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## Scientific aspects of Indian traditions with special reference to women

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### Abstract

Indian society is a well-respected ancient culture in the world based on its values. Each community within the country follows its own set of traditions. Among the traditions, the sacraments mentioned in the Gr̥hyasūtras are found to be practiced by the people in the form of religious rites and rituals that have scientific significance. In India, women are at the center of any tradition. So, seers have emphasized rituals regarding the welfare of women also. It is found from the study that taking vermilion (sindūr), applying kumkum, wearing bangles, keeping fast, etc. is not in any way ridiculous but is completely scientific. If we can identify the real goal of these traditions, then our society and nation surely will proceed toward development. The article focuses on noting the importance of Samskaras, especially from women's perspective by this research paper. The article has used analytical and description methods. The article has mentioned a brief about Indian tradition in the context of women followed by a scientific aspect and then a conclusion. In the conclusion, the article has related the rituals and their importance for women.

**Keyword:** Grihyasootra, Indian, samskara, scientific, tradition, nation, science

### Introduction

‘India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great grandmother of tradition.’

Mark Twain

Science has developed along with knowledge in India. The basis of Indian traditions has always been factual. All the customs practiced in the view of human interest have scientific aspects. Indian society is a well-respected ancient culture in the world based on its values. One of those great values and traditions is to worship Mother Nature and women. Every Indian believes in ‘Yatra nāryastu pūjyante ramante tatra devatāḥ’<sup>[1]</sup>.

India is a culturally rich nation. Each community within the country follows their own set of traditions. These traditions and rituals are continuing since Vedic times. Vedic literature is divided mainly into four sections – Saṁhitā, Brāhmaṇa, Āraṇyaka, and Upaniṣada. After that, it has its six limbs called Vedānga. These six Vedāngas help us to understand the Veda properly. As said – angyante jñyānte emibhiriti vedānga. The six vedāngas are – Śikṣā, kalpa, vyākaraṇa, nirukta, chanda and jyotiṣa. Among these six limbs, Kalpa has again four parts – Śrauta, gr̥hya, dharma, and Śulva. Śrauta sūtras contain big rituals, gr̥hya sūtras contain household-related rituals, and dharma sūtras contain all the customs, and Śulva sūtras contain measurements for alter. We found out about the saṁskāra firstly in the gr̥hyasūtras. The 16 saṁskāras have their significance in our culture.

The sacraments mentioned in the gr̥hya sūtras are found to be practiced by the people in the form of religious rites and rituals that have scientific significance. Saṁskāra means ‘to purify’ or ‘to refine’. So, performing the saṁskāra rituals is noteworthy in the incredible speciality of Indian tradition. The performance of saṁskāras started in the Vedic era. These saṁskāras are not only a ritual; they are related to one's whole life.

Sacraments (samskaras) are the retention of the effects of past deeds. After the mind and the psyche, the next important factor is sacraments (samskaras).

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<sup>1</sup> manusmṛti 3.56

In other words, retained memories become samskaras. Samskaras are responsible for conducting the course of life. From the subconscious level, these memories rise to the forefront and affect behavior. Samskaras also result in biased attitudes [2].

Here, a distinction has to be made between the sixteen sacraments mentioned in the scriptures. These range from conception to funeral ceremonies: (1) Sacrament of impregnation (garbhadhan); (2) second or third month of pregnancy (punsavanam); (3) between the fifth and eighth month of pregnancy (simantonnayana); (4) the time when the child is born (jatakarma); (5) naming the child (namakarana); (6) the time the child is brought out of the house from the place of birth and initial caring (niskramana); (7) the first feeding of cereal at six months (annaprashana); (8) first cutting of hair in the first or third year (chudakarman); (9) piercing the ears in the third or fifth year (karnavedha); (10) investiture of religious sacrament from the eighth year (upanayana); (11) when studies are completed (samavartana); (12) marriage ceremony (vivaha samskara); (13) sacraments relating to householders (grihasthashrama); (14) renouncing the householder's life (vanprasthashrama); (15) leading the life of a monk (sanyasashrama); and finally, the last rites of the dead (antyeshti). These are essentially rituals, marked by certain sacrifices. It is believed that by virtue of performing these rituals, the life of the performer receives a higher sanctity. Just as gold and diamonds that are dug out from the ore need refining and polishing in order to shine in all their splendor, man needs these samskaras or pacificator ceremonies in order to shine in his best form physically, psychically, and spiritually [3].

In Indian culture, samskaras refer to dysfunctional patterns that trace their origins not only to childhood and birth traumas but also to generations of family traditions. The law of Karma is related to these samskaras. These samskaras are the dark soot in an otherwise clear lamp that obstructs the light of our inner self from shining through. Later, when a similar situation revisits this emotional impression (samskara), the same emotion is revived from the memory and the same response is evoked. This is because the samskara, or the emotional charge stored in the memory, is a vibrating energy that attracts the same frequency by the force of resonance. To be free from the hold of our past, we have to cleanse the samskara. Samskara reduces us into a program.<sup>4</sup>

We believe that in nature there are two powers one is positive and one is negative. Humans are naturally surrounded by these two powers and have to work to prevent the negative one. The performance of saṁskāras helps resolve this non-invasive effect.

In India, women are at the center of any tradition. A woman is the central connecting point of humans, family, and society. So, seers have emphasized rituals regarding the welfare of women also.

### Tradition and its scientific aspects

In India, traditions are performed in every nook and corner of the land. Irrespective of land or community, they are performed in every society. Apart from different festivals and fasts, the 16 saṁskāras are mostly followed by Indian families. Among 16 saṁskāras garbhādhāna, puṁsavana,

śimantonnayana, annaprāśana, kaṛṇavedha, and vivāha can be considered women-centric. Other than these, the tradition of Haldi, Mehendi, sindūr, Bengal, kumkum, etc. in Vivāha saṁskāra are related to women and are heavily based on science.

There is a saying that 'mātā nirmātā bhavati', which means the mother is the creator. And so is true as she gives birth to a new life after nourishing the child in her womb with proper care. Actually, to originate life, it can never be a result of lust. Thus, the process of reproduction is considered a saṁskāra in Indian culture. To conceive a life in the womb is a noble deed. A woman or a would-be mother must have to be fit both physically as well as mentally to take care of a life that is growing. So our sage directs for the Garbhādhāna saṁskāra. This ritual is differently named in different Gṛhyasūtras [5]. In the Garbhādhāna saṁskāra, sacrifice is performed to resolve defects and to prepare a mother mentally. A doctor too advises a pregnant lady and her family to keep a happy atmosphere and away from stress. The same thing is done spiritually in Indian rituals. By uttering mantras the priest makes it easier. So, to ensure the healthy mother births a healthy baby, Garbhādhāna saṁskāra is necessary as it is the base of the next generation. It is a ritual from which we get qualified, quality-based, and ideal children. The conception i.e., garbhādhāna saṁskāra done through Veda mantras is a ritual that honors the body and strengthens the bonding of the body. There are specific dos and don'ts mentioned for performing this ritual.

Next to garbhādhāna after 3 or 4 months of conceiving, there is Puṁsavana saṁskāra. The word Puṁsavana means to give birth to a son. Son is derived as *punnāma narakāt trāyate iti putrah* [6]. That is why if we look at the word 'son' more carefully, the meaning is generally not to be male but to show the way to the world, to walk on the path of duty and devotion, who is marching ahead for the benefit of the society. If there had been a chance to have a son only, then any lame, dumb, deaf person would have satisfied the parents, but it is not so. This is a garbha (womb) saṁskāra [7]. On this day an auspicious time after praying Gaṇeśa, grind the new roots and leaves of the banyan tree with water along with the roots of kuśa and the husband uses that medicine with her right nostril. During this sacrament, Vedic mantras are chanted [8]. Due to the effect of such mantras, the flow of sonship flows into the mind of the woman and the signs of the male are produced in the body inside the womb. In this way, this ritual is performed for fatal affection.

The third sacrament of the womb is *Śimantonnayana*. The word *śimantonnayana* is derived as '*śimanta unniyate Yasmin karmaṇi tat śimantonnayanam*'. It means 'the act of grooming the hair of a pregnant woman'. The right is performed in the fourth, sixth, or eighth month of conception. The purpose of this ritual is to prevent miscarriage. The last three-four months are risky for fatal fractures. At this time, the child growing up in the womb becomes capable of learning [9]. After this sacrament, in it, good knowledge comes. For this,

<sup>5</sup> Baudhāyana 4.6.1, kāthaka 30.1

<sup>6</sup> पुन्नाम्नो नरकाद् यस्मात् पितरं त्रायते सुतः । तस्मात् पुत्र इति प्रोक्तः पितृन् यः पाति सर्वतः ॥ (वा.रा. २.१०७.१२)

वाचस्पत्यम् अभिधानेऽपि ।

<sup>7</sup> Āpastamba Gṛhyasūtra 6.14.9

<sup>8</sup> AtharvaVeda 3.23.4-6, Sāmaveda 1.4.7-9

<sup>9</sup> पञ्चमे मनः प्रतिबुद्धतरं भवति, षष्ठे बुद्धिः । (suśruta, śārīrasthāna, chapter 33)

<sup>2</sup> Pp.129, The family and the Nation

<sup>3</sup> Pp.130, ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Mahapragya, Acharya; A P J Abdul Kalam. The Family and the Nation (p. 131). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition

the mother behaves, thinks, lives, and tolerates in the same way. Psychology also believes that the mental state or condition during pregnancy has a great effect on the mind and brain of the child. The best example is Abhimanyu of Mahābhārata. We also find the example of Prahlāda, son of Hiraṇyakaśipu in the Purāṇas. One of its purposes is also believed to keep the pregnant woman free from the influence of invasive powers <sup>[10]</sup>. So the rituals for a pregnant woman have a scientific as well as psychological point of view.

Annaprāśana saṁskāra is necessary for the benefit of both the child and mother. Breastfeeding from the mother until the baby is normally five to six months old is crucial. That is why Annaprāśana saṁskāra should be performed in the sixth month from birth <sup>[11]</sup>. Later, when the baby grows, the mother's milk starts to decrease in its nutritional value. Therefore, this ritual is followed at the right time to separate the infant from drinking its mother's milk so that it can develop properly and not waste the physical strength of the mother <sup>[12]</sup>. When the child is six to seven months old and teething begins, digestive powers start to become strong, and then this ritual is performed. It is seen that whatever methods are mentioned in the scriptures at the time of Annaprāśana Saṁskāra, all of them are based on healthy medical practice in one way or the other.

The karṇavedha ritual is of more importance for better health than it is from a religious point of view. There is no mention in any Gṛhyasūtra concerning this ritual. Therefore, the recognition of this rite and the laws related to it appear to have originated in the modern period. The Suśruta Saṁhitā states that 'the ear of a child should be pierced for protection from diseases etc. and jewelry or ornamentation' <sup>[13]</sup>. Suśruta saṁhitā deals with it in a separate chapter as 'karṇa-vyadha-bandhVidhyaya-adhyāya' in sūtrasthāna. It is more commonly used in women by piercing the nose and ears for jewelry. But behind this lies the science. According to Āyurveda, piercing the ears causes one to bind such a disease, which does not have a disease called a hernia <sup>[14]</sup>. As data says Inguinal hernias are the most common type in both males and females; approximately 25% of males and 2% of females have an inguinal hernia throughout their lifetime. The male-to-female ratio for indirect inguinal hernia is 7:1. In a recent study by RJ Fitzgibbons Jr; Forse, RA on 19 Feb 2015 in his research "clinical practice Groin hernias in adults" at The New England Journal of Medicine mentioned that about 27% of males and 3% of females develop a groin hernia at some point in their lives. So, for inguinal or groin hernia the ratio/proportion is less in the case of women <sup>[15]</sup>. Apart from this, acupuncture occurs through ear piercing. This improves blood flow to the veins leading to the brain. This increases hearing power and prevents many diseases. With this sacrament, the mind becomes stable and focused. Because, it is very important that before the practice of learning begins, the mind's restlessness is reduced. All the metals we get

through excavation etc. in the world, are metals with extraordinary properties for jewelry, whose response not only affects beauty but also affects various diseases inside the body. There is a lot of science hidden behind wearing gold jewelry on the nose and ears. Piercing the nose and ears makes the movement of blood in the brain easy; keeping all the cells in the blood readily active. Also wearing jewelry on the nose facilitates breathing and protects against nasal diseases. Women, in particular, keep their menstruation regular by wearing ear ornaments. In this too, wearing gold jewelry is more beneficial. The progenitor is bright when the sun's rays are transmitted through the nostrils and ear holes. In addition to this, science says, paralysis can also be avoided. The use of gold and silver is very beneficial for the body. To prevent many diseases, there has been talked of Svarṇa Bhasma in Āyurveda. The friction of gold and silver in the form of ornaments in the body continuously, whether it is from the body's stems or while eating, enters the body and benefits from its properties. Therefore, the healing of the body through such rituals has been granted significant attention. This is why women are preached to be equipped with jewelry. The well-being of women is necessary for the development of society and the nation.

In Hindu rites, the marriage ceremony has the most important place among all rites. After the age of twenty-five years, the rite that gives religious and social legitimacy to the relationship between a woman and man to go to the Gṛhastha Āśrama is called the marriage ceremony. When we consider the scientific aspects of a marriage ceremony, then we should see and understand different rituals. Āśvalāyana says that along with classical laws and regulations, local traditions are also recognized, so they should also be followed <sup>[16]</sup>. In Hindu marriages, many traditions are followed starting with the Haldi ceremony to the Mehendi ceremony to the time when the bride gets ready with all the jewelry and also the sindoor or vermilion that is smeared on her forehead. These ancient customs have much reasoning and they also aim at bringing a holistic balance between the body, mind, and soul as they are. The method of applying turmeric to a bride and groom is usually done in the marriage ceremony. In this ceremony simply a paste of Haldi is applied to the bride. Turmeric has a lot of Ayurvedic properties hidden in it. Turmeric enhances organs. The traditional reason behind this is to fend off evil spirits from causing harm to the couple. But as always it has a scientific reason behind this. Turmeric is also called the 'wonder herb' for its medicinal properties. And this custom helps the body to receive the medicinal advantages of turmeric. Thus turmeric kills bacteria in the skin and makes it glow. The method of preparing turmeric varies across different societies. But the mixture has a moisturizing effect too. Mehendi is antiseptic. And it is something that women love a lot, because of its soothing properties. It also has a very cooling effect which takes away the stress of the bride as at the time of marriage she is so nervous. Mehendi is another way helpful to protect against fungal infection on the nail.

Sindūr or vermilion contains turmeric, lime, and a minute level of the metal mercury. When sindūr is applied to the bride's hair partition, the mercury cools down the body and makes her feel relaxed. It also triggers a sexual drive among them. And so widows or unmarried women are not allowed to put it on. Wearing bangles also helps to stay healthy as they put pressure on the acupressure points on the wrist. Also,

<sup>10</sup> पत्न्याः प्रथमजं गर्भमत्तुकामाः सुदुर्गभाः। आयान्ति कश्चिद्राक्षसो रुधिराशनतत्पराः ॥ तासां निरसनाथीय श्रियमावाहयेत् पतिः ।

सीमन्तकरणी लक्ष्मीस्तामावहति मन्त्रतः ॥ (Āśvalāyana Smṛti)

<sup>11</sup> Pāraskara gṛhyasūtra 1.19.1

<sup>12</sup> षण्मासञ्चैनमन्नं प्राशयेत्लघु हितं च (suśruta, śārīrasthāna 10.64)

<sup>13</sup> रक्षाभूषणनिमित्तं बालस्य कर्णौ विध्येत (16.3)

<sup>14</sup> शङ्खोपरि च कर्णान्ते त्यक्त्वा यत्नेन सेवनीम् । व्यत्यासाद्वा सिरां

विध्येदन्नवृद्धिनिवृत्तये ॥ (suśruta, cikitsāsthāna 19.24)

<sup>15</sup> En.m.wikipedia.org

<sup>16</sup> अथ खल्वावचा जनपदधर्मा ग्रामधर्माश्च तन्विवाहे प्रतीयात् (Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtra 1.7.1)

friction improves blood circulation. In many Indian societies, it is mandatory to wear rings on the bride's second toe called *bichiyā*. A nerve there connects to the heart, passing by the uterus. And so it is believed that it regulates the menstrual cycle and makes the uterus stronger. Another belief states that the ring conducts polar energy from earth to body since they are silver-based and silver is a good conductor.

These rituals have various forms and additions in different castes. For example, given the fact the bride and groom do not have any problem with the stomach, in some caste societies at the time of marriage; they are fed only sweet food or sweets for two to three days. Spicy or tempering vegetables are avoided so that they do not become ill and there is nothing inauspicious in the auspicious work.

### Conclusion

It is found from the study that taking vermilion (*sindūr*), applying kumkum, wearing bangles, keeping fast, etc. is not in any way ridiculous but is completely scientific. Traditions like everything from kumkum on the forehead to the *bichiyā* of the feet; including various fasts are for the preservation of a woman's best health and nature. Many invaders had tried hard to hurt the root of the culture and its rich heritage in the past. But the world is again returning to the knowledge of India. Due to the knowledge of sages people in the society were able to attain healthy and long life. In the field of knowledge and science, the sages spent their entire time only for the benefit of man by tying the society in law, customs, traditions celebrations, rules, etc. The all-around development of human personality is the purpose of rituals. Although these *saṁskāras* have been practiced in our society for ages, in the modern age of technology and scientific progress their importance has not reduced in the least and they are most relevant to the present age. If we can identify the real goal of these traditions, then our society and nation surely will proceed toward development.

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