

## Science, patriotism, and Mother Veda: Ritual activism in Maharashtra

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About a decade ago, I found myself watching seventeen priests in an enclosure, enacting a month-long sequence of rites first described nearly three thousand years ago. Around me sat a crowd of local farmers and townspeople who had never seen such a performance before but who had each made a small donation to attend. During lulls in the ritual action, the organizer and other *svāmīs* (holy men) preached about the meaning and value of the ritual and connected it with better-known devotional traditions in the region and with the principles of science. Attendees circumambulated the enclosure and deposited offerings before pictures of holy men, both legendary and modern. The entire arena was filled with explanatory labels and diagrams, augmented by a display of educational posters. This event seemed to crystallize aspects of the debate about what role Brāhmanical traditions can play in contemporary India.<sup>1</sup>

Over the last two centuries, Hindus have sought to come to terms with Western assumptions about what constitutes religion in the modern world. Early observers considered India benighted in its preoccupation with 'idolatry' and arcane priestly ritual, brutal in its myths of bloodthirsty goddesses and village sacrifices, and medieval in its superstition. These criticisms reflected a broadly Protestant ethos that had earlier rejected the allegedly excessive ritualism of the Roman Catholic church and declared the victory of reason over dogma. In the wake of this critique, English-educated Hindu elites developed a variety of forms of 'ethnic nationalism' (as Anthony Smith [1983, 1998] has defined it): The construction of an idealized Golden Age that embodies the 'essential' features of the indigenous culture as well as those features of the dominant alien (especially colonialist) culture that are deemed to make it 'modern' (and thus powerful and successful).

Christophe Jaffrelot (1996), following John Plamenatz (1973), points particu-

larly to the ambivalence implicit in this program: that of asserting native cultural superiority while appropriating the perceived strengths of the alien power. The foreign culture is stigmatized but also emulated (either surreptitiously or unconsciously). With regard to religion, this means producing a version of Hindu tradition that lives up to 'modern' (namely, Western and Protestant) standards of legitimacy: that a religion is defined by a monotheistic creed embodied in a common scripture; that it should minimize priestly authority and rationalize its mode of worship; that it should reject 'superstition' and 'barbaric' practices; that it should be in accord with reason.

Religious reform societies that were started during this period (the Brahmo Samāj, Ārya Samāj, and Prārthanā Samāj) sought to rectify these defects by recovering the pristine form of a universal 'Hindu,' 'Vedic,' or 'Āryan' spirituality, distilling it into a simple creed, and preaching and printing pamphlets after the fashion of the Christian missionaries. A deity defined abstractly in Vedāntic terms was meant to subsume and replace the personal deities, fierce deities were softened, and a spiritualized interpretation of customary practices came to prevail. In Ceylon, the inspiration for an analogous transformation (dubbed 'Protestant Buddhism') can be identified as Henry Steel Olcott and his disciple, Anagārika Dharmapāla: an abstractly stated Buddhist catechism replaced Jātaka stories as the medium of instruction and an intellectualized view of the Buddha came to prevail.

Such projects have been entwined with the construction of new social and political identities. It was the intellectual elites and the middle classes who took an interest in these movements; they thereby claimed to define a modern 'Hinduism' that could be India's answer to Christianity. Meanwhile, villagers and the less educated and the less prosperous in the cities carried on with traditional forms of devotion; thus, the adoption of modernist religious perspectives and practices became a mark of rising status. Now, just as the edifice of 'liberal,' 'reformed' religion (both Christian and Jewish) is being challenged by an upsurge of neo-Orthodox and charismatic movements in the West, India may be witnessing some analogous developments.

One of these developments is a revival of Vedic *śrauta* ritual.<sup>2</sup> By this I mean something different from the revival of a spiritualized *idea* of 'Vedic religion' (or 'Vedic Dharma') and different also from the more or less sustained Vedic practice found in isolated communities outside the mainstream of Hindu religiosity. The former was given its early definition by groups like the Ārya Samāj and Brahmo Samāj, which in turn took their cue from the common nineteenth-century Indological tendency to elevate the Vedic literature as both the foundation and the highest expression of Hindu culture. Hindu intellectuals of the period came to see image worship and village exorcists from the British

point of view as crude and ‘superstitious.’ From his founding of the Ārya Samāj in 1875, Dayānanda Sarasvatī called for a return to Vedic ritual practice in place of the worship of images. But the ‘Vedic’ practice envisioned was highly idealized and shorn of most of the priestly ritual, which many Indologists had cited as the beginning of India’s subjection to the obscurantism of the Brāhmaṇa priests. This type of Vedism is still active today, not least in the Ārya Samāj itself (although, as I shall suggest below, the Samāj has somewhat modified its views on the subject of ritual).

The other way in which Vedic religion has been present in India is as a tenacious traditionalism found in scattered, small communities, mostly in the South. These are Brāhmaṇa communities, generally settled and still living in *agrahāras*, lands donated to them in previous centuries by local rulers. Several of these communities appear to have maintained the transmission of Vedic texts orally by rote from teacher to pupil (often from father to son) as well as the techniques of applying those texts ritually in Vedic *yajñas* (sacrificial rites).<sup>3</sup> Although there have been changes in the character of this Vedic practice over three millennia (see Kashikar and Parpola 1983), one can say that these isolated Brāhmaṇa communities have carried on the Vedic tradition out of a strong sense of pride and collective conviction and that they have done so despite the paucity of wealthy patrons in the contemporary world. Their practice is basically private, and many have gone so far as to seal the walls of their ritual halls (which, according to the ritual codes, are supposed to have gaps) in order to avoid interference from outsiders during offerings that call for animals to be killed.<sup>4</sup> There is no effort to generate public interest in the practice or to recruit people outside the immediate community to participate. There is also no systematic effort to formulate a role for *vaidika* practice in society generally, aside from repeating the traditional claim that *yajña* reinforces the order of the universe. Hence, one cannot call such practice revivalistic, even if, in some respects or on some occasions, certain rites or recitations need to be relearned on the basis of printed or manuscript texts.

By contrast, the revivalist phenomenon that I wish to address here is not entirely new, perhaps, but appears to be a growing trend, even if on a relatively small scale. It is an attempt to reestablish Vedic *śrauta* ritual in its full complexity as a regular feature of modern Indian life. Vedic revivalists of this type tap both the other forms of contemporary Vedism characterized above: They use Ārya Samāj-style arguments for the spiritual and social value of Vedic practice and draw (of necessity) on the expertise of traditionalist Vaidika Brāhmaṇas from the rural *agrahāras*. Revivalism differs from both of these other forms of Vedism by (i) resisting the impulse to simplify and intellectualize the ritual practice to encourage wider participation and (ii) bringing the

Vedic ritual out of the private family or *agrahāra* setting and projecting it as a public, civic undertaking explicitly aimed at the common good. My examples here will be the activities of a few Maharashtrian *svāmīs*, especially those of Ranganath Krishna Selukar. Similar cases can be found in other parts of India, and reports of ‘Vedic *yajñas*’ (a few of which might fairly be termed *śrauta*) run periodically in the newspapers. However, I hope that by contextualizing one regional manifestation as fully as possible, we may be in a position to say what is new in this enterprise and to account for the success it has had.

### SELUKAR AND MAHARASHTRIAN ŚRAUTA PRACTICE

Selukar is based in Gangakhed, a small town in eastern Maharashtra. His father, Krishna Dikshit Selukar (1879–1967), had studied two Vedas and taken an interest in *śrauta* ritual, performing a *soma yajña* in 1932. Before he died, he made his son promise to become an *āhitāgni*, ‘one who has established the [three] ritual fires.’ The use of three fires is precisely what distinguishes *śrauta* ritual from ordinary ‘domestic’ (*grhya*) Vedic ritual. This status brings with it a great deal of new responsibilities and restrictions, notably the requirement to perform complex rites every day in the morning and evening, at both the full and new moon, thrice yearly at regular intervals, and so forth. In 1966, Selukar began offering the simpler single-fire *grhya* rites, with a major performance once a year; in 1972, he fulfilled his promise to his father, to consecrate himself to the life of an *āhitāgni*, by performing his first *śrauta agnihotra* (the twice-daily milk offering) at Tryambakeshvar, at the source of the holy Godāvarī River. Since then, for three decades, he has been performing a series of rites of increasing complexity and length according to a standard hierarchy.<sup>5</sup>

In 1992, I attended his *aīndrasaptāha-soma-yajña*, in which the sacred *soma* juice is pressed and offered into the fire on seven consecutive days, the climax of a full month of ceremonies. Selukar does not have the means to pay for such costly undertakings, but he is able to collect funds in the form of donations, and, during the ceremonies, visitors make offerings. In this way, since 1980, he has been performing a *soma* sacrifice almost every year, and, each year since 1985, the version performed has been one-pressing-day *soma* longer than the last. Mostly these have taken place in Selukar’s native Maharashtra, but he has made some effort to give the project a pan-Indian scope by holding sacrifices in Delhi (1993, 1996) and in the famous pilgrimage town of Hardwar (1998). From April 26, 1999, to May 17, 2000, in Gangakhed, he performed the ritual that marks the apex of his ritual career: the year-long *gavāmayana sattra*.

From his first *agnihotra* until the end of the 1970s, he performed only *iṣṭis*<sup>6</sup> (mostly *cāturmāsya*s), because he was loath to perform rites that involved the slaughter and offering of an animal. The turning point came in 1978, when Selukar attended a *soma* sacrifice in Solapur sponsored by Mahadev Vishnu Apte, a disciple of Gajanan Maharaj of Akkalkot; also in attendance were Yudhishtir Mimamsak (an Ārya Samājist and the preeminent editor of Dayānanda's works)<sup>7</sup> and T. N. Dharmadhikari of Vaidika Saṃśodhana Maṇḍala, Pune.<sup>8</sup> The chief priest at this performance was Aravattur Sitaram Vishvanatha Shrauti of Nellore (originally from Tamilnadu). Vishvanatha (1921–97) and his three brothers were trained both in *Yajur Veda* (including priestly duties of the *adhvaryu* class) and in *Sāma Veda*. Although his biographer firmly asserts that the family had sometimes used *piṣṭa-paśu* (dough figurines substituted for live animal victims) in their performances in earlier generations, including a 1920 rite performed at Petlad in Gujarat, he also notes that when Vishvanatha was engaged by Gajanan Maharaj to perform an *agniṣṭoma* sacrifice in 1969 for one of his disciples, the Mahārāj had to cajole him into consenting to use pots of *ghī* (*ghṛta*- or *ājya-paśu*) in place of animals:

As Shri A.S.V. [Vishvanatha] was hesitant in the beginning to perform Ājya paśu in spite of the tradition of piṣṭa paśu in the family, Shri Gajanan Maharaj reassured him that the responsibility of any lapse due to Aajya paśu will be owned by Shri Maharaj himself....This tradition of Aajya paśu was followed by Shri A.S.V. thereafter (Anonymous 2000: 203).

Later Vishvanatha went so far as to publish pamphlets in four languages (including Sanskrit) condemning the use of animal victims and citing passages from the Vedas and the ritual codes to support the substitution of other substances.<sup>9</sup>

After witnessing the 1978 ritual, Selukar approached Vishvanatha about performing the same rite for him as well. Thus began the partnership between them that continued until Vishvanatha's death. His son, Bharga Ganapati, and his grandsons, Bhattaram Jagadisha and Bhattaram Shrinivasa, who trained under him, have participated in all of Selukar's rituals. Shrinivas served as *adhvaryu* at Selukar's *sattra*, thus fulfilling Vishvanatha's vow, a vow he had made shortly before his death.

### THE DATTĀTREYA CONNECTION

We find in Selukar's enterprise, and in the Maharashtrian Vedic revival more

broadly, a triangle of elements: Vedic ritual, Vaiṣṇava holy men, and the Ārya Samāj. One linking factor here might be the tradition of devotion to Dattātreya. Datta is a legendary ascetic of the extreme *avadhūta*<sup>10</sup> variety; he is deemed an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, along with portions of Śiva and Brahmā. Datta traditions may originally have come to Maharashtra with the Nātha *yogīs*, who included him in their lists of teachers, but the earliest textual references to Datta are found in the works of the Mahānubhavas (Rigopoulos 1998: 57–108).<sup>11</sup> There is a certain irony in the fact that the Mahānubhavas were mostly of low caste and were fiercely critical of Brāhmaṇa ritual authority and orthodoxy; yet, in the Maharashtrian Datta *sampradāya*, Datta becomes a voice of orthodoxy and Brāhmaṇa authority. The foundational text for the *sampradāya* is the *Gurucaritra* of Gaṅgādhara Sarasvatī, written in the middle of the sixteenth century in Marathi. This work presents hagiographies of two men viewed as historical *avatāras* of Datta: Śrīpāda Śrīvallabha (ca. 1323–53) and Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī (ca. 1378–1458). Both men are presented as the offspring of orthodox Brāhmaṇa families (of the Āpastamba and Vājasaneyin branches, respectively), fabulously precocious in their knowledge of Veda and in their spiritual development. Special attention is given to the importance of Brāhmaṇical rituals such as *śrāddha* (offerings to the ancestors) and especially to the ritual of initiation into Veda study (*mauñji-bandhana*). Śrīpāda undergoes it at the age of seven; Nṛsiṃha is initiated at eight, but up to that point he utters nothing but the sacred syllable *om* and, after the rite, spontaneously begins reciting all the Vedas and *śāstras*! Both men renounce worldly life at an early age, visit many pilgrimage sites, and propagate devotion to Datta. Through their blessings, a barren buffalo gives milk, and a low-caste man is able to recite the Vedas (interestingly parallel feats). Several of Nṛsiṃha’s miracles are meant to impress Muslim rulers of the Bāhamānī, ‘Adilshāhī, and Quṭbshāhī Sulṭānates in the Deccan.

Mahīpati’s *Bhaktavijaya* (1762), a compendium of hagiographies of *bhakti* saints, includes a chapter in which he collapses the two *avatāras* into the single person of Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī and particularly emphasizes the saint’s Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy. Nṛsiṃha is said to have preached strict observance of *varṇāśrama dharma* and the importance of reciting Veda and performing *yajñas*. This is the aspect of Nṛsiṃha’s character that modern Maharashtrian scholars have emphasized as well, making Nṛsiṃha an early proponent of ‘Maharashtrian Dharma’ and of Hindu activism to combat the deleterious effects of foreign, Islamic rule on Hindu (and especially Brāhmaṇical) piety (thus Kulkarnee 1989: 203; Tulpule 1979: 352; see also Sardar 1969: 143–49).

It is a bit odd that Datta, the paradigmatic *avadhūta*, should be made, through the medium of his *avatāras* (also renouncers but not *avadhūtas*), to teach the

value of householder ritual and the observance of social norms! If we accept this picture, as the Datta *sampradāya* asks us to do, then Selukar's own mission begins to look perfectly consonant with his tradition. Gajanan Maharaj belongs to the Datta *sampradāya*, and, as mentioned above, he has taken a strong interest in reviving the practice of *śrauta* ritual (albeit with the substitution of *ghī*-animals for *sākṣāt-paśu* ['manifest animals']); many of these rites have been performed by two of his disciples, with Vishvanatha presiding.

There have been a few ramifications of the Datta tradition that look to founders other than Nṛsiṃha. Datta himself may remain somewhat in the background, but the themes of the Brāhmaṇical Datta tradition are strongly present. One branch, the Svarūpa *sampradāya*, which traces its *guru paramparā* back to Samartha Akkalkot Svāmī and is currently led by one Kākā Mahārāj, maintains a temple-complex in Pune (the Śrī Digambaradāsa Maṭha) with a Veda *pāṭhaśālā* in which boys, aged eight and older, learn to recite Vedic *mantras* under the direction of one Madhav Vyankateswar Paranjpe, who also served as *maitrā-varuṇa* priest in Selukar's *sattra*.<sup>12</sup>

Selukar himself belongs to the Ānanda *sampradāya* that is historically associated with four figures: Purṇānanda (author of the *Avadhūtaṭīkā* on Datta, 1610), Sahajānanda (of Kalyani), Nijānanda, and Nijānanda's son and disciple, Raṅganātha.<sup>13</sup> Selukar's literature focuses on Raṅganātha and associates him with Rāmadāsa, Jayarāma, Ānandamūrti, and Keśava as Viṣṇu's *pañcāyatana* (fivefold abode). Although Datta appears top and center, above Selukar himself, in a montage of *gurus* at the front of the *Satra-smaraṇam* volume (Dharma-dhikari, Ranade, Thite, and Kulkarni 2000), he is rarely mentioned in the text. An exception is the biography of Selukar's father, Krishna Dikshit, in which Datta makes a personal appearance:

By the grace of the *sadguru*, even from childhood Śrī Kṛṣṇa Mahārāj's daily routine was always to be continuously reciting the Śrī *Dattopāsanā Bhāgavata*, reciting and meditating on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and so forth. Because of his father's old age, all the household responsibilities fell to him when he was fifteen years of age. But only for about five or six years did he remain in his house, seeing the value of his inheritance. A short time later, while taking *darśan* in the temple to Datta there in Ausā, he had a direct vision of Śrī Datta Mahārāj. Datta gave him a manuscript of that blessed book, the *Bhāgavata*, and told him: 'Perform seven recitations of it, and your prior deeds will come to fruition.' Accordingly, *sadguru* Śrī Kṛṣṇa Mahārāj remained there at *sant* Gorīyā Kākā's holy place, in the Mahādeva [Śiva] temple at Karhi for three or four months without informing anyone at home, and recited the *Bhāgavata* through seven times. There he had a vision of

Śaṅkara [Śiva] [telling him:] ‘The banks of the Gaṅgā (the Godāvarī riverbank) are a place of holy work (*karmabhūmi*).’ After that he returned to the village. (The reader must note that we do not know to whom he gave this above-mentioned blessed book on account of his renunciatory disposition.) (Selukar 2000: 138).<sup>14</sup>

Several points should be noted here. First, the depiction of Krishna Selukar as a *puer senex*, a child with an adult’s piety and maturity, is a common hagiographical motif attested around the world, especially in accounts of future ascetics and monks. The same, of course, is true of the divine visions. In each case, the deity grants a vision to Selukar’s father while he is in the god’s temple. In the first vision, Datta hands down an actual manuscript (*hast-likhit*) of the *Bhāgavata*, the absence of which today is attributed to Selukar’s renunciatory habit of giving things away!

By following Datta’s instructions, Krishna Selukar wins a second vision, this time of Śiva. Śiva proclaims to him the sanctity of the Godāvarī riverbank as a ‘ground for holy work.’ The use of the name ‘Gaṅgā’ to denote the Godāvarī, one of the main rivers of Maharashtra, is certainly meant to superimpose the Sanskrit literary fame of the river that waters the old Brāhmaṇical heartland, Āryāvarta, on this regionally beloved stream. As we shall see, the particular ‘work’ (*karma*) that he will perform there is Vedic *yajña*, which is often referred to simply as *karman* in Sanskrit texts. From the age of twenty-seven, he began performing the sequence of rites ‘on the banks of pure mother Godā,’ climaxing in a grand *soma yajña*:

At that time, wise priests from Kāśī [Varanasi] had come to [officiate at] the sacrifice. For seventeen days, a crowd of two hundred to three hundred thousand people were continuously being fed. Today, the crowd that had gone to that sacrifice tell [how] at that sacrifice the person of Śrī Nijaraṅgī [Raṅganātha Svāmī] was present in form for seventeen days, in the garb of a holy man, keeping silence (Selukar 2000: 139).

This scenario vividly juxtaposes ascetic and householder values: Even as a married Krishna Selukar puts on a dramatic display of munificence and ritual patronage, the quasi-ascetic Raṅganātha appears miraculously to preside, austere and silent, over the whole affair. Years of ‘continuous worship of Yajña-Nārāyaṇa [Viṣṇu as Sacrificial Rite] on the banks of the Godāvarī’ are capped with a pilgrimage to Varanasi on foot (Selukar 2000: 139), an ascetic feat that draws attention yet again to the Sanskrit scriptural (and thus pan-Indian) religious context of Selukar’s piety. Further, the sanctity of the region is

guaranteed by the repeated invocation of the primordial holy land.

### THE ĀRYA SAMĀJ AND THE FIGHT FOR MARĀṬHVĀḌĀ

Besides the various branches of the Datta *sampradāya*, another key factor in the Maharashtrian revival is the Ārya Samāj. Yudhishtir Mimamsak's attendance at Mahadev Vishnu Apte's 1978 vegetarian *yajña* demonstrates the Ārya Samāj's interest in encouraging *śrauta* practice in the region. The Samāj has remained deeply involved in Selukar's performances, too. They mount an informational display at each of his major rituals, and Samājist preachers speak to his audiences on the value and meaning of the Veda. A portrait of Dayānanda is placed among those of others in Selukar's eclectic *paramparā* (including Datta, Paraśurāma, Śāṅkara, and Raṅganātha). Members of the Samāj are listed as advisors in his publications as well. This involvement reaffirms Dayānanda's conviction that India's return to greatness depends on a revival of Vedic Dharma (more precisely, on a revival of the synthesis of sacrificial ritualism and introspective asceticism canonized in the *Mānava Dharma Śāstra*, ca. second century CE). Although he acknowledged the multiple priestly offices of the *śrauta* system, Dayānanda (1971) himself seemed to regard the simpler 'domestic' (*gṛhya*) ritual as the model he wished to see universally adopted by the pure castes, thus emphasizing the *homa* (set of libations of butter fat accompanied by recitations of *mantras*) rather than the more complicated services of the three-fire (*śrauta, vaitānika*) 'high' cult. Image-based worship, on the other hand, represented to him everything that was wrong with Hindu piety.

There is another factor that should be taken into account in assessing the significance of the Ārya presence in Gangakhed and in all Selukar's performances: In this region, the Samāj has had a prominent role in confronting Muslims with Hindu cultural dominance, attempting to convert Muslims 'back' to a Hindu identity, and forestalling potential conversions of low-caste groups to Islam or Christianity by 'purifying' members of castes deemed impure according to the classical *varṇāśrama dharma*. For these purposes, the Samāj developed a rite of conversion called *śuddhi* ('purification'), employed by staff missionaries to reaffirm the Hindu identity of individuals and, later, of groups who had earlier converted to Islam or Christianity; the rite was then extended to any Indian Muslims or Christians and to Dalits (to render them 'pure' Hindus). This practice constituted a deliberate challenge to other religious communities

and generated opposition among other Hindus as well (Jones 1989: 100–101, 195–98).<sup>15</sup> When, in 1921, Muslims in Kerala reacted to Mohandas K. Gandhi's first noncooperation campaign by destroying Hindu temples and forcing Hindus to convert, the Samāj not only sent missionaries to perform *śuddhi* but also provided aid to rebuild Hindu temples. The desire to consolidate a unified Hindu bloc amid the tensions between Hindus and Muslims in the decades preceding Independence thus gave the Samāj a new tolerance for image worship (Jones 1989: 194–95).

Gangakhed is part of Marāṭhvādā, the Marathi-language region that belonged, from the late eighteenth century, to the territories of the Nizām of Hyderabad, a longtime Muslim rival of the Brāhmaṇa Peśvās of Pune. The Ārya Samāj, as early as 1939, organized a *satyāgraha* (civil disobedience) against the Nizām's government that led to mass arrests of activists. When, in 1947, the Nizām refused to cede his lands to independent India as the other princely rulers had done, the Ārya Samāj, led by Rāmānanda Tīrtha, openly protested, promoting the public singing of the new Indian anthem, 'Jana Gaṇa Mana.' The Nizām's rebellious state did not fall until Indian forces marched on Hyderabad in 1948. Later, in 1983 and 1984, the Samāj appears to have had a hand in the rioting sparked by Gaṇapati processions through Muslim areas of the city. Tension surrounding Gaṇapati processions is also attested in the period of the Nizām.<sup>16</sup> Gangakhed itself has not been spared; disturbances occurred there during the 1994 Gaṇapati festival season.

Selukar's enterprise follows in the wake of the Samāj's mission but magnifies the ritual dimension. Rather than settling for the relatively simple *homa*, he calls for people to embrace the full panoply of rites: to make *śrauta* practice a way of life or else to support those who do. Each major performance includes an occasion for initiating groups of boys into traditional Veda study that can now be conducted at his school in Gangakhed. Selukar does not openly employ the confrontational approach of the Samāj, nor does he dwell on the threat widely said to be posed by Muslims or Christians in India today. But he does echo much of the common rhetoric of the Hindu nationalist camp, including the use of V. D. Savarkar's (1969) term *hindutva* (literally Hinduness). Independence alone was not enough to bring about cultural renewal. A 'united Hindu nation' (*sambaddh hiṇdurāṣṭra*) can be brought about 'only when society lives within the bounds of the Mother Veda's Dharma' (Selukar 2000: 138).

Selukar's work is meant to be seen precisely as religious and social, not political. He is said to have become disgusted with public life after Independence and to have 'renounced politics' (*rājkāraṇ sanyās ghetlā*; Selukar 1992: [30]), just as the *saṃnyāsī* renounces earthly ambitions for the sake of spiritual perfection. The self-disciplined Vedic sacrificer, he says, performs his offerings

publicly, 'so that the institution of sacrifice might be revived' (Selukar 1992: [29]) and, with it, the nation itself. Hindu nationalists since the last century have argued that India must overcome its effeminate passivity, the result of long being subject to foreign domination: by the Muslims, by the British, and (so one hears today) by the undue influence of the Muslim minority. Selukar's literature appeals to this assumption, albeit in a muted manner, when it affirms that Vedic ritual evokes divine grace and removes 'weakness of heart' (Selukar 2000: 138). The biography of Selukar provides him with 'freedom-fighter' credentials: anecdotes are told of his skill as a wrestler and bodybuilder, his activities in the underground during the time of the Niṣāṃ, and his defiance of and thrilling escape from the Raṣākārs.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, his publications present the Marāṭha warrior-king Śivājī as the embodiment of Vedic 'values,' while his nemesis, Awrangzīb, belongs to 'the demons,' in the thrall of the senses and the passions.

Yet, in person, Selukar denies any caste prejudice or anti-Muslim dogma (conversations, Gangakhed, February and March 1992; interview, Pune, 22 July 1998). He insists that his *pāṭhaśālā* is open to anyone with the will and ability to study Veda; in practice, this means Brāhmaṇas, and such schools are seen as a valuable resource for poor Brāhmaṇas. More persuasive is the fact that he has had a noted Muslim sitarist, Usman Khan of Pune, perform at two of his sacrifices, going so far as to embrace him on stage and declare him a 'Brāhmaṇa' in spirit. Khan affirms Selukar's sincerity in this regard and was touched by the gesture (interview, Pune, 15 September 1988).

### YAJÑA AS TRADITIONAL VALUES

In the Selukarite literature, one reads repeatedly of Vedic 'culture' or 'values' (*samskār*). By this is meant a learned respect for the importance of dedication to Vedic practice and all that it stands for in this context:

For two dozen years, his father, the learned Eknātha, had studied two Vedas in Kāśī itself. For this reason, *sadguru* Kṛṣṇa Māulī's childhood was passed in the bosom of Mother Veda. His family was born to great wealth, but on account of their pure, dispassionate nature, his mother and father spent all their time in the work of reciting Vedic *mantras*, sacrificing, pilgrimage, and the like. Consequently, the good values of Mother Veda were firmly instilled in Śrī Kṛṣṇa Māulī. Who but a fallen *yogī* would be born in such a supremely pure family! (Selukar 2000: 138–39).<sup>19</sup>

The ethos of the *Bhagavad Gītā* is evident here: Krishna Selukar's parents are 'in the world,' but they do not crave the world's material rewards; they maintain the ascetic's equanimity in the face of pleasures and sorrows. They give freely of their wealth. Recall that Kṛṣṇa would simply give away the miraculous manuscript he received from Datta 'on account of his renunciatory disposition' (*tyāmcyā tyāgī vṛttimuleṃ*). When he, in turn, marries, he does it only 'in accordance with his mother's wish,' out of duty (Selukar 2000: 138), not out of desire for the pleasures of married life. Indeed, the newlyweds 'very early abandoned their household riches' (Selukar 2000: 138). Ranganath Selukar's life mirrors that of his father. 'The divine values of his mother's renunciatory life, of rigorous dispassion and extreme self-control' took root in him (Selukar 1992: [29]). He exhibited his father's compassion and altruism, opening his doors to the unfortunate and giving away the clothes off his back.

These anecdotes exemplify the three principles that Selukar derives from the practice of Vedic ritual itself. A fairly standard presentation of these principles (in Marathi or Hindi) is included in most his publications. A representative example is the following:

Nowadays there is a market in arbitrary, non-Vedic sacrifices that are beginning to appear everywhere. For this reason, for the sake of supporting human society, we are forgetting the true Vedic sacrifices that were set forth on a scientific basis [that is, as an adjunct to science].

The business of sacrifice is not merely to burn *ghī* and grains like sesame; rather the meaning of sacrifice is worship of the gods, organization, and giving (renouncing), for the sake of supporting society—for instance, indicating values.

1. Worship of the gods (*devpūjā*): Worship of the gods is service—showing hospitality and honor—to the powers (deities) who illumine all and to the ideal, great men who give divine inspiration to human society.

2. Organizing (*saṃghaṭan*): Organizing is to organize good people who would work for progress in human society.

3. Giving (*dān*): We ourselves are not masters of any kind of wealth; giving, on the contrary, is expending such wealth in the common interest, in order to maintain balance in the social, national economy.

We are entrusted with that wealth, and we are responsible members of the national economy. Hence the inevitable greatness of giving. Giving also means renouncing (*tyāg*). Giving on account of lofty duty is renouncing (Anonymous nd: 4).

Let us examine these claims. To begin with the latter ones, there is no doubt

that Vedic ritual, famous for its complexity and multiple priestly roles, is a good exercise in organization and cooperation. Selukar would like to insist that the organization that goes into running a sacrificial ritual can be transferred to society at large. Second, Vedic rituals do, indeed, call for giving: the oblations themselves are offered to the gods and then shared in the context of the ceremonies; afterwards, gifts are distributed to the priests and perhaps to other deserving recipients. In the classical model, all of these gifts are given by the *yajamāna*, the sponsor, who bears all the costs of the ritual and stands personally to reap any benefits. In the case of the oblation, the sponsor must make a formal oath of renouncing (*tyāga*) the substance. Yet it is not clear how this ritualized giving brings about a public ethic of disinterested generosity. However, in Selukar's rites, in which he is the official *yajamāna*, the general populace not only has the opportunity but is actively encouraged to contribute to the sacrificial enterprise through small donations. According to a *pūjā*-based interpretation of the ritual, all donors jointly share in the merit of offering and in the rewards of God's grace, which take tangible form in the *mahāprasāda*, the food served daily to all in attendance. Insofar as the enterprise itself is supposed to be for the public good, this might be seen as realizing the third premise.

The first principle, however, is the most interesting. On the one hand, Selukar clearly wants to emphasize that the Vedic ritual is *pūjā* to the gods. I have elsewhere discussed at length the fact that most of the people who come to observe Selukar's ceremonies have little or no idea what Vedic ritual entails, and Selukar has taken some pains to ensure that it may be recognized as a form of *pūjā*, the post-Vedic paradigm of ritual worship (Lubin 2001). Here he states this explicitly. Yet, in the same breath, he secularizes the act by defining *pūjā* as service (*sevā*), that is, 'showing hospitality and honor' to 'powers' (an abstraction glossed parenthetically as 'deities') and to exemplary men (such as himself, no doubt). Selukar's ritual exegesis thus begins to sound like the philosophy of the Rotary Club. The secular language of social ethics is intended to give the impression that this practice, however ancient and traditional, is also in tune with the best aspects of modern secularism. This part of the argument sounds like the liberal, rationalist apologetics often heard in the West: religion is good because it is good for society. Yet the argument in this case is made to promote a return to 'high-cult' orthodoxy.

### YAJÑA AS SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

A similar tactic is to present the Vedic ritual as scientific in essence. The same

pamphlet asserts:

The four monthly sacrifice shows the temporal junctures in the sequence of seasons. This medicinal sacrifice is accepted as maintaining the good health of human life. Disease is more aggressive during the transitional periods between summer, monsoon, and winter. Crowds of people afflicted with illness tend to form at doctors' offices during just this period between two seasons, and those [doctors] make a lot of money. Hence a curative or medicinal sacrifice is undertaken in this transitional time (Anonymous nd: 3).

Selukar and those who write in his publications have long emphasized what they view as the scientific nature of Vedic ritual. 'The structure of the *yajña* is a guidebook to geometry,' begins an essay entitled '*Yajña* theory viewed from the scientific perspective,' by S. N. Bhavasar (2000).<sup>19</sup> Noting that the layout of the ritual space involves precise measurements in three dimensions, he proceeds briskly to find here 'scalars, vectors, tensors,...symmetry, group theory and set theories,...space-time curvature [*sic*],...reletivistic [*sic*] quantum mechanics,... space-time motion, statistics, and dynamics,...elevated, spherical coordinate system,' and so forth (using the English words in the Marathi text; all of those quoted occur in just one paragraph).

The claim that Vedic ritual performance can bring about rain, health, and other tangible benefits was voiced by Dayānanda<sup>20</sup> and, indeed, has ancient roots. The idea is developed in Puṇe Śāhar meṃ honevālā Vaidika Paddhati kā Aitihāsik Mahāyajña, a pamphlet issued as an advertisement for Selukar's 1989 *pāñcarātra* sacrifice held in Pune. The section in that pamphlet entitled 'The construction of science out of sacrifice' begins: 'Out of the sacrifices which take place over twelve years, the disciplines of astrology, geometry, astronomy, cosmology (*sāṃkhyā*), and metaphysics were constructed. Hence, we consider it proper to call the institution of sacrifice the mother who gives birth to science' (Anonymous nd: 8). At the 1992 sacrifice, I was told that a team of researchers from Delhi were coming to measure atmospheric changes during the ritual, in order to confirm the organizers' claim that the *mantras* and smoke have the effect of purifying the air and causing precipitation.<sup>21</sup>

All the scientific claims put forward by Selukar are refuted in a Marathi leaflet, Aindra Saptāha Somayāg var Bahiṣkār Ṭākā, distributed in Gangakhed at the time of the April 1992 ritual:

**BOYCOTT THE AINDRASAPTĀHA-SOMA SACRIFICE**

which reinforces caste doctrine, reinforces inequality between women and men, encourages blind faith and fatalism, leads to extravagance, and is obsolete.

Call of the Anti-Sacrifice Action Committee

Brothers and Sisters:

Currently in the city of Gangakhed an 'aindrasaptāha-soma-yajña' is being held. Please consider:

1. Although they claim to be performing this sacrifice for the welfare of all humanity, the real picture and motive is quite different. Under the pretext of sacrifice, they aim to impress on society the preeminence of the priestly class, the superiority of Brāhmaṇahood, and fatalism. This is an effort to serve the Brāhmaṇa in the name of following Dharma. 'Sacrifice,' being a costly ritual, thereby effects the mental and economic exploitation of the common people and is a conspiracy to uphold the interests of a handful of people. The ancient sacrifices were for the welfare and protection of pleasure-loving, gluttonous, 'kings' endowed with riches. This custom existed for the purpose of maintaining the superiority of the priest in the royal court.

Now this effort is being made to revive the obsolete custom of 'sacrifice,' which encourages blind faith, in order to affirm 'Brāhmaṇahood' and to consolidate the interests of a handful of people.

2. Because of this sacrifice, the caste-oriented mentality and system is being consolidated....There is an effort to reinforce the inequity between women and men. The so-called abbots of monasteries and holy centers of the Hindu Dharma, who support the custom of *satī*, keep women away from the offerings in the name of purity in the sacrifice. As for abandoned, widowed, or divorced women, they are made to listen to the discourse while remaining at a distance during the sacrifice.

3. The organizers are claiming to eliminate pollution in the atmosphere by burning *ghī*, sandalwood, and firewood and, in the name of research, are misleading people. In fact, this has nothing to do with research because when you burn any wood only carbon dioxide is produced; and in order to burn wood, oxygen is used. Even if one supposes that there is something worth doing research about, what need is there for reciting formulas, for performing the sacrificial ritual, for affirming the superiority of Brāhmaṇahood? For this purpose laboratories of physics and chemistry are available. This is throwing dust in the name of research.

4. In this 'sacrifice' roughly ten million rupees are being spent. In order to purge their sins, people who have 'black money' [money acquired through corruption] spend vast sums of unaccounted-for money to get a 'clean chit' (*pramāṇpatra*), only to loot the poor again: they then extract money from the poor and needy under the pretext that by donating money they will earn merit. All this money is being put into the limitless expenses. This is a big waste of

money.

In a 'Hindu' society, in a Dharma, where the number of people who are still illiterate is enormous; where the number of dowry deaths is increasing; where there are not even minimal toilet facilities available to women, no drinking water available to famine-stricken people, no fodder for animals; where unemployed laborers are being forced to move out of their homes—in such a situation, what will be accomplished by performing a 'sacrifice' in which ten million rupees will be spent? Demand an explanation for this unlimited expense.

You are invited to:

1. Boycott this sacrifice which strengthens communalism, encourages blind faith and fatalism, and leads to extravagance.
2. Be aware of the lies being spread about the purpose of the sacrifice.
3. With regard to these matters, think quietly using your own judgment and join the revolutionary movement of the Anti-Sacrifice Action Committee.

Sincerely,  
Yajña Virodhī Kṛtī Samitī

This leaflet brings together most of the explicit claims Selukar makes for the value of Vedic practice and refutes them one by one. It argues that *yajña*, far from being morally or socially salutary, is socially divisive, a throwback to the worst aspects of India's past (the Brāhmaṇa-ruler nexus and its oppression of the lower castes and of women); that it has none of the scientific or ecological benefits that are attributed to it; that it is wasteful; and that it is religiously inauthentic ('blind faith,' 'superstition'). Set side-by-side, the two sides of this argument represented here represent contrasting appropriations of the legitimating power of science and reason in post-colonial India (Prakash 1999).

## CONCLUSION

Like Gajanan Maharaj of Akkalkot and Kākā Mahārāj of the Śrī Digambaradāsa Maṭha in Pune, Selukar's Vedic revivalism draws on the traditions of the Brāhmaṇical Datta *sampradāyas* and Marāṭha *bhakti*, reinforced by the modernist religious ideals of the Ārya Samāj.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Selukar uses novel organizational strategies and rhetoric to popularize an archaic and esoteric practice. Of all the Vedic revivals India has been witnessing, Selukar's is one of the more ambitious ones. Relentlessly public, it is also very thorough in its attempt to

reproduce the priestly Vedic ritual as fully and authentically as possible (albeit without animal victims). Where earlier neo-Vedisms have tended to simplify the rites for the sake of popularizing the practice, Selukar's aim is to encourage an exemplary few to perform on behalf of the many, so that the many may come to understand the language of *yajña* once more. The very performances themselves are supposed to have a direct effect on the moral and material condition of the nation.

Although already in his eighties, Selukar has been able, in the last few years, to establish some durable institutions in Gangakhed that may continue after his death. He has personally introduced a few younger men into the life of the *āhitāgni* (*śrauta* sacrificer), and these, in turn, are teaching and inspiring others to learn to serve as priests and sponsors. Principal among these is Sudhakar Digambar Kulkarni of Warje Malwadi, Pune, who kindled his ritual fires (performed *ādhāna*) in 1998 during Selukar's *soma* ritual at Hardwar and who has been offering the new-and-full-moon rites since then. While Kulkarni regards Selukar as his *guru*, Nana Maharaj Kale of Barsi, who also 'took *ādhāna*' from Selukar in 1981, has rejected Selukar's practice of substituting pots of *ghī* (*ājya-paśu*) for live beasts and, since 1994, has used actual animals where they are called for in his offerings. Kālē claims to have reverted to the use of animal victims because he thereby experiences a greater spiritual efficacy and power.<sup>23</sup> Kulkarni's performance of a *soma* offering at Barsi on May 7–12, 1998, was meant to reassert Selukar's model.<sup>24</sup>

In the context of the rise to power of the Bharatiya Janata party, one may wonder to what degree Selukar's religious vision is shaped by Hindu nationalist politics. The evidence here is ambiguous. His language of inclusiveness, if artificial in many ways, is persistent. Muslim rulers, the Nizām and the Raṣākārs principally, are demonized, but there is no general anti-Muslim language directed at contemporary Muslims. Selukar seems genuinely willing to accommodate 'honorary Hindus' in his idea of an India governed by Vedic Dharma; yet he is also at ease with the ideologues of Hindu nationalism: the *Satra-smaraṇam* includes a photograph of him bestowing a shawl upon Ashok Singhal, executive president of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, one of the groups most widely associated with anti-Muslim rhetoric. On the other hand, there are no overt references in Selukar's literature to the Pariṣad or its sister organizations, the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or the Bajrang Dal.

Although his school appeals mainly to poor local Brāhmaṇas who see new opportunity in Vedic revival, Selukar's publications appear to target an audience of shopkeepers, small business people, and professionals of rural Maharashtra. A valuable index of his supporters is the range of people who purchase advertising space in his commemorative volumes. The usual medium of communication is

Marathi; English or Hindi is used only by the occasional scholarly or non-Maharashtrian contributor. There is little attempt to reach urban intellectuals or the Westernized elite. His call for a return to Vedic ritual derives its particular appeal from combining the language of traditional values and the cachet of modern science. His Vedic ritual, in comparison with a run-of-the-mill *pūjā*, manages to look at once authentic and inscrutable. The ritual technicalities are freighted with the same sense of mysterious importance and power that is attached to medicine, computers, and nuclear physics.

Thus, Selukar's Vedic sacrifices make a two-pronged claim of authenticity. From the ideological point of view, they dramatically 'bring alive' an ancient tradition that has had an aura of distant splendor since eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Indologists 'discovered' it, and Indian scholars and reformers presented it as emblematic of a golden age in India that could inspire ethnic pride and provide a basis for national identity and cultural renewal. Yet, from another angle, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century romanticizing of the 'Vedic civilization' tended to emphasize its 'spiritual' attainments and to view the priestly ritualism as an Achilles's heel that ended up leading the culture into corruption, through syncretism with idolatrous and superstitious Śūdras. Selukar's project departs from this modernist attitude by reaffirming the power of priestly ritualism (the elision of the animal offerings being the major concession to post-Vedic Brāhmaṇical—and 'modern'!—sensibilities). This enthusiastic ritualism endows his piety with a second form of authenticity that carries more weight with rural, less Westernized populations as well as with a middle class eager to 'apply' Vedic principles in a tangible way. This view is equally modernist in the sense that it seeks to legitimate religion in rationalist terms: *Yajña* is to be treated as a technology embodying the wisdom of the Veda in practical, 'scientific' form. This rather utilitarian view of *yajña* reproduces claims actually made in the later ritual literature (*sūtras*, *prayogas*, and *vidhānas*); in the last two decades, in fact, there has been a spate of 'Vedic' sacrifices held for such purposes as reproductive fertility.<sup>25</sup>

Selukar's embrace of ritual, whatever his motivations, has been successful in some respects. As a grandiose and exotic spectacle, it has attracted and held the attention of the rural Maharashtrian populace, who turn out in large numbers at his sacrifices. But the appeal of this enterprise is so far limited to his immediate region and is bound up with his personal credentials as a *guru* in the Maharashtrian tradition of Datta and Rāṅganātha Svāmī. He has had trouble attracting attention elsewhere in India, where he must rely on the support of the Ārya Samāj, whose intellectualist vision of Veda falls flat with the uneducated, and they have had to condescend to championing Hindu temple piety and communalist activism to attract interest.

Selukar's opponents direct against him the same sorts of arguments that Western (Protestant and Marxist) observers leveled at the Vedic priesthood and at Hindu temple traditions: that the Brāhmaṇa priests are cynical humbugs, that ritual is hocus-pocus and superstition, and that priestly ideology is an elite conspiracy against the poor and uneducated. Both sides in the debate between tradition and reform lay claim to reason. For the protestors, 'modern' reason dictates secularism. In Selukar's view, Vedism was modern from the start; he has projected neo-Hindu values into the Vedic primordium, just as both Buddhist and Brāhmaṇical works present their own ideals as a revival of those of the earliest Brāhmaṇa sages.<sup>26</sup> Selukar further modernizes the tradition by employing twentieth-century mass media (print, audio, video), as well as Protestant-style preaching (*veda pracāra*), to 'raise public consciousness.' Even the sacrificial arena is marked out in the fashion of a museum for the sake of public education. In Gangakhed, Selukar has established both a traditional *pāṭhaśālā* to train boys in Vedic practice and a Vedic Sacrifice Research Center that produces computer-printed ritual manuals. The gambit of positioning ritualism as scientific (and thus 'modern') follows a pattern of contemporary efforts to find practical applications for Vedic and Sanskrit traditions: witness the string of books on Vedic mathematics and Sanskrit as a computer language and efforts to apply Vedic principles in politics.<sup>27</sup> Among these, however, Selukar's modern Vedic Dharma manages to look the most traditional and attracts people from the widest range of social positions because of its emphasis on authentic ('othodox') ritual practice.

### Notes

1. This research was supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Institute of Indian Studies. I am also grateful to Frank Conlon, John Stratton Hawley, Philip Lutgendorf, Laurie Patton, and Joanne Waghorne for comments and suggestions.

2. This ritual tradition goes back ultimately to the *R̥g Veda* (ca. 1500–1200 BCE), taking its classical shape a few centuries later in the priestly ritual codes (*Kalpa Sūtras*). The 'high' priestly cult (called *śrauta*, 'based on *śruti*, 'revelation) was well known in North India by the time of Buddha, when newly developing urban trade centers in the Gaṅgā valley brought new social and political structures and new patterns of patronage. The Brāhmaṇical literature of this period records the gradual emergence of classical Hindu piety, in which the Vedic fire tradition plays a reduced and increasingly subordinate role as a marker of extreme orthodoxy. In subsequent times, 'Veda' has become an open category

that has been redefined by innumerable religious thinkers and movements (see Renou 1965; see also Smith 1989).

3. For surveys of modern Vedic practitioners, see Kashikar (1958) and Kashikar and Parpola (1983); more recently, fieldwork on the Vaidika Brāhmaṇas of the Godāvārī delta in Andhra Pradesh has been published by Knipe (1997), and Smith (2001) has surveyed the situation in Maharashtra and Goa. Vaidika ritualists can also be found, for instance, in *agrahāras* in Konneri Rajapuram, Sengalipuram, and Tippirajapuram, all in the vicinity of Kumbakonam, in the Cauvery delta.

4. This was done, for example, by Ananthanarayana Dikshitar of the *agrahāra* in Musiri, Tamilnadu; I thank Paṇḍita Śrīvatsaraṅgācārya of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient, Centre de Pondichéry, for this information. Knipe (1997) also reports on the problems *vaidika* ritualists face from opponents of animal slaughter.

5. I have discussed the ritual dimensions of the 1992 event in detail in Lubin (2001); on Selukar, see also Smith (1987: 49–51, especially n170, 2001: 451–53, 461).

6. This class comprises the most routine rites and calls for offerings of various milk products and grain preparations. All *soma* rites, the highest and most complex ceremonies, involve subsidiary offerings of animals as well as the main offerings of the pressed *soma* juice.

7. Mimamsak subsequently maintained contact with Selukar. A letter from him (printed in the souvenir booklet from the 1992 Gangakhed sacrifice) praises Selukar for managing to perform the costly Vedic rites while living the frugal life of a renunciant (Selukar 1992: [7]); a photograph of Selukar bestowing a shawl on him appears in Dharmadhikari, Ranade, Thite, and Kulkarni (2000), in plates between pages 136 and 137.

8. It is an academic center for the study of Vedic texts and the documenting of Vedic ritual practice.

9. Most of the information on Vishvanatha comes from the anonymously authored 'Biography of Brahmarshi Shri Aravattur Seetharama Viswanatha Srouthi' (2000: 202–5; see also Smith 2001: 450–53).

10. An ascetic who has not only renounced householder life and ritual *yajñas* but who has gone so far as to discard all ritual markers and caste purity rules.

11. Datta is mentioned in the *Lilācaritra* (*ekāṅka* 1, *pūrvārdha* 43, 62, 312, *uttarārdha* 113, 284) and the *Sūtrapāṭha* (282–85).

12. The *paramparā* of the Svarūpa *sampradāya* is: Samarth Akkalkot Mahārāj (d. 1878) > Rāmānand Bīḍakar Mahārāj > Vāsudevānand Sarasvatī Mahārāj (= Raosaheb Sahasrabuddhe, 1854–1914) > Digambaradās Mahārāj (= Vitthalrao Joshi) > Kākā Mahārāj (= Ashokrao R. Joshi, currently enthroned). Vāsu-

devānand is the author of several works in Sanskrit and Marathi on Datta, including the *Datta Purāṇa*, *Guru Saṅghitā*, and *Gurudevacaritra*.

13. *Paramparās* are offered by Bhave (1963: 338) and Dhare (1999: 63–65). The tradition is said to include converts from Islam, including one from Qādirī Ṣūfism, but while devotional traditions in this period involved considerable exchange and mutual receptivity among Hindus and Muslims, one should not simply characterize the Ānanda *sampradāya* as an ‘Islamic version of Datta *sampradāya*’ as Kulkarnee does (1989: 203), cited approvingly by Rigopoulos (1998: 116).

14. All translations from Hindi, Marathi, and Sanskrit in this paper are mine.

15. Such conversions remain controversial today, as is evident from the furor surrounding the allegedly ‘deceptive’ or ‘forced’ conversion of Abdul Manaf and his family in Calcutta on July 2, 2000, see ‘Converted Muslim family alleges deception’ (2000) and ‘Arya Samaj denies role in conversion’ (2000). Given the Hindu right’s sweeping condemnation of conversion in general, the Ārya Samāj and the Vishva Hindu Parishad are at pains to represent their efforts as ‘reconversion’ or ‘purification.’

16. For the Hyderabad government’s perspective, see *The Arya Samaj in Hyderabad* ([1938?]: 42–46).

17. The Razākārs were a paramilitary group founded by Kasim Razvi, ostensibly to defend the Nizām’s state. An outgrowth of the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, they are demonized in Selukar’s literature, as well as in standard (Indian) histories of the period, as having terrorized the Hindu populace; for sympathetic (Pakistani) views of this militia as defending against raiding parties from India, see Ali (1962) and Ahmad (1995). It should be noted that I have found no reference to Selukar in standard histories of the period, such as Bhalerav (1987), Kulkarni (1991), and Parlikar (1988).

18. Here the author quotes *Bhagavad Gītā* (6.41–42) on the *yogabhraṣṭa* (the *yogī* who has faltered in his rigorous self-control). The implication is that Krishna Dikshit is such a spiritually advanced householder that he must have been a *yogī* in his last life who slipped just once from his discipline and was reborn at the pinnacle of householder society.

19. Bhavasar, who is on the faculty of the Department of Space Sciences at the University of Pune, is now part of a research project funded by the Indian Ministry of Defence to develop and apply military technologies supposedly encoded in Kauṭilya’s *Arthaśāstra* (Rahman 2002).

20. In a letter of September 8, 1883, to Jasvant Singh, the Mahārāja of Jodhpur, Dayānanda recommended regular *homa* performances to increase rainfall and reduce diseases in the state (printed in Mimamsak 1955: 463–65, cited in Jordens 1978: 238).

21. Laurie Patton reports that at the Nanded sacrifice later in 1992, one Mr. Agnihotri, who claimed to belong to a tradition of ‘live *samādhi*’ practice, was collecting smoke from *yajñās* in jars in order to measure the purity of the air after sacrifice. These ‘scientific experiments’ were presented as integral to his ascetism (personal communication, 15 October 2001).

22. Smith (2000) has recently written about another *Veda-bhakti* synthesis that shows many similarities to Selukar’s project. In that case, the prominent Puṣṭimārga leader, Gosvama Gokulotsavaja of Indore, has been performing *śrauta* sacrifices since 1991; with the help of a South Indian priest (Agnihotram Ramanuja Tatacariar of Madras), he organized the first overseas *soma* sacrifice, in London, in 1996. Smith’s discussion, which appeared too late for me to refer to it in Lubin 2001, describes many of the factors that I explained as para-ritual elements in the ‘spectacle.’ There too, the spectacle, in encompassing the Vedic ritual, effectively redefined it in terms of Vaiṣṇava theological categories, *pūjā*-based ritual idioms, and public edification. Gokulotsavaji also held an *agniṣṭoma* in New York City in 2000 (Smith 2001: 456).

23. For details on Nānā Kāḷe and his sons, see Smith (2001: 454–58). Smith provides a list of *agnihotrins* in Maharashtra, to which Sudhakar Kulkani can be added. Laurie Patton, who is writing on Kāḷe, also notes that his yogic studies have played a role in shaping his views on Vedic practice.

24. R. P. Goswami, former director of the Sanskrit Library in the Centre for the Advanced Study of Sanskrit at Pune University (personal communication, 9 August 1998). Patton notes an echo of the ancient pattern of ‘competitive sacrifices’ in the Brāhmaṇa literature (personal communication, 15 October 2001).

25. In this he is not out of line with the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā school’s theory of the mechanistic operation of ritual, but he differs in positing immediate, mundane results (as opposed to results that are *apūrva*, not visible in this life).

26. See, for example, *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* 2.5, which describes speaking and breathing as a continuous ‘internal *agnihotra* [fire offering],’ adding: ‘Knowing this, the ancients did not perform the [ritual] *agnihotra*.’ Likewise, the *Brahmadharmika Sutta* (*Sutta Nipāta* 2.7) asserts that the ancient Brāhmaṇas practiced only Veda study and asceticism and never sacrificed cows.

27. See Ajeya Bharat party *Manifesto* (<http://www.ajeyabharat.com/>).

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