

## EVOLUTION OF OBSTETRICS IN NORTHERN INDIA

by

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Allow me to thank you for the honour given to me for addressing you on the auspicious occasion of Silver Jubilee of the premier Branch of the Federation of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Bombay Society, on a very important subject like Evolution of Obstetrics in Northern India.

One can, of course, imagine the obstetrics of pre-ayurvedic era as that of wandering tribes of today unaided, uncared for and purely managed by nature. Change came with the evolution of Ayurveda. Sushrut has made a study of obstetrics and in his book, written 1000 years back, he describes his teaching in the 10th chapter, Purandare has quoted him in the History of Obstetrics & Gynaecology 1959. Some of the verses are:—

The advice is first given to the pregnant woman about how she should have her daily life; secondly, what precautions have to be taken to secure her safe delivery; thirdly, how the newborn is to be looked after and nursed; and lastly, what ailments are apt to befall both mother and child and how they are to be treated.

The advice offered to the pregnant woman is, in short, she should always be in a pleasant mood, be clean, should wear clean, white garments and wor-

ship God, shun the company of the wicked, not to witness dreadful scenes, should avoid all causes exciting anger or fear, should eat appetising, freshly cooked and easily digestible food, never to take stale food, not to lift heavy loads, never to do anything that will bring on fatigue. A long list is given about the variety of food to be taken, comprising both animal and vegetable, a great stress having been laid on milk, ghee and eggs. She ought to have medicines for the improvement of her blood. One thing worthy to be noticed is that the milk has to be taken daily and in increasing quantity as pregnancy advances so as to get well developed sound child. Bowels are to be kept open by taking oil enema.

In the ninth month, she has to enter a house or room, especially made for confinement. It should be small and well lighted. She has to enter it with solemn rights and prayers to God for safe delivery.

Signs indicating the approach of the time of delivery: When the flanks have become relaxed, the fundus has descended from the vicinity of the heart, the pains are being felt in the small of the back, it can be inferred from these signs that she is about to give birth.

To attend labour, four ladies, experts in the practice and craft of con-

finement, should be appointed, one of whom, the chief, should have grown old in experience. They should all be of agreeable disposition and dressed in white, and all of them should have their nails cut short. The last point of directions shows that they had appreciated the dangers of a wound and the probability of its being infected.

When pains begin, one of the attendants should say to the woman (Oh sweet girl, bear down during pain, don't do it in the absence of pain. During the pains the foetus will descend down the birth canal with the help of gentle straining. As it is on the way to come out, strain with force. When at the vaginal orifice, bear down with still greater force). Before the child has engaged the vaginal orifice it has been advised that oil, containing medicinal herbs, should have been boiled and then applied within to facilitate the escape of the child.

After the child is born, it should be laid near the mother; if there be a piece of membrane on the body, it should be removed and the mouth cleaned of the mucus. Then the umbilical cord, on making it straight, is tied at the distance of eight finger's breadth, as measured from the umbilicus, by a piece of thread and cut. The ends of the string are tied round the neck of the child.

After bath the child is laid on a bed covered with a silk sheet. Afterwards everyday, cotton dipped in oil should be placed on its head at the fontanelle. Then confinement room should be fumigated everyday to keep the Rakshas out, who would most probably produce serious dis-

eases to mother or child. Here Rakshas may be supposed to be what we now know to be micro-organisms.

On the fourth or third night the woman gets milk in the breast.

For the lochia to come out freely, drugs like ginger, etc. and drugs of like nature are to be administered.

The child should be nursed by the breast alone. The breasts are likely to fail under the influence of the following emotions. Anger, grief and, above all, want of affection towards child are the causes for the stoppage of the secretion of the breast.

She has to keep diet and to have medicines for a month and a half, when this period has passed she becomes free from the effects of delivery and recognized as such.

Subsequent description is in respect of the nursing of the child and of the mother; and of the treatment of the ailments apt to affect both.

Most of the teachings of the Sushrata are the same as those in the 19th century but since the beginning of the Mohammedan period (about the 12th century) there has been a great decline in the teaching of Sushrata and superstitions, unhygienic living and darkness have prevailed. The country has been in a great turmoil, unrest continued, and war, the result of the same being purdah and early marriage. Obstetrics was left to illiterate dais by whom the knowledge was imparted through mother to daughter, and the whole science was brought to practically pre-ayurvedic era.

With the coming of the British in India, peace prevailed and the

people and the Government had time for beneficial subjects like health, etc. They brought the medical staff with them and opened hospitals and Medical Colleges, but all this was of no use to the women folk of our country, particularly in the north as women would never enter the precincts of an institution manned by male doctors. They would prefer to die unattended if any complication arose during and before labour.

There was no other source left for the alleviation of the sufferings of womenfolk except to educate these illiterate dais (so called midwives of the country). The teachers of various schools started the work of training but they did not succeed. It is a matter of great pride to us to mention here that the *first dai school was opened in Amritsar in 1866* by the then *Civil Surgeon, Aicheson*. This class struggled through many vicissitudes and changes of teachers and became a wellknown Amritsar school in the eighty's under *Miss Hewlett* of the Church of England Missionary Society, one of the women pioneers who initiated medical relief for Indian women. She came out in 1877 and later built up the well-known *St. Katherine Hospital* in Amritsar.

The demand for obstetric practitioners was very great and their number was not even a drop in the ocean. The missionaries from America and England, consisting of unqualified and qualified lady missionaries, took this job in the hand. To mention their names the first qualified lady was *Dr. Clara Swain*,

M.D. Penn., who started from New York on 8-11-1869 and reached Bareilly on 2-1-1870. Through her hard work she made a great name, and the Nawab of Rampur donated a large sum for establishing a hospital. A dispensary was opened in 1873 and hospital in 1874 in her name.

*Miss Sara Seward* was sent out from America by the Presbyterean Foreign Missionary Society in 1871. She opened a dispensary in 1872 in Allahabad and built a large hospital that was called *Sara Seward Hospital*. Then followed *Miss Sara Morris* in 1873.

The English missionaries began to take a great interest in relieving the sufferings of Indian women and *Miss Fanny Butler* M.D. was the first to be sent out by the Church of England Zenana Bible Missionary Society in 1880. This belated approach to the problem from England was because women were allowed medical studies only as late as 1877. Dr. Butler started her activities in Jubbulpore and later, in 1887, in Kashmir.

In the year 1875 *Miss Rose Greenfield* came to Ludhiana. Her work has been very commendable in all aspects of midwifery. She also practised general medicine and taught the people the art of hygienic living. Her practice was carried on in a small room which later became the nucleus of a renowned medical institution. Her old mission church was adopted as a hospital in 1889. In 1893 she was instrumental in starting a Women's Medical School. To this was attached the Memorial Hospital named after her sister,

Miss Elizabeth Greenfield. This was the beginning of female medical education. The first principal of this school was *Dame Edith Brown*, whose services in Ludhiana in particular and Punjab and India in general, would always be remembered.

*Miss Elizabeth Bielby* sailed for India on 20th December 1875, and arrived in Lucknow on 26-1-1876, with great determination of alleviating the sufferings of the women of India. Her sister joined her but she soon died. This lady experienced lot of difficulties in Lucknow.

In the year 1881, Maharaja of Punna asked her to treat his wife. After the lady was cured Dr. Bielby was asked to convey to Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales an idea about the lot of Indian women and their sufferings. She was to write the message on a small paper and the same was closed in a locket. The needful was done on her return to England in 1882. In 1885 Miss Bielby got the licence of King's and Queen's College of Physicians, Ireland, and, later, M. D. Berne. Then she came to Lahore where she was asked by the I.G.C.H. to take charge of women's hospital called *Aicheson Hospital*. For this the municipality had contributed and also collected a lot of money. They chose a dark dingy old house near Anarkali and started the hospital on 15-11-1888. It got later a magnificent building under the Countess of Dufferin Fund.

Next to mention further are :—*Maria White of American Methodist Mission* who came to Sialkot in 1875 and *Dr. Jessie Carleton of American Presbyterian Mission* who came to

*Ambala* in 1887. *Dr. Alice Ernst* came to *Jhansi* in 1887. Other missionary hospitals were opened in Bindra Ban in 1889, Jaunpur in 1891, later in Mardan and Tanila. The *Society for propagation of Gospel and Cambridge Mission*, which started its work in 1867 in *Delhi*, developed the well known *St. Stephen Hospital*.

At the fervant request of the women of India, Dr. Miss Elizabeth Bielby and Dr. Mary Sharlieb sought an interview with Her Majesty the Queen Victoria and conveyed to her the woeful tales and the hardship which the women of India were subjected to. In compliance with this Her Majesty deputed *Countess of Dufferin* to study this great problem and see how she could alleviate the sufferings of fair sex. She came to India in 1883 and after a short stay, she wrote to the wives of the Governors and other big officers and raised lot of funds. With a view to continuity of work she formed an *Association for supplying female medical aid to the women of India*. This was in fact the only solution to this gigantic problem of the women in India. The association wanted the hospitals manned by only women and also such medical colleges where they had only women teachers. This association tackled a number of other problems of the country. Apart from raising funds for the Countess of Dufferin Fund, it got the *Midwives Act* passed in 1902, *Education Act for school children* in 1907, and modification of *Birth and Death Act* in 1907, 1915, 1918.

The hospitals affiliated to the

Countess of Dufferin Fund, in the beginning, were at Agra, Calcutta, Delhi, Alwar, Lahore, Darbhanga and Bhagalpur. In 1924 the *Lady Reading Hospital* in Simla was opened. Now it was imperative that the medical education be imparted to the women of India.

In 1875, 4 female students were admitted in medical college in Vepery, Madras, and they of course passed with credit. But it remained a very difficult problem because co-education was not at all possible. Dr. Humphrey started a class for training women at Nainital in 1869. He trained 14 women and got them the Diploma to practice ordinary diseases. About the same time Behu Gange Parishad started classes in Bareilly. The education was incomplete and unsatisfactory and the class was closed in 1875.

In 1883 Brigadier Surgeon Hilson got the sanction of a separate boarding there for Women's Medical School, Agra, and started admitting girl students for studying together with boys. This arrangement was not a workable proposition till, in 1918, the Lady Lyall Hospital was completed and a separate school for women was started under the principalship of Dr. Mary O' Brian.

In Lahore a similar medical school for women worked till after 1916 in the Lady Acheson Hospital, when it was closed and the grants were transferred to Ludhiana where Dr. Dame Edith Brown, assisted by Miss Greenfield and Miss Hewlett from Amritsar, had started Diploma Class. It is a Christian Medical College today.

For over 30 years one of the

greatest desires of this Association was for supplying medical women with M.B.B.S. degree. On the coronation of Queen Mary in 1911 H. H. the Maharaja of Kotah moved in the matter of a medical college for women and he contributed a large sum also. This move was taken up by Director-General Sir Pardy Lukis, I.M.S., and the foundation stone of the Lady Hardinge Medical College was laid in 1913, the college being completed in 1918. Since then the college has done commendable work and has turned out capable women doctors.

The First Health School, *the Lady Reading School*, (was opened in Delhi) in 1918 and another in Lahore in 1925. With the increase of education, the prejudices against male doctors were slowly disappearing. The ladies though examined by women doctors wanted the advice of the males all the same. Then it became essential to train the male student properly. The first women's hospital manned by a male doctor was the Lady Willingdon Hospital of Lahore (1933) with its first Medical Supdt., Lt. Col. S. N. Hayes, I.M.S. with his team of workers, Dr. J. Heppolitte and Dr. Sant Ram Dhall. At the same time Lahore Maternity Hospital was started and it was manned by another male obstetrician Dr. B. L. Kapur. After the partition, Dr. Tirath Ram Agarwal joined Dr. Sant Ram Dhall in Amritsar Medical College. Last but not the least I may mention Dr. Nawal Kishore, Prof. of Obstetrics in Agra, who made the handling of obstetrics by male students quite popular.

Obstetrics in the North is an advanced science these days. The doctors are not only practising on modern lines but are also doing research in the subject.

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