

# 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. 3&4 of ParamaArtha Tattvam, we discussed the four post-natal *samskaras*, namely, *jAtakarma*, *nAmakaraNa*, *annaprASana* and *cUDA karma*. We will now continue the discussion with the educational *samskAras*, starting from *upanayanam*.

## 4.3 Upanayanam (thread ceremony)

Among the educational *samskaaras*, the foremost is *upanayanam*. Scriptural (vedic) education starts only after this *samskaara* is performed and, as such, can be viewed as a pre-educational *samskaara* also.

*Upanayana samskAra* is to be performed for all three *varNas* - the *brAhmaNas*, the *kshatriyas*, and the *vaiSyas*. Why is this *samskAra* performed only for the three *varNas*? According to scriptures, those who are not initiated, or those who do not perform the *vaidika samskAras* even after initiation, are geneally considered *sUdras*! (one should not confuse this with the caste system).

Scriptures also suggest the time in which this *samskaara* can be performed, which varies with the *varNa*.

- For *brahmaNas*, the 8<sup>th</sup> year (including pregnancy) is suggested. The Spring season is considered ideal. The very function of a *brAhmaNa* was only *veda paThanam* (learning of vedas) and *veda pAThanam* (teaching of vedas). A lot of study of the entire *SAstras* was involved, such as, the *vedas*, the *vedAngas*, the *upAngas* etc. Spring- *vasanta Ritu* - is a mild season, and as such the *brAhmaNas* were supposed to be mild and not involved in aggressive or violent activities.

- For *kshatriyas*, the eleventh year is suggested including pregnancy (*garbha-EkAdaSa*). The suggested season is Summer - *grIshma Ritu*. Their function is not to protect the *Sastras*, but to know as much to follow their *dharma*. Their vedic education was also limited to that extent, since they had a larger responsibility of protecting the entire country, and the other three *varNas*. They had additional education such as, *dhanur vidya*, (archery and warfare), *artha Sastra* (economics) etc. Summer is a hot season and as such, the *kshatriyas* were actively engaged in battles etc. to protect the country, and to punish the wicked to uphold *dharma*.
- For *vaiSyas*, the twelfth year including pregnancy is suggested and the preferred season is Autumn - *Sarad Ritu*. Their function was essentially commerce to assure a sound economic basis for the country and so, their vedic education was limited to that much extent to know their *dharma* adequately. They also had additional education in commerce etc. The autumnal season - just after the rains - stands for prosperity, and was considered the preferred season for the *upanayana samskAra* for the *vaiSyas*.

In addition, platenary positions and other aspects were also considered for the conduct of this ritual by all the *varNas*.

### 4.3.1 Purpose of *upanayanam*

*upanayanam* marks the entry into a second life and after the performance of this ceremony, the boy becomes a *dvija*:. (*dve janmanI yasya sa: dvija:* - one who has got two *janmas*. All the three *varNas* are known as *dvijas*).

What is meant by a second life?

Till *upanayanam*, only the physical personality alone was taken care of, and not the inner personality. The life was similar to that of animal only until this time with little development of individuality, intellect, mind, awareness of family, community etc. When the child reaches the age of 7 or 8, the mind, intellect etc. develop from that stage to a human stage with self-awareness etc. It is necessary and critical to regulate and orient the personality in the right direction, at this time. *upanayanam* is a *samskAra* which is meant to mould the personality to become a responsible human being – with several considerations such as:

- Proper emotional personality; imbibing of values - *satyam vada* (speak the truth); *dharmam cara* (abide by *dharma*) etc. even if the child does not understand and follow for some time, he will realize the values later and grow with the right attitude and emotion.
- Development of the intellect with the right type of knowledge -*viveka* (discrimination); *vairAgya* (dispassion) etc. and development of a spiritual personality.
- Physical discipline – getting up early, cleanliness, etc.
- Knowledge of *varNa dharma* and *ASrama dharma* – and the duties; respect for others etc.
- Knowledge of the responsibility to the society, to oneself, to the family etc.

So, the society and the individual are considered together in the building up of a right personality of the child during growth. Entry into such a life style is indicated by the *upanayana samskAra*.

The ideal setting for this education was the *gurukula* setting where the child can learn without the emotional considerations,

pampering etc. of the parents, and will also be able to learn through interaction with other children.

The syllabus for this education is based on the scriptures (vedas), which talk not only of the *purushArthas* of the individual but also the social well-being, duties to family, to society etc.

Since the child leads a life based on the learnings from the vedas, this life is called, *brahmacaryam* – a way of life, devised by *brahma* – the vedas. One who leads such a life is called a *brahmacArI*.

There is also another meaning for this term – *Brahma* refers to *Para Brahman*, and so, *brahmacaryam* is a life style directed towards *brahmaNi carati* or *brahma vishaye* or *brahma nimittam carati*.

In summary, *brahmacaryam* has two meanings:

1. a life style as prescribed in the vedas
2. a life style meant to reach *brahmatvam*

#### 4.3.2 The word *upanayanam*

The word *upanayanam* has been described in many ways. For example,

- the term *upa* means 'near' and *nayanam* means 'leading'. The word *upanayanam* means 'leading near'. It is a *samskAra* by which a person is purified and made fit to learn the vedas – OR *vedam upanayanam*
- to study vedas, the child goes to a *guru* and so it can be described as *gurum upanayanam*
- Or, through this *samskAra*, the child is coming closer to *parabrahma* and so can be described as *parabrahma-upanayanam*
- Or, since the teacher utters the *mantra* – *aham upanaye* – (I take the boy near myself), it is called *upanayanam*

Since the child learns the vedas from the teacher, an ideal human being is born, and for this birth, the Veda is the mother and the teacher is the father.

मातुः अग्रे अधि जननम् । द्वितीयं मौञ्जीबन्धनात् ।  
तत्रास्य माता गायत्री पितातु आचार्य उच्यते ॥

मातुः अग्रे अधि जननम् । First a non-refined individual is born with human anatomy

द्वितीयं मौञ्जीबन्धनात् the second birth takes place in *upanayanam* referred by *mounjI-bandhanam*

तत्रास्य माता गायत्री (For the second birth - *dvitIya janmani*), the mother is *gAyatrI* - refers to the entire *veda* itself; so *gAyatrI* is taught first.

पितातु आचार्य उच्यते the teacher is the father.

In summary, the purpose of the *upanayanam* is two-fold:

1. It symbolizes entry in to *gurukulam*
2. It purifies the child to enter the *gurukulam* to learn the *gAyatrI mantra* and the *vedas*.

#### 4.3.3 The *upanayanam* ritual

Generally the biological father does the *gAyatrI mantra upadeSam* to the child, before sending to the *gurukulam* and hence, plays the role of the *AcArya*. Because of this, lot of discipline is prescribed to the father since the *mantra upadeSa* will have more effect only when the *upadeSa kartA* has more merit! If the father has not been performing the *sandhyAvandanam* etc. rituals regularly, at least a few weeks before the ritual, he should recite 1008 *gAyatrIs* every day along with the *sandhyAvandanam*.

There are so many preparatory rituals prescribed such as *nAndI SrAddham* (to propitiate the ancestors), *udakaSAnti*, *puNyAhavAcanam* (purificatory rites) etc. Also, till now, the *samskAras* for the boy were done by the father (*jAtakarma*, *nAmakaraNa*, etc.), but now on, the child becomes responsible to do all the rituals and so has to be purified.

Since this is considered a second birth, in olden days, the child was asked to remain silent in a separate room, symbolic of *garbhavAsa*.

Since the *AcArya* is going to teach the child, he keeps the child in his *garbha*, as it were - for three nights - *tam rAtrI: tisra: udare bibharti* ; and when the new *brahmacArI* is born, all the *devatas* will come and be happy - *tam jAtam drushTum abhisamyanti devA:* |

#### 4.3.3.1 *yajnopavIta dhAraNam* - wearing of the sacred thread

After these preparatory rites, the actual ritual begins. The first ritual is *yajnopavIta dhAraNam* - wearing of the sacred thread.

*UpavItam* - is the one that is worn

For what purpose? *yajnAya* - for the sake of performing *yajnas* - *sandhyAvandanam*, *devayajnam*, *pitruyajnam*, etc. - or dedicating all actions as *yajna*.

The following *samkalpam* is made when the *yajnopavItam* is worn

श्रौतस्मार्त विहित सदाचार नित्यकर्मानुष्ठानयोग्यता  
सिध्यर्थम् ब्रह्मतेजः अभिवृध्यर्थं

Who has initiated this?

यज्ञोपवीतं परमं पवित्रं प्रजापतेः यत्सहजं  
पुरस्तात् आयुष्यमग्र्यं प्रतिमुञ्च शुभ्रं  
यज्ञोपवीतं बलमस्तु तेजः

This *yajnopavItam* worn by (born with) *Brahmaji* Himself first - *sahajam* - indicates bondage and the boy will now on be bound by the *veda niyamas*.

#### 4.3.3.2 *kumAra bhojanam* - Joint meal

There is then another ritual known as *kumAra bhojanam* - joint meal with other *brahmacArIs*, friends etc. Then, *vapanam* (shaving the head leaving the tuft) is conducted which symbolizes the removal of all sins (hair is symbolic of sins) followed by *snAnam* (bathing). If the child has undergone the *cUDA karma* earlier, this is only symbolic here.

#### 4.3.3.2 *samidh AdhAnam* - Offering of *samidh* to *agni*

Then a simple ceremony known as *samidh AdhAnam*; the child dips a *samidh* in ghee and offers to *agni*, praying him to be his parent - *pitA iva tvam raksha* and also to give him *Ayushyam, Arogyam ca* - long life, health etc. - to fulfill his mission of doing vedic learning - *veda adhyayanam*.

#### 4.3.3.3 *asmArohaNam* - climbing on stone

Then *asmArohaNam* - standing on the stone - ceremony is performed. The teacher asks the boy to stand on a stone and recites the following mantra - "be firm and strong like this stone"

आतिष्ठेमं अश्मानं अश्मा इव त्वं स्थिरो भव

Stone stands for strength and withstands anything. The ritual is symbolic of not being affected by the problems of life and to win over all internal enemies.

#### 4.3.3.4 *vastra dhAraNam* - wearing of new clothes

Prayers are offered to several *devatAs* - to protect the physical body and the subtle body (the mind) - such as, the deity responsible for cotton; the deities for weaving etc., starting from the deity *Revati*.

There are *mantras* recited during wearing the cloth. All these are done while standing on the stone. Prayers are offered to give the ability to protect others and oneself, for long life, prosperity, and to share the earnings with others etc. The cloth should be tied properly - the navel should not be exposed. The dress can be up to the knee only or sometimes, up to the ankle.

#### 4.3.3.5 *brahmacarya lingAni* - symbols of the *brahmacArI*

There are several symbols to designate the *brahmacarya Asrama*.

- *MounjI mekhalA dhAraNam* - wearing of the girdle made of *munjA* grass around the waist. Three strands of *munjA* grass are braided and tied around the waist three times clockwise.
- *MekhalA* is addressed as sister-deity and *mantra* prays for protection of the body (*SarIra rakshA*), for *prANa-apAna balam* (no breathing problems etc.); *saubhAgya prApti*: (for obtaining all auspiciousness); *tapas Sakti*: (for ability to perform penance); freedom from enemies (internal and external); freedom from selfishness etc.
- *KrishNa-ajina-dhAraNam* - wearing of black deer-skin; *mantras* are recited and a piece of deer-skin is tied to the thread (though not supposed to be tied) - worn while standing on the stone, with prayer for *tejas* (brilliance), *kIrti* (fame), *pushTi*: (nourishment) etc.

#### 4.3.3.6 Purification of the child - *anjali-Irtha-prokshaNam*

In this ritual, the *AcArya* pours a handful of water in to the hands of the student with the recitation of *mantras*. When the water is poured, it will fall down and the student will sprinkle that water on himself. When the *AcArya* holds the water, he invokes all his *mantra Sakti, tapas Sakti* etc. and when it is poured, he transfers all these *Saktis* to the student, which wash off all the sins of the student and render him pure.

During sprinkling, another *mantra* is recited praying for a) the ability to observe *brahmacarya dharma* in the *gurukulam*; b) no misunderstanding between the teacher and the student; c) healthy and happy life till the student reaches the *grihastASrama*; d) for long life, health etc. e) and most importantly - *amrutatvam asya* - for immortality - the goal of life. The teacher faces east and the student faces the teacher.

With these rituals, the student becomes eligible to go 'near' the teacher and to receive the initiation.

#### 4.3.3.7 *AcArya varaNam* - choosing the teacher:

First the deities, Surya, Agni, Soma are invoked as the teachers. The *AcArya* holds the hand of the child and recites mantras to leave the child in the care of these deities. The Sun god is supposed to say to the teacher to take charge of the student in the name of these deities. Now, the *AcArya*, as commanded by the deities, will take the child near him.

देवस्यत्वा सवितुः प्रसवे उपनये

*devasya tvA savitu: prasave upa naye*

Since the *AcArya* uses the expression *upanaye* - the ritual came to be known as *upanayanam*.

Having taken charge of the student, the teacher prays for his welfare: "O, student, you should come up very well, with good health, brilliance, powerful and strong and should have good children when you become a *grihastha*".

Then, a dialog happens between the teacher and the student:

S: *brahmacaryam agAm* ... Now I have taken *brahmacaryam*; I am willing to follow all disciplines, meant for studying the Vedas, as commanded by the Sun god.

T: *kO nAmAsi?* What is your name?

T: *kasya brahmacArI asi?* You belong to whom?

S: *prANasya brahmacArI asmi* - I belong to the *paramAtman*

Then the teacher says, "I am ready to take you - May you not have "*apamrutyu* (untimely death)", etc.

The teacher prays to the Sun god to guide the student.

4.3.3.8 *upanayana homam*, meant for prayers to various deities, and the teacher asks for various boons from each of these deities for the student - for life, nourishment, strength, health, digestion, motherly care, intellect etc. Only after the student is prepared by these rituals, he can be given the *brahmopadeSam*.

#### 4.3.3.8 *BrahmopadeSam*

The term *brahma* refers to *Vedas*.

- Before starting *veda adhyayanam*, one symbolic *mantra* is taught which is the *gAyatrI mantra*
- The *gAyatrI mantra* derives its name because it is set in the *gayatrI* meter - which has 8 syllables per line (*pAda*) and has three *pAdas*
- It is also called *sAvitrI mantra*, after the Sun god - the *savitr devatA*

Holding the feet of the *AcArya*, the student asks - *sAvitrIm anubrUhi* - please teach me the *sAvitrI mantra*.

Then the *brahmopadeSam* ritual is conducted, with the *mantra* recited in the right ear of the child - (*gangA* is supposed to be present in the right ear); also the teacher, the student and the parents are enclosed so that this cannot be overheard. Since the *upanayana samskAra* is considered as the second birth, the enclosure also symbolizes *garbhavAsam*. The teaching is done through a set procedure.

Then there are several other rituals like, *danDa dhAraNam* (holding of the stick from Palasa tree) - symbolic of the discipline that the *brahmacArI* is supposed to follow; the child prays for power of listening (since Vedas are taught orally only) and is taught the *mantras* in a particular format. He is asked to observe things like a crow (*kaaka-drushTi:*); with attention of a crane (*baka-dhyAnam*); never to have deep sleep, like a dog (*SvanidrA*); meager food (*alpa AhAram*); simple dress (*jeerNa vastram*); These are called the characteristics of the student (*etat vidyArthi lakshaNam*)

Since this ritual marks a transformation from a *rAga-dvesha* based life to a *sAstra* based life, the *brahmacAri* is allowed to understand the gravity of this change by observing certain behaviors such as, silence for three days, eating less, sleeping on the ground etc. On the fourth day, a small *pujA* is performed praying for :

- *SraddhA* in Vedas, and
- *MedhA Sakti* – to study the Vedas by heart – *grahaNa-dhAraNa paThitvam* – to absorb and retain.

Then on, study of Vedas/SAstras is taken up in the *gurukulam*.

#### 4.4 Educational *samskAras* – *catvAri vedavratAni* – Four *vratas*

To study the Vedas, the duration prescribed is as follows:

1. All four Vedas – 48 years
2. Three Vedas – 36 years
3. Two Vedas – 24 years
4. One Veda – 12 years

*Vedavratam* is a worship to be done to the presiding deity of the Vedas;

- For each *veda*, this may vary
- Let us take the example of *yajurveda*
  - o Has seven *kANDas* –sections
  - o Each section has a presiding Rishi, known as *kANDa Rishi*:, and the sections are named after them; they are:
    1. *prAjApatya kANDam*
    2. *soumya kANDam*
    3. *Agneya kANDam*
    4. *vaiSvadeva kANDam*

Before the beginning of the study of each of these *kANDas*, and at the conclusion, a ritual is performed to worship the presiding deity of the respective *kANDas*. Since 8 worships are involved – two per *kANDa* (at the beginning and at the end), these rituals are also known as *ashTavratAni*. After the performance of these rituals, the study in the *gurukulam* is supposed to be complete. Today, this practice is not followed at all! They are all merged together and

performed as one brief ritual, just before the marriage!

#### 4.5 Conclusion of *gurukula* education and returning back home – *samAvartanam*

The conclusion ceremony of the *gurukula* education and the returning back to home, is marked by a ritual known as *avabhruta snAnam* – a bathing ritual, with special prayers, *prAyascittam* etc. This is also coupled with a few non-*vaidika* rituals like, shaving, trimming nails etc. Several of the disciplines imposed during *brahmacaryam* are also relaxed – for example, the *daNDa* (stick), *mekhala* (belt made of *kuSa* grass) are removed and certain luxuries are allowed – like use of slippers, mirror, perfumes, etc!!

One who has done the *samAvartana* ritual is called *snAtaka*:. If he has done *vedavratam* and *avabhruta snAnam*, he is called, *veda-vrata-snAtaka*:.

Once he comes out of the *brahmacarya ASrama*, he will enter in to the next *ASrama*, known as *grihasthASrama*. He takes permission from the teacher, does *samAvartana snAnam*, and marries.

गुरुणा अनुमतः स्नात्वा समावृत्तो यथाविधि  
उद्वेहतद्विजो भार्यां सवर्णां लक्षणान्विताम् ॥

One should not be without an *ASrama* at any time; if so, *prAyascittam* has to be done; the *Sastras* say,

अनाश्रमी न तिष्ठेत्तु क्षणं एकमपि द्विजः  
आश्रमेण विना तिष्ठन् प्रायश्चित्तीयते नरैः ॥

Since it is not practical to get married immediately after the *samAvartana snAnam* ritual (a suitable girl has to be found; other logistics have to be worked out etc.), this ritual was kept pending. Once the marriage is fixed, then this ritual was performed, mostly on the day of marriage itself!!

This concludes one of the most important *samskAras*, the *upanayana samskAra* and the following educational *samskAras*. We will continue the discussion with the marriage ritual – *vivAha samskAra* - in the next article.