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On the Boundary between *Yogakkhema* in the *Suttapiṭaka* and *Yogaḥṣema* in the *Upaniṣads* and *Bhagavadgītā**

SUMMARY: The combination of the stems *yoga-* and *khema-/kṣema-* occurs in phrases or compounds in both ancient and in middle Indo-Aryan sources but what is intriguing is that such a combination is generally interpreted as coordinating in the former occurrences and as subordinating in the latter ones. In particular, *yogakkhema-* within the Buddhist Theravāda Canon and its commentarial literature is regularly analysed as a *tatpuruṣa* and often translated as ‘freedom from bondage or safety’.

We recently presented a part of the Vedic and Pali documentation collected in the context of more broadly shared research on this subject during the 18th Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies (Section: “Buddhism and Its relation to other religions”) held at the University of Toronto on August 20th–25th, 2017, now published as Pontillo and Neri 2019. The case of *yogaḥṣema/yogakkhema* in Vedic and Suttapiṭaka sources.

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In response to Norman. In: *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 47(3): 527–563. Here, we shall take a further step in the above-mentioned comparison by concentrating on the occurrences of the compound *yogakṣema/yogakkhema* as found in the *upaniṣads* and in the *Bhagavadgītā* and in some comparable *Suttapiṭaka* passages with the aim of understanding what might have been the boundary that this word historically crossed in the framework of an assumed dialogue between different traditions.

KEYWORDS: *yoga*, *khema-/kṣema-*, *yogakkhema-/yogakṣema-*, *tatpuruṣa*, *dvandva*, boundary, intertextual comparison, *Summum Bonum*, *Suttapiṭaka*, *Taittirīya-upaniṣad*, *Kaṭha-upaniṣad*, *Bhagavadgītā*

1. Introduction

The starting point for the present joint contribution is to try to focus on a boundary which was singled out by Johnston in 1939, when he reflected “On Some Difficulties of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*”, i.e. when he commented on a specific meaning conveyed by a lexeme included in the *Kaṭha-upaniṣad* precisely by making a comparison with the Buddhist sources. This boundary in fact concerns the Pali compound *yogakkhema* and the matching late Vedic form *yogakṣema* in the following *Kaṭha-upaniṣad* passage, where Naciketas has to choose between *preyas*, “that which is agreeable”, and *śreyas*, “that which is excellent”.

KaUp 2.1.2: *śreyaś ca preyaś ca manuṣyam etas tau samparītya
vivanakti dhīrah śreyo hi dhīro 'bhi preyaso vṛṇīte preyo mando
yogakṣemād vṛṇīte ||*

Both the good and the gratifying present themselves to a man; the wise assess them, note their difference;¹ and choose the good over the gratifying, but the fool chooses the gratifying rather than what is beneficial (tr. Olivelle 1998: 381).

¹ Lit. “he sifts them, he divides them asunder”.

Therefore, Olivelle merely translates *yogakṣema* as if it dealt with a simple word (“what is beneficial”), but this is quite far from other translations such as Müller’s (Müller 1884: 8) and Filippi’s (Filippi 2001: 65). The former seems to analyze the ablative *yogakṣemāt* as an ablative of cause (“through greed and avarice”), while the latter interprets the same ablative as a reason underlying a fool’s choice, in the end as a sort of scope (“per conservare e difendere [la propria individualità]”). Both these translations self-evidently rely on an analysis of the compound as a *dvandva*.

What we find more interesting is that, just as Johnston (Johnston 1939: 124) noticed, the term *yogakṣema* of the second *pāda*, which is analogous and synonymic for *śreyas* in the previous *pāda*, is easily comparable with the most famous Buddhist usage of *yogakkhema*, namely in the sense of the *Summum Bonum*.² This is why Johnston presumed that the specific usage of this compound in the *Kaṭha-upaniṣad* should be considered as a piece of evidence for the date of this work, which he considered to post-date the Buddha.³

We shall return to our final hypothesis on the plausible relationship between these two traditions and others at the end, but it must be preliminarily noted that, if *yogakṣema* is a synonym of *śreyas*, then it seems most unlikely that it denotes a combination of two coordinate meanings instead of a single unified meaning.

2. The *Taittirīya-upaniṣad* occurrence of *yogakṣema*-

The only other occurrence of *yogakṣema* in the Vedic *upaniṣads* is TU 3.10.2, where it is included in a long list of definitions or rather equivalences (*upāsana*) of Brahman. In other words, it is stated that Brahman has to be venerated as *yogakṣema*, which Olivelle here translates as a *dvandva*:

² Cf. Charpentier 1928: 226 n. 105.

³ After the 5th century BCE—as he writes.

*kṣema iti vāci. yogakṣema iti prāṇāpānayoḥ. karmeti hastayoḥ.
gatih iti pādayoḥ. vimuktir iti pāyau.
iti mānuṣī samājñāḥ.*

In speech, as rest; in the out-breath and the in-breath, as activity and rest; in the hands, as action; in the feet, as movement; in the anus, as evacuation—these are its human appellations. (tr. Olivelle 1998: 311)

Of course, here we suppose that *yogakṣema* corresponds to this two-fold vital practice, i.e. out-breath and in-breath⁴—when they are put under control—a detail which, from a strictly semantic point of view, might favour the interpretation of our compound as a *dvandva*. Olivelle (ibid.: 577) consistently comments on this passage by associating *kṣema* “with people who settle a land and live there”, which is “contrasted [...] to ‘activity’ (*yoga*) associated with people (who venture out to conquer new land).”

Nonetheless, in the previous equivalence, it is only in *kṣema* that Brahman also has to be venerated, because *kṣema* matches *vāc*, i.e. the language, and, crucially, this is completely at odds with the grammatical analysis, since a singular masculine *dvandva* is indeed unexpected. In fact, if it were an *itaretarayoga* compound, it would be inflected in the dual number, while this is a singular noun. On the other hand, as is well known, unlike the *itaretara dvandva*, the grammatical gender in a *samāhāra*⁵ *dvandva*, which conveys a collective and cumulative meaning, and whose grammatical gender is not determined by the gender of the last word of the compound, but always the same, namely neuter, in accordance with Aṣṭ rule 2.4.17 (*sa napuṃsakam*)⁶ and the gram-

⁴ It is interesting that special attention is also paid in the same context to other basic vital functions and relevant organs, which seem to be listed in a systematic, almost traditional *Sāṃkhya* order.

⁵ This technical term is mentioned as a constraint in Aṣṭ 5.4.106. Wackernagel (Wackernagel 1957: 163) interprets this term as denoting a “summary” or an “amount” (*Zusammenfassung*, Menge).

⁶ Indeed Wackernagel (Wackernagel 1957: 165) records some singular *dvandvas* which use the gender of the second constituent (masculine or feminine) instead

matical number is always singular (*ekavacanam*), in accordance with rules 2.4.2–16. In our case, *yogakṣemaḥ* is masculine and this is why we are persuaded to think that it deals with a *tatpuruṣa*, where the masculine gender of the second term is regularly transferred to the whole compound. Therefore, we suggest that *yogakṣemaḥ* in the above quoted TU passage should be translated as “rest-from-exertion”, which is in accordance with a common translation proposed for the cognate Pali *yogakkhema* (cf. § 4): “[Brahman also has to be venerated] in the out-breath and in the in-breath (*prāṇāpānayoḥ*), as ‘rest-from-exertion’ (*yogakṣema iti*)”.

In fact, we are led to think that it deals with a *tatpuruṣa*, where the head (or better the non-*upasarjana* constituent) is the desired *kṣema* and the masculine gender of the second term is regularly transferred to the whole compound. It might have denoted:

—the sense of security coming from the previous enterprise(-s) / exertion(-s), if we assume the ablative case (*yogāt* or *yogebhyaḥ*) in the corresponding *vigrahavākya*⁷ (*yogāt kṣemaḥ* or *yogebhyaḥ kṣemaḥ*), or even

—the security attained by means of this (*yogena* or *yogaiḥ kṣemaḥ*), by postulating the instrumental case in the *vigrahavākya*.⁸

of the neuter one, such as *jarāmṛtyum* “old age and death” in MuṇḍUp 1.2.7 or *nābhāgeḥkṣvākum* instead of *nābhāgeḥkṣvāku* in MBh 1.75.15 (= 1.70.13 Poona ed.). He also suggests that it might deal with “die laxere Sprache der *Sūtren* und (jüngern?) Upaniṣads, des Epos, der Inschriften” according to him. By contrast, we consider that the status of these apparent exceptions as *dvandvas* is highly uncertain, e.g. *jarāmṛtyum* is used as a *tatpuruṣa*, meaning “dying from age”, in an earlier text, e.g. in AVŚ 2.13.2 and in AVŚ 19.24.4.

⁷ I.e. in the analytical string made of a combination of inflected nouns, which commentaries and word-formation rules, in the traditional grammars, enunciate as matching with derivative and compound words, in order to explain the analysis and meaning of them.

⁸ This hypothesis is also based on some earlier Vedic usages of *kṣema* as an isolated *pada* in the sense of “settlement, security, rest, peace etc”. For instance, in AVŚ 3.12.1:

3. *yogakṣema* in the *Bhagavadgītā*

In our opinion, such an interpretation also seems fit to be extended to one of the most quoted Sanskrit occurrences of our compound, namely BhG 9.22:

*ananyāś cintayanto mām ye janāḥ paryupāsate |
teṣāṃ nityābhiyuktānāṃ yogakṣemaṃ vahāmy aham ||*

To those persons, who worship Me everywhere, thinking [themselves] not-different [from Me], and who are constantly intent [on Me], I bring the rest-from-exertion.

Indeed, in the most of the translations we checked, the compound is analysed as a *dvandva*. The assumed meaning is that Kṛṣṇa provides his devotees with what they do not have and protects what they have already got. For example, Radhakrishnan's (Radhakrishnan 1949: 248) translation of *yogakṣema* is "attainment of what they have not and security in what they have."

*ihaivā dhruvāṃ nī minomi śālāṃ kṣéme tiṣṭhāti ghṛtām ukṣámāñā |
tām tvā śāle sārvaṅvīrāḥ suvīrā áriṣṭavīrā úpa sám carema ||*

"Just here I fix a firm enclosure. Let it stand in peace, sprinkling fat! Let us enter you, oh enclosure! rich in horses, rich in cows, rich in joys!"

There are at least 5 other occurrences of *kṣema* in the AVŚ and 3 other ones in the *R̥gveda*, but what is more noteworthy is that the object of a prayer comparable with this quoted from the *Śaunakīya-Atharvaveda* is conveyed in RV 10.166.5 by the compound *yogakṣema-*, which is the sole *R̥gvedic* occurrence of this compound (there is no occurrence in the AVŚ):

*yogakṣemaṃ va ādāyāhām bhūyāsam uttamā ā vo mūrdhānam akramīm |
adhas padān ma úd vadata maṅḍūkā ivodakān maṅḍūkā udakād iva ||*

Having obtained indeed the *yogakṣema*, might I become the highest!
I have walked on your head. From under my feet, may I raise my voice,
like frogs [who spring] out from the water, like frogs out from the water.

Although in the latter passage, it actually deals with a wisdom target for the aspiring winning poet, it is clear that this longed-for victory will provide him with a quite material welfare, i.e. with the safe possession of what he has won.

This interpretation self-evidently depends on the traditional BhG commentaries. For instance, Śaṅkarabhāṣya's analysis is as follows:

yogaḥ kṣemaḥ yogo 'prāptasya prāpaṇaṇaṃ kṣemas tadrakṣaṇaṃ tad ubhayaṃ vahāmi prāpayāmy aham,

[As regards as the word] *yogaḥ kṣemaḥ*: *yoga* is the action of attaining that which has not [yet] been attained, *kṣema* is the action of protecting it. I am bringing both of them, i.e. I am helping [my devotees] to attain them.

The *Nīlakaṇṭhavyākhyā* is even more explicit:

yogaḥ—aprāptasyānnader yogabhūmikāyā vā prāpaṇaṇaṃ. kṣemaḥ tasyaiva prāptasya samrakṣaṇaṃ. tad dvayam eva vahāmi nirvahāmi. tair annādāyartham vā yogabhūmiśūrdhvordhvabhūmilābhārthaṃ vā cintā na kartavyeyarthah,

yoga is the action of attaining that which has not [yet] been attained, such as food or land property. *kṣema* is the action of preserving that which has been attained. I am just bringing these two, i.e. I am attaining them. This means that they have not to need hence forward to be anxious for food etc. or in the field of land-properties, i.e. hence forward there is no purpose of obtaining land property.

Even though neither the quoted commentaries nor the consulted translations mention this detail, it is reasonable to assume that a crucial source for this interpretation was historically a passage which almost inaugurates the second part of the *Arthaśāstra* (books 6–14). Here *yogaḥ kṣema* is explained by means of an *itaretarayoga* compound which seems to suggest a pair of synonyms of its constituents, to illustrate the complementarity of two likewise necessary kingly tasks, i.e. “to acquire property and wealth through enterprise and then provide security for what he has gained” according to Olivelle (Olivelle 2013: 10).

ĀŚ 6.2.1–3: *śamavyāyāmau yogaḥ kṣemayor yonih | karmārambhānām yogārādhano vyāyāmaḥ | karmaphalopabhogānām kṣemārādhanaḥ śamaḥ |*

Rest and exertion form the basis of enterprise (*vyāyāma*) and security (*śama*). Exertion consists of the enterprise that one furnishes to

activities that are being undertaken. Rest consists of the security that one furnishes to the enjoyment of the fruits of one's activities.
(tr. Olivelle 2013: 273)

Along the lines of this kingly programme, Kṛṣṇa in BhG 9.22 should have been envisioned as a Lord who provides his subjects with all they need.

On the other hand, some translations are so generic that we are not sure about the corresponding analysis, as e.g. in that of Stoler Miller's (Stoler Miller 1991: 86),⁹ where the single term "reward" is used for the whole compound *yogakṣema*. Only Ray (Ray 1933: 134) seems to have understood it as we do, at least from the compound-analysis point of view,¹⁰ when he advances *yogeṣu kṣema iti sa yogakṣemaḥ* as a proper *vigrahavākya* (ibid.: 135), i.e. "among gains what is good or auspicious" and thus he argues that this compound is "equivalent to *niḥśreyasa* or the *Summum Bonum*". Indeed, he postulates that this term derives from the language of traders, according to which "a valuable article of trade, when it has been obtained, has to be guarded carefully, so as to make a good profit out of it when the opportunity came". In actual fact, there is no need to conjecture what is instead included in the relevant sources. Our compound might have denoted the sedentary peaceful life which follows the rides, contests and every kind of exertion which was compulsory for it to be achieved—as is well documented in the earliest Vedic texts. Thus, *yoga-kṣema* might have depicted that which is one of life's highly valued aims, especially in a spiritual sense as far as both the last two passages quoted here are concerned. Even though we are analyzing the compound as a *tatpuruṣa* instead of as a *dvandva*, the final meaning we have assumed for this strophe is, all in all, not so distant from the traditional interpretation.

⁹ "Men who worship me, thinking solely of me, always disciplined, win the reward I secure."

¹⁰ In fact, he maintains that *yogakṣema* means "release from the cycle of rebirths" and that "the real meaning of the verse is that while Vedic sacrificers and the worshippers of other gods are subject to rebirths, the constant devotees of the Lord are not subject to them, because they know the nature of the Lord and are united to Him."

Kṛṣṇa provides his devotees with a carefree life, possibly as far as both the secular and the spiritual life are concerned. The only other BhG occurrence is 2.45:

*traiguṇyaviṣayā vedā nistraiguṇyo bhavārjuna |
nirdvandvo nityasattvastho niryogaḳṣema ātmavān ||*

Arjuna, the realm of sacred lore is nature—beyond its triad of qualities, dualities, and mundane rewards, be forever lucid, alive to your self!
(tr. Stoler Miller 1991: 35)

The final *a* vowel followed by an initial *ā* is therefore considered as the *sandhi* effect of *aḥ*, i.e. *niryogaḳṣema-* is supposed to be a singular nominative referred to Arjuna in exactly the same way as *nirdvandva-* and *nityasattvastha-*, in accordance with BhGC.

For instance, the *Śāṅkarabhāṣya* explicitly quotes this nominative form (*tathā niryogaḳṣemaḥ*) and comments on this compound as follows:

*anupāttasyopādānaṃ yogaḥ upāttasya rakṣaṇaṃ ḳṣemaḥ. yogaḳṣema-
pradhānasya śreyasi pravṛttir duṣkarety ato niryogaḳṣemo bhava,*

yoga is the action of acquiring that which has not [yet] been acquired. *ḳṣema* is the action of protecting that which has been acquired. A behaviour based on the high condition of one who has *yogaḳṣema* as his chief principle is difficult to maintain. Therefore, may you be free from *yoga* and *ḳṣema*!

nir-yogaḳṣema- should be derived in accordance with Pāṇini’s rule Aṣṭ 2.2.18 *kugatiprādayaḥ*, “[The indeclinable *pada*] *ku-* and the units termed *gati* (Aṣṭ 1.4.60) or included in the list beginning with *pra-* (Aṣṭ 1.4.58) [compulsorily combine with an inflected word, to form a *tatpuruṣa* compound].” As the traditional *vigraha niṣkauśāmbi-* is *niṣkrāntaḥ kauśāmbyaḥ*, i.e. the compound *niṣkauśāmbi* denotes “one who has departed from [the town named] Kauśāmbī”, analogously the *tatpuruṣa niryogaḳṣema* could analogously denote “one who has left the condition which is called ‘*yogaḳṣema*’”, and since he is exhorted

to leave it intentionally, “one who is indifferent towards—we mean—the ‘material’ *yogakṣema*”.¹¹ We thus propose the following translation for the above BhG 2.45 verse:

The Vedas are such that their scope is confined to three qualities; be indifferent toward those three qualities, o Arjuna, indifferent towards the pairs of opposites, permanently relying on truth, master of yourself indifferent towards the rest from exertion.

We consider that the auspicious carefree condition mentioned in both BhG occurrences could be interpreted as the *Suttapiṭaka* occurrences surveyed below. Of course, this BhG passage could easily be post-Buddhist and thus be an instance of the continuance of the Buddhist usage in a brahmanical text, i.e. a piece of evidence of a boundary between these two different religious traditions, that has been crossed, possibly favoured by a common Indo-Aryan substrate.

4. *yogakkhema* and *nibbāna* in the Pali *Suttapiṭaka*

In the *Suttapiṭaka* of the Pali canon there are many occurrences of the term *yogakkhema*, included in set formulas,¹² which has different meanings and which has been translated in a great diversity of ways,¹³ though always as a *tatpuruṣa*. In order to compare this huge body of material with the quoted late Vedic texts and in particular with

¹¹ Furthermore, *niryogakṣema ātmavān* might even be considered as a single phrase and thus as a variatio with respect to the previous other compound beginning with the prefix *niḥ*. In this case we should assume the effect of a different *sandhi*, namely from **niryogakṣeme ātmavān* as a *vigraha*, meaning “master of himself in the [condition of] rest free from exertion”, i.e. at peace, in the security of a life free from the thought of acquisition. The whole verse could be translated as follows: “The Vedas are such that their scope is confined to three qualities; be free from those three qualities, o Arjuna, indifferent toward the pairs of opposites, permanently relying on truth, master of yourself in your freedom from exertion.”

¹² E.g.: M I 4; S IV 123–125; S V 327; S V 143–145; A II 86–87; It 9 v. 17: [...] *sekho appattamānaso anuttararam yogakkhemaṃ patthayamāno viharati*.

¹³ An example are the diverse translations of this compound in verse 23 of the well-known *Dhammapada*:

the two BhG occurrences, we will restrict our analysis to passages in which this compound denotes *nibbāna*, the *Summum Bonum*, one of the most important meanings of this term.

Indeed, many Pali scholars have interpreted *yogakkhema* as an epithet for *nibbāna*, e.g. Anālayo (Anālayo 2009: 801) and Kumoi (Kumoi 1997: 409), the latter stating: “In the early Buddhist texts the term *yogakkhema* is used to mean the attainment of perfect peace from the four attachments, which is always an epithet of *nibbāna*.”

Nevertheless, it is the case that there are many passages in which *yogakkhema* is a qualification of *nibbāna*, e.g. M I 173:

atha kho bhikkhave pañcavaggiyā bhikkhū mayā evaṃ ovadiyamānā evaṃ anusāsiyamānā attanā jātidhammā samānā jātidhamme ādīnavaṃ viditvā ajātaṃ anuttaraṃ yogakkhemaṃ nibbānaṃ pariyesamānā ajātaṃ anuttaraṃ yogakkhemaṃ nibbānaṃ ajjha-gamaṃsu

Then the *bhikkhus* of the group of five, thus taught and instructed by me, being themselves subject to birth, having understood the danger in what is subject to birth, seeking the unborn supreme security from bondage, *nibbāna*, attained the unborn supreme security from bondage, *nibbāna*. (tr. Bodhi 1995: 265)

*te jhāyino sātatikā niccaṃ dalhaparakkamā |
phusanti dhīrā nibbānaṃ yogakkhemaṃ anuttaraṃ ||*

Norman (Norman 1997: 4) translates it as “Meditating, persevering, constantly making a firm effort, those wise ones attain *nibbāna*, supreme rest from exertion”, taking *yogakkhema* as a *tatpuruṣa* and translating it as “rest from exertion”. Before him, Max Müller (Müller 1881: 9) translated it as “These wise people, meditative, steady always possessed of strong powers, attain to *Nirvāna*, the highest happiness,” taking *yogakkhema* merely as a synonym for *nibbāna*. Other scholars emphasize the connection of yoga with bond, e.g. Nārada Thera (Nārada 1972: 24): “The constantly meditative, the ever steadfastly ones realize the bond-free, supreme *Nibbāna*” (Carter and Palihawadana 1987: 16): “Those mediators, persevering, forever firm of enterprise, those steadfast ones touch *Nibbāna*, Incomparable release from bonds.”

In this case and in many others (e.g. M I 275; M I 163–7), the compound *yogakkhema* is often associated with *anuttara*, an adjective that means “second to none, incomparable”.

A further example is the formula mentioned previously: *attanā jātidhammā samānā jātidhamme ādīnavaṃ viditvā ajātaṃ anuttaraṃ yogakkhemaṃ nibbānaṃ pariyesamānā* and A III 295:

*yo papañcaṃ anuyutto papañcābhirato mago |
virādhayi so nibbānaṃ yogakkhemaṃ anuttaraṃ ||
yo ca papañcaṃ hitvāna, nippapañcapade rato |
ārādhayi so nibbānaṃ, yogakkhemaṃ anuttaraṃ ti ||*

The creature devoted to proliferation,
who is delighted with proliferation,
has failed to attain *nibbāna*,
the unsurpassed security from bondage.
But one who has abandoned proliferation,
who finds delight in non-proliferation,
has attained *nibbāna*,
the unsurpassed security from bondage. (tr. Bodhi 2012: 216)

In these stanzas, *yogakkhema* clearly qualifies *nibbāna* and from the grammatical point of view it is in apposition with it, used as if it were its synonym. Here and in other works, Bodhi (e.g. Bodhi 1995) translates *yogakkhema* as “security from bondage” and interprets it as a *tatpuruṣa*.

So, as we saw in the BhG passage 9.22 (see § 3), those who are really concentrated on the true goal, that is conventionally identified with Kṛṣṇa, receive the *yogaśema* from him. This BhG passage seems to be a later answer to the ideas expressed in the early Buddhist verses discussed here. In fact, in the Pali canon the people that are not engaged in the mental proliferation (*papañcā*) are said to have attained *nibbāna*. By contrast, the BhG prescribes constant concentration (*niṭyābhiyukta*) on Kṛṣṇa as the ideal. Therefore, the BhG promotes a theistic scope while the Pali texts use a more impersonal idea of the *Summum Bonum*, but beyond this important difference they use the same compound *yogakkhema/yogaśema* to connote the aim of their different religious paths.

There are also some linguistic similarities such as the verbal root *yuj-* (P *anu-yutto* and Skt. *abhi-yukta*), with the BhG's *abhiyukta* possibly being a reuse and reinterpretation of the Buddhist (Pali) *anuyutta*.

5. khema

Another important connection that proceeds in the same direction is seen in TU 3.10.2 already quoted, where Brahman is venerated as *yogaḥṣema*, which in this case is connected with the vital practices and in particular with *ḥṣema* 'the rest'. In Pali Buddhist texts we find that the word *khema*, which corresponds to the Sanskrit *ḥṣema*, "also occurs by itself as a synonym for *nibbāna*" (Norman 1969: 128)¹⁴. An example is:

M I 508: *ārogyaparamā lābhā, nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ |
aṭṭhaṅgiko ca maggānaṃ, khemaṃ amatagāminan ti ||*

Health is the best of gains, the eightfold [Path is the best] of paths,
nibbāna the best happiness, the security that leads to the deathless.

Thus, *nibbāna* is certainly another meaning of *yogakkhema* and in particular of *khema*. The commentary on *yogakkhema* in the previously quoted *Dhammapada* verses highlights the association with *nibbāna*, with the cycle of rebirth:

Dhp-a I 231: '*yogakkhemaṃ anuttaraṃ*' *ti ye va cattāro yogā
mahājanaṃ vaṭṭe osīdāpentī, tehi khemaṃ nibbhayaṃ sabbehi
lokiyalokuttaradhammehi seṭṭhattā anuttaran ti.*

yogakkhemaṃ anuttaraṃ [means] those four bonds¹⁵ that cause the multitude to sink down in the cycle of existence, from them [those wise ones attain] peace, the fearless [state], [which is] supreme on account of exceeding all mundane and supra-mundane *dhammas*.

¹⁴ As mentioned above (see footnote 9), the word *ḥṣema* in RV and AVŚ found by itself also conveys a positive meaning, but it is generally a feature of the secular ordinary life, excluding AVŚ 11.7.13.

¹⁵ Probably these four kinds of *yoga* are the sense-desires (*kāma*), craving for existence (*bhava*), false views (*diṭṭhi*), and ignorance (*avijjā*), e.g. A II 10:

This commentarial explanation is very interesting because it suggests that the late meaning of *yogakkhema* is the absence of suffering or the end of the cycle of life (*mahājanaṃ vaṭṭe*), which correspond to peace (*khema*) and is similar to the Vedic idea to have a period of sedentary life or a period of peace without war (see § 3). Then, this same idea of stopping an “effort cycle (*yoga*)” could become more refined and abstract and come to depict the end of the “*saṃsāra* cycle”, i.e., the interruption of the pain cycle, the attainment of the *Summum Bonum*’, in the Buddhist idea, *nibbāna*.

6. Parallels between the Pali canon and BhG 2.45

Therefore, the meaning of the quoted BhG 2.45 verse (see § 3) could be similar to the contents of other Pali canonical passages, such as the following (A II 52 = It 50 = Paṭi II 80):

te yogayuttā mārassa |
ayogakkhemino janā ||
sattā gacchanti saṃsāraṃ |
jātimaraṇagāmino ||

Such people are bound by the yoke of Māra,
 and do not reach security from bondage.
 Beings continue in *saṃsāra*,
 going to birth and death. (tr. Bodhi 2012: 438)

There is a parallel element with the BhG in the use of a negative matching expression, respectively in Sanskrit *nir-yogakkhema* and in Pali *a-yogakkhema*, to convey the same idea that *yogakkhema* has not been attained, but in the BhG verse this compound is related to something material, toward which wise men have to become indifferent, in the Pali canon it is instead a precious condition difficult to achieve.

The commentary on this verse glosses *ayogakkhema* with:

cattaro’me bhikkhave yogā. katame cattāro? kāma-yogo, bhava-yogo, dīṭṭhi-yogo, avijjā-yogo.

Mp III 91: *ayogakkhemino ti catuhi yogehi khemaṃ nibbānaṃ appattā.*

ayogakkhemin means one who has not obtained *nibbāna*, which is peace (*khema*), because of the four bonds (*yoga*).

Here *yoga* represents something negative, that is, the obstacles to the achievement of peace (*khema*), which is *nibbāna*.

Compared to the idea in the *Śaṅkarabhāṣya* that *yoga* in BhG 2.45 is the element that has not yet been acquired, in this case in this Pali passage it is the negative element (a negative bond). *Kṣema* which according to this Sanskrit commentary refers to “the action of protecting that which has been acquired”, is peace, *nibbāna* in the Pali canon.

What is similar in the BhG and in the Pali texts is the idea of *yogaḥkṣema* as the true final goal of life. The Pali canon ultimately identifies *yogakkhema* with *nibbāna*, but in order to attain this achievement, one has to go beyond the contradictions, beyond the life and death, beyond the *samsāra*, exactly as is the BhG’s vision.

7. Conclusions

In this work we attempted to trace the linguistic and cultural boundary between the compound *yogaḥkṣema* used in a stage of the brahmanical tradition and *yogakkhema* used in the Pali Canon. It appears that translators of the Vedic occurrences generally take it as a *dvandva*, while translators of the Pali passages interpret it as a *tatpuruṣa*. In view of the Pali material, we believe that at least in late Vedic texts and in the *Bhagavadgītā* *yogaḥkṣema* should be interpreted as a *tatpuruṣa*.

Moreover, as far as the meaning is concerned, we also conclude that, although this compound is often used for different purposes, its main meaning for both traditions, *mutatis mutandis*, remains that of signifying the *Summum Bonum*, envisioned as a desired peace, rest and freedom from exertion and bondages.

Of course, the current traditional interpretation of BhG 9.22, which was proposed by the traditional commentaries and which we have assumed as plausibly depending on the late kingly *Arthaśāstra* ideal, is not so bewildering. On the contrary, it seems to be especially

fit for depicting the majestic image of Lord Kṛṣṇa in an anthropomorphic manner above all in a Bhakti context, but the second less renowned occurrence in the BhG, namely 2.45, sounds a little bit too sophisticated and almost philosophically oriented to be merely explained on the basis of the notion documented by its Vedic antecedents.

As a consequence, we consider that although the *Bhagavadgīta* might have inherited the old Vedic secular meaning of this compound, it could have been influenced by early Buddhist ideas or by a broader shared changing cultural scenario of a progressive abstraction of the *yoga* and *kṣema* concepts.

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