



## “Women’s Diseases And Their Remedies In Buddhist India”.

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### Abstract:

The diseases of women were diagnosed and treated in ancient India, the causes of common gynecological disorders were also described and even classified up to large extent. Though the Pali literature does not describe medical science in a organized manner, but the data can be collected from treatises, commentaries and books written by qualified monks for spiritual and religious purposes in order to teach Dhamma. At many places they had described examples and treated cases, which help in drawing the inferences. The science of menstrual cycle, maintenance of hygiene and norms to be followed by women during that time frame were reasonably understood. The crude contraceptive methods were used to prevent the pregnancy. The causes of sterility and the understanding of anatomical malformations of genital were also known. Concept of amenorrhea and dysfunctional uterine bleeding were understood in crude form. It is surprising that the embryology was understood in stage wise manner to large extent.

Key words: Women’s diseases, Buddhist era, Gynecology in ancient India.

### Introduction:

Diseases in Buddhist era were classified as Karmic, evil spirited, current or immediate and life diseases<sup>1,2</sup>. The field of gynecology and obstetric is highly developed in modern medical era of technological advances, however the diseases of women were diagnosed and treated in ancient India as per available examples in literature. The causes of hindrance in pregnancy, miscarriage and birth related issues have been found to be described in ancient literature<sup>2</sup>. It is obvious that ever since human being is in existence there might had been the trials to observe and solve the birth related issues and issues related with gynecological disorders. It seems that the information about the women diseases were first time noted in history of Buddhist literature. The causes for the death of queen Mahamaya, the mother of Buddha are explained in literature<sup>2</sup>. In this study we shall try to explore the evidences from Pali literature of Buddhist era, as to how much did ancient India know about gynecological diseases, how were these diagnosed and treated?

### Material & Method:

Buddhist literature was written for spiritual and religious reasons, hence a research in medicine cannot be retrieved in form of systematic data. The information collected may also be inadequate & anecdotal. Pali literature does not say directly about medical issues in modern scientific manner, but it is collected from treatises & commentaries from different places on varying issues. The date in this article is mainly collected from a book “Science of Medicine & Surgery in Buddhist India”<sup>2</sup>. The author of book have searched the available literature from Pali text i.e. Tripitak, Milindapanha, which are from pre-Charaka Shrusuta era. It was the time period of Buddha (6th cen. B.C.) & the rule of king Harshavardhana

(7th cent A.D.). The help of other books on Buddhist literature is also taken while collecting the information & noted concepts.

### **Observations:**

“Paccitiya” rules for Buddhist nuns were clear during menstruation; they were instructed to maintain hygiene. These nuns were instructed to return the robes used at the time of menstruation to their head nun, once menstruation was over. Vinaya Pitaka<sup>3</sup> narrates that nuns were not allowed to sit on a seat (called as-mancha) or a bench (called as-Pitha) during the period of menstruation for fear of soiling. Instruction and modes of cleaning their genitals were also described<sup>3</sup>.

Vinaya Pitaka narrates that one woman became nun, who initially was serving king. Another nun curiously asked her, oh sister you had been serving king previously then how did you not conceive? She replied that she used “Jatumutthaka” for preventing conception<sup>2</sup>.

In “Vanjahnaitthivathu” it is described by “Buddhaghosa” A woman who does not conceive is called as barren women. It happens so then the uterus of such woman may have some defect<sup>2,4</sup>.

In “Samyutta Nikaya” Indakayakkha asked Buddha that how human body is formed? how the bone and flesh is formed? how does foetus equip with “gabbha”( foetus in uterus)?. Buddha narrates an entire process of birth in details<sup>5</sup>.

In pregnancy, women generally have a longing (desires), which are fulfilled by their husbands or relatives. Queen of Bimbisara had longed to drink blood from the wrist of king, which was fulfilled by king<sup>6</sup>. There are several such stories in Jatakas.

Miscarriage are described in literature, abortion can be caused by 3 ways, by wind (vata), microbes or by once acts (kammuna)<sup>7</sup>.

“Sumangalavilasini” says a woman delivers a child after completion of pregnancy in 9 months, but may deliver in 7 months also rarely, or even in between 7 and 9 months. A child born in 7 months can survive if often smeared with cold or warm oil<sup>2,7</sup>.

### **Discussion:**

We learnt from observations that the women who joined Buddhist nunnery were given some teachings and instructions for maintaining hygiene during menstrual periods in Samgha. It is clear that there were several rules and code of conduct which were followed by nuns during their periods. As much as nearly 47 norms were described in “Pacittiya”<sup>2,9</sup>. A waist band and a use of extra cloth was prescribed to these nuns during menstruation as to day we have refined sanitary napkins. Concept of contraceptives was there as exemplified by the case in observation. On exploring the Pali literature we found the description of four types of contraceptives called as Jatumatthaka. These were, 1-Jatumaya (contraceptives made up of wax or resin), 2-Katthamaya (made up of wood), 3- Pitthamaya (made of flour) and Mattikamaya (made out of clay or mud)<sup>2</sup>. Though there were crude ways of preventing unwanted conceptions, but awareness of contraceptives was there in such an ancient times also. Otherwise also the causes for non-conceiving of women were also described, which included the woman who has crooked passage, overtly looks like a man, but has certain defects in genital system or having no menstrual cycles<sup>10</sup>. Thus it can be observed that ancient scientists also knew few causes of sterility in women, which of course were not so well understood as we know to day. It seems they have concept of congenital malformation of genital system and hormonal impairments responsible for sterility, though not described in refined manner. Moreover sterility was described on impaired Ayurveda concepts of Vat, Pitta and kaphha as apparent in observation. Infection was a well known phenomenon for non-conception, as organisms have been described to be a cause here<sup>2</sup>. According to “samantapasadika” there were four types of women who can not hold foetus, these were, (a) who do not have discharge of blood and passage remain dry, (b) those having continuous blood discharge, (c) blood flow keeps the organ always wet, (d) blood flow keeps trickling, hence they keep changing cloths<sup>2</sup>. On analysis of above causes it seems these are 2 causes which can be compared with amenorrhea and dysfunctional uterine bleeding of modern medical gynaecological science. In both of these conditions women have no chance to conceive. Buddha answered the query raised by “Indakayakkha” in detail as to how the development of foetus occurs in utero starting from first month onward. In beginning a soil (kalala) arises following conception,

which is in semi liquid form in which an egg is born. Seems Buddha was talking about the origin of placenta, which he says solidifies subsequently. The egg gives rise to branches (limbs, hair, nails). A mother takes meals, which nourishes the foetus. Samyutta Nikaya in its verse clearly describes the five stages of development of embryo<sup>2,11</sup>. Though “Kalalam” (first stage) means mud, but it correlates with placenta if one thinks in terms of embryology. Second stage is “Abbudam” means swelling, which signifies enlargement of placenta, the third stage is “Pesim” means lump or mass of flesh. The 4<sup>th</sup> stage is “Ghanna” implies for solidification or compactness and fifth stage is “Pesakha” means branch or tree, it implies for the development of limbs, hair and nails<sup>2,11</sup>. It is apparent from above description that Buddha had a fair understanding of development of embryo, hence of embryology in modern terminology.

### **Conclusions:**

We can conclude from above discussion that ancient medical science has a reasonable understanding of gynaecological problems. The science of menstrual cycle, its care, maintenance of hygiene and norms of this physiological process were understood up to some extent. The crude contraceptive methods were used to prevent the pregnancy, so much so that the contraceptives were classified according to their constituents. The causes of sterility and the understanding of anatomical malformations of genital were also known to cause sterility. Concept of amenorrhoea and dysfunctional uterine bleeding were understood in crude form. It is amazing to know that the embryology was understood in stage wise manner.

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