

A REVIEW ARTICLE ON CHILDHOOD SAMSKARAS

Risha Dhir*

Assistant Professor, Department of Kaumarbhritya, Shaheed Kartar Singh Sarabha Ayurvedic College and Hospital, Sarabha, District Ludhiana (Pb).

Article Received on
21 June 2021,

Revised on 11 July 2021,
Accepted on 01 August 2021

DOI: 10.20959/wjpr202110-21316

*Corresponding Author

Dr. Risha Dhir

Assistant Professor,
Department of
Kaumarbhritya, Shaheed
Kartar Singh Sarabha
Ayurvedic College and
Hospital, Sarabha, District
Ludhiana (Pb).

ABSTRACT

Samskaras are the rites of passage in a human being's life described in ancient *Sanskrit* text. They include important cultural events in an individual's life from birth till death. *Samskara* build wakefulness for the attainment of social status and rights for the individual. While performing *Samskaras* physician can also assess the proper growth and development of the child. The number of *Samskara* varies in different Hindu *Dharma Granthas*, it is about 16-40, but the applicable *Samskara* are 16 (*Shodash*) in number which spreads from *Garbhadan* to *Anteysthi Samskara*. This article will describe in detail eight *Samskaras* for growth and development of children, along with their medical relevance: *Jatakarma* (birth rituals), *Namkaran* (naming the child), *Nishakraman* (first outing), *Annaprashan* (first feeding), *Chudakarna* (head shaving), *Karnavedhan* (piercing the earlobes),

Upanayana (thread ceremony) and *Vedarambha* (start of formal education). In the present paper, it can be concluded that the *Samskaras* described in *Ayurvedic* texts are based on the various milestones of child growth and developments and hence provide a rational guideline toward his care from very conception to adolescence.

KEYWORDS: *Samskara*; Growth and development; Developmental delay.

INTRODUCTION

Samskaras are those religious rites and ceremonies which sanctify the body, mind and intellect, so that person becomes fit for the society.

In *Ayurveda*, the word *Samskara* is described as,

संस्कारो ही गुणान्तराधानम् ।।

(चण्विण१४२१)

Which means “qualitative improvement carried out by incorporating the specific qualities”.[1]

Ayurveda describes different *Samskaras* in the different periods of life to mark, or to announce the attainment of different milestones, thus ensuring proper growth also to differentiate them from the child with developmental delay. 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).[2]

In Hindu culture, it is believed that every aspect of life is sacred, so due to this reason each important stage, from conception to *Anteyeshiti* (death cremation) is distinguished as special rituals. The *Samskaras* are performed for the physical, social, and religious development of the individual. The sacrament composed of worships of Gods and words spoken as *mantras* by the *Vaidya* as per *Ayurvedic* texts. The sacraments occur at important events and give value to a person's life.[3]

Number of *samskaras*

The number of *Samskaras* varies from 13-40 in different communities.

S. no.	<i>Shastras</i> ^[4]	Number
1.	<i>Guatama Dharamshastra</i>	40
2.	<i>Grihya Sutras</i>	12 – 18
3.	<i>Manusamriti</i>	13
4.	<i>Maharishi Dayananda</i>	16

Some *Samskaras* are medically important and some are socially important. The most traditionally accepted number is 16 and they are referred to as “*Shodas Samskaras*”.[5]

Classification of *samskaras*

According to the age, or the time in the individual's life when the *Samskara* is performed, they are broadly classified into 3 categories.

S. no.	<i>Vaya vargikaran</i>	<i>Samskaras</i>	Description ^[6]
1.	<i>Garbhavastha</i>	I. <i>Garbhaadaanam</i>	The first coming together of the husband & wife for bringing about conception.
		II. <i>Pumsavanam</i>	Ceremony performed when the first signs of conception are seen, and is to be performed

			when someone desires a male child.
		III. <i>Seemantonayanam</i>	A ceremony of parting of the hairs of the expectant mother to keep her spirits high & positive. Special music is arranged for her.
2.	<i>Balyavastha</i>	I. <i>Jaatakarmaam</i>	After the birth of the child, the child is given a secret name, he is given honey & ghee, mother starts the first breast-feeding after chanting of a mantra.
		II. <i>Naamkaranam</i>	In this ceremony the child is given a formal name. Performed on the 11th day.
		III. <i>Nishkraamanam</i>	In this the formal <i>darshan</i> of sun & moon is done for the child.
		IV. <i>Annapraashanam</i>	This ceremony is performed, when the child is given solid food (<i>anna</i>) for the first time.
		V. <i>Choodaakaranam</i>	<i>Chooda</i> means the 'lock or tuft of hair' kept after the remaining part is shaved off.
		VI. <i>Karanvedhanam</i>	Done in 7th or 8th month. Piercing of the ears.
		VII. <i>Upanayanam</i>	The thread ceremony. The child is thereafter authorized to perform all rituals.
		VIII. <i>Vedaarambham</i>	Study of Vedas begins with the Guru.
3.	<i>Yuvavastha</i>	I. <i>Samaavartanam</i>	Completion of the studies and then Returning to the house
		II. <i>Vivaaham</i>	Marriage ceremony
		III. <i>Vaanaprastha</i>	As old age approaches, the person retires for a life of tapas & studies.
		IV. <i>Sanyaasam</i>	Before leaving the body a Hindu sheds all sense of responsibility & relationships to awake & revel in the timeless truth.
		V. <i>Antyesthi</i>	The last rites done after the death.

Balyavastha samskaras

The *Samskara* according to *Acharaya Kashyapa* in *Balyavastha* may be classified as follows.^[7]

1. *Ksheerap kala*

- a) During neonatal period
 - *Jatakarma samskara*
 - *Namkarana samskara*
- b) During infantile period
 - *Nishkramana samskara*
 - *Annaprashan/Phalaprashana samskara*
 - *Karnavedhan samskara*

2. *Ksheerannad/Annada kala*

- a) During toddler period
 - *Chudkarana samskara*
- b) During Preschool and School age
 - *Upnayana samskara*
 - *Vedarambha samskara*

A. *Jaatakarma samskara* (Birth Ceremony/Immediate care of new born)

➤ According to *acharaya charaka*,^[8]

- ***Praasan***:- The baby is given to ingest a combination of *Madhu* and *Ghrita* processed with *mantras*.
- ***Stanapaanam***:- The right breast should be suckled first.
- ***Udaka kumbha Sthaapanam***:- Water pot pocessed with *Mantras* should be kept along the side of his head.

➤ According to *Acharaya Vagbhata*,^{[11][10]}

- The first feeding with *Madhu* and *Ghrita* should be given to the baby.

➤ According to *Acharaya Shushruta*,^[11]

- On first day after performing *Nalachhedan*, the child should be sprinkled with cold water
- Then *Madhu* and *Ghrita* mixed with *Ananta* powder in small quantity and sanctified with *Mantras* should be given three times to baby.
- On second and third day *Ghrita* medicated with *Lakshmana*,
- Fourth day *Madhu* and *Ghrita* in the amount which fills the palm of neonate (*Savapanitalsamita*) given two times as well as offer *Prang-nevartsatnya* (breast milk) to baby.^[12]

- The first feeding with *Madhu* and *Ghrta* gives stimulation to gastro-intestinal intrinsic nerve plexus, so as to pass meconium at the earliest. This procedure might have assisted the *Acharayas* to assess the patency of gastro-intestinal tract.^[13]

B. *Naamkaranam samskara* (Naming ceremony)

S. no.	Acharayas	Day of performing <i>samskara</i>
1	<i>Acharaya Shushruta</i> ^[14]	10 th day.
2	<i>Acharaya Charaka</i> ^[15]	10 th or 12 th day.
3	<i>Ashtanga Samgraha</i> ^[16]	10 th or 12 th day.
4	<i>Ashtanga Hridayam</i> ^[17]	End of 10 th day.

C. *Nishkraamanam samskara* (Outing ceremony)

S. no.	Acharayas	Time of Performing <i>samskara</i>
1	<i>Acharaya Kashyapa</i> ^[18]	4 th month.
2	<i>Acharaya Vagbhata</i> ^[19]	4 th month.

It is for the first time during *Nishkraamannam Samskara*, that the child is exposed to some sort of external environmental stimuli, mainly visual and auditory. This *karma* helps the physician to confirm the proper functioning of the sense organs especially the eye and ear of the baby.

According to modern view, macular fixation and pupillary adjustment is attained during the same 4th month. During the early weeks eye movement and co-ordination may not be perfect. However, proper co-ordination should be achieved by 3-6 months.^[20]

D. *Annapraasanam and Phalpraasanam samskara* (Feeding ceremony)

➤ According to *acharaya kashyapa*

- Phalapraasanam* - 6th month^[21]
- Annapraasanam* - 10th month^[22]

Acharaya Kashyapa is the only *Acharaya* who has explained *Phalpraasana*. Upto 6 months of age, the child is fed exclusively with breast milk. Thereafter, prior to the introduction of solid food, so as to make GIT accustomed to it, liquid food is given. Among them, fruit juices are considered ideal. Besides, fruits are best sources of vitamin C and fibrous material.

Initially, central incisors erupt during 6-7th month. Eruption of teeth is indicative of GIT maturity to digest, absorb and assimilate nutrients. A proper co-ordination of oral and pharyngeal muscles is inevitable for the proper swallowing mechanism of solid food.^[23]

- According to *Acharaya Shushruta*^[24], *Acharaya Vagbhata*^[25]
- *Annapraasanam* – 6th month

According to *Acharaya Vagbhata*, after the teeth eruption, the child should be given *Ksheera* i.e. goat milk along with *laghu* and *brimhana aahara*.^[26]

E. *Choorakaranam samskara* (Mundan samskara)

Only *Acharaya Kashyapa* has mentioned this *Samskara*. This is performed during the first or third year of age when the child's hair is removed by shaving.^[27]

According to *Acharaya Sushruta*, the cutting of hairs and nail gives lightness, prosperity, courage and happiness. *Acharaya Sushruta* also gives the scientific explanation by telling that this area is the site of *Sira* and *Sandhi* and these top hairs protect this part. The *Samskara* offers a chance for examination of the skull and stimulate the hair growth. Detection of abnormalities like craniocynostosis, wide sutures, microcephaly, macrocephaly, elevated or depressed fontanelle etc.^[28]

Acharaya Charaka has also given the same opinion.^[29]

F. *Karanvedhanam samskara* (Ear piercing)

S. no.	Acharayas	Time of performing samskara
1.	<i>Acharaya Sushruta</i> ^[30]	6 th or 7 th month
2.	<i>Acharaya Vagbhata</i> ^[31]	6 th or 7 th or 8 th month
3.	<i>Grahsutra</i> ^[32]	3 rd or 4 th month
4.	<i>Dharama shastra</i>	6 th or 7 th or 8 th or 12 th month

In case of male child – Right ear should be punctured first.

In case of female child – Left ear should be punctured first.

Puncturing ears may help to activate immune mechanism so as to bring a secondary immunity against several infections. In addition to the cosmetic value (*karnaabhushana*), it was believed that *karnavedhana* protects the baby from untoward health complications like *Grahas*.^[33]

G. Upanayanam (Thread ceremony)

This *Samskara* is the first step on this long journey towards the goal of self-realization. Amongst all the *Samskaras*, the *Upanayana Samskara* is considered to be of foremost value. This is performed between 6-8 years of age.^[34]

A detailed procedure is to be followed by the disciple (*shishya*) on the instructions of his teachers (*guru*) while starting the study of *Ayurveda* as in *Charaka Samhita*,^[35] *Sushruta Samhita*^[36] and *Kashyapa Samhita*^[37] This *Samskara* correlate with pre-school age (3-6 years). Amongst all the *Samskara*, the *Upanayana samaskara* is considered to be of foremost value. The child enters studentship and a life of perfect discipline which involves *Brahmacharya* (celibacy).^[38]

➤ According to *Grahya Sutras*, it is performed at

8 yrs in *Brahmins*

11 yrs in *Kshatriyas*

12 yrs in *Vaishyas*

➤ While according to *Manusmriti*, it is done at

5 yrs in *Brahmins*

6 yrs in *Kshatriyas*

8 yrs in *Vaishyas*

This is done before starting of puberty and not after completion of *Yuva Avastha*.

The brain growth of the child gets completed up to the age of 5 years. So *Manusmriti*'s opinion of starting the education by 5 years looks to be more logical. A thread tied around the waist may serve the purpose of assessment of the physical growth and to rule out the malnutrition.^[39]

H. Vedaarambham (Beginning of study)

As the child acquires capacity, strength to learn and education should be started. Usually performed at 8th year.^[40] This *Samskara* correlates with school age (6-12 years age).^[41]

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.^[42]

The importance of *samskaras* in life

These *Samskaras* bind an individual to the community that nurtures the feeling of brotherhood. A person whose actions are connected to the others around him would definitely think twice before committing a sin. Lack of *Samskaras* gives rise to indulging in individual physical pleasures. The inner demon is aroused that leads to the degeneration of oneself and the society as a whole. When a person is not aware of his moorings in society he runs his own selfish race against the world and the greed to pitch himself over others leads to the destruction of not only his self but the entire human community. So, the *Samskaras* act as a moral code of conduct for the society.

Benefits of hindu *samskaras*^[43]

1. *Samskaras* provide sound mental and physical health and the confidence to face life's challenges.
2. They are believed to purify blood and increase blood circulation, sending more oxygen to every organ.
3. *Samskaras* can energize the body and revitalizes it.
4. They can increase physical strength and stamina to work for longer period of time.
5. They rejuvenate the mind and enhance concentration and intellectual capacity.
6. *Samskaras* give a sense of belonging, culture, and refined sensibilities.
7. They direct energy to humanitarian causes thereby building a strong character.
8. *Samskaras* kill vices, such as pride, ego, selfishness, envy, greed and fear.
9. They bestow moral and physical balance throughout life.
10. *Samskaras* give the confidence to face death bravely owing to a contented and righteous life.

DISCUSSION

Samskaras can be understood as the important cultural events in an individual's life from birth to death possessing socio-cultural as well as medical significance. It signifies Growth and development and the ceremonial announcement of milestones achieved providing with periodical screening. *Samskaras* provide sound mental and physical health and the confidence to face life's challenges. They are believed to purify blood and increase blood circulation, sending more oxygen to every organ. *Samskaras* can energize the body and revitalizes it. They can increase physical strength and stamina to work for longer period of time. They rejuvenate the mind and enhance concentration and intellectual capacity. *Samskaras* give a

sense of belonging, culture, and refined sensibilities. They direct energy to humanitarian causes thereby building a strong character. They bestow moral and physical balance throughout life. They give the confidence to face death bravely owing to a contented and righteous life.

These *Samskaras* bind an individual to the community that nurture the feeling of brotherhood. A person whose actions are connected to the others around him would definitely think twice before committing a sin. Lack of *Samskaras* gives rise to indulging in individual physical pleasures and fanning one's animal instincts. The inner demon is aroused that leads to the degeneration of oneself and the society as a whole. When a person is not aware of his moorings in society he runs his own selfish race against the world and the greed to pitch him over others leads to destruction of not only his self but the entire human community. So, the *Samskaras* act as a moral code of conduct for the society.

In the span of growth and development person 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* 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. *Samskaras* are to bring refinement in the growth activity of the child. Each *Samskara* help the child to acquire a new talent and is called as *Gunantaradhanam*.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the *Samskaras* are solemn ceremonies and are to be performed in accordance with set procedures. 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.

Samskaras described in Ayurvedic texts are based on the various stages of child growth and developments and hence provide rational guidelines toward his care during celebrating different ceremonies from very conception to death.

REFERENCES

1. *Charaka Samhita, Vimansthana* by Dr. Brahmanand Tripathi, Chaukhambha Surbharti Prakashan, Varanasi, 2015; 1, 680: 1-21.
2. Das S. What are Samskaras? Retrieved from: <http://hinduism.about.com/od/basics/a/Hindu-Samskaras.htm>
3. <http://ijam.co.in/index.php/ijam/article/view/142/143>
4. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273120728_THE_CHILDHOOD_SAMSKARA_S_RITES_OF_PASSAGE_AND_ITS_SCIENTIFIC_APPRECIATION
5. Mishra D. *Kaumarabhritya*. 1sted. New Delhi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Prathisthana, 2007; 108.
6. <http://www.vmission.org.in/hinduism/Samskaras.htm>
7. <http://ijam.co.in/index.php/ijam/article/view/142/143>
8. Notes on *Kaumarbhritya* by Dr. Dinesh, Chaukhambha Publications, New Delhi, Chapter, 12: 136.
9. Ashtang Hridyam, Uttarthanam Dr. Brahmanand Tripathi, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Prakashan, Delhi, Reprint, 2015; 877: 1-11.
10. Ashtanga Sangraha, Uttartantra 1/10, Edited by Dr. Shivprashad Sharma, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi, reprint, 2012; 628.
11. *Sushruta Samhita, Sharirsthana* By Dr. Kaviraj Ambikadutt Shastri, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan, Varanasi, Reprint, 2014; 102: 10, 15-17.
12. *Charaka Samhita, Shareerasthana*, by Dr. Brahmanand Tripathi, Chaukhambha Surbharti Prakashan, Varanasi, 2015; II: 503-504.
13. Notes on *Kaumarbhritya* by Dr. Dinesh, Chaukhambha Publications, New Delhi, Chapter, 12; 136.
14. *Shushruta Samhita, Shareerasthana*, By Dr. Kaviraj Ambikadutt Shastri, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan, Varanasi, Reprint, 2014; I: 160.
15. *Charak Samhita, Shareerasthana*, by Dr. Brahmanand Tripathi, Chaukhambha Surbharti Prakashan, Varanasi, 2015; 953: 8-50.
16. *Ashtanga Samgraha, Uttartantra*, Edited by Dr. Shivprashad Sharma, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi, reprint, 2012; 631: 1, 27-30.
17. *Ashtanga Hridaya, Uttartantra, Uttarasthana* Dr. Brahmanand Tripathi, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Prakashan, Delhi, Reprint, 2015; 879: 1, 22-23.
18. *Kashyapa Samhita, Khila Sthana* English translation and commentary edited by P.V.Tiwari, Chaukhamba Vishwabharti, Varanasi, 1996; 12: 4-5.

19. *Ashtanga Sangraha, Uttartantra*, Edited by Dr. Shivprashad Sharma, Chaukhambha Sankrit Series Office, Varanasi, reprint, 2012; 634: 1-40.
20. Notes on *Kaumarbharitya* by Dr. Dinesh, Chaukhambha Publications, New Delhi, Chapter, 12: 137.
21. *Kashayap Samhita Khila Sthanam* English translation and commentary edited by P.V.Tiwari, Chaukhambha Vishwabharti, Varanasi, 1996; 12-15.
22. *Kashyapa Samhita Khila Sthanam* English translation and commentary edited by P. V. Tiwari, Chaukhambha Vishwabharti, Varanasi, 1996; 12-15.
23. Notes on *Kaumarbharitya* by Dr. Dinesh, Chaukhambha Publications, New Delhi, Chapter, 12: 141.
24. *Shushruta Samhita Shareer Sthana* By Dr. Kaviraj Ambikadutt Shastri, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan, Varanasi, Reprint, 2014; 108: 10-50.
25. *Ashtanga Samgraha, Uttartantra* Edited by Dr. Shivprashad Sharma, Chaukhambha Sankrit Series Office, Varanasi, reprint, 2012; 632: 1-37.
26. *Ashtanga Samgraha, Uttartantra* Edited by Dr. Shivprashad Sharma, Chaukhambha Sankrit Series Office, Varanasi, reprint, 2012; 634: 1-40.
27. *Kashyapa Samhita, Sutrasthana* English translation and commentary edited by P.V.Tiwari, Chaukhambha Vishwabharti, Varanasi, 1996; 2: 14-16.
28. *Shushruta Samhita, Sutrasthana* By Dr. Kaviraj Ambikadutt Shastri, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan, Varanasi, Reprint, 2014; 16(3): 64-65 (3).
29. *Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana* by Dr. Brahmanand Tripathi, Chaukhambha Surbharti Prakashan, Varanasi, 2015; 127: 5-100.
30. *Sushruta Samhita, Sutrasthana* By Dr. Kaviraj Ambikadutt Shastri, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan, Varanasi, Reprint, 2014; 84: 16-3.
31. *Astanga Hyridya, Uttarsthanam* Dr. Brahmanand Tripathi, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Prakashan, Delhi, Reprint, 2015; 1; 28-32, 882-883:
32. *Shushruta Samhita, Sutraasthana*, By Dr. Kaviraj Ambikadutt Shastri, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan, Varanasi, Reprint, 2014; I: 111.
33. *Karnavedha*. Retrieved from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karnavedha>
34. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273120728_THE_CHILDHOOD_SAMSKARA_S_RITES_OF_PASSAGE_AND_ITS_SCIENTIFIC_APPRECIATION
35. *Charaka Samhita Vimanasthana* by Dr. Brahmanand Tripathi, Chaukhambha Surbharti Prakashan, Varanasi, 2015; 8: 7-13, 737-42.

36. *Sushruta Samhita, Sutrasthana* By Dr. Kaviraj Ambikadutt Shastri, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan, Varanasi, Reprint, 2014; I: 8-10.
37. *Kashyapa Samhita, Vimanasthana, Shishoopkramniya* chapter, English translation and commentary edited by P.V.Tiwari, Chaukhamba Vishwabharti, Varanasi, 1996: 12: 56-65.
38. <http://ijam.co.in/index.php/ijam/article/view/142/143>
39. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273120728_THE_CHILDHOOD_SAMSKARAS_RITES_OF_PASSAGE_AND_ITS_SCIENTIFIC_APPRECIATION
40. *Shushruta Samhita, Chikitsasthana.*, By Dr. Kaviraj Ambikadutt Shastri, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan, Varanasi, Reprint, 2014: I: 167-68.
41. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273120728_THE_CHILDHOOD_SAMSKARAS_RITES_OF_PASSAGE_AND_ITS_SCIENTIFIC_APPRECIATION
42. *Samskaras*, Hindu Organization of Long Island. Retrieved from: <http://www.holinyork.org/Hinduism/Hinduism/Samskaras.html>
43. <http://pradeepamohan.net/blog/2012/12/31/16-Samskaras-16-rites/>