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Critical Analysis of *Bala Samskara* w.s.r. to Developmental Milestones in Children : A Review Study

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ABSTRACT

Samskaras are a religious right, rituals sacrifices and a religious ceremony. *Samskara* also build a wakefulness of the attainment of social status and rights for the individual. In *Ayurvedic* aspect *Samskara* is "*Samskaro hi Gunaantaradhanam*" which means qualitative improvement carried out by incorporating the precise qualities (transforming of the qualities). Any process which brings continuous positive changes in a given material (*Dravya*), physical body (*Shareera*), intellectual capacity (*Mana*) and the personality (*Atma*) is called *Samskara*. These are significant in perspective of child health and provide chance for routine examination of growth and developmental milestones of child at regular intervals. A thorough review of childhood *Samskara* reveals that they were aimed at preparing the baby for proper feeding habits, ensuring adequate nutrition, preventing diseases, adapting baby to environment, gave individual identity and educated the child. *Samskara* signifies growth and development and the ceremonial announcement of milestones achieved providing with periodical screening. 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.

Key words: *Samskara*, Growth and development, developmental milestones, *Ayurveda*.

INTRODUCTION

According to Indian culture, each and every important activity is linked with ritual to signify it. If the best qualities and characteristics are cultivated in them right from their childhood then it impact throughout his life. Many principles of Ayurveda are related with religious rituals of ancient India. In Ayurveda, the word *Samskara* is introduced as "*Samskaro hi Gunaantaradhanam*" which means qualitative

improvement carried out by incorporating the specific qualities (transforming of the qualities).^[1] The word *Samskara* is being used for several meanings for example in sense of education, cultivation and training a purificatory rite or ceremony to change the qualities or intrinsic worth. Physician can also assess the proper growth and development of the child while performing these *Samskaras*.^[2] *Samskara* ceremonies invite many persons including spiritual gurus, learned persons, elderly ones and other people which provide a great opportunity for them to get a look of child.^[3] The learned one instantaneously notices any irregularity or lack in developmental milestone. There are many anatomical changes occurring in neonate while coming from intrauterine life to extra uterine life, which are necessary for survival. These changes are in synchronized manner and are achieved within certain range of time period. *Samskara* prepare one for the next stage of growth.

Samskara aim in the first instance at material gain to the individual. During some ceremonies prayers are

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offered to gods for health, wealth, children, intellect etc. which contribute to family and social happiness. *Samskaras* also build a wakefulness of the attainment of social status and rights for the individual. *Samskaras* bring about cultural gains. The various ceremonies related to the *Samskaras* help in the formation and development of personality. *Samskaras* convey a higher sacredness to life. Various Impurities associated with the body are cleared by performing *Samskaras*.

Classification of various *Samskaras*

The number of *Samskara* varies in different *Hindu Dharma Granthas*, it is about 16-40 but the applicable *Samskara* are 16 in number.^[4] These are;

Vaya (different stages of age)		Shodasha Samskaras
Garbhavastha (in pregnant lady)	Pre-natal period	<i>Garbhadana</i> (sacrament of impregnation or conception) <i>Pumsavana</i> (engendering a male issue) <i>Seemantonayana</i> (hair-parting)
	Neonatal period	<i>Jatakarma</i> (birth rituals) <i>Namakarana</i> (naming ceremony)
Balyavastha (in childhood)	Infantile period	<i>Nishkramana</i> (first outing or outing ceremony) <i>Karnavedhana</i> (piercing the earlobes) <i>Annaprashana</i> (feeding ceremony)
	Pre-school / School	<i>Choodakarana</i> (shaving of head) <i>Upanayana</i> (sacred

	age	thread initiation) <i>Vedarambha</i> (beginning of <i>Vedic</i> study)
<i>Yuvavastha</i> (in adulthood)		<i>Samavarthana</i> (end of studentship) <i>Vivaha</i> (marriage ceremony) <i>Vanaprastha</i> (renouncing the householder's life) <i>Sanyasa</i> (leading the life of a monk) <i>Antyeshti</i> (death cremation)

Critical Interpretation of various *Samskara* mentioned in *Balyavastha*

The detailed analysis of *Samskara*, classical description and their significance in examination of different developmental and growth milestones is as follows;

Jata Karma Samskara

The word '*Jata*' means born or brought into existence.^[5] Immediately after birth *Jatakarma* is indicated. According to *Acharya Charaka*, after the initial stabilization of baby (*Prana Pratyagamana*) and cord cutting, *Jatakarma* should be performed. First of all, the child should be given *Madhu* and *Ghritha*. There after, milk from the right breast should be given to the child.^[6] *Acharya Sushruta* has opined *Jatakarma* as cleaning the vernix on newborn's body, clearing newborn's mouth by *Saindhava* and *Sarpi* and placing a ghee soaked cotton on baby's head. This is followed by cutting of umbilical cord at distance of eight *angula* from baby's skin and tying it by thread which is tied to baby's neck.^[7] After this baby is made to lick gold *Bhasma* mixed with honey and ghee.

Analytical interpretation

- *Jatakarma* is the birth rite which helps the baby exceed from intrauterine life to extra uterine life.

This provides an opportunity to examine the baby immediately after birth. Cleaning the vernix provides tactile stimulation to the baby to make it breath or cry.^[8]

- *Swarnaprashana* given to baby as a mixture of gold *Bhasma*, honey and ghee. Gold *Bhasma* gives physical protection to baby, immune booster, enhances brain development and is in nano particles which is easily absorbable by baby's intestine.
- Honey is a rich source of fructose to yield energy and also presence of hermin prevents from respiratory infection. *Kashaya Rasa* of honey clears the *Strotas* also. Honey also serves as a mild allergen, which gives the first opportunity to baby's body to start the synthesis of antibodies.
- *Ghrita* is high caloric diet helps to a new born baby instant energy with lubricating effects. Giving *Madhu* and *Ghrita* in equal quantity is a *Samyoga Viruddha* which may help in developing immunity.
- Also this first feed fulfils the criteria of Trophic feed (a minimum amount of the feed given to the baby to initiate intestinal movements and to activate the gut).
- This *Lehana* (licking of medicine preparations) also gives an opportunity to physician to assess the rooting, sucking and swallowing reflex of neonate. Breast feeding is to be given on the first day so as to ensure proper nutrition and protective immunoglobulin present in colostrums.
- Placing cotton soaked in ghee on head maintains temperature of the baby and provides insulation. It prevents heat loss from baby's head, which has the largest surface area, thus preventing hypothermia.^[9]
- Tying the cord to baby's neck by thread prevents bleeding from cord and minimizes chances of infection of cord by soiling in stool and urine.
- *Jatakarma* can also prove as an efficient tool of examination to rule out oral anomalies such as

cleft palate, natal teeth, fissured tongue, ankyloglossia, tracheo-esophageal fistula etc.

Namakarana Samskara

It is a religious ceremony conducted by the family members to keep name for the newborn child which gives personal identity to the child.

Timing of *Namakarana Samskara* varies a lot as per different Ayurvedic texts;

- *Charaka* - 10th day onwards
- *Sushruta* - 10th day after birth
- *Vagbhatta* - on 10th day along with *Sutika Utthana* or on 12th, 100th day or 1st year.

The *Sutika* mother should take bath with *Sarvagandhodaka*, *Shveta Sarshapa* and *Lodhra*, wear clean, holy white coloured dress and decorate herself with various desirous ornaments. The father should keep two names for his son by worshipping the *Kula Devata* like *Nakshatrika* name and *Abhiprayika* name. The *Nakshatrika* name should be of same *Nakshatra* in which the child is born. In *Abhiprayika* name, *Aadi*, *Madhya* and *Antya Akshara* should be arranged in special fashion. *Aadi Akshara* should be *Ghosha Varna* while *Madhya Akshara* should be *Kanthastha Varna* like and *Antya Akshara* should be *Ushma Varna*. Sons name should have even letters and daughters name should have odd letters.^[10]

Analytical interpretation

- *Namakarana Samskara* is a special procedure practiced in paediatrics, in which a newborn child is given with name. This looks like a simple procedure but name gives personal identity to a child which has got its own significance in future life. It is an important tool for socialization and promotes the healthy psychology, good physical and mental development of the child.
- This is the time when child has successfully passed the vulnerable early neonatal period (birth to seven days) which bears maximum risk of infections, sepsis, neonatal jaundice, etc. Neonatal physiological jaundice appears on

second day of birth reaches peak on 4th or 5th day and disappears by 10-14 days.^[11]

- Bathing of mother and baby with medicated water also ensures hygiene and disinfection. *Lodhra* used has *Shothanashaka* (reduces inflammation) and *Vranaropaka* (wound healing).^[12] Keeping the baby's head towards north or east where maximum illumination of sunlight is present makes any inflammation on head like un-subsided cephalo-hematoma visible.
- Importance of name in cases like blood transfusion, maintenance of medical records and medico-legal purpose is quite obvious.

Nishkramana Samskara

It is the ceremony to expose the baby to the external world.^[13] According to *Kashyapa*, in the fourth month after giving bath the baby should wear new cloths and ornaments and should be taken to the family temple i.e. out of the house for the first time. A paediatrician should be present when the baby comes back home.^[14]

Analytical interpretation

Nishkramana Samskara is taking out the baby in fourth month which is appropriate as by this time baby develops enough immunity and tolerance to external environment. *Kashyapa* clearly mentioned that child should be taken to a temple. The presence of a *Vaidya* (paediatrician) on this occasion provides an opportunity for routine check up and following factors in and around the temple helps to assess the developmental milestones at 4th month of age,

- Presence of neck holding
- Response to sounds
- Head control
- Range of movement of neck
- Hand eye coordination
- Bidextrous grasp approach to a dangling ring
- Laughing loud
- Social smile and

- Recognition of mother

During this *Samskara* the baby gets in an unfamiliar environment when his reaction in form of social smile, anxiety, fear, laugh or reaction to sound of bell can be observed. This provides an opportunity to examine the developmental status of the baby to give necessary suggestions and treatment plan to the parents. Eg. Persistence of primitive reflexes indicative of cerebral palsy.

Phalaprashana and Annaprashana Samskara

This is the act of introduction of the solid food material for the first time. It is performed at 10th

month (*Kashyapa*), 6th month (*Sushruta* and *Vagbhata*) or 5th/6th month (*Gruhya Sutr*)^[15] and 6th month *Phalaprashana* is advised by *Kashyapa*. According to *Kashyapa*, on the day of ceremony in *Prajapatya nakshatra*, cooked food is kept in between the square place prepared by besmearing the cow dung. The sign of *Swastika* is made on that. A picture filled with water is also placed there. Physician is the performer of the ceremony. After offering the food to the *Agni* the remaining part of the food is offered to child for 3 or 5 times.^{[16],[17]}

Analytical interpretation

Fruit juices should be given to the child from sixth month which are source of minerals and vitamins especially vitamin C. At age of 6 month, breast milk is not enough to fulfill the requirement of growing child, So it is the accurate time to introduction of supplementary feeding as *Phalaprashana*.

Phalaprashana ceremony can also be useful for assessment of developmental milestones like,

- Rolling over
- Sitting with own support in tripod fashion
- Bidextrous reach
- Stranger anxiety and
- Monosyllabic speech (pa, ba, da etc.) at sixth month
- Smiles at mirror image

Teeth eruption in children also begins around this age. Similar to *Phalaprashana* and *Annaprashana* introduction in *Ayurveda*, same principle is followed in modern paediatrics as after six month of age weaning (which is the process of gradually introducing a infant to adult diet and withdrawing the supply of its mother's milk) starts as offer foods which are soft, easily digestible and avoid foods with high allergenic potential (cow's milk, eggs, fish, nuts, soybeans). For feeding parents should advise to make use of a cup rather than a bottle. Fluids other than breast milk, formula and water should be discouraged.

Annaprashana can also be useful for assessment of developmental milestones like,

- Bisyllabic speech
- Waving bye-bye
- Immature pincer grasp and
- Standing with support
- Weight of child can also be assessed

Karnavedhana Samskara

Pricking of the ears serves both ornamental purposes as well as protect baby from diseases.^[18] *Acharya* have recommended sixth, seventh or eighth month.^[19] The child should be held in lap and ear pricked in centre of lobule, avoiding blood vessels (*Daivakrita Chhidra*) and nerves by seeing it against sunlight.^[20] In male child first the right ear should be pierced but in female child, left ear should be pierced first and then the *Pichuvarti* be inserted, usually performed on auspicious day in winter season.

Analytical interpretation

- Main intention is to provide protection against *Graha Rogas* so its effect on enhancing the immunity against microorganism.
- Injury produced by piercing the ear may initiate the antigen antibody reaction providing passive immunity to the child. This act also activates the immune mechanism so as to bring a secondary immunity against several infections. This rite is

intended to open the inner ears of the child for receiving sacred sounds.

- Method of pressure point pricking as followed in Acupuncture method and stimulation of ear lobule stimulate adrenal glands and intern reduces the respiratory tract infections.
- Appropriate time to examine respective month (6, 7, 8 months) development milestones. Usually baby cries and vocabulary of the child can be indirectly tested (as by 6, 7, 8 months infant start verbalizing words like ma, pa, da etc.)

Choodakarma Samskara

Choodakarma is head shaving ceremony.^[21] There is a chapter named "*Choodakarniye*" in *Kashyapa Samhita* but there is no reference available about *Choodakarma* procedure because chapter is incomplete. This is performed in the first or third year according to *Grihya Sutra* and *Paraskara Sutra* respectively.

Analytical interpretation

- This *Samskara* adopted for examination of skull, assessment of bone growth of the cranium and to identify the deformities of the skull at the age of 1 year. Detection of abnormalities like craniocynostosis, wide sutures, craniotabes, microcephaly, macrocephaly, elevated or depressed fontanelle etc.
- 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.^[22]
- Various neuro developmental abnormalities may be revealed by gross evaluation of anthropomorphic aspects of the face. Auscultation of the skull is an important adjunct to a neurologic examination.
- Examination of anterior fontanel is useful clinical as excessively large AF and its delayed closure is present in following condition - Malnutrition, Hydrocephalus, Cretinism, Down syndrome,

Trisomies 13 and 18, rickets, pituitary dwarf etc. Bulging anterior fontanel is sign of raised intracranial pressure exclude crying infants, hydrocephalus, vitamin A poisoning, Urea cycle enzyme defects, Vitamin D dependent rickets etc.

- At one year infant following milestones developed such as walk without support, mature pincer grasp developed, starts turning pages of book and scribble, playing simple ball game, first molar eruption occurs (16-20 month).

Upanayana Samskara

This is a special *Samskara*, which is explained in Hindu religion. It is school entrance initiation ceremony. It helps control the fear of separation from parents and to help overcome the anxiety of entering a strange place. It is also called *Yajnopaveeta Samskara*. This *Samskara* helps the child to enter student life with perfect discipline.^[23]

Analytical interpretation

- This *Samskara* is the first step on this long journey towards the goal of self-realization.^[24]
- After the *Upanayana* is performed, the young lad becomes a *Dvija* i.e. twice born as this *Samskara* signifies spiritual rebirth. Change in age may be change in the physical and intellectual power, attaining the skills and also need of the subject. The brain growth of the child gets completed up to the age of 5 years.

Vedarambha Samskara

First time, child is practiced to write a few words. Usually performed at 8th year.^[25] This *Samskara* correlates with school age (6-12 years age). On the tongue of the child the letters "*Hari Shri 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 Shri*" 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. This is education enrichment ceremony which is undertaken when the child is of five years age. It

signifies the student's commitment to learning and the teacher's to teaching.

Analytical interpretation

- Starting formal education at five years, as by this time a normal child learns to walk, run, climb stairs, tell his name and gender, play co-operatively in a group, copy simple diagrams, use pencil, say song, poem, story, feed by himself and can go to toilet alone. It is also time for assessment of mental growth of child.
- Also there are two other *Samskaras* which does not fall under the above mentioned 16 *Samskaras*, but still significant to the context. They are;

Sooryodayadarshana / Chandrodaya Samskara

It is usually performed at 1st month (*Kashyapa*) or 3rd month (*Dharma Sindhusara*). This *Samskara* has got the advantage of testing the development of the child in its ability to look at the objects allowing macular fixation. Exposing the child to ultraviolet rays helps in rickets by formation of vitamin D in the skin. It is proved that only sun rays of *Sooryodayakala* have wavelength of ultraviolet rays which is beneficial to stimulate the production of vitamin D. This is diagnostic tests that if child is not able to fix the vision or not able to see moving sun or the moon by the end of one month development of the child is slow and special care should be given.

Upaveshana Samskara

This is the ceremony of making a normal baby to sit with support. It is performed at 5th month (*Ashtanga Sangraha*) or 6th month (*Kashyapa*). Daily the child is trained to sit for a while and thus by 12 months of age, he shall be able to sit without support. This is a method of giving stimulus for the ability to sit in a normally growing child. It also assess the different milestones such as rolling over, sitting with support, sitting without support, crawling, creeping etc.^[26]

DISCUSSION

The various *Samskara* mentioned in ancient *Hindu* culture can be understood as the important cultural

events in an individual life from birth to death possessing socio-cultural as well as medical significance. In the present era of busy and materialistic world, we have no time to follow the rituals and *Samskara* which have led us to various deviations in the area of child growth and development also their social and spiritual health. That's why we are facing a lot of health problems like - developmental delays in children etc, which are also known disease of civilization. Ayurveda teaches us how to live a healthy life. Following our traditional system may solve many of these problems. *Samskara* is one among them when practiced will help in proper screening and holistic development of child (physical, social and spiritual).

Therefore *Samskara* are the moral code of conduct for the society. During childhood a child passes through the different phases of motor, sensory, neuromuscular, social and mental development and these are termed as developmental milestones. They should occur in the given time otherwise termed as delayed developmental milestones. Ayurveda 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. Therefore for proper physical, mental, social and spiritual growth of development play a significant role and completed differentiation of health in human beings.

CONCLUSION

Present review reveals that the *Samskaras* are religious customs, rituals, sacrifices, or a religious ceremony. This practice is the rich heritage handed down the centuries by our forefathers and the sages. These rituals prepare the mind to assimilate not only the *Vedic* knowledge but also make one a person of character. *Samskara* described in Ayurveda classics are based on the various stages of child growth and development and hence provide a rational guideline towards his care during celebrating different ceremonies from very conception to childhood.

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