

I'm not a bot























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According to the Jainmī Sūtra, it means an act ‘done to attain a specific qualification or eligibility’. For example, the Vivaha Samskara (marriage rite) qualifies a person to enter into Grahasthashrama (Life of a householder).Samskaras are described for simple routine practices such as washing dishes to the most important ones like marriage. To simplify further, Samskaras are nothing but living in harmony with nature, according to our sastras. These are not just dry rituals as assumed by the unsophisticated, unscholarly, benighted people with short sight. They were created by our great Rishis and Gurus to purify and discipline individuals. When Samskaras are used as a template in our everyday activity, we obtain elevated social status; lead a full-fledged life according to the dictates of the scriptures, thereby living in continuous harmony with our environment.The great Rishis and Gurus understood the importance of these Samskaras and prescribed them so that every soul can obtain a higher dignity and the person can lead a civilised social life. Various Smritis and Dharmashastras mention different kinds and numbers of Samskaras. The most popular Manusmriti mentions 10 Samskaras. Later, there were further additions.At present, there are 16 prominent Samskaras. They are Garbhadhana (conception), Poomsava, Seemantanayanaman (done between 3-6 months of pregnancy), Jathakarana (at the time of birth), Namakarana (naming ceremony), Nishkramaan (First outing of child), Annaprashna (first solid food), Chudakarana (tonsure), Karanabheda (ear piercing), Vidyarambha (starting primary education at home), Upanayana (initiation ceremony) or Deeksha, Vedarambha (starting Vedic education), Keshanta (hair cutting and Gura Dakshina), Samavartan (deciding to enter household life), Vivaha (marriage) and Antheshti (after death).Samskaras, it can be observed, in today’s materialistic existence, have gone into oblivion. Most practising Hindus or Dharmics, do not observe them all in the manner described and prescribed in the Sastras. We come across mostly Upanayana and Vivaha these days, and to a lesser extent, Seemanta and Vidyarambham.Even these Samskaras, and the way they are practised, lack Vedic inputs. They are mostly done for publicity and to exhibit the wealth of the kartas. The rite of Garbhadhana, the samskara before birth, is falling into oblivion. The reason this Samskara was done at the time of impregnation was to invoke the blessings of God and to beget a good soul. According to Sanatana Dharma, every soul is given a choice before birth to choose its parents. By performing Garbhadhana, the parents invoke the wise, pious and less karmic soul to be born as their child, thereby elevating their nobility and reducing karmic debt. But in today’s world, such a concept will be laughed out. The concept of a karta chanting a mantra to beget a noble soul as his child is long forgotten today.Similarly, Pumsavana and Seemantanayana are totally forgotten or not done at the right time in pregnancy, leave alone the Vedic mantras behind it. Pumsavana is better understood by appreciating the fact that pregnant Rani Kayadu, wife of the demon king Hiranyakashipu, takes refuge in Narada’s ashrama where the already-conceived child in her womb listens to Narayana Tattva. We all know how the child, Prahlada, turns out to be – one of the parama bhaktas of Mahavishnu.Seemantanayana is better understood today through studies on Japanese and Jewish havahat in pregnancy. In gist, ‘‘a happy, pregnant lady has better chances of a safe pregnancy, and begetting a healthy child.’’Namakarana and Annaprashna are observed scantily and are devoid of any citations from the Vedic texts. The whole affair today is strictly materialistic in design, unless of course, they are done in traditional temples such as Mookambika of Kollur or Srisaileam of Andhra Pradesh or Guruvayoor of Kerala (Temples we can remember immediately).In most cases, the Caula (first cutting of hair of a male child) is performed on the day of the Upanayana and Samavartana is also performed a few days after Upanayana. Even for anthesht, today, there are abridged versions as the karta has no time to spare for the departed soul. This is the sad state of Samskaras and Sanatana Dharma today.Now, why are we in this situation? Are Samskaras irrelevant in modern times?Let us look at why this question arises in the first place. Can there be anything in the sastras which can become irrelevant over time? The simple answer is ‘never’. These practices have been there for thousands of years. Then, why is that we find no references to them now? Why is not enjoying the fact that even today in mind and spirit, Hindu’s believe in the importance of the Vedic tradition. Then, what has made them indifferent to these practices?There are two main reasons, which are interrelated. First, century after century, this tradition has been subjected to cultural attacks and molestations from rival religious schools. The advent of Islam in India eclipsed Hindu culture and in the may part of the country, politics and economic frauds probably prevented the Hindus from performing their religious rites in totality, which probably necessitated the abridged versions in the first place. A few orthodox families persisted with them at great risk. Every Hindu must read this link on Hindu persecution.Secondly, in the recent decades, the more modern impact of materialism inherent to western culture, along with evangelical manipulation, have attacked Hinduism at the very roots of Dharma. Through weapons like an anglicised Macaulay’s educational system and foreign media of instruction (they have complete control on what goes into the minds of people), the church has been fairly successful in alienating a large number of Hindus from their traditional, value-based system of life, both intellectually and emotionally. Hindus are not able to appreciate their loss as they have no sense of what they are losing.Due to this constant onslaught on Sanatana Dharma, the previous generations lost valuable knowledge about our tradition. With a decreasing number of scholars who could reason out each and every ritual, faith in rituals started fading gradually. However, previous generations still followed it because their parents followed it.Today, as life moves on in a hasty, unrelenting pace, people hardly have time to devote themselves to acts which have no bearing on material gains. When one has to think always in terms of profit and materialism in this world, it is natural that spiritual life is bound to be overlooked. Worse still, it has made the neo-converts of Hindu ancestry hostile towards the traditional life of our country, sceptical and intolerant of anything remotely spiritual and religious.Another issue which the current generation faces is that the previous generations were not able to provide ‘‘proof of benefit’’ of rituals or the rationale behind them in an acceptable form, to the younger generation.Any Samskara has three components: 1)Pravayam (Vedic mantras), the Kriya (ritual) and the Antheshti (post-ritual).Deficient in any of these three elements, a Samskara is not an effective one. However, the most important of them is the Antheshti, which has the most powerful impact. The purpose of the Antheshti, century after century, this tradition has been subjected to cultural attacks and molestations from rival religious schools. 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