The “Coming of Age” (Kani-peedi/Ritu Kala Samskara) Ceremony

“Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitah”
“Dharma protects those who protect Dharma.” (Manu Smrti, Ch. 8, v. 15)

This article is quite thought-provoking and is not intended to create confusion, rather to view it from various schools of thought. There are many interpolations on this sensitive topic that now, we at DIPIKA feel obliged to comment about it, so that the people will now have a better understanding about the often misunderstood subject of this article.

The question that may be ask by some is, “Why do only those of South Indian descent (Tamil, Telugu, etc., speaking) perform this ritual in India and South Africa, among other countries”? A relevant question, and it is due to misunderstandings and the lack of knowledge provided by our gurus and priests (past and present) that this ritual is not given it’s deserved importance and made known to the general Hindu populace. It is due to a lack of knowledge and understanding that this ritual is not practiced outside India, often, by non-South Indians. This is particularly worrisome. Also, the topic of menstruation is not spoken about much yet and persons of tarnished demeanour can enter a temple while a female in her menstruation cycle can not. Again, we find this quite disappointing.

In Hinduism, life is a sacred journey, and every stage in one's life (emotional and biological development and so forth) is consecrated with a sacred ceremony to mark that particular event. These rites of passage, or Samskaras, for a female, are performed during birth, coming of age, wedding, pregnancy, funeral and so forth.

The “Coming of Age” ritual (also known as Tamil Manjal Neerattu Vizha (‘Turmeric Bathing Ceremony’), Kani-peedi and Ritu Kala Samskara (Ritusuddhi)) is the last part of the coming of age celebration for a female. Due to a lack of knowledge and understanding, this important prayer is generally only followed by South Indian families. This ritual is performed after the young female first menstruation, and marks her transition into womanhood. The transition from childhood to adulthood in any culture is a reason to celebrate, although different cultures may do so in ways they deem fit, according to their beliefs and value systems. The cultural beliefs and practices of our society are what makes us unique and what give us an identity. Most Hindu ceremonies are performed by men, but this ritual is performed by females only. It is a very joyous time for the family.

The Coming of Age prayer for a male is very different to that of a female in Hinduism. Keshanta (literally, cutting the hair) Samskara is the thirteenth of the sixteen Samskaras (sacraments) practiced by Hindu males. This samskara is connected with the first shaving of a young male’s facial hair when his age is approximately 16 years. The procedure of this Samskara is almost the same as that of the Chudakarana (shaving of the hair on the head) Samskara. Thereafter the sacred (brahmin) thread
ceremony, called Upanayanam (Janeo) Samskara is performed to mark his coming of age prayers. This topic will be addressed in the near future dedicated in another article.

Coming back to the topic of this article, a female's family often celebrate their female child's coming of age ritual by performing the coming of age ceremony upon the young female receiving her first menstruation cycle. This ritual serves as a formal initiation of a female into the next stage of her life and also to suggest that she remains chaste until her marriage. This ceremony includes dressing the young female in a new sari, and announcing her maturity to the community. This ritual offers the female and her family the chance to say farewell to, and give gratitude for, her childhood years, and to welcome her adolescent years. It provides young teens with an opportunity to recognize and cerebrate the changes in their life as they enter a new important phase.

Celebrating a woman's first menstruation is followed in several cultures around the world, thus it is not unique to South India. In North India, the celebration occurs rather quietly and the young girls are taught about menstruation practices and are requested to remain in seclusion. In East India, Assam, the celebration is called as ‘Xoru Biya’, which means ‘small marriage’. Thus, across India, this ritual is observed by various localized customs and ceremonies that celebrate the onset of menstruation. Nepal has a culture of celebrating a woman’s first cycle. The Dagara community in West Africa even holds an annual event to celebrate girls who have had cycles for twelve months. Japanese families celebrate with gifts. Native communities in America and Australia also celebrate by dressing up the young female and holding ceremonies.

What is common in all these ceremonies is the fact that the ceremonies are aimed at:

1) Imparting a very positive notion about menstruation in the mind of the female. The female is treated with much love and care and is given gifts. She is perceived as a manifestation of the Supreme Goddess and is worshipped with aarti (turning of a ghee or camphor lamp). The young female is welcomed into womanhood and the ritual allows her to accept the changes that come along with puberty in a positive and welcoming spirit. She is made to feel confident and happy with her feminine identity.

2) Imparting knowledge that equips the young female well to adjust to her oncoming physical and emotional changes during puberty; imparting knowledge regarding various menstruation practices that she should follow and the reasons and benefits of those practices.

Certain reasons why it is celebrated across the world are:-
- Many cultures believe a woman holds heightened wisdom and healing power during this period. She is considered blessed in this time period.
- It is a way to announce that the female is fertile for child bearing. Years ago, people that resided in small villages and a female coming of age meant she was ready for marriage. A ceremony was held to 'inform' everyone and 'allow' everyone to look at her.

Do note:- This may have been acceptable in the past, however is forbidden in this day and age, and underage relationships are also forbidden.
In South India, there is an evil-eye warding off ceremony after this event. Kindly view page 10 for more information on this procedure.
- It is an opportunity to feed her with nutritious food. Other cultures will have specific diets to be followed as per their traditions.

**The “Coming of Age” puja ritual guidelines**

***Do note that the following ritual is simply a guideline. Many families will have few, or many changes to what is provided below. You are most welcome to change where you see fit according to your family's traditions.***

The “Coming of Age” is a young female's transition from childhood to adolescence. The age at which this transition takes place varies in every society, as does the nature of the transition. It can be a simple legal convention or can be part of an elaborate ritual, as practiced by many societies. In the past, and in some societies today, such a change is associated with the age of sexual maturity (early adolescence); in others, it is associated with an age of religious responsibility.

Kindly note that this ritual is **ONLY** observed for nine days (with the day of the first menstruation counting as day 1 of the 9 day period). Nine being symbolic of the 9 divine Vedic Mothers/Matas/Ammen.

**Day 1:** When the first menstruation is noticed by the female, the mother should record the place, time, date, colour of all clothing, and call/visit their family/local priest. The priest/pandit/guru will advise on the type of prayer needs to be performed and whether or not the first menstrual cycle occurred in an auspicious time or not.  
***If the menstruation occurred in an inauspicious time and/or the colour clothes was inauspicious, then a havan to the Mother/Amma/Mata must be performed by the family priest after 30 days or after the 3rd month to counteract this inauspiciousness. This havan should **not** be performed within the same 9 day period and is either done at young female's home or at a temple. She wears a previously used sari or punjabi and after this havan the sari is given away.***

On the first day, the young female is generally bathed by her father's sister. In the event that the father's sister is not available then any other married lady may do this. On the first day the father's sister gives her a bath and this not done for most of the following days. Daily bathing alternates between 'head and body' and 'body bath only'. The reason for the aunt bathing the young female is to show the young female how to wash herself properly (especially with regards to the pertinent part of her body during menstruation), and so forth.

**Do note:** in light of various child protection laws put in place by various governments this will be a grey area in this day in age. Maybe the young female wouldn't feel comfortable with someone, except a mother or sister, giving her a bath as such. Something like instructing the young female or helping her wash her body while
dressed down, like in underwear and not completely naked. So this can be discussed amongst the elder females and the young female if she is fine with this arrangement.

Her aunt will give her a bath, smearing turmeric on her face and hands, and dot her with kungu powder on her forehead (the first kungu dot must be done by the mother). Daily, from the 1st to the 9th day, the young female must be given one teaspoon of “Sweet Oil” to ingest. Many females may find the taste not palatable, so we would suggest mixing the oil with a cup of orange juice.

The two main food preparations that she should eat daily or every second day are:

1) SWEET PUTTU... We suggest using a handful of rice flour (instead of white rice, as one should soak the white rice and then grind it, which is basically rice flour). This rice flour should be fried in a flat fry pan. Dry fry (without liquid) the flour for a few minutes or so and thereafter add a little water. It should become like crumbly. Thereafter, add the following into the pan, a pinch of sugar, and then salt. Mix and then add 1 tablespoon of butter or butter ghee, then half a pinch of elachie powder, then a little milk and desiccated coconut into the pan. Keep mixing until the mixture dries. It should look like fine crumbs (or like Soojee (Suji)).

2) KITCHARI... Kitchari means mixture, usually of two types of grains (basmati rice and mung dal). Kitchari recipes are those that are particularly nourishing and easy to digest. Kitchari is basic to the Ayurvedic way of life. Composed of basmati rice and mung dal, it has as many variations as there are cooks who prepare it. The skillful use of spices and vegetables can produce balancing effects for the three bodily doshas (three Ayurvedic Constitutions). Kitchari has many qualities but being quick and easy to prepare makes it a popular dish for almost every lifestyle. Basmati rice and mung dal together create a balanced food preparation that is a good protein combination and is tridoshic. This complete food is easy to digest and gives strength and vitality. It nourishes all the tissues of the body. Kitchari is the preferred food to eat when fasting on a mono-fast or while going through cleansing programs. Do use butter ghee liberally. Rich foods is encouraged during this period of hers.

Thereafter, light vegetarian food like sweet puttu, kitchari (as above) etc., and sweets may be eaten as it is easily digestible and for energy.

*** We humbly suggest vegetarian meals be eaten during these 9 days.

When she visits the bathroom, she may carry neem or syringaberry leaves and something made of iron (like a miniature pocket knife), to ward off evil spirits and negative forces (do note that this is optional). Negative entities are attracted to blood, hence precautions should be adhered to. After her daily bath, she should wear clothes (like a punjabi), which preferably should be new but practicality should be observed in these times and we suggest previously worn but already washed clothes.

We would humbly advise that she is given her own set of personal toiletries.
Special Note... Her father’s sister (aunt) generally is the go to female when this special event in the young female’s transition occurs. In this ritual, the mother is not allowed to perform almost any of the activities mentioned, this another married lady, generally the young female’s aunt, performs such activities. The aunt should console her, make her feel special and guide her into this new phase of her life. It can be, for many females, a psychological change. When, all of a sudden, strange things occur, like menstruating - which she has no control over, it can give the young female quite a shock. This is why a more experienced lady (generally an aunt) should be there to guide her and comfort her. Also, the aunt should show her how to use a sanitary towel and dispose of it appropriately later and so forth.

Days 2 - 8: For the next 7 days she should preferably be indoors and not viewed by the opposite gender (if possible). We at DIPIKA humbly suggest that the first three days she **MUST** at all costs stay at home and have no contact with males (if possible – her father and brother/s in the same house are exceptions). Generally, females that have their first menses are around the age of 9-13, thus not attending school for these three days should not pose a major problem, in most circumstances. If she is writing an important test/exam then she may go to school and come back, and have a turmeric water bath. The elder ladies, in the past, used to scare the young female by saying that if she sees any boy (excluding the family males) she will get pimples, etc. This was to scare her, she will in most probability get pimples anyways due to the hormonal changes in her body. Her hormones generally will act up in this period and thus she may have unnatural urges will she may find difficult to understand or control.

Now, from a “modern” outlook it will seem rather archaic, the notion that she has to not attend school or leave her house. This is debatable and controversial, and should be treated with a “time, place and circumstance” outlook. One should consider what is most viable in their own circumstances, as opposed to following set practices to one’s detriment. Kindly use your discretion.

Each day, the father’s sister (young female’s aunt) (or a married lady) will generally bring treats like sweets (mithai) and vegetarian prepared meals like sweet puttu, kitchari and other light meals.

Day 9: In the early part of the 9th morning, the young female has a “special” cleansing bath. During this bath, she should have a three kinds of oil bath. The oils should be either coconut oil, sweet oil, castor oil, til oil or mustard oil. These three oils should be mixed and the young female (with assistance if needed by the aunt) should then apply this mixture on her head, face, hands, breasts, genitals, knees and feet. Then she applies a mixture paste of seeka and turmeric powder and pathai payir on her face and hands. As this is done, she should chant “Om ganga devi-yai namah”. For the rituals later on, she is dressed up very lavishly, like a bride. The mother buys the new sari. No blessings of the sari is needed. Also she should be adorned with much jewelery especially that of gold, but according to the family’s financial circumstances.
After cleansing the ground (using turmeric water on the ground), a designated spot in the yard of the house is chosen for the rituals that will follow. A Kolam (see pictures below) (decorated with maize meal and NOT rice) is drawn on the ground (or on a white canvass cloth). After decorating the kolam, no shoes are worn around the ritual area.

Prayer requirements: A small Lord Ganesh murti or a picture, 1 clay lamp with ghee and a wick, 1 box of matches, 1 incense stick, 2 Kuthu Vilakku (tall lamps – view the picture on page 8), 3 types of vegetable curries (for eg., ‘mixed vegetable’ curry, potato curry, beans curry, herbs, etc.), 1 bowl of sweet puttu, 3 types of fruits (for eg., orange, banana, apple, pear, etc.), 1 coconut cleaned and the turf is still left (as in the picture below), one litre of milk, manja/hurdi (tumeric), kungu, santhanam (chandan powder), gadampodi, in an Aalam bowl (view the picture at the end of this page) add water, then add a little lime paste and hurdi – the mixture should then turn red in colour, a few coins, a few betel leaves and flat betel nuts, rose water to be added in the sprinkler and at least three married ladies.

Make seven, 6 cm in length, round dough bread called Seekaade (sikaade). It’s thickness should be like Rhot. The Seekaade bread is made with just flour and water. No salt or sugar is added. Make a stiff dough. Divide into 7 balls. Then place in palm and tap into a flat, thick round bread and fry on the thavaa (or a deep flat pan) until it is brownish.

What is the English meaning of some of the Tamil/Hindi terms mentioned above and below?
Gadhampodi – a light brown powder used in the prayer.
Seeka powder – a dark brown powder used in the prayer
Santhanam – chandan powder with water added to make a paste.
Chumbhu – lota/clay/metal pot.
Kungu (also spelt as Kungum) – a cerise/pink-coloured powder.
Pathai payir – white rice mixed with split green moong dal.
Aalam bowl – large metal or clay bowl (kindly view picture below).
Sprinkler – kindly view picture below.
On the tray above are the following prayer ingredients:-
Top:- Lime paste, mustard oil, sweet oil, till oil
Middle:- Santhanam (chandan), kungu powder, turmeric powder, coconut with the tuff
Front:- Seeka powder, pathai payir, gadhampodi powder

*** Try as best as possible to commence this ritual in an auspicious time.
Kindly request your family priest to provide an auspicious time in which to commence
this ritual.

The ritual procedure is as follows:- (this may change from family to family or surname
linage to surname linage).

Before taking out the trays, leave the trays at the Lakshmi lamp place in the house and
pray to the Divine couple Lakshmi-Narayan to bless the food and prayer ingredients.
After five minutes, take the trays out and place on the kolam.

On the kolam (view the kolam pictures on the next two pages) (in front of the young
female about half a metre from her), keep a tray which has small containers. In those
containers, place the gadhampodi, santhanam paste, turmeric paste, kungu powder,
sprinkler with rose water in it, the aalam bowl of water mixed with lime paste and
hurdi, coins (one coin per lady), betel leaf + flat betel nut (one per lady) and matches.

On another tray, in containers, place the 3 curries in each container, a bowl of sweet
puttu and the 7 Seekaadages (sikaaade) round dough bread.
On a coffee table place the Lord Ganesh murti or picture which should be decorated with a garland of fresh flowers, and next to Lord Ganesh place the clay lamp (add ghee and a wick). In front of Lord Ganesh place the fruits including the cleaned coconut and milk. The Lord Ganesh murti/picture and the lamp should face the East direction, while the young female looks at the back of the Lord Ganesh murti/picture facing east as well.

Also, place two Kuthu Vilakku (tall lamps) on either side of Lord Ganesh and the lamp. Decorate the Kuthu Vilakku with flowers. Add oil or ghee with wicks and light the wicks.

The married ladies will soon then perform the nelenge/hurdi/turmeric ritual for her protection, purification and finally bestowing their blessings upon her.

The young female is now brought to the ritual area by other elder females and then she sits on her chair. A much younger girl sits (on the young females right hand side) next to the young female throughout the ritual. Because the young female is dressed like a bride the younger female is generally referred to as the bridesmaid.
Under her chair (only), on a saucer, place a handful of rice and a few coins. The ritual now commences. She first proceeds to the table where Lord Ganesh is situated. She prays to Lord Ganesh by offering Lord Ganesh incense, by turning the lit incense stick 7 times around Lord Ganesh, praying to him to remove any obstacles in the upcoming prayer. The coconut is turned three times around the Lord Ganesha’s picture/murti. This coconut is then bust on a brick by one of the married ladies and the coconut parts are left by Lord Ganesh. Then she lights the clay lamp wick and prays to the Mother/Ammen/Mata.

The young female then goes back to her chair, sits and faces the East direction. Then the ladies, (who should be an uneven number of married ladies) come one at a time and firstly dot santhanam paste on the young females forehead, sprinkle a little rose water (from the sprinkler) on her head, then smear a mixture of turmeric paste and a little santhanam paste on her cheeks, then dot her with kungum on her forehead between her eyebrows, then sprinkle a little gadhampodi powder on her shoulders, then turn the
Now turn the Seekaade (sikaade) dough. The first lady will have four Seekaade’s in her right hand and three in her left hand. The lady now with her wrists crossed on the head of the female (and touching her head), then uncrosses her wrists and moves her arms onto the young female’s shoulders (and touches them), and then finally crosses her wrists at the knees (and touches them). This is done three times. The lady leaves the Seekaade back on the tray.

Then she turn a coin (money) clockwise (NOT anti-clockwise) 3 times around her upper half of her body to remove the Evil Eyes (Dristhi). Thereafter, put the coin into the aalam bowl which contains water and lime paste and a little turmeric. The lady then takes a betel leaf and betel nut, and a gift (which is optional) and gifts the young female. Each lady will do the same as the first lady. Her mother and the men in the family can also turn a coin but nothing else is done by them.

During the ceremony, she is presented with a sari while all the ladies present gather near, sing songs of praise and shower her with gifts. In some communities, green-colored presents are given to invite fertility.

The last lady will turn the aalam water clockwise (NOT anti-clockwise) 3 times around her upper half of the young female’s body. The water from the Aalam bowl is then disposed of on a plant or tree in the yard. The three types of curries and sweet puttu is given to an indigent person to eat. The Seekaade is disposed of under a tree in the yard or in a river. The fruits and milk are consumed as Lord Ganesh’s blessed offerings (prashad).

The third and final part is the public function, where the males of the family and friends are all invited. The girl’s maternal uncles generally gift her richly. Although this custom is on the wane, it is very much visibly present in society, especially in villages in smaller cities.

Thereafter she is free to leave the house and resume normal activities. Friends and family are invited to celebrate in this new stage of her life and then partake of the meals. Entertainment may be added to enhance the occasion.

Kindly refer to Dipika’s article on Evil eyes. This is to ward off any evil eyes after this event. Kindly Ctrl+click (HERE) to access the article on DIPIKA.

Special considerations:- Depending on individual circumstances and the ages of the girls involved, the rituals may be a simple one involving just the girls and their mothers or the girls and a few close friends and relatives. Though the coming of age rituals for females are often celebrated with only girls and women present, such a ceremony can be beneficial to everyone in the girl’s lives. Fathers, and the menfolk may be included in some part of the celebrations. In the presence of males who are significant to them, the girls will likely experience positive support and
acknowledgment of their new status. A female whose mother is absent can participate in this ritual with any adult woman who is her primary caregiver or significant emotional caregiver. If this situation applies to someone in your group, you will need to make appropriate modifications to the various parts of the activities. Hindus, in this day and age, need to practice the “consideration” verse from the Srimad Bhagavatam Maha Purana “desa-kala-patra” - “desa means situation, and kala, time, and patra, and the subject”. One should consider what is most viable in their own circumstances, as opposed to following set practices to one’s detriment.

*** A common question that may be asked is, “What happens if I didn’t perform this prayer when I had my first menses?” It is rather unfortunate and nothing much can be done. You will need to ask the guru/priest more on this as there may be a specific fast and prayer for this type of situation which he/she will advise further.

*** The clothes the young female wore on the day that she had her first menses must be washed and given to an indigent child. Her underwear from that day is washed, cut into little pieces and burnt.

**The best foods to eat for a menstruating female**

* Eating the banana flower is extremely beneficial for a menstruating female and is cooked as a curry.

* Eating beetroot salad or drinking beetroot juice is very beneficial for a menstruating female.
* Fruits like oranges, bananas and watermelon.
* Leafy greens like spinach, kale, collard greens and Swiss chard are the best to eat when menstruating because they are filled with iron, which are diminished when one is menstruating.
* Moringa (also known as drumstrick herbs, Saijaan Bhajee (Hindi), Murunkakkai/Murunkede (Tamil)) is finally receiving it’s due recognition as one of nature’s true health gifts to humans, and it is highly beneficial for menstruating females. In future, the female can consume this herb as a curry, as a salad dressing, as a powder, as a tablet, in soups (with the pod) as she desires a few days prior to menstruation.
* Teas like ginger, chamomile and Dong quai.
For other interesting articles on DIPIKA pertaining to this topic, kindly follow these links:-

1) Hinduism’s views on menstruation. Kindly Ctrl-click (HERE) to read this article on DIPIKA.

2) AMBUBACHI-MELA – When the divine Mother performs her yearly menstruation (22nd to 24th June) Kindly Ctrl-click (HERE) to read this article on DIPIKA.

3) The Kannimaar Prayers – The Seven Fairies Prayers Kindly Ctrl-click (HERE) to read this article on DIPIKA.

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