

## **Vedic rituals in Bharat : An understanding of sankaras in the context of Naamkaran sanskar**

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### ***Abstract :***

Vedic rituals, integral to the Hindu tradition of Sanatan Dharma, encapsulate the transformative concept of “Sanskar,” a process essential for personal and societal development. This research examines the role of Sanskar within Vedic rituals in context of *naamkaran* sanskar and its relevance to the holistic growth of individuals, particularly through the lens of *Ashtanga* Ayurveda and its branch, *Kaumarbhritya*. By exploring the sixteen key rites of passage, this study aims to elucidate the multifaceted nature of Sanskar in nurturing physical, mental, and intellectual growth, as well as its role in societal integration.

**Keywords :** Hindu, sanskars, Vedic, Namkaran, Rites

### **Introduction :**

In the context of Hindu Sanatan Dharma, Vedic rituals embody the profound principle of Sanskar, representing a transformative journey aimed at the holistic development of individuals. This principle is explored through developmental milestones in childhood and adolescence, reflecting a commitment to comprehensive growth. *Ashtanga* Ayurveda, with a specific focus on *Kaumarbhritya*<sup>1</sup>, plays a pivotal role in supporting these developmental phases. This research aims to analyze the significance of these practices and their continued relevance in guiding individuals towards becoming well-rounded members of society.

Sanskar, as articulated in traditional Hindu philosophy, is defined as a process that brings about continuous positive transformation in various aspects of existence. This includes material entities (*Dravya*), the physical body (*Shareera*), intellectual capacities (*Mana*), and soul (*Aatma*). The concept of Sanskar is highly individualized, reflecting its impact on personal development. Sanskar refers to the transformative process aimed at enhancing an individual’s qualities by introducing positive attributes and removing undesirable traits. It encompasses various rituals and practices that contribute to the holistic development of a person, integrating physical, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions.

In Hindu culture, every stage of life is considered sacred, from conception to the final rites (*Antyeshti*). Consequently, each significant phase is marked by specific rituals intended to foster physical, social, and religious growth. These rituals are designed to enhance the individual’s development by improving upon existing attributes while eliminating undesirable aspects.

## Literature Review :

The concept of Sanskar is deeply embedded in Vedic tradition, with the sixteen rites of passage, or Samskaras, serving as a framework for personal development. According to various Ayurvedic Acharyas, these rites are not merely ceremonial but are critical for fostering qualities that align with societal values. Ashtanga Ayurveda, especially the *Kaumarbhritya* branch, is dedicated to the well-being of children and encompasses a range of practices designed to support developmental milestones.

The ancient sage *Harita* divided samskaras into two categories: Brahma and *Daiva*. Brahma samskaras include those like *Garbhadhana* and others described in the Smritis (traditional Hindu texts), which purify the individual and elevate them to the status of sages. These samskaras are considered essential for attaining spiritual equality with sages and living in the same realm as them. On the other hand, *Daiva* samskaras involve offerings, such as *Pakayajnas* (offerings of cooked food), *yajnas* (ritual sacrifices) with burnt offerings, and soma offerings, which are discussed in the *Srauta Sutras*. These samskaras are more elaborate and are associated with divine worship and the appeasement of deities.

The *Grhyasutras*, ancient Hindu texts on domestic rituals, deal with samskaras in two different sequences. Some texts, like the *Hiranyakeshigrhya*, *Bharadvaja Grhya*, and *Manavagrhya*, begin with Upanayana and proceed through to *Samavartana* (the completion of formal education). Other texts start with Vivaha and follow the sequence up to Samavartana. Interestingly, some samskaras like *Karnavedha* (ear-piercing) and *Vidyarambha* (initiation into learning) are not mentioned in the *Grhya Sutras* but were later added by Smritis and Puranas (ancient Hindu scriptures).

The *Nirnaya Sindhu*, another ancient text, quotes verses from *Saunaka* and remarks on the differing opinions regarding the performance of samskaras after penance. Some hold that after penance, the omitted samskaras should be performed all at once, while others believe they should not be performed at all post-penance. A third view suggests that if the *Caula* was left unperformed, it could be performed on the same day as Upanayana. The *Dharmasindhu* further out. According to Manu Smriti (II. 27-28), for *dvijātis* (twice-born individuals), the impurities or taints related to birth—specifically those deriving from the physical contributions of the parents (seed and womb)—are addressed through specific rituals. These include *Homa* (sacrificial offerings in fire) conducted during pregnancy, as well as postnatal rites such as *jatakarma* (birth ceremonies), *caula* (tonsure), and the tying of the *munja* grass girdle. These practices are believed to prepare the human body for spiritual endeavors, including the study of the Vedas, through observance of *vratas* (vows), additional *homas*, *traividya* (rituals connected with the three Vedas), worship of deities, sages, and ancestors, procreation, and the performance of daily and solemn Vedic sacrifices.

Yājñavalkya Smṛti Smṛti (I. 13) supports the idea that samskāras serve to remove the taints associated with seed and womb. Commentators have offered various interpretations of these statements:

Medhātithi argues that “seed and womb” should be understood as referring to impurities rather than sins.

Kulluka explains that blemishes related to the seed stem from prohibited sexual practices, while blemishes of the womb result from an impure maternal environment.

The Mitākcarā clarifies that samskāras are intended to address physical defects inherited from parents, such as bodily impairments or diseases, rather than the moral failings of the parents themselves.

Manu II. 66 also indicates that samskāras are performed for women to purify the body, further emphasizing the inclusive nature of these rites.

Harsa, as cited in the Samskāratattva, details that specific rites such as *garbhādhana* (conception rites) aim to ensure that the foetus is suitable for progeny. Other rites, including *pumsavana* (to ensure a male offspring) and *ślāmantonayana* (for the well-being of the foetus), are intended to cleanse the foetus of parental taints and accumulated impurities. The comprehensive practice of eight samskāras—including *garbhādhana*, *pumsavana*, *ślāmantonayana*, *jatakarma* (birth rite), *nāmākarana* (naming ceremony), *aupanayana* (sacred thread ceremony), *cūākaraGa* (tonsure), and *samāvartana* (return to householder life)—is seen as crucial for achieving purity.

In Ayurvedic literature – Kashyap Samhita is well known as the most important text for child development and fulfillment. Acharya Kashyap specify sixteen type of Sanskar particularly from the birth to the end.

A trend of reduced observance has been noted for centuries. The *Smrtyarthasara*, an ancient text, mentions that if samskaras (except Upanayana) are not performed at the prescribed times, a ritual called *Vyahrtihoma* should be performed before the samskaras, even if late. For each missed samskara, a penance called *Prakrcchra* is recommended, especially if the non-performance was due to some difficulty or distress. For example, the penance for not performing *Caula* is *Ardha-krochra*. However, if the omission was intentional or without distress, the penance is doubled. While the texts provide a framework for understanding samskāras, their detailed role in the development of higher human qualities and integration into societal life involves a complex interplay of ritual, spiritual, and social factors. samskāras are viewed as both markers of inner transformation and essential practices for cultivating latent human potential and social status.

## **Purpose of sanskaras :**

Samskaras, in the form of rituals, are viewed not just as cultural practices, but as vital processes that unfold the latent capacities of a person, preparing them for participation in society. Samskaras symbolize the inner transformations necessary for an individual to assume their rightful place in the

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social order. Moreover, undergoing these rituals often conferred a certain social status on the individual, marking their progression through different stages of life.

The purposes of samskaras are manifold, reflecting the diverse needs they address in an individual's life. Some samskaras, such as *Upanayana*, serve spiritual and cultural purposes. The *Upanayana* ceremony, which marks the initiation into Vedic study, symbolically brings the uninitiated into the fold of the learned, granting them special privileges while also imposing specific duties. The psychological impact of these samskaras is significant; they impress upon the individual's mind that they have assumed a new role, with its own set of rules and responsibilities that must be observed.

Other samskaras, such as *Namakarana* (the naming ceremony), *Annaprashan* (the first feeding of solid food), and *Nishkramana* (the first outing), are more popular in nature. These ceremonies provide opportunities for expressing love, affection, and celebrating milestones in an individual's life. The emphasis on communal participation in these samskaras strengthens social bonds and reinforces the importance of community in an individual's life.

The full list of samskaras traditionally recognized in most Smriti works is extensive and detailed. These rituals are typically arranged in the sequence of the times at which they are performed in a person's life, starting from *Garbhadhana*. However, in modern times, the practice of most samskaras, except for *Garbhadhana*, *Upanayana*, and *Vivaha*, has significantly declined. Many of these rituals have fallen into oblivion and are rarely performed, even by Brahmins, in the manner and at the times prescribed by the Smritis.

Certain samskaras, like *Garbhadhana* (conception ritual), *Pumsavana* (a ritual performed to ensure the birth of a male child), and *Simantonnayana* (parting the hair ritual during pregnancy), carry mystical and symbolic meanings. These rituals are performed with the belief that they influence the physical and spiritual development of the unborn child and the well-being of the mother. Marriage, or *Vivaha*, is perhaps one of the most significant samskaras, seen as a sacrament that unites two individuals into a single entity for the purpose of continuing society. *Vivaha* is not just a union of two individuals but is also a commitment to mutual cooperation, self-restraint, and self-sacrifice for the upliftment of both partners.

## **Namkaran Sanskar** (The Ceremony of Naming a Child) :

The *Namkaran Sanskar*<sup>2</sup>, or naming ceremony, is a significant ritual in Hindu tradition that bestows a sense of divinity upon a newly-born child. This ceremony is strategically scheduled based on astrological calculations related to the child's time and place of birth. Traditionally, the naming occurs on specific days: the 10th or 11th day, the 100th day, and at the completion of one year. Based on the arrangement of the constellations at birth, the child is named on a day fixed by caste tradition. In the Hindu Sanatan Dharma, the child is frequently named after an avatar, deity, sacred place or river, saint, etc., as a constant reminder of the sacred values for which that name represents. In the

Swaminarayan Sampraday, the devotees approach *Pramukh*, Swami Maharaj or the other senior sadhus to name their children.

The timing of the *Namkaran Sanskar* reflects both social and communicative dimensions, impacting the individual's identity and societal interactions throughout their life. The first ten days after birth are considered a high-risk period due to potential complications such as congenital abnormalities, Rh incompatibility, or severe birth asphyxia. Consequently, the *Namkaran Sanskar* is typically conducted after this critical period, marking the transition out of the early neonatal phase.

From a medical perspective, this period is crucial for monitoring the completion of umbilical cord detachment and wound healing. By the 10th day, neonatal jaundice and cephalic hematoma are generally expected to resolve. Additionally, the ceremony helps in the maintenance of accurate medical records and prevents the risk of neonatal mix-ups in nurseries.

The ritual of naming a child, known as *Namakarana*, is a significant rite of passage within Vedic traditions. Various ancient texts provide detailed guidelines on this practice, each offering distinct perspectives on the timing and nature of the naming ceremony. The first rule in almost all sutras is that the name for males should contain two or four syllables or an even number. This rule is deduced from Vedic literature where most of the names contain either two syllables (e. g. Baka, Trita, Kutsa, Bhrgu) or four syllables (Trasadasyu, Purukutsa, Medhatithi, Brahmadata &c.), though names of three syllables (like Kavasa, Cyavana, Bharata) and of five syllables.

The Brahmanas, including those attributed to the *Asvalayana*, *Sanatkumara*, *Gobhila*, and *Khadira schools*, delineate the procedures for bestowing names upon a newborn.

1. ***Asvalayana Brahmana*** : This text prescribes the allocation of two names on the day of birth. The first name is intended for common usage and is subject to detailed rules provided by the text. The second name, however, is kept secret and known only to the parents until the child's Upanayana (sacred thread ceremony)
2. ***Sanatkumara Brahmana*** : In contrast, this text recommends that the name with detailed regulations is to be the secret one, with a separate name for common use to be assigned on the tenth day after birth.
3. ***Apastamba Grhyasutra*** : According to this text, a name derived from the nakshatra (lunar mansion) under which the child is born is given on the day of birth, serving as the secret name. An additional name is to be provided on the tenth day.
4. ***Gobhila and Khadira Brahmanas*** : These texts state that a name should be given during the Susyanti-karma (a purification rite), which is also kept confidential. The practice of *Namakarana* involves the assignment of both a public and a secret name, with variations in the timing and specifics of the naming process as outlined by different Vedic texts.<sup>3</sup>

**Importance of Namkaran Sanskar :**

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**Identity Formation :** A person's name is a fundamental aspect of their identity, serving as a primary means of individual recognition and personal definition.

**Social Integration :** The naming ceremony plays a crucial role in socialization, facilitating the child's integration into the community and establishing their social identity.

**Significance of Naming :** It is imperative that the child is given a name that is not only meaningful but also reflects dignified qualities, which may influence their self-perception and societal interactions.

**Parental Guidance :** The Namakarana Samskara provides an opportunity for educating parents and family members on creating an environment that nurtures the child's inherent qualities and potential.

**Psychological and Developmental Impact :** The naming of the child is believed to foster positive psychological development and contribute to overall physical and mental well-being.

**Medical Considerations :** The Ayurvedic text *Charaka Samhita*, specifically in *Sharirsthana* 8/51, references *Ayupariksha* (life assessment) following the naming ceremony, which assesses the health status of the infant.

**Transition to Late Neonatal Period :** The completion of the Namakarana Sanskara marks the beginning of the late neonatal period, during which physiological changes such as the resolution of physiological jaundice are expected.

## **Few ceremonial mentions :**

The diverse birth and naming ceremonies across India, for example in Tamil Nadu *Namakaranam*, Kerala's '*Perital*' *chadangu*, and the *Zeliangrong* community's rites, collectively reflect a profound and unifying cultural tapestry that spans the subcontinent. Each tradition, while unique in its practices and symbols, embodies a shared cultural ethos of integrating the newborn into the community while safeguarding against malevolent forces. This unity in diversity highlights the rich mosaic of Indian cultural and spiritual life.

In Tamil Nadu, the Namakarana ceremony, a vital rite of passage, intertwines astrological, cultural, and religious dimensions to signify the newborn's formal entry into the family and society. The dual naming practice—'*vyavahara nama*' (public name) and '*Ragasiya nama*' (secret name)—illustrates a belief in spiritual protection and the importance of aligning with astrological and ancestral heritage. The use of mantras, turmeric, and kumkum during the ceremony, alongside the invocation of divine blessings through sacred fire, underscores a profound connection to both historical traditions and contemporary spiritual practices. These rituals reflect an enduring respect for cultural heritage and a dynamic adaptation of spiritual beliefs.

Similarly, in Kerala, the '*Perital*' *chadangu*, or baby naming ceremony, demonstrates a regional variation of protective and symbolic practices deeply rooted in cultural traditions. The ceremony,

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typically performed on the 28th or 56th day, involves tying a black thread, or *aranjanam*, around the baby's waist—a practice believed to shield the child from malevolent forces. The avoidance of gold ornaments below the hip and the application of kohl (mayye) for protection are rituals that signify a blend of cultural customs and spiritual beliefs. Offering ghee and honey, often mixed with flags and gold, during the ceremony emphasizes the wish for a sweet and prosperous future for the child. This ceremony highlights the integration of protective traditions with regional variations, reflecting a shared cultural consciousness across different parts of India.

In the Sanatani traditions of Bharat, rituals play a crucial role in integrating individuals into the social and spiritual fabric of their communities. For example, among the Zeliangrong community in the far east of Bharat, the rites of birth and initiation reflect a deep-seated connection with Vedic customs. These ceremonies not only protect but also symbolize important transitions in an individual's life.

The 'Laangmumei Taloumei,' a ritual involving the fastening of black threads around an infant, echoes the Vedic practice of using sacred threads for protection and spiritual blessing. Similarly, the 'Dui Loumei,' which signifies the separation of the child from the mother through a ceremonial bath, purification rites that symbolize a new phase in life.

The 'Nap Mumloumei,' where chewed rice is given to the child, marks their transition to human status, rituals where food offerings signify the acceptance of an individual's new role within the community. The 'Khamjonli Kasan Kanmei,' using burnt ashes for protection against malevolent forces, aligns with the tradition of using sacred elements to ward off evil.

On the fifth day, the community performs 'Penbam Reime,' and subsequent rites such as 'Nanungai' for ear-piercing and 'Khangchu Kailu Thaimai' for initiation, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to safeguarding and integrating the individual into societal roles. These practices reflect a holistic approach similar to the Vedic rites of passage, emphasizing spiritual well-being and social identity.

This alignment highlights the universal importance of *sanskars* in the form of these ceremonies as in reinforcing communal bonds and spiritual growth across diverse traditions in Bharat.

Collectively, these traditions highlight a unifying cultural framework within India that integrates spiritual, protective, and social elements into the rites of passage for newborns and initiates. Despite regional variations, the underlying themes of safeguarding against malevolent forces, marking transitions, and integrating individuals into their social and spiritual communities are consistent. This shared cultural ethos underscores the profound interconnectedness of Indian traditions, reflecting a harmonious blend of diverse practices and a collective commitment to the protection and integration of individuals within the broader societal and spiritual fabric.

## **conclusion :**

'*Sanskar*' refers to crucial developmental rites of passage that signify transitions into new stages of life, each contributing to the individual's growth and adaptation to societal norms. These rituals, rooted in the Vedic tradition, are designed to create a nurturing environment conducive to the child's

development and ability to navigate various life challenges. Although the empirical evaluation of these practices can be complex, their historical and cultural significance suggests a profound impact on the developmental trajectory of the child.

These rites are integral to creating a supportive environment that fosters personal growth and equips individuals to navigate life's challenges effectively. Historically, Sanskars encompass a range of practices from birth through adolescence, including naming ceremonies, educational rites, and initiation rituals. Each rite is designed to instill values, behaviors, and social norms that are crucial for successful integration into society.

However, understanding these practices through the lens of contemporary developmental psychology can provide valuable insights into their impact on emotional, social, and cognitive development. By examining the traditional wisdom embedded in Sanskars and its alignment with modern developmental theories, researchers can explore how these rites influence personal growth and societal integration.

Incorporating scientific methods to analyze Sanskars may offer a deeper comprehension of their relevance and effectiveness in today's context. This approach can validate traditional practices and potentially adapt them to contemporary developmental frameworks, enhancing their applicability. Thus, Sanskar serves as a valuable framework for assessing developmental milestones, bridging ancient practices with modern psychological understanding. This integration of tradition and contemporary research can enrich our understanding of how cultural rituals support individual growth and societal cohesion, offering a comprehensive perspective on nurturing and guiding individuals through critical life transitions.

Thus, Sanskar represents a framework for evaluating and supporting the developmental milestones of children, integrating traditional wisdom with contemporary developmental psychology.

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