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REVIEW ARTICLE

GARBHA SAMSKARA - PRENATAL EDUCATION: CONCEPTS, PRACTICE AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

A couple planning to conceive and visiting Fertility clinic demanding conception of healthy, intellectual offspring with other desired traits is a common sight now a days. As a result of this, the booming fertility markets now also provide techniques like In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) and Pre implantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) for acquiring a desirable progeny. The influence of diet, psyche and other routines of mother on the fetus has been talked since ages. Ayurveda describes simple methods to procure a healthy offspring and the planning of which starts from the selection of partner. These methods are popularized as 'garbha samskara' worldwide. The present paper deals with the concepts, current practices and future prospects of garbha samskara.

Keywords: Garbha Samskara, Ayurveda, Designer baby, pre conception, antenatal care

Introduction:

A healthy, intellectual, beautiful offspring with a long life is desired by all. Today in the fast competitive world, all the parents are longing to achieve an offspring with marked excellence in all fields. Training of baby to induce desired psychological traits in the womb during pregnancy has its roots in cultural tradition and folklore. The practice of the same professionally with the help of workshops and training are gaining popularity since a decade. Working couples prefer a planned pregnancy to avoid chaos in normal routine and can get benefit of bringing the new member of the family at desired time. This has led further interest in enhancing the quality of offspring to meet with the demands of the society.

Science reveals the fact that the anatomical, physiological & psychological built up of offspring is dependent on parents who provide 'genes' for specific characters to the child. Yet the effect of diet, surrounding, maternal emotions, diseases like tuberculosis and other infections, medications^{1,2} all have proven effect on the fetus in the womb.

Pre conceptional and antenatal influence on the offspring is discussed at length in Ayurveda. Parents health status, age, consanguineous marriage (gotra), psyche while performing coitus, diet, rituals, regime during pregnancy influence the physical, psychological and spiritual constitution of the progeny. A planned pregnancy by the couple after undergoing body purification and observing diet and certain rules

mentioned in Ayurveda throughout pregnancy procures a desired progeny³. This concept is practiced by many traditional and Ayurveda practitioners all over India under the name of 'garbha Samskara'.

Concepts of Garbha Samskara:

Garbha Samskara is made of two words Garbha and Samskara.

Garbha means fetus and Samskara means to replace bad qualities by good ones.⁴ Samskaras are ritual and regimen that inspire the individual the importance of new role and to observe the accompanying rules.

Since ancient times, in tradition, the Samskaras been considered as physical representation of a symbolic change in the life of an individual.⁵ Similarly in developing embryo they are proposed to impart changes at physical, mental, spiritual and emotional level.

Thus, garbha samskara is a method for a worth full child, to endow future generations with good health, noble quality and high intelligence by improving the innate quality of mankind. It is achieved by educating fetus for attaining a civilized, cultured, brilliant, beautiful, disease free offspring with physical strength and other qualities like humanity, sincerity, compassion, spirituality, loyalty, courage etc. which are the need for present era. In the 21st century with the development of science in the form of GOD's particle and other astounding technological growth on one side; there is increase in the prevalence of inhumane activities, crimes, addictions, suicidal attempts, terrorist activities etc. which is a matter of utmost concern for our future generation.

The progeny with bad character even if born in high family destroys the reputation of whole family.⁶

Ayurvedic concepts of Pre-conceptual care:

Garbhadhana vidhi (method of conception) is described in Ayurveda in the form of certain rituals and regime to be followed before achievement of conception to acquire a desired

progeny. Further the antenatal regimes and rules with do's and don'ts comprise of Garbha Samskara, as the effect of all the activities, diet and environment during the antenatal period too affects the development of the fetus.

The preparation of achieving a healthy progeny starts before the selection of partner. It is said that the couples should be of different gotra (clan), of proper age with maturity of all Dhatus (seven body tissues), and should not be suffering from diseases.^{7,8,9}

Further the couple should undergo body purification by body purification (Panchakarma) procedures like Vamana, Virechana, and Basti and should be brought to normalcy by prescribed diet.¹⁰ They should perform Putresti yagna, which is to bring spiritual powers.¹¹

Celibacy for 3 months and especially during the first three days of menstruation is must to avoid offspring with less longevity and deformed parts and ensuring best quality of male and female gametes (shukra and rajah).¹² The female should observe strict regimen during menstruation period (rajah kala) – Rajaswala paricharya.¹³ Apart from various deformities of fetus conceived during menstrual cycle such as blindness, deafness, skin diseases and many more, other consequence include intrauterine death of fetus or the child born will be having less longevity.^{14,15} The best period for conception is ritukala that is 12 days from 4th day of menstruation. Selected days for coitus, odd days for achieving female progeny and even days for male progeny (except 11th day and 13th day) are to be considered.¹⁶ One of the sex selection methods adopted for achieving desired sex of fetus as in Shettles method is days of performing intercourse.¹⁷ Particular Hymn is to be recited at the time of coitus with desirable position (supine) of the couple to achieve diving blessings from Brahma, Vishnu, Soma and Surya to procure a courageous son.¹⁸

Observance of all these methods before conception ensures beeja shuddhi, kshetra shuddhi and mano shuddhi of the couple.

After conception:

As soon as the conception is achieved, the female has to follow certain regimen and code of conduct throughout the pregnancy.

Whatever conduct, behavior, activities are followed by parents during the pregnancy, the same characteristics are found in the offspring. The character and inclination to particular diet are also passed on by parents.¹⁹ The behavior of the mother during pregnancy including activities like reading, listening, thinking, dreaming etc, all in one way or the other influence the *psyche* of the child. External circumstances, actions, and thoughts are perceived in the cerebral cortex and subsequently affectively reacted to in the hypothalamus. The hypothalamus, in turn, directs the endocrine system and the autonomic nervous system to produce affect-appropriate physiological changes. For instance, sudden fear in a pregnant women quickly results in the hypothalamus directing the sympathetic division of the autonomic nervous system to make the heart beat faster, the palms to sweat, the blood pressure to rise, the pupils to dilate and the muscles to tense. The hypothalamus also directs the endocrine system to flood the woman's body with hormones,²⁰ which pass through the placenta to the fetus. In one more study²¹ it was found that the infants of mothers who were accepting of their pregnancies and who looked forward to the arrival of the baby were much more likely to give birth to a emotionally and physically healthy child than mothers who had negative attitudes towards the pregnancy and were "rejecting."

Those women who are devoted in their worship of Gods and the Bramhins and cherish a clean soul in a Clean body during pregnancy are sure to be blessed with good, virtuous and generous children; whereas a contrary conduct during the period is sure to be attended with contrary fruits.²²

Fetus resembling snake, scorpion, and other abnormal shapes are delivered from womb of mother who was indulged in deadly sins and

excessive unrighteous behavior.²³ The above mentioned resemblance of fetus with animals refers to congenital abnormalities as a result of non observance of antenatal code and conduct. Teratogenic malformations in fetus because of drugs used in pregnancy, environmental toxins, alcohol, infections, lack of nutrients has been observed.²⁴

Malformed child is due to atheism – disbelief in GOD sinful and inauspicious actions done in previous life by parents, and aggravation of *Dosha* during pregnancy.²⁵

Effect of emotions and thought on Progeny

Cool and calm mind, happiness is essential for conception.

If the couple is not in a state of mental stability and calmness, even if they are physically fit, they cannot give birth to a healthy child.²⁶

The woman desirous of having a child resembling to the persons of any specific country should use diet, mode of life, behavior and garments identical to persons of that very country and also by the same methods as practiced by them. The surroundings, persons, animals, money, grain, clothes, ornaments, jewels, chariot, weapons, garden, bed etc. all things should be as per the desirable progeny. The woman should practice similar behavior in terms of faith, hearing, truth, honesty, humanity, charity, compassion and politeness, courtesy as she wishes to be the nature of her child.^{6,27}

The procedure to be adopted for achieving progeny of desired sex is known as 'Pumsavana karma'. This procedure can be done before conception or immediately after conception for achieving a healthy progeny.²⁸

However, this procedure is done with three aims²⁹

Garbha grahanaya - Before conception for achieving healthy progeny. Garbha sthapanartha - For proper implantation and stability immediately after conception

Putra apatyā janānārtha - For desired sex of child before three months of pregnancy

Again, this procedure is done during 'Pushya nakshatra'. Many different opinions are found in classics regarding duration and method of performing pumsavana karma. The karma includes nasal instillation (Nasya) of certain herbs like Vata Shunga, Laxmana, Shivlingi etc with cow's milk.

Antenatal Regimen (Garbhini paricharya): After achieving conception the mother has to follow certain do's and don'ts and follow a regimen to maintain her healthy during pregnancy and help in proper growth and development of the offspring. These regimen are known as Ggarbhini paricharya which are mentioned as General (Samanya) and month wise (Masanumasik).³⁰

The woman who follows and observes all monthwise dietetic regimen will remain healthy and will deliver a child possessing good health, energy, voice, and will be much superior as compared to other family members.

Hence, the regimen is not only for proper growth and development of child but it also ensures healthy status of woman, normal delivery and no post partum complications.³¹

A pregnant mother's diet not only sensitizes the fetus to those smells and flavors, but physically changes the brain directly impacting what the infant eats and drinks in the future.

Understanding the factors that determine choice and ingestion, particularly the early factors, is important in designing strategies to enhance the health of the infant, child, and adult.³²

Dauhrida:

During the fourth month of pregnancy the fetus expresses its desires for things of taste, smell etc through mother. In the female whose wishes and desires - not being honoured and gratified - lead to the birth of a paralyzed, hump-backed, crooked-armed, lame, dwarfed, defect-eyed, and a blind child. Hence the desires of the (garbhini) mother should be gratified, which would ensure

the birth of a strong, vigorous, and long-lived son.³³

Ayurveda also describes certain dietetics and mode of life contraindicated for the female during pregnancy as use of such diet and routine may harm the fetus. They are termed as 'Garbhopghatkara bhavas'.³⁴

These factors include excessive use of Vata, Pitta or Kapha dosha dominant diet, eating pungent, sour, heavy, putrefied, dry substances. Also wearing of red clothes, sleeping during day time, travelling on uneven path, looking at awful things or listening to exciting stories and others are restricted which are well practiced in traditional and folklore.

The consequences of non observance of these rules lead to an unhealthy progeny with congenital abnormalities or less longevity.

Current practices of Garbha Samskara:

Planned pregnancy makes the couple well prepared physically, psychologically, socially and emotionally for future events. Hence, the concept of garbha Samskara in a planned pregnancy has increasingly gained popularity. As a result, number of books in English and vernacular languages, websites, workshops, blogs are accessible for couples planning conception and expecting mothers. Garbha samskara workshops help in training and implementing the garbha samskara practices throughout the pregnancy. The couples participate in such training programmes or workshops for inducing desired traits and educate the offspring in the womb. These workshops include training the couple especially expecting mothers for healthy diet, Yoga, Positive thinking, Reading, Meditation, Prayer, Homa, Yagna, Music therapy, Aroma therapy, Colour therapy and even communicating with the offspring in the womb. The books available on garbha Samskara comprises of diet planning, herbal formulations for proper growth and development and for minor ailments suffered during pregnancy, yoga and meditation. It is

very regular practice among couples to acquire such books and follow the simple practices for a perfect suprajā. (healthy progeny)

Garbha Samskara in different cultures:

In Korea Taegyo refers to a set of practices and beliefs related to prenatal development. Taegyo is said to be regulations that a mother should observe in order to have good effects on her unborn child during maternity. Also, it is the education occurring in the period of maternity and considered that when an expectant mother tries to be careful of everything, prudent in speech and action, and keep distance from evil thoughts, it affects the unborn child in good ways. In other words, Taegyo is all the effort for the mother to provide the best environment for the fetal development. This is based on the belief that fetal environment has a huge influence on the fetal development and the whole life of the baby. Instructions about t'aegyo tended to vary greatly. They could be very simple, such as simply urging a daughter-in-law to maintain a gentle attitude, to much more complex lists of do's and don'ts. For example, expectant mothers were encouraged to surround themselves with beautiful sights and smells, while refraining from harsh or frivolous speech. Impure behavior was to be avoided at all costs. Similarly, it was said that pregnant women should eat only fruit that was free from blemish or disfigurement. Nor should a woman kill any animals while pregnant, because that violent intention would have a negative impact upon her unborn child. Likewise, it was universally understood in Korea that a pregnant woman would never attend any sort of funeral. For fathers, the instructions tended to be simpler. Because half of the child comes from the father, the father was told to maintain a pure and upright attitude prior to pregnancy, and even afterwards. He was also reminded of his responsibilities to help ensure that the mother was surrounded with a caring and nurturing environment.³⁵

Future prospects of Garbha Samskara:

The term "designer baby" refers to a baby whose genetic makeup has been artificially selected by genetic engineering combined with In Vitro fertilization to ensure the presence or absence of particular genes or characteristics. However, the technique is not limited to screening for genetic and hereditary disorders, but is also used for cosmetic reasons. So by these techniques one can induce desired traits like beauty with sparkling personality, enhanced immune system, resistance to diseases, increased IQ levels, desired color of skin etc. This procedure is done with sophisticated techniques of ICSI (intra cytoplasmic sperm Injection) combined with PGD (pre implantation Genetic Diagnosis) which is a costly affair. Only the rich can afford this and the ethical and legal considerations of the same are debatable. There is a wide variety of biological risks with genetic modifications. New diseases may emerge which will be difficult to prevent.

Ayurveda gives natural, scientific and simplified methods of obtaining a desirable progeny. By adopting these simple methods and following the rule, restrictions and specific regimen, one can procure a desirable, healthy, intelligent, beautiful progeny with strength, vigor and longevity.

Best of male and female gamete (sperm and ovum – through purification) following regimes before conception, atma, suddha garbhashaya, proper kala (ritukala), and observing garbhini paricharya properly will ensure timely and normal delivery of a healthy offspring.³⁶

These natural methods are practiced since ages under tradition and are getting popularized world wide. More scientific evaluation and researches on the same can pave a way for 'Ayurvedic Designer babies' which will be more simplified, natural and legally and ethically acceptable.

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