

## RISHI PANCHAMI

This Vrata is celebrated on Bhadrapada suddha panchami every year. This is performed by women who have passed menopause to atone for the sins accruing out of non-observance of staying away from household duties during their menstrual periods. This Vrata is followed for seven years consecutively, and at the end, udyapana is done symbolizing the end of the Vrata.

**Pooja procedure :** the performer should brush her teeth 108 times with Apamarga sticks and bathe 108 times. Nine nuts symbolizing seven rishis (Kasyapa, Atri, Bharadwaja, Viswamitra, Gautama, Jamadagni and Vasishta and Arundathi and Ganesha) are placed over raw rice spread in the plate, and a worship is offered by women wearing white sarees only. This pooja is started in the evening, preceded by a fast, and continued during the night following on elaborate procedure. For the pooja, the materials to be gathered include nine nuts (suparis), seven types of leaves, seven types of flowers, one coconut, seven sacred threads, one dhoti, nine almonds, nine dried coconuts, twenty five betel leaves and Panchamruta.

### Story of Rishi Panchami

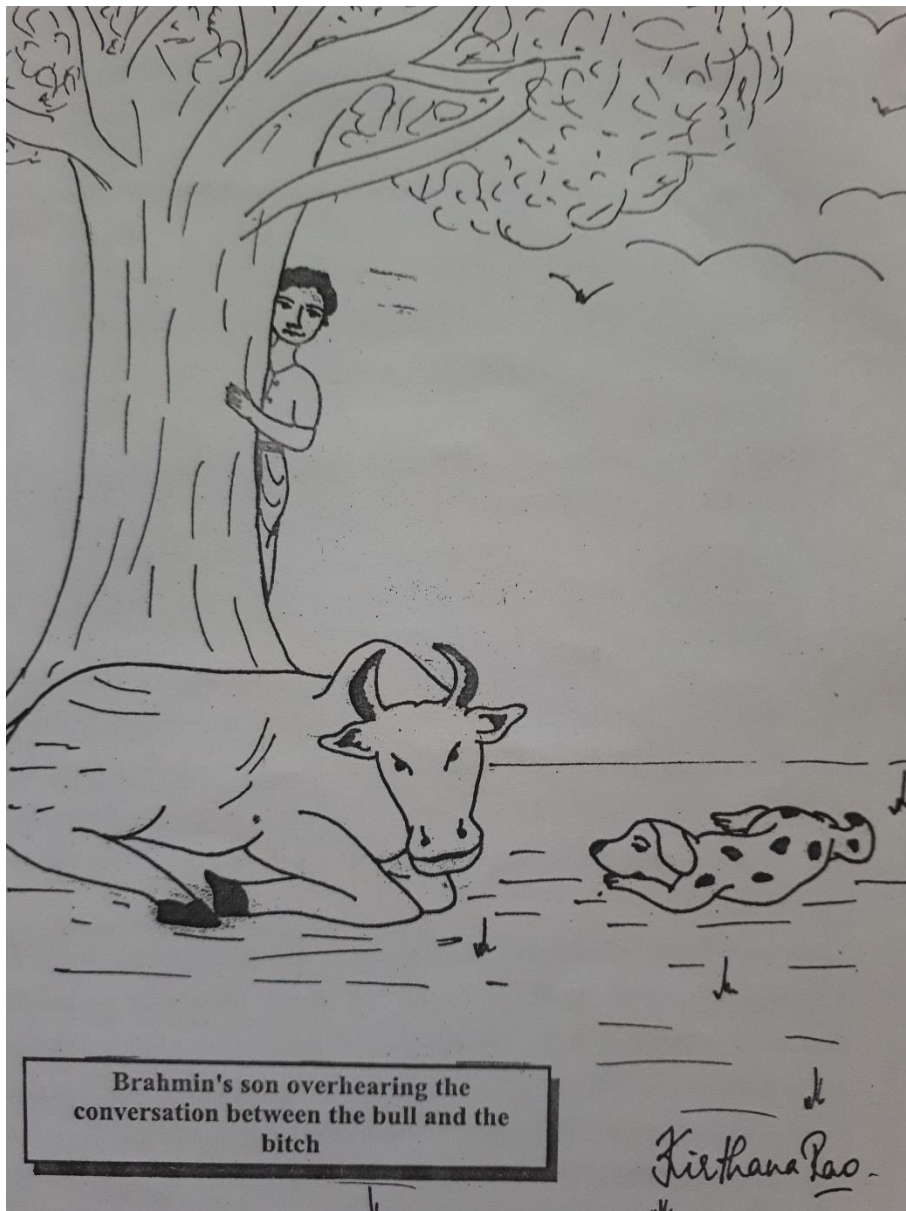
Once upon a time, there lived in a town, a Brahmin and his family. He led a contented life. What happened one day ? It is usual in those days in Brahmin families, for ladies to keep away from household and religious duties during menstrual periods and they will be treated as untouchables for three consecutive days. They used to resume normal duties on the fourth day after taking bath. It will be considered a guilt and an act of sin against God if such ladies ignore this tradition and mix up freely with the households during such periods. The Brahmin's wife ignored this tradition, the result, in her next birth she was born a bitch and her husband a bull.

God's acts are unpredictable. The sad part of the whole story is that the Brahmin and his wife were destined to remain in their own sons' house as bull and bitch respectively in their rebirth, their son being not aware of this fact. The son was highly religious minded, led a dharmic life, performed annual ceremonies of his parents with sincerity and listened to the advice of Brahmins.

One particular day, it was his father's annual ceremony. He called his wife, asked her to prepare kheer. Being a staunch pativrata (dutiful wife) she cooked four types of vegetable curry, four types of kosambiri (a preparation with dhall) and also rice and kheer. Meanwhile, inadvertently, the vessel containing kheer had been left open and a snake put its head inside the sucked. The bitch (none other than the Brahmin's wife) saw this and thought "If the Brahmins who have come for the ceremony partake of this kheer, they will all die of food poisoning, her son will be guilty of Brahmahatya", so saying, the bitch got up instantly and touched the vessel. The lady who saw this was enraged, took a burning piece of firewood and hit the bitch on the neck and drove it away. She threw away all the cooked food and prepared fresh food all over again to ward off any pollution due to the unpardonable act of the bitch. Later food was served to all the Brahmins and ceremonies over, they all left. The bitch was left to mend for itself. Getting neither food nor even water, it had to fast all day.

At night, the bitch went to the bull (her husband in her previous birth) and began to weep loudly saying, "I am very hungry and fasting all day. I am denied food and water. I saw a snake put its head in the vessel full of kheer. Fearing contamination by poison and the resultant danger to the guests, I touched the vessel. My daughter-in-law, got angry and hit me on the neck with a lighted firewood. My whole body is aching, How am I responsible for all this?" The bull replied, "In your previous birth you ignored our tradition and mixed up with the household during your menstrual periods. Not only you, but I too had to suffer the consequences of your action. My son ties my mouth with a rope, makes me plough the field, beats me, I too am hungry and thirsty. The annual ceremony, done for my sake by my son has gone to waste and no food has reached me.

The brahmin's son who was hearing this conversation, between the bull and bitch, got up immediately and gave food and water to both of them. He felt very sad.



The next day, he got up early, went into the forest and met a congregation of Rishis (Mendicants). He paid obeisance to them and in turn they asked him, "O young Brahmin, why do you look sad"? The Brahmin replied, "Revered rishis, my father has been born as a bull and my mother as a bitch in their rebirth in this world. How can they attain salvation? All my thoughts are now on this problem. Kindly enlighten me". The Rishis advised him to observe "Rishi Panchami vrata" and began to explain the details.

"Listen what you should do on Bhadrapada sukla panchami, At noon, go to the river bank, offer your prayers, brush your teeth with well groomed neem sticks,

apply gingelly oil on your head, take oil bath, dress yourself with washed clothes, go to a clean place and worship Rishis along with ARUNDATHI. Repeat the pooja for seven years consecutively and at the end of this period, perform Udyapana (Closing Ceremony).

By doing this, all evils accruing due to failure of observing our traditions, will go. You will get the benefits of bathing in holy rivers and also doing good acts. Your desires will be fulfilled”.

The Brahmin scrupulously followed all the instructions. His parents attained salvation. Their sins were washed off and they were restored to their original glory. There was happiness all around.

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