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Two divisions of śāstra—smārta and paramārtha

The Vedic *ārya-śāstras* are divided into two sections—*smārta* (literature based on *smṛti*) and *paramārtha* (transcendental literature based on *śruti*). Those who are eligible (*adhikārī*) for the *smārta* section do not have any natural inclination or taste for the *paramārtha-śāstras*. The thoughts, principles, activities, and life goal of every human is constituted according to his respective *ruci* (inclination). Generally, *smārtas* accept those scriptures which are in accordance with their respective *ruci*. Having greater *adhikāra* for *smārta-śāstra*, they do not demonstrate much regard for *paramārthika-śāstra*. Providence is the agent behind the creation of these two divisions. Therefore, undoubtedly the maintainer of the world must have a hidden purpose in having made such an arrangement.

As far as I understand, the purpose is that the *jīvas* sequentially make progress in their level of consciousness by remaining steadfast in their respective *adhikāra*. By deviating from one's *adhikāra*, one falls down. According to one's activities, a person attains two types of *adhikāra*—*karma-adhikāra* and *bhakti-adhikāra*. As long as one maintains his *karma-adhikāra*, he derives benefit from the path shown by the *smārta* section. When he enters *bhakti-adhikāra*, by transgressing the *karma-adhikāra*, then he develops a natural *ruci* (inclination) for the *paramārthika*, or transcendental path.

Therefore, providence has made these two divisions of *śāstra*: *smārta* and *paramārtha*.

The rules and regulations of smārta-śāstra are committed to karma

The *smārta-śāstra* has made various types of rules and regulations in order to help one attain *niṣṭhā*, steadfastness, in *karma-adhikāra*. In many instances, it even demonstrates indifference towards *paramārtha-śāstra* to make people attain specific *niṣṭhā* in such rules and regulations.

In reality, although *śāstra* is one, it manifests in two ways for the people. If the *jīva* gives up *adhikāra-niṣṭhā*, he can never attain auspiciousness. For this reason, the *śāstras* have been divided into two: *smārta* and *paramārtha*.

Adhi-māsa (extra month), also called mala-māsa (impure month), is devoid of all auspicious activities

By dividing the whole year in twelve parts, the *smārta-śāstras* have ascertained the auspicious, or religious, activities for these twelve months. All the *karma*, religious activities which are part of the *varṇāśrama* system

when allotted to the twelve months, leave the extra month (*adhi-māsa*) devoid of any such activity. There is no religious performance in *adhi-māsa*. In order to keep lunar months and solar months in tally, one month has to be excluded every 32 months. The name of that month is *adhi-māsa* (extra month).* *Smārtas* have discarded this extra month, considering it abominable. They gave it names such as *mala-māsa* (impure month), *cora-māsa* (thieving month), and so on.

* *It is stated in Śrī Sūrya Siddhānta that in one mahā-yuga there are 1,593,336 extra months and 51,840,000 solar months. Therefore, there is one extra month after every 32 months, 16 days and 4 hours of the solar calendar.*

From the perspective of paramārtha-śāstra, adhi-māsa is superior and advantageous for hari-bhajana

On the other hand, the most *worshipable paramārtha-śāstra* acclaims *adhi-māsa* as the most outstanding month for transcendental activities. Since life in this world is temporary, it is not proper to spend any part of one's life meaninglessly. It is imperative for the *jīva* to remain continuously engaged in *hari-bhajana* at every moment. Thus, the *adhi-māsa*, which comes every third year, may also become useful for *hari-bhajana*. This is indeed the deep meaning of *paramārtha-śāstras*. Even though *karmīs* perceive this month to be devoid of all auspicious activities, for the deliverance of all the *jīvas*, *paramārtha-śāstra*, on the other hand, has ascertained that period as the most conducive for *hari-bhajana*. *Paramārtha-śāstra* says, “O *jīva*! During this *adhi-māsa* why should you remain lazy in *hari-bhajana*? Śrī Golokanātha Himself has ascertained that this month is the best of all. It is superior even to the greatly pious months of Kārtika, Māgh and Vaiśākha. In this month, you should perform arcana of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa with special rules, or moods, for *bhajana*. You will thereby attain all types of perfection.”

The history and glories of adhi-māsa and how it received the name Puruṣottama

The glories of *adhi-māsa* are mentioned in the thirty-first chapter of the *Nāradīya Purāṇa*. *Adhi-māsa* considered the sovereignty of the twelve months and saw that he was being slighted. He went to Vaikuṅṭha and related his dilemma to Śrī Nārāyaṇa. Out of compassion, Vaikuṅṭha-pati took *Adhi-māsa* with Him and appeared before Śrī Kṛṣṇa in Goloka. After hearing about the distress of *mala-māsa* (the impure month), Śrī Kṛṣṇa's heart melted and He spoke thus:

*aham etair yathā loke prathitaḥ puruṣottamaḥ
tathāyam api lokeṣu prathitaḥ puruṣottamaḥ
asmai samarpitāḥ sarve ye guṇamayi samsthitāḥ
mat-sādrśyam-upāgamyā māsānāmadhipo bhavet
jagat-pūjyo jagat-vandyo māso 'yaṁ tu bhaviṣyati
sarve māsāḥ sakāmāś ca niṣkāmo 'yaṁ mayāḥ kṛtaḥ*

*akāmaḥ sarvakāmo vā yo 'dhimāsam prapūjayet
karmāṇi bhasmasāt krtvā mām evaiṣyaty asaṁśayam
kadācin-mama bhaktanām aparādheti gaṇyate
puruṣottama-bhaktānām nāparādhaḥ kadācana
ya etasmin-mahā mūdhā japa-dānādi-varjitāḥ
sat-karma-snāna-rahitā deva-tīrtha-dviija-dviṣaḥ
jāyante durbhagā duṣṭāḥ para-bhāgyopajīvanaḥ
na kadācit sukhaṁ teṣāṁ svapne 'pi śaśa-śṛṅgavat
yenāham arccito bhaktyā māse 'smin puruṣottame
dhana-putra-sukhaṁ bhuktvā paścād-goloka-vāsabhāk*

“O Ramā-pati! Just as I am celebrated in this world by the name Puruṣottama, similarly, this Adhi-māsa too will be renowned in the world by the name Puruṣottama. Now I offer all My qualities to this month. Becoming like Me, from today onwards, this Adhi-māsa is the monarch of all the other months, and is the most worshipable and most adored in the world. All other months are *sakāma*, that is, they will grant worldly desires. This month, however, is *niṣkāma*. Those who worship this month, either without any desires (*akāma*) or with all types of desires, will have all their karmas burnt. Then they will achieve Me. My *bhaktas* sometimes commit offenses, but in this Puruṣottama month, they will be protected from committing any offense. In this Adhi-māsa, those greatly foolish persons who neglect to perform auspicious activities, such as *japa*, giving in charity, visiting and bathing at the holy places, and who are envious of the *dvijas* (*brāhmaṇas*) are deemed wicked, unfortunate and living at the cost of others. Thus, they will not attain a scent of happiness, even in their dreams. Conversely, those who are filled with *bhakti* will take advantage of this Puruṣottama month to perform *arcana* to Me. After enjoying worldly happiness, such as wealth, sons and so on, they will eventually attain residence in Goloka.”

The glories of Puruṣottama month in the context of Draupadī's history

Many episodes from the *Purāṇas* are narrated in the context of the glories of Puruṣottama month. One such example is Draupadī. In her previous life, she was the daughter of Medhā Ṛṣi. Even after hearing of the glories of Puruṣottama month from Durvāsā Ṛṣi, she neglected to observe that month. As a result, she attained many sufferings in that life and became the wife of five husbands in her birth as Draupadī. During their exile, the Pāṇḍavas followed Śrī Kṛṣṇa's instructions to observe *puruṣottama-māsa-vrata* and thus crossed over all their sufferings. As it is said:

*evam sarveṣu tīrtheṣu bhramantaḥ pāṇḍunandanāḥ
puruṣottama-māsādya-vrataṁ cerur vidhānataḥ
tadante rājyam atulam avāpur gata-kaṇṭakam
pūrṇe caturdaśe varṣe śrī kṛṣṇa-kṛpayā mune*

“O Muni! During the period of their exile, the Pāṇḍavas travelled throughout all the holy places, and by the mercy of Śrī Kṛṣṇa they observed Śrī Puruṣottama-vrata with all rules and regulations. As a result of this

they completed their fourteen years of exile without any obstacles and at the end attained an unparalleled kingdom.”

The account of King Dṛḍhadhanvā as spoken by Vālmikī regarding Puruṣottama-vrata

Puruṣottama-māsa is glorified in the account of King Dṛḍhadhanvā’s previous birth. At Badrikāśrama, Nārada heard the procedure of the vrata from Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi, which Vālmikī Muni then related to King Dṛḍhadhanvā in answer to the king’s questions. Just as the rules of ahanika (*gāyatri mantras*) for *brāhmaṇas* are ascertained in *dharma-śāstras*, similarly, the obligatory activities for one observing Puruṣottama-vrata are also delineated, beginning from the brahma-*muhūrtahour*.

Rules for bathing in the month of Sri Puruṣottama

Regarding the rules for bathing during Puruṣottama month, it is said:

*samudragā nadī-snānam-uttamaṁ parikīrtitam
vāpī-kūpa-taḍāgeṣu madhyamaṁ kathitaṁ budhaiḥ
grhe snānaṁ tu sāmānyam grhasthasya prakīrtitam*

“There are three types of baths as declared by the wise. A bath in the rivers which meet the ocean is the topmost. A bath in lakes, ponds and wells is the second best, and a bath in one’s home is an ordinary bath.”

For one who is observing Śrī Puruṣottama-vrata, after taking bath he should observe the following:

*sapavitreṇa hastena kuryād ācamana-kriyām
ācamya tilakaṁ kuryād-gopī-candana-mṛt-snayā
ūrddhva-puṇḍra mṛjum saumyaṁ daṇḍākāraṁ prakalpayet
śankha-cakrādikaṁ dhāryaṁ gopī-candana-mṛt-snayā*

“After bathing one should perform *ācamana* with clean hands. One should then make a paste of *gopī-candana* clay and wear simple, beautiful, straight *ūrddhva-puṇḍra tilaka* on his forehead and the marks of conch, disc and so on, on his body.”

The exclusive worship of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa is obligatory in Puruṣottama month

The worship of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the obligatory activity of Puruṣottama month.

*puruṣottama-māsasya daivataṁ puruṣottamaḥ
tasmāt sampūjayed bhaktyā śraddhayā puruṣottamam*

Vālmikī said, “O Dṛḍhadhanvā! Puruṣottama Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the presiding deity of the Puruṣottama month. Therefore, being filled with *bhakti*–

śraddhā, you should worship Puruṣottama Śrī Kṛṣṇa with sixteen types of paraphernalia every day of this month. As it is said: *ṣoḍaśopacāraiś ca pūjayet puruṣottamam* -“The worship of the divine couple Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa is indeed obligatory in Puruṣottama-māsa.”

*āgaccha deva deveśa śrī kṛṣṇa puruṣottama
rādhayā sahitaś cātra gṛhāṇa pūjanam mama*

What constitutes haviṣyānna

*haviṣyānnaṁ ca bhuñjīta prayataḥ puruṣottame
godhūmāḥ śālyāḥ sarvāḥ sitā mudgā yavāstilaḥ
kalāya-kaṅgunī-vārā vāstukaṁ hilmocikā
ādrakaṁ kāla-śākaṅ ca mūlaṁ kaṅḍaṅca karkaṭīm
rambhā saiṅdhava-sāmudre lavaṇe dadhi-sarpiṣī
payo ‘nudhṛt-sāraṅ ca panasāmra-haritakī
pippalī-jīrkaṅcaiva nāgaram caiva tintiḍī
kramukaṁ lavalī-dhātrī phalānya guḍa maikṣavam
ataila-pakvaṁ munyo haviṣāṁ pravadanti ca
haviṣya-bhojanam nṛṇām upavāsa-saṁ viduḥ*

Foods and conduct that one should abstain from

All types of fish, meat, *āmiṣa*, honey, *kula-karkita* fruit, mustard seeds, and all kinds of intoxicants are to be given up. Foods considered impure and not fit for consumption are *dvidāl* – like split Bengal gram (*chanā dāhl*) and the likes, sesame oil, rice/grains containing stones and particles of sand and other impurities, wealth/materials which are *bhāvaduṣṭa*, *kriyā duṣṭa* and *śabdaduṣṭa* *are prohibited.* Mushrooms, carrots, bottle gourd (*lauki*), *narica*, a root called ‘*kemuka*’.

**Bhāva duṣṭa– any wealth or material offered with an ulterior motive (e.g. let me feed some devotees with a feast so that I stop incurring losses in my business). Kriyā duṣṭa – any fault incurred in the standard procedure/process (e.g. Bhoga offered to the Lord prepared using high quality ingredients but cooked in an unclean state). Śabda duṣṭa– any fault arising by the medium of words (e.g. some donation is offered but the donor also claims that he has done a great favour by offering that donation).*

All the items that one abstained from during Puruṣottama-māsa, can be consumed only after first offering them to a qualified *brāhmaṇa* at the end of Puruṣottama-māsa.

After rising early in the morning, and completing all pre-noon activities, one must follow all these regulations by remembering Śrī Kṛṣṇa with devotion within one’s heart.

A vrata is of three types–

1. *upavāsa*
2. *nakta* (eating *haviṣyānna* at night)
3. eating once

Fruit of listening to Śrīmad Bhāgavatam and observing the vrata

In Puruṣottama-māsa, one should listen to *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* with devotion.

Devotees should worship *śāligrāma-śilā*. This *vrata* is more glorious than one hundred fire sacrifices because by performing a hundred fire sacrifices one attains heavenly planets.

However, all the holy places of pilgrimage and all demigods reside in the body of the one who observes this Puruṣottama vrata.

Offering of a lamp and its fruit

One should consider it one's duty to offer *dīpa-dāna* (offering of a lamp) for the pleasure of Puruṣottama Śrī Kṛṣṇa in this month. If wealthy and eligible, one should offer pure ghee lamps.

O Manigriva! Where will you obtain ghee or sesame oil while in exile (in the forest)? Hence you can offer *dīpa-dāna* using *inguli* oil.

Namaskāra mantra:

*vande navaghana-śyāmaṁ dvibhujam muralī dharam
pītāmbara dharam devaṁ sa rādham puruṣottamaṁ*

Ārati, dhyāna and puṣpāñjalī mantra

Afterwards, offer sesame in the fire sacrifice (*til homa*) and offer *ārati* –

*nirājayāmi deveśa mindīvara-dala cchaviṁ
rādhika-ramaṇa preṇṇā koṭi-kandarpa-sundaram*

Then dhyāna mantra

*antarjyotir ananta-ratna-racite simhāsane saṅsthitam
vamśīnāda-vimohita-vrajavadhu vṛndāvane sundaram
dhyāyed rādhikayā sa kaustubha maṇi-pradyotitora sthalam
rājadratna-kirīṭa-kunḍala dharam pratyagra-pītāmbaram
naumi navaghana-śyāmaṁ pītavāsa samacyutam
śrīvatsa-bhāsito raskam rādhikā-sahitam harim*

Afterwards, offer charity of '*pūrṇa-pātra*' to a devotee *brāhmaṇa* along with *dakṣiṇā* and then give donations. At this time it is stipulated to give *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* in charity to a Vaiṣṇava *brāhmaṇa*. Give a set of

compact bell-metal containers to a *brāhmaṇa*, and serve *prasādam* of sweet rice mixed with ghee, and at the end relinquish all the vows you had accepted specifically for this *vrata*.

Activities forbidden in the month of Puruṣottama

All the rules and regulations regarding Śrī Puruṣottama-*vrata*, which we have presented above from these *śāstras*, should be followed by religiously devoted persons of all the *varṇas* (castes). The *Nārādīya Purāṇa* concludes by saying that in the holy place of Naimiṣāraṇya, Śrī Sūta Gosvāmī spoke to the assembled devotees as follows:

*bhārate janurāsādyā puruṣottam-uttamam
na sevante na śṛṇvanti gṛhāsaktā narādhamāḥ
gatāgataṁ bhajante 'tra durbhāgā janma-janmani
putra-mitra-kalatrāpta-viyogād dukkha bhāginaḥ
asmin māse dvija śreṣṭhā nāsacchāstrāny udāharet
na svapet para-śayyāyām nālapet vitatham kvacit
parāpavādān na bruyān na kathancit kadācana
parānnaṁ na bhunjīta na kurvīta parakriyām*

“Even after taking birth in India, those who are the lowest of mankind remain attached to household life and never hear the glories of Śrī Puruṣottama-*vrata*; nor do they observe it. Such unfortunate persons undergo the suffering of repeated birth and death and the distress inflicted by the separation from sons, friends, wife and other relatives.

“O best of the *dvijas*! In this Puruṣottama month, one should not uselessly discuss worldly literature or mundane poetry. One should not sleep on the bed of others nor indulge in discussions of worldly sense enjoyment. One should not criticize others, eat foodstuffs cooked by others, or perform activities prescribed for others.”

The obligatory activities in the Puruṣottama month

*vittasāṭhyam akurvāṇo dānam dadhyād dvijātaye
vidyamāne dhane sāṭhyam kurvāṇo rauravam vrajet
dine dine dvijendrāya dattvā bhojanam-uttamam
divasasyāṣṭame bhāge vratī bhojanam ācaret
indradyumnaḥ śatadyumno yauvanāśvo bhagīrathaḥ
puruṣottamam ārādhya yayur bhagavadantikam
tasmāt sarva prayatnena samsevyaḥ puruṣottamaḥ
sarva sādhanataḥ śreṣṭhaḥ sarvārtha phala-dāyakaḥ*

*govardhana-dharam vande gopalam gopa-rupinam
gokulotsavam-issanam govindam gopika-priyam**

* “I worship the lifter of Govardhana, Gopāla, who has the form of a *gopa*. He is the festival of Gokula (*gokula-utsava*), the Supreme Controller of all (Īśvara), and He is Govinda the beloved of the *gopīs* (*gopikā-priyam*).”

*kaundinyena purā proktam imam mantram punaḥ punaḥ
japan-māsam nayed bhaktyā puruṣottamam-āpnuyāt*

*dhyāyen-navaghana-śyāmam dvibhujam muralīdharam
lasat pīta-paṭam ramyam sa-rādhām puroṣottamam*

*dhyāyam dhyāyam nayan-māsam pūjayan puruṣottamam
evam yaḥ kurute bhaktyā svābhiṣṭam sarvam āpnuyāt*

“Giving up miserliness, one should give in charity to the *brāhmaṇas*. If a person remains miserly even though he has wealth, his miserliness will be the cause of his going to Raurava (one type of hell). Every day one should feed the Vaiṣṇavas and *brāhmaṇas* with the best foodstuffs. A person who is following the vows should take his food in the eighth part of the day. Indradyumna, Satadyumna, Yauvanāśva and Bhagīratha attained *sāmīpya*, (close association of Bhagavān) by worshipping the Puruṣottama month. One should perform service to Puruṣottama with all of one’s endeavours. Such service to Puruṣottama is superior to all types of *sādhana* and fulfils all varieties of desires. In a previous age, Kauṇḍilya Muni repeatedly chanted the mantra ‘*govardhana-dharam vande*’. By chanting this mantra with devotion during Śrī Puruṣottama month, one will attain Śrī Puruṣottama Himself. One should devote Puruṣottama month to constantly meditating upon *nava-ghana dvibhujā muralīdhara pītāmbara Śrī Kṛṣṇa* with Śrī Rādhā. Those who do this with devotion will have all their cherished desires fulfilled.”

The observance for transcendentalists – *svaniṣṭha*, *paraniṣṭhita* and *nirapekṣa*

There are three types of transcendentalists: *svaniṣṭha* — those who are steadfast in their personal vows; *paraniṣṭhita* — those who are steadfast in following the vows set forth by their respective *ācāryas*; and *nirapekṣa* — those who are indifferent to the above two types of steadfastness.*

* *Svaniṣṭha* and *paraniṣṭhita bhaktas* are generally householders and *nirapekṣa bhaktas* are renunciates. The *svaniṣṭhita sādhanaka* performs all his activities in accordance with the rules and prohibitions laid down for the service and attendance of Bhagavān. The *pariniṣṭhita sādhanaka* completely discards the rules and prohibitions prescribed within *varṇāśrama* and endeavours incessantly simply to please Bhagavān Śrī Hari. The *nirapekṣa sādhanaka* is a renunciate.

All the activities mentioned above for Puruṣottama month are prescribed for *svaniṣṭha* transcendentalists. *Paraniṣṭhita bhaktas* are eligible to observe Puruṣottama-vrata according to the rules and instructions of Kārtika vrata prescribed by their respective *ācāryas*. *Nirapekṣa bhaktas* respect this sacred month by daily honouring *śrī bhāgavat-prasāda* with one-pointed attention, following some routine for *śravaṇa* and *kīrtana* of *śrī hari-nāma* according to their capacity.

The following statement from *Viṣṇu-rahasya*, which is the topmost instruction of *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, recommends:

*indriyārtheṣv-asaktānām sadaiva vimalā matiḥ
paritoṣayate viṣṇuṃ nopavāso jitātmanah*

“Those whose intelligence has been purified by *bhakti* are detached from the inclination for sense enjoyment. The intelligence of such persons is naturally pure; therefore, they are *jitātmā*, they have conquered their minds. It is by their innate *bhakti*, rather than by *upavāsa* (fasting) and other such activities, that they have purified their minds and are thus able to please Śrī Kṛṣṇa at all times.”

The innate ruci (inclination) and obligatory activities of ekāntika bhaktas

Therefore, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī has concluded his book *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* by presenting the following statements for one-pointed devotees:

*evam ekāntinām prāyaḥ kīrtanaṃ smaraṇaṃ prabhoh
kurvatām param-prītyā kṛtyam-anyan na rocate*

*bhāvena kenacit preṣṭhah śrī murter-anghri sevane
syād icchyaishām svatantraṇa sva-rasanaiva tad-vidhiḥ*

*vihiteṣv eva nityeṣu pravartante svayam hite
ityādy ekāntinām bhāti mähātmyam likhitam hi tat*

“*Ekāntika bhaktas* (one-pointed devotees) of Śrī Kṛṣṇa consider *śrī kṛṣṇa smaraṇa* and *śrī kṛṣṇa-kīrtana* alone to be the most fulfilling and valued activities. Generally, they do not engage in any other *aṅgas* of *bhakti* besides these two, which they cultivate with great love and affection. Their eagerness for these *aṅgas* is so strong that no other activity can captivate their taste. They develop an intense desire to serve the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in a specific mood. Therefore, they render service to the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with moods which are favourable to their own *rasa*, along with some independence (to give up the injunctions which are unfavourable to their cultivation). This alone is their *vidhi*. The *ekāntika bhaktas* are not bound to follow all the rules and regulations which have been prescribed by the *ṛṣis*. The moods of the *ekāntika*

bhakta's inborn, natural disposition generally remains prominent. This is their glory.”

Adhi-māsa is dear to bhaktas as there is no disturbance from the karma-kāṇḍa in this month.

The *bhaktas* observe Śrī Puruṣottama month according to their respective *adhikāra*; this means according to the distinctions of the moods of *svaniṣṭha*, *paraniṣṭhita* and *ekāntika bhaktas*. Bhagavān Vrajanātha Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the sovereign of this month; therefore, *adhi-māsa* is dear to every *bhakta*. This is because, incidentally, in this month no disturbance from the *karma-kāṇḍa* can come to obstruct the performance of one's *bhakti*.