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KUMAR TRIPATHI

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Sanskara (IAST: *saṃskāra*, sometimes spelled *samskara*) are rites of passage in a human being's life described in ancient Sanskrit texts, as well as a concept in the karma theory of Indian philosophies.^{[1][2][3]} The word literally means "putting together, making perfect, getting ready, to prepare", or "a sacred or sanctifying ceremony" in ancient Sanskrit and Pali texts of India.^[4]

In the context of karma theory, Sanskara are dispositions, character or behavioral traits, that exist as default from birth or prepared and perfected by a person over one's lifetime, that exist as imprints on the subconscious according to various schools of Hindu philosophy such as the Yoga school.^{[3][5]} These perfected or default imprints of karma within a person, influences that person's nature, response and states of mind.^[3]

In another context, Sanskara refers to the diverse rites of passage in Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism.^{[2][6][7]} In Hinduism, the *sanskaras* vary in number and details according to regional traditions. They range from the list of 40 *sanskaras* in the *Gautama Dharmasutra* from about the middle of 1st millennium BCE,^[8] to 16 *sanskaras* in the *Grhyasutra* texts from centuries later.^{[1][9]} The list of *sanskaras* in Hinduism include both external rituals such as those marking a baby's birth and a baby's name giving ceremony, as well as inner rites of resolutions and ethics such as compassion towards all living beings and positive attitude.^[8]



Etymology and meaning

Samṣkāra (Sanskrit: संस्कार) has various context driven meanings, that broadly refer to "the putting together, accomplishing well, making perfect, a form of solemn recognition and getting ready, engaging in works and acknowledging the purification of body by cleansing or mind by education or an object by a process (such as polishing a gem or refining a metal)".^[4] The term appears in the Śrutis, and in the Smritis of diverse schools of Hinduism as well as the texts of Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism.^{[4][6]} The etymological roots of the word *samskara* when it refers to rites of passage, is also "preparation, purifying, perfecting" from one's past state to one's future state.^[1]

The word *samskara* is rare in oldest layer of Vedic literature, but its roots *sam* and *kr* occur often enough.^[10] The word appears in Rig Veda hymns 6.28.4 and 8.33.9, as well as other Vedic texts, where the context suggests it simply means "purify, prepare". It appears in Jaimini Purvamimamsa-sutra (500-200 BCE) many times, where it again means "prepare, perfect, polish" something, either through action, speech or mind.^{[10][11]} In sections 3.8.3, 9.3.25 and 10.2.49 of the Jaimini Purvamimamsa-sutra, the word *sanskara* is used to describe actions of "washing the teeth, shaving the head, cutting nails, sprinkling water" as part of a ceremony.^[10] Samskara is defined by ancient Indian scholar Shabara as, "that which prepares a certain thing or person fit for a certain purpose".^[11] Another ancient text Viramitrodaya defines *samskara*, notes Kane, as "a peculiar excellence due to performance of certain actions which resides in the soul or the body of the actor".^[10]

Sanskara in Hindu traditions, states Kane, have been ceremonies, with the expression of outward symbols or signs of inner change, marking life events of significance. They served a spiritual, cultural and psychological purpose, welcoming an individual into a stage of life, conferring privileges to the individual(s), expecting duties from the individual, and impressing on the individual as well individual's social circle of his or her new role.^[12]

Sanskāra, in modern usage, is sometimes used to mean "cultural, social or religious heritage".^[13]

Samskara as a psychological concept

In the context of karma theory, Samskara are dispositions, character or behavioral traits either as default from birth (previous lives in some schools of Hinduism), or Samskara are behavioral traits perfected over time through Yoga, through conscious shaping of inner self, one's desire, sense of moral responsibility and through practice.^{[3][5]} In some schools of Hinduism, the psychological concept of Samskara is also known as vāsanā.^{[14][15]}

These are viewed as traces or temperament that evolves through the refinement of an individual inner consciousness and expressed personality, and is a form of "being-preparedness" in Vedantic psychology.^[3] In Samkhya and Yoga schools, Samskara – also spelled as Samksara – are impressions or residues that affect an individual's Gunās (behavior attributes). In Nyaya school of Hinduism, not all Samskara are psychological.^[3] Rites of passage, other actions, studies, diligent preparation and inner resolutions trigger impressions or dispositions in the psyche of an individual, in these schools of Hinduism, and these influence how the individual acts, perceives self and the manner in which the individual responds to or accepts the karmic circumstances and the future.^[16]