



IMPORTANCE OF PHALA PRASHANA AND ANNA PRASHANA SAMSKARA IN CHILDHOOD NUTRITION: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

In Ayurveda, the word '*Samskara*' is introduced as "*Samskarao Hi Gunaantradhyanum,*" which means qualitative improvement is achieved by incorporating specific qualities. *Samskaras* are significant cultural rites performed throughout an individual's life from birth to death. Among the 16 *Samskaras*, *Phala Prashana* and *Anna Prashana Samskaras* are particularly important for the proper growth and development of the child. These *Samskaras* are essential for promoting healthy digestion, improving nutrient absorption, and supporting optimal growth. They help prepare the child to develop proper feeding habits, ensure adequate nutrition, prevent diseases, and boost the immune system. Furthermore, performing *Phala Prashana* and *Anna Prashana* not only aids in establishing a strong foundation for physical health but also allows mothers and caretakers to promote healthy eating habits and reduce the risks of food allergies. This contributes to the child's overall well-being and strength.

Keywords: *Samskara, Phala Prashana, Anna Prashana, Childhood Nutrition.*

INTRODUCTION

In *Ayurveda*, the word “*Samskara*” is introduced as “*Samskarao Hi Gunaantradhyanum*,” which means qualitative improvement is achieved by incorporating specific qualities.¹

Samskaras are significant cultural rites performed throughout an individual’s life from birth to death. As childhood nutrition plays a vital role in shaping the child’s physical, mental, and emotional well-being, so among the 16 *Samskaras*, *Phala Prashana* and *Anna Prashana Samskaras* are particularly important for the proper growth and development of the child. Both *Samskaras* explain the concept of weaning in *Ayurveda*. These *Samskaras* are explained during the *Ksheerapa period*, which suggests that the weaning food should be given in continuation with breast milk. *Phala Prashana Samskara* involves the introduction of fruit pulp and juice of various types of fruits to the child. In contrast, *Anna Prashana Samskara* is feeding the child with solid food. It signifies the transition from milk to solid foods marking an essential step in ensuring balanced nutrition for optimal growth and development of the child.

These *Samskaras* are essential for promoting healthy digestion, improving nutrient absorption, and supporting optimal growth. They also provide the opportunity for routine examination of the child at regular intervals to assess and reassess the developmental pattern and to adopt needed changes in the child’s lifestyle. They help prepare the child to develop proper feeding habits, ensure adequate nutrition, prevent diseases and malnutrition, and boost the immune system.

Childhood undernutrition remains a major health problem in society. To prevent nutritional deficiencies and promote proper growth and development of the child, *Phala Prashana* and *Anna Prashana Samskaras* are discussed here.

Phala Prashana Samskara:

Acharya Kashyapa is the only one who has explained *Phala Prashana* before the introduction of solid foods, as the baby should slowly get accustomed to tolerating and digesting lighter food materials first, followed by heavy food.²

The appropriate time for *Phala Prashana* is 6 months. Up to 6 months of age, the child is fed exclusively with breast milk.³

Fruit juices are considered ideal and are the best sources of Vitamin C and fibrous material. A baby accustomed to *Madhura Rasa* alone will experience difficulty adjusting to *Rasas* like *Katu*, *Tikta*, etc.

At this stage, *Phala Prashana* helps the baby adapt to other *Rasas* through *Madhura Amla Rasas* of fruits. *Acharya Kashyapa* considers dental eruption as the endpoint of *Phala Prashana*.⁴

Significance of *Phala Prashana Samskara:*

At the age of 6 months, breast milk is not enough to fulfil the requirements of a growing child. So, it is accurate to introduce light and digestible supplementary feeding at the beginning, such as fruit juices, i.e., *Phala Prashana*, before giving *Anna Prashana*.

Phala Prashana allows a gradual transition from breast milk or formula to solid foods, reducing the risk of digestive issues. It also promotes the growth of beneficial gut bacteria which is essential for immune system development and overall health. It also brings out the change of taste and the different taste sensations develops in the baby.

Fruit juices given to the child from the sixth month provide adequate Vitamin C, Vitamin D, and iron, which are deficient in the breast milk of the mother, cow, or any other milk.

In addition to *Agni Vriddhi*, it helps supplement extra nourishment, ease constipation, and keep children hydrated.

Phala Prashana also offers assessments of monosyllables, ambidextrous reach, sitting with their support, and recognizing strangers.

Anna Prashana Samskara:

It is the *Samskara* related to feeding the baby with solid food for the first time.

Solid food should be introduced only after the eruption of teeth. After teeth eruption, the child should be gradually taken away from breastfeed. At the same time, the child should be given *Ksheera* along with *Laghu* and *Brimhana Ahara*.⁵

However, this does not mean that the baby should be devoid of breast milk from the age of 8 months, i.e., the period of teeth eruption.

According to *Acharya Kashyapa*, the appropriate time for *Anna Prashana* is the 10th month. Different types of solid foods in quantity equal to the thumb should be given in his mouth three or five times after being made soft by mashing. From the 12th month onwards, it should be given after the desire for food and after observing the tolerance and digestive capacity of the child.⁶ Teeth eruption in children also begins around this age.

In *Astanga Hridaya*, *Acharya Vagbhata* opines that 6th month is the appropriate time for *Anna Prashana*.⁷ According to *Acharya Sushruta*, the child in the 6th month should be given light food and *hitakara*.⁸

Significance of Anna Prashana Samskara:

Anna Prashana initiates the proper enzymatic function of the gastrointestinal tract for the digestion of protein, carbohydrates, fat, etc. It brings out the change of taste and develops different types of taste sensations properly.

It is a good source of carbohydrates, protein, and essential micronutrients such as iron, which are crucial for preventing early childhood anaemia.

Since teeth eruption begins around the 10th month, proper dentition should also be considered.

Similarly, *Anna Prashana* also helps develop fine motor skills and offers assessments for hand-eye coordination, chewing and mouth coordination, immature pincer grasp, and standing with support.

Foods for Anna Prashana:⁹

Many carbohydrate-rich foods should be *Anna Prashana*'s first choice. Carbohydrates are easily available, easily digestible, and high-energy-yielding foods. Rice preparations like *Shali*, especially *Shashtika Shali*, should be taken.

Paddy should be taken and fried with the husk intact, which helps to restore micronutrients and vitamins. Later, the husk should be removed, and the rice should be powdered. Powdered rice can be mixed with different liquids, like milk, added with oil and salt, and given to the baby. This acts as nourishing food.

Similarly, wheat preparations like *Godhuma* and *Yava* are given by considering the congeniality and hypersensitivity of the food.

The above-explained *Shali*, *Godhuma*, and *Yava* preparations can be mixed with *Vidanga*, *Lavana*, oil, and *Ushna Avaleha* are prepared. This acts like delicious, nourishing food.

Baby with symptoms of increased *Pitta*, *Mridvika*, *Madhu*, and *Ghrita* are given with food.

If there are symptoms of increased *Vata*, the *Matulunga Rasa* is mixed with food and given.

The introduction of solid food varies with *Desha*, *Agni*, *Bala*, and *Kala*. It should be given one time, two times, three times, or any time when the baby feels hungry with utmost care.

DISCUSSION

Both *Phala Prashana* and *Anna Prashana Samskaras* are essential rituals in Ayurveda, playing a vital role in shaping a child's physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

As *Phala Prashana* involves feeding fruit pulp or juice from various types of fruits, it serves as an excellent source of essential vitamins and minerals that are crucial for the child's development. It plays a key role in boosting the child's immune system and promoting healthy growth. Immunity is a significant concern in early childhood, as children are more vulnerable to infections and illnesses.

Anna Prashana helps to ensure the child receives a balanced diet that supports the rapid physical and cognitive development during this stage, as breast milk can no longer meet the growing energy needs of the child as they approach their first year of age. Introducing *Anna Prashana* also helps develop the child's digestive system and fine motor skills as eating solid food encourages chewing and swallowing, which are essential milestones in the child's physical development. Additionally, including various foods can help establish a more diverse and balanced diet, promoting better eating habits.

By introducing these *Samskaras* at the proper time, they promote healthy digestion, improve nutrient ab-

sorption, and support optimal growth and development.

They help prepare the child to develop proper feeding habits, ensure adequate nutrition, prevent diseases, and boost the immune system. These *Samskaras* also allow us to assess the baby's developmental milestones.

Furthermore, performing *Phala Prashana* and *Anna Prashana* not only aids in establishing a strong foundation for physical health but also allows mothers and caretakers to promote healthy eating habits and reduce the risks of food allergies. This contributes to the child's overall well-being and strength.

CONCLUSION

Phala Prashana and *Anna Prashana Samskaras* are more than just traditional rituals; they represent important milestones in the child's nutritional development. With the child's increasing age, exclusive feeding is inadequate to meet the macro and micronutrients. So, the timely introduction of weaning foods is necessary during infancy. By nourishing the child with wholesome foods at the proper developmental stages, these *Samskaras* help contribute to the child's physical, mental, and emotional well-being. It also promotes fine motor development as children practice grasping, chewing, and swallowing skills.

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