

A REVIEW ON BAL SAMSKAR AND ITS SCIENTIFIC SIGNIFICANCE

Dr. Jyoti Kaushik¹, Prof. Rakesh Sharma²

¹Assistant Professor Department of Kaumarbhritya, Dayanada Ayurvedic Medical College and Hospital, Siwan, Bihar - 841226

²Professor and Head, PG Department of Kaumarbhritya, Rajiv Gandhi Government P. G. Ayurvedic Medical College and Hospital, Paprola, Himachal Pradesh- 176115

ABSTRACT

The important cultural events in an individual's life from birth to death are grouped under the term "*Samskar*". Commonly used meaning of the word "*Samskar*" is "*Samskarohi gunantaradhanam*", means it is a process or procedure by which change and improvement in the qualities of a substance is brought about. In this context of the article, *Samskar* means the procedure which brings definitive positive changes in life for optimal survival of an individual. *Samskaras* introduce some essential qualities by means of qualitative improvement and some ritual conducts. In contemporary pediatrics the term growth and development are used to denote the maturation of body. While growth denotes quantitative change, the term development refers to qualitative change in body. Optimal growth and development during childhood is necessary for a healthy adult life. In ancient times on the occasion of performing various *Samskaras* at different ages the physician can assess the various aspects of growth and development of an individual. The number of *Samskaras* varies amongst Hindu *Dharma Granthas* (text books) and also in different communities as well. However sixteen in number which were put forward by Maharshi Dayanand. Among these eight *Samskaras* are performed during *Balyavastha*. The main aim of performing *Samskaras* are to provide the baby an optimal intrauterine and extra uterine life, to develop proper feeding habits and to ensure adequate nutrition. In the practice of *Bala-Samskaras* religious rituals holds great importance in the mental, physical, social, and spiritual development of a child. This article explores the concept of *Bal-Samskaras* in Ayurveda and emphasizing the significance of these rituals in shaping a person's life.

Key words: *Samskar*, growth, development, *Bal-Samskar*

INTRODUCTION

In view of Indian philosophy every stage of life is marked with different and distinguished rituals which bring about physical, social, and religious development of an individual. These rituals are known as *Samskaras*. *Samskaras* have been explained elaborately and given increased importance in *Kaymarbhritya* (Ayurvedic pediatrics) which indicates their clinical importance as well. Numerous *Samskaras* have a profound impact on Indian culture as well. Ancient Indian literatures such as Ayurveda and others introduced children to the idea of *Samskaras*, which strives to promote the overall development of the child in a holistic way. Context wise different meanings and interpretations are given for the word "*Samskar*", in Indian literature. The commonly used meaning is – "*Samskarohi Gunaantradhaanam*" - the process which brings the changes in *Dravya* is called '*Samskar*'. In this particular context of "*Bal-Samskara*" it could be understood as the procedures which brings definite positive

changes in life of a child which is important for optimal survival in adulthood. In contemporary pediatrics there are two terms i.e. growth and development are used to denote the overall maturation of body during childhood. While growth denotes the increase in the size of the body due to cell multiplication and increase in cell size, on the other hand development denotes maturation of function due to maturation and myelination of nervous system. In general, growth is the quantitative change of body which can be measured by different parameters like height, weight etc. and development refers to the qualitative changes in body reflected by attainment of various developmental milestones at different ages. These changes were assessed, in ancient times, by physicians during performing the rituals of different *Samskar*. So, in short, the term *Samskar* means those religious rites and ceremonies which sanctify the body, mind and intellect, so the person may become fit and ideal in the community. The number of *Samskaras* varies amongst Hindu *Dharma Granthas* (text books) and also in different communities as well. However the customary *Samskaras* are sixteen in number which were put forward by Maharshi Dayanand. Among these sixteen *Samskaras*, eight are performed during childhood period which can be denoted as “*Bala-Samskar*”. *Bala Samskars* act as rites of passage, guiding a person's progress from one psychological state to another. The term *Samskar* itself denotes the idea of cultivation, education, training, and the intrinsic worth of qualities

NEED OF BALA SAMSKAR

- *Samskar* brings positive and better qualities in life.
- It produces good health, intellect and social happiness
- Provide means for physical and psychological development to the children.
- *Samskar* helps to analyze and assess the different stages of growth and development..
- It introduce religious knowledge and cultural belief in society.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVE

1. To evaluate the scientific understanding of childhood *Samskars* and applicability of *Ayurvedic* childhood *Samskars* in growth and development of children.
2. To Discuss the scientific importance of childhood *Samskars* in children's growth and development
3. To review *Samskara* and its method of implementation.
4. To review various types of *Samskara* and its benefits

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To investigate the scientific understanding of *Bala-Samskaras*, a variety of sources including classical *Ayurvedic* literature, modern literature, current research updates, and scientific material on the internet were searched and reviewed

BALA SAMSAKAR

NUMBER OF SAMSAKAR

According to various religious texts, there are descriptions of 40 *Samskaras*, of which 16 are of utmost importance. There are 18-21 *Samskars* mentioned in the *Grihya Sutra*. While 13 of them are explained in *Manusmriti*, 40 of them are explained in the *Gautama Grihya Sutra*.

While Maharshi Dayananda's 16 *Samskars* are universally accepted and taken into account by Ayurveda *Acharyas*. These 16 *Samskars* are commonly known as the *Shodasha Samskar*.

SODHASHA SAMSKAR

These are 16 (*Shodasha*) in number:

1. *Garbhadhan* (sacrament of impregnation or conception)
2. *Pumsavana* (engendering a male fetus)
3. *Simantonyayana* (hair-parting)
4. *Jatakarma* (birth rituals e.g. At the time when the child is being born)
5. *Namakarana* (naming ceremony)
6. *Nishkramana* (first visit or outing ceremony)
7. *Annaprashana* (feeding ceremony)
8. *Chudakarma* or *mundan* (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. *Vivaha* (marriage ceremony)
14. *Vanaprastha* (renouncing the householder's life)
15. *Sanyas* (leading the life of a monk)
16. *Antyeshti* (death/cremation)

CLASSIFICATION OF SAMSKAR

- **Samskaras during Garbhavastha (Pre-natal period):** *Garbhadan, Pumsavana, Simantonyayana*
- **Samskaras during Balyavastha (Bala-Samskar):** *Jatakarma, Namakarana, Nishkramana, Annaprashana, Chudakarma, Karnavedhan, Upanayana, Vedarambha*
- **Samskaras during Yuvavastha:** *Samavartan, Vivaha, Garbhadhan*
- **Samskaras during Vriddhavastha:** *Vanaprastha, Sanyas, Antyeshti*

BALA-SAMSKARA (Samskaras performed during Balyavastha)

1. JATAKARMA SAMSKAR

It is the ceremony which is performed just after the birth. It should be done when the baby is stable and devoid of any birth complications. According to *Acharya Charaka*, immediately after the birth, baby should be given *Madhu* (honey) and *Ghrita* (ghee) mixed together and the dose of both being not mentioned hence taken in equal quantity. Mantras are recited before the procedure, and mantras are chosen from several Vedas based on *Jati, Kula*, and *Varna*. After this procedure breast feeding should be initiated starting with right breast. To maintain proper humidity in *Kumaragara*, a pot filled with hot or cold water (depending on the season) chanted with mantras should be placed near the baby's head. According to *Acharya Sushruta* after receiving the baby, it should be stabilized first and cold water should be sprinkled to prevent apneic attacks and to get rid of stress. After that, *Madhu, Ghrit* and *Ananta* (gold powder) taken in one fistful quantity of the baby is given for licking by *Anamika* finger

of physician sanctified with mantras. This should be repeated for total three times on first day. *Lakshmana* treated ghee and honey are given three times on the second and third days. On the fourth day, after giving *Madhu* and *Ghrita* in fistful quantity of the baby twice, breast feeding is initiated. According to *Acharya Vagbhata*, *Jatakarma Samskar* is performed as per *Prajapatya Vidhi*.

Jatakarma Samskar provides an opportunity to examine the baby immediately after birth. Use of *Anamika* finger during this procedure help the physician to assess the sucking, rooting, swallowing reflex of the baby as well as to assess any abnormality of palate. A normal palate and good sucking-rooting-swallowing reflex are important for optimal breast feeding. *Ananta* or gold powder possesses immunomodulatory properties. The term *Ananta* can also be taken for *Durva*, which has haemostatic properties. *Ghrita* has high calorific value, hence provide energy to the newborn. *Madhu*, rich in fructose (carbohydrate), also provides energy and being *Kashaya Rasa* clears the *Srotas*. Placing pot of water is a cost effective method of maintaining temperature and humidity. Explanation of *Sushruta* to start breast feeding after third day may be for sick neonates or preterm babies.

2. NAMAKARAN SAMSKAR

Name of baby has a significant role in his/her identity. Timing of naming ceremony varies a lot as per different authors from 10th days onwards upto 1 year of life. It can be performed on 10th day according to *Acharya Charak* and *Acharya Sushruta*. According to *Ashtanga Samghraha* *Namakaran* can be postponed upto one year and *Ashtanga Hridaya* mentioned it to be done after 10th day. On the day of naming ceremony *Sutika* i.e mother should take bath with medicated water, wear clean cloths and ornaments, perform *Pooja*. Baby should be wrapped with clean white clothes and positioned to direction in which head faces the North or East. By worshipping the *Kula Devata*, the father should preserve two names for the baby: *Nakshatrika Nama* and *Abhiprayika Nama*. The *Nakshatrika Nama* is based on the constellation present at the time of birth. The *Abhiprayik Nama* (name for social purpose) should have a *Ghosh Varna* for its first letter and for its last a *Antastha* or *Ushma Varna*, should be free of *Vridhdha Akshara*, should be indicative of one of the three ancestors (father, grand father, great grand father) and should not be newly established.

Name gives identity to a child. First week of life or early neonatal period is considered as high risk period in a newborn's life (due to risk of hyperbilirubinemia, septicemia, hypothermia, initial weight loss of 10%). Hence after completion of high risk period naming ceremony should be done after 10 days, which also provides an opportunity for examination of the baby. As well as, the mother also needs time to recover from the process of birth.

3. NISHKRAMAN SAMSKAR

In this ceremony for the first time baby is taken out of *Kumaragara* or home. 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, for the first time child is 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 *Ghrita* or *Gorochana*, along with *Dhatri* (wet nurse) should be taken out of the house.

Thereafter worshipping the *Agni* (burning fire) with *Ghrta* 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 chant the mantras for the welfare of the baby.

The baby starts thriving well by this time. Its immune system matures well enough by this time, as well as steady growth rate is attained. The physician also can assess various developmental milestones like head control, social smile, recognition of mother, bidextrous reach which are well established by this time. The infant can turn head towards the source of sound and can fixate eyes intently to an object shown to him (grasping with the eyes) during this period which gives a clear indication of normal hearing and vision of the baby.

4. ANNAPRASHANA SAMSKAR

Annaprashan Samskara explains the concept of weaning in Ayurveda. According to *Acharya Sushruta*, the child at the age of six months, should be given food light and *Hitkar* (appropriate wholesome food). According to *Vagbhata* on the sixth month, solid food should be given to the child gradually as much as he requires and breast feeding should be gradually discontinued. On the other hand, *Acharya Kashyapa* has mentioned *Phalaprashana* (feeding with fruit juice) at the age of six months while in tenth month or after eruption of teeth *Annaprashan* (feeding with cereals) is advised.

In contemporary medical science exclusive breast feeding upto six months is recommended. it is recommended. And only after six months complementary feed should be started, as after six months of age only breast feeding cannot fulfill the nutritional and caloric requirement of the baby. Teeth eruption in children also begins around this age. So, it clearly indicates the superior knowledge of our *Acharyas* thousands of years ago. 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. Similarly, *Annaprashan* at tenth month offers assessment of bi-syllable speech, telling a word like bye-bye, immature pincer grasp and standing with support

5. KARNAVEDHAN SAMSKAR

There are different views about performing this ceremony in *Ayurvedic* texts. According to *Sushruta* this should be done in 6th or 7th month and according to *Vagbhata* in 6th, 7th or 8th month. According to *Sushruta*, in an auspicious *Tithi* (date), *Muhurta* and *Naksatra*, after reciting auspicious hymns, the child should be placed in the lap of wetnurse 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 (*Daivakrita Chidra*) 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. According to *Vagbhata* this *Samskar* is usually performed on an auspicious day in winter season. According to *Sushruta* the child's ears are pierced for the purpose of *Raksha-nimitta* (protection from various diseases) and *Abhushan-nimitta* (ornamentation).

Inflicting local wound stimulates the body's immune system (Raksha-nimitta), providing active immunity to the child.

6. CHUDAKARMA SAMSKAR

This *Samskar* involves shaving of the head, preferably if child is son and performed when sun is in *Uttarayana*. According to *Grihya Sutra* and *Manusmriti* this ceremony is done at the end of first year or can be done till child attains three years of age. This *Samskar* is performed in order to attain longevity, strength and radiance. This *Samskar* 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. There is a chapter named "*Chudakarmeeya*" in *Kashyapa Samhita*, but as the chapter is incomplete from beginning no reference is available about this *Samskar*.

This *Samskar* offers a chance for examination of the skull and stimulate the hair growth. Detection of abnormalities like wide sutures, microcephaly, macrocephaly, elevated or depressed fontanelle etc. Palpation of scalp carefully may also reveal cranial defects or craniotabes. 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.

7. VEDARAMBHA SAMSKAR

The *Samskar* is variously named; it is called *Vidyarambha*, *Akshararambha*, and *Akshara Lekhana* by different writers. As the child acquires capacity and strength to learn, education should be started. Usually performed at 5th year according to some religious texts.

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 up and down 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.

8. UPANAYANA SAMSKAR

This *Samskar* signifies spiritual rebirth. That's why after the *Upanayana Samskar* is performed, the young become a *Dvija* i.e. twice born. A sacred thread made of appropriate materials as per the caste and religion is tied around the waist of the child by the *Guru* (teacher). After this the child starts studying under the guidance of the teacher. *Ayurvedic* classics did not explain the procedure in detail, but they have mentioned the word *Upanayan* before initiation of education.

Before this *Samskar*, the child was dependent completely on parents, had no responsibilities and was enjoying readymade facilities and luxurious life with parents. It is done to initiate the sense of responsibility towards the society as well as spiritual well-being of the child.

DISCUSSION

The various *Samskars* mentioned in different philosophical, *Ayurvedic* classics have multiple cultural significant as well as they possess various scientific background. *Bal-Samskar* 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 during childhood. *Samskar* revitalize the mind, improving concentration and intellectual capacity. During the course of a person's growth and development, he or she goes through many stages of motor, sensory, neuromuscular, social, and adaptive development, which are referred to as developmental milestones. They must occur within the time frame specified, or they are referred to as delayed developmental milestones are considered abnormal. All these growth and developmental milestone can be assessed and determined by these *Samskars*.

CONCLUSION

Samskars are a series of rituals and processes which are mentioned in Ayurveda and other Indian philosophical texts. These make improvement in various stages of human life. In case of *Balyavastha* these *Samskar* helps to promote and monitor overall improvement in growth and development of the child. Through this review article we come to conclude that all the *Samskars* mentioned above have various scientific background and importance which can contribute in assessment and promotion of health in children.

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