

CHILD-BIRTH AND CHILD-CARE IN MEDIEVAL ANDHRA SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

People in the primitive society imagined that the universe was going on according to the will of some supernatural power. Since most of the people were ignorant and animistic in nature unable to understand the rational fact, they were guided by priests to perform certain things to prevent or to get relief from the disease. In course of time, there appeared many deities each of whom was believed to be the creator or curer of a certain disease. The hygienic and curative habits were cultivated among the masses in the form of religious customs and it seems to be the background to the continuance of the cult of worshipping the health-deities in medieval Andhra Society. Generally the diseases of children were attributed to the demoniac or *graha* influences. In obstetrics and paediatrics, many hygienic measures conducive for the prevention of infections and many healing techniques, are found incorporated into the social and religious customs of the people.

People in the primitive society imagined that the universe was going on according to the will of some supernatural power. That power was understood by them in the context of their life. The relics of the Indus valley reveals the fact that the people in the society believed that this universe was being administered by a divine couple, i.e. Paśupati, the Lord of Beasts and the Mother Goddess. Paśupati was worshipped as the protector of cattle and plants which can be understood from the seals where he was depicted as

surrounded by animals. The Mother Goddess was worshipped as the guardian of the nature protecting the human-beings from the natural calamities and the epidemics as the mother at home gives food for the health and protects the children and other dependants in the family from the health hazards. It reveals the fact that the people tried to understand the role of the first couple who created this world in the context of their socio-cultural background. Paśupati and the Mother Goddess were worshipped by them in the form

of *linga* and *yoni* as representing the generative organs. It indicates the level of understanding of the inhabitants of the Indus Valley about nature's law. An image of goddess having sprouts emerging out of her womb can be seen on a seal. On another seal, the goddess was among the branches of the pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa* Linn) which is still regarded as sacred and very much valuable medicinally. Especially its breeze, its bark and roots are prescribed by the physicians for the barren women to get children. The medical lexicons described their health-promising nature and stresses on the greater efficacy in curing the gynaec disorders. Another seal from Mohenjodaro shows us the male god horned and three faced, sitting in yogic posture and still another seal gives his representations as surrounded by beasts, the elephant, the tiger, the rhinoceros and the buffalo with a couple of deer at his feet. The yogic posture in which he sat as his legs bent double, heel to heel reminds us of Lord Śiva, the Lord of Yuga. It indicates the prevalence of yoga system in those days which might have been aimed at achieving good mental health. The animals depicted around the god, creates a doubt whether they had knowledge about the medicinal uses of animal substances like horns, gall, urine, dung, etc. The foreign travellers who visited south India, during the medieval period, referred to the wide

usage of substances of animals such as civet, the horns, the teeth, blood, claws and everything of rhinoceroses¹ and the bright pigment of animals such as cow, monkey, goat etc.² Though the Atharvanic medicine was mostly vegetarian, the later writers like Caraka and Suśruta made mention of many animal substances in medicines. Thus, this observation gives us an idea of how some plants and animals were deified on account of their life-promising and life-protecting nature. It can be surmised here that some intelligent people who became the priestly class in the society, observed the causes of health disorders with their preventive and curative methods, might have introduced the cult of the worship of protecting deities along with the life-protecting plants. Since most of the people were ignorant and animistic in nature, unable to understand the rational facts, they were guided by the priests to perform certain things to prevent or to get relief from the disease. In course of time, there appeared many deities each of whom was believed to be the creator or curer of a certain disease.

It seems that, in course of time, the intellectual class tried to cultivate in the minds of the people a regard for tradition, but continued their efforts to find out many new things with their intellectual perception. They observed that it was better to make the people follow the regula-

tions conducive to human welfare out of the fear of the goddess whom they believed as omni-present and on whom they had an implicit faith rather than out of the fear of the political authority, who could not look at every detail into their habits, customs, etc. That's why, the intellectual class laid down in the *smṛtis* that the king had nothing to do with the customs and cultural habits of the people in his kingdom.³ It was only when the people found anything improper in the customs, approached the kings to implement their social decision effectively in the society, then only the kings were expected to interfere in the social matters. It was how the hygienic and curative habits were cultivated among the ignorant masses in the form of religious customs and it seems to be the background to the continuance of the cult of worshipping the health-deities in medieval Andhra Society.

In Andhradesha, the worship of the seven sisters was very much common during this period. The information regarding this can be seen from the epigraphical and the literary sources. In the archaeological remains excavated at Pedabankur (Karimnagar district, Andhra Pradesh) which belonged to 300-200, B.C. we find the images of three goddesses. A goddess shown as elevating her breast from below with her both hands, reminds us of the Mother-goddess.⁴ She might have been

worshipped to be blessed with good crops and children. The names of the deities worshipped for child-birth and child-care were Poturaju, Akati, Mulaguramma, Ellamma, Kunalamma, Errapulamma, Ennemma, Balamma etc.

WORSHIP OF THE DEITIES :

The woman as a mother received great respect in the society. To be blessed with more children was a great thing in the then society. The woman who had only one or two was also considered as a *vandhya* (barren woman).⁵ The woman who had no children received no respect and such women used to perform many things such as *vratas* (religious regimen) to get children. They used to take the popular herbs intended for that purpose. In addition to it, they used to pray Gods and Goddesses to be blessed with children.⁶

In the *jar.apadas* of Andhradesha, people believed that Kunalamma was the goddess who would give children to the childless women if properly worshipped. The woman who had no children worshipped her by food offerings and white saree with red border. That saree was known as Kunalammacira and was worn by the woman who worshipped her.⁷ The woman rises early in the morning and takes the holy-bath in a river. Then she goes to the deity who is seated under a pipal tree and performs the circumambulation around the

goddess. She continues it for forty days (a *maṇḍala*) and at the end, she makes the offerings along with the saree with red border which she wears afterwards. Sitting in the river early in the morning for fifteen minutes and taking in the breath under the pipal tree help to bring the gynaec disorders and dhātus into normalcy. The medical men prescribed the intake of the pipal bark in the powdered form along with honey or its decoction by the woman who aspires to get children. Basavarāju, the physician of medieval Andhra-deshā, mentions that the cause for the barrenness in women is the imbalance of the *tridoṣas*, i.e. *vāta*, *pitta*, and *kapha*. And he prescribes the herbal medicines which can be had easily from the surroundings of the village or from the apothecary shops.⁸ Wearing a white saree with red border after the above *vrata* might have been prescribed just for pious sexual feelings of the couple and personal neatness as the two colours symbolise those two qualities. Generally such a couple was prohibited sexual cohabitation during the *vrata* period (40 days). This too is an important thing to be noticed in the medical context.

People used to worship Balamma to protect the foetus or the infant. In the niches of the home, the image of the goddess Balamma or Baladanamma was installed behind a curtain. She was worshipped once in a week,

preferably on Fridays with certain offerings. People believed that if she was neglected, she would create a trouble to the infant or the mother or she would destroy them both.⁹

Errapulamma was also worshipped as the protector of the pregnant woman and the foetus from the evil spirits, which cause disease or deformity.¹⁰ She was worshipped in the seventh month. Another goddess worshipped praying for an easy delivery was Ennemma.¹¹

People had great faith on the influence of the evil-eye and the evil-spirits. Hence the women took every care against the evil-spirits or *grahas*. They believed that a room which was guarded from the exposure to the sun and to the rapid flash of lighting was desirable,¹² and it was always having the everburning fire. The experienced and elderly women used to gather, to give guidelines and to see that whether all the steps to prevent the evil spirits and evil-eye were being taken or not.¹³

The bed of the child was arranged as light, soft,¹⁴ clean and straight.¹⁵ The articles such as *asafoetida*, *carum copticum*, *acorus calamus*, neem-leaves, husk of paddy, coal, mustard seeds, castor-oil, benzoin and a drug known as *kāyam*, etc. were kept ready in the *prasūtiḡṛha* (labour-room). The sticks known as *musūḷi-kolalu* were arranged in all the corners

of the cot to keep away the influence of demons and evil-spirits. Castor oil was constantly put on the head of the infant. Some other preventive steps were taken not to allow the evil-spirits to enter into the room. A fire was kept constantly burning in the room. In *Simhāsanadvātrimsika*, the things thrown into the fire to prevent the evil-spirits were mentioned as the cotton-seeds, fallen hair and husk of paddy.¹⁶ Mahendravijayamu and vasavadattaparinayamu mention that the husk of paddy, the outer skin of the onions and the seeds of the mustard are thrown into the fire which was kept outside the room and near its threshold.¹⁷

The green leaves of the sacred basil along with *mābira* leaves were hanged to the doors and the figures of the deities which were carved on both sides of the entrance wall were smeared with cow-dung. The threshold was washed cleanly and smeared with turmeric paste. The courtyard leading to the threshold was smeared with cow dung and lime was poured in the artistic form of *muggulu* (designs). Asafoetida was put on fire and its strong smell spread around. In such a *prasūtigṛha*, the people believed, no evil-spirit or malignant *graha* could enter.¹⁸ All the leaves and substances used for various purposes in the *prasūtigṛha* can be found as herbal and which can prevent the germs or other infections to enter into the room.

It indicates the fact that, the custom of keeping the surroundings of the labour-room hygienic and preventive of the entry of the infections into the room, must have been introduced by the intellectual class on the name of the evil *grahas*.

Generally, the common women-folk knew well the signs of the commencement of the labour. The starting of the discharge of the mucous from the vulva was recognised as the sign of imminent labour. Then after sometime, the woman starts crying unable to bear the pains.¹⁹ And the other women in the house observing the time for delivery commencing sooner, call for midwives and start preparing everything ready so as not to face any difficulty during or immediately after delivery. They used to get ready a drug known as *kāyam* made with dry-ginger, long-pepper, the *carum copticum*, etc. for the mother to give immediately after delivery and hot water for the child for bathing. They used to dig a pit before hand so as the water after the bath of the child should flow into it.²⁰ Midwife used to worship *Jyestādevī*, wearing clothes which were dipped in turmeric water. She burnt the snake's moult.²¹ The fumigation by burning the snake's moult is prescribed in the works of Caraka and Suśruta for expulsion of placenta if there is any delay.²²

Generally an easy delivery was

expected. But as Vemana, a social reformer and a *yogi* says, if the foetus is in transverse position, it leads to difficulties during delivery;³ In such cases, surgery was needed. From the information given in *Yogarata-ākaram* a seventeenth century work, we come to know that not only the doctors, but also the midwives were expert in taking out the baby by surgical operation.⁴ In case the foetus was dead, it was advised to be drawn out with hands smeared with pure ghee and with surgical instruments, cutting it into pieces with great care. If the foetus was alive, it was advised strictly that it should not be drawn out cutting into pieces. It was regarded as very much dangerous for the mother also.⁵ *Simhāsanadvātrimśika* describes an incident of taking out the child safely by surgical operation.⁶ But these practices might be common only in the royal harems and in the houses of the rich.

The women in the lower classes, who "deal with tilling the land, fishing and such like labour" along with their husbands generally managed their delivery themselves, sometimes all alone without any difficulty. One such incident was witnessed by Linschoten the Dutch traveller of seventeenth century who described it in his travel account. He further says, "the children are brought up in that manner clean, naked nothing done unto them but only washed and made clean in a little

cold water, and doe in that sort proper and come up as well as man would wish or any child within these countries can do with all the tending they have, and live many times until they be a hundredeth years old without any headache, or losing any of their teeth" ⁷ John Fryer who visited Goa, Vijayanagar and other Deccan kingdoms, also gave almost the same account of the delivery cases among the working class women.⁸ As the women in the *janapadas* were used to do hard work, an easy delivery was a common thing.

DISEASES DUE TO THE INFLUENCE OF EVIL-SPIRITS :

Generally the diseases of children were attributed to the demoniac or *graha* influences. In the ancient period also almost all the scholar physicians advocated these magico-religious concepts. The *uttarasthāna* of *Suśrutasaṃhitā* describes how the nine malignant beings, the *grahas* came into existence. According to it, "when God Skanda was elevated to the leadership of the armies of heaven, some of the deities waited upon him and with folded hands asked him about the means of their subsistence. The God Skanda, in his turn, referred them to His Holiness, the God Śiva, for the answer." Then Lord Śiva asked them to go "wherein the rules of cleanliness and virtues are not observed and the members of which do not make daily offerings to the gods and give no alms to the beggars, and live on food

prepared by others and eat from broken bowls and plates, would be proper persons whom you might strike with impunity, and by your malign influence lay them up with diseases peculiar to infant life. Then the parents of those children worship you in their calamities and you shall get plenty to live upon. Thus the *grahas* came into being and began to attack the children of defaulting parents." ⁹

The people of this region also believed that the evil elements affect an infant when the instructions or guidelines that were revealed by the elders be not followed by the mother or the midwife, or if the *prasūtiḡraha* was in an unclean state. The demons would appear for the purpose of getting proper respect and worship. To avert all these evils, the people in Andhradesha worshipped certain deities. We find the names of the deities in the contemporary literary works. In *Bālagrahacikitsā*,³⁰ the names of the deities which attack the infants are given as *Vāsavi*, *Mānini* and *Kāmini*. *Rasikajanamanobhirāmanu*, a work of the seventeenth century compares a band of car enter bees on the flower bushes with the evil-spirits which gather around the *prasūtiḡrahas*.³¹

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS:

When the deity *Vāsavi* attacks the child, it looks upwards, the mouth shivers and the infant does not suck the breast. If the deity *Mānini* enters

into the person of the infant in the first month, the child vomits, cries in an agonised voice and becomes dull and weak. If *Kāmini* enters in the first year, the child cries in agonised voice, vomits, gnashes its teeth and the stomach contracts. Generally in the 12th year, the deity *Bhairavi* may come into the person of the child. Then the child becomes weak, looks agitated and laughs in an unusual way.³² These beliefs were widespread all over the country. According to *Suśruta*, they were the result of the wrath of the nine stars or *navagrahas* which are: 1. *Skandagraha*, 2. *Skanda-apasmāgraha*, 3. *Śakuniḡraha*, 4. *Revatiḡraha*, 5. *Pūtanāḡraha*, 6. *Andhapūtanāḡraha*, 7. *Śitapūtanāḡraha*, 8. *Mukhamāḡlikāḡraha* and 9. *Naigameḡraha*.³³

It is a great wonder to notice that the physicians of India identified the existence of almost all the paediatric diseases with minute differences in their symptoms in the ancient period itself. They described such diseases like meningitis, encephalitis, the eruptive fevers like small-pox, chicken-pox, measles, diarrhoea and bowel affections of all varieties, nephritis, pyelitis and infantile cirrhosis. But they mentioned that such diseases occur as a result of the influence of the nine malignant stars or demons.³⁴

Thus it can be observed that the medical scholars knew the scientific causes of the diseases peculiar to

children such as the unhygienic atmosphere prevailed in the surroundings of the infants, unclean habits of the mother, the use of broken bowls and plates and such other things. They advocated the preventive steps in the form of the worship of the appropriate goddess, who attacked the child with her wrath. In connection with the treatment of the disorders of the infants and the children, caused by these *grahas* Suśruta says, "the child should be kept in a clean and purified room and its body should be anointed with ghee, mustard seeds should be strewn all over the floor by a clean person and a lamp of mustard oil should be kept perpetually burning therein, libation of ghee also with herbs like sarvagandha dravyas and auśadhibija and flowers as well as sandal-paste should be cast into the fire and kept continually burning while reciting incantations specific for each of the *graha* diseases."³⁵ Which *graha* is causing a disease was told by an expert physician according to the symptoms. It indicates the fact that preventive and curative steps were taken in the form of the propitiation of the deities and as religious rites. These beliefs were continued from one generation to another and took deep roots. That's why, we find these beliefs prevailed among the common-folk even in the medieval period and some of them, though not completely, can be found even today in the villages.

But many physicians of medieval Andhradesha did not accept or advocate these magico-religious concepts in the science of medicine. They observed the right and the rational causes for the appearance of the diseases in children. Except a very few works such as Bālagrahacikitsā, almost all the medical works gave rational and scientific causes for the diseases and prescribed drugs like Ka āyas (decoctions) and cūrṇas (powders). The medieval physicians of this region like Bahatacharya, Basavaraju, Indraganti Vallabhacharya, Srinathapandita, etc. explained the causes of the above diseases in consideration with the theory of tridoṣa and the hygienic or otherwise conditions prevailed in the surrounding area.

Indraganti Vallabhacharya, the author of Vaidyacintāmaṇi prescribed drugs to a *jvara* known as "Bhūta-jvara".³⁶ Though he explained rational diagnosis and treatment, he used the old name which was popular in the society

Various palm-leaf note books which are available in the Oriental Manuscript Libraries³⁷, written in Telugu by the country physicians and literate laymen, also contained prescriptions for the diseases of the children, even though they seem to have faith in the traditional beliefs with regard to the causes of the children's diseases. They gave the

reason of what the folk tradition laid down along with their own notions after finding out in their experience, the real scientific cause. With regard to the method of treatment also, they depended on their previous experience as a professional healer. Especially the women were observed as experts in preparing various kinds of drugs. They were acquainted with the general diseases of children which they called as *arimi*, *kova* (kodava), *angitimullu*, *Chantikriya*, etc. For the cure of these diseases, they depended on medicines.³⁸

Usually the drug-substances were available free of cost in their surroundings either in the backyard of their houses or at the nearby fields or forests or in the outskirts of their villages. Tavernier mentions that he has seen women collecting the drug substances in a particular season for their family use throughout the year.³⁹ Many kinds of medicines and medical substances including minerals were available for purchase in the grocery shops also. *Hamsavimsati*, a contemporary literary work, gives a list of such goods which were exclusively used by women and which were available in the apothecary shops.⁴⁰

People wished to get a male child in the first delivery. To achieve it, they used to make vows to the deities.⁴¹ As there were no equipments to know the sex of the foetus, people used to make speculations depending

on the symptoms appearing on the pregnant woman. In *Simhāsanadvā-trimśika*, we find an example of such an incident. There, the pregnant lady says that the foetus is moving in the left side. Then the maidens who are appointed to look after her lie that she will deliver a male child just to please her.⁴² But in the end, she delivers a male child making the lie of the maidens a truth. Perhaps keeping in view this kind of anxiety among the common people and their strong desire to get a male child, Vemana ridicules their foolishness and tries to arouse common sense saying thus: "United with every living creature, manifest is the deity within them. Consider this deity carefully whether it is a female or male?"⁴³ Here Vemana tries to remind the people of the *Arthanārīśvara*, who is an embodiment of Śiva on the right-half and *Pārvatī* on the left-half and tries to convey them to receive the child either male or female as the representation of the deity. As mentioned earlier, people craved to get more children. With regard to this, he says that only one is enough if he is made efficient and good.⁴⁴

Thus in obstetrics and paediatrics, we find many hygienic measures conducive for the prevention of infections and many healing techniques incorporated into the social and religious customs of the people. It indicates that the findings of the

scientists were made to be put into practice by the people on the name of

religion on which the people had an immense faith.

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सारांश

मध्यकालीन आन्ध्र में प्रसूती तथा बालचिकित्सा विज्ञान

-पी. हैमवती

आदिकालीन समाज के मानव की यह धारणा थी कि ब्रह्मांड के सारे क्रिया-कलाप किसी अलौकिक शक्ति की इच्छा के अनुसार चलते रहते हैं। उनमें अधिकतर लोग स्वभावतः अनभिज्ञ तथा सर्वात्मवादी होने से तर्कसंगत तथ्यों को समझने में असमर्थ थे, जिसके कारण वे लोग रोगों से अपनी रक्षा अथवा उनसे छुटकारा पाने के लिये कुछ भी उपाय करने में पुरोहितों द्वारा मार्गदर्शन प्राप्त करते थे। समय के साथ साथ अनेक देवी देवताओं का उदय हुआ जिनको किसी न किसी रोग के उत्पादक अथवा निवारक के रूप में देखाजाने लगा स्वस्थवृत्तीय तथा स्वास्थ्यप्रद आदतों का लोगों में धार्मिक प्रथाओं के रूप में प्रचार किया गया। मध्ययुगीन आन्ध्र समाज में स्वास्थ्य देवी देवताओं की उपासना क्रम के प्रचलन को इसी पृष्ठभूमि में देखा जा सकता है। सामान्यतया बालरोगों का कारण राक्षसों अथवा ग्रहों के प्रभाव को माना गया है। प्रसूती तथा बालचिकित्सा में रोग-संक्रमण से रक्षा हेतु अपनाये जाने वाले अनेक स्वस्थवृत्तीय तथा स्वास्थ्यप्रद उपायों का लोगों के सामाजिक तथा धार्मिक प्रथाओं में समावेश देखा जाता है।