



CHAPTER 6

yajñasiṣṭāśanam hyetatsatāmannaṁ vidhīyate

Yajñas of the Gṛhasthas

We have so far described the great yajñas of the kings and the tapasvins. The kings and tapasvins are of course essential to the Indian way of life, but the core of social life is constituted by the ordinary gṛhasthas, the householders. It is they who carry forward the normal routine of day-to-day living. And it is their yajñas consisting, as we shall see, mainly of a relatively modest annadāna – but performed unceasingly, everyday, day after day – that sustain all life on earth.

The yajñas of the gṛhasthas of course cannot rival either the splendour of the yajñas of the kings, or the sacrificial intensity of the yajñas of the tapasvins. But the disciplined regularity of the performance, described in the classical Indian texts, indeed has a grandeur of its own. In any case, the yajñas of the gṛhasthas constitute the basic annadāna, that so deeply enriches social living in India. And this is probably what endows the gṛhastha with a crucial centrality in the Indian scheme of things.

Gṛhasthāśrama: Umā-Śaṅkara saṁvāda

There arises many an occasion in Indian classical literature to celebrate the centrality of the gṛhasthāśrama amongst the four āśramas, the four stages of life that an Indian is expected to follow sequentially in a lifetime. One of the most attractive statements of this centrality occurs in the anuśāsanaparvan of Mahābhārata, where Bhīṣma narrates how in earlier times Śrīkṛṣṇa undertakes great austerities on the Himālayas, how one day during the practice of these austerities the great ṛṣis gather around him, and how at the urging of tapasvin Śrīkṛṣṇa, Nārada begins to recall a long

discussion on different aspects of dharma that takes place between Śaṅkara and Umā while they are living the life of a happy man and wife on the Himālayas, which in the presence of the divine couple joyously blossom with natural splendour and beauty.

According to Nārada's recounting of the events, once Umā, standing behind Śaṅkara, playfully covers his eyes with her hands. Instantly the whole world is enveloped in deep darkness. Soon Śaṅkara opens his third-eye that bathes the world in its brilliant gaze. But the Himālayas, unable to bear the sun-like radiance of Śaṅkara's third-eye, catch fire. And Umā, filled with compassion for the Himālayas, appears in front of Śaṅkara with folded hands. Seeing her thus, Śaṅkara recovers his benign tranquillity. He looks at the world with a happy gaze. And the world becomes happy too.

It is then that Umā begins to ask Śaṅkara various questions about the meaning of his forms and that of the various aspects of dharma. In the course of this dialogue between the divine husband and wife, Umā also seeks to know the dharma of āśramas, of the way a man ought to lead his life at different stages during a lifetime. And, Śaṅkara begins his answer to Umā's queries with the unequivocal assertion that of the four āśramas the gṛhasthāśrama is indeed the foremost: *gṛhasthaḥ pravārsteṣāṃ gārhashtyaṃ dharmamāśritaḥ*.¹

Śaṅkara then briefly describes the discipline of the four āśramas, but his heart seems to be in describing the gṛhasthāśramadharmā for Umā. Dealing with vānaprasthāśrama, the discipline of the forest-dweller, and the saṁnyāsāśrama, the discipline of the renouncer, in just six and a half verses, Śaṅkara soon returns to a very detailed description of the gṛhasthāśrama. And the core of the discipline of gṛhastha that Śaṅkara describes is in looking after and generously providing for the sustenance of all, and especially of the guests who arrive at the door of the householder. This opportunity to look after and sustain others is what makes the gṛhasthāśrama so great that, as Śaṅkara says, the severest austerities of vānaprasthāśrama cannot measure up to even the one-sixteenth part of the merit acquired by properly fulfilled gṛhasthāśrama: *samyak tapaścārantīha śraddadhānā vanāśrame gṛhāśramasya te devī kalāṃ nārhanti śoḍaśim*.²

¹ Mahā *anūsāsana* 141, p. 5922.

² Mahā *anūsāsana* 141, p. 5923.

Śaṅkara of course also describes in detail the various observances and fasts that a gr̥hastha is expected to undertake, and even the rules of personal hygiene and social practice that he is expected to scrupulously follow. But he reverts again and again to the sustenance that flows from the gr̥hastha in all directions, and concludes by an expansive listing of the diverse people and other living beings who keep looking up to the gr̥hastha for their livelihood. Thus, says Śaṅkara:³

यथा मातरमाश्रित्य सर्वे जीवन्ति जन्तवः ।

तथा गृहाश्रमं प्राप्य सर्वे जीवन्ति चाश्रमाः ॥

yathā mātaramāśritya sarve jīvanti jantavaḥ
tathā gr̥hāśramam prāpya sarve jīvanti cāśramāḥ

Just as all living beings live under the protection of their mothers, so do all the āśramas derive sustenance from the gr̥hasthāśrama.

And further,

राजानः सर्वपाषण्डाः सर्वे रङ्गोपजीविनः ।

व्यालग्रहाश्च डम्भाश्च चोरा राजभटास्तथा ।

सविद्याः सर्वशीलज्ञाः सर्वे वै विचिकित्सकाः ।

दूराध्वानं प्रपन्नाश्च क्षीणपथ्योदना नराः ।

एते चान्ये च बहवः तर्कयन्ति गृहाश्रमम् ॥

rājānaḥ sarvapāṣaṇḍāḥ sarve raṅgopajīvināḥ
vyālagrahāśca ḍambhāśca corā rājabhaṭāstathā
savidyāḥ sarvaśīlajñāḥ sarve vai vicikitsakāḥ
dūrādhvānam prapannāśca kṣīṇapathyodanā narāḥ
ete cānye ca bahavaḥ tarkayanti gr̥hāśramam

Kings, impostors, artists and acrobats, snake-charmers, cheats, thieves and officers of the king; all of them look up to the gr̥hastha for their sustenance; so do the scholars, the wise, and the sceptics; so do the men on the road, who have travelled a great deal and have exhausted the victuals they carried for the journey; and, so do many others.

³ Mahā anuśāsana 141, p. 5924.

And further still,

मार्जारं मूषिकाः श्वानः सूकराश्च शुकास्तथा ।
 कपोतका कर्कटकाः सरीसृपनिषेवणाः ।
 अरण्यवासिनश्चान्ये सङ्घा ये मृगपक्षिणाम् ।
 एवं बहुविधा देवि लोकेऽस्मिन् सचराचराः ।
 गृहे क्षेत्रे बिले चैव शतशोऽथ सहस्रशः ।
 गृहस्थेन कृतं कर्म सर्वैस्तैरिह भुज्यते ॥

*mārjārā mūṣikāḥ śvānaḥ sūkarāśca śukāstathā
 kapotakā karkṭakāḥ sarīsr̥paniṣevanāḥ
 aranyavāsinaścānye saṅghā ye mṛgapakṣiṇām
 evaṁ bahuvīdhā devī loke'smin sacarācarāḥ
 gṛhe kṣetre bile caiva śataśo'tha sahasraśaḥ
 gṛhasthena kṛtaṁ karma sarvaistairiha bhujyate*

Cats, mice, dogs, pigs, parrots, pigeons, crows, reptiles of all kinds, the beevies of birds and herds of animals that live in the forest, and also the hundreds and thousands of moving and unmoving creatures of diverse kinds that live in the house, the field or the burrow, all of them, O devi, live off what the gṛhastha earns through his karma, his actions.

The merit of the one whose labours sustain so much of life on earth is of course great. It is no wonder that Śāṅkara tells Umā:

उपयुक्तं च यत् तेषां मतिमान् नानुशोचति ।
 धर्म इत्येव संकल्प्य यस्तु तस्य फलं शृणु ।
 सर्वयज्ञप्रणीतस्य ह्यमेधेन यत् फलम् ।
 वर्षे स द्वादशे देवि फलेनैतेन युज्यते ॥

*upayuktam ca yat teṣāṁ matimān nānuśocati
 dharma ityeva saṅkalpya yastu tasya phalaṁ śṛṇu
 sarvayajñapraṇītasya hyaṁedhena yat phalam
 varṣe sa dvādaśe devī phalenaitena yujyate*

Listen to the virtue earned by the one who does not spare a second thought for what has been used up by the men and other living beings that look up to him for sustenance, and who knows that sustaining them is indeed his dharma.

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Such a one, having fulfilled the dharma of gr̥hasthāśrama for twelve years, attains the merit that accrues to those who perform an aśvamedha after having first accomplished all other yajñas.

Such is the glory of gr̥hasthāśrama. And such are the yajñas of the gr̥hastha, that sustain the whole world day after day.

THE FIVE GREAT YAJÑAS OF THE GRHASTHA

Pañcaiva mahāyajñāḥ

The responsibility of the gr̥hastha to provide for the sustenance of the daily routine of life around him is celebrated in the Indian classical texts as the pañcamahāyajña. These are the five great yajñas that a gr̥hastha is expected to perform everyday. In fact, it is the performance of the pañcamahāyajña that defines a gr̥hastha: one who does not undertake these yajñas everyday probably does not even qualify to be called by the name of a gr̥hastha, a householder. And, as we shall see, through the performance of the pañcamahāyajña, the householder shares his daily victuals with the representatives of different aspects of creation, and thus seems to remind himself afresh everyday of his responsibility towards all creation and re-dedicate himself to the sustenance of at least as much of creation as falls within his reach.

Pañcamahāyajña is such an important observance for the Indians that references to it are found in all Indian literature: in the timeless vedas, the ancient itihāsas and purāṇas, and in the smṛtis and dharmasāstras of all ages. Amongst the references in the vedas, the one in the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa is perhaps the most emphatic. In its authoritatively resonant phrases, the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa lays down thus:

पञ्चैव महायज्ञाः । तान्येव महासत्राणि भूतयज्ञो मनुष्ययज्ञः पितृयज्ञो
देवयज्ञो ब्रह्मयज्ञ इति ॥

अहरहर्भूतिभ्यो बलिं हरेत् । तथैतं भूतयज्ञं समाप्नोत्यहरहर्दद्यादोद-
पात्रात्तथैतं मनुष्ययज्ञं समाप्नोत्यहरहः स्वधा कुर्यादोदपात्रात्तथैतं

पितृयज्ञं समाप्नोत्यहरहः स्वाहा कुर्यादा काष्ठात्तथैतं देवयज्ञं समाप्नोति ॥

अथ ब्रह्मयज्ञः । स्वाध्यायो वै ब्रह्मयज्ञः ॥

*pañcaiva mahāyajñāḥ. tānyeva mahāsatraṇi bhūtayajño
manuṣyayajñāḥ pitryajño devayajño brahmayajña iti.*

*aharaharbhūtebhyo balim haret. tathaitam bhūtayajñam
samāpnotyaharaharddadyādodapātrāttathaitam
manuṣyayajñam samāpnotyaharahah svadhā
kuryādodapātrāttathaitam pitryajñam samāpnotyaharahah
svāhā kuryādā kāṣṭhāttathaitam devayajñam samāpnoti.
atha brahmayajñāḥ. svādhyāyo vai brahmayajñāḥ.⁴*

Only five are the mahāyajñas. These alone are the mahāsatras. And these are: yajña for the bhūtas, all created beings; yajña for manuṣyas, the human beings; yajña for pitṛs, the ancestors; yajña for devas, the gods residing in various aspects of creation; and yajña for Brahman, the font of all knowledge.

Take out shares for the bhūtas everyday. That constitutes bhūtayajña. Give away food everyday till the pot is exhausted. That constitutes manuṣyayajña. Give away food for the sake of the ancestors everyday till the pot is exhausted. That constitutes pitryajña. Give into the fire till the wood is all consumed. That constitutes devayajña.

Here follows the description of brahmayajña: svādhyaya, reverential and careful study of the branch of knowledge assigned for oneself, is indeed brahmayajña.

Sāyaṇācārya, the highly respected fourteenth century commentator of the vedas, explaining the various definitional phrases of the Śatapatha prescription says that bhūtayajña, etc., are called pañcamahāyajña, the five great yajñas, because these are to be undertaken always by everyone: *bhūtayajñādayo vaksyamāṇāḥ 'pañcaiva mahāyajñāḥ' sarvadā sarvairanuṣṭheyatvāt.*⁵ And these five are also the mahāsatras, the great sessions, because these are performed everyday till the end of one's life, by the ṛṣhastha himself, without

⁴ Śatapatha 11.3.8.1-3, vol. 4 part 2 pp. 157-8.

⁵ Sāyaṇācārya on Śatapatha 11.3.8.2, vol.4 part 2 p. 157.

looking for a priest to conduct them: *mahānti niścalāni satrāṇi 'mahāsatrāṇi' yāvajjivamanuṣtheyatvādṛtviganapekṣatvācca*.⁶ Incidentally, the Taittirīyāraṇyaka lays down almost exactly the same discipline for the pañcamahāyajña, insisting that this is an observance that has to be initiated and accomplished every day: *satati pratāyante satati samtiṣṭhante*.⁷

Sāyaṇācārya also explains that bhūtayajña involves taking out a portion of food, with the resolve that it reach the bhūtas, and keeping it aside for them. Devayajña involves offering of food to the fire, for the sake of different devas, with their ritual invocation. Pitryajña involves the giving away of food till the pot is empty, while ceremonially invoking the ancestors with the resolve that the food being given away may propitiate them. And manuṣyayajña involves the giving away of food till the pot is empty, without any invocation, and with the resolve that mankind as a whole may achieve satiation.

Brahmayajña, Sāyaṇācārya says, involves reverential and careful study, adhyayana, of one's own branch of knowledge, of the knowledge assigned as one's proper domain: *svaśākhādhyayanam brahmayajña ityarthah*.⁸ And such study is a yajña because it propitiates the devas, pitṛs and ṛṣis – the gods, the ancestors and the seers.

Ṛṇaṁ ha vai jāyate yo'sti

This unqualified insistence of the vedas on the daily undertaking of an observance, that emphasizes human responsibility towards the sustenance of all, is of course related to the Indian understanding of human life as a gift that is constituted of and is sustained by all aspects of creation. Man is thus born in and lives in ṛṇa, debt, to all creation, and it therefore becomes his duty to recognize this debt and undertake to repay it everyday. Explaining the principle, the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa says:

ऋणं ह वै जायते योऽस्ति । स जायमान एव देवेभ्य ऽऋषिभ्यः
पितृभ्यो मनुष्येभ्यः ॥

⁶ Sāyaṇācārya on Śatapatha 11.3.8.1, vol.4 part 2 p. 157.

⁷ Taitt Aranyaka 2.10, p. 143.

⁸ Sāyaṇācārya on Śatapatha 11.3.8.3, vol.4 part 2 p. 158.

स यदेव यजेत । तेन देवेभ्य ऽऋणं जायते तद्धचेभ्य ऽएतत्करोति
यदेनान्यजते यदेभ्यो जुहोति ॥

अथ यदेवानुब्रवीत । तेन ऽर्षिभ्य ऽऋणं जायते तद्धचेभ्य ऽएतत्करोत्यर्षीणां
निधिगोप इति हयनूचानमाहुः ॥

अथ यदेव प्रजामिच्छेत् । तेन पितृभ्य ऽऋणं जायते तद्धचेभ्य ऽएतत्करोति
यदेषां सन्तताव्यवच्छिन्ना प्रजा भवति ॥

अथ यदेव व्वासयेत् । तेन मनुष्येभ्य ऽऋणं जायते तद्धचेभ्य ऽएतत्करोति
यदेनान्वासयते यदेभ्योऽशनं ददाति स य ऽएतानि सर्वाणि करोति
स कृतकर्मा तस्य सर्वमाप्तं सर्वं जितम् ॥

*ṛṇam ha vai jāyate yo'sti. sa jāyamāna 'eva devebhya
'ṛṣibhyah pitrbhyo manusyebhyah.*

*sa yadeva yajeta. tena devebhya 'ṛṇam jāyate taddhyebhya
'etat karoti yadenānyajate yadebhyo juhōti.*

*atha yadevānubruvīta. tena 'ṛṣibhya 'ṛṇam jāyate
taddhyebhya 'etat karotyarṣiṇām nidhigopa iti
hayanūcānamāhuḥ.*

*atha yadeva prajāmiccheta. tena pitrbhya 'ṛṇam jāyate
taddhyebhya 'etatkaroti yadeṣāṃ santatāvryavacchinnā
prajā bhavati.*

*aṥha yadeva vvasayeta. tena manusyebhya 'ṛṇam jāyate
tiddhyebhya 'etat karoti yadenānvvasayate yadebhyo 'śanam
dadāti sa ya 'etani sarvāṇi karoti sa kṛtakarmā tasya
sarvāmāptam sarvām jitam.⁹*

Whosoever is, is born in ṛṇa. In being born, he is in ṛṇa to the devas, ṛṣis, pitṛs and manuṣyas.

He performs yajña, because he is born in ṛṇa to the devas. It is because of the ṛṇa that he does this for them; it is because of the ṛṇa that he performs yajña for the devas and offers homa to them.

⁹ Śatapatha 1.5.5.1-5, vol.1 part 1 pp. 250-1.

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And he learns and recites what the ṛṣis have taught, because he is born in ṛṇa to the ṛṣis. It is because of the ṛṇa that he does this for them; learning and reciting thus, he is acknowledged by the wise as the protector of the treasure of the learning of the ṛṣis.

And he desires for progeny, because he is born in ṛṇa to the pitṛs. It is because of the ṛṇa that he does this for them; it is because of this that he keeps the line of progeny of the pitṛs continuing without a break.

And he offers hospitality, because he is born in ṛṇa to the manuṣyas. It is because of this ṛṇa that he does this for them; it is because of this that he offers hospitality and food to others.

He, who does all this, fulfils all his obligations; for him all is attained and all is conquered.

Pañcamahāyajña, thus, is not an observance that is undertaken for the sake of earning merit or virtue. It is merely a matter of accepting and endeavouring to repay debts that are incurred by the fact of being born and living in the world. It is merely being humanly responsible.

MANU TEACHES THE DISCIPLINE OF PAÑCAMAHĀYAJÑA

And, in India, the fulfilment of no great human responsibility, observance of no great precept, is left merely to the good sense of the seeker or the performer. Invariably, what the śruti – the vaidika saṁhitās, brāhmaṇas, araṇyakas and the upaniṣads – lay down as the broad precept, the smṛtis and dharmasāstras of different sects, communities and groups work out into detailed prescriptive procedures to be followed by the respective groups and communities. The prescriptions differ from one group to the other, and within a group the prescription may vary from occasion to occasion, but an individual in a community always has before him well-defined and often well-articulated norms that show him the way to be followed in most matters of significance.

Below, we describe the canonical prescription for the pañcamahāyajña observance, as it is laid down in the Manusmṛti, the

authentically conservative dharmasāstra text known to present-day India.

Manusmṛti is a smṛti of the brāhmaṇas: its prescriptions are meant to be applicable mainly to them. And as is well known, the responsibility of the brāhmaṇa for the material sustenance of the world is the least of all the varṇas. They are legitimately entitled to pratigraha, to accepting food and material sustenance from the other varṇas, in return for preserving and propagating the traditions of knowledge of the creator and creation, which the Indians believe are essential for the sustenance of dharma, of order and balance in the universe. Therefore, if the Manusmṛti lays down a strict discipline for the observance of pañcamahāyajña for the brāhmaṇa gṛhastha, the responsibility of other gṛhasthas to undertake pañcamahāyajña can only be greater and stricter.

The classical texts in fact make it clear that the pañcamahāyajña observance, and especially the feeding of guests arriving at one's door, is enjoined upon gṛhasthas of all varṇas. Yājñavalkyasmṛti specifically asserts that a śūdra gṛhastha should never neglect the performance of pañcamahāyajña observance, though he may abbreviate the ritual associated with the offerings of food to only the recitation of namaskāra-mantra: *namaskāreṇa mantreṇa pañca-yajñānna hāpayet*.¹⁰

And in the Mahābhārata, Śaṅkara while telling Umā of the significance of the pañcamahāyajña performance for gṛhasthas of all varṇas emphasizes that the śūdra-gṛhasthas should especially offer hospitality to the other three varṇas day after day: *sarvātithyam trivargasya yathāśakti yathārhatāh*.¹¹ The Mahābhārata also narrates the story of a niṣāda dasyu, Kāyavya, achieving great merit by propitiating his parents and by ensuring that everybody in the neighbourhood regularly receives food and care at his hands—at the hands of one who being a niṣāda is apart from the four varṇas and being a dacoit stands apart from society.¹²

Conversely, according to the classical texts, guests of all varṇas, including the śūdras, are entitled to receive hospitality, even at the household of a brāhmaṇa gṛhastha. And, as we shall see, even caṇḍālas have to be looked after and propitiated by the performer

¹⁰ Yājñavalkya 1.121, p. 54.

¹¹ Mahā *anūsāsana* 141, p. 5921.

¹² Mahā *śānti* 135, pp. 4762-4.

of pañcamahāyajña. We shall return to this issue of the universality of the right to receive and the duty to offer sustenance, which is in fact the most significant aspect of the precept of pañcamahāyajña. Let us, however, begin looking at the prescriptions of Manusmṛiti for the pañcamahāyajña performance.

Pañcamahāyajña begins at marriage

Manu begins his description of gr̥hasthāśrama with the advice that immediately after marriage the householder should set up his household around the same fire that has been lit to receive the homa offerings during the marriage ceremony, and begin performing pañcamahāyajña everyday. The five yajñas are then defined in terms that closely echo their description in the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa:

पञ्च क्लृप्ता महायज्ञाः प्रत्यहं गृहमेधिनाम् ।
 अध्यापनं ब्रह्मयज्ञः पितृयज्ञस्तु तर्पणम् ।
 होमो दैवो बलिर्भौतो नृयज्ञोऽतिथिपूजनम् ॥

*pañca klṛptā mahāyajñāḥ pratyaham̐ gr̥hamedhinām
 adhyāpanam̐ brahmayajñāḥ pitryajñastu tarpaṇam
 homo daivo balirbhauto nryajño tithipūjanam*¹³

Five are the mahāyajñas prescribed to the householder for daily observance. These are: brahmayajña, instructing others in knowledge; pitryajña, making offerings for the ancestors; devayajña, making offerings to the fire for the devas; bhūtayajña, taking out shares of food for all beings; and nryajña, offering reverential hospitality to the guests.

It is probably because Manu is addressing almost exclusively the brāhmaṇa gr̥hastha that brahmayajña here becomes adhyāpana, instructing others in sacred knowledge, in place of adhyayana, careful and meditative study, that the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa speaks of. However, the essence of gr̥hasthāśrama for Manusmṛiti remains the same as for the vedas and itihāsas – for all of them gr̥hastha is the font of

¹³ Manu 3.69-70, pp. 84-5.

sustenance for all created beings. Thus, almost immediately after defining pañcamahāyajña, Manu says:

यथा वायुं समाश्रित्य सर्वे जीवन्ति जन्तवः ।
 तथा गृहस्थमाश्रित्य वर्तन्ते इतराश्रमाः ।
 यस्मात्त्रयोऽप्याश्रमिणो ज्ञानेनानेन चान्वहम् ।
 गृहस्थेनैव धार्यन्ते तस्माज्जयेष्ठाश्रमो गृहम् ।
 स संधार्यः प्रयत्नेन स्वर्गमक्षयमिच्छता ।
 सुखं चेहेच्छताऽत्यन्तं योऽधार्यो दुर्बलेन्द्रियैः ॥

*yathā vāyūṁ samāśritya sarve jīvanti jantavaḥ
 tathā gṛhasthamāśritya vartante itarāśramāḥ
 yasmātrayo 'pyāśramiṇo jñānenānena cānvaham
 gṛhasthenaiiva dhāryante tasmājyēṣṭhāśramo gṛham
 sa samdhāryah prayatnena svargamakṣayamicchata
 sukhāṁ chechchata 'tyantam yo 'dhāryo durbalendriyaiḥ*¹⁴

Just as all living beings live off air, so do all āśramas live off the gṛhastha. Because the other three āśramas depend upon the gṛhastha alone, for food and for instruction in knowledge, gṛhasthāśrama is said to be the foremost among the āśramas.

Therefore, those who want great luxury in the world and inexhaustible abode in the heavens hereafter, should strive carefully to fulfil the responsibilities of the gṛhasthāśrama, which are in fact beyond the abilities of the weak in senses.

And the smṛti goes on to insist that the expectations of the seers, ancestors, gods and all created beings, as also of the guests and visitors, are all centred around the gṛhastha. The householder ought to keep these expectations always in mind, and endeavour to fulfil them by regular observance of the five mahāyajñas.

Pitryajña

After having thus explained the centrality of pañcamahāyajña in the daily routine of a gṛhastha, the smṛti begins to lay down

¹⁴ Manu 3.77-79, pp. 92-4.

the detailed procedure for the five observances. The text takes up pitryajña first, and prescribes that a gr̥hastha ought to propitiate the pitṛs by making śrāddha offerings of food and water, or of milk, fruit and roots everyday.

The text further explains that this daily śrāddha offering for the pitṛs is accomplished by feeding at least one vipra, one revered person. And in the meticulous style of the smṛtis, the text clarifies that unlike in the more elaborate śrāddha observance undertaken at prescribed times of the year, where besides the vipras representing the pitṛs at least one more vipra must be present to represent the viśvedevas, the gods of the universe, it is not essential to have a representative of the latter during the daily pitryajña. For the pitryajña observance, it is enough to feed and propitiate a single vipra alone:

एकमप्याशयेद्विप्रं पितृर्थं पाञ्चयज्ञिके ।
न चैवान्नाशयेत्कचिद्वैश्वदेवं प्रति द्विजम् ॥

*ekamapyāśayedvipraṁ pitrarthaṁ pañcayajñike
na caivānnaśayetkaṁcidvaiśvadevaṁ prati dvijam*¹⁵

For the sake of pitṛs, seek to feed at least one vipra. In this context it is certainly not necessary to seek another vipra to take the place of the viśvedevas.

Devayajña

Next, Manusmṛti describes the procedure for the devayajña component of pañcamahāyajña. For this observance, Manusmṛti lays down thus:

वैश्वदेवस्य सिद्धस्य गृहोऽग्नौ विधिपूर्वकम् ।
आभ्यः कुयद्विताभ्यो ब्राह्मणो होममन्वहम् ।
अग्नेः सोमस्य चैवादौ तयोश्चैव समस्तयोः ।
विश्वेभ्यश्चैव देवेभ्यो धन्वन्तरय एव च ।
कुह्वै चैवानुमत्यै च प्रजापतय एव च ।
सह द्यावापृथिव्योश्च तथा स्विष्टकृतेऽन्ततः ॥

¹⁵ Manu 3.83, p. 97.

*vaiśvadevasya siddhasya gr̥hyegnau vidhipūrvakam
ābhyah̥ kuryāddevatābhyo brāhmaṇo homamanvahanam
agneḥ somasya caivādau tayoścaiva samastayoḥ
viśvebhyaścaiva devebhyo dhanvantaraya eva ca
kuhvai caivānumatyai ca prajāpataya eva ca
saha dyāvāpṛthivyośca tathā sviṣṭakṛte 'ntataḥ*¹⁶

When the food for the viśvedevas is ready, the brāhmaṇa householder should make offerings to the household fire for the devas: for agni, soma, the viśvedevas, dhanvantari, kuhu, anumati, prajāpati, dyāvāpṛthivī and, finally, for sviṣṭakṛt.

Medhātithi, whose commentary on Manusmṛti, the Manubhāṣya, is one of the most authoritative, explains that “food for the viśvedevas” literally means the food that has been cooked for the gods of the universe, but it includes food cooked for all, including the bhūtas and the guests. Manu, known for the rigid conservatism of his prescriptions, insists that offerings for the gods from this food have to be made in the gr̥hyāgni, the fire that is lit for the marriage ceremony and is preserved by the householder ever since. Some of the other dharmasāstra texts however allow that if the gr̥hyāgni is not preserved then the devayajña offerings may be offered to the ordinary fire in the household.

The procedure for the devayajña prescribed in most other texts is similar to that of the Manusmṛti, except that the list of devas for whom specific offerings are to be made in the fire may vary from text to text.

Bhūtayajña

The next step in the pañcamahāyajña observance is the offering of food for the bhūtas, all created beings or, perhaps more aptly, to the elements of which the universe is constituted. Such offerings are in the form of appropriate shares of food, bali, taken out for diverse representatives of the bhūtas. The process of taking out bali is baliharāṇa, which is also the bhūtayajña. Manusmṛti prescribes the procedure for baliharāṇa thus:

¹⁶ Manu 3.84-86, pp. 98-100.

एवं सम्यग्घविरहुत्वा सर्वदिक्षु प्रदक्षिणम् ।
 इन्द्रान्तकाप्यतीन्दुभ्यः सानुगेभ्यो बलिं हरेत् ।
 मरुद्भ्य इति तु द्वारि क्षिपेदप्स्वद्भ्य इत्यपि ।
 वनस्पतिभ्य इत्येवं मुसलोलूखले हरेत् ।
 उच्छीर्षके श्रियै कुर्याद्भद्रकाल्यै च पादतः ।
 ब्रह्मवास्तोष्पतिभ्यां तु वास्तुमध्ये बलिं हरेत् ।
 विश्वेभ्यश्चैव देवेभ्यो बलिमाकाश उत्क्षिपेत् ।
 दिवाचरेभ्यो भूतेभ्यो नक्तञ्चारिभ्य एव च ।
 पृष्ठवास्तुनि कुर्वीत बलिं सर्वान्नभूतये ।
 पितृभ्यो बलिशेषं तु सर्वं दक्षिणतो हरेत् ।
 शुनां च पतितानां च श्वपचां पापरोगिणाम् ।
 वयसाञ्च कृमीणां च शनकैर्निर्वपेद्भुवि ।
 एवं यः सर्वभूतानि ब्राह्मणो नित्यमर्चति ।
 स गच्छति परं स्थानं तेजोमूर्तिः पथर्जुना ॥

*evam samyagghavirhutvā sarvadikṣu pradakṣiṇam
 indrāntakāppatīndubhyaḥ sānugebhyo balim haret
 marudbhya iti tu dvāri kṣīpedapṣvadbhya ityapi
 vanaspatibhya ityevam musalolūkhale haret
 ucchīrṣake śriyai kuryādbhadrakālyai ca pādataḥ
 brahmavāstospatibhyām tu vāstumadhye balim haret
 viśvebhyaścaiva devebhyo balimākāśa utkṣīpet
 divācarebhyo bhūtebhyo naktañcāribhya eva ca
 pṛṣṭhavāstuni kurvīta balim sarvānnabhūtaye
 pītr̥bhyo balīśeṣam tu sarvaṁ dakṣiṇato haret
 śunām ca patitānām ca śvapacām pāparogīṇām
 vayasāñca kṛmīṇām ca śanakairnirvapedbhuvi
 evam yaḥ sarvabhūtāni brāhmaṇo nityamarcati
 sa gacchati param sthānam tejomūrtiḥ patharjunā¹⁷*

Having made the proper offerings to the fire for the devas, make bali offerings in the four directions, in the pradakṣiṇa – clockwise – order. Make offerings for all created beings, invoking indra and his followers in the east, yama and his

¹⁷ Manu 3.87-93, pp. 101-6.

followers in the south, varuṇa and his followers in the west and soma and his followers in the north. Make offerings at the door of the house while invoking maruts, at the watering-places while invoking ap, at the pestle and mortar while invoking vanaspati. Make offerings at the head and feet of the vāstupuruṣa, the constructed space, while invoking śrī and bhadrakālī respectively. At the centre of the vāstupuruṣa make offerings while invoking brahmā and vastoṣpati. Make offerings into the air for the beings that move in the day and the night, while invoking the viśvedevas. At the top of the house make offerings invoking an abundance of food for all. Finally, make an offering towards the south while invoking the ancestors.

Then, carefully place a portion of the food on the ground for the dogs, the birds and the insects, and for the fallen, the sick-in-isolation, and the caṇḍālas.

The brāhmaṇa householder who reverentially makes such offerings for all beings everyday attains a golden form, and reaches the glorious worlds through the straight path.

Baliharāṇa thus involves making bali offerings for the keepers of the four directions; for the gods of winds, water and vegetation; for the deities of the house; for the protectors of all beings that move in the day or the night; for the gods of abundance; for the ancestors; and finally for the birds, insects, animals and all of those who by some misfortune or the other are condemned to live outside the social domain.

Unlike the devayajña offerings, which are made into the fire, the baliharāṇa offerings are placed on the ground or offered unto the air. And, Manusmṛti as well as other texts often insist that such offerings should be placed carefully, making certain that the food offered does not get mixed with dust and dirt. Āpastambadharmasūtra insists that the ground should be wiped clean and sprinkled with water before placing bali offerings on it.¹⁸ And, Manusmṛti urges care especially in the context of bali offerings made for birds, dogs, caṇḍālas and the sick, advising that the food should be

¹⁸ Āpastamba 2.3.15, p. 188.

kept on the ground slowly and carefully without raising any dust: *śanakairnirvapedbhuvī*.

Commenting on this verse of Manusmṛti, Medhātīthi explains that the prescription to keep bali offerings on the ground does not imply that these should not be kept in a proper vessel. It only means that the food should be left on the ground for the recipient, and not directly offered. Medhātīthi also asserts that bali offerings for the birds should be placed at a spot where they may feed in peace without being disturbed by dogs and others, and such offerings for the insects should be placed where the insects usually breed.

Manuṣyayajña

It is only after having thus provided for and propitiated the pitṛs, devas and bhūtas that food becomes fit for consumption within human society. But, before partaking of this food himself with his immediate family, a grhastha must first take care of those who come seeking his hospitality and those whose sustenance depends upon him. Feeding the guests and dependents thus, with ritual rigour and thoroughness, is manuṣyayajña.

Bhikṣā

The procedure that Manu lays down for manuṣyayajña is perhaps the most elaborate of the five mahāyajñas. And the first step in this yajña, according to Manu, is the offering of bhikṣa to the seekers:

कृत्वैतद्बलिकर्मैवमतिथिं पूर्वमाशयेत् ।
भिक्षां च भिक्षवे दद्याद्विधिवद् ब्रह्मचारिणे ।
यत्पुण्यफलमाप्नोति गां दत्त्वा विधिवद्गुरोः ।
तत्पुण्यफलमाप्नोति भिक्षां दत्त्वा द्विजो गृही ॥

*kṛtvaitadbalikarmāivamatithim pūrvamāśayet
bhikṣām ca bhikṣave dadyādvividhivad brahmacārīṇe
yatpūnyaphalamāpnoti gām dattvā vidhivadguroḥ
tatpūnyaphalamāpnoti bhikṣām dattvā dvijo grhi*¹⁹

After having performed the balikarma, first feed the guests and offer, in the proper manner, a measure of food each as

¹⁹ Manu 3.94-95, pp. 107-8.

bhikṣā to the seekers. To the brahmacāriṅs offer such bhikṣā with proper ceremony and ritual.

The twice-born householder earns the same virtue by such offerings of food to the seekers as he would earn by gifting a cow with all proper ceremony to his teacher.

Bhikṣā is a small measure of food offered to the seeker at the door. It is an observance distinct from the feeding of guests: the latter is performed ceremonially after welcoming the guest into the house and serving him to his fulfilment, while bhikṣā forms only a part of the meal of the seeker. The brahmacāriṅs and saṁnyāsiṅs are not expected to accept more than a handful from any household; and, as Medhātithi says, a handful of food constitutes bhikṣā. This, according to him, is the established practice, well-known amongst gr̥hastha women. Kullūka, another well-known commentator on Manusmṛti, says that even a single morsel of food may be offered as bhikṣā, but adds that whenever possible larger measures of food ought to be given.

Medhātithi explains that bhikṣā must be offered to all those who seek. The brahmacāriṅs, the non-gr̥hastha young who are engaged in disciplined study of their assigned branch of knowledge, are however to be offered bhikṣā with proper ceremony and respect—with proper invocation of welfare for the receiver. Others, even those who seem to be mere impostors, must also be given bhikṣā, except that the ceremony and ritual associated with the offering of bhikṣā to the brahmacāriṅs may be dispensed with in their case.

The next three verses of Manusmṛti lay down the proper procedure for offering bhikṣā to the brahmacāriṅs, and warn of the great disasters that befall those who offer bhikṣā to the deserving carelessly, with contempt and condescension as it were. Offering bhikṣā, says Manu, is like performing homa to the fire that resides at the mouth of a deserving seeker, and such homa, performed properly, relieves the giver of all obstacles in the present world and cleanses him of the effects of all his transgressions such that there are no obstacles for him in the world beyond.

Atithi

Having thus described the etiquette of offering bhikṣā, Manusmṛti moves on to the next step in manuṣyayajūa, the feeding of the guests. For such feeding, Manu prescribes thus:

संप्राप्ताय त्वतिथये प्रदद्यादासनोदके ।

अन्नं चैव यथाशक्ति संस्कृत्य विधिपूर्वकम् ॥

*samprāptāya tvatithaye pradadyādāsanodake
annam caiva yathāśakti samskṛtya vidhipūrvakam*²⁰

To the guest who appears at the door, offer an appropriate seat to rest upon and water for ablutions, and then with proper ceremony serve him food, which ought to be made specially presentable to the best of one's abilities.

Mēdhātithi explains that an atithi is the one who appears at the door unasked. Manu, a couple of verses later, elaborates upon the precept that only an uninvited person qualifies to be called an atithi. It is such an uninvited and unacquainted one who must be welcomed with great ceremony and offered food with reverence. This is a discipline enjoined upon all grhasthas, even those who live in great austerity themselves. For, as Manu says:

शिलानप्युञ्छतो नित्यं पञ्चाग्नीनिप जुह्वतः ।

सर्वं सुकृतमादत्ते ब्राह्मणोऽनर्चितो वसन् ॥

*śilānapyuñchato nityam pañcāgnīnīnīpi juhvatāḥ
sarvaṁ sukṛtamādatte brāhmaṇo 'narcito vasan*²¹

A brāhmaṇa guest who does not find reverential welcome takes away the merit of all other good deeds of the host, even if the householder be the one who lives by gathering food left over in the fields and the marketplaces, and who regularly makes proper offerings to the five fires everyday in his house.

And, Manu insists, that a warm welcome and hospitality for the guest would never be lacking in the abode of a householder even if he happens to have no food to offer:

तृणानि भूमिरुदकं वाक्चतुर्थी च सूनुता ।

एतान्यपि सतां गेहे नोच्छिद्यन्ते कदाचन ॥

²⁰ Manu 3.99, p. 111.

²¹ Manu 3.100, p. 111.

*ṛṇāni bhūmirudakam vākcaturthī ca sūṇṛtā
etānyapi satām gehe nocchidyante kadācana*²²

A stretch of earth to lie down, a bed of straw, a bowl of water, and pleasing speech, these four are never lacking in the house of a virtuous person.

Atithi and abhyāgata

After having thus prescribed the inviolable discipline of offering hospitality to the atithi, Manu proceeds to define who is and who is not an atithi. And, the main qualification of an atithi is that there is no permanence to his coming and going, and he is someone who is not even remotely known or related to the host. He comes unknown, uninvited and unexpected. As Manu puts it:

एकरात्रं तु निवसन्नतिथिर्ब्राह्मणः स्मृतः ।

अनित्यं हि स्थितो यस्मात्तस्मादतिथिरुच्यते ।

नैकग्रामीणमतिथिं विप्रं सांगतिकं तथा ।

उपस्थितं गृहे विद्याद्भार्या यत्राग्रयोऽपि वा ॥

*ekarātram tu nivasannatithirbrāhmaṇaḥ smṛtaḥ
anityam hi sthito yasmāttasmādatithirucyate
nāikagrāmīṇamatithim vipraṁ sāṅgatikam tathā
upasthitam grhe vidyādbhāryā yatrāgrayo'pi vā*²³

Atithi is the brāhmaṇa who stays only for one night. He is spoken of as an atithi because his stay is not permanent: *anityam sthitaḥ atithiḥ*.

A brāhmaṇa from the same locality is not an atithi, nor someone from the locality from where the wife and the household-fire of the householder have come, and nor someone who is a friend and acquaintance of the householder. These are not said to be atithis, even if they arrive at the door at the proper time.

Manu here seems to be including only a brāhmaṇa in his definition of an atithi. He takes up the issue of the varṇa of an atithi more explicitly later, where he prescribes that a non-brāhmaṇa is

²² Manu 3.101, p. 113.

²³ Manu 3.102-103, pp. 113-4.

not called an atithi in the house of a brāhmaṇa, but all those who arrive at the door of a brāhmaṇa household at mealtimes have to be offered reverential hospitality, whether they be kṣatriyas, vaiśyas or śūdras. We shall have occasion to discuss this issue further, a little later.

At this stage the smṛti is mainly concerned with laying down the precept that only an uninvited and unacquainted seeker of hospitality is an atithi. This seems to be the basic position of the classical Indian texts: feeding the atithis as part of the manuṣyayajña implies feeding the unknown visitor who comes seeking shelter and food, and not the friends and relatives who have been invited, or who visit the gr̥hastha out of love and affection.

In the Mahābhārata, Śrīkr̥ṣṇa, while advising Yudhiṣṭhira on the discipline of annadāna, emphasizes this fundamental distinction between a guest who is already acquainted and the one who comes unknown and uninvited. The former, Śrīkr̥ṣṇa says, is called abhyāgata, the latter alone is an atithi: *abhyāgato jñātāpūrvo hyajñāto 'tithirucyate*.²⁴ A gr̥hastha, of course, must offer reverential hospitality to both the abhyāgata and the atithi. But it is the feeding of the atithi that forms an essential component of manuṣyayajña. The abhyāgata is like a member of the household and, as Manu would explain later, he eats after the atithis, along with the family of the host.

The coming of an unknown, uninvited and unexpected atithi in the evening, Manu says, is like a fortune fetched to the householder's door by the setting sun himself. Such an atithi should be cared for with the greatest reverence. As Manusmṛti puts it:

अप्रणोद्योऽतिथिः सायं सूर्योदो गृहमेधिना ।

काले प्राप्तस्त्वकाले वा नास्यानश्नन्गृहे वसेत् ॥

*apranodyo 'tithih sāyam sūryodho gr̥hamedhinā
kāle prāptasvakāle vā nāsyānaśnangr̥he vaset*²⁵

A guest who comes in the evening is brought to the householder's house by the sun himself. He should never be turned away. And, he should never be made to stay hungry in

²⁴ Mahā āśvamedhika 92, p. 6329.

²⁵ Manu 3.105, p. 116.

the house, whether he comes at the proper or the improper time.

Medhātithi explains that proper time in this verse means the coming of a guest at mealtimes, and improper time means his coming after the evening meal is over and the food cooked for the day is exhausted. Manu would say later that in the latter eventuality, food should be cooked afresh, but in no case a guest who arrives after sunset should be turned away or allowed to sleep un-fed.

A guest arriving in the evening it seems is specially auspicious, probably because his need to find hospitality is the greatest, and therefore the requirement that a gr̥hastha should never turn away such a guest is the most stringent. Viṣṇupurāṇa says that the sin of turning away a guest arriving after sunset is eight times worse than that earned by turning away a guest during the day.²⁶ Incidentally the purāṇa also advises that before partaking of his meal a gr̥hastha should stand outside the house – for at least the time it takes to milk a cow – waiting for a guest to arrive.²⁷

Etiquette of feeding

The next three verses of Manu seek to lay down the proper etiquette for feeding the guests. And the first part of the etiquette is:

न वै स्वयं तदश्रीयादतिथिं यन्न भोजयेत् ।
धन्यं यशस्यमायुष्यं स्वर्ग्यं वाऽतिथिपूजनम् ॥

*na vai svayam tadaśrīyādatithim yanna bhojayet
dhanyaṃ yaśasyamāyusyaṃ svargyaṃ vā'tithipūjanam*²⁸

The householder should not eat anything that has not been offered to the guest. Offering reverential hospitality to a guest brings the host wealth, honour, long-life and an abode in the heavens.

Medhātithi and other commentators explain that the guest should be offered the best food available in the house. The host should not partake of superior foods like fine soups, ghee, curds, sugar, etc., unless these have been offered to the guest also. But

²⁶ Viṣṇu 3.11.108, p. 237.

²⁷ Viṣṇu 3.11.58, p. 233.

²⁸ Manu 3.106, p. 117.

he may of course enjoy less attractive foods like the gruels that are cooked for the sick without necessarily forcing these upon the guest, unless the guest specifically desires them.

The next part of the etiquette laid down by Manu is to offer the guests the treatment appropriate to their status:

आसनावसथौ शय्यामनुब्रज्यामुपासनम् ।

उत्तमेषूत्तमं कुर्याद्धीने हीनं समे समम् ॥

*āsanāvasathau śayyāmanubrajyāmupāsanam
uttameṣūttamaṁ kuryāddhīne hīnaṁ same samam*²⁹

Offer hospitality to the atithis according to their status. Superiors should receive the superior seat, superior place of stay, superior bed, superior reverence and, while leaving, should be escorted by the host for longer distances. Equals should be offered all this in an equal measure; and the inferiors in an inferior measure.

Medhātithi and Kullūka explain that such discrimination is called for when there are many guests in the house at the same time. Treating them all equally in such a situation would be invidious. The host must therefore be careful to respect the accomplishments of different guests and ensure that none of them feels slighted.

And then there is the verse, that we have referred to earlier, advising the grhastha to cook afresh if a guest arrives after the day's food is over:

वैश्वदेवे तु निर्वृत्ते यद्यन्योऽतिथिराब्रजेत् ।

तस्याप्यन्नं यथाशक्ति प्रदद्यान्न बलिं हरेत् ॥

*vaiśvadeve tu nirvr̥t̥te yadyanyo'atithirāvrajet
tasyāpyannaṁ yathāśaktiṁ pradadyānna balim hareṭ*³⁰

If an atithi arrives after the food from which vaiśvadeva offerings – offerings to the viśvedevas and others – have been made is exhausted, then the householder should prepare food afresh for him to the best of his abilities. Vaiśvadeva offerings, however, need not be repeated from this food.

²⁹ Manu 3.107, p. 118.

³⁰ Manu 3.108, p. 119.

Such is the detailed etiquette that Manu prescribes for treating the uninvited and unacquainted guests that come to one's door. But there is an etiquette for the guests also. In a couple of earlier verses, which we have not quoted here, Manu lays down that a householder should not become habituated to seeking food elsewhere. Such a habit deprives the householder of all his learning and tapas, and condemns him to be born as a domestic animal in his later lives. Now Manu prescribes that a guest should not go about advertising one's ancestry and lineage in order to obtain hospitality:

न भोजनार्थं स्वे विप्रः कुलगोत्रे निवेदयेत् ।

भोजनार्थं हि ते शंसन्वान्ताशीत्युच्यते बुधैः ॥

*na bhojanārtham sve viprah kulagotre nivedayet
bhojanārtham hi te śamsanvāntāśītyucyate budhaiḥ*³¹

A vipra does not disclose his kula and gotra to seek food. One who extols his ancestry for the sake of food is known amongst the wise as vāntāśī, the partaker of foul food.

The Mahābhārata, incidentally, lays down the reverse discipline in a similar context: it advises the host to refrain from enquiring about the ancestry, lineage or learning of the guest. We have earlier heard Śrīkrṣṇa telling Yudhiṣṭhira in the vaiṣṇavadharmaparvan: *na pṛcched gotracaraṇam nādhītam vā kadācana*.³²

Non-brāhmaṇa atithis

So far Manusmṛti has been more or less implicitly implying that only a brāhmaṇa can be an atithi in a brāhmaṇa household. In the following verse Manu states this explicitly:

न ब्राह्मणस्य त्वतिथिर्गृहे राजन्य उच्यते ।

वैश्यशूद्रौ सखा चैव ज्ञातयो गुरुरेव च ॥

*na brāhmaṇasya tvatithirgṛhe rājanya ucyate
vaiśyaśūdrau sakhā caiva jñātayo gurureva ca*³³

³¹ Manu 3.109, p. 120.

³² Mahā āśvamedhika 92, p. 6355.

³³ Manu 3.110, p. 120.

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In the house of a brāhmaṇa, a kṣatriya is not called an atithi, nor a vaiśya or a śūdra. A friend is also not an atithi, nor someone who is related to the householder, and not even the guru of the host.

A friend, a teacher or anyone acquainted to the householder is of course not an atithi. We have already heard Manu laying down this precept quite explicitly. Manu's insistence, however, that only a brāhmaṇa guest can be an atithi to a brāhmaṇa host seems incongruent with the essence of pañcamahāyajña, which lies in the gr̥hastha's responsibility to take care of and provide for all. Manu, in fact, immediately after having asserted that a brāhmaṇa alone is an atithi to a brāhmaṇa gr̥hastha prescribes the inviolable discipline of feeding guests from all other varṇas. For the proper hospitality to be offered to the guests of non-brāhmaṇa varṇas, and to the guests who are known to the gr̥hastha, Manu lays down thus:

यदि त्वतिथिधर्मेण क्षत्रियो गृहमाव्रजेत् ।
भुक्तवत्सु च विप्रेषु कामं तमपि भोजयेत् ।
वैश्यशूद्रावपि प्राप्तौ कुटुम्बेऽतिथिधर्मिणौ ।
भोजयेत्सह भृत्यैस्तावानृशंस्यं प्रयोजयन् ।
इतरानपि सख्यादीन्संप्रीत्या गृहमागतान् ।
प्रकृत्यान्नं यथाशक्ति भोजयेत्सह भार्यया ॥

*yadi tvatithidharmena kṣatriyo gr̥hamāvrajet
bhuktavatsu ca vipreṣu kāmam tamapi bhojayet
vaiśyaśūdrāvapi prāptau kuṭumbe'tithidharminṇau
bhojayetsaha bhṛtyaistāvānṛśamsyam prayojayan
itarānapi sakhyādīnsamprītyā gr̥hamāgatān
prakṛtyānnaṁ yathāśakti bhojayetsaha bhāryayā³⁴*

But if a kṣatriya arrives at the house as an atithi, he should also be fed to his heart's content after the brāhmaṇas have been fed. Similarly, if a vaiśya or a śūdra arrives at the house, he too should be fed generously, along with the dependents of the house.

³⁴ Manu 3.111-113, pp. 121-2.

Others, like the friends, etc., who come to the house with love and affection, should be served upon to the best of his capabilities by the householder along with his wife.

Medhātithi explains that anyone who arrives from another locality, at mealtimes, and has exhausted his victuals for the journey is an atithi by definition: *tatrātitherdharmaḥ kṣīṇapathyodanatvam paraḡrāmavāso bhojanakālopasthānam*.³⁵ Such a one, whether he be a kṣatriya, vaiśya or śūdra, has to be fed with all proper reverence.

Manu's prescription is that kṣatriyas should be fed after the brāhmaṇas, and vaiśya or śūdra guests should be fed with the dependents of the house. The dependents of the gr̥hastha, the bhṛtyas, are part of the gr̥hastha family, the kuṭumba, and they, according to Medhātithi, eat after the atithis have been fed, but before the gr̥hastha-dampatī, the husband and wife, partake of food themselves.

Medhātithi further asserts that the etiquette of offering hospitality to the atithis is the same for all the varṇas. The only distinction to be made is in the order of feeding. Medhātithi in fact specifically points out that when Manu says that a vaiśya or śūdra atithi should be fed along with the dependents, he is merely defining the time sequence of feeding. The honour and hospitality offered to the vaiśya or śūdra atithi however is not affected by this qualification, and he must be honoured the same as atithis of any other varṇa.

In elaborating upon Manusmṛti thus, Medhātithi seems to be following what is the classical position on the subject. In referring to an atithi, Indian texts usually do not make a distinction between different varṇas. For most texts a brāhmaṇa guest is indeed the most auspicious, but he alone is not an atithi. Anyone who appears at the door uninvited and unknown at mealtimes is an atithi. Parāśarasamṛti, known to be the smṛti for the present times, says that anyone who arrives at the end of vaiśvadeva – after pitṛyajña, devayajña and bhūtayajña have been accomplished – is an atithi, whether he be a friend or an enemy, and whether he be wise or ignorant:

इष्टो वा यदि वा द्वेष्यो मूर्खः पण्डित एव वा ।
संप्राप्तो वैश्वदेवान्ते सोऽतिथिः स्वर्गसंक्रमः ॥

³⁵ Medhātithi on Manu 3.111, p. 121.

*iṣṭo vā yadi vā dvesyo mūrkhahaḥ paṇḍita eva vā
samprāpto vaiśvadevānte so'tithih svargasamkramah*³⁶

And Śrīkr̥ṣṇa offers the same advice in almost the same words to Yudhiṣṭhira in the vaiṣṇavadharmaparvan:

हितः प्रियो वा द्वेष्यो वा मूर्खः पण्डित एव वा ।

प्राप्तो यो वैश्वदेवान्ते सोऽतिथिः स्वर्गसंक्रमः ॥

*hitah priyo vā dvesyo vā mūrkhahaḥ paṇḍita eva vā
prāpto yo vaiśvadevānte so'tithih svargasamkramah*³⁷

Śrīkr̥ṣṇa in this context also reminds Yudhiṣṭhira that a tired guest brings gods and ancestors in his wake to the door of the gr̥hastha. Devas and pitṛs follow the guest. When the atithi is honoured, the devas and pitṛs are honoured, when he is propitiated they are propitiated; and when the atithi is turned away, the devas and pitṛs also turn away. Therefore, Śrīkr̥ṣṇa advises that even if a caṇḍāla comes as an atithi he must be offered reverential hospitality by the gr̥hastha:

चाण्डालोऽप्यतिथिः प्राप्तो देशकालेऽन्नकाङ्क्षया ।

अभ्युद्गम्यो गृहस्थेन पूजनीयश्च सर्वदा ॥

*cāṇḍālo'pyatithih prāpto deśakāle'nnakāṅkṣayā
abhyudgamyo gr̥hasthena pūjanīyaśca sarvadā*³⁸

Even if a caṇḍāla comes seeking food, at the proper place and time, he should be respectfully welcomed by the gr̥hastha and offered reverential hospitality.

The image of the atithi followed by agni, the devas and the pitṛs is evoked in the Mahābhārata many times; and the command that such an atithi has to be reverentially honoured, whether he be a caṇḍāla or even someone who lives off the flesh of dogs, also keeps appearing repeatedly. And ṛṣi Mārkaṇḍeya, during his long discourse on dharma in the vanaparvan of Mahābhārata, advises

³⁶ Parāśara 1.40, p. 349.

³⁷ Mahā āśvamedhika 92, p. 6330.

³⁸ Mahā āśvamedhika 92, p. 6329.

Yudhiṣṭhira that the one who comes seeking hospitality at the door, whatever be his varṇa, is indeed a brāhmaṇa for the host:

अध्वनि क्षीणगात्रश्च पथि पांसुसमन्वितः ।

पृच्छते ह्यन्नदातारं गृहमायाति चाराया ।

तं पूजयाथ यत्नेन सोऽतिथिर्ब्राह्मणश्च सः ॥

*adhvani kṣīṇagātraśca pathi pāmsusamanvitaḥ
pṛcchate hyannadātāraṃ gṛhamāyāti cāśayā
taṃ pūjayātha yatnena so’titirbrāhmaṇaśca saḥ*³⁹

Offer reverential hospitality to the one who comes to your house, tired from his travels and covered with the dust of the paths he has walked – the one who has reached your house with great hope, having long searched for a generous host. Such a one is an atithi; he indeed is a brāhmaṇa. Look after him diligently.

An unknown, tired and hungry person, appearing at the door thus, ought to be always welcomed and honoured with reverential hospitality and food. This requirement on the grhastha is unconditional, it does not depend upon who the guest is and when he comes. This is manuṣyayajña, and this is what Manu prescribes for the grhastha to perform, in the meticulously well-ordered and proper manner that probably only he could have taught.

This brings us almost to the end of Manu’s prescriptions for manuṣyayajña. But, before closing the yajña and allowing the grhastha to sit down to eat with his wife, Manu, in his usual meticulous ways, makes an exception to the rule of feeding the atithis before everyone else:

सुवासिनीः कुमारीश्च रोगिणो गर्भिणीः स्त्रियः ।

अतिथिभ्योऽन्वगेवैतान्भोजयेदविचारयन् ॥

*suvāsiniḥ kumārīśca rogiṇo garbhīṇīḥ striyaḥ
atithibhyo’nvagevaitānbhojayedavicārayan*⁴⁰

³⁹ Mahā vana 200.60–61, p. 1527.

⁴⁰ Manu 3.114, p. 124.

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Young married women, young unwed girls, the sick, and the pregnant women, ought to be fed, even before the guests. The householder need have no hesitation in this regard.

Dampatī

It is only after such rigorously ordered and careful offering of food to all – to the pitrs, the devas, the bhūtas, the atithis, the dependents and the abhyāgatas – that the gr̥hastha, according to Manu, may rightfully partake of food himself. Failure to follow this rigid discipline of eating would lead to a fate worse than that of Śveta. For Śveta at least his own flesh was saved for him because of his great virtue, but the gr̥hastha who does not follow the discipline of feeding others before eating for himself would not be granted even that. As Manu says:

अदत्त्वा तु य एतेभ्यः पूर्वं भुङ्क्तेऽविचक्षणः ।
स भुञ्जानो न जानाति श्वगृध्रैर्जग्धिमात्मनः ॥

adattvā tu ya etebhyaḥ pūrvam bhunkte'vicakṣaṇaḥ
*sa bhujñāno na jānāti śvagṛdhrairjagdhimātmanah*⁴¹

A householder who eats before feeding all the others is a blind man, who while eating does not see that, when the time comes, his body would be eaten by dogs and vultures.

And, after all have been taken care of, after all have been fed, it is indeed time for the gr̥hastha-dampatī, the husband and the wife, to sit down to eat for themselves. Because, the greatness of the gr̥hastha is in eating what is left after feeding others:

भुक्तवत्स्वथ विप्रेषु स्वेषु भृत्येषु चैव हि ।
भुञ्जीयातां ततः पश्चादवशिष्टं तु दम्पती ॥

bhuktavatsvatha vipreṣu sveṣu bhṛtyeṣu caiva hi
*bhujñiyātām tataḥ paścādavaśiṣṭam tu dampatī*⁴²

The householder and his wife ought to eat only what is left after all others – from the brāhmaṇa guests to the

⁴¹ Manu 3.115, p. 124.

⁴² Manu 3.116, p. 125.

dependents of the household and all the members of the family – have been fed.

Medhātīthi, while commenting on an earlier verse, refers to the use of the phrase, *avaśiṣṭam tu dāmpatī*, above, and explains that the time of eating prescribed for the husband and the wife is the same, there are not two separate mealtimes for them: *yo bhartur-bhojanakālah sa eva bhāryāyā api pṛthaktasyā bhojanakālasyābhāvāt*.⁴³

Draupadī-Satyabhāmā saṁvāda

Medhātīthi here does recall that Draupadī while speaking to Satyabhāmā about her daily routine, in the vanaparvan of Mahābhārata, tells her that she, Draupadī, eats only after feeding everyone else, including her husbands. Draupadī, in that context, says:

नाभुक्तवति नास्नाते नासंविष्टे च भर्तरि ।
न संविशामि नाश्रामि सदा कर्मकरेष्वपि ॥

*nābhuktavati nāsnāte nāsamviṣṭe ca bhartari
na samviśāmi nāśnāmi sadā karmakareṣvapi*⁴⁴

Never do I bathe, eat or sleep, until my husbands, and even their servants, have bathed, eaten and slept.

But Draupadī also tells Satyabhāmā much else about her daily routine in Indraprastha. This dialogue between Draupadī and Satyabhāmā is probably one of the most powerful descriptions of the extraordinary character of Draupadī. She, as she herself tells Satyabhāmā, seems to have taken the burden of running the pāṇḍava household upon her shoulders, and she almost single-handedly runs it, leaving Yudhiṣṭhira free to pursue his interests. She accounts for the income and expense of the pāṇḍava household, she looks after and supervises the work of the various dependents, she performs the pañcamahāyajña, and while doing all this she takes care that she does not go beyond the wishes and desires of the pāṇḍava brothers in any of her actions. As she says:

⁴³ Medhātīthi on Manu 3.113, p. 123.

⁴⁴ Mahā vana 233.24, p. 1620.

ये च धर्माः कुटुम्बेषु श्वश्र्वा मे कथिताः पुरा ।
 भिक्षाबलिश्राद्धमिति स्थालीपाकाश्च पर्वसु ।
 मान्यानां मानसत्कारा ये चान्ये विदिता मम ।
 तान् सर्वाननुवर्तेऽहं दिवारात्रमतन्द्रिता ।
 विनयान् नियमांश्चैव सदा सर्वात्मना श्रिता ॥

*ye ca dharmāḥ kuṭumbेषु śvaśrvā me kathitāḥ purā
 bhikṣābaliśrāddhamiti sthālīpākāśca parvasu
 mānyānām mānasatkārā ye cānye viditā mama
 tān sarvānanuvarte'ham divārātramamatandritā
 vinayān niyamāmścaiva sadā sarvātmanā śritā*⁴⁵

I perform bhikṣā, bali and śrāddha; I undertake sthālīpākāyajña, the cooking of special foods at the appropriate occasions; I offer proper hospitality to the venerable ones. I perform all these dharmas that are followed in the families and were earlier taught to me by my mother-in-law, and also others that I know. I observe all these day and night, untiringly. And, I follow yama-niyama, rules of self-control and hygiene of both body and mind, to the best of my abilities.

अहं पतीन् नातिशये नात्यश्चे नातिभूषये ।
 नापि श्वश्रूं परिवदे सर्वदा परियन्त्रिता ॥

*aḥam patīn nātisaye nātyaśne nātibhūṣaye
 nāpi śvaśrūm parivade sarvadā pariyantritā*⁴⁶

I do not sleep while my husbands are awake; I do not eat while they have not eaten; and I do not adorn myself beyond what they find proper. I do not speak ill of my mother-in-law. I keep myself always under control.

शतं दासीसहस्राणि कुन्तीपुत्रस्य धीमतः ।
 पात्रीहस्ता दिवारात्रमतिथीन् भोजयन्त्युत ।
 शतमश्वसहस्राणि दशनागायुतानि च ।
 युधिष्ठिरस्यानुयात्रमिन्द्रप्रस्थनिवासिनः ।

⁴⁵ Mahā vana 233.33-35, p. 1621.

⁴⁶ Mahā vana 233.38, p. 1621.

एतदासीत् तदा राज्ञो यन्महीं पर्यपालयत् ।
 येषां संख्याविधिं चैव प्रदिशामि शृणोमि च ।
 अन्तःपुराणां सर्वेषां भृत्यानां चैव सर्वशः ।
 आगोपालविपालेभ्यः सर्व वेद कृताकृतम् ।
 सर्व राज्ञः समुदयमायं च व्ययमेव च ।
 एकाहं वेद्मि कल्याणि पाण्डवानां यशस्विनि ।
 मयि सर्व समासज्य कुटुम्बं भरतर्षभाः ।
 उपासनरताः सर्वे घटयन्ति वरानने ॥

*śatam dāsīhasrāṇi kuntīputrasya dhīmataḥ
 pātrīhastā divārātramatīthīn bhojayantyuta
 śatamaśvasahasrāṇi daśanāgāyutāni ca
 yudhiṣṭhirasyānuyātramindraprasthanivāsinaḥ
 etadāsīt tadā rājño yanmahīm paryapālayat
 yeśāṃ saṁkhyāvidhiṁ caiva pradiśāmi sṛṇomi ca
 antahpurāṇāṁ sarveśāṁ bhrtyānāṁ caiva sarvaśaḥ
 āgopālāvīpālebhyaḥ sarvaṁ veda kṛtākṛtam
 sarvaṁ rājñāḥ samudayamāyam ca vyayameva ca
 ekāhaṁ vedmi kalyāṇi pāṇḍavānāṁ yaśasvini
 mayi sarvaṁ samāsajya kutumbam bharatarṣabhāḥ
 upāsanaratāḥ sarve ghaṭayanti varānane⁴⁷*

Carrying pots of food in their hands, a hundred thousand women attendants of Yudhiṣṭhira, the wise son of Kuntī, used to be engaged in feeding the guests day and night. When Yudhiṣṭhira travelled out of Indraprastha, he was followed by a hundred thousand horses and a hundred thousand elephants. This is how things were when Yudhiṣṭhira, while ruling in Indraprastha, looked after the world. And, I organized for all these great numbers, listened to their requirements, and provided for them.

I looked after the inmates of the inner household and all the dependents of the king, including even the cowherds and the shepherds. I kept myself informed of all that they did or did not do.

⁴⁷ Mahā vana 233.49-54, p. 1622.

O Satyabhāmā of great auspiciousness and renown, I alone knew of the entire incomes and expenses of the king and the pāṇḍava brothers. O Satyabhāmā of the auspicious visage, they, the bulls of bhāratavaṁśa, left the entire responsibility of the household on me, and engaged themselves in upāsana, worship and veneration, and actions proper to that.

Draupadī obviously is performing the functions of the head of the household, and as such it is not surprising that she eats the last. Because, the essence of the discipline of eating, according to the Indian texts, is that those who are responsible for others must eat after feeding all the others. Usually, the gr̥hastha-dampatī, the husband and wife both, jointly undertake this responsibility. And, therefore, as Medhātithi says, their time of eating is the same, at the end of manuṣyayajña, after feeding all others.

Vighasāsī bhavennityam

Manu ends this meticulously detailed description of the discipline of eating with a re-assertion of the precept that a disciplined gr̥hastha eats only what is left after feeding others. A gr̥hastha does not cook for himself alone; he cooks for all those who happen to be within reach of his care; he feeds them all and only afterwards does he and his wife partake of food. Eating the leftovers of pañcamahāyajña is eating according to dharma; eating alone without first offering it to others, is eating in sin. As Manu says:

देवानृषीन्मनुष्यांश्च पितृन्गृह्याश्च देवताः ।
 पूजयित्वा ततः पश्चाद्गृहस्थः शेषभुग्भवेत् ।
 अद्यं स केवलं भुङ्क्ते यः पचत्यात्मकारणात् ।
 यज्ञशिष्टाशनं ह्येतत्सतामन्नं विधीयते ॥

*devānṛṣīnmanuṣyāṁśca pitṛnḡrhyāśca devatāḥ
 pūjayitvā tataḥ paścādgr̥hasthaḥ śeṣabhugbhavet
 agham sa kevalam bhunkte yaḥ pacatyātmakāranāt
 yajñāśiṣṭāśanam hyetatsatāmannam vidhīyate*⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Manu 3.117-118, pp. 126-7.

VIGHASĀŚĪ BHAVENNITYAM

The householder ought to eat only what is left after making reverential offerings to the devas, ṛṣis, ancestors, the bhūtas and the guests.

A householder who cooks for himself alone does not partake of food, but partakes merely of sin. For the wise one the left-over of the pañcamahāyajña alone is proper food.

This does not end Manusmṛti's description of pañcamahāyajña. There follow another almost two hundred verses concerning the detailed observance of different aspects of pañcamahāyajña, at the end of which Manu offers the following blessing to the disciplined gṛhastha:

विघसाशी भवेन्नित्यं नित्यं वाऽमृतभोजनः ।

विघसो भुक्तशेषं तु यज्ञशेषं तथामृतम् ॥

*vighasāśī bhavennityam nityam vā'mṛtabhojanah
vighaso bhuktaśeṣam tu yajñaśeṣam tathāmṛtam*⁴⁹

Let you always partake of vighasa and amṛta. What is left after feeding all others is indeed vighasa and what is left after accomplishing the yajña is amṛta.

⁴⁹ Manu 3.285, p. 280.