

Rishi Panchami

(Excerpts from Satsang of Pujya Bapuji)

[This festival is meant for all those who are ignorant of their True Self](#)

India is the land of Rishis and Munis. The country is so profoundly influenced by the enlightening knowledge of the Rishis and their teachings that even today people follow their precepts and succeed in leading a life of piety, virtue and righteousness and finally attain emancipation as well. There have been so many Rishis who have spent their entire lives in the service and welfare of humanity. We adore and worship those Rishis. Of those Rishis, Vasishtha, Vishwamitra, Jamdagni, Bharadwaj, Atri, Gautam and Kashyap are represented by the constellation of Ursa Major, the Great Bear, so that they are forever imprinted in our memory.

Rishis are also called 'Mantradrashtha'. Rishis do not consider themselves to be doers. They observe the world in a detached manner, remaining established in the state of a dispassionate witness. Similarly, they espouse the esoteric meaning and impact of the mantras in a completely detached manner. As such, Rishis are known to be 'Mantradrashtha'.

On the occasion of Rishi Panchami, such Mantradrashtha Rishis are worshipped. Women in particular observe a fast on this day.

There is no distinction between men and women in the eyes of the Rishis. Everything to them is but the manifestation of their own infinite Self. This festival is meant for all those who are ignorant of their own Self. With a heart full of gratitude we salute and pay obeisance to the Rishis who have endeavoured to remove the ignorance due to which jiva gets entangled in cycles of birth and death, going through various species and suffering extensively in the process.

However, the real worship of the Rishis and Munis lies in complying with their commandments. And their expectation is:

'Worship God by being god.' Rishis are established in the state of being an eternal witness and are seers with no attachments at all. They are not distracted in the least from this state by the vagaries of pleasure or pain, loss or gain, respect or disrespect or even auspicious and inauspicious events of the world. To establish oneself in that state of an eternal witness through unrelenting practice is, in essence, their true worship. They have toiled hard to free the world from attachments. They have introduced specific ceremonies, social customs, festivals and traditions so that we may see life as it is and realize the Supreme Self, setting aside the obstructions of our age old notions. As a mark of our gratitude, we should revere the Rishis in order to absolve ourselves from the debt owed to them.

THE STORY IN RELATION TO THE RISHI PANCHAMI FAST

The story related to the Rishi Panchami fast is described in 'Hemadri Khanda' of the 'Bhavishyottar Purana'.

Once there was a Brahmin named Sumitra. His wife's name was Jayashri. In general, they led their life properly, but they failed to observe some of the important canons of healthy living, such as self-restraint and circumspection.

Brahmin's wife Jayashri did not pay heed to the rules prescribed to be followed during menstrual cycles. She continued to cook food on those days and the Brahmin Sumitra used to take the food prepared by her. With the passage of time, the Brahmin's intellect lost its brilliance and sharpness, and his capabilities also got blunted. Though he was blessed with a human life, he made no attempts to elevate himself to the higher stages of divinity. He frittered away his precious human life by leading an animalistic life and was consequently condemned to lower species after his death.

It has been even scientifically proved that the female body emits negative vibrations (aura) during menstruation. Her mind and life force are concentrated in the lower centres. Therefore, it is essential for the sake of our own advancement to follow the rules and regulations prescribed by the scriptures during menstrual periods. For example, a boy who does not study properly while in school and also avoids doing his homework cannot be successful and will lag behind even though he may be intelligent and belong to a progressive family. Similarly, we are attending this school of life in this human form; and without knowing the nuances of righteousness, action and enlightenment, our intellect cannot attain the heightened state required for Self-realization. Thus we fail to appreciate the real worth of our human birth. If a son cannot manage the business and wealth handed over to him by his father, he ends up becoming insolvent and has to find a job to make both ends meet. Similarly, we, the sons of God, who is the embodiment of Truth, Consciousness and Bliss, have been given a human birth, and if we do not progress we will be condemned to take lower births. This is but the law of nature.

That Brahmin Sumitra and his wife Jayashri were born as a bullock and a bitch respectively in the next birth, in their same house. The name of Brahmin Sumitra's son was Sumati and his wife's name was Chandrawali.

Many people have a "debtor-creditor" relationship or feelings towards one another. The law of Karma operates in such a way that even while born in different species such souls happen to live together. Jayashri had not observed the prescribed rules during her menstrual cycles; therefore she had committed grave sins and was condemned to become a bitch. Her husband had unwittingly committed the mistake of not being careful enough; and so he landed up to be an ox.

As a Brahmin, it was his duty to be circumspect and maintain purity within the house as ordained by the scriptures. When he failed in that duty, he also had to suffer the consequences.

One day it so happened that Chandrawali's former mother-in-law, the bitch, entered the kitchen. The daughter-in-law, Chandrawali who was working in the kitchen, beat the bitch with a stick.

All these events are written in the Puranas. As such this event would have occurred even earlier than the Puranic period which is dated thousands of years back. Therefore, it is quite probable that humans and animals could comprehend each other's language in those days. The daughter-in-law Chandrawali did not know that the bitch whom she hit was none other than her own mother-in-law. The former husband and wife in the form of the ox and the bitch were having their meals outside their son's house. They started talking amongst themselves. The bitch said, "She beat me mercilessly. What sins have I committed that the wife of my own son, whom we brought up so carefully, is now beating me?"

The ox said, "Sure enough, we must have committed some sins."

The daughter-in-law overheard this conversation. She told her husband, the son of the Brahmin Sumitra, about this. He was deeply moved, 'Oh! These are my parents and in such a miserable and sorry state! I must do something for their emancipation.'

During those days, a renowned Muni, Sarvatapa, lived in that locality. He was impartial and was established in the Supreme bliss of his True Self. The guidance of such great Saints is highly beneficial for all beings. One, who is beyond attachment and hatred and is established in the Supreme Being, is the most elevated of all. Anyone who follows their instructions, quickly attains an elevated state. What they say may not be appealing at that instant, but should still be accepted whole-heartedly. It brings immense good to one, without fail.

'Shri Guru Gita' says,

'Guru's instructions should never be disobeyed whether right or wrong. One should carry out Gurudev's commandments day in and day out and live like a slave in his proximity.'

For example, when a child goes to school, the teacher tells him that the earth is round. Irrespective of whether it appeals to his intellect or not, he accepts it. Later on he comprehends the concept. Similarly, you should accept this precept of Enlightened Gurus, the liberated Saints, that You are not this physical body but Brahman. Subsequently, if you steadfastly imbibe this truth, you will come to terms with it and realize Brahman.

The Brahmin's son went to Sarvatapa Muni, and related the entire story stating,

"My parents live in my own courtyard as an ox and a bitch. It is the bounden duty of a son to make efforts for his parents' emancipation. Kindly prescribe the ways and means for the same."

Sarvatapa Muni delved for a while into his own Self, the source of all knowledge throughout the universe, and said,

"Your mother transgressed the rules to be followed during menstruation. As a result of this sin she has taken birth as a bitch. Your father unwittingly and foolishly acquiesced in her sin; that is why he is in the body of an ox. He had got the human birth endowed with intellectual faculties, but failing to utilize that invaluable privilege he acted foolishly and ended up as an ox."

Sarvatapa Muni then prescribed a course of action for their emancipation, "These animal bodies do not possess the intellect to comprehend the concept of fasting. You may starve the ox by denying it fodder, and the bitch by refusing to give it bread; but they will hardly comprehend that they are observing a fast. Starving under compulsion yields no virtue. A fast becomes virtuous only when it is observed willingly. Therefore you should yourself observe a fast in lieu of them. On the day of Rishi Panchami observe the fast while remembering and worshipping the seven aforesaid Rishis along with Arundhati (the wife of Maharshi Vasishtha). Offer the virtues of your fast, japa and meditation performed on that day to your parents to absolve them of their sins. This will give your parents an opportunity to be free from the Rishis' debt and they will thus be emancipated."

The Brahmin's son and his wife observed the fast and donated the virtue accruing therefrom to their parents. Consequently, both their parents were released from their animal births and proceeded to heaven.

Generally women observe the Rishi Panchami fast. As per this tale, any woman who has violated the rules ordained by the scriptures in regard to the days of menstruation or unwittingly had darshan of a Rishi during menstrual periods, thereby committing an act of sacrilege, should observe this fast for expiation of that sin, thus seeking forgiveness.

The modern woman may claim, "I don't believe in such customs." As a result, she suffers the consequences; begetting physically impaired and lustreless children.

Rishis and Munis are called 'Arshadrashta'. They have laid down these customs only after thorough investigation and not on the basis of their whims. You can see for yourself that when any woman in the house is menstruating, your mind is not as elevated and cheerful as it is on other days.

I know a number of ascetics and yoga aspirants who engage themselves in austerities and practice of yoga, but to look after their daily needs they keep a woman who disregards the rules of maintaining piety during menstruation. Such yogis and aspirants miss the effulgence of asceticism or yoga in their lives. They fail to impress. Although my Gurudev might not have engaged in such extensive austerities and meditation, yet he had a rare and unique power of elevating people through his gracious glance, because he was highly circumspect in such matters.

My Gurudev believed in women's liberation, but not in the kind of liberation that is observed today. What passes off as liberation today is in fact shamelessness. Women are becoming more and more helpless everyday. Real liberation of women can be appreciated only from the point of view of Rishis. There have been epitomes of female virtue like Madalasa, Jijabai, Chudala, Dirghatapa's wife, etc. Young ladies like Gargi and Sulabha used to have open debates with renowned scholars in spiritual discourses and competitions. Many a woman has attained the status of a Rishi and even contributed to the composition of the Upanishads. Where are that sort of vibrancy, strength and lustre in the modern women? Lustrous children are born in only those families wherein people exercise self-restraint and observe the rules ordained by the scriptures.