

Vaidika Samskaras (contd.,)

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(Sections and sub-sections are numbered in continuation from the previous article)

In the previous article in Volume 4 No. 2 of Paramaatha Tattvam, we discussed the three pre-natal samskaras, namely, garbhAdAnam, pumsavanam and seemantam. All these are meant for the health and complete growth (physical, psychological and spiritual) of the child, in the womb of the mother. We will now continue the discussion with the post-natal samskaras.

4.2 Post-natal samskAras

There are four post-natal samskAras before the Educational samskAras:

1. jaata karma – the birth ceremony
2. naama karaNa – the naming ceremony
3. anna-prASana – Feeding of solid food
4. cUDA karma OR caulam – tonsure ceremony

4.2.1 jaata karma – the birth ceremony

The fourth samskAra is the birth ceremony. Before the actual birth of the child, several details are mentioned:

- Around the time of delivery, the pregnant lady should be taken to a sUtika bhavanam (birthing room) with its door opening in the east or northern side.
- The room should be able to influence positive thoughts in the mother.
- The time of entry into the room is chosen astrologically. The lady should enter into the room with vedic chanting, or music on the glory of the Lord .
- Well experienced ladies in child birth should be asked to assist in the birthing process, as it is a very painful process.

- Then a special rite is prescribed for comfortable delivery called, sOshyantI karma, derived from the root sU – prasavE.

Then, following the child birth, the ritual performed by the father is jAta karma.

जाते सति क्रियमाणं कर्म जातकर्म OR
जातं पुत्रं दृष्ट्वा क्रियमाणं कर्म

- Generally, the time for performance of this ritual has two options:
 - a) Immeidately after the birth
 - b) For any reason if it could not be done, can be done on the 11th day along with naama karaNam.

This is essentially a purificatory rite. The father has sewn the seed in the kshetram - the womb. The child that comes is not in the pure form and so has to undergo jAta karma to remove the natural dOsha's. These are of two kinds:

- a) Those related to garbha - गार्भिक-दोषम्
- b) Those related to the seed - बीजम्

Generally the following rites are involved:

- nAndI srAddham – to propitiate and seek the blessings of the pitrus. The karma is very important during the birth since, it is believed, that all pitrus come to that house during that time. Why? It is a happy affair for the continuation of the paramparA, since a male child is required for pinDa-udaka- kriyA (essentially food-offereing to the pitrus)
- Then the father keeps the child on the lap and prays for the welfare:

a) For divine purpose - देव -व्यवहारार्थम् - there are rules governing the choice of the name. For example, male child will have even letters and female child will have odd letters. There are rules for suffixes etc. The name can be chosen based on several considerations:

- based on the month of birth - SrAvaNkumAr
- based on forefather's name
- based on the kula devatA - family deity
- based on Rishis
- based on what the parent's desire: for example, sundaram, kubEra, meenAkshi

This name is not used casually but only during important spiritual occasions such as upanayanam, vivAham etc., and when the boy recites the pravaram.

b) For social / worldly purpose - लोक -व्यवहारार्थम् - popular name.

- According to one's varNa, proper suffix is chosen for the name; for example,
 - Brahmin - SarMA - stands for Ananda
 - Kshatriya-varMA - an armor to society
 - Vaisya - guptA - one who protects wealth or deals with secrets
 - Sudra - dAsa - one who serves.
- Later, other suffixes are given, such as dlxitaH: (one who takes dlkshA for conducting yajna; sAstrI - one who has studied the sAstras etc.

Before the conduct of the next (6th) samskAra, another ritual is performed by some people, called, nishkramaNam - first outing. This is generally done during the 3rd month. The child is taken out with Vedic chanting etc. for the first time on an auspicious day. The child is shown the Sun and the Moon - sUrya-candra-darSanam - sitting in a decorated place, by the father. Mrutyunjaya mantra is recited for long life.

4.2.3 anna prASanam - First feeding of solid food

This ritual is generally conducted after six months (boy) or seven months (for girls), when the teeth also slowly get formed. The child is fed a combination of ghee, honey, curd and rice mixed with salt and chilli, along with praNava and vyAhruti. A special prayer to all the plants (Oshadhi) and water is recited, essentially to impart respect to nature and for their help and nourishment of the child. At this time, it is believed that the vAsanas get developed for the child and the aptitude of the child can be found - painting, arts, music, tools (motor skills). Even though this ritual is done so early, it is again conducted during upnayanam in a different style (kumAra bhojanam).

4.2.4 cUDA karma - Tonsuring ceremony

The seventh samskAra is चौलम् or चूडा -कर्म - shaving off the hair keeping the tuft or SikhA. It is generally performed during the third year.

- Symbolically hair is considered to represent our rAga-dvEshAs - passion and hatred. The reason for using hair and not other organs as a symbol, is because it is countless, and so does our sins, accumulated over several cycles of births. Shaving of the hair symbolizes the removal of sins.
- The whole body is considered a chariot; the chariot requires a roof, symbolized by the tuft.
- According to Sushruta (Ayurveda expert), within the head, on the top portion, there is a junction of the blood vessels and the vital part (marma sthAnam) and just below that, the life is stored. If that is damaged, death takes place immediately. And, the SikhA acts like a helmet!

Another ritual is vidyArambha or akshara-abhyAsa, where the child is initiated to alphabets. The tradition is to use rice or wheat and practice the child to write on it with a golden pen! After prayers to the various deities, the rice is cooked and offered to them and the prasAdam is given to the child. This ritual is done also on an auspicious day when the planets are in favourable position, and the child will seek the blessings of the elders, the devatas etc.

Source Material:

1. Hindu Samskaras, Rajbali Pandey, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1998.
2. The Book of Samskaras, Prema Rasa Dasa, Bhakti Vedanta Book Trust International, 1977.
3. Lectures by Swami Paramarthananda, Madras