

Prāyashchitta Sādhanā: A Psycho-Spiritual Approach

Kamakhya Kumar

Head, Dept. of Yoga, Uttarakhand Sanskrit University, Haridwar
Email: kamakhya.kumar@gmail.com

Abstract:

A person cannot stop his activity at any time even for a moment, because the entire humanity has been forced by the Nature to perform action, as it is mentioned in Bhagwadgita as well. Therefore it is obvious that there will be some right action or sometimes it may gone wrong. Karma is the expression of the rule of perfect justice within us. It is the law of the cosmos reflected in the microcosm. There is nothing arbitrary or punitive about it. It is universal law and inevitable fact. All the phenomena of Nature are governed by one important law, the universal law of causation, which is also known by the name 'the Law of Karma'. The law of causation is a universal law that keeps up the inner harmony and the logical order of the universe. Man's deeds are subject to this law.

The present study aims to study the approach of Psycho-Spiritual nature of Tapa or penance as adopted by us in the form of Prayaschitta. The ancient texts suggest that there was significant debate and disagreement between Dharma scholars on what is the appropriate and sufficient penance or punishment for a given crime. For example, some texts suggest suicide as penance, or capital punishment for the crime of incest or rape, but other texts consider this as disproportionate punishment.

Keywords: Tapa, Prayaschitta, Dharma and Karma.

Introduction:

The Word Prāyashchitta came from two Sanskrit roots: Praya and Chitta (Praya - sin) (Chitta - destructions). Meaning of Prāyashchitta is nothing but destructions of Sins. Prāyashchitta is a personal attempt for atonement for wrongs committed against another. It "denotes an act or rite, intended for the destruction of sin. It can be considered a different sphere of the law. Penance is the English term used for the same. Generally it refers to repentance or contrition for sin. It refers, more particularly in the Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions, to a sacrament, or an outward sign of an inward grace. In the area of Psychotherapy it can be used to treat the patients suffering with guilt.

In Hinduism, it is a dharma-related term and refers to voluntarily accepting one's errors and misdeeds, confession,

repentance (paccattappam), means of penance and expiation to undo or reduce the karmic consequences. It includes atonement for intentional and unintentional misdeeds. The ancient Hindu literature on repentance, expiation and atonement is extensive, with earliest mentions found in the Vedic literature. Illustrative means to repent for intentional and unintentional misdeeds include admitting one's misdeeds, austerities, fasting, pilgrimage and bathing in sacred waters, ascetic lifestyle, Yajna (fire sacrifice, homa), praying, Yoga, giving gifts to the poor and needy, and others.

The concept of Prāyashchitta can be traced back to the Vedas. However, in some instances such as in Taittiriya Samhita verses 2.1.2.4 and 5.1.9.3, these words simply imply "accidental happening or mishap" and associated sense of remorse,

and their context has nothing to do with "sin". Though in the Indian Puranas it is held that mere remembrance of Lord Narayana is capable of removing all sins yet Prāyaschitta in Narada Purana enumerates five despicable crimes and how one can compensate for it. The word Prāyaschitta is obtained from 'Prāya' meaning 'tapas' and 'Chitta' meaning 'resolve'. The Prāyaschitta is so called because of the firm belief that it will be a means of the sin removal. Sage Narada, in Narada Purana, states that murderer of a *Brahmin*, a drug intoxicant, gold thief, violator of teacher's bed and one who links with the above mentioned evil acts.

In the Code of Manu, we find various kinds of Prāyaschitta for the destruction of various kinds of sins. Prāyaschitta is of two kinds, viz., Extraordinary (Asādhārana) and Ordinary (Sādhārana). Extraordinary penances are those which are prescribed in the Code of Manu for the destruction of particular sins... If anyone repents and openly admits his minor offenses, the sin is washed away. In doing Prāyaschitta the offender actually suffers, he punishes himself by long fasting and other ordeals as described above. Action and reaction are equal and opposite.

The five sinners counted as the equals of a murderer of a Brahmana are: panktibhedi (one who defiles a society of persons), vrathapaki (one who cooks for one's own use), Nityam Brahmanadusaka (one who kills Brahmanas usually), adesi (one who does acts forbidden by the king) and Vedavikreta (a seller of the Vedas). Again, an obstructor of a Brahmana on his way to bathe or worship, a liar, one who is unrighteous, one who hurts others or speaks ill of others, etc also are considered as Brahmana.

One, who kills unknowingly a Brahmana as expiation, should wander in the jungle for twelve years wearing bark as a garment and with a human skull. While doing this

he should bathe, worship *Lord Vishnu* and take food once a day only. A gift of ten thousand given to a virtuous Brahmana is also considered to expiate the sins of murdering of Brahman. In order to redress the sin of liquor drinking one has to drink boiling milk, ghee or cow's urine.

Sins like theft of fruits, musk, jewels, metals like zinc, iron, honey, sandal wood are also equal to stealing of gold also. For pilfering gold belonging to a Brahmana the offender has to undertake Brahmahatya Vrata for twelve years. By stealing the same thing belonging to his teachers, sacrificers, after coating his body with ghee he should burn himself in fire.

A person consigning intercourse with one's own mother, step-mother or teacher's wife mistakenly can compensate the sin by killing himself. Accidental contact with four of the above types of offenders requires the performance of Kayakracha vrata.

Punishments are also mentioned for killing frog, crow, mouse, cat, dog, cow and some other animals. Donation is also prescribed as *Prāyaschitta*. Reparation also differs according to Varna also. If a *Brahmana* kills a sacrificer, *Kshatriya*, he should endure *Brahmahatya vrata*, agnivesha or throwing oneself into the air and ending life. If the slayer is a *Kshatriya* or a *Vaishya*, the same expiations recommended above should be performed twice and three times respectively. If the killer is a *Shudra* he is put to death and punished by the king. This shows that the punishments for misdeeds depended upon the Varna.

These sins can be removed by the expiations said to be prescribed by the prophets, there are some sins which are called complete sins leading the sinner to hells as no penance has been recommended. An offense which has no remedy include lack of sympathy to

Brahman, betraying the trusted, ingratitude, contact with a Shudra woman, living on Shudra's food, offending Vedas and noble stories, and entering a Buddhist temple .

Prāyaścittas are not necessary only for the cleansing of one's own soul, but also for the satisfaction rest of society, as they are not permitted to have social contact with one who has sinned and not completed their penance.

There are some Rituals performed in Hindu traditions to reduce the severity of or eliminate the effects of bad or prohibited deeds. Praya is austerity and chitta is firm resolution; a firm resolution to take up austerity and following thru with it is *Prāyaschitta*. It includes austerities like fasting, chanting of Mantras, giving away gifts or going to pilgrimage. It is a ritual which is performed to eliminate the effects of bad deeds. Praya means austerity and chitta refers to firm resolution. Human beings are bound to make mistakes. However one has to repent, resolve so that it is not repeated.

If one commits a sin one has to commit expiation to get over the guilt. Prāyaschitta depends on the type of sin committed. There are two types of sins: Mahapātakas and Upapātakas. Mahapātakas include killing a person of knowledge, drinking intoxicating liquids and smoking. Upapātakas include neglect of sacred fire, offending one's teacher, theft, nonpayment of debts, selling banned articles, cutting down trees or killing animals who are not dangerous.

Some particular procedures a sinner must undergo take the form of paring his nails, shaving his head, bathing with clay, cow dung, and holy water, drinking clarified butter, and making a declaration of performing the penance indicated by the assembly of the learned men Brahmins, all on the day prior to commencing his

penance. On the next day, he is to bathe, perform Śrāddha and Homa, and give gifts to the Brahmins and feed them. Also during the time of prāyaścitta, the sinner must observe certain rules on food and other matters. This includes that the sinner refrain from taking food at another's house, from sexual intercourse, from speaking at an improper time, and from everything that might cause him to feel strength or sexual passion. It is customary that when undergoing a penance, the sinner begins with a mantra that translates "O! Fire, lord of vrata! I shall perform a vrata." In the same way, when one has finished his penance, he recites a mantra that translates, "O! Fire, lord of vratas: I have performed the vrata, I had the strength to do it, may it be propitious for me." There are also particular virtues that should be practiced while doing penance such as honesty. These are known as yamas.

Two kinds of Prāyaścitta exist: one which is done openly, prakāś, and one which is done secretly, rahasya. Many smṛtis lay down rules about performing secret prāyaścittas. One reason a man would perform a secret prāyaścitta is because no one but himself knows about the sin he has committed. A general rule exists that secret penances are meant for those who have consecrated the Vedic fires, who are disciplined, old or learned, and that the open penances are meant for other people. It is even said that women and Śūdras can perform secret penances because they too can give gifts and prānāyāmas. While some smritis prescribe the enactment of a penance immediately as needed, some other place restrictions on the time (i.e. the Prāyaścittatattva says that a penance should not commence on the 8th or 14th tithi of the month). If one is in mourning, he may also wait to perform penance until the period of morning has been completed.

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Prāyaścitta is one of three sections that traditionally compose the Dharmashastras, the other two being ācāra and vyavahāra. Vyavahāra, technically, is the process, procedure and administration of justice. If convicted, some sins and crimes were specified to invite penance while others punishment (danda). Intentional murder, for instance, was specified to have the punishment of death. This punishment is counted both in a legal sense and as part of the prāyaścitta section. This combining of penance with legal procedure appears to make the prāyaścitta more effective as penance ending in death can result in full expiation from intentional sins. Some text

impose a time scale, wherein prāyaścitta increases the longer the crime or sin goes uncorrected.

Conclusion:

No success can be attained without understanding the law of Karma. The three aspects of the law of Karma should clearly be grasped. The first is the *Sançhita Karma*, the sum total and stored actions, good or bad in the innumerable past lives that we have left behind. The whole of it is recorded and preserved. The second is *Prarabdha Karma*, the inevitable Karma. It is that portion of our Karma which is assigned to us to be worked out in a single life in relation to men and things we met and experienced in previous lives. The third form is that of *Kriyamana Karma*. It is that Karma which is in the course of making. It is that which preserves our free-will with certain limitations and ensures our future success.

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