

# The Srivaisnava Way of Life: Daily Religious Duties and Their Foundation\*

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**Abstract**—This article continues the study of the srivaisnava way of life — one of the most famous and wide spread religious and philosophical tradition of India which formalized in a more explicit form in the 12th-14th centuries. The texts of Pancaratra tradition and visistadvaita-vedanta, as well as some other features of Indian religion played a significant role in the formation of the ritual system, daily duties of the adepts, way of worship and ethics. The first part of the study was dedicated to initiation rituals (pancasamskara). The next step after initiation towards liberation from the wheel of rebirth and attainment of the grace of Visnu-Narayana is the daily worship, performed in the self-surrender act (prapatti). The paper deals with the fivefold division of the day (pancakala-prakriya), described in many texts of the vaisnava tantric tradition of Pancaratra, where every period has its own prescribed practice. Religious and philosophical foundations of these duties, prescriptions for chanting mantras, participation in festivals and holidays, as well as the ethics of srivaisnavism and related duties are also considered in this work.

**Keywords**—Indian religion; Indian philosophy; srivaisnavism; Pancaratra; pancakala; aradhana; prapatti; Visnu-Narayana; yoga; mantra; ethics; Vedanta Desika (Venkatanatha)

## I. INTRODUCTION

Śrīvaiṣṇavism is based on a certain set of prescriptions and rules designed to regulate the code of conduct and morality of adepts within the tradition. The origins of these prescriptions are the smṛtis texts, saṃhitās, philosophical and religious texts of the tradition and its commentaries. Such well-known thinkers of śrīvaiṣṇavism as Yāmunācārya, Rāmānuja, Vedānta Deśika (Veṅkaṭanātha) and their successors devoted some of their works to the questions of initiation, daily duties of adepts, religious practices and rituals<sup>1</sup>. The main goal of the prescriptions is to attain the grace of God (Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa) and reach the liberation state (mokṣa).

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<sup>1</sup> Among of them: Nityagrantha of Rāmānuja, Saccharitrakṣā and Pāñcarātrakṣā of Vedānta Deśika, Āhnikā-kārikā of Śrīraṅganārāyaṇācārya etc.

Śrīvaiṣṇava initiation in the form of five rituals of pañcasamskāra (samāśrayaṇa) and its main philosophical and religious foundations were considered in the first part of this research [1]. Here we will focus in more details on daily religious duties of śrīvaiṣṇavas, which are performed by the adepts throughout their entire life. In addition, we will consider its philosophical and religious context.

It is necessary to note an important point to understand the śrīvaiṣṇava duties formation. Due to the influence of two types of sources on the tradition — the smṛtis texts and Dharmasāstras of the Brahmanical tradition and the tantric saṃhitās of the Pāñcarātra, the duties of adepts can differ. Initially, the smṛtis texts prescribe for all followers specific duties (naimittika karmas) depending on their caste and period of life (varṇāśramadharmā). It includes regular chanting of mantras (japa), compulsory sacrificial rituals (homa), worship of God and much more. The born ones cannot attain mokṣa without abidance by these prescriptions. On the other hand, the Pāñcarātra saṃhitās have their own instructions regarding worship and duties of adepts. Srinivasa Chari writes, “The pañcakāla-prakriyā of the Pāñcarātra system is formulated from out of the religious duties prescribed by the Smṛti texts and fitted into the daily life of a Vaiṣṇava to be observed at five specific times of the day as a form of dedication of one’s life to the service of Viṣṇu. From this it follows, as Vedānta Deśika has explained, that those who live a life according to the dictates of Śruti and Smṛti are not to give up the fivefold religious routine of Pāñcarātra system. Similarly, those who strictly follow the dictates of Pāñcarātra are not permitted to abandon the religious duties of Dharmasāstra”. Chari gives an example of the obligatory morning ritual of sandhyā, without which it is impossible to start worshiping God [2]. Sandhyā is performed as a compulsory practice by all who went through the ritual of upanayana. Therefore, it is also included in the mandatory practices of śrīvaiṣṇavas in addition to the prescriptions of Pāñcarātra saṃhitās on the fivefold division of the day. Other prescriptions are followed in the same way.

## II. PAÑCAKĀLA-PRAKRIYĀ OF THE PAÑCARĀTRA

According to the Pāñcarātra texts after initiation (pañcasamskāra) vaiṣṇava begins his daily practice, which includes in general the worship of Nārāyaṇa (ārādhana),

meditation (dhyāna), chanting mantras (japa). The Pāñcarātra saṁhitās divide the day into five parts (pañcakāla-prakriyā) for practicing: abhigamana or morning prayer, upādāna or preparation for performing worship, ijjā — ritual of worship itself, svādhyāya — learning and reciting the sacred texts and yoga — individual spiritual discipline for contemplation on God. Svādhyāya and yoga today are rarely practiced by śrīvaiṣṇavas, however these two parts of pañcakāla are no less important than the others<sup>2</sup>. Descriptions of the fivefold division of the day are found in a number of Pāñcarātra saṁhitās, such as Sāttvatasāṁhitā, Jayākhyasāṁhitā, Pauṣkarasāṁhitā, Pādmasāṁhitā and others. The most important texts of śrīvaiṣṇava thinkers, which examine these five religious duties in detail — Nityagrantha of Rāmānuja, Āhnikā-kārikā of Śrīraṅganārāyaṇācārya, Pāñcarātrarakṣā of Vedānta Deśika, as well as the works of Pañcakālaprakaśikā and Pañcakālakriyādīpa.

Ijjā, the worshipping ritual, is the main practice in the fivefold division of the day since the goal of entering into the śrīvaiṣṇava tradition is to present oneself, one's life and activities to Viṣṇu as the only refuge. This worship (ārādhana) is considered as the most important duty and includes the daily worship of not only Nārāyaṇa, but also his followers. It is believed that honoring the followers brings special pleasure and joy to God. The rules of deity worship originate from smṛti texts, for example, Viṣṇusmṛti (chap. 65), Manusmṛti. Several chapters of Ahirbudhnyasāṁhitā, Lakṣmī Tantra and other Pāñcarātric texts are also dedicated to this issue. The knowledge of this ritual is transmitted to the adept at the initiation during one of the five initiation rituals - ijjāsāṁskāra.

The practice of worship is performed with strict observance of external and internal purity twice a day. However, today it is carried out mainly once a day. Worship in the temple (parārtha-yajana) is considered particularly favorable, but it is not a substitute of the daily practice performed at home (svārtha-yajana). The home ritual (pūjā) is performed more often at noon (ijjā-kāla). The best image of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa is śālagrāma, a special kind of black stone, mined on the Gandak river. If a group of six śālagrāmas is gathered at home, then worshipping them is equivalent to worshipping a deity in the temple. In the absence of śālagrāma, golden, silver, copper or other specified materials should be used for a deity's mūrti [3].

Before the home worship one should take a bath and perform the "sipping" (ācamana), which is the cleansing ritual. Then, with concentration on the Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa mūrti, the pūjā is performed. A small yajña can also be performed with offering ghee to the sacred fire. Ijjā consists of six parts. The first part of the mantrāsana involves presenting oneself

to God through prayer, obtaining permission to conduct worship and preparing the deity for the pūjā (arghya, pādya, ācamana). The second part is called snānāsana, which means the bathing of the deity while reading the Vedic hymn Puruṣa-sūkta. The third part alamkārasana is intended for dressing and decorating the deity with oils and sandalwood (gandha), incense (dhūpa), presenting a lamp (dīpa), offering tulasi tree leaves and flowers (arcana), reading selected hymns from the most important works of the śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, various mantras, Viṣṇu's names etc. Next, there is a stage of presenting pure, freshly prepared food to the deity. It is named bhojyāsana. During the fifth stage mantrāsana the Ālvārs' hymns are recited in honor of the deity; fruits, betel leaves and camphor are offered. The sixth, last part of worship, paryānkāsana, is the departure of the deity to rest, until the next puja is started (in the evening or the next day) [4]. In the end of all ijjā rituals the food and water offered to Viṣṇu is distributed among the family members and guests. The vaiṣṇavas are prescribed to eat food twice a day; hermits eat once a day. Food must be offered first to deity. Otherwise, eating food that has not been offered to God is forbidden since it is considered unclean.

However, after initiation every vaiṣṇava can perform worship regardless of caste or gender, home rituals are usually performed by the oldest male in the family. If ārādhana cannot be fulfilled, some member of the family should offer the deity the food cooked according to the rules and light the lamp. The worship in the temples can only be carried out by specially initiated brahmanas. It is also important to note, and Chari mentions this, that women and vaiṣṇavas from the lower castes recite tantric mantras instead of Vedic ones, which are forbidden for recitation [5]. Thus, a compliance with the saṁhitās is achieved.

The four remaining periods of the day are also aimed at honoring and presenting oneself to Viṣṇu. Abhigamana is performed in the morning to obtain the blessings of God and the teachers of tradition to serve Him. It is a simple ritual performed after shower and reading of the morning mantras or fulfillment of the Vedic ritual of sandhyā, and literally it means "coming to" God. At this time, the first bow to Viṣṇu is made along with reading the Rāmānuja's Śaraṇāgatigadya — a text about prapatti (śaraṇāgati). This is one of the most important doctrines of śrīvaiṣṇavism, which means a complete surrender and "trust" to God through the realization of your imperfections and sincere desire to obtain His mercy [6].

Then the second period of the day is dedicated to the daily pūjā (upādāna) preparation. During this time the followers of Viṣṇu should collect all the necessary materials, cook food and find money to purchase all necessary things as well. After the daytime worship there is a long period to study the philosophical and religious sacred texts of śrīvaiṣṇavism and Vedānta; it is called svādhyāya. Brahmanas study the texts of the Vedas and smṛtis, the works of Rāmānuja and his successors, they also teach other śrīvaiṣṇava followers. The fifth part of the day, called yoga-kāla, starts in the evening. This is a special practice of contemplation of God, meditating (dhāraṇā and dhyāna) on his form.

<sup>2</sup> There are several reasons for this deviation from the prescriptions. As for the recitation of texts, one of them is the modern development of society, where less and less followers of śrīvaiṣṇavism delve into the foundations of the philosophy and theology of tradition. In addition, the number of well-educated Brahmins, who can not only read and understand Sanskrit literature in original, but also can comment on it and transfer knowledge, is also decreasing. As for yoga in the Pāñcarātra tradition, this spiritual discipline is generally quite complex and it requires a strict discipline and renunciation.

The topic of yoga is discussed in details in the article “Yoga in the Daily Routine of the Pāñcarātrins” by Marion Rastelli [7]. According to the most saṃhitās time for practice comes in the evening and at midnight, although daytime is also possible. The main requirement for timing is the ability to achieve deep concentration. A practitioner performs a series of preparatory rituals, such as bathing, “sipping” (ācamana), placing mantras on the body etc. Then it is time to practice yoga. Despite the fact that the technical requirements of the practice differ in texts, four types of practice can be distinguished: mental visualization of God, identification of a practitioner with God during the meditation, the practice of the yogāṅgas and the last one — tattvayoga which means the dissolving of tattvas. Mental visualization is performed on the anthropomorphic image of Viṣṇu with his attributes, weapons, garments. This description is given in a specific text, followed by an adept. The meditation of identification is the matching of Viṣṇu's body parts with the practitioner's body parts and placing the mantras of four Viṣṇu manifestations on the body (Vyūhas). This practice is accomplished with the gaining the qualities of Viṣṇu and his aspects by practicing. The third form of yoga includes the practice of six, seven, or eight parts of yoga (similar to the Patañjali aṣṭāṅga yoga, but the yoga parts are different). It includes practices such as prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhāraṇā, samādhi, japa, yama, niyama, āsana. Tattvayoga is the fourth yogic technique described in the Pāñcarātra saṃhitās. Performing this practice, the sādhanā (who is practicing yoga sādhanā) consistently dissolves all five tattvas of his body in each other and then in God during the process of meditation. Then meditation on the ultimate source, which is the Viṣṇu himself, is practicing. At the end, the tattvas again recreated. Rastelli concludes in her work that yoga function “is not only to train the mind, but to make the devotee aware of the nature of God and of his relation of God” [8]. It is also important to note that although the practice of yoga was part of the fivefold system of pañcakāla, however, śrīvaiṣṇava ācāryas (for example, Vedānta Deśika in his Pāñcarātrarakṣā) prescribed its practice only for those who have the appropriate abilities.

The religious and philosophical roots of the Viṣṇu worship go back to the prapatti doctrine. According to the ācāryas' belief of the post-Rāmānuja period the salvation of a person is beyond the limits of human perception and cognition, and only complete “refuge”, i.e. prapatti to Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa through the realization of one's helplessness, can be a guarantee of mokṣa. Entrusting oneself to the will of God, who is all-merciful and omnipotent, is a specific act of the mind, called buddhi-viśeṣa by Vedānta Deśika. As a result of this trust the one acquires a full knowledge and wisdom about the nature of one's soul and God and a relationship between them. From this perspective, both, initiation rituals and daily duties, are the acts of expiation and purification, leading the adept to the possibility of pure knowledge and salvation<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> More details about the theology of pañcasamskāra initiation and its particularities in the śrīvaiṣṇava schools of Vāṭakalai and Teṅkalai see [10]

### III. MANTRA-JAPA AND SEVA

In addition to the five daily religious duties, the Pāñcarātra tradition establishes the everyday practice of reading mantras (japa) three times a day, sticking to the Vedic prescriptions (in the morning, at noon, and in the evening). According to Sanatkumārasaṃhitā, morning time a practitioner addresses Nārāyaṇa with the Viṣṇu-Gāyatrī mantra, in the afternoon — to the form of Mahā-Viṣṇu with the help of the Dvaya-mantra, and in the evening to the Sadā-Viṣṇu with the help of Tirumantra. In addition to the mentioned mantras, another vaiṣṇava and Vedic mantras are also chanted, for instance Gāyatrī, Sudarśana, Bīja-mantra etc. [9]<sup>4</sup> As per Lakṣmī Tantra (LT 39:35) japa can be done in various ways depending on a specific goal: aloud (vācika), whisper (upāṃsu), mental (mānasa) and also in meditation (dhyāna). Mālā is used to count the number of mantras. The materials for rosaries are described in many texts. For example, LT 39:36-47 recommends to choose materials depending on the purpose. It is ranging from the fruits of various plants to metals such as gold and silver [11]. The adept should constantly maintain concentration on the divine form of Nārāyaṇa while reading the mantras, and it is not recommended to interrupt reading. The everyday chanting of a certain number of mantras is included in the wider practice of the Pāñcarātra tradition — puraścaraṇa, which also consists of daily rituals of sacrifice, libation, ablution and offering food to the Brahmins. All five parts of this practice are aimed to acquire the complete spiritual power by the adept.

Festivals and other celebrations dedicated to the divine forms of Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī, the Ālvārs and thinkers of the śrīvaiṣṇava tradition have a special place, besides the daily duties and worship in the temples. In Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra three out of ten chapters are dedicated to the vaiṣṇava festivals [12]. The priority practice during these festivals is the worship of Nārāyaṇa and selfless service (sevā) in the places of celebration and fasting. In the viśiṣṭādvaita-vedānta philosophy, the individual soul is considered as dependent on God and subordinated to Him (śeṣa). Thus, a devotee is a servant of God. Since the body of Viṣṇu is the manifested world, hence it is prescribed to vaiṣṇava to serve (kainkarya) both to God himself and to all His followers as his forms. Regarding sevā for followers, it is assumed that every devotee lives in the unceasing worship to Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. Therefore, helping the vaiṣṇavas in the daily duties pleases God. All daily services in the temples and festivals are strictly consistent with the texts of the āgamas<sup>5</sup>. The most important holidays are Śrī Rāmanavamī, Śrī Jayanti, Naraśimha Jayanti, Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī and so on.

<sup>4</sup> In the Brahminical tradition in order to study the Vedas, the Gāyatrī-mantra is recited three times a day. Despite the fact that the practices of the Pāñcarātra are different from the Vedic, the hasty refusal to perform Vedic rituals was not encouraged in śrīvaiṣṇavism. Thus, Vedānta Deśika emphasizes in Rahasyatrayasāra that the followers of Rāmānuja must adhere to the execution of saṃskāras (upanayana, vivāha, etc.) prescribed by smṛti texts.

<sup>5</sup> Some festivals and specific times of their occurrence and duration may differ depending on the tradition of the Pāñcarātra or the Vaikhānasa.

#### IV. ŚRĪVAIṢṆAVA ETHICS

The last topic, which we will discuss in this article, concerns the ethics of śrīvaiṣṇavism and it presents the most important religious and philosophical concept of vaiṣṇava dharma. The development of certain spiritual and ethical qualities in śrīvaiṣṇavism is the basis of every successful practice on the way to liberation. In fact, the main qualities to be cultivated are those which are required to follow the prapatti way: a definite will to perform only the actions which would please God (ānukūlya-saṅkalpah), refraining from the actions that could cause a displeasure of God (prātikūlya-vivarjana), an absolute steadfast faith in God as the all-merciful protector (mahā-viśvāsa), an appealing to God as a protector (gopṭṛtva-varaṇa), self-surrender or devotion (ātma-nikṣepa), humility (kāraṇya)<sup>6</sup>. The development of strong faith, harmlessness (ahiṃsā), truthfulness (satya) are all necessary qualities for worthy worship of God and attaining mokṣa. Vedānta Deśika in Paramapada-sopāna (I-IX) noted nine steps that one's soul goes through on the highest path (paramapada) to liberation. The first four steps soul passes in the physical body during its life and the rest occur during and after death. These four steps are directly related to the individual soul's development over a lifetime and hence so important. An attainment of a clear and correct philosophical knowledge (viveka) of the nature of Brahman, soul and the world under supervision of an experienced guru is the first fundamental step on the path to mokṣa. "Aversion" to one's own weakness and aptitude to feelings and strivings causes repentance (nirveda). This is the second stage and the natural consequence of viveka. Further, the adept attains the quality of non-attachment or "aversion" to external material objects and various pleasures of the world (virakti), which are the cause of constant rebirth. Non-attachment, also known as vairāgya, leads the seeker of mokṣa to the steady pursuit of eternal bliss and mercy of Viṣṇu. Further, the fear (bhiti) in front of the bondage of the bonds of karma and next rebirth grows. These four steps are the prerequisites for attaining the fifth one — blessing of God (prasādāna) and, as a result, moving towards to the next stages'. Vairāgya is the highest quality necessary to achieve liberation. Vedānta Deśika was himself an example of this quality. Vairāgya also implies the development of non-attachment even to liberation itself.

#### V. CONCLUSION

It is important to note that the strict, time-based schedule of life, described in the vaiṣṇava tantric literature, was fully feasible mainly for the Brahmins. First, because it corresponded to their original varṇa duties, such as studying sacred texts, performing rituals and so on. Other members of society, less educated, were unable to study Sanskrit and

<sup>6</sup> The ethical and spiritual practices of śrīvaiṣṇavas were systematized by Vedānta Deśika in his Sanskrit works Nyāsa-vimśati, Nyāsa-tilaka, Nikṣepa-rakṣā, Nyāsa-daśaka, Śaraṅgati-dīpikā and also in the Rahasya-traya-sāra and Rahasya-rakṣā in Maṅglikā language. The main qualities were described in the Pāñcarātra, for example, in Ahirbudhnyasamhitā, Lakṣmī Tantra etc.

<sup>7</sup> All nine steps of the liberation path (paramapada) are described in more detail, for example, in the monograph of Srinivasa Chari [13]

engaged in other activities, often experienced difficulties in observing the prescriptions. At various times up to today simpler śrīvaiṣṇava practices were emphasized due to the development of the vaiṣṇava religious tradition and increasing involvement of people of different varṇas, as well as as a result of economic and social development. For example, singing of the glory of Viṣṇu (saṅkīrtana), listening (śravaṇa) and remembering (smaraṇa) about His greatness, reading His names, prostrating before Him (vandana) etc. became more popular among ordinary people. Such practices did not require adherence to special rules and fulfilment of all cleansing rituals of the pañcakāla system, and did not take so much time. Descriptions of these simplified methods of worship came from Itihāsa and Purāṇas that are available for study to most of the vaiṣṇavas. On the one hand, this tendency helped to spread the teachings of śrīvaiṣṇavism and attract more followers. Regardless of education level, abilities, caste differences and gender it became possible to them to be involved in worshipping Viṣṇu, to develop the necessary spiritual qualities and gradually move towards salvation. On the other hand, such simplification led to a gradual emasculation of traditional knowledge, a reduction of the religious and philosophical education, and a violation of the purity of many rituals and prescriptions. However, today there are still many orthodox śrīvaiṣṇava mathas (Śrīrangam, Kāñcipuram, Ahobilam etc.), where the prescriptions of the śrīvaiṣṇava tradition are being complied same as it was in the 12th-14th centuries.

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