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Vrātya and *vrātīna* in Sanskrit Grammatical Sources*

ABSTRACT: The present research aims at studying the derivation of *vrātya*- on the basis of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* [A] of Pāṇini and on the relevant commentaries, to understand the Vedic usage of this lexeme and to investigate the origin of the notion of violence linked by default with the Vrātya identity. After a general overview of *vrata*- and *vrāta*- lexemes, rule A 5.2.21 *vrātena jīvati* is used to derive *vrātīna*-, and the relevant commentaries *Mahābhāṣya* [M], *Kāśikāvṛtī* [KV], and *Siddhāntakaumudī* [SK], turn out to be useful in understanding the many nuances of *vrāta*-. The derivation of *vrātya*- appears more complicated; the proposal advanced here resorts to A 5.3.113 *vrātaḥphaṇor astriyām* to explain both *vrātyaḥ* (nom. sg.), i.e., the outstanding ascetic mentioned in *Śaunaka Atharvaveda-Saṃhitā* and in *Jaiminīya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa*, and the more widespread *vrātyāḥ* (nom. pl.). Instead, other authoritative etymologies advanced over this last century interpret *vrātya*- as deriving from *vrāta*- based on *vrata*- ('ritual vow') or are influenced by the late association of Vrātyas with a violent behaviour.

KEYWORDS: *vrātya*, *vrātīna*, Pāṇini, *vyākaraṇa*, grammatical commentaries

* All the translations are by the author, unless specifically stated.

1. Introduction

The topic of the present research is firstly the analysis of the derivation of the term *vrātīna-*, as described by the indigenous grammatical works; moreover, the word *vrātya-* is studied in accordance with the grammar of Pāṇini, trying to understand its possible derivation and, in this way, its final meaning. As is well known, *vrātya-* may be derived from *vrata-* “command, observance,” which is ultimately linked with the IE. **wer-* “to say” (Pokorny 1959: 1162). Pāṇini teaches four different rules mentioning the nominal stem *vrata-*; in three of them, it constitutes a semantic constraint for the output of the *sūtra*:

- 1) The first rule dealing with *vrata-* is A 3.2.40 *vāci yamo vrate* that prescribes the affix *KHaC* after the verbal stem *yam* “to curb, suppress” when this root co-occurs with nominal stems containing the word *vāc* “speech” as its object, and the derivate denotes *vrata* “ritual vow.”¹ For instance, *vāc-aṁ-yam-ā* “restrained in speech, silent (while observing a vow)” (Katre 1987: 233).
- 2) The second *sūtra* presenting the word *vrata-* is A 3.2.80 *vrate* that teaches the affix *ṆinI* after a verbal stem when the root co-occurs with a nominal stem ending in *sUP* and the derivate denotes *vrata* “ritual vow.”² For instance, *sthāṇḍila-śāy-in-* “sleeping on the bare ground (as a religious vow)” (Katre 1987: 245).
- 3) The aphorism A 4.2.15 *sthāṇḍilāc chayitari vrate* prescribes the *taddhita* affix *aṆ* after the nominal stem *sthāṇḍila* “bare ground” ending in the seventh case, provided the derivate denotes “agent of sleeping,” under the obligation of a ritual vow (*vrata*).³ For instance,

¹ A 3.2.40 *vāci yamo vrate* [*pratyayaḥ* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, *dhātoḥ* #3.1.91, *karmaṇi* #1, *khac* #38]: “The affix *KHaC* occurs after the verbal stem *yam* ‘to curb, suppress’ when the root co-occurs with a nominal stem containing *vāc* as its object, and the derivate denotes *vrata* ‘ritual vow’.”

² A 3.2.80 *vrate* [*pratyayaḥ* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, *dhātoḥ* #3.1.91, *supi* #4, *ṇiniḥ* #78]: “The affix *ṆinI* occurs after a verbal stem when the root co-occurs with a nominal stem ending in *sUP*, and the derivate denotes *vrata* ‘ritual vow’.”

³ A 4.2.15 *sthāṇḍilāc chayitari vrate* [*pratyayaḥ* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, *nyāpprātipadikāt* #4.1.1, *taddhitāḥ* #4.1.76, *tatra* #14]: “The *taddhita* affix *aṆ* (A 4.1.83)

sthāṇḍil-ā-h bhikṣú-h “an ascetic who sleeps on the bare ground (in fulfilment of a vow)” (Katre 1987: 405).

In the fourth rule, the nominal stem *vrata-* is the etymon for a causative verbal stem, provided that it plays the role of the *karman* “object” of the action of “doing”; rule A 3.1.21 teaches the optionality of the affix *NiC* denoting “doing, making” after the nominal stems listed in the *sūtra* (among which *vrata-* “ritual vow”), which indicate the object of doing.⁴ For instance, *vrat-áy-a-ti* “observes a vow” (Katre 1987: 185). Vasu (1905–1907: III: 357) considers that *vratayati* can also be translated as “eating” or “abstaining therefrom.”

Nevertheless, *vrātya-* may also be derived from *vrāta-* “multitude, troop, group, association” which seems to be linked with the IE. **wer-/*swer-* “to tie, line up” (Pokorny 1959: 1151). The lexeme *vrāta-* is mentioned only in two general aphorisms of Pāṇini, whereas it is commonly used in *Rgveda* [RV] and *Śaunaka Atharvaveda-Saṃhitā* [ŚS]. Mucciarelli (2015) focuses on the occurrences of the word *vrāta-* in both these works.⁵

RV 1.85.4 *vṛṣavrātāsaḥ*
mighty (bulls) squadrons of Maruts

RV 1.163.8 *vrātāsaḥ*
troops (gone after the horse)

occurs after the nominal stem *sthāṇḍila* ‘bare ground’ ending in the seventh case, provided the derivate denotes ‘agent of sleeping’, under the obligation of a religious vow (*vrata*).”

⁴ A 3.1.21 *muṇḍamiśraślakṣṇalavaṇavratavastrahalakalakṛtatūstebhyaḥ nic* [*pratyayaḥ* #1, *paraś ca* #2, *vā* #7, *karmaṇaḥ* #15, *kaṛaṇe* #17]: “The affix *NiC* optionally occurs to denote ‘doing, making’ after the nominal stems *muṇḍa* ‘bald, shaved’, *miśra* ‘mixed’, *ślakṣṇa* ‘smooth’, *lavaṇa* ‘salt, salty’, *vrata* ‘ritual vow’, *vastra* ‘cloth, attire’, *hala* ‘plough’, *kala* and *kṛta* ‘names of dice’, *tūsta* ‘cleaning, combining hair’, which indicate the object of doing.”

⁵ The list drawn up by Mucciarelli (2015) was only partial; for this reason, it has been integrated as follows hereunder.

- RV 3.26.6 *vr̥ātam-vr̥ātam gaṇám-gaṇam*
we beg (the Maruts) troop upon troop, band upon band
- RV 3.30.3 *mahávr̥ataḥ*
having a great troop (Indra)
- RV 5.53.11 *śárdham-śárdham va eṣām vr̥ātam-vr̥ātam gaṇám-gaṇam*
every swarm, every troop, every band (the Maruts)
- RV 6.75.9 *vr̥atasāhāḥ*
conquerors of hosts (forefathers)
- RV 9.14.2 *sábandhavaḥ páñca vr̥atāḥ*
the troops of five kinsmen (i.e., the hands with fingers of the Adhvaryus)
- RV 10.34.8 *tripañcāśáh kriṭati vr̥ata eṣām*
the troop of them counting three times fifty is playing (dice)
- RV 10.34.12 *yó vaḥ senān̄r maható gaṇásya rájā vr̥átasya prathamó babhūva*
the one who became the leader of your great arm, the first chieftain of the troop (i.e., a gambler whose troop consists of dice)
- RV 10.47.5 *bhadrávr̥atam*
(victory) having beneficial troops
- RV 10.57.5 *jīvám vr̥ātam*
troop of the living beings
- ŚS 2.9.2 *jīvánāṃ vr̥ātam*
troop of the living beings

It is already evident from the above list that in six occurrences a military character prevails, even though the martial imagery is also involved to depict hands (1x) and dice (2x). Maruts are the protagonists in three of these instances (note that two examples are associated with the term *gaṇa* and one denotes the group).

Mayrhofer (1986–2001: II, 575–576) accepts this second etymology of *vrātya-* from *vrāta-*, while Falk (1986: 17) combines both *vrata-* and *vrāta-* etymons, and maintains that *vrātya-* “member of a group” is derived from *vrāta-* “group,” which is so called because its leader adopts a certain “observational” behaviour, i.e., one or more *vratas*. Candotti and Pontillo (2015: 165–166) are more oriented to the etymology from *vrāta-* “group” on the basis of Patañjali’s commentary to rule A 5.2.21, and this is also the starting point of this research. In fact, the word *vrātina-* is precisely derived from *vrāta-* “group” + the affix *khañ* [= *-īna*] with the meaning of “the one who lives by the activity which is called *vrāta* (n).” Furthermore, Patañjali states that the masculine *vrāta-* identifies people coming from different castes, who do not have any fixed occupation and who subsist on their *sorties* as groups, without any ritual implication. On the basis of this definition, *vrātya-* will also be derived from *vrāta-*.

Pāṇini mentions the noun *vrāta-* in two rules, not dealing with the derivation of *vrātya-*, but equally useful in order to understand the general meaning behind this lexeme. The first aphorism is precisely A 5.2.21 *vrātena jīvati*, which shows the derivation of *vrātina-* “the one who lives by the group (*vrāta*),” largely discussed in section 2 together with the occurrences of *vrātina-* found in Sanskrit literature. Instead, the second rule involving the noun *vrāta-* is A 5.3.113 *vrātacphañor astriyām*, which will be used to account for the derivation of the nominal stem *vrātya-* in section 3.

The final purpose of the present research is to interpret the technical sources on this lexeme aiming at better understanding its Vedic usage and the traditionally assumed association between violence and *vrātya*. What is here obtained is a survey of the changes in the interpretation of the word *vrātya* (with or without a cultic implication) and their relationship with the normative lines drawn by the authors of grammar.

2. The derivation of *vrātīna*

The word *vrātīna-* is derived by means of the following rule:

A 5.2.21 *vrātena jīvati* [*pratyayah* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, ...*prātipadikāt* #4.1.1, *taddhitāḥ* #4.1.76, *khañ* #18]⁶

The *taddhita* affix *khañ* [= *-īna*] occurs after a nominal base form (that is, *vrāta*) to denote the sense of *jīvati* “lives by” the *vrāta* “group.”

For instance, *vrātena jīvati* = *vrāta-* + *khañ* = *vrātīna-* (see Katre 1987: 556). It is worth considering that a similar construction of instrumental case + *jīvati* is already present in A 4.4.12 *vetanādibhyo jīvati* [*tena* #2], always in the meaning of “lives by,”⁷ whereas the choice of translating *vrāta* generically as “group” is based on rule A 5.3.113 *vrātacphañor astriyām* (see section 3).⁸

Patañjali introduces the comment to rule A 5.2.21 by asking what *vrāta-* means (*vrātena jīvātīty ucyate kiṃ vrātaṃ nāma?*),⁹ and the answer is mentioned here as divided into three parts to make it easier to understand the following commentaries:

*nānājātīyā aniyatavrttaya utsedhajīvinaḥ saṃghā vrātāḥ. teṣāṃ karma—vrātam. vrātakarmaṇā jīvātīti—vrātīnaḥ*¹⁰

⁶ In this rule, the etymon of the *taddhita* is not expressed by the usual demonstrative pronoun, but directly by the unique noun to which the taught affix applies. In other words, Pāṇini uses here *vrātena jīvati* [*prātipadikāt khañ*], instead of *tena jīvati vrātāt khañ*.

⁷ A 4.4.12 *vetanādibhyo jīvati* [*pratyayah* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, *nyāprātipadikāt* #4.1.1, *taddhitāḥ* #4.1.76, *tena* #2, *ṭhak* #1]: “The *taddhita* affix *ṭhaK* occurs after nominal stems beginning with *vetana* ‘wages’, when they end in instrumental case and derivatives denote ‘...lives by’.”

⁸ A 5.3.113 *vrātacphañor astriyām* [*pratyayah* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, *nyāprātipadikāt* #4.1.1, *taddhitāḥ* #4.1.76, *ñyaḥ* #112]: “The *taddhita* affix *ñya* occurs after a nominal stem which denotes a *vrāta* ‘group’ or ends in the affix *Cphañ*, provided that the derived nominal stem is not feminine.”

⁹ *Mad A* 5.2.21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

- (a) People coming from different castes, who do not have any fixed occupation and who subsist on their *sorties* as groups are called *vrātas* (m.).
 (b) Their activity is [also] *vrāta* (n.).
 (c) The one who lives by the activity which is called *vrāta* (n.) is called *vrātina*.

It is evident that *vrāta-* (as a singular masculine noun) indicates primarily a plurality, namely “people coming from different castes,” etc.; however, the same word *vrāta-* (as a singular neuter noun) is then employed to describe “their activity.” Patañjali concludes that “the one who lives by the activity which is called *vrāta* (neuter) is called *vrātina* (masculine).”

The KV tends to be even more specific in explaining what this *sūtra* signifies and especially what the term *vrāta-* stands for. In particular, after the definition of *vrāta-* (m.), the commentary specifies that “those who live by the labour of their body, those are *utsedhajīvinas*” (*utsedhaḥ śarīraṃ, tadāyāsya ye jīvanti te utsedhajīvinaḥ*)¹¹ and that “their activity is [also] *vrāta-* (n.).” Subsequently, the conclusion of the M is repeated (that is, “the one who lives by the activity which is called *vrāta* (n.) is called *vrātina*”), and the KV ends its comment with this statement:

this (*vrātina*) is said of any [individual] belonging to those very *vrātas* (m.). It is not desired that [the word *vrātina*] is used in the meaning of someone else who lives by such [an activity] (*teṣāṃ eva vrātānām anyatama ucyate. yas tv anyas tadīyena jīvati tatra na iṣyate*).¹²

It is important to note that Sharma (1999–2002: IV: 527) tries to find a possible explanation to these last sentences added by the authors of the KV; he points out that the word *vrātina-* cannot be used to

¹¹ KV ad A 5.2.21.

¹² Ibid.

characterise a single person who does not belong to a group, but who earns his living exactly by doing what members of that group do.

The meaning of *vrātīna-* as derived from *vrāta-* has been variously discussed among the main commentaries of Pāṇini's grammar, and it is accepted by other later sources. It is interesting to note that the SK quotes the KV in mentioning that *vrātīna-* is "the one who lives by the labour of his body (*vrātena*), not of his brain" (*vrātena śarīrāyāsena jīvati natu buddhivaibhavena sa vrātīnaḥ*).¹³ In commenting this passage, Vasu (1905–1907: I: 907) underlines that the word *vrāta-* means a multitude or mass composed of various castes, who have no fixed employment, and who live by violence, or by bodily labour. Here, the author introduces the element of living by violence, perhaps deriving it from the word *utsedha-* in the meaning of "killing, slaughter" (n.); nevertheless, this specific interpretation is actually controversial, because it is evident that the grammatical commentaries have never quoted violence in connection with *vrātīna-*, nor even when dealing with the term *vrāta-* in general. For this reason, a question arises: where does the violence come from? The hypothesis is that, since the violence is traditionally attributed to the Vṛātyas (Falk 1986: 29–30), this element is extended here also to *vrātīnas*. However, the element of violence cannot be justified if one accepts that *vrātya-* also derives from *vrāta-*. This topic will be discussed in the next section.

There are two other occurrences of *vrātīna-* in Sanskrit literature; the first instance is still related to Pāṇini's grammar and grammatical commentaries. In fact, the word *vrātīna-* already appears in the poem entitled *Bhaṭṭikāvya* (6th–7th century CE); this work is an attempt to poetically retell the epic adventures of Rāma in a compendium of examples of grammar and rhetoric. The following quotation is from *Bhaṭṭikāvya* [BK] IV.12 that recites:

vrātīnavyāladīprāstrah sutvanah paripūjayan
parśadvalān mahābrahmair āṭa naikaṭikāśramān

¹³ SK 1822 ad A 5.2.21.

With his shining weapons raised against those who were vicious towards itinerant ascetics and honouring the *soma*-drinkers and their retainers, he wandered with the great brahmins among the neighbouring ashrams.¹⁴

Since this is an example taken from the grammatical tradition, it is not surprising that *vrātīna*- is described in the classical way by the *Jaya-maṅgala* commentary [JM] (see JM = Joshi and Paṅśīkar 1934: 74), that is:

vrātīnavyāladīprāstrah = (a) those who live by the labour of their bodies, coming from different castes and who do not have any fixed occupation, those are *vrāta* (m.); (b) their activity is also *vrāta* (n.); (c) those who live by this [activity] are called *vrātīnas*. ‘18221 *vrātena jīvati* 15121211’ [teaches] *khañ*. The shining weapons raised against those who were vicious towards them.

Instead, another occurrence takes place in a completely different work, which is not strictly connected with grammar and its traditional commentaries. In fact, *vrātīna*- is mentioned in the *Lātyāyanaśrautasūtra*, belonging to the *Kauthuma* recension of the *Sāmaveda*, that is largely dependent on the *Sāmavedasamhitā* and on the *Pañcaviṃśabrāhmaṇa* [PB] that has also been analysed. The following quotation is taken from *Lātyāyanaśrautasūtra* [LŚ] VIII.5.1 that recites:

vrātīnānām yaudhānām putrān anūcānān ṛtvijo vṛñīta śyenasya (see LŚ = Vedāntavāgīśa 1872: 569)

He (i.e., the *yajamāna*) should choose the sons of the *vrātīnas* (i.e., ‘those who live by the group’), who are warriors and who have studied the Veda, as officiants of the *Śyena* sacrifice.¹⁵

¹⁴ Sanskrit text and translation are taken from BK = Fallon and Bhaṭṭi 2009: 60–61.

¹⁵ Ranade (1998: II: 807) translates it as “For the (*Sādyaskra* sacrifice known as) *Śyena* they should choose the sons of the *Yodha* (out-caste *kṣatriyas*), who follow the life-style of the *Vrātas* (out-caste Brahmins), who have studied the Veda, as the officiating priests.”

What is noteworthy is that Hauer (1927: 205–206) specifically analyses this example in commenting the derivation of the word *vrātīna-*. He defines *vrātīnas* as those people who live by the work of the *vrāta*, and adds that, according to the basic meaning of the word *vrāta-* as “group united in a holy work,” this “work” is defined as “cultic work.”¹⁶

3. The possible derivation of *vrātya*

The second occurrence of the word *vrāta-* in the A appears to be a good starting point in the derivation of the word *vrātya-*:

A 5.3.113 *vrātacphañor astriyām* [*pratyayaḥ* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, *ñyāpprātipadikāt* #4.1.1, *taddhitāḥ* #4.1.76 *ñyaḥ* #112]

The *taddhita* affix *Ñya* occurs after a nominal stem which denotes a *vrāta* “group” or ends in the affix *CphaÑ*, provided that the derived nominal stem is not feminine.

According to A 5.3.119 *ñyādayas tadrājāḥ*,¹⁷ these *taddhita* affixes beginning with *Ñya* are designated as *tadrāja* affixes, and they can be used to specifically indicate the king / the chieftain / the leader as a derivative noun from the name of the group over which he exercises leadership. In other words, the name of the group constitutes the etymon of the leader’s designation. For instance, *kapotapāka-* + *Ñya* = *kāpotapākya-* can denote the leader of the group named *kapotapāka-* lit. “cooking doves.” The hypothesis is that this derivative pattern could be extended to the hyperonym mentioned in the rule

¹⁶ The quotation is originally in German and it recites “Darnach waren die *Vrātīna* Leute, die vom Werk der *Vrāta* (*vrātam*) leben. Nach der Grundbedeutung des Wortes *vrāta* ‘in heiligem Werk verbundene Schar’ ist dieses ‘Werk’ zu bestimmen als ‘kultische Handlung’.”

¹⁷ A 5.3.119 *ñyādayas tadrājāḥ* [*pratyayaḥ* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, *ñyāpprātipadikāt* #4.1.1, *taddhitāḥ* #4.1.76]: “The *taddhitas* beginning with *Ñya* are designated as *tadrāja* affixes“.

itself,¹⁸ giving rise to the final form *vrātya-* (*vrāta-* + *Ñya*), which could denote the leader of a *vrāta* “group.”¹⁹

Indeed, all the occurrences of the singular noun *vrātya-* (only found in two Vedic works)—here supposed to be derived from *vrāta-* + *Ñya*—are used to denote the so-called *ekavrātya-*, who is definitely a leader. For instance, the beginning of the *Vrātyakāṇḍa* in the *Śaunaka Atharvaveda* reads:

ŚS 15.1 *vrātya āsīd īyamāna evā sā prajāpatiṃ sām airayat*

(...)

ŚS 15.6 *sā ekavrātyò 'bhavat sā dhānur ādatta tād evēndradhanuḥ.*

1. There was a Vrātya, just wandering; he put Prajāpati in motion. (...)
6. He became the unique Vrātya, he took a bow: this was right Indra's bow (Neri and Pontillo 2023: 93).

Analogously, in the *Jaiminīya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa* [J] 3.21.3 the singular *vrātya-*, which occurs only once in the whole work, is used to denote the so-called *ekavrātya-*:

¹⁸ This proposal is not a novelty in the grammatical commentaries; in fact, in *vt.* 5 to 8 *ad* A 1.1.68, Kātyāyana presents a list of rules containing expressions that do also denote their synonyms and other connected words. He later distinguishes four types, which he proposes to mark with the following determinatives: *s* to indicate the subspecies (in A 2.4.12, the words *vrkṣa-* “tree,” etc. indicate all the subspecies of *vrkṣa-*, etc.); *p* stands for the words and their synonyms (in A 3.4.40, *poṣa-* “abundance” stands for *poṣa-* and its synonyms); *j* to indicate that only the synonyms should be understood (in A 2.4.23, *rājan-* “king” indicate the synonym of *rājan-*, but not the word itself); *jh* stands for the mentioned terms and their subspecies (in A 4.4.35, *matsya-* “fish” stands for *matsya-* and all the *matsya-* subspecies). These samples are presented in detail in the work by Scharfe (1971: 42–43). In accordance with the previous explanation, it appears that the derivation of *vrātya* from rule A 5.3.113 *vrāta-cphañor astriyām* could be characterised by the determinative *jh*, since the noun *vrātya-* denotes the “group” and all the species of group.

¹⁹ It is noteworthy that this thesis was refused by Hauer (1927: 8–9), who instead interpreted *vrātya-* as derived from *vrāta-* “group” as based on *vrata-* “ritual vow”.

vrātyo 'sy ekavrātyo 'navasṛṣṭo devānām bilam apyadhāh

Thou art the Vrātya, the only Vrātya, not released of the gods (?). Thou hast closed the opening. (see J = Oertel 1896: 182)

However, once again the grammatical commentaries are worthy of consideration in order to understand the implications of such a derivation.

The M does not comment this aphorism, while the KV again shows the definition of the word *vrāta-*: “people coming from different castes who do not have any fixed occupation and who subsist on their *sorties* as groups are called *vrātas*” (exactly as M *ad* A 5.2.21). KV *ad* A 5.3.113 continues the paraphrasis of this rule, emphasising that the affix *Ñya* is used *svārthe* “in its own meaning.”²⁰ In other words, the nominal stem derived by means of this *taddhita* affix *Ñya* (i.e., *vrātya-*) conveys the same meaning as the nominal base to which the affix is applied (i.e., *vrāta-*):

*vrātavācibhyaḥ prātipadikebhyaḥ ca svārthe ñyaḥ pratyayo bhavaty astriyām.*²¹

The affix *Ñya* occurs after nominal stems signifying a *vrāta* to denote its own meaning (i.e., *svārthe*), but not if [the derived nominal stems are] feminine.

Why is this affix taught as *svārthe* “in its own meaning” by the KV? The following example taken from *Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa* [JB] 2.221 will show how the assumed etymology of the form *vrātyāḥ* (nom. pl.) denoting a group as derived from *vrāta-* is well tuned to the context:

²⁰ This *svārthika* section extends from A 5.3.1 up to A 5.4.160.

²¹ KV *ad* A 5.3.113.

(...) *divyā vai vrātyā vrātyām adhāvayan budhena sthapatinā*

The divine Vrātyas ran the Vrātya expedition with Budha as their *sthapati*.²²

It is worth considering that in the *Jaiminīya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa* the above-mentioned instance of *vrātya-* (singular) as leader of a *vrāta* “group” coexists with three other occurrences inflected in the plural form, that is, *vrātyāḥ*, with the meaning of *svārthe*.²³ The following example is drawn from *Jaiminīya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa* [J] 1.10.9:

tad dha pṛthur vāinyo divyān vrātyān papraccha (...)

Now Pṛthu Vāinya asked the divine mendicants (i.e., members of the group) (...). (see J = Oertel 1896: 90)

Nevertheless, the KV *ad* A 5.3.113 focuses on completely different examples that form the plural with zero-replacement, implicitly alluding to rule A 2.4.62 *tadrājasya bahuṣu tenaivāstriyām*:²⁴

kāpotapākyah, kāpotapākyau, kapotapākāḥ. vraihimatyah, vraihimatyau, vrīhimantāḥ (...) *astriyām iti kim? kapotapākī. vrīhimatī*.²⁵

For instance, *kāpotapākyah* (nom. sg.), *kāpotapākyau* (nom. dual), *kapotapākāḥ* (nom. pl.); *vraihimatyah, vraihimatyau, vrīhimantāḥ (...)* Why is it said “not in the feminine gender”? Let us consider *kapotapākī*, and *vrīhimatī*.

²² Sanskrit text is taken from JB = Vīra and Chandra 1954: 255. Ranade (2019: 835) translates it as “The divine Vrātya persons, indeed, caused the intelligent chief to run a race of the Vrātya.”

²³ The same expression *divya-vrātyas* also occurs in *Jaiminīya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa* [J] 1.34.6 and 1.45.1, always referring to the interlocutors of Pṛthu Vāinya.

²⁴ A 2.4.62 *tadrājasya bahuṣu tenaivāstriyām* [luk #58]: “A *tadrāja* affix which occurs after a nominal stem, when it denotes a plurality, is substituted by *LUK*, provided that plurality is expressed by that affix, except when it is followed by a feminine affix.”

²⁵ KV *ad* A 5.3.113.

It is already evident from the KV commentary that, if the hypothesis of *vrātya-* derived from *vrāta-* + *Ñya* is accepted, the problem is then with the nominative plural. Indeed, the instances given by this work are *kapotapākāḥ* and *vrīhimantāḥ* (nom. pl.), in which the affix *Ñya* does not appear, in clear opposition to *kāpotapākyāḥ* and *vraihimatyāḥ* (nom. sg.), and *kāpotapākyau* and *vraihimatyau* (nom. du). However, the KV here refers to the *tadrāja* interpretation of *kapotapākāḥ* (lit. “the princes of the *kapotapāka* group”) and *vrīhimantāḥ* (lit. “the princes of the *vrīhimant* group”). It is important to understand that, even if the KV prefers to exemplify this plural, which is a *tadrāja*-name, there are still no prohibitions in forming *kāpotapākyāḥ* (nom. pl.); this specific form should be understood in the sense of “group,” derived with the affix *Ñya* in the meaning of *svārthe* “in its own meaning.”

The SK better explains this phenomenon regarding the absence of the affix *Ñya* in the nominative plural, after presenting the rule and quoting an example of a nominal stem ending with the affix *CphaÑ* [= *āyana*] (i.e., *kauñjāyanyaḥ*). In fact, this commentary states “it will be taught *LUK* [of the affix *Ñya*] in the plural, it being [an affix] of the *tadrāja* class” (*bahutve tadrājatvāl lug avakṣyate*).²⁶ This explanation involves two other rules of Pāṇini, dealing with the definition and the enumeration of *tadrāja* affixes, and with the explanation of the *LUK* of the *tadrāja* affixes in the plural. In fact, A 5.3.119 *ñyādayas tadrājāḥ* teaches the *tadrāja* designation for the *taddhita* affixes beginning with *Ñya* (of A 5.3.112);²⁷ Katre (1987: 556) specifies that “these affixes are: [*Ñya* 112, *Ñyaṭ* 114, *ṬeṇyaṆ* 115, *cha* 116, *áṆ*, *aÑ* 117, *yaÑ* 118].” The affixes are then replaced by *LUK* in the plural by means of rule A 2.4.62 *tadrājasya bahuṣu tenaivāstriyām*.

It is clear that if this pattern of derivation is accepted for the noun *vrātya-*, the risk arising is that of applying A 2.4.62 to the plural form to obtain a nominative plural *vrātāḥ* alongside *vrātyāḥ* (nom. sg.) and the non-attested *vrātyau* (nom. du.). Nonetheless, if the many Vedic

²⁶ SK 1100 *ad* A 5.3.113.

²⁷ A 5.3.119 *ñyādayas tadrājāḥ* [*pratyayaḥ* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, ...*prātipadikāṭ* #4.1.1, *taddhitāḥ* #4.1.76]: “The *taddhita* affixes beginning with *Ñya* (of A 5.3.112) are designated as *tadrāja*.”

and Sanskrit occurrences of *vrātyāḥ* (nom. pl.)²⁸ are taken into account, which regularly denote an age-group of unmarried boys living in a brotherhood regime rather than princes, it should be assumed that this plural form is allowed to be derived according to A 5.3.113, without resorting to A 2.4.62, as in the case of the supposed *kāpotapākyāḥ* also denoting a group. On the other hand, through the singular *vrātya-*, obtained by means of A 5.3.113 and denoting a leader (i.e., the charismatic figure of *vrātya-* in the aforementioned occurrences), it is possible to derive the name of a group whose leader is this *vrātya-*, by applying A 4.3.120 *tasyedam*. In fact, this rule states that the *taddhita* affixes introduced from A 4.1.83 onwards occur after a nominal stem ending in the sixth *vibhakti* to denote “this is his.”²⁹ The classical instance is *upagor idam = upagu- + aN = aupagavam* “belonging to Upagu.” This rule can be employed to form the plural *vrātyāḥ*, since it is self-evident that there is only a single leader, but its retinue is made of a plurality. This is why *vrātya- + aN = vrātya-* used as a plural form (*vrātyāḥ*) can denote “those who belong to the Vrātya, i.e., those whose leader is the Vrātya.”

What emerges from this second interpretation of the plural form *vrātyāḥ* (derived from *vrātya- + aN = vrātya-*) is the strong sense of belonging of this group, which is composed of *pares* with respect to the *primus*, i.e., the singular *vrātya-* used to denote the so-called *ekavrātya*. It is clear that this situation is completely different from that of the *kapotapāka-* group, where there can be a single *kāpotapākyah* (nom. sg.), two *kāpotapākyau* (nom. du), or many *kapotapākāḥ* (nom. pl.), all of them defining lit. “the princes of the *kapotapāka*

²⁸ This plural form *vrātyāḥ* prevalently occurs in *Kalpasūtras*, *Brāhmanas*, *Mahābhārata*, *Mānavadharmasāstra* and in the more recent Dharmic literature, with an increasingly sharp derogatory sense. As for this semantic shift see Candotti and Pontillo 2015.

²⁹ A 4.3.120 *tasyedam* [*pratyayaḥ* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, *nyāpprātipadikāt* #4.1.1, *taddhitāḥ* #4.1.76, *samarthānām prathamād va* #4.1.82, *prāg dīvyato 'ṅ* #4.1.38, *śeṣe* #4.2.92]: “The *taddhita* affixes introduced from A 4.1.83 *prāg dīvyato 'ṅ* occur after syntactically related nominal stems which end in the sixth *vibhakti* to denote ‘this is his’.”

group” in a supposed dynastic system. Here, in accordance with the meaning, it is evident that the zero-replacement (*LUK*) of the *tadrāja* affix is applied in the plural form. Instead, the *LUK*-substitution has no application for *vrātya-* because the singular *vrātyaḥ* is not strictly one’s own name, but rather a sort of title with different cultural implications: *vrātyaḥ* (singular) indicates the leader of a *vrāta-* “group,” whereas the plural form *vrātyāḥ* identifies the group, by resorting to A 5.3.113 (*svārthe*), as formed by “those whose leader is the *Vrātya,*” according to A 4.3.120 *tasyedam*.

What is worthy to note is that neither in the example taken from the ŚS and dealing with *vrātyaḥ* (nom. sg.), nor in that drawn from the *Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa* and concerning *vrātyāḥ* (nom. pl.), is there a ritual implication in the derivation of *vrātya-*, which is specifically derived from the term *vrāta-* (according to the grammatical sources) and, for this reason, translated in the sense of “group.”

4. Conclusions

It has been shown above that the term *vrātīna-* is specifically derived in Pāṇini’s grammar by means of rule A 5.2.21 *vrātena jīvati*. This is a very general *sūtra* dealing with affixation, in particular prescribing the affix *khañ* [= *-īna*] after the term *vrāta-* “group” in the meaning of *jīvati* “lives by.” In this context, *vrāta-* is simply the nominal stem after which the affix occurs, and it is translated as “group” on the basis of A 5.3.113 *vrātacphañor astriyām*, which has also been analysed in detail above. Patañjali provides a clear definition of the word *vrāta-* (m.) in the commentary *ad* A 5.2.21, as “people coming from different castes, who do not have any fixed occupation and who subsist on their *sorties* as groups,” and qualifying *vrātīna-* as “the one who lives by the activity which is called *vrāta* (n.).” It is clear from the M that there should be no other meaning for *vrāta-* than “group” (and secondly “the activity” of that group). Furthermore, the connection between *vrātīnas* and *Vrātyas* is not founded on a mere phonetic similarity, but rather on a basically shared meaning. In fact,

vrātya- can also be generically translated as “group,” since it brings the same meaning of the lexeme *vrāta-*.

As far as the derivation of *vrātya-* is concerned, the hypothesis is that the affix *Ñya* taught by A 5.3.113 *vrātacphañor astriyām* can also be extended to the hyperonym *vrāta-*. This solves the derivation of the term *vrātya-* from the lexeme *vrāta-* “group” + the affix *Ñya* in its own meaning (*svārthe*). However, a further problem is that *Ñya* is also classified as *tadrāja* affix; it means that the declension of *vrātya-* should be as follows: *vrātyaḥ* (nom. sg.), *vrātyau* (nom. du.) and *vrātāḥ* (nom. pl.), being the *taddhita* affix *Ñya* zero-replaced in the plural. Nevertheless, since the nominative plural form *vrātyāḥ* is attested for instance in the *Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa* and *Jaiminīya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa*, two solutions are advanced for its derivation, that can also coexist. On the one hand, the plural form *vrātyāḥ* can be derived from rule A 5.3.113 provided that the affix *Ñya* is not used here as a *tadrāja* affix. On the other hand, rule A 4.3.120 *tasyedam* ensures the derivation of the plural form *vrātyāḥ* denoting the group “belonging” to the leader who is called *vrātya-*. Hence, after deriving *vrātya-* from *vrāta-* “group” + the affix *Ñya*, the affix *aṅ* can be added to *vrātya-* in the meaning of “those who belong to the Vrātya, i.e., those whose leader is the Vrātya.”

From the grammatical point of view, and according to the instances of *vrātya-* found in literature, this result appears to be the most reasonable way of understanding the word. Other scholars, such as Falk (1986: 17), combine both *vrata-* and *vrāta-* etymons, and maintain that *vrātya-* “member of a group” is derived from *vrāta-* “group,” which is so called because its leader adopts a certain “observational” behaviour, i.e., one or more *vratas*. This definition of *vrātya-* is probably based on Hauer’s interpretation of the term *vrātina-*. He precisely defines *vrātinas* as those people who live by the work of the *vrāta*, and adds that, according to the basic meaning of *vrāta* as “group united in a holy work,” this “work” is defined as “cultic work” (Hauer 1927: 205–206). The cultic implication is provided by the fact that the term *vrāta-* would be derived from *vrata-* “ritual vow.” It is evident that the final meaning of *vrātya-* changes completely; however, the general idea these authors probably bear in mind is that of

emphasising the important role played by the sacrifice in the society of the Vrātya “groups.”

There is still one last point in the derivation of *vrātya-* which needs to be discussed, and this is precisely the element of violence commonly linked with the behaviour of the group. In fact, it has already been anticipated that, while commenting rule A 5.2.21 *vrātena jīvati*, Vasu (1905–1907: I: 907) points out that the term *vrāta-* means a multitude or mass composed of various castes, who have no fixed employment, and live by violence, or by bodily labour. The origin of violence is probably connected to the term *utsedha-*, that is presented by Patañjali in the definition of *vrāta-* (see *M ad A 5.2.21: nānājātīyā aniyatavṛttaya utsedhajīvinaḥ samghā vrātāḥ*); in fact, the lexeme *utsedha-* has two different meanings: “the body” (m.) / “killing, slaughter” (n.), even if this second meaning exclusively occurs in lexicographic works. For this reason, and probably even because of the Vrātya’s reputation as aggressive warriors, also emphasised by many modern studies (such as the reference work on the subject, Falk 1986: 29–30), the compound *utsedhajīvinaḥ* has been translated as “those who live by the labour of their body” or as “those who live by killing, slaughtering” (Vasu 1905-1907: I: 907). Nonetheless, this second translation is not justified by the derivation of *vrātya-* as based on *vrāta-* “group.” Accordingly, this could only be a general representation of the changing society, where the Vrātyas start being marginalised and accused of being violent.

Many authors have dealt with the noun *vrātya-*, trying to understand its possible derivation and, in this way, its final meaning. However, every scholar reads something different in this term, based on the *vrāta* / *vrātya* interpretation accepted by the works they are studying. Instead, according to Pāṇini and the following grammatical tradition, the derivation of *vrātīna-* from *vrāta-* “group” + the affix *khañ* [= *-īna*] is provided and, on the basis of such derivation, also *vrātya-* can be derived from *vrāta-* “group.” It is evident that the A and the commentaries keep the two lexemes separated: *vrata-* “ritual vow” is found in four different rules, while *vrāta-* “group” appears in only two aphorisms; and they never quote *utsedha-* in the specific meaning

of “killing, slaughter” (n.), which is proper uniquely of the lexicons. For this reason, all these interpretations seem to be the fruit of authoritative speculation lasting centuries.

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that the derivation of *vrātya-* from *vrāta-* here proposed was already advanced by Aufrecht (1850: 139),³⁰ who resorted to *Tāṇḍyamahābrahmaṇa* [T] (alias the *Pañcaviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa* [PB]) XVII, 1, 5 in order to ground this assumption:

“*adhāhīndra girvaṇa*” *iti viṣamaṃ chando viṣama iva vai vrātaḥ sarvān evaitān samān karoti* (see T = Śāstrī and Śāstrī 1935–1936: II: 271)

(The verses, beginning): ‘For, o Indra who lovest the chants’, are (of) unequal metre. The joined group is unequal, as it were. He makes them equal (by applying the verses of this metre). (see PB = Caland 1931: 455)

The T (see T = Śāstrī and Śāstrī 1935–1936: II: 271) also consider *Sāyāṇa* commentary to this sentence (that is, *vrāto vrātyasamudāyo viṣama iva vai vividha iva bhavati*), which can be defined as a further step in the identification of *vrāta-* with *vrātya-* (and vice versa), based on the affix *Ñya* in its own meaning (*svārthe*), and according to *sūtra* A 5.3.113 *vrātacphañor astriyām*. Therefore, the context and the commentary to the verse leave no doubt, that *vrāta-* means the group of Vrātyas.³¹

³⁰ Dealing with the XV book of the *Atharvaveda*, in the section entitled *Bemerkungen*, Aufrecht states: “I, 1. Vrātya. Das Wort ist mir ausserdem im Ath. nicht begegnet. Vrāta finde ich II, 9, 1 „jīvānām vrātam apyayāt“, wo es, wie Yv. III, 55 die Bedeutung „Menge“ hat“.

³¹ The quotation is originally in German and it recites “Schon Aufrecht hat diese Ableitung angenommen (I. St. I, 139), und sie ist gewährleistet durch T.M.Br. XVII, 1,5 (*viṣama iva vrātaḥ sarvān eva etān samān karoti*), wo der Zusammenhang und der Komm. zum Verse keinen Zweifel darüber lässt, dass mit *vrāta* die Schar der Vrātya gemeint ist.”

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