

## **SOCIAL TRADITION AND CUSTOMS IN YAJANVALKA SMRITI**

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Social tradition and customs have great significance in the society. Generally people used to adopt their customs even in the present day. Main thrust of this paper is to throw maximum light as to present a complete picture of the tradition and customs depicted in the Yajnavalkya smriti which are followed even in present day society particularly in gangetic valley. Ancient Indian Literature provides reference to several social traditions, norm and customs which were followed in ancient society .

### **Daily Religious Rites and Rutuals:**

In their daily life the average Hindu used to perform the religious rites and rutuals . They offered their Sandhya Prayers in every morning and evening . The noon time Sandhya had began to be advocated<sup>1</sup>, Perhaps it had not yet became popular Pranayam, Suryopasana and Gayatri Japa formed the main features of Sandhya.<sup>2</sup> The morning sandhya was followed by Devapuja (worship of tutelary deities) and Pitripuja ( the oblations to manes) Smarta sacrifices like panchmahayajnas were daily performed by pious men.<sup>3</sup>

### **Customs concerning food :**

As regards food, it is to be noted that eating of meat was not considered good, but eating of meat was not considered otherwise in certain circumstances, such as when it became difficult to save life without meat or on the occasion of Sraddha etc.<sup>4</sup> Dvija were not allowed to eat all kinds of fishes.<sup>5</sup> Similarly birds of unknown species were not considered fit for food.<sup>6</sup> Stale and offal food were not considered fit to eat. What to talk of preparation food touched by women during menses priod were not considered fit to be eaten<sup>7</sup>. Thus it is clear that women during mense period were not allowed to cook food.

The twice born was not allowed to take wine. Penances are provided for Brahmana's wife, if she violated the rule,<sup>8</sup> but according to Vijnanesvara, there are not necessary if a Sudra wife drinks wine.<sup>9</sup>

Yajnavalkya also forbids the use of milk of a cow in heat, within ten days of the birth of her calf, and of one without calf as also of camel, a single hoofed animal, a woman, a

wild animal or a sheep.<sup>10</sup> He prohibits the eating of roots, onion, garlic, village pig, mushroom and those who violate this rule, should perform Chandrayana penance.<sup>11</sup> Yajnavalkya lays down that the person who compels a Sudra to partake of the prohibited food, shall be subjected to half the punishment involved in the first amercement which shall increase if the offence is committed against members of the higher varnas.<sup>12</sup> This would suggest that certain items of food were prohibited even for the Sudras but those have not been mentioned by Yajnavalkya. On the other hand the list of food items prohibited for the twice born could be taken by the Sudras. Yajnavalkya also lays down rules for the boycott of the Sudra's food, but they have very limited application. They mostly apply either to the Brahmanas or to the Snatakas who were been mainly Brahmanas. He further says that a Snataka should not take the food of a stage player, a bamboo worker, a gold smith, a weapon seller, an artisan, a tailor, a dyer and whose living is by dogs, butcher, a washerman or an oil man.<sup>13</sup>

It is also laid down that a man should eat facing east or south. He must not eat in the open nor with his wife, nor standing nor in the presence of many hungry spectators. He should leave some solid food but eat up all liquid substances, such as curds, honey, milk, butter, sweets etc. He should not drink water out of his joined hands.<sup>14</sup> It is further laid down that a person should never revile food served to him.<sup>15</sup> Generally people took two principal meals and it was considered improper to take a third meal. It is also laid down that a person should avoid the evening meal, if he had satisfied himself during the day.<sup>16</sup> Children, daughter, newly married girls, pregnant women, guests and servants were fed before the householder and his wife took their meal.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Time of various samskara :**

Sixteen Samskaras were regularly performed in all the dvija families. Sacrifice like Chaturmasyestt and Agrahayanesti were performed daily in priestly families.<sup>18</sup>

Twice born's every Samskara from conception to funeral ceremony was done with the recitation of sacred prayer.<sup>19</sup> After the birth of child, on eleventh day namakarana (name giving) ceremony was performed and on the fourth month niskarmana (first outing ceremony) was performed. In the six month of child annaprasana (first feeding) was performed. It is also laid down that in the eighth of the conception or in the eighth year of birth, the Upanayana of the Brahmanas, of the Ksatriyas in the eleventh, of the Vaisya in the twelve should be performed.<sup>20</sup> It is further laid down that one (Snataka) should not use the bed, the seat, the garden, the house, and the conveyance of other without his permission. One should neither drink water out of his joined hands nor awake a person who is sleeping nor participate in gambling.<sup>21</sup>

#### **Customs of Cessation from Vedic Study :**

As regards cessation from vedic study and holiday the following rules were laid down."

On the first, the eighth, fourteenth, the fifteenth tithis (Puranamasi and Amavasya) there was to be cessation of vedic study for the whole day.<sup>22</sup> Sometimes vedic study was suspended on account of some disturbances and such suspension of studies continued as

long as the occasion or disturbance lasted. When there was a noise created by a dog, jackal, ass, owl, singing of Sama, playing on flute and the cries of distressed in the vicinity, cries of impure things, cries on account of a corpse or a Sudra cemetery, when the place of study became impure, when there was continuous flashing of lightning, while one's hands were wet after taking one's meals, in the midst of water, at midnight, when the violent wind was blowing, when there was rainfall, at the two twilights, when there was fog when there was a fright, when one was running, when the smell of something rotten or impure spread, when a distinguished visitor came to the house, when one rode on an ass, a camel, a conveyance like a charriot, an elephant, a horse, a boat or climbed a tree or was in desert or barren place.<sup>23</sup> It is evident that these aforesaid conditions were hardly conducive to studies and, therefore, it was wiser to go on holiday than to persist with studies.

### **Marriage Customs :**

Marriage being the most important of all the samsarakas and one of the sacred institutions of the Hindu Society. A man's life was considered incomplete and unholy without a wife.<sup>24</sup> It seems that girls were married at an early age. Yajnavalkya condemns a guardian to hell if he does not marry his daughter before the time of puberty.<sup>25</sup> Thus it seems that girl had hardly any voice in the settlement of marriage. Parents used to settle her marriage.

For valid marriage, there were certain rules: that the bridegroom should not be Sapinda of the groom, should not have descended from a family having common parvar and gotra and should be fifth and seventh generation from the mother and the father, respectively. As regards the qualification of the bride it is laid down that one should marry a girl with auspicious characteristics, who is lovely, who did not belong to another man, who is younger, free from disease, who has brother who belongs to a family of srotriyas whose ten ancestors are renowned veda readers. The qualification of the bride and groom were equally important. Yajnavalkya states that the bridegroom should possess all the good qualities of a bride.<sup>26</sup> Thus there was no concession to the former.

### **Certain dates prohibited for conception :**

Only nights were prescribed for conception and day times were prohibited. Certain dates of the month were prohibited for conception. The eighth, the fourteenth, the fifteenth and the thirtieth were specially restricted.<sup>27</sup>

During the period of pregnancy, woman should get desired things to eat. Yajnavalkya<sup>28</sup> states that by not meeting the wishes of a pregnant woman, foetus becomes unhealthy. It is either deformed or falls down. Hence she should be given her desired things.

### **Women's conduct under certain circumstance :**

Conduct of women under certain circumstances deserves special attention. It is laid down that a woman, whose husband is away in foreign land, should give up play, the adornment of the body, visiting festivals, laughing and going to the houses of strangers.<sup>29</sup> It is also laid down that deprived of her husband, women should not reside apart from her father, mother, son, father-in-law and mother-in-law etc.<sup>30</sup> Yajnavalkya further lays down that the wife

should honour, obey and serve her husband. She should also pay respect to mother-in-law and father-in-law.<sup>31</sup>

### **Concerning Asauch :**

The rules to be observed during Asauch were of two kinds - negative and positive. The negative rules require the mourners to forgo many pleasures and comforts and even ordinary business of life and also exhibit feeling of grief and sorow.<sup>32</sup> They forbid certain things such as cutting of the hair, beard and study of the Vedas etc during the period of asaucha .<sup>33</sup> The positive rules were to sleep on the ground, to live on bagged or purchased food to eat only in day time etc. The period of defilement differs according to the caste and age of the deceased. On the occasions of death or birth of Sapinda the period of defilement lasts twelve days for a Ksatriya, fifteen days for a Vaisya and one month for Sudra.<sup>34</sup> But person engaged in conducting a sacrifice, one initiated in a sacrifice, those performing similar ceremonies, men performing long sacrifices became instantly purified.<sup>35</sup> It is also laid down that if a child dies, whose teeth have not come out no impurity is involved.<sup>36</sup> The death of a boy after his upanayana entails full-fledged of defilement. It is further laid down impurity caused by the death of one's mother ends with the defilement caused by the death of one's father which takes place earlier, but such is not the case when the death of the mother takes place earlier than the death of the farther, because in this case impurity begins from the latter occurrence.<sup>37</sup>

### **Miscellaneous customs :**

Yajnavalkya speks of some rules and customs of miscellaneous nature. He says that one (Snataka) should wear white or clean cloth, cut the nail of finger regularly and also shave regularly. By bath and other means he should keep himself afresh. He should not take his meal before his wife standing and wearing one cloth.<sup>38</sup> The house holder should not take up such work in which danger to life is involved. He should not be harsh in speech nor speak lie and one should not maintain one self by prohibited interest.<sup>39</sup> In the rain, one should not go anywhere without properly covering with umbrella etc. One should not sleep keeping one's head towards the west.<sup>40</sup> It is difficult to ascertain the reason for such provision of sleeping, but this practice is still maintained. One should neither leap the fire nor should warm the foot with it.<sup>41</sup> It seems that the fire was considered very pious therefore he laid down such rule. One should not separate the calf and the cow from each other while the former is sucking the breast of the latter. One should not enter the village or the temple through other than the proper way for it.<sup>42</sup> It seems that during the time of Yajnavalkya cow, Brahmana, fire and grain were considered very sacred, therefore Yajnavalkya lays down that cow, Brahmana, fire and grain should not be touched in the condition of impurity nor touch them with foot. One should not speak ill to other nor beat any body, but the son and disciple should be beaten while teaching them.<sup>43</sup>

It appears that society was sympathetic to beggars. Therefore Yajnavalkya lays down that beggars and Brahmachari should be given alms with respect. He further says that if friend, relative and bandhava come at time of meal, they should be fed.<sup>44</sup> It is laid that one should not refuse kusa (a kind of grass), vegetable, fruit, fish, incense, flower, curd, land, meat, bed, seat, fried rice and water even if they come without asking for them.<sup>45</sup>

As regards religious works it is laid down that if Savarna (of one's own caste) wife is alive, religious works should not be performed with other's wife. If there are many Savarna wives the religious work should be performed with the eldest wife.<sup>46</sup> Every year a house holder should invite Snataka, acharya, king, dear friend and son-in-law and honour them and ritvija should be worshipped at the time of each yajna.<sup>47</sup> Yajnavalkya was aware of the importance of neatness. Therefore he lays down the rule that leavings of food, urine and stool etc. should be thrown far from the home.<sup>48</sup> It seems that importance of donation was known to Yajnavalkya. Therefore he devotes nineteen verse on it. He says that according to one's capacity one should donate daily. On the occasion of eclipse of the sun or the moon one should donate in aspecial way. And on demand also one should give with respect to deserving men.<sup>49</sup> The practice of giving on the occasion of eclipse of the sun or the moon is still prevalent. It seems that giving of cow was considered very important as Yajnavalkya says that one who gives cow as gift is honoured in the heaven.<sup>50</sup>

The above study prove that some of the social customs got so firmly deep rooted in the society that they are still prevalent. Many of the custom and practices concerning food and daily life in ancient India are still prevalent in our present day society. Thus it seems that we have inherited most of the social rule and customs of ancient Indian society in our day to day life.

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