

Glimpses of Eugenics in Ayurveda WSR to Preconceptional and Antenatal Remedies

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Abstract

Every parent wish to have a good progeny. Improvement is basic human nature. Hence eugenics emerged in 20th century as a movement in many countries which had its own pros and cons with serious ethical concerns. Though conception is a natural and physiological phenomenon, Ayurveda advocates that conception should not be accidental, rather it must be planned. The planning includes preparation of body as well as mind. To fulfil the wish of getting a good progeny Ayurveda texts mention a detailed framework to be followed. It includes pre-conceptional preparation to be executed by the couple and anti-natal care of pregnant lady. This is uniform and open to all aspirant parents without any selective bias. It is purely aimed at achieving a healthy and intelligent future generation irrespective of any race, cast and creed. The unbiased holistic approach of Ayurveda brings out positive aspect of eugenics to the society.

Keywords: *Eugenics, Ayurveda, planned pregnancy.*

Introduction

Pregnancy is a beautiful phase of every woman's life who wishes to be a mother. Giving birth to a healthy and intelligent child is the desire of all aspiring parents. This desire gave rise to principles and practices of eugenics. The word Eugenics come from Greek word *Eugenes* (eu = well, genes = born). The term means improving the human race by the bearing of healthy offspring. The word was first used by Francis Galton (Charles Darwin's cousin) in 1883 to describe the science of biological improvement of human race. He believed that human traits physical, mental and moral are inherited. Therefore he proposed that progress of human race depends on selective transmission of inheritable qualities.¹

The thoughts of Galton could not gain momentum due to lack of scientific records. In the early 1900s Mendel's laws of inheritance were rediscovered and applied to genetics, giving rise to a new dimension to inheritance. It reinforced the idea that human beings are made up of their germ plasm. In Germany, this gave impetus to formulation of eugenics policies supported by medical community. The ideas of racial hygiene were incorporated by Hitler in his book "Mein Kampf."² Similarly, in USA, the eugenics theory gained attention due to undesirable social circumstances that were thought to be related to genetics and the scientists believed that they could be controlled with eugenics. Hundred years ago, eugenicists claimed that all of man's diseases were caused by inferior inherited characteristics. This gave rise to positive and negative eugenics. It resulted in Johnson immigration act of 1924, Involuntary sterilisation act in USA³ It resulted in racial as well as individual abuses and the dark side of eugenics came to the fore front. Eugenics as a belief system promoted the systematic destruction of those deemed inferior. Starting with the killing of infants and children with congenital defects and mental retardation, gradually it also included

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disabled and mentally ill adults. Further it expanded to include adults and children with “antisocial behavior” and those who had minor handicaps and were considered inferior in the society. Thus it took the form of a drive for social improvement by elimination of inferior persons.

The new eugenics: The modern eugenicists present the old eugenics as unscientific and authoritarian, concerned with improving the race. The new eugenics promotes individual human enhancement and undesirable trait elimination not improving the species. Robertson claimed that parents should be allowed to use reproductive technologies as they see fit.

One of the major limitations of the eugenics theory is that one person’s definition of “disabled” or “impaired” may be drastically different from another person’s. For example, in some cultures thick lips are considered as good while they may not be appreciated by another culture. The new eugenics supporters claim that human enhancement through genetic and other reproductive technologies is the new liberal eugenics which considers that it is the parent’s moral duty to produce the best children possible. Although science-based, new eugenics still pursue the same goal as the old eugenics, the development of a superior individual⁴

Aims: The article is aimed to have a brief outlook of pre-conceptual and anti-natal measures for a healthy offspring described in Ayurveda texts.

Objectives:

After reading the article, the reader will be able to understand:

1. That Ayurveda advocates well-planned pregnancy
2. That Ayurveda describes a detailed nine-months plan for good progeny
3. Ayurveda eugenics principles are not biased and differ from other modern thought schools of eugenics

An overview of Ayurveda principles for good progeny:

I. Pre-conceptual preparation: Ayurveda describes the process of conception as a ceremonial rite named as *Garbhaadhaan samskaar* i.e. sacrament of impregnation. *Samskaar* is a Sanskrit word which indicates measures taken to improve the quality of something. Likewise, the aim of this measure is to gain a good progeny⁵ According to Charaka, prior

to this ritual, the man and woman willing for conception are advised to undergo proper *snehan* (oleation) and *swedan* (fomentation), followed by *shodhan* (Cleansing of body from within). Thus, the couple have to go through body detoxification treatment with *Vaman* and *Virechan*. These two processes are part of *Panchakarma*, one of the branches of Ayurveda. After the cleansing process, the couple is directed to follow a special diet regime for a specified time period. Then, gradually they are to be shifted to normal diet. Once this is done, the couple is advised to be administered two types of *basti* (enema) viz. *Anuvaasan* and *Aasthaapan*. Then, the male partner should consume milk and Ghee boiled with herbs of *Madhur gana* while the female partner should consume black gram and oil⁶

Implementing above set of instructions, the couple becomes ready for conception.

II. Garbhadhaan Sanskar (Ritual for conception):

Charaka further elaborated that after detoxification of body, the couple should try for conception in the next menstrual cycle of female partner. On the fourth day of cycle the couple should take bath and wear white clothes, eat easily digestible food, converse with each other and then proceed to intercourse in a fragrant room with good ambience⁷ Charaka has specifically described the coitus position best suitable to maintain the balance of three doshas during intercourse⁸ At this time, some hymns are to be chanted as prayer to the deities to bless with good offspring. This ritual is described in detail along with the measures to be followed by the lady and the man. The woman is advised to wear the clothes and behave in the same manner as she imagine her child to be⁹

III. Masanumasik Garbhini Paricharya (Anti natal care):

Garbhini paricharya is the unique contribution of Ayurveda in the field of Obstetrics. Different *acharyas* have prescribed their own regimen for the mother and fetal wellbeing. The monthly regimen to be implemented by mother for the wellbeing of foetus as per Charaka¹⁰ Sushruta¹¹ Vagbhata¹² Harita¹³

IV. Garbhopghatkara Bhava: Ayurveda experts have also mentioned the factors that are supportive as well as harmful for fetal growth and development. The beneficial ones are *Garbhasthapak* and the harmful ones are termed as *Garbhopghatkara bhava*. These factors are summarised as:

According to Charaka¹⁴: Ushna and Pungent drugs, violent activities, coitus, exercise, less intake of food, alcohol, indulging in fights, unpleasant news, excessive consumption of any one rasa.

According to Sushruta¹⁵: Coitus, exercise, excessive emaciation, sleeping in day, awakening in night, grief, riding on vehicle, fear, squatting, oleation, bloodletting, suppression of natural urges etc.

According to Vagbhat¹⁶: Pungent drugs, exercise, coitus, excessive emaciation, sleeping in day, awakening in night, grief, riding on vehicle, fear, squatting, oleation, bloodletting, Suppression of natural urges, indigestion, prolong stay in hot sun or near fire, Anger, grief, fear, terror, fasting, squatting, looking or hearing of unpleasant things etc.

IV. Garbhasthapak Dravyas¹⁷: These are the herbs which are said to be useful for good implantation of fetus and its proper growth and development during pregnancy. They are *Aindri (Bacopa monnieri)*, *Brahmi (Centellaasiatica)*, *Shatavirya (Asparagus racemosus)*, *Sahasravirya (Cynodon dactylon)*, *Amogha (Stereospermum suaveolens)*, *Avyatha (Tinospora cardifolia)*, *Shiva (Terminaliachebula)*, *Arishta (Picrorhiza kurroa)*, *Vatyapushpi (Sida cardifolia)*, *Vishwasenkanta (Collicarpa macrophylla)* etc. These herbs are said to support the products of conception. These should be taken with milk or ghrita.

Discussion

With increasing discussions on human rights at global level and opposition on the basis of ethical issues, the eugenics policies had to face a back foot. It has been shown that many mental disabilities are not linked with genes; that those that are not simply a result of genetic make-up; and that most human behaviours (including deviant ones) are at least as much shaped by environment as by biological inheritance. These findings also had a negative impact on eugenics progression. Suppression of some and boosting others on the basis of superiority –inferiority complex is another flaw in eugenics as it interferes with individual rights.

Ayurveda's approach towards good progeny have a different stand. According to the aim of Ayurveda prevention comes ahead of treatment. Therefore, Ayurveda start from advice of not marrying in close relation. Marriage within clan, tribe, caste, or biraderi

has been a long-established tradition in many parts of the world. Acharya Charak in *Atulya Gotriya Adhyaya* clearly states that the marriage should be in distant families not in close kinship so as to procure good progeny.¹⁸ Modern science also accept that the frequency of genetic disorders among such children is around twice than in children of non-related parents. Consanguineous unions lead to increased expression of autosomal recessive disorders. One cross sectional study showed that there was a significant difference in the prevalence between the offspring of consanguineous versus non-consanguineous for all cases viz. cancer, blood disorders, anaemia, mental disorders, heart diseases, asthma, hypertension, gastrointestinal diseases, hearing deficits, common eye diseases and diabetes mellitus. All reported diseases were more frequent in consanguineous marriages.¹⁹

Thus choosing a life partner from non Consanguineous community is the first step in elimination of some genetic disorders. Ayurveda advised this principle many thousand years ago for all, without limiting it to a specific class of society. This practice may play an important role in maintaining gene diversity. The lack of genetic diversity is often associated with a decrease in the adaptive response of a population.²⁰

The couple willing for conception is advised purification of body through Panchakarma . Vaman is a body cleansing measure which improves appetite, regulates bowel habits and improves sleep pattern. It decreases LDL and serum cholesterol level²¹ After detoxification of body with vaman and virechan, male partner has been advised to consume madhur dravya siddha milk and ghrita .A clinical study showed that administration of cow ghee after performing *Virechana* provided statistically highly significant improvement on seminal parameters.²² The texts mention purificatory effect of virechan on Beeja (sperm and ovum).

The minute description of intercourse in a good ambience with peaceful and spiritual mindset indicates that intercourse at this point of time is not meant for pleasure, but aimed purely at conception. Mental, spiritual and environmental influence is given importance at the time of conception. This may contribute to positively accepting the process of conception .

Ayurvedic philosophy is based on *tridosha*. Their balance is said to be the state of health. Even during the intercourse for conception, the ideal position has been advised to keep the tridosha in balanced state.

Thought of maintaining balance of *tridoshas* during sex for conception shows medical and clinical concerns. Because the predominance of a dosha in body at the time of conception is responsible for creating the *prakriti* (body type). And the susceptibility of these body types to diseases varies according to the dominance of *doshas*.²³ *Prakriti* has an impact on physical and mental build up of an individual. Once formed at the time of conception, *Prakriti* do not change throughout life. Therefore, Ayurveda has advised measures for laying the foundation of balanced *Prakriti*, before birth itself. Charaka Samhita, mentions that the pregnant women should be treated like an oil filled pot. The slightest oscillation of such pot can cause spilling of oil. Similarly, a little stimulation or excitement to the pregnant women can lead to Garbhapata (abortion). Thus utmost care of the pregnant lady should be taken to prevent miscarriage.²⁵

By the usage of regimens from first to ninth month, women gains strength and complexion and she delivers easily at proper time as desired, with excellent healthy child possessing all qualities and long life.²⁶ The dietary recommendations for pregnant lady has been advised so as to achieve mother and fetal nourishment and strength . It is useful in reducing the month wise complains like nausea & vomiting by liquid diet in initial months, oedema by using Gokshura as a diuretic during second trimester & Constipation by Asthapan Basti in third trimester. Also, the use of various herbs is advised to facilitate conception and pregnancy. Number of studies are available on various aspects of pregnancy, maternal and child health ²⁷Thus, Garbhini Paricharya offers a complete package for overcoming fetal complications, removing anxiety of mother related to pregnancy and delivery and facilitating growth and development of fetus.

Ancient Ayurveda scholars probably knew that there is a connection between mother's diet and behaviour to epigenetic changes that could be transmitted to the next generation. Hence along with clinical management of pregnancy they laid emphasis on environmental factors, too.

Conclusion

Most of the traits the earlier eugenicists were interested in actually result from interactions between genetic and environmental factors. Therefore, even today predictions of traits amaze scientists despite the progress of science and technology. Epigenetic changes

are also being studied keenly by the researchers recently. Ancient Ayurveda theories covered both the aspects genetics as well as environmental factors. Therefore, Ayurveda not only advised physical detoxification of body before conception, but also mental and spiritual wellbeing of mother and father to be. Further, the nine months advisory for anti natal care of fetal and mother wellbeing includes dietary as well as behavioural dos and don'ts. This indicates that Ayurveda experts were aware of the fact that apart from paternal genotype, other factors are also responsible for promotion of eugenics. Thus, Ayurveda principles of good progeny seems to be more broad spectrum in terms of eugenics.

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