all Brahmins, but there is no real *dakṣiṇā* and thus duties and benefits are shared in a mixture of roles, as a sort of sodality, which is not completely in line with Brahmanical orthopraxy. Such a peculiarity might reflect a pre-*śrauta* liturgical reality, preceding the reconfiguration of the priestly function that was brought about by the Kuru hegemony where the then chieftains still held the double

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[12]   Cf. Rossi 2023.
[13]   Cf. Witzel 1995.
[14]   Cf. Rossi 2023.
[15]   Cf. Kane 1941: 1239–1246: 1243.
[16]   Cf. e.g., Falk 1985; Malamoud 2002: 94–95.

role of "warrior-lord" and "priest-lord."[17] Moreover, some scholars[18] have suggested that the *sattra* ritual might be ascribable to the Vrātya sphere since it appears to preserve a similar idea of sharing and sodality.[19] On the other hand, this very idea of Vrātya "sodality" perfectly fits into the Kuru "ecumenical" paradigm of sovereignty. Therefore, the very "agonistic scenes" of the *mahāvrata* rite might be remnants of the Vrātya milieu, particularly the warrior-novices initiation practices aimed at preparing the young male members of the clan for lordship.[20] Let us not forget that the *sattrin*s are also *dīkṣita*s, that is "the initiated." But the "agonistic scenes" are also manifestations of this new kind of Kuru over-lordship and these competitive performances allow supremacy to be symbolically conquered and promoted.

It is remarkable to note that the rare Vedic citations of the terms *abhigara* and *apagara* are correlated to the self-same *sattra* rituals: for example, they are mentioned as *dvandva abhigarāpagarau* not only in the textual sources concerning the *mahāvrata* rite, but also in the list of kings-serpents—*Pañcaviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa* (PB) 25.15.3—who perform a *sarpasattra*, the "sacrificial session of the serpents":[21] the role of 19 priests is carried out by 19 kings, amongst whom Ṣaṇḍa and Kuṣaṇḍa[22] are respectively the *praiser* and the *reviler* (*ṣaṇḍakuṣaṇḍāv abhigarāpagarau*). Moreover, the elliptic dual *abhigarau* is also mentioned in another priestly list, the list of the *saptahótṛs*, the "seven

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17  As regards the late-Vedic priestly specialisation, cf. Brereton 2004.

18  Falk 1986: 31, 44; Kershaw 1997: 230ff.; Selva 2019: 329ff.

19  Cf. Candotti and Pontillo 2015: 199.

20  Cf. Kershaw 1997: 342ff.; Selva 2019: 329ff.

21  The same list is found in *Baudhāyana-Śrautasūtra* (BŚS) 17.18, but the compound *abhigarāpagarau* is missing. Instead, the same expression is quoted in *Lāṭyāyana-Śrautasūtra* (LŚS) 10.20.10: *ṣaṇḍakuṣaṇḍāv abhigarāpagarau*. Cf. Caland 1931: 641–642.

22  The meaning of these names is unclear; as for Ṣaṇḍa, Mayrhofer (1976: 407–408) proposes two possibilities: the former is "Baumgruppe," the latter refers to a bull, that is a breeding bull or "unkastriert," if *ṣaṇḍá* were to be correlated to *sāṇḍá*. However, a contamination with *ṣaṇḍhá* "eunuch" might also be hypothesised. In *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* (ŚB) IV 2.1.4–6 Ṣaṇḍa is cited as name of an *asura*.

*hótṛ*s," referred to on the occasion of the twelve-day sacrifice of *soma*,[23] which in *Śāṅkhāyana-Śrautasūtra* (ŚŚS) 11.1.1 is defined as the model for the *sattra*s. And especially in ŚŚS 10.18.4, in a similar *hótṛ* list, the *dvandva abhigarau* is explained as *anādhṛṣyaś cāpratidhṛṣyaś ca*, that is "unassailable and irresistible." Finally, TĀ 3.5.1 quotes the syntagm *yajñasya abhigarau*, with the same elliptic dual, but in TĀ 3.6.1, *āpas* are *abhigara*, mentioned in the singular on the list of the other micro-, meso- and macro-cosmic equivalences.[24] Similarly, it only appears as a singular noun in *Vājasaneyi-Saṃhitā* (VS) 8.47d and ŚB 11.5.9.7, equivalent to the *anuṣṭubh* metre; the singular form *abhigara* is also cited in BŚS 2.3 to denote one of the officiants of the *soma* rite.

   In most of these occurrences the terms *abhigara* and *apagara*—but especially *abhigara*—connote figures involved in ritual contexts; however, interestingly, terms belonging to the military semantic field (*anādhṛṣyaś cāpratidhṛṣyaś ca*) are employed to define them in ŚŚS 10.18.4. Furthermore, priestly functions are combined with kingship in the Vedic *sarpasattra*:[25] the kings-*sattrin*s attain immortality, like serpents which, having shed their old skin, defeat death.[26] Moreover, references to the *Mahābhārata sarpasattra* context are present: the

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[23]   *Kāṭhaka-Saṃhitā* (KS) 9.12; *Maitrāyaṇī-Saṃhitā* (MS) 1.9.5 (1); *Taittirīya--Āraṇyaka* (TĀ) 3.5.1; ŚŚS 10.18.4. Cf. Heesterman 1985: 222–223. According to Weber (1868: 142) *abhigarau* would mean "two *abhigara*s." The list of the seven *hótṛ*s is already mentioned in *Ṛgveda* (ṚV) 2.1.2, but the pair *abhigara / apagara* is lacking; cf. also Minkowski 1992: 111ff.

[24]   TĀ 3.6.1: *vāg ghótā | dīkṣā patnī | vāto 'dhvaryuḥ | āpo 'bhigaraḥ | mano haviḥ | tapasi juhomi |* "The word is *hótṛ*, the consecration is the sacrificer's wife, the wind is *adhvaryu*, the waters are *abhigara*, the mind is the offering: I offer in *tapas* (fire's heat / ascetism)."

[25]   Cf. Minkowski 1989: 413–416. As for the Vedic *sarpasattra*, see also Minkowski 1991: 386–391.

[26]   PB 25.15.4: *etena vai sarpā apa mṛtyum ajayann apa mṛtyuṃ jayanti ya etad upayanti tasmāt te hitvā jīrṇāṃ tvacam atisarpanty apa hi te mṛtyum ajayan sarpā vā ādityā ādityānām ivaiṣāṃ prakāśo bhavati ya etad upayanti || 4 ||* "By means of this (rite) the serpents defeated death. They, who perform this one, defeat death. Therefore, having shed their old skin, they (serpents) creep over: in actual fact they defeated death. The Ādityas are the serpents: for those who perform this (rite), there is brightness, as if they were Ādityas."

list of the kings-snakes also includes Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Janamejaya, that is the father of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍava descendant, Parikṣit's son, respectively; the former assumes the functions of a *brahman* and the latter of an *adhvaryu*. Therefore, it is likely that the Vedic *sarpa-sattra* and the *Mahābhārata sarpasattra* performed by Janamejaya, when the *Mahābhārata* itself is recited, are correlated in a certain way. For example, Caland (1931: 642) considers the *śrauta sarpa-sattra* the prototype of the *Mahābhārata sarpasattra*; Minkowski (1989: 415–416) argues that both the Vedic and the epic *sarpasattra* are the outcome of a common mythical narrative and ritual heritage related to a form of *sarpavidyā*.[27] Moreover, especially on the basis of Heesterman's theory, van den Hoek and Shrestha (1992: 62) main-tain that the pattern of the *Mahābhārata sarpasattra* is older than the Vedic version, even though both stemmed from a primordial form of *sarpasattra*, whose remnants are still present in the *śrauta* ritual.[28] However, the *Mahābhārata* year-long *sarpasattra* is not a rite per-formed by kings-serpents, but rather a holocaust of snakes and not a *sattra strictu sensu*, given that Janamejaya is clearly a *kṣatriya* who pays the *dakṣiṇā* to the Brahmin Āstīka.[29] Therefore, the relationship between Vedic and epic *sarpasattra* is not such a linear one. Finally, it is most likely that the *mahāvrata* rite might also be correlated. The latter is actually not a *sarpasattra*, but it belongs to a *sattra* such as the *gavām-ayana* and it is the framework in which single duels are performed, especially verbal contests between *abhigara* "praiser" and *apagara* "reviler." On the other hand, the cosmic contest between Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas is also "performed" as if it were embedded in a ritual event. However, whereas in the case of the *mahāvrata*-frame-work the embedded performance consists of acted scenes,[30] the epic

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[27] Cf. also Norelius 2021.

[28] For example, the so-called *pra-sarpaṇa*, a procession of officiants and sacrifice "creeping" towards the *sadas* during the first *soma* pressing of the *agniṣṭoma*. Cf. Falk 1986: 34.

[29] Cf. Minkowski 1991: 385–387.

[30] As for the relationship between the *mahāvrata* rite and forms of dramatic perfor-mances, cf. Malamoud 1998, and von Schroeder 1908: 312–313.

*sarpasattra* performance features oral recitation. Nonetheless, as is well known, Jayamejaya's *sarpasattra* is not the only possible framework, but the *sattra* of Śaunaka and the *ṛṣi*s at Naimiṣa Forest must also be considered, during which the *Mahābhārata* itself was recited by the bard Sauti Ugraśravas. Therefore, the *sattra* as such is the peculiar occasion on which "agonistic" performances are staged and these can be either narrated or acted out.

### 3. *Abhigara* and *apagara* in the *mahāvrata* rite

Against such a background, the contest between *abhigara* "praiser" and *apagara* "reviler," as pictured in the Vedic textual *repertoire* concerning the *mahāvrata* rite, deserves particular attention. Indeed, it might be the "missing link" between classical ritualism, in which the violence was formalised by the sacrificial performance which served to assure the sovereign of his own status, and the pre-Brahmanical clan-based society culture, in which warrior activities supported the chieftainship in order to ensure the livelihood of the clan-community.

The Vedic textual sources of the *abhigara* / *apagara* verbal contest consist of Yajurvedic prose, belonging to the Kaṭha and the Taittirīya schools—KS 34.5; *Taittirīya-Saṃhitā* (TS) 7.5.9.3; *Taittirīya--Brāhmaṇa* (TB) 1.2.6.6–7—and Sāmavedic texts, namely the *brāhmaṇa*s of the Jaiminīyas—*Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa* (JB) 2.405—and Tāṇḍya or Pañcaviṃśa (PB 5.5.13) recensions. The same agonistic scene is referred to in the ancillary literature by the correlated Yajurvedic *śrautasūtra*s—*Āpastamba-Śrautasūtra* (ĀpŚS) 21.18.4; 21.19.9–10, *Kātyāyana-Śrautasūtra* (KŚS) 13.3.4–5, BŚS 16.22—and by Sāmavedic *śrautasūtra*s—LŚS 4.3.1–8; 13–15, Drāhyāyaṇa (DŚS) 11.3.1–2; 4; 6–7; 11.3.12–14.[31] It is worth underlining the fact

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[31]   Further references to the *mahāvrata* rite are found in the *Mānavaśrautasūtra* (7.2.7.11–12) and *Vārāhaśrautasūtra* (3.2.5.33–35). It is also mentioned in the Rigvedic *Śāṅkhāyanaśrautasūtra*, where however it is declared that its agonistic scenes should not be performed since they are "ancient and disused": ŚŚS 17.6.2: *tad etat purāṇam utsannam na kāryam etasmin samupakḷpte* | "As regards the

that the textual data appears to point to different ritual traditions: on the one hand, the Tāṇḍya / Pañcaviṃśa Sāmavedic tradition, and on the other hand, that of the Taittirīya. The former tradition spread especially in the Kurukṣetra area and also influenced the Kaṭha version.[32] It is likely that it was closer to a form of archetypical Kuru rite, even though none of the known Sāmavedic recensions is directly ascribable to the Kuru period. The latter tradition developed within the sphere of the Pañcāla realm, in the Gaṅgā-Yamunā Doāb region, corresponding to a more brahmanised cultural phase.[33] Finally, given the peripheral collocation of the Jaiminīya school, the Samavedic Jaiminīya recension was influenced by the Taittirīya school, but since it also demonstrates a few conservative traits, it represents a peculiar case.

According to most of these textual sources the *abhigara / apagara* contest is correlated to another duel, that is the struggle for the possession of the sun between an *ārya* and a *śūdra*: in KS and PB the *abhigara / apagara* contest introduces the physical contest between an *ārya* and a *śūdra*, but it appears to be a substantially different agonistic scene.

KS 34.5

> *abhigarāpagarau bhavataḥ | pra vā anyas sattriṇaś śaṃsati nindaty anyo yaḥ praśaṃsati | yad evaiṣāṃ suṣṭutaṃ suśastaṃ tat sa praśaṃsati | atha yo nindati yad evaiṣāṃ duṣṭutaṃ duśśastaṃ tat so 'pahanti | śūdrāryau carman vyāyacchete ||*

> There are a praiser and a reviler: one praises the participants in the sacrificial session, the other one reviles (them); he who praises (them), praises what (is) indeed their praise (as) well-recited; then, he who reviles (them), rejects what (is) indeed their blame (as) badly recited. An *ārya* and a *śūdra* contest [for] a hide.

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preparation of this (whole *mahāvrata*), this ancient and disused (rite) is not to be performed." (The text is based on the edition by A. Hillebrandt 1888). Moreover, it is also mentioned in *Jaiminīyaśrautasūtravṛtti* 6.39.

[32]  Cf. Heesterman 1962: 23, fn. 67.
[33]  Cf. Witzel 1997a: 303–307.

PB 5.5.13–14

> *abhigarāpagarau bhavato nindaty enān anyaḥ prānyaḥ śaṃsati ya*
> *enān nindati pāpmānam eṣāṃ so 'pahanti yaḥ praśaṃsati yad evaiṣāṃ*
> *suṣṭutaṃ suśastaṃ tat so 'bhigṛṇāti* || 13 || *śūdrāryau carmaṇi vyāya-*
> *cchete* […]. || 14 ||

> There are a praiser and a reviler: one reviles them [the participants in
> the sacrificial session], the other one praises them; he, who reviles them,
> rejects their evil (*pāpman*); he, who praises what (is) indeed their praise
> (as) well-recited, greets (them) as welcomed. An *ārya* and a *śūdra* contest
> a hide […].

In fact, according to the Sāmavedic *śrautasūtra* textual version, such
a challenge between the "praiser" (*abhigara*) and the "reviler" (*apaga-*
*ra*) takes place in the classical sacrificial area. The two participants are
positioned at the eastern and western doors of the *sadas* respectively,
where the *sattrin*s are "sitting."

LŚS 4.3.1–4 ~ DŚS 11.3.1–2; 4

> *brāhmaṇo 'bhigaraḥ pūrvasyāṃ sadaso dvāri pratyaṅmukha upaviśet* ||
> 1 || *vṛṣalo 'pagaro 'parasyāṃ pratyaṅmukhaḥ* || 2 || *sa brūyān nārātsur*
> *ime satriṇa iti* || 3 || *arātsar ity abhigaraḥ* || 4 ||

> The *brāhmaṇa*, (as) praiser, should sit down at the eastern door of the
> *sadas*, with his face to the west. The low-born person [*vṛṣala*, comm.
> *śūdra*], (as) reviler, (should sit down) at the western (door of the *sadas*),
> with his face to the east. He should declare: "These performers of the
> *sattra* did not succeed." The praiser (should) declare: "(These ones) suc-
> ceeded [comm. *arātsur*]."

On the contrary, the *abhigara* / *apagara* contest in the TS passage
appears to come after the competition for the sun/animal hide. It is
not clear whether the two scenes coincide with each other, as if the

*abhigara* and *apagara* were homologous to the antonymic couple *ārya-śūdra*. Actually, the terms *abhigara* and *apagara* are not mentioned: only the expression *ā́nyáḥ króśati prā́nyáḥ śaṃsati* recalls the Sāmavedic *nindaty enān anyaḥ prānyaḥ śaṃsati*, with the alternative use of the root √*kruś* instead of the root √*nind*. On the other hand, the dichotomy of purity-impurity is suggested through the root √*pū* "to purify" which is also one of the crucial terms in the somic liturgy, thus evoking a more ritualised context.

TS 7.5.9.3.7–9

> *ārdré cárman vyā́yachete indriyásyā̀varuddhyai | ā́nyáḥ króśati prā́nyáḥ śaṃsati yá ākróśati punā́ty eváinānt | sá yáḥ praśáṃsati pūtéṣv evā́nnā́dyaṃ dadhāti |*

> They both contest a wet skin, to obtain strength. One reviles, the other one praises; he, who reviles, purifies these ones, indeed. He, who praises, puts the food into (these ones who are) purified, indeed.

Finally, in the later *Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa* (TB 1.2.6.6–7), the two contests are combined and overlap in a singular scene: the antonymic pairs of *ārya-śūdra* and *abhigara-apagara* are definitively substituted by the new and unique pair of *brāhmaṇa-śūdra*, thus emphasising a Brahmanical orientation or a more ritualistic perspective.[34]

TB 1.2.6.6–7

> *devāsurā́ḥ sáṃyattā āsan | tá ādityé vyā́yacchanta | táṃ devā́ḥ sámajayan || 6 || brāhmaṇáś ca śūdráś ca carmakárté vyā́yacchete | dáivyo vái várṇo brāhmaṇáḥ | asuryàḥ śūdráḥ | imè 'rātsur imé subhūtám akrann íty anyataró brūyāt | imá udvāsīkāríṇa imé durbhūtám akrann íty anyataráḥ | yád eváiṣāṃ sukṛtáṃ yā́ rā́ddhiḥ | tád anyatarò 'bhiśṛ́ṇāti | yád eváiṣāṃ*

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34    As for this interpretation, cf. Rossi 2022.

*duṣkṛtáṃ yắrāddhiḥ | tád anyataró 'pahanti | brāhmaṇáḥ sáṃjayati | amúm evắdityáṃ bhrắtṛvyasya sáṃvindante || 7 ||*

The gods and the *asura*s came into conflict: they contested [for] the sun; the gods conquered it. A *brāhmaṇá* and a *śūdrá* contest [for] a piece of hide; the *brāhmaṇá* (represents) the divine rank, the *śūdrá* the *asura* rank; the former should proclaim: "These succeeded, these acted well (producing welfare [*subhūtá*])"; the latter should proclaim: "These performed the act of abandoning [*udvāsa*], these acted badly (bringing disadvantage [*durbhūtá*])." The former mingles with what is, indeed, well done [*sukṛtá*] on their behalf, that is success; the latter repels what is, indeed, badly done [*duṣkṛtá*] on their behalf, that is non-success.The *brāhmaṇá* wins: they indeed find that, the sun of the rival [*bhrắtṛvya*].

Here, the antonymic expressions of the Sāmavedic tradition such as *suṣṭuta-* "praise" / *duṣṣṭuta* "blame" and *suśasta-* "well-recited" / *duśśasta-* "badly recited" are changed to *subhūtám* / *durbhūtám* √*kṛ* "to act well, producing something whose nature is good / to act badly producing something whose nature is bad," and *sukṛtá* / *duṣkṛtá* "well done / badly done," thereby underlining the actual "good or bad performance" (*sukṛtá* / *duṣkṛtá*) of the ritual action more than the mere verbal performance.[35] As for the Yajurvedic *śrautasūtra*s, the same textual version is found in BŚS 16.22,[36] but in KŚS 13.3 the two contests are clearly separated: in the fourth and fifth *sūtra*s the verbal contest is synthetically portrayed as follows: *abhigarāpagarau || ākrośaty ekaḥ praśaṁsaty aparaḥ ||* "there is a praiser and a reviler;

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[35]　For more on this meaning of *sukṛtá* / *duṣkṛtá*, cf. the classical interpretation by Gonda 1966: 115–143; for an excursus on this question cf. Selva 2019: 394–395.

[36]　BŚS 16.22: *athaitau brāhmaṇaś ca śūdraś cārdre carmakarte vyāyacchete ime 'rātsur ime subhūtam akran | iti brāhmaṇaḥ | ima udvāsīkāriṇa ime durbhūtam akran | iti vṛṣalo brāhmaṇaḥ saṃjayati naśyati vṛṣalaḥ ||* "Then, those, the *brāhmaṇa* and the *śūdra*, contest a piece of wet hide; the *brāhmaṇa* (proclaims): 'These succeeded, these acted well (producing welfare [*subhūta*])'; the low-born person (proclaims): 'These performed the act of abandoning [*udvāsa*], these acted badly, (bringing disadvantage [*durbhūta*])'. The *brāhmaṇa* wins; the low-born person [*vṛṣala*] runs away."

the one reviles, the other praises." In ĀpŚS 21.19.9–12 the two scenes are evidently overlapped in a sort of mixed version, as follows:

ĀpŚS 21.19.9–12

*śūdrāryau carmakarte vyāyacchete ārdre śvete parimaṇḍale | antarvedi brāhmaṇo bahirvedi śūdraḥ || ākrośati śūdraḥ | praśaṃsati brāhmaṇaḥ || ime 'rātsur ime subhūtam akrann iti brāhmaṇaḥ | ima udvāsīkāriṇa ime durbhūtam akrann iti śūdraḥ || taṃ brāhmaṇaḥ saṃjityāgnīdhre carmā-dhyasyati ||*

An *ārya* and a *śūdra* contest a piece of wet, white and round shaped hide. The *brāhmaṇa* is inside the sacrificial area [*vedi*], the *śūdra* outside the sacrificial area [*vedi*]; the *śūdra* reviles [*ā-√kruś*], the *brāhmaṇa* praises; the *brāhmaṇa* (proclaims): "These succeeded, these acted well (producing welfare [*subhūta*])"; the *śūdra* (proclaims): "These ones performed the act of abandoning [*udvāsa*], these acted badly (bringing disadvantage [*durbhūta*])." After having won it, the *brāhmaṇa* throws the hide into the *āgnīdhra* shed.

Finally, the Sāmavedic version of JB 2.405 appears to follow the TS model, but the two contests are evidently overlapped, as if it were a unique duel, as can be seen below:

JB 2.405

*āryaṃ ca varṇaṃ śaudraṃ coparyupari cātvālaṃ bastājine vyāyamayanty ārṣabhe vā carmaṇi | tayor antarvedy āryo varṇo bhavati bahirvedi śau-dras | tayor āryeṇa varṇena śaudraṃ varṇaṃ jyāpayanti | devāś ca vā asurāś cāmuṣminn āditye 'spardhanta | taṃ devā asurāṇāṃ avṛñjata | tad yad āryeṇa varṇena śaudraṃ varṇaṃ jyāpayanty etam eva tad dviṣato bhrātṛvyasya vṛñjate | tayor ānyaḥ krośati prānyaś śaṃsati | ya ākrośati punāty evainān so 'tha yaḥ praśaṃsati pūteṣv evaiteṣu sa indriyaṃ vīryaṃ dadhāti |*

They make a member of the *ārya* rank and a member of the *śūdra* rank contest a goat's hide or a bull's hide, atop the *cātvāla*. Of these two, the member of the *ārya* rank is inside the sacrificial area [*vedi*], the member of the *śūdra* rank is outside the sacrificial area [*vedi*]. Of these two, they cause the member of the *śūdra* rank to be overpowered by the member of the *ārya* rank. The gods and the *asura*s contested that sun. The gods turned it around (warding it off) from the *asura*s. Since they cause the member of the *śūdra* rank to be overpowered by the member of the *ārya* rank, they then turned around that (averting it) indeed from the hateful rival [*bhrātṛvya*]. Of these two, the former reviles [√*kruś*], the latter praises. He who reviles, purifies these ones, indeed. Then, he who praises, puts Indraic strength, (that is) male power, into these ones, (who are) indeed purified.

## 4. Some provisional conclusions

Such a textual survey clearly demonstrates that the development of Brahmanical ritualism was instrumental in causing the role of *abhigara* "praiser" to completely coincide with the priestly function, namely the Brahmanical one, whereas the role of *apagara* was relegated to *śūdra* or *vṛṣala*, that is a marginalised role in the ritualised cosmos which preludes the dharmic *varṇa* system. This is consistent with what already results from the overview of the rare occurances of the very terms *abhigara* / *apagara* in the textual sources, as analysed above: the term *abhigara* comes to be the equivalent of a priestly role within a ritual sacrifice. Moreover, the Brahmanical orientation tends to highlight the physical contest between one who is "well doing" inasmuch as he is performing well ritually, and hence included in the ritual cosmos, and one who is "badly doing," that is performing badly ritually: he is the cosmic enemy, the *asura* who must be removed and annihilated from the Brahmanical cosmic reality. Actually, a form of violence is "ritualised." However, the *śrauta* system relied on the aetiological myth of the conflict between *deva*s and *asura*s, and it is this very "mythical" primordial violence that legitimised the Brahmanical ritualism, and through this Brahmanical supremacy. This would mean that the so-called "ritualised violence,"

as an output of the development of Brahmanism, aims to promote the hegemony of the Brahmanical system itself: the cosmic sacrifice, aimed at re-founding the dharmic order, is based on a form of warrior "sacrifice,"[37] as narrated by the *Mahābhārata* itself. Moreover, it is in turn performed as an oral recitation during *sattra*s, which is even associable with the Vrātya context, but in the case of Janamejaya's *sarpasattra,* Janamejaya himself recognises the role of the Brahmin by paying him the *dakṣiṇā*. This act of turning warrior violence into a ritualised sacrifice by introducing a narrative performance into a ceremony which distinguishes between the officiant Brahmin and the *yajamāna kṣatriya* means ascribing the power of controlling the warrior sphere and the correlated rulership to the sacerdotal category. This is consistent with Brahmanical strategy of "revisionism" applied to the epics: the *Mahābhārata* as an organically compiled work is the eventual expression of the Brahmanical response to anti-ritualistic instances and heterodox movements,[38] and more generally to the very pre-eminence of the *kṣatriya* power, expressed in the bardic tradition. This would mean that "ritualised violence" is the outcome of a process of Brahmanical re-orientation, whereas the dynamics of power were different in the pre-Brahmanical phase, that is during the pre-Kuru period and the Kuru hegemony. As touched on above, the alternating phases of settlement (*kṣéma*) and mobility (*yóga*) in the proto-Vedic clan-based society were managed by a double leadership, personified by Varuṇa (*samrā́j* "sovereign king") and Indra (*svarā́j* "independent king") respectively:[39] the former embodies the model of chieftainship committed to preserving wealth, livestock and the wellbeing of men in the settlements, by means of the regulation of waters, probably in relation to the rainy season, while the latter represents the model of chieftainship committed to managing the seasonal movement of cattle and the correlated warrior operations. This latter form of leadership

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[37] As for *Mahābhārata* and sacrifice, cf. e.g., Biardeau 1976: 203–217; Hiltebeitel 1976: 318–319; Feller 1999; and Bronkhorst 2021 for a synthesis of the question.

[38] Cf. Biardeau 2002: 96–129; 747–783; and Hiltebeitel 2005.

[39] Cf. Schlerath 1960: 132–135; Schmidt 1992.

was trained by means of the esoteric Vrātya initiation practices.[40] More-
over, the authority of the clan-lord was twofold: he was "warrior-lord"
and "priest-lord," or better, the warrior function and the proto-ritual
function were both attributes of lordship,[41] as the kings-priests of the
Vedic *sarpasattra* itself demonstrate.

It was only the Kuru hegemony that delegated definitively the
priestly function to a specialised category of *brāhmaṇa*, entrusted with
performing ritual ceremonies. On the other hand, as mentioned above,
the model of chieftainship also changed into the supra-tribal "ecumen-
ical" sovereign. Therefore, Janamejaya becomes a royal *yajamāna*
in the *Mahābhārata sarpasattra* and in the fourteenth book of this
work, in the Mongoose Stories, he is even instructed about a form of
"cruelty-free" (*ānṛśaṃsya*) or "non-violent" sacrifice.[42] However, his
father, the Kuru King Parikṣit, is celebrated as a cosmic sovereign
by means of the *mahāvrata* rite, as attested in the *Kuntāpa* section—
*Atharvaveda* Śaunaka recension (AVŚ) 20.127–136 ≈ *Ṛgveda-khila*
(ṚVKh) 5.8–22;[43] on the other hand, Janamejaya himself organises the
*sarpasattra* as a holocaust of snakes, despite the support of the Brah-
min Āstīka, in order to revenge his father. Here his violent attitude is
emphasised, whereas the Brahmin category is pictured as entrusted
with the task of putting an end to Janamejaya's violence: the Brahmin
Āstīka eventually manages to persuade him to spare the snake Takṣaka.
Thus, although the *mahāvrata* must originally have been an expression
of Kuru sovereignty, it was later integrated into the Brahmanical sys-
tem through the operation of ritualistic re-orientation, as the passages
from the Taittirīya scholarly tradition appear to prove. This would
mean that with time, "performing well" by means of speech and action
has become an exclusive prerogative of the priestly category, which
was ultimately committed to ritualism. On the contrary, "performing

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[40]   Cf. above, fn. 20.
[41]   Cf. Schlerath 1995: 20–46, namely 33–34; and 1960.
[42]   Cf, Reich 2001. On the *Mahābhārata* as a didactic work for the *kṣatriya*s, espe-
       cially with regards to the *ānṛśaṃsya* "not-cruelty," cf. Hiltebeitel 2001: 202ff.,
       namely 212.
[43]   Witzel 1995.

badly" has become the trait of anyone—especially *kṣatriya*—who must be relegated to the role of sacrificer, paying the *dakṣiṇā*, or even excluded from any ritual roles, whether Vrātya or *śūdra*.

In this perspective, further in-depth textual exploration may shed light on the connection between the *mahāvrata* verbal contest, the dichotomy between "brahmanical sacrifice *vs.* warrior sacrifice," as represented ultimately in the *Mahābhārata*, and the Vedic *sarpasattra* as the mirror of a pre-ritualistic ceremony that involved clan-lords and which was again correlated to the Kuru dynasty.[44] More specifically, such an analysis requires a lexical examination of the pre-ritualistic texts, such as the Rigvedic and the Atharvavedic collections, whose redaction and "canonization" is attributable to the Kuru period.[45]

## 5. Implied terminology in the *abhigara* / *apagara* contest: "Speech of praise" and "speech of blame"

As regards the terminology related to the *abhigara* / *apagara* contest that takes place during the *mahāvrata* rite, special attention must be paid to phrasal expressions, such as *anyas śaṃsati nindaty any[aḥ]* and *nindati anyaḥ prānyaḥ śaṃsati* from the Sāmavedic tradition, and *ā́nyáḥ króśati prā́nyáḥ śaṃsati* that pertains to both the Yajurvedic texts and the Jaiminīya school, since these are all antonymic constructions that emphasise the antagonistic roles of *abhigara* and *apagara*. In particular, the role of the *abhigara* is correlated to the verbal forms *śaṃsati* and *pra-śaṃsati*, respectively from the root √*śaṃs* / √*śas* "to recite" (< PIE \**ḱe(n)s*), and *pra-*√*śaṃs* "to proclaim."[46] Furthermore, the terms *suṣṭuta-* and *suśasta-*, are past participle derivatives of the root √*stav* / √*stu* "to praise" and again from the root √*śaṃs* / √*śas* respectively and connote the role of the *abhigara*. Inversely, the role of the *apagara* is qualified by the terms *duṣṭuta-* and *duśśasta-*,

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[44]   Minkowski 1991: 396–398.
[45]   Cf. Witzel 1995; 1997a: 276.
[46]   Cf. Gotō 1987: 302–303.

both antonyms of *suṣṭuta-* and *suśasta* respectively and by the verbal forms *nindati* and *ā-króśati*, respectively from the root √*ned* / √*nid* "to blame, to revile" (< PIE \**h₃neid*)[47] and the root √*kruś* / √*kroś* "to call aloud, to cry" (< PIE \**kreṷḱ*),[48] also with the prefix *ā-* "to call out, to shout, to revile". Therefore, it is evident that most of the terminology concerning the *abhigara* / *apagara* contest is correlated to the roots √*śaṃs* / √*śas* "to recite" and √*stav* / √*stu* "to praise," which are crucial in both pre-Brahmanical culture and ritualism since they refer to the semantic field of "solemn speech." In fact, their derivatives such as *śastrá* and *stotrá* are technical terms from the *śrauta* ritual: the former denotes the strophic section, "recited" by the *hótṛ* priest, and the latter the melodic section "sung" by the *udgātṛ́* priest. However, the scene of the *abhigara* / *apagara* contest appears to recall a "speech of praise" that is more directly related to the proto-Vedic culture than to classical somic liturgy. In the proto-Vedic clan society, eulogistic speech is one of the most effective means to obtain social prestige and recognition of supremacy, according to the *śrávas* "glory, fame" (< √*śru* "to hear, to hear of") ideology (< PIE \**ḱleṷes*). In compliance with the Indo-European cultural heritage,[49] "heroic status" in the proto-Vedic culture is also founded on publicly "voiced" recognition, inasmuch as it can be "heard" by means of "sonority." This was the prerogative of a category of specialists: the "laud of men/heroes" (*śáṃsa- nṛṇā́m* /*śáṃsa- narā́m* / *narā́ṃ śáṃsa-*)[50] was proclaimed by bards-*kārú*, singers-*jaritṛ́*, praisers-*stotṛ́*, sage poets-*kaví*, through "raising a lofty/high voice" (*bṛhád* √*vad-*), during solemn occasions such as the distribution ceremony (*vidátha*) in the presence of the fire. *Kaviśastá* or "recited, proclaimed by the *kaví*" is mostly an epithet for Agni (e.g., ṚV 3.21.4c; 3.29.7b); in ṚV 3.16.4cd Agni takes place "here amid an abundance of heroes, and here in the praise of men"

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[47]  Cf. Gotō 1987: 202.
[48]  Cf. Gotō 1987: 120; Mayrhofer 1992: 416; Werba 1997: 172.
[49]  Cf. e.g., Campanile 1990; Pinault 2006; West 2007: 397–398; 406–410.
[50]  This syntagm occurs in ṚV 1.173.9–10a; 2.34.6b; 3.16.4d; 6.24.2c; 9.86.42d; 10.64.3a.

(*ā́ suvī́rye* / *ā́ śáṃsa utá nṛṇā́m*). In ṚV 6.24.1cd–2 Indra, the proto-
type of the warrior chieftain, is evoked as follows:

> *arcatryò maghávā nṛ́bhya ukthaír | dyukṣó rā́jā girā́m ákṣitotiḥ || 1 ||*
> *táturir vīró náriyo vícetāḥ | śrótā hávaṃ gṛṇatá urvyùtiḥ |*
> *vásuḥ śáṃso narā́ṃ kārúdhāyāḥ | vājī́ stutó vidáthe dāti vā́jam || 2 ||*

> He is worthy to be chanted by men with solemn words as the bounteous
> one, the heaven-ruling king of hymns, whose help is imperishable. The
> surpassing hero, favorable to men, discriminating, the hearer of the sing-
> er's call, whose help is wide-ranging, the good one, the Laud of Men, who
> gives succor to bards, praised as the prizewinner, he gives the prize at the
> rite of distribution. (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 806).

Similarly, the compound *nárāśáṃsa* "laud of men/heroes"—cognates
of YAv. *nairiiō.saŋha-* and Myc. *Ke-sa-do-ro*—[51] is used as an epi-
thet for the gods, especially for Agni (e.g. ṚV 3.29.11b) but Bṛha-
spati as Lord of the sacred formulation is also invoked as *nárāśáṃsa*
(e.g. ṚV 10.182.2a).[52] It is worth noting that the syntactic relation
between the two constituents of the compound is ambiguous: either
a subjective value must be implied, such as "laud produced by men,"
or an objective value must be presumed, such as " laud with regard
to men," that is having men as its objects. Jamison[53] argues that the
subjective interpretation is more suitable for the deities, who are
the personification of the laud produced by men, since they are pres-
ent at the solemn ceremony only inasmuch as they respond to the
praises proclaimed by the men-poets. However, Durante (1976: 52)
highlights that the feminine derivative *nārāśaṃsī́*—ṚV 10.85.6b =
AVŚ 14.1.7b = *Atharvaveda Paippalāda* recension (AVP) 18.1.6b—
as the name of *gāthā* "strophe," refers to a specific literary genre, that
is the bardic eulogistic song of heroic deeds, the archetype of epic poetry.

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[51]　Cf. García Ramón 1992: 245–250.
[52]　Cf. e.g., Sadovski 2018a; 2018b.
[53]　*Rigveda Translation Commentary ad* 2.34.6 at http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.
edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/II-1-25-23.pdf.

It therefore follows that the meaning of the compound *nárāśáṃsa* must also be "a laud for celebrating heroic men," like a *chanson de geste*, especially in an extra-Brahmanical context. In fact, the occurrence in the first verse of the *Kuntāpa* section (AVŚ 20.127.1 ~ ṚVKh 5.8.1) is to be interpreted in this perspective: it is a heroic praise sung by a *śáṃsa* specialist—maybe *nṛśáṃsa* himself—who will be rewarded for his performance by the patron, the Kuru King Parikṣit.[54]

> *idáṃ janā úpa śruta nárāśáṃsa stáviṣyate | ṣaṣṭíṃ sahásrā navatíṃ ca kauravá[55] ā́ ruśámeṣu dadmahe || 1 ||*

> Listen to this one, o peoples: the Laud of heroes is about to be sung. We accept sixty thousand and ninety (cows) in the presence of the descendant of Kuru, among the Ruśamas.

It is worth recalling that the *Kuntāpa* section, correlated to the *mahāvrata* ceremony, and an expression of the Kuru dynasty, is only partially integrated into Brahmanical orthopraxy and is preserved as an apocryphal Rigvedic material. Therefore, in an extra-Brahmanical sphere, that is diachronically in the pre-*śrauta* phase, *nárāśáṃsa* or *nṛśáṃsa* as "Laud of men/heroes" may be both a specific heroic song and the title of a category of specialists entrusted with its performance.[56] The development of Brahmanism is instrumental in causing the terms *nárāśáṃsa* and *nṛśáṃsa* to assume a meaning consistent with the ritual function of the priestly class.[57] And the derivative *ānṛśaṃsya* comes

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[54] In ṚV 9.81.5c *nṛśáṃsa* "Laud of men/heroes" is an epithet for Bhaga, thus alluding to the function of the "poet."

[55] Text after Jeong-Soo Kim's edition (2021).

[56] Cf. also Horsch 1966: 411–416.

[57] Cf. the role of *nárāśáṃsa* in the Āprī hymns, which even preserve traces of lineage-based ritual distinctions: van den Bosch 1985: 97–98. As for Narā-śaṃsa, a divine figure equivalent to Av. Nairiiō.saŋha, cf. e.g., Oberlies 2012: 74; 155. As regards the eulogistic value conveyed by the term *śaṃsa* especially in extra-sacerdotal milieu, cf. the comparison with the Gr. κῶμος (< PIE *ḱó(n)s-o) as argued by Durante 1976: 53.

to denote "not-cruelty,"[58] as a new rājadharmic value presented in the fourteenth book of the *Mahābhārata*.

Moreover, it is evident that the specialists in pre-Brahmanical eulogistic performances were especially engaged in "competitive" events:[59] verbal contests (*vívāc*)[60] allowed them to compete with each other for the prizes (*vā́ja*) on behalf of the clan-lord or more generally their patron, during public distributions of wealth (*vidátha*) and probably inside particular enclosed spaces (*vṛjána*).[61] For example, in ṚV 1.178 king Indra (1a: *rā́jéndra*), who is "the conqueror with his men/heroes, champion in battles, one who hears the call of the bard begging for help" (3ab: *jétā nṛ́bhir índraḥ pṛtsú śū́raḥ | śrótā hávaṃ nā́dhamānasya kāróḥ*), "will be praised in the competition for refreshment and at the debate" (4c: *samaryá iṣá stavate vívāci*). Here the term *vívāc*, a feminine noun, is evidently a synonym of *samaryá*, "concourse of fighting people," which comes from the warrior semantic field.[62] Similarly, in ṚV 7.30.2ab, Indra is said to be the one who must be invoked at the verbal contest (*tvā hávyaṃ vívāci*), especially on the occasion of the conquering of the sun.[63] In fact Indra himself is invoked by the *vívāc*s in ṚV 6.33.2ab: as a masculine noun, *vívāc* means "contestant, disputant" in a verbal duel, which is parallel to a contest of champions (*śū́rasāti*). Therefore, Indra is both the patron of the duelling heroes and the challenging singers-poets. Finally, in

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[58]   The term *ānṛśaṃsya*, literally meaning "unworthy of the laud of the men," is conventionally explained as a derivative of the negative form *a-nṛśaṃsa* "without laud of men" and then "cruel" (e.g., Lath 1990: 115), which thus means that only a non-violent action may be worthy of an eulogistic speech.

[59]   Cf. Pinault 2006; as for the Indo-European perspective, cf. West 2007: 72ff.

[60]   As regards the verbal noun *vívāc* and its occurrences in the Ṛigvedic and Atharvavedic collections, cf. Kuiper 1960, namely 268ff.

[61]   Cf. Elizarenkova 1987; for the meaning of the term *vṛjána*, cf. Elizarenkova 2000.

[62]   Cf. Kuiper 1960: 271.

[63]   ṚV 7.30.2ab: *hávanta u tvā hávyaṃ vívāci | tanū́ṣu śū́rāḥ sū́ryasya sātaú |* "The champions invoke you who are to be invoked at the verbal contest, at (the contest) for their own persons, at the winning of the sun" (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 918). This reference to the conquering of the sun is perfectly consistent with the sun-contest staged in the *mahāvrata* rite; cf. Kuiper 1960: 271.

ṚV 6.45.29 Indra is pictured as one of the challengers among the praisers-singers (*stotṛ́*) at the verbal contest (*vívāc*):

*purūtámam purūṇā́m | stotṝṇā́ṃ vívāci | vā́jebhir vājayatā́m || 29 ||*

(You,) the first among many at the verbal contest of the many prais-ers-singers, who compete for the prize with their prizes. (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 831).

Indra is also identified in ṚV 3.34.10c (= AVŚ 20.11.10c) with one who dispels those who are *vívāc*:[64] here, as a masculine noun, *vívāc* denotes not only the "contestant, competitor," but more specifical-ly the "opponent, antagonist" in a word duel (Kuiper 1960: 271). In this sense, the masculine term *vívāc* is a sort of *vox media*, basically connoting competitors in verbal duels, who may either be the heroes' allies or rivals, both seeking the prize, and personified by Indra. For instance, in ṚV 10.23.5 = AVŚ 20.73.6 Indra is portrayed as follows:

*yó vācā́ vívāco mṛdhrávācaḥ | purū́ sahásrāśivā jaghā́na |*
*tát-tad íd asya paúṃsyaṃ gṛṇīmasi | pitéva yás táviṣīṃ vāvṛdhé śávaḥ || 5 ||*

He who smote with his speech contestants in verbal duels, those of insult-ing speech, and many thousands of the hostile, this and every (other) masculine deed of his do we sing—he who, like a father (his son), has strengthened his own force and strength. (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 1408, slightly modified).

Therefore, in this kind of antagonistic society, competitiveness entails that all the competitors are equally worthy of praise on behalf of the singers-poets, and each champion probably has his own poets--supporters, who celebrate his heroic deeds. But on the other hand, any of the counterposed contestants who is not praised must be discredited

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[64]   ṚV 3.34.10c = AVŚ 20.11.10c: *bibhéda valáṃ nunudé vívācaḥ |* "He split Vala; he dispelled the opponents."

and the term *śáṃsa* itself is also a *vox media*.[65] Although the terms *suśasta* and *duśśasta* do not occur in the Rigvedic and Atharvavedic collections, the compounds *suśáṃsa* and *duḥśáṃsa* are however both present: the former denotes the "speaker of good, good to proclaim" (*suśáṃsa*), the champion of the lord / *deva* who must be the winner as such; the latter is the "speaker of ill, detractor" (*duḥśáṃsa*), that is the antagonist, champion of the anti-*deva* / rival-lord, who must be defeated as such. For example, both terms are used antonymically in ṚV 2.23.10cd which is dedicated to Bṛhaspati: the formulaic phrase *mā́ no duḥśáṃso īśata*[66] seems to hint at a magic effect:

> *mā́ no duḥśáṃso abhidipsúr īśata | prá suśáṃsā matíbhis tāriṣīmahi || 10 ||*

> Let not the detractor, trying to deceive, be lord of us. As speakers of good, we would advance through our thoughts. (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 434, slightly modified).

The magical connotation of this dichotomous terminology is evident in AVŚ 6.6.2 ac = AVP 19.2.8, where *duḥśáṃsa* is counterposed to the *hapax suśaṃsín*, lit. meaning "provided with speakers of good," that is the antagonists. The term can denote both the champion's "speakers of good" and the champion himself who is worthy of being well proclaimed, and therefore "of good fame":[67]

> *yó naḥ soma suśaṃsíno duḥśáṃsa ādídeśati |*
> *vájreṇāsya múkhe jahi sá sáṃpiṣṭo ápāyati || 2 ||*

> Whoever, evil speaking, will set his sights on us, speakers of good, O Soma, smite upon his face with the mace; may he go away crushed.

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[65]  Cf. Schlerath 1984.
[66]  The same formulaic phrase is also mentioned in ṚV 2.23.10c; 10.25.7e; AVŚ 19.47.6 = AVP 6.20.6b, where *duḥśáṃsa* clearly denotes a hostile person.
[67]  Whitney's translation (Whitney and Lanman 1905: I. 286).

The same magical value is attested in ṚV 7.94.12ab: *duḥśáṃsa* is equated to one who is provided with the power of the demons-*rakṣas*-:

*tā́v íd duḥśáṃsam mártyaṃ*[68] | *dúrvidvāṃsaṃ rakṣasvínam* |

Just you two (Indra and Agni strike) the evil-speaking mortal, the evil-knowing (mortal), provided with demonic power.

In this sense its negative value is radicalised, coming to mean the Other *par excellence*. Similarly, in ṚV1.94.9 *duḥśáṃsa* is combined with *dūḍhī́* "one of evil insight, one of evil poetic vision": in this case it is Agni who is called upon to dispel the evil speakers and those whose insight is evil (*duḥśáṃsām̐ ápa dūḍhíyo jahi*), even though st. 8b in the same hymn reads: *asmā́kaṃ śáṃso abhí astu dūḍhíyaḥ* "let our laud be against those whose insight is evil." The syntagm GEN. + *śáṃsa-* implies the meaning that the laud produced by the singers-poets in honour of Agni makes the clan-men magically able to defeat their antagonists. Therefore, the praise of Agni proclaimed by the singers-poets coincides with the laud of men / heroes. In fact, in ṚV 1.44.6 Agni is portrayed as "one who is good for the singer to laud" (*suśáṃsa-gṛṇaté*). Furthermore, the adverbial prefix *abhí* "against" marks the antagonist magically: the term *abhíśasti*, a derivative of *abhí-√śaṃs* "to recite against, to blame," denotes a sort of "imprecation, curse" especially in the Atharvavedic lexicon (e.g., AVŚ 3.2.1b = AVP 3.5.1b; AVŚ 7.5.3b). Similarly, it is also attested in the Rigvedic collection: for example, in st. 3bc in the same Rigvedic hymn 7.94, it occurs in the formulaic phrase[69] *mā́bhíśastaye* | *mā́ no rīradhataṃ nidé* "Do not make us subject to imprecation, nor to scorn." And in ṚV 10.104.9a and 10a respectively the terms *abhíśasti* and *suśastí* are mentioned with reference to Indra: in the former case Indra frees the waters from an *abhíśasti* "curse"; in the latter *suśastí* "provided with a 'blessing' praises" is an epithet for Indra, inasmuch as he defeats the demon

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68    The same syntagm *duḥśáṃsa- mártya-* also in ṚV 2.42.8c; 8.18.14b.
69    Cf. ṚV 7.31.5ab here below.

"obstructer" of the waters thanks to the magical efficacy of "good speaking" (*suśastí*).

Finally, *duṣṭuta* and *súṣṭuta* do not occur as a pair of antonyms in the Rigvedic and Atharvavedic collections, although the only *súṣṭuta* recalls the Rigvedic epithet *súṣṭuta*, frequently connoting Indra and Agni. Furthermore, in ṚV 8.6.12 = AVŚ 20.115.3 a similar dichotomous expression is referred to by means of the antithetic verbal pair of perfects *ná tuṣṭuvúḥ / tuṣṭuvúḥ* which, according to Jamison, might also be interpreted with a present value,[70]:

> *yé tvā́m indra ná tuṣṭuvúr | ṛ́ṣayo yé ca tuṣṭuvúḥ | máméd vardhasva súṣṭutaḥ || 12 ||*

> (There are those) who do not praise you, Indra, and seers who praise you, but grow strong just (by) my (praise), as one well praised. (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 1039).

This concise lexical survey underlines the fact that even though the dichotomous pairs *suśasta / duṣṭuta* and *suṣṭuta / duśśasta* do not occur in the pre-Brahmanical collections, a similar lexicon does however seem to anticipate them. Especially the compounds *suśáṃsa / duḥśáṃsa* are an excellent example. As a pre-ritualistic dichotomous pair, they imply a singular performative act: "speaking well of someone" means granting this person new vigour and turning him into a winner, a champion; inversely, a demoniac action, that is to be annihilated, is equated to "speaking ill of others." In this way the very person who speaks well of someone will receive the goods and rewards of victory; whereas the person who speaks ill of others must himself be dispelled without any rewards, and perhaps even slain. In this kind of competitive society *śrávas* "fame" is based on the "speech of praise" and the "speech of blame."

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[70]    Cf. http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/VIII.1-42-1-25-23.pdf.

The verbs *nindati* and *ā-krośati* are mentioned as antonyms of *pra-śaṃsati* in the Brahmanical sources and also occur in the pre-rit-ualistic collections: the root √*ned* / √*nid*, and its secondary form √*nind,* (< PIE *$h_3neid$*), is mentioned in the earlier Vedic textual layer with the meaning of "to revile, to blame, to scorn, to mock" as an antonym of the root √*stav* / √*stu* (e.g. ṚV 5.42.10–11) and a formulaic phrase is found in the Rigvedic collection: √*kṛ* someone *nidé* (e.g. ṚV 7.75.8c; 6.45.27c) "to put someone to scorn." For example, expressions such as *ná stotā́raṃ nidé karaḥ* (ṚV 3.41.6c = AVŚ 20.23.6c: "You (Indra) will not put your praiser to scorn," and *mā́ no nidé ca váktave | aryó randhīr árāvṇe* (ṚV 7.31.5ab = AVŚ 20.18.5ab: "Do not make us subject to scorn (to be) spoken or to the hostility of the stranger" (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 919) appear to confirm the peculiar relationship between speaking and warrior action, highlighted above. Similarly, in ṚV 2.23.14b the role of reviling heroic deeds is attributed to the *rakṣás*es "demons," that is the radical antagonists: *yé tvā nidé dadhiré dṛṣṭávīriyam* "[the demons] who have put you, of manifest heroism, to scorn" (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 434).[71] Likewise, the formulaic phrase *ninditā́ro níndyāso bhavantu* "let them who scorn become those to be scorned" occurs in ṚV 5.2.6d, and the same agent noun *ninditṛ́* "one who scorns, one who reviles" is also attested in ṚV 3.39.4a in the phrase: *nákir eṣāṃtheir ninditā́ mártyeṣu* "nobody is their reviler amongst mortals," referring to the Fathers. The same agent noun *naēstar* occurs in OAv, especially as the nom. pl. *naēstārō* in YH 35.2, as the second constituent of the very discussed expression *naēnaēstārō,* "not revilers,"[72] whose first constituent is the negative particle *naē,* from which the YAv *naēciš* 'nobody' is also derived, equivalent to the Vedic *nákis* of ṚV 3.39.4a.

Finally, a few ritualistic sources correlate the phrase *nṛśaṃsa nindita,* conventionally translated as "censured bard,"[73] with the Vrātya milieu:

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[71]  Interestingly, the compound *dṛṣṭávīriya* refers to a heroic deed that is *dṛṣṭá* "seen," maybe alluding to a double performance, that is the recited/proclaimed perfor-mance to be listened to, and the acted one to be watched.

[72]  As for the discussion about the interpretation, cf. Hintze 2007: 63–66.

[73]  As regards this debated meaning, see Candotti and Pontillo 2015: 173ff.

for example, in the depiction of the *vrātyastoma* in PB 17.2.1 this sort of antonymic expression denotes one of the three categories of performers. The past participle of the root √*nid*, used as an epithet for *nṛśaṃsa*, here evidently a bard, a specialist in *śáṃsa*, is interpreted as a token of that pejorative value attributed to the Vrātya culture by the Brahmanical anti-Vrātya propaganda. However, as a "scorned" laud-singer, it may also refer to the same competitive context in which the bards or laud-singers challenged each other, as also alluded to in the aforementioned ṚV 3.41.6c = AVŚ 20.23.6c. For example, in ṚV 7.25.2cd, the term *śáṃsa* "praise, laud" evokes Indra and is associated with *ninitsú*, a desiderative stem of the root √*nid*, thus denoting the laud proclaimed by the adversary, which, inversely, puts the other rival to scorn:

> *āré táṃ śáṃsaṃ kṛṇuhi ninitsór | ā́ no bhara sambhā́raṇaṃ vásūnām ‖ 2 ‖*

> Put the "laud" of the one intending scorn in the distance. Bring here to us an assemblage of goods. (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 913).

As far as the root √*kruś* "to call out, to shout" is concerned, it is also attested in the pre-ritualistic sources: it denotes the lower register of speech, even a non-articulated way of speaking—so to say—such as wild noises (ṚV 10.146.4d), mere shouting (ṚV 4.18.6b; 10.94.4b) that is similar to animal cries. Its derivative *kroṣṭṛ́* "the shouter" identifies a jackal (ṚV 10.28.4d; AVŚ 11.2.11d); *pari-krośá* is the name of a howler animal (ṚV 1.29.7a; AVŚ 20.74.7a); *anu-*√*kruś* means the hue and cry at horse races (ṚV 4.38.5b). Therefore, the root √*kruś* represents the sonority of Otherness as such, outside the realm of well-articulated speech. It is also worth noting that the root *ā-*√*kruś* "to revile, to shout" in JUB 3.7.5 introduces a sapiential contest, whose winner attains heaven. Similarly, in a few passages of *brāhmaṇa* prose, especially in JB 2.297, the *dīkṣita*-participants in a *sattra* ceremony on the Sarasvatī[74] are said to go "killing and shouting

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[74]   TS 7.2.1.3–4; AB 2.19; PB 25.10.19–21; JB 2.297. Cf. also Witzel 1984.

(*ākróśat-*)"[75] and, according to TS 7.2.1.4, in this case, too, they gain
the world of heaven:

> *eṣá vái devayā́naḥ pánthās tám evā́nvā́rohanti ākróśanto yānti |*

> This is the path that goes to the gods; they mount upon it, indeed; they
> go shouting.

This is an actual *yāt-sattra*, that is "a moving sacrificial session"
(PB 25.10), which is a sacrificial session that moves eastward along
the Sarasvatī. It is worth noting that the *Mahābhārata* also contains
traces of this peculiar *sattra*, especially in relation to the journey of the
Pāṇḍavas.[76] However, the same *gavām-ayana* ritual, as a march, may
correspond to this kind of *sattra* (Hiltebeitel 2001: 151). Moreover,
the term *krośa* is attested in JB 2.400, as the name of one of the
*parimād sāman*s employed in the very *mahavrāta* rite: in particular,
the *krośa sāman* and the *anukrośa sāman* are recommended for attain-
ing the heavenly world (*svarga loka*).[77] It is interesting to note that they
correspond to ṚV 8.13.1. and 8.15.1 = *Sāmaveda* (SV) I. 381–382
respectively, both devoted to Indra, as follows:

> *índraḥ sutéṣu sómeṣu | krátum punīta ukthíyam | vidé vṛdhásya dákṣaso
> mahā́n hí ṣáḥ || 8.13.1 ||*

> When the soma juices have been pressed, Indra purifies his resolve, which
> is worthy of hymns. He knows his own strengthening skill, for he is great.
> (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 1054)

> *tám u abhí prá gāyata | puruhūtám puruṣṭutám | índraṃ gīrbhís taviṣám
> ā́ vivāsata || 8.15.1 ||*

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[75]  JB 2.297: *ghnanta ākróśanto yanti | etad vai balasya rūpaṃ |* "They go killing
      and shouting: that is the shape of the strength."
[76]  Cf. Hiltebeitel 2001: 140ff.; Austen 2008.
[77]  Also, in TS 7.5.8.1; *Śāṅkhāyana-Āraṇyaka* (ŚĀ) 1.4; PB 13.5.14.

>   Sing forth to him, much invoked and much praised. Seek to entice mighty
>   Indra here with hymns, (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 1058)

It is evident that in the Rigvedic context the function of purifier is
attributed to Indra in relation to the *soma* liturgy, however, the focus
is once again on Indra's heroic status, so that he merits praise
(*puruṣṭutá*) and eulogistic hymns. Although the motif of purification
is evoked, thus recalling the Jaiminīya and Taittirīya *mahāvrata* pas-
sages concerning the aforementioned *abhigara / apagara* contest (*yá
ākróśati punā́ty eváinānt*), nonetheless, in ṚV 8.13.1, Indra purifies
his own *krátu* "resolve to act" on his own (*punīte*), without any priestly
support, thanks to a peculiar knowledge, as expressed by the Ā verbal
forms *vidé.* It may therefore be assumed that the root √*kruś*, especially
with the prefix *ā*-, specifically denotes a peculiar heroic status that is
embodied by Indra, and which also alludes to a style of life marked
by initiation (*dīkṣā*). In fact, this is the characterising trait of the *sattra*
typology (Amano 2016): all the participants are *dīkṣita*s and brah-
mins at the same time, and their aim is the attainment of the *svarga
loka*, achieved by undertaking initiation practices. Nonetheless, such
"shouting" of *dīkṣita*s, producing unintelligible utterances, similar to
animal noises, seems to be more pertinent to warrior behaviour rather
than to the classical Brahmins.

## 6. The terms *abhigara* and *apagara*: "Poetry of praise" and "poetry of blame"

Such an ambiguity between warrior and priest roles is also suggested
by the very terms *abhigara* and *apagara* whose etymology is contro-
versial. They may be derivatives of the root ¹√*garⁱ* "to welcome, to
approve, to praise" (< PIE *$g^werH$),[78] once again well attested in the

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[78] According to Burrow (1957: 135–136) two homophone roots must be distin-
guished: ¹√*garⁱ* "to welcome, to approve" (< PIE *$g^werH$) and ²√*garⁱ*- (< PIE
*$garH$) "to sing, to proclaim"; however, Gotō (1987: 155) assumes that both the
meanings are correlated to the single root ¹√*garⁱ*.

same solemn eulogistic context of the pre-ritualistic Vedic texts. As for *abhí-*¹√*garⁱ*, it mainly occurs in the later textual layer of the Rigvedic collection and means both "to greet someone as in a welcome" (deities, lords), by means of solemn speeches like hymns of praise (ṚV 1.42.10), and "to reward someone with generosity (*rā́dhasā*)"—for instance, the poet for his eulogistic compositions (ṚV 1.48.14; 1.54.7; 2.9.4; 10.7.2), on behalf of lords / deities. The prefix *abhí* therefore marks the antagonist who must be appeased and turned into a benevolent host / guest and indeed, phrases such as *abhi no gṛṇīhi*; *abhi no gṛṇantu* "welcome us, let them welcome us" are a common occurrence throughout the Vedic repertoire.[79] Thus, *abhí-*¹√*garⁱ* appears to especially connote acts of hospitality: for example, ṚV 7.38.4cd even suggests an "ecumenical" supra-tribal context: "the sovereign kings Varuṇa, Mitra, Aryaman and their allies greet (Savitar) in harmony."[80] However, the root ¹√*garⁱ*, with no prefix, also expresses the same sort of ambiguity one finds in ṚV 1.186.3, since it emphasises acts of hospitality, combined with the eulogistic function, even though the term *turváṇi* "the overpowering, winner," as an epithet for the praiser, refers to a competitive context:

> *préṣṭhaṃ vo átithiṃ gṛṇīṣe | agním śastíbhis turváṇiḥ sajóṣāḥ |*
> *ásad yáthā no váruṇaḥ sukīrtír | íśaś ca parṣad arigūrtáḥ sūríḥ || 3 ||*

> I will praise your guest, the dearest one, Agni, with lauds in harmony, (I) the winner, so that our good praise will be Varuṇa, and he [Agni] will deliver refreshments like a patron praised by a stranger (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 390, slightly modified].

This interpretation may be consistent with the role of *abhigara* who, it is said, *abhigṛṇāti* "greets, welcomes" in PB 5.5.13, but who at the same time is also the antagonist. Such an ambiguous meaning

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[79]   E.g., ṚV 1.10.4b; 1.48.14c; AVŚ 4.12.2b; AVP 15.2.1/5; AVŚ 18.1.52a; KS.22.14b; TS 4.4.12.4b; MS 2.8.1; MS 3.16.4b; VS 2.18; ŚB 8.2.1.5/7.

[80]   ṚV 7.38.4cd: *abhí samrā́jo váruṇo gṛṇanti | abhí mitrā́so aryamā́ sajóṣāḥ ||*

of "ecumenical" welcome and competitive supremacy, expressed by *abhí-*[1]*√gari*, but even more so by the root [1]*√gari*, is also attested in the old Iranian tradition: the agent noun *aibī.jarətar* "one who welcomes, praiser in a song," equivalent to the Vedic *\*abhi-jaritŕ*,[81] derivative of the same root *aibī.gar* "to welcome, to praise in a song," occurs in the Old and Young Avestan textual tradition within the eulogistic lexicon that resembles the Old Indo-Āryan one, despite a different cultural context.[82] For example in Y 14.1 *aibī.jarətar* is also listed in the sequence of agent nouns that are the priestly functions, that is: *staotā zaotā zbātā yaštā framarətā aibijarətā* "praiser, libator, invoker, sacrificer, reciter, welcomer."[83] The same agent noun *aibī.jarətar* is used as an antonym of another agent noun, *naēstar*, in the aforementioned YH 35.2, despite its negative form *naēnaēstar* "non-reviler."[84] Several scholars consider the form *naēnaēstar* "non-reviler" a litotes, which intensifies the positive meaning of *aibī.jarətar*, so that the welcomer is not a reviler, and therefore definitively a praiser in a song.

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[81]   The agent noun *jaritŕ* is frequently mentioned in the Rigvedic and Atharvavedic collections, but without the prefix *abhí*.

[82]   Cf. e.g., Skjærvø 2002.

[83]   As for text and interpretation, cf. Hintze 2013: 66–69. The correspondences between Avestan and Vedic terminology are as follows: *staotā = stotŕ* < √*stav* / √*stu* "to praise" (< PIE \**steu*); *zaotā = hótṛ* < √*hav* / √*hu* "to pour" (< PIE (< PIE \**ǵheu*); *zbātā = hótṛ* < √*hvā* / √*hū* "to invoke, to call" (< PIE \**ǵhueh₂*); *yaštā = yáṣṭṛ* / *yaṣṭŕ* < √*yaj* "to worship, to sacrifice" (< PIE \**Hieh₂ǵ*); as regards *framarətā = prasmartŕ* < *pra*-√*smar* / √*smṛ* "to remember" (< PIE \*(*s*)*mer*), it is not a really a Vedic term, since the root -√*smar* / √*smṛ* with the prefix *pra* is not attested in the Vedic sources.

[84]   Text, translation and interpretation after Hintze 2007: 61ff.:

> *humatanąm hūxtanąm huuarštanąm*
> *iiadacā aniiadacā*
> *vərəziiamnanąmcā vāuuərəzananąmcā*
> *mahī aibī.jarətārō*
> *naēnaēstārō yaϑənā vohunąm mahī* […].

> Of good thought, good words, good deeds, both here and elsewhere
> Being done and having been done
> We are welcomers, not revilers of such good (things) are we […].

Although such phraseology may reflect the specific Zoroastrian dichotomy between good and evil, the terminological survey carried out here indicates a common lexicon that also conveys a common cultural heritage, which is most probably rooted in the pre-Zoroastrian phase on the one hand and in the proto-Vedic period on the other. It is a sort of "praise and blame poetry," also attested in other Indo-European cultures.[85] As far as the Vedic culture is concerned, remnants of this common poetical heritage may be associated with the Vrātya culture, which also influenced the Kuru hegemony: for example, in the Rigvedic hymn 10.61, the *bahuvrīhi* compound *gūrtávacas* "one whose speech is welcome" highlights the antagonistic relationship between Tūrvayāṇa and Cyavāna who are contenders in a verbal duel,[86] as specified in the first stanza:

> *idám itthā́ raúdraṃ gūrtávacāḥ | bráhma krátvā śácyām antár ājaú |*
> *krāṇā́ yád asya pitárā maṃhaneṣṭhā́ḥ | párṣat pakthé áhann ā́ saptá*
> *hótr̥̄n || 1 ||*

> Here is a Rudrian formulation right to the point, (which) he whose speech is welcome (produced) with his mental force at a contest in skill, (a formulation) that, standing ready for liberality, will effectively guide across his two parents and, on the fifth [?] day, the seven Hótṛs. (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 1475).

Tūrvayāṇa is the winner of this duel: actually, in the second stanza he becomes *gūrtávacastama* "one whose speech is the most welcome." It is worth noting that the Rudraic motif correlated to the effective formulation, as quoted in ṚV 10.61, is amplified in st. 3cd of the same hymn by the portrayal of Tūrvayāṇa himself as a skilled archer. In fact,

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[85]   Cf. Skjærvø 2002; West 2007: 27. A cognate of the root √*ned* / √*nid* "to blame, to revile" (PIE \**h₂neid*) is Gr. ὄνειδος "abuse, blame," which also denotes a specific kind of poetry: cf. Nagy 1979: 222ff.

[86]   Cf. Jamison's Rigveda Translation Commentary at http://rigvedacommentary.alc. ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/X.61%E2%80%9394-1-25-23.pdf.

he is denoted as *tuvinṛmṇá* "one whose manly power is strong,"[87] so that his warrior expertise is combined with a peculiar competence in "welcome speech," that is a poetry of praise. This is most consistent with the Vrātya context: warrior initiation implied an esoteric knowledge that was also focused on speech and poetical skill. Rudra himself is the personification of the preceptor of this kind of apprenticeship: in ṚV 1.43.4a he is designated as *gāthápati* "Lord of the song," and the first constituent (*gāthá*) of this epithet is correlated to the feminine term *gā́thā* "strophe," the specific metrical form of bardic compositions such as the *nárāśáṃsa.*[88] Moreover, Rudra as *sabhā́pati*— "Lord of the assembly"[89] can be associated with the ideal seat for the contests, especially the verbal ones.[90] Finally, the cryptic reference to the fifth day (*pakthé áhan*) recalls the fifth day of the twelve-day rite (*dvādaśāha*), which can also be a *sattra*. For example, in PB 13.5.11 it is said that the *cyāvana sāman* is sung, followed by the *krośa sāman*, devoted to Indra. And Tūrvayāṇa himself, as mentioned in ṚV 6.18.13, is supported and protected by Indra.

Finally, the term *apagara*, whose meaning is conventionally "reviler," refers to a function clearly expressed by the verbs *nindati* and *ā-króśati* in the Vedic textual repertoire related to the *mahāvrata* rite, as mentioned above: the *apagara* plays the antagonist role *par excellence*, that is he reviles, blames and shouts at the adversary. Therefore, it may be assumed that the term is a derivative of another homophone root of [1]√*gari* "to welcome, to praise," which is the root [3]√*gari*, meaning "to raise the weapon, to throw" (< PIE *$g^welh_1$)[91] that clearly pertains to warrior lexicon. In fact, the two Rigvedic occurrences of

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87  ṚV 10.61.3cd *ā́ yáḥ śáryābhis tuvinṛmṇó asya | áśrīṇītādíśaṃ gábhastau || 3 ||* "He who, powerfully manly, with arrows in his hand, brought his aim to fulfilment" (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 1475).
88  Cf. Horsch 1966: 214–215.
89  Cf. Falk 1986: 84ff., namely 92 and 96.
90  Cf. Lelli 2023.
91  According to Hintze (2005: 256–257) [3]√*garⁱ* would mean the raising of one's arm immediately preceding the act of striking the enemies with a weapon and it is a cognate of the Gr. βάλλω "to throw."

*apa-√gar^i* are definitely consistent with this value: ṚV 5.29.4c mentions *apajárgurāṇa* "repeatedly raising the arm with weapon,"[92] that is an Ā participle of an intensive stem, while the absolutive *apagū́rya* is found in ṚV 5.32.6d. Both occurrences refer to Indra's warrior deeds, focussing on the precise moment immediately before Indra slays his adversary. Particularly in ṚV 5.32.6d which refers to the archetypical duel between Indra and his anguiform enemy, the absolutive *apagū́rya* is very explicit:[93]

> *tiyáṃ cid itthā́ katpayáṃ śáyānam | asūriyé támasi vāvṛdhānám |*
> *táṃ cin mandānó vṛṣabháḥ sutásya | uccaír índro apagū́ryā jaghāna || 6 ||*

> That very one, lying just so, horribly swollen, having grown strong in the sunless darkness, just him did the bull Indra, invigorated on the pressed (*soma*), smash from above, after raising the arm with weapon against him. (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 697, slightly modified).

According to Hintze (2005: 254), the Vedic *apa-³√gar^i* "denotes an action immediately preceding a physical attack. It describes the first of the three stages by means of which someone inflicts bodily injury on another person with a weapon."[94] This would mean that the term *apagara* might refer to one who assumes an aggressive position, preparing for the enemy's assault, probably with their arm raised, ready to strike. It is worth noting that the Ā participle *apagurámāṇa* "one who raises the weapon" is mentioned in the famous *Śatarudrīya*, the catalogue of Rudra's attributes:[95] "Homage to one who both raises

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92  As for the debated interpretation, cf. Jamison's Rigvedic Translation Commentary at http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/V-1-25-23.pdf.

93  Hintze 2005: 252ff.

94  The other two stages are carrying out the assault without shedding blood, expressed by the root *ni-√han*, and carrying out the assault with the shedding of blood (*lohitaṃ √ kṛ*): Hintze 2005: 256.

95  MS 2.9.8; KS 17.13; TS 4.5.9.2; VS 16.46. As for the *Śatarudrīya*, cf. Gonda 1979.

the weapon and strikes" (*námo 'pagurámāṇāya cābhighnaté ca*); here the pair of participles portrays the first two stages of a duel: firstly, the preparation for the assault (*apa-³√gar^i*), and then the assault as such (*abhí-√han*). Therefore, a connection with the Vrātya context, especially with the figure of Rudra, is present once again. However, two further attestations of the root *apa-³√gar^i* are even more significant, that is the subj. *apagurā́tai* and the opt. *ápagureta* in TS 2.6.10.2:

> […] *kím me prajā́yāḥ* || 1 || *yò 'pagurā́tai śaténa yātayāt | yó nihánat sahásreṇa yātayāt | yó lóhitaṃ karávad yǎvataḥ praskádya pāṃsū́nt saṃgṛhṇā́t tǎvataḥ saṃvatsarā́n pitṛlokám ná prá jānād íti | tásmād brāhmaṇā́ya nǎpagureta ná ní hanyān ná lóhitaṃ kuryāt |* […]

"What is for my offspring?" "He, who will revile (him), will be punished with a hundred; he, who strikes (him), will be punished with a thousand; he, who sheds (his) blood, will not be allowed to become acquainted with the world of the Fathers for as many years as are the grains of sand which (the blood) falling upon impregnates." Therefore, one should not revile against a Brahmin, nor strike (him), nor shed (his) blood. […]

In fact, this passage clearly shows the aetiological basis of what will become the dharmic rule regarding the invulnerable position of a Brahmin: a descendent of Bṛhaspati, who is assigned a priestly role, is rewarded by the gods for his ritual services, so that no member of his own progeny will be harmed or injured without an appropriate penance. This is how Brahmanical prestige is proclaimed and evidently counterposed to violent acts. Therefore, violence is definitively attributed to other social categories and can become a particular prerogative of the warrior class, which is the direct antagonist of the priestly role. Thus, the relationship between priest and warrior functions is definitively dichotomised. This peculiar cultural change is expressed by means of the same phraseology that was used to refer to the phases that characterised the relationship between adversaries of contests in the pre-ritualistic culture, as mentioned for example in ṚV 5.32.6 with regard to Indra. But in this case neither of the two adversaries is a Brahmin.

Thus, not only is violence stigmatised and penalised, but the warrior sphere, the main instigator of such acts, is also scorned, unless these warriors are purified and justified by Brahmanical sapiential authority. Similarly, the ancient warrior culture, such as the Vrātya one, is also integrated and re-semanticised into the Brahmanical sphere. The *apagara*, once the prototype of the aggressive adversary ready to strike and embodied by Rudra and Indra, disappears at this moment and, as demonstrated above, is now only and almost exclusively mentioned as a detractor or a specialist in "poetry of blame" in the Vedic textual repertoire regarding the *mahāvrata*. The *abhigara*, a sort of "master of ceremonies," who welcomes and praises guests and hosts, comes to be equated with the priestly role: in the same textual sources concerning the *mahāvrata* rite he comes to be replaced by the *brāhmaṇa*, the non-violent ritual performer *par excellence*.

## 7. Conclusions

As part of the *sattra* ritual, the classical *mahāvrata* rite is the peculiar occasion which sees the staging of "agonistic" performances which are inherited from a pre-Brahmanical culture, especially the Vrātya context. They are both verbal and physical duels, but it is also reasonable to think that verbal and physical aggressivity may actually be two different stages of a single challenge. The *abhigara* / *apagara* contest is a prime example, since neither a real verbal debate nor a real fight is portrayed. Indeed, *abhigara* conveys a value that can also be associated with verbal contests, which actually stresses the eulogistic function, while *apagara* refers to the first stage in warrior fights, without introducing the other stages. In this sense an *abhigara* is a sort of "fighting poet," whose only duty on occasions of "ecumenical" hospitality is to welcome guests by uttering speeches of praise. However, a survey of the textual sources demonstrates that such a "welcome" function pertains to the later Rigvedic layer, whereas the motif of a competitive relationship between someone who speaks well of others and someone who speaks ill crosses different textual layers. Therefore, *abhigara*,

as someone skilled in *śáṃsa*, may be an epigone of an "agonistic" tradition of "poetry of praise" and "poetry of blame," attested in manifold Indo-European cultures, and especially common to the Indo-Iranian cultural stage. On the other hand, *apagara* actually seems to embody the warrior side of "speech" competitions: verbal aggression and altercations prelude physical fights.[96] Such a scenario is perfectly consistent with the Vedic practice of the sapiential challenges, so well outlined by Witzel (1987): the sapiential debate was considered a real contest between warriors, which led to the loser's head being "severed" or "shattered" and perhaps not only in a metaphorical sense.[97] Furthermore, it may be assumed that the proto-Vedic occasions of such performances—verbal disputes and fights—were the very *sattra*s, that is the pre-Brahmanical seasonal sessions, in which chieftains and clan-members celebrated the passage from the mobility phase (*yóga*) to the settlement phase (*kṣéma*), and reversely, performed the solemn distribution of booty or auspicious magical rites, to protect the warriors' deeds. Moreover, verbal disputes and physical contents must have been a requisite for the warrior initiation training that was part of the Vrātya tradition. Rudra himself personified the double ability of being able to speak well / ill of others and being skilled in fighting with a bow, as a prototype of a Vrātya warrior; similarly, Indra embodied the adult warrior, the ideal chieftain, able to win all kinds of contests, thus ensuring wealth for the clan. By the time of the cultural change inaugurated by the Kuru hegemony and the development of *śrauta* ritualism, these proto-Vedic cultural traits had been integrated into the Brahmanical system by means of an operation of cultural revision, clearly aimed at promoting the supremacy of the priestly category.

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[96] Cf. West 2007: 476.

[97] As Witzel has highlighted (1987), defeat in contests in the Vedic texts is frequently marked by the "loss" of the head on the part of the loser, expressed through the syntagm *mūrdhan / śiras vi-√pat* "to burst, fall off." In the Indraic myth too, the motif of the severed head is represented by Indra's victory against the demon Namuci: cf. e.g., ṚV 8.14.13; MS 4.3.4; ŚB 12.7.1.10ff. The same practice is also attested in a few episodes in the *Mahābhārata*, such as the *Śiśupālavadha*: cf. Reich 2010.

In fact, the *Mahābhārata* itself, the output of sattric traditions, demonstrates that the priestly role came to be attributed with the positive function of purifying and salvific power, whereas the polluting violence was relegated to the *kṣatriya* category, becoming its exclusive prerogative. However, in turn, the *kṣatriya* category came to need sacrificial action to legitimise its own status, and thus to justify violence. The scene of the contest between *abhigara* and *apagara* portrayed in the Vedic textual repertoire concerning the classical *mahāvrata* rite is an example of such a cultural operation: it preserves a few traces of the proto-Vedic background, but the Taittirīya version in particular seems to be ultimately congruent with the *Mahābhārata Weltanschauung*, preluding and even coinciding with the dharmic system. Therefore, the *mahāvrata* rite represents an important link between proto-Vedic cultural reality and the later Brahmanical orthopraxy which precedes the dharmic orthodoxy.

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