



Review Article

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A REVIEW ON PUMSAVANA SAMSKARA: REVISITING THE INTERSECTION OF RITUAL, MEDICINE, AND FOETAL DEVELOPMENT IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Pumsavana Samskara is an ancient Ayurvedic ritual aimed at promoting healthy foetal development, traditionally performed during the early stages of pregnancy. This study explores the origins, procedures, materials, and timing of Pumsavana, as outlined in classical Ayurvedic texts such as Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Samgraha, and Ashtanga Hridayam. Pumsavana is administered nasally or orally before foetal characteristics manifest, using herbal preparations that influence foetal health, potentially altering the child's gender and ensuring optimal growth. Materials like Nyagrodha buds, Masha, Tila, and specific medicinal herbs are employed, especially during the auspicious Pushya Nakshatra. The study also highlights the multifaceted benefits of Pumsavana, not limited to the birth of male progeny, but focused on enhancing overall progeny health. Rituals such as the chanting of mantras contribute to the psychosocial bonding between the parents, reinforcing mental and emotional support during pregnancy. The significance of the herbs, their collection timing, and the method of administration are discussed concerning foetal development and maternal well-being. This research offers a deeper understanding of the clinical and spiritual dimensions of Pumsavana Samskara, linking ancient traditions with modern prenatal care.

Keywords: Ayurveda, foetal health, Pumsavana, Samskara

INTRODUCTION

Samskaras are procedures performed at various stages of life for the purpose of reformation or training of the mind. ¹ The word samskara literally means planned actions undertaken to make things better. Pumsavana is the second samskara among the sixteen samskaras, and it is to be performed in the pre-natal stage. Ashvalayana mentions the origin of Pumsavana samskara in the Grhyasutra.¹

Pumsavana is defined as -“pumān sooyate anena iti pumsavanam”. “puman prasuyate yena karmana tat pumsavanamitaram”. ² Pumsavana is derived from two words, Pum- meaning masculine (also the body, shareera) and Savana- meaning generation or bringing forth children. It also means setting in motion. Hence, Pumsavana is a process of potentiating masculinity in an unborn child and bringing forth movement.

Pumsavana is also defined as “utpatsyamānagarbhasya bejkgārbhikdoṣaparihārārtha pumrūpatvasampattaye ca pumsavana”³, which means Pumsavana is conducted to eliminate the deficiencies of shukra and artava of the unborn child and to make it male.⁴ Pumsavana is to be performed after Garbhadhana Samskara. The Pumsavana Samskara is a special sacrament for begetting male offspring, whereas the Garbhadhana Samskara comprises rituals for general childbearing and processes to foster a conjugal connection between the newlywed couple.

This paper aims to discuss the procedure of Pumsavana, the time of administration, materials used, route of administration, and their importance in detail as described in the Ayurvedic texts.

Data for the review was collected through available ancient texts of Indian philosophy and classical texts of Ayurveda – Brihatrayee, i.e., Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Samgraha, and Ashtanga Hridayam. The procedure of Pumsavana samskara has been described based on three objectives:

1. Garbha grahanartha - for proper conception
2. Garbha sthapanartha - for proper implantation
3. Stithagarbhayashca putrapatya janartha - post-implantation within 3 months for healthy progeny.⁵

For proper conception and to obtain healthy progeny, certain rules have been described by Acharya Charaka. The couple has to undergo the procedures of Snehana (oleation), Swedana (fomentation), Vamana (therapeutic emesis), Virechana (therapeutic purgation), and Basti (therapeutic enema). Further, the male is advised to consume milk and ghee processed with drugs having a sweet taste, and the female is advised to consume masha (Vigna mungo), tila taila (sesame oil), and substances having the ability to increase pitta. After her fourth day of menstruation, with a pleasant mind, the woman should engage in sexual activity with the man on even days of the calendar (e.g., 4th, 6th, 8th, 10th, 12th) for male progeny and on odd days (5th, 7th, 9th, 11th, 13th) for female progeny.⁶

After conception has occurred, on the same day,⁷ during the second month, before the completion of the third month, Pumsavana is advised so that the Garbha (growing foetus) can imbibe the desired qualities. As Pumsavana samskara has the potential to transform the sex of the Garbha, it is to be administered before the signs of gestation/pregnancy are expressed⁵. It is described as this samskara, if done with proper

consideration of desha (place) and kala (time), will invariably yield results.

The procedure of Pumsavana, including the materials required, time, quantity, and route of administration, is detailed in Tables 1-3.

Table 1: Time of Performing Pumsavana Samskara

Charaka Samhita ⁶	After examining the signs of conception in a female (Apanna Garbha Lakshana), before the expression of gestation (Garbha Vyakti Bhava), Pumsavana is to be administered. In the 2 nd or 3 rd month of pregnancy.
Sushruta Samhita ⁷	After examining the signs of conception in a female (Labdha Garbha Lakshana), before the expression of gestation (Garbha Vyakti Bhava), Pumsavana is to be administered. Immediately after conception before the 3 rd month of pregnancy.
Ashtanga Samgraha ⁸	After examining the signs of conception in a female (Labdha Garbha Lakshana), before the expression of gestation (Garbha Vyakti Bhava), Pumsavana is to be administered. On the day of conception within 1 month.
Ashtanga Hridayam ⁹	After examining the signs of conception in a female (Labdha Garbha Lakshana), before the expression of gestation (Garbha Vyakti Bhava), Pumsavana is to be administered. 1 st month of pregnancy.

Table 2: Materials used along with their Quantity

Charaka Samhita ⁶	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2 fresh, undamaged buds of Nyagrodha (<i>Ficus benghalensis</i>) are to be collected on the day of Pushya Nakshatra from the branches facing east or north and macerated well with 2 grains of Dhanyamasha (<i>Vigna mungo</i>) or 2 Gaurasarshapa (<i>Sinapis alba</i>) and curd. Intake of Milk processed with the paste of Jeevaka (<i>Microstylis wallichii</i>), Rishabhaka (<i>Malaxis muscifer</i>), Apamarga (<i>Achyranthes aspera</i>), Sahachara (<i>Barleria prionitis</i>), either separately or together. Intake of 1 Anjali (4 pala) of water with Kudyakita (type of insect) or Matsyaka (type of small fish) Intake of 1 Anjali of curd, milk or water which has been immersed with red hot miniature statues of men made with gold, silver or iron. Inhalation of steam rising from the dish while the powdered Shali rice is cooking, use cotton to swab the liquid at the corners and instil it into her right nostril by placing her head on the door sill or sit on it.
Sushruta Samhita ⁷	3 or 4 Bindu (1 Bindu = approx. .05ml) of milk macerated with Lakshmana (<i>Ipomoea sepiaria</i>), leaf buds of Vata (<i>Ficus benghalensis</i>), Sahadeva (<i>Sida cordifolia</i>), Vishvadeva (Gangeruki- <i>Grewia hirsuta</i>) is administered in the right nostril. It is not to be spit out.
Ashtanga Samgraha ⁸	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3 or 4 Bindu (1 Bindu = approx. 0.5ml) of milk processed with Lakshmana (<i>Ipomoea sepiaria</i>), leaf buds of Vata (<i>Ficus benghalensis</i>), Sahadeva (<i>Sida cordifolia</i>), Vishvadeva (Gangeruki- <i>Grewia hirsuta</i>) is administered in the right nostril (for male progeny) and left nostril (for female progeny). It is not to be spit out. Juice of the root of Shweta Brihati (<i>Solanum torvum</i>) collected on the day of Pushya Nakshatra is to be administered as nasya. Juice of leaves of Utpala (<i>Nymphaea stellata</i>), Kumuda (<i>Nymphaea pubescens</i>), root of Lakshmana (<i>Ipomoea sepiaria</i>), leaf buds of Vata (<i>Ficus benghalensis</i>-8 in number) is to be administered as nasya. Milk macerated with the root of Lakshmana (<i>Ipomoea sepiaria</i>) collected on the day of Pushya Nakshatra in quantity of 1 Udumbara (<i>Ficus racemosa</i>) is administered through the nasal or oral route. Milk macerated with Gauradanda, Apamarga (<i>Achyranthes aspera</i>), Jeevaka (<i>Microstylis wallichii</i>), Rishabhaka (<i>Malaxis muscifer</i>), Shankhapushpi (<i>Convolvulus pluricaulis</i>), Madhyadanda, Sahacara (<i>Barleria prionitis</i>), or 8 leaf buds of Vata (<i>Ficus benghalensis</i>) is to be administered through the nasal or oral route. Inhalation of steam rising from the dish while the powdered Shali rice is cooking, use cotton to swab the liquid at the corners and instil it into her right nostril by placing her head on the door sill or sit on it.
Ashtanga Hridayam ⁹	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Intake of 1 Anjali (4 Pala- approx. 192ml) of milk which has been immersed with red hot miniature statues of men made with gold, silver or iron. Paste of Gauradanda, Apamarga (<i>Achyranthes aspera</i>), Jeevaka (<i>Microstylis wallichii</i>), Rishabhaka (<i>Malaxis muscifer</i>), Sahacara (<i>Barleria prionitis</i>) with water, either individually or together, is to be administered as nasya. Juice of the root of Shweta Brihati (<i>Solanum torvum</i>) collected on the day of Pushya Nakshatra is to be administered as nasya in the right nostril (for male progeny), left nostril (for female progeny) Milk macerated with the root of Lakshmana (<i>Ipomoea sepiaria</i>) or 8 leaf buds of Vata (<i>Ficus benghalensis</i>) collected on Pushya Nakshatra is to be administered through the nasal or oral route.

Table 3: Specific time for collection of herbs and performing Pumsavana Samskara

Charaka Samhita ⁶	On the day of Pushya Nakshatra
Sushruta Samhita ⁷	On the day of Pushya Nakshatra
Ashtanga Samgraha ⁸	On the day of Pushya Nakshatra
Ashtanga Hridayam ⁹	On the day of Pushya Nakshatra

After administration of medicine, for the period of 5 days, the female is advised to take food that is predominantly sweet-tasting, ⁷ milk processed with herbs of Jivaneeya Gana (Jeevaka, Rishabhaka, Meda, Mahameda, Kakoli, Ksheerakaoli, Mudgaparni, Mashaparni, Jeevanti, Madhuka) and rice gruel processed with milk (Payasodana). ⁵ The conduct of the spouse

should be likeable, good, amiable and sexual relations are to be avoided. ⁷



Figure 1: Vatankura collected for pumsavana



Figure 2: Preparation of medicine for nasal instillation



Figure 3: Materials required for performing pumsavana samskara

DISCUSSION

The mention of Pumsavana Samskara can be dated as early as the Vedas. Pumsavana Samskara has been described as Prajapatya in Atharva Veda Suktam 11 in Kanda 6. This verse explains the intake of powder of all 5 parts of Ashwattha (*Ficus religiosa*) with roots near a tree of Shami (*Prosopis cineraria*) by a female desirous of male progeny. In another version, worship using branches of Shami below the branches of Ashwattha (*Ficus religiosa*) signifies the union of male and female and results in male progeny. Pumsavana in Grhyasutras (Vedic household rituals and regulations) explains that on the day of Pushya Nakshatra, in the second or third month before the foetus moves in the womb, the woman has to be administered the medicine on an empty stomach, and after the procedure, curd processed with 2 grains of Masha (*Vigna mungo*) and 1 grain of Yava (*Hordeum vulgare*) is to be sipped 3 times.²

In Shabdakalpadruma, a method of Pumsavana is described wherein three boluses, each of fresh, undamaged leaf buds of Vata (*Ficus benghalensis*), collected from the eastern or northern branches, or Yava or Masha, are to be collected in 7 days while chanting 7 specific mantras, and this is made into a Pottali (poultice) and placed in water. The herbs are then macerated well on a well-washed stone repeatedly and made into a very fine paste. The paste is collected in a clean cloth, and the extract of this paste is instilled into the right nostril of the woman (facing east) by the husband standing behind her, chanting specified mantras. Pumsavana Samskara is to be done after conception and is followed by measures for the proper continuation of pregnancy (Garbha Sthapana Vidhi).

The samskara are basically purificatory in nature and help to bestow good qualities, for well-being and betterment or refinement of body, mind, and spirit. Pumsavana Samskara is for obtaining healthy progeny bestowed with desired qualities and for the protection of the child in the womb of the mother. It applies to both the male and female genders. The specific time of collection of herbs and administration, materials used, quantity, and route of administration are all significant and hence

emphasised as they each affect the psyche of the mother, the relationship between the mother and father, and they all play a role in the process. All the Acharyas unanimously agree on the administration of Pumsavana on the day of Pushya Nakshatra through the nasal or oral route before the signs of gestation are manifested.

Significance of Pushya Nakshatra: Pushya/Tishya Nakshatra is an auspicious nakshatra represented/symbolised by a cow's udder, which represents fertility & nourishment. Pushya Nakshatra is associated with Brihaspati and hence symbolises wisdom.¹⁰ The herbs are to be collected fresh on the day of Pushya Nakshatra from plants growing in clean places from branches facing east or north, as they are said to have the best medicinal qualities and instillation of medicine on this particular day is believed to potentiate the effect of medicine.⁹

Time of Administration: Pumsavana Samskara has to be done before the foetus exhibits specific characteristics, i.e., before the signs of gestation become apparent. As body parts are formed in the 2nd and 3rd month, Pumsavana is advised before the formation of specific characteristics in the foetus.

In Pumsavana Samskara, the herbs used are significant due to their distinctive properties. Those with Madhura Rasa (sweet taste), such as Masha (*Vigna mungo*) and Tila (sesame oil), are believed to nourish and strengthen tissues, aligning with the ritual's goal of supporting foetal development. Herbs with Sheeta Virya (cooling potency), like Nyagrodha (*Ficus benghalensis*) and Jeevaka (*Microstylis wallichii*), provide a calming effect, balancing Pitta Dosha and fostering a serene environment for both the foetus and mother. This combination of sweet taste and cooling properties is intended to enhance the ritual's effectiveness in promoting healthy pregnancy outcomes.

Milk, ghee, curd, or water are told to be used with specific herbs. The herbal drugs are specified to be macerated in milk or curd. They are all products from the same yoni, i.e., milk. Ksheera is best for Brimhana and hence best for Dhatu Poshana. Dadhi, being Abhishyandi, is Stree Vishesha, and Ghrita (ghee), being the sara or essence of Ksheera, is Dhatupushtikara (nourishing).

Quantity of Administration: In Pumsavana Samskara, the specific quantities of herbal preparations, such as the administration of approx. 1.5 ml of milk macerated with certain herbs, are meticulously prescribed to ensure efficacy and safety. The precise dosage, such as 3 or 4 drops (Bindu) or 1 Anjali (approx. 192 ml), is based on traditional Ayurvedic principles to balance the potent effects of the herbs without causing harm. This careful measurement is intended to deliver optimal therapeutic benefits while minimising potential side effects. The quantity is chosen to align with the goals of the ritual in promoting foetal health and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the Samskara.

Route of Administration: Instillation of medicament through the nose highlights its effect on the Shiras (head) and helps in stabilising the Indriyas and Manas of the mother, which is crucial in the continuation of pregnancy.

Why 8 buds to be used?: The use of 8 buds in Pumsavana Samskara is based on traditional Ayurvedic practices and symbolic significance. Scientifically, this number is likely chosen for its perceived balance and potency. In Ayurveda, numbers often hold symbolic meanings, and 8 is considered auspicious and balanced. The number may also represent a specific therapeutic dose believed to optimise the medicinal effects of the herbs. The precise number of buds is thought to harmonise with the ritual's objectives, enhancing the herbal treatment's efficacy and ensuring

a balanced approach to promoting foetal health and achieving the desired outcomes of the Samskara.

Hence, Pumsavana Samskara has a multi-dimensional effect on the individual. As the couple goes through this process, it strengthens their communication and, in turn, their bond. Chanting of mantras during the process gives it an added spiritual aspect, which helps in improving the Satva of the mother.²

The mantra, “may a male embryo enter your womb, as an arrow into a quiver. May a son be born after ten months”, means that the infant will live contentedly in the womb, much as an arrow is nestled pleasantly in a quiver. It is also a prayer that the child will spend the entire ten months in the womb, eliminating the chance of an early birth. The desire for male children unites husband and wife, and this Samskara enhances their bond. This sharing and support are psychologically very reassuring to the wife at this very important and challenging time in her life.

Every conscientious parent desires that their unborn child, male or female, be fully grown and healthy, free from illness, long-lived, clever, and attractive. Pumsavana Samskara is done with this goal in mind. The outcomes of the trials on the Pumsavana Samskara have shown that administration of this Samskara resulted in mothers who were previously prone to abortion, had problems with their metabolic systems, or had certain genetic diseases since birth, giving birth to healthy children. Researchers now acknowledge that the herbal concoction produced in the highly charged yajna vapours has an impact on molecular and cellular systems, including genetic systems.⁴

LIMITATION OF THE REVIEW

The limitations of this paper include the reliance on classical Ayurvedic texts, which may not align with modern scientific standards and lack empirical validation through controlled studies. The procedures and materials described, such as the use of specific herbs and mantras, are rooted in tradition, with limited evidence of their efficacy in contemporary medical contexts. Additionally, the focus on gender selection through Pumsavana raises ethical concerns. The study also lacks a comparative analysis with modern prenatal interventions, making it challenging to assess the true clinical relevance of these ancient practices in today's healthcare framework.

CONCLUSION

Garbha is said to be “Chetana,” indicating having the capacity to hear, learn, taste, and form memories. Science has demonstrated that the mother, family, and social environment have a profound impact on the developing human. Their personalities are formed in the womb, and the child will grow up to be like the environment that we give the fetus.

Pumsavana Samskara, performed properly post-specified Shodhana procedures, transforms the foetus into one with the best qualities and prepares the mother to withstand the strain of pregnancy. Hence, Pumsavana Samskara has a multifaceted approach in bestowing health to both the mother and foetus. It is

not confined solely to the birth of male progeny but aims for the birth of a healthy progeny, both male and female. Thus, Pumsavana Samskara emphasises the importance of nurturing the foetus to ensure its overall development and well-being.

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