

**KARNAVEDHANA SAMSKARA & ITS SCIENTIFIC ASPECTS**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Karnavedhana samskara (ear-piercing ceremony)** is one of the sixteen *samskaras* described in *Ayurveda*. *Acharyas* such as *Sushruta*, *Kashyapa* & *Vagbhata* recommend to perform this *samskara* in the sixth to eighth month of life at *daivakrita vivara*. Divine orifice (*Daivakrita vivara*), a translucent site devoid of major vessels, which is aligns with the scientific recommendation of piercing the soft lobule rather than the cartilage to reduce complications. It is performed due to its social, cultural as well as medical significance. This *samskara* is believed to provide *Raksha-nimitta* (protection against disease) & *Abhushana-artha* (ornamentation). From medical point of view, **Karnavedhana** is comparable with auricular acupuncture which is the point of cardiorespiratory center. Piercing in ear lobule stimulates peripheral nerves, branches of auriculotemporal and vagus nerves, so that it modulates

parasympathetic activity, improves circulation, regulates hormones & enhances immunity. Further, piercing in females is associated with menstrual & reproductive health benefits. *Acharyas* also described about complications when the piercing damages vital points (*marmas*) of the earlobe. Injury to *Kalika*, *Marmarika* & *Lohitika* may result in fever, swelling, pain, neck stiffness or even convulsion, which can be understood by comparing with modern science; improper piercing can cause infection, nerve damage and hypertrophic or keloid scarring. Thus, **Karnavedhana** combines spiritual beliefs with health benefits; while it is celebrated as a sacred rite of passage that promotes a child's social & spiritual well-

being, it's also recognized for its preventive & therapeutic effects. This acknowledges the wisdom of ancient traditions and underscores their continued relevance in contemporary pediatric and integrative medicine, highlighting how such rituals can contribute to a child's overall growth & development.

**KEYWORDS:** *karnavedhana samskara, samskara, ear-piercing ceremony.*

## **INTRODUCTION TO SHODASHA SAMSKARAS AND KARNAVEDHANA SAMSKARA**

In Ayurvedic literature, the *Shodasha Samskaras* (16 sacraments or rites of passage) mark significant life stages, transforming an individual's physical, mental, and spiritual being. In other word, *Samskara* means “*gunantaradhanam*” which is used for transform the qualities.<sup>[1]</sup> Among these rites, *Karnavedhana Samskara*, the ear-piercing ceremony, holds a unique position. It is typically performed in early childhood, often between the sixth and eighth months of life, aligning with critical developmental milestones.<sup>[2]</sup>

**Cultural & Social Dimension-** A timeless tradition that embeds the child within its cultural heritage and community, signifying belonging and social identity.<sup>[3]</sup>

**Spiritual Significance-** Believed to ward off evil, promote spiritual well-being, and open subtle energy channels, enhancing receptivity to divine knowledge.<sup>[3]</sup>

**Medical & Health Aspects-** Helps free flow of blood in the brain of the child so that memory power of the child is increased. Also to initiate antigen- antibody reactions, providing active immunity to the child.<sup>[3]</sup>

## **CLASSICAL REFERENCES ON TIME PERIOD FOR KARNAVEDHANA SAMSKARA**

The importance of *Karnavedhana* is well-documented in classical Ayurvedic texts by *Acharyas*.

**Acharya Sushruta<sup>[4]</sup>**

तौ षष्ठे मासि सप्तमे वा शुक्लपक्षे प्रशस्तेषु तिथिकरणमुहूर्तनक्षत्रेषु कृतमङ्गलस्वस्तिवाचनं.....  
(su.su.16/3)

According to *Acharya Shusutra*, best time indicated for *Karnavedhana* is 6/7 months of life, having bright fortnight, auspicious date, *Karana*, *Muhurta* & *Nakshatra* after reciting auspicious & valedictory hymns.

### Acharya Vagbhata<sup>[5]</sup>

षट्सप्ताष्टममासेषु नीरुजस्य शुभेऽहनि । कर्णौ हिमागमे विद्धयेद्वायुङ्गस्थस्य सान्त्वयन् ॥  
(A.H.U.1/29)

It is advised that, ear piercing is to be done when the child is of 6/7/8 months old. It should be performed when the child is not suffering from any other illness or pain. An auspicious day should be selected when the climate outside is cold. *Acharya Sushruta* says that preferably the *samskara* should be performed in Shukla paksha i.e. in the brighter half of the lunar cycle.

**Acharya Brhaspati:** जन्मतो दशमे वाह्नि द्वादशे वाथ षोडशे।

*Karnavedha* has to be performed in the tenth, twelfth or sixteenth day after birth.

<i>Acharya Garga</i>	6 <sup>th</sup> /7 <sup>th</sup> /8 <sup>th</sup> /12 <sup>th</sup> month
<i>Acharya Shripati</i>	When the child is playing in mother's lap & teething not started
<i>Katyayana Sutra</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> /5 <sup>th</sup> year
<i>Parasara Gruhyasutra</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> /5 <sup>th</sup> years

## THE CONCEPT OF *DAIVAKRITA VIVARA*: BRIDGING ANCIENT SYSTEM AND MODERN ANATOMY

The *Ayurvedic* description of *Daivakrita Vivara* is strikingly resonant with modern anatomical understanding and best practices for ear piercing. It is defined as a.<sup>[6]</sup>

- **Translucent site:** Implying an area with minimal vascularity, reducing the risk of bleeding and hematoma formation.
- **Vessel-free area:** Directly translates to an avascular region, which inherently minimizes the chances of nerve damage and significant bleeding during the piercing process.

This ancient wisdom directly aligns with contemporary medical recommendations for ear piercing, which strongly advocate for piercing the soft, fleshy lobule rather than the cartilage.

The cartilage of the ear, being rich in blood vessels and nerve endings, is susceptible to a host of complications when pierced. These can range from severe infections (e.g., perichondritis) to prolonged healing times, keloid formation, and even disfigurement if not managed properly.

तत्र दैविकृतं विवरं यथा भवति, तथा कुर्यात्।"

*There, one should pierce where there is a divine aperture."*

*Sushruta Samhita, Sutrasthana, Chapter 16*

These texts recommend a specific site for ear piercing: the *Daivakrita Vivara* (literally, "divinely made orifice" or "divine aperture"). This term refers to a naturally occurring and energetically significant point in the earlobe, considered ideal for piercing.<sup>[7]</sup>

## MATERIALS, METHODOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE OF KARNAVEDHANA<sup>[4]</sup>

### Materials

- Wet-nurse or male attendants
- Toys (*kridanaka*)
- Needle (*suchi*)
- Thick needle (*Ara*)
- Sesame oil
- Dilators (*Vardhanaka*) made of *Apamarga*, *Nimba*, *Karpasa* or *Sisaka* & Cotton-wick of different size.

### METHODOLOGY

तिथिकरणमुहूर्तनक्षत्रेषु कृतमंगलस्वस्तिवाचनं धात्र्यङ्के कुमारधराङ्के वा कुमारमुपवेश्यबालक्रीडनकैः प्रलोभ्याभिसान्त्वयन् भिषग् वामहस्तेनाकृष्यः कर्णदिवकृते छिद्र आदित्यकरावभासिते शनैः शनेर्दक्षिण हस्तेन ऋजू विधेत् । प्रतनुकं सूच्या, बहलमारया, पूर्वं दक्षिणंकुमारस्य, वामं कुमार्याः ततः पिचुवर्ती प्रवेशयेत् ॥३॥

(सु.सू. १६/३)

The child should be placed in the lap of wet-nurse or male attendants engaging & consoling him with toys. Then physician should pull the ear lobe with his right hand slowly and evenly at naturally designed & sun rays enlightened hole (*Daivakrita Chhidra*) by *Suchi* (needle) or *Ara* in case of thin & thick lobes respectively. The right lobe in the male & the left lobe in the female children should be pierced, and then insert the cotton-wick into the created hole.

Multifactorial benefits of *Karnavedhana samskara*

रक्षाभूषणनिमित्त बालस्य कर्णो विधेते..... ॥

(सु.सू. १६/३)

- **Raksha-nimitta:** Protect the individual from various diseases and negative influences
- **Abhushana-Artha:** ornamentation for cultural expression

- For keeping the child away from *Graha-baadha*.
- For *pushtayu & Dhana-vridhhi*.

## SCIENTIFIC CORRELATION: AURICULAR ACUPUNCTURE AND NERVE STIMULATION<sup>[8,9]</sup>

### Auricular Acupuncture Site

- The ear lobule, specifically the area where *Karnavedhana* is performed, corresponds to well-established auricular acupuncture points. In traditional Chinese medicine and modern auriculotherapy, the earlobe is considered a significant microsystem reflecting the entire body.
- Notably, specific points on the earlobe are linked to vital organ systems, including the cardiorespiratory center.

### Nerve Stimulation

Piercing the earlobe at this strategic location stimulates several critical nerve branches.

- **Auriculotemporal Nerve Branches:** A branch of the trigeminal nerve, stimulation here can influence various facial and cranial functions.
- **Vagus Nerve Branches:** The vagus nerve (cranial nerve X) is a cornerstone of the parasympathetic nervous system, playing a crucial role in regulating internal organ functions, digestion, heart rate, and immune response. Increased parasympathetic tone is associated with a "rest and digest" state, promoting relaxation, reducing stress, and fostering physiological balance.
- **Greater auricular nerve:** Greater auricular nerve supplies the auricle, helix, antihelix & lobule. Stimulation of this area, as with earlobe piercing may influence the reproductive system & brain function.

## PROFOUND HEALTH BENEFITS OF KARNAVEDHANA<sup>[10,11]</sup>

**Enhanced Circulation and Hormonal Balance:** Stimulation of the earlobe points is believed for better blood flow throughout the body. This, in turn, can contribute to improved hormonal regulation, balancing vital endocrine functions. Also, stimulate the adrenal glands, which in turn can help prevent respiratory tract infections.

**Immunity Modulation:** By piercing the earlobes, minor injury is believed to trigger an immune response. This reaction may help the body to initiate an antigen-antibody response by developing secondary immune response in early life.

**Favorable for Female Reproductive Health:** In females, earlobe piercing is traditionally associated with promoting favorable menstrual and reproductive health. Piercing the left ear is thought to balance energy flows (nadis) and help regulate the menstrual cycle. Specific points on the earlobe are believed to influence the female reproductive system, contributing to regularity and well-being.

**Brain development & mental well-being:** As earlobes are believed to contain meridian points that connect the right & left hemispheres of the brain. *Karnavedhana* stimulates these points to activate brain function, promote intellectual growth, preventing anxiety, nervousness, also improve eyesight & auditory function.

### POTENTIAL COMPLICATIONS: AYURVEDIC AND MODERN PERSPECTIVES

#### Complication in proportion to Ayurveda<sup>[12,13]</sup>

According to *Acharya Sushruta*, *Daivakruta chhidra* is a point which is very thin & devoid of *siras*. The piercing should be done slowly with straight stroke. Absence of complications like severe pain, bleeding, immediate inflammatory reaction, local rise in temperature, swelling and redness etc. is the sign of proper execution of the procedure at the proper site i.e. *Daivakruta chhidra*, neither is high up, sideward nor downward.

<i>Kalika</i>	<i>Jwara</i> (fever), <i>Daha</i> (burning sensation), <i>Shwayatu</i> (swelling), <i>Vedana</i> (pain)
<i>Marmarika</i>	<i>Jwara</i> (fever), <i>Vedana</i> (pain), <i>Granthi</i> (lymph nodes swelling)
<i>Lohitika</i>	<i>Manyasthamba</i> (neck stiffness), <i>Apatanaka</i> (convulsions), <i>Shiro-Graha</i> (headache), <i>Karna Shoola</i> (pain in ear)

These measures done to avoid injury to the *siras* i.e. *Kalika*, *Marmarika* & *Lohitika*. Complications after injuries to the *Siras*.

#### Modern Medical Complications<sup>[14]</sup>

Modern medical science corroborates the risks associated with improper ear piercing, particularly when done through cartilage or without sterile techniques.

- **Infection:** Bacterial infections, including severe ones like perichondritis (cartilage infection), which can lead to significant disfigurement.
- **Nerve Injury:** Damage to the auriculotemporal or other facial nerve branches, potentially causing numbness, pain, or facial paralysis.
- **Allergic Reactions:** To jewelry materials, commonly nickel.
- **Hypertrophic Scarring & Keloid Formation:** Abnormal growth of scar tissue, particularly prevalent in individuals with a genetic predisposition.

- **Bleeding & Hematoma:** If major vessels are punctured.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of *Karnavedhana* for *Raksha* (protection) can be understood by the fact that the surface of the ear is the only location on human body where there is afferent Vagus nerve distribution; that can be stimulated by piercing. The pain stimuli of various somatic, visceral, and chemical-sensory receptors follow the “bottom up” path from peripheral nervous system to central nervous system to produce therapeutic effect by influencing central neural processing and mental activities. The Auricular branch of Vagus Nerve (ABVN) forms a connection between the auricle & the autonomic regulations. The physiological significance of Vagus nerve is controlling the activity of cardiovascular system, respiratory, gastrointestinal systems and has effects on smooth muscles, blood vessels, sweat glands, and the endocrine system through the parasympathetic function. The mode of action of *Karnavedhana* may also be thought to improve the body's function & promotes the natural self-healing process. Vagus Nerve Stimulation (VNS) has been used as a non-pharmacological treatment of epilepsy and depression. It is also proposed that auricular acupuncture may suppress epileptic seizures via activating the parasympathetic nervous system. Transcutaneous Vagus Nerve Stimulation (tVNS) had been hypothesized for the treatment of autism spectrum disorder. Auricular acupuncture is believed to activate the endocrine glands that regulate hormonal balance and menstrual cycles. Traditional Indian system also associates the left side of the body with feminine, or lunar, energy. Piercing the left ear is thought to balance energy flows (*nadis*) and help regulate the menstrual cycle. For males, piercing is said to enhance sperm production.

## CONCLUSION

The *Karnavedhana Samskara* is an ancient practice mentioned by *Acharyas of Ayurveda* thousand years before. Ultimately, *Karnavedhana* is more than an ear-piercing ceremony; it is a holistic intervention designed to support a child's comprehensive growth and development—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Beyond cultural benefits and social identity, it stimulates immunity, suggesting benefits for vision, reproductive health and mental clarity. The act of piercing specific points of earlobe is believed to stimulate nerves and promote blood flow. It eventually improves different organs functions.

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