

Socio-cultural Practice: A Case Study on Personal Hygienic Behavior in the Hindu Society

Chandra Bhakta Bista

Sociologist/Community Development Expert

Email: bista.chadnra@gmail.com

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Abstract

Hindu culture and religion has its own idea regarding what constitutes excellent physical, mental, and spiritual purity. It would be interesting to learn more about whether or not the Hindu society of today adheres to the same practices. All Hindus view maintaining personal hygiene, including cleanliness of the body, hands, clothes, hygienic toilet, and menstrual hygiene management, as a duty and a fundamental principle. Personal hygiene is considered to be a key component of Hindu society. The major objective is to comprehend the level of awareness and personal hygienic behavior in Hindu society. The study primarily takes into account two cultural and social aspects of personal hygiene. The study used hand washing behaviors, trimming and combing procedures, menstrual hygiene management, usage of safe toilet, brushing, bathing, and cleaning practices as the main areas of the study. The necessity of hygienic habits for happiness, social status, and cultural continuity was also well understood in Hindu society. More Hindus now practice personal hygiene than during the Vedic Hindu era. Hygiene habits may be improved by affecting the attitudes of the society. A social and behavior change communication approach for hygiene behaviors should be implemented by the society. The improvement of daily personal hygiene routines and behavior adjustment are required to raise a better social status and cultural practices. The Hindu community is also adopting a novel viewpoint on the connection between personal hygiene and Hindu culture.

Key Words: Personal hygiene, practice, behavior change and hindu society

Introduction

Every religion has its own standards of cleanliness and hygiene. These standards shape the culture, beliefs, knowledge, and way of life. Traditional knowledge and insights from Ancient Text is cleanliness as a basic duty and ethics. Sanitation and hygiene is considered as one of the vital fundamentals in leading a pure and spiritual life. The culture of washing the hands and legs regularly to keep safe from bacteria and other infections were practiced (Daksha Samriti 5.2). Therefore, hands washing is both for cultural and health perspectival behavior in the society. Hygiene is that from which internal and external cleanliness being established arises disgust for one's own body, and non-intercourse with other bodies. There also arises purification of the *Sattva*, cheerfulness of the mind, concentration, conquest of the organs, and fitness for the realization of the self (Patanjali Yoga Sutras, 2.41). Sanitation and hygiene have a significant influence on how people live their daily lives. Their behaviors impact how their lives will develop since

sanitation and hygiene issues have implications for religion, culture, society, physical and mental health, cheerfulness, and confidence etc.

The Vedic texts may be divided into two broad chronological groups: The Early Vedic texts (1500-1000 BC) when most of the hymns of the Rig Veda were composed; and the Later Vedic texts (1000-500 BC) which belong to the remaining Vedas and their branches (*Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads*, etc.). Vedic age is well-known for the creation and composition of Vedas, which are considered sacred texts in Hinduism.

In ancient period, everyday people had to perform morning ablutions, brush their teeth, take a bath in a river or stream, and wear clean clothes before offering prayers to gods. Earth, water and ashes were the usual means to remove physical impurities. People were obligated to wash their hands and feet before entering any home, temple, ritual place or a sacred place or before performing any sacred duty or eating food. Personal hygiene mainly applies for purity, offering prayers to gods, holy duty. Clean water, wearing clean clothes and physical purity were like a regular duties of the Hindu society. So the study is limited mainly on personal hygiene in the Hindu Society.

List of Personal Hygiene Activities

S.N.	Personal Hygiene in Vedic/Hindu Texts	Personal Hygiene in the Present Texts
1	Brushing teeth	Brushing teeth
2	Bathing body	Bathing body
3	Cleaning cloth	Cleaning cloth
4	Washing Hands before eating foods	Washing hands before eating foods
5	Washing Hands performing any scared duty	Washing hand after toileting
6	Washing hands after toileting	Washing hands before feeding foods
7	Washing legs before entering	Washing hands after touching waste and animals
8	Menstruation	Menstrual hygiene
9		trimming nails
10		Combing hair

The aforementioned personal hygiene practices were carried out as quantifiable indicators to determine the level of personal hygiene practice in the Hindu society. The study also included menstrual hygiene as a personal hygiene, which is important for women's health. In Hindu civilization, menstrual hygiene standards were poor in the Vedic era. At that time, it was against the socio-cultural norms for women to engage in daily activities, particularly religious ceremonies, while they were menstruation. Hindu sacred scriptures provide evidence for our understanding of the socio-cultural practices around personal hygiene in Vedic-era. The study presents contemporary practices of personal hygiene like hands washing, safe drinking water, daily cleanliness of the organ of body, properly usage

of the toilet of gathering primary data as well as practices of reviewing Hindu texts. These all data will be linked with socio-cultural perspective when data analysis process begin.

Objective(s)

The overall objective was to understand socio-cultural practices of personal hygiene behavior in the Hindus Society in Nepal. The Hindu society practicing some religious, cultural and social activities relate to personal hygiene depending on the Hindu texts which are discussed in the study too. The specific objectives are as follows;

To review Vedic/Hindu sacred texts identifying the knowledge and practices of personal hygiene in socio-cultural perspective. Then summarize to the major findings of Hindu holy books in regard to personal hygiene for bad and good a religious feeling in Hindu society.

To find out the current knowledge and practices of personal hygienic behavior in the Hindus Society. It makes also easy to define that personal hygiene only socio-cultural part of the Hindu society or more than this in the society.

Methods

Reading many Hindu sacred texts is secondary source for finding out the list of personal hygiene activities in the Vedic era. For primary information, the following methods were applied which helped to meet the objectives of the study. Descriptive and explanatory research designs were applied in the study. The study area was Chhampi Village, Godawari Municipality-9, Lalitpur district for primary information. For the Secondary information, Hindu religious scriptures were the study points. Only Hindus from the research area were included as respondents. Using the convenience sampling method, 300 people of the Hindu community who were 35 years of age above were chosen as respondents. Universe of the sample was not counted. The research was only defined purity, sin, worship in terms of personal hygiene practices so that the research could not concerned caste/ethnicity and other religion. The purity thus means in the study what the Hindu texts linked personal hygiene and religious practices only within a person. As a sociological study, the research did not touch the purity within caste system.

Firstly, the study of the Hindu religious scriptures was done as far as possible for understanding the relation of the personal hygiene and purity, sin, worship etc. Secondly, household survey, observation and key informant interview were applied for collecting primary information from the study area. Qualitative and quantitative information were collected. The qualitative data collected from the review various book as secondary information, observation done as primary information.

Definition of the Major Terms

The following definitions have been created for the research after studying numerous pertinent literatures. Although the definitions should only be used to construct a study or make one specific, they cannot encompass all aspects.

Personal Hygiene: includes brushing teeth, bathing body, washing hands with soap, trimming nails, combing hair and menstrual hygiene.

Practice: includes all of the personal hygiene-related activities in daily practice.

Hindu Society: the term "Hindu society" refers to a group of people who follow the Hindu religion.

Result of the Study

Demographic Information

Sex, age and education were selected as the variables of socio-demographic of the respondent in this study. All respondents were selected for the study over 35 years. The female respondents were selected in-between 35-55 years of old for menstrual hygiene information. They answered a series of questions, in order to gather practices on personal hygiene in Hindu society. The study focused on *the Hindu society so religion of the respondents was Hindu. Detail information is also available in the below table.*

Table No.1: General Information of the Respondents			
Description		Number (300)	Percentage (100%)
Sex			
	Male	100	33.33
	Female	200	66.67
Hindu Religion		300	100
Age			
	Age 35-45	124	41.33
	Age 45-55	132	44.00
	Age 55-65	34	11.33
	Age 65 above	10	3.33
Education			
	Illiterate	12	4.00
	Literate	56	18.67
	Up to SLC/SEE	89	29.67
	College	143	47.67

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Out of 300 respondents, there were 100 (33.33%) male and 200 (66.67%) female was purposely chosen. Their age was from 35 to over 65 years. Majority of the respondents' age was from 35 to 55 years. To influence someone's knowledge and practical behavior, education is a crucial factor. So, the respondents' educational backgrounds may influence how society changes. Here, 12 (4%) of the respondents can't read and write, while 56 respondents (18.67%) were literate, 89 (29.67%) completed up to School Leaving Certificate/Secondary Education Examination (SLC/SEE) and 143 (47.67%) had advanced degrees.

Personal Hygiene

Sanitation and hygiene play a significant role in every aspect of society, including the religious, public health, social, cultural, and economic spheres. The effects of sanitation, health, feeling, religion and self-satisfaction are relating to personal hygiene too. The study selected personal cleanliness as a significant factor associated with socio-cultural impacts. Menstrual hygiene, hand washing, trimming, combing, bathing, cleaning, and brushing were all done as independent variables of personal hygiene in the study. The table below mentioned only daily routines for brushing, bathing and cleaning.

Brushing, Bathing and Cleaning

Personal hygiene includes brushing teeth, bathing body, and washing clothes. It is about a religious and cultural aspect at the very beginning of the hell and heaven. The cleanliness activities are also a part of hole-body bathing so the purity of the body is required to religious activities. Currently, these customs are either related to religion or to health and hygiene, as seen in the table below.

Table No 2: Brushing, Bathing and Cleaning Practices					
		In daily Practices			Total
		Once	Twice	Thrice	
Brushing teeth	Not daily				
Number (300)	5	178	103	14	300
Percentage (100%)	1.67	59.33	34.33	4.67	100.00
Bathing body					
Number (300)	87	205	8	0	300
Percentage (100%)	29	68.33	2.67	0	100
Cleaning Cloths					
Number (300)	92	197	11	0	300
Percentage (100%)	30.67	65.67	3.67	0	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The American Dental Association advises brushing teeth twice a day for two minutes each time with fluoride toothpaste, yet 5 (1.67%) of the respondents did not do so. Of the respondents, 178 (59.33%) brushed their teeth once daily, 103 (34.33%) twice daily, and 14 (4.67%) thrice daily. As the observation during the data collection in the study area, it is found that the more educated and younger respondents had a habit of brushing their teeth twice daily because they are reading health and hygiene stuffs and knew the benefits of brushing twice a day. Moreover, they are interacting with many persons out of the family and the same community and learnt from them. The respondents didn't wash their teeth once a day because of different reasons, it meant they didn't do so the day before the interview.

Barbara Barash said (2021) that there is no true consensus on how often you should bathe. In the United States, most people bathe daily but, in other countries, many people bathe only 2-3 times per week or less. According to Hindu philosophy, bathing is required daily before doing religious performances such as praying. As the findings of the study, 205

respondents (68.33%) showered their bodies once daily, while 8 respondents (2.67%) bathed twice daily. But, Of the respondents, 87 (29%) did not bathe their bodies every day.

Hindu religious should wear clothing for the first time after washing for religious activities like praying and worshipping. However, several articles (As gist of the study references) claim that it depends on the sort of clothing you're wearing, such as shirts and blouses, which should be worn after 1-2 wearing. Slacks or dress pants: after two or three wearing. Jeans: four or five times. The above table encountered Hindu philosophy because the study focused on the sociocultural aspect. Among the surveyed, 92 (30.67%) did not clean their clothes every day, 197 (65.67%) did it once a day, and 11 (3.67%) twice a day. The respondents, who cleaned their clothes once or twice a day, wore them for religious purposes for the first time after cleaning. The respondents who clean twice a day had kids or were generally caring for sick people.

Hand Washing Practices

Hygienic behavior is an important phenomenon in many ways. The poor personal hygiene causes for water-borne diseases and personal ignominy too. Despite of many personal hygiene practices, hands washing were also selected here for measuring the personal hygiene. Four activities as indicators were applied in the study like washing hands before eating foods, washing hands after toileting, washing hands before feeding food and washing hands after touching waste and animal.

Table No 3: Hands Washing Practices					
Hand Washing	Not Washing	Always	Sometimes	Only water	Total
Washing hands before eating foods					
Number (300)	0	188	65	47	300
Percentage (100%)	0	62.67	21.67	15.67	100
Washing hand after toileting					
Number (300)	0	256	15	29	300
Percentage (100%)	0	85.3	5.0	9.7	100
Washing hands before feeding foods					
Number (300)	37	156	79	28	300
Percentage (100%)	12.33	52.00	26.33	9.33	100
Washing hands after touching waste & animals					
Number (300)	48	98	57	97	300
Percentage (100%)	16	32.67	19	32.33	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

One of the greatest ways to stop the transfer of germs to others is to wash your hands frequently. It also serves as a first line of protection against infections like COVID-19. Before worshipping to the god and performing other cultural acts, one must wash one's hands. 188 (62.67%) of the respondents said they washed their hands before eating, 65

(21.67%) said they didn't usually wash their hands with soap before eating, and 47 (15.67%) said they washed their hands with water only. As figure of the table, 37.24% respondents washing behavior and practice of hands washing seem unhygienic.

Hands washing after toileting are important in terms of cultural, health and hygiene. After using the toilet, 256 respondents (85.3%) indicated they always wash their hands, 15 (5%) occasionally did so, and 29 (9.7%) always did so using only water. This figure shown out of 14.7% is under the critical situation. Similarly, 37 (12.33%) of the respondents said they did not wash their hands with soap before consuming food, whereas 156 (52%) said they always did so, 79 (26.33%) said they occasionally did so, and 97 (32.33%) said they did not.

Washing hands with soap after coming in contact with rubbish or animals is also necessary for your health and cultural well-being. While 98 (32.67%) of the respondents always wash their hands with soap after touching waste, 57 (19%) practiced hands washing sometime, 48 (16%) of the respondents only occasionally wash their hands. Of the responders, 97 (32.33%) always wash their hands with water alone.

Trimming and Combing Practice

Personal hygiene includes *trimming nails and combing hair* regularly. It is about a religious and cultural aspect at the *very beginning of the hell and heaven*. Currently, these customs are either related to religion or to health and hygiene, as seen in the table below.

Trimming nails	Not daily	Once	Twice	Thrice	Total
Number (300)	202	89	9	0	300
Percentage (100%)	67.33	29.67	3	0	100
Combing hair					
Number (300)	49	179	46	26	300
Percentage (100%)	16.33	59.67	15.33	8.67	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Hair brushing is a crucial component of regular hygiene. Although brushing is typically solely considered for aesthetic reasons, it also promotes good health. Nail trimming is also connected to personal hygiene and wellness. Only 89 (29.67%) of the respondents said they trimmed their nails once daily, while 202 (67.33%) said they did not. They claimed that nail trimming depends on the circumstance. The same goes for the respondents, with 179 (59.67%) combing their hair once daily, 46 (15.33%) twice daily, and 26 (8.67%) three times daily. However, 49 (16.33%) said they didn't comb every day. Because of their short hair, not hair, and laziness, the respondents did not regularly comb their hair.

Menstrual Hygiene Practice

Menstrual hygiene is influenced by both culture and religion. Women are not allowed to engage in daily activities when they are menstruating. Before being permitted to rejoin her family and resume her regular responsibilities, she must be "purified." These days, talking

about sanitary facilities and accessibility for menstrual hygiene has merged with the habit of menstrual hygiene for personal health. The situation regarding menstrual hygiene facilities, accessibility, affordability, and practice is described in the table below.

Menstrual Hygiene	Not availability/access/afford/support	Not practiced	Practices			Total
			Enough	Not enough	other	
Using safe and hygienic toilet						
Number (Women-200)	7	7	139	43	4	200
Percentage (100%)	3.5	3.5	69.5	21.5	2	100
Access to enough water						
Number (Women-200)	28	0	121	51		200
Percentage (100%)	14	0	60.5	25.5	0	100
Using sanitary pad						
Number (Women-200)	27	35	86	39	13	200
Percentage (100%)	13.5	17.5	43	19.5	6.5	100
Availability of sanitation and hygiene facilities						
Number (Women-200)	7	19	156	17	1	200
Percentage (100%)	3.5	9.5	78	8.5	0.5	100
Affordability & appropriate menstrual hygiene materials						
Number (Women-200)	47	40	111	2	0	200
Percentage (100%)	23.5	20	55.5	1	0	100
Supportive environment						
Number (Women-200)	41	32	125	0	2	200
Percentage (100%)	20.5	16	62.5	0	1	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Out of the 300 responders, 200 were female and directly involved in the management of menstrual hygiene. This table solely includes responses from female respondents who were asked about the aforementioned activities. 7 (3.5%) respondents said they didn't use safe and hygienic toilets/restrooms because they couldn't afford the cost, while the same number said they hadn't used a sanitary restroom before. 139 respondents (69.5%) said they have enough practice with menstruation hygiene as a habit. Despite using a safe restroom, 43 (21.5%) respondents had no proven habits for managing menstrual hygiene and 4 (2%) had no healthy practices.

Regarding the accessibility of enough water for sanitary practice at the time of menstruation, 28 (14%) women did not have that accessibility for enough water. Of the responders, 121 (60.5%) had access to facilities for maintaining proper cleanliness, however 51 (25.5%) lacked accessibility for adequate water or hygienic practices.

Affordability and appropriate menstrual hygiene materials as well as practice for improving hygienic behavior were taken here as a crucial habit in the study. Of the respondents, 47 (23.5%) couldn't afford and didn't use appropriate materials like pads, soap/shampoo, inner-ware and others, 40 (20%) said that they have not extra practices than normal days, 111 (51.5%) had means to afford the appropriate menstrual hygiene materials, while 2 (1%) were not practices having the affordability.

Regarding the supportive environment provided by family and community, the respondents' responses were as follows: 125 (62%) felt a supportive environment provided by families and the community, 41 (20.5%) did not feel a supportive environment, 32 (16%), did not expect any supportive environment. In general, a supportive environment was being created by educated families and nuclear families.

Discussion and Analysis

Age, education, religion, and sex were chosen as the socio-demographic factors of the respondent in this study. Of the 300 respondents, 200 women and all respondents over the age of 35 were chosen. These kinds of respondents can aid in achieving the study's goals. Every part of society, including the religious, public health, social, cultural, and economic realms, benefits greatly from sanitation and cleanliness. Personal hygiene was chosen by the study as an important component connected to socio-cultural effect. Toilet use, menstrual hygiene management, hand washing, hair combing, bathing, cleaning, and brushing were all included under the personal hygiene category as independent variables in the study.

Regarding brushing your teeth, it is customary in society to do so once each day. The more educated and younger respondents regularly brushed their teeth two or three times per day. Because of various factors, 1.65% of respondents did not wash their teeth once each day. The all respondents required brushing their teeth, however it is not a large percentage. Hindu philosophy states that bathing is necessary every day before participating in religious performs, 71% of respondents reported taking a daily minimum of one bath. Hindus should put on their clothes for the first time after washing them before engaging in religious activities like worship and prayer. According to the study, the majority of respondents used freshly washed clothes to pray the God. Nevertheless, the respondents were fully-aware about the brushing, bathing and wash cloths while practicing of the cleanliness is less than awareness.

Hands washing at four critical junctures like before eating foods, after toileting, before feeding food and after touching waste and animal were activities to measure hands hygiene. According to Hinduism, before worshipping to the god and performing other cultural acts, one must wash one's hands. The respondents always washed their hands with soap such as 188 (62.67%) of the respondents said they washed their hands before eating, 256 (85.3%) washed hands after toileting, 156 (52%) washed hands before consuming food, 98 (32.67% washed hands after touching rubbish. The practice of the hands washing at critical juncture is needed to improve changing the respondents' behaviors.

Before consuming food, after using the restroom, before feeding food, and after handling waste or an animal, washing your hands was one of the actions used to measure your hand hygiene. Hinduism mandates that once wash their hands before performing any rituals or acts of worship is must. The respondents always washed their hands with soap, as evidenced by the fact that out of 100% for each activity, 188 (62.67%) of the respondents claimed they did so before eating, 256 (85.3%) after using the restroom, 156 (52%) before eating, and 98 (32.67%) after handling trash. To better change the respondents' behaviors, it is necessary to wash your hands at pivotal situations.

Menstrual hygiene is both cultural and religious consideration. Therefore, in the Hindu religion, women are prohibited from participating in normal life while menstruating. But these days, menstrual hygiene also became a habit for personal health and discussing on sanitary facilities and accessibility, too. Toilet facilities, accessibility, affordability, and practice relate to improve menstrual hygiene management discussed in the study.

To address the issue of menstruation hygiene, only female respondents were chosen. 7 respondents (3.5%) admitted to not using safe toilets. 139 people (69.5%) had enough practice to consider it a habit. 121 (60.5%) had access to sufficient practice for maintaining adequate hygiene, 111 (51.5%) had affordable capacity for the necessary materials and practice too, and 125 (62%) felt that families and the community provided a helpful atmosphere. These numbers made it abundantly evident that, menstrual hygiene practices needed to increase. The study concentrated on enough practice, which sufficiently covered all aspects such as toilet facility, affordability and appropriateness, availability and supportive environment.

Conclusion

Personal hygiene, or maintaining cleanliness of the body, hands, clothes, hygienic toilet, and menstrual hygiene management, is seen by all Hindus as an obligation and a fundamental precept. Before engaging in any religious, cultural, or social events, the Hindu society always instructs or mandates that one should clean their entire body, including their hands, wear clean clothing, and do proper toileting. On the other hand, good personal hygiene shields people from a wide range of illnesses. Instead of their habits, the respondents have a solid practices of personal hygiene. By influencing the community's attitudes, hygienic practices may be enhanced. The study can be concluded to follow a social and behavior change communication model for hygienic practices.

Nowadays, the Hindu society values personal hygiene more than purity and worship since it improves health and social prestige. In the Vedic Hindu society, personal hygiene was mainly a matter of culture and religion, but that has changed. The Hindu culture also had a strong understanding of the need of hygienic activities for happiness, social status, cultural continuity, and better health. An analysis of five personal hygiene indicators painted a clear picture of best practices. According to the result of the study, personal hygiene practices have become more widespread than in the Vedic Hindu civilization. Cleanliness and hygiene are becoming increasingly important for not just religious but also social,

cultural, physical, and psychological well-being in the modern Hindu society. However, for a better social status and cultural practices, behavior modification and daily personal cleanliness practice must be enhanced.

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Nepali

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- विष्ट, चन्द्र भक्त, २०७६। सरसफाइ र स्वच्छताको लागि आनीवानी परिवर्तनः तुगायूगी, वर्ष १, अंक १, कार्तिक(पुस २०७६, ललितपुर महानगरपालिका वडा २२ ।
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