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Sacrament of Medical Importance: A Detailed Review

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Abstract:

Early age of a human being especially infancy and childhood are the periods when there occurs the rapid physical growth, cognitive and emotional development. Therefore, this period is a very crucial period of a human life. There are some ways by using which all these developments can be enhanced up to certain levels. *Samskars* are thought to improve the healthy progeny's intellect, to achieve optimum mental, physical, social and spiritual growth and development, minimize the *Garbhopghatakar bhav* (teratological disorders) etc. Therefore, it is very important to study the *Samskars* in detail. For this study, all the available information regarding *Shodash Samskars* has been searched from classical texts, syllabus books, online journals, authorized websites etc. The information collected was thoroughly reviewed, discussed and conclusions were drawn. This study was conducted to revalidate the importance of *Samskars* in human life especially the infancy. In all the classical texts the no. of *Samskars* found were almost same i.e. 16, though name of some *Samskars* were found different. Out of 16, sacraments of medical importance were mainly found to be 7. Their names and medical importance are discussed in the above study in details.

Keywords: *Samskar*, Sacrament, *Jatkarma*, *Nishkraman Samskar*, *Namkaran Samskar*, *Shodash Samskar*.

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INTRODUCTION:

Early age of a human being especially infancy and childhood are the periods when there occurs the rapid physical growth, cognitive and emotional development. Therefore, this period is a very crucial period of a human life. There are some ways by using which all these developments can be enhanced up to certain levels. The *Samskars* (sacraments) are one of them. In infants, development depends on the dynamic relationship between endowment and environment. Therefore, practically also it has been seen that the newborn expresses the impact of their birth experience and initial encounter with their extra-uterine environment through disharmony in their circadian rhythms.

In ancient and present period also, various *Samskars* are inducted at a particular time which starts far before the conception till death through the intrauterine as well as extra-uterine *Samskars* to improve the healthy progeny's intellect, to achieve optimum mental, physical, social and spiritual growth and development, minimize the *Garbhoghatakar bhav* (teratological disorders) etc.

In *Hindu Dharmagranthas*, these are the special ceremonies to remove sins, bestow good qualities and to increase intellect which are performed for the conception, during in-utero life and after the birth to death. Thus, *Samskar* is a celebration of each milestone of a human life. The nearest English word for *Samskar* is sacrament.

Enculturation is a process of adoption of the behaviour patterns of the surrounding

culture; "the socialization of children to the norms of their culture" [1].

The word *Samskar* is mainly used in two aspects

1. Psycho-social emotional aspect- to develop or incorporate the psycho-social emotional and physical qualities in children.
2. Medicinal aspect-for preparation of good quality medicines such as herbal, Herbo mineral or biochemical drugs.

MATERIALS & METHODS:

All the available information regarding *Shodash Samskaras* has been searched from classical texts, syllabus books, online journals, authorized websites etc. The information collected was thoroughly reviewed, discussed and conclusions were drawn. This study was conducted to revalidate the importance of *Samskaras* in human life especially the infancy.

Literature Review:

Acharya Charaka has described the term *Samskar* in reference to '*Karma*' under the *Ashta Aaharvidhi-Visheshayatana* (Rules for meals). According to him, the qualities are incorporated in addition to or changing the natural properties of a substance by means of water, fire, combinations, cleaning etc. [2]

Types of Samskar:

The sixteen important *Samskaras*, initiated from conception to funeral ceremonies are as follows [3]

1. *Garbhadhan* (Sacrament of Impregnation)
2. *Pumsavan* (*Samskar* of prenatal period)

3. *Seemantonnayan* (*Samskar* of prenatal period- Hair parting ceremony)
4. *Jatakarm* (Birth ritual done after child birth)
5. *Naamkaran* (Naming ceremony)
6. *Nishkraman* (First outing of a baby)
7. *Annaprashan* (First feeding of food)
8. *Choodakaran* (First time hair cutting of a baby)
9. *Karnavedhan* (Ear piercing)
10. *Upanayan* (Sacred thread ceremony)
11. *Samaavartan* (to be done on completion of education)
12. *Vivah* (Marriage ceremony)
13. *Grihashthram* (Sacraments relating to house - holders)
14. *Vanaprasth* (Renouncing the house holder's life)
15. *Sanyas* (Leading the life of a monk)
16. *Swargaroham* (Last rights after death)

All the *Samskaras* are not medically important; rather they possess much of a socio-cultural dimension. Medically important *Samskaras* are *Garbhadhan*, *Pumsavan*, *Jatakarm*, *Naamkaran*, *Nishkraman*, *Annaprashan* & *Karnavedhan* also there is one *Samsakar* mentioned by *Acharyas* which is not mentioned in these *Shodash Samskar* but is of medical importance is *Upaveshan Samskar*.

Garbhadhan (Sacrament of Impregnation):

This is a prenatal *Samsakar* and is performed in order to get Healthy and intelligent child^[4]. Prerequisite of *Garbhadhan* is *Sharirshuddhi* through *Vamanadi Panchakarma*. Eating food containing Milk & Ghee for male & Urad & oil to

female is advisable^[5]. In *Garbhadhan Samskar* detailed advice regarding the food, rules for stepping up the bed, the Mantra to be enchanted is given.

Pumsavan (Samskar of prenatal period):

This *Samskar* is performed during the early conception period before the symptoms of pregnancy are expressed^[6]. Time for this *Samskar* is given as 2nd to 3rd month. Milk drops triturated with medicinal drugs are advised to pour in the nostrils of the pregnant lady in order to decide the gender of the foetus^[7].

Jaatkarm (Birth Ceremony/ Immediate care of New born)

Retaining the socio-cultural aspects and adding on matters of medical importance, *Acharya Charaka* has explained *Jaatkarm* as below^[8].

1 *Prashan*: The baby is given to ingest a combination of honey and ghee processed with mantras.

2 *Stanapan*: The right breast should be advanced^[7] to be suckled.

3 *Udaka kumbha sthanapan*: Water pot processed mantras should be kept along the side of his head.

According to *Acharya Vagbhata* this ceremony should be followed by *Prajapatya vidhi*^[9] *Acharya Sushrut* has given somewhat similar guidelines for the breast feeding except the period of *Jatkarma*. According to *Acharya Sushrut*, after *Nalachedan* (umbilical cord cutting), the child should be sprinkled with cold water, comforted well and made to lick honey, *Ghee (Sarpi)* and powder of *Ananta (Swarna)*, using the ring finger; the child should be anointed with *Bala Taila* and give

bath either with Luke warm decoction of bark of *Ksheerivriksha* or boiled- Luke warm water with *Sarvagandha* (fragrant drugs) in accordance to the *Kala* (time), the *Dosha* and the *Vaibhava* (prosperity). *Ksheerivriksha-Kashaya* water has *Pittaghna* effect, *Sarvagandha* water has *Vataghna* effect while *Kapittha-patra* water has *Pitta-Kaphaghna* effects [10].

Naamkaran Samskar (Naming Ceremony):

It is the sociocultural programme of 'Naming the baby'. According to *Ashtanga Samgraha Naamkaran* can be done either on the 10th or 12th day. *Kashyap Samhita* [11] and *Ashtanga Hridayam* [12] mentions 10th day as appropriate for *Naamkaran*. Detailed description of preparation of the baby is described by the *Acharyas*. Also, different rules for choosing the names for male & female child are also given.

Nishkraman (Outing Ceremony):

It is the ceremony of taking the baby out of the *Kumaragar*. This *Samskar* enables the baby to acclimatize with the external environment. *Acharya Kashyap* and *Acharya Vagbhata* consider 4th month as the appropriate time for *Niskraman karma* [13].

Upaveshan (Sitting Ceremony):

Upaveshan is a ceremony of making the baby sit without support in a proposed manner to ensure the activity, growth and development of the baby. *Acharya Kashyap* suggests *Upaveshan* at the age of 6th month [14]. *Ashtangahridayakar* mentions the same at 5th month [15]. The site where the baby is to be seated has to be smeared with cow dung. Toys used by the baby are to be placed nearby. The baby should be made to sit for a

muhurta (48min.) at a time facing eastwards in the middle of the site. After completion of a *muhurta*, the child should be carefully lifted up. The whole procedure has to be repeated every day.

Karnavedhan (Ear piercing):

Karnavedhan is one of the important *Samskar* with medical and socio-cultural relevance. In addition to the cosmetic value (*karnaabhusan*), it was believed that the *Karnavedhan* protects the baby from untoward health complications like *Grahas*. During 6th, 7th or 8th month of age, in the *Shishir Ritu* on an auspicious day, in the morning, *karnavedhan* has to be done [16]. The right ear should be punctured first in case of a male child and left ear in a female child [17]. The site of the puncture should be in the middle of the ear lobe, slightly towards the cheek, where there is maximum translucency from the light source. The puncturing should be done with a single and straight stroke; it should be neither high up, sideward nor downward. Precautions to be followed are also given by the *Acharyas* [18]. Also, the complications due to wrong puncturing are mentioned [19].

Prashan Samskar (First meal feeding Ceremony):

Acharya Kashyap has mentioned *Phala Prashan* & *Annaprashan*.

Phala Prashan

Acharya Kashyap is the only *Acharya* who has explained *Phala Prashan* (feeding fruits/ fruit juices to baby). Up to 6 months of age, the child is fed exclusively with breast milk. Thereafter, fruits and fruit juices are given to the baby, prior to the introduction of solid food, so as to make the gastro intestinal tract

accustomed to it ^[20]. *Acharya Kasyapa* considers dental eruption as the endpoint of *Phala Prashan*.

Annaprashan (Feeding Ceremony)

It is the *Samskar* related to feeding of solid food for the first time to the baby. After teeth eruption, the child should be gradually taken away from the breastfeed ^[21]. According to *Acharya Kashyap*, 10th month is the appropriate time for *Annaprashan* ^[22]. In *Ashtanga Samgraha*, *Acharya Vagbhata* suggests 6th month to be the time for *Annaprashan* ^[23]. *Acharya Sushrut* also comments that sixth month is good for *Annaprashan* ^[24].

RESULTS:

- 1] In all the classical texts the no. of *Samskars* found were almost same i.e. 16, though name of some *Samskars* were found different.
- 2] Sacraments of Medical importance were mainly found to be 7 out of 16.

DISCUSSION:

By observing the pattern of growth and influence of environmental factors, probably Ayurveda has accepted these *Samskar* to assess the growth and development of the infant, inoculation of good qualities by giving the exposure to different types of qualitative and quantitative stimuli for achieving social, psychological, physical, intellectual effects. *Garbhadhan* is a very important *Sanskar* where the body cleansing and diet advice will make the body favourable for the upcoming pregnancy. The position and days mentioned for intercourse help in conception. *Pumsavan Samskar* is now a days used for *Suprajajanan*. The objective of this *Jatkarma* is to produce

intelligence or *Medha* and longevity. At birth, the child requires specific precautions, attention and specific procedure. To fulfil these purposes, the *Jatkarma* ceremony is developed. The first feeding with *Madhu* (honey) and *Ghrita* (Clarified butter) gives sufficient stimulation to gastro-intestinal intrinsic nerve plexus, so as to pass meconium at the earliest. This procedure might also have assisted the Acharyas to assess the patency of gastro intestinal tract. Naming ceremony provides the opportunity to *Kaumarabhritya* specialists (paediatrician) for re-examining the neonates on 12th day of birth. *Acharya Charak* has described *Ayu-pariksha* (Assessment for longevity) naming, which is helpful in deciding healthy or diseased condition of a baby. In full term by, physiological jaundice disappears by this time, if persists may suggest pathological in are (Full term Baby). It is for the first time during *Nishkraman karma* 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 the ear. In this process, child learns to react to a social contact by a smile or laugh and produces sounds with pleasure. Before this *Samskar*, baby lives with mother in a small room/*Kumargar*, but within one month this area is found to small in reference to his curiosities, movements of limbs etc. to satisfy himself. So, by this ceremony, the baby is introduced to the outer wide world having different new types of stimuli which are essential for their personality development

and growth. According to modern view, macular fixation and pupillary adjustment is attained during the same 4th month. Puncturing ear in *Karnavedhan Samskar* may help to activate immune mechanism so as to bring a secondary immunity against several infections. Unfortunately, this practice has lost its medical relevance after the establishment of sophisticated vaccination technology. The baby who is accustomed with *Madhura rasa* of milk alone will experience difficulty to directly adjust with *rasas* like *Katu*, *Tikta*, etc. At this stage, *Phala prashan* helps the baby to adapt with other *rasas* through *Madhura*, *Amla rasas* of fruits. Also, this is the time when mother is given training regarding weaning and food requirements of the baby. Initially, central incisors erupt during 6-7th month. Eruption of teeth is indicative of GIT maturity to digest, absorb and assimilate nutrients. The gastrointestinal functions vary markedly with the maturity of the infant. A proper coordination of oral and pharyngeal muscles is inevitable for the proper swallowing mechanism of solid food. Otherwise, chances of aspiration are high. The current concept of introduction of solid food at 6th months of age is strictly on the basis of nutritional requirement of the baby.

CONCLUSION:

The *Samskaras* discussed above have scientific base and are of medical importance. Some of these *Samskaras* are to be performed only once while some have to be performed up to certain period of time in order to get the benefits.

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