

Rules of Impurity (Sutak)

From the Preta-kanda of the Garuda Purana.

The impurity accruing from birth and death is fourfold. The rules of impurity are applicable to all the four castes.

The days of impurity are ten for the relatives on the father's and mother's side. Brahmins should avoid taking meals during this period with the relatives of the dead. The bereaved family should neither offer nor receive gifts, should neither undertake nor conduct sacrifices. The study of the Vedas and Shastras (scriptures) is strictly prohibited.

One should observe the following while performing obsequies rites; suitability of place and time, sufficiency of wealth, justification of purpose, validity of reason and his capability.

If a person dies in a forest conflagration or in some foreign country, then the impurity is soon removed by merely taking a bath.

If a child is dead in the womb or is born dead (still born), there should be no obsequies rite, no water libation and no impurity at all. Artisans, architects, physicians, slaves (male or female), kings and Vedic scholars are purified immediately.

He who is undergoing a fast (abstaining from food), he who is performing a sacrifice reciting the mantras, he who has set up a sacrificial fire or he who is a reigning monarch (ruler) – these are exempt from the rules of impurity as are also those who are exempted by the king.

For impurity accruing from birth, the rules are not so strict. Mother is purified after ten days; father just after taking a bath.

Manu deva has said that there is no impurity if a person dies during the days of marriage, during festivities, during days of sacrifice (religious ceremonies). The foodstuff prepared or collected for use can be utilised by the persons concerned.

Birth:- Relatives incur no impurity. Impurity attaches to parents alone. Primarily, it is the mother who becomes impure. Father is purified by the touch of water alone.

In birth or death, impurity lasts for ten days.

By giving food to the hungry and to the poor and the needy, the parents get rid of impurity the sages have declared.

Man is purified after bathing in water from an earthen jar, mixed with gingelly (Til) seeds and clay from holy places.

He should give gifts of some articles to the village assembly (local community organization). Wealth should be given to a Brahmin.

A person distanced by seven or eight generations or he who has not undergone the Sacrament incurs no impurity.

For men who have lost their lives for the sake of (protection of) Brahmins, cows,

women, or in the battlefield, infirmity lasts for a single night only.

Brahmins do not incur impurity if they are engaged in auspicious rites. Those who arrange cremation of an orphan child with a Brahmin assisting them in this act become purified as soon as they take bath.

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