

A HISTORY
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beneficial effects of which may be known through experience, can be called *dharma*. The *Āṅgiraḥ smṛti* echoes this idea when it says that, excepting efforts for attaining self-knowledge, whatever one does out of his own personal desire or wish is like child's play and unnecessary¹.

Many of the important *Smṛtis* however seem to extend the limits of the concept of *dharma* much further than the pure Vedic commands. As Manu's work is based entirely on the purport of the Vedas, he is regarded as the greatest of all *smṛti* writers; whatever *smṛti* is in conflict with Manu's writings is invalid². Manu defines *dharma* as that which is always followed by the learned who are devoid of attachment and antipathy, and that to which the heart assents³. In another place Manu says that *dharma* is of four kinds; the observance of the Vedic injunctions, of the injunctions of *smṛti*, the following of the customary practices of good people, and the performance of such actions as may produce mental satisfaction (*ātmanas tuṣṭiḥ*) to the performer⁴. But the commentators are very unwilling to admit any such extension of the content and meaning of *dharma*. Thus Medhātithi (9th century), one of the oldest commentators, remarks that *dharma* as following the Vedic injunctions is beginningless; only the Vedic scholars can be said to know *dharma*, and it is impossible that there should be other sources from which the nature of *dharma* could be known. Other customs and habits and disciplines of life which pass as religious practices are introduced by ignorant persons of bad character (*mūrkhā-duḥśīla-puruṣa-pravartitāḥ*); they remain in fashion for a time and then die out. Such religious practices are often adopted out of greed (*lobhān mantra-tantrādiṣu pravarttate*)⁵. The wise and the good are

¹ *svābhīprāya-kṛtaṃ karma yatkiñcij jñāna-varjitam
kṛtā-karmeva bālānāṃ tat-sarvaṃ niṣ-prayojanam.*

Vīramitrodaya-paribhāṣāprakāśa, p. 11.

² *vedārthopanibandhṛtvāt prādhānyaṃ hi manoḥ smṛtam
manvartha-viparītā tu yā smṛtiḥ sā na praśaṣyate.*

Bṛhaspati quoted in *Vīramitrodaya*, *ibid.* p. 27.

³ *vidvadbhiḥ sevitaḥ sadbhir nityam adveṣa-rāgibhiḥ
hṛdayenābhyanujñāto yo dharmas taṃ nibodhata.*

Manu-saṃhitā, II. 1.

⁴ *vedo'khilo dharmā-mūlaṃ smṛti-śīle ca tadvidam
ācāraś caiva sādhnām ātmanas tuṣṭir eva ca.*

Ibid. II. 6.

⁵ Medhātithi says that such practices as those of besmearing the body with ashes, carrying human skulls, going about naked or wearing yellow robes, are adopted by worthless people as a means of living. *Ibid.* II. 1.

only those who know the injunctions of the Vedas, who carry them into practice out of reverence for the law, and who are not led astray into following non-Vedic practices out of greed or antipathy to others. And, though a man might be tempted in his mind to perform many actions for his sense-gratification, real contentment of the heart can come only through the performance of Vedic deeds¹. Consistently with his own mode of interpretation Medhātithi discards not only the Buddhists and the Jains as being outside the true Vedic *dharma*, but also the followers of Pañcarātra (i.e. the Bhāgavatas) and the Pāśupatas as well, who believed in the authority of the authors of these systems and in the greatness of particular gods of their own choice. He held that their teachings are directly contrary to the mandates of the Vedas: and as an illustration he points out that the Bhāgavatas considered all kinds of injury to living beings to be sinful, which directly contradicts the Vedic injunction to sacrifice animals at particular sacrifices. Injury to living beings is not in itself sinful: only such injury is sinful as is prohibited by the Vedic injunctions. So the customs and practices of all systems of religion which are not based on the teachings of the Vedas are to be discarded as not conforming to *dharma*. In interpreting the phrase *smṛti-śīle ca tad-vidām*, Medhātithi says that the word *śīla* (which is ordinarily translated as "character") is to be taken here to mean that concentration which enables the mind to remember the right purports of the Vedic injunctions². By customary duties (*ācāra*) Medhātithi means only such duties as are currently practised by those who strictly follow the Vedic duties, but regarding which no Vedic or *smṛti* texts are available. He supposes that minor auspices and other rituals which are ordinarily

¹ In interpreting the meaning of the word *hṛdaya* (heart) in the phrase *hṛdayena abhyamujñāta* Medhātithi says that the word *hṛdaya* may mean "mind" (*manas, antar-hṛdaya-varttini buddhyādi-tattvāni*); on this supposition he would hold that contentment of mind could only come through following the Vedic courses of duties. But, dissatisfied apparently with this meaning, he thinks that *hṛdaya* might also mean the memorized content of the Vedas (*hṛdayaṃ vedāḥ, sa hy adhīto bhāvanā-rūpeṇa hṛdaya-sthīto hṛdayam*). This seems to mean that a Vedic scholar is instinctively, as it were, led to actions which are virtuous, because in choosing his course of conduct he is unconsciously guided by his Vedic studies. A man may be prompted to action by his own inclination, by the example of great men, or by the commands of the Vedas; but in whichever way he may be so prompted, if his actions are to conform to *dharma*, they must ultimately conform to Vedic courses of duties.

² *samādhiḥ śīlam ucyate...yac cetaso'nya-viśaya-vyākṣepa-parihāreṇa śāstrā-rtha-nirūpaṇa-pravaṇatā tac chīlam ucyate.* Medhātithi's commentary, II. 6.

performed by the people of the Vedic circle have also ultimately originated from the Vedic injunctions. Similarly it is only the feeling of self-contentment of those persons who are habituated to work in accordance with the Vedas that can be regarded as indicating the path of *dharma*. It simply means that the instinctive inclination of the true adherents of the Vedas may be relied on as indicating that those actions to which their minds are inclined must be consistent with the Vedic injunctions, and must therefore conform to *dharma*. Other commentators however take a more liberal view of the meaning of the words *śīla*, *ātmanas tuṣṭi* and *hṛdayeṇa abhyanuñjāta*. Thus Govindarāja explains the last phrase as meaning "absence of doubt" (*antaḥ-karaṇa-cikitsā-sūnya*), and Nārāyaṇa goes so far as to say that, unless the heart approves of the action, it cannot be right: Rāmānanda says that, when there is any doubt regarding two conflicting texts, one should act in a way that satisfies his own mind. The word *śīla* has been interpreted as "character" (*ṛtta* or *caritra*) by Rāmānanda in his *Manvarthacandrikā* and as dissociation of attachment and antipathy by Govindarāja: Kullūka takes it according to Hārīta's definition of *śīla* as involving the qualities of non-injury to others, absence of jealousy, mildness, friendliness, gratefulness, mercy, peace, etc. Self-satisfaction can in practice discern the nature of *dharma*, but only when there are no specified texts to determine it. Thus, though the other later commentators are slightly more liberal than Medhātithi, they all seem to interpret the slight concession that Manu had seemed to make to right character and self-contentment or conscience as constituent elements of *dharma*, more or less on Medhātithi's line, as meaning nothing more than loyalty to scriptural injunctions.

It has been pointed out that Medhātithi definitely ruled out the Pañcarātra and the Pāśupata systems as heretical and therefore invalid for inculcating the nature of *dharma*. But in later times these too came to be regarded as Vedic schools and therefore their instructions also were regarded as so authoritative that they could not be challenged on rational grounds¹.

¹ Thus *Yogi-yājñavalkya* says: *Sāṃkhyam yogaḥ pañca-rātram vedāḥ pāśupataḥ tathā ati-pramāṇānyetāni hetubhir na virodhayet*, quoted in *Vīramitrodaya*, p. 20, but not found in the printed text, Bombay. This *Yogi-yājñavalkya* is a work on *yoga* and the other a work on *smṛti*, and it is the former text

It is however a relief to find that in some of the later *Smṛtis* the notion of *dharma* was extended to morality in general and to some of the cardinal virtues. Thus Bṛhaspati counts kindness (*dayā*, meaning a feeling of duty to save a friend or foe from troubles), patience (*kṣamā*, meaning fortitude in all kinds of difficulty), the qualities of appreciating others' virtues and absence of elation at others' faults (*anasūyā*), purity (*śauca*, meaning avoidance of vices, association with the good and strict adherence to one's caste duties), avoidance of vigorous asceticism (*sannyāsa*), performance of approved actions and avoidance of disapproved ones (*maṅgala*), regular charity even from small resources (*akārpaṇya*), contentment with what little one may have and want of jealousy at others' prosperity (*asprhā*), as constituting the universal *dharma* for all¹. Viṣṇu counts patience (*kṣamā*), truthfulness for the good of all beings (*satya*), mind-control (*dama*), purity (*śauca* as defined above), making of gifts (*dāna*), sense-control (*indriya-samyama*), non-injury (*ahiṃsā*), proper attendance to teachers (*guru-śūsrūṣā*), pilgrimage, kindness (*dayā*), straightforwardness (*ārjava*), want of covetousness, adoration of gods and Brahmins, as constituting universal *dharma*. Devala considers purity (*śauca*), gifts (*dāna*), asceticism of the body (*tapas*), faith (*śraddhā*), attendance to teachers (*guru-sevā*), patience (*kṣamā*), mercifulness in the sense of pity for others' sufferings, showing friendliness as if these were one's own (*dayā*), acquirement of knowledge, Vedic or non-Vedic (*vijñāna*), mind-control and body-control (*vinaya*), truthfulness (*satya*), as constituting the totality of all *dharmas* (*dharma-samuccaya*). Yājñavalkya speaks of *ahiṃsā*, *satya*, *asteya* (avoidance of stealing), *śauca*, *indriya-nigraha* (sense-control), *dāna*, *dama*, *dayā*, and *kṣānti* as constituting universal *dharma* for all. The *Mahābhārata* counts truthfulness (*satya*), steadiness in one's caste duties (*tapas* as *sva-dharma-varitva*), purity (*śauca*), con-

that has been printed. The present writer has no knowledge whether the latter text has been published anywhere.

Viṣṇudharmottara also speaks of Pañcarātra and Pāsupata as means of enquiry into Brahman:

sāṃkhyam yogaṃ pañcarātram vedāḥ pāsupatam

tathā kṛtānta-pañcakaṃ vidhi brahmaṇaḥ parimārgaṇe. Ibid. p. 22.

But Mitra Miśra on the same page distinguishes between Pāsupata as a Vedic *āgama* and as a non-Vedic *āgama*. Similarly there was a Vedic and non-Vedic Pañcarātra too. *Ibid.* p. 23.

¹ *Ibid.* pp. 32-4.