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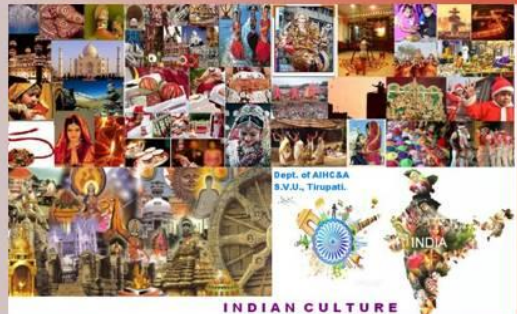
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Subject: **Indian Culture**



Production of Courseware
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Paper : **Vedic, Epic and Puranic Culture of India**
Module : **ASHRAMA SYSTEM IN PURANAS**



ज्ञान-विज्ञान विमुक्तये



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Component-I (B) – Description of module:

Subject Name	Indian Culture
Paper Name	Vedic, Epic and Puranic Culture of India
Module Name/Title	Ashrma System in Puranas
Module Id	IC / VEPC / 27
Pre requisites	Knowledge of the nature, origin and Characteristics of Puranas from Module 31
Objectives	To introduce the systematic social principles under four stages as described in the puranas
Keywords	Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa

E-Text (Quadrant-I):**ASHRAMA SYSTEM IN PURANAS**

In ancient Indian society as per various puranic instructions was divided into four stages of life. Ashram system (Hermitage system) also was well prevailing in those days. Asramites (Inmates of an Āśrama) have to pass through four stages. The four stages of Brahmacharya (Celibacy), Gārhashtya (House holders' life), Vānaprastha (Stage of spending time in forests by aged couples) and Sannyāsa (Monkhood) are known as the four Āśramas. It is really a wonderful Life Management Principle of Indian way of living. In the 9th chapter of the third Amsa of Viṣṇu Purāṇa, a detailed description of each of the Ashrams is available.

BRAHMACHARYA (Celibacy)

For a better livelihood everybody has to get education. The right age of learning should commence at the age of 8 including the months of a boy being in his mother's womb (Garbhashtama) soon after his Upanayana ceremony. Normally every boy has to spend 12 to 16 years time in the hermitage of his Guru along with his co-brahmacharins. During this stage a Brahmacharin is educated in 18 areas of learning majorly. Four Vedas – Rgveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda, Six Angas – Phonetics, Grammar, Etymology, Astronomy, The science of laying bricks and structuring the Sacrificial Altars etc. and Prosody, 18 puranas in the name of Purana, Mimamsa, Nyaya (Indian logic), Dharmasastra, Ayurveda (Indian medicine), Dhanurveda (Archery), Gandharva (The science of fine arts) and State craft (Artha Sastra).

Education with good character useful for both individual's personal life and nation's interest was the target of the Brahmacharya. A student should take his Guru or preceptor as his role model. He should grown on spiritual path with good ethical base. All the students or brahmcharins should be considered as if they were the own

children of their Guru. The students also should consider the ashram of their Guru as their own house. Money was never an element in the process of learning. Hence the knowledge was never available in those days as a commodity in the commercial market. The students have to should never be a burden to their teacher. So the king is assigned with the responsibility of looking after all the needs of the ashrams in his kingdom. The students should spend a luxury free life fixing all their concentration on learning.

During the stay of a Brahmacharin in the ashram of his guru he has to follow the following principles:

श्रीनारद उवाच
 ब्रह्मचारी गुरुकुले वसन्दान्तो गुरोर्हितम्
 आचरन्दासवन्नीचो गुरौ सुदृढसौहृदः १
 सायं प्रातरुपासीत गुर्वग्न्यर्कसुरोत्तमान्
 सन्ध्ये उभे च यतवाग्जपन्ब्रह्म समाहितः २
 छन्दांस्यधीयीत गुरोराहूतश्चेत्सुयन्त्रितः
 उपक्रमेऽवसाने च चरणौ शिरसा नमेत् ३
 मेखलाजिनवासांसि जटादण्डकमण्डलून्

Celibacy is the first stage of Indian life. During this stage a celibate should get admitted in Gurukulam. There he should maintain control over all his senses. He should do whichever is favorable to Guru. He has to perform rituals in both morning and evening. He should worship Guru in the first place then the Sun and then Brahmins. Then he should proceed to learn the Vedas. At the beginning and end of the day's learning he has to bow down before his Guru's feet. He should hold Mekhala (The waist tag), Ajina (Black Antelope's skin) as garment, Matted hair and Kamandulu (Clay pot).

बिभृयादुपवीतं च दर्भपाणिर्यथोदितम् ४
 सायं प्रातश्चरेद्भैक्ष्यं गुरवे तन्निवेदयेत्
 भुञ्जीत यद्यनुज्ञातो नो चेदुपवसेत्क्वचित् ५
 सुशीलो मितभुग्दक्षः श्रद्धानो जितेन्द्रियः
 यावदर्थं व्यवहरेत्स्त्रीषु स्त्रीनिर्जितेषु च ६
 वर्जयेत्प्रमदागाथामगृहस्थो बृहद्ब्रतः
 इन्द्रियाणि प्रमाथीनि हरन्त्यपि यतेर्मनः ७

He should also wear Yajnopavita, should hold handful of Darbhas always and should go around the ashram for alms both in the morning and evening. He should not eat such collected alms but should offer them all to his Guru. If his Guru permits he should eat otherwise should observe fasting. His character should be good. He should eat less and be efficient in deeds. He should have faith and concentration, sense-control and should not have interest in women and even their association. The senses are that dangerous that they can steal even the heart of a monk.

केशप्रसाधनोन्मर्दं स्नपनाभ्यञ्जनादिकम्
गुरुस्त्रीभिर्युवतिभिः कारयेन्नात्मनो युवा ८
नन्वग्निः प्रमदा नाम घृतकुम्भसमः पुमान्
सुतामपि रहो जह्यादन्यदा यावदर्थकृत् ९
कल्पयित्वात्मना यावदाभासमिदमीश्वरः
द्वैतं तावन्न विरमेत्ततो ह्यस्य विपर्ययः १०

He should not comb his hair. He should not take head bath. He should not take the help of the women of Guru's family while taking bath. A woman is Fire and a man is Ghee pot. A man should leave even his own daughter if she is alone. He should not try to spend his time in her presence. That may lead to any unwanted consequences.

स्नग्न्धलेपालङ्कारांस्त्यजेयुर्ये बृहद्व्रताः १२
उषित्वैवं गुरुकुले द्विजोऽधीत्यावबुध्य च
त्रयीं साङ्गोपनिषदं यावदर्थं यथाबलम् १३
दत्त्वा वरमनुज्ञातो गुरोः कामं यदीश्वरः
गृहं वनं वा प्रविशेत्प्रव्रजेत्तत्र वा वसेत् १४
अग्रौ गुरावात्मनि च सर्वभूतेष्वधोक्षजम्
भूतैः स्वधामभिः पश्येदप्रविष्टं प्रविष्टवत् १५

A celibate should never put on garlands, ornaments etc. as long as he is in Brhad Vrata (The great ritual of celibacy). He, staying in the Guru's house should learn Vedas along with 6 ancillary texts and Upanishads according to his strength and interest. In his fresh youth having taken the permission of his Guru he should accept either Grhastha stage (House Holder hood) or Parivrajaka (Wandering Monk's life)

life. He should see Vishnu in the worshipping Fire, Guru and in all the creatures. In all the creatures he should see himself.

This is in brief the course of behaviour of a Brahmachari in Gurukulam or Ashram. One who completes his education for 12 to 16 years in Guru's ashram is called a Snatakin and will be allowed to become either a Grihastha or a Parivrajaka (Wandering monk).

GRIHASTHA ASHRAMA

This is the second stage of a human being's social life commencing with marriage. Soon after returning from the house of his teacher a boy can get married. The boy is allowed to marry a girl of his own caste but not of his Gotra. Thus svagotra vivaha is prohibited. This life of householder is much praised in the puranas. Grihastha Ashrama is praised as the Base Ashrama or the source of all other ashramas. A house holder should hold the responsibility of a comfortable social living. A house holder should protect holy Agnihotra in the Yajnasala of his house performing all the prescribed daily rituals. He has to worship some prime God like Vishnu or Siva or Sakti or Ganesha or Kumara or Surya. He should give noble hospitality to the guests who visit from distant places even if they are not his relatives. Every house holder should respect women both of his own family and those who are in the society. Puranas trust one basic principle that if women are insulted that society will ruin.

The wife and husband are directed to lead an ideal house holders' life following the following principles.

गृहेष्ववस्थितो राजन्क्रियाः कुर्वन्थोचिताः
वासुदेवार्पणं साक्षादुपासीत महामुनीन् २
शृण्वन्भगवतोऽभीक्ष्णमवतारकथामृतम्
श्रद्धानो यथाकालमुपशान्तजनावृतः ३
सत्सङ्गाच्छनकैः सङ्गमात्मजायात्मजादिषु
विमुञ्चेन्मुच्यमानेषु स्वयं स्वप्रवदुत्थितः ४
यावदर्थमुपासीनो देहे गेहे च परिडितः
विरक्तो रक्तवत्तत्र नृलोके नरतां न्यसेत् ५

Grhastha Ashrama or the Householderhood is the second stage of life. This is the married life. A householder should follow all the prescribed rituals with all care and attention showing his utmost devotion to Vasudeva. He should worship all the great people. He should spend his time in the association of good people. He should show interest in wealth to a limited extent. He can have interest in his body and house to a permitted extent. He can have passion for living as a good householder.

ज्ञातयः पितरौ पुत्रा भ्रातरः सुहृदोऽपरे
 यद्वदन्ति यदिच्छन्ति चानुमोदेत निर्ममः ६
 दिव्यं भौमं चान्तरीक्षं वित्तमच्युतनिर्मितम्
 तत्सर्वमुपयुञ्जान एतत्कुर्यात्स्वतो बुधः ७
 यावद्भि्रयेत जठरं तावत्स्वत्वं हि देहिनाम्
 अधिकं योऽभिमन्येत स स्तेनो दण्डमर्हति ८
 मृगोष्ट्रखरमर्काखु सरीसृपखगमक्षिकाः
 आत्मनः पुत्रवत्पश्येत्तैरेषामन्तरं कियत् ९
 त्रिवर्गं नातिकृच्छ्रेण भजेत गृहमेध्यपि

A householder should approve whatever his relatives, parents, brothers and friends say or expect from him. The wealth is of three types for him. One is Earthly one. The second one is atmospheric and the third one is Divine. He should use all these three kinds of wealth to please others. He should maintain only to that extent by which he can feed himself and his family. If he preserves more than that he is as bad as a thief and should be punished. He should consider the beasts like deer, camel, donkey, monkey, mouse, snake and even flies and birds as his own children.

With great effort he should try for Dharma, Artha and Kama.

सिद्धैर्यज्ञावशिष्टार्थैः कल्पयेद्भृत्तिमात्मनः
 शेषे स्वत्वं त्यजन्प्राज्ञः पदवीं महतामियात् १४
 देवानृषीन्भूतानि पितृनात्मानमन्वहम्
 स्ववृत्त्यागतवित्तेन यजेत पुरुषं पृथक् १५
 यद्द्व्यात्मनोऽधिकाराद्याः सर्वाः स्युर्यज्ञसम्पदः
 वैतानिकेन विधिना अग्निहोत्रादिना यजेत् १६
 न ह्यग्निमुखतोऽयं वै भगवान्सर्वयज्ञभुक्
 इज्येत हविषा राजन्यथा विप्रमुखे हुतैः १७
 तस्माद्ब्राह्मणदेवेषु मर्त्यादिषु यथार्हतः
 तैस्तैः कामैर्यजस्वैनं क्षेत्रज्ञं ब्राह्मणाननु १८

He should survive with whatever is readily available for him. The balance of his earnings should be left by him to his dependents. His earnings should please Gods, Sages, Creatures, His Forefathers and his servants. He should devotedly perform rituals. He should worship of the Fire God.

He should perform sacrifices to meet the expectations of Brahmins, Gods and other dependent servants. He is called Kshetrajna by learned people.

VANAPRASTHA

According to Puranas, when householders grow enough old should take a vow to go to the forests to lead ascetics life. This is the third stage of puranic social life. The following are said to be the duties of an aged couple to lead their Vanaprastha life. The word VANAPRASTHA means "Going to Forest".

यानास्थाय मुनिर्गच्छेदृषिलोकमुहाञ्जसा १७
न कृष्टपच्यमशनीयादकृष्टं चाप्यकालतः
अग्निपक्वमथामं वा अर्कपक्वमुताहरेत् १८
वन्यैश्चरुपुरोडाशान्निर्वपेत्कालचोदितान्
लब्धे नवे नवेऽन्नाद्ये पुराणं च परित्यजेत् १९
अग्न्यर्थमेव शरणमुटजं वाद्रिकन्दरम्
श्रयेत हिमवाय्वग्नि वर्षार्कातपषाट्स्वयम् २०
केशरोमनखश्मश्रु मलानि जटिलो दधत्
कमण्डल्वजिने दण्ड वल्कलाग्निपरिच्छदान् २१

Vanaprastha is the third stage of Indian living. The age old couple having given up their interest in householderhood and having handed over the responsibilities to their grown up children enter the forest. They should not cultivate the land for their food. They should not even eat the non-seasonal natural food. They should not cook for themselves. Which ever is dried up under the sun can be eaten by them. They should always eat fresh food and should leave the stored food for more than half a day. A Vanaprasthin should bear with any kind of natural extremity. He should not remove his hair, bodily hair, nails and beard. He should hold, a stick, Kamandulu and should put on the skin of black deer.

SANYASA

From the third stage of social life i.e. Vanaprastha the aged person embraces very naturally the fourth stage of monkhood. According to the puranas : a celibate can directly become a monk. A childless householder can become a Sanyasin. A widower also can become a monk. One who crosses a good amount of householder's life also can embrace Sanyasa. Once a person becomes a monk he doesn't belong to his own family in which he was born. He should not possess any personal assets. Just a piece of cloth (Kaupina) to cover himself only is allowed. He belongs to the entire Universe. He should not continue to have any personal earnings. He has to follow all the noble principles essential to attain moksha. The following are his duties.

कल्पस्त्वेवं परिव्रज्य देहमात्रावशेषितः
ग्रामैकरात्रविधिना निरपेक्षश्चरेन्महीम् १
बिभृयाद्यद्यसौ वासः कौपीनाच्छादनं परम्
त्यक्तं न लिङ्गाद्दण्डादेरन्यत्किञ्चिदनापदि २
एक एव चरेद्भिक्षुरात्मारामोऽनपाश्रयः
सर्वभूतसुहृच्छान्तो नारायणपरायणः ३
पश्येदात्मन्यदो विश्वं परे सदसतोऽव्यये
आत्मानं च परं ब्रह्म सर्वत्र सदसन्मये ४

This is the fourth and the last stage of life. A monk should be a wanderer. He should not maintain anything except his body. He should not stay for more than a day in any village and should move on the earth from one place to the other. He should put on a garment with aKaupina (a piece of cloth inside). He should always go alone satisfying his Atmarama. He should be friendly with all animals and beings. He should always fix his mind in worshipping Narayana. He should realize that he is the Brahman.

Summary

Thus the Four Ashramas have their respective duties to be performed by the people of those respective ashramas. This shows the well organized social life and its success in Indian Soil.