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प्रधानसंरक्षकः

कुलपतिः, काशीहिन्दूविश्वविद्यालयः

संरक्षकमण्डलम्

प्रोफेसरराजेन्द्रमिश्रः, पूर्वकुलपतिः, सं.सं.वि.वि., वाराणसी।
प्रोफेसरराधावल्लभत्रिपाठी, पूर्वकुलपतिः, राष्ट्रीयसंस्कृतसंस्थानम्, नईदिल्ली।
प्रोफेसर मिथिला प्रसाद त्रिपाठी, पूर्व कुलपतिः, पाणिनीवैदिक एवं संस्कृतविश्वविद्यालयः, उज्जैन
प्रोफेसरविन्दाप्रसादमिश्रः, पूर्वकुलपतिः, सं.सं.वि.वि., वाराणसी।
प्रोफेसरकृष्णकान्तशर्मा, पूर्वसंकायप्रमुखः, सं.वि.ध.वि.संकायः, काशीहिन्दूविश्वविद्यालयः, वाराणसी।
प्रोफेसरसत्यप्रकाशशर्मा, पूर्वसंकायप्रमुखः, कलासंकायः, अलीगढ़मुस्लिमविश्वविद्यालयः, अलीगढ़।
प्रोफेसरलक्ष्मीशर्मा, पूर्वविभागाध्यक्षः, संस्कृतविभागः राजस्थान विश्वविद्यालयः, जयपुर।
प्रोफेसरवीरेन्द्रकुमारमिश्रः, पूर्वसंकायप्रमुखः, कलासंकायः, हिमाचलप्रदेशविश्वविद्यालयः, शिमला।
प्रोफेसरविन्ध्येश्वरीप्रसादमिश्रः, संकायप्रमुखः, सं.वि.ध.वि.संकायः, काशीहिन्दूविश्वविद्यालयः, वाराणसी।
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परामर्शदातारः

प्रोफेसरराजीवरञ्जनसिंहः, पूर्वविभागाध्यक्षः, संस्कृतविद्याविभागः, सं.सं.वि.वि., वाराणसी।
प्रोफेसरजयप्रकाशनारायणद्विवेदी, पूर्वनिदेशकः द्वारकाधीशः वैदिक एवं संस्कृतअनुसंधानसंस्थानम्, द्वारका, गुजरात।
प्रोफेसरराजेश्वरप्रसादमिश्रः, प्राच्यविद्यासंकायाध्यक्षः, कुरुक्षेत्रविश्वविद्यालयः, कुरुक्षेत्र।
प्रोफेसरविद्येश्वरझा, पूर्वसंस्कृतविभागाध्यक्षः, कामेश्वरसिंहदरभंगासंस्कृतविश्वविद्यालयः, दरभंगा (बिहार)।
प्रोफेसरलम्बोदरमिश्रः, पूर्वाचार्यः, वेदविभागः, ज.गु.रा.राजस्थानसंस्कृतविश्वविद्यालयः, जयपुर
प्रोफेसरउमाकान्तयादवः, इलाहाबादविश्वविद्यालयः, इलाहाबाद।
डॉ० जीतरामभट्टः, सचिवः दिल्लीसंस्कृतअकादमी, करोलबागोपनगरम्, नई दिल्ली।
प्रोफेसर डॉ० देवेन्द्रनाथपाण्डेयः, विभागाध्यक्षः संज्ञाहरणविभागः, आयुर्वेदसंकायः, का.हि.वि.वि., वाराणसी
प्रोफेसरमुरलीमनोहरपाठकः, संस्कृतविभागः, गोरखपुरविश्वविद्यालयः, गोरखपुर।
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समीक्षकाः

प्रोफेसरसत्यप्रकाशशर्मा, पूर्वसंकायाध्यक्षः एवं विभागाध्यक्षः, संस्कृतविभागः, अलीगढ़मुस्लिमविश्वविद्यालयः, अलीगढ़।
प्रोफेसरमहेन्द्रपाण्डेयः, वेदविभागाध्यक्षः, सम्पूर्णानन्दसंस्कृतविश्वविद्यालयः, वाराणसी।
प्रोफेसर(डॉ०) देवेन्द्रनाथपाण्डेयः, विभागाध्यक्षः, संज्ञाहरणविभागः, आयुर्वेदसंकायः, का.हि.वि.वि., वाराणसी।
प्रोफेसर अरविन्दकुमारजोशी, विभागाध्यक्षः, समाजशास्त्रविभागः, समाजविज्ञानसंकायः, का.हि.वि.वि., वाराणसी।
डॉ० आर०एस० जायसवाल, संज्ञाहरणविभागः, आयुर्वेदसंकायः, का.हि.वि.वि., वाराणसी।

सहयोगिनः

डॉ०उपेन्द्रकुमारत्रिपाठी, डॉ०सुनीलकात्यायनः, प्रो०महेन्द्रपाण्डेयः, डॉ०आर०के०जायसवाल, डॉ०पी०के०भारती, श्रीकिशनकुमारविश्वकर्मा

क्षेत्रीय प्रभारी

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| डॉ० शैलेशकुमारपाण्डेयः- वाराणसी | डॉ०डी०एन०शर्मा- गुजरात |
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प्राप्तिस्थानम्

वेदविभागः

मुद्रकः

मयूरी प्रिंटिंग
मालवीय कुञ्ज, लंका, वाराणसी।

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The Utility of Vedic “saṃskāra” Doctrines from the Perspective of Hindu Tradition

Krishna Murari Tripathi *

Saṃskāra, in Hinduism, is a term meaning a rite of passage. There are sixteen popular *saṃskāras* in contemporary and Vedic Hinduism.

As per *Paninian* grammar, the Sanskrit word “*saṃskāra*” is formed from the verb root “*kr*” (*ḍukṛñkarane*) meaning “to do”. The *pratyaya* “*ghañ*” (to denote “the act of doing”) is added to form “*kr+a*”. The prefix “*sam*” is added to form “*saṃ+kr+a*” and this is changed to “*saṃs+kr+a*” when the intended meaning is ornamentation (by *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 6.1.137). By *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 7.2.115, this changes to “*saṃskāra*”, due to a special property of the *pratyaya* “*ghañ*” after roots that end in vowels.

In the *R̥gveda*, the meaning of “*saṃskāra*” has been explained as purification. By the insertion of the “*s*” after the prefix “*sam*”, the meaning of ornamenting is produced. That act alone by which any distinction, excellence or virtue arises is known by the word “*saṃskāra*”. It is a technical term for a special act performed according to Vedic ordinance.

As also in the *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad*:

“...eṣayannidaṃsarvaṃpunātitaśmādeṣaevayajñastasyamanaścavākcavartanī.
tayoranyatarāṃmanasāsaṃskarotibrahmāvācāhotādhvaryurudgātānyatarāṃ”ⁱⁱ

Meaning “Since he, moving, purifies all this, therefore is he the Sacrifice. Mind and speech are his courses. The officiant called *Brahmā* purifies [*saṃskaroti*] one of these courses with the mind; the officiants known as *Hotṛ*, *Adhvaryu* and *Udgātṛ* [purify] the other with speech.”

In the *Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā-Sūtras* of Jaimini, use of the word *saṃskāra* is seen frequently. In all these usages but one, this word is used in the sense of purity or cleanness. The one remaining instance uses the word to refer to the *Upanayana* ceremony.

The PMS commentator Śabara-Svāmin also has provided a definition of *saṃskāra* in the following words:

“*saṃskāronāmasabhavatiyasmiñjātepadārthobhavatiyogyaḥkasyacidarthasya.*”ⁱⁱⁱ

Meaning that alone is an instance of a *saṃskāra* after which a distinct capability is produced in a substrate.

But in the Hindu law digest “*Vīramitrodaya*”, *saṃskāra* has been defined as “*yogyatā*” (fitness or propriety).

In Advaita-Vedānta, the term *saṃskāra* is used to refer to the illusory superimposition (*mithyāropa*) of material or psychological functions on the *jīva* (the embodied self).

Arts training^{iv} or grammatical correction^v are some of the meanings intended by the word *saṃskāra* in classical Sanskrit literature.

It has been shown by the celebrated writer Pt. MadhusudanOjha, who comments on the Vedas in a scientific light, that the production of the ability to carry out *karma* (actions prescribed by the Veda) is known as *saṃskāra*. In his book *Chandaḥsamikṣā*, he writes that effecting in someone the fitness to perform a particular karma is *saṃskāra*.

In Hindu society and culture, the sequence of rites including *Garbhādhāna*, *Upanayana* and *Vivāha* (marriage) are well renowned as *saṃskāras*.

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By all this, it can be said generally that the meaning of *saṃskāra* in Hinduism is a pure or sacred religious rite which is undertaken by people for initiation or for purification of the body and *antaḥkaraṇa* (which is composed of the four mental faculties, namely, *manas*, the sensory mind, *buddhi*, the intellect or will that carries out decision making or determination of meaning, *citta*, the reserve of memories, and *ahaṃkāra*, the ego or sense of "I" and "my"), by which a person becomes a respected member of society. However, *saṃskāras* traditionally also include *vidhis* (prescriptive rules) and *niyamas* (restrictions). The end these have in view is not merely a metaphorical and/or material purification but also the purification, initiation and fulness of people's entire personalities. Generally it is believed by Hindus that people who go through the *saṃskāra* rituals according to the ordinances of scripture become endowed with desirable virtuous qualities.

Therefore, we are able to say that, for Hindus, a *saṃskāra* is not only for the sake of displaying religious piety or commitment to social norms. In that light, we are of the opinion that, in absence of an understanding of their value and utility, the idea that *saṃskāras* are to be performed as conventions itself diminishes this value and utility. The *Vivāha-Saṃskāra* is an important *saṃskāra* which establishes an enduring trust and unity between a woman and man. The traditional belief is that when a couple is united by the *Vivāha-Saṃskāra* and the rules and restrictions of the scriptures are fully observed throughout the rites of marriage, a bond of harmony and love comes about between the couple and disputes between them are minimised. They enjoy a marital life full of peace and bliss and there is a companionship between them, whether in sorrow or joy. In general Hindu society, weddings are often conducted without regard for the scriptural injunctions. Often, they are used as an opportunity for ornate displays of wealth. This serves to boost the ego, while the purpose of *saṃskāras* is to moderate the ego.

Therefore, the original goal of *saṃskāras* is nothing but the installation of moral virtues in people and so, the accomplishment of *saṃskāras* fosters these virtues in people. In these *saṃskāras* is an integral system by which an individual becomes capable of leading a virtuous life in society.

The sixteen *saṃskāras* beginning with *Garbhādhāna* are generally practised throughout India. Though up to forty *saṃskāras* are ordained in scriptures, these sixteen are particularly popular and widely followed. It is believed in Hinduism that *saṃskāras* performed throughout life are equivalent to a second birth. Indeed, this is one of ideas used to explain the term "*dvija*" or twice-born ("*dvābhyāṃjanma-saṃskārābhyāṃjāyate itidvijah*"). The *saṃskāras* are said to remove ritual impurities or defects obtained in the unclean environment of the womb.

At present, only sixteen *saṃskāras* are popular. Therefore, in this paper, discussion of these sixteen alone has been taken up. These 16 are:

- *Garbhādhāna* (the conception rite)
- *Puṃsavana* (the rite of nourishing the foetus)
- *Sīmantonayana* (the parting of the expectant mother's hair by the father)
- *Jātakarma* (the post-partum ceremony)
- *Nāmakaraṇa* (the name-giving rite)
- *Niṣkramaṇa* (the baby's first exit from the room in which he or she is born)
- *Annaprāśana* (the first feeding of solid food)
- *Cūḍākarma* (the baby's first haircut)
- *Karṇavedha* (the ear-piercing rite)
- *Upanayana* (the sacred-thread ceremony for young boys)

- *Vedārambha* (the commencement of Vedic training)
- *Keśānta* (the coming-of-age haircut and shave)
- *Samāvartana* (the return home after the completion of education)
- *Vivāha* (marriage)
- *Agnyādhāna* (a fire ceremony performed alongside marriage)
- *Antyeṣṭi* (“the final offering,” the funerary rite)

Garbhādhāna

Garbhādhāna is the rite accompanying conception, or rather we can say it is a rite of which conception is a part. The utility of conception is obvious but packaging it in a *saṃskāra* indicates that it is a holy act of religious import.

Puṃsavana

After the act of conception, the next rite or *saṃskāra* performed is known as *Puṃsavana*. Though it is undertaken by parents desiring either a male or a female child, it is predominantly associated with the desire to have a male son as there is a widespread belief in Hinduism that a son prevents his parents from going to *naraka* or hellish worlds after death by performing their funerary rites. The particulars of the *Puṃsavana* vary based on the gender and attributes that the parents desire their child to have but, generally speaking, it is carried out to nurture the foetus and endow it with strength, both physical and intellectual.

In the *Smṛtis*, the appropriate time for performing *Puṃsavana* has been discussed. According to Manu and Yājñavalkya, it should be in the first two months of pregnancy. Śaṅkha also agrees with this prescription. According to Bṛhaspati, it should be after two months have elapsed.

The *ṚṣiJātūkarnya* ordains it be carried out in the second month while Pāraskara allows either the second or third month or even later if the moon is in a masculine nakṣatra (meaning an asterism with a masculine name in Sanskrit is directly behind the moon as viewed from earth). Regional and familial traditions are among the reasons for this diversity of opinion. Bṛhaspati provides an additional allowance: he says that, if it the couple’s first child, *Puṃsavana* should be performed in the third month, while for later pregnancies, the fourth, sixth or eighth month are permissible times.

Sīmantonayana

The third rite for a foetus is *Sīmantonayana* (“parting of the hair”). This rite is so named because it involves the father parting the hair of the expectant mother.

The question arises: when should this *saṃskāra* take place according to the *Gr̥hyasūtras*, *Smṛtis* and *Jyautiṣa* texts. Generally speaking, the *Gr̥hyasūtras* prescribe the fourth or fifth month of pregnancy. According to the *Smṛtis* in general, the rite should occur in the sixth or eighth month. The astronomical texts allow for the rite to be performed at any time before birth. However, some *Smṛti* writers appear to be very liberal with regards to the time. They go as far as saying that, if the rite has been performed by the time of birth, it can even be performed post-partum with the infant in the mother’s lap.

Jātakarma

The *Jātakarma* rite (whose name means “the karma [performed] for a new-born infant”) is the first of the sixteen performed after a child’s birth. The intention of this rite is to rid the newborn of all ritual impurities attained while in the womb. It is also intended to bolster the infant’s life expectancy and intelligence and is therefore considered a very special *saṃskāra*.

Nāmakaraṇa

Nāmakaraṇa is the ritual in which the newborn baby is named. Yāska says in his *Nirukta* that names are necessary for social interactions and so that particular individuals can be specified in conversation. *Brhaspati* also says

**“nāmākhilasyavyavahārahetuḥśubhāvahaṃkarmasubhāgyahetuḥ.
nāmnaivakīrtiṃsamatemanuṣyastataḥpraśastaṃkhalunāmakarma.”**

The meaning of this is: “One’s name is the sole cause of [worldly] affairs. It is the bringer of auspiciousness and cause for fortune in works. With a name alone does man attain glory. Therefore, the name-giving rite is commendable!”

Niṣkramaṇa

Niṣkramaṇa is the event marking the infant’s first outing from the room in which it was born. It is carried out as a preselected time with great attention given to protecting the infant from dangers present in the environment.

Annaprāśana

Annaprāśana is the first time the infant is fed solid food. Its religious purposes are said to be to free the baby of the ritual impurities attained from nutrition via the umbilical cord and to enable the infant to attain good health, strength and spiritual radiance. According to Pāraskara and others, particular mantras are to be chanted as part of this ritual and the *Iṣṭadevatā* (most revered deity of the parents), *Kuladevatā* (tutelary deity of the family), *Grāmadevatā* (tutelary village deity), along with various other deities, are to be worshipped by *pūjā* before the feeding. *Manu* prescribes that this ceremony be undertaken in the sixth month of the baby’s life or at any other time that seems appropriate and auspicious to the family as per their tradition.

Cūḍākarma

The *Cūḍākarma* is the first haircut of a male baby. A tuft of hair, known as a *śikhā*, is left uncut at the crown of the head. Its purpose is to serve as a symbol of Hindu identity, enabling differentiation between Hindus and others. It is ordained for members of all four *varṇas*, unlike the sacred thread, which is only prescribed for the three *dvijavarṇas*. There is a popular saying in Sanskrit, “*śikhāvattvamhindutvam*”, meaning “having a *śikhā* [represents] being Hindu”. There is a diversity of opinions on when the first haircut should be done. The *ĀśvalāyanaGṛhyasūtra* says that the haircut should be performed in the third year of the infant’s life or as per family tradition and that it is known to be performed by diverse communities in the third or fifth year or even in the seventh along with the *Upanayana* ceremony.

Karṇavedha

Karṇavedha is the ear-piercing ceremony of an infant. There is no elaborate discussion of this rite in the Vedas, *Gṛhyasūtras*, *Smṛtis* or other scriptures. There is, however, a mantra in the *Atharvaveda* appendix that is taken to be a prescription for this rite:

**“lohitenasvadhitināmithunaṃkarṇayoḥkṛdhi.
akartāśvinālakṣyatadastuprajayābahu.”**

This is interpreted to mean “Pierce the two ears with a metal needle. The earlobes are then considered to be marked as domains of the twin *Aśvin* gods.” Although this mantra is cited in texts in relation to a description of cows, it is also taken to be an authority for the *Karṇavedha* rite.

Upanayana

The *Upanayana* is the sacred thread rite performed just before the commencement of a boy's Vedic education. The word *Upanayana*, according to Paninian grammar, is formed from the root “*ṇī*” (*ṇīṇprāpane*^{vi}), meaning “to lead”. The *pratyaya* “*lyuṣ*” changes it into “*nayana*”, the act of leading. With the prefix “*upa*”, it means “leading or bringing near”. It is a highly significant ritual involving the teacher drawing his new pupil towards himself and is marked by instruction of the *Gāyatrī* mantra.

It is said:

**“gṛhyoktakarmaṇāyenasamīpaṇṇīyateguroḥ.
bālovedāyatadyogādbālasayopanayaṃviduḥ.”**

Meaning, “the rite ordained by the *Gṛhya* canon, as part of which the boy is led to the vicinity of his teacher for Vedic [study]. Therefore, they [the learned] know this rite as the boy's *Upanayana*.”

Vedārambha

Vedārambha means “commencement of Vedic study”. This rite is only mentioned by name in *Vyāsa-smṛti* in the second section, namely “*Kriyāvidhi*” or “rules for rituals”. It is not explicitly named in other *Smṛtis*, *Gṛhyasūtras* or scriptures, though clear indications to it are widely available.

Keśānta

Keśānta (cutting of the hair) is also known by the name *Godānasamskāra* (the rite of gifting cows). This rite is connected with coming of age and symbolises the pupil's entry into youth and the end of his childhood. It entails shaving the pupil's head hair and facial hair, which is followed by the pupil gifting a cow or cows to a *Brāhmaṇa*. It is prescribed in the sixteenth year of life. The auxiliary actions leading up to the haircut are the same as in the *Cūdākarma* ceremony.

Samāvartana

The word *Samāvartana* is formed by adding the prefixes “*sam*” and “*ā*” to “*vartana*”, which is formed by adding the “*lyuṣ*” *pratyaya* to the verb root “*vṛtu*”. The meaning of the term is exit from the *gurukula* (teacher's residence) and return to one's family home upon completing one's formal study. It is said in *Vīramitrodaya* “*tatrasamāvartanaṃnāmavedādhyayanānantaragurukulātsvagṛhāgamanam. upanayanasamskārahgurukulapraveśārthasamāvartanasamskārogurukulātpatyāvartanārt ham.*”

Meaning, “Returning to one's familial home from the *gurukula* after completing Vedic education is known as *Samāvartana*. The *Upanayana* ceremony is performed for entry into the *gurukula*, while the *Samāvartana* rite is for the return home from the *gurukula*.”

Vivāha

Vivāha is the marriage rite of Hinduism. The word is formed from the root “*vah*” meaning to carry or bear. The “*ghaṇ*” *pratyaya* makes “*vāha*”, meaning the act of bearing. The prefix “*vi*” means it is a special or “*viśiṣṭa*” kind of bearing that is meant, according to, for instance, the *Śabdakalpadruma*, a Sanskrit lexicon. By convention, the term “*vivāha*” is taken to refer to the bearing of householder responsibilities by the couple or the acceptance of the bride's hand in marriage by the groom.

Agnyādhāna (Agniparigraha)

The fire in which certain oblations, such as parched grain, are offered during marriage is known as *avasathyāgni* or *vivāhāgni*. The rituals performed when this fire are kindled are

known as *Agnyādhāna*. After these rituals, the fire must be preserved lifelong by the male householder and the couple should daily perform rituals associated with its upkeep.

Antyeṣṭi

This is the final *saṃskāra* in the Hindu sequence of life rites. It is performed after the death of a person. Discussion of this ceremony is found throughout Hindu scriptures, starting from the Vedas and ending with the Purāṇas. Even in contemporary times, after a person passes away, an *Antyeṣṭisaṃskāra* is performed for them according to their particular *sampradāya* (denomination). According to the *Gṛhyasūtras*, it is believed that the rites starting from *Jātakarma* bestow prosperity and felicity to a person in life, while the posthumous rite of *Antyeṣṭi* enables him or her to go to a desirable realm in the afterlife. It is said the *Jātakarma* enables one to attain victory in this life, while the *Antyeṣṭi* does so in the afterlife.

The significance of the sixteen saṃskāras

Hindu intellectual history, and, more widely, that of Dharmic religions in general, has been influenced by the doctrine of rebirth (*punarjanma*). Following is a discussion of the *saṃskāras* from the perspective of this doctrine.

The *Bhagavad-Gītā* says:

**“natvevāhamjātunāsaṃnatvaṃnemejanādhipāh.
nacaivanabhaviṣyāmaḥsarvevayamataḥparam.”^{vii}**

Meaning, “But indeed never was there any moment when I did not exist, nor you, nor these kings; and nor indeed shall we all cease to be hereafter.”

The belief of traditional scholars of Dharmic religions is that infants are born in their present lives with impressions of actions performed in the previous life. These impressions are also called *saṃskāras* and it is believed that one experiences their effects in one's present life. Generally it is seen that some people show religious or spiritual qualities from birth. The mind of another revels in irreligious or unethical acts. Traditionally, this is taken to be evidence for the theory of rebirth, the idea being one takes birth as per the influences of these impressions. A definite recollection of these impressions is not found in a young child. Therefore, correction, fostering or transformation of impressions from previous lives can be effected through new impressions in the present life. By these new impressions, a development of all the parts of the individual's personality takes place. From time to time in an individual's life, such efforts to imprint new impressions are ordained. They are the very *saṃskāras* that we have discussed. By these *saṃskāras*, there is a gradual development of the individual's physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual capabilities. By this the personality of the individual is developed.

Therefore, in the *Vedas*, *Purāṇas* and *Dharmaśāstras*, the necessity for *saṃskāras* has been proclaimed. As, through the application of heat, substances like gold are purified and beautified and their true form is able to shine through, similarly the stimulating and nourishing of humane qualities in humans are effected by the *saṃskāras* ordained by the Vedic and non-Vedic canon in Hinduism. The intention of Hindu scriptural tradition is that a person should undergo *saṃskāra* rites in life as ordained by the scriptural texts. It is believed that doing so fosters a propensity for sacred wisdom and a desire and capability for understanding the *Ātman* (self) and *Paramātmān* (supreme being).

The *Īśa-Upaniṣad* says “*avidyayāmṛtyumtīrtvāvidyayā'mṛtamaśnute*” meaning “By non-knowing or ignorance he transcends death and by knowledge he enjoys immortality”. In the vast majority of Hindu schools of thought, the attainment of liberation or *mokṣa* is considered the ultimate goal of human life. It is the fourth and final members of the

puruṣārthas, or ends of life. As said above, the *saṃskāras* are believed to purify the body and mental faculties, *manas*, *buddhi*, *citta* and *ahaṃkāra*. These latter four, collectively called the *antaḥkaraṇa*, when purified, motivate a person towards taking a religious path in life. By taking such a path, *mokṣa* can be attained. In this connection, *saṃskāra* is said to be of two types, “*malāpanayana*” and “*atiśayādhāna*”, meaning respectively “that which removes impurity” and “that which positively endows one with virtues”. The *Manusmṛti* says that by *saṃskāras*, impurities or sins accrued in the womb are washed away^{viii} and that *saṃskāras* purify one in this life and the afterlife^{ix}. The *Āṅgīrasa-smṛti* says that, just as appropriate colours are used by skilled painters for making beautiful images (*citra*), *saṃskāras* performed according to scriptural ordinances must be used to make a person’s character (*caritra*).

An analogy of a mirror is often quoted, wherein the first kind of *saṃskāra* is like removing dirt from the mirror surface while the second kind is akin to shining light on the mirror. Here, moral or spiritual virtues can be compared to light. Three Sanskrit synonyms for *saṃskāra* shed light on this idea of *saṃskāras* installing virtues in a person: *bhāvanā*, meaning infusion or production; *pratiyatna*, meaning effort or exertion; and *guṇādhāna*, meaning addition of virtues.

In Hinduism, *saṃskāras* are believed to benefit not only the individual who undergoes them but also his or her family, society and nation and the entire world. The performance of *saṃskāras* encourages one to have faith in the instructions of scripture and to perform his duties in life, by doing which he experiences joy in life and ensures happiness in future lives. According to Manu, religiously carrying out the five *mahāyajñas* (great sacrifices) makes one eligible for attaining *Brahman* (the supreme source of existence).^x

The sequential performance of *saṃskāras* in life is believed to cause a gradual development of positive qualities in a person’s character. There are particular rules and restrictions for all the *saṃskāras*, for instance limitations on when a couple who desire to have a child should try to conceive. It is believed that not only does a foetus imbibe biological nutrients from his mother but also that the mother’s mental state has a significant effect on the child’s development. In the *Mahābhārata*, there is a well known story in which Arjuna was telling his pregnant wife Subhadrā the techniques of entering and escaping from a military formation known as a *Cakravyūha*. Subhadrā fell asleep halfway through the exposition and hence the foetus in her womb only learned how to break into the formation and not how to exit from it. He, later named Abhimanyu, met his demise in the great war of the *Mahābhārata* when he became trapped in this very formation after successfully penetrating it.

In the *R̥gveda*, it is said that both a mother and father should always remain cautious that their children do not develop antisocial qualities.

According to Hindu scripture, a new born male is considered a *śūdra*. A boy born in a *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya* or *vaiśya* family is only to be called a *dvija* (“twice-born”) after his Upanayana ceremony. If he completes his Vedic training, he is known as a *vipra* (“learned”) if he attains brahman by using his learning, he is known as a “*brāhmaṇa*”.

**“janmanājāyateśūdraḥsaṃskārāddvijaucyate.
vedābhyāsībhavedvipro brahma jānātibrāhmaṇaḥ.”**

Understandably, many Hindus are apathetic towards *saṃskāras* as they believe that these are merely ceremonies of religious or social convention. On occasion, this is coupled with an aversion for Vedic ordinances altogether. We are of the opinion that this sentiment comes from an ignorance of the intended reasons for these *saṃskāras* and an indifference to exploring these reasons. In precolonial India, children were raised in an environment in which they were naturally exposed to these ideas but, in contemporary times, this sort of exposure is

rare. If children, and indeed adults, are exposed to traditional beliefs, we believe that they shall be better equipped to judge for themselves what value their religious heritage holds for them. It is our hope that our work is a small contribution towards this end.

ⁱ *Dhātupāṭha* 8.10

ⁱⁱ *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* 4.16.1-2

ⁱⁱⁱ Śabara's commentary on the *Pūrva-MīmāṃsāSūtras*, 3.1.3

^{iv} As in *Raghuvamśa* 3.35

^v As in *Kumāra-Sambhava* 3.18

^{vi} *Dhātupāṭha* 1.1049

^{vii} *Bhagavad-Gītā* 2.12

^{viii} *Manusmṛti* 2.27

^{ix} *Manusmṛti* 2.26

^x *Manusmṛti* 2.28
