

SAMSKAARA KARMAS

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'Samskaara karmas' are rituals, sacraments and ceremonies, fashioned by men endowed with divine powers and exceptional wisdom. These are, indeed, priceless contributions made by venerable 'rishis' to the posterity. They enable the humanity to traverse - from embryonic stage to death - on a progressive path through a process of self evolution and refinement.

Self evolution entails (a) seeing, listening to and doing what is virtuous – ignoring what is sinful (b) speaking truth – refusing what is 'untrue' (c) accepting, after careful deliberation, affable objects, pious thoughts, noble principles, righteous deeds, pleasant memories while rejecting others. Nurturing purity of thought, speech and mind, compassion, kindness, mercy, generosity, forgiveness, tolerance, sympathy, self-restraint, character, equilibrium, humility, gratitude, self-respect, courage of conviction (qualities considered 'saathvik') and desisting anger, jealousy, arrogance, greed, deceit, lust, passion, ego, conceit, snobbery etc. ('raajasa' and 'thaamasa' attributes) is laudable. These are true 'human' values. These are qualities that blossom one's personality - lead one to success, contentment, delight and eminence. Only those endowed with these qualities of body, intellect and heart ('sath-prajaas') can play an effective in building a modern civilised society.'

'Samskaara vidhi' i.e. is a process which is based on cumulative experiences of several men of wisdom gathered over the years, carefully preserved and handed down by one generation to another. They are all intended to remove impurities and undesirable influences on our body and mind caused by our indulgence in worldly affairs and more often arising out of our acts and misdeeds guided by our ignorance.

There are sixteen principal rituals forming "poorva shodasha samskaaras" and many others to supplement them. Of these

- 4 are related to child birth – garbhaadhaana, pumsavana, seemanthonnayana and Vishnu bali. These are aimed at mitigating the risk of child developing physical disabilities, deformities like blindness, dumbness, deafness, and retardation.
- 5 are related to the development of physical, sensual and perceptive organs – jaathakarma, naamakarana, nishkramana, annapraashana and choodaa karma. These are aimed at revitalising intellectual abilities i.e. wisdom, acumen and astuteness.
- 5 are related to vedic education – upanayana and 4 veda vrathas. These are intended to hone intellect, memory power, insight and perceptive abilities.

- 2 are related to grihasthaashrama – samaavarthana and paanigrahana.

If we extend the coverage to the entire life span, we can add three more – vaanaprastha, sanyaasa and the one performed after the death i.e. anthyeshthi.

In some texts, the number enlarged by splitting veda-vrataas into five and adding upa-samskaars like karna-vedha, first birth day and keshaantha. Keshaantha involves cutting hair and shaving signifying attainment of manhood. In practice, this is symbolically done just before the marriage.

A summary of these is presented at the end in a tabular form.

It would be helpful to consider the following propositions in order to (a) adopt a rational approach to these rituals (b) adhere to the principles enunciated in the scriptures and (c) derive supreme benefit from them.

- "Samskaara" literally means a well performed, virtuous act. It is, therefore, obvious that it becomes 'samskaara karma' only when one understands (a) what is to be done (b) how it is to be done and (c) why it is to be done. An appreciation of the context and at least the pith of the manthras chanted become critical if one has to perform them scrupulously with conscience and believing it to be virtuous. Actions are meaningful only when they are backed by emotions, sentiments, passion and zeal. Hence, it would be wasteful and frustrating to merely engage in physical activities as directed by the priest expecting manthras to yield magical results – for they remain as physical activities and do not become samskaaras.
- An overture to turn every ritual into an ostentatious social celebration carries a risk of bypassing hidden treasures enshrined in vedic practices. It is important to create an environment conducive to enhancing the effectiveness of the rituals, focus – body, head and heart - on karmaangas and derive superior results.
- The process (vidhi) is to be seen in the back drop of the economic, social, political systems of the vedic age. For example, the desire to have 'dasha putras' and 'veera putras' explicit in several manthras, justification of extra-marital sex for begetting children etc. emerged only out of the compulsions of a war ridden society.
- 'Sankalpa' made at the start of every samskaara contains our well intended wishes. They are not to be mistaken for the result. Samskaaras carry no magic wand.
- The core of the veda shaastras remain valid for all times, regions, seasons and circumstances. However, as social circumstances, habits and life-styles change, the customs and practices will (and they ought to) undergo transformation. Examples: (a) the 'jaathakarma' vidhi is difficult to practice in

its' original form since most often child birth takes place in a hospital (2) our current life-style may not afford the luxury of an elaborate vivaaha, upanayana vidhi spread over a period of 4 days. Yet, it is still possible for an astute person to secure complete benefit of 'thri-raathra vratha'.

- One may rush to dismiss 'veda vrathas' as irrelevant. It would be worthwhile to treat them as 'vidyaa vrathas'. Let us consider these factors: (1) vedic education does not come in the way of modern education required for earning livelihood (2) traditional education covers entire gamut from astro-physics to aarmaments, from mathematics to music, metullergy and medicine, from poetry to political administration - to make one a complete man with knowledge and skill ready for the life thereafter (3) the guidelines to be followed during the studentship as enshrined in manusmrithi and Upanishads have remained valid at all times : (a) select, as a teacher, one who is scholarly, selfless, interested in imparting knowledge, keen on your development and follows righteous path (b) repose complete trust in him (c) do not follow a teacher if he is mislead or misleading, practicing 'adharma' i.e. preaching / practicing unjust, unfair principles / practices (d) observe 'yama' i.e. truthfulness, sacrifice, celibacy and desisting animosity and revelry (e) observe 'niyama' i.e. cleanliness, contentment, equanimity, self-study and faith in the Supreme power (f) maintain control over senses – ear, skin, tongue, nose, eyes (perceptive) speech, anus, urinary, arms, legs (performing)
- 'Samskaaras' are metamorphic and they work at all levels – physical and psychological. They draw extensively from atharva and aayurveda (vaagbhata, ashtaanga- hridayam, sushrutha, charaka samhitha) underscoring the need to promote physical heath. Examples : (1) Garbhaadhana vidhi involves medication to cleanse the womb, prescribes the age and health conditions for each of them, mandates that they maintain 'brahmacharya' till then, suggests appropriate dates as per the menstrual cycle, recommends right diet, mental preparedness required for the occasion, conducive postures etc. (2) They dissuade having large number of children, restrict sex to 10 days in each menstrual cycle (3) Mixture of ghee & honey is being given to the new born with a gold spoon ; breast feeding is done only after cleaning the area around nipple etc (4) The father of the new born sniffs the crown of the newborn – much like a cow liking the offspring ! - this strengthens bondage between the two (5) There is an extensive use of herbs, panchagavya, darbha and other grass, grains, fruits pulses etc. which have proven medicative prowess etc.
- 'Samskaara' is not one-off act. Refinement is an evolution. It calls for a saadhana. For example brahmopadesha is only an initiation. The benefits will accrue only when the brahmachaari follows the 'vratha' advocated on the occasion through his studentship and unflinching saavithree upasana, agni

kaarya during his life time. Just as a bath is desired to keep our body clean, sandhyaa vandana is essential to cleanse our mind and free ourselves from the myriad sins we commit day in and day out. Similarly vivaaha vidhi gives only a glimpse of grihastaashram. Our evolution hinges on adherence to pathi-pathnee-vratha, grihastaashrama dharma and performance of pancha mahaa yajnas every day.

- Vaanaprastha and Sanyaasa are perhaps most misunderstood concepts. The result of not following the principles enunciated here and consequences of not passing the baton to the next generation are there for everyone to see – ‘generation gap’, conflicts, succession issues and distress. After successfully completing education, fulfilling all the responsibilities of grihastaashrama and ensuring that children, grandchildren and other wards are all well educated and are competent to move forward on their own, one can decide to gradually withdraw from all worldly affairs entrusting all such responsibilities to the next generation. This, of course, is to be done voluntarily, willingly with earnestness, pleasure and utmost faith. A prayer addressed to the children, relatives, friends and associates on the eve of this transition is vividly described in atharva veda. To remain steadfast - not to be swayed again – and focus yoga, vedic studies / teachings, meditating upon divine thoughts, treating all living beings with love and compassion and rejoicing the company of pious and devout persons is a ‘deeksha’. One may even continue to live with the spouse, not expecting / accepting anything other than service. Sanyaasa is a step forward in imbibing all the virtues of a ‘purushothama’ and blissfully committing rest of the life for the good of the humanity meditating upon the path forward until one reaches the lotus feet of the Lord. This is what vaanaprastha and sanyasa are in essence though not in form.
- Anthyeshti is not just a disposal of corpse. It is a ‘samskaara’ – a process of purification to enable the departed soul to move on to the next phase of the journey. It is a way of fulfilling the duties of a ‘putra’; a means of settling pitr’ runa. It should be viewed as a ‘yajna’ – far superior to much acclaimed ashwamedha. It is a “paithr’ medha” where the children offer their own dear parent (who have been responsible for their birth and upbringing) is offered to “agnideva”. Perhaps, there can be no greater sacrifice than this.

Samskaara	Karmaangas	Objective / Desire	Timing	Performer	Thithi	Star	Day	Devatha	Agni
GARBHA-ADHAANA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Guru-Ganesh-Maatrikaa Pooja *nandee shraaddha *swasthi-punyaaha vaachan * Soorya darshan/upaasanam *aajya /charu homa : offerings to Prajaapathi, Vishnu. * administration of durva grass (cynodon dactylon) / ashwagandha (withania Somnifera) juice *braahmana Bhojan-dakshina mantraakshatha * prathama samagama 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Purification of the womb, seed (beeja/kshetra). * to promote health of The mother & child * to beget brilliant children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *5th - 16th days after Menstruation. *Even days if male child is desired. *Couple should be in good health 	husband	2,3,5,7	Rohinee Uttara Hastha Swathee Anu. u.shadha shravana shatabhis ha u.bhadra	Mon. Wed. Thurs Friday	Brahma Prajaapathi vishnu Oshadhe e	Marutha
PUMSAVANA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Guru-Ganesh-Maatrikaa Pooja *nandee shraaddha *swasthi-punyaaha vaachan *aajya / charu homa : offerings to Prajaapathi, Vishnu * dadhi praashan – seeking male child * hridaya-/garbhaashaya sparsha vidhi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * seeking worthy prodigy *creating awareness of ‘manhood’ in the child 	Second / third month of pregnancy	husband	2,3,5,7, 10 shukla paksha desired	Ashwin Rohinee Mrigashir Pushya Uttara Hastha chitra swathi	Mon Wed Fri	Prajaapathi Vaayu vishnu	Pava- maana
ANAVALOBHAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Guru-Ganesh-Maatrikaa Pooja *nandee shraaddha *swasthi-punyaaha vaachan *aajya /charu homa : offerings to Prajaapathi, Brahma, Vishnu. * administration of durva grass (cynodon dactylon) / * hridaya-/garbhaashaya sparsha vidhi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *preventing miscarriage *protecting the child *preventing deformities *driving away evil forces 	Second month of pregnancy	husband	2,3,5,7, 10 shukla paksha desired	Ashwin Rohinee Mrigashir Pushya Uttara Hastha chitra swathi	Mon Wed Fri	Agni Brahma Vishnu Prajaapathi	Pava- maana

SEEMANTHO- NNAYANA	*Guru-Ganesh-Maatrikaa Pooja *nandee shraaddha *swasthi-punyaaha vaachan *aajya /charu homa : offerings to Prajaapathi, dhatha, Vishnu. Prithvee * administration of durva grass (cynodon dactylon) / *cleansing panchasandhi	* promoting mother's Physical, mental health *promoting child's health	6,8,9 months of Pregnancy	husband	2,3,5,7, 10	Ashwin Rohinee Uttara Hastha Chitra Swathee Shravana revathee	Sun Thurs	Dhaatha Vishnu Prithvee Prajaapathi	Mangala
VISHNU BALI	*Guru-Ganesh-Maatrikaa Pooja *nandee shraaddha *swasthi-punyaaha vaachan *aajya /paayasa homa : offerings to Prajaapathi, soma, Vishnu. *cleansing panchasandhi * kalasha, Vishnu pooja	* Safe child birth *begetting child like 'Mahaa Vishnu'	8, 9 months of Pregnancy	husband	2,3,5,7, 10	Ashwini, Rohinee Mrig. Hastha Chithra Swathi Shravana Revathee	Mon Wed Fri	Vishnu Prajaapathi Soma	Aavahaneeya
JAATHAKARMA	*umbilical cord cut, bath given *child is given honey & ghee rubbed with gold. spoon/rod *a name is uttered in child's ears *sniffing the crown of the child by the father	*removal of impurities caused /disorders caused in pregnancy *seek good health & prosperity for the new born	At birth Before breast feed	Father	-	-	-	Mrityu Indra Savitr' Saraswathee	Prabala
SHASTEE POOJA	Only Namaavalee pooja (since there is ashoucha for 10 nights)	Child's protection	6 th day after birth	Father	-	-	-	Shastee Ganesh Janmada a jeevantik aa	-

NAMAKARANA	*Guru-Ganesh-Maatrikaa Pooja *nandee shraaddha *swasthi-punyaaha vaachan *aajya /paayasa homa : offerings to savitr' devathaa *Guru-Ganesh-Maatrikaa Pooja	*granting an identity to the child *promoting physical & intellectual growth	11 th / 12 th Day after birth	Father		Avoid : Grahan Amaa- vaasya Shraaddh a	-	Savitr' Vashatha Maasa naama	Paarthiva
NISHKARAMAN	*swasthi-punyaaha vaachan *Savitr' & ashta-dikpaalak pooja *agni, Chandra, dhenu darshan *visit to kula/graama devatha	*developing mental faculties *seeking longevity	4 th month after birth	Father		Birth star	Birth date	Savitr' Dik- paalaka Osha- dhee	Loukika
ANNA- PRAASHANA	*Guru-Ganesh-Maatrikaa Pooja *nandee shraaddha *swasthi-punyaaha vaachan *Annapraashana – mix of rice, ghee,honey & curd *jeevikaa pareeksha	*physical / intellectual growth *longevity *securing brahma tejas	6 th / 8 th month	Father	2,3,5,7, 10,13	Ashwini Rohini Mrig. Pun. Pushya Uttara Swathi	Mon Wed Thurs Fri	Savitr'	Shuchi
KARNAVEDHA	Prayers : brahma, Vishnu, rudra soorya, Chandra, ashwinee *guru,ganesh,kula-devatha *felicitating vishwakarmee	*seeking longevity, luster, brilliance *building resistance to diseases	6,7,8 th month	Father Gold- smith	3,5,7, 10,13 15 Shukla paksha	Mri. Aardra Pun. Pushya Uttara chitra	Mon Wed Thurs Fri .	Trinity Saraswa- thee Ashwini Dikpalak	
CHOODAA- KARMA	*Guru-Ganesh-Maatrikaa Pooja *nandee shraaddha *swasthi-punyaaha vaachan *aajya homa *vapan (hair cut) *felicitating naapitha	*seeking longevity, luster, brilliance * seeking good health	2 nd / 5 th year	Naapitha	2,3,5,7, 10,13 Shukla paksha Uttara ayan	Mri. Pun. Hastha Chithra Shravana Dhani.	Mon Wed Thurs Fri	Keshina Praja- pathi, agni Vaayu Oushadhi	Sabhya

VIDYA- ARAMBHA	*Guru-Ganesh-pooja *swasthi-punyaaha vaachan *Guru pooja, archana *initiation with 'omkaar'	*Acquiring wisdom & Good education *health, long life	5 th year	father	2,3,5,7, 10,13 Shukla paksha Uttara ayan	Ashwini, Aardra Pun. Hastha- swaathi anuradha Shravana Revathee	Mon Wed Thurs Fri	Ganesh Saraswa- thee Durga Lakshmi	Paavaka
UPANAYANA	*Guru-Ganesh-Maatrikaa Pooja *nandee shraaddha *swasthi-punyaaha vaachan *maat' bhojan, vapan, *yajnopaveeta, ajina, munjee, Danda, dhaaran *aajya homa, aadithya darshan *Savithree manthropadesh *Agni kaarya, medhaa janan *brahmacharya vratha	*acquiring 'dwijathwa', *Elibility for vedic education *perform vedic rituals *seeking good health, brilliance, long life	8-16 years	Father p.grand father/ p.uncle/ brother/ guru	2,3,5,7, 10,13	Ashwini Rohini Mrig Pun. Pushya Uttara Swaathi Anu. u.shadha revathee	Wed Thurs Fri	Savitr', indra, agni Brahma Rudra Aadithya Shraddha Medhaa Mitra- varuna Ashwini	Samud- bhava
VEDA VRATHAS Mahanaamnee Mahaavratha Upanishad Goudaanika	*Guru-Ganesh-Maatrikaa Pooja *nandee shraaddha *swasthi-punyaaha vaachan *aajya, krisaraanna, charu homa *soorya darshana, bhiksha *keshantha & godaana	*seeking blessings for completing education * protection of 'vatu' – *Mental, physical toughness	13 th ,14 th 15 th & 16 th years after Commenc ement of vedic	Brahma- chaari	2,3,5,7, 10,13 Shukla paksha Uttara ayan	Ashwini Pun. Hastha Swathi Anu. Shravana revathee	Wed Thurs Fri	Savitr, Agni Prajaa- pathi Indra Prithvee Vishve- devathas	Samud- bhava Soorya
SAMAVARTHAN	*Guru-Ganesh-Maatrikaa Pooja *swasthi-punyaaha vaachan *aajya homa *samaavarthan, choula *Vratha-lopa prayaschittha *snaataka dharma pratijna	*retiring from brahmacharya *Seeking approval of guru/elders to enter grahasthaashrama	After Completing education	Brahma- chaari	2,3,5,6, 7,13	Rohinee Mrig. Pun. Pushya Uttara Hastha shravana	Sun Mon Wed. Thurs .	Agni Pava- maan Indra Savitr Vishve- devathas	Soorya

PAANIGRAHAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Guru-Ganesh-Maatrikaa Pooja *nandee shraaddha *swasthi-punyaaha vaachan * madhu parka, *kanyaa prathipaadan *paanigrahana *Laja homa, agni parinayana *Sapthapadee, shirodhaaraa *Vivaaha vratha, *grihapravesaneeya homa * lakshmee- pooja *naaga lakshmee pooja 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * progression in life *seeking health, long life * continuation of lineage * Grihasthashrama Dharma 	<p>Bride- 18 years</p> <p>Groom -25 years</p>	Brides' father/ p.grand father/ uncle/	2,3,5,7, 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rohinee Mri. Maghaa Uttara Hastha swaathi anuradha Revathee Avoid janma Nakshtra 	<p>Mon</p> <p>Wed</p> <p>Thurs</p> <p>Fri</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> brahma Vishnu soorya Praja-pathi, agni Varuna Indra Vishw-devathas 	Yojika
VAANA-PRASHTHA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Guru-Ganesh-Maatrikaa Pooja *swasthi-punyaaha vaachan *AAjya homa *engaging in vedic learning & teachings, yoga, bikshaa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Retiring from grihasthaashrama & Proceeding to a 'vana' *self-realisation 	<p>After 60 yrs.</p> <p>After male Grandchild is born</p>	Self	Avoid:	-	<p>Mon</p> <p>Wed</p> <p>Thurs</p> <p>Fri</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aaditya Saraswat hee Pooshna Twastraa 	Prajaa-pathi
SANYAASA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Praajapathyeshthi – discarding Yajnopaveetha, shikha *aajya homa, vapana, snaana, Danda dhaarana *withdrawing aarhpathyaagni, aahavaneeya, dakshninaagni unto the self. *Relinquishing all earthly ties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *seeking oneness with The Supreme. *'sathyopadesha' mission 	<p>Whenever One attains 'vairaagya'</p>	self	Avoid:	-	<p>Mon</p> <p>Wed</p> <p>Thurs</p> <p>Fri</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agni Prajaa-pathi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aadithya Prajaa-pathi Saraswat hee
ANTHYESHTI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Snana, vasthra, alankaara *Dahana *Asthi sanchayana on 3rd day *dashaaha vidhi *shraaddha, daana, braahmana aaraadhana *sapindeekaran 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *purification of the dead body * facilitating smooth voyage *fulfillment of 'pitr' runa 	After death	Male child	-	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agni Prajaa-pathi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agni Prajaa-pathi Pava-maana

Note: (1) The table here above is only indicative & not comprehensive. (2) An appropriate date for performance of these samskaaras has to be determined after consulting the horoscope of the performer / the person for whose benefit it is being performed. (3) While the basic principles involved are valid, practices might vary from region to region and time to time (4) Braahmana bhojana, daana, dakshina and manthraakshatha form an essential part of these samskaaras excepting jaathakarma & shastee pooja since they are performed during 'ashoucha' period. In lieu of the meal they may be offered a kit containing everything that goes into a meal.

