

Jivitputrika Vrat

In the Hindu society there are many rites of passage (*samskara*) that are performed throughout the year. These rites of passage come in many forms, such as, birth, leaving the birth chamber, giving a child a name, first feeding of solid food, puberty, marriage, and cremation. To accompany these rites are the *vrats*, an ascetic ritual that involves women fasting for the welfare of their husbands and children. As stated by Pearson “Vrats [are] a rite...performed on a regular basis to achieve particular objective, following respective rule that have been transmitted from one generation to the next” (Pearson 45). The tradition of *vrats* can be traced back to the Vedic period which makes them over three thousand years old in nature. Most *vrats* are performed by women in Hindu society because they are believed to enhance a women’s power (*sakti*). This power can then be transferred to her loved ones. This idea of women performing *vrats* is common because they are a part of the domestic rituals, over which Hindu women have control and power. Some *vrats* are performed for a woman’s individual needs, so she can focus on herself and then be attentive to her family needs.

Many *vrats* tie in with marriage ideals and are seen as part of dharma (righteousness); they represent the fidelity to a husband and demonstrate their service until the day he passes on. As stated by Rodrigues, “Vrats emanate from ancient Hindu ideas of asceticism as intrinsic to spiritual attainment, meshes with the obligatory duties of married women in the Pativrata ideal” (Rodrigues 61). It is believed that if a Hindu woman performs a certain type of *vrata* that is for their husband then they will be forever protected by the husband. Also when the *vrata* is performed it shows to the husband her loyalty which will allow the women to live in harmony with her family.

The different kinds of *vrats* have various purposes; some are for good health, prosperity, for a son to be born, for a loved one, and protection for the family. Pintchman in her study, “Women’s Lives, Women’s Rituals in the Hindu Tradition,” states: “these rituals are usually undertaken annually, on days sacred to the particular god (*deity*) whose blessings are sought” (110). This day is of great importance when performing a *vrats* because Hindu women believe that they will receive what they are asking for if they perform the right ritual, to the right deity (god). There are men who perform *vratas* but, it is not regarded as a norm; it is more popular among Hindu women. *Vartas* are very organized into castes and regions of India. There are many *vrats* that only upper class women perform or that are only performed in certain areas of India. Despite these differences they are similar in that they are performed in the domestic realm and for the domestic realm (Pintchman 65).

Jivitputrika *vrats*, also called the Jiutiya (a contraction or *jiwit-putra*), is one of many popular family *vratas*. It is often compared to other family *vrats*, such as Halsathi and Ganes Cauth. Women perform these *vrats* for the wellbeing and protection of certain areas of the family life; there is no male involvement. The Jivitputrika *vrat* are performed by the mother where she wishes for the wellbeing and a long life of her sons. The actual English translation of the word Jivitputrika is “living son”. This translation demonstrates a mothers’ wish for her son to live a long, prosperous life. This *vrat* is known as the most difficult one to perform. It is also the most important because it determines the life of a Hindu women’s son. Jivitputrika can be the most effective *vrat* because it is believed by Hindu mothers to work; it also changes a son’s life (Pearson 38). Hindu women pass this ritual on to younger female generations- in most cases their daughters. If the mother does not have any daughters she will pass it onto her younger sisters. This *vrat* has been done for generations, but has not been explored by scholars as to its

procedure. There have been many hypotheses, but the integral details remain unknown. A lot of the details remain unknown because the ritual is only performed by women who have sons or amongst others who practice Hinduism (Pearson 163).

Jivitputrika, is popular among women because Hindu women play a central role in the household; they are responsible for the protection of their children and husband. Hindu women are said to be responsible for three goals: Artha (profit), Kama (pleasure), and Dharma (religion or virtue). All three of these goals are incorporated in the domestic realm over which Hindu women are responsible (Dhavamony 196). As Tripathi states, “the Puranas (literature consisting of ancient myths) say that women who observe this vrat never suffer on account of their sons” (188). If Hindu women perform Jivitputrika, it is believed that they will be forever protected by their sons. The role of the son once the husband has passed on is to protect their mother, so if the mother protects her son while he is young then the mother has returned the favor (Bhattacharyya 57).

The Jivitputrika vrat takes place on the eighth of the waning fortnight of the month of Asvin (September and October). On the day of the *vrat* a Hindu mother will wake up early, complete her chores, and then purify herself in a *tirtha* (pool). She must be fully purified to be able to continue with the *vrat* or it will not work. Once she has bathed she proceeds to make a *sankalpa* (statement of intent before starting the vrat) for the wellbeing and protection for her son. She enters into a fast, where she cannot have food or water for a day. On the eve of the first day, fasting mothers sing Jivtiya (song to the deities) and tell or listen to *kirtan* (song expressing glory to deities). It is unclear what deity that each mother praises because it changes with each request they make for their son and the deity that they worship at their home *puja* (worship, shrine). In the late night they tell a meritorious (story of deserving praise, reward, esteem) and

again perform a *kitana*. On the second day of the ritual they will bathe and give a *dan-daksina* (payment given to Brahmans for ritual service) to a Brahman woman, whose husband is still living and blessed with sons. There are offerings made to the *puja* (worship, shrine). These can be items such as food, or material goods. Once the offerings have been made the Brahmin women blesses the mother by giving her *Jiutya* (red and yellow threads to wear on their necks). This *Jiutya* symbolize that the mother has performed the ritual and that she is protecting her son. The *Jiutya* is worn for months after the ritual. In some cases the mother may never take it off, symbolizing her gratitude to the deity that granted her request. The women continue to fast and go home singing, carrying baskets on their head or hands. The baskets contain the food from the offerings and are chopped and offered as *prasada* those not keeping the *vrata*. She will continue fasting until the next day when she will rises before dawn, bathes and eats. The *Jivitputrika*, *vrata* is not always performed alone; there are times when women who have been blessed with sons perform the ritual as a group. In these cases the meritorious stories are told by the older women and food offerings are performed by them (Pearson 163-165).

The meritorious stories are very important to the *Jivitputrika vrata* because it allows for information to be passed from generation to generation. The most popular story is about a “noble king, Jimutavahan and his self sacrifice to Garuda, the half- man , half-vulture king of the birds, for the sake of Nag (snake) and his mother”(Pearson 164). There are three reasons why this story is relevant to *Jivitputrika vrata*. The first being that the happy ending occurs on the eighth of the dark half of Asvin. The second is that the King Jimutavahan demonstrates a model of what Hindu women wish for their son. The last reason is that snakes are thought to be protectors of children, which portrays protection in the *Jivitputrika vrata*. There are many versions of this story

but, in every version there is an appearance of Siva (lord of the yogi, ultimate reality) and Parvati (wife of Siva), who gives blessings to the sons or ensures their safety.

The Jivitputrika *vrata* demonstrated the limitless love and affection of a mother for her son. This *vrata* is done differently in houses across India but the main message is consistent across the country. The Jivitputrika *vrata* will be performed for many generations and with each generation altering its performance to better meet their needs and values.

References and further recommended readings

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<http://www.brihaspati.net/vratas.htm>

http://www.geocities.com/Athens/2583/fesinf_f.html

http://members.tripod.com/~esh/fesinf_f.html

<http://www.svbf.org/sringeri/journal/vol1no4/festivals.pdf>

http://www.integraldesign.abk-stuttgart.de/wildenstein/lectures/BW_2002/pdf/Vrata.PDF

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http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MahaLakshmi_vratha

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ganesh_Chaturthi

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rama_Navami

<http://www.patnadaily.com/festival2008.html>

http://www.bihartimes.com/festivals/FESTIVALS_2006.HTML

<http://books.google.ca/books>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:Search?search=Jivitputrika+vrats>

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