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The Notion of Dharma in the Pāñca-rātra Tradition

Abstract

Pāñca-rātra is one of the most important and influential among early Vaiṣṇava traditions belonging to the group of the Tantric traditions of India. It, for much of its existence, had to prove and confirm its authoritativeness and conformity to orthodoxy. The discussion concerning this subject can be found in the works of the famous philosophers and religious teachers such as Yāmunamuni in his *Āgama-prāmānya*, Rāmānuja in his *Śrī-bhāṣya*, and Venkatanātha in *Pāñca-rātra-rakṣa*. This subject is still continued, for example in the works of Uttamūr Vīrarāghavācārya who published *Śrī-pāñca-rātra-pāramyam* in 1991 in Tirupati.

One of the methods through which Pāñca-rātra proved its connection with orthodoxy was to use and sometimes to re-define the basic notions of the orthodox tradition. One of such notions is *dharma*.

The article gives some examples of the presentation of this notion in some of the Pāñca-rātra texts, mainly *Viṣṇu-saṃhitā* and *Parama-saṃhitā*. In both texts one finds long passages dedicated to the notion of *dharma* and both texts on the one hand refer to the orthodox understanding of the term known from, for example, *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Manu-smṛti*, on the other hand they propose new definitions, sometimes consisting of several elements constituting *dharma*. Such a policy, namely referring to orthodoxy, but also adding new elements, is typical for the texts of the Tantric traditions claiming to belong to the main stream of the Hindu religion, but also claiming to be, in a way, better, special (*viśeṣa*).

Pāñca-rātra, one of the most important and influential among the early Vaiṣṇava traditions of India, for much of its existence, in its scriptures, created from about the 5th century A.D., had to prove and confirm its authoritativeness and conformity to orthodoxy. Being a Tāntrika tradition, it had to show its adherence to the crucial rules constituting the Vedic and post-Vedic orthodoxy or at least orthopraxy. Although it claims to derive its roots from a lost *śākha* of the Veda, namely Ekāyana-śākha, it was not convincing enough for the orthodox, therefore the discussion about Pāñca-rātra's authoritativeness (*prāmānya*) has been present in the religious and philosophical discourse for many centuries, beginning in the Pāñca-rātrika scriptural texts themselves, for example the

Pādma-saṃhitā (PādS),¹ the Yāmunamuni's *Āgama-prāmāṇya* (9th century), Rāmānuja's *Śrī-bhāṣya* (10th century), Veṅkatanātha's *Pāñca-rātra-rakṣā* (13th/14th century), till the works of, for example, Uttamūr Vīrarāghavācārya, such as *Śrī-pāñca-rātra-pāramyam*, published in 1991 in Tirupati.

Pāñca-rātra has been fighting to gain and maintain the status of the orthodox and authoritative tradition using not only the argument of its own descent from the lost Vedic *śākha*, but also through such devices as *śāstrāvatarāṇa* and by referring to, and sometimes redefining crucial religious and philosophical notions, among them *dharma* – usually translated as “obligation”, “law” or “rule”, *bhakti* – usually translated as “devotion”, and others. Both *dharma* and *bhakti*, as well as many others, acquire a new or modified meaning in the Pāñca-rātra tradition, but in this paper we will only consider *dharma*.

Śāstrāvatarāṇa, a very typical feature of many Tantric texts, is the story of a revelation. The tradition claims that it was directly revealed by the Highest Puruṣa, namely Viṣṇu. The recipients of the revelation are different in different texts, though very often it is Brahmā who then hands down the knowledge to the sages and they become teachers to other devotees. Such a precisely defined chain of the successive recipients of the highest knowledge, as well as the description of the circumstances in which the very revelation and its transmission took place, are meant to make the story more probable and vivid, and to show the divine origin of the tradition.² One more method to prove the authority and attachment to orthodoxy is to address the crucial notions of religion and philosophy. *Dharma* is one of them.

In the Pāñca-rātrika text called *Parama-saṃhitā*, created probably about the 8th/9th century A.D.,³ one finds a whole chapter, entitled *dharma*, dedicated to an analysis of this notion. Worth noticing is the fact that the chapter comes in between two others, dedicated to the interpretation of omens and to the performance of the *kāmya* rites, undertaken in order to acquire the special, supernatural powers (*siddhis*) and, through them, the earthly aims of the devotees. This particular position within the text was probably not accidental and served to diminish or balance the role of these typical Tantric rites by exposition of the notion so inherently belonging to the orthodox milieu.

What does the term mean and how does the description of the *dharma* appear in the *Parama-saṃhitā*? How close is it to the *dharma* known from Smṛti texts? Usually the main source of the rules of *dharma* are considered to be the law books belonging to the Smṛti portion of Sanskrit literature, among them the most authoritative text –

¹ Especially in chapter 21 of PādS (entitled *Siddhānta-bheda-pāñca-rātrādhikāri-vyavasthā-vidhiḥ*) dedicated to the description of the division into *siddhāntas* within the tradition.

² See Oberhammer 1994, 1998 and 1999; Czerniak-Drożdżowicz 2003.

³ About the dating of the text, see Czerniak-Drożdżowicz 2003.

Manu-smṛti.⁴ However, as we can see, the notion was also discussed and modified in other sources.

Chapter 12 of the *Parama-saṃhitā* introduces the topic by the question posed by one of the interlocutors of the revelation dialogue, namely Brahmā, who asks Parama Viṣṇu:

*ko dharmo viṣṇu-bhaktānāṃ deva-deva praśasyate / prāyaś-cittāni vā kāni
dharmā naimittikās tathā // 12.1*

*mukti-kāmasya ke dharmā bhūti-kāmasya ke mataḥ / etat sarvaṃ samācakṣva
tatra me saṃśayo mahān // 12.2*

“What *dharma* is proclaimed for the devotees of Viṣṇu, O God of gods? What are the expiations and occasional rules? What are the obligations (*dharmāḥ*) of the one longing for emancipation (*mukti-kāmasya*) and which are intended for the one longing for earthly goods (*bhūti-kāmasya*)? All this explain to me, since I have serious doubts about it.”

While analysing this introductory remark, one notices that the term *dharma* is used here in the plural, suggesting not one overall law or rule, but obviously many different *dharma*s that determine the behaviour of the pious Vaiṣṇava. Therefore we have to take into consideration that the term here does not describe a holistic and consistent notion, but applies to many different rules that change according to the position of a devotee and his aims. There are *dharma*s which are occasional (*naimittika*), therefore *dharma* here means also rituals, since in the Pāñca-rātriḥ context *naimittika* refers to the occasional rites. Therefore, the *dharma* is distinguished and divided into smaller constituents, differing according to a particular situation, which reminds one of the *Bhagavad-gītā*’s notion of the *sva-dharma* – the need to act according to particular circumstances. Also in the *Bhagavad-gītā* *dharma*s appear in plural in the famous – and very important for Pāñca-rātrikas – verse, called *carama-śloka* (BhG 18.66):

*sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṃ śaraṇaṃ vraja / ahaṃ tvā sarva-
pāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ //*

“Having abandoned all duties, come to me alone for refuge. I will release you from all sins. Do not grieve.”

⁴ We owe the Polish translation of the text to Professor Maria Krzysztof Byrski, who proposes that we translate *dharma* with the Polish word *zaczność*, which can be translated as “righteousness” (*Traktat o zaczności*, Warszawa 1985); one of the most important studies of the Indian law we owe to an Indologist with Polish roots, Ludwik Sternbach, the author of *Juridical Studies in Ancient Indian Law*, Delhi 1965-1967.

In this verse *dharma*s also mean different kinds of obligations constituting correct behaviour, and this particular verse was the subject of crucial theoretical discussions among Pāñca-rātrikas and Viśiṣṭādvaitins, as well as their opponents. Pāñca-rātrikas were accused of an interpretation of this verse as giving permission to give up all ritualistic activities prescribed by orthodoxy, while Rāmānuja, an advocate of Pāñca-rātra, underlined the necessity of giving up the fruits of the deeds, stressing the meaning of the verb *parivṛtyaj*, which was probably what BhG originally meant, having connected the notion of *dharma* with the idea of action not motivated by the desire of getting its fruit (*niṣkāma-karma*).⁵ In the *Parama-saṃhitā*, in the teaching of the sage Mārkaṇḍeya to Devala, the text uses an expression which evokes the devotional attitude of the *carama-śloka* of the *Bhagavad-gītā* and which encourages the devotee to leave all other actions except worship of god:

*tasmāt tvaṃ devala tyaktvā sarvaṃ anyad viceṣṭitam / bhajasva sarva-
bhāvena paramātmānam acyutam //*

“Therefore you, Devala, having abandoned all other actions, worship the Highest Acyuta wholeheartedly.” (ParS 31.50)

In this way the *carama-śloka* was understood in most of the Pāñca-rātriya teachings and this is one of several references to the devotional ideas present in the orthodox texts, such as the BhG, to be found in the Pāñca-rātriya texts.

While Parama Viṣṇu answers Brahmā’s questions, he says that only the deeds by which God is pleased (*prasīdati*) are to be understood as *dharma*. Further, the ParS divides *dharma* into three categories: *dharma* of mind, of speech and of deeds. The *dharma* of mind is defined as faith, firmness and serenity (*śraddhā, dhṛti, prasāda*) (ParS 12.4d-13); that of speech is defined as truth, love and goodness (*satyam, priyam, hitam*) (ParS 2.14-22); and that of deeds as service, cleanliness and graciousness (*paricaryā, viśuddhi, parānugraha*) (ParS 12.23-57). All these qualities and obligations are, in fact, similar to those required of the orthodox devotee.⁶ This definition is elaborated in further verses of chapter 12 (12.58-67). We are told that through scrupulous performance of one’s religious obligations and the meticulous execution of the acts of worship one may win the favour of god and realise the non-difference of the *jīva* (individual soul) and *para* (the Supreme) (ParS 12.63-66):

“God worshipped with deeds protects even in future lives, removes calamities, increases success. For to suppress any sense-faculty by one’s own power, without the favour of God, is impossible. Therefore make him your refuge. For the unliberated – the *jīva* – and the Supreme [soul]

⁵ For the two interpretations of the *carama-śloka* by Rāmānuja, see for example Carman 1981.

⁶ See for example ManuS 2. 159-161 and *Yājñavalkya-smṛti* 1. 122-123.

are distinct. But for the liberated there is no distinction between them, since there is no reason for them to be distinct. Therefore the one who desires emancipation, having abandoned the fruit, everyday should worship Viṣṇu with activities of the mind, speech and body.”⁷

Parama Viṣṇu explains three types of *dharma*, and then the varieties of the *dharma* of mind as follows:

sa punas tri-vidhaḥ proktaḥ pūrvam eva mayā tava / mano-vāk-karma-sambandhāt tatra vakṣyāmi mānasam // śraddhā dhṛtiḥ (em. A; *smṛtiḥ* GOS) *prasādaś ca trayas sarvās tu mānasāḥ /*

“This [*dharma*], as has been explained by me to you, is threefold in connection with mind, speech and action. I will present you with this, which is connected with the mind. Trust, firmness and serenity are the three [characteristics] of the mind.” (12.4-5b)

The *dharma* of mind is described in verses 12.4-14 and the devotee possessing the first characteristic, namely *śraddhā*, is defined as follows:

śraddhāvān labhate jñānaṃ śraddhāvān sādhu-sammataḥ / śraddhāvān api yuktaś ca śraddhāvān deva-sammataḥ //

“The one who trusts acquires knowledge, the one who trusts is considered holy, he is attentive and regarded as god.” (12.6)

The aim obtained by the second constituent of the *dharma* of the mind – firmness (*dhṛti*) is described as follows:

dhṛtyā na cyavate dharmād dhṛtyā duḥkhair na badhyate / dhṛtyā sukhair na muhyeta dhṛtyā nodvegam ṛcchati //

“Due to firmness one does not abandon *dharma*, by firmness one is not bound by misfortunes, by firmness one is not deluded by fortunes, by firmness one does not fear.” (12.7)

⁷ ParS 12.63-66: *karmanārādrito devaḥ pāti janmāntareṣv api / upadravāṃś ca nudati saṃtanoti ca saṃpadaḥ // saṃnirodhūṃ *sva-śaktyā hi* (em. Sanderson; *sva-śaktyābhiḥ* GOS and ParS_m; *sva-śaktyābhis tu* em. Ed.) *śakyaṃ naikam apūndriyam / vinā deva-prasādena tasmāt *taṃ* (em. Aiyangar; *tvaṃ* GOS and ParS_m) *śaraṇaṃ vraja //* **amukte* (GOS and ParS_m; *amuktau* em. Ed.) *bheda eva syāt jīvasya ca parasya ca / muktasya tu na bhedo 'sti bheda-hetor abhāvataḥ //* *tasmād vimuktim anvicchan viṣṇum eva dine dine / tyaktvā phalam upāsta mano-vāk-kāya-karmabhiḥ //*

It seems that especially the third element of the *dharma* of mind, namely serenity (*prasāda*), is considered a very important factor and the benefits of serenity are explained as follows:

prasanno bādhaṭe nānyaṃ prasanno nābhyasūyati / prasanno nārtha-lubhaś ca prasannaḥ satataṃ sukhī // yatraite guṇā yasya sva-bhāvād yatnato 'pi vā / nityaṃ manasi tiṣṭhanti devas tasya prasīdati //

“One who is serene does not oppress others, he does not show anger, he does not desire wealth, and he is always happy. If a person has these qualities in his mind at all times, whether they are his by nature or acquired by effort, God is pleased with him.” (12.8f)

The text sees serenity as connected with devotion, though it does not make this connection explicit. The statement that the success of worship depends on serenity appears in the fourth chapter of the text (ParS 4.71ab) and is followed by a definition of *bhakti* as loving contemplation (*sneha-pūrvam anudhyānaṃ bhaktir ity abhidhīyate //* – 4.71cd). This definition is followed by an enumeration of eight elements that *bhakti* must include (*aṣṭāṅga bhaktiḥ* – ParS 4.72c), such as worshipping god at all times, maintaining the rules of behaviour, placing one’s trust in other Vaiṣṇavas, devoutly listening to the [Purāṇas’] accounts of Viṣṇu’s exploits, and not worshipping him for a living (4.72-76).⁸ The language and vocabulary of devotion in 4.71-76 are closely related to what is found in orthodox Vaiṣṇava sources, and the text’s definition of *bhakti* (4.71cd) is seen in other Vaiṣṇava texts, such as the *Naya-dyumaṇi* of Meghanādārisuri and the *Sarvārtha-siddhi* of Veṅkaṭanātha.⁹

In the following passage of the *dharma* chapter (ParS 12.9-14) the text gives additional information concerning the *dharma* of mind:

“Where these qualities, from one’s own nature or even [acquired] by effort, remain in [one’s] mind, God is pleased with one. Association with those possessing [these] qualities or listening about those great ones who are learned in qualities will be the reason [of the appearance] of [these] qualities. The [qualities] which are opposite to them are called *adharmas*. Those [people] who are addicted to them [namely to *adharmas*] will gain misery in all their lives. Therefore with all his effort the Vaiṣṇava

⁸ ParS 4.72-76: *pūjanaṃ hi vinā bhaktyā kṛtam apy akṛtam bhavet / aṣṭāṅga bhaktir uddiṣṭa vaiṣṇavasya viśeṣataḥ // yām avāpya parāṃ siddhim acireṇādhiṣṭhāt / devasyārādhanam nityaṃ samayasya ca rakṣaṇam // vaiṣṇavasya ca viśvāsaḥ pūjāyām ādaro mahān / svayam ārādhane yatnaṃ tat-kathā-śravaṇādarah // para-bādhāsv anāsthā ca tat-pūjānupajīvanam / ity eṣāṣṭa-vidhā bhaktir vidyate yasya dehinaḥ // sa (em. S.; ya GOS) idaṃ śṛṇuyāt tantram sa cedam vaktum arhati //*

⁹ *Naya-dyumaṇi*: 233.1-9, *Sarvārtha-siddhi*: 88.6f; see Czerniak-Drożdżowicz 2003: 171.

who wishes accomplishment should discipline his mind with these three qualities. If the mind is controlled everything will be controlled; therefore man first has to subdue [his] mind. When the mind is on the good path, speech is [also] on the good path; what is decided by the mind this is then explained by speech.”¹⁰

Considering these passages, we can conclude that the *dharma* of mind is a particular disposition of mind and overall attitude towards god and co-devotees, and that it influences other qualities of man.

The *dharma* of speech is described in verses ParS 12.15-22. First, three main constituents of this kind of *dharma* are listed:

satyaṃ priyaṃ hitaṃ ceti vāg-dharmaḥ tri-vidho [corr.; *strividho* ed.]
bhavet / triṣv eteṣu vyavasthāpya vācaḥ sidhyati mānavaḥ //

“Truth, love and goodness – this is the three-fold *dharma* of speech. Having established his speech in these three, man accomplishes his aims.”

The situations in which one should speak truth (*satyam*) are described as follows:

artha-vārtāsu sarvāsu guṇa-vārtāsu sarvataḥ / dharma-vārtāsu cāgryāsu
satyam evāñjasā vadet //

“In speech about wealth, about qualities in all places, and primarily in speech about *dharma* one should speak truth straight forwardly.”

(ParS 12.16)

Love/kindness (*priya*) as a quality of speech is needed in contacts with others:

prāpta-kāle priyaṃ brūyād gurūṇāṃ mahatāṃ tathā / paṇḍitānāṃ śiṣūnāṃ
ca jīrṇānāṃ kliṣyatāṃ tathā //

“When there is occasion he should speak kindly to teachers and noble ones, to sages, children, elders and the suffering.” (ParS 12.17)

¹⁰ ParS 12.9-14: *yatraite guṇa yasya sva-bhāvād yatnato 'pi vā / nityaṃ manasi tiṣṭhanti devas tasya prasīdati //*
guṇavadbhis tu saṃyogo guṇānāṃ kāraṇaṃ bhavet / śravaṇaṃ vā guṇeṣv eṣu viśrutānāṃ mahātmanāṃ //
eteṣāṃ viparītā ye tān adharmān pracakṣate / teṣu prasaktā duḥkhāni labhante sarva-janmasu //
tasmāt sarva-prayatnena siddhi-kāmas tu vaiṣṇavaḥ / vinayaṃ manasaḥ kuryāt tribhir ebhir guṇais sadā //
vaśī-kṛte tu manasi sarvaṃ eva vaśī-kṛtam / bhaviṣyati naras tasmāt sādhaḥyēt prathamam manah //
sat-pathe manasi nyaste vānī tiṣṭhati sat-pathe / saṅkalpitaṃ hi manasā prakāśayati vāk punaḥ //

The third quality of the *dharma* of speech, namely goodness (*hitam*), is described as follows:

āsannānām sakhīnām ca śiṣyāṇām anujīvinām / dhārmikānām ca bhaktānām hitam brūyād yathāyatham //

“To near ones, to friends, pupils and servants, to the righteous and to devotees one should speak what is good, in a proper manner.”

(ParS 12.18)

Describing the right speech the text reads:

vṛddhānām samprayogaiś ca puṇya-śāstra-niṣevanaiḥ / abhyāsenā ca dīrghēṇa vāṇī san-mārgam ṛcchati //

“By [observation of] the usage of elders, by following the holy texts (*puṇya-śāstra*) and by lengthy practice speech acquires the right way.”

(ParS 12.19)

In the ParS’s opinion speech is not easy to control, therefore sometimes it is recommendable to keep silent, though not for everyone:

“It is not possible to control the organ of speech, due to attachment to evil, without using an effort. Therefore silence is better. [But] for the one who is active in the world silence is not the right behaviour (*dharma*); therefore the devotee of Viṣṇu, firm in vows, should protect the speech. The speech of the embodied one which is deprived of these three [qualities] is known as leading to unrighteousness (*adharma*) and as causing addiction and misfortune.”¹¹ (ParS 12.20-22)

Finally, the third kind of *dharma* is that of the body, namely of deeds, characterised as service, cleanliness and graciousness (*paricaryā*, *viśuddhi*, *parānugraha*) (ParS 12.23-53). The first element, which is service (*paricaryā*) is described as follows:

If one makes a place for the worship of God with vows, substances and effort – this is known as service. Among them are the vow, three baths, lying on the ground, celibacy, silence, eating food without salt, sitting in the *vīrāsana* position by night, avoiding sleeping by day, going to

¹¹ ParS 12.20-22: *vāg-indriyam asat-saṅgād* [em. Ed.; *ajasṛkvād* GOS] *ayātma-viniyogataḥ / saṃniroddhum aśakyam hi tasmān maunaṃ viśiṣyate //* *loka-tantra-pravṛttasya na maunaṃ dharma iṣyate / tasmād vācam sadā rakṣed viṣṇu-bhaktō dṛḍha-vrataḥ //* *tribhir etair vihinātmā vāṇī bhavati dehinaḥ / adharmāyaiva sā jñeyā duḥkha-vyasana-kāriṇī //*

the holy places. O, You who are Sitting on the Lotus; if one collects by oneself the substances for worship of God and purifies with effort – this would be the service.”¹²

The second element, namely cleanliness (*viśuddhi*) is described as follows:

“The removal of all dirt is known as one’s own cleanliness. Dirt is manifold in the body and having removed it, one is cleansed. Urine, semen and excrements, phlegm and transformed blood, sweat, tears and nails and various exudations while within the body they are not impure. Being outside they are causes of impurity. In particular times dirt appears [in the bodies] of all. Their purification [is to be done] with earth or cleanliness by washing [with water]. When one touches the dirt of others one should take a bath. In contact with a dead body and impurity [after child-birth], or in contact with sad [mourning] people, the emission of semen, vomiting – only by bath is self-purification achieved. If one touches one’s own excretions, excepting for example sweat and tears, expelled from the body, a bath is prescribed. Even in that case one should take holy sip. One should not sleep all the time. O, Pitāmaha; if there are any utensils for one’s own body used by others, they are impure for him. The usage of the utensils and places of God by people is the cause of impurity/sin – this is the rule. Whatever substance is [once] used by worshippers during the *pūjā*, this is known as *nirmālya* and should be avoided in all rituals. Purification of gold and gems, clothes and the like, as well as place, fire, *sruva* ladle, vessels and idols is done by washing. Secular cleanliness of dirt is done by washing. The worship of God, bath, daily cleansing of the body [as] prescribed in the popular usage and *dharma-śāstras*, are the methods of purification which should be undertaken by the wise devotee of Viṣṇu.”¹³

¹² ParS 12.24-27: *evasyārādhanaṁrthāya yat karoti pariśrayam / vrataiś ca dravya-yatnaiś ca paricaryā tu sā smṛtā // vrataṁ tri-śavaṇa-snānam adhaḥ śayanam eva ca / brahma-caryāṁ tathā maunam akṣāra-lavaṇāśanam // rātrau vīraśanam caiva divā svāpāna varjanam / puṇya-sthānādi gamanam ity-ādi kamalāsana // 12.26 pūjā-dravyāṇi devasya samāharati yat svayam / viśodhayati saṁśrāntaḥ paricaryā 'pi sā bhavet //*

¹³ ParS 12.28-40ab: *viśuddhir ātmano jñeyam [yā?] malānām apakarṣaṇam / malāś tu bahavaḥ kāye tāt apāśya viśudhyati // mūtra-śukla-purīṣāṇi śleṣma-vikreya-śoṇitam / svedo-śrūṇi-nakhāḥ visravāś ca pṛthag-vidhāḥ // antargatā na doṣāya bahiḥsthā doṣa-hetavaḥ / kāle kāle malāś tv ete sarveṣāṁ saṁbhavanti ca // teṣāṁ śuddhir mṛdā caiva kṣālanāc ca viśodhanam / malānām parakṛtyānām sparśane snānam ācāret // śāva-sūtaka-samyoge durmanaiś ca samāgame / śukla-mokṣe vamtivā ca snānam evātma-śodhanam // ātmīyānām malānām ca pracyutānām śarīrataḥ / sparśane snānam evoktaṁ sveda-bāspādikaṁ vinā // tatrāpy ācamanaṁ kuryān nidrāṁ kuryān na sarvadā / yāni cātma-śarīrasya karmopakaraṇāni vai // anyā-bhogenā duṣyanti tāny apy asya pitāmaha / devopakaraṇānām ca sthānādīnām pitāmaha // doṣa-hetur manuṣyāṇām upabhoga iti sthitiḥ / pūjāyām viniyuktaṁ tu yad dravyam iha pūjakaiḥ // nirmālyam iti vijñeyam sarva-kāryeṣu varjitam / hema-ratnām śukādīnām sthānasyāgneḥ sruvasya ca // pātrāṇām pratimāyāś ca śuddhiṁ prakṣālanād bhavet / malānām kṣālanenāpi śuddhir bhavati laukiki // deva-pūjātha*

The third kind of *dharma* of the body, namely graciousness (*parānugraha*), is described as follows:

“If one gives help to guests, teachers and suffering servants, to the great ones who are the guardians of *dharma* and to the temples of gods, to beggars and cattle and to many Vaiṣṇavas by encouragement and gifts of wealth with effort – this is graciousness (*paropakāra* = *parānugraha*), the highest *dharma* of the body. Among animals cows should be worshipped, of them better are men, among them Brahmins should be worshipped, among ascetics *yogins*. Among *yogins*, those desiring emancipation and devoted ones should be honoured. The gift of food is the highest *dharma* and the gift of goods. The gift of bed and seat for Vaiṣṇavas and ascetics. The gift of knowledge is distinguished and no other, [even] large one. Gifts of land, mounts, carriage, lordliness and other goods confer great fame, but middle fruits. Due to the situation, the place, the fitness of the devotee and trust, the right time and wealth, there are many kinds of fruits. Those desiring honour, intelligence, praise and fame are always blamed, especially in case of the devotee of Viṣṇu. Due to the difference of intention/desire a gift such as land is commended [as well as] if they ask for a long life, health or a son or similar. In connection with it one should examine substances, time and place and the fitness of the devotee. Having examined, whatever is done brings the whole fruit. If good people give whatever should be given in honour of God, the following result will be fame. Service to the Highest One is the gift of the emancipated and noble one. Having acted with exclusive dedication, one gets the accomplishment, not otherwise. In this way the triple *dharma* having the source in the body is explained to you.”¹⁴

ca snānaṃ nityaśaḥ kāya [ed.; kārya GOS] śodhanam / loka-saṃvyavahāreṣu dharmā-śāstrāntareṣu ca // vihi [Ed.; di GOS] tāḥ śuddhayaḥ grāhyāḥ viṣṇu-bhaktena dhīmatā //

¹⁴ ParS 12.40cd-52: *atithināṃ gurūṇāṃ ca bhṛtyānāṃ vāpi duḥkhiṇāṃ // mahatāṃ dharmā-setūnāṃ devatāyatanasya ca / bhikṣukaṇāṃ paśūnāṃ ca vaiṣṇavanāṃ ca bhūtyasāṃ // utsāhair artha-dānaiś ca yatnenopakaroti yat / paropakāra ity eṣaḥ śārīro dharmā uttamahā // gāvaḥ pūjyās tu tiryagbhīyas tābhyo 'pi manuṣyās tathā / tebhyo 'pi brāhmaṇāḥ pūjyā bhikṣubhyo 'pi ca yogināḥ // yogibhyo 'pi tathā pūjyā mukti-kāmāḥ samāhūtaḥ / anna-dānaṃ paro dharmo vasudānaṃ ca sarvaśaḥ // śayanāsana-dānaṃ ca vaiṣṇaveṣu yatīṣv api / vidyādānaṃ viśeṣyante nānyāni vipulāni ca // bhūmi-vāhana-yānādi vāstv-aīśvaryaḥ sampadaḥ / dānāni kīrti bhūyāṃsi madhyamāni phaleṣu ca // avasthayāpadeśena pātreṇa śraddhaya 'pi ca / kālena ca dhanenāpi phalaṃ vividham ucyate // sarvatrāpi yaśo-buddhi[kāma]-kāryāś ca ninditaḥ // ślāghā ca kīrtanaṃ cāpi vaiṣṇavasya viśeṣataḥ / kāma-bhedena dānaṃ tu bhūmy-ādīnāṃ praśasyate // āyur ārogya-putrādi prārthayanti tad-anvayāt / dravyāni kāla-deśau ca pātrasyāpi parīkṣayet // parīkṣya kriyamāṇe tu sarvaṃ sampadyate phalaṃ / yad vā sarvāni deyaṇi dātavyāni manasvinaḥ // deva-devaṃ samuddiśya yaśas tatānuṣaṅgikam / śuśrūṣāpi paraṃ dānaṃ muktasya ca mahātmanah // bhaktyā kevalayā kṛtvā siddhir bhavati nānyathah / ity evaṃ tri-viadhā prokto dharmas te kāya-saṃbhavaḥ //*

After this exposition of the threefold *dharma* connected with mind, speech and body, the ParS informs the reader in brief about the things which should not be done, which are opposed to *dharma*, and therefore fall under the category of *adharma*:

pravṛtter upasaṃkṣepān nivṛtṭim tu parāṃ śṛṇu [corr.; śṛṇu Ed.] / *etebhyo viparīto yas tam adharmam pracakṣate* // *adharmād vinivṛttis tu mano-vāk-kāya-karmabhiḥ* / *nivṛtti-rūpo dharmo 'sau jñeyah pāpa-vināśanaḥ* //

“Since all about [right] activity briefly [has been explained], listen about abstaining. All which is opposed to it [namely to *dharma*] is described as *adharma*. Refraining from *adharma* with the activity of mind, speech and body is known as the *dharma* which has the form of restraining (*nivṛtṭirūpa dharmo*) and it destroys sins.” (ParS 12. 53-54)

Concluding his exposition the author of the text recommends particular kinds of *dharma* as suiting particular types of men, namely for the wise man the best are the three kinds of *dharma* of the mind, for the ordinary man the three kinds of *dharma* of the body are the best. To all those who are in between the best is the *dharma* of speech.¹⁵

The role of activity done according to the rules of *dharma* is again stressed by the Parama's statement that it has both the form of deeds and the form of knowledge. Of course, knowledge is higher, since it gains emancipation, but deeds purify knowledge.¹⁶ Therefore all kinds of *dharma* are needed to accomplish the highest aim of the devotee. God, if worshipped by service performed in the proper form, protects His devotees even in their future lives.¹⁷

The notion of *dharma* is present also in other Pāñca-rātric texts, though not in such an elaborate form as in the ParS. For example, one can find it in one of the later texts, *Viṣṇu-saṃhitā*, dated not earlier than the 11th and not later than the 14th century A.D.¹⁸ In this text, in the context of the discussion of the interaction of the field – *kṣetra* and the knower of the field – *kṣetrajña* (*kṣetra-kṣetrajña-nirṇaya*), presented in the fourth chapter, *dharma* and *adharma* are described in connection with intelligence (*buddhi*), which is eightfold (*buddhir aṣṭavidhā smṛtā* – there are eight states (*bhava*) of *buddhi*), as follows:

¹⁵ ParS 12.56-57: *jitendriyasya viduṣas tri-vidho mānasaḥ paraḥ* / *prākṛtasyāpi bhaktasya kāya-dharmāḥ paraḥ smṛtaḥ* // *madhyamānām tu sarveṣāṃ vāciko dharmo uttamah* //

¹⁶ ParS 12.59: *kriyā-rūpaḥ smṛto dharmo jñāna-rūpaḥ ca tat punah* / *jñānena sādhyate mokṣaḥ kriyā jñānasya śodhinī* //

¹⁷ ParS 12.62-63ab: *tasmād dharmena deveṣam ārādhya tad-anugrahāt* / *antarāyam atikramya siddhiṃ vrajati vaiṣṇavaḥ* // *karmaṇārādrito devaḥ pāti janmāntareṣv api* //

¹⁸ More about the *Viṣṇu-saṃhitā*, see Czerniak-Drożdżowicz 2006.

“*Dharma*, knowledge, renunciation and lordliness [are possessed] by those with minds dominated by *guṇa sattva*; non-indifference [is the characteristic of] the mind dominated by the *guṇa rajas*. Those whose minds are dominated by *tamas* are characterised by *adharma* etc. Self-control, restraint, *dharma* being the activity born from mind, speech and body, should be done for the favour of God by those desiring emancipation. Trust, firmness and the one called graciousness is the highest *dharma* of mind. Rightness, friendliness, friendly speech – this is here praised as the *dharma* of speech. The [*dharma* of the] body of the nature of service, purity and kindness is threefold. These *dharma*s should be performed which follow the [rules of] *varṇa* and *aśrama*, which are Vaidika or Tāntrika. Through this one accomplishes one’s aims, not otherwise.”

(ViṣṇuS 4.15-19.ab)¹⁹

Furthermore, in chapter 29, in which the ViṣṇuS presents the rules of general behaviour and daily routine (*samayācāra-lakṣaṇa*), the text referring to *dharma* classifies it similarly as the ParS, namely into the *dharma* of the mind (*mānasa*), the *dharma* of the body (*kāyika*) and the *dharma* of speech (*vācika*). Also the ViṣṇuS considers *mānasa* as the best one, recommended for those devotees who control their senses (*jīṇḍriyasya bhaktasya*), *vācika* as appropriate for the middle devotee (*madhyamasya*) and *kāyika* for the ordinary, low devotee (*prākṛtasya*). *Dharma* having the form of deeds (*kriyā-rūpa*) is lower than that of the form of knowledge (*jñāna-rūpa*), since through *jñāna* one acquires emancipation, but deeds (*kriyā*), understood here also as ritual, are needed for *jñāna*. The ViṣṇuS warns that the knowledge about *dharma* without favour of God (*anugrahād ṛte*) is not enough to pacify the mind which is filled with worldly existence. Only having acquired by favour an uninterrupted knowledge, does one acquire emancipation.²⁰ This passage of the ViṣṇuS is similar to ParS’s exposition of *dharma*, especially ViṣṇuS 29.33cd-34ab which recalls ParS 12.57-59.²¹

¹⁹ ViṣṇuS 4.15-19ab: *dharmo jñānam ca vairāgyam aiśvaryam sattva-buddhayaḥ / avairāgyam rajo-buddhir adharmādyas tamodhikāḥ //15 yamaś ca niyamo dharmo mano-vāk-kāyaja-kriyaḥ / deva-prasādanāyāsau kartavyo mokṣa-kāṅkṣibhiḥ //16 śraddhā dhṛtiḥ prasādayo mānaso dharmo uttamaḥ / satya-priya-hitālāpo vāg-dharma iha kīrtitaḥ //17 śāstrāḥ paricaryāśuddhy-anugraha-mayas tridhā / ete dharmās tu kartavyā varṇāśrama-gatās ca ye //18 vaidikās tāntrikā vāsya siddhir bhavati nānyathā /*

²⁰ ViṣṇuS 29.32ab-36ab: *jīṇḍriyasya bhaktasya mānaso dharmo uttamaḥ //32 kāyikaḥ prākṛtasyokto madhyamasya tu vācikaḥ / kriyā-rūpaḥ smṛto dharmo jñāna-rūpas tu tat-paraḥ [em., same as ms marked ‘ḍa’; jñāna-rūpaṃ tu tat-param Ed.] // 33 jñānena mokṣam āpnoti jñānārtha ceṣyate kriyā / kevalaṃ tu iha vijñānam dharmasyānugrahād ṛte // 34 nālaṃ ceto bhavāviṣṭam prasādayitum añjasā / tad iṣṭvānantarāyārthaṃ prāpya jñānam anugrahāt // 35 tataḥ sādhyo bhaven mokṣas tad-bhaktair eva nāparaiḥ // 36ab.*

²¹ See footnotes 15, 16 and 20. This is not the only reminiscence of the ParS one can find in the ViṣṇuS, for example, there are similarities in the explanation of the name Pāṇca-rātra, the same *pañcopaniṣad-mantras* are present in both texts, etc. See Czerniak-Drożdżowicz 2006.

Pāñca-rātric texts often refer to *dharma* understood in its conventional, orthodox way, as the rules regulating social and religious life and in such cases *varṇāśrama-dharma* as well as *dharma-śāstras* are mentioned, therefore we can presuppose that these generally respected rules are to be followed also by the Pāñca-rātrikas.²² However, in addition, Pāñca-rātra-saṃhitās add some particular explanations of the notion, referring to its three kinds and connecting them with particular kinds of devotees. Through these additions Pāñca-rātric texts differentiate the rules of *dharma* and underline the role of the ritual, which is crucial for the Pāñca-rātric religious routine. Even if the knowledge (*jñāna*) is higher, its necessary support is *kriyā*, which is all kinds of activity, but in the Pāñca-rātric context it is mainly ritualistic activity.

Through recollecting the value of the *varṇāśrama-dharma* as seen in the *dharma-śāstras*, Pāñca-rātric texts place their tradition within orthodoxy, which was very important in the context of the constant challenge to their orthodoxy by more conservative, especially Smārta, traditions having a major influence on religious life in the South of India, the region in which Pāñca-rātra flourished in the first millennium A.D. Tantric traditions, especially those belonging to the Vaiṣṇava cult, in general did not reject the basic discipline and rules imposed by the authoritative Smṛti texts, and this made their devotees an integral part of Hindu society. Nevertheless, through additions to and modifications of the notions such as *dharma*, they gave to devotees the status of a higher, more instructed and specifically initiated group following a higher, special (*viśeṣa*) form of religion, which provides to devotees more possibilities to realise their aims, endowing them with the powers (*śaktis*) to rule the world and with the certainty of gaining final emancipation.

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²² ViṣṇuS 29.9cd-10ab: *sarve 'pi dikṣitāḥ samyak sadā guru-parāyaṇāḥ // varṇāśrama-gatān dharmān rakṣeyuḥ samayāṃs tathā /*

ViṣṇuS 29.68: *sva-grhye dharma-śāstre ca yad uktam tat sadācaret / tantruktam aviruddham ca kula-varṇāśramānuṅgam //*. ParS 12.39-40ab: *deva-pūjātha ca snānam nityaśaḥ kārya-śodhanam / loka-saṃvyavahāreṣu dharma-śāstrāntareṣu ca // vihi [dī]tāḥ śuddhaya grāhyāḥ viṣṇu-bhaktena dhīmata /*

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