

SEMINAR ON SAṂSKĀRAS

APRIL 9th & 10th 1998

A REPORT BY
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First Session [9.4.1998]

A Seminar on Hindu *Sam̐skāras*, as laid down by the *Mānava* or *Sanātana Dharma* was held in the auditorium of the *Jñāna-Pravāha*, Centre for Cultural Studies on April 9th and 10th, 1998. Distinguished local scholars both representing different streams of *Mānava* and *Śrāvaka Dharma* on one hand and diverse religions like Catholic Christianity and Islam on the other, participated. The audience consisted of scholars and interested people. Prof. (Km.) Prem Lata Sharma, was in the Chair.

Dr. I. Panduranga Rao inaugurated the seminar by lighting the lamp. The seminar started with invocation by Prof. (Km.) Urmila Sharma.

While welcoming the guest-speakers and the audience, Prof. K.N. Mishra gave an introduction of the *Jñāna-Pravāha*, Centre for Cultural Studies, its aims and objectives and a brief account of its activities during its first year of existence. He proceeded to set the tenor of the Seminar with Kashi as the backdrop. The sacred city symbolized the collective wisdom and tradition of the *Sanātana Dharma* in its intensive sensibilities. The *Dharma* is *Sanātana* or Eternal but is continually absorbed in the form of the teachers.

The Seminar aimed at reaching an understanding of the *Sam̐skāras* with objectivity and to view the concept vis-a-vis similar concepts, as prevalent in other religions without imposing one view upon the other since

Samskāras aim at 'refinement' from 'rawness' ('saṃskṛti' from 'prakṛti'). Such an awareness would lead to *kalyāṇa* ('welfare' auspicated prosperity). The exercise needs to address the present day life-style and project *Samskāra* 's relevance to the modern man.

There is a need to plan authentic audio material to reach out to inner pockets of our society to create an awareness for the *Samskāras* especially where exponents are non-available. The *Jñāna-Pravāha* would like to endeavour in this direction.

Pt. Ram Yatna Shukla, formerly Professor, Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, Banaras, was called upon to give his presentation. Pt. Shukla went deep into the etymology of the term *saṃskāra* with its different grammatical constructions. He observed that it should be first *kṛta*, but basing on *Pradīpa Kara*, it is *bahula* or 'long' or *vṛddhi* that is *kṛta* with *sam* (prefix) or *bhūṣaṇa* or 'improvement'. Thus we arrive at the word *Samskāra* or *Śuddhi* or *guṇādhāna* (broadly, improvement) or *utkarṣa* (heightening). The principal objective of the *Samskāras* is unification between *jīvātman* and *Paramātman* whatever is instrumental in this process is *Samskāra*.

The five-fold element-human body (*Śarīra*) being the agent, is to be 'purified' through *Samskāras*, since it is exposed to impurities. He also emphasised the *Bhakti* element in the process of 'improvement' in this world and leading to the next world.

The next speaker was Rev. Fr. Patrick D'Souza, Bishop of Varanasi. He dwelt upon Christian sacraments, parallel to Hindu *Samskāras*. The Father Bishop observed that by referring to *Samskāras* of other religions, one can have a better understanding of ones own *Samskāras*. There needs to be a comparative study of the *Samskāras* (sacraments) yet here he chose only to have an objective discourse on Christian sacraments which are seven in number, known since the Holy Bible times and were developed in later

times. Lord Christ preached these as means of Salvation. One has to know the obvious forms to understand what is beyond the obvious but to know the beyond, one has to know the physical forms. Christian sacraments over the centuries underwent modification. Birth, marriage and death are basic sacraments. But the weak or sinner also needs means for salvation as instituted by Lord Christ and other means of Salvation as prescribed by the Church. Reading of sacred texts, prayers etc. are similarly means of Salvation but these are not Sacraments. Sacraments are meant for the entire humanity. They are both visible and invisible, the invisible part in the divine life is to bring us closer to God. Invisible is the Divine Grace but one has to qualify to receive Grace. Sacraments are instrumental causes. These are performed by the authorised priests and under given rules and also through faith.

There are modifications due to social, anthropological and historical reasons and also influence of local religions. By way of interactions among different religions, each of us would be enriching our self in our understanding.

Replying to Prof. K.N. Mishra, Rev. Father said that Emancipation as a concept in Christianity was to absolve sin and reach out to Holy Father. He also agreed that 'confession' was a Sacrament.

Next Dr. Raghunath Giri, Former Professor and Head of Department of Philosophy, M.G. Kashi Vidyapeeth, dwelt upon the term '*Sam̐skāra*' in different contexts.

Prof. Giri's personal conclusion was that *Sam̐skāras* stood for change. Changes are usually normal and developmental while at times, they are detrimental. Here, *Sam̐skāra* is developmental and applied with motivation. *Sam̐skāra* is applied both to an individual or an object. In case of an individual, involvement of both the performer and the 'subject' (i.e. The object of the *Sam̐skāra*) is called for. An individual can achieve development by his own efforts for his improvement.

He also gave a good bibliography of the publications on *Samskāras* and their objectives. Similarly there was a need to assess the *Samskāra* on the basis of physical experiences. Perhaps ancient people knew the import of *mantras*, *Ośadhīs* (sacred herbs) and *kriyā* (rituals).

Now we have lost these traditions. These *Samskāras* were therefore relevant to that age, not in the present context when these traditions are lost. Some of the *Samskāras* are relevant sociologically like birth, *nāmakaraṇa*, wedding, or the funeral rituals. Others are obsolete. Therefore, the scholars might evolve new *Samskāras*, relevant to our age. *Samskāras* like *Pumsavana Samskāra* are not rational and relevant to the present age.

Dr. Rajiv Ranjan Singh of S.S.V., Varanasi, said that he would present his own interpretation on *Samskāras*, which are directly related to man, and are similarly related to *Dharma*. The Egocentric being is an animal whether it is two-legged or quadruped. The two extremes are represented by *Paśu* and *Pati*. *Paśu* strives for *pati* which is the crux of the *Paśu-Pati* concept. We decide do's and don't's which are laid down in all religions and by para-subjective 'personage', who have a vision of that truth. The preceptor in our country is not king but one who has attained, *Āpta* (para-subjective) and *Parama Kāruṇika* which spreads the knowledge. The source is the *Vedas* which give us four-fold knowledge but here we are concerned with do's and don't's beyond dualism *Vidhi-niṣedha*, *Parisaṁkhyā*, *Artha-vāda*, the *Karma-kāṇḍa* turns into *Jñāna-Kāṇḍa* finally leading to *bhakti*.

Samskāra is not a commodity but is an outcome of a long tradition. The do's of the *Karma-Kāṇḍa* are distinguished from Allah's precepts as final or Bible's forbidden fruits which polluted us. Even a *Śāpa* (curse) is for *Pari-mārjana* (for betterment).

The *Āśrama-dharma* has a logic. *Samskāra* parallels it, striving for betterment and truth (*ṛta*). According to *Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya*, the right-minded effort leads to *Dharma*. Since there was *anīyama* (lawlessness or

wrong precepts) there appeared *niyama* (precepts), *Samskāras* are *nitya* (daily practice), *naimittika* or routine, and *kāmya* (on proper occasions like at *yajña*), which springs forth from a pledge. *Samskāra*, etymologically, is an act which is done with extreme dexterity and by removing the faults (*doṣas*). *Mīmāṃsā* deals with *Samskāras*. Thereafter there was corpus of materials on *Samskāras*. Many forms are obsolete like several types of marriages.

According to the *Mahābhāṣya*, *niyama* is of *Dharma*, for *Dharma* and for the application of *Dharma*.

It is proper to know the import of *mantra* but even without it, faith can supplant it but bereft of both, the tradition loses its weight.

Modifications are possible in the modern context but with full understanding and without disturbing the basic concept.

Samskāras are not just *Sādhana* (instrumental) but also the end result since *sādhana* consumes itself in end-result.

Second Session [9.4.1998]

Pt. Rewa Prasad Dwivedi, formerly Head of the Deptt. of Sahitya and Dean, Faculty of Sanskrit Learning and Theology B.H.U., spoke on 'Samskāras in Sanskrit Literature' especially as depicted in *Kālidāsa's* literature. He posed the basic question, whether *Samskāra* is applicable to *Ātman*. For example, is *antyeṣṭi* applicable to *Śarīra* or to *Ātman*. There is no concept of *ātman* in the *purāṇas*. There was a problem of *śrāddha* in Kashi in view of the precept of *Kāśī-maraṇan-muktiḥ* (one gets *mukti* or emancipation by dying in Kashi). The *śrāddha* was meant for the carnal body.

We should not neglect *Samskāras*. For example, *Rāma* was born due to the *putreṣṭi Samskāra*. The puranic parables give us directions on *Samskāras*. Raghu was born because of his father serving *Nandinī* (The divine cow). *Nandinī*, the cow, instructed *Dilīpa* about the ritual through

which he could beget a son and which *Dilīpa* followed after some refinement.

Similar instances can be furnished. The human body needs *Samśkāras* for refinement like a rough stone is polished on a lathe.

Like in *Āyurveda*, *saṁskāra* is prepared according to the needs of the patient. *Samśkāra* is the medicine. We need retrospection to assess, *Samśkāra vis-a-vis vikāra*.

Samśkāra is meant for the *Sthūla-śarīra* (gross body) extending to *mana* and *buddhi*. In the beginning, Pt. Rewa Prasad Dwivedi challenged the view that *Sāhitya* was an evidence secondary to Philosophy etc.

Acharya Medha Devi, Head of Panini Vidyalaya, Varanasi, was the next speaker. She said that the word *Samśkāra* is derived from 'Sam' *upasarga* (prefix) and *kara*, which joined together stand for 'to do in a proper manner' (i.e. in a heightened manner). She dwelt on the four groupings of the sixteen *Samśkāras* for the purification of body and mind. Some are related to conception and birth, the other for the preparation of child, for education, for the house-holder's life and gradual retirement i.e. from individual life to community life and finally to the funeral rites. Thus these relate to the fourfold division of the life-span. Even *garbhā-dhāna* (conception) was planned as a follow-up of *Yajña*. Similarly, she explained each of the *Samśkāras* and the related rituals in detail. These are scientific.

The *Samśkāra* was meant for all sections of the society, from princely life to the commoner section of the society.

The learned speaker explained *antyeṣṭi* or *śmaśānānta* (last rite) as a *nara-medha yajña*. The *Samśkāras* ultimately lead to *mokṣa*.

Prof. K.N. Mishra posed the question whether they are universal or restricted to certain sections of the society. Similarly as there are *Samśkāras* sanctified by *mantras*, are there *Samśkāras* devoid of *mantras*? The learned

speaker observed that the *Samkāras* are universal.

Next Dr. Sagar Mal Jain, Former Director, Parshva Nath Jain Vidyashrama, Varanasi, presented the *Jaina* tradition of the *saṃskāras*. He informed the house that there is no reference to rites like *Samkāras* in the early *Jaina* canons (i.e. before the Christian era), since it aimed at total renunciation. It is only from the *Jaina* canons from Ca. first Century B.C. to first Century A.D. that we begin to find the fivefold *kalyāṇakas* (parallel to Brahmanical *Samkāras*) in the life stories of the *Jaina Tīrthaṅkaras*. These are *garbha* and *janma kalyāṇakas*, related to their physical birth.

It has already been pointed out that *Samkāras* relate to the householder's life. Therefore *Vānaprastha* and *Sannyāsa* rites are not included.

Only in the case of the *dīkṣā kalyāṇaka*, he (the candidate) takes some vows but no other *mantras* etc. are prescribed. Of course, at the *nirvāṇa kalyāṇaka*, there is a prescription for the 'house-holder' to collect the body for its fire-disposal or in the case of a *Sannyāsin* the body was taken to a hill-top and left there to the elements.

The laity is, atleast in north India, divided between *Jaina* and Brahmanical. In all cases, the *Samkāras* are shared commonly between these two sections. *Samkāras* are refinement. In the south there are some distinct *Jaina Samkāras*. Acharya Jina Sena of the VI cent. of the south, in his *Ādi-purāṇa* has introduced certain *Jaina* traditions among the Hindu *Samkāras*. In *Yaśastilaka champu* of the X cent. A.D., it is clearly laid down that the prevailing *Samkāras* may be adopted in case they are not contradictory to the *Jaina* way of life.

New *Jaina Samkāras* were also introduced like the *Samyukta-jaina Samkāra*. The child is led to the *guru*. *Deva* (*arhanta*), *guru* (*muni*), *dharma* (*ahinsa*), concepts are laid down by the *guru*. The child is preached till about the age of 8 years, about the eight *mūlaguṇas* and seven-fold renunciations (*sapta-tyāgas*). He is then introduced to the twelve *vratas*

(vows) or *vrata-dharma*. Rituals are laid down. There are five *anu-vratas* (partially followed by the house-holder as the situation demanded). Prof. Jain gave a further sub-detail of these rituals.

He also pointed out that these *Samskāras* were obviously influenced by the *Śramana* (Jaina and Buddhist) thought processes.

Prof. (Smt.) Chandra Kala Padia, Professor of Political Science, Women's College, B.H.U., took up the issue in the light of the modern man's attitude towards tradition and heritage. She felt that the *Samskāras* lead to a better life and also to enlightenment (knowledge of *Brahman*). She analysed why the *Samskāras* failed to be integrated in our psyche, especially during the past fifty years of our independence.

The scientific practical base of *Samskāras* had an insight. Yet gradually we lost the real meanings of the *Samskāras*. Yet when Prof. Padia explained the import of *Samskāras*, people started getting interested in them.

She felt that the *Samskāras* should start with the mother because the child's upbringing is coupled with *Samskāras* with its scientific background and not just orthodoxy.

Now, unfortunately, the priest class which performs these *Samskāras* has made these rituals as a means of earning money which contradicts the central concept of the *Samskāras*.

With the early school education, the child drifts away from the Indian tradition and gets involved with the consumeristic society. Our intelligence becomes a victim of its nonchalant existence. This nonchalance is dangerous because the western ideas become assimilated in the context of our own fundamental values. First we have to decolonize our mind, and then re-interpret the texts.

Marx was not analysed in the context of our social values. Marx actually declared that an uneducated person, immersed in religion fails to analyse.

Perhaps that was how he felt that religion was the opium of the masses. The realm of freedom begins where necessity ends. Prof. Padia felt that we have failed to interpret the texts, failed to refer to the originals.

Positivism only aims at 'part' not the 'whole' but 'part' cannot be understood in isolation. She also discussed other thinking processes. Post-colonization emphasises on the indigenous knowledge or construction, a product of our heritage. The British rule tried to eradicate our culture's foundations. We are the only people who are neglecting our own language and heritage.

She suggested that the 'mother' should be educated about the *Samskāras* and thus these can be re-habilitated and the systematic invasion of our culture could be ruptured. *Samskāras* should not simply be a ritual. Efforts to unite us with our heritage should be encouraged. We should de-construct such theories which have undermined us. Our indigenous knowledge must be preserved. Even our simple *Samskāras* do not appeal to our minds but these, nevertheless, should be preserved as links between the past and the present society. The message of our *ṛṣis* is still living in our consciousness. We need to re-interpret our texts and independently think how we can reconstruct our tradition and thus our country. We are already in this process even though sometimes silently.

The seminar was adjourned till the next day.

Third Session [10.4.1998 (morning)]

The third session of the Seminar started with Prof. Prem Lata Sharma in the Chair. The first speaker in this session was Dr. Hriday Narayan Sharma of B.H.U., who spoke on *Samskāras* of the *Sanātana Dharma* tradition as laid down in the sacred texts *Vedas*. The main thrust of the paper was on the number of the *Samskāras*. Man is god's finest creation, among the living beings, having the greatest 'spark' of God. *Puruṣa* (Cosmic Man) manifested himself in the *sva-tantra* existences, unrelated to *pṛthvī* or *dyu-loka* as against vegetables (related to the ground) or gods (related to the heavens).

Sam̐skāras are means to unite us with the divine element (*deva-tattva*). His view possibly suggested that *Sam̐skāras* were *yajñas*.

According to the Vyās school, *Sam̐skāras* are 16 in number : *Garbhādhāna*, *Puṁsavana*, *Sīmantonayana*, *Jāta-karma*, *Nāma-karaṇa*, *Niṣkramana*, *Annaprāśana*, *Cūḍa-karma*, *Karṇa-vedha*, *Vratādeśa*, *Vedārambha*, *Keśānta*, *Snāna*, *Udvāha*, *Vivāha*, and *Pretāgni-Saṁgraha*.

Vira-mitrodaya (i.e. Mitra-Misra) lay down 25 *Sam̐skāras*. The 17 to 25 *Sam̐skāras* of this list are added to the previous list while a few are changed among the original. The learned speaker gave a detailed list of *Sam̐skāras* in this and other tables. Similarly *Gautama* (ṛṣi) furnished a list of 48 *Sam̐skāras*, which are applicable to all the first three *āśramas* i.e. *brahmacarya*, *gārhastya* and *vānaprastha*. Some of these correspond to the *pañca-mahāyajñas*. The first basic eight *Sam̐skāras* broadly correspond to earlier lists. The first forty of these *Sam̐skāras* relate to the *brahmacarya* and *gārhastya āśramas*. While the last eight *Sam̐skāras* are related to the *vānaprastha-āśrama*. Some of these correspond to the *pañca-mahāyajñas* and the others to the *havir-yajña* or the *sapta soma yajñas*.

Dr. Raj Bali Pandey has given certain changes in his list of the *Sam̐skāras* which includes *karṇa-vedha* and *antyeṣṭi* as well.

All these are meant to be *Brahma* and *Daiva Sam̐skāras*. According to *Gautama*, the first 13 *Sam̐skāras* of his list, from *Garbhādhāna* to *Snāna* are *Brahma Sam̐skāras*, from 14th onward these are *Daiva Sam̐skāras* to be performed by *Gṛhīta-agnis* or one who has 'invited' (i.e. invoked *agni* or *Gṛhastha*, i.e. during the marriage ceremony or in the case of *dāyāda* (inheritance). The *Sam̐skāras*, 14th to the 40th are required to be performed with the wife's participation (*sapatnīka*), while the *Sam̐skāras* from the 8th (i.e. *Upanayana*) to the 13th are to be performed during the *brahmacarya-āśrama*. *Sam̐skāras* numbering from 40 to 47 are *Dayā*, *Kṣamā* etc. which are related to the *vānaprastha āśrama*.

Now the question that remains is about the *Samskāras* related to *Sannyāsa*. All the *Samskāras* are applicable to the previous three *āśramas*. *Sannyāsa* aims simply in merging *svayam* (oneself) with *ātma-tattva*. All these 48 *Samskāras* were applicable in the *kṛta-yuga* or the *dhyāna-yuga*. All the *yajñas* prescribed in the *Vedas* are basically *Samskāras*, though not designated as such. The *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* uses the verb *Samskurute* (*ātmānām samskurute*). Thus the *Vedas* are impregnated with *Samskāras*. A *yajña* consists of *dravya*, *devatā* and *tyāga* and all the three are established in the *deva-bhāva* (element). *Yajña* stands for one's transformation into *deva* or *satya-bhāva*. The speaker chose to leave the *Mīmāṃsā* School's interpretation of *Samskāras* due to paucity of time.

The *Samskāras* are *Sanātana* (eternal) yet are mobile to fit into our present needs. These are based on scientific principles according to the *sthāna* and *kāla* (time and space) or *pātratā* (the aspirant's capabilities). These develop a godly element in one's life. These are *karmans*, (rites) according to the *Srauta* and *Smārta paddhatis* (systems).

In the *Kali-yuga*, *Samskāras* are abbreviated yet they yield the same merits (*puṇyas*). We are still in the first quarter (*pada*) of the *kali* age and by following the *paddhati yajñas*, we can continue to derive the benefits of the *Dvāpara* age experiences. In the next i.e. second quarter of the *kali* age, there will be no *Samskāras*, but people will derive the 'merits' only through *Hari-Kīrtana*.

The *Samskāras* do not necessarily lead to *citta-śuddhi* (purification of the mind) and thus qualify us for *sannyāsa*. He equated *Samskāras* with *yajñas*: *nitya*, *naimittika* and *kāmya*, the last mentioned leads to good (worldly) results or even to *svarga*. These are enshrined in the first few stanzas of the *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad*.

Next Dr. I. Panduranga Rao gave his presentation on the *upanayana Samskāra*.

At the outset, Dr. Rao observed that it was a Holy (Good) Friday, especially as it was the first anniversary day of *Jñāna-Pravāha*.

He, who follows (precepts) leaving arbitrariness, is a *Samskārī* (svave) this has to be viewed in the present day context. *Bhagavān* has laid down in the *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā* that there are numerous paths (religious practices) but every aspirant, in spite of this, reaches out to me.

Even though we do not believe in God, he is always present in us. Even bereft of *Samskāras* (rituals), one can have *Samskāra yuktatva* (integration with *Samskāras*) if one has assimilated them in oneself. He further noted that *Samskāras* are not limited to the *Sanātana Dharma* or *Bharata* but every civilization has its own set of *Samskāras*. We should always endeavour to see good in whatever we see or hear. Even an unpalatable thing might have its brighter side. The 'evil' will perish itself and the brighter side will always continue to grow.

Upanayana is the real *Samskāra* and the rest of the *Samskāras* are debatable. *Upanayana* gives us flexibility of thought.

He told the house that the *ṛṣis* laid down the *Samskāras* to regulate (human) life and make it more auspicious. Life however progressed step by step irrespective of the fact whether it was *Samskāra* oriented. *Samskāras* are sociological events, philosophical *yajñas*, auspicious in nature and form.

Vivāha, for example, is a simple, natural event yet it is celebrated and ritualized but *Upanayana* is administered under the sastric precepts. It is compulsory for the *dvijas*. For them this is the stepping stone for *vivāha*. *Upanayana* is an effort to lead us to our 'basics'. Though now neglected, *trikāla sandhyā* is prescribed to us for it is a means to associate ourselves with the god, *Sūrya*. *Vāka*, *citta* and *ātmā* are purified by *sandhyā-karma*. These three together constitute the *Gāyatrī*. It is an excuse that *sandhyā* cannot be performed within the present day life-style. Even the mid-day *sandhyā* can be performed during office hours by reciting the prescribed

mantras or even without it by just remembering the Ultimate.

He added that *sandhyā-karma* should not be just restricted to the first three *varṇas*. If it is a true prayer, then *Bhagavān* can be approached in any language since there is no particular language of God. Actually, the moment the devotee takes upon himself to pray, *Bhagavān* immediately takes cognizance of it. One should not act arbitrarily but act according to *sva-bhāva*: 'I like the man who does not irritate others or others do not irritate him'.

A *brāhmaṇa* is referred to in the context of *adhyātma*, *kṣatrīya* to *adhikāra* (power) and *vaiśya* to *artha*. The rest of the life activities were left for others. But he questioned whether there were true *brāhmaṇas* around, since only a *brahma-vid* (one who has realised *Brahman*) was a *brāhmaṇa*. There are such *brahma-vids* but they are usually hidden in obscurity and they are *su-durlabha* (rare). One who labels himself as a *brāhmaṇa* is no *brāhmaṇa*. The speaker declared that the *Śaṁskāras* are getting obsolete, for the priest performs the ritual without understanding it (its import) and the *yajamāna* does not understand it. No one tries to understand them, therefore, the *Śaṁskāras* are becoming obsolete. *Upanayana* brings us close to the Divine. One should try to *upaviṣṭa* (sit close to) by not following other rituals but at least through daily prayers.

We live in an age of crisis today, a crisis of identity, since we do not try to understand our tradition and heritage. 'I call it a *sāmāsika śaṁkaṭa* (composite crisis)'. There was a cry to reinterpret the *Śaṁskāras* which the speaker thought was called for. Similarly, there was a call for educating the 'mother'. The learned speaker observed that it would be a shade better if the children are educated. The new generation should be made aware of our heritage. Besides, it is easier to impregnate the young mind (with these lofty ideas). The Vedic language is easy, it is easier than our legal documents, but we do not strive to know the Vedic language. A *śaṁskārīta* (groomed) person is one whose language is pure (*suddha-vāṇī*). *Bhāṣā*

(language), *sāhitya* (literature), *darśana* (philosophy) etc. make a culture. Language is important e.g. *sthita prajñasya kā bhāṣā*, or what is the language of a *sthita-prajña*?

Continuing his explanation of *bhāṣā* the learned speaker told the house that the term *bhā* stands for light or *prakāśa*, which manifests itself in the form of *Sūrya*, *Candra* and *Agni*. Therefore, the initial mantra (*agnin-ile...*) is dedicated to (the Lord) *Agni*. What we witness is the fleeting *Agni* in the form of a flash of lightening, yet it is permanent in the skies (i.e. the heavens). Similarly, there is a cosmology of primeval *dhvani* sound, *Óm*. It is said that the indestructible *Brahma* is *óm* (*óm iti akṣaraḥ brahman*) One can derive any (boon) thing from the (divine) sound.

Samskāras heighten *saṁskṛti* (culture, heritage) in our speech, way of thinking (thought-processes) and in action (this is what was stated in the *Bhagavat-gītā*'s enquiry : *Sthita-prajñasya kā bhāṣā...*)

Dr. Jodh Singh, of the Punjab University, Patiala, spoke on *Samskāras* in the Sikh religion. The learned speaker agreed with the view that *Samskāras* were necessary, which he elaborated in the Sikh perspective. At the outset, he gave a brief background of the Sikh religion. With a background of about 500 years only, the religion had the benefit of deriving knowledge and experience of different religious traditions. Guru Nanak ji, the founder, travelled far and wide in search of Truth.

Next he dwelt on the source-material of the Sikh religion. The foundation text, the Guru Granth Sahib, is a compilation of *vaṇīs* (utterances) of 36 saints out of which just 6 are Sikh Guru Maharajas.

The guru Granth Sahib includes *vaṇis* of Kabir and many other saints like Ramananda, Namadeva, Dhanna (of Rajasthan), Jayadeva and a Muslim saint, Sheikh Farid, figure in the compilation. This was compiled by the fifth Guru ji.

Thus the objective, set by Guru Nanak Deva ji of this religion, was broad and cosmopolitan.

Next is the Dasham Granth, a collection of Guru Gobind Singh ji Maharaja's *vāṇīs*. The third in this group are the sayings of Bhai Guru Das, who was a scholar of Vraja-bhasha, Sanskrit and Persian. This is also considered to be a source material. Bhai Guru Das had very closely watched the import of the *guru-vāṇīs* at the time of the compilation.

According to the learned speaker, *Samśkāras* are a process of decarbonization of *mala* (evil) accumulated in our body. Thus, the *Samśkāras* were necessary as in *śrīmad-bhagavatgītā* which lays down that *jñāna-agni* consumes all the *karmas*. This corresponds to the Sikh-view. We need such exercises to purify ourselves at different *moḍas* (junctures) of our lives. These are required to unify oneself with the *parama-tattva* (the Ultimate). The learned speaker was reminded of Dr. I. Panduranga Rao's observation that the inner purification (*āntarika-śucita*) was priority. For example, Guru Nanak Dev ji has propounded, 'O Panda (*Brahmana*), invest me with that *yajñopavīta* which has *dayā* as cotton, *santoṣa* as thread, subjugation of *indriyas* (senses) as *gaṇḍī* or knot of the thread etc. That *janeu* (*yajñopavīta*) will be for my *ātmā* (soul), not just for the body.'

The learned speaker went on to add comments basing himself on the above view that the Sikh religion was introvert and therefore did not believe in outwardly rituals. He further referred to the *nivṛtti-mārga* (way of renunciation) of the *Jana* as pointed out by Dr. Sagarmal Jain. Dr. Singh on the other hand, explained that according to Sikhism *nivṛtti*, (repudiation) and *pravṛtti* (indulgence or worldly involvement), both are extreme views.

The religious symbols (rituals included) should be internalized, otherwise these, being just outer expression (exhibitionistic) are meaningless. The learned speaker went on to say that importance (relevance) of religion is recognised all over the world. Every religion lays down rituals,

(*Samskāras*). Sikhism is basically opposed to a plethora of rituals, yet gradually ritualism is finding its way into Sikhism as well much to the speaker's dismay.

Originally *Samskāras* in Sikhism were hardly 4 or 5. These were quite simple. Each time the family made a holy visit to the nearby gurudwara, there is a recitation of the Guru Granth Sahib with *ardās* (prayer) and *prasāda* (thick paste made of wheat flour, sugar cooked in ghee) is distributed with the final call, *jo bole so nihāl sat Śrī Akāla*.

There are two natural events : birth and death, to be observed with *Samskāras* while the other two *Samskāras* are programmed. The first is the *nāmakaraṇa Samskāra*. There are a few more *Samskāras* prior to this like the *garbhādhāna* etc. Sikhism does not believe in discrimination between a male or female baby. Soon after the birth, when the mother and baby are physically fit enough to take the trip, without checking on the auspicious time or date, the family and friends lead the mother and baby to the nearby gurudwara and they randomly open up a leaf of the Guru Granth Sahib. The first letter of the first syllable on the left leaf is picked up which serves as the acronym of the baby, that is to say the name of the baby should start with that particular letter.

The prayer (*ardās*) follows and the ceremony ends up with the distribution of the *prasāda* and the call, '*bole so nihāl sat Śrī Akāla*.'

The second *Samskāras* is marriage, which is a major 'turn' (*moda*) in (human) life. It is a social event and especially a union of two families. The speaker chose to call the traditional Sikh marriage as 'assisted' in place of 'arranged' marriage, although in the present context there are exceptions. In this case also, no astrological calculations are observed to identify a date or time. The two families, alongwith friends and relatives, assemble in a gurudwara at a mutually convenient date and time. In principle, there is no dowry system. There is no priestly class to officiate the marriage

rituals which is called *ānand karaj* or spiritual delight'. The bride is given the groom's scarf which she holds. Four hymns from Sri Guru Granth Sahib (vide p. 773) the *vāṇī* of Sri Guru Ram Das ji are recited. The couple circumambulate which is locally known as *lāvān*. After the first ambulation, they hail : *ek jot ho* (be spiritually one). There are only four ambulations and at the last one they exclaim, 'we have attained *paramātmā*'.

It is to be noted that the recitation of the *Guru-grantha Sahib* 's passages is not restricted to any particular class of people, anybody in the group can recite these.

Then the learned speaker spoke on the final ritual which is called in the Sikh society 'mounting an attack (on death)', for it is martial community. In the Sikh psyche, death is taken with a positive view-point, with a degree of optimism. In general parlance what we say, 'a person died' the Sikhs would say, he or she mounted an attack (*chadhai kar gaya*). Death is also known as merging with *Akāla* or merging with *Jyoti* (*jyotī men jyotī samānā*, light merging with the divine Light). A Sikh body is invariably assigned to fire and is never buried. The body is washed and carried to the funeral ground with the chanting of '*Sat nām vāhe guru*'. There is no *Śmaśāna* tax, and any fire can light the pyre. *Ānanda vāṇī* (delight of the third Guru) is recited, which is universal, both in joy and sorrow in all the *Samskāras*.

The learned speaker informed that the *Ānanda-vāṇī* of the third Guru is known as 'Anand Sahib'. It is 46 stanzas long but simply 6 of these are prescribed : the first five and the last, which make the required six stanzas.

The following day, the bodily remains (ashes and charred bones etc.) are collected and immersed in running water like a river, rivulet or even in a canal. There is no stipulation in favour of a particular *tīrtha*, except that it should be running water, and not stagnant water. *Śrāddha* or *tarpaṇa* like rituals are given a go-bye and thus the rites are simplified. *Laṅgara*

(community feast and distribution of meal) is sometimes prevalent. 8-10 days after the demise, the recitation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib is prevalent. This is again done by the next to the kin, not by any priestly class or official.

The forth *Samskāra* is initiation in *khālsā* (literally, a crown land), promulgated by the tenth Guru, Sri Gobind Singh ji, at Anandpur Sahib. In this ritual the *Pañja Pyāres* prepare *amṛta*. This is open to all (Sikhs) irrespective of their caste. The recipient sprinkles *amṛta* on his eyes and his head. The *amṛta* is prepared in an iron receptible by adding *batāśās* with water. This is distributed by handfulls to the aspirants five times.

The assembly forms a queue and sips the *amṛta* from the pot, irrespective of caste or age etc. To erode the false concept of egoism, if any, the queue is reversed in its order to sip again. This is the initiation rite with no caste or class bar. The first group of *pañja payāres* consisted of a *khatrī*, barber, *jāṭa*, *kahāra*, etc. They are required to follow 4 *vajras* called *prahars*, no hair cutting, no adultery with other's wife, no use of intoxicants, no consuming of meat prepared under the Muslim *halāla* practice but only meat prepared under the *jhaṭkā* practice. They are also enjoined to following 5 'kas' *kaṅghā*, *Keśa*, *kirpāṇa*, *kacchā* and *karā*.

Dr. Jodh Singh further elucidated his points during the question answer session.

The next speaker was Mr. Nizamuddin Ansari of Banaras Hindu University, who presented his views on Islamic rituals. Islamic tradition aims at the proper education of the parents so that the baby is born with a proper background and his physical, cultural and mental development is assured. At the birth of a baby, it is said in its right ear that there is nobody greater than Allah. He is the sole object of worship. Mohammad Sahib is the final *Rasool*. *Rasool* leads us from impurity to purity. *Namāz* or prayer aims at the development from impurity to purity i.e. towards (ultimate) success. This is followed by a chanting in the baby's right ear and the *namāz* is set

qāyam ho (jaya). This is called *Akīda* and for the poor this *Akīda* is not necessary.

On the 7th day after the birth, the rite of *Akīda* takes place when the baby's head is shaven. It is enjoined that silver equal in weight to the baby's hair-tuft may be distributed among the poor by the head of the family, if he is rich enough. The status 'rich' is also defined. But if he cannot afford it he is exempted from this. This is followed by an animal sacrifice. Giving details of the sacrifice, the learned speaker added that in course of the *duwa* (blessings), the name (nomenclature) of the baby is added. It is also prayed that the vitals of the sacrificial animal may be accepted by God as the vitals of the baby and the prophets Ibrahim and Mohammad are remembered so that the present sacrifice may be equal to their (historical and mythological) sacrifices.

The learned speaker chose to skip over many other Muslim rites but dwelt upon the funeral rite. According to Islam, a human body (corpse) is entitled to be carried on the shoulders of his fellow men and buried. In front of the dying person a particular *sura* (section) of the Quran Sharif is read out (the dying person does not recite it himself or herself).

Then the corpse is abluted, the male by men and female by women, i.e. *wazu*. It is the corpse's prerogative (*ḥaq*) that the *Namāz-e-zanāzā* (the prayer of the coffin) is offered to it. It seeks forgiveness for those present or away (from the spot), those living or dead, young and old, men and women. Those living may follow Islam, those dead follow *Imān* (faith). Islam, as the learned speaker explained, comprises of following these tents with total dedication, not just by birth (in a Muslim family).

The next speaker was Prof. R.S. Tripathi of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarnath. He spoke on the concept of *Samskāras* in *Theravāda*. The learned speaker informed that he was from a non-Buddhist family but had himself embraced Buddhism: as such he was not aware of

the prevalent *Samskāras* among the Buddhists. He also observed that the Buddhist laity usually follow the *Samskāras* as may be current in their society. This is how the daily life of the Buddhists, in different parts of the world, was modified according to local traditions and living conditions. There are no scriptural rules for *Samskāras* in the Buddhist texts. Of course, at the time of the Great Demise (*Mahā-parinirvāṇa*), the Buddha was asked about his funeral rites. The Buddha enjoined to his immediate disciples that the same rites be followed as are laid down in the funeral of a *Cakravartin*.

He also informed that with the revival of neo-Buddhism (under the guidance of Dr. Ambedkar) a set of *Samskāras* had been evolved. Dr. Ambedkar himself declared that it was not within anybody's control to be born, the way he was born but of course he could choose the manner in which he would die (his funeral rites). In a Buddhist marriage, a Buddhist monk, failing that a senior Buddhist of the locality, preaches the *Trī śaraṇa* and *pañca-śīla*, and Buddhist monks are invited to be fed. Similarly, at the initiation of the Buddhist *tāntrika abhiṣeka*, they have set rules comparable to the Brahmanical *tāntrika abhiṣeka*.

At the time of the initiation of a Buddhist monk (*upa-sampada*), a candidate (aspirant) is first questioned in several ways like, have you the permission of your family? Are you not encumbered with debt liabilities ? Were you ever convicted for a crime? Are you not an absconder from law, etc.? Having been satisfied on these scores, a candidate may be given *pra-vrājya* or monkhood. There is very little ritualism involved but the aspirant is preached *tri-śaraṇagamana* and *pañca-śīla* this part of the *pra-vrājya* is a must.

Besides, the learned speaker spoke at length on the term *Samskāra* in the Buddhist context, carrying a totally different connotation.

Prof. Shampa Dorje of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies

Sarnath, was requested to speak on *Samskāra* in the Buddhist tradition, especially as a living tradition in Tibet.

The learned speaker informed that he himself hailed from the Kinnaur area and had learnt about Tibetan traditions through his studies. He informed that since the area comprised of a vast stretch of Himalayan Asia, therefore, the local traditions differed from sector to sector in which local influences and diverse cultures were at work. Spread of Buddhism in that area was attributed to the Chinese Imperial army, escorting the Buddhist Acharya Amogha-varsa, who halted in Eastern Afghanistan near Bamiyain and which thus became Buddhist under his influence.

Buddhism, according to the learned speaker, was open to local cultures and traditions. Local influences on Buddhism can be seen in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Tibet etc. For example, eating of meat or consumption of alcohol for daily need, not for pleasure, were accepted within the parameters of local Buddhism. Local traditions blended with main-stream Buddhism. Local religions, like in China or Japan, again influenced Buddhism in the respective countries. Actually, with this attitude, Buddhism was not met with resistance by the local people.

Referring to the evolution of *Samskāras*, the learned speaker observed that in the beginning, *Samskāras* were natural but the society might have discovered from time to time some lacunae, leading to their modification. The process of standardization also started. Some of these are enshrined in the *śāstras* and attributed to *Prajāpati*, but at the present stage, one does not find even a mention of those texts.

While discussing this problem in the context of Tibet, one has to take in cognizance that Tibet has its own history, culture and tradition. One has to judge the contribution of Buddhism to Tibet against these backgrounds. Geographical conditions similarly influence these traditions. Since it is a vast stretch of land, inter-communication was practically non-existent. It

took, until recently, months to travel from a point to a point. Thus each region had its own peculiarities. For example, the marriage ceremony took 6 days. At each step, reading out from the scriptures was mandatory. The marriage party took a 2 day march to reach the bride's place and again it took 3 days for the groom to approach the bride. However, there was nobody like a *pañḍita* or an official to conduct the ceremony and the senior-most member of the family or from the neighbourhood conducted the ceremony. Each step was accompanied by a *havana* (fire oblation) and *dāna* (religious gift). Dr. Dorje further explained that his account related to Central Tibetan culture only and not to its eastern extensions. In *Tāntrik* Buddhism, these fire oblations were guided by their own texts and traditions.

Here Prof. Dorje also explained the background of the local people. The Central Asian people fanned out in all the four directions. The Khasa people inhabited the Khasa region including Kashmir and Kinnaur, Kashmir was originally Khashmir (from Khasa). In this region, they do not have *varṇas* like *brāhmaṇas* or *sūdras*. The non-Khasas (*Khasa-itaras*) are looked down upon and assigned different types of (lower standard) callings.

He further touched upon certain other *Samśkāras*. There is a ritual of purification (*śuddhīkaraṇa*), four days after the birth. In this an invitation to a Buddhist monk is not obligating. But the *Lāmā* usually brings an icon of *Avalokiteśvara* or *Tārā* and this tradition is also followed at the time of the *nāma-karaṇa* (giving a name to the baby), known in the West as 'Christening'. As the baby attains the age of 3 or 4 years and starts calling *Appā* or *Ammā* like words, it is supposed to be the proper time for starting the education. Again a *pūjā* (religious service) is offered to a Buddhist deity, *Avalokiteśvara* or *Tārā*, and the baby is instructed regarding the (primary) alphabets. To begin with, the baby gets a *darśana* of the deity. Formerly, the *grantha* script of the *Bhoṭī-bhāṣā* was prevalent. The script is an ancient form of *Devanāgarī* script. Nowadays, people in that region are gradually forgetting it. Anyway, the baby is initiated into 5 letters: a

followed by *ka*, *kha*, *ga* and *gha*.

Thereafter, the learned speaker touched upon the funeral rites, according to the local traditions of the Central Tibet. The human body is assigned to the flames. But if the death was caused by certain specific diseases, the body is buried called '*bhūmi-arpaṇa*' since it is believed that the (evil) gas is produced by cremation would harm the locality (by vitiating the atmosphere). Thus, such bodies are sunk in water (*jala-arpaṇa*).

There are certain diseases whose victims can neither be buried nor sunk in the rivers (for fear of contamination). Such a body is handed over to a particular class of men who offer it to the birds. This is known as *vāyu-arpaṇa*. Thus the dead body is offered to one of the four elements.

In Tantric Buddhism, there are different types of *havas* (fire oblations) and different groups of *mantras* (religious formulas to invoke a deity). Those are based of *Mahāyāna* yet the earlier rituals no more survive.

The death rituals take seven weeks, punctuated with *pūjas* (religious services). Each week has its special and independent *pūjā*.

The speaker also expressed his concern on the prevailing situation and observed that it is not the fault of the cultural heritage that it is losing ground but we are the ones to be blamed since we fail to preserve them. The *Śaṃskāras* are relevant (*prāsaṅgika*). He feared that the way things are going, we would have to go abroad to acquaint ourselves with our own traditional knowledge. He queried-where we shall stand in such a situation?

The Fourth (Final) Session [10.4.1998 (Afternoon)]

Prof. R.C. Sharma, Director, Bharat kala Bhavan, B.H.U., spoke on *Antyeṣṭi* or the funeral rites. While in Calcutta, he was working on his publication of *Bharhut stūpa*. It dawned upon him that the *stūpa* was not a symbol of death but of life of *jivana*. The expression '*jīvana śeṣa*' does not stand for 'end of life' but the residual years of life.

The learned speaker observed that while other *Samskāras* were optional, the funeral rites were a social necessity since they were connected with the disposal of the dead body and avoiding of the resultant pollution. Then there was a fear-psychosis of *bhūtas-pretas* (evil spirits connected with the dead) haunting the house.

Tracing historical evolution of funeral rites, Prof. Sharma added that in the nomadic state of mankind and before the invention of fire (i.e. controlled fire), man used to leave the dead at the very spot of death and continued his march. Even some of the fire-worshippers like the zorostrians, despite their fire worship, left the dead body in the wild to be devoured by the predatory birds and animals. Even in the old German society, the dying person was given a sort of neglect so that he lost the wish to live. The speaker felt that with this background the early German scholars discussing the Vedic passages, had a distorted view. Formerly in Bengal, a person on death-bed; yet still alive, was taken to the *śmśāna* and the body was half sub-merged in the wateredging, the *śmaśāna-ghāta*.

There were several cultures which showed different attitudes towards death. In many cultures including Vedic culture, there were attempts to revive the dead. In Spain when a king died, the people would shout three times 'rise up', if that failed, he was declared dead.

There was a tradition of encasing the corpse in a stone chamber or placing it in an earthen vessel and left to decompose. This tradition was known in India as well. Small children's bodies are offered to water (sunk in the water). The same tradition is applied to the dead body of a *sanyāsin*. Quoting from Kalidasa the speaker pointed out that the *munis* used to die after taking a holy dip at the Triveni in Prayag i.e. they offered voluntarily their body (vide Raghuvamśam, Canto XIII.Sl.58). Similarly the pious (hindus) laid down, voluntarily their lives at the *Tīrthas* (as a means for salvation).

The speaker informed that vide *ṛigveda*, 10th *maṇḍala*, we find reference

to burial. *Sāyaṇa* reconciled this ritual in his *bhāṣya* as *asthi-saṅcaya*. In the opinion of the speaker, (burial) referred to disposal of the body of a child or a *sanyāsin*. Referring to mummification practice in ancient Egypt he remarked that this tradition was given up by the later Egyptians, it was never known in our tradition. In our tradition, the *ātman* migrates, thus there is no use of the dead body. Similarly, we do not have any tradition of donation of limbs (for medical purposes), but nobody knows, it might start as a ritual in future.

Cremation is the most scientific method. Even the evil spirits are driven away with cremation. *Agni* is the messenger of gods. Thus the body is offered to Gods through (the good offices of) *agni*. It was a prevalent practice that the dying person should have sweet talks with the relatives and friends so that he departed undisturbed.

There was a practice of *anustaraṇī* cow who helps crossing the *Vaitaraṇī* river to be burnt along with the dead body so that the departed soul is saved from being assigned to the hell. But later on this cow was bequeathed to a *Brāhmin*. There was another custom that this cow was driven out of the cremation ground and was let to wander around.

At the time of death, the dying man was laid down on the ground, after performing the *bhūmi-śuddhi* or 'purification of the ground' *Mantras*, or passages from the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the *Gītā* were recited. There was a custom to lay down the (alive) wife next to the dying man on the ground surface. In the Vedic times she was given her ornaments back as *strīdhana* and alongwith a Vedic *mantra* was even given the option to remarry.

The *ṛṣis-munis* could anticipate the time of their death. There was a *mṛtyu-lāṅgūla-stotra* (literally 'Grasping the Death's tail prayer'). It was believed that while reciting the text, if a portion was left out, the length of that left out part determined the anticipated time and date of the death.

The speaker continued to say that *Antyeṣṭi* was a highly mysterious ritual

but unfortunately now it has deteriorated to the form of a trade. Several steps started even prior to death, others were performed after death. It was certain that one born should definitely die (*jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyuḥ*). Similarly, there is the concept of rebirth. The core problem was to acquire *sadgati* of the departed one. There was complex psychology of both attachment to the departed person and element of fear (of his turning into a ghost). It was also believed that the dead man might return back due to his attachment to the family or even the family assets. Therefore, in many instances, the toes of both the feet of the corpse are tied together, perhaps to prevent the dead from returning. In certain traditions, sharp-edged instruments like a knife are placed under the pillow of a child so that the departed man, if returned to the child, (out of affection, in the form of a ghost) would desist from coming close to the young one for fear of the blade. Even in the earlier times the departed soul was accosted, *yāhi yāhi* - go away, go away so that it might not return.

The speaker did not choose to give details of the *Antyeṣṭi* rituals, since these were popularly known. He observed that in earlier times the body was not borne on the shoulders but was driven in a bullock-cart drawn by a pair of bulls. There is a symbolic background since *Vṛṣo hi Bhagavān Dharmaḥ* (God *Dharma* is manifested in the form of a bull). This was again to promise *sadgati* to the departed soul.

According to the *R̥gveda* (vide 10th *maṇḍala*), departed soul was given a farewell address, known as a *mantra* for *sadgati* with a loaded prayer for auspicious future (*maṅgala-kāmanā*). After the funeral, they had a community meal and a session of *aṭṭa-hāsa* (peal of laughter). The *mukha-agni* was performed with the *yajña-fire* by the family of the deceased. This fire was never brought back but a new fire was lit for the family *havanās* (fire oblations). But the beliefs changed with the time and many rituals were added or changed over the centuries.

Answering the queries, the speaker observed that there were two important

factors: the fear psychosis (of the ghost haunting the family) and *śrāddha* or reverence. The *śrāddha* rites were performed out of *śrāddhā*. The fear-psychosis is a wrong notion but it is the near and dear ones who suffer from it.

The speaker agreed that many of these traditions related with funeral emanated from the principle of rebirth. He also confirmed that sometimes corpses were assigned *jala-pravāha*. (Assigned to running water), especially in the cases of small children. Referring to the *Kapāla-kriyā* rite, he said that it was the final rite which marked the end. It is also believed that by cremation every body is purified.

The next speaker Pandit Rama Kant Pandey spoke on the *pūṃsavana Saṃskāra*. He observed that in case we do not get the desired effects by performing the *Saṃskāras*, it is not the ritual's fault. Actually the performer is to be blamed, since there must be some snag in the performance itself. The precepts as laid down in the *śāstras* are faultless. We should try to examine the lacunae.

Even the women desire to have male progeny as the menfolk do. The *pūṃsavana Saṃskāra* is performed only in the fourth month of pregnancy, since upto the third month the gender of the foetus is not formed.

The ritual starts with the husband performing *Śrāddha* i.e. *nandī-śrāddha*. Then he says to the wife, 'may you beget a son'. At this point Prof. K.N. Mishra enquired whether there was a similar *Saṃskāra* for begetting a daughter. The speaker went on to say that subsequent to the above the husband addresses the pregnant wife, 'Gods like *Mitra* and *Varuṇa*, the two *Aśvinī Kumārs*, *Agni* and *Vāyu* are all males. Thus you may also beget a male baby.' The speaker quoted relevant *mantras* to go with this ritual, while giving details of different steps of the ritual, blessing her that by having a male issue through the *mantras* and rituals the foetus or the 'baby in the womb' should be 're-fined' (*saṃskriyate*) i.e. this *Saṃskāra* 'refines' both the foetus and the mother. Quoting from the texts, he said that

having this and the prospect of having a male baby, the pregnant woman is freed from sloth, nausea etc. since she becomes over-joyed. The validity of this ritual is supported by Ayurvedic texts, by *susruta* who highly recommends it.

In the *Puṁsavan Saṁskāra* the husband is recommended to offer to the pregnant wife two small fruits with two yavas (barley grains).

In her presidential remarks on the above presentation, Prof. Prem Lata Sharma observed that at least from the Upanishadic age, *Ātman* is depicted neither as male nor female. It takes the gender of the body, that the *ātman* takes. Thus the term *Puruṣa* is not restricted to *Puruṣa* in its common sense (i.e. male gender). The term *Puruṣa* appears in all the *Śāstras* and *Kālas*, in *Ayurveda Sāhitya*, *Darśana*, etc. (this concept has been discussed in those contexts as well).

The next speaker was Pt. Lakshmi Kant Pandey. He read out his paper. Peripheral issues were taken up to the neglect of the core issue, the *Saṁskāras*. He defined the term 'vi-vāha' (specially assigned). *Vi* that is *viśiṣṭa* and *vāha* that stands for a special mission. The *Saṁskāras* were supposed to be followed according to the Vedic and *Smārta* precepts and within the parameters of *jāti* and *maryādā*. The objective was to 're-fine' (*Saṁs-kriyate*) leading to *mokṣa* (emancipation). He based himself mainly on Hārita's (*Saṁskāra - Dīpaka*). The *Saṁskāras* were of two types: *Brāhma* and *Daiva*. The *Brāhma Saṁskāras* were 16 fold starting from *Garbhādhāna* etc. The *Daiva Saṁskāras* were: *yajña* which are *Soma-yāga-ādi* and thus were called *Saumyas*.

The speaker objected to the prevailing conditions where so much time is wasted during the marriage ceremony on merry-making neglecting the ritualistic details. He pointed out that the bride is still a *kanyā* (maiden) until the rituals: *maṇḍapa-karma*, *madhu-parka*, *tājā-homa* are not performed. Subsequent to these, the groom places his hand on the right shoulder of the bride and declares that my vows (pledges) are placed in

your heart..... etc. and finally wishes that by following these rules of *Prajāpati*, we shall have a son. The speaker stressed this point referring obliquely to the *Puṁsavana Saṁskāra* that here again the preference was to have a son. It is only after completing these rituals that the bride becomes a wife, otherwise she remains a maiden.

A son is called *putra* since he salvages (the father) from the hell called *pum*. Thereafter is the ritual called *Sumaṅgalī* (i.e. This bride is *Sumaṅgalī* the assembly please bless her and return back to your homes). At this point the bride changes sides and sits on the left of the groom.

There is another ritual laid down called *Caturthī Karma* to be observed four days later but it is becoming obsolete these days.

Finally, Mahamahopadhyaya Pt. Sitaram ji Shastri was requested to bless the Seminar with his views. He discussed in depth the nature of the term *Saṁskāra* from different points of view. In the *Dharma-śāstra* tradition, *Saṁskāra* is an action (*kriyā*) derived from 'to act' (*karma*) with *saṁ* (prefix). Thus we derive *Saṁskaraṇam* it is *yaugika*. But the *Nyāya* school lays down that *Saṁskāra* as a *guṇa*. Thus according to the *Dharmaśāstra* tradition, in its active principle (action), it brings a change in a particular state (situation), but in the *Naiyāyika* tradition it is a *guṇa*, it applies itself (to a particular act) e.g. blue or yellow dress. *Naiyāyikas* regard the *atman* as being distinct from *jñāna* but it is a base for *ajñāna*. There is a relationship between a word and its meaning. These are *nitya* (unchangeable). If one is taught, 'this is a pot, this a bull' one will know the meaning of the word. If one will be aware of the three *vṛttis* (*śakti*, *lakṣaṇa*, *vyañjana*), one will know the meaning of the word. He informed the house that there is a transformation in *rūpa* (form) by *kriyā*. *Saṁskāra* is a *kriyā rūpa*. He made his presentation agreeable by using a number of parables.

According to the grammarians, there is an *abandha* (irrevocable connection) between the word and its meaning. An action leads to the same result whether one knows its meaning or not. For example, the fire

will always scorch one's body whether one gets in touch with it knowingly (i.e. knowing its import) or unknowingly. *Smṛti* (or memory) is also a special type of *jñāna*. In *Pratyabhijñā*, one is reminded of a particular meaning. For example, 'Oh, this is Devadatta whom I saw in Mathura.'

'Now I come to the theme of my lecture,' he declared. Referring to the *Garbhādhāna Saṁskāra*, the learned speaker told the house that one must distinguish between the act of impregnating and the *Saṁskāra* itself. The *Saṁskāra* is a preparation for *Garbhādhāna*. (The woman) is *Mātr-bhūmi* (the field) like *mātā* (mother, i.e. would be mother). It needs a *Saṁskāra* the same way as one needs to prepare a field for sowing. The seed remains the same but the result is different if the field is *Saṁskārita* (well-prepared).

Saṁskāras are of two kinds. *Sīmantonayana* is from *sīmanta* which is *keśa-deśa* (field of hair or scalp). We are actually performing *Saṁskāras* every now and then (in our daily routine) like the morning duties. Even extraction of *mala* (lit. dirt) is a *Saṁskāra*. For example washing a cloth is the *Saṁskāra* of the cloth. Bathing, therefore, is a *Saṁskāra*. The *Bhagavad-gītā* calls it *mala-vimocanam*. Similarly, when we wash our hand and feet and perform the *ācamana*, we are following the concept of *Saṁskāra*. Even for sitting on the *āsana* there is a *Saṁskāra* laid down. Thus, there is a tradition of *Saṁskāra*, at every step of our daily life. For example the speaker said that there are two types of (sacred) baths in the *Gaṅgā*: one is known as a *mūsala snāna*, i.e. throwing oneself in the water like a *mūsala* or pestle (a pounding shaft) which has no *Saṁskāra* while the other is the real *Gaṅgā-snāna* which one performs after offering a prayer to the mother *Gaṅgā*. The latter removes pollution and also brings forth 'fruits' (of life). Thus there are *bāhya-saṁskāras* (overt *Saṁskāras*) while the others are *ābhyantara-saṁskāras* (inner *saṁskāras*). Some are (fortified) with *mantras* (sacred formulae). For example, the *Puṁsavana Saṁskāra* (and other of this group) is an *Ābhyantara Saṁskāra*. The learned speaker gave a paradigm: We cook rice after processing it with *Saṁskāras* like lighting the fuel-wood etc. so that we get the 'fruit' (end-oriented action).

But if we say Devadatta is sleeping, it is an *akarmaka-kriyā* since the action is consumed in the result. Thus the *bāhya* (overt) *Samskāras* are *samantraka*. There are divine words (*īśvaraṇam-vācaḥ*), if a person loses faith in these, it is he who suffers. If you do not get the desired result after performing a ritual, take it that there is some fault in the performance of the ritual.

Patañjali in his *Mahābhāṣya* explains: if one heats water without offering proper *mantras*, even then it will warm up but you will prosper if you do it with the (prescribed) *mantras*.

In our traditions, it is interdicted to argue, thus whatever the *Śāstras* (sacred texts) say is final. But if you wish to cast doubts, you are free to do it (nobody cares). For example if a child is instructed to write the letter 'ka', and he questions the form of the alphabet, there is no remedy. We have the tradition of not sleeping with our heads in the north direction. Now modern science has reaffirmed this on the basis of magnetic pulls of the North pole. There is a rationale in our traditions.

The learned speaker referred to the lack of understanding between the *Guru* and the *Yajamāna*, which had been a fine relationship over the generations. Now the proefficient *Pañḍita jī* feels that the *Yajamāna* has changed (shows no seriousness in his approach to the rituals) *Pañḍita jī* is helpless, or sometimes he feels that any way he is going to get the *dakṣiṇā* so he performs perfunctorily. He gave, at this point, an interesting story of a knowledgeable *Pañḍita* visiting a village where the local *Pañḍita* was ignorant. The visiting *Pañḍita* objected at a point and said that it (that particular passage) should only be in the 4th case (*Sampradna kāraka*). The local *Pañḍita* had no other recourse but to laugh at this by saying, 'Look folks, your parent died on the seventh day (of the lunar calendar, which I am using at present), while this intruder calls it 4th (the fourth day) !' The villagers, naturally, gave a cold shoulder to the visiting *Pañḍita*.

The learned speaker was anguished as he remarked that there is a lack of

availability of the texts. Even the great grammarian Bhattoji Dikshit's *Śabdakoṣa* is known through its fragments. The older generations were committed to religion. They gave charity, built *dharmaśālās*, excavated wells etc. such activities are getting fewer and fewer now-a-days.

Referring back to the *Samskāras*, the learned speaker added that these are like manicuring a garden, or turning a rough stone on a lathe. This process is similarly called *Samskāra* (i.e. parallel to the 16 *Samskāras* in life). There is again a distinction in transformation of a form. Initially the *Samskāras* impregnate one with *tejas* (*teja-ādhāna*), but the other type of *Samskāra* changes the form, for example milk is turned into yoghurt. According to the *śāstras* (sacred texts) the *Samskāras* energise (the recipient) by *teja-ādhāna*. *Puṇya karma* (sacred noble deed) generates happiness in our lives, while a *pāpa-karma* (action leading to evil result) leads to sorrow. For example, *Sītā* remarked to *Rāvaṇa* that his affluence was due to good deeds (*puṇya-karmans*), now the period of *pāpa-karmans* was coming (leading to his destruction). Any deed in contravention of the *śāstras* (shastric injunctions) is a *pāpa-karman*. The parents perform *pumsavana-samskāra* to ward off the *doṣas* (evil spots) of the future baby.

In the end the learned speaker spoke on the achievements of the *Jñāna-Pravāha*, and Smt. Bimla Poddar, the spirit behind it. He jokingly said that the city of Calcutta is known among the Sanskrit Pandits as *Kalī-Krānta*, or attacked by the *Kali-yuga* since the life there, like many metropolitan cities, is mundane in its life style. One single person dedicated to this great cause in her thought, speech and action (*manasā-vācā-karmaṇā*) deserves all our thanks. She has such heavy financial commitments for this noble cause in the city of Lord Vishwanatha. *Jñāna* is the *summum bonum* of our life. Only *śabda* (word or sound) is *brahman* but *artha* (the meaning) is also *brahman*. As the *vaiyākaraṇas* (grammarians) say, it is *śabda* which emanates from *Virāṭa* (Cosmic Man), that (*śadba*) is *Jñāna*. Pt. Sitaram ji Shastri blessed *Jñāna-Pravāha* by saying: May it have a continuous flow of pure '*vimala jñāna*'. The pun is on *Jñāna-Pravāha* (flow) and *Vimala* (Smt

The [Valedictory] Session

In the end, Prof. Prem Lata Sharma, the Chairperson of the Seminar was requested to make concluding remarks. In her valedictory speech she recapitulated important issues raised during the sessions: what is the relationship between *Samskāras* and the (*Sanātana*) concept of *Āśrama* 's, what is the import of the *Samskāras*, what are the reasons for the *Samskāras* alienation from present day life? What are the pure forms of the *Samskāras*? In the present contexts, we sometimes come across '*apa-vyākhyā*' (wrong explanations) of the *Samskāras* thus there is a need for their (right) re-interpretations. The learned speaker agreed with Prof. Chandra Kala Padia on her views of the re-interpretation of our traditions in the process of construction.

A number of issues were brought up in the Seminar : it is always an achievement of such seminars that questions are raised. For example, the question of the relevance of *Samskāras* in the present society was raised. This is vital to us, or, whether these *Samskāras* apply to all the four *varṇas* of our society. Obviously, certain *Samskāras* are related to the *brahmacarya* and *gṛhastha āśramas*, yet others are applicable to the *vānaprastha* and *sannyāsa āśramas* which are not quite specific.

There was a brief reference to '*kumāra*' it would have been more fruitful if the discussion on this topic was more detailed and the questions resolved, then and there. Nevertheless, the participants and the audience could return with some of these queries in their minds. This is an achievement in itself of a Seminar.

There is a case for rationalizing some of the traditional forms or rituals. At present it appears that they have collected a lot of dust over the surface.

In the *Sāhitya Śāstra*, the term *Samskāra* is used in a slightly different sense

yet that is also relevant to this Seminar. The equivalent term in the *Sāhitya Śāstra* is *vāsanā*, which is acquired over one's experience of the present life and past birth. Whatever the *anubhūti* (impression), it is related to our sensibilities. Thus one can 'refine' (*Samskārita*) both our mind (sensibilities) and physical body through *Samskāras*. She pointed out that due to the changed prefixes (*pratyaya*), there is scope for change in the subtle meanings between *Samskāras* (as rituals) and *Samskṛti*. We may 'refine' ourselves through *Samskāra* i.e. our *citta* and *manas*. It is *Samskāra* (process) i.e. *vāsanā* (impression) or *anubhūti* with which the *citta* is *bhāvita* (permeated) since *citta* is a collection of all *Samskāras*. These days we are in the midst of a crisis of character.

She said that Prof. Chandra Kala Padia raised an important issue, viz. our going back to our original texts. Even those who have no access to the original (classical) languages like Sanskrit, Pali, Prakṛita, etc. should get authentic translations as is the case in the West where the Greek and Latin texts are translated in modern European languages, authentically. She referred to a Seminar organised by Dr. Kanti Lala Shah of Dharwad on *Nāṭya-Śāstra* (restricted to a few chapters). Musicology is a recent discipline in India but much progress has been made during the last decades. Even the second and third generation scholars are seriously involved in its study and research, many of them are products of the Musicology Deptt. of Banaras Hindu University. Such studies revealed the fine nuances between the terms *ālāpa*, *ālapti*, *ālāpana* although they are derived from a single root. These show that different meanings stem from one root. Understanding of foundation texts broadens our understanding.

Prof. Prem Lata Sharma concluded her presidential speech again with a reference to the present seminar. She said that this was a hurriedly assembled Seminar but anyway it was *svalpārambha*-- referring to the adage that a small beginning leads to an auspicious end, yet it was nice because now we all can reconsider the issues, especially those raised in the form of queries. There is always room for rethinking. Perhaps after six

months we could assemble again with some deeper issues. The lectures and the points raised during the question-answer session will be documented and sent to the respective scholars for giving final touches and in the final shape these proceedings will be worthy of publication.

The Managing Trustee of *Jñāna-Pravāha*, Smt. Bimla Poddar was requested to speak. She, in her familiar modesty, offered her sincere *praṇāmas* to all those present, while thanking the guests and asked for their *āśīrvāda*.