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INDIAN ACHARAS AND SCIENTIFIC REASONS: AUDIENCE ANALYSIS ON THE SCIENTIFIC
UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICING OF INDIAN CUSTOMS AND RITUALS

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ABSTRACT

World is a place where people from different culture live. Each and every culture is formed as a result of different believes and values that they are following. Each culture is a closed group of many rituals and customs (aacharas) which one is thought to follow molds into their character and becomes the part and parcel of their life. A proverb says "one having little knowledge is more useless than one with no knowledge". Same is the case when we follow certain culture and rituals just because it is a part of our life or we are taught to do so. Indian culture and tradition is known as the oldest and the civilization in India began about 4,500 years ago. The *All World Gayatri Pariwar* (AWGP) organization described the Indian culture as "Sa Prathama Sanskrati Vishvavara", the first and the supreme culture in the world. According to Natasha Cabrera (2016), Cultural socialization refers to parental practices that teach children about their own race and ethnic heritage, cultural customs, and traditions. Examples of cultural socialization practices include talking about history or historical figures, reading culturally relevant books, celebrating cultural holidays, and encouraging children to use their native language (Cabrera, 2016). This research is a study to find out whether people follow Indian customs and rituals called 'aacharas' after knowing the actual benefit of those customs or they are simply following their fore fathers. To reach a conclusion the researcher used questionnaire as the research instrument and collected enough data for the research. By analyzing the data, it concluded that even though most of the people come to know about rituals and customs from their fore fathers, they think about the benefits and reasons behind these aacharas and after that only they practice these aacharas.

Keywords: Aacharas, Customs, Rituals, Scientific

Culture represents shared norms, values, traditions, and customs of a group of people which is responsible to create particular attitudes and behaviors towards their life and the world itself. Cultural socialization refers to parental practices that teach children about their own race and ethnic heritage, cultural customs, and traditions. Examples of cultural socialization practices include talking about history or

historical figures, reading culturally relevant books, celebrating cultural holidays, and encouraging children to use their native language (Cabrera, 2016). The emphasis on cultural socialization will be increased if parents perceived more discrimination themselves or if they had a strong ethnic identity (Hughes, 2003).

Indian culture and tradition is known as the oldest and unique and the civilization in India began about 4,500 years ago. The All World Gayatri Pariwar (AWGP) organization described the Indian culture as "Sa Prathama Sanskrati Vishvavara", the first and the supreme culture in the world. India is known as the land of cultural diversity and it is having variety of geographical features and climatic conditions too. India is home to some of the most ancient civilizations, including four major world religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. The South, North, and Northeast have their own distinct cultures and almost every state has carved out its own cultural niche. There is hardly any culture in the world that is as varied and unique as India. (India, n.d.)

Indians observe various rituals and customs in their day-to-day life from dawn to dusk. Some are pointed out in Vedic scriptures and some were included later during the ages of Brahman scriptures. In Indian society, these rituals were and are connected with religions. Religion and science are not opposing streams. There is a strong connection between them. With the advent of science and technology, we have found scientific reasons behind these rituals and traditions. Traditions and customs were taught at a very young age and followed as part of life. In this modern age of globalization, the existing challenge is an attempt to bridge traditions and Science (Jayalakshmi, 2020).

In this research, I am trying to find out whether people follow Indian customs and rituals called 'aacharas' after knowing the actual benefit of those customs or they are simply following their forefathers. By saying 'Indian aacharas /customs and rituals', I mean the daily practices prescribed by our rishis for our better healthy lifestyle. By saying 'actual benefit', I mean the advantage of practicing those aacharas. For example, to increase blood circulation, to release more oxygen in the blood cells, for the proper use of energy, to get mental satisfaction, for a healthy body etc. The word 'forefathers' mean the parents or grandparents of a particular person.

Before practicing any rituals or being a part of any culture we should have a clear idea about 5 Ws and 1 H of life. That is WHAT, WHERE, WHY, WHICH, WHEN and HOW. So it is always good to practice any ritual by knowing the depth and essence of our wonderful culture. Now a days people misunderstands the actual value and importance of rich Indian aacharas. They often think that they are all part of any religious practice or they are forced to believe the same. So, by this research I am trying to find out the fact and scientific applications behind these aacharas and trying to make it more acceptable among people.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dr. N. Gopalakrishnan provides wider knowledge about the topic in his book, "Paithruka Aacharangalum Avayude Shasthreeyathayum". In which he says, Rituals and customs are basic stones of dharma. The sources of Indian rituals and customs are infinite. It might be derived from ancient books, word of mouth, or it might be hereditary which has passed through generations. Even though it is said that the origin of rituals and customs in India are from Vedas. Vedas are not man-made, the Shakthi (divine energy) present in them is *nirgun* (unmanifest). Vedic messages are applicable to all in the world without the barrier of religion, caste, language, nation of origin, race or age and sex. Integration of science and spirituality, ancient and modern, old and new, experienced and experimental knowledge, spiritual and physical comforts, can be clearly observed in this. They are meant for revolutionary and violent internal changes and evolutionary and silent external changes. (Gopalakrishnan, Paithruka Aacharangalum Avayude Shasthreeyathayum, 2011)

It is said that, "Aacharaheenam Na Punanthuvedah" - The one who does not practice *aacharas* (rituals and customs) cannot be purified even by Vedas. So *aacharas* are meant for prosperous healthy life. It is not for simply or blindly believing. A patient taking medicine properly will be fine even if he do not

know anything about the medicine. But the impact will be different from taking medicine with the knowledge about the medicine and why he or she needs to take the particular medicine.

Any person who evaluates the rituals and customs should understand about the main four principles related to them. These principles will help to acquire sound knowledge about rituals and customs. They are,

- 1) Shaasthram pramanam
- 2) Aapthavakyam pramanam
- 3) Prathyaksham pramanam
- 4) Anumanam pramanam

The first one, *shaasthram pramanam* is from “Bhagavath Geetha”. Anything which guides life can be considered as *shaasthram*. Dharma *shaasthras* give more clear guidelines about food habit, bathing and traveling. In nutshell, whatever says in the dharma *shaasthra grandhas* of each individual can be followed by them.

Whatever say by *pandits*, great people and experienced people can be consider as *aaptavakkyam*. It will be *dharma shaasthra* messages. And proper care need when deciding a person is apt or right person to ask for solutions.

Rituals and customs which can be seen and experience are also there. A person does not need any advice for accepting and practicing *aacharas*. *Soorya namskkara* and morning bath are example for such practices. The effect of these *aacharas* can be seen directly. We use to say that, seeing is believing. This is the message of *prathyaksham pramanam*.

Anumanam pramanam is the message of Ayurveda, the *upaveda*. We need to understand both positives and negatives of these *aacharas*. So that we will be able to put such *aacharas* into practice in a better way. (Gopalakrishnan, Paithruka Aacharangalum Avayude Shasthreeyathayum, 2011)

In his another book, “Collection of essays , Bharatheeya samskrithiyude legghanangal” , Dr. N. Gopalakrishnan says, rituals and customs need not be the same in Kerala and Kashmir, similarly for a *hindu*, the same customs cannot be practiced in America and Rajasthan desert. Hence depending upon the place, time, season, age, availability of the materials, financial position of the individuals, the rituals and customs can be duly modified. The same principle one can see in “Bhagavath Geetha” also. Lord Krishna told Arjuna in the end of “*Bhagavath Geetha*” , “Hey Arjuna, all those whatever I have told you, critically analyze and the option for accepting or rejecting is yours. It’s a rule one should follow while analyzing and practicing the rituals and customs in *hindhu dharma*. (Gopalakrishnan, Collection of essays, Bharatheeya samskrithiyude legghanangal, 2011)

The purposes of practicing the rituals and customs have been described in the *Smuthies*. That is by following the rituals and customs one gets health and longevity. It leads to prosperity, it gives social relations and friends, and the followers of the same are considered as the embodiment of nobility. Rituals and customs always give positive results, which give psychological, physiological, family relation and bondage, social relations and bondage and emotional integration based positive results. (Gopalakrishnan, Collection of essays, Bharatheeya samskrithiyude legghanangal, 2011)

In the book “What is the importance of the substances used in ritualistic worship?” by Dr. Jayant Balaji Athavale, Mrs. Anjali Mukul Gadgil, Ms. Madhura Bhikaji Bhosale and other seekers say, some religious rituals are incomplete without the help of other components. For example specific substances such as Turmeric, tulsi, vermillion, gandh, flowers, betel nut, coconut, camphor, etc. are necessary in ritualistic worship of God. These components aiding religious rituals are an important link in seeking the grace of God through the medium of religious rituals. Understanding the spiritual importance of each of these components enhances the *bhav* towards them, thereby making the religious ritual rich in *bhav*. (Dr. Jayant Balaji Athavale, 2005)

In the following paragraphs, I am pointing out some *hindu* rituals and customs and their scientific value for the better health of people. In the book, "Paithruka aacharangalum avayude shasthreeyathayum", Dr. N. Gopalakishnan has some points.

It was a custom to plant and protect '*Tulsi*' (*Ocimum Sactiva*) in front of every Indian's house. People believed that it was for blessings of goddess *Tulsi*. But actually there is a reason behind protecting *Tulsi* around a home. Ultra violet rays from the Sun have Malignant Melanoma which causes cancer. It reaches the Earth because of the Ozone layer depletion. American scientists from NAZA found that *Tulsi* has the ability to filter these UV rays and it has many medicinal value. Our *rishis* found the same decades ago and prescribed us to plant and protect *Tulsi* around our house. It has the ability to purify blood. So it will be good if we eat *Tulsi* leaf atleast one in every morning. It keeps animals like snakes away also. (Gopalakrishnan, Paithruka Aacharangalum Avayude Shasthreeyathayum, 2011)

The other custom among *hindus* is to sit some more time on the bed and say prayer soon after waking up. People believed that it is for getting blessings for the positive power and to get a good start of the day. The actual reason is that while sleeping we are lying parallel to the Earth and blood circulation in the body will be normal. When we stand, our heart need to apply more pressure to make our blood circulation normal. So if get up suddenly, there is a chance for heart attack. That is why it is advised to wake slowly and sit some time on the bed. And any prayer will always give a kind of positive energy and confidence. (Gopalakrishnan, Paithruka Aacharangalum Avayude Shasthreeyathayum, 2011)

One among the *hindu* custom is that to touch the earth first by hand and not by the feet soon after waking up from the bed. They say it is for getting the blessings of goddess *Bhoomi*. While we are lying, we will have static energy within us. So when we touch Earth directly with our feet there is a chance for earthing. So people use to touch the ground with hands after waking up from the bed to avoid earthing. (Gopalakrishnan, Paithruka Aacharangalum Avayude Shasthreeyathayum, 2011)

It is said that we should not keep our head in north direction while we are lying. Bio magnetism is there in each and every cell of human being. So lying parallel to the Earth's magnetic field need to be avoid. Fe(Iron) atoms in the Hemoglobin which will transform as Ferrous ion and Ferric ion in oxidized state. Magnetic field has an influence in this process. This influence an cause difficulty in blood circulation. This may affect even in blood cells with small diameter in the brain. So enough Oxygen will not reach in the brain. (Gopalakrishnan, Paithruka Aacharangalum Avayude Shasthreeyathayum, 2011)

It is said that we need to take oil bath at least 3 times in a week. Our skin is made of Lippo protein. So the chance of growing bacteria is more. Sweats, body temperature, dead epidermal cells together create a suitable condition to grow microorganisms. Heated oil has Pyrascene in it, which is very good to kill bacteria like microorganisms. Ciesmin and Ciesmol in the custard oil also has the same ability. So both of these oil are good for protecting the skin. (Gopalakrishnan, Paithruka Aacharangalum Avayude Shasthreeyathayum, 2011)

Everybody knows that whenever a person goes to a temple will get Sandal. And they will put that on their forehead. There is a particular spot on our forehead which is an opening to the *Sahasrapadma* in the brain and to the *Sushumna* nerve. This spot in the middle of two eyebrows is known as '*bhroomadhyam*'. While we are applying Sandal in the same spot it will give a kind of cooling effect in the brain. So we will feel a kind of freshness. (Gopalakrishnan, Paithruka Aacharangalum Avayude Shasthreeyathayum, 2011)

Dr. Venganoor Balakrishnan has some points in his book, "Thaliyola". In early days, people use to walk with barefoot. It's because when we walk barefoot, our feet will get a kind of small pressure which will energize our organs like heart. It helps in the blood circulation also. Now we have a treatment which has the same impact of walking with barefoot. It is known as 'aquapuncture'.

We are not allowed to touch the *poojari* of the temple. It is because every people have a kind of energy circle around them. It is known as '*aura*'. Our auras are not supposed to touch each other. It is difficult to follow such customs in normal people's case. (Balakrishnan, 2011)

In the book "Sixteen Sanskars", H. H. Dr. Jayant Athavale and Dr. (Mrs.) Kunda J Athavale say, the vedic rituals performed by the mother, father and the Guru on the son or daughter from the time of conception till marriage, so that they may perform balanced *sattvik* actions are referred to as the *sanskaras*. There are sixteen important *sanskaras*. They are *Garbhadhan (Ruushanti)*, *Punsavan* (Begetting a son), *Simantonayan* (Parting the wife's hair), *Jatakarma* (Rite at birth), *Namkaran* (Naming ceremony), *Nishkraman* (Rite of taking the child out of the house), *Annaprashan* (Partaking of the first solid feed), *Choulkarma/Chudakarma* (Rite of keeping tuft of hair on the rear to the head), *Upanayan/Vratabandh/Munj* (Rite of thread ceremony), *Medhajanana, Chaturved vrat* (Vowed religious observances of the four vedas), *Samavartan* (Giving up bachelorhood) and *Vivah* (Marriage). (H. H. Dr. Jayant Athavale, 1998)

'*Sanskar*' is a process of increasing the potential in ourselves. The origin of the word *sanskar* is *sam+kru+ghyan= sanskar*. Thus the word *sanskar* is performed by prefixing the preposition '*sam*', to the verb '*kru*' and suffixing '*ghyan*' to it. It has multiple meanings, such as to improve, to purify, to remove shortcomings in an object and to endow a new, attractive form to it. In short, the process by which positive qualities in man are developed and enhanced is known as a '*sanskar*'. (H. H. Dr. Jayant Athavale, 1998)

The spread of the concept of *sanskaras* and their number is widely discussed in the "*Gruhyasutras*" (Holy texts of Hindus). *Sanskar* forms the main topic of discussions in the "*Gruhyasutras*". Here the *sanskars* performed on the body from *Vivah* (marriage) till *Samavartan* are elucidated. In many "*Gruhyasutras*" the *sanskar* of performing of performing the last rites is not mentioned as a *sanskar*. (H. H. Dr. Jayant Athavale, 1998)

Gurudev Dr. Kateswamiji said, 'Coal from the mines becomes a radiant diamond only after it undergoes a fine chiseling process. With chiseling of more facets (*sanskars*), it can turn into the world's best diamond, akin to the Kohinoor. In *hindu* religion, there are sixteen *sanskaras*, that give more and more facets to human life. There are *sanskars* to make post-death life happy. Make your and others lives happy to by following these *sanskars*. (H. H. Dr. Jayant Athavale, 1998)

METHODOLOGY

The study used questionnaire for collecting the responses and it is combination of both quantitative and qualitative data. 18 questions are there in the questionnaire. A pilot study has been conducted among a small group of convenient sample. The age group of the study population between 30-60 years old and sample size is 60samples. Convenient sampling is the sampling technique used. Collected questionnaire responses both directly and by mail.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Out of the 18 questions, the first question was whether the person is proud about his/her Indian culture. Because if a person is proud about his/her culture, then he/she can be a believer of the rituals and customs in the culture. About 92% of the responses are they are proud of their Indian culture and 8% are not. This is evident from the chart given below.

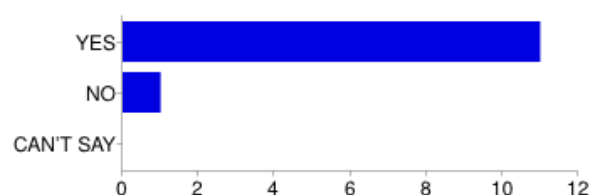


Figure 1 : Individual's proudness on Indian culture

Second question was whether the person follows any Indian rituals and customs or not. 100% of the responses are they follow one or other Indian aacharas.

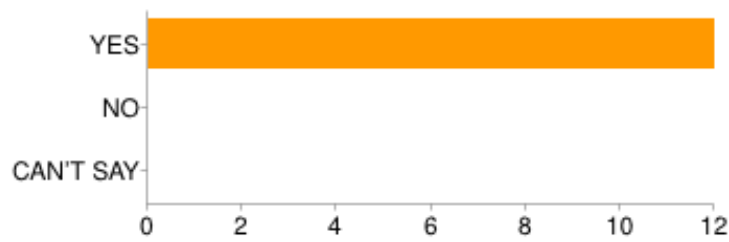


Figure 2: Whether follow rituals or customs

Third question was whether the person believes that any other nation follows any of the aacharas of India or such aacharas. Around 50% of the responses are they believe other nations also has such kind of rituals and customs. And 42% of the population said they cannot say the same and 8% of them replied that they don't believe that any other nation follows any of the aacharas of India or such aacharas.

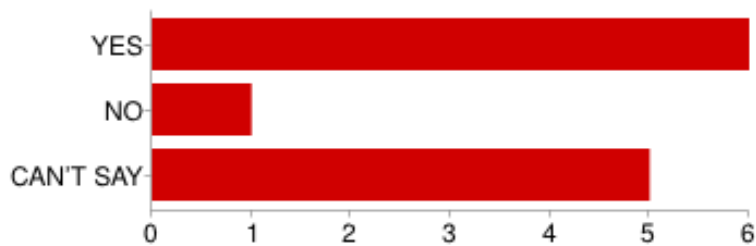


Figure 3: Belief on the thought, other nations follow Indian aacharas

Fourth question was whether the person believes in rituals and customs. Because if people believe in rituals and customs, they should have some kind of idea about those aacharas. 58% of the population replied that their belief in rituals and customs depends on other factors. And 42% of them said that they believe in rituals and customs. None of the population replied that they did not believe in rituals and customs and they cannot say that they believe in rituals and customs. It implies that they have some or other relation with aacharas.

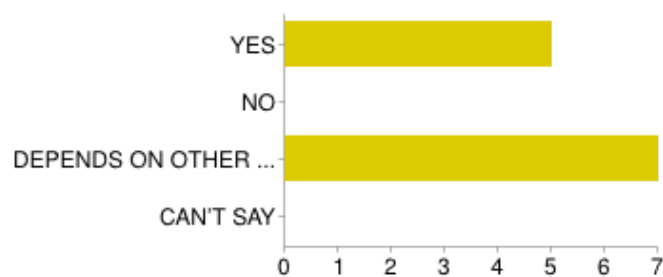


Figure 4: Whether follow any rituals or customs

Fifth question was whether the person agrees with all the customs and rituals. The whole population that is 100% of the population said that they did not agree with all the rituals and customs. It implies that they think about rituals and customs and they have their own proper opinion on the same.

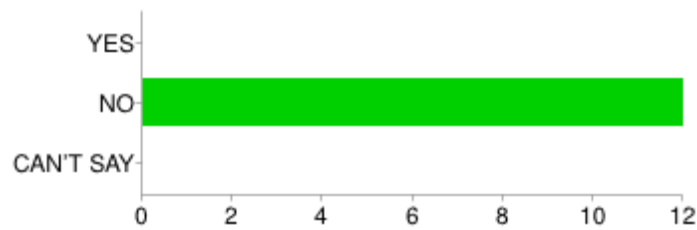


Figure 5: Whether agreeing all rituals and customs

Sixth question was how strong the person believes in rituals and customs. From the responses I could interpret that 50% of them have neutral belief in rituals and customs and the rest 50% of the population have belief in the same. None of them said that they don't believe or they can't say about their belief in the same.

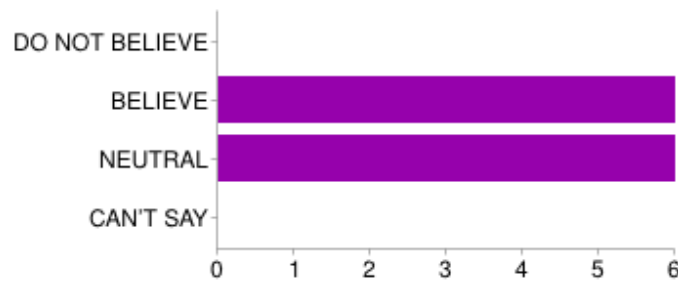


Figure 6: Strength on the belief on rituals and customs

Seventh question was to rate their attitude towards these rituals and customs. The researcher used Likert scale for the measurement. That is the scale rates from strongly disagree to strongly agree. 58% of the population rated as agree, 25% rated as can't say. Strongly agree and disagree are 8% each.

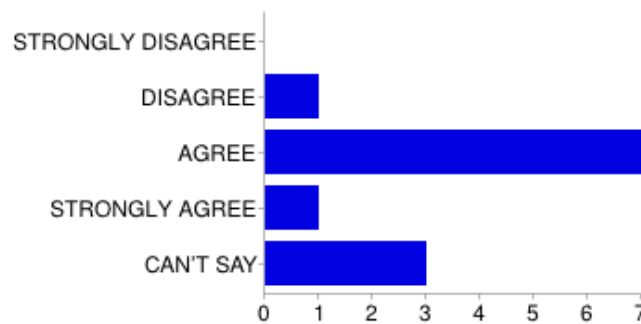


Figure 7: Rate on the attitude towards rituals and customs

Eighth question was to select what are the rituals and customs the person follow daily from the list. The list includes turning to right side while waking up from bed, sit on bed and say prayer for some time soon after waking up, touching the earth first by hand and not by the feet soon after waking up from the bed, takes oil bath, walking bare footedly (goes to worshipping places), none of these and any other. From the options 33% selected sit on bed and say prayer for some time soon after waking up, 17% selected turning to right side while waking up from bed, touching the earth first by hand and not by the feet soon after waking up from the bed and none of these, 8% selected walking bare footedly (goes to worshipping places) and any other. Nobody selected oil bath.

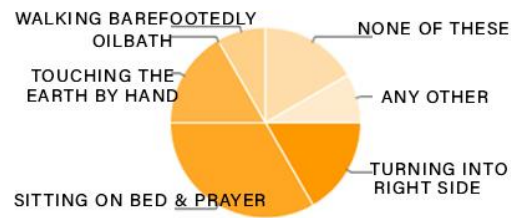


Figure 8: Ritual or customs follow daily basis

Ninth question was why the person follows rituals and customs. 58% selected that they follow rituals and customs because elders taught like that, 33% selected that has experienced its positive results and 8% none of these. None of them selected the options after knowing its scientific reasons and for a healthy life.

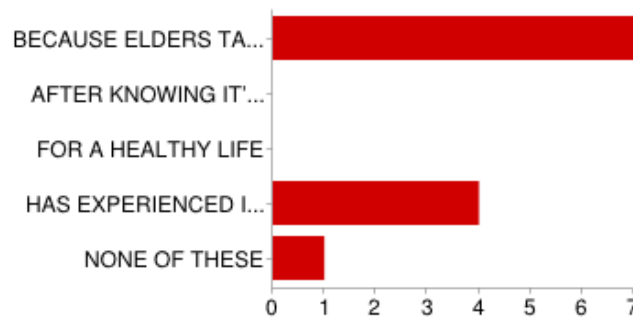


Figure 9: Reasons for following rituals and customs

Tenth question was whether the person gets any benefits by following these aacharas. 67% replied that they get benefits by following aacharas and 33% replied that they can't say that whether they are getting any benefits. And nobody replied that they do not getting any benefits.

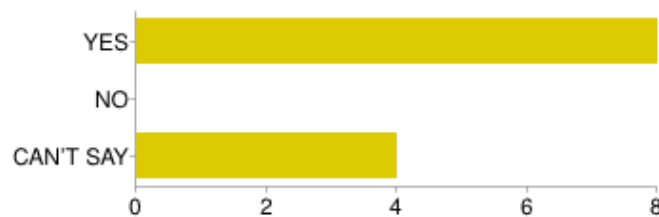


Figure 10: Whether getting any benefits from practicing aacharas

Eleventh question was how the person comes to know about these rituals and customs. 87% of the population came to know about rituals and customs from their elder people and 8% from books and other 8% from other sources.

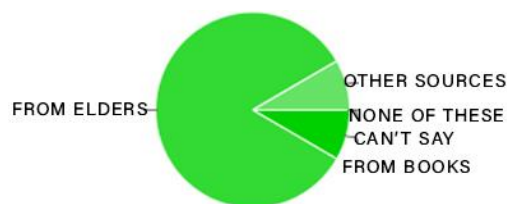


Figure 11: How do they get to know these aacharas

Twelfth question was whether the person has his/her grandfather or grandmother in their home or not. 73% of them does not have their grandparents in their home and 27% have their grandparents in their home.

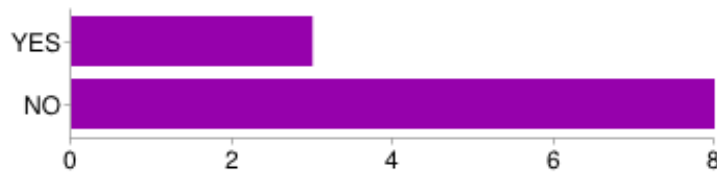


Figure 12: Whether have any grandparents at home

Thirteenth question was whether the person spends time with his/her grandparents. 73% of the population replied that they spend time with their grandparents. 18% replied that they don't and 9% said they can't say the same.

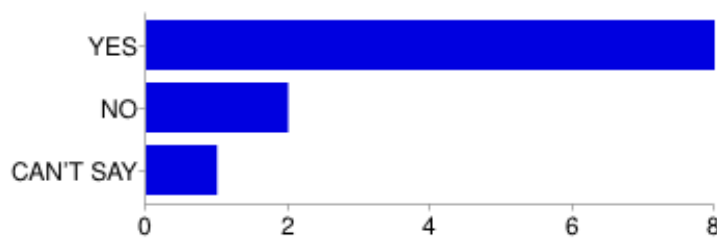


Figure 13: Time spending with grandparents

Fourteenth question was how frequently he/she visits his/her grandparents. 42% of the population said that they visit daily and another 42% said that they can't say that. 8% of them say that they visit weekly and another 8% said that they visit monthly.

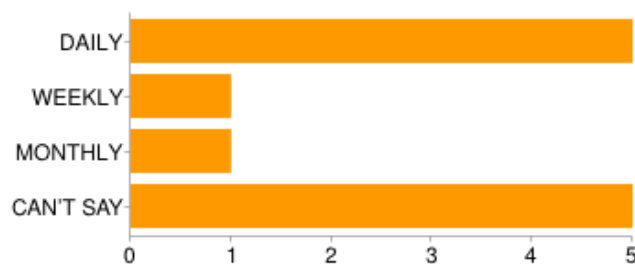


Figure 14: Frequency of visiting grandparents

Fifteenth question was whether the person tried to find out the actual reason behind the rituals and customs or not. 75% said yes and 25% said no.

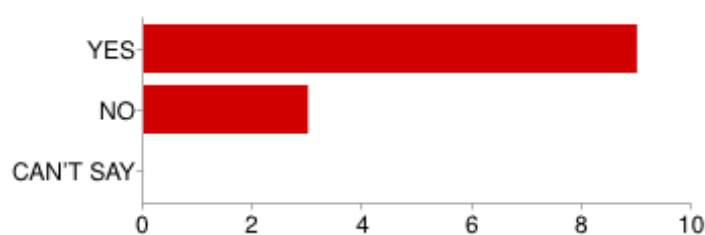


Figure 15: Effort taken in getting to know the benefits of these aacharas

Sixteenth question was to select the answer for the question, what made the person to follow aacharas from the list. The list includes compulsion from parents or elders, upon their interests, as per the

advice of other people, none of these and can't say. 77% said that they follow aacharas upon their own interests. Nobody selected none of these and rest of the options were selected by 8% each.

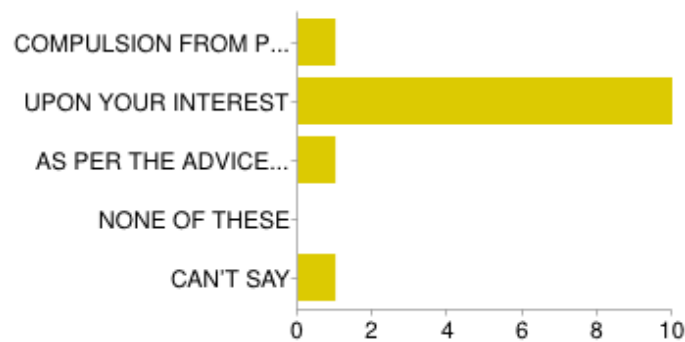


Figure 16: Reason behind following these aacharas

Seventieth question was whether the person advice others to follow aacharas or not. 67% said that they do not advice others to follow aacharas and 33% said yes.

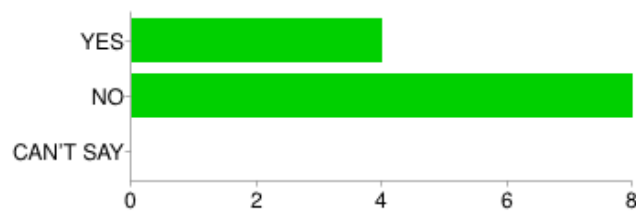


Figure 17: Whether advice others to follow aacharas

Eighteenth and last question was whether the person believes that these aacharas are a part of religious customs or not. 50% of the population replied that they believe that these aacharas are a part of religious customs, 33% said that they do not think that these aacharas are part of religious customs and 17% replied that they can't say the whether they believe that these aacharas are a part of religious customs or not.

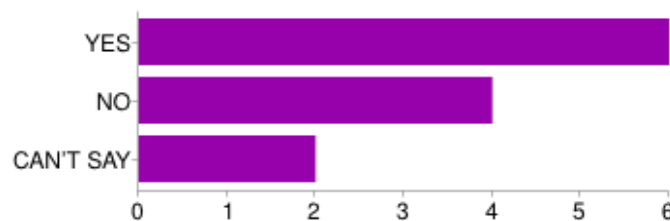


Figure 18: Whether believe these aacharas as a part of religious activities

CONCLUSION

From the analysis and interpretation of the survey results I reached the following points. They are,

- Most of the people follow one or other ritual.
- People have one or other reason to believe in rituals and customs.
- People do not believe and follow rituals and customs blindly.
- Most of the people agree with aacharas.
- More people follow aacharas because their elders taught them like that.
- People belief in the positive results of aacharas.
- Many people try to find out the reason behind the customs and rituals.

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- Most of the people get benefit out of practicing aacharas that's why they are following these aacharas.
 - More people follow rituals and customs upon their own interests.
 - 50% of the people believe that these aacharas are a part of religious custom.

By analyzing these points, it is concluding that even though most of the people come to know about rituals and customs from their fore fathers, they think about the benefits and reasons behind these aacharas and after that only they practice these aacharas.

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