



# Upanayana Saṁskāra Vis-A-Vis Sandhyāvandanam for Refined Personality

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**Abstract.** Upanayana saṁskāra (thread ceremony), one among the Ṣoḍaṣa saṁskāras (sixteen ritual) described in Indian culture - Hindu philosophy, is the right through which a man is initiated into the vows of the guru, the Vedas (wisdom), the restrains (penance), observances, values and vicinity of God (ideals). It is an important saṁskāra performed in the crucial adolescent age of an individual, with a view to boost the physical, psychological, moral, social and spiritual life of an individual. In the present scenario, the increasing use of modern gadgets, indiscreet use of social media, inadequate moral education have resulted in lowered concentration levels, diminished memory, deteriorating practical skills besides increased stress-anxiety-depression levels in adolescents.

Upanayana saṁskāra is being observed just as a symbolic ceremony in most part of the society who perform it, while only very selected few have understanding of the core intention of it as included in the ancient Indian classics. This article is an earnest attempt to briefly apprehend and analyze a few aspects of the Upanayana saṁskāra such as the season and time of performance, the age, the Kaupīna, Yagnopavita, Sandhyāvandanam, Gāyatri japa and such others and their contribution in enhancing the physical, intellectual, psychological and social wellbeing with specific reference to Indian classical Vedic literature. As Vedic literature strongly described, meaningful performance of Upanayana saṁskāra followed by regular practice of Sandhyāvandanam will not only enhance scholastic performance but also bring about comprehensive development of an individual and discipline in the society.

**Keywords.** Upanayana saṁskāra, Sandhyāvandanam, Comprehensive development, Refined personality

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## Introduction

India, the salient land of ancient civilizations, has been the abode of Sanātana dharma, more often than not referred as Hindu dharma, considered as its core component and earnest, esteemed essence. Sanātana dharma, obscurely translated to imply “the natural, ancient and eternal way”, is much more than just a religion, is a code of ethics, a way of living with a coherent and rational view of reality, as Dharma includes three components – ethics, metaphysics and spirituality. Sanātana dharma is the world’s most ancient culture and the socio, spiritual, and religious tradition which has been alleviating man off his sufferings, with a view to aid him in the attainment of the fourfold bliss – Dharma, Artha, Kāma and ultimately and utmost importantly, Moksha (enlightenment, liberation).

India, the bedrock of benevolence has also been the backbone of the ancient wisdom, with exuberant and empirical knowledge bases such as vyākaraṇa, saṅgīta, nāṭya, shilpa, vāstu śāstra, Āyurveda and such others. Many of these knowledge forms extensively and exceptionally owe their origin and development to the Vedas, the universally recognized primary sources of Indian culture - Hindu Dharma. The Vedas are the venerable, vast, virtuous, valuable sources of knowledge, in all its forms. Considering the difficulty in apprehending and analyzing the authentic attributes of the Vedas, the ancient rishis, with their sense of enquiry, expertise and experience explored and extracted the Vedic wisdom, like extracting a precious metal from ore. The teachings were later elaborately explained and exceptionally exemplified for the benefit of common man, under the aegis of Upanishads, Sūtra, Smṛtis, Puranas and such others.

The Vedas, the Brāhmanas, the Gṛhyasūtras, Dharmasūtras, the Smṛtis and numerous other treatises illuminate, illustrate and interpret the importance of absolute harmony in thought (mānasa), word (vācika) and deed (kāyaka) of an individual in accomplishing him to become principled, pure and perfect. The scriptures describe numerous rites, ceremonies and customs to be performed and pursued, beginning from the time of conception until the death of an individ-

ual, in a disseminated manner, which are commonly and conventionally considered as ‘Vaidika Saṃskāras’. The Vaidika Saṃskāras, thus, facilitate the development of an individual into a total person. This article is an earnest attempt to apprehend, analyze and amalgamate the various attributes of Hindu saṃskāras in general and Upanayana saṃskāra in particular, for the promotion of peace, purity of thoughts, perfection in deeds and prosperity of the society.

## Saṃskāras – definition and significance

‘Saṃskāras’ obscurely expressed and explained as ‘sacraments’ of Hindu philosophy, often refer to the religious purificatory rites and ceremonies for sanctifying the body, mind and intellect of an individual, so that he becomes a full-fledged member of the community. The word ‘Saṃskāra’ can be etymologically elucidated to comprise of सम् उपसर्ग कृ धातु धन् प्रत्यय [1] its implications including and indicating several meanings such as i) purification [2], ii) preparation or purification of Havis or oblation for the Gods [3], iii) an act which makes a certain thing or a person fit for some purpose [4], iv) education, v) cultivation, vi) training, vii) a purificatory rite or ceremony to change the qualities or intrinsic worth and so on. Āyurveda, the science of life and the ancient Indian art of holistic medicine defines saṃskāra as “Saṃskārao hi guṇāntardhānam” and describes it as the instrument which initiates qualitative improvement by incorporating specific qualities [5].

Saṃskāras, the authentic attributes of the Hindu faith which initially indicated the specific, special qualities secured [atishaya vishesha], were subsequently assumed to signify the very ritual or ceremony by itself. And also, Saṃskāras are assumed to accomplish two things to an individual; ‘doṣāpanayanam’ that is elimination of physical and mental impurities in addition to ‘Guṇāvadhānam’ the one which aims at adding special virtues or ātma guṇās.

As saṃskāras imbibe new and noble qualities, the entire life style of an individual can be contemplated to be a process of saṃskāra, with

every stage of life being envisioned, expressed and made evident by a particular saṃskāra. Thus, the saṃskāras, having been perceived to present purity and positivity are postulated to be an integral part of one's life, from the time of conception up to his death.

Despite the fact that there are numerous ancient classics which describe and delineate the substance and significance of saṃskāras, the Gṛhyasūtras and Dharmasūtras are considered to be the most legitimate treatises. The texts acknowledge the existence of two principal types of saṃskāras, i.e. i) Daiva saṃskāras (the sacrifices; pāka yagnya, havi yagnya) and ii) Brahma saṃskāras (the ceremonies performed at various occasions in the life of an individual) [6].

The deflection and distinction in different treatises, with respect to the enumeration of the Saṃskāras, extending from the Garbhādāna (conception) to Antyeṣṭi (funeral) saṃskāra, is evident and can be summarized as follows [7]: • the Vedic literature refers to 3 main saṃskāras, Upanayana (the initiation), Vivaha (the marriage), and Antyeṣṭi (the last rites) • the Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtra mentions the number of saṃskāras to be 11 • the Pāraskara, the Baudhāyana and the Varaha Gṛhyasūtras mention 13 saṃskāras each • the Vaikhānasa Gṛhyasūtra gives a list of 18 saṃskāras • the Gautama Dharmasūtra gives a list of 40 saṃskāras • as per Manu Smṛti, the number of saṃskāras is 13

The variation in the total number of saṃskāra as in different texts reflects the prevalence of Sanskar at the respective era and might also reflect difference in the various Vedic teaching schools (Ved Shakha). However, the term 'Ṣoḍaṣa saṃskāra' has gained wide acceptability, enumerating 16 very important saṃskāras in the life of an individual, from Garbhādāna (conception) to Antyeṣṭi (funeral) saṃskāra.

## Upanayana Sanskar

### Definition and implications

'Upanayana' saṃskāra is one among the 'Ṣoḍaṣa saṃskāras' and its indispensable inclusion in the various classifications of saṃskāras authenticate its importance. The literary conception of the word 'Upanayana' being 'taking

near' or 'leading to' or 'initiating', it can be etymologically defined and described as; अध्ययनार्थम् आचार्यस्य उप समीपं नीयते एन कर्मणा इति ॥ उप + नी ल्युट् [8]

Upanayana saṃskāra can further be cited and comprehended as; i) the rite through which the child is taken to the teacher [9], ii) introducing the novice to the stage of student hood, iii) rite by which a boy is able to realize Gāyatri mantra [10], iv) one of the most important rituals to acquire knowledge of the Vedas [11], vi) rite of passage by which a boy entered the first stage of 'Aśrama dharma' and obtained 'dvijatva' or second birth, vii) the ceremony for the investiture of the sacred thread by which act, spiritual birth was supposed to be conferred on a child.

A comprehensive connotation of Upanayana saṃskāra thus sites it as 'the right through which a man is initiated into the vows of the guru, the Vedas, the restrains, observances and vicinity of God'. Thus, Upanayana Sanskar brings one from ignorance to wisdom, new life supporting the vedic hymn "जन्मना जायते शुद्रः संस्कारात् द्विज उच्यते | Janmana Jayate Shudrah, Sanskaraat dwij uchatye ||' – One is born in ignorance, though Sanskar (virtues) ones become *Dwij* (superior).

Upanayana saṃskāra marks the commencement of the first stage of life, the Brahmacharya aśrama and precedes the disciplined, dynamic association in the second stage, the Gruhastha aśrama. The saṃskāra which was initially organized in a simple manner, developed as a comprehensive ritual as described in the Gṛhyasūtras, thus, being reckoned as an important epoch in the life of a 'dvija', the twice born (birth of new pure and refined personality).

Upanayana instigated the imperative time to acquire knowledge, dedication, devotion and discipline in life. It played a pivotal role in sculpting the physical, psychological, moral, social and spiritual life of an individual.

### Important aspects of Upanayana Sanskar for personality refinement

With a change in the consideration of the saṃskāra from its educational concerns to ceremonial considerations, numerous enactments

are proposed and practiced, thus making this saṃskāra associated with adolescence gain and substantial social significance. The apprehension and analysis of a few aspects associated with this saṃskāra can be as follows;

*i) ideal time and age for the ceremony*

Spring season is the ideal time for Upanayana saṃskāra, which symbolises rebirth, renewal, hope, youthfulness and hope is considered to be auspicious for the performance of Upanayana saṃskāra of all individuals [12]. The period when the sun is in the northern hemisphere (ut-tarāyaṇa), the bright half (Śukla - Pakṣa) of a month and the five months starting from Māgha were all considered to be favorable for initiation, as they were regarded as representations of the brightness of knowledge and learning.

Eight or eleven or twelve years, as per the cāturvarṇya system of the earlier days can be understood to be as per the intellectual capacity of children; intermediate options allowed considering the uniqueness of every child.

*ii) Kaupīna, girdle and Danda*

Kaupīna is given to the child as encouragement to observe social decorum and maintain

own dignity and self-respect while the cloths are given by Acharya represents the bond of protection established between the teacher and the student being initiated.

The Girdle used in ceremony is the symbol of purity and strength. The girdle tied around the waist of the child thought to protect own purity and to obtain strength.

The Daṇḍa or the staff given to the child symbolized one as the guardian of the Vedas, the protector of the social order. The different woods used as Danda such as palāśa, bilva, badara, udumbara, nyagrodha have their own symbolic and spiritual importance besides their medicinal values

*iii) Yagyopavita and relation with Gayatri Mantra*

The sacred thread used in the ceremony is called as Yagyopavit. The scripture described : the length of Yagyopavit as ninety-six times the breadth of the four fingers of a man. the four fingers representing the four parts of the Yagyopavit i.e. one knot and three thread (Figure 1).

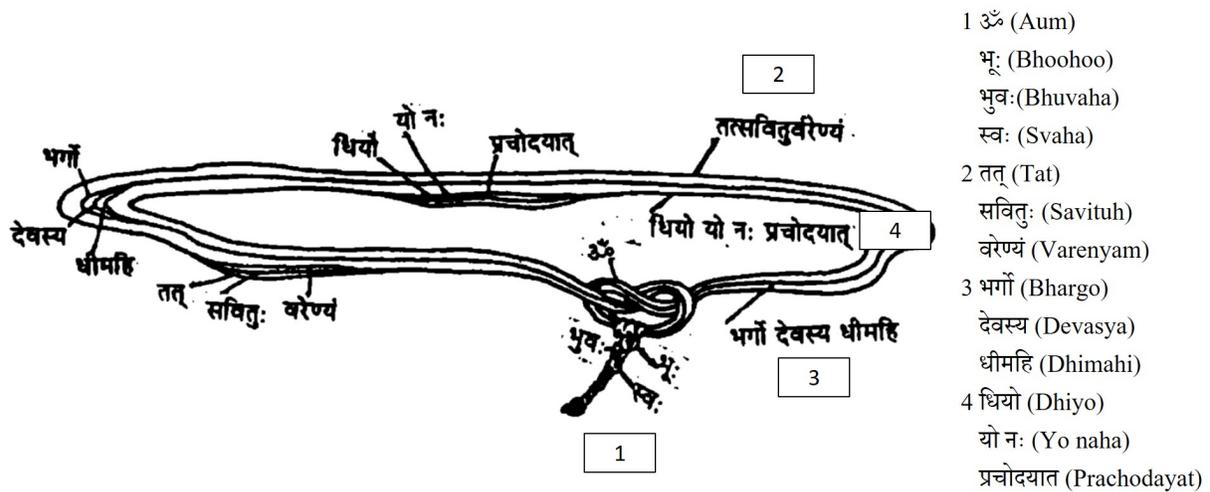


Figure 1: Yagyopavit represented as Gayatri Mantra

Yagyopavit Parts	Gayatri Mantra	Virtues
Main knot (Brahmagranthi)	Aum	Almighty : Theism Is The Root Of Sanatan Dharma
Three Granthi	Bhoohoo	Self-Realization
	Bhuvaha	Karma-Yoga
	Svaha	Sthitpragya
First Thread	Tat	Lifemanship
	Savituh	Mightiness
	Varenyam	Superiority
Second Thread	Bhargo	Serenity
	Devasya	Divine Vision
	Dhimahi	Virtue
Third Thread	Dhiyo	Discriminative Wisdom
	Yo naha	Self-Restraint
	Prachodayat	Service

Table 1: Symbol and virtue of Yagyopavit and Gayatri Mantra.

Each thread is consists of 3 sub-thread. The thread and knot has symbolic and spiritual meaning as described in Figure 1 and Table 1. The three folds of the cord represents the Trigunas and 3 parts of Gayatri Mantra (Tripada) i.e. i) Tatsaviturvarenyam, ii) Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi, iii) Dhiyo yo naha Prachodayat (Figure 1). Figure 1 depicts that Yagopavit is physical presentation of Gayatri Mantra. After Upanayana Sanskar the student lives the life and gradually imbibes 24 virtues of Gayatri Mantra to become *Dwij* with purified and refined personality. The three cords (thread) and one knot (brahmagranthi) reminds the student constantly for the vow taken.

The Gāyatri mantra occurs in all four vedas i.e. R̥gveda , Yajurveda, Sāma Veda and Atharva Veda. It is a prayer to the almighty supreme in form of sun (savita). Gayatri Mantra is supposed to be recited ritualistically at dawn, midday and dusk. There are 24 letters of Gayatri Mantra, 9 words, and 4 phrases. Spiritually chanting of Gayatri Mantra provides vibrations to 24 spiritual centers present in human body for aiding awakening of 24 divine virtues as described in Table 1.

Yagyopavit is worn by the student during Upanayana Sanskar which is the start of the Vedic Study and in this process one becomes *Dwij*

(pure with wisdom as new life from ignorance). In the ritual, Gayatri Mantra is given to the student being initiated. Gayatri is considered as Guru Mantra. It is required for the student to practice quality of Gayatri as from Yagyopavit Sanskar. The practice to become *Dwij* is whole life and every moment but specifically a ritual is performed daily twice as Sandhyāvandanam [13].

#### iv) Sandhyāvandanam

The term literarily represents ‘Salutation to the goddess of Dawn and dusk’; the ritual of Sandhyāvandanam includes Ācamanam, Dhyāna, Prāṇāyāma (Pūraka, Kumbhaka, Rechaka), Mārjanam, Nyāsa (Aṅga Nyāsa and Kara Nyāsa), Mudrās, Bandhas, Gāyatri japa, Agnihotra...etc., Various procedures of nyāsa in Sandhyāvandanam is described in vedic literature. One of them involves touching 12 different parts of the body invoking divine virtues in the same by touching with finger tips. The tips of the fingers are said to be terminal points of Prana. The nyāsa (AṅgaNyāsa, KaraNyāsa and such others) is the spiritual process to activate divine virtues and vital centers of the body and mind for preparing oneself before chanting of Gayatri Mantra to have refined personality..

Upanayana samskāra and initiation for Sandhyāvandanam is done for *Dwijatva* i.e. to

have refined personality. The dynamics of Upanayana saṃskāra vis-à-vis Sandhyāvandanam brings positive multifaceted changes in one's life [13] and can be discerned, and demonstrated to bestow salubrious souvenirs in terms of i) physical wellbeing i.e. immunity, stamina, etc, ii) intellectual progression i.e. increase in medhā śakti, dhi, dhṛuti, Smṛti and psychological wellbeing i.e. bestowing tranquility, increased concentration, strong will power, iii) social wellbeing i.e. simplicity, discipline, self-respect individually and collectively. These multifaceted outcome is achieved once virtues of Gayatri Mantra is implanted in life through upanayana saṃskāra and sandhyāvandanam and are practiced in life i.e. self-realization, karma-yoga, self-control, lifemanship, mightiness, superiority, serenity, divine vision, virtue, discriminative wisdom, self-restraint, service (Table 1).

Upanayana saṃskāra and initiation for Sandhyāvandanam refines the personality. Hence resulted pure consciousness portrays similarities between an individual and nature and proving that individual is a part of nature and not separate from it [loka puruṣa sāmyata]. Also it helps in the journey i.e. creation of consciousness towards the stage of life; for example, after upanayana brahmacharyaśrama, after vivāha gruhasthāśrama; development of sanctity for life itself. Finally, the process leads to spiritual wellbeing which helps keep the consciousness awake to the almighty-truth and establishes harmony with nature.

## Discussion and Conclusion

It is crucial and consequential to note that sincerity and steadfastness in performing any ritual without the proper perception of its principles and purport result in the incurring of heavy expenditure. Logical, legitimate and lawful spreading of the principles, practice and precise knowledge of the Vedas enables even the destitute and deprived classes to earnestly and enthusiastically perform and participate in the performance of the saṃskāras.

Upanayana saṃskāra and initiation for Sandhyāvandanam exists in Indian culture as core practice. Personality development and improve-

ment in scholastic performance as a consequence of Upanayana saṃskāra are the benchmarks which demand further apprehension and analysis.

In the present scenario, the quality of education, the learning standards and the safety and efficacy of students at the institutions have always been matters of chief concern. Lowered concentration levels, diminished memory, deteriorating practical skills besides increased stress-anxiety-depression levels, obscured orientation and many more which may be considered as the pessimistic consequences of inconsiderate, inappropriate implementation of contemporary education system, improper and increasing use of modern gadgets, indiscreet use of social media, inadequate moral education and ignorance towards social responsibilities. It is at this instant of time that the importance of Upanayana Saṃskāra in general and Sandhyāvandanam in particular can be apprehended, analyzed and appreciated. They not only instigate the imperative time to acquire knowledge, dedication, devotion and discipline in life but also play a pivotal role in sculpting the physical, psychological, moral, social and spiritual life of an individual.

It can be thus concluded that Upanayana Saṃskāra is a regenerative symbolic ceremony of immense importance. Explicating and establishing the realisms in the Vedic classics with modern parameters, is however, the need of the hour.

**Compliance with ethical standards** Not required.

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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