

Vamana Purana On Food, Shelter And Clothing

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Abstract

Food, clothing and shelter are considered as the main three essentials in our life. Without food we cannot live in this world. Food and nutrients are needed for basic functioning of body. Shelter is required to protect oneself from outer harsh environment. Clothing is also necessary for everybody. It protects one's body from hot, cold, dust etc. It is a symbol of making human being a social being.

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Introduction

It is well known that food, shelter and clothing are the minimal basic needs of mankind. Puranas like other writings in Sanskrit make mention about all the three. The present paper is a brief note on food, shelter and clothing dealt with in Vamana Purana.

Food

In the Vamana Purana, one can notice the concern about feeding the hungry. The Purana is particular about sharing food with those who are desirous of or rather demand it. It also prescribes the hell called Sleshmabhojana for those who consume food without giving a part of it to one who is desirous of it and demands it.

In the 12th chapter of Vamana Purana there is a conversation between Sukesin and the Rishis. Sukesin asks the Rishis about the reason why people fall into hells. The Rishis give him a detailed reply in which a series of similes have been used with a view to distinguish between the best and the worst. Two Slokas refer to certain eatables. Among fruits mango is mentioned as the best to be consumed. Among roots kanda is the best. Among the white consumables milk is the best.

It is interesting to note that the Purana seriously considers the health aspect of human life too. Constipation has been described as the basic cause of all diseases. The importance of diet in maintaining health also has been emphasised. Kaakamachi is mentioned as the best among vegetables. Salt is described as the best among essences.

It may be noted that salt is pivotal in all food preparations. The only specialty about it is that it should not be consumed too much or too little in quantity. When used in exactly sufficient quantity salt is the best Vyanjaka.

The 14th chapter of Vamana Purana prescribes the posture of a person who is to eat food. One should not eat taking seat facing the south or west direction. From this, it can be presumed that one should sit facing the north or east direction while eating.

A detailed account of what is to be eaten and what is not, is also given in the 14th chapter. The food items cooked in oil, ghee etc. can be kept for comparatively longer period and consumed. Dried rice items and milk products also can be consumed. Pulses are also consumable items. Rabbit, porcupine, alligator, hedgehog, fish and tortoise are also described by Manu as eatables.

Food polluted by the presence of hair, insects and flies and also that affected by saliva of a cow should not be consumed as Such. The same can be purified by sprinkling clay, water, ash or alkali on them and then consumed. One should not take food in the residence of sutikas, shanda, marjara, akhu, svaana, kukkuda, patita, apavidhha, nagna, chandala etc. Sutika is a Brahmin lady who has illicit relation with another Brahmin than her husband. Shanda is a Brahmin who has violated the sacrificial tradition. Marjara is a person who performs japa, Tapas etc, but who does not do anything good for others. Aakhu is a person who does not, enjoy his life, give donation or perform havana, even if he is wealthy. Kukkuda is a man who does modest partiality in assembly. Patita is a person who adopts religious conversion. Apavidhha is a person who has no concern for Gods, pitrs and preceptors and also one who has killed a cow, Brahmana or woman. Nagna is person who ignores the resolutions of Vedas and scriptures. Chandala is a person who does not give anything to his dependents.

There is an anecdote in the 49th chapter of Vamana Purana which deals with the origin of food discrimination. Lord Brahma created the living beings and prescribed their food varieties. Immovables were prescribed as food for immovables. Among the movables the weak ones were prescribed as food for the strong ones.

Another anecdote in the 79th chapter points to the usual food of people of those days. There lived a merchant Sudharman. Once, while travelling from Sakala of Madradesa to Surastra he was attacked by decoits in the desert. Everything he was carrying was lost. He wandered in the desert like a mad man. Finally, he befriended with a host of pretas and they offered him food. The food given to him was a pot full of rice with curd.

In the same anecdote there is another mention about the peculiarities of some of the food items. Sauvira, oil-cake of sesamum, groats of barley and certain vegetables are mentioned as not good for health.

The 84th chapter of Vamana Purana deals with the story of Prahlada wherein a purely austere vegetarian diet is mentioned. Prahlada lived for three months on a diet of roots, fruits and water. The 89th chapter of Vamana Purana makes mention about two particular types of Brahmins who have their own peculiar diet. One type is of those who live on sunlight diet. The other type is of those who live on uncooked natural food. They consumed nuts, roots etc. crushed with stone. Both the types of Brahmins are Munis.

The 91th chapter presents an interesting story of Kosakara and two sons named Nisakara and Divakara. Kosakara nourished Nisakara with lot of curd and milk. It is said that the milk was that of brown cow having a calf. It seems that such milk is peculiar for children's growth. It is also stated that milk was added with sugarcane juice for consumption.

In the same chapter, Nisakara's life well fed with gooseberry is described. Kosakara then threw the child Nisakara into a well without water. Nisakara had no injuries, but found it difficult to live without food. There was a gooseberry tree growing in the well and it had plenty of fruits. It is said that Nisakara lived for ten years in the well. He consumed only gooseberry fruits. One has to reach the conclusion that by eating gooseberry alone, one can live for years. It may be noted that gooseberry is the main ingredient of chyavanaprasa the well-known ayurvedic tonic. The same chapter presents information regarding diet of a parrot. A parrot is fed with rice, water and pomegranate fruit.

Shelter

Shelter is another basic need of mankind. Puranas incorporate in themselves several details of shelter. Vamana Purana modestly deals with the problem of shelter. The very first chapter of Vamana Purana makes mention about shelter.

Pulastya narrates to Narada the story of Siva and Parvatí. Long long ago goddess Parvati said to Siva on the fine coming of the summer season about shelter. She was anxious about a proper dwelling place for her half-heart Siva and herself in the summer season when hot winds and the scorching sun will endanger them. It is well known that Siva has no proper shelter other than the forests where he used to wander. On reading the Siva-Parvati conversation one is reminded of the desire of the female partner of a newly wedded couple. In fact every woman seeks from her husband fulfillment of the three basic needs namely food, shelter and clothing and endeavors to get an assurance to that effect from her man. Parvati however was not lucky enough to obtain a good shelter from her beloved Siva. Both of them spent the summer under the sheds of the trees in the forest.

It is quite natural on the part of the wife to pester her husband get her demand fulfill. The rainy season approached and Parvati again put the question of shelter to her beloved Siva. How can she overcome that rainy season when clouds are thundering, winds are blowing heavily, lightnings are flashing and peacocks are making keka-sound. Parvati therefore persuaded Siva to construct a house on the high and massive mountain Mandara. But Siva was not ready to yield to the argument and argument and counter argument between Párvati and Siva continue in the Vamana Purana.

There is a good description of the assembly of Brahma in the twenty fourth chapter of the Vamana Purana. In fact, the Gods dwell in celestial shelters. The Devas along with Kasyapa proceeded to the heaven of Brahma, which was mighty and full of vigour. , Automatic cars moved everywhere. In a few minutes, they reached the assembly of Brahma, which was extensive and excellent. Humming of bees was to be heard everywhere. Brahma was seated in a conspicuous throne surrounded by Brahmanas, Rishis, Prajapatis and others.

In the fifty fourth chapter there is mention about the construction of a house for Lord Siva on the Mandara mountain. Viswakarman is the sculptor of the entire universe. Lord Siva requested to him to construct a house. Viswakarman constructed a house as long as sixty-four Yojana, marked with the sign of Svastika, gold work everywhere. The gates of the house were built with ivory and same were decorated with Pearl studs. The stairs were made of Sphatika studded with Vaiduryamani. The house had seven spacious rooms with all facilities.

Clothing

The first reference to clothing in Vamana Purana is in the first chapter. But it is not a reference to the clothing of a human being. Lord Siva's clothing is the subject matter. Parvati requests to Lord Siva to construct a house for dwelling without any disturbance caused by seasons. Lord Siva replies that he has no wealth to build a house. He is so poor that he cannot buy a set of neat clothes. His dress is well-known, which is nothing other than the skin of a tiger.

Lord Siva is also referred to as Digambara, which means one whose cloths are the directions. The word meaning of Digambara is naked person. Actually, Siva is fully naked owing to the minimum use of tiger skin and that too around his loin only. In the seventh chapter of Vamana Purana, there is a reference about the clothing of munis. The Purana says that the munis wore deer skin.

People of all ages has been fond of stylistic clothing. Predominance of style is often at the risk of health. Vamana Purana seems to be conscious of this fact. In the twelfth chapter of the Purana, there is mention about the importance of cotton clothing. Cotton clothing is described as the best among all kinds of clothing.

The present system of donating clothes to Brahmins as part of auspicious ceremonies seems to have existed during the period of Purana. In the sixteenth chapter of the Purana, there is a prescription that a Brahmin should be presented with two pieces of cloth as part of worshipping Siva.

Women of those days had fascination for colourful dress. Mena's daughter Ragini and Kutila have been described as crazy of red and white clothes respectively. Cloth of tree bark was considered to be auspicious and that of Cinamsuka was extravagant. White dress also was considered fit to be worn during ceremonies. The fifty third chapter of Vamana Purana mentions Indra's wearing of white dress during Parvati's marriage with Siva.

Conclusion

The basis of existence of any society is its economic structure. Basic human needs play key roles in all levels of existence of the society. Food is of prime importance among the basic needs. The other needs are shelter, clothing etc. All aspects of human life pertaining to the basic needs together constitute the economic aspect. Even today everything we do make our life style better is for the three basic requirements – Food, Shelter and Clothing.

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