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‘...not satisfied with the Mahābhārata...’ (śrutvā  
bhāratasaṃhitām atṛptaḥ): the function of the  
Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha in the Śivadharma corpus

Csaba Kiss

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*Śivadharmāmṛta*  
Essays on the Śivadharma and its Network

UNIVERSITÀ DI NAPOLI L'ORIENTALE  
DIPARTIMENTO ASIA, AFRICA E MEDITERRANEO

THE ŚIVADHARMA PROJECT

*Studies on the History of Śaivism*  
II

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Florinda De Simini & Csaba Kiss (eds)



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‘...not satisfied with the Mahābhārata...’  
(śrutvā bhāratasaṃhitām atṛptaḥ): the function  
of the Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha in the Śivadharmā corpus<sup>1</sup>

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1. *Contents and structure of the Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha*

The *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* (‘Compendium on the Essence of the Bull [of Dharmā]’) is a Sanskrit text of twenty-four chapters brought down to us in Nepa-

<sup>1</sup> This article is an early outcome of my work within task-force D of the DHARMA project (GA no. 809994, ‘The Domestication of “Hindu” Asceticism and the Religious Making of South and Southeast Asia’), in which I work in close collaboration with the ŚIVADHARMA project group (GA no. 803624).

I owe thanks to my immediate colleagues in the project: Florinda De Simini, Margherita Trento, Giulia Buriola, Nirajan Kafle, Kenji Takahashi and Alessandro Battistini, who made innumerable suggestions concerning the constitution and interpretation of the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* and helped me understand the text in every possible way. I am also extremely grateful to my colleagues, friends and fellow team members in Pondicherry, India, for their useful comments and criticism during our online readings and during a workshop at the EFEO center in Pondicherry (February 2020). Among them, Dominic Goodall, S.A.S. Sharma and R. Sathyanarayan stand out. For their help and support I am grateful to Francesco Sferra, Hans Bakker, Judit Törzsök, Nina Mirnig, Kristen de Joseph, Gergely Hidas and Torsten Gerloff. I am grateful to Florinda De Simini and Judit Törzsök for their comments on an early version of this paper and to an anonymous reviewer for some valuable remarks.

lese multiple-text manuscripts of the so-called Śivadharma corpus.<sup>2</sup> The present article aims to answer some very general questions, such as: Why was the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* included in this collection of texts? Does it have a specific role among the works transmitted in these manuscript bundles? And can we make guesses as to what target audience the redactors of the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* had in mind? My efforts are somewhat similar to those of De Simini and Mirnig (2017), who explore another text of the Śivadharma corpus, the *Lalitavistara*,<sup>3</sup> finding clues for its short-lived presence therein.<sup>4</sup> My work on the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* has been carried out within a larger framework of research investigating still little-known textual sources on the lay Śaiva religion.

The text of the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* has appeared in print along the other works of the Śivadharma corpus (Naraharinath 1998), but this version is highly problematic and calls for a new and truly critical edition.

The *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* is probably later than the *Śivadharmaśāstra* and the *Śivadharmottara*,<sup>5</sup> the flagship texts of the Śivadharma corpus, and may be dated to around the tenth century on the following grounds: the oldest dated multiple-text manuscript of the Śivadharma corpus, a palm-leaf manuscript kept at the Asiatic Society of Calcutta, marked as G 4077 (N<sup>K9</sup><sub>77</sub>), dated to Nepal *saṃvat* 156, i.e., 1035-36 CE, already contains the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha*,<sup>6</sup> but a possibly earlier (undated) Śivadharma manuscript (N<sup>K</sup><sub>28</sub>) does not.<sup>7</sup> The *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* is ‘a stable element of

<sup>2</sup> For recent publications on the Śivadharma corpus, see ‘An updated bibliography on Śivadharma research’ on pp. xii–xv. Note that so far no studies have appeared on the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha*.

<sup>3</sup> This *Lalitavistara* is to be distinguished from the Buddhist work of the same title.

<sup>4</sup> De Simini and Mirnig (2017, 588): [It is an] ‘opportunity to examine a specific moment in the textual production linked to the assemblage of a fixed Śivadharma corpus, in which we may more closely trace key aspects and motivations that have led to the composition of more works on Śaiva topics following the model of the *Śivadharmaśāstra* and the *Śivadharmottara*.’

<sup>5</sup> On the date of these two texts (around the seventh to the ninth century), see De Simini and Mirnig 2017, 589, and Goodall 2011, 232, note 33.

<sup>6</sup> See De Simini 2016b, 251 and De Simini and Mirnig 2017, 588.

<sup>7</sup> See De Simini and Mirnig 2017, 591. Nevertheless, this argument is not sufficient proof that the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* is later than the *Śivadharmaśāstra* and the *Śivadharmottara*. In this regard, one could also consider Barois’ argument for an early date for the *Dharmaṃputrikā* (Barois 2020), which is often transmitted as the last text in the multiple-text manuscripts. Thus, the order in which the texts of the Śivadharma corpus appear may not fully reflect the dates of composition of each individual text. For example, the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* shows archaic features, such as the *tattva*-system in chapter twenty, reflecting pre-classical, *Mahābhārata*-style *Sāṃkhya*. This may or may not be an indication of an early date for its composition.



the corpus,’ meaning that it appears in early Śivadharmā manuscripts and continues to be transmitted in later ones,<sup>8</sup> and there is little evidence that it was ever transmitted independently,<sup>9</sup> or outside Nepal.<sup>10</sup> After examining about thirty manuscripts that contain the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha*, I can venture to say that they transmit a fairly unified recension, although with innumerable variant readings and minor changes.

In general, the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* is a text on Dharma (religious duties), as its title suggests. De Simini has raised the possibility that the bull (*vṛṣa*) in the title may not only refer to Dharma but also to Śiva’s mount.<sup>11</sup> As a matter of fact, while the bull as a synonym of Dharma is mentioned in the text repeatedly, somewhat surprisingly, and perhaps significantly, there is no clear reference to Śiva’s mount in the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha*.<sup>12</sup> In contrast with this, the *Uttarot-taramahāsamvāda*, the text that usually precedes the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* in the multiple text manuscripts of the Śivadharmā corpus, does confirm that the bull is the synonym of both Dharma and Śiva’s mount (6.1–2):<sup>13</sup>

*umovāca |*  
*etadgūṇasamāyuktā yathā gauḥ kathitā mama |*  
*vṛṣas cāpi ca ko dharmo vada śigbraṃ jagatpate || 1 ||*  
*īśvara uvāca |*

<sup>8</sup> See De Simini and Mirnig 2017, 592. It is to be contrasted with the swift disappearance of the *Lalitavistara*, ib.

<sup>9</sup> Asiatic Society (Calcutta), Manuscript G 4076, cat. no. 4083, may seem to be an independent manuscript of the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha*, but as De Simini has already remarked (2016b, 240 n. 19), it is probably from a multiple text manuscript. In fact, from what can be gathered from its description in Shastri 1928, 716ff, it seems likely that this manuscript was originally part of manuscript Asiatic Society (Calcutta) G 3852, cat. no. 4085. See for example the folio numbering in these two manuscripts: ASC G 3852 contains 210 folios, and ASC G 4076 starts on folio 210.

<sup>10</sup> See De Simini and Mirnig 2017, 589. That the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* is one of the texts in this corpus that were transmitted and likely composed in the Kathmandu Valley is also hinted at, for example, in De Simini 2017, 506–507.

<sup>11</sup> De Simini 2016b, 238 n. 13: ‘As noted by Sanderson [...], this title can have a double meaning, since the “bull” (*vṛṣa*) is both a synonym of “religious practice” and the traditional mount (*vāhana*) of Śiva.’ In a similar manner, Bakker (2014, 69), while discussing a seal of Śarvavarman that features a beautifully carved bull representing Dharma, remarks: ‘The reader may also see in the image the thriving Śaiva religion, represented by the Bull, the *vāhana* of Śiva [...].’

<sup>12</sup> There is one single line that introduces Nandikeśvara as an interlocutor in 10.3, but this name is very unlikely to have anything to do with Nandin/Nandi, the name usually associated with Śiva’s *vāhana*. On Nandin, see Bhattacharya 1977 and *Tāntrikābbidhānakośa* III s.v.

<sup>13</sup> N<sub>94</sub><sup>C</sup> fol. 184r ll. 3–4.

*na jānanti ca loke 'smin mānavā mūḍhacetasaḥ |  
catuspādo bhaved dharmah śuklo 'yaṃ mama vāhanaḥ || 2 ||*

Umā spoke:

Just as you taught me the cow as having the above characteristics, tell me quickly, O Jagatpati: what kind of a bull is Dharma?

Īśvara spoke:

In this world, foolish people do not know that the four-legged Dharma is this bright mount of mine.

It is not inconceivable that the redactors of the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* had the same association in mind, namely that the bull in question is both Dharma and Śiva's mount. In any case, the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* seems to be one of the few texts in the Śivadharmā corpus, and the first one in the list of titles in most Śivadharmā bundles, that does not have an evidently Śaiva title: the *Śivadharmasāstra*, the *Śivadharmottara*, the *Śivadharmasaṃgraha* and the *Śivopaniṣad*, all have the name Śiva in them; the titles of two further works in the multiple-text manuscripts, *Umāmaheśvarasaṃvāda* and *Uttarottaramahāsaṃvāda*, clearly refer to dialogues between the Śaiva interlocutors of those texts, even if the texts themselves contain, within these purely Śaiva frameworks, some Vaiṣṇava material.<sup>14</sup> The *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* is usually the penultimate work in the multiple-text manuscripts of the Śivadharmā corpus, just before the *Dharmaputrikā*: since the latter is also far from being a purely Śaiva work,<sup>15</sup> this part of the corpus may represent a diversion from strictly Śaiva material. Nevertheless, this question is not necessarily significant here: instead of focusing on whether the title *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* contains a clear-cut reference to Śaivism, one should rather focus on its mention of an image that unambiguously evoke the notion of Dharma. From this point of view the title is thus perfectly coherent with those of the *Śivadharmasāstra* and the *Śivadharmottara*. Whether it is a text on Dharma teachings exclusively for Śaivas is another question and is rather doubtful, as I shall show below. To further investigate why the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* was included in the Śivadharmā corpus and to understand what function it has

<sup>14</sup> On the *Umāmaheśvarasaṃvāda* in this respect, see De Simini and Mirnig 2017, especially page 649: 'The *Umāmaheśvarasaṃvāda*, which uses most of the materials included in the *Lalitavistara*, adopted a more unequivocal Śaiva frame, even just by more systematically identifying the two speakers as Umā and Maheśvara throughout the work.' Also, note that the *Uttarottaramahāsaṃvāda* contains, among other Vaiṣṇava material, a condensed narrative of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and a discussion on Viṣṇu's ten *avatāras* in its seventh chapter. On this topic, also see Kafe's article in this volume.

<sup>15</sup> Kafe's ongoing research on the *Dharmaputrikā* will shed much light on this work's Buddhist background.

in this collection, we need to look at what topics the text focuses on and in what structure it presents them to us.

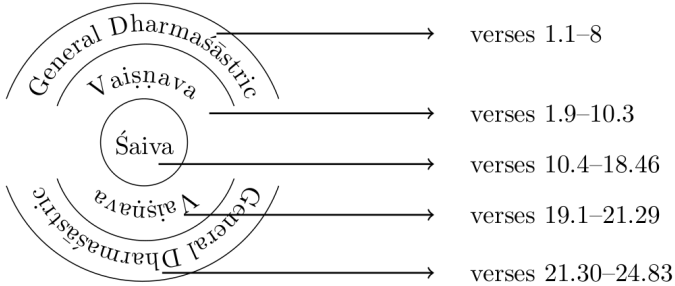
The structure of the text is that of numerous layers embedded in each other, in the manner of Matryoshka dolls. The outermost layer comprises little more than three chapters (1.1–1.8 and 21.22–24.85) in the form of a dialogue between Janamejaya and Vaiśampāyana, echoing the setting of the frame story of the *Mahābhārata*. Janamejaya is the king at whose snake-sacrifice Vaiśampāyana recited the whole *Mahābhārata* for the first time.<sup>16</sup> This important moment is where the frame story of the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* takes off: Janamejaya has listened to the whole of the *Mahābhārata*, but having had the desire to hear the ultimate teaching on Dharma, he is bound to remain unsatisfied.<sup>17</sup> Asked by Janamejaya for a higher teaching on Dharma which can lead to liberation, Vaiśampāyana relates a dialogue between Vigatarāga (in fact Viṣṇu in disguise) and Anarthayajña, an ascetic. This makes up the second layer. This second layer is a substantial part of the text, spanning twelve chapters (1.9–10.3 and 19.1–21.29, with minor additional overlaps). In a simplistic manner, I label the outermost layer ‘general Dharmāśāstric’ (or possibly ‘Vaidika’) because there is little that is specifically Śāiva or Vaiṣṇava in it; and I label the second layer ‘Vaiṣṇava’ because, as mentioned above, one of the interlocutors, Vigatarāga, the one who poses questions to Anarthayajña, turns out to be Viṣṇu in disguise. This latter fact is not entirely clear in the first chapter because the confusing syntax blurs it,<sup>18</sup> but it becomes evident in chapter 21. Later, in verses

<sup>16</sup> See *Mahābhārata* 1.1.8–9.

<sup>17</sup> See *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* 1.2–3ab: *śatasāhasrikam grantham sahasrādhyāyam uttamam | parva cāsya śataṃ pūrṇam śrutvā bhāratasaṃhitām || 2 || atrptaḥ puna papraccha vaiśampāyanam eva hi*; ‘Having listened to the *Bhāratasaṃhitā* [= *Mahābhārata*], the supreme book of one hundred thousand [verses], one thousand chapters and one hundred sections, in its entirety, [Janamejaya] remained unsatisfied and asked Vaiśampāyana.’ The above lines are the source for the title of the present article; compare *Niśvāsataṭṭvasaṃhitā*, Mūlasūtra 1.9: *vedāntam viditam devaṃ sāmḥyaṃ vai pañcaviṃśakam | na ca triptim gamiṣyāmo by ṛte śaivād anugrahāt ||*. Note that when citing the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha*, I use my critical edition in progress which is at the moment based on three to six manuscripts, depending on the passage in question. Note also that the language of the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* is rather peculiar and often non-standard, as can be seen from the passages quoted in this article. Its language displays features that can be labelled Aīśa or Ārṣa; most specifically, the combined use of these two irregularities can be seen as a hallmark of the text: the use of stem form nouns *metri causa*, and the phenomenon of *muta cum liquida*, the licence that allows the presence of the syllables *pra*, *bra*, *vra*, *kra*, *śra*, *śya*, *śva*, *sva*, *dva* etc. after a syllable that should normally be short.

<sup>18</sup> *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* 1.7–8 (note the use of the instrumental for nominative): *anarthayajñakartāraṃ tapovrataparāyaṇam | śīlaśaucasamācāraṃ sarvabhūtaḍāyāparam*

10.1–3, Anarthayajña starts reciting a text in which Nandikeśvara relates a dialogue between Devī and Maheśvara. This layer spans from verse 10.4 till the end of chapter 18, and I label this core section of the text ‘Śaiva.’ The presence of Nandikeśvara as a narrator, as well as of Maheśvara and Devī as interlocutors of a dialogue, allows to connect this section both to the *Śivadharmaśāstra*, which is narrated by Nandikeśvara, and the other works of the corpus such as the *Umāmaheśvarasaṃvāda*, which are clearly framed as conversations between the god and goddess—a feature shared with many other Śaiva scriptures. Somewhat surprisingly, partly in light of the scarcity of narratives in the texts of the Śivadharma corpus, and partly because of the orientation of this section, the actual innermost part, the very centre, of the text (chapter 12), is in fact a narrative, an entertaining tale, told by Maheśvara, of Vipula the merchant. Vipula, in order not to break a promise, has to donate his own wife to a Brahmin. Having done so, after some adventures involving Indra, Soma, Sūrya, a Gandharva, and a monkey, he gets to Brahmāloka eventually. This may be an attempt to produce another layer, that of a Brahmā-oriented core. In any case, in a simplified way, the structure of the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* can be represented like this:<sup>19</sup>



|| 7 || *jijñāsanārtham praśnaikam viṣṇunā prabhaviṣṇunā | dvijarūpadhara bhūtāvā pa-praccha vinayānvitab* || 8 ||; ‘Viṣṇu, the great Lord, assumed the form of a Brahmin, and to test him [i.e., Anarthayajña] he humbly posed a question to the one who performed immaterial sacrifices (i.e., *anarthayajña*), who was focused on his austerities and observances and whose conduct was virtuous and pure, and who was intent on compassion towards all living beings.’

<sup>19</sup> This structure is reminiscent of *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* 11.59, the penultimate verse of that significant chapter: *brahmaṇo hrdayaṃ viṣṇur viṣṇoś ca hrdayaṃ śivaḥ | śivasya hrdayaṃ saṃdhyā tasmāt saṃdhyām upāsayet* ||; ‘Brahmā’s heart is Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu’s heart is Śiva. Śiva’s heart is the Junctions of the day. Therefore, he should worship the Junctions.’

The general Dharmaśāstric introduction gives us a clue to the role of the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* in the Śivadharmā corpus in a broad sense: there is a need for a Dharmic teaching that is more specific than anything in the *Mahābhārata* and probably something that is newer or more approachable than the Dharmaśūtras, the *Mānavadharmasāstra*, and the Smṛti texts. If the Śivadharmā corpus is to be viewed as a coherent unit in which later texts reflect on, and react to, the preceding ones, one could argue that this setting, in which the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha*’s starting point is a certain dissatisfaction with the *Mahābhārata*, is consciously contrasted with *Umāmabheśvarasaṃvāda* chapter eighteen, which praises the *Mahābhārata* (*bhāratākīrtana*).<sup>20</sup>

The topics touched upon in other parts of the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* vary greatly. In chapter twenty-two, the general layer contains discussions on the identity of Anarthayajña, the interlocutor of the Vaiṣṇava layer, binding the two layers, Vaiṣṇava and general, together. It further contains a sequence of teachings on groups of ten (ten yogas, ten meditations, ten sacrifices etc.); chapter twenty-three deals with the nature of sleep, and chapter twenty-four with the seven islands and seven hells, among other minor topics.

The Vaiṣṇava layer discusses the knowledge about the Brahman (*brahmavidyā*), death, time and numbers, but mostly deals with Brahmā’s Egg (*brahmāṇḍa*), i.e., the universe, in chapter one; chapter two is on the world of Śiva (*śivāṇḍa*), which is a sort of heaven to be approached exclusively by meditation. The presence of Śiva’s world in the layer that I label Vaiṣṇava shows that the schematic classification that I propose is slightly more intricate; see *infra* for some more considerations. Chapter three deals with Dharma in general, and Dharma as a bull, characterising its four legs as the four *āśramas* in the sense of ‘life-stages’ or ‘life-options,’ or ‘the social order of discipline’<sup>21</sup> (see more on this below). From verse 3.16 up to the end of chapter eight, the text dwells on ten so-called *yama* rules and ten *niyama* rules, which are basically moral rules and rules of conduct to follow.<sup>22</sup> These make up a substantial portion of the Vaiṣṇava section. In addition, the three *gunas* of Sāṃkhya (chapter nine), cow-worship, the four castes (*varṇa*) and penance (*tapas*) (chapter nineteen), and an early, *Mahābhārata*-style,

<sup>20</sup> *Umāmabheśvarasaṃvāda* 18.5 also reconfirms, similarly to, for example, *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* 1.4.20–25, that the *Mahābhārata* is the fifth Veda composed by Vyāsa to favour Śūdras: *bbāratam pañcama veda itibāseti nāmataḥ | anugrabārtam śūdrāṇām vyāsenāmītejasā ||* ( N<sub>94</sub><sup>C</sup> fol. 162r).

<sup>21</sup> I borrow the phrase ‘the social order of discipline’ from Sanderson 2009, 41.

<sup>22</sup> They are non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), the prohibition of stealing (*asteya*) etc.

system of twenty five *tattvas* (chapter twenty)<sup>23</sup> are dealt with. In chapter twenty one, Vigatarāga reveals his true identity as Viṣṇu and then teaches Anarthayajña about the æons (*kalpa*).

The Śaiva sections deal with external and internalised places of pilgrimage (*tīrtha*, chapter ten), with the four life options/life stages (*āśrama*) and sacrifice (chapter eleven), with the three *guṇas* and embryology (chapter thirteen), with the differences between people and with the human soul (*jīva*, chapters fourteen and fifteen), *śaḍaṅgayoga* (chapter sixteen), donation (*dāna*, chapter seventeen), and *karman* (chapter eighteen).

All these topics are presented in an intellectual framework which can be characterised by the mention of numerous terms referring to scriptures, genres, philosophical schools and religious groups, including the following: *veda*, *śruti*, *smṛti*, *upaniṣad*, *āyurveda*, *dhanurveda*, *gāndharvaveda*, *arhaveda* (= Atharvaveda or Arthaśāstra?), *anyavedāḥ*, *bhāratasambhitā* (= *Mahābhārata*), *dharmaśāstra*, *manu*, *nīti*, *itihāsa*, *purāṇa*, *mīmāṃsā*, *sāṃkhya*, *yoga*, *vedānta*, *pātañjala*, *sāṃkhyayoga* (the last two terms occur next to each other, thus they signify either two traditions or a single one), *pāśūpata*, *pañcarātra*, *śaiva*, *śaivaśāstra*, *kramapada*. In addition to these, some clearly Buddhist terminology is used freely.<sup>24</sup> The wide ranging contents of the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* make its structure more complex than what the schematic diagram above could show. As mentioned above, there is a whole chapter on Śiva's world (*śivāṇḍa*, chapter two) in the Vaiṣṇava layer; the best deity is said to be Hari in 15.18,<sup>25</sup> which belongs to the Śaiva layer; and the last chapter, which is part of the general layer, features praise of Śivaloka (24.63–74), and, at the end, an additional verse giving the whole *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* a Śaiva flavour.<sup>26</sup> All in all, what strikes one is that the

<sup>23</sup> The peculiarities of this *tattva* system are the following: the highest *tattva* is Śiva, Brahmā/*brahman* and the *puruṣa* at the same time (20.6); the twenty third *tattva* is called *matī*; the *mahābhūtas* are called *dhātus* and instead of *tanmātras*, we have a great number of *guṇas*.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. *maitrī*, *karuṇā*, *muditā* and *upekṣā*, the so called *brahmavibhāras*, are mentioned in 11.57–58ab. Note also that the yoga chapter of the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* (chapter sixteen) has numerous passages that appear in another text of the Śivadharma corpus, the *Dharmaputrikā*, which in turn seems to be deeply influenced by Buddhist thought (see Kafle forth. and Barois 2020).

<sup>25</sup> *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* 15.18a: *devatānām hariḥ śreṣṭhaḥ*.

<sup>26</sup> *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* 24.83 (*sragdharā* metre; note the form *pratidina* for metrical reasons): *yenedaṃ śāstrasāram avikalamanasā yo 'bhyaset tatprayatnāt | vyakto 'sau siddhāyogī bhavati ca nīyatam yas tu cittaprasannaḥ || pitryam yo [ye?] gītapūrvam pratidina śatasā uddhriyante ca sarve | ātmānam nirvikalpaṃ śivapadam asamaṃ prāpnūvantīha sarve ||*; 'If someone studies this essential Śāstra with his entire mind, and with a

primary mission of the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* must have been similar to that of the *Lalitavistara*, another, less successfully surviving, text of the Śivadharmacorpus: the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* too must have been aiming at ‘harmonising aspects of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava *dharmā*’ (De Simini and Mirnig 2017, 649) and probably of a number of related philosophical schools and religious currents.

There seems to be even more to the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha*’s aspirations. It would appear difficult to find any further leitmotif in this impressively rich material, in which innumerable traditions intermingle, or to understand what other role this text could have played in the formation of the Śivadharmacorpus, if one thing did not stand out clearly: the figure of Anarthayajña.

## 2. Anarthayajña’s sacrifice and the āśramas

As we have seen, Anarthayajña is the interlocutor of the sections that can be labelled Vaiṣṇava and his name also appears in other parts of the text. That he is part of a Vaiṣṇava setting in chapters one to ten and nineteen to twenty-one is also certain from the observation that when he has answered all of Vīgatarāga’s (Viṣṇu’s) questions in detail, and when Viṣṇu reveals himself, they are described as departing to Viṣṇuloka together,<sup>27</sup> thus offering the impression that Anarthayajña is a devotee of Viṣṇu. One could argue that Viṣṇu’s position as a pupil and the fact that he is being taught Śaiva material (in the Śaiva chapters) point towards the possibility that Anarthayajña is a Śaiva who converts Viṣṇu, thus turning most of the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* into a Śaiva-oriented text; but the episode in which Viṣṇu steps forward and Anarthayajña praises him throughout thirteen *jagatī* stanzas (21.9–21) be-

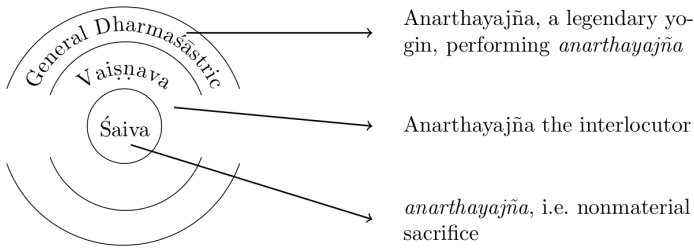
clear heart, by that effort he will evidently and inevitably become a Perfected Yogin; and all those who perform a hundred times the [rituals] of the Ancestors after singing a song every day will reach their non-differentiating Selves, Śiva’s unequalled abode, in this world.’

<sup>27</sup> *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* 21.30–32 (*anuṣṭubh* and *upajātī* metres): *evam ukṭvā haris tatra kare gr̥bhya tapodhanam | tataḥ so ’ntarbitas tatra tenaiva saba keśavaḥ || 30 || evam hi dharmas tv adbhikaprabhāvād gataḥ sa lokam puruṣottamasya | aśeṣabhūtaprabhavāvya- ayasya sanātanaṃ śāśvatam akṣarasya || 31 || tvam eva bhaktim kuru keśavasya janārdana- syāmitavikramasya | yathā hi tasyaiva dvijarābhasya gatim labhasva puruṣottamasya || 32 ||*; ‘Having spoken thus, then Hari took the great ascetic by the hand, who disappeared in that moment, and with him Keśava, too. (30) Thus, as a consequence of the abundance [of] Dharma (in him? Perhaps understand *dharmasyād bhikaprabhāvād*), he [Anarthayajña] reached the eternal and never-ending world of the never-decaying Highest Person, the imperishable origin of all living beings. (31) You yourself should be loyal to Keśava, to Janārdana of unmeasurable heroism, so that you can tread the path of that excellent Brahmin, that [of the] Highest Person. (32)’

fore departing to Viṣṇuloka with the promise of final liberation<sup>28</sup> suggests a truly Vaiṣṇava milieu here.

Moreover, Anarthayajña's figure is not confined to the Vaiṣṇava layer. It reappears in the outermost, Dharmasāstric layer, in a somewhat obscure discussion on Anarthayajña's origins and on the religious practice he followed, that is the practice of performing internalised sacrifice (*anarthayajña*), a concept echoing his name (see 1.7a and 22.1–14). This time, any reference to Anarthayajña's religious affiliations is carefully avoided to better fit him into a layer without any clear sectarian bias. At this point, it begins to emerge that Anarthayajña, rather than Viṣṇu or Śiva, is the key figure in the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha*. What is striking is that no other Sanskrit text seems to mention an Anarthayajña, and the name may in fact be the invention of the redactors or authors of the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha*. This in itself places great emphasis on this mysterious figure.

What is even more important is the aforementioned concept of *anarthayajña*, or 'nonmaterial sacrifice.' This is taught in chapter eleven, within the Śaiva section, and is associated with Anarthayajña, the person in chapter twenty-two; furthermore, it is summarised there with details perfectly in harmony with, and in fact echoing, its Śaiva presentation in chapter eleven. In this way, Anarthayajña or the concept of *anarthayajña* appear in and dominate all three major layers of the text—general, Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva—becoming a binding thread for the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha*, running through the whole work, and giving the impression of a leitmotif. The presence of Anarthayajña as a person and as a concept in the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* can be represented as follows:



<sup>28</sup> *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* 21.29 (*upajāti* metre with some irregularities): *gacchāma bho sāmprata śvetadvīpam agamya devair api durnirikṣyam | madbhaktipūtamanasā prayāti ghorārṇave naiva punaś caranti ||*; 'Well, let's go now to the White Island, which is hidden and inaccessible even for the gods. He who dies after his mind has been purified by devotion towards me, will never again enter the dreadful ocean [of existence].'



Exactly because of this omnipresence of the word *anarthayajña* in the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* can we assume that the main message and role of the work in the Śivadharmā corpus stems from it.

But what exactly is the concept of *anarthayajña*? It is sacrifice (*yajña*) without external, material things (*an-artḥa*), that is, without a sacrificial fire, without substances to be sacrificed, without any ritual elements and without any mantras to be recited, as opposed to *arthayajña* (*Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* 6.2a), also known as *dravyayajña*, which is dealt with in a single verse (*Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* 6.3d). In short, *anarthayajña* is nonmaterial, internalised sacrifice in which any ordinary elements of Vedic or brahmanical sacrifice are substituted with mental processes, mental practices and moral virtues. For example, the great altar (*mahāvedi*) is identified with the yogic practice of the withdrawal of the senses (*pratyāhāra*), the placement of the bowl during a sacrifice is now knowledge about Śiva (*śivajñāna*), the Adhvaryu priest is now yogic concentration (*dhāraṇā*), and so on and so forth (see 11.13–24). It is worth remarking here that all this contrasts conspicuously with *Uttarottaramahāsamvāda* chapter six, which, after defining Dharma as a four legged bull (see p. 186 above), goes on to teach the details of *agnihotra*.

The concept of *anarthayajña* in the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* is introduced at the beginning of the description of the first of the four *āśramas*, in this case that of the *gr̥hastha*, and not the Brahmacārin, as could be expected. Importantly, the term *gr̥hastha* does not appear in this chapter at all; therefore the notion of *anarthayajña* might also be regarded as replacing that of the householder.

Now, it is generally accepted that one of the defining marks of the brahmanical religion is the system of four *āśramas*.<sup>29</sup> The likely date of the creation of the system of *āśramas* is the age of the Dharmasūtras, possibly the fifth century BCE, and its classical formulation probably happened at the beginning of the common era,<sup>30</sup> both dates coming before the supposed time of composition of the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha*. The system of the four brahmanical *āśramas* also survived practically intact during the time of the tantric and non tantric manifestations of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> For example, see Olivelle 1993, 244: [The system of *āśramas* is] ‘an institution that has been—and that has been accepted by native theologians and modern scholars alike as being—a cornerstone of what we have conveniently come to call “Hinduism.”’

<sup>30</sup> See Olivelle 1993, 101–103.

<sup>31</sup> See e.g. Sanderson 2009, 41: ‘The early medieval period, from about the fifth century to the thirteenth, saw a decline in the role of Śrauta sacrifice in the religious ceremonies undertaken by Indian rulers. But it was not that kings turned aside from the brahmanical tradition in a fundamental sense. They continued to uphold the brahmanical social order of

In secondary literature,<sup>32</sup> discussions on systems of *āśramas* tend to focus on the following points: [1] the number of *āśramas* in the system, [2] their names or labels, [3] any subcategories within the four *āśramas*, [4] the order of the presentation of the four *āśramas*, [5] the question of whether they are to be taken as a temporal sequence or as life-choices, and, [6] the required order in which they are to be followed by the individual if they are a temporal sequence, and obviously [7] the content of each category and subcategory.

To address the first point above, in Sanskrit texts touching on the number of *āśramas*, their number is given overwhelmingly as four, with minor exceptions,<sup>33</sup> and it is also so in the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha*. As regards the usual labels associated with the four *āśramas* (point [2] above; *brahmacārīn*, *gr̥hastha*, *vānaprastha*, and *saṃnyāsīn*) and their synonyms, they appear in the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* several times,<sup>34</sup> but in the major discussion on the *āśramas* in chapter eleven, the term *gr̥hastha*, or any of its synonyms, are not present, as noted above. The colophon of chapter eleven reads *caturāśramadharmavidhānaḥ* ('the rules pertinent to the Dharma

the castes and disciplines (*varṇāśramadharmah*) and they were commonly commended in inscriptions from the fifth to the eighth centuries for having rigorously imposed it on their subjects.' See also p. 255 *ibid*.

<sup>32</sup> See e.g. Kane 1941 and Olivelle 1992, 1993 and 2018.

<sup>33</sup> A possible exception could be Kauṇḍinya's comment on *Pāśupatasūtra* 3.1 (*avyaktalinggī*): *ṣaḍāśramalinggānupalabdihāv anavadhytoktalinggavad avyaktāḥ kriyāḥ kāryāḥ*; '[At this stage of the ascetic's life,] actions are to be performed secretly (*avyaktāḥ*), in a way in which the taught sectarian marks are not ascertained (*anavadhytoktalinggavad*), without having any of the sectarian marks of the six *āśramas*.' Note that Hara remarks (1966, 309 n. 1) that one might want to read *vyaktāḥ* for *avyaktāḥ*, given that the next *sūtra* reads *vyaktācārāḥ*; but that is probably not necessary. Here, the editor of the Trivandrum edition of the *Pāśupatasūtra* gives the following list in explanation of the phrase 'six *āśramas*' (*ṣaḍāśrama*): '*brahmacārī, gr̥hasthaḥ, vānaprasthaḥ, saṃnyāsī, pāṣaṇḍaḥ* and *siddhaḥ*.' This interpretation is probably based on Kauṇḍinya ad *Pāśupatasūtra* 1.6 (*atra yathānyeṣāṃ api varṇāśramiṇāṃ āśramaprativibhāgakarāṇi liṅgāni bhavanti*; 'there are distinguishing marks here [in this system] just as for other members of *varṇāśrama*-system') and 4.18 (*gr̥hasthabrahmacārīvānaprasthabhikṣupāṣāṇḍīnāṃ paṅthānaḥ, te kupatbāḥ*; 'the paths of the householder, the chaste student, the forest-dweller, the mendicant, and the heretic are wrong paths'). Another obscure mention of six *āśramas* appears at *Jayadrathayāmala* 1.45.213ab (fol. 194r): *ṣaḍāśramāntarastho yaḥ sa gurur bhairavāgame*; 'He who is established within the six *āśramas* is the [true] *guru* in the Bhairava Tradition.' Here textual corruption is unlikely (e.g. from *śaḍāśrama*'), because this line is part of a passage that lists groups of six items. Furthermore, the *Nityāhnikatilaka*, a post-tenth-century text of the Kujikā tradition, teaches six *āśramas* mostly intended for *yogīns*, namely: *gr̥hastha, śālayin, cāravin, vanaçārīn, naiṣṭhaka* and *yogīn* (NGMPP 3-384, A 41/11, fols 2r–3r).

<sup>34</sup> E.g. in *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* 4.74cd: *gr̥hastho brahmacārī ca vānaprastho 'bha bhaikṣukah*.

of the four *āśramas*’), but the topic that is in focus here is in fact a new kind of sacrifice (*yajña*) which is devoid of materiality because, according to the text, material things are nothing but trouble, or as the text puts it, ‘material things/objects/money (*artha*) present many kinds of obstacles and [their acquisition causes] great fatigue...’<sup>35</sup> Thus, Maheśvara teaches the goddess about the nonmaterial version of sacrifice, and closes the section by saying ‘[By this] the first *āśrama* has been taught to you, O fair-faced goddess! [This teaching of] the true Dharma is worshipped by Sadāśiva and the gods.’<sup>36</sup> Why is the first *āśrama* not named here and why does the term *grhastha* not appear at all in this chapter? Is it simply implied? Or did the nonmaterial version of the daily sacrifices make an impression of being so yogic and so purely mental that the term *grhastha* seemed out of place to the redactors?

As regards any subcategories of the four main *āśramas* in the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* (point [3] above), there is a short discussion on the categories *vīpra*, *muni*, *bbikṣu*, *nirgranthi*, *parivrājaka*, *ṛṣi*, *daṇḍika* and *pāśupata* in 22.59–63. This may be an attempt to elaborate on the subcategories of the fourth *āśrama*, pulling the category of the *atyāśramin* Pāśupata into the fourfold *āśrama*-system,<sup>37</sup> and it may indicate that the redactors’ interest in the *āśramas* focused on the mendicant or the ascetic, rather than the householder.

The order of the four *āśramas* (point [4] above) in *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* chapter eleven provides further clues about the significance of the presentation of its *āśrama*-system. The order here, explicitly, is: first *āśrama* (*āśramaḥ prathamah*, 11.25a, possibly the *grhastha*), *brahmacārīn* (*brahmacāryam*, 11.26; *dvitiya āśramaḥ*, 11.30a), *vānaprastha*, and *parivrājaka*. The order of the first two *āśramas* is emphasised (*prathamah*, *dvitiyah*), as if they were to

<sup>35</sup> *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* 11.6ab: *bahuvighnakaro by artho bahuvāyāsakaras tathā*. The opening of the *Śivadharmasāstra* is similar, see e.g. N<sub>82</sub><sup>K</sup> line 3: *agniṣtomādayo yajñā bahuvittakriyānvitāḥ | na śakyamte yataḥ kartum alpavittair dovijātibhiḥ || sukhopāyam ato brūhi sarvakāmārtasādḥhakam | hitāya sarvasatvānām śivadharmam sanātanam ||*

<sup>36</sup> *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* 11.25: *āśramaḥ prathamah tubhyaṃ kathito ’sti varānane | sadāśiveṇa saddharmam daivatair api pūjitam ||*

<sup>37</sup> See fn. 33 and also a similar attempt in the *Śivadharmottara* mentioned on page below. Also, note that the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* is aware of the fact that the Pāśupata is outside or beyond the system of *āśramas*; see *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* 8.40: *cāturāśramato ’dbhikyaṃ vratam pāśupatam krtam | tasmāt pāśupatam śreṣṭham bhasmadbhāranabetavaḥ ||*; ‘The Pāśupata vow is superior to those within the four *āśramas*. Therefore, the Pāśupata [vow] is the best, because it involves the use of ashes.’ See also De Simini’s relevant remark on how most texts of the corpus, including the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha*, but excluding the first two, reveal traces of tantric influence (2016a, 64 n. 184): ‘the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* distinguishes the texts of the Pāśupatas from those of “Śaivas,” a term used in similar contexts to designate tantric Śaivas.’

be definitely seen as a temporal sequence, rather than options. The order of these two *āśramas* is reminiscent of *Āpastambadharmasūtra* 2.9.21.1<sup>38</sup> but is otherwise rather rare; e.g. the *Mānavadharmasāstra* and other *loci classici* teach a temporal sequence in which the *gr̥bhas̥tha* comes second.<sup>39</sup> The *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* mentions the four *āśramas* elsewhere, in the Vaiṣṇava chapters, twice, in both cases mentioning the *gr̥bhas̥tha* first.<sup>40</sup> The *gr̥bhas̥tha* being the first in the sequence of the four *āśramas* is also what chapter eleven of the *Śivadharmasāstra* teaches. As the recent editors of that chapter remark, this phenomenon might lead ‘one to wonder whether this section of the chapter [*Śivadharmasāstra* 11.10ff], or even the chapter as a whole, might have been composed substantially earlier’ (Bisschop, Lubin and Kafle 2021, 23), a question easily applicable to *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* chapter eleven.

It appears as if part of the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha*’s main agenda could be a reinterpretation of the order of the four *āśramas*, be it temporal or merely a question of an enumeration of options. One’s impression that the central idea in the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* is the presentation of the four *āśramas* is amplified by a discussion in chapter three on why Dharma is thought of as a bull. In spite of the somewhat obscure phrasing, it is clear that in *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* 3.3–4 Dharma is imagined as a bull whose four legs are the four *āśramas*.<sup>41</sup>

*dhṛtir ity eṣa dhātur vai paryāyah̥ parikīrtitaḥ |*  
*ādharmaṇān mahattvāc ca dharmā ity abhidhīyate || 3 ||*

<sup>38</sup> *Āpastambadharmasūtra* 2.[9.]21.1: *catvāra āśramā gār̥bhas̥thyam ācāryakulam maunaṃ vānaprasthyam iti*. In Olivelle’s translation (1999, 64): ‘There are four orders of life: the householder’s life, living at the teacher’s house, the life of a sage, and that of a forest hermit.’ See Kane 1941, 416 and Olivelle 1993, 82ff.

<sup>39</sup> *Mānavadharmasāstra* 4.1: *caturtham āyuso bhāgam uṣitvādyam gurau dvijah̥ | dvitīyam āyuso bhāgam kṛtadāro gr̥be vaset ||*; ‘Having spent the first quarter of his life at the guru’s place, the twice born should dwell at home, married, in the second quarter of his life.’

<sup>40</sup> *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* 4.74cd: *gr̥bhas̥tho brahmacārī ca vānaprastho ’tha bhāikṣukaḥ. Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* 5.9: *etac dhaucam gr̥bhas̥thānām dviguṇam brahmacārīṇām | vānaprasthasya triguṇam yatīnām tu caturguṇam ||*. The latter verse is very close to *Mānavadharmasāstra* 5.137.

<sup>41</sup> See also *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* 4.74: *catuṣpādah̥ smṛto dharmas̥ caturāśramam āśritaḥ | gr̥bhas̥tho brahmacārī ca vānaprastho ’tha bhāikṣukaḥ ||*. The *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha*’s interpretation of the bull’s four legs as the four *āśramas* is in contrast with *Mānavadharmasāstra* 1.81–84: there Dharma loses one leg in each *yuga* as it deteriorates. An idea similar to the one in the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* may be expressed in *Mahābhārata* 12.262.19–21: *dharmam ekaṃ catuṣpādām āśritās te narar̥sabhāḥ | tam santo vidhivat prāpya gacchanti paramām gatim || 19 || gr̥bebhya eva nīskramya vanam anye samāśritāḥ | gr̥ham evābbhisamśritā tato ’nye brahmacārīṇaḥ || 20 || dharmam etaṃ catuṣpādām āśramam brāhmaṇā vidub | ānantyaṃ brahmaṇaḥ sthānam brāhmaṇā nāma niścayaḥ || 21 ||*. See this passage discussed in Olivelle 1993, 99.

‘...not satisfied with the Mahābhārata...’ (śrutvā bhāratasaṃhitām atṛptaḥ)

śrutismṛtidvayor mūrtiś catuspādavyṣaḥ sthitaḥ |  
caturāśrama<sup>42</sup> yo dharmah kīrtitāni manīṣibhiḥ || 4 ||

The stem ‘*dhṛti*’ is said to be a synonym [of *dharma*]. It is called *dharma* because it supports (*ādhāranāt*) and because it is great (*mabattvāt*). (3) The embodiment of Śruti and Smṛti, the Dharma that is the four *āśramas* is taught by the wise as being a four legged bull. (4)

This leads us to the next question (point [5]), namely if the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* teaches a temporal sequence or four distinct life options.<sup>43</sup> The difficulty in answering the above question lies in the fact that the first three *āśramas* are discussed in *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* chapter eleven as if everything were totally internalised, with almost no reference to external objects to be used or actions to be performed in these versions of the *āśramas*: even the devotee’s wife is now substituted with Faith, his ritual bath is said to be Itihāsa, his garments the Purāṇas, etc.<sup>44</sup> This in itself is challenging to interpret, but what comes as a surprise is that the fourth *āśrama* is treated differently. Now real life objects and real life instructions begin to appear among internalised abstractions (*Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* 11.45–46):

varjayaṇ madhu māṃsāni paradārāṃś ca varjayet |  
varjayec cīravāsaṃ ca paravāsaṃ ca varjayet || 45 ||  
varjayet sṛṣṭabhojyāni bhikṣāṃ ekāṃ ca varjayet |  
varjayet saṃgrahaṃ nityaṃ abhimānaṃ ca varjayet || 46 ||

He should avoid honey/alcohol and meat, as well as others’ wives. He should avoid staying [in a place] for long and also staying at others’ places. (45) He should avoid food that has been thrown away and he should avoid food from a single house.<sup>45</sup> He should always refrain from accumulating [wealth] and from self conceit. (46)

<sup>42</sup> Understand *caturāśramāḥ* or rather *caturāśramāni*, both of which would be unmetrical.

<sup>43</sup> On the *āśramas* being either life options (typically in the age of the Dharmasūtras) or temporal stages (typically in the classical period, from Manu on), see Olivelle 1993 in general, and Olivelle 1993, 131 in particular: ‘In contrast to the original system, the classical formulation considers the *āśramas* not as alternative paths open to an adult male but as obligatory modes of life suitable for different periods of a man’s life.’

<sup>44</sup> See *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* 11.18a and 20cd: *śraddhā patnī... itihāsa jalasānaṃ purāṇakṛta m ambaraḥ*.

<sup>45</sup> Compare *Śivadharmasāstra* 11.41 (as edited and translated in Bisschop, Kafle and Lubin 2021, 82 and 115): *mādhukarīm cared bhikṣāṃ ekāṇaṃ parivarjayet | upavāsāt paraṃ bhaiṣṭam ekāṇaṃ grbināṃ malam ||*; ‘He should seek alms like a bee [i.e., from many houses]; he should avoid single food [collected from one house]; almsfood is better than fasting; single food is the stain of householders.’

*Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* 11.52–53 similarly give practical instructions instead of elaborating on internalisation:

*divasasyāṣṭame bhāge bhikṣāṃ saptaḡrham caret |  
na cāsita na tiṣṭheta na ca debīti vā vadet || 52 ||  
yathālābhena varteta aṣṭau piṇḍān dine dine |  
vastrabhojanaśayyāsu na prasajyeta vistaram || 53 ||*

He should go on his alms round visiting seven houses at the eighth part of the day. He should not sit down, he should not stay, and he should not say ‘Give me!’ (52) He should live on what is available, on eight bites a day. He should not stick to items of clothes, food or a bed for long. (53)

Why this partial switching to *realia* here? The passages on the *parivrājaka* give the impression of the redactors finally finding their way back to familiar territory, as if the first three of the traditional *āśramas* were beyond their scope, or would be, in their traditional forms, life-options to object to, or out of their reach, or at least something distinct from the fourth *āśrama*. They present the first three *āśramas* as a temporal sequence of yogic meditations, ignoring all the everyday details of the ritual life of a traditional *brahmacārin* or *grhastha*, and even the *vānaprastha*, emphasising internalisation, but then they switch to a tangible description of a real *saṃnyāsīn/parivrājaka*. Thus, we arrive at a bifurcated system of, on the one hand, devotees, possibly householders, practising internalised sacrifices, and, on the other hand, wandering mendicants.<sup>46</sup> That the married householder is significantly present in the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* can be inferred from the fact that the Śaiva section has two chapters on embryology (chapters thirteen and fourteen), a possible real-life interest for a married man,<sup>47</sup> but yogic teachings and praise of ascetics also abound in the text.

So, is there a temporal sequence of *āśramas* in the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha*, and if there is, what is the required order (points [5] and [6])? What seems clear is that the concept of the *brahmacārin* as a young pupil studying the Veda at his *guru*’s house is totally ignored.<sup>48</sup> The stage of *brahmacārin* seems to follow that

<sup>46</sup> This bifurcation, namely that of the distinction between those who ‘stay at home’ and pursue their religious goals there (*grhastha*), and those who leave their homes to become hermits and ascetics, is the point of departure in Olivelle 2019.

<sup>47</sup> The householder is also said to be the best of the four *āśramas* in 15.17a: *āśramāṇāṃ grhī śreṣṭho*.

<sup>48</sup> This is strikingly similar to what happens in chapter eleven of the *Śivadharmasāstra*. See Bisschop, Lubin and Kafle 2021, 22 on the *śivabrahmacārin* in *Śivadharmasāstra* 11: ‘The *śivabrahmacārin* comes next (11.15). This would seem to be out of order according to the sequence established by Manu, but this *śivabrahmacārin* is not

of the householder in time, possibly representing a level of asceticism or yoga at which the householder may arrive, although its short description (11.26–30) uses words related to the traditional *brahmacārin*: *vrata*, *sāvitrī*, *brahmasūtra*, *snāna*, etc., all now entirely internalised (his staff is self-restraint, his bowl is compassion, etc.). The category of the *vānaprastha* does not seem to refer to a real forest-dweller either: ‘with his sense faculties conquered, he departs to the hermitage of rules of conduct which is in the forest of indifference and is surrounded by walls that have the stone-strong gate of moral conduct.’<sup>49</sup> In short, the descriptions of the *vānaprastha*, the *brahmacārin*, and in fact the *gṛhastha*, sound like yogic meditations.

Thus, the contents of the four *āśramas* (point [7] above) can be summarised as internalised and meditative reinterpretations of the traditional ones, with the possible exception of the *sannyāsīn/bhikṣu/parivrajaka*. What is the purpose of this reinterpretation? Olivelle (1993, 59) quotes Douglas (1982) on the correlation of urbanisation and the weakening of ritualism and the emergence of new ecstatic forms of religion and internalised values. But something even simpler than this may lie behind the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha*’s main agenda: a text that aims to reconcile the practices of Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas (and Vaidikas and possibly Buddhists) may find it difficult to come up with such detailed ritual instructions for the householder and the other *āśramas* that would fit all groups involved and instead invents a generic and mostly yogic variant of the system, without any sectarian bias, balancing on a razor’s edge.

### 3. Possible conclusions and avenues for research

I agree with Olivelle (1993, 3) that the fourfold *āśrama*-system has probably never represented sociological realities faithfully, but has rather always been a theological construct;<sup>50</sup> thus I am aware of the danger of drawing hasty conclusions about the milieu in which a text was born or became popular based on its reinterpretation of the *āśrama*-system.

Nevertheless, one possible way of interpreting the structure of the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* and its presentation of the system of four *āśramas* is the

conceived of as observing the period of studentship in youth, preliminary to marriage. Indeed, no mention is made of Veda-study, its *raison d’être* in the Smārta system. Rather, the term is probably used to mean nothing more than a vow to refrain from sex [...]

<sup>49</sup> *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* 11.32: *vaināgyavanam āśrītya niyamāśramam āharet | śīlaśailadyḍbhadvāre prakāre vijitendriyaḥ ||*

<sup>50</sup> As Olivelle (1993, 7) warns: ‘...the *āśrama* system is primarily a theological construct. The system and its history, therefore, should be carefully distinguished from the socio-religious institutions comprehended by the system and from their respective histories.’

following. As I said in the introduction, the text offers at least three layers of possible religious paths: a general Dharmasāstric or Vaidika one, a Vaiṣṇava, and a Śaiva one, possibly reflecting the religious milieu of its place and time of composition, proceeding from the most orthodox to the more esoteric, from the general and everyday to the secret and only mentally visualised. The *āśrama* system is presented in the innermost, Śaiva, layer in a mentally internalised fashion, quite logically, since, as *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha* 2.16 confirms, there is no *agnihotra* nor any daily rituals in the Śivāṇḍa, a Śaiva heaven that is reachable only through Śaiva yoga:

*na japo nāhnikas tatra nāgnihotrī na yajñakṛt |*  
*na vratam na tapaś caiva na tiryāṅnarakaṃ tatbā || 16 ||*

There is no recitation there or daily rituals, nobody performs the fire sacrifices and there is no sacrificer. There are neither religious observances, nor austerities. And there is no ‘animal hell’ [or: ‘neither animal existence nor hell’].

The *āśrama* system is then reinterpreted, while keeping the four traditional labels, as a twofold system: the first three *āśramas* may concern the inner life of a non ascetic (possibly a householder), who can, in parallel to his everyday religious activities, practise a secret Śaiva version of the traditional *āśramas* as yogic meditation, while the fourth *āśrama* seems to be for those who actually leave their homes to become Śaiva ascetics. The internalised version of the sacrifices of the *gr̥hastha* is introduced through the figure of Anarṭhayajña, whose name and prominence in the text suggests that he is the main propagator of this new approach to ritualism.<sup>51</sup> The *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha*’s role in the Śivadharmā corpus is then twofold: it provides a text that is suitable for Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas,<sup>52</sup> presenting its teachings on different levels of an esoteric scale, the Śaiva teachings being closest to the core, and always providing an internalised, secret version of topics discussed in the other layers; and it also reinvents the traditional *āśrama* system in a Śaiva way,

<sup>51</sup> The internalisation of ritual is of course not the *Vṛ̥ṣasārasaṃgraha*’s invention. For internalization as the perfection of ritual in the case of the *saṃnyāsīn*, see Olivelle 1992, 68–71, and e.g. *Bṛ̥hatsaṃnyāsopaniṣad* 272. In Olivelle’s translation (1992, 256): ‘Having deposited the sacred fires in himself, an ascetic who offers the entire phenomenal world in the fire of knowledge is a great ascetic and a true fire sacrificer.’

<sup>52</sup> As very clearly expressed also by *Uttarottaramahāsaṃvāda* 9.1 (MS N<sub>S</sub><sup>4</sup>, fol. 191v, verse 10.1 in Naraharinath 1998, 577): *ye māṃ caivāvamanyante viṣṇubhaktiparāyaṇāḥ | madbhaktiā cābhavā viṣṇum ubbau narakaḡāminau ||*; ‘Those who are devotees of Viṣṇu and despise me [Śiva], and also those who are my devotees and [despise] Viṣṇu, all of these people will end up in hell.’



‘...not satisfied with the *Mahābhārata*...’ (*śrutvā bhāratasaṃhitām atṛptaḥ*)

but in such a manner that would be acceptable for other religious groups. This may be an attempt to further develop an idea that appears in both the *Śivadharmasāstra* and the *Śivadharmottara*.<sup>53</sup>

The above conclusions await future revision in the light of further research focusing on the connections between the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* and other works of the Śivadharmā corpus, especially the *Śivadharmasāstra* and the *Śivadharmottara* with regards to their *āśrama*-systems, and those for which a Nepalese origin can be hypothesised for other parallelisms. For example, passages and yogic concepts shared by the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* and the *Dharmaputrikā* are to be more deeply investigated. Furthermore, an examination of the relationship between the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* and the *Mahābhārata* has great potential, more far-reaching than what is suggested solely by the numerous verses borrowed from the *Mahābhārata* in chapter twenty of the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha*. A major avenue for further research is undoubtedly the study of other texts of the Śivadharmā corpus in which a co-existence of Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva material can be observed, this being part of the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha*’s agenda.

This preliminary survey of the *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha* might additionally serve the purpose of reminding us that future observations concerning any text in the Śivadharmā corpus need to be based on critical editions and on a thorough and comparative study of the entire Śivadharmā corpus. Fortunately, this is in progress.

<sup>53</sup> These texts use new phrases for the four *āśramas*: *Śivadharmasāstra* chapter eleven uses the terms *śivagrībāśramin*, *śivabrahmacārīn*, *śivavaikhānasa* and *śivavratīndra*, while the *Śivadharmottara* 12.203–207 uses *śivabrahmacārīn*, *śivāśramadharmasthaḥ* *grhasthaḥ*, *śivāśramavanastha*, and for the fourth category both the terms *pāsupata* and *mahāvratadhara*. On this topic, see De Simini 2016a, 52–53 and Bisschop, Lubin and Kafle 2021, 17 ff.

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### **Abbreviations**

EFEO	=	École française d'Extrême-Orient
CII	=	Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum CII vol. III = see Bhandarkar 1981 CII vol. V = see Mirashi 1963
CDIAL	=	Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages, see Turner 1962–1966
EI	=	Epigraphia Indica
IFP	=	Institut français de Pondichéry
GOML	=	Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Chennai
MS[S]	=	manuscript[s]
NAK	=	National Archives, Kathmandu
NGMPP	=	The Nepalese-German Manuscript Preservation Project
SI	=	Select Inscriptions, see Sircar 1942 and 1983
SP <sub>3</sub>	=	<i>Skandapurāṇa</i> Adhyāya 167, S recension, see Bisschop 2006a
TAK	=	<i>Tāntrikābbhidhānakosā</i>

### **Manuscripts and their sigla**

#### Śivadharma corpus

N <sub>02</sub> <sup>C</sup>	Cambridge University Library MS Add. 2102. Palm-leaf, available online: <a href="https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-01694-00001/1">https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-01694-00001/1</a>
N <sub>45</sub> <sup>C</sup>	Cambridge University Library MS Add. 1645. Palm-leaf, available online: <a href="https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-01645/1">https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-01645/1</a>
N <sub>94</sub> <sup>C</sup>	Cambridge University Library MS Add. 1694. Palm-leaf, available online: <a href="https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-02102/1">https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-02102/1</a>
N <sub>07</sub> <sup>K</sup>	NAK 1–1075, NGMPP B 7/3. Palm-leaf

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- N<sub>11</sub><sup>K</sup> NAK 5-738, NGMPP A 11/3. Palm-leaf  
N<sub>A12</sub><sup>K</sup> NAK 5-892, NGMPP A 12/3. Palm-leaf  
N<sub>28</sub><sup>K</sup> NAK 6-7, NGMPP A 1028/4. Palm-leaf  
N<sub>82</sub><sup>K</sup> NAK 3-393, NGMPP A 1082/3. Palm-leaf  
N<sub>52</sub><sup>Ko</sup> Asiatic Society Kolkata MS G 3852, cat. no. 4085. Palm-leaf  
N<sub>56</sub><sup>Ko</sup> Asiatic Society Kolkata MS G 4076, cat. no. 4083. Palm-leaf  
N<sub>77</sub><sup>Ko</sup> Asiatic Society, Kolkata G 4077/1. Palm-leaf, dated to [Nepāla] Saṃvat 156 (1035/36 CE)  
N<sub>15</sub><sup>O</sup> Bodleian Library, Oxford, Sansk a 15. Palm-leaf  
N<sub>57</sub><sup>P</sup> Bibliothèque Nationale de France MS. Skt. 57-B 23  
IFP T. 32 & 514 Paper transcripts in Devanāgarī

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D Manuscript No. 599, Oriental Research Library, Śrīnagar. Kashmirian Devanāgarī on paper.  
L Manuscript No. 7042, Library of the India Office, London. Śāradā on paper.  
S Manuscript No. 1510, Oriental Research Library, Śrīnagar. Śāradā on paper.

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