

AYURVED PURPOSE OF SAMSKARAS AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN BALROGA

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ABSTRACT

All these sanskars are performed since Vedic period. Sanskara means “Gunantaradhanam” which is used for transform the qualities. In Ayurvedic, various Acharya describe many type of Sanskar, in which 16 Sanskar or rites of passage are performed in present era from the birth to the end in a Hindu’s nation. *Samskaras* are the rites of passage in a human being’s life described in ancient *Sanskrit* text. They include important cultural events in an individual’s life from birth till death. *Samskara* build wakefulness for the attainment of social status and rights for the individual. Children are also considered as the most vulnerable class of society as they are unable to express themselves, dependent on caretaker. Thus children need a special attention and nursing as children are in a rapid continuous process of growth and development physically and mentally. While performing *Samskaras* physician can also assess the proper growth and development of the child. In Ashtanga Ayurveda, Kaumarbhritya is one of the prime branches of Ayurveda. The number of *Samskara* varies in different Hindu *Dharma Granthas*, it is about 16-40, but the applicable Samskara are 16 (*Shodash*) in number which spreads from *Garbhadan* to *Anteysthi Samskara*. This article will describe in detail eight *Samskaras* for growth and development of children, along with their medical relevance: *Jatakarma* (birth rituals), *Namkaran* (naming the child), *Nishakraman* (first outing), *Annaprashan* (first feeding), *Chudakarna* (head shaving), *Karnavedhan* (piercing the earlobes), *Upanayana* (thread ceremony) and *Vedarambha* (start of formal education). In the present paper, it can be concluded that the *Samskaras* described in *Ayurvedic* texts are based on the various milestones of child growth and developments and hence provide a rational guideline toward his care from very conception to adolescence.

Purpose of Samskaras

- (1) **Cultural.** The variety of rites and rituals related to the samskaras help in the formation and development of personality.
- (2) **Spiritual.** According to the seers, samskaras impart a higher sanctity to life. Impurities associated with the material body are eradicated by performing samskaras.

KEYWORDS: Ayurveda, Sadas*Samskara*, balroga, Purpose, “Gunantaradhanam”.

INTRODUCTION

The Sanskrit term “Sanskara” means religious customs. The word Sanskara is derived from root word ‘Kri’ with ‘Sam’ upsarga, which is being used for several meanings according to reference to context. Sanskara are mentioned in various Pauranic treatises. Actually Sanskaras are long established practices, started in the ancient period and till now some of these are continuing. The “Sanskara” is used in a very wide senses viz. in the sense of education, cultivation and ornament, a purificatory rite or ceremony to change the qualities. In short, the Sanskara means those religious rites and ceremonies which sanctify the body mind and intellect, so the person may become fit for the society. In other word, Sanskara means “Gunantaradhanam” which is used for transform the qualities. These sanskara are

related to proper growth and development of fetus and child.

Any process which brings continuous positive change in a given material (Dravya), physical body (Shareera), intellectual capacity (Mana) and the personality (Aatma) is called Sanskar. Different meaning of the word Sanskar can be applicable in medical science - Addition of new qualities, skilful activities, bringing fitness, selfproductive and impression creating quality etc. Sanskar are highly individualistic and got its impact on producing qualitative society. This Sanskar means religious purificatory rites and ceremonies for sanctifying the body, mind and intellect of an individual so that he may become a full-fledged member of the community.

Sanskars has been considered as an essential rule for the human being and so it is mandatory to observe this rule. A person who does not observe these sixteen Sanskars in his life, his life is rendered incomplete. Or if one or two Sanskars are left out, there remains its defect in his life. Without Sanskars Swabhav-Dosh, Vani vartan-Dosh, Aacharan-Dosh, Drasti- Dosh, Dosh of Physical and mental deformity, lack of noble qualities of Dharm-Gyan- Vairagya etc., intolerance towards family etc. are found in human life.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The literary material is collected from the various classical *Ayurvedic* text and Pediatrics texts, magazines and research journals. After which classical description is correlated with changes in developmental milestone as per contemporary texts.

Purpose of Samskaras

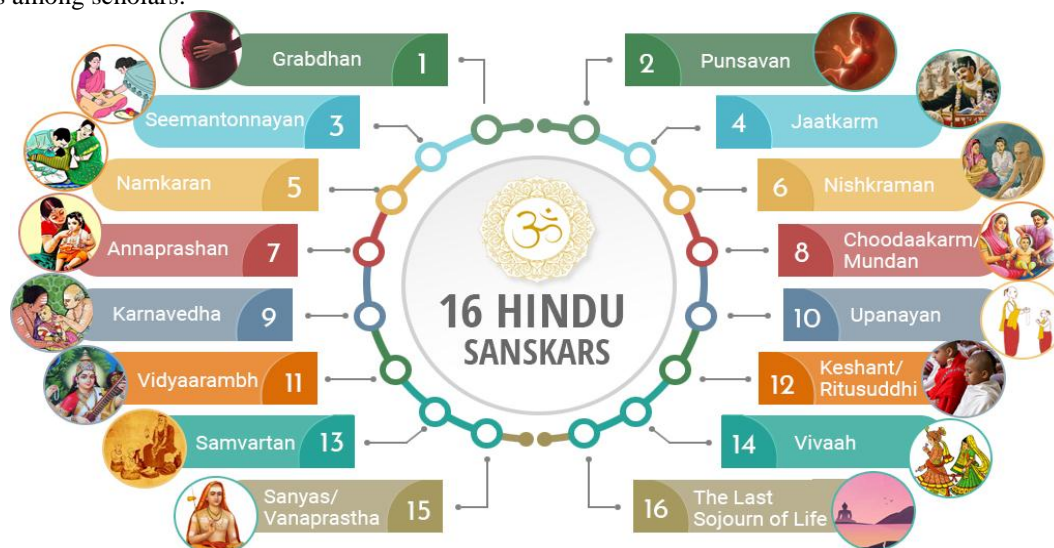
(1) Cultural. The variety of rites and rituals related to the samskaras help in the formation and development of personality. In the Parashar Smruti it is said, "Just as a picture is painted with various colors, so the character of

a person is formed by undergoing various samskaras." Thus, the Hindu sages realised the need of consciously guiding and molding the character of individuals, instead of letting them grow in a haphazard manner.

(2) Spiritual. According to the seers, samskaras impart a higher sanctity to life.

Impurities associated with the material body are eradicated by performing samskaras. The whole body is consecrated and made a fit dwelling place for the atma. According to the Atri Smruti a man is born a Shudra; by performing the Upanayana Samskara he becomes a Dvija (twice born); by acquiring the Vedic lore he becomes a Vipra (an inspired poet); and by realising Brahman (God) he becomes a Brahmin. The samskaras are a form of spiritual endeavor (sadhana) - an external discipline for internal spiritual edification. Thus, the entire life of a Hindu is one grand sacrament. The Isha Upanishad reveals that the final goal of the samskaras, by observing the rites and rituals is "to transcend the bondage of samsara and cross the ocean of death." To this we can add that after transcending the cycle of births and deaths, the atma attains Paramatma - the Lord Purushottam.

Although the number of samskaras prescribed by various scriptures vary, we shall consider the sixteen that are a consensus among scholars:



Names and details of these Sixteen Sanskars are as follows:

1. Garbhadhana Sanskara (Conception)

In Hindu Parampara, Four Sanskars before the birth of a child and eleven Sanskars after the birth and one Sanskar is performed after the death of a person. Garbhadhan Sanskar is performed with an objective of the development and continuance of the progeny of the parents and with a view to get a noble and intelligent child. Prayer is performed to the pious Runanubandhi Atma and wish for Saubhagavati is also cherished.

This Samskara relates to conception. The aim of this Samskara is to get high quality progeny. It should be performed only after marriage. Both partners should be

complete viryavan and should purify their body first by undergoing shodhana procedures. The significance of Shodhan is highly important as this purify the seeds of both partners i.e. ovum and sperm, thus the born child will possess high qualities. Married, 16 yrs female and 25 yrs. male having good health and complete viryatva in their body should undergo this Samskar^[1] Charak and Kashyapa have described the detail method of "Putresti yagna."^[2]

Significance of Garbhadhan Sanskara

These ceremony purify and refine field (woman's reproductive system) and seed (sperms), thus the born child will possess high qualities



2. Punsavana Sanskara (Engendering a male issue)

For the physical and mental development of the baby in the womb of the mother, this Sanskar is performed amidst chanting of the Vedic Mantras. Due to this Sanskar, a child is born and healthy and intelligent.

The meaning of Punsavana is male procreation so the process which is adopted for achieving progeny of desired sex is known as Punsavana Karma. This is performed in second month or before Vyaktibhava.^[3] Different Acharyas prescribe various formulations for use to pregnant woman which may result to male procreation only, as their belief. According to Charaka healthy Sunga (leaf buds) of banyan tree, Dhanyamasha and Gaurasarsapa should be taken with curd during Pusyanakshatra.^[4] Similarly According to Sushruta, paste of Jivaka, Rishbhaka, Apamarga and Sahachara taken with milk.^[5]

Significance of Punsavana Sanskara

The significance of this Samskara is to invoke celestial and excellent qualities in the child. This will strengthen the relation of husband and wife, and bound them together by a common desire for male offspring.



3. Simantonayan Sanskara (Hair-parting)

This Sanskar is performed un completion of 4-6-8 month from the conceiving of a baby. As there has been physical and mental development a baby in the womb of the mother, behaviour and conduct and thinking of a mother are imbibed by the baby. As a baby emulates the mother in letter and spirit, it is in a way ritual for the mother for being alert in her achar-vichar-shravan etc.

Seemantonayana is derived from 'Seemant' – this vernacular word literally means brain, while 'Utnayan' literally means development (The ritual for the mental development of foetus). It is usually performed in 4th or 5th or 6th or 7th or 8th month. In Ayurvedic texts during period of pregnancy, Acharyas advised month wise various dietetic regimen and mode of conducts for pregnant woman which results in normal development of foetus who has good health, strength, voice, compactness etc.^[6] Acharya also advised that if mother not follow proper advised lifestyle then it may result in Doshas vitiation which produce abnormalities of fetus (Garbhang-Vikriti).

Significance of Simantonayan sanskara

The religious significance of this Samskara is to bring prosperity to the mother and long life to the unborn child



4. Jatkarma Sanskara (Birth rituals e.g. at the time when the child is being born)

After the birth of a baby, Jatkarma ritual is performed wherein the baby is released from the Doshas of the birth-time and the Dosha of remaining in the womb of the mother and for the long life of a baby. After performing Suraksha Kavach of Dev-Devi of Kul Parampara, the concerned deities and Pitrus are satisfied through Pooja. Even Ghee and honey are touched at the lip of the baby and nabhi-dand is cut.

According to Ghrihyasutra it is to be performed before the cutting of umbilical cord while Charaka has stated that after the cutting of umbilical cord, Jatkarma Sanskara should be performed. On first day of birth, the child should be given first feeding of honey and Ghrita consecrated with Mantra as given for this purpose. Thereafter, milk from the right breast should be offered to the child^[7] Acharya Sushruta says that on first day after performing Nalachhedan, honey and Ghrita mixed with Ananta powder in minute quantity concerned with mantras should be offered to the newborn thrice a day. On second and third day Ghrita medicated with Lakshmana, on fourth day honey and Ghrita in the amount which fills the palm of neonate (Savapanitalsamita) given two times and after that breast feeding should be started.^[8]

According to Vagbhata, Jatakarma (birth ceremony) should be performed by Prajapatya method.

Significance of Jatkarma Sanskara

- Rooting and Sucking reflex as well as Sucking-Swallowing coordination is assessed while offering honey and ghee
- By this ceremony we should examine the baby to rule out anomalies such as cleft palate, hare lips, tracheoesophageal fistula, fissured tongue etc.
- First feed initiates gastrointestinal movements and activates the gut.
- It promotes breastfeeding as well as beneficial to mother for helps in uterine involution, reduces PPH and protect against pregnancy
- Honey has antimicrobial properties and enhances immunity.
- Honey and ghrita is rich source of carbohydrate and fate respectively which can provide adequate energy even in a minute quantity
- Ghrita increases samriti medha (intellect), kaanti, voice, oja, strength, vishahar, rakshoghan
- Use of gold (suvara-prashan) increases intellect, digestive and metabolic power, strength, aayusha (provide longevity), increase complexion (varnaya), grahamapahum.^[9]



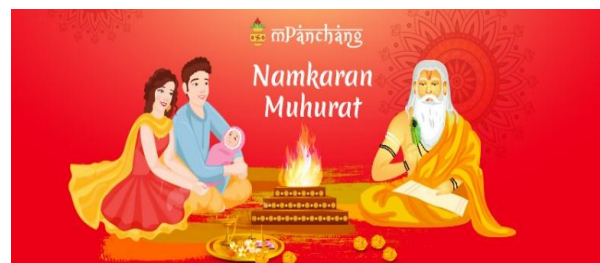
5. Namkarana Sanskara (Naming ceremony)

Ritual of Naamkaran is performed on the 11th day from the birth of a baby. Learned Brahmins prepare Janmpatrika of the birth time and the baby is named accordingly.

Charak has given detail description of this ceremony. On 10th day, mother and child should take bath with water purify by drugs, wear clean cloths, ornaments, touch auspicious things, worship god and brahmana. After Swastikavachana by Brahmana, mother should sit keeping head of the child towards the east or north then father of the child prays to god and give two names to the child.- one Naksatrika (similarity to the planet of birth) and the other Abhiprayika (desired name by which the baby would be known in family or society). It should begin with Ghosaalphabets, middle with Antasth (semi-vowel) and end with Usma-alphabets. It should be composed of either two or four letters.^[10] According to Sushruta and Vagbhata, this ceremony should be performed on the tenth day after birth.^[11] Astanga Samgraha has stated that this ceremony have to be performed on 10th day or 12th day or 100th day or after 1 year.^[12]

Significance of Namakaranana Sanskara

- Name provide identification as well as social and personal recognition to baby
- This Sanskara provides opportunity for examination of baby. Normally, the baby recovers from various traumas including cephal hematoma, fracture and dislocation, facial palsy and physiological jaundice. Persistence of jaundice after tenth day in neonate should be considered serious.
- Baby regains the birth weight on 10th day after birth.
- Umbilical cord falls normally after 5 to 10 days but may take longer



6. Nishkramana Sanskara (Outing ceremony)

Nishkraman means to go out. On the fourth month from the birth, a child is taken out of home and at that he is granted Darshan of Panchmahabhut – Pruthvi, Jal, Tej, Vayu and Aakash and prayer is performed for the well being and health of the child.

This Samskara is performed when the child is taken out of the home for the first time. According to Kashyapa and Astanga Samgraha, in fourth month, baby who having been given bath, adorned, wearing new clean clothes, possessing mustard, honey and Ghrita or Gorochna, alongwith Dhatri should be taken out of the house and ready to enter the temple.^[13]

Upaveshana Sanskara (sitting ceremony)

According to Kashyapa, it should be done on 6th month. As per Kashyapa, baby should not be allowed to sit for a longer time. If it not observed properly then it develops kyphosis, weakness of lumber region, exhaustion, fever, constipation, retention of urine, and tympanitis.^[14] Vagbhata stated that during the 5th month on an auspicious day, the child should be placed on ground.^[15] Sushrut also opined that child should be allowed to sit for a longer time gradually.

Significance of Niskramana Sanskara

- By 4th month child develops head holding capacity, turns his head towards a sound i.e. ringing bell of a temple, this provides the opportunity to examine its hearing capacity.^[16]
- By expose to the sunlight at morning, the synthesis of vitamin D accelerates.
- By seeing moon or sun, the macular fixation and pupillary adjustment/reaction of the child can be observed

- In external environment, infant develops resistance power to adjust in different atmosphere
- Disappearance of grasping reflex at 3-4 months, placing reflex at 3-4 month, stepping reflex at 3-4 months, rooting reflex at 3-4 months, tonic neck at 2-6 month, Moro's reflex at 3-4month. But persistence of these reflexes indicative of cerebral palsy.

Significance of Upaveshana Sanskara

- As per developmental milestone, by 5th to 6th month child is able to sit with support, tries to hold things and put it to the mouth^[17]
- It gives opportunity for initiation of sitting and assesses physical, neurological and psychological growth of child.



7. Phalaprashana/Annaprashana Sanskara (food ceremony)

On the seventh month from the birth, meals are offered to the child as an auspicious sign and on that day poojan of Annapurna Devi is performed.

According to Kashyapa, Phalaprashana (fruit juices) should be advised at the age of 6th month while in 10th month or after eruption of teeth, Annaprashana (feeding of cereals) should be indicated.¹⁸ According to Sushruta, the child at the age of six months, should be given food light and Hitkar (appropriate wholesome food). According to Vagbhat on the 6th month, solid food should be given to the child gradually as much as he required as he goes on and breast feeding should be gradually discontinued.^[19]

Significance of Annaprashana Sanskara

- Fruit juices provides adequate amount of Vitamin C which is deficient breast in milk of mother, cow or any other milk
- At age of 6 month, breast milk now not enough to fulfill the requirement of growing child. So, it is the accurate time to introduce light and digestible supplementary feeding at the beginning as fruit juices i.e. Phalprashana and gradually it is to be replaced by cereal diet i.e. Annaprashana.
- It provides essential nutrients like Fe in adequate quantity, which is deficient in mother milk.
- After eruption of teeth gradual weaning should be done and child should be given substitute fruit juices as well as light and digestible nutrient cereals.

- It brings out the change of taste in the baby and different type of taste sensation develop properly
- It initiates proper enzymatic function of G.I.T. for the digestion of protein, carbohydrate and fat etc.



8. Chudakarma / mundane sanskar (Shaving of head)

Between the age of one-three- five years from the birth, hair of the child is removed through Mundan Sanskar; so that intellect of a child is developed and the insects of the pregnancy time are destroyed.

According to Ghrihya Sutra and Manusmriti Chudakarana Sanskara should be performed at the end of 1st year and before expiry of 3rd year. There is a chapter named "Chudakarniya" in Kashyapa Samhita, but there is no reference available regarding Chudakarma procedure because chapter is incomplete from beginning. Charak has mentioned the utility of Chudakarana as Paustika (nutritive), Vrishya (aphrodisiac), Ayushya (increase longevity), Suchi (Cleanliness) and Rupavirajana (increase personality).^[20]

Significance of Chudakarana Sanskara

- Chudakarana Sanskara gives a chance to examine fontanel of the child. Normally in healthy child, anterior fontanel closes by 18 to 24 months. Delayed closure due to dehydration, meningitis, can be assessed properly.



9. Karnavedhana Sanskara (Piercing the earlobes)

Ears of a child pierced with the help of a golden needle and making it convenient the facility of wearing gold ornaments. Through acupuncture this also helps free flow of blood in the brain of the child so that memory power of the child is increased.

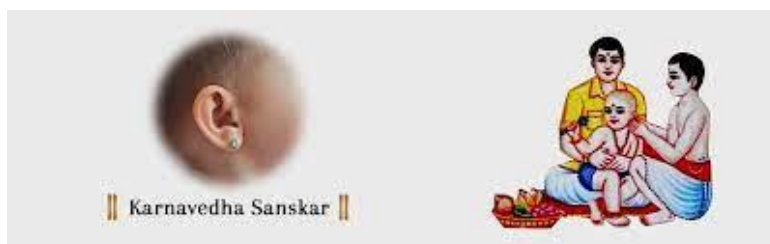
There are different views about performing this ceremony in Ayurvedic texts According to Sushruta, this Sanskara should be performed at 6th or 7th month.^[16] According to Vagbhata, during 6th, 7th or 8th month on an auspicious day in winter season, keeping child on a lap of mother than after ear should be pierced. The right

ear pierced first in case of male while left ear in case of female.^[17]

- To initiate antigen-antibody reaction, providing active immunity to the child

Significance of Karnavedhana Sanskara

- The purpose of this Sanskara is to protect the child from many diseases and to wear ornament (Raksha-Bhushana Nimittam).



10. Upanayana Sanskara (Sacred thread ceremony)

This ritual is performed in front of Guru by accepting a three-layered cotton thread popularly known as Yagnopavit. After accepting and wearing this Yagnopavit, a person is known as Dwij – born second time. In the knot of Yagnopavit are said to be residing Brahma-Vishnu-Shiv and in nine Sutra Tantu is said to be performed poojan of Omkar, Agni, Shesh, Chandra, Pitru, Prajapati, Agni, Surya, Vishwadev.

According to Manusmriti, this ceremony is carried out on 5th, 6th, and 8th year in Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya respectively. They are provided with a sacred thread girdle made of MUNJA grass. There is no any clear cut references are available regarding this ceremony in Ayurvedic classics. However Shshruta and Vagbhata have given the time of starting the education as soon as child fit for the same.^[21]

Significance of Upanayana Sanskara

- Thread around waist may serve the purpose to assess the physical growth to rule out malnutrition.
- Assessment of maturity of brain to perform intellectual activities during school going age is done
- To initiate sense of responsibility as well as spiritual well-being of the child
- This thread might aware him about his responsibility towards society, Guru and mother-father



11. Vedarambha Sanskara (Beginning of Vedic study)

Through this Sanskar, a child is initiated towards appropriate formal education and at that time poojan of Maa Sharda Devi is performed. Besides formal education, the child is also imparted Vedic Gyan. The child who has gain the capacity to learn should be initiated to the study connected with its cast by the teacher. He should teach right living and politeness always. So that with the commencement of youth he will not easily succumb to the bad sensual activity.^[22]

Significance of Vedarambha Sanskara

- This sanskara provides religious cult, humanity, selfcontrol and acceptability with the society
- By this time a normal child learns to walk, run, climb stairs, tell his name and gender, play co-operatively in a group, copy simple diagrams, use pencil, say song, poem, story, feed by himself and can go to toilet alone, acquire capacity, strength and capacity to learn so It is also time for assess the development of child.



12. Keshani Samskar (End of studentship)

During Brahmcharyashram, prior to starting education, head is kept clean shaved for Keshant – Siddhi of Brahmcharya because Kaamdev is said to be residing in Kesh.

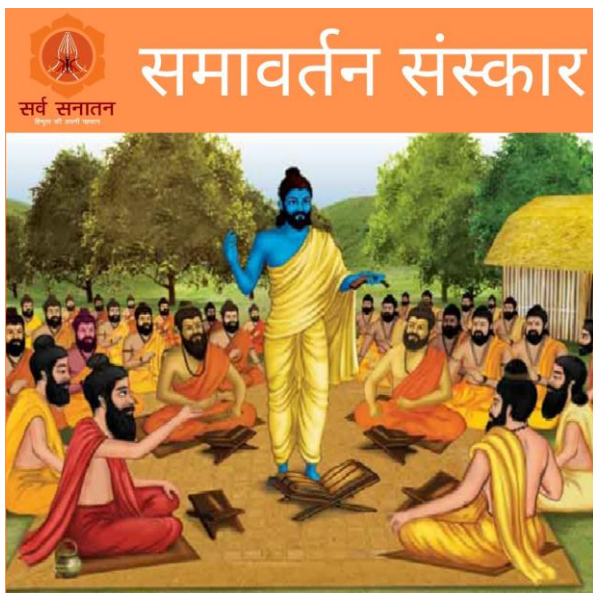
This samskara is included as one of the four Ved Vrats. When the other three faded, keshant itself became a separate samskara. 'Kesh' means hair and 'ant' means

end. This samskara involves the first shaving of the beard by the student at the age of sixteen. It is also called Godaan because it involves gifting a cow to the acharya and gifts to the barber. Since the student now enters manhood he is required to be more vigilant over his impulses of youth. To remind him of his vow of brahmacharya, he is required to take the vow anew; to live in strict continence and austere discipline for one year.



13. Samavartan sanskar (End of studentship)

This Sanskar is performed upon return of the child after completing his education.



14. Vivah sanskar (Marriage Ceremony)

In this most important ritual, Agni is lighted and by performing Parikrama in the presence of Agni dev, bride and bridegroom take oath and perform Sankalp of adhering to Dharma assigned to each of them by this Lagna-Samskar. And one gets rid of Pitru-run.

This is the most important of all the Hindu Samskaras. The Smritis laud the gruhastha (householder) ashram as the highest, for it is the central support of the other three ashrams.

Manu enjoins, "Having spent the first quarter of one's life in the guru's house, the second quarter in one's own

house with the wife, and the third quarter in the forest, one should take sannyas in the fourth, casting away every worldly tie." (Manu Smriti IV.1). By marriage an individual is able to achieve the four purusharthas (endeavors) of life: dharma (righteousness), artha (wealth), kama (desire) and moksha (salvation). He is also able to pay off ancestral debt by having children. Procreation for children is also a primary purpose of marriage. In addition to being a religious sacrament, Hindu marriage is also regarded as an important social institution. For developing a stable and ideal society, marriage has been regarded as an essential element in all cultures of the world. A society without loyal marital ties tends to degrade. It is said that promiscuity was one reason for the downfall of the Romans. By marriage, both an individual and society, while remaining within the moral norms, can progress together. Simultaneously it does not cause harm to others nor infringe upon one's independence. This samskara boosts cultural values and dharma. It upholds and promotes moral righteousness and self control.



15. Sanyash/vanprastha sanskar.

Vanaprastha Sanskar and Sanyasa Sanskar (Renouncing the householder's life)

Sankaras are the rites of passage as per the Vedic way of life that are required to be done by the Hindus, from the time of conception of a baby until death. They are 16 in total and each one of them has its own significance, importance and time when it needs to be done.

Vanaprastha Sanskar

The Vanaprastha Sanskar is one of the last rituals of the 16 Samskaras, and means 'the time when one leaves worldly desires and life and takes up interest for spiritual and religious work to know the real purpose of their soul'. It is one of the four *Ashrama* stages of life, and is a part of the Vedic Ashram system.

This ritual starts when a person officially hands over each one of his household responsibilities to his/her next generation, and withdraws themselves from the worldly matters. They then follow their spiritual instincts and decide to living their life as an ascetic. This phase is thereby considered as a transitional phase and lays emphasis on greater purposes of life, like attaining *Moksha* or Spiritual Liberation or detachment from worldly desires.

'Vana' means 'foreign land' or 'distant land' and 'prastha' means 'going to, or journeying to', thus 'Vanaprastha' meaning 'retiring to the forest'. Hindu traditions respected freedom and personal choice, and this was a recommended Sanskar for all those who wanted to follow it and continue likewise in their lives, and renounce all materialistic pursuits to attain spiritual pursuits.

Sanyasa Sanskar

Among the 16 Sanskars, the Sanyasa Sanskar is one such Sanskar which is actually not just a ritual or celebration, but is a stage in life that is known as 'renunciation'. It

falls within the Hindu philosophy of four age-based life stages known as Ashrams, with Brahmacharya (bachelor student life), Grihastha (householder family life), and Vanaprastha (forest dweller or retired), as the first three, and Sanyasa being the last.

Sanyasa is traditionally conceptualized for both men and women for their later years, but even then young Brahmacharyas have always had a choice to skip the householder and retirement stages and to renounce the worldly and materialistic pursuits and dedicate their lives to spiritual pursuits.



16. Antyesthi sanskar (Death ceremony)

After leaving this human body, agni (fire) which is lighted at the time of Lagna Sanskar is carried from home to crematorium and there body is offered to fire. By doing so, Atma becomes free from all types of Runas (obligations) The rishis and Dharma Sutras were at a consensus regarding the final goal of life, which they enjoined in the four ashrams - stages of life. The stalwart poet Kalidas in his classic, Raghuvansha (1-8) stipulates:

"Shaishave abhyastavidyānām yauvane vishayaishinām

Vārdhake munivruttinām yogenānte tanutyajām."

"One studies during childhood (brahmacharya ashram), fulfills his desires during youth (gruhastha ashram), renounces worldly activity for silent contemplation during old age (vanprastha ashram) and then endeavors for God-realisation, after which he leaves his body."

Antyesthi is the final samskara in a Hindu's life. Yajur Veda regards vivaha as the sixteenth samskara while Rig Veda considers antyesthi. Though performed after the death of a person by his relatives, it is of importance because the value of the next world is higher than that of the present. The final rituals are performed with meticulous care with the help of Brahmin priests.

The first ritual after death is to place a few tulsi leaves and a few drops of water in the mouth of the dead person. It is then laid on the floor which has been purified by applying the sacred cowdung. The old clothes are removed and the body is bathed with sanctified water. The body is then covered with one piece of a new,

unbleached, uncut cloth (kafan). It is then laid on a bier (nanami) made of bamboo canes tied with jute strings. The underlying message in removing the old clothes can be gleaned from a Sanskrit verse:

*"Dhanāni bhumau pashavashcha goshthe,
Nāri gruhadware sakhā smashāne,
Dehashchitāyām paraloka mārge,
Dharmānugo gachhati jiva ekaha."*

"Wealth will remain buried, cattle will remain in the pen, (his) wife will accompany (him) to the doorway, friends will accompany him to the crematorium, the body will come till the funeral pyre, but on the path to the next world, the jiva goes alone (with his karmas)."

In the Swaminarayan Sampraday there is a special ritual. Where possible the sadhus are called, who then do puja of the deceased with vermilion powder. A new kanthi and flower garlands are placed around the neck. The sadhus and the nearest relatives then do arti, followed by pradakshina. Everyone present chants the Swaminarayan mantra. The sadhus then leave after delivering a consolatory This rite performed by sadhus remains unique to the Swaminarayan Sampraday. It infuses spiritual strength and thus considerably offsets the grief and hurt suffered by the relatives of the deceased.

The family members then take the body to the cremation pyre, all the while chanting the Lord's name. 'Ram bolo bhai Ram' is the most commonly uttered phrase. In Bengal it is 'Hari bol, Hari bol.' In the Swaminarayan Sampradaya the Swaminarayan dhun is chanted. After the body is laid on the funeral pyre, ghee is poured over

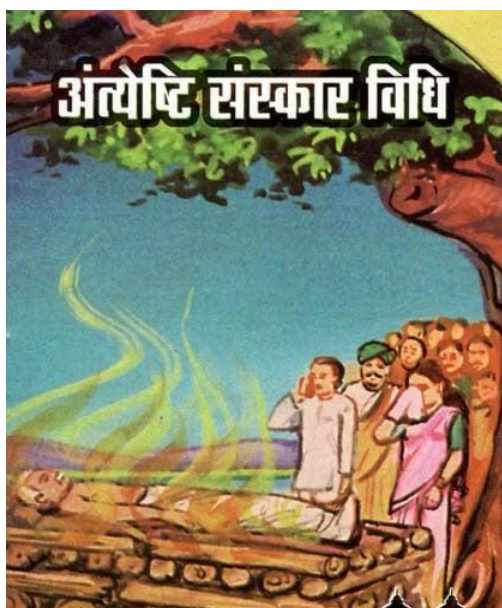
it and the fire kindled by the nearest relative. Sesame seeds are also sprinkled onto the fire as a form of puja. The latter two steps are obviously not possible where an electric kiln is used for cremation. The fire lighted in the vivaha ceremony was later, by tradition, taken to the house and kept kindled in an altar throughout life. This signified that married life was to be lived through life's vicissitudes, together. When one of the spouse died, the agni (fire) was taken in a crucible or pot to the crematorium, where it was used to light the pyre. This symbolized the end of vivaha and the beginning of agni (antyeshti) samskara.

The rituals and observances which then follow vary in different groups and parts of Gujarat.

By cremation, the body's five basic components - known as panch bhuts – prithvi (earth), jal (water), tej (fire),

vayu (wind) and akash (space) are returned to those of the universe, thus maintaining the cosmic equilibrium. All the samskaras are spiritually oriented. However, some directly benefit the environment in one way or another.

Scientists in the past decade have begun to realize this. They have pointed out that cremation, for example, is the best, most effective and environmentally prudent method for disposing of the dead. Burial leads to enormous problems of space and groundwater contamination. Corpses infected with plague and slow virus diseases infect vectors which directly feed on them. This ultimately affects humans. Recently in England, the wisdom of cremating even diseased cattle has been realized, especially those afflicted with mad cow disease.



Benefits of hindu samskaras

1. *Samskaras* provide sound mental and physical health and the confidence to face life's challenges.
2. They are believed to purify blood and increase blood circulation, sending more oxygen to every organ.
3. *Samskaras* can energize the body and revitalizes it.

4. They can increase physical strength and stamina to work for longer period of time.
5. They rejuvenate the mind and enhance concentration and intellectual capacity.
6. *Samskaras* give a sense of belonging, culture, and refined sensibilities.
7. They direct energy to humanitarian causes thereby building a strong character.
8. *Samskaras* kill vices, such as pride, ego, selfishness, envy, greed and fear.
9. They bestow moral and physical balance throughout life.
10. *Samskaras* give the confidence to face death bravely owing to a contented and righteous life.

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