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Bhasmadhāraṇa as Described in the *Agamas*

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शिवं शिवकरं शान्तं शिवात्मनं शिवोत्तमम्।

शिवमार्गप्रणैतारं प्रणतोऽस्मि सदाशिवम्॥

Bhasmadhāraṇa is a process by which we need to purify our body. Particularly in Śaivāgama, *Bhasmadhāraṇa* is one of the rites where the Ācārya, the *Yajamāna* (the host), the disciples and the peoples around the rituals or in the temples used to purify their body and mind before and after the rituals or prayers through this unique object called *Bhasma*. It is one of the important items in all kind of Āgama conducts. At the time of *Abhiṣeka* and the daily temple *Pūjā*, it has a usage; it is applied to God and also given as *Prasad* to the people. The word *Bhasma* is derived from two different letters that is *Bha* means *bhartsanāt* (to destroy) and *sma* means *smāraṇāt* (to remember). The thing which fires all the sins and gives the thought of Lord Śiva is called *Bhasma*. It also gives *Bhoga* and *Mokṣa* to all the devotees of Lord Śiva. There are two kinds of Śiva worship which is endowed with such power “worship for oneself” (*Ātmārthapūjā*) and that “for others” (*Parārthapūjā*). Worship for oneself is again of three kinds: “pure” (*suddha*), “complete” (*kevala*) and “mixed” (*sammiśra*) while there are 28 kinds of worship for others as described by *Sūkṣmāgama*, for all kind of *pūjā* and to purify the body and mind one of the essential item is *Bhasma*. The *Kumāratantra* said -

भर्त्सनात् सर्वपापानां स्मरणात् च शिवस्य यत्।

भस्मेति खलु विख्यातं भुक्ति मुक्ति फलप्रदम्॥¹

Bhasma is also known as *Vibhūti*, which means glory. In the *Anuśāsanika-parva*, in chapter 247 of *Mahābhārata*, there is a conversation between Śiva and Pārvatī. It is a small chapter where the *Pāśupatayoga* is described. Śiva says with respect to *Bhasma* -

रक्षार्थं मङ्गलार्थं च पवित्रार्थं च भामिनि।

लिङ्गार्थं चैव भक्तानां भस्म दत्तं मया पुरा॥²

¹ *Kumāratantra*

There are four types of Bhasma that is *Kalpam*, *Anukalpam*, *Upakalpam*, *Akalpam*. The famous text *Śivārcanacandrikā* said, तत्र व्याध्यादिरहितां सवत्सां गां सम्पूज्य तदीयं गोमयं भुमावपतितं आकाशस्थमेव गृहीत्वा पिण्डीकृत्य विशोष्य पञ्चब्रह्ममन्त्रैः (ओं होम् ईशानमूर्ध्ने नमः। ओं हें तत्पुरुषवक्राय नमः। ओं हुम् अघोरहृदयाय नमः। ओं हिं वामदेवगुहाय नमः। ओं हं सद्योजातमृतये नमः) शिववह्नौ दग्ध्वा मूलेन विशोध्य यत्सम्पादितं यच्चाग्निहोत्रे समुद्भूतं तदुभयं कल्पम्। The second type is वने शुष्कं गोमयं गृहीत्वा शिववह्नौ दग्ध्वा मूलेन विशोध्य सम्पादितमुनुकल्पम्। The third type is अटवीगृहे गोवासे इष्टकापाकादिषु दावाभ्यादिभिर्दग्धं भस्मगृहीत्वा वस्त्रेण संशोध्य गोमूत्रेण पिण्डीकृत्य पुनश्शिववाग्नौ दग्धं मूलेन शोधितमुपकल्पम्। The fourth type is मन्द्रादिहीन ब्राह्मणै स्त्रीशूद्रादिभिर्वा शुचि गोमयं गृहीत्वा सम्पादितं श्रोत्रियागारचुल्ल्यादिभ्योगृहीतं वा यत्तदकल्पम्।

Generally there are two types of Bhasmadhārana one is Malasnānarūpam and Vidhisnānarūpam. अम्भसास्नातस्य द्विविधेऽपि भस्मस्नाने अधिकारः। तदशक्तौ कण्ठपर्यन्तं, कटिपर्यन्तं, जानुपर्यन्तं वा संक्षाल्य क्षालिताङ्गान्यार्द्रवस्त्रेण संमृज्य वस्त्रान्तरं परिधायचम्य ततो हुं फडन्तास्त्रेण दक्षिणपादाङ्गुष्ठोत्थितवह्निना देहगतबाह्यामलमात्रं दग्धं विचिन्त्यबहिसम्बन्धक्षुभित बिन्दुस्थानस्थितशक्तिमण्डलस्रवदमृतप्रवाहेण शरीरमाप्लावयेत्। अथ मनसा मूलमन्त्रान्दान्तमुच्चरन्नेव तत्सम्पर्कक्षुभितशक्तिपरिसृतबहुलामृतधारया देहमभिषिक्तं भावयेत्। इदं मानसस्नानमशुचित्वशङ्कायां सदासर्वत्रविधेयम्।

Carakasamhita, *Susrutasamhita* says: *snāna* eliminates heat, fatigue, itching, burning sensation and thirst. It cleans the sweat on the body, strengthens the heart and naturally cleans the sense organs. It removes the drowsiness and helps in recharging the blood circulation and energy. It improves the appetite *snāna* is purifying, libidinal stimulant, increases longevity. It also brings about strength in the body and is an aid par excellence for the enhancement of Ojas. शब्दकल्पद्रुम says *snāna* is for purification and it is also increases *āyu* as well as it eliminates *śramasveda*.

स्नानं पवित्रमायुष्यं श्रमस्वेदमलापहम्।

शरीरबलसन्धानं केश्यमोजस्करं परम् ॥
स्नानं नाम मनःप्रसादजनं दुःस्वप्नविध्वंसनं
शौचस्यायतनं मलापहरणं सम्बर्धणं तेजसः ।
रूपोद्योतकरं गदप्रशमनं कामाग्निसन्दीपनं
नारीणां च मनोहरं श्रमहरं स्नाने दशैते गुणाः ॥³

In *Saivagama*, *Bhasmadhāraṇa*, *Bhasmasnāna* are very similar action for all kind of rituals. But there is a little bit different, it is said that when someone able to do *jalasnāna* to purify his outer body, still he can purify himself by applying the Bhasma-s. In *Raurava* it is said to remove the sin form the individual's *snāna* is required.

अतः परं प्रवक्ष्यामि स्नानं पापनिवृत्तये।⁴

Ātmarthapūjā-paddhati gives finds *snāna* little bit differently telling that *snāna* is remover of all kind of sins:

जलस्नानं प्रकर्तव्यं सर्वपापहरं शुभम् ।
बहिरन्तर्विशुद्ध्यर्थं शिवेज्यायोग्यकारणम् ॥
आलस्य दाह निद्राणां शत्रूणां च क्षयं यतः ।
सर्वाचार प्रधानत्वात्स्नानमादौ प्रचक्ष्यते ॥

No doubt, most of the *Dharmaśāstra* texts considered *snāna* is for the purification of individuals, they have given importance to *jalasnāna*, whereas in the *Śaivāgama* there are different kinds of *snānas* have been explained in different situations, with or without *jalasnāna* anyone can achieve the purity. I found only in the *bhaviṣyottarapurāna* which explains three types of *snānas*.

स्नातुस्तु वरुणस्तेजो जुह्वतोऽग्निः श्रियं हरेत् ।

भुञ्जानस्य यमस्त्वायुस्तस्मान्न व्याहरेत्त्रिषु ॥

The texts like *Santānasamhitā* and *cintyāgama* explains only three types of *snāna*. Whereas *Kāraṇa* and *Dīpta* emphasise about five types of *snāna*, *Kāmika* and *Somaśambhupaddhati* says six types and *Mṛgendra* says seven types and from unknown source which is quoted in

³ श्रीसुभाषितरत्नभाण्डागारम्, ३:१०३

⁴ *Raurava* - 7:1

Ātmarthapujāpaddhati there are eight types of *snānas* and in *Vīratāntra* it is ten types.

तत्सर्वमखिलं वक्ष्ये शृणुष्वायतलोचने।
स्नानं च त्रिविधं ज्ञेयं तेषां भेदमिहोच्यते ॥
आग्नेयं वारुणं चैव माहेन्द्रं च त्रिधा भवेत्।⁵
वारुणाग्नेय माहेन्द्रं मारुतं मान्त्रमानसम्।
पार्थगौरवमित्यष्टौ स्नानान्येतेषु मध्यतः ॥⁶

Now the question come how to apply this and where to apply, the famous text *Ātmarthapujāpaddhati* says - पादौप्रक्षाल्याचम्य हस्तौ वस्त्रेण शंसोच्च कृष्णाजिनाद्यासने उत्तराभिमुखमासीनः शिवः गुरुन्नमस्कृत्य कल्पनुकल्पोपकल्पादिवक्ष्यमाणलक्षणं विभूतिकोशस्थां विभूतिमभिवन्द्य आदाय वामहस्ते शिवमन्त्रेण दत्त्वा शक्तिमन्त्रेण वस्त्रपूतशुद्धजलं निपीय निरीक्षणादिसंस्कारं कृत्वा दक्षिणहस्तेन पिधाय पञ्चषडङ्गपञ्चकलाभिः संहारक्रमेणाभिमन्त्र्या-ङ्गुष्ठानामिकाभ्यां किञ्चिद्विभूतिमा... ज्योति ज्योतिरिति पदमन्त्रमुच्चार्यपादाङ्गुष्ठादिमस्तकान्तं नीत्वा विकीर्याथ शिवमन्त्रेण स जलां विभूतिं लोलयित्वा पादादिजानुपर्यन्तं हं सद्योजातमूर्तये निवृत्तिकलायै नमः। ललाटादिब्रह्मरन्ध्रपर्यन्तं हों ईशानमूर्ध्ने। जान्वादिनाभिपर्यन्तं हिं वामदेवगुहाय प्रतिष्ठाकलायौ नमः। नाभ्यादिकण्ठपर्यन्तं हुं अघोरहृदयाय विद्याकलायै नमः। कण्ठादिललायपर्यन्तं हें तत्पुरुषवक्राय शान्तिकलायै नमः। ललाटादिब्रह्मरन्ध्रपर्यन्तं हों ईशानमूर्ध्ने शान्त्यतीतकलायै नमः। इत्युच्चरन्नालिप्य सद्योजातेन सव्यापसव्यहस्ताभ्यां पादादिमस्तकान्तं सर्वाङ्गं शनैश्शनैरुद्धृत्य वधिवदाचरेत्। अकृतवारुणस्नानश्चेत् हस्तौ पादौ प्रक्षाल्य नेत्रश्रोत्रनासिकोत्थमलं जलेन संशोध्य धौतकौपीनं धृत्वाचम्य न्यासं कृत्वा पूर्वोक्तविधानेन भस्मना स्नात्वा अनन्तरं पूर्वधृतकौपीनं वसृज्य धौतकौपीनं धृत्वाचामेत्। अशुद्धभूतले मार्गे देवबाह्यकृतघ्नमहापातकयुक्तपुरुषाणां स्त्रीणां च सन्निधाने देवगुर्वग्निशिवशास्त्रसन्निधौ च उद्धूलनं कुर्यात्।

⁵ *Santānasamhitā* - T. 67, p. 229.

⁶ *Ātmarthapujāpaddhati*

There is a reference from Svayambhuva even if without jalasnana or if someone is not well then he or she can purify there body by doing bhasmasnana.

आग्नेयस्नानमपरं भस्मस्नाना समुदाहृतम्।
जलस्नानोत्तरं नित्यमनुत्तरमथापि वा ॥

Even Kamika has given importance to Bhasmasnana

आग्नेयं वारुणीस्नानदसंख्येयगुणाधिकम्।
तस्माद्धारुणमुत्सृज्य स्नानमाग्नेयमाचरेत् ॥

तदुक्तं मतङ्गे -

एवं सकृद्यथाशक्तिस्नातोम्भसि दिने दिने ।
भस्मस्नाने अधिकारी स्यात् नान्यथा मुनिपुङ्गवाः ॥
भूयो भूयोऽम्भसा स्नानं सेव्यमानस्य रुक्भवेत्।
तस्मात् तत्सततं नेष्टमिष्टमाग्नेयमाचरेत् ॥

कारणागमः - रेखाधि देवता

ब्रह्मा विष्णु महेशश्च त्रिरेखाश्च इति स्मृताः ।
अधो ब्रह्मो ततो विष्णुस्ततुर्ध्वतु महेश्वरः ॥

Tripundra bhasmadharana adhidevatha: For three rekha three adhidevathas are there. They are Bramha, Vishnu and Maheshwara. From down 1st line adhidevatha is Brahma 2nd Line adhidevata is Vishnu And 3rd Line adhidevatha is Maheswara.

भस्मधारण क्रमः - कारणागमः

भस्मं वामकरे स्थाप्य दक्षिणे अभिमन्त्रयेत् ।
मध्यङ्गुल्या जलैर्युक्तं उपरैर्जलवार्जितम् ॥
हस्तौ संशोध्य चास्त्रेण सर्वाङ्गं धारयेत् क्रमात् ॥

How to do the Bhasmadharana? - Have to keep the Holy Ash in the Left Hand and to do the abhimantranam from the Right Hand. Add some water and rub with the astramantra and apply with the karma told.

The places to apply the holy ash on the body vibhuti can be worn either in 32 places or 16 places or 8 places or five places. कामिकागमः

द्वात्रिंशत्सन्धिदेशे वा अथवा षोडशेष्वपि ।

अष्टसन्धिषु वा पञ्च स्थाने धार्यं त्रिपुण्ड्रकम् ॥

Head, Forehead, Two ears, Two eyes, Nose, Mouth, Neck, Two shoulders, Two elbows, Two wrists, Chest, Two ribs, Navel, Two sides of groin, Buttocks, Two Urus, Two thighs, Two knees, Two ankles, Two feet 32 Places

Head, Forehead, 2 ears, Neck, 2 Shoulders, 2 Elbows, 2 Wrists, Chest, Navel, 2 Ribs, Back 16 places

Head, Forehead, 2 ears, 2 Shoulders, Chest, Navel, 8 places

Forehead, 2 Shoulders, Chest, Navel 5 places

ललाटे हृदि बाह्यो च दैर्घ्यन्तु षडङ्गुलं ।

शेषमेकाङ्गुलं प्रोक्तं त्रिपुण्ड्रे धारयेत् क्रमात् ॥

Forehead, Chest and 2 Shoulders – we have to apply the holy ash in 6 angulam.

In the remaining places we have to apply in one angulam only.

भस्मधारण फलं

विधूय सर्वपापाणि सर्वकर्माहंको भवेत्।

Benefits of Bhasmadharana:

- Destroys all the sins
- Gives the eligibility to do all the kriyas

Conclusion - The Bhasma is sometimes used for worship of Lord Śiva and poured all over the Śivaliṅga and then distributed as Prasāda among the devotees. People also consume a pinch of the holy ash offered as Prasāda in the temples. It is believed to protect the devotees from ill health and evil influences. It has the medicinal values used in many Āyurvedic medicines as this prepared by various herbs and ghee during the homa. The mantras during the homa would add special powers to the holy Ash.