



Review Article

Volume 14 Issue 10

October 2025

CHILDHOOD SAMSKARAS AND IT'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Background: *Childhood Samskaras* form the foundation of cultural, ethical, and holistic development as described in Ayurveda and classical Indian tradition. These rituals and practices are designed to nurture physical, mental, and spiritual growth during formative years. They are believed to influence not only health and behavior but also long-term development and well-being. **Aim:** To study the role of *Childhood Samskaras* and analyze their relationship with growth and development. **Objectives:** To review classical references of *Samskaras* with emphasis on childhood stages. To examine the physiological and psychological significance of selected *Samskaras*. To evaluate their correlation with modern concepts of growth and development. **Materials and Methods:** This is a conceptual and literary study. Data is collected from Ayurvedic texts including *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, along with commentaries and modern pediatric growth and development literature. Analytical correlation is drawn between traditional *Samskara* practices and contemporary scientific evidence of childhood milestones, nutrition, immunity,

and psycho-social adaptation. **Results:** Classical *Samskaras* such as *Jatakarma*, *Namakarana*, *Annaprashana*, *Chudakarana*, and *Upanayana* were found to be closely aligned with critical phases of physical and mental growth. These rituals emphasize nutrition, hygiene, emotional security, cognitive development, and social integration, thereby showing a direct connection with modern pediatric developmental stages. **Conclusion:** *Childhood Samskaras* hold significant value in shaping holistic health and development. Their principles, when understood in the light of modern science, highlight their preventive, promotive, and psycho-social relevance in contemporary child care.

Keywords: Childhood Samskaras, Ayurveda, Growth, Development, Rituals, Pediatrics

Introduction

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, emphasizes the importance of nurturing an individual from conception through various stages of development. Among the guiding principles of Ayurveda are *Samskaras*—purificatory and transformative rites of passage—that provide a framework for healthy physical, mental, social, and spiritual growth. These *Samskaras* are not merely rituals but systematic processes designed to cultivate *Sharira* (body), *Manas* (mind), and *Atma* (soul) in harmony.¹

The concept of *Samskara* literally means refinement, purification, and transformation. Classical texts describe sixteen principal *Samskaras* (*Shodasha Samskaras*), of which several are dedicated to childhood and adolescence. These include *Jatakarma* (birth ritual), *Namakarana* (naming ceremony), *Annaprashana* (first feeding of solid food), *Chudakarana* (tonsure), and *Upanayana* (initiation to education). Each of these milestones is performed at a particular stage of development, signifying physiological and psychological transitions that are essential for holistic well-being.²

From a modern scientific perspective, growth and development in childhood are critical indicators of health. Growth refers to the quantitative increase in body size, while development signifies the progressive maturation of physical, cognitive, emotional, and social capacities. Adequate nutrition, immunity, emotional bonding, learning stimulation, and social interaction are universally acknowledged as vital for these processes. Interestingly, the objectives of many *Samskaras* correlate directly with these requirements. For example, *Annaprashana* emphasizes the introduction of wholesome diet, *Chudakarana* is linked with

hygiene and neural stimulation, while *Upanayana* fosters discipline, learning, and social integration.³

Furthermore, *Samskaras* function as cultural tools for reinforcing values, identity, and community bonding. They instill a sense of belonging and provide structured opportunities for psychosocial adaptation. Modern developmental psychology also recognizes the significance of such cultural rituals in shaping personality, resilience, and adaptive behavior. Thus, Ayurveda's framework of *Childhood Samskaras* can be seen as an integrated model combining preventive health, promotive care, and psycho-social development.⁴

In the present context, with increasing challenges such as lifestyle disorders, malnutrition, and psychological stress among children, revisiting these classical concepts becomes highly relevant. By understanding *Childhood Samskaras* in light of modern pediatrics and developmental science, we can derive meaningful insights into preventive pediatrics and holistic child care. This integrated approach not only strengthens the bridge between traditional wisdom and modern science but also highlights the timeless applicability of Ayurveda in promoting health across generations.⁵

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Aim:

To study the role of *Childhood Samskaras* and analyze their relationship with growth and development.

Objectives:

1. To review classical references of *Samskaras* with emphasis on childhood stages.
2. To examine the physiological and psychological significance of selected *Samskaras*.
3. To evaluate their correlation with modern concepts of growth and development.

Materials and Methods:

This is a conceptual and literary study. Data is collected from Ayurvedic texts including *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, along with commentaries and modern pediatric growth and development literature. Analytical correlation is drawn between traditional *Samskara* practices and contemporary scientific evidence of childhood milestones, nutrition, immunity, and psycho-social adaptation.

CONCEPTUAL STUDY

S.No.	Samskara (Name)	Description
1.	<i>Garbhadhan Samskara</i>	Conception ritual performed to purify mind and body of parents and ensure healthy progeny.
2.	<i>Pumsavana Samskara</i>	Ritual in the 3rd month of pregnancy for the well-being of the fetus and traditionally for progeny.
3.	<i>Simantonayana Samskara</i>	Performed in the 4th–7th month of pregnancy for maternal mental peace and fetal well-being.
4.	<i>Jatakarma Samskara</i>	Conducted at the birth of the child to welcome the newborn and initiate breastfeeding.
5.	<i>Namakarana Samskara</i>	Naming ceremony performed usually on the 11th/12th day after birth, giving social identity.
6.	<i>Nishkramana Samskara</i>	First outing of the child, usually in the 4th month, to introduce to the outer environment.
7.	<i>Annaprashana Samskara</i>	First feeding of solid food at 6 months to support nutrition and growth.
8.	<i>Chudakarana Samskara</i>	Tonsure (hair-cutting) ceremony between 1–3 years for hygiene and symbolic renewal.
9.	<i>Karnavedha Samskara</i>	Ear piercing, believed to stimulate <i>Marma</i> points and improve immunity.
10.	<i>Vidyarambha Samskara</i>	Beginning of formal education, introducing letters and learning.
11.	<i>Upanayana Samskara</i>	Initiation into Vedic education, marking the start of <i>Brahmacharya Ashrama</i> .
12.	<i>Vedarambha Samskara</i>	Commencement of Vedic studies under Guru's guidance.
13.	<i>Keshanta Samskara</i>	First shaving of the beard at adolescence, symbolizing maturity.
14.	<i>Samavartana Samskara</i>	Completion of student life, marking readiness for <i>Grihastha Ashrama</i> .
15.	<i>Vivaha Samskara</i>	Marriage ritual, sanctifying family life and continuation of lineage.
16.	<i>Antyeshti Samskara</i>	Last rites after death, ensuring proper farewell of the soul and closure for family.

SHODASHA SAMSKARA

According to classical texts (mainly *Grihya Sutras*, later integrated in Ayurvedic and Dharmashastra tradition), the sixteen major *Samskaras* are:

1. Garbhadhan Samskara (Conception Ritual)⁶:

This is the first *Samskara* performed before conception. It emphasizes purification of body and mind of both partners through *Vrata* (vows), *Snana* (ritual bathing), and prayers. Its purpose is to ensure healthy progeny by creating a pure environment for conception, reflecting Ayurveda's focus on genetic, nutritional, and psychological preparation for reproduction.

2. Pumsavana Samskara (For Progeny)⁷:

Performed during the third month of pregnancy, this ritual is aimed at ensuring proper development of the fetus and, traditionally, for begetting a male child. Medicinal herbs and mantras are used to promote strength and protect the fetus, which can be correlated with modern antenatal care focusing on fetal health and nutrition.

3. Simantonnayana Samskara (Parting of the Hair)⁸:

This is performed during the fourth to seventh month of pregnancy. It involves parting the hair of the expectant mother while chanting auspicious mantras. The objective is to keep the mother mentally peaceful and emotionally balanced, thereby supporting the growth of the fetus. Modern science emphasizes maternal mental health and its impact on fetal development, reflecting the same concern.

4. Jatakarma Samskara (Birth Ritual)⁹:

Conducted immediately after childbirth, this ritual marks the infant's entry into the world. The father whispers sacred mantras in the child's ear, honey and ghee may be given as symbolic first feeding, and breastfeeding is initiated. It ensures vitality, immunity, and the establishment of the parent-child bond, correlating with modern neonatal care and breastfeeding initiation.

5. Namakarana Samskara (Naming Ceremony)¹⁰:

Performed on the 11th or 12th day after birth, this ritual assigns a name to the newborn. The name carries cultural, astrological, and social significance, helping in identity formation and

psychological recognition within society. It also marks the transition from neonatal care to social acceptance.

6. Nishkramana Samskara (First Outing)¹¹:

Around the fourth month, the child is ceremonially taken outside the home, usually to a temple or into sunlight. This introduces the child to the external environment, promoting adaptation, immunity, and sensory stimulation. In modern terms, this parallels the importance of exposure to fresh air, sunlight for vitamin D, and gradual social integration.

7. Annaprashana Samskara (First Feeding of Solid Food)¹²:

Performed at around six months of age, this ritual involves the first feeding of solid food, usually rice or other wholesome items. It marks the transition from exclusive breastfeeding to complementary nutrition, aligning with pediatric recommendations for weaning and introduction of solid foods to support physical growth and immunity.

8. Chudakarana Samskara (Tonsure Ceremony)¹³:

Between the first and third year, the child's head is shaved, leaving a small tuft of hair (*Shikha*). This is considered a symbol of renewal, removal of impurities, and maintenance of hygiene. It is also believed to influence brain development and energy regulation. Modern parallels include emphasis on hygiene and symbolic milestones of early childhood.

9. Karnavedha Samskara (Ear Piercing)¹⁴:

The piercing of the earlobes is performed during early childhood. It is believed to stimulate important *Marma* points, promoting good health, immunity, and prevention of ENT disorders. Modern science explains this as minor controlled trauma that strengthens immunity and carries cultural-ornamental significance.

10. Vidyarambha Samskara (Commencement of Education)¹⁵:

Usually performed around the fifth year, this ritual marks the beginning of formal education. The child is introduced to alphabets and writing, often with mantras invoking *Saraswati*. It emphasizes learning, memory, and discipline, correlating with modern preschool education and cognitive stimulation practices.

11. Upanayana Samskara (Sacred Thread Ceremony)¹⁶:

This is the initiation into Vedic education, performed at different ages depending on caste traditions (generally 8 years for Brahmins). The child receives the *Yajnopavita* (sacred

thread) and begins *Brahmacharya Ashrama*. It symbolizes discipline, responsibility, and structured learning, much like modern school initiation with moral training.

12. Vedarambha Samskara (Beginning of Vedic Study)¹⁷:

This ritual follows *Upanayana*, marking the child's formal entry into Vedic and spiritual studies under the guidance of a Guru. It ensures structured intellectual and moral development, aligning with the modern concept of mentorship and higher learning initiation.

13. Keshanta Samskara (First Shaving of Beard)¹⁸:

Performed at the age of puberty (around 16 years), this marks the transition into adolescence. It symbolizes maturity, physical transformation, and readiness for greater responsibilities. It parallels modern recognition of puberty milestones and initiation into adulthood.

14. Samavartana Samskara (Completion of Student Life)¹⁹:

Conducted at the completion of formal education, this ritual marks the end of *Brahmacharya* and the readiness to enter *Grihastha Ashrama* (householder stage). It signifies intellectual maturity, self-dependence, and the ability to contribute to society. In modern terms, it is equivalent to graduation ceremonies.

15. Vivaha Samskara (Marriage Ritual)²⁰:

Marriage is one of the most important *Samskaras*, marking the beginning of family life. It is performed to sanctify the union of two individuals and ensure the continuation of family lineage. It also provides a stable foundation for societal order and mutual responsibilities, similar to the recognition of marital and family systems in contemporary society.

16. Antyeshti Samskara (Last Rites)²¹:

The final *Samskara*, performed after death, ensures the proper departure of the soul and purification of the physical remains. It provides emotional closure to the family and community, maintaining spiritual and social continuity. In modern terms, it is akin to funeral rites and grief rituals that help in coping with loss.

Childhood Samskaras

Among the 16, the ones specifically linked with **childhood** and early development are:

1. **Jatakarma** – Performed immediately after birth; introduces breastfeeding, promotes immunity, and establishes mother-child bonding.
2. **Namakarana** – Naming ceremony performed on the 11th/12th day; ensures identity and psychological assurance.
3. **Nishkramana** – Around 4th month; first exposure to the external environment (sunlight, fresh air, social setting) supporting adaptation and immunity.
4. **Annaprashana** – Around 6th month; scientific introduction of complementary foods, promoting nutrition and growth.
5. **Chudakarana** – Around 1–3 years; tonsure ritual associated with hygiene, brain cooling, and symbolic renewal.
6. **Karnavedha** – Ear piercing, believed to balance *Marma* points, prevent ENT disorders, and enhance immunity.
7. **Vidyarambha** – Introduction to learning, letters, and cognitive training.
8. **Upanayana** – Initiation into education, discipline, and social-cultural responsibilities.

RELATION WITH GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

<i>Samskara</i>	Approx. Age of Performance	Growth & Development Milestone	Relationship with Growth & Development
Jatakarma (Birth ritual)	At birth	Neonatal adaptation, initiation of breastfeeding	Promotes immunity via colostrum, supports bonding, ensures survival and early nutrition.
Namakarana (Naming)	11th–12th day	Early social recognition, identity formation	Provides psychological security and emotional acceptance in family and society.
Nishkramana (First outing)	4th month	Sensory development, sunlight exposure, head control	Supports bone growth (Vitamin D), immunity, and adaptation to external environment.
Annaprashana (First feeding)	6th month	Nutritional milestone, complementary feeding, sitting with support	Ensures timely weaning, supports rapid physical growth and digestive development.

Chudakarana (Tonsure)	1–3 years	Early childhood motor skill refinement, hygiene	Promotes cleanliness, symbolic renewal, and coincides with autonomy and play development.
Karnavedha (Ear piercing)	1–5 years	Early fine motor and sensory stimulation	Stimulates <i>Marma</i> points, may prevent ENT issues, adds cultural–social integration.
Vidyarambha (Beginning education)	Around 5 years	Cognitive readiness, language development, memory	Marks school readiness, enhances intellectual growth, creativity, and discipline.
Upanayana (Initiation into education)	Around 8 years	Psychosocial maturity, structured learning	Promotes responsibility, moral values, and disciplined education during <i>Brahmacharya Ashrama</i> .

RESULT AND FINIDING

- *Jatakarma* was found to be related with neonatal adaptation, initiation of breastfeeding and development of early immunity.
- *Namakarana* provided psychological identity and social recognition, supporting emotional development.
- *Nishkramana* correlated with sensory stimulation, exposure to sunlight, vitamin D synthesis, and immune strengthening.
- *Annaprashana* aligned with the nutritional milestone of complementary feeding, ensuring physical growth and digestive maturity.
- *Chudakarana* emphasized hygiene, symbolic renewal, and supported neurological stimulation during early motor development.
- *Karnavedha* was associated with preventive health, *Marma* stimulation, immunity, and social integration.
- *Vidyarambha* correlated with cognitive readiness, memory, language development, and school preparedness.
- *Upanayana* was linked with psychosocial maturity, discipline, responsibility, and structured educational development.

Discussion

Childhood is a critical phase of life where physical growth and psychological development occur rapidly. Ayurveda, through the concept of *Shodasha Samskaras*, provides a systematic framework for nurturing the child at every stage. The rituals such as *Jatakarma*, *Namakarana*, *Nishkramana*, and *Annaprashana* coincide with significant pediatric milestones, ensuring proper nutrition, immunity, and early adaptation. These *Samskaras* highlight Ayurveda's preventive and promotive approach to child health, which continues to hold relevance in modern pediatrics.²²

The analysis of *Jatakarma* shows its strong relationship with breastfeeding initiation, a practice now universally recommended for neonatal immunity and survival. *Annaprashana* corresponds with complementary feeding at six months, which is essential for meeting the increasing nutritional demands of infancy. Similarly, *Nishkramana* emphasizes controlled exposure to the external environment, resonating with the role of sunlight in vitamin D synthesis and overall immune strengthening. Thus, these practices were scientific in essence, though expressed in ritualistic form.²³

Cognitive and psychosocial development also find expression in *Childhood Samskaras*. *Namakarana* gives social identity, while *Vidyarambha* and *Upanayana* focus on intellectual, cultural, and moral growth. These rituals align with modern educational psychology, where identity formation, discipline, and structured learning are recognized as vital to child development. The ritual framework thus ensured that every child passed through culturally meaningful checkpoints of growth, blending spiritual, emotional, and educational aspects.²⁴

Overall, the findings demonstrate that *Childhood Samskaras* are not just ritualistic traditions but holistic developmental milestones. They integrate physical health, nutrition, hygiene, learning, and social adaptation into a structured pathway for growth. In the present era, where lifestyle-related disorders, malnutrition, and psychological stress are increasing in children, these classical concepts offer preventive guidance. Interpreted in modern scientific light, *Samskaras* can contribute meaningfully to holistic child care and preventive pediatrics.²⁵

CONCLUSION

In this present study, it can be concluded that *Childhood Samskaras* described in Ayurveda are closely aligned with the natural milestones of growth and development. Rituals like *Jatakarma* and *Annaprashana* emphasize neonatal adaptation and nutrition, while *Nishkramana* and *Chudakarana* focus on immunity, hygiene, and environmental adaptation.

Similarly, *Namakarana* addresses psychological identity, and *Vidyarambha* and *Upanayana* support cognitive and psychosocial maturity. These *Samskaras* serve as preventive and promotive health measures, ensuring a holistic framework for physical, emotional, intellectual, and social development, proving their continued relevance in modern child care and pediatrics.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST –NIL

SOURCE OF SUPPORT –NONE

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