

Vaidika Samskaras

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

In the previous article in Volume 4 No. 1 of ParamaArtha Tattvam, we said that,

- the *samskaaras* are a series of sacraments performed by any one belonging to the vedic tradition, which are meant for the overall purification or overall refinement of the individual.
- by overall refinement, we mean the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual development and maturity of the personality at the total level.
- the term *samskaara* has three meanings
 1. the refinement itself
 2. the ritual by which the refinement is achieved, and
 3. the impressions - *vAsanAs* - created by oneself and the environment
- the purpose was not just material prosperity - which was incidental - but the *moksha purushArtha* - based on which the entire *samskaras* were developed. As side benefits, one also gets *dharma, artha* and *kaama purushArthas*.
- before anything is offered to the Lord, the offering should be purified, and our sages took the entire life as the greatest offering of the individual - the *jivaatmA* - to the *paramAtman*:

(*SravaNam keertanam vishnoh: smaraNam pAdasevanam arcanam vandanam dAsyam sakhyam Atmanivedanam*)

- the total life itself is an *yajna*.

दैवमेवापरे यज्ञं योगिनः पर्युपासते ।
ब्रह्माग्नावपरे यज्ञं यज्ञेनैवोपजुह्वति ॥

(Srimad Bhagavadgita 4.25)

(Some yogis perform sacrifices especially to propitiate deities; still others offer the Atman itself as oblation in the fire of brahman)

- in all other offerings, the ego - *ahamkAra* - is present. If one offers oneself to the Lord, one must make sure that he/she is offerable - in a fit condition.
- *samskaara* is that process by which one makes oneself "*sanskrita jeevah*:" (refined individual) to be offered to ISwarah: *ISwara-nivedana-arhah*: or *yogyah*: *bhavati* - in the language of devotion, or *AtmajnAnayogya*: *bhavati*, in the language of *vedaanta*.
- Since the impurities are accumulated over innumerable number of births, the purification will take a long cleansing process over the entire life - right from the very conception onwards. If the purification becomes successful, one will be able to attain *moksha* in this life itself.
- If not, the final rites- the cremation etc. rituals - are performed and if one is born as a human being, one can continue the performance of the *samskaaras* to become eligible for *moksha*. As Sri Krishna says:

अनेक-जन्म-संसिद्धिः ततो याति परांगतिम् ।

(*having achieved purity through several births one can attain liberation*)

As was mentioned earlier, there are forty one *samskaaras*, starting from the conception of the baby in the mother's womb, till the cremation. We will discuss each of these forty one *samskaaras* in some detail in a series of articles, starting from this number of the

Journal. The intent is not to give the *mantras* used in the rituals or the actual conduct of the rituals themselves, but to give a glimpse of the significance of the rituals along with some peripheral details.

4. Classification of *samskaaras*

The forty one *samskaaras* can be broadly classified in to nine groups:

1. Pre-natal *samskaaras* (3)
2. Pre-educational *samskaaras* (4)
3. Educational *samskaaras* (6)
4. Marriage
5. Five *mahAyajnas*
6. Seven *pAka yajnas*
7. Seven *havir yajnas*
8. Seven *soma yajnas*
9. Final Rites

The concept is that, by the time a person completes all the forty *samskaaras*, he may become qualified for *jnAnam* - so all through the life, going through each of the *aaSramas* (stages - *brahmacarya aaSrama, grihasthASrama, vAnaprastha aaSrama and sannyaAsa aaSrama*), the person becomes *yogya*: (qualified) to study *vedaanta* so that the knowledge *aham brahmAsmi* will be realized. Once the person gains this knowledge, then there is no need for any further *samskaaras*. However, this realization may not be possible for most because of the thickness of the impurity accumulated over several cycles of birth and so even after death, the individuality continues. The person has to be purified further and so, after death, the final *samskaara*, known as *antyeshTi*: (*the 41st samskaara*), is performed (by one's son or close relative), with the hope that the person will become qualified for a better birth next time!

As a picture becomes clearer and clearer by each stroke that the artist draws, each of the *samskaaras* makes the *jeeva* more and more refined, to become *yogya* for *moksha*.

4.1 Pre-natal *samskaaras* :

There are three pre-natal *samskaaras* which are performed by the father before the birth of the child, and they are:

1. *garbhAdhAnam* - the conception ceremony;
2. *pumsavanam* - prayer for a male child;
3. *seemantam* or *seemantonnayanam* - parting of the hair of the wife.

4.1.1 *garbhAdhAnam* - the conception ceremony:

There are two schools of thought regarding this ceremony.

- Purification of the mother - to make her eligible to conceive the baby through the spiritual cleansing of the womb - क्षेत्र-संस्कारः
- Purification of the seed - बीज-संस्कारः
- How do the interpretations affect the conduct of this *samskaara*? If it is क्षेत्र-संस्कारः, then there is no need to repeat it for every conception. But if it is बीज-संस्कारः, then it has to be performed for each child. Popularly, the latter is accepted even though the ritual itself is performed once only for the first child.

What is *garbhaadhaanam*? The word *garbha*: has two meanings:

- a) the womb of the mother, and
- b) the baby itself - the embryo or fetus - गर्भस्य शिशुः।

- Here we take the second meaning, the *jeeva* and the term *aadhaanam* means the transfer or placement of the *jeeva* in the womb of the mother.

गर्भस्य शिशोः आधानम्- > गर्भाधानम्।

- The *jeeva* is not created afresh; it already exists in the father, and is only transferred to the mother! The *jeeva* (जीवः) is *anaadi* - never created and when present in the

father, it is called *reta:* (रेतः or पुरुष-बीजम्). This *reta:* is called *garbha:* after transfer to the mother.

- From where did the father get this *jeeva*? It is an elaborate process in which the *jeeva* is believed to go through five stages before coming to human form, the last stage being the mother's womb. According to Mundaka Upanishad (II.i.6)

तस्मात् अग्निः समिधो यस्य सूर्यः
सोमात्पर्जन्य ओषधयः पृथिव्याम् ।
पुमान् रेतः सिंचति योषितायां
बह्वीः प्रजाः पुरुषात् संप्रसूताः ॥

(From Him emerges the fire (i.e. heaven) of which the fuel is the Sun. From the moon emerge clouds, and (from clouds) the herbs on the earth. A man sheds the semen in to the woman. From the *Purusha* have originated many creatures.)

What are these five stages?

1. After leaving previous birth, the *jeeva* enters the *pitru loka:* (or द्यु-लोकः)
 2. From there enters the clouds - पर्जन्यः
 3. From clouds, enters the plants - ओषधयः
 4. From plants, enters the father
 5. From the father, enters the mother's womb.
- The transfer of *jeeva* from one stage to the other is considered a *yajna*. In other words, the *jeeva* comes to this world as a result of five *yajnas*! In each of these *yajnas*, the *jeeva* is offered as the oblation.

Thus, the conception is considered as the greatest *yajna*, which brings a human life into existence, and so it is given a lot of importance. The ritual by which the mother conceives the baby is *garbhaadhaanam* (गर्भ संधार्यते येन तत् गर्भाधानम्) ।

This can be viewed from various angles:

- The birth of the child protects one's family lineage - *kula-paramapara*.
- Also, from the spiritual angle, any person is born with three debts - 1) to the devas (*deva-RuNam*), 2) to the Rishis (*Rishi-RuNam*), and 3) to the ancestors (*pitru-RuNam*). Among these, the third debt is removed by getting an offspring. So the son is called *RuNa-mocaka:* (the remover of debt) who can perform *srAddha* etc. rituals.
- It is believed that, even if the father had committed some sins and has to go to *naraka*, called *put-naraka:* (पुत्-नरकः), he will be saved by the performance of *srAddhas*. The name *putra:* for the son came from the statement: पुन्नाम्नः नरकात् त्रायते इति पुत्रः ।
- Getting a child is indirectly perpetuating oneself. The child is nothing but one's own flesh and blood. Aitereya Upanishad says that the father only is reborn as the child; every organ is made of one's own organs etc.

Time of conception:

The scriptures prescribe the time of conception based on various considerations.

- Physical health of the parents: For example, if the parents are not healthy at the time of conception, the child may be affected.
- The mental condition of the parents will influence the child. If the parents are focused on *artha*, *kAma* (material or sensual pleasure) only, the child also will be *artha*, *kAma* oriented. The scriptures prescribe marriage for begetting *dharma-prajA* (righteous offspring) only.
- The astrological time - position of planets, stars etc - is considered very important. Conception during the day- time is never prescribed.

- Several interesting details are given regarding the time/day of conception. Certain ideal time is prescribed, called *RutukAlam* and sixteen days are given. If conceived on even days (2nd, 4th etc. days), the child will be a boy and, if conceived on odd days, will be a girl. (युग्मासु पुत्राः जायन्ते स्त्रियः अयुग्मासु)
- Further differences are also mentioned: for example, a male child born on the
 - 4th day, will be poor and short lived
 - 6th day, will be a mediocre child
 - 8th day, will be prosperous
 - 10th day, will be wise
 - 12th day, will be best all round
 - 14th and 16th days, will be spiritual
- Similarly, a female child born on the
 - 5th day, will give birth to girls only
 - 7th day, will have no children
 - 9th day, will be very auspicious
 - 11th day, will be irreligious
 - 13th day, will be an evil person
 - 15th day will get male children
- For getting children of certain types and qualities, *brihadAraNyaka upanishad* gives several mantras: (Ch. 6, Sec 4: 14-16)

स य इच्छेत्पुत्रो मे शुक्लो जायेत,
वेदमनुब्रुवीत, सर्वमायुरियादिति,
क्षीरौदनं पाचयित्वा सर्पिष्मन्तमश्नीयाताम्
ईश्वरौ जनयितवै ।

(He who wishes "a son of fair complexion, to be versed in one veda having the full span of life", "should eat rice cooked in milk mixed with ghee, along with his wife." (Then they) would be able to give birth (to such a son)

अथ य इच्छेत्पुत्रो मे कपिलः पिङ्गलो जायेत,
द्वौ वेदावनुब्रुवीत, सर्वमायुरियादिति,
दध्योदनं पाचयित्वा सर्पिष्मन्तमश्नीयाताम्
ईश्वरौ जनयितवै ।

(And, he who desires a son of tawny or brown complexion, to be versed in two vedas and having the full span of life, should eat rice cooked in curd mixed with ghee, with his wife. (Then they) would be able to give birth (to such a son).

अथ य इच्छेत्पुत्रो मे श्यामो लोहिताक्षो जायेत,
त्रीन्वेदानुब्रुवीत, सर्वमायुरियादिति,
उदौदनं पाचयित्वा सर्पिष्मन्तमश्नीयाताम्
ईश्वरौ जनयितवै ।

(And, he who desires a son of dark complexion with red eyes, to be versed in three vedas and having the full span of life, should eat rice boiled in water, mixed with ghee, with his wife. (Then they) would be able to give birth (to such a son).

अथ य इच्छेद्दुहिता मे पण्डिता जायेत,
सर्वमायुरियादिति, तिलौदनं पाचयित्वा
सर्पिष्मन्तमश्नीयाताम्; ईश्वरौ जनयितवै ।

(And he who desires a daughter with learning, to live a full term of life, should eat rice cooked in sesame seeds, mixed with ghee, with his wife. (Then they) would be able to give birth (to such a girl)

- After conception, throughout the course of pregnancy, there was the awareness that the physical and mental conditions of the child are influenced by the environment and a spiritual environment was desired.

4.1.2 *pumsavanam* - ceremony for getting a male off-spring:

The second pre-natal *samskara* is *pumsavanam*. The term पुंस् (*pums*) means "male" and the term सवनम् (*savanam*) refers to the birth. Hence, the birth of a male child is *pumsavanam*. For the sake of the propagation of one's *parampara*, it has been the desire, from the beginning. So the ritual is known as:

पुमान् प्रसूयते येन कर्मणा तत् पुंसवनम् ।

येन कर्मणा - by which rite; पुमान् प्रसूयते - a male

child is given birth.

According to the *sAstras*, the rite is supposed to be performed in the third month after conception. Sushruta, the Ayurveda expert says that the formation of the child takes place only in the third month. According to him, the development of the child happens as follows:

Month	Development
1	still in liquid form; no formation
2	a vague solidified mass
3	sense organs and veins are formed
4	head, hands and legs are formed
5	bones, fingers, hair, and the mind are formed
6	intellect
7	prANa and nervous system
8 & 9	capacity to experience pleasure/pain

Based on the *sAstras*, a time is chosen when the moon is in a male constellation and prayers are offered for the birth of a healthy, fully developed male child. There is also a ritual where the husband pours a drop of the juice from the sprout of the banyan tree and milk, in the right nostril of the wife. This ritual is meant to give birth to a healthy male child.

4.1.3 *seemantam or seemantonnayanam* - parting of the hair of the wife.

The third pre-natal *saskAra* is *seemanta*: which is performed at the 5th or 6th month of pregnancy. The mind and intellect (essentially, the subtle personality) of the baby is supposed to develop around this time. Our *sAstras* clearly acknowledged the fact that,

- a person's superiority is not based on the physical body, but by the *viveka-Sakti*.
- *moksha* has to be attained by the mind alone

and so the mind should be fit for *sAstra-vicAra*, *Atma-jnAna* and so, the *samskAra* is performed right at the time of formation of this faculty.

It is also a symbolic ritual where the husband makes a boundary in the head of the wife by parting the hair. सीमा - boundary; अन्तः - end and so, the limiting line is called *seemanta*: उन्नयनम् - making or parting (of the hair in the head). The purpose of this ritual can be seen from various angles:

- the mind is formed at this time and can be influenced by the subtle forces around - especially negative forces - like *yakshas*, *rAkshasas* etc. The prayers recited during the ritual act as an armor.
- These prayers invoke *mahAlakshmi* in the *seemanta*: line (so *kumkum* is applied there)
- The husband asks *mahAlakshmi* to ward off all evils and make the child pure, and give prosperity.
- Certain warnings were also given to the pregnant mother - do's and don'ts - for a careful conduct of life; movements are restricted; noble and pious thoughts are imparted.
- Husband also takes the responsibility and offers to do everything for her, including dressing her hair (symbolically to show that he will do whatever she needs)

With this, the discussion on the three pre-natal *samskaras* is concluded. We will continue with the post-natal *samskaras* from the next article of this series.

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.