

CHAPTER THREE

CONCEPT OF FASTING IN HINDUISM

In this Chapter we have discussed mainly the concept of **fasting** in Hinduism. We will be looking at the understanding of **fasting**, various kinds of **fasting**, its directions in the Hindu Scriptures, and also the impact and importance of fasting. We are also looking at the benefits of **fasting** as practiced in Samskaras and festivals. We have also studied the use and abuse of **fasting** by the devotees in Hinduism.

THE CONCEPT OF FASTING IN HINDUISM

Introduction

Hinduism is one of the ancient religions in the world. It is a religion that evolved and developed through the centuries from the spiritual, religious and social practices of the people of the Indian Sub Continent. Although, it has sacred writings, there is no specific book (Scripture) or particular spiritual path to follow. Each person is allowed to find and choose the path, the devotions and the practices that best suit him or her, given his or her current status in life, abilities, needs and interests. A person may thus be guided by a guru, a book, a tradition of practice or personal conscience. Fasting in the context of the lives of Hindus reflects all these realities.

Non Aryans or Persians invented the word Hinduism to refer to the spiritual and social practices of the people of India. Hindus themselves use Sanatana Dharma or “the Eternal, Universal tradition of righteousness and duty” to describe their faith and practices.

Hindus consider Brahma (sometimes referred to as Isvara) as the Ultimate Reality. There are many divine manifestations of the Supreme in Hinduism. These manifestations, **Devas** and **Devis**, or gods and goddesses, personify aspects of **Brahman**. The three main gods representing the Hindu trinity, are Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the force for Preservation; and Shiva, the destructive force. All reality is an expression or manifestation of Brahma, the one that is all.

The primary Hindu sacred writings are Vedas, which is “Vid” meaning “knowledge” in Sanskrit, the ancient language of the Hindus. They are the oldest texts known, and they are understood as containing universal truth. There are four Vedic books: the Rigveda, the Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and the Atharva Veda being the most important among them. Other collections of sacred writings are the Upanishads, the Puranas, and two of the world’s famous spiritual works: the Ramayana and the Mahabharata (the Bhagvad Gita is but a part of the

latter)⁶⁴. Among the sacred Scriptures, they also have the Agamas, Smritis, Darshanas, and the Vedanta.

Fasts are performed in virtually every arena of Hindu practice. Sanyasis make public display of Fast, demonstrating their varying degrees of renunciation and ascetic powers. Fasting plays an important role for any Hindu preparing to undergo a ritual initiation and for family members of those participating in life cycle sacraments. In the practice of yoga, fasts famously serve hygienic purposes of cleansing and purifying the body. Fasting is a ritual technique and the body becomes an instrument of power and efficiency. Hindu ideals of Fasting have become increasingly traditional not occasional fasting has emerged as an important element in new Hindu circles everywhere.⁶⁵

Fasting and festivals play an important role to bring unity and integrity among the Hindus. India is the land of festivals and we celebrate some festivals in every month of the year. Because Indians are oriented with agriculture, most of the festivals are related to sowing and harvest and to store the in barns. One of the important factors for such celebration is that people as a society take this opportunity to gather and share their love and affection for one another. Along with the celebration people include several rituals and traditions as part of it. Similar to festivals, fasting also hold certain significance in the society.

Fasting purges the soul of the people and strengthens their spirituality. Fasting also results in certain scientific benefits like proper function of the digestive system of the human body and strengthens it. When proper fasting is taken, it benefits physically. However, after the fasting, unlimited food may cause harm to the body. Thus, observing fast in the proper order is essential for right benefits.

Every practice has its own rules and regulations. It may bring benefit only when it is orderly observed. Fast is a significant instrument for the benefit of human beings. According to some Hindu spiritual teachers, in order to receive blessings one must fast on certain days with some sacrifice and it is called Vrat. Even though the word Vrat and Upavasa are considered similar, Mahant Omnath Sharma differentiates both by saying that in Vrat one can eat the food where as in Upavasa food is prohibited.⁶⁶

⁶⁴Rayan Thomas, CSP, *The Sacred Art of Fasting: Preparing to Practice*. Second Printing, (Woodstock, Vermont, Skylight Paths- Publishing, 2006), p.92.

⁶⁵ Sandra Robinson, "Fasting" in *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, edited by Denise Cush and Catherine Robinson, (London: Routledge, 2008), p 241-242.

⁶⁶Mahant Omnath Sharma. *Hinduom ke Sampurna Vrat-Tyohar (Hindi) (Eng- Hindu's All Fast-Festivals (Delhi: Raja Pocket Books, 2008), p.7.*

Fasting is a popular religious term, may be described as an act of volition whereby a person refrains from nourishment to procure and enhance spiritual discernment of the transcendent. Fasting may be motivated as a means to appease or beseech the divine in times of difficulties or as an offering of the self in devotion and gratitude and penitence.⁶⁷

In Popular Hinduism women frequently fast and perform special devotional veneration (puja) for procuring boon such as child or a good husband and for the welfare of their families.⁶⁸

3.1. UNDERSTANDING OF FASTING IN HINDUISM

The Sanskrit word for Fasting is Upavasa. Upa means “near” and Vasa means “to stay”. Implicit in the word is that fasting means “to stay or sit near (the Lord)” to keep the Lord close to your heart and mind. The very word fasting thus has an inbuilt orientation to the divine.

Most devout Hindus fast regularly or on special occasions such as festivals or High days honoring particular gods and goddesses. On religious holidays, they do not eat at all, eat once or limit themselves to fruits or a special diet of simple food. In other words, the approach to fasting reflects the broad range of possibilities that characterizes Hinduism itself. The practice of Fasting ranges from complete abstinence from any food or drink to abstinence from solid food with an occasional drink of water, milk, or juice to abstinence from certain foods such as salt. Each person finds a way of working with practices of his or her choosing. There are, however, some traditional days for fasting, such as on Purnima (full moon) and Ekadasi, the eleventh day after full moon and the new moon (once a fortnight). On these special days, devotees fast and make an extra effort to render devotional service. Fasting on Ekadasi if observed strictly, involves taking no food or water from the previous day’s sunset. Forty-eight minutes after the following day’s sun rise. The earth’s rotation around the sun takes twenty four hours by the Indian Lunar Calendar, however, it takes sixty Nazhikas or units of time, according to the Hindu calendar. The forty- eight minutes is an extra Nazhikas just to make sure that the lunar rotation is complete and the new day has begun. The Ekadasi days are a time to step back from your normal routine and take stock of your spiritual life. Common practices are fasting from grains and legumes, chanting, reading, avoiding strenuous physical labor and long distance travel, as well as avoiding activities relating to the body such as laundry, shaving, food and shopping. In general, Hindu engages in fasting for

⁶⁷ Habibeh Rahim, “Fasting”, Encyclopedia of Women and World Religion. Vol. 1, edited by Young Serenity, (New York: Macmillan Reference, 1999), p. 325.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

one or more of three reasons: Physical and Mental purity as a sign of respect for a god or goddess and to do penance.⁶⁹

3.1.1. Fasting for Purity of Life

In Hindu Philosophy everything is marked by three qualities or Gunas. Sattva –white (Purity), Rajas red (Passion) and Tamas black (inertia). When something is pure and calm the Sattva Guna is dominant; when restless agitated or angry, it is the Rajas Guna that is manifesting and when sleepy, lazy or lethargic, it is the Tamas Guna that has come to the force. This also applies to types of food and their effects on us.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna declares that food is of three types:-⁷⁰

आयुः सत्त्वबलारोग्यं सुखप्रीतिर्विवर्धनः ।

रस्याः स्निग्धाः स्थिराहृद्या आहाराः सात्त्विकप्रिया (Ch. 17:8)

कट्वम्ललवणात्युष्ण तीक्ष्ण रूक्ष विदाहिनाः ।

आहाराः राजस्येष्टा दुःखशोककामप्रदाः ॥ ;Ch. 17:9)

यातयामं गतरसं पूतिं पर्युषितं च यत् ।

उच्छिष्टमपि चामेध्यं भोजनं तामसप्रियम् ॥ (Ch. 17:10)

First, Sattvic Food: Nutritious, fresh, juicy - increase purity, longevity, strength, health and happiness.

Second Rajasic Food: Hot, salty, spicy, sour or bitter – sows unhappiness, sorrow and disease.

And finally, Tamasic Food: Leftovers, food that is stored, stale, and smelly – it is hard to digest and leads to inertia.⁷¹

In other words, certain types of food contribute to our well-being, while others leave us feeling diseased. As we spend a lot of time shopping for food, preparing it, eating it, and digesting it, there may be certain days when we simply decide to save time and conserve energy by eating either simple, light food or totally abstaining from eating altogether to clear away the mental clutter and become more alert. The mind, otherwise preoccupied with food, can now “stay near the Lord”. The more we indulge the senses, the more they make clamorous demands. Exerting a certain control over the sensual appetites free the mind to pass more easily to contemplation. Fasting helps us cultivate control over the senses and

⁶⁹This passage can be found in the Mahabharata, Anusasana Parva, section CVI.

⁷⁰A.C. Bhakdivedanta Swami Prahbupada, Bhagavad Gita As It is (Mumbai: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1986), p.777.

⁷¹5 Rayan Thomas, The Sacred Art, op cit . p. 93.

keeps the mind peaceful. When the stomach is full, the digestive system draws the blood circulation towards the digestive organs decreasing blood circulation to the head and inducing sleep. Fasting keeps the stomach free and the body light and is conducive to meditation. Thus it is that those practice Yoga. For example, devotees will be careful to eat the kinds of food that will cultivate purity, clarity, balance and peace because these are the foundations for deep concentration in meditation as well as for health in general. So the practice of fasting is of many Yogic techniques for cultivating Sattva. Fasting is to understand to create attunement with the absolute by establishing a harmonious relationship between the body and the soul.

The ancient epic Mahabharata say: it was by fasts the deities have succeeded in becoming denizens of heaven. It is by fast that the Rishis have attained high success. Chyavana, Jamadagni, Vasishtha, Gautama and Brigu – all these great Rishis endowed with the virtue of forgiveness have attained to heaven through observance of fasts. In former days Angirasa declared so unto the great Rishis. The man who teaches another the merit of fasts has never to suffer any kind of misery. The one who daily reads this ordinances (about fast), or hears them read becomes freed from sins of every kind.⁷²

On a physiological level, every system needs a break, a house cleaning day, to function well. The cleansing properties of a fasting day are good for the digestive system and the entire body. In its own way, fasting contributes to physical purity through the elimination of accumulated waste in the body. The ancient Indian medical system of Ayurveda sees the basic cause of many diseases as the accumulation of toxic material in the digestive system. Regular cleansing of toxic material keeps us healthy. In moderate fasting, the organs of the body are cleansed and renewed.

We should not fast beyond our limits. Fasting is supposed to make us feel buoyant, not fatigued. We should only practice as much fasting as our capacity allows. If we cannot do service because of fasting we are better off eating.⁷³

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ The M.K.Gandhi Institute for Non-violence was founded by Gandhi's grandson, Arun Gandhi. See www.gandhiinstitute.org. all the correspondence from which the excerpts here are drawn is available at this website.

3.1.2. Fasting as a Mark of Respect to the Deities

Devout Hindus observe Fasting on special occasions as a mark of respect to their personal deities. Consistent with the meaning of fasting (Upavasa) as staying near to the Lord, individuals choose particular days to be near their favorite god or goddess. On that day, control of all the senses is exercised, not just that of taste. It is like a retreat day or a day of recollection, and devotees may withdraw from regular activities, go to the temple, or find a secluded place for their devotion. It cannot be adequately categorized simply as a “fast day” but it will generally include some form of fasting in the devotee’s observance of vows made to the designated deity. On a particular religious holiday or festival day, for example, a person may choose to generate peaceful energy by meditating or chanting Mantras. Fasting can do integral part of the devotees approach to the manner of living it.

3.1.2.1. Votive Fasting

One of the best examples of how fasting is part of a larger picture are the votive fasting rites called Vrats. They are practiced throughout India and their observance spans social classes, castes and sectarian afflictions. Once again, there is great diversity in the kind of Vrats performed as well as numerous variations in the actual practice of any particular kind of Vrat. In general they are performed by wives as a votive prayer for the benefit of their husband and children.

In Hinduism, fasting is not an isolated activity. It is usually done in the context of a vow. And people make different kinds of vows in their efforts to draw close to a particular god. The Vrats most commonly performed are on Monday to Shiva, Tuesday to Ganpati and Hanuman, Wednesday to Krishna, Thursday to Dattaguru, Friday to Lakshmi and Santosi, Saturday to Shani and on Sunday to Surya,. There are also the Sri Satya Narayan Vrat and the **Karva Chauth**. On the occasion of Karva Chauth, for example a fasting Vrat is observed. In a typical rite, a small container is filled with milk or water. Five pieces of different minerals (gold, silver, copper, brass and iron) are placed in the container and presented to Brahman, (no prayer is complete unless it is accompanied by an offering). While presenting the container, the wife prays for her husband and their marriage and family. Part of her offering that day will be her fast.

3.1.2.2. Festival Fastings

More broadly, fasting at festivals (practically all festivals in India are marked by a religious character) is common. Hindus all over India observe fasts on festivals such as Shivratri and Karva Chauth. Navaratri is a festival when people fast.⁷⁴

3.1.3. Fasting as a Penance

When the word fasting in India is put together, the first person who comes to mind is Mahatma Gandhi. Most people would likely characterize his fast, as an action of social protest. While in some instances that was true, what most people are not aware of is the penitential nature of many of Gandhi's fasts. According to the Gandhi Institute compilation and publication of correspondence and records around the Mahatma's declared fasts, fully half of them were embraced by him in a personal spirit of atonement.

Certainly, what did the Rishis (Sages) of old do? It is unthinkable that they ate anything during their penance – in some cases, gone through in caves and for hundreds of years. Parvati who did penance to win Shiva would not touch even the leaves of trees, much less fruit or food (story from Hindu mythology).

3.1.3.1. Public Fasting

Even the public fast associated with the religious movement of Satyagrah in which Gandhi sought to secure reforms or redress of grievances by self-suffering. In the modern period, people use fasting to address social issues and remedies. Many people are observing fasting as a means of inviting the notice of authorities and resolving social issues for the benefit of the society. However, it is also observed that some people misusing fasting for the sake of their personal agenda. It is worthy to note that fasting is a fair means of agitation in the society.

3.2. A LIVING VOICE FROM THE TRADITION OF HINDUISM

Swami Vasistha, a priest at the Sivananda Yoga Ashram in Woodbourne, New York, who shares his thoughts on Hindu fasting, "fasting in Hinduism is all personal. People, not all will normally fast twice in a month. In India, we follow the path of the moon in our calendar. Hindus will fast on Ekadasi days after the eleventh day of all new and full moons."⁷⁵

⁷⁴Tiwari Laxmi G. A Splendor of Worship, Women's Fasts, Rituals, Stories and Art (New Delhi :Manohar Publications Daryaganj, 1990) , p. 87.

⁷⁵Ibid. p. 98-99.

3.2.1. Fasting as a Tapas

Upanishads do not have any reference about fasting. It all came later in the era of Puranas. There fasting is mentioned as tapas or discipline- the control of all the sense organs. Generally, people observe this kind of discipline, including fasting on particular days dedicated for a special occasion for his or her god or goddess.

Fasting is not a strict discipline in Hinduism with rules that everyone must follow. As mentioned earlier it is all personal. There is nothing compulsory in this fasting. For example, in Southern India, the main ingredient of the food is rice. People eat rice generally at each meal, but on the day of Upvasa, they will not eat rice, though they might eat all other things. Other people will observe their fast by eating just one meal during the day. Still others may eat only fruits and milk. So we cannot say what fasting really means to people. In India we practice Ayurvedic medicine. When someone is ill, the appropriate food will be determined by the doctor according to the illness. The researcher has not heard of any Ayurvedic physician advising long fasts.

The main idea of fasting or Upavasa came from the Mahabhagavat Geetha Purana. There we see a reference that those who completely observed fasting on Ekadasi day we are saved by the god Mahavishnu. So the old people or very strict devotees see this incident in the Purana and try to observe fasting. It will be mainly the devotees of Vishnu who observe this Ekadasi. Again, it is a very personal practice.⁷⁶

3. 3.DETAILS OF FASTING IN HINDUISM

In the context of Hinduism and Hindu mythology, the term **Vrata** (pronunciation: vrat or brat) denotes a religious practice to carry out certain obligations with a view to achieve divine blessing for fulfillment of one or several desires. Etymologically, vrata, a Sanskrit word (and also used in several Indo- European languages), means ‘to vow or to promise.’

A *Vrata* may consist of one or more of several actions. Such actions may include complete or partial fasting on certain specific days; a pilgrimage (*thirtha*) to a particular place or places; a visit, *darshan* and *puja* at a particular temple or temples; recitation of mantras and prayers; performing *puja* and havans.⁷⁷

According to Hindu scriptures, *vrata* assists the person doing the *vrata* to achieve and fulfill his desires as performing *vratas* are supposed to bring the divine grace and blessing. Sometimes, close relatives or family *purohits* may be entrusted with the obligation of

⁷⁶Laxmi, Splendor of Worship, p.93.

⁷⁷ Sastri Natesa, Hindu Feasts, Fast & Ceremonies,(Madras: Madras Publishers, 1903), p.53.

performing the *vrata* on behalf of another person. The object of performing *vrata* is as varied as the human desire, and may include gaining back lost health and wealth, begetting offspring, divine help and assistance during difficult period in one's life. In Ancient India, *vrata* played a significant role in the life of individuals, and it continues to be practiced in modern times as well by a number of Hindus.

3.3.1. Why Fasting?

Fasting in Hinduism indicates the denial of the physical needs of the body for the sake of spiritual gains. According to the scriptures, fasting helps create an attunement with the absolute by establishing a harmonious relationship between the body and the soul. This is thought to be imperative for the well being of a human being as it nourishes both his/her physical and spiritual demands.

Vrata' denotes 'religious vow' is one of the most widely used words in the Hindu religious and ritualistic literature. Derived from the verbal root 'vrn' ('to choose'), it signifies a set of rules and discipline. Hence 'Vrata' means performance of any ritual voluntarily over a particular period of time. The purpose is to propitiate a deity and secure from it what the vrati, the performer wants. This whole process, however, should be undertaken with a sankalpa or religious resolve, on an auspicious day and time fixed as per the dictates of the Hindu religious almanacs called *panjika*.⁷⁸

3.4. FASTING (VRATAS) IN THE PURANAS

The Puranas have a lot to discuss about fasting. In the following we shall refer to some of the references of the various Puranas. The Puranas are a source of valuable information for the ancient period of Indian history.⁷⁹ There is no doubt that the Puranas embody the earliest traditional history and that much of their material is old and valuable. They give us material for critical study of such diverse subjects as religion and philosophy, folklore and ethnology, politics and sociology. Taken collectively, they may be described as a popular Encyclopedia of ancient and Medieval Hinduism, religious, philosophical, historical, personal and political matters.

The Puranas are a source of valuable information for the ancient period of Indian history. The Etymological explanation of the term Purana given by Yaska is everything is new that through which the old becomes new again. Purana is old but retains the spirit of

⁷⁸ www.wikipediaon 'Fasting'.

⁷⁹ M.N.Dutt. *The Garuda Mahapurana* (New Delhi: New Bharatiya Book Corporation, 2007), p. vi.

newness by emphasizing the essential oneness of all men irrespective of their cast and creed. The use of the term Purana in the sense of a religious book dates back to the days of Chandogya Upanisad where in Puarana as declared to be fifth Veda.⁸⁰

Definition of Fasting in Agni Mahapuram

व्रतपरिभाषा

तिथिर्वारदिवसमाससंवत्सरमाब्दार्कसत्राफमे ।

नृस्त्रीव्रतादि वक्ष्यामि वसिष्ठ शृणु तत्क्रमात् ॥ 1 ॥

शास्त्रोदितो हि नियमो व्रतं तच्च तपो मतम् ॥

नियमास्तु विशेषास्त व्रतस्यैव दमादयः ॥ 2 ॥

व्रतं हि कर्तृसंतापातप इत्यभिधीयते ।

इन्द्रियग्रामनियमान्नियमश्चाभिधीयते ॥ 3 ॥⁸¹

This section deal with the meaning of fasts, ceremonies and penances which are to be respectively observed, performed and practiced by men and women on the different days of weeks and on the passing of the sun over to new zodiacal sings of under the auspices of benignant asterisms and phases of the moon (I). Rules of self-control which are known as the Niyamas, when conformed to and carried out, in actual life, constitute what is known as the Tapas. The specific features of a Tapas (practice of austerities) are the subjugation of one's senses and such like acts. A vow, taken out of technically known as the Tapas. The Niyamas are so called from the fact of their enjoining the subjugation (Niyama) of the senses.

अनग्नयस्तु ये विप्रास्तेषां श्रेयोऽभिधीयते ।

व्रतोपवासनियमैर्नादानैस्तथा द्विजः । 4 ।

ते स्युर्देवादयः प्रीता भुक्तिमुक्तिप्रदायकः ।

उपावृत्तस्य पापेभ्यो यस्तु वासो गुणैः सह ॥ 5 ॥

उपवासः स विज्ञेयः सर्वभोगविवर्जितः ।

कांस्यं मांसं मसूरं च चणकं कोरदूषकम् ॥ 6 ॥

शाकं मधुं परान्नं च त्यजेदुपवसन्त्रायम् ।

पुष्पालंकारवस्त्राणि धूपगन्धानुलेपनम् ॥ 7 ॥

उपवासे च शस्यति दन्तधावनपञ्जनम् ।

दन्तकाष्ठं पञ्चगव्यं वृष्ट्वा प्रातर्व्रतं चरेत् ॥ 8 ॥⁸²

⁸⁰S.Jain. Garuda Purana. Vol. I (Delhi: New Bharatiya Book Corporation, 2007) P. vi.

⁸¹Joshi, K. L. Agni Mahapuram (Delhi: Parimal Publications, 2001), p. 453.

⁸²Agni Mahapurana, Chap.175, p.454.

Now, I shall describe the process, whereby the Brahmins⁸³ who are not the custodians of the consecrated fire (Agni), will attain bliss in this life. By fasts, vows and penances, such a Brahmana, will be able to propitiate the gods, who grants enjoyment in this life and salvation in the next. An Upavasa (Fasting) consists in abstaining indulgence in worldly pleasures by a man who has forsaken the company of evil or has determined to commit sin no more and not in withering one's frame simply by inanition (4-5). Bell-metal, meat, the pulse known as the Masura grain, potherbs, honey or wine, boiled rice belonging to other men and an intercourse with a women, should be forsaken, by a man while fasting. Likewise flowers, garlands, ornaments, rich clothes or those of gray colours, fumes of burning incense-sticks, use of sandal-paste, application of collyrium along the eyes, use of tooth-brushes and such like articles of luxury, should be deemed as forbidden to a man while observing a fast. Such a man should cleanse his teeth, in the morning take a dose of the composition known as the pancagavya and then attend to his daily morning prayers and rituals.

असवृफज्जलपानाच्च ताम्बूलस्य च भक्षणात् ।

उपवासः प्रदुष्येत दिवा स्वप्नाच्च मैथुनात् ॥९॥⁸⁴

A rite of fasting becomes violated by drinking water more than once, by chewing the prepared betel leaves, by sleeping in the day time and by holding sexual intercourse with a woman.

क्षमा सत्यं दया दानं शौचमिन्द्रियनिग्रहः ।

देवपूजाऽग्निहरणं सन्तोषोऽस्तेयमेव च ।

सर्वव्रतेष्वयं धर्मः सामान्यो दशधा स्मृतः ॥१०॥

पवित्राणि जपेच्चैव जुहुयाच्चैव शक्तिफतः ॥११॥⁸⁵

The fundamental virtues which should be cultivated in practicing all sorts of penances or in observing vows of all denominations and which should be deemed as running through them all, as their common features, and the ten cardinal pieties such as forbearance, truth,

⁸³ Greg Bailey defines 'Brahma' as pre-eminent in Hindu mythology as the god who created the universe out of pre-existing primal matter. His particular roles are to set the process of creation in motion and to function as the first expression of individuality. Greg Bailey, "Brahma", in Encyclopedia of Hinduism, edited by Denise Cush, (London: Rutledge, 2008), p 112. Peter M. Scharf holds that 'Brahman' is a Sanskrit neuter noun that usually denotes the one supreme, absolute being from which the entire universe develops, which pervades the entire universe and into which the universe merges when it dissolves, and which as pure consciousness is the innermost self (atman) of every being. Peter M. Scharf, "Brahman", in Encyclopedia of Hinduism, edited by Denise Cush, (London: Rutledge, 2008), p 114.

⁸⁴Garuda Mahapurana, Ch.128, p.304.

⁸⁵Ibid.

clemency, charity, purity, subjugation of the senses, worship of the gods, kindling of the consecrated fire and contentment. The Pavitra mantras should be repeated and libations of clarified butter should be cast into the consecrated fire, to the extent, as the means of the performer would admit of (10-11).

नित्यस्नायी मिताहारो गुरुदेवद्विजार्चकः ।

क्षारं क्षौद्रं च लवणं मधु मांसानि वर्जयेत् ॥12॥

तिलमुद्दते शस्यं शस्ये गोधूमकोद्रवौ ।

चीनकं देवधान्यं च शमीधान्यं तथैक्षवम् ॥13॥

शितधान्यं तथा पण्यं मूलं क्षारगणः स्मृतः ।

ब्रीहिषष्टिकमुश्च कलायाः सतिला यवाः ।

श्यामाकाश्चैव नीवारा गोधूमाद्या व्रते हिताः ॥14॥

वूफभाण्डाबुवार्ताकान्पालघञ्जी पूतिकां त्यजेत् ॥15॥

चरुभैक्ष्यं सक्तुकणाः शाकं दधिघृतं पयः ।

श्यामाकशालिनीवारा य ;याद्ध बकं मूलतण्डुलम् ।

हविष्यं व्रतनक्तादावाग्निकार्यादिके हितम् ॥16॥

मधु मांसं विहायान्यद्रते वा हितमीरितम् ॥17॥⁸⁶

The man, who bathes every day, practices moderation in all his acts and doing and worships the gods the Brahmanas and his preceptor, should abstain from taking alkaline substances, small grapes, salt, wine and meat. Grains such as wheat, Kodruva and all other grains except sesamum and Mudga, gram, Devadhanya, Sami paddy, white paddy and edible roots of the forest and Panya, constitute the group of alkaline food stuff. Seeds such as Vrihi, Yasthika, Mudga, Pulse, barely and sesamum should be used in vows and penance's, while vegetables such as kusmanda (Gourd). Alabu, egg-fruit and Palanki, Should be totally avoided, articles such as Caru (sacrificial sweet porridge), powdered barley, potherbs, Nivara seeds and barley should be taken on occasions, where a Havisya form of diet is enjoined or on the occasion of a vow or penance and also in the night, while according to others, all other articles except wine and meat, being the proper diet of a penitent on the above said occasions.

त्रयहं प्रातस्त्रयहं सायं त्रयहमद्यादयाचितम् ।

त्रयहं परं च नाश्नीयात्प्राजापत्यं चरन्दिजः ॥18॥

⁸⁶Agni Mahapurana, ch.175, p.455.

त्रएकैकं ग्रासमशनीयात्त्रयहाणि त्रीणि पूर्ववत् ।
 त्रयहं चोपवसेदन्त्यमतिवृफच्छं चरन्दिजः ।।19।।
 गोमूत्रां गोमयं क्षीरं दधि सर्पिः वुफशोदकम् ।
 एकरात्रोपवासश्च वृफच्छं सान्तपनं स्मृतम् ।।20।।
 पृथक्सांतपनं द्रव्यैः षडहः सोपवासकः ।।
 सप्ताहेन तु वृफच्छ्रोऽयं महासान्तपनोऽघहा ।।21।।
 द्वादशाहोपवासेन पराकः सर्वपापहा ।
 महापराकस्त्रिगुणस्त्वयमेव प्रकीर्तितः ।।22।।⁸⁷

A Brahmana, having undertaken a Prajapatya vrata should abstain from taking anything in the morning for the first three consecutive days, from taking anything in the evening for the second three consecutive days and should live for the next three days on food, not obtained by begging and then fast for the last three days. In the penance known as the Krcchra Santapanam, the diet of the penitent should be composed of the dung and the urine of a cow, thickened milk, curd, clarified butter and the washing of kusa⁸⁸ blade, the penance being closed by a fast for a single night. In the Sopavasaka penance, the diet should consist of the articles enjoined in the case of a Krcchra Santapanam, for a period of six days at intervals, while a Krcchra vrata, extending over a period of seven days constitutes the sin-destroying Maha Santapanam. The penance known as the Paraka vrata, consists of a fast for twelve days, while in the Maha Paraka form, the fast should be observed for thrice a day.

पौर्णमास्यां पञ्चदशग्रास्यमावास्यभोजनः ।
 एकापाये ततो वृत्तौचान्द्रायणमतोऽन्यथा ।।23।।
 कपिलागोः पलं मूत्रामर्धाघ्नैर्द्वष्टं च गोमयम् ।
 क्षीरं सप्तपलं दद्याद्घ्नश्चैव पलद्वयम् ।।24।।
 घृतमेकपलं दद्यात्पलमेकं वुफशोदकम् ।
 गायत्रयाऽगृह्य गोमूत्रां गन्धिद्वारेति गोमयम् ।।25।।
 आप्यायस्वेति च क्षीरं दधिकाम्बोति वै दधि ।
 तेजोऽसीति तथा चाऽज्यं देवस्येति कुशोदकम् ।।26।।
 ब्रह्मवृफर्चो भवत्येवमापो हि ष्टेत्यृचं जपेत् ।
 अघमर्षणसूक्तेन संयोज्य प्रणवेन वा ।।27।।
 पीत्वा सर्वाघनिर्मुक्तो विष्णुलोकी ह्युपोषितः ।

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸A grass used for sacramental rituals.

उपवासी सायम्भोजी यतिः षष्ठात्मकालवान् ।।28

मांसवर्जी चाश्वमेधी सत्यवादी दिवं व्रजेत् ।⁸⁹

In a Candrayana vrata, only fifteen morsels of food should be taken on the day of a full moon, but the penance in question? may be practiced in the following way as well. The diet of the penitent should be composed of a pala weight of the urine of a Kapila cow, a thumb full of her dung, seven pala weights of her thickened milk, tow pala weights of the curd prepared from her milk, one pala weight of the clarified butter obtained from the same source and a Pala weight of the washings of the blades of kusa grass. The urine of the cow in the present instance, should be collected by repeating the Gayatri mantra, the cow-dung by reciting the mantra running as “Gandhadvaram” etc. the thickened milk by uttering the mantra which runs as “Apyayasva,” etc., the curd by repeating the mantra which begins as “Dadhikravna,” ect., the clarified butter by repeating the mantra which runs as “Tajosi” and the washings of the kusa grass by repeating the mantra which runs as “Devasya,” etc. Thus a Candrayana vrata may be converted into one known as the Brahmakurca, by repeating the mantras of the Rk Veda, known as the “Apohistha” etc, by joining with it either the Pranava mantra of the sin-destroying psalm of Aghamarsana. By drinking the potion composed as above and in a manner as above indicated, a man is translated to the region of Visnu. An anchorite who takes his meals at the close of day and the man who practices a penance of fast, as well as persons who forego animal diet of perform the Asvamedha sacrifices, enter the region of paradise.

अग्न्यार्धेयं प्रतिष्ठां च यज्ञदानव्रतानि च ।।29 ।।

देवव्रतवृषोत्सर्गचूडाकरणमेखलाः ।

मार्घैर्ल्यमभिषेकं च मलमासे विवर्जयेत् ।।30 ।।⁹⁰

Gifts, vows and sacrifices, especially the one known as the Agnyadheyam, consecrating rites, Devavratas, Vrsotsargas the rites of Cudakaranam and Mekhala Bandhanam and the installation ceremonies should not be respectively observed, practiced of performed in a Malamasa [a month in which there are two new Moons]

दर्शाद्दर्शस्तु चान्द्रः स्यात्त्रिंशाहश्चैव सावनः ।

मासः सौरस्तु संत्राफोन्तेर्नाक्षत्रो भविर्वर्तनात् ।।31 ।।

सौरो मासो विवाहादौ यज्ञादौ सावनः स्मृतः ।

आब्दिके पितृकार्ये च चान्द्रो मासः प्रशस्यते ।।32 ।।

⁸⁹ Agni Mahapurana, p. 146.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

आषाढीमवर्धिं वृफत्वा यः स्यात्पक्षस्तु पञ्चमः ।
 वुफर्याच्छ्रास्तत्रा रविः कन्यां गच्छतु वा न वा ।।33 ।।
 मासि संवत्सरे चैव तिथिद्वैधी यदा भवेत् ।
 तत्रोत्तरोत्तमा ज्ञेया पूर्वा तु स्यान्मलिम्लुचा ।।34 ।।
 उपोषितव्यं नक्षत्रां येनास्तं याति भास्करः ।
 दिवा पुण्यास्तु तिथयो रात्रौ नक्तव्रते शुभः ।।35 ।।
 युग्माग्निवृफत्तभूतानि षण्मुन्योर्वसुरन्ध्रयोः ।
 रुद्रेण द्वादशी युक्ता चतुर्दश्याऽथ पूर्णिमा ।।36 ।।
 प्रतिपदा त्वमावास्या तिथ्योर्युग्मं महापफलम् ।
 एतद्व्यस्तं महाघोरं हन्ति पुण्यं पुरावृफत्तम् ।।37 ।।⁹¹

A lunar month should be computed from the day of one full moon to the other. A Savana month consists of thirty days. A solar month should be computed from the passing of the sun from one zodiacal sign to the next, while an astral month is closed by one full revolution of an asterism. Marriages and such like ceremonies should be celebrated in solar months. The Savana months are most auspicious for the performance of sacrifices, while the yearly sraddha ceremonies in honour of one's departed manes, should be performed in a lunar month. The sraddha ceremonies of one's deceased ancestors, should be performed within the five fortnights computed from the day of the full moon in the month of Asadha, no matter whether the sun would be in the sign of Virgo or not by that time. In the case of discrepancy between a monthly and an annual Tithi, the latter should be followed, while in matter of asterisms, preference should be given to the former. A man should observe a fast (in Nocturnal vows), till the asterism in which the sun sets on that particular day, does not go down the horizon. The Tithis or the phases of the moon should be deemed auspicious in the day time only, regarding the observance of vows (vratas) which should be kept in the day, the country being the rule in respect of the nocturnal ones. Of the twin or the blended Tithis, the falling off of an Amavasya (new moon) and a Pratipada (the first phase of the moon) on the same day, should be deemed as the most auspicious; and the blending of Tithis should be deemed as dreadful, not only destroying the merit of any pious acts done under their auspices, but as positively detracting from one's past pieties.

नरेन्द्रमन्त्राव्रतिनां विवाहोपद्रवादिषु ।
 सद्यः शौचं समाख्यातं कान्तारापादि संसदि ।।38 ।।

⁹¹Agni Puarana, p.147.

आरब्धदीर्घतपसां न राजा व्रतहा स्त्रियाः ।
 गर्भिणी सूतिका नक्तं वुफमारी च रजस्वला ।
 यदाऽशुद्धा तदाऽन्येन करयेत त्रिफयाः सदा ॥३९॥
 त्राफोर्धात्प्रमादाल्लोभाद्वा व्रतभर्घौ भवेद्यदि ॥४०॥
 दिनत्रायं न भुञ्जीत मुण्डनं शिरसोऽथवा ।
 असामर्थ्ये व्रतवृफतौ पत्नीं वा करायेत्सुतम् ॥४१॥
 सूतके मृतके कार्यं प्रारब्धं पूजनोज्झितम् ।
 व्रतस्थं मूर्च्छितं दुग्धपानाद्यैरुरेदुरुः ॥४२॥
 अष्टौ तान्यव्रतघ्नानि आपो मूलं पफलं पयः ।
 हविर्ब्राह्मणकाम्या च गुरोर्वचनमौषधम् ॥४३॥⁹²

In a ruinous peril, in a wilderness and on the occasion of the celebration of a marriage ceremony or on civic disturbances, the state of impurity should be observed for a single day only, as done by a king, a minister of the crown and a man who has taken a vow. The incapacity of a king, a woman a virgin and a woman, in her menses of a mother who has just been delivered of a child, to perform, at a proper time, a penance reaching its goal through a very long term, on account of his or her state of impurity, does not constitute what is technically known as a Vratabhanga (Breaking of a vow). On the other hand, such a person is allowed to perform the penance by his or her proxy, the merit being the same as it he or she had personally performed it. In the case of the breaking of a vow, either through anger, inadvertence or greed, the penitent should shave his or her head and observe a fast for three days consecutively. A disabled husband may authorize his wife or son to practice a penance or to observe a vow on his behalf. By living on a milk diet pure and simple, the spiritual preceptor of a person shall atone for the sin, incidental to an abandoning of a previously undertaken worship or a vow before its completion, on account of a death or a childbirth in his family. Water edible roots, fruits, milk, clarified butter, the fervent prayer of a Brahmana and the ambrosial words of one's spiritual guide, are the eight things which can never vitiate a vow and make it whole as a medicine, even in the event of its accidental and un-wished-for break.

कीर्तिसन्ततिविद्यादिसौभाग्यारोग्यवृ ये ।
 नैर्मल्यभुक्तिमुक्त्यर्थं वुफर्वे व्रतपते व्रतम् ॥४४॥

⁹² Agni Mahapurana, ch.175, p.455.

इदं व्रतं मया श्रेष्ठं गृहीतं पुरतस्तव ।
 निर्विघ्नां सिंभियातु त्वप्रसादाज्जगत्पते ॥45॥
 गृहीतेऽस्मिन्न्रतवरे यद्यपूर्णं त्रिये ह्यहम् ।
 तत्सर्वं पूर्णमेवास्तु प्रसन्ने त्वयि सत्पतौ ॥46॥
 व्रतमूर्तिं जगद्भूतिं मण्डले सर्वसि ये ।
 आवाहये नमस्तुभ्यं सान्निधौ भव केशवः ॥47॥
 मनसा कल्पितैर्भक्त्या पचगव्यजलैः शुभैः ।
 पञ्चामृतैः स्नापयामि त्वमेव भव पापहाः ॥48॥
 गन्धिपुष्पोदकैर्युक्तमर्घ्यमर्घ्यपते शुभम् ।
 गृहाण पाद्यमाचाम अर्घ्याहं वुफरु मां सदा ॥49॥
 वस्त्रां वस्त्रापते पुण्यं गृहाण वुफरु मां सदा ।
 भूषणाद्यैः सुवस्त्राद्यैश्छादितं व्रतसत्पतेः ॥50॥
 सुगन्धिगन्धिं विमलं गन्धमूर्ते गृहाण वै ।
 पापगन्धविहीनं मां वुफरु त्वं हि सुगन्धिकम् ॥51॥
 पुष्पं गृहाणां पुष्पादिपूर्णं मां वुफरु सर्वदा ।
 पुष्पगन्धिं सुविमलमायुरारोग्यवृये ॥52॥
 दशार्घ्यं गुग्गुलुघृतयुक्तं धूपं गृहाण वै ।
 सत्रसुद्धं धूपधूपितं मां त्वं वुफरु धूपित सत्पते ॥53॥⁹³

“I have taken this vow, Oh you lord of vows, with a view to acquire fame, glory, knowledge, offspring’s wealth, purity and enjoyment in this world and salvation in the next. Oh you lord of the universe, may this penance, which I have undertaken to practice before you, safely come to a successful termination by your gracious pleasure. Oh you lord of the good or the abiding principle in the universe, make whole and complete what would be wanting in my performance of this holy Vrata, in the event of my dying before its completion. I make obeisance to you, Oh Kesava and invoke you, your presence in this mystic diagram. Come, Come, Oh lord, manifest as the embodied image of this vow, yea, stay and assume the shape of the embodied vrta which fill the universe, with bliss and prosperity. With a mind full of humble love and deep devotion I bathe you, oh Kesava, with the washings of the blessed Pancagavya and the five ambrosial substances named as the

⁹³Ibid.

Pancamrta may all my sins be destroyed. I offer this blissful arghya offering composed of flowers, sweet scents and perfumed water, make me the receiver of many such in life, respected by the community I belong to. Accept this water, Oh lord, offered by me, for washing your feet and rinsing your mouth. Kindly accept these clothes. Oh lord, offered at your feet and make me in turn clad in rich clothes and bedecked with ornaments, Oh you the presiding deity of all vows and good clothes. Accept these perfumes offered at your feet, Oh you who are the abode of the proper sensible of smell and make me free even of the smell of sin and let the perfume of chaste conduct break through my corporeal frame. I offer you, Oh lord. These beautiful flowers and may I have many such in return, through you gracious pleasure May flowers bloom in abundance in my gardens flowers which exhilarate the life and bring good health with their presence. Kindly accept these incense-sticks, Oh you the master of the only abiding principle in the universality, sticks which are composed of the ten sweet scented ingredients, may the world burn incense before me in devotion and humility.

दीपमूर्ध्वशिखं दीप्तं गृहाणाखिलभासकम् ।

दीपमूर्ते प्रकाशाढ्यं सर्वदोर्ध्वगतिं वुफरु ॥54 ॥

अन्नादिकं च नैवेद्यं गृहाणान्नादिसत्पते ।

अन्नादिपूर्णं वुफरु मामन्नदं सर्वदायकम् ॥55 ॥

मन्त्राहीनं त्रिफयाहीनं भक्तिहीनं मया प्रभो ।

यत्पूजितं व्रतपते परिपूर्णं तदस्तु मे ॥56 ॥

धर्मं देहि धनं देहि सौभाग्यं गुणसन्ततिम् ।

कीर्तिं विद्यां देहि चाऽयुः स्वर्गं मोक्षं च देहि मे ॥57 ॥

इमां पूजां व्रतपते गृहीत्वा ब्रज साम्प्रतम् ।

पुनरागमनायैव वरदानाय वै प्रभो ॥58 ॥⁹⁴

Accept these lamps, Oh you the original light, accept these lamps with flames tapering towards heaven; and may I ascend the ethereal spheres by the merit of such an offering. Accept these boiled rice and these articles of food, Oh you Supreme God and always keep me well supplied with such comforts and commodities. Make whole and complete, Oh lord, whatever has been omitted or made defective by me, who am void of devotion and ignorant of the mantras and the process of worship. Give me wealth and success, Oh lord and make me the happy possessor of fundamental virtues. Increase my knowledge, piety and faith in your divine self. Bless me with a long and healthful life, lift me up from this miserable earth to the region where pain can never enter and make me free from

⁹⁴Ibid.

the cycles of necessary rebirths. Accept this worship and this my fulfillment of the vow, Oh you who did preside over the observance of all vows and depart in pleasure from this place at present, to return to grant me boon on another occasion.

The following Sutra Agnimahapuram the devotees is advised regarding Fasting:-

स्नात्वा व्रतवता सर्वव्रतेषु व्रतमूर्त्यः ।
पूज्याः सुवर्णजास्ता वै शक्त वै भूमिशायिना ॥59 ॥
जपो होमश्च सामान्यव्रतान्ते दानमेव ।
चतुर्विंशद्वा द्वादश वा पञ्च वा त्रय एककः ॥60 ॥
विप्राः प्रपूज्या गुरवो भोज्याः शक्त्या तु दक्षिणा ।
देया गावः सुवर्णाद्याः पादुकोपानहौ पृथक् ॥61 ॥
जलपात्रां चान्नपात्रामृत्तिकाछात्रामासनम् ।
शय्यावस्त्रायुगं बुफम्भाः परिभाषेयमीरिता ॥62 ॥⁹⁵

In all vratas, the person performing it, should sleep on the bare floor and worship a golden image of its presiding deity, if his circumstances would admit of such a one. Japas (repetition of a mantra) should be made, a homa ceremony should be performed and gifts should be made at the close of all vratas. Twenty-four, twelve, five or a single Brahmana in the alternative, should be feasted in such a connection. The perceptor should be worshipped and remuneration should be given to the Brahmans according to the means of the performer. Cows, gold, shoes, sandals, water-pots, bowls, proprietary rights in land, umbrellas beds, clothes in pairs and pitchers should be separately gifted away on the occasion of the completion of such a vrata.

Definition of the Fasting according to Garuda Mahapuram

व्रतानि व्यास वक्ष्यामि यैस्तुष्टः सर्वदो हरिः ॥
शास्त्रोदितो हि नियमो व्रतं तच्च तपो मतम् ॥1 ॥

Brahma said:- O Vyasa, hear me discourse on the mode of performing a variety of Vratas, which can win the good graces of the God Hari, who blesses the performer with all his cherished boons in return.

नियमास्तु विशेषाः स्युः व्रत स्वास्य दमादयः ॥
नित्यं त्रिषवणं स्नायादधःशायी जितेन्द्रियः ॥2 ॥
स्त्रीशूद्रपतितानां तु वर्जयेदभिभाषणम् ॥
पवित्राणि च पन्थैव जुहुयाच्चैव शक्तिः ॥3 ॥⁹⁶

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶ Garuda Mahapurana, Ch.128, p.304.

A Vratam signifies an act of living in conformity with the rules of conduct and control, as laid down in the Sastras. The Vratam is but another name for penance (Tapasya). A Vrati (performer of a Vratam) is under the obligation of observing specific rule of conduct and self-control. He should bathe, thrice every day, during the entire term of the Vratam, and sleep on the bare ground, contented, and controlled in his mind and senses, and renouncing all talk with women, Sudras, and degraded persons.

दन्तकाष्ठं पंचगव्यं कृत्वा प्रातर्व्रतं चरेत् ॥

असकृज्जलपानाच्च ताम्बूलस्य च भक्षणात् ॥१७॥

उपवासः प्रदूष्येत् दिवास्वप्ना क्षमैथुनात् ॥

A Vrati should wash his mouth with the Pancagavyam in the morning before breaking his fast. The merit of a fast is destroyed by gambling, by indulging in day-sleep or in sexual intercourse, and by constantly drinking water on the day of the breaking.

क्षमा सत्यं दया दानं शौचमिन्द्रियनिग्रहः ॥१८॥

देवपूजाग्निहवने सन्तोषास्तेयमेव च ॥

सर्वव्रतेष्वयं धर्मः सामान्यो दशधा स्मृतः ॥१९॥⁹⁷

Forbearance, truthfulness, clemency, charity, cleanliness of body and mind, and subjugation of the senses, divine worship and Home celebration are the ten cardinal virtues, which should be practised in connection with the performance of every Vratam.

3.4.1. Various Types of Fasting (vratas) in the Puranas

- ‘Kayika-vrata’. It is a vrata pertaining to the body. The stress is on physical austerity like fasting, remaining sleepless, taking baths and such other restraining activity in connection with one’s body.
- ‘Vachika-vrata’ or vrata pertaining to speech. Here much importance is given to speaking the truth and reciting the scriptures, both being a function of the organ of speech.
- ‘Manasa-vrata’ or vrata pertaining to the mind. The emphasis here is on controlling the mind, by controlling the passions and prejudices that arise in it.
- Payovrata - is the vrata or penance observed by Goddess Aditi to propitiate Lord Vishnu. This vrata is discussed in detail in the Bhagavata Purana.⁹⁸

None of these disciplines are exclusive; they may be present in every vrata, in any combination. The difference between Vrata and fasting is: food is eaten in Vrata where as in fasting food is not permitted to eat.⁹⁹

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid.

According to Garuda Purana the one who is observing fasting should follow certain important things such as he must not harbor any anger, temptation, and laziness in his heart, or breaking fasting in between, then should not eat three days food and begin the fast.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, this Purana suggests that during the Sravana shukla Panchami people should offer puja and milk to the king of snakes and make the idol of the snakes and worship it. During the time of Vrat, people must be abstained from chewing tobacco, sleeping in the day time as well as sexual relationship may disturb the devotion, according to Vishnu Purana.¹⁰¹

Moreover, Bhavishya Purana instructs that during the Vrat time, should not steal but with penitence do merciful deeds, gifts and maintain holiness and temperament and devote time to worship god with satisfactory works. Besides, it is the best time to do welfare work to others in the society.¹⁰² It is essential to keep absolute cleanliness during fasting.

According to Bhrama Purana , jesta Shukla dashami (the tenth day of the moon in the month of May or June) the Ganga was emanated from heaven and that day taking bath in river Ganga and fasting is more blessing to body, spirit and mind. According to Skanda Purana the above mentioned day offering puja and observing fasting, sharing gifts and service to others is very much blessed and worthy.¹⁰³

It is mentioned in Vishnu Dharmortter Purana regarding male child birth in relation to fasting. When an aspirer observes fasting at the beginning of the Vaisakh shukla paksha (early part month of June) till the end of the year, he will be blessed with a male child, wealth as well as heaven.¹⁰⁴

According to Varah Purana askand vrat should be observed in the Ashad month in Shukla Panchami and prayers and pujas should offer to gods.¹⁰⁵

3.4.1.1. Fasting: Time Based Vrata

There are vratas again based on time. A vrata to be performed just for a dina or day is a 'dina-vrata'. One lasting for a vaara or a paksha (week or fortnight) is a 'vaara-vrata' or a 'paksha-vrata' as the case may be. One to be undertaken on a particular tithi (a day according to the lunar calendar) or when a particular nakshatra (asterism) is on the ascendant is respectively called a 'tithi-vrata' or 'nakshatra-vrata'. Most of the vratas now in vogue are

⁹⁹Vivek Mohan. Hinduom ke Sampurna Vrat-tyohar (Hindi) (Eng- Complete Vrata and Festivals (Delhi: Raja Pocket Books, 2008), p.7.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p.10.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid. p.11.

¹⁰³ Mohan, Hinduom ke Sampurna. p.64.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p.55.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.p.73.

based on the tithis of the lunar calendar. However, the Hindus are strictly following the demands of vrata and fasting.

3.4.1.2. Fasting: Based on Deity

Another classification is according to the deity (an aspect of God) worshipped; for instance, Swarna-gauri-vrata is dedicated to Gauri, another name of Parvati Devi. Likewise Vara-siddhi-vinayaka-vrata is for propitiation of Lord Ganesha or Satya-narayana-vrata to Vishnu known as Satyanarayana.

The 10th Canto (Mantra), 22nd Chapter of Bhagavata Purana, mentions young marriageable daughters (gopis) of the cowherd men of Gokula, worshiping Goddess Katyayani and taking a vrata or vow, during the entire month of Margashirsha, the first month of the winter season, to get Lord Krishna as their husband.

3.5. IMPACT OF FASTING ON SOCIETY

Who are the persons eligible to perform a vrata? Anyone who has faith in it and wishes to perform it as per the rules, even if the person be a mleccha (alien)! During the Vedic period sacrifices were strictly restricted to the men of the three upper castes called dvijas, meaning twice-born. The doors of the vratas were thrown open to one and all during bhakti movement, thus bringing ritualistic Hinduism to especially the lower castes and women. They had been denied that privilege for centuries. Historically speaking, this might have been a master-stroke devised by the liberal-minded religious leaders of the Hindu society to prevent the exodus of their flock to the Jaina and Buddhist folds, which were singularly free from the labyrinth of rituals and offered a simple religion of ethical conduct for the common public.¹⁰⁶

3.6. RULES OF FASTING (VRATAS)

Though the rules concerning the Vratas had been very much liberalized to embrace as large a segment of the society as possible, there had to be some rules guiding the whole process in order to protect and preserve the sanctity of the ritual system itself. These may be summarized as follows:

- During the period of the observance of a vrata, one should keep oneself clean and pure, observe celibacy, speak the truth, practice forbearance, avoid non-vegetarian foods and scrupulously perform all the rituals connected with it.

¹⁰⁶Shandilya Rajeshwari. Bhartiya Vrat aur Tyohar, [Indian Fast and Festival] 1st Edition. (New Delhi: Sarda Prakashan, 2008), p.5.

- Once a vrata is undertaken, it should never be left unfinished nor a new one started before completing it. But, one should never start the observance while in ashauca ceremonial impurity brought about by birth or death in one's family.
- Persons too old or too sick can get the vrata performed for them by the close relatives if they are willing.
- Once the decision is taken to perform a vrata, the actual commencement should be made only as per the auspicious time, place and mode laid down by the books.¹⁰⁷

Ramanuja, the greatest bhakti theologian says six points of view of devotion for a Hindu.

- a. A Hindu Devotee (Bhakta) has to observe certain dietary rules.
 - b. Bhakta has to show complete disregard for worldly object.
 - c. Bhakta has to continue faithfully all religious activities.
 - d. Bhakta must perform Puja (veneration)
 - e. Bhakta has to behave virtuously
 - f. Bhakta has to be free from Depression.
1. The Central act of bhakti is prapatti, (self – surrender) which consists of five individual components:
 - a. The intention of submitting to the lord.
 - b. The giving up of resistance to the lord.
 - c. The belief in the protection of the lord.
 - d. The prayer and vrata that the lord may save his devotee.
 - e. The consciousness of utter helplessness.¹⁰⁸

3.7. IMPORTANCE OF FASTING

Fasting known as Vrat or tratam, is an integral part of Hindu religion. Each day of a week is dedicated to a particular deity in the Hindu pantheon and depending on personal choice a devotee can fast on any day. Apart from this, there are Ekadasi and Shasti in a month, which are fasting days. Fasting is also associated with important festivals like navratri (for the welfare of the family and prosperity), teej, shivratri, karvachauth (especially women worship for their husband long life), etc. The main aim of all fasting days associated with Hinduism is to rise the mundane materialistic nature and understand the all encompassing and blissful nature of Brahman.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷Klaus K. Klostermier, A Survey of Hinduism. 2nd ed. (New York: State University of New York, 1994), p. 229.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ www.wikipediaon 'Fasting'.

3.7.1. Benefits of Fasting on Spiritual Level

Fasting purifies the mind. It controls passion. Checks emotions. Controls the sense. For many, it is also a sort of penance as it provides a window to escape from sins. Fasting controls the tongue, which when let loose is the greatest enemy of man. Fasting helps in psychological and social aspect.

3.7.2. Benefits of Fasting to the Physical Level

Fasting overhauls the respiratory, circulatory, digestive and urinary system. Impurities and poisons from the body are removed as a fast performs the much needed cleansing. Adequate rest to internal organs and time for cleansing.

Fasting is a simple remedy for various diseases, does not require any resources, it is totally free of cost and can be practiced by any one (rich or poor, older or young) to enjoy better health.

Fasting utilizes the time for contemplation and reading Scripture and lead a life of solitude. When breaking a fast, never opt for a heavy food. It is ideal to start with fruits and milk.¹¹⁰ Due to the hunger some people try to eat full to satisfy the hunger but it is not advisable medically also. Therefore, it is good and safe to refrain from heavy meal.

Lord Krishna says in the Bhagvat Gita, yoga of meditation is not possible, O Arjuna, for one who eats too much, or who does not eat at all; who sleeps too much, or who keeps awake. It means that in the name of Vrata or Fasting, one should not torture the body. Don't ever think that by starving, god will be pleased and shower wealth and happiness. Fasting is purely meant to make a person mentally and spiritually strong. In Bhagvat Gita chapter 9:29 says, "I envy no one, nor am I partial to anyone. I am equal to all but whoever renders services unto me in devotion is a friend, is in me, and I am also a friend to him."¹¹¹

Fasting makes us ascend to a higher level of being as more primitive. To satisfy that hunger is to allow ourselves to be pulled down to earthly or materialistic desires. Hinduism is also a faith of contemplation and thinking. When we are hungry, our first instinct is to get something to eat. When we are thirsty, first instinct is to get something to drink, we don't stop and think about why we need to eat and drink, Fasting causes us to think about what we are doing.¹¹²

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹ Swami Prabhupad, Bhagawad-Gita, p. 863.

¹¹² John Renard, Response to 101 Questions on Hinduism (New York: Paul's Press, 1999), p. 14.

3.8. HINDU CALENDER AND FESTIVALS

3.8.1. Hindu Calendar

Actually these speculations on world ages have no influence on the computation of the Hindu calendar. In India the year 1968 corresponds either to year 2024-5 of the Vikrama Era (starting in 57 B.C.) or 1889-90 of the Saka Era (starting in 78 AD) or `374-75 of the Bengali Era.¹¹³

The reckoning of the days and months and year is either solar or lunar. The Solar months; are defined by the progression of the sun through the twelve solar mansions (Rasi), corresponding to the signs of the Zodiac. One month runs from the moment the sun enters one mansion (samkranti) to the next Samkranti.

The lunar reckoning is sometimes called “luni-solar”. A purely lunar year would run its course independently of the seasons. For this reason the Hindus have fitted the lunar year into the solar scheme. In order to make up for the shorter lunar year, they add an intercalary lunar months (adhika) every third year or so. Thus the shifting the feast and fasting regulated by the lunar calendar is kept within bounds.¹¹⁴

The months are: Caitra (March-April) Vaisakha (April-May) Jyestha (May-June) Asadha (June-July) Sravana (July-August) Bhadrapada (August-September) Asvina (September-October) Kartika (October-November) Margasirsa (November-December) Pausa (December-January) Magha (January-February) Palguna (February-March). Though these are properly speaking the names of lunar months, in many parts of India they are more commonly used for the solar months.

A lunar month is divided into two halves: The bright half (Sukla Paksa) when the moon waxes, and the dark half (Krsna paksa) when the moon wanes. Generally it is the new moon (amavasya) which marks the end of lunar month. Each half of month is divided in to 15 tithis, or lunar days (slightly shorter than 24 hours) these tithis are numbered, e.g., Magha 1stSukla paksa 15thSukla (full moon), 1stkrisna – 15 Krisna (new moon). The lunar reckoning is important for our purpose as most of the feasts and fasts are determined by it. Thus holi

¹¹³R.De Smet and J. Neuner, Religious Hinduism (Mumbai: St. Paul's Publication, 1996), p.183.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

festival will always takes place on the full moon of the month of Phalguna, or Phalguna 15th Sukla paksa.¹¹⁵

3.8.2. Fast, Feast and Auspicious Days

No fixed day of the week is set apart for rest and religious duties, but the whole year is, for the orthodox Hindu, a vast round of fasts, vigils, sacred days and festivals. In a sense each day of the week is a holy day, since it is under the influence of deities. The sun, the moon, the stars and planets are divine beings that must be propitiated. Their malignant or benevolent power is often regarded as determinant. Before a Hindu settles on a course of action, he must make sure that the time is favourable.

3.8.3. Main Festivals and Fast

Hindus in general have their new year's day on the first of the month of Caitra (in April). Rakhi – Bandhana (Tying on lucky threads), called in Tamil Nadu Avani Avittam, is held on the full moon day of the month of Sravana (July-August). It commemorates the occasion when Indra's wife saved her husband from the onslaught of the demon Bali by tying a magic string around his wrist. Accordingly, in each family sister's bind brightly coloured strings on their brothers' wrists. Members of high castes renew their sacred cord. At noon the Brahmins assemble and go in a group to a river or a tank where they bathe; a sacrificial lamp is lighted in to which the old cord is thrown before the new one is put on.

3.8.3.1. Krishna-Jayanti

कृष्णाष्टमीव्रतनिरूपणं

वक्ष्ये व्रतानि चाष्टम्यां रोहिण्यां प्रथमं व्रतम् ।

मासि भाद्रपदेऽष्टम्यां रोहिण्यामर्धरात्राके ॥ 1 ॥

वृषणो जातो यतस्तस्यां जयन्ती स्यात्ततोऽष्टमी ।

सप्तजन्मवृषतात्पापान्मुच्यते चोपवासतः ॥ 2 ॥

वृषणपक्षे भाद्रपदे अष्टम्यां रोहिणीयुते ।

उपोषितोऽर्चयेत्त्वृषणं भुक्तिमुक्तिप्रदायकम् ॥ 3 ॥¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p. 32

¹¹⁶ Agni Purana, Ch.183, p. 466. Sri Vedavyasa, Agni Mahapurana , English Translation according to M.N. Dutt, Edited and Revised by Joshi K.L. Shastri. Forst Edition 2007, Page No. 466

Now I shall discourse on the process of performing the Astami vratas (vows practiced on the day of the eighth phase of the moon's wane or increase), of which the one usually performed on such a Tithi as the above, marked by the asterism Rohini, heads the list in respect of merit. Since, in the month of Bhadra, Krsna was born on the midnight of such a Tithi, marked by the asterism Rohini, the Tithi is known as the Jayanti (victorious) Astami. By observing a fast on such a Tithi in the month of Bhadra, a man becomes absolved of all impieties, accumulated in the course of his seven successive rebirths. The man, who fasts and worships the god Krsna, on such a Tithi. In the month of Bhadra, marked by the asterism Rohini, attains salvation at the close of a happy and prosperous career on earth. The worship should be conducted by addressing Krsna and his relations as follows :

आवाहयाम्यहं वृफष्णं बलभद्रं च देवकीम्।
वसुदेवं यशोदां गाः पूजयामि नमोऽस्तु ते।।4।।
योगाय योगपतये योगेशाय नमो नमः।
योगादिसम्भवायैव गोविन्दाय नमो नमः।।5।।
त्रस्नानं वृफष्णाय दद्यात्तु अर्घ्यं चानेन दापयेत्।
यज्ञाय यज्ञेश्वराय यज्ञानां पतये नमः।।6।।
यज्ञादिसम्भवायैव गोविन्दाय नमो नमः॥¹¹⁷

“I invoke the presence of Krsna as well as that of Balabhadra, Devaki, Vasudeva, Yasoda and of the cows he used to take to the pasturage. I worship them all and make them obeisance. Obeisance to Krsna the communion of the human soul with the eternal spirit, to Krsna the life and soul of such a communion and to Krsna who is the infinite Real, merged in by by should in the above said act. I make obeisance and obeisance to Govinda the protector or the all-pervading spirit of the universe, who has originally come into being, through an act of such blending of the finite and the infinite soul (Yogadisambhava).

गृहाण देव पुष्पाणि सुगन्धीनि प्रियाणि ते।।7।।
सर्वकामप्रदो देव भव मे देववन्दित।
धूपधूपित धूपत्वं धूपितैस्त्वं गृहाण मे।।8।।
सुगन्धं ऽन्धिद्ध धूपगन्धाढङ्ग वुफरु मां सर्वदा हरे।
दीपदीप्तम महादीपं दीपदीप्तिद सर्वदा।
मया दत्तं गृहाण त्वं वुफरु चोर्ध्वगतिं च माम्।।9।।
विश्वाय विश्वपतये विश्वेशाय नमो नमः।।10।।

¹¹⁷ Agnipurana, ch.183, p. 466.

विश्वादिसम्भवायैव गोविन्दाय निवेदितम् ।

धर्माय धर्मपतये धर्मेशाय नमो नमः ॥11॥

धर्मादिसम्भवायैव गोविन्द शयनं वुफरु ।

सर्वाय सर्वपतये सर्वेशाय नमो नमः ॥12॥

सर्वादिसम्भवायैव गोविन्दाय च पावनम् ।

क्षीरोदारणवसम्भूत अग्निनेत्रासमुद्भव ॥13॥

गृहाणार्घ्यं शशाघञ्जुदं रोहिण्या सहितो मम ।

स्थण्डिले स्थापयेद्वे सचन्द्रां रोहिणीं यजेत् ॥14॥¹¹⁸

Accept these flowers and these perfumes you relish and are fond of and grant me all boons, Oh you who are worshipped by the gods. I fumigate you with the fumes of these burning incense-sticks, accept them, Oh Hari and so ordain that people may burn incense before me, in awe and humility some editions read” so ordain, Oh Hari, that people may stew flowers in my path” (Pusadhyam). Accept these flames of lighted lamps, waived before you by my humble self and lift me up towards fuller light and higher self, Oh you light of light, Oh you who shine through all flames and flashes. Obeisance to the lord whose embodiment is the universe. I am a suppliant at the feet of the God, who evolves himself out through the successive evolutions of the universe. I make obeisance to Govinda (the protector of the universe) and to the god manifest as absolute piety. Obeisance to the lord of virtues and to the god who presides over all virtues. Lie down (in this bed) who you Govinda, who make yourself manifest through all virtues. I make obeisance to the all, the all-pervading and the all-controlling deity. I offer this holy thread to the god Govinda. Accept this arghya offering, Oh you manifest as the moon god and are accompanied by thy queen Rohini. Accept these arghya offerings, Oh Moon, who has come into being through the churning of the ocean and has sprung from the eyes of the holy sage Atri”.

देवकीं वसुदेवं च यशोदां नन्दकं बलम् ।

अर्धरात्रो पयोर्धराः पातयेदुडसर्पिषा ॥15॥

वस्त्राहेमादिकं दद्याद्ब्राह्मणान्भोजयेद्ब्रती ।

जन्माष्टमीव्रतकरः पुत्रवान्विष्णुलोकभाव्फ ॥16॥

वर्षे वर्षे तु यः वुफर्यात्पुत्रार्थी वेत्ति नो भयम् ।

¹¹⁸Ibid. ch.183, p.465.

पुत्रान्देहि धनं देहि आयुरारोग्यसंततिम् ॥17॥

धर्मं कामं च सौभाग्यं स्वर्गं मोक्षं च देहि मे ॥18॥¹¹⁹

The moon-god, together with his wife Rohini, should be worshipped on the sacrificial sandcushion. Similarly Devaki, Vasudeva, Yasoda, Nanda and Balabhadra, should be worshipped thereon: and Balabhadra, should be worshipped thereon: and jets of clarified butter and molasses should be let flow on the ground in the mind-night. Clothes, gold, etc., should be given to the Brahmanas who should be sumptuously feasted. The man, who performs this Janmastami vrata (the celebration of the birth day of Krsna), becomes the father of many a good sons and goes to the region of Visnu. Each year, the vrata should be repeated with a view to beget children or to get rid of all dangers by praying as follows.” Bless me with offspring’s wealth, longevity and health, O lord and my piety, possession and fortune augment and increase. May I ascend heaven and attain salvation after death”.

ब्रह्मन् भाद्रपदे मासि शुक्लाष्टम्यामुपोषितः ॥

दूर्वा गौरीं गणेशं च पफलपुष्पैः शिवं यजेत् ॥1॥¹²⁰

Brahma said:- O Brahmana, the deities Siva, Gauri, Ganesa, and Durva should be worshipped with offerings of fruits and flowers under the auspices of the eight phase of the moon's increase in the month of Bhadra.

श्रियै च वसुदेवाय नन्दाय च बलाय च ॥9॥

यशोदायै ततो दद्यादर्घ्यं पफलसमन्वितम् ॥

अनन्तं त्रघंद्धं वामनं शौरिं वैकुण्ठं पुरुषोत्तमम् ॥10॥¹²¹

Similar Argha offerings consisting of fruits should be separately made of Sri, Vasudeva, Nanda, Vala and Yasoda. The God should be addressed as follows:- "I make obeisance to the eternal spirit that shines in the sun. I bow down to the great Vasudeva, the greatest self-conscious individually, and who, though grand yet beyond all comprehension, had born as a dwarf on earth.

वासुदेवं हृषीकेशं माधवं मधुसूदनम् ॥

वराहं पुण्डरीकाक्षं नृसिंहं दैत्यसूदनम् ॥11॥

¹¹⁹Ibid. p.466.

¹²⁰Garuda Purana. Ch. 131, p.311.

¹²¹Ibid.

Salutation unto the god Madhava (lit., the husband of beauty); who killed the demon Madhu, and who is also called Hrisikesa, and whose abode is in the heart of faith that doubts not. Obeisance to the lotus-eyed one, to the great boar and Narsimha manifestations, the slayers of demons.

On the 8th day of the dark half of Sravana (July-August) the Vaisnava all over India celebrate the birth day of Krsna. From the beginning of the dark fortnight the god's praises are sung at musical recitals. After the seventh day at midnight, a special fast and worship is held. In many houses a room is set apart to represent the prison where Krsna was born and the stable where he was transferred with colorful images of the god, his mother Devaki, his murderous uncle Kamsa, etc. Dishes of sweets are presented to the child – god and then eaten by the in mates of the house.¹²²

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According to Matsya Puranam, ch.57 says that whoever take fasting with charity will be blessed from their god and goddesses. But in true sense of fasting, it cannot be agreed.

3.8.3.2. Ganesa Chaturthi

चतुर्थी-व्रतानिद्ध

चतुर्थीव्रतान्याख्यास्ये भुक्तिमुक्तिप्रदानि ते ।

माघे शुक्लचतुर्थ्यां तु उपवासी यजेऽणम् ॥1॥

पञ्चम्यां च तिलान्नादी वर्षान्निर्विघ्नतः सुखी ।

गं स्वाहा मूलमन्त्रोऽयं गामाद्यं हृदयादिकम् ॥2॥

आगच्छोल्काय चाऽऽवाह्य गच्छोल्काय विसर्जनम् ।

उफल्कान्तैर्गादिगन्धाद्यैः पूजयेन्मोदकादिभिः ॥3॥

ओं महोल्काय विप्रहे वक्तुण्डाय धीमहि ।

तन्नो दन्ती प्रयोदयात् ॥¹²⁴

¹²²Ibid. p.185.

¹²³Ibid. p.185.

¹²⁴Agni Purana. Ch.179, p.464.

Now I shall describe the process of performing the vratas, which should be practiced on days of the fourth phase of the moon's increase (Caturthi Tithis), in the different months of the year and which grant enjoyment in this life and salvation in the next. On such a day in the month of Magha, the penitent (Vrati) should observe a fast and worship the god Gana. On the day following (Pancami), he should offer boiled rice mixed with the seeds of sesamum to the god, whereby he would live in felicity. The principal mantra which should be used in connection with the worship in "Gam Svaha," while all other acts of Psychic assignment (Nyasa) etc, should be performed with the "Gam" mantra. The god should be invoked as "come, Oh Ulka," while he should be bid adieu, by repeating the mantra which runs as "Depart, Oh you Ulka". The worship should be conducted by means of flowers and sweet-meats known as the Modakas. The Gayatri mantra, sacred to the god and to be used in connection with the vrata under discussion, runs as follows ; "Om let us know the god Moholka, do we meditate upon his divine self and may he lead us to do the same".

मासि भाद्रपदे चापि चतुर्थीवृषच्छिवं व्रजेत् ॥४॥

चतुर्थ्यर्घीरकेऽभ्यर्च्य गणं सर्वमवाप्नुयात् ।

चतुर्थ्या पफाल्गुने नक्तमक्विनाख्या चतुर्थ्यपि ॥५॥

चतुर्थ्या दमनैः पूज्य चैत्रो प्रार्च्य गणं सुखी ॥६॥¹²⁵

The man, who performs the present Vrata, on the day of the fourth phase of the moon's increase in the month of Bhadra, goes to the region presided over by the god Siva. A man attains everything by worshipping the god Gana on such a Caturthi Tithi. Such a Tithi, occurring in the month of Phalguna, is called the Avighna (unobstructed). A man, by worshipping the god Gana, on the fourth-day of the lunar month of Caitra, becomes happy.

This feast called pillaiyar cayuti by the Tamilians is kept on the 4th bright half of Bhadrapada (Aug-Sept) by all classes except the strict Vaisnavas. Ganesa the Jolly, pot – bellied, elephant-head god, son of Siva and Parvati is invoked for sagacity and patience in business or studies. At noon an images of the god, surrounded with the lamps and mirrors is placed on a platform in the house. Rice puddings of which the god is said to be very fond – flowers and **durva** grass are presented. Devotees fast and worship the Ganesa for beneficiary of families, school boys and students keep their books before the image which is sprinkled

¹²⁵Ibid.

with red- dyed that rice and walked around. Similarly, artisans offer up their tools .In the evening lamps are waved with accompaniment of hymns. On this rite it is very much auspicious to look at the moon on account of a curse cast upon it by the god. A few days later the statue is taken in procession to the river and immersed.¹²⁶

3.8.3.3. Mahalya Amavasya

Each new moon in the year is dedicated to the commemoration of the pitrs (ancestors). All men of the household, more specially dedicated to the new moon that brings the month of Bhadra (Aug-Sep) to a close. The spirit of the forefathers is then supposed to leave the abode of yama, the lord of death, and to come back on earth. Pious Hindus will propitiate them during the whole of the dark fort night, but they must do so at least on this last day; otherwise a curse hangs over them. The day is marked by the sraddha (commemorate meal) the pitrs are called upon to come and share the food under the guise of Brahmins invited for the occasion. Bawls of rice are presented to the spirits and then thrown in to fire or fed to a cow.¹²⁷

3.8.3.4. Navaratra (Festival of “ nine nights”)

नवमी—व्रतानि

नवमीव्रतकं वक्ष्ये भुक्तिमुक्त्यादिसिद्धितम् ।

देवीं पूज्याऽऽश्विने शुक्ले गौर्याख्यानवमीव्रतम् ;तेद्ध ॥1॥

पिष्टकाख्या तु नवमी पिष्टाशी देविपूजनात् ।

अष्टम्यामाश्विने शुक्ले कन्यार्के मूलभे यदा ॥2॥

अघार्दना सर्वदा वै महती नवमी स्मृता ।

दुर्गा तु नवगेहस्था एकागारस्थिताऽथवा ॥3॥

पूजिताऽष्टदशभुजा शेषाः षोडशसत्काराः ।

शेषाः षोडशहस्ताः स्युरञ्जनं डमरुं तथा ॥4॥

रुद्रचण्डा प्रचण्डा च चण्डोग्रा चण्डनायिका ॥

चण्डा चण्डवती पूज्या चण्डरूपाऽतिचाण्डिका ॥5॥

त्राफमान्मध्ये चोग्रचण्डा दुर्गा महिषमर्दिनी¹²⁸

Now I shall describe the process of performing the vratas, which should be practiced on days of the ninth phase of the moon's wane or increase and which grant enjoyment

¹²⁶Ibid. p. 186.

¹²⁷Ibid. p. 187.

¹²⁸Ibid. Ch.185, p.469.

of creature-comforts in this life and salvation in the next. The vrata, known as the Gauri Navami, should be practiced on the ninth phase of the moon's increase in the month of Asvina, wherein the Devi should be worshipped. The vrata known as the Pistasi (cake-eating) navami, should be practiced on the same day as the above, marked by the presence of the sun in the asterism Mula at the sign of the Virgo, the practiser of the vrata eating nothing else than cakes that day. Of all the Navami vratas, the greatest is that which is known as the Aghardana (sin-expiating) Navami. The goddess Nava Durga (the image being installed in a Mandapa or an Ekagrha explained before), should be worshipped as possessed of eight, ten or sixteen hands, as well as the image of Anjan and Damaru. Similarly the different manifestations of the goddess, such as Rudracanda, Pracanda, Candogra, Candanayika, Canda and Candavati should be successively worshipped, the goddesses such as Ugracanda, Durga and Mahisamardini, having been worshipped in course thereof. The mantra with which the worship should be conducted, runs as”

ओं दुर्गे दुर्गे रक्षिण स्वाहा, दशाक्षरो मन्त्रः ।।6।।

दीर्घाकारादिमन्त्रादिर्नवनेत्रो नमोऽन्तकः ।

षड्भिः पदैर्नमः स्वधावष्टकारहृदादिकम् ।।7।।

अर्घ्यैर्द्विष्टादिकनिष्ठान्तं न्यस्यार्घ्यानि जपेच्छिवाम् ।

एवं जपति यो गुह्यं नासौ केनापि बाध्यते ।।8।।

कपाल खेटकं घण्टां दर्पणं तर्जनीं धनुः ।

ध्वजं डमरुकं पशं वामहस्तेषु बिभ्रतीम् ।।9।।

शक्तिमुंरशूलानि वज्रं खर्चं च वुफन्तकम् ।

शंखं चत्राफं शलाकां च आयुधानि च पूजयेत् ।।10।।

पशुं च काली कालीति जप्त्वा खर्चं घातयेत् ।

कालि कालि वज्रेश्वरि लौहदण्डायै नमः ।।11।।

तदुत्थं रुधिरं मांसं पूतनायै च नैर्दृते ।

वायव्यां पापराक्षस्यै चरक्यै नम ईश्वरे ।।12।।

विदारिकायै चाऽऽग्नेयां महाकौशिकमग्नेये ।¹²⁹

Om obeisance to Druga and Durga, who is the protectress of the universe. “and consists of the ten letters the mantras such as “Am Hrim” should be used as well, followed by such terms of obeisance, as Namas, Svadha, Vasat, etc. The rite of Anganyasa should be

¹²⁹Ibid.

performed in the different parts of the body, commencing from the tips of fingers. The man who performs this rite of mysterious Nyasa, overcomes all impediments in life and cannot be bound down by any person. The goddess should be worshipped, as carrying in her left hands a skull, a Khetaka, a bell, a mirror, a bow, a banner, a small drum and a Pasa, while a finger of one, of her left hands should be contemplated as held in a pointing attitude. The arms and weapons of the goddess, such as spear, a club, a trident, a thunder-bolt, a sword, a Kuntakam, a conch-shell, a discus and a rod should be worshipped as well. The mantra running as “O Kali, Kali, O you goddess of thunder, I make obeisance to the goddess carrying an iron-rod,” should be repeated over the animal to be killed with the sword. Jets of blood, gushing out of the decapitated animal, as well as its flesh, should be dedicated to Putana at the south-west, to the monsters of sin at the north-west to the demons Caraki at the north-east and to Vidarika at the south-east, the flesh known as the Mahakausika being dedicated to the fire-god.

तस्याग्रतो नृपः स्नायाच्छत्रुं पिष्टमयं हरेत् ।

दद्यात्स्कन्दविशाखाभ्यां ब्राह्मणाद्या निशि ता यजेत् ॥13॥

जयन्ती मर्धला काली भद्रकाली कपालिनी ॥14॥

दुर्गा क्षमा शिवा धात्री स्वाहा स्वधा नमोऽस्तु ते ।

देवीं पञ्चामृतैः स्नाप्य पूजयेच्चार्हणादिना ।

ध्वजादिस्थयान्नादिबलिदानं वरादिवृफत् ॥15॥¹³⁰

The king should bathe in front of the, image of the goddess and cut in two the image of his enemy, made of rice-paste. Offerings should be made to Skandha and Visakha and the goddesses such as Brahmi etc. should be worshipped in the dead of night, by repeating the mantra which runs as “obeisance to Jayanti (the goddess of victory), Mangala (the goddess of bliss), Kali (the presiding deity of the eternal time). Bhadrakali, Kapalini (the goddess who succors the distressed), Siva (the goddess of bliss), Ksama (the goddess of forbearance), Dhatri (the nurse of the universe), Svaha and Svadha. The image of the goddess should be bathed in the composition known as the Pancamrita and worshipped with oblations and offerings. The man, who carries the image of the goddess in a car (performs the car-festival to the goddess), offers animal sacrifice of plants or banner on the top of her temple, enjoys all bliss.

¹³⁰Ibid.

From the first to the 10th of the bright half of Asvina (Sept-Oct) India celebrates its most popular and most colourful festival, commonly known as puja (worship) holidays. People undertake fasting during navaratra of nine days. During the whole navaratra Durga devotees will take only one meal of fruits and milk-sweet a day. Many of devotees took fasting and worship their local idol god. Some of them took fast first day and last day, some of them whole nine days have taken fast. On the 10th day the goddess leaves the statue, which is then carried to the nearest river; there it is left to sink amid loud cheers. People go from house to house felicitate their friends. This tenth day (dasara or vijai) commemorates also the victory of Rama over Ravana.¹³¹

3.8.3.4.1. The Dasami-vrata; दशमीव्रतम्

दशमीव्रतकं वक्ष्ये धर्मकामादिदायकम् ।

दशम्यामेकभक्ताशी समाप्ते दशधेनुदः ॥

दिशश्च काञ्चनीर्दद्याद्ब्राह्मणाधिपतिर्भवेत् ॥ 1 ॥¹³²

Now I shall describe the process of performing the Dasami vratas, which should be practiced on days of the tenth day of the moon's wane or increase and which increase one's peity, etc. The penitent (Vrati) should take a single meal on the above said days. Gifts of ten cows should be made at the close of the vrata and remunerations in gold should be given to the Brahmanas; whereby the practicer would become their chief.

3.8.3.4.2. Ekadasi

The vratas to be performed in day of the eleventh phase (एकादशीव्रतम्)

एकादशीव्रतं वक्ष्ये भुक्तिमुक्तिप्रदायकम् ।

दशम्यां नियताहारो मांसमैथुनवर्जितः ॥ 1 ॥

एकादश्यां न भुञ्जीत पक्षयोरुभयोरपि ।

द्वादश्येकादशी यत्रा तत्रा सन्निहितो हरिः ॥ 2 ॥

तत्रा त्राफतुशतं पुण्यं त्रायोदश्यां तु पारणे ।¹³³

Now I shall describe the process of practicing the vratas, which should be observed on days of the eleventh phase of the moon's increase or wane and which grant enjoyment of good things in life and salvation in the next. The observer of the vow should abstain from

¹³¹Ibid. p. 188.

¹³²Ibid. Ch.186. p.471.

¹³³Ibid.

taking animal diet and holding sexual intercourse with women and fast on such day's booth in the dark and the light for night of the month. The god Hari should be deemed as present in the blending of a Dvadasi and an Ekadasi Tithi. A man, by fasting on the occasion of such a blending and breaking his fast on the day of Troyadasi, attains the merit of performing a hundred Asvamedha sacrifices.

एकादशीकला यत्रा परतो द्वादशी गता ॥३॥

तत्रा त्राफतुशतं पुण्यं त्रायोदश्यां तु पारणे ।

दशम्येकादशीमिश्रा नोपोष्या नरकप्रदा ॥४॥

एकादश्यां निराहारो भुक्त्वा चैवापरेऽहनि ।¹³⁴

Similarly a man by fasting on a day in which the Edadasi exists for a Kala only after which the Dvadasi sets in and taking his meals on the day following, acquires the same merit as in the preceding case. A man must not fast on a day on which the moon enters her twelfth from her eleventh phase, such a fasting being held as paving one's ways to hell. A man having fasted on the day of the eleventh phase of the moon's wane or increase, should take his meals on the day following, by reciting the followings prayer.

भोक्ष्येऽहं पुण्डरीकाक्ष शरणं मे भवाच्युत ॥५॥

एकादश्यां सिते पक्षे पुष्यर्क्षं तु यदा भवेत् ।

सोपोष्याक्षय्यफलदा प्रोक्ता सा पापनाशिनी ॥६॥

एकादशी द्वादशी या श्रवणेन च संयुता ।

विजया सा तिथिः प्रोक्ता भक्तानां विजयप्रदा ॥७॥

एषैव पफाल्गुने मासि पुष्यर्क्षेण च संयुता ।

विजया प्रोच्यते सदिभः कोटिकोटिगुणोत्तरा ॥८॥

एकादश्यां विष्णुपूजा कार्या सर्वोपकारिणी ।

धनवान्यपुत्रावांल्लोके विष्णुलोके महीयते ॥९॥¹³⁵

“I break my fast, Oh you lotus-eyed god, Oh you who know no modifications, be you my help.” An Ekadasi occurring in a light fortnight and marked by the asterism Pusya, is known as the Papanasini (Sindestroying). By observing a fast on such a Tithi, a man becomes absolved of all sins. An Edadasi or a Dvadasi Makred by the asterism Sravana is known as a Vijaya Tithi and grants victory to the god's elect. Such an Ekadasi occurring in the month of Phalgun and marked by the asterism Pusya, is also known as a Vijaya Tithi and is held as possessed of millions and millions of virtues. A man, by worshipping the god Vishnu on the day of the eleventh phase of the moon's wane or increase, becomes wealthy, begets children

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid. p.472.

and is graced with a residence in the region of Vishnu after death. Such a worship benefits a roan in innumerable ways.

3.8.3.4.3. Dvadasi Vrata

The vratas to be performed in day of the twelveth phase ;द्वादशीव्रतानिद्ध

द्वादशीव्रतकं वक्ष्ये भुक्तिमुक्तिप्रदायकम् ।
एकभक्तेन नक्तेन तथैवायाचितेन च ॥1॥
उपवासेन भैक्ष्येण चैव द्वादशिकव्रती ।
चैत्रो मासि सिते पक्षे द्वादश्यां मदनं हरिम् ।
पूजयेत्भुक्तिमुक्त्यर्थी मदनद्वादशीव्रती ॥2॥¹³⁶

Now I shall describe the process of performing the vratas, which should be performed on days of the twelfth phase of the moon's increase or wane (Dvadasi vrata) and which enable a man to enjoy the good things of the world and to attain salvation after death. The observer of the vow should either fast on the day of its observance or take a single meal in the course of that day and night or live on food obtained by beggings. In the form known as the Madana Dvadasi, the observer of the vow should worship the god Hari and the god of love, on the day of the twelfth phase of the moon's increase in the month of Caitra, the effect of such an observance being the acquisition of all wished-for objects in this life and salvation in the next.

माघशुक्ले तु द्वादश्यां भीमद्वादशिकव्रती ॥3॥
नमो नारायणायेति यजेद्विष्णुं ससर्वभाव्फ ।
पफाल्गुने च सिते पक्षे गोविन्दद्वादशीव्रती ॥4॥
विशोकद्वादशीकारी यजेदाश्वयुजे हरिम् ।
लवणं मार्गशीर्षे तु वृषणमभ्यर्च्य यो नरः ॥5॥
ददाति शुक्लद्वादश्यां स सर्वरसदायकः ।
गोत्वसं पूजयेद्भाद्रे गोवत्सद्वादशीव्रती ॥6॥
माध्यां तु समतीतायां श्रवणेन तु संयुता ।
द्वादशी या भवेत् वृषणा प्रोक्ता सा तिलद्वादशी ॥7॥¹³⁷

The form of the vrata, known as the Bhima Dvadasi should be practiced on such a Tithi as the above, coming on in the month of Magha, The god Narayana should be worshipped on the occasion, by repeating the mantra which runs as "Obeisance to Narayana," whereby he would be the happy possessor of all earthly possessions. The form of the vow known as the Govinda Dvadasi, should be practiced on a similar Tithi in the month of Phalguna, while the form known as the Visoka Dvadasi should be practiced in the month of Asvina, on the day of the

¹³⁶Ibid. Ch.188. p. 472.

¹³⁷Ibid.

twelfth phase of the moon's increase, wherein the god Hari should be worshipped. The man, who worships Krsna on such a Tithi as the above in the month of Magha and makes gifts of salt to the Brahmanas, acquires the merit of making gifts of articles of all taste. In the form known as the Govatsa Dvadasi, calves should be worshipped. The day of the twelfth phase of the moon's wane, coming on after the lapse of the month of Caitra, is known as the Tila (Dvadasi of the sesamum).

तिलैः स्नानं तिलैर्होमो नैवेद्यं तिलमोदकम् ।
दीपश्च तिलतैलेन तथा देयं तिलोदकम् ॥८॥
तिलाश्च देया विप्रेभ्यः पफलं होमोपवासतः ।
ओं नमो भगवतेऽथो वासुदेवाय वै यजेत् ॥९॥
सवुफलः स्वर्गमाप्नोति षट्तिलद्वादशी व्रती ।¹³⁸

The observer of the vow, should bathe with the seeds of sesamum on his head, the homa ceremony should be performed with the same article, offerings composed of sesamum, should be made to the god, libations of water containing seeds of sesamum should be offered to the gods and the Pitrs, while lighted lamps, containing oil pressed out from the sesamum seeds, should be waived before the divine image. Gifts of sesamum should be made to the Brahmanas and the observer of the vow will acquire the full merit thereof, by performing the homa ceremony, while fasting. The mantra with which the worship should be conducted runs as "Om obeisance to the god who is the son of Vasudeva man" who practices this vow of Tila Dvadasi, ascends heaven with the souls of all his friends and relations.

मनोस्थद्वादशीवृफत्पफाल्गुने तु सितेऽर्चयेत् ॥१०॥
नामद्वादशीव्रतवृफत्केशवाद्यैश्च नामभिः ।
वर्षं यजेद्धरिं स्वर्गीं न भवेन्नारकी नरः ॥११॥
पफाल्गुनस्य सितेऽभ्यर्च्यं सुमतिद्वादशीव्रती ।
मासि भाद्रपदे शुक्ले अनन्तद्वादशीव्रती ॥१२॥
आश्लेषर्क्षे तु मूले वा माघे वृफणाय वै नमः ।
यजेत्तिलांश्च जुहुयात्तिलद्वादशीवृफन्नरः ॥१३॥
सुमतिद्वादशीकारी पफाल्गुने तु सिते यजेत् ।
जय वृफणं नमस्तुभ्यं वर्षं स्याद्भुक्तिमुक्तिगः ॥
पौषशुक्ले तु द्वादश्यां सम्प्रातिप्तद्वादशीव्रती ॥१४॥¹³⁹

The form known as the Manoratha Dvadasi, should be observed on the day of the twelfth phase of the moon's increase in the month of Phalgun. The man, who worships the god Visnu, addressing him by such names of his as "Kesava," etc., on each Dvadasi

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹Ibid.

throughout the year, practices the vrata known as the Nama (name) Dvadasi. The performer of such a vrata, ascends heaven after death and is exempted from visiting the hell. The performer of the vrata, known as the Sumati Dvadasi (the Dvadasi vrata of good resolution) should worship the god Visnu, on the day of the twelfth phase of the moon's increase in the month of Phalguna. The form known as the Ananta Dvadasi should be performed on such a Tithi as the above, occurring in the month of Bhadra, The performer of the vrata, known as the Tila Dvadasi, should worship Krsna on the Dvadasi Tithi in the' month of Magha, marked by the asterism Aslesa or Mula and perform the homa ceremony by casting libations of clarified butter mixed with sesamum into the sacrificial fire and by repeating the mantra which runs as "obeisance to Krsna." The performer of the Sugati Dvadasi 1 vrata which secures a good place in the next world) should first undertake the vrata on the day of the twelfth phase of the moon's increase, in the month of Phalguna and worship Krsna on all the subsequent Dvadasis of the year, by repeating the mantra running as "O Krsna, O Krsna, I make obeisance to you," while the vrata known as the Sampriipti Dvadasi should be practiced on Such a Tithi as the above, coming on in the month of Pausa.

3.8.3.4.4. Trayodasi Vrata

The vratas to be performed in day of the thirteenth phase (त्रायोदशीव्रतानिद्ध

त्रायोदशीव्रतानीह सर्वदानि वदामि ते ।
 अनर्घेन वृफतामादौ वक्ष्येऽनर्घैत्रायोदशीम् ।। 1 ।।
 त्रायोदश्यां मार्गशीर्षे शुक्लेऽनर्घैहरं यजेत् ।
 मधु सम्प्राशयेद्रात्रौ घृतहोमस्तिलाक्षतैः ।। 2 ।।

Now I shall discourse on the process of performing the Trayodasi vratas. First I shall narrate the history of the Ananga Trayodasi, The vrata was first practiced by the god of love, on the day of the thirteenth phase of the moon's increase, in the month of Magha, by worshipping the god Hari. The Vratī should take honey on the day of the observance, worship the god Hari and perform the essential homa ceremony, by casting libations of clarified butter mixed with sesamum and sun-dried rice into the sacrificial fire.

पौषे योगेश्वरं प्रार्च्य चन्दनाशी वृफताहुतिः ।
 महेश्वरं मौक्तिकाशी माघेऽभ्यर्च्य दिवं व्रजेत् ।। 3 ।।
 काकोलं प्राश्य नीरं तु पफाल्गुने पूजयेद्ब्रती ।
 कर्पूराशी स्वरूपं च चैत्रो सौभाग्यवान्भवेत् ।। 4 ।।
 महारूपं तु वैशाखे यजेज्जातीपफलाश्यपि ।
 लवर्घाशी ज्येष्ठमासे प्रद्युम्नं पूजयेद्ब्रती ।। 5 ।।

तलोदाशी तथाऽऽषाढे उमाभर्तारमर्चयेत् ।

श्रावणे गन्धतोयाशी पूजयेच्छूलपाणिनम् ।।6।।¹⁴⁰

Thus by propitiating the god Yogesvara with a homa, on such a Tithi in the month of Pausa, as well as by worshipping the god Mahesvara in the month of Magha after having eaten no other thing than Mauktika, the penitent would ascend heaven after death. Similarly a Vrati should take water simply and worship the god Kakola on such a Tithi in the month of Phalguna and live on camphor and worship that god Mahesvara on a similar Tithi in the month of Caitra, whereby his fortune would take a better turn. Similarly, the penitent living on a diet of Jati fruits simply, should worship the god Maharupa, on such a Tithi in the month of Vaisakha, while on a similar occasion, he should worship the god Pradyumna in the month of Jyestha, by eating cloves simply. Likewise the observer of the vow, should worship the husband of the goddess Uma in the month of Asadha and live upon the washings of sesamum on the day of observance, while he should take nothing but perfumed water on a similar occasion in the month of Sravana and worship the trident-bearing god (Sulapani).

सद्योजातं भाद्रपदे प्राशिता गुरुमर्चयेत् ।

सुवर्णवारि सम्प्राश्य आश्विने त्रिदशाधिपम् ।।7।।

विश्वेश्वरं कार्तिके तु मदनाशी यजेद्रवती ।

शिवं हैमं तु वर्षान्ते तु संछाद्याऽम्रदलेन तु ।।8।।

वस्त्रोण पूजयित्वा तु दद्याद्विप्राज्य गां तथा ।

शयनं छत्राकलशान्पादुकारसभाजनम् ।।9।।¹⁴¹

Similarly the Sadyojata manifestation of the God Mahadeva, should be worshipped in the month of Bhadra and the penitent should propitiate his spiritual preceptor as well. Likewise a Vrati should worship the lord of the celestials in the month of Asvina and drink the washings of gold on the day of its observance. The god Visvesvara should be worshipped in the month of Kartika on a similar Tithi and the penitent should eat nothing else than the plant known as the Madanaka, duly cooked and prepared. The Siva manifestation of Sambhu, should be worshipped in the month of Agrahayana or at the close of the rainy season, covered over with the leaves of a mango tree. Clothes and other wearing apparels should be offered to the god on the occasion and gifts of cows, beds, umbrellas, pitchers, shoes and juicy and luscious edibles, should be made to the Brahmanas.

¹⁴⁰Ibid. Ch.191. p.475.

¹⁴¹Ibid. p.476.

त्रायोदश्यां सिते चैत्रो रतिप्रीतियुतं स्मरन् ।
अशोकाख्यं नगं लिख्य सिन्दूररजनीमुखैः ॥10॥
अब्दं यजेत्तु कामार्थी कामत्रायोदशीव्रतम् ॥11॥

The vrata, known as the Kama troyodasi, should be practiced on the day of the thirteenth phase of the moon's increase in the month of Caitra as follows. An image of the celestial elephant known as Asoka should be painted with red lead and the Vрати should worship the same at each night fall throughout the year, whereby he would obtain all his wished for objects in life.

3.8.3.4.5. Caturdasi

The vratas to be performed in day of the fourteenth phase; चतुर्दशीव्रतानिद्ध

व्रतं वक्ष्ये चतुर्दश्यां भुक्तिमुक्तिप्रदायकम् ।
कार्तिके तु चतुर्दश्यां निराहारो यजेच्छिवम् ॥1॥
वर्षद्ध भोगधनायुष्मान्बुधर्वभिश्चवचतुर्दशीम् ।
मार्गशीर्षे सितेऽष्टम्यां तृतीयायां मुनिव्रतः ॥2॥
द्वादश्यां वा चतुर्दश्यां पफलाहारो यजेत्सुरम् ।
त्यक्त्वा पफलानि दद्यात्तु बुधर्वन्पफलचतुर्दशीम् ॥3॥¹⁴²

Now I shall describe the process of practicing the vratas, which should be observed on days of the fourteenth phase of the moon's wane or increase (Caturdasi). A Vрати should observe a fast and worship the god Siva, on such a Tithi in the month of Kartika, by respectively observing and performing which for a year, he would be long-lived and able to enjoy all the comforts which this world offers. Similarly a Vрати should practice self-control and live on fruits only, on days of the third, eighth, twelfth or the fourteenth phase of the moon's increase in the month of Magha and worship the god Siva, subsequently foregoing the taste of all fruits till the completion of the vow, whereon fruits etc., should be given to the Brahmanas. The vrata thus practiced, is known as the Phala-Caturdasi, preference being given to the latter Tithi in respect of its observance.

चतुर्दश्यामथाष्टम्यां पक्षयोः शुक्लवृषणयोः ।
अनश्नन्पूजयेच्छम्भुं स्वर्ग्युभयचतुर्दशीम् ॥4॥
वृषणाष्टम्यां तु नक्तेन तथा वृषणचतुर्दशीम् ।
इह भोगानवाप्नोति परत्रा च शुभां गतिम् ॥5॥
कार्तिके च चतुर्दश्यां वृषणायां स्नानवृषणसुखी ।
आराधिते महेन्द्रे तु ध्वजाकारासु यष्टिषु ॥6॥

¹⁴²Ibid. Ch.192, p.476.

ततः शुक्लचतुर्दश्यामनन्तं पूजये(रिम् ।
 वृफत्वा दर्भमयं चैव वारिधानी समन्वितम् ।।7।।
 शालिप्रस्थस्य पिष्टस्य पूपनाम्नः वृफत्स्य च ।
 अर्धं विप्राय दातव्यमर्धमात्मनि योजयेत् ।।8।।
 कर्तव्यं सरितां चान्ते कथां वृफत्वा हरेरिति ।
 अनन्तसंसारमहासमुद्रे मग्नान्समभ्युद्धर वासुदेव ।।9।।
 अनन्तरूपे विनियोजयस्व ह्यनन्तरूपाय नमो नमस्ते ।
 अनेन पूजयित्वाऽथ सूत्रां बद्ध्वा तु मन्त्रात् ।
 स्वके करे वा कण्ठे वा त्वनन्तव्रतवृफत्सुखी ।।10।।¹⁴³

Likewise a penitent should fast and worship the god Sambhu on the days of the eighth or the fourteenth phase of the moon's wane or increase, (night being the proper time for its observance on both the occasions), whereby he would be the happy possessor of all things worth-having in human life and secure an elevated existence after death, Poles should be set up with streamers unfurled there from, in honour of the god Mahendra (the great Indra), on the occasion of the dark Caturdasi in the month of Kartika and' the' god should be invoked and worshipped over the flag-posts described above, The Vрати should take special care in' bathing and absolving himself of all impieties that day, whereby he would attain eternal felicity. Subsequent to that the Ananta manifestation of the god Hari, should be worshipped on the day of the fourteenth phase of the moon's increase in the same month, The god, as well as the waters of the ocean which forms his abode, should be represented by the blades of holy kusa grass, tied up in knots and the penitent should prepare a cake with pasted Sali and powdered sun- dried rice, Half of the cake should be given to a Brahman, while he should take the other half himself. The history of the origin or the vrata; should be recited and heard on the bank of a pond and a string of thread should be tied round the wrist or the throat of the Vрати, by reciting the following deistic, "Lift me, ever sinking in this bottomless ocean of miserable births, Oh you Vasudeva, whose image is but the eternal time and infinite space, Break, Oh break the fetters that bind me down to successive rebirths and I bow down to you, Oh god".

3.8.3.5.Divali or Dipawali (“Row of Lights”):

Another major festival which takes place from the 13th of the dark half of Asvina (Sept-Oct) to the 2nd of the bright half of **karttika** though all five days are often called **divali**. They in fact constitute a complex of five different feasts:

¹⁴³Ibid.

1. The first day is the Dhan Trayodasi (“wealth thirteenth”) shopkeepers tidy their stores and houses, close their accounts, worship and fasting an image of Laksmi goddess of prosperity and wealth together with their books of accounts and a pile of silver coins.
2. The second day is known as **NarakaChaturdasi** (“Narak fourteenth”) commemorating Krishna’s victory over the demon Naraka. After a perfumed oil bath each man must put out a lamp with the big toe of his left foot and crush with a piece of vegetable (two gesture the symbolism of which is not clear) then everyone puts on new and bright clothes, and spends the day in rejoicing with feasting and fasting. In the evening lamps are lit in private houses and Vaisnava temples.
3. The third day is Dipawali, properly it is also called Lakshmi puja according to places and castes. Sacred tanks or ablaze with thousands of small oil lamps. Children lit of crackers to their hearts content. Modern Hindus see in all this a symbol of light dispelling the darkness of ignorance. Lakshmi worshipers (devotees) took fasting and worship the god Lakshmi.
4. On the fourth day Vishnu’s victory over that demon Bali is celebrated. This is the feast of cattle; cows and horses gaudily caparisoned; are worshiped, fasted, regaled and taken in procession about the streets.
5. The fifth day is called Bhrata Dvitya (“Brother second”) Boys are invited to grand meal by their sisters or cousins. Presents are exchanged, setting of lights and feasting go on unabated. This is new day’s purely social feast.¹⁴⁴

3.8.3.6. Makkara Samkranti (Pongal):

The winter solstice falls approximately on January the 13th and is the only really popular solar festival of the year. It is supposed to inaugurate the day time of the gods and the auspicious season for men. The devotees are worshiped in fasting sun in courtyards under the form of the red diagrams. Makkar Samkranti is celebrated in North India, and Pongal in South India. It is a harvest festival or a thanks-giving festival. It is celebrated for four days, i.e, from 13th-16th January. It is a very important festival for farmers. The Pongal celebrated in four ways- known as: Bhogi Pongal (13th January), Sun Pongal (14th January), Mattu Pongal (15th January) and Kane Pongal (16th January).

3.8.3.7. Sri Panchami

¹⁴⁴Ibid. p.188.

पंचमी—व्रतानि
 पंचमीव्रतकं वक्ष्ये आरोग्यस्वर्गमोक्षदम् ।
 नभोनभस्याश्विने च कार्तिके शुक्लपक्षके ।।1।।
 वासुकिस्तक्षकः पूज्यः कालीयो मणिभ्रदकः ।
 ऐरावतो धृतराष्टः कर्कोटकधनञ्जयौ ।।2।।
 एते प्रयच्छन्त्यभयमायुर्विद्यायशः श्रियम् ।।3।।¹⁴⁵

Now I shall describe the process of performing the vrata, known as the Pancami Vrata, which grants health, residence in paradise and salvation. The serpent, such as Vasuki (the primordial. Hydra), Taksaka, Kaliya, Mani, Bhadraka, Airavata, Dhrtarastra, Karkotaka and Dhananjaya should be worshipped on the day of the fifth phase of the moon's increase, either in the months of Sravana (Nabhas), Bhadra (Nabhasya) Asvina or Kartika. These, when duly worshipped, grant to their votaries, the boons of long life, erudition, fame and prosperity.

It is most probably is made on the fifth day of the bright half of magha (Jan-Feb). Many Hindus school Masters put up an Image of the goddess (in Bengal, she is mounted on a swan, elsewhere generally on a peacock) and friends and patrons of the schools are invited to share in the festivals.

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3.8.3.7.1. Sasthi-vrata ;षष्ठी—व्रतानिद्ध

षष्ठीव्रतानि वक्ष्यामि कार्तिकादौ समाचरेत् ।
 षष्ठङ्गा पफलाशनोऽर्घ्याद्यैर्भुक्तिफुत्तिखमवाप्नुयात् ।।1।।

Now I shall describe the process for performing the vrata, known as the “asthi vrata and which should be practiced in the months of Kartika and others. The penitent should live on fruits on the day of the vrata and perform it by offering Arghas and other oblations, whereby he would attain salvation.

स्कन्दषष्ठीव्रतं प्रोक्तं भाद्रे षष्ठङ्गामथाक्षयम् ।
 वृफण्णषष्ठीव्रतं वक्ष्ये मार्गशीर्षे चरेच्च तत् ।

¹⁴⁵Ibid. Ch.180, p.464.

अनाहारो वर्षमेकं भुक्तिमुक्तिपवाप्नुयात् ।।2।।¹⁴⁶

The vrata, known as the Skanda “asthi, should be performed in honour of the Marshal of the heavens, on the day of the sixth phase of the moon’s increase in the month of Bhadra. The vrata, known as the Krsna” asthi, should be first undertaken on such a Tithi, occurring in the month of Magha. The penitent should observe a fast for the whole of that day and abstain from taking anything on such Tithis throughout the year. The effect of practicing such a vow, is salvation after a happy and prosperous career on earth.

3.8.3.7.2. Saptmi-vrata;सप्तमी-व्रतानि

सप्तमीव्रतकं वक्ष्ये सर्वेषां भुक्तिमुक्तिदम् ।

माघमासेऽब्जके शुक्ले सूर्यं प्रार्च्यं विशोकभाव्फ ।।1।।

सर्वावाप्तिस्तु सप्तम्यां मासि भाद्रेऽर्कपूजनात् ।

पौषे मासि सितेऽनश्नन्प्रार्च्यार्कं पापनाशनम् ।।2।।

वृषष्णपक्षे तु माघस्य सर्वावाप्तिस्तु सप्तमी ।

पफाल्गुने तु सिते नन्दा सप्तमी चार्वपूजनात् ।।3।।

मार्गशीर्षे सिते प्रार्च्यं सप्तमी चापराजिता ।

मार्गशीर्षे सिते चाब्दं पुत्रीया सप्तमी स्त्रियाः ।।4।।¹⁴⁷

Now I shall narrate the process of performing a Saptami vrata (vrata practiced on the day of the seventh phase of the moon’s wane or increase), which grants to all, enjoyment in this life and salvation in the next Grief can never touch a man, who worships the son-god with white lotus flowers on such a day, in the month of Magha: the” result of such a worship on an identical Tithi in the month of Bhadra, being the attainment of all wished for objects. The man, who observes a fast and worships the sun-god on such a Tithi in the month of Pausa, becomes purged of all sins. The fulfillment of all heartfelt desires follows in the train of such a worship, held on the day of the seventh phase of the moon’s wane, in the month of Magha. Such a worship, performed on the day of the seventh phase of the moon’s increase in the month of Phalguna, is known as the Nanda and fills the votary with eternal felicity. A man by worshipping the sun-god on such a Tithi in the month of Magha, conquers all his enemies; whereas a suppliant for the birth of a child, should practice the vrata on the same day.

3.8.3.8. Mahasivaratri

शिवरात्रिव्रतं वक्ष्ये कथां वै सर्वकामदाम् ।।

यथा च गौरी भूतेशं पृच्छति स्म पर व्रतम् ।।1।।

¹⁴⁶Ibid. Ch.181, p.465.

¹⁴⁷Ibid. Ch.182.p. 465.

Brahma said: I shall now describe the mode of practising the Sivaratra Vratam, the performance of which confers all wished for blessings on the practiser. The goddess Gouri learnt it of yore from the God Mahadeva, the lord of all created beings.

माघपफाल्गुनयोर्मध्ये कृष्णा या तु चतुर्दशी ।।
तस्यां जागरणाद्बुधः पूजितो भुक्तिमुक्तिदः ।।2 ।।

The god said:- "He who keeps a vigil and shorships the god Rudhra on the night of the fourteenth phase of the moon's wane which comes between the months of Magha and Phalguna, becomes entitled to the pleasures of life and the liberation of self.¹⁴⁸

शवरात्रिव्रतं वक्ष्ये भुक्तिमुक्तिप्रदं शृणु ।
माघपफाल्गुनयोर्मध्ये वृषणा या तु चतुर्दशी ।।1 ।।
कामयुक्ता तु सोपोष्या बुधर्वज्जागरणं व्रती ।
शिवरात्रिव्रतं बुधर्वे चतुर्दश्यामभोजनम् ।।2 ।।
रात्रिजागरणेनैव पूजयामि शिवं व्रती ।
आवाहयाम्यहं शम्भुं भुक्तिमुक्तिप्रदायकम् ।।3 ।।
नरकार्णवकोत्तारनावं शिव नमोऽस्तु ते ।
नमः शिवाय शान्ताय प्रजाराज्यादिदायिने ।।4 ।।
सौभाग्यारोग्यविद्यार्थं स्वर्गमार्गप्रदायिने ।
धर्मं देहि धनं देहि कामभोगादि देहि मे ।।5 ।।
गुणकीर्तिसुखं देहि स्वर्गं मोक्षं च देहि मे ।
लुब्धकः प्राप्तवान्पुण्यं पापी सुन्दरसेनकः ।।6 ।।¹⁴⁹

Now I shall describe the process of practicing the Sivaratri vrata, which makes a man the envied possessor of all the good things of the earth and liberate him from the cycles of necessary existences, The observer of the vow (Vrati), should observe a fast and keep a vigil in the night on the occasion of a dark Caturdasi, occurring between the months of Magha and Phalguna and pray as follows" I shall practice the vrata, known as the "Sivaratri vrata," fast on the day of its observance keep a vigil in the night and worship the god Siva," I invoke the latter deity who blesses his votaries with earthly prosperity and emancipates their souls after

¹⁴⁸M.N. Dutt. The Guruda Mahapuram, (New Bharatiya Book Corporation, Delhi), p. 298.

¹⁴⁹Ibid.p.478.

death. I make obeisance to the god Siva, who serves as a boat in taking the benighted souls across this stream of life. Salutation to Siva, the absolute pacific soul, who increases the progeny of men and crowns their devotion with kingdoms and principalities, success in life, health and erudition and opens the gate of heaven to his votaries. Increase my piety, augment my possessions, O lord and may I have the envied goods of the world in abundance and the capacity to enjoy them. May I thrive in fame and happiness and may I ascend heaven and work out the liberation of my soul, through the merit of my virtues, growing more and more every day".

The 13th of the dark half of magha (Jan - Feb) the great night of Siva is celebrated as a festival of importance all over India. It is dedicated to Lord Siva under the symbol of the Linga. Many Hindus are taking fasting and worship their god Siva with full respect and religious ritual. All Siva temples are specially decorated and special **pujas** are conducted for the devotees.

Fast is kept during the whole tithi, and a vigil at night, especially by all unmarried girls who wish to secure a husband as accomplished as Siva was Uma. The Linga is bathed in milk and honey; ketaki flowers and betel leaves are offered.¹⁵⁰ All over India the faithful devotees of Lord Siva keep a **strict fast** the day prior to the feast night, during which Siva in the form of **Linga** is honoured by a night long vigil, by a ritual bathing of the **Linga** with honey and milk and offerings of bel leaves, accompanied by the recitation of **mantras**. The following day is celebrated with great rejoicing and fasting.

In Shivapuram also mentions whoever comes to Lord Shiva with fasting and prayer and offer him opium, charas or Ganga that Lord Shiva will be pleased and devotee will get blessing according his needs.¹⁵¹ Moreover, in Narada Purana uttarbhag, mentioned that through fasting please Siva and get salvation.¹⁵²

3.8.3.8.1. Asoka Purnima-vrata अशोकपूर्णिमादिव्रतम्

अशोकपूर्णिमां वक्ष्ये भूधरं च भुवं यजेत् ।

पफलान्यां सितपक्षायां वर्षं स्याद्भुक्तिमुक्तिभाक् ।।1।।

कर्त्तव्यां तु वृषोत्सर्गं वृफत्वा नक्तं समाचरेत् ।

शैवं पदमवाप्नोति वृषव्रतमिदं परम् ।।2।।

पित्रया याऽमावसी ;स्याद् तस्यां पितृणां दत्तमक्षयम् ।

¹⁵⁰Ibid.

¹⁵¹Shiva Mahapuram, p.56.

¹⁵² Shri Narada Purana pg. 649

उपोष्याब्दं पितृनिष्ठ्वा निष्पापः स्वर्गमाप्नुयात् ।।3 ।।

पञ्चदश्यां च माघस्य पूज्याजं स्वर्गमाप्नुयात् ।।¹⁵³

Hear me discourse on the process of practicing the Asoka-Purmima-vrata, in which the Bhudhara manifestation of the god Siva, as well as the earth-goddess should be worshipped. The vrata should be first undertaken on the day of the full moon in the month of Caitra and practiced on the occasions, of all subsequent Purnimas for a year. The rite of Vrsotsarga should be performed on such a Tithi in the month of Kartika. The penitent should break his fast in the night, which should be spent in vigil. By practicing such a vrata, a man goes to the region of Siva after death. This is what is known as the Vrsa vrata. Libations of water 'and cakes of obsequies offered to one's departed manes on the occasion Om the Amavasi (day of the new moon), known as the Pitr Amavasi, last them for eternity. By observing fast and propitiating' the souls of his departed ancestors for a year, a man becomes purged of all sins and ascends heaven after death. Similarly by worshipping the birthless deity (Narayana) on the day of the full moon in the month of Magha man is able to witness the fulfillment of all his heartfelt desires.

वक्ष्ये सावित्रयमावास्यां भुक्तिमुक्तिकरीं शुभाम् ।।4 ।।

पञ्चदश्यां व्रती ज्येष्ठे वटमूले महासतीम् ।

त्रिरात्रोपोषिता नारी सप्तधान्यैः प्रपूजयेत् ।।5 ।।

प्ररूढैः कण्ठसूत्रौश्च रजन्यां वुफघङ्गमादिभिः ।

वटावलम्बनं वृफत्वा नृत्यगीतैः प्रभातके ।।6 ।।

नमः सावित्र्यैः सत्यवते नैवेद्यं चार्पयेद्द्विजे ।

वेश्म गत्वा द्विजान्भोज्य स्वयं भुक्त्वा विसर्जयेत् ।।7 ।।

सावित्रिा प्रीयतां देवी सौभाग्यादिकमाप्नुयात् ।।8 ।।¹⁵⁴

Now I shall describe the way of practicing the Savitri vrata, which should be observed on the day of the new moon in the month of Jyestha. The female Vрати should fast for three consecutive days on the occasion and worship Savitri the model of chastity, with the grains known as the Saptadhanya, underneath a vrata tree, on the above said Tithi. Damsels should join hands in a merry-go-round and dance and sing round the Vata tree, fondly embracing (Kanthasutra)*and worshipping it with pasted saffron. They should return home on the morrow, dress up and dedicate platefuls of offerings. By repeating the mantra "Obeisance to Savitri and Satyavan" and make them over to the Brahmanas. On the same day, the pious

¹⁵³Garuda Mahapurana, Ch.124, p.314.

¹⁵⁴ Agni Mahapurana, p.

Brahmanas should be treated with sumptuous repasts and the penitent shall break her fast. Farewell should be bid to that model wife (Savitri), by reciting the mantra which runs as "Be pleased, O you goddess. Savitri" A damsel practicing such a vrata becomes exceptionally fortunate.

3.8.3.9. Holi

Coincides with full moon of the bright half of Phalguna (February – March). It is celebrated more or less all over India, though not by every caste. In most places it is customary to light a huge bonfire. Passers – by generously squirted with coloured water.¹⁵⁵ The coloured powders and water, which have become so characteristic of Holi are a part of all this.

3.9. FASTING IN BHAKTI PERIOD(14-17th Century AD)

The term fasting in Bhakti Marga-(path of devotion) or Bhakti Yoga (Devotional Discipline) refers to an extremely complex and manifold phenomenon.

Satv-asmin Parama-Prema-rupa-the nature of Bhakti is absolute love in Him (Narada Bhakti Sutra, 2) Sapara anuraktir Isvare – Bhakti is supreme attachment to the Lord (Sandilya Sutra 1, 1, 2).

3.9.1. The Nature of Fasting in Bhakti

The word *bhakti*, generally, translated as devotion is rich with meaning; faith, love, loving surrender, devotional attachment, piety. It is closely associated with the word *Puja* which mean adoration, reverence, worship. There is implied in these two words a very personal relation, a concrete and existential attitude of reverential dependence and piety. The most normal gesture people make to express this feeling is the *Pranama*, God is, of course, the Supreme object of *bhakti* and fasting (*upvasa*) and *puja*, but the mother land, parents and elders, spiritual teachers and holy men are *pujaniya*, and in various degrees, object of bhakti, the *Pranama* made to them does convey this sense of deep reverence and worshipful devotion.¹⁵⁶

Bhakti is absolute love for Him. It is the supreme attachment to the Lord. It is ambrosia that divine drink or nectar which confers immortality. He who has obtained true “fasting” in *Bhakti* is *Siddha* (perfect), *amrta* (immortal) *trpta* (satisfied, blessed) he desires nothing else; there is in him no sorrow, hatred or passion. He is at peace, intoxicated with

¹⁵⁵Ibid.p. 189

¹⁵⁶Ibid. p.304.

love, yet quiet, his mind centred on the Lord. All other affections are suppressed selfishness is transcended; all form of activity, sacred or profane, being dedicated to Him.¹⁵⁷

Fasting (*upavasa*) in *Bhakti* Marga is loving devotion, gives the *bhakta* (devotee) a much greater and more valuable knowledge of the Lord than any intellectual process of meditation or reflection. The relation between *bhakti* and *jnana* has been variously explained in different schools – faith (*sraddha*) is of course always required as a precondition of genuine devotion; the worst vices are *kautily* (crookedness or insincerity) and *asraddha* (irreligiousness or unbelief).

3.9.2. Fasting and Divine Grace

In all *Bhakti* Treatises the greatest stress is laid on the importance of God's grace. The *Upanisads* already had taught that divine election alone qualifies a man for personal communion with the supreme spirit.

Most *Bhaktas* (devotees) insists that grace elevates and transforms the devotees (*Bhaktas*) but not without some collaboration, preparation or response, on his part. Detachment and humility avoidance of evil company, faithful and unselfish fulfillment of one's social and other duties, constancy in prayer, these and many other moral obligations rest upon the true *bhakta* (devotes). *Bhakti* is gift of the Lord to His chosen ones, but these have to respond to the advances of His love.¹⁵⁸

What is theological nature of this divine grace on the *Bhaktas* rely upon? Is there only close parallel with Christian doctrine of grace? Most *bhakti* theologians adhere to some form of *Advaita*; not the pure *Advaita* of a Sankara but a non-dualism more or less tainted with *Parinama-vada*, viz a metaphysical theory which introduces change or evaluation within the supreme reality. They safeguard a certain distinction between the *Jivatma* (individual soul) and the *Paramatma* (Supreme Spirit), the individual being naturally divine without being God Himself. This pantheistic trend of most *bhakti* theologies as also the extremely anthropomorphic conception of eternal life uphold by the *bhaktas* made it impossible for them to reach a clear idea of the perfect gratuity of God's grace and of the infinite and supernatural greatness of its elevating power. Grace is a help given to man to enable him to realize what he essentially is rather than a supernatural gift which divinens a mere creature. The indwelling of God in the soul and the Trinitarian life we are called to share and contemplate in the beatific vision are but dimly and faultily adumbrated in the Hindu

¹⁵⁷Ibid. p. 305.

¹⁵⁸ John B. Carman, *Bhakti*, the Encyclopedia of Religion Vol.2 edition (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), p.130.

conceptions of *Bhakti* and *Mukti*. As the correct idea of creation is generally absent from Hindu thought, so also there is lacking the knowledge of Christian faith gives us of this new creation; this rebirth in Christ, this supernatural destiny to which divine grace raises us.¹⁵⁹

3.9.3. The Object of Bhakti

The *bhakti*, in its lower and secondary manifestation can have for its object some minor deity, the higher bhakti is centred on the Lord alone. The Lord (*Isvara*) is God conceived as a personal all powerful, all merciful being – both transcendent and immanent. He is the ‘*Bhagwan*’ the blissful one, love and beauty infinite. But Hindu metaphysicians have never been able to understand personality except in terms of non-absolute reality this is why the *Saguna Brahman* is said to be the object of the bhakta’s devotion, not the *nirguna* (unrelated absolute) *Brahman*. Most bhakti theologians have tried to solve this antinomy between the claims of their devotion, which is meaningless without a personal god, and those of their metaphysics, which tends to deny absolute transcendence to a personal being, they have generally failed, at least on the theoretical plan.

The object of the *bhakta*’s devotion is therefore not God but a god, the highest god he can imagine or conceive, an individual being but endowed with all the attributes and qualities that belong to the Divine, a being therefore, which is said to be the Supreme person (*Purusottama*), identified even with the supreme *Brahman*, yet conceived as related and internally subject to change. This god of the *bhakta* is not God Himself and all *bhakti* remains somehow idolatrous.¹⁶⁰

But the *bhakta* wants to worship and to love a god whom he can see and touch and serve a god who is near to his devotee. This desire exists even in idolatry, but in *bhakti* it becomes a moving and pathetic yearning for the incarnate the God-man. The *avatara* (doctrine) evolved considerably from the days of the *Gita* to those of the *Bhagavata-Purana*, it became even further complicated in the medieval *bhakti* schools. A ‘descent’ or *avatara* of the Lord who through the power of His *maya*, assumes a human or other visible form; a ‘theophany’ of the Lord displaying His beauty and divine charm to attract the *bhakta*’s mind away from earthly things; an appearance partial and temporary of the supreme deity with the object of performing some actions necessary for the protection and salvation of creation, the *avatara* is never incarnation in the Christian sense. The ‘body’ or human shape assumed is not a real human nature, possible and earthly; it is made of *visuddha sattva* (heavenly matter)

¹⁵⁹ Chandradhar Sharma, A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy, (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Das Publishers, Pvt., 1987), Pp.336-227.

¹⁶⁰ V.S. Lalrinawma, Major Faith Traditions in India, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), p.207.

it is a passing manifestation only. The *avatara* is not a ‘new Adam’ belonging to our race, one of us. The *avatara* is not the Word made flesh.

3.9.4. The Naksatra-vratas नक्षत्राव्रतानिद्ध

नक्षत्राव्रतकं वक्ष्ये भे हरिः पूजितोऽर्थदः ।

नक्षत्रापुरुषं चाऽऽदौ चैत्रामासे हरिं यजेत् ।।1।।

मूले पादौ यजेज्जले रोहिणीष्वर्चये(रिम् ।

जानुनी चाश्विनीयोगे आषाढासूरसंज्ञके ।।2।।

मेढ्रं पूर्वोत्तरास्वेव कटि वै वृफत्तिकासु च ।

पार्श्वे भद्रपदाभ्यां तु वुफक्षिं वै रेवतीषु च ।।3।।

स्तनौ चैवानुराधासु धनिष्ठासु च पृष्ठकम् ।¹⁶¹

Hear me, O god, discourse on the process of observing the Naksatra vratas, (vows to be observed under the auspices of different asterism) which are as follows: The god Hari should be worshipped during the ascendancy of each of the twenty-seven asterisms, by which the worshipper would have all his objects and desires fulfilled and realised in life. The god Hari, manifest as the Naksatra Purusa (an imaginary figure whose body is supposed to be composed of the clusters of asterisms, grouped so as to form its different parts) should be worshipped in the month of Caitra. The legs of the god (Naksatra Purusa) should be worshipped under the auspices of the asterism Mula, while the regions of his groins should be worshipped under the benignant influence of the asterism Rohini, The knee-joints of the divine figure, should be worshipped under the auspices of the asterism Asvini, while the regions of its two thighs, should be worshipped under the influence of the asterisms Asadhas, The public region of the divine image, should be worshipped under the auspices of the asterisms Purvas and Uttaras, while the region of the waist, should be worshipped under the influence of the asterisms known as the Krttika, Similarly the sides of the figure, should be worshipped during the ascendancy of the asterisms known as the two Bhadrpadas, while the regions of its armpits should be worshipped, when the asterisms known as the Revati would ascend a similar altitude in the skies. The cardiac region of the image, should be worshipped under the influence of the asterisms known as the Anuradha, while its back should be worshipped during the ascendancy of the asterisms Dhanistha.

भुजौ पूज्यौ विशाखासु पुनर्वर्षेऽङ्गलीर्यजेत् ।

आश्लेषासु नखान्पूज्य कण्ठं ज्येष्ठासु पूजयेत् ।।4।।

श्रोत्रौ विष्णोश्च श्रवणे मुखं पुण्ये हरेर्यजेत् ।।5।।

¹⁶¹ Agni Mahapurana, Ch. 196, p. 479.

यजेत्स्वातिषु दन्ताग्रमास्यं वारुणभेऽर्चयेत् ।
मघासु नासां नयने मृगशीर्षे ललाटकम् ।।6 ।।
चित्रासु चाऽऽर्द्रासु कचानब्दान्ते स्वर्णकं हरिम् ।
गुडपूर्णं घटेऽभ्यर्च्य शयागोर्थादिदक्षिणा ।।7 ।।¹⁶²

The arms of the divine figure, should be worshipped, when the asterisms known as the Visakha would be ascendant, while its figure should be worshipped under the blissful influence of the asterisms, known as the Punarvasus, Similarly, its finger-nails should be worshipped under the auspicious of the asterisms, known as the Aslesas, while the region of its throat should be worshipped under a similar condition of the asterisms, known as the Jesthas, Likewise the ears, face, tips of teeth and mouth of Visnu should be respectively worshipped under the benignant influences of the asterisms, known as the Sravana, the Pusya, the Svatis and the Varuna. In the same manner, the nose, the eyes, the forehead, the hairs and the complexion" of the divine image, should be respectively worshipped under the auspicious of such asterisms as the Magha, the Mrgasira, the Citra and the Ardra. The god should be invoked and worshipped on a pitcher, full of molasses. Gifts of beds, cows and money, should be given to the Brahmanas as remuneration for their officiating as priests at the ceremony or for attending the same as onlookers.

नक्षत्रापुरुषो विष्णुः पूजनीयः शिवात्मकः ।
शाम्भवनीयव्रतवृफन्मासभे पूजये(रिम् ।।8 ।।
कार्तिके वृफत्तिकायां च मृगशीर्षे मृगास्यके ।
नामभिः केशवाद्यैस्तु अच्युताय नमोऽपि वा ।।9 ।।
कार्तिके वृफत्तिकाभेऽमिसनक्षत्रागं हरिम् ।
शाम्भवायनीव्रतकं करिष्ये भुक्तिमुक्तिदम् ।।10 ।।
केशवादि महामूर्तिमच्युतं सर्वदायकम् ।
आवाहयाम्यहं देवमायुरारोग्यवृद्धिदम् ।।11 ।।
कार्तिकादौ सदा देयमन्नं मासचतुष्टयम् ।
पफाल्गुनादौ च वृफशरमाषाढादौ न पायसम् ।।12 ।।
देवाय ब्राह्मणेभ्यश्च नक्तं नैवेद्यमाशयेत् ।¹⁶³

Each month the observer of the vow, known as the *Sambhavaniya vrata*, should worship the god *Visnu*, manifest as the *Naksatra Purusa* (the astral figure) who is but an incarnation of the divine essence of *Siva*, The *vrata* should be practiced in the month of *Kartika* and *Magha* under the auspicious of the asterisms, known as the *Kritika* or *Mrgasira*, from which the months have respectively derived their epithets and address the god *Hari* by

¹⁶² Agni Mahapurana, Ch.196, p. 479.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

such names as "*Kesava*," "*Acyuta*" etc. or by invoking his presence as "obeisance to *Kesava*" and "Obeisance to the god who suffers. No waste" (*Acyuta*). The penitent should recite the prayer, running as "I shall practice the '*Sambhavanīyakam Vratam*, by worshipping the god Hari, present in the presiding asterism of, the month and which makes the life of its observer, a run of continuous pleasures and grant him salvation after death. I invoke the presence of the god *Hari*, who contained in himself the water on which floated the seeds of a potential universe and who, though eternally existent, suffers not the ravages of time and grants health and longevity to his votaries. During the four months, commencing from that of *Kartika*; boiled rice and potherbs should be offered to the god, *Krsara* (rice and pulse boiled together with spices) in the months such as *Phalgunā* etc., while sweet porridge should be offered in the months of *Asādha*, etc., The *Naivedyas*, after being dedicated to the deity in the night, should be made over to the *Brahmanas*. The penitent should bathe in water saturated with the composition known as the *Pancagavya* and live on the same substance on the day of observance of the vow.

पचगव्यजले स्नातस्तस्यैव प्राशनाच्छुचिः ॥13॥

अर्वाग्विसर्जनाद्द्रव्यं नैवेद्यं सर्वमुच्यते ।

विसर्जिते जगन्नाथे निर्माल्यं भवति क्षणात् ॥14॥

नमो नमस्तेऽच्युत मे क्षयोस्तु, पापस्य वृष्टिसमुपैति पुण्यम् ।

ऐश्वर्यवित्तादि सदाअक्षयं मे, क्षयं च मा संततिरयुपैतु ॥15॥

यथाअच्युतस्त्वं परतः परस्तात्, स ब्रह्मभूतः परतः परात्मन् ॥¹⁶⁴

An article offered to a god and kept behind his image, becomes a *Naivedya*, while flowers etc, become *Nirmalyas*, simultaneously with their offering. The *vrata* should be closed with the following prayer: "I make obeisance to you, O lord may my sins grow more and more attenuated and my pieties grow more and more, every day. O you god who know no waste, may my wealth, possessions and progeny suffer no decrease and become unnumbered and endless instead.

तथाऽच्युतं त्वं वुफरु वाञ्छित मे,

मया वृफतं पापहराप्रमेय ॥16॥

अच्युतानन्द गोविन्द प्रसीद यदभीप्सितम् ।

अक्षयं माममेयात्मन्वुफरुष्व पुरुषोत्तम ॥17॥

सप्तवर्षाणि सम्पूज्य भुक्तिमुक्तिमवाप्नुयात् ॥¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

¹⁶⁵Ibid.p. 498.

O Acyuta, as You are greater than the greatest of beings, as You are the Supreme Soul, absolve me of all impieties and may the wishes of my heart take fruit in this life. Be pleased, O you the wasteless (Acyuta) protector of the universe, grant me the fulfillment of my desires and make me wasteless as your own self, O you the immeasurable spiritual light, O you the best of beings." A man by worshipping the god as above indicated, for seven consecutive years, enjoys all the comforts of the world and becomes an emancipated Spirit after death.

अनन्तव्रतमाख्यास्ये नक्षत्राव्रतकेदर्शदम् ।।18 ।।

मार्गशीर्षे मृगशिरे ःशीर्षेद्ध गोमूत्राशी यजोरिम् ।

अनन्तं सर्वकामानामनन्तो भगवान्पफलम् ।।19 ।।

ददात्यनन्तं च पुनस्तदेवान्यत्रा जन्मनि ।

अनन्तपुण्योपचयं करोत्येतन्महाव्रतम् ।।20 ।।

यथाभिलषितप्राप्तिं करोत्यक्षयमेव च ।

पादादि पूज्यं नक्ते तु भुञ्जीयात्तैलवर्जितम् ।।21 ।।

घृतेनानन्तमुद्दिश्य होमो मासचतुष्टयम् ।

चैत्रादो शालिना होमः पयसा श्रावणादिषुद्ध ।।22 ।।

मान्धीताअभूद्युवनाश्वादनन्तव्रतकात्सुतः ।।23 ।।¹⁶⁶

Now I shall describe the process of performing the Ananta vrata, which is one of the greatest of the boon-conferring Naksatra (astral) vratas. The god Hari should be worshipped under the auspicious of the asterism Mrgasira in the month of Margasirsa, the penitent living on the urine or a cow on the day of its observance. The god Ananta (infinite) grants infinite merit and enjoyment in the next birth of the observer. Infinite merit is acquired by the observance of such a vow and infinite enjoyment follows in its wake which knows no waste or satiety and the heartfelt desires of the penitent are realised hundred-fold in his next existence. The Vрати should break his fast in the night after the worship and should not take anything containing oil, the homa being continuously performed for four months with libations of clarified butter. By taking nothing else than clarified butter on the day of its observance, a Vрати ascends the region of the Rudra manifestation of the god Siva after death. Likewise, the man who practices the Triratra vratas, (a vrata or a fast of three nights) each fortnight, by taking a single meal on each day of its observance, becomes the master of unbounded wealth. Similarly by practicing each month, the vrata as above indicated, a penitent goes to the region presided over by the god Ganapati, Thus by practicing the vrata in

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

honour of the god Janardana, a man is enabled to live in the same region with Visnu, in the company of the souls of all his friends and relations.

The penitent should first observe the vow (Triratra vrata) on the day of the ninth phase of the moon's increase in the month of Magha; and hundred times repeat the mantra, running as "Om obeisance to the god Vasudeva." Only a single meal should be taken on the eighth day of the moon's increase (on the day immediately preceding the day of observance), then a fast should be for the next three days. The god Visnu should be worshipped on the day of the twelfth phase of the moon's increase in the month of Kartika and the vrata should be duly practiced on the same day. The homa should be performed with libations of clarified butter, containing grains of Sali rice, while it should consist of clarified butter simply in a similar ceremony undertaken in the month of Sravana. By performing homa ceremonies as above indicated, Mandhata was able to perpetuate his memory as the venerable Yuvanasv

3.10. UNDERSTANDING OF FASTING IN EACH DAY OF A WEEK IN HINDUISM

दिवसव्रतानि

दिवसव्रतकं वक्ष्ये ह्यादौ धेनुव्रतं वदे ।

यश्चोभयमुखीं दद्यात्प्रभूतकनकान्वितम् ।।1।।

दिनं पयोव्रतस्तिष्ठेत्स याति परमं पदम् ।

त्रयहं पयोव्रतं वृफत्वा कान्चनं कल्पपादपम् ।

दत्त्वा ब्रह्मपदं याति कल्पवृक्षव्रतं स्मृतम् ।।2।।

दद्याद्विशत्पलादूर्ध्वं महीं वृफत्वा तु कान्चनीम् ।।3।।

दिनं पयोव्रतस्तिष्ठेद्द्रुद्रगः स्यादिव्रावती ।

पक्षे पक्षे त्रिरात्रां तु भक्तेनेकेन यः क्षपेत् ।।4।।

विपुलं धनमाप्नोति त्रिरात्राव्रतवृफदिनम् ।

मासे मासे त्रिरात्राशी एकभक्ती गणेशताम् ।।5।।

यस्त्रिरात्राव्रतं वुफर्यात्समुद्दिश्य जनार्दनम् ।

वुफलानां शतमादाय स याति भवनं हरेः ।।6।।

नवम्यां च सिते पक्षे नरो मार्गशिरस्यथ ।

प्रारभेत त्रिरात्राणां व्रतं तु विधिं वद्व्रती ।।7।।

ओं नमो वासुदेवाय सहस्रं वा शतं जपेत् ।

अष्टम्यामेकभक्ताशी दिनत्रायमुपावसेत् ।।8।।

द्वादश्यां पूजयेद्विष्णुं कार्तिके कारयेद्व्रतम् ।
 विप्रान्सम्भोज्य वस्त्राणि शयनान्यासनानि च ॥१९॥
 छत्रोपवीतपात्राणि ददत्सम्प्रार्थयेद्विजान् ।
 व्रतेऽस्मिन्दुष्करे चापि विकलं यदभून्मम ॥१०॥
 भवद्विस्तदनुज्ञातं परिपूर्णं भवत्विति ।
 भुक्तभोगो ब्रजेद्विष्णुं त्रिरात्राव्रतकव्रती ॥११॥¹⁶⁷

Now I shall describe the process of performing the Divasa vratas. First hear me discourse on the process of practicing a Dhenu vrata (a cow-giving vrata) which should be practiced by making the gift of a cow, whose mouth and tail had been covered over with plated gold. The penitent should drink clarified butter only on the day of its observance, whereby he would attain an elevated station in the next world. Similarly, by living' simply on clarified butter for three consecutive days and by making the gift of a golden Kalpa tree, a man attains the Supreme Brahma. By making the gift of a twenty-two Pala weights of earth encased in a golden casket, a man goes to the region of Rudra. Brahrnanas should be feasted and gifts of clothes, beddings, seats, umbrellas, Vessels and holy threads, should be made to them with the following prayer." May all that which has been made defective in this difficult vrata, through my ignorance or omission, be remedied and made up, through your gracious benediction." A man by practicing such a vrataascends the region of Visnu, after a long and prosperous career on earth.

कार्तिकव्रतकं वक्ष्ये भुक्तिमुक्तिप्रदायकम् ।
 दशम्यां पञ्चगव्याशी एकादश्यामुपोषितः ॥१२॥
 कार्तिकस्य सितेअभ्यर्च्य विष्णुं देवो विमानगः ।
 चैत्रो त्रिरात्रां नक्ताशी अजापन्चपदः सुखी ॥१३॥
 त्रिरात्रां पयसः पानमुपवासपरस्त्रयहमृद्ध ।
 पष्ठङ्गादि कार्तिके शुक्ले वृफच्छ्रोः माहेन्द्र उच्यते ॥१४॥
 पन्चरात्रां पयः पीत्वा दध्याहारो ह्यपोषितः ।
 एकादश्यां कार्तिके तु वृफच्छ्रोअयं भास्करोअर्थर्दः ॥१५॥
 यवागूं यावकं शाकं दधि क्षीरं घृतं जलम् ।
 पन्चम्यादि सिते पक्षे वृफच्छ्रः सान्तपनः स्मृतः ॥१६॥¹⁶⁸

Now I shall describe the process of practicing the Kartika vrata, which grants enjoyment of earthly pleasures and salvation after death. The Vрати should eat only the composition known as the Pancagavya, on the day of the tenth phase of the moon's increase

¹⁶⁷ Agni Mahapuarana, Ch.197, p.482.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. p.483.

in the month of Kartika, fast on the following day and worship the god Visnu, whereby he would go to the region presided over by that deity. By making gifts of five goats to a Brahmana and by breaking his fast in the night for three consecutive days" a man attains the highest felicity. In the vrata, known as the Krcchara Mahendra, the Vratī should drink milk only for the first three nights, fast on the next three and practice the vrata on the day of the sixth phase of the moon's increase' in the month of Kartika. Similarly in the form, known as the Krcchara Bhaskara, the penitent should live on curd on the day of the eleventh phase of the moon's increase in the month of Kartika and drink milk on the next five days, whereby he would acquire immense wealth. In the Santapana vrata, the diet of the penitent should consist of wheat, articles made of wheat, potherbs, curd, thickened milk, clarified butter and water, on the day of the fifth phase of the moon.

In Hinduism during fasting drinking milk, curd, butter and water and good gifts has offered to only Brahman. According to researcher point of view it is good to become healthy it is more Physical benefit then spiritual.

In Hinduism, each day of a week is dedicated to a particular god in the Hindu pantheon. Apart from the special Vratas and Upvaas, many Hindus also fast on a particular day in a week. Each day in a week has a specialty and there are numerous folklores associated with the fasting observed on the days of a week.

3.10.1. Sunday

Sunday is dedicated to Lord Surya (Sun God). Those who undertake “fast” (upvaas) on the day only take a single meal. Oil and salt is avoided. Red is the color of the day and red flowers are offered to Surya. Devotees are offered water to lord Surya as part of their worship.

3.10.2. Monday

Monday is dedicated to Lord Shiva. It is said that Lord Shiva is easily pleased. Therefore many people observe Upvaas on Monday. Those devotees observing “fast” only eat food once. People visit Lord Shiva shrines and conduct pujas, especially, Ardhanarishwara puja. The mantra ‘Om Namah Shivaya’ is chanted continuously. Siva devotees also read Shiva Purana. Unmarried women observe the Vrat to get good husbands. Others observe it for a happy and prosperous family life. Shivites see in Shiva unspeakable power and mystery. Devotees of Shiva also worship the divine energy (shakti), personified as the various female consorts of deities.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹www. Hindu Blog.com, on ‘Fasting’, June, 5’ 2013, at 10 am.

3.10.3. Tuesday

Tuesday is dedicated to Lord Ganesha, Durga, Goddess Kali and Lord Hanuman. Most devotees visit Devi and Hanuman shrines. Those people who “**fast**” avoid taking food containing salt at night. In North India most of the Hindu devotees do not touch nor eat egg on this day.

3.10.4. Wednesday

Wednesday is dedicated to planet Mercury and Lord Vithal, an incarnation of Krishna. Green color leaves, especially Tulsi leaves, are used in Pujas. The day is highly auspicious for starting new ventures and it is believed that those who observe the Vrat are bound to get blessed with fortunes. People also give alms to the poor and needy on this day.

3.10.5. Thursday

Thursday is dedicated to Lord Vishnu and his incarnations. Pujas are conducted using milk, ghee etc. Food is only eaten once and that too containing milk products. People read Srimad Bhagavad Purana on the occasion.

3.10.6. Friday

Friday is dedicated to Mother Goddess – Mahalakshmi, Santhosi Ma, Annapuraneshwari and Durga. Sweets are distributed on the day. Those devotees observing the Vrat make it a point to eat at night. Most Hindu acknowledge the feminine aspect of divinity under the generic names Devi (“the goddess” the feminine form of Deva), or “the mother” (Ma), or shakti (the feminine aspect of power).worshiper frequently specify further by identifying their own chosen deity with any of several other name-forms. Some such as Mahalakshmi, Santoshi Ma, Anapurnaraneshwari and Durga, are known large areas of India. Tradition has conferred divine status on even the motherland herself, as the goddess Bharat Mata, “Mother India”.

3.10.7. Saturday

Saturday is dedicated to alleviating the bad influence of Lord Shani. The Vrat on this day is mainly observed by those people who believe in Hindu astrology. Black is the color of the day and people visit Shani shrine or Navagraha shrines. Food is only consumed once on the day.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

It must be noted here that the deity worshipped on a particular day might vary from region to region and community to community. The result of all upvaas or **fast** depends on the person. It is good, if all the members in the family can undertake a **Vrata** together. Miracles do happen by observing a particular **Vrata** and the greatest miracle is Brahman realization. All rituals and observances are path towards understanding the Supreme Soul and this will automatically alleviate all sufferings.¹⁷¹

3.10.8. The Monthly Fast Vows;मासव्रतानि

मासव्रतकमाख्यास्ये भुक्तिमुक्तिप्रदायकम् ।

आषाढादिचतुर्मासमभ्यर्घे वर्जयेत्सुधीः ।।1।।

वैशाखे पुष्पलवणं त्यक्त्वा गोदो नृपो भवेत् ।

गोदो मासोपवासी च भीमव्रतकरो हरिः ।।2।।

आषाढादिचतुर्मासं प्रातःस्नायी च विष्णुगः ।

माघे मास्यथ चैत्रो वा गुडर्धेनुप्रदो भवेत् ।।3।।

गुडव्रतस्तृतीयायां गौरीशः स्यान्महाव्रती ।

मार्गशीर्षादिमासेषु नक्तवृषद्विष्णुलोकभाक् ।।4।।

एकभक्तव्रती तद्वद्द्वादशीव्रतकं पृथक् ।

पफलव्रती चतुर्मासं पफलं त्यक्त्वा प्रदापयेत् ।।5।।¹⁷²

Now I shall describe the process of practicing the Masa vratas (vows which should be observed in the different months of the year), which grant enjoyment in this life and salvation in the next. The wise and the intelligent should forego the use of oils and unguents during the four months, commencing from the month of Asadha. Similarly by foregoing the use of flowers and salt in the month of Vaisakha and making the gift of a cow to a Brahmana, a man acquires a sovereignty in this life. A man by observing a fast, extending over a period of month and making the gift of a cow to a Brahmana, should practice the vrata known as the Bhimavrata. By bathing every day in the morning during the month of Asadha, a man becomes merged in the essence of Visnu, the same result being obtained by making gifts of treacle and a cow in the months of Caitra and Vaisakha, The greatest of all observers of vows, the husband of the goddess Gauri, practiced the above said vrata of treacle, on the day of the third phase of the moon. The man who practices the Nakta vrata (Breaking one's fast in the night) in the month of Margasirsa, goes to the region of Visnu, The vratas known as the

¹⁷¹Ibid.

¹⁷²Agni Mahapurana, Ch. 198, p.487.

vrata of a single meal each day (Ekabhakta), the Dvadasi vrata and the Tila-vrata should be practiced for four consecutive months.

श्रावणादिचतुर्मासं व्रतैः सर्वं लभेद्व्रती ।
आषाढस्य सिते पक्ष एकादश्यामुपोषितः ।।6 ।।
चातुर्मास्यव्रतानां तु वुफर्वीत परिकल्पनम् ।
आषाढञ्च चाथ संरफान्तौ कर्कटस्य हरिं यजेत् ।।7 ।।
इदं व्रतं मया देव गृहीतं पुरतस्तव ।
निर्विघ्नां सिस्मायातु प्रसन्ने त्वयि केशव ।।8 ।।
गृहीतेअस्मिन्नते देव यद्यपूर्णे भ्रिये ह्यहम् ।
तन्मे भवतु सम्पूर्णं त्वत्प्रसादाज्जनार्दन ।।9 ।।
मांसादि त्यक्त्वा विप्रः स्यात्तैलत्यागी हरिं यजेत् ।
एकान्तरोपवासी च त्रिरात्री विष्णुलोकभाक् ।।10 ।।
चान्द्रायणी विष्णुलोकी मौनी स्यान्मुक्तिभाजनम् ।
प्राजापत्यव्रती स्वर्गी सयुक्तयावकभक्षकः ।।11 ।।
दुग्धाद्याहारवान्स्वर्गी पन्चगव्याम्बुभुक् तथा ।
शाकमूलपफलाहारी नरो विष्णुपुरीं व्रजेत् ।।12 ।।
मांसवर्जी यवाहारो रसवर्जी हरिं व्रजेत् ।¹⁷³

By practicing vratas during the four months commencing from the month of Sravana, a man is able to witness the realisation of all his heart-felt desires. The resolution of practicing the Caturmasya vratas spoken of before, should be first solemnly made, by fasting on the day of-the eleventh phase of the moon in the month of Asadha. The god Hari, manifest as the sun god, should be worshipped under the auspicious of the continuance of that luminary in the sign of cancer and by reciting the following prayer" I undertake this vow, O lord, in, your presence, may this come to a safe termination through your gracious pleasure, O Kesava, May this vow be deemed as complete even in the event of my dying before it reaches its goal." Thus a Brahmana should abstain from taking all animal food, forego the use of oils and unguents and worship the god, Hari for three days by observing a fast on each alternate day, whereby he would attain the region of Visnu, A man, by practicing the vow of silence (Mauni-vrata) and the one known as the Candrayana, goes to the region of Visnu and becomes an emancipated spirit in the end. Similarly, by practicing the vrata known as the Prajapatya, while living on a diet of powdered wheat and barley, a man ascends the heaven after death. Again by drinking milk simply or by living solely on the composition known as the Pancagavya or on roots and vegetables, a man goes to the region of Visnu after death.

¹⁷³Ibid.p.488.

Similarly the man who abstains from all meat, lives on a diet of barley or foregoes the use of all sweet articles, attains the god Hari.

कौमुदव्रतमाख्यास्ये आश्विने समुपोषितः ॥13॥

द्वादश्यां पूजयेद्विष्णुं प्रलिप्याब्जोत्पलादिभिः ।

घृतेन तिलतैलेन दीपनैवेद्यमर्पयेत् ॥14॥

ओं नमो वासुदेवाय मालत्या मालया यजेत् ।

धर्मकामार्थमोक्षाश्च प्राप्नुयात्कौमुदव्रती ॥15॥

सर्वं लभेद्धरिं प्रार्थ्य मासोपवासकव्रतीद्ध ॥16॥¹⁷⁴

Now I shall describe the process of performing the Kaumuda-vrata, which should be practiced in an empty stomach in the month of Asvina. The god Visnu should be worshipped in the vrata, occurring on the day of the twelfth phase of the moon's increase. Lotus and other water-flowers and Naivedyas illuminated by lamps of oil or clarified butter, should be offered to the god. The god Vasudeva should be worshipped with garlands of Malati flowers and by reciting the mantra running as "Om obeisance to Vasudeva." Thus by practicing a fast for a month in connection therewith, a man acquires piety, worldly prosperity, wealth and salvation, in short, everything he sets his mind upon.

3.10.9. Rtu-vrata (Season-vows) ;ऋतुव्रताद्ध

ऋतुव्रतान्यहं वक्ष्ये भुक्तिमुक्तिप्रदानि ते ।

इन्धनानि तु यो दद्याद्वर्षादि चतुरो ह्यतून् ॥1॥

घृतधेनुप्रदश्चान्ते ब्राह्मणोऽग्निव्रती भवेत् ।

वृफत्वा मौनं तु सन्ध्यायां मासान्ते घृतवुफम्भदः ॥2॥

तिलघण्टा वस्त्रादाता सुखी सारस्वतव्रती ।

पचामृतने स्नपनं वृफत्वाऽब्दं धेनुदो नृपः ॥3॥¹⁷⁵

Now I shall describe the process of practicing the Rtu-vratas, vratas peculiar to the different seasons of the year which grant enjoyment in this life and salvation in the next. By making gifts of faggots in each of the four seasons such as the Rains, etc. and by giving a cow and a quantity of clarified butter at its close, a Brahmana is said to practice the Agni-vrata. Similarly, the Sarasvati-vrata should be observed by practicing absolute silence for a month and by making gifts of bells, clothes, sesamum and pitchers, full of clarified butter, to the Brahmanas at its close, whereby the penitent would attain absolute felicity. Thus by

¹⁷⁴Ibid.

¹⁷⁵Ibid. ch. 199, P.484.

bathing for a year, in the composition known as the Pancamrita and by making the gift of a cow to a Brahmins at its close, a man becomes a king in his next existence.

एकादश्यां तु नक्ताशी चैत्रो भक्तं निवेदयेत् ।
हैमं विष्णोः पदं याति मासान्ते विष्णुसद्व्रती ।। 14 ।।
पायसाशी गोगुग्दः श्रीभागदेवीव्रती भवेत् ।
निवेद्य पितृदेवेभ्यो यो भुर्धैक्ते स भवेन्नृपः ।। 15 ।।¹⁷⁶

The devotee of the Visnu-vrata, should offer edibles to the God Visnu, on the day of the eleventh phase of the moon's increase in the month of Caitra and observe a fast on the day of its observance, whereby he would be able to sit at the golden feet of that deity. The man who eats porridge and makes the gift of a couple of cows to a Brahmins, is said to observe the Devi-vrata, the result of such an observance being the increase of wealth. The man who practices for a year, the vrata of eating his meals after dedicating them first to the souls of his departed manes, becomes a king.

वर्षव्रतानि चोक्तानि संव्रफान्तिव्रतकं वदे ।
संव्रफान्तौ स्वर्गलोकी स्याद्रात्रिजागरणान् ।। 16 ।।
अमावस्यां तु संव्रफान्तौ शिवाकर्मयजनात्तथा ।
उत्तरे त्वयने चेज्यः प्रातःस्नानेन केशवः ।
द्वात्रिंशत्पलमानेन सर्वपापैः प्रमुच्यते ।। 17 ।।
घृतक्षीरादिनास्नाप्य प्राप्नोति विषुवादिषु ।। 18 ।।¹⁷⁷

I have finished describing the process of practicing the Varsa-vratas, now I shall discourse on the ways of observing the Sankranti vratas (vratas to be practiced on the occasion of the sun's passing over to a new zodiacal sign.) The man who keeps a vigil in the night of a Sankranti, goes to heaven after death, a similar result being obtained by worshipping the God Siva and the sun-god, on the occasion of an Amavasya occurring on a Sankranti day. Again by washing the image of the god Kesava with jets of clarified butter on the day of the sun's first appearance on the Tropic of Cancer, the worshipper becomes absolved of all impieties a twenty-two Pala, weight of clarified butter being used in that divine ablution. A similar merit is acquired by performing the rite of ablution to the image of the god Kesava with jets of thickened milk and clarified butter, on the occasions of the sun's twice passing over the equator.

स्त्रीणामुमाव्रतं श्रीदं तृतीयास्वष्टमीषु च ।।
गौरी महेश्वरं चापि यजेत्सौभाग्यमाप्नुयात् ।। 19 ।।

¹⁷⁶Ibid.

¹⁷⁷Ibid.

उमामहेश्वरौ प्रार्च्य अवियोगादि चाआप्नुयात् ।

मूलव्रतकरी स्त्री च उमेशव्रतकारिणी ॥10॥

सूर्यभक्ता तु या नगरी ध्रुवं सा पुरुषो भवेत् ॥11॥¹⁷⁸

Now I shall describe the process of performing the Uma-vrata, which should be practiced only by female penitents, on days of the third or the eighth phase of the moon's increase. The vrata consists in worshipping Uma and Mahesvara, whereby a woman usually becomes lucky and is never subjected to feel the pangs of separation from her consort. The woman, who duly worships the sun-god, takes birth as a man in her next existence.

3.11. FASTING IN CULTIC HINDUISM

3.11.1. Fasting in Saivism

Saivism is a religion which holds Siva as the supreme Lord. It is said to be the oldest and pre-historic religion. Scholars wonder that the origin of Saivism surpasses our imagination. Its traces were found in the Mohenjadro-Harappa excavations: Sir John Marshall says; side-by-side with this Earth or mother Goddess, there appears at Mohenjadarо a male god, who is recognizable at once as a prototype of the historic. He further goes on the state that among the many revelations that Mohanjadarо and Harappa have had in store for us, none perhaps is more remarkable than this discovery that Saivism has a history going back to Chalcolithic age or perhaps even further still, and that it thus takes place as a most ancient living faith in the world. Saivism is commendable not because it is the oldest religion, but because it is still a living religious practiced by multitudes. Many devotees of the Sai are taking fasting and offering the fruits and sweets along with money in the offering box. Many do not know more about the Sai but simply offering the sweets etc. It is also one of the cults to the people because they must have to understand about true God and their Creator. They must know who is the Creator of the whole universe? Therefore it is a worship of gods and goddesses ignorantly. It may be idolatry or cult. The most important feature of the cult of Shiva is perhaps his sexual complexity.¹⁷⁹

3.11.2. Fasting in Vaishnavism

In some specific period of time like (Chaturmasy and Ekadashi fasting) it is said that one who fast on these days and properly doing spiritual practice on these days like associating with devotees (Sadhu – Sangha). Fasting is one spiritual relationship both

¹⁷⁸Ibid.

¹⁷⁹V.S. Lalrinawma, Major Faith Traditions of India, (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), p. 127.

between God and worshipper but the worshipper must sit near to God and truly worship Him. If he/she is only showing others of taking fasting it may be cult. Worshiper has to be purely dedicated to God. He must look unto Him, and please Him. If the worshiper is able to please God, then God may be pleased with him. Apart from true fasting and worship it may be a cult. Today in India Hindu devotees are only following each other, not following or seeker of truth. Seeker of truth may not be cultic worship. Therefore, **Bhakta** totally surrenders to God and Bhakti (devotion) is absolute love for Him. It is a supreme attachment to the Lord. Devotion gives the devotees much greater and more valuable knowledge of the Lord than any intellectual process of meditation or reflection. It depends upon devotee, that fasting is not only to avoid food but it is totally to commit ourselves to God through whole body, tongue, hand, eye, legs and mind in our devotions or God must be centered. If God is not centred in our devotion, it may totally be a cult.¹⁸⁰

3.11.3. Fasting as a Part of Sacraments (Samskaras) Griha-Sutras

The term samskara and sacrament come from the same root Kr. (to make + Samskara (a prefix indicating completion refining and finishing). Thus, they signify an action by which someone or something is raised to a special excellence and completion. In Hinduism, it means a rite by which a person is sanctified and thus qualified for performing the sacred actions (sacrifices and sacraments) of the Brahmanic community.¹⁸¹

There are many customs, rites and rituals connected with birth, marriage and death which, vary from region to region. Each religion prescribes a number of ceremonies or rites to be performed by its followers. The use of the ceremonies, speaking generally is to the people (1) to conquer and purify the mind and soul, (2) to please God (3) and to improve the atmosphere around us.

3.11.4. Samskaras:

The Samskaras cover the whole life of an individual. The Samskaras are performed and at various occasions of Hindu life from conception in the mother's womb to the cremations of the body at death. The Samskaras are in effect expressive and symbolic performances. They are also certain dramatic utterances and theological gestures. In order to make them intelligible symbols or unfolded and explained and suggestions are made more articulate. Many constituents of the samskaras were to be means of intercourse with in

¹⁸⁰R.De Smet and J. Neuner, *Religious Hinduism*, (Mumbai: St. Paul's Publication, 1996), p.308.

¹⁸¹Rajbali Panday, *Hindu Samskara* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Das Publishers), p.70.

influence upon spiritual beings that were believed to guide and interfere with the course human actions.¹⁸²

The Samskaras do not mean merely outward rites ordained by the scriptures. The Grihya Sutras indicate twelve to eighteen in number: they are as follows:

1. Garbhadhan (conception)
2. Pumsavana (engendering of male issue)
3. Simantonnayana (Parting the hair)
4. Jatakarmans (Nalal rites)
5. Namakarna (Naming)
6. Niskramana (First outing)
7. Annaprasana (First feeding with boiled rice.)
8. Cudakarana (Tonsure)
9. Karna-vedha (Piercing the ear lobes)
10. Vidyarambha (Learning)
11. Upnayana (Holy thread ceremony)
12. Vedarambha (First study of the Vedas)
13. Kesanta (Cutting the hair)
14. Samavartana (Graduation)
15. Vivah (Marriage)
16. Antyeshthi (Funeral)

We would like to highlight the above mentioned Samskaras in brief:

1. Garbhadhan (conception): The life of a person starts with conception. The very first sacrament therefore, is known as Garbhadhan which literally means placing the seed in the womb. According to Hinduism, procreation is not looked upon as a Biological Phenomenon but it should be seen in a social ethical prayer and **fasting** to their gods by young Indian women.
2. Pumsavana: After the conception is ascertained the child in the womb is consecrated by the Samskaras called Pumsavana. This ceremony takes place generally in the third month of pregnancy, when the moon is in a male constellation, particularly the tisyā nakshatra. It was taught proper treatment of the pregnant mother is

¹⁸² Ibid. p.80.

necessary. The child in the womb should be influenced and nourished. In this case some of older ladies of the family taking **fast and prayer** for the male issue.

3. Simantannayana: The third sacrament is called simantannayana in which the hairs of a pregnant woman are ceremoniously parted. The purpose of the sacrament is symbolic as well partial
4. Jatakramana: This Samskaras or birth ceremony is to be performed immediately after birth. The father breathes three times on the child and then draws in his breath. He smears the child's tongue with a mixture of butter or honey and curd from a golden vessel or spoon.
5. Namakarana: The name giving ceremony – Namakarana comes next. The Hindu very clearly realize the importance of naming person and elevated the act to the position of a religious sacrament. The child is named after a goat that is regarded as its protector or it is named after a saint whose blessings are sought for it.
6. Niskaramana: It is the name given to the taking of the child for the first time of the house. In the beginning the child is confined to the life in chamber and then to the house in which it is born.
7. Annaprasana: It is the first feeding of the child with the soled food of boiled rice. This ceremony is commanded during the six month of the child. On the day of feeding ceremony the sacramental food is prescribed out of white rice while uttering appropriate Vedic hymns.¹⁸³
8. Cudaakarna: This ceremony is the eight Samskaras of the Hindus which conducts to long life and beauty by cutting hair, nails and beard. According to Caraka, it gives strength vigour and purity. Generally, the hair is cut of and offered to a deity as a gift.
9. Karnavedha: It is a sacrament linked to the piercing of the ear, perform between the first and the fourth year of the child. The Piercing of the ear is a custom undoubtedly ornamental in its origin, but later on it was believed also to be useful from the point of health. This importance might have been a religious sanction.
10. Vidhyarambha: Learning. After the fifth year, child is sent to the Gurukula for the basic knowledge of Vedas, general mathematics and yoga studies.
11. Upanayana: It is holy thread ceremony of the child. All the parents who want to be send their children to the Gurus house for the education have to perform this holy thread

¹⁸³Amulya Mahopatra & Vijay Mahopatra, Hinduism, Analytical Study, (New Delhi: Mittal Publication, 1993, p.95.

ceremony. It is indicated in communal discipline. The Sudras were not allowed to have this thread and pursue education. The most striking feature of this rite lies in the belief that by its performance the initiative is given to a cultural and spiritual rebirth. It takes place during the seventh ninth and twelfth year of age. At this stage the preceptor performs the oblation and other appropriate formula in connection of the ceremony.¹⁸⁴

12. Vedarambha: It is the beginning of study. It is the stage when the mind of child has developed and become ready to receive education. At this time the first thing that is to be done is to teach the alphabet. An auspicious day is fixed to start the vidyarambha with the special ceremony in the presence of a Guru. This Samskaras is related to Upanayana. After the Upanayana the Vedic Study follows. Every student has to master his own branch of the Vedas as settled by his parents and teachers. In guru kula or teachers house the Vedic knowledge was important to the students. The Brahmachari must study the Vedas during this period.¹⁸⁵
13. Kesanta: The kesanta as the name suggest is a sacrament connected with the first saving of the beard at the age of 14 or 16. The Procedure of the sacrament is almost the same as that of the cudakarana.
14. Samavartana: It is the sacrament performed when student complete their study the students at this stage are consider to have crossed the ocean of learning and discipline. The ceremony take place just before the student enters his father's house after completing his studies. The Sataka, after taking his bath dressed in his new attire and in introduced to the learned people by his teacher as a worthy scholar.
15. Vivaha: After Samvaratana sacrament is performed the student is considered to be mature enough to get married. The Sacrament of marriage impresses upon a person that earthly life is not to be despised rather it should be accepted and elevated to the level of a spiritual experience. A priest conducts marriage ceremony before the oblation of fire-god (Agni) alongwith different rituals for 4 to 8 days.¹⁸⁶ During time of the marriage the father and mother and other family members took fasting to offer their daughter to bridegroom as kanya dan.
16. Antyesthi: Funeral: This is the last sacrament to perform in ones life in Hindu religion. The Sacraments are performed throughout life. Death is celebrated as the last sacrament. During this ceremony oblation are offered in to the sacrificial fire and Ganga

¹⁸⁴Ibid .p.96.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid .p. 97.

¹⁸⁶Panday, Hindu Samskara, p.106-107.

water and tulsi leaves in to the mouth of dying. A special oblong frame is prepared to take dead body to the place of cremation. Men the nearest relatives and friends as an act of honours to the dead carry the bier. After abhisheka, a piling of the pyre fire is set to the pyre with Vedic hymns. It is offering water after the body undergoes cremations. After the cremation of the body bones are collected and thrown in to the sacred river Ganga. From birth to death is a continuous series of incidents moving from one pivot to the desire the live, to enjoy to think and ultimately to retire.¹⁸⁷

3.11.5. Significance of the Samskaras

The significance of the samskaras is consisted in its main features. It should be performed when the moon was on a male constellation. This time was regarded as favourable for producing a male issue. They are performed for the removal of hostile influences. They were also performed to win the favour of the deities. Samskaras were also performed for material gain, cultural purpose and moral purpose for the development of personality and for the spiritual growth.

3.11.6. Dangers of Samskaras:

It has been helpful in many ways in developing human and God relationship but at the same time the use of ritualism and Samskaras can be dangerous for spiritual growth of human beings. The following are the dangers of Samskaras and ritualism:

1. It has a tendency to make religion mechanical when the same method is applied every day and the same mantra are read they are apt to lose the power they possess. But if a passage from the spiritual book is read with full understanding of the meaning of what we read, it may be helpful and spiritual growth. The ultimate object of ritualistic worship is the realization of God.
2. Samskaras as ritualism tends to make religion not only mechanical but also static, just as in the progressive language spelling should be able to change. Samskaras like grammatical forms are natural growth.
3. Continuous use of samskaras may lead to pharisaism against which all the great religious prophets have raised their indignant voices.

3.11.7. Fasting for God's Blessing and Longevity

¹⁸⁷Ibid. p.105.

Fasting releases God's power, blessing and longevity. The true **power of fasting** as it relates to prayer that Lord has given devotees to destroy the strongholds of evil and use in a great blessing and spiritual growth in the life of Bhakta. During the **fasting** much time should be spent on the Bhakti and meditation, and abstinence from food should be a constant reminder of the more important abstinence from selfish and carnal desires and also cultivate spiritual qualities, but many of them simply taking fasting without knowing because of their family and customs. The main **object of fasting** is to get blessing from their god. In popular Hinduism, women frequently **fast** and perform special devotional generation (puja) for procuring a boon, such as a child or a good husband, or for the welfare of their families. **Fasting** in Hinduism indicates the denial of the physical needs of the body for the sake of spiritual gains. Hindu believes, it is not easy to unceasingly pursue the path of spirituality in ones daily life. However, **fasting** is not a part of worship but a great instrument for self discipline too.¹⁸⁸ It is a training of mind and the body to endure and harden up against all hardships, to persevere under difficulties and not give up. According to Hindu philosophy food means gratification of the senses and to starve the senses is to elevate them to contemplation. **Fasting** and worship in Hinduism create spiritual environment during the **fasting**. If really he/she is totally surrendered to God in their worship and **fasting** no doubt at all God is source of all blessing and devotee must understand true **meaning of fasting** and worship and also he/she may know their creator. If a person who fear the Lord with all mind and soul and walk accordingly so there is no doubt God will bless them abundantly. The Hindu Bhakta believes more in ritual and traditions. All religions have their own different traditions which also bind together to others. But devotion demands true devotees' with pure heart and mind and God has to bless His devotee and grant him long life. Every good thing comes from God. **Fasting** and worship must be in pure heart and mind because it makes relationship between body and soul and also relation between God and devotees.

3.11.8. Fasting as Practiced by Men

Fasting in Hinduism indicates the denial of the physical needs of the body for the sake of spiritual gain. **Fasting** helps us to create an attainment with the absolute by establishing a harmonious relationship between the body and soul. This thought is imperative for the well being of a human being as it nourishes both his/her physical and spiritual demands.

¹⁸⁸Young, Encyclopedia of Women Vol.1, p.325.

Hindu believes it is not easy to unceasingly pursue the path of spirituality in one's daily life. We are surrounded by a lot of considerations, and worldly indulgences do not allow us to concentrate on spiritual attainment. Therefore, a worshiper must strive to impose restraints on himself/herself to get his mind focused and one form of restraint is **fasting**.¹⁸⁹

However, **fasting** is not only a part of worship, but a great instrument for self-discipline too. Everyone agrees that food is necessary for the physical body. However, it is not sufficient to merely ensure that food is nutritious. Even the most nutritious foods become detrimental to the health if the body cannot assimilate them. Just because you are able to eat food does not mean you can digest. The digestive process is very complex. Food has to be split up into so many components before it can be absorbed in to the body.

To digest the food men eat, men need fine digestive secretions in proper balance, as well as a specific group of enzymes. Besides this, men need the correct inner body temperature, which varies in different areas of the body. From the mouth to the rectum there are different zones. In the small intestines one needs a constant temperature for a long period of time. In the stomach men need a higher temperature for a maximum of three hours. If there is a higher temperature for longer than three or four hours, he will have hyperacidity and stomach ulcers. If men have a reduced temperature in the stomach and small intestine, then he will have indigestion, and if he has a higher temperature in the large intestines, he will have diarrhea, dysentery and colitis.¹⁹⁰

Whenever there is indigestion or some other disturbances, the inner temperature becomes very erratic and all the other systems of the body are disrupted sooner or later. Many degenerative processes and diseases develop in this way. This is why proper maintenance of the digestive process is necessary to preserve human physical health. This is achieved in two ways: firstly, by adopting proper dietary habits, and secondly by undertaking fasts from time-to-time. It is a fact that most of human diseases, whether they are physical or mental, are caused by overeating. Nobody dies on account of **fasting** but many people die on account of over eating. **Fasting** and feasting are two different things by overeating he/she many disturb their digestive system invite diseases, and create imbalance in the body. By **fasting**, he/she can create a balance in their digestive system and also in their nervous, circulatory and

¹⁸⁹Ibid.

¹⁹⁰Srivastava, *Fasting&Health*, p. 97.

coronary system. They have to understand what is **fasting** in relation to their physical and mental health and also for spiritual experiences.

Fasting is usually done to purify the physical body, but if the mind is very turbulent then he can also resort to fasting. When food is in the body, it affects the mind, when the body is not pure, the tranquility is disturbed. This is because in human existence body and mind are not separate, they interact upon each other.¹⁹¹

A body full of rubbish transfers the foul smell to the mind, a mind with evil thoughts transfers the evil influences in to the body. Men can never escape from this law, what affects the body affects the mind. Because the gross body is fed by food, the best way to purify it is the system of **fasting**. It is a way of rousing himself from sleep to gain a higher level of health and to catch a glimpse of the higher possibilities of life. When Mahatma Gandhi was experimenting on the three principles of satya (truth), ahimsa (non-violence) and brahmacharya (celibacy), one of the things he practiced was **fasting**. Once he fasted for a period of forty days when he was asked why he exposed his body to such a rigor at his advanced age. He replied, for self-purification. When the self is purified, lights shine. Then people begin to see things more clearly. Just as men clean their bowels with laxatives, the self also has to be purified. Then how to purify the self? Mahatma Gandhi found that along with other practices **fasting** was most powerful. Again he said about **fast** (vrat) are two types. Kamyā and Nityā. Kamyā is special demand and Nityā is only for devotion and love for taking spiritual inspiration. Vrat means work of bondage or work of truth, fruit from works of type. Today, in India and across the country women are more devoted than men. Women believe more rituals, customs, traditions and taking the **fasting**. In Hinduism, they have every day a new festivals, men are less than women in taking part of “**fasting**.” Men may not like it or may have their self interest. But women believe more in worship (puja) and taking **fasting**. **Fasting** and worship demands self renounce and totally make relationship with body and mind and relation between God and devotee.

Fasting and worship should not be in vain. It brings spiritual fruit in a life of Bhakta, devotion in absolute love for God, its supreme attachment to the Lord. Loving dedicated devotion, gives the devotees much greater and more valuable knowledge of the Lord than any intellectual process of meditation or reflection. In devotion, men should totally surrender to God during the time of Bhakti (devotion) then see spiritual growth in devotee's life. Today, men are more running after materialistic world to become soon a rich person, very few like to

¹⁹¹Ibid. p.99.

become a spiritually rich man. A human must have to be spiritually rich than material richness, both are needed as balanced in this world today.

3.11.9. Fasting as Practiced by Women

The women of this area believe that **fasting** to propitiate specific gods and goddesses assure that health and prosperity of one's family. It is highlighted here all fourteen of the festivals are celebrated with definite goals in mind. Jagannath, Gobardhan, and Badi Ekadasi for family happiness and prosperity. Sitala Astami, a word for smallpox, Nag Panchami, to prevent snake bites, Bhaiya Duj, for well-being of brothers,

Bahura Cauth, Harachath, and Avai Athai, for protection of sons, Baragadahi, Ciraiya Gaur and Karva Cauth, to protect husbands. Tij and Sakath is for prosperity and protection of sons and husbands. Except for the Jagannath and Badi Ekadasi festivals when both men and women **fast** and worship, all the rituals mentioned here are performed only by women some exclusively by married women. The festivals and **fasts** are arranged in the order in which these festivals occur in the Vikram Samvat (the Hindu calendar popular in the area of research). In this calendar the year begins with new moon and the month of Cait. Each lunar month is divided in to two fortnightly halves (paksh), each consisting of fifteen lunar days (tithis). The fortnight beginning with the night of the new moon (amavasya) is called the bright half (sukla paksha).¹⁹²

¹⁹²Laxmi, A Splendor of Worship, p. 17.

3.11.9.1. Fasting Based on Calendar

According to the numerical day bright or dark half of a particular month (e.g. Avai Athai occurs on the eighth day in the dark half of the month of Kartik). The name of the lunar months and their Gregorian equivalents are Cait (March – April) Baisakh (April-May), Jeth (May-June) Asadh (June – July), Savan (July – August), Bhadau (August-September) Kvar (September-October), Kartik (October-November), Agahan (November-December), Pus (December-January), Magh (January-February) Phalgun (February-March). Almost all the festivals require fasting followed by specific foods, thereby cleansing the body and then providing appropriate nourishment. Fasting ranges from Nirjala (total abstinence from eating and drinking) to specific food which may not or should be eaten. The festivals of Harachath, for example forbids eating Jotaann (plough – produced food) where as the Ekadasi Fasts prescribe eating of puris made of singhada or kutu flour, and boiled or fried potatoes. Purity and distinction in cooking ingredients is maintained while preparing the fasting foods. Besides the special food to be eaten by active participants in a fast, many festivals require elaborate preparations of festive food, which is enjoyed by non-fasting members of a family, especially the children.¹⁹³

3.11.9.2. Compulsion for Fasting

Nevertheless, ability to fast is held up as a goal for children to reach, for mother suggest to young children, “Ek dadh se upase rahav” (fast from one side of your mouth) to inculcate the concept that fasting is good and that they are capable of doing it. Women also claim that fasting helps them concentrate on the reason for worship and facilitates their communication with the deity; they thereby hope to win the deity’s favour and all the blessings of a happy life for themselves and other family members. Older girls are subjected to strong psychological pressure to fast and participate in certain rituals, so that they will get good husbands and be prepared for any fasting required at their in-laws houses. The joint family system makes it almost mandatory for daughter in-laws to fast in order to make a good impression by following examples of their mother-in-laws or sister-in-laws. Thus, if one woman in a household observes a fast, the other women also almost invariably fast. Hindu fast and festival are so numerous, so complex and so easily variable in practice with household that no claim can be made about covering all the peculiarities. The basic order of

¹⁹³Laxmi, Splendor of Worship, ,p. 9.

events is that women fast during the day, while preparing any festival foods or paintings required worship the deity for the festival at the appointed time and in the manner prescribed for that festival tell the stories associated with it and then ¹⁹⁴break their fast.¹⁹⁵ Whatever status or blessings a woman receives are attributed to her hard work, selflessness and faithful performance of ritual fast.

3.11.9.3. Benefits of Fasting

According to famous Hindu author and Professor Ram Raj of Sri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha has explained the merits of Hindu fasting and Vrtas. He describes that by fasting one can achieve physical, inner and emotional control. By taking fasting the following benefits he comments:

Firstly, fasting brings purification of mind. In order to do good things one needs good mind. Fasting removes confusion and brings stability of thoughts and mind.

Secondly, fasting causes proper digestive system in an individual. Many diseases are caused by mal functioning of the digestive system. However, fasting controls digestive and imparts proper health and hygiene to people.

Thirdly, fasting enables people to lead a perfect religious life and activity. It prompts them to be godly and righteous in their social and religious life.

Forthly, fasting motivates people for high moral and philosophical life style because proper reflection on the realities of life. People who take fasting uphold values of life and lead a selfless life style.

Fifthly, fasting provides people a quality social life and relationship in the society. It enables them to be sociable people and to build a better a society. They respect others and consider their property and wealth as soil of the earth. Moreover, they exempt themselves from the evils thoughts and patterns of others.

Lastly, according to him, human life is meant for four things: religion, wealth, sex and moksha. However, religion, sex and wealth are attaining in this life whereas mokshacan be achieved by fasting and Vrtas after the death.

3.11.9.4. Abuse of Fasting

¹⁹⁴Ramraj Upadhyaya, Professor, Interview on 3/3/2015 at SLBSRS Vidyapeeth, New Delhi.

¹⁹⁵Srivastava, Fasting and Health, p. 105.

In Hinduism during the time of fast, some of those who fast, take food in the night rather than take only one meal, but consume more than being unusual diet. Such funny taboos cannot be considered as true fasting. On other occasions focus is purely physical. People might only think of fasting, for example, when they have a problem of indigestion or when one wants to lose weight but it is not something to be done on special religious days. There seems to be no spiritual motivation in fasting.

3.12. FASTING ACCORDING TO THE AYURVEDA

While discussing the medical impact of fasting it is necessary to look into the medical stream of Ayurveda which is a popular Indian system of medicine invented by the rishis of ancient times. Experts believe that this stream of medical science has both natural and medical healing processes without any after and side effects. It is worthy to note down that even in the most advanced allopathic medical treatments, more people are relieving on Ayurveda medicines.

“In Ayurveda, there is use of plants, leaves and herbs which are medicinal in nature and character and are very helpful in maintaining good health and a proper appetite. Plants like; tulsi, which is very rich providing good health taking care of stomach problems, etc.”¹⁹⁶

The prime concern of Ayurveda is to ensure longevity by maintaining and promoting positive health. According to Ayurveda, health depends on the balanced state of all the bodily elements, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Whenever there is an imbalance due to an abnormal increase or decrease of those constituents. As these essential elements exist in nature in their natural state. Ayurveda aims at correcting this imbalance through natural substances only. Since the action is co-relational Ayurveda provides a safe natural way of setting right any imbalance of bodily elements.

Ayurveda is one of the oldest living medical treatments which has managed to preserve its holistic character and treat the human body as a whole complex. Natural medicines are used for the treatment and health is restored by the use of diet, medicinal plants and the natural products thus medical science plays an important part in providing an invigorating

¹⁹⁶ Dr. Ashok Majmudar, Home Remedies (Delhi: Amar Granth Publication, 2002), p. 8-9.

and fulfilled life through health education and yoga practices. Ayurveda is a knowledge which removes disharmony in the physical body and human mind.¹⁹⁷

Moreover, Yoga is always closely associated with the Ayurveda, both have strong cultural impact in its heritage in India for the maintenance of good health, having no side effects. It is very useful for the management of common ailments and chronic disorders and diseases.

“Ayurveda recognizes that all existing phenomenon having an influence on human make-up; e.g, Physical, mental and emotional, love, hate eating, drinking, fasting, drugs exercise, and massage. Pleasant or unpleasant experiences or situations; positive or negative criticism; faith in God or lack of it, natural or evil thoughts etc.”¹⁹⁸

Ayurveda describes three types of treatment; 1. Daivayapasraya, 2. Yuktivyapasraya and 3. stvaavajya. The first therapy Daivaya pasraya is meant for the disease for which the causes are unknown, which is supposed to be due to the sins committed in the previous birth. In such diseases which are born-powerful or strong from the origin. Daivayapasraya therapy is used. It includes; ‘homa’, havan, ‘bali’ (sacrifice) ‘archan’ (mantra) ‘mani’, ‘vrata’ upvas or fasting etc. Satvaavajya is useful mostly for mental ailments. It includes Dhyaana, Japa, Shanti, ‘yama’, niyama ‘yoga’ pranayama etc.

It says that unhealthy food and living and vagaries of seasons cause some disease called ‘dosh bala’ praravrut, or due to our fault, of dosh.

Yuktavyapasraya therapy is meant for them, the therapies which are in practice now have developed this type only. It includes restricted diet and living, medicines, etc. This restricted or helpful diet and living is called pareji in Gujrati and pathya in Ayurveda. This therapy consists of two parts. ‘Santarpana and apatarpana’.

Santarpana is for the person who is weak frail infirm and debilitated. One who is obese fatty, hefty, strong, over-size, over-fed has to be treated with apatarpana.

Santarpana treatment means strengthening the elements additive treatment. Apatarpana treatment means reducing the elements, curing dysentery, cleansing treatment.

Ten types of this apatarpana treatment have been mentioned as stated below.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

1. Vomiting
2. Purge
3. Nasal drops
4. Enema, apart from these
5. Restriction on drinking water
6. Use of air or wind
7. Sun-bath
8. Digestive Medicines
9. Fasting
10. Exercise

These are ten types of Langhan which form apatarpana therapy. Langhan has been explained whatever helps reduction in the body is called Langhan.

Substances helping reduction are supposed to be light not severe, expensive or spreading, rough minute, even smooth or slippery and hard in their qualities.

Who should be treated with Langhan or reduction? Ayurveda states: Those who have more Phelgm, those who are obese, those who have blood problem, or gas troubles, those who have large size, heavy or fatty body and who are diseased by strong, should be treated with Langhan.

If the Langhan or reduction is overdone, these symptoms are seen:

1. Pain in the joints.
2. light pain all over the body
3. cough
4. dry mouth
5. loss of appetite
6. dislike for food
7. excessive thirst
8. hearing loss
9. defective vision
10. illusion
11. Excessive bile
12. Digestion system

13. Gas troubles
14. Momentary dazzles
15. Pain in the heart
16. Loss of fire, energy, warmth and at last
17. Destruction of the body.

Initially symptoms like hiccoughs, breathing trouble or yawning, etc. are seen.¹⁹⁹ For this very reason, Ayurveda has very clearly stated that Langhan should be prescribed only after proper diagnosis and in proportion to the drawbacks or weakness and the physical ability of the patient.

3.12.1 Fasting in Naturopathy

According to Naturopathy, the root cause of most of the diseases is accumulation of toxic matter in the digestive system. Fasting is considered as one of the most important methods of nature care. In naturopathy, fasting is practiced to enable nature to perform its cleansing process in the body without any hindrance, and without, any additional load of food to digest. The digestive organs are given a rest to enable them to regain their health and work efficiently. As per naturopathy, initially one should fast for a limited period. One should break the fast with juice, vegetable juice, soups, and fruits. But the best and safest way of fasting is the time juice fasting. Before fasting, the bowel should be completely empty. In naturopathy, rest is advised during fasting.²⁰⁰

Fasting undoubtedly, is one of the most important and incidentally the cheapest of all natural remedies. It is the quickest, simplest and most efficient method of relieving the body of overloaded food and preventing it from poisoning the system. It is surprising to know that only a small quantity of food is actually required to keep the human system in good fasting in one of the most effective and natural treatments covering a wide range of disorders.

Fasting is natural curative agent. It can restore health where everything else has failed. It give natural chance to clean the system. Fasting means total abstinence from all

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Swami Siwanand, Naturopathy in Life and Health, March- 2002, 11.

food, both liquid and solid. Therefore taking of fruit juice and coffee goes against fasting. Water is not food, therefore it does not stimulate the appetite. During fasting drink plenty of water. This will drive away weakness.

Fasting helps to excrete accumulated poisons toxins and waste materials. Dead cells are removed and new cell formation is sped up.

Fasting provides rest to the different organs of the body, especially the digestive and assimilative ones.

“Fasting is good in treating of disorders like indigestion, gas formation, obesity, asthma, high blood pressure and other digestive disorders”, according to Jagadguru Kripalu Yoga and natureopathy Hospital – Odisha.²⁰¹ Naturopathy fasting is powerful treatment which heals our body to have physiological rest, helping to repair, strengthen and heal the damaged organs of human body.

3.12.2. Rules and Regulation of Fasting in Naturopathy

- 1 Patients positive mental and emotional attitude is necessary
- 2 Complete rest-physical, mental and sensory is essential. All activities should be reduced to minimum.
- 3 Sufficient amount of clean filtered water should be taken during fast.
- 4 Sunbath is advisable.
- 5 Patient is advised to take enema during fast
- 6 Crisis like headache, weakness, nausea should be handled with care.
- 7 Long fasting should be done under expert’s guidance.
- 8 Fasting is a natural instinct. Let the body intelligence guide for complete rest and cleansing of physical system.

Fasting is a royal road to internal purity. Eat with intelligence and enjoy the glorious health with fasting therapy.

3.12.3. Use of Water therapy

Fasting is an exceptionally ancient and powerful approach to heal many common disease conditions. It allowed body to rest, detoxify and to heal. During fasting the body moves into the same kind of detoxification cycle that it normally enters during sleep. It uses

²⁰¹ Ibid. n

its energy during fast not for digesting food but for cleansing the body of accumulated toxins and healing any parts of it that are ill. As a fast progresses the body consumes everything that it can that is not essential to body functioning. This includes bacteria, virus, fibroid, tumors, waste products in the blood, any build up around the joints and stored fats.

Water fasting has been found to help a number of disease conditions, often permanently. There have been a number of intriguing clinical trials and studies numbers disease condition with fasting. Fasting is exceptionally beneficial in chronic cardio vascular disease and heart failure, reducing triglycerides, atheroma, and total cholesterol.

Water fasting has been found effective in the treatment of type II diabetes, often reserving the condition permanently.

Poor immune function improve during fasting. Water fasting offers the quickest detox and strongest therapeutic effect. It is also the most challenging fast to perform in the first few days.

A true water fast maintain a zero caloric intake. This means water only added to it. Some call water fasting the only true fast and believe that any food allowed into the bodily system prevents the complete resting state desired compromising the level of cleansing and detox attained.

Conclusion

In this research the practice of vrat and fasting, with all its diverse forms of practices by both women and men in special as well as normal occasions, it is clear that Hinduism upholds the need of fasting for special favour from God or get some material prospects to the devotees. Although, it is practiced by different sections of people in the society, it is observed that many are not be observing fasting with proper understanding of its worth and values. However, it is worthy to note that the practice of fasting is not only religiously approved but scientifically also for the benefit of each person. Hinduism promotes fasting with right purpose for its followers and we should see what the Christian perspective of fasting which we are going to study in the following chapter.