

Mother - The Architect of Child

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Abstract: The present paper attempts to analyze the guidelines for “Mother and Child Care” released by Ayush ministry and to draw parallels between the ancient Indian practices for pregnant women and concerned scientific researches across the world. The study also reveals the significance of upholding the physical, psychological and emotional conditions of pregnant women and how their imbalances influence the child before and after birth. The mother, as an architect of a child, shapes most of the physical and mental condition of a child and must be treated with utmost care recognizing her great contribution to the human race.

Keywords: Ayush suggestions, Indian practices, Modern researches, Pregnant women.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The study attempts to analyze the guidelines for “Mother and Child Care” released by Ayush ministry and to draw parallels between the ancient Indian practices for pregnant women and modern scientific researches across the world. The study also explores the significance of upholding the physical, psychological and emotional conditions of pregnant women and how their imbalances influence the child before and after birth. The paper reveals the psychological state of a mother, during pregnancy and after delivery, has a direct effect on the health of a baby even after birth. Therefore, the mother can be proclaimed as the ‘architect’ in shaping most of the physical and mental condition of a child.

Recently, there is a great deal of controversy over a booklet “Mother and Child Care,” which has suggestions to manage the motherhood problems. The Indian government-funded Central Council for Research in Yoga and Naturopathy has made few recommendations related to pregnant women, on the occasion of Yoga Day on 21st June 2017. It advises, “pregnant women should detach themselves from desire, anger, attachment, hatred and lust; avoid meat, bad company and be with good people in stable and peaceful condition always”. The booklet suggests that pregnant women to have positive and spiritual thoughts besides reading and listening to the life histories of great personalities. It recommends hanging “good and beautiful pictures” on bedroom walls, which will have a positive impact on the fetus.

But, the hell breaks out when the media and some activists in India have severely criticized and accused the Indian Ministry of ‘imposing ideology’. They seek facts and scientific basis for such recommendations and argue that these recommendations are imprudent and lack discernible rationale. The controversy over the booklet is continued until Ayush Ministry releases another press note saying, “Some news reports carry an assertion that the booklet puts forward the “prescription” that “pregnant women in India” should “say no to sex after conception”. This is far from the truth. In fact, the word “no sex” does not feature at all in the booklet”. However, the argument over no meat and no sex has gone wild and made headline by many national and regional newspapers accusing it of a push from culturally hegemonic ‘vegetarianism lobby’.

In this context, the study examines the other nations and governments’ suggestions to the pregnant women earlier. To name a few, there is a National Childbirth Trust (NCT) in United Kingdom that offers information and support in pregnancy, birth and early parenthood. They campaign to improve maternity care and ensure better services and facilities for new parent. Natural Baby Project from San Diego offers support and care to pregnant women. Even the World Health Organization (WHO) publishes “Pregnancy, Childbirth, Postpartum and Newborn Care: a guide for essential practice” -3rd edition (PCPNC), which updates periodically to include recommendations from recently approved WHO guidelines relevant to maternal and prenatal health. It contains recommendations on pregnancy, mother and child care, interventions to improve preterm birth outcomes, post-partum depression, against use of tobacco, drugs, infections etc. during pregnancy and the care relevant to their countries. But, when our government suggests the same, it is sad that media and some ‘activists’ contest this issue attaching it to religion.

However, all that criticism seems to be an attempt to distort India's image and the ministry of Ayush declares that many of the reports were 'inaccurate' and 'misrepresented facts'. It states "The booklet puts together relevant and useful information culled out from many years of clinical practice in the fields of Yoga and Naturopathy".

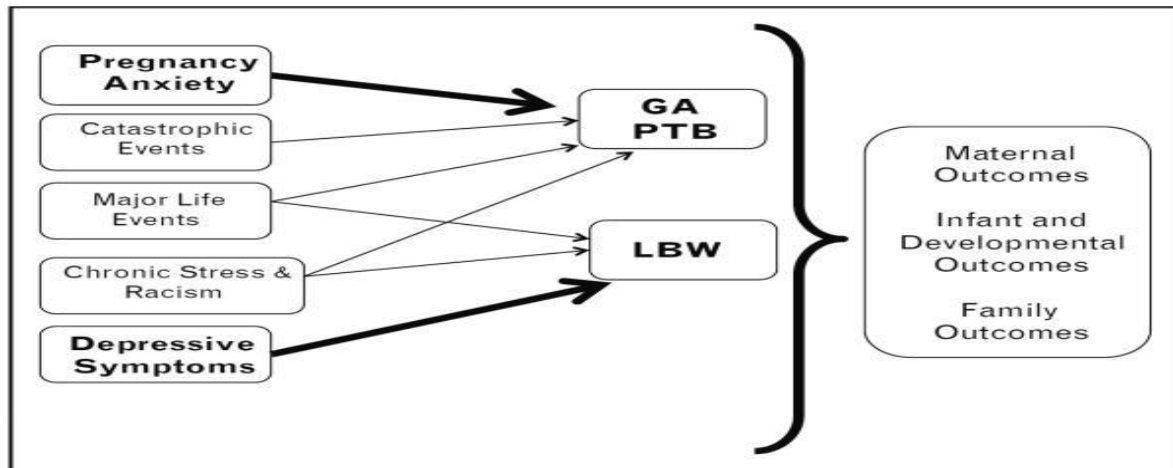
Consequently, the study tries to promote the facts and scientific theories with reference to the Ayush's booklet on mother and child care. It is a well known fact that every woman has to undergo a lot of physical and psychological changes during pregnancy and after delivery. According to NCT and WHO, the changes in hormones during pregnancy cause mood swings in the women. Hormones are the emotional triggers that make pregnant women to be more vulnerable, sensitive and fragile. There may be different types of emotions in pregnancy to make women experience a number of sensations during their journey through pregnancy to child birth. These may be sudden or gradual changes with an array of anxiety, anger, fear, stress, sadness, depression etc. at varied levels. The altered hormones result in strong and swift mood changes and some women experience very violent or extreme emotions which is a sign of a physical or psychological problem during pregnancy. As a precaution, the NCT suggests that pregnant woman has to remind herself every time whenever she feels restless that these changes are all designed to provide a healthy environment for the growing baby and to help her give birth by minimizing complications and problems.

The safety and happiness of pregnant women is given utmost importance by many governments highlighting the domestic abuse as a risk factor for maternal and infant well being. The NCT has concern over violence faced by pregnant mothers and warns the consequences of any form of abuse and violence inflicted on women before and after conception. According to the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), USA, the government defines domestic violence as: "any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality". It states a significant number of troubles result in domestic violence in pregnancy which can be physical (including miscarriage, low birth weight, placental separation, foetal fractures, rupture of uterus, preterm labour, long lasting physical disability) and/or psychological (including depression, anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder, flashbacks, nightmares etc.). Further, it is established by National Collaborating Centre for Women's and Children's Health (UK), that a US study's findings of major correlation between pregnancy, domestic violence and suicide. It exposes that women who have experienced abuse or violence are five times more likely to attempt suicide; three times more likely to be identified as depressed or psychotic and other dangerous misuse of alcohol and drugs. The UK government's Department of Health set up the Domestic Abuse and Pregnancy Advisory Group in 2005, identifying many cases of domestic abuse and providing care during pregnancy.

In this context, balancing both hormonal changes and any form of abuse during pregnancy is highly difficult and many researches strive to sensitize people on this subject. A research by Prof. Curt A. Sandman, Elysia P. Davis and co. from the University of California shows how a fetus receives chemical signals from agonized mother during pregnancy that can have a negative impact on baby's development. The study declares that psychological state of a mother, during pregnancy and after delivery, has a direct impact on the health of a baby after birth. Researchers reveal a variety of factors in the womb can affect a baby's health and found that babies can be depressed after their birth if mother is depressed during pregnancy. They have emphasized on mother's emotional consistency, that must be taken care of.

The National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), in its PUBMED journal has published a study that pregnancy brings up emotions that have not been used to experience earlier and suggested an expert's advice on prenatal and post natal problems and to have complete analysis for the well being of mother and child. In Western countries, the experts and doctors focus on why the emotional imbalance and how to cope with mood swings in pregnancy along with general health. The doctors work together with family members, especially with the spouse, educating them to create a safe and happy environment for pregnant women. The research explains that there is substantial evidence that anxiety, depression, and stress in pregnancy are risk factors for adverse outcomes for mothers and children. It explores that anxiety in pregnancy is associated with shorter gestation and has adverse implications for fetal neurodevelopment and child outcomes that is shown in the figure below. The picture is a summary of evidence on stress, depression and anxiety. Here, GA refers to gestational age at birth; LBW refers to low birth weight; PTB refers to preterm birth.

Fig.1.Courtesy: NCBI, US National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health



For a detailed information on Fig.1, PubMed Central (PMC) is available for reading, on biomedical and life sciences journal literature at the U.S. National Institutes of Health's National Library of Medicine (NIH/NLM).

Another study by Prof Alytia Levendosky, Michigan State University, reveals that domestic abuse affects unborn children. The study finds a direct link and a strong relationship between a mother's prenatal abuse or domestic violence by a male partner and postnatal trauma symptoms in their children during the first year of their life. Prof. Levendosky says, "For clinicians and mothers, knowing that the prenatal experience of their domestic violence can directly harm their babies may be a powerful motivator to help mothers get out of these abusive situations". Thus, prenatal abuse cause changes in the mother's stress response systems, increasing levels of the stress hormone Cortisol, in both mother and fetus. Prof Levendosky warns that Cortisol is a neurotoxin which has damaging effects on the brain when elevated to excessive levels leading to emotional problems for the baby after birth. As part of her research program, she examines physiological factors, behavioral factors, as well as relational factors, including the investigations on violence and its effects that are transmitted from parent to child. Another important observation is that many domestic violence survivors do not believe the abuse will affect their child until the child is old enough to understand what is going on. However, it is believed that these research findings create sensitization among people that the violence is affecting the child even before it is born.

Therefore, the summary of the various researches can be condensed into the Ayush's suggestions of 'pregnant women should detach themselves from desire, anger, attachment, hatred and lust; avoid bad company and be with good people; stay in stable and peaceful condition always'.

Thus, creating a healthy and peaceful environment for pregnant women is given utmost importance by many governments highlighting the domestic abuse as a risk factor for maternal and infant well being. It is also observed that many countries adopt scientific courses, classes and conduct awareness programs at community levels, online classes for support and guidance on pregnancy and child birth. Interestingly, some countries include YOGA programs to support Women's Whole Health. For example, Jen Keeler & Yoga Momma at Seattle in America offers the Yoga Moms, specially designed plan for supporting and leveraging pregnant women. For nearly 12 years, the Yoga Moms center is conducting counseling, workshops and teacher training programs throughout western Washington. Primarily, the center teaches women in transition to motherhood, helping them to navigate and build community in parenting. It has the experts who have extensive training and experience in prenatal and postnatal yoga, reproductive health and menopausal support. The Yama Yoga Studios in Qatar, Doha offers classes in prenatal and postnatal Yoga. It also offers courses in guiding people through a sound meditation for inner peace and a state of relaxation which is also an ancient Indian practice. Even the Prime Minister Narendra Modi says, "The world is connected with India because of Yoga". Recognizing the significance of Yoga, the UN General Assembly has brought a Resolution, proclaiming June 21st as the International Day of Yoga that has been adopted by nearly 180 countries across the world. Interestingly, while the other countries considering the Indian Yoga and its ancient practices to create a secure and peaceful surroundings for a healthy motherhood, in India there is a complete negligence over the same. Further, a seething criticism explodes whenever any Indian Ministry make few recommendations attached to Yoga. While other nations try to learn Yoga from India, practicing it as a science and alternative therapy for many psychological and physical problems, some people condemn it attributing Yoga to a 'religious ideology'. The same situation is prevailed when the ministry promotes traditional and alternative medicine. The booklet is actually published in 2013, puts together relevant facts culled out from clinical practice in the fields of yoga and

naturopathy and the traditional wisdom accumulated over many centuries. In this backdrop, the study now focuses on how pregnancy is treated in traditional India.

In ancient Indian practices, a traditional method of “Garbha Sanskar” is referred as a guide for pregnant women in prenatal education. Garbha Sanskar is a very old practice which can be traced back to the Vedas which date to 1500-500 BC. Garbha sanskar is a Sanskrit term, which literally means ‘education in the womb’. It is traditionally believed that a child’s mental and behavioral development starts as soon as it is conceived. Its personality begins to form shape in the womb, and this can be influenced by the mother’s state of mind during pregnancy. It is found that practicing Garbha Sanskar benefits both the mother and fetus which results in a well-balanced and healthy baby. According to ancient scriptures, the fetus in the womb registers everything that the mother goes through - mental, emotional, physical, etc., and it registers everything in the form of impressions that also form the basis of life. The fetus responds to the mother’s moods as well. Indian mythology is filled with many stories that illustrate the power of Garbha Sanskar. It also finds reference in the “Mahabharata” which is written roughly around 400 BC. Some of the best known mythological stories about Garbha sanskar are Abhimanyu, Prahlad, Hanuman and Ashtavakra.

Abhimanyu, the son of Arjuna and Subhadra is one of the most famous warrior in Mahabharata. Abhimanyu learns the art of breaking into the war, called Chakravyuh or Padmavyuh when he is in Subhadra’s womb as Arjuna is narrating it to Subhadra. Unaware of the fact that the foetus is listening, Arjuna describes Subhadra how to go through but not exit from Chakravyuh (a particular war strategy of multi-tier defensive formation that looks like a blooming lotus). Later, Abhimanyu is trained in all types of warfare, but he does not know how to come out successfully from the Chakravyuh. When Abhimanyu participates in the Kurukshetra war, he remembers his father’s story and is able to employ the strategy that he has heard from his mother’s womb. Though, Abhimanyu is able to defeat many great warriors, he is finally killed by Kauravas as he is not able to listen how to escape from Chakravyuh.

Another story is about Prahlad, from Indian mythology who is described listening to devotional prayers and stories about Lord Vishnu from his mother’s womb. As a result, the boy, Prahlad has become a passionate devotee of Lord Vishnu, though he is born into a family of demons who are on warfare against Gods. Prahlad’s father, King Hiranyakashyapa learns about the boy’s devotion to Vishnu who is his archetypal enemy. The king, furious with rage, tries to shun his son from worshipping. Finally, the king threatens to kill the boy which leads to the downfall of demon father’s evil empire.

Another baby listening from mother’s womb is Ashtavakra, who is a sage and a celebrated character in the mythologies of the Hindu Epics. It is described that Ashtavakra’s mother Sujata wishes to have the most intelligent sage there ever was. So she pays attention to the classes taught by her father and husband during her pregnancy. In a class taught by her husband, the unborn baby speaks out to correct his father Kahoda. But, Kahoda feels insulted and curses his son to be born deformed. Thus, Astavakra is said to be born physically challenged. Since he has learnt from the teachings of his learned father and grandfather while in the womb of his mother, he has become a genius. The story goes on to say that because of his intelligence, he is able to fix his physical handicap. Therefore, in the end he becomes handsome and the most intelligent sage of his time. Though, the above stories are said to be myths, the study finds many similarities in modern scientific researches and Indian practices of Garbha Sanskar. Ayush’s statement of ‘pregnant women to have positive and spiritual thoughts besides reading and listening to the life histories of great personalities’ is demonstrated by the studies mentioned here. The saying ‘positivity begets positivity’ is true in this case.

According to Harvard professor Heidelise Als, Professor of Psychology, Harvard Medical School, “the womb is such an ideal environment for the unborn child”. Her research shows that unborn infants respond to more than just physical touch, they respond to their mother’s emotional state as well. She says that when mothers watch sad films, babies move less. But when a mother laughs, ultrasound images show that “the baby kind of trampoline bounces.” And when the mother laughs harder, the baby bounces even more exuberantly which is fascinating”. There’s such an interaction between mother and child at all levels. Dr. Als is also the Director for Neurobehavioral Infant and Child Studies at Boston Children’s Hospital who has spent most of her life to test the effectiveness of the Newborn Individualized Developmental Care and Assessment Program (NIDCAP). Her study aims at the lifelong impact and risks of physical, psychological and intellectual problems in babies.

The research study published by American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), 26 August 2013 says that ‘Babies Learn to Recognize Words in the Womb’. The new research by Dr. Eino Partanen, Cognitive Neuroscientist of the University of Helsinki, has proved that the babies in the womb can hear the rhythm of speech, rhythm of music etc. He says that “the fetus can learn much more detailed information than we previously thought and that the memory traces are detectable after birth”. Therefore, it is good to be careful what we say around a pregnant woman. Eino Partanen explains the science around what happens when the mother talks to her baby in her womb and explores the potential benefits of this early communication. His findings are available in the “Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences”. Earlier,

in 1988, the world famous study by Professor of Psychology Peter Hopper, Queen's University at Belfast has also proved that newborns recognize the theme song from their mother's favorite soap opera. Prof. Hopper's team has established the world's first research centre dedicated to the study of fetal behavior. He says, "Nothing much has been known about fetal behavior. The general view has been that new-borns are not able to do very much: they are born with reflexes but have no memory. We have been able to prove memory develops earlier." More recent studies have expanded on the idea of fetal learning, indicating that newborns already familiarize themselves with sounds of their parent's native language.

In the course of adding more of facts to Indian mythology, the study provides the Scottish Government, NHS's (Health Scotland) entire procedure of 'Hearing and listening in the womb' from 0 to 24 weeks and then till birth, with a practical research. It says between 0 and 16 weeks is an early stage the unborn baby is surrounded by sound, vibrations and motions which are 'felt' through the skin and skeletal systems. In 2008, Graven and Browne found that voices can be heard in the womb above the natural noises of the mother and other distorted noises from outside. Intonation patterns of pitch, stress and rhythm can be heard clearly as well as music. There are various studies into fetal listening. In 1992, Shahidullah and Hepper illustrate that reactive listening begins at around 16 weeks. This is significant as the ear is not fully complete until 24 weeks. At 16 weeks the unborn baby is particularly receptive to its mother's voice. It is fascinating that around 24 weeks, the babies develop preferences for music while in the womb. Fridman's study in 2000 found that the babies' heart rates increased and that they moved around in rhythm to the music. Once born, the infant responds more to certain music. Prof. Patricia K. Kuhl, Chairperson of Bezos Family Foundation, specialist in early childhood learning and a professor of speech and hearing sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle, declares that babies are listening and learning and remembering during the last stages of pregnancy and their brains do not wait for birth to start absorbing information.

Further, Studies by DeCasper and Fifer and Kolata published by American Association for the Advancement of Science, found that unborn babies respond to the rhythm of being read to. The development of listening before birth is vital to the progression of listening and attention skills after birth. Thus, these findings draw parallels between science and stories i.e proven facts from the research world and Indian mythological stories of Abhimanyu, Prahlada etc.

Now, the final reference is the vegetarian food that is suggested by Ayush and criticized by others. The food is said to be a dynamic force that interacts with the human on the physical body level, the mind emotional level, and also the energetic and spiritual level. It is an ancient Indian practice of balancing the emotional body with food. In Ayurveda, a dietary system has been developed by the ancient masters and sages thousands of years in working with the mind to support an individual that is perfected by the ancient forms of yoga and meditation. The Ayurveda emphasizes the vegetarian or Sattvik diet for healthy living, particularly for keeping our minds clear, happy and at peace. Having studied the emotional disturbances during pregnancy, the recommendation is acceptable to keep the pregnant women in a calm and peaceful condition. Sattvik means not only vegetarian food, but food rich in Prana 'life-force' like organic food, avoiding canned and processed food, and foods grown with pesticides, herbicides, chemical fertilizers, hormones or anything unnatural. It also means properly prepared fresh foods with love and care, will add to their Sattvik quality. However, the study does not support any religion or food habit as it is purely individual's choice.

On the other hand, the western world has adopted the vegetarian philosophy along with Yoga, the Sattvic way of eating is also promoted. It is apt to remember Sir Paul McCartney's (an English singer-songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, and composer) words: "If slaughterhouses had glass walls, everyone would be a vegetarian. Moreover, the vegetarianism has its roots in 570B.C and some of the most prominent ancient Greek philosophers like Pythagoras, Empedocles, Theophrastus, Plotinus, Plutarch, Porphyry and Plato are followers of vegetarianism. Pythagoras is famous for his contributions to math, music, science, and philosophy and he has created a lasting 'vegetarian legacy' in the West. It is his philosophy which promotes the idea that all animals, not just humans, have souls. Pythagoras is said to be one of the earliest campaigners for ethical vegetarianism and his teachings are accepted by many cultures across the world.

To conclude, the study defends Ayush's suggestions to Mother and Child care by providing extensive authenticated facts over the same. Thus, all the illustrations, whether it is modern researches or Yoga Mom courses or ancient Garbha Sanskar practices, establish the fact that pregnant women must live in a positive environment, think positive and remain happy and peaceful to have a healthy child. The government has to include sensitization and awareness program along with the guidelines. Thus, woman, as the architect of child has to be properly taken care of, recognizing her great contribution to the human race as Mother.

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