

Postnatal Sacrament (Samskara): A Review

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Abstract

The number of major samskaras fluctuates between 12 and 18. Later, it became 16 in number, generally known as "Shodasha Samskaras". Among these post natal samskaras are six in number as, Jatakarma, Namakarana, Nishakramana, anna prashana, chuda karana and karma veda, A number of works that occupy by far the most prominent place among the literary productions of the sūtra-period are *Srauta sūtras* and *Smarta sūtras*. The performer of these sacraments receives a higher holiness not only these performances brings cultural gains, removes impurities. During historical period various references of sacraments can be traced. Postnatal samskarasa helps to gain a healthy progeny and makes balanced progress in all the four great eternal human pursuit.

Keywords: Samskras; Sacraments; Rites; Jatakarma; Namakarana; Nishakramana etc.

Introduction

Most of the Hindus used to follow rituals in connection with major events in their lives, such as pregnancy, childbirth, education, marriage, and death. The number of major samskaras fluctuates between 12 and 18. Later, it became 16 in number, generally known as "Shodasha Samskaras". In these post natal samskaras are Jatakarma, Namakarana, Nishakramana, anna prashana, chuda karana and karma veda, which will be discussed further.

Kalpa (Vedanga)- It is one of the six disciplines of Vedanga, treating ritual.

Tradition does not single out any special work in this branch of the Vedanga. A number of these works have come down to us, and they occupy by far the most prominent place among the literary productions of the sūtra-period.

The **Kalpa-sūtras** are of two kinds

1. The *Srauta sutras* - which are based on the *shruti* and
2. The *Smarta sutras* - based on the *smruti* or tradition.

The latter class again includes two kinds of treatises:

1. The *Grhya sutras* - domestic rules and
2. The *Dharma sutras*, which treat customs and social duties [1].

Post Natal Samskaras

Childhood Samskaras are six in number as,

1. Jatakarma (Birth rituals)
2. Namakarana (Name-giving)
3. Nishkrama (First outing)
4. Annaprashana (First feeding)
5. Chudakarma (or Chaul) (Shaving of head)
6. Karnavedh (Piercing the earlobes)

Jatakarma (Birth Rituals)

This ritual is performed at the birth of the child. It is supposed that the moon has a special effect on the newly born. In addition, the nakshatras also decide the degree of auspiciousness. The jatakarmas are

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performed to ward off their unfavourable effects on the child.

The persons anxious sprinkle water on the woman who is giving birth to a child.

At the time when labour is going to take place, the sprinkling of water on the body of the pregnant woman should be done with the Mantras.

The ceremony proper should be performed (unless prevented by death in close family circles) before the umbilical cord of the child is cut off. The father looks at the face of the newly born infant and then performs charity and other such good deeds.

Sushruta tells to make child to lick honey, ghee and ananta (gold powder -Dalhana) [2].

The father then touches the tongue of the infant with a drop of honey touched by a gold ring, uttering Mantras. This action endows the child with intelligence. A name is also given to the child, in secret, to prevent enemies practising black magic on the child with that name. Then the father utters a prayer for long life in the ear of the infant.

After severing the umbilical cord, the child is handed over to the mother, then husband prays to god to protect the mother. Thereafter the father of the child should whisper mantra for firm wisdom of child. " Some interesting pre-natal directions found in early texts on the subject".

During labour mantras are chanted outside the ward to get rid of evil spirits. An elderly person at home unties several knots of a rope suggesting the loosening of muscles tying the child in the womb. The rakshogana dravyas are placed near the lady. If the delivery is difficult, the verse from the Atharva Veda meant for it, is chanted. On safe delivery a small fire called Sutika-fire is lighted in the room to purify and protect the child and mother. Mustard seeds and grains are thrown into the fire to counteract evil forces [3].

Namakarana Samskara (Naming the Child)

This is the ceremony in which child is given a name. According to Shastras, the name of boy should have an even number of syllables. It is believed that a two-syllable name will bring material prosperity and fame and a four syllable name will bring religious fame [4].

The names of girls should have an odd number of syllables and end in "I" or "aa". They should be easy to pronounce, pleasing to the ear and auspicious.

The Namakarana Samskar is performed, normally on the tenth or twelfth day after birth. If there are inconveniences then it is taken to the end of the first

year.

After preliminaries, the parents give the offerings to gods and feel the breath of the child symbolising the awakening of its consciousness and utters in its ear three times. The Brahmins and elders are asked to follow, calling the child by that name and are asked to bless.

The parents, Acharya (teacher) etc. give name to the child. On the day fixed for giving name to the child, the father of the child and the priests of the yajna invite the guests present and commence the ceremony.

The father of the child, keeping the child's head in the north direction and feet in south direction, should give the child to his wife (the mother of the child). They then follow the procedure that has been mainly prescribed for Namakarana Samskara. A Homa is performed. Filling the spoon with ghee, the father of the child should offer oblation pronouncing Mantra [5].

Niskramana Samskara

The infant is taken out of the house into the climate of fresh air and sunshine.

For the time of Niskramana, two dates are mentioned and they are -

1. The first date is the third lunar date of the third full-moon from the birth date of the child.
2. The second date is the birth Tithi (date) of the child in the fourth month from the date of birth.

The Procedure

The mother of the child brings the child in Yajnashala, after bathing and dressing, gives the child into the hands of her husband, keeping the head of the child in the north direction. The mother then and takes her seat on the left side of her husband.

After the yajna the father of the child gives the child to the mother. Keeping silence, the husband touches the head of his wife. The child is then taken out in the sun with the Mantra from the Yajurveda.

After exposing the child to the sun and fresh air, the child is brought back into the Yajnashala where people bless the child.

Exposing the Child to the Moonlit Night

Same procedure mentioned above is followed during night to expose the child for moon light. Thereafter both husband and wife, in a happy frame

of mind, take the child back into the house [6].

Annaprashan (First Feeding)

Feeding the child with solid food is the next important samskara. For a son this is done in even months - the 6th, 8th, 10th or 12th months. For a daughter this is done in odd months - 5th, 7th or 9th months. The food offered is cooked rice with ghee.

Some advocate honey to be mixed with this. By advocating this samskara, the wise sages accomplished two important considerations.

1. The child is weaned away from the mother at a proper time.
2. It warns the mother to stop breast feeding the child.

This is the ceremony for the first feeding of cooked rice. The object of this ceremony is to pray to the gods with Mantras to bless the child with good digestive powers, good thoughts and talents. It is performed when the child becomes six months.

Offerings are made to the goddess of speech and vigour. The father feeds a little of the sweet food anointed with gold to the child with Mantras so that it may ensure a healthy life to the child and prevent ill-health.

It is concerned with awareness of the growing needs of the child at that age in a scientific and caring manner. Its systematic observance therefore ensures the results accepted especially when equipped by Mantras.

Thereafter the oblation of the cooked rice that was given to the Yajman and to the priests, should be offered with Mantras [7].

Chudakarma (Chaul) (Shaving of Head)

This samskara involves shaving the head initiating him with the Upanayan. The significance of this, with nail cutting, is to give prosperity, courage and happiness.

A tuft of hair is left in place at the top of the head for longevity. Sushrut points out its significance, "Inside the head, near the top, is the joint of a shira (artery) and a sandhi (critical juncture). This is a vital spot called the adhipati (overlord). Any injury to this part causes sudden death". This ceremony is to be performed in the third year of the male child.

Removing the hair, excess nails etc., contribute to longevity, purity and beauty of the individual. An auspicious day is selected for the ceremony. A porcupine quill, Darbha grass, and a razor are the

specific materials used by the father for symbolically cutting the child's hair first.

The procedure

The barber who is competent and swift has come with his razor with utmost care and (thereafter) cut the hair.

The father of the child mixes hot and cold water reciting the Mantra.

The detailed procedure entails the father cutting a little of the hair first from the right side of the child's head with appropriate Mantras. Then the same sequence is followed for the left side of the head. The third time from the back of the head, the fourth time again the father cuts a little hair from the back of the head.

All the hair cut by the razor or scissors, together with Kusa grass and the leaves of Mimosa (Shami) should be placed in an earthenware container. All loose hair pieces on the floor should be carefully picked up and placed in this container.

The father of the child blesses the child (with Mantra) by placing his right hand on the head of the child and then rubs a little butter or curd on the head of the child. The child is then bathed. When the child is dressed, the father sits with the child chants mantras [8].

Karnavedh (Piercing the Earlobes)

The ears of a child should be pierced for protection. For a boy, the right earlobe is pierced first and for a girl, the left. For boys today, this samskara is only prevalent in some states of India. In girls, this samskara has lost its religious [9].

Piercing the ears is done in the third or fifth year of child's birth. In the morning, dressed with clothes and ornaments, the mother brings the child to the Yajman. A Homa is performed with Mantra. The physician (Surgeon) then should pierce the right ear first with the following Mantra. The physician then inserts thin wire/ thread like objects in the freshly pierced ears to prevent them from closing. The physician (Surgeon) then applies healing ointments to the ears [10].

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