

Exploring the Sources of Chandrayana Vrata in Ancient Texts

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Abstract

This study undertakes a critical analysis of Chandrayana Vrata as depicted in ancient Indian texts including the Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis and Dharmashastras. By exploring the various types of Chandrayana Vrata, their associated rituals and their role in giving health benefits, in promoting spiritual growth and social harmony, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of this ancient tradition and its continued relevance in modern India.

Keywords: Chandrayana Vrata, Ancient Indian Texts, Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis, Dharmashastras.

Introduction

Yoga is a priceless gift from India's greatest sages to humanity. Knowing one's personality is a philosophical and scientific discipline. Yoga is mentioned in India's ancient literature, such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis, Epics, and Puranas. However, prior to the time of Maharshi Patanjali, a very systematic approach was not available. He is the one who has made a significant contribution to the field of yoga through his work. Maharshi Patanjali tells “तपःस्वाध्यायेश्वरप्रणिधानानि क्रियायोगः” yoga of purificatory action, also known as kriya yoga, includes mortification (Tapas), analysis of scriptures (Svadhyaya), and self-surrender (Ishvarapranidhana)¹. Kriya yoga is a technique for reducing afflictions and training the mind for Samadhi. They are used to cleanse the impurities of mind and eliminate distractions. There are two types of purification: Internal (mental) and External (physical). It is more necessary to maintain mental purity. There is also a need for physical purity. Cleanliness is second only to godliness in importance. External purity has little meaning of its own. External washing does not consume a significant amount of time. You forget the eternally pure Atman in this way. These two kinds of purification can be achieved by the practice of Chandrayana Vrata.

Chandrayana Vrata is derived from one of the ancient scriptures which is arduous Vrata, which is very much praised in Sanatana Dharma. There are many kinds of vratas in Sanatana Dharma. The most popular ones include the Navaratri Vrata, Shivratri Vrata, Purnima Vrata, Ekadashi Vrata, Dwadashi Vrata, Gayatri Vrata and the most powerful of them, Chandrayana Vrata².

The ancient texts have several references about Chandrayana Vrata mentioned directly and indirectly. In this article, the various attributes and associations of Chandrayana Vrata are discussed with reference to the various ancient texts such as Patanjala yoga sutra, Vyasabhashya of Maharshi Vyasa, Vedanthasara of Sadananda, Chatruvargachinthamani written by Hemadri, Padma Purana, Garuda Purana, Manusmriti,

Madana Maharnava Karma Vipaka Grantha decoding various hints from these ancient texts may lead to new lines of research.

Concepts of Chandrayana Vrata in ancient texts

Tapas means austerity, a discipline, which purifies the body, indriyas (both sensory and motar) and mind. According to pathanjala yoga suthra ‘tapas’ is one of the basic steps in practising Kriya Yoga¹.

Maharshi Pathanjali says,

“तपः स्वाध्यायेश्वरप्रणिधानानि क्रियायोगः”

(PYS, Chapter 2 Sutra 1)

The Practice of austerity, self-study, and surrendering the fruits of one's labour to God is known as kriya yoga. Here, ‘tapas’ or ‘austerity’ refers to firmly holding the mind while guiding the body and organs, not allowing them to do whatever they want but keeping them both under proper control. Tapas in sanskrit is rooted from the word ‘tapa’ which means subject to heat¹².

Patanjala Yoga Sutra explains the importance of tapas as

“कायेन्द्रियसिद्धिरशुद्धिक्षयात् तपसः”

(PYS, Chapter 2 Sutra 43)

It means that adopting austerity methods which destroys the impurities of the body and indriyas to make them powerful¹³.

Vyasabhashya of Maharshi Vyasa says Chandrayana Vrata one of the austerity method by adopting it, the impurities will be destroyed and one gets control over dwandvas or dualities like: hunger – thirst, heat – cold, success – failure, honour – insult, positive – negative etc³.

Vedanthasara of Sadananda also mentions about Chandrayana Vrata as,

“प्रायश्चित्तनी पपाक्षयसाधनानी चंद्रयानदीनी”

(Vedanthasara Chapter 2)

Chandrayana Vrata can be used as prayaschitha karma, which destroys all the sins⁴.

Chatruvargachinthamani written by Hemadri (13th century) is virtually an encyclopaedia of Hindu religion rights and observances. He explains his work in five sections, vratha, dana, thirtha, moksha and parishsha. He also included prayschittakanda at the end. He explains various vartas in vartakanda. Chandrayana is the one, selected from Brahmapurana to overcome the papas or sins. Chandra, moon is the presiding deity of this varta and it is called Chandrayana Vrata. In the beginning of the Chandrayana Vrata, various Gods have to be invoked, offerings be made in the sacrifice. The vrata details that “the food shall be consumed with gradual reduction. On the full moon day, it will be 15 times the size of an egg. The next day it shall be 14 times the egg size. Like this, it shall be ‘nirahara’ on the new moon day. Further, the consumption of the food shall be in the ascending order of an egg size every day”.

“कुक्कुतन्दोपमन ग्रसन पौर्नमस्यन्क भक्सयेत्
कृत्व पन्कदसिय ग्रसयेत्तु दिने दिने”

(Vol.2-part II; Vratkanda 27th Adhyaya, page 787)

The fruit of Chandrayana Vrata is described at length. By following this vrata for a year one shall get wealth, health, prosperity and pleasure in this world and one later enjoys heaven⁵.

According to the Padma Purana and the Garuda Purana people who have taken tamasic food must perform the Chandrayana Vrata.

Padma Purana states,

पलांडु लसुनम सिग्रम अलंबम गजनम पालम

भुंक्ते यो वै नरो ब्राह्मण व्रतं चन्द्रायणं चरेत्

(Padma Purana, Brahma Khanda 19,10)

O sages, one who eats garlic, onion, sigrum (a kind of plant), turnip, bottle gourd and meat, that person should observe a Chandrayana fast⁶.

Garuda Purana says,

By eating garlic and onion one becomes sinful and as atonement one should perform Chandrayana Vrata⁷.

Manusmriti explains four kinds of Chandrayana vrata as the prayaschitta karmas. According to Manusmriti one should follow certain rules and regulations during the period of vrata.

एकैकं हासयेत् पिण्डं कृष्णे शुक्ले च वर्धयेत् ।

उपस्पृशंस्त्रिषवणमेतत्चाण्ड्रायणं स्मृतम् ॥

(Manusmriti, Adhyaya 11, Shloka 216)

The 'Chandrayana' is attained by reducing one grasa of food daily during the dark half of the month and increasing it during the light half of the month.

The Chandrayana is from full moon to next full moon. This is 'Pipeelikamadhya' Chandrayana⁸.

एतमेव विधिं कृत्स्नमाचरेद् यवमध्यमे ।

शुक्लपक्षादिनियतश्चरंश्चान्द्रायणं व्रतम् ॥

(Manusmriti, Adhyaya 11, Shloka 217)

The 'Yavamadhyama' penance should be performed in the bright half of the month, with the same method; and the 'Chandrayana' penance should be performed with a controlled mind⁸.

अष्टावष्टौ समश्रीयात् पिण्डान् मध्यन्दिने स्थिते ।

नियतात्मा हविष्याशी यतिचान्द्रायणं चरन् ॥

(Manusmriti, Adhyaya 11, Shloka 218)

The person who performs the 'Yati-Chandrayana' must eat eight grasa every day at noon, controlling himself and eating only sacrificial food⁸.

चतुरः प्रातरश्रीयात् पिण्डान् विप्रः समाहितः ।

चतुरोऽस्तमिते सूर्ये शिशुचान्द्रायणं स्मृतम् ॥

(Manusmriti, Adhyaya 11, Shloka 219)

The sadhaka shall eat four grasa in the morning and four grasa after the sun has set. This is known as the 'Shishu-Chandrayana'⁸.

यथा कथं चित् पिण्डानां तिस्रोऽशीतीः समाहितः ।

मासेनाश्रन् हविष्यस्य चन्द्रस्यैति सलोकताम् ॥

(Manusmriti, Adhyaya 11, Shloka 220)

If a man eats two forty grasa of "sacrificial food" in a month with a focused mind, he will reach the Moon's regions⁸.

“**Madana Maharnava Karma Vipaka Grantha**” of Sri Vishveshvarabhata mentions Chandrayana Vrata to purify oneself. There are few rules to follow when performing this vrata. Telling the truth, avoiding bad company, and being in dhyana at all times have all been added to the daily routine. After washing oneself with Mantra, one should take three baths and give Jala tarpana (marjana). It is recommended that you perform a sacrifice at the start of this vrata. The food system is dictated by the vrata as follows: On the full moon day, 15 units (grasa) of food are consumed, with the number of units gradually decreasing to zero. As a result, on the 15th day, you must fast. The units gradually increase from the next day onwards, with the 15 units of food being consumed on the full moon day⁹.

The person who performs this vrata will be cleansed of all his sins. The sin of the previous ten births is released when you do it a second time. During this vrata, the sacrifices for various Gods are equally important. The predominating diety of this vrata is Chandra, hence the name Chandrayana Vrata. Grasa is a unit of food equal to the volume of a peacock egg. Performing this vrata will purify the person from all his sins. Doing it second time it makes the person sacred along with past and coming next generation. Pipilika-madhyachandrayana, yava-madhyachandrayana, shishuchandrayana and rishichandrayana are explained in this grantha⁹.

With reference to the texts mentioned in this chapter in the form of Shlokas, Sutras and Mantras it's understood that Chandrayana Vrata was widely practiced and was a part of Indian lifestyle. Different classic texts have references where it was mentioned that during the time of Mahabharata 'Draupathi' (The wife of pandavas) used to practice this vrata as a part of her sadhana and Mahabharata, in Anushasana Parva has quoted that must perform Chandrayana Vrata in Mrigashira Masa (November-December) to acquire beauty and popularity. In recent times Mrs. Kasthuba Gandhi (wife of Mr. M. K. Gandhi) was a regular practitioner of Chandrayana Vrata throughout her life^{14,15}. Practice of this vrata by the prominent personalities mentioned above marked the importance of having a detailed study and to bring out this scientific culture for the wellness of mankind.

Conclusions

This article has written for the desire to learn more about the Shastric Vrata that is Chandrayana Vrata as described in various Puranas, Upanishads, Grantas, Smrutis, and Samhitas. The Vrata that is currently practiced is receiving some scholarly attention from anthropologists, but the Shastric Vrata like Chandrayana Vrata has been largely ignored¹⁰. When these Vratas are discussed in these kinds of research articles, they are usually described rather than critically analysed. In Shastras, many ancient, traditional forms of tapas are described. Chandrayana Vrata is one of the most ancient Vrata¹⁰. The current article illuminates this ancient knowledge and aims to benefit humanity as a whole.

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