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A critical review of *Bal Samskara* and its scientific importance

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ABSTRACT

Various *Samskara* are mentioned since *Pauranic Kala*. In *Ayurveda*, the word *Samskara* is introduced as "*Samskaraohi Gunaantradhyanam*" which means qualitative improvement carried out by incorporating the specific qualities. The main aim of performing *Samskaras* are to preparing the baby for intrauterine and extra uterine life successfully, develop proper feeding habits, ensure adequate nutrition. In short, the *Samskara* means those religious rites and ceremonies which sanctify the body mind and intellect. *Ayurveda* also describes different *Samskaras* in the different period of life to mark, or to announce attainment of different milestones thus ensuring proper growth and also to differentiate them from the child with developmental delay. Each *Samskara* make the child to acquire a new talent and is called as *Gunantaradhanam*. These all *Samskara* plays the main role in child health and overall development at each step of life.

Key words: *Kaumarbhrutya, Samskara, Kashyapa Samhita, Gunantaradhanam.*

INTRODUCTION

The *Ayurveda is Upveda of Atharvaveda*, is a "science of life", describes the holistic approach towards life and a great heritage of India. *Kaumarbhrutya* is one of the prime branches of *Ayurveda* and *Samskara* are studied under this branch. The word *Samskara* is derivative from root word 'Kri' with 'Sam' *Upsarga*, which is being used for several meanings. The *Sanskrit* term "*Samskara*" means religious customs. Various *Samskara* are mentioned since *Pauranic Kala*. In *Ayurveda*, the word *Samskara* is introduced as "*Samskaraohi Gunaantradhyanam*" which means qualitative improvement carried out by incorporating

the specific qualities (transforming of the qualities).^[1] In short, the *Samskara* means those religious rites and ceremonies which sanctify the body mind and intellect, so the person may become fit and ideal in its community. Thus *Simantonayana* (hair-parting), *Jatakarma* (birth rituals e.g. At the time when the child is being born), *Namakarana* (naming ceremony), *Nishakrama* (first visit or outing ceremony), *Annaprashana* (feeding ceremony), *Chudakarma* or *Mundana* (shaving of head), *Karnavedhan* (piercing the earlobes), *Upanayana* (blessed thread initiation), *Vedarambha Samskara* are related to proper growth and development of fetus and child. In Hindu culture, *Samskara* cover the entire life of an individual which begins from the moment he is conceived in the mother's womb till his death.^[2]

OBJECTIVES

1. To review *Samskara* and its method of implementation.
2. To review various types of *Samskara* and its benefits for child.

MATERIALS & METHODS

The literary review done from the various classical *Ayurvedic* treatises like *Kashyapa Samhita* and text

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book on *Kaumarbhrutya*. Critical review also done from articles published in national and international journals.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Upanishads mention *Samskaras* as a means to grow and prosper in all four aspects of human pursuit - *Dharma* (righteousness), *Artha* (wealth), *Karma* and *Kama* (work and pleasure), and *Moksha* (salvation).^[3]

Numbers of Samskara^[4,5]

Samskara are 16 (*Shodasha*) in number:

1. *Garbhadhan* (sacrament of impregnation or conception)
2. *Pumsavana* (engendering a male issue)
3. *Simantonayana* (hair-parting)
4. *Jatakarma* (birth rituals e.g. At the time when the child is being born)
5. *Namakarana* (naming ceremony)
6. *Nishakrama* (first visit or outing ceremony)
7. *Annaprashana* (feeding ceremony)
8. *Chudakarma or mundane* (shaving of head)
9. *Karnavedhan* (piercing the earlobes)
10. *Upanayana* (blessed thread initiation)
11. *Vedarambha* (beginning of vedic study)
12. *Samavartan* (end of studentship)
13. *Vanprastha* (renouncing the householder's life)
14. *Vanprastha* (renouncing the householder's life)
15. *Sanyyas* (leading the life of a monk)
16. *Anteyeshti* (death cremation)

Classification of Samskara^[6]

1. The *Samskara* are categorised from conception (pre-birth) to funeral (post-death) ceremonies as;
 - a) *Garbhastha* (pre-natal) *Samskaras* - *Garbhadan, Pumsavana, Simantonayana.*

Balyawatantargata (childhood) *Samskaras*:

- b) *Jatakarma, Nishakramna, Namkarana, Annaprashana, Chudakarma, Karnavedhan.*
- c) *Adhyanartha Samskara: Vidyarambha, Upanayana, Vedarambha*
- d) *Grahasthartha* (Marriage) *Samskara: Vivaha*

2. The *Samskara* in *Balyaawastha* may be classified follows;

a. *Ksheerap Kala*

During Neonatal Period: *Jatakarma, Namkarana*

During Infantile Period: *Nishakramana, Annaprashan, Karnavedhan*

b. *Ksheerannad/ Annad kala:*

During Toddler Period: *Chudkarana Samskara*

During Preschool and School Age: *Upnayana Samskara, Vedarambha Samskara*

Concept of Bal-Samsakara

1. *Jatkarma Samskara:*^[7-9] (Ceremony performed after birth or birth rituals)

Jatkarma is the birth ceremony which helps the baby transcend from intrauterine life to extra uterine life. It should be done for clearing the mouth secretions which clears airway and prevents aspiration. Placing cotton soaked in ghee on head maintains temperature of the baby which prevents heat loss from baby's head, which has the largest surface area, thus preventing hypothermia. Only after the baby is stabilised umbilical cord was cut, emphasizing on resuscitative measures. Tying the cord to baby's neck by thread prevents bleeding from cord and minimizes chances of infection. *Swarnaprashan* a type of *Lehan* given to baby by *Suvarna Bhasma*, honey and ghee serves the purpose of both nutrition and immunization. This *Lehana* (licking of medicine preparations) also gives an opportunity to physician to assess the rooting and sucking reflex of neonate. Honey and ghee have a rich caloric value, provide energy to baby whose previous source of nutrition from placenta has stopped. This first feed initiates gastrointestinal movements and activates the gut. *Swarna Bhasma* gives physical protection to baby,

enhances brain development and is in micro particles easily absorbable by baby's intestine. Use of *Mantra* in *Jata Karma* gives psychological support to parents especially mother. Breast feeding is to be given on the first day so to ensure proper nutrition and protective immunoglobulin present in colostrum. Early initiation of breast feed also stimulates prolactin reflex. When the baby sucks, the nerve ending in the nipple carry message to the anterior pituitary which in turn release prolactin and that acts on the alveolar glands in the breast to stimulate milk secretion. The water filled earthen jar may serve cooling purpose or maintenance of humidity in baby's ward room.

2. *Namakaran Samskara*:^[10-12] (Naming ceremony of baby)

Name of baby has a significant role in his/her identity. Generally appropriate time for naming ceremony in 10th after birth of child. This is the time when child has successfully passed the susceptible early neonatal period (birth to seven days) which bears maximum chances of getting risk of infections, neonatal jaundice, sepsis, etc. As new born health is indeed the key to child health and survival, *Namakaran Samskara* has a significant place. As the name is given by parents, it helps develop a parental bonding with baby and understanding of parental responsibilities. With all appropriate arrangements on the day of naming ceremony, bathing of mother and baby with medicated water also ensures hygiene and disinfection. *Lodhra* used has *Shothenashaka* (reduced inflammation) and *Vranaropaka* (wound healing) properties and is categorized under *Artava Sangrahaniya* (controls excessive vaginal bleeding).

3. *Nishkrama Samskara*:^[13,14]

In this ceremony, baby is taken out of *Kumaragara* or home first time. This empowers the baby to adapt with external environment. It is performed by father and mother at fourth month according to *Vagbhata* and *Kashyapa*. During this child is first time taken outside home preferably to a temple with *Shankha Nada* and chanting of Vedic mantras. The baby should be given bath, wearing clean clothes, ornamented, possessing mustard, honey and *Ghritha* or *Gorochana*,

along with *Dhatri* (wet nurse) should be taken out of the house. Thereafter worshipping the *Agni* (burning fire) with *Ghritha* and *Akshata* should be done. There after worshipping the *Brahmana*, God *Vishnu*, *Skanda* and other family gods with *Gandha* (fragrances), *Pushpa* (flowers), *Dhupa* (fumigations), *Mala* (garlands) etc. Then performing prayer with *Brahmanas* and taking their blessings and saluting the Guru, and then re-enter own house; the physician should narrate the mantra for offering prayer for baby.

4. *Simantonayana* (Hair-parting):^[15,16]

In this *Samskar*, the husband parts the wife's hair; it is performed in fourth to eight months of pregnancy. In *Ayurvedic* texts during period of pregnancy, *Acharyas* advised month wise various dietetic regimen and mode of conducts for pregnant woman which results in normal development of foetus who has good health, strength, voice, compactness etc.

Acharya also advised that if mother not follow proper advised lifestyle then it may result in *Doshas* vitiation which produce abnormalities of foetus (*Garbhag-Vikriti*), affecting its appearance, complexion and *Indriyas* (sense organ).

5. *Annaprashana Samskara*:^[17-20]

Generally, paediatricians recommend breast feeding upto six months and supplementary food can be started after six months. Similar theory also described by our *Acharya*. The food is properly mashed, should be liquid form to avoid difficulty in deglutition. Cleaning by *Jal Achamana* (water) indicates the highly developed sense of oral hygiene. Starting the intake of fruits offers energy as well as vital vitamins and minerals to baby. This ceremony can also be useful for assessment of developmental milestones like rolling over, Sitting with own support in tripod fashion, stranger anxiety and monosyllabic speech at sixth month. Teeth eruption in children also begins around this age. Due to all this proper dentition is also need for care. Similarly, *Annaprashan* at tenth month offers assessment of bisyllabic speech, telling a word like bye-bye, immature pincer grasp and standing with support.

6. Karnavedhan Samskara (Piercing the earlobes):^[21-25]

There are different views about performing this ceremony in Ayurvedic texts:

- A. According to Sushruta in 6th or 7th month
- B. According to Vagbhata in 6th 7th, 8th month
- C. There is a chapter named “Chudakarniye” in *Kashyapa Samhita (Kashyapa Samhita Sutrasthana 21*, but there is no direct reference available about performing this ceremony because chapter is incomplete from beginning.

According to *Sushruta*, in propitious *Tithi* (date), *Muhurta* and *Naksatra*, after reciting auspicious hymns, the child should be placed in the lap of wet-nurse or male attendant engaging and consoling him with toys; then the physician pulling the ear with his left hand should pierce the ears in the middle of the *Karnapeetha* where the skin is thinner (*DaivakritaChidra*) with his right hand slowly and evenly by needle or any tool in case of thin and thick lobes respectively. In male child first the right ear should be pierced but in female child, left ear should be pierced first and then the *Pichuvarti* should be placed at that place, usually performed on auspicious day in winter season.

Importance of Karnavedhan Samskara:

According to Sushruta the child's ears are pierced for the purpose of *Raksha-nimit* (protection from various diseases) and *Bhushan-nimit* (ornamentation).

7. Chudakarma Samskara:^[25-29]

This *Samskara* involves shaving of the head, preferably if child is son and performed when sun is in *Uttarayana*. This ceremony is done within 1 year or can be done till child gain 3 years. This *Samskara* is performed in order to attain longevity, strength and radiance. This *Samskara* involves first shaving of the child's hair. The shaving blade should be harmless. According to *Sushruta*, the cutting of hairs, nail gives lightness, prosperity, courage and happiness. The *Samskara* offers a chance for examination of the skull and stimulate the hairgrowth. Detection of

abnormalities like wide sutures, microcephaly, macrocephaly, elevated or depressed fontanelle etc. Palpation of scalp carefully may also reveal cranial defects or craniotables. During scalp examination, inspect any cutaneous abnormalities such as cutis aplasia or abnormal hair whorls as they may suggest an underlying genetic disorder and it also offers protection of the child.^[30]

8. Vedarambha Samskara:^[31-34]

The *Samskara* is variously named; it is called *Vidyarambha*, *Akshararambha*, *Aksharasvikarana* and *Akshara Lekhana* by different writers. As the child acquires capacity, strength to learn and education should be started. Usually performed at 6th year. This *Samskara* correlates with school age (6-12 years age). On the tongue of the child the letters “*Hari Sri Ganapataye Namah Avignamastu*” and all the alphabets are written with a piece of gold. The child is made to write the same letters from “*Hari Sri*” onwards with its index finger on raw rice in a bell metal vessel and the child is made to utter each word when it is written. Either the father of the child or an eminent teacher officiates at this ritual. In this *Samskara*, each student, according to his lineage, masters his own branch of the *Vedas*. It signifies the student's commitment to learning and the teacher's to teaching, and involves a *Homa* and many prayers. Starting formal education at five years is apt in today's era also, as by this time a normal child learns to walk, run, climb stairs, tell his name and gender, play cooperatively in a group, copy simple diagrams, use pencil, say song, poem, feed by himself and can go to toilet alone. Thus, a child of this age can adjust well if sent to *Gurukul* (formal school). It is also time for assessment of mental growth of child.

9. Upanayana Samskara:^[35,36]

This *Samskara* signifies spiritual rebirth that's why after the *Upanayana Samskar* is performed, the young become a *Dvija* i.e. Twice born. The brain growth of the child gets completed up to the age of 5 years. A thread tied around the waist may serve the purpose of assessment of the physical growth and to rule out the malnutrition. This Thread around waist

also serves the purpose to ascertain the physical growth. Assessment of maturity of brain to perform intellectual activities during school going age is done. It is also done to initiate sense of responsibility as well as spiritual well-being of the child. The child who has gain the capacity to learn should be initiated to the study of interest with the guidance under Guru.

DISCUSSION

Various *Samskaras* can be understood as the significant cultural events in an individual's life from birth to death. These methods or rituals possessing socio-cultural as well as some scientific rational behind it. *Samskaras* provide sound mental and physical health and the confidence to face life's challenges. It signifies Growth and development and the ceremonial announcement of milestones achieved providing with periodical screening. *Samskaras* can energize the body and revitalizes it and this help to increase physical strength and resilience to work for longer period of time. *Samskara* described in *Ayurvedic* texts are based on the various stages of child growth and developments and hence provide a rational guideline toward his care during celebrating different ceremonies from very conception to childhood.

Garbha-Samskara means imbedding good values (*Samskara*) in the foetus. It prevents complications during pregnancy like pregnancy induced hypertension, post-partum haemorrhage. All procedure of *GarbhaSamskara* helps in every stage for the all-around development of a healthy, beautiful, social and smart progeny with longevity. It plays the prime root role in mother and child health care system of our nation. *Ayurveda* also describes different *Samskaras* in the different period of life to mark, or to announce attainment of different milestones thus ensuring proper growth and also to differentiate them from the child with developmental delay. Introducing the newer faculties like *Upaveshana* or the protective measures like *Karnavedhana* in the form of *Samskara* to bring about refinement in the growth activity of the child. Each

Samskara make the child to acquire a new talent and is called as *Gunantaradhanam*.

CONCLUSION

Samskaras are a series of rituals that mark the improvements in various stages of the human life. *Samskara* are a religious custom (rite), rituals and sacrifices are religious ceremony. It plays the prime role in child health system and overall development at each step of life. It also prevents diseases, adapt to environment for further survival, give individual identity and educate the child. Thus, it is concluded that knowledge of developmental milestone is described in scientific manner in *Ayurveda* under the heading of *Samskara*.

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