

Ethnobiological Studies from *Manusmruti* : VI. Human Beings Essentially are Vegetarian

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ABSTRACT *Manusmruti* has emphasized on the vegetarian status of human beings.

INTRODUCTION

Manusmruti has classified the human beings into three categories; such as *Raakshaasa*, *Pissaacha* and *Manushya*, on the basis of food habit, social and cultural activities. Eating of flesh and consuming alcohol is attributed to the former two groups of lower status, while *Manushya* is considered to be vegetarian (Dash and Padhy, 1997). On the contrary modern science has placed man as omnivore in trophic level, playing a key role in the ecological food web (Odum, 1971). If the *Raakshaasas* and *Pissaachas* are to be considered equal to *Manushya* from morphological appearance, in such case the position of the latter is safe in the trophic level as omnivore. But analysis of the morpho-physiological and behavioural characteristics of man supports him more as a vegetarian, such as:

- (i) absence of fangs;
- (ii) comparatively long intestine as that of other vegetarians; and
- (iii) the drinking habit unlike the carnivores, who lick the water and other liquids.

The concept of vegetarianism is emphasized in *vedas* (Khosala, 1996), but the possibility of eating flesh by vedic people can not be ruled out (Macdonell and Keith, 1967). Moreover, vegetarianism is one of the priceless gifts of the Hinduism (Gandhi, 1926). *Manusmruti*, a contemporary vedic literature and pioneer compilation of human ethics, has devoted a separate chapter to explain the lawful and forbidden food. The sayings of the epic against flesh eating are depicted below to illucidate the fundamental vegetarian character of human beings.

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VEGETARIANISM: FROM HEALTH POINT OF VIEW

It is emphasized that faults committed by eating forbidden food, death becomes eager to shorten the lives (*Sl.4/V*). It is worthy of note here that flesh is the chief among the forbidden foods mentioned in chapter V.

The *Sloka* 50 / chapter V states:

*Na Bhakshayati Yo Maamsam Bidhim
Hitwa Pissa Chabat
Sa Loke Priyataam Yaati*

Byaadhibhisscha Na Peedyate (50/V).

Meaning : He who disregarding the rule, does not eat meat like a *Pissaacha*, becomes dear to men and will not be tormented by diseases (Buhler, 1886).

This shows that the *vedic* people were conscious of diseases caused by taking flesh. As an ecological principle, any toxic substance in the food chain undergoes bio-magnification and the ultimate target is the top consumers like man. The Minamata bay disease in Japan which revealed the poisonous effects of organic mercury is a result of consuming contaminated fishes. (D'ietri, 1971; Anonymous, 1976). Also the recent mad-cow disease in Britain is an outcome of forceful ingestion of non-vegetarian food to a vegetarian animal. The subsequent consumption of its beef transmits the disease to human beings. This reflects on the reaction against nature's principle of food chain.

VEGETARIANISM: FROM ETHICAL POINT OF VIEW

Manusmruti has discouraged the consumption of flesh as an action of sin as evident from following:

Sloka 48/V states :

*Naa Krutwa Praaninaam Hinsaaam
Mamsamutpadyate Kwachit,
Na Cha Praanibadhya*

*Swargyasta Smaanmaamsam
Bibarjayet (48/V)*

Meaning : Meat can never be obtained without injury to living creatures and injury to sentient beings is detrimental to (the attainment of) heavenly wish; let him therefore shun (the use of) meat (Buhler, 1986).

Sloka 49/V states:

*Samutpattim Cha Maamsasya
Badhabandhou Cha Dehinaam
Prasameekshya Nibartteta*

Sarbamaamsasya Bhakshyanaat. (49/V)

Meaning : Having well considered the (disgusting) origin of flesh and the (cruelty of) fettering and slaying corporeal beings, let him entirely abstain from eating flesh (Buhler, 1886).

Sloka 51/V states :

*Anumantaa Bissasitaa Nihantaa
Krayabikrayee*

*Samskarttaa Chopahartta Cha
Khaadakasscheti Ghaatakaah. (51/V)*

Meaning : He who permits (the slaughter of an animal), he who cuts it up, he who kills it, he who buys or sells (meat), he who cooks it, he who serves it up, and he who eats it, (must all be considered as) the slayers (of the animal) (Buhler, 1886).

Similarly the dictums like:

1. The guilt of one who slays not as that of him who eats meat for no purpose (*Sl.34/V*) (Buhler, 1886).
2. There is no great sinner than that (man) who seeks to increase (the bulk of) his own flesh by the flesh of other (beings) (*Sl.52/V*) (Buhler, 1886).
3. Me the (*Maam Sah*) will devour in the next (world), whose flesh I eat in this (life); the wise declare this (to be) the real meaning of the word flesh (*Maam Sah*) (*Sl.55/V*) (Buhler, 1886).
4. Abstention in eating meat, in drinking spirituous liquor and in carnal intercourse brings great rewards (*Sl.56/V*) (Buhler, 1886).

VEGETARIANISM: FROM SOCIAL POINT OF VIEW

The sellers of meat, consumer of forbidden foods and he who delights in injuring living creatures are considered to be socially degraded

(*Sl. 152, 164/III; 19/V*). Furthermore the meat seller is not to be invited and entertained in *Ssraaddhas* and not to accept gifts (*Daana*) from him (*Sl.84/IV*). This is to create guilt consciousness in some one, who has a profession of selling flesh.

Considerations of vegetarianism in *Manusmriti*, broadly from ecological point of view, for conservation of biota, are discussed separately in our forthcoming paper. Exceptionally, one can eat meat when one's life is in danger (*Sl. 27/V*).

India is a country where people are predominantly vegetarian by habit and/or by necessity. The spirit of vegetarianism is cultivated on this soil as the basis of moral values than physical (Gandhi, 1931), and no doubt the seeds of this morality have sprouted in this peninsula since the vedic age. Concept of vegetarianism, apart from humanitarian point of view, is required to be analysed scientifically from nutritional, medical, anthropological, economic and ecological basis (Gupta, 1986).

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