A STUDY OF THE VRATAS AS DESCRIBED IN THE
MATSYAPURĀNA

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Abstract
Yajña which occupied prominent place among rituals among Vedic Aryans gradually lost its importance during course of time and Puranic culture started gaining popularity among the masses. Thus religious rites prescribed in puranas got importance; common people adopted the vratas, upavāsas, śrāddhas, prāyascittas, dānas, dikṣās, etc. as the way of worshipping the deities while Vedic yajña was confined among upper classes. Among the religious rites described in the Purāṇas vratas occupy a very important place which is testified by the large numbers of vratas enjoined therein. This paper is an attempt to analyse different types of vratas enumerated in Matsya Purāṇa.

Keyword : Yajña, vrata, upavāsa, śrāddha, prāyascitta, dāna, dikṣā, saṅkalpa

Introduction
The Purāṇas are repositories of stories, legends, and other religious rites and customs. The Purāṇas hold the ideas and ideals of the Hindu religious community. During the Puranic age the Hindu religion emerged with a new look which was different from the Vedic ideas of worshipping gods and goddesses. In this period performance of Vedic yajña has lost its importance. In place of Vedic yajña common people adopted the vratas, upavāsas, śrāddhas, prāyascittas, dānas, dikṣās, etc. as the way of worshipping the deities. Unlike the Vedic yajñas these religious works were not reserved only for the upper three castes. All castes and all common people including śūdras, maidens, married women, widows, even prostitutes can take part in these rites. Among the religious rites described in the Purāṇas vratas occupy a
very important place which is testified by the large numbers of vratas enjoined here.

**Meaning of vrata**

In the dictionary of M.M. Williams several meanings are given for the word of *vrata* viz., (1) will, command, law, ordinance, rule; (2) obedience, service (3) dominion, realm, conduct, manner, usage, custom; (4) religious vow or practice, any pious observance, meritorious act of devotion or austerity, solemn vow, rule, holy practices, (5) any vow or firm purpose, resolve to (6) practice of always eating the same food, feeding only on milk.\(^1\) P. V. Kane in his *History of Dharmaśāstra* derives the term *vrata* from the root *vr* (to choose or will) with the suffix *ta*. He says, “Therefore, when the word vrata is derived from ‘vr’ with the suffix ‘ta’, the meaning of vrata can be ‘what is willed’ or simply ‘will’.”\(^2\) This term is used in the sense of law or ordinance as the will of a person who has authority is obeyed by others as law. People generally believe that the gods have laid down certain rules and duties to be followed by them. When commands are obeyed or duties are performed in the same way for long, they become the patterns of obligations and thus it means customs or practices.

The vratas are found treated in the Vedas, Brāhmaṇas, epics, Dharmashastras, Sūtras and Purāṇas. In *Rgvedasamhitā*, *vrata* is used to mean divine ordinance or ethical patterns of conduct.\(^3\) Again in the *Rgveda*, Agni is said to be the *vratapā* which means the protector of *vrata*.\(^4\) *Atharvaveda* uses the term *vrata* as ordinances of gods.\(^5\) Yāskācārya has given two meanings of *vrata* viz. (1) religious observance or restrictions as to food and behaviour; (2) special food prescribed for a person engaged in religious rites.\(^6\) In the sūtras of Pāṇini also these meanings of the term *vrata* are expressed clearly.\(^7\) In the *Mahābhārata* the word *vrata* is used to mean mainly a religious undertaking or vow in which one has to follow certain restrictions on food or on general behaviour.\(^8\) Śabara in his *Bhāṣya* on *Mīmāṃsādarśana* stated that *vraṭa* means an activity of mind which is a resolve in the form of “I shall not do this”.\(^9\) The Mitākṣara on *Yājñavalkyasyāmṛti* indicates that *vrata* is a mental resolve to do something or refrain from doingsomething.\(^10\)
Thus the word *vrata* has different etymological meanings, yet it is mainly used as a religious undertaking observed on certain day, *tithi*, month or other period of time for the attainment of fruits. *Vrata* is observed by the worship of the deity, usually accompanied by restrictions to food and behaviour. *Vrata* is a definite resolve relating to a certain matter held as obligatory and proceeds to lay down that it may be positive like „I must do it’ or negative „I must not do this”.

**Concept of Vrata in the Purāṇas**

Though all the scriptures speak about vratas, it is the Purāṇas which give the utmost importance to the observance of vratas. Almost all the Purāṇas have discussed about the vratas and stressed the need for the performance of vratas and upavāsas. The authors of the Purāṇas have placed the vratas before the Vedic sacrifices. The *Brahmapurāṇa* has stated that the observance of a vrata for the god Sūrya for one day only gives the reward which cannot be achieved by hundreds of Vedic sacrifices. Thousands of vratas in the sense of self imposed, devout, or ceremonial observances of different sorts are described in the Purāṇas. The rules of the vratas in the Purāṇas have been very much liberalized to embrace different segments of people. For this reason the caste and gender restrictions have been reduced. Yet there had to be some rules guiding the whole process in order to protect and preserve the sanctity of the ritual system itself. According to *Agnipurāṇa*, *vrata* involves certain regulations such as regular bath, limited food, worshipping god etc. It also speaks of ten virtues which must be followed as common to all vratas, viz., forbearance, truthfulness, compassion, charity, purity of body and mind, curbing the organs of the senses, worship of deities, offering into fire, satisfaction and not depriving any other of his belonging. The central point of *vrata* is *upavāsa* i.e. fasting. The *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, *Liṅgapurāṇa* and *Matsyapurāṇa* give a clear picture of the extent to which numerous vratas are performed with upavāsas. However, alternative rite is permitted for those who find it hard to observe a fast. It is said in the *Matsyapurāṇa* that one who cannot take a complete fast of 24 hours may take food after sunset and this is known as *nākta*. Purāṇas enjoin that before starting a *vrata sankalpa* (mental resolve) is to be taken and there
must be a pāraṇā in the conclusion of the vrata. In case of a fast or a vrata, saṅkalpa is to be generally made in the morning. Even when a tithi doesn’t begin in the morning the saṅkalpa has to be made in the morning. If no saṅkalpa is made the devotee loses the merit of vrata and gets very little benefit from it. For making a saṅkalpa one has to perform some rites to the gods. The Garudapurāṇa has an ideal example of such saṅkalpa. It is found thus “O God! I have undertaken this vrata in your presence; may it succeed without obstacles if you become favourable to me; after I undertake this vrata if I die when it is half finished, may it become completely fulfilled through your favour”. On the other hand, a vrata comes to an end by a rite called udyāpana or pāraṇā. The Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa clarifies that a vrata ends with pāraṇā and at the end of a vrata, pāraṇa takes place the day after the day of the fast and generally performed in the morning. It ordained that without doing pāraṇā of a vrata, another cannot be started. A vrata becomes fruitless if the udyāpana or pāraṇā is not performed.

The Padmapurāṇa classifies vrata into three types, viz., mental vratas, physical vratas and vratas of speech. Non-violence, truthfulness, not depriving a person of his property by wrongfully taking it, continence, freedom from hypocrisy are the mental vratas that lead to the satisfaction of Hari. Eating once only in the day, eating after the sunset (nakta), fasting, abstaining from begging, etc are physical vratas for human beings. Study of the Vedas, recounting the name of Viṣṇu, speaking the truth, abstaining from backbiting are the vratas of speech. Another classification is made on the basis of time i.e. for how much time a vrata lasts. A vrata may last for a day or a fortnight or a month, season, ayana, etc. and on the basis of such time vratas are classified.

Vratas Described in the Matsyapurāṇa:

The Matsyapurāṇa containing twenty thousand stanzas is the store house of historical, political, social, geographical, religious data of ancient India. It has exhibited the religious part in a considerable length. It has depicted the religious customs like vrata, upavāsa, dāna, śrāddha, tirtha etc. to a great extent. Among
all the descriptions of religious activities described in the *Matsyapurāṇa vrata* holds the upper hand as the main custom of that age. As many as 90 vratas are described here. It is found mentioned in this *Purāṇa* that the great sages preferred vratas or *tapas* to Vedic sacrifices which involve killing of animals. They believed that *vrata* takes a man to heaven. The emphasis of *Matsyapurāṇa* on vratas is regarded as special feature of Puranic religion and deserve a thorough study. The main objective of these vratas are purification and enrichment of the individual and social life by means of positive action. Among the many vratas described in this *Purāṇa* some are practised even today. There are again some vratas which are not found to be prevalent now a days. But from the elaborate description of those vratas found in this *Purāṇa* it can be assumed that during the time of the *Purāṇa* these vratas held importance in the society. In the present paper we shall deal with those vratas first which are commonly observed by the people all over India, even today. We shall also discuss in detail some other vratas, which, though not practised now a days, appear to possess much importance in the *Purāṇa*.

1. *Akṣayatṛtiyāvrata* :

The *Akṣaya tṛtiyā* is regarded as one of the holiest *tithis* of a year. It is the third day of bright fortnight (*śuklapakṣa*) of the month *Vaiśākha* (April-May). If this *tṛtiyā* falls in *Kṛttikā Nakṣatra* then it is regarded more sacred. One who observes a *vrata* in this auspicious day begets inexhaustible fruit of all his good deeds. The progeny of the devotee will be unlimited and the good deeds of the person will never come to an end. This *vrata* is known as *Akṣayatṛtiyāvrata*. It is described in the *Matsyapurāṇa* thus:

\[
\text{vaiśākhaśuklapakṣe tu tṛtiyā yairūpoṣitā/}
\text{akṣayam phalamāpnoti sarvasya sukṛtasya ca/} \]

It means: one who observes a fast in the third day of bright fortnight of Vaiśākha attains imperishable fruits of his all good deeds.

In the 65th Chapter of *Matsyapurāṇa* the greatness of *Akṣayatṛtiyā vrata* is found described by lord Śiva to Nārada in response to a query of the great sage. The *Purāṇa* mentions that one
who is willing to observe this vrata should take bath in water mixed with akṣata (unhusked rice) and offer akṣata to Lord Viṣṇu. Akṣata or well made barley meal (śaktu) should be offered to the brāhmaṇas as well as should be taken by the devotee himself. By performing this vrata the devotee gets never ending benefit. If this vrata is observed according to rules even for once, the devotee begets the benefit of all the tṛtiyās. One who keeps a complete fast on this tṛtiyā and worships Janārdana gets the benefit of having performed a Rājasūya sacrifice and attains bliss. Viṣṇusmṛti said that one should fast on this tithi and worship Vāsudeva with whole grains of rice and should offer them into fire and donate to the brāhmaṇa. Thus the devotee becomes purified from all sins, whatever is donated or sacrificed or muttered on this tithi brings inexhaustible results. “The Bhaviṣyottarapurāṇa deals at some length with it. It says that this tithi is one of the yugādi tithis because the kṛta age began on it. Whatever is done on it, such as bath, gifts, muttering of sacred texts (japa), offerings into fire, Veda study, satiating deceased (with water)— all that becomes inexhaustible. It provides that gifts of jars of water and of umbrellas and of footwear should be made (to brāhmaṇas) on this day and that what is sacrificed or donated on this day never comes to an end and therefore this tithi is called akṣaya (inexhaustible) by the sages.”

Describing the majesty of Prthudaka tīrtha, Vāmaṇapurāṇa speaks about Akṣayatṛtiyā. It is said in that Purāṇa that the day on which Moon, Sun and Jupiter unitedly come under Mārgaśirā Nakṣatra is called Akṣaya tṛtiyā. And on this sacred day the devotee should visit the Prthudaka tīrtha.

In the modern age also Akṣayatṛtiyā vrata carries great value. People worship Vāsudeva on this day. Śrī Bānkebihārī temple of Vṛndāvan remains open for visiting the main idol of lord Vāsudeva only in this auspicious day. Many businessmen start their business on this day. Gifts of pitchers filled with water, together with sweets and seasonal fruits are held in this vrata for the benefit of departed ancestors.

2. Śivacaturdāśī Vrata :

Śivacaturdāśīvrata as the name suggests is a vrata which is
observed for propitiating Śiva for the welfare of the devotee. Hence this vrata is also known as Māheśvaravrata. In the 95th Chapter of Matsyapurāṇa Nandikeśvara, the chief attendants of Lord Śiva tells Nārada about the Śivacaturdaśī vrata. Śivacaturdaśī varta is observed on the 14th day (caturdaśī) of bright fortnight in the month of Mārgasirā (Nov-Dec). This vrata is regarded as the giver of happiness and emancipation. It is so effective that it washes away the sin of killing of brāhmaṇa and also the sins committed against parents, brothers etc. The devotee gets long life, good health and prosperity by observing this vrata. The woman who observes it taking permission of her husband or son or the preceptor attains bliss by the grace of Śiva. This vrata is regarded as equal to a thousand Aśvamedha. The Matsyapurāṇa describes the procedure of this vrata thus: The devotee who wants to observe this vrata, should take meal once and pray lord Śiva with the sankalpa of Śivacaturdaśī varta, on the day prior to the caturdaśī i.e. on the 13th day. He takes the vow with these words:

"O Lord of All deities! I take refuge in thee. Tomorrow, the caturdaśī day, I shall take a complete fast without eating anything and worship Śiva. I shall give away a bull, made of gold and then take my meals the next day."

On the next morning i.e. on the Caturdaśī day the devotee worships lord Śiva and his consort Umā with white lotus, garlands sandal paste etc. Different mantras are recited in connection with the different limbs of Śiva. The feet of the lord is worshipped after reciting the mantra śivāya namaḥ, the head is worshipped with the mantra sarvātmane namaḥ, the eyes, with the chanting of after chanting trinetrāya namaḥ etc. Then a bull made of gold is to be given to the brāhmaṇa along with a pitcher which is full of water, covered with white garments, five jewels, and various kinds of eatables. The devotee should eat ghee mixed with coagulated milk and sleep on the ground. Nextday after worshipping the brahmins he should take food. The worship is performed in the same way on all the 14th days of each fortnight of every month for twelve months. Special mantras are recited for commencing with the month Mārgasirā starting with Śamkarāya namah. Other names of Śiva which are uttered in the mantras are: Karavīraka, Tryambaka, Mahēśvara Mahādeva, Sthānu, Paśupati, Nātha, Śambhū, Paramānanda, Somārdhadhārin, and Bhauma. Thereafter pancagavya consisting of cow,s urine, cow-dung, milk,
curds and clarified butter, water mixed with *kuśa* grass, wood apple, camphor, *agaru*, barley, black sesamum and long pepper are offered to Śiva as *Prāśana*. These are offered to Śiva one by one on the *caturdaśī* day of each month. Similarly Śiva is offered one type of flower every month among *mandāra*, jasmine, *dhatūrā*, *sambhālū*, *aśoka*, *mallikā*, *pātala arka*, *kadamba*, *śatapatrī* and *kamala*. Again in the month of Kārtika the devotee should feed brāhmaṇas with various kinds of food and offer garments, ornaments and garlands. As words given in *sankalpa* the devotee gives a black bull as gift with Vedic rites. And then he gives away a bull and a cow along with a golden image of Śiva and Pārvatī. A bedstead, along with eight pearls, sheets, pillows, and vase is also give away to the *brāhmaṇa* who is acquainted with *Sāmaveda*. The *Matsyapurāṇa* also enjoins that gifts should be given to a *brāhmaṇa* who is not widower, who is of good conduct and who is not of defective limbs. If the preceptor of the devotee is present, then the gifts should be given to him only. In this way the *Matsyapurāṇa* describes the *Śivacaturdaśī vrata*.

The *Agnipurāṇa* deals with a *vrata* which is very similar to *Śivacaturdaśī vrata*. This is which is termed as *Phalacaturdaśī vrata*. This *vrata* is also observed for getting happiness and emancipation. It is observed on the 3rd, 8th or 12th or 14th day of the bright fortnight in the month of Mārgaśirā. The devotee lives only on fruits and worships lord Śiva. And then fruits are given as gifts to the *brāhmaṇa*.

Again the *Liṅgapurāṇa* deals with a similar *vrata* which is observed in the month of *Pauśa*. The devotee lives only on *nākta* taking food of wheat, rice and milk only. This *vrata* is observed till the month of Mārgaśirā for one year.

A vow called *Śivarātrivrata* is observed even today in Assam, Bengal, Orrissa and other parts of India. This is observed on the 14th day of the dark fortnight of Māgha or Phālguna. This *vrata*, though performed on the *caturdaśī* day and dedicated to Śiva is different from *Śivacaturdaśī vrata* mentioned in the *Matsyapurāṇa*.

3. *Saṁkrāntivrata*:

The 98th Chapter of *Matsyapurāṇa* deals with *Saṁkrāntivrata*. 
Samkrānti means the passage of the Sun from one rāśi to the following rāśi. And thus the rāśi in which the Sun enters is designated as the samkrānti of that name. Each of the twelve samkrānti is regarded as auspicious. The Samkrāntivrata is observed on the day of equinoxes or solstices. This vrata leads a man to heaven and begets everlasting bliss and it washes off all the sins of the devotee. One who observes this vrata enjoys the honour in the next world and is respected by the Gandharvas, Indra and other gods.

The description of the Samkrāntivrata found in this Purāṇa runs thus: the day prior to Samkrānti the devotee takes his food only once. And on the following day he cleanses teeth and takes bath in water mixed with sesamum. On the Samkrānti day he draws a lotus with eight petals with sandal on the earth in the centre of which the presence of the Sun is invoked. A golden vessel of clarified butter, a pitcher of water and a golden lotus are donated to a brāhmaṇa according to one’s own capacity. Thereafter the arghya consisting of sandal, water and flowers is placed on the earth as an oblation to the Sun following the mantra- viśvāya viśvarūpāya viśvadhāmne svayambhūve namo’nanta! Namo dhātre ṛkṣāmayajuṣāmpate. This ritual is observed in each month or at the end of the year. Rice cooked in milk, and sugar is poured into fire as oblation. Then the brāhmaṇa is fed with eatables. On that occasion 12 pitchers of water with few gems, 12 golden lotus flowers, and 12 milch cows are given to poor and well deserved brāhmaṇas. In case of a poor person it is mentioned that he may give only one cow. Afterwards an image of earth along with that of serpent Śeṣa is made of gold, silver, copper or even of kneaded flour, according to the means of the devotee and given away to Brāhmaṇa along with the golden image of the Sun. Miserliness should be avoided in this vrata. One who does this mistake goes to hell in spite of having riches.

Now-a-days people take special snānas or baths in the river ganges or any other holy rivers on Samkrānti days. The digestes also prescribe different gifts on the Samkrānti day from which great merit is collected. Among all Samkrāntis Makarasamkrānti is observed all over India as a religious and social festival. No fast is observed now on this day. But bathing in holy rivers and giving
gifts are very much in vogue. The Makarasamkrāntī coincides with the Māghabihu of Assam which is actually a social festival and is totally different from Samkrāntivrata of Matsyapurāṇa.

4. Nakṣatrapuruṣavrata:

Nakṣatrapuruṣa is a form of lord Nārāyaṇa. And Nakṣatrapuruṣavrata is the worship of Nārāyaṇa. In the 54th Chapter of Matsyapurāṇa the Nakṣatrapuruṣavrata is discussed. Here in the form of Nakṣatrapuruṣa, Nārāyaṇa is conceived as the person comprising 27 Nakṣatras in his body. According to the Brhat Samhitā the Mūlā Nakṣatra dwells in his feet, Rohiṇī Nakṣatra in his thighs, Aśvinī in his knees, Pūrvaśāḍha and Uttarāsāḍha in his chest etc. The worshipper of this vrata attains all his desires and gets happiness. This vrata washes off all sins of the devotee as well as deceased ancestor committed in their lives. Vamanapurāṇa also tells about the fruits of this vrata. It says that by performing it Bhrigu washed off his all sins. Revatī also observed it for getting son, Rambhā did it for radiance and beauty, King Pururavā had accomplished Nakṣatrapuruṣa vrata to please Lord Viṣṇu and attained the charm of the Moon and got back kingdom and being pleased by this vrata Lord Viṣṇu bestows and sweet voice to the Tilottamā.

Procedure: In this vrata the devotee prepares an image of Vāsudeva made according to the instructions of the brāhmaṇas and then it is worshipped in the month of Caitra at the time when the moon is in the nakṣatras like Mūlā etc. Mūlā Rohiṇī, Aśvinī, Pūrvaśāḍha, Uttarāsāḍha, Pūrvāfālgunī, Uttarafālgunī, Kṛttikā, Purvabhādra, Uttarabhādra, Revatī, Anurādhā, Dhanisṭhā Viśākhā, Hastā, Punarvasu, Aśleṣa, Jyeṣṭhā, Śravaṇa, Pusya, Śvāti, Svātī, Satabhiṣa, Māgha, Mārgaśīrā, Cittābharaṇī and Ārdra are honoured in connection with the limbs viz. feet, ankles, knees, thighs, organ of generation, waist, ribs, arm-pits, chest, back, forearms, hands, tips of the finger, nail, throat, ears, mouth, teeth, gullet of the mouth, nose, eyes, forehead and head respectively of the Nakṣatrapuruṣa. After completion of the vrata the devotee donate a mace filled with pearls and jewels as also cows, bedstead etc.to the pious brāhmaṇa and thereafter, the devotee prays lord Viṣṇu for the fulfilment of his desires thus: “O thou! having the
form of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva fulfill all my cherished desires."  

The image of Viṣṇu along with the goddess Lakṣmī is given to a worthy brāhmaṇa and his wife along with wooden bedstead. Then he prays to Viṣṇu for health, beauty and wealth. The image of the Nakṣatrapuruṣa is given away along with other clothes to the brāhmaṇa who is well versed in astronomy. During the 27 days of this vrata the devotee should take food without salt and oils.

A devotee who worships Lord Viṣṇu according to the rituals attains liberation. Worshipping Lord Viṣṇu’s different limbs helps in attaining good health and a disease free life. This way, whoever performs this vrata, his desire is fulfilled with the blessings of Viṣṇu. We have not found any mention of Nakṣatrapuruṣa vrata being observed now-a-days.

5. Rohiṇīcandraśayanavrata:

In the 57th Chapter of Matsyapurāṇa, the Rohiṇīcandraśayana vrata has been discussed. When sage Nārada has asked lord Śiva about such a vow which can give long life, good health, kingdom in several successive lives then Śiva describes about the Rohiṇīcandraśayana vrata. Rohiṇīcandraśayana vrata is regarded as one of the most sacred vratas. In this vrata the devotee worship the image of Nārāyaṇa, after reciting the names of the moon in observing it. Śiva said-

rohiṇīcandraśayanam nāmavratamihottamam/ 
tasminnārāyaṇasyarcyāmarcayedindunāmabhīh/  

When the pañcadaśī or pūrṇimā day falls on Monday or Rohiṇī asterism falls on full moon day the devotee takes bath with the pañcagavya and mustard oil and after that recites the apyāśva mantra for hundred and eight times. The mantra is found in the Ṛgveda thus: ā pyāyasva sametu ve viśvataḥ soma vrṣṇyam/ bhavā vājasya samgathe/  

This vrata is also observed by śūdras also. They should worship the gods Viṣṇu, and Soma with the 19 non-Vedic mantras starting with somāya sāntāya namah and ending with viśveśvarāya namah. After uttering these mantras the devotee worships Madhusūdhana with fruits and flowers. Then again he worships Soma and Viṣṇu with kadamba, blue lotus, jasmine, kuvja, white kannair and campaka flowers. Thus the
devotee observes it till the end of the year. Rohiṇī the spouse of Moon is also worshipped in this vrata. After observance of the above mentioned rites, the devotee gives away the golden idol of Rohiṇī and Moon to a good brāhmaṇa along with white pearls and white clothes, milk, fruits etc. Then the devotee gives a white cow to the worthy brāhmaṇa and prayed the brāhmaṇa and his consort as the Soma or Moon in company with Rohiṇī for happiness, emancipation, health and prosperity.

P.V. Kane in his History of Dharmaśāstra given some exceptional rules about this vrata. According to this book, the devotee should drink cow’s urine after completion of the prayer to Rohiṇī and Moon and take 28 morsels food without any flesh. This vrata is described in the Padmapurāṇa also in the same way as in Matsyapurāṇa.

6. Madanadvādaśī vrata:

The vrata of Madanadvādaśī also finds an important place in the Matsyapurāṇa though this vrata is described in the Digests like Kṛtyakalpataru, Kṛtyaratnākara, Hemādri’s work on vrata etc., among the Purāṇas it is only the Matsyapurāṇa which gives its elaborate description. In the 7th Chapter of the Matsyapurāṇa Diti, the mother of the Maruts asked Sage Vaśiṣṭha about some vrata which can remove her grief of her son’s destruction and carry happiness for her. Then Vaśiṣṭha advised Diti to observe Madanadvādaśī vrata. By observing it Diti regained her forty nine sons and became liberated from her grief. This vrata is observed in the month of Caitra on the 12th day (dvādaśī) of bright fortnight (śuklapakṣa). The observer of this vrata becomes liberated from all evils, gets worthy sons, prosperity and becomes one with the Viṣṇu. This vrata also improves the man both physically and morally.

Procedure: On the 12th day of bright fortnight of Caitra the observer of Madanadvādaśī vrata should place an unbroken jar covering it with two white clothes and white sandal paste. That jar should be filled with different fruits and white rice. After this a small plate of copper containing some fruits, gold, and molasses should be placed on the top of the jar. A plantain leaf, bearing an image of Madana is placed above it. And to the left of it the image of Rati,
made of sugar is placed. After this the worship of Madana and Rati starts with the bathing of the two images with incense and water. And thereafter white flowers, rice, sesame should be offered. And then the aṅgapujā of lord Hari should be done with different mantras. Various parts of the body of Keśava starting from the feet, then the legs, thighs, waist, stomach, breast, mouth, hands and head are worshipped uttering mantras. Thereafter offering sandal and incense prayer is sung accompanied by music and glorifying Kāma and Keśava. On the following morning the jar should be given to a brāhmaṇa. After that the worshipper should feed a number of brāhmaṇas with devotion, and take his own meal without salt. Then uttering the prayer priyatāmatra bhagavān kāmarūpī janārdanah/ hṛdaye sarvabhūtānāṁ ya ānando bhidhiyate, the invited brāhmaṇas are dismissed with gifts. This routine is followed for a complete year. And at the beginning of the 13th month on the completion of the vrata a golden image of Rati is worshipped. Afterwards white sesame mixed with clarified butter is offered into fire pronouncing the names of Madana. At the end of the vrata the priest and his consort are worshipped, feasted and offered within various gifts viz., garlands, cow, butter, bedstead, ornaments, ornaments etc. All the gifts are given as per the means of the devotee.

Although this vrata is not found to be performed at the present time yet it carries a high value from different aspects. It is the first vrata which is discussed in Matsyapurāṇa and this is performed by a woman. Hence preference is given to the woman through this vrata. At the end of the vrata it is said that the devotee can gifts according to its means. This shows the flexibility of the vrata by which a poor devotee also can perform it.

7. Ādityaśayanavrata:

This is also known as Ādityaśayana śankerārcana observance. This auspicious vrata falls on the Sunday when there is Saṁkrānti and also on the seventh day of dark fortnight when the moon is in the Hasta Nakṣatra. In this vrata Śiva is shown as non different from the Āditya and consequently the devotee uttering the mantras addressing Āditya worships Śiva. The 55th Chapter of Matsyapurāṇa discussed the Ādityaśayana vrata elaborately. This
vrata is observed by both man and woman. By observing this vrata the devotee attains divine facility and remains free from all diseases, grieves and sufferings. The Matsyapurāṇa describes the procedure of observing this vrata thus:

One who wants to observe this vrata should worship Maheśvara and Umā. Reciting the names of the Āditya he also worships the Sun on a Śivalinga of Śiva. Lord Śiva is non-different from Sūrya and hence Śiva is worshipped with the mantra sūryāya namah. The mantras are also chanted for different limbs honouring different Nakṣatras starting with Hastā Citrā etc. The devotee, during this vrata, does not take oil, flesh, green vegetables, and take food only at night. On the Punarvasu Nakṣatra the devotee offers rice along with clarified butter to the brāhmaṇa in a vessel made of fig-leaves putting there some gold. On the 7th year of the fast the devotee gives gifts of a pair clothes to brāhmaṇa. On completion of the 14th year the brāhmaṇa is offered molasses, milk, and clarified butter. And after that the devotee give golden lotus along with gems, bed sheets, pillow, shoes, utensils, cāmara etc. to the needy brāhmaṇa. A cow is also given to the brāhmaṇa on that occasion. And then the Sun is prayed for getting lustre, fortune, and prosperity.

This vrata is also found treated in the same way in the Padmapurāṇa. No reference of the prevalence of this vrata in the present day society is found by us. It is not known whether this vrata is observed in any part of India.

A Short Description of Some another Important Vratas:

In the 56th Chapter of Matsyapurāṇa greatness of Kṛṣṇāṣṭamī vrata is described. This vrata is observed in Aṣṭamī tithi of Kṛṣṇāpakṣa (eighth day of dark fortnight) in the month of Mārgaśirā for getting victory, peace and emancipation. The devotee worships Śiva by uttering in twelve different names in different months for one year. The devotee gives feast to the learned and pious brāhmaṇas and at the conclusion of the vrata curds, grain, canopy and cāmara are given in charity. Brāhmaṇas are also given five gems with a vase of water, black cow, gold and clothes. In case of poor devotee only a cow is to be given instead of all. As Kṛṣṇāstami tithi is mainly observed for Lord Kṛṣṇa but in this vrata
Lord Śiva is worshipped and this is ingenious way of bringing about synthesis between the followers of Śiva and Kṛṣṇa and vice versa.

In the Chapter 60 of Matsyasuraṇa the Saubhāgyaśayana vrata is described. This vrata is observed on the third day of bright fortnight of the month of Caitra. The devotee taking bath with sesame oil, worships Śiva and Pārvatī with flowers, fruits, incense etc. Then the image of Gaurī is bathed with pañcagavya. The limbs of Śiva is worshipped chanting mantras with his different names. After worshipping Śiva the devotee places eight objects like ghee, milk which generates the Saubhāgya before Śiva. On the next morning the devotee takes bath and thereafter offers clothes garlands, ornaments etc. to brahmana and his consort. This worship should be performed for a year. This vow is the giver of all bliss. This vow can be observed by the male and female observers. It is also ordained that any one fruit should be given up by the observer who performs this vrata. The performer of this vrata attains all his desired fruits and in the end archives the feet of Brahman.

The 62nd Chapter of Matsyapurāṇa deals with the Gaurītiyāvrata. This vrata is observed in Bhādra, Vaiśākha or the holy Mārgaśirṣa, on the third day of bright fortnight. After taking bath the devotee puts a tilaka on his/her forehead of a paste which is made from cowdung, urine of cow and sandal mixed with curd. Then the devotee bathes the goddess Gaurī with pañcagavya, milk and honey and thereafter worships with flowers sandal, fruits, salt, jaggary, butter etc. Then salutation is made chanting the mantras with the different names of Gaurī. Observing this vrata the devotee can be rid of all his sins. And the devotee becomes healthy and wealthy. Poor peoples who observes this vrata for three years and chants mantras offering flowers also gain the same fruit.

Chapter 82 of Matsyapurāṇa narrates Viṣokadvādaśīvrata. This vrata concentrates on the glorification of the cow. Goddess fortune that is amongst men and gods is in the cow. She is prayed here to confer mental peace. Lakṣmī of Viṣṇu, Rudrāni of Śiva, Svahā of Agni, Brahmani of Brahmadeva, Bhadra of Kubera, Svadhā of the pīṭra and the female power of Sūrya, Candra and Indra are all present in the cow. Viṣokadvādaśīvrata is the dispeller of all sins.
and is auspicious. The devotee attains longevity, prosperity and good health from it.

The number of vratas described in the *Matsyapurāṇa* is extremely large. Therefore attempt is made here to describe only a few vratas elaborately. Other vratas of *Matsyapurāṇa* are presented in a tabular form here so that a fair idea of all these vratas can be attained at a glance.

| Name of the vrata         | Gods/Goddess worshipped | Day, *tithi* or time of observing | Fruits of the vrata                                      |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| *Rasakalyāniṭṛtiyā vrata* | Gaurī                   | 3rd day of lunar fortnight of Māgha | Becomes liberated from sin                               |
| *Śuklatṛtiyāvrata*        | Bhavānī                 | 3rd day of bright fortnight having the stars Purvāśādhā, Rohinī, Mārgaśirā, Hastā or Mūlā | Good health, longevity, wealth and happiness             |
| *Sarasvatī vrata*         | Sarasvatī              | Any Sunday                       | Becomes learned, wealthy, and achieves melodious voice   |
| *Bhimadvādasī vrata*      | Mahādeva                | 12th day of lunar fortnight of Māgha | Dispels sin.                                             |
| *Aśūnyaśayana vrata*      | Keśava                  | 2nd day of dark fortnight of Śrāvana | Become free from sorrow, blessed with sons wealth etc.   |
| *Aṅgarakavrata*           | Mars (Aṅgaraka)         | 4th day of bright fortnight which fall on Tuesday | Handsomeness and brings goodluck                         |
| *Viṣokasaptami*           | Sūrya                   | 7th day of bright fortnight in the month of Māgha. | Attains bliss, stays far from sorrow and also from disease |
| *Phalasaptami vrata*      | Sūrya                   | 7th day of bright fortnight in the month of Mārgaśirā | Gets endless fruits, becomes liberated from sins.        |
| *Sarkarāsaptami vrata*    | Sūrya                   | 7th day of bright fortnight in the month of Vaiśākha | Removes disease, makes the sons and grandsons thrive    |
| *Kamalasaptami vrata*     | Sūrya                   | 7th day of bright fortnight of the spring season | Gives inexhaustible wealth                               |
| *Mandārasaptami vrata*    | Sūrya                   | 7th day of bright fortnight in the month of Māgha | Fulfill all desires, destroys of sin                     |
| *Śubhasaptami vrata*      | Prāśana                 | 7th day of bright fortnight in the month of Aśvina | Gives wealth and renowned life in each birth             |
| *Viṣokadvādaśī vrata*     | Viṣṇu                   | 12th day of Aśvina                | Gives prosperity and saves man from all evils           |
Besides these 101st Chapter of Matsyapurāṇa has given glimpses of 60 different vratas. These are observed in order to reduce the great sins. A few of them are: Devavrata, Rūdravrata, Lilāvrata, Prītivrata, Gaurīvrata, Kāmavrata, Śivavrata, Saumyavrata etc.

**Conclusion:**

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that vratas occupied important place among the religious rites performed by the people of the time of Matsyapurāṇa. The Purāṇa contains the descriptions of the largest no of vratas and upavāsas. It is clear from the description of vratas that the Matsyapurāṇa supply these as the substitutes of Vedic sacrifices which are very difficult to perform and which are meant only for the three upper castes. But vrata found in the Matsyapurāṇa can be performed by even the śudras and women. From the social point of view it is thus clear that the vrata in the Matsyapurāṇa is not just an oblation to gods and goddessess, rather it is directly concerned with the social and moral life. Each and every vrata is depicted with utmost care for the society. Through the saṅkalpa of a vrata one not only starts the vrata but also ropes himself with all good things and stays away from all bad things. The regular bath, which is instructed for almost all vratas of Matsyapurāṇa, indicates the value of external purity. Fast is a way of gaining internal purity which refresh one’s body. This is the central point of all vratas of Matsyapurāṇa. When one observes a vrata it increases the self control. The internal purity also comes from penance in the form of chanting mantras and worshipping gods etc. There are hardly any vrata which runs without worship and without chanting any mantra. Dāna is shown as the most necessary part of vrata in the Matsyapurāṇa. Without it vrata remains incomplete and fruitless. The vratas of Matsyapurāṇa bears great social value through dāna which is based on dayā, tyāga, and samatā. It is clearly mentioned in the Saṃkrāntivrata that donation should be made to poor or to needy
The ethics of the *dāna* consist in the fact that it benefits both the giver and receiver. *Dāna* can work for reducing the poverty, and produce equality in the society. It can be also noticed that almost all the vratas *dāna* is made to the *brāhmaṇa* caste only. The reason of this may be that as at that time *brāhmaṇaḥ* were not permitted to do menial works so they had to depend on the donation of others. In this way they were encouraged to remain engrossed in the spread of education which was their main duty. Another important thing about *dāna* mentioned in the *Matsya-purāṇa* is that though donation of many costly things like gold, silver, jewels etc. are enjoined here, alternatives for the poor people are also prescribed here. In this way poor people are also prescribed enabled to perform vratas. Thus *vrata* promotes social harmony among all castes.

**References:**

1. Williams M.M, *Sanskrit English Dictionary*, p. 1042
2. Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. V, Pt. I, Ch.1, p. 5
3. Cf. *viṣṇoḥ karmāṇi paśyata yato vratāni paspaśe/ indrasya yujya sakhā/ *RGvedasamhitā*, 1.22.19
4. *tvamagnē vratapā asi deva a martyeśvā/ tvāṁ yajñēśvidya/ *RGvedasamhitā*, 8.11.1
5. Cf. Atharvaveda, 20.25.5
6. *vratamiti karmāṇa vṛṇotīti vārayatīti sataḥ/ idamapitaradvratatmetasmādeva nivṛttikarma/ varayatīti sataḥ/ *annamapi vratamucyate yadāvṛṇotīt śarīram/ Nirukta*, 2.4.1
7. Cf. *vrate/ Aṣṭādhyāyī*, 3.2.80; *mante śvetahokaśaśapurodāśo nvin/ Ibid* 3.2.71
8. Cf. *Mahābhārata*, *Vanaprava*, 296.3; *Udyogaprava*, 39.71-72
9. *vratamiti ca mānasam karmocyate/ idam na kariṣyāmīti yaḥ sankalpaḥ/ katamattvam / *Śabarabhāṣya*, VI. 2. 20
10. *evam śratasmārtāni karmāṇaḥbhidāhančāṛanām grasthasya snānādārabhyā/ brāhmaṇasyāvāsakarāvāyāni vidhi-pratiṣedhātmakāni mānasasankalparūpāni snātakavratānāhrāna/ na śvadhyāya/ *Mitāksara on Yājñavalkyasmārinti*, I.129.
11. *ekāhenāpi yadbhānoḥ pājāyaḥ prāpyate phalam/ yathoktadaksināvīrorvīrpaṁrīttāntah / *Brahmapurāṇa*, 29.61
12. *Agnipūrāṇa*, 175.12-17
13. Ibid.
14. *upavāseśvaśaktaśya tadeva phalamicchataḥ/ anabhyāsaḥ rogādvā kimistiāṁ vratamuttamam/ *Matsya-purāṇa*, 55.1
15 upavāse ‘pyāsaktānāṁ naktaṁ bhojanāṃisyate/ Ibid., 55.2
16 Cf. Kane, P.V., History of Dharmaśāstra, Vol. V, Pt. I, Ch. 4, p. 82
17 idāṁ vratam mayā deva grhiṁ puratastava/ nirvighnasāṁ siddhimāpnotu
prasanne tvāy keśava// grhiṁe’smin vrate deva yadyapūrne
mriyāmyaham/ tanne bhavatu sampūrnam tvat prāśāda jjanārddana//
Garuḍapurāṇa, I.121.2, 3
18 Vide. Kane, P.V., History of Dharmaśāstra, Vol. V., Pt. I, Ch. 5, pp.120, 121
19 Padmapurāṇa, 4.8.42-44
20 Ayana is the time of the stay of the Sun in the northern or southern
hemisphere. Vide. Viṣṇupurāṇa, 2.8.65
21 Matsyapurāṇa, 143.33-34
22 sā tathā kṛttikopetā viśeṣena supūjita/ tatra dattaṁ hutaṁ japaṁ
sarvamakṣayam āpnotu// Ibid., 65.3
23 Ibid., 65.2
24 Ibid., 65.3, 4
25 tṛtiyāyāṁ samabhyaṛcyā sopavāso janārdanam/ rajasūyaphalāṁ
prāpyagatimāpnoti// Ibid., 65.7
26 vaisākhaśuklatṛtiyāmupoṣito’śataiḥ śrīvāsudevamabhyaṛcyā/
tāveva hūtvā datvā ca sarvapāpebhyaḥ puto bhavati/ /
yacca tasminnahnā prayačcha tadakṣayamāpnoti// Viṣṇusmrī, II. 90.17,18
27 Kane, P.V., History of Dharmaśāstra, Vol. V., Pt. I, Ch. 4, p. 88
28 Vāmaṇapurāṇa, 50.3-6
29 Cf. Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV, p. 483
30 anena vidhinā yastu kuryāchivacaturdaśiṁ/ sośvamedhasahasrasya phalamāpnotimānaṁvah// Matsyapurāṇa, 95.32.
31 brahmahatyādikāṁ kīncidyadatrāmutra vā kṛtam/ pitṛbhirbhrātśvabhirvāpi
tatsarvanāshamāpnoti// Ibid., 95.33.
32 dirghāyurārogyakulānnavāṭhi ratrākṣayāmutra caturbhujatvam/
ganādhipatyāṁ divi keśaḥ śāvaxaśrayaṁ padameti śambhoḥ// Ibid.,95.34
33 yā vātha nārī kurūtehi bhaktiyā bhartāramāpṇcchya sutān gurun vā/
sāpi prasādātparameśvarasya parampadam yāti pinākapāṇeḥ// Ibid.95.37
34 Ibid., 95.32
35 ...prārtayeddeśaśtvāmaḥ saranaṁ gataḥ,catudṛśāyāṁ nirāhārāṁ
samyagbhyaṛcyā samkaram/ suvarṇavṛṣabham dattvā bhokṣyāmi ca
parē’hanīḥ// Ibid., 95.6
36 Ibid., 95.9-13
37 tatastu vṛṣabham haimamudakumbhasamanvītam/ śuklamāyāmbaradharam
paṇcaratnasamanvītam/ bhokṣyāimāvyāvidhairyuktam brāhmaṇāya
nivedayet// Ibid., 95.14
38 Ibid., 95.18-22
39 Ibid., 95.21,22
40 arkapusphaṁ kadambaiśca śatapatrya tathotpalaṁ/ ekaikena
caturdaśyorarcayetpārvatīpatim// Vide, 95.24
41 Cf.kṛtvā nīlavṛṣotsargāṃ śṛtyukta vidhiṅā naraḥ / umāmaheśvaram haimaṁ
vṛṣabhaṅca gava saha// muktāphalāṣṭakayutam sitanetrapatavṛtām/
sarvopaskarasanyuktāṁ śayyāṁ dadyāt sakumbhakām// Ibíd., 95.26, 27
42 Agnipurāṇa. 192.2-3
43 Lingapurāṇa, 83.13.54
44 Kane, P.V., History of Dharmaśāstra. Vol. V, Pt. I, Ch. 11, p. 211
45 ayane viśve vāpi samkrāntivratamācaret / pūrvedyurekabhaktena
dantadhāvanapurvakam// samkrāntivāsare prātastilaiḥ snānam
vidhiyate./ / Matsyapurāṇa, 98.2
46 Cf. yāvanmahendrapramukhairagendraliḥ: prthvi ca saptābdhir eva tiṣṭhet/
tāvatsagandharvaganairasāsaiḥ samūḥyate nārada/ nākapṛṣṭhe// Ibíd.,98.13.
47 dvījāya sodakumbhaṅca ghtāpātram hiranmayam/ kamalaṅca yathāṣaktyā
kārayitvā nivedayet./ / Ibíd., 98.3-8
48 Ibid., 98.3-8
49 nakṣatrapuruṣaṁ nāma vratām nārāyaṇātmakam/ pāḍādi kuryādvidhivat
viṣṇūnamānukārtaṁ// Matsyapurāṇa, 54.7
50 Cf. pādau mūlaṁ tu jāṅghe ca rohini jānuni tathāscin ṣv/ uru cāśādha
dvayamtha guhyam phalguni dvitayam// kaṭirapi ca kṛttikā pārśvayosoḥ
yamalā bhavantī bhadrapadāḥ/ kuśisthā revatyo vijñeyamuro nurādha ca//
prśtham vidvālī dhanisthām bhūjāvā biśākha śrmatau karau hastāḥ/ angalyaśca
punarvasuśālesā saṁjñītaśca nakāḥ// grīvā jeṣṭhā śravaṇam śravanau puseyo
mukham dvījā svatīḥ/ hasitam satabhisagatha nāsikā maghā mṛgasīro
netre// citrā laḷāta sarīnāḥ śiro bharaṇya sīro rurāḥ ścārdra/
nakṣatrapuroṣako'yam kartavyā rūpamīcchadbhiḥ// Brhat Samhitā,
Rūpasatrādhyāyaḥ, 1-5
51 Matsyapurāṇa, 54.29, 30
52 nakṣatrapuruṣākhyam hi vratānāmuttamaṁ vratam/ pūrva kṛtam hi bhṛgunā
sarvapātaka nāśanam// Vāmanapurāṇa, 80.30
53 Ibid, 80.36,37
54 Matsyapurāṇa, 54.9-19
55 manoratham naḥ saphalikurṣa ṣviraṇya garbhāḥcyutarūdrarūpīn// Ibíd.,
56 54.23
57 salakṣmtakmsabhārīya kaṇcanam puroṣottamam/ śayyāṁca dadyān thắngrenā
granthibhēdāvivarjitaṁ// Ibíd., 54.24
58 evaṁ nivedya tatsarvam vastramīcchadbhiḥ/ naksatrapuruṣajñāya
viprāyāthasaṁsthāṁ// Ibíd., 54.27
59 Ibid., 57.3
60 Ṛgvedasamhitā. I.91.16
61 sudro’pi paryābhalkāya pārśanandālaparvajītaḥ/ omāya varadāyātho viṣṇave
namḥ// Matsyapurāṇa, 56.6
62 Ibid., 57.6-15
63 Ibid., 57.7
rohiṇicandramithunam kārayitvā thakañcanam thakañcanam candraḥ ṣaḍamgulaḥ kāryo rohiṇicaturaṅgulā muktāphalāṣṭakayutaṁ sitanetrapaṭāvṉtam kṣīrakumbhaopari punah kāṁsyapātrāksatānvitam// dadyāṁmantrena pūrvāhṇe sālikṣuphalsamayutam// Ḵbid., 57.19, 20

Kane, P.V., History of Dharmaśāstra. Vol. V, Pt. I, Ch.13, pp. 395, 396

caitramāsi sitepakṣe dvādaśyām niyatavrataḥ Matsyapurāṇa, 7.10.(a)
yah kuryādbhāryādvayopetam ratināṃ tasya vāmataḥ// Ḵbid., 7.13

The Matsyapurāṇa enjoins thus : After pronouncing Om kāmaya namaḥ worship the feet, After pronouncing Om saubhāgyadaya namaḥ worship the legs, After pronouncing Om smarāya namaḥ worship the thighs, After pronouncing Om manmathāya namaḥ worship the waist, After pronouncing Om svaschodarāya namaḥ worship stomach, After pronouncing Om anaṁgāya namaḥ worship the breast, After pronouncing Om padmamukhāya namaḥ worship the mouth, After pronouncing Om paṇcaśarāya namaḥ worship the hands, After pronouncing Om sarvatmane namaḥ worship the head. Matsyapurāṇa, ed. H.H. Wilson, Vol. I, p. 31

Matsyapurāṇa, 7.20

virebhoyodbhjanam dadyādvittaśāthyāṃ vivarjayet/ iksudandānathodadyāt Ibīd.26.(b)

ādityasayanam nāma yathāvaccantrikār̥cancanam/
yadā hastena saptamyāmādityasya dināṁ bhavet/ suryyār̥cyāṁ cātha samkrāntistithīḥ sā sārvakāmī// Ibīd., 55.4

umāpatervervāpi na bhedo drṣyatekvacit/ yasmātānāmśānāmūnismāreṣṭha grheśamhbu samarcayet/ Ibīd., 55.6

Ibīd., 55.31

Ibīd., 55.7-15

yathāvādityasayanamasūnyam tava sarvadā/ kāntā dhṛtyā śriyā ratyā tathā me santu sīdhyaḥ// Ibīd., 55.26

Padmapurāṇa, V.24.64-96

Matsyapurāṇa, 56.2-6

Ibīd., 10

Ibīd., 11

vasantamāsamāsādya tṛtiyāyām janapriya/ śuklapakṣasya pūrvāhne tilaiḥ snānam samācaret// Ibīd., 60.14
The eight blessings consisting of the eight things viz. clarified butter, *niśpāva* saffron, cow’s milk, cuminseed, sugarcane, salt and coriander seed. *Matsyapurāṇa*, ed. H.H. Wilson, p.283

*Matsyapurāṇa*, 60.32

*Ibid*., 62.34.

*Ibid*., 37

*yā lakṣmiḥ sarvabhūtānāṁ yā ca deveśvavasthitā/ dhenurūpeṇa sā devī mama sāntim prayacchatu/ / *Ibid*.82.11

*Ibid*., 13-15.

*Ibid*., 63

*Ibid*., 64

*Ibid*., 66

*Ibid*., 69

*Ibid*., 71

*Ibid*., 72

*Ibid*., 75

*Ibid*., 76

*Ibid*., 77

*Ibid*., 78

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