CHAPTER NINE

CODA:
TRANSITIONAL TEXTS OF THE ĀPADDHARMAPARVAN II

This chapter unites together the last four texts of the ĀDhP. These texts continue the transitional function begun by those texts discussed in the last chapter, a transition marking not just a shift from the thematic space of the ĀDhP to the MDhP, but also a shift from the entire royal instructions constituted in the RDhP and ĀDhP taken collectively to the instructions on the ‘laws of liberation’ that constitute the MDhP. This broader context in which there is a general division between instructions on ruling and instructions on liberation accounts, I suggest, for the large number of texts apparently devoted to this transition. The relative prominence of the Mbh’s inner frame in these four texts emphasises their transitional position, with Vaiśāmpāyana’s presence explicitly felt (having emerged once already in the previous sequence of transitional texts1) in the last three of the four texts of this sequence.2 In the first two of these cases, Vaiśāmpāyana introduces new participants in the ĀDhP’s most prominent interlocutory frame, normally dominated only by Bhīṣma and Yudhiṣṭhira. These variations in frame interlocution, and their significance for the transitional positions of these units, are discussed further below.

The transitional texts discussed in this chapter part with those explored in the previous chapter on formal grounds, a formal distinctiveness matched by their quite separate transitional functions. The first of these units offers a long and idiosyncratic exposition of penance, the purificatory practices advocated not only for crimes, but also for the sorts of breaking of normative rules that typifies a time of crisis. The second and third units form a kind of pair. The former reworks an important mythologem figuring the foundational significance of royal power that, in its recurrence on three separate occasions through their royal instructions, frames the texts of the RDhP and ĀDhP sequence.

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1 See above pp.346f. Cf. pp.166f. above.
2 See 160.1, 161.1 and 167.24 in units 26, 27 and 28. In the latter case, Vaiśām-pāyana delivers the final stanza of the ĀDhP.
The latter, on the other hand, while glancing back at the instructions that have just passed, looks forward to those that are coming in the near future, namely the instructions constituting the MDhP. Finally, in revisiting a number of themes that weave through the ĀDhP, the last text offers a cautionary tale that, among other things, points to limits in the application of āpadadharma.

9.1 ‘Concerning penance’ (Mbh 12.159; SU 25)

This unit is distinguished by its strongly dharmaśāstric character, which is no more obvious than in its close relationship to the MS. There is no praśna framing this text’s contents and Bhīṣma begins quite abruptly. The paucity of the text’s frame, and its consequent lack of rhetorical integration in the ĀDhP, suggests its secondary character. Unlike an earlier sequence of units lacking praśnas, SUs 4-8, each of which can be readily understood as foreshadowed in the praśnas framing SUs 1-3,3 the absence of a praśna in the present text is disconcerting, emphasising again the important integrative function the praśna plays in the didactic corpora of the Mbh. This is not to say, however, that the contents of this text do not have some thematic continuity with other material in the ĀDhP that can help us make some sense of its inclusion. Some suggestions in this direction will be made towards the end of this discussion.

This text has many passages parallel to other dharma-sūtras and -śāstras, most especially the MS, as outlined in the table in FIGURE 14. This table uses the symbols =, ≡ and ~ to indicate the declining degree of the relationship the stanzas of ĀDhP 159 have with stanzas from these other texts. In all cases I have attempted to give preference to verbal parallels rather than just semantic similarities, though these have been included too in the cases that they have been located. In view of the need for economy, sometimes the = symbol is used even in the case that there is a variant reading (some of these variants are noted). Much of the data for this table has been gleaned from Bühler’s translation of the MS in which he collated an enormous number of parallels between the MS and the Mbh and the other dharma texts.4

3 See above p.224. In the CE, units 16-17 are also without praśnas, a problem relieved in some manuscript by the insertion of a praśna (see above pp.247f).
4 Bühler, The Laws of Manu, pp.533-82.