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Dr. Kinjal B Panchal
H.O.D. & Associate Professor
Kaumarbhritya Department
Akhandanand Ayurved College
& Hospital, Ahmedabad,
Gujarat, India

Dr. Himangi Baldaniya
H.O.D. & Associate Professor
Stiroga and Prasuti Tantra
Department, Akhandanand
Ayurved College & Hospital,
Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India

Concept of Sanskara and its relation to developmental milestone

Dr. Kinjal B Panchal and Dr. Himangi Baldaniya

Abstract

The Samskara are a series of sacraments, sacrifices and rituals that serve as rites of passage and mark the various stages of the human life and to signify entry to a particular Ashrama (i.e. stage of life). Basically all these rituals are of the nature of purification and give good qualities. In other word, Sanskara means “Gunantaradhanam” which is used for transform the qualities. The number of Sanskara varies in different Hindu religious texts; it is about 16-40. But at present 16 Sanskara are as in practice which should be performed from conception to after death. These Sanskara are related to proper growth and development of fetus and child.

Keywords: Sanskara, Sacrament, Growth and Development

1. Introduction

The word Sanskara is derived from root word ‘Kri’ with ‘Sam’ upsarga, which is being used for several meanings according to reference to context. The Sanskrit term “Sanskara” means religious customs. Sanskara are mentioned in various Pauranic treatises. Actually Sanskaras are long established practices, started in the ancient period and till now some of these are continuing.

The “Sanskara” is used in a very wide senses viz. in the sense of education, cultivation and ornament, a purificatory rite or ceremony to change the qualities. In short, the Sanskara means those religious rites and ceremonies which sanctify the body mind and intellect, so the person may become fit for the society. In other word, Sanskara means “Gunantaradhanam” which is used for transform the qualities. These sanskara are related to proper growth and development of fetus and child.

Materials & Methods

The literary material is collected from the various classical *Ayurvedic* text and Pediatrics texts, magazines and research journals. After which classical description is correlated with changes in developmental milestone as per contemporary texts.

Numbers of Sanskara

The number of Sanskara varies in different Hindu religious texts; it is about 16-40.

- In Grihya Sutra there is mentioning of 18-21 Sanskara.
- In Manusmriti, 13
- In Gautama Grihya Sutra, 40

At present the applicable Samskara are 16 (Shodash) in number
Sanskara performed during prenatal period are

- Garbhadan (Conception)
- Pumsavana (Engendering a male issue)
- Simantonayana (Hair-parting)

Sanskara performed during postnatal period are

- During neonatal period
- Jatakarma (Birth rituals e.g. at the time when the child is being born)
- Namakarana (Naming ceremony)

Correspondence

Dr. Kinjal B Panchal
H.O.D. & Associate Professor
Kaumarbhritya Department
Akhandanand Ayurved College
& Hospital, Ahmedabad,
Gujarat, India

- During Infantile period:
 - Nishkrama (Outing ceremony)
 - Upaveshan (sitting ceremony)
 - Karnavedhan (Piercing the earlobes)
 - Phalaprashana/Annaprashana (feeding ceremony)
- During Preschool period:
 - Chudakarma or Mundan (Shaving of head)
- During school age period:
 - Upanayana (Sacred thread ceremony)
 - Vedarambha (Beginning of Vedic study)
- Sanskara performed during youth and later lives are:
 - Samavartan (End of studentship)
 - Vivaha (Marriage Ceremony)
 - Vanprastha (Renouncing the householder's life)
 - Sanyyas (Leading the life of a monk)

Sanskara performed after death

- Anteyeshti (Death ceremony)

Here in this article we are concerned with Garbha sanskara which are - Garbhadhan, Pumsavana, and Simantonayana & Bal Sanskaras which are - Jata Karma (birth rites), Namakaran (naming), Nishkraman (taking baby out of home), Annaprashan (starting solid feeding), Chudakarma (head shaving), Karnavedhana (piercing of the ear), Upanayan (thread ceremony) and Vedarambha (start of formal education)

Sanskara During Intra- Uterine Period

The three Samskara's are done before Birth of child and performed in 'mother'

Garbhadhana Sanskara

This Samskara relates to conception. The aim of this Samskara is to get high quality progeny. It should be performed only after marriage. Both partners should be complete viryavan and should purify their body first by undergoing shodhana procedures. The significance of Shodhan is highly important as this purify the seeds of both partners i.e. ovum and sperm, thus the born child will possess high qualities. Married, 16 yrs female and 25 yrs. male having good health and complete viryatva in their body should undergo this Samskar ^[1] Charak and Kashyapa have described the detail method of "Putresti yagna" ^[2]

Significance of Garbhadhan Sanskara

These ceremony purify and refine field (woman's reproductive system) and seed (sperms), thus the born child will possess high qualities

Punsavana Sanskara

The meaning of Punsavana is male procreation so the process which is adopted for achieving progeny of desired sex is known as Punsavana Karma. This is performed in second month or before Vyaktibhava ^[3]. Different Acharyas prescribe various formulations for use to pregnant woman which may result to male procreation only, as their belief. According to Charaka healthy Sunga (leaf buds) of banyan tree, Dhanyamasha and Gaurasarsapa should be taken with curd during Pusyanakshatra ^[4]. Similarly According to Sushruta, paste of Jivaka, Rishbhaka, Apamarga and Sahachara taken with milk ^[5].

Significance of Punsavana Sanskara

The significance of this Samskara is to invoke celestial and excellent qualities in the child. This will strengthen the relation of husband and wife, and bound them together by a common desire for male offspring

Simantonayan Sanskara

Seemantonayana is derived from 'Seemant' – this vernacular word literally means brain, while 'Utnayan' literally means development (The ritual for the mental development of foetus). It is usually performed in 4th or 5th or 6th or 7th or 8th month. In Ayurvedic texts during period of pregnancy, Acharyas advised month wise various dietetic regimen and mode of conducts for pregnant woman which results in normal development of foetus who has good health, strength, voice, compactness etc ^[6]. Acharya also advised that if mother not follow proper advised lifestyle then it may result in Doshas vitiation which produce abnormalities of fetus (Garbhang-Vikriti).

Significance of Simantonayan sanskara

The religious significance of this Samskara is to bring prosperity to the mother and long life to the unborn child

Sanskara During Neonatal Period

Jatkarma Sanskara

According to Ghrihyasutra it is to be performed before the cutting of umbilical cord while Charaka has stated that after the cutting of umbilical cord, Jatkarma Sanskara should be performed. On first day of birth, the child should be given first feeding of honey and Ghrita consecrated with Mantra as given for this purpose. Thereafter, milk from the right breast should be offered to the child ^[7] Acharya Sushruta says that on first day after performing Nalachhedan, honey and Ghrita mixed with Ananta powder in minute quantity concerned with mantras should be offered to the newborn thrice a day. On second and third day Ghrita medicated with Lakshmana, on fourth day honey and Ghrita in the amount which fills the palm of neonate (Savapanitalsamita) given two times and after that breast feeding should be started ^[8]. According to Vagbhata, Jatakarma (birth ceremony) should be performed by Prajapatya method.

Significance of Jatkarma Sanskara

- Rooting and Sucking reflex as well as Sucking-Swallowing coordination is assessed while offering honey and ghee
- By this ceremony we should examine the baby to rule out anomalies such as cleft palate, hare lips, tracheo-oesophageal fistula, fissured tongue etc.
- First feed initiates gastrointestinal movements and activates the gut.
- It promotes breastfeeding as well as beneficial to mother for helps in uterine involution, reduces PPH and protect against pregnancy
- Honey has antimicrobial properties and enhances immunity.
- Honey and ghrita is rich source of carbohydrate and fat respectively which can provide adequate energy even in a minute quantity
- Ghrita increases samriti medha (intellect), kaanti, voice, oja, strength, vishahar, rakshoghan
- Use of gold (suvara-prashan) increases intellect, digestive and metabolic power, strength, aayusha

(provide longevity), increase complexion (varnaya), grahamapahum^[9].

Namkarana Sanskara

Charak has given detail description of this ceremony. On 10th day, mother and child should take bath with water purify by drugs, wear clean cloths, ornaments, touch auspicious things, worship god and brahmana. After Swastikavachana by Brahmana, mother should sit keeping head of the child towards the east or north then father of the child prays to god and give two names to the child.- one Naksatrika (similarity to the planet of birth) and the other Abhiprayika (desired name by which the baby would be known in family or society). It should begin with Ghosa-alphabets, middle with Antasth (semi-vowel) and end with Usma-alphabets. It should be composed of either two or four letters^[10]. According to Sushruta and Vagbhata, this ceremony should be performed on the tenth day after birth^[11]. Astanga Samgraha has stated that this ceremony have to be performed on 10th day or 12th day or 100th day or after 1 year^[12].

Significance of Namakaranana Sanskara

- Name provide identification as well as social and personal recognition to baby
- This Sanskara provides opportunity for examination of baby. Normally, the baby recovers from various traumas including cephal hematoma, fracture and dislocation, facial palsy and physiological jaundice. Persistence of jaundice after tenth day in neonate should be considered serious.
- Baby regains the birth weight on 10th day after birth.
- Umbilical cord falls normally after 5 to 10 days but may take longer

Sanskara During Infantile Period

Nishkramana Sanskara

This Samskara is performed when the child is taken out of the home for the first time. According to Kashyapa and Astanga Samgraha, in fourth month, baby who having been given bath, adorned, wearing new clean clothes, possessing mustard, honey and Ghrita or Goroohana, alongwith Dhatri should be taken out of the house and ready to enter the temple^[13].

Significance of Niskramana Sanskara

- By 4th month child develops head holding capacity, turns his head towards a sound i.e. ringing bell of a temple, this provides the opportunity to examine its hearing capacity.
- By expose to the sunlight at morning, the synthesis of vitamin D accelerates.
- By seeing moon or sun, the macular fixation and pupillary adjustment/reaction of the child can be observed
- In external environment, infant develops resistance power to adjust in different atmosphere
- Disappearance of grasping reflex at 3-4 months, placing reflex at 3-4 month, stepping reflex at 3-4 months, rooting reflex at 3-4 months, tonic neck at 2-6 month, Moro's reflex at 3-4month. But persistence of these reflexes indicative of cerebral palsy.

Upaveshana Sanskara

According to Kashyapa, it should be done on 6th month. As per Kashyapa, baby should not be allowed to sit for a longer time. If it not observed properly then it develops kyphosis, weakness of lumber region, exhaustion, fever, constipation, retention of urine, and tympanitis^[14]. Vagbhata stated that during the 5th month on an auspicious day, the child should be placed on ground^[15]. Sushrut also opined that child should be allowed to sit for a longer time gradually

Significance of Upaveshana Sanskara

- As per developmental milestone, by 5th to 6th month child is able to sit with support, tries to hold things and put it to the mouth
- It gives opportunity for initiation of sitting and assesses physical, neurological and psychological growth of child.

Karnavedhana Sanskara

There are different views about performing this ceremony in Ayurvedic texts

According to Sushruta, this Sanskara should be performed at 6th or 7th month^[16]. According to Vagbhata, during 6th, 7th or 8th month on an auspicious day in winter season, keeping child on a lap of mother than after ear should be pierced. The right ear pierced first in case of male while left ear in case of female^[17].

Significance of Karnavedhana Sanskara

- The purpose of this Sanskara is to protect the child from many diseases and to wear ornament (Raksha-Bhushana Nimittam).
- To initiate antigen-antibody reaction, providing active immunity to the child

Phalaprashana/Annaprashana Sanskara

According to Kashyapa, Phalaprashana (fruit juices) should be advised at the age of 6th month while in 10th month or after eruption of teeth, Annaprashana (feeding of cereals) should be indicated.¹⁸ According to Sushruta, the child at the age of six months, should be given food light and Hitkar (appropriate wholesome food). According to Vagbhat on the 6th month, solid food should be given to the child gradually as much as he required as he goes on and breast feeding should be gradually discontinued^[19].

Significance of Annaprashana Sanskara

- Fruit juices provides adequate amount of Vitamin C which is deficient breast in milk of mother, cow or any other milk
- At age of 6 month, breast milk now not enough to fulfill the requirement of growing child. So, it is the accurate time to introduce light and digestible supplementary feeding at the beginning as fruit juices i.e. Phalprashana and gradually it is to be replaced by cereal diet i.e. Annaprashana.
- It provides essential nutrients like Fe in adequate quantity, which is deficient in mother milk.
- After eruption of teeth gradual weaning should be done and child should be given substitute fruit juices as well as light and digestible nutrient cereals.
- It brings out the change of taste in the baby and different type of taste sensation develop properly

- It initiates proper enzymatic function of G.I.T. for the digestion of protein, carbohydrate and fat etc.

Sanskara during Preschool Period

Chudakarana Sanskara

According to Ghrihya Sutra and Manusmriti Chudakarana Sanskara should be performed at the end of 1st year and before expiry of 3rd year. There is a chapter named “Chudakarniya” in Kashyapa Samhita, but there is no reference available regarding Chudakarma procedure because chapter is incomplete from beginning. Charak has mentioned the utility of Chudakarana as Paustika (nutritive), Vrishya (aphrodisiac), Ayushya (increase longevity), Suchi (Cleanliness) and Rupavirajana (increase personality) [20].

Significance of Chudakarana Sanskara

- Chudakarana Sanskara gives a chance to examine fontanel of the child. Normally in healthy child, anterior fontanel closes by 18 to 24 months. Delayed closure due to dehydration, meningitis, can be assessed properly.

Sanskara during School Age Period

Upanayana Sanskara

According to Manusmriti, this ceremony is carried out on 5th, 6th, and 8th year in Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya respectively. They are provided with a sacred thread girdle made of MUNJA grass. There is no any clear cut references are available regarding this ceremony in Ayurvedic classics. However Shshruta and Vagbhata have given the time of starting the education as soon as child fit for the same [21].

Significance of Upanayana Sanskara

- Thread around waist may serve the purpose to assess the physical growth to rule out malnutrition.
- Assessment of maturity of brain to perform intellectual activities during school going age is done
- To initiate sense of responsibility as well as spiritual well-being of the child
- This thread might aware him about his responsibility towards society, Guru and mother-father

Vedarambha Sanskara

The child who has gain the capacity to learn should be initiated to the study connected with its cast by the teacher. He should teach right living and politeness always. So that with the commencement of youth he will not easily succumb to the bad sensual activity [22].

Significance of Vedarambha Sanskara

- This sanskara provides religious cult, humanity, self-control and acceptability with the society
- 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, acquire capacity, strength and capacity to learn so It is also time for assess the development of child.

Conclusion

In the present paper I can conclude that the Samskaras are a series of sacraments, sacrifices and rituals that serve as rites of passage and mark the various stages of the human life. The main aim of performing Sanskaras are to preparing the

baby for intrauterine and extra uterine life successfully, develop proper feeding habits, ensure adequate nutrition, prevent diseases, adapt to environment for further survival, give individual identity and educate the child. Thus, we can see that knowledge of developmental milestone [22] was clearly described in Ayurveda classics under the heading of Sanskara.

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