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Spiritual Purification in Hinduism-An Analytical Review

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Abstract:

Religious Purification is a process of making something spiritually or ceremonially clean: purification of mind through reflection and contemplation. In Hinduism, the perception of purity “Śuddhā” deals within the caste classification. Hinduism had their stereotype & ceremonial purification system that mostly consisted upon the external rites’ while in fact, the core concept of purifying system concerned with inwards purification rather than outwards. By the purification’ may be in form of physical rites & formal functions or form of contemplation & meditation’ the principle is same to be spiritually & religiously high and purified. The purpose of the research study is to disclose briefly the fundamental concepts & believes, the status of “Brahman” in their cast system, and the core rites of spiritual purification in Hinduism; the sacredness of cow, “mañtrā” singing, dancing & “Gaṅgā aśhnānā”, celebrating their festive, meditations techniques particularly “yogā” in the light of their religious doctrine. An analytical & descriptive methodology is adopted for this study.

Key words: Stereotype; ancient religions; cast classification; ceremonial system; purification.

Introduction:

Purification is an act of cleaning and refining process, or the process of removing impurities by using some particular purification apparatus. It is religious tradition & action by which a defiled person was made clean, to remove grimy or harmful substances’ to become morally good”.¹ Historically “spirituality” was related to the holiness.² It is a mostly used term especially in

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the contemporary world. Spirituality is a totally unified approach. The purpose of human life is self-realization. The actual happiness does not depend upon the sensual pleasure and intellectual satisfaction. It transcends in imperfection and limitations

Spiritual purification is an act of removing from a person, generally by a formal procedure, the bad affects and their ultimate suffering because the person has broken a religious or a moral law”.³ Spiritual purification moulds and shapes “sin into virtues, forces the soul to seek God and his will as it should be his ultimate goal. Not to oppose the laws of God but redirected towards God and employed in what is for greater glory alone”.⁴

As humans are the combinations of both body & soul, so both needs to be clean and purify. It is also believes in that spirit is the only reality that exists even after the death of a person.⁵ “When a person commits sin and breaks his religious laws, the level of spirit gradually comes at the lower level. Different kind of sufferings hardships and difficulties of the worldly life makes the human filthy. By the purification’ may be in form of physical rituals & ceremonies or form of meditation & contemplation’ the purpose is same; to be spiritually & religiously high and purified. “*Dārśhanā Tyāgī*” explained that it is a kind of metaphysics. Inside a person, apart from the body’ soul or spirit is comprehensively universal.⁶

According to a Hindu *Swāmī Vīvekāñāṇḍā* (1863–1902) “our life-blood is spirituality. If it is correct everything is right, political, social, any other material defects, even the poverty of the land will all be cured, if that blood is pure.”⁷ According to *Bhagvād-Gītā*; “soul penetrates; it can be neither drowned nor scorched nor dried. It is eternal, all-pervading, unchanging, immovable and the most ancient”.⁸ So to make our self-pure, the repentance, abstinence (reluctance of the self towards the world), Patience, thankfulness and sincerity are all tools toward the spirituality.

Spiritual Purification in Hinduism

One of the ancient religions is Hinduism and the third major religion of the world. It looks as a disorganized religion as it has no common religious scripture, no common language, and no founder, and even no common ritual. Most of Hindus believed that we have a soul that is the reflection of god. The soul is divided in nature. Soul reincarnated many times. All creatures have soul so they worship many creatures like “*Hanūmāñ*” and many others.

In Hinduism, religious purification approaches personage and communal structure as well. Spiritual purification is based upon their religious literature that includes “*Vedās, Pūrānā, Mahābhārātā, Bhāgavād-Gītā, Manū-Smṛiti*” and some other reference books. As

mentioned in Hindu scriptures that a Hindu can't see wisely with apparent eyes, without "*the eyes of wisdom*". In Hinduism, sensual and ceremonially cleansing process is symbolized as ability to receive super natural powers. "*If from self-conceit, thou wilt not listen (To Me), thou shalt perish*"⁹

Hindu scriptures prescribed the self-purification for salvation called "*Nirvāṇā*". The Vedas presents Brahman¹⁰ "*Śuddhā*", "*Śattvā*" as a pure being with pure consciousness, free from modifications and impurities. This world is mixture of heaven "*Śvāh*", earth "*Bhū*" and mid-region "*Bhūvā*", and the underworld "*Pātālā*". Only the purified one can enter or reach the heaven "*Śvāh*". A man is born with the quality to recognize physical, verbal and mental sins and virtue in behavior.¹¹

The status of purity or impurity is considered through the hierarchy of cast system in Hindus.¹² For lower castes, impurity is permanent¹³, while for a layman, due to the occurrence of death, the entire body becomes waste.¹⁴ Hindu believes in non-violence, sacredness of cow, vegetarian diet and characterizes the purer castes.¹⁵ It is acknowledge that cow was created on the same day as "*Brahmā*" and the sin of killing cow is equal to "*Brahmiṇicide*"; murder of a Brahman.¹⁶ Light, wisdom, righteousness, divinity, prosperity, happiness, pure "*karmā*"¹⁷ "*Pūṇyām*" auspiciousness,¹⁸ self-control, cleanliness, health, power, intelligence, honor,¹⁹ success, immortality and morality are the considered aspects of purity.

The rule regarding impurity "*Asaūchā*" and purification "*Śuddhī*" occupy, therefore, a conspicuous place is there in the Sanskrit law-books and many treaties in Sanskrit on the subject.²⁰ As *Manū Smṛitī* says; "The frame is cleansed by way of water, the internal organ is purified by using truthfulness, the character soul by way of sacred studying and austerities, and the intellect by means of (real) know-how."²¹

In Hinduism, impurity has been defined as any waste from human or animal or divine body is impure. With death, the entire body becomes waste²² while for the lower castes; impurity is permanent²³ so no inter-relations with "*Śūdar*" or other low caste²⁴ makes them pure. Lower caste members suffer a kind of inherited defilements.²⁵ Besides pollution from a caste's traditional occupation, its dietary and material customs are relevant to its ritual rank, absorbed into Hinduism from Buddhism. Jainism was a belief in non-violence: as consequently, a belief that a vegetarian diet characterizes the purer castes.²⁶

Impurity is also characterized by darkness, ignorance,²⁷ egoism, evil conduct, evil desires, selfishness, death, disease, suffering, sorrow, conflict, poverty, sin "*pāpam*", weakness, lust, pride, envy, anger, cruelty,

duality, attachments, bondage, vanity, etc. Spiritual impurity also lies with some food (meat), alcohol and by attending funeral ceremony.

Spiritual purification practices are common in Hinduism. To be a Hindu, the religion made some obligatory duties for each Hindu. A common Hindu prays seven days a week and each day prayer dedicated to a particular god. Prayer is obligatory and week days are fixed for particular god; “*Śhīvā, Hanūmāñ, Kriśhñā, Dākśhīñā-mūrthy, Mahā-lakshmī, Śhañī-Gāyātrī* and *sūryā -gāyātrī*”. They fast on a particular day. It is prerequisite for the purification of mind and soul.

Hinduism has divided life into four stages to attain practical spirituality;

- 1st stage; education in the prime of life and abstinence in adolescences
- 2nd stage; householder’s life perform “*yājñās*” (sacrifices) in adult age
- 3rd stage; woodland life in years
- 4th stage is to wander about for liberation in old age.²⁸

When people having religious trends realized that the worldly life was full of sufferings and sorrow, they renounced household life and kept themselves aloof from human affairs.²⁹

The significant spiritual evolutionary system and traditions are severity “*tāpāhā*”,³⁰ continence “*brāhmachāryā*”,³¹ keeping pace inhalation “*prāñāyāmā*”, attentiveness “*dhārānāyghbū*”, meditation “*dhyānā*”, contemplation “*nidhedhyāsā*” along with be quiet or self-control of verbal communication “*māūnā*”. A few additional corporeal holy acts are intellect devotion “*manāsā puja*”, continuous reading the of deity’s titles “*jāpā*”, religious hymns chanting “*kīrtānā, bhājānā*”, adherence helping “*chāryā*” like brushing the place of worship, arrangements of the ceremonial objects along with assistance the spiritual leader.

In Puranic era, cow had been taken as the most holy in Hinduism. An important nostrum for spiritual practicality is the blend recognized as “*pāñchā-gāvyā*”, means ‘five cows’ in here are the 5 foodstuffs of cow, that is, ghee (clarified butter), curds, cow dung & urine. The consumption of “*go-mūtrā*”, ‘cow urine’ is very sacred to Hindus. Pious Hindus still be seen cupping their hands and drinking straight from flow of urinating cow. Washing in cow urine is a form of purification, bath “*Śhnānā*”.³²

Manū Smṛitī says; “The body is cleansed by water’ the internal organ is purified by truthfulness, the individual soul by sacred learning and austerities, and the intellect by (true) knowledge.”³³ Ablutions and bath in sacred water³⁴ “*Gāṅgā*”³⁵ *Kārmā Yogā*,³⁶ sacred objects in nature and five

daily misconduct are also set rules for purification. The misconducts are mentioned as;

- 1: *Brāhmahāṭṭyā*; murder of a Brahmin.
- 2: *Śīśūhāṭṭyā*; demolition of an unborn child (willful abortion).
- 3: *Sūrpānā*; to drink toddy, the juice (wine) of palm tree.
- 4: *Swārnā-sneyā*; to steal gold.

5: *Gūrū- tālpā-gāmānā*; to be sexual with *gūrū* wife or of the spiritual or temporal superior. Some added a sixth, which consists in holding communication with any one guilty of any of these five evil deeds, commonly called “*pāñchā- pātākās*”, the five misdeeds.³⁷

Formal Procedure & Customs for Purification:

The Hindu's worship idols and believed that their “*Mañtrās*” can infuse their image with life. In Hinduism, “*Trimūrti*” is the central image presented in temple. “*Trimūrti*” is the three-faced bust, with faces that represent *Brāhmā* is creator, “*Vīśhṇū*” is preserver and “*Śhīvā*” is destroyer. All over modern India, there are colored prints of the blue-skinned “*Krīśhnā*” in a yellow vest playing to the *gopīs* on his flute. The scenes have been appeared in images on temple walls, crowned, with the “*Vīśhṇū*” mark on his forehead and playing flute. The praises of *Krīśhnā* (*Harī*), are chanted countless times in daily repetitions of the “*Bhāgāvād Gītā*” (songs of god).³⁸ Mostly Hindu temple contained images and symbols of gods. The images have been portrayed like a real person. They maintain them by washing, dressing and offer their eatables. Sometime they can be seen in a form of simple stone with red mark. Hindus recites Vedic hymns on them. The goddess appears as “*Dūrgā*” and “*Kālī*” in terrifying and fearful images mostly in back with blood.

A *Brāhmṇ* has given the most important place in Hinduism. He is the leading personality and conducts all religious rites & traditions. As the spiritual status of *Brāhmṇ* is high, the religion demanded that they must have the qualities of self- control, austerity, forbearance, uprightness, wisdom, knowledge and firm faith in religion.³⁹ In Hinduism, different period of life is divided into four “*Āśharāms; Brāhmāñchāryā, Ghrīsthāśhrām, Vānprāsthāśhrām & Sāñyāsāśhrām*”. It is compulsion for a *Brāhmṇ* to go through all four stages “*Āśharām*”.

- In the first stage of twenty five years is only for religious education (*Vedās*) and training and keep away from women, called “*Brāhmñchāryā*”.
- In second stage of age twenty-five to fifty, is for family life, to fulfill family needs, keep on studying Vedas and

perform ritual and sacrifices etc, known as “*Ghrīsth-āśhrām*”.

- In third stage, (*Vāñprāsth-āśhrām*) at the age of fifty to seventy-five, spend the life of monastic and study the book *Ārñik*.
- The last stage is called “*Saṅyāś-āśhrām*”; in this stage a Brahman must leave all worldly material life and becomes a Teacher’ to teach and train others.

Most of the hymns, prayers and composed from *Rīg-Vedā*. The Vedic texts and hymns are being recited daily by innumerable people. They repeat prayers, meditate, and read the “*Gāyātrī Māñtrā*” many times. Some *Vedīc* prayers are a part of Hindus daily worship particularly “*Gāyātrī Māñtrā*; “*let us meditate on the most excellent creator so he may guide our intellect*”⁴⁰. According to their traditions, these hymns spell to their gods. Hindu practices silent recitation of “*māñtrās*”, that repeated for a long hours. Mostly the repeat the same particular words like *Rāām*, *Rāām* or *Oom*, *Oom*⁴¹ etc constitute the prayer.⁴² Every devout Hindu recites them many times’ as possible every day as the “*Gāyātrī māñtrā*”, is called ‘the mother of the *Vedās*. It is also said that a “*Bārvhmāñ*” reads this more than two million times in his life.⁴³ The religious value of recitation of a text can also be given precisely; to get a husband, the “*rāmārāksastotrā*” text should be repeated 220 times by the women and many such other acts also being observed.⁴⁴

In Hinduism, people gather in group and sing song from their religious scripture “*Bhāgavād- Gītā*” and “*Rāmāyanā*” in routine life. On particular occasions they sang in congregation by organizing “*Hārī-Kīrtān*” (song of God) or “*Yājñā*” by paying sacred offerings to flames of sandal wood etc.⁴⁵ The praises of *Krishna* (*Hārī*), are chanted countless times in daily repetitions of the *Bhāgavād Gītā* (songs of god).⁴⁶ Vedic hymns⁴⁷ show the religious tradition of four cast’s dates from ancient Vedic period. Moreover women are not allowed in Vedic worships and to read *mañtrās* (*sāmhītās*).

In Hinduism, each day of the week is fixed for a particular god prayer as physical domain of spiritual purification. Their worship has different requirements like some gifts to present the gods, some eatables’ like rice, milk, honey, water, and some other things like clothes , *tūlasī* leaves, jewelry, scents, flowers, incense, lights, food etc”.⁴⁸ The term “*poojā*, *tāpās*” and “*jāpā*” uses instead of prayer. Monday is fixed for “*Śhīvā*”, Tuesday for “*hānūmāñ*”, Wednesday for “*Krīshnā*”, Thursday for “*Dākshīñāmūrthy*”, Friday for goddess “*Māhā lākshmi*”, Saturday for “*Śhāñi gāyātrī*”, Sunday for “*sūryā gāyātrī*.” These each day *poojā* is

obligatory for every Hindu. A *Brāhmān* pupil should make offerings to deities, sages and fathers and keep on worshipping of the deities and placing of fuel.

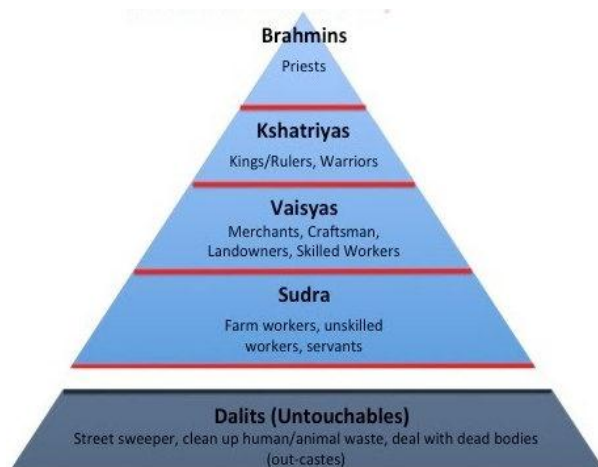
In Hinduism, bath is a ritual obligation named the ‘*śhāñāñā*’, for purification ‘*sodhāñā*’ performed in river water.⁴⁹ Ablutions in sacred waters ⁵⁰(*Gāṅgā*),⁵¹*Kārmā Yogā*,⁵²to drink the juice of palm trees (*Sūrpānā*) are also set rules for purification.

Fire (*Āgñī*) worship is also a part of Hinduism. *Rīg-Vedā* has given detail status of “*āgoṇy*” (fire). Fire bath is also taken by jumping, walking and standing or sitting position. Air bath and dust bath have been also performed as religious ritual for purification purpose. There are different types of fires; some are reserved for public sacrifices and some in domestic hearth. The construction of the sacred fire alter, the collecting of firewood, establishing fire with aid of rubbing sticks attended by rituals. The ritual of kindling the sacred fire is called “*āgnādhey*” that belongs to simple “*srāūtā*” sacrifices.⁵³

In Hindu “*Vedas*” and “*Śhāstrās*”, fasting has been termed as “*Vārāt*”. “*Vārāt*” is observed for the Fire God.⁵⁴ “*Poorṇīmā*” (full moon) and “*Amāvāsyā*” (no moon) are particular fasting days.

The most prestigious ritual in Hinduism was the fire ritual called “*Homā*”. The *Brāhmṇ* priest, who memorized Vedic hymns perform this ritual.⁵⁵ “*Homām*” is the first Brahmin sacrifice performed by standing on coals. It is an obligatory to every *Brāhmān* daily in different circumstances. It is a form of idolatry.⁵⁶ Sacrifice is to give up addiction, lure, deficiency, accountability, exposure etc.

Caste system has a very stronger grip in Hinduism. According to Hindus religious scriptures, Brahma (god) has created *brāhmīṇs*, *kshātrīyās*, *vaīśhyās* and *śhūdrās* from his mouth, shoulders, thighs and feet.⁵⁷ Interrelations are based on their religious cast system. Different casts don’t interact with each other and makes even no relationship. They don’t make marriage with each other. ‘*Brāhmīṇsān*’ and ‘*śhūdrās*’ can’t even sit with each other.



Hindu cast system (untouchable) is discrimination in humanity. The exaggerative status of *Brāhmṇ* has dominated the entire religion of Hinduism. Due to this degradation of “*śhūdrās*” many Hindus converted to Islam, Buddhism and Sikhism. In contemporary India *Bhimrāo Rāmji Ambedkār* (1890-1956) was a lawyer and awarded doctoral degree from Columbia University has also been suffered discrimination and even physical violence also converted to Buddhism.⁵⁸

They copy them and try to become the reflection of their deities. These are some of their important sacred days;

- “*Holi*” festival at the beginning of spring, in February- March, comes clearly from an ancient fertility ritual. People squirting colors, sing songs, dances and enjoy the festival. Their religious love story of “*Rādhā*” and “*Kṛīshanā*” and celebrate the killed demon.
- “*Dāserā*” (*Dāsārā*), in September-October, is a ten-day feast in honor of the goddess “*Dūrgā*”. They celebrate it as a victory of “*Rāmā*” against “*Rāvān*”.
- “*Dīvālī*”, (collection of lights) is well known in October-November for 4 days and New Year pageant. The event is in remembrance of *Vīśhnū* and *Lākśhmī*. *Gāñēśhā*, is another festival. “*Gāñēśhā*” is considered the god of prosperity, and *Sārāsvātī* is known as patron of learning and music and some other memorable days have also been celebrated as festivals in Hinduism.
- *Kūmbhā* is a festival has been celebrated on after twelve years. It is also named as the great pilgrimage. The back-ground is that gods fought and won against demon.

In Hinduism, dances are regarded as the depiction of their adoration. Different type of dances is performed in front of each deity, particularly at specific occasions. The traditional dance was invented by “śhīvā” god who first dances the cosmic “tandāvā”. His wife “pārvātī” contributed the seductive “lāsyā”. These became the prototypes of the male and female dances respectively. Historian of dance believe that Indian dancing evolved from ritual steps taken by priests and acolytes while executing certain tasks that involved going from one part of ceremonial area to another.⁵⁹ “Bhāratnāṭyām” is a religious theme dance, has been exercised in south India. Dancing girls were employed in all greater temples and certain sacred dances such as “kūttū” could not be performed at ordinary places of entertainment but only in temples. Classic dance form like the “Bhāratānāṭvyām” were traditionally associated with the “devādāsīs” (female slaves of god) as professional temple prostitutes were euphemistically known and whose function is to sing and dance before the deity. In the middle period of Hinduism with the rise of sects, dancing was used as a devotional aid, largely confined to men. The vaishnavite mystic’s “chāitāṇyā” and “tūkārām” both danced in ecstasy before idols.⁶⁰

Meditation and contemplation are the basic practice to attain spirituality .Yogā is the most essential meditation and adoration technique. It is derived from the “Yogāsūtrā” or “pātāñjālī-sūtrā” (the religious scripture of Hindus). The philosophy of “yogā” is associated with “pātñjālī”. Hindus are commanded; to be steadfast in the performance of their obligation, O Ārjun, forsaking attachment to success and failure. Such equanimity is known as Yogā.⁶¹ *Bhagavad-Gītā* describes; *the status attained by those who follow the “Sāmkhyā” is reached also by those who practice Yogā. One sees truly who sees Yogā and Sāmkhyā as one.*⁶²

Yoga has some major part or levels to be followed by a “Yogī”. The six yogic practices called “krīyās”; “Netī” (nostril cleaning), “Dhāūtī” (cleaning of the digestive and respiratory tracts), “Nāūlī” (cleaning of the abdominal in circular motion), “Bāstī” (cleaning of the lower abdomen), “Kāpālābhātī” (cleansing of the brain), “Trātākā” (a meditative technique to awaken the third eye) are also purification practices only.⁶³

Conclusion:

Spirituality or the religion is the only way to elevate human soul and the truths of human heart and put them into the higher level to resolve pertaining issues created by man’s free will.⁶⁴ The Hinduism lays stress upon their devotees to take up and sustain high-quality and moral

principles. To elevated rank of spiritual purity, the followers should keep and observe the religious traditions and customs performed by their spiritual leaders, a few in routine lives and several on just occasionally. The certain days and particular ritual & rites are the monumental. The concluding point is that spiritual purification is not merely apparent but the actual purification is that inner self should be purified. To attain spiritual purification both spiritual and physical domains involved. By the purification' may be in dimension of physical rituals & ceremonies or in the appearance of meditation & contemplation' the purpose is to be spiritually & religiously high and purified.

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